

Mahoney Saves Rural Housing Program

Ensures Small Town America gets funding to Revitalize Downtowns

(January 17, 2008)

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(Washington, D.C.) - Today Congressman Tim Mahoney (FL-16) passed an amendment to H.R. 3524, the HOPE VI Improvement and Reauthorization Act, which saved the Main Street Grant program. Without Congressman Mahoney's Amendment, small rural communities would have been excluded from critical funding to revitalize main streets in small rural communities with mixed-use affordable housing and commercial development projects.

H.R. 3524 re-authorizes the HOPE VI program, which provides assistance to public housing agencies to improve the living environment of severely distressed public housing projects. The purpose of the HOPE VI Main Street program is to provide grants to small communities to assist in the rehabilitation and new construction of affordable housing in conjunction with an existing program to revitalize a historic or traditional central business district or Main Street Area.

"The Main Street Grant program is crucial to rural communities with small populations because it ensures they will get their fair share of funding to revitalize their downtown areas with mixed-use housing and commercial development. By revitalizing main street America, we ensure that our rural communities stay vibrant" said Congressman Tim Mahoney. "Saving small town America is an American value."

"On behalf of Moore Haven, one of the smallest and poorest Main Streets in Florida, I commend Congressman Tim Mahoney for leading the charge to ensure that the Main Street HOPE VI grant program will continue. The opportunity for rural communities like Moore Haven to get grants of up to \$1 million dollars is a huge victory for struggling rural communities trying to promote affordable housing and economic development. The HOPE VI Main Street grant literally brings hope to small communities nationwide," said Tracy Whirls, the Executive Director of the Glades County Economic Development Council.

The HOPE VI Improvement and Reauthorization Act will:

Reauthorize the HOPE VI program through 2015 and authorizes \$800 million for the program in each fiscal year.
Prohibit the Secretary from awarding HOPE VI grants for the demolition of public housing units without the replacement of units through revitalization.

Expand upon the types of activities that the grant can be used for to include costs associated with:

- Green developments
- Temporary and permanent relocation of residents
- Monitoring and tracking of displaced residents
- Development of public housing units to meet the one-for-one replacement requirement.

Eliminate the Main Street Grant Program-Congressman Mahoney's Amendment prevented this elimination.

The HOPE VI Improvement and Reauthorization Act, which had 9 co-sponsors, passed the House by a vote of 260-130 on January 17, 2008.

Congressman Tim Mahoney, Floor Statement on H.R. 3524:

Mr. Chairman, I rise today to offer the amendment that will preserve the HOPE VI Main Street Grant program.

This program, important to rural communities with very small populations, was created with the passage of the American Dream Act in 2003. Since its inception, the program has helped a small number of rural communities develop affordable housing units in conjunction with larger revitalization efforts.

The creation of the HOPE VI Main Street Grant program in 2003 was important to rural communities, because it allows rural communities to compete with larger urban areas for a small percentage of HOPE VI dollars. Mr. Chairman, for those not familiar with the program, the HOPE VI Main Street grants are funded through a 5 percent set-aside in the HOPE VI annual appropriations, and each award is capped at \$1 million.

As I noted, this program is extremely important to rural communities, such as Moore Haven, Florida. Located on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River in Glades County, in one of the most rural areas of South Florida, Moore Haven is one of the oldest cities in South Florida. This beautiful old sleepy Florida town is home to one doctor, Dr. Geek, and one restaurant. It is one of the few places left in Florida where the families have lived there for generations and everyone knows their neighbor. Unfortunately, it is also one of the poorest areas in the State. The population of the City is approximately 1,900 and the annual tax revenue for all of Glades County is \$6 million. The people of Moore Haven have the desire to revitalize their historic downtown area, but, they lack the financial resources.

Guided by the vision and leadership of Tracy Whirls, the Executive Director of the Glades County Economic Development Council, Moore Haven applied for a HOPE VI Main Street grant last year. The city had hoped to use the money to purchase three historic- but dilapidated and vacant - buildings with the intention of attracting businesses to the first floors and 12 affordable housing units on the upper levels. Plans for the first floors included opening Moore Haven's only pharmacy and furniture store.

I regret, Mr. Speaker, that Moore Haven was not successful in its attempt to secure the grant. The good news is that they are game and they're going to apply for it again this year, but I believe that it is imperative that as we continue to give Moore Haven and small rural cities like Moore Haven across this great nation this opportunity.

Mr. Chairman, in closing I would like to leave you with the words of Larry Luckey, the Glades County Property Appraiser: "If we are unable to save these historic commercial building, the downtown historic district will cease to exist. I am saddened at the thought that we may well become a city with no history."

I would ask for the support of my colleagues to preserve the HOPE VI Main Street Grant Program, and the economy and history of small towns throughout America, including Moore Haven. In addition, with the passage of my amendment, we will ensure that rural communities continue to have access to the affordable housing benefits provided by the HOPE VI program.

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