Western Reserve Land Conservancy
Thriving Communities Institute
FROM VACANCY TO VITALITY

The newsletter of Western Reserve Land Conservancy's Thriving Communities Institute

URBAN LANDLINE

www.thrivingcommunitiesinstitute.org

Fall 2012

A message from Jim Rokakis



The land bank/demolition express continues to move steadily forward! We will have 15 county land banks in Ohio up and running by the end of the year, including nine in the 14-county Western Reserve Land Conservancy footprint. We are amazed at how quickly this effort has taken off.

We are aided greatly by Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine and his willingness to commit $75 million of Ohio's "robo-signing" settlement towards demolition of distressed properties in Ohio. Thriving Communities Institute assisted the attorney general by holding workshops in Toledo and Canton to answer questions from communities in northern Ohio about how the demolition money would and should be used.

Thiriving Communities was asked to present at a conference sponsored by the U.S. Department of Treasury on Sept. 24 at the Treasury Department in Washington, D.C. Treasury is trying to determine if there is a casual link between demolition and a decrease in foreclosures. If that link can be established, the department will work to support HR 4210 - the bill Thriving Communities spearheaded to create tax credits for demolition or for additional funds from other sources for demolition of vacant properties.

Robin Darden Thomas and I will be in Columbus on Nov. 2, speaking to the Ohio Township Association about land banks and conservation. On Nov. 14, also in Columbus, we will talk to the County Commissioners Association of Ohio on the same topic. We are anxious to spread the word about our work and excited to

Ohio land bank conference will offer latest on revitalization



The Second Convening of Ohio County Land Banks, co-hosted by Thriving Communities Institute and Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation, will take place Nov. 27-28 at the Holiday Inn Cleveland South, 6001 Rockside Road in Independence, Ohio. The conference will offer essential information for land bank board members and staff, county and municipal officials, community and economic development officers, community development corporations and anyone interested in repurposing vacant and abandoned properties and revitalizing our neighborhoods.

The conference will offer more than 25 breakout sessions covering topics of concerns to land banks throughout Ohio. In addition, two mobile workshops will be offered Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning, allowing participants to witness projects first hand. Presenters will include legal and financial experts, land bank practitioners with hands-on experience and community organizations that work to move projects from concept to reality. To register for the conference or find out more information, click here.

Fifteen Ohio counties now have land banks



For more than a year, Thriving Communities Institute has been working with officials across the state to establish land banks. To date, 15 counties have formed land banks: Lucas, Erie, Lorain, Cuyahoga, Trumbull, Mahoning, Franklin, Montgomery, Hamilton, Summit, Portage, Stark, Lake, Butler and Muskingum.

Seven other counties -- Medina, Wood, Clark, Greene, Richland, Ashtabula, Tuscarawas, Jefferson and Belmont -- have expressed interest in establishing land banks. Land banks can safely hold distressed properties until they can be repurposed for the betterment of the neighborhood and larger community. For more information, contact Thriving Communities at (216) 515-8300 or visit www.thrivingcommunitiesinstitute.org.

Rokakis speaks on housing at Treasury Department meeting

Jim Rokakis, director of Thriving Communities Institute, was one of the experts who spoke about residential property vacancy, abandonment and demolition at a U.S. Treasury Department meeting in Washington, D.C. David M. Dworkin, housing policy advisory for the Treasury Department, invited Rokakis to speak at the September intergovernmental meeting. The participants were invited to share experiences and information about initiatives dealing with the problem of vacant homes. The four studies reviewed at the meeting included one from the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland and one from The Brookings Institution.

have the opportunity to help revitalize our communities.

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Upcoming Events

The Second Convening

of Ohio County Land Banks

Tuesday, Nov. 27 and

Wednesday, Nov. 28

Holiday Inn Cleveland South

6001 Rockside Road

Independence, Ohio

Co-hosted by Thriving Communities Institute and Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation, the conference will offer essential information for land bank board members and staff, county and municipal officials, community and economic development officers, community development corporations and anyone interested in repurposing vacant and abandoned properties and revitalizing our neighborhoods. Click here for more information.

CNN scheduled to revisit Ohio's demolition initiatives



There Goes the Neighborhood

CNN is expected to air in November or December an update of the 2011 '60 Minutes' segment on the foreclosure crisis in America. The '60 Minutes' piece, titled "There Goes the Neighborhood," featured Jim Rokakis, director of Western Reserve Land Conservancy's Thriving Communities Institute and focused on Cuyahoga County's efforts to make neighborhoods safer by tearing down homes. CNN crews were scheduled to visit the region this month and do interviews for the update. You can revisit the segment, which helped prompt a national discussion about the revitalization of urban centers that have been devastated by foreclosures, by clicking the photo at right.

Dutch journalists visit Thriving Communities



Thriving Communities receives international exposure.

In July, our Jim Rokakis was interviewed in Cleveland by Niewsuur TV, a news magazine in The Netherlands, for a segment on America's foreclosure crisis and the efforts to help homeowners cope with it. Rokakis took correspondent Tom Kleijn and cameraman Remco Bikkers on a tour of Cleveland's Slavic Village neighborhood to show them vacant, vandalized and foreclosed homes. Kleijn is an American correspondent for Niewsuur, which is considered to be the Dutch equivalent of our "60 Minutes."

Thriving Communities offices are in a thriving neighborhood



The new offices of Thriving Communities Institute are located in a neighborhood that is an example of what we hope to help create in urban areas around Ohio. Cleveland's resurgent Ohio City neighborhood is a blend of restored buildings (including the United Bank Building that houses the TCI offices), restaurants, shops, parks, urban agriculture and, of course, the historic West Side Market. Our offices are at the corner of Lorain Avenue and West 25th Street. The nine-story building opened in 1925 as the tallest and largest commercial building on Cleveland's West Side. It was one of the last of a series of classical bank buildings constructed in Cleveland during the 1910s and 1920s, a golden age for the city's banking industry. The address is 2012 West 25th Street, Suite 504, Cleveland, Ohio 44113. The phone number is (216) 515-8300.

Sarah Ryzner, Jon Logue join Land Conservancy staff



Sarah Ryzner

Western Reserve Land Conservancy and its Thriving Communities Institute have added two talented professionals to the staff.

Sarah Ryzner, an attorney who also has a master's degree in urban planning from Cleveland State University, is the new director of projects for Thriving Communities. She is responsible for identifying and managing key real-estate transactions in urban areas and, in conjunction with our partners, promoting healthy land in urban neighborhoods. She will also build relationships, network and promote Land Conservancy programs.

Jon Logue, the organization's new development officer, came to us from John Carroll University, where he worked as the director of prospect management and research. In that role, Jon worked closely with major gift officers to develop major gift strategies and solicitation priorities. Before that, Jon worked as development research associate at University Hospitals and director of public programs at Western Reserve Historical Society. In all, Jon comes to us with more than 15 years of experience in the nonprofit sector, focused on fundraising research, prospect management, non-profit

For a complete listing of Western Reserve Land Conservancy events, visit www.wrlandconservancy.org

Want to help support our efforts? Click here.

Want to find out more about our organization? Check out our latest video below.



Western Reserve Land Conservancy: What we do

operations and education programming. Jon will add structure and strategy to the Land Conservancy's fundraising operations.



Jon Logue

EverGreen EverBlue helps fund our work

About 500 people attended this year's EverGreen EverBlue, Western Reserve Land Conservancy's annual gala. The Sept. 7 event was hosted by Claire and Sandy McMillan at their Cotswold design home, which was built in the 1920s and sits on the 900-plus acres still owned by the descendants of Cleveland's Mather family. Attendees celebrated the expansion of our efforts to connect people and land and heard how our work to preserve northern Ohio's abundant natural resources is now reaching out to the urban cores of our cities -- and making a difference. The annual event raises operating funds for the Land Conservancy and its programs, including Thriving Communities Institute.



Attendees Deryck Toles, left, Sarah Wean, Gordon Wean and Patsy Kouvas

Quicklinks

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Western Reserve Land Conservancy
OUR LAND. OUR LEGACY.

How Thriving Communities was formed

In March 2011, Western Reserve Land Conservancy launched a region-wide effort to help revitalize our urban centers. We named the effort Thriving Communities Institute because of all the connotations the word thriving holds for urban centers: flourishing, prospering, blossoming and successful. Our cities have thrived in the past; and we believe they will thrive again. They will move from vacancy to vitality.

Thriving Communities Institute, led by director Jim Rokakis, is already lending its hand to transform vacant and unproductive properties into new opportunities to attract economic growth, to bring green space to our cities, and to support safe, beautiful neighborhoods. In working with community leaders in our region, we have learned that urban revitalization is a process, one with many steps supported by great partnerships. Thriving Communities is helping secure our cities' vacant, unhealthy properties by establishing and supporting county land banks throughout our region.

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