

# Project targets neighborhood blight

**BY:** Nikie Mayo

**POSTED:** 8:22 PM, Sep 3, 2015

**UPDATED:** 7:42 AM, Sep 4, 2015

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In the next 10 days or so, Anderson County officials will send certified letters to dozens of people who own dilapidated, burned, uninhabitable houses. And they will ask those owners if they are willing to sell.

On Thursday, county officials conducted one of the first public meetings about their plans, talking with residents who live just outside the city of Anderson limits. A small group gathered at the South Fant School of Early Education, and saw a list of 10 structures that could qualify for purchase and demolition, including houses on Harris, Prince and Belton streets.

“We want to get the neighborhood’s input on these properties and we also want to hear about others that should be on our list,” said Steve Newton, the county’s governmental affairs and special projects director. “If you know of burned, falling-in, derelict properties, we want to know about them.”

The move signals the beginning of ambitious program under which the county will try to demolish 70 rundown houses and clean up the land around them. The county and city of Anderson recently qualified for a combined total of nearly \$3 million through the South Carolina State Housing Finance and Development Authority Neighborhood Initiative Program. The money is to be used specifically to remove rundown, vacant houses and landscape the area around them.

The maximum amount that the county can spend on any single property — including purchase, demolition and “greening,”— is about \$35,000.

“We want to stress that this is 100 percent voluntary on the part of the property owners,” said Michael Forman, the county’s planning and community development manager. “We aren’t coming in and taking someone’s home away from them, and we aren’t demolishing any homes

that people are legally living in.”

Anderson County was awarded \$2,496,284, a forgivable loan, to carry out the project. The city of Anderson was awarded \$424,504 and hopes to use it to demolish 10 to 15 houses. City officials are also sending out letters to notify owners of qualifying properties in the city limits.

Justin Holder, the senior pastor at Project 7 Church on South Murray Avenue, attended the meeting Thursday because he had seen a county notice about it.

“We walk the streets in this neighborhood a lot doing outreach,” Holder said. “I wanted to learn more about this project because we might be able to help, or we might be able to tell the county about empty houses that are in bad shape that we see all the time.”

Anderson County Councilwoman Gracie Floyd has lobbied for razing rundown houses since at least May 2012, when she played a key role in getting the county to up its own budget for such demolitions. Floyd attended the gathering Thursday.

“Efforts like this are important for communities and for keeping them strong,” she said. “This program is happening. And it’s going to make a big difference in District 2 and throughout the county.”

*Follow Nikie Mayo on Twitter @NikieMayo*

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