

Recommendations on Pittsburgh's Affordable Housing and Floodwater Mitigation Strategies

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Rationale

Pittsburgh's Affordable Housing Task Force outlined in 2016 just how in need of affordable housing the City was. Today, an unmet gap of 15,000 affordable units persists.

Approach

The report is largely interview- and GIS-based. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted over the past year, and residents of the Hill District and Oakland were canvassed regarding green design concepts.

Questions

We evaluated flooding mitigation via green design, affordable housing, and local policy to answer the following questions:

- What green design concepts both complement the traditional style of Pittsburgh homes and mitigate flooding?
- Where are the blighted plots in the Hill District?
- What guidelines can assist the Land Bank in their recycle and reuse of blighted plots?
- Which plots are ideal for City conservatorship filings?

Findings

What green design concepts both complement the traditional style of Pittsburgh homes and mitigate flooding?

The green design concepts recommended by City stakeholders, literature and residents are:

- Rain Barrels
- Increased green space & parks in currently blighted lots
- Water-Consuming Trees
- Permeable Pavement
- Porch Gardens

Where are the blighted plots in the Hill District?

Over half the Hill District's property is currently vacant, blighted. The GIS maps identify both City-owned and non City-owned condemnations and vacancies throughout the neighborhood and Pittsburgh more broadly.

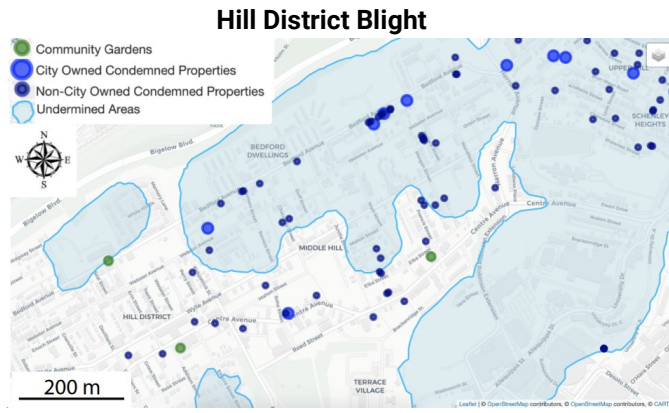


Figure 1. City- and non City-owned condemnations contrasted against undermined area.

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Key Terms

Blighted Lot:

Vacancy, abandonment, tax delinquency or condemnation. A parcel of land or building that has been left in disrepair, without perspective buyers on the horizon. Some are City-owned, many are not.

Conservatorship:

A tool allowing for abandoned or otherwise blighted property to be assumed under the control of a new party, whose plans for the property must include some form of positive reuse.

What guidelines can assist the Land Bank in their recycle and reuse of blighted plots?

While the City and community nonprofits continue building affordable homes at a steady pace, the Land Bank would conserve capital by recycling blighted lots into small parks for communal use. Blighted lot recycling would feature the green design concepts recommended by community stakeholders and residents alike.

Which plots are ideal for City conservatorship filings?

Clustered condemnations and those vacancies located near City-owned properties are ideal for the Land Bank's recycling program. The GIS maps highlight ideal plots for City conservatorship filings.

Bedford Condemnation Cluster

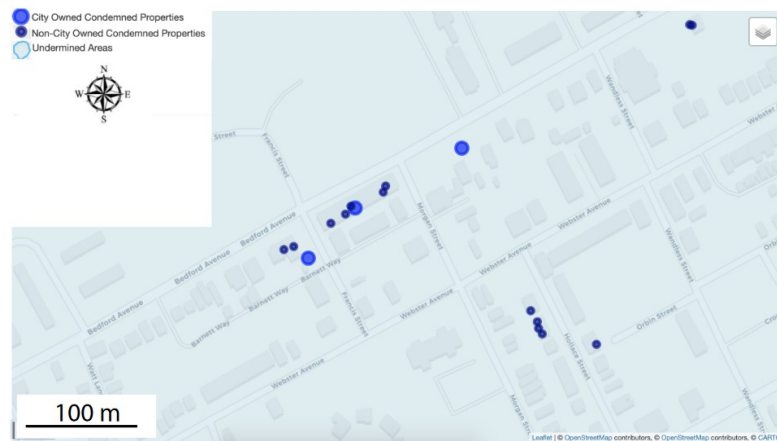


Figure 2. The City already owns a few properties in this condemnation cluster. The remaining condemnations would be ideal for Land Bank assumption via conservatorship filing.

Morgan Condemnation Cluster

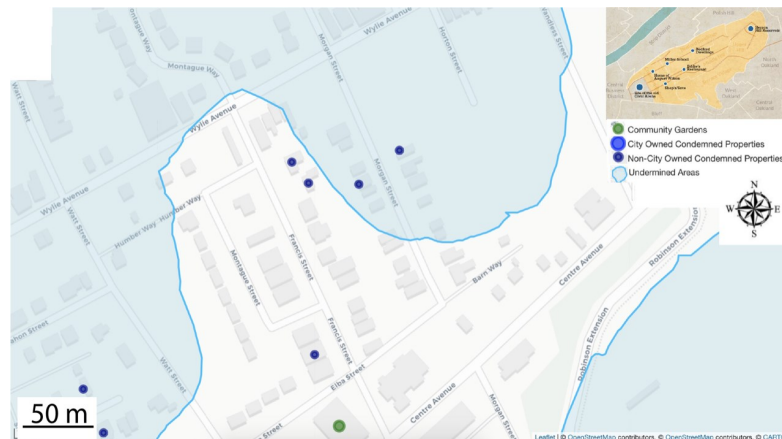


Figure 3. Non City-owned blight within close proximity is ideal for green recycling following a conservatorship filing.

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Centre Condemnation Cluster

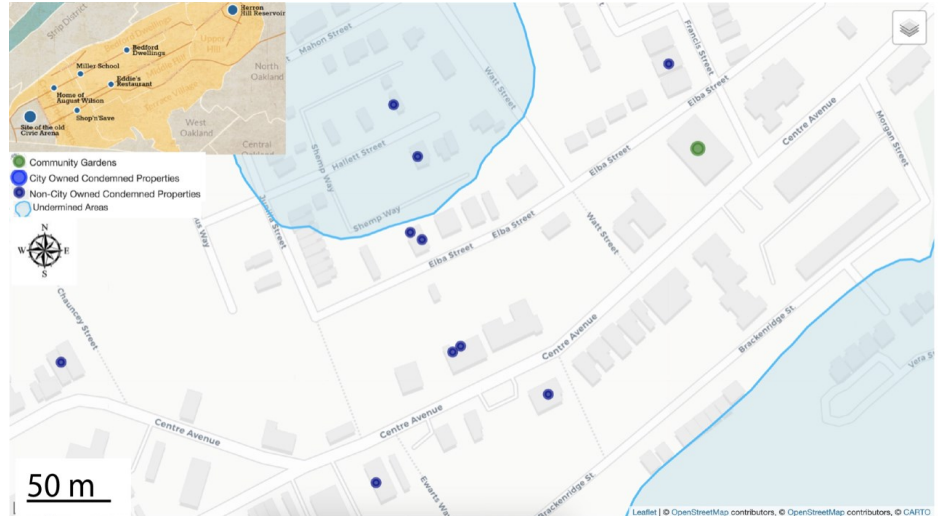


Figure 4. Partially on undermined land, these successive condemnations would be ideal for a long park featuring multiple green design concepts.

Implications

- The Land Bank could recycle more vacant plots through green recycling than through full-rebuilds
- For-profit companies are increasingly filing for conservatorship of properties in unseen neighborhoods without resident well-being in mind. The City and Land Bank have a limited window to assume these blighted properties
- The City of Pittsburgh might set a standard for sustainability by implementing green design practices in blighted lots

Recycling blighted lots into parks with two medium-sized trees and permeable pavement could retain nearly 115,000 gallons of water annually on each plot. A Citywide rain barrel initiative could retain nearly 265,000 gallons each year in the Hill District alone. At the neighborhood scale, Porch gardens could retain over 390,000 gallons annually.

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