
Comprehensive Blight Strategy Plan

**Blight Task Force
City of Altoona**

March 2018

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City of Altoona Blight Task Force

Comprehensive Blight Strategy Plan

Executive Summary

In its continuing effort to fight blight and promote community investment, the City of Altoona assembled a Blight Task Force to develop a comprehensive plan for implementing effective strategies to address blight in Altoona. The Blight Task Force includes representatives from City government, residents, businesses, institutions, and nonprofit organizations. Over the course of several months, the Blight Task Force examined data on the nature and extent of blight in Altoona, reviewed a range of blight tools and strategies, and reached consensus on blight strategies to prioritize for implementation. This report sets forth the work of the Blight Task Force and includes recommendations for implementation.

Priority Strategies Recommended by the Blight Task Force

1. Establish a land bank
2. Expand home repair and rental rehabilitation assistance
3. Expand implementation of Act 90 of 2010 which allows the City to revoke permits and to lien personal and real estate assets of owners
4. Encourage the Blair County District Attorney to charge repeat code violators with criminal misdemeanor
5. Hall of Shame program to publicize and shame owners who fail to bring their property up to codes
6. Acquire vacant lots encumbered by demolition liens through foreclosure and subsequently convey these properties to pre-qualified adjacent owners
7. Engagement with incoming Magisterial District Judges
8. Expand financial resources for the demolition of properties by pursuing state grants

Blight Task Force Members

Mayor Matt Pacifico	City of Altoona
Lori Bechtel-Wherry	Penn State Altoona
Rebecca Brown	Codes & Inspections, CoA
Sergio Carmona	Blair County Community Action Agency
Christopher Cook	Local Resident
Mitchell Cooper	Local Resident
Rob Dennis	Codes Officer, CoA
Shawna Hoover	Operation Our Town
Joe Hurd	Chamber of Commerce
Cheryl Johns	Altoona Housing Authority
Mary Johnson	CDBG Manager, CoA
Robert Lynn	ReMax Realtor
Marla Marcinko	City Manager, CoA
Steve McKnight	Altoona Blair County Development Corp.
Pam Mitchell	Landlord Representative
Jerry Murray	UPMC Altoona
Michelle Peterson	Improved Dwellings for Altoona, Inc.
Lee Slusser	Director, Community Development, CoA

Section 1

Introduction

In August 2017, a Blight Task Force was appointed by Mayor Matt Pacifico to develop a plan for addressing blighted properties in the City of Altoona. Like most post-industrial Pennsylvania cities, Altoona has long suffered from blighted properties and disinvestment due to loss of population and jobs, as well as changing market conditions. In response, the City uses many of the best practices and recommended strategies for fighting blight. Through this planning process, the Task Force will explore some additional blight strategies and make recommendations on strategies that should be prioritized as part of a comprehensive blight strategy plan.

The process used to develop this Comprehensive Blight Plan is detailed in the publication, *We Can Do This: A Five-Step, Fast Track Blight Plan*, published by the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania in 2016.

The five steps in the Blight Plan process include:

Step 1: Gain Consensus for Developing a Blight Plan

Step 2: Assess the Nature and Extent of Blight

Step 3: Convene a Blight Task Force

Step 4: Engage Municipal Officials

Step 5: Identify Priority Action Steps and Implement!

Winnie Branton of Branton Strategies LLC was retained to facilitate the Blight Plan process. Ms. Branton serves as the Blight and Land Bank Training and Technical Assistance Program Manager for the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania. Funding for this work is provided through the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development and the Housing Alliance.

Step 1-Gain Consensus for Developing a Blight Plan

This step was accomplished in early 2017 with discussions among and between City officials and residents, which culminated with the appointment of the Blight Task Force by the Mayor in August. In December 2016, the City made application to the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) for a Blight Training and Technical Assistance Grant. This grant was subsequently approved by DCED and the City entered into a contract with the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania in April 2017 for services that include the development of a community-driven blight action plan, planning to create a land bank, and technical assistance to the City on best practices for code enforcement. These services are being provided to the City by Winnie Branton of Branton Strategies LLC.

Step 2-Assess the Nature and Extent of Blight

Through the ongoing work of the Codes and Inspections and Community Development Departments, as well as data contained in various plans and studies, the Task Force had access to information regarding the nature and extent of blight in the City.

A. Problem Properties Identified by the Department of Codes and Inspections

The City aggressively enforces the *2009 International Property Maintenance Code*, as adopted by the Altoona City Council.¹ This enforcement includes, among other things, regular inspections of rental properties and responding to resident complaints. However, enforcement can be thwarted by property owners who refuse to comply with the law and allow their properties to deteriorate and become blighted.

The Codes and Inspections Department identified eighteen (18) properties which have been chronically blighted and pose the most difficulty with regard to enforcement. These chronically blighted properties are characterized by little to no compliance by property owners, out-of-town or deceased owners, tax delinquency, and vacancy. Most of these properties are structurally sound and are not considered a threat to public health or safety. They are included on the list due to severe overgrowth issues, lack of maintenance and/or repairs, and the presence of garbage or debris. Primarily, they are an ongoing nuisance and have become an eyesore for the neighboring property owners.

A table showing the property addresses of the chronically blighted problem properties is shown on the next page and a more detailed chart and a map showing the property locations are included in the Appendix.

¹ Altoona Code of Ordinances, § 550-1.

City of Altoona - Chronically Blighted Problem Properties					
<u>Property Address</u>	<u>CDBG Area²</u>	<u>Taxes Due</u>	<u>NOV Issued</u>	<u>Citation Issued</u>	<u>Vacant</u>
907 27th Street	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
624 E. Logan Avenue	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
109 E. Grant Avenue	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
506-08 5th St*	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
322 Lowell Avenue	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
1106-10 7th Avenue	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1501 12th Avenue	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1926 12th Avenue	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
1024 4th Avenue	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
801 Bell Avenue	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
102 4th Street	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
321 3rd Ave	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
414 Bell Avenue	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
420 23rd Ave	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
307 21st Street	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
2812-14 Pine Ave	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
521-23 8th Ave	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
224 E. Crawford Ave	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes

*The status of properties with strike-through text changed following the first Task Force meeting. The Codes and Inspections Department is currently working on resolution of blighted conditions on those properties.

Eleven of the eighteen properties are located in the neighborhoods to the east and northeast of the downtown area. Only one of the properties is in the downtown area. The remainder are in scattered locations.

B. Rental and Vacant Property Registrations

The City requires the registration of rental properties.³

City of Altoona - Rental Properties as of 2/12/18	
Registered rental properties (not units)	3,058
Owners living outside of Altoona	1,041
Owners living out of state	56

² Area characterized by low to moderate income households which receives services under the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.

³ Altoona Code of Ordinances § 550-2, Chapter 9.

The City also requires the registration of vacant properties.⁴

City of Altoona - Vacant Properties as of 2/12/18	
Registered vacant properties	133
NOVs for failure to register as vacant	63
Additional properties under review for vacancy	27

C. Housing Conditions Survey

In 2016 and 2017, the Community Development Department conducted a survey of housing and infrastructure conditions within the City's low to moderate income Census block groups (Survey).⁵ The parcel-by-parcel survey was performed to gather information on the occupancy, structural conditions, structure use, property/site conditions, sidewalk conditions, street conditions, curb conditions, and street accessibility of every parcel within the Survey area.

The Survey covered block groups in twelve census tracts⁶ and included 9,185 parcels.

Information on the structural condition of the parcels surveyed provides some key data regarding the nature and extent of blighted properties in the City.

City of Altoona - Housing Conditions Survey		
Structural Condition	No. of Parcels	No. Occupied
Demolition Needed	20	1
Rehabilitation Needed	369	294
Maintenance Needed	4,845	4,703

Within the surveyed area, more than one-half of all parcels had structures in need of rehabilitation or maintenance (57%), and almost all of those structures were occupied (97%).

Surveyors used the following criteria in assessing structural condition:

- Demolition needed - where a building is so deteriorated that it is beyond repair;
- Rehabilitation needed - major repairs needed such as new roof, windows, siding;
- Maintenance needed - minor repairs such as painting needed.

A map showing the structural conditions of the surveyed properties on a parcel-by-parcel basis is included in the Appendix.

⁴ Altoona Code of Ordinances § 550-2, Chapter 10.

⁵ The Survey was required in order for the City to continue to receive CDBG funding for one of its code enforcement officers.

⁶ Census Tract (CT) 1003 Block Group (BG) 1, 2; CT 1004 BG 1; CT 1005 BG 2; CT 1007 BG 1, 2, 3; CT 1008 BG 2; CT 1009 BG 2, 3; CT 1014 BG 1; CT 1015 BG 3; CT 1016 BG 1,2,3; CT 1017 BG 2, 3, 4; CT 1018 BG 3; CT 1019 BG all.

D. City's Act 47 Plan as amended

The City of Altoona recently exited the Act 47 program administered by DCED under the Municipalities Financial Recovery Act.⁷ As part of the Act 47 process, a Recovery Plan was prepared for the City and approved by Council (Act 47 Plan). The Act 47 Plan and its amendments include information and recommendations relating to housing, community development, and economic development, and offer data that's useful in developing anti-blight strategies.

Excerpt from the Act 47 Plan:

Unlike some other cities that had grown up as manufacturing centers and subsequently entered into a protracted period of economic disinvestment, Altoona does not have major concentrations of blighted and abandoned properties. However, vacant houses can be found dispersed through a number of the city's older neighborhoods, along with deteriorated garages and sheds, and, in some areas, abandoned industrial buildings ... In citizen forums associated with the preparation of the comprehensive plan, the blighted condition of properties in Altoona neighborhoods—including both vacant properties and deteriorated occupied properties, was most often cited as the biggest problem affecting the city's communities.⁸

Initiatives and recommendations related to blight that were included in the final Act 47 Plan (as amended August 2016):

- Fund infrastructure improvements in areas selected for targeted neighborhood improvement strategies.
- Promote neighborhood planning in areas targeted for comprehensive property maintenance inspections and code enforcement.
- Develop a strategic approach for land banking.
- Make use of new tools for blight prevention and elimination.

E. Comprehensive Plan - *Positively Altoona*

In May 2013, the City adopted a comprehensive plan entitled *Positively Altoona*. The plan was developed through an extensive public outreach campaign that included surveys, neighborhood and stakeholder meetings, planning charrettes, and focus groups, to obtain input from residents, business owners, organizations and other stakeholders.

⁷ Act of July 10, 1987, P.L. 246, No. 47 (as amended, 53 P.S. §§ 11701.101-11701.501).

⁸ Act 47 Plan (December 2012), p. 185.

In surveys of residents, the blighted condition of properties in Altoona neighborhoods, including both vacant properties and deteriorated occupied properties, was most often cited as the biggest problem affecting the City's communities.

To address this, the plan set forth certain priorities relating to blighted property:

- Investigate the advantages of creating a City-focused community land bank.
- Develop stronger and more predictable code enforcement.
- Maintain the Blighted Property Demolition Program as a means of removing blight and preserving neighborhood quality.

As part of the comprehensive planning process, a City-wide housing conditions analysis was performed in 2011. This analysis concluded that the residential housing stock throughout Altoona is in good condition, and that poor housing conditions are generally limited to pockets dispersed throughout the City. A map showing the results of the housing conditions analysis is included in the Appendix.

F. U.S. Census American Community Survey Data 2012-2016

In addition to the data and studies discussed above, American Community Survey data provides useful information that can contribute to the understanding of the nature and extent of blight in Altoona.

Ten percent of the City's housing units are vacant. Units that remain vacant for considerable periods of time are prone to deterioration and more likely to become blighted.

HOUSING OCCUPANCY

OCCUPANCY	Altoona	Blair County
Total housing units	20,658	21,179
Occupied housing units	89.9%	91.1%
Vacant housing units	10.1%	8.9%

Source: American Community Survey 2012 -2016 Five Year Estimates

Sixty-four percent of the City's housing units are owner-occupied. The City's housing occupancy rate is comparable to that for Blair County. Owner-occupied housing is often better maintained than renter-occupied.

OWNER OCCUPANCY

OWNER OCCUPANCY	Altoona	Blair County
Owner-occupied housing unit rate	64.0%	70.7%

Source: American Community Survey 2012 -2016 Five Year Estimates

The median value of owner-occupied units in Altoona is about thirty percent less than that of units located in Blair County (28%). Median rents are comparable.

HOME VALUES AND RENTS

MEDIAN VALUE AND RENT	Altoona	Blair County
Median value owner-occupied units	\$85,400	\$112,600
Median gross rent	\$606	\$658

Source: American Community Survey 2012 -2016 Five Year Estimates

The City has an aging housing stock and an aging population. According to the American Community Survey (ACS), almost half of the occupied housing units in Altoona were built in 1939 or earlier (47.2%). Almost one-quarter of the City's population is 60 years or older (22.7%) according to ACS. The comprehensive plan reported that the City is experiencing an increasing trend in its aged populations, with three age groups growing between 2000 and 2015: 55 to 64, 65 to 74, and over 85.⁹ Home owner repair programs are common strategies for preventing and eliminating blight in communities where an aging housing stock is coupled with an aging population.

Step 3-Convvene a Blight Task Force

FIRST MEETING

The first meeting of the Blight Task Force occurred on September 27, 2017. During the meeting, the City's current efforts to address blighted properties were reviewed and data and information regarding blighted properties was discussed. Task Force members provided observations on the nature and extent of blight, its impact on the community, and their desired outcomes resulting from developing and implementing a comprehensive blight plan.

Current City efforts to address blighted properties include:

- The City gathers data about blighted properties from rental inspections, complaints, vacant/abandoned property registries, and the housing conditions survey (underway).

⁹ *Positively Altoona*, p. 40.

- The City aggressively enforces the property maintenance code, and employs many of the available blight fighting tools including rental property registration, abandoned property registration, public nuisance ordinance, and home repair programs.
- The City demolishes 15-20 properties each year using CDBG funds.
- The demolition program has two primary considerations: (1) is the property beyond repair/rehab; and (2) does the property/lot have value for redevelopment.
- The City used to acquire properties before demolition, but stopped that practice in 2008.
- Since 1990, 477 properties have been demolished and 1821 properties rehabbed through City programs.

Observations of Task Force members on the nature and extent of blight included:

- More than one-half of the problem properties identified by the Codes and Inspections Department are vacant.
- More than one-half of the problem properties identified by the Codes and Inspections Department are tax-delinquent.
- Deceased owners and bankrupt owners make code enforcement more difficult.
- Elderly residents are increasingly asking the City for assistance with home repairs and maintenance.
- Properties are sitting longer before they are sold or occupied again.
- Low value properties are attracting rougher residents, facilitating crime, attracting vermin and squatters, and posing health and safety risks.
- Easy access to drugs and cheap housing contribute to the problem.
- The City loses businesses because of blight. Economic development and attracting new residents are needed to revitalize the City.
- Blight makes it more difficult for employers to attract and retain employees.
- The extent of the blighted property problem touches owner-occupied and rental, vacant and occupied, commercial and residential properties.

Desired outcomes as expressed by members of the Task Force:

- City employees have effective tools to impact blight and are using those tools to prevent and remediate blight and redevelop properties.

- Magisterial District Judges (MDJs) are partners with the City in ensuring enforcement of the property maintenance code and other laws designed to prevent and remediate blighted properties. Two MDJs will be newly-elected in November, great opportunity for building relationship and developing partnership.
- System in place to connect interested buyers to vacant/blighted properties in order to promote and encourage the repurposing and redevelopment of blighted properties.
- Property owners, especially older residents, have access to resources to maintain and repair their homes, and feel comfortable seeking assistance from the City and its partners.
- A partnership to address blight, including residents, neighborhood groups, organizations like Operation Our Town, employers/businesses/institutions and city/county government, is in place and working to prevent, remediate and redevelop blighted properties.
- Humanist approach is taken when dealing with blighted properties and selecting appropriate strategies.
- City residents have renewed pride and feel connected to and invested in their neighborhoods.

SECOND MEETING

Between the first and second meetings, Task Force members were asked to read [*From Blight to Bright – A Comprehensive Toolkit for Pennsylvania*](#) published by the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania.¹⁰ The publication is a compendium of tools available to address blighted properties in Pennsylvania. The consultant reviewed each tool at the second meeting of the Task Force which was held on November 8, 2017. The tools were grouped into three categories: prevention, remediation and redevelopment.

After questions from the Task Force were answered, Task Force members were each given seven “sticky notes” to cast their votes for the tools or strategies they felt would be the most effective for addressing blight in the City.¹¹ A list of all of the tools to address blight and the number of votes for each is included in the Appendix.

¹⁰ [From Blight to Bright – A Comprehensive Toolkit for Pennsylvania](http://www.pablightlibrary.com) is available for download at <http://www.pablightlibrary.com>.

¹¹ As described in the *Five-Step, Fast Track* publication, all of the strategies to address blighted properties are listed under one of the three categories on a large blank wall and members of the Task Force “vote” by placing sticky notes on the strategies that they feel would be most effective.

A. Top Tier Strategies

A number of top tier strategies emerged from the Task Force voting. These tools received ten (10) votes or more:

1. Establish a land bank (17 votes)
2. Expand home repair and rental rehabilitation assistance (13 votes)
3. Expand implementation of Act 90 of 2010 which allows the City to revoke permits and to lien personal and real estate assets of owners (11 votes)
4. Encourage the Blair County District Attorney to charge repeat code violators with criminal misdemeanor (10 votes).

The top tier strategies include tools from all three categories, addressing prevention, remediation and redevelopment of blighted properties.

A discussion of the top tier strategies follows:

1. Establish a land bank (Redevelopment)

In Pennsylvania, land banks are public entities that may be created by counties, municipalities with a population of 10,000 or over, or a group of municipalities to address the problem of blight and abandonment.

Land banks are tools by which local governments can acquire and hold vacant, abandoned, and tax-delinquent property and return it to the real estate market. Once it acquires a property, a land bank removes all liens and claims on the property and clears the title, making the property ready for sale to a new owner. Land banks may hold property tax-exempt and without amassing any additional liens which makes land banks a valuable partner for community and economic development projects. Laws that restrict how municipalities may dispose of real property do not apply to Pennsylvania land banks. Land banks may sell, transfer, lease, or mortgage real property for any amount and/or form of consideration – as well as for any future use – it determines to be appropriate.

Land banks have a decided advantage in acquiring tax-delinquent properties at the judicial tax sale stage with the cooperation of the County Tax Claim Bureau. A land bank may enter into an agreement with the County Tax Claim Bureau which allows the land bank to be the sole bidder for selected properties at the judicial sale. This keeps speculators from buying these properties which are available at low prices.

By recycling vacant and tax-delinquent properties to new responsible owners, land banks create economic development opportunities, stabilize the housing and job markets, and promote community cohesion.

Land bank operations may be funded through a variety of ways including grants and loans, contributions from municipalities, proceeds from sales and leases, and shared real estate taxes. State law permits taxing authorities to share up to fifty percent (50%) of the real property taxes

collected on property sold by a land bank for up to five years. At the end of five years, all of the real estate tax revenue generated by the property is remitted to the taxing authorities.

Case Study – Westmoreland County

The Westmoreland County Land Bank has been in existence since late 2013 and has considerable accomplishments. Recently, a long-vacant former restaurant and hotel building in downtown Irwin was sold by the Land Bank to a North Huntingdon buyer for \$50,000. The buyer plans to renovate the three-story condemned structure into six apartments on the top two floors and possibly a commercial use on the first floor. The Land Bank acquired the building through the Westmoreland County Tax Claim Bureau for \$417 in September 2015.

As of November 2017, the Westmoreland County Land Bank had acquired 74 properties, sold 47, and leased 3 to community groups.

Mayor Pacifico has been leading an effort to establish a land bank, which was first identified as a need in the City's comprehensive plan, *Positively Altoona* (adopted by Council in May 2013). This need was subsequently identified in the City's Act 47 Plan. Beginning in 2014, the Mayor convened a task force of stakeholders representing the City, the County of Blair, social service agencies, the County Tax Claim Bureau, and economic developers to discuss the formation of a land bank. Through the DCED Blight Training and Technical Assistance Grant, the consultant will be able to assist the City in moving ahead with planning and organizing a land bank.

2. Expand home repair and rental rehabilitation assistance (Prevention)

Home repair and rental assistance programs can provide owners with the resources they need to bring their properties up to code. When homeowners are cited for substantial violations, they should be given an opportunity to prove that they are unable to fund needed repairs and, where possible, should be offered financial assistance to help them do so. By making grants and loans available to homeowners and small "mom and pop" landlords who lack the money to keep their properties up to code, municipalities can improve the housing stock condition, eliminate blight, and revitalize neighborhoods.

Unlike some of the other tools which are directed at bad actors, home repair and rental rehabilitation assistance is a tool focusing on good owners who lack the resources to maintain

their properties. By combining “carrots” and “sticks,” local governments can have the most success improving their properties, reducing abandonment, and eliminating blight.

The City currently offers two home repair and rental assistance programs:

- HOME Rehabilitation Program: to address substandard rental units; funds 50% of rehab costs up to \$14,950/unit; units must be rented to tenants meeting HUD low-income guidelines; and
- 0% Direct Homeowner Rehab Loan Program: to support owner-occupants; 0% loan program; income limits by family size.

Expanding these programs and exploring the creation of new programs will make additional resources available to the owners of the properties identified in the Housing Conditions Survey as needing rehabilitation or maintenance.

3. Expand implementation of Act 90 of 2010 which allows the City to deny permits and to lien personal and real estate assets of owners (Remediation)

Act 90 of 2010, titled the *Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act*, empowers municipalities to deny municipal permits and to lien personal and real estate assets of property owners under certain conditions.¹²

Permit denial. The Act authorizes municipalities to deny municipal permits¹³ to any property owner who has an unappealable delinquent real estate tax or municipal claim or a “serious code violation” *anywhere* in the Commonwealth. The municipality may withhold the permit until the property owner provides confirmation that he or she has paid taxes or remedied the code violations. For municipalities to deny the permit on the grounds of a “serious violation,”¹⁴ the owner must have failed to take “substantial steps”¹⁵ to correct the violation within six months after receiving notice of the imposition of a fine, penalty, or judgment by the court.

To use this tool, the City should enact an ordinance that explicitly gives the City the right to deny permits under Act 90. In addition, the City should prepare a written policy that includes clear procedures for permit denial.

Permit denial gives negligent property owners who have multiple properties an incentive to pay their taxes and maintain their properties if they wish to expand their property holdings in Pennsylvania.

¹² Act of Oct. 27, 2010, P.L. 875, No. 90, codified at 53 Pa.C.S. §§6101-6145.

¹³ “Municipal permits” are defined broadly as privileges relating to real property granted by a municipality. 53 Pa.C.S. § 6103.

¹⁴ “Serious violation” is defined as a “violation of a State law or a code that poses an imminent threat to the health and safety of a dwelling occupant, occupants in surrounding structures or a passersby.” 53 Pa.C.S. § 6103.

¹⁵ “Substantial step” is defined as an affirmative action, as determined by a property code official or officer of the court, on the part of a property owner to remedy the serious violation. 53 Pa.C.S. § 6103.

Asset attachment. Act 90 allows a municipality to place a lien against an owner's real property and personal assets as well as against the property in question. By allowing jurisdictions to attach other personal and real estate assets of the property owner, rather than limiting their efforts to obtain value from the blighted property itself, the law provides the opportunity to recoup the costs of code enforcement, blight remediation, and demolition from owners who have sufficient assets to cover the costs. In addition, the filing of an action to attach an owner's personal home, wages, or other assets may motivate a property owner to appear in court to defend his or her valued assets.

Asset attachment is a legal process for seizing real or personal property to satisfy a court judgment. As this is a legal process, the municipal solicitor will be a key player in using this blight remediation tool.

Asset attachment is most effective when an owner has multiple blighted properties but also has real estate in Pennsylvania and wages sufficient to cover penalties and costs that the government has incurred in remediating the properties.

To date, the City has not exercised any of these strategies but has threatened their use in communications with uncooperative owners of properties with serious code violations.

4. Encourage the Blair County District Attorney to charge repeat code violators with criminal misdemeanor (Remediation)

One way to get the attention of chronic code violators is to request that the District Attorney file a criminal charge against the owner for the crime of *Failure to Comply with a Code Requirement* under Act 90.¹⁶ A property owner commits this offense if (1) the owner has been convicted of a second or subsequent serious violation of the same code provision for the same property, (2) the violation poses a threat to public health, safety or property and the owner has not taken a substantial step to correct the violation, and (3) the violation is considered a public nuisance and the owner has not made a reasonable attempt to correct the violation. Where the offense is a second conviction of a serious violation of the same code provision for the same property, the owner is guilty of a misdemeanor of the second degree. Where the offense is based on three or more convictions, it constitutes a misdemeanor of the first degree. Other options for criminal charges include misdemeanor public nuisance.¹⁷

The County District Attorney has worked closely with the City in pursuing criminal charges in cases involving serious health, safety and welfare issues. The City has experienced some success in the relatively small number of misdemeanor cases pursued to date. Further discussions among the DA, the City Solicitor, and the Codes Department are recommended.

¹⁶ 53 P.S. § 6115.

¹⁷ 18 Pa.C.S. § 6504.

Case Study – City of Harrisburg

The City of Harrisburg has charged property owners with misdemeanor criminal offenses related to dangerous and blighted properties. When an owner is convicted, the City enters the misdemeanor information into the National Crime Information Center database so that if the owner is stopped for a traffic violation or for some other reason, the police can arrest the owner on the misdemeanor charge. This strategy has helped the City motivate owners to pay to repair or demolish properties.

B. Middle Tier Strategies

A number of other strategies garnered between six and nine votes from Task Force members. These strategies include:

5. Hall of Shame program to publicize and shame owners who fail to bring their property up to codes (9 votes)
6. Acquire vacant lots encumbered by demolition liens through foreclosure and subsequently convey these properties to pre-qualified adjacent owners (8 votes)
7. Engagement with incoming Magisterial District Judges (6 votes)
8. Expand financial resources for the demolition of properties by pursuing state grants (6 votes)

These four middle tier strategies include tools for remediation and redevelopment of blighted properties.

A discussion of the middle tier strategies follows:

5. Hall of Shame program to publicize and shame owners who fail to bring their property up to code (Remediation)

Owners who chronically violate codes and are not responsive to code violations can sometimes be shamed into action, including selling the property, if their lack of cooperation is publicized. This is done by posting a photograph of the property on the municipality's website along with the name and address of the owner. Another effective approach is erecting a sign on the property with the property owners name and address and encouraging the local media to do a story on the property.

To implement this strategy, the City will need to decide what types of properties are appropriate for this approach. For example, the City of Allentown has implemented the Hall of Shame but includes only investor-owned rental properties whose owners live outside of the state and have repeatedly refused to make needed property repairs.

6. Acquire vacant lots encumbered by demolition liens through foreclosure and subsequently convey these properties to pre-qualified adjacent owners (Redevelopment)

When property owners refuse or are financially unable to demolish dangerous structures on their properties, a municipality may choose to demolish the structure and place a lien on the property for the cost of demolition. The demolition lien is payable when the property is transferred. However, the vacant lots remaining after demolition are often located in areas with little or no market demand, making collection of the liens highly unlikely.

But, the now vacant lot with no market value needs to be maintained or it will become overgrown and unsightly. To avoid the maintenance costs and prevent blighting conditions, a municipality may choose to foreclose on the demolition lien and acquire the property through the foreclosure process for subsequent conveyance to an adjacent property owner. Having the ability to foreclose on those liens enables a municipality to take control of properties rather than have them remain in limbo, stuck in the market. A land bank, as recommended by the Task Force, could assist the City in acquiring and transferring these properties.

7. Engagement with Incoming Magisterial District Judges (Remediation)

Magisterial District Judges (MDJs) preside over the hearings at which code violations are adjudicated. It is important that MDJs have an understanding of the nature and extent of blight in a community and the impact of blighted properties. To that end, the City should reach out to the President Judge of the Blair County Court of Common Pleas to ask if she would convene a meeting with the MDJs to discuss the issue of blighted properties, building on the success of “Code Court” (see sidebar). The purpose of the meeting would be to share information on the nature and extent of blighted properties in the City and the challenges of locating owners and enforcing the law

Altoona’s Code Court

Several years ago, the City requested a meeting with the President Judge and the Magisterial District Judges (MDJs) to coordinate the handling of code enforcement matters. These matters were taking a lot of the MDJs’ time and clogging their dockets. The President Judge agreed and, as a result of the meeting, “Code Court” was created. There are two MDJs that cover the City. Code Court occurs on the first Thursday of the month (one MDJ holds court in the morning, the other one in the afternoon). This arrangement gives ample time for the City to put on its cases and the judges to not feel overwhelmed or rushed. Code Court continues to operate today, providing a predictable and efficient process for handling code enforcement matters.

efficiently and effectively. The meeting would also provide an opportunity to review the success of the Code Court and discuss any other process improvements that might be considered.

8. Expand financial resources for the demolition of properties by pursuing state grants (Remediation)

The City currently utilizes CDBG funding to demolish 15 to 20 blighted properties each year. By seeking additional resources, the City could demolish more properties or redirect some of the CDBG funds currently being used for demolition to other purposes. Additional resources could also be used to strategically acquire properties needing demolition. The DCED Keystone Communities program has provided funding to communities that have enacted a comprehensive strategy to address blight. For example, Northumberland County received \$500,000 in 2014 and an additional \$200,000 in 2017 for this purpose. This program requires matching funds from the City. The source of the match could be the City's CDBG funds.

Another source of funds for the City to consider is the DCED Neighborhood Assistance Program which provides up to a seventy-five percent (75%) tax credit for business donations to projects dealing with blighted properties. Major businesses could be solicited for contributions which would make them eligible for certain tax credits. Addressing blight is good for business. Revitalizing blighted properties and investing in communities increases confidence in local markets and makes it easier for businesses to attract and retain management personnel and employees.

Blair County recently created a county demolition fund. As authorized by state law,¹⁸ the County opted to impose an additional fee of \$7.50 for recording deeds and mortgages to create a fund to be used solely for the demolition of blighted structures. As reported in the *Altoona Mirror* recently, with an average of 7,550 deeds and mortgages recorded annually, this fee is expected to generate about \$55,000 annually for the demolition fund.¹⁹ The City should work closely with the County to determine how this new funding will be allocated.

THIRD MEETING

The third meeting of the Task Force was held on January 10, 2018. Prior to the meeting, a draft of the comprehensive blight strategy plan was prepared by the consultant and provided to Task Force members for their review. At the meeting, Task Force members discussed the strategies selected and offered feedback on the draft plan. The table below summarizes the top and middle tier strategies selected by the Task Force.

¹⁸ Act of November 4, 2016, P.L. 1170, No. 152 (Act 152 of 2016). This law amended the Recorder of Deeds Fee Law, authorizing an additional fee of up to \$15 to be imposed and used for demolition.

¹⁹ <http://www.altoonamirror.com/news/local-news/2017/06/county-plans-fee-to-tackle-blight/>.

Blight Task Force Top and Middle Tier Strategies
<i>Prevention</i>
Home Repair and Rental Rehabilitation Assistance
<i>Remediation</i>
Permit Revocation and Asset Attachment (Act 90)
Charge Repeat Offenders with Misdemeanor Crimes
Hall of Shame
Expand Financial Resources for Demolition
Engage with MDJs
<i>Redevelopment</i>
Land Bank
Acquire and Convey Vacant Lots Through Foreclosure

In addition, the group discussed ways to engage municipal officials and the broader community to support the implementation of the comprehensive blight strategy plan. Key takeaways from that discussion are included in Section II below.

This plan and the work of the Task Force will be shared with the public at the fourth meeting of the Task Force being held on March 7, 2018.

SECTION II

Step 4: Engage Municipal Officials/ Step 5: Identify Priority Action Steps and Implement!

City officials and staff in Altoona are already very engaged in tackling blight. The goal is to build on those efforts. The strategies selected by the Task Force will complement and advance the work that the City and its partners are currently doing to prevent, remediate and redevelop blighted properties.

On prevention - The City aggressively enforces the property maintenance code, and employs many of the available blight prevention tools including rental property registration, vacant and foreclosed property registrations, and home repair programs. By expanding the home repair and rental rehabilitation assistance program, the City will help to keep the housing stock in good condition which benefits the property owner as well as neighboring property owners. A challenge to this strategy is the lack of available contractors. Placing informational notices about homeowner repair job opportunities in with contractor licenses and permits is one way to inform and attract contractors. Other marketing and communication tools need to be explored.

On remediation - The City is effectively using the property maintenance code, other city ordinances, and state laws to pursue owners of properties with serious code violations. The strategies selected by the Task Force should advance and strengthen the City's blight

remediation efforts. Using strategies such as the hall of shame, permit revocation, asset attachment, and criminal charges can motivate owners *with resources* to address blighted properties. By using these more aggressive strategies, the City will send a clear message that dangerous, eyesore properties won't be tolerated. This should motivate compliance by other property owners. Engaging with the newly-elected Magisterial District Judges will give the City an opportunity to share its efforts and priorities in addressing blighted properties and build on the success of Code Court.

On redevelopment – A land bank can assist the City in acquiring property for redevelopment. A land bank can acquire properties through tax sales, donations, municipal transfers, and other means. A land bank can also discharge liens and clear title on properties making them more attractive to private investment. A land bank holds property tax-exempt which is especially useful when a larger development parcel is being assembled. A land bank is a proven tool for repurposing tax delinquent properties. Judicial sale and repository list properties are common sources for property acquisitions for land banks.

Blair County Judicial Sale and Repository List Properties 2017	
Type of Sale/List	No. of Parcels located in Altoona
Judicial Sale (exposed to sale on 6/21/17) ²⁰	46 (28 sold to bidders)
Repository List (last updated 6/25/17) ²¹	141

Repository list properties are tax delinquent properties that remain unsold after the judicial sale (also known as the free and clear sale) by the County Tax Claim Bureau. These properties are often abandoned by the owners and left vacant. In fact, two of the properties on the Codes Department's list of chronically blighted problem properties are on the Blair County Repository List. The City should reach out to the County, as trustee for repository list properties, to determine how those properties will be remediated. Moving forward, cooperation and collaboration with the County will be essential to the formation and operation of a land bank.

The overarching goal of this effort is to mobilize the City to more aggressively and strategically address the problem of blighted properties. There are three key actions needed to make this happen:

- Matching blight strategies to property and neighborhood conditions.
- Effectively deploying existing and future financial and community resources.
- Clearly identifying action steps and an action team to implement the plan.

A. Matching blight strategies to property and neighborhood conditions

A successful blight strategy takes into account the condition of the property as well as conditions in the surrounding neighborhood. For example, rehabilitation assistance should not be directed to properties that are beyond repair and located in neighborhoods where no one

²⁰ <http://www.blaircountytaxbureau.com/content/taxsaleinfo/saleresults/41-2017jtsr>.

²¹ <http://www.blaircountytaxbureau.com/content/propertylists/12-repositortlist>.

wants to live. In neighborhoods where employers and anchor institutions are located, public-private partnerships are often employed to fight blight and revitalize neighborhoods.

Strategies have varying degrees of effectiveness depending on neighborhood and market conditions. Most of the strategies selected by the Task Force can be used effectively in all types of neighborhoods and markets. However, aggressive enforcement against property owners using strategies like permit revocation, asset attachment, and imposition of fines should only be pursued where the owner has resources and/or the property has value.

Stable Neighborhoods

Stable neighborhoods are predominantly owner-occupied. Housing prices are relatively stable, and the homes are in good physical condition.

Prevention and remediation strategies are the focus in stable neighborhoods where the incidence of blight is typically scattered. In addition to active code enforcement, the City's role in these neighborhoods should be to respond quickly and carefully to any nuisance properties. Using strategies such as the hall of shame, permit revocation, and asset attachment can motivate owners with resources to address blighted properties. For the most serious offenders, criminal prosecution may be warranted. When an owner fails to comply and acquisition of the property is advisable, the City can use tools like the land bank and conservatorship to get control of the property and prepare it for redevelopment. The City does not need to be as concerned about encouraging private investment in these areas as property values are higher and people are willing to spend money without public incentive if the return on their investment is good and not uncertain.

Transitional Neighborhoods

Transitional neighborhoods are neither clearly thriving nor overtly distressed. These neighborhoods have housing prices just above and below the median for their jurisdictions and offer a reasonable quality of life, but are in danger of falling into decline. Transitional neighborhoods are often home to a disproportionate share of the jurisdiction's aged population

Conservatorship

Conservatorship is the court appointment of a third party to enter an owner's property and make repairs to bring the property up to code. Under the *Blighted and Abandoned Property Conservatorship Act (Act 135)*, a municipality, school district, redevelopment authority, neighbor or nonprofit organization petitions a judge to appoint a responsible party to bring a neglected property into compliance with code standards. An owner can step in at any time to terminate the conservatorship, but the owner must reimburse the conservator for all costs incurred before regaining control of the property. Once the property has been rehabilitated or demolished, if the owner has not approached the court to regain possession after paying all costs, the conservator may seek permission to sell the property.

Conservatorship is a useful tool for dealing with an individual blighted property whose owner refuses to address serious code violations. Conservatorship cases have been brought in a number of counties, including Allegheny, Butler, Schuylkill, and Philadelphia. For more information on conservatorship, see the Housing Alliance's online blight library, www.pablightlibrary.org.

and characterized by higher vacancy and renter-occupancy rates.

The City's role in transitional neighborhoods should be to preserve the housing stock and valued amenities (e.g. commercial corridors, high-performing schools, parks and recreation areas). Home repair and rental rehabilitation assistance programs are effective in transitional neighborhoods. Side lot programs that convey vacant lots to neighboring homeowners also make sense. A land bank can be used to strategically acquire blighted properties that are prominent and if not addressed could tip the neighborhood toward a worse situation. Incentivizing private investment in these neighborhoods through tax abatement is an effective strategy because without that incentive people may defer improvements to their property because of a lack of confidence in recouping their investment through higher property values.

Real Estate Tax Abatements

State law authorizes local taxing authorities to exempt from real estate taxation the increased assessed value of the actual cost of new residential construction and improvements to deteriorated residential properties in designated areas. Abatements are available to both homeowners and developers and can last for up to 10 years. Residential tax abatements have been shown to stimulate investment in housing. The City of Reading has adopted a residential tax abatement program for new construction (100% for three years) and improvements (100% in year 1, decreases by 10% each year in years 2 through 10).

Challenged Neighborhoods

Challenged neighborhoods are characterized by low property values, elevated vacancy rates, and substantial population loss. These neighborhoods also have a disproportionate rate of renter-occupied housing and a disproportionate share of blighted housing.

In challenged neighborhoods with low market demand, property owners have few incentives to improve or even simply maintain their properties, leading to abandonment and tax delinquency. The City's role in challenged neighborhoods should be to eliminate dangerous conditions and create conditions that support neighborhood revitalization and market rebirth. Boarding and sealing abandoned properties prevents their use for crime and can stave off further deterioration. A land bank is an effective tool in these neighborhoods. A land bank can gain control of blighted and abandoned property (frequently through delinquent tax sales), and assemble parcels to form a larger site. The land bank then tees up the redevelopment of the

site for a private developer by providing site control and packaging below market rate financing needed by the developer to redevelop the property. The land bank should also seek out opportunities to receive properties through donation.

B. Effectively Deploying Existing and Future Financial and Community Resources

Financial Resources

As noted in the Act 47 Amended Recovery Plan, the City has experienced substantial reductions in federal funding available through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME).²² These reductions are expected to continue which makes it increasingly important that the City leverage other sources of funds such as Keystone Communities. The City uses some of its CDBG funds for code enforcement and demolition. While code enforcement is essential, there is a diminishing effectiveness in neighborhoods where property values are so low that property owners will see little financial return for any improvements they are required to make to address codes. Demolition funds need to be utilized strategically, focusing on properties which are good candidates for redevelopment. Through its current demolition program, the City is doing just that – focusing on removing dangerous structures and preparing for redevelopment. But, there are more structures that need to be demolished than there is currently available funding.

As the City establishes a land bank, additional resources will be needed to support property acquisition, demolition, and site assembly. Projects that will be taxable in the near term should be given the highest priority. For funding, the City should consider applying for state grants through programs like Keystone Communities and the Pennsylvania Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement (PHARE) Realty Transfer Tax (RTT) fund.²³ In 2017, the Schuylkill County Land Bank was awarded \$175,000 grant from the PHARE/RTT fund to acquire and rehabilitate two vacant properties to be sold to low-to-moderate income households.

The City should work with the Altoona Blair County Development Corporation (ABCD Corp.) and the Greater Altoona Economic Development Corporation (GAEDC) to pursue all available funding sources to ensure implementation of the strategies prioritized by the Task Force.

Community Resources

Tackling blight is a community effort. It cannot be accomplished by government alone. Collaboration is critical. As noted in City plans like *Positively Altoona* and evidenced by the Task Force, there is an abundance of local and regional institutions, organizations and individuals that have resources (monetary and non-monetary) that can be leveraged to help transform the City. They are essential partners for implementing the strategies in this plan to resolve and repurpose blighted properties. In addition, law enforcement leaders such as the Police Chief, the Fire Chief, the Solicitor and the District Attorney, play critical roles in the City's effort to

²² Act 47 Recovery Plan (as amended August 2016), p. 68.

²³ PHARE program funding assists with the creation, rehabilitation and support of affordable housing throughout the Commonwealth.

fight blight and they should be actively involved in implementing this plan. The City should engage City and County staff and officials, residents, neighborhood and nonprofit organizations, landlords, businesses, and institutions to implement this plan.

C. Clearly Identifying Action Steps and an Action Team to Implement the Plan

The Task Force’s development of this comprehensive blight strategy plan is a first - not the final - step to more effectively address blighted properties in Altoona. The priority strategies selected by the Task Force must be implemented in order to make an impact.

To ensure implementation, an action team should be formed. The team should include individuals and representatives of organizations that will have a role in putting the comprehensive blight plan into action. The job of the Action Team is to develop a detailed action plan for each strategy recommended. The Action Plan should include:

- Tasks necessary to implement each strategy
- Time frame for completing tasks
- Lead organization
- Resources needed
- Measurements of success

A sample Action Plan is included in the Appendix.

The Action Team should include representatives of the City, Redevelopment Authority, County, ABCD Corp./GAEDC, and others as recommended by the Task Force and determined by the Mayor.

In addition to developing the Action Plan, the Action Team should assist the City and later the Land Bank in identifying properties that have the potential for successful redevelopment. The Action Team can also assist with integrating blight remediation activities into plans for downtown (*Ahead of the Curve*) and neighborhood areas that are proposed for revitalization and/or improvement.

The Action Team should meet quarterly to assess progress, consider the best ways to address implementation issues, update the plan as needed, and identify prominent blighted properties that might be good opportunities for redevelopment and reuse.

Added bonus: Having a written blight plan with clearly articulated action steps for execution increases the likelihood of successful grant applications.

For more information on the Comprehensive Blight Strategy Plan, contact:

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Winnie Branton

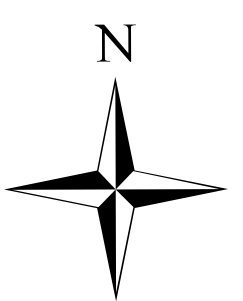
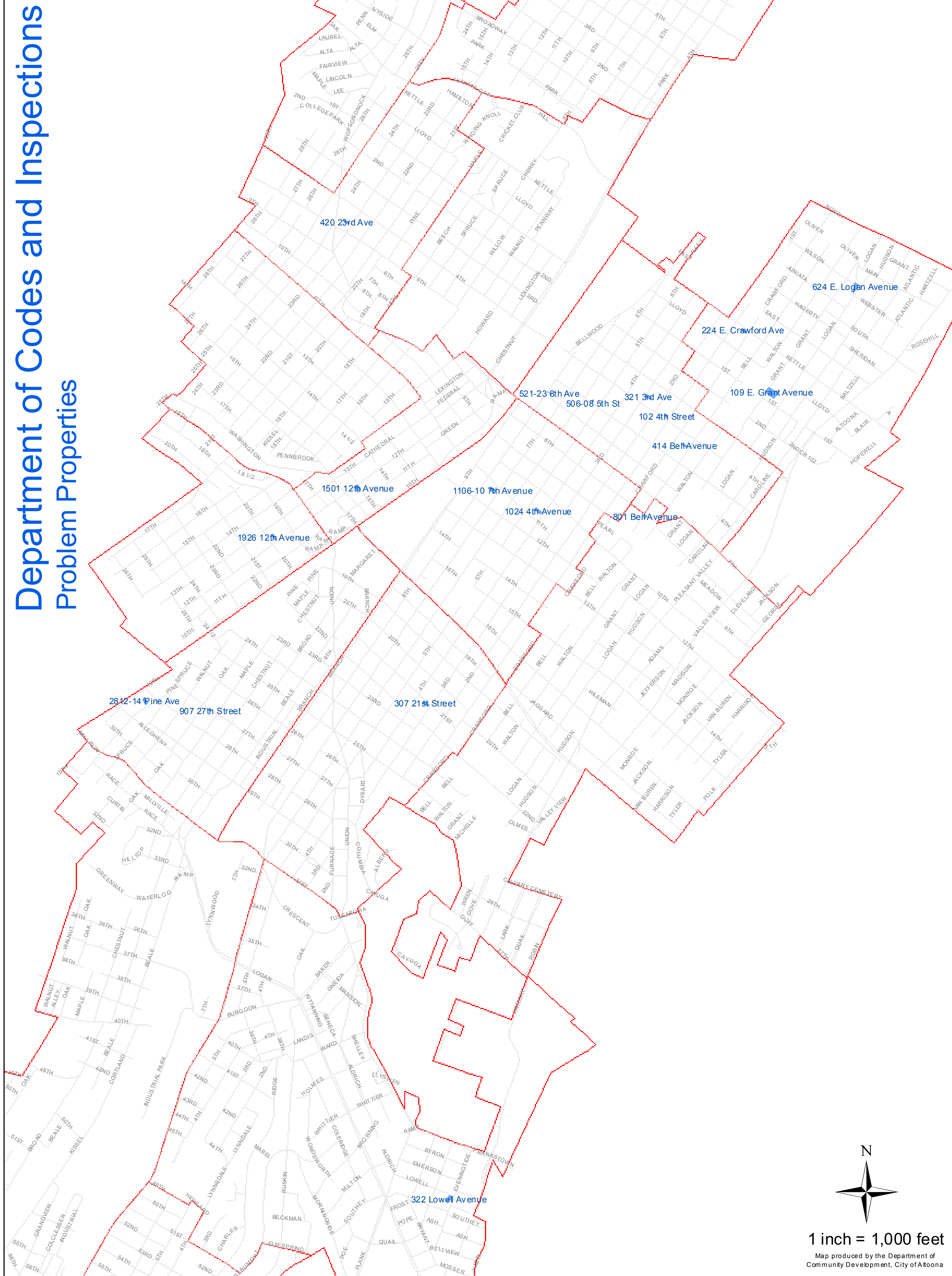
wbranton@brantonstrategies.com

APPENDIX

1. Chronically Blighted Problem Properties Chart and Map
2. Map Showing Structural Conditions, Housing Conditions Survey
3. Comprehensive Plan Map Showing General Housing Conditions
4. List of Blight Strategies with Task Force Votes
5. Sample Action Plan

BLIGHT TASK FORCE - problem properties in no particular order									
PROPERTY ADDRESS	OWNER NAME	OWNER ADDRESS	CDBG AREA	TAXES DUE	NOV ISSUED	CITATION ISSUED	VACANT	NOTES	UPDATE 2/8/18
907 27th Street	Shlomo Dotan	PO Box 1780 Altoona PA 16603	Yes	\$0	Yes	Yes	Yes	Interior and exterior repairs, 2nd hearing scheduled for Nov, unregistered rental, paint, grass, furniture	Guilty at hearing in Dec, Guilty at hearing in Jan, tenants moved out unable to gain interior access
624 E. Logan Avenue	Howard Gates	624 E. Logan Ave Altoona PA 16602	No	\$0	Yes	Yes	No	Bankruptcy, Howard Gates, citations filed, hearings scheduled, major disrepair	Guilty on first citation, second citation filed 2/6/18
109 E. Grant Avenue	Ward & Verna Ketrow	624 E. Logan Ave Altoona PA 16602	No	\$2,805.34	Yes	Yes	Yes	Bankruptcy, Howard Gates, hearings scheduled, 2 guilty verdicts, major disrepair, D/A won't pursue misdemeanor	No further updates on misdemeanor charges
322 Lowell Avenue	Joseph & Nicole Costanza	322 Lowell Avenue Altoona PA 16602	No	\$0.00	Yes	Yes	No	Disrepair, accumulations, vehicles, misdemeanor, warrant issued	Hearing at Blair County scheduled for 2/9/2018
1106-10 7th Avenue	Benjamin Grove	1429 Bell Ave Altoona PA 16602	Yes	\$1,529.08	Yes	Yes	Yes	Disrepair, demolition, owner plans to demo in spring? Church	Warrant issued for owner from hearing on 2/1/2018
1501 12th Avenue	Bishop Botros	106 Patmos Dr Canadensis PA 18325	Yes	\$6,439.21	Yes	Yes	Yes	Church, demolition, under agreement for tax payments, warrants issued, no permits issued or work started	Currently exploring alternative enforcement options
1926 12th Avenue	Fern Daugherty	1926 12th Ave Altoona PA 16601	Yes	\$0.00	Yes	Yes	No	Condemned, broken windows, in mow program, warrants issued for owner	Company cleaning property so bank can sell
801 Bell Avenue	Sean & Melanie Hook	801 Bell Avenue Altoona PA 16602	No	\$838.93	Yes	Yes	Yes	Overgrowth, in mow and lien, repair notices, owner in SC?	Fees assessed for incomplete repairs, citation will be filed if no action taken, vacant registration issued
102 4th Street	JK Myers Contracting	4075 Linglestown Rd Harrisburg PA 17112	Yes	\$644.01	Yes	Yes	No	Disrepair, etc, aka Hunter Property Services, warrants issued	Guilty plea from December hearing; 2nd citation issued
321 3rd Ave	William and Cynthia Brown	1130 13th Ave Altoona PA 16601	Yes	\$846.52	Yes	Yes	Yes	Vehicles, repairs, fees assessed	Hearing held 12/7/17, warrant issued
414 Bell Avenue	Florence Ferrier (deceased)	225 E 23rd Ave Altoona PA 16601	Yes	2015 \$1439.23 2016 \$1078.12	Yes	Yes	Yes	Repairs, overgrowth, vacant up for tax sale, in mow and lien, no estate, in contact with granddaughter	No estate opened, no taxes being paid, as per city solicitor currently at a standstill
2812-14 Pine Ave	WR Asset Trust	2915 E Baseline Rd Building 1 Gilbert, AZ 85234	No	\$188.53	Yes	Yes	Yes	vacant, bank-owned, overgrowth, hearing scheduled, in mow and lien, trash	December hearing found guilty for overgrowth, January hearing found guilty for trash
521-23 8th Ave	County Repository/John Rhone	Same Address for Rhone, 523 8th Ave	Yes	\$0	Yes	Yes	No	Duplex, poor structural condition, 1/2 County (vacant) 1/2 occupied (Rhone)	Attempting to remove owner from 523 8th Ave, property red-tagged and owner cited for failure to vacate

Department of Codes and Inspections Problem Properties



1 inch = 1,000 feet

Map produced by the Department of Community Development, City of Altoona

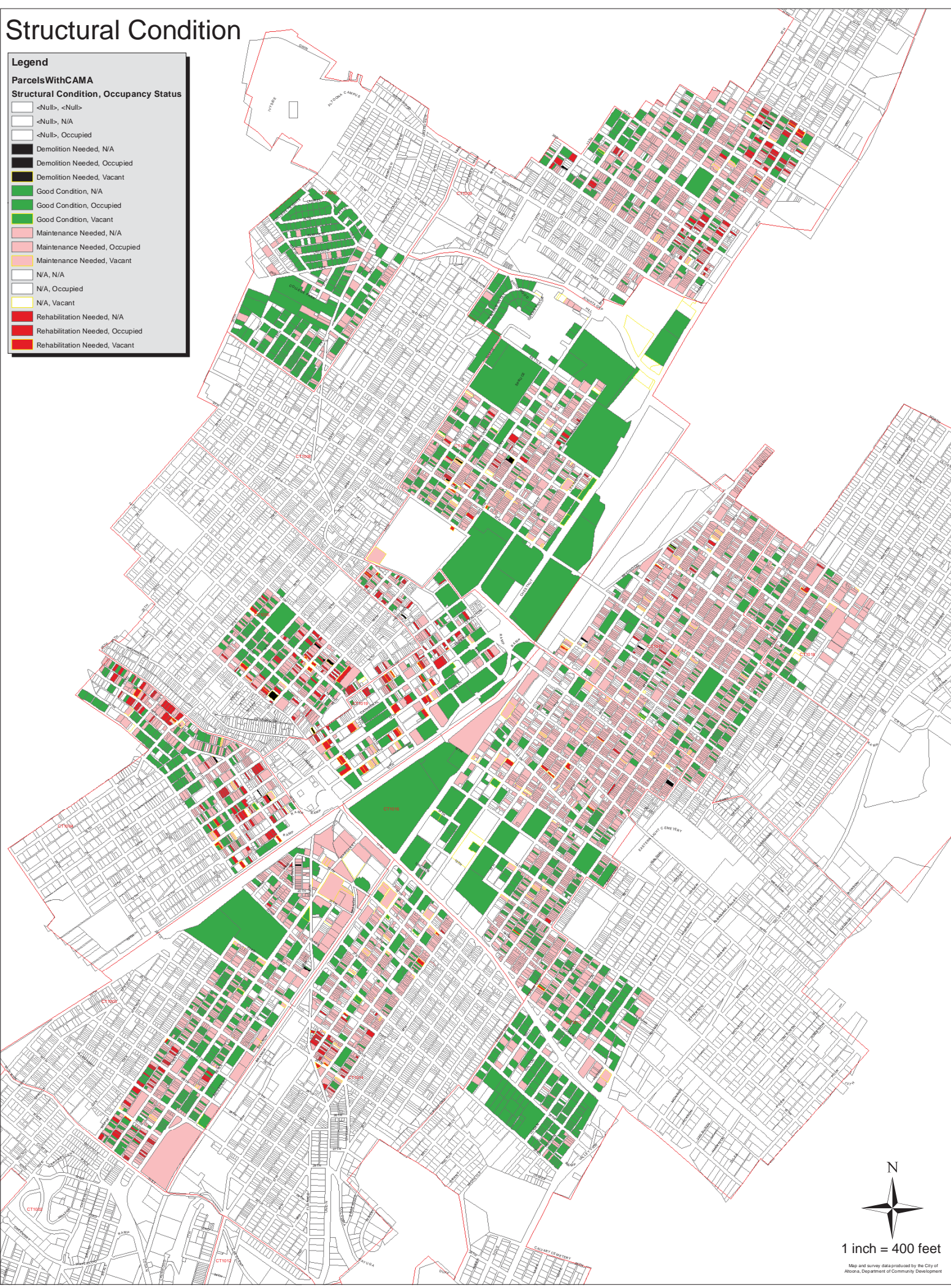
Structural Condition

Legend

ParcelsWithCAMA

Structural Condition, Occupancy Status

- <Null>, <Null>
- <Null>, N/A
- <Null>, Occupied
- Demolition Needed, N/A
- Demolition Needed, Occupied
- Demolition Needed, Vacant
- Good Condition, N/A
- Good Condition, Occupied
- Good Condition, Vacant
- Maintenance Needed, N/A
- Maintenance Needed, Occupied
- Maintenance Needed, Vacant
- N/A, N/A
- N/A, Occupied
- N/A, Vacant
- Rehabilitation Needed, N/A
- Rehabilitation Needed, Occupied
- Rehabilitation Needed, Vacant



1 inch = 400 feet

Map and survey data produced by the City of
Albion, Department of Community Development

GENERALIZED HOUSING CONDITIONS MAP


LEGEND

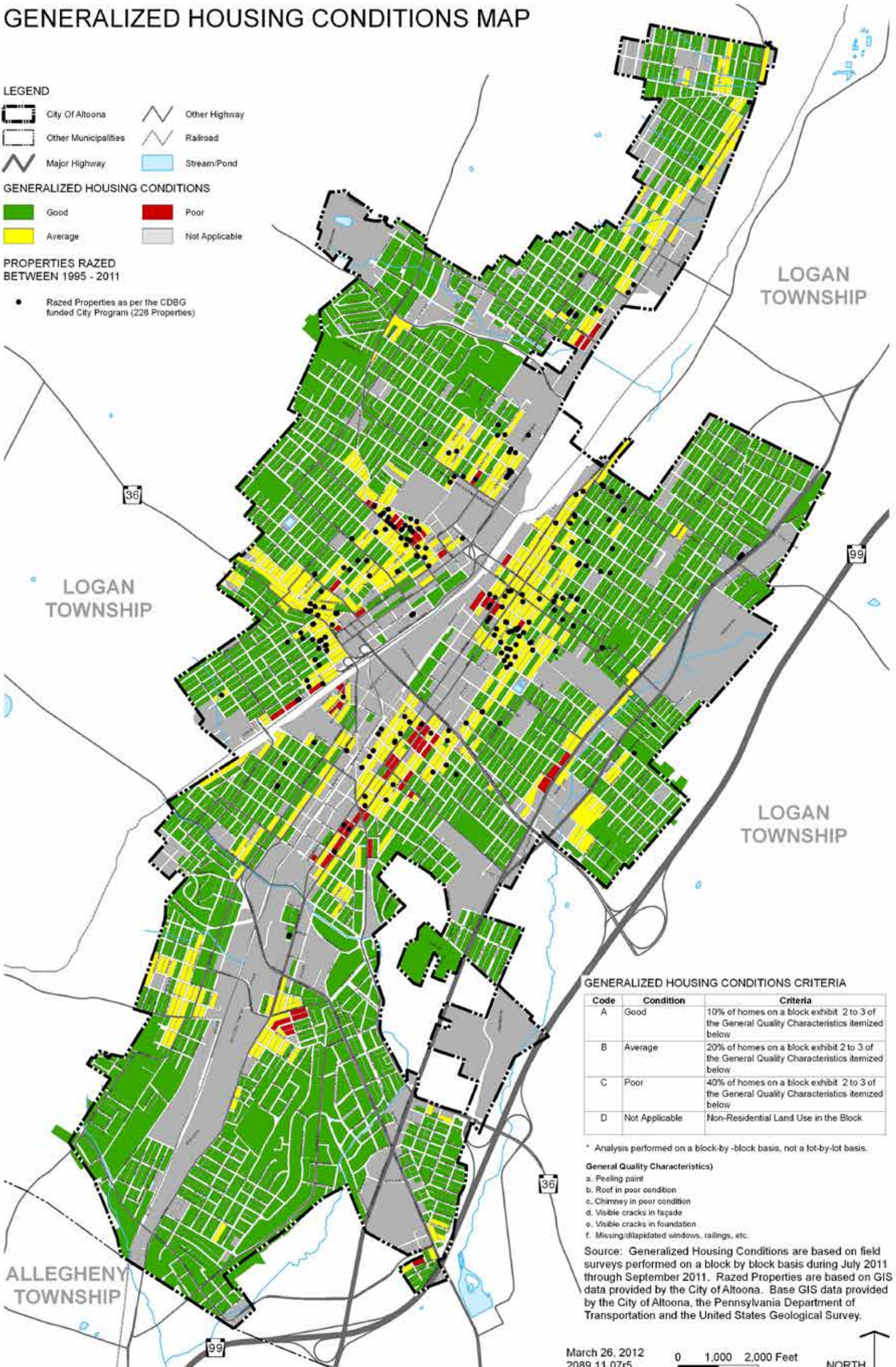
-  City Of Altoona
-  Other Municipalities
-  Major Highway
-  Other Highway
-  Railroad
-  Stream/Pond

GENERALIZED HOUSING CONDITIONS

-  Good
-  Average
-  Poor
-  Not Applicable

PROPERTIES RAZED BETWEEN 1995 - 2011

-  Razed Properties as per the CDBG funded City Program (228 Properties)



GENERALIZED HOUSING CONDITIONS CRITERIA

Code	Condition	Criteria
A	Good	10% of homes on a block exhibit 2 to 3 of the General Quality Characteristics itemized below
B	Average	20% of homes on a block exhibit 2 to 3 of the General Quality Characteristics itemized below
C	Poor	40% of homes on a block exhibit 2 to 3 of the General Quality Characteristics itemized below
D	Not Applicable	Non-Residential Land Use in the Block

* Analysis performed on a block-by-block basis, not a lot-by-lot basis.

General Quality Characteristics)

- a. Peeling paint
- b. Roof in poor condition
- c. Chimney in poor condition
- d. Visible cracks in façade
- e. Visible cracks in foundation
- f. Missing/dilapidated windows, railings, etc.

Source: Generalized Housing Conditions are based on field surveys performed on a block by block basis during July 2011 through September 2011. Razed Properties are based on GIS data provided by the City of Altoona. Base GIS data provided by the City of Altoona, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and the United States Geological Survey.

March 26, 2012
2089.11.07r5

0 1,000 2,000 Feet

NORTH

LISTING OF BLIGHT STRATEGIES WITH TASK FORCE VOTES

PREVENTION STRATEGIES:

- Expand Home Repair and Rental Rehabilitation Assistance (13 votes)
- Enact Quality of Life Ticketing Ordinance for code violations (4 votes)
- Engagement with Incoming District Justices (6 votes)
- Outreach to Blair County Tax Claim Bureau to restrict bidders who have tax delinquencies or code violations (4 votes)
- Amend Abandoned Property Registration Ordinance to require lenders to pay a fee and partner with a for-profit company to manage this registry (0 votes)
- Incentive program that rewards landlords for compliance with codes (1 vote)
- Enact a Presale Inspection Ordinance (1 vote)
- Education program to train responsible owners to bid at sheriff's sales (2 votes)

REMEDICATION STRATEGIES:

- Hall of Shame program to publicize and shame owners who fail to bring their property up to codes (9 votes)
- Expand implementation of Act 90 of 2010 which allows the City to revoke permits and to lien personal and real estate assets of owners (11 votes)
- Expand financial resources for the demolition of properties by pursuing state grants (6 votes)
- Encourage the Blair County District Attorney to charge repeat code violators with criminal misdemeanor (10 votes)
- Consider pursuing court action for the appointment of a conservator to make improvements to properties (4 votes)
- Open estates of deceased property owners to transfer blighted properties (3 votes)

REDEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES:

- Establish a land bank (17 votes)
- Acquire vacant lots encumbered by demolition liens through foreclosure and subsequently convey these properties to pre-qualified adjacent owners (8 votes)
- Incentivize private development using programs authorized under state law (1 vote)
- Explore opportunities to support employer-assisted housing programs with matching fund support (1 vote)

Sample Action Plan

Strategy and Tasks	Lead Organization	Time Frame for Accompl.	\$ Resources Required	Measurements of Success
STRATEGY 1. Encourage municipalities to adopt comprehensive property maintenance codes	Planning commission			Four communities adopt a property maintenance code within 12 months
Task a. Identify which municipalities do not have a property maintenance code		Jun 30	none	
Task b. Reach out to municipalities to gauge their interest in adopting a property maintenance code		Sept 30	none	
Task c. Retain consultant to work with municipalities in drafting an appropriate ordinance		Dec 31	\$7,500	
STRATEGY 2. Use the conservatorship process to deal with long-time blighted properties	Redevelopment authority			Three conservatorship actions filed within 12 months
Task a. Identify properties appropriate for conservatorship action		Mar 31	none	
Task b. Develop pool of funds to undertake rehab or demolition of properties		Sept 30	\$100,000	
Task c. Retain legal services to file conservatorship actions		Sept 30	\$10,000	