MAKE NOISE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST BLIGHT

Who would have guessed that 43 blighted buildings have been razed in Shamokin in the past 18 months - about one every 13 days? It's true, according to code officials, and more are set to come down.

Of course, plenty more need to come down. But the numbers speak to progress - one case at a time - being made in the fight against blight.

The accelerated rate of blight demolition is credited in part to the involvement of police. Code officer Rick Bozza said he's been able to double what he accomplished on his own prior to the joint effort, which includes property owners getting letters from the code office and police. "People take the police letters more seriously," he said. As they should.

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Another important recent development in the fight against blight is taking place in Mount Carmel, where companies can use a 75 percent state tax credit for contributions toward blight removal. Borough officials are now studying the development of a land bank, a government entity that focuses on the conversion of vacant, abandoned, tax-delinquent and foreclosed properties into productive use. Land banks became an option through a state law passed two years ago.

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Back in Shamokin, cooperation between the code and police departments is among the 120 suggestions made in a preliminary Act 47 plan released earlier this month and created to improve the city's finances. Officials had actually gotten under way with that effort back in 2013.

But any municipality can do the same, and should do the same, regardless of its financial status. And they can pursue land banks, too; and they can push the Neighborhood Assistance Program to community businesses; and they can take advantage of the expertise, funding and organization offered through the Northumberland County Blight Task Force; and they can make use of any other number of tools that help in the fight against blight.

This takes time and expertise, but with blight tied to so many other community problems - public health, crime and stagnant economic development - it's a critical investment. If you don't believe officials in the municipality you call home are doing enough to combat blight in your neighborhood, let them know the era of excuses is coming to an end.