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COUNCILWOMAN SÁNCHEZ INTRODUCES UPDATED LAND BANK BILL TO ADDRESS BLIGHT AND IMPROVE CITY PROPERTY VALUES

PHILADELPHIA, PA — Councilwoman María Quiñones Sánchez and Councilman Bill Green today reintroduced legislation to create a Philadelphia Land Bank that will transform the City's fragmented land-holding system into a single, streamlined entity with the power to quickly acquire and strategically dispose of vacant properties. The updated bills reflect a year-long collaborative process, including stakeholders from Council, the Nutter administration, and citywide coalitions representing nonprofit community organizations and for-profit developers.

The bills are based on national best practices, and designed to effectively address the issue of vacant, unoccupied, rundown houses and empty lots in Philadelphia. Vacant properties—totaling more than 40,000 in Philadelphia—bring blight and depressed property values. Currently, City-controlled vacant land is spread among four local public agencies. Each agency has different rules for property sales, making it almost impossible for a buyer to purchase a parcel quickly. In addition, studies have demonstrated a relationship between vacant property and crime, and have shown that improvements to derelict parcels reduce gun assaults and vandalism.

The Philadelphia Land Bank will be a new entity created and controlled by the City of Philadelphia. It will be coordinated with the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority and other City agencies directly engaged with vacant property management and blight elimination. The Land Bank will build on recent reform efforts by the Nutter administration, which has created a "Front Door" to serve as a single point of entry to coordinate applications for publically-owned property. The Land Bank bill complements a package of legislation introduced today by Council President Clarke, authorizing a range of disposition incentives to move public land to sale and spur development.

“I have long fought to streamline redevelopment in collaboration with nonprofit and private developers,” said Councilwoman Sánchez. “These bills will create one governmental authority to take control. The Land Bank will help eliminate blight, stabilize our neighborhoods, and put vacant property back on the tax roll.”

Councilman Green and Councilwoman Sánchez have also introduced Bill #120054, given a favorable recommendation last week by Council’s Committee on Finance, which will require prompt foreclosure of tax-delinquent properties and improve access to payment plans for tax-delinquent homeowners. Together, these bills will reverse the depressive effect of widespread tax delinquency. Currently, Philadelphia's blighted properties drag down the total value of city real estate by \$3.6 billion, or about \$8,000 per household.

Added benefits of the proposed Philadelphia Land Bank include making real-time information about all vacant properties available online, and reporting requirements that will guarantee transparency in its operations. Members of the public would also be represented on the Land Bank’s Board of Directors, giving residents a voice in the creation of the Land Bank’s policies. The Land Bank will be guided by City’s new zoning code and Comprehensive Plan.

“A Land Bank will put Philadelphia ahead of other major cities that have been grappling with vacant property issues. PACDC and its allies applaud Councilmembers Sánchez and Green for moving us one step closer to creation of a Philadelphia Land Bank,” said Rick Sauer, executive director of the Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations.

The Philadelphia Land Bank bill will implement a new state law, introduced by Pennsylvania Representative John Taylor and passed in October of last year, which authorizes municipalities to create land banks.

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