ELYRIA

2016 PROPERTY INVENTORY REPORT

Western Reserve Land Conservancy
land • people • community
ABOUT US

Western Reserve Land Conservancy is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing the people of our region with essential natural resources through land conservation and restoration. We work with landowners, communities, government agencies, park systems and other nonprofit organizations to permanently protect natural areas and farmland. In March 2011, we launched Thriving Communities, a region-wide effort to help revitalize our urban centers, and named nationally known expert Jim Rokakis as its director.

Today, our Thriving Communities program is known nationally for raising awareness about the impact of blight on our urban communities and for helping to raise over $440 million to eradicate this blight throughout Ohio. Between the Ohio Attorney General’s Moving Ohio Forward Program and the United States Department of Treasury Hardest Hit Fund program, Lorain County has received approximately $6.8 million to demolish vacant and abandoned homes. Western Reserve Land Conservancy’s Thriving Communities team continues to work with communities and organizations throughout the region to transform vacant and unproductive properties into new opportunities to attract economic growth, add green space to our cities and support safe, beautiful neighborhoods. Our cities have thrived in the past, and we believe they will thrive again in the future.

For information regarding our work, please visit: www.wrlandconservancy.org
OUR THANKS

Western Reserve Land Conservancy’s Thriving Communities thanks The Nord Family Foundation, United Way of Greater Lorain County, the Bettcher Foundation, the Nordson Corporation, and PNC Bank for their generous support of this project.

In more than twenty years of activity, The Nord Family Foundation has contributed more than $90 million for charitable and philanthropic purposes in Lorain County and in several other communities of interest to the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of Walter and Virginia Nord, the original founders of the charitable trust that later became the Foundation. Through their support, a similar study was conducted for the City of Lorain in 2013. As a result of that study, the City of Lorain has had the tools needed to strategically approach the problem of vacant and abandoned houses, and has used data from the study to positively impact property values and to improve the quality of life for all Lorain residents. We are confident this study will do the same for the residents of Elyria.

The United Way of Greater Lorain County, the highest rated United Way in Ohio as ranked by United Way Worldwide, has made a commitment to building stronger communities through community collaboration. We applaud their collaborative focus and are grateful to have been able to work in partnership with them.

Thanks to the Bettcher Foundation and Bettcher family for their enthusiasm in getting this project started. With family ties to Elyria, the Bettcher Foundation is happy to support our work in helping Elyria position itself for success.

The Nordson Corporation and its employees have supported the work of Western Reserve Land Conservancy through employee volunteerism and community action for many years. They once again have shown their commitment to Lorain County and Elyria by providing support for this project.

PNC is an active member of each community where they conduct business. They are eager to support community revitalization projects that allow for growth and development. This property survey lays the groundwork for the revitalization of the City of Elyria.

Thanks also to Oberlin Community Services and especially its Executive Director, Cindy Andrews, for continuing to assist the Land Conservancy with staffing and managing survey projects in Lorain County.

Finally, we thank Elyria Mayor Holly Brinda for her support of this project and Kevin A. Brubaker, Assistant Safety Service Director for the Building Department. Kevin’s daily support of this project was critical to its success.

We cannot thank this group of funders enough for supporting our work, this project and the betterment of Elyria and Lorain County.
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Elyria, Ohio is like many other Midwestern communities facing a post-industrial future. When Western Reserve Land Conservancy’s Thriving Communities program first began conducting property surveys and researching the impact of blight in the urban context, there were very few resources available for blight remediation. But since 2012, over $440 million has been raised to fight blight in Ohio communities. In many communities, these funds have changed the nature of our property surveys. We no longer focus our efforts on identification of vacant, abandoned properties for targeted demolition. In cities like Elyria, many of the worst properties have already been razed. At the present time, survey results are useful in dealing with less blighted properties through rehabilitation, code enforcement and some further demolition.

As we have done in many Ohio communities, Western Reserve Land Conservancy undertook a parcel by parcel inventory for the City of Elyria in order to assess the current condition of the city’s housing stock. Only 2.9 percent of the 21,827 parcels were classified as vacant structures — as opposed to the 6.1 percent that were found to be vacant in nearby Lorain, Ohio where the Land Conservancy conducted a survey in 2013. Even more significant is that the surveyors found 96 percent of Elyria’s occupied housing stock graded as either “A” (“Excellent”) or “B” (“Good”). This gives Elyria a solid base upon which to build a strategy that protects that quality of the city’s residential housing stock.

This survey shows that overall the City of Elyria’s housing stock is in good condition and offers hope for the future. But the city is also aging. Over 40 percent of the housing stock was built before 1950; nearly half of that was built before 1939. As aging properties require additional maintenance, Elyria residents with limited financial resources may be unable to keep up with routine maintenance, let alone major repairs. The city needs to be proactive in seeking solutions to these property maintenance issues.

The property inventory results were compiled by ward. All but one of Elyria’s wards fare extremely well in this survey. In Wards 3 and 4, 99 percent of the properties were graded as “A” or “B” on the condition reports. Wards 6 and 7 showed 98 percent, Ward 1 - 94 percent and Ward 2 - 93 percent.

Ward 5 shows the highest level of housing distress in Elyria. Only 83 percent of the properties were graded “A” or “B” with most of the remaining occupied housing falling into the “C” (“Fair”) category. Over 10 percent of the properties in that ward were judged to be vacant. Ward 5 also has the highest percentage of properties that graded out as vacant “D” (“Deteriorated”) and “F” (“Unsafe/Hazard”) properties — about 1.4 percent of the total in that ward.

This property survey can help guide City of Elyria officials to make informed decisions about their housing stock moving forward.
INTRODUCTION + BACKGROUND

Elyria, Ohio was founded in 1817 by Heman Ely as a planned settlement from the Western Reserve lands of the Connecticut Land Company. Elyria is situated along the Black River, just south of Lorain, Ohio, and is approximately 30 miles west of Cleveland. Elyria serves as the county seat for Lorain County.

The City of Elyria has been slowly, but steadily, losing population since 1980. The population loss is in contrast with the population trends in the county overall. Lorain County saw a population increase during this time, with much of the population growth happening in areas such as Avon Lake, Avon, and North Ridgeville — communities that serve as suburbs to the City of Cleveland. In fact, North Ridgeville has been the fastest growing suburb in northeast Ohio for a number of years. While Elyria has lost population since 1980, its losses have been slight compared to other cities in northeast Ohio—most notably Cleveland, Akron, Canton and even suburbs of Cleveland like Bay Village, Fairview Park and North Olmsted.

![Population - City of Elyria](image1)

*Figure 1: Population trends in the City of Elyria, 2014 American Community Survey data*

![Population - Lorain County](image2)

*Figure 2: Population trends in Lorain County, 2014 American Community Survey data*
According to 2014 data from the 5-year American Community Survey, there are 25,085 housing units in Elyria, of which 13,647 units were owner-occupied and 8,753 were renter-occupied. Housing tenure is broken down in the figure below.

Housing Tenure

- Percent Owner-Occupied: 39%
- Percent Renter-Occupied: 61%

Figure 3: Housing tenure figures for the City of Elyria, 2014 American Community Survey data

The US Census reports a 10.7 percent vacancy rate in Elyria. One discrepancy worth mentioning is that this survey of vacant and abandoned properties is conducted by parcel, not by unit. For instance, more than one unit can exist on one parcel, and if any unit seemed to the surveyor to be occupied, the property would have been considered “occupied” by our measure of analysis.

The median income in Elyria is $42,272 (in 2014 inflation-adjusted dollars)\(^1\) and the median home value, according to Zillow, is $88,900, compared to $127,200 for all of Lorain County. The popular real estate data website reports that the housing market in Elyria is “warm,” edging toward a seller’s market. They report a 5 percent increase in sales prices from June of 2015.\(^2\)

Recent changes in Elyria’s economy may have an effect on Elyria’s housing, bringing with them some uncertainty. The city lost two of its major employers in the last 18 months — the Bendix Corporation and Riddell. Both of these companies are relocating to neighboring communities — Bendix to Avon and Riddell to North Ridgeville. While these nearby moves are not likely to result in population losses from relocation of Elyria residents, they are costly to the city through reduced income taxes that will have an adverse effect on the city’s finances.\(^3\) Mayor Holly Brinda addressed some of these concerns at her State of the City address in February 2016. She described how the lack of an anti-poaching policy in Lorain County proved to be detrimental to her community. She strongly advocates for a county-wide anti-poaching policy moving forward.\(^4\) Additionally, Mayor Brinda highlighted Elyria’s “surplus of older housing stock” as a chief concern.

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1: http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_14_5YR_B19013&prodType=table
2: http://www.zillow.com/elyria-oh/home-values/
With the combination of steady population loss, and the 1-2 punch of relocation decisions by major employers, getting out in front of this issue becomes critically important to maintain the health of Elyria’s housing and building stock. One key starting point can be found through the use of a comprehensive property survey, which is what this report contains. The data within this report can point city officials to the areas within the city that might require the most significant interventions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Built</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010 or later</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 to 2009</td>
<td>1,763</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990 to 1999</td>
<td>1,924</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
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<td>1980 to 1989</td>
<td>1,564</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970 to 1979</td>
<td>5,239</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
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<td>1960 to 1969</td>
<td>3,728</td>
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<td>1950 to 1959</td>
<td>3,864</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940 to 1949</td>
<td>1,546</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939 or earlier</td>
<td>5,132</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>24,824</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4: Year Structure Built data for the City of Elyria, U.S. Census Bureau, 2010*
DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In June 2015, Western Reserve Land Conservancy received grants from The Nord Family Foundation, United Way of Greater Lorain County, the Bettcher Foundation, the Nordson Corporation and PNC Bank, to complete the citywide property survey of Elyria. The property inventory in Elyria also included a workforce development component through a partnership with Oberlin Community Services to employ staff from the Women in Sustainable Employment program. After completing training, six women were employed to survey the 21,827 parcels across the city.

The inventory was completed using mobile devices loaded with GIS software developed by LOVELAND Technologies from Detroit, Michigan. For each parcel, surveyors took a photograph of the site and assessed whether the parcel contained a structure or was a vacant lot. If the parcel had a structure, the surveyors determined whether it was occupied or vacant using visual clues and uniform guidelines. The surveyors then responded to a series of questions regarding the property’s physical characteristics, and then gave each property a condition grade. The grading ranges from “A” for “Excellent” to “F” for “Unsafe/Hazard.” Each parcel was evaluated from the sidewalk. The grading scale is provided below and includes an image of a sample property in Elyria that was given that particular designation. It should be noted that the outside appearance of structures does not always correspond to indoor conditions; property inventory results should only act as an initial flagging of problem properties.

Survey findings were mapped and analyzed by the Land Conservancy staff. Quality control measures were in place to assure that grading standards were consistent among surveyors and that each property was surveyed and photographed.

Results were compiled by ward and for the city as a whole. Findings of the study follow.

Figure 5: An example of the data collection process
PROPERTY INVENTORY GRADING SCALE

A - EXCELLENT
• No visible signs of deterioration
• Well maintained and cared for
• New construction/renovation
• Historic detailing, unique

B - GOOD
• Needs basic improvements
• Minor painting
• Removal of weeds
• Cleaning

C - FAIR
• Some cracking of brick or wood
• Major painting required
• Deteriorating concrete
• Crumbling concrete
• Cracked windows or stairs

D - DETERIORATED
• Major cracking of brick/wood rotting
• Broken or missing windows
• Missing brick and siding
• Open holes

F - UNSAFE or HAZARD
• House is open and a shell
• Can see through completely
• House ransacked and filled with trash
• Immediate safety hazard to neighborhood

Figure 6: Property Inventory Grading Scale with images of sample properties in Elyria
RESULTS

The survey results present positive news for the City of Elyria. Of the 17,152 structures that were surveyed, 96 percent (16,506) were classified as occupied. An overwhelming majority (96 percent) of these occupied structures were given a grade of “A” or “B”; 6,690 were given a rating of “A” and 9,110 received a score of “B.” Of the 16,506 occupied structures 692 were considered to be “C” structures and only 14 structures were given the grade of “D.” There were no occupied structures graded as “F.”

Of the 642 parcels, or 4 percent, of the structures classified as vacant, only 9 percent were given a grade of “D” (24 structures) or “F” (31 structures). This means that as few as 55 structures may need to be considered for demolition at this time.

Again, it should be noted that the outside appearance of structures does not always correspond to indoor conditions; property inventory results should only act as an initial flagging of problem properties.

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**Survey Categories**

![Pie chart showing survey categories](chart)

Figure 7: Percentage of property types determined by the Elyria Property Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Categories</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>No Grade</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupied Structure</td>
<td>6,690</td>
<td>9,110</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16,506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant Structure</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td>645</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vacant Lot</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking Lot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Adjacent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,807</strong></td>
<td><strong>9,448</strong></td>
<td><strong>824</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,676</strong></td>
<td><strong>21,827</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8: Overall Elyria Property Inventory results
Those structures rated “C” and “D” could be targeted for home improvement programs, or programs that aid homeowners with code enforcement. Working with the Lorain County Reutilization Corporation could also help streamline the demolition process, and move it away from a responsive action to a more proactive one.

Nearly 13 percent of the parcels surveyed, or 2,754 properties, were classified as vacant lots. Almost 5 percent of the parcels surveyed were designated as “with adjacent,” representing structures that span multiple parcels. Since data collection is parcel-based, this category prevents multiple parcels from being categorized as occupied or vacant when in fact, together they contain only one such structure, allowing for a more accurate count of total occupied and vacant structures.

The survey found far more properties were given a grade of “B” (9,110 properties) than “A” (6,690 properties). This might signify that while most of the housing stock is in good shape, it is beginning to show signs of deferred maintenance. Also important to note is the number and location of “C” properties, as they may require the most monitoring. A number of “D” and “F” properties near “C” properties may indicate a transition of those properties to a worse condition. On the other hand, “C” properties in a neighborhood with mostly “A” or “B” properties also require monitoring to prevent the rest of the neighborhood from declining.
VACANT LOTS
There were 2,754 vacant lots identified by this property inventory. Although these are not graded, the location of these vacant lots is important to consider and monitor. Identifying potential redevelopment sites or creating a comprehensive redevelopment plan for these vacant lots is crucial for the success of neighborhoods. Different strategies can be applied to different neighborhoods. Neighborhoods with higher numbers of “A” and “B” properties could be targets for various types of infill development. A side yard expansion program could also be considered, where an adjacent neighbor could apply to take over possession of the vacant lot to expand their yard. In neighborhoods with higher numbers of “C”, “D” and “F” properties, vacant lots may be greened to improve the appearance of the street help stabilize those neighborhoods. Larger, anchor-style redevelopment strategies could be considered for neighborhoods with a number of adjacent vacant lots.

WARD ANALYSIS
There are seven wards in Elyria. The maps found in the appendices show that many of these vacant and blighted properties are concentrated in a few neighborhoods, especially in Ward 5. Notable findings are:

- Ward 5 had the highest number of “C” structures (244) and also had the highest number of “D”, “F”, and vacant structures.
- Ward 5 also has the highest number of parking lots.
- Ward 2 ranks the highest in terms of vacant lots.
- Ward 7 has the highest number of occupied structures, and also the highest number of A and B properties.

A ward-by-ward breakdown of percentage graded occupied structures shows the differences between wards.

Grade Results by Ward

Figure 11: Comparison of graded properties by ward
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Category</th>
<th>Ward 1</th>
<th>Ward 2</th>
<th>Ward 3</th>
<th>Ward 4</th>
<th>Ward 5</th>
<th>Ward 6</th>
<th>Ward 7</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Occupied Structure</td>
<td>2,937</td>
<td>2,271</td>
<td>2,432</td>
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<td>A</td>
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<td>341</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>96</td>
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<td><strong>3,546</strong></td>
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<td><strong>3,363</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,531</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,247</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,853</strong></td>
<td><strong>21,827</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 12: Elyria Property Inventory results, by ward*
Elyria has a stable housing stock. While the housing market in Elyria is solid, population loss continues to be of concern as it contributes to reduced city revenue and housing vacancy. Vacant and abandoned homes within a neighborhood negatively impact surrounding properties, both aesthetically and financially. It is critical that Elyria officials work to eliminate blighted vacant properties and work with property owners to maintain and improve their homes.

RECOMMENDED INTERVENTIONS
One intervention that has proven success is a “strategic demolition” plan. Strategic demolition selectively removes problem properties so that neighborhood reinvestment is properly targeted. Removing vacant and abandoned blighted property can help maintain property values in neighborhoods. There are relatively few of these properties remaining in Elyria, but the recent allocation of demolition funds to the Lorain County Land Reutilization Corporation should serve as an impetus to the city to target these remaining properties and have them demolished. Two hundred and thirty-two units were demolished in Elyria between January 2013 and December 2016 through Moving Ohio Forward and Hardest Hit Funds. The city had 45 additional units on their list to demolish as of December 2016 that they hope can be addressed by remaining Hardest Hit Fund dollars.

This leaves the greatest challenge for the City of Elyria: How to address the thousands of properties beginning to show signs of age and disrepair? Some of the pieces are already in place. The city has a strong code enforcement program that is aggressively pursuing properties in disrepair. They should continue these efforts including, if necessary, the prosecution of the most serious offenders.

Additionally, Elyria might want to look at programs that have had some degree of success in other Northeast Ohio communities. In 1999, Cuyahoga County established a linked deposit loan program for home improvements through the County Treasurer’s Office called the Housing Enhancement Loan Program (HELP). To date, the program, acting in partnership with local banks, has helped to underwrite almost $200 million of home improvement loans. This program offers home improvement loans at 2-3 percent below market rate and is extremely popular. The city cannot create this program on their own and will need the cooperation of the Lorain County government.

Other programs the city might want to review are the new approaches being taken by Habitat for Humanity and Safe Routes to School in numerous locations around the country. Rather than building new homes, Habitat is rehabilitating older homes and making them available to first time home buyers. On two contiguous streets in Cleveland’s Mount Pleasant neighborhood, Habitat has restored six homes. Elyria might want to look at homes that are graded vacant “C” properties — or even vacant “D” properties — that might be good candidates for Habitat, especially where the surrounding neighborhood is strong. Moreover, the Safe Routes to School model identifies priority areas for reinvestment within a designated distance from schools. This provides another opportunity to leverage the property inventory data for better public decision making. A buffer of one-quarter to one-half mile from every school creates priority areas that have the greatest impact on existing public
investments. Beautification of the streetscape or housing structures, as well as improvement of areas around existing assets like schools, is a persuasive argument that would be sure to generate ample community support.

Given the strength of the condition of the Elyria housing market, it is critical for the city to take a proactive approach to the problems that do need to be addressed—before they get worse and affect adjoining properties. For example, the city can look at the survey results and select all properties that were identified as requiring paint — and partner with national companies, like Sherwin Williams, in trying to develop deeply discounted paint programs for property owners seeking to paint structures on their properties. This preventative investment could have a spillover effect on neighboring households, multiplying the impact of the program if the housing improvements are both visible and concentrated. The program could target the older homes in the survey that received grades of either a “B” or a “C.” This paint program initiative could expand to other weatherization aspects of home improvement. Older “C” properties would receive notifications outlining the cost of old windows, poor insulation, unsealed attics, etc.

FUTURE PLANNING

The property inventory data, when combined with a variety of other neighborhood indicators, could create a housing market dashboard. This would highlight specific areas in greater detail than the traditional U.S. Census data. The property inventory data combined with indicators such as income levels, assessed housing values (pre- and post-recession levels) and vacancy rates could allow decision makers to drill down to specific areas when implementing policy interventions like the proposals outlined above.

Prioritization areas are created by comparing assessed values with property grades. Property value increases would most likely occur given different types of investment (minor repairs, major renovation, or even demolition). The property inventory data denoting building conditions is also useful in combination with the median age of housing stock in an area. This could help to identify specific areas for preventive maintenance programs and closer scrutiny for code enforcement.

There are currently a variety of planning tools that could provide powerful quantitative models and visual renderings using the property inventory data. For example, The Nord Family Foundation has identified the decision-making tool called CommunityViz® to visualize future possibilities through scenario-based planning. CommunityViz® is a scenario-based land use planning and 3D visualization computer software used by urban planners around the world. CommunityViz® has a wide range of applications that aid in decisions about the location, type, and design of future developments.

CommunityViz® is a powerful and data-hungry planning tool, which requires a variety of data sources to provide the most accurate and useful scenarios. Use of the property inventory data would be helpful in determining where there is a need for increased green space or infill housing development.

The Elyria Property Inventory provides a baseline snapshot that when updated, will track improvement or decline. Another great aspect about this dataset is that its value will continue to appreciate over time. Different programs and interventions can use this initial property data set in the evaluation process.
This type of longitudinal data analysis is what the City of Cleveland is working on after completing its own property inventory in 2015. Funding agencies and organizations are always looking at the metrics of success. Using this dataset to frame the narrative on why interventions are necessary and where the interventions should take place are two of the most important initial questions. Other types of reporting are also bolstered when using the property inventory data. This data allows public agencies to prove different methods of compliance with state and federal regulations. Past property inventory data has proven useful in demonstrating fair housing standards to secure Community Development Block Grant funding.

CONCLUSION
The City of Elyria, like many communities in Northeast Ohio, is changing. However, the quality of a community can no longer be measured by growth. Considering the devastating impacts of the foreclosure crisis, the “Great Recession” that followed and job losses that have impacted many older industrial communities, Elyria has fared quite well. Its housing stock – as evidenced by this report – is in solid condition. Little blight remains. By taking some proactive measures the City of Elyria can make sure that its residential neighborhoods remain stable and its property values solid. Fortunately for the city’s residents, its leadership understands these challenges and is poised to move forward.
Elyria Property Inventory Results: Ward 5

Survey Category
- Occupied Structure
- Vacant Structure
- Vacant Lot
- Parking Lot
- Park
- With Adjacent
- Not Surveyed
- Interstate
- State Highways
- Active Rail Lines

Map Created 12/1/2016 pb

Western Reserve Land Conservancy

Path: F:\TCI_Projects\Vacant_Property_Inventories\Elyria\Results\Revised_Final_Results\Maps\Elyria_Revised_Final_Results_Wards_Map_Book_20161201.mxd