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More funding, oversight needed to fight blight

Government must take on a bigger role

Blight elimination requires not only removing or renovating abandoned property, but then planning for reuse or greening of the vacant land. Funding for these efforts is limited, but must be made available, a new Policy Matters Ohio report says.

Blight continues to pose a significant problem in Cuyahoga County since the 2008 recession and mortgage crisis sparked a wave of foreclosures and abandoned properties.

NEO CANDO, a Case Western Reserve University property database, reports 27,540 vacant residential class properties in the county, totaling \$52.6 million in unpaid property taxes.

Without action, Cuyahoga county communities will continue to suffer from the negative effects of blight, including higher crime rates, less safe neighborhoods, and lower property values. Good efforts to combat blight exist, but they are too poorly funded and not necessarily coordinated between government and independent organizations. To eliminate the problem of blight, these efforts must use existing successful infrastructure with extended coordination between public and private efforts.

The report emphasizes the need for better funding. It also calls for government leadership. The report documents the value of existing efforts, including the land bank, the newly created position of Cuyahoga County housing director and other entities dedicated to combatting blight and greening the county's vacant land. Reuse of the land through urban farms, community gardens, side-yard acquisition, park creation or perhaps for development of renewable energy sources will revitalize Cuyahoga communities. Side-yard acquisition, the most popular land bank program, enables neighbors of a vacant lot to acquire the property and assimilate it into their own property or in some other way use the property.

"Eliminating blight is critical step to making Cuyahoga County communities more vibrant and sustainable," said Amy Hanauer, Policy Matters Ohio executive director. "We need to restore vacant lands with effective reuse and greening."

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Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.