

Jim Rokakis

Jim Rokakis is the Director of the Thriving Communities Institute, a program of Western Reserve Land Conservancy. Jim is involved in a variety of activities, including the establishment of County Land Banks throughout Ohio and working with Ohio communities in Columbus and Washington, D.C. to raise funds to deal with distressed properties. To date, Jim has helped establish fifteen (15) land banks in Ohio counties in approximately two years.

Growing up in Cleveland's Archwood-Denison neighborhood, Jim Rokakis saw firsthand how neighbors helping neighbors could strengthen an entire community. Elected as the youngest member of Cleveland City Council at age 22, Jim embarked on a 19-year tenure that saw several successes in reversing neighborhood blight, redeveloping Downtown Cleveland, creating the Cleveland Housing Court and serving as chairman on the influential Finance Committee for his last seven years on Council.

In 1997, Jim took office as Cuyahoga County Treasurer, bringing his innovative skills and passion for the community to a struggling county office. In the decade that followed, Jim overhauled the entire office, reduced staffing by over 40%, but expanded the role of the office in numerous areas that positively affected the residents of Cuyahoga County.

Faced with Cuyahoga County's mortgage foreclosure crisis, Jim helped to write and pass House Bill 294, which streamlined the foreclosure process for abandoned properties. Additionally, Jim was the driving force behind a bill that allowed for the creation of the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation, also known as the Cuyahoga County Land Bank. He served as the CCLRC's first chairman and played a key role in moving the land bank from a concept to a vital force in Cuyahoga County that has changed the real estate picture for distressed properties in just 18 months.

Local and national organizations have recognized Jim for his efforts in strengthening neighborhoods and communities. In 2007 he received the NeighborWorks America Local Government Service Award, the Leadership in Social Justice Award from Greater Cleveland Community Shares and was named the County Leader of the Year by American City and County Magazine. Recently, Jim was featured on the CBS program "60 Minutes", discussing the need to fund demolition in distressed urban areas, and wrote the cover story for the Washington Post's Outlook section on February 10, 2012 about the need to demolish distressed properties in inner-city neighborhoods.

Jim earned his undergraduate degree at Oberlin College and his Juris Doctorate degree from Cleveland-Marshall School of Law. Married with three children, Jim resides in Rocky River.