

# The Village Common of Rhode Island

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*Aging Better Together*

## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT & HOUSING

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey, Chair

Testimony by H. Philip West Jr on March 20, 2025,

in support 25-H 5955 by Representative June Speakman, et. al.,

### HOUSING LAND BANK

Thank you, Chairman Casey and members of the House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing for this hearing. **I testify in support of Vice Chair Speakman's legislation, 25-H 5955, that will create a state housing land bank with authority to acquire real estate for affordable housing.**

My name is H. Philip West, Jr., and I serve as a volunteer lobbyist on behalf of The Village Common of Rhode Island, a statewide non-profit that helps older adults live safely and independently in their homes. We coordinate volunteer services through locally organized and operated villages in Barrington, Burrillville, Cranston, Glocester, Middletown, Newport, Pawtucket, Portsmouth, Providence, Warwick, and Westerly. We are currently helping form new local villages in Bristol-Warren, Exeter, Cumberland, and Jamestown. The Village Common now has 525 members and 355 volunteers. **Our volunteers save lives and money. Our motto is: "Aging Better Together."**

During the 1990s, I served for six years on the board of a community development corporation that later merged with several others into what became One Neighborhood Builders. In the immensely complex arena of nonprofit housing development, we often found that one of the most time-consuming tasks was acquiring land to build on.

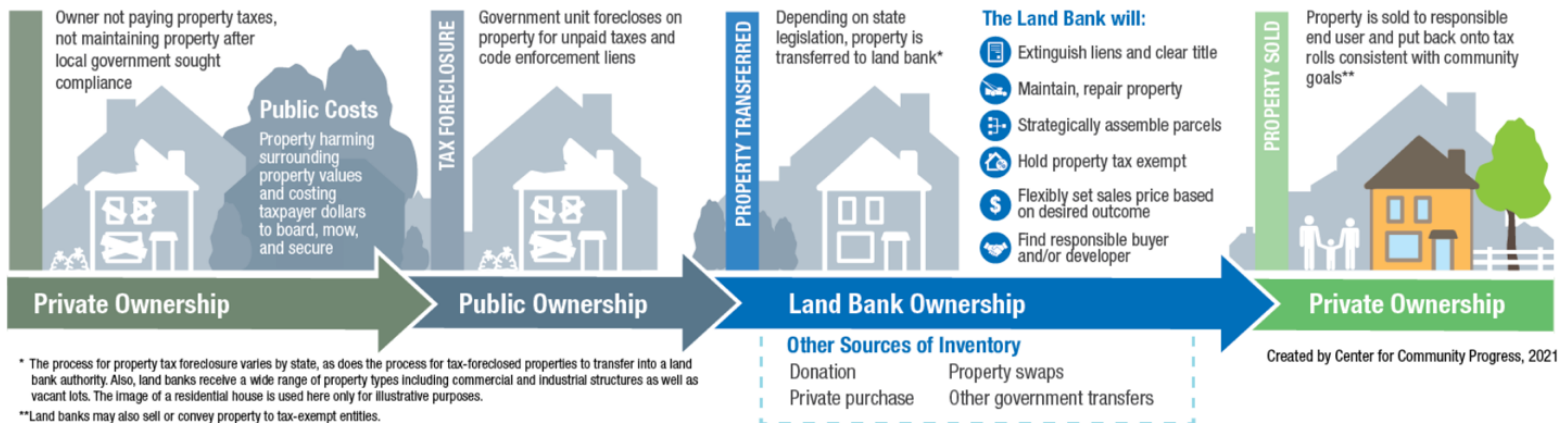
Since moving to Pawtucket eight years ago, I've greatly appreciated the work of the Pawtucket-Central Falls Development Corporation. I've seen that the work of finding places to build, identifying owners, agreeing to a price, and clearing title often takes as long as the financing, architectural, and construction.

In recent years, Rhode Island Housing has developed a land bank program that helps developers finance the purchase of land for affordable housing, but Rhode Island has no program for cataloging and acquiring sites for housing development across the state.

Rep. Speakman's proposal would empower the Department of Housing to create a state housing land bank that would actually acquire real estate for affordable housing. Each parcel could then be sold to a public housing authority or to a 501(c)(3) community organization. The State Properties Committee would be required to catalog real estate owned by the state, quasi-public bodies, and municipalities, and it would report this inventory to the Department of Housing. The State Properties Committee would develop long-term plans for "those real estate assets not in current use." Properties suitable for housing and not designated of other purposes within ten years would become subject to negotiations for sale.

The Center for Community Progress, a national nonprofit, created this diagram that shows roughly how the land bank process operates.

# How a Land Bank Works



The record from other states is that land banks are effective. Ohio has been a leader in this practice, and Georgia, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania also rely on county land banks (map attached below). Many of those counties are larger than Rhode Island.

**25-H 5955 grapples with one of the most significant hurdles that developers of affordable housing face in acquiring properties. Creating a statewide land bank in the Department of Housing will speed and simplify that process. With special thanks to Rep. Speakman for her visionary and steady leadership, the Village Common urges passage of 5955.**

Respectfully,

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## COUNTY AND REGIONAL LAND BANK PROGRAMS IN NEIGHBORING STATES identified by the Center for Community Progress

