

## **Wayne County Regional Land Bank**

### **2019 Mid-Year Report**

#### **Our Mission**

To address the problems of vacant, abandoned, derelict, contaminated or tax delinquent property in a coordinated manner through the acquisition and disposition of real property and returning that property to productive use in order to strengthen the economy, improve the quality of life, and improve the financial condition of the municipalities, through the use of the powers and tools granted to Land Banks by the Laws of the State of New York.

#### **Our History**

We are very new. After numerous conversations and years of planning, the Wayne County Regional Land Bank Corporation was incorporated on March 29, 2018.

#### **Our Leadership**

The Land Bank is led by a Board of Directors that is strongly committed to the Land Bank and its' mission.

#### **Executive Summary**

I am very excited to be part of the Wayne County Regional Land Bank. As many know, I joined the Land Bank in June after a career with SUNY. I am also a local farmer and businessman with a strong commitment to the future of Wayne County. I am very involved in the community.

The County's commitment to the Land Bank mission is paramount to its' success. The prominence of Land Banks across New York State and the country as tools to address community concerns is growing quickly. In New York State, Land Banks are having a significant impact in communities through a wide-range of activities, including removal of blight, improvement of health and safety, economic development, and enhancement of community through improved housing community renewal.

The Land Bank Board of Directors has done an excellent job creating and leading the Land Bank.

The Land Bank is vigorously engaged in activities to build capacity to fulfill our mission. We have secured significant grant funding. We have developed numerous relationships with individuals, civic leaders, and community groups and organizations that will lead to effective partnerships.

New York State leaders envisioned and created Land Banks as they did to be tools to make appropriate, timely, and impactful changes in communities. The State expects Land Banks to be

significant, aggressive, and effective change agents that facilitate and participate in community enhancement.

The wisdom of the Wayne County Board of Supervisors in creating the WCRLB will pay dividends to individuals, families, and communities across the County for decades, even generations, to come.

Some of the dividends Wayne County will realize as a result of Land Bank activities are:

- Remove the blight of derelict properties
- Remove health and safety concerns
- Provide encouragement and incentive for all property owners to maintain and improve their property
- Reduce the number of tax foreclosures
- Generate excitement and interest in appropriate and effective development across Wayne County
- Reduce crime as crime-related derelict properties and neighborhoods are improved or eliminated
- Improved student success in K-12 as less families improved housing reduces transiency throughout the County
- Increased tax revenue

These dividends will come from the following activities:

- **Removal of structures** on properties that have gone beyond their useful life. These properties can be re-developed or annexed by neighbors to make them visibly appealing and tax-generating. In some communities, these properties may be used for needed green space or other community improvement projects.
- **Rehabilitation** of properties that still have useful life through sale to persons and entities who will responsibly improve them to make them more visibly appealing and assure their ongoing tax-generation. We will eliminate properties repeatedly going through tax foreclosure.
- **Environmental evaluation and re-purposing** of questionable properties that are currently not generating taxes due to environmental or safety concerns. These properties are often avoided in the foreclosure process, do not generate tax revenue, and deteriorate into derelict properties. Environmental assessments can help the County and Land Bank to make informed decisions about the properties future and develop a plan to return these parcels to tax-generation.
- **Collaboration and partnership** with the towns, villages, concerned and engaged citizens, community groups, and organizations with a common mission.

The Land Bank activity can be as simple as demolishing a few tax-foreclosed properties each year. I do not believe that anyone believes this should be the limit of the Land Bank's mission and efforts. I recommend partner and collaborate to aggressively go after opportunities that



make significant, far-reaching and permanent changes to improve our County. It really is possible for us to remove blight, improve derelict properties, remediate concerns left by prior generations, and increase the property tax generation across the County for decades to come.


The County has committed to the Land Bank mission in a very significant way by providing funding through a three-year commitment of \$250,000 per year and an arrangement to provide the net proceeds of the Tax Foreclosure process to the Land Bank for its' activities. This funding is a necessary commitment to assure there is adequate funding to allow the Land Bank to fulfill its mission. In the early stages of the Land Bank, this funding will be necessary to fund many mission-focused activities. The County commitment will provide cost-share funding to allow the Land Bank to apply for and obtain revenue from a wide range of grant sources.

As I was giving her a tour of Wayne County today, a New York State grant administrator told me the Wayne County financial commitment to the Land Bank is significant and will enhance our opportunity for future funding as it becomes available.

As the Land Bank builds capacity, relationships, and knowledge, we will continue to find many opportunities to make a significant difference in Wayne County.

Below is a brief summary of our activities and accomplishments our first few months.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Mark C. Humbert

Executive Director

Wayne County Regional Land Bank Corporation

### **Our Progress**

The first year of the Land Bank involved developing policies, obtaining 4 parcels and hiring an executive director.

Since June 1, 2019, we have built and expanded our capacity significantly to fulfill our mission:

- Dr. Mark Humbert was hired to be Executive Director
- We acquired 17 properties as part of the 2019 County Tax Foreclosure process
- We secured a \$500,000 grant from New York State to provide funding for our efforts
- We entered into a sub-recipient arrangement with the County to use about \$748,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds to remove a residential property at 48 Broad Street in Lyons and a large commercial structure at 42 Elmer Street in Lyons and a



residential structure at 48 Broad Street, Lyons. The CDBG funding transferred to the Land Bank from Economic Development was earmarked upon transfer to complete two previously determined demolition projects. These funds were earmarked for these activities and are not discretionary funding available for the Land Bank's use.

- We have contracted with an engineering and environmental firm to perform environmental assessments on all properties scheduled for demolition. This firm will also function as project manager for the demolitions, including assisting with bid development, contractor selection, on-site job supervision, and air quality monitoring.
- We have developed relationships with community leaders and several community organizations and agencies to pursue partnerships that will enhance the Wayne County community. These include Habitat for Humanity and WFL BOCES.
- We are building relationships with Supervisors, Mayors, Code Enforcement Officers, and others to understand the needs of communities and determine how the Land Bank can partner with Towns and Villages to fulfill the Land Bank mission
- We sold one property we had acquired in 2018.

### **Upcoming Activities**

We will demolish or sell for rehab all currently-owned properties by early 2020. Empty lots will be sold after demolitions.

- Demolition of 13 properties acquired in the 2018 and 2019 foreclosure process. We plan to use the State grant funding for most of these demolition projects. Our intention is to use our current State grant funding as quickly as possible in hopes of obtaining additional State funding as it becomes available.
- Rehabilitation of 5 properties acquired in the 2019 foreclosure process. We will sell the properties to responsible individuals with enforcement liens that specify required repairs and updates that must be done to the property.
- Demolition of the commercial building at 42 Elmer Street in Lyons using the ear-marked CDBG funds. This property was recently condemned by the Town of Lyons for health and safety reasons and their authority to demolish the building was transferred to the Land Bank.

We will partner with the County to evaluate properties to be considered for foreclosure by the County in 2020 to determine which properties are most appropriately transferred to the Land Bank. We have begun conversations with the Treasurer and County Attorney regarding how we can improve on this process in 2020. We have the option to perform Phase 1 Environmental reviews on potentially contaminated or otherwise questionable properties to help us make informed decisions about the future of questionable properties.

We will continue to build relationships and collaborate with Towns, Villages, community groups, and organizations that have a similar mission.

