

## Genesee County Land Bank FY 2021 Annual Review

### Message from our Board Chair & Executive Director

#### *Celebrating our Partners in Progress*

We are excited to share stories of our many successes in creating opportunities for affordable homeownership, eliminating blight, and supporting community and economic development through this Annual Review. As many of you know, the Genesee County Land Bank is an independent governmental entity created to receive foreclosed properties from the Genesee County Treasurer after tax foreclosure. Today we hold more than 15,000 properties in Flint and Genesee County, and most of these properties are residential, vacant land. We try and sell these properties to adjacent property owners to increase the size of their lots whenever possible. We also hold properties for development that aligns with the Master Plan for the City of Flint and other City plans county wide.

We receive many properties with vacant houses and buildings. We offer houses for sale through our **Featured Homes** and **Ready for Rehab** programs to streamline the sales process to get people in affordable homes faster. This year **we renovated and sold seven homes to homeowners** transforming neighborhood eyesores into assets. The house on Radcliffe depicted below is just one example of our success. We also support small businesses, nonprofit groups, faith-based institutions and investors to foster an inclusive and equitable approach to development.

Most of the structures we receive have been vacant and abandoned for years and require demolition or significant repair by the time we receive them. Unfortunately, funding to address all the challenges on the properties we accept is limited. We are constantly seeking funding from federal, state, and local government, as well as our philanthropic partners, and we do our best with what we have.

This year we hosted our Second Annual Virtual **State of the Land Bank Address: The Community Speaks: Partners in Progress** where we spotlighted some of our partners who have worked with us to eliminate blight, enhance neighborhoods, and strengthen communities. We hope that you will view the event here: <https://youtu.be/Oervl9lyBOK>. We are grateful to our funders and partners. We could not do what we do without you.

Thank you. Stay well, stay safe.

*Deborah Cherry, Chairperson and Michael Freeman, Executive Director*



**Deborah Cherry**



**Michael Freeman**



Before



After

## Summary of Successes for Fiscal Year 2021



**19 commercial properties sold**



**364 vacant lots sold**



**196 homes sold**



**7 homes renovated by Land Bank**



**29 local crew members hired and trained**



**65 community groups partnered with the Land Bank through Clean & Green**



**870 lots leased and maintained by volunteers**



**1,200 vacant structures boarded**



**8,400 blighted structures demolished since 2004. 136 demolitions this year**



**More than 50,000 vacant lot mowings completed by crews and Clean & Green**



## Partnering to Revitalize Neighborhoods

The Land Bank continued to support and partner in the revitalization efforts in the Durant Tuuri Mott (DTM) target area. We collaborated in several neighborhood improvements completed during fiscal year 2021, including: demolished 17 structures, completed two full-code rehabs that were sold to income qualifying buyers, repaired façades of three properties, painted five utility boxes, replaced sidewalks for six properties in the Carriage Town neighborhood, repainted a community resource center, repaired broken lighting at the Garland St bridge, and co-hosted a neighborhood festival with over 300 attendees. This work would not be possible without our outstanding partner organizations!

- Moses Timlin



Photo credit: Faith Finholm



Photo credit: Moses Timlin



Porchfest 2021- Photo credit: Eye Snap Studio photos

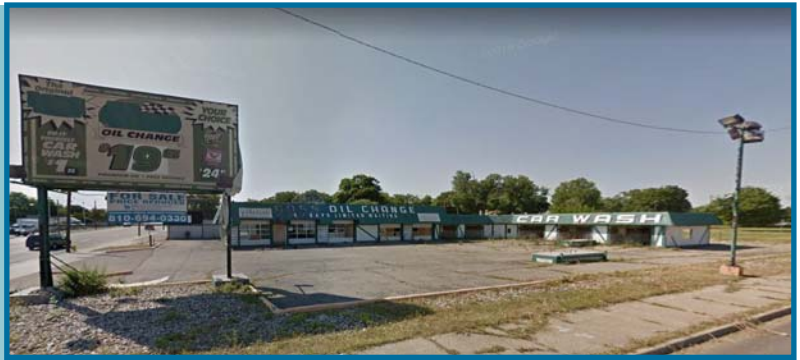


## Partners in Progress:

### Repurposing Land for Children's Health

The new home of the Center for Children's Integrated Services on S. Saginaw St. in downtown Flint is located on several formerly blighted tax-foreclosed properties. One of the sites in particular presented a significant hurdle to redevelopment as a former oil change enterprise. Foreclosed in 2011, the Land Bank demolished the building and cleared the site in 2014 to prepare the lot for future development. Recently, the Greater Flint Mental Health Facilities, Inc. partnered with Genesee Health System to develop the facility that will co-locate Genesee Health System's core service and provide physical health care services. We are so pleased that the lot is being used to fill a crucial need for Flint and Genesee County residents.

- Christina Kelly



1402 S. Saginaw Street—Before Demolition



### Restoring Value to the Community & Rebuilding with Equity

Homeownership is the foundation for generational wealth and helping us build strong, stable neighborhoods. Since 2004, more than 55% of all Land Bank sales were sold for home ownership including the successful completion of 579 sales transactions – generating nearly \$2.6 million in revenue – this year.

Removing barriers to homeownership is an essential part of sustainable neighborhood revitalization and helping families build equity and pass on financial wealth through generations. Our Featured Homes program offers easy and affordable finance options and partners with community organizations to provide financial education workshops for buyers to be successful upon taking the next step toward housing stability and asset building.

This year we closed on 364 residential vacant & side lot sales – offered for just \$25 to qualifying adjacent property owners – helping eliminate blight, increase land ownership, and make neighborhoods safer. We also launched our Ready for Rehab program to make residential and commercial properties requiring repair and investment available with a quick, efficient process towards ownership so that new owners can get to work right away.

Being a Partner in Progress means supporting small businesses, nonprofit groups, faith-based institutions and investors to foster an inclusive and equitable approach to ascertain that development opportunities are intentional, sustainable and make a real impact.

- Alexandria Riley



FY 2021 Sales by Type	Number
Residential w/Structure	196
Resident Vacant Lot	364
Commercial w/Structure	12
Commercial Vacant Lot	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>579</b>

## Partnering with Habitat for Humanity to Revitalize Our Community



### Supporting Homeowner Housing Repairs

The Genesee County Land Bank received a \$500,000 Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) grant to support Habitat for Humanity's established Owner-Occupied Repair (OOR) Program for low-moderate-income homeowners in the City of Flint. The program provides critical home repair, exterior façade improvement, emergency repair, and quality water assurance. The program keeps residents in their homes while also improving the appearance of neighborhoods. In addition to the NSP funds, the \$1 million program is supported by grants from the C.S. Mott Foundation, Ruth Mott Foundation, United Way of Genesee County, and the Community Foundation of Greater Flint. The Land Bank is pleased to partner with Habitat for Humanity to keep homeowners in their homes, invest in and improve neighborhoods, and prevent future abandonment and tax-foreclosure.

### Laying the Groundwork for Affordable and Supportive Housing

Habitat for Humanity completed the Sylvan Court development in the Spring of this year. The townhomes are a part of Habitat's "Almost Home" programs to provide transitional housing for families that are waiting to move into their very own Habitat for Humanity home. Habitat purchased the lots for development from the Land Bank after the Land Bank cleared the blighted houses from the lots in previous years leading up to the sale. The Land Bank demolished the single remaining blighted structure on the block across the street from the new development earlier this year to create a new opportunity for development or vacant lot re-use in support of the new development. We are pleased to support the work of Habitat for Humanity to make quality, affordable housing available to those who need it. —Christina Kelly





## Small But Dedicated Land Bank Crew Cleans and Clears Vacant Properties

Blight is a huge challenge for Flint and Genesee County. As the population has declined over the past few decades, the number of vacant and abandoned properties has increased. We estimate that it would cost more than \$7 million annually to mow tall grass and remove trash from the more than 20,000 vacant properties in Flint, once a month from spring to summer. This year, the Land Bank spent roughly \$2 million on vacant property maintenance. Part of this funding was used to hire local, seasonal crews to inspect, board and clean out vacant structures and mow and clear vacant lots that we are not able to sell or lease. Instead of just mowing Land Bank properties, crews mow all vacant lots in the City of Flint.

This season, the small but hard working and efficient crews:

- completed 21,500 mows and boarded and secured 1,200 vacant structures
- cleared 140 tons of garbage from vacant lots and loaded them away in Land Bank dumpsters
- cleaned 20 additional dumping sites using dumpsters provided by the City of Flint
- created 500 cubic yards of woodchips from downed trees and limbs cleared from Land Bank properties
- cleaned out more than 150 houses to prepare them to be sold as Featured Homes
- fully renovated 5 houses and positioned them for sale
- completed 3,000 housing inspections to assess property conditions, inform Land Bank decision-making, and prepare properties for sale.

We are grateful for the small but dedicated team of crew members, led by Duane Bickford, the Land Bank's Property Manager, for all they do to prepare properties for re-use and make neighborhoods cleaner, safer and more attractive.

- Christina Kelly & Duane Bickford





## Neighborhoods are Cleaner and Safer Thanks to Our Clean & Green Partners!

Our Clean & Green Program has ended for the 2021 season with remarkable success. This season Land Bank partnered with 65 groups, which included teams that were led by five different family members, teams that have been with us since the program started, a team led by a young man in his 20s and other teams led by other young men in their 30s. These groups are impressive, to say the least. These and other volunteers collectively mowed **3,660 lots, totaling 30,000 mows for the season**. Our Clean & Green program is one of our most celebrated programs at the Land Bank because it is the heart of our community engagement strategy and supports residents who want to remove blight, clean, and beautify their neighborhoods. Research now shows that the work they do makes neighborhoods safer by reducing gun violence.

- Raynetta Speed

### 2021 Clean & Green Program Results:

- 65 groups including 58 returning & 7 new
- 30,000 Mowings completed collectively
- 3,660 lots mowed every 3 weeks
- 5,000 parcels maintained in total
- 1,055 interactions with neighbors
- 32,000 digital surveys submitted
- 40% of groups held a large scale clean up
- 50 dumpsters of debris removed
  - apx. 450,000 lbs. of debris

### Groups reported that because of their work....

- Neighbors spend more time outside = 68%
- Neighbors connect more = 64%
- The neighborhood feels safer = 79%
- The neighborhood looks better = 100%
- Nearby neighbors are taking better care of their properties = 98%
- The percentage of neighboring lots that are better taken care of = 69%





## Clean & Green Tests New Strategies to Prevent Dumping and Reduce Long Term Maintenance Needs

### PREVENTING DUMPING ON VACANT LOTS:

This year, the Genesee County Land Bank Authority (GCLBA) partnered with the University of Michigan, Youth Violence Prevention Center to design and research interventions in neighborhoods to prevent dumping. We received \$50,000 to work with 9 groups to clean and install dumping prevention improvements on several lots. The City of Flint and GCLBA crews removed illegal dumping before crews worked with groups to install solar lighting, trail cameras and/or boulder barriers to prevent future dumping. Researchers from University of Michigan are evaluating the effectiveness of the interventions. We hope we can use their findings to create models for effective yet low-cost dumping prevention interventions. Sites that were part of the project have so far seen little to no illegal dumping activity since the installations were completed. Given this initial success, we are considering ways to expand this project.



### DESIGNING NATIVE GARDENS ON VACANT LOTS:

To reduce long term maintenance demands on vacant property, the GCLBA is exploring using native plantings on targeted vacant lots. Michigan State University's (MSU) Sustainable Built Environment Initiative (SBEI) provided design assistance to five Clean & Green groups. The designs created through a collaborative process depict vacant spaces transformed into gardens with native flowers, trees and bushes with pollinator watering and nesting stations. Four of the five groups decided to move forward with their projects, receiving seed funding of \$1,000 to begin work on the sites. Over the long-term, we hope native plantings will both beautify as well as help to reduce the need for extensive mowing in some areas.

- Melissa Hertlein





## Prioritizing Demolition with Community Input

Last year, we asked the community to help us to prioritize demolitions with limited funding. We used this resident feedback to create a data driven demolition scoring framework. We used the framework to select and demolish 37 blighted structures with funding from the C.S. Mott Foundation. All of structures were burned and/or blighted and immediately adjacent to at least one occupied home. This is the transformation of one of those blighted properties into a clean and clear green space that will soon be available for sale.



Thank you to those who completed the survey and helped us build a demolition framework custom made for this community, by this community.

To learn more about the framework and resident priorities go to: <https://youtu.be/EVE0aC3-W0I>

- Melissa Hertlein



## Bob the Rebuilder Salvages Historic Home in Carriage Town

Among the many highlights of our partnerships in the Durant Tuuri Mott Area (DTM) over the past year, we are so thankful for the commitment of neighborhood residents in improving their neighborhood conditions in Flint. Bob Sims, a resident of the Carriage Town neighborhood, saw the potential to rehabilitate a former Land Bank-owned historic structure in “substandard” condition. Bob pursued the rehabilitation of this property to beautify his block and bolster the historic district.

Photo credit: Bob Sims



He plans to make the home his primary residence once completed. We are so grateful for Bob's contributions to the revitalization work in DTM, and more broadly Flint!



Follow his journey in restoring this historic property at his Facebook page, “My Ridiculous Old House Rescue”.

- Moses Timlin



## Addressing Blight with Limited Resources

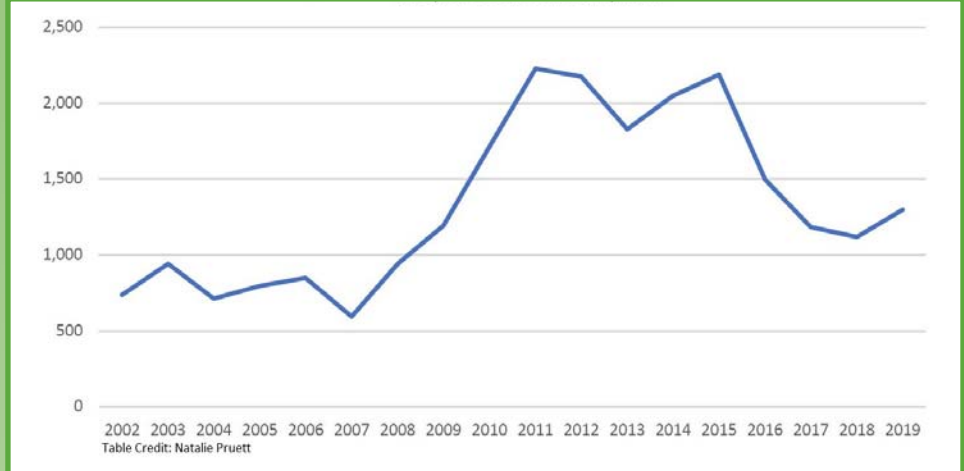
By the end of 2021, Genesee County Land Bank Authority (GCLBA) will have accepted more than 25,000 tax-foreclosed properties from the Genesee County Treasurer to facilitate their return to productive use. Prior to the 2008 economic crisis, GCLBA had accepted a little more than 500 properties per year, ~5,600 properties total. By the end of 2008, GCLBA sold ~1,500 properties and demolished ~1,000 structures, leaving an inventory of about 3,100 properties. Since 2009, with the exception of 2020 (no foreclosures due to the pandemic), GCLBA has accepted between 1,000-2,000 properties per year. The Land Bank accepts these properties without funding to address the challenges remaining that private owners walked away from.

GCLBA currently holds 14,359 properties, 73% of which are vacant lots and 20% are structures in need of demolition or major renovation. Through the years, GCLBA has demolished more than 8,300 structures in Flint and Genesee County. Most of these demolitions took place between 2010 and 2019 under state and federal grants received to address challenges stemming from the 2008 economic crisis. In 2020, GCLBA wrapped up its largest grant to date: \$67.5M in Hardest Hit Funds (HHF), completing 317 demolitions in FY 2020.

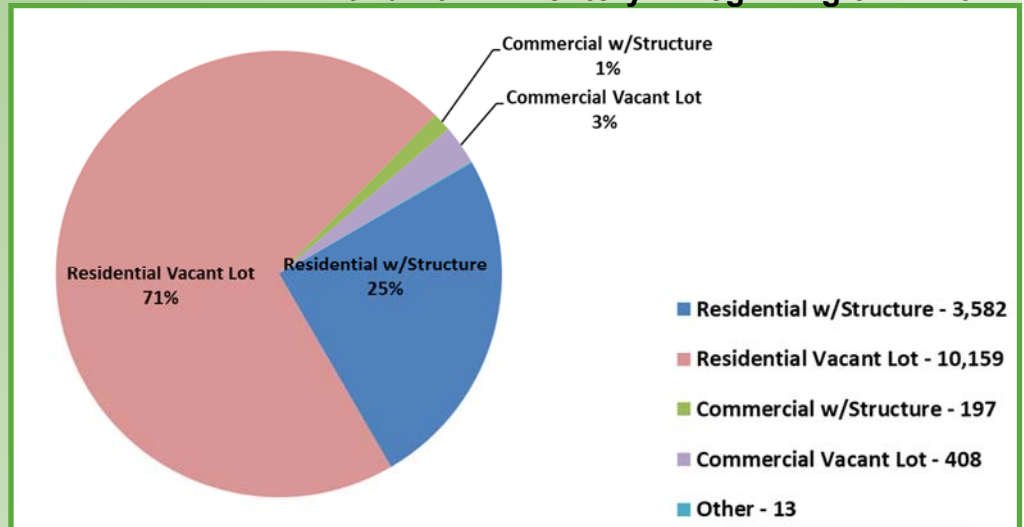
GCLBA started FY 2021 with the fewest available resources to commit to demolition that it has had since prior to 2010, completing the fewest demolitions since 2008.

GCLBA anticipates receiving approximately 1,000 tax foreclosed properties in January 2022. If trends hold, about 50% of the new foreclosures will be in poor or substandard condition, adding to GCLBA's inventory of unfunded demolitions. **Examples of current Treasurer foreclosures GCLBA will add to its inventory in January are depicted below.** (Continued on next page)

Land Bank Properties Received by Year



Land Bank Inventory— Beginning of FY 2021

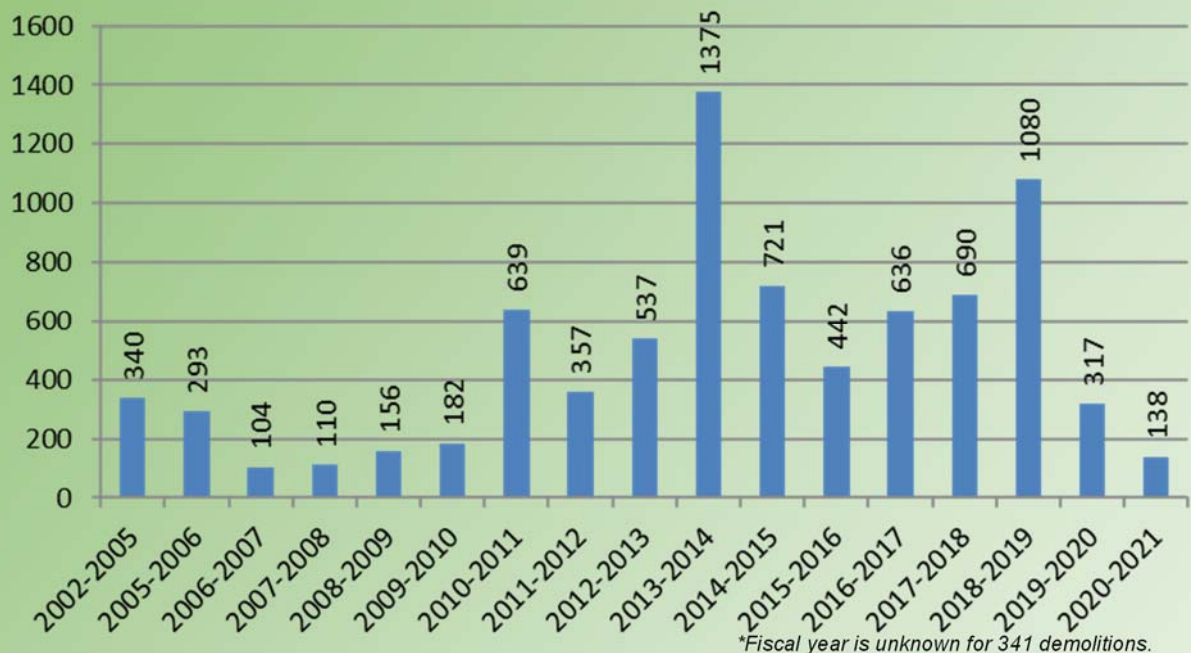




## Addressing Blight with Limited Resources (con't)

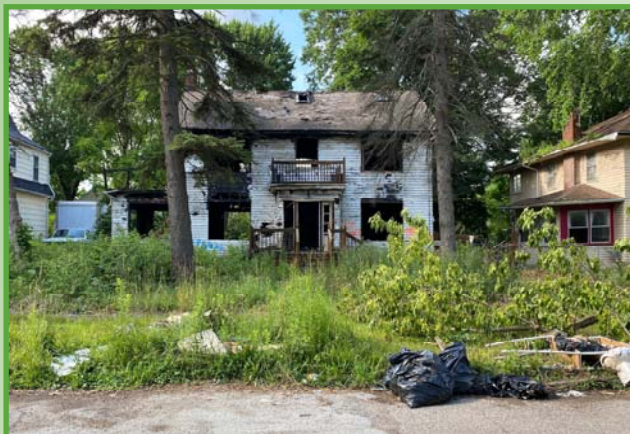
While the challenges associated with vacant, abandoned and blighted structures persists, state and federal funding for blight elimination has diminished. Despite this, **GCLBA completed 138 demolitions (comprised of 146 structures)** with support from the City of Flint CDBG, Mott Foundation, and United States EPA in 2021. Three of these demolitions were large, multi-structure, multi-family apartment complexes. To select so few properties with limited funding, GCLBA engaged community members to help create a data driven demolition scoring framework (*see article on pg 7: Community Driven Demolition*) that we will continue to use to prioritize demolitions as GCLBA will make hard decisions about how to direct limited resources to persistent problems. Community members can help by utilizing [www.flintpropertyportal.com](http://www.flintpropertyportal.com) to ensure GCLBA has the best and most up to date data available for decision making purposes.

**Land Bank Demolitions By Fiscal Year (FY)\***



Despite the lack of resources for blight elimination, partners made significant investments to redevelop formerly tax foreclosed properties (*see articles on pg 2 and 3 for some recent successes*). We hope to continue to create many more opportunities for investment by actively seeking funding to address the many challenges posed by an ever-growing inventory of problem properties. We look forward to sharing our progress with you into the future.

- Faith Finholm





### Partners in Progress: A State Park in Genesee County! Imagine it.

Chevy Commons, also known as the old “Chevy in the Hole” is a 60+ acre property on the Flint River, a few blocks from downtown. The manufacturing complex was established in the 1930’s as one of General Motors’ four major production facilities in Flint. Once containing 17 buildings; at its peak, the complex employed around 8,000 workers. Plant closings and building demolitions started in the mid 1990’s and continued through 2004, leaving acres of vacant, concrete-clad, contaminated brownfields in downtown.

“Reimagining Chevy in the Hole” began in 2007, with publication of the first concept plan. The plan outlined two possible alternatives for the site, one which



imagined the site becoming a State Park in two phases, completing the transition by 2040. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of a coalition of local, state and federal partners, the concept became an approved site plan in 2014 and the first phase of construction began on just 16 acres east of Chevrolet Avenue in 2015. Designed to be developed in phases as funding became available, the remainder of the earthen cap was constructed over the next 6 years. The final phase of construction began west of Chevrolet Avenue in September 2020, laying the groundwork for the July 2021 announcement that the community greenspace branded as Chevy Commons would be a part of Genesee County’s first State Park.

It seems impossible that such a grand vision could be achieved so quickly after construction began in 2015. Without the multitude of committed partners and champions, Chevy Commons and the State Park would have been unimaginable. Thank you to all project partners and funders that believed in the project and supported it along the way, including: City of Flint; United States Environmental Protection Agency; Genesee County Treasurer; Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy; United States Forest Service; Genesee County Parks; Michigan Land Bank Authority; C.S. Mott Foundation; and Kettering University.

- Faith Finholm

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