



Food In LOUISVILLE Neighborhoods Community Coalition

November 29, 2021

Dear Ms. Grabowski,

For over a year, Food In Neighborhoods (FIN) has been working with the Office of Community Development's Landbank staff and board to support West End residents in acquiring vacant properties for growing food. While some policy and procedural changes have been made to increase community land access, we are writing today to share suggestions for further changes which we believe will help the Landbank achieve community-based development that puts vacant and abandoned properties back into productive use.

- 1. People should be able to purchase vacant lots for agricultural use.** This could be at market price or at a reduced rate via a new or existing program. Land security is a key part of community food security and developing successful long-term agricultural enterprises. The Landbank could utilize land contracts¹ for vacant lots and lots with habitable homes to promote land and home ownership among low-income residents.
- 2. Increase the minimum lease for agricultural projects from 1 to 5 years at a minimum.** Successful agricultural endeavors require years of commitment to a site. The security of a 5 year minimum lease with options to renew allows farmers and gardeners the time to cultivate their land and improve the soil.
- 3. Implement a lease-to-own program for agricultural projects.** Agriculture involves a large investment in time and place. An extended lease coupled with an opportunity to eventually own the land allows both parties the opportunity to evaluate each other and the site. This program could begin at the end of the initial 5 year lease. The Genesee County, Michigan Landbank's land contracts (mentioned in Goal #1 above) offer an excellent model to adapt for housing and agricultural use here in Louisville.
- 4. Long-time renters should be able to purchase vacant lots in the block where they live.** Establishing a minimum number of years for a long-time renter to purchase property allows for a deeper resident investment in a neighborhood. The Detroit Land Bank Authority's Vacant Land Reuse Programs provide a model for expanding an existing

¹ Similar to those used by the Genesee County Land Bank in Flint, Michigan for new buyers and tenants as explained here: <http://www.thelandbank.org/residential.asp>

Side Lot program² to allow residents to buy lots for discounted flat rates determined by the distance from the purchaser's home and the situation of the lot.^{3,4}

5. Include the voices of residents who live in areas with high concentrations of vacant/abandoned property on the Landbank board and Conservatorship board.

The current board structure does not allow residents of the areas most impacted by vacant/abandoned properties to have a say in changes to their communities. The perspectives of people living near vacant/abandoned properties will provide for a richer discussion and more creative ideas for how to best utilize the properties. For a model on formalizing and utilizing community members in creating and implementing land bank policies and strategies, we offer the local ordinance that established the citizen advisory board with the Greater Syracuse Land Bank⁵ as well as the Roles and Responsibilities Guidelines used by the Genesee County Land Bank to set clear expectations for the Citizens Advisory Council.⁶

FIN has collected models from other cities that have implemented similar policies and programs to those listed above, and we are excited to share what we have learned. We are committed to continued cooperation with the Landbank, the Office of Community Development, and community members as all of us work together to envision and implement creative and inclusive solutions for community-based development in Louisville.

To that end, we would like to schedule a virtual meeting with you within the next month. Please let us know when you are available for a conversation.

Sincerely,



The Food in Neighborhoods Community Coalition

² <https://buildingdetroit.org/sidelots/>

³ <https://buildingdetroit.org/land-reuse-programs>, see Neighborhood Lots section

⁴ <https://dlba-production-bucket.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/Land-reuse/Evolution+of+DLBA+Lots.png>

⁵ <http://syracuselandbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Land-Bank-CAB-Legislation-1.pdf>

⁶ http://www.thelandbank.org/downloads/roles_and_responsibilities.pdf It should be noted the Genesee County Land Bank has also created a full-time staff position for a Community Outreach Coordinator. The current Coordinator is a long-time resident of Flint, where most of the land bank's properties are located, and a well-respected member of the community.