

Low and Moderate Income Housing Development Task Force

Monday, March 28, 2022 - 11:00 am

Jim Monty - Chairman

Chairman Monty called this task force to order at 11:05 am with the following in attendance: Clayton Barber, Robin DeLoria, Stephanie DeZalia, Derek Doty, Charlie Harrington, Ken Hughes, Jim Monty, Matt Stanley, Tom Scozzafava, Joe Pete Wilson, Mike Mascarenas, Terri Morse, Anna Reynolds, and Carol Calabrese. Alan Jones, Krissy Leerkes, and Brook Ripper-Clark were absent. Roy Holzer and Bruce Misarski had been previously excused.

Also present: Dina Garvey

News Media present: Tim Rowland - Sun Community News

MONTY: Thank you all for coming this morning, we're running a little late, but and we have to cut this short, because there's a public hearing at 11:30. So, last week I was tasked with getting some information out to everyone on how to go about establishing a land bank. I forwarded all that information out to everyone and did not get much of a response, so I guess, are there any questions?

HUGHES: I read through the application and the process. The application looks pretty straight forward. It's just short paragraph answers based on 3 or 4 pages of different questions, so I think that we will be well poised to answer those questions from the variety of stakeholders that we have on this committee, to put together a strong application, once we know that we're ready to pull the trigger on that and we have Board support. It didn't look overly complicated, but it's just a thing that needs to be done, once we have the Board onboard.

MONTY: I agree and Ken, also sent out some information that he had gathered from the ADK Action meeting. He sent out the links to that and things. Again, going back to my suggestion is I think, I would like to see us push forward with establishing this land bank, because we don't have to, once we get it established, it's here, it's part of our toolbox, but we can still move forward with doing some of the things that we talked about during, as far as cleaning up some of these zombie properties and if you read anything about those land banks, a lot of what's going on is cleanup within the communities and that's a lot of what they're doing. So, I think I would like to push forward with beginning to fill out our application for a land bank, in the same breath, still moving forward with what else we want to do, which would include the plan of how this land bank is going to officially work, if that makes sense.

HUGHES: Yeah, I would like to pick up on that topic. I made copies for the people, for those on the committee here, I tasked myself with a couple of responsibilities after our last meeting and I just wanted to bring that up really quickly, just to remind the Committee on where we were a month ago. We talked about a structure, a mission and financials and the first thing, I reached out to the Greater Mohawk Land Bank, because there were concerns about what life is like for a land bank inside the blue line and it turns out that the only land bank that does partially exist inside the Adirondack line is Herkimer County, the Greater Mohawk and according to them, they actually don't have a lot of responsibility, they don't do a lot of work in the Adirondacks, most of their, that's Old Forge, Town of Webb. So, they actually said, they don't, this land bank, there was questions

in this Committee about what the concerns are of, about running a land bank inside the Blue Line and the only one that was inside the Blue Line was Greater Mohawk and they actually don't do a lot of work up there. They maybe push and try to stay away from up there, is what it sounded like to me, which is fine. So, we're going to be trendsetters.

Again, everybody on the committee received Kim Davis' comments. Kim is the Treasure of Clinton County, from the ADK Action meeting and there's a second land bank conversation coming up, I don't remember the date or time of that, but I do know it's coming up. If you don't know it and would like to know it, let me know and we'll get it to you.

But, the big thing, my issue at the last meeting that I really wanted to hone in on was a recipe for success. So, you probably have seen these on the shared drive and I wanted to make sure that you had a physical copy, in case you hadn't seen in on the shared drive, I know we're all super busy people, but just trying to keep the conversation going to try to get a little bit more concrete, I created this small little, blue circle logo, just to try and make it something tangible. The one with the zombie property at the top, I just found a picture of a derelict property, this could be a property that we might invest in, a pretend property and what I tried to do, from my seat, from my vision, from my perspective, only, is just to try and create what the process might look like for us, as a housing committee, based on all the conversations we've had, based on all the experts we've talked to, based on all the webinars and meetings that we've had, what might our local process be? I did share this document with Buck Bobbin at ADK Action, Dan Kiefer-Bach at Living ADK, Erin Tobin at AARCH, I shared it with Common Ground Alliance and I shared it with Leslie Karasin at Northern Forest Center and encouraged them to edit and mark up and make modifications or comments to this shared document and I don't believe any of them did, which is disappointing, but again I know everybody has busy lives. So, until someone challenges my thinking on this, this is my thinking on this. If that's selfish of me, then that's selfish of me, but I truly believe that there are two big issues that our County needs to focus on and that's jobs and housing and as Joe Pete Wilson adeptly pointed out that last time we met in the Recruitment and Retention meeting, they're linked and they are part of the package deal that we have in Essex County that we have to attract people here, not only people who want to live here, but people that want to work at our County. We must make process and so that is why I made this document. It is up for debate, discussion, if you want to trash it and start over, fine by me, but I am, still remain very optimistic for our process and I'll fill out the application, if you want, we'll put it up online, very collaboratively to get feedback on that, but whatever we can do to keep this ball rolling and move it down, I am 100% behind it and I welcome your thoughts and comments on that.

MONTYL I thank you, Ken, you've done great work.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, I think, Ken, you've hit the nail on the head and I personally appreciate all the work you put into this. It's well done and I think it captures what we've talked about in a lot of these meetings. I think what I would suggest is that, at our Board meeting, we seek a resolution from the Board for permission to apply to become a land bank. I don't know, I think having that process begin, know that the State takes a long time to work through some of those things, we do have that in the hopper, be ready to go. I know we don't have all the details worked out in terms of how that process is going to move forward for the Board, but I think it's going to be a tool in the toolbox, long term, something that we don't necessarily have to activate, but I sit here, month after month and keep rehashing the same arguments and the same, you know, discussion, I think we're getting bogged down in some of the minutia, between you and I and I think we run

the parallel approach with looking at the tax sales. I think we got to be able to focus on that, being that we are so far behind in tax sales, due to the pandemic that we're going to have to focus a lot of time and energy on that moving forward and we should be able to do our due diligence by that and look at the properties that need removal or taking down. So, I think if we could get that approved by the Board to apply, maybe on Monday, and simply explain to the Board, that no we don't have all the details worked out, this is something in the toolbox, we're taking a parallel approach with blight versus land bank usage long term and we'd have to come back to the Board to activate it anyhow; right? With a plan of action, this is simply for an application, no real different than applying for a grant application that the Board would then get another crack at down the road to approve. So, I think that would be proper to get the ball rolling and start getting some action at this Committee moving forward and the focus has been there, it's just that we're getting into the detail a little bit too much, I think, and not able to focus on the prize and the goal; right? And that initially looking at those housing units that we frequently are seeing, those are some of the easy things that we can do, the low hanging fruit that I think we can pick off and show that there's value in what we're trying to accomplish and if we can show value on the front end, then the land bank will make sense to everyone on the back end, but if we can't show that value on the front end then we don't have to, we simply have permission to do it from the State; right? So, I think moving forward that application makes a lot of sense and we should ask the Board for that approval.

HUGHES: And in my brain, right now, I hear Tom Scozzafava saying, where is the money coming from? How are you going to pay for it? Right? That's the question that's going to be on the table when we present this resolution. How are you going to pay for fixing up these houses? And that's why the single piece of paper, right here, is really sparse, because I personally do not have the answer to that. I've heard Mr. Monty say, maybe we can use some ARPA funding and maybe we can take a chunk of that money, the money that the County received from the Federal Government and use that. Okay, that's great, I'm newish on the Board, so, I don't know if I have the authority to support that or not. I love the idea, but we, I think, need to feel better about this process by knowing where that money is going to come from and how are we going to spend money in the appropriate way to make that low hanging fruit viable; right? I mean, I can't answer that and that's what I need help with.

MASCARENAS: I think I can help a little bit with that, right now, and I talked to Mr. Palmer about it and I think he's onboard with it, as well. Initially, I think we would look to ARPA to do some of these tax sale removals that we're talking about in this current year and we need to know that we're limited in what we can do. We're going to put a number to it; right? Or we going to put a threshold, is it \$100,000.00 that we're going to say, okay and then how much, how many properties does that \$100,000.00 get us to take care of? Is it 4? Is it 5? It's going to depend on the house, it's going to depend on hazardous materials; right? It's going to depend on the tipping fee, the size of the home, those types of things, it's going to ultimately determine that we can do for our money. But, I think if we dive in with some of that ARPA funding, if it's 3 houses, great, we get to see, is there success from that? We've never tried it. So, let's see if we can take down a few of these homes. We can set stipulations and once we own the property, of who we sell it to; right? How that goes back out. It won't be in the tax sale this coming year, but do we put it in a tax sale in the future year? Do we put up to a realtor to sell? Do we seek out a specific buyer that meets a certain income threshold? We can do that all after the fact, in terms of coming up with that detail, but if we let these tax sales pass us by, we're going to miss the boat. We're going to

miss the boat to get those properties. You see what we have left now; right? And none of those properties are even welcoming to anything or anyone.

MONTY: I agree 100% with both of you and once we get that money in place then we can tap into some of the ideas Kimberly Davis had, from Clinton County. She had some good ideas about potential ways to help finance it. But, I think we do need to step up and keep moving forward by establishing it and then we can start putting together the rest of the package with it. I did have a brief conversation, recently, with Habitat for Humanity and they would love to partner with us in a way that would help and there is going to be some money there that would be available to us.

HUGHES: I suspect all of these non-profits that have been holding webinars, having conversations and roundtables are willing to pony up, I would like to think they would be willing to pony up something if they knew the big dog, which is us, is actually is in the game.

MONTY: We got skin in the game.

HUGHES: Right, I mean, who else is going to if it's not us?

MONTY: Right, I agree with you.

HUGHES: I feel like it has to be a governmental agency, you know.

MONTY: And I feel the biggest challenge outside of the financing for us is when you look around the room and we're here as the Board of Supervisors, everybody's community is different. You're housing needs aren't necessarily for low income, you've got a lot, what's it called? J1s, that you have to house there, people to work within the community. That's totally, it's a little different than what Tommy's facing in Moriah, maybe what Robin's facing in Newcomb, what I'm facing in Lewis. So, we're going to have 18 communities invested in this, but they're going to be different plans, so to speak.

HUGHES: And that's the beauty of the Committee, is we have members, and obviously we're all going to fight for our own individual towns, but we've got Carol, we've got Anna, we've got Mike, who are, Terri, who are community agnostic; right? They're here for the County; right? And they're looking at the County, the needs of the County and maybe it might be worthwhile to do something in North Elba or in Newcomb or in Minerva, we'll cross that bridge when we get there, but we're all looking at the bigger picture.

MONTY: We're looking at the whole picture and everything under the umbrella.

HUGHES: Right and we'll pick and choose as it comes up and we'll do so intelligently, in the moment.

DOTY: I think I can draw a very good correlation though from North Elba to everyone here and that is the one project that's being done now by Homestead Development; which is to resell those units at actual cost. So, you know the excitement that we all feel around this room, doesn't need

a land bank, like Mike says, we can move now. Let's acquire a few pieces of property. Let's look at this Homestead Development that will be done prior to us moving ahead of the land bank situation and see what some actual costs are other than just acquire land. My biggest concern is the actual cost to renovate these places. In many cases, bringing an old place back is more expensive than starting from scratch.

MONTY: But, again, I would go back to, that works great for North Elba, that same type of plan might not work in Moriah.

DOTY: No, but the idea of building something for cost and passing it along.

MONTY: Oh no...

DOTY: Is an idea that hasn't even been tried yet.

SCOZZAFAVA: Yeah, the biggest issue, I spoke with Mike Diskin on it just week. Moriah's situation and a couple of other towns also, the first thing we need to do is tighten up on our tax sales and not go down there and sell property just because somebody puts in a high bid and might be \$15,000.00 worth of back taxes owned on a property that we're selling for \$1,000.00. So, you've got people buying these properties who probably have the best intention of the world, but have no financial means to do anything with them once they own them, so they sit there, dilapidated and, you know, hopefully this next sale we're going to get a handle on that, whether any of these individuals that purchase property in the last tax sale or the tax sale before that and have done nothing with these properties, Mike, I have had this conversation with you and they still sit there vacant and falling in, they shouldn't be allow to bid again, in my opinion. They haven't done anything in regards to cleaning the properties up or trying to bring them up to code or anything else. I don't know, you know, how do we pick and choose what properties go to a land bank, what properties we demolish so you have an empty lot, you can put a house up? I mean, as you said, Jim, that's where it's going to get, because every community's different and I remember the house on Elizabeth Street, when the Village of Port Henry was still in existence, the house that was falling in, right onto the street and the County went in and took it down, I think back then it was close to \$50,000.00 to take it down and you know you got an empty lot that was sold at the tax sale, but it sits there vacant.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, just to answer some of that, Tom. Ken does cover it in his paper here. I think initially this committee would make a recommendation to the Board on what properties would be considered via the tax sale, based on tax property history, based on conditions of the home, based on the budgetary requirements that is given to us by the overall Board of Supervisors; right? So, all those things are going to matter. We would bring those, that to the table. Yes, somebody's going to get their feeling hurt, some town isn't going to get what they feel like they should this time around, but ultimately, I think everybody will be touched as time goes on and we start to clean up that blight.

One thing Ken brought up and he's absolutely right for anyone, especially me, that sits on this committee, is I look at this as service provision. I look at it like any other service the County provides. There's communities I provide a lot more service in than others and being in DSS, you might be happy if I'm not in your community; right? You're probably really thrilled if I'm not, but

there's people here and you know, when I was Anna, there was communities I worked a lot more for depending on the time. When Hurricane Irene happened I lived in the Town of Jay for about 3-5 years; right? That's just the way it was, but then a couple of years later I ended up in North Elba and I was doing projects in North Elba. I was doing water projects in Essex and water and sewer projects in Ticonderoga. So, while you might not be there all the time, because you physically can't be, ultimately, when you need us to provide a service, whether it's us, Probation, Mental Health, IDA, we're there, right? You might not feel like you're getting your bang for your buck, every minute, but this is just another service provision for me, another service the County offers to make our communities more attractive to people that want to live here and the only areas we have are our hamlets, right? We talked about this. We know we can't expand those hamlets. There's a reason why Mohawk Valley doesn't touch the Adirondack Park. We don't have to talk about it. We know what those reasons are. It's hard, that's the reason why. So, if we can start building on our blight issue and start talking about some of those properties that you're talking about, we at least have a catalyst and have the ability to take advantage of opportunity when it presents itself; right? How often does opportunity come and we don't have the place to put it? A builder comes and says, hey, we want to do this, we want to do that. Well, we don't have a vacant lot, we can't do that. This is going to present us with opportunities down the road to be able to meet some of the needs we haven't been able to previously.

CALABRESE: The conversations that the gal from Clinton County had, there's ways to address in how to identify the low hanging fruit, when some of the funding could come in with buy-ins in different communities, either now or later, reimbursement to the communities that buy-in early and the ones that come in later. We can set in the bylaws that we can put criteria where you have one land bank project and then there's got to be so many miles or in a different corner of Essex County, so that it can be evenly distributed, as opportunities arise in all 18 communities, so it's not all going to one geographic area, that we're being conscientious in incorporating those criteria in the bylaws, trying to make it fair for everybody.

STANLEY: I think the land bank opens opportunities. Just like when we were talking with Clayton, not too long ago, about going out and looking for funding for bridges, it's going to open doors for us. So, I think creating a land bank is going to open things and we don't even know what they are yet. So, getting that first step and that application in, we will then start to see what other things and programs and people who want to jump in board, but you've got to build a structure first, and then they'll come.

DELORIA: I'm not on your Committee, a couple of observations, if I were to buy this house, I can go in and demolish it and get a demolition permit and it would be gone tomorrow. If I were to hire a contractor to do that for me in New York State that triggers what they call, asbestos abatement, which can be very, very costly on this type of property. So, I would just throw that out to be something that you look at prior to acquiring, whether it be deed or gift.

The other observation I have and it's more of a revolving door, as opposed to an open door, so that Newcomb had a parcel back in the, I think it was the early 20's that we sold, but there was a deed restriction placed on that lot and there was a separate deed restriction that the purchaser had 5 years to build a residence on that property or a business, otherwise it would be sold back to the Town at fair market value. We ended up buying it back at twice what we sold it for, but that was fair market value, so maybe 2 years and not 5, because you actually increased the price.

But, in the same respect, if it's a piece of property that we like in the land bank, you can keep it in the land bank with a deed restriction, because it's going to come back to you, if they don't like to mow it and step in and clean it up. So, it's a thought for selling this property, I've got a list that I can give you.

HUGHES: Those are really great points and that's why we, I mean, that's why we would use, Seth Celotti would be an integral part of the process and one thing I've learned as a town supervisor, is just because you're given, that doesn't mean you have to receive it; right? Just because you're offered a gift, doesn't mean you have to actually have accept that gift.

MONTY: I know we've got to wrap it up shortly, because the Public Hearing. Is there anybody that has anything they clearly want to discuss or mention? Terri, you're always very insightful and we've had conversations?

MORSE: I appreciate it, I have an offer to Ken, if he wants it, but I'll talk to him about it later.

MONTY: Okay.

HUGHES: The only thing I will do, is if it's okay with the Committee, I will take that application, I will put it up online and make it editable, so that anybody, and I will share that link, so if you have a few moments to answer some of those land bank questions, throw in your answer and we'll just keep refining it as we go along with the intelligence of everybody. I don't necessarily know if we want to rush this, Mr. Monty, through to next Monday?

MONTY: I don't think so.

HUGHES: I think it would behoove the Committee and the process to give another month, because you were talking about doing something in June.

MONTY: Right

HUGHES: And now we're talking about late April.

MONTY: I agree, Ken.

HUGHES: So, if you give me time, I'll put those questions up online, we can all answer them and then we can move forward.

MONTY: And I encourage, please, read what we send out to you, because that helps us all and if you have any questions, reach out to Ken and myself. I really think this is something that we need, we can do, but we need to act, instead of having it be the old, okay, we'll do it and then 3 years later we're still in the same chair. So, thank you and we stand adjourned.

**THERE WAS NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THIS TASK FORCE IT WAS
ADJOURNED AT 11:30 PM.**

Respectively Submitted,

Dina Garvey, Deputy Clerk
Board of Supervisors