

Stephen D. Hambley called the public hearing to order at 9:00 a.m. with Aaron M. Harrison and Colleen M. Swedyk present. The meeting was held in the commissioners’ hearing room. Mr. Hambley stated that the purpose of the public hearing was to discuss the formation of a land reutilization corporation.

The following guests were in attendance:

- Township Trustee Rick Dumpert
- Northern Medina County Chamber Alliance Executive Director Debbie Boehmke
- Wadsworth City Economic Development Director Tom Morris
- Habitat for Humanity Executive Director Tom O’Connell
- Derek Rance
- Medina City Economic Development Director Kimberly Marshall
- Planning Services Director Denise Testa
- Treasurer John Burke
- Assistant Prosecutor Mike Lyons
- Sara Crawford, Medina Gazette
- State Representative Sharon Ray
- Medina County Historical Society President Brian Feron
- Wadsworth Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Janie Parish
- Economic Development Manager Brandon Gibson
- Assistant County Administrator Matt Springer
- Kyle White

Mr. Hambley noted that a public meeting was held on October 10, 2023 for the same purpose where the Ohio Land Bank Association shared a presentation regarding the benefits of a land bank. Following that, there were additional discussions by small groups hosted by Medina County Economic Development Corporation including himself and John Burke to review the information. He reviewed the following special land bank authorities:

- Automatic Property Tax Exemption Holds real property tax free while working to return it to the private tax rolls
- Political Subdivision Immunity Like other governmental entities, immune from ordinary negligence claims in the conduct of land banking work
- Environmental Liability Immunity Generally immune from liability under state environmental law while holding property
- Streamlined Public Procurement Land banks may set their own purchasing policies, bidding thresholds and use informal procedures when appropriate

He stated that there is no other entity involving the transaction of real estate property like that other than a land bank. The Port Authority, the commissioners, nor any other public entity has that kind of authority, so it makes it a unique entity. Mr. Hambley opened the floor for comments.

Tom Morris stated that on behalf of the City of Wadsworth, they are in favor of having a land bank. It is a tool that helps challenging areas of governmental agencies such as Wadsworth deal with blighted properties that are not productive. It gets them back on the tax rolls and lets you put them into smarter development that may not necessarily be the lowest and best bidder. It is a tool that is only as good as the craftsman who wields it. He has met with the group who has been pushing for it, and he believes in their abilities and their passion for the project. It is very little expenditures for a lot of value added to the community and to the county, and there is certainly a reason that every county our size or bigger has one for grant receiving purposes, for planning purposes, it just makes a lot of sense.

Brandon Gibson stated that Medina County Economic Development offered their support for the creation of a land bank. It will create a way for private, public, and nonprofit organizations to work together to address the housing supply shortage in Medina County. County land banks can help communities to stabilize property tax basis and assist in eliminating blight. Additionally, the Department of Development created grant programs that require counties to have these land banks – 75% of the counties in the state have them. Without one, we will become less competitive statewide. He thanked the county commissioners and treasurer for their leadership and for hopefully creating a tool that will help Medina County’s economy.

Mr. Hambley noted Mr. Gibson’s reference to a state grant which is the Welcome Home Ohio grant. He recognized Representative Sharon Ray who as part of the legislature made sure that was part of the budget considerations and setting aside the money for those purposes that only a land bank can have access to. He thanked Representative Ray for her support at the legislature and her long-term interest in working with the county in a lot of these needs.

Brian Feron stated that he concurred with the previous comments noting that he thinks it’s a great idea. From a historic perspective, it will make properties better rather than seeing them demolished due to neglect. He thinks a land bank provides opportunities by providing a tool to salvage some properties and improve some neighborhoods that may be nice except they have one blighted spot the brings everybody down and invites more deterioration. He stated that he believes our county has several areas that are ripe for this opportunity. He encouraged the board to exercise this option as quickly as possible.

Tom O’Connell stated that Habitat for Humanity is committed to the vision of seeing a county where everyone has a decent place to live. To that end, since 1991 through the support of generous donors and dedicated volunteers, they have donated 51 safe, decent, and affordable homes across Medina County. We are all aware of the growing need of affordable housing and workforce housing units in Medina County, and Habitat is taking active steps to address this growing need, but one of the constant challenges to their success is property acquisition. Whether its availability of buildable lots, homes to rehab, or the actual cost of these properties, property acquisition is a real threat to their ability to partner with more households in Medina County. Therefore, Habitat for Humanity is in support of the creation of a Medina County land bank. They understand that the creation of a land bank will not solve all the challenges we face regarding property acquisition, but they believe the creation of a land bank will allow Habitat for Humanity to partner with more households to provide strengths, stability, and self-reliance. In doing so, they believe Medina County will become stronger through these efforts.

Rick Dumperth stated that he concurred with Tom O’Connell’s comments. He attended a conference in November on behalf of Habitat for Humanity where there was much discussion about the need for a land bank. He also learned at the Township Trustee Winter Conference that land banks are a mechanism that is used in some capacity for cleaning up properties, so it has another use. He thanked the commissioners for what they are doing.

Commissioner Harrison stated that the critical step for him was the initial convening of all the economic development folks around the county because they shined a light on some alternative uses. Alternatives to the tax sale process are going to be the key indicator of the success of this program. He stated that having the buy in from the economic development community around the county is going to be key in this because, as we’ve heard from the treasurer not just recently but in prior years, the tax sale process alone isn’t likely going to be something that moves the needle a whole lot, so we are going to look at some of those public-private partnerships to move this forward. We’ll look to those folks to bring those to us and see how much we can maximize the benefits.

Commissioner Swedyk added that it is also significant to make sure that we are part of the grant pool, to have access to any grants that are offered because we have a land bank.

There were no further comments.

Mr. Hambley noted that the resolution establishing the land reutilization corporation will be included in the agenda during the regular meeting which begins at 9:30 a.m. Mr. Harrison moved to close the public hearing; Mrs. Swedyk seconded the motion. Roll call showed all commissioners voting AYE; the motion carried. The public hearing closed at 9:10 a.m.

All deliberations concerning official business and formal actions by this Board of Commissioners were conducted in an open public meeting this fifth day of March, 2024.

Respectfully submitted,	COMMISSIONERS	_____
		Stephen D. Hambley
	OF	_____
_____		Aaron M. Harrison
Rhonda J. Beck	MEDINA COUNTY	_____
Clerk to the Commissioners		Colleen M. Swedyk