

Housing official commends Fayette County agencies

By Patty Yauger HeraldStandard.com | Posted: Friday, October 26, 2012 2:00 am

WHARTON TWP. — A National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) representative encouraged local housing groups on Thursday to share the good news of how their agencies are making great strides in providing homes to those in need.

John Bohm, NAHRO senior director of congressional relations, public affairs and field operations, was the keynote speaker for the Fayette County celebration of Housing in America Month held at the Stone House Inn and co-hosted by the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, Fayette County Housing Authority and the Fayette County Community Action Agency.

The three agencies, along with other area authorities and entities that receive state and federal funding, are active in providing housing opportunities for those with low- to moderate-income levels.

“There is great work going on here in Fayette County,” said Bohm. “The dollars are being put to good use and aiding in the growth of the economy, creating jobs, growth and development.”

Prior to his taking the podium, Andrew French, executive director of the county redevelopment authority; Andre Walters, housing authority director of funding and asset planning; and Tammy Knouse, customer service director for Community Action; shared their respective achievements.

Walters said that a priority of the housing authority over the past year is to comply with requirements in providing access to those with physical disabilities. The initiative has cost millions of dollars, but has resulted in those with special needs to have homes that are safe.

Knouse, too, said that the agency has worked to help families buy their first home and offer accommodations to those without the means to do so.

French said the redevelopment authority has embarked on several initiatives that have resulted in new home opportunities and improved neighborhoods throughout the county.

“A lot of people have benefited greatly,” he said.

Bohm, meanwhile, cautioned the groups that the current national fiscal crisis may have a negative impact on their ability to help Fayette County residents in the future.

“We will be facing difficult days and challenging days ahead,” he said.

Bohm said that he anticipates that those agencies that already have suffered budgetary cuts likely will see further decreases in their funding as certain federal mandates, such as sequestration, are implemented.

Sequestration — a budget-enforcement mechanism — is the result of the Budget Control Act of 2011. The law set caps on future discretionary appropriations to reduce federal budget deficits.

Set to become effective on Jan. 1, the sequestration trigger will reduce spending at the federal level for all departments, including those that fund the Fayette County housing agencies, said Bohm.

While it is estimated that 2 percent or less of the federal budget is earmarked for housing projects, it is vital the funds remain intact, he said.

“We do have a fiscal crisis that needs to be addressed,” said Bohm. “Any additional cuts could have a chilling effect on what we do.”

Many of the local agencies saw upwards of a 15 percent funding cut last year. An additional 8.2 percent decrease could result if the federal caps are enacted, Bohm said.

Thomas Harkless, executive director of the county housing authority, said that another decrease would be detrimental to its program.

“I’ve been doing this for a long time and every year, no matter where I was at, we would always be able to set money aside in our capital reserves,” he said. “Last year, we had to take money out of capital reserve to pay the bills.”

Bohm said that funding decreases would impact those most in need, such as those who receive rental assistance, live in public housing and the homeless.

Certain congressional members are working behind the scenes to offer other recommendations to the hefty cuts, he added.

“We have some difficult problems and we must solve them,” he said.



Ed Cope

Fayette County Housing Consortium

John Bohm, National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) senior director of congressional relations, public affairs and field operations, speaks at the Fayette County Housing Consortium luncheon Thursday afternoon.