



**Contacts:** Roberta Garber  
Community Research Partners  
Office: 614-224-5917 ext. 100  
Cell: 614-571-5127

Mary Helen Petrus  
ReBuild Ohio  
216-928-8100

Lavea Brachman  
ReBuild Ohio  
Co-Director, Greater Ohio  
Office: 614-258-1713 ext. 27  
Cell: 614-620-4715

## 25,000 Vacant and Abandoned Properties in Eight Ohio Cities Cost the Public more than \$60 Million a Year

*Groundbreaking study finds local governments do not have the resources needed to address the problem*

### **ReBuild Ohio calls for policy changes to reclaim unused properties**

- What:** Media/Policy Forum on new report, “\$60 Million and Counting: The cost of vacant and abandoned properties to eight Ohio cities”
- Where:** Ohio Statehouse Atrium
- When:** Tuesday, Feb. 19, 2008  
10:30 a.m. – Noon

**Editor’s Note: A copy of the full report, executive summary and policy recommendations are available online at [www.rebuildohio.org](http://www.rebuildohio.org) and [www.communityresearchpartners.org](http://www.communityresearchpartners.org).**

COLUMBUS – Vacant and abandoned properties are a significant problem in cities across Ohio, costing taxpayers tens of millions of dollars a year in extra municipal services and lost tax revenue, a new study has found.

The study by Community Research Partners (CRP), a nonprofit research center based in Columbus, calculated there are at least 25,000 vacant and abandoned properties in all or parts of eight cities of varying sizes that were part of the study. The report will be publicly released at a media/policy forum held at **10:30 a.m.** on **Feb. 19** in the Statehouse Atrium in Columbus.

Those unused properties cost the eight cities a total of \$15 million in extra municipal services and \$49 million in lost property tax revenues – a total drain of more than \$64 million. The study was commissioned last year by ReBuild Ohio – a consortium

of local government, nonprofit and civic organizations working to develop new state and local measures that reduce and reclaim vacant and abandoned properties. The study concludes that local governments need additional tools to adequately track vacant and abandoned properties and to take steps to return them to productive use.

The study examined six cities: Dayton, Ironton, Lima, Springfield, Toledo and Zanesville; the Columbus neighborhoods of Livingston-Driving Park, Franklinton and North Linden; and the Cleveland neighborhoods of Detroit Shoreway, Mount Pleasant and Slavic Village.

“We were surprised to find the extent and impact of vacancies across the study cities, both large and small, as well as the significant challenges facing city staff in addressing the problem,” noted CRP Executive Director Roberta Garber. “Because most of the cities don’t have resources for a comprehensive vacant property inventory, we know that actual numbers are even higher than we were able to identify.”

“We designed this study as a ‘snapshot’ approach to quantifying the damaging impacts of vacant and abandoned properties on cities, towns and neighborhoods across Ohio. The study certainly validated the depth of the problem in each study community,” said Lavea Brachman, co-chair of ReBuild Ohio. “And, based on study results from these eight cities, ReBuild Ohio estimates the number of abandoned properties and municipal costs to be close to ten-fold statewide. Over the long term, the lost revenue and perpetuation of neighborhood blight caused by vacant properties hurts the quality of life for Ohioans throughout the state.”

In response to the study’s findings, ReBuild Ohio has identified several steps that state and local governments should take, including:

- **Develop comprehensive inventories of vacant and abandoned properties.** State and local governments can collaborate to develop integrated, public databases that track the status of properties. The state should create incentives and data tools for local governments to do this, so that a municipality can understand the full extent of the abandonment problem and design appropriate solutions.
- **Strengthen local code enforcement.** Steps include making it more difficult for absentee owners to hold abandoned homes hostages in disrepair; streamlining the

nuisance abatement by receivership laws; and developing affordable home repair programs for low- and moderate-income homeowners.

- **Create new tools and incentives for redevelopment of vacant and abandoned properties.** These fixes should include programs or mechanisms that enable local governments to acquire properties and facilitate productive reuse and to target neighborhoods for redevelopment strategies.
- **Expedite foreclosures and institute foreclosure prevention reforms.** The state can encourage redevelopment of abandoned properties by expediting foreclosure, while providing increased protections to homeowners struggling to pay mortgages with increased foreclosure prevention measures.

A full listing of ReBuild Ohio’s recommendations is available online at [www.rebuildohio.org](http://www.rebuildohio.org) and [www.communityresearchpartners.org](http://www.communityresearchpartners.org).

The CRP study, which is one of the largest scale studies of vacant and abandoned properties ever conducted in the country, focused on eight cities of various sizes.

Researchers carefully analyzed a city code enforcement, community development, and health department data to calculate the number of vacant and abandoned residential buildings and lots in each city. The study also analyzed various municipal costs, such as demolition and boarding-up of abandoned building, code enforcement, fire department and police department expenses, and property mowing and clean up. CRP used county auditor data to calculate lost property tax revenue from abandoned properties and analyze patterns of property values and sales prices in Cleveland and Columbus neighborhoods based on proximity of homes to vacancies.

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*Community Research Partners, a Columbus-based, nonprofit research organization, strengthens Ohio communities through data, information, and knowledge. CRP has undertaken over 100 community data, applied and policy research, and program evaluation projects since its formation in 2000, both within and outside of central Ohio. For more information, visit [www.communityresearchpartners.org](http://www.communityresearchpartners.org).*

*ReBuild Ohio, a consortium of local government, nonprofit and civic organizations, promotes the revitalization and reuse of vacant and abandoned properties, thus enhancing the quality of life for all Ohioans. ReBuild Ohio meets its mission by advancing new policies and tools designed to prevent and reverse the cycle of deterioration, and to reclaim and reinvest in all types of properties, including residential, commercial and industrial. For more information, visit [www.rebuildohio.org](http://www.rebuildohio.org).*