

Quitman County, Mississippi  
Blight Elimination Project: Phase 1

## **Project Narrative**

### **I. The project background: Why is there a need for this proposed project? Identify problems that will be solved and the project's objectives.**

The county, city of Marks and the other rural municipalities elected officials receive 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.

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 the small, rural neighborhoods. Our hope is that one day future affordable housing units will be available to those in Quitman County.

The short and long-term objectives are:

- Create 15 local 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 on the site to house staff and equipment. The rubbish site will have the capacity to obtain debris/rubbish from surrounding areas, not just in Quitman County, to help with facility maintenance, upgrades, and ongoing costs.
- Create an opportunity to be put into place a countywide recycling program. The program will require funding from state and federal levels as possible resources to implement and sustain it.

### **II. The proposed project description and the location**

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 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 invoices.

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.

The County will enter into maintenance agreements with licensed local maintenance lawn services within the eight (8) municipalities to provide the necessary ongoing lawn care required for cleared parcels located within the boundaries of Quitman County.

**The Proposed Targeted Locations of Properties within (8) 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>

**III. The targeted population demographics**

The current racial makeup of Quitman County 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. Thus, 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 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.

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 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 health outcomes related to flood contaminated waters.

#### **IV. The project's desired outcomes**

The desired outcome from phase 1 is to:

- Rid the county of blighted properties. This will increase the county chances to recruit business and industry back to the county that will create local jobs. The county eligible workforce will be able to work at home and not travel to neighboring counties or states for employment.
- Improve the overall health and living conditions, tearing down these blighted properties will be a breath of fresh air and help to revitalize and bring beautification to the neighborhoods plagued by these unsightly properties.
- During the 18months -2years this project will create jobs for local residents. These jobs will help reduce the county current 10% unemployment rate. A percentage of these jobs will become long term.
- Currently Quitman County has no operational countywide rubbish site. Residents have to travel to neighboring counties to disposal of large tonnage of rubbish and pay a disposal fee up to \$50.00. This project will allow for a class 1 rubbish site to become operational and sustainable. With an operational class 1 rubbish site, this project will be a step to getting a countywide recycling program established.

The long-term goals:

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.

## **V. Project Evaluation Process**

This project will be evaluated on the implementation process as previously described under section 2. The forms developed as part of the tracking and evaluation are linked within the attached narrative to show what information is obtained and verified for each property subject to demolition, and the follow up tracking that is done for each vacant parcel afterward for a period of one year. The contractor, non-profit director and the financial entity, North Delta Planning and financial entity, North Delta Planning and Development District will be provided copies of these documents for oversight and review.

The form used in the evaluate process include:

- [Consent for demolition of property](#)
- [Attestation](#)
- [Property checklist](#)
- [Property maintenance](#)

Site visits will be scheduled for property to be demolished and follow up visits after demolition and to monitor maintenance upkeep.

Quarterly town hall meetings will be held to obtain feedback from the concern citizens, local organizations and local church clergymen. These groups will be asked for their participation in ongoing community clean-up campaigns and ideas for improvements for neighborhood beautification projects.

## **VII. Volunteers' participation in the project**

The local stakeholders and many of the local churches have organized volunteer annual clean-up campaigns. These efforts have overall been successful. However, the [blighted pictures](#) in this proposal, show homes that will require heavy equipment and professional demolition crew to tear them down and disposal of the debris in a safely manner.

### **VIII. Project sustainability**

In 2020 Quitman County along with its municipalities adopted a new [zoning ordinance](#) and appointed a countywide zoning board. In January 2021, a part-time zoning coordinator has been hired to oversee and manage the zoning regulations for homes and businesses.

Additionally, the budget has a line item for a property maintenance fee for the 125 properties that will be demolished. The fee will remain in place for one year after the property is demolished. The maintenance process will be managed in conjunction with county non-profit director and the contractor.

### **IX. Project Budget and Budget Narrative**

Amount request: [\\$1,950,000.00](#)

### **X. Project Duration: 18 months-24 months**

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