

# Orange expected to gain \$3.6 million in housing funds

By John Zucal Managing Editor, Orange Transcript  
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Orange may be in line to receive additional housing funds for two redevelopment areas, city officials said Tuesday night. The city is expected to receive approximately \$ 3.6 million in funds under the federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program. City officials said the money will be used to acquire and rehabilitate residential properties within the Central Orange Redevelopment Area and Central Valley Redevelopment Area. Along with the rehabilitation, some of the funding may be used to construct new residential units. City officials said approximately 55 residential units may be restored or created through the funds. They stressed the number of units will depend on the cost to acquire the properties from the banks which initiated and completed a foreclosure against the original owners.

Valerie Jackson, Orange's director of planning and economic development, said the funds would help the city restore housing during a period when the housing market is struggling. The department is expected to lead the city's functions within the program.

"This grant helps us address the current foreclosure and housing crisis, stabilize our neighborhoods and move our redevelopment plans forward. Orange has a comprehensive strategy to prevent foreclosures and minimize the consequences when foreclosures occur," Jackson said Tuesday night in a statement. "The strategy was announced at a public forum in January 2009 and includes acquiring vacant, abandoned and blighted foreclosed properties at a discount from banks and others, rehabilitating the properties, and selling them to home buyers, who meet the affordable housing criteria."

City officials said their application required they identify the developers with whom they intend ed to work to execute the project. The for-profit RPM Developers of Montclair, and Housing and Neighborhood Development Services, a local nonprofit community and housing development organization located in Orange, will work with the city within the project.

Orange was part of a consortium of municipal and nonprofit organizations which teamed in July 2009 to submit an application to the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for \$ 45 million in funding. The department recently announced its awards; the Essex County group will be awarded \$ 20.8 million.

Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. said the partnership will aid Orange as city officials continue their attempt to reduce the number of properties which are foreclosed, vacant or in disrepair.

"Increasingly, homes are falling under the ownership of banks, which are poorly equipped to maintain, restore or find purchasers for them. The problem puts families in jeopardy and threatens the city's tax base, property values and quality of life," Hawkins said in a statement. "This grant is one part of our strategy to stabilize our neighborhoods and help residents stay in their homes. Our goal is to provide assistance tailored to the needs of specific homeowners, reduce the number of foreclosures, and reduce the number of vacant and abandoned properties."

City officials said an award notice from HUD is pending.