

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
July 6, 2021

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## **State Blight Law Invoked to Fix Delinquent Properties in the Mon Valley**

In addition to recently highlighted blight tools like Conservatorship and land banking, a state law called Act 90 offers another mechanism to hold delinquent property investors accountable and collect unpaid taxes. Earlier this summer, Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments (TCVCOG) invoked this Act in East McKeesport to collect delinquent taxes and resolve outstanding code violations from a business with unmaintained and hazardous properties in multiple municipalities in Pittsburgh's Mon Valley and Eastern suburbs.

"Thanks to The Turtle Creek Valley COG's coordination of code enforcement, East Pittsburgh was able to utilize the provisions of Act 90 of 2010 to collect on two delinquent tax bills," said Seth Abrams, Manager of the Borough of East Pittsburgh. "Through this intergovernmental cooperation we are all able to hold property owners to account when they fail to keep up their properties anywhere in the commonwealth. This was our first opportunity to work with our neighbors to leverage the power of the law. While we all hope that every property owner will be responsible in their care of a property and payment of taxes, it is nice to know that we have another tool to help hold people accountable for their fair share, which reduces collections costs and allows small municipalities like us to not have to pass these costs onto our other residents."

One key provision of Act 90 is the ability of municipalities to deny permits if a property owner has serious tax delinquencies or code violations anywhere in Pennsylvania. Because TCVCOG operates code enforcement for multiple municipalities, it has more data to pull from in order to invoke this tool to clean up blight in its footprint. A regional code enforcement program makes it easier to track down and hold accountable property investors and owners that have unpaid taxes and unaddressed violations in multiple towns, giving more power and strength to each individual claim.

"Act 90 empowers municipalities to hold irresponsible and negligent property owners accountable," said Winnie Branton, President and Founder of Branton Strategies LLC, a Pennsylvania law firm specializing in blight mitigation. "While voluntary compliance is the goal, some property owners just refuse to comply. When all other efforts failed, TCVCOG used Act 90 and finally got this national investor's attention by refusing to issue an occupancy permit in East McKeesport until the investor paid delinquent taxes owed and resolved outstanding code violations for properties located in East McKeesport as well as neighboring municipalities including East Pittsburgh. TCVCOG used Act 90 effectively to gain the owner's attention, collect delinquent taxes, and get a plan in place to improve dangerous properties. TCVCOG's data-driven, collaborative approach to code enforcement makes it easier to build

a successful case under Act 90, ensuring that owners, not taxpayers, foot the bill for blighted properties. A model worth replicating state-wide.”

In 2022, TCVCOG plans to further strengthen its program through the introduction of a new civic software, CodeNforce, that will help towns to share data across municipal lines and assess the condition of problem properties in real time. This software is being developed with the help of a \$125,000 grant recently awarded through the Redevelopment Authority of Allegheny County’s Community Infrastructure and Tourism Fund.

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#### About the Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments

The Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments (TCVCOG) brings together 20 municipalities to work together to find efficient, cost-effective solutions and programs that benefit the member communities and more than 175,000 residents that call them home. TCVCOG’s mission is to facilitate collaboration, programs, and services that strengthen the connections between its member communities and the region. Its members include Braddock, Chalfant, Churchill, East McKeesport, East Pittsburgh, Edgewood, Forest Hills, Monroeville, North Braddock, North Versailles, Penn Hills, Pitcairn, Plum, Rankin, Swissvale, Turtle Creek, Wall, Wilkins, Wilmerding, and Wilkinsburg.