



LANCASTER COUNTY
**Redevelopment
Authority**

November 1, 2017

Christine Goldbeck, Executive Director
House Urban Affairs Committee
Room 226, ROB
P.O. Box 202217, MCB
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2217

Dear Ms. Goldbeck:

SB 667 proposes to extend to redevelopment authorities the same powers granted to land banks under Act 153. Concerns have been raised about the extent to which this might undercut the effectiveness of the land bank concept. Lancaster County is a good venue for comparing the two, as we have both. Our observations from the past year, since the inception of the Lancaster County Land Bank Authority, might prove pertinent. The following are some key points drawn from that experience.

- The Land Bank and Redevelopment Authority are run out of the same office by the same staff. The marginal administrative costs are negligible.
- The Redevelopment Authority is an old organization. Although it is well regarded by those who deal with it, its form and function seem mysterious to many, shrouded in the mists of urban renewal. The Redevelopment Authority transacts many types of business, from administering HUD entitlements (CDBG, HOME and ESG) for the County, to issuing tax-exempt multifamily housing bonds and 501(c)(3) bonds, and serving as the local conduit for RCAP grants. We fund infrastructure projects, home repair for low income homeowners, and services for the homeless. Trying to differentiate the land bank function from these others would be a challenging marketing problem.
- Having the Land Bank as a new, separate entity has given us a “fresh start” in relating to the municipalities. It has a clear, identifiable function. It prescribes municipal participation, making blight remediation a true team effort. Our member communities have responded very well. They feel the Land Bank is their project, too, not just something being offered by the Redevelopment Authority.
- This sense of teamwork is important, because fighting blight is more than just repairing buildings. To keep blight at bay, communities must maintain a constant awareness and improve municipal services to curb blight early. It is not a one-time action, but an on-going process that requires the keen attention of multiple players. The dedicated purpose of the Land Bank supports this goal.

- The same functions could be accomplished by the Redevelopment Authority (it's the same staff working out of the same office) but would lose the clear sense of purpose conveyed by the new Land Bank.
- Finally, for tax functions, SB 667 requires agreement by the municipality and school district, as does Act 153. We believe that the finite scope of the Land Bank made it much easier to get those bodies onboard. A redevelopment authority seeking a share of school district taxes would have been a much harder sell.

In summary, we have found the Land Bank Authority to be a very promising vehicle. I encourage you to avoid blurring the community's understanding of it by extending the same powers to redevelopment authorities. The change might work administratively, but I believe it would be detrimental at the program implementation level.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Sternberg', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew T. Sternberg
Executive Director
Lancaster County Redevelopment Authority
Lancaster County Land Bank Authority

cc: Jon Castelli, Minority Director