

IN MEMORIUM

I have had the pleasure and privilege of working in the field of planning and local government in Pennsylvania for over 40 years, and during that time, I served for 30 years as the Executive Director of the House Local Government and Urban Affairs Committees for the Pennsylvania Legislature.

While in Harrisburg, I met and worked with hundreds of elected state Representatives and Senators at the Capitol. Few, impressed me as much as the late *State Senator James Rhoades*.

To begin, Senator Rhoades was a wonderful man who loved his family and the people he served; his constituents from Schuylkill, Berks, Carbon, Lehigh, Monroe, and Northampton Counties. **Serving others... was his life!**

At a time when the divide between the "haves" and "have nots" in our society is growing wider, and people are becoming more and more disillusioned with their government; Senator Rhoades saw to it that <u>everyone</u>, **including the "have nots"**, had (1) an equal opportunity to receive a good education in Pennsylvania; (2) a "place at the table"; and (3) most importantly, **a strong "voice"**... along with... the many "special interests" with money and lobbyists in Harrisburg, trying to sway public policy their way!

Senator Rhoades also understood better than most, the destructive and demoralizing affect blight has on all communities in Pennsylvania, including those in Schuylkill County. Blight to him was an economic crime which deprived local municipalities of much needed revenue and economic development opportunities, while reducing the equity of property owners living nearby. Senator Rhoades also believed that slumlords, just like drug lords, destroy Pennsylvania's neighborhoods and communities and reduce the "quality of life" for the people living there!

His vision was to create a **Statewide Blight Task Force** with representation from all of Pennsylvania's state local government organizations, which he established. The mission he gave them, was to examine Pennsylvania's blight problems and come up with new state legislation to "level the playing field" by giving municipalities more tools and municipal powers to fight blight.

It has been an honor for me to have been selected by the late Senator Rhoades as the consultant to work with and lead, his Statewide Blight Task Force.

This report is therefore dedicated to his memory and the love and concern he had for all of the communities and constituents in his legislative district, including, his beloved *Schuylkill County*.

It is the author's hope that local governments in Schuylkill County and throughout Pennsylvania, will be strengthened and improved in the future, through the use and implementation of the ideas and suggestions for eliminating and managing "blight" contained in this report: Senator James Rhoades's vision!



MUNICIPAL RESOURCE GUIDE FOR FIGHTING BLIGHT SCHUYLKILL COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

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23. Municipal Taxes and Claims Under Pennsylvania Real Estate Tax Sale Law of 1947

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I. Acknowledgements

There have been many groups, organizations, and individuals actively involved with the issue of eliminating blight in Pennsylvania during the last 15 years including the author of this Municipal Resource Guide.

Our collective goal has been to see that municipalities in Pennsylvania are given the legal tools and powers they need, as well as the state financial resources, necessary to be successful in their efforts to eliminate blight. Their previously prepared studies, reports, and work efforts used in the preparation of this manual/report and included in the Appendix of same, are commendable, and <u>I wish to acknowledge</u> and give them credit for their previous efforts which were invaluable and used... in the preparation of this manual.

Many are included in the Appendix of this Municipal Resource Guide and users of this manual are encouraged to review and read their studies and reports as well as use them in the preparation of Municipal Strategic Blight Management Plans in Schuylkill County.

They include:

- Irene McLaughlin, Esquire-University of Pittsburgh-CEDC
- Mary Beth Dougherty, Senator Rhoades's staff
- Clyde "Champ" Holman, Senator Rhoades staff
- Micah Gursky, President, Tamaqua Borough Council

- Jeffrey A. Feeser, Schuylkill Community Action Director of Housing
- Michael A. McGeever, Schuylkill Community Action Elm Street Manager
- Gary Bender, Grants Administrator and Demolition Coordinator, Schuylkill
 County
- Dan Grow, Schuylkill County Blight Coordinator
- Darlene Dolzani, Schuylkill County Director Tax Claim Bureau
- William Reppy, former County Administrator
- Jeffrey K. Box, NEPA
- Brian P. Langan, NEPA
- Alan S. Baranski, NEPA
- John Kromer, Fels Institute of Government
- The Pittsburgh Foundation
- World-Class Industrial Network, LLC
- The Redevelopment Authority of Beaver County
- Beaver County Chief Assessor Michael Kohlman and staff
- Ms. Paula J. Burdine and Captain Jerry Weatherly of Beaver Falls
- Ms. Liz Hersh, Director of the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania
- Mr. Grant Ervin, Policy Director of 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania
- Dorothy Lengyel of the Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood
 Development
- The staff at the Community Economic Development Clinic
- The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

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- Dan Woodske, Beaver Initiative for Growth
- Tom Scuoteguazza, World-Class Industrial Network
- Professor Daniel Friedson, University of Pittsburgh Community and Economic Development Law Clinic
- Erika Myers, University of Pittsburgh Community and Economic
 Development Law Clinic
- Jason Wrona, University of Pittsburgh Community and Economic
 Development Law Clinic
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- Chelle Buffone
- Christina Gabriela
- Court Gould
- Ray Reaves
- Joanna Deming
- Bob Gradeck
- Kendall Pelling
- Dan Sullivan
- Greg Simmons

The author apologizes to anyone who may have been missed!

Special Recognition and thanks is also extended by the author to the following ad hoc group members who worked tirelessly over many months helping in the preparation of this Municipal Blight Resource Guide which is designed as a guide for municipalities in Schuylkill County and beyond to help them in their fight against blight.

- James J. Rhoades, Jr., Alfred Benesch and Company and A. Mahanoy City Borough Council
- Jerry Teter, Mahanoy City Borough Manager
- Bill Killlian, Mahanoy City Code Enforcement Officer
- Anthony Merklinker, Alfred Benesch and Company

11 Introduction: Purpose of Guidelines

Blight has a negative effect on all municipalities regardless of size or location. In addition, its presence is demoralizing and dangerous to neighborhoods, residents, and the communities in which it exists. Like a cancer, it also spreads, resulting in decreased property values, increased crime and arsons, as well as lost municipal tax revenue with which to provide needed municipal programs and services. In the end, if not addressed, it can and will destroy a community's quality of life as well as opportunities for revitalization and new economic development.

The purpose of these municipal guidelines is to provide municipalities in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania with critical information regarding blight, as well as methods for reducing, fighting, and eliminating same under current and proposed state enabling legislation.

The North East Pennsylvania Alliance has stated the following concerning "blight": The American Planning Association uses the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language to simply define blight as: "Something that impairs growth, withers hopes and ambitions, or impedes progress and prosperity."

To one degree or another, blight is an issue currently affecting most municipalities in Pennsylvania, and its negative consequences are critical to the economy of Pennsylvania and every one of its regions. Billions of dollars in state and municipal tax revenue has been lost as a result of the blighted and abandoned buildings in our cities, boroughs and

townships, in both urban and rural parts of the state. This includes lost municipal property tax revenues desperately needed to meet the increasing demand for municipal services, resulting from decreasing property assessments, as well as the equity lost by others owning property near these blighted and abandoned buildings. The negative affect that current blighted conditions have on potential new businesses deciding not to invest in Pennsylvania's deteriorating communities is incalculable. Then there are the hidden costs to Pennsylvania's economy. Increased fire insurance premiums in the community due to higher incidents of arson and the fire threat which blighted and abandoned buildings pose, is not only a financial burden for all residents, but it many times prevents the opening of new businesses and new employment opportunities, due to the inability of the new businesses to pay overbearing fire insurance premiums.

Blighted and abandoned buildings also pose a threat to the public's health and safety; are a dangerous place for children to play; and represent a prime location for criminal activity. Municipal expenditures to police and secure or demolish these structures annually, is significant.

These are taxpayers funds that could be better spent to help the local and state economy in more beneficial ways, than on cleaning up the mess created by greedy slumlords after they have "milked all the equity out of" these blighted buildings, which are then often abandoned.

A significant effort was put forth to attack blight and bring about urban renewal in the 1950's and 1960's through numerous federal and state programs, including those developed through the U.S. Housing Act of 1949. Unfortunately many of these programs

destroyed irreplaceable historic structures in America while failing to address the "cause of blight", which still remains prevalent in many Pennsylvania communities today. It was the "bull in the china shop" approach to the problem. It is therefore incumbent that measures be implemented to enable local governments in Pennsylvania to begin to easily and effectively address the issue of blight and in turn encourage economic development and community prosperity.

Schuylkill County in northeast Pennsylvania is an area which continues to struggle with the issue of blighted properties and the development of actions to counteract the problem. Available resources are limited, especially funding mechanisms, to assist municipalities. Further, tools to assist, track, and manage properties and their owners are presently inadequate.

The Pennsylvania Legislature through the unanimous passage of House Resolution 91 several years ago (see Appendix) directed the House Urban Affairs Committee to examine the issue of blight in Pennsylvania and the detrimental effects caused by this problem. Through their efforts, a report, authored by Jeri E. Stumpf, entitled "Eradicating Blight and Expediting Economic Development in Pennsylvania in the 21st Century" was issued. This report identified causes and proposed solutions critical to addressing this problem, including the development of a statewide computer registry blight tracking system.

This same report was also used recently by the American Planning Association in Chicago in the development of their new national policy on redeveloping underutilized and blighted property in the United States. Implementing enabling legislation was also an outgrowth of the work of the House Urban Affairs Committee. Unfortunately, while some of the proposed legislation was enacted into law, not all of it was.

More recently, a statewide taskforce comprised all of the major statewide organizations that deal with this issue was formed by State Senator James Rhoades approximately one year ago. Their charge was to: (1) determine the causes and effects of blight in Pennsylvania's municipalities and (2) make legislative recommendations to address the problems. The Statewide Blight Taskforce held a press conference at the State Capitol and part of their recommendations was the introduction and passage of the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act and the Mortgage Guaranty Corporation Act.

The proposed acts are designed to help municipalities attack the problems of blight through aggressive code enforcement initiatives involving slumlords and seriously blighted or abandoned properties, as well as to acquire and demolish structurally unsound blighted properties that pose a danger to the community. Funds to build new, for sale and rental, market rate housing and commercial projects on the sites of formerly blighted properties, or in, blighted and abandoned buildings that are structurally sound, was also to be part of the legislative package. Enactment of same would be a tremendous help in stimulating the local and state economy.

Jeri Stumpf, consultant for the Senator Rhoades Statewide Blight Task Force, has stated there are five primary factors associated with the proliferation of blight:

- A lack of code enforcement,
- Weak laws on abandoned property,
- A lack of deterrents for slumlords,
- A lengthy tax lien process, and
- A lack of recognition by the judiciary of the significance and cost of blight

He acknowledged that while the State Legislature has made some minimal progress against blight in the past ten years, for example: making serious property maintenance code violations a first degree misdemeanor after the fifth conviction which carries an imprisonment of up to 5 years in prison; changing municipal codes to allow nonprofit groups to acquire from municipalities blighted buildings for renovation for affordable housing and commercial development without going through the bid process; and requiring property purchased at tax sales to be brought to code within 18 months of the purchase, much more needs to be done.

Both the Statewide Blight Taskforce and Mr. Stumpf have identified the need for the development of a statewide blight tracking system, which would provide municipalities with the ability to (1) more easily identify problem blighted property owners and (2) help manage a property maintenance code enforcement process in Pennsylvania. The system as envisioned would track serious property maintenance code violations and tax

delinquencies of property owned by slumlords similar to the way outstanding warrants are presently tracked along with motor vehicle code violations, will be a critical tool in the fight against blight in Pennsylvania.

III What is "Blight"?

While blight certainly includes deteriorating buildings, vacant buildings and vacant lots, nuisance bars, accumulated trash, junk, abandoned vehicles, and high grass and weeds, all of

which negatively affect the quality of life of residents living in neighborhoods where blight

exists; abandoned property also falls within the definition of blight and presents perhaps the

greatest challenge to municipalities fighting to eliminate blight.

An abandoned property under current state law consists of any building that has not been legally occupied for at least 12 months and is also a blighted property meeting any of the following:

- (1) Premises which, because of physical condition or use, are regarded as a public nuisance in accordance with the local housing, building, plumbing, fire and related codes and ordinances, including nuisance and dangerous building ordinances.
- (2) Premises which, because of physical condition, use, or occupancy, are considered an attractive nuisance to children, including, but not limited to, abandoned wells, shafts, basements, excavations, and unsafe fences or structures
- (3) A dwelling which, because it is dilapidated, unsanitary, unsafe, vermin-infested condition, or lacking in the facilities and equipment required under the housing code of the municipality, has been designated by the municipal department responsible for enforcement of the code as unfit for human habitation.

- (4) A structure which is a fire hazard or is otherwise dangerous to the safety of persons or property.
- (5) A structure, from which the utilities, plumbing, heating, water, sewage or other facilities have been disconnected, destroyed, removed or rendered ineffective so that the property is unfit for its intended use.
- (6) A vacant or unimproved lot or parcel of ground in a predominantly built-up neighborhood which by reason of neglect or lack of maintenance, has become a place for accumulation of trash and debris or a haven for rodents or other vermin.
- (7) An unoccupied property which has been tax delinquent for a period of two years.
- (8) A property which is vacant but not tax delinquent and which has not been rehabilitated within one year of the receipt of notice to rehabilitated from the appropriate code enforcement agency.

A blighted property is one meeting any of the aforementioned conditions whether occupied or not.

Blight is also defined as a vacant property that is a public nuisance; condemned under the municipal code; seriously tax delinquent or abandoned. It requires a blighted property review committee to certify the property as being blighted before the county redevelopment authority can proceed with spot condemnation eminent domain proceedings. Typically it takes a six month period from the initial notice to obtain clear title. Additional information on identifying problem properties that are blighted

including the rules and responsibilities for municipalities as well as preventing blight in problem properties is included in the Appendix of this report.

IV Schuylkill County: An Overview

According to a report issued by the Brookings Institution, titled 'Back to Prosperity – A Competitive Agenda for Renewing Pennsylvania', the Commonwealth has experienced minimal growth resulting in decentralization and the shifting of populations outward from urban and suburban centers. This report states 'Pennsylvania's cities, towns and older suburbs continue to decline as the locus of the state's growth shifts decisively toward outlying newer communities.' This documented trend has had an especially heavy toll on Schuylkill County as confirmed by the following demographic information, compiled using data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Pennsylvania State Data Center.

- Schuylkill County has experienced a population decrease from 152,585 to 150,336 between 1990 and 2000. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, State Water Planning Resource Center, the population is projected to fall, between 2000 and 2010 by 5,564 people, or 3.7%.
- The number of housing units in Schuylkill County increased from 66.457 units in 1990 to 67,806 units in 2000, an increase of 2.0%. During the same period, the number of housing units in Pennsylvania increased from 4,938,140 units in 1990 to 5,249,750 units in 2000, an increase of 6.3%. In the United States, the number of housing units increased from 102,263,678 units in 1990 to 115,904,641 units in 2000 an increase of 13.3%.

- During the same period:
 - O The number of owner-occupied housing units decreased by 0.6% in Schuylkill County as compared with an increase of 7.2% in Pennsylvania and an increase of 18.3% in the United States.
 - O The number of renter-occupied housing units increased by 0.2% in Schuylkill County as compared with an increase of 3.9% in Pennsylvania and an increase of 8.3% in the United States.
 - O The number of vacant housing units increased by 28.0% in Schuylkill County as compared with an increase of 6.9% in Pennsylvania and an increase of 1.0% in the United States.
- In 2000, the median housing value in Schuylkill County was \$63,300, 65.3% of the median housing value in Pennsylvania, which was \$97,000, and 52.9% of the median housing value in the United States, which was \$119,600.
- When compared with the United States and Pennsylvania, Schuylkill County has the oldest hosing stock because 52.9% was constructed in 1939 or earlier and only 13.5 was constructed between 1980 and 2000. In terms of the median year structures were built, Schuylkill County has the oldest housing stock in the entire Commonwealth. It is the only county in the state that has its median year structures built as pre-1940. Depending on its condition, an older housing stock could lead to lower real estate tax revenues.
- In both 1989 and 1999, per capita income in Schuylkill County was lower than Pennsylvania and the United States. In 1989, it was \$11,193 in Schuylkill

County, \$14,068 in Pennsylvania and \$14,420 in the United States. In 1999, it was \$17,230 in Schuylkill County, \$20,880 in Pennsylvania and \$21,587 in the United States. A low per capita income leads to low income tax-based revenues.

Pottsville, Pennsylvania

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Pottsville is the only city in and the county seat of Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, United States. [1] The population was 15,549 at the 2000 census. The city lies along the west bank of the Schuvlkill River, 97 miles (156 km) north-west of Philadelphia. It is located in Pennsylvania's Coal Region, named for the abundance of anthracite coal.

Pottsville is not to be confused with Pottstown, a borough in Montgomery County approximately 40 miles (64 km) northwest of Philadelphia.

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Pottsville, Pennsylvania

Coordinates: 40°41'6"N 76°12'10"W



Pottsville skyline





Pottsville's location in Schuvlkill County



Location within Pennsylvania

Coordinates: 40°41′6"N 76°12′10"W

Overview

Pottsville is built on seven hills (like ancient Rome). The most notable is Sharp Mountain. The founder of the city is John Pott, born in Oley Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania. The city is famous for being the gateway to the Anthracite Coal Region and is also home of America's Oldest Brewery: Yuengling, which has been in operation since 1829. John O'Hara was a famous novelist who brought Pottsville alive with his "Gibbsville" stories. Pottsville was home to an NFL franchise in the early 20th Century named the Pottsville Maroons. [citation needed]

History

Early settlement

By the Charter of Charles II, by 66 the grace of God, King of England, Scotland and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, to his trustie and well beloved subject, William Penn, Esq., sonne and heire of Sir William Penn, for the Colony of Pennsylvania, the grantee, William Penn, was given power and authority to erect counties, in the following words: "And we do further for us, our heires and successors, give and grant unto the said William Penn, his heirs and assignees, free and absolute power to divide the said countrey and islands into townes, into boroughes and counties, etc.," whereupon William Penn did divide the Province into three counties, Philadelphia, Bucks and Chester.

Country	United States	
Commonwealth	Pennsylvania	
County	Schuylkill County	
Founded	1806	
Incorporated as a Borough	February 19, 1828	
Chartered as a City	March 22, 1911	
Government		
- Mayor	John D.W. Reiley	
Area	The state of the s	
- Total	4.2 sq mi (10.9 km ²)	
Elevation	659 ft (200.9 m)	
Population (2000)		
- Total	15,549	
- Density	3,697.4/sq mi (1,426.0/km ²)	
Time zone	EST (UTC-5)	
- Summer (DST)	EDT (UTC-4)	
ZIP Code	17901	
Website	www.city.pottsville.pa.us	

[citation needed]

The last comprised all lands west and south of the Delaware and the Schuylkill; therefore the site of Pottsville was originally in Chester County. When the legislative Council, on 10 May 1729, enacted the law erecting the Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, which included all the lands of the Province lying westward of a straight line drawn northeasterly from the headwaters of Octorara Creek (near the southern borders) marked with blazed trees, to the Schuylkill River, then this placed Pottsville in

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Lancaster County. By enactment of the same Council, approved on 11 March 1752, the Berks County was erected; this placed Pottsville within the limits of that county.

Pottsville's anthracite coal history began in 1790 when it was discovered by hunter Necho Allen. Legend has it that Allen fell asleep at the base of the Broad Mountain, and woke to the sight of a large fire; his campfire had ignited an outcropping of coal. By 1795 an anthracite-fired iron furnace was established on the Schuylkill River.

19th century

In 1806 John Pott purchased the furnace. By an act of Assembly of the Commonwealth approved March 1, 1811, the County of Schuylkill was erected out of portions of Berks and Northampton; this placed the site of Pottsville in Schuylkill County. The town was formally laid out in 1816 by a local surveyor, Henry Donnell. Pottsville was established as a village in Norwegian Township in 1819 and incorporated as a borough on February 19, 1828.

In 1829, D.G. Yuengling & Son established the oldest operated family brewer of beer in the United States. In 1851 Pottsville became the county seat; the original county seat being Orwigsburg.^[2]

The Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company, which has its roots in the Philadelphia and Reading Railway Company, the remnants of which were acquired in the late 20th century by the Reading Anthracite Company, acquired extentive coal lands and would become one of the most notable of the coal companies operating in Pennsylvania until the demise of the anthracite industry after World War II.

Because of its location along the Schuylkill River, Pottsville developed a small textile industry. Out of this industry grew the Phillips Van Heusen company which was founded in 1881. Moses Phillips and his wife Endel began sewing shirts by hand



View of Pottsville in 1854

and selling them from pushcarts to the local coal miners. Van Heusen and other textile companies left the region starting in the late 1970s, mainly as a result of foreign competition. Another element of the textile industry was the Tilt Silk Mill on Twelfth Street, which produced silk from silk worms imported from China which fed on mulberry trees in the building's solarium. The silk business eventually was eclipsed by the development of nylon stockings. The building still stands and is presently the headquarters of a storage and vehicle rental business.

20th century

During the Prohibition period in the United States, under the 18th Amendment, Yuengling stopped making beer and moved to production of "near beer". The three brews produced in this time were the Yuengling Special (The most popular brand), Yuengling Por-Tor (a version of their "celebrated Pottsville Porter"), and finally, the Yuengling Juvo, which was a cereal beverage. Then-owner Frank Yuengling also opened the Yuengling Dairy, which produced ice cream and other dairy products for the local area. These ventures helped to keep the company afloat during that period.

When the 18th Amendment was repealed, Yuengling stopped production of "near beer" and resumed making alcoholic beverages. The brewery famously sent a truckload of its Winner Beer to the White House in 1933 as thanks to President Franklin D. Roosevelt for the repeal of Prohibition.

Yuengling still continues its family-owned business today. (The Yuengling Dairy was operated by a different branch of the family than the Brewery. Business declined and the dairy folded as of 1985.) Attempted buyouts by large conglomerate breweries have all been unsuccessful.

Pottsville was chartered as a third-class city on March 22, 1911.

Pottsville was host to a National Football League (NFL) franchise from 1925-1928. The Maroons played in Sportsman's Park (or Minersville Park) in nearby Minersville, now the site of King's Village shopping plaza. The Pottsville Maroons posted some of the best records in the NFL during the 1925 and 1926 seasons.

Until the middle of the 20th century, Pottsville was a popular destination for many traveling acts and vaudeville performers. The 1929 film Berth Marks stars the comedy legends Laurel and Hardy as they attempt to reach Pottsville by train for one of their booked performances.

The Maroons had a claim to the 1925 NFL championship, but because of a controversial decision by NFL President Joe Carr, the title was instead awarded to the Chicago Cardinals. The Maroons suffered two more losing seasons before relocating to Boston and becoming the Bulldogs. The Boston Bulldogs folded in 1929.

In August 1997, the Pottsville Railway Park Little League all star team, managed by 42-year veteran Irv Shappell, made an impressive run to the Little League World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania by representing the U.S. East Region. The team glided through the Pennsylvania District 24 Tournament including defeating their cross-town rival Pottsville Rotary Little League 19-0. Following the District 24 Tournament Railway Park continued its impressive run through the PA Section 3 Tournament beating every team they played! Moving on to the Pennsylvania State Tournament which was held in Carbondale, PA; they suffered their first loss of the tournament to Berwyn-Paoli Little League only to bounce back the next night to win the State Crown which earned them a berth in the U.S. Eastern Region Tournament in Bristol, Connecticut. Defeating Connecticut twice, as well as teams from Rhode Island, Maine, and New Jersey they played their final game before the Series against California-Hollywood, Maryland, defeating them 2-1 in a LIVE-televised game on ESPN2. Finally, in Williamsport for the World Series they defeated Dyer, Indiana 1-0 in an extra inning game. The following evening they played Bradenton, Florida at Lamade Stadium before the largest crowd ever to watch a Non-championship game. The crowd was estimated at more than 35,000. Although they lost the game they played their final game against Mission Viejo, Southern California, losing to that team 3-1; one game shy of the United States Championship Game. The team returned home to a city-wide party and more than 200 fire trucks welcomed them back to town. [citation needed]

21st century

Today Pottsville is on the verge of revitalizing the downtown area. The city completed in 2007 a streetscaping project on Centre Street. In addition, the city plans on using the funds from the Elm Street project to revitalize Nichols Street. The city also is working on bringing the railroad back into center city for tourist excursions and is also planning to build a large transportation hub in the same location for bus service throughout the county. It will also accommodate Trailways and Greyhound Services. It will also be accommodated by a train station in the current Union Street Parking Lot.

Pottsville is also the home to the Great Pottsville Cruise which is held on the second Sunday of August each year. The Great American Way Fair is also held annually in early May. Each New Year's Eve the city sponsors the raising of the Yuengling Bottle to the top of the flagpole at Garfield Square to ring in the new year.

Geography

Pottsville is located at 40°41′06″N 76°12′10″W (40.685058, -76.202747).^[3]

According to the United States Census Bureau, the city has a total area of 4.20 square miles (10.9 km²). It is all land; none of the area is covered in water. Although there are no lakes within the city there are several water courses which flow through the city. The Schuylkill River flows through the extreme southern part of the city near Mount Carbon. The West Branch of the Schuylkill River makes up the western border for the city. Within the city itself the West Branch of Norwegian Creek flows through the Fishbach section of the city and the East Branch of Norwegian Creek flows through the Jalappa section of the city. Joining together near Progress Avenue and Terry Reiley Way they form Norwegian Creek which flows underground through the heart of the city. The creek empties into the Schuylkill River at Mauch Chunk Street.

Pottsville is said to rest on seven hills, like ancient Rome. These seven hills are Lawton's Hill, Greenwood Hill, Bunker Hill (Sharp Mountain), Guinea Hill, Forest Hills, Cottage Hill and Mount Hope.

Demographics

As of the census^[6] of 2000, there were 15,549 people, 6,399 households, and 3,877 families residing in the city. The population density was 3,697.4 people per square mile (1,426.0/km²). There were 7,343 housing units at an average density of 1,746.1/sq mi (673.4/km²). The racial makeup of the city was 95.73% White, 2.26% African American, 0.12% Native American, 0.51% Asian, 0.01% Pacific Islander, 0.53% from other races, and 0.84% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 1.22% of the population.

There are 6,399 households, out of which 27.3% have children under the age of 18 living with them, 41.7% were married couples living together, 13.9% had a female householder with no husband present, and 39.4% were non-families. 34.9% of all households were made up of individuals and 17.2% had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 2.29 and the average family size was 2.97.

In the city the population was spread out with 22.6% under the age of 18, 7.2% from 18 to 24, 27.2% from 25 to 44, 22.1% from 45 to 64, and 20.9% who were 65 years of age or older. The median age was 40 years. For every 100 females there were 87.3 males. For every 100 females age 18 and over, there were 83.5 males.

The median income for a household in the city was \$30,137, and the median income for a family was \$41,124. Males had a median income of \$31,510 versus \$21,433 for females. The per capita income for the city was \$18,165. About 10.1% of families and 13.9% of the population were below the poverty line, including 15.4% of those under age 18 and 10.1% of those age 65 or over.

City of Pottsville Population by year ^{[4][5]}				
1830	2,464			
1840	4,345			
1850	7,515			
1860	9,444			
1870	12,384			
1880	13,264			
1890	14,117			
1900	N/A			
1910	20,236			
1920	N/A			
1930	N/A			
1940	24,530			
1950	23,630			
1960	21,659			
1970	19,715			
1980	18,195			
1990	16,603			
2000	15,549			

Neighborhoods

2005 (est.) 14,764

- Center City- Area consisting of Centre Street and Market Street from Garfield Square to Line Street and from Nichols Street to Mauch Chunk Street.
- Yorkville located on the west side of the city, west of the Pottsville Area High School and west of 16th Street to the city line. Yorkville was a borough that merged with Pottsville in the early part of the Twentieth Century.
- Quinntown Along W. Market Street, south and west of Garfield Square up to 16th Street.
- Lawton's Hill East of Route 61, north of E. Norwegian Street.
- Greenwood Hill East of Route 61, south of E. Norwegian Street.
- The Island The area surrounding the former site of the Atkins Brothers furnace; near Washington Street and Route 61.
- Jalappa North of Route 61 and east of Centre Street on the north side of town.
 - Jalappa Heights Scenic, elevated northeast corner of Jalappa.
- Fishbach West of Jalappa, in the area between Centre Street and Peacock Street.
- Russelville Along W. Market Street, north and west of Garfield Square up to 16th Street.
- Forest Hills a residential development south of Mount Carbon.
 - Forest Hills West a residential neighborhood south of Mount Carbon and west of Forest Hills.
- Bunker Hill south of Mahantongo Street from S. 2nd Street to S. 11th Street.
- Morrisville South Centre Street from Mauch Chunk Street to the city line with Mount Carbon borough.
- Guinea Hill A residential neighborhood which extends north of W. Arch Street to W. Laurel Blvd. and from N. 3rd Street westward to N. 12th Street.
- Cottage Hill North of West End Avenue from N. 20th Street to Westwood Road. Subdivided into Cottage Hill West and Cottage Hill East.
- Hillside Cressona Road from Hotel Street to the city line.
- York Farm North of First Avenue to Mount Hope Avenue and from N. 16th Street west to the city line. (Also includes High Park Manor)
- Mount Hope North of Laurel Boulevard to Fairmont Avenue and from N. Second Street to North 16th Street and Walter Griffith Avenue.
- Yorktowne East of Westwood Road along Woodglen and Yorktowne Roads.

Parks and recreation areas

- Rotary Park Located at South 20th & Mahantongo Streets, is one of the largest recreational areas in the city. It includes Pottsville Rotary Little League which can accommodate night games. Also, the park includes a basketball court. There is also playground equipment located on the Norwegian Street side of the park. The park has a fairly large grassy area. The park lacks shade trees.
- Railway Park Located in the Yorkville section of Pottsville at the end of First Avenue the park includes the home of Railway Park Little League, the 1997 United States Eastern Region Champions of Little League Baseball.
- General George Joulwan East Side Park Located on East Norwegian Street, the park is built in tiers along the hillside. In the past the park included the East Side swimming pool; but this has been demolished and now is home to a skate park. Basketball courts and playground equipment are also located in the park.
- Henry Clay Park Located on South Second Street, high on the hilltop overlooking the south side of Pottsville is the Henry Clay Monument. The park is relatively small with no benches or

Property Profiles in Schuykill County

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Prepared by:



Shortcomings of the Data

The Schuykill County Assessor's office does not keep records on the condition of existing properties. Therefore, there is no reliable, quantifiable way to determine whether an individual property may be blighted or not on a County-wide basis. This presents a major hurdle for the study of properties in Schuykill County, particularly in comparison to places like Philadelphia. For example, the Bureau of Revision and Taxes in Philadelphia maintains the following fields of data regarding property condition:

These are the definitions for the following classifications of exterior condition as defined by the tax assessor:

BELOW AVERAGE – Excessive deferred maintenance, wear and tear, abuse, and/or minor vandalism, or unrepaired minor fire damage. These items are starting to add up and take their toll.

VACANT/SEALED – No occupancy. FHA, VA, FNMA signs may be on the property. Property has been secured with fresh plywood over doors and windows. Doors and windows have been covered over by plywood, tin, concrete block or stucco. No interior access.

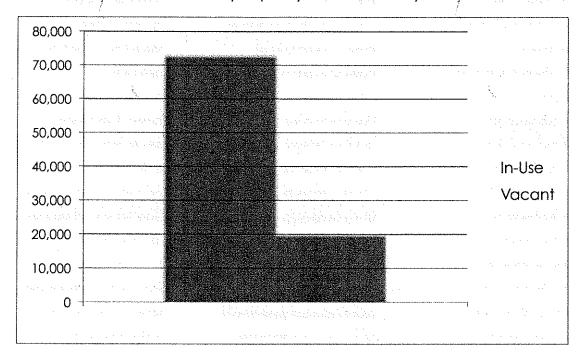
STRUCTURALLY COMPROMISED, OPEN TO THE WEATHER - Some or no windows, no door or door open, evidence of past abuse by vandals such as graffiti, missing railings, deteriorated wood and metal, etc. Scorch marks and/or fire and water damage to exterior brick, siding, bays, etc. Broken windows with blackened and charred interior.

Total Known Property Counts

liem #	Type	Count	Notes
1			Count of properties based on tax_map field.
2	Total vacant properties	20,153	Using Property Type codes
	Total government owned properties		Count of properties based on tax_map field and Gov_Prop = "Y"

Vacant Property

There are over 20,000 vacant properties in Schuykill County according to the assessor's files. According to the assessor, that code is used only for property with no structure on it. This accounts for 21.6% of all property in the county.



Data referenced in this report is from the Schuykill County property assessment file, obtained and up-to-date as of August 24th 2009 and referenced as part of the Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS® Datamine.

Government Owned Property was it with the same and the first

Schuykill County lists 1251 government-owned properties in its database, accounting for 261 different government entities. Little to nothing is known about these properties other than their location and the entity owning them. The following verbatim names are given as government property owners:

AMERICAN TOWER, PROP TAX DEPT	BUTLER TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL AUTH	EAST BRUNSWICK TOWNSHIP OF
APPLACHIN TRAIL COUNCIL	BUTLER TOWNSHIP OF	EAST NORWEGIAN TOWNSHIP
ASHLAND AREA MUNICIPAL AUTHY	BUTLER TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DIST	EAST UNION TOWNSHIP
AUBURN MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY	BUTLER TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS OF	ELDRED TOWNSHIP OF
AUBURN SCHOOL DISTRICT	CARBON COUNTY	FIRE DEPT TURKEY RUN
BARRY TOWNSHIP OF	CASS TOWNSHIP OF SUPERVISORS	FOSTER TOWNSHIP OF
BLUE MT SCHOOL DISTRICT	CASS TWP SCHOOL DISTRICT	FOSTER TWP MNCPL AUTHY
BLUE MTN SCHOOL DISTRICT	CENTER CITY LND TR	FRACKVILLE AREA MUNICIPAL AUTH
BLYTHE MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY OF	COM OF PA GAME COM	FRAILEY TOWNSHIP OF %
BLYTHE TOWNSHIP MNCPL ATHRTY	COMM OF PA	FRAILEY TWP SCHOOL DIST
BLYTHE TOWNSHIP MUNCIPAL AUTHY	COMM OF PA - DEPT ENV RESOURCE	FRAILEY TWP SUPERVISORS
BLYTHE TOWNSHIP OF	COMM OF PA DEPT ENV RES	FRIEDENS CHURCH BRCH TWP
BLYTHE TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS OF	COMM OF PA DEPT OF	GENERAL STATE
BLYTHE TWP	COMM OF PA DEPT OF GEN SVCS	GENERAL STATE AUTH
BLYTHE TWP MUNIC AUTH OF	COMM OF PA GAME COMM	GENERAL STATE AUTHORITY
BLYTHE TWP MUNIC AUTHORITY	COMM OF PA GAME COMMISSION	GENERAL STATE AUTHY
BLYTHE TWP MUNICIPAL ATHY	COMM OF PA GENERAL SERVICES	GENERAL STATE AUTHY PENNA
BLYTHE TWP MUNICIPAL AUTH	COMM OF PENNA DEPT FOREST	GIRARDVILLE AREA MUNICIPAL AUT
BLYTHE TWP WATER AUTH	COMM OF PENNA GAME COMMISSION	HAWK MOUNTAIN COUNCIL NO 528
BRANCH TOWNSHIP OF	COMM OF STATE GAME COMMISSION	HAZLETON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
BRANCH TWP BOOSTER CLUB	COMM PENNA DEPT OF FOREST	HAZLETON CITY AUTHORITY
BRANCH TWP SCHOOL DIST	CONRAIL-PROP TX DEPT	HAZLETON CITY WATER AUTHORITY
BRANCH TWP SCHOOL DISTRICT	DELANO TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS OF	HEGINS TOWNSHIP AUTHORITY
BRANCH TWP SUPERVISORS	DELANO TWP BD OF SUPERVISORS	HEGINS TWP AUTHORITY

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HEGINS TWP SCHOOL DIST	NORWEGIAN TOWNSHIP OF	PENNSYLVANIA COMMONWEALTH
HUBLEY TOWNSHIP OF	PA COMM DEPT GEN'L SERVC	PENNSYLVANIA COMMONWEALTH C
HUBLEY TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS OF	PA COMM DEPT GENL SRVC	PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION
KLINE TOWNSHIP MNCPL AUTHORITY	PA COMM DEPT GENL SRVCS	PENNSYLVANIA HOUSING AGENCY
KLINE TOWNSHIP OF	PA COMM DEPT OF ENV RES	PENNSYLVANIA HOUSING FIN AGCY
KLINE TWP FIRE HOUSE	PA COMM DEPT OF FOREST & WATER	PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
LAKE WYNONAH MUNICIPAL AUTH	PA COMM DEPT OF GENL SERV	PENNSYVANIA COMMONWEALTH OF
LAKE WYNONAH MUNICIPAL AUTHY	PA COMM DEPT OF GENL SVCS	PHILADELPHIA CITY OF
LEBANON CITY OF	PA COMM OF DER	PHILADELPHIA CITY OF TRUSTEE
MAHANOY AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT	PA COMM OF DEPT OF TRANS	PINE GROVE TOWNSHIP OF
MAHANOY CITY BOROUGH BUILDING	PA COMM OF DEPT TRANS	PORTER TOWNSHIP OF
MAHANOY CITY BOROUGH OF	PA COMM OF GAME COMM	PORTER TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DS
MAHANOY CITY COMMUNITY F	PA COMM OF PA GAME COMMISSION	PORTER TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS OF
MAHANOY CITY MUNICIPAL AUTHY	PA COMMONWEALTH OF	POTTS CITY OF PARK AUTH
MAHANOY CITY PUBLIC L	PA COMMONWEALTH OF GAME COMM	POTTSVILLE CITY HALL
MAHANOY CITY SEWER AUTHORITY	PA COMWLTH OF	POTTSVILLE CITY HOUSING AUTHY
MAHANOY TOWNSHIP	PA DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION	POTTSVILLE CITY OF
MAHANOY TOWNSHIP AUTHORITY	PA GAME COMMISSION	POTTSVILLE CITY REDEV AUTHY
MAHANOY TOWNSHIP OF	PA HOUSING	POTTSVILLE HOUSING AUTH
MAHANOY TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS	PA HOUSING FINANCE AGENCY	POTTSVILLE HOUSING AUTHORITY
MAHANOY TOWNSHIP WATER AUTHOR	PADELAWARE DIST COUNCIL OF THE	POTTSVILLE HOUSING INC
MAHANOY TOWNSHIP WATER AUTHORI	PENN COMM OF GAME COMMISSION	RAHN TOWNSHIP OF
MAHANOY TWP AUTHORITY	PENN GAME COMMISSION	REILLY TOWNSHIP OF
MAHANOY TWP SCHOOL DHS	PENNA COMM DEPT ENVIR RES	REILLY TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS OF
MAHONY AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT	PENNA COMM DEPT GENL SRVC	REILLY TWP SCH DIST
MINERSVILLE MUNICIPAL AUTHORTY	PENNA COMM DEPT OF TRANSP	REILLY TWP SUPERVISORS OF
MINERSVILLE MUNICIPAL AUTHY OF	PENNA COMM OF DEPT OF GEN SERV	RINGTOWN BOR OF MUNICIPAL AUTH
MINERSVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT	PENNA COMM OF GAME COMMISSION	RINGTOWN BORO MUNICIPAL AUTHY
NEW CASTLE TOWNSHIP OF	PENNA COMMONWEALTH	RINGTOWN MUNICIPAL AUTH
NEW PHILADELPHIA BOROUGH OF	PENNA COMMONWEALTH OF	RINGTOWN MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY
NORTH MANHEIM TOWNSHIP OF	PENNA COMMONWEALTH OF GENERAL	RUSH TOWNSHIP OF
NORTH MANHEIM TOWNSHIP SCH DIS	PENNA GAME COMMISSION	RUSH TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS OF
NORTH UNION TOWNSHIP OF	PENNA OF COMMONWEALTH	RUSH TWP MUNICIPAL BLDG

Data referenced in this report is from the Schuykill County property assessment file, obtained and up-to-date as of August 24th 2009 and referenced as part of the Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS® Datamine.

RUSH TWP REC COMM	SCHUYLKILL COUNTY PROPERTY	TRI VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT
RUSH TWP REC COMM OF	SCHUYLKILL CTY HOUSING AUTH	TRI-VALEY SCHOOL DISTRICT
RUSH TWP SCHOOL DIST	SCHUYLKILL CTY MUNICIPAL AUTH	TWIN CO JOINT MUNICIPAL AUTHY
RUSH TWP SEWER AUTHY OF	SCHUYLKILL HAVEN MUNICIPAL ATH	U S GOVERNMENT
RYAN TOWNSHIP OF	SCHUYLKILL MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY	UNION TOWNSHIP OF
RYAN TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS OF	SCHUYLKILL TOWNSHIP OF	UNION TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS OF
RYAN TWP EMER & RESCUE SQUAD	SCHUYLKILL TWP MUNICIPAL AUTHY	UNITED STATES GOVT
RYAN TWP EMERGENCY RESCUE SQUA	SCHUYLKILL TWP MUNICIPAL BLDG	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
RYAN TWP FIRE CO	SCHUYLKILL TWP SUPERVISORS	UNITED STATES POSTAL SERV
RYAN TWP FIRE CO OF	SEC. OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVL	UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE
SC CO COUNCIL FOR THE ART	SECRETARY OF HOUSING AND	UNITIED STATES POSTAL SER
SCH CO MUNICIPAL AUTH	SHEN MUNICIPAL AUTH OF	UPPER MAHANTONGO TOWNSHIP OF
SCH CO TAX CLAIM BUREAU AS TR	SHENANDOAH BORO MUNICIPAL AUTH	UPPER MAHANTONGO TWP OF
SCH COUNTY MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY	SHENANDOAH SCHOOL DISTRICT	US GOVERNMENT
SCH COUNTY OF	SOUTH MANHEIM TOWNSHIP OF	USA DEPT HOUSING & URBAN DEV
SCH COUNTY RAIL TRANSPORT AUTH	ST CLAIR AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT	VOL FIRE CO NO 1 OF TOWER CITY
SCH CTY HOUSING DEV CORP	SUPERVISOR BRANCH TWP	W MAHANOY TWP SUPRV OF
SCH HAVEN AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT	SUPERVISORS BRANCH TWP	WALKER TOWNSHIP OF
SCH. CTY. MUNICIPAL AUTHY.	SUPÈRVISORS BRCH TWP	WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP OF
SCHOOL DIST BORO MAHANOY CITY	SUPERVISORS OF SCH TWP MUN BLD	WASHINGTON TWP SUPERVISORS OF
SCHOOL DISTRICT	TAMAQUA AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT	WAYNE TOWNSHIP OF .
SCHUYLKILL CO MUNICIPAL AUTHY	TAMAQUA BOROUGH COUNCIL	WEST BRUNSWICK TOWNSHIP
SCHUYLKILL COUNTY AIRPORT	TOWER CITY AUTHORITY	WEST BRUNSWICK TOWNSHIP OF
SCHUYLKILL COUNTY AIRPORT AUTH	TOWER CITY BORO & PORTER TWP	WEST BRUNSWICK TWP LLC
SCHUYLKILL COUNTY AREA	TOWER CITY BORO AUTH	WEST MAHANOY TOWNSHIP OF
SCHUYLKILL COUNTY COURT HOUSE	TOWER CITY BOROUGH AUTHORITY	WEST MAHANOY TWP SCHOOL DIST
SCHUYLKILL COUNTY HOUSING AUTH	TOWER CITY BOROUGH AUTHY	WEST MAHANOY TWP SUPERVISORS
SCHUYLKILL COUNTY MUNICIPAL	TOWER CITY BOROUGH OF	WEST MAHANOY TWP SUPERVISORSOF
SCHUYLKILL COUNTY OF	TOWER CITY COMMUNITY AMBU	WEST PENN TOWNSHIP OF
SCHUYLKILL COUNTY PRISON	TREMONT TOWNSHIP OF	WEST PENN TWP SUPERVISORS OF

Data referenced in this report is from the Schuykill County property assessment file, obtained and up-to-date as of August 24th 2009 and referenced as part of the Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS® Datamine.





About Our Agency

Poverty in Our County

Poverty in Schuylkill County

Poverty Guidelines

Federal Poverty Guidelines are used to determine financial eligibility for certain federal and state funded programs.

2009 HHS Poverty Guidelines

Persons in Family or Household	48 Contiguous States and D.C.
A desire	\$10,830
**************************************	\$14,570
	\$18,310
4	\$22,050
5	\$25,790
Ö	\$29,530
The state of the s	\$33,270
8	\$37,010

For each additional person, add \$3,740

SOURCE: Federal Register, Vol. 74, No. 14, January 23, 2009, p. 4200

The Self-Sufficiency Standard

The Self-Sufficiency Standard measures how much income is needed for a family of a certain composition in a given place to adequately meet their basic needs with or without public assistance.

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Table 21
The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Schuylkill County, 2008

MONTHLY COSTS	Adult	Adult + Preschapler	Adult + Infant Preschoole	Adult Prescheeler Schoolege	Adult Schoolage Teenager	Adult r Infant Freschooler Schoolage	A CONTROL OF THE PARTY OF THE P	2 Adelts + Preschooler Schoolege
Housing	47.4	5.46	\$46	546	546	682	546	545
Child Care	0	477	692	668	391	1282	892	868
Food	209	316	.411	473	547	555	592	650
Transportation	226	233	233	233	233	233	146	446
Health Care	119	267	280	286	307	798	338	344
Mixcellaneous	103	18.4	236	241	202	305	281	185
Taxes	227	336	-438	457	7.46	680	529	547
Earned Income Tax Credit (-)	0	-120	-125	-110	-253	0	-33	.16
Child Care Tax Credit (+)	ō	-73	-115	-126	· 48	-100	-110	-110
Child Tax Credit (-)	0	-83	-167	167	-152	-250	-167	-167
SELF-SUFFICIENCY WAG	£	***************************************	(*				of \$10.00 to place 10.00 to 1	
BOURLY	\$7.72	\$11.84	\$14.94	\$15.34	\$11,47	\$20.94	\$9.41	\$9.64
	<u></u>	The state of the s	5	and the second s			peradult	per adult
MONTHLY	51.358	\$2,084	52.629	\$2,700	52.020	53,686	\$3.314	53,393
ANNUAL	\$16,295	\$25.009	\$31,545	\$32.405	524.234	\$44.229	\$39.769	\$40,718

Poverty Thresholds

The dollar amount the Census Bureau uses to determine poverty

How does the Census Bureau determine poverty? http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/povdef.html#2

What are the Poverty Thresholds? http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/threshld/thresh06.html

Poverty in Schuylkill County The latest statistics

The 2006 American Community Survey reveals the following results for Schuylkill County:

In 2006:

. People in Poverty

12.4 percent (17,432) of people were in poverty (PA, 12.1%, US, 13.3%) - a rate slightly above the statewide rate, but below national estimates.

Related Children in Poverty

18.5 percent of related children under 18 were below the poverty level (PA, 16.5%, US, 17.9%) - a higher percentage than state and national levels.

People Age 65 and over in Poverty

8.3 percent of people age 65 years and over were below the poverty level (PA, 8.9%, US, 9.9%) - a percentage slightly below state and national percentages.

Families in Poverty

9.4 percent of all families (PA, 8.2%, US, 9.8%) and 34.2 percent of families with a female headed householder and no husband present (PA, 26.8%, US 28.36%)had income below the poverty level - rates slightly above state and national levels (not including percentage of all families, which is slightly below national rates).

Median Earnings

The median earnings for the population 16 and over was \$24,845 (PA, \$27,151, US, \$27, 239) - median earnings lag behind state and national levels.

Median income

The median income of households was \$38,496 (PA, \$46,259, US, \$48,451) - median income is below that of state and national levels.

A comparison of 2004, 2005, and 2006 County ACS data shows:

Schuylkill County, American Community Survey Estimates	2004	2005	2006
People in Poverty	10.2%	13%	12.4%
Percent of related children under 18 below the poverty level	12.2%	19%	18.5%
Percent of people age 65 years and over below the poverty level	12.7%	12%	8.3%
Percent of all families below poverty level	7.2%	10%	9.4%
Percent of families with a female headed householder and no husband present below poverty level	21.5%	30%	34.2%
Median earnings for the population 16 and over	\$23,977	\$25,492	\$24,845
Median income of households	\$36,843	\$35,610	\$38,496

The American Community Survey (ACS) can be accessed by visiting the U.S. Census Bureau website, at www.census.gov.



SCA is an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

SCA is firmly committed to the provision of assistance regardless of race, color, age, national origin, sex, familial status or disability.



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V Existing Blight Problems/Issues: Schuylkill County and Beyond

Based on discussions with many individuals in Schuylkill County during the preparation of this municipal resource guide; the work of the "Ad Hoc" blight committee, and public testimony by Schuylkill County officials at the Pennsylvania Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee's hearing on the proposed Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act, SB 1291 last session and SB 900 during the 2009-2010 legislative session in Pottsville, Pennsylvania; the following, based on these sources, represent a summary of the current key blight problems/issues in Schuylkill County today.

NOTE: Some of the following statements are direct quotes taken from testimony at the hearing.

Summary

- Municipalities in Schuylkill County do not have enough tools to fight blight with, and current penalties for blighted property code violations are not strict enough. Slumlords owning blighted property not only know that current laws can be easily circumvented; they know exactly how to do it.
- In spite of all the positive steps taken to date by municipalities in Schuylkill County to fight blight, the problem with blighted properties cannot be satisfactorily addressed until new powers are provided to municipalities by the Pennsylvania legislature such as those included in the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act introduced by the late Senator Rhoades based on work of his the Statewide Blight

Task Force. Senate Bill 1261 during the 2007-2008 legislative session and Senate Bill 900 in the current 2009-2010 legislative session. A copy of Senate Bill 900 is included in the Appendix of this report.

- As trustee for unpaid taxes, the Schuylkill County Tax Claim Bureau currently has an inventory of hundreds of properties which have been exposed to the tax upset sale. Furthermore, an additional 250-300 properties are exposed to upset sale each year due to unpaid taxes and a majority of the properties offered at the tax sale are blighted.
- A serious problem exists with blighted properties sold to buyers at a tax
 sale who have no plan or intention of improving the property.
- The long term presence of blighted, deteriorating, and abandoned properties in Schuylkill County only hinders the goals of initiatives such as the Elm Street Program, and its downtown business district counterpart, the Main Street Program in Pottsville. "Without new state legislation in the form of the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act, giving municipalities the power to more effectively and swiftly deal with the issue of blight, further frustration will be heaped on responsible home and business owners who work within the guidelines of these programs; some who invest their own monies as matching funds to the grants and loans for which they have successfully applied."

- "The inability of municipalities in Schuylkill County to deal with blighted, deteriorating and abandoned properties as they should be empowered to do, results in an overall decrease in the property values in a neighborhood. It is also an obstacle for realtors trying to market homes in the neighborhood, and makes the prospect less attractive for potential businesses to move into an area; many of whom will provide much needed amenities for that neighborhood or area."
- "What about the social and psychological impact that chronic blight has on a community? How can homeowners or business owners be encouraged to invest in their properties when on a daily basis, year after year, they witness sections of their blocks literally crumbling around them"?
- "As a neighborhood revitalization specialist, how can I urge homeowners to participate in home renovation programs, and in some instances ask them to invest their own hard earned money, when irresponsible property owners on their block laugh in their face when they are confronted about the deplorable conditions of their property"?
- As an Elm Street manager I am fortunate to have a great working relationship with Pottsville's code enforcement team. On a day to day

basis, they communicate the desire to obtain the ammunition to fight blight. Code enforcement is on the front line. As outlined in Chapter G of Senate Bill 1291, the commonwealth's municipalities must be given additional tools and funding to augment existing code enforcement regulations to deal with the spread of chronic blight. Such additional fire power will allow code enforcement to initiate preventive measures and tailor them to their needs. For example, in the recent past, structures, many of historical significance in Schuylkill County, could have been saved if the owners of the properties were compelled to at least put a roof on the structure to prevent water damage. There is a potential to refurbish some of the existing housing stock and make properties across this commonwealth attractive to potential buyers from all walks of life. That possibility evaporates, if that housing stock, as well as potential business premises, are allowed to rot due to lack of action by the owner and the absence of resources for communities to reverse the situation."

"At the county level, tax bureaus and related administrators, need to work more closely and uniformly with municipalities and/responsible entities such as Schuylkill Community Action that seek to acquire blighted properties for demolition or renovation, with the goal of targeted community revitalization."

- "Properties acquired through a tax sale that have previously been deemed blighted, deteriorating or abandoned, must have their conditions addressed in a timely manner. Parties' acquiring these types of properties should have background checks to investigate whether or not they possess other properties that have serious code violations. At the time of the tax sale, stipulations should be in place to mandate the rehabilitation or demolition of the structure in a certain time frame."
- "If the purchasers at a tax sale do not meet their responsibilities, then the municipalities must be empowered to seek recourse to bring the property owner to task or pursue criminal prosecution and seize assets. Setting conditions and stipulations for tax sales will make opportunists, especially out of state property buyers, think twice before buying blighted properties with the intention of making a quick buck by flipping the property on EBay without ever even crossing the threshold of the properties."
- Current blight issues in Schuylkill County, also include but are not limited to:
 - Slumlords, out of state blighted property owners
 - Tax delinquencies
 - On-line sales of blighted properties
 - Municipal code enforcement

- Demolition of blighted structures
- Blight remediation initiatives (Example: Borough dumpster program)
- Municipal ordinances necessary to help fight blight, including the need to review current municipal ordinances/codes to determine current enforcement activities to see if updates are needed or if new ordinances/codes should be developed. These reviews have not been completed to date due to lack of funds in current municipal budgets. Included in these reviews should be:
- UCC Program
- Realty transfer inspections
- Rental property inspections
- Multi-family inspections
- Contractor registration
- Property maintenance
- Local zoning
- A statewide system to track blighted building owners needs to be developed. It should consider using existing systems through the state and county (tax claims office, drivers license data system, recorders office, etc). The process must address fictitious names, addresses, multiple

listings, etc. Any program must be able to track out-of-state landlords through use of social security and/or EIN for tracking.

- The current antiquated municipal delinquent property tax sale process needs to be reviewed and revised to account for blighted properties and there is also a need to identify ways to address the concerns with blighted property transfer and to expedite the process. A way to cover county/municipal costs also needs to be identified (advertisement, inspections, legal fees etc.) and provided for; in addition to expediting the process.
- A streamlined approach to allowing a municipality to obtain a blighted
 property is also needed. See the flow chart on the next page identifying
 the current process for Mahanoy City Borough to obtain a blighted
 property. Presently, up to four (4) deed transfers may be needed to get rid
 of the blighted property currently.
- There is a need to address the process for an adjacent property owner to obtain a blighted property next to them. The process needs to be easier and municipal controls need to be revised to allow for more flexibility in allowing this to happen. Maybe tax relief; allow for the transfer for \$1. Also, consider a program to allow for a plan submittal to the municipality to be discussed at a public meeting. The new owners should be able to

show the financial capabilities to demolish or bring the blighted property up to code, perhaps through a performance bond, and be given a set time to do so.

- There is a need to examine how a property is classified as "blighted" so a different way of tracking the transfer is made in order for problems to be addressed (similar to car title transfers). A clear definition of "blight" as applied to a given property needs to be used, and existing laws need to be reviewed. The physical condition is typically the primary factor in classifying a property as "blighted". There is also a need to look at the economic value of a property. If it costs more to bring a property up to code than it's worth, that should be classified as blighted. There is also a need to review municipal property maintenance ordinances relating to the condemnation process.
- If a building is classified as "blighted", how can all liens be cleared faster?

 There needs to be specific rules for how municipalities or private residents take over a "blighted," "abandoned," or "unoccupied" property. This review should include the process of eminent domain and how it is applied in these instances (avoid changing lien holders' laws). The conservator concept incorporated in recently enacted state legislation also needs to be further reviewed and expanded.

- Another issue is the problem created when previous owners don't record a realty transfer. They pay taxes to stay off the tax claims list, but they are not listed as the "owner" in the county data. Mahanoy City has dealt with this and there is no law requiring the recording of the deed. This needs to be changed.
- Online sales have been used in Schuylkill County where the online parcel locator photos, taken in 1995, are used for sales. In many instances, especially in Mahanoy City, the building conditions have deteriorated to such a degree that the photos do not match the current condition of the property. This practice has to be addressed to require current owners to upgrade the property to code before transfer; or the new owners must agree to address any code violations in a given timeframe prior to the issuance of an occupancy permit.
- There is a need to address blighted properties where taxes are paid and up to date. In Mahanoy City, several properties have been sold or "flipped" by out-of-state owners who pay the taxes before transfer.
- There is a need to work with lien holders to release liability on blighted properties. Consultation with local banks is critical in any blight management program. Banks need to be held liable for blighted properties under their control. **NOTE**: For demolition of properties, Mahanoy City

Borough issues a permit. The process requires property utility clearance and appropriate sign-off from pest control/extermination/abatement. The Borough typically uses a portion of entitlement CDBG funding for demolition projects. The Borough will buy a property to demolish, then sell it after demolition is complete. Any money gained is placed in the Borough Demolition fund to use as recycled money for future demolition projects. The Borough also allocates \$4,500 for their dumpster program. See Appendix.

- Under municipal codes, municipalities can have a blighted property that is an eminent threat to the public safety demolished (a licensed engineer must identify a building as structurally unsafe and recommend immediate demolition). More municipalities need to be aware of this authority.
 The International Property Maintenance Code also allows for a building code officer (BCO) to require a property to be demolished. Municipal property maintenance code ordinances in Schuylkill County need to be reviewed to ensure this authority is used.
- There is a need for appropriate code enforcement training of all involved with it in Schuylkill County.
- Additional cooperation and consultation with the district magistrates in Schuylkill County is needed. Some violators are willing to pay the fines

instead of bringing a property up to code as it is the cheaper alternative. Some magistrates do not take a hard stance and will only fine a violator a portion of what is allowed under the municipal ordinance. Magistrates need to understand the damage a slumlords blighted property has on the community. Training of state magisterial district judges should include blight management and enforcement as well as state blight statutes and municipal ordinances.

- Some school districts won't release tax liens related to blighted properties.
 School officials need to be educated about blight, and consideration
 should be given to allowing the release of all tax liens where two of the
 three taxing bodies agree to waive the liens.
- e Education and enforcement must go hand-in-hand. All municipal officials, code officers, police officers, and district justices need to be involved in the development of any ordinances or plans for effective implementation. Education of the general public must also be included to let people know that building code enforcement is not a revenue generator for the municipality and that the ultimate goal is to improve the community's quality of life and the health and safety of its residents. It is also important to point out that ultimately, implementation of blight management practices will promote economic development, increase property values and improve the municipal tax base.

• There is a need to review the process of tax sales in Schuylkill County and the state's antiquated enabling legislation. There has been recent activity by out-of-area purchasers in Schuylkill County who buy multiple properties and resell them without bringing them up to code. There should be post-sale conditions for upgrading of the property to meet code requirements by anyone buying property at a tax sale including posting a performance bond.

NOTE: As discussed in this manual, Mahanoy City has an incentive program to provide dumpsters to owners who are demolishing vacant/blighted homes in the Borough. The Borough will cover costs up to \$1,500 for single buildings (or \$2,000 for multiple buildings) to assist with landfill fees. This program is unique to Mahanoy City but should be considered by other municipalities in Schuylkill County and the state.

• A model municipal Strategic Blight Management Plan as described in this resource guide should tie all existing laws, codes, ordinances, etc. into one package to streamline efforts to fight blight. New strategies should be identified and implemented as recommended. The plan should also address economic development and the need for funding justification and future grant requests. Stakeholders should also be identified from within: I.E. Upper Schuylkill, Mahanoy Downtown, Inc., Chamber of Commerce, etc and on a regional basis,

I.E. Northern Schuylkill Council of Governments, Schuylkill Section of the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs, etc for the development and implementation of a plan's elements. **NOTE**: The model municipal blight management plan should be innovative and support the proposed state legislation showing owners of blighted properties that the state and local municipalities are serious about blight management. The state should also give municipalities the tools to address this serious problem.

- Consider state legislation to allow a fee or tax on realty transfers to cover blight management programs. Consider a 1% from the buyer and a 1% from the seller (or some other amount) to go to a County Blight Task Force. It could be called a "blight fee" where the title company has the liability to make sure it is paid prior to transfer. NOTE: There is a need to review the judicial tax sale property transfer process and work with the tax claim bureau to identify how to better address and expedite the sale of blighted properties. Abstract companies are typically not used. Schuylkill County municipalities could condemn a property and ask the County to add a condition to any tax claim sale requiring demolition within a given timeframe from sale. This approach would keep slumlords (in most cases) from purchasing the property.
- To ensure code compliance, consider at transfer of title for blighted property, a
 buyer must post a promissory agreement/bond to bring the property up to code

standards within a given timeframe (90-180 days) with a chance to extend it in good faith cases. The amount could be for full demolition costs.

• State legislation should consider requiring the Attorney General's office to be responsible for helping local municipalities end the current corrupt/deceiving practices of slumlords. While there have been previous amendments to the crimes code to help fight slumlords, another look may be warranted including a way to combat and stop their current tricks (i.e., use of 1995 photos for online sales).

Examples of Success in transforming blighted properties in Schuylkill County

While there are many success stories in Schuylkill County involving formerly blighted properties that were rehabilitated through economic development projects, including many in the City of Pottsville included in the Appendix, the following are examples from Tamaqua Borough that were included in testimony before the Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee on the proposed Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act. Similar projects could be considered by other municipalities in Schuylkill County under the Blight Management Plans they develop using this resource guide.

• Used everything from transportation to Heritage Park funding to restore the blighted train station which now houses an upscale restaurant and shops.

- Used Main Street and Conservation and Natural Resources funding to construct
 Depot Square Park; a park and garden where a gasoline station was being
 abandoned and which would have become further blighted.
- Cited property owners under a local Historic District Ordinance which prohibits demolition by neglect
- Used private funds and preservation funding to acquire and restore blighted properties like the Shep House Mansion.
- Acquired 50 Mauch Chunk Street at a municipal tax sale and sold it to the highest bidder who now operates a successful pub and restaurant on the site.
- Created a partnership with John Morgan Trust, Lehigh Carbon Community
 College, and Tamaqua School District to construct a new community college
 campus where a junior high school was being abandoned.
- Implemented an aggressive demolition program to eliminate blight. In the past 10 years, Tamaqua has spent More than \$373,000 demolishing 30 blighted properties. This is just the demolition costs and does not include legal fees, countless hours of enforcement officers and borough employee's time, unpaid taxes, water, sewer and refuse bills.

- In addition, dozens of other properties were taken to the point of demolition but the property owners either abated the violations, or demolished the structures themselves to avoid the demolition lien filing. Up until this year, Schuylkill County contributed 50% towards demolition costs and the Tamaqua School District contributed 12.5%. Tamaqua has always been proud of their enlightened school board which understands eliminating blight is a good investment.
- Restored a blighted factory the former boot and shoe factory. It was vacant for
 many years. This was accomplished by partnering with the Alliance for Building
 Communities to use historic tax credits, Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh,
 using affordable housing funding, the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency
 housing tax credits and PennHomes financing.
- Used negotiated consent orders to allow property owners to address code and blight issues. One property owner, who purchased two Tamaqua properties sight unseen at the same sheriff's sale, was given time to address the code issues and agreed to allow the borough to hold the deed in escrow until those code issues were addressed. The property owner of course did not address the property code issues and Tamaqua Borough executed the deed and took ownership.

 Unfortunately, the property burned down before the Borough could rehabilitate it.
- Implemented a substantial housing rehabilitation program helping hundreds of property owners.

- Operated a residential rental property registration program with inspection every four years.
- Worked closely with Tamaqua's water and sewer authorities to strictly enforce
 and routinely shut off water service to delinquent customers to try to keep a
 property from falling into a spiral of delinquency and blight.
- Monitored sheriff and judicial sales to attempt to acquire blighted property for demolition or rehabilitation, and also to ensure that purchasers were aware of their obligations to address code violations.
- Cut untold amounts of grass around abandoned or neglected properties knowing that the Borough was unlikely to recoup the costs simply by filing a lien. Liens were filed anyway.
- Placed more than 18 vacant and blighted properties in the KOZ and KOEZ
 Programs. Many of these sites are now quality, highly desired apartments and locations for small businesses.
- Launched and sustained a Main Street Committee and program that includes dedicated annual funding from the Borough to sustain the program now that the state funding is no longer available.

- Launched an Elm Street committee in our south ward to address blight in a residential neighborhood.
- Organized volunteers at the New Life Assembly of God Church who repaired the roof of one of the neighborhood residents to prevent it from becoming blighted.
- Worked with the Schuylkill County Community Action to construct a new singlefamily detached home where a blighted home had been demolished.
- Raised \$1.3 million in private funding to construct a community center where our
 Victoria Theater collapsed and a vacant lot existed for many years.
- Routinely performed fire inspections at commercial properties.
- Completed a \$2.3 Streetscape Project.
- Maintains a staff that includes a code enforcement officer, assistant code enforcement officer, and two housing rehabilitation officers.
- Offered low interest housing rehab financing, sidewalk financing, and commercial property financing to address code violations.



Services



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J.U.N.E. Project





For the City of Pottsville, once crown jewel of the Southern Anthracite region, the road to recovery has been long and arduous. However, the progress made in rejuvenating and revitalizing neighborhoods in the last several years has been nothing short of astounding. Through the concerted efforts of community members and volunteer groups,



neighborhoods blighted by abandoned buildings and crumbling facades are gaining a new and vibrant identity.

The dynamic behind this transformation is a cooperative spirit among residents, merchants, and volunteer groups. This united effort has created a synergy, and is the driving force behind neighborhood revitalization.

One of the greatest assets to our revitalization effort is a group of teen volunteers known as the J.U.N.E. Project (Jesus Uniting Neighborhoods Everywhere) and also known as Darryl's Army. These kids, who travel a great distance at their own expense, will be coming to our community again this summer. From August 3rd through August 7th, this New Jersey-based group of about 100 teens will be lending their labor and enthusiasm to community projects in the 'Elm Street' district in the City of Pottsville, as well as other areas of Schuylkill County.



During the summer of 2008 the "J.U.N.E. Project" made a positive impact everywhere they focused their efforts. A few of their many accomplishments from last summer included:

Clearing of debris and initial planting of greenery in the pocket park located in the 500 block of North Centre Street Stream clean-up and beautification along the creek walk at the Barefield Recreation Complex Scraping and painting of windows and landscape work at

the Y.M.C.A.

Interior demolition and clean-up of a blighted property in Mahanoy City

The "J.U.N.E. Project" brings fervor to the neighborhoods they work in, which acts as a catalyst. Merchants and residents unite for the common goal of moving our City and County closer to the thriving center of commerce and culture that the City of Pottsville and County of Schuylkill once were.

As Elm Street Manager, I'm asking for your assistance to help feed this army of volunteers. These teens travel a long distance, at their own expense, to pitch in and support our revitalization efforts throughout the City and County. To help support the "J.U.N.E Project" effort we would like to provide lunches and dinners for our volunteers, as well as provide them with water, soft drinks, and ice (we are planning cook-outs for dinner) Additionally, we would like to provide transportation within the



County for this large group of volunteers.

would like to thank you in advance for any consideration and support of this effort. Please contact me if you can help at 570/622-1995 or e-mail me at mgabardi@schuylkillcommunityaction.com.

Click here for the J.U.N.E. Project Contribution Form

City of Pottsville "Elm Street" Program

The City of Pottsville *Elm Street* Program has been designed to spearhead a neighborhood revitalization effort in a designated older historic district in the City of Pottsville. The City's *Elm Street* Program is a comprehensive community revitalization program targeted at improving the housing stock, providing economic opportunity, improving the neighborhood infrastructure, developing "green" space, and providing lighting and signage. Housing assistance to neighborhood residents will be provided in the form of home renovation/repair grants and closing cost or down payment assistance grants. The Program offers eligible homeowners in the *Elm Street* area an opportunity to make renovations or repairs to their home or provides assistance to first-time homebuyers to purchase a home.



The current *Elm Street* neighborhood consists of North Centre Street from Harrison Street to Peacock Street and then returns to Laurel Boulevard through Terry Reiley Way (formerly Coal Street). Efforts are currently underway seeking approval to extend the *Elm Street* neighborhood to encompass Nichols Street in its entirety.

Schuylkill Community Action is the implementing agency for the City of Pottsville *Elm Street* Program offered by the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (PA DCED) in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Downtown Center (PDC).

"Elm Street" Home Renovation Assistance Program

Goal

The goal of the *Elm Street* Home Renovation Assistance Program is to help stabilize and enhance the *Elm Street* neighborhood by improving the current housing stock through housing renovation activities. Home renovation and repairs may include such activities as "accessibility" modifications; roof, window or door replacement; electrical upgrade; plumbing repairs; heating or hot water system replacement; kitchen or bathroom upgrades; insulation or other energy efficiency/conservation improvements; or other contracting activities to correct code deficiencies. Contracting activities will be considerate of historic preservation and promote the utilization of "green" technologies.



Program Benefits

The Elm Street Housing Renovation Assistance Program will:

- Provide up to \$15,000 in the form of an interest-free, convertible (forgivable) loan for housing renovations and repairs
- Provide 100% of the costs related to Uniform Construction Code deficiencies and 50% of the costs for non-code related renovations
- Provide 100% of the cost of energy conservation improvements
- Provide 100% of the cost for "accessibility" modifications
- Remain interest free and payment free for ten (10) years at which time the loan converts to a grant and is forgiven providing the borrower remains in good standing for the entirety of the loan



Eligibility

In order to be eligible:

- The property must be a residential property located within the City of Pottsville's Elm Street district
- The property must consist of no more than four individual units
- The property must be the borrower's primary residence (in the case of multi-unit buildings up to 4 units, the borrower must reside in one of the units)
- The property owner must have all property taxes paid to date and must maintain current status

- The property must be insured with a home owners policy at all times
- Total household income cannot exceed 115% of the County Median Income at time of application as published by U.S. HUD



Project Requirements

- Construction must abide by the Uniform Construction Code as well as any applicable local building codes and regulations
- Participant must reside in the property through the duration of the recapture period (10 years) or face repayment as defined below
- The loan is one hundred percent (100%) repayable if the property is sold, or its use changes, within the first five years
- Funding is provided in the form of a conditional loan and will be forgiven starting in the sixth year at a rate of twenty percent (20%) per year for the remaining five years (years 6 through 10)
- The loan will automatically convert to a grant which is forgiven after ten years providing the borrower remains in good standing for the entirety of the loan
- · All appliances purchased must be "Energy Star" rated

City of Pottsville "Elm Street" Down Payment Assistance Program

Another facet of the City of Pottsville's *Elm Street* Program is the Down Payment Assistance Program which provides "down payment" assistance to first-time homebuyers who are desirous of purchasing a home in the *Elm Street* neighborhood.

Goal

The goal of the *Elm Street* Down Payment Assistance Program is to encourage individuals or families to purchase a home in Pottsville's *Elm Street* neighborhood.



Program Benefits

The Elm Street Down Payment Assistance Program will:

- Provide 20% of the purchase price (up to a maximum of \$10,000) in the form of a "down payment" assistance grant
- Provide an interest-free and payment-free period of ownership
- Require repayment upon the transfer of ownership or a change in use

Eligibility

In order to be eligible:

- The property must be a residential property located within the City of Pottsville's Elm Street district
- The property must be utilized as the purchaser's primary residence (multi-unit building may have up to four residential units as long as one of the units is the purchaser's primary residence)
- The applicant must successfully complete the Homebuyer Education course as instructed by Schuylkill Community Action
- The total household income cannot exceed 115% of the County Median Income as published by U.S. HUD



Project Requirements

- A "soft" second mortgage to be executed at time settlement and recorded with the Schuylkill County Recorder of Deeds Office
- 100% of the loan is due in full upon transfer of ownership or change in use of the property receiving assistance (i.e. the property is no longer the purchaser's primary residence)

Participation in the Down Payment Assistance Program does not preclude the homebuyer from participating in the Home Renovation Program.

No one person, household, or property can receive more than \$20,000 of combined assistance under the *Elm Street* Programs

Pottsville's Northern Gateway Project

Another facet of the Elm Street initiative is tackling neighborhood blight. The walls at the corner of North Centre and Nichols Streets have undergone extensive repairs over the

past three months. The work was completed by Pottsville-based contractor Norm Felker of Felker Masonry. The project also included the demolition of a derelict gas station on the property. Currently, Pottsville artist Martin Braukus is painting a "Welcome to Pottsville" mural on the finished walls that will give the illusion of a Romanesque façade and portals incorporating familiar icons of the city. The work is expected to be completed by early 2008.

Funding for the project was provided by a grant from the PA Downtown Center's "Gateway Signage" Program. The elimination of neighborhood blight is a contributing factor in increasing property values in a neighborhood and also gives residents a better sense of safety, according to studies by the PA Department of Community and Economic Development and the PA Downtown Center. The City of Pottsville and SCA are taking further steps to eliminate blight in the Elm Street Neighborhood. Meanwhile, a tree planting project was recently undertaken in the Elm Street Neighborhood.

Pictured here are various of stages of Pottsville's Northern Gateway Project.







CONTACT INFORMATION:

Mike McGeever, Elm Street Manager Schuylkill Community Action



Hamburg History King Frost Parade

Blight Could Yield Boon for Hamburg PA

By: Dan Roman - 06/28/2006

entertainment hub in the borough.

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A rusting rail yard and buildings scarred by neg ect are part of the legacy of the once booming industrial area of Hamburg PA. Now that boom has turned to blight, a plan is in the works to redevelop the area into a commercial and

The Second Street Redevelopment Plan is a joint effort by the Hamburg PA Borough's Planning Commission and the Berks County Redevelopment Authority (BCRA). One of the first steps in the redevelopment effort required an official designation from the state for the blighted area. The planning commission recently accepted its certification of blight for the area between the Schuylkill River and Peach Alley to the east and between Island Street to the north and Route 61 to the south. Under state law, a blighted area is eligible for Pennsylvania and federal grants that it otherwise wouldn't be able to receive.

In order to qualify, an area only has to meet one of seven conditions laid out by the state's Urban Redevelopment Law. Some of the criteria used to determine whether an area is blighted include unsafe or unhealthy buildings, Inadequate planning, faulty street layout, and economically or socially undesirable land use. A study of the area found that only 18 of the 175 properties in the blighted area are beyond repair and another 26 are in need of major repairs. The majority, 111 of the properties, are in need of minor repairs. The blighted area is made up of industrial, commercial, and residential properties.



Revitalization Hamburg is a Pennsylvania Blueprint Community >

is under the Mainstreet Program>

Hamburg PA

been watching the revitalization efforts of older boroughs," Ken Pick, community development director and executive director of the BCRA, said. Pick said Hamburg PA is the second borough the county is helping with the process. The first such project in West Reading has already completed some revitalization projects in their blighted area. West Reading has already undergone a streetscape project similar to one taking place in Hamburg.

Both West Reading and Hamburg are farther along in revitalization efforts and have, therefore, attracted the county's attention, Pick said. In addition to the Main Street Program and its designation as a Blueprint Community, Hamburg may eventually qualify for the state's Elm Street Program and qualify for even more funding, Pick said. Hamburg's Second Street Redevelopment Plan is a preliminary vision to resurrect a section of the borough that was once dominated by knitting mills, factories and rail yards. The plan seeks to incorporate part of the industrial past into a more commercially-oriented future.

Hamburg is joining the National Register of Historic Places>

A plan to resurrect the old train station and rail line in order to promote tourism and excursions between Temple and Scranton is one of the goal's for the area

Other goals include creating professional office space, extending Grand Street to intersect with Route 61, helping homeowners in the area renovate their properties if needed, hastening the opening of the Reading Railroad Museum and creating an entertainment and shopping district. But Leonforte is quick to note that the borough has not made a commitment to act on any of these goals. "This is still in the preliminary stages and nothing is concrete," Leonforte said. "We're not committed to anything yet." In fact, the plan is undergoing further review by both the Berks County Redevelopment Authority and the Hamburg Planning Commission.

Before Hamburg Borough Council can adopt such a plan, a public hearing has to be held. That prospect lies months in the future

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Tower City pushes for funding

o Comments | Republican & Erald; Pottsville, Pa., Jul 6, 2009 | by VICKI TERWILLIGER

TOWER CITY -- Organizers in Tower City hope others may see the improvement potential for abandoned and blighted properties and follow suit with upgrades of their own.

Community and business leaders met with state Sen. David Argall, R-29, on June 29 to push for sustainable funding for revitalization efforts.

"I encourage you to help with funding issues and keep us moving forward," Northern Dauphin Revitalization Project Executive Director Ben Scott told the senator.

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Joining Argall and Scott for the roundtable discussion were Tower City Borough Councilwoman and Revitalization Committee member Ellen Carroll; accountant and developer Richard H. Blickstein, president of R.B. Hill Ltd., Harrisburg; business owner Frank A. Kasper; members of the Tower City Revitalization Committee Ethel G. Russell and Natalie Neyer; and Argall's assistants, Mary Beth Dougherty and Nick Troutman.

"Of all the communities that have latched onto the Main Street project, Tower City is one of the most organized. This is probably one of our most promising," Scott said.

The group met in the roughly 11,000-square-foot, three-story building that Blickstein plans to renovate. Blickstein expects to establish a grocery store in the street-level middle floor; have college classrooms in the upper floor; and eventually create a family-style restaurant in the lower level at 512 E. Grand Ave. as the final phase of a \$750,000 development investment.

Currently serving as vice chairman of the Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee, Argall was instrumental in creating the Main Street downtown revitalization program when he was still serving as a state representative in the House.

Just as blight can spread, so too, can revitalization, he said.

"In upper Schuylkill, it was very contagious," said Argall.

Since 1993, Argall said he's seen first-hand the Main Street improvements made in Tamaqua and the surrounding region's growing interest in upgrading facades, establishing hiking/biking trails and erecting historical markers.

Scott explained that NDRP has 23 Main Street projects currently under way that can aid job creation and increase property valuations. NDRP serves six communities in Dauphin County -- Halifax, Millersburg, Elizabethville, Gratz, Lykens, and Williamstown -- and Tower City in Schuylkill County.

"Specifically, revitalization identifies abandoned and blighted properties . . . and seeks to replace them with productive, new businesses focused on tourism, technology or education," according to the NDRP site.

Scott said he hoped the senator would see the comprehensive nature of NDRP's projects, including items such as the intraregional transit initiative that provides commuter services to and from Harrisburg with stops in Elizabethville, Millersburg and Halifax; and the Lykens Valley Rails-to-Trails project through Lykens, Wiconisco Township and Williams Township. Ideally, the trail could be extended through Schuylkill County to reach I-81.

Anytime an outdoor component can be added to the revitalization efforts is a plus, Argall agreed.

Initially, NDRP had a five-year contract with the state in 2004, which gave the program \$50,000 annually for operating expenses and \$40,000 for facade improvements, Scott said. Now, there's concern about that continued level of financial support, according to Scott.

"What we're trying to do is to give local communities a couple extra tools in the toolbox," said Argall. "We need to cut the programs that we can and balance the budget so we don't have to raise taxes. We need to figure out which cuts make sense," the senator said of the pending state budget.

The Tower City Revitalization Committee meets at 7 p.m. on the third Tuesday of the month at borough hall. For more information on NDRP, visit www.visitnortherndauphin.com.

Infobox

Meeting place

To highlight area revitalization, the Tower City meeting was held at 512 E. Grand Ave.

Accountant and developer Richard H. Blickstein, president of R.B. Hill Ltd., Harrisburg, bought the building that previously held Carroll's New Furniture Carpeting Bedding Antiques & Reproductions. Blickstein plans to establish a grocery store in the street-level middle floor; have college classrooms in the upper floor; and eventually create a family-style restaurant in the lower level.

He also purchased the neighboring, abandoned former Knights of Pythias building from the borough for \$500, and will demolish it to erect a two-level parking lot in its place. That building had been condemned and was deemed unsalvageable. Blickstein said he hoped to start an impetus of improvements for the borough while boosting the economy through the purchase of locally-grown produce, meats and baked goods for his store.

Scott said in accordance to the Federal Fresh Foods Initiative, Tower City is designated as an underserved area, because there's no grocery store within five miles of its rural hub. Blickstein added that a survey of local residents that was conducted in June 2008 showed that people did want such a business in their community.

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Other positive actions taken by municipalities in Schuylkill County are included in Section VI of this report where the results of the Schuylkill County municipal blight questionnaire are discussed.

The following data, taken from a briefing paper entitled "Opportunities for Commonwealth Leadership to Revitalize Pennsylvania" while applicable to Schuylkill County, also indicates the significance of blight beyond Schuylkill County.

It was prepared by:

Author: Cynthia Witman Daley, Esquire, Housing Alliance of PA

Contributing Authors: Elizabeth G. Hersh, Housing Alliance of PA, Janet Milkman and Julie Lalo, 10,000 Friends of PA

Contributors: Mark Edwards, Richard Manson and Joe Yarzebinski, Local Initiatives
Support Corporation, Rick Sauer, Philadelphia Association of Community Development
Corporations, Mark Schwartz, Regional Housing Legal Services, Grant Ervin, 10,000
Friends of PA, Larry Swanson, ACTION Housing, Laura Zinski, Mon Valley Initiative,
Beverly Coleman, Philadelphia Neighborhood Development Collaborative.

Funding for the development of this briefing paper was provided by the Local Initiatives Support Group, the William Penn Foundation, PNC, National City, Philadelphia Neighborhood Development Collaborative, the Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development, and Mellon Financial Corporation. NOTE: A copy of the entire paper is included in the Appendix of this Municipal Resource Guide.

Summary

Our Vision

We envision a Pennsylvania in which our communities are vibrant, healthy and thriving places for people to live and work. We see older towns and neighborhoods reinvigorated as unique, attractive places where past and present combine to create a promising future.

We see the thousands of vacant and abandoned properties in our communities not as the eyesores they are today, but as untapped assets. They provide land for redevelopment.

Today's deteriorating hulks are the sites for tomorrow's homes and shops.

We see abandoned land, when transformed into productive reuse, as a critical opportunity for our older communities to modernize, revitalize, and grow, and to improve the quality of life for neighbors who are already there.

We are optimistic about the future of our communities.

But these changes cannot happen without a strong partnership of state and local government, private investment, and nonprofit and community contributions. We need leadership from the Governor and our State Senators and Representatives to help make our vision a reality, and to transform our abandoned past into a bright and promising future.

The progress already made is a down payment on the work to be done. Pennsylvania's elected leadership must be dedicated to:

- 1. Moving the state from a passive to an active role in attacking blight and abandonment;
- 2. Supporting effective local efforts;
- 3. Providing new tools to tackle old problems;
- 4. Removing the government red tape;
- 5. Leveling the playing field between green space development and built space redevelopment.

With state leadership supporting local efforts, we can reinvent the future of Pennsylvania's communities.

Background

300,000 vacant buildings are spread across Pennsylvania, impeding community and economic development programs and conveying images of old, worn-out communities.

In small cities, large cities, and rural towns throughout the state, 300,000 buildings stand vacant, including 1,591 in Altoona, 932 in Lebanon, and 2,278 in Wilkes-Barre. Another 35,000 are vacant in Philadelphia and almost 19,000 in Pittsburgh. Though fewer in number, vacant properties also litter small towns throughout rural Pennsylvania.

Tools currently available to municipalities for acquiring vacant properties are cumbersome, time consuming, and not consistently available.

Homes in older communities are often vacated by the death of the owner, the inability of the owner to pay property taxes, or by families moving to more modern homes in the suburbs. Because Pennsylvania has stagnant population growth and is losing young people, there is often little demand for the homes left empty in the cities and boroughs. Low demand reduces property values, which in turn reduces opportunities for homeowners to build equity and makes rehabilitation economically infeasible for the private sector alone.

At the same time, the demand for homes affordable to working families is increasing.

Where the cost of rehabilitation exceeds the market value of properties, state and local

assistance is needed to turn vacant buildings into homes within reach of working families, the elderly and people with disabilities in Pennsylvania.

Obstacles to the Vision

1.) Legal remedies available to local governments for reclaiming vacant buildings are outdated and inadequate.

The most common method of acquiring vacant buildings is the tax sale. Once a property is tax delinquent for two years, the county can list it for tax sale. But Pennsylvania's tax sale laws were designed to raise revenue, not to reclaim vacant buildings. According to the law, the property must be sold to the highest bidder. The local government has no control over who buys the building or what will be done with it. Other remedies, such as appointing a community development corporation or redevelopment authority as receiver of the vacant building, are not available in Pennsylvania.

2.) Redevelopment in older communities is more difficult and, in the short run, more costly than development of "greenfields." The public investment of dollars is inadequate to meet the needs of revitalization efforts in older communities.

Redevelopment projects in older communities often require the amassing of numerous parcels of property. Finding owners, acquiring properties through negotiations, tax sales

or other means, and clearing title can take years – long enough to dissuade a developer from undertaking a project.

Moreover, some vacant properties were once home to manufacturing and industrial plants, leaving behind environmental problems. Ownership brings liability for clean-up, and clean-up is costly. Development is easier and cheaper on undeveloped greenfields.

In some areas, the process is complicated by the city's sale of its tax liens to private entities. Developers who try to purchase properties held by these companies often find it more difficult, more time consuming, and more costly than if they were able to negotiate directly with the municipality.

Pennsylvania's spending on community revitalization, although increased in recent years, is woefully inadequate. Funds are needed for acquisition, environmental remediation, site preparation, title clearance, and rehabilitation and new construction. With the resources currently available, local governments are struggling just to tread water.

3.) Infrastructure in older communities is in poor repair and in need of state support.

As tax bases in older communities shrink the local governments' ability to maintain their infrastructure is compromised. Pennsylvania's roads are in dire need of attention, with 56% being rated in fair or poor condition. Similarly, roughly half of the bridges in the

Pittsburgh and Philadelphia metropolitan areas are structurally deficient. School buildings and public transportation also show their age. New regulations from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will require millions of dollars worth of improvements to existing water treatment facilities. Yet, despite the need for improvements in our existing infrastructure, more and more tax dollars are spent on building new roads, water and sewer facilities, and schools – all of which will have to be maintained in the future.

4.) Disinvestment in occupied properties is contagious and eventually leads to abandonment.

Over 50% of Pennsylvania's homes are more than 40 years old. For the 17% of homeowners whose income is less than \$20,000 per year, and for the 28% of homeowners who are elderly, maintenance and property taxes are major concerns. In addition, landlords in lower-priced areas often cannot command sufficient rents to adequately maintain their properties. Eventually, some of these under maintained properties will be abandoned because low property values do not support the investment needed to modernize and maintain them. Abandonment further reduces neighborhood property values. The local tax base shrinks as wealthier residents and businesses leave for greener pastures. With less revenue, municipal services suffer, further fueling the exodus. While families wait months, if not years, for homes within their reach, properties sit vacant because redevelopment is too difficult and costly. When properties are not maintained, the occupants suffer, and the communities suffer.

5.) While various state agencies and municipal governments are attempting to address the problems of revitalization, policies and programs focusing on vacant buildings are piecemeal and uncoordinated.

State agencies have begun to place more emphasis on projects which utilize previously developed sites and existing infrastructure, and which expand the availability of housing choices in communities. Nevertheless, the actions of the various agencies are not coordinated, nor are the resources which the state has to offer.

Greenfield industrial parks are often filled with businesses leaving older communities, rather than new businesses coming into the state. Too often, state funded economic development projects, which rarely include a housing component, have negative unintended consequences for older communities: higher-wage workers follow the jobs to their new locations beyond the core communities, while lower-wage workers either embark on long commutes or leave their jobs because of lack of transportation. A Commonwealth commitment to the revitalization of vacant buildings in older communities for both economic development and a range of housing options could reverse this trend.

Some local governments have taken it upon themselves to try to reclaim the vacant buildings within their borders. But lack of coordination makes this difficult. There is no statewide inventory of vacant buildings and little regional planning to address redevelopment issues including those of vacant buildings. The Commonwealth is large

and varied, but abandonment is a common problem that is best addressed in a coordinated way.

The Time to Act is Now

1.) Blight is contagious. We must stop it and reverse the trend before it is unmanageable.

Pennsylvania's older communities have lost population and found themselves with more housing units than households. Lack of demand leads to lowered property values, which in turn discourages investment. Soon properties become blighted, further reducing values. Not only Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, but smaller cities and rural towns across the state have found themselves locked in the downward spiral of abandonment and flight. Before we can expect people and businesses to return to these communities, the public sector must act to stop abandonment and invest in revitalization.

2.) New developments in outlying areas are costly to local governments and school districts.

While the cost of new developments on formerly open land may be less expensive for the developer than building in established communities, "greenfield' developments can be very expensive for the area's taxpayers. New roads, water and sewer systems, police and other municipal services and schools place a heavy burden on residents. This

infrastructure requires ongoing maintenance, continuing to burden the taxpayers for decades after the developer has moved on. To address these costs, some townships are considering charging residential developers \$20,000 to \$30,000 per house constructed to cover these costs. Such a fee would further drive up the cost of already expensive new homes. With leadership from the state, we can take advantage of Pennsylvania's existing resources and infrastructure rather than building more roads, schools, and sewage treatment facilities. In the process, we can revitalize our communities.

3.) We cannot afford to waste the investment we have already made in our older communities.

In earlier years, state and local governments invested in cities and towns with funding for building roads, public transportation systems, schools, and water and sewer facilities.

Now those same systems and facilities are in need of funds for maintenance and modernization. Without such improvements, businesses and more mobile residents look to other locations where new facilities can be built. But new facilities are not the answer; what is new today will need to be maintained 10 years from now. Instead, we must act now to protect our original investments and shore up existing resources, enabling those facilities to provide for a population that will find older communities more attractive once the improvements are made.

4.) Neighboring states are acting now. Pennsylvania must join them in order to remain competitive.

New Jersey and New York City have reformed their tax sale laws to allow abandoned properties to be sold to responsible developers, rather than simply selling to the highest bidder. They have also enacted receivership statutes. Maryland targets state funding to development in older communities. In order for Pennsylvania's out-migration to be reversed, the Commonwealth must act now to counter the deterioration of its older communities.

5.) Pennsylvania's out-migration includes a significant loss of young people.

Between 1990 and 2000, Pennsylvania experienced a total net out-migration of 131,296. in the age group 25-34 year olds (those who were 15-24 in 1990), 120,597 left. Recent studies show that young people prefer to live in vibrant, diverse urban areas. Pennsylvania is quickly aging and losing the workforce necessary to support those unable to work. In order to stop the "brain drain" exodus of young people, Pennsylvania must act now to revitalize its urban communities.

6.) Those regions of the state which are experiencing in-migration have a unique opportunity to plan their growth.

Residents of New York, New Jersey and Maryland are moving to Pennsylvania's border communities, creating a high demand for development. Local municipalities, backed by state policies and investments, can use this opportunity to provide incentives for

developments that contribute to the revitalization of older core communities. Unless the state acts now, uncontrolled development will eat up greenfields, moving population centers further away from blighted communities.

In addition, this in-migration is fueling a dramatic rise in property values in those regions. While higher property values may bode well for revitalization efforts, they leave more and more working families unable to afford homes in the communities where they work. The revitalization of older communities and that of vacant buildings can reverse this trend.

VI. Schuylkill County Municipal Blight Questionnaire

As part of the preparation of this Municipal Resource Guide for fighting blight in Schuylkill County, the following questionnaire and cover letter was sent to all municipalities in Schuylkill County. A summary of the results from the questionnaires returned follows.

The information submitted by municipalities in Schuylkill County was helpful and supports the existing blight problems and issues that exist in Schuylkill County and Pennsylvania discussed in Chapter V of this manual.

NOTE: If a Schuylkill County Blight Task Force is created in the future to further the work of fighting blight in Schuylkill County, it is suggested that the Questionnaire that follows be reviewed and modified and that another survey of all municipalities in Schuylkill County be taken with respect to blight conditions and successful steps taken to eliminate same.

October 5, 2009

Insert all County Townships and Boroughs and City of Pottsville (Mail Merge?)

Subject:

Fighting Blight in Schuylkill County - Municipal Blight Questionnaire

Dear (Township Supervisors/Borough Council/City Administrator):

On behalf of Jeri E. Stumpf & Associates, Inc., I am transmitting the attached survey for your timely completion. Your input is needed for inclusion in the Schuylkill County Blight Study. The goal of the study is to identify the negative impact of blight in our communities and to identify strategies to fight blight. But we need your help!

Fighting blight is not new for us, but now is the time to get your voice heard! Local and state government leaders are looking for your input. Attached is an article from the October 5, 2009 edition of the Pottsville Republican & Evening Herald identifying a situation all too common in our communities. Mr. Stumpf argues that blight is an "economic crime" that is running rampant across the Commonwealth. I think we can all agree. So what can we do?

I have taken a personal interest in fighting blight as my father, the late Senator James J. Rhoades initiated the Pennsylvania Blight Task Force in 2008 and introduced the first legislation to help municipalities fight blight. The current version of the legislation, Senate Bill 900, re-introduced by Senator David Argall is currently in front of the senate appropriations committee. I've volunteered to help Mr. Stumpf see my Dad's vision through by assisting with the County Study and providing my input as a local municipal engineer.

Please complete the survey and return it to my attention by October 30, 2009. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. If you have any questions or comments concerning the above, please contact our office.

Respectfully submitted, alfred benesch & company

James J. Rhoades, Jr., P.E. Project Manager

JJR: Lt.Sch Co Blight Survey.100509..doc Enclosure

cc: Schuylkill County Commissioners
Jeri Stumpf, Jeri Stumpf and Associates

MUNICIPAL BLIGHT QUESTIONAIRE SCHUYLKILL COUNTY BLIGHT STUDY

JULY 2009

1. NAME OF MUNICIPALITY	
2. POPULATION-2000 CENSUS	
3. TOTAL PARCELS	
4. TOTAL BLIGHTED PARCELS (estimate, or use po	ercentage if not
formally known)	
a. How many of these are owned by out-of-area owners?	
b. How many are foreclosed/have mortgage liens?	-
c. Are they impacting adjacent properties?	
d. Estimated lost annual real estate tax from these properties	? \$
5. TOTAL NUMBER OF RENTAL UNITS	
a. How many rental unit owners are from out of the area?	
b. How many rental units are considered blighted?	
6. PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT BLIGHT PROBLEM: (NOTE: PLEASE ATTACH A SEPARATE NARRATIVE TO DE SAME IF NECESSARY)	SCRIBE
	14.44
7. WHAT IS YOUR MUNICIPALITY PRESENTLY DOING TO CO	OMBAT BLIGHT?
	77

8. DO YOU HAVE ORDINACES ENACTED (OR BEING CONSIDER BLIGHT? PLEASE LIST:	ERED) TO ADDRESS
	NAME OF THE PARTY

9. DO YO	U CURRENTLY ENFORCE A PROPERTY MAINTENANCE CODE? YESNO? If you don't have a Property Maintenance Code, go to	
	questions #10.	
a.	a. How is your property maintenance code administered?	
h	Circle: In House Code Enforcement or Third Party Estimated annual cost of Property Maintenance Code Enforcement? \$	
	How do you pay for Property Maintenance?	
	D YOU ENACT A PROPERTY MAINTENANCE CODE, IF FUNDS WERE LE? YESNO	
	LD YOU BE WILLING TO SUPPORT A SHARED "COG OR COUNTY CODE EMENT PROGRAM" IF FUNDS WERE AVAILABLE? YESNO	
12 DA VA	DU PRESENTLY HAVE A LANDLORD/RENTAL UNIT REGISTRATION	
	ICE? YES NO	
	AND ADDRESS AND AD	
	DU PRESENTLY HAVE A REALTY TRANSFER/OCCUPANCY PERMIT	
ORDINAN	NCE? YESNO	
	YOUR POLICE FORCE/DISTRICT MAGISTRATE UNDERSTAND YOUR PROBLEMS? YESNO If "NO," Please expand:	
PROGRAI	D YOUR MUNICIPALITY SUPPORT/ATTEND LOCAL TRAINING MS DESIGNED TO TEACH YOU HOW TO FIGHT BLIGHT IN YOUR NITIES? YESNO	
	ADDITIONAL AUTHORITY FROM THE STATE DO YOU FEEL LD BE HELPFUL TO YOU IN COMBATING BLIGHT?	

PEASE MAIL...OR E-MAIL BY JULY 31, 2009 TO:

JERI E. STUMPF & ASSOCIATES, INC. P.O. BOX 85 WILLOW STREET, PENNSYLVANIA 17584

SCHUYLKILL COUNTY MUNICIPAL BLIGHT QUESTIONAIRE SURVEY SUMMARY OF SOME KEY SURVEY RESULTS

1. TOTAL BLIGHTED PARCELS

- 15% (Total unknown)
- 8-9
- 72% (Total parcels 1,937 or 1,394)
- 10
- 5
- 10
- 4% (Total parcels 1,300 or 52)
- 32
- 4
- 10-15
- 1% (Total parcels 832 or 8.3)
- 4

2. BLIGHTED PROPERTIES-OUT OF AREA/STATE OWNERS

- 50%
- 1
- 40
- 19
- 1

3. RENTAL PROPERTY OWNERS-OUT OF AREA

- 33%
- 19%
- 20%
- 50%
- 59%
- 90%

4. CURRENT BLIGHT PROBLEMS

- Junked up properties
- A few blighted properties letters sent
- Homes in disrepair
- Lack of funding to fight blight
- Some properties are abandoned: some are littered with trash & building materials: unkept grounds; junk vehicles

- Absentee landlords neglected properties
- Blighted properties on leased land
- Existing structures in deplorable condition
- Properties with broken windows bad roofs siding falling off weeds Rubbish
- Blighted homes on land owned by coal company homes abandoned for delinquent taxes.

5. CURRENT MUNICIPAL BLIGHT FIGHTING ACTIVITY

- None
- Send letters to repair at first signs of blight and before it gets too bad
- Nuisance ordinance sheriff & judicial sales
- Condemnation
- Ordinance against unkept properties
- Recently passed residential rental & licensing & inspection ordinance
- Demolish one home a year
- Nothing. Lack funds to employ a code enforcement officer
- Enforcing: ICC property maintenance code; municipal rental property inspection ordinance & fire insurance escrow ordinance. Also use municipal & CDGB funds to acquire, rehab, or demolish...blighted properties. Also, provide low interest loans to help low to low-moderate income residents rehab their homes
- Nothing. No money to fight blight
- Code Enforcement
- Dangerous structures/nuisances ordinance; rental property registration; international property maintenance code

6. MAJOR OBSTABLES TO FIGHTING BLIGHT

- County Zoning not enforced
- Lack of funding properties owned by Schuylkill County
- Amount of time it takes to enact ordinances & prosecute offenders
- Inadequate laws to go after owners of blighted property
- Lack of money
- Out of town landlords who just want rental income & put none back in repairs
- No money
- Money

7. DO YOU CURRENTLY ENFORCE A PROPERTY MAINTENANCE CODE?

- Yes - 6 No - 1 Considered it - 1

8. DO YOU PRESENTLY HAVE A LANDLORD/RENTAL UNIT REGISTRATION ORDINANCE?

- Yes 6 No 6 Considering it 1
 - 9. <u>DO YOU PRESENTLY HAVE A REALTY TRANSFER/OCCUPANCY PERMIT ORDINANCE?</u>
- Yes 6 No 5
- 10. DOES YOUR POLICE FORCE/DISTRICT MAGISTRATE UNDERSTAND YOUR BLIGHT PROBLEMS?
- Yes 9 No 2
- Police officer also code enforcement officer
- Making strides to fix our problems as well as the district magistrate
- Police know we have blighted properties and they do not have the training
 - 11. WOULD YOUR MINICIPALITY SUPPORT/ATTEND LOCAL TRAINING PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO TEACH YOU HOW TO FIGHT BLIGHT IN YOUR COMMUNITIES?
- Yes 7 No 1 Perhaps 1
 - 12. WOULD YOU ENACT A PROPERTY MAINTENANCE CODE IF FUNDS WERE AVAILABLE?
- Yes 4 No 0
 - 13. WOULD YOUR MUNICIPALITY SUPPORT/ATTEND LOCAL TRAINING PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO TEACH YOU HOW TO FIGHT BLIGHT IN YOUR COMMUNITIES?
- Yes 7 No 0 Perhaps 1
 - 14. ADDITIONAL STATE HELP YOU FEEL WOULD BE HELPFUL?
- Pass SB 900 *
- Additional laws to help smaller townships battle blight problems within the community
- Stronger finds an jail time; ability to extradite out of state slumlords; ability to seize offenders assets
- More state funding

15. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- The laws should also say that they must give any change of address of each owner so we can locate these people to send violations notices and citations.

VII Existing Municipal Powers for Fighting Blight: Current State Enabling Legislation

One of the major problems for municipalities in Pennsylvania today in their efforts to combat blight is a lack of state authorized punitive measures to take against slumlords; the lack of adequate state financial resources to acquire and demolish existing blighted buildings or to acquire and rehabilitate for adaptive reuse, blighted, vacant structures that are structurally sound; or, the needed funds to establish, enforce, and maintain, an effective property maintenance code and code enforcement staff where none exists; or, to add to the existing code enforcement staff to focus on the elimination of blighted structures where a municipal code enforcement program does already exist.

Background

In 1995, State Representative John Fichtner recognized that there was a distinct problem with blight in Pennsylvania's communities. I was the Executive Director of the House Local Government and Urban Affairs Committees for Pennsylvania Legislature at the time, and he asked me how to combat the issue.

His question resulted in my drafting House Resolution 91 (HR 91) that was passed unanimously by the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. Under HR 91, the House Urban Affairs

Committee held 8 public hearings across the state examining the causes of blight and how to stop it. The Urban Affairs Committee adopted and made public, the report I drafted on our findings. A legislative package of over 30 bills was subsequently introduced in the General Assembly to implement the report recommendations.

Summary

The Resolution

On March 16, 1995, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives unanimously passed House Resolution 91. House Resolution 91 directed the Urban Affairs Committee to examine the cause and effect of blight in Pennsylvania's urban areas, including those in rural settings. In addition, the Committee was asked to (1) determine the extent to which existing Commonwealth statutes and programs adequately addressed the elimination of blight and economic revitalization in these blighted areas and (2) where necessary, recommend program or legislative changes.

The Urban Affairs Committee held eight public hearings across the state from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia and heard testimony from a wide range of experts, including municipal and state officials, economic development professionals, code enforcement personnel, housing and redevelopment staff, nonprofit organizations, and citizens.

The Report

The House Resolution 91 report focused primarily on the specific problem areas identified by the experts who testified at the public hearings, and what they suggested needed to be done to eliminate the problems. With this in mind, the final report included: findings, conclusions, and legislative and program recommendations.

The Committee believed that the reading of the report by public officials, civic groups, organizations, and citizens interested in eliminating blight and encouraging economic revitalization in Pennsylvania's urban and rural areas would: 1.) stimulate future dialogue and discussion; and 2.) lead to even more innovative ideas for changes in state urban programs and policies, and additional remedial legislation in the future.

Implementing Legislation

Unlike most reports that end up collecting dust, the Urban Affairs Committee staff immediately drafted remedial legislation to implement the recommendations contained in the report. Twenty-nine bills were introduced during the 1997-1998 legislative session and others were introduced later.

Urban areas, whether they are cities, or boroughs in rural areas of the state are an important asset and resource to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and its economy. Having available,

adequate affordable housing, needed community services and facilities, and a stable local economy, including good jobs and job training opportunities, is as important to the Commonwealth's urban areas as is, improving the physical condition of the blighted buildings and infrastructure that is located there.

While not all of the enabling legislation drafted and introduced as a result of the research completed as part of HR 91 was enacted into state law, **some was.**

NOTE: IT IS CRITICAL FOR READERS OF THIS MANUAL WHO WILL BE
INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING MUNICIPAL STRATEGIC BLIGHT

MANAGEMENT PLANS PERSUANT TO THE STEPS PROVIDED FOR IN
THIS MANUAL, TO REVIEW ALL OF THE CURRENT STATE LAWS
ENACTED TO DATE MENTIONED IN THIS SECTION OF THE MANUAL
WHILE DEVELOPING THE PLAN, IN ORDER TO INSURE THEY ARE
INCORPORATED IN THE MUNICIPALITIES PLAN DEVELOPED

Key Legislation Enacted to Eliminate Blight in Pennsylvania

- PRISON TIME FOR SLUMLORDS...Act 64 of 1997
 - 4th Conviction same offense....Up to 2 years
 - 5th Conviction same offense... Up to 5 years

• <u>LIMITS ON</u> REAL ESTATE TAX SALE PURCHASES

- Individuals can't buy property at a tax sale if they are delinquent in paying real estate taxes or utility bills on other property they own... Act 133 of 1988
- Individuals buying property at a tax sale with substantial code violations must bring the property into code compliance or demolish it, within 18 months of purchase... Act 99 of 2000

• EXPEDITING SALE OF BLIGHTED PROPERTY TO NON-PROFITS

• Waives all advertising and <u>bidding requirements to the "highest bidder</u>", for the sale of blighted property a municipality ends up owning, when sold to a non-profit which will use the building for affordable housing or commercial or industrial development. The

property can be sold for \$1... Act 64 of 1997, Acts 44, 54 of 1998, Act 73 of 2000, and Act 12 of 2002.

• <u>INCREASED FINES AND PENALTIES</u> FOR SLUMLORDS IN THIRD CLASS CITIES

Increases fines and penalties for slumlords whose property poses a threat to public health and safety... Act 135 of 1998

• KEYSTONE OPPORTUNITY ZONES

 Established tax-free zones in Pennsylvania to encourage new economic development in blighted industrial areas including brownfield sites... Act 92 of 1998

• NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS

Allows for the creation of neighborhood improvement districts in residential areas, similar to business improvement districts in a community's downtown commercial area, to deal with problems of blight and other revitalization issues in the neighborhood...Act 130 of 2000

• ELM STREET PROGRAM

Established a new program patterned after the highly successful national Main Street Program, to eliminate and prevent blight in residential areas adjacent to downtown commercial areas... Act 7 of
 2004

BLIGHTED PROPERTY DONATIONS & CREDIT REPORTING

- Allows taxing jurisdictions to waive tax claims in exchange for the donation of the tax delinquent property and;
- Requires tax claim bureaus to maintain a mailing address of all tax delinquent property owners for submission to national credit reporting agencies... Act 12, 18 of 2006

• ADMINISTRATION OF ESTATE OWNED PROPERTY BY REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITIES

Allows redevelopment authorities to be given by the court, "letters of administration", to manage property in an estate without heirs... where left unmaintained... the property would eventually become blighted... Act 171 of 2006

It should be noted that under current state law, municipalities in Pennsylvania can acquire title to, and remove, blighted property via eminent domain. The problem however, is that this is a long, laborious, and costly process which municipalities cannot afford, which county and city redevelopment authorities are in a little better position to do this because of the financial resources needed to meet the challenge blighted properties currently pose in the Commonwealth.

Municipalities can however, under their police powers, condemn a property where the blighted conditions make the property structurally unsound, and danger to the public's health and safety. Once the municipality condemns the property and it is demolished and the site cleared, they **do not get title to the property**. Title still remains in the original owner. A municipality can however, place a lien on the property to recover the costs associated with the demolition of the dangerous structure through the condemnation process. Most times however these liens are worthless liens as the cost of demolition exceeds the value of the cleared lot. Under Senate Bill 900, the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act, prepared for and recommended by, the late Senator Jim Rhoades Statewide Blight Task Force, a copy of which is included in the Appendix of this report, a municipality in Pennsylvania would be allowed to obtain a judgment against the property owner, and go after the owners assets, in order to recover all municipal costs associated with a blighted property.

Additionally, it is worth noting that many times, over 50% of the blighted properties in Pennsylvania's counties have been previously subject to a tax sale, and are in a repository of the county for unsold property.

A tax sale is a process imposed under state law to collect unpaid real estate taxes from property owners who have not paid them and the County Tax Claim Bureaus has the responsibility to see that a tax sale is conducted once the tax claim becomes absolute.

If at the upset sale, a price is not offered that covers all costs and liens, a judicial sale is held. A traditional sale passes title free of all claims and liens.

Pennsylvania's real estate tax sale laws are outdated and in need of reform. The statewide task force originated by the late Senator James Rhoades, acknowledged this in their work, and meetings have been held with the State Association of County Tax Claim Bureaus with the idea of initiating steps to modernize Pennsylvania's delinquent tax sale laws. County Tax Claim Bureaus presently do a great job under current circumstances, but acknowledge the enabling statutes under which they currently operate need to be modernized.

Updating these laws could allow municipalities the option to deal with blighted properties in a much more expeditious fashion, than they can now; especially where a potential developer or investor is interested in doing something with a property that would be

beneficial to the municipality and result in the elimination of the blighted conditions, and all of the associated municipal problems, associated with same.

The problem now with the current delinquent property tax sale procedures in place, is that it takes years and it is a very lengthy process, no potential investors are willing to wait the length of time it normally takes to get a blighted property into a position that it can be rehabilitated if structurally sound, or demolished and new development built on the cleared land. This is a major disincentive to not only municipalities actively involved in code enforcement and the eliminating blight, but to investors and developers interested in revitalizing Pennsylvania's older communities by replacing blighted properties with new investments and new development.

In Pennsylvania, there are counties where properties have been on the repository list of the county for over 20 years. In addition, municipalities or individuals attempting to acquire blighted county repository properties that have insurable title and are in such condition that they can be rehabilitated many times, incur other potential problems associated with the acquisition.

The problems which can arise include:

- Local title agencies declining to pursue voluntary conveyances.
- Abstract companies declining work associated with petitions for approval involving sales from the repository of unsold properties; and

 Title insurance companies declining to insure titles on repository parcels as a result of potential problems involving defective tax sales.

From a title insurance perspective, tax sales can be defective if all real estate tax sale law service requirements are not met. Service related to a judicial sale, the last stage under the real estate tax law, and one of the reasons Pennsylvania's tax sale enabling statues need to be modernized, are extremely onerous. Pennsylvania's real estate tax sale law requires that service prior to the judicial sale, must be made in the same manner of service as if it was original process i.e. personal service only by the sheriff. Personal service by the sheriff's office on properties that have not sold for taxes are unlikely to be successful. All of this is also cost prohibitive, and one more reason that if Pennsylvania and its municipalities hope to eliminate blight in the state, and remediate existing blighted properties through their acquisition, demolition, and/or rehabilitation for alternative use where they are still structurally sound, a major effort will need to be undertaken to modernize Pennsylvania's current real estate tax sale laws.

The acquisition process to obtain properties in the repository can begin with a written consent from the taxing bodies and the order of a title report. Title reports on tax sale properties are usually more exhaustive and most times require more time than other property title searches. Following the title search is an approximate 15 month process required to complete 6 major stages to acquire blighted properties in the county repository with insurable title from the tax claim bureau. They are:

1. Execution of option agreement

- 2. Filing a service of complaint in action to quiet title
- 3. Request for alternative service by publication where sheriff could not serve personally
- 4. Petition for file decree
- 5. Entry of final judgment
- 6. Closing

VIII New Municipal Powers for Fighting Blight: Senator Rhoades Statewide Blight Task Force and Senate Bill 900

The late State Senator James Rhoades (R-29) recognized the problems blight causes in the communities in his legislative district and wanted to do something about it. As a result, he called me to a meeting at his office in the Capitol several years ago, during which he learned of the work I had done with the House Urban Affairs Committee pursuant to HR 91, as well as the fact that the American Planning Association recently had adopted the HR 91 report as their new national policy regarding redeveloping blighted properties.

Senator Rhoades asked me who should be on the new Statewide Blight Task Force he was creating to examine what needed to be done in Pennsylvania to win the battle against blight. As key stakeholders in this issue, the following entities were identified as participants:

- Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs
- Pennsylvania League of Cities & Municipalities
- Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors
- Pennsylvania County Commissioners Association
- Pennsylvania Planning Association
- Pennsylvania Association of Housing and Redevelopment Authorities

- Pennsylvania Downtown Center
- 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania
- Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania
- Department of Community and Economic Development
- Key Committee staff of the Pennsylvania Legislature
- Jeri E. Stumpf & Associates, Inc. (Task Force Consultant)

These statewide organizations were suggested to Senator Rhoades not only because they have a vested interest in the issue of blight in Pennsylvania due to the nature of their members, but also because they collectively represent a politically powerful group in terms of constituents. Using this political power will be critical in getting funding and the new blight fighting statutes enacted into law.

The Task Force met regularly over many months and developed the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act (SB 1291 in the 2007-2008 Legislative Session and SB 900 in the 2009-2010 Legislative Session). Copies of each are included in the Appendix of this Manual.

It is important to note that SB 900 alone will not solve Pennsylvania's current blight problems. It will also be necessary to educate the public, as well as judges and magisterial district judges

about the importance of the blight issue and the new legislation enacted. It is equally important to realize that Pennsylvania took the lead nationally in creating new state economic development stimulus programs to revitalize older core communities through new public/private partnerships. However, if we hope to achieve the desired economic results, we must (1) eliminate the existing blight in the neighborhoods surrounding project areas, while (2) preventing marginal properties in our communities from becoming blighted in the future. Elimination and prevention measures can assist in securing a viable future for these transforming capital investments.

Unfortunately, if the current blight problems are not successfully addressed, Pennsylvania will be doing urban renewal all over again in another 30 years or sooner.

Summary of Senator Rhoades Statewide Blight Task Force Activities

Findings

Blight IS NOT just an urban problem! It affects all municipalities in Pennsylvania to some degree or another, i.e. cities, boroughs, & townships in urban and rural parts of the state.

While most landlords are good business people, some landlords and property owners, referred to as "slumlords," milk all the equity out of their properties. They take rental income, and rather

than using a portion of it to maintain their property, they pocket it. This leads to the eventual deterioration of their property referred to as blight. When their property loses its economic value, the owners simply abandon it; leaving unpaid municipal taxes, and sewer and water liens. The aforementioned actions by slumlords in Pennsylvania also results in the following:

- Their blighted property drives down values for all property owners in the neighborhood, resulting in lost equity to other property owners.
- Their blighted property reduces the assessed value of all property in the neighborhood and community on which property taxes are levied. Thus, tax paying residents, many of whom also lost equity in their property, must make up the lost tax revenue through higher taxes.
- Abandoning their blighted properties without paying the real estate taxes which
 are due also leaves municipal budgets with a shortfall which other taxpayers must
 make up.
- Municipalities are forced to use taxpayer funds to secure their abandoned properties in order to prevent unsuspecting children from entering and being injured or killed.

- Their abandoned blighted buildings are a favorite target for arsonists, and the frequent fires in their properties jeopardize the lives of neighborhood residents and municipal
- Public safety personnel, while increasing insurance premiums for other property owners in the neighborhood.
- Their abandoned blighted buildings are a source of criminal activity, including being used as crack houses. Frequent police calls to these abandoned properties increase municipal public safety expenditures for taxpayers.
- The presence of abandoned blighted buildings in a community is also depressing for residents and discourages potential investors and individuals thinking of buying property there.

Blight is an "economic crime" costing taxpayers and municipalities millions of dollars annually in lost property tax revenues, sewer and water fees, and increased municipal expenditures. It must begin to be viewed as such by the judicial system in Pennsylvania.

Municipalities currently lack adequate deterrents to discourage slumlords from letting their properties become blighted and then abandoning them.

Municipalities need increased state financial assistance to acquire more blighted property to demolish, or where structurally sound, to rehabilitate.

Senator Rhoades







STATEWIDE BLIGHT TASK FORCE

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With state encouragement and initial financial assistance, more municipalities need to enact and enforce municipal Property Maintenance Codes.

With state financial assistance, currently blighted property can be a source for new, for sale and rental housing opportunities, capable of assisting in the community's economic transformation.

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Recommendations

Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act

SB 1291 2007-2008 Legislative Session SB 900 2009-2010 Legislative Session

- Property owners would have to bring any property they own that has serious code violations which threaten the public's health into compliance before they could obtain any municipal or state permits or approvals for any other property they own in the Commonwealth.
- A state database would be established to administer the program

- Property owners that created the blighted conditions, and not taxpayers, would now be responsible for paying the municipal costs of demolition, or to secure a blighted property. This would be done by giving the municipality the legal authority to go after financial assets, in addition to being able to place a lien on their valuable properties as well as the property where code violations exist.
- The lengthy and costly process of prosecuting slumlords in the judicial system is expedited, by helping to clarify who owns the property if in corporate ownership, and provisions are also made to return out of state slumlords to Pennsylvania to face criminal prosecution.
- Before a property becomes blighted, a conservator could be appointed by the
 court to manage it, and use income from the property to maintain it, where failure
 to do so would result in the property becoming blighted.
- Blighted abandoned property with development potential could be sold differently from other tax delinquent property. This expedited process would be quicker and result in new development in a mandated time frame, via a development agreement with the purchaser.
- Mortgage lenders would be responsible to maintain properties, the purchase of which they financed, where a default occurs, until there was a new owner so the property doesn't become blighted.

Senator Rhoades







STATEWIDE BLIGHT TASK FORCE

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- Educational programs would be developed for Pennsylvania's judiciary; teaching the significance of the economic crime that blight represents.
- Expand the ability of redevelopment authorities to assist municipalities with blight remediation, and allow enforcement of municipal property maintenance codes by private right of action on the part of individuals and non-profits, where municipal code enforcement personnel is limited.

Mortgage Guaranty Corporation Act of 2008

This would allow the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency to insure private sector loans in blighted
areas of communities in Pennsylvania where a strategic blight removal strategy is in place, and where
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Additional Suggestions:

- Have the Commonwealth fund the development of model Municipal Blight
 Management Plans:
 - Should include rules to "rehabilitate" and/or "revitalize" blighted properties (i.e., must be structurally sound, proper utility connections, no water leak issues, etc.).

- Should include a program for "matching funds for rehabilitation of blighted property to provide a "carrot" for property owners, maybe a program in cooperation with a local vocational-technical school. Any program developed would have to have some sort of "means" test to identify recipients.
- Development of tax credits for owners who demolish or rehabilitate blighted properties. The model plan should be innovative and support the new state legislation.

As part of the work of Senator Rhoades' Statewide Blight Task Force, a review of all key blight legislation introduced and enacted in the Pennsylvania General Assembly between 1997 and 2007 was made. A summary of same is contained in the Appendix of this manual.

NOTE: IT IS CRITICAL FOR READERS OF THIS MANUAL WHO WILL BE
INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING MUNICIPAL STRATEGIC BLIGHT MANAGEMENT
PLANS PERSUANT TO THE STEPS PROVIDED FOR IN THIS MANUAL, TO
REVIEW ALL OF THE CURRENT STATE LAWS ENACTED TO DATE MENTIONED
IN THE APPENDIX OF THIS MANUAL WHILE DEVELOPING THE PLAN, IN
ORDER TO INSURE THEY ARE INCORPORATED IN THE MUNICIPAL PLAN
DEVELOPED.

The following solutions to problems with blight and blight related issues are contained in the briefing paper entitled, "Opportunities for Commonwealth Leadership to revitalize Pennsylvania", discussed previously in this manual and contained in the Appendix, prepared by the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania and authored by Cynthia Daley, Esq., for the Alliance.

SUMMARY

With strong leadership from the Governor and General Assembly, Pennsylvania can promote the revitalization of older communities by linking growth to existing resources, bolstering current infrastructure, coordinating development with existing or well-planned transportation, and encouraging the reuse of vacant buildings and previously developed land for commercial, cultural, and residential development. Offering environmental, historical, and educational resources to these projects will serve as further incentives to the revitalization of our older towns and neighborhoods.

Benefits

1.) Preserving Pennsylvania's rich heritage

Pennsylvania's older communities are windows to our past. Not only famous buildings but the many and varied neighborhoods and towns can take us back to glimpse colonial times, the young Republic, coal mining days, the industrial revolution, and immigrant cultures from around the world. Once gone, these windows cannot be reopened.

2.) Conserving Pennsylvania's resources

Revitalizing our older communities also helps us conserve the state's rich farmland, forests, mountains, and streams by directing development away from them. One of the most beautiful states in the nation, Pennsylvania can approach development in the 21st century with an eye toward conserving and preserving our resources.

As we move forward, we must also think about conserving energy. Revitalized older communities allow families to live close to their work, schools, and activities. Families save the cost of fuel, and the state reaps the benefit of less air and water pollution.

3.) Strengthening Pennsylvania's economy

Pennsylvania's older communities are a tremendous asset to the state. By capitalizing on our heritage and resources, including human resources, we can attract businesses and new residents to our communities – once we return vacant buildings to productive reuse. We can produce jobs which are accessible to the workforce, and affordable homes close to businesses. Community revitalization is contagious, bringing more investment and energy into our communities.

4.) Building vibrant, active communities

By reclaiming vacant buildings and investing in older communities, Pennsylvania can attract young people to the state. Pennsylvanian's young and old will benefit when

young adults live alongside families and older Pennsylvanian's, contributing to our economy and, more importantly, to a better quality of life.

Glossary of Terms

Adverse Possession - A legal concept which allows a person who as used land openly, publicly and continuously for a designated period of time to file a petition with a court for the title to the land. In Pennsylvania, an adverse possession action currently requires continual use for 21 years.

Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) – The executive department responsible fore administering programs to promote the health and growth of Pennsylvania's businesses and communities. Community development programs include Housing and Redevelopment Assistance and the Main Street and Elm Street programs.

Elm Street - A state funded program of grant funds for planning, technical assistance and physical improvements to residential and mixed use areas in proximity to central business districts.

Greenfields – Land which has never been developed.

Homeowners Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program – A program to provide temporary assistance to homeowners facing foreclosure through no fault of their own.

HEMAP was created by the General Assembly in 1984, and is funded both by the state and repayments of HEMAP loans. HEMAP is administered by PHFA.

Homeownership Choice – A PHFA initiative to create more homes available for ownership by low and moderate income families, and to revitalize communities. The program has three components: the Homeownership Construction Initiative, the Mixeduse Facility Financing Initiative, and the Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative.

Housing and Redevelopment Assistance – A state funded program providing grants for community revitalization and economic development activities at the local level. The program assists the communities in becoming competitive for business retention, expansion, and attraction.

Main Street – State-funded grants to municipalities to help downtown economic development efforts. The funds allow local organizations to manage downtown revitalization efforts by hiring project coordinators.

Mixed Use Facilities Financing Initiative – A component of the Homeownership Choice program designed to encourage the revitalization of commercial corridors by providing financing for storefronts and other mixed use buildings.

PennHOMES – A PHFA funded and administered program of 0% interest loans to assist in the development of rental homes for low income families.

Solutions

1.) Adopt legal remedies and proven programs to make redevelopment easier and turn vacant properties into assets for reinvestment.

Reform the state's tax foreclosure laws to allow local governments to sell abandoned properties to responsible developers, rather than to the highest bidder. Follow the examples of New York and New Jersey to establish special tax sales

Encourage local governments to create land banks to assemble parcels of land for development. A state program providing funding for acquisition, land clearance, and staff would allow municipalities to attract developers looking for buildable sites.

Ensure that the process for property acquisition is fair and balanced, adequately compensating homeowners, protecting intact neighborhoods, and promoting revitalization of blighted communities.

2.) Level the playing field for development in older communities and those one greenfields. Increase funding for programs that work.

PennHOMES, Homeownership Choice, Mixed Use Facilities Financing Initiative, Main Street, Elm Street, and Housing and Redevelopment Assistance have all successfully contributed to community revitalization efforts and to the development of homes within reach of working families. But much more remains to be done. Support for these

programs needs to be increased, and a new predevelopment fund should be created for acquisition and site preparation costs. These programs aid Pennsylvania's working families, elderly, and disabled citizens, and fuel private investments as the renewed health of older communities becomes apparent.

3.) Invest in the Commonwealth's existing infrastructure.

Focus state funding for infrastructure on maintenance of existing facilities.

Make efficient use of limited transportation resources by spending a higher percentage of funding on maintenance and reconstruction.

Support public transit by establishing a dedicated source of funding.

Prioritize water and sewer investments in older communities by targeting funding for improvement of existing systems and by establishing an expedited permitting process for those projects.

4.) Invest in occupied properties to prevent abandonment.

Create a statewide property repair program to assist lower income property owners in maintaining their homes and apartments.

Prevent mortgage foreclosures, which can lead to abandonment, by increasing funding for the Homeowners Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program (HEMAP) and housing counseling, and by strengthening anti-predatory lending laws.

Prevent tax foreclosures by helping low-income and elderly homeowners in paying their property taxes. While Pennsylvania does have a property tax rebate program for the elderly and disabled, it needs to be modernized to raise the eligibility limits and the amount rebated. Homeowners would also be better served if the program provided direct payments to the taxing authorities and did not require homeowners to first pay their bills in order to qualify for the rebate.

Assist landlords and tenants with a Renters Emergency Assistance Program and Rental Assistance Program, both designed to enable tenants to pay rent which would otherwise be unaffordable and to maintain a cash flow to landlords who are often struggling to maintain their properties

Reduce the adverse possession time period on occupied single family homes fm 21 years to 10 years, allowing long-term residents to clear title and gain access to home improvement loans and grants.

5.) Strengthen Pennsylvania's commitment to older communities by coordinating state resources and providing incentives to developers.

Create new incentives and promote existing ones, such as tax increment financing (TIFs), historic preservation programs loans and grants for the purchase and repair of older homes, impact fees, and tax abatement.

Encourage new approaches, such as land banking, side yard programs, and making predevelopment funds available to nonprofit developers.

Target state resources to older communities to promote conservation of resources instead of waste. Following Maryland's Priority Places Strategy, institute a comprehensive strategy of

targeting state resources – not just economic and community development funds – to projects in older communities. Maryland has established an Interagency Coordinating Committee made up of 10 departments to work together on designated projects and target resources. The Committee includes the Departments of Transportation, Natural Resources, Housing and Community Development, General Services, Environment, Business and Economic Development, Budget and Management, Agriculture, Planning and the Higher Education Commission.

IX. Developing a Municipal Strategic Blight Management Plan: Getting Started

The following represents an overview of the process for municipalities in Schuylkill

County and elsewhere to use to develop a Strategic Blight Management Plan. Since all

municipalities in Pennsylvania are governed by **the same** enabling statutes, and since

blight affects all municipalities **in the same way**, this overview is intended to give

municipalities without significant expertise or financial resources, a better understanding

of what they can do to combat blight in their communities in order to eliminate same, and

revitalize their communities through new economic development projects where blighted

properties presently exist.

To support these municipal efforts, specific critical reports, studies, and data, as well as draft ordinances for consideration by municipalities in Schuylkill County and elsewhere, are included in the Appendix of this Municipal Resource Guide. The sample municipal ordinances contained in the Appendix should also be considered by any municipality in Pennsylvania considering a blight remediation program and should be reviewed by the municipality and its solicitor and tailored to fit the appropriate local situation in any given municipality. To restate, they are included in this Resource Guide as a reference and aid to municipalities wishing to embark on a blight remediation program.

Sample municipal ordinances are also available from various state local government associations. Interested parties should check their respective web sites.

To restate, blight is not just an urban problem. It affects all municipalities in every county of Pennsylvania, including Schuylkill County, the same way. The only difference is the degree of its severity.

OPTIONS

- Consider having the County help in creating a <u>County</u> Blight Task Force
 which could <u>utilize the information contained in this initial Municipal</u>
 <u>Resource Guide including its Appendix</u>, as well as information from all municipalities in the County and the <u>County and State</u> Township and
 Borough (PSAB and PSATS) organizations in developing model ordinances,
 and more detailed guidelines for developing Municipal Strategic Blight
 Management Plans after, new state blight enabling legislation is enacted into law.
- New municipal blight ordinances, programs, and policies enacted in Schuylkill
 County in the future, should also be added and included in the Appendix of this

 Municipal Resource Guide as they become available.
- Reproduce a copy of this initial Municipal Resource Guide for every municipality in Schuylkill County which should be updated over time.

SPECIFIC FIRST STEPS

First, have the municipal governing body appoint a Community Blight Committee to study blight in the municipality. They can report their findings back to the municipal governing body.

Included on the Study Committee at a minimum should be:

- Municipal Manager
- Code official where one exists
- Elected Official
- Businessman/woman
- Citizen
- Attorney (Volunteer)

This Committee should first, before beginning their work, review this municipal Resource Guide for Fighting Blight.

Next, the committee should:

- Identify local assets, as well as barriers and constraints, to implementing a
 Blight Management Plan in the municipality.
- Define and prioritize local goals and objectives of the municipal blight plan.

- Conduct a windshield survey of the community to determine the extent of municipal blight, with an emphasis on specific blighted properties and neighborhoods.
- Determine if there is community support for a blight abatement program, and if there is, the community groups in place to support same. This would include church, neighborhood, business, and fraternal groups and organizations in the community that could be advocacy groups.
- Review whether or not the community currently has a code enforcement program and enforces property maintenance codes. If so, any existing problems?

NOTE: Solutions to problems uncovered can be provided in the Municipal Blight Management Plan developed.

Inventory and review, all existing municipal blight ordinances, codes, policies
and programs already enacted which deal with blight remediation in the
municipality; and the effectiveness of same.

After the committee reviews the aforementioned, they should bring their findings and recommendations, including needed new ordinances, policies and programs, to the governing body at a public meeting, at which, a discussion can be held with residents and local officials to determine the best way to proceed.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROCEEDING: WHERE THE BLIGHT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS SUCH ACTION TO THE GOVERNING BODY; THERE IS AGREEMENT AT THE PUBLIC MEETING TO PROCEED; AND, THE GOVERNING BODY APPROVES SAME:

- Follow up the windshield survey by creating an inclusive color-coded inventory of all blighted properties in the municipality based on the severity of the blighted conditions related to public safety and the structural soundness of the structures.
- Prioritize hazardous and unsafe properties, as well as properties which appear to be structurally sound that have the potential for adaptive reuse via new economic development activities. The inventory should include high visibility properties that are blighted with respect to public health and safety issues they pose to residents including whether such properties are also a base for local drug and crime related activity.
- The properties should be cataloged in a central municipal database or tracking system, and a map or computer generated chart of all properties developed with the properties numbered for inspection purposes.

It is important to note, that this tracking system **need not be overly technical**, **complicated or expensive**, however, outside help may be necessary from the County, State, a COG, or other source, for some of these tasks.

A computer generated chart of all properties should also include the following:

- (a) priority number for inspection purposes;
- (b) tax map parcel identification number;
- (c) street address;
- (d) small map outlining the property in relation to other properties in the same block;
- (e) photograph of the building;
- (f) status of inspection activities.

In addition, a chart could also be developed providing the status of all of the legal action taken to date affecting property inspections at a particular property, related to the enforcement of the property maintenance code. This should include:

- (a) initial inspection date;
- (b) date write of entry letter was sent;
- (c) inspection findings;
- (d) date violation notice was sent and date given for compliance;
- (e) date the citation letter was sent;
- (f) date of the magisterial district justice hearing;
- (g) date of the county court hearing if Magistrate's decision is appealed.

For those unfamiliar, a "right of entry" letter is a letter sent to a property owner requesting permission to enter the property at a convenient time for the express purpose of making an interior inspection of the property for code violations.

To track the property maintenance code inspection program, a color-coded map or computerized map can also be created for all municipal properties which shows:

- (a) properties not yet inspected;
- (b) inspected with major violations;
- (c) inspected with minor violations;
- (d) pending interior inspections;
- (e) exterior and interior inspection completed with major violations;
- (f) exterior and interior inspection completed with minor violations;
- (g) court case pending;
- (h) condemned;
- (i) demolition in progress;
- (j) completed required repairs;
- (k) demolition completed.

These maps and computerized charts and maps will allow for a close monitoring of the overall code enforcement initiative and the preparation at any time, of reports for the Mayor, Council, and public, of the municipality's code enforcement initiatives to combat blight.

While the enforcement of a municipal Property Maintenance Code is perhaps the most significant action step necessary in implementing a Strategic Blight Management Plan in a municipality, to restate, municipalities at the present time in Pennsylvania are limited with respect to the statutory authority provided them by the Pennsylvania General Assembly. Hopefully, these will soon be bolstered by the enactment of S.B. 900 drafted by the late Senator Rhoades Statewide Blight Task Force; the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act. During the 2007-08 legislative sessions, the proposed enabling legislation was Senate Bill 1291. As stated previously, a copy of S.B. 900 is included in the Appendix of this report and should be reviewed by all readers of this manual along with the other documents contained in the Appendix of this manual.

While amendments have been made to Senate Bill 900 from the original Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act introduced during the 2007-2008 legislative session (Senate Bill 1291) the major recommendations made by the late Senator Rhoades Statewide Blight Task Force to assist municipalities in Schuylkill County as well as throughout Pennsylvania, implement a municipal Strategic Blight Management Plan remain intact.

Another step for a municipality desiring to implement a Strategic Blight Management Plan to take, in addition to enacting and enforcing a municipal property maintenance code, either on its own or in cooperation with other municipalities on a regional basis through an intergovernmental cooperation agreement or through a Council of Governments (COG), would be to review the sample codes and ordinances contained in the Appendix of this Municipal Resource Guide to determine the feasibility of enacting same, with modifications, to address peculiar aspects of same unique to their particular municipality. Enactment of these municipal ordinances and codes will also help in managing and preventing blighted conditions, before such problems get out of control.

The sample ordinances and codes in the Appendix include:

- Other municipal property maintenance codes or International Property
 Maintenance Code
- Buyer notification inspection of residential and rental units ordinance
- Multifamily building conversion to single family program
- Contractor registration program/ordinance
- Financial incentives for dumpsters where blighted properties are being razed
- Renters ordinance and residential rental property inspection ordinance
- Residential rental unit permit program

In addition to reviewing the draft ordinances and codes contained in the Appendix of this Manual before developing a municipal Strategic Blight Management Plan, a municipality considering developing and implementing a Strategic Blight Management Plan should also contact other municipalities within Schuylkill county or whichever county the municipality is located in, as well as the statewide organization for that type municipality

ie. State Boroughs Association, Pennsylvania League of Cities and Municipalities, and Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors to determine what other, existing municipal blight ordinances have already been enacted that are working, to combat and remediate blight in order to revitalize their municipalities they have on file.

In addition, **county associations** of boroughs and townships should also be contacted to learn about the best practices of blight remediation programs and ordinances that are working in other municipalities within the county, thus <u>avoiding unnecessary legal and consulting fees to develop **new** blight ordinances and codes.</u>

It was recommended that a statewide blighted property database be established in the Department of Community and Economic Development in Senate Bill 900, the new state Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act proposed by Senator Rhoades Statewide Blight Task Force. Thus, any database developed by a municipality as part of its Strategic Blight Management Plan can eventually, also be utilized as part of a County Blight Tracking Database established, and then later, by the Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development or other state agency in a state blight database tracking system developed. The state database originally called for by Senator Rhoades Statewide Blight Task Forced was to track slum lords, remediate blight, and implement the new powers to be given to municipalities relative to municipal permit denials, and asset attachment which would allow municipalities to recover municipal costs, including legal fees, in the acquisition and demolition of blighted properties or in

bringing blighted and abandoned properties with serious code violations into code compliance.

Presently, municipalities in Pennsylvania do not have the financial resources they need to fight blight. When they do <u>incur costs</u>, any lien they levy against a particular blighted property to recover same, is never realized; as municipal costs, most times, including the costs of attorneys and demolition, <u>exceed the value of the land once cleared of the blighted structure</u>, making the municipal lien worthless! Thus there is a critical need for municipal asset attachment as proposed in S.B 900.

To restate, blight is an "economic crime" which costs taxpayers and municipalities millions of dollars annually in lost property tax revenues, sewer and water fees, and in increased municipal expenditures. It is time that it is viewed as such, by the Pennsylvania legislature and judicial system in Pennsylvania.

The major problem in Pennsylvania currently, is the lack of adequate deterrents to discourage slumlords from letting their properties become blighted in the first place and then abandoning them.

Municipalities need new statutory authority and power to fight blight as well as increased state financial assistance to acquire blighted property and demolish same, and where structurally sound, to rehabilitate the blighted, abandoned structures for use as (1) new affordable housing and (2) new economic development projects.

More municipalities in Pennsylvania need to enact and enforce municipal property maintenance codes if blight is to be eliminated in Pennsylvania; individually, as well as jointly, through intergovernmental cooperation agreements or through COG's (Council of Governments). With new state financial assistance, currently blighted property can be a source for new, for sale and rental affordable housing opportunities, capable of assisting in a community's economic transformation and revitalization.