

NEW YORK
LAND BANK
ASSOCIATION

February 17, 2023

Hon. Liz Krueger
Chair
New York State Senate Finance Committee
416 Capitol
Albany, NY 12247

Hon. Helene E. Weinstein
Chair
New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee
LOB 923
Albany, NY 12248

Sent electronically via financechair@nysenate.gov and wamchair@nyassembly.gov

RE: Written testimony for the 2022 joint legislative budget hearing on housing

Dear Chairperson Krueger and Chairperson Weinstein,

On behalf of the New York Land Bank Association, I respectfully submit the enclosed written testimony regarding the FY 2023 New York State budget.

New York's land bank program was established in response to the 2008 Foreclosure Crisis and has grown exponentially since its inception in 2012. From Buffalo to Long Island, New York's 26 land banks serve an area that includes 70% of the state's population outside of New York City and consists of hundreds of towns and rural villages, and nearly all of New York's urban centers. Empire State Development recently approved the creation of New York's 27th land bank in Franklin County and the number of land banks in New York is expected to increase as more communities turn to these proven and effective organizations to help combat both the vacant property and affordable housing crises.

New York's land banks utilize grant funding to support property demolitions, acquisitions, stabilizations, lot improvements, and rehabilitation projects and work in partnership with state and local government, non-profits, residents, community groups, and responsible developers and investors to return properties to productive use and support community development.

As communities throughout New York continued to grapple with challenges that include population loss, the housing crisis, continued impacts of the pandemic, inflation, racial and economic disparities, and substantial concentrations of vacant properties, New York's land banks have emerged as an invaluable resource that can operate at the intersection of solutions that help address these challenges.

Land banks are New York's most effective tool for reclaiming vacant properties and revitalizing neighborhoods and are uniquely situated to help New York's urban areas combat the damaged caused by decades of discriminatory and systemic disinvestment in urban neighborhoods that has resulted in the

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tremendous racial and economic disparities that plague our cities today. In New York's rural areas, land banks help low- to moderate-income families achieve the dream of homeownership, build wealth, and revitalize small-town main streets facing vacancies and disinvestment. Many rural towns and villages suffer from poverty and income inequality and lack the resources to address problem properties. New York's rural land banks have proven they can build the capacity of small municipalities to help combat vacant properties and have become a vital resource.

New York's network of land banks has the state-wide presence and on-the-ground infrastructure to help the state achieve its ambitious but necessary goal of building 800,000 new homes over the next decade to meet the historic shortage and address New York's housing crisis. In many communities, land banks can help local governments meet their housing goals through reclaiming vacant and abandoned properties, providing the dual benefit of reducing the harm caused by vacant properties will creating more affordable housing and revitalizing neighborhoods.

Fortunately, land banks in New York have proven to be one of the most effective tools to halt and reverse vacancy and disinvestment, stabilize, and strengthen neighborhoods, advance local priorities, support economic recovery, and transform vacant properties into opportunities for affordable housing. **Over the past 10 years New York's land banks have generated over \$480 million in new investment in historically underserved urban neighborhoods, village centers, rural main streets, and formerly contaminated industrial sites across the state.** Our land banks have transformed hundreds of vacant properties into new affordable homeownership opportunities, created programs to address racial housing disparities and helped foster responsible redevelopment throughout upstate cities and rural communities alike.

Land banks are one of the most powerful community development tools in New York State and assist our communities by transforming vacant properties in a variety of ways, including building stronger, safer neighborhoods; expanding the production of affordable housing; remediating and activating contaminated sites; advancing racial equity, and supporting workforce development goals.

As you will see in the enclosed materials, New York has become a national leader in this movement, building one of the most effective networks of land banks in the United States. The progress our land banks have achieved over the past decade is remarkable:

- ✓ **Acquiring over 5,000 problem properties**
- ✓ **Demolishing 1,567 vacant structures**
- ✓ **Returning 3,231 properties to productive use**
- ✓ **Generating more than \$300 million in private investment**
- ✓ **Returning \$135 million in assessed value to local tax rolls**

To build upon the tremendous success that New York's land banks have achieved over the past decade and equip our communities with the tools they need to combat New York's vacant property and affordable housing crises, the New York Land Bank Association requested a budget allocation of \$100 million. The FY 2022 budget appropriated \$50 million for the services and expense of land banks. New York State Homes and Community Renewal (NYSHCR) is administering the funds under their newly created *Land Bank Initiative* program, which is part of NYSHCR's affordable housing strategy. Grant funds are already being deployed to land banks across the state to ensure our communities remain equipped with the tools they need to combat New York's vacant property and affordable housing crises.

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However, while the FY 2022 budget appropriation represents a meaningful investment in reclaiming vacant properties and supporting the creation of more affordable housing, the need for additional investment remains vital. Statewide pandemic-related moratoriums have expired and local governments throughout New York are working to catch up to the backlog of tax-foreclosures as communities brace for waves of vacant properties in the aftermath of COVID-19. Governor Hochul has rightfully made increasing New York's supply of affordable housing a key priority in the proposed 2023 New York State Budget.

New York's network of land banks has the state-wide presence and on-the-ground infrastructure to help the state achieve its ambitious but necessary goal of building 800,000 new homes over the next decade to meet the historic shortage and address New York's housing crisis. In many communities, land banks can help local governments meet their housing goals through reclaiming vacant and abandoned properties, providing the dual benefit of reducing the harm caused by vacant properties will creating more affordable housing and revitalizing neighborhoods.

To support the important work of our land banks the New York Land Bank Association respectfully requests an additional \$50 million of funding be allocated to NYSHCR's *Land Bank Initiative* so we can collectively continue to realize the tremendous and transformative return on the investment that New York's land banks have, and continue to, provide our state and local governments.

We appreciate your time and consideration and look forward to discussing how we can work together to transform vacant and abandoned problem properties from harmful liabilities into opportunities to build more affordable housing and create more equitable, inclusive, healthy, and resilient communities.

Sincerely,



Adam Zaranko
President
New York Land Bank Association

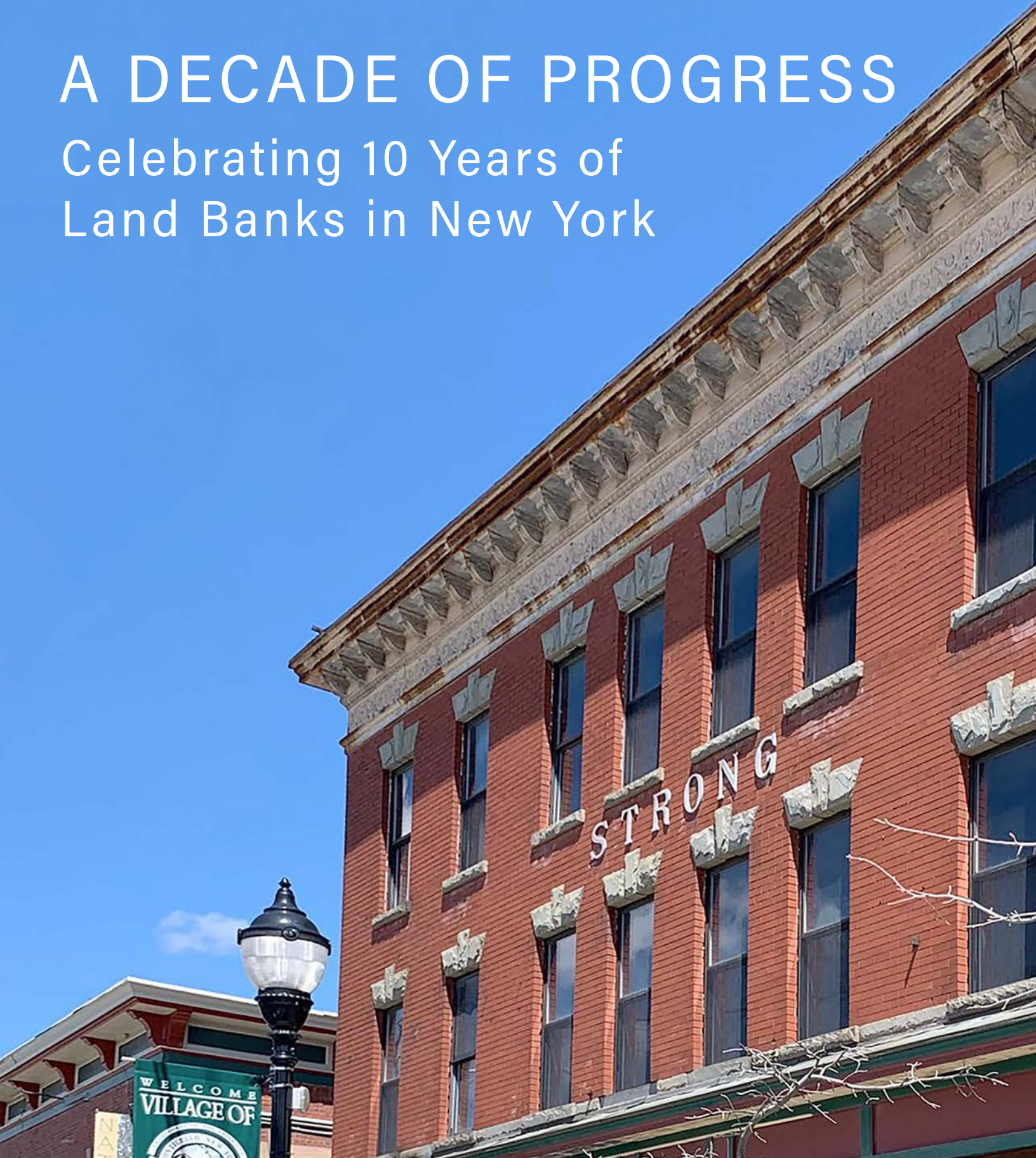
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A NEW YORK LAND BANK ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

A DECADE OF PROGRESS

Celebrating 10 Years of
Land Banks in New York



This report was prepared for the New York Land Bank Association
by Center for Community Progress.

JANUARY 2023

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For any community—whether urban, rural, or suburban—there is no greater symbol of neighborhood disinvestment, an economy in transition, or sustained population loss than vacant, deteriorated property.

Boarded-up or altogether abandoned, these properties gather garbage, present nuisances and safety hazards to neighbors, demand repeated service calls from police, fire, and code officers, and harm the equity of nearby property owners.

Today, in cities like Rochester and Albany, vacant and abandoned properties are concentrated in neighborhoods that were historically shaped by unjust, racist land-use and lending policies and inequitable public investment decisions. In too many rural towns or small villages, like Monticello and Endicott, once active main streets are drained of vibrancy by a row of vacant, deteriorating buildings. In suburban communities on Long Island and upstate, former industrial sites, also known as brownfields, can haunt residents of an economy long gone and present a seemingly intractable barrier to future resurgence.

From Buffalo to Long Island, the fate of vacant and abandoned properties was typically the same. These properties would accumulate years of delinquent taxes and end up falling into the local tax foreclosure pipeline. County or local governments would eventually offer up such properties at tax auction, with no certainty of who was bidding and why. Rarely did the tax auction result in positive outcomes for neighborhood's trending downward, and certainly not for those neighborhoods burdened by decades of disinvestment.

Too often, speculators or irresponsible landlords would scoop up these vacant properties for a small outlay of cash, and then did little to change the property's trajectory. For vacant properties that were so distressed and received no bids at the auction, governments would have to assume responsibility, often ill-equipped to steward these properties to productive reuse or compelled to use local tax dollars to demolish the dilapidated and dangerous structures.

For communities struggling with weak housing markets, population and job losses, and limited resources, this traditional approach to vacant, deteriorated, and tax-delinquent properties was delivering harm, not hope. The system was actually exacerbating the challenges of disinvestment and decline instead of supporting neighborhood stabilization and revitalization.

Fortunately, in 2011, New York state officials followed the lead of Michigan and Ohio and passed legislation that offered communities across the state the option to create and deploy an emerging and promising new community development tool: the modern-day land bank.

From 2000 to 2022, land banks have spread from Michigan to sixteen other states, including New York, and now play a critical role reversing trends of disinvestment and steering long-term recovery and revitalization efforts in more than 250 communities across the country.

In just ten years, New York has become a national leader in this movement, and this report documents and celebrates the remarkable rise and achievements of land banking in New York.¹

As of December 2022, there are 26 land banks of incredible diversity serving more than 70% of the state's population outside of New York City.

Since 2013, these community development entities have acquired 5,205 problem properties, attracted and catalyzed investments of approximately \$480,000,000 in urban, rural, and suburban neighborhoods, returned an estimated \$134,219,946 in assessed value to the tax rolls, and generated nearly \$56,000,000 in sales proceeds, which were rolled back into land bank interventions or shared back with local and county governments to support other public services.

New York's successful land banking story is one of forward-thinking public officials and creative practitioners who acknowledged the traditional tax auction was no way to resolve vacant, abandoned, and dilapidated properties and that a bolder approach was possible.

New York's story is one of shared learning and local experimentation that reimagined vacant properties not as a liability to cast off to some anonymous bidder, but as an asset that could be patiently and thoughtfully stewarded back to productive use in support of a community's priorities, such as affordable and healthy rental housing, local homeownership and wealth-building, food security, climate resiliency, and more.

This is a story of respectful collaboration and remarkable innovation that, in the last decade, has seen the evolution of New York land banks from transactional public entities at the fringe of community development to transformational hubs of excellence at the center of equitable, inclusive development.

Land banks in New York have proven to be one of the most effective tools to halt and reverse vacancy and disinvestment, stabilize and strengthen neighborhoods, advance local priorities, and support economic recovery.

However, there are both persistent and emergent new threats to the health and safety of neighborhoods across the Empire State, primarily from the long-term destabilizing impacts of COVID-19 and our acute housing crisis. In the face of these challenges, it is promising to know that land banks are well-positioned to play a key role in long-term recovery efforts—so long as state, county, local governments, and philanthropic partners continue to provide the resources needed to advance equitable development, inclusive neighborhoods, and resilient communities.

¹ The New York Land Bank Act was passed in 2011, and the first ten land banks were approved by the NYS Empire State Development in 2012 and 2013. For purposes of this report, the ten-year period used to measure the impacts of New York land banks is from January 2013 to December 2022.

As of March 2022, the following seventeen states have passed comprehensive state-enabling land bank legislation:

- ♦ Michigan (2004)
- ♦ Ohio (2009)
- ♦ New York (2011)
- ♦ Georgia (2012)
- ♦ Tennessee (2012)
- ♦ Missouri (2012)
- ♦ Pennsylvania (2012)
- ♦ Nebraska (2013)
- ♦ Alabama (2013)
- ♦ West Virginia (2014)
- ♦ Delaware (2015)
- ♦ Virginia (2016)
- ♦ Indiana (2016)
- ♦ Kentucky (2017)
- ♦ Connecticut (2019)
- ♦ New Jersey (2019)
- ♦ Maryland (2019)

VACANT PROPERTIES IN NEW YORK

No resident or elected official in New York needs to be convinced of the negative impacts of vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated (VAD) properties. New Yorkers know how VAD properties harm the health and safety of neighbors and neighborhoods, drain local tax dollars, and stifle investment.

Following the Great Recession of 2008 and the mortgage foreclosure crisis, perhaps no other state than New York has invested more resources in building local governments' capacity, knowledge, and tools to tackle vacant properties from a number of different angles.²

The most significant investment over the last ten years has been in land banks, which are public nonprofit corporations created by local or county governments with an exclusive focus on converting vacant, abandoned, and tax-delinquent properties into assets that serve neighbors and neighborhoods.

Passed in 2011, the New York State Land Bank Act authorizes any government that enforces delinquent property taxes (termed a "foreclosing governmental unit" or FGU) to create a land bank. The Act, borrowing and tailoring key provisions from Michigan and Ohio's land bank legislation, also grants land banks a number of special powers that enable them to carry out the mission-driven work more equitably, effectively, and efficiently.

To date, there are 26 land banks operating in the state and virtually all of them are unique in their own way, whether that's the geography served, size of their service area, focus and priorities, or scale of operations. The latter part of this report features project highlights from all 26 land banks, and the portfolio demonstrates how incredibly flexible land banks can be designed and deployed to address local challenges and advance community-driven priorities.

² According to the Office of the New York State Attorney General, more than \$600 million in settlement funding was redirected to communities across the state in support of a diverse suite of interventions that helped stabilize and revitalize neighborhoods. In addition to nearly \$100 million for land banks, settlement funds were also directed to support foreclosure counseling and loans to protect homeowners, provide legal assistance to vulnerable tenants, offer loans and grants for affordable multi-family developments, boost local code enforcement capacity and data systems, enable innovative anti-displacement programs, and help municipalities tackle 'zombie properties.'

KEY POWERS OF A LAND BANK

A land bank's ability to serve such a uniquely customized role across a range of urban, rural, or suburban communities traces back to the powers granted to land banks under the state's enabling legislation. While there are a number of special provisions, the most important powers are as follows:

- 1**
ABILITY TO OBTAIN PROPERTIES COST-EFFECTIVELY THROUGH THE TAX FORECLOSURE PROCESS

Ability to obtain properties cost-effectively through the tax foreclosure process. It's estimated that more than 90% of the 5,205 properties acquired by the state's land banks since 2013 were acquired through the local tax foreclosure process. This is intentional and by design. Rather than push vacant, deteriorated, and tax-delinquent properties to the auction and risk uncertain outcomes, FGUs are permitted by state law to instead transfer or sell these problem properties to their local land bank, recognizing these focused, mission-driven entities are building the partnerships, experience, and resources to steward problem properties to an outcome that meets local priorities.
- 2**
HOLD PROPERTIES TAX-FREE

Hold property tax-free. Land banks are typically working with properties that have little to no market value, because they either are burdened by significant legal, financial, or environmental barriers or require more in repairs than a sale would ever return given the weakness of the neighborhood housing market. Thus, state law grants land banks the power to hold property tax exempt so that all available resources can be directed to transform the liability to an asset.
- 3**
FLEXIBLE BOARD APPOINTMENTS & ABILITY TO CREATE COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARDS

Flexibility with board appointments and ability to create community advisory boards. A land bank's ability to transform liabilities to assets that serve neighbors and neighborhoods is contingent on ensuring voices from those neighborhoods most impacted by vacancy and disinvestment are helping to define priorities and render decisions. The state law grants local governments a lot of discretion in naming board appointees, and permits the creation of community advisory boards to expand representation and involvement.
- 4**
NEGOTIATE AND APPROVE SALES BASED ON BEST OUTCOME, NOT HIGHEST PRICE

Negotiate and approve sales based on best outcome, not the highest price. Local governments are bound by restrictive disposition procedures to ensure the best financial return for taxpayers. However, because land banks are focused on vacant and problem properties that have little to no market value, the law grants these locally-created, mission-driven entities much more flexibility with disposition decisions. In essence, the law is valuing equitable outcomes that support local priorities, such as prioritizing first-time homeownership for long-time local residents, or affordable and safe rental housing that supports vulnerable populations, or lot sales to adjacent homeowners or local urban gardening groups.

It is important to recognize how significant the first (acquisition) and final (disposition) powers are in setting the stage for land bank successes. Together, they intentionally allow for a more thoughtful and predictable approach to VAD properties that advance local priorities than the traditional, broken approach of offering these distressed properties up at an auction to the highest bidder, whoever that may be and for whatever purpose, on a single day in a church basement, hotel ballroom, or online platform.

The flexible acquisition and disposition powers also help explain why there is such a broad, diverse set of land banks in operation across the state. Some of the most challenging tax-delinquent properties in a particular community might be brownfields, main street commercial buildings, or single-family residential structures. One community might have 1,000 properties heading to tax foreclosure, while a smaller village might be enforcing delinquent taxes on only a dozen. The scope, scale, and nature of the inventory of VAD properties a land bank might be expected to resolve varies significantly across regions and communities in New York—and how well a land bank meets those expectations depends significantly on the amount of funding it can access, number of resourced-partners it can collaborate with, and the degree to which local political leadership will champion it.

The next section offers a brief summary of the growth of land banks in New York and the variation seen across the current 26 land banks.



NEW YORK LAND BANKS

1. Albany County Land Bank
2. Allegany County Land Bank
3. BENLIC (Buffalo Erie Niagara Land Improvement Corporation)
4. Broome County Land Bank
5. Capital Region Land Bank
6. Cattaraugus County Land Bank
7. Chautauqua County Land Bank
8. Chemung County Property Development
9. Dutchess County-Poughkeepsie Land Bank
10. Finger Lakes Regional Land Bank
11. Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank Corporation
12. Greater Syracuse Land Bank
13. Kingston City Land Bank
14. Livingston County Land Bank
15. Nassau County Land Bank
16. Newburgh Community Land Bank
17. Niagara Orleans Regional Land Improvement Corporation
18. Ogdensburg Land Bank
19. Oswego County Land Bank
20. Rochester Land Bank
21. Steuben County Land Bank
22. Suffolk County Land Bank
23. Sullivan County Land Bank
24. Tioga County Property Development
25. Troy Community Land Bank
26. Wayne County Regional Land Bank

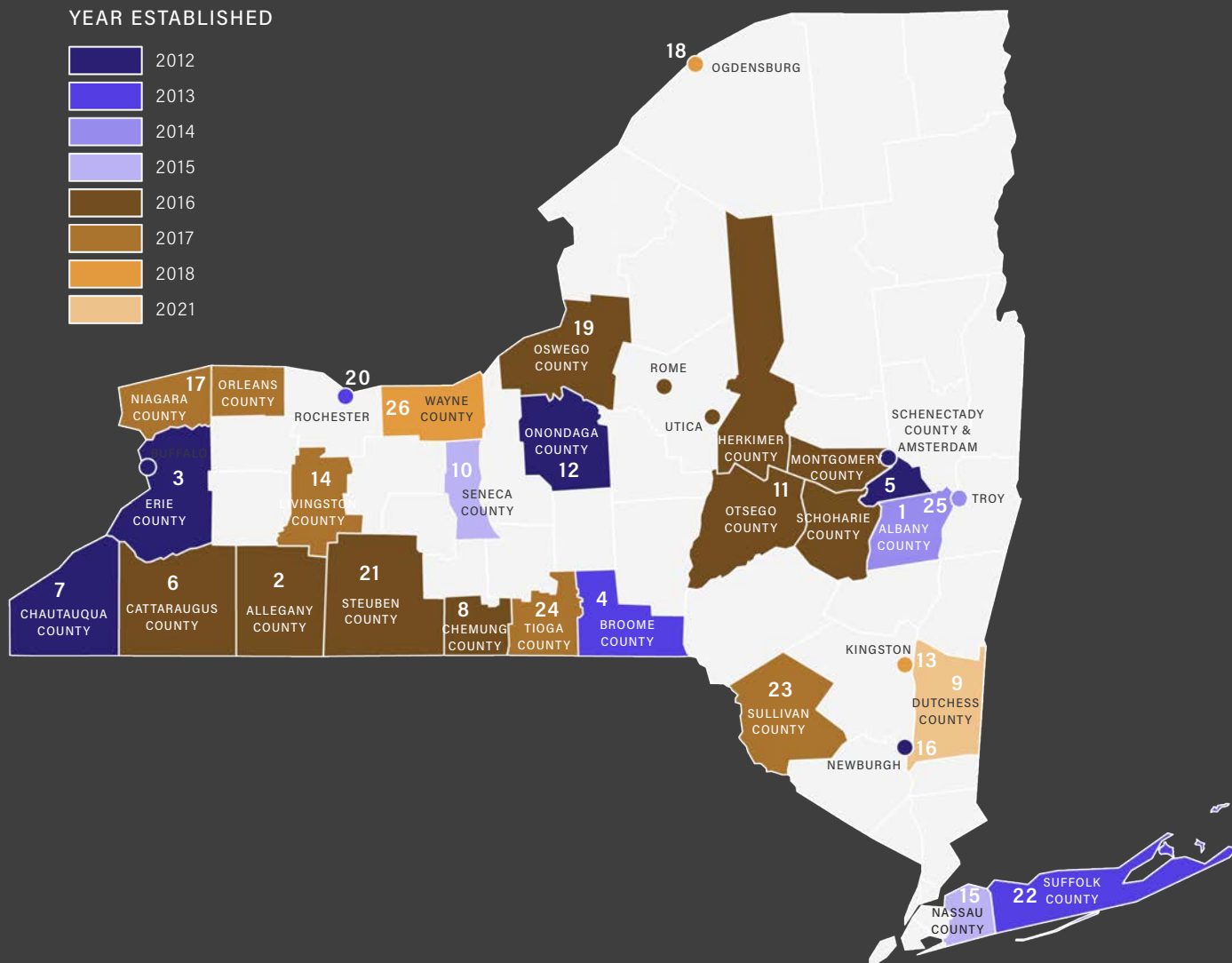
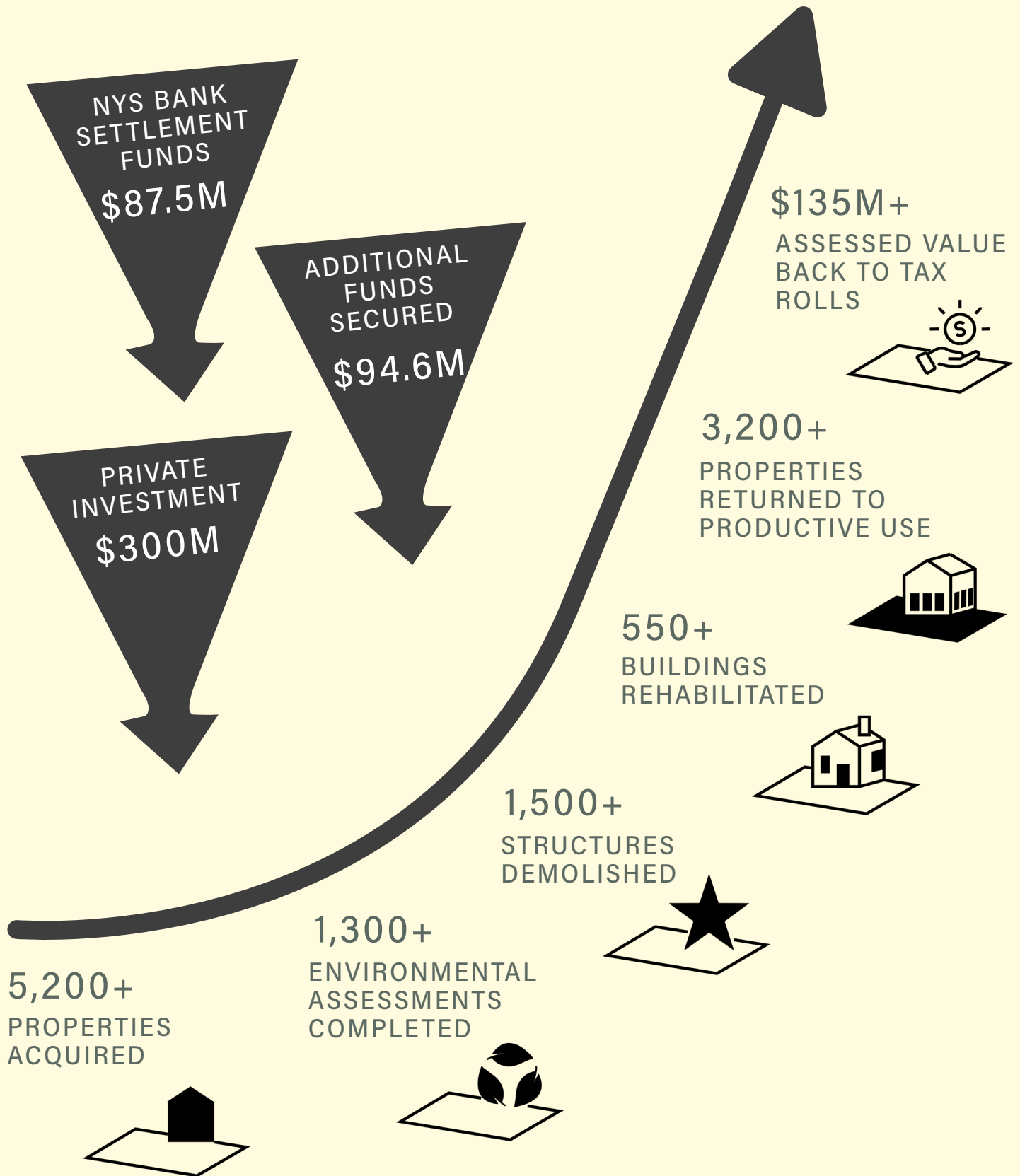


FIGURE 1.
NEW YORK LAND BANKS, AS OF DECEMBER 2022

NEW YORK LAND BANKS: TRANSFORMATIVE INVESTMENT



SECTION 2.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS: BY THE NUMBERS

In 2017, the New York Land Bank Association (NYLBA) partnered with the Center for Community Progress to produce a report on the first five years of land banking in New York. A table of performance metrics was created in order to quantify the impacts of the first ten land banks following the initial \$33 million in grant funds provided by the AG's Office.

NYLBA has maintained the database since, and the numbers below reflect the data provided by all 26 land banks through November 2022.

5,000+ PROBLEM PROPERTIES ACQUIRED
1,567 DEMOLITIONS (30% OF ACQUISITIONS)
3,231 PROPERTY DISPOSITIONS

\$180M LOCAL STATE & FEDERAL FUNDING
SECURED BY NEW YORK LAND BANKS
FOR NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION &
REVITALIZATION EFFORTS

\$300M PRIVATE INVESTMENT ATTRACTED TO
NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION &
REVITALIZATION GOALS, PRIMARILY
HOUSING INVESTMENTS EXPANDING SAFE,
HEALTHY, AFFORDABLE HOUSING CHOICES
FOR HOUSEHOLDS AT ALL INCOME LEVELS

\$135M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED TO TAX ROLLS

\$56M SALES PROCEEDS ROLLED BACK INTO LAND
BANK INTERVENTIONS OR SHARED BACK
WITH LOCAL & COUNTY GOVERNMENTS TO
SUPPORT OTHER PUBLIC SERVICES

By any measure, land banks have proven to be a remarkable success in New York, responsible for attracting and stewarding investments of more than \$480,000,000 in historically underserved urban neighborhoods, village centers, rural main streets, and even dilapidated manufactured home parks and contaminated industrial sites.

In some sense, this vindicates the daring pivot made by state and local leaders not just in New York, but also in Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Nebraska, and other land bank states in the face of persistent problems with vacant, deteriorated, tax-delinquent properties.

Rather than seeing these problem properties as liabilities that should be struck off to any private bidder as quickly as possible, more and more governmental leaders and practitioners are understanding that the public has a role and responsibility to steward some or all of these problem properties back to productive use, in partnership with others, to serve residents and neighborhoods.

This paradigm shift, enabled and led by a land bank, couldn't succeed without leadership, resources, collaboration, patience, and redefining success.



And the numbers affirm that land banks, no longer transactional entities at the fringe of community development, have become transformational entities at the center of equitable, inclusive development. The land banks in New York are:

▶ **Building Stronger, Safer Neighborhoods.**

From Buffalo to Long Island and up north to Ogdensburg, land banks have strengthened communities by demolishing severely blighted buildings, stabilizing and beautifying commercial properties, supporting the expansion of recreational amenities and public spaces, and helping to advance food justice by supporting urban agriculture.

▶ **Expanding the Production of Affordable Housing.**

Fifteen land banks have partnered with Habitat for Humanity affiliates to expand quality, affordable homeownership opportunities. Five land banks have sold properties to local community land trusts or are involved with shared-equity housing models, helping to build a portfolio of housing with lasting affordability. And all land banks have partnered with either nonprofit housing providers or private local contractors to create more affordable housing choices, including rental units, across the state.

▶ **Remediating and Activating Contaminated Sites.**

Following the pioneering work by Suffolk County Land Bank, seven more land banks have executed or are finalizing agreements with NYS DEC and NYS Comptroller's Office to more effectively and efficiently tackle brownfields in their respective communities.

▶ **Advancing Racial Equity.**

Ten land banks, mostly those that serve urban communities where vacant properties often disproportionately impact neighborhoods of color, are leaning into racial equity and justice work, and have either reformed policies or implemented programs to achieve more equitable outcomes.

▶ **Supporting Workforce Development Goals.**

Five land banks have active partnerships with their local vocational and trades schools, providing young students with on-site experience rehabilitating vacant properties or constructing new homes. Another seven land banks have confirmed partnerships that are advancing local workforce development goals.

Additionally, land banks are also stopping the vicious cycle of predatory actions like absentee landlordism and property speculation, putting local community goals and health and safety first, addressing the racial wealth gap by creating affordable homeownership opportunities for underserved populations, and helping to build wealth and stabilize distressed neighborhoods by fostering local, responsible buyers and investors.

The evolution from transactional to transformational within the last ten years has been remarkable, but more importantly, it means communities and regions across the state now have a hub of excellence when it comes to stewarding VAD properties back to productive use in support of local priorities and needs. Given ongoing and looming challenges, the need for these hubs of excellence will likely only increase.

SECTION 3.

THE NEW YORK STORY: GROWTH AND VARIATION OF LAND BANKS IN NEW YORK



Following the passage of the 2011 Land Bank Act, the state's economic development agency, Empire State Development (ESD), was charged with overseeing this new initiative. Communities interested in creating a land bank had to apply to ESD for approval, since the state's Land Bank Act originally capped the number of new land banks to ten.

In the first three years of the program (2012-2014), ten land banks were approved and created, representing almost every region of the state. Troy, Rochester, and Newburgh represented the first three municipal land banks. The first four county land banks were created by Albany, Broome, Chautauqua, and Suffolk. Land banks serving the greater Syracuse area, Capital Region (Amsterdam and Schenectady), and greater Buffalo area were formed as multi-jurisdictional entities by at least two FGUs.

Just like superheroes, the origin stories of land banks are telling and informative. For example, the Greater Syracuse Land Bank was created to help resolve the City's backlog of nearly seven years of tax delinquencies by agreeing to accept all properties that were foreclosed upon. There was shared consensus that the land bank, if properly resourced annually by local and county governments, could become a hub of excellence by building the expertise, partnerships, and capacity necessary to carry out a laser-focused mission: stewarding thousands of VAD properties from liabilities to assets that could benefit Syracuse's residents and neighborhoods.

Understanding this story helps explain why the Greater Syracuse Land Bank has acquired more than 2,100 properties in ten years—which is far more than any other land bank in the state and accounts for about 41% of all the properties acquired by the state's 26 land banks through 2022. In effect, Syracuse leaders have walked away from the tax auction altogether and now rely on its land bank as a mission-driven public broker, working in partnership with residents and organizations to reimagine and repurpose these liabilities as neighborhood assets that meet local needs. Through this work, the Greater Syracuse Land Bank has earned statewide and national reputation as a leader in the field.

How did the Suffolk County Land Bank end up pioneering a groundbreaking agreement between NYS DEC, NYS Comptroller's Office, Suffolk County, and the Land Bank to make the disposition of brownfields more efficient? Because the Suffolk County Land Bank was the only land bank in the state at the time that was originally created and charged with a singular focus on brownfields. The innovative agreement has since been replicated by seven other Land Banks, demonstrating the value land banks can bring to both community and economic development goals.

The first ten land banks were largely focused on addressing systemic vacancy in urban centers, and in 2014, the New York State legislature unanimously approved increasing the number of land banks that can be created from 10 to 20. The second wave of land banks quickly followed, and were primarily smaller rural counties, such as Cattaraugus, Tioga, and Seneca (Finger Lakes Regional Land Bank). The Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank (GMVLB), created jointly by four upstate rural counties, also emerged during the second wave, and boasts the distinction of serving the largest geographical area of any land bank in the country.

The rapid emergence of 20 land banks in just a few years was not by happenstance. For sure every city, county, and region that created a land bank had significant, long-standing challenges with vacant, blighted properties. Most genuinely sought a more proactive and effective alternative than the typical two outcomes: auctioning them off to the highest bidder or taking possession and demolishing the dangerous structures as resources allowed.

What really accelerated the process was grant money—lots of it. And that's a key part of New York's land bank movement origin story, because the impressive metrics of success, discussed in this report, were possible only because of the significant investments made by the state in a network of land banks that have become a national model of excellence.

SECTION 4.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT: FUELING LAND BANK EMERGENCE, EVOLUTION, AND EXCELLENCE

Following the mortgage foreclosure crisis, state and federal governments collaborated on a major lawsuit against what were then the five largest mortgage servicers. A \$50 billion settlement was reached in February 2012 providing (1) relief to distressed borrowers harmed by questionable and wrongful practices, and (2) direct payments to the federal government and 49 states that signed the settlement (Oklahoma was the only state not a party to the settlement).

The Office of the New York State Attorney General (AG) initially had full discretion over how to direct the state's payments, and showed incredible leadership in carving out a portion to support the state's emerging land bank movement. The Office recognized that if the banks' nefarious practices created a wave of vacancies that could destabilize neighborhoods, the proceeds from bank settlements should go to entities laser-focused on addressing vacant properties toward stabilizing and strengthening neighborhoods.

In the summer of 2013, the AG's Office announced \$33 million available to the first wave of land banks through the new Community Revitalization Initiative. Turned out that was just the beginning. Over eight years and multiple settlements later, **almost \$86 million was allocated by the AG's Office to support land bank interventions and innovations.**³

This massive and sustained infusion of grant funding was a transformative investment. It allowed a network of land banks in every region of the state to emerge, innovate, evolve, and drive meaningful impacts faster than anticipated.

It inadvertently helped foster a cohort of land bank practitioners that leaned on each other to understand the laws, policies, politics, and practices of this new community development tool. This loose network of land bank leaders eventually formalized as the New York Land Bank Association which remains a powerful resource to the broader field of practice in New York—and a model for other states.

The AG's allocations of settlement funding also allowed land banks to demonstrate, when properly resourced, the positive impacts of steering vacant, deteriorated, and tax-delinquent properties away from the auction and toward mission-driven entities that can predictably and reliably meet neighborhood needs and achieve local community and economic development goals.

³ Because the New York State Office of Attorney's General had jurisdiction over Wall Street, New York reached a number of smaller, but still significant, settlements with other lending and financial institutions that were implicated in some way with the Great Recession. With each settlement, the NYS AG continued to carve out portions to dedicate to the Community Revitalization Initiative. A number of other grant programs were also designed by the AG's Office and funded by settlement dollars over eight years, all of which boosted the capacity and knowledge of local governments and partners to address vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties as well as overall housing needs.

While the four rounds of grant funding from the AG's Office demonstrated what land banks can achieve with adequate funding, it also created some unrealistic expectations from some local leaders who saw their respective land bank demolishing hazardous eyesores, creating new homeownership opportunities, transforming lots into gardens, and then assumed such incredible work could continue in perpetuity without the need for any investments of local tax dollars.

Fortunately, most local and county leaders created their land bank with an understanding that an entity charged with tackling VAD properties would need some degree of local funding or at least in-kind contributions, such as "donating" the time of governmental employees to help run or support the land bank, whether that's offering legal counsel, sharing GIS and IT services and expertise, or even providing basic property maintenance.

A few land banks have even received annual general fund allocations from the local governments that created them, ranging from \$100,000 to \$1,000,000. Some local governments provide their land bank just enough support to cover one full-time staff member, or again, commit existing government employees to run the land bank.

While in-kind contributions or cash support from local governments and the grant awards from the AG's Community Revitalization Initiative were critical to fund operations and VAD property interventions—such as demolition, rehabilitation, or new construction—land bank leaders in New York started to show an impressive degree of entrepreneurialism in leveraging other resources. New York land banks have successfully secured federal brownfield grants, federal and state low-income housing tax credits, state historic preservation grants, state parks grants, federal and state housing grants, philanthropic grants, and more. It is an impressive record of leveraging the AG's grant funding many times over, and driving significant investments into neighborhoods that had typically been overlooked and delivering real benefits to neighbors that for too long felt neglected, ignored, or devalued.





SECTION 5.

THE LONG PATH TO RECOVERY: RECURRING, RELIABLE FUNDING IS CRITICAL

This network of high-capacity, innovative land banks tailored to local needs and conditions is an invaluable resource that must be valued, preserved, and strengthened with ongoing investments from local, county, state, and philanthropic partners—particularly as communities continue to grapple with population loss, an acute housing crisis, the ongoing destabilization impacts of the pandemic, inflation, and what could possibly be inaction at the federal level for years to come.

Consider the following trends that threaten neighborhood vitality and opportunity for all:

- ▶ **According to a 2022 Pew report, New York led the nation in population loss from July 2020 to July 2021, with 319,000 fewer residents, driven primarily by migration to other states.**
- ▶ **The cost of housing is skyrocketing, and New Yorkers were already having trouble with housing costs before this most recent jump. According to ACS data (2016-2020), 3.4 M households in New York rented their home, and 49% were cost burdened, paying more than 30% of monthly income for housing costs.**
- ▶ **Persistent poverty—just as much of a challenge in rural communities as it is in certain urban neighborhoods—remains an almost intractable barrier to homeownership. And too many working families who were making all the right decisions to prepare for homeownership must now rethink plans due to the climbing interest rates.**
- ▶ **In New York, according to 2019 ACS, the Black homeownership rate is 31.4% and the racial homeownership gap in New York (35%) is higher than the national racial homeownership gap (30%). The Albany-Schenectady-Troy metro area has the second highest racial homeownership gap in the country.**
- ▶ **In virtually every corner of the state and in between, there is evidence of institutional and corporate investors feasting on local housing markets and exacerbating the housing crisis.**

Despite the tremendous achievements of New York’s land banks in the last ten years, it is clear there are still many factors threatening housing and neighborhood stability, and undermining the long-term vision of equitable, inclusive, and resilient communities.

As leaders at all levels continue to look to land banks to help address some of these challenges, it is important to lift-up a key lesson learned over the last ten years of land banking in New York: that addressing vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties in a systematic manner that supports local priorities will require sufficient and sustained public investments.

Looking ahead, there is no low-cost or cheap way to replicate the successes of the last ten years. After all, the inventory that is the focus of land banks has largely been abandoned or discarded by the private market is the kind of distressed inventory that, when auctioned, attracts the worst actors: slumlords or speculators.

Land banks have proven to be far better stewards of vacant, deteriorated, tax-delinquent properties than slumlords and speculators for sure—and because they are designed with special powers and charged with an exclusive focus, land banks have proven to be better equipped and more nimble stewards than local governments too.

The underlying premise of a land bank, if not always articulated, is that local governments should not view property as a commodity but value property as one of its greatest assets. Through this lens, the annual pipeline of properties slated for tax foreclosure can be seen not

as a short-term means to generate nominal revenue but as a long-term opportunity to steward a prized asset to increase community-control, expand wealth-building opportunities, create permanent affordable housing choices, achieve community resiliency goals, and advance healthy, safe, and inclusive neighborhoods.

And because these outcomes have value in and of themselves, this work will always need to be subsidized to some degree by public investments. To be clear, land banks have been exceptional at partnering with nonprofit organizations and private investors to leverage additional investments, but the nature of the distressed inventory and its mission-driven work will still require some level of public investments.

New York land banks knew in 2019 that there would be no more settlement funds from the AG's Office. As a response, the New York Land Bank Association began advocating in earnest with state leaders for the need to include dedicated funding in the state's budget in the coming years.

Fortunately, the flexible federal funds directed to every unit of government under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to help with recovery efforts from COVID-19 came at a critical time.

New York State's final budget for 2022-2023 included an impressive \$300 million in new funding to support local efforts to address vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties: \$250 million was used to supercharge the very successful Restore NY program, and another \$50 million was dedicated exclusively to land banks.

Allies of land banks at the state agency tasked to administer the \$50 million land bank grant program carved out almost \$15 million for operational grants, which were awarded in the fall of 2022. This forward-thinking decision demonstrates that key allies at the state have a strong understanding of how land banks need both operational and capital funding in order to carry out the work equitably, effectively, and efficiently. This admirable trend should continue in the years ahead.

At the same time, some land banks in New York have been successful in receiving portions of the flexible ARPA funds that were awarded directly to local and county governments:

- Niagara-Orleans Land Bank received \$1 million from Niagara County
- Kingston Land Bank received \$1.1 million from the City of Kingston
- Broome County Land Bank received \$2 million from the City of Binghamton & \$300,000 from Broome County
- Greater Syracuse Land Bank received \$5 million from the City of Syracuse
- GMVLB received \$195,000 from Schoharie County & a number of smaller allocations from villages within its service area

While these are positive developments, these allocations were made possible by an unprecedented and one-time infusion of federal recovery resources. There is still a need for sustained, reliable funding for land banks in New York.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTINUED SUCCESS

Land banks, by virtue of their successes, have become an essential and trusted entity at the center of equitable development, and funding should follow. Here are two suggestions:

1. Every city or county in New York that created a land bank should take advantage of the infusion of ARPA dollars over the next couple of years and work into their annual budget dedicated funding for their respective land bank that at *minimum* covers all operating costs. This should be a recurring, annual appropriation going forward.
2. Similarly, state officials should make permanent an annual appropriation dedicated to land banks of *at least* \$25 million a year.

While the above recommendations aren't sufficient to carry out all the work that land banks could do, they would provide a solid base of public funding that would allow all existing land banks to deploy their creative, entrepreneurial skills in leveraging partners and other resources (public, private, and philanthropic) to continue the impressive work that is strengthening neighborhoods across the state in ways that are equitable, inclusive, and resilient.



SECTION 6.

CONCLUSION

Ten years ago, land banks were an experiment in New York. Today, they are essential, playing a critical and influential role in helping cities, towns, and villages across the state address vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties consistent with community and economic development goals.

Legally engineered with unique powers, land banks provide an optimal vehicle to more equitably, effectively, and efficiently tackle vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties—particularly those that fall into the local tax foreclosure pipeline.

Whether in western New York, North Country, or Long Island, the traditional practice of auctioning off distressed properties in struggling neighborhoods to the highest bidder generated plenty of evidence that it is actually harming residents and neighborhoods. The auction is unpredictable, excludes buyers who lack access to cash, and concedes outcomes to chance.

The first land bank in New York, launched in Syracuse, was meant precisely to serve as an alternative to the unpredictable tax auction process. The land bank would become the repository of all tax-foreclosed properties, serving as a mission-driven public broker that sought not the highest price but the best outcome for the neighborhood.

Local officials understood that given the targeted inventory—deteriorated, tax-foreclosed properties located primarily in neighborhoods shaped by decades of racist policies and disinvestment—the land bank's charge would require resources, patience, partnerships, some experimentation, and a little bit of luck.

Ten years in, and the Greater Syracuse Land Bank has earned a reputation of excellence both across the state and the nation.

While no other land bank in the state is addressing the same scale as Syracuse (Albany County is close, since local officials there also abandoned the tax auction and rely almost exclusively on the land bank to steward foreclosed properties back to productive use), the purpose and approach is largely similar across the state.

From urban centers like Buffalo and Binghamton to rural or village centers like Hornell and Herkimer, land banks have demonstrated the value of a more thoughtful, intentional, and predictable approach to vacant, abandoned, and tax-delinquent properties than the tax auction.

Over the last ten years, New York land banks have demonstrated an entrepreneurial spirit,

prudently managing public investments to leverage hundreds of millions in private, nonprofit, and philanthropic investments. Land banks have also demonstrated a creative, collaborative approach, linking vacant property interventions to positive outcomes with youth development, public health, workforce development, racial equity, wealth-building, climate resiliency, and local control and ownership.

As a flexible entity, land banks have assumed responsibility for addressing some of the toughest property challenges in any community—whether those are systemic vacancy in historically disinvested neighborhoods, commercial vacancy, brownfields, or even dilapidated mobile home parks—and have been celebrating successes that improve the health, safety, and vibrancy of neighborhoods, and generate hope, security, and opportunities for residents.

As of 2022, the 26 land banks in New York represent one of the nation's most advanced, innovative, and impactful networks of land bank practitioners. As we continue to recover from the lasting impacts of our public health, economic, and housing crises, New York public leaders and elected officials at all levels of government must acknowledge, value, protect, and strengthen this powerful, prized resource, and continue to invest in these transformational entities serving at the center of equitable development.



PORTFOLIO OF PROGRESS:
HIGHLIGHTS FROM NEW YORK'S
26 LAND BANKS





ALBANY COUNTY LAND BANK CORPORATION

SPEARHEADING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN, EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ALBANY'S SOUTH END

ALBANY COUNTY LAND BANK

www.albanycountylanbank.org

1,242 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

112 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

\$51.9M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$27.4M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

\$10M SALES PROCEEDS

In 2019, the Albany County Land Bank (ACLB) formed a public-private development partnership with South End Partners, LLC (a joint development venture between Metropolitan Development Group and Toporovsky Realty Corp) to transform over 70 vacant properties assembled by the Land Bank in the City of Albany's South End Neighborhood into a blend of affordable homeownership opportunities and mixed income quality affordable rentals to catalyze neighborhood revitalization in this historically redlined community.

Through the Land Bank's extensive community outreach and engagement efforts it became apparent

that ACLB could have a significant role in aligning community priorities and helping to shape the redevelopment of the properties through close collaboration with affordable housing developers that possessed the experience and expertise necessary to accomplish the planning, financing, and redevelopment of multiple vacant properties in an economically distressed neighborhood.

Creating more affordable homeownership opportunities was among the top priorities that emerged from discussions with community stakeholders. Although affordable housing developers often focus on leveraging low-income housing tax credits to create affordable rental housing, ACLB was able to provide local market knowledge, relationships with governmental partners, and facilitate increased communication between the developers and community members, organizations, and local elected officials to incorporate and prioritize affordable homeownership into the redevelopment effort. Through collaboration, the co-development team was able to identify and secure state grants and municipal American Rescue Plan Act funding to finance up to ten affordable townhomes which will be constructed in the first phase of the redevelopment program and sold to first-time homebuyers.

ACLB's participation in this project has enabled continued communication and collaboration between community stakeholders and the development team which has allowed the redevelopment program to adapt to changing conditions while remaining focused on accomplishing community priorities, preserve the viability of the project, and keep stakeholders apprised throughout the duration of the project.

INVITING THE TRADES SCHOOL TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD TO CONSTRUCT NEW HOMES



Allegany County Land Bank Corporation

<https://www.alleganyco.gov/departments/planning/allegany-county-land-bank-corporation>

22 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

11 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

\$1.4M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$751K ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

The Allegany County Land Bank (ACLBC) partnered with Alfred State College's Building Trades School to provide cost-free labor and allow students to have hands-on experience in the development of a single-family home.

The site was acquired from the county's tax foreclosure list. The lot was overgrown and a half-standing garage was entangled in trees and brush. Students from Alfred State College assisted in clearing the brush, trees, and refuse that littered the 1.2 acre lot. After ACLBC demolished the garage, engineers were brought in to draft the layout of a new home.

Alfred State professors brought their classes on-site to shoot transit lines and mark out the site plan. Heavy equipment classes brought in machinery and practiced their earthwork skills as they moved materials and dug out what would be the home's foundation.

Private contractors were hired to install the foundation, erect walls, roof, and siding in order to seal the house from the weather. Alfred State plumbing students were then brought in to rough in the electric and plumbing.

The home was finished by local contractors and the house was almost ready for sale. The final part of the partnership was complete when a student group applied grass seed and mulched the yard as well as performed light landscaping to give the home curb appeal. The project was a success for both ACLBC and the school, contributing to a newly built single-family home in a neighborhood that has several problem properties.



BUFFALO ERIE NIAGARA LAND IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION (BENLIC)

www.benlic.org

REVERSING DECADES OF DISINVESTMENT: THE ADAMS STREET INFILL INITIATIVE



The Land Bank
Buffalo Erie Niagara Land Improvement Corporation

230 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

112 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

44 RENOVATIONS COMPLETED

\$14M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$2.4M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

\$8.6M SALES PROCEEDS



As the City of Buffalo experienced significant population loss in the second half of the 21st century, the city's East Side was hardest hit. In 2018, it was estimated that over 1,650 acres of vacant land existed on the East Side, including almost 7,000 residential parcels. BENLIC is now hoping to reverse this trend through a multi-partner infill housing initiative.

In late 2021, BENLIC worked with the City of Buffalo and locally based Evans Bank to identify Adams Street, within Masten Park Community, as an ideal infill target area. The neighborhood is already home to the recently completed Westminster Commons, an 84-unit affordable and supportive apartments complex for seniors in the historic Westminster Settlement house, and includes an Evans Bank branch, community outreach space, and senior adult day care provider. Through a series of community outreach meetings held by Evans Bank at the Westminster Commons community space, infill housing was identified by neighboring residents as a key need. With an interest to fulfill resident-driven priorities, the City identified 24 parcels on Adams Street to transfer to BENLIC to support an infill housing initiative.

The Adams Street Infill Initiative aligns with BENLIC's commitment to developing a strategic infill program and addressing housing and equity issues within the City of Buffalo, key goals in its strategic plan update in 2022.

BENLIC put out a Request for Proposal in July of 2022 and received significant developer interest in the innovative opportunity. A selection committee consisting of BENLIC staff, board members, City of Buffalo staff, Evans Bank officials, and a member of the minority-owned brokerage MMB Realty Group, chose Severyn Development as the preferred developer.

Severyn Development was selected due to their local expertise, commitment to MWBE utilization, high quality of work, and prior work in Buffalo building multiple residential homes. Their proposal was for 7 single-family homes with high-quality finishes and detached garages.

As a NYS Land Bank, BENLIC is primed to act as a catalyst for development not only on Adams Street, but citywide. Acting as a flexible and nimble intermediary, BENLIC was able to solicit developer responses, engage with stakeholders, and perform pre-development needed to lay the groundwork for new housing construction. In total, the project represents over \$2.5 million in investment activity and a reversal of decades of disinvestment within one of the city's hardest hit communities. Groundbreaking is anticipated in early 2023. Future phases and expanded development collaborations are currently being explored.



INCENTIVIZING AFFORDABLE RENTAL PRODUCTION WITH RESPONSIBLE, PRIVATE PARTNERS

57 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

49 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

\$8.9M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$780K ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

\$1.1M SALES PROCEEDS

The Broome County Land Bank (BCLB) acquired 3 King Avenue in late 2018 from Broome County's property tax foreclosure list. Initially, BCLB had intended to rehabilitate this property as a single-family home using Community Revitalization Initiative funds made available by the NYS AG's Office. Due to a high total development cost estimate, however, BCLB decided to solicit proposals from private developers to rehabilitate the property as a two-family rental property.

A Request for Proposals was issued in late 2020 for the Purchase and Development of 3 King Avenue on the City of Binghamton's West Side with an optional \$75,000 development incentive. The Land Bank received a proposal from Managing Member of Vision Build Holdings Binghamton LLC, Bob Chan. He and his team had proposed to rehabilitate the existing structure as a two-family rental property and opted for the development incentive.

The Land Bank entered into several development agreements with Vision Build Holdings Binghamton, LLC to transform the once vacant property into two, move-in ready rental units. The \$75,000 development incentive that Mr. Chan opted for subsidized a portion of the construction costs in exchange for agreeing to keep one unit available at affordable rents as defined by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for the Binghamton area. The one affordable unit must be maintained for ten years per a deed restriction attached to the sale of the property from BCLB to the developer. BCLB partnered with The SEPP Group to assist in managing the phases of construction proposed by Mr. Chan, and BCLB managed the income verification and affordability analyses for the proposed tenant of the restricted unit.

Completed in the summer of 2021, the project's total cost was approximately \$333,000. Although the affordability requirement applied to only one unit, Mr. Chan voluntarily decided to rent both units to very low-income families, addressing a significant need in the area's rental housing market.

Both tenants are pleased to have found quality affordable housing and love their new homes, and the rental property—the first for BCLB—proved to be a huge success.

BCLB will continue to assess how residential properties made available by Broome County can be reactivated with available funding resources and local partners to meet affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization goals across Broome County.





COLLABORATION CORRIDOR: A CATALYST FOR INVESTMENT IN SCHENECTADY'S EASTERN AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD

77 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

158 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

85 RENOVATIONS COMPLETED/SUPPORTED

\$106.6M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$15.0M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

Over the past twenty years, the City of Schenectady has realized an astonishing revitalization of the core downtown, led by a unified economic development effort. With an infusion of settlement funding for land banks over multiple years, the Capital Region Land Bank followed a similar model of collaboration to extend the redevelopment into Schenectady's neighborhoods, starting with the Eastern Avenue neighborhood corridor.

In 2015, Eastern Avenue's neighborhood center included a defunct former catholic church campus, a growing number of blighted residential and former mixed-use buildings, and a lack of adequate greenspace. Through extensive outreach and collaboration with residents, businesses, philanthropic and municipal partners, over \$50 million of new investment has now been realized. Projects include over ten renovations, twenty-five demolitions, and new and renovated homeownership opportunities in partnership with the Social Enterprise and Training (SEAT) Center (an affiliate of YouthBuild), Habitat for Humanity, and other not-for-profit and private developers. Complementary investments in the built environment have also improved accessibility to the historic Vale Park and resulted in a new pocket park with a splash pad.

Renaissance Square, a \$20 million, fifty-five-unit housing development, restored the historic St. Mary's School and built a new mixed-use building in the place of four long-blighted buildings. The Land Bank steered the planning effort to add the former church campus to the state and federal historic registers and initiated outreach to find capable developers to partner with the local housing group, Better Community Neighborhoods, Inc. (BCNI).

Now fully leased, Renaissance Square continues to be a catalyst for future projects. The same development team is now underway rehabilitating and converting a former elementary school just up the street into a \$27.2 million affordable senior housing project.

Through the collaborative and strategic work of the Capital Region Land Bank, people are not just talking about the incredible revitalization of downtown Schenectady. Schenectady's neighborhoods are also on the rise because the Land Bank and its partners are working together to remove blight and bring forward equitable neighborhood redevelopment solutions.



**CAPITAL REGION
LAND BANK**
Revitalizing Schenectady and Amsterdam



TACTICAL AND IMPACTFUL: THE WORK OF A RURAL LAND BANK



**CATTARAUGUS COUNTY
LAND BANK CORPORATION**

www.cattlandbank.org

57 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

49 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

\$2.1M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$1.1M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

The mission of the Cattaraugus County Land Bank Corporation (CCLBC) is to restore and build value in the Cattaraugus County communities by returning underutilized properties to dynamic and productive use, preserving and creating quality housing, enhancing the quality of life within neighborhoods, and encouraging private sector investment in cooperation with stakeholders who value responsible land ownership.

CCLBC is lessening the burden on local governments within the County by strategically acquiring and either demolishing or developing distressed, vacant, and/or tax delinquent properties. Through this process, the CCLBC has successfully returned 51 improved properties to productive use totaling a return of \$1,056,259 assessed property value to the tax rolls. CCLBC has also increased homeownership and affordable housing opportunities for low to moderate-income families by rehabilitating and selling 11 properties at a reduced and affordable price.

CCLBC is working to combat community deterioration and decay caused by vacant, abandoned, tax-delinquent, and tax foreclosed properties. CCLBC is taking remedial action to eliminate the physical, economic, and social causes of such deterioration by strategically acquiring properties that are in a cycle of blight and converting them into assets for community revitalization. CCLBC has demolished 39 dilapidated properties that were beyond repair from the county foreclosure auction. By allowing the CCLBC to acquire properties before the auction, the CCLBC is able to improve the community by eliminating unsafe properties and ensuring other problem properties end up in the hands of a responsible owner that promises outcomes that are consistent with local priorities.



TAKING DOWN BLIGHTED PROPERTIES, BUILDING UP PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY LAND BANK

www.chautauqualandbank.org

The Chautauqua County Land Bank Corporation (CCLBC) was founded in 2012 as the first land bank in New York State serving a largely rural county. During the past 10 years, CCLBC has endeavored to strengthen neighborhoods and improve communities through their housing rehab and demolition programs. CCLBC has successfully facilitated 118 rehabs and 172 demolitions, leveraging more than \$10 million dollars in public grant funds to attract an additional \$10.8 million of private investment in local housing improvements.

In 2021, the Land Bank expanded its programming to include the Hands On Neighborhoods program, a multi-faceted initiative meant to build community through empowerment and inclusiveness, and increase homeownership in lower-income and underserved communities.

Components of the program include:

- Community Clean-Up Events and Tool Kit
- Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) Workshops
- Housing Fairs
- Rehab Loan Program for Income Qualified Residents
- First-time Homeowner Mentoring (1 on 1 coaching for 12-18 months)
- Mobile Tool Lending Library (limited to participants of the mentoring program)
- Healthy Housing Rebates Program (to address lead and remediate mold)

362 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

172 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

\$21.5M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$8.5M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

\$1.5M SALES PROCEEDS

CCLBC wanted to create a more positive impact in distressed neighborhoods by engaging with those residents in ways that inspired hope and community-building, and to show that their neighborhoods mattered. Additionally, we wanted to nurture homeownership to create a more equitable housing landscape and help to create a safe and stable environment to raise families.

These programs couple with the Land Bank's 'Sales 4 Rehab' program to make homebuying more accessible, and to build the homebuyer's capacity for long-term success. Graduates of the first-time homebuyer courses offered by partner agencies, Chautauqua Opportunities Inc. (COI) and Chautauqua Home Rehab and Improvement Corp. (CHRIC), will be assigned a mentor from CCLBC's volunteer cohort to serve as their resource through the first year of homeownership. The mentors will counsel them through the buying process, help to establish a home budget and maintenance plan, and tackle issues as they arise in that first year.

The Chautauqua County Land Bank has committed to strengthening neighborhoods and improving communities by not only enhancing the built environment, but also cultivating stable and responsible homeownership in our communities and fostering a collective sense of local pride.



CHEMUNG COUNTY PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

www.chemunglandbank.com

- 28** PROPERTIES ACQUIRED
- 8** DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED
- 13** RENOVATIONS COMPLETED
- \$1.7M** PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED
- \$1.2M** ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

HELPING HABITAT FOR HUMANITY HELP OUR RESIDENTS: ONE HOME AT A TIME

The mission of the Chemung County Property Development Corporation (CCPDC) is to acquire and return vacant, abandoned, and/or tax delinquent properties to productive uses that support community revitalization, sustained economic development, and improvement of the financial condition of the City of Elmira and Chemung County.

When Chemung County finalizes its tax foreclosure list and before auction, CCPDC and County officials agree on a number of strategic properties that could be transferred for a nominal cost to CCPDC. The Land Bank then uses its grant funding, local partners, and expertise to either demolish or rehabilitate the properties, interventions that improve the health and safety of neighborhoods and expand homeownership opportunities for Chemung residents. This work also helps build the tax base and improves the finances for both the city and county. For example, in 2021 alone, the amount of taxes collected on properties that the Land Bank has since reactivated to productive use was \$52,338.

When CCPDC acquires and transforms dilapidated properties from the tax foreclosure list into new homes, CCPDC exercises prudence during the applicant vetting and selection process to create equitable outcomes and support inclusive neighborhoods. Studies have shown that children can benefit tremendously later in life if they have the opportunity to move from poor neighborhoods into mixed income neighborhoods. Fortunately, most of the grant funding that enables the transformation of distressed properties to homes also requires the buyer to be either first-time, low-income, or both.

One great example of this work was at 1055 Admiral Place in Elmira. The distressed property was acquired from Chemung County's 2019 tax sale list and required a full rehab. CCPDC partnered with Habitat for Humanity of Chemung County, who helped place a single mother with five children in their first home.

According to Habitat's press release, the new homeowner stated, "Without the support of this community, my family would never have been able to purchase such a nice home."





DUTCHESS COUNTY - POUGHKEEPSIE LAND BANK

www.dcpoklandbank.org



SETTING THE IDEAL STAGE FOR IMPACT: ALIGNING PRACTICES, POLICIES, AND PARTNERS



Since incorporating in April 2021, the Dutchess County-Poughkeepsie Land Bank (DCPLB) has been doing the hard work of establishing a brand-new organization—from establishing bylaws and electing board officers to adopting policies and writing budgets. Throughout the planning and launch phases, DCPLB advocates and inaugural board members have benefited tremendously from the expertise and support provided by members of the New York Land Bank Association.

Recently, DCPLB applied for and was awarded funding from the NYS Homes and Community Renewal Land Bank Initiative for operational assistance, and with that funding, they are (among other things) hiring an executive director to serve as their first staff.

In order to help create a pipeline of potential properties, the land bank successfully advocated for Dutchess County to consider DCPLB an eligible recipient of tax-foreclosed properties. The Dutchess County Legislature passed a resolution in September 2022 identifying DCPLB as a suitable entity to transfer properties acquired through the in rem foreclosure process, thus securing an acquisition option from one of two FGUs in Dutchess County from which the land bank may receive properties.

The City of Poughkeepsie—the other primary FGU from which the land bank could receive properties—was one of the few remaining municipalities in New York state to handle tax delinquency through the sale of tax liens to private investors. DCPLB, along with other advocates, successfully convinced the City of Poughkeepsie to end its policy of tax lien sales in favor of adopting an in rem foreclosure process, similar to Dutchess County. With the City's policy shift at the end of 2021, DCPLB can now play a more intentional and thoughtful role in helping the City address vacant, distressed, and tax-delinquent properties consistent with local priorities and neighborhood plans. Thus, DCPLB intends to establish a similar, formal relationship with the City of Poughkeepsie as it has with Dutchess County with regard to property acquisition.

DCPLB is now well-positioned to begin tackling the vacant and abandoned property issue facing communities across Dutchess County. The mission of the DCPLB is to promote equitable and sustainable development through the rehabilitation of vacant, abandoned, and underutilized properties in the County of Dutchess and City of Poughkeepsie in ways that are guided by ongoing community input, that foster housing that is affordable, that nurture communities of choice and access, and that support economic, environmental, and social resilience. The land bank expects to receive its first properties in November 2022.



FINGER LAKES REGIONAL LAND BANK CORPORATION

www.flrlandbank.org

TACTICAL AND IMPACTFUL: HOW A RURAL LAND BANK ADVANCES KEY HOUSING GOALS

31 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

18 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

\$4.5M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$650K ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

Access to affordable housing is a growing concern in Seneca County. The Finger Lakes Regional Land Bank Corporation (FLRLBC) was created to serve as a tool for both the elimination of blight and development of new housing, bringing investment to our rural hamlets and villages, many of which have not seen a building permit for a new single-family home in years.

The FLRLBC is hosted by the Seneca County Department of Planning and Community Development, which is focused on expanding Seneca County's capacity and ability to produce meaningful housing opportunities for its 33,814 residents. To do this, the FLRLBC concentrates on neighborhoods in villages and hamlets throughout the County that have high rates of vacancy and tax abandonment. Investing in the densest neighborhoods with the oldest housing stock enables the FLRLBC to make noticeable increases in neighborhood quality. Considering our smaller relative population, eliminating blight and supporting infill development in our densest neighborhoods, at a pace of two to four projects per year, is creating meaningful forward momentum.

Take for example our partnership with Habitat for Humanity of Seneca County. In 2019, FLRLBC acquired four vacant, abandoned, and distressed properties from Seneca County after tax foreclosure for a nominal price of \$1. One of the properties was a single-family home located at 1537 Main Street in the Hamlet of Willard that had suffered a fire and was condemned by Seneca County Code Enforcement. FLRLBC completed demolition of the structure in January 2020, and then partnered with Habitat for Humanity of Seneca County to construct a new home for an income-qualified family. The project was completed in 2022. FLRLBC has now partnered with Habitat on five projects throughout the County since 2017, including both home rehabilitations and new builds.

To build on this momentum, Seneca County is undertaking a Housing Needs Assessment to be completed in 2023 that will help direct and guide County policy on vital issues of workforce housing, affordability, and availability. FLRLBC will continue to play an important role as a liaison between County government and local partners, strategically acquiring tax-foreclosed properties and investing grant resources and leveraging partnerships to return unproductive properties to the tax rolls as safe, decent, and affordable housing for Seneca residents.



GREATER MOHAWK VALLEY LAND BANK

www.gmvlb.org



REDEFINING WHAT'S POSSIBLE AND CREATING A REGIONAL HUB OF EXCELLENCE

69 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

36 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

\$4.7M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$1.6M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

\$889K SALES PROCEEDS

The Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank (GMVLB) has been one of the more innovative multi-county land banks in building a hub of excellence that serves a diverse region with common challenges related to vacant, abandoned, and blighted properties. Whether helping the many resource-constrained towns or villages across a number of rural counties or offering an additional tool and funding to urban centers like Utica and Rome, GMVLB has helped communities expand code enforcement capacity, acquire and demolish dangerous and abandoned properties, secure funding to address brownfields across the region, and even establish new historic districts that will open the door to new funding sources for property stabilization and revitalization.

One of GMVLB's most interesting projects is The Park @ 220, which is a distressed manufactured home park located along the entrance corridor to the Town of Herkimer.

The owner of the property fell behind on both utility and tax bills, threatening the housing security of the residents. Through negotiations with the owner, county, and state housing officials, GMVLB took title to the property and led an intensive planning effort with local residents toward a vision of sustainability and livability. Coined "the Park of the Future," this redevelopment project will serve as a model for the numerous other aging trailer parks throughout the county and state. According to census data (2017, ACS), there are 193,493 mobile homes in the state of New York, representing 2.3% of the state's housing stock.

The project will replace the six, deteriorated mobile homes with zero-energy modular homes, helping to reduce the community carbon footprint, decrease water consumption and costs, and improve the quality of the groundwater in the area. The Park will have a community electric car charging station to afford the homeowners a low-cost shared transportation option where little public transportation exists. The Park will also promote growing vegetables and will plant fruit trees for shade and sustenance.

The process has been challenging and time-consuming, but the potential for impact locally and statewide has kept the dedicated partners inspired. In the summer of 2022, GMVLB contracted with a manufactured home builder and began site work. The first two carbon-neutral homes will be delivered in winter 2023, with the full park build-out expected to be completed by late-summer 2023, representing the first zero-energy manufactured home park in New York.

GMVLB is redefining what's possible for a regional land bank serving a mix of communities in need, most of which are rural, and leveraging federal and state resources to help address locally-defined priorities that will ultimately contribute to the health, safety, and vibrancy of neighborhoods across its large service area in upstate New York.





GREATER SYRACUSE LAND BANK

www.syracuselandbank.org

2,138 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

522 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

41 NEW CONSTRUCTION

\$112.4M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$35.7M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

\$11.5M SALES PROCEEDS

One of New York's first land banks, the Greater Syracuse Land Bank (GSLB) is currently working with the City of Syracuse, Home Headquarters (HHQ), and other affordable housing developers to build 200 units of new housing (a mix of single- and two-family homes) under Syracuse Mayor Ben Walsh's Resurgent Neighborhoods Initiative. This initiative was kicked off in 2021 with the new construction of eight single-family homes on Woodland, Baker, and Garfield Ave.

Cutting the ribbons for the first eight homes represented the tangible, most visible outcomes of planning and work that started years before. The Land Bank had been working since 2015 to assemble and prepare these eight sites for new construction. In fact, there were initially twelve separate parcels under ownership of multiple parties. Over a few years, GSLB acquired ten of the twelve parcels from the City via tax-foreclosure for a nominal cost. GSLB also purchased one blighted house from Fannie Mae for \$10,000 so it wouldn't go to a slumlord, and one property was acquired via donation by a bank. GSLB leveraged multiple grant funds to demolish nine structures, and then applied to the City Planning Commission for approval to combine lots or adjust lot lines to create eight lots appropriately sized for infill construction.

After priming this neighborhood for catalytic development, GSLB sold all eight lots to HHQ for \$1,000 each, keeping the price low in order to subsidize the planned infill construction.

Eight new, proud, first-time homebuyers have transformed this neighborhood. One resident who was previously afraid to walk her dog at night is now excited about her new neighbors who have a vested interest in the long-term health and safety of the neighborhood. The new group of neighbors have even started a friendly competition for best kept front yards!

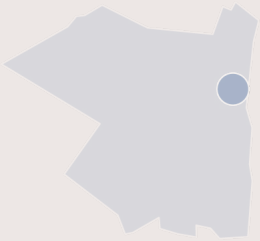
While residents often see demolition as the most visible intervention of the Land Bank, staff at GSLB in collaboration with residents and local partners are hard at work, often overseeing and leading years of planning and pre-development efforts to set the stage for catalytic development. It may not always look like much is going on with properties owned by the Land Bank and this work can be slow, but GSLB is preparing sites like this for clustered development all over the City as part of a long-term investment strategy to create healthier, safe, more vibrant places for all the residents of Syracuse.



HARD AT WORK SETTING THE STAGE FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL, NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENTS



GREATER SYRACUSE
LAND BANK



KINGSTON CITY LAND BANK

www.kclb.org

14 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

\$8.1M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED



FROM DISINVESTMENT TO DISPLACEMENT: A LAND BANK PIVOTS TO ADDRESS CHANGING LOCAL NEEDS

Ten years ago, communities along the Hudson River north of New York City still struggled with vacant, blighted properties and pockets of disinvestment. However, since COVID-19, the migration of many New York City residents up the valley has placed incredible pressures on local housing markets, including Kingston, which is now facing an acute housing affordability crisis and the threat of displacement of too many legacy, low-income residents.

Since becoming fully operational with funding in 2020, the Kingston City Land Bank (KCLB) has been laser-focused on trying to meet the urgent need of affordable housing, working closely with the City and local partners in support of equitable development that results in housing choices for all income-levels in the city's neighborhoods.

For example, it jumped into action following the announcement in 2021 by state officials of a new grant program, called the Legacy Cities ACCESS Program. The program's goal is to provide resources to land banks, in partnership with minority contractors and nonprofit developers, to rehab vacant one- to three- unit residential properties into affordable homeownership opportunities for underserved households.

KCLB identified four vacant properties heading to tax foreclosure, and acquired them from the City of Kingston for the full price of back taxes. In the fall of 2022, KCLB became the first organization in the state to close on funding and commence construction under this new program. The project also represents KCLB's first development partnership with Maeda Construction, a Certified MWBE General Contracting firm based in Staatsburg. The properties will be fully rehabbed and sold to first-time homeowners beginning in the summer of 2023.

As housing markets shift, local housing needs do so as well. KCLB is demonstrating how a land bank can serve a critical role in a community's comprehensive approach to housing that seeks to advance goals of equity and inclusion.





A RURAL LAND BANK FINDS A NICHE: IT'S NOT SCALE, IT'S IMPACT

12 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

5 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

\$2.3M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

The Livingston County Land Bank Corporation (LCLBC) was founded in 2017 by the Livingston County Board of Supervisors. LCLBC is managed by a Board of Directors consisting of Livingston County officials and staffed through in-kind work from Planning Department employees.

Since its founding, LCLBC has acquired twelve total properties for rehabilitations and demolitions. To date, LCLBC has completed two residential rehabilitations in partnership with the Livingston County Chapter of Habitat for Humanity. An additional rehabilitation is also currently underway. LCLBC has completed multiple residential demolitions and one demolition of a likely contaminated commercial property (brownfield) in partnership with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

Outside of the traditional property rehabilitations and demolitions, LCLBC is and has been involved in innovative housing projects. In 2019-2020, LCLBC was represented on a steering committee directing the completion of a Housing Needs Assessment and Market Analysis in Livingston County. The assessment, completed by MRB Group, evaluated the housing market in the county to identify gaps in stock and provide recommendations on closing housing gaps to serve the residents of the county. The assessment recommended use of LCLBC to address a lack of affordable housing units in the county.

LCLBC is also part of working group that includes County Planning and Social Services departments and Catholic Charities of Steuben/Livingston to address the need for supportive housing in the county. The group is proposing to utilize federal and state funds to redevelop a motel or pair of motels in the county into housing for homeless individuals with wrap-around supportive services including job training and substance use counseling. The project is in the early design phase.

Additionally, LCLBC partnered with the County and Cattaraugus Community Action, Inc. (CCA) to submit an application to New York State for a Community Development Block Grant award to fund a Mobile Home Replacement project. If awarded, the grant would fund the removal and replacement of up to four dilapidated mobile homes in Livingston County at no expense to homeowners.

Serving a largely rural county with a population of about 62,000 residents, LCLBC has found a niche role in tackling a small number of tax-foreclosed properties and contributing to a number of coalitions and partnerships that are pursuing innovative and important projects that align with the needs of Livingston County.





LAND BANK PART OF STRATEGY TO HELP NASSAU NEIGHBORHOODS UNDER ATTACK BY ZOMBIES

Following the national mortgage foreclosure crisis, communities in all corners of the country started to face waves of new vacant residential properties, a particular type of vacant property that soon earned its own nickname: 'zombie properties.'

Zombie properties are vacant properties (because the homeowner has walked away) stuck in the mortgage foreclosure process either because the legal process is slow or because the bank or lending institution never completed the foreclosure action. By 2015, with about 2,000 zombie homes in Nassau alone, it was a full-on crisis that had the complete attention of local and county officials.

The County approved the creation of a land bank in 2015, and the Nassau County Land Bank Corporation (NCLBC) was founded in 2016. It was just one of a few tools, policies, and programs that both the County and municipalities like Hempstead and Oyster Bay started to explore and implement to help slow and reverse the 'zombie' neighborhood invasion.

Since zombie properties don't always end up in the local tax foreclosure process, which is the primary pipeline for land bank acquisitions, NCLBC couldn't easily tackle the problem head-on. However, other land banks in the state had success convincing some financial institutions, banks, or lenders to donate their 'zombie properties' to the land bank, so NCLBC staff looked at all options.

NCLBC has acquired ten residential properties since its inception, carrying out moderate repairs or significant renovations to bring them back to productive use, or building new homes on vacant lots. For example, NCLBC has constructed three single-family residential homes, one of which has been sold to the area's community land trust, which has a mission to expand lasting affordable housing. NCLBC is partnering with both nonprofit and private partners on other residential new-builds or renovations, and is trying to link the activation of these properties to other community and economic development goals, such as workforce development.

During COVID-19, there was an understandable need to redirect county staff to address more urgent public health concerns and help with the immediate response and recovery needs, and consequently the activity of the NCLBC stalled. However, now with a full-time Executive Director, NCLBC is positioning itself to be more engaged and aligned with county and local goals, while also being able to listen and respond to needs expressed by partners and residents. Going forward, NCLBC is committed to finding creative ways to bring its unique powers, resources, and expertise to partnerships that bring real, positive impact to neighbors and neighborhoods within the county.



A MUNICIPAL LAND BANK AT THE CENTER OF EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT & CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS



NEWBURGH COMMUNITY LAND BANK
www.newburghcommunitylandbank.org

124 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED
113 STABILIZATIONS/PARTIAL REHABS
\$84.8M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED
\$17.8M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED
\$3.2M SALES PROCEEDS

The Newburgh Community Land Bank (NCLB) has broken the mold of municipal land banks, implementing some impressive programs and partnerships that have enhanced the built environment through art installations, advanced food security by supporting a local urban agriculture movement, eliminated vacancy rates by more than 35% in its target neighborhood, and significantly expanded the number of safe, affordable housing units for both homeowners and tenants.

For example, a multi-phase partnership with RUPCO, a regional nonprofit affordable housing developer, has leveraged \$47 Million in investment and generated 107 units of affordable rental units in a four-block radius. The process has involved NCLB acquiring tax-foreclosed properties from the City, open market acquisitions, and both renovation and new construction. More than just new housing units, this transformative redevelopment project over multiple years has also transformed vacant structures into community spaces, created new permanent supportive housing, and even led to the launch of Newburgh YouthBuild, a pre-apprenticeship training program that prepares students for careers in carpentry, construction trades, and nursing.

NCLB has demonstrated the same level of excellence in addressing the racial disparity in homeownership rates within the community. In Newburgh, the homeownership rate for White residents (57.5%) is three times higher than that of Black residents (18.7%) and 2.4 times higher than Hispanic or Latino residents (23.6%).

Through its comprehensive House to Home Program, NCLB has renovated and sold six homes to local minority first-time homebuyers since 2017, with six more homes at the sales stage or development phase. NCLB intentionally targets and renovates two-family homes to ensure first-time homebuyers have a stable revenue stream, which helps the qualified buyer improve access to capital. NCLB also partners with the nonprofit Pathstone to both address credit issues and qualify potential homeowners for low interest SONYMA mortgages, down payment assistance, and other grants from local lenders. Finally, by using grant funds to complete renovation work, including the costly lead and asbestos remediation and significant structural work needed in these long vacant buildings, NCLB can offer a turnkey home at a fraction of the real cost of repairs and below market value.

NCLB continues to carry out its work with purpose and in partnership, using vacant properties as a means toward broader community development goals centered around equity and inclusion. By attracting public and philanthropic funds and leveraging the capacity and expertise of partners, NCLB is able to generate outcomes that the tax auction never could—demonstrating that equitable outcomes have far-reaching and long-term impacts for neighbors and neighborhoods.

A DOUBLE FOCUS: RESOLVING BROWNFIELDS AND INVESTING IN STRATEGIC NEIGHBORHOOD BLOCKS

19 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

21 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

11 RENOVATIONS COMPLETED

\$2.2M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$1.6M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

Niagara Orleans Regional Land Improvement Corporation (NORLIC) was jointly created by five local and county jurisdictions in Western New York: the cities of Niagara Falls, North Tonawanda, and Lockport; and the counties of Niagara and Orleans.

A primary focus of NORLIC is to help unlock the potential of brownfields, which are former industrial or

commercial sites with real or perceived contamination. Given its history as a critical industrial center in western New York, Niagara County has its fair share of brownfields. In the summer of 2022, Niagara County secured \$3.9 million grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to assess, clean, and redevelop brownfields, which represented the largest award in New York state that grant cycle.

NORLIC is well-positioned to help implement this work. In February 2021, The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) announced it had executed a new cooperative agreement with the State Comptroller's Office, Niagara County, Orleans County, the cities of Lockport, Niagara Falls, and North Tonawanda, and NORLIC. Modeled after the agreement pioneered by Suffolk County Land Bank years previously, the agreement is designed to remove contaminated properties from tax foreclosure lists and put these sites back into productive use while addressing any potential contamination.

NORLIC has a secondary focus on addressing residential and commercial blighted and abandoned properties in neighborhoods. Two examples in North Tonawanda and Niagara Falls demonstrate NORLIC's ethos and values—and that this work isn't always about demolition.

In North Tonawanda, NORLIC worked with the small business operators of The Vegan Grocery Store to expand to a new location on an historic commercial thoroughfare and in an area that had been underserved by the market. This community-minded organization created an anchor for the street while revitalizing a previously blighted building—a win for all involved.



In Niagara Falls, a dilapidated home in the downtown tourism core neighborhood, and occupied by an elderly resident, fell into tax foreclosure. In an effort to bring about justice for a legacy resident, NORLIC contacted the resident's closest family member (who lived in Texas) and worked with them to bring the home up to code, avoiding displacement of an elderly homeowner. The family also owns property in other parts of the city, and has been subsequently restoring those properties, bringing optimism to several parts of Niagara Falls.

NORLIC will continue in its dual mission to tackle brownfields and address neighborhood disinvestment by leveraging partners and resources to create more vibrant communities.

OGDENSBURG LAND BANK

www.asmith4227.wixsite.com/ogdensburglandbank



A NORTH COUNTRY LAND BANK DELIVERS OUTSIZED IMPACTS FOR RESIDENTS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

23 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

14 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

\$1.8M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$1.1M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

Ogdensburg, a city along the St. Lawrence River with a view of Canada, has faced its challenges over the last couple decades. From 2000 to 2020, Ogdensburg lost nearly 19 percent of its population as well as a couple major industries that had served as economic anchors for generations.

Ogdensburg didn't concede to these challenges, but proactively took steps to face them head on. Amidst growing fiscal pressures with the budget, City leaders in 2017 requested support and a comprehensive review from the state's Financial Restructuring Board. The City also seized on the new resources being made available by the NYS AG's Office to help local governments more effectively and equitably address vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties.

As part of this latter work, the City submitted an application to Empire State Development to start the Ogdensburg Land Bank (OLB), and used another grant to boost capacity of the local code enforcement department. With technical support from the Center for Community Progress in 2018, Ogdensburg leaders and the inaugural land bank board realized that the City's practice of selling tax liens would undermine the land bank's ability to acquire vacant, tax-delinquent properties. Over the next couple of years, the City stopped selling tax liens and directed some tax-foreclosed properties and City-owned parcels to the OLB for stewardship.

OLB secured more than \$1.1 million in grant funds from the AG's Office Community Revitalization Initiative, and made the most of the funds to generate real impact in such a small community. Some of the worst properties were demolished, a few were renovated or stabilized, and a very creative partnership with St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES has resulted in the new construction and siting of two single-family homes on vacant lots.

Launched in 2020, the partnership reflects the kind of "get-it-done" attitude from City leaders and partners that has helped Ogdensburg address some of its challenges. Under this program, OLB pays for all the materials and students take a year to build the home on campus, which is then transferred and sited on the selected neighborhood vacant lot. Two homes have been constructed through the program, and the first was sold in the fall of 2022 to a first-time homebuyer.

Small but scrappy, OLB demonstrates that land banks can be deployed in rural, resource-constrained communities that struggle with vacancy challenges, and still post outsized wins that benefit neighbors and neighborhoods.



FOCUSED, PLACE-BASED INVESTMENTS TRANSFORM THE BLOCK AND STRENGTHEN THE HOUSING MARKET



OSWEGO COUNTY LAND BANK CORPORATION

www.oswegocountylandbank.com

89 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

53 RENOVATIONS COMPLETED/SUPPORTED

\$3.5M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$3.2M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

The Oswego County Land Bank Corporation (OCLB) carried out a focused, multi-year investment strategy in the City of Fulton that not only transformed some dilapidated properties into safe, quality homes, but also inspired some nearby property owners on the block to invest in upgrades that, collectively, have enhanced both the neighborhood market.

The domino effect started with a rehab at 420 Oneida Street in the City of Fulton, which involved the transformation of a vacant, abandoned property into a single-family home that was sold to a family of five purchasing their very first home. Not only did the value of 420 Oneida St. increase by 73% from the time it came into OCLB inventory to the time it was sold, but after OCLB's investments one problematic adjoining property started renovations and another adjacent property began a full rehab shortly later. Together the rehabs had a tremendous impact on the entire block.

Shortly after, OCLB acquired the two properties on South Seventh Street and another on South Third Street that were nearby the Oneida Street rehabs with the recognition that further renovations in the vicinity could have a real, lasting impact on the neighborhood.

The three additional properties were completely rehabbed in 2021, with the two South Seventh Street properties selling in late 2021 and the South Third Street parcel selling in January 2022. The taxable value of the South Seventh Street properties increased by 99% and 111% due to OCLB's renovations and the South Third Street assessment increased by 88%. All three properties were sold to first-time homebuyers.

The cluster of properties on the eastside of the Oswego River in the City of Fulton not only provided homes to first-time homebuyers and strengthened the local taxbase, but the improvements and activities proved to be a positive influence for adjacent property owners and will ultimately enhance the resale value for nearby properties.

The Fulton success story is just one example of the many ways in which OCLB, and land banks in general, can be an effective tool for reclaiming vacant, unproductive properties and revitalizing neighborhoods without placing further burdens on taxpayers and municipalities.

STEPPING IN WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS: STEWARDING LIABILITIES TO ASSETS WITH EXCELLENCE AND IMPACT



ROCHESTER LAND BANK CORPORATION

www.cityofrochester.gov/landBank

164 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

60 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

30 NEW CONSTRUCTION

\$27.1M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

The home of Susan B. Anthony and the Susan B. Anthony Square in Rochester attract thousands of visitors a year, and are listed as National Historic Landmarks. The sites also anchor the Susan B. Anthony Historic District.

But the historic neighborhood and tourist attractions are not immune from the threats of vacancy and abandonment. Fortunately, through the good work of the Rochester Land Bank Corporation (RLBC), two long-standing, residential eyesores immediately adjacent to these Historic Landmarks have been remedied and transformed from liabilities to neighborhood assets.

One property had been tax delinquent since 1996, and the other since 2005. Multiple attempts to auction the properties over the years failed, and demolition proved to be difficult because of historic preservation district rules and regulations.

In stepped RLBC with a determined approach to access various grant funding sources, some of which were exclusive to land banks, and steward the properties to assets that would both contribute to the neighborhood's historic significance and advance the City's housing goals.

Within four months of acquiring 54 Madison Street, RLBC had issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) with \$200,000 in grant funding available to a responsible neighbor in the area who would renovate the two units and rent them out with affordability restrictions to expand the City's inventory of quality, affordable rental housing units. Before the rehabilitation work was completed, the property was assessed for \$4,000. After the work was completed in 2019, consistent with the guidelines of both the preservation district and grant funding, the assessment of the tax-producing affordable rental property increased to \$120,000.

The second property at 6 Madison proved just as successful. RLBC acquired the property, which had been vacant for more than 20 years, from the City in July 2021 and followed a similar approach. RLBC again successfully accessed grant funding from the state, and issued an RFP seeking a responsible developer to fully rehabilitate the two-family structure into affordable rental housing, again providing up to \$100,000 in financial support to achieve outcomes that aligned with the City's and neighborhood's housing needs.

RLBC helped resolve two long-standing liabilities that threatened a historically significant neighborhood by steering hundreds of thousands of grant dollars to responsible purchasers. The outcomes have helped protect the Susan B. Anthony neighborhood, increase demand and appeal for homes in this historic area, and increase the number of quality, affordable rental units available to vulnerable individuals and families.





21 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED
14 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED
\$1.25M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED
\$822K ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

CREATING IMPACT THROUGH TACTICAL INTERVENTIONS: THE VALUE OF A RURAL LAND BANK

The Steuben County Land Bank Corporation (SCLBC) endeavors to reverse the trend of declining property values and further deterioration of Steuben County's housing and commercial stock by stabilizing neighborhoods, encouraging private investment, and improving the quality of life for Steuben County residents.

While most land banks in New York that serve smaller, primarily rural counties are managed by county employees, SCLBC, along with the Chemung County Land Bank, are both administered and managed by Arbor Housing and Development, a nonprofit housing and community development organization. This arrangement leverages Arbor's vast expertise and capacity with affordable housing and homeownership.

SCLBC is tactical and strategic about how to deploy its limited resources, and two examples demonstrate how a small organization can deliver big impact through partnerships.

First, SCLBC will be carrying out a couple of residential demolitions in the city of Hornell, both of which were acquired through the tax foreclosure pipeline. One of the parcels, once the structure is demolished, will serve as the site of the next BOCES house, a partnership between the city and the school in which students construct new homes for vacant lots in Hornell. Eleven homes have been completed thus far through the innovative partnership.

Second, SCLBC collaborated with Habitat for Humanity and Corning Housing Partnership along with many volunteers to revitalize a residential structure at 356 E. Third Street in Corning. The home was transformed with a full gut interior rehabilitation and moderate improvements to the exterior. On April 4, 2022, the family and project sponsors came together to celebrate and welcome home Jennifer, Jayden, Andre, and Donovan.

SCLBC continues to find creative ways to bring its unique powers, resources, and expertise to partnerships that bring real, positive impact to neighbors and neighborhoods in Steuben County.



STEUBEN COUNTY LAND BANK CORPORATION

www.steubencountyny.gov/481/Steuben-County-Land-Bank-Corporation-SCL



A TRAILBLAZER IN BROWNFIELD REMEDIATION AND ACTIVATION

SUFFOLK COUNTY LAND BANK CORPORATION

www.suffolkcountylandbank.org



The Suffolk County Land Bank (SCLB) is a trailblazer when it comes to brownfield reactivation. As mentioned previously in this report, SCLB pioneered a multi-party agreement with state agencies and the county to streamline the disposition of brownfields with substantial liens from various public entities, an agreement that has been replicated around the state by seven other land banks and their respective county governments. With almost a decade of experience resolving these extremely challenging contaminated sites, SCLB is making headway in redeveloping the 125-acre Lawrence Aviation Industries (LAI) property, a federally designated Superfund Site located in Port Jefferson Station. LAI represents SCLB's largest brownfield site to date, and the mid-term results are already quite impressive.

- 37** PROPERTIES ACQUIRED
- 91** ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS COMPLETED
- \$3.4M** PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED
- \$7.8M** ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED
- \$6.6M** SALES PROCEEDS
- \$10.6M** OUTSTANDING TAXES RECOUPED

Starting in the 1950s, portions of Lawrence Aviation were used for heavy industrial manufacturing, primarily producing titanium sheet metal for use in aviation. Waste generated included fluorides, sludges, caustic acids, and halogenated solvents, which were dumped in several areas including lagoons and cesspools as well as drums, most of which were crushed, spilling contents and producing a hazardous groundwater plume.

The property was declared a Superfund site in 2000, with the EPA clean-up ultimately costing over \$50 million. In 2017, the SCLB commissioned a Reuse Feasibility Study, facilitated by funding from New York State. Over the past several years, the SCLB—in cooperation with the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), US Department of Justice, local municipal and elected officials, and multiple claimants—has advanced a multi-faceted disposition strategy designed to meet regional needs, community determination as to future uses, and an agreed-upon process for distribution of the proceeds of a potential sale of the property.

Given the sizeable liens on the site from the EPA cleanup as well as public tax arrears over \$18 million, Suffolk County's objective is twofold: an orderly disposition of the property to maximize the value for claimants and future reuse of the property that is consistent with local community goals. With a winning bid of \$5 million, i.on renewables LLC is purchasing approximately 36 acres zoned light industrial on which it will install 5 MW of ground mount solar. An additional 31 acres on the northeast portion is projected for railroad use. The remaining acreage on the southern portion of the property will be designated as open space.

Addressing LAI has required an unprecedented collaboration of governments at all levels—local, county, state, and federal—with SCLB again at the center driving outcomes that are not only improving public health and safety, but also advancing community and economic development goals that benefit all residents of Suffolk County.



A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO ACTIVATE ICONIC PROPERTIES ABANDONED BY THE MARKET



SULLIVAN COUNTY LAND BANK
www.sullivancountylandbank.org

75 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

25 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

\$4.8M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$1.0M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED



The Sullivan County Land Bank (SCLB) has been carrying out successfully some of the more common land bank interventions, such as demolitions, rehabilitation of residential properties, and new construction on vacant lots. SCLB has even helped transform a series of wooded parcels in the village of Monticello into new public walking trails and an outdoor classroom with the help of young residents employed through Sullivan County's summer youth program.

However, one could argue that SCLB's most impactful work is in trying to address some of the greatest property challenges in the village of Monticello: long-abandoned, iconic large commercial structures whose sustained presence seem to stifle both investment in and imagination of the future of this key main street corridor.

Despite the financial and legal barriers, as well as the risks, SCLB and its partners understood that without proactive efforts by the public sector to position these key commercial properties for redevelopment, there was little hope of reclaiming the vibrancy that once defined the village center.

Over the last few years, SCLB reached consensus with local and county officials on a long-term recovery plan for the Broadway corridor in Monticello's downtown center. Acquisition started in 2019 of these four buildings, some of which had been abandoned and tax-delinquent for more than a decade: (1) Strong Building, (2) Key Bank Building, (3) Monticello Manor, and (4) Broadway Theater.

This work is slow, tedious, and expensive, but SCLB has had the support to proceed as circumstances allowed. Leveraging the County staff's expertise, SCLB demonstrated adeptness at securing funds that would allow for phased investigations, site planning efforts, and eventual redevelopment. Some examples include:

- Grant funds from the NY AG's Community Revitalization Initiative were used to acquire and stabilize the properties
- Federal brownfield grants were secured to conduct assessments and support remediation efforts of the Monticello Manor, an abandoned hospital and nursing home
- Multiple federal and state grants have advanced the Strong Building and Key Bank Building to the redevelopment phase, an \$8 million dollar project that will include ground floor commercial and up to 16 affordable housing units
- A grant from NYS Empire State Development is funding a community-driven feasibility study for the Theater

One of the most important attributes of a land bank is its flexibility, and SCLB continues to expertly carry out both impactful, small-scale interventions—from demolition to new infill housing construction—to proactive and large-scale interventions on abandoned commercial properties that could unlock the potential of an entire village center.

INVESTING IN PLACES AND PEOPLE THROUGH CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS



TIOGA COUNTY PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

www.tiogacountyny.com/programs-agencies/property-development-corporation

30 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

20 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

\$1.7M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

Established in 2017, the Tioga County Property Development Corporation (TCPDC) has achieved many important successes toward stabilizing and strengthening neighborhoods across the county.

TCPDC works with partners and strategically identifies and acquires tax-foreclosed properties that can complement existing neighborhood investments or launch new opportunities. For example, in 2021, TCPDC acquired and demolished ten properties as part of a larger redevelopment project in Owego, completed the rehabilitation of two single family homes in Waverly, and secured funding to revitalize three mixed-use buildings on Main Street in Candor.

TCPDC is particularly excited about a new partnership with the Owego Apalachin Central School District that promotes career exploration in the construction industry and connects students with potential job opportunities post-graduation.

TCPDC acquired a deteriorated, tax-delinquent single-family home in the Village of Owego, which will now serve as a "live classroom" for junior and senior level students enrolled in the school district's Building Trades and Construction Systems Program. As part of this program, students will learn all aspects of property rehabilitation and hone their technical skills in specialized areas of the construction industry. Training will occur in machine operations, test equipment, hand tools, portable and stationary power tools, pneumatic tools, rigging, and OSHA Safety requirements. The project will provide hands-on experience in residential framing, carpentry and cabinet making, door and window hanging, electrical wiring, heating systems, plumbing, siding, roofing, drywall installation, and interior/exterior trim. Blueprint reading, material codes, and specifications will also be extensively taught.

TCPDC's successes are based on listening to and building meaningful partnerships with residents, community-based groups, businesses, agencies, and organizations throughout the region. These collaborative endeavors end up being about more than just "addressing vacancy and abandonment." Together, we are investing in our places and our people, simultaneously advancing a number of community development, workforce development, and economic development goals that will ultimately help to create a more vibrant Tioga County.

"For our students, we're trying to teach them that the job opportunities can be here, that life can be here....Programs like this give them a home. Not somewhere to live, but this is somewhere where they come and they feel comfortable and they show up. That home doesn't have to look like a classroom, it can look like a house that's getting remodeled on Liberty Street. It's a different level of scholar; one that has a little bit of dirt under their fingernails."

- Mike Daly, Owego Apalachin Central School District





**TROY COMMUNITY
LAND BANK**

ASSEMBLING AND HOLDING LAND FOR LARGE-SCALE, RESIDENT-DRIVEN REDEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

TROY COMMUNITY LAND BANK
www.troycommunitylandbank.org

51 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

18 DEMOLITIONS COMPLETED

13 RENOVATIONS COMPLETED

\$5.0M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$2.1M ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

When seeking to drive investment into neighborhoods that have blighted streetscapes and a history of disinvestment, the challenges are steep. Properties are under ownership of so many different actors, each have their own challenges, and residents often feel forgotten or overlooked. Major investments in Troy's North Central Neighborhood, however, show one pathway to success, and how a land bank can play a critical role setting the stage for neighborhood-wide investments.

Hillside Views is a collaborative \$23 million, new construction affordable housing and supportive services project in Troy's North Central Neighborhood that was informed by an intensive citizen engagement initiative. Residents expressed a clear desire for service-enriched, quality affordable housing in order to protect long-term stakeholders from market-driven displacement. Residents also indicated a preference for scattered sites and for new construction infill housing that matched and strengthened the neighborhood's character.

TCLB took responsibility for the slow, patient work of acquiring and assembling tax-foreclosed or underutilized properties—both vacant lots and dilapidated structures—from the City. TCLB also leveraged grant funds to either demolish structures or stabilize those that could be rehabilitated and then responsibly maintained all parcels until funding was secured for the large-scale redevelopment project. A groundbreaking ceremony was held in the summer of 2021, and many of the 51 units across eight buildings have already been occupied.

Building on that success, TCLB and additional partners have recently created an exciting North Central Neighborhood Redevelopment and Revitalization Plan. Only blocks from the Hillside Views footprint, each partner will be selling sites and leveraging niche roles that best align with their respective funding and capacities, generating the level of efficiencies and effectiveness that come from authentic collaboration.

The result will be new infill construction and rehabs, creating new, safe, and affordable ownership and rental housing opportunities. Preferences and outreach will be targeted to BIPOC families seeking homeownership and affordable rentals. Energy efficiency, green building practices, security, and reliable access to good internet are also elements and goals of this project.

By leveraging its unique powers and niche role as part of a broad coalition of stakeholders, TCLB is playing a critical role in enabling neighborhood-wide investments that meet the priorities of local residents, particularly those most in need of healthy, affordable housing.

BRINGING A MUCH-NEEDED RESOURCE TO THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF WAYNE COUNTY



WAYNE COUNTY REGIONAL LAND BANK

www.waynecountylandbankny.com

55 PROPERTIES ACQUIRED

31 STABILIZATIONS/PARTIAL REHABS

\$3.9M PUBLIC + PRIVATE INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

\$485K ASSESSED VALUE RETURNED

Ever since the Wayne County Regional Land Bank (WCRLB) in 2019 started scoring small wins and successfully carrying out vacant property interventions, community leaders and residents have been approaching the organization with problems that needed a fix.

There is one story, in particular, that is worthy of lifting-up; a story that is about blighted properties, timing, community need, relationships, and children.

In 2020, the Wayne County Commissioner of Social Services approached Mark Humbert, the Executive Director of WCRLB, and asked if the Land Bank had a building that could be used as a Child Advocacy Center (CAC). Humbert mentioned an old house that would likely be demolished, but after a brief tour, there was real excitement by the Commissioner and her staff about the property's potential to be saved and reactivated as a community asset.

At the time, Wayne County was one of only five counties in New York State that did not have a CAC, which exists to assist children and families that are dealing with the tragedy of sexual abuse. Bringing a CAC to Wayne County could provide children and families with a local support system and greatly improve access to essential services.

Humbert approached an old friend and retired builder, Bob Ohmann, to look at the property and give him an assessment of its condition. Humbert hadn't even told him what the project was, but after walking through the house for about 5 minutes, Ohmann insisted, "I'll do it."

WCRLB's Board of Directors was supportive of the idea, but as a new organization still struggling to get on their feet, there was apprehension about the costs and risks. Humbert approached Enterprise Community Partners, who had been managing the land bank grant program on behalf of the NYS Attorney General's Office, to see if additional grant funding was available for the project. Sufficient grant funding was secured, the Board authorized the project, and the partners implemented successfully.

It turns out that Ohmann's immediate commitment to the project was personal. The property was his childhood home, and he volunteered to serve as general contractor for the project. Because his mother spent her career in Child Protective Services for Wayne County, the new CAC building was dedicated in her honor at the ribbon-cutting ceremony in 2021.

The fact that the CAC has served dozens of children and families in just over a year of operation is tragic. The fact that the CAC now exists to help numerous children, families, service providers and the community is a blessing.

This is not WCRLB's biggest project nor its most obvious project, but it is the one project of which the staff, board, and partners are certainly most proud.

