

Cities Devise Solutions For Abandoned Property Reuse

Officials from twelve NJ cities participate in Community Leadership Institute

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The Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey (the Network), in partnership with the Center for Community Progress, New Jersey Community Capital, the John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy and the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association, will host a session for city officials and community development leaders from across the state this week. Leaders from Jersey City, Newark, Irvington, Orange, Millville, Paterson, Bridgeton and Camden will join other state and local players and representatives of the financial sector to examine cutting edge solutions and practices for reinvigorating problem properties and restoring neighborhoods.

“The crippling budgets that have put a squeeze on our cities are making community revitalization efforts that much harder,” said Diane Sterner, executive director for the Network. “Municipal and community leaders need access to the best tools and strategies available to help them both advance their redevelopment goals and bounce back economically. The Summer Institute is a forum for local decision makers to share solutions with their peers and gather ideas from experts so that these cities can flourish.”

The two-day Summer Institute for Community Leadership is an extension of a session hosted earlier this year at Harvard University by the Center for Community Progress – one of the nation’s leading organizations in helping cities and states craft land reform strategies that turn vacant, abandoned and problem properties into vibrant places. Experts from Community Progress will be on hand at the Summer Institute for Community Leadership in Trenton to lead workshops and share experiences with the group.

“Our core group of policy experts, researchers and advocates are united around a common goal – to revitalize American cities,” says Dan Kildee, Executive Director of the Center for Community Progress. “To support this goal, we help people develop the knowledge and hands-on expertise it takes to prevent abandonment and encourage constructive, productive land reuse that provides tangible social and economic benefits for their communities.”

The foreclosure epidemic and economic downturn of the last few years have hurt many New Jersey cities and towns, with the uptick in abandoned and deteriorated properties slowing community progress and spreading economic distress. Beyond lowering the value of the homes around them and draining the equity nearby homeowners have built in their homes, abandoned and distressed properties also cause significant losses in property tax revenue and generate other real economic costs. Crime commonly spikes in and near abandoned properties, the demand for public services – and funds – to board up and maintain property and secure public safety increases, and civic morale suffers.

The Summer Institute is built upon the understanding that New Jersey communities have the potential to transform themselves into thriving places again, in no small part because of the significant resources in institutional and human capital that these communities already possess

or are able to marshal. The Summer Institute is designed in part to help participants shape strategies that foster the creation of homes and jobs in economically and environmentally viable places that have good access to transit and the other civic resources that these cities possess or can develop.

Cities and towns selected to participate in the Summer Institute have shown a commitment to neighborhood revitalization, and have either begun to implement systems reforms for problem properties or have indicated that they plan to do so.

"The Summer Institute gives us an opportunity to learn about what has worked in other parts of the country, what our options are, and how we can deploy government strategies to undercut the problem and start to take the steps to turn our neighborhoods around for the better over the long term," said Irvington Mayor Wayne Smith, president of the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association.

"We're committed to improving our neighborhoods through the most current revitalization strategies available," said Bridgeton Mayor Albert Kelly. "Bridgeton's participation in the Summer Institute is vital to our leadership as we gain assistance in our efforts to build stronger communities while adopting new tools and strategies as we collaborate with other urban cities facing similar challenges."

Capital One Bank will be a lead sponsor for the two-day event as part of its long-standing commitment to community investment.

"Capital One Bank is proud to partner with the Summer Institute for Community Leadership to help local leaders identify solutions to drive the growth and vitality of our communities," said Doug Kennedy New Jersey State President for Capital One Bank. "As a local bank, we are committed to investing in programs and partnerships that support neighborhood recovery and expand economic opportunity for local families and small businesses."

To learn more about vacant property challenges and creative, constructive strategies to address the issue, please visit the Center for Community Progress' website at www.communityprogress.net. To learn more about the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey, visit www.hcdnnj.org.

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