

Dayton's glut of vacant and abandoned structures has shrunk because of unprecedented levels of demolition by the city, which has been fueled by state and federal dollars.

But the number of removals fell last year after one funding source dried up. Now another pot of money is gone.

Since 2009, the city has bulldozed more than 2,000 homes, commercial buildings and garages, with demolitions peaking at 648 structures in 2013, according to city data. About two-thirds of the money spent on demolition came from two outside funding sources.

The city still has \$4 million in federal Neighborhood Initiative Program funds to spend on razing through the end of 2016.

Residents who live near some of the 279 homes targeted for demolition are eager to see the eyesores eliminated. They say they are magnets for vagrants, vandalism and trespassing youth.

The city plans to take down two long-abandoned homes at 21 and 27 Drummer Avenue.

"That's just an eyesore, and I'd like to see kids be able to play over there in those yards," said Patrick McGinness, 39, who has lived across the street for more than a decade.

But these federal funds come with restrictions that likely will make razing more expensive, meaning the dollars may not stretch as far as past awards, officials said.

And once that funding disappears, there may not be more to replace it.

"This is the source we know exists," said Aaron Sorrell, Dayton's director of planning and community development. "There has been talk of demolition funding coming down the pike, but at the moment, it's just talk."

#### Millions spent

Dayton spent about \$3.2 million last year to knock down 264 structures, according to the city. More than half of the money came from the Moving Ohio Forward grant program.

In 2013, the city spent \$6.2 million leveling a record number of structures, including 487 homes, 144 garages and 17 commercial buildings. The city used \$1.9 million in Moving Ohio Forward grants and \$1.4 million from the federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program. The rest of the money came from the city's general fund and Community Development Block Grants.

Since 2009, the city has spent more than \$17.4 million on demolition. Of that, about \$11.4 million was from federal and state grant programs.

“We think these programs have been extremely effective at what they set out to do, which is to control **blight**, stabilize neighborhoods and set the stage for revitalization,” said Allison Goebel, associate director of the Greater Ohio Policy Center, which helped the Ohio Attorney General’s Office create the Moving Ohio Forward program.

But the federal stabilization funds have run out, and Moving Ohio Forward money has been used up. The city is down to one major outside funding source, excluding Community Development Block Grants.

The city will get about \$4 million out of the \$5 million that was awarded to the Montgomery County Land Bank through the federal Neighborhood Initiative Program.

The city has committed to tear down at least 279 properties by the end of next year, but the actual number could be higher, depending on costs, said Sorrell.

The money will help the city get rid of some of its worst residential nuisance structures, Sorrell said.

But recipients of neighborhood initiative funds are required to acquire and maintain the properties they bulldoze. With past grants, the city could remove nuisance structures on private property.

Acquisitions add cost, and the city has to pay for asbestos surveys and abatement, Sorrell said. The city also will be required to maintain the properties.

Under Moving Ohio Forward, the city spent about \$12,000 per residential structure for demolition. But the city has budgeted about \$16,000 for each of the 279 neighborhood initiative properties, Sorrell said.

Redirecting dollars?

Neighborhood Initiative Program funds have restrictions because they are recycled Troubled Asset Relief Program dollars, said Frank Ford, senior policy advisor for Thriving Communities Institute, a Cleveland-based group devoted to revitalizing urban centers.

The dollars were not originally intended for demolition, but the U.S. Department of Treasury authorized the state to use them for that purpose if communities could show they would help “tipping point” neighborhoods avoid foreclosures, Ford said.

TARP funds are supposed to protect home values and preserve homeownership. That’s why they can only be used to remove one- and two-family homes.

The city has plenty of commercial **blight**, but it’s a challenge to find funding to tackle the problem.

The city has knocked down 65 commercial structures since 2009, including 17 in both 2013 and 2014. Demolition tends to cost about \$9,000 to \$10,000 per unit.

The neighborhood initiative money will benefit Ohio cities, but it is unfortunate that there are not

other unrestricted federal dollars available specifically for demolition, Ford said.

“There are communities like Cleveland and Dayton that don’t have the money to address the scope of the problems they have,” he said.

Thriving Communities director Jim Rokakis said he may join officials from other U.S. cities to lobby the Treasury to re-purpose more of the TARP funds for demolition.

He said Ohio cities need financial support to continue chipping away at massive **blight** problems.

Demolition remains a priority for Dayton, but the level of removal activities moving forward is unclear, city officials said. The city estimates it still has about 6,500 vacant and abandoned residential structures.

“We set a record in 2013 by knocking down 648 structures,” said Kevin Powell, the city’s acting housing inspection manager. “If we were to set a record every year, we would still have a long ways to go.”

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