

The Leader-Herald

Land bank gets \$1.6M to battle blight

The newly created Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank has received \$1.6 million in funding, part of \$20.9 million disbursed to 19 land banks across the state.

The money was awarded by the Land Bank Community Revitalization Initiative established in 2013 by the New York State Office of the Attorney General, with funding from settlements with the big banks after the foreclosure crisis.

Tolga Morawski, the executive director of the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank, said a company called Local Initiatives Services Corp. actually administers the \$1.6 million in funding, which is then given to the land bank on a project-to-project basis. He said the The Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank is set to meet Thursday in the village of Mohawk in Herkimer County at 26 W. Main St. at 6 p.m. He said one of the first projects his land bank will tackle is providing funding to help assist with the demolition of the Wagner House in Palatine Bridge.

“Our mission is to fight blight,” Morawski said.

New York state land banks are formed by local governments that have the power to foreclose on properties. The Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank is made up of the counties of Montgomery, Otsego, Oneida, Schoharie and Herkimer as well as the cities of Utica and

Rome. Fulton County and the city of Johnstown chose not to join the land bank, making them the only county in the Mohawk Valley without access to the land bank's funds.

The purpose of land banks is to provide funding for the rehabilitation of foreclosed properties. Morawski said land bank funding can be allocated in different ways, sometimes with the land bank acquiring ownership of the foreclosed properties and other times only providing funding, like with the Wagner House demolition.

Morawski said the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank has already received \$150,000 in start-up funding and another \$57,000 as part of the federal matching AmeriCorps program to hire two full-time workers to help identify blight within the territory of the land bank and to categorize it.

The Capital Region Land Bank, which includes the city of Amsterdam, also received \$1.7 million.

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