

## **Turtle Creek Valley COG Director's Report**

TCVCOG Board Meeting  
November 20, 2014

### **Important Dates:**

Please note we will adjourn for the rest of the year due to the holidays. Our next board meeting will be Thursday January 22, 2015.

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### **Blight Fight**

On October 24th the Pennsylvania Department and Community and Economic Development awarded \$75,000 of Municipal Assistance Grant funds to the Tri-COG Collaborative to continue efforts in blight mitigation, strategic planning and land banking. Portions of the money will be used to purchase and enhance existing geographical information systems in order to create comprehensive community maps that pinpoint indicators for blight and potential for future development. This is just one component of the comprehensive analysis the Tri-COG plans on conducting to ensure strategic revitalization efforts are in place.

While we recognize the land bank is a very powerful tool that can help communities mitigate blight, we felt it was important to also provide resources to those communities that may lack capacity to engage in planning and strategic decision making. Therefore the Tri-COG Collaborative has been seeking funding for the following analysis and planning efforts:

1. Housing Market Profile and Asset Analysis that will include identifying local market strengths, educational training on housing market strategies, and creating a vision for local housing markets
2. Commercial District Analysis and Strategic Redevelopment Planning – This will include conducting a thorough analysis of current economic conditions and business district corridors with updated Geographical Information System software and mapping capabilities. There will also be a review of existing commercial development plans. These items will produce a strategic plan for commercial district revitalization.
3. Measuring the Effects of Vacant Lots and Green Infrastructure on Home Values – This effort will include cataloging different green infrastructure improvements on vacant lots and assessing the effects of green improvements on real estate values.

We had a meeting with Western Pennsylvania Conservancy to discuss our vacant lots and green infrastructure analysis initiative. The Western PA Conservancy has a lot of experience with vacant land and greening efforts. We will be working with them to develop a method for analyzing the effects of blighted land on real estate values and subsequently the economic

effects of cleaning and greening blighted land. We will be working on a joint grant application to allow this partnership to move forward.

We are also working on compiling another EPA Brownfield Assessment grant application. It is due in mid-December and successful applicants will be announced in May. We still have another year on our current grant and there is some funding remaining for brownfield assessments. Please let us know if your communities have potential sites for assessment.

### Land Banking

On October 30<sup>th</sup> we presented on the land bank business plan at the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf community meeting. There were a few managers from our communities as well as other non-government community members.

On November 5<sup>th</sup> we presented the Land Bank business plan to the Woodland Hills School Board. They will be taking a vote to join the land bank on December 10<sup>th</sup>.

The Center for Community Progress, which is the only national organization whose mission is solely concentrated on blight mitigation, conducted a site visit on November 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Their team met with some of our municipal leaders to discuss the issues they face related to blight and vacancy and how they feel the land bank would benefit their communities. The CCP applauded our efforts and were very supportive in our design of a community-driven land bank model. We need to continue to deliver the message that blight and tax delinquencies are not municipal problems, but community problems. We are continuing to look to our elected municipal officials to bring this message to our school boards.

We will be meeting with County Executive Rich Fitzgerald on Monday November 24<sup>th</sup> to discuss the land bank and provide a report on the progress we have made thus far.

To date, Monroeville, Forest Hills, Turtle Creek, and Churchill have all passed ordinances to become members of the land bank. More municipalities plan to pass their ordinance in November and December.

### Homes Within Reach Conference

Liz and I attended the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania's annual Homes Within Reach Conference earlier this week in Harrisburg. There were close to 900 people in attendance and it was a very productive conference. At the conference I had the opportunity to present, along with An Lewis, on the progress we have made with our land bank business plan and code enforcement program.

A few things became clear from the conference, we really are moving in the right direction to ensuring our land banking and fight blight initiatives are successful. Strategic code enforcement is also becoming an increasingly important factor in ensuring communities' cohesiveness and mitigating blight. One presentation included ways of increasing revenue based on billing repeat offenders cost recovery amounts and using the money to reinvest in code enforcement efforts. We are also going to be pursuing ways to involve the court system to better strengthen municipal code enforcement efforts.

The conference gave us the opportunity to speak to developers, a group we historically have had little interaction with. Developers are going to be vital partners with the land bank, and we plan on reaching out to many of them to begin conversations of future partnerships. This includes Habitat for Humanity which has an interest in expanding to the eastern part of the county and would be a great disposition partner that can ensure home ownership.

#### Other News

We hope everyone has a healthy and happy holiday season, and we look forward to strengthening our partnerships and advancing our efforts in the New Year!