

Rehab program expects to expand

Layton Boulevard West Neighbors wants to find benefits from foreclosures

By [Thomas Content](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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A Milwaukee neighborhood group is preparing to expand a home-by-home revitalization program that attempts to take the foreclosure crisis and turn it into something that benefits the community and the environment.

Layton Boulevard West Neighbors Inc. will receive \$112,000 from Wells Fargo Bank to expand its Turnkey Renovation Program.

Under that program, the neighborhood group and corporate partners are battling the nation's foreclosure crisis.

The plan is to take one house at a time, targeting foreclosed homes, and rehab them with an eye toward making energy-saving improvements that will lower the cost of ownership for the buyer.

Layton Boulevard West Neighbors launched the program in 2008, retrofitting its first home with energy-saving appliances and improvements that enabled it to achieve the Energy Star for Existing Home standards.

To date, the group has completed five turnkey homes and is acquiring and rehabilitating a sixth.

A recently completed home on S. 37th St. received upgrades that include an Energy Star furnace and water heater as well as R-50 insulation blown into the attic, dense pack cellulose insulation in wall cavities, energy-efficient lighting, low-flow water fixtures and in some cases a solar thermal hot water system.

The program has been led by Jeremy Belot of Layton Boulevard West Neighbors.

"We're trying to create a brand with what we're doing, so people have a good idea of what they're getting - an older home that has a lot of character of the older homes but has the energy efficiency of newer homes," he said.

"You go from having that vacant foreclosed home that's in really rough shape on the block and replace it with a home that has some curb appeal, and a new homeowner who's excited to be there and becomes a stakeholder for the overall neighborhood," Belot said.

Under the program, the group combines grants and corporate assistance, as well as the involvement of banks, to retrofit the homes and then sell them to families at an affordable price - from \$88,000 to \$100,000.

For each home, Layton Boulevard West Neighbors uses about \$75,000 in grants, combined with federal

neighborhood stabilization program loans, to pay for the rehab projects. A private loan from Tri City National Bank, a local lender, is used to acquire the home.

The program is one of several around the city involving nonprofits that are adding solar hot water systems, said Amy Heart of the city's Milwaukee Shines program.

"It's a really neat project - taking existing homes and making them more energy efficient. Then we're able to support that next step of adding solar, which will translate into reduced energy bills in the long run," she said.

The city's solar program also has worked with the Walnut Way Conservation Corp. on the city's north side, which retrofitted three multifamily buildings in an initiative that also provided training to neighborhood residents on solar thermal installation work.

The \$112,000 grant from Wells Fargo was part of \$5.53 million the bank awarded nationwide to 52 nonprofits and government agencies with track records of building or renovating housing for low- to moderate-income homebuyers.

"This funding will allow us to install additional energy efficiencies and renewable energy options on our turnkey homes," said Charlotte John-Gomez, executive director for Layton Boulevard West Neighbors. "This is an important strategy for creating sustainable homeownership opportunities."

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