

Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank brings itself and a new tool to combat Zombie properties to Utica NY.

Acquisition Of Vacant, Blighted Home Marks A First In The Organization's Plans To Fight Blight In All Of Utica's Neighborhoods

UTICA -- East Utica Councilman and Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank (GMVLB) Treasurer Joseph A. Marino announced today, the acquisition of one the cities most problematic "zombie" properties and the first taken using a Land Bank.

Marino Said the property at 1128 Hammond Ave in East Utica has sat vacant for years and has amassed dozens of codes violations. Its "zombie" status has prevented foreclosure because banks kept the property taxes current—despite the health and safety hazard of an unkempt house, and a severe eyesore to the otherwise picturesque neighborhood, there wasn't much the City of Utica could do, until now.

It has drained thousands of tax payer dollars in Codes department resources, Fire Marshall inspections, Parks Services not to mention, Corporation Council hours pursuing legal actions against the banks.

"Until the City of Utica joined this land bank, we have been held hostage by big banks and 'REO' property clearing houses doing the bare minimum or less on properties that have become the property value draining blight all Cities fear the most. Since joining the GMVLB, we have a new tool in our tool box to combat this and bring pride and stability back to our neighborhoods, that hadn't had that access in the past." Councilman Marino Said. "This is the first of a great many projects to be done in the City by the GMVLB and I welcome them here officially and look forward to our continued partnership in fighting blight and zombie properties in all four corners of Utica." Continued Marino.

GMVLB Board Chair Karl Gustafson Said: "I am very pleased that the GMVLB will be working to remedy this situation for the Hammond Avenue neighborhood. It has been a pleasure to be able to work closely with Councilman Marino to be a part of the solution. We look forward to working with the City of Utica to bring resources to the table in their ongoing effort to improve the City. We are proud partners in their efforts. The Board of Directors and staff of the GMVLB will continue to work hard on behalf of communities throughout the Mohawk Valley in the ongoing fight against blight."

In late 2016, the New York State Empire Development Corporation approved the application of the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank which covers the Cities of Utica and Rome, as well as the Counties of Herkimer, Montgomery, Otsego and Schoharie. Making this the 19th approved Land Bank in the State.

In order to combat the problem of vacant and abandoned properties, the New York State Land Bank Program permits municipalities to apply for and create land banks in their communities, pursuant to Article 16 of the New York State Not-for-Profit Corporation Law signed into law by Governor Cuomo in July 2011, which permits the creation of up to 25 land banks in New York State.

Along with the help of the Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi, Senator Joseph Griffo and the NYS Legislature along with funding from legal settlements stemming from the housing crisis of 2008, land banks have been funded by more than \$30 Million dollars state wide to revitalize housing stock, put properties back on tax rolls and save the integrity of neighborhoods.

The primary focus of land bank operations is the acquisition of real property that is tax delinquent, tax foreclosed, vacant and/or abandoned, and to use the tools of the program to eliminate the harms and liabilities caused by such properties. Land banks help communities facilitate the return of these vacant, abandoned and tax-delinquent properties to productive use.

In March of 2017, the GMVLB was awarded its first Community Revitalization Initiative (CRI) grant from the NYS Attorney General's Office and Local Initiatives Services Corporation (LISC) of \$1.642 Million to begin its important work in participating communities.

Executive Director Tolga Morawski Said: "It is exciting to see years of effort in establishing the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank culminating in this important project on Hammond Avenue. We have arrived at this point through the leadership of Utica Mayor Robert Palmieri and the Utica Common Council, both early supporters of the land bank, with the hard work of Councilman Joe Marino and Commissioner of Urban & Economic Development Brian Thomas. We look forward to further collaboration with our partners at City Hall and within the Utica Housing Action Committee. All this, though, wouldn't be possible without the leadership at the state level from Assemblyman Brindisi and Senator Griffo for making Land Banks in New York State, a reality. "

Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi Said: "I sponsored legislation in the Assembly that was signed into law by the Governor two years ago giving municipalities the tools to combat abandoned properties because I saw how zombie houses can quickly suck the life out of many of our neighborhoods, in Utica and other communities in the region. The purchase of a property that neighbors have complained about for years is a very significant accomplishment for the Land Bank, and I look forward to hearing about more successes taking back Utica's neighborhoods."

Senator Joseph Griffo Said: "Abandoned and blighted properties aren't only eyesores, but they can have a negative effect on neighborhoods, residents and entire communities. I am pleased to see that the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank will be acquiring this property and am optimistic that they will be able to enhance it. I also am hopeful that this will be the first of many projects undertaken by the Land Bank here in Utica because, by repurposing and removing blighted properties, we can help to create stronger communities and improve the quality of life for all residents in the region."

Helene Caloir, LISC's Director of its NYS Housing Stabilization Fund, administrators of New York Attorney General generated land bank funding, said, "Congratulations to the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank for acquiring a highly distressed 'zombie' property and using its tools to transform it into a community asset. LISC looks forward to its continued work with GMVLB to revitalize distressed properties all over the Mohawk Valley."

About the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank:

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