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Lake County Housing Authority gets \$300K grant

Organization will use funds to upgrade public housing properties

By Bob Chiarito, Special to the Tribune

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The Lake County Housing Authority recently learned it will receive almost \$300,000 to upgrade several subsidized public housing properties.

The grant was given by the Illinois Public Housing Authority's energy program at the University of Illinois and the Illinois Energy Office at the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. The award totals \$292,617 and is directed to be used for electrical upgrades.

Beginning in 2010, the Lake County Housing Authority began working with Johnson Controls on a \$2.6 million energy performance contract, according to housing authority executive director David Northern.

"This (grant) helps us to facilitate capital improvements and helps us budget our money," Northern said.

The Lake County Housing Authority is the fourth largest housing authority in Illinois and currently owns 620 subsidized public housing units, Northern said.

Northern said the housing authority learned of the award in a letter and are still waiting to learn if they will receive two other grants — \$400,000 for solar panels and \$100,000 for gas.

Word of the electrical grant came by letter Jan. 30, and the housing authority anticipates finding out about the other grants by the end of this month, according to housing authority public relations manager Laura Siebert.

Joe Pash, account executive at Johnson Controls, who helped with the application, said the grants will help improve residents' lifestyle and comfort, and also will help conserve energy and modernize the buildings.

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Northern said being energy-efficient also saves residents money.

"The tenants pay a portion of their energy bills, so if the costs go down, they pay less," Northern said.

Pash added that the grant is important because five of the seven multi-unit buildings owned by the county are entirely electric.

"We'll be putting in new lighting fixtures, refrigerators, heating and cooling systems and water flow regulators. Plus, it will all be done by Lake County contractors, so it's good for them also," Pash said.

The application, which took nearly eight weeks to finish, was described by Pash as an arduous task.

"They need as much information as possible. They need model numbers, makes and year of every system that will be replaced," Pash said. "It took a month for the preliminary analysis and another four weeks to write the grant application."

Upon learning of the grant, Pash said it was satisfying in several ways.

"Given all the hard work, it's nice to see it pay off. I'm happy for the housing authority and happy for the residents," Pash said.

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