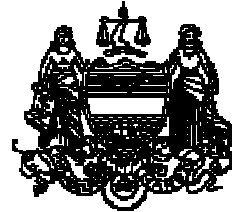


**Blight Recertification for the area generally bounded by
Girard Avenue, 52nd Street and Lancaster Avenue**

Philadelphia City Planning Commission
October 2003

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

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Victoria Mason-Ailey, AICP, Division Director
Richard Redding, Deputy Division Director

Report by:
Richard Redding

Contributions by:
Cornel Pankey, Community Planner
Vicki Gatanis, Community Planner
Bryan Lightner, GIS Specialist, GIS/ Graphics Division

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents an evaluation of blight in a section of West Philadelphia known as the “Cathedral Park” neighborhood. The blight recertification boundaries are shown on the map on page 3. The boundaries form a triangular study area. The southern boundary is Girard Avenue. The western boundary is N. 52nd Street. The other boundary is the rear of properties fronting on the south side of Lancaster Avenue. Lancaster Avenue properties are part of an adjoining redevelopment area certified in 1997, known as the Parkside-Lancaster Redevelopment Area.

The blight recertification boundaries are entirely within the West Philadelphia Redevelopment Area as certified on August 20, 1963, with subsequent amendments. This 1963 certification is superseded only within the above-mentioned boundaries by this recertification.

The study area is relatively small in size, comprising 40 acres and 16 city blocks. The neighborhood has a population of approximately 2,000 persons, and it is well represented by a neighborhood association involved in planning, housing, commercial revitalization and neighborhood revitalization. Improving the neighborhood will require City assistance in the form of property acquisitions through the urban renewal process. This blight recertification, using updated information and documentation, is an early step in the urban renewal process. The initial project to be advanced will be the renewal of the 4900 block of Girard Avenue. Properties will be assembled for new construction of homes for first-time homebuyers. Funding will be provided by the Office of Housing and Community Development and the City’s Empowerment Zone Office.



The study area is shown in red; centrally located in West Phila.

The recertification 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.

This report cites specific examples of the 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



The 4900 block of Girard Avenue contains many vacant homes and is planned for renewal with new infill housing.

ANALYSIS

The following section describes the characteristics of blight evident in the area generally bounded by Girard Avenue, 52nd Street and Lancaster Avenue.

1. Unsafe, Unsanitary, Inadequate or Overcrowded Conditions

Evidence of this criterion is presented in the following categories: (1) the presence of a significant number of vacant properties; (2) the existence of numerous vacant and trash-strewn lots, and (3) many properties in violation of City Code.

Vacant Properties: The area contains 861 separately-titled properties. Recent field surveys indicate that 215, or over 24% of the properties are vacant (see map on page 3). Included among the vacant properties are 115 vacant structures and 100 vacant lots.

Vacant, Trash-Strewn Lots: Unsafe and unsanitary conditions were also documented through the observation of 100 vacant lots, most of which are uncared for and littered with trash. Many of the lots are overgrown with weeds.

Code Violations: Many of the occupied structures in the neighborhood exhibit unsafe conditions, inadequate conditions, neglect and deferred maintenance. This is documented through Code violations. There are 96 properties in violation of the City Code in the one census block group located entirely within the study area, and there are hundreds more properties with Code violations located in census block groups that are partially inside the study area (source : University of Pennsylvania Neighborhood Information System and Department of Licenses and Inspections, April 2003). See chart on page 4 for a summary of Code violations and other blight indicators.

2. Inadequate Planning

The 1400 block of Crescent Place (north of Master Street) is indicative of inadequate planning. It is an extremely narrow (9 ft.) dead-end street designed without adequate space for vehicular turn-around.

The status of the street has been researched using Sanborn maps, aerial photos and Streets Department maps. The street is not confirmed on the City Plan and there is no record of legal opening. It is assumed that Crescent Place was developed in the early part of the 1900's as a private driveway. It provided access to eight residential properties. Homeowners would have had great difficulty obtaining insurance, since the street lacks official status. The rear of the driveway was adjacent to an outdoor scrap yard situated less than 30 feet from the homes. The eight homes were demolished in recent years, and today the driveway quickly disappears into overgrown vacant land. Crescent Place was poorly planned in terms of land use, access and circulation.



This map shows the boundaries of the Blight Recertification study area. It also shows vacant structures in the darker purple color, and vacant lots in the lighter gold color. Areas of faulty street and lot layout are circled on the map: Crescent place is in the upper circle, the 1300 blocks of Farson and 50th Streets are located in the middle circle, and St. Bernard and Stiles Streets are in the lower circle.

3. Faulty Street and Lot Layout

Faulty street layout is demonstrated in the following areas:

- 1200 block St. Bernard Street – 30 ft. wide
- 1300 block Farson Street – 30 ft. wide
- 4900 block Stiles Street – 30 ft. wide
- 1400 block Crescent Place – 9 ft. wide private drive

The above-mentioned streets are too narrow in relation to the current City Code (Section 14-2104[5]) which recommends the following standards:

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

Faulty lot layout also exists in the study area, on the following blocks:

- 1300 block Farson Street: residential lots are 704 sq. ft. in size
- 1300 block N. 50th Street: residential lots are 1,024 ft. in size

Residential properties on Farson and 50th Streets are far smaller than the minimum in the City Code (1,440 sq. ft.), providing evidence of faulty lot layout.

4. Economically or Socially Undesirable Land Use

Economically undesirable land use exists in the study area. There are more than 96 properties with Code violations, showing a lack of investment and upkeep in the area. In addition, the 215 vacant structures and lots represent economically undesirable land use. Vacant properties 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 crime. Furthermore, residential abandonment deprives the neighborhood, the City and region of revenue through income taxes and real estate taxes.



Vacant building and vacant lot -- 5100 block of Thompson St.

The study area has generally lower property values when compared to the City, and this is evidence of economically undesirable land use. See the chart below for property value information and other neighborhood statistics providing evidence of blight

BLIGHT INDICATORS

Sources: University of Penna. Neighborhood Information System and L&I, BRT, Census Bureau

Census Tract & Block Group	Code Violations L&I, 2003	Median Value Owner-occ. 2000 Census	Median Res. Sales Price 2002 (# sales) BRT
111/ 7*	96	\$27,800	\$15,000 (3)
111/ 2	176	\$35,300	\$7,500 (4)
111/ 3	155	\$40,500	\$45,000 (7)
111/ 6	93	\$37,800	n.a. (0)
111/ 8	99	\$26,300	\$9,900 (5)
CITY	n.a.	\$59,700 City Median Value	\$55,000 City Median Price

* Block group 111/ 7 is entirely within the study area, while the other block groups are partially within the study area.

CONCLUSION

In the area generally bounded by Girard Avenue, 52nd Street and Lancaster Avenue, existing conditions 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 on the south by Girard Avenue, on the west by N. 52nd Street, and further bounded by the rear of properties fronting on the south side of Lancaster 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 14th day of October 2003, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission hereby finds, based upon its staff report dated October 2003 that the area bounded on the south by Girard Avenue, on the west by N. 52nd Street, and further bounded by the rear of properties fronting on the south side of Lancaster 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.