

# TIMES TELEGRAM

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## Senate acts to save land bank funds

**By Times Telegram**

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MOHAWK — A consortium of land banks in New York was successful in supporting their state senators as they passed a bill sponsored by Sen. David Valesky, D-Oneida, in the closing hours of the regular legislative session that exempts the real property owned by a land bank from certain sewer charges and other fees for services that aren't being used in vacant buildings.

“Those charges and fees take away from the land banks' capital for accomplishing improvements, rehabs and demolitions of blighted properties,” Tolga Morawski, acting executive director of the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank, said in a news release.

“We owe a vote of thanks to the senators representing our regional land bank. It was Sen. Joseph Griffo and Sen. George Amedore Jr. who worked hard to get Sen. Valesky's bill through in the last minutes of this session,” Karl Gustafson, Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank board president, said in the release.

The bill, S4346, passed unanimously.

“Our senators made the tight calendar work for us,” said Gustafson.

“I was pleased to sponsor this bill and to work with my Senate colleagues to ensure its passage. Exemption from sewer taxes and other fees will result in significant savings for land banks, which can be reinvested into the important work of demolition and rehabilitation projects,” Valesky said.

“The eyesore of abandoned and blighted properties can be a negative drag on our communities, so this measure will ensure that more resources will be available to clean up our neighborhoods,” said Griffo, R-Rome. “The Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank plays an important role in enhancing the potential for economic growth in our region by addressing vacant properties, and I was glad to help expedite this measure in the Senate to improve the quality of life in our communities.”

“The savings achieved by this legislation will mean more money available to help remove or repurpose abandoned and blighted properties, leading to stronger, healthier communities for all the residents of the Mohawk Valley. I was glad to be able to assist in getting his bill passed quickly through the Legislature,” said Amedore, R-Rotterdam.

The Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank was established in 2016 to address the Mohawk Valley’s inventory of tax-foreclosed, vacant properties, and is unique among New York state. No other land bank includes territory with six foreclosing governmental units.

Gustafson said as a multi-county land bank, the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank as the ability to work with many state elected officials.

“Our senators’ timely action saved land banks across the state significant dollars that can now be invested directly into managing vacant and tax delinquent properties. Our senators made a difference that will be seen on the streets of our municipalities,” he said.

Morawski said, “Comprehensive planning, reevaluating code enforcement’s role in combating decline, job training in property deconstruction and rehabilitation and creative peacemaking are all in our toolbox. Thanks to

our senators and Sen. Valesky, we will better be able to achieve these goals.”

The Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank is made up of foreclosing governmental units including the cities of Rome and Utica, Herkimer, Montgomery, Otsego and Schoharie Counties. The land bank is governed by a nine-member board with representatives from each foreclosing unit and with several functioning standing committees including project review, property distribution, hiring and accounting/financial.