

Before the Senate Finance Committee

Am. Sub. House Bill 49

**Testimony of
Bob Nau, Executive Director
Stark County Regional Planning Commission**

June 7, 2017

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for affording me the opportunity today to speak about the need for dollars to remove vacant and abandoned commercial structures in Ohio's communities.

My name is Bob Nau. I am the Executive Director of the Stark County Regional Planning Commission which administers the Stark County Land Reutilization Corporation, known as the Stark County Land Bank. We incorporated our land bank in 2012 to deal with the thousands of tax delinquent, abandoned and derelict properties in our county. To date we have received over 16.2 million dollars to demolish vacant and blighted residential properties and we have made incredible progress—but we have been unable to use any of the monies from either the Attorney General's settlement or the monies made available to Ohio through the Hardest Hit Fund for the removal of commercial and industrial properties—and that is why I am here.

Both the Moving Ohio Forward Program and the Hardest Hit Funds were limited to the removal of residential properties, not the demolition of abandoned and blighted commercial and industrial properties. Many small and medium sized towns in Ohio are working hard to restore the vitality of their main street business districts – but they have seriously distressed commercial properties in their downtowns, and have no funding to address them. For example, in the city of Van Wert, there is a building at the corner of Main and Market streets that is literally falling down, but the town has no funding to remove the structure. Their only recourse is to surround the building with yellow police tape.

In many cases dealing with that one problem building can make a huge difference in the success of a main street retail revival. An example of that is in Allen County, in the City of Delphos, where there is a strip of commercial buildings with common walls that need to come down. They are eyesores, and dangerous and are impeding every effort by that small town to move that City forward.

I have included two examples of old commercial sites in my county that are abandoned and tax delinquent. There has been no interest expressed in rehabilitating these eyesores—but we feel if we could clear these old buildings we can create developable sites. The Weber Dental site in Canton could offer a 5 acre site for redevelopment. The Bishop's Gate site in Uniontown would provide a site three times that size—almost 17 acres. These sites offer real promise for redevelopment—but not without the removal of the blighted property on them.

Weber Dental						
Parcel	Land Use	Owner	Site Address	Tax Mailing Address	Bldg.	Total Acreage
235665	350 – Industrial Warehouse	Canton City Land Reutilization	2206 – 13 th Street NE, Canton, Ohio 44705-1924	218 Cleveland Avenue SW, Canton, Ohio 44702	2.00	5.05



Bishops Gate					
Parcel	Land Use	Owner	Site Address	Tax Mailing Address	Total Acreage
2206217	Commercial Warehouse	Bishops Gate Properties (former Delbert Smith Greenhouse)	12777 Mogadore Ave., Uniontown, Ohio 44685	6545 Market Ave., North Canton, Ohio 44721	16.83



I also want to share with you a new study commissioned by Western Reserve Land Conservancy from Case Western Reserve University that documents the connection between property abandonment and crime. Anecdotally, news reports in recent years suggest that vacant homes are often sites for rape, murder, assault, arson and assaults on police officers. In my written testimony I provide links to some of these cases. (The recent murder of Alianna DeFreeze, whose body was found in an abandoned home <http://fox8.com/2017/03/22/ohio-legislature-considers-alianna-alert-named-after-murdered-cleveland-teen/> . The murder of Officer Derek Owens in 2008, shot while investigating youth hanging out in an abandoned property: http://blog.cleveland.com/metro/2008/10/jury_convicts_lamidi_kafaru_in.html).

Simply put – crime follows abandonment. It’s logical, but until now no concrete statistical evidence has confirmed this. The new study found that the highest rates of homicide, aggravated assault and weapons violations can be found in the same “hot spots” where vacancy and abandonment are also high.

You know what else follows abandonment - lower property values. In a study done in 2011, titled “The Cost of Vacancy—Everybody Pays,” it showed how distressed property values in core cities--- and even inner ring suburbs-- can drive costs up for homeowners in more stable neighborhoods because of countywide property tax levies . This study showed how 43 million dollars in property tax collections were shifted to more stable communities in Cuyahoga County. <http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/1096130/the-cost-of-vacancy.pdf>

I realize how great the demands are on this legislature to deal with a difficult budget. Sitting here and listening to the demands being placed upon this legislature is a sobering experience. But know that certain allocations—even relatively small allocations can make a difference in certain areas. Monies allocated for commercial and industrial demolition can pay big dividends with safer neighborhoods, increased property values and more stable communities. Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.