

Reclaiming Philly's Vacant Properties: Strategies for Strengthening the Partnership Between the Philadelphia Land Bank and Local Community Land Trusts

Introduction

One of the primary functions of urban planning is to bring together residents, city officials, businesses owners, and other stakeholders to address a shared problem and find a solution that benefit the common good. Key to all of the activities that urban planning encompasses is access to land. In many cities, land is a scarce resource, often sold at a high premium to the developers that promise the highest return on investment. This makes it difficult for organizations that develop land for community benefit, such as affordable housing, open space, and urban agriculture, to secure long-term land control. Enduring vacancy is particularly evident in post-industrial cities within the Rust Belt in Northeast and Upper Midwest region of the U.S. The implications of vacancy are often a combination of interrelated factors, including decreased property tax revenues, increased crime rates, and rising public health concerns. Declining populations and shrinking economies have made development prospects in these cities scarce, and municipalities are looking for new ways to revive formerly vibrant urban centers.

One solution that has emerged to combat vacancy is land banking. A land bank is a public authority responsible for acquiring and managing public and privately owned vacant properties, and then clearing title and disposing the property to an entity that will develop the land (Burlington Associates 2014).¹ The benefit of land banking can extend beyond developing property to increase its market value. A systematic method of

¹ For the purpose of this thesis, “vacant property” will include all property that is blighted, tax delinquent, and abandoned.

addressing vacancy should begin with the most underserved populations, as the burdens of vacancy fall disproportionately on low-income communities and communities of color. While land banking has the potential to intervene in the marginalization of specific populations, it also can perpetuate cycles of disinvestment and neglect if it solely disposes land to the highest bidder for market rate development, and continues to price out uses that serve a public benefit but are not as economically profitable, such as affordable housing and urban agriculture.

To avoid sustaining this inequitable system, land banks can help redistribute power by providing land to organizations that are accountable to the community. Uses supported by local residents facilitate community stabilization, and in a time when gentrification is an increasingly pressing issue, land banking can be one component of a larger effort to promote equitable development that does not displace longtime residents, but instead builds upon existing community assets and facilitates community control of land. A community land trust (CLT) is a model of community ownership that demonstrates how land banking can help redirect resources (in the form of land) to communities that have previously been denied opportunities for development on their own terms. A CLT is a nonprofit organization that maintains long-term stewardship of land so that it can be utilized for community benefit (Democracy Collaborative 2014). CLTs are most commonly used in the context of affordable housing, and ensure that homes remain affordable and are protected from speculation. This model recognizes the inherent use value of land that has been compromised under today's dominant capitalist economic paradigm in favor of generating the highest exchange value so that land control is retained in the hands of a few elites.

Despite the different functions of land banks and CLTs, the two are commonly viewed as competing urban land management strategies. The purpose of this paper is to not only clarify the different functions of a land bank and CLT, but also to explore their partnership potential in the context of the newly formed Philadelphia Land Bank. Created in 2013, the Philadelphia Land Bank was a result of a long-term, extensive stakeholder engagement and grassroots organizing effort on the part of the municipal government and community members. Although the Philadelphia Land Bank is known as one of the more progressive land banks in the country, its ability to facilitate community control of land has yet to be realized. While the land bank is still in its very early stages of development, tensions around the discourse of “community control of land” indicate there are still questions about how the land bank will serve communities that have been historically denied opportunities to access land. This paper will explore how the Philadelphia Land Bank can facilitate community control by strengthening its partnership with local CLTs that take land out of the speculative market and retain it for community benefit.

Theoretical Foundation of Urban Change, Blight, and Vacancy

Thinking around how cities operate as a hub of converging social, political, environmental, and economic forces has greatly evolved over time. Urban theorists have long explored the many ways in which cities operate as “dense networks...of sociospatial processes,” and urbanization is distinctly recognized as a process of socioecological change (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003, 898; Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2006, 3). Increasingly, human beings have been viewed as integral components of the urban ecosystem, rather than external manipulators of nature. Urban theory has evolved

accordingly, continually seeking out the overlapping ways in which humans engage in both social and environmental control as a means of asserting power. As nations continue to develop, and subsequently urbanize, understanding these mutually reinforcing social and natural processes are key to shaping urban environments that are culturally inclusive, equitable, and just.

Marxist urban political ecology solidifies the link between social and ecological processes by drawing parallels between the exploitation of both nature and people under a capitalist system. This lens can be used to understand cities as simultaneous forms of social and environmental organization, underpinned by the desire for power and control. Put simply, this means urban environments are manipulated in a way that benefits the elite at the expense of marginalized populations. The elite classes have controlled nature and the lower classes in a way that perpetuates their own social status and maintains their own power. Some argue that elites are able to unify under the common goal of maintaining the city's social structure, which is fueled by a shared desire for consistent growth (Molotch 1976, 311). Molotch is credited with identifying the city as a growth machine, which implies that communities are continuously seeking to expand and in competition with one another to achieve the highest land use potential, which drives the system of power imbalance. This illustrates the tension between the use value and exchange value that has led to the treatment of land as a commodity, rather than a resource needed for communities to grow and evolve on their own terms.

One particular way in which these uneven socioecological conditions are sustained is through the framing of blight. Superficial associations with blight include vacancy, crime, lack of economic activity, and an overall poor quality of life, which

demonstrates how blight removal via urban renewal was sustained on seemingly moral grounds and in the name of neighborhood improvement. Instead, urban political ecology tells us that the blight that requires removal for neighborhood revitalization is not just the physical structures that comprise the communities, but also includes the people themselves. Not only is blight not an apolitical term, but the act of removal of blight is another manifestation of control by the few elites that control the distribution of resources that facilitated the blighted conditions in the first place. The removal of marginalized populations and systematic devaluation of certain pieces of land helped sustain the economic benefits that the few elites retained during the process of urban redevelopment.

Understanding urban change through this framework helps clarify the roots of social and environmental injustices that are embedded in virtually all urban environments, and offers some insight into how urban planners and policymakers play a unique role in addressing these inequities. The core charge of urban political ecology is “to enhance the democratic content of socioenvironmental construction by identifying the strategies through which a more equitable distribution of social power and a more inclusive mode of environmental production can be achieved” (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003, 914). Identifying and naming the structural inequalities embedded in urban formation is an important first step in asserting how control and power play out in an urban landscape, and key to formulating practical visions for how these processes can become more equitable. Ultimately, cities do not have to accept vast social, environmental, and economic inequality as their default setting. There are several strategies that can help ensure that all people are given an equal opportunity to have a high quality of life. A vital piece of urban political ecology calls for an understanding of

the historical processes that led the formation of urban spaces. The following section will help contextualize this theory in a discussion of the modern history of urban transformation in the U.S.

U.S. Urban Renewal

Exploring the history of the intersection of urban renewal and environmental justice in the United States helps shape the practical implications of these theories. As white families moved into the suburbs, low-income communities and communities of color living in disinvested pockets of the inner cities bore the brunt of the consequences of urban renewal. Slums were cleared across the country in an effort to revitalize the urban core, but the reality was the systematic destruction of communities that were historically underserved and marginalized. Jane Jacobs, a prominent urban planning scholar and theorist, was a vocal critic of urban renewal, citing the work as primarily profit-driven and negligent of its disproportionately negative impact on low-income populations. In *Life and Death of American Cities*, published in 1961, she argues:

“At best [urban renewal] merely shifts slums from here to there, adding its own tincture of extra hardship and disruption. At worst, it destroys neighborhoods where constructive and improving communities exist and where the situation calls for encouragement rather than disruption” (270-271)

Several other urban scholars have echoed Jacobs sentiments, arguing urban renewal in the context of blight removal is only a facially apolitical term. Blight as justification for the demolition of entire neighborhoods has been criticized as merely a convenient incantation used to define communities that cannot effectively fight back and are well located for particular redevelopment projects (Weber 2002, 528). Wendell

Pritchett paints a powerful picture of the implications of the rhetoric utilized around blight. He states:

“Blight was a facially neutral term infused with racial and ethnic prejudice. While it purportedly assessed the state of urban infrastructure, blight was often used to describe the negative impact of certain residents on city neighborhoods. This "scientific" method of understanding urban decline was used to justify the removal of blacks and other minorities from certain parts of the city. By selecting racially changing neighborhoods as blighted areas and designating them for redevelopment, the urban renewal program enabled institutional and political elites to relocate minority populations and entrench racial segregation” (6).

Clearly, the assumption that urban renewal was a purely moral process done for the good of communities is inherently flawed, and these analyses of the framing of blight demonstrate an implicit perpetuation of structural inequality. Unsurprisingly, this fueled the already strained racial tensions, and issues of redlining and racially restrictive covenants were raised to the forefront. During this time of simultaneous urban renewal and white flight, restrictive covenants came in the form of an implicit understanding between developers and homeowners associations that the newly built suburban single family homes be reserved for white, middle to upper class families (McClintock 2011, 98). William Levitt, the president of Levitt and Sons Co., was explicit in his belief of racial segregation, restricting the sale of his homes to Caucasian families because “racially integrated neighborhoods would deter buyers” (Teaford 2006, 79). This facilitated racial and social segregation and forced low-income communities and communities of color to remain in city centers in the midst of destruction.

These restrictive covenants were made illegal in 1948, but the discriminatory practices continued. Redlining, or the process by which banks explicitly restrict funds from communities of color, was rampant during this time. The Home Owner’s Loan Corporation and the Federal Home Loan Bank Board partnered with banks and realtors in

order to develop residential security maps that divided cities into sections based on the potential security of real estate investments made in each area. Most African American communities were colored red, indicating that they were “hazardous” investments. Furthermore, communities that had restrictive covenants in place were ranked higher, demonstrating the pervasive and systemic desire to keep communities racially and socially segregated (McClintock 2011, 99).

As a response to these widespread inequalities, the civil rights movement began to gain considerable traction. The environmental justice movement followed, and communities since have made great progress in the name of addressing systemic inequities that manifest in the local economy and environment. However, there are still implicit biases that perpetuate structural inequalities, and much remains to be done to ensure that all communities have equal opportunity to develop on their own terms. Vacant land presents an opportunity to look at environmental justice from the other side of the coin, and explore how a local burden can be turned into a community asset.

Environmental Justice Implications of Vacant Land

One lingering manifestation of disinvestment facilitated by urban renewal is rampant vacancy in low-income communities and communities of color. The social, economic, and environmental costs of vacancy is staggering. In addition to the symbolic implications that a community is not worthy of the investment of resources that facilitate equitable development, cycles of vacancy highlight the concern with putting the exchange value of land on higher footing than its use value. Different manifestations of urban change, such as sprawl, changes in employment, and demographics shifts, also

influence the extent to which vacant lots burden a community (National Vacant Properties Campaign 2005). These evolving development patterns are frequently both a reflection of and an impetus for disinvestment; oftentimes, public and private funders are not interested in investing in economically downtrodden cities that offer little hope of garnering a return on investment. Unfortunately, this is the narrative in many Rust Belt cities. Vacancy discourages the investment of resources for development in the regions that arguably need it most.

The cyclical nature of the challenges associated with vacant land demonstrates that these burdens are multifaceted. First, managing vacant property is expensive. Vacant property is often tax-delinquent, or only generates minimal tax revenue. Nationwide, it is estimated that the taxes lost on vacant land cost local governments anywhere from \$3-\$6 billion (National Vacant Properties Campaign 2005). Furthermore, vacant land depresses local property values. The increased costs associated with vacant land also come in the form of supporting increased police presence; vacant property has been known to attract crime, and the Broken Windows Theory explains how crime is more likely to occur in a place that appear neglected and already experiences a high crime rate (Alexander 2011, 16). Vacant land is also viewed as a public health concern, as they are sometimes sites for illegal drug use, rodent infestation, and toxic waste dumps.

More communities are actively working on turning vacant land from a burden to an asset, but as markets evolve and start to favor development, a threat of gentrification emerges. Gentrification occurs when neighborhood revitalization efforts lead to an increase in property value, subsequently displacing longtime residents that cannot afford to pay rent and replacing them with, typically, younger newcomers. This demonstrates

how the challenges associated with vacant property do not stop once the property is purchased and developed. Fortunately, cities have several tools at their disposal to help mitigate the negative impacts of vacant land and turn them into productive community assets. The next section will explore two different urban land management structures—land banks and communities lands trusts—and identify the strengths and weaknesses of each model, as well as assess the partnership potential between the two.

Land Banks and Community Land Trusts

In order to best understand how land banking can be a direct response to cycles of disinvestment and structural inequality, it is important to having a working knowledge how a land bank works. A land bank is a public authority responsible for acquiring and managing public and privately owned vacant properties, and then clearing title and disposing the property to an entity that will develop the land (Burlington Associates 2012). First, the state must pass enabling legislation that gives municipalities the power to create a land bank (Restoring Prosperity Initiative 2008). Once the municipality passes a local land bank ordinance to create the agency, the operation of the land bank is maintained by a redevelopment authority, a city commission, or a newly established “land bank authority.” The responsibility of managing the land bank falls on an appointed board, oftentimes comprised of at least one-third community representatives. Ideally, a land bank, “[targets] the structural and systemic obstacles that encourage abandonment and that stand in the way of returning properties to productive use” (Alexander 2005, 141). While disposition policies vary across municipalities, the

ultimate goal for land banks rests in creating a systematic method for addressing vacancy in an effort to revitalize local communities.

Once all of the appropriate legislation is signed, the land bank can technically begin the acquisition process, though the city or state enabling legislation may require certain mechanisms be established prior to acquisition. Typically, a land bank acquires property via four different methods—tax foreclosure, intergovernmental transfers, nonprofit transfers, and open market purchases, with tax foreclosure being the most common (Sage Computing Inc. 2009). In 2008, the Housing and Economic Recovery Act expanded the scope of land banks by allowing them to acquire mortgage foreclosures in addition to tax foreclosures, formally recognizing land banking as a viable strategy for communities coming out of the 2008 economic recession (Sage Computing Inc. 2009; Heins and Abdelazim 2014, 15). Once the property is freed from all tax burdens, the land bank board can issue a request for proposals, or begin accepting applications for the acquisition of property. All transfers must be approved by at minimum the land bank board, and development can begin when transfers are completed.

Understanding the differences between land banks and community land trusts (CLTs) is essential when assessing the viability of a partnership of these two structure to facilitate community control of land. CLTs are nonprofit organizations that maintain long-term stewardship of land so that it can be utilized for community benefit (Democracy Collaborative 2014). Typically, CLTs are used to increase the availability of affordable housing to low- and moderate-income residents, though there is increasing interest to apply the CLT model to other end uses. The land the CLT acquires is generally gifted as a private donation or purchased on the open market. While the trust maintains

long-term ownership of the land, the trust can enter a ground lease agreement with parties interested in purchasing homes (or other kinds of property) on the land. The length of this lease is typically 99 years, and the CLT holds title to the land while homeowners are subject to use restrictions laid out by the trust (Burlington Associates 2012). If a homeowner chooses to sell his or her property, they only retain a portion of the increased property value; the remainder stays with the trust to ensure long-term affordability (Democracy Collaborative 2014). With nearly 250 CLTs in the United States, more cities and towns are exploring ways to expand the CLT model to ensure land is protected from speculation and retained for community benefit. (Democracy Collaborative 2014).

Despite their functional differences, land banks and community land trusts are commonly confused with one another. One significant difference between a land bank and a CLT is the impetus for creating the structure. Typically, land banks facilitate access to property available for development, while community land trusts are a more micro-scale, place-based model that requires the involvement and leadership of local residents. This idea of scale is an important consideration, as CLTs commonly have a stronger localized understanding of the historical context the land. Land banks are generally more concerned with the overall consequences of vacancy, rather than the specific implication that each parcel has on every unique neighborhood in a municipality. While both would like to see productive uses for vacant land, CLTs tend to be more vocal about what that particular use should be, whereas land banks are traditionally focused on transferring title and opening the roads for development as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The differing organizational and governance structure for land banks and CLTs also play a role in how effectively the two are able to cooperate with one another. A

traditional land bank is created as a public authority or as a quasi-public municipal corporation, while CLTs are private nonprofit corporations. A land bank board is under no obligation to include community representatives on its governing board, though many do, while traditional CLT governing boards are comprised of leaseholders, community representatives, and public representatives, and the majority of board members are elected by neighborhood residents (Burlington Associates 2012). Therefore, while CLTs have community representation and leadership built into its structure, it takes a bit more intention to get residents thoroughly involved in land banking.

These functional differences have led some to believe that land banks and CLTs are competing strategies for urban land management. In reality, there lies great partnership potential. As community development consultant John E. Davis articulates, “what a land bank does best is what a land trust does worst – and vice versa. Each has a problem the other can fix: land banks have a disposition problem. Land trusts have an acquisition problem” (Davis 2012). Both could be coupled together to not only reduce the burden of maintaining vacant land, but also make these properties productive community assets. Given the function of CLTs, a partnership with land banks can help further ensure that vacant land is being put to a use that builds community power. Each mechanism addresses a different phase of the vacant land transfer process, and this can strengthen a potential land bank-community land trust partnership.

In the case of Philadelphia, it is perhaps too early to discern the extent to which the Philadelphia Land Bank will establish a formal relationship with local community land trusts in order to ensure that land is retained for community benefit in perpetuity. In the meantime, this paper will explore ways in which the Philadelphia Land Bank, given

its foundation in grassroots organizing, can lay a foundation for the strategic transfer of land to CLTs. The land bank was framed by organizers as “fair, accountable, and transparent,” and while there are several mechanisms in place that allow for greater community input and involvement than most other land banks, there is potential for the Philadelphia Land Bank to address the long-standing imbalance of power that manifests as the exclusion of marginalized communities from land access opportunities. The following sections will detail the history of the formation of the land bank, and explore ways in which the land bank can support community land ownership opportunities via the transfer of land to community land trusts.

The Philadelphia Land Bank

A complex set of interrelated factors contributed to the widespread vacancy that still burdens Philadelphia residents today. First, the sheer number of vacant properties in the city is staggering. In Philadelphia, there are approximately 40,000 vacant parcels, and nearly a quarter of those are publicly owned. Of those 8,000-9,000 public properties, ownership is primarily scattered among four different agencies—the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, the Department of Public Property, the Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation, and the Philadelphia Housing Authority. Each agency has a different method for disposing of property, and while Philadelphia Landworks is an online repository of vacant property information for these four agencies, the website has limited data and is not regularly maintained. It can be challenging to inquire about a single parcel, never mind multiple properties owned by multiple agencies. This has resulted in a slow-moving, “gap-toothed” process of developing publicly owned vacant

land; historically, city agencies are only able to sell about 1% of their parcels annually (Matheson 2014).

Managing the privately owned properties presents an even more complex set of challenges. In addition to the inherent difficulty of tracking down absentee owners, the city has no system in place for acquiring legal ownership of these properties for the purpose of redevelopment. If land were to go to a sheriff's sale, the person or group interested in the property would have to come with the knowledge to navigate the process, as well as cash. Additionally, speculators would sometimes attend these sales to acquire more land, but had no intention of development. Poorly attended sheriff's sales were not necessarily of a reflection of the demand for land, but rather, a consequence of a process that was inherently confusing, inaccessible, and resource-intensive.

In addition to the burdens of vacancy on communities, the City was also losing a tremendous amount of money. A 2010 study estimates that Philadelphia's stock of vacant properties costs the City \$20 million in maintenance costs, and a staggering \$3.6 billion in lost household wealth annually (Econsult Corporation).² The City is also facing a significant lack of funding for its public schools, which has the public even more critical of the City's lack of uniform response to the property tax delinquents that owed the city a total of \$514.4 million as of 2012 (Inquirer Editorial 2012). The economic and social toll of vacant land in Philadelphia has generated a substantial amount of momentum and public support for a new system that will present a streamlined solution to addressing vacancy across the city.

² From "Vacant Land Management in Philadelphia:" "Vacant parcels have a blighting effect on nearby properties, reducing values by 6.5 percent citywide and by up to 20 percent in some neighborhoods...this results in an estimated \$3.6 billion reduction in property values, an average of \$8,000 for each household in the City."

It is no surprise a wide range of community stakeholders were invested in the establishment of a land bank in Philadelphia. The two predominant groups leading the charge were the Philadelphia Land Bank Alliance and the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land. Approximately a dozen real estate and development groups and local community-based organizations, including the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land, made up the Philadelphia Land Bank Alliance. The Campaign, on the other hand, was comprised of nearly 60 faith, labor, and community organizations. The Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations (PACDC) spearheaded the Philadelphia Land Bank Alliance, while the Women’s Community Revitalization Project (WCRP) led the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land.

While discussions of how to combat vacancy in Philadelphia have been circulating for decades, a concerted effort toward the formation did not start until about 2011 with the publication of the “Put Abandoned Land in Our Hands” report by the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land. While the strength of the Campaign lied in its community organizing, PACDC and the Alliance focused on more on the actual mechanics of the land bank, advocating for a “fair, accountable, and transparent” land bank that would efficiently transfer land for development. After years of push and pull between the two community groups and municipal stakeholders, the City passed a local ordinance allowing the land bank in December 2013. This ordinance mandated that the land bank create a strategic plan, and that plan was approved the following year.

Although each group did not see eye-to-eye on all decisions leading up to the formation of the land bank, they shared some common values that found their way into the land bank legislation. Four of the eleven land bank board members must be

community representatives, and while several stakeholders would have liked to see greater community representation on the board, this provides a platform for residents to have some say in land bank decision making. Furthermore, the land bank is required to update its strategic plan annually, and this update must include information about what land was transferred, to whom, and for what end use. This creates another means by which the community can keep its eyes on the land bank and ensure that it is staying true to its community-oriented roots. Furthermore, the land bank's disposition policies highlight specific uses would allow developers or community groups to purchase land at a below market-rate price. While these are guiding principles and not mandatory, this language was seen as a victory for many groups that often struggle to secure land.

Unfortunately, the community coalitions also faced some common losses; most notably was the inclusion of the Vacant Property Review Committee (VPRC) in the land transfer process. The VPRC is a notoriously slow-moving and opaque governmental body traditionally tasked with approving individual title acquisitions. Most land bank stakeholders were not interested in including the VPRC in the land bank in fear that they would stagnate a process already plagued by inefficiency and government bureaucracy. Furthermore, including this committee in the process seemed like another iteration of councilmanic prerogative, which allows district councilmembers to have final say over all land transfer decisions in their districts. Councilmanic prerogative was viewed by many as a burden that prevented the previous system of property transfer from being accountable, transparent, and efficient. Ultimately, to the dismay of many community stakeholders, it was decided that the VPRC must approve all land bank transactions.

Overall, the Philadelphia Land Bank ordinance, strategic plan, and disposition policies include a substantial amount of language that supports uses that benefit the public; however, whether or not the land bank will be a true power-shifting mechanism remains to be seen. There are some steps the land bank can take to strengthen its relationship with communities, especially those that have been marginalized from land access opportunities in the past. One way in which the land bank can help ensure that these underserved populations are getting a fair shot at accessing land from the land bank could be to establish a partnership between local community land trusts. By putting land under the stewardship of the community, the City can not only revitalize properties that have been sitting vacant for extended periods of time, but can also provide residents with the opportunity to engage in development on their own terms.

Discussion: Opportunities for Partnership

It is important to note that the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land made an attempt to establish a more formalized partnership between the land bank and local CLTs; however, that idea was met with both confusion and hesitation. Some people conflated the ideas of a land bank and a community land trust, and argued that a preference toward any end use would result in a land bank that was not truly fair. Furthermore, Philadelphia has a history of community land trusts that have gone under and nonprofits that have held on to vacant land; for example, in the 1990s, Manos Unidas was a particularly infamous CLT in Philadelphia that failed when homeowners defaulted on their loans and the board was never notified of the organization's financial troubles (Otterbein 2011). Ultimately, the land trust dissolved, people could not sell their homes

because the trust was gone, and no one had legal authority over the land. Therefore, some stakeholders were not comfortable with the idea that the CLT model merited priority.

However, there are several successful CLTs in Philadelphia that would benefit tremendously if the land bank could offer land at below market-rate. Most notable is the Neighborhood Gardens Trust (NGT). Part of the Philadelphia Horticultural Society, NGT manages more than thirty gardens, and also holds a few parks and open space parcels (Neighborhood Gardens Trust 2015). Additionally, WCRP is home to the newly emerging Community Justice Land Trust, which will serve as an affordable housing CLT once the organization acquires land. While Philadelphia is slowly coming around to community land trusts and community ownership of land, there is still much work to be done. Below is a selection of recommendations for the land bank to consider if it chooses to move toward this direction of equitable development and community control.

Resident Advisory Committee: The retention of the VPRC in land bank decision-making was seen as a disappointment by several land bank stakeholders. Additionally, several community-based land bank advocates would have liked to see increased community representation on the land bank board, or at least a stricter definition of what it means to be a community representative.³ One way to strengthen the leadership capacity of residents within the land bank could be through the creation of a land bank resident advisory committee that would serve as a conduit for regular communication between the land bank board and Philadelphia residents. This would create a defined space in which residents can help direct land bank transfers toward uses that benefit the

³ The Philadelphia Land Bank Ordinance defines community representative as: “employees, members, or board members of nonprofit or advocacy organizations working in the field of housing or community development, or of civic associations.”

public, which include opportunities for community ownership. Using the framework of Arnstein's ladder, this kind of partnership between residents and local government would function as placation, which is a notch higher than the current mechanisms in place that rank lower as elements of tokenism (Arnstein 1969). However, a resident advisory committee is still en route to true citizen power, which would manifest as community control of land via CLTs or other structures.

One example of a land bank that has implemented a resident advisory committee is the Newburgh Community Land Bank in New York. The committee "acts as a liaison between the resident community and the Board of Directors of the NCLB" by advising the board and hosting regular community meetings (Newburgh Community Land Bank 2015). While this is not an active decision-making role, the resident advisory committee can make it known when their vision for the best use of certain parcels is not in line with that of the board. In the case of Philadelphia, some may be hesitant about adopting a resident advisory committee due to a perceived hindrance to efficiency. In reality, the inclusion of resident voices from the beginning will help ensure that land use decisions are made in a long-term, sustainable way, ideally preventing land from becoming vacant again in the future. Frankly, a true burden to efficiency is the retention of the VPRC in the decision-making process, as several members of this committee are part of the transfer process separate from the VPRC. In the future, the Philadelphia Land Bank can continue to strengthen the influence residents have on the land bank, with one possible option being the creation of a resident advisory committee.

Work proactively with existing CLTs: After fortifying a strong connection with the community, an appropriate next step would be to identify potential CLTs that could

develop land from the land bank. As mentioned, one of the major benefits of a land bank-CLT partnership is that a land bank can facilitate land access opportunities for organizations that traditionally struggle to acquire land, for financial reasons or otherwise. This is especially true in the case of urban agriculture groups, which often have a hard time securing land for long-term use. Given that the Neighborhood Gardens Trust is one of the most successful community land trusts in Philadelphia, this would be great place to try out a land bank-CLT partnership.

What that partnership looks like can certainly take many forms, but one way to ensure that the NGT has greater access to land from the land bank is to proactively issue requests for proposals for parcels that would be suitable for urban agriculture. If the NGT has the resources necessary to expand their work to new parcels, then the land bank should consider the benefits of NGT's work outside of how the organization will influence the exchange value of the property. The land bank's strategic plan encourages the land bank to put social and financial capital on equal footing when assessing an organization's capability to develop land. Though this is not a requirement, if the resident advisory committee and local community stakeholders advocate for a community garden or urban agriculture enterprise, then these views should take precedent.

The role of CDCs: Given the hesitation the Campaign faced when advocating for the strategic transfer of land to CLTs from the land bank, another potential avenue for securing greater community control of land may be through community development corporations that manage land, and perhaps have a future interest in adding a CLT model to their work. This is where an organization like the Women's Community Revitalization Project would fit in, as WCRP has a long history of successes, and is now looking to

expand their CLT. Additionally, there are CDCs in Philadelphia that utilize multiple parcels of land for large-scale community development projects that would benefit from below-market rate land from the land bank. For example, the New Kensington CDC and Fairmount CDC convert abandoned buildings and factories into affordable housing, which is vital in a time when federal funds for affordable housing development have decreased dramatically. Given the high premium put on urban land, reducing the barriers to access is one step the land bank can take to ensure land is not simply sold to the highest bidder, but truly has long-term community benefit in mind.

The case of the collaborative effort between the Atlanta Land Bank Authority (LBA), the Atlanta Land Trust Collaborative (LTC), and a local CDC in the Pittsburgh neighborhood called the Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association (PCIA) demonstrates the feasibility of these kinds of partnerships. PCIA created a land trust with support from the land trust collaborative, but found the cost of acquiring land for redevelopment to be prohibitive. Instead, PCIA partnered with the LBA so that the land bank would acquire the land and set it aside for PCIA as long as it the organization worked on its financing strategy to acquire the land and develop affordable housing. Ultimately, 39 parcels were transferred to PCIA's CLT, and the partnership with the land bank helped jumpstart the CLT's operations once the CDC secured funding for development. In two years of operation, PCIA had 39 properties in its portfolio. Though this example of a land bank, CLT, and CDC partnership is unique to the context of this neighborhood, the Philadelphia Land Bank could explore ways it can actively collaborate with local CLTs and CDCs and proactively pull land out of the speculative market as these organizations acquire funds for development (Davidson 2012).

Conclusion

The Philadelphia Land Bank will be operational once it acquires its first parcels. The first few transactions the land bank completes will help shape its identity going forward. Given the land bank's community roots, using some of those first few transfers to put land in the hands of CLTs or other organizations responsible to the community would highlight how the land bank is staying true to the values it highlights in the ordinance, strategic plan, and disposition policies. By facilitating access to land to CLTs and other resident-accountable organizations that traditionally struggle to acquire land when faced with competition from market-rate developers, the land bank can help pull land out of the speculative market so its worth extends beyond its exchange value.

While this kind of power shifting frame may seem like a bold move for a public entity, it is important to remember that the land bank and CLT partnership is a mutually beneficial endeavor. The land bank can efficiently dispose its inventory to trusted community-based entities that will engage in long-term development, preventing any new vacancies from emerging. At the same time, CLTs and other organizations can proactively work with the city to gain access to parcels that they previously would have not been able to afford. This kind of partnership can help ensure that development happens with residents' best interest in mind, and land is not treated solely as a platform for market-rate development that drastically alters a community's character. Furthermore, as evidenced in the case of the partnership in Atlanta, funders are often more inclined to support collaborative efforts, indicating collaboration in Philadelphia may be a more cost-effective approach, versus operating in silos.

It should be noted that, in certain circumstances, commercial and market-rate development will make sense for certain parcels. This is why continued communication with residents via bodies like the resident advisory committee is necessary.

While it may be inevitable that neighborhoods change over time, it does not have to happen in a way that excludes historically marginalized populations. With some intentional discussion about the future of Philadelphia's diverse and evolving communities, the Philadelphia Land Bank has the potential to serve as a means of revitalizing vacant property into community assets that build on existing community character and support an improved quality of life for all Philadelphia residents.

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