



## Momentum Building for Solutions to Our Vacant Property Crisis

Vacant properties in Metro Louisville continue to be a vexing problem, but they also present opportunities for innovative solutions. It is the hope of Metropolitan Housing Coalition (MHC), the Louisville Vacant Property Campaign (LVPC) and others that we seize upon the current excitement regarding addressing vacant properties. LVPC has been meeting for over three years, even before the National Vacant Property Campaign held its national conference in Louisville in June 2009. Many citizen activists, elected officials and government employees attended that conference, where most of the citizen activists were from Louisville.

Recently, momentum has been building to develop solutions to our vacant property crisis. On April 28, Louisville Metro Government convened a day-long Vacant, Abandoned and Underutilized Property Summit. LVPC had been advocating for such a summit prior to the Fischer Administration. The Summit brought together over 200 people from local governments, for- and non-profit developers, neighborhood associations, community-oriented farmers and gardeners, and community activists. The day began with a call to action from Dr. James Mims, Director of Louisville Metro Codes & Regulations. Following Dr. Mims were speakers regarding problems and challenges; code enforcement, court and lien processes; and the Land Bank Authority. These presentations were followed by small group discussions, focusing on ideas and solutions to be forwarded to Mayor Greg Fischer for policy consideration. These same recommendations will be posted online at [www.louisvilleky.gov/ipl](http://www.louisvilleky.gov/ipl), along with available notes and links.

One session concentrated on preventive strategies, where it was pointed out that the best way to prevent vacant properties is to keep the property inhabited. Various methods of prevention include homebuyer education, foreclosure counseling and prevention, not privatizing the sale of unpaid property taxes, and neighborhood planning and mapping. Another aspect of prevention occurs after a property has become vacant, but before it becomes a neighborhood problem and eyesore. Some of these preventive strategies include retrofitting older homes for energy conservation and cost savings, organized and caring social networks such as neighborhood associations, specially-formed nonprofits, temporary green spaces and community gardens, private side-yards, public art, public or private parks and an active, strategic Land Bank with expanded staff and resources.

On Thursday, May 19, MHC hosted Daniel T. Kildee, Co-Founder and President of the Center for Community Progress, as the speaker for the successful 2011 MHC Annual Meeting.

Prior to founding the Center, Kildee served as Genesee County (Michigan) Treasurer from 1997-2009. Before his election as Treasurer, Dan served for 12 years as a Genesee County Commissioner. Kildee initiated the use of Michigan's new tax foreclosure law as a tool for community development and neighborhood stabilization. He founded the Genesee Land Bank, which has become a model for cities across the nation.

While in town, Kildee also met with Mayor Fischer and aides, Metro Council members, Jefferson County Legislators, staff from Codes & Regulations, Housing & Family Services, Economic Development, Jefferson County Attorneys, nonprofit housing developers, and activists from various groups, esp. neighborhood associations. Much of his time was spent explaining the need to strengthen the local Land Bank Authority and the need to end the forced sale of tax liens to the private market. This move would allow local government more control over decisions affecting delinquent tax payers, their property and neighborhoods in which these properties are found.

A coalition of local organizations was already addressing the effects of tax lien sales to third-party investors that reduce local control. In fact, they held a meeting of about 60 people on this topic in April. They continue to meet, have given a presentation to the Community Affairs Committee of Metro Council and have plans to meet with other officials and stakeholders. This group also has hosted self-help clinics in the community to assist delinquent property tax-holders who had been identified and noticed of these clinics. The first clinic served 25 families in addressing their delinquencies and need for the Homestead exemption. The Office of the County Attorney worked out payment plans, which took the tax liens off the list for private sale. A second clinic will be held on June 21 at Northwest Neighborhood Place from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

This group has begun discussions with local and state officials on how to change the state statutes to allow for local governments to purchase the tax liens. This is viewed as a first step toward re-invigorating the local Land Bank. In fact, the local Land Bank began discussions on this and other possible changes after staff attended the recent national conference on land banks.

The LVPC will continue to meet, work on innovative solutions and monitor the proposed policy recommendations and review those which were not sent on to the Mayor. The next meeting of LVPC will be Tuesday, June 21 from 5:30-7:30 PM at Presbyterian Community Center, 701 S. Hancock Street. For more information or to be added to the email distribution list, please contact Doug at [doug@metropolitanhousing.org](mailto:doug@metropolitanhousing.org).

## Changes through the Louisville Metro Budget

Mayor Fischer announced his first budget on May 26. Shaped by the Mayor's priorities and fiscal constraints, the budget also proposed structural changes to city government. What was formerly the Department of Housing and Family Services is now reorganized into the Community Services and Revitalization Department, consisting of three divisions: Community Services, Community Revitalization, and Compliance and Administration. We are still learning about how this will work. But we do know that several people were laid off who had worked in the housing division. Cuts to the federal Community Development Block Grant program and restructuring of tasks caused a sharp decrease to an already diminished division.

Of course at a time of greatest need, there is a shortfall in revenue which is affecting many programs. With the rate of homelessness in school-age children rapidly increasing, we are concerned about the lack of long-term, stable, affordable housing in our community.

Louisville Metro Council is now conducting hearings on the budget and will make changes before passing it, but the focus is on hard choices that must be made given limited resources. More open communication between the Mayor and Metro Council is creating dialogue, and we need to be sure that affordable housing is a priority for Metro government and remains an important part of that conversation.

One bright spot Mayor Fischer's proposed budget is to provide up to \$100,000 in funding for the Louisville Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) if matching funds can be found. Leveraging resources has been a proven model for all AHTFs and the local board is already at work to secure commitments for match money. This one time money helps bridge the time until we can get a dedicated renewable public source of funding for the local AHTF. The hard work of the Open the Door campaign is still a powerful influence. With the Mayor's help, we are moving forward toward creating funding sources for this locally-controlled housing resource.

### **The 2<sup>nd</sup> Housing Partnership, Inc. Annual Dinner Thursday, June 23**

This event celebrates the impact of affordable housing in our community. All proceeds support the mission of The Housing Partnership, Inc.—to create, sustain and promote access to affordable housing opportunities. For more information, contact Lydia Prichard at 814-2709 or [lprichard@WeAreHPI.org](mailto:lprichard@WeAreHPI.org). Sponsorships and tickets are available.

Grand Ballroom, Galt House East, 140 N. 4<sup>th</sup> Street  
Reception- 5:00 p.m. Dinner- 6:00 p.m.

## 2011 Annual Meeting A Great Success

Over 300 people attended the 2011 MHC Annual Meeting on May 19, where we focused on how we can "save for our future" by implementing policies that will help turn vacant properties into assets- not liabilities. Keynote speaker Dan Kildee made a powerful presentation demonstrating how communities can implement policies that can strategically and effectively respond to vacant and abandon properties and bring revenue back to local government. In the two days before the annual meeting, Mr. Kildee met with Mayor Fischer, members of Metro Council, members of the Jefferson County Kentucky Legislative Delegation, local government officials, non-profit housing developers, and community activists. For more information about Kildee's organization, the Center for Community Progress, go to [www.communityprogress.net](http://www.communityprogress.net).

At the Annual Meeting, Mayor Fischer stated that our vacant property crisis is a social justice issue that must be solved. He noted that his administration will be an ally for citizens concerned about vacant properties as it explores policy solutions to this problem.

As a community, we should advocate for the smart, sensible policies that will empower our city to strategically address vacant properties and their impacts on our neighborhoods.

We'd like to thank our volunteers for their time and hard work: Becki Winchel, Janet Dakan, Faith Weekly, Alicia Hurle, Amber Duke, Rachel Cutler, Summer Milliner, Adam Hall, Lawrence Wilbon, Connor Riley, Dan Forbis, Michael Gardner, David Ritchay, and Peter Wayne. Thanks also to Carling Sothoron and Lydia Comer for providing vacant property photos shown as a slide show at the Annual Meeting.

The generous support of our 2011 Annual Meeting sponsors was key to the event's success. Thanks to: Fifth Third Bank, PNC Bank, American Founders Bank, Janet Dakan, Kentucky Housing Corporation, Stites and Harbison, Beacon Property Management, Carpenters Local 64, Habitat for Humanity of Metro Louisville, Johanna Bos, LDG Development, Louisville Metro Housing Authority, Louisville Urban League, Network Center for Community Change, New Directions Housing Corporation, Oracle Design Group, Project Warm, River City Housing, and Volunteers of America. Thanks also to Republic Bank for designing and printing our program covers.

MHC also welcomed two new members of our Board of Directors at the event. We look forward to working with Candice Payton and Ted Fulmore, and want to thank outgoing board members Kenny Lanham, Jr. and Carmen Tisdale for their years of dedicated service.

## Schedule of Events

**June 21- Louisville Vacant Properties Campaign.** Presbyterian Community Center, 701 S. Hancock St., 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

**July 12- Fair Housing Coalition Meeting.** New Directions, 1000 E. Liberty St., 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.

**Now through June 30- Free GED Testing and GED Prep Classes for Kentucky Residents from Kentucky Adult Education.**

Kentuckians taking the GED before June 30 will not have to pay the usual \$55 fee. For more information, contact the adult education center in your county to discuss how to get started. To find the local adult education center, call 800-928-7323 or visit [www.kentuckyged.org](http://www.kentuckyged.org).

**June 16- Network Center for Community Change Press Conference and Network Nite.** After ten years, the Making Connections Network is changing their name—but not their work. Press conference celebrating the name change, held at the Muhammad Ali gloves in Sheppard Square, 5:30 p.m. Network Nite, where you can connect with opportunities and join NC3 for dinner, Presbyterian Community Center, 701 S. Hancock, 6:00 p.m.

**June 18- NDHC Metro Louisville Repair Affair.** New Directions' Repair Affair mobilizes community-wide resources and volunteers to support the home repair needs of elderly and disabled homeowners of low income in Louisville. Homeowners who need assistance, call 719-7143. To volunteer, call 719-7130.

**June 21- Clinic for Homeowners on Past Due Property Tax Liens and Their Sale to 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Purchasers.** A coalition of agencies is hosting a clinic to educate homeowners about how their property tax liens can be sold. The clinic will provide homeowners with strategies that will help them to protect their assets, including how to work with the County Attorney's Office to establish a payment plan for past due property taxes. Representatives of the County Attorney's Office, volunteer lawyers, and several elder services providers will be present. For more information, contact George Eklund at 618-5892 or [george eklund@makechangetogether.org](mailto:george eklund@makechangetogether.org). Northwest Neighborhood Place, Shawnee High School, 4018 W. Market, 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

**June 21- Legal Aid Presentation on Tenant Rights on Foreclosed Properties.** Many tenants mistakenly believe that they must immediately vacate their homes when a landlord defaults on a mortgage, or that a new owner is allowed to force tenants to move right away. Join Legal Aid attorney Eileen Ordovery to learn more about tenants' rights according to the *Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act*. Louisville Free Public Library Job Shop, Main Branch, 301 York St., 2:00 p.m.

**June 25- Through the Grapevine: Urban Gardening for Community Strength.** A tour hosted by the NDHC Neighborhood Roundtable ReciproCity Project. For more information or to RSVP, contact Lydia Comer at [lydiac@nhdc.org](mailto:lydiac@nhdc.org) or 719-7169. Meet at 1000 E. Liberty St., 4:00 – 8:30 p.m.

**June 27- New Direction Housing Corporation Neighborhood Roundtable "Green Meeting."** For more information or to RSVP, contact Lydia Comer at [lydiac@nhdc.org](mailto:lydiac@nhdc.org) or 719-7169. 1000 E. Liberty St., 5:30- 7:30 p.m.

**June 28- Kentucky Equal Justice Center Presentation on Workers' Rights.** Zenaida Lockard will provide information on Kentucky workers' basic rights, as well as information on wage and hour laws. Louisville Free Public Library Job Shop, Main Branch, 301 York St., 2:00 p.m.

**June 29- Competitive City Report 2011: A Decade of Data.** Features Mayor Greg Fischer as guest. For more information, call 693-8585 or go to [www.greatertlouisvilleproject.org](http://www.greatertlouisvilleproject.org). Kentucky International Convention Center, 221 S. Fourth St., 10:00 a.m.

**June 29- Urban League 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Community Career Expo Jeffersontown.** Provides a venue for job seekers to connect with employers, colleges, universities and training providers. For more information, go to [www.lul.org](http://www.lul.org) or call 566-3371. Jeffersontown Community Center, 10617 Taylorsville Rd., 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

**July 1- Applications due for the Anne Braden Institute for Social Justice Research Healing History Academy.** ABI will select 25 participants for a free six-month program to learn parts of Louisville and US history. Participants will meet with and learn from local educators, artists, performers, historians, and community advocates to consider the meaning and unfinished business of social and racial justice movements of the 20th century. For more information and to get an application, visit <http://al.comm.louisville.edu/abi> or call 852-6142.

**July 9- Creative Commons: Enhancing Your Community with Public Art.** A tour hosted by the NDHC Neighborhood Roundtable ReciproCity Project. For more information or to RSVP, contact Lydia Comer at [lydiac@nhdc.org](mailto:lydiac@nhdc.org) or 719-7169. 201 E. Spring St., New Albany, time TBA.

**October 12-13- Kentucky Housing Corporation 2011 Kentucky Affordable Housing Conference.** This year's theme is "Housing is the Key." For more information, go to [www.kyhousing.org](http://www.kyhousing.org). Lexington Convention Center.

**Help for Homeless Veterans**

**Call the VA Homeless Veteran Hotline  
1-877-4AID VET**

## Help Strengthen the United Voice for Fair and Affordable Housing- Join MHC or Renew Your Membership Today!

As we look at the cuts to federal, state and local budgets, MHC asks for your support, both financially and in helping MHC increase membership. Our need is two-fold: MHC needs to replace funds that have been decreased; but equally important is that MHC wants to make our voice stronger as the same budget cuts affect policy in providing fair and affordable housing for our most vulnerable populations.

### As an MHC Member you:

- **Support** the creation of long-term solutions to our community's affordable housing crisis.
- **Join** the diverse coalition of over 300 individual and organizational members which make up our far-reaching base.
- **Receive** our monthly newsletter and published reports on timely housing issues that touch the Metro Louisville region and beyond.
- **Advertise** your events in our printed and electronic newsletters.
- **Most important of all**, you will have your voice heard at this historic and critical time!

For membership questions, please call the office at (502) 584-6858 and speak with Curtis Stauffer.  
To make an online donation, visit us on the web at [www.metropolitanhousing.org](http://www.metropolitanhousing.org).



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