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# Rural land bank gets county OK

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Thursday, November 27, 2014 - Updated: 9:47 AM

By NICOLE ANTONUCCI

For the C-S-E

FONDA -- The Montgomery County Legislature has unanimously endorsed the concept of a regional land bank that would address blighted properties in six counties.

According to a resolution approved Tuesday in Fonda, the creation of the land bank will foster the development of abandoned, vacant and tax-foreclosed property by returning the property to productive use in order to strengthen the economy, improve the [quality](#) of life, and improve the financial condition of the municipalities.

"It is a great idea," Legislative Chairman Thomas Quackenbush said. "I think it is a perfect way to address some of these [tax](#) auction properties that we have. It is the ideal way to address it."

District 4 Legislator Ryan Weitz said it is a great [opportunity](#) for the county to take a different path for tax-delinquent properties.

"We have seen over the past year that the tax [foreclosure](#) process we follow by state law is fraught with issues," Weitz said. "It generally turns over ownership of properties to people that are not going through the process, numerous times. By having the land bank we can turn over the properties to owners that will take care of them and preserve the taxes in the county."

District 5 Legislator Barbara Wheeler also supported the venture.

"I am excited for it to be brought into the county," she said.

Montgomery County is the first of the six counties to endorse the initiative, which is being spearheaded by Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful Committee of the Mohawk Valley Economic Development District. The group is investigating the [possibility](#) of a six-county land bank that could cover Fulton, Herkimer, Montgomery, Oneida, Otsego and Schoharie counties.

A land bank is a government-created nonprofit [corporation](#) that has special powers above typical foreclosing entities that enables it to convert vacant, abandoned and tax-delinquent properties into productive space.

There are approximately 270,510 vacant [housing](#) units in the state and 34 percent of those units were built before 1940, which makes it more difficult for the properties to be turned over.

The role of the land banks is to acquire title to problem properties, eliminate liability and transfer the properties to new, responsible owners in a transparent manner that results in outcomes consistent with community-based [plans](#).

There are currently 11 land banks in the state but most of these are in urban areas like Albany, Schenectady, Syracuse or Troy. The new regional land bank would focus on the smaller municipalities in the counties.

"I am strong supporter of what could be the first rural land bank in the state," County [Executive](#) Matthew Ossenfort said. "I believe housing is one of our greatest issues. This is one option to solve this problem."

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