

# Housing Project Funds Expected

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Wytheville's public housing shortage could improve if funding for a proposed 24-unit apartment complex is approved. Funding from federal and state grants is expected to be announced within 90 days.

Wytheville Town Council learned Monday night that all documents associated with the Wytheville Redevelopment & Housing Authority's application process have been completed. Council had previously authorized Town Manager Wayne Sutherland to execute the necessary paperwork regarding the town's involvement.

Sutherland also was delegated to apply for Community Development Block Grant Funding with the stipulation that the Housing Authority would prepare the grant application and handle the administration of the funds. Council agreed to waive 60 percent of the water and sewer tap fees associated with the project.

"All of these applications have now been submitted to the appropriate financial agencies," Councilman and Public Works Committee member Bill Weisiger state at Monday evening's meeting. "And it is anticipated that notification of the approval or disapproval of the grant fund applications should be received within about 90 days. We hope that the Housing Authority is successful with these efforts because they have noted to us that there are more eligible applicants on the waiting list for public housing than the amount of housing that is available."

No one knows that need better than Randy Martin, executive director of the WRHA. His waiting list spans six years.

"We have more of a need now than when I started 16 years ago," Martin stated earlier this week. "It's more among the elderly and handicapped and it's a need I don't see going away." WRHA operates 400 various residential units in Wytheville and Wythe County. It provides accommodations for the elderly, persons with disabilities and families with qualifying incomes.

The authority is owned by the federal government. It is governed by a board of directors appointed by Wytheville Town Council.

"Our units stay full," Martin noted. "Some people have been on the waiting list for five or six years. Local residents are considered first on a point system."

The new complex, Jefferson Union, will be located on a 2.57-acre site on the north side of Jefferson Street between 12th and 14th streets. It will consist of 12 units for people with handicaps and 12 regular housing units.

The site comprises an entire block. The property was bought in 2008 by the authority with an option on a piece of adjoining property.

According to Martin, the authority has applied for tax credit funding through the federal stimulus package. Addition funding is being sought from Appalachian Region Commission grants and other state and federal agencies.

“We’re very hopeful we’ll get the stimulus funds,” Martin remarked. “We’ve been working on this since 2007.”

Construction could begin in late winter or early spring, Martin said. Occupancy could be before the end of this year, according to him.