

- [BIG NEWS:](#)
- [Paul Krugman](#)
- |
- [Real Estate](#)
- |
- [Bernard Madoff](#)
- |
- [AIG](#)
- |

[More...](#)

June 19, 2009

This is the print preview: [Back to normal view »](#)



[Arthur Delaney](#)  
[arthur@huffingtonpost.com](mailto:arthur@huffingtonpost.com) | HuffPost Reporting

## How Cities Might Cope With Population Decline

First Posted: 06-17-09 03:15 PM | Updated: 06-17-09 03:25 PM

[digg](#) [f](#) [stumble](#) [reddit](#) [del.icio.us](#)

[ShareThis](#)

[I Like It](#) [Don't Like It](#)

**Read More:** [Bulldozing Neighborhoods](#), [Cities](#), [Business News](#)



Dozens of U.S. cities will bulldoze entire neighborhoods under an Obama administration plan to stave off economic decline, the London Telegraph [reported](#) Friday.

But despite the gleeful reaction from conservative pundits, don't expect to see bulldozers knocking down a neighborhood near you anytime soon.

The Telegraph reported that the plan would be modeled on efforts in Flint, Mich., where Genesee County treasurer Dan Kildee is a [lead proponent](#) of shrinking his town to fit its already-shrunken population. Kildee said he had spoken with federal officials who are interested in taking the plan to other troubled cities.

**AP** Rush Limbaugh, among others, has seized on what he saw as a capitulation of the Obama administration in its economic recovery efforts. Bulldozing entire neighborhoods -- liberal Big Government at its worst!

"It's amazing to listen to Democrats say, 'We don't have any interest in rebuilding Flint. We want to bulldoze it,'" Limbaugh [said](#). "And then the guy comes up with the idea. Obama says, 'Hey, apply your theory to 50 of our cities.'"

Here's what's really happening: Kildee told the Huffington Post that federal officials approached him about his county's "land bank" concept, asking him to explain it to other municipalities facing similar problems of vacant buildings and unused land as their populations shrink. He was not asked, he said, to advise other city officials about how to bulldoze swaths of urban neighborhoods across the country.

"It is really irritating to have the characterization that this is some sort of totalitarian approach," said Kildee, chairman of the Genesee County Land Bank Authority. The law that created the GCLBA was crafted with bipartisan support, he said.

And it wasn't the Obama administration that first approached Kildee about exporting the land bank concept. "The Bush administration was the first federal administration to ask for our help," he said.

Story continues below ↕

The GCLBA acquires abandoned properties through a [special process](#) designed to prevent foreclosed properties from sitting vacant and contributing to neighborhood blight. A recent survey of real estate agents found that bank-owned properties that sat vacant and damaged brought down the value of their next-door neighbors by 21 percent.

According to Kildee, the program has taken ownership of 4,000 unoccupied land parcels in the county since 2002. In addition, 1,000 abandoned houses have been demolished, and 900 empty lots have been turned over to adjacent neighbors.

There's no wholesale demolition of neighborhoods, according to Kildee. Instead, it is a piecemeal process, in which empty buildings are taken down, allowing the empty lots to be redeveloped, handed to neighbors, or returned to nature. Eventually, Kildee said, the built environment of Flint might need to be reduced by about 25 percent. After all, he said, Flint has lost half its population.

Kildee said that he'd been approached by officials with the Federal Reserve, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the Department of Housing and

Urban Development about bringing the land bank program to other cities. Among the 15 towns on the GCLBA's radar are Syracuse, N.Y. Cleveland, Ohio Baltimore, Md. and Pittsburgh, Pa.

Any plan to consolidate under-populated neighborhoods would be 100 percent voluntary, Kildee said. "The people who are stuck in these neighborhoods should be given the opportunity but should never be forced to [to participate]. It has to be the community's plan," Kildee said.

Ivonne Audirac is a professor of urban planning at Florida State University and a member of the [Shrinking Cities International Research Network](#). She told the Huffington Post the concept of shrinking cities gets less traction in the United States than in Europe.

"Most of what we have is private property so there has to be a plan, and the plan has to be highly participative so that in theory everyone has a chance to say whether they want to be relocated or not to the areas that will be consolidated. That's obviously very problematic and politically sometimes not very viable," she said.

"What we try to do is change the paradigm from the tradition based on growth to focus on urban growth and decline as a phenomenon happening simultaneously."

**HuffPost readers: Living in an underpopulated neighborhood? Tell us what it's like -- email [arthur@huffingtonpost.com](mailto:arthur@huffingtonpost.com).**

SEARCH

- [Copyright © 2009 HuffingtonPost.com, Inc.](#) |
- [Archive](#) |
- [User Agreement](#) |
- [Privacy](#) |
- [Comment Policy](#) |
- [About Us](#) |
- [Powered by Movable Type](#)