

# 30 for 2030

## 2026-2030 Strategic Plan

Creating a Vibrant Kalamazoo County for All



# About the Project

This plan was commissioned by the Kalamazoo County Land Bank Authority and was primarily authored by **Janell O’Keefe**, Associate Director, Technical Assistance, and **Nora Daly**, Associate Director, Technical Assistance at the Center for Community Progress, on behalf of the KCLBA. Additional contributing authors include:

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## Acknowledgments

The Kalamazoo County Land Bank Authority thanks the dozens of individuals who contributed to this plan, including past and present staff and leadership.

Thanks to your collaboration and insights, *30 for (20)30* provides a roadmap for the KCLBA to help ensure Kalamazoo County is full of vibrant, healthy, safe, and connected communities and charts the course for the future of land banking. We also extend special thanks to our partners at the Center for Community Progress.



## Kalamazoo County Land Bank Authority

The Kalamazoo County Land Bank Authority envisions a future where all county residents live, work, and play in vibrant, healthy, safe, and connected communities. We work toward this vision by partnering with local governments and community members to address problem properties and catalyze community change. We offer opportunities for residents, local organizations, entrepreneurs, and others to transform vacant and deteriorated properties into community assets. To learn more, visit [kalamazoolandbank.org](https://kalamazoolandbank.org).



## Center for Community Progress

The Center for Community Progress helps people to transform vacant spaces into vibrant places. Since 2010, their team of experts has provided urban, suburban, and rural communities looking to revitalize vacant properties with the tools and resources needed to address those properties at the policy and systems level. As the only national nonprofit dedicated to vacant property revitalization, Community Progress drives change by uncovering and disrupting systems that perpetuate entrenched vacancy and property deterioration. Community Progress has delivered customized, expert guidance to leaders in over 300 communities and provided hundreds of hours of free educational resources as well as leadership programming to help policymakers, practitioners, and community members across the country return properties to productive use. To learn more and get help for your community, visit [communityprogress.org](https://communityprogress.org).

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# Message from the Executive Director



## It is my pleasure to share the Kalamazoo County Land Bank Authority's 2026–30 strategic plan.

The planning process invited us to look back on 15 years of accomplishments, assess our current opportunities, and chart the next five years and beyond.

Since 2010, the KCLBA has evolved to meet the changing needs of our partners and our community—from fulfilling traditional land bank functions such as demolition, rehab, and side lot sales to managing affordable housing and providing pathways to homeownership through our Prairie Gardens project and Homeward Promise program. In the next five years, we look forward to continuing to innovate in collaboration with our partners throughout the county without losing sight of our primary objective: promoting neighborhood stability by addressing problem properties.

Over the last year, we developed this plan through a robust process, reviewing available data and engaging partners. The plan details our proposed approach for balancing innovation and commitment to our core tools and functions. It is organized around seven priorities and 30 strategies—all in service of our

mission to be a catalyst for community change, addressing problem properties by bringing together land bank tools, people, and place.

We thank all who contributed to the planning process and look forward to strengthening and building partnerships to carry out the activities that follow. We are confident that, with the support of our partners and our community, this strategic plan will help us achieve our vision of a Kalamazoo where all county residents live, work, and play in healthy, safe, and connected communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Zachary Bauer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Zac Bauer**

Executive Director, Kalamazoo County  
Land Bank Authority

# Executive Summary



Since 2010, the Kalamazoo County Land Bank Authority (KCLBA) has worked to address vacant, abandoned, deteriorated, and tax-foreclosed properties in the city of Kalamazoo and throughout the county. As vacancy challenges and market conditions have shifted over the last 15 years, the KCLBA has proven to be a dependable partner in designing programs and strategies to meet the community's most pressing needs.

Much of the KCLBA's work has reflected traditional land bank work—demolition, rehab, and side lot sales. As Kalamazoo weathered the Great Recession better than many of its peer cities, the KCLBA began exploring what land banking could look like when housing markets stabilized and vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties were limited to a handful of neighborhoods and large industrial sites. **The KCLBA is now at the leading edge of the next era of land banking.**

To navigate this new era, the KCLBA embarked on a strategic planning process throughout 2025. They partnered with the Center for Community Progress (Community Progress) to lead the effort. Through interviews, site visits, data analysis, and legal research, Community Progress and land bank staff thoughtfully evaluated the KCLBA's role in community development and where it must focus going forward. One clear priority emerged: As the KCLBA finds **creative solutions to new challenges**, it must not lose its **core focus on problem properties**.

Rooted in continued engagement with partners, residents, and national leaders, the KCLBA can help ensure Kalamazoo County is full of vibrant, healthy, safe, and connected communities. *30 for (20)30* provides a roadmap for doing so—maintaining clear focus while adapting to new conditions.

# Strategic Priorities

## 1. Ensure land bank powers are appropriately used to address problem properties in Kalamazoo County.

**Strategy 1:** Expand local awareness about the KCLBA's purpose and powers.

**Strategy 2:** Accurately understand and articulate the scale of vacant and deteriorated property in Kalamazoo County.

**Strategy 3:** Assess all KCLBA-owned properties for target end use(s).

**Strategy 4:** Leverage land bank powers to support reuse and redevelopment.

**Strategy 5:** Develop "properties of interest" list for future acquisitions.

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## 2. Be an active, collaborative community development partner.

**Strategy 6:** Build meaningful, formal partnerships with residents and community organizations in neighborhoods most affected by vacant and deteriorated properties.

**Strategy 7:** Strengthen relationships with out-county communities.

**Strategy 8:** Activate the KCLBA office for community benefit.

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## 3. Support the development of new quality, attainable housing options.

**Strategy 9:** Leverage vacant lots to build a diversity of housing types.

**Strategy 10:** Partner to develop housing to meet the needs of special populations.

**Strategy 11:** Expand disposition strategies and options.

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## 4. Preserve and grow neighborhood stability by improving residential property conditions.

**Strategy 12:** Continue to be good stewards of KCLBA-owned property.

**Strategy 13:** Lead rehab of existing land bank-owned, vacant residential property and explore proactive vacant property acquisition for rehab.

**Strategy 14:** Conduct strategic demolition as needed.

**Strategy 15:** Implement an owner-occupied home repair program out-county.

**Strategy 16:** Repair occupied Homeward Promise properties and adopt a process for transitioning away from land bank ownership.

**Strategy 17:** Carefully consider additional opportunities to acquire substandard rental properties.

## 5. Strategically intervene to support transformational projects.

**Strategy 18:** Develop a roadmap for participating in commercial and industrial projects.

**Strategy 19:** Expand the use of land bank tools to advance economic opportunities.

**Strategy 20:** Explore and conduct strategic acquisition and holding.

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## 6. Activate vacant lots to improve environmental health and quality of life.

**Strategy 21:** Create interim use plans for lots slated for future development.

**Strategy 22:** Make vacant lots available for short- and long-term reuse activities.

**Strategy 23:** Strategically acquire, hold, and/or transfer vacant lots to facilitate priority open space projects.

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## 7. Operate with organizational excellence.

**Strategy 24:** Ensure staff are supported by a strong organizational culture and equipped to implement strategic goals.

**Strategy 25:** Evaluate and modify strategies, activities, and programming.

**Strategy 26:** Develop diverse and robust funding to grow strategic programming and sustain long-term operations.

**Strategy 27:** Practice good governance and board development.

**Strategy 28:** Reconstitute Vibrant Kalamazoo.

**Strategy 29:** Leverage the KCLBA's resources and spending to support the local economy.

**Strategy 30:** Actively participate in the larger land bank field through membership organizations and other affiliations and programming.



# Introduction to 30 for 2030

The KCLBA is at the leading edge of the land banking field and must balance its core functions with expanding services to meet community needs. This strategic plan sets an ambitious course for how land banks can address and prevent vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated property.

# Understanding Land Banks

To understand the priorities, strategies, and activities outlined below, it is important to understand land banks in Michigan and the KCLBA's role in Kalamazoo County.

## What is a land bank?

In Michigan, land banks are quasi-governmental entities that leverage unique legal powers provided by state law to acquire vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated (VAD) properties; extinguish debt and liens; clear title; and transfer those properties to new, responsible ownership in alignment with community goals.<sup>1</sup>

## What do land banks do?

Land banks play a critical role in helping communities respond to systemic vacancy. They are reliable, responsive partners to local governments, neighborhood groups, and residents, and use their unique legal powers to transform VAD properties into community assets. In Michigan, land banks have special powers to:

- Extinguish liens and clear title efficiently through expedited bulk quiet title
- Hold property tax-exempt
- Flexibly sell property to a responsible buyer and/or developer, driven not by the highest price but to ensure desired community outcomes
- Generate and collect revenue from property tax capture, tax increment financing, and other funding mechanisms

Land banks help increase property values and municipal revenue, decrease municipal service expenses, improve health and quality of life, create new housing opportunities, and leverage investments for economic growth.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Land Bank Fast Track Act, Michigan 2003 PA 258. Available at <https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-258-of-2003.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> "Progress Point: Michigan Land Banks," (Center for Community Progress, 2023), <https://communityprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Progress-Points-MI-Land-Banks-2023.pdf>.



# How Land Banks in Michigan Work

	Features of Michigan Land Banks	Features of the KCLBA
<b>How are they established?</b>	Land banks in Michigan can exist at the county and city level, created by an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with the State Land Bank Authority. Almost all land banks are at the county level.	The KCLBA was created in 2010 during the peak of land bank formation in Michigan through an IGA with the State Land Bank Authority.
<b>How are they governed?</b>	All land banks are governed by a board of directors. The composition of the board of directors is detailed in each land bank's IGA.	Per its IGA, the KCLBA is governed by a seven-member board: the County Treasurer and six general members appointed by the County Board of Commissioners. At least one of the general members shall be recommended by the Kalamazoo City Commission.
<b>How do they get properties?</b>	Most land banks receive properties that have gone through property tax foreclosure and did not sell at public auction ("involuntary" transfer). Land banks can also get properties through intergovernmental transfers, donation, swaps, and purchase.	Like many land banks, the KCLBA receives property through the tax foreclosure process. More recently, the KCLBA has purchased vacant and deteriorated properties from private sellers and accepted some property donations.
<b>How do they sell properties?</b>	Land banks are designed to sell properties with flexibility, including pricing. This allows them to more quickly return properties to productive use and ensure the sales are in line with community goals.	Historically, the KCLBA has leveraged a variety of programs to support reactivation of vacant and underutilized properties, including a side lot program, discounted sales to nonprofits for affordable housing development, and market rate sales. This plan details future planned programming.
<b>How are they funded?</b>	Land banks have access to the following funding mechanisms: 50 percent share of property taxes for the first five years after a property is sold (commonly called 5/50); property sales and other earned revenue; foundation and government grants; and in-kind support.	The KCLBA's annual revenue comes largely through philanthropic grants and local government support, with additional funding from property sales and property tax recapture.

# Vacant and Deteriorated Property in Kalamazoo County

A decade ago, housing vacancy in the city of Kalamazoo was nearly double that of Kalamazoo County—6.5 and 3.6 percent respectively.<sup>3</sup> Today, the gap is less than 1 percent, reflecting a positive trend of decreased tax foreclosures.<sup>4</sup> Through traditional vacant property interventions from the County Treasurer’s Office, the City, the KCLBA, and innovations of partners like Kalamazoo Promise and Kalamazoo Foundation for Excellence, much of the city’s previously challenged housing market has stabilized.

Shifting course on systemic vacancy is a multi-decade effort; while there has been much progress, pockets of entrenched vacancy persist. In the city, these pockets are in Kalamazoo’s “core neighborhoods”: Eastside, Northside, and Edison. Vacancy exceeds 8 percent in some census tracts, and in a few it exceeds 12 percent.<sup>5</sup> Vacancy under 4 percent is considered “normal,” and anything over 12 percent is considered high.<sup>6</sup> Outside of the city, communities experiencing vacancy challenges include Portage, Comstock, and Galesburg.

The city of Kalamazoo has approximately 1,100 vacant structures and another 2,000 vacant lots. Countywide, vacant structures total roughly 1,900.<sup>7</sup> The KCLBA currently owns 325 properties, more than 80 percent of which are in the city of Kalamazoo. Its remaining inventory—mostly vacant houses—is spread across the county.

<sup>3</sup> Estimated percent of all housing units that were vacant type “other” in 2009–2013. PolicyMap/US Bureau of the Census. Accessed November 12, 2025. <http://www.policymap.com>. “Other” vacant is used by the Census Bureau to categorize units neither held for future occupancy nor used only seasonally.

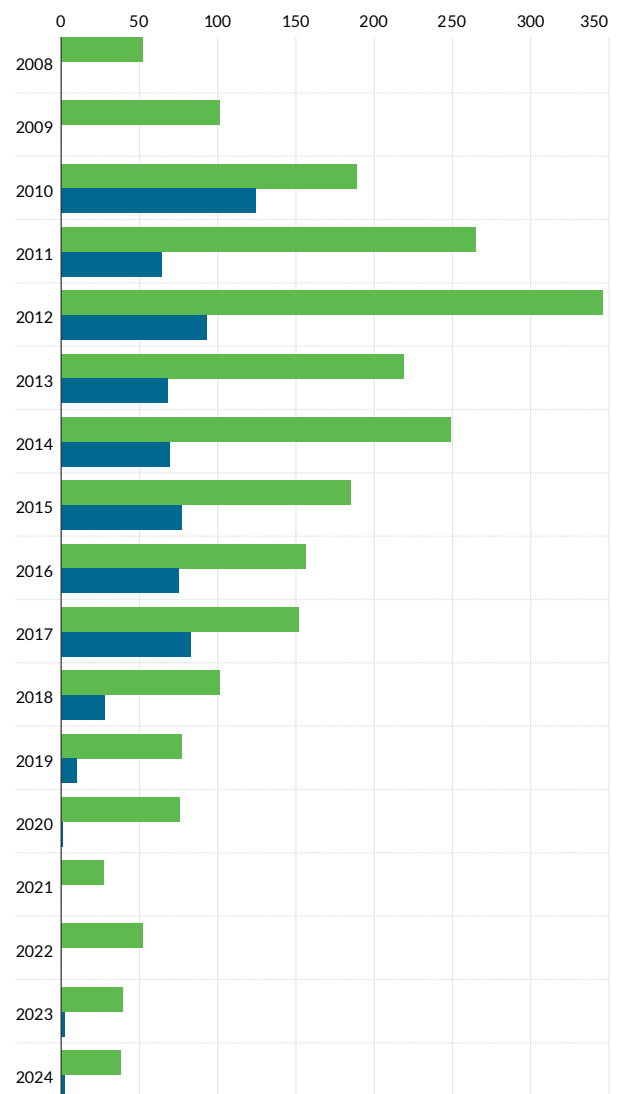
<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Mallach, *The Empty House Next Door: Understanding and Reducing Vacancy and Hypervacancy in the United States*, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2018.

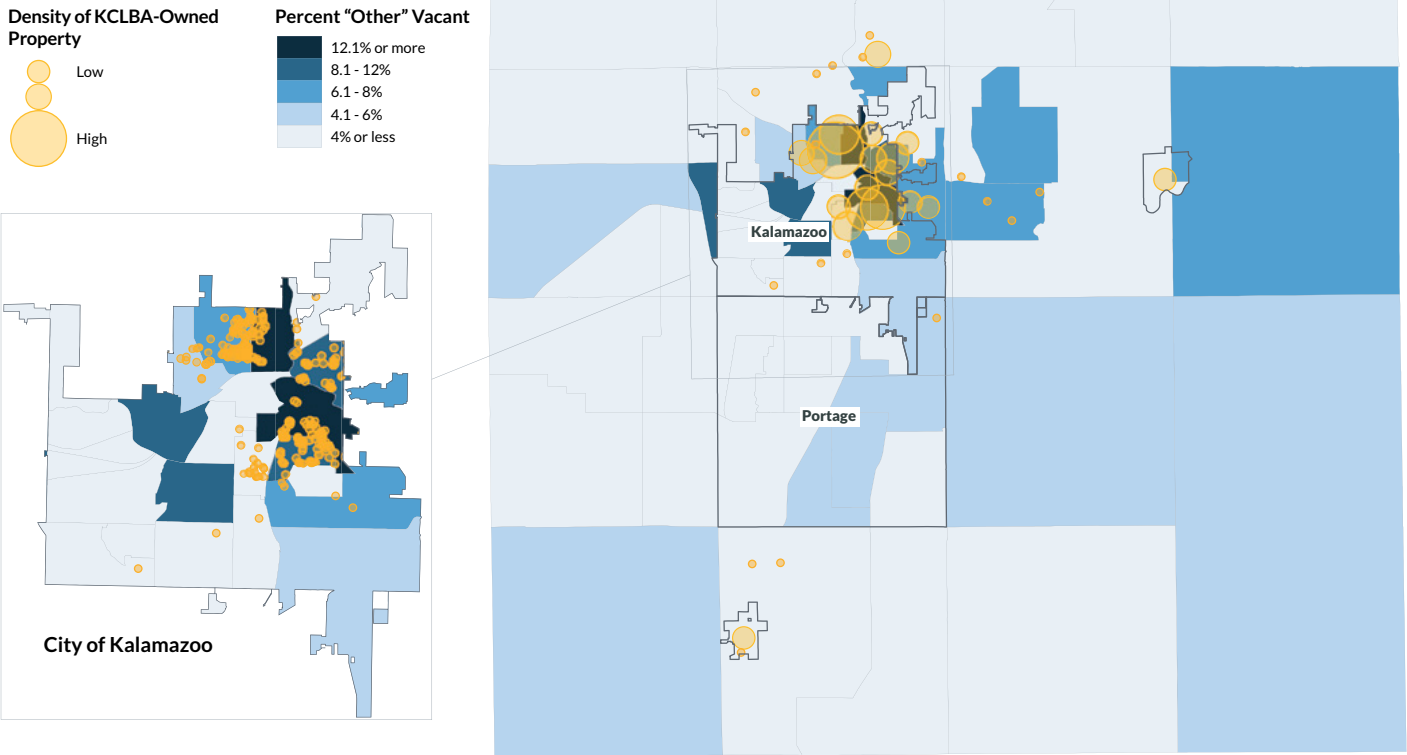
<sup>7</sup> “Kalamazoo County Parcel Data - USPS Vacancy Status,” Regrid, accessed November 15, 2025, <https://app.regrid.com/us/mi/kalamazoo>.

**County Tax Foreclosures and KCLBA Acquisition of Unsold Tax-Foreclosed Property (2008–2024)**



Source: Kalamazoo County, 2008–2024; Kalamazoo County Land Bank Authority, 2008–2024

## Residential Vacancy and Land Bank Inventory in Kalamazoo County



Sources: Kalamazoo County Land Bank Authority, 2025; American Community Survey, 2018-2023. Map: Center for Community Progress  
 Note: "Other" vacant is used by the US Census Bureau to categorize units neither being held for future occupancy nor used only seasonally.

0 1 2 4 Miles

Addressing deteriorating homes is a core component of *preventing* vacancy. The need is well-known in the city of Kalamazoo, which has several home repair programs available to address its aging housing stock—much of it built before 1950. But property deterioration is not exclusively a city issue: More than 50 percent of housing countywide is at risk of deterioration or already in need of repair.<sup>8</sup>

Yet vacancy and deterioration are only part of the picture. As the local residential property market has stabilized and other efforts have attracted new residents, three key new challenges have emerged alongside the remaining VAD issues: (1) population growth outpacing new housing

development (with the exception of a temporary dip in 2020–21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic);<sup>9</sup> (2) a lack of variety in housing stock to meet residents' needs;<sup>10</sup> and (3) a growing unhoused population.<sup>11</sup> Numerous municipal and County initiatives—including a countywide housing millage—are aimed at addressing these growing issues. The land bank is well-positioned to use its inventory, expertise, and unique powers to partner on these issues and other community development priorities.

8 Emily Petz, Lee Adams, Val Klomprens, Gerrit Anderson, and Brian Pittelko, Kalamazoo County Housing Plan Updates (Upjohn Regional, 2025), <https://www.kalcounty.gov/DocumentCenter/View/4834/Kalamazoo-County-Housing-Plan-Updates-PDF>.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 "Annual Survey: Kalamazoo County Homelessness Rising," United Way of South Central Michigan, (webpage), accessed November 20, 2025, <https://unitedforscmi.org/annual-survey-kalamazoo-county-homelessness-rising/>.

# Overview of the KCLBA

The KCLBA was founded in 2010 in response to growing tax foreclosures in Kalamazoo, with the goal of leveraging land bank tools to support community development, improve quality of life, and halt neighborhood decline. Its early work focused on neighborhood stabilization activities such as construction, demolition, and rehabilitation within the city of Kalamazoo.



Over the years, the KCLBA has partnered with local organizations on redevelopment initiatives aimed at strengthening the housing ecosystem. Projects such as Prairie Gardens—an affordable senior housing community—have allowed the KCLBA to address the housing needs of specific populations. The KCLBA has also supported opportunities for small and locally owned businesses.

The KCLBA has adapted and evolved its programs and activities as tax foreclosure acquisitions decreased. In 2023, the Homeward Promise program began, a collaborative initiative between local partners—including Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), Kalamazoo County, the City of Kalamazoo, and Stryker Johnston Foundation. Homeward Promise aims to address quality housing needs and foster housing stability, through stabilizing existing rental housing and creating pathways to homeownership. The KCLBA continues to focus on repurposing, renewing, and reconnecting with local partners and residents to support the growth and vibrancy of Kalamazoo County.

## Recent Impact

Since 2023, the KCLBA has invested over \$2.5 million in addressing vacancy, abandonment, and deterioration in Kalamazoo County, including demolishing dangerous, uninhabitable homes and commercial properties. In addition, the land bank has invested over \$700,000 in rehabbing deteriorated homes in the Edison neighborhood. Today, the KCLBA provides high quality affordable housing to 20 renters in Edison through its Homeward Promise program and manages an additional 24 units of affordable housing for seniors through its Prairie Gardens project.

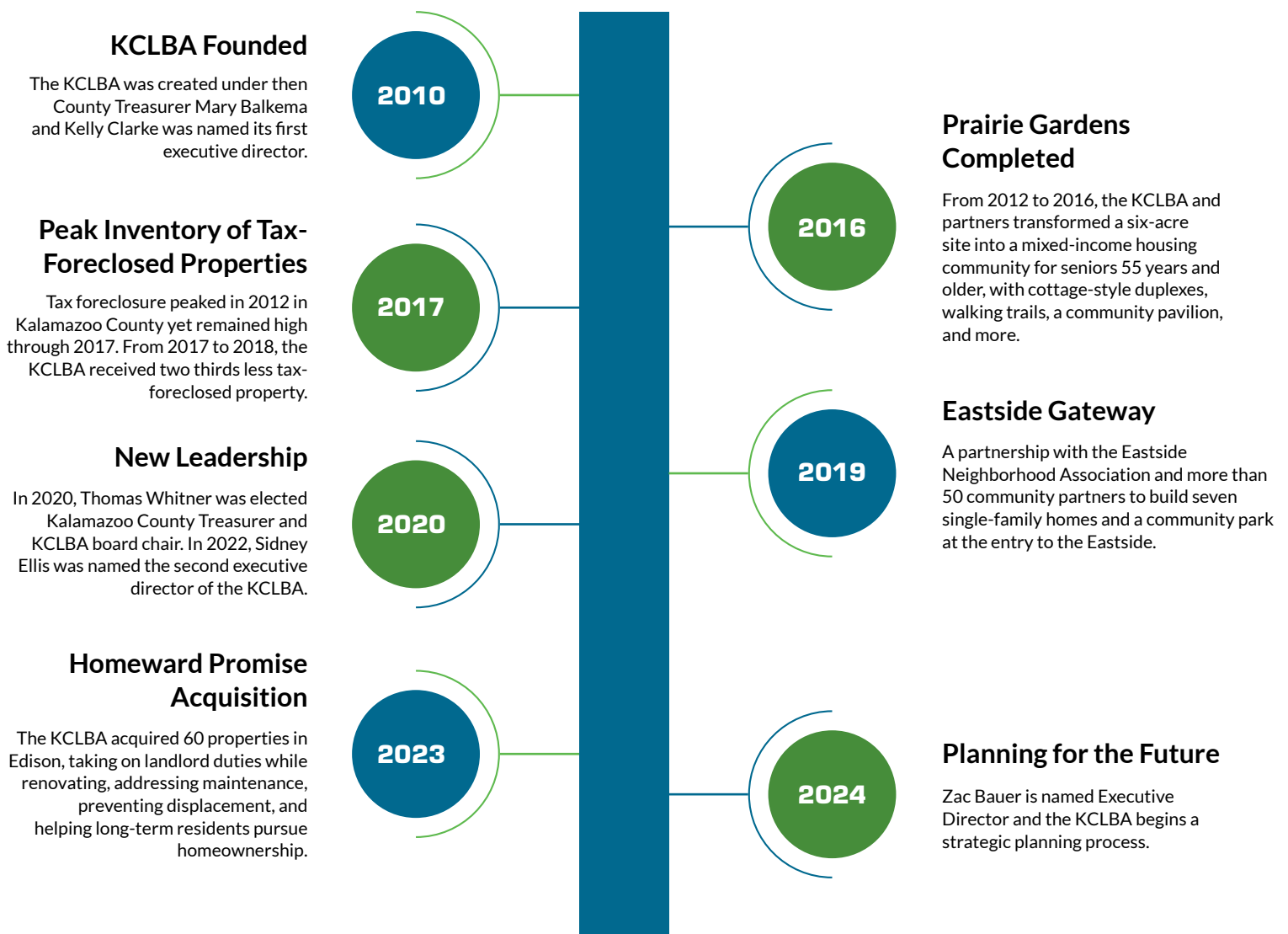
## Role

As the only public entity exclusively focused on acquiring, managing, and disposing of vacant property in the county, the KCLBA is a crucial community development partner. A cohesive, effective, efficient community development system has clear roles, minimal service duplication, a culture of collaboration, and flexibility to respond to changing needs. Depending on the project or program, the KCLBA may lead, support, or advise—leveraging its unique tools to respond to emergent opportunities while scaling its involvement to best match its unique powers and capacities.

The activities in 30 for (20)30 reflect existing municipal plans and priorities, partner input, the specific conditions of Kalamazoo County, and the expertise of land bank staff and board.

While 30 for (20)30 was completed prior to the updated Imagine Kalamazoo master plan, the KCLBA can still align implementation with that plan as it moves forward.<sup>12</sup>

## Brief Timeline of the KCLBA



12 "Imagine Kalamazoo," City of Kalamazoo, <https://www.kalamazooocity.org/Government/Programs-Initiatives/Imagine-Kalamazoo>.

The KCLBA manages its property and programs through oversight from its board and a dedicated staff. The land bank also operates a 501(c)3 subsidiary organization, Vibrant Kalamazoo.

## Board

The KCLBA Board comprises the County Treasurer and six general members. Board members during the planning process in 2025 were:

**Thomas Whitener**  
*Kalamazoo County Treasurer, Land Bank Board Chair*

**Pat Clark**  
*Housing Director, CARES, Land Bank Board Vice Chair*

**Riley Lukomski**  
*Director Economic Development, Southwest Michigan First, Land Bank Board Treasurer*

**Sharon Ferraro**  
*Retired Historic Preservation Coordinator, City of Kalamazoo*

**Antonio Mitchell**  
*Director, Community Planning & Economic Development, City of Kalamazoo*

**Barb Ogrin**  
*Resident*

**John Taylor**  
*Kalamazoo County Commissioner*

## Staff

The KCLBA is run by an executive director, appointed by the board, and additional staff to support land bank operations, programming, and property maintenance. Staff members during the strategic planning process in 2025 were:

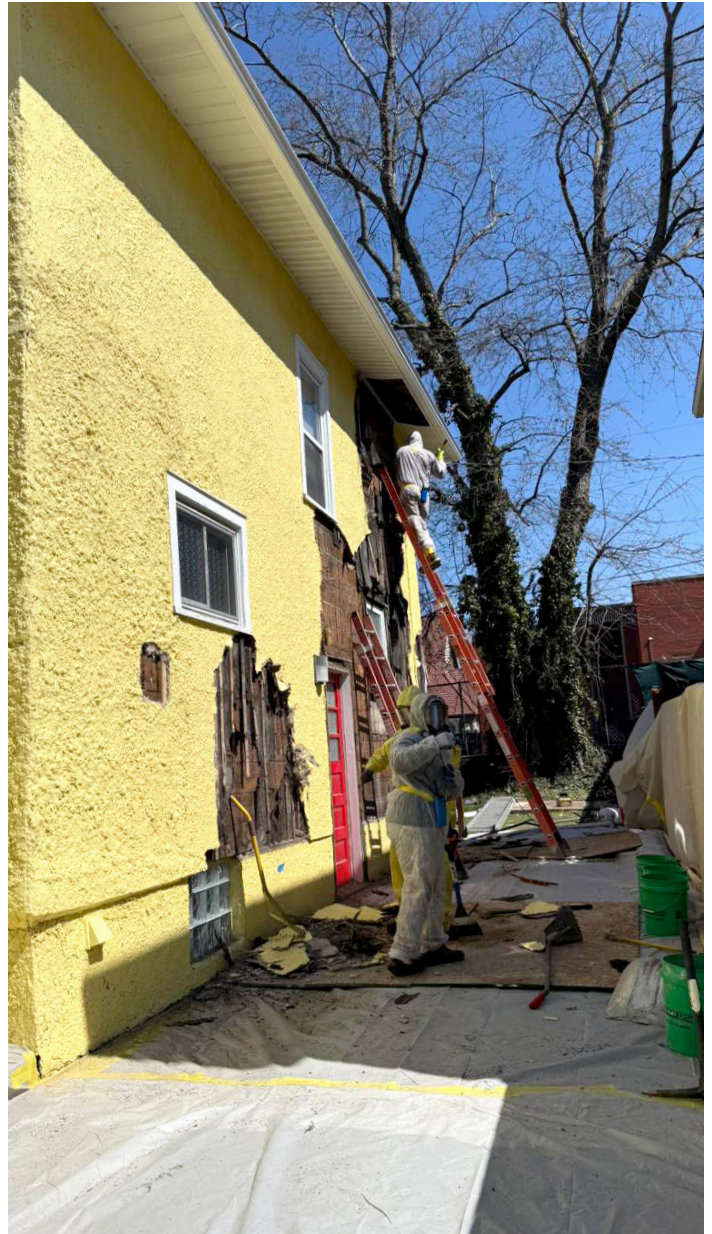
**Zac Bauer**  
*Executive Director*

**Derek Mann**  
*Deputy Director*

**I'yanna Wilson**  
*Operations Coordinator*

The land bank also leverages the expertise of outside legal counsel and other partners as needed. For an up-to-date list of staff and board members, see <https://kalamazoolandbank.org/about-us/team/>.

↓ A KCLBA property on Maywood undergoes renovations (Photo: KCLBA)



## Vibrant Kalamazoo

In 2012, the KCLBA created a subsidiary 501(c)3 nonprofit organization to support its mission and activities. For many years, Vibrant Kalamazoo was the fundraising arm of the land bank. Over the last five years, the organization has been mostly dormant. However, there is likely still utility in its existence (see [Strategy 28](#)).

## Funding

In 2025, the KCLBA had a total budget of just over \$2 million. Nearly half of this was dedicated to property and building maintenance. Restricted grant revenue accounts for about 40 percent of the KCLBA's total budget, while other sources of revenue, such as property sales (14 percent) and tax recapture (3 percent) account for a smaller share of the overall budget.

## Current Land Bank Inventory

As of December 2025, KCLBA owned 325 properties, including its office space. Of these, 296 are vacant, the majority being vacant residential lots in the city of Kalamazoo, particularly in the core neighborhoods. The land bank owns some nonresidential property, almost all of which is in the city of Kalamazoo. The land bank also owns and manages occupied rental properties at the Prairie Gardens development and those acquired through Homeward Promise.

**325** total properties in KCLBA inventory, 296 of which are vacant

**10%** of KCLBA property is non-residential

**44** KCLBA-held properties are outside the city of Kalamazoo

## KCLBA Holds Property in 40% of County Municipalities

Kalamazoo (city)	281
Kalamazoo Township	19
Cooper Township	10
Schoolcraft Township	5
Comstock Township	4
Portage	2
Galesburg	2

## Vacant Land Comprises a Significant Portion of the KCLBA’s Inventory—But Not All

### Structures

Residential Structure	55
Commercial Structure	1
Industrial Structure	1

### Vacant Land

Residential Vacant Lot	237
Commercial Vacant Lot	21
Industrial Vacant Lot	8

## KCLBA’s Occupied Properties

**Prairie Gardens:** In 2011, the KCLBA partnered with Western Michigan University and the City of Kalamazoo to purchase and demolish the former Southwestern Michigan Tuberculosis Sanitarium and Kalamazoo Psychiatric Hospital complex, which had sat vacant and deteriorating since 1990. Based on community input, the KCLBA and partners developed the six-acre site into a mixed-income community for residents aged 55 and older. It now features 24 cottage-style duplexes, walking trails, rain gardens, a bioswale, and a community space. The KCLBA remains the owner of the site and serves as landlord.

**Homeward Promise:** In 2024, a private donor funded the KCLBA’s acquisition of 60 properties in the city’s Edison neighborhood. The Stryker Johnston Foundation, in partnership with LISC, made a \$4.5 million grant to renovate those properties into high-quality rentals and prepare them for sale to the current occupants. The KCLBA has been steadily renovating the properties while serving as a landlord to current tenants, addressing maintenance issues, preventing displacement, and supporting long-term residents in pursuing homeownership if desired.

# Planning Process

In 2025, the KCLBA engaged Community Progress—the leading national provider of land bank strategic planning—to help develop a five-year strategic plan spanning 2026–2030. Community Progress worked with the KCLBA to define its vision for the future and hone its approach in the context of both local conditions and national best practices. Community Progress approached this process in three phases:

## 1. Analyzed local, state, and national resources, policies, and data

- Documents, policies, programs, and local data to understand neighborhood conditions and trends across Kalamazoo County and the KCLBA's approach to addressing these conditions
- Local and state laws and regulations related to land banking, brownfields, and landlord-tenant relationships
- Examples and best practices from Michigan and other US land banks

## 2. Engaged the KCLBA board, staff, and local partners

- Survey of KCLBA board members to identify challenges, opportunities, and priorities to guide future programming
- Two-day site visit including a tour of the KCLBA's properties and guided staff workshops to discuss the KCLBA's mission, vision, values, and programming
- Interviews with staff and external partners (see [Appendix A](#))

## 3. Drafted and revised strategic plan elements

- Potential mission and vision statements and activity groupings workshopped with KCLBA staff
- Proposed mission, vision, priorities, and strategies presented to the board in November 2025
- Preliminary updated mission and vision statements presented to the board in September 2025
- Full draft strategic plan delivered to KCLBA staff in December 2025
- Potential priorities and strategies discussed with KCLBA staff

By pursuing the priorities, strategies, and activities outlined below, the KCLBA will be positioned to serve as a leader in the national field over the next five years and beyond. The contents of this plan were informed by learnings from the analysis and engagement phases, and rooted in Community Progress' extensive knowledge of the land banking field. The KCLBA should consult local counsel before implementing this plan.

# 30 for 2030 Strategic Plan

The KCLBA is a catalyst for community change, addressing problem properties by bringing together land bank tools, people, and place.

# Our Mission, Vision, and Values

The KCLBA is at the leading edge of the land banking field and must balance its core functions with expanding services to meet community needs. This strategic plan sets an ambitious course for how land banks can address and vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated property.

As part of the planning process, the KCLBA updated its mission and vision and developed new values statements to better reflect current and future work and guide overall direction.

## Mission

The KCLBA is a catalyst for community change, addressing problem properties by bringing together land bank tools, people, and place.

## Vision

For all Kalamazoo County residents to live, work, and play in vibrant, healthy, safe, and connected communities.

## Our Values



### We are focused on our mission

ensuring all Kalamazoo County residents benefit from their land bank.



### We are engaged

active in our community and committed to building trusted relationships with partners from all walks of life.



### We are dependable

a trusted partner that follows through, welcomes accountability, and shares openly.



### We are thoughtful

respecting lived experiences, learning together from failure and success, and making data-informed decisions.



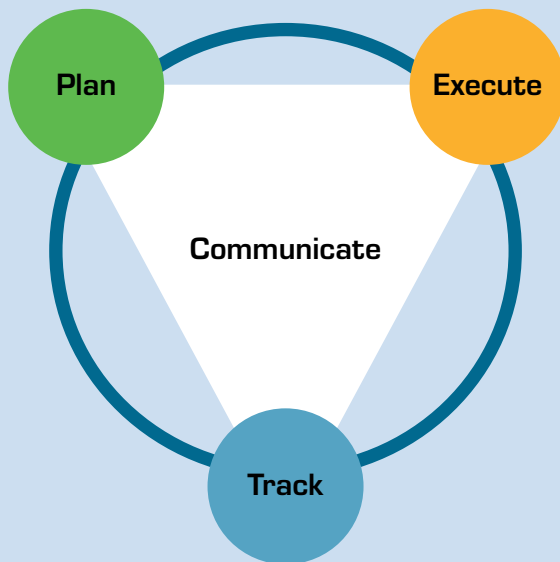
### We are adaptable

to changing conditions and needs, nimbly finding creative solutions to new challenges and constantly improving.

The plan is grounded in seven priorities that answer the most crucial questions:

- What is our role? —> **1. Ensure land bank powers are appropriately used to address problem properties in Kalamazoo County.**
- Who will we partner with? —> **2. Be an active, collaborative community development partner.**
- What specific outcomes do we care about? —> **3. Support the development of new quality, attainable housing options.**
- > **4. Preserve and grow neighborhood stability by improving residential property conditions.**
- > **5. Strategically intervene to support transformational projects.**
- > **6. Activate vacant lots to improve environmental health and quality of life.**
- What do we need as an organization to achieve those outcomes? —> **7. Operate with organizational excellence.**

Under each priority are specific strategies—30 in total—with action steps. Each priority includes a measurable outcome to be tracked over the next five years (see the outcomes dashboard in [Appendix B](#)).



### Our Approach

The cornerstone of the KCLBA's approach to this work is continuous improvement—actively planning, executing those plans, and tracking impact. In each stage we strive for strong communication with our team, our partners, and our community. While many of the following activities refer to planning, executing, or tracking specifically, this cycle also reflects the overall approach through which everything in this plan flows.

## Priority 1

# Ensure land bank powers are appropriately used to address problem properties in Kalamazoo County.



**Metric:** 80% of annual staff time is spent on strategic plan-aligned work.

Kalamazoo County is a diverse place, with communities ranging from small villages to urban centers. Each faces its own vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated property challenges: obsolete industrial sites, vacant homes, underutilized commercial buildings, and deteriorated rental properties.

As the only entity focused solely on vacant property in the county, the KCLBA has a responsibility to understand and communicate both its role and the range of local challenges. As the primary entity who owns and can acquire vacant property, it also has a responsibility to foster diverse end uses of that property to support community priorities.

### Strategy 1

## Expand local awareness about the KCLBA's purpose and powers.

The KCLBA has a unique role in community development and problem property revitalization—one that must be clearly understood by all of its constituents. Without articulating its place and priorities, the KCLBA risks mission-drift or inefficient use of resources.

- Make immediate website improvements to reflect language and information in this plan.
- Develop and implement a communication strategy. (See proposed outline in [Appendix C](#).)
- Consider working with a professional marketing firm (or similar) to update logo, colors, and other branding.
- Participate in local planning efforts, such as Imagine Kalamazoo, to ensure the KCLBA's powers are included and leveraged appropriately in long-term land use planning.

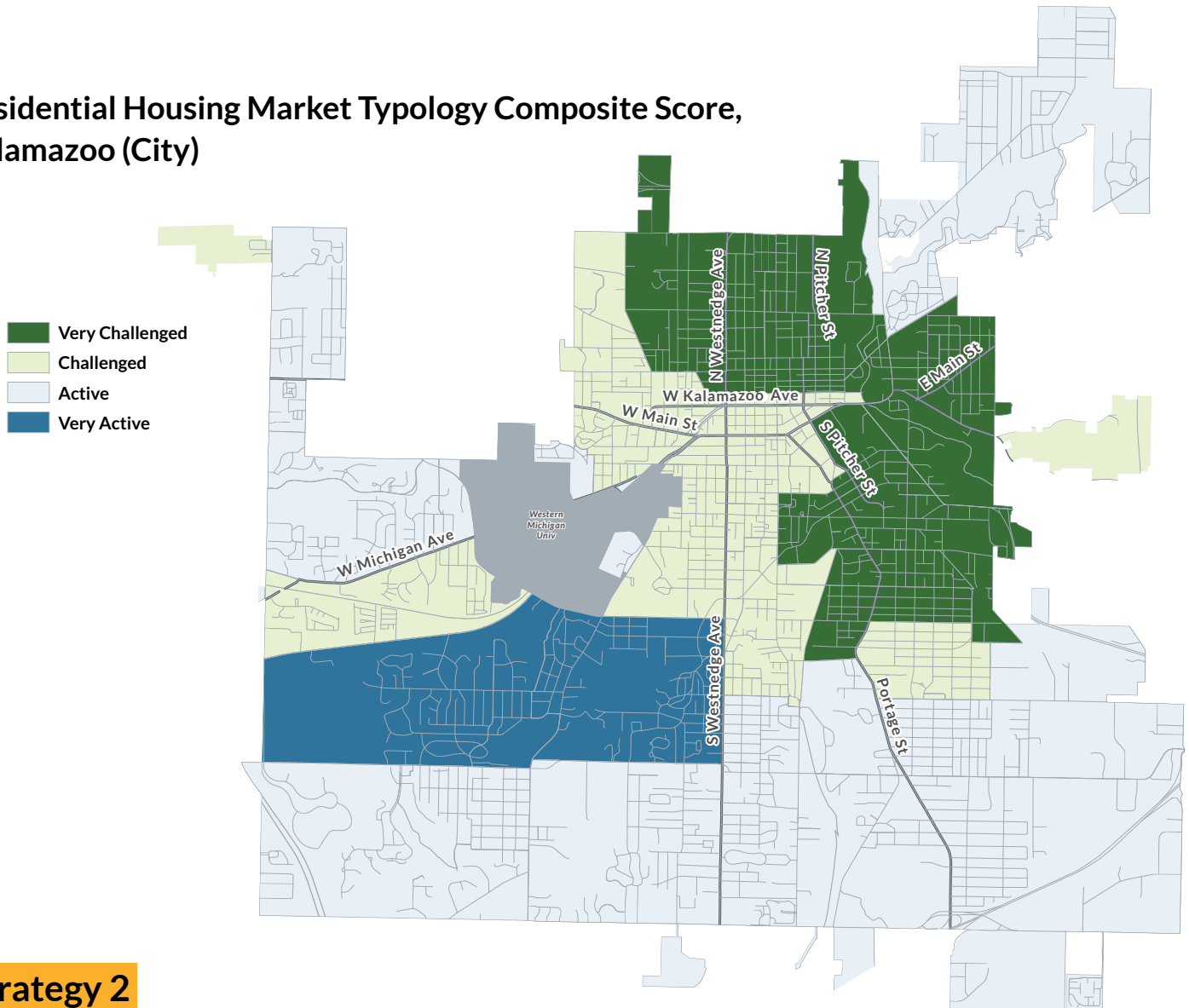
### Inspiration from the Field

## Muncie Land Bank's First Friday: Property Abandonment and Housing Development Monthly Meeting

On the first Friday of each month, the Muncie Land Bank in Indiana hosts a public “lunch and learn” (with food provided) conversation about property abandonment, deterioration, and housing development. The sessions attract attendees from local government, nonprofits, and for-profit developers, among others. The goal is to educate current and prospective partners and the public about innovative approaches to addressing vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties, and encourage conversation across sectors.<sup>13</sup>

13 “First Friday,” Muncie Land Bank, (webpage), accessed December 17, 2025, <https://muncielandbank.org/first-friday/>.

## Residential Housing Market Typology Composite Score, Kalamazoo (City)



### Strategy 2

## Accurately understand and articulate the scale of vacant and deteriorated property in Kalamazoo County.

Land banks are often only able to address vacant property reactively. The KCLBA can take a more proactive approach by being the voice for VAD property in the county and aligning its programming accordingly. See [Appendix D](#) for more details.

- Create and share “Understanding Vacant Property” resources, such as standard slide decks, a website FAQ, and one-page handouts.
- Track and review VAD property throughout the county and especially in the city of Kalamazoo to understand how the scale and needs vary in different neighborhoods.
- Prioritize land bank programming in neighborhoods most impacted by systemic vacancy.

0 0.35 0.7 Miles



Sources: US Census Bureau, 2025;  
American Community Survey, 2018-2023;  
Center for Community Progress Analysis

Map: Center for Community Progress

### Strategy 3

## Assess all KCLBA-owned properties for target end use(s).

The first step in being more proactive is to plan for the target end use of existing inventory, especially vacant lots. Each property should have an identified disposition priority and corresponding sales strategy.

- a. Create and implement a workflow to assess properties upon acquisition and identify their disposition pipeline and target end use (and interim uses for appropriate vacant lots, as discussed in [Strategy 21](#)).
  - Review master plans and other planning documents to inform workflow.
  - Partner with the City of Kalamazoo and their housing consultant team to determine the best use for specific vacant lots.<sup>14</sup>
- b. Use the workflow to assess current inventory and ensure each property has a defined target end use. This should include determining which, if any, structures will be demolished and which will be rehabbed.
- c. Develop, if needed, additional disposition tools (such as leases or temporary use agreements) to facilitate all sales strategies.
- d. Reassess properties annually where conditions and/or local priorities may have significantly changed.

### Strategy 4

## Leverage land bank powers to support reuse and redevelopment.

The County and multiple municipalities are actively engaged in programs, projects, and policy changes to address housing, small business development, green space, and more. Many of these align with the land bank's priorities within this plan and would benefit from its unique tools, especially where the private market faces barriers.

- a. Work with the County and other local governments to establish housing goals, including defining clear roles and responsibilities with a focus on leveraging land bank powers.
- b. Work with the County and other local partners to improve coordination and avoid duplication of efforts, especially on larger development projects (see [Strategies 18 and 19](#)).
- c. Use land bank property inventory to support countywide workforce development goals, for example, hosting trainings on land bank properties or hiring participants from workforce development programs for repair and construction work

### Strategy 5

## Develop a “properties of interest” list for future acquisitions.

With limited inventory coming through the traditional property tax-foreclosure pipeline, the KCLBA has an opportunity to strategically acquire properties. To do so, the land bank must define its acquisition priorities and adopt policies accordingly.

- a. Using *30 for (20)30* priorities, define acquisition criteria. Considerations should include proximity to current inventory or key local projects, potential inclusion in the brownfield housing TIF, or potential to fill a specific community need (e.g., grocery store in a food desert, green space in a neighborhood lacking park space).
- b. Identify and track properties that fit the criteria and develop acquisition plans as necessary.
- c. Develop and adopt a property donation policy to receive key properties and leverage land bank powers to accelerate the reuse of a property.
- d. Amend acquisition policies to reflect the strategic plan.

<sup>14</sup> As part of the Imagine Kalamazoo planning process, the City has engaged multiple consultants for additional studies. See <https://www.kalamazoocity.org/Government/Programs-Initiatives/Imagine-Kalamazoo> for more details.

## Priority 2

# Be an active, collaborative community development partner.



**Metric:** *50% increase in formalized partnerships with neighborhood and community organizations.*

Kalamazoo County has a rich community development ecosystem of public agencies, nonprofits, and philanthropic entities dedicated to improving residents' quality of life. As a partner to both local government and nonprofit organizations across the city and county, the KCLBA is uniquely positioned to bridge gaps and coordinate efforts—streamlining capacity and resources in pursuit of shared community development goals. Over the next five years, the KCLBA should focus on building new partnerships and strengthening existing ones, leveraging its powers, resources, and physical office space to support community priorities.

### Strategy 6

## Build meaningful, formal partnerships with residents and community organizations in neighborhoods most affected by vacant and deteriorated properties.

Beyond improving communication through Strategy 1, the KCLBA should engage community organizations and residents in programming and decision-making as appropriate. (See [Appendix E](#) for more details on levels of community engagement.)

- a. Include upcoming events and opportunities to engage with the land bank (e.g., board meetings) in all communications and presentations. This could be as simple as linking a website calendar in email signatures or sending a quarterly or annual events calendar.
- b. Offer regular, scheduled opportunities for neighborhood associations and similar organizations to present their priorities and initiatives at land bank board meetings.

- c. Develop a process for formalizing partnership agreements with neighborhood organizations, for example, Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for community-based maintenance or collecting input during the planning and design phases of new construction projects.
- d. Explore opportunities for shared leadership, particularly with tenants, and consider ways to support neighborhood leaders in preparing to serve as future board members.<sup>15</sup> See “Inspiration from the Field” on the next page for more approaches.

### Strategy 7

## Strengthen relationships with out-county communities.

Given trends in tax foreclosure, population density, and other macro factors, most of the land bank's work historically has been within the city of Kalamazoo. With a more manageable city inventory, the KCLBA can now dedicate time to growing relationships and better understanding the needs and opportunities of out-county communities.

<sup>15</sup> “Washington Heights Neighborhood Advisory Committee,” Calhoun County Land Bank Authority, <https://calhounlandbank.org/washington-heights-neighborhood-advisory-committee/>.

- a. Review master plans and identify opportunities for partnership or discussion of shared goals.
- b. Identify municipalities to prioritize for engagement, starting with places where the land bank currently has inventory.
- c. Review municipal calendars annually and identify key events for land bank staff to attend, such as council and board meetings, holiday events, and chamber of commerce gatherings.

## Strategy 8

### Activate the KCLBA office for community benefit.

The land bank's office building and surrounding property offer a unique opportunity to bring the community into the land bank's physical space, increase visibility and awareness, and earn revenue.

- a. Develop a programming plan for the entire space, including:
  - Determining how much space the land bank needs for its activities
  - Determining what space, if any, could be available for other organizations to rent, and how many tenants the land bank wants to manage
  - Identifying and recruiting potential tenants for the greenhouse space
  - Using the space for land bank programming, such as educational sessions, office hours, or other direct community touchpoints
  - Developing a rental strategy for private events, community partner events, and larger gatherings like existing festivals
- b. Include the land bank office and on-site barn in the capital improvements fund planning in [Strategy 26](#).

#### Inspiration from the Field

### Washington Heights Neighborhood Advisory Committee

The Calhoun County Land Bank Authority (CCLBA) owns over 250 properties in the majority-Black Washington Heights neighborhood of Battle Creek, Michigan. Many of these properties went through property tax foreclosure before coming to the land bank, often representing lost “family property,” where the original owner passed away without a will. In those instances, surviving family members lacked clear title to the property and were unable to access tax exemptions and home repair assistance—programs intended to prevent property deterioration and tax foreclosure.

To meaningfully engage impacted residents in land use planning, CCLBA organized the Washington Heights Neighborhood Advisory Committee (WHNAC), a group of 17 community members who gather input from neighbors, review data, and shape the direction of land bank projects in Washington Heights by voting on land bank plans and policies. Notably, the WHNAC helped CCLBA establish its “legacy purchasers” initiative, which enables family members to purchase land bank properties previously owned by their late relatives.

↓ KCLBA, CCLBA, and Ingham County LBA staff (Photo: KCLBA)



## Priority 3

# Support the development of new quality, attainable housing options.



**Metric:** 50% of new homes built are an offering other than single-family detached.

Kalamazoo County needs approximately 8,000 new housing units over the next six years, with need spread across municipalities and housing types.<sup>16</sup> Less than half of those units should be single-family detached, meaning significant demand exists for new multi-unit and accessory dwelling units (ADUs).<sup>17</sup> The land bank can play a key role in supporting this varied housing development, for example rehabbing and building housing for a range of renters and buyers. The land bank should focus on filling gaps where the private market cannot or will not act, expanding on established and successful projects, and exploring new pathways to homeownership, with partners.

### Strategy 9

## Leverage vacant lots to build a diversity of housing types.

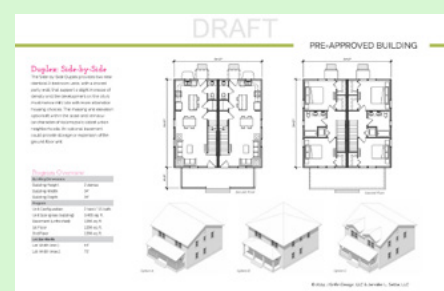
The land bank has enough inventory to play a serious role in infill development. It should focus on new construction projects that the private market cannot produce, particularly urban infill.

- a. Develop an infill framework to guide the approach to new home construction. It should include:
  - What work is done in-house versus by others
  - Geographic priorities
  - Target number of different housing styles (e.g., single-family detached, multi-family)
  - Target number of units by tenure (e.g., owner-occupied, rental, shared equity)

### Key Idea

## Streamlining Development with Pre-approved Housing Plans

To expedite and reduce the cost of new housing development, the City of Kalamazoo created eight [pre-approved housing plans](#) covering both single-family and small-scale multifamily options. Because these plans have already been reviewed for compliance with local building codes, they allow for an expedited approval process and streamlined permitting. In addition to shortening the development timeline, using these plans can reduce upfront design costs and potentially lead to lower project costs overall.



<sup>16</sup> Petz et. al, *Kalamazoo County Housing Plan Updates*, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

- b. Continue to develop a brownfield housing TIF plan, including:
- Proposed duration and timeline
  - Target number of total units
  - Target number of units for income-qualified tenants/buyers
  - Proposed units by housing typology
  - Proposed amenities
  - Plan for how taxable value will be established once homebuyers take possession
- c. Continue to partner with the City on implementing pre-approved plans and improving the process of using them.
- d. If necessary, proactively acquire vacant lots for infill development in select neighborhoods.

## Strategy 10

### Partner to develop housing to meet the needs of special populations.

The KCLBA already owns the Prairie Gardens senior housing development and could be a useful partner in building additional housing for special populations including seniors, veterans, and individuals with disabilities.

- a. Review existing housing needs assessments for special populations and assess what role the land bank could play. If the assessments do not exist, speak with relevant agencies and organizations to better understand opportunities to leverage land bank tools.
- b. Develop a plan for unit turnover at Prairie Gardens and long-term tenure planning to ensure occupancy remains high.
- c. Explore building additional units at Prairie Gardens to meet projected demand for additional senior housing.

↓ *Prairie Gardens senior housing development (Photo: KCLBA)*



## Key Idea

## Creating Better Land Contracts

A growing cohort of community development organizations now offer land contracts as a viable alternative for households that cannot obtain a traditional mortgage. Although land contracts are associated with a history of misuse by bad faith sellers, there is nothing inherently exploitative about this path to homeownership. Researchers with University of Michigan Poverty Solutions identified best practices for good-faith lenders,<sup>18</sup> including:

- Use clear, easy-to-understand contract language to close the information gap between sellers and buyers.
- Record contracts with the county register of deeds and hold the deed in escrow until the home is paid in full.
- Provide financial education and support, including offering homeownership counseling and sharing information about other resources such as tax exemptions and home repair assistance.
- Set interest at or below the market rate (some organizations offer contracts with no interest).
- Offer payment plans and work with buyers to catch up on missed payments in lieu of exercising the forfeiture clause.
- Help buyers transition to traditional mortgage financing and exit the land contract when appropriate.



## Strategy 11

### Expand disposition strategies and options.

Interviewees identified a need for more diverse homeownership models in Kalamazoo, including land contracts and shared equity models such as community land trusts. While long-term land ownership under a shared equity model is likely not an appropriate role for a land bank, the KCLBA should explore how it can partner with local governments, nonprofits, and residents to create more pathways to homeownership.

- a. Explore offering land contracts as a purchase option,

building on best practices from other land banks across the United States.

- b. Create more comprehensive disposition strategies to support partners in delivering alternative homeownership models (e.g., selling land at low cost to an affordable housing provider offering a shared equity model).
- c. Develop long-term disposition strategies for occupied properties in the land bank's portfolio, including working towards resident ownership of Prairie Gardens and developing an exit strategy for Homeward Promise and other occupied homes (see [Strategy 16](#)).

<sup>18</sup> Karen Ann Kling, Evelyn Zwiebach, Leonymae Aumentado, and Patrick Cooney, "In Good Faith: Reimagining the Use of Land Contracts," (University of Michigan Poverty Solutions, 2021), <https://poverty.umich.edu/files/2021/05/PovertySolutions-Land-Contracts-PolicyBrief.pdf>.

## Priority 4

# Preserve and grow neighborhood stability by improving residential property conditions.



**Metric:** 50% increase in units improved by the land bank.

Land banks are excellent at addressing vacant property through rehab, demolition, reuse, and new construction—activities the KCLBA already engages in and will continue as needed.

As local housing markets rebound and vacant, tax-foreclosed property inventories decline, many land banks are exploring ways to prevent future vacant properties by addressing deteriorating occupied property. While tools like code enforcement are limited to local government, land bank powers can be creatively used to acquire and repair deteriorated properties. The KCLBA has already started exploring this through acquisition of the Homeward Promise portfolio of occupied, substandard rental properties and pursuing grant dollars to support owner-occupied home repair in villages and townships. Home repair activities will be a key activity for the KCLBA in the future.

### Key Idea

## Terminology

In this priority, **repair** describes improvements to occupied housing and **rehab** describes improvements to vacant housing.

Rehabbing a vacant house is generally presumed to be more costly and burdensome than repair.



## Strategy 12

### Continue to be good stewards of KCLBA-owned property.

The KCLBA is a trusted partner and generally viewed as a responsible property owner. To continue being a good neighbor, property maintenance must remain a key activity. As a landlord providing housing to over 50 renters, it is imperative for the KCLBA to provide quality housing conditions for those tenants and, ideally, help them transition to homeownership.

- Develop property maintenance standards and an annual maintenance plan.
- Bring property management in-house to ensure responsiveness, compassionate accountability, adequate property maintenance, and generally being a good landlord. (See [Strategy 16](#) for more details on Prairie Gardens and Homeward Promise.)
- Explore creating a proactive capital improvements fund to plan and raise money for ongoing maintenance needs of occupied properties, the land bank office building, and other key projects.
- Explore opportunities to engage residents and other partners in property maintenance activities. (See [Priority 6](#) for more on vacant lot maintenance.)

## Strategy 13

### Lead rehab of existing land bank-owned, vacant residential property and explore proactive vacant property acquisition for rehab.

A key component of improving property conditions (and increasing housing options) is rehabbing and reoccupying vacant houses. The KCLBA currently owns a couple dozen vacant houses, but much of the vacant inventory in the city remains in private hands.

- Determine what rehab work, if any, the land bank should do in-house and adjust sales programs accordingly.
- Partner with local neighborhood organizations to identify vacant, salvageable homes for acquisition and strategically acquire a select number for rehab.<sup>19</sup>

## Strategy 14

### Conduct strategic demolition as needed.

Even with efforts to prevent vacancy, improve property conditions, and stabilize neighborhoods, the land bank will likely still receive or acquire properties in need of demolition.

- Assess inventory and demolish when necessary.
- Support municipal and County demolition efforts as needed.
- Acquire properties for demolition only when land bank involvement is necessary and funding is secured.

## Strategy 15

### Implement an owner-occupied home repair program out-county.

Outside of the cities of Kalamazoo and Portage, few organizations have the capacity to coordinate home repair programs, making the land bank well-positioned to fill this gap. The land bank recently received a Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) grant to offer owner-occupied home repair in non-entitlement communities in Kalamazoo County.<sup>20</sup> The KCLBA should implement this program as a pilot and then determine whether to pursue future funding opportunities.

- Administer the current MSHDA home repair grant in non-entitlement communities in Kalamazoo County.
- During and after grant implementation, evaluate the program's impact and the capacity required to administer the grant.
- Determine whether to continue providing this service.

<sup>19</sup> Multiple recent Michigan and US Supreme Court rulings have impacted the property tax foreclosure process, with another (*Pung v. Isabella County*), currently before the Court. Given this rapidly changing landscape, Strategy 13 does not consider exercising the land bank's right of first refusal option at this time.

<sup>20</sup> Entitlement community refers to the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Entitlement Program, which provides annual grants on a formula basis to select ("entitled") cities and counties (see <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/cdbg-entitlement/cdbg-entitlement-program-eligibility-requirements/> for more details). Kalamazoo County has two entitlement communities: the cities of Kalamazoo and Portage. The county itself is not an entitlement community.

## Strategy 16

### Repair occupied Homeward Promise properties and adopt a process for transitioning away from land bank ownership.

Land banks are not designed to be long-term landlords, but they can be responsible interim ones. The focus of any occupied property acquisition should be repair, with a secondary focus on transitioning occupants into homeownership. Ideally this happens by the renter purchasing the repaired property or another land bank property. Doing this well requires a thought-out approach with specific “off ramps” for occupants and the land bank. A proposed process is described in [Appendix F](#), but the following steps should guide the land bank’s approach to its existing Homeward Promise inventory.

- a. Complete repairs to occupied properties.
- b. Establish how the land bank will determine sales prices, likely committing to below-market rates.

Options could include capping monthly payments at 30 percent of the purchaser’s income, using three times 50 percent AMI as a purchase ceiling, or setting a flat rate (potentially tiered by size and condition). Explore escrowing rent payments toward a down payment or mortgage, while collaborating with rental service providers to improve rent collection.

- c. Decide eligibility criteria for purchasing and what role, if any, the KCLBA wants to play in supporting renters preparing to become homeowners (e.g., homeownership or financial counseling).
- d. Develop a process for discussing homeownership opportunities with each tenant, including giving those who wish to purchase a role in design choices if repairs are still pending.
- e. Determine criteria for when the land bank will exit rental property ownership and how it will ensure renters remain in quality housing (see [Strategy 11](#) for joint ownership options).

#### Inspiration from the Field

### Make It Home

The Make it Home Program is a partnership between United Community Housing Coalition, the City of Detroit, and Rocket Community Fund to prevent renter displacement during property tax foreclosure and improve housing stability.<sup>21</sup> Through a multi-partner acquisition process and dedicated home repair funding, the program transitions renters to homeowners, with approximately 1,500 successful sales to date.<sup>22</sup>

Eligibility requirements are intentionally limited: occupants must show current residency, ability to afford the property and ongoing expenses (considering available property tax credits and exemptions), and absence of criminal activities that threaten neighbors’ well-being. Provided the property does not pose an immediate safety risk, it is sold to current occupants for cash or through a zero-percent-interest land contract. After purchase, buyers can access funding for critical home repairs, support coordinating these repairs, and homeownership counseling.

Community Progress’ 2022 publication, *From Harm to Home: Replicating Detroit’s Make it Home Program*, contains more on the program’s background, key lessons, and guidance for communities interested in replicating it.<sup>23</sup>

21 See <https://www.uchcdetroit.org/makeithome> for more details.

22 “Rocket Community Fund, United Community Housing Coalition and City of Detroit Help 1,500 Detroit Families Become Homeowners Through Make It Home Program,” City of Detroit, (website), <https://detroitmi.gov/news/rocket-community-fund-united-community-housing-coalition-and-city-detroit-help-1500-detroit-families>.

23 Full report can be accessed at <https://communityprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/11-2022-Make-It-Home-Final-Report-and-Playbooks.pdf>.

## Strategy 17

### Carefully consider additional opportunities to acquire substandard rental properties.

With the lessons learned from Homeward Promise, the land bank can be more strategic and intentional if additional opportunities to acquire deteriorated occupied rental properties arise in the future. The goal of this type of acquisition should be to interrupt the cycle of property deterioration and vacancy, and should only happen when there is potential to significantly impact a portfolio of property or neighborhood.

- a. Adopt criteria for future acquisitions, some considerations are:
  - **Location:** Must be in one of Kalamazoo's core neighborhoods and in need of sustained support to serve existing renters.
  - **Neighborhood Relationships:** Existing strong relationship with neighborhood organization(s) and/or acquisition is at the request of neighborhood organization.
  - **Portfolio Size:** Size of portfolio has measurable impact on neighborhood and/or is a significant portion of the existing landowners' substandard rental portfolio.
  - **Condition:** Properties must be deteriorated and salvageable.
  - **Partnership:** Philanthropic, government, and other partners commit resources to improving property conditions and supporting renters.
  - **Potential Purchasers:** No other responsible party is interested or able to purchase.
  - **Exit Strategy:** At least 50 percent of current renters are interested and eligible to purchase their homes.
- b. When properties do not meet the full criteria but still have the potential for significant impacts, explore if temporary land bank acquisition could help secure brownfield or other funding for redevelopment.



## Priority 5

# Strategically intervene to support transformational projects.



**Metric:** 25% increase in the number of commercial and industrial projects the KCLBA supports out-county.

In addition to the ongoing work outlined previously, which will likely comprise the bulk of the KCLBA's day-to-day programs and activities, the land bank should be prepared to leverage its powers to support transformational projects as opportunities arise. Like most Michigan land banks, the KCLBA has completed some commercial projects and very few industrial ones. Given the scale of these projects—both financially and in square footage—land banks often function better as strategic partners rather than primary project leads. The KCLBA has learned important lessons through past involvement in commercial projects that should inform any new commercial and industrial projects.

### Strategy 18

## Develop a roadmap for participating in commercial and industrial projects.

The KCLBA needs to determine what types of commercial, industrial, and other special projects it is open to supporting, considering community goals and the land bank's past experiences.

- a. Establish goals for land bank participation in commercial and industrial development, specifically how to serve in a supportive role without taking on a lead developer role.
- b. Create criteria and other decision components for determining what roles the land bank is willing to play and projects it is interested in pursuing.
- c. Work with local partners to understand the property needs of small businesses and commercial and industrial development priorities in neighboring localities, and determine if there is a role for the land bank to play.

### Key Idea

## Leveraging Land Bank Tools for Keystone Projects

The KCLBA can explore how to leverage its powers to facilitate keystone projects like the Vicksburg Mill or the Crown Vantage Paper Mill in the city of Parchment. The Kalamazoo County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (KCBRA) is actively working to address the Crown Vantage Mill, which has been shuttered since 2000, using a multipurpose grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to cover site assessment, planning, and cleanup costs.<sup>24</sup>

↓ Crown Vantage Paper Mill (Photo: Kzoo Cowboy / Flickr)



<sup>24</sup> Brad Devereaux, "Parchment gets \$800K to clean up shuttered paper mill site," MLive, June 14, 2023, <https://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/2023/06/parchment-gets-800k-to-clean-up-shuttered-paper-mill-site.html>.

## Strategy 19

### Expand the use of land bank tools to advance economic opportunities.

Beyond commercial and industrial properties, the land bank has an opportunity to expand its economic development impact by building new relationships and partnerships.

- a. Continue building relationships with small developers and others through Kalamazoo Contractors and Developers Connect.
- b. Build a relationship with Southwest Michigan First to better understand regional economic development priorities and opportunities and how the land bank can help achieve them.
- c. As part of the communication strategy developed in [Strategy 1](#), actively and accessibly communicate about the land bank's powers, programs, and priorities to prospective partners.
- d. Establish relationships with nonprofit developers to expand the range of partners in this work.

#### Key Idea

### Washington Square

The KCLBA's work to revitalize the Washington Square commercial corridor—in partnership with the Edison Neighborhood Association (ENA) and El Concilio—exemplifies a community-centered approach to commercial revitalization. By working with the partners to understand resident needs and attract businesses that reflected those needs and the neighborhood's diversity, Washington Square became fully occupied for the first time in more than 15 years, and all occupants were locally owned businesses. This approach could be replicated in other commercial corridors in partnership with local organizations.

## Strategy 20

### Explore and conduct strategic acquisition and holding.

The land bank currently does not leverage its property-holding tools for projects where it is not the lead agency. Moving forward, doing so could benefit development throughout the county and generate revenue for the land bank.

- a. Re-establish the land bank's real estate committee.
- b. Explore offering temporary land bank ownership as a service, enabling partners to leverage tools such as quiet title, brownfield designation, or holding property tax-free.<sup>25</sup>
- c. Establish goals for strategic acquisition and holding across property types, including housing for special populations.

#### Inspiration from the Field

### Metro Atlanta Land Bank Depository Agreement Program

Through its Land Depository Agreement Program, the Metro Atlanta Land Bank takes temporary ownership of properties on behalf of nonprofit and mission-driven developers seeking to redevelop them for the public good.

In exchange for a fee, the land bank insures, maintains, and holds properties tax-free, leveraging its powers to support community-driven end uses, such as affordable housing.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> In Michigan, properties owned by land banks are automatically considered brownfields. See Brownfield Redevelopment Financing Act, MCL § 125.2652 (2023), available at <https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-258-of-2003.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> "Land Banking Depository Agreement Program," Metro Atlanta Land Bank, (webpage), accessed September 23, 2025, <https://www.metroatlantalandbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Land-Banking-Depository-Agreement-Program-pdf>.

## Priority 6

# Activate vacant lots to improve environmental health and quality of life.



**Metric:** 25% increase in the number of lots with interim reuse agreements.

As the largest owner of vacant lots in the city of Kalamazoo, the KCLBA is responsible for ensuring residents have access to the range of benefits vacant lot reuse can provide, from individual and community health and safety to environmental quality.<sup>27</sup>

While quality, attainable housing will remain a priority over the next five years, the land bank must not overlook opportunities to use vacant lots to temporarily and permanently benefit the environment and residents' quality of life. It is also imperative that vacant lot sales also align with the larger strategy and be treated as community assets, rather than individual parcels to quickly transfer.

## Strategy 21

### Create interim use plans for lots slated for development.

Anticipating future infill housing should not preclude using vacant lots for community benefit in the interim. Beyond routine maintenance, consider how land bank-owned lots can be leveraged to benefit surrounding neighborhoods.

- a. Identify tenable interim uses for vacant lots that align with local zoning regulations and meet community needs.



<sup>27</sup> See a summary of findings at <https://communityprogress.org/resources/vacant-land/>.

### Inspiration from the Field

## Clean & Green

For over 20 years, the Genesee County Land Bank Authority has engaged community members directly in cleaning and maintaining vacant land in its inventory through the Clean & Green Program. Today, more than 60 community groups receive annual stipends to participate, with the program continually refined through participant feedback. University of Michigan researchers found that lots maintained by Clean & Green groups were associated with reductions in overall crime, violent crime, and youth-involved firearm violence in the areas surrounding lots maintained by Clean & Green groups.<sup>28</sup>



↓ Clean & Green mows a vacant lot (Photo: GCLBA)

- b. Include interim uses in the target end uses analysis in [Strategy 3](#).
- c. Assess lease and license tools and create template agreements for interim vacant lot reuse.
- d. Establish eligibility criteria for individuals and organizations seeking to implement interim projects on land bank-owned vacant lots.
- c. Explore community-engaged maintenance and greening programs, such as the Genesee County Land Bank's Clean & Green program.

## Strategy 22

### Make vacant lots available for short- and long-term reuse activities.

Once acceptable uses and the associated tools have been developed, the KCLBA must be proactive in matching lots with eligible users.

- a. Offer vacant lots for short- and long-term reuse to eligible parties via the tools developed in [Strategies 3](#) and [11](#).
- b. Identify opportunities to partner with neighborhood associations on reuse projects.

## Strategy 23

### Strategically acquire, hold, and transfer vacant lots to facilitate priority open space projects.

In addition to offering lots for temporary uses, the KCLBA will coordinate with local and County government on opportunities to use existing and future inventory to implement open space and other environmental projects.

- a. Work with community partners to establish target properties for acquisition.
- b. Develop property-holding opportunities and advertise them to local government partners.
- c. Amend disposition policies to include new tools and reflect new priorities.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> "Community Groups Fighting Blight One Property at a Time," The Genesee County Land Bank Authority, (webpage), accessed December 17, 2025, <https://www.thelandbank.org/cleanandgreen.asp>.

<sup>29</sup> This may include significantly restructuring or even rescinding side lot sales and vacant lot discount pricing.

## Priority 7

# Operate with organizational excellence.



**Metric:** 80% of (20)30 activities are completed.

To achieve the ambitious goals in 30 for (20)30, the KCLBA must be a well-resourced, skilled, effective, and collaborative organization. A strong land bank is essential to Kalamazoo County's success more broadly. Organizational excellence encompasses many factors, and an entire strategic plan could be devoted to operations alone. The activities in this section focus on two areas: elements unique to the KCLBA and the most critical needs for organizational success.

### Strategy 24

#### Ensure staff are supported by a strong organizational culture and equipped to implement strategic goals.

Staff are the backbone of the land bank and essential to accomplish the work of 30 for (20)30. To reach the next level of organizational growth and achieve the priorities outlined above, the land bank must formalize pathways for staff support and development.

- a. Develop standard onboarding and staff training processes.
- b. Develop a multi-year staffing plan, including determining which skills are needed in-house and which can be contracted out.
- c. Provide opportunities for career growth through a formal program or policy covering time and expenses for professional development.
- d. Establish and document key human resource elements, such as pay ranges, job descriptions, performance reviews, and career paths.
- e. Continue providing a fun, nurturing work environment where work-life balance is encouraged and respected.

### Strategy 25

#### Evaluate and modify strategies, activities, and programming.

Incorporating opportunities for reflection and adjustment is critical to implementing a multi-year strategic plan. Not every activity will succeed—some are designed to stretch the land bank, some depend on partners, and some will be sensitive to external factors like the economy and housing market. The land bank must be prepared to adjust accordingly.

- a. Develop an evaluation plan to track outputs and outcomes, collect feedback, and adjust programming as needed. This should include measuring board effectiveness through self-evaluation or another tool.
- b. Document processes, partnerships, and initiatives to preserve institutional knowledge across staff and leadership transitions.
- c. Continue creating and disseminating an annual report.
- d. Update all relevant policies (e.g., acquisition, disposition, personnel, procurement) to reflect changes arising from this plan.
- e. Develop standard contracts and other templates.

## Strategy 26

### Develop diverse and robust funding to grow strategic programming and sustain long-term operations.

The land bank has been a strong fundraiser, often finding creative opportunities to diversify its funding streams. As it expands into the activities of 30 for (20)30, that skill will be vital. The land bank must solidify existing funder relationships and explore new earned revenue opportunities. The Kalamazoo community should commit to supporting the land bank as a key component of neighborhood stability and revitalization for years to come.

- a. Seek expanded philanthropic support through relationship development.
- b. Sustain and grow municipal and County government funding sources.
- c. Explore fee-for-service program offerings, such as quiet title or property-holding services, and develop earned revenue streams, such as event and venue rental fees.
- d. Research individual donor cultivation and explore creating an individual giving strategy.
- e. Clarify the board's role in fundraising.
- f. Proactively collect 5/50 and explore opportunities to maximize its value.
- g. Participate in efforts through the Michigan Land Bank Association (MLBA), the National Land Bank Network (NLBN), and others to secure dedicated state and federal funding for land banks.

## Strategy 27

### Practice good governance and board development.

The board plays a critical role in oversight and governance. To best equip current and future board members, the land bank should standardize board member roles and activities

#### Inspiration from the Field

### Maximizing 5/50 Revenue in Muskegon

The Muskegon County Land Bank Authority often retains title while partners rehab or build, maximizing 5/50 revenue by collecting for the full five years at the value of the improved property rather than for a year or two at the lower original value.

#### Key Idea

### Funding Insights from the Field

According to the National Land Bank Network's 2025 State of Land Banking Survey, funding remains a challenge for land banks across the US, although public funding now comprises a larger share of land bank budgets than in 2023.<sup>30</sup> Nationally, government grants and appropriations account for more than half (57 percent) of land bank funding on average. Other significant sources include real estate revenue (e.g., from rent, sale of land bank properties, and interest on land contracts) and tax recapture.

Michigan land banks follow a similar pattern, with slightly more funding from government sources and a larger share from "other" sources, such as borrowing and investment. In both Michigan and nationally, land banks devote more than half of their budgets to property programming on average, with the second largest share going to staff, and less than 10 percent dedicated to property maintenance and legal, administrative, and other professional services.

30 "State of Land Banking Survey Dashboard," Center for Community Progress, (webpage), <https://communityprogress.org/data-stories/national-land-bank-survey-dashboard/>.

and maintain a consistent onboarding process for new board members.

- a. Develop standard onboarding and training for board members, covering land bank basics, how to read financial statements, and expectations around fund development and cultivating new partnerships.
- b. Develop board member “job descriptions” to clarify the commitment and needed skills, including exploring their role as brand ambassadors.
- c. Use programming, such as the activities described in [Strategy 6](#), to cultivate potential board members.
- d. Build strong relationships with County Commissioners and offer recommendations for board members when seats become vacant.

## Strategy 28

### Reconstitute Vibrant Kalamazoo.

The land bank created a 501(c)(3) subsidiary in 2012 to support fundraising efforts and some programming. Vibrant Kalamazoo has not been actively used in recent years, but it remains a likely useful tool and should remain a subsidiary of the land bank.

- a. Determine the focus of Vibrant Kalamazoo and the role it should play in supporting the land bank, including whether it will have dedicated staff.
- b. Rebuild the Vibrant Kalamazoo board with individuals who can support its identified focus moving forward.
- c. Explore opportunities for other organizational affiliations to sit within Vibrant, such as a Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO).

## Strategy 29

### Leverage the KCLBA’s resources and spending to support the local economy.

The KCLBA spends hundreds of thousands of dollars on services, purchases, and other expenses every year—an important opportunity to support good jobs and local businesses. The KCLBA also has property that can support training and workforce development programs administered by other organizations, supporting job creation and further benefiting the local economy.

- a. Prioritize and track the KCLBA’s local spending.
- b. Leverage land bank-owned property for training



opportunities, such as partnering with skilled trades apprenticeship programs or workforce development programs to have participants complete work.

- c. Provide avenues for small developers to access land bank properties, including exploring co-development opportunities.
- d. Explore entering into more master service agreements to provide consistent work to local businesses and reduce staff time spent procuring services for common, recurring needs.

## Strategy 30

### Actively participate in the larger land bank field through membership organizations and other affiliations and programming.

Land banking is a small but diverse field, and actively connecting with peer organizations is essential to developing robust programming and operations. As the KCLBA aims to be a leader in the field, it must prioritize these connections.

- a. Dedicate time and resources for staff and board participation in MLBA—attending quarterly association meetings, serving on committees, and attending the annual summit—and explore opportunities for staff to take on leadership roles.
- b. Maintain membership in NLBN and dedicate time and resources to participating in its programming.
- c. Support NLBN, MLBA, and others' efforts to improve state and federal policy related to land banks.
- d. Provide regular state and federal policy updates to the land bank board and consider making these updates a standing agenda item.

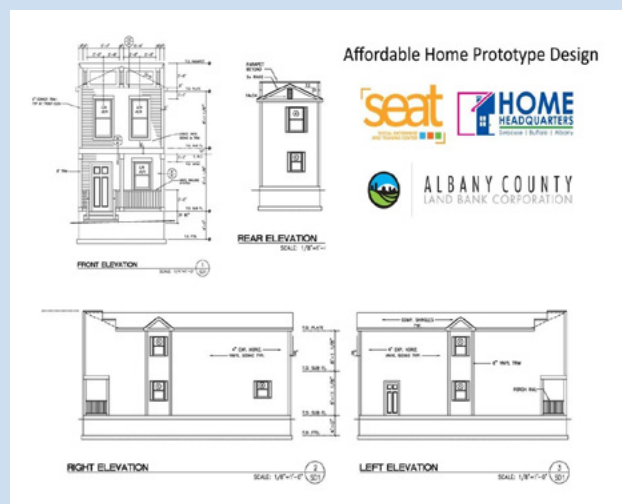
## Inspiration from the Field

### Land Bank Partnerships

Across the country, land banks are partnering with mission-driven developers, community development financial institutions (CDFIs), and others to achieve community goals like property revitalization and affordable homeownership. The Albany County Land Bank in New York works with Home HeadQuarters, Inc. to provide access to capital access for first-time homebuyers from historically underserved communities interested in buying and rehabbing land bank properties.<sup>31</sup>

In Pennsylvania, the Tri-COG Land Bank works with two councils of government, a community land trust, and the local chapter of Rebuilding Together to shepherd properties through the full cycle of revitalization.<sup>32</sup> After acquiring properties leveraging its special powers, the land bank immediately transfers them to Rebuilding Together for rehabilitation or to the community land trust to ensure permanent affordability.

↓ Proposed design of Albany County Land Bank and Home HeadQuarters' affordable homes. (Photo: [Home HeadQuarters](#))



31 "Financial Resources," Albany County Land Bank Corporation, (website), <https://www.albanycountylandbank.org/financialresources>.

32 "Tri-COG Land Bank, Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh Transform Abandoned Properties into Affordable Housing," Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh, (website), <https://trpittsburgh.org/tri-cog-land-bank-rebuilding-together-pittsburgh-transform-abandoned-properties-into-affordable-housing/>.

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## Appendix A

# Planning Process Participants

Through surveys, interviews, and workshops, Community Progress engaged the following individuals, in addition to the KCLBA staff.

### Land Bank Board

**Thomas Whitener**

*Kalamazoo County Treasurer, Land Bank Board Chair*

**Pat Clark**

*Housing Director, CARES, Land Bank Board Vice Chair*

**Riley Lukomski**

*Director Economic Development, Southwest Michigan First, Land Bank Board Treasurer*

**Sharon Ferraro**

*Retired Historic Preservation Coordinator, City of Kalamazoo*

**Antonio Mitchell**

*Director, Community Planning & Economic Development, City of Kalamazoo*

**Barb Ogrin**

*Resident*

**John Taylor**

*Kalamazoo County Commissioner*

### Other Interviewees

**Mary Balkema**

*Director, Kalamazoo County Housing Department*

**Willa DiTaranto**

*Deputy Director, Kalamazoo County Housing Department*

**Macy Rose Walters**

*Brownfield Redevelopment Administrator, Kalamazoo County Department of Planning and Development*

**Rachael Grover**

*Director, Kalamazoo County Department of Planning and Development*

**Rebekah Kik**

*Deputy City Manager, City of Kalamazoo*

**Antonio Mitchell**

*Director, City of Kalamazoo Department of Planning and Economic Development*

**Jamie McCarthy**

*Sustainable Development Coordinator, City of Kalamazoo Brownfield Redevelopment Authority*

**Carol R. Snapp**

*Vice President, Program, Irving S. Gilmore Foundation*

**Von Washington, Jr.**

*Chief Executive Officer, Kalamazoo Promise*

**Sarah Klerk**

*Chief Strategy Officer, Kalamazoo Promise*

**Todd Kuntz**

*Senior Impact Investment Officer, Kalamazoo Community Foundation*

**Bobby J. Hopewell**

*President & Chief Executive Officer, Kabundant, LLC*

**Khalil Adams**

*Executive Coordinator, Kabundant, LLC*

**Sonja Dean**

*Deputy Director, LISC Kalamazoo*

**Dr. Kenlana Ferguson**

*Executive Director, Michigan Transformation Collective*

**Beth Berglin**

*Director of Policy and Strategy, Michigan Transformation Collective*

# Appendix B

## 30 for (20)30 Dashboard

What the KCLBA is striving to achieve by 2030:

Priority	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Ensure land bank powers are appropriately used to address problem properties in Kalamazoo County.					80% of annual staff time is spent on strategic plan-aligned work.
Be an active, collaborative community development partner.					50% increase in formalized partnerships with neighborhood and community organizations.
Support the development of new quality, attainable housing options.					50% of new homes built are a style/ offering other than single family detached.
Preserve and grow neighborhood stability by improving residential property conditions.					50% increase in units improved by land bank.
Strategically intervene to support transformational projects.					25% increase in the number of commercial and industrial projects the KCLBA supports out-county.
Activate vacant lots to improve environmental health and quality of life.					25% increase in the number of lots with interim reuse agreements.
Operate with organizational excellence.					80% of 20(30) activities are completed.

## Appendix C

# Communication Strategy Outline

Land banks need effective communications to build trust with their community, clarify their role to stakeholders, and show their impact. For a small organization with limited staff, the goal is not to do everything, but to focus on communications activities that have the most impact.

This outline provides a framework for developing a communications strategy appropriately sized for the land bank's capacity. It identifies the key components of a strategy, explains why each step is important, and recommends a sequence for implementation.

You can use this as a template for your future strategy, replacing the examples we have included, and adding more context and detail.

### Identify Purpose and Objectives

Identifying why your team is doing communications and how it connects to the land bank's mission and vision ensures that you spend your limited capacity on the highest-impact efforts.

Use this section to define 2-3 communications objectives. For example:

- Increase community understanding of what the land bank is and does.
- Set clearer boundaries with municipal partners about the land bank's role through transparent communication.
- Strengthen the reputation of the land bank as a trusted stewards of community assets.

You should set a measurable indicator for each objective to the extent possible (e.g., website visits to FAQ page, positive feedback from partners, fewer non-related inquiries and questions like "is this the flower shop?").

### Audience Profiles

Knowing who the land bank is speaking to helps shape your content, tone, and priorities.

Identify and name a clear set of audiences. For each audience identify who they are and what they want from the land bank. After identifying your audiences, you should make sure land bank leadership agree that these audiences

(and their order of priority) are correct. Three audiences your team identified on an earlier call were:

- **Community members and partners:** What they want (clarity, local impact), and what the land bank needs from them (trust, participation).
- **Municipal partners:** What they want (land bank as a responsive problem-solver), and what the land bank needs from them (clear boundaries, support).
- **Board of directors:** What they want (clarity and alignment with community goals), and what the land bank needs (support for messaging consistency)

Clarify and build out this list of audiences and their needs in your communications strategy.

### Key Messages

Clear, consistent language builds understanding across your audiences and dispels misconceptions about the land bank's role. It also gives you a salad bar of words for developing everything from website copy to social media content.

Using the mission and vision statement developed during this engagement, draft key messages that you can incorporate into your materials. Think of them like a series of one-sentence bullet points that answer the following questions in plain language:

- Why does the land bank exist?
- What is the short/long-term purpose of the land bank?

- How does the land bank fit into the context of the Kalamazoo community?
- What does the land bank do?
- How does the land bank do it?
- What is your land bank's "call to action" for the community? Why should they support you?

## Communication Channels

Thinking about your priority audiences, ask: "Where do they already go for updates on their neighborhoods?"

List all the communication channels you currently use and do not use (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, newsletters, website, public events). Consider which ones are the best use of your limited time to achieve your stated purpose and objectives. For example, a channel assessment in this portion could look like this:

- **Email Newsletter**
  - **Status:** Currently do not have one.
  - **Goal:** Goal of an email newsletter is maintaining a relationship with existing audience by sending them regular updates with the goal of them engaging with that content in a way that meaningfully and measurably achieves one of our core objectives.
  - **Primary Audience:** Community members and local partners
  - **Assessment/Next Step:** Maintaining an email newsletter is a lot of work, requiring procuring a CRM, designing the newsletter, and sending content regularly. Given current capacity and the primary goal is increasing visibility among new audiences, a newsletter does not make sense at this point.

The above example also serves as elements to critically consider with respect to starting and maintaining an email newsletter. When considering which channels are the best use of your time and capacity, ask yourself:

- How much time do I spend on this each week? (e.g., "three hours a week writing posts for Facebook")
- How much "return" does this get me? (e.g., "two Likes per

Facebook post" and any other analytics Facebook gives you about visibility and reach)

- Is this return worth the time I spend on it? Could I be spending this time on something else?

A small team with limited capacity should focus on maintaining one or two channels well—for example, prioritize updating the website with clear resources and messages and directing people to follow you on Facebook for timely updates and new resources.

## Leveraging Partners' Communications Channels

Consider low-lift ways to reach partners with audiences that overlap with the land bank. Some of the places residents already go to for updates on their neighborhoods are places where you can share your information.

It may not make sense for the land bank to start a newsletter—but municipal partners and elected officials already have them, and their audiences would benefit by having land bank news included. Identify contacts at organizations with these communication channels and ask them to share key updates with their audience as appropriate. For example, the land bank should request that new opportunities for residents be included in the City View newsletter, because the City has a shared interest in residents accessing those opportunities.

There may also be communication channels the land bank can access without contacts, such as hyperlocal Facebook groups you can join and post updates to.

## In-Person Visibility

Though not solely the purview of a communications strategy, showing up at community events with a branded table and a big sign is a great way to let residents know the land bank exists and build relationships with neighborhood organizations. Communications can support community engagement efforts like this in a few ways. For example:

- Develop a calendar of local events you can set up a table at or support as a sponsor—and not just the housing-related ones. You can show up at a local "Halloween

Spooktacular” or 5k race, or partner with other local nonprofits to host public events aimed at your shared goals of neighborhood revitalization and community service, such as community cleanups, school supplies distribution events, community vaccine clinics.

- Develop branded event materials that prominently display the land bank’s name and logo (e.g., a tablecloth with the logo, a banner).
- Develop small, low-cost materials you can hand out at events, like postcards with your website URL and a QR code that links to an FAQ page, branded stickers, or printed one-page resource guides.

## Content Strategy

A content strategy describes what you should prioritize developing for the communication channels you identified above. For example:

- On the **website**, prioritize:
  - Educational content, like a prominent FAQ about what the land bank is and is not
  - Prominent resources, like “how-to” guides
- On **social media**, prioritize:
  - Lower-effort updates like before/after photos, new resources you have posted on the website, updates on processes, sharing positive news articles about land bank work
- As **handouts** for key stakeholders (like residents and municipal partners), prioritize:
  - One-pagers that draw on content from the FAQ explaining what a land bank is what the Kalamazoo County Land Bank does

## Website Improvements

The website is the first place people go to learn about the land bank, and it can be a major source of confusion if the information on it is incorrect or out of date. However, a full website redesign is an expensive and time-intensive undertaking. Improving the website should start with understanding what needs to change, and what can be improved easily:

- Create a sitemap—a list of every page on the website. (You can view automatically created sitemaps by going to [https://kalamazoolandbank.org/sitemap\\_index.xml](https://kalamazoolandbank.org/sitemap_index.xml) to get a starting point, which also includes date a page was last updated.) Consider setting it up as a three-column table in an Excel document. For every page, note whether it needs to be updated/deleted/remain as-is, and how high-priority the change is. For example:
  - **Webpage:** <https://kalamazoolandbank.org/programs/>
  - **Needs:** Update outdated content and paste text on the webpage, rather than embedding as an image (to make it more accessible)
  - **Priority:** High
- Identify any pages that need to be created, like an FAQ page explaining what the land bank does, how it operates, and how residents can engage.

If capacity allows, consider implementing Google Analytics 4 and training staff on basic GA4 use (this is a quality training course we recommend that will take you from start-to-finish). This will help you track and measure success, like seeing how much traffic comes to your website from social media and Google searches, which pages are your most-visited, and more.

## Media Relations

Local media amplifies local awareness, uplifts success stories, and boosts your credibility. Remember, however, that local reporters will not cover something simply because you ask them to—it must be newsworthy and important to residents. The media relations strategy portion of your communications strategy should outline your goals for media relations (i.e., which types of stories you hope media will tell) and your potential vulnerabilities, and identify a few key outlets you hope to build or maintain relationships with. To develop the media strategy you should also:

- Develop a short media list—a spreadsheet of local reporters who cover issues related to housing, neighborhood stabilization, or local government (also include folks who run community print and e-newsletters or blogs). Include their name, email address, whether they have written about the land bank before, and who holds the relationship.

- Sit down with land bank leadership and stakeholders to answer the question: “What stories do we want local media to tell about the land bank, and why?” Perhaps it is something about the rental housing portfolio, a recent positive success story, or a new program you want residents to be aware of.
- In the same conversation, identify potential vulnerabilities: “What kind of local media story would be a worst-case-scenario for us?” Ask yourself if you are ready for that story if it published tomorrow, and what you can do to mitigate it or preemptively draft talking points in response.
- Check in with local reporters on your media list to make sure they know you are available as a resource. Offer to provide simple quotes or updates to strengthen coverage of neighborhood revitalization efforts.
- Identify who will be the spokesperson for the land bank, and make sure they feel comfortable with the messages.

## Roles and Capacity

With limited staff capacity, clarify who is responsible for what and how to prioritize the elements of the communications strategy. For example:

- Who is the main point of contact for communications-related questions?
- How many hours per week are they dedicated to communications activities?
- Who is the spokesperson in media requests?
- How will you create and manage a content calendar that indicates who will do what, and when?

## Prioritizing Steps in Phases

Based on our understanding of the land bank’s limited capacity, current gaps and pain points, and what is needed most urgently, the following is a suggested order of priority for the items in the communications strategy (though you should refine once you develop the actual strategy).

### Phase 1: Goals, Audiences, and Messages

- Write through the communications strategy above:

Define purpose and objectives of the communications team; Identify core audiences and build their profiles; Identify and prioritize communication channels, and purpose of earned media

- Develop key messages, using mission/vision developed with Community Progress
- Develop an FAQ about the land bank

### Phase 2: Content Assessment and Creation

- Create website sitemaps and prioritize pages for creation and improvement
- Establish purpose of posting on social media channels and create a schedule for regularly posting content
- Develop a media list and goals/storylines for media outreach
- Train staff and board on key messages
- Develop plan for tabling at public community events

### Phase 3: Implement and Assess

- Update and reorganize content on the website
- Pitch stories or engagement opportunities to reporters and other community outlets
- Develop additional engagement materials as needed
- Host community events as needed

## Conclusion

For a small team, effective communication does not mean doing more—it means focusing your limited resources on the things that will have the most impact on building community connections. This communications strategy outline and template suggests starting with key messages, updating foundational materials, and leveraging partner events and proactive media relations to help the land bank increase visibility and strengthen understanding of its mission.

Community Progress is pleased to continue to provide guidance, message refinement, and support as the land bank builds its capacity in communications and beyond.

## Appendix D

# Geographic Areas of Focus and Neighborhood Housing Market Typologies

As part of our data analysis work, Community Progress explored the residential housing markets in Kalamazoo County to determine neighborhood market typologies, detailed below. Those typologies helped identify neighborhoods most impacted by systemic VAD property and helped inform where the KCLBA should prioritize which activities.

### Geographic Areas of Focus

This table serves as a quick reference guide for where common land bank activities should occur based on *30 for (20)30*. Specifically, it shows fully aligned, to-be-deermined, and unaligned activities.

- Aligned
- To-Be-Determined
- Not Aligned

	Northside, Edison, and Other Core Neighborhoods	City of Kalamazoo	Out-County
Vacant house rehab	Aligned	Aligned	Not Aligned
Owner-occupied home repair	Not Aligned	Not Aligned	Aligned
One- to four-unit residential new construction	Aligned	Not Aligned	Not Aligned
Multifamily housing new construction	Aligned	To-Be-Determined	Not Aligned
Demolition	Aligned	To-Be-Determined	Not Aligned
Large scale vacant lot reuse and/or green or open space development	To-Be-Determined	Aligned	Not Aligned
Quiet title fee-for-service	To-Be-Determined	To-Be-Determined	To-Be-Determined
Property depository (i.e., land banking)	To-Be-Determined	To-Be-Determined	Not Aligned
Homeward Promise: (future) acquisition of rental properties for repair and conversion to homeownership	To-Be-Determined	Not Aligned	Not Aligned
Commercial or mixed-use new construction	To-Be-Determined	Not Aligned	Not Aligned
Small-scale vacant lot reuse	To-Be-Determined	Not Aligned	Not Aligned
Traditional brownfield projects (commercial or industrial)	Not Aligned	Not Aligned	To-Be-Determined
Large-scale transformational projects	Not Aligned	Not Aligned	To-Be-Determined

## What is a typology?

- Creates a composite sense of relative residential housing market strength or weakness for small areas within a city
- Does not tell you what to do in any area, they are a tool to
  - Help you evaluate ideas for an area
  - Help you figure out how to pursue a strategy successfully
- Can be used as a tool for land use planning or for the feasibility assessment of development alternatives
- Helps give a sense of the market for majority of residential properties present in a neighborhood

## What is the process?

The neighborhood unit used for the typology is the census tract, which allows for a reasonably fine-grained analysis.

- Five main variables aggregated and calculated
- Data grouped into tiers
- Values normalized to 5
- Minimum (1) and maximum (5) scores for each variables
- Variables combined for a composite score for each census tract

## Limitations

- American Community Survey data has severe limitations across the board. Because it is a sample survey, it has a significant margin of error at the census tract level.
- Changes in census tract borders from 2010 to 2020 required some estimations for combining multi-year data. We followed the Census' crosswalk guidance as able.
- We were not able to include property tax delinquency or foreclosure data, which could add additional detail but likely would not significantly alter the current typologies.
- We looked at market strength and weakness in the Kalamazoo context (not national or regional). Typologies created by Community Progress are not directly comparable across locations.

## Observations

- Census tracts that scored "very challenged" generally align with where the KCLBA owns the most inventory and is already focusing programs and investments.
- All typologies have seen improvement over time, including very challenged.
- Challenged markets are still fairly strong when compared nationally.
- Activities and interventions for challenged urban markets should be different than for challenged rural markets.

## Kalamazoo County Neighborhood Housing Market Typologies

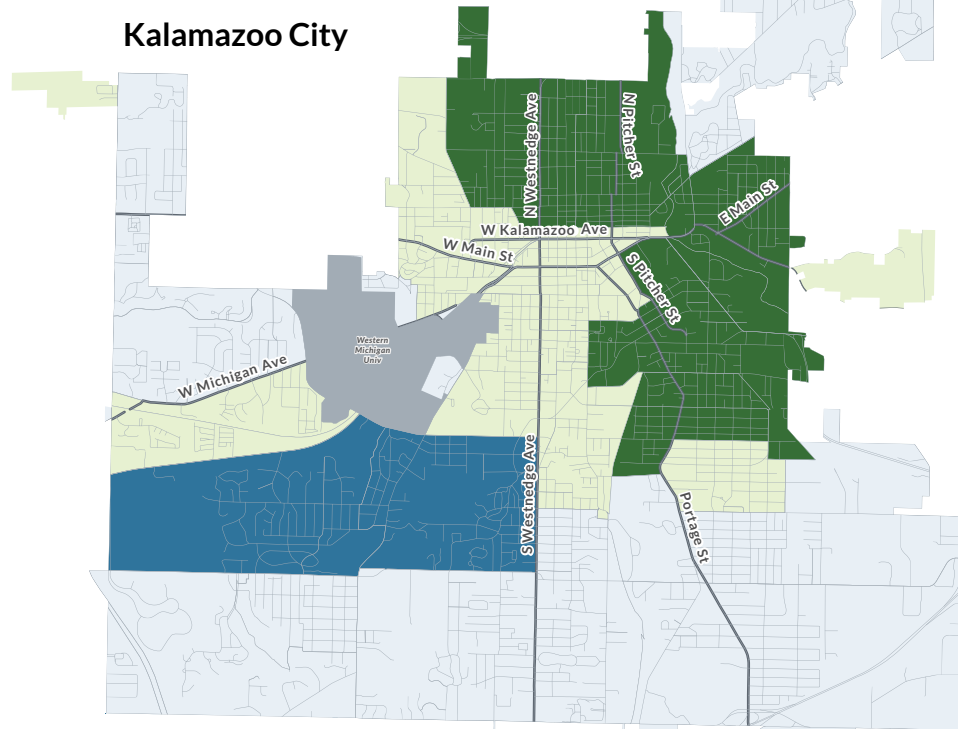
Variable	What it Measures	How it Was Calculated	Source
<b>Sales Ratio</b>	Measures whether the volume of arm's length sales is adequate to ensure absorption of the normal turnover of residential properties in the market. 12+% is considered optimal.	Arm's length residential sales (sales with a value >\$10,000) were divided into the total number of residential properties in the census tract. To reduce the effect of annual variations, the composite ratio for 2022 through 2024 was used.	Kalamazoo County Equalization Department, 2022-2024; 2025
<b>Median Sales Price</b>	Price buyers are willing to pay for houses in a neighborhood is an indicator of its market strength.	After removing sales (<\$10,000) the median was calculated. Average of median prices from 2022 to 2024 was used.	Kalamazoo County Equalization Department, 2022-2024; 2025
<b>Mortgage Ratio</b>	Percentage of buyers who plan to live in the house (homebuyers) as distinct from those who see it as an investment and rent it out is an indicator of the desirability of the neighborhood and its market strength.	The ratio between total sales and the number of owner-occupied sales (as identified by the Equalization Department). The composite ratio for 2022 through 2024 was used.	Kalamazoo County Equalization Department, 2022-2024; 2025
<b>Residential Address Vacancies</b>	Number of residential vacancies in a neighborhood reflects the ability of the market to absorb the inventory and is an indicator of market strength.	Average percentage of residential addresses vacant for more than 90 days in the third quarter of 2022-2024.	US Department of Urban and Housing Development (HUD), 2022-2024
<b>Socioeconomic Index</b>	Measures variables that are likely to influence or be influenced by market conditions. It is not a measure of the "quality" of an area (something which is affected by many other factors and is highly subjective). Variables included were: 1) Median household income (double weighted); 2) Percentage of adults with a BA or higher degree; 3) Percentage of adults in the labor force; 4) Percentage of single-family homes that are owner-occupied; 5) Change in the number of households between 2010 and 2020.	The tract values were divided into quintiles for each variable. Values were then normalized to 5.	American Community Survey 2018-2023; 2010-2015

# Residential Housing Market Typology Composite Scores

## Legend

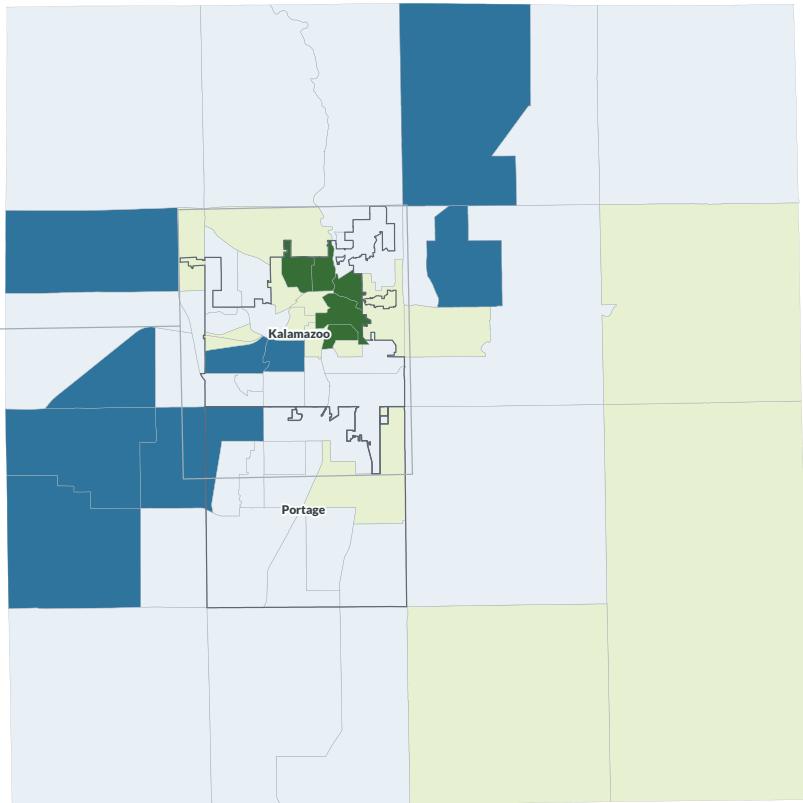
- Very Challenged
- Challenged
- Active
- Very Active

### Kalamazoo City



0 0.35 0.7 Miles

### Kalamazoo County



0 1.5 3 Miles



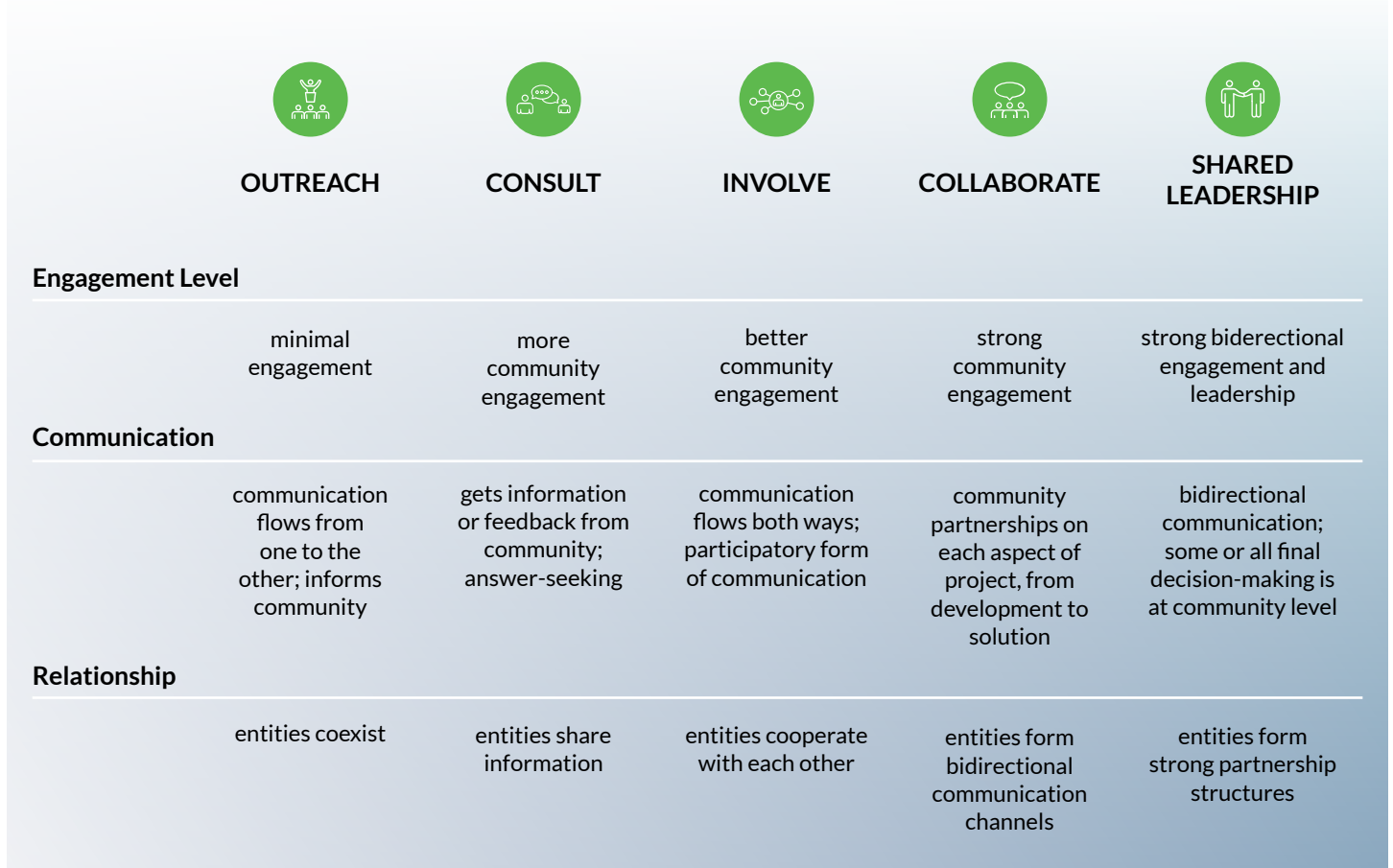
Sources: (Kalamazoo County) Kalamazoo County, 2022-2024; PolicyMap 2025; US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2022-2024; American Community Survey, 2018-2023 and 2010-2015 (Kalamazoo City) US Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2018-2023

Map and data analysis by the Center for Community Progress

# Appendix E

## Levels of Community Engagement

As discussed in [Priority 2](#), the KCLBA seeks to deepen its relationships with existing partners and explore ways to increase resident leader engagement. This Community Engagement Continuum offers a range of engagement levels to consider. As the KCLBA implements this plan, it will offer multiple avenues for consistent, authentic engagement in the development and execution of activities and programming.



This framework was adapted by Community Progress from the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, developed by the International Association for Public Participation. Learn more at <https://www.iap2.org/page/SpectrumEvolution>.

## Appendix F

# Homeward Promise Decision Tree

A critical component of *30 for (20)30* is a property-by-property and person-by-person strategy for Homeward Promise renters. Community Progress proposed the following decision tree (see next page), activities, and criteria to determine that strategy. The KCLBA should review and adopt a final version.

### Outreach Process

The land bank must develop a standard process for asking renters about homeownership. This should involve some pre-assessment by land bank staff (e.g., rent payment record) before approaching individuals. The outreach process should be documented and renters who are unsure or not ready to decide should be asked annually—ideally ahead of lease renewal—if their interest has changed.

### Qualification Process

- Modify based on Detroit’s Make It Home program (see case study on [page 31](#))
- Some eligibility requirements could be:
  - current on rent, with good tracking record of paying on time
  - can afford to buy the property
  - can afford ongoing expenses (consider available property tax credits and exemptions)
  - not engaging in criminal activities that threaten the well-being of neighbors
  - completion of housing or financial counseling programs offered by HUD-certified organizations in Kalamazoo

### Purchase Options

- Land contracts
  - Land bank serves as “lender,” offering purchaser favorable terms
  - Land bank supports purchaser in connecting to conventional lending at end of land contract
  - Land bank should be open to extending land contract terms for additional years when appropriate
- Conventional mortgage
  - Land bank builds partnership(s) with local lenders for more specific support
- Cash
  - Land bank helps renter escrow purchase price over time, perhaps setting aside part of their monthly rent payment

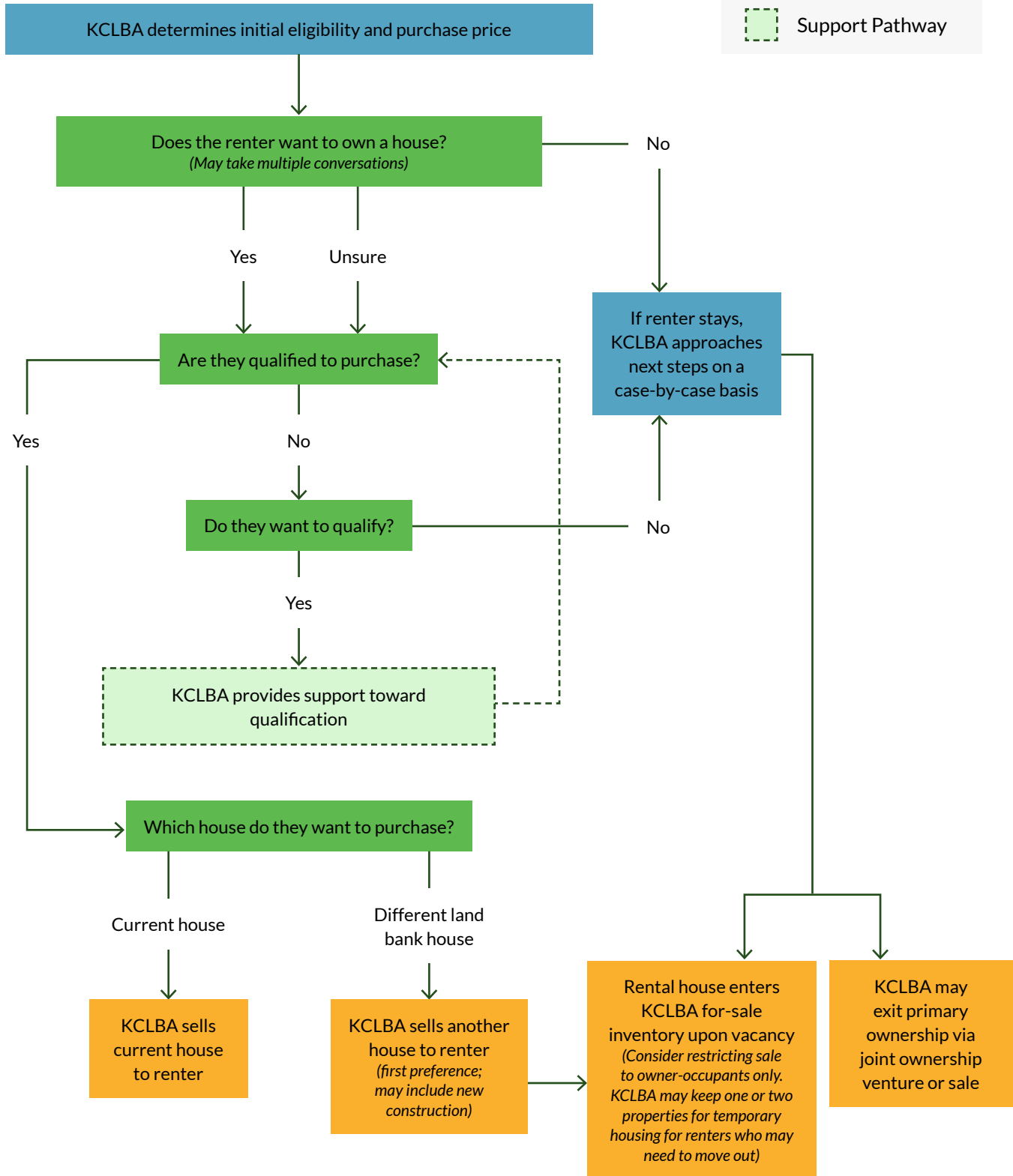
### Land Bank Exit Strategy

The land bank will annually review the number of Homeward Promise (or other rental property) renters who are not pursuing homeownership and, if number falls below a to-be-established threshold, the land bank will explore options for a responsible transfer of ownership. Those options may include entering into joint ownership ventures with neighborhood organizations, selling or transferring ownership to a housing authority or other nonprofit housing provider, or selling to a responsible landlord with proven track record and existing portfolio in the neighborhood. If the land bank completely exits ownership, any transfer should include some tool to ensure current renters can remain, such as an affordability period or rent restrictions.

### Homeward Promise Decision Tree

A framework for supporting renters in achieving homeownership while positioning the KCLBA to transition out of its role as landlord.

- KCLBA Action
- Decision
- Outcome/Exit
- Support Pathway



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