

Greater Cleveland Vacant and Abandoned Property Action Council
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Recommended Action Steps
Submitted To County Executive Ed Fitzgerald
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Challenge/Opportunity: With the consolidation of several County agencies and departments under the unified leadership of the County Executive, there is an opportunity to create a transparent and unified system of real estate transactions that supports rather than inhibits strong, vibrant neighborhoods.

Recommended Actions: The County Executive either creates a new position or redefines an existing County position with the power and authority to implement process changes to proactively address the negative impacts of the housing crisis on our neighborhoods. The position would be responsible for, among other things:

- Serving as the focal point regionally around managing issues of vacancy, foreclosure and abandonment.
- Establishment of a housing crisis task force comprising key County personnel and departments to ensure that county departments are aligning their internal processes to meet current and emerging challenges to neighborhood stabilization .
- Participation in and ensuring key County staff participation in regional efforts aimed at stabilizing neighborhoods and implementing foreclosure process reform, such as monthly VAPAC meetings.
- Identification of needs and securing of funding to strengthen neighborhoods impacted by the foreclosure crisis.
- Serving as the central link between the County Executive and municipalities on housing and neighborhood issues.
- Serving as a linkage and advocate with the judiciary and at the federal and state level to champion legislative and policy changes aimed at strengthening housing and neighborhoods, e.g. HB 323.
- Developing a Placemaking strategy to create and maintain vibrant cities and healthy, safe and sustainable neighborhoods throughout the county.
- Researching and making recommendations regarding potential new approaches to address the housing crisis, e.g. a regional Housing Court.
- Providing funding to support capacity building for cities and CDCs to address neighborhood strengthening, e.g. a regional code enforcement academy.

Challenge/Opportunity: As thousands of demolitions take place throughout the county as a result of the region's loss of population and the housing crisis, it is essential that planning infrastructure is in place to address the changing shape of our region to ensure that the county creates quality places that attract and retain residents. The housing crisis has created an unprecedented opportunity to create a well thought out regional planning effort

and engage in meaningful discussions in land use planning throughout the region, but county departments continue to operate independently without the benefit of being guided by an updated regional plan.

Recommended Actions: The County Executive:

- Incorporate the County Land Bank (CCLRC) and municipalities in planning discussions. Our nationally heralded Land Bank can and should play a pivotal role in both planning and implementation of initiatives related to housing and land use planning.
- Initiate a broad, inclusive planning vision for the region.
- Improve coordination and/or merge the County Planning Department with the Department of Development to ensure that scarce resources are deployed in accordance with an updated regional plan.
- Support and encourage the work of “Re-imagining Greater Cleveland”. This overarching planning exercise being spear-headed by Neighborhood Progress, Inc., ParkWorks, and The Kent State Urban Design Collaborative needs additional funding and county support so that its innovative ideas can be brought to life in the form of more tangible projects throughout the city and the urban county and to ensure that its analysis is incorporated into the county’s strategic vision.
- Play a more pro-active role in providing planning and mapping services, without charge, throughout the urban county. Many smaller cities lack planning departments and cannot produce GIS maps and access important planning data. Currently the Planning Commission offers mapping for a fee. Many cities lack the resources to pay these fees, yet desperately need these services. It is in the best interest of the region to provide planning assistance to smaller cities and work collaboratively with municipalities throughout the region to access their needs and ensure the creation of a comprehensive and well thought out regional plan.

Challenge/Opportunity: Many county agencies directly involved in the foreclosure process could make simple process changes that would dramatically improve outcomes and allow for greater coordination of data so that trends can be spotted more quickly and there could be improved data collection and sharing throughout the region.

Recommended Actions: Implement immediate fixes, such as:

- A single point of contact within County government to address property-based data requests from NEO CANDO and the CCLRC.
- Allow NEO CANDO and the CCLRC to extract Auditor data directly from the "Query King", "Download King", and "Comp King" software. This is possible because the CCLRC server room is physically connected to the County Planning Commission's network. One CCLRC computer with limited users could be put on the County's network for the purposes of accessing these data. This request has been made to the Auditor's IT staff, but has not been answered.
- Continue weekly data dumps to NEO CANDO and the CCLRC from the Recorder's Index, and provide the historic data from 1999-2002. Currently, data is not shared across departments efficiently. Standardizing data and consolidating data from multiple county agencies onto one platform would allow for greater analysis by

research entities such as CWRU's NEO CANDO, CSU and The Federal Reserve Bank.

- Require that the Sheriff's Department request property condition reports (criminal code violations, condemnations, vacant property registrations, nuisance abatement actions, etc.) from municipalities on a regular basis and, when available, disclose this information at Sheriff Sales to prevent the continued churning of blighted properties.
- Require that the Sheriff's Department routinely collect legally mandated information on Sheriff Sale buyers and sellers and share that with municipalities through an improved on-line data system so that owners can be held accountable for addressing property conditions.
- Require that the Sheriff's Department file deeds promptly after sale and inform municipalities in writing when there are municipal deeds awaiting pick up.
- Require that the Auditor's office establish an online system for tracking pending liens and assessments against a parcel instead of keeping these in a desk drawer, causing properties to transfer without disclosure of these encumbrances.

For additional information contact:

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