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MOHAWK VALLEY

Land Bank That Could Restore Towns Discussed for Mohawk Valley

By: Alana LaFlore 09/16/2014 10:31 PM



MOHAWK VALLEY, N.Y. -- Years ago, the Mohawk Valley was an economic hot bed. The area has made strides recently, but it's not where it many say it could be. To further those efforts, some local groups are proposing a new land bank to help clean up vacant properties.

"As we drive through the small towns up and down the Valley, we see blue tarps," said Bob Albrecht, chairperson of Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful. "And in some cases they've been there for years. They're all tattered and flying in the breeze. We think addressing the issue in the six-county region that's home to 500,000 people might get something done."

The counties involved would be Herkimer, Oneida, Otsego, Fulton, Montgomery and Schoharie.

Land banks are possible through the state's Land Bank Act. Under the act, not-for-profits like Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful, take possession of abandoned and tax delinquent properties. They then redevelop and decide what to do with them like making affordable housing.

"If that property is managed right, maybe even by turning it into green space, if that property is managed right, the value of all those properties on the block are lifted up," said Albrecht.

Those behind the effort pitched their plan to residents in Herkimer Tuesday. They say when an area has high value and more properties are back on the tax rolls, it creates a ripple effect.

"We want the money to back to the school systems, the towns, the cities, the villages and the counties," said Stephen Smith, Executive Director of Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful.

"When you have a nice looking village or town all of the sudden businesses start to come in. And it fills all those vacant buildings for more money in sales tax and revenue. And it's just a huge economic development booster."

At the end of the meeting participants filled out a survey, saying whether or not they think the land bank is necessary for the area. Those results will determine whether or not the project moves forward.

Another informational meeting will be held Thursday at Fulton-Montgomery Community College in Johnstown.