



WINTER 2010

DAN KILDEE LEAVES LAND BANK TO LEAD CENTER FOR COMMUNITY PROGRESS

Leading advocate organizations join forces to address vacant and abandoned properties Center for Community Progress launched

The Genesee Institute and the National Vacant Properties Campaign have joined forces to form a new organization currently going by the name of the Center for Community Progress. This merger brings together two of the nations leading advocacy organizations for the revitalization of neighborhoods, towns, and cities that have been devastated by both long-term abandonment and the foreclosure and economic crises. The Center will provide direct and ongoing support to cities, metropolitan areas, and states as they address the challenges presented by vacant and abandoned properties.

Not long ago, primarily residents of cities and towns in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and other "older industrial" places understood what a challenge it is to maintain vibrant and vital neighborhoods among blocks of vacant, abandoned, or underutilized properties. But the foreclosure and economic crises changed all that. Today the negative impacts of vacant and abandoned properties are felt nationwide—in towns large and small; from the center city neighborhoods in the Northeast and Midwest, to the fast-growing suburban communities of the Sunbelt.

Over the last six years, there have been numerous local and national efforts to help communities face these challenges. Two of the most respected leaders of these efforts are the Genesee Institute (GI) based in Flint, Michigan and the National Vacant Properties Campaign (NVPC) based in Washington, DC. Where the Genesee Institute has led the nation in developing and helping communities adapt innovative tax foreclosure, land acquisition, maintenance, and disposition efforts, the NVPC has helped reframe the potential of vacant and abandoned properties from liabilities to opportunities and supported communities in designing a holistic set of strategies including code enforcement efforts, information systems, acquisition, and sustainable reuse. Both GI and NVPC have created strong networks of practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and others to support the land systems reform critical to reusing these properties to transform communities into better places to live.

Upon its launch, the organization will be staffed by Dan Kildee (President of the Genesee Institute and former Genesee County Treasurer), Jennifer Leonard (director of the National Vacant Properties Campaign), Frank Alexander (Professor of Law at Emory University), and Amy Hovey (President of Protogenia Group.)

Keeping a strong community base is critical to ensure that the Center works towards effective, equitable, and sustainable revitalization. The Center, which will be headquartered in Washington, DC will have an office in Flint, Michigan. It will also co-lead an initiative started as a partnership between the National Vacant Properties Campaign and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation in New Orleans, and exploring other models for national, state, and local partnerships. The Flint office of the Center for Community Progress is open and located in the newly redeveloped historic Berridge Place.

The Center for Community Progress is funded by the C.S. Mott Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

Stay tuned for more!



Daniel Kildee,
Former Genesee County Treasurer/
Land Bank Chairperson

JILL McKENZIE IS ACTING TREASURER

Upon Dan Kildee's resignation as Genesee County Treasurer on January 1, Chief Deputy Treasurer **Jill McKenzie** became the Acting Treasurer. Ms. McKenzie will serve in that capacity until a new Treasurer is appointed by a three person panel comprised of County Clerk Mike Carr, County Prosecutor David Leyton and Chief Judge of Probate Court Jennie Barkey. Ms. McKenzie will serve as Acting Treasurer and can exercise all the powers of the office. In her capacity as Acting Treasurer, Ms. McKenzie will also serve as Chair of the Land Bank Board of Directors.

By Jennifer Leonard,
Center for Community Progress

GENESEE COUNTY FORECLOSURE PREVENTION

In 2002, the Genesee County Treasurer's Office implemented a program aimed at preventing the foreclosures of **owner occupied homes** in Genesee County due to hardship. The program, referred to as Foreclosure Prevention, allows for a postponement of home foreclosure of initially up to one year, if certain conditions are met by the homeowner.

Under Foreclosure Prevention, a petition for hardship (application) is filed by the owner with the Genesee County Treasurer's Office. To qualify for a postponement due to hardship, a home owner must reside at the property or be a legal guardian or conservator of or have legal power of attorney over the homeowner. Applicants who have assets in excess of federal law income standards for Genesee County will only be eligible for hardship postponement if their household can demonstrate substantial financial hardship. Examples of such hardships might include an unavoidable increase in expenses or an involuntary loss of income.

It is important to note that the program does not eliminate tax debt for the home owner. Tax liability will remain the owner's responsibility. Participation will require a commitment to satisfying repayment schedules that are realistic. Payments are monitored and significant progress must be attained to continue participation.

The program requires the submission of a petition for hardship (application). In order to process the application, the applicant must meet with the Foreclosure Prevention staff. The Treasurer's Office is now setting appointments to meet with home owners who are subject to foreclosure on March 31, 2010. If you are a qualified homeowner (owner occupied housing only) facing foreclosure, call **(810) 257-3059** and request an appointment for postponement of tax foreclosure.

Applications can be picked up and filled out prior to an appointment. Applications are available in the Genesee County Treasurer's Office

Qualified home owners (owner occupants only) who are subject to foreclosure on March 31, 2010 can call (810) 257-3059 to make a Foreclosure Prevention appointment with the Genesee County Treasurer's Office

located on the first floor of the Genesee County Administration Building at 1101 Beach Street, Flint, MI 48502. The Administration Building is directly west across Saginaw Street from Flint City Hall. Applicants will need a picture I.D.; a valid mortgage, deed or land contract for the property; federal tax return for the last year filed for each household resident who filed; and proof of any needs based state or federal assistance for any household resident.

(1) <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/1999-2000/billanalysis/House/htm/1999-HLA-4489-B.htm>

By Jon Care

CLEAN AND GREEN PROGRAM CONTINUES BEAUTIFYING NEIGHBORHOODS IN 2010

Neighborhoods, churches, civic organizations and other community groups interested in maintaining and beautifying Land Bank owned properties are once again invited to submit an application to participate in the Clean and Green Program, one of the Land Bank's most popular programs. Organizations receive funding from the Land Bank to maintain at least 25 properties and one garden site in a specific geographic area. In 2009, Clean and Green had a record 29 community-based groups participating in the program who collectively maintained approximately 750 Land Bank properties. Many groups went beyond the Land Bank owned properties and mowed and cleaned up additional lots in their areas.



Applications due March 15, 2010

Applications for Clean and Green can be found on the Land Bank's website at www.thelandbank.com. For more information about the program or for assistance in filling out the application, please contact Heidi Phaneuf, Community Resource Planner at

(810) 257-3088 ext 524 or by email at hphaneuf@co.genesee.mi.us.

Applications will be available February 1, 2010 and are due to the Land Bank by March 15, 2010. You can also pick up an application at our office or at our table at the Keep Genesee County Beautiful Conference on March 6, 2010 at the University of Michigan – Flint. Join us in our efforts to engage community in cleaning and greening Flint and Genesee County.

By Heidi Phaneuf,

REPORT OUT FROM STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY IN THE FACE OF POPULATION DECLINE

On October 8th, 27th, and November 5th, the Genesee County Land Bank coordinated with the City of Flint, Mt. Morris Township and community partners to host three forums called *Strengthening our Community in the Face of Population Decline*. Flint's population is now about forty five percent smaller than it was in 1960. Thirty two percent of residential properties are abandoned and the average sale value of a home in Flint in 2009 reached an all time low of \$16,000. The purpose of the forums was to explore land use trends, learn about government and community based efforts to improve land and neighborhoods, and hear fresh ideas about how to strengthen Flint and Beecher in the face declining populations and property values.

Presenters included community leaders and activists and representatives from the City of Flint, Mt. Morris Township, Genesee Township, the Genesee County Land Bank, and the U.S. Census. After representatives from the U.S. Census and the Genesee County Land Bank set the context for the discussion by presenting trends in population decline and abandoned property, the rest of the presenters shared revitalization strategies that are either currently in use or proposed. Different presenters shared new ideas during each of the three sessions. Some of the strategies discussed included:

- Developing a process for land use decision making that is responsive and equitable and acknowledges the historical inequities of land use decisions in the past
- Engaging the community to develop a master plan given the smaller population, abandoned properties and new challenges
- Developing neighborhood plans to strengthen the community and create opportunities out of vacant lots and abandoned houses, schools and commercial buildings
- Converting stretches of vacant lots into large community park
- Converting abandoned land into an urban farm to provide healthy food and learning and engagement opportunities for young people
- Gardening and maintaining vacant lots to improve the neighborhood and create jobs and opportunities for young people to be involved in strengthening their neighborhood
- Strengthening downtown and providing a range commercial, recreational and learning opportunities to attract and retain more young people
- Enhancing existing neighborhoods while giving residents living in areas with lots of abandoned land the option to move into more dense neighborhoods
- Developing an efficient citywide service delivery system based on resident priorities
- Maximizing federal resources available by getting counted in the U.S. Census
- Effectively using funds now available through neighborhood stabilization to eliminate blight and improve neighborhoods
- Using Land Bank properties to clean, green, and revitalize neighborhoods through the many program in place



Photo courtesy of Franklin Pleasant

Forum participants responded to these ideas and shared their thoughts about how to strengthen the community during facilitated small group discussions. The most frequently cited themes that came up during these discussions were:

1. Community engagement and empowerment and positive communication
2. Eliminating blight (demolishing blighted structures, enforcing codes to improve housing, cutting weeds and removing trash from abandoned properties)
3. Supporting education and programming for youth
4. Using vacant lots to create gardens and natural and/or cared for green spaces
5. Developing citywide master plan and neighborhood plans
6. Creating new jobs and providing training opportunities

The Land Bank is now identifying opportunities to strengthen or expand its programs in response to this input. Since community engagement and empowerment and positive communication was the most commonly cited theme, the Genesee County Land Bank is collaborating with the City of Flint and community partners to host trainings to support organizing and action at the neighborhood level. More information on the trainings will be available soon.

A power point presentation and report from the forum will be available for download at www.thelandbank.org or upon request at (810) 257-3088 ext. 527.

By Christina Kelly

STAFF NOTES

When **Jeff Burdick** left his position after five years as the Community Resource Planner at the Land Bank, he left a big pair of shoes to fill. Filling those shoes will be **Heidi Phaneuf**. Heidi joins the Land Bank after previously working as a Planner in the Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission where she had worked on the Rails to Trails project and as a transportation planner. Heidi is also the President of the Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association and brings a great deal of experience developing and implementing a neighborhood plan. Those skills will be very useful to her as the Land Bank works to support neighborhood associations in Flint and as we work with those and other organizations to develop neighborhood level plans. While we all miss Jeff, we wish him and his family well in Traverse City where they have relocated.

Also, leaving the Land Bank for a new position is **Courtney Knox**, the Land Bank's accountant. Courtney accepted a position with the Center For Community Progress. In her new position Courtney will be working with Dan Kildee and Amy Hovey as they establish this new national organization. Her duties will include providing technical assistance to other counties in Michigan as they establish land banks. Filling Courtney's position is **Alicia Pruitt**. Alicia most recently worked in her own accountancy practice. Her past experience includes having worked for a number of years with the IRS and working for a local accounting firm.



Heidi Phaneuf & Alicia Pruitt,

GENESEE COUNTY LAND BANK BOARD MEMBERS:

Jill McKenzie – *Chair*
Brenda Clack – *Vice Chair*
Patricia Lockwood - *Secretary*
Omar Sims – *Treasurer*
Jim Ananich
Patrick Gleason
Paul Long

GENESEE COUNTY LAND BANK CITIZENS BOARD OF ADVISORS:

Chris Delmorone – *Chair*
Larry Petrella – *Vice Chair*
William Alexander
Harold Doll
Rev. Jacob Hawkins
Deborah Holmes
Joe Karlicheck
Joe King
Joe Madore
Chris Monk
Patricia Myles
Harry Ryan

Douglas Weiland,
Executive Director

To receive our e-newsletter please sign up on our website at:
<http://www.thelandbank.org/newsroom.asp>

URBAN GARDENING EXPANDS

Many things will be growing in Flint this year including the Land Bank's urban gardening program. In 2009, over 85 vacant city lots were transformed into urban vegetable gardens. Programs like Adopt-a-Lot and Clean & Green have not only helped to rid the city of blight but also to build long lasting community relationships, educate urban youth in agricultural sciences and provide fresh, healthy, organic produce to many Flint and Genesee County families.

In 2010 we look forward to the addition of signs for all the Land Bank community gardens, the development of a food shed educational farm, many free workshops and lectures pertaining to gardening in the city, continued growth in the number of urban gardens, and the second annual Edible Flint Food Garden Tour!

To learn more about how to start a community garden on vacant property, and the resources available to those who do, contact Edible Flint at edibleflint@gmail.com or become a fan on Facebook.

By Roxanne Adair,