



KALAMAZOO COUNTY  
**LANDBANK**

**2016 Annual Report**  
*Repurpose. Renew. Reconnect.*



# A Message from the Board

Kalamazoo County saw the strongest local impact from the recession in 2012 – tax foreclosures spiked to an all-time high of 346 that year. In 2016, that number was down over 50% from our all-time high, but we still have not reached pre-recession levels. However, foreclosures are trending downward year by year, and we are seeing the economy grow steadily. The Kalamazoo County Land Bank has been an instrument of positive growth and change in Kalamazoo's hardest hit areas. Now in its seventh year, the Land Bank has proved itself a valuable asset in the fight to remove blight, stabilize neighborhoods, and bring vacant spaces back to productive use and back on the tax rolls.

As the Kalamazoo County Treasurer, I've worked closely with the Land Bank over the past two years on the Merchants Crossing site, just outside of downtown Kalamazoo in the River's Edge district. These vacant and blighted buildings presented challenging environmental and bureaucratic hurdles to get them back to productive use. But seeing the potential for something greater at this site, we have worked through many of these challenges. The MDEQ, the County Treasurers Office and Michigan Land Bank were instrumental in supporting the removal of contamination and blight, so the buildings and vacant land are now seeing renewed interest from developers. We're excited about the future of this space.

Like this and other projects across Kalamazoo County, we continue to work diligently to lift up the level of the housing stock, turn the tide of blight and break the cycle of decline, because we believe in the positive impact this work has on our communities and tax base. I'm grateful to our board, the staff and the people and partnerships who have helped us along the way. I sincerely thank you all for your continued support of the Land Bank.

With Gratitude,



Mary Balkema



**KALAMAZOO COUNTY  
LANDBANK**

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Cover Photo:  
Prairie Gardens resident Delphine Nichols



Mary Balkema  
Board Chair  
Kalamazoo County Treasurer

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With special thanks to Chuck Vlieg for his work on behalf of the Land Bank as board member from 2011 to 2016



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Executive Director

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Assets & Construction Manager

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Program Coordinator

Tammy Lahman  
Finance Manager

Anna Roeder  
LISC Americorps Project Coordinator

Michelle Tombro Tracy  
Assistant Director

Amanda Wilholt  
Administrative Assistant

With special thanks to Catie Boring for all her hard work as Americorps and Land Bank staff from 2010 to 2016

In 2016, we identified *Repurpose*, *Renew* and *Reconnect* as our driving themes for underutilized properties. Individual examples of all these themes can be found throughout our annual report.

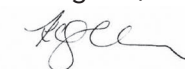
Our Washington Square commercial corridor work captures all these themes, and in 2016 we reached a milestone in this work. After decades of disinvestment, this previously thriving commercial node saw six formerly vacant commercial storefronts either leased or under agreement with locally owned, community responsive tenants. Arts and culture events have been the guiding force in this work – allowing informal opportunities for creating new relationships and engaging the community to share their ideas with the new businesses. We are looking forward to the opening of a new restaurant in Washington Square in 2017, and have more events planned for the year ahead.

In 2016, we participated in the City of Kalamazoo's process of updating their ten year master plan – Imagine Kalamazoo – which is an effort to engage as many residents as possible to discuss what our city can build upon, what we can improve, and what new things we want to try. The first step is visionary ideas, and the Imagine Kalamazoo process has achieved much in getting us there.

We understand that disinvestment in our county, and urban neighborhoods across the country, has spanned multiple decades. There will be no magic bullet or quick solution to transform Kalamazoo as we work towards inclusive redevelopment. Community input and our themes of *Repurpose*, *Renew* and *Reconnect* are providing a solid framework as we continue to work on the day-to-day challenges and opportunities associated with our properties.

We're indebted to our partners who have made every step forward possible. Thank you to all who help to guide, shape and execute our work supporting Kalamazoo's communities.

Best regards,



Kelly Clarke



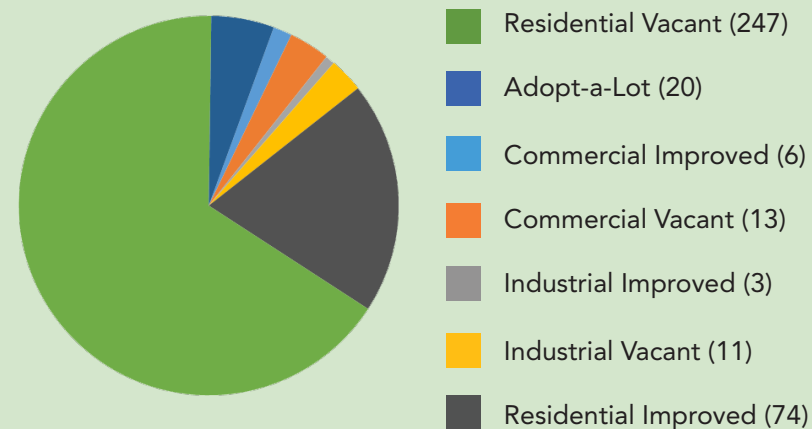


## Progress by the Numbers

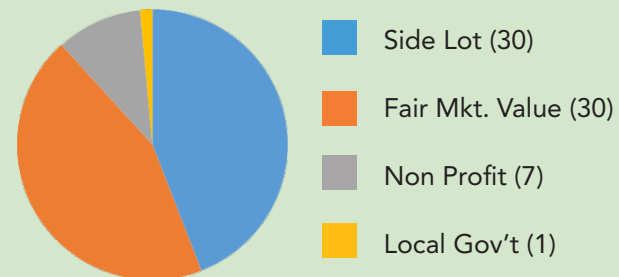
In 2016, the Land Bank worked to repurpose vacant, abandoned, foreclosed, and blighted properties. A total of 374 properties were managed in our inventory, and 68 properties were returned to the

tax rolls in 2016. The Land Bank acquired 75 parcels through the tax foreclosure process in 2016, handled 60 Fair Market Value and Side Lot sales, 7 Non Profit sales, and 1 Local Government transfer.

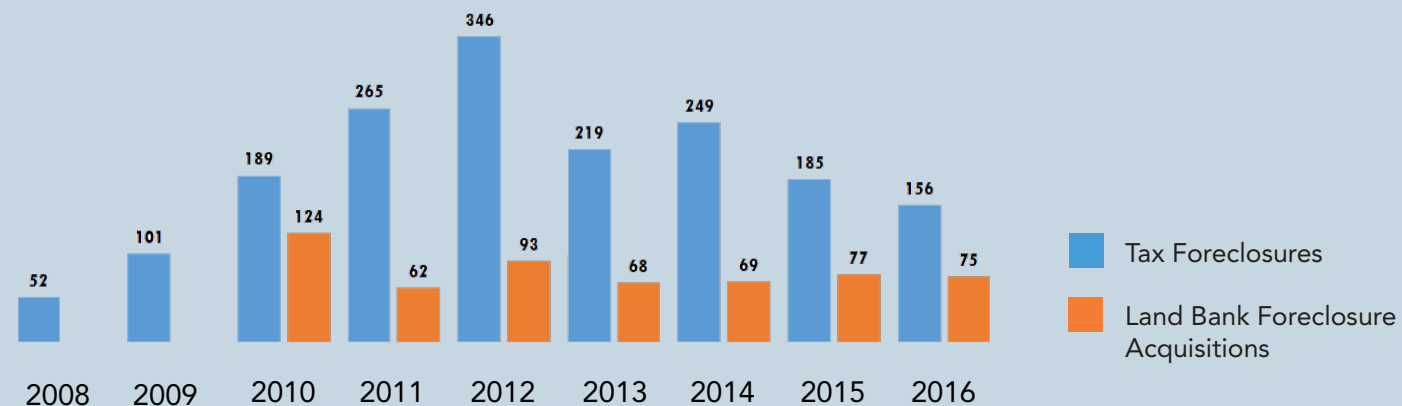
Year End Inventory



Disposition



Kalamazoo County Tax Foreclosures & Acquisitions



## WELCOMING KZOO NUTRITION

Washington Square celebrated the addition of a new business at 1315 Portage Street - Kzoo Nutrition. Owners Jorge Balderas and Maria Gutierrez-De-Garcia are residents of the Edison neighborhood and were committed to keeping their business in the neighborhood after their previous space burned down.

Jorge and Maria found a new home for Kzoo Nutrition at 1315 Portage, which was recently renovated through the support of the Irving S. Gilmore Foundation as a part of the Washington Square revitalization. They invested in building a bar and installing upgrades so they could serve Herbalife nutrition shakes.

Through their free Fit Dance classes and active participation in Washington Square events, Kzoo Nutrition is helping forge a link between the Edison neighborhood's Hispanic and Latino population and the community-building work the Land Bank and partners have been coordinating in the Square. From the August Art Hop to the December Holidays in the Square, we've seen steady increases in the number of Hispanic and Latino guests at these events, helping increase the diversity of people who meet, dance, play, shop, and interact with their neighbors in Washington Square.



## Washington Square



*"We think our business is a great fit for Washington Square and we're excited to engage the community in thinking about how to eat well, get moving, and feel good about themselves."*

— Jorge Balderas, Co-Owner, Kzoo Nutrition





# Washington Square

## FARE GAMES

2016 was a transformational year for 1301 Portage Street, which has had many different lives since it was built in the early 1900s, including a bank, drugstore, and insurance agency. This building became the centerpiece of the Fare Games competition, which brought together food entrepreneurs to compete for reduced, graduated rent for this space and a prize package of goods and services worth over \$30,000 donated by local businesses. The Land Bank and a group of funders invested over \$200,000 in façade restoration and renovating the interior to include a fully functional restaurant kitchen.

Fare Games kicked off in March, organized by a volunteer committee which included representatives from across the community. They coached the applicants on their business plans, and a tasting event for the public was held during the August Art Hop. During the final round, the top three applicants presented their plans to the judging panel, who chose unanimously to award the prize to Pho on the Block. Reggie Kaur and Nancy Tien, in partnership with Reggie's father, Balwinder Singh developed a vision for the space and business plan for a modern Vietnamese eatery. The highly anticipated Pho on the Block is expected to open in spring 2017, and Reggie and Nancy look forward to serving up fresh, interesting flavors in Washington Square.



*"My business partner Nancy and I are thrilled to be opening our dream restaurant in 1301 Portage. The history of the building, the diversity of the neighborhood, and the community feeling in Washington Square are all part of what attracted us to this space and the Fare Games competition."*  
— Reggie Kaur, Fare Games winner



## SPONSORS

Adams Outdoor Advertising  
Allegra Marketing  
Continental Linen Services  
Edwards  
Gould, Stinson & Comer P.C.  
KSS Enterprises  
LKF Marketing  
Rocksteady Shops  
SKP Design  
VanderSalm's Flowershop & Garden Center  
Warner, Norcross & Judd

## RENOVATIONS TO 1301 PORTAGE MADE POSSIBLE BY

City of Kalamazoo  
Fifth Third Bank Foundation  
Harold and Grace Upjohn Foundation  
Irving S. Gilmore Foundation  
Jim Gilmore Jr. Foundation  
Kalamazoo County Land Bank  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
Michigan Municipal League  
Title-Check LLC

## MANY THANKS

to our Fare Games competitors:  
Bomba's, Fo' Real BBQ, Kalamazoo Barbecue,  
Koolio Jetz, The Organic Gypsy,  
and Pho on the Block

## ART HOP IN WASHINGTON SQUARE

Art Hop in Washington Square has grown over the past 3 years, bringing in more and more people every year, as more artists, performers, and interesting activities are added to these events. In 2016, our largest event was in August, with over 500 people turning up to taste delicious, free "small bites" from the Fare Games competitors. This event brought people from all over the Edison neighborhood, and around Kalamazoo to see what Washington Square is all about. In October, we celebrated fall with apple pressing, pumpkin painting, and a goat petting zoo.

December's Art Hop event featured performances by the Boys & Girls Club kids, who sang and danced in the Kalamazoo Color Lab, a vacant building in Washington Square that we are working to temporarily activate with the goal of ultimately repurposing. There were arts and crafts, holiday shopping at a pop-up artisan market, and trees for sale from Wahmhoff Farms.

We look forward to continuing these community building events, meeting new friends, highlighting the fun and diverse Edison neighborhood, and rethinking what's possible in vacant spaces.



*"I very much enjoyed the Dance Night in Washington Square. I was impressed by the respectful participation of the young people. In a time of instability and social problems, it was encouraging to see such positive energy in our neighborhood."*

— Sonya Brower,  
Edison resident and event volunteer



# Riverview Launch



## THE LAUNCH IN ACTION

Riverview Launch was all about action in 2016 - from yoga retreats to volunteer work days – this space was host to over 1,000 people throughout the year.

In April, the Kalamazoo Conservation District partnered with the Land Bank to create an Earth Day event: distributing native trees, enjoying music by The Pine Lunch band, food trucks, and information from local environmental organizations. In September, Movies on the Barn returned with *Zootopia*. The movie was preceded by storytelling time with Robin Nott, and dozens of families joined us on the lawn for a beautiful fall evening at Riverview Launch. Open Roads continued to expand their programs and services, including their first-ever Girls on Wheels program, which was successfully launched in 2016.

Riverview racked up the accolades this year: the Kalamazoo Historic Preservation Commission bestowed an award on the site for adaptive re-use, and Riverview was named one of West Michigan's Trails Must-See Destinations by *Rapid Growth Media*.

Volunteers continued to show up in large groups throughout the summer and fall months to keep Riverview looking beautiful. We're so thankful for our talented and hard working friends from Pfizer, Bell's Brewery, and all who turned up to dig in this year!

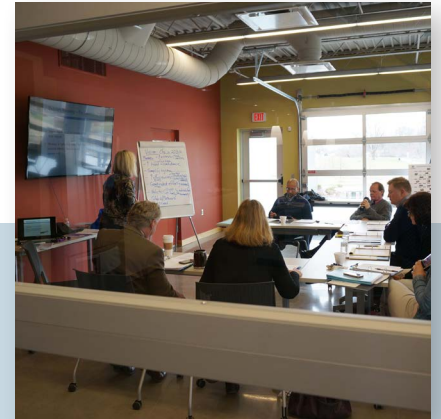


## WELCOMING THE WATERSHED COUNCIL



Festival, so we were delighted to welcome Jamie into the space full time, to allow for more collaboration opportunities with the Land Bank and to get to know her better. You can find out more about the Watershed Council and their work at [www.KalamazooRiver.org](http://www.KalamazooRiver.org).

We welcomed a new member of the Riverview Launch community in 2016. The Kalamazoo River Watershed Council decided to move the offices of their employee, Watershed Coordinator Jamie McCarthy, into the shared co-working space at Riverview. The Watershed Council works with the community, including government, non-profits and businesses to restore and protect the Kalamazoo River. Having office space right along the Kalamazoo River was a natural fit for them, and for Riverview Launch. The Land Bank partnered with the Watershed Council and Drain Commissioner Pat Crowley to put together the 2015 Kalamazoo Water



Riverview Launch was home to 34 events in 2016, including those hosted by outside organizations who rented space in the building, barn, or grounds. Rental of these spaces helps support long-term maintenance of the site. Find out more about event rentals at [RiverviewLaunch.com](http://RiverviewLaunch.com).

The Donor Wall, designed and created by artist Conrad Kaufman, was installed on the barn in 2016 as a tribute to the dedicated group of people who came together to turn a vacant space into a community place. Thank you all for your support!





# Responsible Disposition



*"After looking around Kalamazoo's Edison, Vine, and Stuart neighborhoods for an affordable home that needed some love, we nearly purchased another home but decided to look at one last house - at 829 W. Vine Street. We couldn't believe we'd found this gem, and were so pleased to be able to stay in the Vine neighborhood, which offers the compact living we've come to love, as well as a feeling of real community, being able to know our neighbors. We plan on continuing to improve our home, including new exterior paint colors, and fencing and landscaping our yard."*

— Sara Jo Shipley  
Land Bank home buyer

## MAKING A NEW HOME

The Land Bank acquires blighted homes each year that need repairs to get them back to a liveable condition. Through the Responsible Disposition program, we find buyers who have a plan to fix up the property and funds to make it happen. This program is meant to break the cycle of decline that happens to homes that are bought by speculators who often don't have the time or money to invest in the property, which continues to deteriorate and cycle back through the foreclosure process. We find people who are dedicated to bringing a vacant space back to active use.

In 2016 we sold 14 houses for fair market value to responsible investors. 829 W. Vine, in Kalamazoo's Vine neighborhood, was formerly a renovated rental property that the Land Bank had earmarked for owner-occupied sale, but held until the time was right to bring it onto the market.

Sara Jo Shipley and Andrew White moved to Kalamazoo and purchased 829 W. Vine after renting in the Vine neighborhood. Because Sara Jo works for the City of Kalamazoo, she was able to take advantage of the financing incentives they offer for buying a home within one of the City's inner-ring neighborhoods. They enjoy the neighborhood's access to downtown, and being able to walk to nearby restaurants and entertainment in the warmer months.

# Homeownership Rehab

## AT HOME IN EDISON

We partnered once again with the City of Kalamazoo on the HOME Investment Partnerships Program to completely renovate 1407 Clinton Avenue, in the Edison neighborhood. This house is just a couple blocks away from two homes that were rehabbed by the Land Bank in 2014, and sits in a targeted investment area for the Land Bank and other local community development partners. This little three bedroom bungalow was given new life and will be sold to a low-income buyer in early 2017.

We're grateful for Pfizer volunteers for their hard work whipping the yard into shape. In just one day, they completely re-landscaped this lot, pulling out invasive weeds, tearing up an overgrown lawn and creating new flower beds around the house. We're also thankful to have a great partner in Jeffrey Michael and his crew, who did an excellent job renovating this home inside and out.





# Blight Elimination

## MERCHANTS CROSSING

Merchants Crossing was a collection of vacant commercial buildings and parcels on the edge of the Eastside neighborhood, in the River's Edge district. The site is just a five minute walk from downtown and is situated on the banks of the Kalamazoo River. Originally home to the Merchants Publishing business, the site has housed numerous businesses over the years, before falling into disrepair, vacancy, and eventually tax foreclosure in 2014 and 2015. The County Treasurer and MDEQ invested thousands in securing the property and cleaning up contamination. In 2016, the Land Bank was awarded a \$200,000 blight elimination grant from the Michigan Land Bank Fast Track Authority to demolish blighted and unsecured buildings on the property that were a target for crime, looting, and trash dumping. Two brick buildings on the property were saved for future redevelopment. New mixed use projects in the River's Edge district, as well as the site's proximity to downtown and the river make this site ideal for residential and commercial interest. The Land Bank issued a request for proposals from private developers after the demolition was complete, and is continuing to work with interested parties to determine a creative repurposing of this site that will benefit the neighborhood. Eliminating blight in this area has reduced safety concerns, and contributes to a more positive impression when potential businesses or residents come to this neighborhood to rethink the possibilities for living and working on the Eastside.



## HARDEST HIT

The Land Bank was awarded \$1.2 million from the Hardest Hit program for residential blight elimination in 2016. This program will demolish 70 vacant and blighted houses around Kalamazoo County throughout 2017-18. We are grateful to the Michigan Homeowner Assistance Nonprofit Housing Corp. for this generous grant, and look forward to sharing the positive changes that happen in neighborhoods when the cycle of decline is broken.



*"I knew kids growing up in Vine who never had the opportunity to see fruit grow on a tree, so I started Fruit of the Vine with the thought that this would encourage kids to learn about and harvest their own fruit."*

— Sally Reynolds

## SIDE LOT

Fruit of the Vine began in 2014 after the demolition of a blighted house at 1017 S. Park Street created space next to Sally Reynolds' home for a fruit tree garden. She gathered 42 neighborhood volunteers to collect fieldstones, amend the soil, plant cherry, apple, and pear trees, as well as strawberries, fruiting bushes, and other native plants. Sally finally had the opportunity to buy the neighboring lot in 2016 through the Land Bank's Side Lot program. She plans to buy a permanent sign for the garden and continue her yearly tradition of gathering neighbors for a community planting party, where adults help clean up the garden and kids get to pick fruit and do an art project like creating stepping stones.



## ADOPT-A-LOT

Peace House is actually two houses, located on Phelps Street in the Eastside neighborhood, and run by the DeWaele and Mechtenberg-Berrigan families. Their volunteer-run programs offer free after-school and summer day camp for Eastside youth, including music, art, cooking, homework help, community service, and field trips. In 2014, they adopted 407 Phelps Ave. in order to have more space for sports and outdoor activities for the kids.

*"Our summer programs bring 30-60 kids to Peace House to learn, play, and experience a peaceful and caring community. We adopted 407 Phelps because Peace House has a hilly yard, and this lot was a large, flat space just a few doors down that was perfect for sports, games and outdoor activities with the kids."*

— Michael DeWaele, Co-Founder of Peace House





# Prairie Gardens



Photo credit: Fran Dwight

2016 marked the completion of the construction of Prairie Gardens Phase II. The circle of homes now completed, there was a celebratory event in September, bringing together Prairie Gardens' senior residents, Land Bank staff, property managers Intrepid Professional Group, developers Byce & Associates and Glas Associates, and funders from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. The group celebrated the years of hard work that have transformed this site from one of the worst spots in the Fairmount neighborhood to now a beautiful and tranquil corner of Kalamazoo.



# Thank You Partners!

## COMMUNITY/ EVENT VOLUNTEERS & OTHER PARTNERS

Dale Abbott & Tomme Maile  
Bell's Brewery volunteers  
Bellydance Kalamazoo  
BenJammin Educational Music  
Big Trouble Band  
Angela Brown  
Tom Brown  
Byce & Associates  
Ursula Chapman  
Chunky Dunk Food Truck  
City of Kalamazoo Parks & Recreation  
City of Kalamazoo Community Planning & Development  
Community Promise  
Federal Credit Union  
Cosmic Ethics  
Crepes by the Lakes  
Cutting Edge  
Dan Denov  
Diva of DomesticaShon  
Fran Dwight  
Holly Eakes  
Edison Business Association  
Mark Gates  
Ilse Gebhard  
Glas Associates  
Howard's Party Store  
Improv Effects  
Intrepid Professional Group  
Jaqua Realtors  
Jersey Giant SUBS!  
Kalamazoo County Drain Commissioner  
Kalamazoo County Parks & Recreation  
Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety  
Conrad Kaufman  
Kellogg Community FCU volunteers  
Rebekah Kik  
Kinetic Affect  
Ryan Koziattek

Kzoo Nutrition  
La Guatemalteca Tacos  
Layla's Cool Pops  
Lucy in the Sky Quilts  
Karlina Lewis  
Michigan State Housing Development Authority  
Michigan Statewide LISC  
AmeriCorps  
Kama Mitchell  
MSU Extension Master Gardeners  
Naylor Landscape Management  
Ian Nielson  
Robin Nott  
OCBA Landscape Architects  
Olivia's Fashionista Designs  
PalletPalooza  
Paramount Charter Academy  
Pfizer Volunteers  
Sabrina Pritchett  
Josh Ritzma  
River Street Flowerland  
Rootead African Drum & Dance  
Chuck & Kathy Ryzenga  
Lauren Schildberg  
Roger & Ryan Schmidt  
Dana Scott  
Patty Smetana  
Soil Friends Farm  
Stumbling Grace Farms  
Kristie & Daniel Tellier  
Pine Lunch Bluegrass Band  
Michael Tracy  
Tree of Life School  
Tremolo Guitar Shop  
Trybal Revival Gardens  
Scarlet & Olivia Vasquez  
Wahmhoff Farms  
Jean Walker  
Luchara & Layla Wallace  
Washington Square Co-op Senior Apartments  
Greg Wells  
Wenke Greenhouses  
Linda Whitlock  
Wild Ones - Kalamazoo Area Chapter

Young Living Essential Oils  
Zion Lion Reggae Band

## FARE GAMES COMMITTEE

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Carl Brown  
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Holly Crump  
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Heather Isch  
Ian Kennedy  
Miguel Romero  
John Schmitt  
Tammy Taylor  
Paul Valentin  
Andy Wilkerson

## MUNICIPAL PARTNERS

City of Kalamazoo  
City of Parchment  
City of Portage  
Comstock Township  
Cooper Township  
Kalamazoo County  
Kalamazoo Township  
Oshtemo Township  
Schoolcraft Township  
Texas Township  
Village of Climax  
Village of Schoolcraft  
Village of Vicksburg

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Holly Crump  
Becky Fulgoni, Vice Chair  
Brian Hudson  
Heather Isch  
Paul Valentin, Secretary  
Andy Wilkerson

## NON-PROFIT & FOUNDATION PARTNERS

Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Kalamazoo  
Building Blocks of Kalamazoo  
CEDAM  
Center for Community Progress  
Community Homeworks  
Eastside Neighborhood Association  
Edison Neighborhood Association  
Fire Historical & Cultural Arts Collaborative  
Friends of the KRV  
Hispanic American Council  
Irving S. Gilmore Foundation  
Jim Gilmore Jr. Foundation  
Kalamazoo Arts Council  
Kalamazoo Community Foundation  
Kalamazoo Nature Center  
Kazoo School  
Kalamazoo Neighborhood Housing Services  
Kalamazoo Valley Habitat for Humanity  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
Michigan Association of Land Banks  
Michigan Homeowner Assistance Nonprofit  
Housing Corporation  
Michigan Land Bank Fast

Track Authority  
Michigan Municipal League  
Northside Neighborhood Association  
Kalamazoo County MSU Extension  
Kalamazoo County Parks Foundation  
Kalamazoo Farmers Market  
Kalamazoo Public Library  
Kalamazoo River Watershed Council  
Kalamazoo Valley Community College  
Mt. Zion Baptist Church  
National Community Stabilization Trust  
Northside Ministerial Alliance  
Open Roads  
People's Food Co-op  
Pretty Lake Camp  
Stuart Area Restoration Association  
Urban Alliance  
Vine Neighborhood Association  
Volunteer Kalamazoo

## SPECIAL THANKS

*The Land Bank's work wouldn't be possible without the support of the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners. We thank them for their continued partnership in supporting Kalamazoo's communities!*

## 2016 LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

5/3 Bank  
Pitsch Companies  
PNC Bank

*The Leadership Circle is a dedicated group of civic-minded businesses that support the Land Bank's mission to create vibrant communities.*



# *What do we mean by...*

## *Repurpose*

Identify appropriate new uses for obsolete, damaged, depleted, underutilized, and fragmented assets in the community



## *Renew*

Support the restoration or adaptation of a property's use through redevelopment and partnerships



## *Reconnect*

Seek to reconnect obsolete, damaged, depleted, and underutilized properties within the block, neighborhood, and community

