



PO Box 4906
Poughkeepsie, NY 12602
(845) 293-3547
info@dcpoklandbank.org
www.dcpoklandbank.org

Annual Report – January 2023 to March 2024

Introduction

On behalf of the Dutchess County-Poughkeepsie Land Bank (DCPLB) board of directors, it is my pleasure to present this annual report on DCPLB activities from January 2023 to March 2024. The past year has been exceptionally busy for the land bank, marked by the hiring of an Executive Director, securing vital funding, and laying the groundwork for the acquisition of our first properties in 2024. The board's unwavering commitment to establishing this new organization, tasked with addressing some of the most challenging problem properties in Dutchess County, cannot be overstated. I take pride in the accomplishments of the past year and eagerly anticipate the achievements that lie ahead. Here is a summary of our activities during this period.

Administrative Activity

Land bank activity over the last year has largely been managed by the all-volunteer board, in absence of full-time staff for most of the year. The DCPLB holds its Board of Directors Meetings in person at Christ Episcopal Church in the City of Poughkeepsie on the 4th Wednesday of each month at 5:30 PM.

Being in the start-up phase of a new organization, the board accomplished a number of necessary tasks in order to position itself to begin the work of land banking. Those tasks included:

- Engaged with necessary professional service firms for services including auditing, as required by the Authorities Budget Office (ABO); website development; and legal services.
- Board members completed strategic planning sessions where the mission and goals of the Land Bank were determined.
- Established necessary insurance policies including worker's compensation, disability, commercial general liability coverage and directors & officers coverage.
- Adopted policies including Sexual Harassment
- Developed a job description and launched a search for an Executive Director.
- Hired an Executive Director who began employment on September 1st, 2023.

Board of Directors and Staff

The DCPLB board is comprised of nine members who are appointed by either Dutchess County or the City of Poughkeepsie in accordance with the Articles of Incorporation. Over the course of the last year, the board has experienced some changes in membership.

- Board member Jordan Schinella resigned in October of 2023. An appointment of the Poughkeepsie Common Council, her replacement has not been appointed.
- Board member Brian Engles' term completed in September 2023. An appointment of the County Legislature, his replacement has not been appointed.

The current roster of the board is as follows:

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|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ● Rev. Susan Fortunato (Chair) | ● Eoin Wrafter (Secretary) |
| ● Angela DeFelice (Vice Chair) | ● Heidi Seelbach |
| ● Jacob Reckess (Treasurer) | ● Dr. Brian Martinez |
| | ● Kari Reiser |

The diligent efforts of the Board of Directors culminated in the appointment of Amy Gigliuto as the Land Bank's first Executive Director. Amy brings a wealth of experience, having led various non-profit organizations for many years. Her most recent role was as the Director of Operations at Habitat for Humanity of Greater Newburgh. With her proven track record and commitment to community service, Amy officially assumed her responsibilities on September 1st. Her leadership promises to steer the organization toward continued growth and positive impact.

The Land Bank also has assistance from a Dutchess County Planning staff member, for which we are grateful.

Summary of Financial Activity

The DCPLB received funding from several sources this year. Those sources include a \$100,000 contribution from Dutchess County, \$18,000 from City of Poughkeepsie ARP, and \$62,023 from NYS Dept. of Homes and Community Renewal Land Bank Initiative. The latter is a grant award specifically for operational assistance for land banks.

The land bank had minimal expenses last year, primarily administrative in nature, such as insurance costs, legal and website development fees, and dues and subscriptions. We began incurring personnel costs September 1st with the hiring of the Executive Director. A copy of the year-end financial management report is attached to this report. The DCPLB is in a strong position to begin working with distressed properties throughout Dutchess County.

Properties

The primary way all land banks acquire properties is through partnerships with tax foreclosing governmental entities. A foreclosing governmental unit (FGU) is permitted by state law to transfer tax foreclosed properties (or other problem properties within the FGU's portfolio) to a land bank. The two FGUs applicable to the DCPLB's activities are the County of Dutchess and the City of Poughkeepsie.

In May 2023, the US Supreme Court made a rare but important decision about property taxes in Tyler v. Hennepin County. They clarified that if the government or a private entity takes ownership of a property due to unpaid taxes, the previous owner has the right to reclaim any extra money made from selling the property if it's worth more than the owed amount, including taxes, interest, fees, and other debts. This decision sparked a temporary moratorium on in rem tax foreclosure proceedings in New York pending legislative reforms. The delays in tax foreclosure proceedings have impacted local government units and land banks statewide, including the Dutchess County-Poughkeepsie Land Bank.

The DCPLB is working with staff from the Dutchess County Department of Finance, the department responsible for managing the county's annual property auction, to identify properties as potential candidates for transfer to the land bank. As a result of the Tyler vs. Hennepin case the properties that were previously identified as potential candidates for transfer to the land bank are still being held by Dutchess County pending state legislative clarification and approval of transfer to the land bank.

We are hopeful that Governor Hochul's proposed revisions to the Real Property Tax Law Article 11 (Procedures For Enforcement Of Collection Of Delinquent Taxes) in the budget bill will be adopted so that Dutchess County and the City of Poughkeepsie can resume in rem tax foreclosure proceedings and have the framework in which to carry out the transfer of property.

Conclusion

We are grateful for the support we continue to receive from Dutchess County and the City of Poughkeepsie. Your forward-thinking action to create a joint county-city land bank was an important step toward addressing the vacant and abandoned property issue in Dutchess County. Land banks are a critical tool in this effort, and we look forward to continuing to serve the community.

Best regards,

Susan Fortunato, Chair