



Citizens Advisory Board for Residential/ Urban Renewal

Presented to the

Caribou City Council



Submitted December 9, 2019

Preface

On April 22, 2019, at a regularly scheduled meeting of the Caribou City Council, Mayor R. Mark Goughan created the ***Citizens Advisory Board for Residential Rural/Urban Renewal*** and appointed the following citizens to serve on it: James Cerrato, Timothy Ring, Jay Kamm, Karen Rockwell Ouellette, Jessica Plourde and Paul Camping (who will serve the Chair).

The Mayor read from a prepared statement in which he stated, “In the interest of protecting both rural and urban neighborhoods from blight emanating from uninhabitable and rundown housing, I hereby create and impanel a Citizens Advisory Board for Residential Rural & Urban Renewal. This board will consist of volunteers who will:

- 1) Study the problems to determine the causes of vacant and substandard housing
- 2) Make recommendation to the Council intended to reverse the conditions which will make our neighborhoods stronger and safer
- 3) Make recommendations that will ultimately increase Caribou’s Valuation
- 4) Recommendations made on or before December 1, 2019, to the Caribou City Council.”

And so, the Board convened its first meeting on June 4, 2019. We met a total of 7 times and produced this report. We met with Caribou Zoning Administrator and Code Enforcement Officer Kenneth Murchison, Jr., and others, to determine what Caribou and our neighbors in Fort Fairfield and Presque Isle are doing to combat blight. Then we expanded our research to include other cities such as Sanford and Portland, Maine as well as Detroit, Michigan and the State of Pennsylvania. We discovered some excellent reference material regarding ***Land Banking***, and as we reviewed and discussed this information, it became abundantly clear to us that we did not need to “***reinvent the wheel***”, as other cities have provided us and others with a blueprint to follow.

Accordingly, that material has been appended to this report for your edification and future use.

It was also determined that blight begets blight. The implication here is that a blighted property, to some extent, negatively impacts the surrounding properties and is often the first impression of the community. Therefore the committee felt that commercial, industrial and agricultural properties should be included in any program devised to improve substandard housing in our neighborhoods.

We hope that the Council and city staff will find this report useful. It is important to note that a key component in any program instituted to address the issues of blight and substandard housing is a universal understanding among all Caribou residents that our City is ailing and changes need to be made to restore it to its former grandeur. And this understanding must be combined with a rock-solid, unanimous and bullet-proof commitment from our elected officials that this anti-blight fight is worth fighting for. It will require updates to the City Code and a cultural shift in our community that includes copious amounts of public outreach. Without the Council's leadership and a zero-tolerance approach, applied uniformly throughout the four corners of Caribou, we will surely fail.

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Introduction

This report was authored by six diverse individuals who care deeply about our families, our homes and our community. This level of caring serves as our motivation for participating in the effort to reduce or eliminate blight in Caribou. We have selflessly given of our time throughout this past summer to examine our current conditions, try to understand their many causes and make recommendations to alleviate them.

In the beginning, none of us knew just how widespread blight was in Caribou until we were appointed to this Board. Then, as we defined and discussed the problem, it seemed like everywhere we looked we were able to find substandard buildings in one form or another. And it mattered not if we were within or outside of the Urban Compact Zone; we found barns on the verge of collapse with holes in their roofs, unused broken-down farm equipment rusting in the elements, a commercial trucking company with the ruins of a collapsed building in their yard and a multitude of residential homes with numerous code violations. Some of the homes were vacant while others were not. And they were all within easy sight of the road because no buffering existed.

Surprisingly, one of the most egregious examples of substandard housing is found on Main Street at the City-owned Trailer Park next to the Airport. Everyone agrees that something needs to be done there but nobody is doing anything. Closing it through the process of attrition sends the wrong message to the community. It says that dealing with blight and substandard housing is not a priority and it's OK to procrastinate. The City must lead by example and any new initiative to fight blight must be delayed until the city takes care of its own!

This Advisory Board unanimously agreed on one important factor; Blight is like a cancerous tumor that left untreated, will metastasize and overwhelm our neighborhoods resulting in an accelerated population decline and a substantial loss in the City's real estate valuation. It will not cure itself! As such, like an Oncologist surgically removing a patient's tumor, so too must the City act quickly to remove the "diseased flesh" from our neighborhoods.

In this simile, the surgeon is the Code Enforcement Officer supported by staff from all city departments. They are the tip of the spear in the fight against blight and they need the full and unwavering support of the City Manager and the City Council. We believe that in laying the groundwork for change, new and more effective tools are required to quickly respond to areas of blight as soon as it is discovered.

Land Banking, the use of Eminent Domain and demolition are just some of the tools the city can use to fight blight and encourage reinvestment in our community. When these strategies, and others, are properly executed, property values and tax revenues will increase.

This report presents the Council with much important information. However, the real value of this report lies not in what we have written, but in the publications, we have appended to it. We suggest that after reading this report, one goes directly to Appendix B and D and familiarize yourself with the publications from the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania entitled, **From Blight to Bright** and **We Can Do This**. Here you will find easy to understand, step by step processes on how to begin the blight fight.

Understanding Blight and Substandard Housing

The first order of business when determining how to combat the problem of blight in Caribou is to understand how the term is defined. For the purposes of this report, we consider a blighted property to be any land or buildings that are dilapidated, unsafe, and/or in unsightly condition. This is inclusive of both commercial and residential premises and structures, including lots, which may be vacant, uninhabitable, and potentially hazardous because of their condition. We realize this is a broad definition and blight can be considered in a variety of circumstances. It could occur in a simple situation, such a lawn that is overgrown, or in a more complicated instance, such as structures where the roof has caved-in. Simply stated, blight occurs where there are visible signs of neglect and deterioration sufficient to cause harm to health, safety or public welfare.

As a group, we felt our focus should encompass all of the aforementioned circumstances. We wanted to take a broad view and try to determine the causes of blight and work to understand how the context of substandard housing is affecting our city. We know that the existence of blighted properties can prevent growth and prosperity. It can scare away potential investors, thus steering them to other areas, driving both business and potential tax dollars away. Knowing the impact can be severely detrimental to any community, we feel strongly that swift action is needed to combat this growing epidemic.

What are some of the causes of blight?

Behind every blighted property is a sad story. Many of the stories begin with a dream being realized like owning a home and having a place to raise a family. Others may dream of a place to start a business or begin farming. And then tragedy strikes in one form or another and the dream becomes a nightmare. Families fall apart and businesses go bankrupt and the home or commercial property is no longer affordable. Sadly, the real estate, which

was a big part of that dream, goes into foreclosure. Lenders are then faced with the problem of recovering their investment. Sometimes ownership transfers quickly, many times it does not and the vacant buildings languish in limbo. Property maintenance suffers. Burglary is commonplace and fires, accidental or otherwise, are soon to follow. Vandals, squatters and drug dealers now claim the premises as their own and, even if their time there is fleeting, they leave their mark! The property is now not marketable and inevitably the city acquires it for unpaid taxes and blight becomes a reminder of someone's failure.

It is nearly impossible to prevent but not impossible to fix. Regrettably, all structures are vulnerable to vacancy and blight, as they are all directly tied to our personal fortunes which rise and fall throughout our lifetimes. Of course, there are other factors that lead to blighted properties. Caribou has a very old housing stock that is not comparable with residential homes built today in accordance with modern building codes. Older homes are difficult and expensive to heat. They are also expensive to repair. Homeowners die and their heirs, if any, do not want to inherit the property. As a result, the property is sold as a fixer-upper, but if the new owner can't afford to make repairs, degradation continues. Then, the house or commercial property becomes more and more expensive to rehab and blight secures a foothold in the neighborhood.

In some instances, owners simply walk away from homes because the cost to repair or remodel the property is greater than the house is worth, especially if asbestos abatement is required. In an aging population, "Do-it-YourSelfers" are literally dying breed and this dilemma is compounded by a paucity of qualified contractors available to work on home repairs. And some property owners just don't care about property maintenance. They abuse their land and its structures and they may never change voluntarily. In these hardcore cases, the force of the law may be the only remedy!

Fighting blight is an important part of Economic Development.

Blight free neighborhoods are strong welcoming neighborhoods that provide the type of environment that is in high demand by those individuals who start or manage companies. A suitable place to live and raise a family is absolutely essential in attracting and retaining the type of individuals that

are the drivers of commerce and industry. Quality schools, medical services, places of worship and other public amenities are also important, but in the final analysis, there is no substitute for a safe neighborhood in which to live.

An important key to a successful economic development program is for a municipality to have a healthy community development program in place first. It must concentrate its limited resources on the things it can control and not on the things it can't. Geography, an aging population, and harsh winter weather are negative factors that could influence many potential business people to avoid Caribou when searching for a location to expand or start their business. One way to overcome those negative factors is to concentrate resources on developing strong blight free neighborhoods.

How Does Blight Affect Our City and What Are The Consequences of Allowing Blight to Exist?

Blighted properties have a significant negative impact on neighborhood house values and the quality of life for its inhabitants. And, as blighted properties continue to deteriorate, they eventually get demolished by the city at taxpayer expense. This puts upward pressure on the mil rate twice; first from the expense of demolition and second from the loss of tax revenue that this property used to generate.

Additionally, the Caribou Utility District must bear the expense of having to remove meters from the vacant buildings and place liens on properties for uncollected sewer and water fees, most of which will never be collected. The C.U.D. revenue budget is also adversely affected.

Blighted properties also strain the resources of the city by causing extra work for the police and fire departments and the code enforcement officer. Furthermore, they are a magnet for crime and drug activity. There are numerous studies that have found that as properties become vacant, criminal activity increases. This is commonly referred to as the "Broken Window Theory." Originally developed by social scientists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, it is the idea that visible signs of disorder such as a single broken window will lead to further crime. These additional crimes can range from more broken windows and graffiti, to squatters

trespassing and homicides. Recently, in Detroit, Michigan, when workers were clearing a blight infested neighborhood they discovered a body of a woman who was later determined to have been murdered.

Blighted properties and vacant houses cause abundant health and safety hazards. A few of the hazards include fires due to accumulated trash from squatters, faulty electrical wiring, and infestations by insects and rodents. As blighted properties deteriorate, they can become structurally unsafe creating the potential of physical harm.

Blight is a strong deterrent to economic investment and leads visitors to form negative opinions about our neighborhoods. When word gets out that certain street addresses are risky, property values plummet and homes become difficult or impossible to sell.

The Role of Code Enforcement

During research conducted by the Advisory Board, several publications were reviewed. The **From Blight to Bright - A Comprehensive Toolkit for Pennsylvania**, developed by the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania, states *“Municipalities must have a legal framework to enforce, whether it is in the form of a comprehensive code or individual targeted laws. Dealing with a potential violation as swiftly as possible is the most cost-effective approach to preventing blight and abandonment. The most severe actions are reserved for long-term vacant properties that threaten a community’s health and safety.”* The report also states that *“Code enforcement officials have some responsibility for nearly every aspect of a municipality’s response to vacant properties, including identifying, tracking, and responding to all types of abandoned property issues.”*

Caribou has one full-time Zoning Administrator and Code Enforcement Officer, a Chief Building Official, a Deputy Building Official, a Health Officer, and a contracted Local Plumbing Inspector. The Code Enforcement Department was combined with the Tax Assessment office in 2014. The Department is responsible to facilitate voluntary compliance with local ordinances set forth in the city code; the building, energy, plumbing, health and life safety codes adopted by the State of Maine; and must follow-up on violations of the ordinances.

Land uses and buildings are regulated by a Citywide Zoning ordinance, Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code (MUBEC), International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC), and the City works with the State's Electrical Inspector for electrical permits. While the Advisory Board believes that the tools are in place to help reduce the amount of blight in the community, they need to be more proactively utilized.

We believe stricter enforcement and strong adherence to existing codes will help prod reluctant owners into fixing and maintaining their property.

The following are the recommendations of the committee:

Administration

- Ensure that the City's Code Enforcement Officer, Building Inspectors, and Local Plumbing Inspector are fully certified and obtain the required recertification credits needed to maintain certification.
- Proactively enforce the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC).
- The CEO, Building Officials, and Health Officer should work closely in the identification and mitigation of Dangerous Buildings.

Ordinances

Work with the Planning Board to:

- Amend codes and regulations relating to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy (CoO) to include the rehabilitation of the property.
- Develop standards in applicable ordinances that require all code violations to be cleared within 18 months before a CoO is issued.
- Develop a fine or ticketing system for properties in violation of the IPMC.
- Review ordinances to ensure that the merger or joining of adjacent lots is affordable and easy with minimal oversight by the Planning Board.

City Council

- Review the workload of the CEO and Building Officials to determine how more proactive enforcement could be completed.
- Commit to investing in legal fees and staff time to following up and resolve non-responsive and difficult cases.
- Ensure the legality of, and follow through with, the lien process on property owners who fail to pay penalties.
- Strongly consider the creation of a Land Bank. (See Land Bank section).

Are There Barriers to Fighting Blight?

The short answer is yes, there could be many potential barriers that might impede the City's ability to deal with substandard housing. For example:

- The City Council may lack the political will to embark on a revolutionary endeavor that requires a substantial shift in the culture of property ownership in Caribou.
 - The anti-blight programs might be poorly presented to the public causing citizens to become outraged over the enforcement component causing the Council to repeal that part of the code.
 - Some members of the Council may believe that the money could be better spent elsewhere or threaten to raise taxes to pay for the programs.
 - Lawsuits could be brought by property owners who allege that the new anti-blight laws or codes are unconstitutional causing the effort to stall.
 - PLEASE NOTE: *While this Committee believes that all measures proposed or described in our report and the relevant appended publications are lawful, we have not sought a legal opinion to determine if they are consistent with Maine law.*
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Creating A Favorable Political Consensus

In a perfect world, the Caribou City Council would be unanimous in their resolve to institute programs and dedicate resources to the blight fight. Regrettably, unanimity seldom occurs there. However, we believe the public would be far more likely to accept a zero-tolerance anti-blight initiative, and the barriers listed above would be easier to overcome if everyone knew that the entire Council stood firmly, shoulder to shoulder behind the effort.

Once the Council organizes its resources and begins implementing its programs, they should invite County and State Representatives to a meeting where they can announce their intentions and request their participation and/or assistance, should the Council determine that new legislation would be beneficial to their effort.

And finally, timely public hearings should be held in which residents are given ample opportunity to voice their opinions or submit them in writing. Outreach at this juncture is critical to enlisting the much-needed support of the community.

Public Education and Outreach

During a review of appended publications, public education and outreach were mentioned as the means to draw attention to blighted housing conditions and as a method for identifying solutions that the Advisory Board may not have thought of. Community outreach gives citizens an opportunity to be heard, to learn more about the issues, and to participate in shaping development. Targeted outreach efforts can include specific groups that are not usually present in the decision-making process.

The Advisory Board believes that careful planning for education and outreach may make the difference between developing a program(s) that works with wide-spread support or one that ends divisively.

Currently, city officials are undertaking a comprehensive planning process. A key component of that program is public participation and community visioning. A thoughtful and innovative approach to developing a public input program may be a way to begin educating a large portion of Caribou's residents on the current conditions within the city and allow the public to provide meaningful input into the planning process. It is also a great time for officials to think "outside the box" when it comes to public education.

The Committee recommends the following:

- Utilize public access television to the greatest extent practical.
- Create and submit monthly (or more frequently) articles for the weekly newspapers/web site/blog regarding issues, common violations, grant and program opportunities, procedures, contact information, and other information.
- Develop brief educational videos for the city's website, YouTube, and other venues that present facts and information about blighted conditions, programs, funding opportunities, code enforcement, assessing, and other issues. Update as new opportunities arise.
- Host targeted workshops with realtors, developers, and neighborhood associations. Keep the meetings as short as possible, set a workable and achievable agenda, and identify specific goals for the meeting(s). Host them "there" rather than at the city office.
- Utilize electronic survey tools, such as Survey Monkey, to obtain resident input and suggestions.
- Partner with the Caribou Housing Authority, Recreation Department, Utilities District, and others to convey a consistent message.

Formulating A Comprehensive Plan To Eliminate Blight

Caribou has a strong history of planning for the future and has adopted at least three modern comprehensive plans. These plans date back to 1992 and have been updated to reflect the changing conditions within the City. At the time of the writing of this report, City Officials are in the process of updating the most recent plan (2014).

The City is required under Title 30-A Chapter 187: The Planning and Land Use Regulation Act (known as the Growth Management Act) to have an adopted and consistent comprehensive plan that supports the zoning ordinance. While not a legal document, it serves as the “business plan” for the community and there are legislative incentives for adopting a plan that is consistent with the Growth Management Act. These include but are not limited to:

- ☐ The community can enact legitimate zoning, impact fee, and rate of growth ordinances;
- ☐ Require state agencies to comply with local zoning standards;
- ☐ Qualify for preferred status with many state competitive grant programs;
- ☐ Guide state growth-related capital investment towards locally-chosen growth areas;

The Advisory Board believes that strategies should concentrate on those measures over which Caribou has control, such as regulatory provisions of ordinances or freeing up of surplus land for housing projects. It is important that specific staff, agencies, or organizations be assigned responsibility. Timetables should be discussed, as should the question of whether Caribou should commit financial support to an endeavor. Potential strategies to be included in the updated comprehensive plan may include:

- Develop a housing rehabilitation program for tax acquired homes which allows for repairs to be made to the structure, where feasible, and then places them up for sale. Funds from sales would go towards the rehabilitation of additional homes. An alternative strategy could be developed which forms a stronger relationship with the Caribou Housing Authority. It could determine if said property would qualify for inclusion in its “*Home Ownership*” program and then transfer the property to eligible participants. Utilize HUD and other funds to underwrite the rehabilitation costs of those homes.
- City officials will apply for Community Development Block Grant Housing Assistance funds for the development and expansion of multi-family units.

- City officials will annually contact the Aroostook County Action Program for information on the availability of rental vouchers/assistance and monitor trends.
- Apply for a CDBG-Planning Grant to complete a local housing assessment that identifies unsafe homes for possible demolition and targets others for rehabilitation investment. Apply for CDBG-Housing Assistance funds as indicated by the housing assessment.
- Send annual notices to property owners when properties violate Dangerous Building Law. Take legal action when justified by risk level.
- Participate in programs, grants and projects for the construction of subsidized housing within the town and the region to ensure sufficient, affordable housing options for its elderly or low-income citizens, including subsidized housing and energy-efficient housing.
- Ensure that the CEO addresses reported violations of local ordinances and state laws and regulations that affect the health, or safety of individuals or the community.
- Amend codes and regulations relating to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy (CoO) to include the rehabilitation of the property.
- Develop standards in applicable ordinances that require all code violations to be cleared within 18 months before a CoO is issued.
- Develop a fine or ticketing system for properties in violation of the IPMC.
- Review ordinance to ensure that the combination of lots is affordable and easy with minimal oversight by the Planning Board.

Land Banking

This report has made previous references to Land Banking without defining just exactly what Land Banking is. So let's take this opportunity to develop an understanding of this novel concept. Reprinted below is an excerpt from the ***Introduction*** of the publication authored by Frank S. Alexander in 2011 which is entitled, **LAND BANKS and LAND BANKING**, and is appended to this report.

“Land banks are governmental entities that specialize in the conversion of vacant, abandoned and foreclosed properties into productive use. The primary thrust of all land banks and land banking initiatives is to acquire and maintain properties that have been rejected by the open market and left as growing liabilities for neighborhoods and communities. The first task is the acquisition of title to such properties; the second task is the elimination of the liabilities; the third task is the transfer of the properties to new owners in a manner most supportive of local needs and priorities.

*Land banks are relatively new additions to the toolbox of urban planning and community development. The first generation of land banks emerged as local government entities in the last quarter of the twentieth century in St. Louis, Cleveland, Louisville and Atlanta. In each of these localities, the land banks were created in response to the growing inventories of properties stuck in the maze of nineteenth-century property tax foreclosure laws. Out of sync with evolving federal constitutional due process requirements, these state foreclosure laws often created incentives for owners to simply walk away from the payment of taxes, and from the property itself. When accumulated taxes exceeded the fair market value, no one could or would touch the property. By the close of the twentieth century, public officials and urban planners realized that far more was at stake than simply the enforcement of delinquent property taxes. Each and every tract of vacant and abandoned property imposes costs on the adjoining properties, on the fabric of the neighborhood and on the vitality of the community. Bolder and more creative approaches were required, and these emerged in the second generation of land banks led by Michigan and then by Ohio. At the beginning of the emergence of this second generation of approaches, I prepared what was at the time the seminal text on land banks and land banking, *Land Bank Authorities: A Guide for the Creation and Operation of Local Land Banks* (2005). That publication was prompted by the insight and determination of Lisa Levy at the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and Stephanie Jennings at the Fannie Mae Foundation. Both Lisa and Stephanie saw far more clearly than I did that vacant, abandoned and foreclosed properties were at the heart of building and rebuilding our communities.*

LISC and the Fannie Mae Foundation made that first text possible and made it accessible throughout the country. The emergence of the second

*generation of land banks in Michigan is the story of the intentional restructuring of Michigan's public policies to redirect control of tax-foreclosed properties from out-of-state investors back to local government entities, and land banks provided the viable structure. The Michigan statutes are about land banks and land banking, but they are also about providing new sources of revenue to acquire, remediate and maintain the properties. They are about creating catalytic opportunities for new development when the private market says it isn't possible. They are about creating hope in the face of despair. The pivotal figure in all of Michigan's property tax foreclosure reform and comprehensive land banking legislation was the Treasurer of Genesee County, Dan Kildee. Never one who is discouraged by barriers of the past or the challenges of the present, Dan always asked, and still asks, "Why not do it another way? Why not dream of the very best systems that can work together for the entire community?" And then Dan does precisely that. No one anticipated the mortgage crisis at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, but everyone feels its consequences. With the highest rates of mortgage foreclosures on record, the inventories of vacant and abandoned properties have also reached levels never seen before. As specialists in these distressed assets, land banks quickly emerged as a key tool in the toolbox of urban planners in responding to this crisis. Land banks and land banking was formally recognized in federal law in 2008 as a targeted use for the **Neighborhood Stabilization Program** funding. As the first text was at the cusp of the transition from the first generation of land banks to the second, this volume marks the emergence of the third generation. Each month, more and more states are considering comprehensive land bank legislation, often coupled with parallel legislative reforms in property tax foreclosure, in code enforcement, in vacant property registration, and in mortgage foreclosure. The goal of this volume is simply to facilitate this new generation. It is designed to provide context, to describe the wide range of approaches being taken and to present the possibilities of dreams to be realized."*

A Caribou Land Bank could be a standalone enterprise fund with its own Board of Directors who oversee its operation and budget, similar to the way Cary Medical Center is structured. Funding can come from a variety of sources, but one of its key features is that it is not part of the city's Expense

Budget. It could actually serve to reduce the city's expenses by funding some of the tasks, like the demolition of buildings, that have previously been paid for from the Expense Budget.

To fully appreciate all of the advantages Land Banking has to offer, one must first read the publications appended to this report. We feel that summarizing their benefits here in this report would not be as clear, concise and understandable as has been done in the publications themselves.

Using the City of Sanford, Maine as A Template

Sanford, Maine is a Land Banking City. In 2017 they introduced a housing program called:

SAFER, FAIRER HOUSING - Partnering for a Quality Housing Market through Land Banking, Licensing, and Proactive Inspections.

In this program, they created a Land Bank Authority and funded it with \$250,000. The Authority is managed by a seven-member Land Bank Commission comprised of three City Councilors and four residents of Sanford. The Commission reports to the Sanford City Council.

Their website contains a 23 page PowerPoint presentation. It shows how they utilized the Land Banking tool and incorporated it into their housing strategy. The presentation can be viewed by following this link:

https://www.sanfordmaine.org/vertical/sites/%7B9A3D3C8D-76EE-4CC5-B86E-C19FDBF5E473%7D/uploads/SAFER_FAIRER_HOUSING_07-18-17.pdf

The website gives the viewer a good idea of what is possible for Caribou.

Recommendations of the Advisory Board

Clearly, there is no quick fix to solving the issues of blight and substandard housing. We believe that Caribou would be well served by developing a comprehensive housing program similar to that in Sanford, Maine. In Section 9 of this report, **Formulating a Comprehensive Plan to Eliminate Blight**, we have made some recommendations that are sufficient to provide

a framework to guide the Council as they begin the process of instituting any anti-blight programs. Additional recommendations have been made in sections entitled **The Role of Code Enforcement** and **Public Education and Outreach**. They are not intended to be an exhaustive list of all the potential measures that could be employed to strengthen our neighborhoods. Only the Councilors themselves can make those choices.

In general, we urge the Council to be mindful of the following tenets:

- It is better to be more proactive in addressing the issues of blight and substandard housing and deal with the property owner before he or she abandons the property.
 - The City should thoroughly explore financial grant opportunities for housing rehabilitation and/or demolition. Programs may be available through the Area Agency on Aging or Aroostook County Action Program to help with handicapped-accessible ramps, weatherization, siding, roofing or other projects.
 - Conduct an inventory of all structures in Caribou and create a database of information on their age, type, and condition. Properties can be mapped out and color-coded to give users quick information relative to where problems may exist.
 - Identify properties in Caribou that can be rehabilitated easily and work with potential investors to ensure that the rehabilitation can be completed as inexpensively as possible.
 - Develop a vacant lot program. Lots can be used for off-street parking, pocket parks, and community gardens or sold to abutting landowners for side yard usage. Otherwise, the vacant lots themselves can be a form of blight.
 - Create a Land Bank Commission to fund the financial costs associated with the blight fight.
 - When reselling a tax-acquired property, conduct a thorough inspection of all code violations and require the buyer to sign a contract in which they commit to bringing the structure up to code within 18 months or face foreclosure. The Code Enforcement Officer may withhold issuing a Certificate of Occupancy if violations still exist. All potential bidders must be current on their property tax payments or be disqualified.
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Appendices

Appendix A

LAND BANKS and LAND BANKING- 119 pgs.

[http://www.downtowndevelopment.com/pdf/LB Book 2011 F.pdf](http://www.downtowndevelopment.com/pdf/LB_Book_2011_F.pdf)

Appendix B

**FROM BLIGHT TO BRIGHT BY THE HOUSING ALLIANCE OF
PENNSYLVANIA – 68 pgs.**

<http://www.pablighlibrary.com/>

Appendix C

**LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR CHANGE: - 47 pages
Demolition, urban strategy, and policy reform By Alan Mallach
Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program – September 2012**

<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/24-land-use-demolition-mallach.pdf>

Appendix D

WE CAN DO THIS – 28 pages

A Five-Step, Fast-Track Blight Plan

<http://www.pablightlibrary.com/>

APPENDIX A

Land Banks and Land Banking by Frank S. Alexander

http://www.downtowndevelopment.com/pdf/LB_Book_2011_F.pdf

(The entire 119- page document to be included here)

APPENDIX B

From Blight to Bright by The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania

<http://www.pablighlibrary.com/>

(The entire 68-page document included here)

APPENDIX C

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR CHANGE:

Demolition, urban strategy, and policy reform By Alan Mallach

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(The entire 47-page document included here)

APPENDIX D

WE CAN FO THIS
A Five-Step, Fast-Track Blight Plan
By The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania
<http://www.pablighlibrary.com/>

(The entire 28-page document included here)
