

THE BASICS OF BLIGHT

Recent Research on Its Drivers, Impacts, and Interventions

Joseph Schilling¹ & Jimena Pinzón²



Blighted Property in Detroit, Michigan (1999)

Image by: J. Schilling

Civic leaders and government officials have struggled for nearly a century to define blight and deploy effective policies and programs to address its community impacts. Blight encompasses vacant lots, abandoned buildings, and houses in derelict or dangerous shape, as well as environmental contamination. Blight can also refer to smaller property nuisances that creep up on cities and suburbs: overgrown lawns, uncollected litter, inadequate street lighting, and other signs of neglect. Blight's legal and policy foundation can be found in longstanding principles of public nuisance: property conditions that interfere with the general public's use of their properties. Although there is wide debate about what exactly blight is and how people should talk about it, the most useful description is "land so damaged or neglected that it is incapable of being beneficial to a community without outside intervention."^[1] Thus, blight may be defined not so much by what it looks like, as by what it will take to reverse it.

This research brief examines blight's multiple dimensions, offers a definition of blight, summarizes recent scholarship, and discusses the meaning of this concept for scholars and practitioners who work on the issues of distressed properties and urban regeneration. As a translation brief, it synthesizes what the research says about blight and the interventions to address its impacts, what the blight research does not say, and questions for future investigation.

The Vacant Property Research Network's "research and policy brief" series bridges the traditional divide between research and practice by explaining the methods behind recent research along with the context and findings so that practitioners and community leaders can better understand what the research says, what the research does not say, and how it might be relevant to their respective vacant property initiatives.

By understanding how current research may or may not apply to local efforts, we believe practitioners and policymakers will be better equipped to make better decisions, improve policy and program implementation, and ultimately facilitate the regeneration of their communities.

This effort was made possible with the support of the [Ford Foundation](#).



Scope of Translation Brief

What is it? How to use it?

Blight is a frequent topic in the headlines and in hallways of city and county governments. From Reno, Nevada to New Orleans, Louisiana, a growing number of communities have launched citywide campaigns to eradicate blighted properties. One of the most comprehensive efforts, Detroit's 2014 Blight Removal Task Force Plan, identified more than 80,000 derelict structures and vacant lots with about 50 percent in need of demolition. In nearby Flint, Michigan, the blight element of its comprehensive plan documents that more than 30 percent of all properties in the city—roughly 20,000 homes, businesses and vacant lots—are seriously derelict and will cost the city an estimated \$100 million to demolish and reclaim during the next decade or more.

Blight is no longer just a pressing problem for older industrial, legacy cities, but concerns fast-growing cities in California, Arizona, Nevada, and Texas thanks in large part to the recent mortgage foreclosure crisis spreading the blighting influence of vacant homes to once stable neighborhoods. The direct cost of addressing the issue can be staggering for any community as local code enforcement officials are called upon every day to abate derelict properties, remove graffiti and cleanup vacant lots with little chance of recouping all of their costs against neglectful property owners.

Although the term blight seems more popular today, researchers note its long and complex history within the academic literature. Scholars from different disciplines have documented blight's evolution from its genesis in the early 1900s to describe the spread of slums and disease, to blight's racial legacy as the legal touchstone for many eminent domain actions that broke apart predominately African American communities throughout hundreds of American cities. This research translation brief offers a synthesis of the relevant research findings and then explores their significance for practitioners and policymakers trying to eradicate and remediate blighted properties in their communities.

- **Section 1:** Offers a summary of the history and evolution of blight in America.
- **Section 2:** Provides an overview of the recent socio-economic research on blighted properties (What causes it? What are common indicators? What are blight's economic and social impacts?).
- **Section 3:** Summarizes research on policy and program interventions (What are communities doing about blight? What are the effects of anti-blight strategies?).
- **Section 4:** What can practitioners learn from the blight research?

Authors:

1. J. Schilling, Senior Fellow, Metropolitan Institute and Assistant Research Professor, Urban Affairs and Planning, Virginia Tech, Alexandria Campus.
2. J. Pinzón, Graduate Research Assistant, Metropolitan Institute.

The authors would like to thank Dr. Katie Wells for her valuable contribution to this brief.

1. The Evolution of Blight in the U.S.

Civic leaders and government officials in the U.S. have used the term blight to talk about urban development problems for more than one hundred years. Early 20th century social reformers used blight to call attention to the unhealthy housing and substandard living conditions confronting new waves of immigrants in American cities. Later housing reformers of the New Deal adopted the concept of plant blight to explain how slums could spread from one neighborhood to another. But these conversations have seldom defined blight with any consistency.^[4] This lack of clarity is rooted in a long history of concerns about related issues, each with differing perspectives and agendas, such as housing for low-income workers, public health of the city at large, and the economic fates of central business districts.

What is Blight?

A blighted property is a physical space or structure that is no longer in acceptable or beneficial condition to its community. A property that is blighted has lost its value as a social good or economic commodity or its functional status as a livable space. Blight is a stage of depreciation, not an objective condition, which conveys the idea that blight is created over time through neglect or damaging actions. This definition also stresses the role of a community in defining blight.^[2] As a Philadelphia planner in 1918 once explained, blight is a property “which is not what it should be.”^[3]

1.1 Early 20th Century-Blight as Unsanitary Living Conditions

Urbanization Affects Health & Human Behavior

At the beginning of the 20th century, social reformers raised alarm about the deleterious effects of urbanization and industrialization. The places where industrial workers and their families lived were overcrowded and squalid, seen as menaces to the residents who lived in these horrid conditions, as well as the city as a whole. The work of journalists, reporters, novelists, and researchers depicted industrializing cities as breeding grounds for disease, disorder, and a host of social ills. Across the country, cities were undergoing massive change, their populations had exploded and the number of factories had surged. Dominant narratives at the time described these quickly changing cities as places of danger, chaos, isolation, detachment, anonymity, and social distance.^[5]

Urban researchers at the University of Chicago documented how industrial cities were flooded with crime, disease, and deviant human behavior, and the extent to which these places did not resemble their ideas about good, moral, and functional societies. These Chicago sociologists argued that urban environments directly shaped human behavior. In contrast to popular ideas that put biological differences as the root cause of social conflicts in cities, these researchers made the case that the quality of neighborhoods and homes for working-class families deeply mattered to the kinds of success that people could obtain when living in those settings. These kinds of arguments, and the research that supported them, were instrumental to urban reform movements that saw substandard infrastructure as reason for broad action.^[6]

The Chicago-based work of Jane Addams also helped to bring attention to the substandard living and working conditions of immigrants, through the proliferation of the settlement house movement in the U.S. Her reports and campaigns, which would form the basis of almost all U.S. housing-reform legislation in the early twentieth century, were based on research undertaken with settlement house residents who were seen as capable partners in building better cities. Many times, advocates of housing reform blamed the poor, black, alley residents for the miserable conditions of the slums or suggested that the residents did not know any better than to live as they did. Addams, along with Jacob Riis in New York City (who drew attention to the poor in his dramatic photographs) tried to counter these arguments. They were among a group of mostly young Americans who settled in poor neighborhoods with the intention of improving them. In cooperation with residents, they created kindergartens, fought for better work and living conditions, and advocated for parks and playgrounds.

Their work did not prevent the general adoption of razing and bulldozing as a solution to substandard housing. The model for urban development for the first half of the 20th Century was destruction and whole-cloth replacement by government in a top-down fashion, rather than cooperative planning with stakeholder residents.^[7]

Demolition of Substandard Housing to Deter Blight

At the same time that the Great Depression renewed the urban crisis in the U.S., 'blight' came to replace the term 'slums' in public discourse. To stress the urgency of the urban housing problem, civic leaders increasingly borrowed the term blight from plant sciences. They wanted to suggest that

The City Beautiful Movement Influence

The arguments about the dangers of cities were taken to an extreme with the City Beautiful movement. In a way that did little to improve the housing woes of working families in cities or sanitation access for crowded slums, which were the original concerns of urban reformers, the City Beautiful movement promoted the idea that physically beautiful architecture would breed healthy, productive, and moral communities. The path of Philadelphia's Ben Franklin Parkway, for instance, is a legacy of this way of thinking. The Parkway cut through a dense working-class neighborhood and only worsened the city's shortage of decent, affordable housing.

unsanitary conditions were as dangerous as diseases and could spread through a city like plagues. Blight was a natural but deadly feature of cities which needed to be quarantined. And, if cities were to remain healthy and safe places, wretched houses needed to be eliminated.^[8] Blighted properties were social liabilities to their communities.

Early reformers aggressively sought the eradication of substandard housing and slums through clearance projects. They used zoning/land use regulations, building, fire, and health codes to gain the legal approval to demolish properties. Even houses that were in good shape were targeted in these campaigns because proximity itself was seen as a hazard. Slum conditions could spread.^[9] Removal became a central tool to the vocabulary of urban policy by the 1930s. The impetus for this new approach to thinking about poor people's housing as places that needed to be

demolished became the status quo.^[10] Working-class areas of cities were not improving. Over time, because they were not receiving investments, poor people's housing was deteriorating.

Urban infrastructure like housing requires the constant addition of greater and greater sums of investments over time in order to maintain the same quality.^[11] Though some reformers and government officials acknowledged that eliminating slum dwellings “would only worsen the shortage unless the supply of sanitary, low-income housing elsewhere in the city could be increased,” demolitions were pursued with nearly no plans to increase the housing stock elsewhere.^[12] Unlike its counterparts in Europe, the federal government did not see itself as responsible for the provision of low- and moderate-income housing or capable of making such provisions. The hope was that the private market forces would respond and remedy the problem. However, even with the programs of the New Deal, from 1935 to 1940, “practically no new private housing was built [in the U.S.] that the poorest one-third of families could afford.”^[13]

1.2 Mid-20th Century : The Economics of Blight

1940s—Blight Inhibits Economic Growth of Communities

Spurred in large part by the economic collapse of the Great Depression, urban reformers also began to link blighted homes with stalled economic growth and reduced economic values. For reformers and officials, blighted homes were not just social but economic liabilities to their communities and dangerous places that could destroy economies. By the 1940s, the issue of housing was directed away from questions of

public health to a new association with economic development. Whereas the offensive sanitary conditions of housing had incited urban reform interventions at the turn of the century, and a flu epidemic had spurred the adoption of zoning in many cities in the 1920s, “by 1940 the ‘health’ of the city had entirely different (that is, economic) connotations.”^[14]

Much of this change was linked to the New Deal's housing programs, passed in the 1930s. The housing goals of the New Deal were generally aimed at Depression-era problems of moderate-income populations for those most adversely affected by the Great Depression, rather than the longstanding housing problems of the poor.^[15] The programs sought to increase participation in the private housing market—not redesign how or for whom housing was distributed, created, or consumed. Few low-income families benefited from the Federal Housing Administration's programs.^[16] The public housing programs, which funneled federal money to local housing agencies like the National Capital Housing Authority (the former Alley Dwelling Authority), tore down substandard housing to construct new low-income rental units, a process that displaced residents and temporarily worsened the housing crisis.^[17] Rather than aimed at solving the lack of adequate low-income housing in U.S. cities, the pioneering efforts of the New Deal were designed to be short-term solutions to short-term problems of unemployment.

1950s and 1960s – Blight, Urban Renewal, & Economic Redevelopment

Urban renewal programs in the 1950s and 1960s formalized blight as an economic problem often using the term blight as the legal justification for large scale infrastructure and redevelopment

projects. The new clearance programs that used federal grants to bulldoze a large number of poor neighborhoods pursued the growth of economic markets through the containment of poor neighborhoods. These projects treated blight as a feature of urban space at two different scales. At a micro scale, blighted properties were understood to be dangerous places that possessed the power to destroy a neighborhood. At a macro scale, however, blighted neighborhoods could be optimistic canvases for building better cities and economies. In these strategic demolitions, urban renewal programs routinely exaggerated the extent of structural decline contributing to depressed appraisal values for black communities and mass displacements. Neighborhood redevelopment came to the fore of national debates about these controversial programs.^[18]

In the aftermath of these mid-century bulldozer responses to blight, urban tenants, most of whom were black, argued for revitalization without displacement in their neighborhoods. Black residents wanted better housing where they lived rather than clearance projects and buildings from scratch. The federal Model Cities program of the 1960s responded to these changing political dynamics. For the first time in mass numbers, low-income residents and black community groups had their voices heard in public debates about the condition of housing and neighborhood life.^[19] Still nearly none of these government programs concerned with urban development in the 20th Century or those in the subsequent century have directly addressed the ongoing problem of why poor housing conditions exist in the first place.

1.3 Late 20th Century: The Fight to Remake Cities

1980s-2005—The Pinnacle of Urban Redevelopment & Eminent Domain

A policy and political resurgence to revitalize deteriorating downtowns in the 1980s and 1990s cemented private property acquisitions through eminent domain as a cornerstone of urban redevelopment practice. It was now common place for local governments to charter special redevelopment authorities (RDAs) with powers of eminent domain to acquire private property for major economic development projects.^[20] Depending on state law, local officials relied on the blight definition as the basis for their exercise. Blight in the redevelopment context generates a host of specialized legal, policy, and social issues that affect its legal definition and policy responses. In light of these broad definitions of blight, eminent domain actions could involve occupied properties on the verge of decline, perhaps underused and obsolete, with other indicators of neglect beyond physical deterioration.

Legal commentators and experts began to question this practice.^[21] By the early 2000s, several special policy reports highlighted how local governments had greatly extended the eminent domain's economic development definitions to properties that were old, perhaps obsolete but not deteriorating or structurally deficient.

This expansion, or perhaps misapplication, of the original intent behind using eminent domain for strictly public development projects led to a popular media and community backlash against local governments' use of eminent domain for economic development purposes. This was propelled by the now famous 2005 U.S. Supreme

Court case of *Kelo vs. City of New London*. While the Court upheld the city's use of eminent domain to take Ms. Kelo's home to assemble land for a downtown development project, nearly all states subsequently amended their statutes to prohibit (or severely restrict) eminent domain solely for economic development. A few states also made the definitions of blight more restrictive.

The *Kelo* decision and subsequent actions by state and local governments still generates extensive debates within the legal and policy literature. Several important policy and legal questions still surround the use of blight as acceptable legal grounds for eminent domain.^[22] Legal commentators have called for revisions that would return blight's focus to properties that are severely substandard, involve structural problems, and/or pose health and safety hazards.^[23] Other commentators argue that blight itself should be retired as legal grounds for eminent domain given the high degree of subjectivity involved in making that determination.^[24] Despite the debate, blight remains a valid legal ground for using eminent domain.

21st Century Blight Policy & Research— Foreclosure Crisis, Vacant Properties, Demolition & Land Banks

Around 2004, a huge shift in the literature arose with a new focus on reclaiming vacant housing and abandoned properties in response to the community impacts of the mortgage foreclosure crisis and Great Recession. The contemporary challenges of vacant properties now dominate the recent legal and policy scholarship on blight as an ever-increasing body of academic work discusses new legal tools and policy strategies designed to prevent, abate and/or reclaim vacant and abandoned properties—homes, retail strips,

shopping malls, and older industrial plants. Few of the articles evaluate or assess the results or outcomes from using these tools, but instead examine the underlying legal and policy issues, such as the authority to enact these tools and the policy implications of using them.

A multitude of factors cause people and organizations to vacate and/or abandon real property, but economic factors remain the dominant driver.^[25] Other macro-level drivers include a faulting regional economy, demographic shifts, urban sprawl, predatory lending, and speculative real estate practices.^[26] Decisions by individuals also cause or contribute to property abandonment. Shifts in real estate markets no longer make it economically feasible to repair an aging home or structure, and thus, homeowners and landlords essentially walk away from their financial obligations or remain living in constantly deteriorating conditions.^[27]

Earlier scholarship examined the impacts and legal and policy responses to vacant properties caused by decades of depopulation and deindustrialization primarily in older industrial cities in Michigan, Ohio, New York and Pennsylvania—the proverbial Rust Belt region of the country.^[28] Along came the illicit financial practices of subprime lending and the collapse of the housing market in 2007 that together triggered a tsunami of mortgage foreclosures through the entire nation.^[29] Vacant properties, once thought of as only a problem for Rust Belt cities, now infected the fast growing cities of the West and Southwest.^[30] Securitization of mortgages by national and multinational financial institutions made it difficult for local officials to identify a responsible party to maintain the property as the legal owner and, in some cases, the banks would “walk away” from this most fundamental duty of property ownership.^[31]

Another strand of the vacant property research covers the adoption and expansion of land banks as a policy strategy and legal tool that local governments are increasingly using to address vacant and tax-foreclosed properties.^[32] Land banks are often defined as “governmental entities or special purpose nonprofit corporations that specialize in the acquisition of problem properties, with the intention of either immediately returning these properties into productive use or temporarily holding and maintaining them for the purpose of stabilizing distressed markets or fulfilling long term land use and community goals.”^[33]

In the 1970s, older industrial cities such as Cleveland and St. Louis created some of the first land banks to address blighted vacant and abandoned homes caused by deindustrialization and job and population loss. A new wave of land banks emerged around 2004-2005 thanks to the pioneering efforts of the Genesee County Land Bank Authority in Flint, Michigan.^[34] Today roughly 25 land banks now exist in Michigan and over 20 more exist in Ohio (where it replicated and enhanced the Michigan and Genesee County laws and policies).^[35] Land bank scholarship continues

to increase its scope by covering a range of legal and policy issues, including the history of how land banks came about, their powers and programs^[36], their legal structure, and policy advantages in tackling vacant and abandoned properties.^[37]

Within the land bank community and beyond, strategic demolition has become a major strategy for stabilizing distressed neighborhoods in older industrial legacy cities.^[38] Cities such as Detroit have adopted city wide blight strategies that document the scale and costs for removing more than 40,000 substantially blighted structures and over 6,000 blighted vacant lots at a cost of over \$850 million. A handful of researchers are exploring question around the nuts and bolts of doing strategic demolition, often led by land banks, while others are studying the socio-economic impacts from these strategic demolition initiatives in legacy cities. Additional issues that are starting to rise in the literature include historical preservation, political leadership, ownership of vacant properties, etc.



Additional information on strategic demolition is available in the VPRN website:

<http://vacantpropertyresearch.com/briefs/>

EARLY 20TH CENTURY

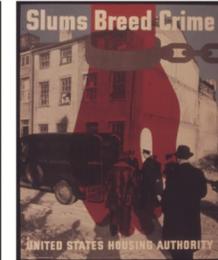
EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Housing advocates, like Jane Addams & Jacob Riis, helped bring attention to substandard housing conditions in industrial cities.



GREAT DEPRESSION

Substandard housing (slums) linked to crime and sickness. Zoning/land use regulations, building, fire, and health codes gained legal approval to demolish properties.



MID 20TH CENTURY

1940s

Urban reformers began to link blighted properties with stalled economic growth. New public housing programs created new low-income rental units.



1950s - 1960s

Poor neighborhoods are bulldozed and replaced by large, modernistic urban renewal projects. (Left: Boston West, Right: Igoe Pruitt)



LATE 20TH CENTURY & 2000s

1970s-1990s

Many cities, like Baltimore, began to redevelop their downtowns and waterfronts to spur economic development.

1990s - 2005

Despite being controversial, eminent domain is used for urban revitalization. Backlash from *Kelo v. New City of London* restricted its use for economic development.



AFTER 2005

Large numbers of vacant/abandoned properties due to the mortgage crisis & Great Recession. Cities look at land banks & strategic demolition to address blight.



2. Recent Research on Blighted Properties

Blight research comes from different disciplines and moves in several directions.^[38] For example, social-psychologists might examine the behavior that encourages or drives individuals or groups to litter or neglect properties or they might study the relationship of blight, crime, and social order under the rubric of the Broken Window Theory.^[39] Some researchers develop elaborate models that document the economic impacts from blighted properties, such as decreases in property values or property tax revenues from properties adjacent to or within certain proximity of blighted properties. Others might calculate property value increases from specific blight interventions, such as urban greening. Within the fields of planning, public policy, and public administration, researchers often conduct case studies on how particular strategies work or not offering detailed snapshots in time of the policy and community dynamics. All of this research offers different vantage points from which to assess and examine the impacts that blight has on our communities.

This translation brief will focus on two important trajectories of the current research:

- 1) The socio-economic conditions and impacts of blighted properties, and
- 2) The policy and program responses to remediate blighted properties.

Recent Approaches & Applied Methods

Without venturing into an elaborate debate over research methods, it becomes important to understand who did the research and how they did it as methods can influence the applicability or transferability of the findings or results. Researchers often examine a particular program in a particular city or neighborhood which may or may not have similarities to other communities. They might document the costs and/or benefits from a particular set of problems (e.g., vacant properties or foreclosed homes) or the impacts or influence from a particular intervention (policy, program, plan, or project) using a variety of research methods, such as econometric analysis and gathering environmental data from a sample of individual sites or projects. For social analysis, the researcher might conduct a survey and engage local residents in focus groups to tell their perspective using social science ethnographic methods or perhaps social network analysis to examine the collective impact of organizations and individuals. Policy and program evaluations often lend themselves to case studies that describe how new practices and policies are adopted and implemented in cities. For example, classic public policy program evaluation might attempt to assess the return on investment of public or nonprofit funds and estimate the other economic benefits that flow from the blight fighting strategy or treatment.



For a more comprehensive discussion in recent blight research, consult the “Charting the Multiple Meanings of Blight—A National Literature Review,” report, available at www.vacantpropertyresearch.com.

2.1 Socio-Economic Conditions & Impacts of Blighted Properties

This trajectory of research examines the causes and effects of blighted properties. Scholars in this vein seek to *describe blight's causes and conditions and/or quantify the community costs of blighted properties* (e.g., decreases in property values, local government response costs, relationship of blighted properties with crime, remediation/demolition costs, and public health impacts).

Causes of Blight

Blight is not a problem that U.S. cities inherited from the past, but a complex problem driven by the interplay of public policies, market forces, and socio-economic changes.^[40] Blighted properties are often the outcome of structural forces, institutional mechanisms, and powerful decisions by individuals and institutions that facilitate, reward, promote or support property neglect and disinvestment. Even though many of the forces and factors responsible for blighted properties are difficult to see, this invisibility does not mean that blighted properties are natural results of urban and suburban development.^[41] On the contrary, a number of federal, state, and municipal policies and market trends have helped to create blighted conditions in the U.S.

Some argue that U.S. cities *continue to enable* disinvestment and blight through economic policies, urban development practices, and municipal services.^[42] Some identified policy drivers include: changing land uses; technological changes; rising social standards; the reduction of cost in suburban housing; a decline in municipal investments; and a regressive tax system that de-incentivizes property investment. The emergence of blighted properties in shrinking and

deindustrializing cities in the U.S. is not happenstance.^[43] The emergence of blighted properties is part of a larger pattern of deterioration and neglect.^[44]

Common Blight Indicators

Blight describes a stage of property depreciation. It is not a clear-cut set of traits.^[45] Communities and researchers look at a number of socio-economic indicators to track, document, and assess the community impacts of blight. Some of the more common blight indicators that practitioners use to identify blighted properties include:

Code Enforcement Violations: Properties with violations of local real property, building, and health and housing codes remain one of the more common indicators of blighted status.^[46] Most local government have ordinances and processes that declare various types of problem properties, often vacant and/or abandoned, that pose threats to public safety as unsafe, substandard, dangerous, and/or structurally unsound.

Mortgage Foreclosure: Other popular blight indicators involve homes with high rates of mortgage foreclosures. Data can include the number of default notices of default to those that have finished the process and/or properties on their way to auction or those that have reverted to bank ownership (real estate owned properties or REOs).^[47]

Tax Foreclosure: Some tax-delinquent properties are seen as blighted by their communities.^[48] Tax delinquency is often an indicator, but it is not always evidence of blight. One recent study showed that areas where there are high levels of city-owned properties and elevated rates of vacancies are more likely to experience housing abandonment.^[49]

Vacant and Abandoned Lots, Homes & Buildings:

A study of Baltimore found that properties abandoned for less than 3 years have greater impact on the value of those properties within 250 ft.; the impact can extend to properties as far away as 1500 ft., but the decrease in value is less.^[50] Abandonment and vacancy are not the same. Vacancy, which the research seems to give more attention to than other blight indicators, describes property that is not occupied, but it could still be maintained, so a vacant property does not automatically mean a blighted one.

Abandonment occurs when a property no longer has a steward who is responsible for the basic responsibilities of property ownership.^[51] The critical transition is when, how, and why a vacant or abandoned building becomes a public nuisance—those problem properties that pose threats to public safety and neighborhood quality of life.^[52]



It is important to keep in mind that vacancy is not abandonment. Vacant properties are spaces that are not occupied but still may be maintained. An abandoned property is a space which no longer has a steward. In some cases, vacancy can eventually lead to abandonment.

Economic Impacts of Blight

Economic research on blighted properties primarily focuses on its effects on property values and the cleanup costs to local government.

Researchers estimate that the direct revenue losses to municipal governments vary between \$5,000 and \$35,000 per property to cleanup these properties.^[55]

Tracking Vacancy & Abandonment

Although state and local governments have laws, ordinances, and policies that define the characteristics of vacant and/or abandoned properties, the absence of a universal definition complicates efforts to track and access the number of such properties and thus their socio-economic impact.^[53] The US does not have a national data base of vacant properties. The best sources are the [U.S. Census Bureau's tracking of vacant housing units](#) and the [U.S. Postal Services undeliverable addresses database](#). Without access to national or state data, more cities — often led by local nonprofits — are launching their own condition surveys that empower local residents with handheld technology to walk each block and rank the condition of each property.^[54]

Researchers have also demonstrated how distressed residential properties shape property values within 500 feet. One project found that foreclosures in low-poverty areas lead to reductions in neighboring property values by \$7,000 (or by 4.2-7.5 percent). An additional vacancy reduces sales prices by 1.1 percent; an additional tax-delinquent property reduces sales prices by 2 percent; and, if a house is both vacant and delinquent, the sales price is reduced by 4.6 percent.^[56] These estimates vary greatly. This variation helps to explain why there is such a need for multiple measures of blight, which researchers sometimes refer to as multivariate models.

Other research investigates the effects of blighted properties on market values of a single home, or on a neighborhood as a whole. This body of work has produced a number of estimates: a selling price of a vacant and foreclosed home is 2 percent, 22-24 percent, or 46.6 percent lower than that of an occupied house. ^[57]

Communities have also commissioned reports to estimate the economic costs of blighted properties. [58] These reports have been instrumental in educating policymakers about the continuous nature of blighted properties and especially the cumulative costs they impose. While the methods used may not be as robust as those from peer reviewed academic journals, the community impact studies offer general insights into the most common economic and fiscal impacts that blighted properties can have on adjacent properties, neighborhoods and the local government itself.

Social Impacts of Blighted Properties

Economic, social, and functional depreciation of property affects cities across the U.S., but not evenly. Researchers have begun to pay attention to the uneven distribution of blight across cities and the social impacts that flow from it.

Blight does not affect all neighborhoods or populations equally, either. Black residents of cities are disproportionately affected by the concentration of potentially contaminated, tax delinquent, or vacant properties. Low-income neighborhoods are also more vulnerable to increases in property abandonment and blighted properties after natural disasters.[59]

Blight predominantly affects neighborhoods where marginalized populations live, and anti-blight policies which focus on downtown economic development often ignore or fail to adequately address the socio-economic conditions of the residents who live in blighted areas.[60] Residents in blighted areas are politically, economically, and socially marginalized and exposed to greater-than-average safety and environmental contamination issues.[61] Blighted places also have low levels of

Parameter	Impacting	Costs or Results	Academic Article	Community Report
Vacant property	Local government tax revenue	\$5,000 -- \$35,000/ property/ year	Summell,2009	
Residential foreclosures	Value of private property within 500 feet	\$7,000 loss of value	Whitaker and Fitzpatrick , 2013	
Presence of graffiti	Safety and transportation/retail sales.	Clean-up costs \$9.47/graffiti		2011 Clean Pittsburgh State of the City Report (2009)
Fires from vacant properties	Health & safety	\$20,700/affected property		Vacant Building Fires Fact Sheet (2009)
Crime	Public safety	Increased aggravated assaults by 15%	Branas, 2014	

employment opportunities.^[62] Youth violence also persists at high rates in blighted neighborhoods.^[63]

Blighted neighborhoods do not typically have strong social networks, and have greater needs for city intervention with services.^[64] And, even when blighted neighborhoods have strong social ties, the residents who live in these places often possess little political power.^[65]

How Blighted Properties Relate to the Mortgage Foreclosure of Homes

With the 2007-2008 financial collapse of the mortgage industry and subsequent Great Recession, fast and slow growth communities still struggle with how to address problems caused by hundreds of vacant and foreclosed homes.

Researchers and practitioners document the increasing inventories, the length of vacancy, and the community impacts to adjacent property owners and neighborhoods. Recent research suggests, however, that the impact of foreclosures on urban economies and communities is more complicated than previously thought.^[66] For example, a study in Columbus Ohio found that vacant properties had greater impact on adjacent properties than foreclosed properties, but that foreclosures still had a modest impact over a much larger range than vacant properties.^[67] Some of the more interesting research on the community impacts from mortgage foreclosures includes:

- Two research studies found that a vacant house, not surprisingly, takes longer to sell on the market than occupied houses while properties that go through lengthy foreclosures are more likely to become vacant.^[68]
- Foreclosures depress the sales price of nearby homes by as little as 0.9 percent to as much as 8.7 percent.^[69]
- The relationship of crime and foreclosed homes has become a special interest of policymakers, residents and several researchers. According to the Broken Window Theory, vacant and abandoned properties with boarded doors, broken windows, and unkempt lawns can create a haven for criminal activity or a target for theft and vandalism.^[70]
 - ◊ Research demonstrates that additional foreclosures lead on average to a 1 percent increase in additional crimes, especially violent ones.^[71]
 - ◊ A study in Pittsburgh found that a house in foreclosure did not affect crime until the property became vacant and the longer periods of vacancy have a greater effect on crime rates.^[72]
 - ◊ A study of Philadelphia found an association between vacant properties and the risk of assault—vacancy was the strongest indicator among other socioeconomic and demographic variables for predicting crime.^[73]



Access to these academic articles and reports is provided through our [online](#)

2.2 Blighted Property Remediation & Policy Responses

A review of recent research reveals little data about what policies and programs work best to limit, eradicate, or remediate blighted properties.^[74] Part of the problem is that anti-blight policies, like blight itself, vary greatly; they often involve multiple agencies and actors which may have competing goals and objectives. Early blight policy scholarship discussed laws and policies traditionally associated with redevelopment planning, eminent domain, littering, and illegal dumping while more recent academic articles examine new legal tools and strategies that communities use to reclaim increasing waves of vacant and abandoned properties.^[75]

This section offers a general framework for understanding the types of strategies that communities commonly use to address blighted properties, who is involved, and the underlying policy drivers and goals. It then summarizes some of the recent research about the effects of these anti-blight policies and programs while noting the need for more robust research.

Who is Involved and Why?

When it comes to taking action against blighted properties, the primary actors are local governments, nonprofit organizations, and community-based groups with support from businesses, schools, universities, foundations, etc. While each actor may have individual interests, particular expertise, and/or special authorities, they often come together around the common goal

of remediating blighted properties.

Blight's legal and policy roots derive from long standing legal principles of public nuisance—harmful property conditions that pose threats to the health, safety and welfare of a community.^[76] Public nuisance principles focus not only on the existing physical conditions of the blighted properties but also the human behavior and conduct that cause it. In the U.S., state laws typically delegate to local governments (cities, counties, towns, etc.) the powers and legal authority to abate the public nuisances caused by blighted properties.^[77]

Underlying these anti-blight laws and interventions are a myriad of policy goals and drivers, such as stabilizing declining neighborhoods, ensuring compliance with applicable codes, rehabilitating problem properties, restoring distressed real estate markets, facilitating community and/or economic development, building affordable housing, and empowering community based organizations. Recently, policymakers and researchers have begun to pay more attention to strategies and practices that could help prevent blighted properties as well as assess existing or potential negative costs and positive benefits. New research examines the social dimensions, such as whether the greening of vacant lots can help reduce crime and provide a myriad of social benefits and ecosystem services.



To learn more about urban greening, refer to the “Greening Legacy Cities” brief available at www.vacantpropertyresearch.com.

What are Communities Doing About Blight?

Coalitions of public officials, government staff, community and nonprofit organizations together with civic and business leaders across the U.S. are taking a variety of actions to address the problems of blighted properties. Numerous local governments have launched citywide campaigns to eradicate blighted properties. After months of deliberation Detroit's Blight Removal Task Force unveiled its 2014 strategic plan to address the more than 80,000 derelict structures and vacant lots where about 50 percent need demolition.^[78] In nearby Flint, Michigan, as part of its 2014 comprehensive plan, the city's Blight Elimination Framework Element estimated the total costs (\$100 million) to remove and reclaim nearly 20,000 derelict properties, but also set a series of five-year benchmarks and proposed program and policy actions.^[79] In addition, New Orleans adopted a comprehensive data system—Blight Stat—to not only identify blighted properties but also track the results from their different policy interventions from code enforcement to land banking.^[80] Many of these local actions are supported by a growing network of national, state and local nonprofit organizations such as the Center for Community Progress, the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania, and Thriving Communities Institute that provide technical assistance, convene workshops, research model practices, and advocate for state and local policy changes.

For purposes of this brief, it would be impossible to discuss the myriad of actions and strategies that communities are using to address blighted properties. However, the following typology categorizes the primary and secondary approaches that most communities deploy in one fashion or another.

Code Enforcement Programs: These local government departments use their nuisance abatement powers to inspect, investigate and take administrative and judicial actions to gain compliance with relevant state and local laws that regulate the physical condition and safety of homes, buildings, and structures.^[81]

Real Property Information and Data Systems: A growing number of cities have established regional and city wide data warehouses that organize and manage public and private sector data about the status of real properties from tax and mortgage foreclosure data to code enforcement cases and water utility shutoffs.



To learn more about Real Property Information and Data Systems, visit the VPRN website at:

<http://vacantpropertyresearch.com/>

Registration Ordinances: Many local government have adopted special regulations that require property owners and managers to register their vacant properties, monitor its condition and make minimum repairs to protect public safety; other ordinances require landlords to obtain annual licenses and inspections for rental properties of certain size.^[82]

Demolition of Vacant and Abandoned Properties: In response to decades of job and population loss as well as the recent foreclosure crisis, more cities must confront the difficult choice of demolishing vacant homes and abandoned buildings in order to address the substantial oversupply of residential and commercial structures compared with market demand and current and future population.^[83]

Land Banks and Tax Delinquent Properties: A growing number of states now authorize cities and counties to create quasi-public land bank authorities that have special powers to acquire, dispose, and redevelop primarily tax delinquent properties.^[84]

Neighborhood Rehabilitation, Redevelopment, and Revitalization: Community based organizations and community development corporations in hundreds of cities work to rehabilitate dilapidated homes and buildings, often to provide affordable and workforce housing, along with managing other neighborhood and community driven revitalization programs. Cleveland has leveraged on its community development corporations to reclaim vacant properties for decades.^[85]

i Additional information on Cleveland's successful and extensive community development corporation network is available the Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, Ohio case study, available at: <http://vacantpropertyresearch.com/case-studies/cleveland/>

Community Education and Cleanups: National organizations, such as [Keep America Beautiful](#), with state and local affiliates coordinate regular community cleanups of blighted properties, including public rights of way, along with community education on anti-littering and graffiti.

Urban Greening of Vacant Lots: New community based green intermediaries are leading local initiatives to green vacant lots, restore urban waterways, and reclaim older industrial sites with innovative approaches to urban sustainability. Local organizations, such as the [Pennsylvania Horticultural Society](#) have cleaned, greened and maintained over 10,000 vacant lots in Philadelphia.

[Groundwork USA](#), a national nonprofit, manages a network of more than 20 trusts dedicated to leveraging urban greening strategies for purposes of environmental justice.^[86]

i Additional information on urban greening is available in Greening Legacy Cities Research and Policy brief available in the VPRN website.

What Does the Research Say About the Effects of Anti-Blight Policies, Programs & Practices?

A quick answer to this question might be “not much” or “we need more” as few contemporary studies about the effectiveness of anti-blight policies exist.^[87] In this section, we explore the recent research that seeks to track, document and assess the existing and potential impacts and effectiveness of these policies, programs, plans and projects.

One explanation for the lack of good research is researchers can encounter difficulty studying anti-blight policies and practices, which are often ad-hoc in their design and operation.^[88] Moreover, the research typically spans a wide range of fields and disciplines, such as public policy, public administration, urban planning, economics, real estate, environmental studies, urban geography, public health and sociology. Each field may study only certain aspects of these anti-blight policies.

Two of the most common research approaches investigate:

1. The external effects (positive benefits and/or negative costs) that flow from these policy interventions; and/or
2. The internal assessment of how the policy came

about, its development, design, implementation, and program evaluation.

Anti-blight policies are often implemented in a piecemeal approach and directed toward ambiguous goals of increasing economic wealth for particular places or people.^[89] “Cities seeking to redevelop large stockpiles of vacant land have struggled to resolve” social and spatial issues, and where and how and for whom to redevelop.^[90] These programs offer an impression of vacancy, abandonment, foreclosure, and other aspects of blight as problems in and of themselves. Many anti-blight policies and programs engage the private sector to revitalize distressed neighborhoods. These projects aim to ready the land for the market, or, as in greening programs, reduce the appearance of neglect until developers return. Rather than rely on community development corporations as they did in the past, policymakers leverage private investments with public acquisitions of large tracts of lands and try to expand the area’s marketable potential.^[91]

Despite these policy challenges, a number of studies document the positive benefits or spillover effects on adjacent properties that flow from these anti-blight policy interventions and practices:

- One study found that property values near recently greened spaces increase at a rate greater than that of the city as a whole.^[92]
- A study of the impacts of the [PHS LandCare](#) program in Philadelphia found that incidence of police-reported crimes decreased around greened lots when compared to areas surrounding vacant lots that had not been

greened. Regression modeling showed that vacant lot greening was linked with consistent reductions in gun assaults across four sections of the city.^[93]

- A study of 52 vacant lots in Cleveland, OH demonstrated that properly designed and managed green infrastructure on vacant lots can have sufficient capacity for detention of average annual rainfall volume.^[94]
- Passive experience of a green environment has been linked to a greater sense of safety and wellness, reduced stress, and diminished driving frustration.^[95]
- Greening programs also provide eco-system benefits —such as food production, biodiversity and habitat conservation—and be used as much more than temporary strategies to stabilize the spillover effects from blighted properties.^[96]
- Research in Cleveland indicates that real estate equity may be protected by demolition. Higher benefits are accrued in stronger submarkets through targeted demolitions.^[97]
- A study in Philadelphia established that concentrated code enforcement efforts “resulted in numerous financial benefits to the city, including increased real estate transfer tax revenue, increased tax receipts from higher rates of tax compliance and higher sale prices, along with fees and penalties coming back to the city that underwrite the cost of the enforcement effort.”^[98]

- The City of Tacoma’s application of the Ecological Economic framework, which places substantial value on social justice goals and outcomes related to community and economic development, has been found to be more successful than a market-based program aimed at demolitions and offers hope for new directions in blight remediation.^[99]

More scholars are calling into question the existing and potential consequences of particular anti-blight policies, such as the negative effects of these projects for marginalized residents of the central cities where new investments were directed. A handful of social scientists have recently raised questions about the extent to which anti-blight policies prioritize social justice outcomes over private market stabilization.^[100] This critical research examines how anti-blight policies can negatively affect communities of color.^[101]

In the past, municipalities routinely justified the use of eminent domain and other anti-blight tools to “eliminate black communities and replace them with highway infrastructure” and other publicly funded projects like stadiums and hospitals.^[102] Today, researchers are starting to study whether urban agriculture and other anti-blight programs can contribute to the displacement of communities of color.^[103] Other scholars show how anti-blight projects often, and many times unintentionally, limit economic wealth, increase residential segregation, and continue social polarization for marginalized populations.

Emerging Informal Projects and Interventions to Address Blight—A Need for Future Research

Few studies address the informal anti-blight projects and the practices of actors outside of formal governance structures. Across the US, post-industrial landscapes have become laboratories for new poverty survival strategies. Groups like the Chicago Anti Eviction Campaign and Take Back the Land of Miami, Florida and Rochester, New York are changing the meaning of vacant property in cities and rural areas. In Baltimore, community organizers are pairing residents who are homeless with houses that have no tenants. In Philadelphia, too, vacant houses have been occupied as recovery homes for residents struggling with drug and alcohol addiction.^[104] Future research should address the implications of these informal anti-blight programs, including their capacity to shift political priorities and governmental responses to disinvested neighborhoods.

3. How Can Research Shape Policy, Practice & Research on Blight?

Blight is a complex and dynamic phenomenon with different meanings and applications shaped and influenced by a variety of actors and institutions. The practices and research about blight shift with time and place. In some instances, the scholarship examines blight as a symptom of larger social and economic forces, such as the byproduct of poverty and racial injustice. More recently, the scholarship on blight studies the physical changes of properties, the harmful impacts that blighted properties have on the life cycle of neighborhoods and its residents, along with the legal and policy strategies deployed by local communities to combat its secondary effects.

This last section offers several overarching observations and suggestions for practitioners and researchers. It concludes with more concrete policy and program ideas. Many of these ideas are discussed in more depth in the *VPRN—KAB National Literature Review on Blighted Properties*. Together these recommendations suggest that practitioners and policymakers who are concerned with blight can draw from the growing set of scholarship to answer many of the difficult and complex challenges surrounding the drivers and interventions to address blighted properties.

3.1 Observations & Suggestions for Practitioners

Revise how we think about and use the term blight

Policymakers, civic leaders, planners, ecologists, and lawyers in the U.S. use the noun “blight” and the adjective “blighted” to refer to very different features of the American landscape. As this brief explains, there was no singular discovery of something called “blight” in U.S. cities.

Today, the stand-alone noun “blight” does not convey a clear message. The term remains ambiguous and contested for researchers. For policymakers and practitioners concerned with the quality of urban America, blight’s etymological history offers a cautious message. The term “blight” misplaces attention on the condition and characteristics of problem spaces; however, it does not shed light, as it should, on the actions and processes that contribute to the blighting of particular places. What this discussion is focusing on is spatial change caused by population shifts, disinvestment, and persistent poverty, and how to manage it.

Policymakers and practitioners should avoid perpetuating the ambiguity that surrounds talk about spatial change by using terms like blight. Civic leaders should employ the phrase “blighted properties” to describe problem places, and think about their work as “blighted property” remediation.

Expand policy goals to address socio-economic and social justice dimensions.

Research about blighted properties reveals wide disagreements among scholars and policymakers beyond definition differences. Research about blighted properties spans public health, personal safety, environmental contamination, and economic prosperity issues. But this research also varies in its assumptions about the problems that blighted properties cause. Some researchers believe that the greatest problem posed by blighted properties are health and safety concerns; others see social polarization or low employment opportunities as the greatest threats. [105]

A majority of the research and practitioner reports about blighted properties adhere to the idea that decreased housing market values and municipal tax-revenues are the primary problems, and increased tax-bases are the solution. This belief emphasizes strong property market values will make strong and decent cities. Increased and stable property values may not benefit the residents who live in blighted neighborhoods, as new research suggests. This finding challenges current practices and programs that treat market driven policy interventions and economic development goals as a primary rationale for remediating blighted properties.

Blighted properties do not emerge in all neighborhoods equally, or affect them in similar ways. For historically marginalized populations, blighted properties can have severe social and safety consequences in terms of reduced political power, social polarization, increased threats of fire, limited access to high quality soil, and exposure to crime, contaminants, and allergens. Scholarship

shows how quality of life for communities of color has been routinely hurt by the production of blighted properties and the responses to it.

The socio-politics of blighted properties put a pressing task on the plate of leaders concerned with the quality of the American landscape. Policymakers and practitioners should stay attuned to questions about where blighted properties emerge, whose lives are most shaped by blighted properties, and to what end those properties are being remediated. Before selecting a course of action, policymakers and practitioners should identify a vision of what a good and just landscape looks like. Leaders should agree on a set of goals and make sure that all anti-blight policies and projects work toward that those ends.

Gather, track, synthesize, and disseminate more robust data about blighted properties and anti-blight policies and programs

Effective initiatives to remediate blighted properties demand better data. Researchers and policymakers would benefit from more comprehensive information and data about blighted properties, neighborhood characteristics, market dynamics, etc. Several cities, such as Cleveland and Detroit, have developed independent data intermediaries in partnership with local universities and nonprofit organizations to gather, track, and share data about blighted properties. [106] They often facilitate collaborative data gathering efforts that survey properties conditions to identify all of the blighted properties through in a city. Local and community leaders can leverage this data to target policy interventions to match neighborhood conditions, better understand how these anti-blight interventions work and how they affect all members of the communities in

which they are used. Local government and nonprofits should also establish internal performance measures to monitor the progress of anti-blight interventions, beyond counting outputs, but to measure community driven policy outcomes.^[107]

Make policy and program evaluation a priority

Recent scholarship on blight offers little data about what policies and programs work best to limit, eradicate, or correct blighted properties. Few studies thoroughly examine the socio-economic implications of recent anti-blight initiatives and innovative projects. Local leaders could benefit from more rigorous policy analysis and program evaluation as they experiment with these new policies and institute new organizational changes and structures. Published reports and peer reviewed studies about effective policy and program interventions would also help facilitate the diffusion and replication of best practices among communities. Policymakers and practitioners should make efforts to study and evaluate their practices as they both contribute to blighted property scholarship, and help other places in adapting model practices to their communities' efforts to remediate blighted properties. Ideally, government policies should require and provide sufficient resources for independent policy and program evaluation. Alternatively —where resources are scarce—they should seek support from nonprofit think tanks and national and local foundations.

Engage and develop collaborative, community-based partnerships.

More nonprofits and community based groups are leading city wide and neighborhood anti-blight initiatives. Policymakers and practitioners should increase their support of these collaborative community partnerships as they can often galvanize community around blighted properties more effectively than government can alone. Few studies, however, address these emerging collaborations, especially the informal responses to blighted properties and the practices of actors outside of formal governance structures. . Policymakers and practitioners should expand partnerships with informal groups, and be attentive to place-specific changes in public-sector governance. Moreover, future research should also study these emerging partnerships that encourage civic engagement, secure community buy-in, and even help local government implement anti-blight policies and programs.

3.2 Observations & Suggestions for Practitioners

The following table provides simple and practical anti-blight initiatives that community and civic organizations, government agencies, private-sector groups, and communities can take to address blighted properties. The ideas and examples presented are based on a presentation by Mr. John Kromer, a housing and community development expert.^[108]

	Document the costs of inaction	Commission studies that show how blighted properties drain local and county budgets as well as the social and economic costs on neighborhoods.	Financial Impact of Blight Study Steel Valley, Allegheny County, PA
	Organize blighted/vacant properties working groups	Convene a cross section of public, private and nonprofit leaders to develop more comprehensive and coordinated responses to blight, including changes in state and local laws.	Abandoned Property In Indianapolis Report Indianapolis, IN
	Launch a good landlord program	Offer incentives to review landlords who maintain their properties blight- and crime-free.	Good Landlord Program Ogden City, Utah
	Conduct targeted code enforcement	Place-based code enforcement can stimulate market activity in selected neighborhoods through comprehensive property maintenance actions.	Neighborhoods in Bloom Richmond, Virginia
	Explore urban greening	Techniques like gardening, urban agriculture, green infrastructure, etc. Can be used as opportunities to address vacant lots and blighted land.	Urban Agriculture Feasibility Study Youngstown, OH
	Charter a land bank or adopt land-banking statutes and ordinances	Land banks can acquire neglected and/or tax delinquent properties and return them to the mainstream real estate market or support their improvement as public green space.	Chautauqua County Land Bank Chautauqua County, New York
	Publish a problem properties toolkit	Having a guide that explains how communities can take action with vacant and blighted properties.	From Blight to Bright Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania
	Expand the use of low-cost, high tech tools	Many neighborhood groups from New Orleans to Youngstown, Ohio, are using apps to inventory blighted properties in their communities. This helps to document the costs and identify opportunities for reuse.	MyPhoenix Phoenix, AZ

Endnotes

1. Breger, 1967
2. Whitaker and Fitzpatrick 2013; Johnson et al 2010; Weaver 2013; Ellen et al 2013; Hortas-Rico 2013; Rosato et al 2010; Runfola and Hankins 2010; Jackle and Wilson 1992
3. Quoted in Gordon 2003:305
4. Weaver 2013; Shlay and Whitman 2006
5. Breger 1967; Holliman 2009
6. Wells 2014; Gordon 2003
7. Judd and Simpson 2011
8. Holliman 2009
9. Breger 1967; Prakash 2013; Carrier 2013; Holliman 2009
10. Page 2001
11. Wilson 2007
12. Diner 1983:12
13. Richter 1983:173
14. Farrar 2008:81
15. The slate of programs to reduce foreclosures, take over defaulted mortgages, offer federal insurance for private lending institutions, and stimulate housing construction pivoted around the capacity of the private market to alleviate economic woes.
16. Downie 1974
17. Richter 1983
18. Linehan 2000; Highsmith 2009; Oakley 2006
19. Gillette 1995
20. Reynolds 2005
21. Tepper 2001
22. Lefcoe 2008

23. Kokot 2011
24. Cahn 2014
25. Samsa 2007
26. Ibid
27. Ibid
28. Schilling and Logan 2008
29. Lind 2011
30. Hollander 2011.
31. Lind 2011
32. Keating and Lind 2012
33. Alexander 2011
34. Keating 2013
35. Alexander 2011
36. Keating and Lind 2012
37. Samsa 2007
38. Schilling, Wells and Pinzon 2015
39. Wilson and Kelling 1982
40. Kivell 1987
41. Brueckner and Helsley 2011
42. Highsmith 2009
43. Albers 2006
44. Runfalo and Hankins 2009
45. Breger 1967
46. Weaver 2013
47. See Johnson et al 2010 and Ellen et al, 2013.



A list of references is available in the following link: . These references are also compiled in our Zotero database (http://www.zotero.org/groups/vacant_property_research_network_vprn/)

48. Whitaker and Fitzpatrick, 2013)
49. Silverman et al 2013
50. Han. 2013
51. See generally Rosato et al 2010; Runfola and Hankins (20-09) and Hortas-Rico (2010)
52. Schilling, Wells and Pinzon 2015
53. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2014
54. See for example property condition surveys in Detroit, Flint, Youngstown, and Atlanta.
55. See Summell 2009
56. Whitaker and Fitzpatrick 2013
57. See Summell 2009
58. See generally, Econsult Corporation, Penn Institute for Urban Research and May 8 Consulting 2010; National Vacant Properties Campaign 2005; Detroit Blight Removal Task Force 2014; City of Flint 2014.
59. Leigh and Gradeck 1996; Silverman et al 2013; Runfalo and Hankins 2009; Carriere 2013
60. Oakley 2006
61. Johnson 2008; Hillier et al 2003; Kaplan 1999; DeMarco 2009; Runfola and Hankins 2010; Leigh and Gradeck 1996; Morrel-Samuels 2013
62. Kaplan 1999
63. Morrel-Samuels 2013
64. DeMarco 2009; see also Benediktsson 2014
65. See Runfola and Hankins 2010
66. See Whitaker and Fitzpatrick 2013
67. Mikelbank 2008
68. See Peng and Cowart 2004; Ellen et al 2013
69. Frame 2010; Lin et al. 2009. Lin et al. study found the higher estimate.
70. Arnio et al. 2012.

71. See Ellen et al 2013; see also Hillier et al 2003
72. Cui 2010.
73. Branas et al. 2012
74. Heckert and Mennis 2012;
75. Schilling, Wells and Pinzon 2015:25
76. Ibid
77. Juergensmeyer and Robert 2007
78. AlHajal 2014
79. Clark 2015
80. Chieppo 2014
81. Schilling 2009
82. Martin 2010
83. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2014
84. Alexander 2011
85. Schilling, Wells and Pinzon 2015
86. Schilling and Vasudevan 2013 and Heckert et al. 2015
87. Hortas-Rico 2010
88. Francis and Thomas 2006
89. Gordon 2003; Weaver 2013
90. McGovern 2006:535
91. Ibid
92. See Heckert and Mennis (2012); see also Dunn (2010).
93. Branas et al. 2011
94. Shuster et al. 2014
95. Thompson et al 2012; Cackowski, and Nasar, 2003; Heckert et al. 2015; Kuo et al. 1998

96. Gardiner et al. 2013
97. Griswold 2014
98. The Reinvestment Fund, Policy Solutions 2014
99. See Weaver (2013) for a case study.
100. See Weaver (2013).
101. See Weber (2002) and Highsmith (2009).
102. Prakash 2013:1437
103. Hoover 2013
104. Fairbanks 2011
105. See Sumell (2009) and Silverman (2013).
106. Vacant Property Research Network 2014; see also NEOCANDO 2012 and Data Driven Detroit 2015
107. For Phase II of its Blight Initiative Keep America Beautiful is developing a user friendly dashboard or calculator of the direct costs that communities incur in fighting blighted properties. See Shilling, Wells and Pinzon pages 40-42.
108. John Kromer 2015

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT
BLANK



Abandoned property in New Orleans, LA (2004)

Image by: J. Schilling

THE BASICS OF BLIGHT

Recent Research on Its Drivers, Impacts and Interventions



METROPOLITAN INSTITUTE

2016

<http://vacantpropertyresearch.com/>