



News Release

Russell M. Pry – Summit County Executive

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Officials Gather to Address the Growing Number of Abandoned and Vacant Properties, Summit County AVP Task Force Unveils Goals

On Tuesday, January 27, 2010, the County of Summit Abandoned and Vacant Property Task Force (AVP Task Force), chaired by Summit County Councilman (District 5) Cazzell Smith, unveiled goals for combating the growing number of abandoned and vacant properties in Summit County.



Nearly 200 citizens attended the community meeting that took place at the Akron-Summit County Public Library, located at 60 South High Street in downtown Akron.

In 2008, Summit County Council established the Abandoned and Vacant Property Task Force in an effort to reduce the number of abandoned and vacant properties in the community, decrease neighborhood blight and decay, maximize the use of abandoned and vacant properties and prevent future abandonments and vacancies by addressing the needs of homeowners who face the loss of property through foreclosures.

Throughout 2009, the fifteen member work group met regularly to tackle the complex issue, as well as the costly problems abandoned and vacant properties create (i.e., criminal activity, decreasing home values, public health concerns, limited economic growth, etc.).

As a result of their efforts, the Summit County Abandoned and Vacant Property Task Force recommended the following goals for implementation:

1. **Develop a centralized system for tracking abandoned and vacant properties.** The development of such a database would provide officials with a comprehensive AVP inventory, help track the progress of putting such properties back into productive use, forecast future AVP trends and assist area officials with future planning efforts. The Summit County General Health District has already committed to overseeing the development of this specialized database.

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2. **Enforcement of existing codes and the recommendation for more effective legislation.** County of Summit officials are presently investigating the possibility of creating one or more specialty courts to handle housing issues only. Housing courts have already been established in Cleveland and Columbus.
3. **Identify and make recommendations regarding the best use of funding streams to address the problem and seek other resources to prevent abandonments and vacancies due to foreclosures and other major causes.** To achieve this goal, the AVP Task Force is pursuing the creation of land banks. Land banks will allow local governments to purchase homes as a way to restore economically distressed areas.
4. **Develop strategies to implement alternate uses for existing abandoned and vacant properties.** Strategies to achieve this goal include the removal of uninhabitable buildings and the development of community gardens and green space. The AVP Task Force recommends collaboration with the County of Summit Green Policy Task Force on this effort.

To accomplish these four goals, the AVP Task Force's next step is to create an Ad Hoc Committee made up of key community partners. Once established, the committee will be responsible for submitting regular progress reports to Summit County Council's Long Term Planning Committee, as well as County Executive Russell M. Pry.

"I am eager to see these goals advance to the implementation phase," stated Summit County Executive Russell M. Pry. "I believe citizens of Summit County want their neighborhoods to return to the safe and pleasing environments they once were."

Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray, Summit County Council President Jon Poda, Summit County Councilwoman At-Large Ilene Shapiro and City of Akron Council President Marco Sommerville were also on-site to pledge their support.

"The community has really come together to tackle this community problem," stated Cazzell Smith, chair of the Summit County Abandoned and Vacant Property Task Force. "I believe we are all very motivated to move this project forward."

For more information about the County of Summit Abandoned and Vacant Property Task Force, contact Summit County Council at 330-643-2725. To view the [Summit County Abandoned and Vacant Property Task Force: Report to the Community](#) in full detail, click on <http://www.co.summit.oh.us/council/index.htm>.

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