

Tools for Managing Blight

*Highlights from “From Blight to Bright”
published by the
Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania*

Why Eliminate Blight?

Eliminating blight reduces crime, improves health, and increases property values and tax revenues.

Fighting blight is a proven method to increase tax revenues to government, increase the wealth that residents possess in their homes, reduce crime, and improve the health of residents. Properties that comply with citations create higher sales prices for surrounding properties.

Studies by the University of Pennsylvania give conclusive evidence that eliminating blight from vacant properties through greening or redevelopment increases surrounding property values by up to 30% in certain neighborhoods, markedly reduces gun-related violence, and improves the health and exercise habits of residents while reducing their stress.

Blight elimination efforts can be divided into four critical categories:

1. Enforceable legal framework

High quality data collection allows code enforcement officials and consultants to target their limited resources toward the most effective use; show a pattern of violations to a judge; enforce licenses, permits, fees, and fines; and create a performance management tool for tracking the progress of code enforcement efforts throughout the municipality. The data base is used to record each complaint, inspection, violation, communication, and action intended to resolve a violation. The database can also track licenses and permits obtained, as well as permits' expiration dates. Keeping clear records of every action taken is often the key ingredient for success.

The database can be as simple as a spreadsheet that includes all complaints (type, status, and dates) and all code violations (type of violation, status, dates), or as complex as a database that fully integrates police and fire reports, property ownership records, and building permits and that maps violations across the municipality. The goal is to create a property history that provides a view of everything that is happening or has happened on any property.

Once set up, the municipality can use the database to:

- Identify owners of more than one problem property
- Identify the most common violations in each area

- Evaluate the number and types of violations in each area
- Enforce registration and permit laws
- Establish the best areas to target proactive enforcement efforts
- Make a strong case before a judge as to why action is needed to bring a property up to code

2. Targeting limited resources and collaborating to enforce the law

Identifying the 3 – 5 poorly maintained properties that have the greatest negative impact in a community allows municipalities to create detailed plans to enforce the laws against those properties before moving on to others. By focusing resources and attention on the very worst properties, the blight they create can be removed. Publicity about actions taken against such properties can motivate other owners to bring their properties into code compliance.

3. Compliance and Changing the Culture

Many long-term vacant properties have been in poor condition for years or even decades. Making clear that the municipality will enforce a higher standard for the condition of those properties is crucial to changing the culture and setting an expectation that the exteriors of all properties must be well tended and cared for. A progressive-discipline approach that imposes consistent penalties on properties that violate codes and increases fines and penalties over time is most effective. It is also essential to tailor tools and their penalties to the conditions of properties and the owners' abilities to bring them into code compliance. The harshest fines and penalties should be reserved for absentee owners who have clear assets but refuse to invest in their properties. Harsh treatment of owners who lack sufficient resources may only cause them to walk away. Where properties are in poor condition partly or wholly because of their owners' limited financial resources, assistance programs may be needed to facilitate repairs.

4. Transfer Worst Properties to Responsible New Owners

When a property affects a community's health and safety and remains in blighted condition despite regular fines and penalties, it may be time to transfer the property to a responsible new owner, using conservatorship, eminent domain, or another tool. Taking

that step with even one property – the worst of the worst – has the benefit of creating a tangible threat that will encourage owners to improve other properties.

Tools to Prevent and Eliminate Blight and Keep Properties Up to Code

Municipalities must have a legal framework to enforce, whether it is in the form of a comprehensive code or individual targeted laws. Dealing with a potential violation as swiftly as possible is the most cost-effective approach to preventing blight and abandonment. The tools discussed here are intended to bring vacant properties into code compliance and to eliminate blight. The most severe actions are reserved for long-term vacant properties that threaten a community's health and safety.

The numbered points that follow outline steps that municipalities can take to prevent and eliminate blight. The bulleted items are specific laws and strategies. After each is a more detailed discussion about each step.

1. By enacting key codes or individual ordinances, setting a legal framework, and holding properties to clear standards, municipalities can better maintain the condition of occupied properties and prevent blight.
 - *International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC) or Individual Ordinances:* a legal framework to hold properties to clear standards
 - *Quality-of-Life Violation Ticketing Ordinance:* Tickets and fines for code violations that are visible on the exteriors of private properties

2. By requiring the registration of rental, vacant, and foreclosed properties, municipalities can better monitor conditions and finance proactive efforts to ensure that properties remain up to code.
 - *Registration of Rental Properties:* Requiring rental property owners to provide contact information for the owners or their local agents, pay an annual fee to cover the costs of regular inspections and complaint response, and learn their responsibilities under the code and regulations

 - *Registration of Vacant Properties:* Requiring vacant property owners to provide contact information for the owners or local agents, pay an annual fee to cover the costs of regular inspections and complaint response, and learn their responsibilities under the code and regulations

- *Registration of Foreclosed Properties*: Partnering with a for-profit company to require lenders to register properties once they are in default, pay an annual fee, and identify a contact person to oversee the security and maintenance of foreclosed properties
3. By requiring that properties be brought up to code within a specific time frame after sale and by disqualifying tax-sale bidders who have tax delinquencies or code violations, municipalities can break the cycle of blight.
- *Pre-sale Inspections*: Requiring sellers to pay for inspections before transferring properties to new owners and notify owners of deficiencies or bring properties up to code
 - *Municipal Code and Ordinance Compliance Act*: Requiring purchasers of properties that have known code violations to resolve the violations within 18 months
 - *Disqualification of Tax Sale Bidders*: Restricting bidders who have tax delinquencies or code violations
4. By making grants and loans available to homeowners or small “mom and pop” landlords who lack the money to keep their properties up to code, municipalities can improve the housing stock condition, eliminate blight, and revitalize neighborhoods.
- *Home Repair and Rental Rehabilitation Assistance*: Financial assistance to owners who lack the money to bring properties up to code
5. By prioritizing severely blighted properties that threaten health and safety, and by gaining the owners’ attention through significant fines, permit denials, or criminal charges, municipalities can encourage owners to repair and maintain blighted properties. The goal is to change the owners’ stance from “I’m going to ignore you” to “How much time do I have to get my property into compliance?”
- *Doors and Windows Ordinance*: Fines for each missing door and window, and increasing fines over time
 - *Permit Denial*: Denying permits to owners of tax-delinquent properties or properties that have judgments for serious code violations

- *Asset Attachment*: Attaching owners' other assets to pay to demolish or improve properties
- *Hall of Shame*: Bringing public pressure to bear on owners of the most blighted properties
- *Criminal Misdemeanor Sanctions for Multiple Code Violations*: Criminal penalties on owners who repeatedly violate building, property maintenance, or housing codes
- *Extradition of Out-of-State Property Owners*: Asking Pennsylvania's governor to extradite property owners living in other states so that they can be brought for criminal prosecution

Description of Tools

Tool	Paid for through	How to Use Law	How to Implement	How to Combine with other Strategies
International Property Maintenance Code or Individual Ordinances – A legal framework to hold properties to clear standards	Fines & penalties	Adopt formally	Notice Warning Fine	Is a prerequisite to other tools
Quality of Life Violation Ticketing Ordinance – Tickets and fines for code violations that are visible on the exteriors of private properties	Fines to pay for inspectors/No legal limit on amount of fines collected	Ordinance allowing for quality-of-life ticketing; tickets; Appeals forms	Warning Code violation Ticket Fine Court if unpaid fines	Tickets issued must meet violation definitions in the PMC or Municipal ordinances. HAP recommends adopting IPMC before passing a ticketing ordinance or beginning to ticket for offenses.
Rental Property Registration – Requiring rental property owners to	Fees collected must not exceed total cost of administering program	Ordinance sets goals, specifics of registration process, inspection schedule, duties of owners,	Ordinance establishing registration requirements;	Database created by registering rental properties can be very helpful in

Tool	Paid for through	How to Use Law	How to Implement	How to Combine with other Strategies
provide contact information for the owners or their local agents, pay an annual fee to cover the costs of regular inspections and complaint response, and learn their responsibilities under the code and regulations.	(includes salaries and benefits for inspectors' time devoted to program); annual fee per residential rental unit (license fee)	enforcement mechanisms, & appeals process.	registration forms; searchable database; fee schedule.	proactive code enforcement. Registration can also be an effective strategy for vacant and foreclosed properties.
Vacant Property Registration – Requiring vacant property owners to provide contact information for the owners or their local agents, pay an annual fee to cover costs of regular inspections and complaint response, and learn their responsibilities under the code and regulations.	VPR laws pay for themselves. License fees may not exceed actual or probable cost of special municipal services needed to enforce program (includes salaries and benefits for inspectors' time & creation & maintenance of vacant property database.) Ordinance can employ an escalating fee structure.	Ordinance to include clear definition of which properties/parties must register; registration requirements & procedures; fee structure; owners' obligations in maintaining property; penalties for failing to register in a timely fashion	Ordinance establishing registration requirements; registration forms; searchable database; fee schedule	The database created by registering rental properties can be very helpful to record code violations & enforce progressive discipline. Ordinance can also require registration of foreclosed properties.
Registration of Foreclosed Properties – Partnering with a for-profit company to require lenders to register properties once they are in default, pay an annual fee, and identify a contact person to oversee the security and maintenance of foreclosed properties.	Program is financed through an annual fee or one-time fee.	Can be handled by a for-profit company that contracts to implement the law for a fee. For-profit will alert municipality when a foreclosure is imminent, create a comprehensive database of all foreclosed properties that allows the municipality to contact a specific individual at the bank's property management firm or division by e-mail, & handle enforcement of that provision, in return for a percentage of annual fees.	Ordinance establishing registration requirement; registration forms; searchable database, possibly created and maintained by for-profit partner; fee schedule.	Several cities are considering a single ordinance to cover both properties facing foreclosure and vacant properties, rather than instituting a vacant property registration ordinance separate from a foreclosed property registration ordinance.
Presale	Inspections are	Ordinance that requires	Ordinance	Presale inspections

Tool	Paid for through	How to Use Law	How to Implement	How to Combine with other Strategies
<p>Inspections – Requiring sellers to pay for inspections before transferring properties to new owners and to notify owners of deficiencies or to bring properties up to code.</p>	<p>financed by the seller who must pay a fee for the inspection. Fee should be no more than necessary to support the presale-inspection program.</p>	<p>presale inspections. Sellers pay a fee. Municipal officials conduct inspections before a sale. Presale report is issued. Either seller corrects violations before settlement or buyer corrects violations within a certain number of days after settlement. Law should allow for a hearing so that owners may appeal a finding of code violations. Municipality should ensure it has sufficient housing inspectors, either on staff or available under contract, to operate program.</p>	<p>requiring presale inspections; buyer notification inspection report form or presale-inspection report form; Certificate that certifies the property for transfer without code violations. Where violations exist, a form in which buyers can acknowledge violations and state their commitment to fixing violations within required timeframe.</p>	<p>are an opportunity to document violations on a property and obtain a commitment from buyer, seller, or both to resolve them. Should be used with other code enforcement tools.</p>
<p>Municipal Code and Ordinance Compliance Act – Requiring purchasers of properties that have known code violations to resolve the violations within 18 months.</p>	<p>Fines ranging from \$1,000 - \$10,000 can be used to administer the law. In a municipality that has low-income housing, however, not less than one-third of the fine imposed must be used by the municipality for low-income housing in a manner determined by municipality.</p>	<p>Municipality must cite properties for substantial code violations and make the citations available to the public so that it is clear that buyers have at least <i>constructive knowledge</i> of substantial violations at time of sale. Buyers have only the responsibility to remedy substantial violations that pose a threat to health and safety that they know about. The tool differs from a presale inspection ordinance which requires sellers to arrange for an inspection of the property before being able to complete a sale. This law places the responsibility for providing an inspection on the municipality.</p>	<p>Municipality must retain clear records noting all code violations and must share those records with a buyer at sale.</p>	<p>Progressive code enforcement and clear reporting are crucial for enforcement of this tool.</p>
<p>Disqualification of Tax Sale Bidders – Restricting bidders who have tax delinquencies</p>	<p>The only cost is a basic search of each bidder's history of tax payments,</p>	<p>In Real Estate Tax Sale Law jurisdictions, the county tax claim bureau must qualify bidders at tax sale. The tax claim bureau can establish a</p>	<p>Affidavit in which bidders certify that they are eligible to bid under the</p>	<p>Restricting eligible buyers at tax sale can work jointly with progressive code enforcement</p>

Tool	Paid for through	How to Use Law	How to Implement	How to Combine with other Strategies
or code violations.	outstanding code violations, and revoked rental licenses. Code enforcement agencies have 20 days after tax sale to complete searches before a deed is issued to the winning bidder.	mandatory preregistration process for buyers of tax sale properties. Process allows relevant agencies to screen registered bidders before sale. Under RETSL, municipalities may challenge a successful bidder within 20 days of sale. Code officials must coordinate with tax claim bureau and the sheriff to identify bidders who have tax delinquencies, code violations, or revoked rental licenses to disqualify them from buying properties.	county's rules. Schuylkill County asks each bidder to sign the affidavit in the presence of a notary public.	discipline and denials of permits by providing increased incentives for owners to bring their properties up to code.
Home Repair and Rental Rehabilitation Assistance – Financial assistance to owners who lack the money to bring properties up to code.	Home repair loans & grants are typically funded through U.S. HUD, CDBG, and HOME funds which can be used for home repairs. Community development corporations & nonprofits (Habitat for Humanity) & Rebuilding Together may also be able to provide crucial repairs for low-income homeowners.	Municipality must determine whether property owners who have serious violations are able and willing to take loans to repair violations. If so, a revolving loan fund with low interest rates may be the least expensive way to provide financial assistance. When owners do not have the credit scores or willingness to finance repairs, counties & municipalities may explore grants or deferred loans payable on the transfer of a property. Such loans can be forgiven over time. Habitat for Humanity and Rebuilding Together are also important steps.	Legal documents differ, depending on the type of financial assistance offered.	Most of these tools focus on taking action against property owners who choose to leave their vacant properties in disrepair. Home repair and rental rehabilitation assistance is a tool focusing on good owners who lack the resources to maintain their properties. By combining these tools, local governments can have the most success improving their properties, reducing abandonment, and eliminating blight.
Doors & Windows Ordinance – Fines for each missing door and window, and increasing fines over time.	Program pays for itself through fines, license fees. License fees cannot exceed total costs of program. It has no similar requirement for fines & penalties.	Finding the owners; notifying the owners; dedicated court time; and liens attached to property.	Ordinance establishing the law; Letter notifying owner of violations; Poster to place on property in clear sight that notes the violations; Deed and	The goal is for all owners to sign agreements that they will install windows and doors, become tax compliant, and obtain vacant property licenses. The law can be used in tandem with Act 90 powers to attach

Tool	Paid for through	How to Use Law	How to Implement	How to Combine with other Strategies
			mortgage records; Tax records; Database to store owner information and track 3 inspections completed during the compliance period, along with court activities; Complaint to the court; Individuals to do the research.	assets and ensure the payment of fines and penalties.
Permit Denial – Denying permits to owners of tax-delinquent properties or properties that have judgments for serious code violations.	The denial of a permit should not impose any added costs on a municipality. Denials are issued by a zoning hearing board or other body with jurisdiction to render decisions under the PA Municipalities Planning Code.	Municipality may refuse to grant permits for real property – including, but not limited to, building permits, occupancy permits, and exceptions to zoning ordinances. Certain requirements apply for denying permits. See <i>From Blight to Bright</i> , p. 40.	Ordinance that explicitly gives the municipality the right to deny permits under Act 90 and provides a compliance response form. In addition, a municipality should draft a written policy that sets out procedures for: Steps to be taken before permit denial; Review and authentication of compliance letters submitted by the applicant; Issuance of permit denials; Response to compliance requests within the mandated 45-day period. May also create a disclosure form in which	Permit denial may be used with two other tools: asset attachment and placing a judgment lien on another property that has the same owner. Where an owner of multiple properties invests in some structures and allows others to deteriorate, the municipality can attach the owner’s personal assets (i.e., wages) to recover costs associated with the blighted properties or can place a lien for past code violation fees and fines on another of the owner’s properties in PA.

Tool	Paid for through	How to Use Law	How to Implement	How to Combine with other Strategies
			<p>applicants affirm that they have no tax delinquencies or serious violations of state law or codes, on properties they own in PA, or applicants must list all properties owned in PA. Note: use of permit denial needs cooperation between municipalities.</p>	
<p>Asset Attachment – Attaching owners’ other assets to pay to demolish or improve properties</p>	<p>Asset attachment pays for itself. If it is successful, municipality will recover costs by placing a lien on owner’s personal and other real estate assets. Assets that can be attached include property owner’s bank accounts, other real property, and a portion of property owner’s salary beyond what is exempt for personal and family support.</p>	<p>A code official must cite a property for substantial violations. In 6 months, the code official must re-inspect property. If official sees that owner has failed to remediate violations, municipality files an action in common pleas court against owner. If court issues a judgment against owner & owner fails to satisfy judgment, the municipality can submit a writ of attachment to collect judgment. Under Act 90, the court may issue a levy of attachment directing sheriff or other law enforcement officer to serve a copy of the order on the defendant & to seize property equal in value to the sum specified in the writ. Asset attachment is most effective when an owner has multiple blighted properties but also has real estate in PA and wages sufficient to cover penalties and costs incurred in remediating the blighted properties. Identifying owners of</p>	<p>Ordinances allowing for asset attachment and a template for a writ of attachment.</p>	<p>Asset attachment can be used in concert with nuisance laws and code enforcement to force owners of nuisance properties to pay under a court judgment. Publicizing the successful attachment of an owner’s assets will help ensure that other owners come forward to pay outstanding penalties. A municipality may also want to consider placing a lien on other properties owned by the owner of a property that has serious code violations as defined in Act 90.</p>

Tool	Paid for through	How to Use Law	How to Implement	How to Combine with other Strategies
		<p>multiple blighted properties; Determining whether the owners have the money to cover costs that the government has incurred to remediate the properties; Determining whether the owners have other properties in PA that have value. Attachment is difficult when a person owns property in PA but lives in another state. For additional information, see <i>From Blight to Bright</i>, p. 43.</p>		
<p>Hall of Shame – Bringing public pressure to bear on owners of the most blighted properties</p>	<p>Minimal cost. The owner’s name and the property’s address are added to the municipal web site, posted on the property, and featured in the news media.</p>	<p>Municipality should first establish rules for eligibility into the Hall of Shame. Jurisdiction should also establish criteria for inclusion in the hall of shame such as delinquent fees (water and sewer, rental, taxes, business license, business privilege tax); Property declared a nuisance according to the property rehabilitation and maintenance code; Registration or license revocation or warnings; Neighbor “testimonials”; Health issues (solid waste, animals, etc.); Building issues (no permits, no plans); Police issues; Fire issues.</p>	<p>No legal documents are needed</p>	<p>Can use in concert with the blight determination process of its Blighted Property Review Board. Owners are notified that they will be featured in the hall of shame and that their properties are being considered for condemnation within a month of their inclusion in the hall.</p>
<p>Criminal Misdemeanor Sanctions for Multiple Code Violations – Prosecute owners who repeatedly violate building, property maintenance, or housing codes.</p>	<p>Repeated fines may be imposed against chronic violators to cover costs. Unlike license fees, fines and penalties may exceed the costs to administer the program.</p>	<p>After the requisite number of code violation convictions have occurred under either law, the code official requests prosecution by the assistant district attorney. The ADA considers the facts and decides whether to prosecute. The code official conducts periodic inspections to support the prosecution.</p>	<p>Criminal sanctions typically require the involvement of an ADA or the police who will have all necessary legal documents.</p>	<p>Criminal sanctions are a last resort. In addition to prosecution, a municipality may consider asset attachment, the demolition of dangerous structures, or assigning a conservator to bring the property back up</p>

Tool	Paid for through	How to Use Law	How to Implement	How to Combine with other Strategies
<p>Extradition of Out-of-State Property Owners – Asking PA’s governor to extradite property owners living in other states so that they can be brought for criminal prosecution.</p>	<p>Municipality requesting extradition is responsible for costs incurred by PA & the other state in extraditing the owner. Even if the owner is found guilty of criminal code violations, the court will not necessarily require the owner to reimburse the municipality for the extradition costs incurred. The municipality must therefore have a plan to pay the costs out of its general budget or from other resources.</p>	<p>The owner must be charged with a crime and a warrant must be issued for arrest. PA’s governor must then make a written request to the other state’s governor to arrest and send the property owner back to PA for criminal prosecution. For additional information, see <i>From Blight to Bright</i>, p. 48.</p>	<p>Governor’s warrant; Fugitive affidavit; Warrant for arrest of the fugitive. The county’s ADA will have access to the documents.</p>	<p>to code. Although it is difficult to hold long-term absentee owners accountable, a municipality can use vacant property registration laws to require a nonresident owner to appoint someone as the owner’s “duly authorized agent” (also known as a “local agent” or “responsible agent”). The municipality can then treat the agent the same as the owner in terms of legal responsibility.</p>
<p>Demolition – Removing unsafe structures and preparing properties for reinvestment</p>	<p>A demolition lien, payable when a property is transferred, is placed on the property. In PA, a municipal lien generally takes priority over all mortgage claims. Where CDBG funds are used, the municipality typically places a lien on behalf of the county and Davis-Bacon wage standards apply. When a property value is less than the cost of demolition, it will be difficult to obtain payment. It</p>	<p>Municipalities need a property maintenance code or a set of ordinances that: Clearly establishes the right to demolish a property that is unsafe or unhealthy, and authorizes the imposition of a lien to recover costs. For additional information, see <i>From Blight to Bright</i>, p. 53</p>	<p>Property maintenance code or ordinance that provides a clear process for demolishing unsafe structures and that includes the right to recover costs through a demolition lien. When signing contracts with demolition contractors, a municipality should require the contractors to obtain all needed permits, perform an asbestos survey, remove</p>	<p>Demolition should be one part of a larger revitalization strategy. A database of vacant properties is beneficial for rental registration, vacant property registration, land banking, and demolition. A land bank can carry out demolitions.</p>

Tool	Paid for through	How to Use Law	How to Implement	How to Combine with other Strategies
	<p>is important that municipalities assess the value of the property “as is” to determine whether they can recover costs. Cost savings can be substantial where demolitions are planned and contracts are negotiated for multiple buildings as part of a bidding process.</p>		<p>and dispose of asbestos, remove debris (including below-grade foundations), restore shared walls, and grade and seed the lot.</p>	
<p>Blight Fund – Establishing a fund with tax revenue to address blight and dangerous conditions.</p>	<p>When it creates a blight fund, municipality must identify a sustainable source of funding that will provide sufficient revenue to finance the implementation of many of these tools. Revenue from taxes, fees, fines, and penalties, property sales, or other resources can by law or policy be directed into the fund.</p>	<p>A blight fund is created through a law or policy enacted by local government.</p>	<p>Municipalities can create a blight fund as part of their budget or laws.</p>	<p>A blight fund can be used to finance each of the strategies outlined for these tools.</p>
<p>Administration – Opening estates of deceased property owners to transfer vacant property to new owners.</p>	<p>An estate attorney’s reasonable legal fees are included in the estate’s liabilities and are among the highest priority items paid out of the estate. The attorney will be paid only after the real estate is sold.</p>	<p>The redevelopment authority petitions the probate clerk & the county register of wills for letters of administration. If the letters of administration are granted, the redevelopment authority identifies & retains an interested estate attorney to perform the estate administration legal work, including a search for heirs, assessing assets & liabilities, & explaining to heirs that they may renounce the role</p>	<p>An estate attorney must file appropriate documents with the probate clerk & county register of wills. The attorney’s legal work for a redevelopment authority is essentially the same as the work would be for an executor, an heir,</p>	<p>A municipality can use proactive and progressive code enforcement to ensure that, when an estate is opened, the municipality can collect not only taxes owed but also municipal liens and claims for any code violations.</p>

Tool	Paid for through	How to Use Law	How to Implement	How to Combine with other Strategies
		of administrator but still receive estate assets, if any. Typically, an estate attorney will send letters to neighbors & family members, hold conversations with them, & review all mail sent to the estate, looking for assets & debts.	or a creditor. Estate attorneys have the relevant PA documents required to open an estate.	
Conservatorship – Appointing a 3 rd party to enter onto someone else’s property and complete the improvements needed to make it safe.	Conservatorship includes a need to pay for the expenses involved in petitioning a court to have a conservator named & for the rehab or demolition of the property. To ensure that resources exist to pay the expenses, some jurisdictions have petitioned for conservator-ship only after they have identified a buyer for the blighted property, so that they can provide marketable, clear title to the buyer & be certain to recover costs incurred. Other possible funding sources include CDBG, HOME, Neighborhood Assistance Program tax credits, and other state and federal funds. See <i>From Blight to Bright</i> , pp. 58-59 for more info.	The process begins with the filing of a petition by a party of interest. The owner, all lienholders, & local & county governments receive notice of the action, of the hearing date, & of their right to intervene. The court sets a hearing date within 120 days of the filing of the petition. At the hearing, the court receives evidence on why a conservator should be appointed. Before appointing a conservator, the court must be satisfied that the building meets certain criteria. For more information, see <i>From Blight to Bright</i> , p. 59.	A full set of all needed documents is available in the <i>2011 Regional Housing Legal Services Conservatorship Implementation and Best Practices Manual</i> .	Conservatorship builds on other tools, especially code enforcement, to prod reluctant owners into fixing up their properties. If an owner fails to respond to code enforcement efforts, conservatorship is a good and effective option.
Condemnation – Condemning	Condemnation can be funded through	The process to condemn a property takes 12 – 18	The redevelopment	This tool should only be used after code

Tool	Paid for through	How to Use Law	How to Implement	How to Combine with other Strategies
Properties Using Blighted Property Review Committee	<p>CDBG funds if the acquisition of the property will address a serious public health or safety issue, or through general operating budget funds.</p> <p>The latter stages of eminent domain are costly. Early hearings and notice to owners are not. But for the tool to be used effectively, the redevelopment authority must be prepared to follow through & to complete the condemnation when the owner fails to take action.</p>	<p>months from initial identification. After a municipality decides that a property may meet the definition of blight, it sends a warning letter to the owner. If the owner fails to respond adequately, a notice of determination hearing is sent to the owner. At the hearing, the municipality presents evidence of blight to the blighted property review committee and the owner may respond. The BPRC then holds a blight determination vote. If the BPRC determines that the property is blighted, a determination order is sent to the owner, saying that a certification hearing will be held within 60 days. At the hearing, the BPRC will vote to decide whether to certify the property as blighted. If the property is declared blighted, a certification order is sent to the owner. Next, the redevelopment authority issues a declaration of taking and a statutory offer to pay a specific amount for the property. The property owner has 20 days to object. If the owner offers no objection, the redevelopment lawyer goes to court to pay the just compensation or the fair market value of the property and is granted a writ of possession. If the owner objects at this point, the case moves to the county court of common pleas. If the owner does not object, the municipality owns the property once the check is sent to the property owner. If the owner objects at this late</p>	<p>authority has all legal documents and notices required to condemn a property.</p>	<p>enforcement and other less costly tools have failed to bring the properties up to code.</p>

Tool	Paid for through	How to Use Law	How to Implement	How to Combine with other Strategies
		date, the complaint goes to the board of views, but the owner may dispute only the fair market value of the property.		
<p>Land Bank – a single governmental entity that works solely to return vacant, abandoned, tax-delinquent, and foreclosed properties to productive use.</p>	<p>Most land banks use a mix of funding streams. Because land banks deal with properties that no one else wants, it is rare that they are completely self-financing. Funding for a land bank can come from sales of higher-value properties, rents, & leasehold payments, grants & loans from public & private sources, general operating support, & income from investments. When necessary, a land bank may borrow money to cover its initial operating costs. It may also collect a portion of real estate taxes on the properties it conveys under an agreement with the relevant municipalities and/or school district(s). For additional info on land banks, see <i>From Blight to Bright</i>, pp. 64-66.</p>	<p>A land bank must have an accurate inventory of properties available for public review, must keep minutes of its proceedings, and must submit an annual audit of income, expenditures, and activities.</p>	<p>Local ordinance that establishes the land bank and that includes the name of the land bank, members of the initial board of directors, methods of community input, and policies for owner-occupied properties. For more information, see <i>From Blight to Bright</i>, pp. 64-66.</p>	<p>To eliminate blight and bring properties back into productive reuse, a land bank should use as many of the tools described here as possible.</p>

A copy of *From Blight to Bright* is available from Marilyn McCall at smallestcityusa@yahoo.com or 724-399-0076.