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Analysis called a 'road map' to drive money where needed

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The market value analysis the Reading Redevelopment Authority unveiled Wednesday will help focus the efforts of numerous local redevelopment and housing agencies, said its executive director, Adam Mukerji.

"We will take the MVA as our road map and decide how we can channel our sparse dollars," he said.

Up to now, the city, the Reading Redevelopment Authority, local social service agencies and housing agencies each had their own way of deciding how and where to spend their money, Mukerji said.

Often, the decisions came down to "We've got money available for here, so let's do this," rather than a coordinated effort, leading some agencies to criticize others for those decisions, he said.

For instance, the nonprofit Our City Reading run by retailer Albert R. Boscov was criticized for rebuilding more than 500 dilapidated homes scattered throughout the city, rather than targeting specific neighborhoods.

Mukerji said people didn't realize the federal program funding the nonprofit required that it take every city home foreclosed by the Federal Housing Authority, and it couldn't choose which ones it wanted.

The market value analysis will allow the agencies to focus better, he said.

"It's a more surgical approach to economic development, rather than approaching a problem with whatever resources are available," he said.

He noted the grant pipeline is shrinking, with up to 45 percent cuts in recent years in federal community development and housing oriented grants.

"We have to learn how to do more with less," Mukerji said. "We have to be unified with a common purpose to work together."

Mukerji said suburban municipalities also are seeing some fraying at the edges, so there will be a follow-up meeting in which leaders of surrounding communities will be invited to discuss the analysis and how to work together.

That meeting, being put together by the Center for Excellence in Government at Albright College, will Nov. 8 at 6:30 p.m.

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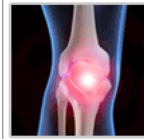
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