

# Documenters

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## Board of Directors (in-person only)

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Agency: [Cuyahoga County Land Bank](#)

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## Summary

- The land bank is in the middle of its six-month revitalization of the abandoned ACME plant on East 131st Street at Coit Road in Cleveland.
- In many cases, homes assumed by the land bank were in worse shape than expected and cost more than expected to renovate.
- Proposed reduction in funding from the state could reduce future grant money.

## Follow-Up Questions

- What implications will the state budget have on the success of the county land bank's applications for state grants?
- What are the board's priorities for the 2030 strategy?
- How is the Circle East Project coming along? How will it impact the community?

## Notes

At 10:01 am, Cuyahoga County Treasurer and Land Bank Board Chair Brad Cromes called the meeting to order. Cromes asked records custodian Sarah Norman to take the roll call.

With six of nine members present, the board had a quorum.

The following board members were present:

- Brad Cromes - Cuyahoga County Treasurer
- Annettee Blackwell - mayor of Maple Heights
- Chris Ronayne - Cuyahoga County executive, represented by Katherine Gallagher, who serves in the county's Operations and Community Innovation office
- Sally Martin O'Toole - Director of Building and Housing, City of Cleveland

- Jasmin Santana - Ward 14 Cleveland City Council member
- Anthony Brancatelli - former Cleveland City Council member
- Dale Miller - Cuyahoga County council president, represented by Michael King, special counsel to Cuyahoga County Council

The following board members were absent:

- Michael Booker - mayor of Highland Hills
- Rev. Brian Cash - pastor, East Mount Zion Baptist Church

Cromes opened the meeting by informing audience members interested in participating in public comment that sheets were available at the front to request speaking time.

"We have some new faces around the table today," Cromes continued. He asked those present to introduce themselves, including the interim COO, Steve Weitzner, interim CFO, Bill Aamoth, and new Board Secretary, Ben Chojnacki.

Land Bank President and CEO Ricardo León explained that the organization is in transition as it searches for a new COO and CFO. . "We're becoming a bit more corporate in our structure," León said.

Cromes then introduced the agenda. After approving the minutes from the board's last meeting, Cromes moved the meeting into executive session, asking audience members to step out so the board could consider appointments of public officials.

After approximately 15 minutes, the board returned to the open meeting. Cromes entertained a motion to officially appoint Chojnacki as board secretary. The motion passed. Cromes asked León to present the president's report.

León mentioned that he is trying to make the president's report more informative and straightforward, acknowledging that it often becomes too long and detailed to understand the most important information.

**Contractor reports:** The County Land Bank is "doing well on most projects," León said. He pointed out the Clean Harbors contract, which includes the \$11 million project to transform the former [National ACME Plant](#) into a site ready for economic growth. The six-month project, which started in April, aims to remove "27,000 tons of asbestos-laden, illegally dumped debris, and trash" and "demolish about 330,000 square feet worth of buildings," [according to Ideastream](#).

León explained that this is by far their largest contract, and "that number is going to be massive compared to other contractors." León asked the board if they would rather have a separate report for the ACME contractor. The board members agreed to keep the ACME contract in the general contractor report.

**Production report:** León went over activity since the last board meeting in March, including eight new construction homes underway, 42 homes sold, seven rehabs underway, and one more on the market. They have over 10,300 demos and about 1,400 parcels in their inventory. Of the parcels in their inventory, 664 properties are located in the City of Cleveland, meaning that about half of their inventory is within the city limits.

**County housing program:** Inventory has been a challenge since 2019, when the [county stopped doing direct transfers](#). In 2006, Ohio enacted a law allowing the direct transfer of foreclosed, abandoned properties to land banks, bypassing the historic procedure of selling tax-foreclosed properties at auction. After settling the property owner's debts, any remaining proceeds from the sale were returned to them, which ensured that the owner was compensated for any equity they had in the property beyond their outstanding debts. The 2006 law eliminated compensation for property owners. In 2019, [a class action lawsuit](#) halted the direct transfer of foreclosed, abandoned properties to the county land bank.

He said that developers must obtain approval from the city before submitting proposals to the county land bank, ensuring their proposals align with city-level guidelines, such as zoning regulations.

León also mentioned that some areas need more subsidies. He explained that the land bank usually allocates about \$60,000 to rehab each unit, but some properties require significantly more.

Council Member Santana asked if the rental units the land bank acquired would be sold or rented after renovation. León responded that some units will be for sale and some will go to Habitat for Humanity and Cleveland Housing Network, and they will work with grassroots organizations and charities to develop 12 to 13 units into housing for the city's most vulnerable populations.

Blackwell asked about programming to raise awareness about the [municipal gap funding](#). León responded that there's no direct programming, but they are trying to reach out to Cuyahoga County mayors to let them know they have the land bank as a resource.

Next, León reviewed the project updates. The land bank received funding from County Council Member Michael J. Houser for the construction of 30 new units in District 10. León said that Houser was impressed with the land bank's success in his district. León added that it's a win for the land bank when they are seen as a trusted community partner. Booker asked where the units would be. León said that they are looking around District 10, which spans Cleveland, East Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, University Heights and Bratenahl.

León provided details about [First National Bank's partnership](#) in the [Circle East Project](#), starting with the redevelopment of four streets east of Woodlawn Avenue to bring new private investment into East Cleveland. The land bank owns about 30 acres at the site, where it is constructing 12 new townhouses and 21 new single-family homes. León said that additional banking partners create more capital to offer developers, which allows the land bank to develop more creative approaches to development.

Mayor Blackwell asked if the partnership with First National Bank would address the lack of lending in communities of color. Roberts said it would and said they are working to get the word out to the community about this opportunity. Blackwell followed up by asking if the land bank has contacted local real estate agents to encourage buyers to consider homes in Circle East as not many people are looking to buy in East Cleveland until they hear about Circle East. Blackwell emphasized the importance of letting the families who have historically been marginalized from the lending system know that there are paths to homeownership. Roberts asked for ideas to spread the word. Blackwell mentioned the 12 churches in East Cleveland.

Adam Stalder, the land bank's director of community Stabilization, stated that for the FY24-25 state budget, 369 grants were awarded statewide, and the land bank received 42 of those, accounting for 34% of the state's total funding. The board engaged in a brief round of applause for their success.

Cromes asked about changes in the proposed state budget. León said the funds have been reduced and more organizations can apply. The new system will create a hyper-competitive market. Now, the state will use a scorecard to evaluate applications. Local land banks can't push for their preferred applications.

León said the state still needs to create the scorecard, and they are trying to get the state land bank to help develop the scorecard. There is also new language for "priority investment areas." The state can designate priority investment areas and those areas will

receive higher scores.

León moved on to the financial presentation. He explained that they are looking to concentrate on a monthly budget based on when the funds are actually being used. For example, if most construction occurs between April and October, that should be reflected in the budget documentation.

Furthermore, there are numerous demos and construction projects in the summer, but some grants may be received in the fall or winter when business activity is slower.

Aamoth said they are trying to develop a financial dashboard to make the information more accessible and add annual balance forecasts.

León also mentioned that the land bank has raised \$750,000 to support operations from the 4% administrative fee they charge to manage [brownfield cleanups](#). They also have about \$23 million in investments. León and Aamoth agreed that the land bank is in a good position.

León expressed interest in increasing savings for a "rainy day fund."

Cromes entertained a motion to accept the financials as presented. The motion passed.

León explained that he is looking to establish three working groups. First, to audit their financial reporting for more effective information. León said they are transitioning from paper-based to more modern, cloud-based reporting.

Second, a group to focus on governance. León said that they need to update their bylaws, and they are in the beginning stages of developing a new employee handbook. They are seeking to revise the board's operations. For example, he wants to move to digital distribution of packets only, uploading them to a digital database that members can refer to. León also wants this working group to weigh the pros and cons of allowing for remote or hybrid board meetings.

Third, a working group on long-term strategy. They are the final year of the 2019 strategic plan and León would like this working group to identify all the elements they want to see in the strategic plan for 2030, and then they can work with an external organization to further develop that plan. There is money put aside to fund strategic planning development.

Cromes said they are trying to add an additional board meeting per quarter. He asked

board members to let him know by the end of the week whether they would participate in the working groups.

With no forms submitted for public comment, Cromes made a motion to adjourn. Chojnacki took roll, and the board adjourned until their next meeting in September.

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