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Summit County Abandoned and Vacant Property Task Force Has Initial Meeting

The Summit County Abandoned and Vacant Property Task Force held its first meeting Thursday, February 5, 2009 in the Council Chambers. Council Member Cazzell Smith, Sr. (District 5) who introduced the legislation to establish the task force last October was nominated and elected as Chairman.

Appointed by the County Executive and approved by County Council, the task force consists of representatives from: the Summit County Executive, Council, Fiscal Office, Consumer Affairs, Health District, Mayor's offices of Akron, Cuyahoga Falls and Barberton, Local non-profit builder's organizations, lending, insurance and real estate institutions and three other appointees who provide balanced advice on rural, suburban and urban land use and development, civic participation and beautification efforts, environmental protection and economic growth. Over the next six months, the task force will meet and work to find ways to promote civic responsibility and engagement in maintaining local neighborhoods and reducing the number of abandoned and vacant properties in Summit County.

"There is a good representation from all the major contributors and stakeholders in Summit County who have unique knowledge and expertise in this area," said Smith. "We are looking forward to sharing ideas and resources to help reduce the number of abandoned and vacant properties and make more productive use of existing residential areas that are affected by this problem," said Smith.

During the initial meeting, Smith shared a PowerPoint presentation which outlined the problem of abandoned and vacant property in Summit County, its causes and effects on the community, health and safety risks, and possible solutions – including policy regulation, property rehabilitation, community gardens and temporary community art-space.

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Following the Councilman's presentation, there was an open discussion focused on the identification of abandoned and vacant properties – there are currently more than 7,000 in the Akron area alone, but there is no current system in place to accurately track abandoned and vacant properties throughout the County. Information was also shared on programs currently in progress to address the problem of abandoned and vacant homes, and task force members were given the opportunity to serve on a sub-committee to examine foreclosure prevention alternatives.

The next task force meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 5, 2009 in the Summit County Council Chambers at 9:00 a.m.

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