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Mayor-Elect Peduto's Transition Team Blight Remediation and Land Banking Subcommittee Final Report

Group: Economic Development

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Recommendation #1

Title of Recommendation

Prioritize the Creation of a Land Bank

Describe the Recommendation

The PA Land Bank Bill passed in 2012 allows municipalities with populations of 10,000 or more to establish land banks. A land bank would be able to systematically address blight, tax delinquency, and abandonment more effectively and efficiently than the City of Pittsburgh's current systems.

Because of the high level of municipal fragmentation of Allegheny County, the initial land bank should apply only to the City of Pittsburgh. However, the option to gradually incorporate other municipalities in the County into the land bank should be included. Smaller municipalities in Allegheny County are becoming increasingly interested in land recycling initiatives, and particularly land banking, as a blight remediation tool. However, multiple land banks in Allegheny County would be inefficient and expensive. To reduce duplicity and overhead costs as well as incorporate a broader range of real estate (a national best practice for successful land banking), Pittsburgh's land bank should be gradually expanded to other areas in the County.

Is this an immediate or long term recommendation?

Acting on this recommendation is possible in the immediate/short term. The initiative to create a land bank can begin within the first 100 days of the Peduto Administration. Funding for the land bank will require immediate initial support, but after the 3 years the land bank should be able to become self-sufficient. While some of the impacts are also short-term, a 5-10 year timeline is necessary to realize all of the benefits of land banking.

One of the core principles of land banking is that the land bank will be most successful at the most diverse real estate market (largest geography) possible. Therefore, expanding the land bank to include land outside of the City of Pittsburgh is a long-term sub-recommendation. The Land Bank Act states that municipalities with populations of 10,000 or more have the legal authority to land bank. However, this does not mean that every municipality that is able to do so should start a land bank: this may lead to an inefficient and expensive land banking system. Instead, it may be more efficient for these municipalities to work with the Pittsburgh land bank in the long term, and the Pittsburgh land bank should incorporate this goal of regionalism into its long-term mission.

How will this address our challenges or reach our goals?

Aligns and Streamlines the land revitalization process. Legal access to land is often the barrier to redevelopment and blight remediation. By utilizing new state powers we can more effectively enforce delinquent tax collections which fund City services and will thus enhance our capacity for blight remediation and/or acquire abandoned or derelict land at a pace which matches the pace of the spread



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of blight. Our current system does neither. Most blighted parcels are also tax-delinquent, and tax-delinquent parcels are frequently vacant, abandoned, or being held onto by irresponsible land owners. The City of Pittsburgh's current manner of dealing with tax-delinquent and/or abandoned properties does not get these parcels back into productive use in a quick or efficient manner. This is because the current legal framework was created 40+ years ago under the assumption that land is a highly desired asset that would very infrequently be abandoned, which is no longer the case in many parts of Pittsburgh. In the current model used to recycle land, the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh and the City of Pittsburgh will go through the Second Class Cities Treasurer's Sale and Collection Act (the "treasurer's sale") to receive a treasurer's deed. This process takes 12 months from start to finish. A quiet title process can then be undergone to produce a free and clear title, but because this process takes additional time and money, the URA and City generally do not do this unless a buyer or end use has already been identified. As a result, the City and URA do not own free and clear title to much of the property currently in their portfolios. This discourages investors who want to acquire land but do not want to wait for a long legal process. Because of this expensive and cumbersome process, many parcels remain abandoned and blighted with no clear, timely path to vibrancy.

Land Banking can overcome this obstacle because it allows for a single entity to systematically and aggressively engage in bulk quiet-title proceedings. This allows title insurance to be obtained and the properties to ultimately be marketable, unlocking both public *and* private investment. Land banks have proven to be so successful in many other cities and counties with large amounts of vacant land, and there are currently nearly 100 land banks in operation in 15 states across the country.

Addresses problematic speculators: Many blighted properties are owned by non-local speculators, who often buy the property sight unseen and then do not maintain it. A local land bank would be able to abate this issue by gaining control of these types of property before distant speculators could, maintaining the site properly, and being able to capture a social benefit if and when the land appreciates in value.

De-politicize the sale and holding of land: Currently City Council must approve every single sale of land out of the City's portfolio, whether it is to another public agency, a nonprofit community based organization or a private purchaser. This adds an additional layer of bureaucracy which has been fraught with inconsistency and lack of clarity to an already lengthy procedure. A land bank will have pre-approved rigorous procedures in place, and governed by a set of revitalization experts which will ensure appropriate acquisition, maintenance and disposition which will render this step moot.

Prioritize community inclusiveness: The Land Bank must also have both inclusive, transparent public processes and be in alignment with any and all appropriate land use/community plans. Ensuring that there is a robust community dialogue in the creation of the Land Bank as well as ongoing in setting its strategic plan, annual priorities for acquisition, maintenance and disposition, will ultimately ensure that there is hyper-local community support of revitalization projects and land use decisions as well as that there is neither duplication nor conflicting projects and resources.

What are the obstacles to implementation?

A comprehensive program framework must be developed: The success of land banking is largely contingent on its agenda. Priority goals must be developed and balanced with financial feasibility.



Community buy-in and support must be incorporated in a systematic manner to ensure the land bank maintains a positive role in community development efforts.

Local legislation must be passed: To implement a municipal land bank in Pittsburgh, the necessary legislation must be written and passed through City Council. This legislation must comply with the PA Land Bank Law, which is highly flexible in how it allows land banks to be structured. The first major obstacle is passing the necessary legislation.

The land bank must be depoliticized: In order to effectively remediate blight in the aforementioned systematic manner, a land bank must operate with a *high level of autonomy*. If the land bank does not have maximum authority to negotiate and complete its transfers, the land bank becomes more cumbersome and counterproductive. Local government should, through the land bank's board of directors, provide broad public policy goals and/or primary purposes for the land bank. Beyond this, elected officials should not be a part of ongoing operations.

Initial Gap Funding: Although land banks should become sustaining after a few years through land sales, a land bank will require some substantial initial startup support. The robust philanthropic community in Pittsburgh should be further engaged to possibly provide a portion of the start-up gap funding that will be necessary. Act 153 provides for numerous other public funding sources for land banking operations as well. These options are good starting points and should be analyzed for their appropriateness and local financing capacity.

Comprehensive Effective Code Enforcement: The Land Bank will be able to more effectively collect delinquent taxes and/or take clear title to a greater volume of currently non-productive land which will ameliorate blighted property conditions fairly significantly. However, until the City's code enforcement system is able to work seamlessly and in tandem with this increased land recycling operation, it will be of limited effect.

Revision of Current City-3rd Party Contracts: A Land Bank can be structured in several ways. All of them require that the Land Bank be closely linked to existing City systems, contracting back to city departments, agencies and staff for various functions. At the same time some of the functions which will fall under the land bank's purview and be necessary to its efficient funding and operations and are currently outsourced to 3rd party companies may either no longer be necessary or may need to have the terms revised within the initial implementation phase of the Land Bank.

Who needs to be involved?

- Key city department and authorities: Urban Redevelopment Authority, Department of City Planning, Bureau of Building Inspection, Department of Finance & Real Estate Division, Law Department, Department of Public Works, Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh
- The new Vacant Land Coordinator established in the upcoming City budget / the OpenSpacePGH Comprehensive Plan coordinator
- Local and regional land banking experts: members of Mayor Ravenstahl's Land Recycling Task Force, members at the Center for Community Progress (national experts),



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- External stakeholders: community development practitioners, development agencies (for and non-profit), outside attorneys with expertise in tax collections and foreclosure, real property, titles, and government entities.
- The foundation community for initial funding
- Other Real Property Taxing Jurisdictions: Pittsburgh Public Schools, Allegheny County, Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority
- Eventually, officials from other municipalities in Allegheny County

What City resources need to be invested?

Buy-in from City Council will be the most important factor due to the need to pass effective legislation. Support from the Law Department will allow the land bank to have the legal backbone to operate effectively. A pro forma developed in 2012 by the Land Recycling Task Force shows the land bank—after initial startup money of approximately \$1.5m from private sources and foundations—becoming self-sufficient with a positive balance.

Coordination and information sharing with all parties involved is essential. It will be more efficient and far less expensive in the long run if the various parties that utilize City resources to pursue land banking, code enforcement, sheriff's sale, treasurer's sale, historic and other planning, community initiatives, bankruptcy, and other related issues all work together with mutual respect and an understanding of designated roles and responsibilities. This would require creation of a committee with regular meetings, or an expectation of regular inter-governmental strategic planning.

What will be different if the recommendation is adopted?

A new land bank will be able to systematically address tax-delinquent property in a more efficient manner than what currently exists in Pittsburgh. The City will be able to address, at scale, blight remediation, property maintenance and activating currently derelict land.

Describe any background materials you have consulted.

- In-Depth Interviews with members of the City of Pittsburgh Land Recycling Task Force: Kendall Pelling, Moira Egler, Kyra Straussman, Andrew Dash, Bethany Davidson
- PA Land Bank Enabling Legislation
- Best Practices in Land Bank Operation (Cleveland State University)
- Land Banks and Land Banking (Frank S. Alexander)
- Operating Principles (Twin Cities Community Land Bank)

Have other cities implemented this recommendation?

Yes, there are already over 80 land banks in operation at either the city or county levels across the county in more-than 15 states. The Center for Community Progress is a national public policy research organization that concentrates on vacant property, blight, and land banking, and has been advocating for land banking in Pennsylvania and the Rust Belt for several years.



Are there any other considerations?

This process should be transparent and explained clearly to the public. Land banking is complex and often misunderstood, and a lack of transparency may generate mistrust. Tax increment financing (TIF's), for example, are a commonly misunderstood financing mechanism that receive negative publicity due to a misunderstanding of its role in transforming blighted or underutilized property. Land banking should avoid this problem as much as possible.

It is important to re-emphasize that those who might profit both financially and politically from a land bank should be prevented from influencing the land banking process as much as possible. This is critical in order to maintain both the financial efficiency and public/social benefit of the land bank. It is a national best practice and should be adhered to as strictly as possible.



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Recommendation #2

Title of Recommendation

Identify, Collect, Integrate, and Share Property Data

Describe the Recommendation

The current data collection and use system in the City of Pittsburgh is inefficient and alienating to both internal agencies and to the general public. This is especially true for property data. The Department of City Planning, Bureau of Building Inspection, and Department of Finance Real Estate Division use different databases. These databases do not use common fields, recording protocol, or standardized definitions, making them almost completely incompatible with one another. Although most of their records are automated, the Bureau of Building Inspection still keeps some records on paper instead of a shareable digital database. Even if these databases were compatible with one another, there is no regularly scheduled updating or maintenance of the data. Data is difficult to get internally across City departments to assist in day-to-day operations, and, except for some data provided by the Department of City Planning, difficult for the general public to access as well.

The Bureau of Building Inspection, Department of City Planning, and Department of Public Works have all installed Accela Automation software to automate permitting. This should be extended to include code enforcement as well. Common fields and standards to update them by should be agreed upon and followed with designated responsibilities set out for each stakeholder. The county Assessor's Office, Prothonotary, Sheriff's Office, and Recorder of Deeds do not regularly exchange information about any issues, let alone data management solutions for the City's systems. This should be addressed directly and specifically regarding data and blight remediation.

These data issues are directly applicable to blight remediation as it impacts all stakeholders' ability to identify and address problem properties, to be proactive instead of entirely reactive (and only then, as reactive as inconsistent, inaccessible data allows). Public data should inform and increase efficiency in public agencies, provide and inform possible courses of action/resolution for interested or affected individuals, connect community groups to solutions, and provide information for Housing Court.

Because Pittsburgh's poor public data system affects much more than blight remediation, **a comprehensive open data initiative should be put into place.** This initiative would:

- *Identify the types of data that would be useful - be creative.*
- *Create Standardized Definitions and Fields for public data collection, management, and tracking.*
- *Develop methods and programs to collect the desired data.*
- *Eventually Integrate the data into a comprehensive data management system.*
- *Include in the data management system a user Interface available to the public.*

Data that should be collected specific to blight remediation include (but is not limited to):

- Mortgage (or other private lien) Foreclosure Action
- Code Citations and Violations



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- Tax delinquency (including both the four real property taxing jurisdictions *and* Wage and business tax data)
- SNAP data from City Planning
- Building Permits
- Property assessment
- Sales price / date of transactions
- Ownership (current and historical) – both name and address
- Zoning
- Property conditions
- Photos
- Penalties and liens
- Zoning
- Deeds
- Emergency Services (311, 911, Fire, Crime Data)
- Health Codes
- Pest Data
- Disruptive Properties Citations
- Bureau of Building Inspection's Complaint Log (already exists)

Other Data that should be gathered and integrated for a comprehensive understanding of property conditions, underlying cause/effect of blight and neighborhood goals (including both national as well as community data sets)

- Demographic data, including Census Data
- Labor Statistics
- Utility / Postal Service
- Vacant Property/Housing Surveys
- Quality of Life / resident surveys

Data fields in the new master system should be table driven. If possible, it should sync with an existing data system, such as Allegheny County Real Property Assessment System. This data should also be able to specifically address blight remediation. To accomplish this, there should be one attribute column that specifically relates to the "blight timeline" in Recommendation #3. This column should have the current and estimated future dates of Prevention, Mitigation and Remediation for blighted or tax-delinquent parcels to indicate which stage of blight this parcel is in.

Is this an immediate or long term recommendation?

Both: A commitment to prioritizing the movement towards comprehensive, open data can be implemented immediately via an executive order. Also, identifying data can begin in the short term, while the other tasks are more long term. Identifying data should also include compiling existing data sources and software applications.

- In the first 100 days the Peduto administration can begin identifying data to standardize. Then data can be aggregated from existing data sources and software applications.



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- In the first year, a comprehensive property data system that facilitates data sharing among City departments and with the public can be created and implemented.
- In the long term, data needs for property management can be assessed and maintained. Improvements and adjustments should be made as necessary.

How will this address our challenges or reach our goals?

Data of this sort is required in order to identify blight, and is necessary to develop a comprehensive plan to address blight issues. Practical, apolitical policy-making without the necessary data is nearly impossible. Access to this type of transparent data is imperative if the properties are to return to their highest and best use.

What are the obstacles to implementation?

- Different relevant agencies/departments/groups collect some of the data, but cooperation between them will need to be facilitated.
- Some data is not currently collected. A collection plan and a designated agency must be delegated to do this.
- This project requires funding of some sort.
- Sensitive data should be available to some people, but should not be available to the general public - proper safeguards must be included.
- Timely updates require a commitment of resources, and without it will degrade the value of the system.
- The database and information subsets need to be clearly defined when it comes to user access, reporting and updates. All data sets need to conform to standards which maintain and audit those that can Add, Edit, Delete or Read the data.

Who needs to be involved?

- All city agencies and departments that collect and/or manage relevant data or who could collect and/or manage relevant data.
- Community Based Organizations and other organizations that could collect relevant data.
- Potential funders (grant programs?)
- Potential users.
- Potential stakeholders that would contribute to or benefit from this data.
- Local technology start-ups and existing corporations – small and large.
- Local University and/or National partnerships such as the University of Pittsburgh Center for Social and Urban Research's Pittsburgh Neighborhood Community Information System (PNCIS), Code for America, Google

What City resources need to be invested?

- The identification of relevant data can be implemented using existing city human resources (plus other groups - including members of this subcommittee).



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- Preparing a format for managing the data can be done at little or no cost to the City, possibly using local area graduate programs.
- Implementing the data management system requires resources that the City probably would have to find resources to support/fund.
- Ongoing updates could possibly be managed using current City human resources.

What will be different if the recommendation is adopted?

Policymakers, city employees with responsibility for blight prevention/remediation, community groups, and other stakeholders will finally have the data necessary to address the effectiveness of existing programs and to determine if new programs should be adopted. In addition, such information can be used as an input in a comprehensive blight prevention program. A municipal land bank should be part of this strategy as well, as highlighted in Recommendation #1. In addition, arming the public with information so that they themselves can be proactive is critical (see Recommendation #4). This eases the burden and the needed resources of the City itself by empowering community members to take direct action in addressing community conditions as it is appropriate.

Besides exposing the information to those that increase property value, we need to establish a set of metrics which monitor the success of this recommendation. The first one would be number/value of the blighted properties. As an example, we may begin with 27,000 properties worth \$270 million, but it would be interesting to see what the value of the properties removed from blight were valued at two or three years out. Success allows more resources to be allocated, making this a potentially highly catalytic process.

Describe any background materials you have consulted.

- Data.gov
- Pittsburgh Neighborhood Community Information Systems
- Sunlight Foundation
- Socrata, Inc.
- Code for America
- National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership
- Civic Insight
- Two conversations with Ron Graziano, former Chief of Bureau and Building Inspection.

Have other cities implemented this recommendation?

Open Data exists in 39 US state and 43 Cities and counties. Some of the nationally recognized programs exist in New York, New Orleans, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

Are there any other considerations?

A data system development would be a great project for a graduate school to work on. Carnegie Mellon University's School of Public Policy and Information Systems is a highly competitive school whose core curriculum for graduate students requires hands-on information systems management related to



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public policy. This project would be an excellent match for many Heinz students, and would strengthen the relationship between the City of Pittsburgh and its educational institutions. A partnership should be investigated.

Ron Graziano, former Chief of Bureau and Building Inspection, worked with CMU and Pitt on a database called "Map Pittsburgh" during the Murphy administration. It was to include shared information from the Real Estate Office, Police, Property and others through a series of overlays. Mr. Graziano recalls that perhaps a million dollars might have been spent on this project. He's not sure where it stands today but noted that there was progress and in its final state would have been very useful in what we're trying to accomplish. This should be investigated and analyzed for best practices before a new data initiative is undertaken.



Recommendation #3

Title of Recommendation

Create a vision and plan to systematically address blight which includes both prevention, mitigation *and* remediation. Coordinate, organize, and simplify public processes around this overarching strategy, including the creation of a comprehensive resource guide/toolkit to communicate these policies and programs to the general public (see Recommendation #4).

Describe the Recommendation

Maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of addressing blight requires a comprehensive strategy. Each blighted parcel is a unique situation at a different stage in the “life cycle” of blight. Therefore, a more comprehensive toolset of blight abatement programs and strategies than what currently exists must be developed. Specifically, this means developing a more effective arsenal of tools, including:

- Expedited code enforcement
- Act 135: Conservatorship
- Local implementation of Act 90: The Neighborhood Blight and Reclamation and Revitalization Act, specifically the Private Asset Attachment and Extradition
- Private Right of Action
- Land Banking (see Recommendation #1)
- More extensive use of currently available local tools:
 - Mayor-Elect Peduto’s amendment to Title 10, authorizing signs to share contact information of owners of blighted property on or near the property.
 - Councilman Lavelle’s Vacant Property Registry ordinance

It will be important to create guidelines and a standardized protocol with which these tools will be administered. This will fall largely on Bureau of Building Inspection and the Department of Law. At the same time, ensuring that the numerous City agencies which interact with implementing these policies are working in coordination, and that the process is simple, transparent and easily accessible to the general public, is critical. Creating a master tools and resources guide/kit which enumerates both the various tools available, and how to access and/or utilize them, will further add transparency to city government as well as enable residents to be more effective in their private lives as well as in interacting with government employees and agencies.

As a sub-recommendation, it will be important for members of City government to communicate more regularly in order to ensure these new processes are working properly. Members of the URA’s housing department used to meet regularly with inspectors from the Bureau of Building Inspection to walk them through the URA’s housing and façade improvement programs. This practice ended, but it should be reestablished. Leaders of key departments in the City do not have monthly or bi-monthly meetings to check in. This should happen regularly to ensure City government is on the same



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page. Lines of communication between the City and the County should be re-established and strengthened as well, particularly in property issues where both parties are involved in different ways. This includes the Sheriff's Office, Allegheny County Economic Development, and other agencies that are tangentially involved but critically important.

Is this an immediate or long term recommendation?

Long term. For example, an effective land bank resource is a valuable resource to ensure the blight remediation strategy is addressed (See Recommendation #1). However, we should ensure the City has all available blight remediation resources available to it (for example, effective use of building inspection resources, timely and effective tax issue resolution, etc.).

How will this address our challenges or reach our goals?

In our subcommittee meetings it became apparent that while there have been piecemeal approaches to identifying and addressing blighted properties, no comprehensive strategy that brings more than two stakeholders together has ever been attempted. As a result, many different approaches have been taken but no concerted effort has been made for comprehensive change. Some programs worked great for certain properties or certain situations. Some groups focused on one approach to remediation, while not knowing about or attempting other approaches. It seems that anecdotal evidence was the only type of resource available to those attempting to address property issues. This piecemeal approach may work well when focusing on one property, but to address blight on a City-wide scale a more comprehensive and centralized approach and plan would be very helpful.

What are the obstacles to implementation?

This is a time-intensive and human resource-intensive project. It will require identifying and evaluating the effectiveness of existing programs, the potential of other types of programs, and a streamlined process for streamlining blight prevention, mitigation, and remediation. Although these goals are concrete, this is a highly subjective and ambiguous process and is (necessarily) open to a large amount of interpretation. It will also require coordinating, organizing and partnering with various groups in both government and the private sector. It will be largely dependent on who makes these decisions, posing the challenge of choosing the "right people" for this recommendation.

Who needs to be involved?

City departments and agencies, community development corporations and other community groups, and nonprofits should all be involved. A good start would be to recruit representatives from City Planning, the URA, Department of Public Works, Bureau of Building Inspection, Police, Fire, City Parks, City Council, the Mayor's Office, City Information Systems, Department of Finance, Law Department, Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority, Utility companies, and the County Real Estate Department to work on this project.

What City resources need to be invested?

Developing a City-wide plan that is comprehensive and flexible will involve organizing information & community outreach. The Law Department, Bureau of Building Inspection, Department of Finance, Urban Redevelopment Authority, Department of City Planning, Allegheny County: Department of Economic Development, Office of Property Assessment, Prothonotary, Register of Wills, and Sherriff's Offices could also be involved.

What will be different if the recommendation is adopted?

The City will have a comprehensive blight control program, while it is piecemeal at the moment. This will make dealing with blighted properties easier, less expensive, and more transparent. This recommendation makes blight prevention tools more available to the general public than what is currently available, and it expedites reducing blight through a more user-friendly process that does not discourage participation.

Describe any background materials you have consulted.

PA Urban Redevelopment Law
Urban Blight and Sprawl (City of Wichita)
City of Pittsburgh Vacant Property Working Group
Detroit Works Project / Detroit Future City
Reimagining Cleveland: Vacant Land Re-Use Pattern Book
City of Pittsburgh, Open Space, Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan

Have other cities implemented this recommendation?

This recommendation is highly specific to Pittsburgh. However, many cities including Detroit, MI, Flint, MI, Bridgeport, CT, Baltimore, MD, and other cities with large amounts of vacant land have all attempted process streamlining with the end goal of blight prevention. The City of Philadelphia is working on a similar initiative.

Are there any other considerations?

It would be most useful to develop a Best Practices guide on projects other cities have developed to determine if they could be adapted to Pittsburgh's needs (see other resources listed above).



Recommendation #4

Title of Recommendation:

Prioritize blight *prevention* programs and take a proactive approach to reducing blight.

Describe the Recommendation

Various City departments, agencies, and nonprofit groups provide resources or information on programs aimed at promoting healthy property ownership and use. While these programs are of value, they are not centrally organized or coordinated. An organized and coordinated approach to blight prevention programs should be available to every resident of the City. The City could take the initiative to provide a centralized and comprehensive approach to identifying, developing, and implementing blight prevention programs. The City should also allocate resources to identify, implement, and promote effective blight prevention programs and/or partnerships.

Although the City of Pittsburgh has some blight remediation programs in place, there is currently no official blight prevention program. Blight prevention could reduce the amount of resources used on remediation programs and should have other economic benefits such as preventing tax base shrinkage and free up resources by solving problems before they become expensive to fix.

Our team thought of several creative low-maintenance solutions that may be added to various departmental responsibilities that take a proactive approach to reducing blight. They were:

- First-time homeowner seminars on available resources for blight prevention
- Posting problematic properties in legal limbo to law school clinics, specifically to what is informally called the "Allegheny County blight bar"
- Workshops on wills and estate management in areas that have suffered from abandonment. Running these may save money for the city in the long run because of avoiding the high legal costs of acquiring an abandoned parcel. Preventing even a small number of parcels from requiring the full legal limbo and reacquisition—not to mention the social benefits of preventing blight in a community—could pay for the workshop's cost.
- Creating a (foundation-supported?) pool of funds (may be recoverable grants) which is available to homeowners in need of assistance to ameliorate blighted conditions.

Is this an immediate or long term recommendation?

Short term and long term. Short term in that the resources that are already in use by the City departments/agencies and nonprofit groups could be accumulated into one resource.

Long term in that, the resources should be expanded upon, updated, and built upon to ensure we have the most comprehensive continuum of resources.



How will this address our challenges or reach our goals?

This recommendation will change the system from reactive to proactive: The primary goal should be to prevent blight from occurring in the first place. However, the City's system currently waits for blight, abandonment, and tax delinquency to become serious issues before intervening. Developing a comprehensive strategy which can utilize common indicators to identify 'at-risk' parcels or geographies, can be pro-active at intervening *before* blight takes hold and its effect spread. This can maintain the City's housing stock, and may be more fiscally desirable than waiting for problems to become expensive to fix. Intervening *pre*-blight is less-expensive for the City and less harmful to the overall community conditions and quality of life of the people who live, work and play in our neighborhoods.

What are the obstacles to implementation?

The city faces challenges to be the most effective deliverer of blight prevention programs, and there would need to be considerations of resources to create or implement programs and to keep the resources up-to-date.

This recommendation may require the use of new agencies or non-City agencies to properly implement. A City-wide nonprofit group, or partnerships with existing organizations and corporations who may be in a better position to face the challenges which are required as part of delivering such programs may be preferable or more effective, but they too would require dedicated funding streams, volunteers and time to create or implement programs and to keep resources up-to-date.

Blight prevention programs may be considered to be invasive. Working closely with neighborhood CDC's if and where they exist will help to eliminate this perception while keeping the emphasis on community and economic development at the local level with the larger city-wide vision centralized. Regardless of partnerships, messaging and communications are very important to ensuring that both the negative impacts of blight and the intent of blight prevention and remediation are clearly delivered to the community and stakeholders which are affected by both.

There doesn't seem to be a central source for information about blight prevention programs (See Recommendation #3).

The data needed to identify, develop, or implement blight prevention programs are not currently available (See Recommendation #2).

Property rights are a tightly guarded and defended legal construct. At the same time, there are many blight prevention and remediation mechanisms which municipalities in Pennsylvania are legally enabled to carry out. Ensuring that not just the processes put in place are legally defensible, but that there is the will and support to defend these actions will require a culture whiff in both the City Law Department as well as with the local court systems, District Magistrates, and local law firms which work directly with the City.

Who needs to be involved?

City departments and agencies, charitable groups (including CDC's and other CBO's), potential funders, and law/legal groups should all be involved. The Department of Law, Bureau of Building Inspection, City Finance Department, URA, City Planning, Allegheny County Assessor's Office, Allegheny County Prothonotary, Allegheny County Register of Wills, and Allegheny County Sheriff's Office should also be involved.

What City resources need to be invested?

Input from subject matter experts to develop informational resources or present educational information. For example, a representative from building inspection could help to develop a pamphlet on the most frequent code violations for residential homes and the process to address.

If involving partnerships with City and private groups, initial seed funding may be needed to assist in developing the resources or programs.

What will be different if the recommendation is adopted?

The City will have a comprehensive blight prevention program, whereas, no such program currently exists.

Residents will have easier access to information and resources in addressing property issues.

Describe any background materials you have consulted.

There are residential facade grant programs. See Recommendation #3; there are "toolbox" materials related to recourses for prevention. There are programs related to providing low-cost housing for at-risk citizens or citizens willing to invest their time in at-risk properties; this program would ensure those residents have easy access to all possible information/programs that may assist them.

Have other cities implemented this recommendation?

Numerous community development groups have developed informational seminars in their local neighborhoods (in the City & elsewhere). We should have these resources readily available to all residents. Hartford, CT and Bridgeport, CT—both postindustrial cities that suffer from large-scale blight and abandonment in their urban cores—have implemented a preventative approach with success.



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CREATING A NEW PITTSBURGH

Are there any other considerations?

Implementation of this recommendation will require collecting and organizing information. It will require coordination of various groups, and ties into all previous recommendations.