

A United Fight Against Blight:

The Alle-Kiski Regional Solution



**a presentation for the APA
PA Annual Conference**

Monday, October 13th, 2025
@ 2-3:15 PM

Hello!

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Local Government Academy

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Westmoreland County Redevelopment Authority & Land Bank

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Manager, Mt. Oliver Borough | Financial Consultant |
Real Estate Agent

AGENDA

TOPICS COVERED

Importance of Partnerships/County & Regional Leadership

Methods/Process of Multi-Municipal Blight Inventory & Plan Project

Relevant Tools and Strategies to Address Blight

WHO DO WE HAVE HERE TODAY?

County Planner

Municipal Planner

Government Official

Student/New Planner

Consultant

Other



Setting the Stage

Partnership & capacity building – nonprofits have an important role in the fight against blight.

Local Government Academy

Established in 1983

501(c)(3) Public Charity

Mission: Promote Excellence in Local Government

Purpose: provide non-partisan, fact-based information on issues relevant to Pennsylvania's municipal officials & employees.



Our Services

Education

Fact-based, non-partisan training on matters relevant to Pennsylvania municipalities including the Newly Elected Officials Course.

Municipal Intern Program

Workforce development initiative to introduce college students to careers in local government. Grant reimbursements to eligible placement sites offset 50% of the intern's salary.

Technical Assistance

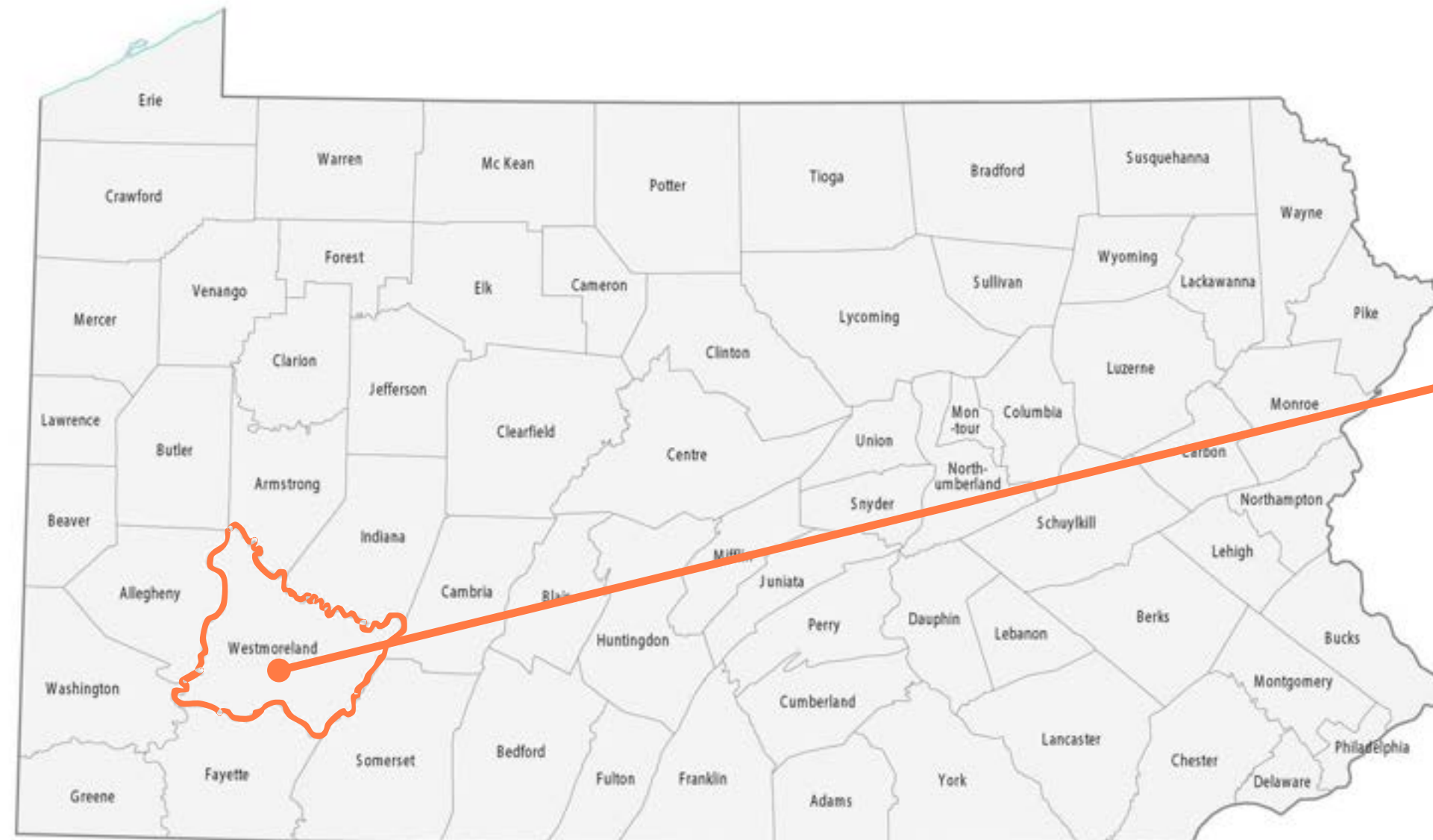
Third-party consultants who work directly with communities to strengthen municipal governance and resilience.



Project Background

How did we get here & why this project?

WESTMORELAND COUNTY, PA



WESTMORELAND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Five public/private organizations under one roof – collaborating resources & expertise

Community Development Division





TECHNICAL RESOURCES AND
MUNICIPAL SERVICES PROGRAM

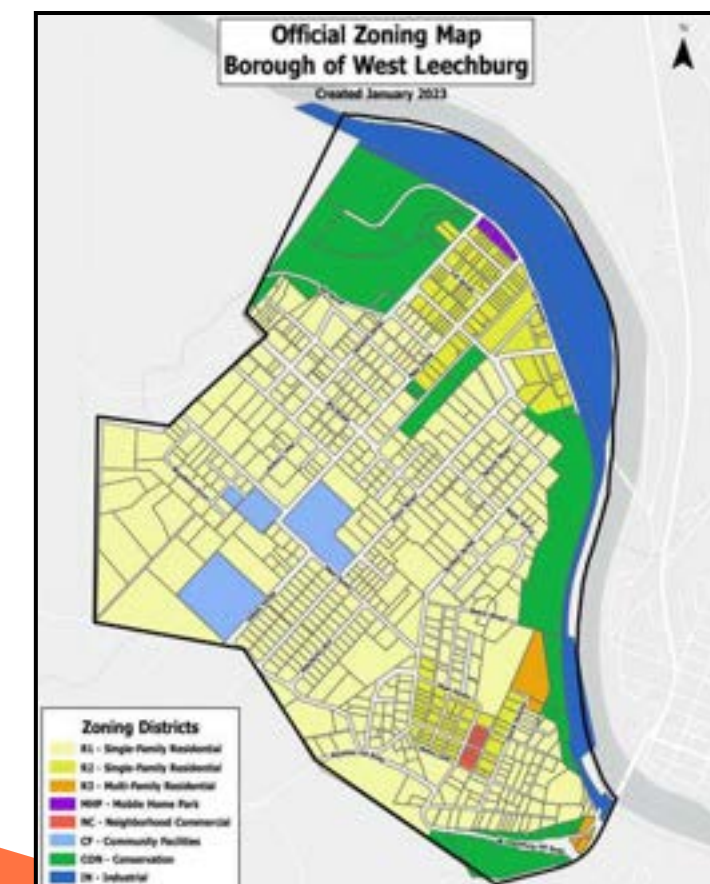
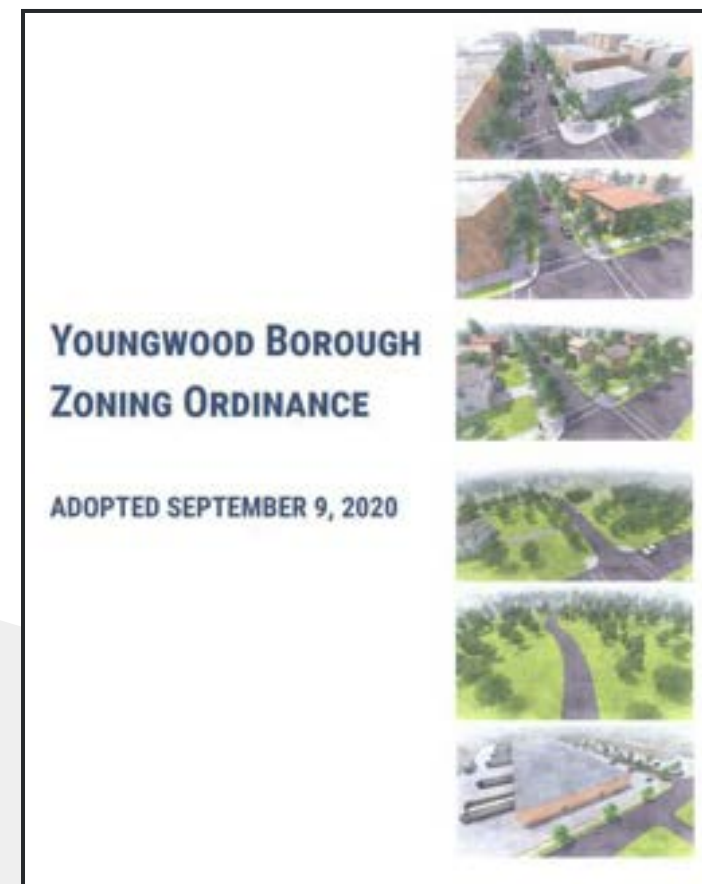
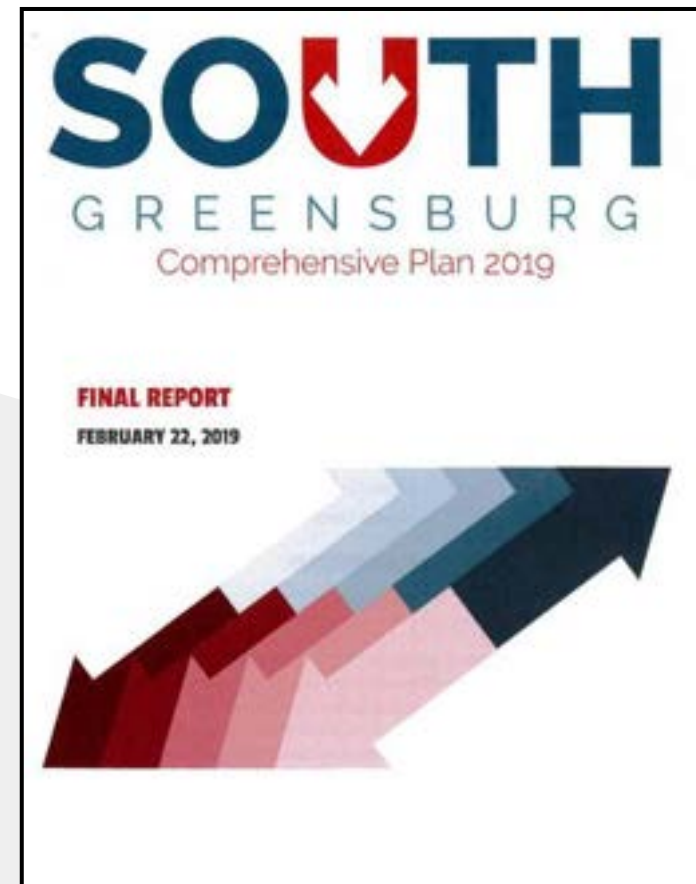
Less than 10 communities have full-time planners &
less than 1/3 have professional management

Bridge capacity gap

Offer professional planning services

Blight inventories:

- City of Monessen
- City of Greensburg
- City of Latrobe
- Alle-Kiski Region
- Irwin Borough



INTERGOVERNMENTAL PARTNERSHIPS

Reimagining Our Westmoreland

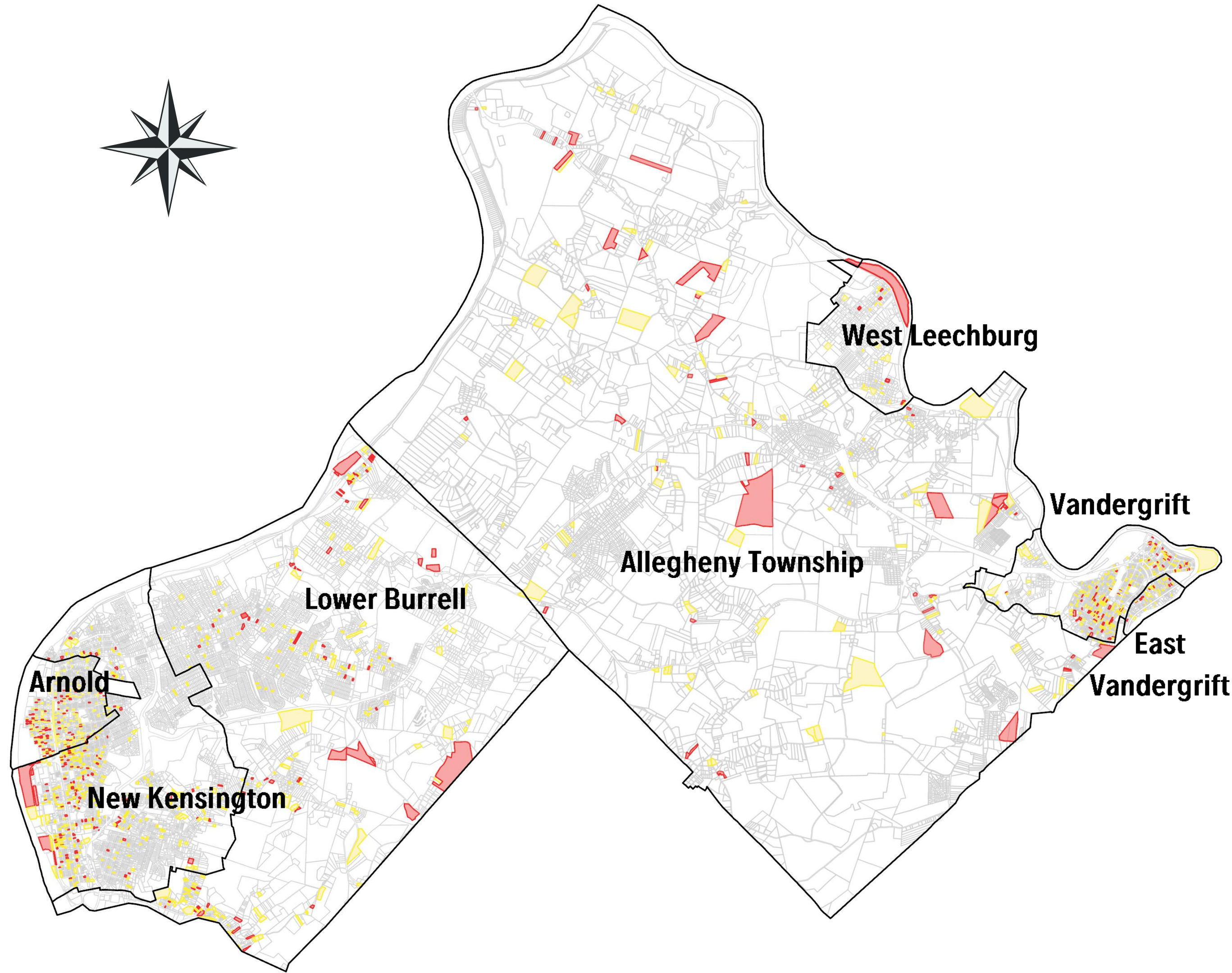
Planning Districts – *Plan regionally, act locally*

Alle-Kiski Planning District

Alle-Kiski Intergovernmental Council

Shared Challenge: **Blight**





Alle-Kiski



1. Allegheny Township
2. City of Arnold
3. East Vandergrift Borough
4. City of Lower Burrell
5. City of New Kensington
6. Vandergrift Borough
7. West Leechburg Borough

Project Goal: conduct a comprehensive regional property conditions assessment and create a blight mitigation plan to help address blighted properties in the Alle-Kiski Region

Commenced: October 2023
Completed: July 2025



Understanding The Problem

We can't help if we don't know where the problem is.

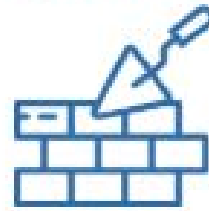
Two Agencies, One Mission

To build healthy and whole communities and reposition our towns by eliminating blight and its influences in the communities of Westmoreland County.

Our Programs



Blight Demolition



Rehabilitation



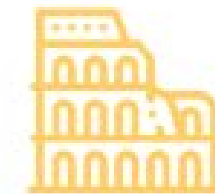
Land Banking



Accessible Housing and
Homeownership



Education & Training
Partnerships

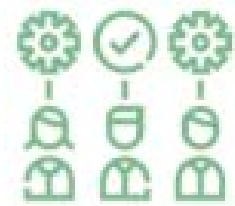


Historic Preservation

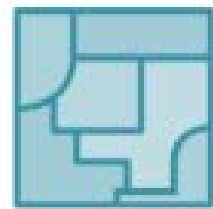


Brownfield Clean-up

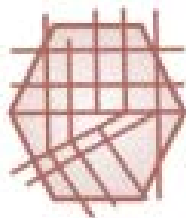
2022-2027 Strategic Goals



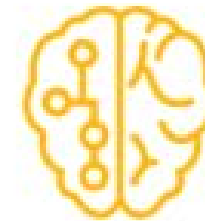
Equip Local
Partners



Support Regional
Solutions



Revitalize Whole
Neighborhoods



Gather, Share, &
Use Intel



Create Equitable
Development Opportunities



Tell Our Story

Our Process: Acquisition, Management, and Sale



Blighted Property Reports Summary

Redevelopment Authority Management Dashboard



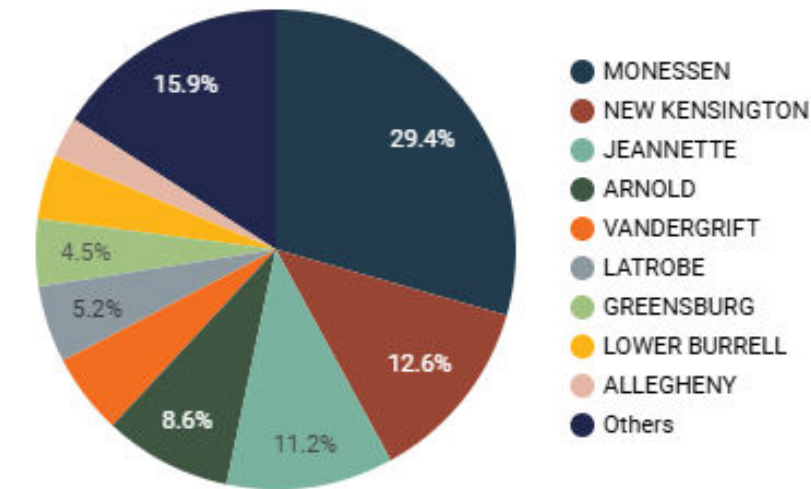
Blighted Property Reports by Parcel Number and Address

Parcel Number	Address	Municipality	Blightin...	Last Upda...
02-02-07-0-286	1517 4th Avenue / 1519 4th Avenue /	ARNOLD	21	Feb 12, 2024, 3...
02-02-07-0-278	1533 4th Avenue /	ARNOLD	21	Feb 12, 2024, 3...
02-02-07-0-729	1607 Victoria Avenue /	ARNOLD	21	Jan 17, 2024, 1...
02-02-07-0-374	1410 3rd Avenue /	ARNOLD	21	Jan 11, 2024, 4...
02-02-11-0-076	1341 5th Avenue /	ARNOLD	21	Jan 11, 2024, 9...
14-01-16-0-382	718 Chambers Avenue /	JEANNETTE	20	Mar 25, 2024, 1...
20-02-07-0-450	212 Aliquippa Avenue /	MONESSEN	20	Mar 25, 2024, 1...
20-02-06-0-179	928 Knox Avenue /	MONESSEN	20	Mar 25, 2024, 1...

Filter by Municipality

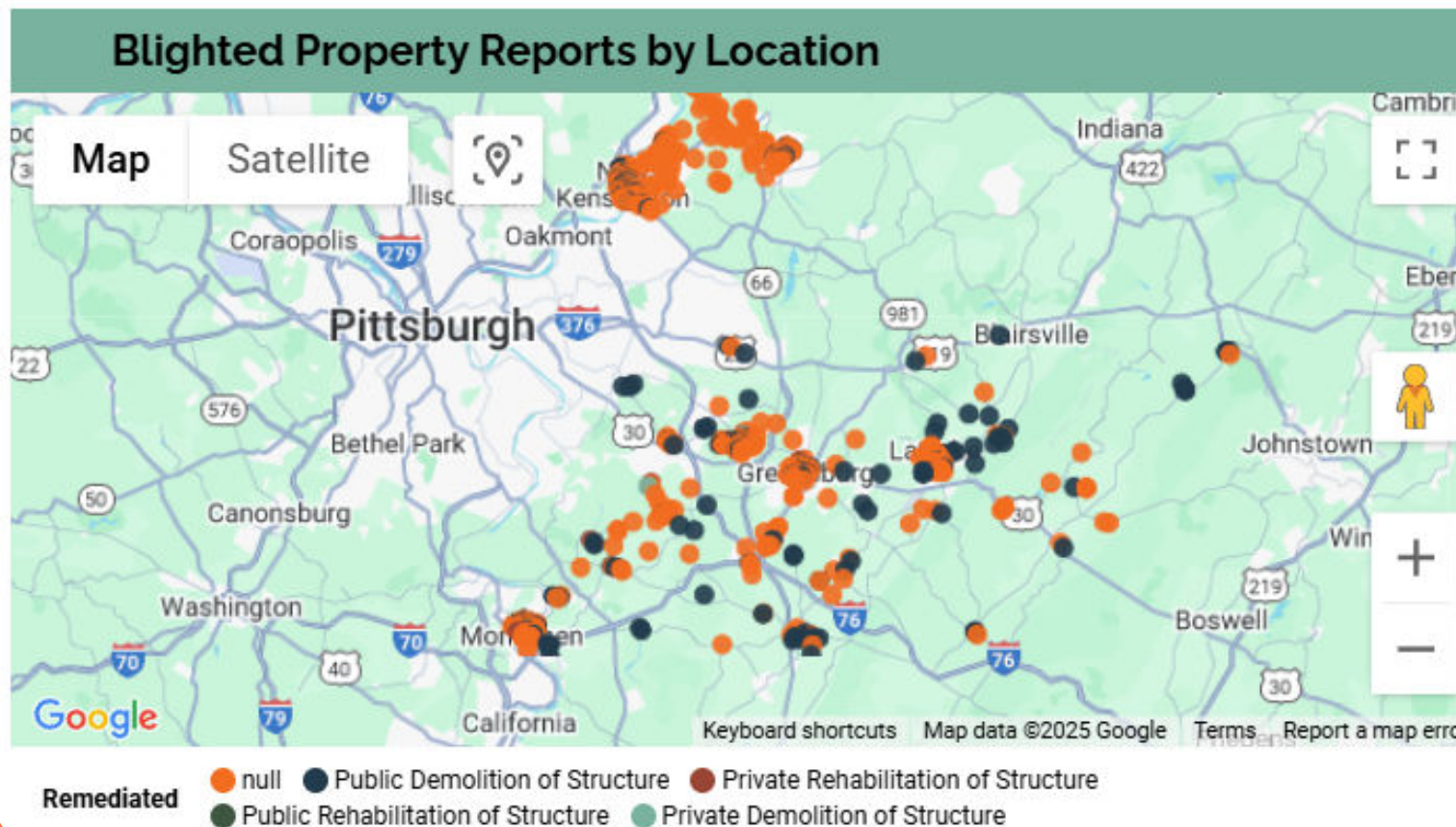
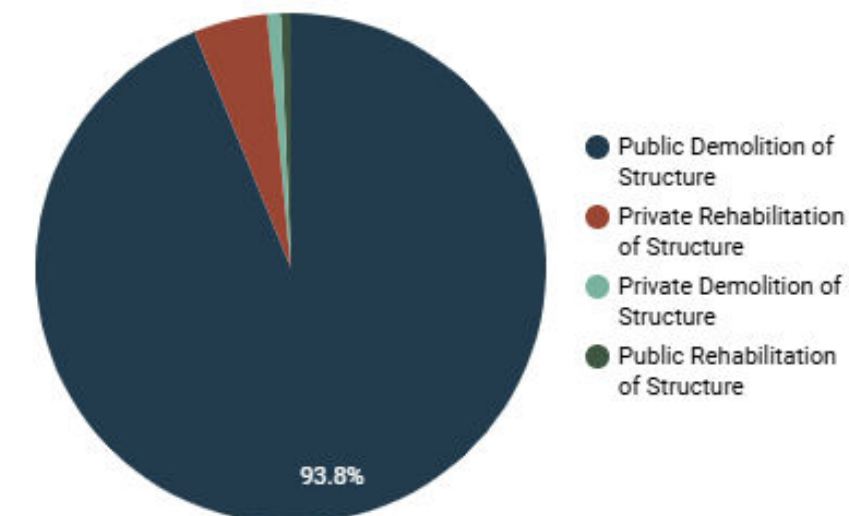
Blighted Properties Reports Submitted

1,648



Blighted Properties Addressed as of 1/2021

470



Strategic Imperatives

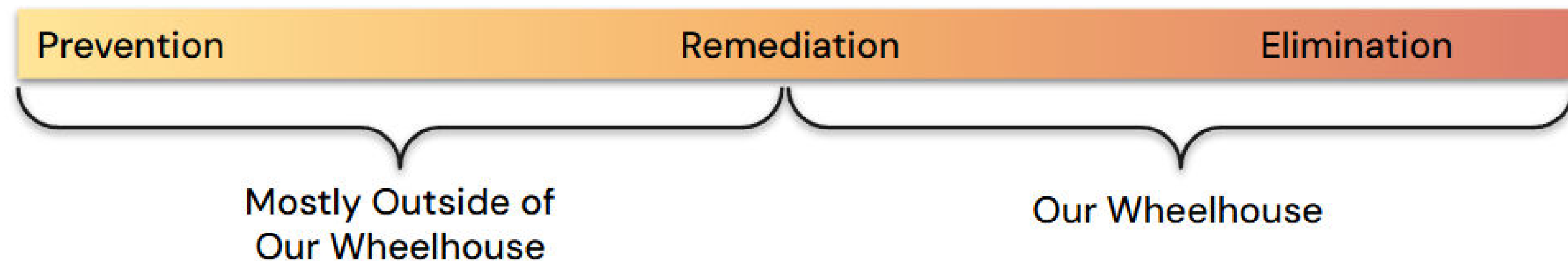
The RA/LB cannot adequately plan and implement programs and projects if we don't know where the problems are.



Demolition whack-a-mole
*AI generated

Strategic Imperatives

The RA/LB focuses mostly on one piece of the Prevention, Remediation, and Elimination spectrum. Most of our tools, resources, and processes are designed to eliminate blight... through demolition. How do we become proactive?



Strategic Imperatives

Well-informed and proactive blight prevention, remediation, and elimination relies on cooperation between multiple layers of government, and the private sector.



*AI generated

Technical Assistance

Applying specialized skills and services to help identify strategies.

Grass Root Solutions

Deborah J. Grass

PROJECT TEAM

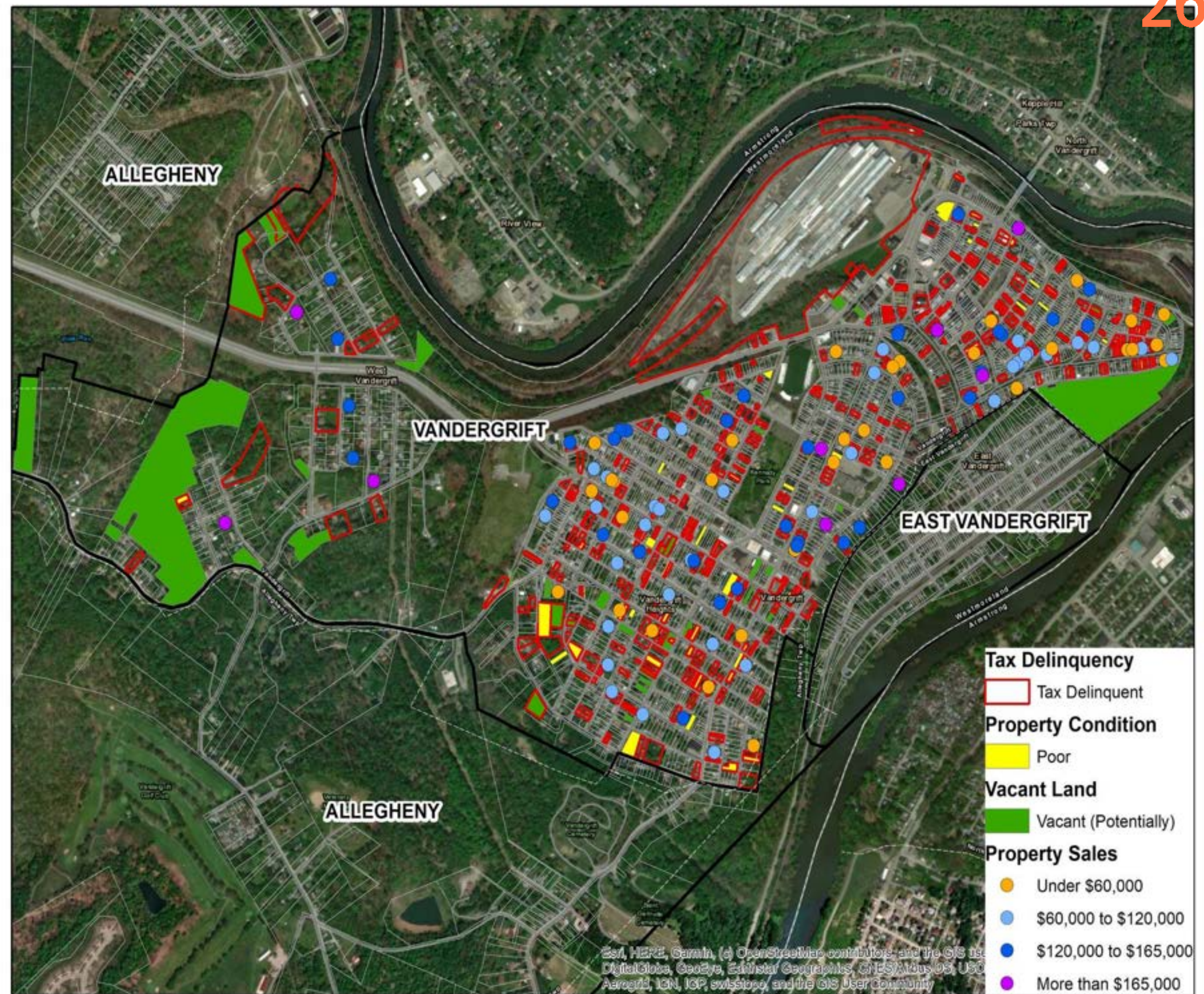
- Rick Hopkinson
- Barb Ciampini
- Coleen Davis



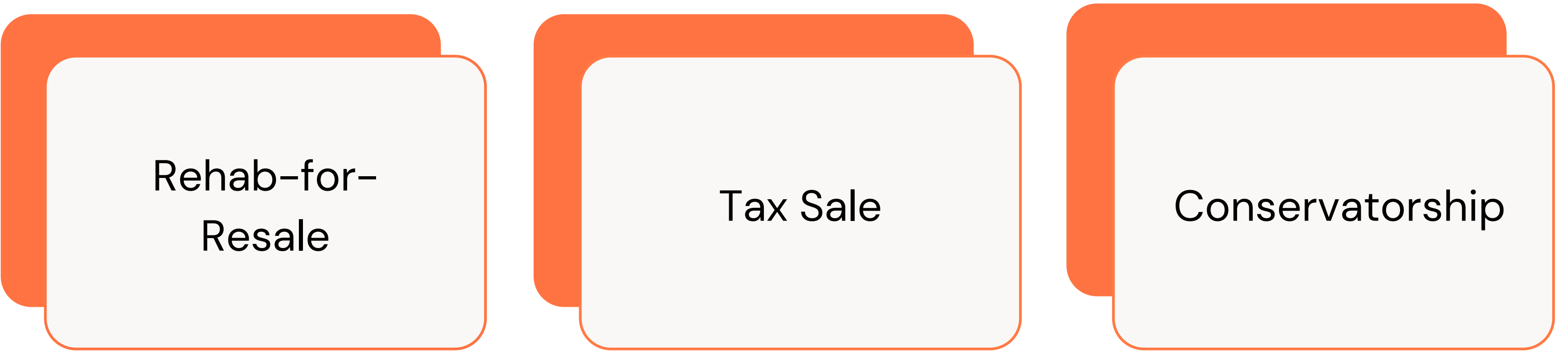
*AI generated

Market Driven Approach

What is a *market driven approach* to fighting blight and why should you consider it in your next blight plan?



Strategies for Strong Markets



Rehab-for-
Resale

Tax Sale

Conservatorship

What's the Process?

From data collection to tool identification.

BLIGHT INVENTORY & PLAN PROCESS

Phase I

Phase II

Data Collection

- Identify datasets
- Collect data
- Data verification

Data Analysis

- Analyze data
- Community-based meetings
- Existing blight tool survey

Regional Task Force

- Review findings
- Identify priorities
- Review & identify blight fighting tools
- Explore partnerships

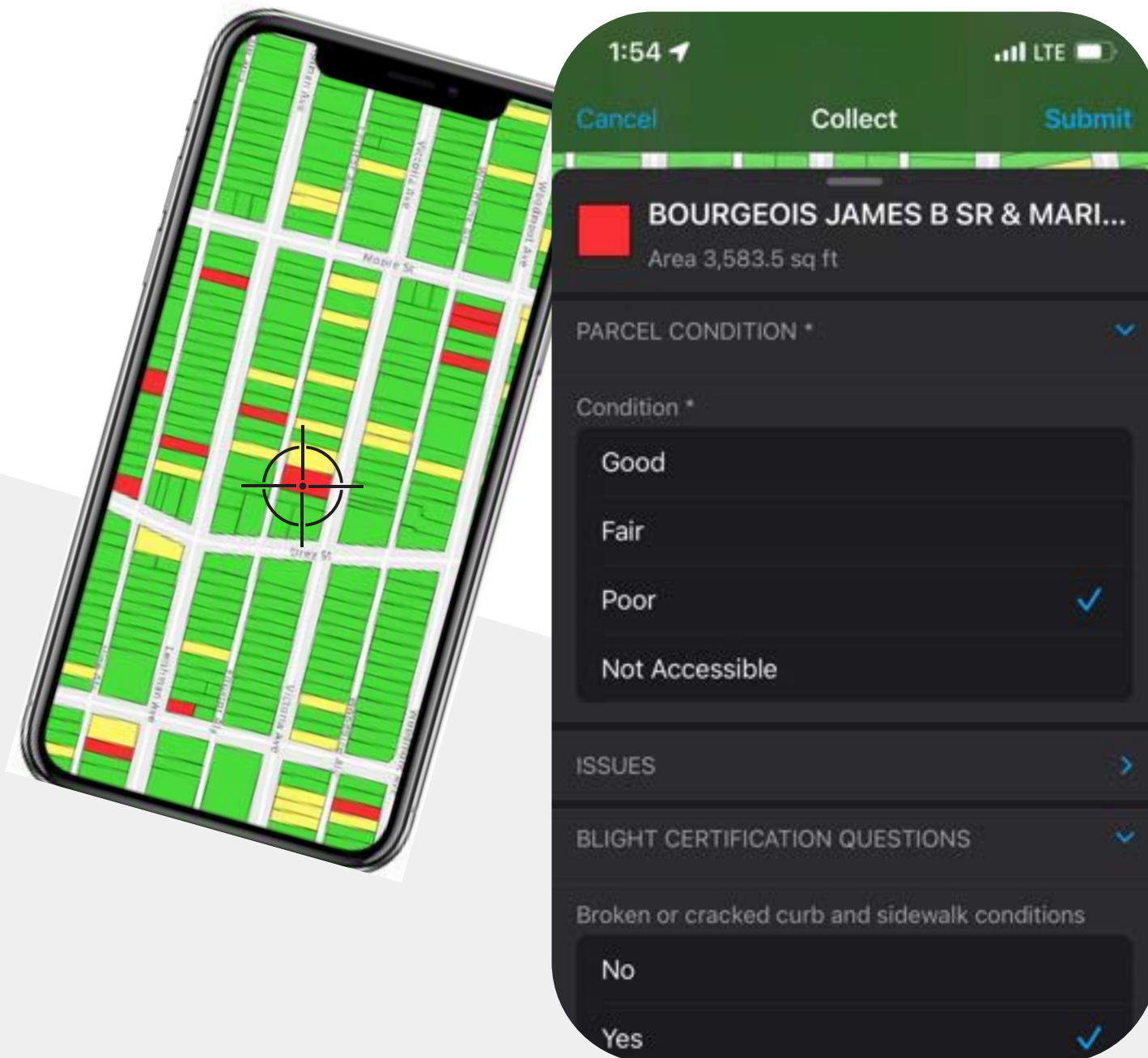
Blight Plan

- Prepare blight plan strategies
- Identify resources

METHODS



ArcGIS® Field Maps



Fieldwork Collection

- Parcel-level conditions
- Live updates to inventory – Wifi hotspots
- Photos of **Poor** rated parcels – public ROW
- Staff walk & drive communities

Quantify Issues

- Issues 1–3: peeling paint, rotting wood, deteriorating roof, etc.
- “Blight certification” questions – Westmoreland RA/LB
- General observations – notes

Relevant Available Datasets

- **County:** ownership, tax delinquency, tax generation
- **Municipality:** code violations, building permit locations, junk vehicles locations, vacancies, structural fire locations
- **Consultant:** residential property sales (market)

METHODS – PROPERTY CONDITIONS GUIDE



Good

- New construction/well maintained & cared for
- No significant signs of deterioration/damage
- Needs minor painting/basic improvements or cleaning
- Empty lot/no structure: no major visible debris

Fair

- Visible deterioration – cracking brick, rotting wood, rusting metal, crumbling concrete
- Significant painting needed
- Degraded features – windows, stairs, porches, awnings, cornice, etc.
- Empty lot/no structure: visible debris

Poor

- Substantial deterioration – cracking brick, rotting wood, rusting metal, missing siding/brick, crumbling foundation
- Broken, missing, or boarded-up windows/doors
- Immediate safety hazard – open holes/house is a shell
- Structure is filled with trash/debris, severely overgrown, or inaccessible due to overgrowth/debris
- Empty lot/no structure: major debris/dumping area

REGIONAL BLIGHT TASK FORCE

32

agency new vibrant refreshed
awesomeness beautiful uphill improved
quality life safer community attraction miracle
opportunity start
neig
attrac



Role: Create a vision for a blight-free Alle-Kiski. Serve as the sounding board, reviewer, & recommending body of strategies to tackle blight.

Findings

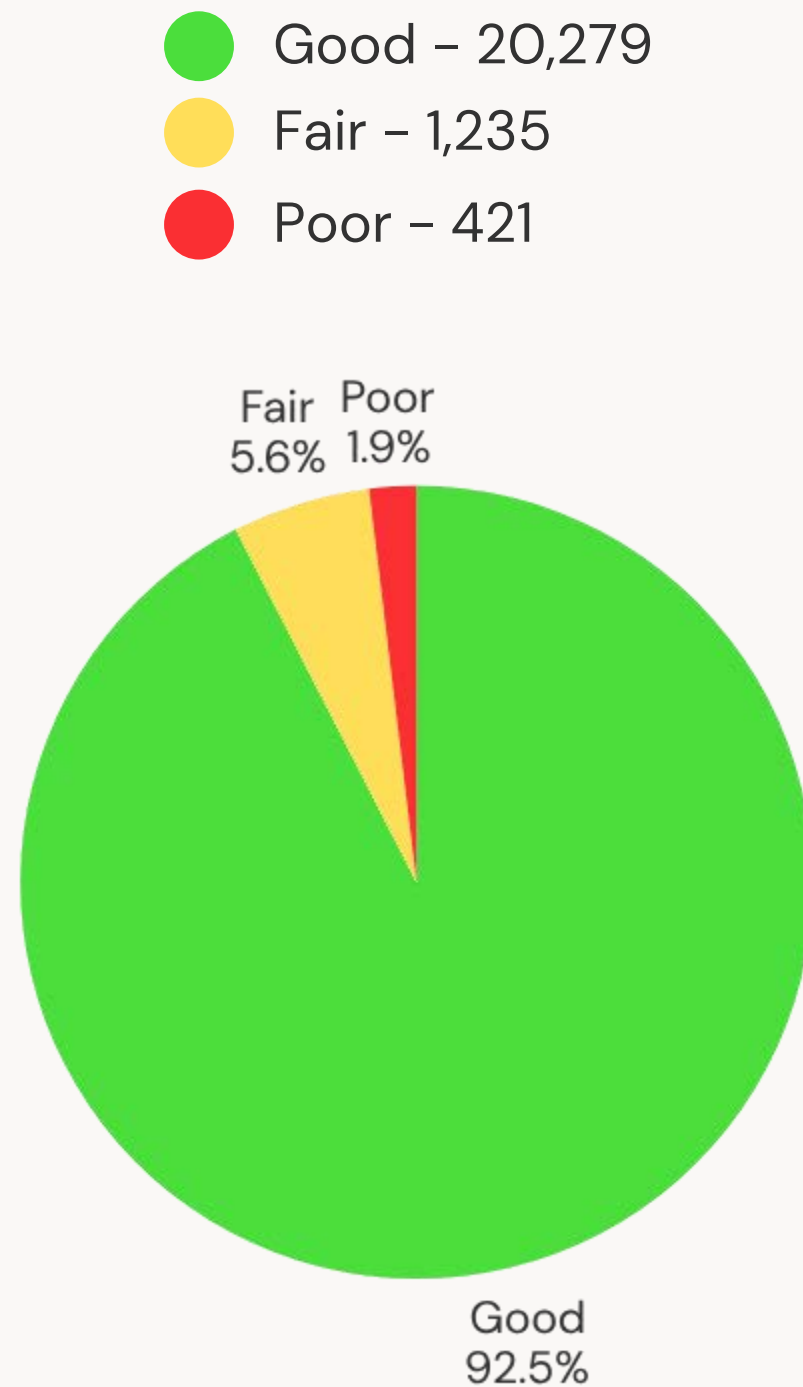
Blight and residential market conditions for the Alle-Kiski.



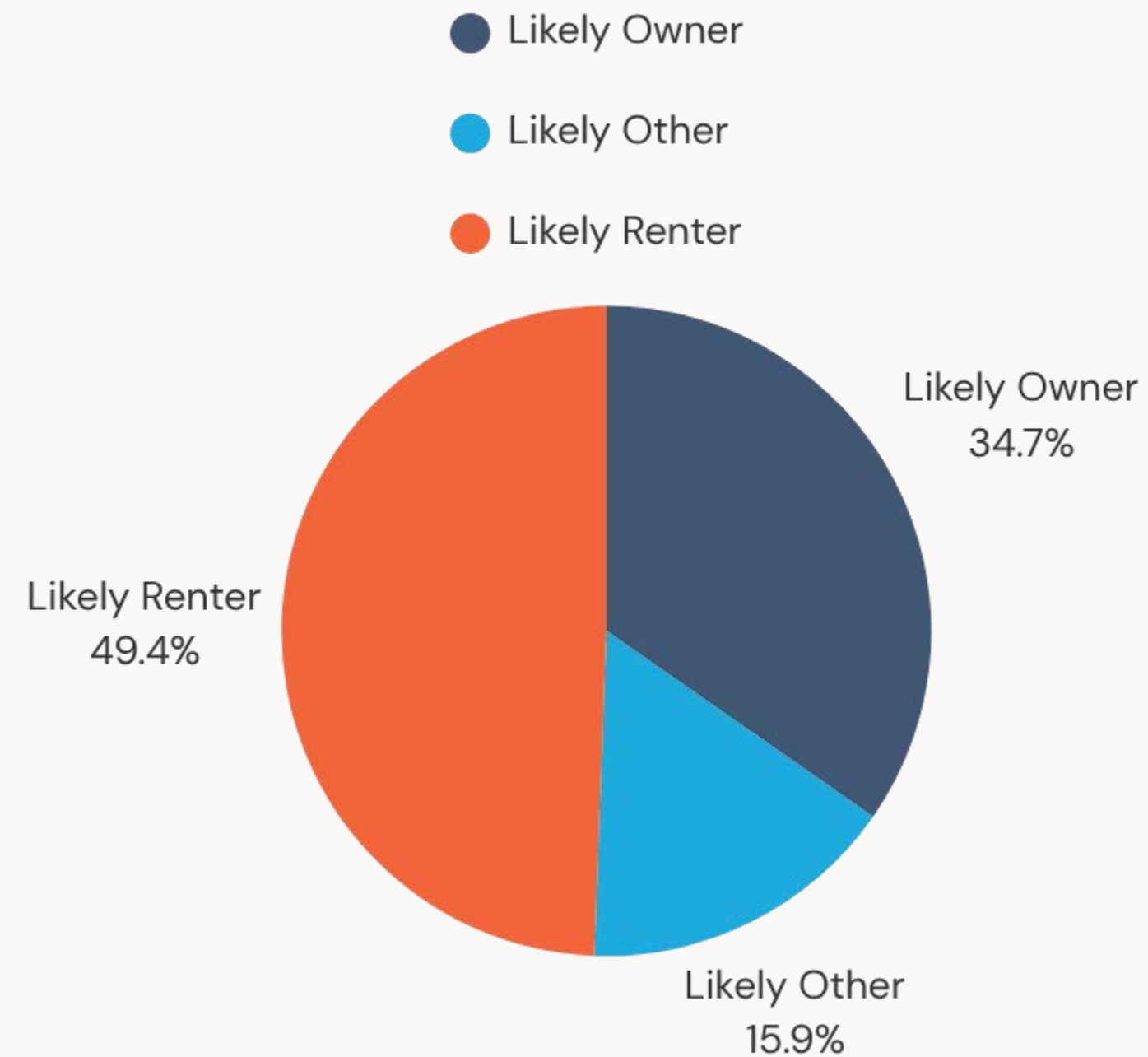
REGIONAL CONDITIONS

34

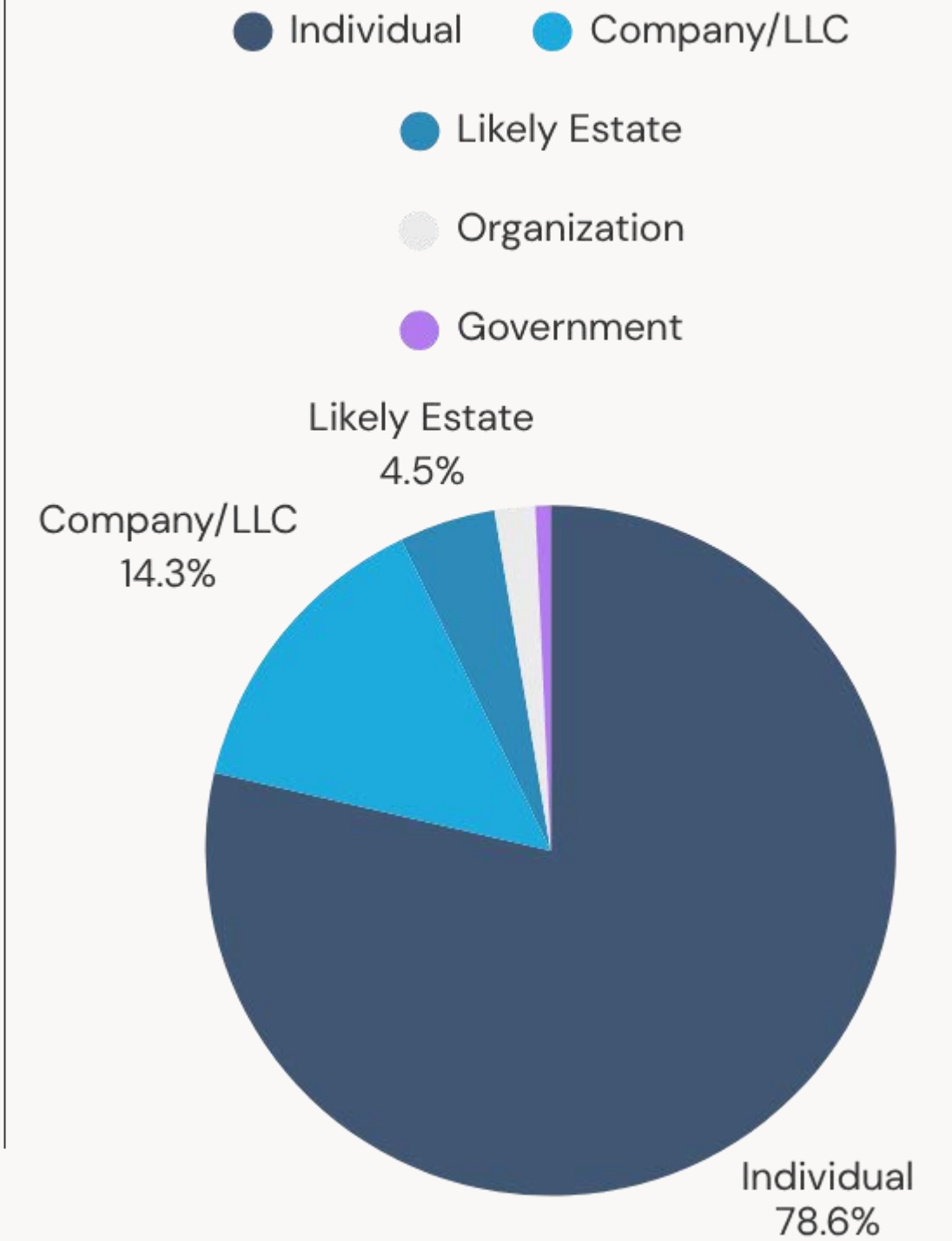
Conditions among **all** property



Tenure among **Poor** rated



Ownership among **Poor** rated



TOP ISSUES

Peeling paint (**2,020**); damaged accessories (**1,659**); cracking brick/rotting wood/rusting metal (**1,272**); deteriorating roof (**1,260**)

TAX DELINQUENCY

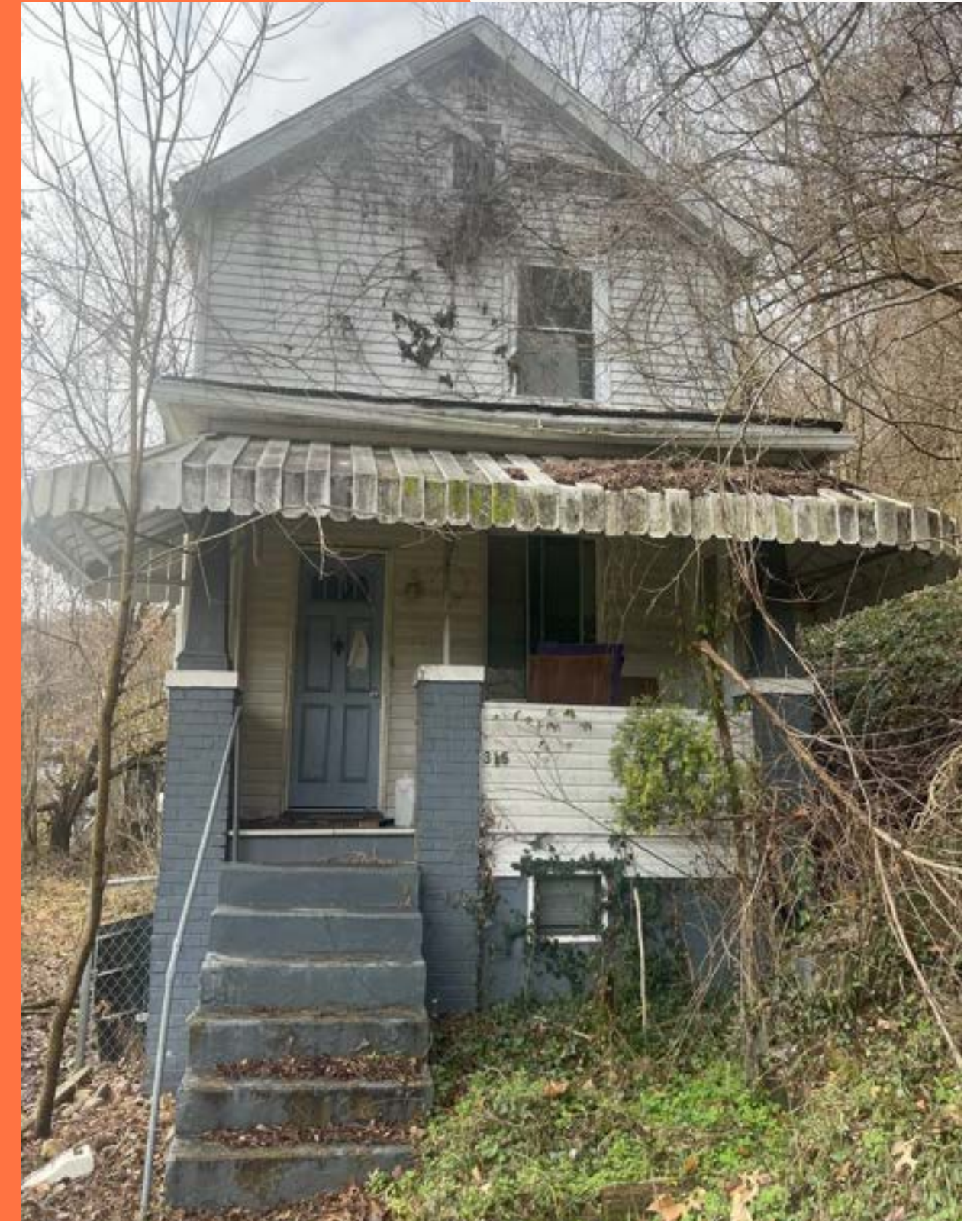
373 tax delinquent properties (**121** in a blighted condition)

OWNER LOCATION

80% of **Poor** rated property owners are local (within 30 min. drive), **20%** non-local

OWNERS OF MULTIPLE

21 owners hold two or more **Poor** rated properties (**13%**)



Example Poor rated property, East Vandergrift Borough

REGIONAL MARKET & PROPERTY CONDITIONS

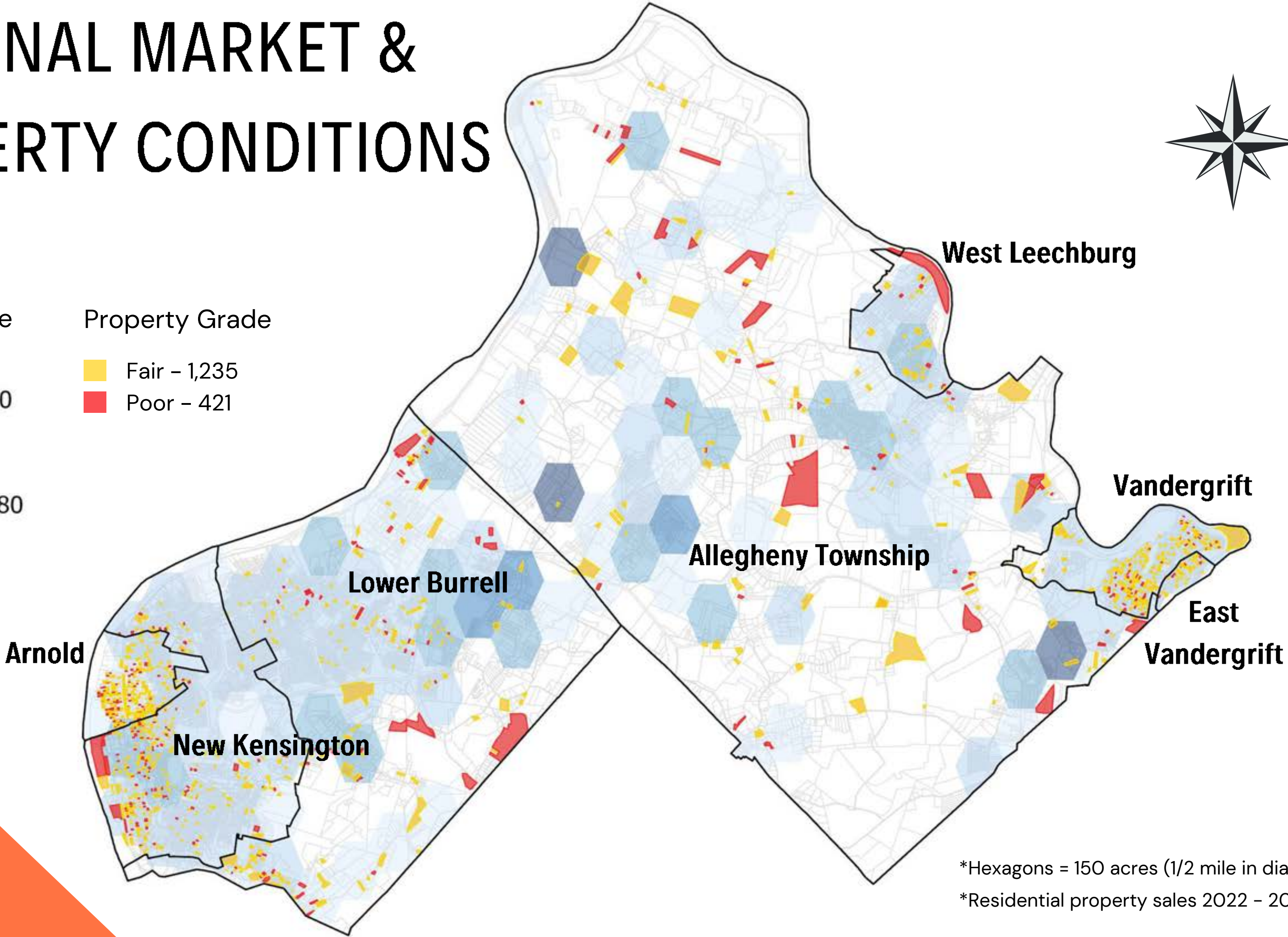


Sale Price

Property Grade



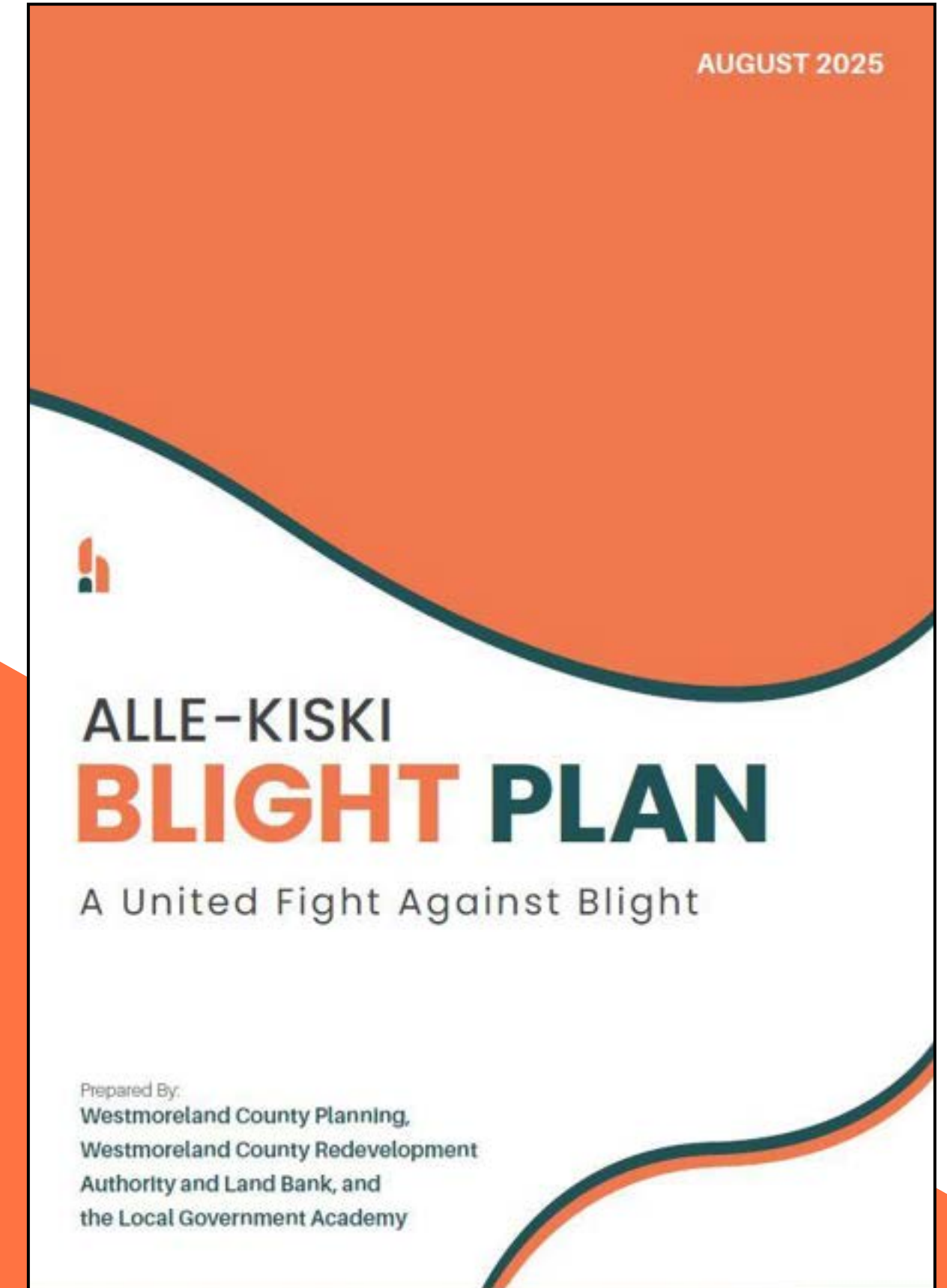
- Fair – 1,235
- Poor – 421



*Hexagons = 150 acres (1/2 mile in diameter)
*Residential property sales 2022 – 2023

Recommendations

Resources & capacity are tight – what's most important?



Alle-Kiski Region.

Key Recommendations

Overarching actions that are applicable and span across all communities within the Alle-Kiski are identified next. Key recommendations represent core actions to address blight. Regional recommendations also represent opportunities for municipalities to work together or where a collaborative approach will yield the best results. Recommendations are in order of operation for implementation.

Where actions overlap or could be considered both prevention and remediation for example, these will be identified as such.



Prevention

Prevention actions help keep Good and Fair rated properties from deteriorating. This includes the legal framework, such as codes or ordinances and internal processes in place at the local level.



Remediation

Remediation actions help return Fair rated properties to Good condition and Poor rated properties to Fair and Good condition. Remediation efforts include working with property owners to address issues and bring properties into code compliance.



Elimination

Elimination actions are reserved for the most severe or extreme cases and help return Poor rated properties to Good condition. For some properties, the only realistic or viable option is to remove the blight through demolitions.



Repurpose

Repurpose actions also help return Poor rated properties to Good condition and are often used in tandem with Remediation or Elimination actions to turn formerly blighted properties to productive use.

ALLE-KISKI REGION

(22) Key Regional Recommendations

- Core actions
- Applicable to all
- Collaborative opportunities

(5) Supporting Recommendations

- Reinforce/support
- Address common themes/opportunities

ALLE-KISKI COMMUNITIES

▶ Priority Areas

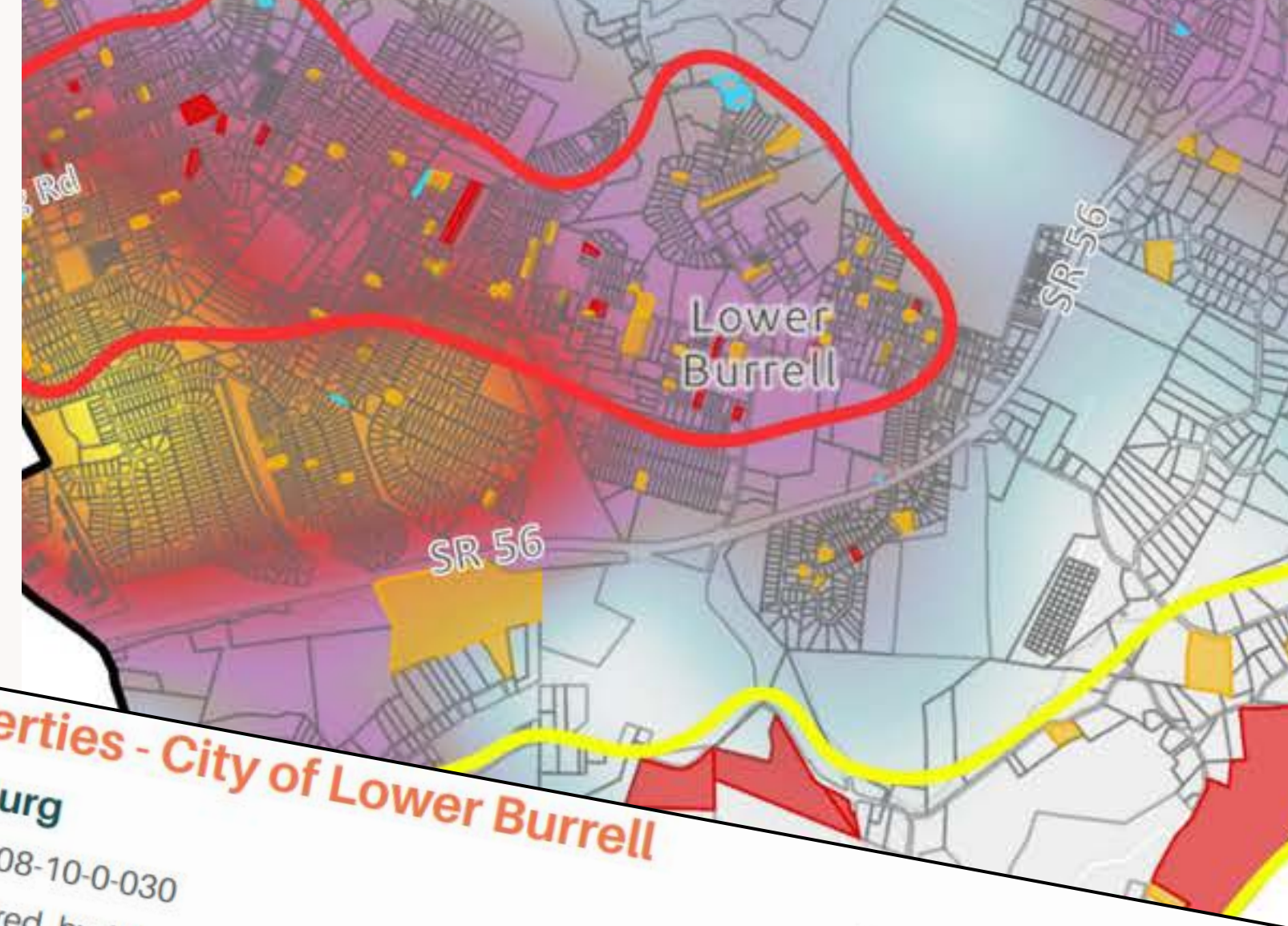
Focus efforts, time, & resources

▶ Key Properties

A closer look at critical properties & specific recommendations

▶ Community Recommendations

Local context & (5) "Take Action" – high priority



Key Properties - City of Lower Burrell

945 Greensburg
Parcel ID: 17-08-10-0-030
Owner: acquired by Westmoreland Land Bank during blight study (formerly Michelle L. & Bryant J. Mullen)
Occupancy Status: vacant institutional property
Condition: Poor
Tax Delinquency: at the time of inventory, 10 years delinquent; \$68,439; Unsold category
After Repair Value: not applicable

Strategy:

- Identify partnership opportunities for redevelopment
- Demolition using the IPMC condemnation process
- Repurpose site through new construction
- Explore the use of Industrial Sites Reuse Program funds



Notes: located along highly visible road; old school building; potential for rehabilitation project for apartments or commercial space

ADOPT MOST RECENT IPMC

Minimum standards to ensure public health, safety, & welfare

Legal framework – hold owners accountable

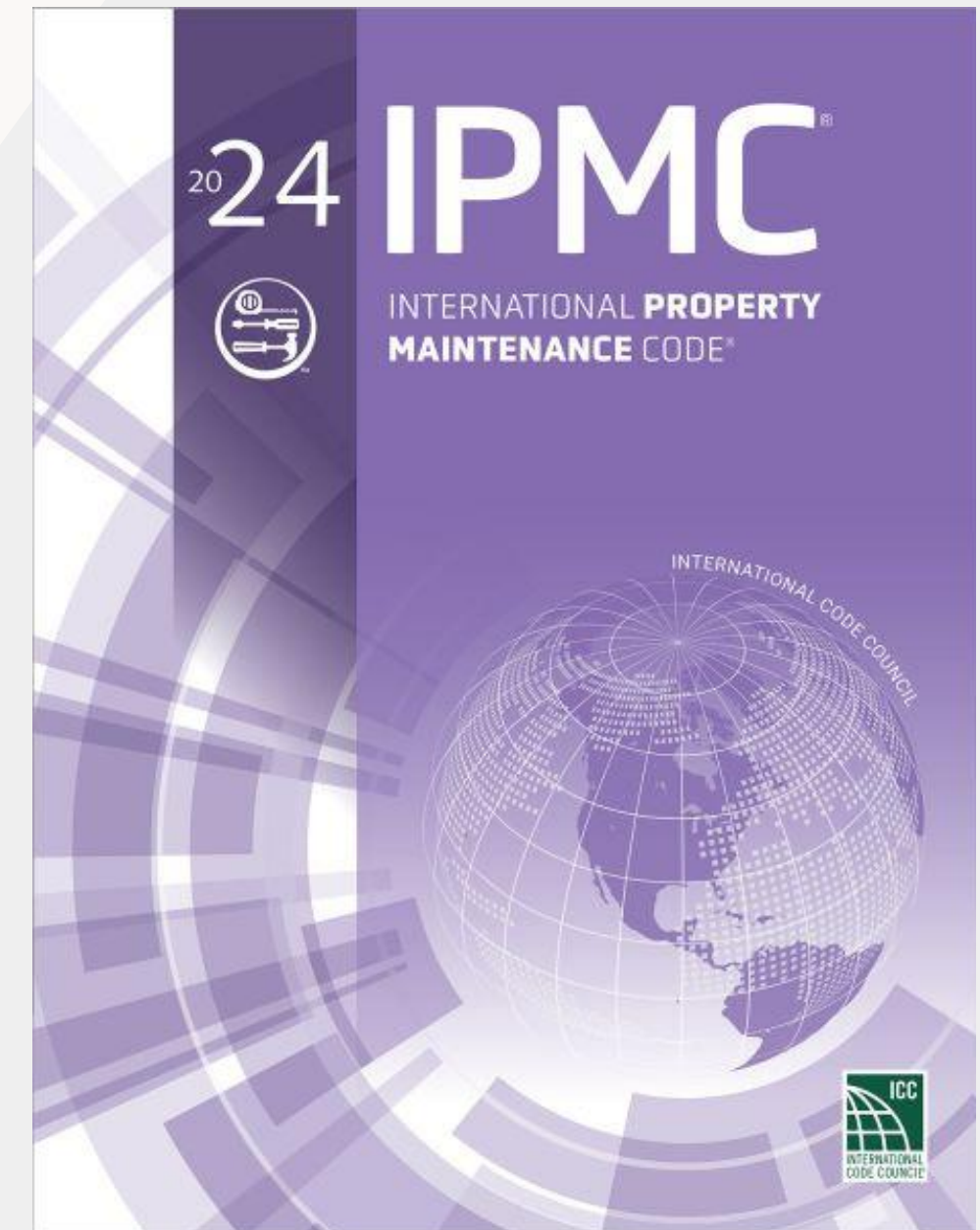
Replace local codes (duplicative/redundant)

Comprehensive & consistent – across municipal boundary

Lower municipal insurance rating

▶ Alle-Kiski Context

6 out of 7 communities follow the IPMC, but most are following outdated editions. All have local property maintenance codes



Credit: International Code Council

DIGITALIZE CODE ENFORCEMENT

Track/administer progress – streamline day-to-day enforcement
Update records, issue violation letters, create reports

Keep track of relevant property & owner information

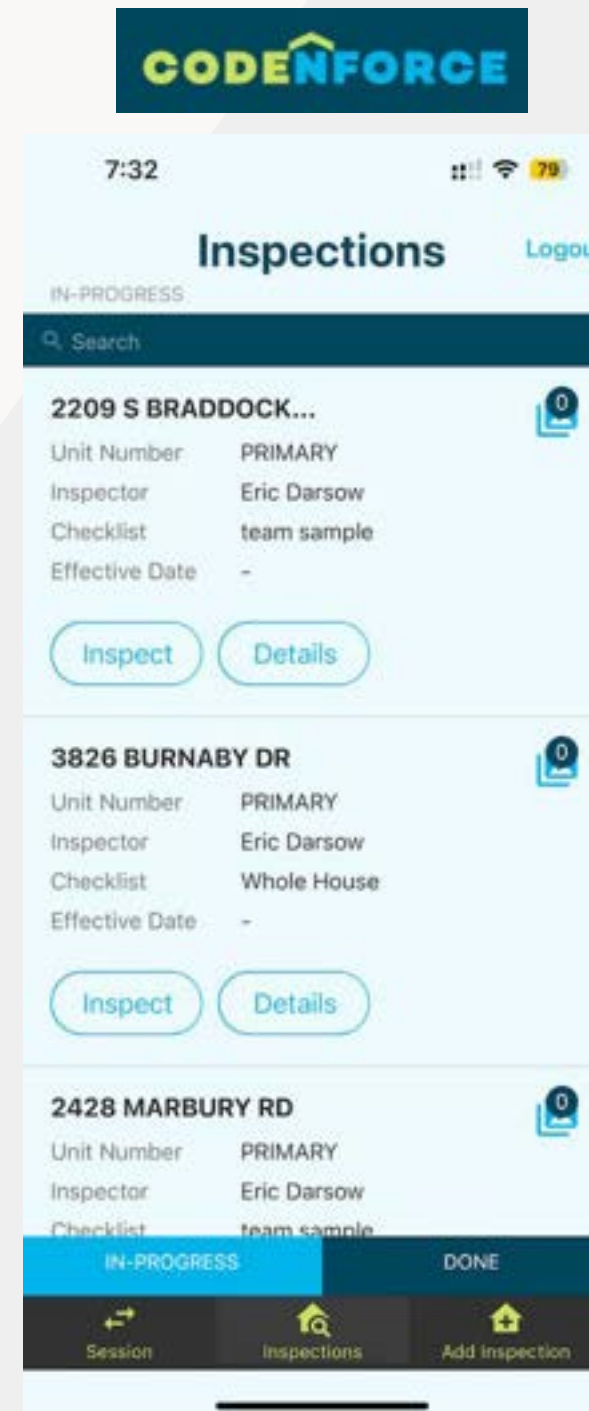
Build a violation history – hold repeat violators accountable

Integrate local data/allow for the sharing of code enforcement data

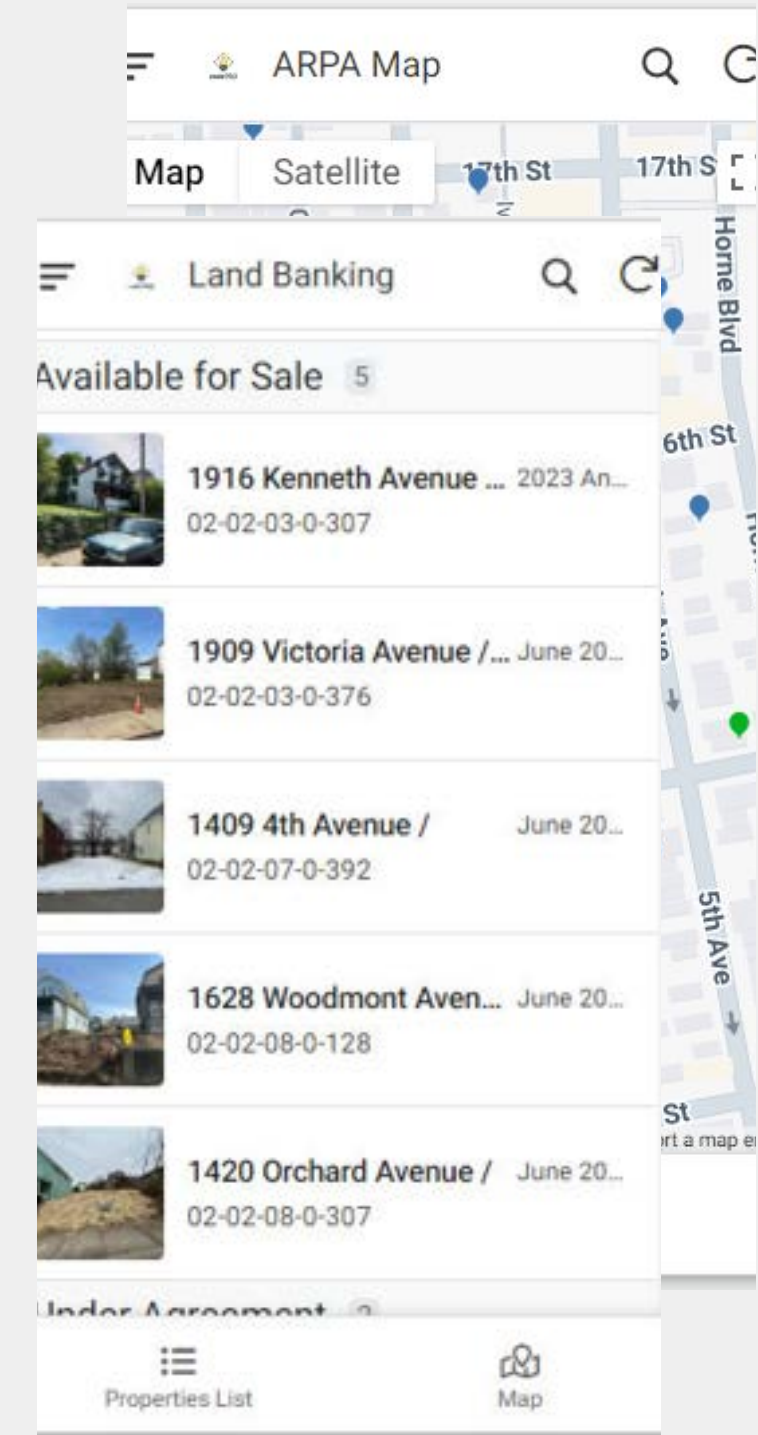
Consistent systems = easier intergovernmental collaboration
Share data & Code Enforcement Officers

▶ Alle-Kiski Context

5 out of 7 communities have some digital system in place – ranging in capability/function. Most have expressed desire to share services



CodeNforce software, Credit: TCVCOG



codePRO software, Credit: WC RA/LB

SUFFICIENTLY FUND CODE ENFORCEMENT 42

What if We Increase Code Enforcement Expenditures to 3%?

	TOTAL GENERAL FUND EXPENSES	CODE ENFORCEMENT EXPENSES	% OF TOTAL	INCREASE TO 3% OF BUDGET	CURRENT HOURS (AT \$25 PER HOUR)	POSSIBLE HOURS - INCREASE TO 3% OF BUDGET	CURRENT FULL TIME/ PART TIME EMPLOYEE	POSSIBLE FULL TIME EMPLOYEE EQUIVALENT
Allegheny Township	4,325,121	45,055	1.0%	129,754	1,802	5,190	1 PT	2.50
City of Arnold	7,802,070	38,951	0.5%	234,062	1,558	9,362	1 FT	4.50
East Vandergrift	433,404	2,800	0.6%	13,002	112	520	1 PT	0.25
City of Lower Burrell	10,882,339	23,470	0.2%	326,470	939	13,059	1 FT	6.28
New Kensington	9,534,847	124,829	1.3%	286,045	4,993	11,442	2 FT 1 PT	5.50
Vandergrift Borough	4,938,583	15,668	0.3%	148,157	627	5,926	1 PT	2.85
West Leechburg Borough	739,791	3,669	0.5%	22,194	147	888	1 PT	0.43

Alle-Kiski Context

6 out of 7 communities are spending at or under 1% of their total general fund expenditures on code enforcement. 4 are spending 0.5% or under

PA Funding Sources:

- General fund
- Inspection/registration fees
 - regulating properties
- Penalties/fines for violating property maintenance codes
- CDBG

Figures based on 2023 budgets

STRATEGIC CODE ENFORCEMENT

Meet owners where they are at; focus efforts on **priority areas**

Deploy different strategies, goal: **code compliance**

Acknowledges differences between common scenarios, rather than a blanket approach

Develop criteria to direct how, when, & where to use limited resources:

- Neighborhood **market conditions** (strong or weak housing sales)
- **Property type** (vacant, owner-occupied, renter-occupied)
- **Owner circumstances** (abilities & incentives)



Homes in East Vandergrift Borough

EXAMPLES:

- **Blighted Property 1** – owner occupied; weak market; owner is low-income & elderly
 - **Strategy** – refer to home repair resources/partners for rehab.; engage social services; reward compliance
- **Blighted Property 2** – vacant; weak market; owner lives out of state
 - **Strategy** – violation letter w/ strict deadlines; vacant property registration; require local manager/secure property

STRENGTHEN RENTAL PROGRAMS

Register properties, pay a fee, & make available for inspections on a schedule

Proactive approach, goal: **code compliance & safe/healthy housing**

Increase frequency of inspections – annually or every 2–3 years

Prioritize:

- Older units first
- Focus on properties with a history of violations
- Spend additional time in neighborhoods with more rental units

Incorporate incentives for compliance/opposite measures for noncompliance:

- Discounted fees, waived fees or other rewards/
- Revoking rental licenses or occupancy permits; steep non-compliance fees

Alle-Kiski Context

6 out of 7 communities have rental registration & inspection programs in place – most conduct inspections only at the change of tenant. Many have expressed difficulty with compliance

25% of all
property is likely
renter-occupied

44% of rental
property is in Fair &
Poor condition



Duplex in the City of Arnold

ESTABLISH POWERWASH/PAINT PROGRAM

Serious issues could be mitigated with prevention on all properties: **Good, Fair, & Poor:**

- Peeling paint: **2,020**
- Damaged accessories: **1,659**
- Cracked brick/rotting wood/rusting metal: **1,272**

Establish regionally oriented program to address minor issues for owners who may lack the resources/ability to maintain aspects of their property

- **Powerwash, minor repairs, & painting** of exteriors of homes

Help beautify neighborhoods and support those in need

Can be funded through municipal **Blight Funds** (fines/fees or taxes collected)

Program Administration:

- Coordinated effort between communities & their staff (**ICA**)
- **Partner** agency/nonprofit lead
- Supplement with help from volunteers, technical schools, outside agencies or companies

Westmoreland Lead Safe Program

- Targeted mailings to Fair & Poor rated property with peeling paint
- Using data to connect those in need with resources available



TLC NOW = LESS SERIOUS REPAIRS LATER



Credit: Hallandale Beach CRA

SUPPORTING RECOMMENDATIONS

Verify/correct all property addresses

Fix unclear, incorrect, & misleading addresses

Assemble vacant lots for productive use

Combine smaller lots for greater uses, market properties

Champion adaptive reuse

New life for aging structures

Turn vacant lots into green spaces

Sustainable, lower-cost, community-driven solutions

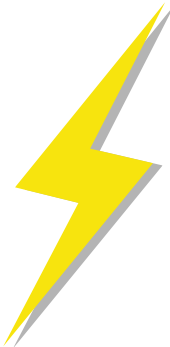
Foster public art

Brighten decaying structures & blocks

PROJECT DELIVERABLES

Alle-Kiski Blight Plan

- ▶ **Regional Recommendations**
Key & Supporting; applicable to all/collaborative
- ▶ **Community Recommendations**
Priority Areas & Key Properties; local context & high priority actions
- ▶ **Resources for Redevelopment**
Potential funding sources/programs to support implementation
- ▶ **Recommendation Matrix**
Identifying alignment among communities



- ▶ **Appendix**
Code Enforcement Toolbox (*Rental Inspection Ordinance, Inspection Scheduling Form, IPMC Procedures...*); *Annual Blight Ranking Matrix*; *RA/LB Demo. Application*; *Linked Resources* +

ES

Program	Purpose	Match Requirement	Agency	
Neighborhood Assistance Program	Provides tax credits to a contributing business for affordable housing, economic development, neighborhood assistance, and other projects in low-income or distressed areas	Varies	PA DCED	
Pennsylvania Mixed-Use Housing Program	Provides...			
Section 504 Program				
Program	Purpose	Match Requirement	Agency	
A Brush with Kindness – Home Repair Program	Provides painting, landscaping, weather stripping, and minor repair services for low-income homeowners impacted by age, disability, and family circumstances	Program participants must volunteer 8 or more hours and contribute to building materials for the project	Allegheny Housing	
State Historical Brownfield Program	Testing, cleanup, and redevelopment of brownfields and other industrial sites which have real or perceived environmental contamination	No match	Westmoreland RA/LB, US	
Strategic Marketing Planning Initiative	Planning and implementation grants to transform or distressed neighborhoods by replacing aging or substandard housing with new, mixed-income housing; improving the lives of residents; and creating strong and safe neighborhoods	5% Match	US Housing	
Westmoreland Demolition Fund	Community Development Block Grant	Funds a variety of community development activities such as housing rehabilitation and economic development to assist primarily low-to-moderate income neighborhoods	Varies	Westmoreland US Housing
	Community Revitalization Fund	Finances the construction or rehab of projects providing affordable housing in commercial corridors, in particular mixed-use projects	No match, but other funding that can be leveraged is encouraged	PHFA
	Creative Communities Initiative Grant	Provides multi-year funding for place-based, community driven, arts-based projects	10% cash or in-kind	PCA

Appendix

Code Enforcement Toolbox (Rental Inspection)

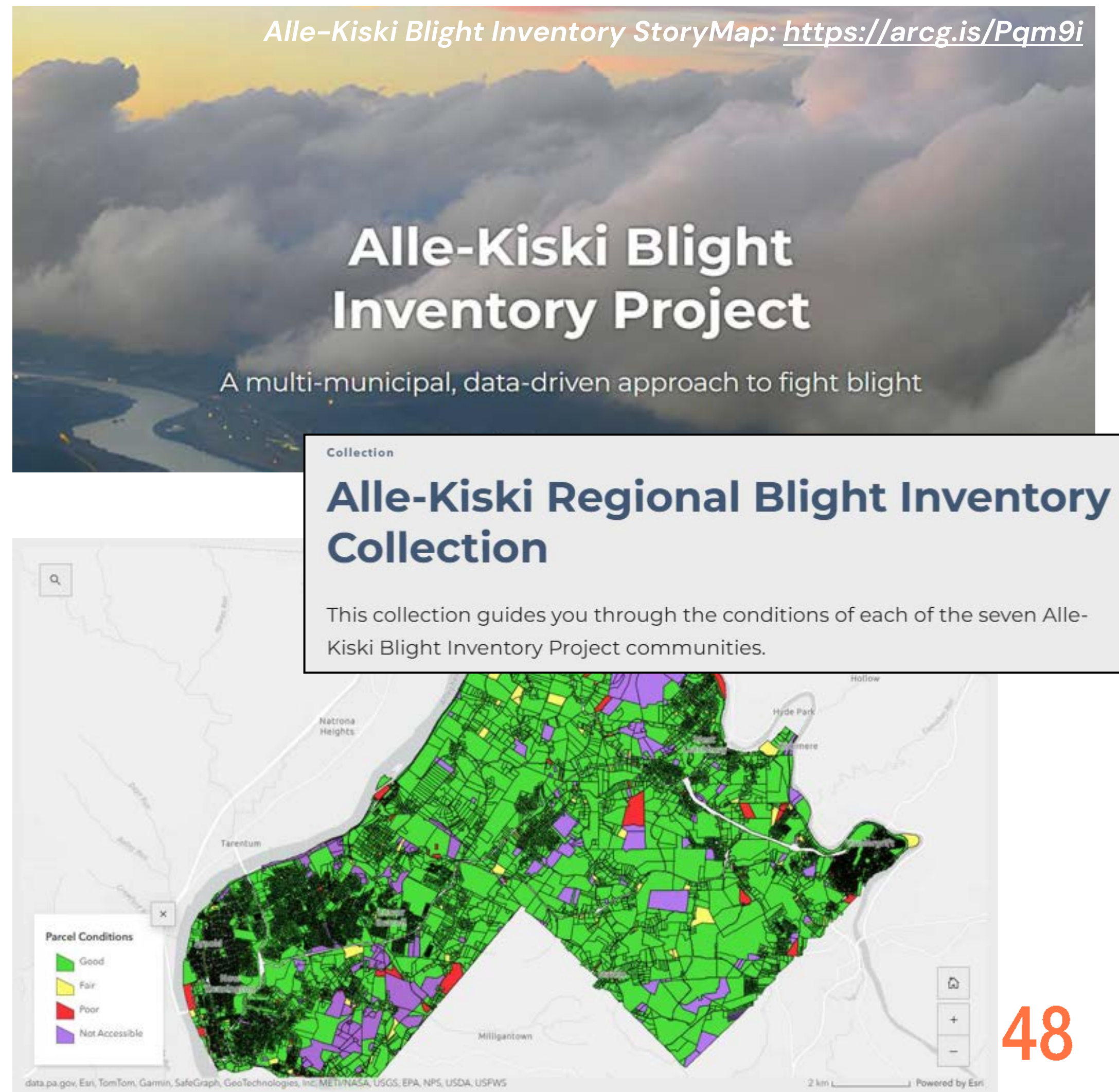
PROJECT DELIVERABLES

Explore the Regional
StoryMap & Plan Here:



StoryMaps

- Display collected data & benchmark status
- Decision making tool
- Communicate/share info. about project
- Show regional scale/link communities



Implementation & Lessons Learned

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

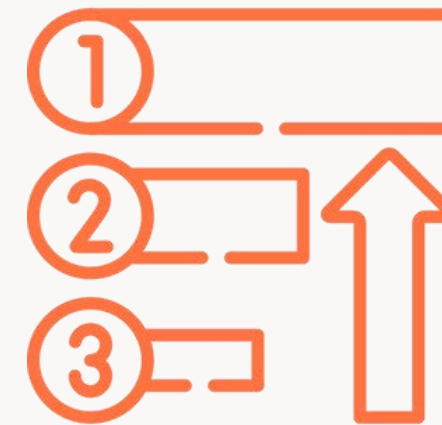
AK IGC serving as “core” of **Action Team**

Pursue local **partnerships**, involve key stakeholders for support (Resources for Redevelopment)

Alignment between communities (Matrix) = opportunities to work together

Focus on high priority actions and priority areas

Complete process or policy changes first



Alle-Kiski Context

AK IGC has committed to meet quarterly to champion implementation of plan recommendations. Several communities have taken immediate action steps:

- reassessing rental registration/inspection fees,
- exploring new digital systems for code enforcement,
- & continued exploration of sharing services

LESSONS LEARNED

We can accomplish more **together**

A foundation of working **relationships/rapport** between communities and county is essential, building on previous planning = **TRUST**

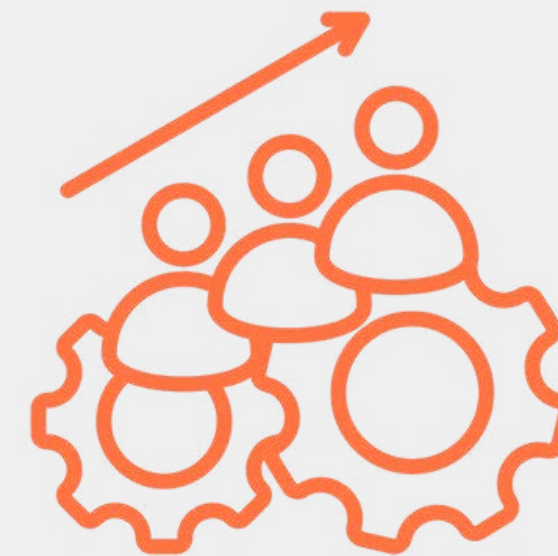
County leadership & partnerships with regional nonprofits/organizations can be transformative

Counties have an important role in **bridging the capacity gap**; helping municipalities with **technical expertise**

Having a **plan in place/data** to show can help with resources +

In their absence, there is no other way to understand

The work begins with a blight inventory & plan





Blight is not just a local government problem, but a challenge that requires partnership and collaboration.

Local government can't do it alone. We all have a part to play in the fight against blight.

Questions?



Thank you!

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