

# Federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program awards Pasco \$27 million

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NEW PORT RICHEY — Pasco County will get another \$27 million in federal housing funds to help deal with the foreclosure crisis, officials said Thursday.

That award, part of the U.S. Housing and Urban Development's Neighborhood Stabilization Program, comes on top of the \$19.4 million the county received last year in that same program's first round.

Pasco has spent 75 percent of that first award — more than any other community in Florida, county officials say.

More than 480 agencies and governments competed for the \$2 billion in this latest round of funding, which was earmarked for areas hit hardest by foreclosures and vacancies. Only 56 agencies were funded.

Pasco teamed up with Pinellas County and Neighborhood Lending Partners of West Florida, Inc., a non-for-profit banking consortium, on the latest application.

The three received a total of \$50 million, and Pasco's share is the \$27 million, said George Romagnoli, Pasco's community development manager.

Florida groups received a total of \$348 million.

According to the Pasco and Pinellas group's application, the funds will be used in targeted areas across 103 census tracts where the economic downturn and volatile financial and housing markets have resulted in high foreclosure rates and declining communities.

In both counties, the money will go toward home buyer assistance, the rehabilitation of foreclosed or abandoned homes, the demolition of blighted structures and redevelopment of vacant or demolished lots.

These activities target households with incomes at or below 120 percent of area median income. The cutoff for a family of four, for instance, is \$71,040.

In Pasco County, the lion's share of the money — \$15 million — will go to a program that funds nonprofit agencies to acquire and fix up homes then put them back on the market.

Another \$6 million will go toward down payment assistance, with the rest spread among acquiring and refurbishing multifamily projects, demolishing blighted structures and redeveloping vacant properties, according to Romagnoli.

The first round of funding has been targeted at west Pasco, but this \$27 million can be used in other parts of the county, including Dade City, Zephyrhills and central Pasco, where investors

were once scooping up as many as 15 homes at a time with balloon and subprime mortgages, according to the application.

HUD officials say the money went to applicants "who developed the most innovative ideas to rebuild local communities while demonstrating that they have the capacity to be responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars."

The Neighborhood Stabilization Program was created to redevelop hard-hit communities, create jobs and jump start the local housing market. Last year, HUD awarded nearly \$4 billion to 300 applicants as part of the program.

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**Where's the**

**money going?**

**\$15 million** toward a program that helps nonprofits fix homes and put them back on the market.

**\$6 million** in down payment assistance.

**The rest:** Acquiring and refurbishing multifamily projects, demolishing blighted structures and redeveloping vacant properties.