

MEMORANDUM

TO: PCRG Membership
FROM: Alyssa P. Lyon, Manager of Membership and Community Engagement
SUBJECT: Pittsburgh Land Bank Policies and Procedures Member Discussions
PRIORITY: High
DATE: November 17, 2016



Introduction and Background

The Pittsburgh Land Bank (PLB) Board of Directors have intended to hold a series of public engagements during the fall of 2016 around the Policies and Procedures, which are actively being drafted by contracted consultants. Initial discussion of this topic took place among PCRG members at the September 9 Vacant Property Working Group (VPWG) meeting. Several concerns were expressed including lack of clarity and transparency into the PLB's Policy and Procedures formulation processes, how community organizations and residents provide input, and that the proposed public engagement timeline seems rushed and lacking adequate opportunity to educate and prepare communities for participation. VPWG recommended that broader engagement on these issues take place with PCRG membership. By statute, the PLB is required to conduct a least five public meetings throughout the city.

After initial struggles, City leadership has committed to an operational land bank by the end 2016. The City, URA, and PLB Board of Directors have been developing the required organizational and legal infrastructure for the land bank to function effectively. Vital to that are Policies and Procedures that will govern day-to-day operations including the acquisition and disposition of property and how the land bank responds community priorities.

At the request of the URA and PLB Board of Directors, PCRG proposed a comprehensive scope of activities to facilitate community engagement with the creation of the Policies and Procedures. However, PCRG was not comfortable that adequate resources weren't available to responsibly perform this scope and formally withdrew from contract discussions on September 8. We then turned to our members for direction on what course of action PCRG should take on their behalf.

Summary of Activities

On October 12-14, 2016, PCRG convened its membership to discuss the current state of PLB Policies and Procedures creation, reaffirm membership priorities regarding the PLB, and gauge their expectations regarding the Policies and Procedures creation and the PLB's potential engagement process. In total, 23 members participated in these discussions (Attachment 1).

Members reaffirmed the following priorities that serve to ensure a community-serving land bank (in no particular order):

- Transparency and accountability;
- Affordable housing preservation and creation;
- Integration of community plans and development priorities;
- Priority access, pricing, and expedited process for community organizations to acquire property;
- Adequate maintenance of land bank property;

- Support of workforce development opportunities;
- Preservation of green and recreational space and other community assets, and;
- Partnerships between developers, purchasers of land bank property, and community organizations

Members also clearly expressed that the proposed PLB public engagement strategy does not provide adequate time and resources necessary for meaningful citywide engagement, and that the timeline is too aggressive. While there is a strong desire to move forward, effectiveness far outweighs expediency. Members were clear that a deliberately transparent, two-way engagement process must be at the center of these meetings. A “report-out” of the Policies and Procedures to the community, without meaningful opportunity for input into their creation, is not acceptable. Furthermore, members stated the importance of affording communities, especially those most impacted, adequate time to notify and educate residents of this process so that they are prepared to participate.

Actions Requested: PCRG and Membership

PCRG staff received a clear and immediate directive from members to draft a letter to the PLB Board of Directors requesting an inclusive opportunity for residents and organizations to provide feedback on the Policies and Procedures. This letter was drafted, endorsed by 24 member organizations, and submitted to the PLB Board of Directors on Friday, October 21 (attachment 2); copying Mayor Peduto and Chief of Staff Kevin Acklin.

Additionally, PCRG staff requested that members begin educating their communities about the PLB in preparation for the upcoming Policies and Procedures public meetings. In turn, members requested that PCRG staff compile materials to aid them in these efforts.

Ongoing Actions

Listed below are action steps taken by PCRG in an effort to respond to member concerns:

- Progress updates were provided at the October PCRG Membership meeting, the November VPWG meeting, in email to members on October 20, and in PCRG’s October and November Newsletters *Ongoing progress reports will continue to be provided through these channels.*
- PCRG held a meeting with Land Bank board Chair and URA Land Recycling Manager - Councilman Burgess and Bethany Davidson, respectively - on November 16 to discuss member concerns stemming from the October meetings. PCRG is scheduled to meet with Mayoral staff on November 21.
 - PCRG staff will apprise members of both meetings no later than December 2.
- PCRG will host an informational meeting (for members ONLY) in collaboration with Councilman Burgess and the Land Bank board on December 6th
- PCRG is finalizing a selection of informational resources for use by member organizations in their community engagement efforts (i.e. PowerPoint presentations, websites, reference sheets). These will be made available on PCRG’s website no later than December 2. PCRG staff will notify members of their availability once posted.

Closing

PCRG's VPWG has advocated for the policies, tools, and resources that empower our communities to transform the challenges of blight and vacancy into opportunities since 1996. VPWG's founding issue that remains central to these efforts is the creation of a community-serving land bank. PCRG, at great expense to itself, helped bring a land bank into legislative existence in April, 2014. We, and our members, remain committed to belief that a community-serving land bank can be an effective and equitable blight mitigation tool. It cannot be this, however, without robust input and community-protecting and empowering mechanisms. Therefore, effective dialogue around Policy and Procedure formulation is paramount.

Community organizations and the residents they serve will undoubtedly be impacted by the activities of the Land Bank. It's important that both are prepared to meaningfully participate in discussions about its Policies and Procedures. PCRG is committed to ensuring that the priorities of our members and their communities are preserved, and that the Land Bank Policies and Procedures are created through a robust and inclusive manner that results in a transformative tool that truly serves - and is driven by - Pittsburgh's communities.