

‘Race against time’ for \$150M in demolition funds from the state

Counties want to move fast because awards are first come, first served.



There are dangerous, blighted buildings along North Main Street in Dayton.
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Ohio has nearly \$150 million to dole out for blight removal, but much of the demolition funding will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so some local jurisdictions are scrambling to get in line.

Local counties are assured to receive grants that collectively will be worth a few million dollars, but some hope to get more than that to knock down vacant and decaying homes and buildings that frustrate neighbors and drag down property values.

“The land bank’s goal is to apply for as much funding and as many projects as we can complete by May 2023,” said Mike Grauwelman, executive director of the Montgomery County Land Bank. “It’s fundamentally a race against time.”

Ohio’s new Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Program has guaranteed that each of the 88 counties in the state is eligible to receive \$500,000 in demolition funds. Counties then can apply for the remaining funds for demolition and renewal projects.

The program — funded by the state budget bill and administered by the Ohio Department of Development — will provide grants to raze commercial and residential buildings on non-brownfield sites and support revitalization of

surrounding properties.

“There are dangerous, blighted buildings all over Ohio that are nothing more than eyesores that restrict new development,” Gov. Mike DeWine said in a statement when the program was announced last week.

Overall, the state has nearly \$150 million to distribute, and more than two-thirds of that money (\$106 million) will be allocated based on the order requests are received.

The Montgomery County Land Bank started the submission process on Wednesday when a state online portal opened, officials said.

A day earlier, the land bank approved using \$3 million it set aside for its own Demolition 2.0 program to put toward providing matching funds to take advantage of the new grant program.

The state program requires that counties and their lead entities that seek in excess of \$500,000 must provide a 25% county match for projects beyond that threshold.

Greene County applied for state demolition funds.

“Our department has conducted a rudimentary survey of all Greene County jurisdictions to determine the need for demolition funding,” said Eric Henry, Greene County development director.

“Based on the results of this survey, we believe that this program has the potential to benefit nearly every community in Greene County.”

Miami County is looking into the funding and expects to apply, likely through its new land bank, Miami County Administrator Charlotte Colley said.

Warren County is researching the program and the specific rules around how funding can be used, said Martin Russell, deputy county administrator and executive director of the Warren County Port Authority.

“We believe there are opportunities to use these funds inside of the county but want to make sure the parameters set forth meet the needs at hand,” he said.

Clark County will seek funds, possibly in excess of the \$500,000 set aside, said Ethan Harris, executive director of the Clark County Land Reutilization Corporation (land bank).

“Like other legacy cities coming out of the great recession, the city of Springfield struggled with vacant housing,” he said. “This is critical in helping reduce urban sprawl and improve existing neighborhoods.”

The Montgomery County Land Bank plans to suspend its Demo 2.0 program and use that money to cover half the cost of the state match requirements (12.5%).

The land bank will ask partner communities and jurisdictions to cover the other half of the matches, Grauwelman said.

Grauwelman said about 10 jurisdictions will participate or have expressed interest in participating in the state program, including Dayton, Huber Heights, Brookville, Riverside, Trotwood and West Carrollton.

Demolition was one of Dayton’s top priorities for its \$138 million in federal rescue funds, and the city already proposed spending more than \$15 million of its federal money on blight removal.

Under this new program, demolition work must be completed by May 2023, which is a short window of time, Grauwelman said, and he added that capacity also is a concern.

The land bank already has 100 or more properties that are were in the demolition queue, and they are expected to be part of its first application for grant funds, Grauwelman said.

Speed is of the essence to try to get to the front of the line, said Montgomery County Commissioner Carolyn Rice, a member of the land bank board.

“Let’s get every penny we can for Montgomery County,” she said.

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