

Housing rehab program to be reviewed by city

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added.

In 1991-92, the city earmarked \$251,000 (including \$60,000 of loan repayments) of the total \$394,000 block grant money for about 40 housing rehabilitation projects.

INCOME-ELIGIBLE residents apply for loans or grants to the Housing Rehabilitation Loan Board. Successful applicants are given a list of contractors for needed work. Project costs are brought back to the city. But the loan board apparently does not see the bids, Costick said.

"Frankly, the (Ranesbottom's) report is quite critical. The last thing we want is to lose this money coming to this community," coun-

cilman Aldo Vagnozzi said.

Ranesbottom told the city council she would send her written statement to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which finances and administers block grant programs.

Costick said Plante & Moran auditors are expected to develop improved procedures for the housing program governing how applications and bids are processed, record keeping, as well as improving communication between the loan board and residents who receive help.

"We'll be looking at getting more feedback at the close of each project," Costick said. "There hasn't been a formal appeal process before."

Blight remains despite enforcement

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Ida Ranesbottom will tell you that with houses priced \$72,000-\$125,000 Old Town and Meadowbrook Heights are not blighted. But blight continues in some areas of southeast Farmington Hills, despite a federally financed code enforcement officer's charge to clean up the problem.

"There is a perception in this program that since the hiring of an additional zoning inspector things have been made better for the areas he has had assigned to him. We are here tonight to tell you this is not true," said Ranesbottom, secretary of the Old Town-Meadowbrook Heights Homeowners Association.

Ranesbottom objected to using block grant money to help pay for a code enforcement officer hired specifically for the southeast section of the city.

"The city of Farmington Hills and the administration sends inept, unqualified personnel to enforce the zoning ordinances of the city," Ranesbottom said. "The money being expended from the CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) funds for a zoning officer is being spent unwisely and we, as representatives of our members, object to the continuation of allocation of monies for the expense of an ineffective zoning officer."

court; let's make a deal; neighborhood feud," Ranesbottom said. "The list of why a complaint cannot be handled is long. However, one excuse we get is it's an ongoing problem. Our question is why? Why are zoning violations ongoing?"

No answer was given by council members or city administrators. But promises were made to check into the problem.

"I think Mrs. Ranesbottom is expressing concern we have to pay attention to," councilman Terry Sever said. "We're not delivering to the community when we go 20-some months before this comes to the council."

Using block grant money to defray the cost of a code enforcement officer's salary was started two years ago when residents in southeast Farmington Hills complained about code and zoning violations.

IN THE FIRST year, block grant money alone was used for the new officer. Last year, the city council agreed to pay half the \$2,000 salary and fringe benefits, with the other half coming from block grant money.

For 1992-93, City Manager William Costick has recommended that block grant money pay 75 percent or \$32,000 of the position.

With news that problems are not being solved in southeast Farmington Hills, decisions on the distribution of block grant money between the housing rehabilitation program, code enforcement, capital improvements and administration, were postponed until April 13.

"That's when the council wants some answers. For starters, Sever requested — and Costick agreed — that block grant program administrators Richard Lampl and Dale Countegan sit down with residents and determine goals and objectives for improved zoning and code enforcement."

"Short of that, I'm reluctant to spend anymore money," Sever said, adding he nonetheless agrees the code enforcement officer should be financed with block grant money.

Costick said Tuesday that meeting will take place within a week. "We'll talk about a concerted

effort with goals and objectives that can be measured. I want to address the issues raised to improve the program."

Old Town resident Massie Kurzeja, chairwoman of the Farmington Hills Zoning Board of Appeals, told the council she wanted a zoning inspector hired for the whole city, not just the southeast section. Money for a code enforcement officer should be put toward the capital improvements section of the block grant program. "Hire two inspectors for the city out of taxes," she said.

COUNCIL MEMBERS also asked for a report of zoning and code violations on record in the city's planning and community development department. "I would like to have those numbers," said councilman Ben Marks, who opposes using block grant money for the code inspector program.

Ranesbottom and Kurzeja also questioned the process used to develop the proposed Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategies Report, which is part of the application process for block grant money from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

A public hearing was scheduled to discuss the report. But it was not a city council hearing and the public was notified of the December hearing through a legal ad in the Observer.

"The resident of Farmington Hills and you, as our representative, should have informed us as a whole, how we would be affected, let us know what is going on, let us know what is required in the application and why the five-year plan became a part of the CDBG application," Ranesbottom said.

The plan is a document that identifies the need for affordable housing and offers a plan on how that need will be fulfilled.

"We handled it administratively," Costick said, referring to the document and the public hearing.

Kurzeja requested a copy of the report under the Freedom Of Information Act from HUD. "I feel it is your responsibility to let us know,"

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