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MVOC and Area's Legislative Leaders Secure Meeting with Lt Governor Lee Fisher

Fisher to come to Youngstown to discuss state resources for addressing vacant properties

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COLUMBUS – A delegation of federal, state, city and county officials as well as community and faith-based leaders organized by the Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative met with state officials in Columbus this past Friday to discuss the state's commitment in allocating additional resources to address the foreclosure and vacant property crisis in Youngstown.

The meeting was spurred by the state's recent announcement of a zero dollar allocation to Youngstown in regards to its \$116 million dollar Neighborhood Stabilization Program.

In October, Youngstown received a direct allocation of \$2.7 million from Housing and Urban Development through the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of July 2008 which provides billions of dollars to cash-strapped local governments and states to acquire, demolish, or rehabilitate homes vacated due to foreclosure. In addition to direct federal funding, the State of Ohio received \$116 million in discretionary funds to additionally distribute to the areas of greatest need.

In December, city and community officials submitted a formal request to the Ohio Department of Development asking for an additional \$16 million, however, while Mahoning County as a whole received 2.9 million, the City of Youngstown received no specific funding from the State of Ohio's discretionary allocation.

According to City of Youngstown Community Development Director William D'Avignon, the cost to "stabilize" the City of Youngstown is \$42.9 million.

D'Avignon – who attended the meeting Friday – made specific reference to the city's Youngstown 2010 Citywide Plan which, he noted, has received national and international attention due to its recognition and acceptance of the city's population decline. D'Avignon noted that the plan is "based in reality" and went on to say that "(in Youngstown) we are not trying to build glass towers. (The plan) is about stabilizing a community. That is the Youngstown 2010 plan. You cannot deny that Youngstown did not get what it deserved." D'Avignon suggested that the foreclosure data used by the state was inaccurate and being that state officials had to adhere to a federal formula, getting that data correct was critical to the funding allocation to Youngstown.

Valley representatives also acknowledged that Friday's meeting was not an attempt to have the state reallocate NSP funding but rather to discuss what alternative funding could be found to assist the city.

Mayor Jay Williams stated that he had been in discussions with Lt. Gov. Lee Fisher prior to the Friday's meeting and stated the Lt. Governor expressed displeasure about the allocation and assured the Mayor that all efforts will be made to find additional resources to assist Youngstown.

Williams also explained that representatives were also here today to "reintroduce" Youngstown and added that the meeting, additionally, was an opportunity to discuss a number of "transformative" initiatives currently underway that make Youngstown a strategic investment area, largely unlike in the past. In addition to Youngstown 2010, Valley representatives outlined initiatives such as the recently released Youngstown/Mahoning County Vacant Property Initiative which includes the establishment of a county-wide land bank, establishment of professional community organizing (MVOC) and the establishment of a multi-faceted, high capacity, city-wide community development corporation (Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation) in addition to Congressman Ryan's Urban and Suburban Communities Regeneration Act which will reach the house floor at the end of January or early February.

Lt. Governor Lee Fisher – who attended the meeting by telephone – reiterated that the state is committed to "exploring ways to find funding" for Youngstown and that he is willing to have a follow up conversation in the Mahoning Valley in February. William Graves, Director for Community Development for the Ohio Department of Development, said he will see the Lt. Governor's commitment through and will come with him to the Mahoning Valley in order to have a more detailed discussion about funding opportunities.