



Report: The High Cost of Vacant Lots
Abandoned, Vacant Lots Cost Allegheny County Nearly Half-a-Billion in Property Values
Financial and Health Impacts Concentrated in Tri-COG Land Bank Communities

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Homestead, PA (December 13, 2022) – If you live near a blighted, vacant lot in Allegheny County, you lose an average \$5,145 in property value and suffer needless health impacts, a newly released report from Tri-COG Land Bank reveals. Solutions to this problem, several of which are also detailed in the report, would help nearly 23,000 vacant lots in Allegheny County that meet this description.

“When most people think about blighted properties, they think of abandoned and dilapidated buildings. However, the problem doesn’t always end with demolition. This report reveals that there is more to the story. To improve our neighborhoods, we need a deliberate, long-term approach to deal with abandoned, vacant lots,” said An Lewis, Executive Director of Tri-COG Land Bank (TCLB).

Blighted, vacant lots reduce nearby property values, increase the risk of crime, and create hazards when left unattended. Reduced property values hurt both property owners’ equity and municipal budgets. And living near vacant and abandoned properties is associated with increased depression, higher rates of chronic illness, and stunted mental and physical development in children.

Recovering vacant lots with activities like trash removal, proper grading, and landscaping almost entirely remove the negative impacts. That can increase property values up to 17%, which means that if all the blighted lots in Allegheny County were stabilized, the region would see a total increase of \$457,620,095 in property values, or \$5,145 per neighboring house. Transitioning vacant lots can also offer opportunities to address other neighborhood challenges such as food access, flooding, and air quality.

- [The full report, *Liabilities to Assets: A Comprehensive Strategy for Transforming Vacant Land*, can be found here.](#)
 - **NOTE: The report includes maps and numbers for each individual community in TCLB’s 2022 service area:** Blawnox, Braddock Hills, Chalfant, Churchill, Clairton, Dravosburg, East Pittsburgh, East McKeesport, Edgewood, Etna, Forest Hills, Glassport, McKeesport, Millvale, Monroeville, North Braddock, North Versailles, Pitcairn, Port Vue, Rankin, Sharpsburg, South Versailles, Swissvale, Turtle Creek, White Oak and Wilkins.
- [The Executive Summary of the report can be found here.](#)

“Reclaiming vacant lots can mitigate many adverse health effects, especially in underserved neighborhoods lacking green space. Stabilizing communities faced with property blight reduces the impact of negative consequences caused by abandoned properties. It’s incumbent on all of us to work together to solve this problem for the benefit of our neighbors,” said Karen Black, CEO of May 8 Consulting and Senior Research Fellow at the Drexel University Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation.

To solve the problem, TCLB researched numerous examples of successful programs from our area and around the country:

- **Side Lot Programs.** Gives neighbors the chance to purchase adjoining vacant lots at a discount.
- **Mow to Own.** This is a sweat equity program where residents may apply the costs and labor of maintaining a publicly owned vacant lot toward future ownership.
- **Play Spaces or Parks.** For communities with younger demographics and limited greenspace or park options, these are creative reuse strategies for vacant land.
- **Stormwater Management.** In communities facing challenges with flooding , landslides, and dangerous overflows, vacant lots can become sites for rain gardens, bioswales, and other green infrastructure to absorb stormwater runoff.
- **Community Gardens.** Many neighborhoods, especially those in historically redlined communities, experience food apartheid – there is nowhere nearby to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. Community gardens provide fresh, nutritious produce and empower residents to grow their own food.

“This strategy underscores the important role TCLB plays in stewarding revitalization in Allegheny County. Vacant land repurposing is a critical part of TCLB’s work and offers new opportunities to restore investment, health, safety, and equity in our communities,” said James Fisher, President of the TCLB Board of Directors and Board Member of the Shaler Area School District.

The report, *Liabilities to Assets*, was informed by conversations with over 15 local organizations that offer services related to vacant land reclamation, describing how partnerships are central to driving sustainable neighborhood transformation.

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About Tri-COG Land Bank

Tri-COG Land Bank is a public body organized under the Pennsylvania Land Bank Act, as well as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Tri-COG Land Bank revitalizes neighborhoods by transitioning abandoned properties to beneficial reuse. TCLB is committed to a transparent and community-driven process that benefits both neighborhoods and their residents. Since its founding in 2017 by the Steel Rivers Council of Governments and the Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments, Tri-COG Land Bank has acquired 89 properties and sold 39. **For more information, visit tricoglandbank.org. For a list of member municipalities and school districts, visit tricoglandbank.org/about/our-members.**