



# Capital District Homeownership Collaborative

• • • • • Solving the Vacant Buildings Problem

*Affordable  
Housing  
Partnership*

Recent media reports across the Capital District have focused attention on the problem posed by vacant buildings. This is a critical issue affecting cities throughout our region. We applaud the efforts of elected officials and local leaders to develop meaningful solutions to the abandoned building problem. Through 180 years of collective experience, our organizations have gleaned a few pertinent insights into the issue.

*Albany  
Community  
Land Trust*

*Albany County  
Rural Housing  
Alliance*

The process of abandonment is exactly that: *an ongoing process*. If communities wait until property is abandoned, it's too late. Buildings soon deteriorate beyond their functional use. The cost of repairs far surpass what the market will bear. For every abandoned building fixed at the public's expense, another appears behind it unless we disrupt the system that leads to abandonment.

*Better  
Neighborhoods  
Incorporated*

*Capital District  
Community  
Loan Fund*

Meaningful solutions should focus on early intervention and prevention. Here are a few potential solutions we think are worthy of consideration:

*Community  
Land Trust of  
Schenectady*

PREVENTION

*TAP, Inc.*

1. Intervene immediately. When the first property tax payment is missed, inspect for occupancy and code violations. If necessary, secure buildings and make roofs weather tight. Bill the owner for the work. Otherwise, three years of neglect becomes the public's problem.
2. Speculators who bid on municipal property tax foreclosures should not be allowed to bid at subsequent auctions if building permits have not been pulled to renovate earlier acquisitions.
3. Support anti-predatory lending measures, including education, fair lending alternatives and consumer protection legislation. Go on record in support of state action with respect to anti-predatory lending measures and consumer protection legislation. Pass local resolutions asking the state to advance such legislation.
4. Support existing foreclosure prevention services so that owner-occupants who have experienced financial hardship are able to prevent foreclosure or achieve a responsible disposition of the property.

*Troy  
Rehabilitation  
and  
Improvement  
Program*

EXISTING RESOURCES

5. Insist that CDBG and other HUD allocations produce verifiable results for people and communities in need.

6. Focus city resources geographically to achieve maximum coordinated impact. Many abandoned buildings are in our poorest neighborhoods where market forces discourage investment.
7. Local development zones should be in the areas greatest need, particularly the lowest income census tracts where abandoned buildings are most prevalent.
8. Support the existing efforts of nonprofits revitalizing abandoned properties and neighborhoods.
9. Municipalities that receive HUD "CHDO" dollars should use these funds to increase the development capacity of local Community Housing Development Organizations.

#### NEW RESOURCES

10. Provide financial incentives for owner-occupant rehab of buildings in target areas.
11. Create a program to use NYS's new Bonding authority for stabilizing buildings. Design city and county government systems to allow for appropriate intervention and minimization of demolition. Where demolition makes sense, improve the usability of resources such as RESTORE-NY by local municipalities and nonprofit organizations.
12. Advocated for expanded State and federal funds for "Brownfield" economic redevelopment to include vacant and hazardous residential buildings.
13. Create a county-wide housing trust funds with new and permanent resources to develop housing units. Fund the trust funds with fees levied against owners of problem buildings.
14. Provide fast-track planning approvals, higher unit density allowances, reduced permit costs, or other incentives to developers of abandoned buildings.
15. Offer abandoned properties to adjoining property owners at minimal cost.
16. Expand availability of tax credits for the preservation and repair of historic properties.

#### ACCOUNTABILITY

17. Target code enforcement with meaningful fines against problem properties.

18. Hold owners accountable. Municipalities should pass the cost of higher police, fire and code services to owners of vacant building. Assess owners of vacant buildings a fire department surcharge to offset the cost of maintaining and protecting vacant buildings.
19. Do not sell public property (i.e. tax foreclosures) to developers who do not have a plan for rehabilitation.
20. Advocate for and support Federal efforts to investigate and prosecute purchases of "owner-occupant" HUD foreclosures by non-occupant speculators.
21. Prioritize preservation and reuse of existing buildings.
22. Revise and strictly enforce key city ordinances dealing with vacant properties.
23. Set up management system for vacant property maintenance, stabilization and (as a last resort) demolition.

#### LEGISLATION

24. Advocate our congressional delegation to introduce an amendment to FHA 203k rehabilitation loan requirements to accommodate purchasers who submit competitive bids which may exceed the most recent FHA appraisal.
25. Advocate for a moratorium on the use of public funds to finance sprawl (e.g. public water extensions, new highway access, "green-field" development, etc.) Urban abandonment is literally the "back end" of sprawl.
26. Focus regional development efforts in core neighborhoods with existing infrastructure and underutilized building stock.
27. Build support through the Conference of Mayors for state legislation that limits property insurance payouts until damaged parcels are code compliant. Owners of fire gutted buildings should not be allowed to run off with insurance payouts, only to leave the burned out shell for the tax payer.

Our organizations look forward to working with the public and elected officials on meaningful solutions to the abandoned building problem.

For more information about our work, visit  
<http://www.ahphome.org/collaborative.htm>

We welcome your ideas. Email [edahl@ahphome.org](mailto:edahl@ahphome.org)