

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

The cities of Imperial and Ogallala will share a grant for the demolition of 10 blighted structures under a grant received through West Central Nebraska Development District (WCNDD). A total of \$210,000 has been awarded for the project through the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

The cities are two of six across the state to receive grants through the Community Development Block Grant Neighborhood Stabilization Program 1.

The program provides emergency assistance to state and local governments to purchase, redevelop and rehabilitate foreclosed, abandoned and vacant properties that otherwise already are or may become inhabitable.

A main focus of the program is to return safe and decent affordable housing units to the market in an area in which at least 51 percent of residents earn incomes at or below 120 percent of the Area Median Income.

Carl Elmshouser, executive director of WCNDD, said Tuesday that his office doesn't expect to have the contract and funds in hand until mid-October. It may be mid-December before WCNDD decides which 10 houses or trailer houses in the two towns will be chosen for demolition.

Each community had to prepare a list of possible houses for demolition when WCNDD applied for the grant, Imperial City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland stated.

"In order to have a house demolished it has to be on the list for the grant application," she explained. She came up with 19 possibilities in Imperial. Some are occupied and some are not. WCNDD has a list of criteria for choosing a house for demolition, Leyland said. That includes a willing property owner, if the house is vacant, how long it's been vacant and a point system for ranking the houses in order of demolition.

Elmshouser said there is no set amount of grant funding for each community. Trailer houses cost less to demolish, while some houses may cost more than other houses.

He said the two communities will have on the average a total of 10 houses making the final demolition list. That means there could be one more, or one less, depending upon how the bids are made.

Leyland said she and Economic Development Director Leslie Carlholm made their Imperial list with a "broad brush" by driving around town during a housing study. "We marked some to see if they were salvageable, and ones that we knew of that were probably candidates," she said.

"Most are where people don't want to spend money to tear them down," she added. There are also two mobile homes on her list that have been causing problems for the city.

Some of the houses are being lived in. Some may have landlords who don't want the property torn down, she said.

The property owner retains ownership of the land when the house is demolished, Leyland pointed out.

She said she had hoped that the project would begin in October. However, Elmshouser said it would be later this year.