# "Pursuing Adaptive Resilience—Building Institutional Capacity, Designing a Cohesive Policy Framework"

**Presenters:** Joseph Schilling, Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech; Lauren Bulka, Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech

Joseph Schilling leads the Metropolitan Institute's sustainable communities and urban regeneration initiatives that explore the intersection of policy, planning, and collaboration in the development of sustainable communities. His fieldwork serves as a living laboratory for research, service learning, and policy change by extracting and disseminating model programs and practices through case studies, roundtables, and planning studios. Through the institute's Sustainability Planning Lab, students are classifying local city/county sustainability plans—over 150 to date. Based on this research, Schilling is designing a sustainability policy "index" to measure the sustainability potential of older industrial cities. With support from the Ford Foundation, the institute is home to the Vacant Properties Research Network—facilitating policy and research translation among scholars, policymakers, and practitioners on the regeneration of legacy cities. Schilling coauthored a 2012 APA report on "Cities in Transition" that provides a strategic policy planning framework for distressed communities. As part of the White House's Strong Cities, Strong Communities initiative, Schilling is working with the German Marshall Fund to manage and evaluate a midcareer fellowship program for seven pilot cities. Schilling holds a master's of environmental law (LLM) from George Washington University and a JD from Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco.

Lauren Bulka is a graduate research assistant at the Metropolitan Institute who is pursuing a master's of urban and regional planning at Virginia Tech. Her primary interest lies in community and economic development as it relates to the regeneration/revitalization of distressed communities and cities. At the Metropolitan Institute, her involvement spans several projects, including the inventory and analysis of formally adopted sustainability plans and policies in the United States; background research and interviews for the IBM "Challenge.gov: Using Competitions and Awards to Spur Innovation"; projects in the Vacant Property Research Initiative; and evaluation of the Strong Cities, Strong Communities Fellowship Program. As a summer fellow in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Policy Development and Research in 2012, Bulka researched the role of individual development accounts (IDAs) in increasing low-income homeownership. She has a bachelor's in urban and environmental planning and a minor in architecture from the University of Virginia.

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**Summary and Findings:** Reclaiming vacant and abandoned properties remains a core strategy for regenerating older industrial cities that have lost 25 to 50 percent of their peak populations. Such "legacy" cities (such as Cleveland, Baltimore, and Detroit) are experimenting with new policies and programs, such as land banking, real property data systems, and city-wide strategic plans that focus on reconfiguring the physical footprint of abandoned neighborhoods. Many legacy cities, however, do not have the institutional capacity, cross-sector partnerships, and cohesive policy frameworks sufficient to operate at the scale necessary to reclaim thousands of vacant properties. Using the principles of adaptive resilience and policy change, our poster presents a framework for reclaiming vacant properties that works toward resilient outcomes by  rebuilding institutional capacity through a collaborative, cross-sectorial, and iterative process; developing a cohesive suite of vacant property policies that can adapt to changes in neighborhood and market dynamics; and designing a plan that provides a menu of ideas for the sustainable reuse of vacant properties.  Our model is based on the Metropolitan Institute's participatory research  work with Cleveland officials, civic leaders, and

community organizations. Over the past 10 years, Cleveland has become more resilient by reengineering its institutional capacity and redesigning its vacant property policies and plan through a cross-sector partnership.

**Implications for Policy and Practice:** Cleveland's pursuit of adaptive resilience in the face of long-term challenges offers many lessons for other postindustrial cities plagued with vacant properties. Legacy cities should consider conducting policy and program assessment to identify strengths and weaknesses of existing vacant property systems. Such assessments can galvanize political and policy action and provide a multiyear road map for policy change. Cleveland's experience highlights the need for developing a data-driven, place-based tool kit that applies to different neighborhoods facing different community dynamics. Cleveland's Northeast Ohio Community and Neighborhood Data for Organizing (NEO CANDO) info system, for example, provides the data that support its other vacant property programs. When designed correctly, such a tool kit marries the menu of legal and programmatic tools that acquire and abate vacant properties with longer-term reuse and redevelopment of vacant land. By convening a regular working group, the Vacant and Abandoned Property Action Council (VAPAC) for the past 10 years, Cleveland has solidified cross-sector collaboration and institutional capacity that can help stabilize declining real estate markets, revitalize distressed neighborhoods, and catalyze their eventual recovery and regeneration. Our model's focus on rebuilding institutions in tandem with developing more systematic policy frameworks and reuse plans offers a new twist on the emerging literature of urban resiliency, collective impact, policy, and neighborhood change.