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Mayor Tom Barrett criticizes President Trump's plan to cut community block grants

[Meg Jones](#), Published 4:36 p.m. CT March 19, 2017 | Updated 7:40 p.m. CT March 19, 2017

Standing in front of recently renovated homes in Milwaukee's Westlawn public housing development, Mayor Tom Barrett on Sunday sharply criticized President Donald Trump's effort to cut Community Development Block Grants.

Trump's budget, released last week, would cut the \$3 billion U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development program used by communities since 1975 for affordable housing, anti-poverty initiatives and development of infrastructure. The president wiped out the program because, according to the budget proposal, it's "not well-targeted to the poorest populations and has not demonstrated results."

When asked about the president's assertion that Community Development Block Grants don't work, Barrett took aim.

"In my mind that statement is based on as much fact as his claim that President Obama was wiretapping him. It's total fabrication," said Barrett, adding that what block grants do "you can't see it from Trump Towers, you can't see it from his Florida estate."

"But you can see in these neighborhoods people working to improve lives of other Milwaukeeans. The fact that he's so totally out of touch with what's going on in American cities is another reason why he should not be making this proposal."

Barrett picked the housing area on the city's northwest side for a Sunday news conference because of the large redevelopment that has transformed homes on the east side of Westlawn, with work to be done next on the west side. The 75-acre area on W. Silver Spring Drive was first developed in the 1950s and was at one time the state's largest public housing development. In 2015, Milwaukee received a \$30 million federal grant to redevelop Westlawn and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Barrett noted the partnership between the city and federal government to redevelop housing for the elderly, veterans and low-income people will be destroyed if Trump's cuts to HUD are

approved. He also said funding will be cut for programs that provide summer jobs to youths, help displaced workers find employment and fund community organizations in neighborhoods.



Westlawn Gardens was completed in 2012 and formally opened the following year. (Photo: Michael Sears / Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

Ald. Cavalier Johnson, who represents the city's 2nd District, said his grandmother was a Westlawn resident for 15 years and would have loved the opportunity to live in one of the redeveloped homes. Cutting block grant funding will affect efforts to renovate homes on the west side of the housing development, Johnson said.

Barrett encouraged people to contact congressional representatives to protest cuts to the Community Development Block Grant program.

The mayor said when Trump was campaigning for the presidency he said "African-Americans should vote for him because it can't get any worse. ... He said that without knowing what's going on in American cities, without visiting places like Westlawn where we, through our partnership with the federal government, literally transformed the eastern section of Westlawn into a neighborhood."