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Unified Board awards \$350,000 in grants for development in urban core.

By: MARK WIEBE

Three Kansas City, Kan., developers have received \$350,000 in grants from Wyandotte County's Unified Government to help with projects they're tackling in the city's urban core.

The county's Unified Board of Commissioners, for the first time using money from the government's Neighborhood Revitalization program, approved the grants Thursday.

Working from a list of 13 applications, the Public Works and Safety Standing Committee selected the three projects for the board's approval.

Funds set aside in the 2004 and 2005 budgets have brought the amount of money available for grants to \$680,000. With these grants, that amount will be pared to \$330,000.

The grant recipients are:

- ◆ Reunion Homes, a Kansas City, Kan., developer that will use a \$170,000 grant to help pay for road, curb and infrastructure in its 124-home development at 18th Street and Getty Street.

Bill Davis, a partner of Reunion Homes, said the \$12 million to \$15 million project – dubbed The Estates of Rivers Edge – would essentially rebuild an old neighborhood in a roughly 35-acre area that had deteriorated.

Davis stressed that the homes would sell at market rates for the area -- \$127,000 to \$165,000 – and would target homebuyers with discretionary income.

“We're not going to rebuild our city with just affordable housing,” he said.

Davis said that the project's first phase had already begun and that two homes were built. Reunion Homes hope to have the development completed by 2008.

- ◆ CHWC Inc., (Community Housing of Wyandotte County), a non-profit developer that received a \$100,000 grant to pay for \$750,000 renovation of the historic Fire Station No. 9, at 14th Street and Central Avenue.

The 7,000-square-foot station will serve as a new home for CHWC, community meeting space and possibly offices for other non-profit organizations.

The Unified Government gave the station to CHWC last year. Michael Snodgrass, the organization's president and CEO, said the grant brings the amount of money raised for the project to \$400,000. He hopes to have the renovations completed by June.

Snodgrass said the move for the organization would give it a higher profile in the Central Avenue corridor, near where several CHWC projects are underway. "I think it's going to serve as a huge stimulus for Central Avenue," he said. "There are some really great businesses that have located there."

- ◆ City Vision Ministries, a non-profit developer that landed an \$80,000 grant for environmental cleanup at *The Kansas City Kansan* newspaper's former downtown building. City Vision purchased the building at Eight Street and Armstrong Avenue two years ago with plans to convert it into a 21-unit loft condominium.

The money will pay for most of the cleanup, which includes removing asbestos and chemicals related to printing and cleaning the old presses.

City Vision President John Harvey said he hopes to begin construction on the nearly \$3 million project in July and have some of the first units ready by early 2006.

"We just haven't been able to do much until the environmental issues were resolved," Harvey said.