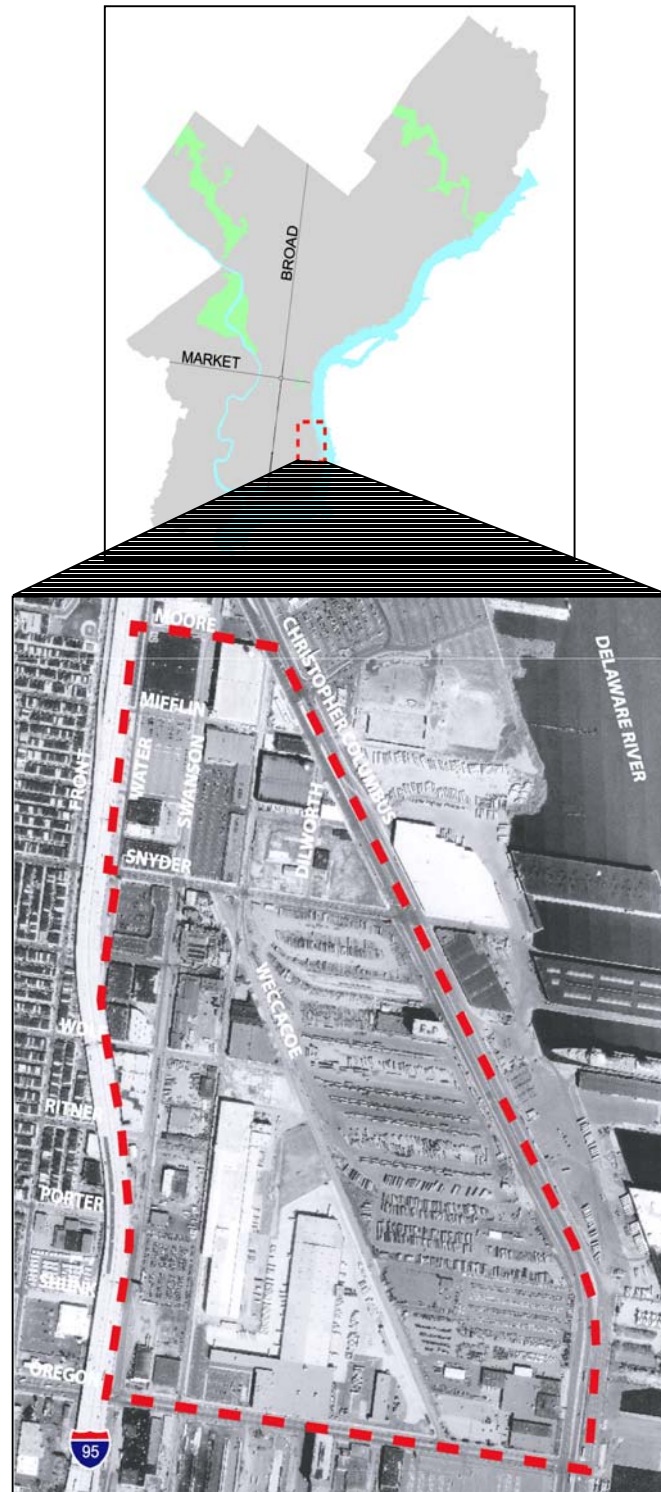


Blight Certification for the Area Bounded by Christopher Columbus Boulevard, Oregon Avenue, I-95 and Moore Street

Philadelphia City Planning Commission
April 2003



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INTRODUCTION

This report represents an evaluation of blight in a section of the South Delaware riverfront. The blight certification boundaries are shown on the cover of this report: Christopher Columbus Boulevard on the east, Oregon Avenue on the south, Interstate 95 on the west, and Moore Street on the north.

The study area contains many industrial establishments, vacant industrial properties and parking lots. The older industrial uses are gradually being replaced with retail uses. A portion of the area near Moore and Swanson Streets, along with additional properties immediately to the north and east, were recently redeveloped for retail purposes. The remainder of the study area is the focus of significant development pressure. A major retail shopping center is proposed to the south of Snyder Avenue and additional commercial development is expected to occur in the area. For some of these developments, private developers may need City assistance to complete land assembly and acquisition. Blight certification is a first step toward enabling the City to provide such assistance.

The blight 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.



Blighted conditions:
Above: vacant lot and structure near the intersection of Dilworth Street and Snyder Avenue. Below: abandoned railroad and overgrown vegetation located to the rear of a Weccacoe Street property.

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

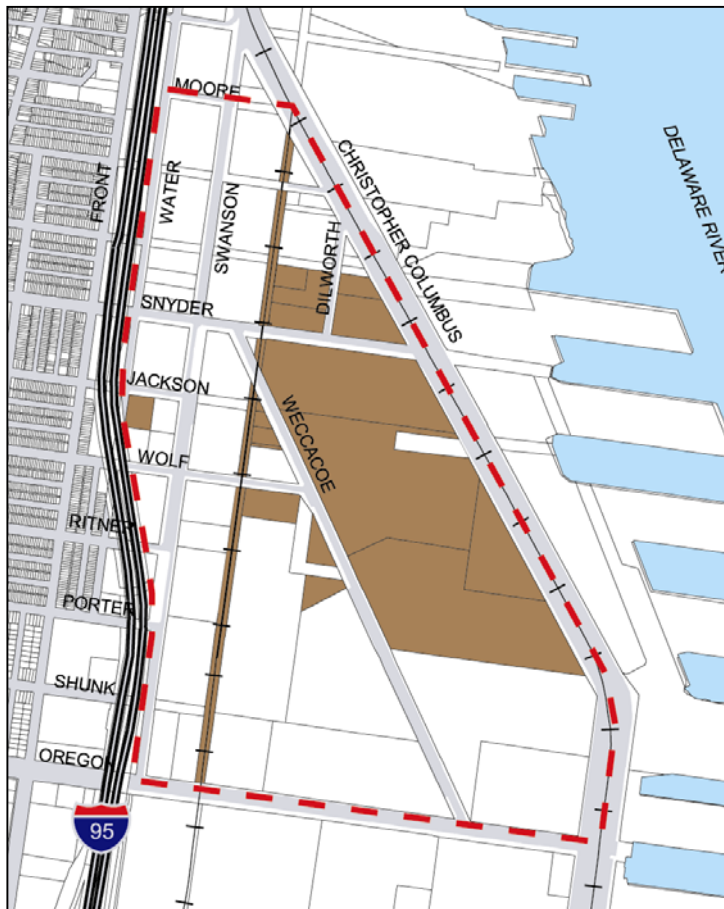
ANALYSIS

The following section describes the characteristics of blight evident in the area bounded by Christopher Columbus Boulevard, Oregon Avenue, I-95 and Moore Street.

1. Unsafe, Unsanitary, Inadequate or Overcrowded Conditions

Evidence of this criterion is presented in the following categories:

- the presence of a significant number of vacant properties
- the existence of numerous vacant, trash-strewn lots



Vacant Properties: The area contains 17 vacant properties and a vacant railroad right-of-way. The vacant parcels comprise 35% of the total parcel area. The vacant buildings that exist on these properties present a safety hazard. The vacant properties therefore demonstrate unsafe and inadequate conditions (see the vacancy map to the left for location of the properties).

Vacant, Trash-Strewn Lots: As indicated by the accompanying photos, most of the vacant properties contain vacant land that is poorly maintained, littered with trash and debris. Shrubs and weeds are overgrown and growing wild. This creates unsanitary, unsafe and inadequate conditions.

2. Faulty Street Layout

Originally, the streets in this industrial area were intended for industrial traffic and port-related railroads. The streets were not

designed for use by more typical vehicular traffic including local residents, shoppers and tourists. However as the area has gradually changed into a mixed-use zone serving the needs of the general population, some of the roadway configurations have become inadequate and unsafe.

As shown in the accompanying photos, there is an active freight railbed sharing the road with vehicles at the intersection of Swanson Street and Snyder Avenue. There is no curbing, median barrier or crossing signal to organize the movement of vehicles and freight trains. This intersection, serving the adjacent Snyder Plaza shopping center and the nearby discount department store, has significant vehicular traffic volume. Traffic will increase substantially when new investment and development takes place in the area. Other sections of Swanson Street have lane shifts and lane divisions that are confusing and dangerous. When railroads share the road with vehicles, especially without adequate safety measures, an unsafe condition is the result, and this is evidence of faulty street layout.

Other sections of Swanson Street have unsafe arrangements involving parking lots and loading areas bleeding into the roadway, as indicated in the accompanying photo (1800 block of Swanson Street). This loading dock was not designed with sufficient setback from the street. This is an example of faulty street and lot layout in the study area.

3. Economically or Socially Undesirable Land Use

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 17 vacant properties that were counted during recent field surveys. Tax delinquency provides additional evidence of economically undesirable land use.



Swanson Street -- faulty street layout:
Above: railroad and vehicles sharing the right-of-way.
Below: confusing and dangerous traffic pattern adjacent to new retail centers located to either side of the roadway.



Faulty street land lot layout in the 1800 block of Swanson Street: loading dock posing a danger to vehicular traffic

Vacant structures and lots are economically undesirable inasmuch as city-wide experience has demonstrated that vacant properties have an increased likelihood of being long-term tax-delinquent. Commercial and industrial property abandonment is a significant problem affecting the local area, the city and the region. Jobs are lost and the tax base is negatively affected. This erodes the local economy and results in reduced revenue to government.

Vacant structures and lots 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, vacant buildings in this area 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 this blight certification Area, 10 properties (16% of total properties) 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.

CONCLUSION

In the area bounded by Christopher Columbus Boulevard, Oregon Avenue, I-95 and Moore Street, 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.



Blighted conditions:
Above left: trash-strewn sidewalk at Dilworth & Snyder.
Left: vacant lot at Weccacoe & Wolf.

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's staff has presented a report concluding that the area bounded Christopher Columbus Boulevard, Oregon Avenue, I-95 and Moore Street 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 fifteenth day of April 2003, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission hereby finds, based upon its staff report dated April 2003 that the area bounded by Christopher Columbus Boulevard, Oregon Avenue, I-95 and Moore 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.