

Annual Report 2023



CALHOUN COUNTY
LANDBANK
AUTHORITY

Message from the Executive Director

The past year has been a time of significant growth and exciting new initiatives for the Land Bank. Our programs have seen **increased participation** and engagement, and we've both maintained and **developed partnerships** to tackle challenges across Calhoun County. Through collaboration and creativity, we made a **meaningful impact** in 2023.

Among our achievements were targeted demolitions and rehabilitations, and we began to lay the foundation for infill development projects. We also revitalized the **Neighborhood Mow & Maintenance program**, invested in workforce development and community building, and began to explore **legacy interests** for family properties.

The success of the Land Bank is largely due to the **dedication** of our staff, board members, incredible partners, and community members who care deeply about their neighborhoods. As we continue to grow, we're eager to continue applying **innovative thinking** to all our future endeavors. Thank you for your ongoing support.

Sincerely,

Krista Trout-Edwards
Krista Trout-Edwards

Executive Director, Calhoun County Land Bank Authority



WHNAC Community Walk



Overview

With the help of targeted funding, the Land Bank completed multiple projects in 2023, including four demolitions, one residential stabilization, and an environmental remediation and building stabilization project. In another facet, staff worked with the **Washington Heights Neighborhood Advisory Committee** to educate residents about property ownership, building assessments, redevelopment, and building trades. These efforts, while community-driven, were supported by a broad base of local and regional partnerships, reflecting a **unified approach** to neighborhood revitalization.

The Land Bank also received core support funding to hire additional staff members that will focus on future work with new funding that it received. This additional funding will support blight elimination through **rehabilitation, stabilization, and demolition**. These blight elimination projects began in 2023 and will be completed throughout 2026.

68/70 Frelinghuysen-Stabilization Project

Highlights

EPA Funding & Community Revitalization

The Calhoun County Land Bank Authority (CCLBA) continued to leverage grant dollars from the **Environmental Protection Agency** (EPA) to drive redevelopment, job creation, and community engagement. Staff sought a grant extension to finalize key projects in order to set up future work; specifically, this included exploring **micro Tax Increment Financing** for future infill housing development in the Washington Heights Neighborhood. This work helps the Land Bank and others understand how they can utilize new legislation adopted by the State of Michigan that allow **brownfield tools** to be used for residential development.

Staff also applied for and received a **\$1.5 million EPA grant** that will be available from late 2024 – 2028 for site assessment and predevelopment activities. This funding can also assist with new infill housing developments.



EPA Site

Land Reuse Strategy

The Washington Heights Neighborhood Advisory Committee (WHNAC), with assistance from CCLBA staff, developed a **land reuse strategy** for the CCLBA's **250 properties** within the Washington Heights Neighborhood.

This strategy focused on determining the **highest and best use** of these properties through various methods, including side lot sales to neighboring property owners, beautification projects, and housing and commercial development opportunities. The WHNAC identified challenges to property ownership and development related to title work, property combination, and site clearance, including tree removal. With this input, staff initiated changes to alleviate challenges in 2024.

Relaunch of the Neighborhood Mow & Maintenance Program

After a three-year hiatus due to the pandemic, the Neighborhood Mow & Maintenance (NMM) program was reintroduced in 2023. The program allows local community groups to apply to mow and maintain CCLBA-owned lots in Battle Creek and Albion, earning **\$3,600** for their efforts from April to October. In 2019, **nine volunteer groups** maintained over **400 lots**, and the CCLBA aims to replicate or exceed that success this year. This program not only supports neighborhood upkeep, but also provides funding for local projects, youth activities, and community events.



WHNAC Members



NMM at Work



Workforce Development & Community Building



Workforce development continued to be a major focus for the CCLBA. A networking group, called **Calhoun Builders Connection (CBC)**, began in April, and now meets on the **fourth Friday of every month** at 8 a.m. at Torti Taco in downtown Battle Creek. This group brings together contractors to discuss licensing, bid applications, mentorship opportunities, and more. Staff also began working with the **W.E. Upjohn Institute** to assess the local construction workforce and to identify gaps and trends in contractor development. The findings from this assessment will be used to secure future funding for workforce development initiatives, which will in turn enhance opportunities for local contractors.

State Funding & Property Stabilization

The State of Michigan allocated funding to land banks across the state for property stabilization, demolition, rehabilitation, and environmental remediation projects. In total, the CCLBA received **\$5.7 million** under various rounds for projects that must be completed by 2026.

The initial \$200,000 was used for key projects like the demolition and cleanup of **15 Merritt St** and **207 Upton Ave**, as well as addressing an abandoned gas station at **3312 Michigan Avenue W** in Bedford. All three of these locations had long been sites for property crime and trespassing, and these demolitions were targeted to improve safety in the immediate areas.

In subsequent funding rounds, the CCLBA secured **\$2.5 million** in Round Three and **\$3 million** in Round Four. These funds are earmarked for continuing efforts in stabilization, demolition, and housing redevelopment, focusing on making properties affordable to residents earning **60-120%** of the area's median income.





Rock the Block Volunteers

Rock the Block

A notable success in 2023 was the "Rock the Block" event, hosted in collaboration with the **Battle Creek Area Habitat for Humanity** and the **WHNAC**. Held on April 15, the event brought together nearly **90 volunteers** to work on **13 project sites** in the Washington Heights Neighborhood. This event served as a community-building opportunity and demonstrated the collective power of local residents, organizations, and volunteers.

Staff Participation & Development

CCLBA staff actively participated in various conferences and events throughout the year, including the **Brownfields National Conference**, where Executive Director Krista Trout-Edwards delivered a presentation on the CCLBA's work. A new **"selfie station"** was also set up on Cliff Street, coinciding with **Battle Creek's Color the Creek Art Festival**, inviting residents to engage with the Land Bank by sharing their photos on social media.

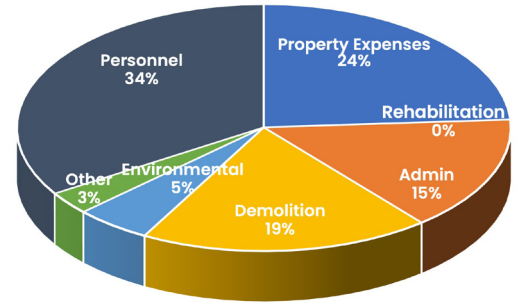
Internally, the CCLBA experienced a significant staff reorganization in 2023. Quinton Hay was hired full-time as the Housing Projects Coordinator, Mariah Monahan was promoted to Office Coordinator, and two new job postings were announced to expand the team. Amy Rose Robinson was named Assistant Director, signaling a strategic focus on strengthening internal leadership and capacity.

Looking Ahead: 2024 & Beyond

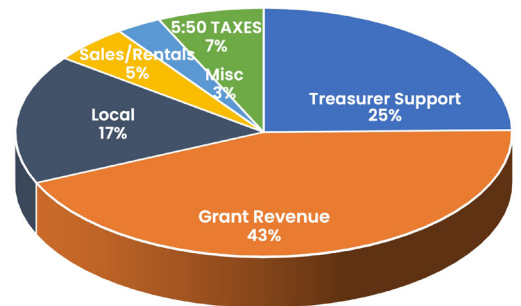
As the CCLBA moves forward, it remains committed to housing rehabilitation, property stabilization, and fostering new housing developments. In 2024, the **Regional Housing Partnership** through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) will recognize Region J, which includes Calhoun County, as a recipient of housing development support. This partnership aligns with the Land Bank's mission to **provide affordable housing options** and contribute to long-term community resilience. In conclusion, 2023 was a year of rebuilding and revitalization for the CCLBA. Through strategic investments, community engagement, and workforce development initiatives, the Land Bank made tangible progress toward transforming neighborhoods and providing a **better quality of life** for residents across Calhoun County.

Financials

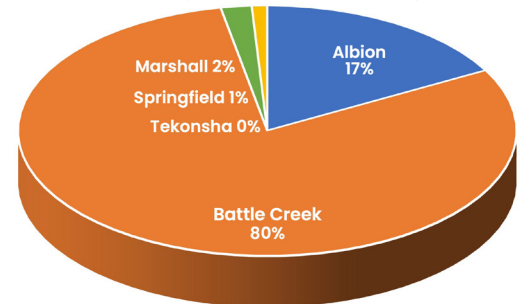
Expenses \$1,049,391



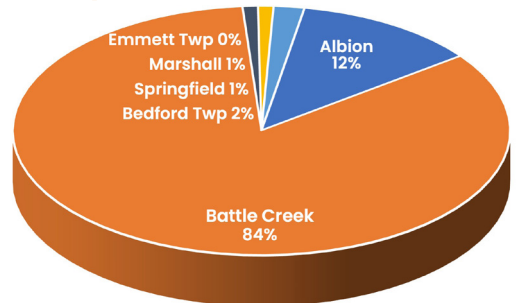
Revenues \$1,153,019



Property Inventory



Property Sales* \$18,236



*99% Residential, 1% Commercial

