

Board hears about proposed land bank



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Stephen Smith, executive director of the Mohawk Valley Economic Development District, presented information about a proposed Mohawk Valley Land Bank during Wednesday's meeting of the Iliion village board. Also shown is Village Clerk Cindy Kennedy. TELEGRAM PHOTO/DONNA THOMPSON

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Posted Mar. 27, 2015 at 6:12 PM
Updated Mar 27, 2015 at 6:20 PM

Herkimer, N.Y.

ILION — A six-county land bank could offer part of the solution to blighted properties in the village of Iliion.

Stephen Smith, executive director of the Mohawk Valley Economic Development District, and Bob Albrecht, chairman of the board of directors of MVEDD's Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful Committee, were on hand at Wednesday's Iliion village board meeting to discuss the land bank and other opportunities for sprucing up communities.

The Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful committee is looking at the possibility of establishing a six-county land bank that would cover Fulton, Herkimer, Montgomery, Oneida, Otsego and Schoharie counties.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo set aside funds to start land banks in 2011, according to Smith. "The governor is always talking regionalization," he said. "So why not have a multi-county land bank?"

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The purpose would be to deal with properties that come up for tax auction repeatedly and are so dilapidated the county could not get any return on them, according to Smith. These are buildings that often end up in the hands of out-of-town owners who try to some money and then abandon them. The county would have to give a property to the land bank, free of back taxes or liens. The land bank would then renovate it, stabilize it, deconstruct it to take materials that could be used for other projects and demolish the rest, or simply demolish the building.

Buildings that are renovated would be sold so the property could be put back on the tax rolls with the money from the sale being used to renovate or demolish other properties.

"We're not trying to replace the tax auction," said Smith. "This is another tool to use to help out the smaller municipalities."

Smith said he had visited several of the counties, conducted public meetings and met with committees about the land bank proposal.

"The response has been mostly positive," he said.

Last month the Herkimer County Legislature voted in favor of a resolution to endorse and encourage the formation of a land bank to deal with rundown and abandoned properties. Montgomery County has also agreed to take part.

He is conducting meetings with other counties and cities in the region and awaiting their decisions.

"We would become the 11th land bank in New York state," said Smith.

Trustee Bridget McKinley commented the land bank could possibly help the village with the dilapidated houses on Lester Avenue.

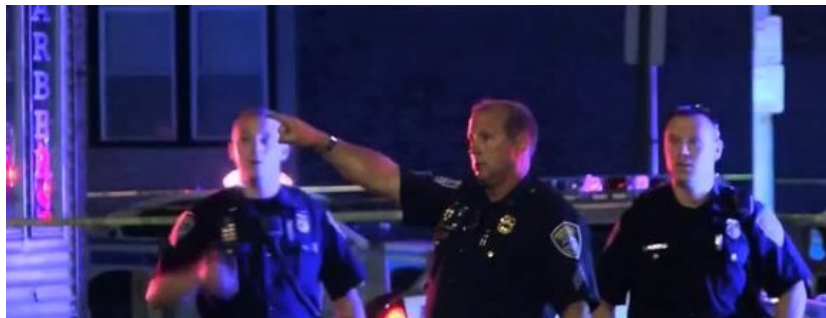
Albrecht discussed the core programs of Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful, including a Community Appearance Index, the Great American Cleanup and Adopt-a-Spot. As an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful, KMVB supports reduction of waste materials, increase in recycling and beautification of public spaces. Members record volunteer hours and submit records twice a year to KMVB. They pay modest dues and have the opportunity to seek grants through the program.

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