

www.thrivingcommunitiesinstitute.org

Winter 2013

A message from Jim Rokakis

Thriving Communities Institute will begin its third year of operation in March. Looking back, we have accomplished more than we ever imagined.



Our first year, we concentrated on establishing county land banks throughout Western Reserve Land Conservancy's 14-county footprint, as well as in major cities throughout Ohio. We developed a "playbook" of best practices, forms, statutes and enabling legislation to share with newly created land banks. Thriving Communities Institute and the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland sponsored the first Convening of Land Banks in October 2011.

Approximately 120 participants from throughout the state learned the basics of establishing county land banks and the power a county land bank has in acquiring tax delinquent properties, removing blight and repurposing vacant land within their community. We quickly learned that the effectiveness of a land bank depended upon the availability of funds for demolition of blighted properties.

Thriving Communities' second year focused on acquiring funding for demolition. While county land banks have access to Delinquent Tax and Assessment Collection Fees (DTAC) this funding was clearly not enough to solve the problem. When we became aware of the settlement of the state attorneys general lawsuit against the five largest mortgage holders accused of "robo-signing" foreclosure documents, we approached Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine to point out the impact these foreclosures had not only on the

Second Land Bank Conference draws crowd from across Ohio

The Second Convening of Ohio County Land Banks, co-hosted by Thriving Communities Institute and Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation, was a huge success, drawing a crowd of about 200 people. The event, held Nov. 27-28 at the Holiday Inn Cleveland South in Independence, featured 29 presenters, 20 presentations and a five-member panel discussion. Attendees included land bank board members and staff, county and municipal officials, community and economic development officers, community development corporations and others with an interest in repurposing vacant and abandoned properties and revitalizing our neighborhoods.



To access the presentations made at the conference as well as biographical sketches of the presenters, click [here](#).

Thriving Communities Institute and the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation would like to thank major sponsors Safeguard Properties, RIK Enterprises, Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing, Kurtz Brothers Inc., PNC Bank, Ohio Housing Finance Agency, Key Bank, SecureView, Calfee Halter, ePropertyPlus by STR, FirstMerit Bank, Squire Sanders and Reclaimed Cleveland.

Study will examine link between demolition and foreclosure

All across Ohio, residents and city officials have witnessed first-hand the positive impact of demolishing vacant and abandoned homes. Neighborhoods dragged down by the foreclosure crisis now have an opportunity to be revitalized. There may soon be hard evidence of the link between the razing of vacant and abandoned properties in some of our hardest hit areas and the likelihood of future bank foreclosures in those neighborhoods.



The Land Conservancy is working with nationally known researchers, Case Western Reserve University's Center on Urban Poverty and the Cuyahoga Land Bank to conduct research that is expected to statistically prove the link between demolition and subsequent foreclosures.

We hope to report on the results of the study later this year.

National publication focuses on Slavic Village revitalization

Jim Rokakis, director of Thriving Communities Institute, and Cleveland Councilman Anthony Brancatelli are featured in an [in-depth story](#) on efforts to save Cleveland's Slavic Village neighborhood after it was devastated by the foreclosure crisis. The story, written by George E. Condon Jr., appeared in The National Journal. The story quotes new Slavic Village resident Jeremy Salupo, 28, as saying, "There is real momentum now." Salupo also praises Brancatelli and government for "actually working with us" to rescue Slavic Village,



homeowner, but on the residents living nearby the vacant and abandoned foreclosed home. Attorney General DeWine understood the connection between bank foreclosures and the need for demolition of those vacant, abandoned properties left behind. He was the only attorney general in the 50 states receiving settlement dollars to earmark funds for demolition -- \$75 million of the \$93 million of discretionary funds made available to Ohio, although at least two other states have decided to set a small amount aside now as well.

Our second-year efforts sought funding at the federal level as well. The Restore our Neighborhoods Act of 2012 was introduced by Congressman Steve LaTourette and Congresswoman Marcia Fudge as a way of giving states and local communities the ability to issue long term bonds and utilize tax credits to further fund demolition. With Congressman LaTourette's retirement from Congress, we are searching for additional sponsors for this critical bill. We continued to establish and advise county land banks and are forming a Network of Ohio County Land Banks. Our Second Ohio Land Bank Conference in November 2012 brought more than 200 land bank practitioners from throughout the state together for 1 1/2 days of practical sessions and mobile workshops.

As we enter our third year of operation, our goal is to provide irrefutable evidence that demolition of vacant and abandoned properties within the hardest hit areas of our cities will reduce future bank foreclosures. To accomplish this, we are working with nationally known researchers, Case Western Reserve's Center on Urban Poverty and the Cuyahoga Land Bank to conduct research that is expected to statistically prove the link between demolition and subsequent foreclosures.

Throughout the year, Thriving Communities Institute will expand the number of county land banks, sharing information through quarterly meetings and host the Third Ohio Land Bank Conference in the fall of 2013. We look forward to initiating urban conservation projects bringing together the expertise of the "traditional" Western Reserve Land Conservancy staff with Thriving Communities and its urban partners.

Looking back on our first two years and ahead to our third, Thriving Communities Institute, as Western Reserve Land Conservancy's urban program, serves as a valuable asset in removing blight from our cities and creating healthy, thriving communities.

Contact Info

Thriving Communities Institute

adding, "Whereas in the past you saw one house demolished every couple months, now it is a few every month. And where it took us a year and a half to get six people to move down here, now it is 25 and growing. So we've reached a tipping point."

'60 Minutes on CNBC' to feature Rokakis, demolition on Jan. 15

"Home Wrecker," a followup to the 2011 nationally televised report on Cleveland's approach to stabilizing its neighborhoods, will air at 9 p.m. and midnight on Tuesday, Jan. 15 on CNBC. The piece will feature original footage from the "60 Minutes" story as well as additional interviews with experts, including Jim Rokakis, executive director of Thriving Communities Institute.

The "60 Minutes on CNBC" episode reports on the threat to American neighborhoods posed by the surge in the number of abandoned houses, a result of foreclosures and owners who can't or won't keep paying on a mortgage debt that may be twice the value of their home. The report focuses on Cleveland, and that city's decision to demolish its abandoned houses. It includes interviews with Rokakis, a former county treasurer of Cuyahoga County, and Cleveland homeowners Roberta Bryant, Linda Bizzelle, Gina Bruno, Beverly Anderson, Norma Scott and Monica Hubbard.



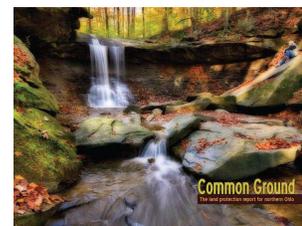
State approves more funding for Akron greenway acquisition

Efforts by the Land Conservancy and Thriving Communities Institute to expand an urban greenway in Akron have just received a major boost from the state. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources has approved grants totaling \$26,880 for the purchase of a 2.5-acre property along Adam's Run, which is in southeast Akron. The award will cover the cost of purchasing the property. The Land Conservancy worked with Lockheed Martin Corp. to help create Haley's Run, a greenway that connects to Adam's Run just south of the Goodyear test track. The Land Conservancy is working with local partners to extend the greenway to the Little Cuyahoga River and then to the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail.



Regional conservation report will be unveiled at Feb. 14 event

Thriving Communities Institute's efforts to revitalize and reshape urban neighborhoods are cited in the just-released publication *Common Ground: The regional land protection report for northern Ohio*. The report will be unveiled to Thriving Communities' partners at a reception from 2-4 p.m. Thursday, February 14 at the Dunham Tavern Museum Barn, 6709 Euclid Ave., Cleveland 44103. There will be food, refreshments, a short presentation at 3 p.m. and distribution of the report. Please RSVP by contacting Gina Pausch at gpausch@wrlandconservancy.org or (440) 528-4150. The report 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, the Alton F. and Carrie S. Davis Fund and the Sandra L. and Dennis B. Haslinger Family Foundation.



It was a great year for the Land Conservancy

Western Reserve Land Conservancy just finished one of its best years ever in terms of land preservation. In 2012, the Land Conservancy preserved another 5,522 acres -- only two acres shy of our record total from the previous year. We are grateful for all the landowners, supporters and partners who believe in conservation and in our mission. To date, we have preserved 474 properties and 34,441 acres in northern Ohio. In addition, our Thriving Communities Institute held the



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Upcoming Events

Grand River Chapter Speaker

Series

7 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 7
Painesville Field Office
70 South Park Place
Painesville, Ohio 44077

Herpetologist Greg Lipps, who has done field research throughout the state, will talk about frogs, snakes, turtles, salamanders and the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake.

Landowner information meeting

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 13
Homerville Community Center
State Route 301
Homer Township

Landowners from throughout the region are invited to learn about conservation easements and farmland preservation efforts, including the state's Agricultural Easement Protection Program. Featured speaker will be the Land Conservancy's Andy McDowell, who has overseen the preservation of thousands of acres of farmland in the region.

Reception for release of Common Ground: The regional land protection report for northern Ohio

2-4 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 14
Dunham Tavern Museum Barn
6709 Euclid Ave.
Cleveland, Ohio 44103

Reception will include food, refreshments, copies of the report and a short presentation. RSVP by

second statewide land bank conference and has now helped establish land banks in 15 Ohio counties. We thank all those who have helped make this happen.

Thanks to the foundations that have supported our work

Western Reserve Land Conservancy's Thriving Communities Institute would like to thank the following foundations for their generous support. It would be impossible for us to achieve what we have been able to achieve thus far without their support. THANK YOU!

Abington Foundation, Akron Community Foundation, Dominion Foundation, Eva L. and Joseph M. Bruening Foundation, FirstEnergy Foundation, Fund for Our Economic Future, GAR Foundation, Herbert W. Hoover Foundation, John P. Murphy Foundation, Lake Geauga Fund, PNC Foundation; Cleveland, Saint Luke's Foundation, Sandusky/ Erie County Community Foundation, Stark Community Foundation, The Billie Howland Steffee Family Fund, The Cleveland Foundation, The Generation Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Kurtz Foundation, The Mary S. and David C. Corbin Foundation, The Raymond John Wean Foundation, Third Federal Foundation, William J. and Dorothy K. O'Neill Foundation and the Youngstown 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.

contacting Gina Pausch at (440) 528-4150 or gpausch@wrlandconservancy.org.

Winter Ecology Tour

10 a.m.-noon
Saturday, March 2
Morgan Swamp TNC Camp Office
3973 Callender Road
Rock Creek, Ohio 44084

Join Paul Belanger and Brett Rodstrom, our eastern field director, for a look at how our woodland critters survive and deal with winter in northern Ohio. We'll meet at the office at the camp first and head out into the woods from there. We'll see swamp forests, boreal hemlock forests, vernal pools, beaver ponds, the Grand River and its floodplain. We will look at tracks, food sources, and discover their survival tactics. There are restroom facilities (and buildings to get warm in!) at the camp. Participants should dress for the condition and bring a water bottle. Please RSVP to Kim Bihler at kbihler@wrlandconservancy.org.

Grand River Cleanup

May 18

More information to come!

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!

For more information on Land Conservancy events, visit www.wrlandconservancy.org

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