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KIM GRAZIANI TO HEAD COMMUNITY PROGRESS 'CAPACITY BUILDING' PROGRAM
Former Pittsburgh Official to Champion Local Efforts Around the Country for Land Reform

WASHINGTON, DC (May 31, 2011) – Kim S. Graziani, formerly the Director of Neighborhood Initiatives for the City of Pittsburgh, has been named Vice President of Capacity Building at the Washington-based Center for Community Progress.

Community Progress, the nation's preeminent organization concerned with prevention and adaptive reuse of vacant buildings and land, convened its first Leadership Institute (CPLI) this spring. The Institute brought together state and local leaders from 14 cities in Georgia, Minnesota, New Jersey and Tennessee, at Harvard University to learn and share ideas about effective strategies to address the many challenges posed by empty lots, abandoned properties, foreclosed homes and other problem properties that can foster blight and depress local economies. In her new role with the organization, Graziani will work with these CPLI participants, and many practitioners around the country, to apply the general principals learned at Harvard to the specific needs of their own communities.

"This issue of vacant, abandoned properties is, in my opinion, one of the most important issues facing our nation right now," says Graziani, who spearheaded Pittsburgh Mayor Luke Ravenstahl's revitalization initiatives in the city's 90 neighborhoods. "Cities are the drivers of our economy, but, between years of population and industry loss, the recession and the foreclosure crisis, cities are really struggling with the scale of blight and abandonment."

Graziani, who holds Master's degrees in Social Work and Public Administration from the University of Pittsburgh, first encountered Community Progress co-founder and President Dan Kildee when she heard him speak at a 2009 conference on the vacant property issue.

"I had been in my job [with the City of Pittsburgh] for two years and it had become apparent to me that this issue of finding a way to deal with vacant properties and get them back into productive use was the number one issue for the City and the folks in the neighborhoods, too. I heard Dan talk about land banking and something just clicked in me. I knew this was what we needed in Pittsburgh."

Land banks, public authorities created to efficiently acquire, hold, manage and develop tax-foreclosed property, have emerged as a key tool in the toolbox of urban planners, especially in response to the mortgage crisis. Graziani was instrumental in bringing a robust land banking strategy to Pittsburgh and in securing more than \$5 million in funding to develop and implement complementary strategies focused on community engagement, land use planning, community greening, public safety, business district revitalization and housing development.

Now, Graziani says, she is looking forward to taking that work to a national level. "My charge is to increase the capacity of local and state governments and organizations around the country," she says, "and really to provide whatever level of assistance they need, be a point person, a sounding board and find the right resources to help them achieve their goals and see their reform strategies through."

"The most exciting part for me," she says, "is the prospect of presenting information to someone in just the way I got it at that first session in 2009 ... to get other people to have those 'aha' moments about this issue."

Graziani will relocate from Pittsburgh to Washington DC, where Community Progress has one of its three offices, this summer and looks forward to getting to know her own new neighborhood there.

To learn more about the Center for Community Progress, please visit www.communityprogress.net/ or call (877) 542-4842.

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