

Contact: City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr.
Phone: 614.645.7385
Email: rcpfeiffer@columbus.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

City Attorney Produces Documentary

Pfeiffer analyzes the causes and effects of neighborhood blight by focusing on a North Linden street block where 67 percent of the properties are vacant and abandoned

COLUMBUS, OH—Columbus City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr. knew he had to find a way to tell the story of one of the most important issues tackled by his office and one of the greatest challenges faced by Columbus residents: vacant and abandoned properties. Out of 337,719 housing units in Columbus, 6117 are vacant and abandoned. The damaging effects this form of blight has on neighborhoods and the seemingly viral-like way it can spread from property to property compelled Pfeiffer to work on a documentary with the assistance of Columbus Television (CTV).

After seeing a concerned resident consistently attending City Council meetings and giving impassioned pleas about the conditions on Myrtle Avenue in the North Linden section of Columbus, Pfeiffer launched a project to document every property on the street. Focusing on one street block, between Cleveland Avenue and Greenwich Street, 14 out of the 21 properties are vacant and abandoned. The average delinquent taxes owed on the abandoned properties is \$5,393.

“I didn’t necessarily want to single out any one neighborhood,” said City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr. “But we didn’t want to talk about this issue only in the abstract, so we felt that looking at Myrtle Avenue would allow us to provide a heartrending example of the housing crisis that impacts neighborhoods throughout our country.”

Pfeiffer gave a presentation on “deteriorating neighborhoods” in June at the 2011 Ohio Mayors Association annual conference and noted that mayors of villages and small towns throughout Ohio were facing similar types of issues with vacant and abandoned properties as was urban Columbus. Thus, he wanted to show that Myrtle Avenue is a microcosm of the confluence of factors—multi-national banks bundling and selling mortgage assets sight unseen, out-of-state real estate speculators neglecting properties, questionable lending practices, and bad business decisions—that has led to a vacancy epidemic in certain neighborhoods.

One particular property highlighted in the documentary, 1618 Myrtle Avenue, had been transferred 13 times since 1992. Many of the transfers occurred between California-based limited liability companies, which seemed to treat the property as just a number in a lengthy list of unseen assets in a ledger book. In fact, the neglected property was transferred twice to California companies after a demolition order was issued on the property last year.

“Our objective is to abate nuisances, preferably by using private resources,” explained Pfeiffer. “However, in many instances the property owners have walked away from their responsibilities and left their remaining neighbors and government to clean up the mess.”

As the documentary details, Pfeiffer and his staff were able to locate human beings responsible for only six out of the 14 abandoned properties. The other eight provided an assortment of challenges,

including records showing a property still owned by an individual tragically murdered in 2009 and properties owned by artificial entities, some of which are defunct. Out of the seven other properties on the block, four are owner-occupied, one is rented, one is in the possession of the city's land bank, and the other is an old post office converted to a church by the pastors of the New Walk Church of God in Christ.

The documentary, entitled "Just the Facts with City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr." can be viewed in its entirety here: <http://bit.ly/rc518b>

The program also is scheduled to air on CTV (Channel 3 on Insight and Time Warner, and Channel 99 on Warner, WOW, and AT&T U-Verse) on:

- Thursday, September 15 at 10:00 a.m.
- Friday, September 16 at 8:30 p.m.
- Saturday, September 17 at 9:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.

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City Attorney Pfeiffer in a scene from the filming of "Just the Facts"