An Ounce of Prevention:
How Connecticut Cities & Towns Can Keep LANDLORDS from SLUMLORDS

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Overview

The roof leaks: "Hmm, I thought I fixed that." ... The toilet leaks: "Put a towel around it." ... The front steps are broken: "Use the back door."

Problem landlords. Problem buildings. Problem neighborhoods. Buildings with one broken window will soon have several, according to the broken window theory. It doesn't take many run-down buildings to take down a neighborhood. Run-down buildings breed vandalism, crime and arson. Run-down properties lead to abandoned properties and vacant lots, run-down neighborhoods, and soon, to economically depressed cities and towns.

Local governments have multiple tools for dealing with vacant and abandoned properties. But considering that problem properties depress tax revenues, strain public services, and demand constant and expensive attention from local government agencies, wouldn’t it be cheaper and more effective to prevent them in the first place?

This CPEC Policy Brief compiles tools and resources for cities, towns, and community groups to prevent problem properties.

Psychology of a Slumlord

Good landlords try to maximize their return on investment with financial and tax planning. They purchase each property carefully, manage their properties while they own them, and market them professionally when they decide to sell. Slumlords don’t.

Many slumlords look to buy junk property on the cheap, with little or no down payment. They try to put as little money possible into a property and take the most they can out of it, for as long as they can. A slumlord doesn’t usually care about tax benefits, because he tries to collect as much of the rent in cash as he can, which he forgets to report to tax authorities as income. Slumlords don’t care about appreciation because they’ll abandon the property when it has been finally milked dry. Slumlords keep lowering the rent until some poor soul takes it as is, and the downward spiral continues until the cash dries up.

Another kind of slumlord has good intentions, but becomes one anyway – usually because he got in over his head. This kind of slumlord didn’t do his homework before buying a rental property, and faced far more rehabilitation or renovation costs, as with asbestos or lead, than he anticipated before he can even rent the property. He usually doesn’t realize that owning rental property is a time-consuming small business that requires vigilant tenant screening and on-site management. Or, this kind of slumlord might genuinely lack sufficient cash flow to repair and maintain his property because he was a victim of bad tenants who trashed his property, or a victim of reduced demand for rentals.

Either way, slumlords destroy buildings, neighborhoods and seriously impact the lives and hopes of their tenants and their neighbors.

Tools and Resources for Connecticut Cities and Towns

Local governments have a variety of state laws, municipal powers, and government and nonprofit programs at their disposal for combating problem properties. Key tools and resources include:

A slumlord doesn’t usually care about tax benefits, because he tries to collect as much of the rent in cash as he can, which he forgets to report to tax authorities as income.
### Anti-Blight Ordinances

Ordinances must include standards to determine neglect and may carry fines of from $10 to $100 a day for each violation. Municipalities that impose fines must adopt citation hearing procedures. But the content of anti-blight ordinances, exemptions to them, consequences for violations and enforcement levels vary significantly by municipality.

### Nuisance Abatement Program

Connecticut’s Nuisance Abatement program combines innovative problem solving with traditional policing and criminal prosecution to address the quality of life issues. The program is handled by the Nuisance Abatement Unit in the Office of the Chief State’s Attorney. Nuisance Abatement prosecutors work with the State’s Attorneys, police departments, municipal agencies and neighborhood groups to clean up nuisance properties.

The Nuisance Abatement Unit attacks chronic nuisances created by commercial or residential properties, and works with landlords who are willing to clean up their properties. Some cities and towns take advantage of the Nuisance Abatement program more than others. [Nuisance Abatement Program](#).

### Landlord and Tenant Laws

Connecticut State laws sets out comprehensive rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants. [Landlord and Tenant Act](#).

### Municipal Housing, Fire, Safety, Health Codes

Local governments may establish and enforce housing, fire, safety and health codes. As a general rule, they may impose penalties of up to $100 per violation per day. One exception allows municipal health directors to regulate nuisances and “sources of filth” and impose penalties of $250 per violation per day. [Municipal Authority](#).

### Connecticut Housing Courts

Sometimes you have to let people talk to the judge. Connecticut’s Housing Courts, which are well trained in a variety of housing related law, help cities and towns that have landlord/tenant problems get housing and nuisance laws and ordinances enforced. Recently, the Housing Court sentenced a Waterbury landlord to prison for repeatedly failing to correct fire safety code violations at properties he owned in Waterbury.

The Court provides online answers to [Connecticut Housing Court FAQs](#), and publications on [Rights and Responsibilities of Landlords and Tenants](#); a [Landlord's Guide to Eviction](#); and a [Tenant's Guide to Eviction](#).

### Rent Receivers

Municipalities may appoint people to deal with landlords who have problem properties. When a landlord does not comply with a municipal order to remove a nuisance or keep his property habitable, the authority may ask for a court-appointed receiver to collect rents, resolve the nuisance, and evict tenants. [Rent Receivers](#).

### Eminent Domain

Local governments can use their power of eminent domain to acquire key properties which are part of targeted homeownership initiatives. Eminent domain could be used where the properties cannot be acquired by other means (such as private purchase at a reasonable price, foreclosure of a tax lien, summary tax foreclosure) and where the owner is unwilling or unable to redevelop the site. For example, see [Coming Home to Hartford](#).
Neighborhood Revitalization Zones

Connecticut municipalities may create Neighborhood Revitalization Zones where a significant number of properties are foreclosed, abandoned, blighted, substandard, or pose a public safety hazard. NRZs require a collaborative process among community stakeholders and all levels of government. Community stakeholders create and implement neighborhood revitalization plans, which include specific projects to be developed with local or State aid. The Office of Policy and Management and the Connecticut Economic Development Fund offer technical assistance to NRZs through mini-grants. NRZ Guide: Turning around Downtown.

Land Banks

Land banks are public authorities created to acquire, hold, manage, and develop tax-foreclosed property. Through land banks, a community can ensure that tax-foreclosed property is sold or developed with the long-term interest of the community and surrounding property owners in mind.

While land banks are generally associated with older urban communities that have significant abandonment, they can be equally useful to safeguard healthy communities from deterioration, and for smaller communities seeking to protect land from passing through the slow process of decline often associated with tax-foreclosed properties.

A land bank gives a community the opportunity to take a “deep breath” before deciding the fate of a tax-foreclosed property, rather than allowing each parcel of vacant land to fall into the hands of speculators who spread the infectious disease of blight. The National Vacant Properties Campaign was formed to share successful strategies and develop new approaches to abandonment - which is both a cause and effect of sprawl. Land Bank Authorities.

One group has recommended to Hartford that a land bank entity be formed to work with the city to negotiate the purchase of properties that are part of targeted homeownership initiatives. The land bank would acquire and hold the property for redevelopment by developers selected through an RFP process, and coordinate disposition with the city. Coming Home to Hartford.

Identifying Absentee Landlords

Local governments and community groups often report having a hard time identifying and finding the owners of neglected properties. But some municipalities, like Hartford, Bridgeport, Stamford, Meriden, and Waterbury, have their own property assessment data online, searchable by street, owner or parcel. In 51 other towns, an outside firm provides real estate appraisal services. The company’s searchable databases include owner names and addresses. Vision Appraisal Databases.

Reverse lookup tools, for finding someone associated with a street address, are also available online. Reverse Phone Directory; Reverse Address.

Additionally, the Secretary of the State’s CONCORD system may be useful in finding contact information for a business’s principals and statutory agents, whose role is to receive legal notices for the business. Business forms may also be reviewed at the SOTS Commercial Recording Division office. Secretary of the State.

Resources in State Government

State agencies provide an array of resources to local governments for fighting blight and problem properties.
Building and Fire Codes
The Department of Public Safety houses the State Building Inspector and the State Fire Marshal, which set and enforce the state building code and state fire code, respectively. Both offices work with local inspectors to promote health and safety.

Community Development and Housing
The Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development works with municipal leaders, public agencies, community groups and others on community development projects ranging from small-scale housing construction to repairing community facilities to creating museums, parks, theaters and cultural centers. DECD offers grants and loans for things like removing lead paint and asbestos. DECD also develops programs that expand affordable housing opportunities and build a strong tax base, encourage safe streets, and empower neighborhoods and communities to flourish. DECD.

Rehabilitation Financing and Technical Assistance
Rehabilitating problem properties can discourage future slumlords. To that end, the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority administers the Urban Rehabilitation Homeownership Program, which provides low-interest-rate mortgages, down-payment assistance and rehabilitation loans. Connecticut Housing Finance Authority.

The Connecticut Housing Investment Fund, Inc. (CHIF) finances affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization projects throughout Connecticut. CHIF helps individuals and organizations buy, rehabilitate, or construct homes for low and moderate income families. CHIF also helps nonprofit organizations, housing authorities, and community organizations plan and develop affordable housing projects. In its Predevelopment Loan Program, for example, CHIF offers low interest loans to nonprofit organizations for predevelopment and planning activities. In its Neighborhood Rebuilder Program, CHIF offers short term construction loans and bridge financing to nonprofit and for profit developers. CHIF.

Security Deposit Investigations
The Connecticut Department of Banking investigates problem landlords who unjustly withhold tenant’s rental security deposits. In 2004, the Banking Department resolved 256 landlord-tenant disputes in the fiscal year and recovered $95,307 for tenants. Security Deposit Investigator.

Eviction Prevention Program
The Department of Social Services Eviction Prevention Program uses landlord-tenant conflict resolution services to help prevent evictions and its subsequent homelessness, lost rental income, and repair costs. Trained community-based mediators use assessment, mediation and, when necessary, rent bank resources, including grants, to keep families in their homes. Eviction Prevention Program.

Community Development Corporations
Community development corporations rebuild their communities through housing, commercial, job development and other activities. Generally, they are nonprofit organizations that are responsible to residents of the area they serve. A CDC’s mission normally focuses on serving the needs of local, low- or moderate-income households. CDCs can develop strategies to acquire abandoned units outright or the delinquent mortgages that had enticed speculators. Stopping Crime and Blight at the Source; Turning around Downtown.

Nonprofit Legal Services
Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut
Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut helps low-income people with landlord-tenant matters. SLS runs a telephone referral service where people can get information about their legal rights, consult with an advocate or attorney, and get do-it-yourself legal advice and
referrals to other organizations’ services. SLS has an online Guide to Teaching Clients to Be Organized, Be Repaired, Take Action, and Get Results, and a Guide for Self-Advocacy.

The Legal Assistance Resource Center of Connecticut
LARCC, the Legal Assistance Resource Center of Connecticut, provides guidance for navigating the housing code enforcement system. LARCC publishes pamphlets on Tenants’ Rights, Energy And Utility Problems With Landlords, and tenants’ rights, energy and utility problems with landlords, court appointed rent receivers, and filing a complaint with the Fair Rent Commission. LARCC.

2005 LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

- **Public Act 05-223: Identification of a Landlord**
  Connecticut has a new law on the books for identifying landlords. As of October 1, 2005, Public Act 05-223 (HB 6539) allows cities and towns to require nonresident owners of rental property, or their agents, to keep their current residential addresses on file in the municipality where the property is located. The owner or his agent has 21 days to report any address changes to the town.

  Failing to file an address or keep it current is an infraction. The new law allows towns’ legislative bodies to adopt an ordinance establishing civil penalties of up to $250 for the first violation and up to $1000 for any subsequent violation. Municipalities may adopt such ordinances as of July 6, 2005. See Public Act 05-223.

  The 2005 state legislative session included several other proposals that would have helped cities and towns deal with problem properties and fight blight further. Among them were bills on separate rates of taxation for real estate, municipal liens for accrued fines for certain code violations, and property tax relief for residential properties in municipal improvement zones, none of which were enacted.

- **Senate Bill 977: Separate Rates of Taxation for Real Estate**
  This bill would have adopted land-use theories that conclude that traditional property tax methods punish “do-ers” and reward neglect and vacant properties. The bill would allow the five largest cities (Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Stamford, and Waterbury) to tax land at a higher rate than buildings and other improvements made to the land, a system known as “split rate property taxation.” The bill would have allowed cities to use a split-rate property tax system for most property beginning with the October 1, 2005 assessment year if their legislative bodies adopt implementing ordinances. Land in the 490 program, in which eligible farm, forest, or open space land is assessed based on its current use, rather than its full market value, would not have been subject to split-rate taxation. Bill.

- **Senate Bill 691: Municipal Liens for Accrued Fines for Certain Code Violations**
  This bill would have increased various municipal fines and authorized municipalities to place liens on real property for any unpaid fine imposed for a zoning violation, violations of housing sanitation laws and housing local codes. Bill.

- **Senate Bill 201: Property Tax Relief for Dwellings in Municipal Improvement Zones**
  Senate Bill 201 would have given property tax relief for people who own and occupy two to four-unit homes in locally designated “improvement zones.” If passed, towns could use improvement zones in areas already designated under other programs, including state-approved enterprise and railroad depot zones, locally designated neighborhood revitalization zones and village districts. Towns that wanted to provide tax relief in the zones would first have to create a committee to analyze the issue. Towns also would have had to adopt an ordinance authorizing property tax relief in improvement zones. Bill.
WHAT SOME CONNECTICUT TOWNS ARE DOING ABOUT PROBLEM PROPERTIES

**City Scan**

Bridgeport, Danbury, Hartford, New Britain, Norwalk and Stamford have used City Scan to address blight. City Scan projects use handheld computers, custom-designed software, wireless modems, Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) receivers and digital cameras to empower citizens in local government. In City Scan projects, citizens prioritize the physical improvements they want in their community and gather information on progress and results. City Scan prepares reports and maps using the visual database created from the data. Neighborhood groups and local government officials can use these reports to find solutions at regular, action-oriented, Code Enforcement Task Force meetings. City Scan.

**Behind the Rocks with Civic Radar**

CivicRadar lets citizens to make service requests on "nuts and bolts issues" directly to their local governments and follow up on the status of those requests. While CivicRadar creates unique opportunities for high-level interaction between citizens and governments, it also gives governments a new way to track workflow and the allocate resources.

In Hartford's Behind the Rocks neighborhood, groups of neighborhood volunteers are using CivicRadar to identify and report incidences of blight to the City of Hartford, and monitor the city's follow up.


**Bridgeport's Project “Clean Sweep”**

Modeled after New York City’s highly successful Model Block Program, Bridgeport’s Project “Clean Sweep” addresses health, zoning, and housing code violations, community policing, parks maintenance, street cleaning and improvements, and bulk trash pick-ups. Spearheaded by the Public Facilities Department, Project Clean Sweep is a multi-pronged program drawing resources from several city departments.

As part of Project Clean Sweep, Bridgeport adopted a new anti-blight ordinance that lets the city impose heavier fines on people who don’t dispose of trash properly. The ordinance also makes it easier to prosecute violators. The new, stricter ordinance came at the urging of Bridgeport Mayor John M. Fabrizi, who promised that the ordinance will be “strictly enforced. We will no longer tolerate people dumping trash anywhere and everywhere they want.”


**New London NIP-IT Code Enforcement Team**

New London uses a team of four specialists, from the Police, Fire, Health and Building Departments, to collaborate from an office at the Police Department’s Truman Street Substation. This NIP-IT team systematically addresses quality of life issues by jointly examining all properties street by street. That means the impact can be felt by the whole neighborhood. The team aims to get compliance with all applicable codes, ordinances and laws. This is usually achieved voluntarily by educating homeowners, landlords and tenants, but abatement and criminal charges may result when other options fail. NIP-IT.
Waterbury – Citation to Court in One Week

Using a proactive approach to resolving blight instead of waiting for a complain to trigger action, Waterbury issues notices of code violations to first time violators, and on-the-spot summonses to repeat code offenders. Waterbury can have a violator in court a week after issuing a citation.

Meriden Certificates of Compliance

Besides inspecting rental units for compliance with the Housing Code, keeping a tracking and referral system for suspected code violations, and keeping records for the city’s Neighborhood Rehabilitation Advisory Board, Meriden’s Housing Division inspects rental units and issues Certificates of Compliance for them. Meriden requires a Certificate of Compliance for any dwelling or dwelling unit more than 10 years old before it is rented to ensure that the unit complies with the Housing Code. Certificate of Compliance, Housing Division.

Stamford Anti-Blight Officer

Stamford’s Anti-Blight Officer works closely with the city’s Health, Zoning, Building, Police and Fire Departments. When any of those departments encounter a blighted property, they notify the city’s Anti-Blight Officer. Stamford’s Anti Blight Program also has an online system for reporting problems. Complaints are referred to the appropriate departments and a complete investigation will follow. Anti-Blight Program.

Norwalk “Call SoNo Home – Again”

"Call SoNo Home...Again" is a collaborative venture among the city of Norwalk, Weed & Seed, Citizens Bank, and Fannie Mae to improve a targeted neighborhood in South Norwalk. Because of community meetings, street lighting, traffic improvement, and greater community police presence are all underway. Also, in an effort to provide home improvement assistance, funding, and technical assistance sources, a tenant/landlord education component has been designed to meet the requests of the neighborhood. Fannie Mae.

Norwalk Weed & Seed

The Norwalk Weed & Seed Initiative is a collaboration among several city agencies, non-profit organizations, and private and public funding sources to revitalize neighborhoods. It is a federally funded strategy of the United States Department of Justice designed to "weed" out criminal activity from targeted neighborhoods and to "seed" the community with a wide range of human services, encompassing prevention, intervention, treatment, and neighborhood revitalization. Weed & Seed focuses on one neighborhood at a time. Community-oriented policing bridges weeding and seeding strategies. The Weed & Seed Initiative is administered by the city of Norwalk and the Norwalk Police Department. Fannie Mae.

BEST PRACTICES FOR ROOTING OUT SLUMLORDS AND TURNING AROUND BLIGHT

Education, collaboration, and strong enforcement are the common denominators of successful anti-blight programs. Effective efforts to tackle blight involve building, health, fire, housing inspectors, police, and neighborhood groups. Here’s a glimpse of how other cities and towns across the country are winning the battle against blight.

Landlord Training

Successful anti-blight groups have learned that few landlords are fully aware of their legal rights and responsibilities, and that landlord training can go a long way toward reducing blighted and abandoned properties. A few examples of top-notch education programs follow.

Fee for Service Training in New York City

Neighborhood Housing Services of New York City developed a training program for first-time homeowners who would also be first-time landlords. The training covers the financial responsibilities of owning a building, tenant selection, landlord/tenant regulations, including...
housing court, evictions, rent increases and code enforcement, insurance issues and membership in homeowners associations.

Through Chemical Bank and Chase Manhattan Bank, NHS gives monthly seminars for which the banks pay anywhere from $75 per family to $500 per seminar. NeighborWorks and MetLife recognize NHS’s program as a “Winning Strategy.” Winning Strategies.

Training Required in New Jersey’s Cool Cities Initiative
Fannie Mae’s Cool Cities™ urban revitalization initiative in New Jersey requires landlord counseling for buyers of properties with two-units or more. Cool Cities helps low and moderate income New Jersey residents become homeowners. Fannie Mae.

Police and Others Collaborate on Training in Syracuse
Home Headquarters in Syracuse, New York, runs a free Landlord Training Program for owners and managers of residential rental properties in Syracuse, New York. Syracuse’s frequently-cited model is based on the National Landlord Training Program created by John Campbell of Campbell Delong Resources Inc. of Portland, Oregon (www.cdri.com).

HHQ, the Syracuse Police Department, the Division of Code Enforcement and the Lead-Based Paint Abatement Program teach the program, which is sponsored by Weed & Seed and HUD. Training covers sections information on fair housing laws, applicant-screening procedures, using credit reports, getting criminal background checks; effective rental agreements, city code requirements, crime prevention through environmental design, lead-based paint abatement, crisis resolution, marketing strategies, resident-retention strategies, and the role police officers play in resolving neighborhood issues, and most importantly, tenant screening.

Area banks have started to require landlord training for first-time homebuyers of two-family homes before closing on their mortgage. Syracuse’s Winning Strategy.

Landlord Rehabilitation Classes in Kansas City
Kansas City started a Bad Apple Program, where slumlords are treated as troubled individuals in need of rehabilitation. Instead of going to jail, habitual violators of the city’s nuisance and maintenance property codes must attend a landlord school similar to a school for drunk drivers. Besides attending courses in landlord-tenant law, slumlords sit in on victim impact panels where they face residents who relate the horror stories of slum life. Some violators are forced to clean up their own property and other eyesores across the city as well. Slum Offensive.

Targeting Absentee Landlords in Troy
Troy, New York adapted the Syracuse landlord training model and made it Troy-specific. Troy’s soft real estate market, oversupply of vacant housing, and older housing stock replete with lead, asbestos, and poor conditions means much of the city’s housing stock had a negative value. This fosters landlords’ inabilities or disinclinations to do repairs and increase their interest in taking any tenants that come along regardless of issues. Across the board, absentee landlords emerged Troy’s most significant problem.

Troy’s decision to use a “carrot approach” instead of a punishment model to encourage landlords to attend is credited as a key part of the program’s success. Turning Landlords into Community Allies.

Landlord Training Part of Community Policing in Portland
Portland sought to increase landlord accountability when it started its community policing program in 1989. It used a massive campaign to educate landlords about taking effective security measures at their properties. The effort centered on a formal landlord training program, developed and run in collaboration with a private consultant, which dealt with issues like how to screen tenants effectively, how to streamline evictions, and how physical security could help prevent crime. Several thousand landlords have participated in the program. One survey found that over 90% of them went on to make changes in the way they managed their property. Community Partnerships; Community Policing Strategic Plan.
CHFA Spearheading Landlord Training
Encouragingly, the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority is reviewing proposals for counseling agencies to provide several types of services for landlord education and counseling for buyers of two- to four-family homes. CHFA expects to announce awards in June 2005. [CHFA RFP]

Neighborhood DA
A Portland, Oregon neighborhood plagued with crime and problem properties used a Neighborhood District Attorney, equipped with a cell phone and a truck as his mobile office, to provide citizens and police with easy access to the district attorney’s office. The NDA quickly established himself as a resource for activists and police. Portland’s NDA did everything from developing a citizen-driven search warrant, to enabling property owners to make it easier for police to arrest trespassers, to using civil eviction, to drafting city ordinances to close down nuisance properties, to accompanying police on “knock and talk” sessions.

As with community policing, community prosecution with NDAs is based on the idea that district attorney offices are more effective at identifying problems and tailoring solutions in specific neighborhoods if they develop mechanisms and capacity for input from community residents. [Mobilizing Against Crime, Making Partnerships Work]

Project SCOPE: Selling City-Owned Properties Efficiently
Baltimore’s Project SCOPE (Selling City-Owned Properties Efficiently) is a promising model for getting properties back on the tax rolls and revitalizing neighborhoods. Through Project SCOPE, Baltimore sells vacant properties through real estate agents who earn commission on sales. Unlike similar city projects, SCOPE does not subsidize buyers. The Community Law Center thoroughly vets prospective buyers to see whether they have previous housing code violations or have engaged in illegal flipping—buying a house relatively cheaply and selling quickly at an inflated price with few repairs.

The program has strict rules about rehabilitation. A SCOPE property must be repaired and inhabited within 18 months or it will revert to the city. In some neighborhoods, buyers must live in the homes or sell to someone who will. In other areas buyers can rent the houses out after rehabbing them. [Project SCOPE]

Phoenix Dirty Dozen and Slum Offensive
Phoenix was once a haven for out-of-state investors in the business of buying rundown properties and neglecting them. Phoenix’s Slumlord Task Force and Arizona’s Slumlord Abatement Law changed that. Formed in 1998, Phoenix’s Slumlord Task Force consists of city, county and federal agencies all working together in a proactive, preventive approach to dealing with slums. Using such objective measures as the number of police calls, and city and county code violations on the properties, the task force developed a "Dirty Dozen" slum list for Phoenix.

The task force wrote Arizona’s tough Slumlord Abatement Law, which requires registration of all rental property with county assessors, making it easier to find absentee landlords. The law gave cities and counties new power against owners of property used for criminal activity and closed commonly used loopholes. [Anti Slum Program, Slum Offensive]

Landlord Registration
Responsible developers in Chicago who wanted to take control of problem properties were frustrated by the State’s reluctance to foreclose on properties or file suits against secret land
trust owners. Thanks to a push from Chicago’s Lawyers Committee for Better Housing, Chicago has a property ownership registration provision in its Residential Landlord and Tenant Ordinance, making it easier to find owners of problem properties.  *Ten Steps to Successful Land Reform.*

### Neighborhood Early Warning Systems

Neighborhood early warning systems (NEWS) are web-based systems that pinpoint deterioration in housing. Several cities, such as Minneapolis, Chicago and Los Angeles, have created NEWS to alert policy-makers and community advocates to buildings at risk and to craft strategies to revive failing neighborhoods. Early warning systems track key variables, such as tax delinquency, code violations, crime indicators, perhaps an absentee landlord and the absence of an onsite property manager, and certainly property abandonment are red flags that a neighborhood is on the verge of decline. *Neighborhood Early Warning Systems.*

### Faith-Based Alliances

The Annie E. Casey Foundation lists Bethel-Ensley Action Task, Inc.’s work in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Birmingham, Alabama as a best practice in church-community collaboration. Despite the Bethel AME Church's barriers, which included a bad location, few active members, no money, no expertise in construction, no credibility in the philanthropic community, no funding experience, no track record in housing or community development, and skepticism among its members, Bethel AME realized its vision for the future.

Through BEAT, the church developed affordable housing, encouraged community and economic development, and strengthened the capacity of residents to determine the future of the community. Once 90% owned by outsiders, today 90% of the community’s properties are owned by people who live there. *Faith into Action Resource Guide.*

### Collection Call

Chicago’s Corporation Counsel periodically issues "collection calls" to enforce the collection of fines assessed against owners, with a priority given to owners of multi-family buildings. *Ten Steps to Successful Land Reform.*

### Social Outreach Workers

Social outreach workers in Toledo help landlords resolve tenant problems before having to evict them. Weed & Seed and the Toledo Community Foundation fund the social outreach worker positions. *Social Outreach Workers.*

**THINKING BIG: WHAT IF…?**

Communities have many tools and multiple legal frameworks available to them for tackling slumlords, problem properties, and blight. Some cities and towns take advantage of those tools more than others. Even so, local governments still need the technology, staff, commitment to collaboration, and an unwavering resolve to handing out swift, certain and meaningful consequences to recalcitrant landlords. Essential tools for preventing slumlords include:

- Strict ordinances on nuisance abatement, registration, maintenance, and securing vacant properties;
- Meaningful penalties that are consistently imposed;
- Notices of violation that clearly spell out the legal consequences of noncompliance;
- Property ownership databases;
- A registry of problem properties; and
- Some form of early warning system.
But what if Connecticut’s cities and towns didn’t stop there? What if…

- Blight-fighters across Connecticut held periodic roundtables where community groups, government officials, prosecutors, and lenders could share ideas and information?
- Blight inspectors could issue citations on the spot, just as parking tickets are issued?
- Local governments had deadlines for enforcing blight violations?
- Problem tenants had to attend tenant training programs?
- There was a single state registry for problem landlords?
- Problem tenants attended tenant training programs?
- Local governments cultivated relationships with landlords, and rewarded the good guys with awards, acknowledgements, and positive press?
- Connecticut had a single State Housing Code?
- Lenders, and cities in tax auctions, vetted prospective landlords and required pre-purchase landlord training?
- DCF caseworkers were trained on whom to alert about problem properties they encounter in their work?
- Landlord registration requirements included a telephone number for emergency contact?
- Local governments cultivated relationships with landlords, and rewarded the good guys with awards, acknowledgements, and positive press?
- Cities and towns made properties available through tax auctions to their own residents first?
- There was a single State Housing Code?

CPEC provides information and innovative decision-making processes to citizens, community and business leaders, civic organizations and local governments to set priorities and improve government performance. Visit www.cpec.org for more information on CPEC’s projects and publications.

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ADDITIONAL SOURCES

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<td>Annie E. Casey Foundation</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aecf.org">www.aecf.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Anti-Blight Ordinance</td>
<td>See Connecticut General Statute §7-148(c)(7)(H)(xv), on the scope of municipal regulatory and police powers regarding public health and safety.</td>
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<td>Brookings Institution</td>
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<td>Community Development Corporations</td>
<td>See 42 USC § 9802, and LISC, Overview of Important Tax-Exemption Issues for Community Development Corporations (CDCs) as Charitable Entities, at <a href="http://www.lisc.org/resources/assets/asset_upload_file836_577.pdf">http://www.lisc.org/resources/assets/asset_upload_file836_577.pdf</a></td>
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<td>Department of Social Services</td>
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<td>Eviction Prevention Program</td>
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<td><strong>Fannie Mae</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.fanniemae.com">www.fanniemae.com</a></td>
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<td><strong>Government Innovators Network Research</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.innovations.harvard.edu/">http://www.innovations.harvard.edu/</a></td>
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<td><strong>International City/Council Management Association</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.icma.org">www.icma.org</a></td>
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<td><strong>Knowledge Plex</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.knowledgeplex.org">www.knowledgeplex.org</a></td>
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<td><strong>Legal Assistance Resource Center of Connecticut</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.larcc.org">www.larcc.org</a></td>
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<td><strong>Local Government Environmental Assistance Network</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.lgean.org/">http://www.lgean.org/</a></td>
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<td><strong>Local Initiatives Support Corporation</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.lisc.org">www.lisc.org</a></td>
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<td><strong>Meriden Property Search</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.meridenrealestate.org/meriden208/LandRover.asp">http://www.meridenrealestate.org/meriden208/LandRover.asp</a></td>
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<td><strong>National Governors Association Center for Best Practices</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.nga.org/center/">http://www.nga.org/center/</a></td>
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<td><strong>National Vacant Properties Campaign</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.vacantproperties.org/resources.html">http://www.vacantproperties.org/resources.html</a></td>
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<td><strong>Neighbor Works America</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.nw.org/network/home.asp">http://www.nw.org/network/home.asp</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Neighborhood Revitalization Zones</strong></td>
<td>See Connecticut General Statutes §7 - 600</td>
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<td><strong>NeighborWorks</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.nw.org/">http://www.nw.org/</a></td>
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<td><strong>Nuisance Abatement Program</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.ct.gov/csa/cwp/view.asp?a=1798&amp;q=285774&amp;csaNav=%7C">http://www.ct.gov/csa/cwp/view.asp?a=1798&amp;q=285774&amp;csaNav=%7C</a></td>
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<td><strong>Rental Housing On Line</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://rhol.org/rental/slumlord.htm">http://rhol.org/rental/slumlord.htm</a></td>
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<td><strong>State Building Inspector</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.state.ct.us/dps/DFEBS/OSBI/index.htm">http://www.state.ct.us/dps/DFEBS/OSBI/index.htm</a> and <a href="http://www.state.ct.us/dps/DFEBS/OSBI/Lbo/index.htm">http://www.state.ct.us/dps/DFEBS/OSBI/Lbo/index.htm</a> for a list of municipal building officials.</td>
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<td><strong>State Fire Marshal</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.state.ct.us/dps/DFEBS/OSFM.htm">http://www.state.ct.us/dps/DFEBS/OSFM.htm</a></td>
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<td><strong>Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.slsct.org">www.slsct.org</a></td>
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<td><strong>Urban Institute</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.urban.org">www.urban.org</a></td>
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<td><strong>Vacant Properties and Smart Growth</strong></td>
<td>Vacant Properties and Smart Growth: Creating Opportunity from Abandonment, Funders’ Network For Smart Growth and Livable Communities, Livable Communities @ Work, September 2004</td>
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<td><strong>Weed &amp; Seed</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ccdo/">http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ccdo/</a></td>
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