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**COMMUNITY LEADERS STALWART ON ISSUES OF BLIGHT**

***Reclaiming Vacant Properties conference attendees exchange ideas for recovery***

**CLEVELAND (Oct. 19, 2010)** – The continuing housing and foreclosure crises have not offered much in the way of good news for those concerned with some of the nation's most troubled neighborhoods. But a convening of industry experts and officials in Cleveland this week has given local leaders an opportunity to showcase successful efforts for coping with urban blight and to chart a way forward to a broader economic recovery.

Organized by the [Center for Community Progress](#) with their local partner, [Neighborhood Progress, Inc.](#), the third national [Reclaiming Vacant Properties](#) conference, was held Oct. 13 to 15 in Cleveland at the Renaissance Cleveland Hotel.

The conference, attended by nearly 1,000 government officials, academics, community activists and nonprofit leaders from around the country, offered a chance for those in the forefront of working to revitalize abandoned properties to come together to discuss solutions. Mayor Dayne Walling, of Flint, Mich., and Mayor A.C. Wharton, of Memphis, shared hard-won insights and opened the discussion between the Rust Belt and Sun Belt cities, who have been hit the hardest. Many speakers touted the benefits of collective expertise and partnerships in turning communities around.

"Stronger neighborhoods make a stronger nation," U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) told the audience Wednesday in a speech that met with a rousing ovation.

Dozens of sessions featuring leaders of local governments and community organizations mapped out methods for recovery, giving attendees ideas to cure blight in their areas and to move beyond the constraints of the economy.

Preservation was the theme of the conference's opening plenary session, featuring Mayor Wharton and Mayor Walling, who have led efforts to revitalize vacant properties in their cities.

"No doubt [vacant properties] affects a community's sense of self," Walling said, adding that the economy has forced the city to choose between weekly garbage pickup or development staff.

Wharton said local governments can't cure cities' problems alone.

"You cannot do this without partnerships," he said.

On Wednesday, the Center for Community Progress released a report, entitled [Restoring Properties, Rebuilding Communities: Transforming Vacant Properties in Today's America](#), outlining successful strategies for reclaiming vacant properties, featuring case studies of specific cities that have found innovative, successful solutions.

"We need to focus on vacant and abandoned properties not just as a problem, but as a resource," said Dan Kildee, president of the Center for Community Progress, "Vacant houses can be turned back into homes. Obsolete factories can become incubators for emerging technologies. Even older cities that are losing population can maintain strong downtowns and neighborhoods and also replace blighted areas with green space."

In a demonstration of the federal government's commitment to spurring growth and development of distressed communities, on Friday, Shaun Donovan, secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, announced a \$4.25 million grant to the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) to promote the revitalization of local neighborhoods. This grant is one of 45 Sustainable Communities Regional Planning grants issued by the Obama administration, totaling \$100 million. One of the primary reasons NOACA was approved for a grant was because it is a multi-county, multi-stakeholder agency that stands to impact thousands.

Donovan's first stop after making the announcement was to address the conference there he lamented the recession's toll on the country. While he addressed the country's tough times, Donovan said opportunities await cities and towns.

"The country will turn around because of the people at this conference," Donovan said, pointing to the efforts of attendees that have helped secure billions in Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds. The challenge, he reiterated, is to tap in to the potential of partnerships.

"We've seen how putting our heads together and sharing best practices has worked," Kildee said. "We see it all across the country. Now is the time to take advantage of public-private partnerships and heal our cities and towns."

The Center for Community Progress is a new nonprofit organization that helps local and state governments seize the opportunity of reusing vacant and abandoned properties for the economic and social benefit of their communities.

For more information on the conference, please visit <http://reclaimingvacantproperties.org/>. To learn more about the Center for Community Progress, please visit [www.communityprogress.net/](http://www.communityprogress.net/) or call (877) 542-4842.

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