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Housing Programs Nationwide See Big Infusion of Earmark Cash.

The largest increase for housing and community development in the latest federal spending bill came from earmarks, where lawmakers direct funding to specific projects in their states.

People have been moving away from parts of Columbus, Mississippi, in recent years, leaving behind empty houses with sheets of plywood covering doors and windows.

The city's mayor, Keith Gaskin, said in an email that about 2,300 homes—or nearly a fifth of the homes in the city—are now sitting vacant, creating what he described as urban blight that's increasing crime and reducing property values for people who have stayed behind. "Our declining population has slowly changed the appearance of our community," he said.

Meanwhile, nearly 1,000 miles to the northeast, the Riverside neighborhood in Wilmington, Delaware, is dealing with similar struggles that, according to community activists there, reflect systemic racism and the nation's legacy of discriminatory housing policy.

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Route Fifty

by Kery Murakami

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