



### What is the Abandoned Housing Initiative?

Abandoned homes not only present a safety hazard but depress residents' satisfaction and pride with the neighborhood. The **Office of the Attorney General's Abandoned Housing Initiative** is mechanism municipalities utilize to breathe new life into previously discarded properties.

After receiving a referral from a municipality about a particular property, the Attorney General's Office works to identify and locate property owners and enforce state sanitary codes. If the owner does not alleviate violations, the Attorney General's Office will seek a court order to appoint a receiver to bring the property up to code.

A receiver, if appointed by the court, temporarily takes over the management of the property and makes the required repairs. All the receiver's actions are approved and monitored by the court.

If the property owner does not pay for the repairs, the state may sell the property to pay the outstanding bills. The property owner retains ownership if they opt to pay the bills.

Communities can refer up to 10 properties for the Attorney General's Office to inspect for potential court action.

Locally, a collaborative team of officials from throughout the county recognized that expanding usage of the **Abandoned Housing Initiative** is an important strategy to improve housing, health, and economic wellbeing throughout the Berkshires.

[A Housing Vision for the Berkshires](#) notes that with few new developments and the current age of Berkshire County's housing stock puts the county at an economic disadvantage because of a lack of quality housing options.

The working group identified the Abandoned Housing Initiative as an underutilized way cities and towns can address blighted conditions throughout the region.

**Example:** *The Attorney General's Office appointed a receiver to renovate an abandoned Lenox property and resell it.*



Before



After



### BRPC PROGRAM

Community Planning Program  
[berkshireplanning.org/programs](http://berkshireplanning.org/programs)

**Urgency:**

Abandoned homes pose significant health, safety, and environmental concerns for neighborhoods. An abandoned home is more likely to be vandalized, attract squatters, become infested with rodents, and has the potential for hazardous chemicals to seep into the environment.

The potential impacts are not only dangerous to the health and well-being of the neighbors but come at a cost to municipalities because abandoned homes are more likely to require police and/or fire responses, decrease neighborhood property values, and subject towns to potential litigation.

The Abandoned Housing Initiative is only one of many ways cities and towns can address abandoned houses. Communities can also address issues directly with homeowners through Boards of Health or Building Departments, seeking resolution through Housing Court, taking the property through tax taking, and condemnation.

Towns should keep all options available to address individual circumstances and the best practice calls for maintaining an inventory of distressed properties and documenting conditions.

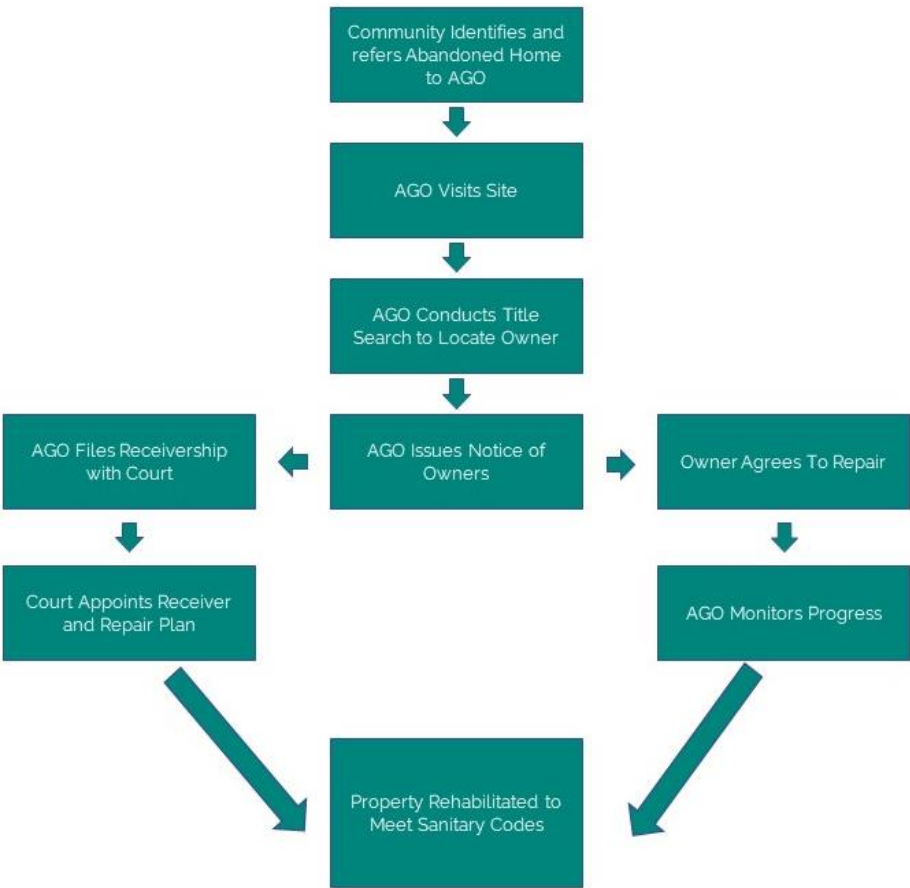
**Example:** The AG's office facilitated a full restoration of a First Street multi-family home in Pittsfield.



Before



After



**Additional Abandoned Housing Initiative Funding:**

The Attorney General's **Abandoned Housing Initiative Receivership Fund** provides communities with additional resources to assist in the receivership process in partnership with the Attorney General's Office.

The Attorney General's **Abandoned Housing Initiative Technology to Enrich Community Housing Grant** provides municipalities up to \$25,000 to implement code enforcement software that streamlines data across departments and guides new strategies to prevent housing abandonment.

The Attorney General's **Abandoned Housing Initiative Strategic Demolition Fund** provides for post-demolition redevelopment of affordable housing.