



# MAHONING COUNTY LAND BANK IMPACT REPORT: 10 YEARS OF TANGIBLE RESULTS

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES    REPURPOSING LAND    IMPROVING PROPERTY VALUES



**IN THIS REPORT:**  
OUR ROOTS  
PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS  
PARTNER SPOTLIGHTS  
COMMUNITY IMPACT  
OUR FUTURE



mahoning  
county

landbank



# Strong Roots for an Even Stronger Future

The Mahoning County Land Bank was established at a time of tremendous need and opportunity.

In 2010, decades of job and population losses and the foreclosure crisis left Mahoning County with thousands of forgotten, neglected, debt-laden parcels that decreased neighboring property values and increased maintenance costs for cities, townships and villages.

Formally known as the Mahoning County Land Reutilization Corp., the Land Bank was created to help remediate the blight and vacancies by restoring and promoting sustainable land and neighborhoods.

For the past decade, the Land Bank has worked with local governments, community leaders, non-profit organizations and neighbors to bring land, houses and buildings back to life. It has acquired distressed properties and cleared their titles, making them more attractive for new investors.

From 2012 to 2019, the Land Bank completed more than 1,400 demolitions through the Moving Ohio Forward demolition grant program funded by the Ohio Attorney General's Office and the Neighborhood Initiative Program demolition grant funded by the Ohio Housing Financing Agency.

Partly as a result of these efforts, the number of vacant properties in Youngstown decreased from 3,927 in 2014 to 2,226 in 2018.

In recent years, the Land Bank has shifted its efforts from demolition work to revitalization projects, through residential and commercial rehabilitation, greening strategies and more.

Local communities are experiencing the favorable results of having fewer blighted, vacant properties.

"We're reflecting on the past decade and are grateful for how far we've come," said Debora Flora, executive director of Land Bank. "The partnerships we've established, the impact we've made in so many communities and the relationships we've gained through collaboration really add up to make our efforts worth every minute of our work."

After completing nearly 1,500 demolitions and countless greening projects, along with restoring and putting nearly 100 formerly tax-delinquent homes back on the market during its first decade, the Land Bank is looking forward to the future.

## OUR EARLY ROOTS

**2004** – Vacancy and abandonment are high in Youngstown and experienced throughout Mahoning County.

**2005** – Mahoning County and City of Youngstown establish a regional Council of Governments to restore vacant, abandoned land to productive use.

**April 2010** – Youngstown, Campbell and Struthers cities and Austintown Township join the Council of Governments on an EfficientGovNow contest application for land bank startup funding.

**May 2010** – Organizing collaborative, block watch groups, churches and news media encourage voting for local projects.

**June 2010** – 15,000 ballots are cast in Northeast Ohio for 10 finalists. Mahoning County Land Bank finishes in first place.

**Feb. 24, 2011** – Mahoning County Commissioners vote to create Mahoning County Land Reutilization Corporation.

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# Residential Project Highlights

The Land Bank has secured several demolition grants to acquire, demolish and improve vacant lots that included more than 1,400 tax-delinquent, abandoned, blighted residential houses.

Also as a result of the Land Bank's various programs and collaboration with community partners, 93 housing units have been preserved and improved across Mahoning County.

Through demolitions, acquisitions and sales of vacant homes and properties, as well as home renovations, many communities are noticing the tremendous results of the Land Bank's work.



The Land Bank established Bright Avenue Park, a community space with a little free library in a Campbell neighborhood. The land once housed several vacant, blighted homes that were demolished.

## Residential Demolition Impact

The Land Bank's demolition program has helped increase property values in neighborhoods, prevent future housing foreclosures and encourage investors to renovate nearby homes.

From 2014 to 2019, the Land Bank received reimbursements from the Neighborhood Initiative Program funded by the Ohio Housing Financing Agency. More than \$15 million was recovered to support 1,106 demolitions in Mahoning County.

The Land Bank allocated the funds to 15 communities, based on the share of vacant properties in each, and then acquired, demolished and landscaped properties.

In Campbell alone, the Land Bank leveraged \$1.2 million over three years to complete targeted improvements, including acquiring more than 100 properties, completing 97 demolitions, establishing Bright Avenue Park and preserving, renovating and selling six houses previously targeted for demolition.

From 2012 to 2014, the Land Bank also received \$2.6 million in residential demolition reimbursements from the Moving Ohio Forward Program, which was administered by the Ohio Attorney General's Office with settlement funds from mortgage lawsuits. With matching funds from local governments, the Land Bank and its community partners razed 308 vacant, abandoned houses.

## Side Lot Program Highlights

The Land Bank's Side Lot Program has enabled more than 1,100 home owners to acquire properties next to their own.

Lifelong West Side residents Chuck and Mary Sheffield are among the program's beneficiaries. They enjoyed living in their home for 37 years, but they grew concerned after the property next door became empty. The Sheffields cut the grass for years and watched the house decay over time. It was eventually damaged in a fire – a too-frequent result at vacant properties – and reduced to a vacant lot. That's when the Land Bank stepped in and helped them acquire the lot and build their dream "Garage Mahal," a 2,000-square-foot two-car garage with 12-foot ceilings.



West Side residents Chuck and Mary Sheffield built their dream "Garage Mahal" after acquiring a vacant side lot from the Land Bank.

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### **Side Lot Program continued**

William and Esther Johnson also expanded their property on the South Side by acquiring a vacant side lot, but they had different dreams. The couple used the extra space to build an aquaponics system in their backyard.

Rodney and Henrietta Lewis of Youngstown have also acquired vacant lots around their house in the Idora neighborhood. As master gardeners with the Ohio State University Extension Office, they set out to beautify land that was once neglected – and that’s what they did.



**Jamaican immigrant William Johnson is pursuing his “American dream” by restoring his family’s home on the South Side, which included adding his own aquaponics system to his property after acquiring the vacant lot from the Land Bank.**

### **DIY Fixer-Upper Home Makeovers**

The Land Bank’s Buy a House to Renovate program, more formally known as its Deed-in-Escrow program, allows a qualified owner-occupant or investor to buy a house already owned by the Land Bank for a modest purchase price. The deed is held in escrow until the buyer completes a renovation with their own funds that brings the house up to meet a community’s housing code, inside and out.

Canfield resident and landlord, Jay Kamruzzaman, purchased and renovated a vacant duplex, restoring it for two families -- a dream of his that was made possible through the Deed-in-Escrow Program.

In the past 10 years, the Land Bank has acquired and sold 53 housing units across Mahoning County through this initiative.



**The Land Bank renovated a 1,864-square-foot, split-level Austintown home that was once deemed a “nuisance” by the township.**

### **Market Rehab Restoration**

The Land Bank also works with contractors to renovate homes and sell the move-in ready properties at market value through its Market Rehab Program.

It also works hand-in-hand with its partner, Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation. Together, they have acquired, restored and sold 43 housing units.

The Land Bank recently completed an exhaustive renovation of a split-level Austintown home once deemed a “nuisance” by the township.

The Land Bank staff and contractors replaced the ceilings, installed new flooring, replaced the cabinets and hardware in the kitchen, restored and added onto the walk-out deck, added a new heating, ventilating and air conditioning system and more.

The Land Bank hopes to continue working with communities by assessing vacant housing, clearing the titles, restoring them, and putting them back on the market at a fair price.





# Commercial Project Highlights

In recent years, the Land Bank expanded its participation in economic development through acquisitions, demolitions and renovations of commercial properties.

In 2020, the Land Bank and Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corp. renovated a commercial building on the West Side that sat vacant for more than a decade.

The Land Bank acquired the 2,240-square-foot building after it was foreclosed on for non-payment of real estate taxes. YNDC acquired the building with a clean title from the Land Bank and completed renovations, including the installation of a new roof. It also restored utilities, overhead doors, electrical work and more.

This marked another milestone in the partnership of the two agencies to restore and revive vacant, abandoned properties.

The Land Bank acquired and sold another industrial property in Youngstown through public auction.

It has also worked with community partners, including local government officials and business owners, to demolish vacant and blighted structures and restore properties.

Among those were several vacant, blighted, tax-delinquent properties in Sebring Village and Goshen Township.

In Sebring, the former Royal Sebring China Co. property on South 15th Street, an 18-acre site just south of the village center, remained dormant for decades due to significant real estate tax delinquency. The overgrown property was an "eyesore" for nearby businesses and local residents, who sought action from village officials.

The Land Bank acquired the abandoned property with a clean title, then worked with local government officials who identified a local business owner to take on ownership of the land and accept responsibility for cleanup.

In Goshen Township, the Land Bank managed a similar



**The Land Bank partnered with YNDC to restore and sell this formerly vacant, tax-delinquent commercial building on the West Side.**



**In Sebring, Michael Conny, president/owner of MAC Trailer in Alliance, received a deed for 18 acres of land from the Land Bank.**



**Ethan Witmer, operations manager at Witmer's Feed & Grain, received a deed from leaders of the Land Bank for two acres of land across from its current operation in Goshen Township.**

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### **Commercial Project Highlights continued**

transition for five parcels of tax-delinquent land, including an empty, damaged house, that sat vacant for years along a stretch of South Pricetown Road (State Route 534). Township officials lacked the funding to clean up the land and the house did not meet the parameters of the Land Bank's demolition reimbursement award program. So the acquisition by the Land Bank and subsequent sale to a local business owner was the best route for success.

In another instance, the Land Bank acquired and demolished a vacant commercial building on Mahoning

Avenue in Youngstown and greened the site with grass and landscaping. This enabled cleaner lines of sight at the corner of Mahoning and Steel Street. The Land Bank had planned to restore the building but later determined it was too severely damaged for repair to be practical.

By acquiring and restoring neglected, tax-delinquent properties or transferring them with clear titles to responsible parties, the Land Bank has provided an important boost to economic development in Youngstown and the surrounding communities. As a result, it's helping to attract or sustain businesses in the area while removing eyesores.

## **Nonprofit Project Highlights**

The Land Bank has worked with dozens of nonprofit organizations and churches by acquiring and transferring vacant properties to be restored for productive use.

The land has been utilized to expand existing properties or to add additional programming.

The largest project to date was the result of a partnership with the Rescue Mission of the Mahoning Valley, a nonprofit emergency shelter on the North Side of Youngstown. The nonprofit's decades-long dream of building a new facility finally became a reality in 2020, and the Land Bank was glad to play a key role in that achievement.

After years of searching for a suitable site, John Muckridge III, Rescue Mission chief executive officer and president, met with Land Bank Executive Director Debora Flora to seek out property.

The Land Bank identified 16 vacant lots up the street from the Rescue Mission's former location. After demolishing two vacant, abandoned houses on the property and completing the work to acquire titles to surrounding properties that were vacant for decades, the Land Bank transferred the parcels to the Rescue Mission. Those parcels became a significant portion of the mission's four-acre site.

The nonprofit's new 47,500-square-foot building is nearly double the size of its former home.

"This is the first time we've been able to work with a nonprofit at this capacity," said Flora. "And we're very glad we're able to do so, by providing space that will fit the needs of the Rescue Mission's residents and help support its impactful work and programs."



**Land Bank Executive Director Debora Flora joined Rescue Mission CEO and President John Muckridge for the groundbreaking event for the new shelter in 2019.**

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**Martin Luther Lutheran Church (pictured in background) acquired vacant parcels from the Land Bank to create Hope for Newport community garden, which sits across the street from the church.**

### ***Nonprofit Project Highlights continued***

In 2019, the Land Bank transferred a vacant, formerly tax-delinquent, single-family house to the Ursuline Ministries of Youngstown for one of its residential programs on Youngstown’s South Side. After several failed attempts to obtain ownership of the house, the nonprofit turned to the Land Bank for help. Shortly after, Ursuline Ministries acquired a clean title from the Land Bank and remodeled the home, which provided an ideal location for housing and replaced a space it outgrew.

The Land Bank served as a pass-through vehicle for military veteran Joseph Socie and his wife, Rita. The couple donated a house to the Land Bank, which transferred it to Family & Community Services. The nonprofit uses the house for its supportive services for veteran families.

In another instance, the Land Bank assisted with land acquisition for the Dorothy Day House to expand its campus, providing additional land for volunteers to grow food for its meal-distribution services.

The Land Bank has also worked with many churches in the community, helping them to acquire adjacent properties for community gardens, outdoor worship areas, community gathering places and more.

Martin Luther Lutheran Church in Youngstown has been working with the Land Bank for several years, purchasing additional vacant properties to expand its community garden, Hope for Newport Community Garden.

In another neighborhood, a stretch of church-owned lots acquired through the Land Bank has become a sports field for kids.

“These are all positive examples of different entities working together for the benefit of all involved,” said Flora. “Each organization now owns the land or house it needed to expand its programming to help others in need, and the vacant land has been wiped clean of any unfulfilled mortgages or other debt. These have all been smooth transactions that reflect our mission — to take abandoned property and put it to productive use.”

**“Each organization now owns the land or house it needed to expand its programming to help others in need, and the vacant land has been wiped clean of any unfulfilled mortgages or other debt. These have all been smooth transactions that reflect our mission — to take abandoned property and put it to productive use.”**

**DEBORA FLORA**

*Land Bank  
Executive Director*



# Greening Project Highlights

The Land Bank uses greening and landscaping efforts to repurpose vacant, abandoned and blighted land to make it productive again.

Land Bank staff work with local governments, neighborhood groups and community partners to identify the needs and interests of residents.

Over the past decade, the Land Bank has catalyzed community gardens, flexible parks, little free libraries, a bus shelter and more.

In 2020, the agency began exploring urban ecoscaping efforts by incorporating native plants into its urban properties, moving toward more environmentally and economically sustainable greening strategies.

To help further implement these efforts, Danielle Lewis, a sustainability scientist, naturalist and educator, developed a greening guide for the Land Bank, which is now available to the public.

“There are many benefits to implementing native species into green infrastructure, which can include trees, bushes and plants,” said Lewis. “Native plants are beneficial to local birds and pollinators, as well as other wildlife, and they require lower cost for upkeep. More importantly, ecoscaping is beneficial for our overall health. Trees take up carbon dioxide and pollution and also help with stormwater management. There are so many benefits to adding green to our gray infrastructure.”

The Land Bank is using some of these strategies to create a pollinator garden on the North Side of Youngstown. In addition to native pollinators, the area will have natural barriers and a tower for chimney sweeps, a threatened bird species, so it'll also serve as a bird conservation site. The green infrastructure will enliven a vacant, abandoned corridor.

In 2019, the Land Bank received a “Beautification Award” from one of its community partners, Youngstown City-Scape, for its neighborhood beautification projects, including the establishment of a Western Reserve Transit Authority bus shelter on Mahoning Avenue in Youngstown. The bus stop replaced a blighted, tax-delinquent house the Land Bank demolished.



**Debora Flora, executive director of the Mahoning County Land Bank stands in front of a WRTA bus stop where the Land Bank demolished an abandoned house in 2018.**

Since its inception, the Land Bank has assisted local governments, schools, community organizations and neighborhood groups in assembling land for future projects and creating green spaces to replace vacant, blighted land. The agency also leases many of its properties and offers space to local groups that wish to plant trees or establish community parks.

“We continue to leverage our unique authority for taking action in situations when property owners do not,” said Dan Yemma, Mahoning County treasurer and chairman of the Land Bank. “Our efforts help restore neighborhood and community pride, and we’re gaining momentum. With the support of dedicated neighborhood organizations, our efforts are especially productive.”



**The Land Bank worked with local government leaders and the community to establish Peace Park, a flexible park at the intersection of Parkwood Avenue and Thorn Street on the South Side of Youngstown. It replaces a multi-family housing complex that was turned over to the Land Bank for demolition in November 2017 when deemed obsolete.**

# Partner Spotlight

Removing blight is the first step toward improving communities, but what comes next? The repurposing and re-activating work that follows demolitions and acquisitions is the result of key partnerships and community collaboration.

The Land Bank is sharing the stories of 10 partnerships from the past decade to spotlight the work of its impactful community relationships with individuals, local governments, nonprofits and other public and private organizations.

**Through a community partner spotlight video series, which will be released throughout 2021, these individuals share their stories and showcase the powerful results of collaboration.**

## JOHN MUCKRIDGE

*Rescue Mission of Mahoning Valley President, CEO*

The Land Bank helped with the assembly of 16 vacant parcels at the site of the nonprofit's new homeless shelter.

## DARREN CRIVELLI

*Austintown Township Zoning Inspector*

The Land Bank acquired and demolished or renovated several tax-delinquent, abandoned "problem properties" and transferred them to the township with clear titles.

## IAN BENISTON

*Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corp. Executive Director*

YNDC partners with the Land Bank on several community and neighborhood revitalization efforts, as well as commercial renovation projects, through acquisition, demolition or rehabilitation of properties.

## SOPHIA BUGGS

*Lady Buggs Farm Owner, Operator*

The Youngstown resident and urban farmer leases more than an acre of land from the Land Bank, which is the site of her urban farm that sits adjacent to her own property.

## BRIGID KENNEDY

*Ursuline Ministries President*

The nonprofit works with the Land Bank to acquire vacant properties at low cost and then uses the homes and/or land to expand its residential programming and services.

## JAY KAMRUZZAMAN

*Investor, Landlord*

The Canfield resident purchased and renovated a vacant duplex through the Land Bank's Deed-in-Escrow Program.

## TONY KELLY

*Campbell City Schools Board Member*

The Campbell native has enjoyed the favorable aftermath of neighborhood revitalization as a resident of Bright Avenue, a street that was heavily targeted for demolitions and restoration. He purchased a post-demolition side lot from the Land Bank, expanding his property.

## MOHAMMAD ABUNIAJ

*Student, Husband, Father*

In need of a roomier house, Abunijaj found an affordable opportunity with the Land Bank, and turned the renovation project into a family affair.

## LOURDES CRUZ

*Homeowner, Mother*

After purchasing a house on land contract, she turned to the Land Bank for help in expanding her yard by half an acre for her family's enjoyment.

## SOLID PLATFORMS

*Scaffolding Supplier*

As demand for its products grew, the scaffold solutions business needed more space at its Youngstown location on South Avenue. Without the Land Bank's help, Solid Platforms would have moved its operations and employees elsewhere.

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**Partner Spotlight continued**

“The Land Bank was created after housing vacancy and abandonment had increased in Mahoning County,” explained Debora Flora, executive director. “Our goal was to unlock potential and grow opportunities around

vacant properties. The stories of our Community Partners are proof of our collaborative success. We acquired and cleaned up properties so that residents, civic groups and businesses could use them in new, better ways.”

Visit our website to watch the Community Partner Spotlight video series.



**John Muckridge, President and CEO of the Rescue Mission of Mahoning Valley, worked with the Land Bank to identify and acquire 16 vacant parcels of land for its new shelter.**



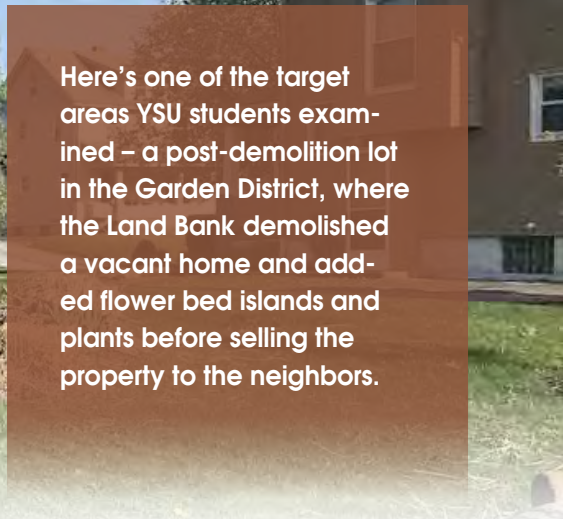
**Sophia Buggs, owner and operator of Lady Buggs Farm, built the urban farm on the nine lots of formerly vacant land she leases from the Land Bank.**



**Ian Beniston, YNDC executive director, stands in front of a newly constructed home built by YNDC on a property it acquired from the Land Bank.**

**HERE ARE SOME OF OUR OTHER KEY PARTNERS:**

<p><b>PROGRAM INVESTORS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Raymond John Wean Foundation</li> <li>• The Youngstown Foundation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mahoning County Commissioners</li> <li>• First National Bank of Pennsylvania</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund for Our Economic Future</li> <li>• Ohio Housing Finance Agency</li> <li>• National Community Stabilization Trust</li> </ul>
<p><b>STRATEGIC PARTNERS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation</li> <li>• Economic Action Group/ Western Reserve Port Authority</li> <li>• Mahoning County Townships Association</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youngstown State University Center for Nonprofit Leadership</li> <li>• Youngstown State University Geography and Urban-Regional Studies Program</li> <li>• Western Reserve Transit Authority</li> <li>• Ohio Land Bank Association</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thriving Communities Institute, Western Reserve Land Conservancy</li> <li>• Home Savings Bank NKA Premier Bank</li> <li>• Mahoning County Prosecutor’s Office Civil Division</li> <li>• Mill Creek MetroParks</li> </ul>
<p><b>COMMUNITY PARTNERS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rotary Club of Youngstown</li> <li>• Rocky Ridge Neighborhood Association</li> <li>• Garden District Neighborhood Association</li> <li>• Taft Promise Neighborhood</li> <li>• 7th Ward Citizens Coalition</li> <li>• Know Your Neighbor Block Watch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youngstown CityScape</li> <li>• Healthy Community Partnership/Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley</li> <li>• Municipal Action Corporation, Ltd.</li> <li>• Greater Friendship Baptist Church</li> <li>• Elizabeth Missionary Baptist Church</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• St. Dominic Church</li> <li>• St. Patrick Church, Youngstown</li> <li>• St. Angela Merici Parish</li> <li>• Martin Luther Lutheran Church</li> <li>• St. James Church of God in Christ</li> <li>• Youngstown Community Police</li> <li>• Youngstown Property Code Enforcement &amp; Demolition Department</li> </ul>



## Community Impact

As a result of its demolition and revitalization efforts, the Land Bank expects to see a continuous reduction in crime rates, vacancy and blight by 2023, the next time the Mahoning County is scheduled to perform property assessments.

Each year, the Land Bank partners with math students at Youngstown State University to conduct research and gather data, and they're already noticing a positive impact with blight remediation.

In 2018, YSU math professor Tom Wakefield and his Preparations for Industry Careers class began analyzing areas where the Land Bank has performed demolitions and/or greening projects to assess trends and analyze their social and economic impact. The research is scheduled to continue through 2023.

In 2020, students found that the crime rate per capita had decreased in the targeted areas where the Land Bank performed demolition and greening work.

The partnership with YSU began with John Bralich, senior manager of geographic information system services at YSU's Department of Geography and Urban-Regional Studies, who is contracted by the Land Bank to provide data and mapping services.

Bralich assists the students with the mapping work and with gathering statistics for them to analyze.

Since 2018, they've looked at neighborhoods in Youngstown, Campbell and Struthers, where the Land

Bank has performed the greatest number of its demolitions.

"We're looking at about one-third of the city of Youngstown," said Bralich. "This is a long-term effort and we won't be able to quantify the results until the next property valuation. However, one immediate impact we're seeing is the reduction in vacancy and blight. That has improved significantly."

Another one of the Land Bank's community partners, Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corp., has reported similar trends. In its 2014-2018 Neighborhood Action Plan Impact Analysis, it found that vacancy has decreased dramatically citywide, from 3,927 vacant structures in 2014 to 2,226 in 2018.

The Land Bank has been a pipeline for YNDC to acquire, renovate and sell 43 houses in Youngstown.

YNDC also reported that homeownership rates have stabilized and property values have increased significantly in those areas, from an average sale price of \$35,235 in 2014 to \$50,544 in 2018. It also found that crime has decreased significantly in the targeted neighborhoods.

In addition to adding economic value to neighborhoods, the Land Bank has worked with organizations to improve environmental factors.

For the past three years, it has partnered with Youngstown CityScape to recycle more than 150 evergreen trees by removing them from planters in downtown Youngstown and replanting them at vacant properties owned and maintained by the Land Bank.

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**Community Impact continued**

The Community Corrections Association and Municipal Action Corp. help the Land Bank recycle Christmas trees by removing evergreens from downtown planters and replanting them in vacant lots.

In 2020, the Land Bank launched an environmental initiative with the YSU Legacy Forest project, an effort by faculty and students to plant a tree for each incoming freshman and create micro-forests throughout the Mahoning Valley. The program was first proposed by Lauren Schroeder, YSU emeritus professor, and grew to include a committee of faculty, staff and students in the YSU Environmental Science program. The goal is to plant native trees to offset carbon footprints and slow climate warming.

Through its various partnerships, the Land Bank plays an instrumental role in removing blight and adding economic, societal and environmental benefits to communities in Mahoning County.

In 2020, it was featured in a book titled, "The Land Bank Revolution: How Ohio's Communities Fought Back Against the Foreclosure Crisis." Authors Jim Rokakis of Western Reserve Land Conservancy and Gus Frangos, executive director of Cuyahoga Land Bank, highlight how county land banks played a major role in raising money, demolishing tens of thousands of vacant and abandoned properties and improving communities that were hit hard by the Great Recession.



**Executive Director Debora Flora is among the land bank leaders quoted in the book:**

"The demolition of a vacant house is just the first step to what we do as land banks," said Flora. "But our mission as a whole is to establish how we can make these spaces productive again. Whether that is working with community groups to install bus stops or create flexible parks where children and neighbors can gather for games, picnics or reading books from the little free libraries located there – we work with individuals in the communities to find out what those neighborhoods need."



# A Message from the Executive Director

Anniversaries are celebrations of enduring commitments. Throughout its first decade of operations, Mahoning County Land Bank has enjoyed many successes, as detailed in this report. We also honor and respect the early work of many community-minded persons.

In late 2008, the Ohio Legislature authorized Cuyahoga County to begin a statewide pilot project to return vacant, abandoned property to productivity. The Cuyahoga County Land Bank was supposed to operate for at least two years before the legislature would consider expanding the program, but Mahoning County could not afford to wait. With one in five Youngstown houses being statistically empty, the city had one of the largest inventories of vacant and abandoned properties per capita in the nation, along with all of the associated costs and dangers.

I made several trips to and from Columbus in 2009 with concerned citizens who became the Mahoning County Land Bank's early allies. Thanks to those coordinated lobbying efforts, legislation that opened the land banking door to other counties was approved by both chambers of the Ohio General Assembly -- on the same day -- in April 2010.

Simultaneously, regional philanthropic groups launched a contest to inspire governmental collaboration and efficiency toward strengthening the Northeast Ohio economy. Youngstown, Austintown, Campbell and Struthers co-sponsored Mahoning County's contest entry, titled "Grounds for Change." Community organizers encouraged citizens to vote for local projects. Among 10 regional finalists, "Grounds for Change" was the top vote-getter and thus received start-up funding for the Mahoning County Land Bank.

When state legislators expanded the county land bank system, they did not mandate participation; decisions were to be made at the county level. By the time the Mahoning County commissioners voted on the matter in February 2011 to formally establish a county land bank, they already had received words of encouragement from residents, church congregations, civic organizations and members of the Mahoning County Townships Association. Then volunteers were sought to serve on the Land Bank's board of directors. Those leaders continue to be a mix of local and county government officials and representatives from the business and nonprofit sectors.

Forming a land bank made Mahoning County eligible for more than \$18 million to clear away empty, badly damaged houses in 16 communities. It streamlined and amplified a system by which abandoned, tax-delinquent properties could become productive again. Neighborhood stability has increased in many places, thanks to the outstanding work of the Land Bank's numerous partners.

Residents of Mahoning County sparked the momentum to establish the Land Bank a decade ago. In return, the Land Bank remains committed to improving residents' lives through vacant property revitalization. In this effort, we have found common ground.

**Debora Flora**



# Thanks to Our Village

The Land Bank has demonstrated what an enormous impact it can make on a community through demolitions, acquisitions and repurposing efforts and, most importantly, through community collaboration.

It truly does take a village to achieve productive change in a neighborhood, community, county and region.

Our staff and board members would like to thank the village in which we've been glad to be a part.

Our mission has always been to acquire vacant, abandoned, tax-delinquent properties and make them productive spaces again, and it's our community counterparts who help us see that through and bring change to Mahoning County.

Thank you, to our Mahoning County "village."

Land Bank staff include Roger Smith, Gary Davenport, Sandra Nehlen, Steven Brown, Cathie Hicks and Debora Flora.



## The Land Bank is governed by a Board of Directors:

### DANIEL YEMMA

*Mahoning County Treasurer, Board Chair*

### ROSE CARTER

*ACTION Executive Director, Board Vice Chair*

### LARRY MOLITERNO

*Boardman Township Trustee, Board Treasurer and Large Townships Representative*

### J. MICHAEL PINKERTON

*Former Village of Sebring Mayor, Board Secretary and Small Cities & Villages Representative*

### DAVID DITZLER

*Mahoning County Commissioner, Board Member*

### CAROL RIMEDIO-RIGHETTI

*Mahoning County Commissioner, Board Member*

### WILLIAM "ARTIE" SPELLMAN

*Ellsworth Township Trustee, Small Townships Board Representative*

### GWENDOLYN BUSH

*Real Estate Professional, City of Youngstown Board Representative*

### RICHARD CHASE

*Mahoning Valley Real Estate Investors Association, Real Estate Investors Board Representative*






  
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