



Mitigating Blight for the Win: Greensburg's Elevated Strategy Toolbox

October 4, 2022

Hello!

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WESTMORELAND COUNTY
PLANNING + DEVELOPMENT

Goals for Session

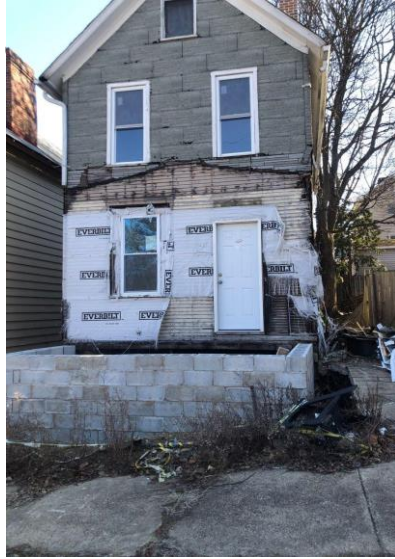
- Greensburg's Blight Inventory project
- Interactive exercise: *Defining a Blight Reduction Strategy - Rosemont Neighborhood*
- Greensburg's Blight Mitigation Strategy
- Q&A

Defining Blight

What is blight? What words come to mind?



Defining Blight



Example Poor parcels
Greensburg Blight Inventory Project, April 2021

Source: Westmoreland County Planning

Impacts of Blight

- Threatens health, safety, and welfare
- Decreases property values
- Diminishes community aesthetics
- Impedes growth & development
- Plagues many communities



Blight is a billboard for a community.

How do we address blight?

Comprehensive strategy must be based on data, not anecdotes



Step 1: Gain Consensus for Developing a Blight Plan



Step 2: Assess the Nature and Extent of the Blight



Step 3: Convene a Blight Task Force



Step 4: Engage Municipal Officials



Step 5: Identify Priority Action Steps and Implement Them

Source: <https://housingalliancepa.org>



**we can
DO this!**

**A Five-Step,
Fast-Track
Blight Plan**

by **Chris Gulotta** for the



**Housing Alliance
of Pennsylvania**

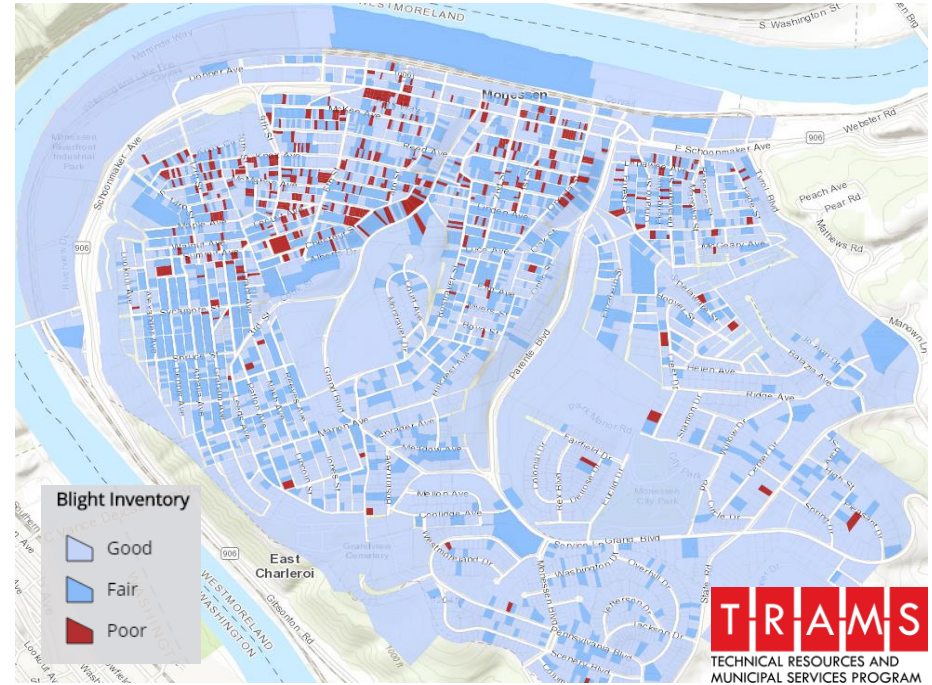
Map-Based Blight Inventory

- Complete picture of blight
- Baseline for measuring success
- Informed decision making
- Utilize limited resources
- Build strategies around
- Data driven, progressive discipline approach
- Funding opportunities



Pilot Project - City of Monessen

- Comprehensive planning process (Spring 2019)
 - Major blight problem
- TRAMS program
- Inventory of 5,032 parcels
- Result: interactive ArcGIS StoryMap
- Example process and product
- Show value of data
- City using inventory



City of Monessen Blight Inventory StoryMap

Source: Westmoreland County Planning

Greensburg's Blight Inventory

Project - City of Greensburg

- Precursor to comprehensive plan update
 - City's interest - build strategy to address blight
 - County's interest - help communities plan/improve
- \$10,000 Grant
 - National Association of Realtors®' Housing Opportunity Program
- Shared interest - realtors help build strong communities

GOOD
DATA

=

GOOD
PLANNING



Blight Inventory Process



Getting Started

Project proposal & cooperation agreement (Fall 2020)

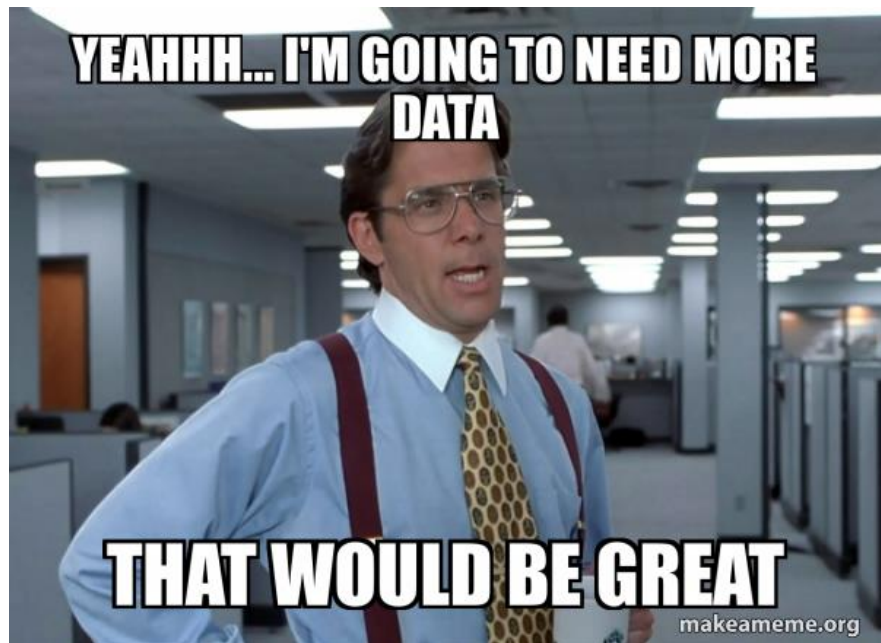
- Project Team:
 - City Police
 - City Fire
 - City Public Works
 - City Planning & Code Enforcement
 - City Council
 - Realtors® Association of Westmoreland, Indiana and Mon Valley
- Define framework, determine end product goals, and ensure data quality & accuracy
 - Monthly meetings - steer process, shape products



Getting Started

Met with Project Team:

- Identify goal
 - Create user friendly and comprehensive blight inventory tool (6,070 parcels)
- Identify available data sets
 - **City:** code violation, crime, structural fire, Red-X, RoadBotics
 - **County:** parcel, tax delinquent, tax generation
- Gain consensus on property evaluation process/methods
- Complete end user assessment



Data Collection

Field work (Jan. - March):

- ArcGIS Collector App
 - Internet hot-spots
 - Live updates to inventory
- Parcel-by-parcel property conditions
 - Used adapted Grading System
- Photos taken of:
 - “Poor” parcels
 - “Developable” parcels



Parcel Inventory Grading System City of Greensburg BLIMP Project



Good

- New construction/renovation
- No visible signs of deterioration
- Needs minor painting/basic improvements
- Well maintained and cared for
- Some cleaning necessary
- *Empty lot/no structure—no major visible debris



Fair

- Some cracking of brick or wood
- Major painting required
- Deteriorated cornice
- Crumbling concrete
- Cracked windows or stairs
- *Empty lot/no structure—some visible debris (tires, trash, abandoned objects, etc.)



*Poor

- Major cracking of brick, wood rotting
- Missing brick and siding
- Broken, missing, or boarded-up windows
- House is a shell or has open holes/Immediate safety hazard
- House is filled with trash/debris and or severely overgrown
- Empty lot/no structure—major visible debris (tires, trash, abandoned objects, etc.)

Note: For any lot with more than one visible structure, grades are determined based off of the presumed primary structure. For example, if a garage or accessory structure is Poor, but the primary structure is Good – but it is indicated in the notes section that the garage is Poor.

*Photos are taken of all Poor structures and of all Good, Fair, and Poor “developable” empty lots without structures.

Guide updated 4/8/21

Data Collection

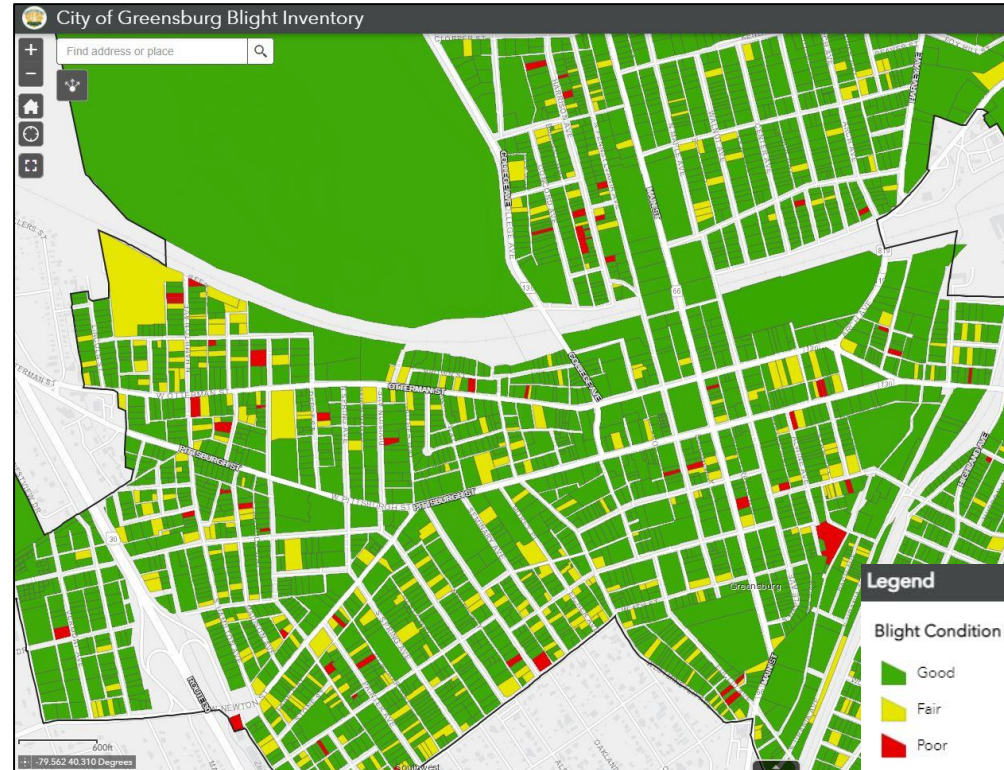
Desk work (Jan. - May):

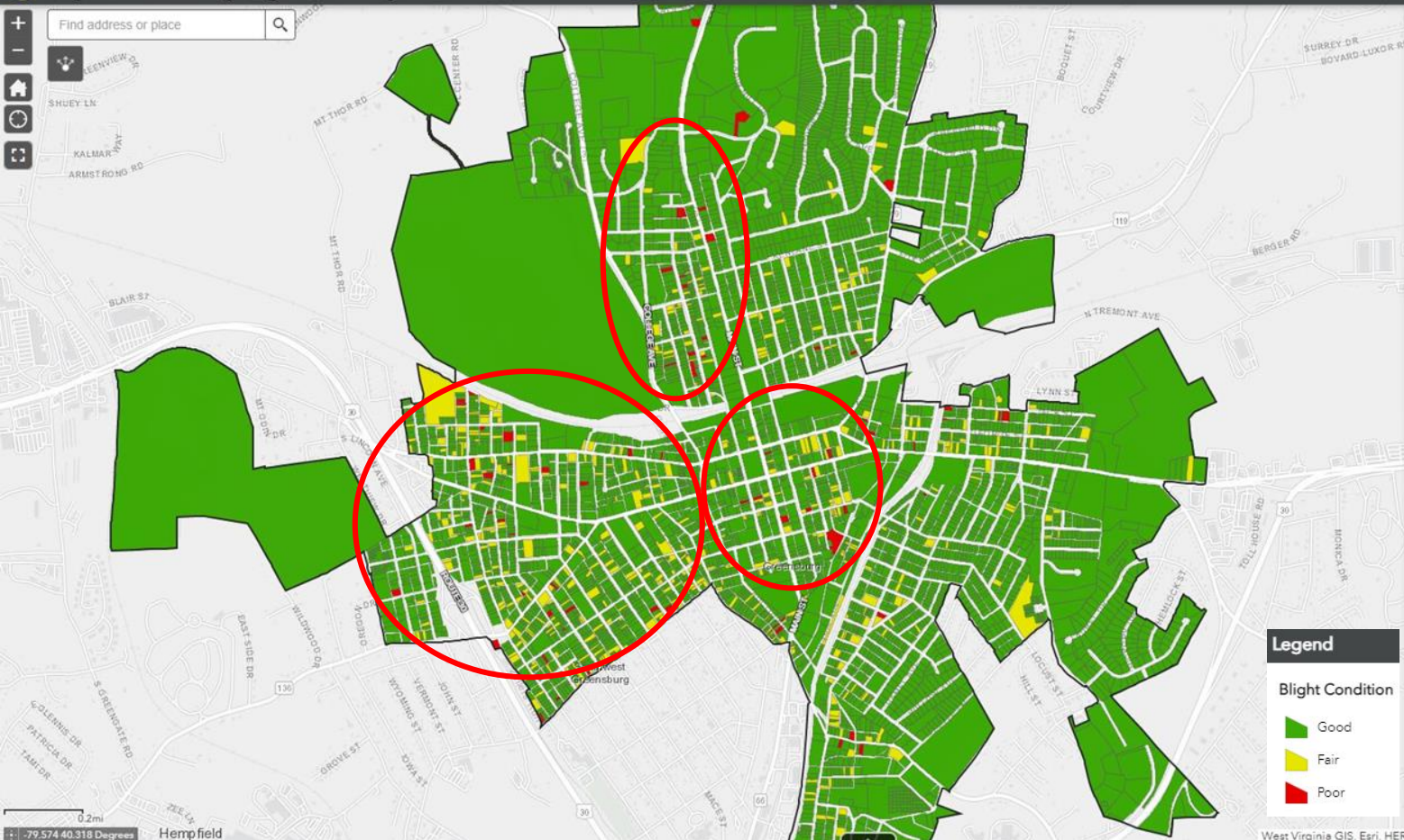
- Data acquisition/preparation
 - Correcting addresses
 - Tabulating data
 - Eliminating certain entries
 - Calculating
 - Analyzing
- Data from 2016 - 2020 & 2021
 - **City:** code violation, crime, structural fire, Red-X, RoadBotics
 - **County:** parcel, tax delinquent, tax generation



Online Tool #1

- ArcGIS web app
 - Not public facing
 - Internal use by:
 - City staff
 - City Council
 - Planning Commission, etc.
 - Includes all layers of data
 - Help research, make decisions
 - Updated over time





Layer List

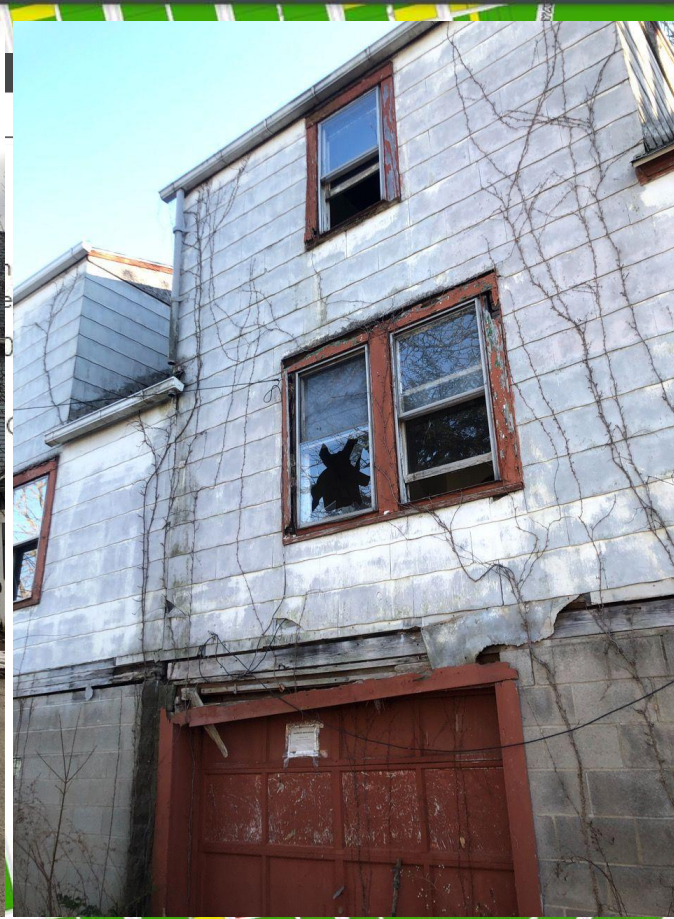
Layers

- ☒ Greensburg Boundary
- ☐ Tax Delinquency 20201222
- ☐ Repository Parcels 20210115
- ☐ Developable Vacant Parcels
- ☐ Tax Delinquency
- ☐ Tax Generation
- ☐ Parcels with Code Violations
- ☐ Density of Code Violations
- ☐ Red X Properties
- ☐ Structural Fires
- ☐ Crime Incidents
- ☐ Owner-Occupied Properties
- ☐ RoadBotics Pavement Assessment
- ☒ Greensburg Street Labels
- ☐ Zoning Districts
- ☐ First Ward
- ☐ Second Ward
- ☐ Third Ward
- ☐ Fourth Ward
- ☐ Fifth Ward
- ☐ Sixth Ward

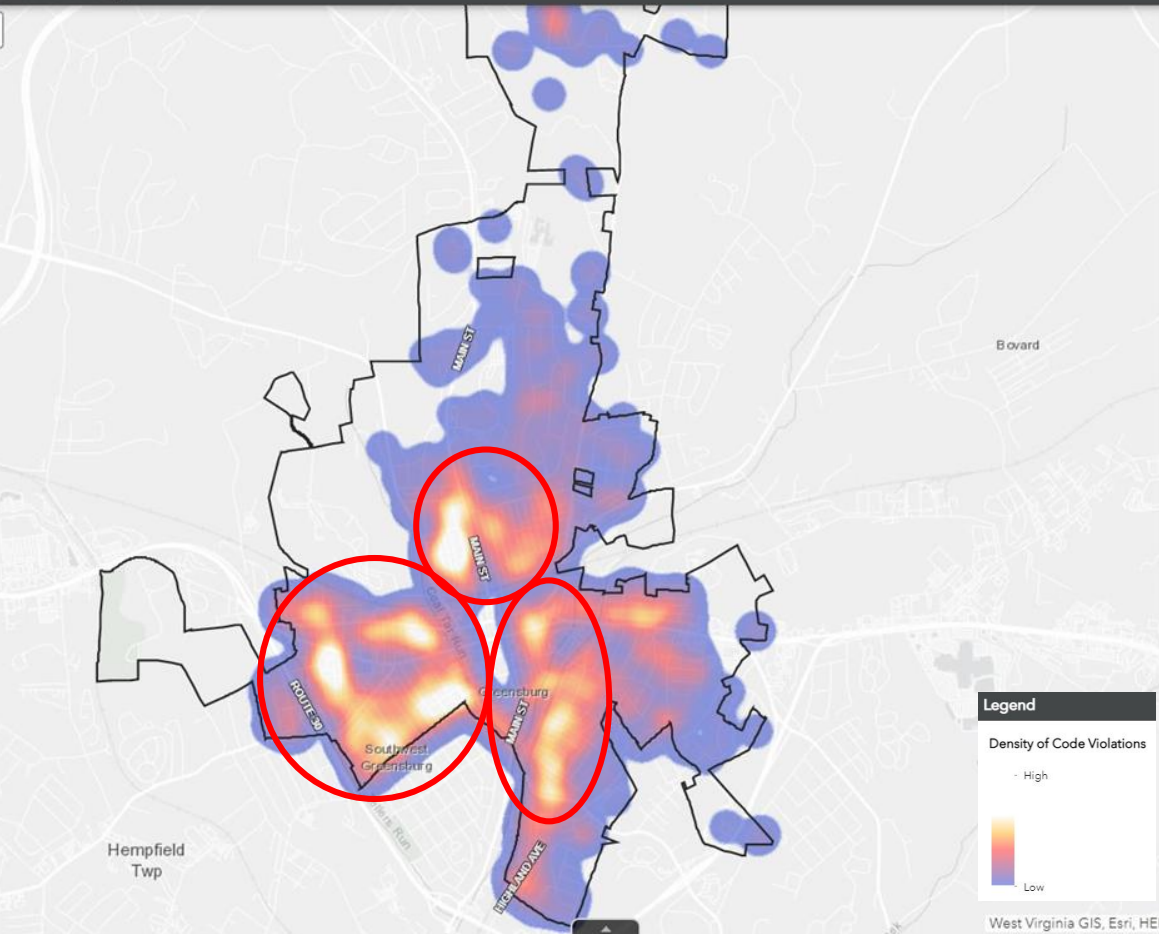
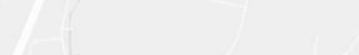
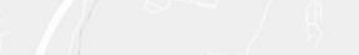
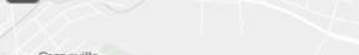
Legend

Blight Condition

- Good
- Fair
- Poor



Find address or place



Layer List

- ☐ Tax Delinquency
- ☐ Tax Generation
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- ☒ Density of Code Violations
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- ☐ Sixth Ward
- ☐ Seventh Ward
- ☐ Eighth Ward
- ☐ Blight Condition

Legend

Density of Code Violations

High



West Virginia GIS, Esri, HERE

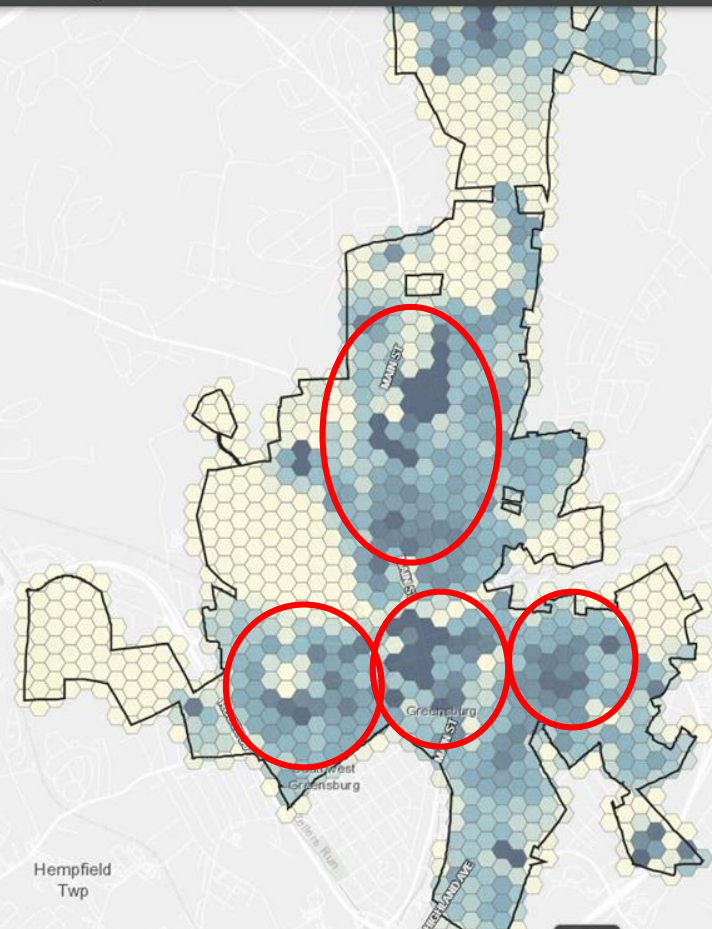
Find address or place



peville

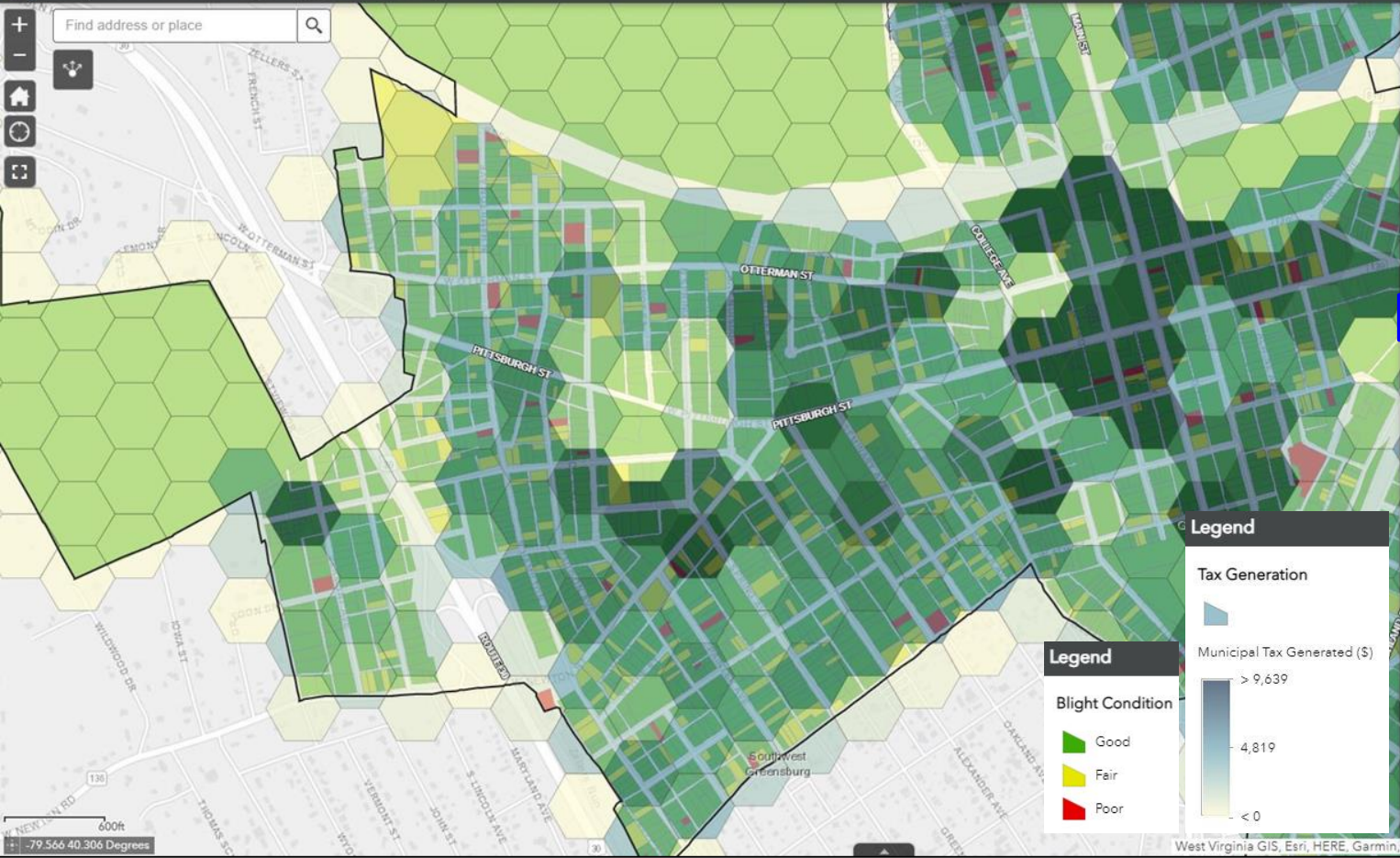
0.4mi

-79.607 40.340 Degrees



Layer List

- ☒ Tax Generation
- ☐ Tax Delinquency
- ☐ Parcels with Code Violations
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- ☐ Blight Condition



Layer List

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- ☐ Fourth Ward

Legend

Blight Condition

- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Tax Generation

Municipal Tax Generated (\$)

> 9,639

4,819

< 0

Online Tool #2

- ArcGIS hub site
 - Public facing
 - Communication tool:
 - Project information
 - Status of blight
 - Progress
 - Resources
 - Includes data selected by Project Team
 - Updated over time





City of Greensburg Blight Inventory

Project Background

In November 2020, the City of Greensburg initiated a citywide inventory of blighted properties. The inventory was completed by the Westmoreland County Department of Planning and Development through their Technical Resources and Municipal Services (TRAMS) program. Funding for the inventory was secured through a partnership between the City of Greensburg and the Realtors® Association of Westmoreland, Indiana and Mon Valley (RAWIM).



The inventory, completed in April 2021, provides a detailed look at property conditions throughout the city, parcel-by-parcel. Properties considered to be blighted are dilapidated, abandoned, and sometimes vacant, and ultimately pose a threat to the health, safety, and welfare of the community. The completed inventory will inform blight policy decisions and assist planners in targeting future rehabilitation, demolition, and investment efforts.



The inventory was guided by a project team, selected by the city's Planning Commission. The group met monthly with county planners to define the framework of the project, determine end product goals, hear updates from the field, address issues, and ensure data quality and accuracy.

Exploring the Inventory

During the course of the project, planners physically inventoried all 6,070 parcels in the City of Greensburg. Each property was evaluated based off of the exterior appearance of the property utilizing a three-grade **parcel grading system** shown below. Parcel grades are visually shown on maps using a three-color system (green = Good, yellow = Fair, and red = Poor). Parcel grades and any additional descriptive notes can be found by clicking on a parcel and viewing the pop-up window.

This Hub site is intended to be a tool for the City of Greensburg to use to benchmark, track, and communicate to the public the state of blight within the city and how it's being addressed.



Good

- New construction/renovation
- No visible signs of deterioration
- Needs minor painting/basic improvements
- Well maintained and cared for
- Some cleaning necessary
- *Empty lot/no structure—no major visible debris



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- Some cracking of brick or wood
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[Sign In](#)[City of Greensburg Blight Inventory](#)[Developable Vacant Parcels](#)[Tax Delinquency](#)[Tax Generation](#)[Code Violations](#)[Red X Properties](#)[Structural Fires](#)[More ▾](#)

Total Parcels in Greensburg

6,070

Good Parcels

5,538

Fair Parcels

456

Poor Parcels

76

Developable Vacant Parcels

127

Blight Map





Sign In



City of Greensburg Blight Inventory

Developable Vacant Parcels

Tax Delinquency

Tax Generation

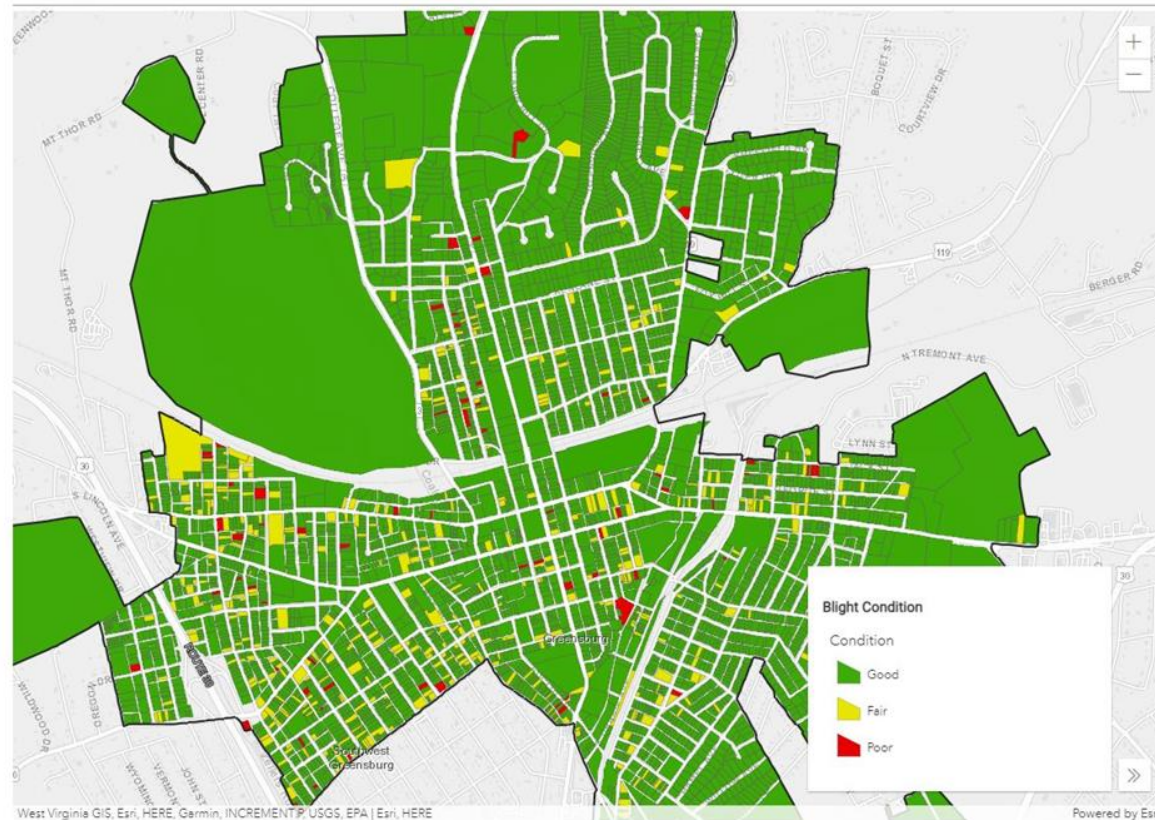
Code Violations

Red X Properties

Structural Fires

Owner-Occupied Properties

Blight Map



Powered by Esri



Report Blight

Citizens can report instances of blight via an [online form](#) or by calling the Greensburg Department of Planning & Development. The Department of Planning & Development is open Monday-Friday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. Call **(724) 838-4335** to talk with a planner.

Additional Resources



938 St. Clair Way • Greensburg, PA 15601 • 724-837-9305
www.realtorsWIM.com • info@realtorsWIM.com

Contact a Realtor

If you are interested in buying property in Greensburg, you can get in contact with a local Realtor by going to the Realtors® Association of Westmoreland, Indiana, and Mon Valley Member Offices webpage at <http://realtorswim.com/membership/member-offices/>.

Lessons Learned

- Not everyone collects data
- Green, yellow, red isn't always the best color scheme
- Try to quantify qualitative data
- Each project/municipality is unique



Parcel Info:
Area 3,428 sq ft8.8 mi

DETAILS

ATTACHED

Owner

~~STRUBBLE-LOVHNER~~
~~STRUBBLE-LOVHNER~~

Condition

Poor

Issue 1

Paint peeling

Issue 2

Cracking brick, rotting wood

Issue 3

Overgrown

Structure

Yes

Notes

Side fire escape looks unsafe/falling over

Parcel Number

Questions - 5 minutes

—

Interactive Exercise: Defining a Blight Reduction Strategy

Defining a Blight Reduction Strategy

Goal: Understand the complexities of blight reduction for implementation

Outcome: A simplified Blight Reduction Strategy for a fictitious neighborhood



Addressing Blight: A Data-Driven & Progressive Discipline Approach

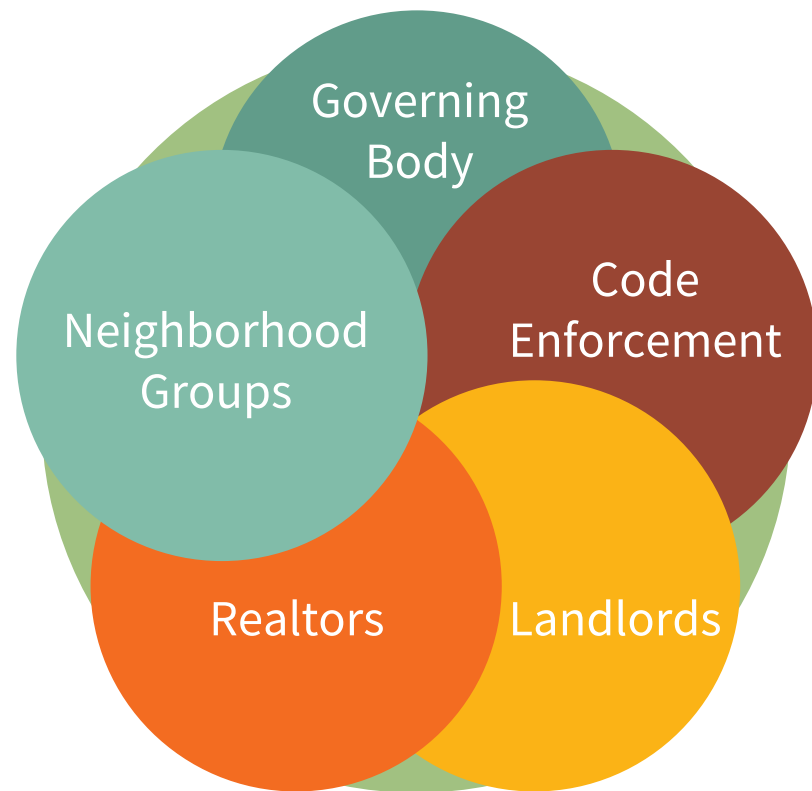
- ~~Step 1: Blight Inventory~~
- Step 2: Convene a Blight Task Force
- Step 3: Tailor Tools and Interventions
- Step 4: Set Priorities and Implement
 - Action team oversees implementation
 - **Municipal action**
- Step 5: Monitor and Evaluate Outcomes



Convene a Blight Task Force

Today, **YOU** are the Blight Task Force

- Develop a blight strategy:
 - How would my community be better with less blight?
 - What would my community look like?
 - How will addressing blight provide results?



Rosemont Neighborhood

“A great place to raise a family!”

Rosemont Neighborhood



City of New Haven

Rosemont (pop. 4,000)

Small mixed-use center

Walkable village character

Close to greenway/trail

Close to downtown NH

Mix of housing and
transportation options

Aging, declining population

Our Interactive Scenario

- New Haven City Council plans for blight reduction in Rosemont
- Your role: Blight Task Force
- Your task:
 - Design Blight Reduction Strategy
 - Deliver greatest impact
 - Balance private property rights/public interest
 - Save as many buildings as possible, esp. historic
 - Maintain/improve tax base
 - Make Rosemont “A great place to raise a family!”

Our Toolbox

Less Complex



More Complex

Tool ID	Tool Name	Pros	Cons	Costs	Results Timeframe
A	Targeted Code Enforcement	Best for arresting the spread of blight	Can be very time intensive, enforcement never ends	Area dependent Entire neighborhood: \$150K/year	Immediate Mid-Term Long-Term
B	Quality of Life Ticketing	Best for fair condition properties	Not useful on long-standing blight issues	Entire neighborhood: \$50K/year	Immediate Mid-Term Long-Term
C	Presale Inspections	Makes potential owners aware of violations prior to purchase	Requires lots of time tracking and enforcing	Area dependent Entire neighborhood: \$150K/year	Immediate Mid-Term Long-Term
D	Rehab Grant and Loan Program	Incentive to improve property	Costly per unit	Property dependent Minimum \$50K/property	Immediate Mid-Term Long-Term
E	Demolition	Clears blight in its entirety, by property	Diminishes tax base, missing "teeth"	Property dependent Minimum \$20K/property	Immediate Mid-Term Long-Term
F	Acquisition by Land Bank for Future Use	Separates bad actors from blight	Limited opportunity to acquire and for reuse	Property dependent Minimum \$10K/property	Immediate Mid-Term Long-Term

Blight Inventory



352 Properties

	Good Condition 196 Properties
	Fair Condition 64 Properties
	Poor Condition 92 Properties

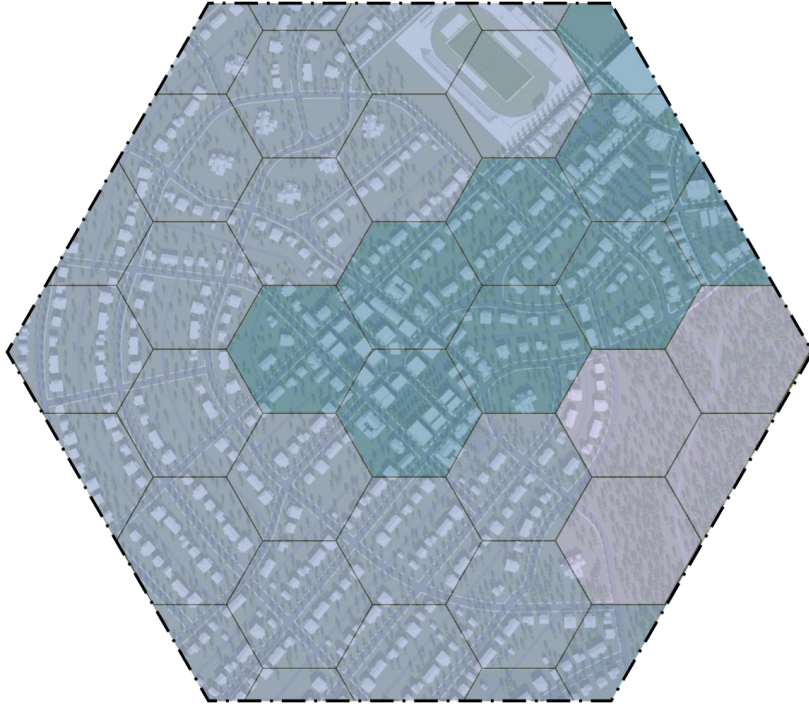
Historic Inventory



28 Historic Properties

 Historic Property/Area

Tax Generation



High Tax Value

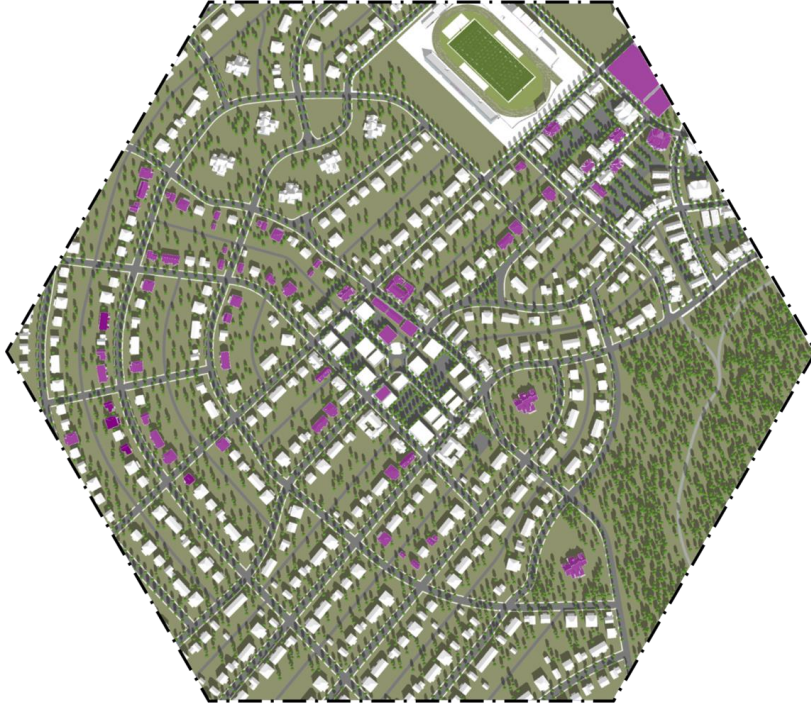


Medium Tax Value



Low Tax Value

Tax Delinquency

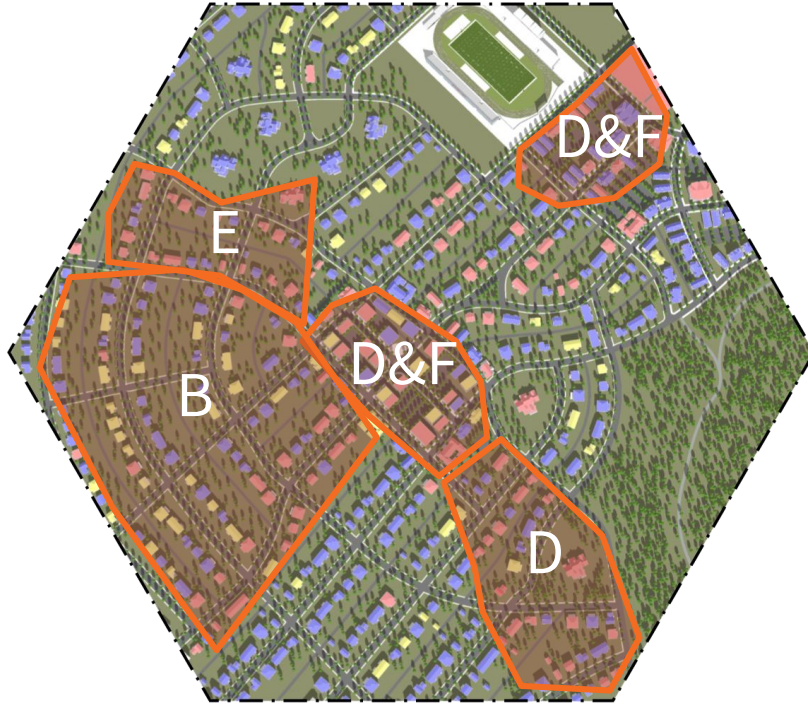


Tax Delinquent

Design Your Strategy - 10 Minutes

—

For Example: Part 1



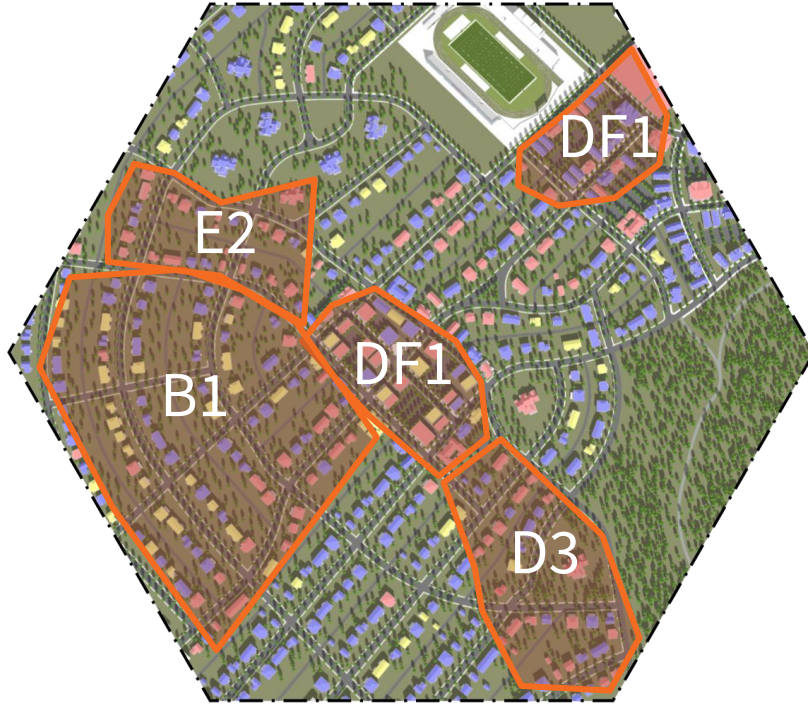
D&F - Rehab Grant and Loan
+ Land Bank

B - Quality of Life Ticketing

E - Demolition

D - Rehab Grant and Loan

For Example: Part 2



D&F1 - Rehab Grant and Loan + Land Bank, Top Priority

B1 - Quality of Life Ticketing, Top Priority

E2 - Demolition, Middle Priority

D3 - Rehab Grant and Loan, Low Priority

Your Task:



- Design Blight Reduction Strategy
- Deliver greatest impact
- Balance private property rights/public interest
- Save as many buildings as possible, esp. Historic
- Maintain/Improve tax base
- Make Rosemont “A great place to raise a family!”

You have 10 minutes!

What's *Your* Plan? - Discussion - 10 Minutes

Blight Inventory



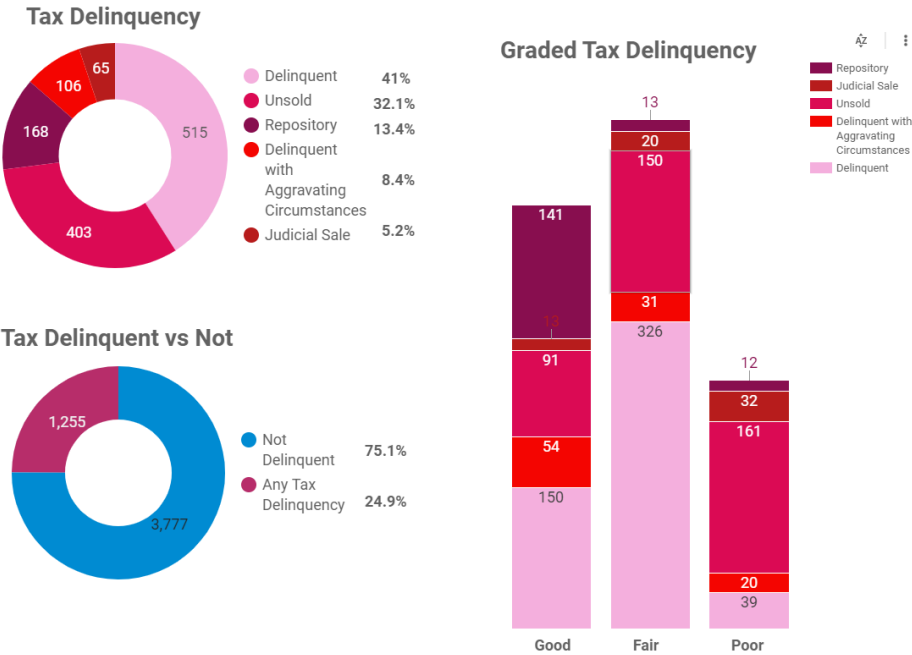
352 Properties

	Good Condition 196 Properties
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Monitor & Evaluate Outcomes



Monitor & Evaluate Outcomes



Source: Westmoreland County Planning

Greensburg's Blight Mitigation Strategy

FOCUS AREAS & ACTION PLAN

The plan's 5 focus areas and associated recommended actions are summarized below, each representing the community's vision for the future.



WELL KEPT NEIGHBORHOODS

#	Recommended Action	Project Commitment Timeframe	External Partners/Collaborators	City Departmental Staff	Boards and Commissions
A.1	Assemble and mobilize a network of local businesses (e.g. landscapers, contractors), banks, and service organizations (e.g. faith-based organizations) to assist with property maintenance and renovation/rehab projects. (Action A.1 of the Blight Mitigation Strategy)	Less than 1 year	Contractors/landscapers; Faith-based congregations; Habitat for Humanity; Local real estate agencies; Grassroots citizen groups; Local property managers/landlords	Code Enforcement; Planning & Development	
A.2	Facilitate programs regarding property owner assistance loans and grants for maintenance and rehabilitation projects which will help bring properties into compliance with property maintenance code. (Action A.2 of the Blight Mitigation Strategy)	2 to 6 years	Westmoreland County Planning; HUD	Planning & Development	Planning Commission; City Council
A.3	Establish a Quality-of-Life Ticketing ordinance to encourage more convenient and efficient enforcement for minor external property maintenance violations, such as overgrown lawns, trash, and abandoned vehicles. (Action C.1 of the Blight Mitigation Strategy)	1 to 3 years		Planning & Development; Code Enforcement; City Solicitor	Planning Commission; City Council
A.4	Conduct "Block sweeps" as enabled by the Quality-of-Life Ticketing ordinance, in which code officers walk the streets to educate property owners about property maintenance laws proactively. These activities may be paired with citizen-engaged block clean-ups in which the city supplies waste disposal equipment. (Action C.2 of the Blight Mitigation Strategy)	1 to 3 years	Grassroots citizen activist groups; Faith-based congregations; Habitat for Humanity	Code Enforcement; Administration	
A.5	Upgrade the Code Enforcement database system used for tracking property maintenance code violations to be equipped with the latest technical (i.e. live/online) capabilities. (Action C.4 of the Blight Mitigation Strategy)	2 to 6 years	Redevelopment Authority of the County of Westmoreland (RACW) & Land Bank; Phippsfield Township	Code Enforcement	Planning Commission; City Council
A.6	Pursue policies and actions, legally afforded by Federal and State law, which discourage negligent property owners from perpetuating blight. (e.g. Disqualify negligent property owners to bid on tax sale) (Action C.5 of the Blight Mitigation Strategy)	1 to 3 years		Code Enforcement; City Solicitor	City Council
A.7	Conduct a comprehensive update of the city's Zoning Ordinance in part based on the recommended guidance of the Regulatory and Process Barriers to Development report (Appendix) and including topics such as land use permissions and form/scale standards to ensure development aligns with established character.	1 to 3 years	Westmoreland County Planning	Planning & Development; Planning Consultant	Planning Commission; Historic & Architectural Review Board; Mayor & City Council
N	Implement neighborhood priority project: West, East	Less than 1 year (1st priority)	Grassroots citizen activist groups; Faith-based congregations; Habitat for Humanity	Code Enforcement; Administration	
N	Implement neighborhood priority project: Central, North Central	Less than 1 year (2nd priority)	Grassroots citizen activist groups; Faith-based congregations; Habitat for Humanity	Code Enforcement; Administration	



HIGHLIGHT: ADDRESS BLIGHT WITH COMMUNITY-ENGAGED CODE ENFORCEMENT

An approach to code enforcement which aims to educate and engage local residents in improving property maintenance at a block level in a proactive and supportive manner

- » Action (A.3) Establish a Quality-of-Life Ticketing ordinance to encourage more convenient and efficient enforcement for minor external property maintenance violations, such as overgrown lawns, trash, and abandoned vehicles.

Advantages:

- Treats property maintenance code violations like parking tickets (starting at \$25), rather than through the courts, saving time/resources
- A proven blight prevention tool identified by the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania "From Blight to Bright" Toolkit.

- » Action (A.4) Conduct regular block-by-block "sweeps" as enabled by a Quality-of-Life Ticketing ordinance, in which code and/or police officers walk the streets to proactively educate property owners about property maintenance laws.

Advantages:

- Block sweeps are grounded in non-threatening face-to-face interactions with code enforcement officers educating property owners and resolving potential issues before a fine is necessary.
- Empowers residents to be a part of the solution. Block sweeps can be paired with citizen-engaged clean-ups, with City support.



Residents conducting litter clean-up efforts.

External Partners/Collaborators:

- Grassroots citizen groups
- Faith-based congregations
- Habitat for Humanity
- Local property managers/landlords

Why are these actions important for Greensburg?

This community approach to code enforcement responds to public input which identified unkempt yards/exterior of occupied buildings (specifically housing) as the predominate form of blight impacting Greensburg neighborhoods.

Project Commitment Timeframe

1 to 3 years



ALSO SEE:

**BLIGHT
MITIGATION
STRATEGY**

Catalytic Actions

- I: Convene a Blight Task Force to inform and guide the action implementation
- II. Expand capacity for City staff dedicated to managing implementation



**every member
of the community
has an opportunity
to do their part**

Blight from 3 Fronts

A. **STABILIZE** with Property Owner Assistance

B. **RECLAIM** through Targeted Revitalization

C. **HOLD ACCOUNTABLE** via Community-based
Code Enforcement

Front A

STABILIZE with Property Owner Assistance

1. Assemble and mobilize a broad network of partners → **assist with** property maintenance and renovation/rehab **projects**
1. Pursue programs providing property owner assistance loans and grants for maintenance and rehabilitation projects → **compliance with codes**

Front B

RECLAIM through Targeted Revitalization

1. Develop and maintain an active sorted inventory list → **two-tracks**:
 - a. demolition and eventual redevelopment or
 - b. rehabilitation of an existing structure
1. Assemble an inventory vacant downtown buildings including the condition of structure and internal building systems, suitability for certain uses, etc.

→ **inform potential opportunities** and **prevent further deterioration**

Front C

HOLD ACCOUNTABLE via Community Code Enforcement

1. Establish a Quality-of-Life Ticketing ordinance → **encourage** more convenient and efficient enforcement for minor external property maintenance violations, such as overgrown lawns, trash, and abandoned vehicles.
1. Conduct regular block-by-block “sweeps” → to **proactively educate** property owners about property maintenance laws

Front C

HOLD ACCOUNTABLE via Community Code Enforcement

3. Bolster the enforcement of the rental registration → **shift process online**
4. Upgrade the existing code enforcement database system used for tracking property maintenance code violations → **equip** updated technical **capabilities** (i.e. **live/online**)
5. Pursue policies and actions legally afforded by Federal and State law → **discourage** negligent property owners from **perpetuating blight**



Q&A

Thank you!

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Policy, Environmental
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