

**Blight Recertification for a Section of the North Philadelphia
Redevelopment Area Bounded by 19th Street, 23rd Street, Master
Street and Montgomery Avenue**

Philadelphia City Planning Commission

January 18, 2011

Philadelphia City Planning Commission

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents an evaluation of blight in a section of Lower North Philadelphia, generally bounded by: Montgomery Avenue (north); Master Street (south); 19th Street (east); and 23rd Street (west).

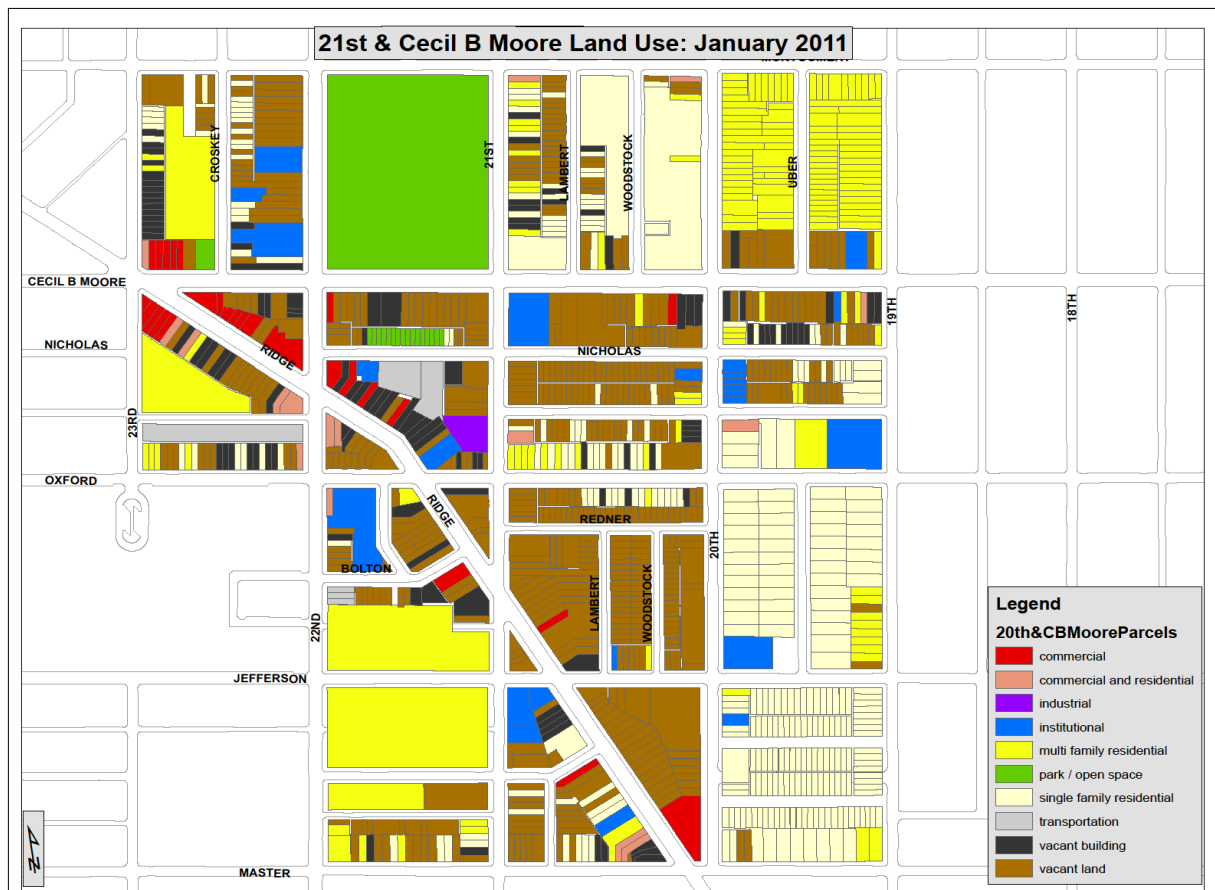
The primary purpose of this blight recertification is to facilitate acquisition of vacant and underutilized properties for a health and wellness center to be developed by a community based organization. The proposed location is the 2100 block of Cecil B Moore Avenue. The boundaries include other nearby concentrations of vacancy that are subject to future development. This area of North Philadelphia was initially certified in 1968. The original certification is superseded within the boundaries mention in this recertification.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



This is a typical series of vacant lots in the 2000 block of Cecil B Moore Avenue



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 **two** 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, the high volume of tax delinquency in certain blocks, and the large percentage of code violations compared to the city as a whole. These conditions satisfy two criteria for blight certification:

Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions

Of 1,237 of parcels, 471 vacant lots and 203 vacant buildings exist. Most of the vacancy is concentrated in the triangle bounded by Oxford Street, 22nd Street, Ridge Avenue and 21st Street. Fifteen other lots, owned by city government or other public agencies, are considered to be vacant and undeveloped, but are being used informally for parking, parks, and religious ceremonies. Vacant properties provide clear evidence of unsafe and



This series of vacant lots at 21st & Redner has attracted piles of trash on the outside and apparently abandoned vehicles within the fence.

inadequate conditions.

Staff identified these conditions while conducting a land use survey over six days in December 2010 and January 2011. Data from the Philadelphia Water Department, the Office of Property Assessment, and the



This vacant building is the only thing standing on the block bounded by 21st Street, Ridge Avenue and Oxford Street. The open door and broken windows and trash show that someone has recently accessed the property. This is a public safety concern

University of Pennsylvania's Neighborhood Information System, confirm this general level of vacancy.

In all, about 54 percent of properties in the study area are vacant. While this number is high, without roughly 280 parcels that have become subsidized housing units since 2005, the vacancy rate would be closer to 78 percent. The new housing is mostly clustered around 19th Street on the western edge of the Cecil B Moore Homeownership Zone, except for the 54 unit mid-rise Haven Peniel housing at 23rd and Turner streets.

An average of about 1,200 structures had code violations each year from 2000 to 2005. Although this probably represents multiple housing violations on certain properties, not 1,200 properties out of compliance, it still shows an average of one violation for each property in the study area. Citywide, housing code violations averaged about 20 percent. Code violations provide documentation of unsafe, unsanitary and inadequate conditions.

Economically and socially undesirable land use

A high vacancy rate discourages private investment and decreases the value of adjacent property. A loss of residents deprives local business owners of customers,



The vacant buildings in the background are in the 2000 block of Ridge Avenue. Only two buildings on the block are occupied. Notice the sky showing through the large building on the left.

which leads to fewer essential goods and services for the residents who are left. City government also collects fewer taxes, making the provision of city services more difficult.



These rowhouses are located on the 1700 block of North 23rd Street. Only seven out of 22 are occupied.

Owners of 28 percent of the properties owed more than two years worth of property taxes at the end of 2010

Vacant buildings and lots can become attractive nuisances for drug dealers, prostitutes, arsonists and vandals, further driving residents away.

Property values in the area are well below the norm for the city, indicating economically undesirable land use. Housing values have risen since 2000, likely due to the new construction in the Cecil B Moore

Homeownership zone east of 20th Street, but they remain below the city median of \$95,000.

Percentage Increase in Housing Sales Values 2000 to 2007

	Median Sales Price 2000	Median Sales Price 2007	Percentage Increase
Tract 139. Block Group 1	No data	\$82, 500	n.a
Block Group 5	No data	\$31,000	n.a
Block Group 7	\$6,000	\$10,162	69 %
Tract 148, Block Group 1	\$6,300	\$72,000	1,043 %
Block Group 2	No data	\$0	n.a
Block Group 3	\$17,750	\$20,983	18 %

Source: University of Pennsylvania: Neighborhood Information System

Despite blighted conditions, there are positive trends and strengths that give hope for renewal. Individuals and organizations are turning vacant land into assets. And strong institutions remain, including the Wharton Centre, a settlement house with a long history of serving Philadelphia’s black community, the Martin Luther King Jr. Recreation Center, and many religious congregations.

CONCLUSION

In the portion of the North Philadelphia study area bounded by 19th Street, 23rd Street, Master Street and Montgomery Avenue, existing conditions are consistent with two of the criteria necessary to produce a finding of blight under Pennsylvania Redevelopment law. Those criteria are: (1) unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions and (7) economically or socially undesirable land use. Therefore the area is eligible for recertification.

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 19th Street, 23rd Street, Master Street, and Montgomery Avenue 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 January 2011, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission hereby finds, based upon its staff report dated January 18, 2011 that the area bounded by 19th Street, 23rd Street, Master Street, and Montgomery Avenue exhibits the following characteristics of blight as established by Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law:

- 1) Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions,
- 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.