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WARDS CORNER

\$1 MILLION PROGRAM TO HELP REVITALIZE 3 NEIGHBORHOODS

By Lia Russell The Virginian-Pilot

More than 130 people – nearly double the expected number – attended a recent Wards Corner Residential Renovation and Remodeling Services meeting at the Workforce Development Center.

The program, sponsored by the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, offers qualifying homeowners in Denby Park, Oakdale Farms and Monticello Village loans and grants to make interior and exterior home improvements.

In September, city officials, working with NRHA, approved a plan that offers \$1 million in revitalization assistance for more than 1,200 residential properties in the three neighborhoods.

“The city has indicated that it will consider additional funding in the next fiscal year,” Judy Haller, NRHA director of residential rehabilitation, said. “Interest like this from homeowners hopefully will help to generate more funds.”

Information was mailed to property owners last fall and the effort garnered 80 phone calls and 25 applications that have been pre-qualified, Haller said.

The recent meeting, on Jan. 29, was the first public meeting on the program held by NRHA with homeowners.

“In my 30 years in the rehabilitation department, this turnout was a first for me,” said Haller, impressed with the amount of interest.

“There’s just a different feel among this group. There’s not a lot of apprehension. These people really want to improve their neighborhoods.”

Greg and Teresa Fortner, who have lived in their circa 1942 Oakdale Farms home for seven years, attended. They hope to get assistance to replace their roof and antiquated heating system and repair their chimney – critical improvements they say they can’t afford to make otherwise.

“It’s nice to see that the city is finally looking at the central part of Norfolk – not just at Ocean View and downtown,” said Greg Fortner, who works at the Norfolk Navy Exchange.

Property owners may apply for one of three types of improvements – structural, aesthetic or home expansion.

To qualify, applicants must be up-to-date on property taxes, mortgage payments and homeowners’ insurance and meet specific income criteria.

Andrea Sutton, a single mother who purchased her 1940s Monticello Village home in September, is familiar with NRHA programs.

“I received a \$30,000 grant through NRHA’s HomeNet program,” Sutton said. “I never thought I’d be able to own a home.”

Now Sutton, a Chesapeake parole officer, hopes to qualify for a “Home Appeal” grant to spruce up the exterior of her residence.

“NRHA is really great to work with,” Sutton said. “But my advice to anyone interested in these programs is ‘have patience.’ The process takes time.”

With only a 10-member staff to process applications, oversee construction and coordinate financing, Haller concurs.

“With the amount of interest we’re seeing, we won’t be able to zip through the process,” she said.

“But we’re going to do our best to get things done in a timely manner. ”

For more information on applying, call 314-2087 or go to www.nrha.norfolk.va.us.

