



THE COMMUNITY TABLE

The Hill District Consensus Group Responds to the Pittsburgh Land Bank bill February 2014

On Tuesday, January 14, 2014, Pittsburgh City Council introduced City Council Bill #2014-0025,¹ a Pittsburgh Land Bank ordinance. For this legislation, a land bank is defined as a public authority created to efficiently acquire, hold, manage, and develop vacant, abandoned, and/or foreclosed properties. Generally, a land bank unites the collection of delinquent property taxes, land recycling, and homeownership preservation into one aligned system.² The bill is sponsored by Councilwoman Deb Gross and supported by the efforts of the Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group (PCRG) as well as other partners. PCRG is a Pennsylvania nonprofit consortium of community-based organizations that represent low- and moderate- income neighborhoods in the City of Pittsburgh.

The Hill District Consensus Group (HDCG) is an organizational member of PCRG and supports the idea of establishing a land bank in our city. However, HDCG cannot support the ordinance in its present form. Other PCRG members have also provided valuable feedback regarding the bill.³ The following are key issues of concern and recommended proposals to improve the legislation for our communities.

Community Control

How will community members hold the Land Bank accountable to the public? Moreover, how will the working poor, lower-income, and other stakeholders have a voice in Land Bank decisions that disproportionately affect distressed communities? The Pittsburgh Land Bank needs to offer our communities an effective way to address neighborhood land issues, beyond just working with City Council and Community Development Corporations alone.

- **Community Plans** – Develop a formal process to adopt and enforce community plans. At present, the City of Pittsburgh does not have a policy of adopting and enforcing such plans.
- **Education** – Provide educational programming and technical assistance to access the Land Bank.
- **Neighborhood Councils** – Form neighborhood-based sub-committees or advisory committees to the Land Bank board. Committees might be similar to the Community Roundtables proposed by Mayor Peduto⁴ or development review committees such as the South Side Planning Forum.⁵

¹ <http://www.pcr.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/2014-0025-Pgh-Land-Bank-Bill.pdf>

² <http://www.pcr.org/land-banking/>

³ <http://www.pcr.org/pcrg-member-response-to-pending-city-land-banking-legislation/>

⁴ <http://www.billpeduto.com/2013/04/08/44-community-roundtables-bringing-our-neighborhoods-together-to-solve-problems/>

Public Process

How will the public ensure transparency in Land Bank operations? How will the Land Bank engage stakeholders in the decision-making process? How will the Land Bank avoid backroom deal making and political cronyism? The Pittsburgh Land Bank needs to be open and accessible to the general public.

- **Community Outreach** – Provide advance public notice to all, particularly community stakeholders most directly impacted by Land Bank operations.
- **Public Participation** – Develop a process to effectively engage stakeholders, solicit feedback, and respond to questions and concerns. This may include organizing regular meetings and public hearings in neighborhoods where the Land Bank operates.
- **Standardized Process** – Establish and follow a standard process to assess land acquisition and development proposals.

Neighborhood Equity

How will communities benefit from the Land Bank? How will the Land Bank promote community development? Community members are concerned that the Land Bank will enable developers to grab public land and develop it for private profit, with no interest in addressing community needs. The Pittsburgh Land Bank needs to require community benefits from development proposals, particularly involving parcels over a certain size threshold.

- **Public Private Partnership** – Promote partnerships between developers and community-based organizations (CBOs), with community co-ownership stakes. Preferably, CBO partners will be controlled and held accountable by residents as members. This provides the opportunity for community groups to participate in the development process, share in decision-making, and earn financial returns of development in their neighborhood.
- **Community Economic Benefits Assessment** – Require Community Economic Benefits Assessments for land acquisition and development proposals.⁶
- **Displacement Prevention** – Adopt policies to prevent direct and indirect displacement of residents and businesses, such as inclusionary zoning for affordable housing. Bonnie Young-Laing (Co-Director, HDCG) and Bob Damewood (Attorney, Regional Housing Legal Services) authored a paper recommending a number of strategies to prevent displacement in Pittsburgh's Hill District neighborhood.⁷ Additionally, local precedents include the activities of the Sanders Task Force.⁸

⁵ <http://www.southsidepgh.com/>

⁶ www.livingwagesonoma.org/pdf/Petaluma_FCIR_1_28_08.doc

⁷ http://www.prrac.org/pdf/Hill_District_Anti-Displacement_Strategies-final.pdf

⁸ http://www.clearinghouse.net/chDocs/resources/caseStudy_GeorgeGalsteretal_1228063598.pdf