

Blight Certification
for the Area Generally Bounded by
S. 52nd Street, Chester Avenue, S. 62nd Street,
and the AMTRAK rail line

Philadelphia City Planning Commission
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CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents an evaluation of blight in an area of Southwest Philadelphia in the vicinity of S. 58th Street and Kingsessing Avenue. The blight certification boundaries are shown on the map on page 5: the boundaries are S. 52nd Street, Chester Avenue, S. 61st Street, Kingsessing Avenue, S. 62nd Street and the AMTRAK rail line. The blight certification boundaries are an extension of an area previously certified for blight, to the north of 52nd Street.

This is a portion of the neighborhood known as Kingsessing. The blight certification boundary encompasses a 40-block area containing 275 acres. The predominant land use is residential, and the predominant house type is the attached row home.

The certification study reviews existing conditions in relation to seven criteria used to determine whether blight exists in an area. The criteria are set forth in Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law, which stipulates that only one of these criteria must be met to make a finding of blight in an area. The law also states that blighted conditions need not be evident throughout the area under study. The fact that individual properties are free from blight does not make the finding of blight arbitrary, according to the law, because comprehensive planning requires that areas be considered in their entirety, and not in their unseverable parts.

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

CRITERIA

Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law contains the following criteria for establishing the presence of blight in a particular area:

1. Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions
2. Inadequate planning
3. Excessive land coverage
4. Lack of proper light, air and open space
5. Faulty street and lot layout
6. Defective design and arrangement of buildings
7. Economically or socially undesirable land use

ANALYSIS

The following section describes the characteristics of blight evident in the area bounded by S. 52nd Street, Chester Avenue, S. 61st Street, Kingsessing Avenue, S. 62nd Street, and the AMTRAK rail line.

1. Unsafe, Unsanitary, Inadequate or Overcrowded Conditions

Evidence of this criterion is presented in the following categories:

- the presence of a significant number of vacant properties
- the existence of numerous vacant, trash-strewn lots

Vacant Properties: The area contains 4,289 separately titled properties. Recent field surveys indicate that 712, or 16.6% of the properties are vacant. Included among the vacant properties are 506 vacant structures and 206 vacant lots. (Source: vacancy study by the Capital Program Office of the City of Philadelphia jointly with Hill International and Gannett Fleming, dated September 17, 2002).

Another important data base for vacancy is the United States Census of 2000. In the census tracts which make up the area under review nearly 17% of the total dwelling units were vacant (961 vacant residential units out of a total of 5,694). This compares to a 10.9% vacancy rate for the city as a whole. The Bureau of the Census counts dwelling units, while the City statistic cited previously counts separately-titled properties.

Vacant, Trash-Strewn Lots: Unsafe and unsanitary conditions were also documented through the observation of 206 vacant lots, most of which are uncared for and littered with trash.

2. Economically or Socially Undesirable Land Use

There is substantial evidence of economically and socially undesirable land use in this area. This criterion is primarily met within the study area by virtue of the 712 vacant structures and vacant lots that were counted during recent field surveys.

Vacant structures and lots are economically undesirable inasmuch as citywide experience has demonstrated that vacant properties have an increased likelihood of selling for less than the citywide median. Residential property abandonment deprives the neighborhood, the city and the region of purchasing power, which erodes the local economy and results in reduced sales tax revenue to government.

Vacant structures and lots are socially undesirable for a number of reasons: they downgrade the overall physical environment of the neighborhood, they reduce the area’s vitality, and they increase the potential for vandalism, arson, and other crime. The increased threat of arson is a hazard which affects both vacant buildings and adjoining, occupied structures in the neighborhood. Furthermore, many of the vacant buildings in this area are structurally deteriorated and therefore they pose a danger to children, passersby and people who might be trespassing on the property.

Relatively low housing values provide additional evidence of economically undesirable land use. In the two census tracts which comprise the area, the median house value as recorded in the 2000 census far below the citywide median.

U.S.Census, 2000

Census Tract	Median Value	Citywide Median Value
CT 66	\$35,400.	\$59,700.
CT 70	\$29,300.	

3. Inadequate Planning

Inadequate planning in the area is represented by substandard house lots which create crowded conditions. The parcel size of certain individually-titled lots is as small as 14’ x 50’, for a lot area of 700 square feet. This is less than half the lot size which the City’s zoning code would prescribe for new construction attached houses (16’x90’; lot area 1440 square feet). Examples of these may be found in the 2000 and 2100 blocks of S. Cecil Street (both sides), as well as the 2000 block of S. Alden Street, the 1800 block of S. Allison Street and the 6000 block of Upland Street. Inadequate planning is also documented by the 5800 block of Yocum Street, described below, and by 59th Street between Greenway and Woodland Avenues.

4. Faulty Street Layout

The 5800 block of Yocum Street is a residential block between Greenway and Woodland Avenues. It is a dead-end street connected to surrounding streets by a narrow alleyway. This is evidence of faulty street layout. In the same general area between Greenway and Woodland, S. 59th Street is also a dead-end street. S. 59th Street is physically built to a width of 10 ft. It is passable only for the width of a car and there is no provision for a turn-around. This is additional evidence of faulty street layout.

CONCLUSION

In the area bounded by S. 52nd Street, Chester Avenue, S. 61st Street, Kingsessing Avenue, S. 62nd Street, and the AMTRAK rail line, existing conditions are consistent with four (4) of the criteria necessary to produce a finding of blight under Pennsylvania Redevelopment law. Those criteria are:

1. Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions
2. Economically or socially undesirable land use
3. Inadequate planning
4. Faulty street layout

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that these four (4) criteria for establishing the presence of blight are satisfied and the area is eligible for certification.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law, Act of May 24, 1945 (P.L. 991) as amended, authorizes the Philadelphia City Planning Commission to certify as blighted specific areas which may then, in whole or in part, be made the subject of redevelopment proposals formulated by the Redevelopment Authority in accordance with said Act, and

WHEREAS, after substantial review and study, the Commission's staff has presented a report concluding that the area bounded by S. 52nd Street, Chester Avenue, S. 61st Street, Kingsessing Avenue, S. 62nd Street, and the AMTRAK rail line, exhibit characteristics of blight as defined by the Act, and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission concurs with the findings and conclusions set forth in said staff report,

NOW THEREFORE on this fifteenth day of October 2002, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission hereby finds, based upon its staff report dated October 2002 that the area bounded by S. 52nd Street, Chester Avenue, S. 61st Street, Kingsessing Avenue, S.62nd Street, and the AMTRAK rail line exhibits the following characteristics of blight as established by Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law:

1. Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate or overcrowded conditions
2. Economically or socially undesirable land use
3. Inadequate planning, and
4. Faulty street layout

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

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