

Land Bank lends a hand to neighborhoods

COMMENTARY



Montgomery County Commissioner Carolyn Rice



The Land Bank has helped with many projects, including renovation of the Dayton Arcade.

BY MONTGOMERY COUNTY
COMMISSIONER CAROLYN RICE

Montgomery County experienced real estate troubles even before the Great Recession.

This was due to the loss of automotive manufacturing jobs, predatory lending and the foreclosure crisis that resulted in thousands of vacant, abandoned properties throughout our community.

The Great Recession only made the situation worse.

One positive outcome of the challenging times was the creation of the Montgomery County Land Reutilization Corporation, or Land Bank. While the Land Bank is not a high-profile organization, it has played an important role in many of the area's recovery efforts in recent years. Since the Montgomery County Land Bank will soon celebrate its 10th anniversary, that provides a great opportunity to review its accomplishments and look forward to upcoming projects.

I have long been a champion of land banking.

Although it has existed in Ohio since the 1980s, today's more robust land bank authority was first granted to Cuyahoga County in 2009.

When I was the Montgomery County Treasurer, I wanted to bring this tool here. Working with other county treasurers and lobbying members of the Ohio General Assembly, legislation passed to expand those same land bank authorities to other Ohio counties. Then in 2011, the Montgomery County Land Bank was incorporated, and initial funding and staffing was provided by the Treasurer's Office.

The Land Bank has the authority to acquire and then manage, rehab, demolish and resell vacant, abandoned and tax-delinquent properties.

It also works to reposition problem properties for reuse. Problem properties face challenges ranging from taxes owed, title issues, financial liabilities, environmental concerns and more.

The Land Bank initiates foreclosure through the County Treasurer on properties that are tax delinquent and abandoned for reuse. It collaborates with jurisdictions to identify neighborhoods for stabilization and revitalization that are strategic to the community.

Additionally, the Land Bank has been a part of many of the area's development and redevelopment projects over the last 10 years, including the redevelopment of the Dayton Arcade, the OneFifteen outpatient clinic and the site of today's Dayton Children's Health Pavilion, as well as acquiring and managing millions of dollars for targeted demolition of vacant, abandoned properties.

Targeted demolition

One of the first grants the Land Bank approved was for the demolition of one of the former United Theological Seminary buildings, now the site of the Omega CDC campus.

The Land Bank acquired more than \$9 million for demolition of blighted properties through then Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine's Moving Ohio Forward program. I remember then Attorney General DeWine coming to our first demolition of an abandoned house on East Fifth Street with all the neighbors clapping as the first wall came down.

Abandoned houses that have had redevelopment potential were made available to individual rehabbers through a Do-It-Yourself Renovation Program where 87 properties have resulted in more than \$2 million in private investment and nearly \$1 million in avoided demolition costs. Working with federal and state agencies, the Land Bank brought more than \$20 million in funding through the Neighborhood Initiative Program for demolition of properties. In the last six years, this has resulted in more than 1,200 residential demolitions in nine communities throughout the county.

Today, new housing, neighborhood parks, urban farming programs and reforestation projects are thriving on these once desolate properties.

Building on success

The Land Bank residential demolition programs are intended to stabilize neighborhoods.

Recently the organization piloted a program entitled Thriving Neighborhood Initiative, working with neighborhood residents and a variety of community partners to make an intense, long-term effort in a neighborhood to help it reach its objectives and get it on track to be sustainable. Dayton's Pineview neighborhood was the first neighborhood to participate.

Built in the 1950s, the housing was showing signs of decline and home values were substantially below comparable neighborhoods.

Residents and partners focused efforts to demolish obsolete housing, rehabilitate remaining housing, fix up owner-occupied housing and improve the neighborhood, removing some four tons of debris from the area. The results have been encouraging, with increased resident investment in their homes, sales of renovated homes for prices three times the neighborhood average and increased property values.

Similar efforts are underway in Harrison Twp.'s Castleton neighborhood and the Huffman Historic District.

Over the last 10 years, we have faced many challenges.

The Land Bank has been and will continue to be one of the partners in addressing these challenges. Every project has many groups involved and the Land Bank is prepared to bring its special resources to help jurisdictions address their challenges and prepare for the future.

Find additional information at www.mclandbank.com.