

**Blight Certification
for the area known as Upper Nicetown;
bounded by Broad Street, Wingohocking Street
and the Railroad Right-of-Way**

Philadelphia City Planning Commission
September 2003

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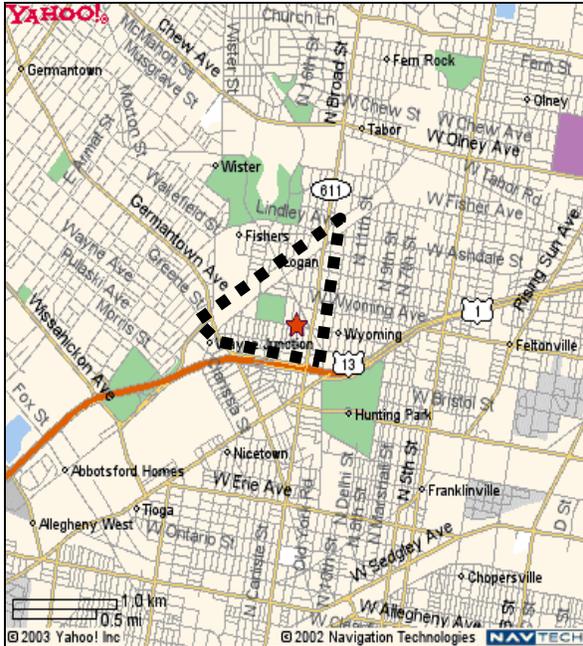
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INTRODUCTION

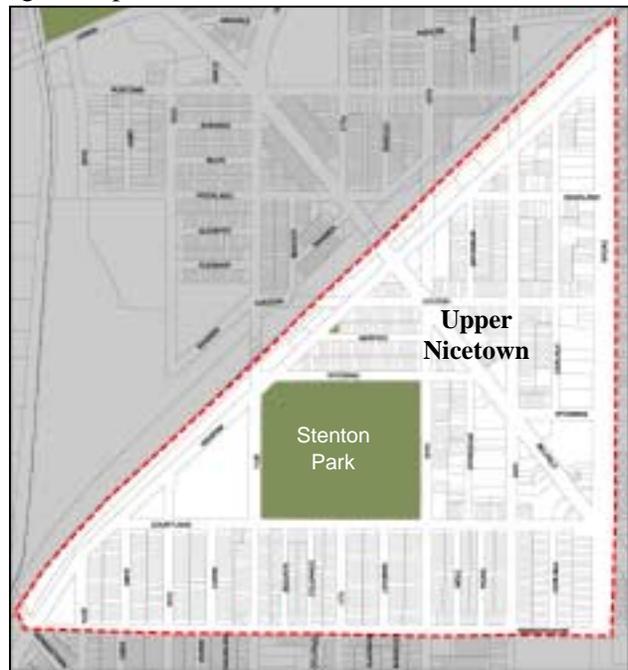
This report is an evaluation of blight in an area known as Upper Nicetown, located in Upper North Philadelphia section of Philadelphia. Upper Nicetown is adjacent to the Nicetown, Germantown and Logan neighborhoods. The study area boundary for certification is: Broad Street on the East, Wingohocking Avenue on the south, and the railroad right-of-way on the north and west. The railroad, running parallel to Windrim Avenue, carries commuter trains for SEPTA routes R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5 and R-8.

Blight certification is the first step in a redevelopment process designed to facilitate housing rehabilitation and encourage new development in Upper Nicetown.

Upper Nicetown (and Upper North Philadelphia in general) is one of many older areas of the City that has shown deterioration caused by the age of the building stock, the decline of manufacturing, and the resulting disinvestment and abandonment. The targeted neighborhood surrounds Stenton Park, which contains the historically significant mansion known as Stenton. In colonial days this was the summer home to James Logan, Secretary to William Penn and Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court. As the City began to spread this area became one of the hubs for the railroads that supplied the factories and warehouses that were located in the residential areas or adjacent to the residential communities of North Philadelphia. Upper Nicetown also became a major crossroads in the regional highway network. However despite these locational advantages, Upper Nicetown in more recent years has seen an increase in vacant homes, vacant lots, abandoned businesses and factories, and a general decline in maintenance and upkeep of properties. The neighborhood has always housed a population of middle class and working class families.

CRITERIA

This report will describe existing conditions of Upper Nicetown in relation to seven criteria set forth in the Pennsylvania Redevelopment Law, 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 non-servable parts. This report cites specific examples of the conditions listed in two of the criteria. Blight does exist in the study area.

Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law establishes the following criteria for evaluating 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



Vacant properties

ANALYSIS

The Planning Commission staff performed a vacancy survey, examined Licenses and Inspections data and Board of Revision of Taxes data, and collected housing data from the 2000 Census. Census data is collected at the Census Block level. The Upper Nicetown study area is comprised of Tract 280, block groups 3, 4, 5; and Tract 281, block group 3. See page 5 for a map of Census Tracts and Blocks.

1. Unsafe, Unsanitary, Inadequate or Overcrowded Conditions

Evidence of this criterion is presented in tseveral categories: vacant structures, vacant lots, trash strewn properties and code violations.

Vacancy: there are 44 vacant properties in the area, (40 vacant buildings and 4 vacant

lots). Included is an abandoned factory across from Stenton Park. This is evidence of unsafe and inadequate conditions.

Vacant and trash-strewn properties: there are four vacant lots in Upper Nicetown, some of which are strewn with trash and overgrown with weeds (source of vacancy data: Planning Commission staff survey, 2003). Other properties, such as those along Windrim Ave., are not classified as vacant but are littered with trash and debris. This is evidence of unsafe and unsanitary conditions.

Code Violations: Many of the properties exhibit signs of neglect and deferred maintenance. There are 382 properties in violation of the City Code in the census blocks under study (source: University of Pennsylvania Neighborhood Information System and Dept. of Licenses and Inspections, April 2003). This is evidence of inadequate and unsafe conditions.

2. Economically or Socially Undesirable Land Use

Economically undesirable land use exists in the study area. The 382 code violations indicate that the level of economic investment in housing is substandard. In addition, the 44 vacant properties represent economically undesirable land use because they downgrade the overall physical environment of the neighborhood, reduce the area's vitality and property values, and increase the potential for vandalism, arson, and other crimes. Furthermore, residential abandonment deprives the neighborhood, the City and region of revenue through income taxes and real estate taxes.

The Upper Nicetown study area has significantly lower property values when compared to the City, and this is additional evidence of economically undesirable land use. In some of the census blocks, property values and sales prices are less than half of the City median. Furthermore, there are sections of Upper Nicetown where the change in real estate sale prices over the period 1997-2002 has not kept pace with sale prices citywide. See the chart on page 4 for property value data and other indicators of blight.

CONCLUSION

In the Upper Nicetown area bordered by Broad Street, Wingohocking Street and the Railroad Right-of-Way, existing conditions are consistent with two (2) of the criteria necessary to produce a finding of blight under Pennsylvania Redevelopment law.



Vacant corner house at Bouvier & Courtland



Abandoned factory, 18th & Courtland



Vacant lot at Bouvier & Courtland

Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Those criteria are: (1) unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions, and (2) economically or socially undesirable land use. This analysis has demonstrated that these two criteria for establishing the presence of blight are satisfied and the area is eligible for certification.

UPPER NICETOWN BLIGHT INDICATORS, by Census Block Group

Census Tract & Block Group	Vacant Buildings PCPC, 2003	Vacant Lots PCPC, 2003	Code Violations L&I, 2003	Median Value Owner-occ. 2000 Census	Median Res. Sales Price 2002 (# sales) BRT	Sale Price % Change 1997-02 BRT
280/ 3	7	0	61	\$37,600	\$30,000 (3)	+46%
280/ 4	7	0	97	\$31,900	\$11,850 (6)	-21%
280/ 5	24	4	121	\$21,400	\$4,500 (3)	-76%
281/ 3	2	0	103	\$38,900	n.a. (0)	n.a.
(total)	40	4	382	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
CITY				\$59,700 City Median Value	\$55,000 City Median Price	+15%

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 Upper Nicetown area bounded by Broad Street on the East, Wingohocking Avenue on the south, and the railroad right-of-way on the north and west as exhibiting characteristics of blight under the 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 16th day of September 2003, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission hereby finds, based upon its staff report dated September 2003 that the Upper Nicetown area bounded by Broad Street on the East, Wingohocking Avenue on the south, and the railroad right-of-way on the north and west exhibits the following characteristics of blight as established by Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law:

- Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions,
- Economically or socially undesirable land use

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



Above: vacant and trash-strewn properties along Windrim Ave.

