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## **COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TAKE CENTER STAGE AS HOUSTON LAND BANK HOSTS NATIONAL GATHERING ON VACANT, ABANDONED AND DAMAGED PROPERTIES**

Cities and counties can address vacant, abandoned and deteriorating properties as part of disaster planning and resiliency efforts, but will not succeed without strong community engagement and partnerships, according to panelists closing out the two-day [VAD Academy](#) presented by the [Center for Community Progress](#) and hosted by the [Houston Land Bank](#) this week with support from United Airlines and the Houston office of the Local Initiatives Service Corporation (LISC).

The Vacant, Abandoned, and Deteriorated Properties Training Academy (VAD Academy) is an intensive two-day training primarily designed for public and nonprofit leaders who are ready to take a more strategic, comprehensive approach to revitalizing VAD properties and the neighborhoods in which they are located. This year's VAD Academy, sponsored by the Houston Land Bank, equipped participants with a strong foundation in the core systems that affect equitable revitalization, from policy to law around vacant properties. Given Houston's recent experience with severe storms, the event also focused on the critical issue of addressing VAD properties in disaster resiliency and recovery plans. The event drew 118 participants from 19 states.

Representatives from the East End District, Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation, Harris County Flood Control District, Houston Parks Board, and Rice University's Kinder Institute closed the event with the disaster resiliency and recovery discussion, and agreed that unless neighborhoods and communities are engaged and heard, long-term efforts to address these challenges will struggle to achieve their goals.

"We're not going to succeed unless we first embrace the community, the individual, the family, and have them embrace us," noted Curtis Lampley, a flood control district official and Houston Land Bank (HLB) board member. Kathy Flanagan Payton, president of the Fifth Ward CRC, agreed, adding that proper outreach and discussion with the community ensures that "we're not planning for 'them,' we're planning for 'us.'" Veronica Chapa Gorczyński, president of the East End District, was also among panelists noting that while funding and legal obstacles can represent challenges to building and implementing regional solutions to disaster resiliency, failure to engage residents in planning can have further negative impacts on underserved communities.

Houston Land Bank Board Chair Nicholas Hall echoed that sentiment: "We are doing good work in several areas of Houston, but we know it's essential to continue building sustained relationships throughout communities in need of affordable housing assistance that has only been amplified by recent storms," he said. "We remain committed to being a good



neighbor, aligning with community plans and priorities, supporting existing organizations already doing wonderful work throughout Houston. Community engagement does not end after a set number of outreach efforts, it needs to be a continuous process that is ultimately sensitive to the fact that many voices are ignored, and it is important that we keep reaching out with open minds instead of expecting them to come to us.”

“We were delighted to bring the VAD Academy to Houston, through our important partnership with the Houston Land Bank,” said Dr. Akilah Watkins-Butler, president and CEO of the Center for Community Progress. “This was an opportunity to showcase work in Houston to a national audience, while at the same time connecting local stakeholders to leading experts to help shape efforts to tackle VAD properties in the wake of natural disaster.”

### **About the Houston Land Bank**

Houston Land Bank (HLB) strategically acquires and conveys vacant, abandoned and damaged properties to productive uses for local communities and the City of Houston. HLB is the new name of the Land Assemblage and Redevelopment Authority (LARA), established as a local government corporation for the City of Houston in 1999 to facilitate the redevelopment of vacant and tax delinquent residential real estate in targeted Houston ‘Hope’ neighborhoods. In the past year, HLB has realigned its strategic activities to better serve neighborhood revitalization activity in the City of Houston and changed its name to reflect its core function; its amended bylaws and articles of incorporation were passed by City Council in August 2018. The Board of Directors continues to include representatives from the City of Houston, Harris County, and the Houston Independent School District. More information is available at [www.houstonlandbank.org](http://www.houstonlandbank.org).

### **About Center for Community Progress**

The mission of Center for Community Progress is to foster strong, equitable communities where vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties are transformed into assets for neighbors and neighborhoods. Founded in 2010, Community Progress is the leading national, nonprofit resource for urban, suburban, and rural communities seeking to address the full cycle of property revitalization. The organization fulfills its mission by nurturing strong leadership and supporting systemic reforms. Community Progress works to ensure that public, private, and community leaders have the knowledge and capacity to create and sustain change. It also works to ensure that all communities have the policies, tools, and resources they need to support the effective, equitable reuse of vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties. More information is available at [www.communityprogress.net](http://www.communityprogress.net).

-- 30 --