

Blight Certification for the Area Bounded Generally by:
Lehigh Avenue, Emerald Street, Clearfield Street, Ann Street,
Memphis Street and Aramingo Avenue

Philadelphia City Planning Commission
November 2003

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

John F. Street, *Mayor*

Philadelphia City Planning Commission



Gary Hack, *Chairman*
Jeffrey S. Batoff, *Vice Chair*
Lynette M. Brown-Sow
James J. Cuorato
Janice Davis
Patrick Eiding
Philip R. Goldsmith
Gloria Levin
Marcia Moore Makadon

Maxine Griffith, AICP, *Executive Director*
Richard L. Lombardo, *Deputy Executive Director*

Community Planning Division

Victoria Mason-Ailey, AICP, *Division Director*
Richard Redding, *Deputy Division Director*

Report by:
David Ortiz, *Community Planner*

Contributions by:
Bryan C. Lightner, *GIS Specialist*

Blight Certification for the area bounded generally by Lehigh Avenue, Emerald Street, Clearfield Street, Ann Street, Memphis Street and Aramingo Avenue

November 2003

INTRODUCTION

This report presents an evaluation of blight in a section of Kensington. The blight certification boundaries are shown on the map on page two: Lehigh Avenue on the south, Emerald Street on the west, Clearfield Street, Elkhart Street, Somerset Street and Ann Street on the north, Frankford Avenue, Amber Street, Memphis Street and Aramingo Avenue on the east.

The southeastern part of the study area was previously certified as blighted in 1969 when the Auburn Redevelopment Area was established. This action expands the original boundaries and relies on conditions that may not have been present in 1969. Additionally, this area is partially contained within the East Kensington Redevelopment Area, also certified as blighted in 1969. The certification study 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 make a finding of blight in an area. 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. This report cites specific examples of the conditions listed in three of the criteria. Blight does exist in the area.

CRITERIA

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

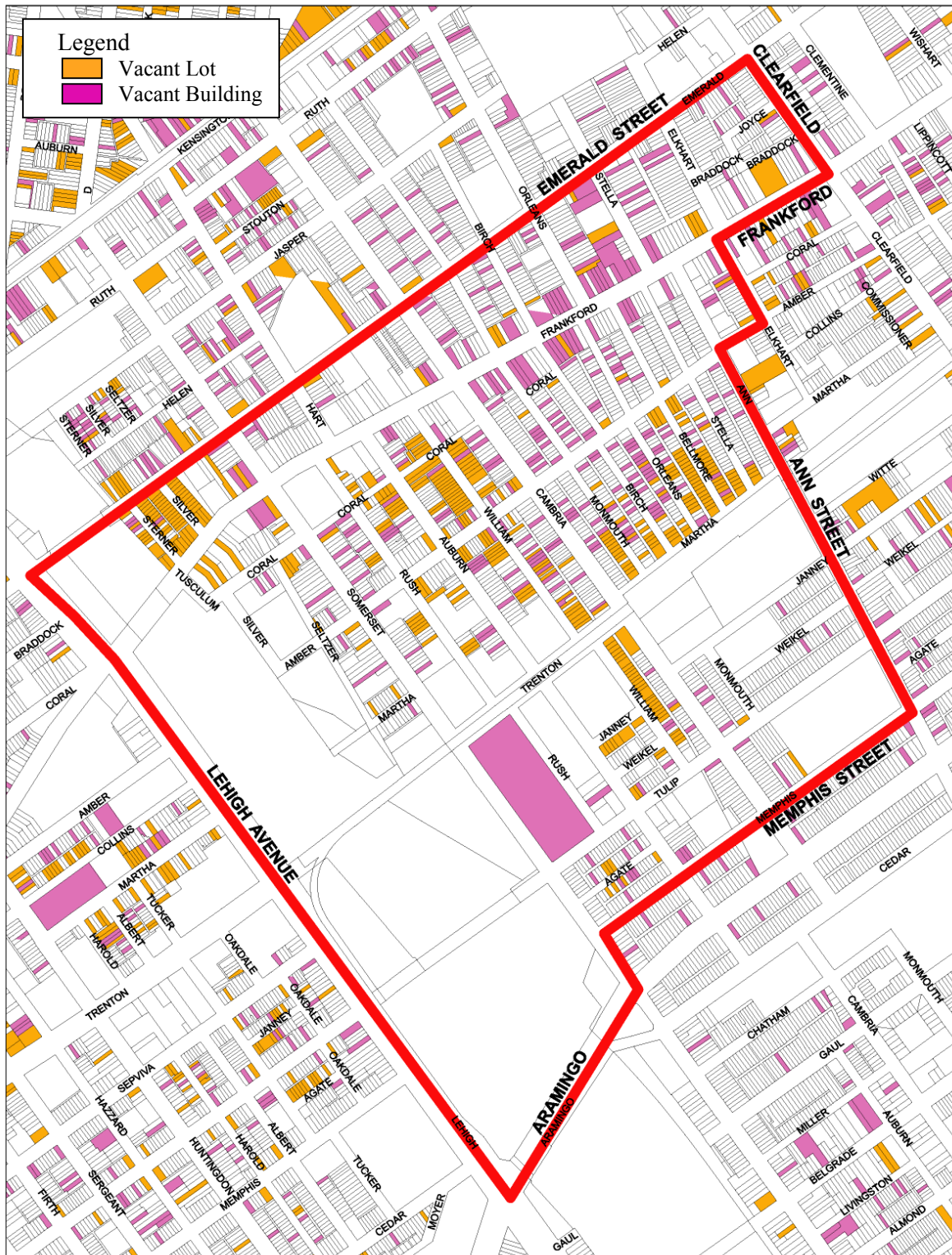
1. Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions
2. Inadequate planning
3. Excessive land coverage
4. Lack of proper light, air and open space
5. Faulty street and lot layout
6. Defective design and arrangement of buildings
7. Economically or socially undesirable land use

ANALYSIS

The following section describes the characteristics of blight evident in the area generally bounded by: Lehigh Avenue, Emerald Street, Clearfield Street, Ann Street, Memphis Street and Aramingo Avenue.



Location map



Vacancy map

1. Unsafe, Unsanitary, Inadequate or Overcrowded Conditions

Key evidence includes the following:

- the presence of 286 vacant structures
- the existence of 355 vacant lots
- the presence of 858 properties with code violations

There are many vacant properties in this area, providing clear evidence of blight. The most recent Licenses & Inspections vacancy survey indicates that there are 641 vacant buildings and lots in the area, representing an overall vacancy rate of 30%. This includes 286 vacant buildings and 355 vacant lots surveyed in 2001 by L & I. Many of the vacant lots are unmaintained and strewn with trash, as observed by Planning Commission staff in the field and displayed in the accompanying pictures; indicating the presence of unsafe, unsanitary and inadequate conditions in the area.



2000 block E. Stella Street

Census information confirms that there is a large amount of vacancy in the study area. There are eight census block groups in the study area, containing 1,736 housing units, of which 330 are vacant (2000 Census). Vacant housing accounts for over 19% of the housing units in the area, significantly higher than the comparable city rate of 11%.

Code violations are indicative of unsafe and inadequate conditions. In the census block groups located within the study area boundary (one block group is partially in the area), there are 858 properties in violation of City Code as determined by the Department of Licenses and Inspections in April 2003. Code violations exist for 39% of the properties in those tracts, almost twice the City's rate of 20% (data sources: University of Pennsylvania's Neighborhood Information System, and L & I).

2. Faulty Street and Lot Layout

Faulty lot layout is evident in the study area. The residential lots on the 2000 blocks of Monmouth, Birch and Orleans and the 2800 blocks of Tulip, Agate and Memphis measure approximately 620 square feet, less than half of the minimum lot size in the City Code (1,440 sq. ft.).

The 2000 blocks of Stella, Bellmore and Orleans Streets, approximately 30 feet in width, demonstrate faulty street layout. These streets are too narrow in relation to the current City Code (Section 14-2104[5]) that contains the following standards:

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



2800 block N. Coral Street

3. Economically or Socially Undesirable Land Use

There is substantial evidence of economically and socially undesirable land use. This criterion is primarily met within the study area by virtue of the 330 vacant housing units (2000 Census) and 858 properties with code violations. Tax delinquency provides additional evidence of economically undesirable use.

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 purchasing power, which erodes the local economy and results in reduced tax revenue to government.

Vacant structures and lots and properties with code violations 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, which affects both vacant buildings and adjoining, occupied structures in the neighborhood. Furthermore, the vacant buildings in this area may be structurally deteriorated and therefore pose a danger to children, passersby and people who might be trespassing on the property.

Tax delinquency represents 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 area, approximately 348 properties are long-term tax-delinquent. These tax delinquent properties appear in the L & I database as being included in a 1996 lien sale; and the lien sale data is reported by the University of Pennsylvania's Neighborhood Information System. This indicator gives a picture of tax delinquency that is understated, in the opinion of Planning Commission staff. Staff experience with tax delinquency trends strongly suggests that actual tax delinquency is far greater than 348 properties; but regardless, the significant level of tax delinquency shows that the area currently provides a low economic return to the City.

CONCLUSION

In the area generally bounded by Lehigh Avenue, Emerald Street, Clearfield Street, Ann Street, Memphis Street and Aramingo Avenue, existing conditions are consistent with three (3) of the criteria necessary to produce a finding of blight under Pennsylvania 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 (3) criteria for establishing the presence of blight are satisfied and the area is eligible for certification.

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 Commission staff has presented a report concluding that the area bounded generally by Lehigh Avenue, Emerald Street, Clearfield Street, Ann Street, Memphis Street and Aramingo 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 eighteenth day of November 2003, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission hereby finds, based upon its staff report dated November 2003 that the area bounded by Lehigh Avenue, Emerald Street, Clearfield Street, Frankford Avenue, Elkhart Street, Amber Street, Ann Street, Memphis Street, Somerset Street and Aramingo Avenue 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.