

securing homes &

Opening New Doors

for allegheny county

2019 Update



TCLB

Tri-COG Land Bank

About Us

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The year 2019 marked a transition point for Tri-COG Land Bank (TCLB). After laying the operational groundwork, we can now turn our attention toward reaching new property buyers and communities. Since our founding in 2017, we have focused our energy on putting the necessary systems in place to acquire properties strategically to advance community goals. In 2019, we shifted our focus to property disposition.

Our aim at this next stage of the TCLB process is to maximize our ability to identify the most beneficial reuse for each property we acquire. In everything we do, our decisions are driven by input and oversight from our member communities and best practices learned from our national partners.

With those systems in place, in 2019, we reached an important milestone. We listed our first property for sale – a vacant, buildable lot in Edgewood. This was the first time any land bank in Allegheny County has marketed a property. We also expanded our inventory with the acquisition of 21 other properties and added Property Development Manager Gary Hitchins to our staff.

As we move into 2020, we are excited to acquire 19 more properties and to expand our outreach to new communities across Allegheny County. We also plan to put at least 20 more properties on the market by the end of the year. As we continue to grow, we are grateful for the ongoing commitment from our members and other key stakeholders who help support more sustainable communities free of blight and attractive to residents and businesses.

An Lewis
Executive Director



OUR PURPOSE

Blight is pervasive, expensive, and has damaging effects on the economic and social fabric of communities. Unattended property vacancies result in blocks wrought with blight, high maintenance costs, nuisance issues, such as crime and fire, and uncollected taxes. This creates a cycle of disinvestment with the ultimate cost paid by existing community residents.

TCLB is dedicated to eliminating blight in local communities through responsive, community-centered action that aids in the development of the region. We are driven by a “Plan for the Place” and use data to support strategic decisions. In everything we do, we are responsive to community priorities and development opportunities.



Our vision is to achieve sustainable communities free of blight and attractive to residents and businesses.



Our mission is to strategically restore investment in blighted properties to enhance community safety, value, and vibrancy.



Neighborhood Restoration
“Greening” vacant lots through side lot sales and neighborhood green spaces



Neighborhood Preservation
Addressing abandoned homes in stable neighborhoods



Site Development
Assemble and acquire multiple lots for larger redevelopment plans



Economic Redevelopment
Acquire and repurpose commercial spaces to bring in new businesses and strengthen existing commercial districts

Better Together

OUR MEMBERS

TCLB membership is comprised of 22 municipalities, 6 school districts, and Allegheny County. In order for us to operate in any community, the municipal government, school district, and county government must all join the land bank. Member participation is paramount to the function of TCLB. All of our members have representatives who serve on our Municipal and School District Advisory Committees, helping to review property decisions and elect our Board of Directors. From property selection to acquisition to disposition, TCLB staff work closely with each member community to ensure our work is consistent with neighborhood plans and goals.

To financially support operations and property transactions, members contribute to the TCLB annually. As enabled by the PA Land Bank Act, 50% of property tax revenue is also shared with TCLB for five years after a property is sold. Members also agree to forgive any outstanding liens on TCLB properties. A clear, insurable title is critical to protecting future owners, and thus the stability of communities after properties are sold to a new owner.



22 Municipalities

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Blawnox | McKeesport |
| Braddock Hills | Monroeville |
| Chalfant | North Braddock |
| Churchill | Pitcairn |
| Clairton | Rankin |
| Dravosburg | Sharpsburg |
| East Pittsburgh | South Versailles |
| Edgewood | Swissvale |
| Etna | Turtle Creek |
| Forest Hills | White Oak |
| Millvale | Wilkins |

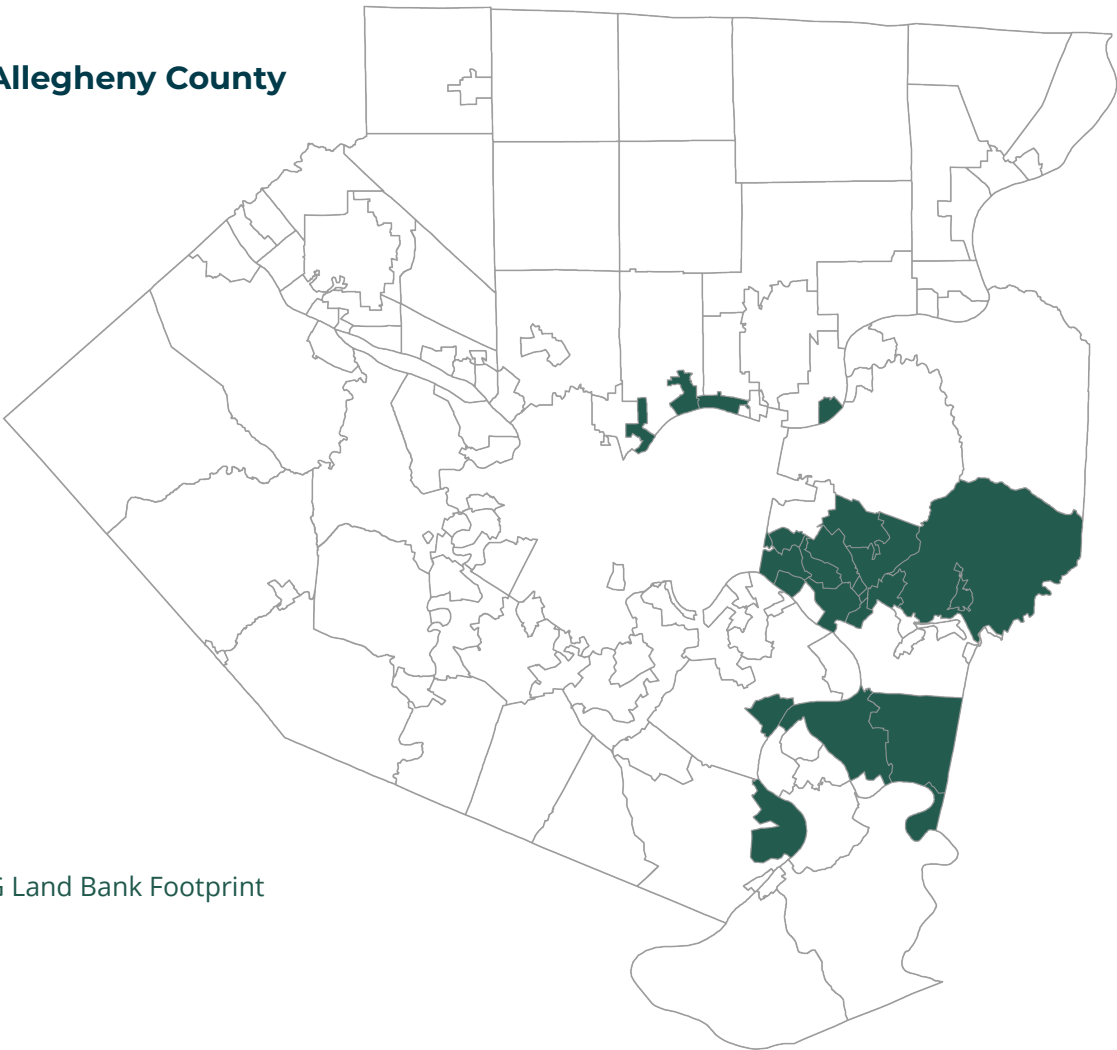


Six School Districts

- Clairton City School District
- Fox Chapel Area School District
- Gateway School District
- McKeesport Area School District
- Shaler Area School District
- Woodland Hills School District



Allegheny County



Tri-COG Land Bank Footprint

BENEFITS OF WORKING WITH TCLB TO FIGHT BLIGHT INCLUDE:



Savings in code enforcement, police, fire, and public works costs



Increased tax revenues



Reduction in crime, in particular gun-related violence



Revitalized communities, attractive for new residents and growth



Improved health for community members



Can raise surrounding property values up to **30%** simply by greening a vacant lot



Bottomfield Street

Organizational Progress



Properties Owned in 2018



Properties Acquired in 2019



Total Properties

GROWING OUR INVENTORY

Throughout 2019, TCLB acquired 21 houses. We ended the year owning 32 total properties. While we acquired most of these houses and lots through Sheriff Sale, we also received our first property donation in November.

To effectively steward these properties back to productive use, we have also solidified our procedures for property disposition and created property purchase applications. We also finalized our Side Lot Development Program, offering homeowners an opportunity to expand their yard by purchasing an adjacent vacant lot at a discounted price.

Community Partners

Whenever we can, TCLB works with other community organizations to support shared priorities like public health, workforce development, and housing affordability. In 2019, TCLB cleaned out four properties using the services of Hilltop Rising LLC and the South Hilltop Men’s Group – a program designed to create hope and opportunity for men who are struggling with employment barriers. As a member of the Lead Safe Allegheny coalition, TCLB also worked with Conservation Consultants, Inc. to gather data about lead in two properties which needed to be demolished and develop technical specifications for a lead-safer demolition. Additionally, TCLB is working with the City of Bridges Community Land Trust to create new affordable housing opportunities in Etna, Millvale, and Sharpsburg. Starting in 2018, TCLB also continues to work with Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh to create two affordable housing units in Braddock Hills.

Internal Growth

With more properties in our inventory, TCLB expanded its capacity to stabilize and maintain our houses and lots by hiring a new Property Development Manager. Gary Hitchins, a Code Enforcement Officer for Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments, joined our staff in January 2019 to take on this new role. Gary manages contractor relationships, conducts inspections, and coordinates maintenance for all TCLB properties after acquisition.

This year, we increased our capacity to share information about TCLB, its work, and the properties we have available for sale. We accomplished this in part through continued participation in elevate412, Pittsburgh’s first nonprofit marketing collaborative. Within this collaborative, six nonprofit partners share communications services from TrailBlaze Creative, a local marketing firm. In May, we hired local graduate student, Emily Woodard, as a summer intern to help facilitate our work with elevate412 and establish a new Facebook presence for the organization. She joined the team as a permanent full-time employee in January 2020.

Lastly, TCLB engaged architects to design an addition to a house in Braddock Hills and engineers to develop a demolition specification that will help minimize community exposure to lead.



Hired 1 new full-time employee



Shared marketing support with 5 organizations



McKinney Road

Purposeful Action

GETTING PROPERTIES READY FOR SALE

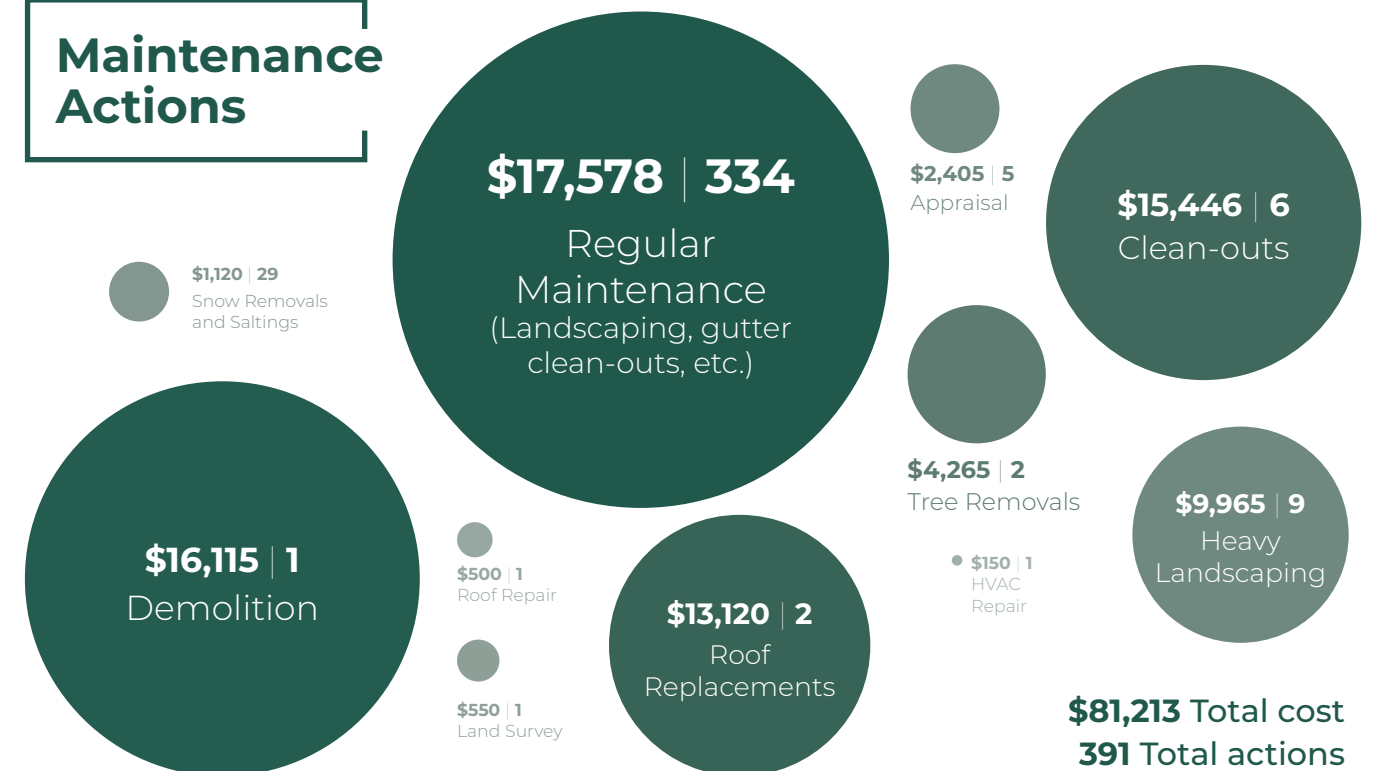
From the moment we acquire a property, we visit it, secure it, and monitor it on a regular basis. We move quickly to improve its exterior conditions through grass cutting, brush removal, snow removal, and any other maintenance needed. We clean out trash and debris and address any other urgent needs such as roof replacement or tree removal. These maintenance activities immediately make an impact on surrounding property values and neighborhood safety.

283
Park



Sunnyside Avenue

Maintenance Actions



Moving every property through Quiet Title Action is an essential step to uphold a core value – to protect the people who buy our properties.

Insurable Titles Protect New Owners

TCLB is committed to obtaining clear, insurable titles for all of our properties. Having a clear title allows for the purchase of title insurance, an essential protection that ensures property owners will not be financially responsible for the unpaid debts of previous owners. This financial liability is a potential risk for all property owners, but it is much higher for abandoned properties with absent owners. As a result, title insurance companies are often reluctant to provide policies for properties purchased at Sheriff Sale without first going through an additional legal process called Quiet Title Action.

We believe that moving every property through Quiet Title Action is an essential step to uphold a core value – to protect the people who buy our properties and our community members. Clear titles help support neighborhood stability, preventing financial hardships that cause foreclosure or abandonment. Removing the risk of unpaid liens and ensuring the financial safety of our property buyers is one of our top priorities.



Closing Old Doors

Delaware Street

Braddock Hills Demolition

A dilapidated property on Delaware Street sat vacant for five years, causing neighbors to express concerns about its impact on their safety and quality of life. Braddock Hills Borough recommended the house to us for acquisition, and in June 2018, TCLB purchased it at Sheriff Sale.

After entering the property for the first time, we realized that renovation would be cost prohibitive. Instead, we chose to move forward with demolition and plans to build a new house with Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh. TCLB used this project as an opportunity to engage Conservation Consultants, Inc., gathering data on how lead levels in the soil are impacted by demolitions.

Now that the property is stable, we are one step closer to creating a new, affordable home that will contribute to the increased vitality of Braddock Hills.



Pilot demolition projects measure lead in soil before and after



JILL DALY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
jdaly@post-gazette.com

SEP 19, 2019 6:00 AM

Article screen capture courtesy of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

Opening New Doors

First Property on the Market

In October 2019, TCLB officially listed its first property for sale. This 5,565 sq. ft. buildable lot in Edgewood is the first property to be marketed by a land bank in Allegheny County.

The lot was previously the site of a fire, resulting in demolition. The owners abandoned the property, and it sat tax delinquent and unmaintained for over a decade. The Borough of Edgewood made multiple attempts to find a new buyer with no success, so they requested that the Tri-COG Land Bank intervene. In May 2018, TCLB acquired the lot through Sheriff Sale and pursued a legal process called Quiet Title Action to obtain a clear, insurable title. Thanks to this intervention, the lot can now be purchased by a new owner without any fear of liability for past bills or liens.

ALLEGHENY

Tri-COG Land Bank lists \$45,000 vacant Edgewood lot as 1st property for sale



BOB BAUDER | Wednesday, October 9, 2019 3:31 p.m.



Article screen capture courtesy of the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*



Morris Street

Cleaning Out

When a property is abandoned, an empty house isn't the only thing left behind. In many cases, piles of trash and debris also remain, collecting dust and disintegrating. Left behind items run the gamut from old appliances and clothes to fallen wall material and fully stocked (and spoiled) refrigerators. After TCLB acquires a property, we remove this trash as soon as possible before showing the house to potential new owners.

In 2019, we partnered with clean-out contractors to remove the trash in six of our houses. Depending on the amount of trash at each property, these clean-outs can take a half day to three days and fill anywhere from one to seven dump trucks. We also encourage our contractors to donate and recycle salvageable items whenever possible.



1
Demolition



6
Clean-Outs

Poplar Street Before



Poplar Street After



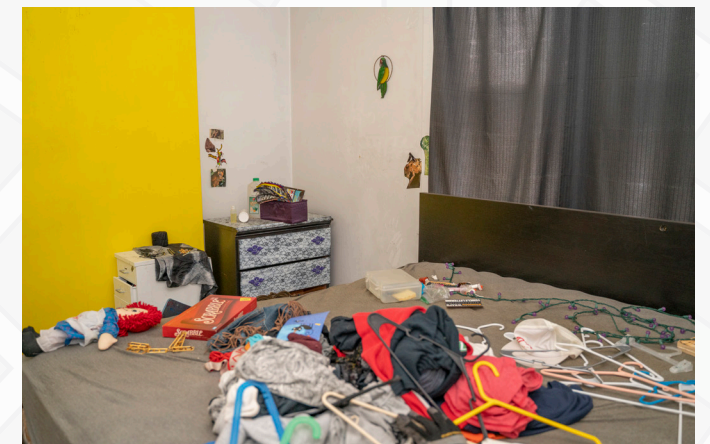
Highland Avenue Before



Highland Avenue After



Avenue D. Before



Avenue D. After



Wilkins Avenue

Looking Ahead

Now for Sale



705 MERCER STREET
\$18,000



1114 WILKINS AVENUE
\$10,000

SEEING WITH 20/20 VISION

As we move more properties through the Quiet Title Action legal process, 2020 will be a landmark year for marketing properties. By the end of summer 2020, we expect to have at least 20 more properties ready to be sold with clear, insurable titles. We are also acquiring 19 more houses, buildings, and lots, and we will accept new acquisition recommendations from our members in April and September.

In 2020, we will begin a strategic planning process to map out our growth trajectory and ensure that everything we do aligns with our mission to strategically restore investment in blighted properties to enhance community safety, value, and vibrancy.

Continuing Technical Support

In 2020, TCLB will continue its engagement with the Center for Community Progress to receive technical assistance and hear from other land banks about tried-and-true strategies they employ in their new communities. Beginning at the end of 2019, we engaged a new consultant, Evaine Sing from EKS Solutions, to explore new pathways and pipelines for vacant land recovery and reuse. We hope this work will spark a new program to address the many abandoned vacant lots littering our communities. TCLB is committed to staying well-versed in community development best practices and looks forward to pursuing innovative solutions that will create sustainable communities free of blight and attractive to residents and businesses.

Using Every Tool We Have to Fight Blight

As we continue to grow and move more properties through our pipeline, we are using other tools to combat blight. One of those tools is Conservatorship. Enabled by the PA Blighted and Abandoned Property Conservatorship Act of 2008, this legal tool provides community members with the court appointed authority to repair seriously blighted properties and bring them into compliance with code standards. In 2020, TCLB will begin the Conservatorship process to improve an abandoned commercial property in the middle of Etna's commercial district.

N 3rd Street

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White Oak Borough

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Maureen McKeever, Treasurer

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Law Office of Robert J. Wratcher LLC

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Executive Director

Natalie Boydston

Program Director

Gary Hitchins

Property Development Manager

Anna Meehan

Project Coordinator

2019 FUNDING PARTNERS

Buhl Foundation

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Thank you for your support and generosity!



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