

**Blight recertification for the area bounded by  
Front Street, Interstate 676, Broad Street and Spring Garden Street,  
including the blocks bounded by 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Spring Garden Street, 10<sup>th</sup>  
Street and Fairmount Avenue, and 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Race Street, Broad  
Street and Vine Street**

**Philadelphia City Planning Commission**

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Philadelphia City Planning Commission

**CITY OF PHILADELPHIA**

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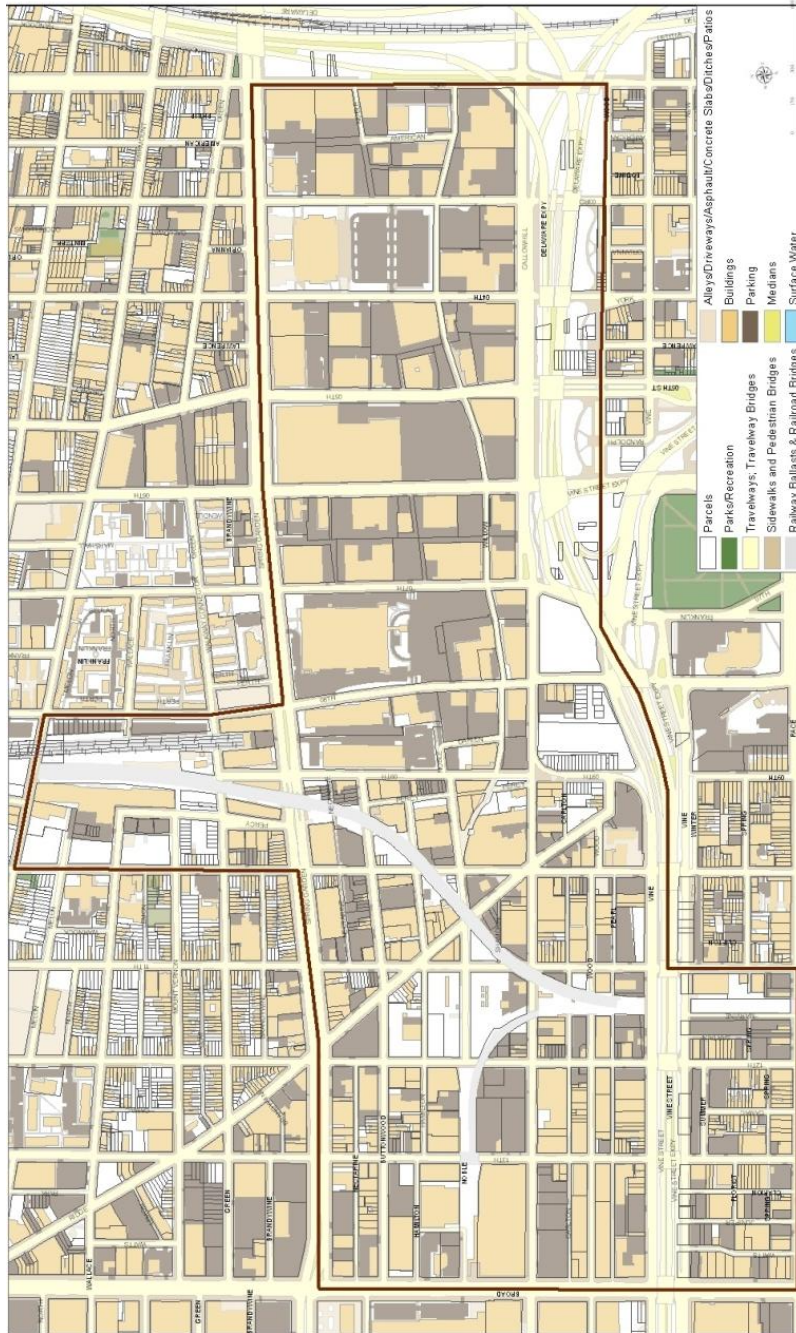
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## **INTRODUCTION**

This report presents an evaluation of blight in the northeast quadrant of Center City in an area generally bounded by Front Street, Interstate 676, Broad Street and Spring Garden Streets, including the blocks bounded by 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Spring Garden Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Fairmount Avenue, and 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Race Street, Broad Street and Vine Street. A major portion of this section is known as the Callowhill Industrial District. (See map on following page.)

The primary purpose of this blight recertification is to facilitate acquisition of vacant and underutilized properties to reestablish the street grid in the eastern section, facilitate the development of affordable housing, and support the creation of a park along the Reading Viaduct. The boundaries include other nearby concentrations of vacancy that are subject to future development. This area was previously certified as blighted by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission. In 1963, the area south of Spring Garden Street was certified as part of the Center City Redevelopment Area. In 1968, the area north of Spring Garden Street was certified as part of the North Philadelphia Redevelopment Area. The original certification is superseded within the boundaries mentioned in this recertification.



This recertification reviews existing conditions in relation to seven criteria used to determine whether blight exists. The criteria are set forth in the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law, which stipulates that only one criterion must be met to make a finding of blight. Blighted conditions need not be evident throughout the study area. Individual properties may be free from blight, but that does not make the findings arbitrary, as the area is considered in its entirety.

This report cites specific examples of the conditions satisfying **three** of the blight criteria. The Philadelphia City Planning Commission affirms that blight exists in the area.

## CRITERIA

Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law contains the following criteria for establishing the presence of blight in a particular area:

1. **Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions**
2. Inadequate planning
3. Excessive land coverage
4. Lack of proper light, air and open space
5. **Faulty street and lot layout**
6. Defective design and arrangement of buildings
7. **Economically and socially undesirable land uses**

Evidence of blight is presented by the significant number of vacant lots and structures and poorly-designed street configurations that have created large mega-blocks that are difficult to redevelop. These conditions satisfy three criteria for blight certification:

### Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions

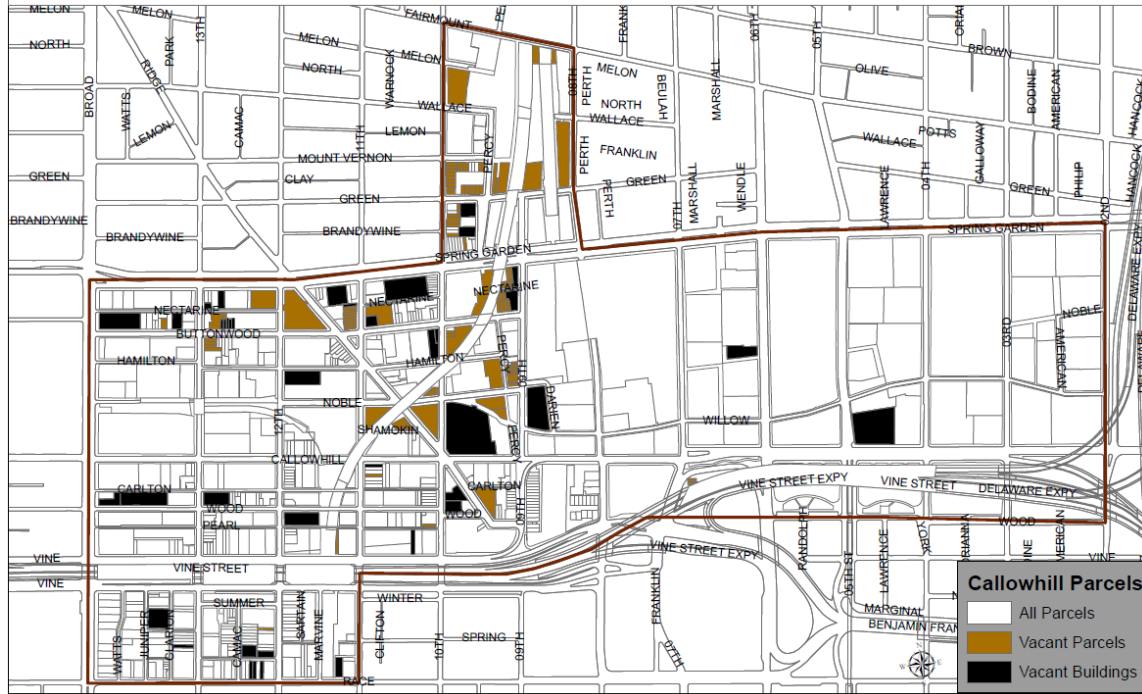
Of 760 parcels, 106 vacant lots and 37 vacant buildings exist. Vacant properties provide clear evidence of unsafe and inadequate conditions. Also in the area is the defunct Reading Railroad Viaduct. This structure spans over 15 blocks in the area and creates unsafe conditions as it crosses over streets and along vacant parcels. The crossings over streets lack lighting, making the area seem unsafe especially at night, and the structure and security fencing trap trash and debris.



Reading Viaduct at Buttonwood Street

Staff identified these conditions while conducting a land use survey in August 2011. Data from the Philadelphia Water Department, the Office of Property Assessment, and the Office of Licenses and Inspections, confirm this general level of vacancy. In all, about 19 percent of properties in the study area are vacant.





Map showing vacant lots and buildings in the area.



900 block of Ridge Avenue



10<sup>th</sup> and Wallace Streets

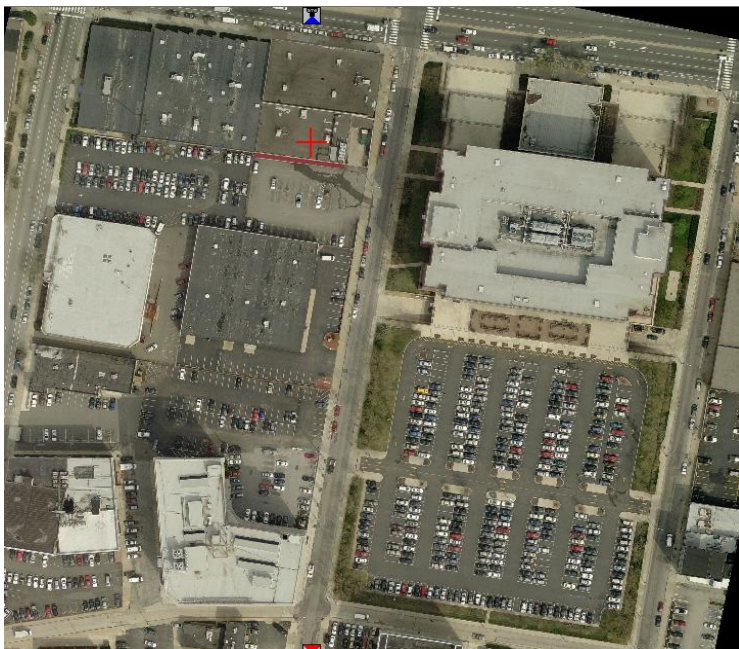
### Faulty Street and Lot Layout

Faulty street layout is demonstrated by narrow streets concentrated in the southwestern portion of the area in question. These streets do not meet modern street standards set in Section 14-2104 (5) of the Philadelphia Code which states the following:

- 64 ft. for a primary residential street
- 54 ft. for a secondary residential street
- 50 ft. for a tertiary street
- 36 ft. for a marginal access street

Watts, Juniper, Florist, Spring, Clarion and Sartain Streets vary in width from 10 to 24 feet. This is far less than the minimum width for a marginal street, 36 ft. This makes access difficult and constrains the delivery of City services.

The layout of the streets in the eastern half of the area also fails to meet current standards. The



average block size in Center City Philadelphia is 220 feet by 450 feet. In this area the blocks average 450 feet by 850 feet. These large blocks create an environment that deters development at the pedestrian scale. This type of scale differs too greatly from the thriving neighborhoods to the north and south and creates a barrier that is difficult to cross unless in an automobile.

Mega-blocks between Spring Garden and Willow Streets, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Streets

### Economically and socially undesirable land use

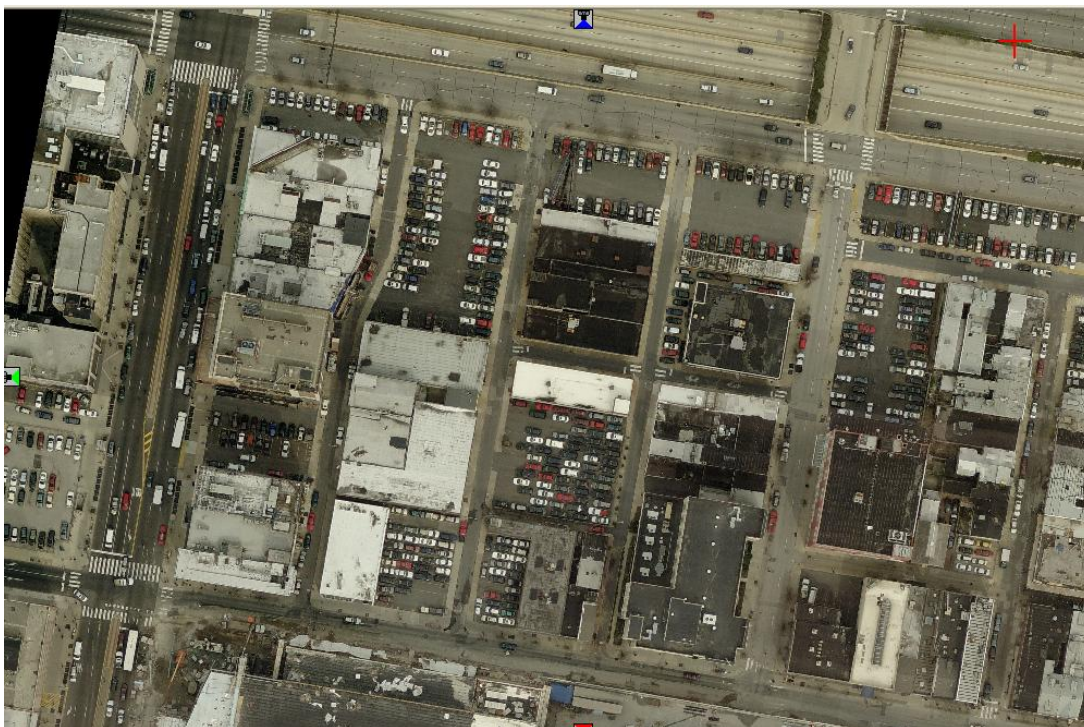
The 19 percent vacancy rate discourages private investment and decreases the value of adjacent property. The loss of local industrial businesses means the area no longer produces industrial jobs and goods, but also leaves large development parcels that are poorly configured



for reuse as neighborhood-oriented commercial businesses and residences. City government collects fewer taxes in areas of high vacancy, making the provision of city services more difficult. Vacant structures, buildings and lots can become attractive nuisances for drug dealers, prostitutes, arsonists and vandals, further driving development away.

West of 9<sup>th</sup> Street, 133 parcels are used solely for surface parking. East of 9<sup>th</sup> Street, over 50% of the land area is used as surface parking. In a dense urban setting, the amount of land dedicated to such a low-value use negatively affects the overall market value of the area. Large amounts of surface parking and vacancy indicate that the square footage of existing development is far less than permitted under the zoning. This is evidence of economically undesirable land use.

Despite blighted conditions, community organizations continue to strive for revitalization. The Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation is set to start construction on a community center and market-rate residential tower at the corner of 10<sup>th</sup> & Vine Streets. Residents west of 8<sup>th</sup> Street are working on creating a Neighborhood Improvement District (NID) to help keep the area clean of trash and graffiti, and there are a number of volunteer groups working to convert the Reading Railroad Viaduct into a neighborhood park.



Area between Race and Vine Streets, Marvne and Broad Streets



**CONCLUSION**

In the portion of the northeast quadrant of Center City generally bounded by Front Street, Interstate 676, Broad Street and Spring Garden Streets, including the blocks bounded by 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Spring Garden Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Fairmount Avenue, and 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Race Street, Broad Street and Vine Street, existing conditions are consistent with three of the criteria necessary to produce a finding of blight under Pennsylvania Redevelopment law. Those criteria are: (1) unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions, (5) faulty street and lot layout and (7) economically or socially undesirable land use. Therefore the area is eligible for recertification.

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**RESOLUTION**

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law Act of May 24, 1945 (P.L.991) as amended, authorizes The Philadelphia City Planning Commission to certify as blighted specific areas which may then in whole or in part, be made the subject of redevelopment proposals formulated by the Redevelopment Authority in accordance with said Act, and

WHEREAS, after substantial review and study, the City Planning Commission staff has presented a report concluding that the area bounded by Front Street, Interstate 676, Broad Street and Spring Garden Streets, including the blocks bounded by 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Spring Garden Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Fairmount Avenue, and 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Race Street, Broad Street and Vine Street exhibits characteristics of blight as defined by the Act, and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission concurs with the findings and conclusions set forth in said staff report,

NOW THEREFORE, on this 18th day of October 2011, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission hereby finds, based upon its staff report dated October 18, 2011 that the area bounded by Front Street, Interstate 676, Broad Street and Spring Garden Streets, including the blocks bounded by 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Spring Garden Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Fairmount Avenue, and 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Race Street, Broad Street and Vine Street exhibits the following characteristics of blight as established by Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law:

- 1) Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions,
- 5) Faulty street and lot layout
- 7) Economically or socially undesirable land use

And hereby recertifies the above described area as blighted under the terms and provisions of the said Act.