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## Albany considering creation of land bank

By: Innae Park

*The next round of Land Bank applications are now available. Under the program, Albany County can convert vacant or abandoned properties into uses that better serve the public. A meeting was held in Albany Tuesday night to discuss the possibilities. Innae Park has more.*



ALBANY, N.Y. -- It's a sight commonly seen in New York: Vacant, abandoned properties. Now communities have a chance to bring their neighborhoods from blight to bright with land banks.

“This is a unique tool. We're talking about the ability to involve government. We're talking about intercepting things from the tax foreclosure process and stopping the toxic speculative investment,” said community organizer Michael Guidice.

“We have been caught in the same cycle for many years, where we see the same properties coming through the auction process,” Albany County Legislator Chris Higgins said.

So Albany County is jumping on board. Grassroots efforts have led to a strong movement to create the non-profit corporation and organizers are reaching out to their community for ideas.

“Arbor Hill, West Hill, the South End are all where the blight is,” said community organizer Nolene Smith.

Guidice said, “This is the first time we're seeing such a broad coalition of forces to really tackle this problem.”

If granted permission by the state, the county could redevelop the properties for anything from commercial to residential and even recreational purposes, keeping buildings from seeing demolition.

“Those costs reach into the millions of dollars each year. We could save money in the long-term if we invest in the short-term,” Higgins said.

While the idea excites some, others are more guarded, worried that the people in the affected neighborhoods themselves will be ignored.

Smith said, “Have to empower the people in the community to believe that their voice is going to be more important. They must be able to explain their focus, what they want. I just don't think they were represented in this room tonight.”

All applications have to be submitted by a Foreclosing Government Unit (FGU). As a result, the Albany County legislature will have to pass a bill to allow for a land bank and create a board to oversee it. That legislation is currently in committee.

The deadline for the applications is November 30th.