



PHILADELPHIA CITY COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 22, 2018

To: Members of City Council

From: Council President Clarke

RE: Land Bank Charter Amendment

This Thursday I will be introducing a Charter Amendment to improve the ability of the Land Bank to acquire properties for equitable development and other community uses.

December 2017 marked the fourth anniversary of the Philadelphia Land Bank. To date, using the special powers granted under the General Assembly's historic Land Bank legislation, the Philadelphia Land Bank has acquired only 66 properties using these special powers. This represents a little over 1 property per month since the inception of the Land Bank. With over 10,800 vacant, tax delinquent parcels in Philadelphia, the Land Bank has acquired only .61 % of these properties. At the same time, Land Banks established in Pennsylvania counties like Westmoreland and Lackawanna have acquired more properties than Philadelphia. This lack of progress is unacceptable.

Why so few? There are several factors, but from my perspective, one stands out as the main contributing factor. The administration has chosen to prioritize selling vacant land, especially vacant land in gentrifying neighborhoods, through Sheriff's Sale rather than placing these properties in the Land Bank and using them to support equitable development. They have opted for short term gains over the long-term benefits creating affordable housing opportunities in these upscale or soon to be upscale neighborhoods.

We have attempted, for over a year and a half, to secure a change in this short-sighted policy to no avail. Even properties where there is agreement to put them in the Land Bank have been sold to private parties and this cannot continue.

This Charter Amendment will make it easier for the Philadelphia Land Bank to acquire vacant, tax delinquent properties and return such properties to productive use while revitalizing

neighborhoods fairly and equitably, by authorizing City Council to enact legislation relating to City tax liens on such properties and to the Land Banks's ability to acquire such properties at Sheriff's Sale.

There are many sound public policy reasons to engage in this process and to strengthen the Philadelphia Land Bank – the very same reasons why highly successful land banks are being created across our nation. Moreover, for Philadelphia, where the pressures of gentrification are increasingly manifested, it is particularly important that we preemptively assemble land in high value neighborhoods in order to meet maintain some level of economic and ethnic diversity.

Philadelphia is uniquely positioned to create the largest, most successful Land Bank in the nation. A Land Bank that supports a progressive agenda by creating opportunities for persons of diverse backgrounds and economic circumstances to live together sharing in the amenities that our new found growth has generated. We cannot afford to be blinded by short term gains and turn away from this unique opportunity to be a national leader and create a lasting legacy for our City.