

Johnson Bill Protects Home Buyers *continued from front page*

be very liable for damages,” explains Jim Tierney, “The frustrating thing was that lenders and some other professionals are exempt from making such “Substantially Damaged” disclosures [about previously flooded properties], ostensibly because they have no sure way of knowing,” explains Tierney.

Tierney is very familiar with flood recovery efforts in Vernonia and Columbia County, having worked on the issue extensively following both the 1996 and 2007 floods. CAT has directly overseen the recovery efforts since the 2007 flood.

Tierney went on to explain that FEMA requires local governments to use their development ordinances as a tool to protect against flooding and repeated claims from federally declared natural disasters.

The key piece of this requirement is that, in order for a community to qualify for and receive National Flood Insurance, local government is obligated to include wording in their development ordinances that require a home owner in the flood plain, who has been “Substantially Damaged,” to either elevate their home or tear it down. Not having this language in the local ordinance could keep all property owners in a municipality from participating in the National Flood Insurance Program.

According to Tierney over 240 homes in Vernonia have been declared “Substantially Damaged.”

Tierney says that Vernonia City, and Columbia County officials became aware of this requirement following the 1996 flood, and used that information after the 2007 flood to notify property owners of their obligations through letters declaring “Substantial Damage.” The letters were helpful but there was a gap; there was nothing in place to permanently identify a property as having been “Substantially Damaged.” Homes that had been foreclosed, and were now bank owned, were not being identified to potential buyers.

Tierney and Vernonia City Planning Commissioner Dan Brown, who was also working on the flood recovery effort, tried to record those notices onto the title of the affected properties, but the responsibilities of county clerk’s office are very prescribed and, notice of “Substantial Damage”

was not on the list.

Tierney says he approached Senator Johnson’s office about the problem. Senator Johnson was already aware that there was an issue, thanks to repeated contacts from citizens. Together CAT staff and Senator Johnson’s office began to work on a solution to the problem. Tierney and Brown worked on the technical side, providing relevant information to Senator Johnson’s staff and legislative counsel.

Together they crafted Senate Bill 465 which would allow local governments with land use jurisdiction over residential structures declared “Substantially Damaged” by flooding to record, in the office of the county clerk, official designation of “Substantial Damage.”

Senator Johnson introduced the bill in February of this year; it was approved by the State Senate in

April, and by the House in May; there were zero no votes in both the Senate and the House against the bill. It was signed into law by the Governor on June 4th.

“Cities and Counties can now record these notices, at their option, and help protect the few folks who buy into an area after a flood, without jeopardizing the rest who depend on FEMA flood insurance,” said Tierney.

“This was really a team effort,” said Senator Johnson. “People often ask, ‘What does my government do for me?’ This is a great example of government being responsive to the needs of it’s citizens. Government got it done and a law was changed.”

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CAT Receives Grant for Family Program

Community Action Team’s (CAT) Child & Family Development Program has received a two-year grant from the Children’s Trust Fund of Oregon for Northwest Parenting Education programs to expand prevention programs to parents of older school children and in communities under served by parenting education. The grant allows continued programming at Columbia Community Mental Health’s Pathways program and will enable CAT to serve the community of Vernonia through a partnership with Vernonia Prevention Coalition and Columbia Community Mental Health prevention staff.

Strengthening Families Program for families with children 10-14 years will begin Wednesday, October 2nd from 6:30-8:30 at the Vernonia Community Church on 957 State Avenue.

For nearly thirty years the

Children’s Trust Fund of Oregon has worked on behalf of parents struggling to give their children the best start in life. As Oregon’s only statewide organization focused exclusively on child abuse prevention, the Children’s Trust Fund invests in best practice child abuse prevention programs, while also investing in public awareness campaigns, research and sound public policy to create lasting change for Oregon’s children. Since the inception of the Children’s Trust Fund grant program, \$10 million has been invested in prevention programs across the state. With the support of thousands of Oregonians, the Children’s Trust Fund made it possible for 10,000 children and families in 2012 to receive the parenting classes, therapeutic daycare services and home visits needed to prevent child abuse and neglect. Learn more by visiting: www.ctfo.org

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