

**Comprehensive Approaches to Vacant Properties and Affordable Housing
National Vacant Properties Conference Fall 2007**

Prepared by Liz Hersh, executive director
Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania

Successful affordable housing strategies and abandoned property strategies can go hand in hand to improve neighborhoods, cities, and regions while ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing.

Pennsylvania has been pioneering innovative financing, housing, community and economic development tools to provide incentives, capital and technical support for “core communities.” The term “core communities” refers to the older, generally industrial areas, many in the 53 third class or small cities, boroughs and older suburbs throughout the state. It also includes Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, although they are more often referred to as “urban neighborhoods” to distinguish between those in small towns and cities.

Governor Edward G. Rendell advanced the revitalization of “core communities” as a primary plank in his platform in running for Governor and has committed millions of dollars in new money to making this a reality. Most notably, the state adopted a \$200 million economic stimulus bond and a Growing Greener II bond, which included community revitalization as an explicit goal of countering suburban growth and green space development through cultivating new markets in old places.

Given this vision, the administration has, through the two key state agencies, the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) and the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) developed several new funding and financing programs to target the special needs and opportunities of housing development in older, industrial cities.

The Housing Alliance continues to advocate for a statewide vacant property inventory, land bank authority and a more comprehensive and proactive approach to addressing vacant property. But the efforts made by the state to date to link economic development with community development, especially as it relates to revitalizing blighted, abandoned property, is a pioneering model that has broad applicability to other states. Attached are three information sheets that provide highlights of Pennsylvania’s Comprehensive Approach.