

Report to the Joint Committee on Government and Finance

West Virginia Property Rescue Initiative Update

Submitted Dec. 20, 2018 by Erica L. Boggess, Executive Director, West Virginia Housing Development Fund

The West Virginia Property Rescue Initiative (WVPRI) (House Bill 2810) mandates that the Fund allocate \$1 million per fiscal year for five years beginning July 1, 2015 and ending July 1, 2019 for a revolving loan program available to counties and municipalities for identification, purchase, removal and rehabilitation of dilapidated properties. Additionally, the WVPRI provides technical assistance to communities to acquire and/or remove dilapidated properties from their communities.

To be eligible, cities and counties must have the authority to acquire and/or demolish the property and the structures to be razed must constitute a health and safety hazard. Assistance is provided in the form of a loan.

As of Nov. 30, 2018, the Fund reports the following activity:

- July 1, 2015 - \$1 million deposit to PRI account
- July 1, 2016 - \$1 million deposit to PRI account
- July 1, 2017 - \$1 million deposit to PRI account
- July 1, 2018 - \$1 million deposit to PRI account
- WVPRI loans approved as of Dec. 31, 2018 total \$1 million.

2018 Technical Assistance has been provided through a contracted partnership with The WV Community Development Hub (The Hub), Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center (NBAC), and WV Land Use & Sustainable Development Law Clinic (Law Clinic) to conduct outreach efforts to promote the WVPRI and provide guidance to communities.

These outreach efforts include regional WVPRI Technical Assistance workshops, online webinars, email and newsletter announcements, outreach support from partner organizations and direct calls to municipalities.

Six municipalities were awarded help with code enforcement and technical assistance services to help take down blighted and dangerous buildings through the West Virginia Property Rescue Initiative. They include Cowen, St. Marys, Beech Bottom, Ravenswood, Beverly and St. Albans. The WVHDF allocated the technical assistance grants below in fiscal year 2018 and will allocate up to \$50,000 in technical assistance grants in fiscal year 2019.

Barrower	Total Award
Town of Cowen	\$3,500
City of St. Mary's	\$10,000
Village of Beech Bottom	\$3,000
City of Ravenswood	\$10,000
Town of Beverly	\$5,000
City of St. Albans	\$2,777.45
Total	\$34,277.45

To be considered an eligible borrower for the technical assistance grants, the applicant must have met the following criteria:

- Populations of up to 20,000 (cities) or 50,000 (counties)
- Receiving technical assistance as part of the Property Rescue Initiative Program
- Identified by the WVHDF or its contracted partners under the technical assistance portion of the Property Rescue Initiative Program as an entity with a feasible code enforcement strategy
- Compliance with all applicable state and local laws relating to the adoption of the code or ordinance (An opinion by a licensed attorney is required when a community is requesting funds to adopt a new code or ordinance)
- Have the authority to enter into a binding debt obligation for the term of the loan (cities or counties may authorize other organizations to apply for a Program Loan on their behalf)

The Kanawha County Commission, which received a \$475,000 WVPRI loan in 2017, razed 33 properties in 2018. They also took down 25 dilapidated structures in 2017.

Media & Online Engagement – The Fund updated its Impact Video to reflect its partnership with Kanawha County. The video is posted on our YouTube channel and has been shared through the Fund’s Facebook and Twitter channels. The Fund continues to maintain a page devoted to WVPRI on its website. Visitors can read more about the program, download the program guide and program application and find links to agencies the Fund partners with to help carry out this initiative. Licensed contractors, developers, nonprofit organizations, disposal companies and landfills who want to be considered for demolition opportunities can also fill out a web form to register and a resource to assist communities. The page has been visited more than 35,000 times since it was created in 2015.

Status of WVPRI in 2018

Task 1: Statewide BAD Buildings Summit

One statewide workshop was developed and implemented through resources, technical assistance, speakers and interactive trainings. These tools were used to assist communities dealing with their vacant, abandoned and dilapidated problem properties and to promote the Property Rescue Initiative funding program.

TA Partners enthusiastically planned and developed the 2018 Bad Buildings Summit. It was held on Nov. 8 at the Embassy Suites in Charleston. At the Summit, two tracts were available to participants: **Standard Sessions** and **Specialized Sessions**. Standard Sessions covered the more basics of topics such as How to Build a BAD Buildings Team and Inventory Properties. The Specialized Sessions covered certain topics intensively such as site redevelopment or creative problem solving beyond program basics. The event was attended by 120 engaged and active community-minded citizens. Sen. Joe Manchin helped to kick off the summit.

Task 2: Community Coaching & Capacity Building Technical Assistance

Community capacity building coaching will be provided for up to ten local communities to help them organize local teams to participate in the BAD Buildings model technical assistance program and to increase their likelihood of successfully applying for PRI loan funding. On-going coaching will continue for up to five local communities who initiated engagement in the program in 2017 but were not participating yet in the BAD Buildings model technical assistance program.

All of the communities identified during this year as target communities were contacted and are engaged in community coaching or technical assistance. One new community had been identified for outreach:

- Martinsburg

Initial contact conversations were conducted with:

- New Martinsville
- Oceana
- West Liberty
- McMechen

TA partners have conducted coaching calls with:

- Elkins
- White Hall
- Oceana
- McMechen
- West Liberty

- Grafton

WVPRI Presentations:

Information about PRI was presented to approximately 165 stakeholders at two events convening community leaders from across the state. The events were:

- Brownfields Conference
- WV Housing Conference

Stakeholder meetings were held with three new communities:

- McMechen
- West Liberty
- Oceana

Ongoing Coaching and Transition to technical assistance:

Two new communities transitioned from community coaching to technical assistance through the BAD Buildings program:

- McMechen
- Matewan

Task 3: Direct BAD Building Technical Assistance

Direct one-to-one technical assistance will be provided to qualifying communities who request to implement the BAD Buildings Model in order to create a competitive application to the WVHDF Property Rescue Initiative loan program. This technical assistance will allow selected communities to implement the BAD Buildings model in order to identify problem properties, conduct site research, build relationships with property owners, adopt and enforce municipal building codes, and identify reuse options for prioritized properties.

BAD Buildings Community Meetings Held this year:

7/23 Bath
7/31 Danville
8/14 McMechen
8/16 Matewan
8/16 Piedmont
8/21 Bath
8/21 West Liberty
9/11 Danville
9/12 McMechen
9/18 Oceana
9/24 Bath
9/25 Davis

9/25 West Liberty

9/27 Piedmont

Task 4: Project Management

Project management will include technical assistance program coordination and development, planning, facilitation and participation in biweekly meetings, and various partner communications to ensure a continued smooth technical assistance partnership between the two primary project partners, The WV Community Development Hub and the WVU Northern Brownfields Assistance Center, as well as the WVU Land Use & Sustainable Law Clinic.

Biweekly calls continue to be conducted with TA partners. The PRI tracking spreadsheet continues to be utilized to track all program data from all TA partners and continues to be refined for ease of use and efficiency.