



Months after it started, the Franklin County land bank will begin its mission to eradicate abandoned buildings by tearing down a mold-infested Far East Side apartment complex.

The land bank, which incorporated in April, hired a construction manager on Friday to oversee demolition projects approved by the bank's board. The manager's first job will be to demolish the vacant 55-unit apartment complex in Madison Township that has sat crumbling for almost a decade.

The township's fire marshal condemned the building, which has languished in environmental court for about six years. It will be the first structure the county's land bank demolishes using some of the almost \$8.2 million the county received from Attorney General Mike DeWine's office as part of a national foreclosure settlement.

It's the first in a long line of blighted structures to be razed now that the land bank has a process in place to identify and demolish problem properties.

The land bank's three employees are assessing about 250 properties outside Columbus to determine whether they should be demolished, renovated or rejected for the program. About 12 of those already have been slated for destruction and will come down shortly after the apartment complex at 3232 Noe-Bixby Rd.

A demolition date has not been set.

Franklin County Treasurer Ed Leonard said hiring an external construction manager to oversee the projects will avoid bloating the land bank with bureaucracy.

“We didn’t feel we wanted to be hiring a bunch of full-time staff,” Leonard said, adding that a private company could contract for additional help as needed to match the ebb and flow of work.

The land bank’s board chose local contracting firm Miles McClellan as the construction manager, which will see the projects through from demolition and environmental reporting to planting grass on the vacant lot.

Hamilton “Joel” Teaford, the land bank’s executive director, said the company has been instructed to hire small and minority-owned businesses when possible to handle the demolitions.

He said that despite the early emphasis on tearing down blighted structures, the land bank did not want to be known as the “Franklin County Demolition Corporation,” and the group ultimately would like to transition more to renovation and neighborhood revitalization.

That must wait in part because the county is on the clock to use the attorney general’s money by the end of the year, although both Teaford and Leonard hope the deadline can be extended. Most of about \$3.2 million the land bank is expected to receive this year from delinquent tax assessments will go to pay a local match for the state dollars.

Efforts to demolish the blighted apartment complex brought together officials from the land bank, the Franklin County prosecutor’s office, the health board, environmental court and township government, Leonard said. “All of a sudden, we have other partners who are helping us get the word out about what we’re doing.”

Madison Township Fire Chief Robert Bates said township officials are just happy to see the nuisance property finally coming down. It has been plagued by scrap-metal thieves and vagrants. His biggest concern is that someone will start a fire in the building to keep warm.

“Abandoned buildings and buildings under construction are significantly more dangerous to firefighters,” Bates said.