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Vacant Spaces into Vibrant Places

September 2015

VACANCY AND BLIGHT ACTION PLAN FOR THE CITY OF DALLAS, TEXAS

Center for Community Progress Report to Dallas, Texas
2015 Technical Assistance Scholarship Program (TASP) Recipient

A Center for Community Progress TASP Final Report

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ABOUT CENTER FOR COMMUNITY PROGRESS

Founded in 2010, the Center for Community Progress is the only national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization solely dedicated to building a future in which entrenched, systemic blight no longer exists in American communities. The mission of Community Progress is to ensure that communities have the vision, knowledge, and systems to transform blighted, vacant, and other problem properties into assets supporting neighborhood vitality. As a national leader on solutions for blight and vacancy, Community Progress serves as the leading resource for local, state, and federal policies and best practices that address the full cycle of property revitalization. Major support for Community Progress is generously provided by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

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OVERVIEW OF THE TASP PROJECT

In January 2015, the Center for Community Progress ("Community Progress") announced that the City of Dallas ("City") was one of four communities competitively selected to be a recipient of the Technical Assistance Scholarship Program ("TASP").[1] The City's successful TASP application, developed by the Dallas Community Prosecution Office, sought a review and assessment of the City's current code enforcement and blight remediation efforts.

During an initial two-day site visit in April, Community Progress staff led a community forum and interviewed more than 20 city officials, department heads, and community non-profit leaders to better understand the unique challenges presented by vacancy and blight in the City.[2] Community Progress staff also reviewed local law and policy, as well as recent reports with relevance to vacancy and blight in Dallas.[3] In addition, the recently developed *Neighborhood Plus—Neighborhood Revitalization Plan for Dallas,* designed to revise and update the housing and neighborhood portions of the Dallas Comprehensive Plan, served as a guiding document for Community Progress' work in Dallas. Included in the six strategic goals for Dallas identified in *Neighborhood Plus* is a call to "Fight Blight" and "to identify and target blighted properties more strategically and effectively to eliminate their negative impact on neighborhoods and return them to productive use."[4]

Although there does not appear to be a single definition of blight in Dallas local law, the Dallas leaders interviewed for TASP defined blighted properties as those characterized by unsound and substandard conditions, and also those that reflect chronic vacancy and abandonment. Blighted vacant properties are also often encumbered by multiple public and private liens which outweigh the value of the property itself, and are often owned by absentee owners or burdened by complicated multi-generational title interests held by multiple, absent and disperse heirs.

The initial Community Progress site visit and preliminary review of the resources described above yielded five key observations:

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[1] For more information about Community Progress and the Technical Assistance Scholarship Program, please visit http://www.communityprogress.net/technical-assistance-scholarship-program--tasp--pages-456.php.

[2] A list of interviewees from the initial site visit and preliminary calls is contained in Appendix A.

[3] See e.g., *Texas Problem Properties Toolkit: A Resource to Help Texas Communities Address Problems Created by Vacant and Abandoned Properties*, Community Development Clinic at the University of Texas School of Law, 2010; *From Blight to Light: Assessing Blight in the City of Dallas*, Prepared for Dallas Area Habitat for Humanity by Praveen Maghelal et al, Department of Public Administration, University of North Texas, 2013, abridged version available at: http://www.dallasareahabitat.org/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=33636&folderId=48594&name=DLFE-2241.pdf.

[4] See June 2015 Draft *Neighborhood Plus: Neighborhood Revitalization Plan for Dallas*, available here: http://dallascityhall.com/departments/pnv/DCH%20Documents/Neighborhood-Plus-June17-small.pdf at 5.

1. *The City of Dallas has the expertise, capacity, focus and commitment to wage an effective fight against vacancy and blight.* The sheer talent and institutional knowledge contained in, for example, the City Attorney's Office, the Departments of Code Compliance, Housing, Planning and Neighborhood Vitality, Economic Development and Sustainable Development & Construction are an asset that will be critical to the City's success in tackling blight moving forward.

2. *City departments do not coordinate regularly and meaningfully on comprehensive blight strategies, and there is no high level senior staff member empowered to direct and hold accountable interdepartmental teams.* The lack of consistent communication and strong coordination across departments results in 'siloed' interventions that fail to make a systematic, measurable, and equitable impact in the neighborhoods burdened by high levels of vacancy and blight.

3. *The City's data systems are often department specific, and there is no reliable, regular way to access, share, integrate and analyze property datasets.* The patchwork of data systems and 'siloed' data management practices result in a general lack of understanding of the true inventory of problem properties, an inability to design appropriate solutions to different neighborhoods, and uncertainty about the impacts of interventions.

4. *Almost every Dallas leader that was interviewed recommended a "fight blight" pilot program*, whereby all available legal, policy, programmatic and community partner tools and investments are directed to a specific neighborhood or neighborhoods, used in coordination, and then evaluated before expanding to other neighborhoods. Such a program may require some redirection of focus and public resources, but does not require a new funding source or budget item.

5. *The City of Dallas is poised <u>now</u> to make a significant and equitable impact on the blight, vacancy and abandonment that has plagued various portions of the City for decades.* In concert with the proposed multi-year Dallas *Neighborhood Plus* Plan, Mayor Rawlings' GrowSouth Initiative, a growing regional economy and population, and other key programs that recognize and seek to respond compassionately and justly to the poverty and inequities endemic to many blighted communities, Dallas leaders have a unique opportunity to direct focus, resources, and collaborative efforts toward reducing blight and vacancy in Dallas in a manner that is efficient, effective and equitable.

Based on the above observations—and guided by the overwhelming refrain from Dallas leaders that intergovernmental coordination is necessary to address vacancy, abandonment and blight in a systemic, measurable and equitable fashion—Community Progress recommended, designed and facilitated a planning retreat for Dallas local government leaders as the second phase of the TASP engagement ("TASP Retreat"). An additional round of phone interviews and discussions with high level leaders in ten City departments helped structure the retreat, and shape the agenda content and goals.[5] As defined by City staff, the ultimate objective of the retreat was to explore opportunities for collaboration and improved coordination, and identify key gaps in understanding/information/capacity among City of Dallas departments in order to more effectively address vacant, abandoned, and blighted properties across the City and help improve the quality of life for its residents. The 1.5-day retreat was held on July 22-23, 2015 and conducted at an off-site location in Dallas.

At the close of the retreat, there was general agreement on three key needs:

1. The City needs to be far better at *communicating and coordinating* across all departments in order to wage an effective fight against vacancy and blight.

2. The City needs to improve *information sharing and data management systems and practices across departments* in order to be more effective in combating vacancy and blight.

3. The City needs to *institutionalize* improved coordination, communication, and data management through the creation of a Blight Task Force that is empowered to lead the City's efforts to fight blight and is accountable to the Mayor, City Council, and the public.

In the following sections, we will briefly discuss how the City can address each of these three needs, offer examples of how other communities have tackled similar needs with great success, and provide some recommendations for cost effective and equitable blight elimination activities for consideration by Dallas leaders.

[5] A list of TASP Retreat attendees and the agenda is attached as Appendix B.

(1) COORDINATION IS KEY: THE BLIGHT TASK FORCE AS A SUCCESSFUL MODEL

Community Progress strongly supports the data-driven, inter-departmental blight task force model, which has been used successfully throughout the country. Though cities large and small have successfully utilized the blight task force model, each team must always tailor their efforts to the unique local challenges presented by vacancy and abandonment and be guided by community priorities and neighborhood goals. Some additional common traits of successful interdepartmental blight teams include agreed-upon strategic goals; consistent and steady participation from all senior decision-makers; a culture of innovation and risk-taking; clearly defined roles, with delegation of authority by the Chief Executive(s) to one individual; frequent reporting to the Mayor/City Council/City Manager, and the community; and a high degree of accountability. Three examples include:

i. **New Orleans, Louisiana.** The "BlightStat" Task Force in New Orleans is composed of high-level city managers and leaders from multiple departments who meet on a monthly basis to review performance results under Mayor Landrieu's direction to reduce blighted units in the City.[6] Between 2010 and 2014, BlightStat's coordinated, targeted, and data-driven efforts reduced the number of blighted units in New Orleans by 10,000 parcels.[7]

ii. **Duluth, Minnesota.** The Vacant and Blighted Property Task Force was formed in 2010 to foster stronger communication and coordination among local government and community leaders in the effort to reduce vacancy and blight in Duluth.[8] In the space of four years the efforts of this task force resulted in the hiring of dedicated staff for blight remediation efforts, the remediation or demolition of hundreds of vacant and blighted properties, and the creative re-use of vacant lots to support work training programs and urban agriculture. The Duluth Vacant and Blighted Property

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[6] See BlightStat website including meeting schedules, methodology and performance metrics available here: http://www.nola.gov/performance-and-accountability/reports/blightstat/.

[7] See 2014 New Orleans Blight Reduction Report available here: http://www.nola.gov/getattachment/Performance-and-Accountability/Initiatives-and-Reports/BlightSTAT/Blight-Report_web.pdf/.

[8] See LISC Duluth website: http://www.lisc.org/duluth/partners_and_supporters/community_safety_initiative/duluth's_blight_collaborative.php.

Task Force is now focusing on proposed changes to state policy to prevent blight through effective and equitable state property tax enforcement law.

iii. **South Bend, Indiana.** After taking office in 2011, Mayor Pete Buttigieg assembled a diverse group of cross-sector leaders, city practitioners, policy experts, and neighborhood leaders to study the issues of vacancy and blight, explore appropriate solutions, and prepare a comprehensive report. The final report by the Vacant and Abandoned Property Task Force was released in February 2013, and the Mayor promptly pledged to eliminate 1,000 blighted, abandoned homes in 1,000 days using a range of the tools and programs identified by the task force. An interdepartmental team within the City continues to monitor progress, evaluate and adjust interventions, and report back to the community. With 100 days to go, the City had already addressed 991 abandoned properties.[9]

[9] See City of South Bend website: http://www.ci.south-bend.in.us/government/content/vacant-abandoned-properties-initiative.

(2) DATA IS KEY: UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM, INFORMING THE SOLUTIONS

A community's effectiveness in tackling vacancy and blight largely hinges on its ability to collect, manage, share and analyze property datasets in a timely, accurate and reliable fashion. Certain data points, like property tax payment status or housing and building code violations, can be very helpful in predicting vacancy or abandonment. Since so many different City departments touch vacant or blighted properties in some way, it is critical to share, integrate and analyze the various property data to gain a deeper understanding of both the problem and potential solution. Similarly, understanding housing market conditions and trends can be useful in determining which interventions might be most appropriate for a given property. Both property data and market conditions should constantly drive and inform a City's efforts to combat vacancy and blight.

Although the City of Dallas currently lacks a comprehensive data platform that allows easy access to various data points in real time, City leadership from GIS/CIS provided valuable insights at the TASP Retreat into the City's data mining and organizational capacity, and expressed significant interest and willingness to assist in an effort to catalogue and share blight data. Community Progress has assisted a number of communities with the build-out and implementation of information management systems, and a proposed list of key data points for the City to consider in developing a fight the blight strategy are included in Appendix C. Community Progress also encourages the City to consider collaborating with a local university or research center, which could assume a central role in developing a long-term, regional approach to data management across multiple sectors. Two examples include:

i. **NEO CANDO (Northeast Ohio Community and Neighborhood Data for Organizing).**[10] NEO CANDO is a project of the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development at Case Western Reserve University's Mandel School of Applied Sciences, and is one of the most highly regarded data information systems by vacant property reclamation practitioners. The system tracks not only property data, but also social and economic data from a variety of publicly-available data sources and various public agencies for the 17-county Northeast Ohio region.

ii. **Lafayette, Louisiana.** One of the recipients of the first-round of TASP awards, Lafayette illustrates that improved data management systems and practices need not

[10] See NEO CANDO website: http://neocando.case.edu/.

always involve major investments in sophisticated technological systems.[11] Applying the lessons to Dallas, if all departments geocoded their datasets with a common identifier (usually the tax or parcel ID #), customized and cost-effective web mapping applications could pull and map data from a variety of sources to allow for easy visualization and analysis. For Dallas, even monthly extraction of data from disparate datasets to generate maps for the Blight Task Force to review, analyze and discuss might be a manageable task for GIS/CIS and a big step in the right direction.

[11] For full TASP report produced for Lafayette, LA, please see http://www.communityprogress.net/filebin/LCG_-_TASP_Report_-_December_2014.pdf.

(3) A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION: CREATING THE DALLAS BLIGHT TASK FORCE

Key Neighborhood Plus Goals: Create a permanent blight task force under one leader to coordinate and prioritize efforts across departments and agencies and to streamline accountability. Proactively and systematically bring blighted properties into code compliance in areas of concentrated blight. Strategically target public investment for acquisition and improvement of properties in blighted areas to play a catalytic role in neighborhood revitalization through housing development, neighborhood green space and other public amenities.

The blight task force model, highlighted in *Neighborhood Plus*, was repeatedly identified by Dallas leaders as a necessary framework for moving the ball forward on blight remediation. Local government leaders consistently described frustration with their perception that current blight remediation efforts are occurring in silos. Many shared that the lack of targeted coordinated efforts has led to large expenditures of time and resources on individual and disconnected problem properties that, taken together, fail to make a large and quantifiable impact in Dallas neighborhoods. To this end, Community Progress proposes the following action items to address this key need:

1. Convene an intergovernmental Dallas Blight Task Force led by an Assistant City Manager ("ACM"), who has been delegated full responsibility and authority to manage this high-level senior team.

2. Ensure the Blight Task Force is authorized and empowered to meet at least bi-weekly for an initial period of at least six months, and that all Blight Task Force members are given clear expectations and authorization from the Mayor, City Council and City Manager to prioritize this initiative and allocate departmental resources as needed to sustain the activities and work of the Blight Task Force.

3. Ensure high-level representation on the Blight Task Force from at least the following departments:
    a. City Manager's Office (with ACM as lead)
    b. Planning and Neighborhood Vitality

c. City Attorney's Office
d. Housing
e. Economic Development
f. Sustainable Development and Real Estate
g. Land Bank
h. Geographical Information Systems (GIS)
i. Communication and Information Services (CIS)
j. Community Prosecution
k. Mayor's Office
l. Center for Performance Excellence
m. Intergovernmental Services (Grants Department)
n. Code Compliance

4. Charge the Blight Task Force with developing and presenting to the Mayor and City Council a list of top five goals. Relevant goals might include:
    a. Define a geographic target area for a blight elimination pilot project in concert with *Neighborhood Plus* framework. Possible target areas might include those neighborhoods already defined by the Mayor's GrowSouth initiative. Selection of target area should be mindful of market conditions, including the possibility of focusing initial attention and investment on areas that are bounded by some market strength followed by movement to more challenged areas. Note that a targeted blight elimination pilot project does not obviate the need to remain responsive to demolition, abatement and other housing and building code enforcement needs throughout the City, but rather allows for proactive focus and use and testing of all available tools in pilot area and coordinated measuring of impact of interventions.
    b. Develop list of blight remediation tactics[12] informed and guided by data, to be utilized in pilot project including, but not limited to:
        i. High impact landlord initiative
        ii. General housing and building code enforcement
        iii. Community prosecution actions
        iv. Code 100 tax foreclosure enforcement
        v. Non-tax lien enforcement
        vi. Land Bank, Sustainable Development & Construction and Economic Development land assemblage and disposition efforts
        vii. Incentives for redevelopment in commercial areas within target areas
        viii. Housing and community development investments made with federal, state and private grants

[12] An inventory of key programs and resources was brainstormed at the TASP Retreat, so the task force could continue to brainstorm and explore how to align and coordinate interventions and investments to maximize the impact in the targeted area.

c. Develop dynamic, replicable and periodically updated datasets of property conditions in the initial geographic target area and allow data to guide messaging, tactics and methods of measuring impact.
d. Ensure effective and transparent communication regarding progress of pilot project to the public, and develop list of specific priority vacant and blighted parcels targeted for intervention in coordination with neighborhood resident leaders. Consider distributing list of top 50 target parcels in target area, defined by properties that are vacant, abandoned, tax or code lien delinquent or otherwise in substandard status. Hold public meetings in target area to discuss the list and develop consensus on priority parcels targeted for intervention and remediation.
e. Identify all potential funding sources for vacancy and blight remediation efforts including local tax dollars, state, federal and philanthropic grants, private sector donations, in-kind donations of services and volunteer hours by relevant organizations and agencies.

5. Report and track progress on blight elimination pilot project in bi-weekly Blight Task Force meetings. The Assistant City Manager should provide monthly updates to the City Manager, City Council and Mayor.

6. Capitalize on increased coordination among government departments addressing blight, and track any efficiencies of time and cost-savings realized by a more coordinated approach to blight remediation.

7. Develop working, cross-departmental approach to blight remediation that may ultimately be employed as a matter of course throughout the City of Dallas. Utilize pilot project to identify areas of inefficiency, confusion and ineffectiveness, and to test underutilized blight remediation tools including foreclosure of non-tax liens, targeted tax foreclosure programs, the high impact landlord initiative and land banking for purposes of assemblage in target geographic areas.

(4) QUICK WINS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COST-EFFECTIVE BLIGHT ELIMINATION ACTIVITIES IN YEAR ONE

Many of the most important tools available to address vacancy, abandonment and blight are cost-neutral—they simply require leadership, reallocation or focus of existing resources, and a combination of data-driven, strategic, and publicly accountable decision making. However there is no doubt that in the wake of the Great Recession and as a result of long histories of inequitable, uneven and ineffective development in American cities, sustained public and private investment scaled to the scope of vacancy and abandonment in a given community is required to eliminate blight. Like any complex and challenging issue facing Dallas leaders, from the support of the public school system to ongoing infrastructure needs and challenges, blight elimination initiatives require financial support. But there are a number of possible action items that could be employed to make an impact on vacancy, abandonment and blight in the near term that are achievable with existing Dallas resources and tools in a cost-effective and even cost-neutral fashion. The following observations and recommended responsive action items were generated by Community Progress over the course of the TASP engagement and are offered for consideration by Dallas leaders.

Observation # 1 – Lack of cross-departmental communication led by high-level City staff is a primary obstacle to implementing effective and impactful blight remediation strategy.

1a. Create bi-weekly "blight task force" working group meetings that include every City department that touches vacant, abandoned and sub-standard properties.

1b. Blight task force coordination efforts must be made a priority, and should be directed by the City Manager's office; departments or sub-working groups should be tasked with specific deliverables and actions, and required to report progress on these actions.

1c. The Mayor's staff and Planning and Neighborhood Vitality department should primarily lead fundraising efforts to support ongoing initiatives, reaching out to key philanthropic and private business to sponsor aspects of work (e.g. funding a citywide parcel survey if necessary).

Observation # 2 – Lack of enforcement of non-tax liens; Properties are cited by Code Compliance, code liens are placed on properties, but reaching compliance is largely dependent on relationships, outreach and the willingness of owners to comply voluntarily. Without a true 'hammer,' enforcement is limited, and costs to cite and fine are not being recouped.

2a. Utilize tax and non-tax lien foreclosure to clear title and transfer abandoned and blighted properties to responsible ownership or public ownership where necessary. Code 100 program should be expanded upon. At a minimum, ensure non-tax liens are included in tax lien foreclosure to increase marketability of title at the end of tax foreclosure process.

2b. Explore reports of insufficient capacity at county court with jurisdiction over tax foreclosure. Coordinate with County leadership to increase capacity to enable increased volume of tax foreclosure on vacant, abandoned and tax delinquent parcels.

2c. Utilize code lien foreclosure in strategic fashion, particularly on vacant, abandoned and substandard structures. Explore possibility of utilizing collections department capacity to foreclose on non-tax liens. Note that lien foreclosure should not be utilized on owner-occupants without the means to bring property up to code—such property owners should be quickly diverted to supportive programs.

2d. Provide more public education around city housing and building code enforcement; create a 1-2 pager of code basics (in layperson's terms) that is provided to every new landlord registered in City's records, and to residents. Share this resource with realtors in area for them to share with their clients. Provide public access to code basics 1-2 pager on City website.

2e. Time code inspections based on condition of property at last inspection. Reduce required number of inspections on properties in good condition, thereby focusing time and resources on properties most in need of intervention.

Observation #3 – Substandard rental properties are a significant and growing concern that must be addressed to provide safe housing to Dallas renters and prevent further deterioration of housing stock across the city.

3a. Get all landlords "on the books" – registered and licensed.

- Establish an initial amnesty period where landlords can register their properties for FREE; the goal is to get landlords on the books, not to initially penalize them for doing the right thing.
- Make registration easy! Automate the process of filling out forms on the City website.

- Use available homestead data to determine which properties are not rental properties; cross reference this list with the list of current registered landlords; do targeted outreach, based on the gap between likely rental and not registered.
- Compare property address with owner address to determine which properties are absentee owners.
- Revise multi-unit and single family registration ordinances to simplify registrations and renewals, eliminate needless paper requirements and improve presumptions of notice, effective service and rights to interior inspections as recommended by the City Attorney's Office.
- Ultimately develop and implement city-wide vacant property registration ordinance. Ensure adequate staffing capacity and technological systems to manage all registration processes over time.

3c. Reward and incentivize responsible landlord behavior.

- Provide training and education on housing and building code compliance for landlords; this could be led by the Code Inspector and Community Prosecutor teams in each service area.
- Develop a 'how-to' quick reference guide for landlords; hand out during trainings, give to each newly registered landlord, and have available on City of Dallas website.
- Develop rewards and incentives for landlords that complete the city-sponsored trainings, such as reduced registration fees, less frequent inspections, or free listing on the City's website as 'certified' rental property.

Observation #4 – There is room to improve understanding of the inventory of problem properties across Dallas; there does not appear to be a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the scope, scale and nature of the problem(s) (e.g. # of vacant properties, # of blighted properties, and # of vacant lots).

4a. Conduct a citywide property condition survey. Consider reaching out to philanthropic and business community to fund effort. Residents could be paid and trained to survey their neighborhoods; training could be led in each service area by the community prosecution and code inspection team assigned to that service area. It is critical to have a citywide understanding of the problem in order to measure changing neighborhood conditions over time. It will not be possible to measure the *Neighborhood Plus* goal of 25% reduction in blight by 2020 without knowing how much blight currently exists in the city. A citywide effort to survey vacant property can itself engage residents, and build momentum around *Neighborhood Plus*.

4b. Work with an appropriate company to survey properties using a mobile application. For a large city like Dallas, this will be important to help expedite the process, and reduce possibilities for error.

4c. More data should be added to the excellent EPIC Dallas Civic Insight platform including the parcel survey (if done), ACTIVE (not just closed Code data), ALL City and land bank owned property data, delinquent tax and non-tax lien data, and data for *Neighborhood Plus* target areas (when decided).

4d. The City should explore what options and resources exist for a comprehensive and shared interdepartmental database that includes increased capability for real-time data updates.

4e. Consider working with an appropriate firm or research entity to conduct a "Cost of Blight" study that analyzes the current cost of vacancy, abandonment and blight to Dallas taxpayers—that is, determine the cost of the status quo which may help build the case to make change.

Observation #5 – There seems to be a lack of capacity for the City or Land Bank to take on more property in its inventory, leaving a number of problem properties in limbo and inaccessible to the market or future land use planning activities.

5a. Consider increasing capacity to acquire, hold, maintain and assemble substandard properties within the City of Dallas or the Land Bank. Recognize that the City owns the problems presented by vacant, abandoned and blighted properties, and thus the City should consider capacity to own the property where no responsible private ownership options exist in the near term.

5b. Prioritize title clearing and land assemblage within the City. Several interviewees reported that there are responsible, private end users for land throughout Dallas, but most City inventory does not reflect clear title and is often scattered site.

5c. Consider placing responsibility for ensuring maintenance of all city-owned inventory in the Department of Sustainable Development—Real Estate Division, ensuring this Office has increased capacity to take on this assemblage, and charging it with ensuring marketable, insurable title for such property. Work with Office of Code Compliance, Streets Services Department or other appropriate Department to take on management of all city-owned inventory and take advantage of economies of scale.

5d. Track condition of parcels disposed of by City and the Land Bank at 6-month, 1-year, 3-year and 5-year intervals to ensure disposition strategy is incentivizing responsible property development and ownership. Ensure such data is publicly available.

5e. "Take the long view" on intervention programs to address vacancy and blight. There is significant pressure on existing (Land Bank) and new (*Neighborhood Plus*) City programs to become immediately self-sustaining. However, neighborhood revitalization takes significant time and significant investment to generate systemic and permanent impact. Requiring self-financing often generates pressure to focus more investment in stronger market neighborhoods—concentrating vacancy and blight in the weakest market neighborhoods in need of the most intervention.

Observation #6 – There seem to be some City and community resources available that are not being taken full advantage of to reduce blight.

6a. *Tomorrow Fund:* The City should expand eligible uses for the Tomorrow Fund, and lead a broader education effort around it and similar programs in key target areas.

6b. *Other housing rehab programs:* The City should compile a list of these programs and funding resources, make them available on the City website, and have Code Inspectors and Community Prosecutors do outreach around these programs so that residents can tap in to them.

6c. *Philanthropic and Business Sector:* Several interviewees mentioned that there are foundations willing to fund efforts but there is no coordinated or universally accepted vision to which they might contribute. The City should explore harnessing energy and recommendations around *Neighborhood Plus* and goals of a constituted Blight Task Force to explore these options.

6d. *Philanthropic and community support for home repairs for low income owner-occupants.* If there are inadequate existing public and private programs to support low-income owner occupants in need of support to bring their homes into compliance, consider launching fundraising effort around this specific goal. If possible, house administration of home repair philanthropic program within the Department of Code Compliance or Community Prosecution team such that those citing substandard properties are able to directly provide information and access to supportive programs to low-income owner occupants.

6e. *Engaged Residents and Community Groups.*

- "Fight the Blight" Community Conference: Hold an annual or bi-annual conference of residents, block clubs and other community groups to tackle community driven efforts around reducing blight. Invite the City and other outside organizations to lead trainings, sessions and discussions.
- Community driven vacant lot maintenance: The City should harness the interest of resident and community groups to improve their neighborhoods.

6f. *Existing City services:* Consider whether it is possible to enhance the City's garbage collection contract to require that garbage trucks also pick up illegal dumping seen along routes.

6g. *Schools:* A major issue raised by Dallas leaders was the declining middle class in the City. All seemed to agree that a major reason behind this decline was the actual, or perceived quality of Dallas public schools. The City should tie its targeted blight reduction effort with a positive school rebranding campaign. Increased communication and coordination with schools across the City will be important. Consider whether a fund could be developed devoted to school and children's safety modeled after the federal "Safe Routes to School Program." The dedicated fund could help support demolition of dangerous structures and boarding and securing of vacant properties immediately near elementary schools or along the walking routes to schools. This could be an excellent funding opportunity for local philanthropy.

Observation #7 – Like almost every city in the United States, socio-economic and racial segregation is an entrenched, systemic reality in Dallas. Ensuring residents and community leaders most affected by vacancy, abandonment and blight are both at the table to make decisions about how to address blight, and in the streets providing leadership and capacity to strengthen neighborhoods will be critical to the success of Dallas blight remediation efforts.

7a. In selecting target areas as part of the *Neighborhood Plus* plan, the City needs to concentrate a multi-dimensional, and proactive effort in lower wealth, distressed neighborhoods, while ensuring that access to and efforts to support quality and affordable housing are distributed equitably and in a non-discriminatory fashion in neighborhoods throughout the city.

7b. Existing residents and leaders of communities that include blighted properties must be included and consulted in identifying problem properties for remediation, be provided with ongoing updates on blight remediation progress, and offered meaningful opportunities to identify and transform inefficiencies and inequities that develop in any pilot targeted blight remediation project.

7c. Consider building on the significant trust and good will that is apparent between Community Prosecution attorney/inspector teams and neighborhood leaders to host neighborhood meetings designed to solicit guidance, input and assistance from residents on target blight remediation plans and implementation assistance.

7d. City and philanthropic programs to provide assistance to low-income owner occupants with fixing housing and building code violations should be collated and described in a simple 1-2 page document that might be shared on the City website, and sent to property owners in conjunction with notices of code violations.

7e. Consider highlighting information about existing pro bono legal resources available to existing owner-occupants who hold fractured title (e.g., heirs property). Require those who receive public grants for property ownership to have wills addressing transfer of title upon death. Work with appropriate local non-profit or law clinic leaders to host annual or bi-annual information session on strategies to equitably address fractured title properties and serve generational ownership.

CONCLUSION

City of Dallas leadership and staff have all of the necessary ingredients for a successful, data-driven, blight remediation initiative: political leadership and focus on neighborhoods struggling with vacancy and blight; public recognition of the problems presented by vacant and blighted properties; legal and policy tools that can be employed strategically to combat blight; and high-capacity local government staff including attorneys, planners, IT experts, housing, management and economic development professionals.

We hope the observations and recommendations contained in this report and gleaned throughout the TASP engagement are helpful to Dallas leaders and provide a basis for discussions moving forward. It has been a privilege for Community Progress to learn from the broad range of leaders and constituencies in Dallas, and to be invited to offer recommendations and observations from our "outside" perspective, based on our experience with multiple communities around the country.

APPENDIX A: INITIAL SITE VISIT & PRELIMINARY PHONE INTERVIEWS

Participants: April 2015 Interviews

1) Community Prosecution Team
2) City Attorney's Office
3) Department of Code Compliance
4) Economic Development
5) Housing & Community Services/Dallas Land Bank
6) Sustainable Development & Construction and Real Estate
7) Planning and Neighborhood Vitality
8) Linebarger Goggan Blair and Sampson LLP (Dallas lien foreclosure counsel)
9) Dallas Area Habitat for Humanity leaders
10) Community forum hosted by Community Prosecution team and attended by approximately 40 community leaders.

APPENDIX B: TASP RETREAT

Dallas Blight Strategic Planning Retreat Agenda

July 22-23, 2015

Objective

The objective of this retreat is to explore opportunities for collaboration and improved coordination, and identify key gaps in understanding/information/capacity, among City of Dallas departments in order to more effectively address vacant, abandoned and blighted properties across Dallas and help improve the quality of life for its residents.

Confirmed Attendee List

Facilitators: Sara Toering, Payton Heins, Center for Community Progress
Christina Carter, Center for Community Progress
Art Hudman, Robin Bentley, and Barbara Martinez, City Attorney's Office
Ashley Eubanks, Office of Real Estate
Bernadette Mitchell and Terry Williams, Housing and Land Bank
Bob Curry and Ben Collins, Code Compliance
Joey Zapata, Assistant City Manager
Maureen Milligan and Mark Murrell, Community Prosecution
Michael Miller, Kevin Burns, and Girish Ramachandran, GIS/CIS
Theresa O'Donnell and Peer Chacko, Planning and Neighborhood Vitality
Tim Glass, Economic Development
Anna Holmes, Intergovernmental Affairs
Vana Hammond, Office of the Mayor

Wednesday, July 22

12:30 – 2:00 pm	Welcome and Set the Stage
2:00 – 3:30 pm	Department Updates
3:30 – 3:45 pm	Break
3:45 – 5:00 pm	Laying the Groundwork for Collaboration: Hypothetical Activity
5:00 – 7:00 pm	Happy Hour and Dinner

Thursday, July 23

8:30 – 9:00 am	Breakfast and Recap of Day One
9:00 – 12:00 am	Blight Task Force and Data Discussion
12:00 – 12:15 pm	Break
12:15 – 1:15 pm	Working Lunch – Topical Discussion on HUD Settlement/New HUD regulations
1:30 pm	Establishing a Roadmap: Next Steps

APPENDIX C: PROPOSED DATA POINTS FOR STRATEGIC BLIGHT ELIMINATION

Key Neighborhood Plus Goals: Create a GIS database of blighted properties along with a methodology for maintaining and updating it across departments. Link the blighted properties database with the Dallas Open Data Portal and collaborate with EPIC (Economic Partners Investing in Communities) to enable residents to track the City's progress on addressing blighted properties. Develop a comprehensive GIS database of all City-owned and land bank properties along with a methodology for maintaining and updating it across departments.

In meetings with Dallas leaders and at the TASP Retreat, Community Progress consistently heard support for the development of a reliable inter-departmental set of data that might both provide a detailed picture of the blighted conditions in Dallas, and might also allow Dallas leaders to efficiently and effectively track progress on blight remediation goals. City leadership from GIS/CIS spent two days with cross-departmental leaders at the Retreat and provided valuable insight into the City's data mining and organizational capacity, and expressed significant interest and willingness to assist in an effort to catalogue and share blight data.

Based on guidance provided by Dallas leaders at the Retreat, we recommend the development, mapping and provision of data points for the geographic areas targeted for initial blight remediation efforts by the Blight Task Force including, but not limited to:

a. Most recent tax appraisals for all property in targeted location.
b. Number and location of City-owned properties.
c. Number and location of Housing Authority-owned properties.
d. Number and location of Land Bank owned properties.
e. Number and location of any other publicly owned properties.
f. Number and location of single family homes, multi-family homes, commercial structures.
g. Number and location of active business licenses.
h. Number and location of active building permits.
i. Number and location of community assets including school, public parks, libraries, police and fire stations, community centers, and functioning non-profit development and other supportive organizations.

j. Transportation data including accessibility of public transportation.
k. Number and location of any vacant, abandoned structures based on USPS data, lack of utility hook-up, windshield survey or other measures.
l. Number and location of any vacant lots based on windshield survey or existing data.
m. Location and concentration of police and fire calls over a set time period (consider at least 3 years).
n. Location and number of owner-occupied properties.
o. Location and number of renter-occupied properties, and information on rental property owners.
p. Number and location of income restricted housing units.
q. Any 311 data available.
r. Number and location of non-tax liens.
s. Number and location of delinquent property tax liens.
t. Number and location of housing and building code violations and outcomes.
u. Number and location of parcels mowed or otherwise maintained by the City or other public entity.
v. Previous investment (dollars and locations) of Office of Economic Development and other public funds in the target area.
w. Number and location of water liens and other utility data including illegal utility hook-up information.
x. Additional and supplemental Census data.