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Base encroachment mostly fixed in Bibb, moving now in Houston

By MIKE STUCKA

mstucka@macon.com November 29, 2014

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Debris remains behind in a Walnut Street trailer park purchased by the state in Warner Robins. State and local officials are working to reduce encroachment around Robins Air Force Base, which largely comes from high population densities in noises and crash zones. MIKE STUCKA — mstucka@macon.com [|Buy Photo](#)



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WARNER ROBINS -- A former mobile home park is a sign of an unusual kind of progress. Just across the street and a set of railroad tracks from Robins Air Force Base, most of the mobile homes are gone, with stairs that used to lead to front doors now leading to nothing.

Some trailers remain on the Walnut Street, with pieces of their aluminum siding stripped off. A shattered television is left outside, among an infant's car seat, hard hats and pieces of air conditioning ducts that are scattered on the property.

Where dozens of families once lived, none remains. But that's an indication of progress in the fight against encroachment, where millions of dollars from local, state and federal agencies are being used to buy properties to fix the encroachment problem. Encroachment is expected to be considered a factor in the next round of military base closings.

While local officials for years have been buying properties in southern Bibb County to remove people from some of the most noisy areas, state officials have been speeding up their purchases in northern Houston County.

The encroachment buys target the most noisy civilian areas near the base as well as properties that fall in airplane crash zones.

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources purchased the trailer park on Walnut Street on Nov. 14. Daniel Brown, a business operations specialist for the department, said the site once had 61 mobile homes as well as a house. He didn't know how many had been occupied.

The department has closed on 11 properties and expects to have another 15 properties approved for purchase in time for a State Properties Commission meeting Dec. 16, Brown said. The purchases of those properties could be finalized by the end of January.

"It takes awhile for it to ... take off. But once it does, we've been busy," Brown said. "I'm excited about it, finally getting some movement."

The state agency has options to purchase another 16 properties, and the state is targeting mobile home parks with five or six trailers to more quickly get the density down.

"Those are the priority," he said.

Brown said state officials will be discussing how to demolish the housing and clean up the sites in the coming weeks. Five properties already have been cleared of debris, he said.

The state isn't trying to purchase a specific number of properties. Like the locally run effort in Bibb County, properties are purchased from willing sellers at appraised values.

"The goal is to purchase until the funds aren't available. It's going to be as many as we can get with the funds we have," Brown said. "The option to purchase these properties won't be there forever."

Total encroachment funding includes \$9.5 million from the U.S. Department of Defense, \$7.5 million from Georgia, \$6.2 million from Bibb County, \$6.2 million from Houston County and \$400,000 from Peach County.

Air Force bases that do similar work as Robins fixed their encroachment problems years ago. Robins officials worry encroachment could hurt the base's prospects in the next round of the base realignment and closure process.

The state is focusing on the most noisy areas of Houston County west of Ga. 247, mostly around the intersections of Elberta Road and Ga. 247, as well as King and North Davis drives. People interested in selling to the state can call Robin Grooms at 478-397-1485.

But while north Houston County purchases are still ramping up, most of the properties in encroachment areas in southern Bibb County already have been bought.

Daniel Cummings, a Middle Georgia Regional Commission government services specialist who is coordinating the effort in Bibb County, said 199 properties of the 250 targeted by the Central Georgia Joint Development Authority have been purchased.

Cummings said his goal is to get as many of the remaining 51 properties as finances allow -- likely 25 to 30 more.

That should lower the density enough.

"I'm still trying to get those," he said. "It's becoming harder and harder."

After the properties are acquired and cleared, the focus will turn to maintaining the properties. Under the Air Force guidelines for encroachment, population density and types of construction are important. Officials previously have talked about leasing some of the vacated land to farmers or looking to low-density commercial operations, such as lumber yards.

Cummings said he's certain the efforts will be successful.

"I feel confident that encroachment will be solved," he said.

Information from Telegraph archives was used in this report.

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