

TIMES TELEGRAM

Frankfort gathering list of properties for land bank

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FRANKFORT — The village of Frankfort will put together a list of properties that could be considered for action by the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank, once it is up and running, according to Mayor Richard Adams.

Adams, along with Trustee Colleen Bentley-Ciccione and Village Clerk Karlee Tamburro, attended a meeting last week in Utica to discuss so-called zombie properties — properties that are abandoned and falling into disrepair.

A regional list of properties is being put together and the village was asked to submit a list of addresses of zombie properties. Adams said the presentation was informative and he hopes to arrange for an update when the county Conference of Mayors meets again.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo set aside funds to start land banks in 2011 as a way to deal with properties that come up for tax auction repeatedly or are so dilapidated the county could not get any return on 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. Money from the sale would be used to renovate or demolish other properties.

Asked about the time frame for getting the land bank started, Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank Committee member Dan Sullivan, who was one of the presenters at last week's meeting, said the committee is expecting to receive word on two different kinds of funding.

"First is the \$150,000 startup grant that will give us a chance to build staffing capacity. The second, the bigger pot, is a share of the \$17.3 million that comes out of the attorney general's office," he said.

The state attorney general went after the big banks and fined them for the bad loans that triggered the recession in 2007 when the housing bubble burst, Sullivan explained.

The money from those fines is going into land banks

"We get a share," Sullivan said. "The money will be shared among four new land banks in the state."

There are nine foreclosing units in the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank Corporation's six-county region and some have not yet committed to the project, he said.

"This is a huge piece to the economic development future of the area," said Sullivan. "If we can make it livable and attractive, people will choose to live here."

He added, "Local governments can be cautious."

Sullivan said a list of properties is currently being developed. The list will be submitted to the funding agency that works for the attorney general.

"By next spring, we could be working on some projects," he said.

The Herkimer County Legislature voted in July to take part in the creation of the land bank and appointed Legislators Raymond Johnson and Kurt Ackerman to serve on the board of directors.

"We're in a weird place," said Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful Land Bank Committee Chairman Tolga Morawski, who was a presenter along with Sullivan at last week's information meeting. "As soon as we get the green light, we have money waiting for us."

He said that will happen when all of the government foreclosing units are on board. In some cases, the issue is passing through communities before a final vote is taken.

Morawski was pleased with the turnout at last week's meeting.

"We had over 100 people in attendance from local governments, villages and towns," Morawski said.

He said at one point they showed a picture of a dilapidated house in Little Falls with a tarp on the roof and asked if anyone had a similar property in his or her community.

"Not one person didn't raise their hand," he said.