



\$1.5M from feds targets changes for DeSoto Bass, west Dayton

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By Cornelius Frolik

A federal grant awarded Tuesday could pave the way to transforming a poverty- and crime-stricken part of west Dayton.



The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded \$1.5 million to Dayton to develop a blueprint to remake the distressed DeSoto Bass Courts and Hilltop Homes public housing projects and surrounding neighborhood into a mixed-income area with more economic opportunities.

Now, Dayton has a shot at getting as much as \$30 million dollars from HUD to make that plan a reality.

“What we envision with the implementation is to create a diverse, mixed-income neighborhood where people can have safe, affordable housing and a resource network that would lead to stability and growth and a transformed community,” said Jennifer Heapy, the CEO of Greater Dayton Premier Management (GDPM), the local public housing authority.

Earlier this year, the city of Dayton and GDPM applied for a Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant through HUD.

The joint application asked for \$2 million to pay for a comprehensive neighborhood plan that addresses economic development, safety, jobs, local schools and other environmental factors.



HUD Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Public and Indian Housing Lourdes Castro Ramírez attended a press conference Tuesday at DeSoto Bass to announce Dayton's award worth \$1.5 million.

Castro Ramírez said the area has suffered from years of disinvestment, but the HUD funding will help build on local assets to create a more thriving neighborhood.

“Transforming a community requires a diverse group of stakeholders getting engaged and being involved,” she said.

The Choice Neighborhoods program provides significant sums to de-concentrate public housing and create more economically diverse, dynamic and safe neighborhoods with updated housing units, Castro Ramírez said.

Successful participants in the program are able to leverage investments from private and public partners.



The grant money provides an opportunity for the city, the local housing authority and other stakeholders to revitalize a distressed area by replacing deteriorating and outdated housing with high-quality, mixed-income units, said Heapy, with GDPM.

HUD received 60 requests for planning grants, but the agency granted funding to 10 communities. Dayton and Phoenix received the largest awards.

The plan will outline strategies to improve housing, educational outcomes, intergenerational upward mobility and reduce poverty and connect residents with supportive services, Heapy said.

Planning will take about two years to complete.

The process will allow community partners to identify services, infrastructure, educational supports and housing upgrades that will improve residents' lives, she said.

Once finished, the city and GDPM will apply for a HUD grant worth as much as \$30 million to implement the new vision for that section of west Dayton, officials said.

Receipt of the planning grant does not guarantee Dayton will receive an implementation grant award. But it's typically an important step to obtaining the funding.

Heapy said one goal would be to replace many of the units in DeSoto Bass with modern and higher-quality public housing that is far less dense and that is mixed in with market-rate units.

The implementation grant would be a sizable financial boost for west Dayton.



Some local residents were skeptical that a plan can transform the neighborhood.

Jenisicia Shackelford, 26, has lived at DeSoto Bass for about six months. Before that, she lived at Hilltop briefly.

Shackelford said she hopes to move because of the crime and violence in her neighborhood.

She said things won't get better unless there is a greater police presence, more patrol officers and the drug dealers and troublemakers are kicked out or jailed.

"Safety is everything because you have to protect your kids and protect yourself," she said.

Distressed neighborhoods in both Cincinnati and Columbus have benefited from the Choice Neighborhoods initiative.

The Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority was awarded a \$29.7 million implementation grant in fiscal year 2013 after receiving a planning grant two years earlier. There, local partners committed about \$225 million in resources and other investments to support the vision for revitalization.

The Community Builders received a \$29.5 million implementation grant in 2012 to transform the Avondale neighborhood in Cincinnati, said Jeff Beam, director of development with the group's Cincinnati office.

"We're leveraging that \$29.5 million grant to over \$110 million," he said.