BLIGHT CERTIFICATION REPORT
for the area generally bounded by
Frankford Avenue, Adams Avenue,
Orthodox Street, Castor Avenue, and Hunting Park Avenue

PHILADELPHIA CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

November 19, 2002
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INTRODUCTION: The study area
This report examines facts regarding blighted conditions which exist alongside the Frankford Creek in Northeast Philadelphia. Frankford Creek is part of, and physically divides, two Philadelphia communities: Juniata Park (to the west) and Frankford (to the east).

The study area comprises approximately 78 acres. The study area contains census tracts 189, 190, and 293 and includes the following street boundaries: Frankford Avenue, Adams Avenue, Orthodox Street, Castor Avenue, Cayuga, "O" Street, and Hunting Park Avenue (reconnecting at Frankford Avenue).

It is important to note that although the creek serves as a boundary line between the two neighborhoods, the creek does not create a barrier between the cooperative spirits between the two communities. In fact, these communities share similar strengths, as well as challenges.

BLIGHT CERTIFICATION
The blight certification reviews existing conditions in relation to seven criteria used to determine whether blight exists in an area. The criteria are set forth in Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law, which stipulates that only one of these criteria must be met to determine blight within an area.

Moreover, the law states that blighted conditions need not be evident throughout the area under study. The fact that individual properties are free from blight does not make the finding of blight arbitrary, according to the law, because comprehensive planning requires that areas be considered in their entirety, and not in their unseverable parts.

This report cites specific examples of the conditions listed in four of the criteria and establishes that "blight" clearly exists in the study 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 or socially undesirable land use

SITE ANALYSIS
The following section describes the characteristics of blight evident in the study area.

1. UNSAFE, UNSANITARY, INADEQUATE OR OVERCROWDED CONDITIONS
Evidence of Unsafe, Unsanitary, and Inadequate conditions is presented in the following categories:

- The existence of 83 vacant properties, or approximately 23 acres (21%) of vacant property within the study area (see map on page 9). Most of the vacant properties are neglected, unmanaged, and overgrown.
- Environmental contamination, illegal dumping into and poorly maintained public right of ways alongside Frankford Creek.

Overgrown and Neglected Spaces
Overgrown and neglected spaces are unsafe, unsanitary, and inadequate for a number of reasons. First, these spaces discourage any sense of community, largely because they are unattractive and unused. Unused spaces largely go unpoliced, thereby creating a threat to personal safety.

Additionally, these uncontrolled areas create an unsanitary environment, by attracting wild or stray animals, pests, and vermin.

With this in mind, neglected space can pose a real threat and danger to the health, safety, and welfare, of the population at large.

Vacant and neglected properties exist at several locations within the study area. For instance, the 1100 block of Adams Avenue (see photo above) contains approximately 9 acres, which are fenced off, overgrown and undeveloped. This large vacant piece of land is not being maintained and abuts 2 local shopping centers.

Additionally, large spaces of privately owned land behind the address of 332 Frogmoor and the lot behind 4100 Kensington Avenue contain approximately 3 acres of outside storage for automobile salvage.

Situated around the salvaged cars are high, overgrown weeds, which provide a safe harbor for unwanted insects, ticks, fleas, and other unwanted pests. Additionally, this site is strewn with trash and litter.
Environmental Contamination and Unsafe Access to Public Creek

Most of the properties that abut the creek are privately owned, so there is little or no public access to the creek. This creates a problem for the health, safety, and welfare of citizens who often try to access the creek for enjoyment of the waterside amenity.

After ongoing field surveys, PCPC has found strong evidence to support the fact that the public is trampling through overgrown weeds, bushes, and dangerous debris to access the creek. The ways in which people are accessing the creek are extremely hazardous. Evidence to support these findings is illustrated in the following photo, which was taken from the bridge over the creek near the 1400 Block of Kensington Avenue.

Debris in the Frankford Creek

Pedestrian trying to access the creek amidst hazardous debris

2. INADEQUATE PLANNING

Evidence of inadequate planning is covered below under "Faulty Street and Lot Layout."

3. FAULTY STREET AND LOT LAYOUT

Evidence of Faulty Street Layout is presented in the two following categories.

- The extremely narrow width of several streets in the area
- The existence of several "dead end" streets, which impede the area's ability to achieve its maximum development potential.

Street Width

As illustrated in the photos and map below, Deal Street (30 feet wide) and Romain Street (35 feet wide) do not meet today's city code for legal street width. Section 14-2104 (5) of the Philadelphia Code requires new streets to meet the following minimum widths (including sidewalks and cartway):

a. 64 ft. for a primary residential street  
b. 54 ft. for a secondary residential street  
c. 50 ft. for a tertiary street  
d. 36 ft. for a marginal access street

While code allows for even narrower streets to be accepted onto the City Plan, code will not allow for streets that are less than 30 feet wide. Section 11-407 of the Philadelphia Code states that a street which does not conform to Sec. 14-2104 (5) may be accepted and placed on the City Plan if it was physically or legally opened or built.
tion of modern street standards and now pose a problem for large, modern-day vehicles. Therefore, in their current state, the streets are a blighting influence to the neighborhood. As is illustrated in photographs below, these streets do not provide room for loading, parking or pulling off to the shoulder. Also, there is no provision for a turnaround at the stub-end of these streets.

Dead End Streets
Dead end streets hamper traffic movement and are prohibited for new streets under section 14-2104(3) of the Philadelphia Code. In the study area, Deal Street, Cayuga, Bristol, Leiper and Worrell Street (between Kensington and Frankford Avenues) are all dead end streets.

Romain Street was built in 1890, and is 35 feet wide, so although it is a narrow street, legally it is eligible to be placed on the city plan. However, Deal Street is only 30 feet wide and the section just south of Romain was constructed after 1906.

Most importantly, the narrowness of Deal Street and Romain Street detracts from the residential area's full development potential. If these streets were introduced today, they would not be accepted onto the City Plan because of their narrow widths. These narrow streets were built before the adoption of modern street standards and now pose a problem for large, modern-day vehicles. Therefore, in their current state, the streets are a blighting influence to the neighborhood. As is illustrated in photographs below, these streets do not provide room for loading, parking or pulling off to the shoulder. Also, there is no provision for a turnaround at the stub-end of these streets.

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These street conditions reduce the service that can be provided to buildings in the area, making trash removal, emergency vehicle access, security and normal circulation impractical.

4. ECONOMICALLY OR SocialLY UNDESIRABLE LAND USE
Evidence of economically or socially undesirable land use is presented in the following categories:

- The presence 83 vacant properties (see map on page 9).
- Underutilization of land (outdoor storage)
- Incompatible or undesirable land use
- Low housing values
- Tax delinquency
Vacant Properties
There are 83 vacant properties in the study area. These vacant properties are socially undesirable for a number of reasons: they downgrade the overall physical environment of the neighborhood, they reduce the area's vitality, and they increase the potential for vandalism, arson, and other crime. The increased threat of arson is a hazard and expense, which affects both vacant buildings and adjoining occupied structures in the neighborhood. Furthermore, many of the vacant buildings in this area are structurally deteriorated and therefore pose a danger to children, passersby, and people who might be trespassing on the property.

Additionally, the abundant amount of vacant and/or underutilized land frequently mixes with, or exists adjacent to, residential homes. This type of inadequate planning only decreases property values, and discourages future investment, as illustrated by the continuing deterioration of homes and vacant structures.

In the study area, there is substantial evidence of economically and socially undesirable land use in this area. This criterion is primarily met within the study area by virtue of the 23 acres of vacant land, which exists within a 78 acre catchment.

Vacant land, resulting from previous demolitions, also appears throughout the residential portion of Deal Street. This land is currently being maintained as recreational space by adjoining residential neighbors. Some of these lots are being maintained informally through volunteer action but without proper ownership because the properties have been abandoned by the owner of record.

Obsolete Industrial Facilities
The current physical state of the area has been shaped by the creek's history. The development of the creek dates back to the industrialization of Philadelphia. During the time of the mid 1800's, several textile mills, dye factories, chemical works, machine shops, and iron foundries flanked the banks of the creek. As demand for labor grew, the area began to grow in population and attract immigrant workers from other countries.

Industrial manufacturing co-existed with residential development in a time when zoning and development controls did not exist. As a result, many
On the edge of two residential areas, on the 4100 Block of Kensington Avenue, abutting the creek, car lots and auto repair facilities often obstruct pedestrian thoroughfares by parking cars right on top of the sidewalks. Instances such as this contribute to a poor “quality of life” and represent socially undesirable land use.

Litter and trash, from some of these neighboring businesses, also infringe upon and blight the residential neighborhood at the back and sides of Cayuga and Potter Street. Another area where this takes place is between the creek’s right of way and the backyard drives of homes between Bristol and Kensington Avenue.

Both neighborhoods are economically stigmatized by these particular types of uses. Because there is little diversity in the types of businesses that exist in this area, the agglomeration of these auto-related businesses leave little opportunity for other types of development including mixed use, residential, or commercial.

Additionally, the presence of these auto-related businesses discourages home ownership and detract away from the quality of life in these residential areas. Consequently, incompatible uses adjacent to residential areas deter residential investment and inhibit local economic stimulus. This is reflected in weak residential property values, according the U.S. Census.

One of the census tracts (tract 293) has values that are only half of the city median. Additionally, housing values are increasing at a rate that is significantly less than the citywide trend.
erodes the local economy and results in reduced sales tax revenue to government. Tax delinquency and relatively low housing values provide additional evidence of economically undesirable land use. When real estate tax is not paid, privately owned properties are benefiting from municipal services without contributing to the revenue base that pays for those services.

Within the blight certification study area, 44 properties (over 11%) have been found to be tax delinquent for two or more years. Therefore, it is apparent that the area currently provides a low economic return to the city.

**Frankford (East of the Creek, CT 293)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Census 1990</th>
<th>Census 2000</th>
<th>% Change</th>
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<td></td>
<td>$25,600</td>
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**Juniata Park (West of the Creek, CT 190)**

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**Philadelphia (Citywide)**

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<td>$47,400</td>
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**Tax Delinquencies**

Vacant structures and lots are economically undesirable inasmuch as citywide experience has demonstrated that vacant properties have an increased likelihood of being long-term tax-delinquent. Residential property abandonment deprives the neighborhood, the city, and the region of revenue and purchasing power, which

**CONCLUSION**

The existing conditions in the area generally bounded by Frankford Avenue, Adams Avenue, Orthodox Street, Castor Avenue, and Hunting Park Avenue exhibit four of the criteria necessary to produce a finding of blight under the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law. Those criteria are:

1. Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions
2. Inadequate planning
3. Faulty Street and Lot layout
4. Economically or socially undesirable land use

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that these four criteria for establishing the presence of blight are present and the area is eligible for certification as blighted.
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 the 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 Frankford Avenue, Adams Avenue, Orthodox Street, Castor Avenue, and Hunting Park Avenue as exhibiting characteristics of blight under terms of the said Act, and

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

NOW THEREFORE, on this 19th day of November 2002, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission hereby finds, based upon its staff report dated November 19, 2002, that the area generally bounded by Frankford Avenue, Adams Avenue, Orthodox Street, Castor Avenue, and Hunting Park Avenue exhibits the following characteristics of blight as established by Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law:

1. Unsafe, Unsanitary, Inadequate or Overcrowded Conditions
2. Inadequate planning
3. Faulty street and lot layout
4. Economically or socially undesirable land use

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