

Redevelopment Authority to buy additional lots

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The Covington Redevelopment Authority is planning to purchase nine more lots in the Walker's Bend subdivision as it continues efforts to revitalize that area.

The lots are owned by the United Community Bank, according to the Newton County Tax Assessor's Web site. The bank has a branch on the Covington ByPass Road.

The nine lots will be purchased on June 18 for a total of \$45,000, about \$5,000 a lot, plus additional closing costs, according to a letter from city Finance Director Leigh-Anne Knight.

On Monday night, the Covington City Council voted unanimously to approve the purchase. The CRA required permission from the council because it used money loaned by the city to purchase the lots, Carter said Tuesday. The city previously loaned about \$570,000 in seed money to the CRA. As affordable houses are built and sold, the mortgage money will be used to repay the city. Once all of the original seed money has been repaid, the CRA will then be autonomous, Carter said.

The nine lots are spread throughout the subdivision. The CRA purchased 38 properties in Walker's Bend in December, most of which were foreclosed.

City Planning Director Randy Vinson previously said the goal was to partner with a private development firm to renovate current housing and build new affordable housing. However, one roadblock was the fact another private development firm, Rialto Capital Management, had purchased 31 lots primarily near the entrance of the neighborhood. Vinson had been attempting to negotiate for the CRA to purchase Rialto's lots or trade lots within Walker's Bend.

However, Carter said Tuesday that the CRA had recently put Rialto in touch with Affordable Equity Partners, a firm the city has worked with in the past. She said it's possible the two groups may be able to work out a deal, which could lead to AEP building 30 single-family affordable homes.

She said the CRA is also working on a partnership with the Covington Housing Authority to create a homebuyer counseling service program to help train families on how to repair their credit and learn how to handle the responsibilities of owning a home.

The CRA is working in Walker's Bend, located off of Ga. Highway 81 before Porterdale, because it saw the neighborhood as being on the verge of becoming a slum and officials hoped to turn it around through concentrated investment, Vinson said previously.