

The June 2013 edition of HW Focus features an article authored by Safeguard Properties Founder and Chairman, Robert Klein. In this article, Klein introduces a model for community revitalization that utilizes a holistic approach. Klein also discusses a new innovative tool to combat blight.

Fighting Blight

Stakeholders should Work Together to Find Creative Solutions

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HW Focus
June 2013

There is not a community in America that is immune to the national blight epidemic. While there is not a silver bullet to cure this devastation, I do believe there are innovative solutions, as well as common sense measures that can be taken to ease the burden on communities, homeowners, and local governments. This takes a multifaceted approach that uses a combination of resources to breathe life back into hard hit communities. Rehabilitation and fighting blight cannot be done in a silo. It requires bringing stakeholders to the same table and thinking creatively to produce a solution.

This method is currently being tested at what is called the “ground zero” of the foreclosure crisis in Slavic Village of Cleveland. Slavic Village is the story of a private-philanthropic partnership coming together to fight blight by rehabilitating a Cleveland neighborhood where between 23% and 30% of the homes are vacant. The focus of the partnership formed between Slavic Village Development, RIK Enterprises and Neighborhood Progress Inc. is to obtain properties from lenders, mortgage servicers, and the local land bank in order to renovate the homes to sell or rent. This process removes bureaucratic obstacles and also has the ability to bring large scale improvement to a community in a relatively short amount of time.

In Slavic Village homes beyond repair were identified immediately to support the overall redevelopment. One of the most important steps in rehabbing a community is identifying what cannot be salvaged. Unfortunately, there are often challenges in getting the demolition process underway as the permit process can be both costly and time consuming. This proves that greater education is necessary on the need for demolition and its associated benefits.

While many may consider demolition as a last resort, it is in fact a vital step in a comprehensive approach. It is impossible to cultivate development and garner interest from investors if homes that cannot be saved are still standing. If the proper steps are not taken to remove a nuisance property then rehabbing efforts are futile. There are also several benefits in demolition including stabilizing property values and eliminating older homes that contain dangerous substances such as asbestos. Additionally, many of the materials from demolished properties can be recycled.

Land banks are a great tool in getting rid of nuisance properties. Centralizing vacant and abandon properties is a highly effective way to fight blight. Land banks can make the process for starting demolition more efficient and increase the effectiveness of property preservation. Communities are increasingly considering the possibility of land banks as a way to recover and repurpose vacant properties, and servicers with surplus real estate owned properties are recognizing the value in donating to land banks.

Property preservation is the bottom line in maintaining home values, avoiding extreme rehabbing or demolition and ultimately fighting blight. I believe one of the best tools at our disposal in this battle is a new innovative product that secures vacant properties, preserves home values, and increases neighborhood safety. SecureView is an alternative board-up system that is designed to look like traditional windows providing clear views, letting in natural light. This is revolutionary way to secure vacant and abandoned properties without exposing their vacancy. By utilizing SecureView rather than traditional methods for securing homes, both marketability and safety are enhanced. SecureView is the only product that allows first responders to see inside a vacant property in the event of an emergency.

Made from 100% recycled materials, it is virtually unbreakable, which means it has the wherewithal to protect property from intrusion, and reduce the crime and squatting so often associated with plywood and steel board ups. SecureView can be modified to fit any window, and is quickly and easily installed using a simple but effective compression bolt system. This is truly an effective solution to the issue of blight, increasing a property's value due to improved curb appeal, which in turn helps to stabilize the entire neighborhood.

<http://secureviewusa.com/>

There may not be a silver bullet in fighting blight but this is a close second. Although the Nation has begun to climb out of an economic recession, this industry will continue to rebuild communities facing the aftermath of a housing crisis.

If we can recognize our collective resources and take a step back to think outside the box a little, we can help these communities join the rest of America on the road to recovery.

It is my hope that Slavic Village, the "ground zero" of the foreclosure crisis, will be looked at as a model for rehabilitation rather than a reminder of devastation.