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Council hears pitch for land bank

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By KERRY MINOR, Leader Herald

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GLOVERSVILLE - A group trying to start a regional land bank is looking to get the city government's endorsement of the proposal.

Dan Sullivan and Tolga Morawski - both representing Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful - spoke to the Common Council on Tuesday about the initiative.

"We just wanted to get Gloversville's endorsement to get behind the effort as a supporter, because we feel the positive and forward-thinking ideas coming out of Gloversville also dovetail really well with the land-bank effort," Morawski said.

Article Photos



Tolga Morawski, with Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful, spea...

Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful is a six-county organization, which includes Fulton County, that works on beautification projects in its area.

Sullivan, the chairman of KMVB, said the organization has started an application with the state for a regional land bank, which could lead to state funding for projects that help the area.

"We're here tonight to seek the endorsement of the city of Gloversville in our effort to have that application completed. And to get your support so we can finish this application and begin to receive funding with certification of a land bank," Sullivan said.

Several council members appeared to support endorsing the proposed land bank.

The council is expected to review a resolution of support for the agency's application during its meeting May 10. The resolution would only be a statement of support for the proposal; no money would be given to the group by the city.

Morawski said the state has been pushing the idea of land banks since 2011 to help deal with blight.

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A land bank buys foreclosed properties and makes them available for sale to developers or builders.

Morawski - the KMVB Land Bank Committee chairman - said the Mohawk Valley, along with Fulton and Montgomery counties, "are the highest areas of distress in the Northeast."

He said factors that lead to the high ranking include lack of jobs, poverty rates and housing vacancies.

Morawski said he thinks the regional approach is preferred by the state, since it has created 20 spots for land banks. He noted with 62 counties in the state, there won't be enough funds for every county.

"[The state] wants a bigger entity that's going in," Morawski said. "And finding projects and goals that are more regional."

Morawski said the Mohawk Valley Economic Development District - which KMVB is part of - is seeking to work with smaller projects around the area to fund and help support.

"There is already an infrastructure that is here and ready to do projects and just need a funding frame, and that's really the interest," Morawski said.

Morawski said the group should hear from the state by June about its application. It would receive around \$100,000 to \$150,000 by the summer to hire workers and prepare the plan and get \$1 million to \$2 million by the third quarter of this year.

"[The state] has given us a hard deadline of May 15," Morawski said.

Funding for the projects would come from the state Attorney General's Office, and applications go through Empire State Development.

Morawski said the agency is also trying to get support from Fulton County and the city of Johnstown.

Kerry Minor covers Gloversville. She can be reached at kminor@leaderherald.com

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