



Patrick Mack
Housing Authority of Northumberland County
PA Land Bank Act (Act 153 of 2012) Testimony

It is an honor and a privilege to be invited to meet with you today to discuss the land bank legislation. In providing this testimony I must honestly say that on the surface our statistics about our accomplishments may seem small relative to other areas that you are hearing about today, the blighted properties that we have repurposed/repositioned are very significant for our area. This difficult work has been facilitated by processes that Act 153 of 2012 provided, and those processes should be complimented. It is through the process of municipal engagement, intergovernmental cooperation, and garnering community support that we have been able to accomplish many of the goals we set out to achieve through our Countywide Blight Strategy developed in late 2012.

While creating a land bank was not the top priority in that strategy, it was recommended as a tool that would be needed at some time in the future. During the time and process of creating the Land Bank we were well underway in addressing blighted properties. We held two blight summits, and many blight strategy meetings with municipalities and others over the last several years to discuss available tools and ideas to address blight. The early discussions pointed us to the repository list as the primary place that held many of the biggest problem properties. That list was quite extensive and some properties had been on it for many, many years. At that time, and to date we haven't needed the tools to "trump" the speculators at tax sale. The speculators had already come and gone. Don't get me wrong we still have speculators, but as we have addressed the worst of the worst properties others have somewhat fallen in line. This is where we realized the need to be proactive and get ahead, hence our creation of the land bank. We had traction, support, and ongoing discussions about blight and we need to be equipped to be proactive in the future. The more tools we had at our disposal, the better. Our process in its entirety from the development of a blight strategy, to the selection of the



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properties to be addressed has let local leaders, mainly municipal officials be the decision makers. The Housing Authority meanwhile has provided the back of the house administrative support to those officials when it came time to pool funds to match grants and to apply for various sources of funding. We have been the applicant, and the municipalities have been the sub-recipient of funds. This process has worked well for us as it lets the municipalities be concerned with addressing the blight, while most of the other administrative work was left to us.

As an Authority we recently completed our poster child for blighted property redevelopment. We recently completed Phoenix Court Apartments. Phoenix meaning, rising from the ashes. In this case we acted as the developer to create 5 garden style apartments in Atlas, PA. This was on the site of over ten properties that fell victim to fire two to three years prior. We worked directly with the municipality to find the funding to demolish the properties almost all of which were previously long standing properties on the repository list, and engaged in a partnership with the municipality to redevelop them. The municipality took ownership of the lots, and acted as the applicant for a HOME grant to construct the units. The development of these apartments shows that the process of municipal engagement, intergovernmental cooperation, and land banking works. While our Land Bank didn't officially complete this project, it was land banking without using the name and thankfully we were already many steps into the process and discussions when this opportunity came forward.

We have made great progress in our County and look forward to continuing to working on blight throughout region. We appreciate the work of this Committee and the Legislature in providing us the tools they have to address blight and look forward to continuing the work together to better all of our communities.



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