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Spring 2013

## Building community by razing vacant homes

As this region battles the ongoing effects of the foreclosure crisis, no topics have received more discussion than vacancy and demolition. Should we demolish, mothball or preserve? Can a neighborhood retain its identity if many of the structures that helped shape that identity are gone?



**Jim Rokakis**

As the organizer of county land banks in more than a dozen communities around Ohio, I can tell you this is not just a Cleveland problem: It is a problem communities in the industrial Midwest struggle with every day.

Of course, the issues related to what to do with vacancy aren't just practical; they're also emotional. People with roots in struggling Cleveland neighborhoods are generally distressed by the decline of the community where they, their parents or even their grandparents were raised. But we need to check our emotions when dealing with these problems and agree on certain irrefutable facts that can help guide us as we prepare struggling communities for their next phase of development.

Read the full column, as published in *The Plain Dealer*, [here](#).

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## Thriving Communities, Greater Ohio Policy Center plan Columbus conference

Mark your calendars: A two-day conference sponsored by Thriving Communities Institute and Greater Ohio Policy Center is coming to Columbus this fall. Revitalizing Ohio's Vacant Properties: Tools and Policies to Transform Communities, will take place Oct. 22-23 at The Westin Columbus. This will be an interactive training and policy solutions summit that will offer hands-on techniques and strategies to address vacant and abandoned property challenges and generate redevelopment opportunities. It is intended for local and regional leaders, land bank practitioners, nonprofit community development organizations, as well as private sector representatives.

For more information, visit or [www.thrivingcommunitiesinstitute.org](http://www.thrivingcommunitiesinstitute.org) or [www.greaterohio.org](http://www.greaterohio.org). For questions or sponsorship opportunities, please contact Kate Hydock of Thriving Communities at [khdock@wrlandconservancy.org](mailto:khdock@wrlandconservancy.org) or (216) 515-8300 or Christina Burke of Greater Ohio Policy Center at [cburke@greaterohio.org](mailto:cburke@greaterohio.org) or (614) 224-0187.



## Lorain, Thriving Communities to conduct vacancy study

Thriving Communities Institute and Lorain are expected later this month to begin a comprehensive study aimed at identifying the number of vacant structures in the city. The comprehensive, citywide survey will cover approximately 25,000 parcels, using uniform methodology to identify vacant properties. The survey is expected to take about two months to complete. The goal of the study is to provide the city of Lorain with information that can be used to prioritize properties with the goal of strategically using available demolition funds and determining the need for additional demolition funding.

The results will also be helpful in future land-use planning for vacant land and for creating a development strategy.



## Crain's names Sarah Ryzner person to watch in nonprofit world

*Crain's Cleveland Business* has named Sarah Ryzner, director of projects for Thriving Communities Institute, to its Who to Watch list for nonprofits. Ryzner joined Western Reserve Land Conservancy and Thriving Communities after working as a real estate lawyer and as a site-acquisition consultant for commercial interests. Sarah, who also holds a master's degree in urban planning from Cleveland State University, 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 also builds relationships and promotes Land Conservancy programs. Sarah lives in Cleveland.

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Sarah Ryzner

## Upcoming Events

### **Grand River Cleanup**

8 a.m.  
Saturday, May 18  
Hidden Valley Metropark  
4880 Klasen Road  
Madison Township, Ohio 44057

*Come help us keep the Wild and Scenic Grand River in Ashtabula and Lake counties clean and pristine! Team River collects trash and debris from the banks of the Grand with help of canoes, donated by Lake Metroparks and ODNR Scenic Rivers. Team Terra Firma will hit the parks along that stretch to keep the land around the river trash-free.*

### **Conservation Rocks!**

6:30 p.m.-midnight  
Friday, June 7  
Beachland Ballroom  
15711 Waterloo Road  
Cleveland, Ohio

*Join us for a night of music and fun as musicians who work in local conservation play the venerable Beachland. Performers will include Paul Van Curen and Julie Patton, Foster Brown, Paul Pira, The Rust Buckets, Fat City and Pete McDonald & the Black Oaks. Tickets are \$10 and can be purchased through the Beachland website or by contacting a Land Conservancy staffer.*  
[www.beachlandballroom.com](http://www.beachlandballroom.com)

### **Raccoon County Music Festival**

Noon - 8 p.m.  
Saturday, Aug. 17  
Century Village Museum  
Burton

*A day of music, food and fun for people of all ages!*

### **Revitalizing Ohio's Vacant Properties: Tools and Policies to Transform Communities**

October 22-23  
The Westin Columbus  
310 S. High Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

*Revitalizing Ohio's Vacant Properties is a two-day interactive training and policy*

## Akron greenway cleanup has record number of volunteers

A record 58 volunteers helped clean up Adam's and Haley's runs in southeast Akron on April 27. The cleanup was done in cooperation with Keep Akron Beautiful and was part of Super Saturday for Clean Up Akron Month. Volunteers picked up trash and pulled invasive plants along both creeks. Event sponsors were Keep Akron Beautiful, National Park Service, Summit Soil and Water Conservation District, Lockheed Martin, Riverworks, Goodyear Tire & Rubber and Western Reserve Land Conservancy.

Several years ago, Lockheed Martin worked with a number of groups, including Western Reserve Land Conservancy, to restore Haley's Run and create a beautiful urban greenway. The Land Conservancy has preserved property along nearby Adam's Run and hopes to one day create a trail system linking this neighborhood to the Little Cuyahoga River and to the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail.



## Thriving Communities applauds new bill for demolition funding

Western Reserve Land Conservancy, which launched its Thriving Communities Institute program to address the foreclosure crisis, is applauding a bill introduced by area congressional representatives to establish a bond program to fund demolition of vacant, abandoned and tax-foreclosed homes.

Land Conservancy President and CEO Rich Cochran and Thriving Communities Institute Director Jim Rokakis, a national expert on the foreclosure crisis, praised U.S. Reps. David Joyce, Marcy Kaptur and Marcia Fudge for introducing the Restore Our Neighborhoods Act, which would authorize up to \$4 billion in new bond allocation for states to help fund demolition. The bill would authorize the sale of tax credit bonds - essentially interest-free loans - to states, which will have the discretion to issue the bonds or allow land banks to issue them. Proceeds from the sale of the bonds would fund demolition of vacant and abandoned homes.



**U.S. Reps. Dave Joyce, left, Marcia Fudge and Marcy Kaptur announce the introduction of the bill.**

## Regional conservation report unveiled at Dunham Tavern

Organizations and individuals focused on urban revitalization were among the approximately 40 people who attended the Feb. 14 unveiling of *Common Ground: The land protection report for northern Ohio* at the Dunham Tavern Museum Barn in Cleveland. The report, which was compiled by Western Reserve Land Conservancy, is the first comprehensive analysis of all the land conservation work done in a 14-county region and was the result of cooperation between dozens of partners, including park systems, nonprofits, land trusts, soil and water districts and other organizations. Funding for the report was provided by Western Reserve Land Conservancy,



solutions summit that will offer hands-on techniques and strategies to address vacant and abandoned property challenges and generate redevelopment opportunities. For more information, please visit

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For more information on Land Conservancy events, visit [www.wrlandconservancy.org](http://www.wrlandconservancy.org)

the Alton F. and Carrie S. Davis Fund and the Sandra L. and Dennis B. Haslinger Family Foundation.



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.

#### Quicklinks

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