



QUITMAN COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI: Blight Elimination Project: Phase 1



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Project Overview

A local grassroots committee has been active for the past six years, and recently formed a non-profit, the *Quitman County Economic & Tourism Development, Inc.* (QCETD) which has been in collaborative partnership with the Quitman County Board of Supervisors and the City of Marks Board of Aldermen. The primary focus of the group is the improvement of the living conditions for residents residing in this small Mississippi Delta County. Learn more by visiting the website www.discoverqc.org.

The non-profit Quitman County Economic and Tourism Development, Inc. is requesting funding for a countywide Blight Elimination Project (BEP) to help demolish 125 **blighted properties** within the Cities of Marks and Lambert and all municipalities located within the boundaries of **Quitman County**. These properties have been abandoned, condemned and are unsafe structures to inhabit, and they present a very serious problem for this county’s homeowners, the neighborhoods, and the overall community. The current conditions of these properties negatively impact homeowners and neighborhoods by reducing property values, creating environmental health hazards, and by creating havens for homelessness and crimes.

The Proposed Targeted Locations of Properties within (7) Municipalities of Quitman County:

Locations	Number of Homes
City of Marks	31
Town of Lambert	22
Darling	16
Sledge	15
Crenshaw	12
Falcon	11
Crowder	9
Belen	9
Total	125

The county, City of Marks and other rural municipalities listed previously receives frequent requests from residents in these communities to help demolish abandoned and condemned properties, however these entities do not have the funds, nor the equipment needed to assist the property owners. The imposed state restrictions on property owners can be arduous in processing the necessary paperwork and finding the means to pay the legal costs and permit fees.

The Quitman County non-profit is seeking a grant in the amount of \$1,950,000.00, to address the serious problem and help improve the living environment for residents of Quitman County. Once the blighted properties are demolished, the non-profit will work with local stakeholders and homeowners to implement a strategic plan to transition the newly vacant lots for redevelopment or future greenspaces. The lots will become a part of the future neighborhood redevelopment, which will ignite revitalization within our small, rural neighborhoods. Our hope is that one day future affordable housing units will be available to those in Quitman County.

The Need

Quitman County has suffered an economic decline over the past several decades. The county has lost many of its manufacturing jobs. Furthermore, it has been subject to [frequent flooding](#). The decline of the economic base has resulted in the lack of adequate funding for education, housing, and healthcare with a continued decline in the county's population due to lack of opportunities.

The current racial makeup is 72.0% black, 26.0% white and 1.2% other. It is one of the poorest counties in our nation with a median annual household income of \$25,283, and an alarming current poverty rate of 35.6% percent. According to 2010 U.S. Census, the county's population was 8,200, and the most recent [2020 Census](#) show a decline in the county's population by -17.40, with a population of 6,792. In that year, Quitman County had the biggest population decline out of the 82 counties in the State of Mississippi. The median age is 38.7%, with 24% of the population (2,191) is between the ages of 55 to 85. Many in this category are retired or on fixed incomes or disabled. The current unemployment rate is 10.0% and due to the currently COVID-19 pandemic that jobless rate is on the rise.

Quitman County is approximately 400 square miles lying within the Mississippi and Yazoo Delta region. The county's tax base is primarily centered around agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting. The rich soil is highly productive, and most of the farmland is considered high yield. The main crops are cotton, corn, soybeans, and rice. The larger row crop farmers generate approximately 2/3 of the taxable income for the county. However, the majority of these farmers live outside of the county, and most of them in neighboring states.

With farming now mechanized, few jobs are available in the industry to help support the local population. The biggest downfall of the county's economy came when the three (3) manufacturers closed in the late 1990s. These closures caused a further decline within the county's population and severely corroded the economic base. The last manufacturing company, *Bunge North America* closed in 2013. During the time of closure, it employed fewer than 20 people.

Currently, employment in the county is for the most part service-based. Most jobs are in healthcare,

social assistance, or education. Other service-sector jobs include arts, entertainment, and recreation. According to the latest Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) figures, over 60 percent of Quitman County's workforce commutes outside the county for employment, and a big portion of those dollars never make it back to the community.

The only [rural critical access hospital](#) closed in 2016, which at that time, was the largest employer in Marks/Quitman County, with 99 employees. The nearest hospitals are located in the neighboring counties of Coahoma and Panola, which is a 30-minute drive to either location. After 5 years of the hospital being closed the county has resolved to reopen it. A partnership has been created with nearby hospital Panola Medical Center and a path has been cleared for the [Quitman Community Hospital](#) to reopen. This hospital will have the capacity to provide emergency care as well as beds for acute patients, including those with COVID-19. The targeted date to have the hospital reopened is November 1, 2021. By reopening this hospital, the loss of jobs in the community will be reversed and the citizens of Marks will have renewed energy to grow the economy in the area.

Most recent data from the *National Rural Accountable Care Consortium* for the 82 counties in Mississippi, has Quitman County ranked 79th for health outcomes, 79th for health behavior, and 77th for health factors. Significantly, the county has an obesity rate of 42 percent. More data available at: <https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/files/profiles/Quitman.pdf>

The 2017 closing of the only [full-service grocery store](#) located in Marks, Mississippi, resulted in repercussions to the county's health and economy, the loss of 25-30+ jobs, and a reduction in sales tax revenue. Quitman County was a food desert during that time. The nearest grocery stores are located in the neighboring counties of Coahoma and Panola, and it took a one-hour round trip to reach either place. This situation affected the elderly and disabled particularly hard. Many had to pay someone to drive them for hospital visits and to purchase food. On April 5, 2021, the grocery store reopened after being closed for nearly four years. The reopening of the store was coordinated by a grassroots committee in conjunction with local stakeholders. Read more: <https://www.reinvestment.com/success-story/new-store-brings-food-and-hope/>

Quitman County also experiences annual spring flooding. A total of (5) [five flood events](#) have been reported by the National Climatic Data Center resulting in \$2.1 million in property damage. On an annualized level, these damages amounted to \$2,005,796 for Quitman County. The annual flooding is one of the contributors to the systemic poverty in Quitman County, of the 125 blighted/condemned properties over 90% experienced flood damage. Many of residents cannot afford flood insurance, and have to abandon their properties, or without any recourse, continue to occupy these homes. Currently 1/2 of the homes occupied by Quitman County residents are not in good repair. In addition to flood damage, severe storms have caused roof and structural damages to many of these homes. Many of the residents are subject to hazard health concerns, such as respiratory infection, which can trigger allergies, especially from mold cause by flood contaminated water.

Project Implementation: The Demolition and Maintenance Process

The project operations will follow standards guidelines for best practices in demolition of residential property, and will adhere to the Mississippi Department Environmental Quality (MDEQ) requirements as outlined in the Quitman County's Blight Elimination Manual.

Each property will be subject to the [Blight Elimination Property Checklist](#). The checklist states each task, such as obtainment of the Property Owner's Consent, permits, removal of hazardous materials, removal of debris from demolition, and the site's restoration. Each task outlined on the checklist will need to be completed prior to the payment of the invoice.

The contractor will complete the [Blight Elimination Project Attestation Form](#), for each property prior to the demolition to attest the complete scope of work. This form will validate the correct property address, the pre-demolition and post photos, that all permits are in order, the asbestos survey is complete, if required, and verification of all expenses incurred with the demolition of each property.

Each property will be subject to the completion of an [Administration & Property Maintenance Claim Form](#). This form will be used for the maintenance accountability of each property that is demolished. It will track the work performed, such as, grass mowing and debris control. The maintenance crew will be asked to provide seasonal photos of the property upkeep on a continual basis.

QCETD and Scott Construction will enter maintenance agreements with licensed local maintenance lawn services within the seven (7) municipalities to provide the necessary ongoing lawncare required for cleared parcels located within the boundaries of Quitman County.

Organizational Structure:

A full-time Economic Development Director has been hired by the Quitman County Board of Supervisors. The director's start date was July 1, 2020. This person will be housed in the Visitor's Tourism Interpretive Center. The director is responsible for creating and managing the County's non-profit Economic Development Division. The director will manage and implement the day-to-day operations related to economic development and redevelopment opportunities. The Economic Development Director serves as the main point-of-contact and the leader of the county's economic development projects, and will further the economic interests of the county under the direction of five (5) Board of Directors appointed and approved by the Quitman County Board of Supervisors.

The Quitman County Board of Supervisors will maintain oversight of this division.

The lead organization will be [Quitman County Economic & Tourism Development, Inc.](#), under the leadership of the Quitman County Economic & Tourism Development director, [Velma Wilson](#). She was instrumental in organizing the county’s grassroots committee in 2014 and served in a volunteer capacity for two years prior to becoming a consultant for the county. In 2016, Wilson was employed as the first African American, and the first female County Administrator for the Quitman County Board of Supervisors. During this time, Wilson helped to develop strategic goals to economically improve the county. Some of her responsibilities included oversight and management of the county’s budget, marketing strategy, and operational and property functions, but a large portion of the job entailed seeking resources for economic stimulus, through networking and grant writing to regional, state, and federal resources. Within the three-year tenure with the Board, over \$5 million in local, regional, state and federal funds were obtained for projects that benefitted Quitman County. The projects included: the stabilization of the Marks’ [Rosenwald School](#), installation of a Civil Rights “Mule Train” Freedom Marker, erection of a welcome sign in Marks’ city park, establishment of eleven markers to identify the “[Mule Train Trail](#),” which portrays the history of the 1968 Marks Mule Train & MLK’s Poor People’s Campaign to Washington, D.C., and funding to renovate the historic 110-year-old courthouse. She also founded the annual Quitman County Mules & Blues Festival and worked to successfully obtain state and federal grants to build the [Amtrak stop](#) that opened May 4, 2018. This stop, located the Marks/Quitman County, is one of Amtrak’s **more than 500 destinations** in 46 states and three Canadian provinces, operating more than 300 trains daily.

[North Delta Planning and Development District \(NDPDD\)](#) will serve as the fiscal partner for this project. This agency is a non-profit established to serve as a liaison between local government and the various state, regional, and federal agencies involved in development of economic, community, and human resources. If funded, this agency will assist the non-profit with administration of funds and help oversee the contractor’s budget component and reporting compliance. The NDPDD is governed by a twenty-eight (28) member Board of Directors. It is managed by Executive Director, James Curcio, and is staffed with administrative personnel, and specialists in areas such as planning, economic development, community development, job training, social services, transportation, geographic information systems and financial institution.

[Scott Construction \(Mississippi\) Corp.](#) will serve as the contractor for the Blight Elimination Project. This is a minority-owned company licensed in the State of Mississippi since 1993. [Jimmy Scott](#) is the Owner and President, and his office and residence are both located in Quitman County. He is experienced in the areas of building construction, electrical work, hazardous materials abatement and remediation, heavy construction, highway, street and bridge construction, mechanical work, municipal and public works construction and water and sewer. Scott has been in business for 53 years as a licensed contractor. From March 2006 to December 2008, he successfully completed a Homeland Security Contract (FEMA) on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, which entailed the placement,

maintenance, and removal of trailers utilized by victims of hurricane Katrina.

Scott is the elected president for the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Levee District. He has served in this capacity for seven years and been a commissioner for the levee district since 2008. The mission of the Board of Levee Commissioners is to erect and maintain a system of levees to protect the people and property of the Delta from damages from high flood waters of the Mississippi River. It also directs the necessary activities to protect lives and property from the threat of flooding from interior streams, and furnishes the local cooperation for various flood control projects of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The project manager will be **Dennis C. Bounds**. Bounds is a retired U.S. Marine and served for six years as a Marine Security Guard at U.S. Embassies aboard. He was responsible for the interior security for the U.S. Missions. He currently holds a Demilitarization Certification. Since his retirement, he has worked with his father, Jimmy Scott, in the family construction business. Bounds has over 15 years of experience in construction management, administrative works, and logistical planning. He is also president of the Marks Recycling Company, which was organized in 2015.

Project Locations

The overall project will be managed at **300 Cherry Street**. This is the Quitman County Welcome and Tourism facility that houses the County's Economic & Tourism non-profit office.

Scott Construction's corporate office is located at **1815 Charley Pride Highway 3 South**. Office space for this project will be at the company's recycling location on 200 Brooks Road, Marks, Mississippi. The location has the space to house the equipment, has an installed ground scale and is located in close proximity to the Class 1 rubbish site.

The Class 1 rubbish site is located on **4680 Hood Road**. This is a privately owned company. If funded, the owner will use a portion of the proceeds to build a metal building to house equipment and staff. The successful opening of the site will employ two full-time staff members at a decent wage. One of the long-term goals is to establish a countywide recycling program at this location.

Economic Impact: Short and Long-Term Goals

- Create 15 local jobs good paying jobs within the community
- Rid the county of blighted and condemned properties
- An opportunity for these lots to be used for redevelopment or turned into greenspaces.

- The county will have a sustainable Class 1 rubbish site that will be privately owned and will employ two people year-round. This will be an opportunity to build an operational facility to house staff and equipment. The rubbish site will have the capacity to obtain debris/rubbish from surrounding areas, not just here in Quitman County, to help with facility maintenance, upgrades, and ongoing costs.
- Allow an opportunity to be put into place for a countywide recycling program. The program will require funding from state and federal levels as possible resources to implement and sustain it.
- This proposal is for Phase 1, which addresses a request for funding to eliminate blight properties in Quitman County.
- The 2nd phase will be finding resources to assist residents with remodeling of homes.
- The 3rd phase will be to seek resources to build new homes.
- The 4th phase will be to establish a Quitman County Housing Authority to help manage the housing needs in this county.

Project Budget:

Amount request: **\$1,950,000.00**

Project Duration: 18 months

The projected timeline is subject to change based on weather conditions.

Blight Elimination Project: Phase 1

Quitman County
MISSISSIPPI

WILLIAMS, CLARK & MORRISON, INC. | CONSULTING ENGINEERS

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Quitman County Blight Elimination Program
Projected Timeline: 18 months for Completion

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DRAINAGE
FLOOD PREVENTION
HIGHWAYS AND STREETS
LAND SURVEYS
MUNICIPAL WORKS

30-Jul-21

PROPOSED BUDGET

1--Demolish 125 Properties @ \$15,600.00 each

\$ 1,950,000.00

PROJECTED EXPENSES

SUBTOTALS

2--Estimated Labor Cost: \$350,000.00

a--6-man crew @ \$110 per an hour

b--40-day work week over 18 months

\$ 350,000.00

3--Regulatory Permit and Inspection fee: (\$520.00 x 125 properties)

\$ 65,000.00

4--Removal & Disposal of Asbestos: (\$1,200.00 x 125 properties)

\$ 150,000.00

5--Equipment Rental: (\$183,000.00 based off the combined rental fees for equipment)

\$ 183,000.00

6- Land Surveys (125 properties x \$600)

\$ 75,000.00

6--Legal fees: Per property (\$1000.00 x 125 properties)

\$ 125,000.00

7--1 /2 staff & Admin Fee

\$ 157,500.00

8--Materials for Site Restoration: Per property (\$600.00 x 125 properties)

dirt (100 CY per house X 125 houses = 12500 cy X \$8 per cu =

fertilizer

grass seeds

small trees

\$ 105,000.00

9--Landfill Cost Plus 2 full Time Employees

\$ 233,250.00

10--Property Maintenance Fee: (\$1,000.00 x 125) (1 year maintenance of property)

\$ 125,000.00

Contractor's Fee:

\$ 187,500.00

Insurance

\$ 100,900.00

Subtotal

\$ 1,857,150.00

Contingency

\$ 92,850.00

TOTAL

\$ 1,950,000.00

Discover Quitman County

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