

What is the Athens County Land Bank?

In 2009, the Ohio General Assembly passed Ohio Senate Bill 353, giving county land banks the tools required to address blight and dilapidation in their respective communities. This led to the formation of Ohio's first county land bank, the [Cuyahoga Land Bank](#).

The Athens County Land Reutilization Corporation, or Land Bank, formed in 2018 to address the issue of blight and dilapidation across Athens County. By seeking ownership and redevelopment of vacant, tax delinquent, and blighted properties, the Land Bank has the potential to serve as one significant tool in the economic development toolbox available to county and regional leaders.

How does the Athens County Land Bank acquire properties?

The Athens County Land Bank primarily acquires properties via tax foreclosures and occasionally by donation or purchase.

After a property is foreclosed upon, it will likely go to [sheriff sale](#) unless the amount of taxes owed is greater than the valuation of the property. If the property does not sell at sheriff sale, the Athens County Land Bank has the right to claim the property subject to certain conditions and may acquire the property at that point. The Athens County Land Bank only seeks acquisition of properties that are **vacant and abandoned**.

What types of projects does the Athens County Land Bank engage in?

For a comparatively smaller land bank, we stay busy! If a structure is too dilapidated to be considered a viable candidate for renovation, we demolish it and make the property available for purchase as green space or as vacant lot upon which to build when applicable. We have recently completed our second in-house renovation, working with a construction company to perform full renovations on two land bank-owned houses which were then made available for purchase.

The Athens County Land Bank is also regularly involved in brownfield remediation across the county. [According to the US EPA](#), a brownfield is "a property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant". In Athens County, this often looks like abandoned gas stations, mechanic's shops, or in the case of the old Jacksonville-Trimble school, the presence of high concentrations of asbestos. In partnership with [Tetra Tech](#), we have been involved with the successful remediation of

brownfield sites in Athens, Chauncey, Trimble, and Glouster, with two upcoming projects in Lee Township and Hollister.

We recommend viewing our [annual reports](#) for specific project highlights!

Who runs the Athens County Land Bank?

The Land Bank has a board of directors dictated by [state statute](#). The board consists of: The Athens County Treasurer, two Athens County Commissioners, the Mayor of Athens and one Township Trustee. The board typically meets monthly on the third Wednesday of the month at 11am.

The Land Bank also employs a full-time manager, Aaron Dye and a full-time property manager, Jody Barnes who works in the field to inspect, maintain and conduct the clean up of our properties.

How is the Athens County Land Bank funded?

The Athens County Land Bank is primarily funded through a percentage of the delinquent property tax and assessment collection fund. By resolution of the County Commissioners, the Land Bank receives 5% of all delinquent taxes collected by the County Treasurer. Other funding sources include proceeds from the sale of properties, grants, and donations. Recent grant awards include the Ohio Department of Development's [Building Demolition & Site Revitalization Program](#) and [Brownfield Remediation Program](#), [USDA Rural Development](#), [OhioSE](#), and the [Athens County Foundation](#).

I'm interested in a Land Bank property. How do I buy a property from the Athens County Land Bank?

The first step in acquiring a property from the Athens County Land Bank is to fill out our [Purchaser Qualification Form](#). This form qualifies an individual, business, or other entity as eligible to purchase from the Athens County Land Bank. The second form to fill out is our [Application to Acquire Property](#), where the applicant notes the specific property they are interested in purchasing.

If a property is ready for disposition, the applicant will be notified, and the property will be brought to one of our public Board of Directors meetings for discussion and disposition.

If a property is not yet ready for disposition, it likely means that further work needs to be completed before it can be made available for purchase. This may be due to imminent demolition, ongoing waste diversion, brownfield remediation, or other factors. In this case, an applicant's information is recorded in our database, and they will be notified of progress as it occurs.

If an applicant is interested in acquiring a property as green space/a side lot, no further items will need to be submitted.

If an applicant is interested in renovating an existing structure or building a new one, we require a detailed project proposal. Requirements for project proposal submissions are sent out at the time applicants are notified of the request for proposals. Examples of past proposals are also provided at this time. Project proposals often include details such as estimated renovation/build costs and source(s) of funding.

The Athens County Land Bank Board of Directors must hold a vote to dispose of a property to a qualified end-user.

How much does it cost to buy a Land Bank property?

The Athens County Land Bank does not often have set sale prices. There are often four circumstances when it comes to sale price:

- 1) If there are no other qualified end-users for a property, or if no other qualified end-users submit project proposals, the applicant may negotiate a purchase price with the Board of Directors.
- 2) If there are two or more qualified end-users for a property, the Board of Directors may vote to dispose of the property to the applicant with the end-use they believe to be the best fit. In this instance, the scenario above would apply.
- 3) If the end-uses are similar or there is no obvious best end-use, the Board of Directors has historically set a minimum bid for the property. Qualified end-users are then asked to submit sealed bids to be opened at a predetermined time. The highest bidder would be awarded the property.
- 4) There may be a predetermined minimum bid or sale price if a property is part of our Rural Acquisition ("Pay-in-advance") program. Details about this program can be found below.

There's a property near me that I believe could be a potential Land Bank project. What should I do?

If there is a building or residence in your community that you are concerned about, please reach out to the Athens County Land Bank at landbank.athens@gmail.com or (740) 592-3231. A property must be vacant, abandoned, and usually tax delinquent to be considered eligible as a land bank project. If the property cannot become a land bank project, we can likely direct you to community leaders that may be able to assist.

Can you describe the Athens County Land Bank's Rural Acquisition ("Pay-in-advance") program?

Occasionally there are properties located in rural areas that are brought to our attention, usually by neighbors or community members, that we would not seek to acquire through our usual processes. The potential end-user must fill out a Purchaser Qualification Form and an Application to Acquire Property so they may be qualified as an approved applicant per our ordinary process. If the parcel(s) are determined to meet the acquisition requirements that include being vacant, abandoned, and tax delinquent, the qualified end-user may choose to engage our Rural Acquisition ("Pay-in-advance") program.

The property must be accepted by the Board of Directors as a project. The qualified end-user will enter a contract with the Athens County Land Bank and will pay a refundable \$3,000.00 deposit to cover the cost of foreclosure. The contract will include an agreed-upon purchase price for the property. The foreclosure will then be facilitated by a private attorney.

At the end of the foreclosure process, the property will go to sheriff sale if the amount of delinquent taxes does not exceed the valuation of the property. If the initial qualified end-user chooses to bid on the property at sheriff sale and wins, the funds paid-in-advance are refunded to them at the end of the process. If another buyer bids on the property at sheriff sale and wins, the funds paid-in-advance are refunded to the initial qualified end-user. If nobody buys the property at sheriff sale, the Athens County Land Bank would acquire the property and it would be made available to the public via the Athens County Land Bank's property website.

Other qualified end-users may apply for the property once it is made available to the public. If there are two or more qualified end-users, the Board of Directors may vote to dispose the property to the applicant with the best end-use. If a different end-user is chosen by the Board of Directors, the initial qualified end-user is refunded the funds paid-in-advance. If there are several qualified end-users, the Board of Directors may choose to have end-users submit sealed bids with the minimum bid amount being the initially agreed-upon purchase price. If the initial qualified end-user is outbid, they will be

refunded the funds paid-in-advance. If the initial qualified end-user is the final end-user, they will not be refunded their funds and will proceed to purchase the property for a) the initially agreed-upon purchase price or b) their winning bid amount should the property have been put up for sealed bids by the Board of Directors.

I'm a contractor interested in performing demolitions for the Athens County Land Bank. How do I submit a bid?

Contractors can fill out [this form](#) to be added to our "Request for Proposals" email list! When we publish bid specifications for our group demolitions, we notify this email list, [our Facebook Page](#), and the notification is published in the Athens Messenger.

Does the Athens County Land Bank partner with other organizations?

Yes! We frequently partner with several local and community organizations in the region. We regularly engage with [Habitat for Humanity of Southeast Ohio](#), [Hocking Athens Perry Community Action](#), [Rural Action](#), [Athens-Hocking Solid Waste District](#), [Athens-Hocking Recycling Centers](#), the Athens County Sheriff's Environmental Officer, and more. Community support and engagement is crucial to the work being done by the Athens County Land Bank!

We recommend viewing our [annual reports](#) for highlighted projects with community partners!

How do I find out about upcoming Board of Directors meetings?

Board of Directors meeting notices are sent to our Land Bank email list, local media outlets, and published on [our Facebook Page](#). If you would like to be added to the Land Bank email list, please contact landbank.athens@gmail.com!