

**Blight Certification for the area bounded by  
N. 54<sup>th</sup> Street, Columbia Avenue, Ruby Street and Hazelhurst Street**

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Philadelphia City Planning Commission  
JANUARY 2004

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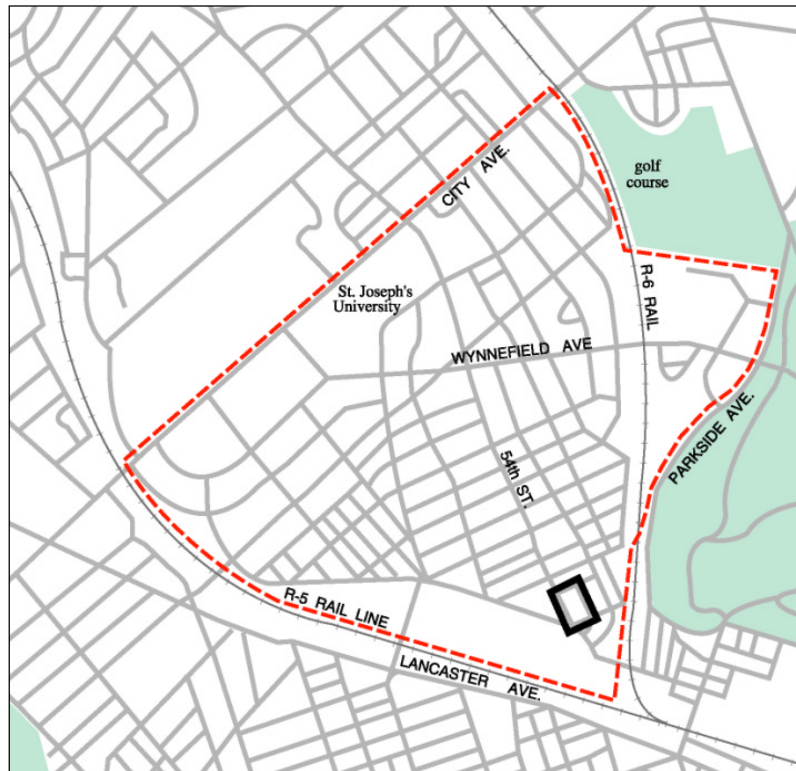
INTRODUCTION

This study evaluates the presence of blight in one city block in the Wynnefield neighborhood of West Philadelphia. The blight certification boundaries are N. 54<sup>th</sup> Street, Columbia Avenue, Ruby Street and Hazelhurst Street.

Blight certification is an early step in the redevelopment process. As a result of this report and other redevelopment approvals, the City plans to acquire properties in this area to facilitate residential and residential-related development.

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 the 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 Wynnefield neighborhood is shown in the dotted red boundary. The blight certification area is located in the southerly portion of the neighborhood, along 54<sup>th</sup> Street.

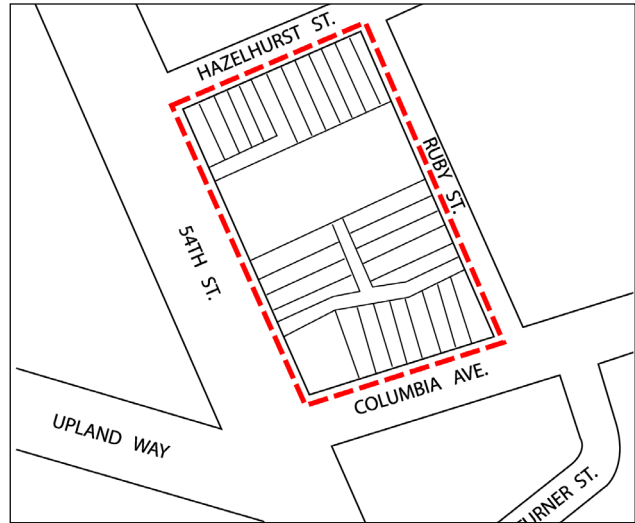


This report cites specific examples of the conditions listed in two of the criteria. Blight does exist in the area.

### 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



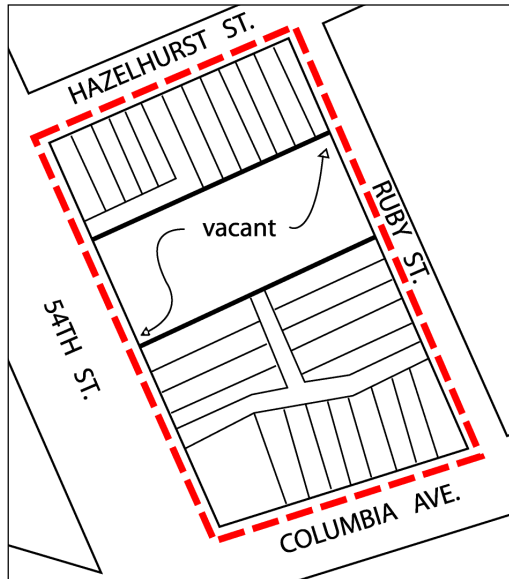
Study area: one city block at 54<sup>th</sup> & Columbia.

### ANALYSIS

The following section describes the characteristics of blight evident in the area bounded by N. 54<sup>th</sup> Street, Columbia Avenue, Ruby Street and Hazelhurst Street.

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

Vacancy represents unsafe and inadequate conditions. In this city block, there is one large vacant property, the site of a former fuel oil company at 1717-21 N. 54<sup>th</sup> Street. The property contains a 14,000 sq. ft. vacant building (facing 54<sup>th</sup> St.) and a 6,000 square ft. vacant lot in the rear (facing Ruby Street). The property has been vacant for many years. It is an opportunity for vandalism and arson. It is an attractive target for youngsters (perhaps not knowing the dangers of vacant buildings) seeking a place to play. Persons who may be trespassing on the property are risking injury from the deteriorated, neglected interior of the building. The vacant building is an eyesore in the Wynnefield community and it is the largest property on the block. It is located on the major north-south street in the community and therefore its blighting impacts are greater than would be found at a more obscure location.



The largest property in the block has been vacant for many years.

Total square footage of the vacant property is 19,950 sq. ft. This represents 27% of the land area within the study area. The vacant property is large in size and it occupies a significant percentage of the study area. It is currently in violation of City Code, being cited as

“Unsafe” by the Department of Licenses and Inspections.

For all these reasons – vacancy, Code violation, large size, danger to children and trespassers, target for vandals, high visibility of the site -- the vacant property at 1717 N. 54<sup>th</sup> Street provides clear evidence of unsafe and inadequate conditions.

## 2. 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 vacant building at 1717-21 N. 54<sup>th</sup> St. Relatively low property values provide additional evidence of economically undesirable land use.



Vacant structures and lots are economically undesirable inasmuch as city-wide experience has demonstrated that vacant properties have an increased likelihood of becoming tax-delinquent. Commercial vacancies erode the local economy, resulting in reduced tax revenue to government.



The presence of the vacant property at 1717 N. 54<sup>th</sup> Street appears to be having a downward effect on property values. For the Census block group containing this building, the median residential sale price in 2002 was \$38,500, which is significantly below the City median of \$55,000. This demonstrates economically undesirable land use.

Vacant building, 1717 N. 54<sup>th</sup> St., with vacant lot in the rear facing Ruby St.

Vacant structures and lots are socially undesirable for a number of reasons: they downgrade the overall physical environment, reduce the area’s vitality (especially when located along a major, highly-visible thoroughfare such as 54<sup>th</sup> St.) and increase the potential for vandalism, arson, and other crime. Arson is a hazard that threatens vacant buildings along with adjoining, occupied structures. Vacant buildings may be structurally deteriorated and therefore pose a danger to children and passersby who might seek to enter the property.

## CONCLUSION

In the area bounded by N. 54<sup>th</sup> Street, Columbia Avenue, Ruby Street and Hazelhurst Street, existing conditions are consistent with two 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. Economically or socially undesirable land use

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that these two criteria for establishing the presence of blight are satisfied and the area is eligible for certification.



**Housing in the study area**

*Above left:*  
Hazelhurst Street

*Above right:*  
Columbia Avenue

*Left:*  
Ruby Street

**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 bordered by N. 54<sup>th</sup> Street, Columbia Avenue, Ruby Street and Hazelhurst 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 twentieth day of January 2004, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission hereby finds, based upon its staff report dated January 2004 that the area bounded by N. 54<sup>th</sup> Street, Columbia Avenue, Ruby Street and Hazelhurst Street exhibits the following characteristics of blight as established by Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law:

1. Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions
2. Economically or socially undesirable land use

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