

Neighborhood improvement projects get \$200,000 grant

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The Lycoming County commissioners Thursday approved a \$200,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement funding for the Brodart Neighborhood Improvement Program for interior and exterior health and safety improvements.

William Kelly, deputy director for county planning and community development, said the project is essentially recapturing money from the Act 13 impact fee with this "quality project," for PHARE's Homes in Need program.

Lycoming County

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As STEP Inc. is contracted to do the work, Rachele Abbott, the agency's director of planning, told the commissioners home owners make up about 50 per-

cent of the program.

Kelly said there are several funding sources restricted to home owner-occupied dwellings, but they are developing more funding sources for rental properties.

Abbott said they distributed 40 applications to interested parties, and there are currently 14 applicants eligible out of a neighborhood of 150 houses in the Memorial Avenue area. Of those, five are ready to audit.

The program will also offer workshops for recipients to teach them how to be "home stewards" with financing and other classes.

"We're not just working on homes, but the people who live there," Abbott said.

Kelly said the workshops are a real investment in people's futures.

He also expressed excitement that individuals and families who earn up to 200 percent of the area median income are eligible for these funds.

"We're trying to reach working folks," he said.

Kelly said the county can recapture Act 13 money that was designated for PHARE programs through grant requests.

Lycoming County townships can only keep \$500,000 from Act 13 funds, but can apply for "overflow" funds through grants, Kelly said.

Last year, the county received \$1.1 million from Act 13 funds from PHARE. Those funds were accrued by Act 13 impact fee funds from Penn, Cogan House and Cummings townships.

The \$200,000 is the first installment of that \$1.1 million toward the Brodart Neighborhood Improvement Program.

The rest will be funneled into the Williamsport Housing Strategy program, an umbrella program for the project.

Commissioners credited state Sen. E. Eugene Yaw, R-Loyalsock Township, with helping to craft the Act 13 legislation and ensuring PHARE funding is available to the county.