ST. LOUIS
LAND BANK ASSESSMENT
PREPARED FOR THE
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION AGENCY
INTRODUCTION

ZAKCQ LOCKREM, AICP
Principal, Director of Planning
Asakura Robinson Company

ALEXANDRA MILLER
Principal
Asakura Robinson Company
• Public entities

• Established to acquire and manage vacant, abandoned and tax-delinquent properties; and

• Bring these properties back into productive use and onto the tax rolls.

• Center for Community Progress estimates over 120 land banks currently in the U.S.
• **Before a Land Bank Acts:**
  Property becomes vacant and tax-delinquent

• **Step 1: Acquisition**

• **Step 2: Maintenance**
  » Including demolition or stabilization for structures where needed
  » Including mowing and possible leasing of vacant lots for greening uses

• **Step 3: Disposition** for redevelopment, greening, or other permanent productive use
PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT

• Develop a deep understanding of current LRA operations

• Research national best practices of land banks, including the Land Bank of Kansas City, MO

• Make recommendations for operational and process improvements
- Initial research on best practices
- 3 site visits
- Over 80 total stakeholders consulted through interviews and focus groups
- Multiple interviews with LRA leadership and key City agency partners
- Draft recommendations vetted and improved
- Final recommendations issued (February 2017)
FINDINGS: EXISTING EFFORTS

• Mow to Own program
• Center for Community Progress technical assistance
• Americorps mapping of a percentage of vacant properties
• Metropolitan Sewer District partnership - land disposition for stormwater management
• Vacancy Task Force
FINDINGS: KEY THEMES

• **Adopt National Best Practices**
  » Inclusive mission & vision
  » Adoption of additional policies & procedures
  » Managing the full “property lifecycle” from acquisition, to maintenance, to disposition
  » Communications & transparency to build partnerships
  » Leveraging new resources and partnerships
FINDINGS: KEY THEMES

- **Recognize & Address Resource Constraints**
  
  » Few staff per property compared to land banks nationally
  
  » A smaller budget & fewer sources of revenue than other land banks - reliant entirely on property sales for funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Flint, MI (Genesee County Land Bank Auth.)</th>
<th>Cuyahoga County, OH (Cuyahoga Cty. Land Reutilization Corp.)</th>
<th>New Orleans, LA (New Orleans Redevelopment Authority)</th>
<th>Detroit, MI (Detroit Land Bank Authority)</th>
<th>Kansas City, MO (The Land Bank of Kansas City, Missouri)</th>
<th>St. Louis, MO LRA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Staff Members</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Properties in Land Bank Inventory</td>
<td>13,120 (as of 2015)</td>
<td>1,156 (as of 2013)</td>
<td>2,200 (as of 2016)</td>
<td>95,387 (as of 2016)</td>
<td>5,000 (approx., as of 2016)</td>
<td>12,000 (approx., as of 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Properties per Staff Member</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>2,327</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>1,412</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings: Key Themes

- Manage the Full Lifecycle of a Vacant Property
  - Acquisition: Strategically target properties for tax enforcement
  - Maintenance, Stabilization, Demolition: Create plans that further strategic use of existing resources, while also stating long-term goals
  - Disposition: Define strategic areas for redevelopment, stormwater management, greening & adopt disposition policies

One of 26 properties targeted for demolition in 2014 near Ranken Technical College. Source: NextSTL.com
FINDINGS: KEY THEMES

• **Build on Work Completed by the Center for Community Progress**
  - Partner with the KCMO Land Bank to address insurable title issues at the state level
  - Define plans that address overall goals of CCP report while refining benchmarks
GOAL 1: Define a forward-looking, inclusive LRA mission and vision.
EXAMPLE RECOMMENDATIONS

• Produce a study defining the **costs of vacancy**, as CCP’s study recommends.

• Partner with stakeholders to analyze the **economic and social benefits of greening projects** such as community gardens, urban farms, habitat enhancement, beautification, etc.
GOAL 2: Formalize LRA policies and procedures.
**EXAMPLE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Create an LRA policies and procedures manual.
- Adopt an LRA Annual Operating Plan and release an LRA Annual Report each year.

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**Putting Property Back on the Tax Rolls**

Revenue from the sale of tax-foreclosed properties is the primary source of funding for the operation of the Genesee County Land Bank (GCLB) and the maintenance of vacant properties. Fiscal year 2014/2015 has turned out to be the second best year for sales at the GCLB with 943 properties sold generating a total of $4.2 million in gross revenue. Approximately half (425) of these sales were houses sold on land contracts, primarily to first time home owners. 269 of these properties were vacant lots sold to adjacent homeowners or businesses. The remainder were commercial and cash sales of structures.

The GCLB currently has 1,495 active land contracts with a balance of $7,826,230.00. In addition to generating funds for Land Bank operations and property maintenance, these properties generate tax revenue for local, regional and state government. During the 2014/2015 fiscal year, 186 land contracts were paid off and deeded to the purchasers.

*By Phil Stair*
GOAL 3: Manage vacant properties comprehensively.
EXAMPLE RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Work with the KCMO Land Bank** to implement CCP recommendations related to insurable title and waiting periods.

- Define a **comprehensive maintenance plan** that includes target standards for maintenance and stabilization for all properties in the LRA inventory.

- Promote and facilitate **alternative land uses and greening**.

**Example Format for Comprehensive Maintenance Plan Components Including Current Targets, Long-Term Goals, and Resources.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maintenance Program Element</th>
<th>Current Annual Target</th>
<th>Long-Term Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Mow all vacant lots on a regular basis to preserve community quality of life and safety. | Mow all vacant lots seven times per year.  
*Resources Required:* Existing resources of $225,000 per year, plus additional financial resources contributed by the Forestry Department. | Mow all vacant lots twelve times per year to reduce overgrowth.  
*Resources Required:* An increase in budget of $200,000 per year for the LRA, plus additional resources of $400,000 per year and potential maintenance partnerships for the Forestry Department. |
GOAL 4: Foster clear communication and transparency to build trust.
EXAMPLE RECOMMENDATIONS

• Develop a new, stand-alone website for the LRA based on national best practices.

• Develop tailored materials, seminars, and learning sessions for groups at varying levels of capacity.

EXAMPLE WEBSITE BEST PRACTICE: KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
GOAL 5: Grow the LRA’s staffing and financial resources.
EXAMPLE RECOMMENDATIONS

• Hire at least **four new staff** in the next 1-3 years. Potential focus areas:
  » Strategy & partnerships
  » Communications
  » Community engagement
  » Greening

• Develop a comprehensive strategy to **increase LRA revenue**.
GOAL 6: Build and solidify partnerships to further the LRA’s mission.
• Work with the IT department and other agencies to ensure that all sources of data related to vacancy can be reliably accessed and utilized within a single database.
THANKS to the EPA, LRA, City, and stakeholders who contributed time & energy.

Contact: alexandra@asakurarobinson.com