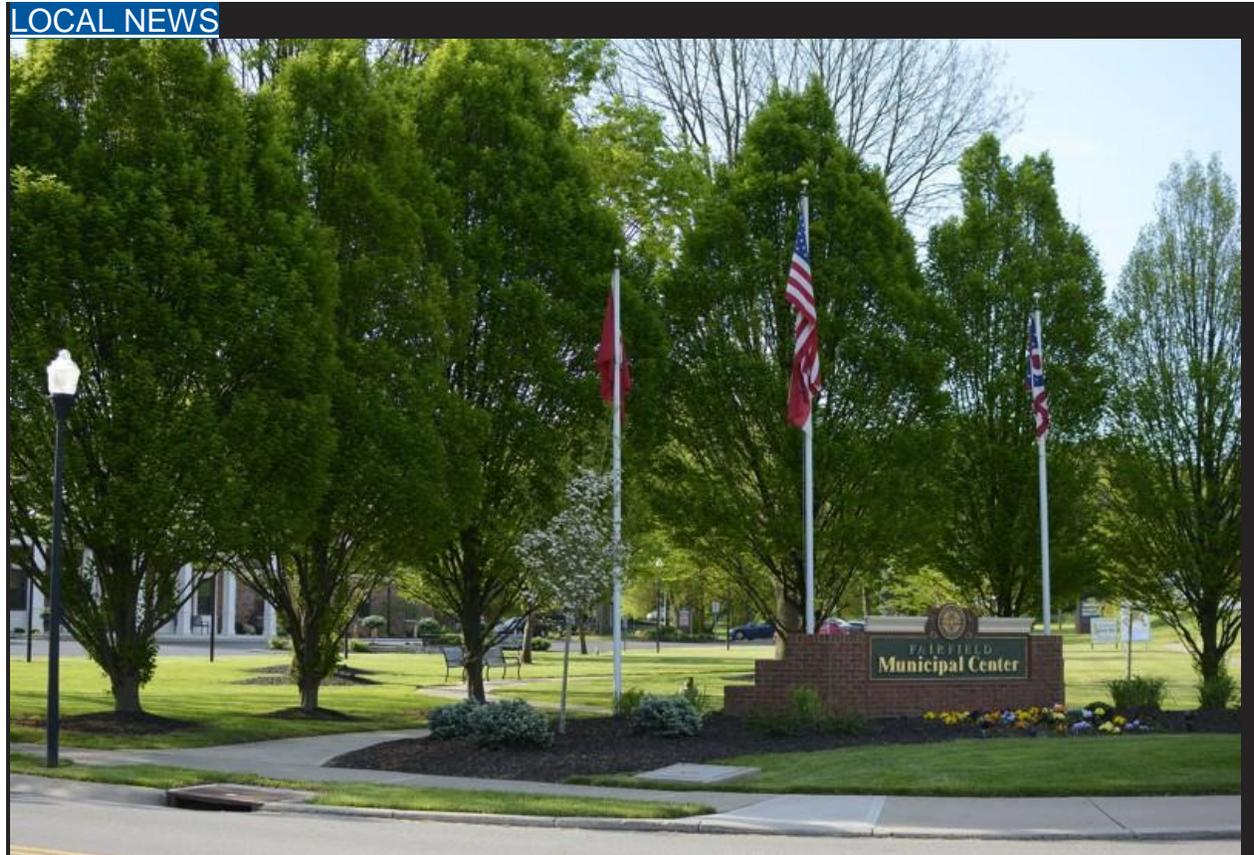


Fairfield to join Butler County blight-busting program

- [Michael D. Pitman](#)

Staff Writer

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Michael D. Pitman

The city of Fairfield is expected to be the next Butler County community to join the county land bank. MICHAEL D. PITMAN/FILE

FAIRFIELD

The city of Fairfield is set to be the 14th Butler County jurisdiction to join the county's land bank.

City Council verbally agreed this past Monday to move forward with the process to join the Butler County Land Reutilization Corporation, commonly known as the county land bank.

Council directed staff to prepare a memorandum of understanding to join. It will be presented at its next meeting in July.

The land bank, among other things, helps eliminate blight and stabilize neighborhoods, something that isn't a rampant problem in Fairfield, according to Fairfield Development Director Greg Kathman.

"Fortunately, we here in Fairfield, don't have some of the serious property issues like some of our neighboring communities have in terms of foreclosures and abandoned properties, but that's a good thing," he said. "But we still think there are some valuable resources that the land bank could provide in certain circumstances that would make it worthwhile. It just provides an additional tool for our tool box, primarily acquiring property, cleaning up titles and positioning property for re-development."

And clearing up a property title is likely to be the biggest benefit for the city, said Kathman.

"The cost of the demolition is not really all that substantial, but clearing the title — it might have back taxes due, mortgages are due to some bank somewhere, or assessment for demolition, or grass cutting bills the city puts on — so you have all these negative lien issues on the property that a developer, some builder doesn't want to get up in."

The land bank started in 2012 when the cities of Hamilton and Middletown accepted a \$2.7 million Moving Ohio Forward grant from the Ohio Attorney General's office, but that's been the only investment from local communities. The land bank was opened to other communities in 2014 when the Butler County Commission agreed to fund the quasi-public organization with 1 percent of the county's Delinquent Tax Assessment Collections funds. It brings in around \$130,000 a year, said land bank Executive Director Mike McNamara.

The land bank was also one of 18 counties last year to receive funding — \$1.77 million — from the Ohio Housing Finance Agency's Hardest Hit Fund Program.

McNamara said most of the work has been in Hamilton and Middletown — mainly because each community invested \$1.1 million in 2012 — and dividends are paying off.

"Property values within a 500 foot vicinity of where we were active have increased by 30 percent," said McNamara. "In Middletown, they had a somewhat similar effect — not so much with home values but with the incidents of foreclosures. Their foreclosure incidents went down 30 percent."

Where the land bank can help the city of Fairfield is clean up titles on foreclosed on commercial properties or help the city "strategically acquire properties."

"In the current Hardest Hit funding, for instance, we have target neighborhoods that we're trying to address so that we can bring those neighborhoods back from the tipping point," said McNamara.

The village of Seven Mile joined the land bank in April, and McNamara has said West Chester Twp. has also expressed interest in becoming a member.

And at no cost to the city, Fairfield City Council member Chad Oberson said, "It's almost like it's free money, honestly."

LAND BANK MEMBERS

There are 13 members of the Butler County Land Reutilization Corporation:

- Seven Mile
- Middletown
- Hamilton
- Trenton
- Fairfield Twp.
- Hanover Twp.
- Liberty Twp.
- Ross Twp.
- Madison Twp.
- Lemon Twp.
- Wayne Twp.
- Oxford Twp.
- St. Clair Twp.