

**Blight Recertification for Sections of the North Philadelphia
Redevelopment Area Generally Bounded by Germantown Avenue,
2nd Street and Oxford Street**

Philadelphia City Planning Commission

August 16, 2011

Philadelphia City Planning Commission

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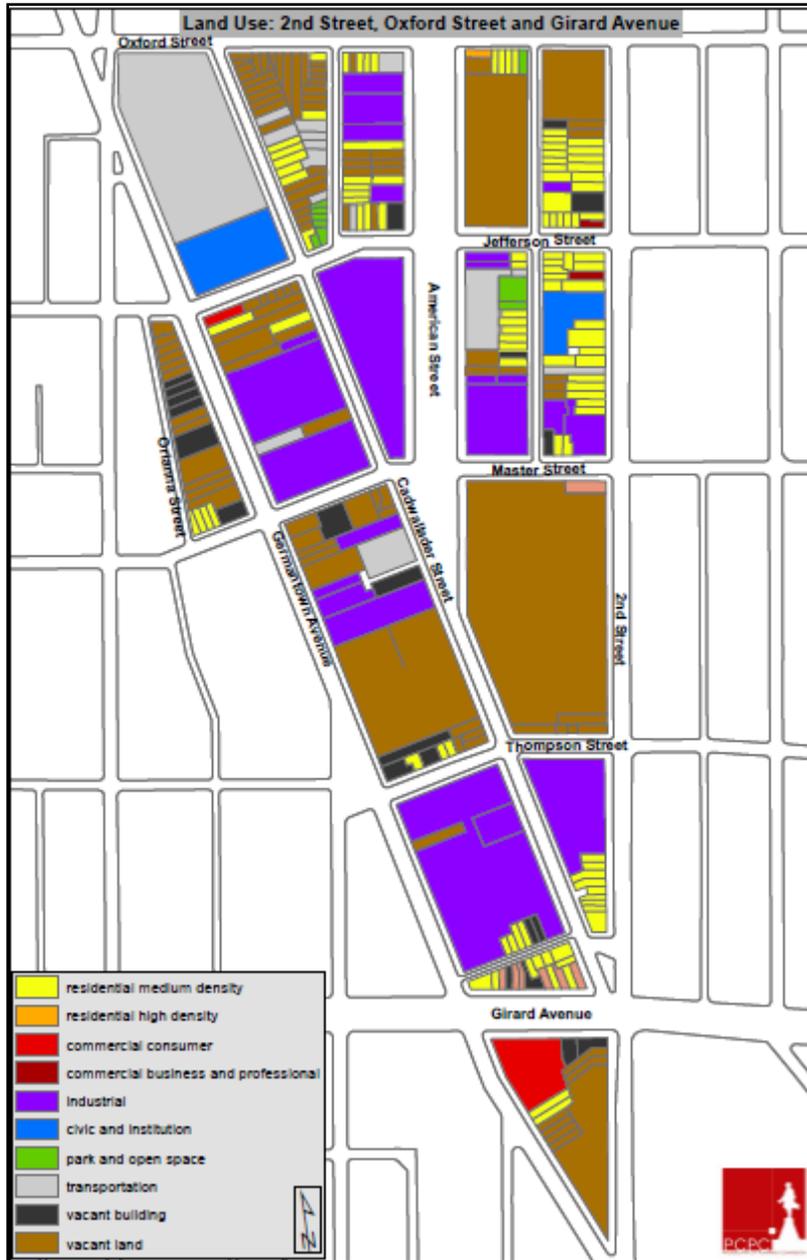
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INTRODUCTION

This report presents an evaluation of blight in sections of Lower North Philadelphia generally bounded by: 2nd Street (east), Oxford Street (north) and Germantown Avenue (west), including the block bounded



by Germantown Avenue, Orianna and Master streets. This blight recertification will facilitate the assembly of sites for mixed use and residential related development south of Girard Avenue, and will encourage development of other opportunity sites in South Kensington.

This area was initially certified in 1968 as part of the North Philadelphia Redevelopment Area. The original certification is superseded by this blight recertification within the boundaries mentioned above.

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 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**



This fence surrounds a vacant property at Cadwallader and Oxford streets. The barbed wire is sagging, the fence is falling, and trash has collected along the back edge of the sidewalk. This is unsanitary and unsafe.

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:



These houses on the 200 block of W. Stiles Street have broken and boarded windows and doors, holes in the back wall, and graffiti. Loose bricks have fallen off of the front wall of one property and lie on the sidewalk next to the stoop.

Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions

Of 294 parcels, 104 vacant lots and 22 vacant buildings exist. This does not include lots that are vacant according to City data, but are being used as gardens or parking pads, so the number of vacant lots could be higher. Vacant properties provide clear evidence of unsafe and inadequate conditions.

Staff identified these conditions while conducting a field survey in April through June 2011. Data from the Philadelphia Water Department, the Office of Property Assessment, and the University of



This fence (left photo) surrounds a vacant property on American between Oxford and Jefferson streets. The fence is leaning precariously into the right of way. Further north, this unsecured property (right photo) has attracted trash and graffiti. This is clear evidence of an unsafe and unsanitary condition. A side wall from the previous building barely stands next to an adjacent lot.

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

In all, 43 percent of properties in the study area are vacant, totaling more than 400,000 gross square feet of land area. Vacant properties represent unsafe, unsanitary conditions because they increase the potential for vandalism and other crime. Some of the vacant buildings are clearly a public safety hazard, allowing unsecured entry. Many are missing windows, have holes in their walls, are scarred by graffiti and accompanied by trash, showing evidence of illegal trespass and neglect. The map on page 3 shows vacant buildings in black and vacant lots in brown.

A new way to track unsafe conditions is the city's 311 non-emergency response system. Since July 2009, the city has recorded 23 requests for graffiti removal, 56 for vacant lot cleaning, and 14 for issues related to vacant buildings and vacant lots in the neighborhoods surrounding this blight recertification area.

Economically and socially undesirable land use

The high 43 percent vacancy rate is evidence of 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, which leads to fewer essential goods and services for the residents who are left. Vacant buildings and lots attract drug dealers, prostitutes, arsonists and vandals, further driving residents away. City government also collects fewer taxes.

Tax delinquency is an indicator of economically and socially undesirable land use. 2011 data shows that 26 properties (nine percent) were more than two years tax delinquent. This deprives city government of revenue to provide basic services, creating a further incentive for residents to leave.



This vacant lot on the northeast corner of American and Thompson streets encompasses a whole city block. This former brownfield has been remediated, although redevelopment is still many years away. The combination of this, and vacant parcels on the northwest and southwest corners of the intersection, is an example of an economically undesirable land use.



The entire 1400 block of Germantown Avenue (west side) is vacant. Empty buildings are interspersed with grass lots. Graffiti mars several buildings and structures.

This is clear evidence of an economically undesirable land use.



This open cellar is all that remains of a house at 245 Jefferson Street. According to the city's Licenses and Inspections database, the house was demolished in 2008, coinciding with the zoning notice pictured. No project is currently proposed. This open cellar with no pending project is socially and economically undesirable. It also demonstrates unsafe and inadequate conditions.

CONCLUSION

In the portions of the North Philadelphia Redevelopment Area generally bounded by 2nd Street, Oxford Street and Germantown 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 generally bounded by 2nd Street, Oxford Street and Germantown 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 16th day of August 2011, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission hereby finds, based upon its staff report dated August 16, 2011 that the area generally bounded by 2nd Street, Oxford Street and Germantown 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.