

Regenerating Youngstown and Mahoning County

Through Vacant Property Reclamation

Reforming Systems and Right-sizing Markets



National Vacant Properties Campaign Policy Assessment Report
Dan Kildee, Jonathan Logan, Alan Mallach, and Joseph Schilling
February 2009

The Youngstown-Mahoning County VPI

The Youngstown-Mahoning County Vacant Properties Initiative (VPI) is a diverse coalition of public officials, nonprofit organizations, business leaders, and citizens seeking to collectively address the vacant and abandoned properties challenges facing Youngstown and Mahoning County. In the fall of 2007, Wick Neighbors, Inc. convened the VPI in response to the practical, how-to neighborhood reinvestment workshops held in 2006. These workshops engaged a full range of community participation. Several of the sessions focused on model vacant property strategies and tools from other cities.

The main focus of the VPI is to create and revise existing city and county systems to reclaim vacant properties. By improving existing city and county policies and programs, the VPI seeks better integration and coordination of vacant property management efforts to more effectively prevent, acquire, and reuse these assets. The VPI intends to:

- *raise awareness about the effects of vacant properties on communities, neighborhoods, and the area's housing market;*
- *advance both the public and private sectors' capacity to prevent and reclaim vacant properties;*
- *evaluate and adopt model programs and lessons learned from similar initiatives in other cities such as Buffalo, Cleveland, Toledo, Flint, Dayton, and Richmond;*
- *shape a more robust and efficient land-banking program for future revitalization;*
- *develop coordination and communication protocols within and among city and county agencies;*
- *produce a strategic short- and long-term action agenda outlining official recommendations;*
- *evaluate the adoption and implement these strategies in light of what stakeholders can do; and*
- *create a coordinating council to oversee the implementation of the strategic plan recommendations.*

Vacant Properties Initiative Partners

Recognizing the broad impact of vacant properties, the VPI steering committee is comprised of members from a number of state, county, and city organizations along with community groups and the private sector. This unprecedented illustration of regional collaboration includes representation from:

- Mahoning County: County Commissioners and Treasurer's Office
- City of Youngstown: Department of the Mayor, Community Development Agency, and City Council
- Wick Neighbors, Inc.
- Lien Forward Ohio
- The Home Savings & Loan Company
- Coldwell Banker First Place Real Estate
- State of Ohio Department of Development
- St. Patrick's Church
- Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative

See Appendix A for a full list of the VPI Steering Committee.

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Acknowledgments



Our work in Youngstown/Mahoning County would not have been possible without the continuous support of our local host, Wick Neighbors, Inc. Early on Executive Director Margaret Murphy recognized the need for vacant property policy reforms and issued the initial invitations to form the Vacant Properties Initiative (VPI). She and her thoughtful staff provided strong coordination and management of the project.

We also want to acknowledge the tireless effort by members of the local VPI Steering Committee who shared their thoughts about vacant property reform and also reviewed and commented on preliminary drafts of the report. A special thank you to the VPI co-chairs, County Commissioner John McNally and Youngstown Mayor's Chief of Staff Jason Whitehead for rallying the troops for the NVPC's work and providing strong leadership and commitment to the study and its findings. This project was made possible through the financial support of Mahoning County, the City of Youngstown, Home Savings and Loan Charitable Trust, The John and Doris Andrews Foundation, and the Dominion Foundation.

The NVPC assessment team is especially grateful to the local officials and individuals it interviewed from the City of Youngstown, Mahoning County, Austintown and Boardman townships, Youngstown State, and community organizations for their time, openness, and responsiveness to the NVPC team's questions and suggestions. The oversight of this report's recommendations now firmly rests within the hands of each member of the VPI.

We are indebted to the National Vacant Properties Campaign production team, Director Jennifer Leonard and freelance writer and editor Lisa Schamess. We also want to thank those amateur photographers whose images adorn the cover and pages of the report: Ian Beniston, Deb Flora, Heather McMahon, and Joseph Schilling.

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Introduction: Toward a Priority Approach to Vacant Properties

Neighborhood decline, caused by decades of vacant property blight and abandonment, poses one of the most significant barriers to the regeneration of Youngstown, Ohio, and the surrounding communities of Mahoning County. Throughout city and county government and at community meetings, the constant refrain is, “What can we do to address the problems of vacant properties?” Although local governments and nonprofits have numerous individual initiatives, the growing number of vacant properties is too great for any one entity to manage alone.

Throughout [Youngstown’s government and communities] the constant refrain is, “What can we do to address the problems of vacant properties?”

As residents and leaders of Youngstown and Mahoning County reflect on the past and chart a new course for 2009, this report urges all sectors (government, civic, nonprofit, and business) to make the reclamation of vacant properties their top priority. These partners must put aside past differences and develop new, collaborative strategies that prevent, abate, acquire, manage, and

reuse vacant and abandoned properties. The growing cancer of blight and abandonment presents the region with its greatest challenge, yet simultaneously offers a tremendous opportunity. This report proposes a holistic policy framework, supported by regional collaboration and a step-by-step action plan to coordinate vacant property programs, rebuild community capacity, and right-size shrinking markets.

Offering a pragmatic menu of policy reforms and specific actions for the city and county to implement, the report scans existing programs and policies in Youngstown and Mahoning County through a systems lens. **It is not an in-depth management evaluation of the costs, benefits, or performance of these systems.** By conducting an overview of existing vacant property policies and programs, the assessment team can assist Youngstown and Mahoning County to better integrate and coordinate efforts to prevent, acquire, and reuse vacant and abandoned properties.

The NVPC Policy Assessment Process

Since 2004 the National Vacant Properties Campaign (NVPC) has provided technical assistance to more than 25 communities throughout the United States. Within Ohio, NVPC has completed vacant property policy assessments for Cleveland (2004), Dayton (2004) and Toledo (2007). NVPC has also worked closely with Rebuild Ohio, Cuyahoga County, the First Tier Suburbs Alliance of Cuyahoga County, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland.

NVPC’s field work includes community workshops, policy roundtables, scoping visits, and comprehensive policy assessments. Tapping the expertise and experience of practitioners from other cities is one of the hallmarks of NVPC’s technical assistance. Another critical element is the formation of a local advisory group or steering committee to guide NVPC’s assessment

team. Typically the sponsors or the hosts of the assessment project coordinate and convene a diverse group of stakeholders who have direct involvement or interest in vacant property reclamation. The team works closely with all members of the advisory group to get their insights about the challenges and brainstorm possible solutions. Through this collaborative assessment process, the local participants gain a deeper appreciation of the multiple dimensions of vacant property reclamation and how strategies from other communities can be adapted to meet local conditions. Although each assessment project is unique, NVPC essentially followed this successful formula for its work in Youngstown/Mahoning County.



The Youngstown-Mahoning County Assessment

After several conversations and a scoping visit in 2007, the Youngstown-Mahoning County Vacant Properties Initiative (VPI) steering committee requested that NVPC design a work plan and proposal to conduct a regional assessment of existing vacant property policies and programs in the City of Youngstown and Mahoning County. The NVPC goal is to identify the challenges and opportunities facing the city and the county and propose recommendations for how to proceed.

From June 9 through June 11, 2008, the NVPC team met with representatives of the city, county, development community, real estate sector, nonprofits, and educational institutions to discuss the on-the-ground situation in Youngstown and Mahoning County. City and county officials, agency staff, developers, Youngstown State University faculty, and representatives of nonprofits working to address vacant and abandoned properties provided useful insights into how the city and county can move forward.

During the summer and fall the team conducted telephone interviews to engage additional individuals or groups. The VPI also reviewed preliminary draft reports and formed four working groups around the report's major topics to offer feedback and guidance. Although the assess-

ment team did not accept every comment or suggestion, it did its best to reframe and revise its analysis and recommendations in light of the VPI's feedback.



The NVPC's project work is organized into three phases: 1) an assessment report that evaluates existing city and county vacant property systems (programs, policies, and projects); 2) an action plan of next steps for implementing the report's recommendations; and 3) pilot testing the system reforms and convening special implementation workshops (e.g., land banking and code enforcement). This report and the policy brief that supplements it cover the first two phases of the NVPC intervention.



The assessment team was comprised of Joseph Schilling, associate director of the Green Regions Initiative at Virginia Tech's Metropolitan Institute; Daniel Kildee, Genesee County, MI, Genesee County Treasurer and executive director of the Genesee Institute in Flint, MI, Alan Mallach, non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, and Jonathan Logan, design coordinator at the Rochester Regional Community Design Center in Rochester, NY. For biographical information on the assessment team members, please see the Appendix C.

Policy Problems and Priorities in Youngstown and Mahoning County

Government Vacant Property Systems Need Retooling: Effective vacant property initiatives require systems that local governments, nonprofits, community organizations, and business can easily understand and implement. Unfortunately, most communities operate under cumbersome and outmoded government programs and policies. In the Youngstown region, the city controls some of these government systems while Mahoning County takes the lead in others. Although the city and county have several successful programs and initiatives that cover vacant properties and facilitate neighborhood revitalization, they do not operate as a holistic system. Each enterprise has its own priorities and goals with varying levels of resources and staff capacity: The results are isolated to certain projects and not sustainable throughout the city or the region.

Youngstown has several vacant property programs that need retooling, such as code enforcement and housing/community development. Moreover, the city and the county are missing some of the fundamental tools to aggressively attack vacant properties. For example, they do not have a land bank that can systematically acquire, manage, and reclaim vacant land, nor do they possess a real property information system to track vacant properties. The challenge is to immediately develop these essential tools and then coordinate these government systems across the city and the county so they can leverage the expertise and resources of each toward a common mission.

Regional Vacant Properties Strategy Is Lacking: Although promising programs are on the ground in Youngstown and Mahoning County, no truly regional strategy exists to reclaim vacant properties. The lack of regional consensus results in part from the old perception that abandonment and disinvestment are largely city problems. And yet everyone recognizes the region's long-term economic viability and vitality depend on having healthy core communities. A regional vacant properties strategy will go a long way toward uniting the city and county in this collaborative endeavor by pooling resources and minimizing duplicative efforts.

Although the weakest markets are in the city of Youngstown, the region's economic indicators also illustrate a steady decline. In light of sprawling development patterns and the current foreclosure crisis, vacancy and blight are gaining a foothold in the first-ring suburban communities such as Austintown and Boardman Township. As a result, the region's suburban communities also need to join the battle against vacant properties by partnering with the County and the City in deploying strategies designed to prevent and contain the spread of blight and decay.

Civic and Business Partnerships Are Needed: The problems of vacancy and abandonment are so great that no single entity can address them alone. Government must work closely with neighborhood and community development organizations as well as foundations and the business sector. Community development corporations (CDCs) have become the pioneers and catalyst of urban revitalization in scores of communities across the nation. Using a blend of public and philanthropic funds, successful CDCs are known for infill development projects that stabilize decaying neighborhoods. Youngstown, unfortunately, does not have a strong tradition of CDCs compared with places such as Baltimore, Cleveland, or Pittsburgh. It will need to rebuild its community and civic capacity to join the battle against blight and abandonment. Moreover, the city and the nonprofit partners will have to devise a new CDC model for those neighborhoods with weak or nonexistent demand. Building new housing in those neighborhoods will likely fail given the oversupply through the city as a whole. Organizations such as Wick Neighbors, Inc., and the Wean Foundation, through their Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative (MVOC), are examples of how these partnerships can form and be implemented.

Youngstown will need to rebuild its community and civic capacity to join the battle against blight and abandonment.

Markets Should Be Right-Sized:¹ Youngstown's population is less than half of what it once was, but the physical footprint of the city—roads, housing, and commercial/industrial buildings—is still roughly the same. The exodus of residents left behind thousands of dilapidated homes, abandoned buildings and vacant lots. Youngstown's challenge is how to readjust or "right-size" the footprint of the city so it reflects the demands of the city's and the region's current and foreseeable future population. Beyond the direct costs and impacts of vacant properties, the oversupply of vacant land and abandoned buildings continues to weaken demand and therefore creates a serious dysfunction in the local and regional markets. As long as this imbalance remains, other policies and programs that stimulate demand for new industries, job growth, and development will be marginally successful.

For purposes of this report, right-sizing means developing a holistic and equitable process for stabilizing the most dysfunctional markets and distressed neighborhoods by adjusting the amount of land available for development; this process more closely aligns the built environment of a city with the needs of its existing and foreseeable future population.

¹The NVPC team acknowledges that many VPI members, along with officials and staff from the city and county, do not endorse the terms right-sizing and shrinking cities. Even within the planning and policy fields there is no consensus on these terms. The label of shrinking cities carries negative connotations that runs counter to the American ethic of growth and development. Policy reports and media articles have used other terms such as older industrial cities, low-performing cities, and weak-market cities; however, these terms do not fully describe the unique circumstances confronting cities with dramatically less population and more vacant properties. We use the term right-sizing because it best captures the process for addressing the challenge of vacant and abandoned properties.

The Vacant Property Challenge in Youngstown and Mahoning County

Youngstown was historically a single-industry town, and when that industry—steel-making—declined, the city’s economy followed, most dramatically during the decade of the 1970s. This history is shared by many other medium and small cities in the nation’s Rust Belt, from Upstate New York through the Midwest. From a population of about 170,000, which remained more or less the same from the 1930s through most of the 1960s, the city’s population has declined to roughly 80,000, less than half its peak population.²

Given the decline in population and jobs, housing market conditions in the city are extremely weak. A table of housing market indicators reports the 2005 median mortgage was only \$52,000, and conditions are likely to have deteriorated since then (Table 1). Rents, even in prime locations, rarely exceed \$500 per month. Both sales prices and rent levels are well below the levels at which they can cover the replacement cost of the unit, which is a minimum threshold requirement for motivating unsubsidized private development. Even in the city’s stronger neighborhoods, sales prices rarely exceed \$150,000, still well below replacement cost and a reflection of both weak demand and the low incomes of most families in the city.³

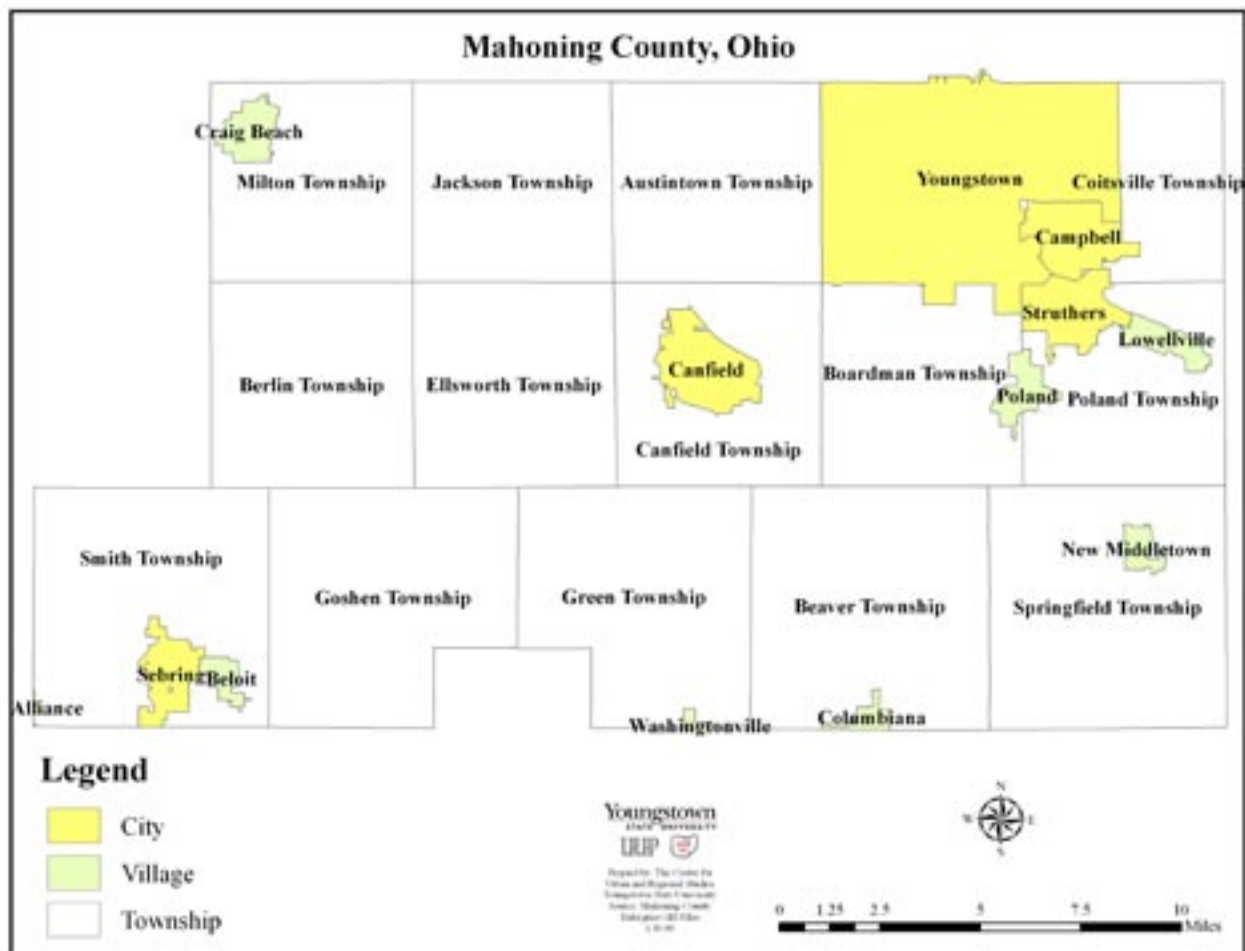
Table 1: Housing Market Indicators 1999-2005								
		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Median home purchase loan amount	City	\$37,500	\$39,000	\$44,000	\$41,000	\$46,000	\$50,000	\$52,000
	County	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$77,000	\$75,000	\$76,000
Number of purchase loans	City	740	764	689	754	702	817	818
	County	3,450	3,306	3,284	3,577	3,734	3,795	4,023
Purchase loans/1000 housing units	City	22	23	31	23	21	25	25
	County	35	33	33	36	38	38	41
% purchase loans not owner-occupied	City	14%	13%	12%	26%	21%	25%	22%
	County	7%	7%	7%	10%	8%	11%	11%
% purchase loans subprime	City	22%	16%	17%	26%	26%	32%	NA
	County	7%	7%	7%	10%	11%	15%	NA
% purchase loans to borrowers >80% AMI	City	28%	31%	31%	25%	24%	25%	25%
	County	61%	61%	60%	56%	55%	53%	53%
New dwelling units authorized by permit	City	60	9	56	59	42	130	9
	County	802	718	624	670	574	773	511

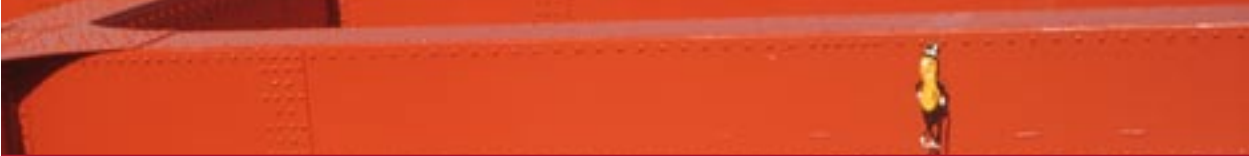
²According to official estimates, the 2006 population of Youngstown is 81,520, or largely unchanged from the 82,026 measured in the 2000 Census. We question the accuracy of the 2006 figure. According to the 2006 American Community Survey, the number of occupied housing units in Youngstown has dropped by nearly 4,000 since 2000. Assuming the upper limit of the margin of error range for the ACS data, the drop is still roughly 2,200. This is consistent with housing market data through 2005 that indicates a rate of home purchases only 70-75 percent of the level needed to replace likely turnover, as well as with estimates of the number of demolitions relative to the number of new units created. We would suggest that the actual 2006 population was more likely to be in the vicinity of 70,000 to 75,000. The ACS population tally is 70,459 with a margin of error of $\pm 3,696$.

³In 2006, the median household income in the city was under \$22,000, less than half of the Ohio median. During this period, only 6 percent of Youngstown’s households possessed incomes above \$75,000.

Youngstown in its Region

Although many regional issues are beyond the scope of the NVPC's systems analysis, the regional context dramatically influences the ability of city and county leaders to implement many of the recommendations set forth in this report. Youngstown is even more closely tied to its surrounding regions than cities of similar character. Its problems and opportunities are interwoven with those of Mahoning County, as well as the larger Youngstown-Warren MSA. Youngstown's economy is strongly linked to the surrounding area. Some 55 percent of all workers who live in Youngstown commute outside the city to work, while – according to estimates by the city's economic development office – more than 80 percent of all the workers in the city's new industrial parks live outside the city. Since house prices in surrounding villages and townships are relatively modest, it is not difficult for anyone who gets a good job to move from the city. Almost any household with two wage earners can afford a house in the nearby suburbs. Anecdotal evidence suggests the city's strongest residential neighborhoods – from a market perspective – are found at its perimeter (principally to the south and west), abutting similar neighborhoods in the adjacent suburbs.





Mahoning County and City of Youngstown: Quick Facts

Mahoning County is located in the northeastern portion of Ohio along the Pennsylvania border, with the City of Youngstown as its county seat.

- The county's population peaked in 1970 at 303,424 and declined to 257,555 in 2000. In 2007, the U.S. Census estimated its population to have further declined to 240,420 and projections indicate that the decline will continue through 2030, to 226,800. The city population peaked in 1930 at 170,002 and declined to 82,026 in 2000. The U.S. Census estimated population to have declined to 73,818 in 2007. Projections indicate the city's population will decline to 54,000 through 2030.
- In 2000, the population of the county was over 80 percent white, while the city of Youngstown was just over 50 percent white.
- 43 percent of persons 25 or older possessed an education beyond a high school degree in the county, compared with only 32 percent in the City of Youngstown.
- The percentage of total families with an income below poverty level in the county in 1999 was 9.6 percent; in Youngstown, 20.4 percent of families were in similar straits. Census data from 2006 estimates poverty levels increased to 27 percent in Youngstown over the seven-year period.
- 88.5 percent of the population in Mahoning County either lived in the same house in 2000 as they did in 1995 or had moved within the county.
- The median value for a home in Mahoning County in 2000 was \$79,700 as compared with \$40,900 in the city and \$119,600 in the US.
- Median household income grew from \$35,248 in 2000 to \$38,393 in 2006 in the county. In Youngstown, the median household income declined to \$21,850 from \$24,201 during this same period.
- The civilian labor force of the county grew from 118,100 (2002) to 119,600 (2006), while the unemployment rate declined from 7.1 percent to 6.5 percent during the same period.
- The number of active businesses in the county grew from 5,852 in 2002 to 5,949 in 2006.
- The number of new residential units constructed in the county dropped from 670 in 2002 to 402 in 2006. During this same period, the city experienced a decline as well, from 59 to 22.

Although Mahoning County is faring better than the city, it is not thriving. Municipalities outside Youngstown are still adding population, albeit slowly, but the county as a whole is losing population. In light of modest economic growth in recent years, house prices have remained relatively flat. Ultimately, the future of the city and the county are closely linked. Youngstown's economic weakness has exacerbated the problems of regional competitiveness facing Mahoning County and the metropolitan area. **One of the most important lessons learned about economic regeneration is that without revival of the central city, the ability of a region to revive is severely constrained.**

The Incidence and Costs of Vacant Properties

Despite demolition efforts, the number of vacant properties within the city appears to be rising. Although there is no accurate and consistent national database, the figure of total vacancies reported by the U.S. Census has steadily grown since 1990. While the 2006 vacancy data has a larger margin of error ($\pm 1,373$), the overall trend is clear. Not all of these units in Youngstown are abandoned; however, given the limited housing demand, the great majority is certainly vacant and will likely become abandoned in the future.

Study Ranks Youngstown MSA's Housing Market Affordable

Curiously, a 2008 BusinessWeek.com article ranked the Youngstown Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) the second most affordable housing market in the United States. The standing is based on the National Association of Home Builders/Wells Fargo Housing Opportunity Index. The Youngstown Metropolitan Statistical Area – with a median home price of \$77,000, median household income of \$52,000, and large share of homes affordable to median-income families during the second quarter of 2008 (90.1 percent) as compared with the same period in 1998 (80.1 percent) – was ranked second to Indianapolis. Although this distinction shows market potential, there is little housing demand in part because of the lack of jobs that further depresses property values. For additional information, see <http://finance.yahoo.com/real-estate/article/105683/Affordable-Housing-Exists,-If-You-Know-Where-to-Look>.

Table 2: Vacant Units in Youngstown

	Number of Vacant Units	% of Total Housing Stock
1990 Census	3,763	10.2%
2000 Census	4,981	15.5%
2006 American Community Survey	8,405	22.8%

Source: US Census

Table 3: Undeliverable Addresses in Youngstown Identified by the USPS

Year	Quarter	Total Addresses	Total Vacant	Total No-Stat	Total Undeliverable	Percentage Undeliverable
2005	4th	40,245	3,100	3,404	6,504	16.16%
2006	1st	40,214	3,524	3,480	7,004	17.42%
2006	2nd	40,146	3,405	3,573	6,978	17.38%
2006	3rd	40,040	3,628	3,490	7,118	17.78%
2006	4th	39,898	3,648	3,511	7,159	17.94%
2007	1st	39,714	3,805	3,661	7,466	18.80%
2007	2nd	39,414	3,427	3,961	7,388	18.74%
2007	3rd	39,714	3,319	4,094	7,413	18.67%
2008	1st	39,639	3,236	4,385	7,621	19.23%
2008	2nd	39,416	3,108	4,388	7,496	19.02%
2008	3rd	39,600	3,093	4,487	7,580	19.14%

Source: <http://www.huduser.org/DATASETS/usps.html>

Notes: Data are unavailable for the fourth quarter of 2007. Vacant addresses are those identified as not collecting mail for 90 days or longer. No-Stat addresses include those that urban carriers identify as not likely to be active for some time.

As Tables 2 and 3 illustrate, the number of vacant housing units and undeliverable addresses within the city of Youngstown continues to increase. Although the Census and USPS data bases may not provide a complete and comprehensive picture of all vacant properties within Youngstown, they definitely highlight a trend of increasing vacancy, warranting immediate action to abate and prevent vacant properties.

What Are Vacant Properties?

The National Vacant Properties Campaign (NVPC) views vacant properties through a continuum of residential, commercial, and industrial buildings and vacant lots that either:

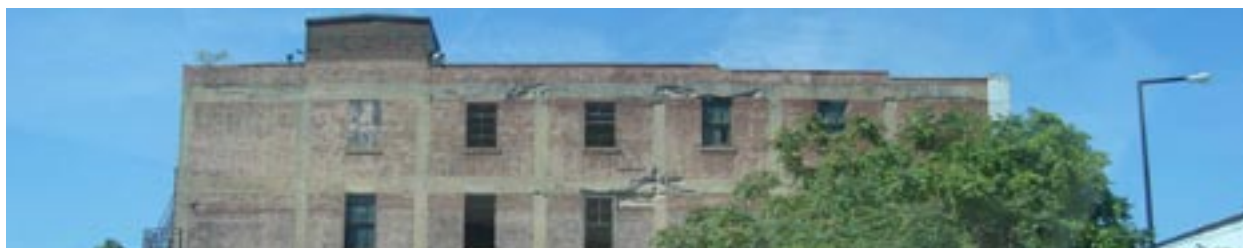
- Threaten public safety (e.g., meet the definition of a public nuisance); and/or
- Have been subject to the neglect of fundamental duties of property ownership (e.g., failure to pay taxes or utility bills, defaults on mortgages, and liens against the property).

These problem properties can include abandoned, boarded-up buildings; lots with trash and debris; vacant or under-performing commercial properties known as greyfields (such as shopping malls and strip commercial properties); and neglected industrial properties with environmental contamination known as brownfields. The NVPC continuum also includes deteriorating vacant single-family homes, apartments with significant housing code violations, and long-term vacant housing as indicators of future abandonment.

State laws and uniform building codes further refine what defines an abandoned building in particular jurisdictions, such as vacancy of over one year, deficiencies deemed beyond repair, and serious public safety hazards.

In February 2008, ReBuild Ohio and Community Research Partners (CRP) released *\$60 Million and Counting: The cost of vacant and abandoned properties to eight Ohio cities*.⁴ The CRP report identifies the causes and challenges of vacant properties in addition to estimating their fiscal impacts in Dayton, Ironton, Lima, Springfield, Toledo, Zanesville and three neighborhoods each in Cleveland and Columbus. It also provides an inventory of the programs these cities are employing to address vacant properties. The report highlights the costs and challenges associated with vacant properties in eight Ohio cities, where neighborhood conditions are similar to those found in Youngstown. Thus, the findings from this report have great applicability to Youngstown.

The CRP report estimates that there are more than 25,000 vacant and abandoned properties in the eight study cities.⁵ The report's consultants used a variety of inventorying techniques to estimate these impacts, with citywide vacant property surveys being the most accurate and County Auditor data being the least.⁶ CRP conservatively estimated vacant and abandoned properties cost these cities \$64 million annually – over \$49 million in lost tax revenues stemming from demolitions and tax delinquencies and nearly \$15 million attributed to providing city services related to code enforcement, maintenance, and fire and police services.



The Causes of Vacant Properties in Ohio

CRP identified multiple causes of vacancy and abandonment based on research in Ohio and from the national literature. In addition to housing stock deterioration, CRP cited the following causes:

- **Job loss:** Ohio lost over 275,000 manufacturing jobs between 1999 and 2005; 40 percent of this loss occurred in the counties where the eight study cities were located.
- **Population loss:** Between 1970 and 2000, the study cities lost 13.2 percent of their population, while Ohio's population increased by 6.6 percent.⁷
- **Tax delinquency:** Indicating inability to maintain a property or neglect of financial obligations, the tax delinquency rates cited by the study were two to three times that of all Ohio cities in 2005 (with the exception of Columbus).
- **Mortgage foreclosure:** The counties containing the study cities experienced a 358 percent increase in foreclosure filings between 1995 and 2006 and comprised 42.6 percent of the 79,072 foreclosures filed in Ohio during 2006.
- **Subprime lending:** Foreclosures have been linked to subprime lending; in five of eight counties that contain study cities, the foreclosure rate was 16 percent higher than the state average for home purchase loans. Six of those counties were above the statewide average of 23 percent for refinance loans.

Leveraging Existing Assets and Opportunities

Youngstown and Mahoning County have a variety of assets and opportunities that offer the potential for change. A critical and effective regeneration strategy builds new initiatives upon existing physical assets and successful policies and programs. For example, the NVPC assessment found the city's brownfields redevelopment efforts have brought a variety of new industries into the community, while Youngstown State University represents not only an economic anchor, but also a resource for future redevelopment. Mayor Jay Williams has also gained national recognition for his forthright acknowledgment that Youngstown is a shrinking city, and for the right-sizing vision of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan.

⁴To read the full report, see http://www.greaterohio.org/rebuildohio/ROPolicyrecsfinal_nonembargoed.pdf

⁵Anecdotal evidence suggests Youngstown/Mahoning County has almost as many vacancies.

⁶Although they are the most readily available data, CRP believes U.S. Census and Postal Service records overcount the number of vacant and abandoned properties (this conclusion is subject to some debate within the field). Cities with limited funds and staffing are unable to undertake the more accurate (but time-consuming and costly) process of completing a citywide inventory of property conditions. Although code enforcement data are less comprehensive, they include citations, board-ups, and maintenance records, and may provide a good snapshot of vacancy problems.

⁷Figure excludes Zanesville because 1970 population data are not available. When using data accounting only for "old city" Columbus, the area within the 1950 Columbus boundary, population decline during this period was 29.8 percent.

Local city and county officials, staff, and a diverse array of other public and private partners must now determine how to translate the 2010 Comprehensive Plan of small but mighty into an effective course of action. As Youngstown works to realize this vision, it will benefit most by building upon and leveraging existing assets and initiatives.

- **2010 Comprehensive Plan and Neighborhood Planning Efforts.** Adapting the concept of smart growth to its own conditions, the plan sets out a vision for Youngstown to become a vibrant city of 80,000. Realizing this plan requires aggressive and creative approaches for addressing vacant properties.
- **Youngstown State University.** During the course of the 2010 planning process a partnership developed between the city and Youngstown State University (YSU), demonstrating that their individual success is interdependent.
- **Economic and Brownfields Redevelopment Projects.** The city is demonstrating its ability to successfully confront the issue of business attraction, job creation, and vacant properties exists in the numerous brownfields redevelopment projects located on sites left empty with the departure of the steel mills, expertise that could be adapted to address the broader context of vacant residential and retail properties.
- **Neighborhood Institutions and Foundations.** Youngstown's rich history of charitable organizations that support efforts to build civic capacity and neighborhood investment can be leveraged to develop holistic, community-driven solutions to vacant properties.



- **Greater Ohio.** Through the activities of organizations such as ReBuild Ohio, Youngstown can learn from other Ohio cities and also participate in advocating for and forming a statewide policy agenda benefiting older industrial communities, by providing tools, resources, and flexibility to address the reclamation of vacant and abandoned properties.⁹
- **Youngstown Business Incubator (YBI).** In September 2008, the Youngstown Foundation provided \$25,000 to fund YBI's *INSPIRE!* program designed to develop flexible office suites and provide access to entrepreneurial resources for emerging information technology start-ups.
- **Lien Forward Ohio.** A program unique to the Youngstown region, Lien Forward Ohio provides an accessible and straightforward means to regain local control of vacant and abandoned properties that have been sold through a system of private tax liens.
- **Wick Neighbors.** This nonprofit development corporation is redeveloping historic Smoky Hollow into the first major market-rate residential development in the city in many years.

⁹ReBuild Ohio held its second forum on vacant properties in August 2008. Community development professionals, public officials, civic leaders, local and state government staff, citizen activists, financial professionals, real estate professionals, academics, developers, and planners came together to highlight best practices on foreclosure prevention and redevelopment strategies for vacant properties. For additional information about ReBuild Ohio and the forum, see www.rebuildohio.org.

A Systems Approach to Vacant Property Reclamation and Right-Sizing

Communities must design and manage government systems and programs to address the many challenges of blight and vacant properties, and to facilitate a vision for revitalizing neighborhoods and rebuilding markets. They must also engage public agencies, nonprofits, and private entities over a sustained period necessary to achieve results. *The Vacant Property Revitalization Cycle* (see Figure 1) illustrates the relationship among these systems and the various strategies that address different facets of decay and revitalization at various stages of neighborhood stability and decline.

In examining the diagram's inner circle, NVPC fieldwork finds that older industrial cities have fewer stable neighborhoods and more transitional and distressed neighborhoods. A handful of these communities contain a growing number of rebuilding neighborhoods with significant levels of blight and abandonment that will require large-scale demolition and long-term holding strategies. The city of Youngstown is one of these communities, with a great number of rebuilding and distressed neighborhoods that will demand special attention in rebuilding market demand for vacant properties.

The cycle's outer ring illustrates the wide variety of vacant property strategies and tools. Each of these programs is part of a larger group of systems in which public, private, and nonprofit entities operate—sometimes effectively working together and sometimes not. For example, the systems of tax foreclosure, land acquisition, and neighborhood stabilization influence the policy strategies to acquire, manage, and prevent vacant properties. **By improving both the systems and strategies, the City of Youngstown and Mahoning County can better understand and more effectively and efficiently address the myriad problems surrounding vacant properties.** Limited market demand for vacant properties in Youngstown, however, poses a particular challenge that must be addressed in conjunction with the vacant property “supply-side” strategies of acquisition and management.

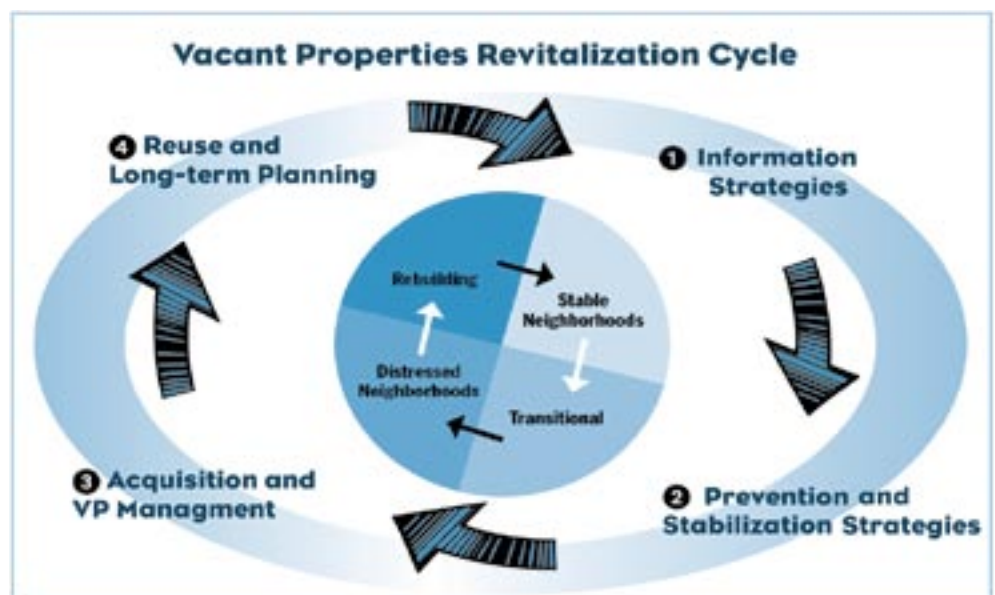


Figure 1

Information Strategies

One of the most promising strategies is to develop a **neighborhood typology** based on a wide range of socio-economic indicators along with a comprehensive inventory of vacant property conditions. The challenge for many communities is how to systematically compile, maintain, and update these indicators as neighborhoods and properties move back and forth through the revitalization cycle. A growing number of cities have created **real property information systems** incorporating data from field work along with public data systems, such as records of water utility shutoffs, code enforcement cases, and foreclosure filings.

“**Targeting**” vacant property strategies, based on the neighborhood typology, can ensure selection of the right remedy for the right neighborhoods. Targeting can help focus the attention of policymakers, staff, and community groups to these neighborhoods and their problems. Effective targeting is also a cost-efficient method of achieving meaningful results. Building the political consensus for which neighborhoods to target is often one of the biggest hurdles to targeting. Many of these programs are coordinated across different local government departments (or different local governments and quasi-governmental agencies) working in concert with nonprofits, community groups, local business, and foundations. These coordinated programs offer a range of appropriate remedies to address all types of problem properties in different neighborhoods.

Prevention and Stabilization Strategies

Effective vacant property programs contain a variety of strategies to prevent troubled properties from becoming vacant and to abate properties that may contain dilapidated and abandoned buildings. These programs should include code enforcement measures such as vacant property registration ordinances or routine rental inspection programs, as well as stronger prevention and enforcement actions like foreclosure prevention and education, civil injunctions, and prosecution of fraudulent lending. University-managed regional real property information systems can also serve as early warning systems that can guide the allocation of resources and strategies.

In light of the market conditions present in the Youngstown-Mahoning Valley region, the creation and implementation of prevention and abatement strategies is also an important piece of the vacant property puzzle. Stabilizing neighborhood conditions by proactively addressing problem properties before they become severely blighted and vacant will help alleviate some of the conditions that limit market demand.

In relatively stable neighborhoods, routine housing inspections and aggressive **code enforcement programs** are often sufficient to address vacancies. In neighborhoods with nuisance properties presenting more imminent threats to public health and safety, local officials must respond with stronger remedies, such as criminal prosecution or nuisance abatement. These code enforcement actions require more detailed and comprehensive property inspections and investigations.

Rapid increases in mortgage foreclosure can make an already serious housing abandonment problem worse. State and local governments must utilize the full range of **foreclosure prevention tools** such as hotlines, lending institution working groups, foreclosure counseling, emergency loans, and mortgage fraud prevention to work with residents, lenders, and housing advocates. While many foreclosures, and attendant abandonment, may be unavoidable, others can be

prevented through renegotiating loan terms with lenders. Lending institutions and government agencies must both play critical roles to make this happen.

Each preventive measure requires local government officials to follow different legal procedures and may require them to work across multiple departments within each jurisdiction. Vulnerable to bureaucracy, overlapping agendas, and conflicting requirements, these systems can break down at crucial junctures, causing many communities to fail to prevent or contain the blight caused by vacant properties. In fact, such system failures can make the conditions substantially worse. Effective programs require strong coordination among city, county, and town officials.

Acquisition and Management Strategies

While cities need to use strategies encompassing all of the elements in the revitalization cycle, the gravity of the existing vacant and abandoned properties landscape sometimes warrants a strong emphasis on acquisition and management policies. Many of Youngstown's neighborhoods demand immediate and aggressive vacant property actions. In certain neighborhoods, the level and nature of the blight and abandonment can become firmly entrenched. When owners or lending institutions effectively walk away from their properties, public agencies and their private and nonprofit partners must step in to maintain or demolish structures, clear legal titles, and facilitate appropriate reuse. If they fail to act, these truly abandoned buildings and vacant lots will dramatically accelerate the rate of blight and decay in their surroundings.

Land banks are an effective way to reclaim vacant properties, especially in those cities with hundreds of tax-delinquent parcels. Existing activities by public, private, and nonprofit organizations can serve as a foundation from which to improve and build new systems approaches to acquire and manage vacant properties, dramatically changing the landscape of neighborhoods and the city. Youngstown especially needs to address the realities of limited market demand and a shrinking population, which has led to the need for many properties to be assembled and held to await future opportunities, in light of inadequate short-term demand.

Reuse and Planning Strategies

The previous systems and strategies focus on vacant property prevention, stabilization, and acquisition. **Comprehensive and neighborhood plans, zoning codes, and development/re-development processes** govern the decisions about potential reuse and eventual reclamation of vacant properties—often the most critical step in the revitalization cycle. Effective reclamation of vacant properties requires creative approaches to neighborhood planning and building design. In relatively stable or transitional neighborhoods with a handful of vacant properties scattered throughout, infill housing, mixed-use developments, and pocket parks might be appropriate. As the level of abandonment increases, communities must adopt large-scale demolition strategies and a different mix of reuse options. These places must consider interim and/or permanent uses that include green infrastructure (e.g., parks, open space, stormwater filtration, trails, recreational facilities, and urban agriculture).

NVPC Recommendations: Essential Vacant Property Policies and Programs

Using the vacant property revitalization cycle as a diagnostic framework, the recommendations discussed below are designed to help Youngstown and Mahoning County reform and revise their current programs and policies for preventing and reclaiming vacant and abandoned properties. Many of these recommendations capitalize on Youngstown's existing assets by better integrating existing systems. The following is a summary of the policy and programmatic recommendations as well as a preview of proposed action steps for the VPI advisory group. For a more in-depth discussion of this report's five policy areas see the supplemental program briefs.

The city will be charged with adopting some of these recommendations, while the county will need to lead on others. Many will require joint city and county coordination working together with nonprofit partners. Suburban officials must participate and also tailor a few of these recommendations to address special conditions in first-tier suburbs. The NVPC assessment team did its best to offer what it thought was achievable in the short term (less than one year) versus long term (a year or more). Unfortunately, the team did not have sufficient time or information to estimate the costs of its recommendations.

Institute a Regional Real Property Information System (RPIS)

An RPIS is a comprehensive electronic system designed to provide up-to-date and accurate information about real property. It can provide data pertaining to individual properties as well as neighborhood conditions and trends. The system allows data from local resources (i.e., county auditor, code enforcement) and national resources (i.e., U.S. Census) to be compiled and analyzed by a diverse set of users. Using an RPIS as an analysis tool requires accurate information.



Being able to easily update the data in the system on a regular basis is an important characteristic of an RPIS. Model systems are found in educational or research institutions, which possess the ability to manage large amounts of data and generate useful analysis tools such as maps, charts, and tables.

An RPIS affords the opportunity to gather and analyze the property and neighborhood data necessary to strategic planning. The RPIS can provide a picture of current conditions in a neighborhood and its trajectory based on historic trends, as well as serve as an early warning system for properties in danger of becoming vacant and abandoned. An RPIS can help affordable housing developers coordinate projects so they won't directly compete in a weak market. The system can also serve as a foundational element for other vacant property management systems, such as land banking and code enforcement. Developing an RPIS is also valuable for the creation of planning and reinvestment activities that respond to the regional market.

Based on successful model programs from other communities, the NVPC assessment team offers the following short- and long-term recommendations toward the necessary information infrastructure for a regional Vacant Properties Initiative.

In the short term the city and its partners should:

- convene a task force to create a RPIS action plan by:
 - creating a strategy to develop a single data warehouse that is easily updatable and can be readily accessed,
 - providing access to good data to educate officials and the public about these systems, and
 - streamlining the system to minimize strain on the workforce;
- begin to assemble the critical pieces to develop a coordinated computerized data management system by:
 - examining existing information resources and designating key characteristics of the data to be part of the RPIS, and
 - identifying essential categories of critical information to include in the RPIS;
- investigate the ability to partner with local educational institutions and other organizations (i.e., the Wean Foundation, Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative) to complete a follow-up to the 2010 Plan building conditions survey,
- implement existing ordinances and streamline existing procedures that will generate valuable RPIS data, and
- generate and implement an early warning system for vacant properties.

In the mid- to long term, the city and its partners should:

- synchronize the city and county information tracking systems;
- engage Youngstown State University or another capable research institution as the potential home for the RPIS;
- work with Lien Forward Ohio to incorporate its lien data into the RPIS;
- develop a training system to inform users how to work with the RPIS;
- integrate mortgage foreclosure data into the RPIS; and
- create the RPIS to enable monitoring of the historic trend of a property or neighborhood to provide baseline information for strategic planning purposes.

Expand and Synchronize a New Arsenal of City and Suburban Code Enforcement Policies and Programs to Prevent Vacant Properties and Contain Blight

Code enforcement serves two primary policy goals when it comes to vacant properties: 1) prevention; and 2) abatement/stabilization. Through different regulatory mechanisms and systematic inspections, effective code enforcement programs can help prevent buildings from becoming vacant and later abandoned. By using its traditional nuisance abatement powers, a municipality can address property conditions that pose imminent threats to public health, safety, and welfare (e.g., the boarding and securing of vacant structures and in some cases demolition). A few of these strategies can eventually lead to the acquisition of vacant properties through tax foreclosure on nuisance abatement liens or spot blight procedures. In such cases, code enforcement can indirectly facilitate the acquisition and reuse of vacant properties.

Vacant properties demand comprehensive approaches to code enforcement that blend compliance strategies and enforcement remedies along with the strategic use of rehabilitation resources and housing assistance programs.¹⁰ Effective code enforcement programs can deploy a wide array of strategies and legal remedies to address a property's conditions and the underlying circumstances of its owner. In some cases, a compliance approach will be more successful, while particularly complex or difficult properties may demand stronger enforcement actions, such as criminal prosecution or civil injunctions. Compliance strategies and enforcement actions can also be tailored in accordance with neighborhood types (e.g., compliance strategies may be more appropriate for relatively stable neighborhoods) and property owner profile. From a policy perspective comprehensive code enforcement programs routinely coordinate the use of three major code strategies:

- *Regulatory strategies:* Regulatory strategies are effective prevention approaches that reinforce good business practices and often require minimal staffing. They can also generate user fees to cover enforcement costs and partially support local code enforcement programs, such as landlord registration and rental property licensure programs.
- *Compliance strategies:* Most local jurisdictions gain compliance with their housing and property maintenance codes through a variety of less formal actions, such as the issuance of notices and warnings or the convening of administrative hearings. Compliance strategies often provide deserving property owners with incentives and resources to repair.
- *Enforcement strategies:* Every community has a small number of owners and property managers who are bad actors. These landlords maintain properties in substandard conditions and do not reinvest or repair the properties until the local government files a formal enforcement action (i.e., a civil or criminal complaint in court or a formal administrative hearing or citation). Typical housing-inspection departments need stronger investigatory tools and prosecutorial powers to identify, track down, and bring these so-called slumlords to justice.

Youngstown and the suburban towns and cities within Mahoning County confront slightly different code enforcement challenges. First-tier suburban communities such as Boardman and Austintown are seeing a rise in clusters of nuisance properties as the housing stock ages, along with increases in landlord neglect and foreclosures. Substandard housing, blight, and vacant

¹⁰Schilling, Kromer, and Millman, *Reinventing Dayton and the Miami Valley: Through Vacant Property Revitalization and Reclamation* (National Vacant Properties Campaign, May 2005). See www.vacantproperties.org.

properties are scattered throughout the County. Although Youngstown has its share of occupied substandard housing in need of housing enforcement and rehabilitation, it must first tackle a tremendous inventory of seriously dilapidated and abandoned homes, many which will likely require demolition.

In the short term the city and its partners should:

- convene a code enforcement workshop to:
 - develop a coordinated multi-departmental code enforcement management framework, and
 - form a cohesive and collaborative Code Enforcement Leadership Team from the managers and director of the core code enforcement entities;
- establish a neighborhood targeting strategy in partnership with existing neighborhood initiatives (i.e. CDA and MVOC); and
- establish a community-based code enforcement partnership initiative.

In the mid- to long term, the city and its partners should:

- design and implement a code enforcement case tracking system;
- commission a code enforcement systems assessment;
- establish a special senior inspector to run the processes for administrative citations, rental licensing, and other regulatory measures;
- explore the use of civil judicial actions for complex cases; and
- explore the expansion of the Housing Judge's code enforcement docket into a full time Housing Court.

Suburban jurisdictions should also consider:

- establishing a formal network of suburban code enforcement practitioners.

Establish a Joint City-County Land Bank to Acquire and Manage Vacant Properties and Redesign a Tax Foreclosure System that Promotes Vacant Property Reclamation and Neighborhood Revitalization

The fortunes of Youngstown and Mahoning County will depend on strategies that rebuild neighborhoods and healthy markets for housing, small businesses, and jobs. However, with one of the largest per capita inventories of vacant and abandoned properties, the city faces a tremendous barrier in attracting sufficient private reinvestment to rebuild these distressed markets. The vacant property problems within the city significantly impede the ability of the county and the entire region to grow and sustain functional markets. Moreover, blight and abandonment are now spreading into suburban jurisdictions and throughout the county as a result of the current foreclosure crisis and nationwide recession.

Vacant properties can become assets, especially when tax foreclosure reform enables financial and property control to remain local. Collecting back taxes on suburban properties helps to finance the stabilization of vacant properties in the city. Properties stabilized by greening and other activities help to improve the image of the city, which in turn elevates the conditions and image of the region as a whole. By controlling and managing vacant properties as land assets and not just liabilities, Youngstown and Mahoning County have a realistic chance to stabilize regional markets, reverse the decline of the city, and prevent blight and decay from gaining a permanent foothold in nearby suburban communities

The experience of other communities with large inventories of vacant properties suggests Youngstown and Mahoning County need a common land bank – a single-purpose program or public entity responsible for the acquisition, management, and disposition of vacant and abandoned properties (including the inventory of tax-foreclosed properties within the community). While the logistical details – such as the institutional home for a land bank – still require further discussions, the city and the county clearly need the systematic approach to property reclamation that a land bank can offer. Neither the city nor county officials can afford to tinker with incremental and tentative policies, given the mounting number of vacant properties. The longer they wait, the worse the problem becomes.

The experience of other communities with large inventories of vacant properties suggests Youngstown and Mahoning County need a land bank. As the policy brief explains in more depth, we propose a joint venture between the city and the county to operate a regional land-banking program that blends the strengths of the city's neighborhood planning and community development pro-

grams with the real property expertise and disposition capacity of Lien Forward Ohio.

In the short term, the city, county, and their partners should take the following actions:

- research and write the appropriate legal and financial feasibility memos;
- schedule and hold a land bank management workshop in early 2009;
- coordinate a 2009 site visit to Genesee County, MI to better understand their land banking operation);
- explore the feasibility of filing a joint city-county application with the State of Ohio for its supplemental Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) funds to form the city-county land bank;
- identify and procure resources for the start-up of the land bank; and
- conduct a quick and simple internal study of the current tax lien portfolios and tax lien sale systems.

Adopt Community Development Strategies Suitable for Shrinking Markets

Within the context of the vacant properties cycle, community development programs and strategies act as the policy bridge between the prevention/abatement strategies of code enforcement and the acquisition/management strategies of a land bank. Community development works best at the neighborhood scale with a focus on housing and improving the quality of life for residents and their families in predominately declining and distressed blocks, streets, and sites. Traditional community development strategies include infill housing development projects, first-time home buyer financing and education, foreclosure prevention, and rehabilitation assistance. Community development also has strong roots in the principles of neighborhood organizing, engagement, and empowerment. Having a common understanding about community development is essential for moving the vacant properties policy agenda forward.

In the short and long term, the city and its partners should follow these core principles:

- target limited community development resources to preserve viable neighborhoods;
- ensure policies and programs support viable development projects that can create new housing market demand;



- rebuild the civic and nonprofit infrastructure to champion neighborhood revitalization; and
- integrate economic development programs and projects (i.e., brownfields and greyfields redevelopment) and community development initiatives (i.e. housing and neighborhood development) into a comprehensive revitalization strategy.

Infuse Vacant Property Reclamation into Neighborhood Plans and the Implementation of Youngstown's 2010 Comprehensive Plan

Comprehensive and neighborhood plans, zoning and building codes, and development/redevelopment processes govern the decisions about potential reuse and design of vacant properties. These plans describe how vacant property reclamation and community revitalization fits within a broader, citywide vision as well as preserving the unique characteristics and assets of each neighborhood and place.¹¹

The premise of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan's right-sizing vision rests on the ability of the city to holistically address its vacant property problem. One of the most important dimensions is the ability to gain control over vacant properties—both buildings and land—to enable the city to develop a long-term vacant land management strategy. While such long-term planning strategies can take many different directions and forms, without the ability to undertake land banking as described above, they cannot realistically be implemented. Although the city may consider any vacant property strategy or program a key part of its efforts to implement 2010, this report suggests the city strengthen this relationship with vacant property reclamation by instituting any or all of the short- and long-term actions listed below.

In the short term, the city and its partners should:

- recalibrate and coordinate city and community-driven neighborhood planning activities to target vacant properties; and
- adopt and implement a citywide vacant property and land management strategy.

In the mid- to long term, the city and its partners should:

- design and adopt a comprehensive urban greening initiative; and
- update and reform existing zoning code and land development processes.

¹¹The analysis and recommendations set forth in this section could also apply to the planning and land development processes of Mahoning County and the surrounding cities and towns; they too should consider revamping relevant land use plans and codes to facilitate vacant property reuse.

Next Steps: The Youngstown/Mahoning County VPI 2009-2010 Action Plan

The ideas and recommendation set forth in this report will demand commitment, bold leadership, and creative management. By designing and convening the Vacant Properties Initiative and working through the NVPC policy assessment process, local leaders, neighborhood organizations, and citizens have a better understanding about urban regeneration through vacant property reclamation. Active participation in the assessment process has built a solid foundation for action. The challenge for Youngstown and Mahoning County is transforming the recommendations in this report to action.

Based on its work in other cities, the NVPC assessment team offers the following recommendations that could form the core of the VPI 2009-2010 Action Plan:

- Establish partnership agreements and leadership actions that outline basic roles and responsibilities among public, civic, and private sector institutions.
- Convene a multi-day workshop to design the VPI oversight process and its many activities.
- Form a VPI Coordinating Council comprised of approximately 15-20 city, county, nonprofit, civic, and business leaders.
- Develop a VPI Policy Agenda that organizes the policy reforms and action steps into a wide range of goals and objectives (i.e., short-, mid-, and long-term actions).
- Convene a special vacant property policy charrette to develop the policy agenda.
- Select three or four target neighborhoods to pilot-test the policy reforms and recommendations set forth in this report.

Partnerships and Leadership Actions

From our vantage point, it seems the success of VPI hinges on four essential strategic partnerships: 1) City and County; 2) City-County and Youngstown State University; 3) City-County and Nonprofits/Civic and Business Groups; and 3) City-County and Suburban Communities.



The Youngstown and Mahoning County region is a close-knit community, and many of these institutions have worked together on individual projects or programs. There is not much experience, however, in developing and implementing collaborative policy change involving multiple departments, agencies, and nonprofit partners. All of the participants will need to jettison baggage from past activities and focus on new opportunities.

The city and county have the requisite legal authority and the primary responsibility to set vacant property policy and direct its implementation. However, city and county officials cannot accomplish the re-

generation of Youngstown and Mahoning County without significant assistance from its anchor institution, Youngstown State University, and from nonprofit, civic, and business organizations. The challenges are too great and the resources too small for the public sector to go it alone.

We would suggest that city and county leaders spend time brainstorming with Youngstown State University on potential roles and opportunities. Given YSU's critical role in the Youngstown 2010 planning and community outreach activities, it makes sense for YSU to once again take a leadership role.

At the same time, the problems of vacancy and abandonment are now spreading to inner-ring suburban communities such as Austintown and Boardman. City, county, and suburban officials must now sit down and devise regional strategies to combat the common foe of blight and abandonment.

Each of the critical city and county entities will need to take ownership and responsibility for implementing some of the policy recommendations set forth in this report: 1) public officials – mayor, commissioners, treasurer, and other administrators; 2) city and county programs; 3) housing court; 4) community development sector; 5) foundations and prime lending institutions; and 6) Youngstown State University.

As a preliminary step in developing the VPI Action Plan and restoring relationships among the parties, **we would propose a one- or two-day VPI planning retreat that would bring together the relevant city and county officials and staff to devise a series of communication and coordination MOUs/protocols based on the policy recommendations of this report.** We understand that these groups do not all have extensive experience working together and a few have some history they must work through. A strategic planning retreat could offer an ideal vehicle and neutral setting for meaningful exchange. NVPC is ready and available to work with the VPI to design and facilitate such a retreat as part of its next visit to Youngstown. NVPC would need to work closely with small group of VPI members to plan the retreat and ensure buy-in from all of the players so they are ready and open to engaging in the process.

Youngstown/Mahoning County VPI Coordinating Council

A City-County VPI Coordinating Council would serve as the primary forum for sharing information and coordinating actions and resources among the key organizations and stakeholders engaged with vacant property prevention and reclamation. The VPI Coordinating Council would be charged with devising a comprehensive VPI Policy Agenda to include a menu of policies and programs that: 1) prevent/abate vacant properties; and 2) strategically acquire and reuse vacant properties.¹² Some of these reforms would likely surface as simple policy changes at the local level and perhaps require changes in state law that could be done through a partnership with ReBuild Ohio. As part of this effort the Coordinating Council would work with city and county officials to explore alternative funding resources to implement several of the proposed strategies set forth in this report.

¹²This assessment report could easily serve as a starting point for drafting a VPI policy agenda.

Cleveland's Vacant Property Action Council

Following the 2004 release of the NVPC technical assistance report, *Cleveland at the Crossroads*, the local sponsors – including Neighborhood Progress, Inc., Cleveland Neighborhood Development Corporation, and Cleveland Marshall School of Law – brought together senior public officials to form a vacant properties working group or Action Council. The Action Council, which meets monthly, is comprised of seven city and county agencies as well as local community development agencies that are committed to working across institutional boundaries. The VP Action Council is actively working to implement the policy and practice recommendations from the Crossroads publication. While seeking funding to implement specific recommendations, the Council has made progress by coordinating efforts for reducing inefficiencies and identifying common priorities among its members.

Planning and preparatory steps of the VPI might include:

- drafting and adopting an official charter for the VPI Coordinating Council that establishes its goals, roles, and processes;
- organizing three to four VPI Technical Working Groups of practitioners and nonprofit leaders to oversee the implementation of the policy recommendations set forth in this report, in such areas as: 1) vacant property inventory and real property information systems, 2) prevention and abatement strategies, 3) demolition, scattered site acquisition, and land assembly, and 4) reuse strategies;
- convening a VPI Coordinating Council Policy Charrette to create the VP policy agenda and offer strategic direction for the VPI Coordinating Council and its Technical Working Groups; and
- holding a Community Forum/Town Hall Meeting to formally launch and announce the VPI Initiative, Coordinating Council, and VP policy agenda.

The VPI retreat could further refine the mission and scope of the VPI along with ground rules for internal communication, meetings, and coordination. These meetings should also confirm membership of the Council and the Technical Working Groups. After establishing internal ground rules, a second session might focus on the specific issues and strategies proposed below and bring together all the Working Groups.

Given its successful effort so far, it seems that Wick Neighbors, Inc., would remain as the convener and staff to VPI. However, it would likely need supplemental support to adequately staff the Coordinating Council and the Working Groups (e.g., plan the meetings, provide logistical support, facilitate meetings, take notes, and conduct background research). No doubt members of the Council and Working Groups would be willing to contribute some level of in-kind assistance (meeting facilities, food, note takers, etc.), but supplemental funds are needed to adequately support this oversight and implementation effort. Without an entity to focus the participants, many of these recommendations would likely languish.

Pilot Projects to Road-Test New Vacant Property Programs

After establishing the internal communications and coordination, the VPI may consider road-testing a few of the vacant property policy reforms in certain city neighborhoods and county communities. A road-testing project would help work out any problems before expanding the programs throughout the city and/or county. Moreover, with tight budgets it may help to phase in certain strategies (e.g., administrative citations and registration ordinances) until they can raise revenue to defray much of their costs. Within Youngstown it would make sense to link these road-testing projects with the neighborhood planning effort. For example, the Idora neighborhood, which has 120+ vacant properties and 2-3 others that are in the neighborhood planning track, might be a good candidate. Given the significant number of vacant properties and the type of blight and decay in the city, Youngstown and its partners should target vacant property reclamation efforts to certain neighborhoods, consistent with neighborhood-driven plans.

Cleveland's Early Intervention Pilot Project

Case Western University and Neighborhood Progress, Inc., in cooperation with city and county officials, are using a database that combines utility data and mortgage information to identify troubled households where foreclosure prevention may be needed. Identifying properties where information indicates water shutoffs and low usage combined with a loan from a subprime lender or a foreclosure filing allows local community development corporations to intervene in one of two ways. If water is still on, suggesting the property remains occupied, the project can provide foreclosure assistance that helps keep the borrower in the home. If water has been shut off or usage is extremely low, indicating abandonment, project partners can begin to explore acquisition or redevelopment strategies. The limits of utility data as identifiers of properties where foreclosure prevention may be needed are identified in the report *\$60 Million and Counting*. These limits include a lack of interface between utility company data and city property databases, a lack of address data and some question about what qualifies as "low-flow."

State and Federal Legislation and Funding Opportunities

As the VPI comes together in early 2009, it should also carefully examine potential federal assistance with vacant properties and explore state authorizing legislation and support. Several such opportunities are described below. Other legislative ideas introduced in the last session of Congress will no doubt surface again in 2009 with the new Congress and the new president. Plus, the recent legislation authorizing Cuyahoga County's three-year land banking pilot could be expanded to Mahoning County.

Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 – the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP):

This federal legislation provides \$3.9 billion for the acquisition and rehabilitation of foreclosed and abandoned homes. However, it gave state and local governments little time to develop and submit action plans to HUD (approximately 60 days from the promulgation of HUD regulations). Many NSP plans were officially approved by HUD in early 2009. Now local governments must make funding commitments within 18 months of receiving the funds and to fully expend all funds within 5 years. Such a compressed process will make it difficult for local community

development/housing agencies to consult with their community development partners as well as thoroughly examine alternatives that might build program capacity to stabilize neighborhoods.

Youngstown will received \$2.7 million, but Mahoning County will have to petition the state for any NSP funds. We would urge city and county leaders to carefully consider using the majority of their funds for capacity-building projects and programs and resist the temptation to use all of the funds for demolition or acquisition and rehabilitation. Investment in a land bank would pay dividends well beyond mere property demolition and acquisition. City and county leaders should also consider submitting a joint application to the state for NSP funds that could defray the start-up costs for operating the proposed city-county land bank

Higgins and Ryan Demolition Funding Legislation: During the 110th Congress, proposed legislation (H.R. 3498 and S. 2054 introduced by Congressman Higgins from Buffalo and H.R. 5870 introduced by Congressman Ryan from Youngstown) would have given additional CDBG funds for housing demolition initiatives in many shrinking cities. Some of these funds could have been channeled to charter land bank programs and develop green infrastructure plans. Demolition funds, however, only address part of the vacant property reclamation effort.

Congressman Higgins' Neighborhood Reclamation and Revitalization Program Act of 2007 would have authorized \$100 million in grants to local government to demolish properties and study what could be done with the land.¹³ For cities demonstrating population loss, this bill responded to the needs of grassroots leaders by providing micro-targeted grants for vulnerable neighborhoods to help stabilize the vacant housing problem there and breathe new life into the urban context. Congressman Ryan's Emergency Neighborhood Reclamation Act of 2008¹⁴, similar to the Higgins bill, would have authorized \$1 billion in grants to local governments with substantial vacant housing problems to facilitate the demolition of vacant and abandoned housing consistent with local comprehensive plans.

Community Regeneration Sustainability and Innovations Act of 2009 (CRSI): Building on their preliminary work in the 110th Congress, Congressmen Ryan and Higgins have together drafted a pioneering piece of federal legislation. CRSI would create a new, competitive grant program within the U.S. Department of Housing and Community Development (HUD) similar to the U.S. EPA's Brownfields pilot grant initiative. CRSI would address the complex revitalization challenges confronting cities and metropolitan areas experiencing large-scale property vacancy and abandonment due to long-term employment and population losses.

The Community Regeneration Act would provide assistance to communities to start or expand land banks that establish public control over vacant and abandoned property to facilitate the stabilization of neighborhoods and housing markets. It would further encourage innovation, experimentation, and environmentally sustainable practices through collaborative efforts to re-use land bank properties in ways that will provide long-term benefits to the public, whether it is through the creation of green infrastructure, economic development, renewable energy, or other strategies. Implementation of such strategies would create new and sustainable employment opportunities for residents.

¹³H.R. 3498, 110th Cong. § 5.

¹⁴H.R. 5870, 110th Cong. § 3.

CRSI would also require successful recipients to coordinate and leverage existing federal resources with other public, nonprofit, and private-sector grants and programs. Applicants would be encouraged to establish regional coordinating councils to facilitate cross-agency collaboration and intergovernmental partnerships, along with rewarding innovative policies and projects.¹⁵

Conclusion

This report and assessment process is based on a fundamental policy premise—that vacant property reclamation is a critical step to first stabilize and then revitalize declining neighborhoods so they can be woven back into the larger fabric of a smaller, but economically healthy and strong city and region. The premise of vacant property reclamation, however, requires immediate reform of fragmented vacant property programs and policies. At its core, the Youngstown and Mahoning County’s Vacant Property Initiative is about building a cohesive and collaborative system of strategies and tools that will address vacant property reclamation at the scale it merits. Such an initiative would lay the foundation for rebuilding markets and attracting private investment back into one of the region’s greatest assets – its neighborhoods.

Now is the time to launch this bold policy initiative to regenerate Youngstown and Mahoning County through vacant property reclamation. Great promise appears on the horizon as the new administration takes hold in Washington, D.C. and indicates a willingness to provide more resources and support to address the special challenges of older industrial communities like Youngstown. Moreover, local leaders and community groups are also energized and committed to making vacant properties a top priority.

The report sets forth a solid game plan that outlines the critical roles and responsibilities for building a more collaborative approach to regional regeneration. It is now incumbent for the VPI, its member organizations, and local residents to take these recommendations and put them into practice. The NVPC believes Youngstown and Mahoning County have the ability to go far down the path of becoming a national model for urban regeneration.

When it first came to Youngstown, the team was inspired by the mural that adorns a former gas station/ auto repair business (see below) as it illustrates the can-do spirit of the region’s residents. Now it is their turn and their time to roll up their sleeves and get to work.



¹⁵The inspiration for the legislation was the Living Lab concept discussed in the Campaign’s Blueprint Buffalo assessment report (see www.vacantproperties.org) and the following article: Joseph Schilling, “Buffalo as the Nation’s First Living Laboratory for Reclaiming Vacant Properties,” in *Cities Growing Smaller*, Steve Rugare and Terry Schwartz, eds., (Cleveland: Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative, Kent State College of Architecture and Environmental Design, 2008) (see also www.cudc.kent.edu/shrink).

Appendix A:

VPI Steering Committee

John McNally IV, Esq.,
VPI Co-Chair
Commissioner
Mahoning County

Mr. Jason Whitehead,
VPI Co-Chair
Chief of Staff
City of Youngstown

Ms. Margaret Murphy,
Project Manager
Executive Director
Wick Neighbors, Inc.

Ms. Lisa Antonini
Treasurer
Mahoning County

Mr. Jamael Tito Brown
Director of Operations
Mahoning County Treasurer's Office

Mr. Ian Beniston
Director of Policy/
Community Organizer
Mahoning Valley Organizing
Collaborative

Ms. Donna Buzulencia
Realtor
Coldwell Banker/First Place
Real Estate

Mr. Arnold Clebone
Governor's Regional Representative
Ohio Department of Development

Mr. William D'Avignon
Director, CDA and Planning
City of Youngstown

Mr. Michael Dockry
Administrator
Austintown Township

Patty Dougan, Esq.
Member
7th Ward Citizen's Coalition

Mr. Tom Finnerty
Associate Director
YSU Center for Urban and
Regional Studies

Anthony Farris, Esq.
Deputy Law Director
City of Youngstown

Ms. Debora Flora
Executive Director
Lien Forward Ohio

Robyn Gallito, Esq.
Trustee
Boardman Township

Mr. Paul Hagman
Architect
Ronald Cornell Faniro Architects

Ms. Linda Hoefert
Housing Director
City of Youngstown

Mr. Phil Kidd
Director of Communications/
Community Organizer
Mahoning Valley Organizing
Collaborative

Ms. Heather McMahon
Associate Director
Wick Neighbors, Inc.

Martha Morgan, Esq.
Legal Consultant
Wick Neighbors, Inc.

Mr. Kirk Noden
Executive Director
Mahoning Valley Organizing
Collaborative

Fr. Edward Noga
Pastor
St. Patrick's Catholic Church

Mr. Richard Shafer
Vice President, Mortgage Services
Home Savings & Loan

Mr. Roger Smith
Regional Planner
Lien Forward Ohio

Appendix B:

Youngstown Housing Market Trends

Real Estate Price Trends, 1970-2000

Real Estate Price Trend: City of Youngstown				
	1970	1980	1990	2000
No change in constant dollars	\$12,806	\$25,200	\$38,500	\$47,400
Actual prices		\$26,700	\$31,000	\$40,900
Price in constant dollars		\$13,570	\$10,310	\$11,050
Average annual change/ constant dollars		+0.6%	-2.4%	+0.6%

Real Estate Price Trend: Mahoning County				
	1970	1980	1990	2000
No change in constant dollars	\$15,939	\$31,300	\$47,900	\$59,000
Actual prices		\$37,500	\$47,900	\$79,700
Price in constant dollars		\$19,097	\$15,939	\$21,531
Average annual change/ constant dollars		+1.8%	-1.5%	+3.1%

County/City Median Price Ratio				
	1970	1980	1990	2000
County: City Price ratio	1.24 to 1	1.40 to 1	1.55 to 1	1.95 to 1
Source: Census of Housing				

Homeownership Rate: Change in City Households by Tenure, 1970-2000

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2006*
Number of homeowners	30,171	28,099	21,467	19,564	17,114
Number of renters	14,461	13,891	12,022	11,549	11,318
Homeowner change (number)		-2,072	-6,623	-1,912	-2,450
Renter change (number)		-570	-1,869	-471	-231
Homeowner change (%)		-6.9%	-23.6%	-8.9%	-12.5%
Renter change (%)		-4.0%	-13.5%	-3.9%	-2.0%
Homeownership rate	67.6%	66.9%	64.1%	63.1%	60.2%
*Data from Census except for 2006, which is from American Community Survey. ACS data is based on a smaller sample and has a substantially greater margin of error.					

Housing Market Indicators, 1999-2005

		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Median home purchase loan amount	City	\$37,500	\$39,000	\$44,000	\$41,000	\$46,000	\$50,000	\$52,000
	County	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$77,000	\$75,000	\$76,000
Number of purchase loans	City	740	764	689	754	702	817	818
	County	3,450	3,306	3,284	3,577	3,734	3,795	4,023
Purchase loans/1000 housing units	City	22	23	21	23	21	25	25
	County	35	33	33	36	38	38	41
% purchase loans not owner-occupied	City	14%	13%	12%	26%	21%	25%	22%
	County	7%	7%	7%	10%	8%	11%	11%
% purchase loans subprime	City	22%	16%	17%	26%	26%	32%	NA
	County	7%	7%	7%	10%	11%	15%	NA
% purchase loans to borrowers >80% AMI	City	28%	31%	31%	25%	24%	25%	25%
	County	61%	61%	60%	56%	55%	53%	53%
New dwelling units authorized by permit	City	60	9	56	59	42	130	9
	County	802	718	624	670	574	773	511

Appendix C:

Assets and Opportunities for the Future

As Youngstown and Mahoning County moves toward implementation, it will need to build upon many of its existing assets and initiatives already underway:

- **2010 Plan and Neighborhood Planning Efforts.** The 2010 Plan, adopted in 2005, is Youngstown's first revised comprehensive plan in 50 years. Adapting the concept of smart growth to its own conditions, the plan sets out a vision for Youngstown to become a vibrant city of 80,000 instead of trying to regain its status as a city of 170,000. Building on the successful community engagement models developed during the 2010 planning process, the city is embarking on an ambitious neighborhood planning effort. The goal is to translate the 2010 vision into more than 120 specific neighborhood action plans.
(www.youngstown2010.com/plan/plan.htm)
- **Youngstown State University.** A partnership developed between the city and Youngstown State University (YSU) during their respective recent planning efforts. This partnership represents much more than planning for the physical development of these institutions – it also indicates recognition that the success of each is dependent upon the other. As the city continues on its path of economic redefinition, YSU can play an integral role in producing new opportunities for business development as well as providing an influx of new residents (students) to patronize the emerging downtown business community. Similarly, YSU serves as an anchor institution that has made significant and long-term investments in the city.
(www.ysu.edu)
- **Economic and Brownfields Redevelopment Projects.** The city's economic development department faced significant challenges with the departure of the steel industry. Evidence of its ability to successfully confront the issue of business attraction and job creation exists in the numerous brownfields redevelopment projects located on former steel mill sites. Projects such as the Performance Place Industrial Park and those on the west side of the city demonstrate the city's capacity to successfully engage in traditional economic development. Redevelopment of brownfields into active industrial parks and distribution warehouses has played an important role in the city's revitalization efforts in recent years, with those projects today making a significant contribution to the city's overall tax base. The 2010 Plan's green industry land use category further illustrates the desire for Youngstown to build on its industrial heritage while looking toward the future by pursuing and developing more environmentally-friendly industry.
- **Lien Forward Ohio.** This organization currently provides a service to residents, nonprofits, and government to regain control of properties sold through the tax lien process. As a regional governmental entity, it is a partnership between the city and county, presenting an opportunity to create more synergy between these two sometimes disparate entities. An asset unique to the Youngstown region, Lien Forward Ohio provides an accessible, straightforward, and relatively inexpensive means to regain local control of vacant and abandoned properties. It may also provide the foundation for developing a land bank in the region.
(www.mahoningcountyoh.gov/DepartmentsAgencies/Departments/Treasurer/LienForwardOhio/tabid/1230/Default.aspx)

- **Neighborhood Institutions and Foundations.** Youngstown has a rich history of charitable organizations that contribute financial support to build civic capacity and investment in neighborhoods. Organizations such as the John S. and Doris M. Andrews Foundation, the Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley (www.cfmv.org), the DeBartolo Family Foundation (www.debartolofamilyfoundation.com), the Home Savings and Loan Foundation, First Place Bank Community Foundation, the Raymond John Wean Foundation (rjweanfoundation.org), and the Youngstown Foundation (www.youngstownfoundation.org) contribute financial and other resources to improve the region. Activities by these organizations and others like them build more civic capacity in the neighborhoods. Examples of existing activities that could be leveraged to address the vacant properties challenge include:
- **The Raymond John Wean Foundation** (rjweanfoundation.org) embarked on a major neighborhood revitalization and capacity-building initiative by supporting five neighborhood organizers in separate sectors of the city. This endeavor represents an opportunity to build capacity on the local level to address some of the on-the-ground challenges. It also creates the prospect for a partnership between the city and the foundation to move forward with neighborhood-level planning initiatives.
- **Wick Neighbors, Inc.** Organized in 2003, Wick Neighbors, Inc. is a nonprofit development corporation whose mission is to bring the community together to build a neighborhood for creative living, working, learning, and worshipping in the heart of the city.¹⁶ The goals of the organization are to:
 - redevelop historic Smoky Hollow as a competitive mixed-use neighborhood;
 - promote and guide collaboration in planning, design, development, and promotion of the Wick District as a vibrant urban center;
 - attract residents and workers back to the city; and
 - serve as a catalyst for the 2010 Plan and other revitalization efforts.

The Wick District-Smoky Hollow Development represents the first major market-rate residential development to be attempted in the city in many years. It is located adjacent to the YSU campus and the downtown. The project capitalizes not only upon the partnership between the city and YSU, but also relationships with trade unions, homebuilders, financial institutions, Wick District's cultural, educational, religious institutions, Andrews Avenue businesses, churches, Youngstown Business Incubator businesses, and residents. (wickneighbors.org)

- **Greater Ohio.** Opportunities and assets for Youngstown also exist beyond the borders of the city and region. ReBuild Ohio is a statewide forum for practitioners and policy makers to vet ideas and strategies for addressing the problems the state is encountering as it transitions to the new economy. Through the activities of ReBuild Ohio, Youngstown can learn from other Ohio cities and also participate in forming and advocating for a statewide policy agenda that benefits older industrial communities by providing more tools, resources, and flexibility to address the reclamation of vacant and abandoned properties. (www.greaterohio.org)

¹⁶ Wick Neighbors, Inc. activities create a vibrant urban center with a shared sense of place through collaboration with the Wick District's educational, cultural, business and religious institutions and serve as a catalyst for continued revitalization in Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley. The board of directors consists of over 40 members representing public, private, institutional, nonprofit, and resident interests in Youngstown and the surrounding region.

- **Youngstown Business Incubator.** Located in downtown, the Youngstown Business Incubator (YBI) serves provides young companies and innovative people, especially those with a focus on business-to-business software development, providing a place for the exchange of ideas and an incubator for new businesses. Activities of YBI, in combination with an affordable cost of living and the organization's skills designed to assist nascent enterprises, are also playing a role in attracting new businesses and residents to downtown, as well as drawing former Youngstown residents back to the region. The Taft Technology Center was developed to encourage YBI-incubated businesses, such as Turning Technologies, to remain downtown. The Center is now the headquarters for Turning Technologies, listed by Inc. magazine as the fastest growing software company in the country in 2007 (the company chose to locate its headquarters in Youngstown instead of London, where it also has an office). In September 2008, the Youngstown Foundation provided \$25,000 to fund YBI's INSPIRE! program designed to develop flexible office suites and access to entrepreneurial resources for emerging information technology start-ups. (www.ybi.org)

Appendix D:

NVPC Assessment Team Biographies

Daniel T. Kildee was elected Genesee County Treasurer in November 1996, and took office on January 1, 1997. Mr. Kildee currently serves as chairman of the Fifth Congressional District Democratic Party. Before his election as treasurer, Mr. Kildee served for 12 years as a Genesee County commissioner, including 5 years as chairman of the Board of Commissioners.

Kildee is also president of the Genesee Institute, a research and training institute focusing on Smart Growth, urban land reform, and land banking. Kildee initiated an effort to use Michigan's new tax foreclosure law as a tool for community development and neighborhood stabilization. He founded the Genesee Land Bank—Michigan's first land bank—and serves as its chairman and chief executive officer.

In 2003 Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm appointed Kildee to the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council, which made 160 recommendations to deal with urban sprawl and other land use issues. In 2005 Governor Granholm appointed Kildee as one of the initial directors of the Michigan Land Bank Fast Track Authority, the nation's first statewide land bank.

Kildee is a member of the Michigan Economic and Environmental Roundtable, is co-chair of the Michigan Redevelopment Readiness Advisory Council, and serves on the Board of Directors of the Land Information Access Association and the Board of Directors of Automation Alley, southeastern Michigan's regional technology cluster designed to attract technology based industry to the region. He is also on the Advisory Board for the National Vacant Properties Campaign. Kildee recently completed a Fannie Mae Foundation Fellowship at the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government.

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Jonathan Logan serves as the design coordinator for the Rochester Regional Community Design Center in Rochester, NY. His projects at RRCDC include streetscape improvements, neighborhood revitalization planning and vacant property reuse. In addition to completing vision plan designs and reports, he assists with community charrettes and facilitating pro bono design work. He also assisted the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech and the National Vacant Properties Campaign on projects in Buffalo, Toledo, and Syracuse. Logan has a Bachelors of Landscape Architecture from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry and a Masters of Urban and Planning from Virginia Tech.

Alan Mallach is a nonresident senior fellow at the Metropolitan Policy Program of The Brookings Institution, a visiting scholar in the community affairs department of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, and a visiting lecturer in the graduate city planning program at Rutgers University. He has been a consultant, advocate and public official, has taught at a number of colleges and universities, and served as director of the Department of Housing & Development in Trenton, New Jersey from 1990 to 1999. He is the author of *Bringing Buildings Back: Turning Abandoned Properties into Community Assets* as well as many other works on city planning and housing as well as Italian opera. He is a member of the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Certified Planners, and holds a B.A. degree from Yale University.

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Professor Joseph Schilling, as a founding member of the National Vacant Properties Campaign, works closely with state and local officials and community development practitioners on designing innovative revitalization strategies in such areas as code enforcement, zoning and housing codes, land use planning, and green infrastructure. Schilling was the team leader for NVPC's assessment work in Toledo, Cleveland and Dayton, Ohio and served on the New Orleans study team. He directs NVPC's research and policy activities.

As professor in practice at Virginia Tech's Alexandria Center, Schilling's Green Regions Initiative explores the dimensions of creating environmentally sustainable regions through collaborative planning, better community design, and consensus building strategies. Schilling provides strategic guidance to community organizations, government officials, and business leaders in such areas as the revitalization of vacant properties/abandoned buildings, brownfields redevelopment, smart growth, land use planning and zoning code reforms, active living, and the reuse of former military installations.

Prior to joining the Institute, Schilling directed the community and economic development programs for the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). Before coming to Washington, D.C., Schilling served for over ten years as a deputy city attorney for the City of San Diego in charge of its code enforcement unit, where he drafted land use ordinances and building codes. Mr. Schilling earned a Masters of Environmental Law from George Washington and a J.D. from Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco.

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The National Vacant Properties Campaign

In 2002, with financial assistance from the Fannie Mae and Ford Foundations and U.S. EPA, a coalition of national organizations came together to launch the National Vacant Properties Campaign (NVPC). Housed at Smart Growth America (www.smartgrowthamerica.org), NVPC brings together practitioners, experts, and policy makers to forge a network that supports vacant property policy reforms and provides peer-to-peer technical assistance to communities. NVPC has worked with dozens of cities, counties, and nonprofits to design innovative policies and effective programs to prevent and reclaim vacant properties. Its efforts range from helping write tax foreclosure legislation in Indiana to creating a regional policy framework in Buffalo. With generous support from the Surdna Foundation and matching national and local funds, NVPC has now worked with local officials and community development organizations in more than 25 cities, including Cleveland, Dayton, and Toledo.

In 2005, NVPC helped launch Ohio's first statewide forum on vacant properties. In September 2007, more than 600 policymakers and practitioners gathered in Pittsburgh to participate in NVPC's first national conference on vacant property reclamation and neighborhood revitalization. The next national conference will be held in Louisville, Ky. For more information visit www.vacantproperties.org.