

(on your letterhead)

June 1, 2009

The Honorable (Representative's Name)

Address

Dear Rep./Sen. (Name):

On behalf of <organization> and the Alliance for Community Trees, we are interested in legislation you recently introduced in the Senate, <H.R. 927 or S. 453>, the 'Community Regeneration, Sustainability, and Innovation Act of 2009.' We applaud your work in addressing urban property vacancy, and would like you to consider amending the legislation to specifically include non-profit organizations doing similar work in local communities.

As you may know, green space and trees increase property values. In fact, research shows that the property value of homes with trees in their landscape are five to 20 percent higher than equivalent properties without trees.<sup>1,2</sup> You may also know that commercial properties with trees result in higher rent prices and less turnover.<sup>3</sup>

Greener communities encourage positive merchant interactions and product quality. Merchants pay close attention to the quality of features that contribute to store image, which influence patrons' perceptions including the outdoor environment. Shaded landscapes attract shoppers to business districts and increase revenues.<sup>4,5,6</sup> These correlations align well with your bill to address property vacancy and abandonment and strike at the heart of local economic development.

Research in Chicago has also shown that trees help to reduce crime rates. It was found that residents from public housing campuses with higher levels of greenery reported 48 percent fewer property crimes<sup>7</sup>, 56 percent fewer violent crimes<sup>8</sup> and nine percent fewer individuals actually engaged in crime themselves.<sup>7</sup> It's probably not a surprise that high crime areas tend also to correspond with unmanaged vacant property, and that caring for landscapes is a salient strategy of caring for communities.

Green infrastructure is a great way to achieve triple bottom line outcomes that stabilize neighborhoods and real estate markets, rationalize land use and provide new public amenities including open space and green infrastructure.

Non-profit organizations are the lifeblood of local greening initiatives. Because citizen participation is critical to addressing these concerns, we ask that you include non-profit organizations doing similar work in local communities to be eligible to apply for the grants that would be established by <H.R. 927 or S. 453>.

Based on cited research and local applications of trees and green infrastructure as vital elements in addressing property vacancy and abandonment, we recommend the following additions and amendments to <H.R. 927 or S. 453>:

Sec.3

(b) Eligibility of Units of General Local Government- A unit of general local government, or a consortia of such units, **or non-profit organizations with the support of their local**

**government**, shall be eligible for selection for participation in the demonstration program under this section only if the unit or consortium meets one of the following two requirements:

(1) **SUBSTANTIAL POPULATION LOSS**- The applicant's **region** ~~unit of general local government, or the most populous unit of general local government of the applicant consortium,~~ has experienced at least 20 percent population loss since 1970, as measured by data from the 2000 decennial census.

(2) **CONCENTRATED HOUSING VACANCY AND ABANDONMENT**- The applicant's **region** ~~unit of general local government, or the most populous unit of general local government of applicant consortium--~~

(c) **Multiyear Cooperative Agreements-**

(1) **AUTHORITY**- In carrying out the demonstration program under this section, the Secretary shall enter into multiyear cooperative agreements with units of general local government, ~~or~~ consortia consisting of units of general local government, **or non-profit organizations** selected for participation pursuant to subsection (h) in the demonstration program under this section, to design and implement regeneration plans to address problems associated with vacant and abandoned properties.

(2) **TERMS**- A cooperative agreement entered into under this subsection--

(B) shall provide for the Secretary to make grants under subsection (d) to the unit of general local government, ~~or~~ consortium, **or non-profit organization**;

(C) shall provide for interaction between the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the unit of general local government, ~~or~~ consortium, **or non-profit organization** to implement a regeneration plan; and

(d) **Grants**- To the extent amounts for grants under this section are made available in advance in appropriation Acts, the Secretary shall make a grant under this section to each unit of general local government, ~~or~~ consortia of such units, **or non-profit organizations** selected to participate in the demonstration program under this section, for each fiscal year covered by the multiyear cooperative agreement entered into by the unit or consortium pursuant to subsection (c).

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions or if I may be of further service.

Sincerely,

Name

Title

Organization

Email

## References

1. Wolf, K. L. 2007 (August). *City Trees and Property Values*. Arborist News 16, 4: 34-36.
2. Wachter, S. M., and K. C. Gillen. *Public Investment Strategies: How They Matter for Neighborhoods in Philadelphia, Working Paper*. The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 2006.
3. Laverne, R.J., and K. Winson-Geideman. *The Influence of Trees and Landscaping on Rental Rates at Office Buildings*. Journal of Arboriculture, 29, 5, 2003, pp. 281-290.
4. Wolf, K. L. *Assessing Public Response to the Freeway Roadside: Urban Forestry and Context Sensitive Solutions*. Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board, No. 1984, TRB, National Research Council, Washington, D.C., 2006, pp. 102-111.
5. Wolf, K. L. 2005. *Business District Streetscapes, Trees And Consumer Response*. Journal of Forestry, 103, 8: 396-400.
6. Wolf, K. L. 2004. *Nature in the Retail Environment: Comparing Consumer and Business Response to Urban Forest Conditions*. Landscape Journal, 23, 1: 40-51.
7. Kuo, F.E. & Sullivan, W.C. 2001. *Environment and crime in the inner city: Does vegetation reduce crime?* Environment and Behavior, 33(3), 343-367.
8. Kuo, F.E. & Sullivan W.C. 2001. *Aggression and violence in the inner city: Impacts of environment via mental fatigue*. Environment & Behavior, 33(4), 543-571.