

[Print Page](#)

â€˜Douglas Goes Greenâ€™™

WHBA green housing initiative promotes foreclosure renovation

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The Westside Home Builders Association (WHBA) has announced a new green housing initiative to help clear up economic red ink from the massive number of area foreclosures.

The â€œDouglas Goes Greenâ€ plan involves building model energy efficient (green) houses in selected subdivisions with large numbers of foreclosures and renovating the foreclosed homes to meet green standards. The program would make use of some of the \$3.8 million foreclosure renovation money awarded to Douglas County last week by the federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP).

Chris Collier, WHBA executive officer, presented details of Douglas Goes Green to the Monday morning Douglas County Board of Commissioners (BOC) work session.

Collier said the program is designed to address the large number of foreclosures and to encourage upgrading these foreclosed homes to energy efficient standards.

â€œIn todayâ€™s business environment, home builders canâ€™t build new homes and compete against the current foreclosed properties,â€ Collier told the meeting. He said over the next six months, the WHBA will build green showcase homes at selected subdivisions and educate builders, Realtors and buyers on energy efficiency standards. He said his group will work with local banks to provide financing packages for retrofitted, green foreclosed homes.

Collier said the first model home will be built at the Whitestone subdivision, located on Highway 5, about a half mile south of the Highway 166 roundabout. A second site will be Ashley Falls in the north side of Douglasville and another at Providence Walk.

Collier said two banks, First National Bank of Georgia and First Georgia Bank, have indicated they will work with WHBA on its green mortgage program.

This program will provide down payment assistance with only 5 percent required at closing and a \$20,000 maximum no-interest second mortgage to bring the foreclosed house up to minimum green energy standards.

â€œThis is something that Douglas County will have that nobody else will have,â€ Collier said. â€œIt will attract buyers to the homes and create jobs in the county.â€

Collier said the program would also offer a first-year warranty on the renovated foreclosed homes that would cover appliances, plumbing, electrical, structure and upgrade items. An optional 2-10 year warranty would provide additional protections including roof leaks. Buyers usually donâ€™t get warranties with foreclosed homes, he noted.

He said the renovated homes would meet Earth Craft certification, a nationwide standard for energy efficient homes. He said WHBA would work with local codes officials to train and certify Earth Craft inspectors.

He said energy testing of homes will include use of pressure devices that find energy leaks which might be fixed by better windows, insulation, replacement of duct work, new air conditioning systems or maybe just a lot of caulking.

Collier listed the following benefits from the Douglas Goes Green program:

â€¢ home buyers will get a quality home at a fair price;

• building and banking industries will begin recovery by eliminating foreclosure property inventory;
• Realtors will generate sales commissions;

• local businesses will benefit from increased spending;

• home values will stabilize;
• utility bills for a green home would fall from about \$650 to \$250 per month;

• and Douglas County would raise its image.

Collier noted that about 18 percent of the homes currently on the market are foreclosures. He said the Douglas Goes Green program hopes to sell about 70 homes between now and the end of November.

"I can hear excitement in your voice when you talk about this program," District 4 Commissioner David Latham told Collier after the presentation. "We need people to start thinking like you do. We have to get out of this 'me' mentality."

"We're certainly with you," Commission Chairman Tom Worthan said. "I like the program. I think it's something positive."

Close Window