

**Blight Recertification for the Area Bounded by  
42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Westminster Avenue, Holly Street, Aspen Street,  
40<sup>th</sup> Street and Haverford Avenue.**

April 2005





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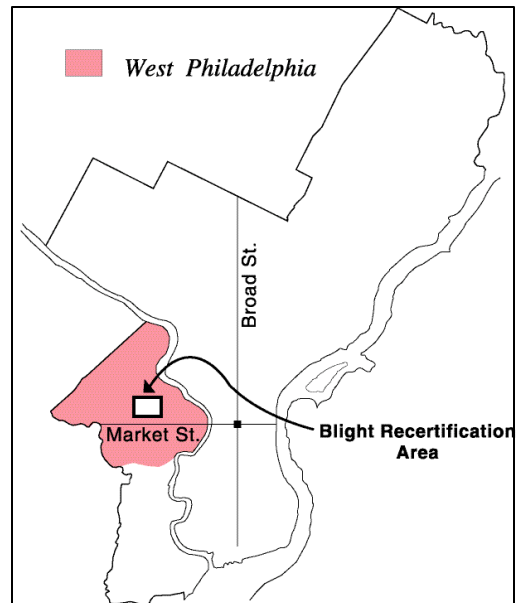
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**INTRODUCTION**

This report presents an evaluation of blight in a portion of the Belmont neighborhood of West Philadelphia. This report expands the blight recertification of November 2002 that addressed a larger area to the west of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. The purpose is to facilitate the redevelopment of public and market rate housing and stimulate revitalization efforts in the broader neighborhood.

The study area comprises approximately 40 acres and covers 21 city blocks. The western boundary of the blight recertification area is 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. The northern boundaries are Westminster Avenue and Aspen Street. The eastern boundaries are Holly Street and 40<sup>th</sup> Street. The southern boundary is Haverford Avenue. This area was originally certified in 1963 (West Philadelphia Redevelopment Area) and again in 1972 (Belmont Redevelopment Area). In addition, a small portion of the recertification area was previously certified as blighted in 1998 (Sarah Allen Redevelopment Area). Within the area bounded by 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Westminster Avenue, Holly Street, Aspen Street, 40<sup>th</sup> Street and Haverford Avenue, this Blight Recertification of April 2005 supersedes prior certifications.

The blight 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.



The concept of comprehensive planning is especially important in this blight recertification. For this study area, a finding of blight can substantially be justified on the basis of “comprehensive planning.” This is because this recertification area joins with other certified areas to the west, north and east. Specifically this blight recertification is contiguous with the 44<sup>th</sup> & Aspen Redevelopment Area and the Sarah Allen Redevelopment Area, creating a large 55-block zone that has been recertified as blighted since 1998; and the Mantua Redevelopment Area borders this area to the east. Despite this convergence, the Planning Commission will proceed to document blight in this newly recertified area based on existing conditions within the boundaries.

This report cites specific examples of conditions listed in four 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 study area.

### 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, unsafe and dangerous properties
- the existence of numerous vacant, trash-strewn lots

*Vacant Properties:* 190 properties are vacant, according to the most recent vacancy survey by the Department of Licenses & Inspections (L&I). The 190 properties include 60 vacant structures and 130 vacant lots. These statistics show that vacancy is a severe problem in the area. The photos



Recertification boundary in red; the blue color signifies Belmont Elementary School.





This 2003 aerial photo shows a large amount of vacant land in the southern portion of the study area. There are 17 vacant lots on this one block of Budd Street.

in this report add to the documentation of vacancy.

*Dangerous and unsafe properties:* The Department of L & I has issued 607 code violation notices for properties located in the Census block groups corresponding with this blight recertification. Housing code violations indicate unsafe, unsanitary and inadequate conditions.

*Vacant, Trash-Strewn Lots:*

Unsafe and unsanitary conditions are documented through the presence of 130 vacant lots, many of which are uncared for and littered with trash or debris. Many lots are overgrown with weeds.

2. Faulty Street and Lot Layout

Faulty street layout is demonstrated by Warren Street (east of 41<sup>st</sup> Street), a dead-end street. Dead end streets are prohibited for new streets under section 14-2104 (3) of the Philadelphia Code.



Vacant land and debris; vicinity of 4000 block Wallace St. This is evidence of unsanitary and unsafe conditions.

The 600 block of Ludwick St. provides additional evidence of faulty street layout because Ludwick is an extremely narrow 20 ft.-wide street. It does not meet modern street standards. Section 14-2104 (5) of the Philadelphia Code requires new streets to meet the following minimum widths:

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

Faulty lot layout also exists in the study area. In two areas, residential house lots are overly small in size:

- 655-59 N. 41<sup>st</sup> St. (east side): 3 homes with lot sizes ranging from 420 to 560 sq. ft.
- 621-27 Preston St. (east side): 4 homes with lot sizes of 672 sq. ft.

This is far smaller than the minimum lot size in the City Code (1,440 sq. ft.).



Vacant housing, 800 block N. Holly Street

In addition, the 600 block of Preston St. (west side) contains several homes with lots that extend from Preston St. to Ludwick St. Correspondingly, the residential properties on the east side of Ludwick St. appear as rear yards. Ludwick St. was designed with homes on one side of the street, and rear yards on the other side of the street. This is evidence of faulty lot layout, faulty street layout and inadequate planning. The homes fronting on Ludwick St. (addresses 626-30) had become vacant and were demolished.

### 3. Inadequate Planning

The area contains residential house lots and a public street that are smaller than City standards. The area of the 600 block of Ludwick St. was designed in a faulty manner. There is substantial evidence of inadequate planning.

### 4. Economically or Socially Undesirable Land Use

There is clear evidence of economically and socially undesirable land use in this area. This criterion is primarily met by virtue of the 190 vacant structures and vacant lots that are documented by the most recent L&I vacancy survey. Another indicator of vacancy is the US Postal Service, which lists 101 properties as vacant in the Census block groups corresponding to this study area.

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 sales tax 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 that affects both vacant buildings and adjoining, occupied structures in the neighborhood.

Housing value comparisons provide further evidence of economically undesirable land use in the area. Examining the value of housing is one way to measure the economic viability of a neighborhood. According to the 2000 Census the median value of owner-occupied housing units in this area is well below the median value for the City as a whole (\$59,700); and according to the Philadelphia Board of Revision of Taxes, the 2002 median sale price for residential properties in this area was far below the City median price of \$55,000. Furthermore, the 1997-2002 rate of increase in median sale prices was generally far lower than the citywide increase of 22%. The figures appear in the table below. The information in the table was compiled by the University of Pennsylvania Neighborhood Information System (NIS) using data from the City, the US Postal Service and the US Census.

Additionally, the median rent for rental housing is below the City median of \$569 in five out of the six Census block groups corresponding with the recertification boundaries (2000 Census). This is indicative of economically undesirable land use.

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. In the Census block groups corresponding with this recertification area, 196 properties are included in a tax delinquency lien sale established by the City. This is a significant amount of tax delinquency in the study area. It is apparent that the area currently provides a low economic return to the City.

<b>Census Block Group</b>	<b>Vacant Postal Service 2005</b>	<b>Median Res. Sale Price BRT 2002</b>	<b>Change in Median Sale Price 1997-02</b>	<b>Code Violations L&amp;I 2005</b>	<b>Lien Sales Delinquent Taxes BRT 2005</b>	<b>Median Value Own-Occ. 2000 Census</b>	<b>Median Rent 2000 Census</b>
106/ 002*	19	\$2,600	- 37.50%	112	29	\$9,999	\$346
106/ 003	7	\$5,700	- 83.24%	60	24	\$41,800	\$475
106/ 004*	22	\$3,750	- 73.21%	131	38	\$15,000	\$315
107/ 004	16	\$6,661	- 45.85%	94	41	\$19,000	\$350
107/ 005*	19	\$20,000	+35.59%	89	23	\$37,200	\$366
107/ 008*	18	\$11,600	- 22.67%	121	41	\$29,700	\$582
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>101</b>	n.a.	n.a.	<b>607</b>	<b>196</b>	n.a.	n.a.

\* Block Groups that are partially within the bight recertification boundary

## CONCLUSION

Existing conditions in the area bounded by 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Westminster Avenue, Holly Street, Aspen Street, 40<sup>th</sup> Street and Haverford Avenue are consistent with four (4) 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. Inadequate Planning
3. Faulty Street and Lot Layout
4. Economically or socially undesirable land use

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that these four (4) criteria for establishing the presence of blight are satisfied and 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, on August 20, 1963, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission certified the area bounded on the north by Girard Avenue, Parkside Avenue, Columbia Avenue (extended), the Manayunk branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad, the Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad, 59th Street, Columbia Avenue, Lebanon Avenue; on the west by Cobbs Creek Park; on the south by the Media Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad; the line of 43rd Street extended to the Schuylkill River; on the east by the Schuylkill River as exhibiting characteristics of blight under terms of said Act, and

WHEREAS, after substantial review and study, the Commission's staff has presented a report concluding that the area bounded by 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Westminster Avenue, Holly Street, Aspen Street, 40<sup>th</sup> Street and Haverford Avenue continues to exhibit 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 fourteenth day of April 2005, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission hereby finds, based upon its staff report dated April 2005 that the area bounded by 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Westminster Avenue, Holly Street, Aspen Street, 40<sup>th</sup> Street and Haverford 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 recertifies the above described area as blighted under the terms and provisions of the said Act.