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Franklin County Treasurer and Prosecutor to Expedite Foreclosures for More Than 400 Vacant and Blighted Properties

Columbus, (OH) - Franklin County Treasurer Edward Leonard and Prosecutor Ron O'Brien announce the filing of the first expedited foreclosure actions in Franklin County's Court of Common Pleas. Over the next several weeks, it's anticipated that more than 400 of these expedited tax foreclosure cases will be filed.

All these new expedited cases involve tax delinquent, vacant, blighted properties that have been eyesores to the community for years. These new expedited tax foreclosure actions will allow land banks and other jurisdictions to more quickly gain control over these blighted properties by eliminating the sheriff sale auction that typically occurs after the judge rules in a case.

Prosecutor O'Brien and Treasurer Leonard have been working with Columbus City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer as well as officials from the City of Columbus land bank and the Central Ohio Community Improvement Corporation (COCIC), the Franklin County land bank, to identify properties to include in this process. Due to the large number of cases that need to be filed, Prosecutor O'Brien hired three Ohio law firms that specialize in foreclosure cases to act as special counsel to supplement staff for the increased caseload.

“We see these expedited foreclosure actions as a new and important tool in the battle to address these cancerous properties in our neighborhoods,” said Treasurer Leonard. “This new process will cut out the property speculators and speed the process of demolishing the properties that need to be demolished. In addition to improving the quality of life in effected neighborhoods, this new tool will help protect the property values of all those homeowners who work hard to keep their properties in good shape.”

The County's land bank was awarded \$8.2 million in matching funds from Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine's Moving Ohio Forward grant program that will help to pay for demolition of these vacant and abandoned homes throughout the County. Because Attorney General DeWine's grant funds are matching dollars, the \$8.2 million grant will be matched by demolition dollars from the City of Columbus and Franklin County's land bank, the COCIC; thus bringing the total demolition amount to nearly \$16 million. These expedited foreclosures will allow the Columbus and County land banks to do demolitions more quickly.

After judgment is rendered in typical foreclosures, property is auctioned at a sheriff sale, which can add months to the tax foreclosure process and can allow property speculators to buy properties without a real interest in the community welfare. After judgment is rendered in these expedited cases, the owner is given a final 45-day period to pay delinquent property taxes. If taxes aren't paid in that 45-day period, the court can order the property be immediately transferred to the City of Columbus or Franklin County land bank on the 46th day. After the transfer, the demolition process can begin.

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