

Foreclosed homes get efficiency makeover

BY ANN DEPPERSCHMIDT, COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Vacant foreclosed homes can become a community eyesore, causing neighboring property values to dip while the bank-owned houses fall into disrepair.

But a local nonprofit is trying to combat those problems, turning once problematic empty houses into environmentally friendly homes. And Denver Water is helping to make sure the homes' landscape, toilets, showerheads and faucets don't waste water.

"It's important to be a part of rehabilitating these homes so they can be as water- and energy-efficient as possible," said Stacy Smith, a conservation specialist who is overseeing Denver Water's portion the project. "It's an important contribution to the neighborhoods."

The Denver Urban Renewal Authority (DURA) established a nonprofit organization called Denver Neighborhood Revitalization Inc. to use federal grant money to buy, rehabilitate and resell foreclosed homes. The nonprofit plans to rehabilitate 50 to 75 foreclosed homes in the Marley, Westwood, Barnum and Green Valley Ranch neighborhoods by 2013. That number ultimately will depend on how fast the homes sell and how much work each foreclosed home needs.

Fred Yeazel, a rehabilitation specialist with DURA, said the nonprofit hires local contractors to work on about 10 homes at a time, and each home needs anywhere from \$35,000 to \$80,000 worth of work.

"It relieves banks of their toxic debts," said Yeazel, adding that people who buy the rehabilitated homes must meet income requirements and take a class in homeownership and maintenance. "And it helps people become homeowners."

Crews must fix any environmental problems with the house, which includes alleviating radon issues, getting rid of mold, disposing of asbestos and stripping the house of lead paint. Then they have to fix foundation problems, structural issues or anything else that needs to be done to make the house livable.

From there, they work on the house's efficiency. Denver Water is supplying each house with high-efficiency 1.28-gallons-per-flush toilets, low-flow showerheads and faucet aerators. Denver Water also is providing \$3,000 per house to be put toward efficient irrigation equipment and low-water-use plants, provided each yard has no more than 50 percent turf.



This yard on this foreclosed Louisiana Street house will save the next homeowners money on their water bill.



Before



This foreclosed Tennyson Street house has a new, water-efficient yard thanks to the Denver Urban Renewal Authority and Denver Water.



Before

"We didn't want to make just the inside of the properties efficient," said Tim LaPan, Denver Water's landscape architect who is overseeing landscape plans for each house. "We wanted the outside to be efficient, too."

Each house will get new Energy Star appliances, compact-florescent light bulbs and high-efficiency furnaces and hot water heaters. New carpet is made from recycled soda bottles, and tiles are made from recycled material. And most of the old wood, pipes, cardboard and other material taken from each house will be recycled.

Then the agency puts the house up for sale so any profit can be put into rehabilitating the next foreclosed house.

"We want to stave off the negative impacts that foreclosed homes can have on neighborhoods," said Marianne LeClair, housing manager at DURA. "We want to recapture and revitalize the neighborhood by putting the homes back on the market. Hopefully that will be a catalyst to get other people to invest in the neighborhoods."

Partnering to restore foreclosed homes

Two Denver-based nonprofit organizations are using federal grant money to purchase, rehabilitate and resell foreclosed homes in several Denver neighborhoods.

The Denver Urban Renewal Authority established the nonprofit Denver Neighborhood Revitalization Inc. to restore homes in the Marley, Westwood, Barnum and Green Valley Ranch neighborhoods.

The Denver Housing Authority established the nonprofit Neighborhood Development Collaborative Inc. to restore homes in the Montbello, Northeast Park Hill, Swansea, West Colfax, Villa Park and Athmar Park neighborhoods.

Denver Water is working with both agencies to make sure the restored homes have efficient landscapes and appliances.