

COUNTY OF  **ALLEGHENY**
RICH FITZGERALD
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

August 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

I write today to convey my support for the proposal by the leadership of the Steel Valley Council of Government, the Twin Rivers Council of Government and the Turtle Creek Council of Government to propose a land bank, to be known as the Tri-COG Collaborative Land Bank. I applaud their efforts to date, and acknowledge that while their efforts started as an initiative for their 41 member municipalities, they are allowing any Allegheny County municipality or school district to join where the municipality is a member of a COG.

The Tri-COG Collaborative Land Bank will be an important tool to return abandoned, vacant, tax-delinquent properties to productive use. Blight is certainly one of the toughest problems we face, with a far-reaching impact. It negatively impacts the value of property owners near such a structure. It also costs municipalities, as blighted properties use more services including public works, police and fire. Blight also costs all three taxing bodies, as most blighted properties are tax delinquent. As such, much needed tax revenues are not collected, adversely affecting the bottom line of all of the taxing bodies.

Allegheny County is in the process of a renaissance and we need to capitalize on innovative, new solutions – such as land banking – to address our tough problems. That could include opportunities for the county to assist with the financial sustainability through discharge of the taxes for properties acquired by the land bank, a tax recapture on properties sold by the land bank, and a collection of a portion of the delinquent real estate taxes from jurisdictions participating in the land bank.

While there are many programs and opportunities to address blight, I am excited about having a land bank established in Allegheny County. With this formation, our communities will have another way to actively, and strategically address blight. The three COGs have worked with their individual communities, as well as my office, for years to study blight and ways to fight it more effectively. The proposed land bank would work with local officials to acquire properties, in line with the vision and priorities for each municipality which decides to participate. I encourage the individual municipalities, and school districts, to join the Tri-COG Collaborative Land Bank.

Sincerely,


Rich Fitzgerald

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