



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
Hon. Stephanie A. Miner, Mayor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DATE: May 15, 2017

CONTACT: Alexander Marion
Press Secretary (315) 448-8044

**MAYOR MINER VETOES COMMON COUNCIL'S BUDGET
AMENDMENTS, PUSHING TO RESTORE FUNDING TO THE
GREATER SYRACUSE LAND BANK**

*In Veto Message, Miner Highlights the Land Bank as the Strongest Tool to Combat
Urban Blight in Syracuse*

Miner: The Land Bank Needs and Deserves the Full \$1.5 Million in City Support

SYRACUSE, N.Y. – Mayor Stephanie A. Miner today issued her veto of the Common Council's budget amendments, including an amendment which defunded the Land Bank.

“The Land Bank is the strongest tool Syracuse has to revitalize its neighborhoods and the Common Council has inexplicably taken that tool away from our community,” said **Syracuse Mayor Stephanie A. Miner**. “This shortsighted decision means there are 60 properties in our neighborhoods which cannot be demolished this year ensuring that longstanding eyesores remain and blight continues in our neighborhoods. The Land Bank needs and deserves the full \$1.5 million in support from the city and the council should ensure it remains in the budget.”

The Land Bank has returned more than 440 properties into productive use and demolished more than 170 blighted properties across the city. With the Land Bank as a tool to support more aggressive tax collection, the city has recouped more than \$10 million in back taxes, penalties, and interest payments. Land Bank properties are currently adding \$700,000 annually in city, county, and school taxes. The Land Bank has been recognized for its success and awarded millions of dollars in funding by the New York State Attorney General.

The Mayor also vetoed a \$1 million cut from both the police and fire departments. The council set that money aside to fund a new class of police officers, which Mayor Miner has pledged not to authorize.

Mayor Miner added, “While hiring more police officers is always important, we cannot take from the immediate staffing needs of our departments to fund personnel that will not be on the streets for at least a year.”

The Council's proposed cuts were not announced until after a public meeting was held and were not discussed in council budget hearings.



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The Mayor's full veto message appears below:

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John Copanas
231 City Hall
233 East Washington Street
Syracuse, New York 13202

Re: Common Council 2017-18 Amended Budget Veto

Dear Mr. Copanas:

Pursuant to the City Charter, I have reviewed Ordinance Number 398-2017 which adopts the fiscal year 2017-18 budget as amended at the Common Council meeting on May 8, 2017. After reviewing this legislation, I hereby object (veto) the attached budget ordinance. In addition, as required by the City Charter, I have objected to each of the proposed Common Council Amendments relative to the City portion of the Budget and filed my objections (vetoes) with your office.

I cannot in good conscience enact a budget that is fiscally irresponsible, jeopardizes the readiness of our public safety forces, and diminishes the quality of life in our neighborhoods by thoughtlessly cutting funding from the Land Bank. By defunding the Land Bank, the Council is eliminating the best tool we have to combat blight in the city of Syracuse.

Since the beginning of my administration, I have worked to holistically address the complicated, intersectional challenges impacting the city of Syracuse. The aging housing stock in our neighborhoods has suffered because of tax delinquencies and an abundance of blighted, vacant properties. Property values dropped, tax collections were slowed, and neighborhood pride was low. Administrations past had struggled to address this issue, and on the occasions properties were seized, little could be done with them.

In 2012, following enabling legislation from the State of New York, we set up the Greater Syracuse Property Development Corporation – the Land Bank – as a remedy. We had seen the success of Land Banks in communities like Lansing, Michigan and knew this was a special opportunity to revitalize our neighborhoods.

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We set to work establishing the Land Bank, which passed the council overwhelmingly. After establishing a dynamic board of directors and talented staff, the Land Bank began work of transforming our neighborhoods.

Since the city has begun more aggressively seizing properties with delinquent taxes, we have collected more than \$10.5 million in back taxes, penalties, and interest payments. The 440 properties the Land Bank has sold have contributed an additional \$700,000 in city, county, and school taxes – roughly the equivalent value of a 2% tax increase in city property taxes. Additionally, the Land Bank has leveraged \$16 million in construction and investment in these properties, not to mention the domino impact of neighbors with growing morale making improvements to their own properties.

Many of these Land Bank properties, especially the ones in worst condition slated for demolition, have been historically been the source of vandalism and criminal activity. The Syracuse Police Department and Syracuse Fire Department work diligently to myriad address the issues posed by vacant structures in our neighborhoods and the Land Bank is an invaluable resource for improving our neighborhoods. The Police and Fire Departments have their plates full keeping our community safe. To accomplish their missions, we put high demands on our police officers and firefighters requiring departments to authorize overtime shifts. The appropriate budgeting for overtime expenses allow our departments to have the flexibility to assign personnel for emergencies as needed. This reduction could even result in fire department layoffs, as overtime shifts are required to meet our minimum manning requirements.

To cut overtime expenses for our public safety forces in the name of hiring a new class (for one department) is disingenuous and shows a fundamental misunderstanding of how our departments function. If we began the hiring process today, a new class of police officers would not be hired, trained, and on the streets until at least May or June of 2018. We would have the currently projected overtime needs for the next year as we do now, just without the resources to pay for them.

There is no question we are in challenging financial times. The budget I proposed was designed to continue our progress, focused on cutting where we could and make strategic investments in the programs that have a tangible impact on our community's success. What will improve the overall financial health of the city of Syracuse will be strong neighborhoods generating tax revenue, improving our educational outcomes, and the ability to pay our public safety forces without doubt or question. What the Council approved did the exact opposite and will have a detrimental impact on the ability for the city of Syracuse to deliver for its residents. I urge the council to seriously consider the consequences their actions will have on the people we all serve.

Sincerely,

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/s/

Stephanie A. Miner
Mayor of Syracuse

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