
Cottman Riverview Blight Certification

Tacony Extension

PCPC

Philadelphia City Planning Commission

September 2005

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents an evaluation of blight for a portion of the North Delaware Riverfront located to the north of Unruh Avenue and south of Cottman Avenue. The specific boundaries are: (1) Delaware River, (2) Cottman Avenue, (3) Milnor Street, (4) New State Road, and (5) Unruh Avenue. The boundaries are shown on the map on page 2.

Within the aforementioned boundaries, riverfront properties may have ownership rights or development rights extending into the Delaware River. Those property extensions are included in this certification.

This blight certification is an extension of a previous certification: the Cottman Avenue Riverview Blight Certification, approved by the Planning Commission in September 2004.

This blight certification study reviews existing conditions in the study area in relation to seven criteria used to determine whether blight exists in an area. The criteria are set forth in Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law (P.L. 991, May 24, 1945 as amended), which stipulates that only one of the criteria must be met in order for an area to be deemed blighted. The law also 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.

CRITERIA

Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law has established the following criteria for evaluating blight in a particular area:

- Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions
- Inadequate planning
- Excessive land coverage
- Lack of proper light, air and open space
- Faulty Street and lot layout
- Defective design and arrangement of buildings
- Economically or socially undesirable land use

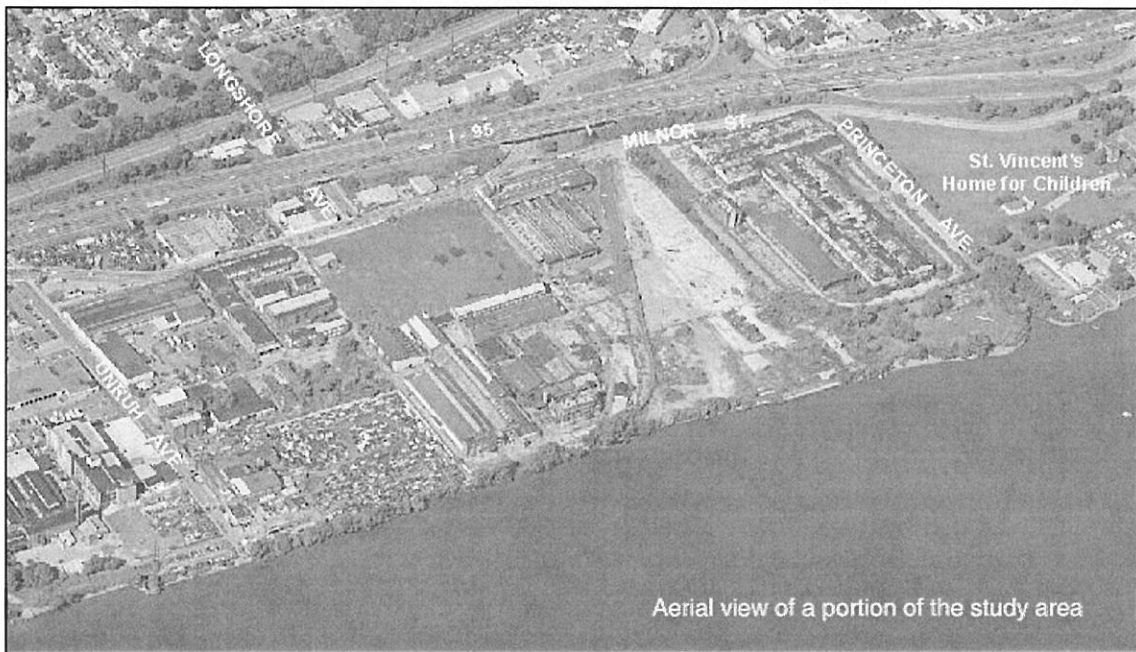
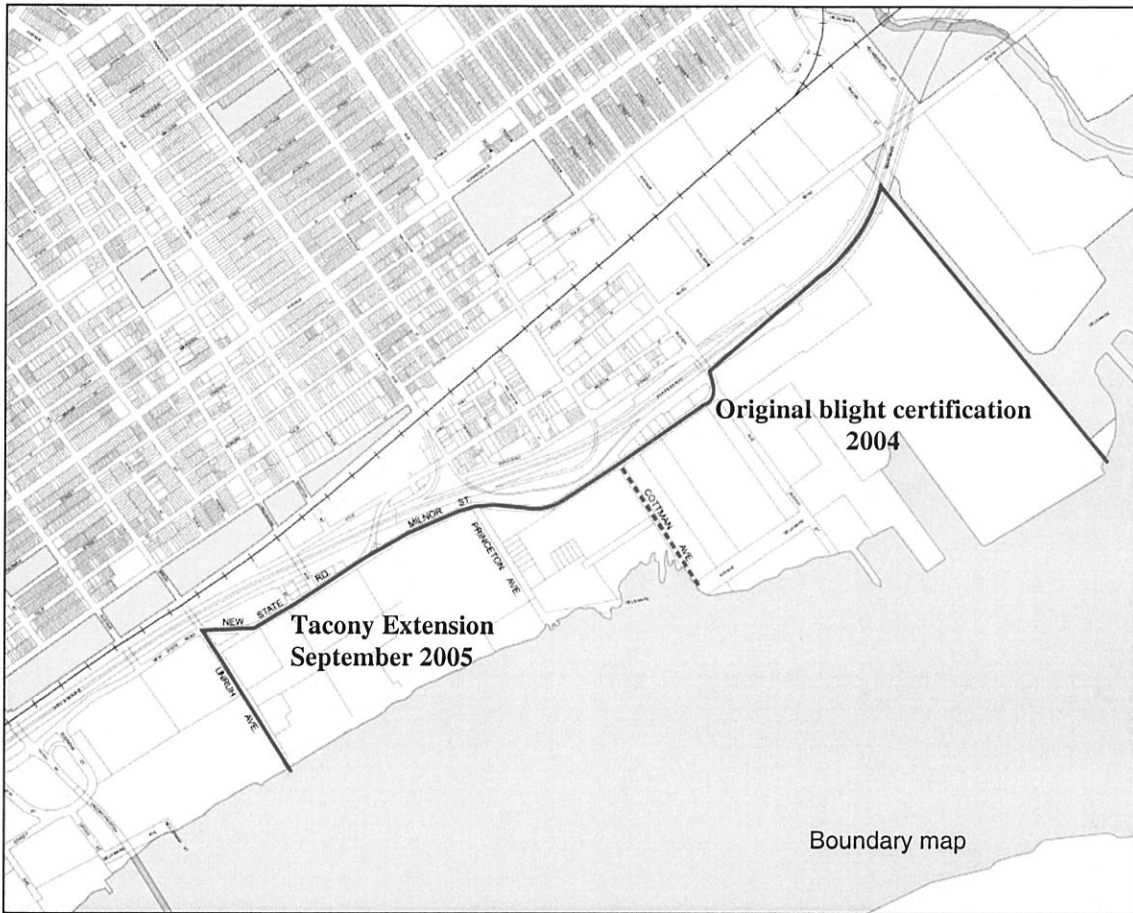
ANALYSIS

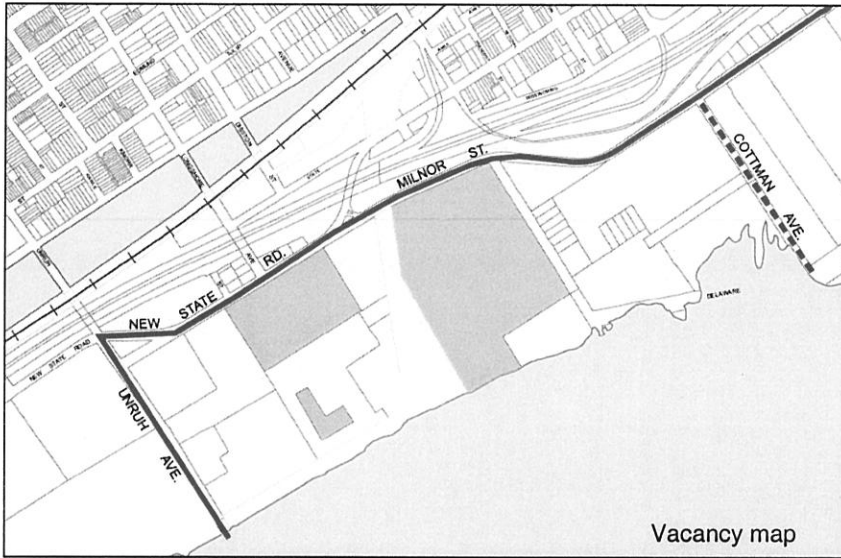
The following section describes evidence of blight in the area bounded by the Delaware River, Cottman Avenue, Milnor Street, New State Road and Unruh Avenue.

Unsafe, Unsanitary, Inadequate or Overcrowded Conditions

Evidence of this criterion is illustrated through the following:

- 1) Significant amounts of vacant property
- 2) The presence of environmentally contaminated sites

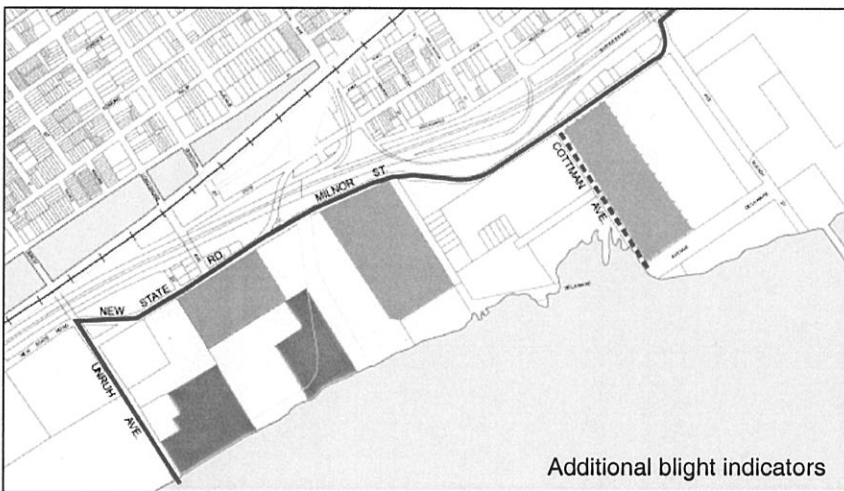




3) Deteriorated buildings exposed to the elements, short dumping, outdoor storage of rubber and metal industrial related debris.

Vacancy

There is a substantial amount of vacancy in the 111-acre subject area. Vacant property comprises a total of 31 acres, or 28 percent of the study area. The vacant properties are vacant lots. There are several deteriorated buildings used for storage, but these buildings were not classified as vacant. The vacant land is evidence of unsafe and inadequate conditions.





Contaminated Sites

There are two large contaminated sites in the study area, representing unsafe, unsanitary and inadequate conditions.

The first parcel is the former Tacony Warehouse property, located at State Rd. & Princeton Ave. The warehouse was used by the

LEGEND: Blight indicators

-  CONTAMINATED SITES
-  AUTO JUNK YARDS

US Army for storage. The soil on the site is contaminated and the property is approved by the PA Dept. of Environmental Protection for remedial action as per a PADEP Record of Decision. The large T-shaped warehouse is shown on the aerial photo on page 2, below Princeton Ave. It was demolished after the photo was taken in 2003. The site is now a vacant lot.

The former Metal Bank Scrap Yard, located on the 6800 block of New State Road has been encapsulated to reduce the potential for further exposure and groundwater impaction. Additional remedial action will be applied prior to any new development.

The property immediately north of Cottman Avenue is contaminated, as well. It was also used by the Metal Bank company. It was listed by the EPA as a Superfund site. This property is located in the original Cottman Riverview Blight Certification area.

Deteriorated buildings

Several large buildings are exposed to the element, lacking heat, water, electric, windows and/or portions of roof. Four large deteriorated buildings are used for storage of abandoned cars. These buildings are not classified as “vacant” but they are shells in a state of disrepair and constitute inadequate conditions.

Short dumping, storage of debris

Trash and debris are strewn along several access areas to the study area including a private driveway (Knorr street extended) accessing the former Henry Disston & Son Tool and Saw Works. In addition, short dumping piles were found at the foot of Unruh Street, Cottman Avenue and Princeton Street. This constitutes an unsafe and unsanitary condition.

Faulty Street and Lot Layout

Evidence of this criterion is illustrated through the following:

- 1) Dead-end streets
- 2) The presence of several parcels of land with minimal or no street frontage.

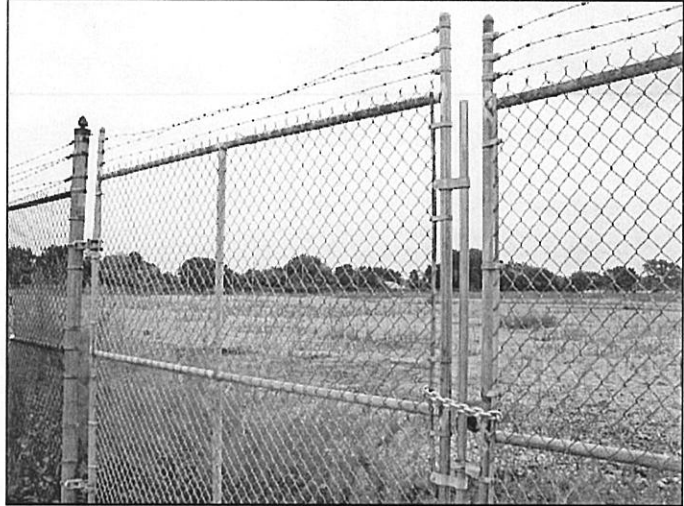
Faulty Street Layout

Many of the streets within the study area (Cottman Avenue, Princeton, and Unruh streets) are stub-end streets. These particular streets are more than 900 feet in length and they provide no space for turnaround. These types of roads are prohibited (per Section 14-2104 (3) of the Philadelphia Code. Philadelphia street code specifies that new non-through streets must have a cul-de-sac and must be less than 500 feet in length. The aforementioned dead-end streets violate both of these Code requirements. Dead-end streets hamper traffic movement and emergency access, making them faulty and a blighting influence on the area.

Faulty Lot Layout

Some of the large industrial properties have little or no street frontage, representing faulty lot layout. An auto storage property located adjacent to the Kensington and

Tacony Railroad right-of-way is set back from State Road with no street frontage. The manufacturing and railroad uses within the study area are relics from the industrial age. Many of the properties were developed with direct access to rail transport, but with minimal highway access. Within the old



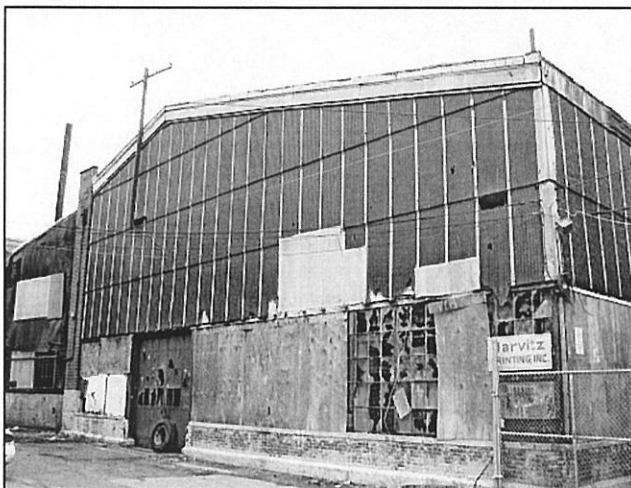
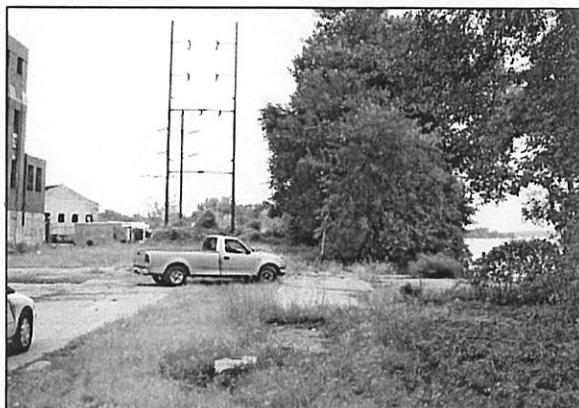
Top: vacant land (site of former Metal Bank scrap yard)
Middle: deteriorated building near the river bank
Bottom: dumping and debris along a driveway to the north of Unruh St.

industrial complexes, networks of narrow paths and alleys were originally designed for use by pushcarts or horse-drawn wagons. This kind of layout predates contemporary site standards and would not be approved under modern regulations. Faulty street and lot layout is clearly evident in the blight certification area.

Economically or Socially Undesirable Land Use

The presence of vacant and underused land is evidence of economically and socially undesirable land use. Clearly, the development potential of this area is not being met. Vacant land comprises a total of 31 acres or 28% of the total land area. In addition, 2 large parcels of land (over 11 acres) are severely underutilized (used for auto storage and automobile junk yards).

Vacant properties are economically undesirable inasmuch as citywide experience has demonstrated that they have an increased likelihood of being long-term tax-delinquent. Vacant commercial and industrial properties deprive the city of jobs; and the vacancy reduces municipal revenue from business, real estate and wage taxes. Vacant residential properties (or potential residential properties) deprive the city of purchasing power and revenue from sales and real estate taxes. Vacant properties are socially undesirable for a number of reasons: they downgrade the overall physical environment, they reduce the



Top: Unruh Street dead-end
Bottom: deteriorated building used for auto storage

Top: vacant land and abandoned railroad near the river
Bottom: deteriorated auto storage building

area's vitality and they increase the potential for vandalism, arson, and other crime. The increased threat of arson is a hazard that affects both vacant buildings and adjoining, occupied structures in the area.

CONCLUSION

The existing conditions in the area bounded by the Delaware River, Cottman Avenue, Milnor Street, New State Road and Unruh Street exhibit three 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) Faulty street and lot layout
- 3) Economically or socially undesirable land use

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that these three criteria for establishing the presence of blight are present. A finding of blight is warranted.

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 "Cottman Riverview Blight Certification / Tacony Extension" area bounded by the Delaware River, Cottman Avenue, Milnor Street, New State Road, and Unruh Street exhibits characteristics of blight under terms of said Act, and

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

NOW THEREFORE, on this day of September 21, 2005, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission hereby finds, based upon its staff report dated September, 2005 that the area bounded by the Delaware River, Cottman Avenue, Milnor Street, New State Road and Unruh Street exhibits the following characteristics of blight as established by Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law:

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

And hereby certifies the above described area as blighted under the terms and provisions of the said Act. The newly-certified area will be added to the previously-approved blight certification boundary for the Cottman Avenue Riverview Area.