

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** **CONTACT:** Winnie Branton
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**Task Force Presents Comprehensive Blight Strategy Plan in Aliquippa***As part of a statewide effort, the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania deploys its proven techniques and resources*

ALIQUIPPA, PA. Aliquippa’s *Blight Task Force* held its fourth official meeting yesterday at City Hall. The 25-member group, made up of residents, local community advocates, housing and government officials, and nonprofits, completed the process of creating a comprehensive plan to address issues of blight throughout the city.

Mayor Dwan Walker applauded the work of the Task Force. “Fighting blight takes a community,” said the Mayor. “This Blight Plan is the result of true collaboration between City government and our residents to improve quality of life and bring more jobs and better housing to Aliquippa.”

Throughout its four meetings, Aliquippa’s *Blight Task Force* examined the current scope of issues created by blight. This set the stage for the group’s selection of different strategies to address blight.

The Blight Task Force agreed a top goal is to achieve voluntary code compliance by property owners, but many owners are unaware of their maintenance responsibilities. To address this, the Task Force recommended community education and outreach to property owners and tenants.

Another Task Force priority is the strategic demolition of vacant, unsafe, and uninhabitable buildings. This will build upon Mayor Walker’s work with the Aliquippa Economic Development Corporation to demolish dangerous buildings as part of its Neighborhood Partnership Program. Mayor Walker focused first specifically on blighted properties near bus stops, as a way to improve the safety for children on the way to school. AEDC has been targeting its efforts in the Plan 11 Extension neighborhood, the neighborhood with the most blighted properties in the City. Over the past two years, 36 blighted properties have been demolished under this program.

Properties become blighted for many different reasons and understanding those reasons helps guide choosing a strategy for bringing that property into compliance. For instance, there are senior citizens living on fixed incomes that don’t have the resources to maintain their properties. The approach for dealing with this property will be different than where the owner simply chooses not to comply with repeated citations from the Codes office. There is no single solution in dealing with blighted properties, a multi-pronged approach is necessary.

“The Task Force members put the time in to learn about blight strategies that are working in other communities,” said Code Enforcement Officer James Bologna. “Implementing the recommended strategies will help educate owners about their responsibilities to keep up their properties so they can avoid code violations.”

The *Task Force* was formed as part of the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development’s (DCED) Act 47 municipality intervention efforts. DCED contracted with the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania to provide technical assistance that will help financially distressed communities improve community and economic development by attacking issues of blight.

"At the Housing Alliance, we see abandoned and blighted properties in our communities not as the eyesores they are today, but as untapped assets that provide land for redevelopment,” said Phyllis Chamberlain, Executive Director of the Housing Alliance. “Abandoned land, when transformed into productive re-use, is a critical opportunity for our older communities to modernize, revitalize, and grow, and to improve the quality of life for neighbors who are already there."

With the help of its statewide network of experts, the Housing Alliance is deploying a three-step process in Aliquippa:

1. Establish a local task force and create a plan to tackle blight.
2. Evaluate the possibility of forming a local land bank.
3. Examine processes and make recommendations to enhance code enforcement capabilities.

In Aliquippa, the Housing Alliance has partnered with Winnie Branton of Branton Strategies to facilitate and guide the *Task Force* through the process.

“Long neglected properties impose heavy costs on cities and towns,” Branton said. “Communities like Aliquippa are refusing to accept the status quo. They are adopting new and proven strategies to return these properties to productive use and grow the tax base.”

The *Blight Task Force* is intended to bring broader perspective to the issue of blight by assembling a group of individuals reflecting various parts of the local community. Members of the *Blight Task Force* include:

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| Sheril BergJames Bologna, *City Code Enforcement Officer*Kelly CapelKathryn L. Clark, *Act 47 Coordinator*Deborah Grass, *Act 47 Coordinator*Dave Foringer, *City Fire Chief*James Friend Samuel Gill, *City Administrator*Sandra M. Giordano | William JohnsonDaniel J. Jones Kathleen Maloney Joanne McCracken Cynthia NewsomeAnthony Palombo Cynthia Peatross Brandie Pupi Michael Ranieri Barbara Reddick-Glover  | Cory Roma Laura Rubino, *Aliquippa Economic Development Corp*. Johann Smith Donald C. Walker III, *City Council Member*Dwan Walker, *Mayor, City of Aliquippa*Sheryl Young |

The group used the Housing Alliance publication, [*From Blight to Bright*](http://www.pablightlibrary.com/s/Blight-to-Bright-rev-June-2016-Print-Friendly.pdf)*: A Comprehensive Toolkit for Pennsylvania*, as a resource in selecting strategies to address blight. *From Blight to Bright* is a data-driven manual of best practices and successful strategies that have eradicated the harmful effects of abandoned, blighted properties in Pennsylvania communities.

The next step in the technical assistance will be to develop action plans to implement the high priority blight strategies, with target dates for completion and identified measures of success.

Aliquippa is one of six municipalities the Housing Alliance is currently working with through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development’s *High-Impact Locally Driven Code Enforcement, Blight and Land Bank Training and Technical Assistance Program.*

**ABOUT**
The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania is a statewide coalition working to provide leadership and a common voice for policies, practices and resources to ensure that all Pennsylvanians, especially those with low incomes, have access to safe, decent and affordable homes. To learn more, please visit www.HousingAlliancePA.org. ###