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# Pittsburgh hopes land bank will fix 'broken' system

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By Robert Zullo / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Interested in buying one of the thousands of vacant, abandoned and tax-delinquent parcels in Pittsburgh?

In many cases, you might need more time than money.

City finance director Paul Leger, also in charge of the city's real estate division, which handles an inventory of 11,000 such properties, said it can easily take six months for city staff to vet a buyer and prepare a property for a treasurer's sale. That must be put in the form of a resolution that goes before city council, where some members frequently "delete" properties in their districts from the list, sometimes in deference to community groups, sometimes with no explanation. Even with the blessing of council and a successful treasurer's sale, it can take as much as two years for the city to conduct a title search, deed acquisition and transfer, not counting litigation from other interested buyers or parties with claims to the property, Mr. Leger said.

"If this sounds ridiculously long and impossible, it is," Mr. Leger said. "It is the most tangled, most complicated process I have dealt with in my life."

Last year, city council passed legislation backed by Mayor Bill Peduto to establish a Pittsburgh Land Bank, billed as a more efficient way to manage the city's sprawling roster of delinquent parcels and return them to productive use and the tax rolls. Six members of the land bank board have been appointed, including three council members, though three members remain to be named. A resolution authorizing a request for proposals and a \$50,000 budget for legal counsel for the land bank has been tabled since July.

"First, the land bank will have to retain legal counsel and write their rules," said Mr. Leger, who is on the board, though he noted that there is no firm timetable for that to happen. Though the city