

Genesee County Land Bank FY 2020 Annual Review

Message from our Board Chair & Executive Director



Deborah Cherry

On behalf of the Genesee County Land Bank Authority, we are pleased to share our results from the 2020 Fiscal Year (October 1, 2019-September 30, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has created challenges and losses that we could not have imagined just over a year ago. The pandemic has also changed our daily lives in so many ways, including how we work at the Land Bank. We have adjusted to office closures, remote work when feasible, and shifting to on-line collaboration in place of meeting in person.

Despite the challenges, we have achieved many important successes, including demolishing 317 blighted and abandoned structures, completing nearly 40,000 vacant property mows - half of those in partnership with community groups, removing 730 tons of debris and trash from lots, renovating 9 houses, and selling 439 properties to responsible owners. The revenue generated from these sales is then invested back into our programs.

We could not have achieved any of these successes without our partnerships with residents, community-based groups and the many agencies and organizations we work with. Our accomplishments have helped to stabilize and revitalize neighborhoods throughout Flint. We look forward to our continued work together to overcome the additional challenges ahead to make Flint and Genesee County a more vibrant place to live and work.

We hope that you stay healthy and safe during this holiday season.

- Deborah Cherry, Chairperson and Michael Freeman, Executive Director



Michael Freeman

Opening Doors, Unlocking Opportunities & Restoring Value to the Community

The end of fiscal year 2020 has undeniably been an unforgettable one. As the pandemic paused housing markets for a few months, the rebound in Land Bank sales resulted in the successful completion of 435 sales transactions generating nearly \$2.2 million in revenue.

The deepening COVID-19 outbreak, has increased challenges for affordable housing in our community, but the Land Bank sales approach has never been clearer. Putting properties back into productive use and opening the door to many first-time homeowners is at the heart of our sales strategy.

Through Land Bank sales, many individuals and families are able to achieve homeownership. Our Featured Homes program offers affordable finance options and partners with community organizations to provide homeowner and financial education workshops for buyers to be successful upon taking the next step toward housing stability and asset building.

This fiscal year, over 900 applications were received, processed and/or are pending review for the sale of vacant lots and side lots to adjacent owners. These sales transactions assist in reimagining vacant spaces and stabilizing neighborhoods. Closings on commercial properties have also provided local developers and community partners opportunities to transform eye sores into vibrant places. Sales revenue supports the Land Bank's community redevelopment work. Since 2004, the Land Bank has continued to make a powerful impact in Flint and Genesee County.

- By Alexandria T. Riley



ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL CLEAN & GREEN SEASON DESPITE THE PANDEMIC

2020 has been a challenging year for programs across the nation with Clean & Green being no exception. We did not even know if we would be able to have a Clean & Green season this year. This would have meant that thousands of properties across the city of Flint would have gone without regular maintenance for the duration of 2020. However, to our pleasant surprise, commitment to the program was stronger than ever! Statewide lockdowns delayed the season start resulting in knee high grass before the first mowing round. Volunteers



were required to wear masks, maintain social distance while working and sanitize equipment, which successfully prevented the spread of COVID.

58 community based groups from across the city of Flint participated in the program this season with a total of 173 volunteers and 151 paid workers. Many groups included youth with nearly 200 youth engaged in the program, 65% of whom were paid workers. Groups created and managed their own maintenance plans within their areas and were able to **strategically maintain over 6,000 individual lots** throughout the growing season



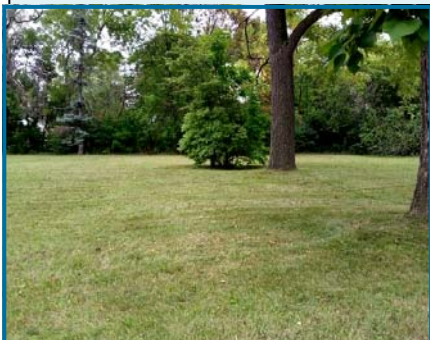
using a variety of mowing methods. Altogether, **groups collectively completed over 22,000 mows.** They also **cleaned waste and debris from nearly 250 properties** with several groups coordinating larger clean-up projects within their neighborhoods.

The work of Clean & Green volunteers is valued at \$1.1 million dollars but the true impact of groups presence in the neighborhood is much greater. Groups reported that their neighborhoods looked better, felt safer and that neighbors were taking better care of their properties because of the work that they do. University of Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center found that violent crimes were lower by 40% in areas that had an active Clean & Green volunteer group.



Groups used the Flint Property Portal for digital reporting instead of meeting face to face every three weeks. Additionally, our program kick off and end of season celebration were unfortunately cancelled along with group gardening projects and decorative boarding projects to further limit the spread of COVID-19. The season officially closed in October with applications for next year's program available in January 2021. We thank our groups for working with us through unknown territory to ensure a safe and effective Clean & Green season. We could not have done it without you!

- By Melissa Hertlein

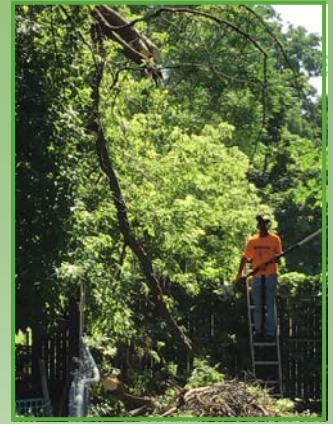


Land Bank Crews Clear Blight in Flint and Genesee County

The Land Bank hires seasonal weed and trash abatement crews that remove blight by mowing grass, removing trash, and boarding vacant properties in Flint and Genesee County.

During fiscal year 2020 Land Bank Crews

- Trained and employed more than 35 local crew members
- Removed more than 730 tons of trash from vacant properties
- Mowed more than 17,000 vacant properties
- Boarded and secured more than 500 vacant structures - *By Duane Bickford*



Supporting Revitalization Around Durant Tuuri Mott and EduCare

The Land Bank continues to support revitalization efforts in the residential areas surrounding Durant Tuuri Mott (DTM) Elementary, Educare Flint, and the historic Carriage Town neighborhood. Several improvement projects were completed during fiscal year 2020, including: demolished 15 blighted structures, installed two small greenspaces with benches and tree stumps seating, planted a community garden, organized two clean-up days with 40 volunteers, supported two neighborhood festivals with 150 attendees, and partnered in establishing a jogging trail on vacant lots across from Hurley Hospital.



The Land Bank collaborated with key partner organizations, such as the Hurley Foundation and the Genesee County Conservation District, to reuse vacant lots for public gathering spaces. The goal of reusing these vacant lots for public purposes was a directive that resulted from undergoing a nine month planning process with residents, business area professionals, the University Avenue Corridor Coalition, the Historic Carriage Town Neighborhood Association, and other organizational stakeholders. Nearly 100 participants were engaged through three visioning meetings led by the Michigan State University's (MSU) Sustainable Built Environment. A final planning document was formalized with recommendations and strategies which can be accessed here: http://www.thelandbank.org/downloads/dtm_vacant_lot_reuse_plan.pdf.

While challenges still persist with the uncertainties presented by COVID-19, the Land Bank will continue to support catalytic improvement projects, blight elimination activities, and outreach support for the DTM target area in fiscal year 2021.

- *By Moses Timlin*

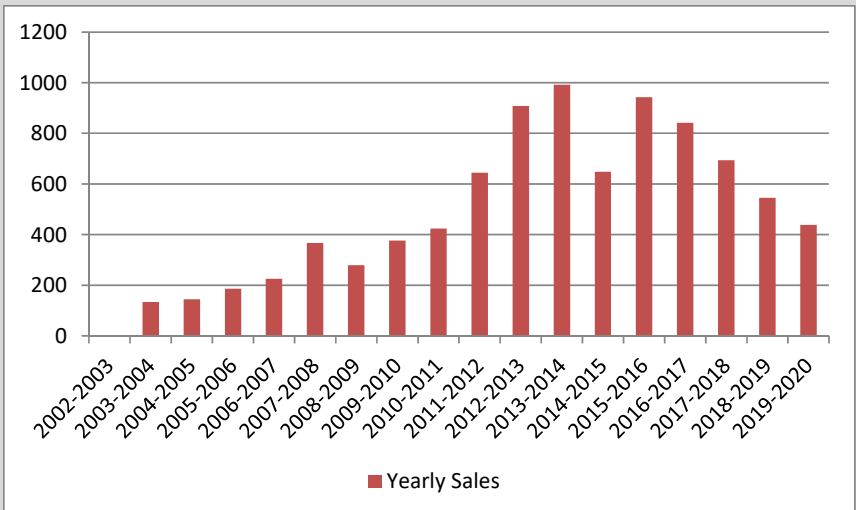


Genesee County Land Bank Inventory In Review

Land Bank Sales Fiscal Year 2020 by Property Type

GLBA Sales by Property Type	Number
Residential w/Structure	192
Resident Vacant Lot	224
Commercial w/Structure	3
Commercial Vacant Lot	15
Other	1
Total	435

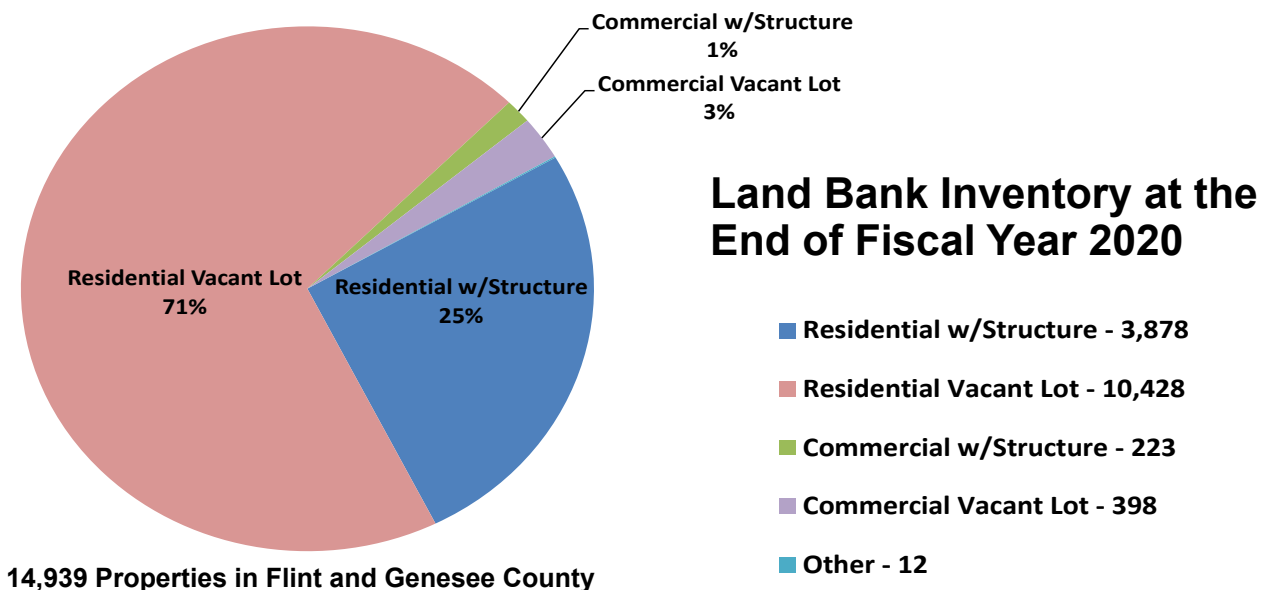
Land Bank Property Sales By Fiscal Year



LAND BANK INVENTORY SUMMARY:

The Land Bank sold 435 Properties in fiscal year 2020 as detailed in the chart above. While the total number of properties sold continued to decline this fiscal year, the value of properties with structures continued to increase due to the success of the Land Bank's Featured Home program combined with stronger market conditions. Sales this year generated nearly \$2.2 million in revenue to be re-invested in the Land Bank's revitalization efforts.

The Land Bank typically receives properties each year after the Genesee County Treasurer completes the foreclosure process. However, since the Genesee County Treasurer did not foreclose on properties due to the pandemic, the Land Bank did not receive any new properties this year. The inventory at the end of this fiscal year included 14,939 properties throughout Flint and Genesee County with 74% of properties being vacant lots and the remaining 26% properties with a structure as depicted in the chart below.



Fiscal Year 2020 Summary of Successes



18 commercial properties sold



192 houses sold



317 blighted structures demolished



~40,000 mows completed on vacant properties by crews and partners



211 vacant lots sold to nearby owners



9 houses remodeled by Land Bank crews and sold



35 local crew members hired and trained



58 community groups partnered with the Land Bank through Clean & Green



978 lots leased and maintained by volunteers



~500 vacant structures boarded and secured



730 tons of garbage and debris removed from vacant properties



\$3.2 million in grants secured for revitalization. An additional \$2 million invested by partners in demolition and environmental response.



What's In Store for the Land Bank? Message from the Executive Director



Vacant Land Bank lot sold as a sidelot on the East Side

When I started at the Land Bank this Spring, I worried about how the pandemic would affect the work that we do here. How would we interact and communicate with the community? How would we manage some of the functions virtually that have always been done through direct engagement? How do we work remotely in a cohesive way and catch up on everything that had stalled during the shelter in place order? To make matters more challenging, I was facing the loss of two of our senior staff due to new opportunities and retirement. I can safely say I found the prospect overwhelming at the least. But then I remembered my favorite quote by Winston Churchill, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." In response to this crisis, the first thing we decided was that the safety and the well-being of both the public and the land bank employees was the most important. We modified all of our practices and activities to make sure that we could get our work done in the most responsible way possible. While not ideal nor convenient, the staff was able to be creative and nimble in their service to the

community. Furthermore, in response, we are taking this change in the way we work to re-examine everything about the Land Bank; our relevance, and how we will work to serve the residents of Flint and Genesee County. We will hone our focus on the guiding principles of ethical treatment, transparency and dedication when dealing with the blight and abandonment due to foreclosure.

We will have a renewed focus on projects such as those depicted here that support the residents of our proud community. We will look for opportunities to continue to innovate our practices and collaborate with community partners who share our goals of prosperous neighborhoods that are free of blight. We will continue to find new ways to communicate with residents and respond to their feedback on a regular basis. We will convene all of our stakeholders to help us plan strategically to meet the changing needs and economy of our community. And most importantly, we will make sure that we are utilizing all the resources available to us to maintain and preserve our neighborhoods. This is indeed a heavy lift, but it is what we must do. The world has changed, maybe not permanently, but it is undeniable. This crisis has been painful and unimaginable – but it has prompted us to rethink all that we do and can do. I am positive that we will come through this better than we were, and I look forward to the new and improved Genesee County Land Bank Authority.

- By Michael Freeman



Mural by Kevin Burdick, Flint Public Art Project

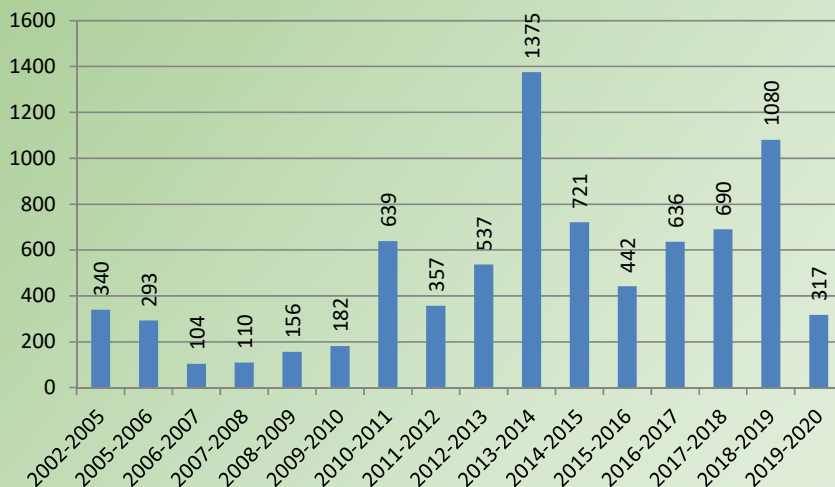
A Knock-down, Drag-out Fight Against Blight

Since 2004, the Genesee County Land Bank Authority (GCLBA) has demolished more than 8,300 residential and commercial structures in Flint and Genesee County. Despite the progress we have made and continue to make, we have a long way to go to eliminate blight in Flint. It would cost more than \$40 million to demolish the nearly 3,000 blighted houses in Flint alone. While 2020 has presented plenty of challenges resulting in project delays, the fight against blight has continued. In fiscal year 2020, GCLBA knocked down (and dragged out!) 317 blighted structures with grant funding from the Genesee County Treasurer, the City of Flint under their Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Michigan Homeowner Assistance Nonprofit Housing Corporation (MHA) with the last of the \$67.5 million in Hardest Hit Funds awarded to the GCLBA. We also leveraged resources through partnerships with the Genesee County Planning Commission, Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for environmental remediation and demolition of three vacant, abandoned, and dangerous structures. This includes the demolition of the burned and collapsed industrial building at 925 Dort Hwy. near Court St.

In the coming year, GCLBA will continue to pull no punches in our pursuit of resources to fight blight and revitalize our neighborhoods. We will continue to work in collaboration with the City of Flint and others with blight elimination planning. We will say good-bye to some blighted former apartment complexes on Lapeer Rd. and on Stevenson St. near Hurley hospital, Durant Tuuri Mott Elementary and the EduCare Facility. We also have plans to demolish additional blighted structures with CDBG and C.S. Mott Foundation funding in support of the City of Flint's Choice Neighborhoods Initiative. We will also be demolishing approximately 30 blighted houses as a result of the C.S. Mott Foundation's Focus on Flint community survey where residents identified residential demolition as a priority for grant funding. GCLBA conducted outreach to gather community input on how to best prioritize demolitions with limited funding available. Details on the process and results are available at www.thelandbank.org and on our Facebook page.

- By Faith Finholm

Land Bank Demolitions By Fiscal Year (FY)*



*Fiscal year is unknown for 341 demolitions.



Leveraging State and Federal Resources for Brownfield for Re-Use

The Genesee County Land Bank relies on its partnerships with the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) and US EPA to leverage investments in brownfield assessment and cleanup. During the past two years, we have worked with EGLE to identify 15 properties that may be eligible for assessment and emergency response through the State of Michigan and two properties eligible for assistance through the EPA.



925 S Dort- EPA Response
BEFORE



925 S Dort- EPA Response
AFTER

Through these partnerships, a total of 40 properties have been assessed and response activities have been conducted at seven properties since 2018; including the full abatement, cleanup and emergency demolition of the blighted and burned structure located at 925 S Dort Highway. The EPA invested nearly \$1 million through their Emergency Response division. EGLE and the EPA both are assessing and providing emergency response to a former commercial laundry on Flushing Road and the immediate surrounding neighborhood. EGLE has estimated a total of \$1,040,000 in assessment activities that may lead to demolition and cleanup since 2018. Through this work EGLE has confirmed underground contamination at 1604 Martin Luther King Drive, at the entryway to the Choice Neighborhood Redevelopment area, making it eligible for demolition to complete the

remediation below ground. Project planning and design is now underway. Total leveraged funding in brownfield remediation from the EPA and EGLE exceeds \$2 million.

This work helps position these site for reuse. Those interested in purchasing commercial properties can go to thelandbank.org and search for commercial properties in the property look up.

- By Christina Kelly

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4 – Vacant Positions

Michael Freeman, *Executive Director*

To receive our e-newsletter please sign up on our website at:
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