



TOWN OF RIVERHEAD NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 12, 2016

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RIVERHEAD AWARDED \$100,000 TO COMBAT VACANT AND "ZOMBIE" HOMES

Riverhead, NY - The Town of Riverhead was among 76 cities, towns and villages across New York State that were awarded funding to address the problem of vacant properties and so-called "zombie" homes – vacant and abandoned homes that are not maintained during a prolonged foreclosure proceeding.

Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman announced that Riverhead will receive \$100,000 of the \$12.6 million that was awarded to local municipalities statewide. The grants were awarded under the *Zombie Remediation and Prevention Initiative*, which the Office of the Attorney General established in July with funds drawn from the \$3.2 billion settlement agreement with Morgan Stanley that Schneiderman, as co-chair of the federal-state working group on residential-mortgage-based securities, negotiated in February. That settlement generated \$550 million in cash and consumer relief for New Yorkers.

The Local Initiatives Support Corporation, a national community development intermediary that specializes in affordable housing, economic development and community revitalization, is overseeing the initiative and has selected the grantees. The LISC will be providing technical assistance to the funded municipalities as they implement their plans. "Too many homeowners across New York are still struggling to rebuild their communities in the wake of the housing crisis caused by major banks," said Attorney General Schneiderman. "I'm proud that the funding obtained by my office's settlement with Morgan Stanley will now help cities and towns across the state reverse the proliferation of "zombie" properties which invite crime and threaten the value of surrounding homes. These grants will help rebuild, revitalize and stabilize communities across the state."

"LISC is thrilled to be awarding \$12.6 million in grants to cities, towns and villages in partnership with Attorney General Schneiderman to combat their "zombie" and vacant properties," said Denise Scott, LISC's Executive Vice President for Programs. "We can't wait to work with mayors and supervisors and their communities... all over New York State."

"The Town of Riverhead is extremely grateful for this grant from the Office of the Attorney," Supervisor Sean M. Walter. "We are confident that these funds will help Riverhead combat code enforcement issues related to "zombie" properties." The grant funds awarded to Riverhead will, according to Supervisor Walter, address housing vacancies and blight by the town's capacity for housing code enforcement, for tracking and monitoring vacant properties, and for legal enforcement capacity to ensure banks and mortgage companies comply with local and state law.

While accurate numbers have been hard to come by, it has been estimated, based on data released by Realty Trac in 2015, that there are approximately 16,000 zombie homes across the state. The Abandoned Property Neighborhood Relief Act allows the state, for the first time, to accurately track the number of abandoned properties and ensure their upkeep. The *Zombie Remediation and Prevention Initiative* grants allow cities and towns across the state to maximize the impact of the law and to partner with the state in addressing the blight of abandoned properties.

"The growing problem of abandoned, "zombie" properties has a significant adverse effect on our neighborhoods," said Supervisor Walter. "While the efforts of the Code Enforcement Division to date are commendable, budgetary constraints have unfortunately imposed some limits on what the town can do. This grant will alleviate some of the financial burden that has resulted from the blight of abandoned properties and protect the quality of life Riverhead residents expect and deserve living on the East End. It is critical that we protect the integrity and safety of our neighborhoods."

Town Attorney Robert F. Kozakiewicz, whose office oversees Riverhead's Code Enforcement Division, said, "Although Riverhead has made progress and continues to address the blighting influence of so-called "zombie" homes, there is a lot more work to be completed before the problem can come close to being resolved. This funding from Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman will provide much needed financial support to better coordinate Riverhead's efforts. The Office of the Town Attorney is dedicated to addressing any and all code enforcement issues resulting from derelict properties."

The New York State Attorney General's office has offered this advice:

Homeowners who are at risk of foreclosure to existing foreclosure prevention programs can find honest and accurate information about the mortgage modification and foreclosure process at www.AGScamHelp.com or call 1-855-HOME-456 to get connected to free, high-quality help from a trusted counseling agency partner.

The New York State Attorney General created www.AGScamHelp.com to assist homeowners in finding free, qualified mortgage assistance relief services from a network of trusted partners operating across the state under the New York Attorney General Homeowner Protection Program (HOPP). We are dedicated to alerting homeowners like you about foreclosure rescue scams so you can avoid scammers and get legitimate help.

Check your eligibility for the federal government's modification and refinance programs: *You may qualify for assistance under the federal Home Affordable Modification Program (HAMP), the Home Affordable Refinance Program (HARP), or other similar government programs. If you cannot afford to make your monthly mortgage payments, you may qualify for a loan modification or loan refinance to make your monthly payment more affordable. To find out more about the program, visit www.MakingHomeAffordable.gov.*