

Funds for concrete testing part of block grant disbursement

By Eric Bedner

ebedner@journalinquirer.com

HARTFORD — The state is willing to set aside funds for testing crumbling foundations, but some area municipalities may not need it because they already have more than enough from this year's allocation.

A joint legislative committee Tuesday approved an allocation plan for the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant, or CDBG, program, a portion of which is slated to be set aside to test crumbling foundations.

The total amount available this federal fiscal year is expected to be \$13.3 million, and up to 15 percent will be allocated for public service activities, including shelter diversion activities, housing for homeless young adults, and crumbling foundation testing.

Residents in Vernon, Ellington, and Stafford already are able to access a portion of \$480,000 granted to the towns in March for testing that has "gathered critical data related to crumbling foundations," Department of Housing Commissioner Seila Mosquera said.

The grants provide \$5,000 per applicant to test their foundation for pyrrhotite, the mineral causing foundations to deteriorate.

Vernon is in the process of putting out a request for proposals for the testing firm, which once secured, will begin testing the 18 homes whose homeowners have applied through the three towns, Vernon Social Services Director Allison Maynard said.

She said the interest in testing has surpassed what she expected when applications began being accepted on May 30, adding that there's been "constant inquiries," including three applications sent in on Wednesday.

"We want people to be aware of this resource and we want people to be contacting us," Maynard said, adding that she's unsure if the three towns will apply for more funding this year.

The Housing Department provides grants that have up to a 24-month performance period, meaning communities can spend 2017's allocations up through 2019 or even an additional year if the department extends the timeframe.

The three-town allocation was awarded in March, but approved in September 2018.

At this point, there are no dollars yet set aside for testing because the towns

that have applied have sufficient access to money, according to Miguel Rivera, housing and community development manager with the Housing Department.

Other affected towns, including Coventry, he said, are having difficulty finding low- and moderate-income homeowners who want to have their foundations tested.

CDBG eligibility is limited to non-entitled communities — those with less than 50,000 residents — and at least 51 percent of the overall grants must benefit low- and moderate-income residents.

Rivera said the Housing Department is reaching out to more affected communities in an effort to find more eligible homeowners.

"We're preparing for the long haul," he said.

While last year there were two separate notices for the bulk of the CDBG

grants and the 15 percent for public service, this year applications will be accepted all at once as part of the state's standard competitive process, according to Michael Santoro, director of the Office of Policy, Research, and Housing Support within the Housing Department.

Communities will also be able to apply for both pools of money rather than just one, Santoro said.

Rivera said that assuming applicants comply with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development regulations, projects would be approved based on the needs of communities.

Aside from foundation testing, CDBG grants have also been used to improve infrastructure, rehabilitate homes, provide compliance to the Americans with Disability Act, assist with public housing, and create jobs, Mosquera said.

N.Y. governor airs concerns over solitary confinement

By Ryan Tarinelli

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — New York's governor expressed concerns Tuesday with a proposal that would restrict the use of solitary confinement, saying the legislation would require the construction of new facilities and cost jails about \$1 billion statewide.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo made the comments on WCNY's the Capitol Pressroom the same day advocates prodded New York lawmakers to green-light the proposal before they are scheduled to

adjourn this week.

"I am not in favor of building a billion dollars in new jails," Cuomo said in the interview.

The bill hasn't been scheduled for a vote.

The Democratic governor says that he is in favor of safer and more humane procedures, but that the proposal would require the building of a new type of jail known as a residential rehabilitation unit.

"It would say to county jails you now have to build a new jail facility for these different type of units," he said.

Opponents of solitary confinement

compare the practice to torture and say isolation can leave lifelong psychological scars.

They also argued that the legislation would not require any new jails.

A thousand mental health professionals and advocates from around New York have signed on to a proposal to restrict the practice. But supporters worry the bill might not pass.

Prisoners would not be placed in isolation for more than 15 days consecutive days under the legislation. It also stipulates officials cannot impose "restricted diets" as punishment.