
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE BILL

No. 900 Session of
2009

INTRODUCED BY ARGALL, YAW, PIPPY, ERICKSON, RAFFERTY, KASUNIC,
WONDERLING, COSTA, O'PAKE, BROWNE, BAKER, FERLO, WASHINGTON,
ALLOWAY, BOSCOLA, STACK, EARLL, EICHELBERGER, WILLIAMS, WARD,
TOMLINSON, LOGAN, FOLMER AND KITCHEN, JUNE 17, 2009

AS AMENDED ON THIRD CONSIDERATION, JULY 1, 2010

AN ACT

1 Amending Title 53 (Municipalities Generally) of the Pennsylvania
2 Consolidated Statutes, providing for neighborhood blight
3 reclamation and revitalization.

4 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
5 hereby enacts as follows:

6 Section 1. Title 53 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated
7 Statutes is amended by adding a chapter to read:

8 CHAPTER 61

9 NEIGHBORHOOD BLIGHT

10 RECLAMATION AND REVITALIZATION

11 Subchapter

12 A. Preliminary Provisions

13 B. Actions Against Owner of Blighted Property

14 C. Permit Denials by Municipalities

15 D. Miscellaneous Provisions

16 SUBCHAPTER A

17 PRELIMINARY PROVISIONS

1 Sec.

2 6101. Short title of chapter.

3 6102. Definitions.

4 § 6101. Short title of chapter.

5 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the
6 Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act.

7 § 6102. Definitions.

8 The following words and phrases when used in this chapter
9 shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
10 context clearly indicates otherwise:

11 "Blighted property." Any of the following:

12 (1) Premises which, because of physical condition or
13 use, have been declared by a court of competent jurisdiction
14 as a public nuisance at common law or have been declared a
15 public nuisance in accordance with the local housing, ←
16 building, plumbing, fire and related STATE LAWS AND RELATED ←
17 MUNICIPAL codes and ordinances, including nuisance and
18 dangerous building ordinances.

19 (2) Premises which, because of physical condition, use
20 or occupancy, are considered an attractive nuisance to
21 children, including, but not limited to, abandoned wells,
22 shafts, basements, excavations and unsafe fences or
23 structures.

24 (3) A dwelling which, because it is dilapidated,
25 unsanitary, unsafe, vermin-infested or lacking in the
26 facilities and equipment required under the housing code of
27 the municipality, has been designated by the municipal
28 department responsible for enforcement of the code as unfit
29 for human habitation.

30 (4) A structure which is a fire hazard.

1 (5) A vacant or unimproved lot or parcel of ground in a
2 predominantly built-up neighborhood which, by reason of
3 neglect or lack of maintenance, has become a place for
4 accumulation of trash and debris or a haven for rodents or
5 other vermin.

6 (6) An unoccupied property which has been tax delinquent
7 for a period of two years.

8 (7) A property which is vacant but not tax delinquent
9 and which has not been rehabilitated within one year of the
10 receipt of notice to rehabilitate from the appropriate code
11 enforcement agency.

12 "Building." A residential, commercial or industrial building
13 or structure and the land appurtenant to it.

14 "Code." A building, housing, property maintenance, fire,
15 health or other public safety ordinance enacted by a
16 municipality.

17 "Competent entity." A person or entity, including a
18 governmental unit, with experience in the rehabilitation of
19 residential, commercial or industrial buildings and the ability
20 to provide or obtain the necessary financing for such
21 rehabilitation.

22 "Consumer." A person who is a named insured, insured or
23 beneficiary of a policy of insurance or any other person who may
24 be affected by the Insurance Department's exercise of or the
25 failure to exercise its authority.

26 "Cost of rehabilitation." Costs and expenses for
27 construction, stabilization, rehabilitation, demolition and
28 reasonable nonconstruction costs associated with any of these
29 projects, including, but not limited to, environmental
30 remediation, architectural, engineering and legal fees, permits,

1 financing fees and a developer's fee consistent with the
2 standards for developer's fees established by the Pennsylvania
3 Housing Finance Agency.

4 "Court." The appropriate court of common pleas.

5 "Mortgage lender." A business association defined as a
6 "banking institution" or "mortgage lender" under 7 Pa.C.S. Ch.
7 61 (relating to mortgage loan industry licensing and consumer
8 protection) that is in possession of or holds title to real
9 property pursuant to, in enforcement of or to protect rights
10 arising under, a mortgage, mortgage note, deed of trust or other
11 transaction that created a security interest in the real
12 property.

13 "Municipality." A city, borough, incorporated town, township
14 or home rule, optional plan or optional charter municipality or
15 municipal authority in this Commonwealth. The term also includes
16 any other governmental entity charged with enforcement of
17 municipal housing, building, plumbing, fire and related codes
18 and specifically includes a neighborhood improvement district
19 and nonprofit corporation created under the act of December 20,
20 2000 (P.L.949, No.130), known as the Neighborhood Improvement
21 District Act.

22 "Municipal permits." Privileges relating to real property
23 granted by a municipality, including, but not limited to,
24 building permits, exceptions to zoning ordinances and occupancy
25 permits.

26 "Owner." A holder of the title to residential, commercial or
27 industrial real estate, other than a mortgage lender, who
28 possesses and controls the real estate. The term includes, but
29 is not limited to, heirs, assigns, beneficiaries and lessees,
30 provided this ownership interest is a matter of public record.

1 "Property maintenance code." A municipal ordinance which
2 regulates the maintenance or development of real property.

3 "Property maintenance code violation." A violation of a
4 municipal property maintenance code.

5 "Public nuisance." Property which, because of its physical
6 condition or use, is regarded as a public nuisance at common law
7 or has been declared by the appropriate official a public
8 nuisance in accordance with a municipal code.

9 "Serious violation." A violation of a State law or municipal
10 housing, building, property maintenance or fire safety code that ←
11 poses an immediate threat to the health and safety of a dwelling
12 occupant, occupants in surrounding structures or passersby.

13 "Substantial step." An affirmative action as determined by
14 an independent third party or officer of the court on the part
15 of a property owner or managing agent to remedy a serious
16 violation of a State law or municipal code, including, but not
17 limited to, physical improvements or reparations to the
18 property.

19 "Tax delinquent property." Tax delinquent real property as
20 defined under the act of July 7, 1947 (P.L.1368, No.542), known
21 as the Real Estate Tax Sale Law, located in any municipality in
22 this Commonwealth.

23 SUBCHAPTER B

24 ACTIONS AGAINST OWNER OF BLIGHTED PROPERTY

25 Sec.

26 6111. Actions.

27 6112. Asset attachment.

28 6113. Duty of out-of-State owners of real estate in this
29 Commonwealth.

30 6114. Duty of corporate owners.

1 § 6111. Actions.

2 In addition to other remedies, a municipality may institute
3 the following actions against the owner of any building, housing
4 or land in serious violation of an ordinance regarding a code or
5 which causes the property to be blighted:

Page 5
Line 13

6 (1) An in personam action may be initiated for a
7 continuing violation for which the owner takes no substantial
8 step to correct within six months following receipt of an
9 order to correct the violation, unless the order is subject
10 to a pending appeal before the administrative agency or
11 court.

12 (2) An action against the owner shall be for an amount
13 equal to any penalties imposed against the owner and for the
14 amount expended by the municipality to abate the violation.

15 (3) A proceeding in equity.

16 § 6112. Asset attachment.

17 (a) General rule.--A lien may be placed against the assets
18 of an owner of unremediated blighted real property after a
19 judgment, decree or order is entered by a court of competent
20 jurisdiction against the owner of the property.

21 (b) Construction.--Nothing in this section shall be
22 construed to authorize, in the case of an owner that is a
23 corporation, a lien on the individual assets of the shareholders
24 of the corporation.

25 § 6113. Duty of out-of-State owners of real estate in this
26 Commonwealth.

27 A person who lives or has a principal place of residence
28 outside this Commonwealth, who owns real estate in this
29 Commonwealth against which code violations have been cited under
30 18 Pa.C.S. § 7510 (relating to municipal housing code

1 avoidance), and who has been properly notified of the violations
2 may be extradited to this Commonwealth to face criminal
3 prosecution.

4 § 6114. Duty of corporate owners.

5 Where, after reasonable efforts, service of process for a
6 notice or citation for any code violation for any property owned
7 by a corporation or business association cannot be accomplished
8 by handing a copy of the notice or citation to an executive
9 officer, partner or trustee of the corporation or business
10 association or to the manager, trustee or clerk in charge of the
11 property, the delivery of the notice or citation may occur by
12 registered mail, accompanied by a delivery confirmation:

13 (1) To the registered office of the corporation or
14 business association.

15 (2) Where a corporation or business association does not
16 have a registered office, to the mailing address used for
17 real estate tax collection purposes, if accompanied by the
18 posting of a conspicuous notice to the property and by
19 handing a copy of the notice or citation to any adult in
20 possession of the property.

21 SUBCHAPTER C

22 PERMIT DENIALS BY MUNICIPALITIES

23 Sec.

24 6131. Municipal permit denial.

25 § 6131. Municipal permit denial.

26 (a) Denial.--

27 (1) A municipality may deny issuing to an applicant a
28 building permit, zoning permit, zoning variance, municipal
29 license, municipal permit or municipal approval for
30 contemplated action that requires the approval of the

1 municipality, if any of the following final and unappealable ←
2 tax, water, sewer or refuse collection delinquencies or
3 serious violations of State law or municipal code for real
4 property which:

5 (i) The applicant owns in any municipality.

6 (ii) Is in serious violation of an applicable State
7 law or municipal code requirement and the applicant has
8 taken no substantial steps to correct within six months
9 following notification of the violation. THE APPLICANT ←

10 OWNS REAL PROPERTY IN ANY MUNICIPALITY FOR WHICH THERE
11 EXISTS ON THE REAL PROPERTY:

12 (I) A FINAL AND UNAPPEALABLE TAX, WATER, SEWER OR
13 REFUSE COLLECTION DELINQUENCY ON ACCOUNT OF THE ACTIONS
14 OF THE OWNER; OR

15 (II) A SERIOUS VIOLATION OF STATE LAW OR MUNICIPAL
16 CODE AND THE OWNER HAS TAKEN NO SUBSTANTIAL STEPS TO
17 CORRECT THE VIOLATION WITHIN SIX MONTHS FOLLOWING
18 NOTIFICATION OF THE VIOLATION.

19 (2) The municipal permit denial shall not apply to an
20 applicant's action to correct a violation of an applicable
21 State law or municipal code for which the building permit,
22 zoning permit, zoning variance, municipal license, municipal
23 permit or municipal approval for contemplated action
24 requiring such approval is required.

25 (3) The municipal permit denial shall not apply to an
26 applicant's delinquency on taxes, water, sewer or refuse
27 collection charges that are under appeal or otherwise
28 contested through a court or administrative process.

29 (b) Proof of compliance.--

30 (1) All municipal variances, approvals, permits or

1 licenses may be withheld until an applicant obtains a letter
2 from the appropriate State agency, municipality or school
3 district indicating the following:

4 (i) ~~The~~ THE property in question is not presently ←
5 tax delinquent.; ←

6 (ii) ~~The~~ THE property in question is now in code ←
7 compliance.; OR ←

8 (iii) ~~The~~ THE owner of the property has presented ←
9 and the appropriate State agency or municipality has
10 accepted a plan to begin remediation of a serious
11 violation of State law or municipal code, subject to the ←
12 following:

13 ~~(A) acceptance of the plan may be contingent on~~
14 ~~the beginning of the remediation plan within no fewer~~
15 ~~than 30 days following acceptance of the plan; or~~

16 ~~(B) acceptance of the plan may be contingent~~
17 ~~upon the completion of the remediation plan within no~~
18 ~~fewer than 90 days from the commencement of the~~
19 ~~remediation plan.~~ ACCEPTANCE OF THE PLAN MAY BE ←

20 CONTINGENT ON:

21 (A) BEGINNING THE REMEDIATION PLAN WITHIN NO
22 FEWER THAN 30 DAYS FOLLOWING ACCEPTANCE OF THE PLAN.

23 (B) COMPLETING THE REMEDIATION PLAN WITHIN NO
24 FEWER THAN 90 DAYS FOLLOWING COMMENCEMENT OF THE
25 PLAN.

26 (2) Letters required under this subsection shall be
27 verified by the appropriate municipal officials before
28 issuing to the applicant a municipal variance, approval,
29 permit or license.

30 (c) Applicability of other law.--A denial of a building

1 permit, zoning permit, zoning variance, municipal license,
2 municipal permit or municipal approval for contemplated actions
3 that requires approval of a municipality shall be subject to the
4 provisions of 2 Pa.C.S. Chs. 5 Subch. B (relating to practice
5 and procedure of local agencies) and 7 Subch. B (relating to
6 judicial review of local agency action).

7 SUBCHAPTER D

8 MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

9 Sec.

10 6141. Education and training programs for judges.

11 6142. County housing courts.

12 6143. Conflict with other laws.

13 § 6141. Education and training programs for judges.

14 The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts may develop
15 and implement annual and ongoing education and training programs
16 for judges, including magisterial district judges, regarding the
17 laws of this Commonwealth relating to blighted and abandoned
18 property and the economic impact that blighted and abandoned
19 properties have upon municipalities. The education and training
20 programs shall include, but not be limited to:

21 (1) The importance and connection of code violations and
22 crime.

23 (2) Time-in-fact violations as they relate to code
24 violations.

25 (3) Conduct of witnesses in prosecuting code violations.

26 (4) Limiting continuances in code violations.

27 (5) Use of indigency hearings in the prosecution of code
28 violations.

29 § 6142. County housing courts.

30 Upon a request or approval of a resolution by the county

1 commissioners, the president judge of a county may establish a
2 housing court to hear and decide matters arising under this
3 chapter and other laws relating to real property matters.
4 § 6143. Conflict with other law.

5 In the event of a conflict between the requirements of this
6 chapter and Federal requirements applicable to demolition,
7 disposition or redevelopment of buildings, structures or land
8 owned by or held in trust for the Government of the United
9 States and regulated pursuant to the United States Housing Act
10 of 1937 (50 Stat. 888, 42 U.S.C. § 1437 et seq.) and the
11 regulations promulgated thereunder, the Federal requirements
12 shall prevail.

13 Section 2. This act shall take effect in 90 days.

Slumlords, not Pennsylvania taxpayers, should foot bill for blighted properties

Blighted and abandoned properties:
▶ destroy neighborhoods.

▶ reduce a community's overall property values and the annual property tax revenues desperately needed to provide municipal services.

▶ steal the equity from nearby property owners.

▶ harbor and conceal criminal activities.

▶ provide targets for arsonists.

▶ pose a danger to the public's health and safety, including nearby property owners and neighborhood children.

▶ demoralize residents.

▶ impede new development; and

▶ send a negative message about the community.

Then, why isn't something done?

The answer is simple. Under current Pennsylvania law, municipalities have little power to do much.

It is more profitable for slumlords to take all the

rental income from a building and "put it in their pockets" than it is to use some of that income to maintain the property in a safe condition.

When the property becomes dilapidated, the owner can simply walk away and abandon it, with thousands of dollars of unpaid taxes and sewer and water bills — which must be made up through higher taxes and sewer and water fees on residents who do maintain their properties.

If the property becomes so blighted it must be torn down, like many properties in York, it's the taxpayers again who must "foot the bill."

And the municipal costs associated with doing so normal-

ly far exceed the value of any lien placed on the property.

This archaic and patently unfair system must end.

I have been, and am presently, the consultant to Pennsylvania's Statewide Blight Task Force comprised of state housing and local government organizations. Legislation I drafted for the Task Force, the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act, Senate Bill 900, sponsored by Sen. David G. Argall, passed in the Senate 50-0 in June and is in a position to be considered by the House when they return in September.

Under this proposed historic legislation, a municipality in Pennsylvania for the first time would be able to attach any and all assets of a slumlord to pay to bring a blighted property up to code or to tear it down, including all legal costs. Thus the individual or corporate owner that created the mess would be responsible

to pay for cleaning it up — not the taxpayers.

In addition, municipalities would also be able to deny owners of blighted properties municipal permits and approvals for other properties they own anywhere in Pennsylvania, until the blighted property is brought up to code standards or demolished.

Out-of-state owners of blighted and abandoned properties under Senate Bill 900 also would be able to be brought back to Pennsylvania to face criminal prosecution.

I strongly believe it's time to change current laws dealing with blight in Pennsylvania, and Senate Bill 900 should be passed unanimously in the House when the Pennsylvania Legislature returns from summer recess.

— A Lancaster resident, *Jeri Stumpf is a native of York and served as the city's director of planning from 1969 to 1973.*



**JERI
STUMPF**

Blight meets its match

Jeri Stumpf takes on landlords whose negligence infects neighborhoods

BY CHIP SMEDLEY
Sunday News Staff Writer
csmedley@inpnnews.com

Jeri Stumpf sits in a diner and worries about the future of urban neighborhoods.

He puts a coffee cup in the middle of an empty placemat and says, "This is your investment. Maybe it's a retail business. Maybe," he shrugs, "it's a convention center. Your investment is surrounded by neighborhoods. Some of them may be marginal, may have blighted properties. If those neighborhoods are not protected, what will happen to your investment?"

Eliminating blight isn't just about fixing facades, he preaches. It's about sustainable economic growth.

And it's about justice. He uses a more individual analogy to underscore his belief that "slumlords" need to receive harsher treatment in court.

"If I rob a bank and get caught, I am punished," he says. "Now take a couple who's getting older. They have a lifetime of equity in their property. Suddenly there's a blighted property in their neighborhood and the owner won't do anything because he wants to milk all of the equity out of it. The property values in the neighborhood go down and that couple loses their equity. That owner is taking their money. Isn't that a crime?"

Decreased property values lower tax revenue. Money that municipalities must spend on blighted properties or in chasing slumlords comes from the taxpayer-funded general fund budget

Simply, Stumpf believes that blight "saps the life blood out of the community."

On the attack

A York native who works out of his consulting firm in Willow Street, Stumpf has been on a crusade to eradicate blight and revitalize municipal

economies for more than 35 years.

His quest received a shot in the arm one year ago, when Stumpf took a call from state Sen. James Rhoades of Schuylkill County. He asked Stumpf to consult with a task force targeting blight in Pennsylvania cities and boroughs.

Stumpf laughs about the conversation and says, "I told him I was involved in this issue 10 years ago and nothing happened. I said, 'I'm not going to get involved if nothing is going to happen this time, either.'"

Rhoades was emphatic. "He said, 'I guarantee you I am going to do something about it,'" Stumpf recalls.

When Rhoades gave Stumpf the green light to make up the task force roster himself, Stumpf leapt aboard.

But he still remembers the unanimous passage of state House Resolution 91, which directed the Urban Affairs Committee to examine the cause and effect of blight in Pennsylvania's urban areas. The goal was to determine whether state programs were addressing blight and subsequent economic revitalization. If not, new legislation would be recommended to fix the problems.

Stumpf led the study, compiled the research and drafted legislation. His report pursuant to the study, "Urban Opportunities, Eradicating Blight and Expediting Economic Development in Pennsylvania in the 21st Century," was used by the American Planning Association when it drafted a new redevelopment policy.

Meanwhile, the state Legislature did nothing.

Stumpf doesn't say exactly why the legislation died in the state Senate, but rubs his thumbs and index fingers together indicating his belief that at the time, some monied interests were in opposition.

For a man who spent his career in local government

housing, planning and community revitalization work, that stung.

Given his energy level and passion for the topic, it's easy to understand why he didn't retreat. And now Stumpf is fired up about his second kick at the blight can.

Multi-level approach

He is already the author of Pennvest, Pennsylvania's multi-billion dollar infrastructure financing program, along with the economic development programs of Keystone Opportunity Zones and Neighborhood Improvement Districts.

Yet, while he believes those programs are helpful, they alone won't succeed unless blight, which destroys cities and boroughs on many levels, is tackled.

One of those levels involves the use of liens, which Stumpf believes are an exercise in futility.

"Say the redevelopment authority must demolish a dangerous, blighted structure," he says, "and it costs \$30,000, so they put a lien on the property. Except now the vacant lot is worth only \$5,000 and they'll never recover the cost."

He wants to go another direction.

"The owner who let that property deteriorate has another business, or other properties, or a bank account," Stumpf says. "The municipality should be able to go right after his other assets to recover their loss."

And there are public safety concerns. Blighted properties offer kids dangerous new environments to explore. They also offer drug dealers places to set up business.

Learning ins and outs

Stumpf's blight-fighting journey began when he was a sophomore at Dickinson College and took an internship with the York Redevelopment

Authority. After graduating from college, he heard in 1968 that York was looking for a chief planner.

But there was a rub. "The then-mayor of York hadn't had a planner for six years," Stumpf recalls with a smile.

He interviewed for the post. "After about 45 minutes the mayor looked at me and said, 'I don't like planners, I don't like planning, but I want you as my director of planning,'" Stumpf laughs.

At 23, he became the youngest planning director in the state and came to know the ins and outs of city code enforcement.

He next served as director of York's Redevelopment Authority, where he saw how crucial property values were to overall economic development.

Since then he has worked in the governor's office to help develop a new statewide housing and revitalization strategy and, prior to that, as the first executive director of the House Local Government and Urban Affairs Committee.

Along the way, he's honed his political skill and is determined to do all he can to avoid that frustrating experience of 10 years ago.

Back in the diner, Stumpf's eyes twinkle as he mentions the "Clean and Green" program, how people are drawn to catchy names and how the media has an affinity for repeating them.

So Stumpf says he decided his legislative package "should have a name that says what it does and makes a statement to the Legislature."

So he chose to name this package the "Enhanced Quality of Life Act," because it serves both those functions.

As well as one more.

He leans back in his chair, spreads his arms, palms up, smiles a broad but innocent smile and asks, "Now who, in an election year, could vote against the Enhanced Quality of Life Act?" ■



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Report: Schuylkill making some progress fighting blight, but much work remains

BY BEN WOLFGANG (STAFF WRITER BWOLFGANG@REPUBLICANHERALD.COM)
 Published: July 25, 2010

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A recent report on blight in Schuylkill County found that the county has made some progress in dealing with the problem, but report author Jeri E. Stumpf believes much more must be done.

"The lead (on fighting blight) is going to come out of Northeastern Pennsylvania," said Stumpf, a member of the statewide Blight Task Force. "We're halfway. If this doesn't happen now, I don't know when it's going to happen."

The report contains both success stories and troubling statistics. It also calls for the immediate passage of Senate Bill 900, a blight-fighting bill awaiting a vote in the state Senate.

The bill was introduced by state Sen. David Argall, R-29, and was conceived by the late state Sen. James J. Rhoades. The bill would give municipalities the ability to attack absentee landlords' other assets, holding them financially responsible for repairs or razing dilapidated properties.

The bill would also allow municipalities to deny permits to those with a poor track record of keeping properties up to code.

"Nobody has gotten this idea that blight is an economic crime. The courts have not gotten it," Stumpf said. "This (passage of the bill) is going to be the most radical change in Pennsylvania" history, with respect to fighting blight.



BING

Legislation could help officials contend with blighted properties

By: JERI STUMPF Herald Standard

Everyone knows that blighted and abandoned properties:

- n Destroy neighborhoods.
- n Reduce a community's overall property values and the annual property tax revenues desperately needed to provide municipal services.
- n Steal the equity from nearby property owners.
- n Harbor and conceal criminal activities.
- n Provide targets for arsonists.
- n Pose a danger to the public's health and safety, including nearby property owners and neighborhood children.
- n Demoralize residents.
- n Impede new development, and send a negative message about the community.

Then, why isn't something done?

The answer is simple. Under current Pennsylvania law, municipalities have little power to do much, and it is more profitable for slumlords to take all the rental income from a building and "put it in their pockets"... than it is to use some of that income to maintain the property in a safe condition.

When the property becomes dilapidated, the owner can simply walk away and abandon it with thousands of dollars of unpaid taxes and sewer and water bills, which must be made up through higher taxes and sewer and water fees on residents who do maintain their properties.

If the property becomes so blighted it must be torn down like some properties in Browns-ville, it's the taxpayers again who must foot the bill, and the municipal costs associated with doing so, normally far exceed the value of any lien placed on the property.

This archaic and patently unfair system must end.

I'm the consultant to Pennsylvania's Statewide Blight Task Force comprised of state housing and local government organizations.

Legislation I drafted for the task force, the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act, Senate Bill 900, sponsored by Sen. David G. Argall, passed in the Senate 50-0 in June and is in a position to be considered by the House when its members return in September.

Under this proposed historic legislation, a municipality in Pennsylvania for the first time would be able to attach any and all assets of a slumlord to pay to bring a blighted property up to code or to tear it down, including all legal costs. Thus the individual or corporate owner that "created the mess" would be responsible to pay for cleaning it up, not the taxpayers!

In addition, municipalities would also be able to deny owners of blighted properties municipal permits and approvals for other properties they own anywhere in Pennsylvania until the blighted property was brought up to code standards or demolished.

Out-of-state owners of blighted and abandoned properties under Senate Bill 900 would also be able to be brought back to Pennsylvania to face criminal prosecution.

I strongly believe it's time to change current laws dealing with blight in Pennsylvania and Senate Bill 900 should be passed unanimously in the House when the Pennsylvania Legislature returns from summer recess.

September 05, 2010

post-gazette.com Pittsburgh Post-Gazette OPINION / PERSPECTIVES

End blight in Pennsylvania

Municipalities in this state need stronger tools to go after unscrupulous landlords, argues community development consultant JERI E. STUMPF

Sunday, September 12, 2010

Blighted and abandoned properties:

- Destroy neighborhoods;
- Reduce a community's overall property value;
- Reduce property tax revenues needed to provide municipal services;
- Steal equity from nearby property owners;
- Harbor and conceal criminal activities;
- Provide targets for vandals and arsonists;
- Pose a danger to the public health and safety, including nearby property owners and neighborhood children;
- Demoralize residents;
- Impede new development; and
- Send a negative message about the community.

Then, why isn't something done?

The answer is simple. Under current Pennsylvania law, municipalities have little power to do much, and it is more profitable for unscrupulous landlords to take all the rental income from a building and put it in their pockets than it is to use some of that income to maintain their properties in a safe condition.

When a property becomes dilapidated, the owner can simply walk away and abandon it -- leaving behind thousands of dollars of unpaid taxes and sewer and water bills, which must be made up through higher taxes and sewer and water fees on residents who do maintain their properties.

If a property becomes so blighted that it must be torn down -- like many properties in the city of Pittsburgh and in Allegheny and adjoining counties -- it's the taxpayers again who must foot the bill. The municipal costs associated with demolition normally far exceed the value of any lien placed on a property.

This archaic and patently unfair system must end!

I'm a consultant for Pennsylvania's Statewide Blight Task Force, which is comprised of state housing and local government organizations. Legislation drafted for the task force -- the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act sponsored by Sen. David G. Argall -- passed in the Senate 50-0 in June and is ready for House members to consider when they return to Harrisburg this month.

Under this proposed historic legislation, a municipality in Pennsylvania for the first time would be able to attach any or all assets of a slumlord to bring a blighted property up to code or to tear it down, including all legal costs. Thus, the individual or corporate owner who creates a mess would have to pay for cleaning it up -- not the taxpayers!

Municipalities also would be able to deny owners of blighted properties municipal permits and approvals for other properties they own anywhere in Pennsylvania until their blighted properties were brought up to code or demolished. Out-of state owners of blighted and abandoned properties could be brought back to Pennsylvania to face criminal prosecution.

It's time to strengthen the laws dealing with blight in Pennsylvania. The Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act should be passed unanimously by the House when the Pennsylvania Legislature returns from summer recess.

Governor signs blight reclamation bill into law

BY CHRISTINE HAINES

Herald-Standard

Municipalities battling blight received a few more weapons for their arsenal this past week when Gov. Ed Rendell signed Senate Bill 900 into law.

The Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization act goes into effect in six months. State Sen. Richard A. Kasunic, D-Dunbar, was one of the co-sponsors of the bill. Kasunic said he has heard for years from township, borough and city officials about the difficulty they have dealing with the owners of blighted properties.

"The purpose of this is to give them a little more teeth in enforcing their maintenance codes," Kasunic said. "There are

things in there that weren't in the law in the past, like asset attachment. With this bill, one of the main things is you can go after the property owner's personal assets."

The bill also calls for all municipal permits statewide, except those needed to bring a property into compliance, to be denied to any property owner who has serious, unaddressed violations at any property in the state. Kasunic said that should be particularly effective against developers with multiple properties.

Jeri Stumpf, who once served as a consultant for Brownsville's targeted code enforcement program and was previously the executive director of the House Urban Affairs Committee, drafted the current legislation.

Stumpf said his experience with Brownsville emphasized the need for blight legislation.

"In the 30 years I've been in this profession, the blighted conditions in Brownsville were the worst I had seen," Stumpf said.

"It's a real danger and it's very demoralizing to a community to have blighted conditions like Brownsville has."

Andrew French, executive director of the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, said steps are being taken to revitalize downtown Brownsville, but the process has been slow and tedious.

After years of legal proceedings, the redevelopment authority in mid-October took possession of eight downtown

Brownsville properties through eminent domain after paying \$114,400. Proceedings are continuing against 14 additional properties in Brownsville. According to French, that's just the tip of the iceberg.

"We have a tremendous amount of blight throughout Fayette County," French said. "We could use some pretty substantial and consistent resources."

"I look at this as an additional tool that obviously strengthens our work in that we can put pressure on the owners of blighted properties," French said.

The late Sen. James Rhoades of Schuylkill County, who died in a car accident, initially introduced the bill. Sen. David Argall, who took Rhoades' place, continued with the

legislation.

"This is revolutionary, this legislation. In the past when you had a code violation, you could only go against the property that had the violations, not the other assets," Stumpf said.

Often the dilapidated property was worth less than the municipal liens placed against it, putting the burden of tearing down abandoned properties on municipalities using public funds. The ability to attach the property owner's other assets changes that, Stumpf said.

"It fundamentally changes the way blight is dealt with and takes the cost off of the taxpayers and puts it on the property owners," Stumpf said.

Stumpf said his one disappointment with the bill is that the Legislature took

out provisions that would have held mortgage companies and banks responsible for the exterior condition of properties they take by foreclosure. Stumpf said that once the property owner in default is evicted from a house, the mortgage holders rarely complete the title transfer process, leaving the property in limbo when it comes to code enforcement.

"Once this starts into effect, people are going to realize that mortgage companies and lenders should be held responsible when they foreclose," Stumpf said.

Kasunic said he envisions the possibility of additional legislation being drafted to address blight problems as loopholes are found in the new legislation.

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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

New state law puts owners of blighted property on notice

Saturday, October 30, 2010

By Diana Nelson Jones, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Under a new law signed by Gov. Ed Rendell on Thursday, municipalities fighting blight can seek judgment against the assets of derelict property owners, who may also be extradited for prosecution and forbidden to develop properties in the state.

The Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act of 2010 is an anti-blight bill that Jeri Stumpf, a former executive director of the House Local Government and Urban Affairs Committee, calls "revolutionary." He worked on drafts of the bill, the first of its kind to allow municipalities to go after assets, which would provide the needed funds to repair, renovate and reuse the offending properties.

"Before, the only power municipalities had was to go after the building itself," said Ed Boito, the campaign director for the Pennsylvania Works! coalition that rallied behind the bill. The building was often heavily liened.

Being able to "go after the owner's assets" is a strong tool and "a very powerful motivator" for an owner, he said.

Kendall Pelling, project manager for East Liberty Development Inc., said "The most exciting part is the private asset attachment. That means a judgment against "their good house, or any property they have. It gives some real teeth to the system."

"Finally, finally, finally," said Aggie Brose, deputy director of the Bloomfield Garfield Corp. "This blight is a fungus. Curing it will solve public safety issues. They [derelict owners] should feel some pain. What they're doing in our neighborhoods, robbing people of their equity, is criminal."

Representatives of local landlord associations could not be reached for comment about the bill and the effect it may have on members.

Kim Graziani, director of Mayor Luke Ravenstahl's office of Neighborhood Initiatives, called the law "an incredible complementary tool. Enforcing the code and holding property owners accountable have to work hand-in-hand."

"Quality of life stuff is what's integral to what we know and love about this city."

Mr. Boito calls the new law "a triple win -- for the local economy, taxpayers and the environment."

He credited Sen. David Argall, R-Schuylkill, "and his staff for their amazing commitment to shepherding this legislation through both houses," and the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania, "who led the effort to get this important bill passed."

The law would lower the boom on "egregious offenders," said Mr. Boito. Speculators buy up "block after block" in Philadelphia, he said, where there are approximately 30,000 vacant properties.

"They let them deteriorate to lower the value of other properties so they can buy them up. The people living there are victims."

Mr. Stumpf said one strength of the law is that perpetually negligent property owners can be thwarted from any development in the state.

"We have language [in the law] to work with the state data base and we'll shut you down -- no permit for any property anywhere in state."

Mr. Stumpf said he worked on legislation years ago that "big money killed." Several years ago, he said, the late Sen. James J. Rhoades of Schuylkill County asked him to reprise the legislation. To pass, he said, it required the support of the group that rallied behind it this time, the Pennsylvania Works! coalition.

The law's other provisions call for a housing court to deal specifically with these cases and training to bring magisterial district judges up to speed on issues regarding blight. It would not help neighborhoods deal with abandoned properties whose owners are long dead "because there's no one to go after," said Mr. Pelling. "But this is a big improvement."

From: Haines Christine <chaines@heraldstandard.com>

To: Jeri <jstumpfassoc@aol.com>

Subject: RE: Friends

Date: Sat, Sep 11, 2010 2:24 pm

Since you asked nice and cheered for the Steelers ;-) here it is. Will you be coming to Fayette County in the near future? The first purchase of Liggett properties was approved this week by the Redevelopment Authority... \$114,000 for the eight Manor Investment properties he failed to contest in a timely manner...most were deemed to be without value. Chris

Legislation could help officials contend with blighted properties

Author: Jeri Stumpf

Section: LETTER TO EDITOR

Published: September 5, 2010

Everyone knows that blighted and abandoned properties:

- n Destroy neighborhoods.

- n Reduce a community's overall property values and the annual property tax revenues desperately needed to provide municipal services.

- n Steal the equity from nearby property owners.

- n Harbor and conceal criminal activities.

- n Provide targets for arsonists.

- n Pose a danger to the public's health and safety, including nearby property owners and neighborhood children.

- n Demoralize residents.

- n Impede new development, and send a negative message about the community.

Then, why isn't something done?

The answer is simple. Under current Pennsylvania law, municipalities have little power to do much, and it is more profitable for slumlords to take all the rental income from a building and "put it in their pockets"... than it is to use some of that income to maintain the property in a safe condition.

When the property becomes dilapidated, the owner can simply walk away and abandon it with thousands of dollars of unpaid taxes and sewer and water bills, which must be made up through higher taxes and sewer and water fees on residents who do maintain their properties.

If the property becomes so blighted it must be torn down like some properties in Browns-ville, it's the taxpayers again who must foot the bill, and the municipal costs associated with doing so, normally far exceed the value of

any lien placed on the property.

This archaic and patently unfair system must end.

I'm the consultant to Pennsylvania's Statewide Blight Task Force comprised of state housing and local government organizations.

Legislation I drafted for the task force, the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act, Senate Bill 900, sponsored by Sen. David G. Argall, passed in the Senate 50-0 in June and is in a position to be considered by the House when its members return in September.

Under this proposed historic legislation, a municipality in Pennsylvania for the first time would be able to attach any and all assets of a slumlord to pay to bring a blighted property up to code or to tear it down, including all legal costs. Thus the individual or corporate owner that "created the mess" would be responsible to pay for cleaning it up, not the taxpayers!

In addition, municipalities would also be able to deny owners of blighted properties municipal permits and approvals for other properties they own anywhere in Pennsylvania until the blighted property was brought up to code standards or demolished.

Out-of-state owners of blighted and abandoned properties under Senate Bill 900 would also be able to be brought back to Pennsylvania to face criminal prosecution.

I strongly believe it's time to change current laws dealing with blight in Pennsylvania and Senate Bill 900 should be passed unanimously in the House when the Pennsylvania Legislature returns from summer recess.

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Christine Haines

Herald-Standard Reporter

724-425-7223 desk

724-691-5568 cell

From: Jeri [<mailto:jstumpfassoc@aol.com>]

Sent: Sat 9/11/2010 3:01 PM

To: Haines Christine

Subject: Friends

Hi Chris! I got an e-mail from Norma. She said the article on **SB900** was published last Sunday. I tried to find it on line and couldn't.

Could you please e-mail me a copy? Thanks.

Have a nice weekend & go Steelers!

Jeri

JERI E. STUMPF & ASSOCIATES, INC.

P.O. BOX 85

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717 284-9930

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Bill gives municipalities teeth to hold slumlords accountable

BY JERI E. STUMPF (GUEST COLUMNIST)
Published: September 4, 2010

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YAHOO! BUZZ



Blighted and abandoned properties.

- Destroy neighborhoods.
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- Steal the equity from nearby property owners.
- Harbor and conceal criminal activities.
- Provide targets for arsonists.
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- Demoralize residents.
- Impede new development.
- Send a negative message about the community.

Then, why isn't something done?

The answer is simple. Under current Pennsylvania law, municipalities have little power to do much, and it is more profitable for slumlords to take all the rental income from a building and put it in their pockets than it is to use some of that income to maintain the property in a safe condition.

When the property becomes dilapidated, the owner can simply walk away and abandon it with thousands of dollars of unpaid taxes and sewer and water bills, which must be made up through higher taxes and sewer and water fees on residents who do maintain their properties. If the property becomes so blighted it must be torn down, like many properties in the city of Scranton and Lackawanna and adjacent counties, it's the taxpayers again who must foot the bill, and the municipal/county costs associated with doing so normally far exceed the value of any lien placed on the property.

This archaic and patently unfair system must end.

I am the consultant to Pennsylvania's Statewide Blight Task Force comprising state housing and local government organizations. Legislation I drafted for the task force, the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act, Senate Bill 900, sponsored by Sen. David G. Argall, passed in the Senate 50-0 in June and is in a position to be considered by the House when they return in September.

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In addition, municipalities would be able to deny owners of blighted properties municipal permits and approvals for other properties they own anywhere in Pennsylvania, until the blighted property was brought up to code standards or demolished.

Out-of-state owners of blighted and abandoned properties would be brought back to Pennsylvania to face criminal prosecution.



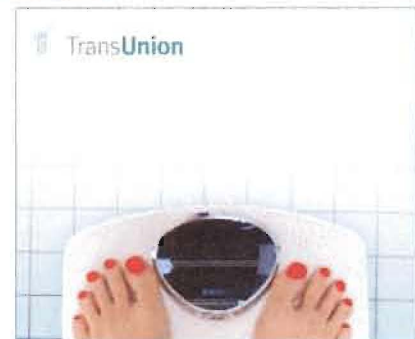
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Opinion

Municipalities have little power to deal with blighted properties

Monday, September 20, 2010

Blighted and abandoned properties destroy neighborhoods, reduce a community's overall property values and the annual property tax revenues desperately needed to provide municipal services, steal the equity from nearby property owners, harbor and conceal criminal activities, provide targets for arsonists, pose a danger to the public's health and safety including nearby property owners and neighborhood children, demoralize residents, impede new development and send a negative message about the community.

Then why isn't something done?

The answer is simple. Under current Pennsylvania law, municipalities have little power to do much, and it is more profitable for slumlords to take all the rental income from a building and "put it in their pockets"... than it is to use some of that income to maintain the property in a safe condition. When the property becomes dilapidated, the owner can simply walk away and abandon it; with thousands of dollars of unpaid taxes and sewer and water bills, which must be made up through higher taxes and sewer and water fees on residents who do maintain their properties. If the property becomes so blighted it must be torn down in Pottstown, Norristown, Phoenixville, Reading, Philadelphia, or in Montgomery, Bucks or adjacent counties, it's the taxpayers again who must "foot the bill," and the municipal/county costs associated with doing so normally far exceed the value of any lien placed on the property.

This archaic and patently unfair system must end!

I have been, and am presently, the consultant to Pennsylvania's Statewide Blight Task Force comprised of state housing and local government organizations. Legislation I drafted for the Task Force, the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act, Senate Bill 900, sponsored by Sen. David G. Argall, passed in the Senate 50-0 in June and is in a position to be considered by the House when they return in September.

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In addition, municipalities would also be able to deny owners of blighted properties municipal permits and approvals for other properties they own anywhere in Pennsylvania, until the blighted property was brought up to code standards or demolished.

Out-of-state owners of blighted and abandoned properties under Senate Bill 900, would also be able to be brought back to Pennsylvania to face criminal prosecution.

I strongly believe it's time to change current laws dealing with blight in Pennsylvania and Senate Bill 900 should be passed unanimously in the House when the Pennsylvania Legislature returns from summer recess.

JERI E. STUMPF

Jeri E. Stumpf and Associates Inc.

Community Development and

Governmental Affairs Consulting Firm

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Legislation targets slumlords

This article has been read 393 times.

Blighted and abandoned properties destroy neighborhoods, impede new development and send a negative message about the community. Then, why isn't something done?

The answer is simple. Under current Pennsylvania law, municipalities have little power to do much, and it is more profitable for slumlords to take all the rental income from a building and put it in their pockets than it is to use some of that income to maintain the property in a safe condition. When the property becomes dilapidated, the owner can simply walk away and abandon it; with thousands of dollars of unpaid taxes and sewer and water bills, which must be made up through higher taxes and sewer and water fees on residents who do maintain their properties.

If the property becomes so blighted it must be torn down like many properties in Washington County, it's the taxpayers again who must foot the bill, and the municipal costs associated with doing so far exceed the value of any lien placed on the property.

This archaic and patently unfair system must end.

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I strongly believe it's time to change current laws dealing with blight in Pennsylvania, and Senate Bill 900 should be passed unanimously in the House when the Pennsylvania Legislature returns from summer recess.

Jeri E. Stumpf

Willow Street, Pa.

The writer is a consultant to Pennsylvania's Statewide Blight Task Force.

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Jesse meet Matt.

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PENNSYLVANIA PLANNING ASSOCIATION

A Chapter of the American Planning Association

December 13, 2006

Jeri Stumpf
Jeri E Stumpf Associates
PO Box 85
Willow Street PA 17584

Dear Mr. Stumpf:

Pennsylvania Planning Association's 2006 Annual Conference was a tremendous success this year! While the opening receptions at the historic Harrisburg Transportation Center and the Appalachian Brewing Company were great fun, the primary focus of this event was education, and this year's conference provided excellent sessions on a diverse array of topics that reflect the broad range of interests for planners.

Nearly 550 professional planners, planning officials, and planning students actively participated in this year's conference. We offered 50 workshops, five mobile tours, four plenary sessions, and a post conference workshop for professional planners. All of this was accomplished because professionals such as you agreed to share your knowledge and experience. Please accept our thanks and our appreciation!

Many participants expressed a desire to obtain information from sessions they could not attend. In response, we are placing materials of sessions on our website. If you have an electronic version of your presentation or hand-outs and you wish to make them available, please send them to mawirick@comcast.net. Also if you are interested, evaluations of your session can be e-mailed upon request.

PPA's strength lies in the commitment of our members and additional supporters who seek to achieve the most effective planning possible in Pennsylvania. **Thanks to your involvement as a speaker at our conference, planners are even better equipped to impact how Pennsylvanians live, work, and play.**

Thank you again for your participation in the 2006 PPA Annual Conference. Our 2007 Annual Conference will be held in Gettysburg, PA on October 28-29. Watch for the Call for Presenters soon!

Best Regards,

W. Craig Zumbrun
Conference Chair

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State bills aimed at ousting blight

BY ROBERT SWIFT
 TIMES • shamrock writer
 rswift@timeshamrock.com
 02/13/2008

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HARRISBURG — Calling blight an “economic crime,” a bipartisan coalition of state lawmakers unveiled legislation Tuesday giving local officials more power to rid communities of abandoned and derelict buildings.

Speakers at a press conference denounced owners of blighted buildings for causing property values to decline, wiping out the equity in homes owned by neighbors and leaving local taxpayers with the costs of demolishing or securing dangerous and vacant buildings.

“They (problem landlords) leave unpaid utility bills,” said state Sen. James J. Rhoades, R-29, who sponsored a package of bills developed by a statewide task force of local officials and housing groups.

“They also reduce the property value of nearby properties,” he said.

A video played at the press conference showed local officials discussing the problems blighted properties cause in Girardville, Mahanoy City and Shenandoah, all in Rhoades’ district. A vacant and boarded-up high school in Shenandoah was also pictured.

Rhoades predicted his legislation will face opposition from lobbyists because of its impact on the real estate and lending industries, as well as landlords who buy and sell blighted properties. An earlier effort to pass anti-blight legislation stalled several years ago.

State Reps. David G. Argall, R-124, and Todd Eachus, D-Butler Township, and several mayors lended their backing to the bills.

The bills represent a comprehensive effort to attack blight, task force members said.

Key proposals include:

- Give local and state officials power to deny permits and zoning approvals in all areas to any individual who owns property with code violations that threaten public health and safety.
- Give municipalities legal authority to seize the financial assets of owners of blighted properties in order to pay for the costs of demolishing or securing a building. Officials put the average cost of demolition at \$30,000.
- Require that mortgage lenders and banks be responsible to maintain deteriorating property if a default occurs. • Allow courts to appoint conservators to manage properties before they become blighted and use income from the

property to keep up maintenance.

- Create new reporting requirements for corporate owners of properties.
- Create programs to educate district justices and judges about blight. Allow counties to create "housing courts" to deal with property upkeep cases.
- Provide more state aid to help towns and redevelopment authorities reclaim blighted areas.
- Create a state database so local officials can check on ownership of blighted properties.
- Give the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency Authority to insure private sector loans in neighborhoods undergoing renovation.

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Pennsylvania SB 1291 Neighborhood Blight Reclamation & Revitalization Act

Wednesday, 30 July 2008

Two articles in *The Morning Call* and *The Republican Herald* discuss proposed Pennsylvania SB 1291 and recent public hearings.

Tamaqua has done "all it can" to deal with a blighted property at 205 W. Broad St., the former Mitchell Furniture Building, said borough council President Micah Gursky.

Tamaqua has done "all it can" to deal with a blighted property at 205 W. Broad St., the former Mitchell Furniture Building, said borough council President Micah Gursky.

In order for the borough to take further action against the property owner, the state legislature must pass Senate Bill 1291, the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act, Gursky testified Tuesday at a public hearing on the bill at Schuylkill County Courthouse.

"What happens if this property owner skips town or stays in New Jersey, where he resides? Senate Bill 1291 will allow Tamaqua to bring him back to Pennsylvania to face citations," Gursky said.

The building's owner, Tadeusz A. Skwarek, Lawrence Township, Mercer County, N.J., said Tuesday he didn't like being used as an example. He called it "harassment."

"Everything I said was true. I was just trying to give a present day, real world example of these issues," Gursky said.

Describing 205 W. Broad St., Gursky testified the front windows were broken, and the upper-floor, exterior, concrete window sills had to be propped up to prevent them from crashing to the sidewalk.

"I'm fixing it up. I'm replacing all the front windows and making other repairs to the building. I just use it for storage. I'm going to move the stuff out and I'm going to sell it, as soon as I get it cleaned out. I got it up for sale now, if anybody's interested," Skwarek said in a phone interview Tuesday afternoon.

In June, Magisterial District Judge Stephen J. Bayer, Tamaqua, sentenced Skwarek to six days in jail for ignoring code violations on the building. That sentence was scheduled to begin later this week, but Skwarek appealed the decision, according to Gursky and Tamaqua Code Enforcement Office Jim Barron.

There are an estimated 300,000 blighted, abandoned buildings in Pennsylvania, according to a 2004 study conducted by The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania. Jeffrey A. Feeser, director of housing and community development for Schuylkill Community Action, said he doesn't have concrete numbers for Schuylkill County, but believes there are "several thousand."

Despite this, municipalities don't have laws strong enough to stop the spread of urban blight, said Gursky and others who took the stand.

"It's one of the most serious issues facing our area," said Sen. James J. Rhoades, R-29, Mahanoy City, who conducted the hearing along with Sen. John Pippy, R-37, Allegheny County, Sen. Pat Browne, R-16, Allentown, and Greg Mahon, executive director of the Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee, Harrisburg.

This was the second public hearing the committee has so far scheduled to gather public input on Senate Bill 1291 before it goes to the state House and Senate for a vote, according to Mary Beth Dougherty, Rhoades' administrative assistant.

Meanwhile, the House has developed an identical bill, House Bill 2445, according to the Pennsylvania General Assembly Web site.

The House and Senate proposals include:

- Requiring the owners of properties with serious code violations to bring them into compliance before those individuals can obtain any local or state permits for any other property in the state.

- Requiring property owners with blighted conditions to pay local costs of demolition by giving the municipality legal authority to pursue a property owner's financial assets.
- Clarifying who owns properties if they are in corporate ownership.
- Requiring mortgage lenders to maintain properties, to prevent properties from becoming blighted.
- Creating a state database offering information about offenders.

"This database can be used to demonstrate a history of violations, where now the only way for a municipality to show that an owner has a history of not correcting violations is to wait until it happens in that particular community," Gursky said.

Local representatives who also provided testimony at Tuesday's hearing at the courthouse included Pottsville Mayor John D.W. Reiley and Michael McGeever, Schuylkill Community Action Elm Street manager.

McGeever said if this bill becomes law, it can help the City of Pottsville deal with 11

E. Norwegian St., a vacant three-story building in a state of advanced deterioration.

"Blight seems to have more of an impact on smaller communities, probably because it is more noticeable more quickly. All you have to do is look out of the courthouse window at properties on the 400 block of Laurel Boulevard. I know because I live there," McGeever said.

Two properties on that block are vacant and falling apart, McGeever said.

The Schuylkill County Tax Claim Bureau has an inventory of about 1,300 properties sold at sheriff's sale for unpaid taxes, and an additional 250 to 300 properties are sold at sheriff's sale for unpaid taxes each year.

"It's fair to assume that a majority of these properties offered for tax sale are blighted," Feeser said. But while he had no statistics, he believed there were more blighted properties in the county than that.

INFO BOX

Neighborhood Blight Reclamation & Revitalization Act

If Senate Bill 1291 and House Bill 2445, which propose to create this act, are passed, they will:

- Require property owners to bring properties with serious code violations into compliance before they can obtain any local or state permits for any other property in the state.
- Require property owners with blighted conditions to pay local costs of demolition, by giving the municipality legal authority to pursue the property owner's financial assets.
- Clarify who owns properties if they are in corporate ownership.
- Require mortgage lenders to maintain properties, to prevent properties from becoming blighted.
- Educate the state's judiciary about the economic crime which blight represents.
- Give redevelopment authorities more ability to assist municipalities with blight remediation.
- Create a state database offering information about offenders.

Schuylkill hearing focuses on state blight bill

Proposal would let municipalities force property owners to make repairs.

Municipalities throughout the state may be able to act more quickly and effectively against owners of dilapidated properties under a state Senate bill slated for a vote this fall, officials said Tuesday at a hearing in Schuylkill County.

The Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act would let municipalities force owners of blighted properties to bring them up to code and, if municipalities must do the work themselves, would allow them to pursue reimbursement from the owners' financial assets.

"You see a trend -- a lack of effort in upkeep," said state Sen. John Pippy, chairman of the Urban Affairs and Housing Committee, which held the hearing. "We're usually talking about vacant properties. These aren't people who are living in their homes and just aren't taking care of them."

Jeri Stumpf of the state chapter of the American Planning Association, which was invited to testify on the bill, said blight is an "economic crime."

"That's something most people don't get," Stumpf said. "If I go down the street and rob a bank, I go to jail. If I'm an investor and milk all the equity out of a property and take taxpayer money, isn't that a crime? Slumlords created these conditions. Let them clean it up -- not the

taxpayers."

The bill also got support from the state Housing and Finance Agency, League of Cities and Municipalities, and Association of Boroughs, as well as Schuylkill Community Action.

Tamaqua Borough Councilman Micah Gursky said that in the past 10 years, Tamaqua has spent more than \$373,000 demolishing 30 blighted properties, not including the cost of legal fees, borough employees' work and unpaid taxes, water, sewer or refuse bills.

Lebanon Mayor Robert Anspach said his borough spends \$400,000 to \$500,000 a year to demolish blighted properties. He said blighted row homes are a big problem and have an impact on connecting buildings, which require thousands of dollars in support and foundation repair during and after demolition.

Officials said state regulations punish slumlords by imposing fines or jail sentences through a district magistrate, but often those penalties aren't enough.

"It's not that things aren't being done," said Sen. James Rhoades, R-Schuylkill, who co-moderated the event with Pippy. "It's the amount of hurdles you have to go through, the amount of paperwork."

Gursky cited a property owner who was jailed and fined more than \$10,000 for a dilapidated building just three blocks from a thriving pub he owns.

The new bill also would create a statewide database of repeat offenders and tie an individual's assets together to force them to make repairs by withholding permits, such as liquor license renewals for the pub in the example Gursky provided. Rhoades said it even may be possible to tie assets together across state lines.

Members of the Pennsylvania Bankers Association said they oppose parts of the bill, including one that would require mortgage lenders -- usually banks -- to maintain foreclosed properties they financed until new owners are available.

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MIDSTATE PHOTOS

Legislators, mayors target urban blight

by CHARLES THOMPSON, OF The Patriot-News

Tuesday February 12, 2008, 5:47 PM

Legislators and local officials declared war today on urban blight and on landlords who permit their properties to deteriorate.

Planked by municipal officials and a bipartisan corps of legislators, Sen. James Rhoades, R-Schuylkill, unveiled two measures intended to give communities stronger weapons with which to fight back against shumlords and a hand up to help neighborhoods recover.

Harrisburg Mayor Stephen R. Reed said the effort should be the top story in every newspaper in the state. Rhoades predicted, "Now you're going to see the special interests come out with all guns blazing."

Rhoades' "Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act" combines ideas that stalled in the General Assembly in the 1990s, during an earlier assault on blighted properties, with new concepts that have worked elsewhere.

The measures would

- Create a statewide registry of property owners who have serious, unresolved building code violations.
Require state and municipal officials to search that database and deny applications from anyone on the list for licenses or permits related to other properties -- including liquor licenses and building permits.
Empower municipalities to seize other assets of negligent landowners to recoup the cost of acquisition, repair or demolition of a blighted property.
Require mortgage lenders to maintain properties when a loan default occurs until there is a new owner.
Give municipalities the ability, with court approval, to place threatened properties into conservatorship and to use any income from the properties to maintain them.

Just as important as the new weapons, said Jeri Stumpf, a former House staffer who helped Rhoades craft the bill, is a measure that would empower the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency to guarantee new private investment in blighted areas.

Those guarantees -- intended as an incentive to bring private capital into blighted areas -- would be available in communities where a "blight removal plan" is in place.

Stumpf said guarantees can help communities seed new development and return residents, businesses and jobs to decaying town centers, arresting the decline in property tax bases that harms schools and protecting other public investment.

Rhoades, with Reps. Todd Eichel, D-Luzerne, and David Argall, R-Schuylkill, said the bills will be introduced shortly in both the Senate and the House. While he is open to compromise, he said, any changes would be vetted by an ad hoc task force that helped him write the bills.

Several local officials endorsed Rhoades' plan, which could face opposition from owners of rental properties, mortgage lenders and other interest groups.

"This legislation is an opportunity to change the face of our communities and get the attention of some people who have had a very negative impact on our towns," said Lebanon Mayor Bob Anspach, one of several midstate officials who's waged high-profile battles against negligent landlords.

Reed went further, contending the new measures are needed to counter lax real estate law that has helped make Pennsylvania a magnet for absentee landlords who drain value from properties in what he likened to slow-motion robbery from nearby neighbors.

"If you count up the lost equity from declining property values (in blighted areas)... I guarantee it's in the billions of dollars" statewide, Reed said. "We're known for it nationally. This nonsense must stop."

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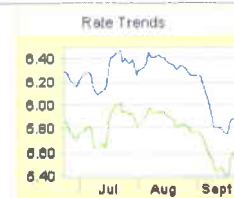
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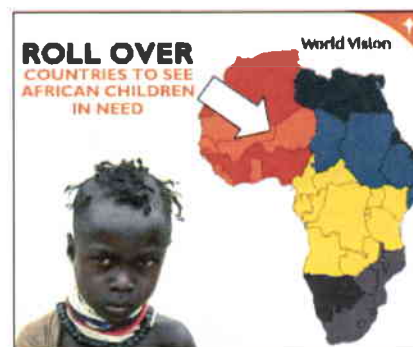
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10 North Second Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101-1678

Stephen R. Reed
Mayor

September 14, 2006

(717) 255-3040

**Honorable James Rhoades, Member
Senate of Pennsylvania
Senate Post Office
Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120**

Dear Senator Rhoades:

It is our understanding that you are taking steps to establish a statewide Blight Task Force that would, amongst other matters, seek the introduction or reintroduction of a series of blight-mitigation bills as part of its work.

Bravo! Such an action is much needed for the cities, older towns and even the older peripheral suburbs in our Commonwealth. Know that you have our full endorsement and support in this effort.

Jeri Stumpf was a key figure in the preparation of essentially all of the previously drafted blight-mitigation legislation. As you probably know, he was Executive Director of the House Urban Affairs Committee and, later, served in the Office of the Governor in a similar community revitalization role. He would be expert on this subject and has had and continues to maintain strong contact with various mayors and other governmental officials across the state, which would be most helpful to any statewide Blight Task Force that would be formed.

This therefore serves to recommend that Mr. Stumpf be considered as a paid consultant for Task Force-related work. He would, without question, be steadfast in his zeal and dedication to assuring the Task Force's success and that of legislation that would result from Task Force work.

We wish you well in these endeavors and appreciate your consideration of this suggestion.



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Blight meets its match

Jeri Stumpf takes on landlords whose negligence infects neighborhoods

By CHIP SMEDLEY, Staff writer
Sunday News

Published: Dec 30, 2007 12:17 AM EST

LANCASTER, Pa - Jeri Stumpf sits in a diner and worries about the future of urban neighborhoods.

He puts a coffee cup in the middle of an empty placemat and says, "This is your investment. Maybe it's a retail business. Maybe," he shrugs, "it's a convention center. Your investment is surrounded by neighborhoods. Some of them may be marginal, may have blighted properties. If those neighborhoods are not protected, what will happen to your investment?"

Eliminating blight isn't just about fixing facades, he preaches. It's about sustainable economic growth.

And it's about justice. He uses a more individual analogy to underscore his belief that "slumlords" need to receive harsher treatment in court.

"If I rob a bank and get caught, I am punished," he says. "Now take a couple who's getting older. They have a lifetime of equity in their property. Suddenly there's a blighted property in their neighborhood and the owner won't do anything because he wants to milk all of the equity out of it. The property values in the neighborhood go down and that couple loses their equity. That owner is taking their money. Isn't that a crime?"

Decreased property values lower tax revenue. Money that municipalities must spend on blighted properties or in chasing slumlords comes from the taxpayer-funded general fund budget

Simply, Stumpf believes that blight "saps the life blood out of the community."

On the attack

A York native who works out of his consulting firm In Willow Street, Stumpf has been on a crusade to eradicate blight and revitalize municipal economies for more than 35 years.

His quest received a shot in the arm one year ago, when Stumpf took a call from state Sen. James Rhoades of Schuylkill County. He asked Stumpf to consult with a task force targeting blight in Pennsylvania cities and boroughs.

Stumpf laughs about the conversation and says, "I told him I was involved in this issue 10 years ago and nothing happened. I said, 'I'm not going to get involved if nothing is going to happen this time, either.'"

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Rhoades was emphatic.

"He said, 'I guarantee you I am going to do something about it,' " Stumpf recalls.

When Rhoades gave Stumpf the green light to make up the task force roster himself, Stumpf leapt aboard.

But he still remembers the unanimous passage of state House Resolution 91, which directed the Urban Affairs Committee to examine the cause and effect of blight in Pennsylvania's urban areas. The goal was to determine whether state programs were addressing blight and subsequent economic revitalization. If not, new legislation would be recommended to fix the problems.

Stumpf led the study, compiled the research and drafted legislation. His report pursuant to the study, "Urban Opportunities, Eradicating Blight and Expediting Economic Development in Pennsylvania in the 21st Century," was used by the American Planning Association when it drafted a new redevelopment policy.

Meanwhile, the state Legislature did nothing.

Stumpf doesn't say exactly why the legislation died in the state Senate, but rubs his thumbs and index fingers together indicating his belief that at the time, some monied interests were in opposition.

For a man who spent his career in local government housing, planning and community revitalization work, that stung.

Given his energy level and passion for the topic, it's easy to understand why he didn't retreat. And now Stumpf is fired up about his second kick at the blight can.

Multi-level approach

He is already the author of Pennvest, Pennsylvania's multi-billion dollar infrastructure financing program, along with the economic development programs of Keystone Opportunity Zones and Neighborhood Improvement Districts.

Yet, while he believes those programs are helpful, they alone won't succeed unless blight, which destroys cities and boroughs on many levels, is tackled.

One of those levels involves the use of liens, which Stumpf believes are an exercise in futility.

"Say the redevelopment authority must demolish a dangerous, blighted structure," he says, "and it costs \$30,000, so they put a lien on the property. Except now the vacant lot is worth only \$5,000 and they'll never recover the cost."

He wants to go another direction.

"The owner who let that property deteriorate has another business, or other properties, or a bank account," Stumpf says "The municipality should be able to go right after his other assets to recover their loss."

And there are public safety concerns. Blighted properties offer kids dangerous new environments to explore. They also offer drug dealers places to set up business.

Learning ins and outs

Stumpf's blight-fighting journey began when he was a sophomore at Dickinson College and took an internship with the York Redevelopment Authority. After graduating from college, he heard in 1968 that York was looking for a chief planner.



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But there was a rub.

"The then-mayor of York hadn't had a planner for six years," Stumpf recalls with a smile.

He interviewed for the post. "After about 45 minutes the mayor looked at me and said, 'I don't like planners, I don't like planning, but I want you as my director of planning,'" Stumpf laughs.

At 23, he became the youngest planning director in the state and came to know the ins and outs of city code enforcement.

He next served as director of York's Redevelopment Authority, where he saw how crucial property values were to overall economic development.

Since then he has worked in the governor's office to help develop a new statewide housing and revitalization strategy and, prior to that, as the first executive director of the House Local Government and Urban Affairs Committee.

Along the way, he's honed his political skill and is determined to do all he can to avoid that frustrating experience of 10 years ago.

Back in the diner, Stumpf's eyes twinkle as he mentions the "Clean and Green" program, how people are drawn to catchy names and how the media has an affinity for repeating them.

So Stumpf says he decided his legislative package "should have a name that says what it does and makes a statement to the Legislature."

So he chose to name this package the "Enhanced Quality of Life Act," because it serves both those functions.

As well as one more.

He leans back in his chair, spreads his arms, palms up, smiles a broad but innocent smile and asks, "Now who, in an election year, could vote against the Enhanced Quality of Life Act?"

Chip Smedley is a staff writer for the Sunday News. You can e-mail him at csmedley@lnpnews.com.

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December 11, 2007

Mr. Jeri Stumpf
President
Jeri E. Stumpf & Associates, Inc.
PO Box 85
Willow Street, PA 17584-0085

Dear Mr. Stumpf,

Thank you for your congratulations and kind words about my participation in developing effective public policy to assist the Commonwealth's urban areas, including Philadelphia.

I appreciate your taking the time to inform me about the *Neighborhood Blight Reclamation & Revitalization Act* that is part of the *Enhanced Quality of Life* legislative blight package and the activities of the Statewide Blight Task Force. Dealing with blighted property and constructing affordable mixed use housing that includes accessible units for members of the disability community are all important aspects of urban policy.

Please keep me informed of the progress of these initiatives. In the meantime, I have passed your information on to a member of my staff for further review.

It was good to see you at the Capitol in Harrisburg and, again, thank you for contacting me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael A. Nutter", is written over a light blue circular stamp.

Michael A. Nutter
Mayor-elect
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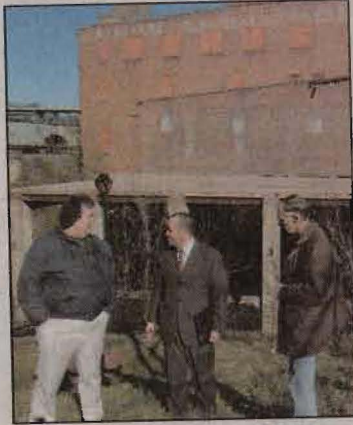
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DEVELOPMENT MODEL?



With its vacant storefronts and dilapidated buildings, Brownsville hardly looks like a role model for economic development, but that is what it has become. See details on B1.

BROWNSVILLE

Town to receive notice in article

BY CHRISTINE HAINES

Herald-Standard

BROWNSVILLE — With its vacant storefronts and dilapidated buildings, Brownsville hardly looks like a role model for economic development, but that is what it has become.

Jeri Stumpf, a special assistant for urban affairs in the governor's office of Housing and Community Revitalization who serves as the governor's liaison with Brownsville, has been asked to write an article for the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs magazine which he has titled "Revi-

talization 101: Brownsville."

"When we think of economic development, we always think of the ribbon-cutting on a brand new building. The truth is, code enforcement is the stimulus for economic development," Stumpf said. "We need good code enforcement so people know their investment will be protected."

Stumpf also has been invited to speak at the borough's association convention in March on the role of code enforcement in economic development, along with Brownsville Borough Council President Jack Lawver.

Talks between the governor's office and the borough began in October 2004. In March 2005, the borough entered into the agreement to participate in the economic development program that focuses on code enforcement. The Fayette County Redevelopment Authority is overseeing the \$150,000 grant that is being used to hire a code enforcement officer for the targeted area and to cover office and legal expenses.

"Brownsville is the perfect model to do it right. Of all the communities I've been through

Please see **Stumpf**, Page C8

Stumpf

Town to receive notice in article

Continued from B1

in Pennsylvania, I've never seen a town in worse condition than downtown Brownsville," Stumpf said.

That blight is being systematically attacked through Project BRIGHT Tomorrow, a targeted revitalization initiative focusing primarily on the downtown area. There are 128 properties in the targeted area, with 65 different property owners, according to project information.

According to a January project update report, 56 of the 128 properties have been inspected, with six inspections pending. There have been 27 violation notices sent out, with four properties brought up to code, 11 with work in progress and 11 citations issued. Twenty-eight letters have been sent out asking for permission to conduct interior inspections.

"I'm getting a real good response from most of the people. They're repairing their properties," said Don Baugh, the code enforcement officer hired for the project.

Baugh said he has been working with the property owners who are willing to make improvements to bring their buildings up to fire and safety codes.

All 11 of the citations that have been issued have gone to properties owned by Ernest and Marilyn Liggett and their various businesses. All have been based solely on exterior inspections, because, Baugh said, Liggett has not given permission for any interior inspections.

"You don't know what the interiors are like, and that's a problem," Baugh said. "You don't know if there's a fire hazard."

Baugh said he has condemned four properties in the targeted area, all owned by the Liggetts. Baugh said those buildings have obvious structural defects such as collapsed walls or roofs. The courts previously ordered one of those buildings, a yellow brick structure at 204 High St., torn down.

"The health and life and safety of the residents is at stake. It's not just that it doesn't look nice," Stumpf said. "It isn't just aesthetics. It's to protect the life and safety of everyone who lives in Brownsville. Every day an owner leaves property in that condition, we are rolling the dice that something bad isn't going to happen."

Stumpf said he anticipates

visible changes in the community by the end of summer.

"By March 1, we'll have finished the inspections of all 128 properties. One third of those left are vacant lots," Stumpf said.

Andrew French, director of the county redevelopment authority, said he has been pleased with the progress in Brownsville.

"We have an extremely aggressive schedule to carry out this initiative and it's been very productive," French said.

The Autenreith Building, which had been adjacent to the Cast Iron Bridge on Market Street, has been torn down. The dilapidated building had been owned by the redevelopment authority, though its demolition was tied up in the courts for a while to determine ownership. The Liggetts had claimed the property. It was decided that the redevelopment authority would tear down the building to its support columns and platform.

"The Liggetts now have six months to get the necessary permits to leave the pillars standing and to reimburse the redevelopment authority for the demolition and all our other costs," French said.

Autenreith demolition expenses were listed on the January report as \$120,000. French said that if the Liggetts do not obtain the necessary

permits and pay the required amount within six months, the redevelopment authority would complete the demolition.

"We are seeking additional resources to address the other deficient properties out there," French said.

French said funding also is being sought through the state Department of Transportation's Hometown Streets program for improvements to Market Street, both on the North Side and in the downtown area.

Stumpf said the revitalization of Brownsville will come one building at a time, with specific projects for specific properties, using the comprehensive plan as a model for the development.

"Our approach is realistic. It's taking one building at a time, one business at a time," Stumpf said. "The secret to good revitalization is determining what the niche businesses are that the market will support. If you don't go after businesses supported by a market study and the needs of the community, you aren't going to have a successful redevelopment."

Stumpf said successful redevelopment programs he has observed have included bringing residential development to the downtown area to provide the people to support new businesses.



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Sunday, April 02, 2006

4/2/2006 Battling blight

Scott Beveridge
Staff writer

BROWNSVILLE -- The narrow road nicknamed "The Neck" is tucked so tightly between tall, rundown storefronts in Brownsville that the buildings loom like overgrown weeds over the sidewalks.

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A section of Market Street known as "the neck" welcomes motorists to Brownsville's blighted downtown. (JOAN O'NEILL/O-R)

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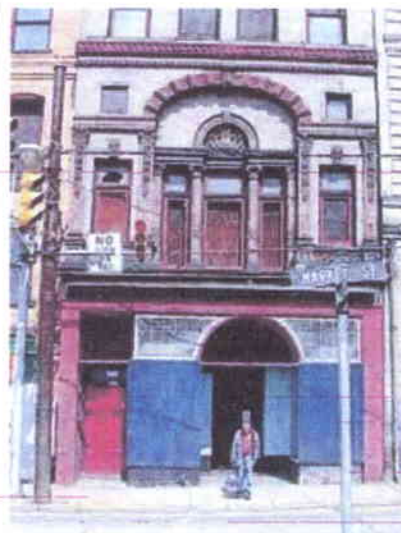
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A pedestrian waits to cross Market Street in front of a building that has been condemned under Brownsville's strict code enforcement program. (JOAN O'NEILL/O-R)

Vacant and allowed to deteriorate, some for more than two decades, these once-stately buildings have become the worst examples of metropolitan blight in Pennsylvania.

"I've not seen anything like Brownsville in my travels in 35 years. It's criminal, a catastrophe waiting to happen," said Jeri E. Stumpf, an urban planner who just may be the borough's last hope for



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recovery.

Stumpf was hand-picked by Gov. Ed Rendell to lead Brownsville in a new direction in what may prove to be a test case for the state's new aggressive code enforcement program. Last year, the governor also gave the cash-strapped borough a free, full-time code enforcer to cite property owners for ignoring building codes, citations that can rise to a crime carrying a possible prison sentence upon conviction.

For the officer, Donald Baugh, it's been an overwhelming challenge just to inspect a string of buildings in the heart of town owned by a Pittsburgh man, who holds an unusual property monopoly.

Baugh issued the property owner, Ernest Liggett, building code citations that carry \$17,000 in fines and court costs, Fayette County court records show. The violations were issued because windows are broken or falling out, roofs are in dire disrepair or exterior walls are crumbling or bowing. Liggett was found guilty of the citations in local court and appealed the verdicts Feb. 28 to Fayette County Court. His petition did not include grounds for the appeal, said Melinda Dellarose, Brownsville's solicitor. She said Liggett is facing countless other fines stemming from separate code violations.

Liggett or his corporation, Manor Investments, also owes more than \$55,000 in unpaid real estate taxes on 23 Brownsville buildings, according to the Fayette County Tax Claim Bureau. He is on a payment plan with the county that prevents the buildings from being sold at tax sale, according to the bureau.

Liggett was a stranger to Brownsville before he began buying up the property, some of which had been on the market for unpaid property taxes. He introduced a grandiose vision for Brownsville in 1994 named "Rebirth of an American City ... River City USA," complete with architectural renderings showing renovated storefronts as factory outlets. At some point, the development touted riverboat gambling on the nearby Monongahela River.

While floating casinos had been considered by the state Legislature at the time, the initiative drowned in committee. Liggett later said he had agreed to sell the buildings to an American Indian tribe and profit by gaming as part owner in that deal, which has yet to come to fruition.

It seemed that some residents of this aging borough built on river and coal industries had begun to lose hope that things in the downtown might improve. The community had just 2,804 residents at the time of the 2000 census, having lost more than half of its population since the 1940 count.

Rendell, however, had a plan to breathe new life into Pennsylvania's downtown districts, all of which have slumlords and decaying neighborhoods to varying degrees. After taking office in 2003, he created the Governor's Office of Housing and Community Revitalization by executive order to attack the problem.



In worst-case scenarios, the office would enforce 1999 amendments to the crimes code that gave municipalities police power to condemn and demolish dangerous buildings. The law recognizes that it's a crime to "bilk the equity" out of a building to the point where someone else's well-maintained property loses its value, said Stumpf, who is special assistant for urban affairs for the new state office. It's the same thing as stealing your neighbor's money, he said.

"The fire chief will not allow (firefighters) to enter any of those dilapidated buildings," he said. "It could be a tragedy waiting to happen. It's very dangerous."

But now, a property owner in Pennsylvania can be charged with a misdemeanor on the fourth consecutive guilty verdict on a building code citation involving a risk to the public, and face a possible 2-year prison sentence. A 5-year prison sentence can be handed down on the fifth consecutive violation leading to a conviction. To date, no one has been convicted to such a degree under the law.

Recognizing Brownsville's dilemma, Rendell came to its downtown in April 2005 to deliver \$150,000 to establish the code enforcement office. The grant was matched by lumber giant Joe Hardy, a commissioner in Fayette County with a reputation of giving small business owners there money to improve their buildings.

A high school marching band welcomed the governor, while more than 400 people stood alongside the vacant buildings to greet him. Rendell was impressed with the turnout, which suggested to him that people still had pride in their hometown, Stumpf said. The governor also demanded that the downtown be placed on the list to receive new sidewalks, landscaping and underground utilities.

In no time, Baugh identified 128 properties in the downtown district, 31 of which are listed as being owned by Liggett, either separately or jointly with his wife, Marilyn, or with other investors, according to Stumpf.

"They all have historical significance," Baugh said. "They want to see most of them saved."

While several property owners were approached to make building repairs after Baugh's inspections, Liggett became the only person with citations that reached the courts, Stumpf added. Most of his buildings line Market Street, a dirty thoroughfare where windows are boarded up and litter and debris collect in vestibules.

Baugh is now completing interior inspections and preparing to cite Liggett a second time over the same buildings, Stumpf said. Additional citations can be issued now every 15 days, he said, until the violations are corrected. It's possible that Liggett could see his fourth and fifth convictions in local court before his initial appeal is heard by a Fayette County judge, Stumpf added.

In lieu of jail time and paying the fines, Liggett could be given the

option to turn over title of his dilapidated buildings to Brownsville, Stumpf added. That would begin a new chapter in finding uses for the buildings or tearing down those that are beyond repair.

"I absolutely want to see our town come back," said Norma Ryan, a local preservationist and former borough mayor. "Those buildings, most of them are five bricks thick. They're built to last."

But with leaking roofs, some are feared to have lost their elaborate interior balconies and stairwells.

"These just aren't ordinary buildings in this downtown," Stumpf said, pointed to hand-carved sandstone ornamentation around a clock above the entrance to an impressive building that was once home to Monongahela National Bank.

"You talk about a crime, when you look at the artistry that went into these buildings," he said.

The Liggetts agreed to discuss the code enforcement effort over the telephone when they were approached by the Observer-Reporter Tuesday at a meeting in Brownsville on the downtown revitalization plan. However, they did not return messages Wednesday and Thursday seeking comment. The attorney representing Liggett in his appeal of the building code fines, Sean P. Audley of Pittsburgh, also did not return messages seeking comment.

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Friday, July 21, 2006

7/21/2006 5:16:00 AM Brownsville's battle

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Scott Beveridge Staff writer

BROWNSVILLE - A Pittsburgh man is facing fines of more than \$100,000 over his dilapidated buildings in Brownsville, where local officials want to put him in jail on accusations he caused severe downtown blight.



A Pittsburgh man is being fined \$200 a day over this run-down building, one of many he owns in similar condition in downtown Brownsville. (SCOTT BEVERIDGE/O-R)

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Ernest Liggett, who owns much of the downtown property, also is being fined \$200 a day for ignoring a Fayette County Court order to tear down one building that has begun to collapse into a hillside.

"We've got to deal with this blight," borough Councilwoman Tracy Sheehan Zivkovich said at a news conference on a pilot program that Gov. Ed Rendell launched in Brownsville to eliminate municipal blight.

"Our call today is to the judicial system, the (district attorney) to

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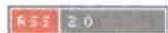
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enforce the criminal law," Zivkovich said.

Rendell gave the old Monongahela River town \$150,000 a year ago to launch an aggressive code enforcement program after he visited the borough and was stunned to see its condition. He then hand-picked state municipal planner Jeri E. Stumpf to get tough on Liggett and other owners of property in disrepair in the downtown.

Liggett and his wife, Marilyn, began buying property in Brownsville in the early 1990s, acquiring most of the downtown district before announcing bold plans to create an elegant shopping district around riverboat gambling. State lawmakers were considering a bill to allow such gambling at the time, but it eventually died in committee. There have been other attempts by the Liggetts to redevelop the downtown while the borough became what Stumpf has labeled the worst case of municipal blight in Pennsylvania.

Stumpf has threatened to seek a jail term against Ernest Liggett under 1999 amendments to the state crimes code that call for a sentence of up to five years on five consecutive convictions for the same building code violation. To date, there have been four such convictions against Liggett at the local court level; however, he has appealed them to Fayette County Court. A hearing on the appeal is scheduled for Sept. 22 before Judge Steve Leskinen.

In all, Brownsville's new code enforcement officer has cited 38 property owners over problems ranging from broken windows to collapsing roofs. Fourteen of the citations involving different property owners either have been corrected or attempts are being made to erase the citations, said Andrew P. French, executive director of Fayette's redevelopment authority.

The Liggetts own the other 24 properties with citations, he said. Ernest Liggett has been found guilty in district court of 34 citations, some of which are repeat violations. Marilyn Liggett is named in one of the appeals.

The Liggetts have not returned messages for prior stories involving the citations. They could not be reached Thursday to discuss the news conference. It was not immediately known if they have an attorney for the appeals.

Brownsville council President Jack Lawver said it was ironic that the building at 149 High St., which has been racking up daily fines, was among the first that was purchased by the Liggetts.

He said they presented borough officials with architectural renderings for that building, which showed beautiful balconies outside each apartment facing the street. Today, the windows are boarded up, weeds are sprouting from the side lot and the rear of the building is falling down.

"His pictures looked phenomenal. I was on cloud nine," Lawver said.

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Memorandum from office of the Mayor

200 Second Street Brownsville, PA 15417

724-785-3363

e-mail brownsvillemayor@excite.com

To: Honorable Governor Edward Rendell
CC: Larry Segal, Lisa Yaffe
From: Mayor Norma J. Ryan
Date: November 23, 2004
Re: Thanks

>Dearest Honorable Governor,

I am so elated today that I just had to write a note to let you know about what a delightful day we had with Jeri Stumpf.

Honestly in the past, there were times when I wondered if anything would EVER happen in Brownsville. Then along came this great Governor with a vision and willingness to help small communities and that ray of hope is allowing our dreams to surface . . . at last!!

Today, Andrew French of the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority and Joy Wilhelm of Mackin Engineering (doing the comprehensive plan for Brownsville) and I sat around the table with Jeri and brain stormed and talked and dreamed big then came down to earth and narrowed our vision to a workable plan for a realistic future. I am so excited I wonder if I will be able to settle down to sleep tonight.

Governor, I just had to let you know how much I appreciate you and what you have planned for this state. It has been a long time coming, but we now have a Governor with a vision who puts his action where he has spoken. I just cannot thank you enough for sending Jeri to us through Larry and Lisa.

Just cannot wait to get moving on this project. As soon as we put all our thoughts of today on paper, I will be forwarding it to you for your review and approval (I pray so).

Incidentally have you ever had an opportunity to call Laura Schrock in CA about her desire to help us in Brownsville? She has a big meeting on Monday Nov 29th and would love to be able to say she spoke with the Governor of PA and he understands her desire to help and promote the town in a unique manner. There are a lot of issues that have to be resolved in her plan and that can happen if she gets a studio interested. Her phone number is: 310-922-8509.

Have a blessed Thanksgiving and look forward to hearing from you.

CONFIDENTIAL

Brownsville council votes to join new state program

By CHRISTINE HAINES

Herald-Standard

BROWNSVILLE — Brownsville Borough Council Tuesday opted to participate in a new state program out of the governor's office designed to spur community redevelopment.

Under the program, the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority will receive a \$150,000 grant on behalf of the borough to staff a code enforcement office in the former Odd-

fellows Building to concentrate on the downtown business district. Jeri Stumpf, a special assistant for urban affairs in the governor's office of Housing and Community Revitalization, will serve as the point man for the borough in all dealings with the state as the borough's strategic investment officer.

Stumpf attended Tuesday's meeting to answer council questions prior to the vote on whether the borough was going to accept the grant. Stumpf said

he has met with council members individually and attended various meetings regarding Brownsville's strategic plan.

"I got from you what you thought the town needed for revitalization," Stumpf told council. "I came to you to see what you wanted done and you said code enforcement was the number one priority."

The targeted area will run along Market Street from the Flatiron Building to the Borough Building.

"If, in fact, you are going to get a new tax base in the community, it's the former central business district that must be targeted," Stumpf said. "If it's a shotgun approach in a community instead of in a concentrated area, you don't get the economic development. It needs to be focused."

Councilman John Hosler voted against the program, saying the entire borough should be

Please see **Council**, Page **B3**

Council

Brownsville to join new state program

Continued from B1

considered blighted and one area or one property owner should not be singled out. Ernest Liggett, who said he owns 30 percent of the buildings in the designated area, questioned the legality of targeting the downtown buildings.

"We need to be clear about this. You are using code enforcement as a redevelopment tool, targeting downtown. To me, that is selected enforcement," Liggett said.

Both Hosler and Liggett pointed out that there are also blighted areas on Brownsville's North Side that are part of the community's gateway, affecting the impression the town makes on people driving through. Hosler suggested that efforts be concentrated in that area first, since a new museum is being developed there.

"I'm not ready to write off downtown Brownsville," Lawver said.

Stumpf noted that under state law boundaries must be set and redevelopment plans must be prepared for blighted areas.

"If you don't want the money to do this, there are a lot of other communities that want it. I'm not here to convince anyone to participate," Stumpf said.

Liggett pointed out that the Brownsville Area Revitalization Corporation and the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority also own buildings in the targeted area.

"I can tell you there are as many code concerns with those properties that are somewhat tolerated and I am cited and taken into litigation," Liggett said.

Stumpf noted that the code enforcement aspect is just the first phase of the redevelopment plan. He said that more than a million dollars could come into the town under the second phase that could include buying blighted buildings and either fixing them up or tearing them down, setting up a revolving fund for building improvements and developing streetscapes to make the area more attractive to prospective businesses.

Councilmen Jack Lawver, Robert Pritts, Edward "Tuck" Rohrer and Martin Redigan voted in favor of accepting the grant, while councilmen John Hosler and Russell McMaster voted against it. Councilman Tom Bush abstained, saying he needed more information about the program.

Battling blight



Code enforcement program targets 128 properties in Brownsville

BY CHRISTINE HAINES

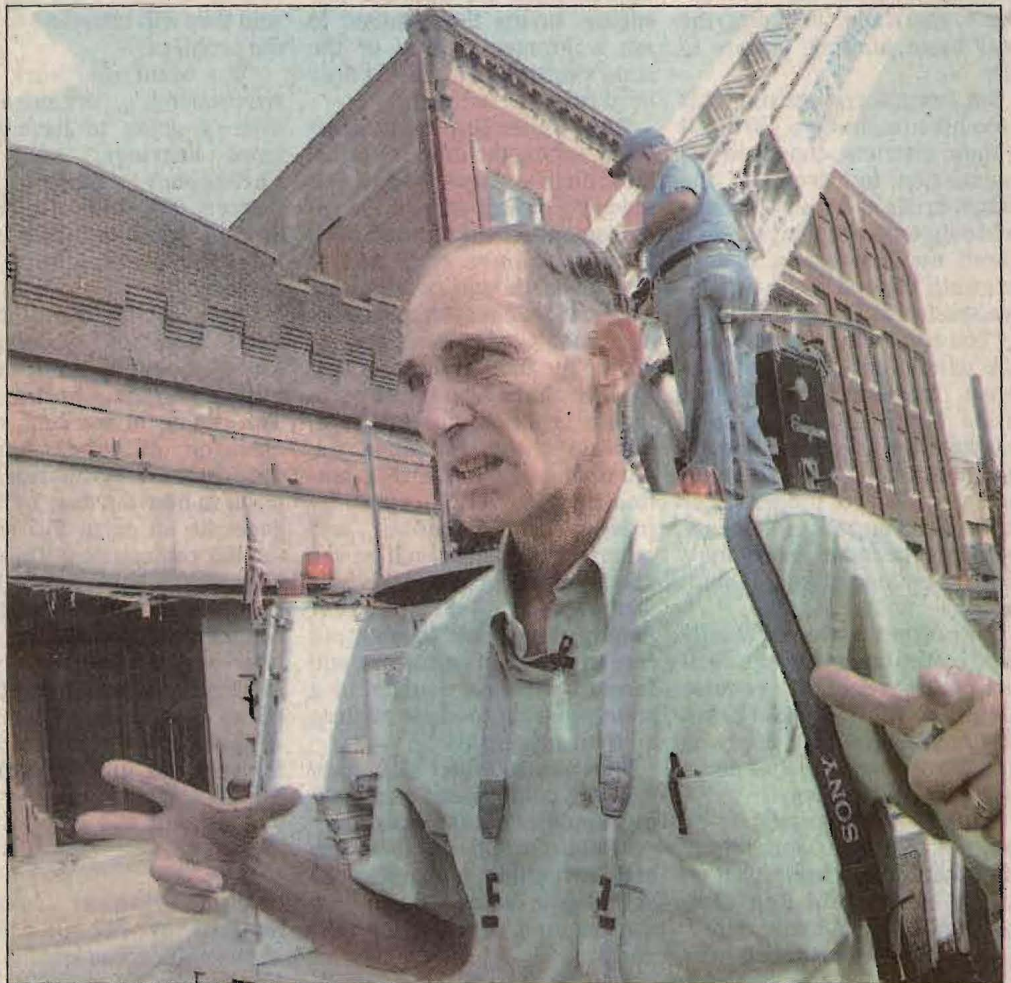
Herald-Standard

BROWNSVILLE — Inspections of downtown Brownsville buildings began Tuesday in an effort to eliminate blighted conditions in the borough.

The undertaking is known as Project B.R.I.G.H.T. Tomorrow, with the acronym standing for "Brownsville Revitalization Initiative for a Great Home Town. A \$150,000 state grant to the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority is funding the code enforcement efforts in downtown Brownsville, including funding for legal fees as cases are taken to court. The enforcement area contains 128 properties with 65 different owners, according to Project B.R.I.G.H.T. Tomorrow staff members.

The area targeted for intense code enforcement stretches from the Inter-County Bridge through downtown Brownsville to Arch Street and reaching up Arch Street to Cadwallader Street according to Andrew French, the executive director of the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority. Jeri Stumpf of the Governor's Office of Housing and Community Revitalization said the area has been targeted for enforcement because it has been declared blighted by the Fayette

Please see **Blight**, Page A2



DAVE RAFFERTY/*Herald-Standard*

In the top photo, a worker inspects the inside of Brownsville's former Odd Fellows Building Tuesday as Project B.R.I.G.H.T. begins. Directly above, Donald Baugh, Brownsville code enforcement officer, works near the former Authenrith's building.

Blight

Program targets code enforcement

Continued from A1

County Planning Commission

"This problem with code enforcement in Brownsville is probably about the worst in the state," Stumpf said. "We really believe that Brownsville can be a model for code enforcement in the state."

A full-time code enforcement officer and administrative assistant have been hired by the redevelopment authority to staff the Brownsville office for targeted code enforcement. While the two, code officer Donald Baugh and assistant Jessica Yuhas, have been working to build a database of the buildings in the targeted area, Tuesday was their first day on the job in Brownsville.

Baugh began by taking photographs and videos of the rooftops of the downtown buildings using the South Brownsville ladder truck along with fire official and part-time borough code enforcement officer Edward "Woody" Nicholson.

He found problems with the very first building he looked at on Market Street near the Cast Iron Bridge.

"This building here is in very, very bad shape. There are holes in it. It looks like it might be where the air-conditioning units might have fallen through," Baugh said.

Stumpf said the video and photographs will add weight to the cases filed with the magisterial district judges who initially hear the cases, as well as if there are subsequent appeals to Fayette County Court.

Stumpf said that when he was putting together information about the targeted area he

asked the previous code enforcement officer for previous inspections.

"Not one building had been completely inspected inside and out," Stumpf said. "It's a safety issue."

Stumpf said the goal of the new code enforcement officer is to inspect each building in the targeted area inside and out.

"The code enforcement officer has the right to inspect the interior of any property. However, the code enforcement officer has to be invited onto the property by the owner," Stumpf said.

Stumpf said appointments will be made with the property owners in the area.

"If, in fact, access is denied, they will go to court and get an order and the inspection can take place," Stumpf said.

Some of the more hazardous properties may not receive internal inspections, French said.

"Some of these you can do from the outside. If the roof is gone and the windows are out, you can basically tell the condition of the building without going inside," French said.

Stumpf said train tracks run behind the Market Street buildings and he worries about what could happen in the community if a train carrying hazardous materials derailed behind Market Street, or if there were to be a fire in one of the buildings.

"I have learned that the volunteer fire departments will not risk their lives by going into these buildings," Stumpf said.

One building in the targeted area, the former Autenreith Building, is currently being torn down by the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority. Nearly the entire roof on the building has already collapsed onto the first floor, making demolition conditions hazardous, French said.

Stumpf said the code enforcement in the targeted area will be fast-tracked, with computer tracking of each case so

they don't fall through the cracks once a citation is issued.

The borough previously employed CodeSys for code enforcement, with a code officer in the borough one day a week, including any court appearances. Borough officials said that tended to drag the process out, with limited time for follow-up.

"The problem in the past was we had limited resources," French said. "We were limited not only on code enforcement, but also on the money for legal fees."

Stumpf said that shouldn't be the case under the new system.

"This is going to be very aggressive. We are going to cite the ones where there is the most need first. They will be given a reasonable time. If nothing is done, they will be cited again," Stumpf said.

Stumpf said that under state law, the fifth time a property owner is cited for failure to correct a problem at a property, the owner could be subject to criminal charges with a penalty of up to five years in jail.

"We want to get this corrected as soon as possible. People's lives are at stake," Stumpf said.

Stumpf said the code enforcement officer will work with property owners who are making an effort to correct maintenance deficiencies. Stumpf said the possibility of setting up a revolving loan fund for property owners who don't have the financial resources to fix up their buildings is also being considered, though evidence of financial need would be required, if that program is established.

Stumpf said property owners who are cited also have the option of tearing the dilapidated structure down, or turning them over to the redevelopment authority for renovation or demolition. Stumpf said the state would most likely come up with funding to help with the demolition if buildings are

acquired by the redevelopment authority, with liens placed against the property to recover the cost of demolition in the event the land is sold.

Whether the dilapidated buildings are torn down or rehabilitated, Stumpf said, the property would then be available for development.

"It all starts with code enforcement. No developer is going to come and spend money here with the way the buildings are today," Stumpf said.

Stumpf said that if need be, eminent domain regulations could be put into place in the targeted area to eliminate blight and bring about economic revitalization in the community.

"The point is, something is going to happen here in Brownsville, something good," Stumpf said.

The Project B.R.I.G.H.T. Tomorrow office is located in the former Oddfellows Building, which has been renovated to accommodate the office and the People Place, an information clearinghouse for services and activities in the area.

Stumpf said the building itself is part of the economic revitalization plan for the community.

"If everything on both sides of the street looked like this building, it would look like downtown Uniontown," Stumpf said.

Brownsville Mayor Norma Ryan said the Oddfellows Building was acquired by the Brownsville Area Revitalization Corp. following a recommendation from the Appalachian Regional Commission.

"Their recommendation was that a building in the center of town be the center of redevelopment efforts in our community," Ryan said.

The building will be open daily from 9 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.

"We're very excited that this is the first phase of a lot of activity in our community," Ryan said.

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08/13/2005

Crowd discusses Brownsville plan

By Christine Haines , Herald-Standard

BROWNSVILLE - More wooden folding chairs had to be set up Thursday as about 75 people attended a public hearing on the joint comprehensive plan for Brownsville and Brownsville Township.

"This is really an incredible turn out. It says a lot about you, your community and your commitment to your community," said Joy Wilhelm of Mackin Engineering, the firm that prepared the comprehensive plan.

Numerous handouts were available to all who attended, including the findings and analysis and action plans for the communities in each of the areas covered by the comprehensive plan and results of a community survey and input from focus groups. The plan covers the historic character of the area, population characteristics, community facilities, transportation, housing, economic characteristics and sustainability, land use and previous studies done on the communities.

Wilhelm noted that the municipalities can accept the plan as written, revise the plan, accept only portions of the plan or reject it entirely.

Jeri Stumpf, a special assistant for urban affairs with the governor's office of Housing and Community Revitalization, said he has looked at the current comprehensive plan and previous studies done on the town.

"I get to see a lot of comprehensive plans and work with numerous engineering firms. It's as good a plan as any I've seen in 35 years, including the ones I wrote," Stumpf said.

Stumpf is the liaison between Brownsville Borough and various state agencies for an extensive code enforcement project aimed at the revitalization of downtown Brownsville.

"It's your downtown. What happens in Brownsville is going to be determined by you, the residents and local officials. In an ideal world, what would you like to see in Brownsville? This plan is...not a law. It's not an ordinance. It's a plan. It's a guide for what you want to happen in Brownsville in the future," Stumpf said. "I'm optimistic this town is going to change."

During the public comment period, Brownsville resident Carl Blakey stated that while the need for recreational outlets was noted in a community survey and in focus group meetings, it was not specifically addressed in the strategic plan.

Wilhelm said it was not in the original scope of work, but that while preparing the plan it became obvious that more work needed to be done.

"One of the recommendations is to do a comprehensive recreation study funded by the Department of Conservation of Natural Resources," Wilhelm said.

Resident Harold Richardson suggested that the borough and township jointly hire a Main Street manager.

"Brownsville Borough Council and Brownsville Township should not rely on a single organization such as B.A.R.C. (the Brownsville Area Revitalization Corp.) to carry out this plan," Richardson said.

Wilhelm said that the plan does recommend a Main Street program.

"The plan also identifies as a weakness that there is an insufficient amount of resources in either community to carry out an economic development plan," Wilhelm said.

Lewis Hosler, who won the Democratic nomination for mayor in the primary election, asked about a section of the plan that reads: "Ongoing support to the Brownsville Police Department must be a priority for the borough and township."

Wilhelm said that the plan acknowledges that there are problems with increasing expenses and decreasing revenue for the police department, but it recommends that the full-time department be kept.

Wilhelm said one recommendation is to offer services to surrounding municipalities for a fee.

"I agree with that, and lately there have been improvements to the department. If I have an emergency, I don't want to have to wait for a state trooper," Hosler said.

John Hosler, who serves on Brownsville Borough Council, noted that while the plan refers to the possibility of industrial development on Norfolk Southern Railroad property in the borough, there could be problems with hazardous materials at that site.

"You would actually need to complete an environmental study for that parcel. The plan recommends working with Fay-Penn because they are the entity with the expertise for industrial development," Wilhelm said.

Andrew Pasquini of Brownsville, who identified himself as a small landlord, questioned a recommendation in the plan that calls for fees to be placed on rental units based on square footage, as well as inspections of the properties.

"Is this going to bankrupt the few private landlords?" Pasquini asked.

Wilhelm said that wasn't the intent of the recommendation.

"It helps identify a way for inspections to occur on a regular basis for the health and safety of the community," Wilhelm said. "If you choose to become a landlord, you do have a responsibility to the community."

Bob Arthurs, the owner of the Brownsville Apartments, a private high rise in downtown Brownsville, said that taxes are paid on his building and it is already extensively inspected physically and financially by the department of Housing and Urban Development.

Wilhelm said landlords who could show proof that they are meeting health and safety regulations would not be required to duplicate the process.

"Fire departments need to know when a single-family home has been made into apartments," Wilhelm said.

"There are already regulations for rental properties in the borough. What needs to be done is enforcement of the regulations we already have," John Hosler said.

Wilhelm said that lack of code enforcement is noted as a deficiency in the comprehensive plan.

Resident Stella Broadwater questioned how the inspections would take place and how much permits would cost.

Wilhelm noted that such matters would be determined by a locally drafted ordinance adopted by the municipality.

"This plan is not binding. It is something for the municipalities to consider," Wilhelm said. "They have to affirm that this is the will of the people."

Nena Kaminsky questioned whether the recommendation to reduce the number of people on council was also a recommendation to merge the two communities.

"Absolutely not. There is no recommendation in this plan for the borough and the township to merge," Wilhelm said.

Wilhelm said the plan does recommend intergovernmental cooperative agreements for certain services, with the municipalities sharing costs and responsibilities in certain areas.

According to Dennis Puko of the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, grant money is available to cover up to half the cost of setting up a cooperative agreement between municipalities, noting that under state law, anything that can be done by one municipality can legally be done under a cooperative agreement.

"We know it's not easy to take what you have and let it be used by another municipality," Puko said.

Puko said the grants are an incentive to set up the joint programs and can be used for equipment purchases, office set up, and even for start-up salaries.

"You have to have a plan for how it's going to be sustained afterward," Puko said.

In many cases, Puko said, the cost of the on-going services is covered by the savings created by municipalities not duplicating services each of them would have been providing individually without the agreement.

Brownsville property owner Ernest Liggett suggested that more information on the number of Pennsylvania municipalities under Home Rule be addressed in the plan.

Stumpf noted that Home Rule is primarily used by municipalities that no longer want their taxing ability to be restricted by state code or those

that want a different form of government than is defined for the municipality by state code.

Stumpf said that even under a Home Rule Charter, there are certain state statutes that must be adhered to and property assessment is still in the hands of the county.

The public comment period for the comprehensive plan continues through Aug. 26.

Each municipality will vote on the plan during meetings in September, with public hearings in each municipality a half hour prior to the regular meeting times, Wilhelm said.

The Brownsville Township supervisors are scheduled to meet Sept. 6 and Brownsville Borough Council will meet Sept. 13.

Officials from both municipalities expressed satisfaction with the plan.

"It provides us with a guideline for numerous opportunities to make the community better," said Jack Lawver, Brownsville Borough Council president.

"Now it's our job to try to follow through with the recommendations that will work for us," said Homer Yeardie, chairman of the Brownsville Township supervisors.

A copy of the plan is available for review at the Brownsville Municipal Building. It is also available at the Herald-Standard Web site, www.heraldstandard.com. To view the comprehensive plan, the PDFs and maps, go to the local news section on the Herald-Standard Web site.

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Backing Brownsville



Hardy matches \$150,000 grant for revitalization

By CHRISTINE HAINES

Herald-Standard

BROWNSVILLE — Revitalization efforts for downtown Brownsville got an even bigger shot in the arm than anticipated Wednesday when Gov. Ed Rendell helped to convince Joe Hardy to match his state grant.

The Fayette County Commissioner and owner of 84 Lumber pledged \$150,000 toward the revitalization of the downtown area. Hardy said it was a spur of the moment decision for him.

"It's a moving thing when you see so many people out here who have hope. It moves me to see this," Hardy said.

Hardy said in part his decision was to show support for Brownsville Mayor Norma Ryan's efforts to bring Brownsville back.

"I think Norma does such a job. She's out fighting and fighting and people should encourage her," Hardy said.



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In the top photo, Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell speaks to state and local dignitaries and citizens of Brownsville during a visit to deliver \$150,000 in state funding for revitalization efforts. Directly above, Fayette County Commissioner Vincent A. Vicites shakes the hand of Commissioner Joe Hardy after Hardy decided to match the grant.

Please see **Grant**, Page A2



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**Wednesday's Rural Issues
Community Action Agency in**

budget proposal would have a severe effect on patients and place a financial strain on hospitals.

Rendell's proposed changes to the program, known more commonly as Medicaid, include limiting the number of hospital admissions and outpatient visits for recipients annually, placing monthly caps on the number of prescriptions that will be covered by Medicaid, and requiring more recipients to make higher copayments on many prescription drugs.

Because Fayette County has a high poverty rate, Bacharach said Medicaid covers 20 percent of the patients Union-

ple. And if we cut those people, they would be knocking on the hospital doors for uncompensated care."

As for other topics, residents also expressed their concerns about unemployment.

"Foreign competition is killing us," he said.

Rendell said that he is aware of unemployment problems, but said more manufacturing jobs are starting to become available across the commonwealth.

"There's help out there. You just got to ask," Rendell said, urging owners of small businesses - companies that have 10 em-

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Brownsville Mayor Norma Ryan reads a proclamation to Gov. Ed Rendell, declaring it Gov. Ed Rendell Day in Brownsville Wednesday.

town area of Market Street from the Flatiron Building to the Borough Building, with the code enforcement officer housed in the Odd Fellow Building in the center of the project area.

"The resources aren't unlimited and we have to prioritize where we're going to go. There is a lot of need out there," Rendell said.

"The thing that determines where we go is how committed

the local people are to bringing their hometowns back. Your local officials, your mayor and your council are committed to this project.

"We're not going to stop with downtown. Every part of this

town will be helped," Rendell said. "We've got to start at the center, here in the downtown. Every one of these abandoned buildings needs to either be brought up to code or torn down. We don't mean this to be mean to anybody, but we're going to say we're here to bring Brownsville back and you're either going to bring your buildings up to code or we're going to raze them at your expense."

The project has been dubbed "Project BRIGHT Tomorrow" for "Brownsville Revitalization Initiative for a Great Home Town."

"When BRIGHT has taken the important first step, we will be back to redevelop this town the way you want it. You can look at Uniontown. We're not done there, but you can look at it and see that there is hope," Rendell said.

The governor pledged his support for additional funds for the borough.

"When I'm back in Harrisburg shuffling through the requests, I'll remember how many of you showed up today," Rendell said. "As my colleague the governor of California says 'I'll be back.'"

Rendell is no stranger to economic revitalization.

He noted that when he was mayor of Philadelphia in 1992 there were neighborhoods where you couldn't give the property away.

Aggressive revitalization

A called dedicated prosecutor

time with his girlfriend, a clerk in the DA's office said by police to have been the last person to see and speak with him on Friday.

Authorities probing his disappearance have sifted through files, talked to family

\$5,000 reward for information on Gricar's whereabouts.

Police have applied for a search warrant to look at Gricar's medical history. Gricar's girlfriend, Patty Fornicola, said the prosecutor had been complaining the last three

which first reported details of the search warrant.

A source familiar with the case told The Associated Press that obtaining warrants to look at bank, phone and medical records are typical in a missing person's investigation

Carnegie Mellon comp

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Carnegie Mellon University is warning more than 5,000 students, employees and graduates that their personal information may have been accessed during a breach of the school's computer network earlier this month.

Officials at Carnegie Mel