

MAHONING COUNTY LAND BANK: 15 YEARS OF IMPACT

FULFILLING THE PROMISE OF PROPERTY



Our staff recently toured Flying High Inc.'s Molina Training Center, built on land acquired and assembled by the Land Bank. Read more about this partnership on page 9 and see how we are turning the promise of every property into a blueprint for impact.

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From Demolition to Building Back

In 2011, the Mahoning County Land Reutilization Corporation — known today as the Mahoning County Land Bank — began with one clear purpose: to tackle the growing challenge of vacant, distressed and abandoned properties across Mahoning County. These neglected sites contributed to declining neighborhood safety, lower property values and a diminished sense of place.

What started as a focused effort to remove blight through demolition, lot clearing and greening has grown into a comprehensive approach to community revitalization. Over the past 15 years, the Land Bank has evolved from clearing eyesores to building back vibrant neighborhoods, restoring homes, renewing industrial properties and unlocking land for future opportunity.

With the simple yet powerful motto that **“Every Property has Promise,”** the Land Bank partners with local governments, nonprofit developers, investors and residents to turn neglected parcels into productive assets that strengthen neighborhoods and support economic growth.

From its early years of demolition to today’s focus on housing construction, rehabilitation, commercial redevelopment and greening, the Land Bank’s story is one of transformation — laying the groundwork for a more resilient, inclusive and flourishing Mahoning County.



OUR EARLY ROOTS

2004 - Vacancy and property abandonment are high in Youngstown and evident 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, Struthers and Austintown 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.

FEBRUARY 2011 - Mahoning County Commissioners vote to create Mahoning County Land Reutilization Corporation.

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“EVERY PROPERTY HAS PROMISE”

Fifteen years ago, the Mahoning County Land Reutilization Corporation – Mahoning County Land Bank – was established with a clear mission: to acquire vacant, distressed or abandoned properties and restore them through rehabilitation or demolition and greening, creating cleaner, safer neighborhoods in Mahoning County.

Our motto is simple but profound: **Every property has promise.** What was once a lost collection of forgotten lots, blighted houses and contaminated industrial sites now holds the potential for new life. The Land Bank is the hub – the center of the wheel connecting businesses, nonprofits, individuals, private investors and state and local governments, to see that through.

A Brief History

At its inception in 2011 the Land Bank focused heavily on demolition, lot clearing, greening initiatives and stabilizing properties that threatened neighborhood health and safety. The early years produced hundreds of demolitions, lot assemblages and the beginnings of reuse. Since then, we have evolved. Today we’re focused squarely on new housing construction, renovation, commercial redevelopment and teaming with economic development partners to build back what was once lost.

The Center of the Wheel

We are the coordinator and accelerator of progress. We bring together state funding, local government, nonprofit developers, builders, community groups and private investors to make revitalization happen. We take vacant and forgotten land, acquire it, assemble it, clear titles, remove blight or contamination and then link it to a partner who builds, reuses or re-imagines it.

New Construction

22
New Homes Built

Home Rehabilitation

60+
Homes Renovated

Commercial Redevelopment

8
Brownfield Sites Developed

With access to funds from the Ohio Department of Development’s Welcome Home Ohio program, a state-funded initiative to provide more affordable housing, we have partnered with local governments and community partners to build affordable new homes, mostly on lots that were previously vacant, acquired and then held by the Land Bank.

Through acquisition and partnerships with owner-occupants or investors, the Land Bank uses our portfolio to put homes back into productive use.

The Land Bank’s Make It Yours (MIY) program enables qualified owner-occupants to buy Land Bank-owned houses at reduced prices. The Land Bank will “seal” the exterior and the buyer takes care of the rest.

The Land Bank has secured nearly \$12.7 million from the Ohio Department of Development since the state launched its Brownfield Remediation Program in 2022 to remediate industrial and commercial sites, removing environmental barriers and positioning the sites for redevelopment.





NEW CONSTRUCTION & INFILL HOUSING

22

New Homes Built:
19 in Youngstown
1 in Campbell
1 in Sebring
1 in Struthers

The Land Bank’s role in expanding housing options has gained momentum in recent years. By assembling vacant lots and leveraging state and local resources, it supports the creation of new, affordable homes in communities across Mahoning County, which offers individuals and families the security and long-term stability that comes with home ownership.

Through strategic partnerships with organizations like the Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation and funding from the Ohio Department of Development’s *Welcome Home Ohio* program, the Land Bank has helped launch numerous new builds in Youngstown, Struthers, Campbell and Sebring, with plans to continue in neighboring communities.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: MINERAL SPRINGS AVENUE

In just one year, from 2024 to 2025, the Land Bank and YNDC built seven new single-family homes on Mineral Springs Avenue. The single-block street, once full of tax-delinquent and abandoned homes, experienced a total transformation.



With property tax abatements and down payment assistance available to qualified buyers, this project reflects the potential for affordable homeownership and reinvestment in Mahoning County’s communities.



STRUTHERS INFILL HOUSING



“We don’t have a lot of available land – we’re landlocked.

What we do have are vacant lots where homes were demolished.

Being able to fill in these spaces throughout the city has been incredible. And the Land Bank has been essential to making it happen. We couldn’t be more thankful for how they’ve plugged into our plan.”

-Struthers Mayor Catherine Cercione Miller, third from right, at a ribbon cutting event for a new home.





HOME RENOVATIONS & NEIGHBORHOOD RESTORATION

Building strong neighborhoods goes beyond new construction. The Land Bank also returns existing houses to productive use through strategic home renovations that preserve original character while expanding affordable housing options.

With the ability to acquire tax-delinquent and vacant homes, the Land Bank secures state funding and works closely with trusted community partners such as the Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation to complete renovations. In 2025, four homes were renovated and sold, with two additional houses targeted for completion in Spring 2026.

The Land Bank also facilitates rehabilitation through our Make it Yours (MIY) program, formerly known as Deed-in-Escrow. Through this program, homes are sold to qualified buyers at reduced prices, enabling renovations that meet local standards and return properties to the tax rolls.

Over the years, more than 60 homes have been successfully renovated through this approach, supported by inspection reports, guided project oversight and clear ownership transitions.

FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF PENNSYLVANIA BACKS “MIY”

The refreshed Make it Yours program is supported by a partnership with First National Bank of Pennsylvania, whose financial backing will help expand access to renovation opportunities and lower barriers for qualified buyers. We will now offer two renovation pathways through this program:

MIY: WHOLE HOUSE

This is designed for owner-occupants and investors pursuing full-scale rehabilitation. Homes are offered at modest sale prices and include detailed inspection reports outlining required repairs, inside and out, to meet local building codes. Participants fund renovations while the Land Bank retains ownership, monitors progress and transfers the deed once all requirements are met.

MIY: INSIDE FINISH

This option enables buyers to focus on interior renovations at their own pace and cost. The Land Bank first secures and seals the exterior – including roofs, doors and windows – creating a solid foundation for buyers to complete interior improvements at their own pace, based on a budget they can afford.

60+

**Homes Renovated
through Deed-in-
Escrow Program**



INDUSTRIAL & COMMERCIAL CLEANUP & REDEVELOPMENT

The Land Bank is helping to reignite the local economy by accessing and transforming underutilized industrial sites and commercial brownfields, thereby creating opportunities for growth. We work with state funding sources to support the critical cleanup efforts to remove environmental barriers and pave the way for redevelopment, economic investment and job creation.

Since 2022, we have secured eight brownfield remediation grants totaling more than \$12.7 million from the Ohio Department of Development in support of redevelopment progress at major sites, including historic industrial buildings and long-vacant commercial parcels. These efforts have repositioned these formerly “stuck” sites for future use.

Serving as a bridge between environmental remediation and economic development, we have helped attract private investment, support commercial activity and strengthen local tax bases, all while supporting local contractors involved in completing the work.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: YOUNGSTOWN FLEA REMEDIATION

One highly visible cleanup project involved the historic **Youngstown Flea** building, where hazardous, asbestos-laden caulking was removed and nearly 4,000 panes of glass – the majority of the building’s exterior – were replaced. This critical improvement sealed the building, which made future improvements possible. The project not only enhanced functionality and appearance, but also preserved the economic impact of the Flea and its vendors.



“These large brownfield grants fund work that communities simply can’t afford on their own. By cleaning up these sites, we’re making it possible for businesses to invest, create jobs and bring new life to underused properties.”

-Debora Flora, Land Bank Executive Director





LAND ACQUISITION & SIDE LOT TRANSFORMATION

THOUSANDS OF VACANT PARCELS ACQUIRED & MANAGED

Acquiring land is the first step in reclaiming underproductive spaces. The Land Bank strategically acquires properties that stand in the way of neighborhood stability, whether through tax foreclosure or donation. Once in hand, land can be assembled, cleared or prepared for housing, business expansion, community use or greening.

Our Side Lot Program invites owner-occupants to expand their yard space by acquiring adjacent vacant lots, many of which were once-blighted parcels. More than 3,300 parcels of land have been transferred to individuals, businesses and local municipalities in the last 15 years.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: UNLOCKING A FORGOTTEN PARCEL FOR LOCAL RESTAURANT

A notable example of this work is the Land Bank’s partnership with Anne Massullo-Sabella, owner of **Avalon Downtown Pizzeria** in downtown Youngstown. Her family had owned the building since the 1970s, but decades later discovered that a portion of the rear addition had been built on a separate parcel that was never included in the original purchase. Although the space had been used and maintained all of those years, the ownership issue did not come to light until the early 2020s, when Massullo-Sabella needed to find a legal path forward.

She turned to the Land Bank, which was able to acquire the forgotten parcel and transfer it to her – helping her avoid more time-consuming and costly alternatives.

While the acquisition and transfer were relatively straightforward for the Land Bank, the impact was significant for the restaurant. Resolving the ownership issue also enabled Massullo-Sabella to create a more accessible rear entrance for customers when construction was limiting foot traffic through the front.





GREENING & ADAPTIVE REUSE

Since its early days, the Land Bank has been using greening initiatives to transform vacant land into vibrant community spaces. From parks to gardens and flexible green spaces, the Land Bank works with local contractors and landscapers to design and implement spaces that invite gatherings, little free libraries, recreational spaces and community use. These efforts reduce blight, improve neighborhood safety and support a range of activities.

Beyond beautification, adaptive reuse encourages creative repurposing of land — whether for solar access, community events or ecological benefit — and helps neighborhoods, parks and communities thrive in ways that reflect local needs and support the environment.



More than 80 native plant varieties are grown from seed and planted across Land Bank properties, parks and community spaces.



Here’s a flashback to 2019 with Debora Flora, when the Land Bank received a beautification award for land repurposing efforts including adding a WRTA bus stop in place of a demolished dilapidated house.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: SOWING SEEDS FOR COMMUNITY GROWTH

The Land Bank partners with **CityScape at Briel’s Greenhouse** to grow native plants from seed, nurturing them locally before transplanting them across Land Bank properties and throughout **Mill Creek MetroParks**. These plantings strengthen local ecosystems while enhancing the appearance and function of vacant land. The partnership recently expanded to include plant sales at the **Mahoning Soil & Water Conservation District’s** Pollinator Palooza, giving the community an opportunity to take part in greening efforts. This collaborative approach demonstrates how strategic partnerships can extend the impact of greening initiatives, which benefit neighborhoods, parks and the broader environment.



COMMUNITY PARTNER SPOTLIGHTS

The Land Bank is shining the spotlight on community partners through a video series, which will be released throughout 2026. Here are some words from four of 15 individuals and organizations who share their stories and showcase the powerful results of collaboration.



Anne
Massullo-Sabella

Owner,
Avalon Downtown
Pizzeria

“It was so easy and smooth working with the Land Bank. There were several avenues we could have taken to legally obtain this additional parcel attached to our building ... the Land Bank provided the best and easiest solution to remedy this situation to everybody’s benefit. Other avenues would have presented a much lengthier transaction at much more cost.”

Jeff
Magada

Founder,
Executive Director
Flying High Inc.

“This is how I think our system is supposed to work – where the public sector removes the hurdles for the private sector to make progress in the community. And that’s exactly what happened here, I think this is a perfect example of that. And because of that, the end result is, lives are being changed. People are becoming more economically stable because of this partnership.”

Derrick
McDowell

Founder,
Youngstown Flea

“The Land Bank has carried not only the wisdom that we needed to navigate the process of going after the state’s brownfield remediation grant, they also carried the patience. When we first went after this grant, the application closed on us. But the Land Bank didn’t close the conversation on us. They didn’t close the opportunity for us. They stuck beside us and worked with us until we were successful at getting the grant. And they’re still walking with us.”

Ian
Beniston

Executive Director,
Youngstown
Neighborhood
Development Corp.

“I’ve been working with the Land Bank since day one ... there’s been a synergy and longstanding relationship in the most sincere way. My favorite part of working together is that they make everything easy. We’ve worked on so many projects together and I have many favorite moments, but above all it’s about how our partnership actually works and functions very well. We can get a lot done together.”



Follow us on Facebook and LinkedIn to watch these videos and more partner spotlights as they’re released throughout 2026.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS



**Center for Community Progress /
National Land Bank Network**

East Side Home Owners & Concerned Citizens

Economic Action Group

First National Bank of Pennsylvania

**Healthy Community Partnership /
Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley**

Mahoning County Commissioners

Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office

Mahoning County Soil & Water District

Martin Luther Lutheran Church

Mill Creek MetroParks

National Community Stabilization Trust

Ohio Department of Development

Ohio Land Bank Association

Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Ohio State University Extension

Rocky Ridge Neighborhood Association

Rotary Club of Youngstown

**Thriving Communities Institute, Western Reserve
Land Conservancy**

The Raymond John Wean Foundation

Western Reserve Port Authority

**Youngstown Neighborhood Development
Corporation**

Youngstown CityScape

**Youngstown City Code Enforcement and Blight
Remediation**

**Youngstown State University Center for Urban
Research & Studies**

**Youngstown State University Departments of Art,
Geography and Mathematics**

**Youngstown State University Center for Nonprofit
Leadership**

Youngstown Warren Regional Chamber

Every property has promise. We unlock the potential.

Together, with our community partners, we're growing Mahoning County's appeal, vitality and economic strength.

With our ability to provide a unique suite of services designed to unlock the potential of distressed, abandoned and tax-delinquent properties, we work hand-in-hand with a wide variety of community partners to put properties back to productive use.

**10,000+ properties
positively impacted through:**

Property transfers
New home construction
Home rehabilitation
Demolition work
Brownfield cleanup
Land clearing and beautification efforts

**\$79 million generated
in economic impact over the last 15 years.**

Includes contracts with local companies and service providers that support local employment and generate significant tax revenues.





LOOKING AHEAD: From the Executive Director

As a leader in distressed, abandoned, tax-delinquent property reclamation and redevelopment, the Mahoning County Land Bank works to create more vibrant communities, increase economic investment and enhance residents' quality of life. **This is how we deliver on the promise of property.**

The Land Bank's impact on Mahoning County has grown significantly these past 15 years. Cumulatively, we've elevated the local economy by securing grants totaling \$36 million for new construction, brownfield cleanups, demolitions and greening projects. Ninety-four cents of every grant dollar was spent on these projects, resulting in job creation and increased desirability, safety and security in our neighborhoods and business districts. Communities are becoming cleaner and greener because of the Land Bank. We remain committed to this work as Mahoning County competes locally, statewide and nationally to accelerate economic and population growth.

If the Land Bank is the center of the revitalization wheel, then our partners and neighbors are its spokes. They are essential to the wheel's performance and longevity because they add strength and stability. I am inspired by community spokes who continue the promise of property.

Flying HIGH Inc. opened the Molina Training Center in September 2024 to prepare young adults for in-demand construction and manufacturing jobs. It was built on formerly vacant land at Kensington and Bissell avenues in Youngstown, which the Land Bank acquired and assembled for the project. One year later, Flying HIGH continued the promise by adding on to the center to accommodate high interest from students and employers.

Johnny Prejean, formerly of Houston, Texas, was preparing to relocate his family to western Pennsylvania when he learned of the Land Bank's housing partnership with Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation. He purchased one of seven new single-family homes on Mineral Springs Avenue – on the edge of Mill Creek Park – and continued the promise by installing a modern entertainment wall in the first-floor, open-concept living space. His skills are impressive!

Many others have continued the promise. Homeowners seek the Land Bank's help with yard expansions and then beautify those spaces in attractive ways. Business owners create and expand their operations by absorbing underutilized properties through the Land Bank.

Here's to another 15 years of transformation!

Debora Flora



GET INVOLVED!

Promote Your Services and Lake-to-River Region

Great news! Mahoning County Land Bank has been selected to host the 16th Annual Ohio Land Bank Conference.

And, Debora Flora is the president-elect of the Ohio Land Bank Association, which provides a unified voice for 71 county land banks on matters of policy and funding.

This conference will shine a light on the good work of the MCLB and its partners, displaying the rise of Mahoning County and why it is a great place to live, work, play and invest. While MCLB is the conference lead, we have invited land banks that comprise the Lake-to-River region to be our partners. Strong voices working together help every community rise!

The April 2027 OLBA conference offers a tremendous opportunity for our sponsors. The conference provides for fabulous networking with hundreds of attendees and will be an economic driver for all involved. Look for more announcements on these exciting efforts or, for more information about our conferences now, please contact Debora directly at dflora@mahoninglandbank.com.



THANKS TO OUR WHEEL THAT DRIVES ECONOMIC GROWTH



As we mark this milestone anniversary, our motto is simple yet profound: **Every property has promise.** What once seemed lost – forgotten lots, blighted houses or contaminated industrial and commercial sites – each holds the potential for new life. The Land Bank serves as the hub, connecting businesses, nonprofits, individuals, private investors and state and local governments to see that through.

To all our partners that make up the wheel of impact – local governments, nonprofits, funders, builders, home-buyers and neighbors – thank you for believing that every property has promise. Thank you for showing up, investing, collaborating and committing to what was once unproductive. Because of you, what was vacant is becoming vibrant. What was blighted is becoming beautiful. What was forgotten is becoming foundational. Let’s keep the momentum going. **Every property has promise. And together, we will fulfill it.**

Meet the Landbankers



Jocelyn Steven Cathie Deb Roger Gary Serene

- Debora Flora,**
Executive Director
- Cathie Hicks,**
Fiscal Officer
- Roger Smith,**
Director of Planning
- Gary Davenport,**
Project Coordinator
- Steven Brown,**
Property Inspector
- Sandra Nehlen,**
Admin. Assistant
- Jocelyn Borrell,**
Property Inspector
- Serene Awad,**
Project Associate
- George Rusnak,**
Field Specialist
- Atty. Christopher Sammarone,**
Legal Representative

The Land Bank is governed by a board of directors:

DANIEL YEMMA Mahoning County Treasurer, Board Chair	LARRY MOLITERNO Boardman Twp. Trustee, Large Townships Rep. Board Treasurer	GENO DIFABIO Mahoning County Commissioner, Board Member	CAROL RIMEDIO-RIGHETTI Mahoning County Commissioner, Board Member
REV. ROLANDO ROJAS Pastor, Spanish Evangelical Church, Non-Profit Org. Rep.	WILLIAM "ARTIE" SPELLMAN Ellsworth Twp. Trustee, Small Townships Rep.	GWENDOLYN BUSH Real Estate Professional, Large Municipality Rep. City of Youngstown	RICHARD CHASE Mahoning Valley Real Estate Investors Association, Real Estate Investors Rep.
			JAMES HARP Former Mayor, Village of Sebring, Small Cities & Villages Rep.



JOIN THE IMPACT



SUPPORT THE MAHONING COUNTY LAND BANK

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This conference will shine a light on the good work of the Mahoning County Land Bank and our partners, displaying the rise of this region and why it is a great place to live, work, play and invest. It'll provide networking opportunities with hundreds of attendees, all focused on economic development.

Get involved by becoming a sponsor of the event. Stay tuned and follow us on social media for updates, or contact Debora Flora directly at dflora@mahoninglandbank.com.

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STAY IN TOUCH



We'd love for you to connect with us:

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THE DIRT

An update from the Mahoning County Land Bank

Visit our Website → What's Happening → The Dirt Newsletter

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Every Property Has Promise.



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