A Message from the Board

2014 has been a very productive year for the Land Bank. We met the milestone of our 5th birthday and have a lot to be proud of.

As a local leader on solutions for vacant, abandoned, and problem properties, the Kalamazoo County Land Bank serves as a leading resource for local and state policies and best practices. We work to address the full cycle of property revitalization, from blight prevention, through the acquisition and maintenance of problem properties, to their productive reuse.

In 2014, we were the recipient of a Blight Elimination Grant in partnership with the City of Kalamazoo. We have removed large scale commercial properties, old industrial facilities, and many neighborhood structures. We have been creative with our deconstruction process and have partnered with KPEP to employ residents who are working toward a positive future. We continue to believe that every neighborhood has a future, and that future does not include blight.

Earlier this year, I was elected by my peers to be the President of the Michigan Association of Land Banks. I am excited about this role and hope to advocate for stronger policies that will help all communities in Michigan. I am encouraged as I tour various parts of the state to see the determination and hard work in rebuilding our cities. The results are showing. But we have a lot more work to do to accomplish our goals. Stay tuned - together we can build a stronger Michigan.

I would like to give a special thank you to our funders, who share our vision and continue to partner with us on our projects. Looking forward to 2015.

Sincerely,

Mary Balkema
Land Bank Board Chair

In 2011, Frank Alexander, a Law Professor at Emory University and co-founder of the Center for Community Progress noted in his publication on land banks, "Both people and land lie at the heart of community. It is the people who create the relationships, the dreams, the spirit and the culture and it is the land that creates the place and the space." Land Banks provide a unique opportunity for people to come together around neglected and abandoned property to create new spaces, new possibilities and new relationships.

As we celebrate our 5th year serving Kalamazoo County and present our 2014 Annual Report, we are humbled and grateful with the growing list of partners and people involved in addressing blight, improving quality of life, and growing our local tax base each year.

Relationships with the local townships and villages have strengthened and grown as we have worked together on blight elimination. We have seen tremendous community leadership and forward momentum on efforts in the City of Kalamazoo focused on reversing patterns of vacancy and neglect and creating vibrant, inclusive community spaces.

Michiganders are resilient. We have seen this first hand as elected officials, community residents, private business leaders and professionals, civic leaders, and non-profit employees have rolled up their sleeves to sit together on committees, provide input at events, and dream, plan and implement uses for vacant spaces. We were delighted with last year's enthusiasm around embracing the arts and the growing local food culture as a means to bring people together to activate vacant spaces.

A special thank you goes out to our staff and our growing partner community for their dedication and involvement in this work.

Best regards,

Kelly Clarke
Executive Director
Progress by the Numbers

During 2014, the Land Bank worked to repurpose vacant, abandoned, foreclosed, and blighted properties. In total, 50 properties were returned to productive use in 2014.

The Land Bank acquired 69 parcels through the tax foreclosure process in 2014, received 2 properties through donation, handled 4 quiet title transactions, and maintained 240 properties from existing inventory.

### Progress by the Numbers

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR-END INVENTORY</th>
<th>Disposition</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Residential Improved (60)</td>
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<td>Adopt-a-Lot (18)</td>
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### Washington Square

The Kalamazoo County Land Bank and local partners have made tremendous strides in Washington Square in 2014. This historic area was once a center of activity as people shopped in locally owned stores along Portage Street, talked to neighbors, and made daily trips to this hub in the Edison neighborhood. After a period of decline in the 1970’s and 80’s, Washington Square became associated with crime, vacancy, and the adult entertainment previously located on this block. Partners are working to attract businesses to long-vacant buildings in Washington Square in a way that brings activity back to the block, and celebrates the diversity of the area.

Community efforts are fostering local businesses - including ones that support workforce development and entrepreneurship in Edison. The Land Bank has worked over the past year to collaborate with partners who are dedicated to encouraging small business and actively working to engage the community in Edison.

The Land Bank has partnered with the City of Kalamazoo to invest in façade improvements in Washington Square. The old L.A. Insurance building is undergoing a much-needed renovation inside, as well as on the exterior. New lighting, signs, and other improvements are making this block look like a vibrant hub once again.

“The Jersey Giant/Urban Alliance partnership is proud to support workforce development in the Edison neighborhood by providing job opportunities for residents who may not have any previous work experience. Creating a pipeline of workers with practical training and skills is important for both the businesses and residents in Edison.”

— Roger Schmidt, Board President, Inner City Ventures

“It’s been amazing to see the number of people who have come out to be a part of events, volunteering and activities in Edison. We have seen involvement in everything from an art park to building book boxes from deconstructed materials. The neighborhood association is working hard to strengthen our resident engagement efforts - events like those we have partnered with the Land Bank on are another great way to bring the community together to celebrate our neighborhood.”

— Miguel Romero, Edison Neighborhood Association
As a part of our mission to bring properties back to active use, the Land Bank is focusing on Washington Square’s vacant spaces. In 2014, that work has included transforming unoccupied commercial suites on Portage Street into active retail space, while attracting local businesses to Washington Square. We were happy to welcome three new businesses: Tremolo Guitar Shop, Bellydance Kalamazoo, and Jersey Giant SUBS! During the October Art Hop event, these business partners participated in a ribbon cutting to celebrate new beginnings in Washington Square. Our new partners have been essential to the early success of the revitalization efforts, and helped pave the way for a more vibrant hub in the Edison neighborhood.

“As a pastor, resident and business owner in the Edison neighborhood, I have witnessed the incredible energy and passion to begin a neighborhood-wide transformation. I’m encouraged to see new hope on the faces of my friends and neighbors, and look forward to being a part of the great things to come.”

— Scott Sonneville, Pastor at oneCHURCH & Owner, Tremolo Guitar Shop

Holidays in the Square 2014 included a lunchtime series in December – complete with lights and window displays from businesses around the Square. The “pop-up shops” brought holiday shopping to Washington Square in a way that supported and showcased the work of local artisans and entrepreneurs living in the Edison neighborhood.

“Crepes by the Lakes debuted at the Kalamazoo Farmers’ Market in summer 2014 and has continued building relationships in Edison. We are excited to bring healthy, affordable food to neighborhoods that have historically been denied access due to a lack of options.”

— Stephanie Lenhart, Co-Owner, Crepes by the Lakes

Bellydance Kalamazoo generously opened their new suite to a great group of local vendors. We packed the space, but had a great time connecting with old friends, making new ones, and spreading holiday cheer in Washington Square. The Kalamazoo Farmers’ Market team coordinated several pop-up events on Saturdays that attracted additional vendors, like Mamaleelu Coffee.

“Art Hop in Washington Square was held in May and October, 2014. These events drew large crowds to the Square for art, music, food and entertainment. The May event featured performances by the Crescendo Academy Fiddlers, the Boys & Girls Club, and Bellydance Kalamazoo.

Opening the doors to the newly renovated suites at 1350 Portage Street, the community was able to see first hand the changes happening in Washington Square and offer their thoughts and suggestions on idea boards, as well as make new connections.

By October’s Art Hop event, we were welcoming three new businesses with a ribbon cutting, and enjoying food trucks, art, and special performances under the tent. Despite the pouring rain at times, another big crowd showed up in Washington Square to take part in the fun and celebration.

“I’ve been a resident in this neighborhood for 21 years now. We’ve had changes and challenges, both good and bad. It’s gratifying to see so much new energy in our neighborhood, and I’m grateful to be a part of that.”

— Fran Dwight, Photographer

“My students from the Boys & Girls Club were so excited to perform at the Washington Square Art Hop. They worked so hard for weeks on their dance routine. This was a fantastic opportunity for them to showcase their talents to the community.”

— Scarlet Vasquez, Director of Participating Arts, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Kalamazoo
Riverview Launch

TAKING SHAPE

Riverview Launch is a community-driven effort to revitalize a tax foreclosed property located along the Kalamazoo River and Kalamazoo River Valley Trail. After public visioning sessions in 2013 revealed a strong desire for a community "hub" in this neighborhood - a space that would increase access to the trail and river - the idea for Riverview Launch was formed.

2014 was a critical year for this project, as the campaign committee ramped up the Riverview Launch Capital Campaign to raise resources valued at $1.94 million for this project. The community rose to the challenge, coming together to raise over $1.8 million by December 2014.

Riverview Launch became an active space in 2014. New life was breathed into the site through volunteer activity, events, and youth programs. The Land Bank partnered with local organizations including Open Roads, Boys and Girls Club, and MSU Extension to bring outdoor youth programs to Riverview Launch.

A new pilot program, the MSU Youth Growers, began in June 2014. Over the next two months, 8 children from the Boys and Girls Club came to Riverview each week to learn from MSU Master Gardener Linda Whitlock, who helped them map out and plant their own raised garden beds. They had the opportunity to get hands-on gardening experiences, interact with the environment, and received a Junior Master Gardener certificate at the end of the program.

PROGRAMS

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Over the course of the summer and fall, 200 children from around Kalamazoo participated in Open Roads Bike Programs at Riverview Launch. Kids had the opportunity to learn how to fix bicycles while building social skills through programs like Earn-a-Bike and Fixapalooza.

*The Land Bank has been a wonderful partner for Open Roads! Through Riverview Launch, they have allowed us to be in a fantastic community space. It has been a welcoming environment for all of our youth workshops and volunteer events. What a great opportunity for not only Open Roads, but for Kalamazoo!*

— Ethan Alexander, Executive Director, Open Roads
Riverview Launch

 EVENTS

 Riverview Launch became a hive of activity in 2014, due in part to community events at the site. We had fun family events like the Movie on the Barn, which our partners at City of Kalamazoo Parks and Recreation held at Riverview Launch in August. Over 200 people came out to play lawn games, grab a bite of popcorn, do a silly dance with Mayor Hopewell, and watch The Lego Movie.

 Educational events like the Native Pollinator Workshop brought people to Riverview to learn about the importance of pollinators in our local ecosystem. More than 70 people participated in the “Pedal to the Mat” event at Riverview, engaging in a calming yoga session after biking the KRVT. In 2015, we’ll continue partnering with local organizations and engaging the Kalamazoo community to work, play, and learn at Riverview Launch.

 VOLUNTEERS

 Riverview Launch’s landscapes have improved dramatically over the last year thanks to the hard work of volunteers. Over 400 volunteers gave their time to make this site look and feel like the vibrant, accessible hub our community envisioned. From building a deck to painting a mural on the garage, moving mountains of mulch, rolling new sod, and planting countless perennials, our wonderful volunteer groups made a huge impact on this site. We are so grateful for their willingness to lend a hand (and shovel) to this community project.

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 Native pollinators have a new home at Riverview Launch, thanks to the ingenuity of Dale Abbott and Tomme Maile of Trybal Revival Gardens. With the support of funds from Mary Balkema’s LISC Community Champion Award, Dale and Tomme built a ‘bee condo’ for Riverview’s pollinators, and an educational showpiece to learn more about the importance of native bees in our ecosystem.

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 Local artist Conrad Kaufman crafted signs for the rain garden with nature themed art and beautiful posts, as well as a ‘wayfinding’ tower to point the way to nearby sites. This work was made possible because of the generosity of the Jim Gilmore Jr. Foundation. In 2015, he’ll complete interpretive signs that detail the history and natural features of the area.

 Pfizer employee volunteer groups made a huge impact at Riverview Launch.
The Side Lot Program gives neighbors and community members the opportunity to purchase vacant lots that result from recent demolitions. Since 2010, 118 lots have been sold through the Side Lot program. In 2014, 30 lots were repurposed to expand yards, improve quality of life in Kalamazoo neighborhoods, and contribute to the tax base.

“The drug house next door used to be a constant source of worry, with police there all the time. It was finally torn down and we were able to take ownership of the lot. We also own an adjacent home that our daughter and granddaughter moved into. It’s been a godsend to have a safe, fenced yard with a sandbox for her to play in, so close by. We’re just so grateful to have this wonderful property.”

— Bobby Jo & Barbara Snell
Vine Neighborhood Residents, Side Lot Participants

ADOPT-A-LOT

For the lots not eligible to be sold as a Side Lot, some are adopted out to neighborhood individuals or organizations. The Land Bank currently has 19 lots in the Adopt-a-Lot Program. For a one-year renewable lease, the adopter agrees to care for the lot, and in return can use the space to create a garden or enjoy more green space in their neighborhood.

Local artist Remi Harrington worked with a group of volunteers from Kalamazoo Probation Enhancement Program (KPEP) to create a lively, interesting space on a lot on Jackson St. After adopting the parcel from the Land Bank, Remi and KPEP volunteers worked throughout the summer to lay down mulch, stone pathways, and plant trees and perennials. Art pieces and benches were placed around the new “art park,” and a small reception celebrated the hard work and vision that transformed this lot from vacant to vibrant.

COMMUNITY GARDENING

2014 was another successful year partnering with our friends at Common Ground to promote community gardening in Kalamazoo. The Community Garden Shed on East Michigan Avenue continues to support local gardeners, who can borrow garden tools and supplies during the spring, summer, and fall.

Common Ground’s annual Community Garden Tour was the best and busiest yet! For the July 2014 “Garden Hop,” we had the largest crowd ever – with 44 people on the bus, 17 bicyclists, and participation from 8 community gardens on the tour. Each ‘hop’ showed the diversity of Kalamazoo’s garden culture, and brought people from around the area together to talk and learn about gardening.

Western Michigan University students showed off their hard work at the WMU Student Garden – experimenting with different growing methods, educating the community on the wide variety of plants, and showcasing their cooperative efforts to maintain the garden.

The tour also highlighted Trybal Revival Gardens, and the efforts of Dale Abbott and Tomme Maile, who are passionate about urban agriculture and interested in expanding the possibilities for their garden, including everything from beekeeping to food forests.
Blight Elimination

The Land Bank remains committed to reducing blight in Kalamazoo County, which helps prevent property value decline in surrounding homes, and reduces health and safety risks to residents. Anti-Blight funds from the State of Michigan helped accomplish this work, allowing the Land Bank to complete the demolition of 15 blighted structures. The City of Kalamazoo partnered with the Land Bank to complete an additional 12 demolitions.

In 2014, the Land Bank participated for the second year in a partnership between local governments in Kalamazoo County. Tax foreclosed properties that were blighted and beyond repair were demolished – with funding coming in equal parts from the Kalamazoo County Treasurer and the municipality in which the property resided. The Land Bank joined this partnership to manage the demolition process in sites around the county. Six blighted properties were demolished in 2014 thanks to this local cooperation. An additional 20 demolitions funded by Kalamazoo County brings the total to 53 blighted and unsafe structures demolished in 2014.

Climax Lumber Company

Kalamazoo County and the Village of Climax participated in a 50/50 partnership to fund the demolition of the old Climax Lumber Company. The Land Bank managed the demolition of this building, which was severely blighted and a safety hazard.

218 Morrow, Comstock Twp.

Anti-blight funds helped rid this beautiful lot in Comstock Township of a home in very poor condition. The lot was sold to neighbors Donald & Darla Mann through the Land Bank’s Side Lot Program.

“I have appreciated working with the Land Bank. Their expertise and knowledge in the demo area is invaluable. They are helping remove the blight in Comstock and have a great team.”

— Ann Nieuwenhuis, Comstock Township Supervisor

Home & Rental Renovations

The Land Bank’s work on home rehabilitations directly contributes to our mission of reducing blight and providing affordable homeownership opportunities in Kalamazoo. In 2014, our rehab efforts were concentrated in the Edison neighborhood - a target area for revitalization efforts in Kalamazoo.

The City of Kalamazoo partnered with the Land Bank to renovate two homes on Clinton Street. The newly repaired houses presented an opportunity for buyers to purchase affordable, quality homes in the Edison neighborhood.

The Land Bank rental program provides apartments and single family home rentals to residents in Kalamazoo. In 2014, renovations began on several apartment suites at 1350 Portage Road, in the Edison Place building. With freshly renovated space available, the Land Bank was able to establish occupancy in formerly vacant spaces and was pleased to welcome new families and individual residents into Washington Square. Single family homes on Miller Road and James Street were also renovated and leased in 2014.

Edison Neighborhood Rehabs

The City of Kalamazoo partnered with the Land Bank to fund the renovation of two homes on Clinton Street, in the Edison neighborhood. Jeffrey Michael LLC renovated these homes, that were sold in February 2015, and now provide quality, affordable housing to their new owners.

Newly renovated apartments in Edison Place are returning this formerly vacant property to active use.
Thank You Partners!

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS & OTHER PARTNERS
- Dale Abbott & Tomme Maile
- Paul Banner
- Brookside Greenhouse
- Byrne & Associates
- Chemical Bank Volunteers
- City of Kalamazoo Parks & Recreation
- Community Promise
- Federal Credit Union
- Cutting Edge
- Sam Ewbank
- Ilse Gebhard
- Glas Associates
- Philip Goff
- Hacker Gals
- Happy Our Art
- HRM Innovations
- Impact Kalamazoo
- Intrepid Professional Group
- Jaqua Realtors
- Jeffrey Michael, LLC
- Kalamazoo College
- Student Volunteers
- Kalamazoo County Parks & Recreation
- Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety
- Kenco Group Volunteers
- Main Street East
- Michigan State Housing Development Authority
- Michigan Statewide LISC
- AmeriCorps
- Millennium Restaurant Group
- Miracle Camp
- MSU Extension Master Gardeners
- Ian Nielson
- OCBA Landscape Architects
- Paul McNellis
- Pfizer Volunteers
- Polish Ambassador’s Permaculture Action Tour
- River Street Flowerland
- Soul Springs Permaculture
- Stryker Volunteers
- Linda Whitlock
- Tammy Wilson
- TECsystems Electric
- Tremolo Guitar Shop
- Van Kal Permaculture
- VML Volunteers
- Wenke Flooring & Design
- Wenke Greenhouses
- WMU Student Volunteers

RIVerview Launch Capital Campaign Cabinet
- Matthew Burian (co-chair)
- Josie Boucher
- Kelly Clarke
- Becky Fulgoni
- Chris Haenicke
- Jeff Hawkins
- Phillip Heasley
- Ian Kennedy
- Jerome Kisscorni
- John Kittredge (co-chair)
- Ken Peregou
- Dave Rachowicz
- Lynn Spurr
- Tim Surprise
- Martha Todd
- Perry Wolfe (chair)

Advisory Panel
- Mary Balkema
- Pat Crowley
- Mayor Bobby Hopewell
- Ronald Reid
- Bill Rose
- Chris Tracy
- Chuck Vliek

MUNICIPAL PARTNERS
- Charter Township of Comstock
- Charter Township of Kalamazoo
- City of Kalamazoo
- City of Portage

COOPER Charter Township
- Kalamazoo County
- Kalamazoo County Drain Commissioner
- Oshtemo Charter Township
- Schoolcraft Township
- Texas Township
- Village of Climax
- Village of Schoolcraft
- Village of Vicksburg

VIBRANT KALAMAZOO Board of Directors
- Mary Balkema, Chair
- Dale Abbott
- Pam Burpee
- Kelly Clarke
- Becky Fulgoni
- Chris Haenicke
- Heathc Isch
- Chris Lampen Crowell
- Andy Wilkerson

NON-PROFIT & FOUNDATION PARTNERS
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Kalamazoo
- CEDAM
- Center for Community Progress
- Eastside Neighborhood Association
- Edison Neighborhood Association
- ENA Go Green
- Deconstruction
- Fair Food Matters
- Fire Historical and Cultural Arts Collaborative
- Friends of the KRVT
- Irving S. Gilmore Foundation
- Kalamazoo Arts Council
- Kalamazoo Community Foundation
- Kalamazoo Nature Center
- Kazoo School
- KNHS
- Kalamazoo Valley Habitat for Humanity
- KPEP
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation
- Michigan Association of Land Banks
- Michigan Land Bank Fast Track Authority
- Michigan Municipal League
- Northside Neighborhood Association
- Kalamazoo County MSU Extension
- Kalamazoo County Parks Foundation
- Kalamazoo Farmers’ Market
- 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
- Stuart Area Restoration Association
- Urban Alliance
- Vine Neighborhood Association
- Volunteer Kalamazoo

ART HOP PARTICIPANTS
- Kim Bailey
- Beauty with Brains Arts Collaborative
- Bellydance Kalamazoo

Beyond Books Project
- Bistro on the Roll
- Boys and Girls Clubs Artists
- Byrne & Associates
- Coffee Rescue
- Crescendo Fiddlers
- Duffield Caron Project
- Fran Dwight
- Amelia Falk
- Fresh Food Fairy
- Francis Granzotto
- Aubrey Hardaway
- K College SMART Girls
- Conrad Kaufman
- Chuck and Kathy Ryzenga
- Stoop Hoops
- Taiko Drumming Troupe
- Lewis Tardy
- Kristie Tellier
- Tess Tobolic
- Water Street Coffee

HOLIDAYS IN THE SQUARE PARTICIPANTS
- Crepes by the Lakes
- Diva of DomesticaShon
- Eric’s Pots
- Fran Dwight Photography
- Granny Woobie Mittens
- The Grasshopper Whisperer
- Juicy Leaf
- Kaleamazoo Chips
- Kristie Tellier Jewelry
- Mamaleelu Coffee
- Dana Scott
- Tagua Dreams
- Trybal Revival Gardens
- Zia Dolci Kalamazoo

Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean. ~Ryunosuke Satoro