

Cook County  
Offices Under the President



# Policy Roadmap Community Conversation Report

June 8, 2018

**HEALTHY  
COMMUNITIES**

**SUSTAINABLE  
COMMUNITIES**

**VITAL  
COMMUNITIES**

**OPEN  
COMMUNITIES**

**SAFE AND  
THRIVING  
COMMUNITIES**

**SMART  
COMMUNITIES**

# Cook County Policy Roadmap

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# Cook County Policy Roadmap

## Introduction

The President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners is the Chief Executive Officer of Cook County, and is charged with presenting a balanced budget to the Board of Commissioners each year. In addition, the President oversees the Offices under the President (OUP), which spans six bureaus and 34 offices and carries out operational and administrative functions to support the work of the entire County government.

Since taking office in 2010, President Preckwinkle has provided strong leadership by transforming County government; promoting fiscal responsibility; advancing reforms in the criminal justice arena; ensuring residents have access to quality healthcare; providing multi-modal transportation options that connect people to family, work, and school; and becoming a regional leader in growing our economy.

These accomplishments reflect the President's vision and policy priorities and establish a foundation in Cook County for long-lasting and systemic changes in how good government operates, including how government makes forward-thinking public policy decisions.

To ensure these reforms are institutionalized and provide sustainable benefits to Cook County residents, the County is crafting and implementing a Policy Roadmap—OUP's first comprehensive policy-driven strategic plan since the administration's 2011 transition plan.

The Policy Roadmap will incorporate key policy priorities and strategic initiatives to address the major public policy challenges facing Cook County residents, and will reflect the Preckwinkle administration's core values and vision for fostering safe, thriving, and healthy communities. OUP will complete and publish the final Policy Roadmap in the fall of 2018.

This report honors the administration's pledge of transparency regarding the feedback received during the year-long Policy Roadmap planning process. It summarizes key insights gained during the six community conversations OUP hosted, and details next steps for the Policy Roadmap.

## Community Conversations Overview

In early 2018, President Preckwinkle's staff held a series of community conversations to introduce the Policy Roadmap and ensure the County incorporates residents' voices throughout the process. The seven conversations were geographically distributed across the County:

- ▶ Roberts Temple in Bronzeville (March 28, 2018)
- ▶ Sullivan High School in Rogers Park (April 4, 2018)
- ▶ South Suburban College in South Holland (April 5, 2018)
- ▶ National Museum of Mexican Art in Pilsen (April 24, 2018)
- ▶ Oakton Community College in Des Plaines (April 25, 2018)
- ▶ Village of Maywood Multi-Purpose Center in Maywood (May 3, 2018)
- ▶ Village of Bellwood Municipal Building in Bellwood (May 30, 2018)

The County publicized these conversations on the County's website and through outreach to various community groups. While the size of the community conversations varied, in total 433 people expressed interest in attending and 278 people attended at least one meeting.

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Each community conversation began with a brief overview of Cook County to provide context on how County government works and define the scope of the Policy Roadmap. After the overview, conversation participants broke into six focus groups corresponding to the six Policy Roadmap focus areas (healthy communities; open communities; safe and thriving communities; smart communities; sustainable communities; and vital communities). Facilitated by at least one County employee, each focus group addressed the following two questions:

- ▶ For the strategic focus area selected, what do you believe are some of the challenges still existing?
- ▶ What steps do you think OUP should pursue over the next four years to eliminate those challenges?

Each attendee could participate in up to two focus groups of their choosing. After the focus groups concluded, facilitators gave an overview of the major themes that arose during their conversations and staff summarized next steps regarding the Policy Roadmap timeline.

## Community Conversation Feedback

### Healthy Communities (Health and Wellness)

The Healthy Communities focus groups generated a great deal of interest from participants and covered a range of issues including prevention and wellness, affordability and availability of behavioral and mental healthcare, and barriers to accessing currently available healthcare.

#### Healthcare System

Residents are often confused regarding which healthcare system is responsible for which services and programs, making it hard to identify the most appropriate place to seek a given service. Additionally, participants feel there is a lack of cohesion between social service providers, healthcare providers, and County government, which prevents residents from understanding and accessing available prevention and wraparound services and treatment options.

Participants in every focus group requested increased focus on the County's customer service within the healthcare system, citing a lack of staff supervision and employee training to provide effective and pleasant interactions. Focus group participants recommended strategies to address these challenges, including:

- ▶ Increase awareness of services and priorities by:
  - » Coordinating between all departments to publicize currently available services;
  - » Creating a support services department to provide information;
  - » Utilizing marketing campaigns to circulate important health information;
  - » Holding regular community meetings to give residents a forum to provide feedback;
  - » Creating an external database of health-related organizations; and
  - » Holding informational fairs in the community to raise awareness regarding healthcare resources;
- ▶ Hold cultural trainings with staff to improve cultural competency among workforce; and
- ▶ Create health-focused Community Hubs to involve the community in decision-making.

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Additionally, participants in almost every focus group noted the funding challenges both healthcare systems and patients face. Participants emphasized that many patients cannot afford medications and have trouble navigating complex healthcare and insurance systems. Recommendations related to affordability include:

- ▶ Expand access to CountyCare for more low-income and middle-income residents by increasing the income guidelines (e.g., condition eligibility on annual income of 133% of federal poverty level instead of 100%).
- ▶ Provide more information to residents on navigating and accessing health insurance.
- ▶ Increase available funding for healthcare services and protect human service dollars in Cook County's budget.
- ▶ Advocate for Medicare for all residents.

## Service Availability

Focus groups discussed a range of strategies to increase service availability:

- ▶ Conduct a needs assessment to inventory resources and identify gaps.
- ▶ Create community health centers and programs.
- ▶ Increase availability of treatment options for opioid addiction.
- ▶ Increase access to dental services, especially for adults and low-income families.
- ▶ Provide resources for early diagnosis and treatment of developmental illnesses.

In each community conversation, participants specifically identified mental health as an area in which residents experience a severe lack of services, including a lack of preventative measures, a lack of awareness regarding existing mental health services, and a lack of access to mental healthcare. Focus groups emphasized the need to recognize the greater costs to society of failing to address mental health issues. Strategies to increase availability and accessibility include:

- ▶ Create location(s) that provide collaborative mental healthcare.
- ▶ Advocate for counseling services and coping skills in schools and workplaces.
- ▶ Train first responders to identify and assist people experiencing mental health crises.
- ▶ Open more mental health and counseling facilities, ensuring public transit accessibility.
- ▶ Increase Cook County Health and Hospitals' focus on mental illness, including inpatient psychiatric services.

## Prevention and Wellness

In addition to essential, urgently needed healthcare services, participants discussed the importance of prevention and wellness when building healthy communities. Specific prevention and wellness recommendations include:

- ▶ Increase focus on chronic illnesses and co-morbidities, specifically diabetes and obesity.
- ▶ Provide free diabetes education resources to all community residents.
- ▶ Address inequities in access to safe, secure, and accessible recreation by fostering walkable neighborhoods and increasing accessibility of Forest Preserves.
- ▶ Use technology to teach people how to monitor their health and make healthier choices.

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## Broad health-related policies

While access to healthcare is essential, many of the problems underlying health inequities directly relate to poverty; the healthcare system alone cannot address these systemic challenges. Specific strategies to address broad health-related problems include:

- ▶ Address food insecurity by:
  - » Considering economic development policies that create a diverse, rich food base;
  - » Training hospital staff to incorporate food access screenings into check-ups; and
  - » Informing residents about businesses that buy and use food from local farms.
- ▶ Expand program that houses homeless patients.
- ▶ Support efforts to legalize marijuana.

## Inequity and barriers to accessing healthcare

Equity is a central principle of the Cook County Policy Roadmap; the need to highlight this principle in every aspect of the County's work was reflected in conversations regarding existing disparities and barriers in the healthcare system. Participants particularly noted inequities faced by certain vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, and the elderly. Furthermore, participants identified that inequities in availability of certain health services are concentrated in certain areas of the County. Participants expect equity in health services for all neighborhoods in the County.

People with limited English proficiency experience severe barriers to accessing health services, including a lack of translation and interpretation services, compounded by the lack of bilingual and culturally competent personnel employed in the healthcare system. Additionally, hospital systems must improve the availability of translated materials and information to increase accessibility.

Strategies participants recommended to address these language barriers include:

- ▶ Hire doctors and other staff who reflect the community.
- ▶ Create County-wide language access policy that incorporates language lines in all departments.

Finally, participants highlighted concerns regarding how the healthcare system interacts with undocumented immigrants. Participants believe that the healthcare system does not feel safe for many residents, even though Cook County is a Fair and Equal County for Immigrants. To ensure safety and sanctuary for all residents, participants recommend Cook County:

- ▶ Make every effort to provide care without requesting sensitive personal information such as Social Security numbers and photo IDs.
- ▶ Train staff on importance of Fair and Equal County status and how to provide safe care.

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## Open Communities (Operational Excellence)

Throughout the open communities focus groups, participants reported a lack of clarity regarding what services or programs fall under the County's jurisdiction and the role of each elected official. This confusion poses problems for each office and complicates residents' attempts to access government services and programs. To address these issues, participants suggested Cook County:

- ▶ Educate the public on Cook County's services by:
  - » Utilizing social media to connect with more residents;
  - » Utilizing County website to explain government structure and services;
  - » Sending County staff to municipalities to educate residents on County services;
  - » Holding "County Fairs" to provide a forum where residents can interact with County and municipal officials and learn how to access services;
  - » Creating a video and mass mailing to explain what County offers; and
  - » Educating youth about local government through school government days.
- ▶ Foster connections, collaboration, and communication to make all units of government work together by:
  - » Integrating technology systems enhance information sharing;
  - » Increasing collaboration between the City of Chicago and Cook County;
  - » Creating County-wide leadership council to address all County services; and
  - » Forming intergovernmental agreements to reduce overlapping services.
- ▶ Create a centralized customer service intake like the City of Chicago's 3-1-1.
- ▶ Provide grant writing technical assistance or an abbreviated application to ensure small organizations can compete for County grants.

Participants also expressed concern regarding Cook County customer service, noting the public believes County employees do not care about residents seeking services or assistance. Most focus teams cited instances of negative customer service and suggested the following strategies:

- ▶ Provide customer service training to employees.
- ▶ Create metrics to evaluate customer service, and use them to improve (ex: number of employees a customer speaks with to get answer; wait time for service).
- ▶ Increase diversity of Cook County staff by:
  - » Hiring more qualified bilingual and culturally competent employees;
  - » Promoting job opportunities among community members; and
  - » Increasing the ease of applying to County jobs.
- ▶ Translate Policy Roadmap community survey into Spanish and other languages.

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## Safe and Thriving Communities (Criminal Justice)

Criminal justice focus groups discussed systemic injustices inherent within the criminal justice system, broader policies issues that are linked to crime, and services to prevent crime and enable returning residents to flourish.

### Systemic injustice

Participants discussed a range of systemic flaws in the criminal justice system, including inequality in sentencing based on race and ethnicity, discrimination against poor residents through the bail system, drug laws that predominately incarcerate young people of color, misaligned profit incentives for vendors who rely on a flow of individuals into the criminal justice system, and an overly punitive mentality within the system. These barriers fuel a lack of trust between residents and law enforcement agencies, and make residents skeptical of government. To address these and other large-scale challenges, participants recommend Cook County:

- ▶ Reallocate money and resources from criminal justice system, such as Cook County Jail, to preventative focus (e.g., jobs programs) and health services.
- ▶ Study vendors' profit from criminal justice system and create safeguards to prevent vendors from influencing incarceration policies to generate profit (e.g., Cook County vendors providing substance abuse or mental healthcare treatment for people detained in Cook County Jail or for electronic monitoring services for residents released on probation).
- ▶ Support efforts to legalize marijuana.
- ▶ Ensure Cook County remains a fair and equal county for immigrants by:
  - » Protecting sensitive personal information;
  - » Moving Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) offices out of court buildings to decrease barriers to access for undocumented individuals;
  - » Refusing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement access to courts and justice system buildings; and
  - » Calling for an end to the Chicago Police Department gang database.
- ▶ Increase collaboration between elected officials responsible for public safety to achieve policy reform.
- ▶ Use political influence to stir a paradigm shift toward community policing and non-criminal resolution of antisocial behaviors.
- ▶ Continue supporting policy changes that permit non-violent drug offenders to be released regardless of ability to make bond.
- ▶ Increase availability of diversion opportunities that allow individuals to avoid criminal records if completed successfully
- ▶ Support criminal record expungement.

As with other policy issues detailed in this report, participants noted that crime and safety are intertwined with poverty. Recommendations to fight poverty include:

- ▶ Build transportation system to connect communities to jobs.
- ▶ Ensure youth receive education necessary to be employed when they graduate high school.
- ▶ Connect people experiencing homelessness to programs and jobs.

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- ▶ Provide additional support to victims of crime and their families to address post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at the individual and community level.

Finally, participants discussed strategies for both providing prevention services and serving people currently involved in the justice system:

- ▶ Increase focus on restorative justice so youth learn appropriate conflict resolution skills.
- ▶ Hire more translators in the criminal justice system to support victims, defendants, and their families.
- ▶ Support currently detained residents by:
  - » Increasing access to education to improve job prospects upon return to community;
  - » Continuing to provide mental health services; and
  - » Providing pro bono legal services to guide people through the judicial process.
- ▶ Support returning residents by:
  - » Creating transition center for released residents to access available resources;
  - » Creating scholarships for returning residents to attend trade school;
  - » Banning housing and employment discrimination against people with criminal records;
  - » Providing transitional housing at Cook County Land Bank properties;
  - » Increasing available post-incarceration resources for women and girls; and
  - » Developing policies and incentives to encourage the hiring of returning residents, including encouraging insurance companies to lessen restrictions and premiums for these individuals.

## Smart Communities (Public Infrastructure)

Public infrastructure conversations include discussions on affordable housing, transit and transit-oriented development, and development. Participants are concerned about aging infrastructure, including roads, water mains, and abandoned buildings, and cited a lack of maintenance plans to address this issue. Strategies include:

- ▶ Increase availability of senior and fair market housing and decrease barriers to developing multi-bedroom units to ensure families can access housing.
- ▶ Address flooding concerns in affected communities by:
  - » Providing more grants to key flooding areas;
  - » Expanding Rain Ready Program;
  - » Creating a County working group to address this issue;
  - » Installing more underground sewers as part of Cook County's Storm Water Management Plan; and
  - » Funding storm sewer projects in unincorporated areas.
- ▶ Foster walkable neighborhoods.
- ▶ Increase efficiency and sustainability by installing technology such as electronic enabled water meters and LED lights.

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- ▶ Enforce stricter regulations on checking pipes for lead and assist residents and businesses in replacing contaminated infrastructure.
- ▶ Focus on transportation equity when making transportation investments.
- ▶ Increase collaboration with municipalities to minimize the burden of transportation construction on residents (ex: given municipality notice when opening a road so they can secure funding to simultaneously replace affected water pipes)
- ▶ Incentivize local agencies to conduct Complete Streets Planning.
- ▶ Pass ordinance to have municipalities file their annual Capital Improvement Plans.

Discussions of public infrastructure also focused on data, technology, and the County's roles and responsibilities in this regard. Discussion participants noted that different municipalities have different technological tools and capabilities, which can cause challenges when trying to design a system or initiative that everyone can use. Participants discussed the following strategies:

- ▶ Create opportunities for municipalities to share purchasing of technology equipment to lower the overall cost.
- ▶ Ensure equity in internet and technology by:
  - » Investing in wireless internet in key locations to provide access for residents;
  - » Advocating for data privacy protections on behalf of residents;
  - » Ensuring maximum security of data collected or managed by Cook County; and
  - » Advocating for net neutrality.

## Sustainable Communities (Environmental Sustainability)

Sustainable communities' conversations focused on increasing public awareness, combating pollution, and creating environmental policy initiatives. Participants feel Cook County and individual communities do not adequately prioritize environmental needs or provide suitable funding for sustainability issues. Intergovernmental collaboration is essential to sustainability given that environmental challenges do not fall neatly within municipal boundaries. To address these challenges, participants recommend Cook County:

- ▶ Create County-wide and agency specific environmental targets to prioritize and make cost feasibility determinations in a transparent and accountable way.
- ▶ Provide environment and sustainability trainings for employees.
- ▶ Require regular environmental reports from Department of Public Health.
- ▶ Create an environmental task force with seats for concerned residents.
- ▶ Adequately fund Department of Public Health and environmentally focused organizations.

Participants also discussed strategies to address the lack of community awareness regarding the County's sustainability responsibilities and initiatives, as well as general best practices for individual households. The County must make residents aware of available services, and ensure information is available in all necessary languages. Recommended strategies include:

- ▶ Organize public awareness campaigns around pressing environmental issues (e.g., lead pollution; air quality; green space initiatives), as well as available programs (e.g., water testing; plant giveaways; farmers markets).

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- ▶ Encourage schools, park districts, and Forest Preserves to organize environmental projects for youth to promote early interest in the environment.
- ▶ Hold more community forums to increase communication with residents.

Participants also discussed tactics to address specific environmental challenges and policy issues:

- ▶ Consider green housing initiatives to address homelessness and create jobs.
- ▶ Connect Cook County Land Bank to community gardens and other community plots.
- ▶ Support active transit, including bicycling, by connecting the lakefront trails with the Forest Preserves.
- ▶ Increase utilization of solar, geothermal, and wind energy by:
  - » Allowing and offering property tax breaks for residents to integrate eco-friendly energy into their homes (e.g., solar panels; wind turbines; rain water towers) and
  - » Working with private sector to install wind turbines along highways.
- ▶ Improve Forest Preserve maintenance through more beautification programs.
- ▶ Increase penalties for landlords regarding environmental and health violations.
- ▶ Reduce barriers for residents to repurpose vacant land.

In addition to broader policy initiatives, focus group participants expressed deep concern regarding pollution and toxins, and emphasized that pollution disproportionately affects certain communities. Participants felt government does not effectively inform the public of environmental hazards, including lead and asbestos contamination in facilities and residential homes, air pollution caused by vehicular emissions, toxic soil, and dump site contamination. Participants want expanded legal ability to inspect facilities and infrastructure, increasing government's ability to evaluate problems and provide information to the public. Strategies to address pollution include:

- ▶ Emphasize "environmental justice" and equality, instead of simply sustainability.
- ▶ Address disparities within water infrastructure systems.
- ▶ Levy larger fines for dumping into waterways and land.
- ▶ Test for lead in suburban Cook County residential homes and facilities.
- ▶ Regulate vehicular equipment that releases poisonous emissions into air.

## Vital Communities (Economic Vitality)

Economic development discussions revolved around key questions such as, "How can municipalities bring businesses to their neighborhoods?"; "How can we create more transparency in the bidding process?" and "What do businesses and individuals need to be economically successful?"

### Workforce development and job training

When discussing unemployment, participants noted a wide range of systemic barriers to employment including untreated mental health conditions, inequitable school funding, food insecurity, lack of affordable housing, and inaccessible public transit. To combat these challenges, participants recommended the County:

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- ▶ Use the Regional Growth Initiative as a partnership model to address state tax reform, equitable school funding, and federal government assistance.
- ▶ Work with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to increase availability of Housing Choice Vouchers for the Housing Authority of Cook County.
- ▶ Ensure that residents living in affordable housing can rely on public transportation to access employment opportunities.
- ▶ Make data-driven decisions by mapping affordable housing and employment opportunities
- ▶ Track developer compliance with affordable housing requirements to ensure units remain dedicated to affordable housing for entirety of incentive agreement.
- ▶ Consider innovative projects to provide affordable housing in partnership with the Cook County Land Bank (e.g., Tiny House program in Englewood).
- ▶ Advocate for raising the minimum wage statewide to eliminate disparities between municipalities.

In addition to addressing these systemic barriers, participants discussed the importance of training programs to provide job seekers with the necessary skills to compete for available jobs. Programs should incorporate soft skills, including resume writing and interview etiquette, and entrepreneurial training into their curricula. While participants commended the County's existing job training efforts, including the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, they also suggest the following strategies:

- ▶ Better advertise existing job training opportunities by creating database or website of available job training services.
- ▶ Ensure job training opportunities are available to all residents, including young people with or without high school diplomas, returning residents, and workers seeking retraining.
- ▶ Address skilled worker shortage by training workers for current opportunities in the trades.

Participants also discussed broad economic development policies. To spur equitable business development, participants request increased County support for minority- and women-owned business enterprises (M/WBE), including forming a universal certification program and making M/WBE data publicly accessible. Municipal leaders who attended the community conversations requested improved communication with municipalities regarding economic incentive decisions and their impact on communities. Other broad policies discussed include:

- ▶ Reconsider Property Tax Incentive – Prevailing Wage Requirement (Ordinance 18-1604) and reassess implementation date to allow for comprehensive discussions, assessments, and alternatives.
- ▶ Revitalize the Single-Family Rehabilitation Program.
- ▶ Develop a data matrix to support data-driven decisions relating to economic development.
- ▶ Support the proposed Peotone Airport for economic development benefits.
- ▶ Pass an ordinance to require banks to invest in communities they serve.
- ▶ Improve County procurement operations by:
  - » Developing regional formula to distribute procurement opportunities and dollars;
  - » Awarding contracts primarily to companies located within Cook County; and
  - » Establishing a set-aside program for opportunities that specifically promote South Suburban businesses.

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## Taxation

Throughout vital communities' discussions, participants expressed frustration regarding tax rates within the County and the intertwined nature of taxes, population decline, and business development. Participants want information on how the County plans to entice businesses to locate in some hard-pressed areas of Cook County and compete with neighboring municipalities and counties that have lower tax rates. Participants believe the tax system negatively incentivizes building owners, citing tax breaks for vacant properties that encourage building owners to keep storefronts vacant. Finally, participants perceive severe inequity and insider-bias in the property tax system, and feel it lacks clarity, standardization, and compliance. To address these concerns, participants suggested Cook County:

- ▶ Create additional tax incentives to draw businesses to Cook County.
- ▶ Establish an office to assist developers with navigating the tax code to utilize existing incentives without passing additional business incentives.
- ▶ Address problem of vacant properties by:
  - » Increasing oversight to ensure owners do not receive tax breaks by claiming building is vacant when it is occupied;
  - » Eliminating incentives by penalizing vacant building owners;<sup>1</sup> and
  - » Allowing municipalities to assume possession of delinquent vacant properties.
- ▶ Encourage local government consolidation to reduce number of taxing bodies.
- ▶ Distribute sales tax back to municipalities based on population.
- ▶ Establish program that follows the formula through which Illinois allocates Motor Fuel Tax (MFT) dollars to counties.
- ▶ Require companies and developers to hire communities' residents to qualify for tax incentives.

## Next Steps

As mentioned earlier, in addition to collecting information from residents through these community conversations, the Policy Roadmap Committee has conducted an internal staff survey, conducted a community survey, and hosted policy luncheons on each of the six policy focus areas. The Policy Roadmap Committee has also convened a focus team for each policy area, composed of internal and external stakeholders, to review and supplement the feedback received on each topic and draft the goals, objectives, and strategies. The draft Policy Roadmap will be published for public review in early fall 2018, with the final Roadmap completed late fall 2018.

Stay updated on our strategic planning process through the County website:

[www.cookcountyil.gov/service/policy-roadmap](http://www.cookcountyil.gov/service/policy-roadmap)

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<sup>1</sup> A proposed example includes: (a) Years 1-3 of vacancy: Building owner receives existing tax break without penalty; (b) Year 4 of vacancy: Tax break reduced by 25% (incentive to rent); (c) Year 5 of vacancy: Tax break reduced by 50%; (d) Year 6 of vacancy: Tax break reduced by 75%; (e) Year 7 of vacancy: Tax break eliminated; (f) Year 8 of vacancy: Full property reassessment without possibility of tax break; (g) Year 9 of vacancy: Penalties begin; (h) Year 10 of vacancy: Penalties double; and (i) Year 11 of vacancy: Forced public auction sale.