



# Albany County Land Bank Forms New Partnership to Expand Opportunities

***New partnership with Home HeadQuarters, Inc. will increase resources available to purchase and rehabilitate Land Bank properties***

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**ALBANY, NEW YORK** – The Albany County Land Bank has formed a new partnership with Home HeadQuarters, Inc., a non-profit housing and community development organization based in Syracuse, New York.

The partnership will increase access to the resources necessary to purchase and rehabilitate vacant, abandoned or tax-foreclosed properties from the Land Bank and provide more opportunities for historically underserved populations and minority contractors to purchase real estate and build wealth. The effort is part of the Land Bank’s continued expansion of programs, partnerships and resources designed to return vacant properties back to productive use, address housing disparities and better serve historically underserved populations.

In partnership with the Land Bank, Home HeadQuarters will offer financing to qualified buyers for the purchase and rehab of Land Bank properties. HeadQuarters is a certified Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) that serves individuals and businesses that cannot access resources from traditional financial institutions by applying more flexible underwriting standards. Home HeadQuarters is also a certified NeighborWorks® HomeOwnership Center, offering a wide range of programs and services for all homeownership needs from pre- to post-purchase. Under the partnership, Home HeadQuarters will serve as a one-stop-shop, providing educational resources as well as purchase and construction financing to qualified individuals, families, contractors, and investors seeking to purchase and redevelop properties from the Albany County Land Bank, creating a new pathway to homeownership and wealth building for people that have difficulty securing the financial resources needed to purchase and rehab buildings. Home HeadQuarters financed the first purchase and rehab of a Land Bank property for a first-time homebuyer in Albany, New York earlier this year ([story here](#)).

“Homeownership helps build wealth and stabilize neighborhoods,” said **Charles Touhey, Chairman of the Albany County Land Bank Corporation**. “The Land Bank is in a position to create opportunities for individuals and families that have been denied the chance to own a home because of what they look like or where they live. Through these initiatives we will continue to take the lead on building more equitable communities.”

“Home HeadQuarters has worked to fill these kinds of equitable lending gaps in the Central New York housing market for 25 years,” said **Kerry Quaglia, Chief Executive Officer of Home HeadQuarters, Inc.** “We’re proud to be a productive partner with the Albany County Land Bank and hope we can finance many more families to help them achieve their dreams of homeownership.”



The new partnership will enable more Land Bank properties to return to productive use and increase access to capital to create more equitable opportunities for underserved populations. Lower-income residents, particularly within Communities of Color, face significant housing challenges. Owning a home can be a significant way to build intergenerational wealth, but Black households and other households of color in America have largely been denied this opportunity through systemic and discriminatory housing and lending practices such as “redlining,” which are widely recognized as a major cause of the current racial wealth gap.

“This partnership with Home HeadQuarters will enable more people to access the resources needed to purchase and rehabilitate a vacant and abandoned building from the Land Bank, including members of underserved populations who are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and who have been denied the opportunity to build wealth through generations of institutional discriminatory housing and lending practices,” **said Adam Zaranko, Executive Director of the Albany County Land Bank Corporation.** “Eliminating barriers to accessing capital is a significant step towards addressing the tremendous racial housing disparities that exist in our communities and will enable more properties to go back to provide use while creating more equitable and inclusive opportunities.”

The Land Bank’s expansion of equitable initiatives is being led by the Land Bank’s Underserved Communities Committee, which was established by the Land Bank’s Board of Directors to address racial disparities created by generations of discriminatory housing and lending practices, which are being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Racial disparities in terms of homeownership and wealth are real issues in Albany and cities across the country, and they call for creative solutions. Homeownership is critical to saving money and building wealth, but sadly, minority communities historically haven’t had access to the resources or opportunities needed to enter the market,” **said Albany County Executive Daniel P. McCoy.** “This new collaboration between the Albany County Land Bank and Home HeadQuarters will help to address serious inequities that have existed for too long and will have the added benefit of reducing blight and crime in our underserved neighborhoods.”

The Committee was formed in June 2020 and convened Land Bank leadership, elected officials who represent underserved communities and leaders from the Black real estate, contracting and business community. A series of working group meetings were held over the course of several months to identify barriers that Black individuals, families and investors can encounter when seeking to purchase and redevelop vacant, abandoned or tax-foreclosed real estate. The Committee and working group identified ways that the Land Bank and other partners could help reduce barriers and create more equitable opportunities for Black homebuyers, businesses, and contractors.

“We want to congratulate the Albany County Land Bank for securing this new partnership, which will not only bolster our efforts in the Albany County Legislature’s Blight to Betterment Task Force, but also create an easier path for everyone to realize the dream of homeownership,” **said Albany County Legislature Chairman Andrew Joyce.** “We now have a way to get resources to qualified buyers to purchase and rehabilitate properties and get them back on the tax rolls.”



Difficulty accessing capital is a major contributing factor and structural barrier to Black families and individuals seeking to purchase homes in the United States. A recent study by Northwestern University found that racial disparities in the mortgage market haven't declined in the last four decades when it comes to discrimination in loan denial and interest rates. A report released in February by the New York State Department of Financial Services found that less than 10% of all loans were issued to minorities in the Buffalo region despite minorities comprising 20% of the region's population.

“Correcting disparities in our community begins with housing. With this partnership we will be able to expand access to homeownership to those who could not see owning a home in their future,” said **Carolyn McLaughlin, Albany County Legislator for District 1, Co-Chair of the Albany County Legislature’s Blight to Betterment Committee and Underserved Communities Committee Advisor**. “I look forward to sharing this initiative with as many residents and future residents as possible.”

Increasing access to capital for underserved populations to purchase and rehabilitate vacant and abandoned properties creates more opportunities for homeownership, especially for minority populations which have been historically denied the opportunities to build wealth. Through discussions with the Underserved Communities Committee Working Group and other stakeholders, it was determined that limited access to capital was the largest barrier for Black homebuyers and contractors purchasing and rehabilitating vacant buildings from the Albany County Land Bank. Approximately 60% of all properties acquired by the Albany County Land Bank are located within a neighborhood that was historically redlined.

“This partnership will be a game-changer for many underserved communities across the City of Albany impacted by urban blight,” said **Albany Common Council Member for the 5<sup>th</sup> Ward and Underserved Communities Committee Advisor Jahmel K. Robinson**. “This partnership will eliminate barriers and create more pathways for homeownership for people of color.”

Increasing Black homeownership rates is a principal goal of the Albany County Land Bank’s expansion of equity initiatives. Nationally, the gap between White (71%) and Black (41%) homeownership rates is approximately 30%, which represents the largest disparity in the past 50 years. The harmful legacy of discriminatory practices like redlining remains very evident in several neighborhoods within communities served by the Albany County Land Bank. An analysis conducted by the Urban Institute that analyzed the gap between the White and Black homeownership rates in the 100 American cities with the largest number of Black households found that Albany, New York – the capital of New York State - had the second largest gap between Black (20.1%) and White (68.9%) of all 100 cities in the study (with a gap of 48.8%). A 2019 analysis of data from the U.S. Census by Policygenius identified that the Albany-Schenectady-Troy metropolitan had the second lowest Black homeownership rates among all the nation’s largest metro areas (at 25%).

Purchasers of Land Bank buildings are required to rehabilitate the properties to the local municipal code. The Working Group also identified increasing the capacity of minority owned contractors as a significant opportunity to create more equity and support homeownership. Many smaller minority-owned businesses lack the ability to access the capital needed to expand and become a certified Minority Owned Business in New York State, consequently limiting opportunities to participate in larger value projects. Conversely, many buyers of Land Bank properties, especially properties in neighborhoods that were redlined, express difficulty securing qualified contractors willing to undertake the rehabilitation of a vacant building.



To provide additional access to capital to increase Black homeownership rates, the Land Bank is also collaborating with organizations like Building Blocks Together, a nonprofit organization committed to transforming communities through homeownership and education. Building Blocks Together provides homebuyers who identify as Black or African American grants to assist with the costs of purchasing a home in the Capital Region.

In addition to eliminating barriers to accessing capital, the Land Bank has adopted a number of additional recommendations of the Underserved Communities Committee, including, but not limited to, increasing buyer education, outreach, and property purchase assistance resources, enhanced the Equitable Ownership and Spend a Little, Get a LOT! purchase programs and expanded hiring of minority owned business and services.

Visit [www.homehq.org](http://www.homehq.org) to learn more about financing the purchase and rehab of Land Bank properties as well as homebuyer education and certified housing counseling programs.

#### About the Albany County Land Bank Corporation

The Albany County Land Bank was established in 2014 by Albany County to facilitate the process of acquiring, improving, and redistributing tax-foreclosed, vacant, or abandoned properties. The Land Bank is a nonprofit organization committed to revitalizing neighborhoods and strengthening communities throughout Albany County. The Land Bank uses funding from the Office of the New York State Attorney General, Enterprise Community Partners, Inc., and Albany County to support property demolitions, acquisitions, stabilizations, lot improvements, and rehabilitation projects. The Albany County Land Bank works in partnership with state and local government, non-profits, residents, community groups, and responsible developers and investors to return properties to productive use and support community development. To learn more about the Albany County Land Bank please visit: [www.albanycountylandbank.org](http://www.albanycountylandbank.org).

#### About Home HeadQuarters, Inc.

Home HeadQuarters (HHQ) is a Syracuse, New York-based non-profit neighborhood and housing development organization and certified Community Development Financial Institution that has, since 1996, helped more than 4,000 families become first-time homebuyers; provided nearly 11,000 homeowners with \$113 million in home improvement loans and grants, and redeveloped nearly 900 formerly vacant properties. Recognized nationally for its innovative and equitable loan products, Home HeadQuarters is annually recognized as the leading home improvement lender to families of color living in Syracuse, out lending all other financial institutions combined. The organization is the country's first designated Community Based Development Organization (CBDO) and is a chartered member of NeighborWorks America. HHQ was recently awarded the designation of *2020 Top Home Improvement Lender in the Nation* amongst 240+ NeighborWorks America member organizations. Learn more at [www.homehq.org](http://www.homehq.org).

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