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Tuesday, March 26, 2019

HOME

Weather for Poughkeepsie  
Sunny  
Time: 10:00 am  
Temp: 34  
RealFeel Temp: @28  
Humidity: 39  
Winds: N at 12 mph  
[Click for 5-day forecast!](#)  
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### Poughkeepsie begins land bank process

POUGHKEEPSIE – The Poughkeepsie Common Council is embarking on a path to create a land bank to deal with blighted properties in the city. Prior to Mayor Robert Rolison taking office, the city had over 750 vacant properties that were in various stages of disrepair. The creation of the "anti-blight task force" has reduced that number to just under 500 properties, with a majority of them in the 5th ward, represented by councilwoman Yvonne Flowers.

Council members Sarah Brannen and Sarah Salem have seized upon a state law that allowed for the creation of 35 land banks throughout the state. The law allows municipalities to apply for and create land banks in their communities.

The primary purpose of those operations is the acquisition of real property that is tax delinquent, foreclosed, vacant or abandoned, and to use the tools of the program to eliminate the harms and liabilities caused by such properties. Land banks help communities facilitate the return of vacant, abandoned and tax-



Residents packed the common council chambers for the Monday night meeting

delinquent properties back to the tax rolls.

Brannen and Salem held a panel discussion in the council chambers on Monday night with land bank veterans and experts to help explain the concept to a standing-room audience of concerned citizens.

Brannen started the meeting by saying "there are precious few items we agree on and this is one of them," indicating that both the council and administration are supporting the idea.

Christa Hines, executive director of Hudson River Housing, lauded the plan as something that can help alleviate the housing problem in Poughkeepsie, noting there is a "housing crisis" in the city.

"We are receiving over 100 applications per month for individuals looking for affordable housing," Hines said. "Fair market rents are over \$1,000 a month which means a renter would need to make an annual salary of at least \$43,000 per year to afford the rent."



The problem of blighted properties took a tragic turn in December when fire in this boarded up house on Academy Street claimed four lives

Panelist Allison Cappella, executive director of the Newburgh Community Land Bank, said her operation has been successful because of partnerships and the ability to secure grant funding. Cappella said that her agency has a very productive relationship with Habitat for Humanity and noted that grant monies have helped pay for asbestos abatement and other issues with blighted properties that they are currently marketing.

Joshua Simmons, senior research associate at The Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz also spoke. He recently published a study entitled "Going Going Gone ...Tax Lien Auctions, Hidden Costs, And Missed Opportunities For The City of Poughkeepsie."

Simmons' report indicates that the city's tax lien auctions used to collect delinquent taxes is helping to increase the number of abandoned homes and suggests that the city change its method in order to participate in the land bank system. He recommends switching to the standard tax foreclosure system that would allow the city to be eligible for land bank funds from the New York State Attorney General's Office.

Land bank funds can be used to demolish properties, if needed, according to Katelyn Wright, executive director of the Greater Syracuse Land Bank. When her program started, the city had 1,800 vacant buildings and 3,000 vacant lots. The land bank has acquired 1,700 properties and rehabilitated approximately 600, according to Wright. She also indicated that her land bank demolishes structures that are beyond repair at a cost of about \$25,000 per building, paid for by grant money. The rest of the properties are put on the market as "extreme fixer-uppers."

All the panelists agreed that one of the best practices for the sale of held properties is to include deed or title restrictions that call for purchasers to rehab the purchased building within 12 months of purchase or the land bank will take back possession of the property.

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