



Western Reserve  
Land Conservancy

## BUILDING AND NURTURING SAFE AND VIBRANT COMMUNITY SPACES



### A Strong Neighborhood

#### Program Strategy Overview

We catalyze and sustain opportunities to improve social conditions and improve physical environments in the Mt. Pleasant, Woodland Hills and Buckeye neighborhoods.

### GRANTEE PARTNER: WESTERN RESERVE LAND CONSERVANCY - THRIVING COMMUNITIES

Western Reserve Land Conservancy's Thriving Communities program is a statewide effort to help revitalize our urban centers by working with cities and organizations to transform vacant, unsafe and unproductive properties into useful ones. In the process, communities are finding new opportunities to attract economic growth, add green space and support safe, beautiful neighborhoods.

**WHAT WE FUNDED:** The Foundation's grant (\$734,000) over three years provided support for the Western Reserve Land Conservancy's Thriving Communities program to identify and remove blighted, vacant, and abandoned homes, and to re-purpose the land for productive community use.

#### WHAT IS THE NEED?

- An accurate inventory and accounting of housing conditions and vacancy.
- More focused advocacy at the local, state and national level for resources to address blight such as the Hardest Hit Funds.

**WHY WE FUNDED THIS WORK:** To address our neighborhood's biggest challenge – blight.

#### GOALS FOR THIS GRANT

- Position Saint Luke's targeted neighborhoods to qualify for a significant portion of Hardest Hit Fund demolition dollars.
- Identify properties for demolition or re-purposing.

#### OUTCOMES

- 25% of the Cuyahoga Land Bank's demolition activity in Cleveland was targeted in the Saint Luke's neighborhoods during the first round of demolition funding
- Survey identified 1,072 structures that needed to be demolished; as of May 2016, 340 structures have been demolished and 27 vacant parcels identified for side-yard expansion and other greening activities.
- By June 2015, 91% (420 of 460) uninspected demolition candidate properties were inspected and violations issued.
- Strong working relationships have been established with the Cuyahoga Land Bank, the City of Cleveland's Bureau of Demolition, and the Building and Housing Department. Stronger connections to CDCs have been built through the Southeast Collaborative Code Enforcement Partnership. Communication has improved with residents, city departments, and the land banks.
- Increased the number of the "eyes and ears" in the battle against blight by searching out and communicating where problem properties are located and attending Cleveland Housing Court as advocates.

#### THE APPROACH WE SUPPORTED

- Identification of blighted and vacant properties; sharing data about property conditions with the Cuyahoga Land Bank – foreclosure data, evidence of declining property values, identification of historic structures, and description of neighborhood assets.
- Development and implementation of demolition and re-purposing strategies.
- Working with local residents to plan and implement projects to turn demolition sites into community assets.
- Combined efforts of the Land Conservancy, Saint Luke's Foundation, and the neighborhoods.
- Collaboration and alignment with community partners such as Harvard Community Services Center, Mt Pleasant NOW Development Corporation, Cleveland Neighborhood Progress and the Cleveland Police.

#### REPORTED GRANTEE-LESSONS LEARNED

- Community engagement followed by swift action fosters not only a belief in change, but engagement in change.
- Whatever the problem - take time to understand the root causes and convene the appropriate partners
- Collaboration and convening of like-minded groups and citizens is the only way to effectively accomplish this work.
- Working directly with CDCs in the four wards has provided a street-level perspective that is necessary to be successful.
- Providing support, programs, and funding for minor home repairs remains a need in this neighborhood.
- Engaging residents is key to sustaining progress.