



Gonzalez, Preckwinkle showcase Cook County investments totaling \$11M in Chicago Heights

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CHICAGO HEIGHTS | Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and officials from the U.S. federal housing authority visited Chicago Heights last week to see for themselves the \$11 million of federal- and county-funded investments the city has received in recent years, according to a news release from the city.

Chicago Heights Mayor David Gonzalez hosted Preckwinkle, local elected officials and top management from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to showcase the strategic investments in city housing rehabilitation, road construction, and other development projects as well as a fruitful "city-county partnership."

The visit also highlighted the job-anchoring industrial locations within Chicago Heights.

Gonzalez welcomed Preckwinkle and the other officials to Chicago Heights' City Hall and then the group toured the investments that Cook County has made through \$9 million in federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program money to rescue neighborhoods and homes lost to the foreclosure crisis and \$1.9 million in Community Development Block Grant money to fund road improvements in the city and the demolition of neglected and abandoned commercial and residential properties.

From 2009 to 2013, more than \$9 million of federal government neighborhood stabilization money has flowed into Chicago Heights to rehab housing 53 units of housing stock and return the properties to the property tax rolls, thanks to Preckwinkle's and Gonzalez's efforts to secure the federal funding, according to the news release.

"Through our flourishing city-county partnership, we are restoring housing vitality to neighborhoods significantly hit by the foreclosure crisis," Gonzalez said in a prepared statement. "President Preckwinkle's personal commitment to revitalizing our housing stock is bringing neglected homes back onto the tax rolls. That's how we define success."

In addition to the neighborhood stabilization program, Gonzalez and Preckwinkle also highlighted projects funded between 2010 and 2013 through \$1.9 million from community block grants that include the demolition of dilapidated properties and road rehabilitation projects.

“The Community Block Grant money is helping to provide a new face to the city and is helping to provide leverage for broader, citywide economic growth,” Gonzalez said.

Another key element to future citywide growth is a technical assistance grant that the city was awarded from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning to assist city officials with the modernization of the Chicago Heights Comprehensive Development Plan.

“The last comprehensive plan we have is from the mid 1990s,” Gonzalez said. “We need a plan for the 21st century.”

By revising and updating the city’s strategic plan, Gonzalez wants to partner with Cook County to apply for a federally funded Choice Neighborhoods grant.

That grant will enable Chicago Heights, the Housing Authority of Cook County and the Bureau of Economic Development to develop a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization strategy, including integrated public housing, new schools and other neighborhood amenities, which are key elements of Gonzalez’s “future vision” for the east side.

“My future vision for the city’s east side is to develop job opportunities through light manufacturing and neighborhood stability through affordable housing,” Gonzalez said in the statement. “The east side can serve as a platform for future, broader economic development in Chicago Heights.”