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From left are Alderwoman Patricia Jodway and Aldermen Justin Welyczko and Jeffrey Gressler and, back, City Treasurer David Petkovsek at Tuesday night's meeting of the Little Falls Common Council. TIMES TELEGRAM PHOTO/DONNA THOMPSON

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Herkimer, N.Y.

LITTLE FALLS — The Little Falls Common Council added its endorsement to the establishment of the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank during a meeting Tuesday evening.

Bob Albrecht, of the Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful Committee of the Mohawk Valley Economic Development District, was on hand at Tuesday's meeting to explain the program and answer questions.

"Our goal is to fight blight," said Albrecht.

He explained the committee set out to form a six-county land bank that would include Herkimer, Otsego, Oneida, Montgomery, Schoharie and Fulton counties. Three of the six counties have agreed to participate, as have the cities of Rome and Utica.

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"That's five of nine foreclosing entities," he said.

A decision was made to move ahead with the application in the hope other counties might decide to join the land bank later.

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 roll. Money from the sale would be used to renovate or demolish other properties.

Albrecht said the initially formed land banks were each given \$3.2 million to operate, but he did not know how much the proposed land bank might receive. A board of directors would operate it, making decisions about which properties to take on, he said.

He said there are steps municipalities can take to put themselves in the best position for having the land bank take on some of its vacant properties. The walkabout that the Common Council authorized, for example, shows the city is trying to deal with the problem.

Asked if a land bank might take over just any rundown property, Albrecht pointed out the land bank only deals with tax-delinquent properties.

Alderman Patricia Jodway asked if the land bank could take on old factory buildings.

"That would be up to the board of directors," said Albrecht.

He commented, "We're living with the remnants of the industrial revolution."

Not everyone present was in favor of the land bank, however.

Local resident Michael Lonis commented he had been able to buy a house at a tax auction and fix it up to live in.

"How is the next guy going to be able to do what I did," he asked.

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