

Land Bank

Thank you for permitting me the opportunity to provide input on the decisions of HB 155. Being a life long resident of Athens co. and specifically of Trimble Township my concerns for the area have been many, but not nearly as concerned as I have been over the issue of blighted properties for the past 10-15 years.

These properties have led to the deterioration of the communities involved, along with the deterioration of community pride, morale, health and safety of all who live here. I am representing a grassroots group that was formed in 2000 because of the increased incidence of drug use and death among the youth in my community. I consider Jacksonville, Trimble, Glouster and Trimble Township all my "community". The group that came together to try to make change is called Tomcat Bridgebuilders. I have a copy of our most recent annual report for you.

Approximately 3 or 4 years ago it became part of our focus to address the issue of housing blight in our area. We knew that areas with increased housing blight were targets for crime and drug use. There are many studies that reflect this problem. I used to worry that these communities were going to end up like the areas in a MAD MAX movie. We were witnessing increased drug use, property values decreasing, the environment becoming unsafe(these properties being used as meth houses and drug dens), and the revenue from taxes for these properties not being collected. Our group decided to explore a solution to address this situation. We heard about the landbank in other cities such as Portsmouth, and Cleveland and decided to explore the possibility of such a thing happening in Athens Co. We met with the Athens Co commissioners, the County Treasurer and some officials from Cleveland. We went to Portsmouth to sit in on one of their meetings and talk with the parties involved there. Needless to say we left Portsmouth very energized to begin this process here. After a few meetings with the treasurer and commissioners, the wise leadership began the process of forming a landbank.

I am happy to report that to this date the landbank meetings are very open and transparent. The commissioners and treasurer are very open to public comment and very willing to collaborate with other programs such as FEMA.

Trimble alone has seen the opening of two new businesses, Glouster has formed a restoration committee which built a mini park on the site of a demolished building. People are noticing the improvement, and many are interested in

building new homes on these sites. Habitat for humanity has built affordable housing, and Integrated Services is building a facility for their clients. Businesses are buying property for their business improvement. It also opens up housing development for people to get out of the flood plain. These properties will now be generating tax revenue for the area. Drug dens have been removed, trash dumps have been cleaned up, all to add to the improved health of the neighbors and citizens.

To date:

the total number of parcel projects in Trimble township is 115

the number of parcels actually acquired is 81

the number of demolitions to date is 28

the number of parcels transferred to tax-paying entities is 17

Progress that I thought would never happen is being made. We are a very poor community and county, but with cooperation and collaboration positive improvements are being made and the health and well-being of our citizens will continue to improve. I strongly encourage your support to further fund the land bank.

Sincerely,

Diana Chalfant

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