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## **Franklin County Commissioners Celebrate Ripple Effect of \$2.1 million Neighborhood Investment in Whitehall**

Part of a national effort to reverse the debilitating effects of foreclosed and vacant homes on local communities, Franklin County Commissioners are celebrating the ripple effect of investing more than \$2.1 million of federal neighborhood stabilization and community development funds in the City of Whitehall: construction jobs, affordable housing, and increased homeownership.

The Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development was created to redevelop hard-hit communities and grow local economies by providing communities with funding to purchase and rehabilitate vacant homes and convert them to affordable housing.

Since 2009, Franklin County has directed a significant portion of these NSP funds to projects in Whitehall, including the construction of 12 affordable homes. Additional federal community development funds were also directed to infrastructure and roadway improvement projects.

Franklin County's Economic Development and Planning Department partnered with the Mid Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and Habitat for Humanity-MidOhio to purchase and renovate the foreclosed or vacant homes. Once renovated, these homes were sold to qualified homebuyers at affordable prices.

The last of these homes -- located at 689 Erickson Avenue -- is set for closing later this month and builds on the emerging local efforts in Whitehall to encourage more homeownership in a community hard-hit by foreclosures.

"We've seen firsthand the impact the foreclosure crisis had on homeowners. But the crisis hurt communities, too," said Commissioner John O'Grady, President of the Franklin County Board of Commissioners. "By redeveloping these vacant and foreclosed properties, we've started a ripple effect of revitalization -- putting homebuilders to work, creating more affordable housing, and helping neighborhoods that need it most."

"By investing these federal dollars in stabilizing and revitalizing hard-hit neighborhoods, we're giving communities an opportunity for a fresh start," said County Commissioner Paula Brooks. "By creating high-quality, energy efficient housing and modernizing the infrastructure around these neighborhoods, this effort has helped to re-ignite local housing markets, protect home values, and support local economic development growth."

"Even one vacant home can have a debilitating effect on a neighborhood, leading to reduced property values, blight, and neighborhood decay. By rescuing and renovating these 12 homes, our partners have provided a safe home for a Whitehall family and at the same time secured the health and safety of the surrounding community," said County Commissioner Marilyn Brown, who also serves as chair of the MORPC board of directors. "Investing in homes, families, and communities is the best foundation for long-term economic growth."

“The Whitehall community has greatly benefited from the NSP funds,” said Mayor Kim Maggard. “This program has helped revitalize our neighborhoods and has given an affordable option to those looking to purchase a home in the City of Whitehall.”

In addition to requiring homebuyer education for families who purchased one of these homes, Franklin County also required that all houses be AWARE Certified (Accessible, Water Conservation, Air Quality, Resource Conscious, Energy Efficient), ensuring a green and healthy home that lasts a lifetime.

As part of the \$2.1 million total investment in Whitehall, Franklin County directed more than \$350,000 of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to road and infrastructure improvements along Country Club Road and Bernhard Road.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has recognized the great work being done in Franklin County using NSP and CDBG funds, citing homebuilding projects throughout the greater Columbus region in several case studies.

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