

Six Towns Get \$10M to Rehab Buildings

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TRENTON -- Neighborhoods in six tri-county municipalities that the state determined were hit hardest by foreclosures are set to benefit from millions of federal dollars disbursed by the state on Wednesday.

Three groups in Camden were awarded a total of \$4 million in Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds by the state Department of Community Affairs, while Gloucester County received \$2.5 million for work planned for Woodbury and Paulsboro. Willingboro was awarded \$2 million for neighborhood remediation, Burlington City was given \$1.67 million and an organization was given \$622,716 to revamp an area of Clementon.

A \$1.34 million award thrilled Helene Pierson, executive director of the Heart of Camden, an organization with 25 years of rehabilitating homes in the city's downtown. Pierson said the New Jersey Housing & Mortgage Finance Agency will be foreclosing on 12 vacant units in the South Camden Historic District and turning them over to her group.

"The plan is to finish off blocks," Pierson said, referring to sections along the west side of Broadway between Jackson Street and Chelton Avenue. "We won (the money) because we're ready to go."

Pierson said architecture and pre-development will start immediately, in part with interior demolition that the organization does with volunteers. She said construction by general contractors will start later this year, adding that the 12 units will be available for people under federal affordable rules around the middle of 2010.

To spur economic recovery in at least 25 New Jersey municipalities, the state DCA doled out \$49.4 million in neighborhood stabilization funds to municipalities, nonprofit organizations, companies and two counties.

Officials in Gloucester County said they were thankful for the award, even though it was about \$3 million less than expected.

In March, county officials proposed to acquire and rehabilitate 37 foreclosed properties in low-income areas in Woodbury and Paulsboro, using \$5.5 million sought in Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds.

County Freeholder Joe Brigandi said the funds will still be used to revamp downtown Woodbury and the Buck Street and Blue Manner areas in Paulsboro.

"It doesn't change the fundamental plan. There's plenty of funding to go with that," Brigandi said. "We may have to downsize the scope a little and apply for more to get it back to the original."

Paulsboro Mayor John Burzichelli said the money is good news for the borough, which has a few foreclosed properties to be rehabilitated and lots of vacant homes that can be restored.

"The money will be put to good use and have a positive impact," Burzichelli said.

Woodbury Mayor Robert Curtis said he is grateful for the county's timely plan to turn around

properties in the city's downtown that can be purchased by low- to moderate-income families in a struggling housing market.

"We have been trying to do this all along, working with other groups, while our resources are stretched thin," Curtis said. "But this is another way in accomplishing that goal."

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