

Housing Rehab Program Topic of Public Hearing

WAYNESBURG — Representatives of several communities expressed interest Monday in being considered for funding through the Home Investment Partnership Program to assist residents with housing rehabilitation.

At a public hearing on the program, representatives of Mather, Morris Township, Greensboro and Bobtown spoke of the need for a housing rehabilitation program in their communities.

The county is preparing a new grant application for the program, which has provided individual grants of up to \$25,000 to income-eligible homeowners to assist them with repairs to bring their homes into compliance with current construction codes.

The county previously offered the program countywide, but guideline changes several years ago required it to designate a target area in which the money will be spent. The last target area was the 15370 ZIP code.

"It's a good program," said Richard Davis, county housing specialist, who noted the county has operated the program for the last 17 years. During the last two five-year grants, the county has rehabilitated 48 homes, he said. Each of the last two grants has been for \$500,000.

The county is now preparing a new grant application. "We're here to get some suggestions," Davis said. "We want to identify where the target area should be."

Cathy Henderson told county officials she badly needs a new roof and windows on her house in Mather. Some of her windows are in such poor condition they have mold around the frames, she said. Henderson said she would like to make the repairs but doesn't have the income to qualify for a loan.

Morris Township Supervisor Bob Keller also spoke, saying one particular area of the township where housing conditions warrant attention is West Union. Most of the homes are blighted and are inhabited by older residents on fixed incomes, he said. One woman's home was damaged by fire and she now lives in a trailer at the site though that, too, is barely habitable, he said.

Darlene Urban Garrett, Elm Street manager for Greensboro Borough, also said several homes in Greensboro are in need of rehabilitation. Garrett also spoke of the problems in Bobtown, where, she said, many of the more than 300 houses were constructed before 1950.

Robbie Matesic, director of the county's Department of Economic Development, said the county has had a waiting list of homeowners interested in the program but that list has dwindled. She asked the municipal officials and two Mather residents in attendance to gather information on income eligible residents in their communities who might be interested in the program and to provide that information to Davis.

The information will be used to determine which area should be targeted and the size of the grant request.

Commissioner Pam Snyder, who also attended the hearing, urged the local representatives to stay in touch with the county. Other avenues might be available to assist with their housing needs, she said.

The county redevelopment authority has been focusing on housing, Snyder said. One option it will explore is assisting with the judicial sale process to get tax delinquent properties more quickly back on the tax rolls, she said.

The county also has proposed using Community Development Block Grant money for a home rehabilitation program.

The money, which may not be available until the 2013 program year, could be used anywhere in the county except municipalities that receive their own CDBG allocation.

Home Investment Partnership Program money, federal funds passed through the state, also can be used for programs addressing home rehabilitate and resale, tenant-based rental assistance and landlord rehabilitation.

The public comment period on the grant application will extend through Feb. 10, Davis said.