

**Putting Back the Welcome Mat:
A Neighborhood Guide for Turning
Vacant Houses into Homes**



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary.....	vii
PART I: NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED STRATEGIES	
Chapter 1: Putting Back the Welcome Mat.....	3
Chapter 2: Getting Started.....	5
Chapter 3: Keep Houses Occupied.....	9
Strategy 1: Empower homeowners to remain in their homes	9
Strategy 2: Be an active and watchful neighbor	10
Strategy 3: Launch information campaign about preventing vacant houses	11
Chapter 4: Prevent Damage by Securing and Maintaining Vacant Houses.....	13
Strategy 1: Inform neighbors about what to do with vacant houses	13
Strategy 2: Maintain the exterior of vacant houses	13
Strategy 3: Increase code enforcement	15
Strategy 4: Increase security of vacant houses	17
Chapter 5: Obtain Control of Key Houses	21
Strategy 1: Purchase properties from banks.....	21
Strategy 2: Use the Wayne County Nuisance Abatement Program.....	23
Strategy 3: Use the Wayne County Land Bank Authority	24
Chapter 6: Getting the Houses Reoccupied	27
Strategy 1: Repair vacant houses.....	27
Strategy 2: Create a neighborhood marketing campaign	28
Chapter 7: Addressing Vacant Houses in MorningSide	33
PART II: SYSTEM-CHANGING STRATEGIES	
Chapter 8: Create an Early Warning System to Help Keep Houses Occupied.....	47
Chapter 9: Develop Better Ways to Prevent Damage to Vacant Houses	51
Strategy 1: Expand the Nuisance Abatement Program to include demolition	51
Strategy 2: Improve code enforcement practices	51
Strategy 3: Create a Wayne County Housing Court	53
Strategy 4: Create a licensing and registration program for vacant buildings.....	53
Chapter 10: Find New Ways to Obtain Control of Key Houses and Get Vacant Houses Reoccupied	59
Strategy 1: Use current receivership legislation to eliminate nuisances and amend receivership law for greater effectiveness	59
Strategy 2: Establish clear land banking policies	63
Strategy 3: Form a city-wide intermediary to fund CDCs to repair and rehabilitate vacant houses	63
Strategy 4: Make use of available rehabilitation funding sources.....	64
Strategy 5: Train youth to fix houses.....	65
Chapter 11: Implementing New Approaches to Turning Vacant Houses into Assets	69
Appendix A: Unoccupied Property Visual Indicators Survey.....	71
Appendix B: Block Condition Coding Sheets.....	75
Appendix C: Census Tract Map	83

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1: Lower Property Values as a Result of Vacant Property.....	14
Figure 4.2: Painted Boards a House on Three Mile Drive.....	16
Figure 4.3: Painted Boards on Southside Preservation Hall.....	16
Figure 4.4: East Third Street Before Painting	16
Figure 4.5: East Third Street After Painting	16
Figure 4.6: Vacant House on Bedford in MorningSide in Good Condition That Should Not Be Boarded.....	17
Figure 4.7: House Secured Using the VPS System	18
Figure 5.1: Potential Outcomes for Investors and Special Servicers	21
Figure 5.2: Decision Tree for Assessing Vacant Properties Qualification for NAP	23
Figure 5.3: Before NAP.....	24
Figure 5.4: After NAP	24
Figure 7.1: MorningSide Neighborhood and Study Area	33
Figure 7.2: Block Conditions	35
Figure 7.3: Conditions of Vacant Houses	35
Figure 7.4: Potential Housing Vacancies	36
Figure 7.5: Areas With Few Vacant Houses.....	37
Figure 7.6: 4127 Courville.....	38
Figure 7.7: Courville Between Waveney & Bremen.....	38
Figure 7.8: 4240 Audubon	38
Figure 7.9: Audubon Between Waveney & Wallingford	38
Figure 7.10: 4345 Devonshire	38
Figure 7.11: Devonshire Between Munich & Waveney	38
Figure 7.12: 4158 Beaconsfield Could be Painted with a Mural	39
Figure 7.13: 4158 Beaconsfield in its Setting on a Block in Poor Condition	39
Figure 7.14: 4414 Three Mile (before).....	39
Figure 7.15: 4414 Three Mile (after)	39
Figure 7.16: 4129 Beaconsfield.....	39
Figure 7.17: Beaconsfield Between Waveney & Bremen.....	39
Figure 7.18: 4240 Audubon.....	40
Figure 7.19: 4140 Audubon.....	40
Figure 7.20: Audubon Between Waveney & Wallingford.....	40
Figure 7.21: Location of Potential NAP Houses.....	40
Figure 7.22: 4102 Beaconsfield	40
Figure 7.23: 4303 Beaconsfield.....	40
Figure 7.24: Location of Potential Short Sales.....	41
Figure 7.25: 4388 Audubon.....	42
Figure 7.26: 4118 Courville.....	42
Figure 7.27: 4175 Bedford	42
Figure 7.28: 4182 Bedford.....	42
Figure 7.29: 4409 Haverhill	42
Figure 7.30: 4384 Berkshire	42
Figure 8.1 Risk Analysis Map Produced for Properties in the Holland Neighborhood Using the MNIS Interface	50
Figure 9.1: Potential Revenue, Actual Revenue, and Cost of the DAH	52

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Profile of City of Detroit’s Online Property Tax Information System	6
Table 2.2: Profile of Wayne County’s Online Register of Deeds System	6
Table 2.3: Profile of the State of Michigan’s Online Business Entity Search	7
Table 2.4: Profile of the <i>Detroit Legal News</i>	7
Table 2.5: Profile of Wayne County Treasurer Property Tax Administration System.....	8
Table 4.1: Ways to Make a House Look Occupied and Their Costs	13
Table 4.2: Common Code Violations.....	15
Table 5.1 Professionals That May Offer Helpful Advice During the Property Acquisition Process.....	22
Table 6.1: Characteristics of the Lead Organization in a Neighborhood Marketing Campaign	29
Table 7.2: Potential NAP houses	40
Table 7.3: Potential Short Sale Houses	41
Table 7.4: Potential Themes of a MorningSide Marketing Campaign.....	42
Table 8.1: Possible Sources of Vacancy Indicators in Detroit	47
Table 9.1: Registration Program in St. Paul, MN	53
Table 9.2: Registration Program in Chicago, IL.....	54
Table 9.3: License Program in Cincinnati, OH.....	54
Table 9.4: Recommendations for a Detroit Vacant Property Registration Program.....	55
Table 10.1: Recommendations for Changes to Current Receivership Law in Michigan	61

SUMMARY

Putting Back the Welcome Mat: A Neighborhood Guide for Turning Vacant Houses into Homes provides residents, block clubs, neighborhood associations, and community development corporations with strategies to turn vacant and abandoned houses into neighborhood assets. Part I details strategies that will help these neighborhood stakeholders keep houses occupied, secure vacant houses, gain control of key properties, and get houses reoccupied. Chapter 7 then illustrates how these neighborhood-based strategies can be implemented in Detroit neighborhoods by applying them to a 26-block area of the MorningSide neighborhood. Part II identifies system-changing strategies that neighborhood stakeholders, the City of Detroit, and Wayne County can work toward implementing in the future.

Since 2002, mortgage foreclosure in Detroit and other U.S. cities has increased. This increase, in addition to property tax foreclosures and decline in demand for housing due to population loss and an economic downturn, have added enormously to the number of vacant houses in Detroit. As homeowners leave their properties, many houses become vandalized and blighted and threaten neighborhoods that have seen little vacancy in the past. As mortgage foreclosures continue, the number of vacant and abandoned properties will continue to increase, and Detroit neighborhoods could face more blight. Residents, block club leaders, neighborhood associations, and community development corporations can use this manual to identify ways they can combat the effects of mortgage and tax foreclosure and other reasons for housing vacancy and protect their neighborhoods.

PART I. NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED STRATEGIES

Residents, neighborhood organizations, and CDCs can take immediate action to keep houses occupied, secure vacant houses, gain control of key properties, and get houses reoccupied. The condition of the block and of the house will signal which strategies are most useful. These strategies can be applied individually, in conjunction with another strategy, or more extensively.

Getting started on assessing the vacant housing situation

Finding the owners of vacant houses and assessing the condition of vacant houses and of residential blocks can help CDCs, neighborhood organizations, block clubs, and residents decide what strategy is most appropriate for handling vacant housing. For example, a good house located on a very poor block could be boarded to prevent stripping and watched by neighbors to help prevent vandalism. On the other hand, residents may not want to board a vacant house in good condition on a very good block.

Assessing the vacant housing situation in a neighborhood may include several actions:

- **Identify vacant houses.** CDCs, neighborhood organizations, or block clubs could create an inventory of vacant houses. Common signs of vacancy or mortgage and tax foreclosure include neglected yard maintenance, accumulated mail or flyers, posted notices of mortgage or tax foreclosure or boarded windows and doors.
- **Determine who owns the vacant houses.** Resources such as the City of Detroit Online Property Tax Information System and the Wayne County Register of Deeds can help determine who owns the vacant houses and who is legally responsible for maintaining the property.

- **Perform a vacant house condition assessment.** This assessment helps evaluate the condition of a vacant house based on factors such as the exterior appearance of a house's frame, chimney, roof, gutters, siding, paint, windows, doors and porch.
- **Perform a residential block condition assessment.** This assessment helps determine the condition of the block by assessing factors such as sidewalk conditions, exterior appearance of the houses on a block, and the presence of graffiti.
- **Identify pending vacancies.** Noticing signs of pending vacancies can help neighbors and others tailor strategies to prevent vacancy. Some signs of potential vacant houses include neglected yard maintenance, for sale signs, a mortgage foreclosure notice, and tax-delinquency status.

Keep houses occupied

Homes that remain occupied are more likely to remain neighborhood assets than vacant houses. Occupied homes are less likely to be stripped or vandalized or to experience rapid deterioration. Therefore, preventing vacancy increases the likelihood that the condition of the neighborhood will not deteriorate. Strategies to keep homes occupied include:

- **Empower homeowners to remain in their homes.** Michigan law allows a homeowner to remain in a home until the end of the mortgage or tax foreclosure process. Many residents leave their homes early and accelerate the vacancy of the house.
- **Be an active and watchful neighbor.** Quick action by neighbors can prevent homes from becoming vacant. Potential interventions include talking with neighbors whose houses show signs of pending vacancy or reporting the signs of impending vacancy to block clubs or neighborhood organizations.
- **Launch information campaign about vacant houses.** Residents and neighborhood organizations may need education about how to prevent homes in their neighborhoods from becoming vacant. Neighborhood meetings, flyer campaigns, or mass mailing could provide residents with facts to help combat vacancy in their neighborhoods.

Prevent damage to vacant houses

After residents leave, neighbors, block clubs, neighborhood organizations, and CDCs can take steps to ensure that houses do not deteriorate. Maintaining vacant houses can preserve the condition of individual houses and that of the entire block. Strategies to prevent damage to vacant houses include:

- **Inform neighbors about what to do with vacant houses.** A CDC or neighborhood organization could select and spread information that would help neighbors identify what action to take if they live near a vacant house.
- **Maintain the exterior of vacant houses.** Neighborhood organizations, block clubs, or residents can make houses look occupied by maintaining yards or clearing debris from the yard. Painting the boards that secure a vacant house can show that neighbors and others are caring for the house.
- **Increase code enforcement.** Involved residents can help increase the level of code enforcement within their neighborhoods. By coordinating with city officials to hold property owners responsible for the condition of their properties, neighbors take an active role in improving the level of security and maintenance of vacant houses.
- **Increase security of vacant houses.** Block club leaders can recruit residents and form security taskforces. These taskforces can patrol the neighborhood and keep a watchful eye on vacant houses to prevent them from becoming blighted and dangerous.

Obtain Control of Key Properties

If a house remains vacant for an extended period, neighborhood organizations and CDCs may want to gain control of the property to repair, rehabilitate or demolish it. Strategies to obtain control of vacant houses include:

- **Purchase properties from banks.** A bank-owned house may be vacant for months before a realtor announces the house is for sale. If a CDC, neighborhood organization, or resident can negotiate a purchase of the house for a reduced price during this period, the house is less likely to deteriorate.

- **Use the Wayne County Nuisance Abatement Program (NAP).** Residents can report nuisance houses to NAP as candidates for intervention and possible rehabilitation. In addition, CDCs or neighborhood organizations can purchase or acquire key properties for rehabilitation from NAP.
- **Use the Wayne County Land Bank Authority.** Programs such as Project SAVED can help CDCs acquire properties at reduced prices and rehabilitate them.

Get the houses reoccupied

Getting houses reoccupied stops the deterioration of houses and strengthens neighborhoods. Neighborhood organizations, CDCs, and residents could:

- **Repair vacant houses.** A CDC could work with private developer to repair vacant houses and provide attractive housing options for potential renters or homebuyers.
- **Create a neighborhood marketing campaign.** A neighborhood organization or CDC can create a marketing campaign to highlight neighborhood strengths and attract future homebuyers.

Addressing vacant houses in MorningSide

The MorningSide neighborhood on Detroit's eastside has many well-built houses, long-term residents, and increasing numbers of vacant houses. Applying several of the previously described neighborhood-based strategies to this area illustrates how residents, block clubs, the MorningSide community organization, and U-SNAP-BAC (a community development corporation) can collectively address vacant houses.

PART II: SYSTEM-CHANGING STRATEGIES

Neighborhood organizations, CDCs, city and county officials, and state legislators can form coalitions and partnerships to implement new strategies to deal with vacant properties in Detroit. These system-changing strategies, some of which have proven successful in other U.S. cities, may require changes to governmental policies, modification of organizational practices, investment of additional resources, or more effective collaborations.

Create an early warning system to keep houses occupied

An early warning system helps city officials, CDCs, neighborhood organizations, and residents prevent vacancies by drawing on a range of databases to provide information about properties showing signs of potential vacancy.

Develop better ways to prevent damage to vacant houses

New ways to prevent damage to vacant houses depend on changing current programs and legislation or implementing new programs. Changes that can prevent damage to vacant houses include:

- **Expand the Wayne County Nuisance Abatement Program (NAP) to include demolition.** Due to lack of resources, NAP is unable to demolish vacant houses when necessary. More resources and better coordination with CDCs and the City of Detroit could increase NAP's capacity.
- **Improve code enforcement practices.** Program changes to the City of Detroit's Department of Administrative Hearings (DAH) could hold property owners more accountable for the maintenance of their properties.
- **Create a Wayne County housing court.** Designating one Wayne County judge to handle all housing matters could increase the county's ability to handle vacant houses effectively.
- **Create a licensing and registration program for vacant buildings.** Registration systems help track vacancies and ensure that owners and other responsible parties maintain their houses. This method may provide a more effective approach to holding property owners responsible for safety and maintenance.

Find new ways to take control of key properties and get houses reoccupied

New kinds of strategies, not now implemented in Detroit or not used by some CDCs, can help CDCs and other neighborhood organizations gain control of key properties and get vacant houses reoccupied:

- **Use receivership to eliminate nuisances and amend receivership law for greater effectiveness.** Michigan law allows a circuit court to assign third parties to repair, rehabilitate or demolish properties that are considered dangerous or public nuisances. Amendments to these laws could increase their usefulness.
- **Establish clear land bank policies.** Clearer guidelines could expand the Wayne County Land Bank's work with CDCs and neighborhood organizations to include donating and purchasing vacant houses.
- **Form a city-wide intermediary to acquire vacant houses and fund CDCs to rehabilitate them.** A non-profit, city-wide intermediary could help community development corporations purchase vacant houses and rehabilitate them by providing financial resources and technical assistance.
- **Use available rehabilitation funding sources.** Several state and federal funding sources can help CDCs acquire funds to rehabilitate vacant houses.
- **Train youth to fix houses.** Youth could play a significant role in repairing and rehabilitating vacant houses while they acquire training and skills needed for future employment.

Strategic implementation

Citywide and statewide coalitions of neighborhood-based development organizations can work to change programs and introduce legislation to improve the handling of vacant houses in Detroit neighborhoods. Collaborative efforts could set priorities in a number of ways:

- **Focus on changes that promise the greatest impact.** Improving enforcement capabilities of the DAH and registration of vacant houses would be high priority.
- **Focus on changes that empower CDCs.** Reforming receivership legislation and enabling demolitions by NAP would help CDCs.
- **Focus on changes that can happen quickly or are most doable.** Stronger procedures for the Wayne County Land Bank could be easily implemented.

The hope is that by using strategies outlined in this manual, residents, block clubs, neighborhood organizations, and CDCs can put back the welcome mat in neighborhoods across Detroit.

PART I

NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED STRATEGIES

How can vacant houses become homes? The first part of this manual suggests neighborhood-based strategies for residents, neighborhood organizations, and community development corporations (CDCs) to implement to achieve this goal. The introduction outlines the setting for the manual by briefly detailing the issue of housing vacancy in Detroit, and Chapter 2 provides users with strategies to assess the situation of vacant houses in their neighborhoods. The following four chapters each focus on a specific objective. Chapter 3 examines how to keep homes occupied; Chapter 4 discusses ways to prevent damage to vacant houses by securing and maintaining them; Chapter 5 outlines ways nonprofit organizations and CDCs can obtain control of key houses in a neighborhood; and Chapter 6 explores how to get houses reoccupied. Chapter 7 applies each strategy specifically to the MorningSide neighborhood on the eastside of Detroit, yet they are applicable to a wide range of neighborhoods.

CHAPTER 1

Putting Back the Welcome Mat

This manual focuses on how residents, neighborhood organizations, and community development corporations (CDCs), can address the vacant houses dotting Detroit and many other U.S. cities. Since 2002, increasing numbers of homeowners have been unable to pay their mortgages causing lending institutions to foreclose on their homes. Mortgage foreclosure affects neighborhoods across the nation, as residents vacate houses and absentee lending institutions become the new owners. These houses often sit vacant, inviting a host of unwanted activities, including squatters, graffiti, drug dealing, prostitution, and vandalism.¹ Once someone vandalizes a house, it quickly becomes a blight and liability to the neighborhood, creating a hazard and lowering the values of the homes near it.

Many residents, neighborhood organizations, and CDCs ask what they and others can do to prevent vacant homes from becoming liabilities and to return them to community assets. This manual aims to answer this question with suggestions for strategies to keep houses occupied, secure vacant houses, gain control of key properties, and get houses reoccupied.

This manual provides both neighborhood-based and system change strategies. The former seek to provide neighbors, neighborhood organizations and CDCs with immediate strategies for turning vacant houses into community assets, while the latter offer a number of changes in laws and program implementation that could benefit neighborhoods experiencing a high number of vacant houses.

How do houses become vacant?

Mortgage foreclosure is the leading cause of the recent increase in vacant properties in Detroit and Wayne County, Michigan. Subprime lending further drives this spike in mortgage foreclosures as many borrowers cannot meet their payments due to economic stress, a changing real estate market, or onerous repayment terms imposed by the lender.² After a home is foreclosed, the mortgage holder takes legal ownership. The occupants often then vacate the house, leaving it vacant and often untended by the mortgage holder.

Tax foreclosure occurs when property owners do not pay their property taxes. Property owners must be delinquent on their property taxes for at least two years before the county forecloses on the property.³ If residents have not already left before the tax foreclosure, many will leave a house after the county has foreclosed on it.

A weak regional real estate market in Detroit has also contributed to vacant properties. To potential investors and homeowners seeking an appreciation in value of a home they might purchase, investing in an area with declining home values is a risk. As a result, many houses may remain on the market, unoccupied.

Market and physical obsolescence⁴ both occur when a house becomes outdated. Detroit has an aging housing stock. Older houses do not necessarily have the features available in new homes. In addition, older homes often require physical updates and repairs. In both cases, property owners may have a difficult time selling their properties to new homeowners and investors. As a result, these properties may sit vacant and potentially unattended for extended periods of time.

The mortgage foreclosure crisis

The rise in homeownership rates over the past fifteen years is largely due to the emergence of the subprime mortgage market. Borrowers pay higher interest rates and higher fees and are penalized for early payment of their mortgages. As a result, the effective mortgage interest rate, commonly known as the average percentage rate (APR), is much higher than a prime mortgage's APR.⁵

While mortgage foreclosure affects only one percent of mortgages in the prime market, it has become an enormous problem in the subprime mortgages market. Almost five percent of subprime mortgages were in foreclosure by late October 2007, and many experts and housing analysts expect this number to go up further in 2008.⁶ Since subprime mortgages are concentrated in neighborhoods with minority residents and homeowners with moderate incomes, the impact of increased foreclosures has a devastating impact on those neighborhoods.

How do vacant properties affect neighborhoods?

A vacant house imposes significant costs on a surrounding neighborhood if the vacancy lasts long. Undesirable activities often take place in a vacant home, quickly turning a marketable house into a neighborhood nuisance that decreases nearby property values and reduces the remaining residents' quality of life.

Vacant properties also impose significant costs outside a neighborhood. These properties represent lost revenue for municipal governments, which are often forced into a caretaker role, inspecting, securing, and often demolishing these properties. In 2005 the City of Detroit budgeted almost \$6 million dollars for its demolition program.⁷

A proactive neighborhood strategy to fight housing vacancy has the potential to restore vacant houses to assets, whether in Detroit or elsewhere. Communities across the United States have begun addressing vacant properties through collaboration among residents, neighborhood organizations, and CDCs. The next chapter discusses ways to assess the housing vacancy situation as the basis for undertaking strategies to deal with vacant houses.

Notes

1 Joseph Schilling, et al., *The Revitalization of Vacant Properties: San Diego, California Case Study* (International City/County Management Association, 2002).

2 Dan Immergluck and Geoff Smith, "Measuring the Effects of Subprime Lending on Neighborhood Foreclosures: Evidence from Chicago," *Urban Affairs Review* 40 (2005) 362-389.

3 Wayne County Treasurer's Office, "Delinquent Property Taxes," 15 Dec. 2007, <http://www.waynecounty.com/treasurer/PA123Timeline.htm>.

4 Alan Mallach, *Bringing Buildings Back: From Abandoned Properties to Community Assets: A Guidebook for Policymakers and Practitioners* (Montclair, NJ: National Housing Institute, 2006) 5.

5 Edward Gramlich, *Subprime Mortgages: America's Latest Boom and Bust* (Washington D.C: Urban Institute Press, 2007) 3.

6 Stephen Pearlstein, "It's Not 1929, but It's the Biggest Mess Since," *Washington Post* 5 Dec. 2007: D01.

7 City of Detroit, "Buildings and Safety Engineering Department Demolition Program 2007-2008 Budget," 15 Dec. 2007, http://www.ci.detroit.mi.us/budget/2007-08_Budget/Agencies/EB_13_BUILDINGS%20&%20SAFETY_07-08.pdf.

CHAPTER 2

Getting Started

The strategies in this manual can apply to houses and residential blocks in different conditions. Some blocks may have very few vacancies, and the houses on these blocks may show no signs of deterioration. Another block may have many vacant lots, boarded houses, and houses that show significant deterioration. The range of housing and block conditions may affect what strategy for addressing vacant houses is most appropriate. The type of owner may also affect what strategy may be most appropriate for addressing a vacancy. This chapter outlines how CDCs, neighborhood organizations, block clubs, and residents can assess the conditions of residential blocks and vacant houses in their neighborhood and find the owner of a house in order to help select or tailor strategies for addressing vacant houses.

Conduct a vacant housing inventory

Identifying the vacant houses in a neighborhood or on a block may help determine which strategy or set of strategies may be most appropriate for each house. In order to do this, a **CDC**, **NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION**, or **BLOCK CLUB** could perform a vacant housing inventory. A list of indicators for identifying houses that are likely vacant could guide the process. Residents and CDC staff could record vacancies using a form similar to that provided in Appendix A.

Surveyors could use the list below to guide determination of whether a house is vacant. None of the signs will be a sole determinant of vacancy; however, considered collectively, signs could indicate vacancy. Some common signs of vacancy include:

- Severely neglected yard maintenance
- Accumulated mail or flyers
- Posted "For Sale" signs
- Missing doors or windows
- Posted notices of mortgage or tax foreclosure or seizure of property
- Boarded windows and doors
- Burned out or significantly deteriorated structure

- Significantly tagged or vandalized structure
- Unshoveled driveway or sidewalk during winter months

Determine who owns the vacant houses

Once a vacant house inventory is completed, **CDC** staff or neighborhood **RESIDENTS** can determine who owns the vacant houses. The owner of a property is legally responsible for that property, and must keep it up to city code, whether vacant or occupied. The main resources available to identify property owners are the City of Detroit Online Property Tax Information System, the Wayne County Register of Deeds, and the State of Michigan On-line Corporate Entity/Business Search.

The City of Detroit Online Property Tax Information System and the Wayne County Register of Deeds are also helpful in determining if a property is officially foreclosed due to past-due taxes or a delinquent mortgage. If foreclosure is final, the new owner may be listed in both the systems unless the information has not been updated. The following descriptions of these resources, as shown in Tables 2.1 and 2.2, provide a quick summary to learn how to access each system, find the information they provide, and determine the best resource to use for a particular property.

The State of Michigan Online Corporate Entity/Business Search displayed in Table 2.3 allows the public to access information related to the formation of businesses. Searching this system helps the user gather more information related to businesses listed as property owners or taxpayers. For example, if the owner of a property is listed as Real Estate 4 Dummies, LLC, in the Detroit online property tax system or the Wayne County Register of Deeds, this system could identify the business's local agent and provide an official office address.

If tax or mortgage foreclosure is not final, neighbors and CDC staff may have difficulty identifying owners or responsible parties. In many instances, individuals may abandon their houses before foreclosure becomes final. After the homeowner moves, concerned neighbors, block club leaders, or CDCs may not know how to

Table 2.1: Profile of City of Detroit's Online Property Tax Information System

Description	This system lets homeowners pay their property taxes electronically. In addition, it provides access for third parties to information regarding a specific property.		
Website	https://is.bsasoftware.com/bsa.is/default.aspx		
Cost	Free to view owner's name, but \$2.00 to access a detailed report		
Registration Process	1) Provide valid credit card information 2) Fax signed billing agreement 3) Wait for password to be sent via email		
Search Fields	Property Address, Owner Name, or Parcel Number		
Information Provided for a Fee	Parcel Number	Assessed Value	Legal Description
	Owner Name & Address	Lot Size	Most Recent Sale Date
	Taxpayer Name & Address	Square Footage	Most Recent Sale Price
	Taxable Value	Land Value	
Pros	Simple, inexpensive if looking at only a few properties Provides information about the housing structure		
Cons	Lag in updating information Ownership information for properties not sold since 2001 may not be correct No ownership history provided		

Source: City of Detroit Online Property Tax Information System, 24 November 2007, <https://is.bsasoftware.com/bsa.is/default.aspx>.

Table 2.2: Profile of Wayne County's Online Register of Deeds System

Description	This office maintains all recorded actions related to real estate ownership in Wayne County.		
Website	http://www.waynecountylandrecords.com/		
Mail Requests	International Center Building Wayne County Register of Deeds 400 Monroe-7th Floor Detroit, MI. 48226-2925		
Cost	An "On-Demand User," such as a neighbor or a member of a neighborhood organization, authorizes Wayne County to place a \$20.00 hold on his or her credit card or debit card. Wayne County then bills these users \$5.00 for search and \$1.00 for each document page viewed. If the document contains more than one page, \$5.00 will be charged once the user views the first page. The site shows the total charges accruing throughout the search. For those who want to use the website more frequently, a "Commercial User" account may be set-up. Wayne County charges a one-time \$500 application fee to become a Commercial User. In addition, the county charges \$10.00 for every 15 minutes someone searches the system, and \$1.00 to print each page. The County bills Commercial Users on a monthly basis.		
Registration Process	On-Demand Users can provide credit card and billing information on-line. Access is immediate. Commercial Users must complete The Wayne County Register of Deeds Commercial Agreement. The agreement binds the commercial user for one year, but can be amended, cancelled, or extended with written notice.		
Search Fields	Tax ID	Owner Name	
	Address	Document Type	
	Legal Description	Instrument Number	
Information Provided	Dates Transactions Recorded	Document Type	
	Owner Name	Images of Documents	
Pros	Extensive property history Ability to view documents such as recorded liens, affidavits and recorded mortgages. Displays mortgage and tax foreclosure documents such as Sheriff Deeds, Judgments of Foreclosure		
Cons	Cost System may be at least 6 months outdated		

Source: Internet Land Records Search Engine, Wayne County Register of Deeds, 24 November 2007, <http://www.waynecountylandrecords.com>.

contact a mortgage company representative to report vandalism or to inquire about purchasing the property. The Wayne County Register of Deeds keeps records related to foreclosure proceedings such as a deed acquired through a sheriff sale. Other resources such as the Detroit Legal News and the Wayne County Treasurer Property Tax Administration System (described in Tables 2.4 and 2.5) can also help track the status of mortgage or tax foreclosures before they are final.

Many residents in Detroit who are without internet access at home would be unable to obtain most of this information. A CDC could help eliminate this obstacle by making a computer available for neighborhood residents or block club leaders to conduct research related to ownership of vacant properties in the neighborhood. Any information gathered from their work could be kept in a file at the CDC and serve as resource to assist with the acquisition of vacant properties by residents, potential homebuyers, or the CDC itself.

Table 2.3: Profile of the State of Michigan's Online Business Entity Search

Description	This website provides access to information on the formation of corporate entities and businesses.		
Website	http://www.dleg.state.mi.us/bcs_corp/sr_corp.asp		
Cost	Free		
Registration Process	None		
Search Fields	Business Name or Keyword		
Information Provided	Business Identification Number Local Business Agent's Name Date Business Formed	Copy of the Registration Application Mailing/Office Address	
Pros	Free Allows user to find contact information for business entities listed as property owners/taxpayers Information is not listed in other systems		
Cons	"Business" may not be registered with the State		

Source: Corporate Division Business Entity Search, State of Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, 24 November 2007, http://www.dleg.state.mi.us/bcs_corp/sr_corp.asp.

Table 2.4: Profile of the Detroit Legal News

Description	A daily legal newspaper that provides information related to the real estate, banking and financial industries in the City of Detroit and Wayne County.		
Website	http://detroitlegal.legalnews.com/		
Print Edition	The Detroit Public Library carries daily copies of the <i>Detroit Legal News</i> . In addition, individuals can purchase copies at the Downtown Border's Bookstore, the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center, and other bookstores in Detroit		
Cost	\$140.00 for a yearly online subscription \$.75 for daily print edition		
Subscription Process	Contact company via phone or complete on-line credit card authorization		
On-line Search Fields	Property address	Homeowner's last name	City
Searching the Print Edition	If an individual does not have internet access, he or she can search the print edition for information. However, all mortgage companies may not include the same information in their legal notice. Consequently, some properties may be identified by their address while others may only be identified by the legal description.		
Information Provided	Owner's Name Mortgage Company Initial Mortgage Amount	Name of Law Firm Initial Interest Rate Date of Sheriff Sale	End of redemption period Legal Description Attorney's File Number
Pros	Updated daily Lists contact information for mortgage company's attorney		
Cons	Archive editions of the paper are not available on-line. Individuals must search daily. In addition, paper edition does not provide property address for every property. Users may need to search by legal description if the mortgage company did not include the address in the newspaper.		

Source: *Detroit Legal News*, Detroit Legal News Publishing, LLC. 4 December 2007, <http://detroitlegal.legalnews.com>.

Table 2.5: Profile of Wayne County Treasurer Property Tax Administration System

Description	This system provides an on-line way for homeowners to pay property taxes. In addition, it provides access to third parties to information regarding a specific property.
Website	http://www.waynecounty.com/pta/Default.asp
Cost	Free
Registration Process	None
Search Fields	Property Address, Parcel ID
Information Provided	Wayne County Tax Status
Pros	Free States whether property taxes are delinquent or forfeited
Cons	None

Source: Property Tax Administration System, Wayne County Treasurer, 24 November 2007, <http://www.waynecounty.com/pta/Default.asp>.

Perform a vacant houses condition assessment

Both the condition of vacant houses and the condition of their residential blocks may affect which strategies may be appropriate. **CDCs, NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS, BLOCK CLUBS** or **RESIDENTS** can perform an assessment and record the condition of the vacant houses. This can be done during or after the compilation of the vacant houses list (see above). As with the block condition analysis in the following section, the vacant house condition analysis should be based on a clear set of criteria. Criteria could include the conditions of a house's frame, chimney, roof, gutters, siding, paint, windows, doors and porch. For an example of a vacant house condition assessment form, see Appendix A.

Perform a block condition assessment

As mentioned, determining the appropriate strategies for dealing with a vacant house can depend on the condition of the house relative to the surrounding conditions of block. In order to aid that decision-making process, a **CDC, NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION, or BLOCK CLUB** could perform a block condition assessment. A block condition analysis should be based on consistent measures. One possible form, with criteria that include factors such as sidewalk conditions, the appearance of houses on a block, and the presence of graffiti, is included in Appendix B.

By performing a vacant housing inventory, determining vacant property ownership, assessing the condition of vacant houses, and conducting a block assessment, residents, neighborhood organizations, and CDCs can begin the process of developing neighborhood-based strategies for vacant houses. This work will help direct the strategies discussed in the next chapters about keeping houses occupied, preventing damage to vacant houses, gaining control of key properties, and getting houses reoccupied.

Observe pending vacancies

As Chapter 3 will discuss, an awareness of pending vacancies may also affect which strategies may be most appropriate for occupied houses. Tracking which homes are potential vacancies could help **CDCs, NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS, or BLOCK CLUBS** develop intervention strategies to keep houses occupied. Signs of a pending vacancy include:

- Neglected yard maintenance
- For Sale signs
- A mortgage foreclosure notice
- Tax-delinquency

Residents, block clubs, neighborhood organizations, or CDCs may notice neglected yard maintenance or For Sale signs in the neighborhood. In order to determine the tax status of a property, neighbors, block clubs, or CDCs could use the City of Detroit's Online Property Tax Information System (see Table 2.1) or the Wayne County Property Tax Administration System (see Table 2.5). These users could look for mortgage foreclosure notices in the *Detroit Legal News* (see Table 2.4).

The next chapter discusses what residents, block clubs, neighborhood organizations, and CDCs can do to keep houses occupied when they notice signs of pending vacancies.

CHAPTER 3

Keep Houses Occupied

Homes that remain occupied are unlikely to be vandalized or become neighborhood eyesores. Occupied homes also do not require constant neighborhood vigilance or governmental intervention, and remain marketable for future buyers. This portion of the manual provides strategies for **RESIDENTS, BLOCK CLUBS, NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS**, and **CDCs** to keep homes occupied and therefore to preserve their neighborhoods.

STRATEGY I: EMPOWER HOMEOWNERS TO REMAIN IN THEIR HOMES

Homeowners often vacate their homes after they receive a mortgage foreclosure notice. However, Michigan law allows a homeowner to remain in a home until the end of the mortgage or tax foreclosure process.¹ Neighbors and community leaders should encourage residents to remain in their homes until after a sheriff's sale to prevent a home from unnecessarily being vacant.

The mortgage foreclosure process begins with a "Demand Letter" (often known as a "Notice to Accelerate") that is generally sent after a borrower misses three monthly payments. If a homeowner fails to make the mortgage current within 30 days, the mortgage company schedules a sheriff sale, which occurs approximately six weeks later. The redemption period begins after the sheriff sale. Michigan state law requires this period to last between thirty days and one year, with most redemptions lasting for six months. If a mortgage holder does not redeem during this time period, summary proceedings action occurs in which an eviction notice is filed. The borrower is allowed ten days to after the date of the summary proceeding to leave the premise of the house. Therefore, a resident may remain in a home for at three and a half months after receiving a Demand Letter from the mortgage company, and at least a month after the sheriff sale. Residents and neighborhood organizations can encourage owners of foreclosed homes to remain in their houses free

of charge until the end of the foreclosure process to prevent vandalism of the property before the mortgage holder claims ownership of the property.²

A homeowner who is delinquent in paying property taxes should also work with neighborhood organizations. Homeowners with unpaid property taxes will have the county treasurer foreclose on the property and offer it for sale at a public auction within two or three years.³ Since property tax delinquency information is available to the public, neighborhood organizations and CDCs could regularly check this information from Wayne County's Property Tax Administration System website to note what homes in their neighborhood are delinquent on their property taxes. Neighborhood organizations and CDCs can also contact residents with information to assist in payment of their property taxes or direct them to other organizations such as Michigan Legal Aid and Defender at (877) 964-4700.⁴ The Wayne County Treasurer's Office encourages residents to contact the Taxpayer Assistance Department (TAD) at (313) 224-6105 for assistance or to file for an extension for tax payment.⁵

An effective campaign to keep vacant homes occupied through the mortgage or tax foreclosure process could incorporate the following strategies:

- **Hold a neighborhood meeting.** A neighborhood meeting provides a forum for community leaders to encourage residents to remain in their foreclosed homes. A neighborhood meeting can also connect residents with CDCs that can assist residents in staying in their homes by providing homeowner counseling and information about the tax and mortgage foreclosure processes. Residents can receive this information in a setting that preserves anonymity.
- **Contact residents receiving foreclosure notices.** Residents noticing tax foreclosure notices posted on properties can attempt to contact the owner and inform him or her of their right to remain in the home until the foreclosure process ends. Neighborhood organizations could also seek

CLEVELAND, OH

Slavic Village neighborhood

Residents of the Slavic Village neighborhood of Cleveland saw that many homes in their neighborhood displayed signs of vacancy. In 2004 committed residents sought to fight the blight by banding together to form a neighborhood group devoted to keeping homes occupied. Residents sought information on the buildings owned by absentee landlords and banks, and demanded that these properties be kept up to code to ensure that they would be reoccupied and remain community assets.⁶

Residents' groups have collaborated with the Slavic Village Development Corporation. After a wave for foreclosure filings in the summer of 2007, members of the Bring Back the 70s Block Club organized to keep residents in their homes. Residents first cleaned up vacant lots in their neighborhood, organizing large clean up gatherings and neighborhood watch patrols.⁷ Bring Back the 70s constantly updates Slavic Village Neighborhood Association about homes that might become vacant, and provides literature to encourage residents to remain in their homes.

to use data from the Wayne County Treasurer's Office to contact residents facing mortgage and tax foreclosure.⁸

STRATEGY 2: BE AN ACTIVE AND WATCHFUL NEIGHBOR

A strong neighborhood is one where residents watch a neighbor's home as if it were their own. Often, the signs of an impending vacancy are apparent. Quick action in response to these indicators helps keep a house occupied. Residents in the Slavic Village neighborhood of Cleveland deal proactively with homes showing signs of distress in their neighborhood (see case study in sidebar). Residents can act in a number of ways to keep an eye on potentially vacant houses.

- **Notice a pending vacancy.** As discussed in Chapter 2, signs of a pending vacancy include:
 - Neglected yard maintenance
 - For Sale signs
 - A filed mortgage foreclosure notice in the county circuit court
 - Notice of tax forfeited notices posted at a home between the delinquency and foreclosure period.
- **Talk to the property resident or owner if signs of pending vacancy appear.** If the resident is not around, an individual could provide information about the address and signs of the pending vacancy to a neighborhood organization to take potential action. The Slavic Village Development Corporation of Cleveland, Ohio, uses information from the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas about pending vacancies to contact residents with filed mortgage foreclosures.
- **Report the signs of impending vacancy to block clubs or neighborhood organizations.** Neighbors are often the first to see signs of pending vacancy, and can ensure that other neighbors also know. Providing this information helps organizations gather information about trends in the neighborhood and to reach out to the resident of the specific home. Residents and neighborhood organizations can use the information to launch a targeted information campaign in the neighborhood that encourages residents to remain in their homes and directs residents to available resources.

STRATEGY 3: LAUNCH INFORMATION CAMPAIGN ABOUT PREVENTING VACANT HOUSES

Residents and neighborhood organizations may need education about how to prevent homes in their neighborhoods from becoming vacant. The Baltimore Neighborhood Collaborative (BNC) in Baltimore, Maryland, has led a number of neighborhood organization meetings to provide strategies for helping residents remain in their homes. BNC has established the Baltimore Homeownership Preservation Coalition (BHPC), a collaboration among public, private, and nonprofit organizations devoted to reducing foreclosures and keeping homes occupied (see case study in sidebar). Effective strategies could include:

- **Discuss vacant houses at a neighborhood organization meeting.** Many neighborhood organizations hold quarterly or monthly meetings. Such events offer an opportune time to discuss the need to keep homes occupied. These meetings provide a place for residents and municipal officials to meet and discuss vacant houses, while also connecting residents with contact information for available resources on keeping homes occupied. A neighborhood organization could also provide special training for block clubs leaders that would provide a connection between residents and a larger neighborhood organization. The BNC model is based on a NeighborWorks program which focuses on providing homeowner counseling and assistance to residents facing possible mortgage foreclosure. BNC works closely with neighborhood organizations to reach out to owners whose homes are listed as being in mortgage foreclosure or are delinquent in property tax payment. BNC found that contacting homeowners early in the mortgage foreclosure process was crucial to keeping a home occupied, as residents were more aware of their rights during the foreclosure process and potential resources.⁹
- **Reach out to neighborhood residents through a neighborhood organization newsletter.** Neighborhood organizations could use newsletters to provide residents with information about vacant properties in the neighborhood. Community newsletters could provide contact information for residents concerned about potential vacant properties in their neighborhood, and also direct residents to resources to assist them in keeping their homes.
- **Launch a flyer campaign to encourage residents to be alert about potentially vacant homes in their neighborhood.** A flyer campaign could be sponsored by neighborhood organizations or

BALTIMORE, MD

Baltimore Neighborhood Collaborative

Local and national funding agencies founded the Baltimore Neighborhood Collaborative (BNC) of Baltimore, Maryland, in 1996. The BNC works with neighborhood organizations and nonprofits to direct resources to fund programs that assist neighborhood revitalization throughout Baltimore. In 2006, BNC founded a new program entitled the Baltimore Homeowner Preservation Coalition (BHPC) that sought to “strengthen neighborhoods and preserve homeowner assets by increasing homeowner education and assistance.”¹⁰

BHPC focused on providing short and long-term strategies to assist homeowners and preserve neighborhoods. A twenty four hour hotline (311) was established with the assistance of NeighborWorks to take questions from homeowners and city residents about preventing vacant homes and to provide resources to residents. BHPC also partnered with select neighborhood organizations to launch information campaigns designed to target homeowners in neighborhoods experiencing signs of pending vacancies. One of BHPC’s first outreach efforts was the creation of the Judge Smartt DVD. This DVD tells the stories of residents facing mortgage foreclosure through a courtroom drama. Judge Smartt also examines the impact that potentially vacant homes have on neighborhoods in Baltimore, and encourages neighborhood organizations and residents to keep residents in their homes through the foreclosure process. Many community leaders and residents of Baltimore serve in the jury in Judge Smartt, offering advice to people considering leaving their homes, directing them to information and neighborhood organizations that are ready to provide help to prevent the abandonment of their homes.¹¹ In partnership with BNC and other regional nonprofit organizations, BHPC has planned a forum to educate citizens and public officials about preventing home vacancy.¹²

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	CHAPTER 2: GETTING STARTED	CHAPTER 3: KEEP HOUSES OCCUPIED	CHAPTER 4: PREVENT DAMAGE	CHAPTER 5: OBTAIN CONTROL	CHAPTER 6: GET HOUSES REFUSED	CHAPTER 7: IMPLEMENTATION	CHAPTER 8: KEEP HOUSES OCCUPIED	CHAPTER 9: PREVENT DAMAGE	CHAPTER 10: OBTAIN CONTROL	CHAPTER 11: IMPLEMENTATION
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CDCs. This campaign could provide residents with information on what they can do to help keep houses occupied.

11

Baltimore Homeowner Preservation Coalition.

12

Baltimore Homeowner Preservation Coalition.

- **Launch a partnered information campaign with local utilities and governmental agencies.** A mass mailing with the City of Detroit, specific Detroit departments, or utility companies could provide residents with information. Information about preventing and identifying vacant houses could be included in a property tax bill from the City of Detroit, a monthly electric/gas bill from DTE, or a monthly water bill from Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD). Residents may be more likely to open these bills and read the information about resources to assist in avoiding property tax delinquency or mortgage foreclosure than if this information came as a flyer.

These strategies focus on preventing vacancy. However, a comprehensive approach to addressing vacant houses must also incorporate what residents, block clubs, neighborhood organizations, and CDCs can do with already vacant houses. The following chapters discuss how to address already vacant houses.

Notes

1 Foreclosure by advertisement; deficiency; defenses, MCL 600.3201-600.3280.

2 Revised Judicature Act of 1961, MCL 600.3201-600.6070.

3 Wayne County Treasurer's Office, "Delinquent Property Taxes," 9 Dec. 2007, <http://www.waynecounty.com/treasurer/PA123Timeline.htm>.

4 Kiersten Grove, "Proposal for a Wayne County Property Tax Foreclosure Prevention Program," Urban and Regional Planning Program, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2007, 3-5.

5 Wayne County Treasurer's Office, "Need Help With Taxes? Call Us," 9 Dec. 2007, <http://www.waynecounty.com/treasurer/docs/1-NEED-HELP-WITH-TAXES.pdf>.

6 Chara Gupta, "Stealing Home," *Cleveland Free Times* 29 June 2007 (15) 8.

7 Les Christie, "Cleveland: Foreclosure's other victims," CNN Money, 28 Nov. 2007, http://biz.yahoo.com/cnnm/071128/112807_slavic_villages_other_victims.html?.v=7

8 Wayne County Treasurer's Office, "Property Tax Administration System," 15 Dec. 2007, <http://www.waynecounty.com/PTA/Default.asp>.

9 Sally Scott, Baltimore Neighborhood Collaborative, personal interview, 28 Nov. 2007.

10 Baltimore Homeowner Preservation Coalition, 1 Dec. 2007, <http://preservehomeownership.org/about.htm>.

CHAPTER 4

Prevent Damage by Securing and Maintaining Vacant Houses

Sometimes residents cannot stay in a home. After residents leave, the house enters a vulnerable stage where security and maintenance play an important role in preserving a house's value and marketability. Maintaining vacant houses stabilizes the condition of the individual house and that of the entire block.

STRATEGY 1: INFORM NEIGHBORS ABOUT WHAT TO DO WITH VACANT HOUSES

Residents can play a role in securing and preserving vacant houses. However, residents can be unsure what actions they can take to minimize the negative effects of vacant properties.

A **CDC** or **NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION** can present information about how residents can secure vacant homes and prevent damage.

- **Choose a way to spread information.** A CDC or neighborhood organization may choose to spread information through a pamphlet, flyer, door-to-door campaign, or informational meetings based upon available resources, and neighborhood size.
- **Select information to share.** A CDC or neighborhood organization can choose information to share with neighbors, such as code violation reporting or exterior maintenance tips. Refer to the sidebar, on the next page, for an example of information that a CDC could include in a neighborhood pamphlet.

A **CDC** could strategically spread information about actions to take if living near a vacant house by selecting blocks to target for an intense information campaign. First, a CDC may want to gather information about the location

of vacant buildings throughout the neighborhood (see Chapter 2). Then, the CDC could coordinate with the neighborhood organization and block clubs in the area to plan a strategy to spread information. For example, a CDC representative might present the information at a general neighborhood organization meeting or mail pamphlets out to all homes. In addition, a block club representative could start a door-to-door campaign in areas vulnerable to vacancy. By spreading the information through more than one source, the CDC emphasizes the importance of taking action and may reach more neighbors.

STRATEGY 2: MAINTAIN THE EXTERIOR OF VACANT HOUSES

Residents who maintain the exterior of a vacant house help to reduce the appearance of vacancy. Their action signals that the property is being cared for and may help prevent damage to a vacant house and decline in the block condition.

A **NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION**, **BLOCK CLUB**, or **RESIDENT** may maintain the exterior of a vacant house by:

- **Making houses look occupied.** For vacant houses that are not boarded, reducing the appearance of vacancy may be an effective strategy to prevent

Table 4.1: Ways to Make a House Look Occupied and Their Costs

Task	Cost
Throw away handouts from the front door and porch	Free
Clear any garbage or debris from lawn and porch	Free
Put up holiday decorations	\$2.00-25.00
Place potted plants on the porch	\$5.00-15.00
Place 2-4 solar powered exterior lights on the lawn or porch	\$4.00 and up
Paint over graffiti	\$10.00-30.00
Mow lawn	Variable
Shovel the snow from walkway and driveway	Variable

Information for a neighborhood pamphlet

Why should you get involved?

- Vacant houses may increase crime. Robbery, vandalism and drug activity can easily spill over from one vacant house to other areas if the activities go unchecked.
- Vacant houses decrease your property value. One study found that houses on blocks with abandonment sold for \$6,715 less than houses on blocks with no abandonment.¹
- Vacant houses lead to increased vacancy. The contagion effect² of vacant properties can be stopped if neighbors and neighborhood groups take an active role in protecting the vacant property and neighborhood.

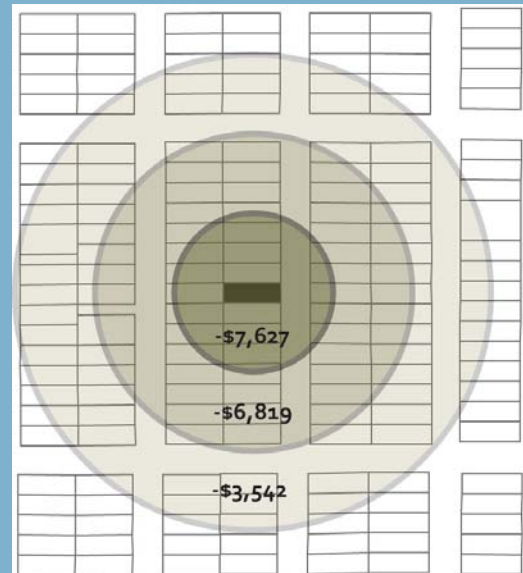
What can you do?

- Maintain the exterior of the house. Help to make the house appear occupied by mowing the lawn, removing the snow, clearing flyers from the porch, placing potted plants on the porch, putting up holiday decorations, or placing solar-powered exterior lights on the lawn or porch.
- Keep watch. A vacant house will negatively affect your home if it becomes susceptible to crime. If the property is open and dangerous, report it by calling 3-1-1.
- Report code violations. Call 3-1-1 to report code violations or report them to your neighborhood city hall.

Common code violations:

- Failure to remove snow and ice from driveways and sidewalks
 - Grass and weed growth past 8 inches
 - Failure to remove graffiti
 - Exterior (doors, window frames, porches, etc) poorly maintained showing crumbling, loose, missing, rotting, or inadequately finished materials
 - Accumulation of solid waste, garbage, debris
- Get involved with your neighbors. Contact your block club, neighborhood group or local community organization to determine if they have programs to deal with vacant homes.

Figure 4.1: Lower Property Values as a Result of Vacant Property



Source: Image based on Joseph Schilling. "Vacant Properties: The True Costs to Communities." Vacant Properties Campaign. August 2005. (http://www.vacantproperties.org/latestreports/True%20Costs_Aug05.pdf).

vandalism to the house. Table 4.1 presents suggestions for ways to reduce the appearance of vacancy.

- **Reduce the visual effect of a boarded house.** A house that is boarded sends a clear message to residents and outsiders that the house is vacant. While boarding may be a necessary step to keep a house secure, a neighborhood organization or individual can improve the appearance of the boards. Painting the boards with a color that blends in with the exterior of the house or painting murals on the boards could improve the appearance of the block while still protecting the house (see case studies in sidebar on following page).

Organize for maintaining exteriors of houses

To preserve the exterior of houses, a neighborhood organization could organize resident efforts and prioritize areas and tasks. A neighborhood-wide strategy may work best if various groups work regularly to maintain vacant houses. The neighborhood organization can help with tasks that an individual cannot afford or cannot physically perform.

The following steps offer suggestions for a **NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION** to approach exterior house maintenance on a neighborhood-wide basis:

- **Identify and prioritize neighborhood needs.** The neighborhood organization could create a list of vacant houses and their condition, as discussed in Chapter 2. The neighborhood organization could use this information to prioritize houses that need maintenance most, to identify tasks for the property, and to track the availability of supplies and volunteers.
- **Assemble volunteers.** The neighborhood organization might assemble volunteers from various places to help with maintenance.

The neighborhood organization could assign the volunteers based upon task, time available, and skill level. For a frequently occurring task, like lawn mowing, the neighborhood organization may form a group of residents who commit to one day of work each month. The group may break up into four teams, each performing a day of maintenance on a different week in the month. For a larger task that occurs less often, like raking leaves, a neighborhood organization could recruit students from a local high school that requires service hours for graduation. The neighborhood organization could plan three raking events during the fall using the high school volunteers and rakes lent by neighbors. For irregular tasks, like shoveling snow, the neighborhood organization may want to make a list of residents who

have snow blowers and residents who do not work mornings. The neighborhood organization could match resources with volunteers.

STRATEGY 3: INCREASE CODE ENFORCEMENT

Public agencies can protect public health and safety, maintain homes, and reinforce community norms through the code enforcement process.³ Community involvement is essential for effective and thorough code enforcement. By coordinating with the city to increase the level of code enforcement in the neighborhood, a resident may assist the city in helping to increase the security and maintenance of vacant houses.

A **CDC, NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION, BLOCK CLUB** and/or **RESIDENT** can take the following steps to increase code enforcement:

- **Learn about what constitutes a violation.** Table 4.2 presents common Detroit code violations.

Table 4.2: Common Code Violations

Property Maintenance Code	
In general, any vacant structure must be maintained by the owner in a "clean, safe, secure, and sanitary condition...so as not to cause a blighting problem or adversely affect the public health, safety, or welfare." ⁴	
Cite	Violation
Detroit City Code Sec 9-1-13(a)	Accumulation of any solid waste, garbage, debris
Detroit City Code Sec 9-1-13(b)	Failure to remove peeling paint
Detroit City Code Sec. 9-1-111(b)	Failure to remove graffiti
Detroit City Code Sec. 9-1-201 (b)	Exteriors (doors, window frames, porches, etc) poorly maintained showing crumbling, loose, missing, rotting, or inadequately finished materials
Ord. 36-04 Sec. 9-1-103(c)	Failure to remove snow and ice from driveways and sidewalks after 24 hours of snow
Ord. 36-04 Sec. 9-1-104	Grass and weed growth past 8 inches

- **Report the violation.** If a vacant property is in violation of the property maintenance code or blight ordinance, call the city's 311 hotline to report the violation. If calling from a landline in Detroit, dial 3-1-1. If calling from a cellular phone, dial (313) 224-INFO (4636). The 311 operator will place a service request for the appropriate

DETROIT, MI

Beautifying with boards

A neighbor in the MorningSide neighborhood on Detroit's east side saw a boarded up vacant property; but rather than seeing boards, saw a canvas. This house on Three Mile Drive shows how painted boards can preserve a house's appearance. This sends the message to others that someone in the neighborhood is watching this house.

Figure 4.2: Painted Boards a House on Three Mile Drive



FORT WORTH, TX

Southside Preservation

The Southside Preservation Association, a CDC in Fort Worth, sought to preserve and restore the Southside Preservation Hall, a local community center. Prior to purchasing the property, the Southside Preservation Association boarded up the hall and painted the windows.⁵

The CDC took the initiative to install and paint these boards despite not having title to the property. They recognized the potential of this intervention to prevent further vandalism.

Figure 4.3: Painted Boards on Southside Preservation Hall



Source: <http://www.southsidepreservation.com/LibscombHouse.html>, Nov. 2007.

DAYTON, OH

Blending Boards

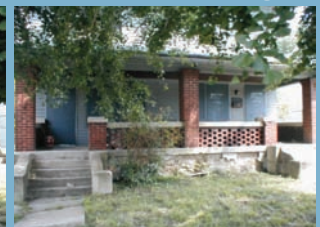
The Dayton Housing and Neighborhood Strategies Task Force decided to paint the boards on vacant buildings a dark gray color in order to lessen the "visual impact" of the vacancy.⁶ In a little over a month, the Task Force successfully repainted the boards on 30 buildings.

Figure 4.4: East Third Street Before Painting



Source: <http://www.ci.dayton.oh.us/html/FINALHNSTF10-6-04.pdf>, Nov. 2007.

Figure 4.5: East Third Street After Painting



Source: <http://www.ci.dayton.oh.us/html/FINALHNSTF10-6-04.pdf>, Nov. 2007.

department and will assign the request a service request number. An inspector should respond to the call within the week. If the inspector verifies the violation, the city department will issue the owner a violation, and the owner must remedy the violation or face a fine.

- **Record violations reported.** Record the violation, address, report date, and service request number. If the inspector or owner does not follow through on the violation, this record provides the necessary information to report the issue to the 311 call center again. Additionally, recordkeeping offers a way to track owners that are repeat offenders.
- **Report the violation, again.** Reporting a violation once may not garner the attention from the city that the problem warrants. If an owner does not bring his or her property up to code, continue to report the violation.

Take a neighborhood-wide approach to increase code enforcement

A CDC or neighborhood organization may increase overall code enforcement in their neighborhood by forming a vacant house code enforcement patrol. This patrol would be in charge of routinely patrolling the vacant houses in the neighborhood, recording code violations, and reporting the violations. Reporting code violations on a regular basis is important to get the attention of violation-writing city departments.

To enact a neighborhood-wide approach to increase code enforcement for vacant houses a CDC or NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION could take the following steps:

- **Form a vacant house code enforcement patrol.** The CDC or neighborhood organization could ask for volunteers to patrol the neighborhood once a week. The patrollers may break up into four teams of two and pick one day a month to patrol. Breaking up the patrolling may keep volunteers' time commitment small.
- **List vacant properties to patrol.** The patrol may gather a list of vacant properties based on resident feedback about vacant property by using vacant properties indicators listed in Chapter 2. Once the patrol gathers the list of vacant houses, the patrol may then decide on a schedule to patrol the houses. If the patrol covers a large area, they may choose to divide the neighborhood into smaller sections or quadrants so the patrols are more manageable.
- **Determine a consistent method of recording and reporting violations.** The patrol may want to agree on a format and method of recording code violations. The patrol may determine that a person should photograph the violation and record the date, address, type of code violation, and violation

description. To distribute the work, the patrol may agree that one person records the violation, and another reports it to the city.

STRATEGY 4: INCREASE SECURITY OF VACANT HOUSES

Increasing the security of a vacant house prevents damage that might deter potential homebuyers, preserves the property value of that house and the homes surrounding it, and increases overall safety on a block. On some blocks, residents could prevent damage to vacant houses by keeping a vigilant watch over the vacant houses on their block. On other blocks residents may want to board up windows and doors to prevent vandalism.

A vacant house on a block with a number of houses in poor condition on it could benefit from being boarded. However, a boarded up vacant house on an otherwise strong block might deter future homebuyers and give the impression that the block is in decline, (see Figure 4.6).

Take a neighborhood-wide approach for securing a house before it becomes vacant, open, and dangerous (VOD)

On blocks where the majority of the houses are vacant or where the majority of houses have significant physical deterioration, property owners should secure their properties to protect them from vandalism. Securing a house on these blocks may include installing a lock box or padlock, or boarding.

Figure 4.6: Vacant House on Bedford in MorningSide in Good Condition That Should Not Be Boarded



Boarding houses should be the responsibility of the property owner and currently CDCs cannot ensure that a property owner will reimburse them for boarding a house. However, sometimes an organization needs to take immediate action to protect a house, particularly on blocks where houses face a higher risk of vandalism.

In some cases, the owners of vacant houses on largely vacant or deteriorated blocks do not secure their houses. The longer a house sits vacant and unprotected, the more vulnerable it becomes to vandalism. In cases where property owners do not secure their vacant properties CDCs could take the initiative to secure the houses by boarding up windows and doors.

A CDC could:

- **Designate a boarding point person.** A CDC staff person could take responsibility for coordinating neighborhood-wide efforts to secure vacant houses.
- **Contact the owner.** The boarding point person could perform a quick property owner search using one of the methods outlined in Chapter 2. The point person could then contact owners and request that they board up their vacant houses. If the owner refuses to board his or her house, the CDC could request permission to board the house.
- **If the house should be boarded, choose a boarding material.** Purchasing and installing plywood boards is less expensive than many other approaches (OSB plywood: \$8/ 4'x8' sheet). If funds are available, a CDC could use services such as Vacant Properties Services, Inc (VPS). VPS is business that secures houses with metal plating and charges a rental fee for use of the plates, see Figure 4.7.

Figure 4.7: House Secured Using the VPS System



Source: <http://www.vacantpropertysecurity.com>, Oct. 2007.

- **Inform neighbors that the CDC can be a contact.** Neighbors can contact the CDC if they believe a vacant house is at risk of becoming open and dangerous. The CDC can then help choose the appropriate actions.

Create a block club security task force

In addition to CDCs, neighborhood residents play an active role in securing vacant houses on their block by helping identify and report them. A block club can organize a volunteer security task force that keeps watch over vacant houses in good physical condition on blocks in good condition. This help to ensure that vacant houses on blocks in good condition do not become open and dangerous and susceptible to illegal activity. If the security task force notices, suspicious behavior individuals can report the activity to the police.

This strategy focuses on neighborhood block clubs creating a security task force within a neighborhood. A block club may provide the amount of volunteers needed to implement these vacant houses task forces. Neighborhood residents often know first when a house on their block is in danger of becoming vandalized or dangerous. The block club security task force could also coordinate with a neighborhood code enforcement patrol or a neighborhood organization to inform them of recently vacated houses to aid those groups' efforts to secure and maintain vacant houses.

In order to initiate a block club security task force a **BLOCK CLUB** captain will need to:

- **Organize a block club meeting and enlist volunteers for a security task force.**
- **Assign a leader to be the liaison to city officials and neighborhood organizations.**

A **BLOCK CLUB'S** security task force could:

- **Organize weekly patrols of their block.** The security task force could patrol their block weekly, watching for houses recently vacated and vacant houses that show signs of neglect by their owners.
- **Create a list of vacant houses.** This list could be used to tell the police what houses on a block are vacant so they will have a watchful eye on these houses when they patrol.
- **Call the City of Detroit Police Department to inform them of vacant houses.** A representative of a block club security task force could contact the police to inform them of houses that would benefit from additional police patrols.
- **Adopt a house.** Assign individual task force members with the responsibility of watching specific houses on the list. This ensures the house remains under close surveillance and helps to ensure that someone notices when changes occur with a house, such as contractors performing work or new owners moving in. The watchperson can also report suspicious behavior to the police and or inform the task force when a house is no longer vacant.

While securing and maintaining houses preserves vacant house for new owners, the next chapter discusses how organizations can obtain control of vacant houses that can be repaired and rehabilitated for potential homebuyers.

Notes

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PART I: NEIGHBORHOOD BASED STRATEGIES		PART II: SYSTEM-CHANGING STRATEGIES	
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	CHAPTER 2: GETTING STARTED	CHAPTER 3: KEEP HOUSES OCCUPIED	CHAPTER 4: PREVENT DAMAGE
		CHAPTER 5: OBTAIN CONTROL	CHAPTER 6: GET HOUSES REFUSED
			CHAPTER 7: IMPLEMENTATION
		CHAPTER 8: KEEP HOUSES OCCUPIED	CHAPTER 9: PREVENT DAMAGE
			CHAPTER 10: OBTAIN CONTROL
			CHAPTER 11: IMPLEMENTATION

CHAPTER 5

Obtain Control of Key Houses

Vacant houses often fall into disrepair despite efforts to prevent damage, further reducing the houses' market values and increasing their negative impact on the surrounding neighborhood. Since some houses remain vacant for extended periods, neighborhood stakeholders may work to gain control of these properties through a variety of methods. Due to limited resources, CDCs and neighborhood organizations may choose to help gain control of specific key houses. CDCs and neighborhood organizations could consider houses with unique architecture, with locations on well-maintained blocks or at highly visible intersections, in areas where existing rehabilitation projects are concentrated, or those with small amounts of exterior damage. Gaining control of a house is the first step towards getting the house repaired or rehabilitated and ultimately, reoccupied.

STRATEGY I: PURCHASE PROPERTIES FROM BANKS

A bank-owned house may be vacant for months before a realtor announces the house is for sale. If a **CDC**, **NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION**, or **RESIDENT** could intervene during this time of uncertainty and purchase the property, they could prevent further deterioration of the house.

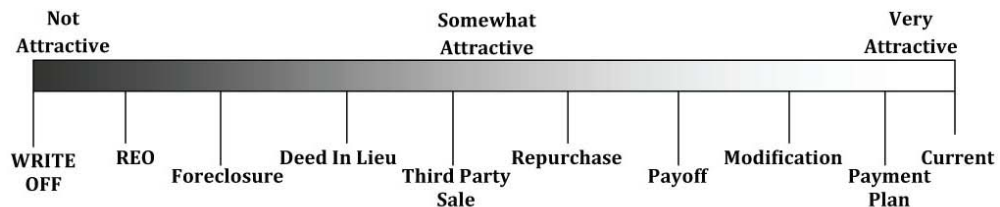
Once a home is taken over by a bank or mortgage holder at the end of the mortgage foreclosure process, a bank appoints a "special servicer" for the house. The special servicer is legally responsible for protecting the financial interest of investors who have purchased mortgages that have been pooled together.¹ Therefore, the most desirable outcome for a special servicer is to restore all

defaulting mortgages through payment plans, loan modifications, or payoff of the outstanding loan amount.²

Figure 5.1 illustrates the potential outcomes from worst to best based on the financial interests of investors and their special servicers. The most attractive outcome for an investor is when a special servicer works out a payment plan with the original owner or modifies the loan to make the payments more manageable. Investors also prefer third party sales and deeds in lieu to foreclosure. In a third party sale, the homeowner sells his or her house to another buyer before the foreclosure becomes final. The bank must approve the transaction if the purchase price is less than the amount owed on the mortgage. This transaction is known as a "short sale." A "deed in lieu," another alternative to foreclosure, enables a homeowner to voluntarily "give back" their property to the mortgage company before foreclosure is final. The mortgage company then releases the homeowner from further financial obligation and does not report this as a mortgage foreclosure.³ Both of these outcomes can reduce the amount of time a house remains vacant.

Once foreclosure becomes final, the house is referred to as "real estate owned" or REO. At this time, a CDC could intervene and negotiate directly with the bank or mortgage company to purchase the house. Banks are more likely to approve a short sale of a house at this point, as the example from Cleveland shows (see case study in sidebar on following page).

Figure 5.1: Potential Outcomes for Investors and Special Servicers



Source: Adapted from Gregory Tornquist. Mortgage Risk Exposure for Options for Limiting Loss. Powerpoint presentation to 2007 MBA's National Secondary Market Conference and Expo. New York. 21 May 2007. <http://www.mortgagebankers.org/files/CREF/docs/2007/ManagingRiskExposureandOptionsforLimitingLoss-GregTornquist.pdf>

CLEVELAND, OH

Slavic Village neighborhood

Slavic Village Development Corporation purchased several properties from banks by negotiating short sales. Short sales occur when a mortgage corporation accepts a purchase price lower than the mortgage amount owed.

Stace Pugh, Slavic Village Housing Director, stated that the organization does not have “amazing” relationships with any specific banks. Instead, the organization does extensive research on a property, makes numerous contacts with mortgage representatives via phone and letter, and invests significant time in negotiating a reasonable price with the bank. For example, Pugh negotiated for approximately 8 weeks to finalize the sale of a property for \$7,500. The homeowner, who did not maintain the property, owed approximately \$100,000 to the bank.

After negotiating the purchase of the property, Slavic Village worked with a local developer to rehab the property. These lessons from Slavic Village’s experience may be helpful for CDCs that wish to purchase properties from banks.

1. Monitor properties closely. The best time for a CDC to negotiate with a bank is after the foreclosure is final, but before the property is listed with a local real estate agent.
2. Start negotiation with a low price. Slavic Village starts negotiating by first asking the bank to donate the property to their organization. If the bank declines, Pugh may offer as little as \$1,000 for a property to start negotiation.⁴

A CDC can acquire houses from banks or other mortgage holders using the following steps:

- **Identify potential houses for acquisition.** A CDC could identify houses for acquisition by examining the ownership of vacant houses. Through the methods described in Chapter 2, a CDC could determine if a bank owns a vacant house that the CDC would like to acquire or if the house is in the mortgage foreclosure process.
- **Find real estate professionals willing to help.** If a CDC is inexperienced in housing rehabilitation or real estate matters, professional assistance may be helpful. Professional organizations, such as the Detroit Association of Realtors (www.detroitassociationofrealtors.com) or Builders and Contractors of Michigan, (www.abcmi.com) may provide referrals as well.

Table 5.1 Professionals That May Offer Helpful Advice During the Property Acquisition Process

Professional	Information professional may provide
Real estate attorney	Provides assistance by writing the real estate offer, verifying the property ownership, or handling disputes.
Title officer	Helps to confirm property ownership by conducting extensive research and facilitates the sale of the house by coordinating all necessary paperwork.
Housing inspector	Checks the structure and mechanical parts of the house such as the foundation, roof, plumbing, electrical systems, and heating for current and potential problems.
Appraiser	Estimates the value of a house based on its condition, neighborhood condition, and recent sales of comparable homes in the area.
Real estate agent	Provides “snapshot” of current market conditions by assessing homes currently for sale and those recently sold. Also helps negotiate a sale price and finds other professionals.

- **Assess the house value.** Parties who own or control a vacant house often set unrealistic sale prices and ignore extreme disrepair or unsatisfied liens, such as unpaid property taxes or water bills. These unrealistic prices make acquisition and renovation unaffordable for many CDCs. The following is a suggested framework for calculating more realistic property values:⁵

o **Consider these factors to calculate an initial purchase price.** As stated in Chapter 2, Wayne County and the City of Detroit provide resources to help discover facts about a house. In addition, a real estate agent or housing inspector may be helpful in determining the following figures:

- Assessed market value
- Last sale amount
- Comparable property sales
- Owner's expectations⁶

o **Adjust downward for the total value of the following:**

- Unsatisfied liens
- Cost of needed repairs
- Pending legal action such as lawsuits from unpaid contractors.⁷

o **Start negotiation with this price**

- **Contact a bank representative.** As stated previously, this step may be difficult because of trouble identifying the representative. Resources such as the Detroit Legal News and the Wayne County Register of Deeds may be helpful in identifying a bank representative or attorney responsible for the house.
- **Make an offer.** Due to unrealistic expectations or lack of knowledge regarding the local market, the bank may want too much money for the house. Therefore, any materials that will offer the bank a more realistic estimate of the house's true value could aid a CDC's ability to negotiate a lower price. Pictures, code violations, and recent neighborhood sales, along with a letter explaining the purpose of the organization may be helpful.⁸

STRATEGY 2: USE THE WAYNE COUNTY NUISANCE ABATEMENT PROGRAM

The Wayne County Nuisance Abatement Program (NAP) is an effective tool for gaining control of nuisance properties through legal action. In 1999, the Wayne County Corporation Counsel established NAP as a program to identify nuisance properties and compel the property owners to remove the nuisance or face property seizure. The program is responsible for renovating and demolishing more than 2,000 buildings in the past seven years. During the year ending in June 2007, NAP filed 801 lawsuits, sold 91 homes, and developed renovation agreements with 458 owners.⁹

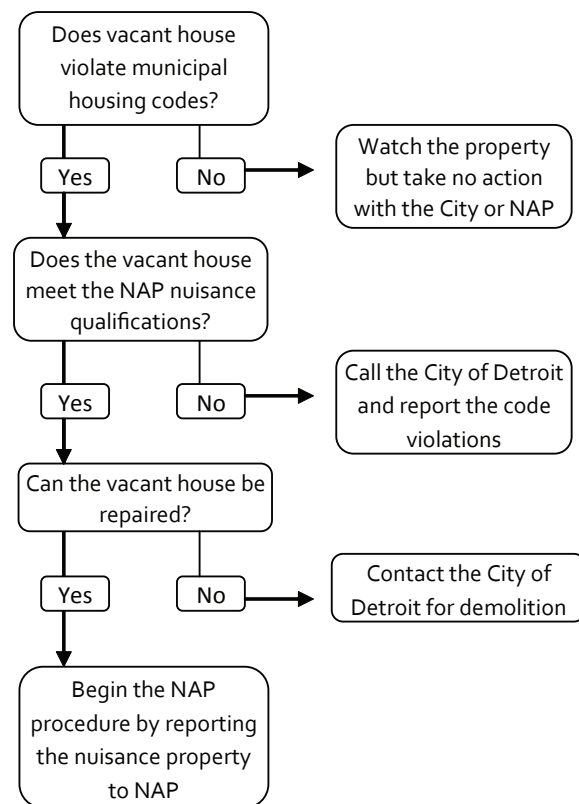
NAP works to enforce a minimum level of property maintenance for vacant houses. While code enforcement helps prevent damage to a house, NAP addresses damaged houses that have become a nuisance to the

surrounding neighborhood. Figure 5.2 outlines the assessment process for deciding if a property qualifies for NAP.

As Figure 5.2 shows, a vacant property must meet certain conditions for action by NAP. A nuisance is "a condition that adversely affects the health, safety, or well-being of the residents or neighbors of a property."¹⁰ NAP's nuisance qualification also requires that a property be "a blighting influence and abandoned."¹¹ NAP determines abandonment based on a visual inspection and the opinions of surrounding residents, which factor heavily in NAP's assessment of a vacant house. For example, if a resident feels a nearby house is dangerous and requires boarding, NAP may consider it a nuisance and will examine it for entry into the program.¹²

After NAP completes an on-site analysis and certifies the house as a nuisance, NAP files a nuisance abatement suit against the last identifiable owner. This lawsuit requires the owner to remedy the nuisance house. If the owner responds to the lawsuit and agrees to participate, NAP enters a contract with the owner that establishes a specified timeline for the rehabilitation of a house. If the owner fails to respond to the lawsuit or if a defendant unsuccessfully contests NAP's action, Wayne County

Figure 5.2: Decision Tree for Assessing Vacant Properties Qualification for NAP



Source: Michael D. Russell, Assistant Wayne County Corporation Counsel, November 30, 2007.

WAYNE COUNTY, MI

Wayne County Nuisance Abatement Program

The NAP program has successfully ordered the restoration of many former nuisance properties in Detroit. In the Brightmoor neighborhood, NAP sued a landlord to repair his blighted house. The house was a detriment to the surrounding neighborhood with its burned roof, garbage-filled lawn, and extensive drug activity. As shown in Figures 5.2 and 5.3, the landlord successfully repaired the house, eliminating its negative effect on the neighborhood.¹³

Figure 5.3: Before NAP



Source: Michael D. Russell, Assistant Wayne County Cooperation Counsel, November 30, 2007.

Figure 5.4: After NAP



DETROIT, MI

Bagley Housing Association

Bagley Housing Association worked with NAP to acquire key properties on 17th Street in the Hubbard-Richard neighborhood in Southwest Detroit. One property owner held several abandoned houses on 17th and 18th Streets, which Bagley wished to remediate. NAP stepped in and filed a lawsuit to force the owner to take action. The owner relinquished four properties to the county, and Bagley purchased these houses through a county auction. Bagley demolished three of the structures and facilitated the rehabilitation of one.¹⁴

Corporation Counsel asks the Wayne County Circuit Court for title to the property. After the court awards the property title, Wayne County Corporation Counsel sells the property through auction and negotiates a contract with the new owner to redevelop the property within an established period.¹⁵

RESIDENTS, NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS, and CDCs, may start the NAP process by taking the following steps:

- **Identify houses that qualify for NAP.** By using Figure 5.2, stakeholders can identify houses in their neighborhood that qualify under NAP's nuisance criteria.
- **Report the nuisance.** After determining which houses meet NAP's criteria, a neighborhood organization could contact NAP's Nuisance Abatement Team at (313) 224-5757 or info@fixitupwaynecounty.org to ask them to come to the neighborhood to perform an inspection of the properties.

CDCs or **NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS** could partner with NAP to develop neighborhood-wide approaches to expedite the handling of nuisance properties. Representatives from NAP and CDCs could identify vacant houses that qualify for NAP throughout the neighborhood.

Also, a CDC could work with NAP to obtain NAP houses in their neighborhood. After NAP obtains the title for a nuisance property, a CDC could buy the property from NAP. The Bagley Housing Association took this approach and acquired four houses in the Hubbard-Richard Neighborhood of Detroit (see case studies in sidebar).¹⁶

STRATEGY 3: USE THE WAYNE COUNTY LAND BANK AUTHORITY

The Wayne County Land Bank was founded in 2006 and has the power to hold properties within Wayne County for future redevelopment.¹⁷ The Wayne County Land Bank can purchase and hold properties for **NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS** or **CDCs** in Detroit. Currently, the Wayne County Land Bank is creating and developing several new programs that may help nonprofits and CDCs to gain control of key properties. Two of the programs currently in use are Project SAVED and TURBO.

- **Participate in Project SAVED.** The Wayne County Land Bank sells its properties to CDCs through Project SAVED. Project SAVED aims to encourage reuse of tax-reverted properties for affordable housing that can revitalize a neighborhood and

promote homeownership. After purchasing properties from the Wayne County Land Bank, CDCs will rehabilitate and sell or rent the houses to low and moderate income households.¹⁸

- **Ask the Wayne County Land Bank to purchase and hold properties for CDCs.** After the State of Michigan and the City of Detroit, Wayne County has the right of first refusal for tax-foreclosed properties before the opening of the treasurer's tax foreclosure auction. In order to gain control of key properties, CDCs could ask the Wayne County Land Bank to purchase their desired properties and sell them to the CDCs at nominal rates.
- **Consider using the TURBO Program.** The Wayne County Land Bank's TURBO (Transforming Underdeveloped Residential & Business Opportunities) program is a subsidy program to encourage development and rehabilitation within Wayne County. The TURBO program encourages CDCs, non-profit organizations, private investors, developers, and private homeowners to develop and rehabilitate their properties.¹⁹ Depending on the type of development, the program may offer up to a 100% property tax exemption for one year and a 50% rebate on property taxes for the next five years to property owners who invest in rehabilitating a property within Wayne County.²⁰ Details about how a CDC or nonprofit housing corporation could use TURBO are not yet entirely clear, as the program was recently established.

Obtaining control of vacant houses helps stabilize a neighborhood. However, getting vacant houses reoccupied requires additional strategies that are discussed in Chapter 6.

Notes

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- 5 Frank Ford, "Assessing the Value of Vacant or Abandoned Property," National Vacant Property Campaign Conference, Pittsburgh, PA, 1, 24 Sept. 2007, 13 Dec. 2007, http://www.vacantproperties.org/conf/3B_Assessing%20Value.pdf
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- 11 *Nuisance Abatement Program PROGRESS REPORT*, Handout, Wayne County Nuisance Abatement Program, 13 Nov. 2007.
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CHAPTER 6

Getting the Houses Reoccupied

Getting houses reoccupied reinforces neighborhood strengths, stops the deterioration of houses, and promotes reinvestment in a neighborhood. In order to facilitate the reoccupation of vacant houses, neighborhood organizations could pursue two different neighborhood-based strategies. The first strategy focuses on repairing vacant houses for new owners, while the second strategy focuses on how a neighborhood organization could create a marketing campaign to attract new homebuyers.

STRATEGY I: REPAIR VACANT HOUSES

Getting new homeowners or renters to occupy vacant houses can often prevent or halt deterioration of the house's physical condition. Home repair programs offer an opportunity for CDCs and neighborhood organizations to act quickly and effectively on vacant houses in need of repair (Chapter 10 further explores strategies for rehabilitating houses).

Although neighborhood organizations and CDCs may have limited funding for repair of vacant houses, CDCs could form relationships and partnerships with private developers who could purchase houses either from CDCs or others, - perform repairs, and sell the vacant houses to make a profit. Building relationships with private developers through coordinating the repair of vacant houses could provide the foundation for the developer and CDC to work together in the future to repair other vacant houses in the neighborhood.

A CDC could take the following steps to encourage and facilitate the repair of homes in a neighborhood by working with a developer:

- **Obtain control of vacant houses.** In order to encourage developers to work on vacant houses, a CDC could obtain site control. A CDC would then transfer ownership of the vacant house to a private developer for redevelopment, acting as a facilitator. By granting a developer control of the house, a CDC still acts as a facilitator of rehabilitation but avoids the responsibilities of

repairing the vacant house and ensuring that the house will be suitable for new occupants after the repairs are finished (see case study in sidebar on following page).

- **Build on existing relationships.** CDCs that already have worked with developers to repair and sell houses could refer other CDCs to these developers.

Developers could also use their expertise to purchase vacant houses on their own, repair them, and resell them, a process often called "flipping houses." Many interested buyers may seek to buy vacant houses for a low price and make needed repairs before reselling them for a profit. Although Maple Heights, an inner ring suburb of Cleveland, has a large number of vacant houses, people are interested in "flipping" repaired vacant houses (see case study in sidebar on following page). Potential developers use this type of "flipping" as an opportunity to repair a house and reinvest in a neighborhood that has a number of houses in fair condition that could be repaired.

A CDC could use the following programs as an alternative to repairing homes with a developer:

- **Create a repair bank to harness the skills of neighborhood residents for house repair.** A repair bank brings together neighborhood residents with homebuilding or rehabilitation experience to provide services for CDCs, neighborhood organizations, and residents. The repair bank contacts could be available to residents who need assistance with repair on vacant houses in their neighborhood. CDCs could provide small amounts of funding to pay for repairs using the services from the repair bank.
- **Adapt Habitat for Humanity's "Blitz Build" model for repairing houses.** Habitat for Humanity's Blitz Build offers another model for repairing houses. Blitz Build is a program where Habitat for Humanity builds 10 to 12 homes in one neighborhood over the course of a week.² This technique could be modified so that a team of workers could repair 10 to 12 houses near each

CLEVELAND, OH

Slavic Village Development Corporation

Slavic Village Development Corporation (SVDC) works with private developers to repair or rehabilitate vacant houses in the neighborhood. SVDC works with developers who have a track record in the neighborhood and whose work they trust. Then SVDC sells vacant houses to private developers at cost, who in turn repair the houses and sell them to new owners. SVDC receives a developer's fee for brokering the deal and selling the house to the developer. Although the developers sell the houses, the developer may request SVDC's help with marketing. Additionally, SVDC ensures that developers use all city incentives available to assist with the repair and rehabilitation of the vacant house. In this situation, SVDC does not complete any repairs but instead relies on the private developer to purchase houses and make any necessary repairs for resale.³

MAPLE HEIGHTS, OH

Repair "flipper"

In Maple Heights, Ohio, people interested in repairing homes are purchasing mortgage foreclosed homes, and repairing and reselling them to make a small profit. These investors purchase houses at Cuyahoga County auctions for reduced prices and repair the houses, making them habitable and available for resale. One investor in Maple Heights bought a home for \$65,000 and planned to resell it for \$110,000, making a profit between \$10,000 and \$20,000 after factoring in the cost of repair.⁴

other all at once. A CDC could organize this effort and ask for neighborhood organizations and residents to volunteer and recommend houses for repair.

Demolition of vacant houses

Some vacant houses may be beyond repair. CDCs could identify vacant houses that are beyond repair and ask the city to demolish them. To get the City of Detroit to demolish a vacant house, a CDC could call the Building and Safety Engineering Department at (313) 224-2733 to place the house on the demolition list or to check the status of a property on the list.⁵

STRATEGY 2: CREATE A NEIGHBORHOOD MARKETING CAMPAIGN

A marketing plan determines a neighborhood's strengths by identifying a market segment for a particular community and implements a plan that communicates these strengths to future residents. An effective marketing plan serves as a road map that guides the work of those involved in the process by prioritizing activities that will have the greatest impact for the smallest investment of time and money.⁶

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS and **CDCs** often lead efforts to develop and implement a neighborhood marketing plan, as shown in Table 6.1.

Marketing a neighborhood helps establish its uniqueness, identify potentially interested homebuyers, and emphasize the value of the neighborhood.⁷ The following four phases outline the steps a CDC or neighborhood organization could take to develop and implement a successful neighborhood marketing plan.⁸

- **Organize Neighborhood Stakeholder Efforts.** The first phase requires the establishment of a neighborhood marketing committee. A neighborhood marketing committee could be responsible for organizing the efforts of local residents to promote their neighborhood. Although marketing a neighborhood may seem unrealistic for residents living in an area with significant numbers of vacant houses, many residents possess the skills and creative ability needed for effective marketing. For example, potential committee members might include a teenager with artistic ability, a block club member skilled at event planning, or a senior citizen with extensive knowledge about the history of the neighborhood. Once created, a marketing committee can create a neighborhood profile, establish a community vision, and locate partners who might help the

Table 6.1: Characteristics of the Lead Organization in a Neighborhood Marketing Campaign

Marketing Campaign Lead Organization	
Description	Can be either a new or existing organization that widened its scope. Examples include a CDC or a neighborhood organization. The organization implements specific aspects of the strategy and manages the overall process.
Purpose	Acts as the “quarterback” and “cheerleader” for strategy/implementation.
Responsibilities	Insures that implementation of the marketing plan continues. Identifies a leader to deal with outside criticism. Sets standards for style, appearance, and quality of materials.
Requires	Strong leader. Political willingness for one entity to have influence or control over the marketing process, and the ability to bring people together

Source: Christopher Leinberger. Fannie Mae Neighborhood Planning Cards. Classroom Handout. Urban and Regional Planning Program, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI. 2007.

committee reach its goals and contribute their skills or organizational resources. Some possible partners include neighborhood churches, schools, and businesses.

- **Determine neighborhood strengths.** A marketing committee should next determine a neighborhood’s strengths. Every neighborhood possesses appealing qualities. Determining a neighborhood’s strengths refocuses attention on neighborhood assets and uses the following steps.
 - o **Define the neighborhood.** Boundaries are important for identifying a neighborhood. Boundaries help focus the committee’s efforts, make data collection possible, and provide the basis for neighborhood identity. Streets, well-known landmarks, historic attributes, zip codes, or census tracts can serve as boundaries or neighborhood identifiers.
 - o **Create a neighborhood profile.** Important questions for a neighborhood profile to address include:

- How many people are in the neighborhood, and how has that number changed over time? What are the race and age distributions, and how have they changed?
- What type of housing is available in the neighborhood?
- What schools are located in the neighborhood?
- Are after-school programs available for children?
- What are the major employers in or near the neighborhood?
- What stores or businesses are close to the neighborhood?⁹

While numbers help measure certain aspects of the neighborhood, a committee should consider other sources to create a more vivid account of the neighborhood. Personal interviews, neighborhood surveys, and historical research can help the committee identify neighborhood assets. For example, teenagers living in the North End of Detroit interviewed senior citizens to help the Vanguard Community Development Corporation create a history of the neighborhood. This information helped create promotional materials to publicize the organization and their new housing development.

- **Identify people who might like the neighborhood.** When individuals evaluate a potential neighborhood, they assess its strengths and weaknesses. Those with a high tolerance for risk are more likely to select a neighborhood that is experiencing decline than those with a lower tolerance. According to neighborhood marketing consultant Marcia Nedland, a small group of individuals would more likely move into a neighborhood like MorningSide because they value being different.¹⁰ These individuals are often considered innovators who “forge the trail” for others and create a neighborhood renaissance. These people are less concerned with the current state of the neighborhood because they believe it will improve. More importantly, they contribute to making what they envision a reality by volunteering their skills and talents to improve the condition of their neighborhood. Innovators are attracted to a particular neighborhood for many reasons. Some may have grown up in the neighborhood, have rented in the neighborhood for several years earlier, or value the neighborhood for its convenience or unique architecture.
- **Create key strategies.**¹¹ Neighborhood marketing involves matching the proper strategy to the correct audience in order to bring a desired response. For example, a press release could announce a

HOUSTON, TX

Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation

Fifth Ward is the lowest-income neighborhood in Houston. The neighborhood experienced decline and disinvestment for over 20 years and was described by *Texas Monthly* as “Texas’ toughest, proudest, baddest ghetto.”¹² However, high poverty and violent crime rates do not reflect the rich cultural history of the neighborhood.

In 1989, Fifth Ward residents, civic leaders and business partners organized Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation to foster “collaborative holistic community development, economic revitalization, safety, and beautification.”¹³ In addition, Fifth Ward CRC uses marketing strategies to overcome the negative perception of the neighborhood and to promote economic development initiatives, new housing developments, and neighborhood activism.

Fifth Ward CRC creates and disseminates press releases and electronic newsletters through its website. This helps to overcome the negative perception of the Fifth Ward by repositioning it as a neighborhood where good things happen.

In addition to seminars to educate residents about buying a home, the non-profit organizes an annual festival to promote the neighborhood. Activities include a kid’s zone with a moonwalk, face painting, train ride, live entertainment, retail exhibits, social service exhibits, giveaways, and prizes.

beautification contest and help combat the effects of a story about vacant houses that appeared in the local newspaper. Other strategies may include:

- o Write press releases and letters to the editor
 - o Write articles for newspapers
 - o Inviting press and civic leaders to events
 - o Conduct neighborhood tours to showcase for-sale properties
 - o Have an awards banquet
 - o Partner with local businesses to host a community clean-up event
 - o List available homes for sale on a non-profit’s website
 - o Create a blog or email group to notify people about neighborhood events and achievements
- **Implement a persuasive and creative campaign.** In the final phase, the committee develops promotional materials that highlight key neighborhood facts. Residents, business owners, volunteers, funders, and neighborhood “friends” can help distribute marketing materials on behalf of the committee. In addition, these people can serve as neighborhood ambassadors to speak with potential residents about their experience living or working in the neighborhood.

Part of the above strategies involves putting this information in a format that can be marketed and distributed. Marketing materials are tools to attract a target population. Investing a significant amount of time developing eye-catching, high-quality, and persuasive materials can provide dividends. Key marketing materials can include:

- **Brochure:** A brochure creates interest, leaves a positive first impression, and encourages further action by prospective investors or residents. A marketing brochure should:
 - o Incorporate neighborhood slogan or theme
 - o Display appealing visual images of homes and other community assets
 - o Contain factual and accurate information regarding neighborhood resources, schools, and quality of life
 - o Promote strengths identified by community stakeholders
 - o Include committee contact information
- **Neighborhood profile:** A neighborhood profile provides a detailed picture of the neighborhood’s potential. The neighborhood profile should:
 - o Incorporate pictures, graphs, and maps to illustrate significant neighborhood assets
 - o Showcase testimonials from long-time residents, successful entrepreneurs, new residents or respected leaders
 - o Detail positive developments or trends within the neighborhood

- **Website:** A website enables interested homebuyers to access information and allows a larger audience to learn about the neighborhood. A website should:
 - o Include current contact information and data for neighborhood organizations
 - o Present key information in an accessible manner
 - o Illustrate the positive aspects of the neighborhood by showing pictures of quality housing stock and friendly neighbors
 - o Provide links to other significant organizations in the area such as nonprofit organizations, schools, government offices, hospitals, and volunteer organizations

After the marketing materials are created, implementation of these strategies can begin. A lead implementation organization ensures that neighborhood enthusiasm and commitment help a neighborhood vision become a reality. The marketing efforts of the Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation (see case study in sidebar on previous page) offer an example of an effective neighborhood-based marketing campaign.

A marketing campaign can highlight the many assets of a neighborhood and encourage future homebuyers to invest in the neighborhood. Each neighborhood offers a unique set of assets that could potentially attract homebuyers if organizations can publicize these assets.

Strategies to get vacant houses reoccupied offer an array of ways that residents, block clubs, neighborhood organizations, and CDCs can address such properties. The application in Detroit's MorningSide neighborhood of strategies to keep houses occupied, prevent damage to vacant houses, gain control of key properties, and get houses reoccupied is the focus of the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 "Home Builders Blitz Fact Sheet," Habitat for Humanity, 12 Dec. 2007, http://www.habitat.org/buildersblitz/fact_sheet.aspx.
- 2 "Home Builders Blitz Fact Sheet."
- 3 Stace Pugh, Housing Director, Slavic Village Development Corporation, personal interview, 1 Dec. 2007.
- 4 "Rehabbers Cash in on Foreclosure Wave," *The Associated Press*, 2 Dec. 2007, <http://www.msnbc.com/id/22068520/>.
- 5 City of Detroit, "Buildings and Safety Engineering Department frequently asked questions," 12 Dec. 2007, <http://www.ci.detroit.mi.us/bsed/faqs.htm>.
- 6 Nancy Beck and Lindley Higgins, "Building

Neighborhoods of Choice: A Workbook on Marketing Neighborhoods and Affordable Housing," Local Initiatives Support Corporation, 2001, 1, 12 Dec. 2007, <http://www.lisc.org/content/publications/detail/905/>.

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8 Beck & Higgins, 17.

9 Beck & Higgins, 17.

10 Marcia Nedland, "Ten Tricks for Marketing Neighborhoods as Places of Choice," 23 Dec. 2007, <http://www.fallcreekconsultants.com/documents/Top%20Ten%20Neighborhood%20Marketing%20Principles.pdf>.

11 Beck & Higgins, 2.

12 Celine Thomasson, "Houston: Where Both the Challenges and Prospects are Larger Than Life," *Bright Ideas*, 25, Spring 2004, 12 Dec. 2007, http://www.nw.org/network/pubs/brightIdeas/documents/mykindoftown_000.pdf.

13 Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation, "About Us Page," 12 Dec. 2007, <http://fifthwardcrrc.fifthwardhouston.org/en/cms/?187>.

CHAPTER 7

Addressing Vacant Houses in MorningSide

This chapter applies the strategies discussed earlier in the manual to a 26-block section of the 190-block MorningSide neighborhood on Detroit’s eastside as shown in Figure 7.1. This portion of MorningSide represents a cross-section of the neighborhood’s housing. While MorningSide is a unique neighborhood, it provides an example of how to apply strategies in neighborhoods throughout Detroit. An analysis of MorningSide’s vacant housing begins with the neighborhood’s history and population characteristics.

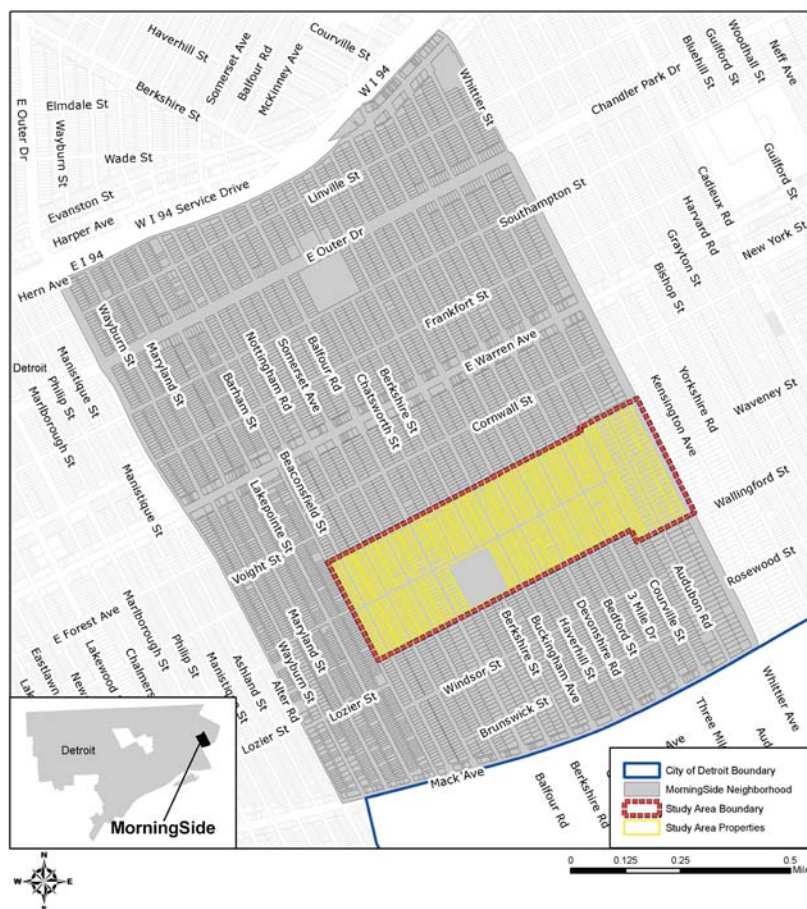
The residential platting of the future MorningSide began after the area was annexed by the fast-growing city of Detroit in April 1917. Housing development began in the late 1920s and lasted through the early 1930s. By the early 1950s Morningside was fully developed, with a diverse housing stock ranging from modest wood frame homes to brick Tudor and Four Corner styles.¹

In the late 1970s MorningSide and other eastside neighborhoods began experiencing a rise in crime, as many longtime residents began to move out of the area. Neighborhood organizations, including the Neighborhood East Area Residents (NEAR), began forming to counter crime and increased blight.²

NEAR was renamed the MorningSide community organization—commonly known as MorningSide—in 1995. The organization seeks to conserve the neighborhood and prevent residential blight. Most neighborhood residents are active in maintaining their homes, and MorningSide organizes an annual beautification program that honors residents whose homes are exceptionally well maintained.

The community development corporation U-SNAP-BAC (United Streets Networking and Planning Building a Community) was founded in 1987 by seven eastside block clubs and neighborhoods. The MorningSide community organization joined U-SNAP-BAC in 1996.³ Since 1995 U-SNAP-BAC has built over 130 single-family homes and townhouses in the western part of MorningSide and plans to build over 100 more homes on Maryland, Lakepointe and Barham streets, southeast of Warren.⁴

Figure 7.1: MorningSide Neighborhood and Study Area



Source: City of Detroit Planning & Development Department

Changes in the population and housing⁵

In 2000 MorningSide's population was 16,547, an increase from 15,713 people in 1990. As shown in Table 7.1, this increase of 5% contrasted with Detroit's overall population decline of 7% between 1990 and 2000. Ninety percent of the residents were African American in 2000. In 2000 there were 4,905 households in MorningSide, and the median household income was \$36,933 in 1999.

Census statistics also display some negative trends in MorningSide. The rate of poverty increased between 1989 and 1999, from 14.1% to 18.3%. These poverty rates are much lower than the citywide poverty rate of 26.1% in 1999 and 32% in 1989. The poverty rate likely has increased since 1999, as metropolitan Detroit's economy is experiencing a period of decline. The housing vacancy rate also increased, rising from 6.2% in 1990 to 7.9% in 2000, and has risen sharply since, as mortgage foreclosures have affected MorningSide significantly.

Any approach to handling vacant houses would involve U-SNAP-BAC and the MorningSide community organization. Efforts would also build on the work of neighborhood block clubs and individuals, who are often the first to know of the impact of vacant houses on the neighborhood.

An effort to turn vacant houses into homes requires an assessment of the MorningSide area. Using the cross-section of MorningSide as representative, the next section examines the current conditions of blocks and vacant houses. This analysis helps to ground the strategies that follow in the context of the neighborhood.

Table 7.1: MorningSide Population and Housing Changes, 1990-2000

	MorningSide 1990 Census	City of Detroit 1990 Census	MorningSide 2000 Census	City of Detroit 2000 Census
Population	15,713	1,027,974	16,547	951,270
% of African-American population	71%	75.6%	90%	81.6%
% individuals in poverty	14.1%	32.0%	18.3%	26.%
Housing vacancy rate	6.2%	NA	7.9%	10.3%
Number of Households	4,606	374,057	4,705	336,428
Median Household Income	\$27,120	\$25,300	\$35,933	\$29,526

Source: 1990 and 2000 United States Census

Block condition and vacant house assessment

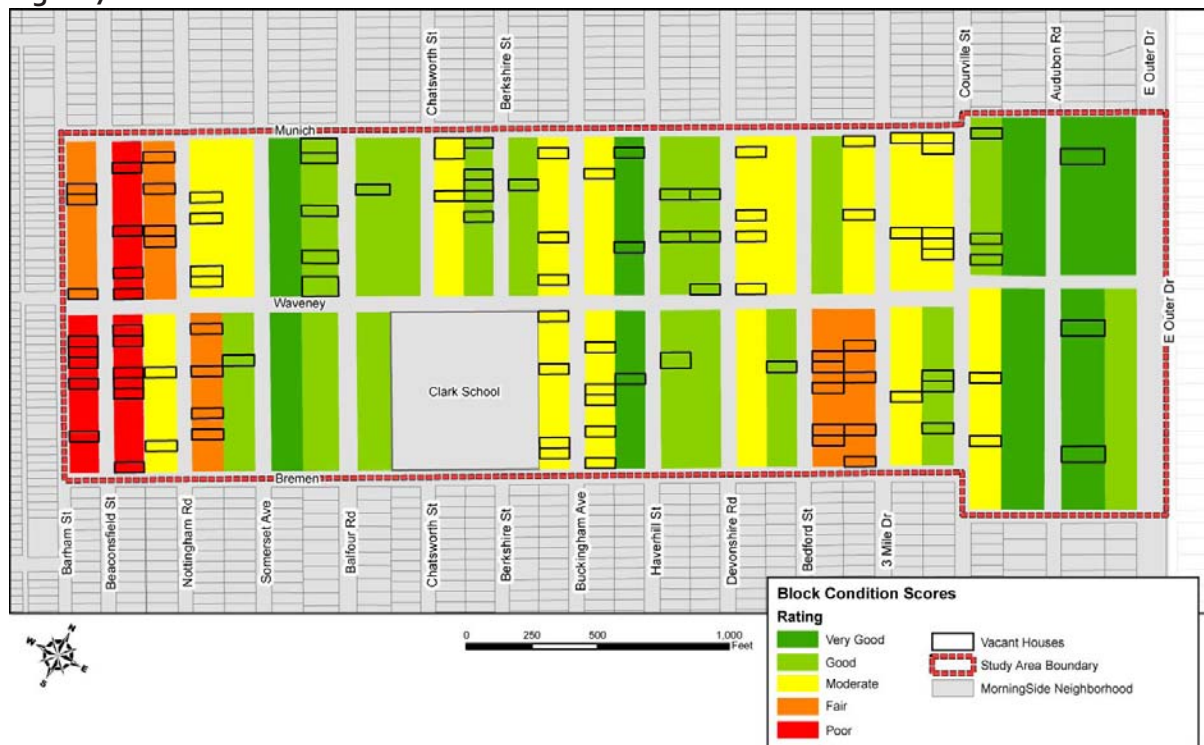
As discussed in Chapter 2, a block condition survey can be used to assess the exterior appearance of a block. Block condition assessment is important in determining what strategies to implement for the vacant houses on the block. For example, a vacant house on a block with good conditions may require different strategies than on a block with poor conditions.

As shown in Figure 7.2, block conditions in MorningSide improve from west to east. The two streets located on the west side of the analysis area (Beaconsfield and Nottingham) ranged from poor to moderate condition, as these blocks had many vacant houses that had been severely vandalized or had piles of trash dumped on their front lawns. The block conditions for streets further to the east were much better. With the exception of two block faces between Bedford and Three Mile Drive that were in fair condition, the blocks ranged from moderate to very good.

A vacant house assessment looked at the condition of vacant houses. Understanding the conditions of houses in different portions of the study area helps guide redevelopment strategies. An analysis of vacant houses in the MorningSide study area included mapping vacant houses and evaluating their exterior conditions. Figure 7.3 shows the conditions of houses judged to be vacant. Of the 104 houses assessed, 57% are in good condition (59 of 104 houses), 33% are rated fair (34 of 104 houses), 6% are in poor condition (6 of 104 houses), and 4% (5 of 104 houses) need to be demolished. Many of the houses that are in poor condition are located on the western streets of the neighborhood that also exhibit poor block conditions.

Knowledge about block and vacant house conditions help in developing neighborhood-based strategies to handle housing vacancy. The next section will detail the possible ways to implement these strategies in MorningSide.

Figure 7.2: Block Conditions



Source: City of Detroit Planning & Development Department, University of Michigan Urban & Regional Planning Program Field Research, September 2007.

Figure 7.3: Conditions of Vacant Houses



Source: City of Detroit Planning & Development Department, University of Michigan Urban & Regional Planning Program Field Research, September 2007.

STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION IN MORNINGSIDE

This manual provides a variety of strategies that a CDC, community organization, block club, or resident may use to convert vacant properties to assets. The varieties of strategies provide options for different types of houses, blocks, and people. The strategies are not mutually exclusive or sequential. The best approach for a CDC may be to use many strategies at once to achieve more than one goal. The person or organization may best use limited resources by prioritizing houses, blocks, and neighborhood segments. The individual or organization may choose to invest resources in the most troubled blocks or to invest in the better blocks in an attempt to build on their assets. An organization or individual has the best understanding of their priorities. For that reason, these strategies are not laid out by priority; they are laid out according to the goal the strategy accomplishes.

KEEP PROPERTIES OCCUPIED

This section focuses on how **RESIDENTS, BLOCK CLUBS,** the **MORNINGSIDE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION,** and **U-SNAP-BAC** could use the strategies outlined in Chapter 3.

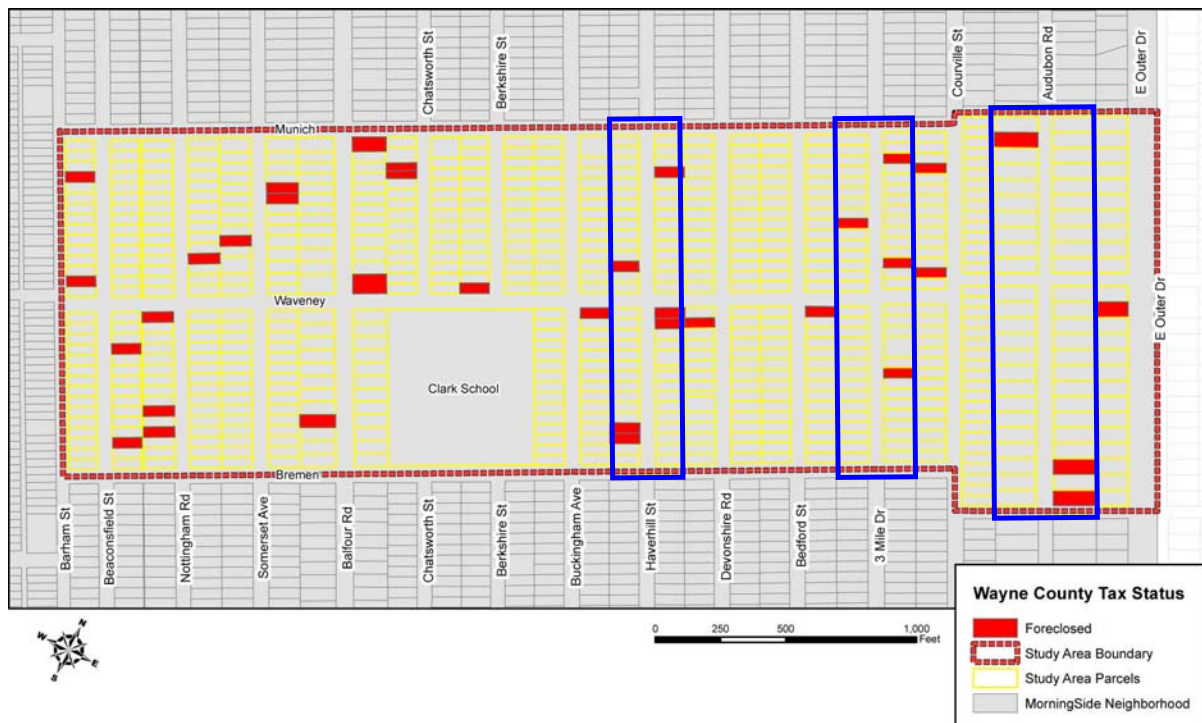
Be an active and watchful neighbor

Figure 7.4 shows occupied houses that are on the Wayne County sheriff's deed foreclosure list. These 36 houses have a high risk of becoming vacant. **MORNINGSIDE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION** or **U-SNAP-BAC** could provide the homeowners or tenants in those houses with information on how to get help with mortgage or tax foreclosure, how to address code violations, or how to stay in their homes for the duration of the foreclosure process.

RESIDENTS of MorningSide can play an active role in preventing vacancy by watching for the warning signs of potential vacancy outlined in Chapter 3. Residents on Haverhill, 3 Mile, and Audubon could reinforce the strength of their blocks by talking to their neighbors and informing them that organizations like U-SNAP-BAC or the MorningSide community organization may be able to help if a neighbor is facing a situation that may result in leaving his or her home.

These blocks on Haverhill, 3 Mile, and Audubon are in good to fair condition with few existing vacancies, and keeping homes occupied can help preserve and improve the conditions of the block by ensuring that homeowners continue to care for and live in their houses, even if they experience foreclosure.

Figure 7.4: Potential Housing Vacancies



Source: City of Detroit Planning & Development Department; University of Michigan Urban & Regional Planning Program Field Research, October 2007; "Search our database of Wayne foreclosures," *Detroit Free Press*, 29 November 2007, <http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071123/NEWS02/71124002>, based on Wayne County sheriff's deed foreclosure list data.

Empower homeowners to remain in their homes

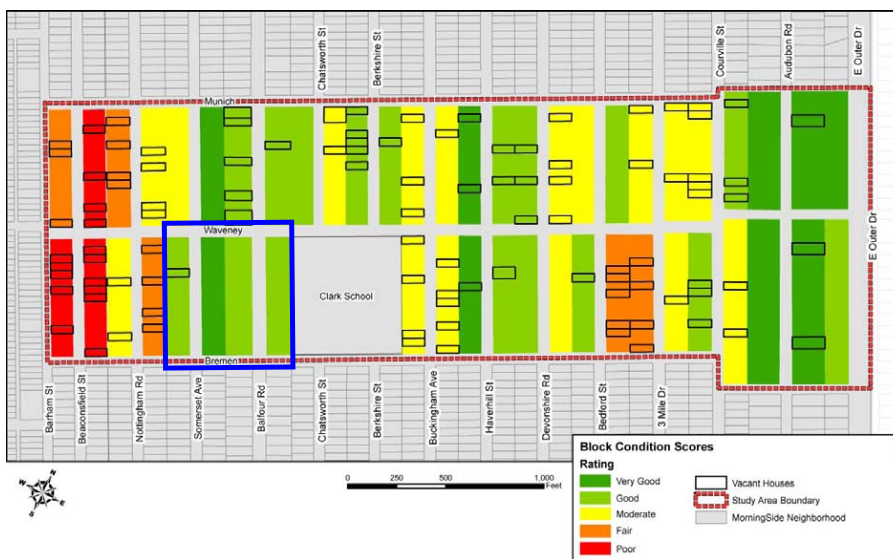
Streets like Somerset and Balfour shown in Figure 7.5 have few or no vacancies and very good block conditions. **RESIDENTS** and the **MORNINGSIDE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION** could encourage homeowners to stay in their homes if they are facing foreclosure to help preserve the houses on these blocks. Residents here could use the Wayne County Property Tax Administration System (<http://www.waynecounty.com/PTA/Default.asp>) to look up a home they fear may be experiencing tax foreclosure and then inform MorningSide community organization about the situation. MorningSide community organization could then contact that neighbor and inform the owner or tenant that he or she can stay in the home after foreclosure, as discussed in Chapter 3.

If a resident on Somerset or Balfour remains in his or her home as long as possible, the house could get reoccupied more quickly because the block conditions are very good and the house would likely need less repairs than if the house sat unoccupied for an extended period of time. Therefore, the house could more likely be sold.

Launch an information campaign about vacant houses

U-SNAP-BAC could form a partnership with **MORNINGSIDE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION** to organize an information campaign. **U-SNAP-BAC** could work with MorningSide community organization to hold a neighborhood-wide meeting to discuss the issues

Figure 7.5: Areas With Few Vacant Houses



Source: City of Detroit Planning & Development Department; University of Michigan Urban & Regional Planning Program Field Research, September 2007.

behind impending vacancies and dispense educational material. In addition, **U-SNAP-BAC** could publish information through their own MorningSide newsletter that could discuss how to be an active and watchful neighbor (see Chapter 3).

U-SNAP-BAC could also contact DTE, the City of Detroit Finance Department, or the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department to work with them to dispense mailings.

PREVENT DAMAGE TO VACANT HOUSES

This section details how **RESIDENTS**, **BLOCK CLUBS**, the **MORNINGSIDE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION**, and **U-SNAP-BAC** could implement the strategies in Chapter 4.

Distribute information about what to do if living next to a vacant house

In addition to providing information to neighbors about how to prevent vacancies, **U-SNAP-BAC** and the **MORNINGSIDE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION** can also distribute information about what to do if vacant houses already exist on the block. For example, **U-SNAP-BAC** could provide information about how block clubs could start a block patrol, how residents could reduce the signs of vacancy, and how residents could report vacant houses to the City of Detroit and **U-SNAP-BAC**. The MorningSide community organization could include this information in the neighborhood newsletter or at a neighborhood meeting.

Maintain exterior of houses

The **MORNINGSIDE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION**, **BLOCK CLUBS**, or **RESIDENTS** could help maintain the exterior of vacant houses in several ways. For example, MorningSide community organization, or the block club or residents on Devonshire, Audubon, or Courville could reduce the appearance of vacancy for the houses in good condition (in Figures 7.6 through 7.11) by mowing the lawn, putting up seasonal decorations, and removing flyers from the door.

Figure 7.6: 4127 Courville

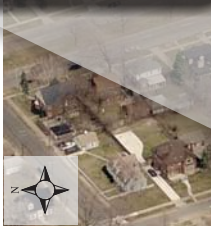


Source: <http://maps.live.com/>

Figure 7.7: Courville Between Waveney & Bremen



Figure 7.8: 4240 Audubon



Source: <http://maps.live.com/>

Figure 7.9: Audubon Between Waveney & Wallingford



Figure 7.10: 4345 Devonshire



Source: <http://maps.live.com/>

Figure 7.11: Devonshire Between Munich & Waveney



Block clubs on these streets could maintain houses so they continue to appear occupied. MorningSide community organization could work with block clubs to help organize volunteers who could perform some of the tasks suggested in Chapter 4 if residents on the block cannot perform them.

This type of maintenance is appropriate for these houses because they are in very good condition and situated on blocks in good to very good condition. Boarding these houses may not be desirable because it may diminish the appearance of a well kept block by communicating that the houses are vacant.

Understandably, some blocks in MorningSide do have boarded houses. These blocks could also benefit from efforts that lessen the visual impact of vacancy. For example, **MORNINGSIDE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION** or the **BLOCK CLUB** on Beaconsfield could organize to paint murals on the boarded houses on this block (see Figure 7.12). Murals may help deter further vandalism on this block that has a number of vandalized houses because murals may convey that the house is being watched and cared for. A block club could work with MorningSide community organization to purchase supplies and recruit volunteers for this task.

BLOCK CLUBS on stronger blocks that have boarded houses, such as Three Mile Drive, may wish to paint boards to “blend” them into the house. The block club could buy paint to match the house and find a volunteer on the block to paint the boards. Figures 7.14 and 7.15 show how blending can reduce the appearance of vacancy on a house on Three Mile Drive.

Figure 7.12: 4158 Beaconsfield Could be Painted with a Mural



Figure 7.13: 4158 Beaconsfield in its Setting on a Block in Poor Condition



Source: <http://maps.live.com/>

Increase security of a vacant house

Some vacant houses in MorningSide require boarding in order to secure them. This strategy is necessary for houses in good condition on blocks that have a number of vacant, open, and dangerous (VOD) houses. The house at 4129 Beaconsfield shown in Figures 7.16 and 7.17 is in good condition, but several of the surrounding houses are vacant, open, and dangerous. U-SNAP-BAC could designate a staff member to contact the owner of this house, and if the owner does not or cannot take action to board the house, U-SNAP-BAC could request permission to board it.

As an alternative to boarding, **BLOCK CLUBS** could create a security task force to monitor houses on blocks with no boarded houses. For example, residents on Audubon, a block in very good condition (Figure 7.20), could organize to patrol their block to watch houses they know are vacant. If boarded by their owners or U-SNAP-BAC, the houses at 4140 and 4240 Audubon (Figures 7.18 and 7.19) may degrade the block. Residents on this block could organize a meeting and assign houses to watch through patrol. Neighbors on Audubon could “adopt” these houses under their watch to secure them without boarding.

Figure 7.14: 4414 Three Mile (before)



Figure 7.15: 4414 Three Mile (after)



Figure 7.16: 4129 Beaconsfield



Figure 7.17: Beaconsfield Between Waveny & Bremen



Source: <http://maps.live.com/>

Figure 7.18: 4240 Audubon



Figure 7.19: 4140 Audubon



Figure 7.20: Audubon Between Waveney & Wallingford



Source: <http://maps.live.com/>

OBTAIN CONTROL OF KEY PROPERTIES

This section focuses on how **RESIDENTS**, **BLOCK CLUBS**, **MORNINGSIDE** and **U-SNAP-BAC** could use the strategies outlined in Chapter 5 to obtain control of key properties in the MorningSide neighborhood.

Use nuisance abatement
U-SNAP-BAC, the **MORNINGSIDE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION**, **BLOCK CLUBS** and **RESIDENTS** may report vacant houses to the Wayne County Nuisance Abatement Program (NAP), as discussed in Chapter 5. In MorningSide an effective strategy would be to recommend houses in poor condition for inclusion in the program (see Table 7.2). U-SNAP-BAC may choose the Beaconsfield houses shown in Figures 7.22 to 7.23 first, because they are located on a block with poor conditions (Figure 7.13). If these properties were improved or demolished through the NAP program, they could stabilize a declining block.

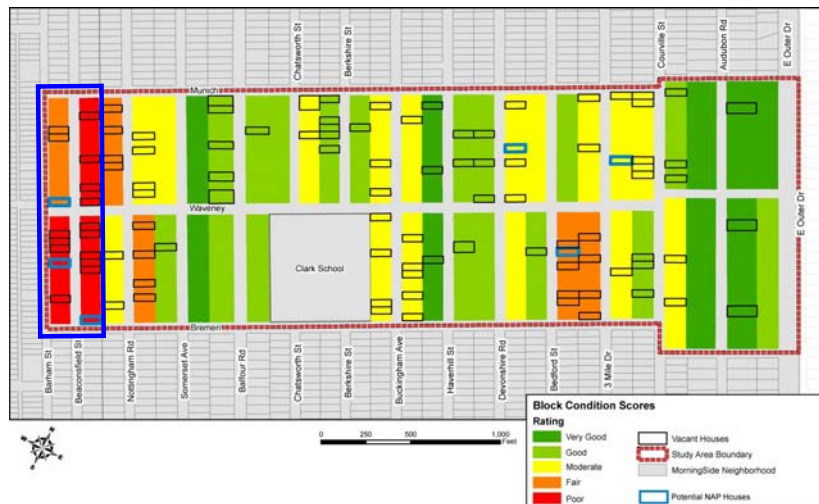
Table 7.2: Potential NAP houses

#	Street	Condition	Taxpayer
4342	3 Mile	Poor	GORDON, LASHONDA
4303	Beaconsfield	Poor	DIAZ, MANNY
4167	Beaconsfield	Poor	P M S ONE MANAGEMENT CO INC
4102	Beaconsfield	Poor	MERRILLAT, DONALD & CAROL L
4180	Bedford	Poor	BIBLEWAY DELIVERANCE CHURCH
4360	Devonshire	Poor	CLARK, GRACE

Gray shading indicates tax forfeiture or delinquency

Source: Taxpayer information retrieved from Wayne County Tax Database, Oct 2007.

Figure 7.21: Location of Potential NAP Houses



Source: City of Detroit Planning & Development Department; University of Michigan Urban & Regional Planning Program Field Research, October 2007.

Figure 7.22: 4102 Beaconsfield



Figure 7.23: 4303 Beaconsfield



Purchase houses from mortgage companies

By obtaining control of a vacant house through short sale purchase from a bank or mortgage company, **U-SNAP-BAC** may prevent the further deterioration of both the house and the block. Houses on Buckingham and Three Mile, listed in Table 7.3 and shown in Figure 7.24, may offer the best potential for purchase by U-SNAP-BAC because the successful acquisition and sale would help to improve the moderate conditions on these blocks. U-SNAP-BAC may appeal to LISC or Shorebank for acquisition funding.

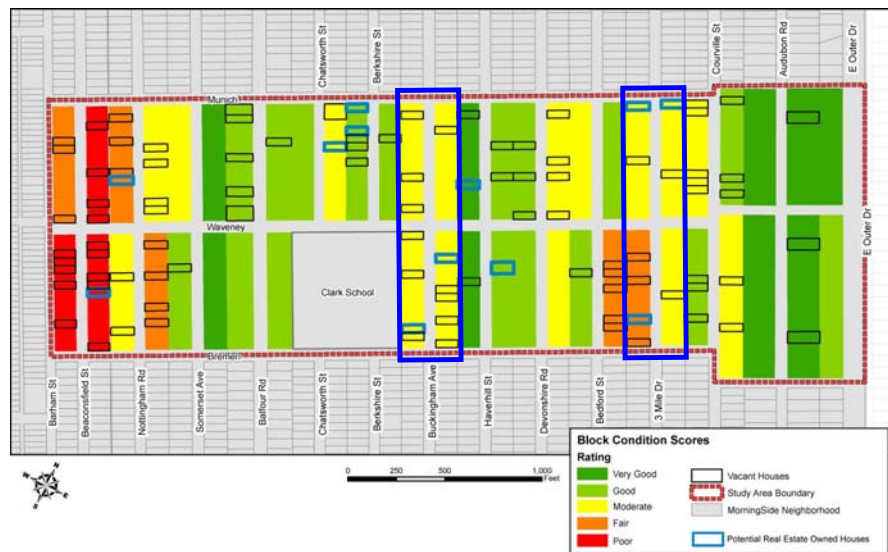
Table 7.3: Potential Short Sale Houses

#	Street	Condition	Taxpayer
4417	3 Mile	Good	WELLS FARGO BANK NA
4127	3 Mile	Fair	US BANK NA ASSOC AS TRUSTEE
4414	3 Mile	Fair	LASALLE BANK NATIONAL ASSOC
4158	Beaconsfield	Fair	DEUTSCHE BANK NATIONAL TRUST CO.
4417	Berkshire	Fair	LASALLE BANK NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
4391	Berkshire	Fair	FEDERAL NATIONAL MORTGAGE ASSOCIATION
4119	Buckingham	Good	WELLS FARGO BANK
4188	Buckingham	Fair	WASHINGTON MUTUAL BANK
4374	Chatsworth	Good	FEDERAL NATIONAL MORTGAGE ASSOC
4184	Haverhill	Good	COUNTRYWIDE HOME LOANS INC
4337	Haverhill	Fair	EMC MORTGAGE CO
4343	Nottingham	Good	CITIBANK NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

Gray shading indicates tax forfeiture or delinquency

Source: Taxpayer information retrieved from Wayne County Tax Database, Oct 2007.

Figure 7.24: Location of Potential Short Sales



Source: City of Detroit Planning & Development Department; University of Michigan Urban & Regional Planning Program Field Research, October 2007.

GET THE HOUSES REOCCUPIED

This section focuses on how the **MORNINGSIDE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION** could use the strategies outlined in Chapter 6 to get houses in their neighborhood reoccupied.

Create a marketing campaign

The **MORNINGSIDE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION** could develop a marketing campaign for the neighborhood to increase its attractiveness to potential homeowners.

The MorningSide community organization could hold resident meetings to generate ideas about the focus of a marketing campaign. Resident involvement is essential for a successful marketing campaign. For example, residents could choose to highlight the neighborhood characteristics and amenities listed in Table 7.4.

A MorningSide marketing campaign could include provisions for advertising available homes, such as the ones pictured in Figures 7.25 through 7.30 on a website developed by the organization.

Rehabilitate Housing

The **MORNINGSIDE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION** and **U-SNAP-BAC** could work with developers to select houses for rehabilitation. U-SNAP-BAC has already worked with numerous developers and agencies to create new housing in Morningside Commons, and could use these relationships to rehabilitate select houses that are under the organization's control or that a developer can obtain. Houses

Figure 7.25: 4388 Audubon



Figure 7.26: 4118 Courville



Figure 7.27: 4175 Bedford



Figure 7.28: 4182 Bedford



Figure 7.29: 4409 Haverhill



Figure 7.30: 4384 Berkshire



Table 7.4: Potential Themes of a MorningSide Marketing Campaign

Positive characteristic	Description
Central location	MorningSide has easy access to the I-94 freeway and downtown Detroit.
Diversity of incomes	Residents of MorningSide are economically diverse.
Unique housing stock	MorningSide has well-built brick homes at affordable prices. Morning Side boasts a large percentage of both single-family homes and duplexes.
Schools in neighborhood	There are three elementary schools within a walkable distance from home.
Shopping	MorningSide's proximity to Grosse Pointe provides numerous shopping opportunities for residents.
New development	New investment and development are occurring in the MorningSide neighborhood. Habitat for Humanity and U-SNAP-BAC are building new homes in MorningSide.

on Buckingham and Three Mile that U-SNAP-BAC selects for short-sales would be ideal candidates for rehabilitation work.

This chapter concludes the manual's neighborhood-based strategies that can be used by residents, block clubs, neighborhood organizations, and CDCs. While these strategies serve as an effective approach to getting vacant houses reoccupied, changes to existing programs, as well as the establishment of new organizations, could complement these efforts. The next major section of the manual discusses some of these possible changes.

Notes

- 1 Patricia S. Painter, *DEAR: A Community History* (Detroit, MI: John F. Kelly, 1981), 4-15; Gene Scott, *Detroit Beginnings: Early Villages and Old Neighborhoods* (Detroit, MI: DRCEA, 2005), 4-13; Oliver Zunz, *Detroit's Neighborhoods: Socio-Ethnic and Land Use Patterns, 1880-1920* (Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 1978), 124-127.
- 2 U-SNAP-BAC, 2 Dec. 2007, <http://www.usnapbac.org>.
- 3 Eric Dueweke, MorningSide resident, personal interview, 9 Dec. 2007.
- 4 R. J. King, "East Detroit Neighborhood to get 3,000-home makeover," *Detroit News*, March 10, 2005.
- 5 Census data for the MorningSide neighborhood were gathered from the 1990 and 2000 Census. Census Tracts 5013, 5014 (Blocks 1, 3, 4), 5018 (Blocks 2, 3), 5019, 5020 covered the MorningSide neighborhood but went beyond the neighborhood in Census Tracts 5014 and 5018. Hence, these neighborhood statistics are close estimates based on share of block groups (See Appendix C for the census tract map of MorningSide).

PART II:

SYSTEM-CHANGING STRATEGIES

Part II of this manual suggests system-changing strategies for residents, neighborhood organizations, and community development corporations (CDCs) to work towards implementing. The sections in Part II consider how to keep homes occupied, how to prevent damage to vacant houses, and how to gain control of key properties and get them reoccupied. These strategies are long term because new laws or ordinances may be required, no program or practice already exists, or organizations may need to decide to build capacity in new areas.

CHAPTER 8

Create an Early Warning System to Help Keep Houses Occupied

Some efforts to keep properties occupied require extensive resources and time. In the long term, neighborhoods could benefit from an information system that could indicate signs that a house may become vacant. By using the warning signs tracked in an information system, a CDC, neighborhood organizations, and residents could intervene more quickly and possibly prevent a vacancy from occurring.

A property information system stores data about properties within a city or metropolitan region and can serve a number of different functions. In order to prevent vacancies and keep houses occupied, a property information system would primarily serve as an early warning system. An early warning system could aid CDCs and neighborhood organizations in targeting houses that show signs that vacancy may be imminent and in tailoring their interventions when these signs appear in a neighborhood if they know the type and location of distress signs.¹

Components of an early warning system

Disinvestment in a neighborhood often precedes vacancies and abandonment. An early warning system would include indicators of disinvestment.² By having this information, neighborhood residents, CDCs, and neighborhood organizations could intervene when specific houses are in distress. An early warning system flags distress indicators such as:

- Property tax payment history
- Number of code violations
- Number and type of liens placed on a property, including a total amount owed
- Stop mail/mail forwarding requests
- Utility shut-offs³

What can an early warning system do?

A number of programs and resources exist to help homeowners stay in their homes. If the early warning system flags a property in a neighborhood with one

Table 8.1: Possible Sources of Vacancy Indicators in Detroit

Data Type	Data Source
Ownership information	Wayne County Register of Deeds
Property tax information	Wayne County Treasurer's Office City of Detroit Finance Department
Code violations	City of Detroit Building and Safety Engineering Department Department of Environmental Affairs City of Detroit Environmental Health and Safety of the Health and Wellness Department Police Department Neighborhood City Halls
Recorded property liens	Wayne County Register of Deeds
Utility shut-offs	DTE Energy City of Detroit Water and Sewerage Department
Stop mail/mail forwarding requests	U.S. Postal Service

Source: Adapted from Cleveland at the Crossroads: Turning Abandonment into Opportunity⁴

LOS ANGELES, CA

Neighborhood Knowledge LA

Neighborhood Knowledge Los Angeles (NKLA) began at the University of California – Los Angeles' Advanced Policy Institute.⁵ Researchers developed the system to be an early warning system for Los Angeles homes. They wanted it to predict financial and physical condition changes within the city. Data include: tax delinquency, building permits, code enforcement, code complaints, at risk affordable housing, and contract nuisance abatement.⁶

Neighborhood residents, CDCs, and policy makers can use this information to tailor strategies to improve neighborhood housing conditions. The NKLA can:

- Help developers and CDCs identify distressed houses that they can purchase and rehabilitate
- Assist non-profits in identifying homeowners in need of financial services and counseling
- Provide information about housing and neighborhood conditions for policy advocates and policy-makers⁷

UCLA developed the system using funding from the National Telecommunication Information Administration, the FannieMae Foundation, the Los Angeles Housing Department, and the Microsoft Corporation.⁸ Use of the system is free for registered users.

of the distress indicators above, city departments, CDCs, and neighborhood organizations can use this information to contact homeowners and inform them of:

- property tax relief options
- mortgage foreclosure prevention programs
- financial management programs
- home repair assistance for elderly or low-income homeowners to address code violations
- utility payment assistance⁹

In addition, an early warning system can also assist:

- Developers and CDCs who could identify houses that they could purchase and rehabilitate or redevelop (see Chapter 5)
- The Wayne County Nuisance Abatement Program identify houses with multiple code violations for nuisance abatement (see Chapter 5)
- Policy-makers and advocates with identifying areas where distress indicators are concentrated in order to initiate or implement new programs to address vacant housing

Developing an early warning system

In many cases, non-profit organizations and universities create and manage a property information system for cities.¹⁰ Several universities have already developed property information systems that serve as early warning systems for properties that may become vacant. The University of Minnesota worked with the City of Minneapolis to create an early warning system that can create a map of at-risk properties. Los Angeles has a property information system, developed by UCLA that includes code complaints, nuisance abatement actions, building permits, property tax status, and utility liens.¹¹ Philadelphia also has a Neighborhood Information System that the University of Pennsylvania created and maintains (see case studies in sidebar).

Although an institution or university may maintain the system, cities and counties have the data necessary for creating a property information system.¹² For example, the City of Detroit has a geographic information system (GIS), and assessor's property search database. The Wayne County Register of Deeds and the Wayne County Treasurer also have online search databases. A good property information system could pull together these different sources into a single, user-friendly system.¹³

An early warning system is only one function of a property information system. Early warning systems can help address the initial threats to vacancy and could have immediate positive effects. However, in the future, the system could expand to include data that could serve

a number of different purposes, including information that may be helpful for strategies for addressing houses that have already become vacant.

Notes

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PHILADELPHIA, PA

Philadelphia Neighborhood Information System

The University of Pennsylvania working with several city agencies in Philadelphia, developed the Philadelphia Neighborhood Information System, a family of interactive applications that can be used to obtain information at the parcel level. Although neighborhood level information can be accessed by the public through neighborhoodBase, only authorized city and non-profit users can access parcelBase, the parcel level database.¹⁴ According to their website, the Neighborhood Information System includes data on: census data, ownership, sales history, taxes, building type, fire history, vacancy, assessment history, utilities shutoffs, utilities assistance, housing violations, and housing seals and demolitions.¹⁵

The University of Pennsylvania's Cartographic Modeling Center, the key developer of NIS, hopes to inform decisions by city agencies and nonprofits as to which properties are least likely to be redeemed before tax foreclosure. This information allows them to initiate actions against owners or to plan for redevelopment before a property is foreclosed, mitigating tax losses, property deterioration, and neighborhood decline.¹⁶

MINNEAPOLIS, MN

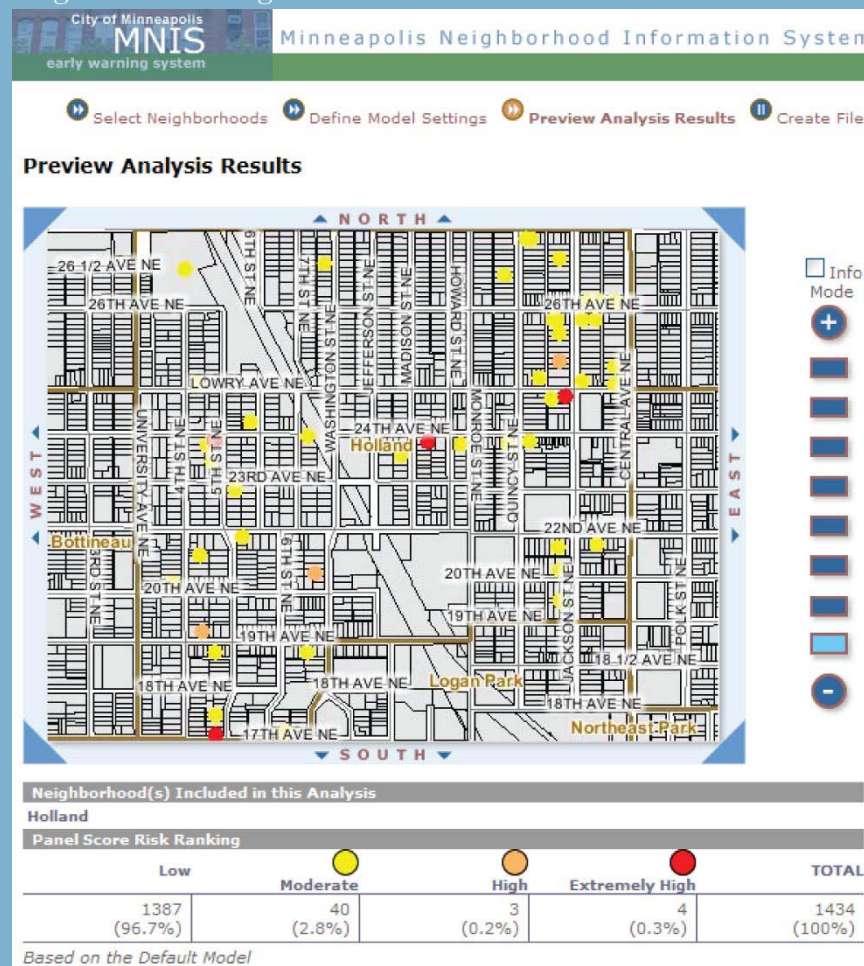
Minneapolis Neighborhood Information System

Several partners came together including the City of Minneapolis, the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, and the Neighborhood Revitalization Program, to create the Minneapolis Neighborhood Information System.¹⁷ This information system has an early warning component to it that can create an early warning analysis. The user can select a neighborhood and run a risk analysis that scores the following vacancy indicators:

- Building condition
- Contract for deed mortgage (if present)
- Homestead status and tax payer residency (to indicate homeownership)
- Multiple sales in the previous 12 months
- Tax delinquencies
- Code violations
- Whether there is a Letter of Intent to Condemn¹⁸

CDCs and neighborhood organizations can then produce GIS maps that meet their specific needs. The city updates the data monthly to ensure that users have current data.¹⁹ By using the risk analysis and indicators mentioned above,

Figure 8.1 Risk Analysis Map Produced for Properties in the Holland Neighborhood Using the MNIS Interface



Minneapolis CDCs and neighborhood organizations can tailor interventions based on the type and severity of the indicator.²⁰ Figure 8.1 illustrates how MNIS can produce a risk analysis map for properties within a specific neighborhood.

Source: http://apps.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/mnisapp/EWS_PreviewMap.aspx

CHAPTER 9

Develop Better Ways to Prevent Damage to Vacant Houses

This chapter focuses on strategies that can change existing programs and laws and create new programs. These strategies outline potentially better ways to prevent damage to vacant houses. CDCs may help to institute these changes by collaborating with stakeholders, such as other CDCs, city department heads, and county officials.

STRATEGY 1: EXPAND THE NUISANCE ABATEMENT PROGRAM TO INCLUDE DEMOLITION

As noted in Chapter 5, the activity of the Wayne County Nuisance Abatement Program (NAP) has increased since its inception in 2000. Several CDCs in Detroit have created relationships with NAP to target nuisance properties in their neighborhoods.¹ NAP's lack of funding for demolition requires it to concentrate on getting houses repaired and not on demolishing them.² However, some vacant houses sorely need demolition because they lack structural integrity.

Three program changes could help NAP expand their efforts to include demolition:

- **Reallocation of funds within Wayne County to pay for demolition.** Wayne County could provide additional funding for NAP to carry out demolition of vacant houses as necessary. This could allow NAP to continue filing lawsuits against owners for repair of their property, along with the option to order demolition. Neighborhood organizations and CDCs could use NAP to report houses that need demolition and the same process of filing a lawsuit could begin.
- **Close coordination with CDCs could facilitate some demolitions.** In certain circumstances, NAP could transfer a property needing demolition to a CDC for a nominal sum. The CDC may then be able to demolish the vacant house by using funds from outside sources.

- **Improved coordination with the City of Detroit.** Demolition of vacant, open, and dangerous houses in Detroit is the responsibility of the city's Buildings and Safety Engineering Department (B&SE). NAP and B&SE could coordinate their efforts for demolition of vacant houses. Houses identified by NAP as needing demolition could be classified as high priority by B&SE.

The NAP program has already successfully dealt with a limited number of vacant houses. By providing NAP the option to order and enforce demolition, CDCs can work with a partnership between NAP and the City of Detroit and further reduce the inventory of vacant houses in Detroit. However, the need for demolition may be reduced in many cases by the enforcement of code violations.

STRATEGY 2: IMPROVE CODE ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES

Code enforcement may motivate property owners to comply when violations are properly adjudicated. If the Department of Administrative Hearings and the City of Detroit Finance Department do not enforce penalties in a timely manner, an offender has no financial reason to change the status of the property. The number of code violations heard in the city improved after the establishment of blight codes and the Department of Administrative Hearings.³ However, Detroit's code enforcement practices need some improvement to live up to their potential.

Department of Administrative Hearings and blight codes

In 2003, the Michigan legislature approved Public Acts 312 and 317 to institute a more effective ordinance violation system.⁴ PA 312 gave city governments the authority to develop ordinances creating penalties for the presence of blighting conditions on a property. The act also permitted a city to create an administrative hearings bureau to rule on violations and impose fees

for violations. This shifted the adjudication authority from criminal courts to the administrative hearings bureau. The act also allows for a blight violation fine to reach up to \$10,000. Additionally, PA 317 allows the city to place a lien on the land or property if the fine for the violation is not paid.

Detroit adopted a blight ordinance and created the Department of Administrative Hearings (DAH) in 2004 after the passage of this legislation. The Detroit DAH has three different hearing divisions - zoning, solid waste/illegal dumping (also referred to as the environmental division), and property maintenance.⁵ The property maintenance division would deal the most with vacant house conditions. The Buildings Safety and Engineering Department and Detroit Police Department may issue property maintenance violations.⁶ If a property owner does not pay a blight violation, it will proceed to the DAH.⁷ If the violation remains unpaid after the hearing, the Accounts Receivable division of the Finance Department may garnish wages, take credit actions, or impose liens or seizures.⁸ Thus far, the DAH and blight violation procedure in Detroit do not seem to be effective in reducing code violations and blight.

Program changes to the DAH and blight codes

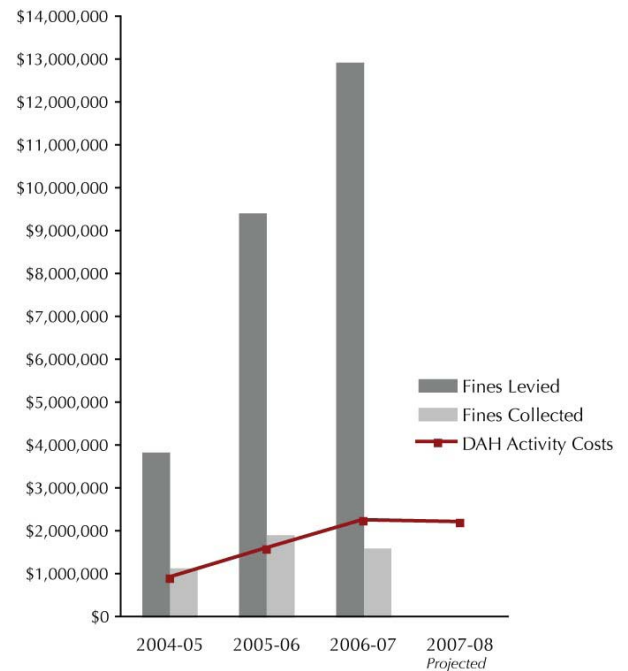
The following changes could improve the effectiveness of DAH and blight codes:

- Raise awareness of blight codes and DAH.** The DAH and the violation issuing departments could try to raise the public's awareness of the blight codes and the DAH.⁹ The Neighborhood City Halls could offer more information to residents. Perhaps DAH and the violation issuing departments could continue to use radio or TV to inform residents about the increased enforcement, the DAH, and where to get more information.¹⁰ Increasing the public's knowledge about the code enforcement process, how to report violations, and the repercussions if a property owner does not comply, may work to increase the overall effectiveness of the program because the public may report more violations, and property owners may become more likely to pay the ticket instead of face the repercussions.
- Emphasize compliance.** Code enforcement uses penalties to enforce compliance. Thus, the DAH's goal for code enforcement should be to seek compliance, not to levy a fine. To increase compliance, the DAH hearings officers could offer a compliance period¹¹ or an amended fine based upon the individual case circumstances. In the previous code violation procedure, judges in the 36th District Court would issue a compliance date. If the violator removed the violation, the judge sometimes dismissed the case. If the violator

did not comply by the set date, the judge could impose a penalty. This system focused more on compliance than the current DAH system.¹² The current ordinance language does not seem to permit the hearings officers to amend the penalty¹³ or offer a compliance period.¹⁴ Amending the city ordinance to give hearings officers some discretion and the chance to offer a compliance period may more effectively serve the purpose of the blight codes and DAH by encouraging homeowners to fix the property.

- Increase the number of hearings officers.** The Detroit DAH heard 41,400 cases in the 2005 fiscal year,¹⁵ an average of around 13,800 cases per hearings officer.¹⁶ The Chicago DAH averages around 4,700 cases per hearings officer.¹⁷ Detroit's hearings officers have too many cases to handle to be able to work out compliance periods that might lead to reduction in blight, the goal of the DAH.
- Improve fine collection.** Without the Finance Department's collection of fines, the DAH and blight violations will be ineffective. Currently, the Finance Department has only recouped 18% of the fines levied by the DAH.¹⁸ Code enforcement

Figure 9.1: Potential Revenue, Actual Revenue, and Cost of the DAH



Source: Graph by author. Fines levied and fines collected information gathered from David Josar, "Detroit finds blight fight hard to win: City prosecutes more cases, but collecting fines difficult." Detroit News 12 Nov. 2007.

DAH Activity cost information gathered from City of Detroit Budget Department, "Budget Summary: Department of Administrative Hearings," 2007, 3, Nov. 2007 http://www.ci.detroit.mi.us/budget/2007-08_Budget/Agencies/EB_45_DEPARTMENT%20OF%20ADMINISTRATIVE%20HEARINGS_07-08.pdf.

cannot work if the department only successfully carries out penalties for violations 18% of the time. As shown in Figure 9.1, fines collected as a result of DAH barely cover the city's expense incurred to operate the DAH. Since 2003 the Finance Department has been permitted to garnish wages, take credit actions, or impose liens or seizures in order to collect fines.¹⁹ However, the Finance department garnished wages and seized assets for the first time in November 2007.²⁰ Additionally, they have yet to report unpaid bills to credit rating agencies and garnish bank accounts.²¹ The department took some action to increase the collection rate in early November 2007, and issued demand letters to around 45,000 people.²²

STRATEGY 3: CREATE A WAYNE COUNTY HOUSING COURT

Housing courts have been effective throughout the United States in enforcing maintenance standards for vacant houses. In Wayne County, the Third Judicial Circuit Court handles mortgage and tax foreclosures as well as nuisance abatement cases filed by the Wayne County Corporation Counsel (see Chapter 5). Michigan law currently does not allow housing cases

to be handled in a separate division of a circuit court designated as a housing court. However, a designated judge could handle all housing matters in order to facilitate coordinated action on vacant housing issues.

The Housing Court of Buffalo, New York, is an example of an innovative court that enforces maintenance standards creatively. For example, the housing court judge can refuse to handle a particular mortgage lender's foreclosure cases until the mortgage company's property servicer brings already foreclosed houses up to housing code standards.²³

STRATEGY 4: CREATE A LICENSING AND REGISTRATION PROGRAM FOR VACANT BUILDINGS

Many cities use licensing and registration programs to reduce the problems of vacant houses and delinquent owners. These programs generally establish a public point of contact for every building's owner, and ensure a minimum level of security for the property. These programs offer the city of Detroit a way to track vacancies and ensure that owners, or responsible parties, hold their buildings to a minimum level of maintenance.

Table 9.1: Registration Program in St. Paul, MN

St. Paul – Vacant Building Registration	
Applicability²⁴	Not all vacant buildings Building must be registered if it is unoccupied and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unsecured, or - Secured by other than normal means (meaning means other than those used in the design of the building), or - A dangerous structure, or - Condemned, or - Has many housing or building code violations, or - Is condemned and illegally occupied, or - Is unoccupied for a period of time longer than one year and the enforcement officer has issued an order to correct nuisance conditions.
Fee Structure²⁵	Annual vacant building registration fee of \$250.00 If the building is vacant due to a fire, the owners have 90 days to pay the fee, as long as they submit the registration within 30 days with plans for the building.
Compliance²⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Register within 30 days after building becomes vacant, as defined in applicability section above, describe plans for rehabilitating and reoccupying or demolishing the building. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Disclose ownership information. o Disclose people that have a legal claim to the property (lienholders). o Disclose Truth-in-Sale of Housing Disclosure Reports. A Truth-In-Sale of Housing Disclosure Report informs buyers of the condition of a house. It describes the houses' components and fixtures.²⁷ - Provide access to the building so the Enforcement Officer can make a complete inspection. - All responsible parties for the building are required to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Keep all buildings secure. o Keep all porches, stairs, and exterior premises free of refuse, junk and debris. o Cut grass and weeds. o Remove snow and ice from sidewalks
Enforcement	Failure to comply will result in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A misdemeanor charge punishable by a fine up to \$700, and jail time up to 90 days²⁸
Misc	The vacant buildings list is provided to the public through the Department of Safety and Inspections website (available at http://www.stpaul.gov/depts/dsi/codeinsp/vblist.html). The website supplies vacancy address, vacancy date, ward, and structure type information. ²⁹

Licensing or registration programs

The programs vary in applicability, fee structure, and compliance standards. Shown in Table 9.1, Table 9.2, Table 9.3 are summaries of the programs in St. Paul, Chicago, and Cincinnati.

Table 9.2: Registration Program in Chicago, IL

Chicago – Vacant Building Registration and Insurance	
Applicability ³⁰	Any vacant building (meaning a building that lacks the habitual presence of people)
Fee Structure	\$50.00 or \$100 ³¹ - Charitable, religious, educational, goodwill associations and all governmental agencies are exempt from the annual registration fee ³²
Compliance ³³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Register within 30 days <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Disclose ownership information - Responsible parties are required to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Enclose (board or better means such as VPS) and secure property o Post sign on property with owner/agent name, address and telephone number that is legible from street or sidewalk o Maintain the building (keep it secure and closed) and maintain the sign until the building is occupied again or until repair has been undertaken. o Acquire liability insurance, \$300,000.00 for residential units and \$1,000,000.00 or more for any other building
Enforcement	Failure to comply will result in: - A fine of \$200 to \$1,000 for each offense (every day that a violation continues is a separate offense) ³⁴

Table 9.3: License Program in Cincinnati, OH

Cincinnati - Vacated Building Maintenance License	
Applicability	Mainly buildings that are dangerous Buildings that have been ordered vacated with violations
Fee Structure	\$900-3,500 annual ³⁵
Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must apply for license within 30 days from the date of the first order to vacate the building³⁶ - Acquire liability insurance, \$300,000.00 for residential units and \$1,000,000.00 or more for any other building³⁷ - Bring building into compliance within 60 days of application - Must be protected trespassers and from weather damage. Inspector will check to ensure that the structure is/has:³⁸ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Boarded o Sound roofs o Proper drainage systems o Structurally sound building structure: good repair, free from debris, rubbish and garbage, and sanitary (meaning free from health hazards for the resident, visitor, or public)³⁹ and interior floors, walking surfaces and stairs are structurally sound, and interior walls and ceilings are free of loose or hanging plaster and finishes. o Structural members free of deterioration and capable of safely bearing loads. o Foundation walls are plumb, free from open cracks and breaks, and rat-proof. o Exterior walls are free of holes, breaks, and loose or rotting materials. Exposed metal and wood surfaces are protected from the elements and against decay or rust. o Decorative features are safe and in good repair. o All balconies, porches, etc are in good repair o Chimneys are structurally safe. o Sidewalk openings are safe for pedestrian travel. o Garages, etc, are free from safety, health, and fire hazards. o Building premises are clean, safe and sanitary, maintained free of weeds, junk cars, and litter, and premises do not pose a threat to the public health or safety
Enforcement	Failure to comply will result in: - A misdemeanor in the first degree ⁴⁰ punishable by up to six months of jail time, and a fine up to \$150 ⁴¹

Table 9.4: Recommendations for a Detroit Vacant Property Registration Program

Applicability	
St. Paul	These standards would exclude some vacant buildings from registration if applied in Detroit. The rules include any open building regardless of condition, which would include many vacant houses in Detroit.
Chicago	If Detroit adopted the Chicago standards, the number of buildings to be registered would be enormous and difficult to process. Additionally, too many buildings would fall within Chicago's vacancy definition, and, as a result, Detroit would have a hard time enforcing the registration requirement.
Cincinnati	These applicability standards require issuance of a notice to vacate before a building must register, which adds an extra step in the registration process. Further, these standards exclude a number of buildings from the registration process. Detroit may benefit from broader standards.
Recommendation	
	The St. Paul applicability standards may be the most suitable for Detroit. These standards offer a middle ground between the Chicago and Cincinnati standards. While Detroit may benefit most from a broad standard, like Chicago's, too many issues exist with enforcement to make the program viable. Detroit could start with applicability rules like St. Paul's and then broaden the rules once a city agency successfully established the program.
Fee Structure	
St. Paul	The fee structure does not seem unreasonable. However, given the large number of homes that the registration program would apply to, the fee may be burdensome to some owners. The increased time to pay the fine if a fire causes the vacancy is a reasonable extension.
Chicago	The city may have set the fee low because of the wide applicability. Had Chicago set the fee high, vacant property owners may have been more reluctant to register property because of the increased financial burden. The exclusion for certain building owners seems unnecessary given the extremely low fee.
Cincinnati	This fee structure is the highest of the three programs, and may be justified because the program goes after the most dangerous vacant buildings in the city. The city may use the high fee to motivate the owner to get the vacated order removed and to recoup some of the expense of the building to the city.
Recommendation	
	The city should set the registration fee reasonably low, around \$75 to \$125. The fee may cover the costs of the registration program. The registration fee should not be so high as to discourage owners from registering property. Given Detroit's weak market, a high fee, like Cincinnati's, may be an unfair burden to apply to any vacant home. The city should not penalize people with a high annual fee who unsuccessfully attempt to sell or rent their property. Detroit may also want to adopt St. Paul's fire extension.
Compliance	
St. Paul	These compliance standards are reasonable. They are consistent with the existing property maintenance code in Detroit.
Chicago	Chicago has minimal compliance standards. In Detroit, not all residents feel that boarding is a positive action for the neighborhood. Some neighborhoods may see boarding a vacant property as lowering the community maintenance standard and as interfering with getting the property reused. The requirement for owner information posting may be extremely helpful for CDCs and neighbors in Detroit. If the building falls below the neighborhood maintenance standard, neighbor may quickly access the owner information.
Cincinnati	These compliance standards are very comprehensive. The standards are designed to bring uninhabitable buildings up to code. Detroit's property maintenance code is consistent with many of these standards. This registration program would give the property owner and city the benefit of a single compliance period for a number of code violations, relieving a city agency from citing a building for numerous violations and conducting numerous follow-up inspections.
Recommendation	
	Detroit may want to adopt the St. Paul compliance standards because the current codes support those requirements. Additionally, requiring a minimum level of upkeep on a property may reduce the impact of a vacant home on the surrounding neighborhood. Detroit may also want to adopt Chicago's requirement to post owner information. Owner information and boarding should only be required for vacant and open houses, not all vacant houses in Detroit. Not all vacant houses in Detroit display obvious signs of vacancy, and these requirements would clearly signal vacancy putting the house at increased risk of vandalism.
Enforcement	
St. Paul	These penalties appear reasonable and offer impetus to comply.
Chicago	Chicago's penalties seem to help support the city's registration fees. The fee, as stated above, is low, so as to encourage people to register, and the penalty for failure to register and maintain property according to the compliance standards is very high, which should further persuade people to register.
Cincinnati	Cincinnati's penalties for noncompliance appear out of line with the registration fees. If a registration fee is much higher than the penalty for failure to register and maintain property according to the compliance standards, people may choose the lower penalty fee.
Recommendation	
	Detroit may want to consider a strong penalty like Chicago's. The city should place the program emphasis on registration but also offer strong penalties for failure to comply by not registering or not following the property compliance standards.

Detroit program analysis and recommendations

Examining the existing programs across the country displayed in Table 9.4 will give city officials a starting point for adopting a vacant property registration or licensing program.

Vacant building registration programs are another tool for municipalities to fight against blight. By requiring that the owner of every vacant house register these houses with the city and maintain a minimum level of compliance, city officials may more thoroughly address the problem of widespread vacancy. Registration programs may offer Detroit a city-wide approach to recoup some of the costs incurred from vacant houses, while at the same time provide a means to hold owners responsible for the safety and maintenance of their properties.

This chapter has suggested directions for strengthening ways to prevent damage to vacant houses in Detroit. However, just preventing damage does not solve the problem of vacant housing. The next chapter suggests changes in systems that could help in gaining control of properties and getting them reoccupied.

Notes

1 Michael D. Russell, Assistant Wayne County Corporation Counsel, personal interview, 20 Nov. 2007.

2 Russell.

3 David Josar, "Detroit finds blight fight hard to win: City prosecutes more cases, but collecting fines difficult." *Detroit News* 12 Nov. 2007.

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PART I: NEIGHBORHOOD BASED STRATEGIES	
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	CHAPTER 2: GETTING STARTED
CHAPTER 3: KEEP HOUSES OCCUPIED	CHAPTER 4: PREVENT DAMAGE
CHAPTER 5: OBTAIN CONTROL	CHAPTER 6: GET HOUSES REFUSED
CHAPTER 7: IMPLEMENTATION	CHAPTER 8: KEEP HOUSES OCCUPIED
CHAPTER 9: PREVENT DAMAGE	CHAPTER 10: OBTAIN CONTROL
CHAPTER 11: IMPLEMENTATION	

CHAPTER 10

Find New Ways to Obtain Control of Key Houses and Get Vacant Houses Reoccupied

This chapter focuses on new kinds of strategies, some not currently implemented in Detroit, that can help CDCs and other nonprofit organizations gain control of vacant houses and help CDCs, nonprofits and individuals restore these houses to occupancy.

STRATEGY I: USE CURRENT RECEIVERSHIP LEGISLATION TO ELIMINATE NUISANCES AND AMEND RECEIVERSHIP LAW FOR GREATER EFFECTIVENESS

Receivership is one tool that can be used to handle vacant houses. It enables the improvement and stabilization of the houses independent of the property owner. The basic principle of receivership is that intervention is warranted when the property endangers the health, safety, and welfare of the public.¹ Therefore, receivership is a remedy a judge uses after determining that a property is a public nuisance.² The judge then appoints a third party, known as a court-appointed receiver, to eliminate the nuisance because the current owner is either unwilling or unable to do so.

The current state of receivership in Michigan

Michigan's housing law³ promotes the health, safety, and public welfare of citizens by regulating the maintenance and improvement of houses, and by establishing remedies for properties that endanger public health and human welfare.⁴ A house can be defined as either a public nuisance or a dangerous building if it fulfills at least one of the following requirements under Michigan law:⁵

- Fails to be sufficiently supported, ventilated, sewerred, drained, cleaned, or lighted
- Fails to conform to the fire code of the city in which the building or structure is located

- Sustains damage by fire, wind, flood, deterioration, neglect, abandonment, vandalism so that the structural strength or stability of the building or structure is less than it was before the damage
- Fails to meet the minimum requirements of a city's building code
- Endangers people or other property if a portion of the building would fall or collapse
- Fails to be safe for the purpose for which it is used
- Attracts children who might play in the building or structure to their danger
- Entices people to use the building or structure for committing a crime
- Possesses unsanitary conditions which make it unfit for human habitation
- Invites trespassers due to an accessible and exposed interior
- Remains unoccupied for a period of 180 consecutive days or longer and is not for sale, lease, or rent with a licensed real estate broker

Vacant houses that meet any of these requirements are considered illegal and in violation of state law.⁶ A city can then petition its circuit court to appoint a receiver to bring the property into compliance with local ordinances and state law.⁷ In situations where joint enforcement of vacant and abandoned properties is practical, a city could also agree to jointly manage receivership petitions with a county.⁸ In Michigan, the court empowers a receiver to repair, renovate, rehabilitate, or remove the building, manage and lease rental units that are nuisances, and hire contractors to repair, renovate, and rehabilitate the property (see case study in sidebar on following page).⁹ Although Michigan law does not state where funds to perform these activities come from, it does state that a receiver "has full and complete powers necessary to make a building comply"¹⁰ A receiver may be able to acquire funds to rehabilitate vacant and abandoned properties by acquiring construction loans, grants, or a line of credit from a bank. Money spent by a receiver to rehabilitate a vacant or abandoned property can be reimbursed in three ways. Michigan law allows a

ANN ARBOR, MI

Receivership in Michigan

In 2004, the City of Ann Arbor filed its first test case for court-appointed receivership. The property in question was known as the “center of crime”¹¹ for nearly ten years before a woman died in the basement from a drug overdose.¹² According to Ann Arbor City Attorney, Steve Postema, city government “must see situations differently, scrutinize problem properties more closely, and use the definition of public nuisance to make receivership successful.”¹³ Postema outlines the steps that made his office’s first attempt at using receivership successful:¹⁴

Action by the City

1. Contacted the owner to see if he would help do away with the nuisance.
2. Sued the landlord for owning a public nuisance after he failed to take action.
3. Asked the judge to declare the property a public nuisance.

Action by the judge

1. Declared the property a public nuisance.
2. Appointed a third party as receiver.

Action by the receiver

1. Renovated the property.
2. Collected rent.
3. Found new tenants.

Outcomes

1. Property stopped being a public nuisance.
2. Owner retained property.

receiver to place a lien on the property to recoup costs¹⁵ or to go after other assets of the owner.¹⁶ Additionally, the circuit court may foreclose on the property due to the unsatisfied lien.¹⁷

In Detroit, an effective receivership program would identify funds for potential court-appointed receivers to use to board vacant open buildings, repair and rehabilitate properties, or demolish buildings with significant structural damage. In addition, the threat of court-appointed receivership could prompt property owners or other responsible parties to maintain vacant and abandoned properties to a maintenance level required by law.

Increase the effectiveness of receivership in Michigan

Although current Michigan law permits receivership, legislative changes could provide for a clearer application of the law. These changes could increase the frequency of cities’ use of receivership and empower nonprofits, CDCs, and neighborhood associations to eliminate the presence of vacant and abandoned properties. According to Alan Mallach, “Receivership is not widely used because legal obstacles often arise from the inadequacy of state statutory provisions.”¹⁸ For receivership to be effective, Mallach recommends explicit guidelines regarding who can petition the court to bring a receivership action, property conditions that warrant potential receivership action, the ability of receivers to borrow money and to place liens on the property, the ability of owners to regain control of the property, and the ability of receivers to sell the property after they abate the nuisance.¹⁹ Table 10.1 compares current statutory provisions in Michigan and best practices from other states to help identify potential changes that could increase the effectiveness of Michigan’s receivership law.

According to Dia Mason, Assistant Corporation Counsel for Wayne County, the increased number of vacant houses may compel Michigan legislators to amend the state’s receivership law. She states, “Vacant and abandoned properties are a political hotbed. People’s perceptions are changing as these properties are dangerous, blighted, and open to trespass.”²⁰ If legislators implement some of the best practices in receivership statutes, the use of receivership could likely increase in Detroit.

Implement a receivership program

Although receivership is a powerful tool, obstacles exist to its implementation. Costs associated with property rehabilitation are difficult to assess, qualified receivers may be hard to find, and funding sources may be limited. Therefore, the use of receivership should build on a clear implementation plan and knowledge about housing rehabilitation. The best receivers are

Table 10.1: Recommendations for Changes to Current Receivership Law in Michigan

Grounds for Receivership	
Best Practice	"The statute should be drawn broadly enough to provide the courts with flexibility to address the wide variety of conditions that arise with respect to distressed property, but not so broadly that it can be invoked for minor violations." ²¹
Recommended Change in Michigan Law	None. Current definitions for public nuisances and dangerous buildings identify significant indicators, not minor infractions.
Parties Authorized to Bring Receivership Action	
Best Practice	"The statute should grant appropriate third parties with a clear interest in the abandoned property, including nonprofit entities such as CDCs and housing corporations, the ability to bring receivership actions." ²²
Recommended Changes in Michigan Law	Currently, Michigan law only allows municipalities such as cities and villages to bring a receivership action. ²³ The law could be amended to enable non-profits, neighborhood associations, block clubs, or neighbors affected by the nuisance to petition the courts to appoint a receiver.
Parties Eligible to be Court-Appointed Receivers	
Best Practice	"The statute should require that the receiver be fully qualified but should give the court broad discretion within those parameters." ²⁴
Recommended Changes in Michigan Law	Michigan law currently enables the court to appoint a municipality, a local agency, or a competent person as a receiver. Legislative changes could explicitly identify non-profits and/or CDCs as potential receivers and provide more specific requirements by which a court determines competency.
Power of Receiver to Borrow	
Best Practice	The statute should provide clear language "authorizing the receiver to borrow funds for improvements and to access public grants or redevelopment loan funds. The receiver should also have the ability to secure loans with a lien on the property. This is essential as banks will rarely lend unsecured money or voluntarily allow their mortgage liens to be subordinated to a non-municipal lien." ²⁵
Recommended Changes in Michigan Law	Michigan law currently states receivers "have full and complete powers necessary to make a building comply" ²⁶ with local ordinances and state laws. However, the ability of owners to borrow funds or to access public grants is not explicitly stated in current law. A statutory provision clarifying the powers of receivers to acquire money to rehab properties may eliminate any discrepancy regarding their ability to do so.
Owner's Ability to Regain Control of the Property	
Best Practice	The statute should provide clear language that "requires the owner to pay outstanding taxes, reimburse the receiver, assume responsibility for receiver's liens, and to post a bond before regaining control of their property." ²⁷
Recommended Changes in Michigan Law	The ability of owners to regain control of their property is not explicitly stated in current law. Therefore, judges can use their discretion to determine if an owner is eligible to regain control. ²⁸ A statutory provision allowing or prohibiting this outcome could clarify the intended outcomes for court-appointed receivership.
Sale of the Property to Third Party	
Best Practice	Because an owner may be unable or unwilling to regain control of his or her property, a statute should provide clear language to "provide for the sale of the property. The court should establish fair market value for the property, negotiate with prospective buyers, extinguish any remaining liens, and distribute proceeds from the sale to all appropriate parties." ²⁹
Recommended Changes in Michigan Law	The ability of the receiver to sell the property to a third party is not explicitly allowed in current law. Therefore, judges can use their discretion in this matter. ³⁰ A statutory provision allowing this outcome could clarify what happens when the circuit court forecloses on a property due to a unsatisfied receiver's lien. Sales to third parties could generate income for the both the property owner and the municipality. See previous page for an example in Ann Arbor.

BALTIMORE, MD

Receivership use by the city of Baltimore

Collaboration among various departments allows the City of Baltimore to inspect abandoned properties, appoint receivers, and sell properties within 12 months after receiver referral.³¹ An owner can stop further action from the local government if he or she meets the following requirements:

- Proves able to complete the razing or rehabilitation within a court approved time period.
- Posts a bond, in an amount determined by the court, as security for performance of the required work.³²

If the property owner is not able to meet these requirements, the timeframe for receivership is:

Day 1: Referral for receivership. City officials, CDCs, or neighborhood organizations petition the court to appoint a receiver. Before the court hears a petition for receivership, the petitioner provides the following:

- A copy of the original violation notice and order to rehabilitate.
- An affidavit confirming the required work is not complete.
- A cost estimate and description of work needed to renovate the property.
- A list of qualifications of the proposed receiver.³³

Day 120: Petition served/court hearing/receiver appointed. If a qualified receiver with ownership interest cannot meet the requirements of the court, the judge will appoint a receiver to

- Contract for necessary labor and supplies for rehabilitation.
- Borrow money for rehabilitation from an approved lending institution or through a government agency or program, using the receiver's lien against the property as security.
- Manage the property after rehabilitation, with all the powers of a landlord, for a period of up to two years and apply the rent received to current operating expenses and to repayment of outstanding rehabilitation expenses.
- Foreclose on the receiver's lien and sell the property.³⁴

Day 240: Transfer to new owner. One House at A Time, the current receiver for all properties in the city of Baltimore, renovated the property, pre-approved potential buyers, and managed the resulting auction. If the receiver sells the property to a new owner, the receiver must apply proceeds from the sale to their renovation costs, and to all other property liens. In addition, the receiver must file an accounting report with the court. Within the past 18 months,³⁵ One House at A Time, achieved the following benchmarks for the benefit of the city of Baltimore:³⁶

- Renovated 34 properties.
- Generated \$1.9 Million dollars in sales to property owners.
- Collected \$368,000 in city liens and other fees.
- Managed eight successful auctions resulting in \$999,000 in proceeds.

often CDCs or individuals with a solid record in property management or housing rehabilitation.²⁹ As shown by the City of Baltimore (see case study in sidebar), the City of Detroit could work with CDCs to develop a long-term strategy for receivership.

STRATEGY 2: ESTABLISH CLEAR LAND BANKING POLICIES

As discussed in Chapter 5, the Wayne County Land Bank can help in efforts to obtain control of key properties. However, a land bank can become even more effective in helping neighborhood organizations and CDCs to obtain key properties and develop a long-term strategy for strengthening a neighborhood. The following sections describe ways the land bank could support the work of CDCs and neighborhood organizations.

Establish clear policies to guide relations with CDCs and nonprofit organizations

While not requiring a change in existing enabling legislation, the Wayne County Land Bank could establish clear guidelines for its relationships with CDCs and neighborhood organizations. The Wayne County Land Bank could also determine the standards for accepting gifts of property from private parties and purchasing property on behalf of CDCs and nonprofit organizations.

Clear guidelines can make the Wayne County Land Bank an effective manager of its vacant properties. The Wayne County Land Bank could use an established set of guidelines created and used by other land banks to limit acceptance of properties to those that meet certain criteria. Listed below is an example of guidelines used by an existing land bank.³⁸

- Properties identified by nonprofit corporations for ultimate acquisition and redevelopment
- Properties identified by governmental entities for ultimate use and redevelopment
- Residential properties that are occupied or available for immediate occupancy without need for substantial rehabilitation
- Improved properties where structures should be demolished
- Vacant properties that could be placed into a program for sale to adjacent homeowners
- Properties that would be in support of strategic neighborhood stabilization and revitalization plans

- Properties that would form part of a land assemblage development plan
- Properties that will generate operating resources for the functions of the Land Bank

Establishing guidelines such as these could help the Wayne County Land Bank encourage revitalization of neighborhoods in Detroit. Such guidelines will also help CDCs and neighborhood organizations to participate in long-term redevelopment within their neighborhoods.

Allow for tax “extinguishing” by Wayne County Land Bank

Land banks in Michigan are currently unable to extinguish property tax liens on acquired properties. While municipalities can waive property tax liens on land bank properties, this has rarely happened. As shown by the example of the Atlanta Land Bank, the power to extinguish property tax liens improves the marketability of properties.³⁹

The Atlanta Land Bank uses its power to extinguish delinquent property taxes to encourage private redevelopment of tax delinquent properties. The land bank allows a buyer to purchase a property that is tax delinquent from its previous owner and convey it to the Atlanta Land Bank. The land bank promptly returns the property to the new owner free from tax liens. Such a process also keeps a property out of the tax foreclosure process that often keeps a house vacant for an extended period of time, leaving the property susceptible to vandalism.⁴⁰

This expanded power would allow the Wayne County Land Bank to support redevelopment efforts with neighborhood organizations and CDCs in Detroit. The land bank would not be selecting or holding properties requested by CDCs or nonprofits that stand little chance of being developed or purchased, whether marketed at fair-value or as low-income housing.

STRATEGY 3: FORM A CITY-WIDE INTERMEDIARY TO FUND CDCs TO REPAIR AND REHABILITATE VACANT HOUSES

As houses remain vacant for extended periods of time, the financial resources needed to repair and renovate the houses increases. CDCs may not have the financial resources or technical expertise needed to undertake significant housing rehabilitation projects. Consequently, many vacant and abandoned houses may continue to deteriorate as the organizations who work in the neighborhood lack the resources they need

CLEVELAND, OH

Neighborhood Progress Inc. (NPI)

In 1988, several local foundations in Cleveland created Neighborhood Progress, Inc. (NPI) “to serve as the conduit for leveraging philanthropic dollars for community development via a unified strategy.”⁴¹

One of NPI’s programs, the Vacant Property Prevention, Reclamation and Strategic Land Assembly Initiative, helps advocate for change to decrease the negative impact vacant and abandoned properties have on neighborhoods. Through this initiative, NPI “promotes policy changes to reduce predatory lending, foreclosures and abandonment that results from such practices, helps to remove obstacles that impede recovery and redevelopment of vacant and abandoned property, and identifies local and national best practices in vacant property reclamation and land assembly.”⁴²

Through funding provided by the Cleveland Foundation, Enterprise Community Partners and the George Gund Foundation, NPI increases the capacity of CDCs to combat the effects of abandoned properties and “to produce measurable change over the next 10 years in property values, homeownership and occupancy rates” within their neighborhoods. For example, NPI provided some funding to help Slavic Village Development Corporation demolish and renovate houses within its neighborhood.⁴³

to make a difference. A possible long-term solution to this problem may be to create a non-profit, city-wide intermediary which could:

- Secure resources from private funders to assist with neighborhood-based redevelopment
- Purchase large volumes of property from banks and mortgage companies
- Offer technical assistance and training to CDCs regarding housing rehabilitation
- Serve as a conduit through which mortgage foreclosed houses can be allocated or sold to community development corporations
- Offer grants or low interest loans for property acquisition and construction costs if needed

Currently, Detroit Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) fulfills some of these functions. Detroit LISC could collaborate with foundations, the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, and other organizations interested in strengthening Detroit neighborhoods to expand its own activities substantially or to create and fund a new organization.

The creation of this city-wide intermediary could unify different organizations with complementary missions to increase the organizational capacity of CDCs to rehabilitate vacant houses in Detroit. Neighborhood Progress, Inc., in Cleveland (see case study in sidebar) illustrates how this type of organization can empower CDCs to deal with vacant houses.

STRATEGY 4: MAKE USE OF AVAILABLE REHABILITATION FUNDING SOURCES

Many vacant houses require rehabilitation before anyone can occupy them. Several programs exist at the state and federal levels to provide funding for the rehabilitation of housing. Some of these programs are available only to homeowners. A new owner could seek funding through these programs when purchasing a vacant house. CDCs can share information about programs for individual homeowners, while other programs provide funds for CDC initiated rehabilitations.

City funding sources

A low-income **RESIDENT** could contact a **CDC** who administers Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) minor home repair funds and apply for participation in the program. Currently in Detroit, there is a limit of \$25,000 per house for essential repairs.⁴⁴ **NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS** or **CDCs** could also approach owners of now-vacant houses who might get the houses reoccupied and improve the neighborhood

through use of minor home repair funding. However, CDCs like U-SNAP-BAC receive a limited amount of CDBG funds annually and could benefit from a higher funding level for the minor home repair program.

State funding sources

The Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) also has a funding program available to owners of now-vacant houses. The Property Improvement Program (PIP) loan provides a long-term, low-interest loan for home repairs and rehabilitation of existing housing (4 to 8 percent interest depending on income). Almost any type of repair is eligible. The loan is made through a MSHDA-approved participating bank. To apply, a homeowner should call one of the banks in Wayne County, listed on MSHDA's website http://www.michigan.gov/mshda/0,1607,7-141-8002_8957-29483--,00.html. For further information call MSHDA's Community Development office at (517) 373-1974.⁴⁵ **NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS** and **CDCs** could advertise this program to potential users.

CDCs could also apply for funds through MSHDA's Office of Community Development (OCD) that could assist them with efforts to repair vacant houses. The Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP) and Special Initiatives program could provide funding for neighborhood revitalization strategies, including demolition and the rehabilitation of vacant houses. For more information regarding these sources, visit the MSHDA website at http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mshda/mshda_2008_NOFA_packet_214481_7.pdf.⁴⁶

Federal funding sources

Several federal programs work in conjunction with local governments or lending institutions to administer funds for repairing and rehabilitating houses. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) administers two programs, which include:

- *Dollar Home Initiative*: HUD offers local governments the opportunity to purchase qualified HUD-owned homes for \$1 each. The Federal Housing Administration acquires homes through foreclosure, and if the houses are not sold within six months, HUD sells them for \$1.⁴⁶ Local governments participating in the program can obtain the houses and then convey them to **NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS** and **CDCs**. City and CDC staff should check <http://www.clfres.com> weekly to see what properties have become available in their neighborhoods. The City of Detroit may be participating in this HUD program in 2008.

HUD also provides loan programs that **RESIDENTS** could use to fund repair or rehabilitation:

- *Section 203(k) program*: This program provides mortgages to eligible homeowners for the rehabilitation and repair of single-family homes. The program assists homeowners in rehabilitating a property, including purchasing a house to repair it or refinancing an existing house and rehabilitating it.⁴⁸

The 203(k) loans are geared towards improving low-income housing, although any resident homeowner could apply for this program. Neighborhood organizations and CDCs could provide information about this program to potential buyers of vacant houses.

STRATEGY 5: TRAIN YOUTH TO FIX HOUSES

Youth can play a significant role in repairing and rehabilitating vacant houses. Volunteer organizations working with CDCs and low-income homeowners in rehabilitating houses could involve young people. Involving young people in housing rehabilitation provides training for future employment. To begin to involve youth in housing rehabilitation, a CDC or another nonprofit organization could do the following:

Develop relationships with existing organizations that train youth in construction

CDCs and **NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS** could partner with YouthBuild Detroit. CDCs and neighborhood organizations could encourage young residents in their neighborhoods to join the 10-month YouthBuild program. YouthBuild offers educational services, leadership training, on-the-job building trades training, employment counseling, and job assistance. This program focuses on working with high school drop outs and low-income individuals between 18 and 24 years old.⁴⁹

CDCs and neighborhood organizations also could contact Wayne County Community College about collaborating on a youth housing rehabilitation program. Wayne County Community College offers a program in architectural construction technology that aims to enable students to find entry-level employment in construction and in property maintenance and management.⁵⁰

Create a youth training program engaging neighborhood residents and high schools

CDCs and **NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS** could also create a youth training program. This program could train young people to repair houses as modeled

PITTSBURGH, PA

The Pittsburgh Project

The Pittsburgh Project, a CDC, operates a series of after-school programs for young people, and uses over 2,500 people annually to perform free home repairs for Pittsburgh's needy elderly homeowners.⁵¹

The Pittsburgh Project also offers 'Service Camps,' 'Day Camps,' and 'Pittsburgh Semester' that draw about 50 interns and 4000 students each year from all over the country. Currently five colleges participate and endorse the Pittsburgh Semester as an official off-campus program.⁵² These programs enable students to build relationships with urban homeowners.

For further detail on The Pittsburgh Project see the website: <http://www.pittsburghproject.org/>

by the Pittsburgh Project (see case study in sidebar). Teenagers and young adults could be trained in interior and exterior painting, installation of various appliances and fixtures, construction, weatherization, roofing, rain-gutter cleaning and repairs. The scale of the youth training program at a CDC or a neighborhood organization could be limited based on the funding and other resources available. CDCs could proceed in the following ways to create a youth training program:

- CDCs could recruit neighborhood residents who are skilled in building trades to train youth.
- A youth training program could enroll high school students who need to fulfill their community service hours. High school students in Michigan must complete 40 hours of community service to graduate. CDCs could develop relationships with students at local high schools to direct them to projects in their own neighborhoods.
- CDCs and non-profit organizations could follow the Pittsburgh Project model described in the box below and adapt it for high school students.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	CHAPTER 2: GETTING STARTED	CHAPTER 3: KEEP HOUSES OCCUPIED	CHAPTER 4: PREVENT DAMAGE	CHAPTER 5: OBTAIN CONTROL	CHAPTER 6: GET HOUSES REFUSED	CHAPTER 7: IMPLEMENTATION	CHAPTER 8: KEEP HOUSES OCCUPIED	CHAPTER 9: PREVENT DAMAGE	CHAPTER 10: OBTAIN CONTROL	CHAPTER 11: IMPLEMENTATION
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CHAPTER 11

Implementing New Approaches to Turning Vacant Houses into Assets

This manual discusses ways neighborhood residents, block clubs, neighborhood organizations, and CDCs can handle vacant houses. In Part I, the manual outlines strategies that CDCs, community organizations, block clubs, and individuals can take to deal with vacant properties, drawing on existing programs. Part II focuses on how existing city and county programs can improve to advance the four goals of vacant-house asset-building and points to aspects of programs that will require legislative changes before the programs can be useful in the city.

Implementing Part II strategies requires the formation of coalitions and partnerships among non-profits, CDCs, city officials, and state legislators to push for broad changes to existing systems and for new programs to handle vacant houses. Community Development Advocates of Detroit (CDAD), the trade association of Detroit nonprofit developers, can place greater emphasis on the issue of handling vacant houses and encourage city, county, and state officials to improve vacant property practices. The Detroit Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Community Legal Resources, CDAD, and the University of Michigan's Detroit Community Partnership Center have created the Detroit Vacant Properties Campaign and are working to develop a vacant properties agenda for the city. Gaining the support of the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM), the statewide trade association of nonprofit developers, is also central to pursuing statewide legislative changes. A Wayne County-wide coalition can promote strategies that would serve not only neighborhoods in Detroit, but also those in its surrounding suburbs.

To advance a vacant property agenda, the organizations mentioned above and others would benefit from prioritizing directions for change. They can set priorities in a number of ways. The following are examples:

- **Focus on developing program revisions and legislative changes that promise the greatest impact on vacant houses and blight.** Improving enforcement of DAH penalties would encourage owners of vacant houses to keep their property in compliance with city housing codes. DAH

adjudicates a large number of citations in a year, but violators ignore the orders to comply and do not pay the fines. If these citations were aggressively enforced, a large number of vacant houses could be improved, and the reduction of blight in Detroit would be considerable. Requiring owners to register vacant houses could also be a powerful new tool in fighting blight. A registration program developed by the City of Detroit could be tailored to reduce the difficulty in identifying ownership of vacant houses. Other changes, such as granting land banks the power to extinguish property taxes would not have as large an effect.

- **Focus on the changes that can put the most powerful new tools in the hands of CDCs.** Reforming existing receivership law would allow CDCs to play a more active role in taking control of vacant houses and to increase their rehabilitation efforts. Providing the Wayne County Nuisance Abatement Program with increased funding to demolish houses could allow for neighborhood leaders to instigate the removal of vacant houses that cannot be rehabilitated.
- **Focus on the changes that can happen most quickly or are most doable.** Developing stronger procedures for the Wayne County Land Bank, improving existing code enforcement practices through DAH and expanding the Wayne County Nuisance Abatement Program's ability to demolish houses could be strategies that help mobilize an effective coalition of supporters in Detroit. These relatively simple changes might be made quickly due to pressure from nonprofit coalitions.

Vacant houses need to be addressed in communities across the United States. Detroiters and their allies can demonstrate ways to implement neighborhood-based strategies that address vacant houses and also promote changes to existing programs while offering new approaches to getting houses reoccupied. This manual is written for the residents, block clubs, neighborhood organizations, and CDCs that seek to put back the welcome mat in neighborhoods across Detroit.

Appendix A: Unoccupied Property Visual Indicators Survey

Unoccupied Property Visual Indicators Survey

Address: _____
Date: _____
Survey Completed by: _____

Property type (check one; if duplex or multi-family, note upstairs or downstairs)
<input type="checkbox"/> Single-family
<input type="checkbox"/> Duplex (<input type="checkbox"/> upstairs <input type="checkbox"/> downstairs)
<input type="checkbox"/> Multi-family (<input type="checkbox"/> upstairs <input type="checkbox"/> downstairs)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied

Below are listed a number of signs to look for when determining whether or not a property is currently occupied. Generally, no single indicator will solely determine whether a property is unoccupied. However, when considered together, they are useful for determining whether or not the property is currently occupied. Circle the number of all applicable criteria. In addition, be sure to photograph each property.

1. There is a posted notice on the door or windows of the residence.

Notes: _____

2. The house is boarded up. The windows, doors, and other openings are covered by plywood or other material. Note that only one floor may be boarded up and may indicate that only one floor of a duplex/multi-family structure is unoccupied.

Notes: _____

3. Yard maintenance has been severely neglected. Lawn is overgrown and may be covering sidewalks. Significant vegetation appears to be dead.

Notes: _____

4. Excessive mail is piling at the doorstep or mailbox. Advertisements, junk mail, and other mail may indicate vacancy. Newspapers may not necessarily be an indicator.

Notes: _____

5. "For Sale" signs may be a sign that a property is unoccupied. Be especially mindful of houses that are for sale in property auctions.

Notes: _____

6. The house is missing key structural components or doors and windows.

Notes: _____

7. The house is burned out or shows significant deterioration. Major portions of the house may be exposed to the elements.

Notes: _____

8. The building has been significantly tagged or otherwise vandalized.

Notes: _____

9. Any additional factors not listed here. (Please explain on reverse)

Housing Conditions Checklist

Building Frame/Structure:

____ Minor: Building is not leaning, but foundation is in need of minor repairs or is missing materials

____ Major: The building is not straight--leans or tilts

The foundation is in need of major repair or is missing a lot of materials

____ No problems

Roof/Chimney/Gutters:

____ Minor: Minor deterioration, improper roof repair

Some mortar missing from chimney; gutters in need of repair

____ Major: A lot of deterioration, missing material, holes in roof, or sagging roof

A lot of mortar missing from chimney or chimney is leaning

____ No problems

Windows/Doors:

____ Minor: Window frames need replacing or paint is peeling

____ Major: Windows missing, doors missing or rotted

____ No problems

Siding/Paint:

____ Minor: Some peeling or cracking paint

____ Major: (brick building) Building missing many bricks

(frame building) Wood siding is rotted

____ No problems

Porch:

____ Minor: Separation of the porch from the building, paint needed

____ Major: Significant deterioration; steps missing, porch sagging, supports holding up porch are rotted

____ No problems

Definitions of Housing Conditions:

Good*: The building looks structurally sound and well maintained. It needs **no more than two minor repairs. It is not leaning or tilted and the foundation is in good shape. The building may need some general maintenance, such as the replacement of window frames or painting.

Fair*: The house is structurally sound, and may need **three or more minor repairs, but no more than one major repair. The building could be rehabilitated fairly inexpensively to improve its rating.

Poor*: The house may not be structurally sound, **and needs two or more major repairs. The building may have broken windows or the porch may look like it is falling off the structure. Major repairs need to be made for this building to be safe, adequate housing.

**Should be demolished*: This house is not structurally sound and should not be lived in. It may have fire damage or it may be leaning.

**Vacant lot*: No structure stands in the lot although there may be debris.

The condition of this vacant house is:

_____ Good

_____ Fair

_____ Poor

_____ Should be demolished

Appendix B: Block Condition Coding Sheets

BLOCK CONDITION CODING SHEETS

These coding sheets were adapted from The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods Systematic Social Observation coding sheets that were developed by Felton J Earls, Stephen W. Raudenbush, Albert J. Reiss Jr., and Robert J. Sampson.

Date: _____ *Start Time:* _____ am pm *End Time:* _____ am pm

Partner Name: _____ *Partner Name:* _____

VERY IMPORTANT!!!

On the diagram below, please write the street names to indicate the starting point of your observations. Please include the range of addresses present on that block face. For example, 4700- 4900.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">1 B</div>	<div style="border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 100%; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"><div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><i>Street Name:</i> _____</div><div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><i>Address Range:</i> _____</div></div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">2 B</div>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">3 B</div>	<div style="border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 100%; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"><div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><i>Street Name:</i> _____</div><div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><i>Address Range:</i> _____</div></div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">4 B</div>

QUESTIONS ABOUT ENTIRE STREET

QUESTION	BLOCK FACE			
	1B	3B	2B	4B
1. Volume of Traffic (CHECK ONE)				
1) No Traffic				
2) Light (occasional cars)				
3) Moderate				
4) Heavy (steady stream of cars)				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
2. Condition of the Street (CHECK ONE)				
1) Under Construction				
2) Very Poor (many sizeable cracks, potholes, or broken curbs)...				
3) Fair				
4) Moderately Good (no sizeable cracks, potholes, or broken curbs)				
5) Very Good				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
3. How noisy is the street? (CHECK ONE)				
1) Very Quiet – easy to hear almost anything				
2) Fairly Quiet – can hear people walking by talking, though you may not understand them				
3) Somewhat Noisy – voices are not audible unless very near				
4) Very noisy - difficult to hear a person talking near to you.				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
4. Are there any people visible on the street? (CHECK ONE)				
1) Yes				
2) No (Skip to Question 6)				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
5. How were you regarded by the people on the street? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)				
1) No people around				
2) Paid Little or No Attention by Those Around				
3) Treated with Suspicion				
4) Friendly Responses/Greetings/Helpful				
5) Polite Responses to Own Questions				
6) Queried About what One was Doing in Area				

QUESTIONS ABOUT INDIVIDUAL BLOCK FACES

QUESTION	BLOCK FACE			
	1B	3B	2B	4B
6. Which of the following are present on the block face? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)				
1) Abandoned cars				
2) Empty beer or liquor bottles in streets, yards, or alleys				
3) Condoms on the sidewalk, in gutters, or street				
4) Needles, syringes, or drug-related paraphernalia on the sidewalk, in gutters, or street				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
7. Are there cigarette or cigar butts or discarded cigarette packages on the sidewalk or in gutters? (CHECK ONE)				
1) Yes				
2) No				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
8. Is there garbage, litter, or broken glass in the street or on the sidewalks? (CHECK ONE)				
1) None				
2) Light (some is visible)				
3) Moderate				
4) Heavy (visible along most or all of the street)				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
9. Are there trees lining the street of the block face? (CHECK ONE)				
1) Most or all of the block face				
2) Some				
3) None				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
10. Is there graffiti on buildings, signs, or walls? (CHECK ONE)				
1) Graffiti visible				
2) No visible graffiti				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
11. Is there evidence of graffiti that has been painted over? (CHECK ONE)				
1) Yes				
2) No				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
12. Are there any murals/paintings on sides of buildings/walls? (CHECK ONE)				
3) Yes				
4) No				

QUESTIONS ABOUT INDIVIDUAL BLOCK FACES (Continued)

	1B	3B	2B	4B
13. Are the following signs visible? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)				
1) Neighborhood or Crime Watch				
2) Block Home or Safe Haven				
3) Security Warning Signs				
4) Signs advertising tobacco products				
5) Signs advertising beer, whiskey, or other alcohol				
6) Houses with FOR SALE signs				
7) Traffic signs (stop, yield, children playing)				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
14. Are sidewalks cracked, broken, uneven or damaged? (CHECK ONE)				
5) None				
6) Light (some is visible)				
7) Moderate				
8) Heavy (visible along most or all of the street)				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
15. Is there any residential housing on the block face? (CHECK ONE)				
1) Yes				
2) No				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
16. What type of residential housing is in the block face? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)				
1) Detached single family houses				
2) Two family house/duplex				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
17. What type of residential housing occupies the <u>most</u> space on the block face? (CHECK ONE)				
1) Detached single family houses				
2) Two family house/duplex				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
18. In general, how would you rate the condition of <u>most</u> of the residential units in the block face? (CHECK ONE)				
1) Very well kept/good condition – attractive for its type				
2) Moderately well kept condition				
3) Fair condition (peeling paint, needs repair)				
4) Poor/Badly deteriorated condition				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
19. In general, how would you rate the condition of <u>most</u> of the lawns in the block face? (CHECK ONE)				
1) Very well kept/good condition – attractive for its type				
2) Moderately well kept condition				
3) Fair condition				
4) Poor/Badly deteriorated condition (overgrown, neglected)				

QUESTIONS ABOUT INDIVIDUAL BLOCK FACES (Continued)

	1B	3B	2B	4B
20. Are there window bars/gratings on residential doors or windows? (CHECK ONE.)				
1) On almost all houses/apartments				
2) On about half of the houses/apartments				
3) On a few of the houses/apartments				
4) On none of the houses/apartments				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
21. What type of building materials are used in the majority of residential housing on the block face? (CHECK ONE)				
1) Brick				
2) Aluminum siding				
3) Wood				
4) One or more materials				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
22. Are fences present around residential housing? (CHECK ONE)				
1) On almost all houses/apartments				
2) On about half of the houses/apartments				
3) On a few of the houses/apartments				
4) On none of the houses/apartments (Skip to Notes Section)				
	1B	3B	2B	4B
23. What types of fences are present around the residential units of the block face? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)				
1) Chain link				
2) Picket Fence				
3) Barbed wire				
4) Natural fencing				
5) Privacy Fence				

Notes

SIDE STREET CONDITIONS CODING SHEET

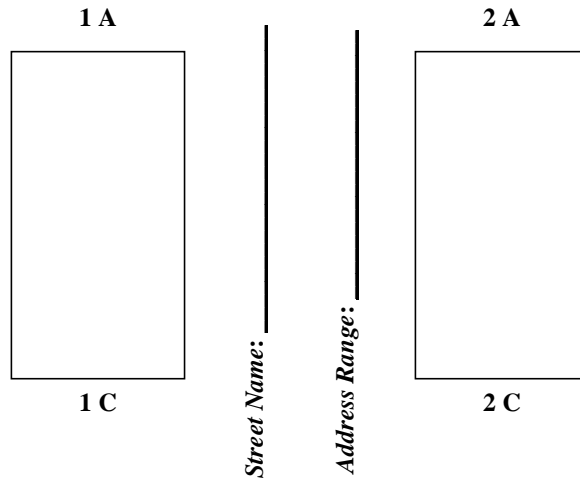
Date: _____ Start Time: _____ am pm End Time: _____ am pm

Partner Name: _____ Partner Name: _____

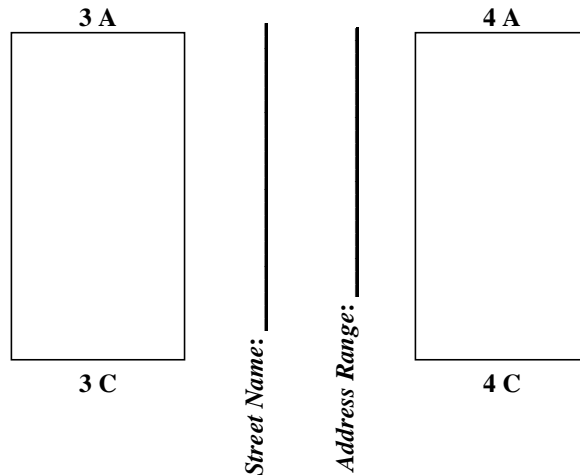
VERY IMPORTANT!!!

On the diagram below, please write the block face street name to indicate the starting point of your observations. Please include the range of addresses present on that block face. For example, 4700- 4900. All of the side streets facing north the will be coded "A" and all the side streets facing south on will be coded "C."

Street Name: MUNICH



Street Name: WAVENEY



Street Name: BREMEN

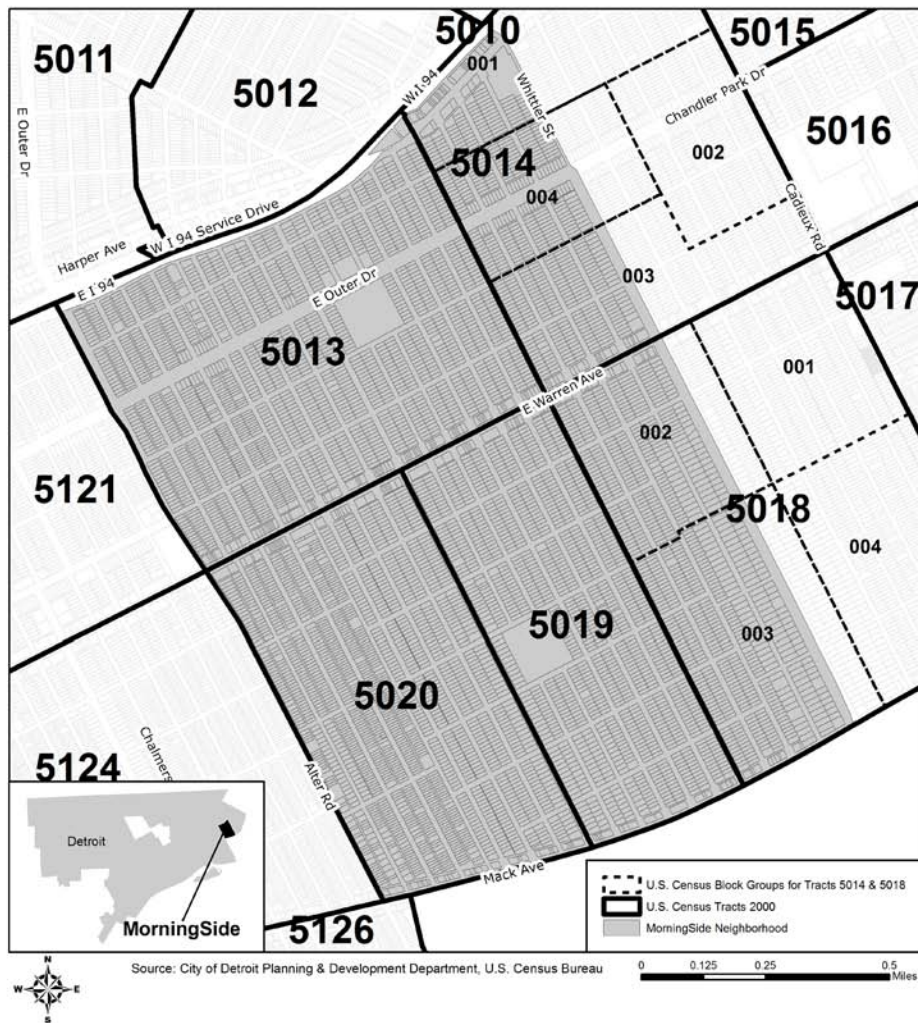
QUESTIONS ABOUT SIDE STREETS

QUESTION	SIDE STREET							
	1A	2A	1C	2C	3A	4A	3C	4C
1. Volume of Traffic (CHECK ONE)								
5) No Traffic								
6) Light (occasional cars)								
7) Moderate								
8) Heavy (steady stream of cars)								
	1A	2A	1C	2C	3A	4A	3C	4C
2. Condition of the Street (CHECK ONE)								
6) Under Construction								
7) Very Poor (many sizeable cracks, potholes, or broken curbs)...								
8) Fair								
9) Moderately Good (no sizeable cracks, potholes, or broken curbs)								
10) Very Good								
	1A	2A	1C	2C	3A	4A	3C	4C
3. How noisy is the street? (CHECK ONE)								
5) Very Quiet – easy to hear almost anything								
6) Fairly Quiet – can hear people walking by talking, though you may not understand them								
7) Somewhat Noisy – voices are not audible unless very near								
8) Very noisy - difficult to hear a person talking near to you.								
	1A	2A	1C	2C	3A	4A	3C	4C
4. Are there any people visible on the street? (CHECK ONE)								
3) Yes								
4) No (Skip to Question 6)								
	1A	2A	1C	2C	3A	4A	3C	4C
5. How were you regarded by the people on the street? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)								
7) No people around								
8) Paid Little or No Attention by Those Around								
9) Treated with Suspicion								
10) Friendly Responses/Greetings/Helpful								
11) Polite Responses to Own Questions								
12) Queried About what One was Doing in Area								
	1A	2A	1C	2C	3A	4A	3C	4C
6. Which of the following are present on the block face? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)								
5) Abandoned cars								
6) Empty beer or liquor bottles in streets, yards, or alleys								
7) Condoms on the sidewalk, in gutters, or street								

8) Needles, syringes, or drug-related paraphernalia on the sidewalk, in gutters, or street								
	1A	2A	1C	2C	3A	4A	3C	4C
7. Are there cigarette or cigar butts or discarded cigarette packages on the sidewalk or in gutters? (CHECK ONE)								
3) Yes								
4) No								
	1A	2A	1C	2C	3A	4A	3C	4C
8. Is there garbage, litter, or broken glass in the street or on the sidewalks? (CHECK ONE)								
9) None								
10) Light (some is visible)								
11) Moderate								
12) Heavy (visible along most or all of the street)								

QUESTION	SIDE STREET							
	1A	2A	1C	2C	3A	4A	3C	4C
9. Are there trees lining the street of the block face? (CHECK ONE)								
4) Most or all of the block face								
5) Some								
6) None								
	1A	2A	1C	2C	3A	4A	3C	4C
10. Is there graffiti on buildings, signs, or walls? (CHECK ONE)								
3) Graffiti visible								
4) No visible graffiti								
	1A	2A	1C	2C	3A	4A	3C	4C
11. Is there evidence of graffiti that has been painted over? (CHECK ONE)								
5) Yes								
6) No								
	1A	2A	1C	2C	3A	4A	3C	4C
12. Are there any murals/paintings on sides of buildings/walls? (CHECK ONE)								
7) Yes								
8) No								
	1A	2A	1C	2C	3A	4A	3C	4C
13. Are the following signs visible? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)								
8) Neighborhood or Crime Watch								
9) Block Home or Safe Haven								
10) Security Warning Signs								
11) Signs advertising tobacco products								

Appendix C: Census Tract Map



2000 U.S. Census Tracts in MorningSide Neighborhood
Detroit, MI