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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Municipalities receive grants to improve neighborhoods

MADISON – Seven Wisconsin municipalities will receive \$218,145 in grants to demolish blighted houses as part of a statewide program designed to improve residential neighborhoods. Municipalities receiving funding under the Strategic Blight Elimination Program are:

- Eau Claire, \$18,950 to remove one house.
- Mauston, \$39,000 to remove six houses.
- Merrill, \$20,000 to remove one house.
- Oconomowoc, \$24,000 to remove three houses.
- Oconto County, \$46,195 to remove four houses.
- Portage, \$25,000 to remove one house.
- Wausau, \$45,000 to remove three houses.

Earlier this year, 10 Wisconsin cities were awarded grants totaling just over \$900,000. The program is funded by \$500,000 from the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions (DFI) and \$500,000 from the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) with proceeds both agencies received from the National Mortgage Settlement earlier this year. DFI has allocated an additional \$118,666 to help fund the latest round of demolitions. That money will come from non-mortgage related settlements received by DFI. The program is being administered by the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA).

“Community leaders in cities that have already received funding have expressed tremendous support for the program because removing blighted houses has a positive impact on neighborhood property values,” DFI Secretary Peter Bildsten said. “DFI is pleased to be able to add a little more financial muscle to this innovative program,”

Demolition of such properties also can lead to safer neighborhoods, according to Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen. “Abandoned houses cause harm because they attract criminal activity,” Van Hollen said. “By providing resources to tear down some of these properties, we are increasing public safety and improving neighborhoods.”

“WHEDA is grateful that DFI and DOJ are providing resources necessary to begin an economic revival,” WHEDA Executive Director Wyman Winston said. “Removing blighted properties creates more desirable locations for housing and business development and re-energizes dilapidated neighborhoods across Wisconsin.”

The program targeted properties that represented a pronounced safety issue, occupied a parcel that will be immediately repurposed for a broader strategic development plan, or inhibited the re-emergence of a neighborhood. Once all of the projects are complete, 131 housing units will have been demolished under the program.

For more information about the Strategic Blight Elimination Program, go to www.wheda.com/WorkingWithWHEDA.

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