



COUNTY OF ERIE

MICHAEL P. KEARNS
COUNTY CLERK

May 7, 2025

The Honorable Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin Street – Fourth Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

Re: COMM. 6E-9 Requested Supplemental Material

Dear Honorable Members:

I write to follow up on the discussion had with this Honorable Body and the Western New York Law Center ("WNYLC") regarding COMM. 6E-9, requesting approval to enter into a second and final extension of the contract with the WNYLC.

At that meeting, the WNYLC was tasked with providing supporting documentation regarding its work on the various Zombie properties in our area. It is my understanding that the requested supplemental material has been mailed by the WNYLC to each Legislator, however I am filing a copy of the material so that it is part of the record.

Included with this letter is the April 2025 Update to the Legislature and several letters of support from local Code Enforcement Officials. I am also attaching the previously filed proposed Resolution as a courtesy.

Once again, I thank this Honorable Body for its consideration of the important work the WNYLC has done with the Erie County Clerk's Office, and respectfully request that the contract be extended for a final two years, as recommended to me by the Division of Purchase. I look forward to continued discussions with this Honorable Body and the WNYLC at the next Committee meeting.

Very truly yours,


MICHAEL P. KEARNS
Erie County Clerk

MPK/wal

Encl.



Erie County Clerk
Michael P. Kearns



April 2025

Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin St, 4th floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

Dear Erie County Legislators,

I have attached the requested data following our discussion on April 3, 2025, regarding the Zombies Initiative and the extension of our contract with the Erie County Clerk's Office. Additionally, I have included several letters of support from local Code Enforcement Officials, which highlight the positive impact of our work in their communities. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (716) 828-8400 or via email at aknapp@wnylc.net.

Thank you.

Best regards,

Allison E. Knapp

Western New York Law Center



Erie County Clerk
Michael P. Kearns



Zombie Property Outreach Services

WNY Law Center: April 2025 Update to Erie County Legislature

The Erie County Clerk's ZOMBIES Initiative is a collaboration between the Office of Erie County Clerk Michael P. Kearns and the Western New York Law Center. The primary goal of this collaboration is to provide resources to Erie County municipalities and communities facing zombie foreclosures. Since 2019, the Western New York Law Center (the Law Center) has contracted with Erie County through the Clerk's Office to provide county-wide services to help address zombie properties. These services range from researching vacant properties to sharing information through our Stay in Your Home Campaign to prevent people from leaving homes before they must. We continue to provide services to keep people in their homes to avoid future vacancies and address current zombies to preserve neighborhoods across the county.

April 2025 Update:

From 2019 to 2025, the ZOMBIES Initiative conducted research on 678 properties in Erie County. Community members, neighbors, local code enforcement officials, and municipal officials reported these properties to us. The properties are categorized based on their status: Zombie, Vacant & Abandoned (not mortgaged but tax delinquent), Other (with no delinquent mortgage or taxes), or Estate cases. Out of the 678 properties we examined, 171 were identified as Zombie properties, where the servicer was responsible for maintenance and repairs.

How many properties sold?

We conducted research to determine how many properties have sold since they were reported to us and researched. This is based on the most recent data available via Erie County parcel search and online public records. Out of 678 properties, 469 of them did not sell or the homeowner retained ownership. 209 of the properties that we researched have sold. Per U.S

Census data for Erie County, the average household size is 2.26 (2019-2023), meaning that the Zombie's Initiative has assisted at least 609 individuals secure housing since the start of our work.

Breakdown by municipality:

Municipality:	Number of properties reported:
Akron (14001)	5
Alden (14004)	1
Amherst/East Amherst (14051,14068-14261)	16
Angola (14006)	9
Aurora (14052)	1
Blasdell (14219)	1
Boston (14025)	11
Buffalo (14201-14228)	263
Cheektowaga (14225)	29
Clarence (14031, 14032)	23
Colden (14033)	10
Collins (14034)	2
Concord (14141)	1
Depew (14043)	22
East Aurora (14052)	1
Eden (14057)	7
Elma (14059)	5
Evans (14006)	14
Getzville (14068)	1
Gowanda (14070)	3
Grand Island (14072)	22
Hamburg (14075)	15
Holland (14080)	7
Kenmore (14127)	10
Lackawanna (14218)	11
Lakeview (14085)	3
Lancaster (14043,14086)	17
North Collins (14111)	7
Orchard Park (14127)	9

Sanborn (14312)	1
Sardinia (14055)	1
Sloan (14212)	1
South Wales (14149)	1
Springville (14141)	3
Tonawanda (T & C) (14150,14223,14217)	117
West Seneca (14224)	21
Williamsville (14221)	8

**Any municipality not listed had no properties reported.

Community Reinvestment:

The work that we do explicitly leads to servicers and investors spending money on preserving and maintaining vacant properties; this is a direct investment in the community. Not counting any pending work or settlements, we have reinvested at least \$355,369.34 on sixteen properties that have been on our 'Priority property' list over the last six years.



VILLAGE OF ANGOLA

41 Commercial Street • Angola, NY 14006

(716) 549-1126

(716) 549-1180

Fax: (716) 549-5130

www.villageofangola.org

TDD 1-800-662-1220

April 17, 2025

Allison E. Knapp
Zombies Community Engagement Paralegal
Western New York Law Center
37 Franklin Street, Suite 210
Buffalo, NY 14202

Dear Allison,

On behalf of the Village of Angola, I am writing to express our strong support for continued funding of the Zombies Initiative through Erie County. Over the years, this program has proven to be an essential tool in our efforts to identify, monitor, and address vacant and abandoned properties that pose risks to our neighborhoods.

The Zombies Initiative has provided municipalities like ours with critical resources, technical guidance, and enforcement support to mitigate the negative impacts of "zombie" properties. These properties, often left in limbo during lengthy foreclosure processes, can quickly become health and safety hazards, diminish property values, and threaten the well-being of nearby residents.

Through the assistance provided by the Initiative, the Village of Angola has been able to take proactive steps in maintaining community standards, ensuring safer streets, and preserving the character of our neighborhoods. Without this program, our ability to address these issues would be significantly diminished, potentially leading to increased blight, public safety concerns, and greater costs to taxpayers in the long term.

We strongly encourage the Erie County Legislature to continue funding the Zombies Initiative. The benefits this program brings to our community—and to municipalities throughout the region—are both tangible and lasting. Discontinuing it would jeopardize years of progress and put communities at a disadvantage in dealing with these complex property issues.

Thank you for your efforts to advocate for this important initiative. I would be happy to provide additional information or speak further on this matter if needed.

Thomas M. Whelan

Thomas M. Whelan
Mayor
Village of Angola

Allison Knapp

From: David Albert <DALbert@clarence.ny.us>
Sent: Thursday, May 1, 2025 8:15 AM
To: Allison Knapp
Subject: RE: Zombie Initiative Updates: Roundtable & EC Legislature

Allison

Sorry for the late response, I was out of town.

Anyway, I have been working with the WNYLC and the Zombie Initiative since the beginning. They have been very helpful in finding information on abandoned and neglected homes and finding the banks or owners that are supposed to be taking care of them. With their help I have been able to either have the property maintained and/or demolished. Once these properties have been maintained or demolished it can be put back on the tax rolls and/or re built to enhance the neighborhood.

Without the help and support of the WNYLC and the Zombie Initiative I would have struggled to accomplish any of this.

Thank you very much for your help.

Dave Albert
Code Enforcement Officer
Town of Clarence

From: Allison Knapp <aknapp@wnylc.net>
Sent: Thursday, April 17, 2025 10:20 AM
To: Jean Blizzard <jblizzard@wnylc.net>; Allison Knapp <aknapp@wnylc.net>
Subject: RE: Zombie Initiative Updates: Roundtable & EC Legislature

Hi everyone,

I'm following up on my email from last week. If anyone is interested in supporting the Zombie's Initiative, please respond to this email with examples of how the program has been helpful or any successes you can recall. Your input is greatly appreciated.

Have a wonderful weekend!

Best regards,

Allison E. Knapp (she/her)
Zombies Community Engagement Paralegal
Western New York Law Center
37 Franklin Street, Suite 210
Buffalo, NY 14202
Telephone: 716-828-8400
Ext: 131

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Allison Knapp

From: Town of Boston Supervisor <supervisor@townofboston.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 17, 2025 12:20 PM
To: Allison Knapp
Subject: Re: Zombie Initiative Updates: Roundtable & EC Legislature

Hi Allison -

Please see below on behalf of Supervisor Jason Keding:

On behalf of the Town of Boston, I would like to express our full support for the continuation and funding of the Zombies Initiative. Since becoming a participant in this program, our town has seen firsthand the vital role it plays in addressing the challenges posed by vacant and abandoned properties. These properties, left in limbo during foreclosure, quickly deteriorate and contribute to neighborhood decline, safety concerns, and a reduced quality of life for our residents.

Through the support of the Zombies Initiative, the Town of Boston has been able to take proactive steps to identify, track, and address these properties before they become larger community issues. The technical assistance and training offered through the initiative have strengthened our code enforcement efforts, helped preserve property values, and, most importantly, improved the safety and appearance of our neighborhoods.

Losing this program would significantly hinder our ability to maintain this momentum and continue addressing problem properties in a timely and effective manner. The ripple effects would be felt not only in property values and community morale but also in the increased strain on our already limited municipal resources.

We strongly urge the Erie County Legislature to continue supporting and funding the Zombies Initiative. The return on investment in terms of community revitalization, safety, and municipal efficiency cannot be overstated. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out if additional information is needed or if there is an opportunity for the Town of Boston to speak further in support of this essential program.

Thank you,



Allison Koczur

Town of Boston, Executive Assistant to Supervisor

P: (716) 941-6518 | F: (716) 941-6116

8500 Boston State Road | Boston, New York 14025

www.townofboston.com | [Let's Connect!](#)

Thank you for not printing this e-mail!



Town of Lancaster

OFFICE OF THE SUPERVISOR

21 Central Avenue
Lancaster, New York 14086
(716) 683-1610
Fax: (716) 683-0512

ROBERT E. LEARY
Supervisor

April 4, 2025

Honorable Legislature,

On behalf of the Town of Lancaster, I want to join in with our Lancaster Building and Zoning Department to recognize and thank the Zombie Property Task Force for its efforts and the resources dedicated to partnering with Municipalities in servicing residents struggling with blight within their neighborhoods.

The Town of Lancaster has been a participant in the County Clerk's Office Zombie Property initiative since 2016, and it has been a great collaborative effort with the Erie County Clerk's office and the WNY Law Center in dealing with Mortgage Foreclosures, and now, Tax Delinquent properties.

Our Building Department has talked about the countless success stories throughout the years and highlighted the recent March 19, 2025, CEO Roundtable discussion, where effective open dialog related to Tax Delinquent properties was discussed and the available resources to assist owners in navigating and overcoming compounding expenses. Thus, providing an avenue for local input on parcels in jeopardy of tax foreclosure & revealing long standing "Tax Zombies" that evaded the foreclosure process to administer viable investment. It is great to hear how everyone works together.

On behalf of the Town of Lancaster I want to thank you because your continued support for these efforts lessens the strain on our Town Zoning & Code Enforcement Department to better serve our Lancaster residents.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert E. Leary", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Robert E Leary



Town of Lancaster

BUILDING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT

21 Central Avenue
Lancaster, New York 14086
716-684-4171
Fax 685-5317

4/8/2025

Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin St., 4th Floor
Buffalo, NY 14202

RE: Zombie Property Task Force

Honorable Legislature,

The Lancaster Building and Zoning Department wishes to applaud efforts and resources dedicated to partnering with Municipalities in servicing residents struggling with blight within their neighborhoods.

As a participant in the County Clerk's Office Zombie Property initiative since 2016, there have been countless success stories and collaborative efforts with the Erie County Clerk's Office and WNY Law Center in dealing with Mortgage Foreclosures, and now, Tax Delinquent properties.

Our March 19, 2025, CEO Roundtable discussion sparked open dialog related to Tax Delinquent properties and available resources to assist owners navigate and overcoming compounding expenses, providing an avenue for local input on parcels in jeopardy of tax foreclosure, & revealing long standing "Tax Zombies" that evaded the foreclosure process to administer viable investment.

Your continued support for these efforts lessens the strain on Local Zoning & Code Enforcement Agencies to better service their communities within the region.

Sincerely,

Matt Fischione, Code Enforcement Officer/ZEO/CFM/SMO
Town of Lancaster Building and Zoning Department

MF



COUNTY OF ERIE

MICHAEL P. KEARNS
COUNTY CLERK

March 12, 2025

The Honorable Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin Street – Fourth Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

**Re: Resolution to Authorize Entry into Third Extension of Contract with Western
New York Law Center, Inc.**

Dear Honorable Members:

The attached proposed Resolution seeks authorization for the Erie County Executive to execute a third and final extension of the contract with Western New York Law Center, Inc., for a period of twenty-four (24) months, to provide zombie property outreach services. This Honorable Body previously authorized entry into the contract in December 2021 (COMM. 25-E-16 [2021]) and approved a first extension in June 2023 (COMM. 11E-33 [2023]) and an amendment and second extension in February 2024 (COMM. 2E-1 [2024]). A memorandum of support is also included.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. If your Honorable Body requires further information, kindly contact the Office of the Erie County Clerk.

Respectfully submitted,


MICHAEL P. KEARNS
Erie County Clerk

MPK/wal

Encl.

**STATE OF NEW YORK
LEGISLATURE OF ERIE COUNTY
BUFFALO, NEW YORK**

**A Resolution Submitted by the Erie County Clerk
Re: Authorization for Third Extension of Contract With Western New York Law Center,
Inc. for Zombie Property Outreach Services**

WHEREAS, a “Zombie Property” is a parcel improved by a one-to-four-family dwelling and abandoned by its occupants when a foreclosure action has been instituted against the property owner; and

WHEREAS, upon vacating the properties, the structures can experience: damage from weather, scavenging, squatters, and criminal activity, and the resulting deterioration creates nuisance conditions and can often affect the values of surrounding properties; and

WHEREAS, the prolonged foreclosure process clouds title to the property, making it difficult for municipalities to enforce code violations resulting from neglect and leads to blight; and

WHEREAS, the Erie County Clerk recognizes that grappling with the blight of Zombie Properties transcends all communities and impacts all County taxpayers, regardless of the property location, and believes this initiative will become more important as the number of foreclosures is anticipated to continue to rise; and

WHEREAS, the intended effect of combating Zombie Properties is to put them in a position for improvement and conveyance so there may be an increase in mortgage and transfer tax revenues, as well as securing value in the County’s tax base; and

WHEREAS, in November 2021, the Erie County Clerk issued RFP #2021-044VF seeking proposers for Zombie Property Outreach Services, advertised in the Orchard Park Bee and Buffalo Challenger, and provided the RFP to several potential proposers; and

WHEREAS, a committee received, reviewed, and scored the two (2) proposals that were submitted in response to the RFP and determined that Western New York Law Center, Inc. submitted the best proposal and that their organization was the most responsible, well-regarded, and best-positioned to perform the services requested; and

WHEREAS, on December 16, 2021, the Erie County Legislature authorized the Erie County Clerk to enter into a contract with Western New York Law Center, Inc., in the amount of \$250,000, for zombie property outreach services for an initial term of twelve (12) months (COMM. 25-E-16 [2021]); and

WHEREAS, the initial term of the contract ran from January 4, 2022 – January 4, 2023; and

WHEREAS, on June 8, 2023, the Erie County Legislature authorized the Erie County Clerk to enter into the first contract extension with Western New York Law Center, Inc., in the amount of \$250,000, for zombie property outreach services for a period of twelve (12) additional months (COMM. 11E-33 [2023]); and

WHEREAS, the first contract extension ran from January 4, 2023 – January 4, 2024; and

WHEREAS, on February 15, 2024, the Erie County Legislature approved COMM. 2E-1 (2024) authorizing the Erie County Clerk to amend and extend its contract with Western New York Law Center, Inc., in the amount of \$125,000, for zombie property outreach services for a period of twelve (12) additional months; and

WHEREAS, the second contract extension began on June 10, 2024 and is set to expire on June 10, 2025; and

WHEREAS, the contract has only been in effect for three (3) years to date, considering the initial term of twelve (12) months and the two extension of twelve (12) months each; and

WHEREAS, it is vital that these services continue to ensure continuity and preserve the best value for County funds; and

WHEREAS, the Erie County Clerk consulted with the Division of Purchase and confirmed that a third and final extension of the contract for an additional two (2) years was appropriate, in light of the contract not exceeding the standard five (5) year limit for vendor contracts; and

WHEREAS, the Erie County Clerk is now requesting authorization from the Erie County Legislature for the third and final extension of the aforementioned contract with Western New York Law Center, Inc. to provide zombie outreach services for an additional term of twenty-four (24) months; and

WHEREAS, the funds necessary to cover the costs of extending the aforementioned contract are currently available in the following account: County Clerk- Registrar Division, Account No.: 516020- Professional Services Contracts and Fees; and

WHEREAS, the Erie County Clerk and Western New York Law Center have negotiated in good faith the cost of zombie outreach services at a reduced rate for this third and final extension.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, that the County of Erie is hereby authorized to enter into a third and final contract extension for a period of twenty-four (24) months with Western New York Law Center, Inc., in the amount of \$125,000 per year, to provide zombie property outreach services; and be it further

RESOLVED, the source of these funds comprising payment under the contract to Western New York Law Center, Inc., in the amount of \$125,000 per year, shall be from and are currently

available in the following account: County Clerk- Registrar Division, Account No.: 516020- Professional Services Contracts and Fees; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Erie County Executive, or the Deputy County Executive, is authorized to authorize the said Third Extension with the fundamental terms set forth above, subject to a form of the final Third Extension being approved by the County Attorney; and be it further

RESOLVED, that authorization is hereby given for the Division of Budget and Management to make any technical adjustments necessary to effectuate this resolution; and be it further

RESOLVED, that certified copies of this Resolution be sent to the Erie County Clerk, the Director of Budget and Management, the Erie County Attorney, and the Erie County Comptroller.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members of the Erie County Legislature
FROM: Michael P. Kearns, Erie County Clerk
RE: Third Extension for Contract With Western New York Law Center, Inc. for Zombie Property Outreach Services
Date: March 12, 2025

SUMMARY

The Erie County Clerk's Office is requesting authorization to enter into a third and final extension of the contract with Western New York Law Center, Inc. for zombie property outreach services. A "Zombie Property" is a parcel improved by a one-to-four-family dwelling and abandoned by its occupants when a foreclosure action has been instituted against the property owner. Upon vacating the properties, the structures can experience: damage from weather, scavenging, squatters, and criminal activity, and the resulting deterioration creates nuisance conditions and can often affect the values of surrounding properties. The prolonged foreclosure process clouds title to the property, making it difficult for municipalities to enforce code violations resulting from neglect and leads to blight.

The negative impacts of Zombie Properties transcend municipal boundaries and affect all Erie County taxpayers. The Agreement between the Erie County Clerk's Office and Western New York Law Center Inc. has been extended twice already, however the total amount of years the contract has been in effect is only three. The Erie County Clerk consulted with the Division of Purchase and confirmed that a third and final extension of the contract for an additional two (2) years was appropriate, in light of the contract not exceeding the standard five (5) year limit for vendor contracts.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

Positive. The funds necessary to cover the costs of extending the aforementioned contract are currently available in the following account: County Clerk- Registrar Division, Account No.: 516020- Professional Services Contracts and Fees. In addition, the Erie County Clerk and Western New York Law Center have once again negotiated in good faith the cost of zombie outreach services at a reduced rate for this third extension, bringing the initial annual fee of \$250,000 down to \$125,000 per year.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

Many individuals in Erie County are ninety days or more in arrears on their mortgage payments and Lis Pendens filings in foreclosure actions have been filed in 2024. A third extension of this initiative will help ensure continued cooperation amongst Erie County, local municipalities, and non-profits in addressing Zombie Property issues.

CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION

Failure to extend the property outreach services would result in less guidance and technical support for municipalities across Erie County that are already struggling to effectively address Zombie Properties in their communities, thereby likely leading to increased numbers of blighted properties, decreased property values for neighboring properties, and less property, mortgage, and transfer taxes being collected in Erie County.

STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL

The Erie County Clerk will work with Western New York Law Center, Inc., the Erie County Attorney, and Division of Budget and Management to finalize the third extension of Erie County's contract with Western New York Law Center, Inc.