

Owner-Occupied program enters second round

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The Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation (OOR) program is entering its second stage of fixing up houses in Wabash that are in need of repairs.

OOR, which is one of Wabash's Stellar projects, receives grant money from the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA) to help fund repairs for local homes owned by residents who may not be able to do the repairs otherwise.

"From the very beginning, the community wanted to see the benefits ... for eliminating eyesores or more importantly, eliminating dangerous living conditions by upgrading roofing and HVAC and things that affect safety," Deputy Program Manager Rachel Swanson said. "I think that's really important. It's a good program the state's been doing for a long time and Wabash was excited to be part of it."

The criteria for applicants looking to benefit from the OOR program, according to Housing Manager Matt Brinkman, requires them to be 55 years or older or disabled. In addition, the applicants' income must be 80 percent or less than the area's median income. During this second round of applicants, there were around 20 applications from which Brinkman said approximately a dozen homeowners were selected.

The IHCDA has provided the program with two grants worth \$250,000 apiece, plus a ten percent matching grant requirement from the City of Wabash amounting to \$25,000 per grant. From there, the funds are able to be distributed for the repair projects, with each homeowner receiving no more than \$25,000. The program does not require participating homeowners to contribute their own money toward a project, but there are limits to the types of repairs that can be completed with OOR funds.

"Generally it is just repairs," Brinkman said. "No full-scale add-ons, and we don't make any structural changes to the house."

Brinkman informed the Plain Dealer that they planned to submit the selected applications to IHCDA next month and from there will take their cues from IHCDA on how and when to proceed. He predicted, based on the proceedings of their first round of repairs, that it would take about two months for the IHCDA to approve the applications and go through the environmental release process.

The houses will then be split into two groups, with the first half starting the contractor bidding process in December or January and the second half going through the same process about 60 days later.

"Doing it all at once is too much, so we take six at once and get contractors in there and have them submit bids to get work done," Brinkman said. "Looking at the life-cycle, all 12 homes probably won't be done until late spring, early summer of 2018."

During the first round, the program assisted 11 homeowners with home improvement projects, bringing the total to over 20 homeowners that benefited between both rounds. Work done during the first phase included installing new windows and HVAC systems and repairing leaky roofs, according to Brinkman. He noted that many of the homeowners from the first round said that certain improvements had lowered their heating and electric bills. In addition, the houses were also cleared of hazards like lead paint and were fixed to comply with requirements from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) so that the homeowners could be sure that they could remain living in their homes without safety concerns.

"The key thing is keeping a lot of seniors aging in place," Brinkman said. "And there is a general appreciation that homes will not be deteriorating and that we are eliminating potential eyesores."