

New Bedford's Mayor Mitchell announces program to revive significant vacant properties

Mayor Jon Mitchell announced a new program today that is dedicated to reviving significant vacant properties in New Bedford. The program's goal is to revitalize neighborhoods and combat the impacts of residential, commercial, or industrial blight by providing financial support for projects that will return vacant or abandoned properties to productive use.

The Vacant or Abandoned Property Rehabilitation Program is supported by the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and will benefit properties in qualified census areas.

"Revitalizing underutilized properties can energize businesses and neighborhoods alike," Mayor Jon Mitchell said. "This program will give developers and businesses the support they need to move stalled projects forward."

The program is seeking substantial projects that have additional revenue sources and are ready to move forward quickly. Supported projects must begin funded activities within one year of the grant award, and total project costs must be at least \$750,000. Support from the program may not exceed 50% of total project costs. Chain stores and franchises are ineligible, and renovations or demolitions must not result in a reduction of the total number of occupiable housing units.

All improvements must be approved by the New Bedford Historical Commission, which will act as the City's Design Review Board to evaluate projects for their aesthetic, architectural, or urban design quality, and compatibility with nearby development.

“Advocating for the revitalization of blighted neighborhoods has been a top priority for me throughout my City Council service,” City Council President Ian Abreu said. “I am very supportive of leveraging these one-time ARPA dollars to support efforts to restore the community integrity that every pocket of our city deserves.”

The program defines vacant properties as those that are not legally occupied and have been unoccupied for at least six months. Abandoned properties are vacant and in a blighted condition, meaning one or more of the following qualities: unsecured; open to the weather; boarded-up windows and doors; disconnected or non-operating utilities; uncovered swimming pool; or the presence of perishable food, dangerous substances or chemicals, animal litter, trash, or debris.

Eligible activities supported by the program include:

- Rehabilitation, renovation, or costs to secure vacant or abandoned properties to reduce their negative impact
- Costs associated with acquiring and securing legal title of vacant or abandoned properties, and other costs to position the property for productive use
- Removal and remediation of environmental contaminants or hazards from vacant or abandoned properties, in compliance with environmental laws and regulations
- Demolition or deconstruction of vacant or abandoned buildings (including residential, commercial, or industrial buildings) paired with greening or other lot improvements as part of a strategy for neighborhood revitalization
- Greening or cleanup of vacant lots, as well as other efforts to make vacant lots safer for the surrounding community
- Inspection fees and administrative costs to ensure compliance with environmental laws and regulations for demolition, greening, or other remediation activities

Responses are due Sept. 30, and may be emailed to arpa@newbedford-ma.gov.

Questions about the program and responses also can be sent to that address.

Learn more on the City's ARPA website:
www.newbedford-ma.gov/arpa.