

Blight Certification  
For the Area Generally Bounded by  
Ivy Hill, Broad Street, Cheltenham Avenue and Stenton Avenue

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**Philadelphia City Planning Commission**  
**May 2005**



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to determine if conditions are present that would warrant a certification of blight for sections of West Oak Lane and Upper Mt. Airy in Northwest Philadelphia. The boundaries of the Blight Certification area are shown on the vacancy map on page four (4). The boundaries generally include the area bounded by Ivy Hill and Upsal Street, Cheltenham Avenue, Old York Road and Broad Street, and Stenton Avenue. Properties abutting either side of the boundary streets are included except for Cheltenham Avenue (City limit).

To the west of Upsal Street, four additional areas are included in the boundaries:

- Cheltenham Avenue corridor: Properties abutting the 2500 through 3200 blocks of Cheltenham Avenue, from Upsal Street to Ivy Hill Road.
- Stenton Avenue corridor: Properties abutting the 6400 through 8300 blocks of Stenton Avenue, from Upsal Street to Ivy Hill Road.
- Wadsworth & Cheltenham commercial area: Properties abutting the 1500 and 1600 blocks of Wadsworth Avenue, also including 8301-49 Pickering Avenue.
- Vernon Road & Greenwood Street area: The predominantly commercial block bounded by Vernon road, Greenwood Street and Fayette Street; also including the area bounded by Cheltenham Avenue, Mt. Pleasant Avenue, Michener Avenue and Vernon Road (former Temple Stadium site).

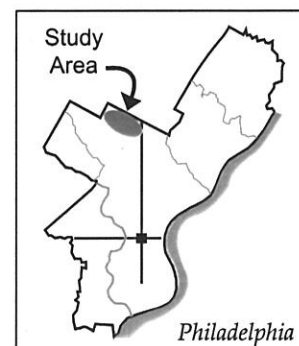
Blight certification is an early step in the redevelopment process. As a result of this report and other redevelopment approvals, the City plans to assist with acquisition of properties in the area for housing rehabilitation and commercial revitalization. Redevelopment will be carried out primarily by community-based development organizations with support from local elected officials. The blight certification boundary includes two previously certified areas, specifically the Stenton Avenue and Ogontz Avenue Redevelopment Areas. These two earlier certified areas are superseded by this blight certification.

Conceptual redevelopment plans are discussed in a companion document entitled, West Oak Lane Redevelopment Area Plan.

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 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 unservable parts.

This report cites specific examples of the conditions listed in 3 of the criteria. Blight does exist in the area.

The study area is located in Northwest Philadelphia and includes the neighborhoods of West Oak Lane and Upper Mt. Airy.



## II. CRITERIA

Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law established 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

## III. ANALYSIS

This section provides a detailed discussion of characteristics of blight evident in the area generally bounded by Ivy Hill and Upsal Street on the west, Broad Street and Old York Road on the east, Cheltenham Avenue on the north, and Stenton Avenue on the south.

### 1. Unsafe, unsanitary, Inadequate or Overcrowded Conditions

Evidence of this criterion is presented in two categories: vacant structures and lots, and unsafe and inadequate conditions.

There are 247 vacant properties scattered throughout the study area according to the 2000 Licenses and Inspections vacancy survey (see vacancy map). There are 183 vacant buildings and 64 vacant lots in the study area. Vacant land represents 2% of the total number of properties. Vacant and abandoned property is unsafe, a haven for vermin and vandalism and is a blighting influence on the area.

Census Tracts	Vacant Properties L & I, 2000	Code Violations L & I, 2005	Lien Sales for Tax Delinquent (2003)
263.02	45	232	31
264	20	204	12
265	64	323	44
266	47	301	24
267	60	399	48
Additional corridors	11	n.a.	n.a.
(Total)	247	1,459	159



6400 block of 20<sup>th</sup> Street.

Code violations are indicative of unsafe and inadequate conditions. In the census tracts that most closely mirror the study area boundary, there are 1,474 properties in violation of the City Housing Code as determined by the Department of Licenses and Inspections. Code violations exist for 14% of the properties in the study area. Additionally, overgrown vegetation, trash, sealed buildings and lack of activity make the area appear unsafe. (Source: University of Pennsylvania Neighborhood Information System (NIS), and L & I, 2005.)



1900 block of Stenton Avenue.

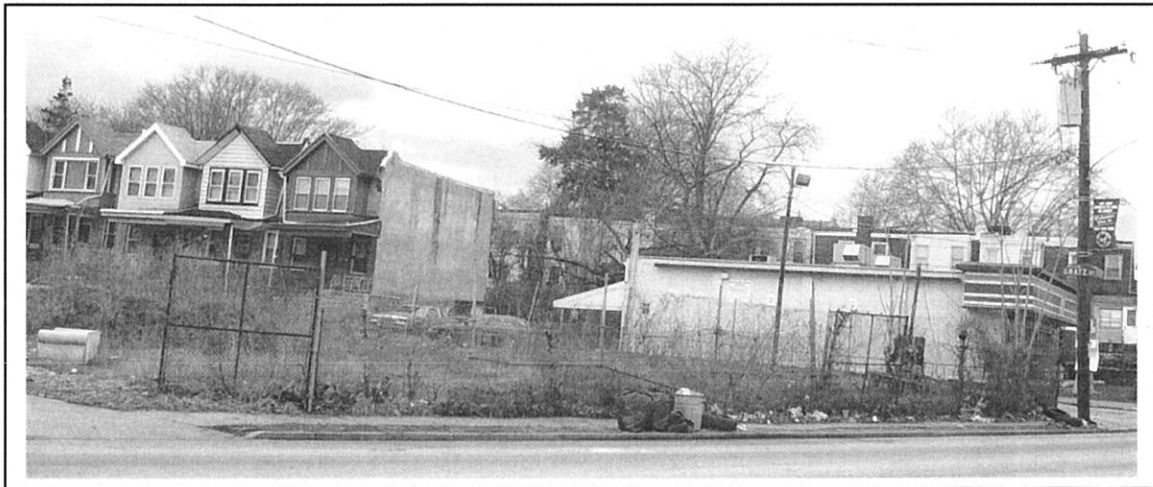
## 2. Faulty Street and Lot Layout

Faulty lot layout is evident in the study area. There are many residential lots that are smaller than the minimum lot size of 1,440 permitted by the City Code. Some of these blocks include:

- 7400 block of Walnut Lane are 1,125 sq.ft. (15 x 75)
- 2100 block of 66<sup>th</sup> Avenue are 1,285 sq.ft. (15 x 85)
- 6300 block of N. 18<sup>th</sup> Street are 1,285 sq.ft. (15 x 85)
- 7300 block of Bouvier Street are 1,050 sq. ft. (15 x 70)
- 1800 and 1900 blocks of Penfield Street are 1,050 sq.ft. (15 x 70)

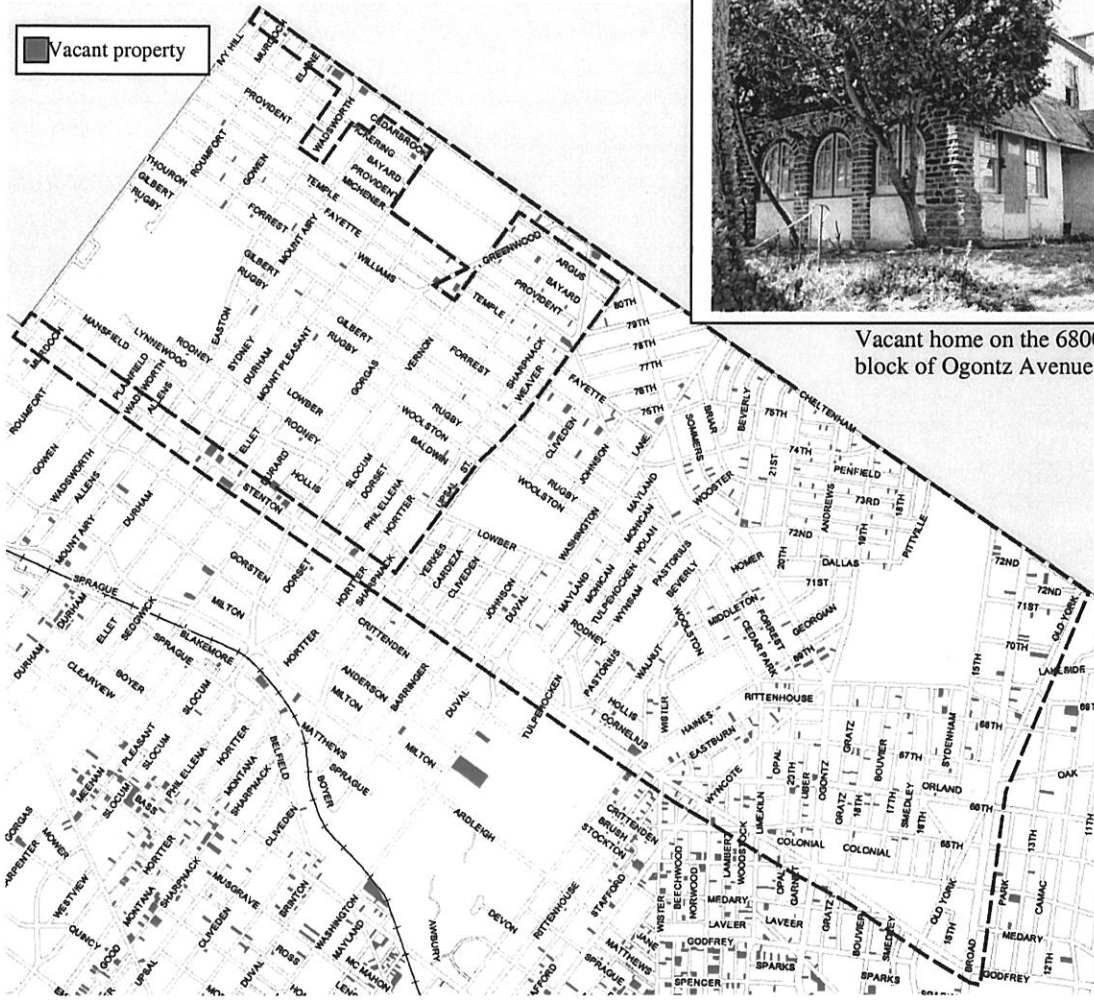
## 3. Economically or Socially Undesirable Land Use

There is substantial evidence of economically undesirable land use throughout the study area. This criterion is primarily met within the study area by virtue of the 247 vacant properties and 1,474 code violations.



1600 block of Gratz Street at Stenton Avenue.

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 home on the 6800 block of Ogontz Avenue.



Vacant commercial building on 6300 block of Stenton Avenue.

VACANCY MAP



Vacant structures and lots are socially undesirable for a number of reasons: they downgrade the overall physical environment, reduce the area's vitality and increase the potential for vandalism, arson, and other crime. Vacant buildings may be structurally deteriorated and therefore pose a danger to children and passersby who might be in the vicinity or trespassing on the property. Code violations indicate a lack of investment, upkeep and maintenance. This is evidence of economically undesirable land use.

Low property values provide additional documentation of economically undesirable land use. Property values can be measured using median sale price and percent change in sale prices over time. The data is provided by the University of Pennsylvania Neighborhood Information System (NIS) and the Philadelphia Board of Revision of Taxes (BRT). The City median housing price for 2002 was \$55,000 and the citywide percentage change in sale price for the years 1997-2002 was +15%. Unfortunately median sale prices in two of the five census tracts in the study area fall well below the City median, \$32,000 and 36,000 respectively. Additionally, in three of the five census tracts the percentage change in sale price for the years 1997-2002 were well below the City average, 4.53%, -21.81%, and -27.28 respectively. Low property values are indicative of disinvestment, economic distress and blight.

Tax delinquency represents economically undesirable land use. When real estate taxes are not paid, the owners of properties are benefiting from municipal services without contributing to the revenue base that makes those services possible. Within this certification area of the City there are 159 tax delinquent properties. (Source: NIS and BRT, 2003)

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The existing conditions in the area generally bounded by Ivy Hill and Upsal Street on the west, Broad Street and Old York Road on the east, Cheltenham Avenue on the north, and Stenton Avenue on the south are consistent with three (3) of the criteria necessary for a finding of blight under Pennsylvania Redevelopment Law. Those criteria are:

1. Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or over crowded conditions.
2. Faulty street and lot layout.
3. Economically or socially undesirable land use.

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that these two (3) criteria are present and the area is eligible for certification as blighted.

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#### 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 area generally bounded by Ivy Hill and

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Upsal Street, Cheltenham Avenue, Old York Road and Broad Street, and Stenton Avenue (see detailed boundary description below) as exhibiting 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 12th day of May 2005, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission hereby finds, based upon its staff report dated May 2005 that the area generally bounded by Ivy Hill and Upsal Street, Cheltenham Avenue, Old York Road and Broad Street, and Stenton Avenue (see detailed boundary description below) exhibits the following characteristics of blight as established by Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law:

1. Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions, and
2. Faulty street and lot layout, and
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.

**Blight Certification Boundaries:** The boundaries include the area bounded by Ivy Hill and Upsal Street, Cheltenham Avenue, Old York Road and Broad Street, and Stenton Avenue. Properties abutting either side of the boundary streets are included except for Cheltenham Avenue (City limit).

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