

Blight to Bright

By Marcia Brown

Like many counties, Cuyahoga County suffers from blight. Dilapidated properties divide neighborhoods, heighten crime, negatively affect health, and lower property values. The drag on property values not only affects neighborhoods with abandoned properties, but also surrounding areas.

Managing blight is essential to the county's economic and environmental future. The county must help take the lead to meet this goal.

Blight in Cuyahoga County

Cuyahoga County has 27,540 vacant residential class parcels, according to NEO CANDO, a data system of Case Western Reserve University that documents property data in Cuyahoga County. Some of those should be renovated and resold as homes. Some should be demolished and the land greened. But more coordination and funding is needed to manage and repurpose abandoned properties.

Key findings

- Eliminating blight is essential to community health.
- Reusing and greening land raises living standards for the surrounding community and revitalizes the economy.
- Streamlining existing infrastructure and better using public resources are necessary to effectively fight blight.
- At \$12,000 or more per demolition, county demolition projects need reliable sources of federal funding – especially because greening requires additional funds.

- **Many cities suffer from population loss and a resulting drop in residency and tax revenue.** In Cuyahoga County, there are more than 25,000 vacant homes with over \$52 million in delinquent taxes according to NEO CANDO data. When the solution is demolition, reusing the land can enhance neighborhood life.
- **Trees and greening techniques greatly revitalize communities.** Greening vacant lands lowers crime, revitalizes the local economy, enhances overall health, improves land quality and raises property values.
- **The use of databases for greening as well as property information is essential to effective and efficient resource use.** To combat blight efficiently, it's essential to have comprehensive information on vacant lands and properties. With that knowledge, vacant lands can be used for appropriate projects. For example, lots adjacent to each other can be used for an urban farms.

Recommendations

Funding for land banks, an essential tool for fighting blight, comes mainly from federal sources like the Hardest Hit Fund, a program of the Troubled Asset Relief Program. TARP was designed to relieve financial distress during the 2009 mortgage crisis. State and local governments can't afford to sustain Ohio's 22 land banks independently. More federal funding should be provided. Ohio clean energy standards and Cleveland Public Power might also offer funding for greening

projects to help meet regulation standards. Furthermore, greening programs should be cohesive efforts to combat blight. This includes using a central data system such as NEO CANDO as the resource for most agencies combating blight. It's essential that independent and government agencies work together to strategically and efficiently fight blight, rather than working independently of each other towards the same goal.