Acknowledgments

Western Reserve Land Conservancy’s Thriving Communities program thanks the City of Hamilton for their generous support of this project.

Lead surveyor Adrian Marti made this report possible as an enthusiastic, flexible, and supportive trainer and resource for the Hamilton surveying team. Our surveyors Lily Wilmot, Joseph Albinus, Tim Kranbuhl, John Vaughn, Nick Schraub, Robert Batterson, Gerald Olson and Kyle Cummins were invaluable assets and recorded diligent and detailed surveys of Hamilton’s parcels.

Through the support of the City and the surveying team, the City of Hamilton now has the data to strategically approach vacancy and abandonment and positively impact property conditions and the quality of life for current and future Hamilton residents.

About Western Reserve Land Conservancy

Western Reserve Land Conservancy is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to preserving the natural resources of northern Ohio. We work with landowners, communities, government agencies, park systems and other nonprofit organizations to permanently protect natural areas and farmland. In March 2011, Western Reserve Land Conservancy launched the Thriving Communities program, a region-wide effort to help revitalize our urban centers.

Today, Thriving Communities is working with communities and organizations throughout the state to transform vacant and unproductive properties into new opportunities to attract economic growth, add green space to our cities and support vibrant neighborhoods. Our cities have thrived in the past, and we believe they will thrive again in the future.

For information regarding Western Reserve Land Conservancy please visit our website: www.wrlandconservancy.org

Note on Images Used in Report

All images in this report were taken as a part of the property survey unless otherwise noted.

Bottom cover image courtesy of Adrian Marti.
Congratulations Hamilton on being the first Ohio team to make it to the Little League World Series finals!
The story of the City of Hamilton, Ohio echoes economic patterns experienced in cities across the Northeastern and Midwestern United States. Completed in 1845, the Hamilton Hydraulic System brought water from natural reservoirs and the Great Miami River into the city to be used as a power source, stimulating industrial and population growth. By the early 20th century, manufacturing laid a strong economic foundation in Hamilton, providing jobs in various industries from tractors to paper to military supplies. After the mid-20th century, loss of industrial jobs across the region caused Hamilton’s economy to restructure. Today, the City of Hamilton is revitalizing its economy around the arts, music, recreation, and a vibrant downtown.¹

In the summer of 2021, Hamilton was abuzz with the sights and sounds of the cicadas and the excitement around the success of the little league team.

In tandem with a restructuring economy are shifts in land-use and structural repurposing. As part of larger urban revitalization efforts to address the city’s changed needs, uses, and conditions of the built environment, the City of Hamilton requested a parcel-level inventory. This report assesses the built environment and the land, and proposes recommendations to prevent existing structures from experiencing distress as well as suggestions for the productive use of vacant land. The study was completed by Western Reserve Land Conservancy’s Thriving Communities team with the support of our on-the-ground survey team of local Hamilton residents.

The results of the inventory are overwhelmingly positive considering the ongoing economic realignment as well as the age of the building stock. The results of this inventory, combined with the United States Postal Service (USPS) data, revealed

¹ See: https://www.hamilton-oh.gov/history
an overall building vacancy rate of less than 2.5%, at 547 vacant structures. Among vacant structures in need of intervention are 219 vacant structures considered "Deteriorated" or "Unsafe", in need of condemnation or demolition, and 140 vacant structures considered "Fair", in need of strategic code enforcement. If the City is able to prevent structures graded as "Fair" from slipping into "Deteriorated" or "Unsafe" property grades, this data suggests that blight will remain manageable going forward and that the quality of the city's building stock will be bolstered by continued reinvestment. The inventory also found that 88.0% of Hamilton's occupied built environment is rated as structurally "Excellent" or "Good."

It is also important to note that the built environment in the City of Hamilton is aging with 49.7% of structures built in 1950 or earlier and 38.7% built before 1940. Aging buildings require more maintenance, investment, and caution with regard to lead paint, asbestos, and other outdated mechanical features, but the overall cost to maintain these structures is generally less than the cost of demolitions replaced by new builds. If well-cared for, these aging buildings deliver greater return on investment and community impact.

To assist with strategizing for blight remediation (also known as "strategic demolition") going forward, this study analyzed areas with high distress prevalence and vulnerability. The inventory data indicate that Jefferson, Dayton Lane, and Riverview (see Appendix) have the highest concentrations of "D" and "F" rated structures, comprising over 8% of all structures in each neighborhood. Jefferson and Dayton Lane have the highest concentrations of "C" properties, comprising over 25% of the built environment in each neighborhood. The highest percent of perceived code violations were in Lindenwald, Jefferson, and East End.

Vacant structures are most prevalent in the Central Business District while vacant land is most concentrated in Jefferson and Riverview, with each neighborhood containing over 12% of the city's 4,337 vacant lots. It is recommended that blight remediation and strategic code enforcement be concentrated in areas experiencing the highest incidence of structural distress and deterioration to maximize spillover
effects on surrounding properties. That is not to suggest, however, that other neighborhoods experiencing structural distress, code violations, vacancy, and vacant lots should not also be invested in. Removing hazardous structures and remediating deteriorating structures within those any of those neighborhoods, and particularly any especially distressed block, is critical to maintaining surrounding property values. Equally important is the maintenance and rehabilitation of properties graded as “Fair,” which may not be immediate sources of blight within neighborhoods but could be in the future. If the 9.7% of Hamilton's built environment graded “Fair” goes unattended in the near term they are likely to slide into disrepair and require larger, immediate rather than smaller, dispersed investments. Properties graded as “Fair” are most concentrated in Jefferson, Dayton Lane, and Riverview.

The survey data overall demonstrates that Hamilton's built environment is in good condition with small but not insignificant exceptions, particularly the 2,093 structures graded as “Fair” and the 500 structures graded as “Deteriorated” or “Hazardous”. This property inventory report encourages the City of Hamilton to develop and strengthen blight remediation and prevention efforts, through strategies including stronger partnership with the county land bank as well as home repair loans and home restoration programs. Likewise, the recently published Plan Hamilton, the City’s Comprehensive Plan, proposes to create incentives such as rehabilitation loans and facade grants to encourage new residents to relocate to the community and current homeowners to stay and invest in their homes.² The information provided by this study should encourage the City to strengthen and create additional structural repair and rehabilitation programs to prevent more properties from becoming distressed in Hamilton's future.

² See: https://www.planhamilton.com/residents-housing-neighborhoods
This report also recommends land use programs for the 4,337 or 13.7% of Hamilton’s parcels inventoried as vacant lots. The City of Hamilton recently published a plan that proposes a number of revitalization and reuse initiatives for both the built environment and vacant land.3 Listed goals in Plan Hamilton include a partnership with the Butler County Land Bank4 to expand reliance on existing initiatives, such as the side lot program, to increase land ownership among neighborhood residents and to dispense land for redevelopment.5 Other proposed uses for vacant land in Plan Hamilton are temporary installations, such as performance spaces, plazas, pop-up markets, parklets or amphitheaters. On a neighborhood scale, the citizen-led group 17 Strong encourages residents and neighborhoods to apply for project-specific microgrants, placemaking grants, funds to better care for city blocks, and funding to host movie viewings in city parks.6 Western Reserve Land Conservancy’s Ground Work program is recommended in this report as an additional model for creating green community gathering spaces on vacant lots, in alignment with residential values.7

The data provided by the parcel inventory will provide the City of Hamilton with detailed information that can be used to address distressed structures and parcel-level concerns, as well as to reveal trends city-wide and by neighborhood. In addition to this report, the product of the inventory includes a complete dataset of 31,579 parcels; maps of property inventory, code vacancy and violations, and dumping city-wide as well as neighborhood-scale maps of property inventory and vacancy and violations. These resources provide a comprehensive view of the status of land use and the built environment in the City of Hamilton, Ohio.

3 See: https://www.planhamilton.com/
4 See: http://www.butlercountylandbank.org/
6 See: https://www.17stronghamilton.org/grants
7 See: https://www.wrlandconservancy.org/ground_work/
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 cornice
- Crumbling concrete
- Cracked windows or stairs

D

Deteriorated

- Major cracking of brick
- Significant wood rotting
- Broken or missing windows
- Missing brick and siding
- Open holes

F

Unsafe/Hazard

- House is open and a shell
- Can see through completely
- House ransacked or full of trash
- Immediate safety hazard to the neighborhood
“Hamilton seems to have shaken its reputation as a downtrodden, stagnant city in the region. Recently there is a resurgence of community pride. A trust in the effectiveness of city government and the strategies the current administration is taking to revitalize neighborhoods.”

— Adrian Marti, Lead Surveyor
Introduction

First founded in 1791 as Fort Hamilton, the City of Hamilton is bisected by the Great Miami River and lies in Butler County, Ohio. Hamilton is approximately 30 miles north of the state’s southwest city of Cincinnati and 15 miles east of the Indiana border.

The 5-year American Community Survey data from 2009 to 2019 contextualizes demographic and housing characteristics in the City of Hamilton over time. The city’s population increased 1.52% between 2010 and 2020, from 62,447 to 63,399.\(^8\) The slight population gain despite fewer structures suggests an increase in dense living. This pattern correlates with a rise in aging residents, as between 2010 and 2019 the 60 and over population grew 3.6%.\(^9\) The city’s housing supply has remained relatively stable, decreasing slightly from 28,522 units in 2010 to 28,024 units in 2019. According to the 5-year American Community Survey, the percent of vacant housing units increased by 3.9% while the homeowner vacancy rate and rental vacancy rates decreased by 1.4% and 3.3%, respectively, between 2010 and 2019.\(^10\)

The seemingly contradictory patterns in vacancy and population change suggest increased living density in Hamilton. Although Hamilton is not experiencing both or significant increases in vacancy and population loss, insufficient stabilization and revitalization efforts could trigger potential abandonment and structural distress in coming years. For these reasons, in Hamilton, it is crucial to study the areas that exhibit high concentrations of “C” graded (“Fair”) properties as they are potential hot spots for structural distress in the future.

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\(^8\) See: [https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/hamiltoncityohio/PST045219](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/hamiltoncityohio/PST045219)


In the cases of residential properties, vacant and abandoned houses act as a disamenity — a negative attribute — that reduces the appeal of a neighborhood. This is in contrast to an amenity, like waterfront access or a park, which enhances neighborhood appeal. Termed the “disamenity effect,” ample research has demonstrated that vacant and distressed houses (1) decrease values of nearby properties; (2) attract crime; (3) decrease perception of neighborhood safety; and (4) increase mental stress.\textsuperscript{11} In all, a feedback loop occurs in which the “flight from blight” increases depopulation which, consequently, increases vacancy. To halt this feedback loop, blight abatement is needed.

The bluntest intervention to remove vacant and distressed property from the neighborhood is via “strategic demolition,” a process of selectively removing vacant structures so that neighborhood reinvestment is best leveraged. Demolition of vacant and distressed properties has been shown to retain nearby property values and reduce crime at rates equaling that of police activity in the immediate area. The cost of demolition is substantial (between $10,000 and $12,000 per structure), and removing blight requires public financing, which is largely dependent on local taxes. This presents an unwelcome paradox for post-industrial communities as more revenue is needed to deal with blight, yet blight erodes the availability of tax-based revenue. Furthermore, property tax is critical for local financing, especially for schools. If property values gradually slip, the resulting decline in funding for schools may act as a disincentive for existing residents to stay. Likewise, if taxes are increased to fund demolition or rehabilitation efforts, that too may be a disincentive that could push residents out.

\textsuperscript{11} See: http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2012/09/24-land-use-demolition-mallach
To get ahead of this situation, state and federal investment in hard-hit municipalities is needed to continue strategic demolition at a rate that parallels the growth in newly vacant structures. Over the past several years, lobbying efforts led by the Thriving Communities program team have helped allocate significant state and federal monies for strategic demolition across Ohio. This summer, the General Assembly of the State of Ohio announced that each county is eligible for a $1 million grant for brownfields and an additional $500,000 grant for the demolition of commercial and residential buildings and the revitalization of surrounding, non-brownfield properties.12

Accessing strategic demolition funds is only part of the solution. A key parallel step is a process of surveying, identifying, and strategically prioritizing vacant and distressed properties—as well as distressed occupied properties—so that limited government, grant, and demolition dollars can be best leveraged and met with private investment. Properties in good and excellent condition (grades “A” and “B”) are in such condition largely due to private funds from home owners and are not in need of government monies. Deteriorating and hazardous properties (grades “D” and “F”), however, require significant public investment for rehabilitation or demolition and would concentrate government funds into fewer properties. Channeling limited government funds into consistent maintenance repairs (e.g., roof repair, porch repair, paint, step repair) for “C” properties, on the other hand, has the potential to stretch government funds across a greater number of structures, particularly when accompanied by incentives for home owners to invest some of their own capital towards these repairs to the extent possible. In other words, funding home repair programs and rehabilitation efforts would support a great portion of the built environment and would prevent the spread of blight in the future. With a $200,000 budget, for example, one new home could be built, 20 deteriorated or unsafe homes could be demolished, or 10 existing homeowners could receive grants or loans to repair or maintain their home. For the City’s bottom line, strategic investments in maintenance and repair spread across the housing stock maximize future savings and stabilize the property tax base.

This inventory provides parcel-level data that will guide the City of Hamilton’s neighborhood stabilization strategy going forward. More specifically, City staff can use the data to make recommendations on the areas in which demolition will have the highest impact or where rehabilitation should be promoted and how to manage non-buildable parcels going forward. The Appendix contains city-wide maps of the overall inventory, vacancy, and dumping; neighborhood-scale inventory maps; and neighborhood-scale vacancy and code violation maps.

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Methodology

From May through July 2021, Western Reserve Land Conservancy completed a comprehensive citywide property inventory. A team of 7 trained surveyors inventoried over 31,579 parcels across the city’s 17 neighborhoods.

Surveyors collected data for each parcel on a digital, customized Geographic Information System (GIS) map and database developed by Regrid (formerly Landgrid). The GIS program communicates data collected in the field by surveyors directly and is stored in the cloud where it is both protected and accessible to the team. The surveyors used the Regrid application on their tablets with Western Reserve Land Conservancy login credentials to protect the recorded data. This allowed for all input data to be saved automatically and securely on the app, allowing all with the login credentials to see the input data. The immediacy of this system means that surveyors can see each other’s work on the map in real time, avoiding repetition and increasing efficiency. Midday, the surveyors would discuss the parcels they completed, troubleshoot difficulties, and make sure their calibration was consistent on grading and values.

Using Regrid software on small tablet computers, the surveyors documented a categorization of each parcel (e.g. occupied structure, secure vacant structure, open vacant structure, park, parking lot, vacant lot), and photographed the parcel from the sidewalk. Parcels containing a structure—occupied or vacant—were classified according to their apparent use as residential, commercial, industrial, or other (representing municipal use, as well as indeterminable use). Determining occupancy versus vacancy required a detailed visual inspection governed by a number of guidelines as outlined in the Appendix B: Questions to Determine Vacancy. Based on the criteria in Property Inventory Grading Scale Guide (Figure 1), each parcel received a grade on the following scale: “A” for Excellent condition; “B” for Good condition; “C” for Fair condition; “D” for Poor condition; and “F” for Unsafe/Hazardous condition.

Finally, the surveyors examined each property for a number of criteria related to potential code violations for both occupied and vacant structures, as well as vacant lots. Surveyors assessed the condition of the buildings and/or parcels through various conditions: the presence of damaged paint or siding; damaged windows; broken windows or doors; damaged roof; damaged fence; damaged garage; trash or dumping; junk cars; sidewalk condition; signage condition; and parking lot condition.

Neighbors are valuable resources who surveyors were encouraged to consult when determining vacant or hazardous properties. Surveyor-resident interactions were a great way to demonstrate to residents that the City cares and is taking an active approach to neighborhood stabilization and revitalization. Feedback from and interaction with residents revealed an overall sense that residents were supportive of the study and optimistic that this project would catalyze momentum within the city administration in terms of revitalization, economic development and quality of life.
Above: A surveyor uses a digital tablet to answer property inventory questions.

Below: A screenshot of the Regrid database platform shows the survey results.

Image sources: Adrian Marti (top); Regrid.com (middle and bottom)
Identifying problem properties is the first step to remediating blight. Vacant and distressed structures graded as “D” or “F” in the present analysis should be flagged by the City for further scrutiny and possible demolition. Structurally sound vacant properties (graded “A” or “B”) should be monitored for any future signs of distress. Structures with “C” grades should be targeted for strategic code enforcement efforts and home repair programs. The City of Hamilton should consider abating occupied distressed structures with “D” or “F” grades through other means, particularly, strategic code enforcement or structural rehabilitation.
Vacant and Occupied Structures

The surveyors recorded 547 vacant structures out of a total of 21,664 residential and commercial structures, representing a 2.5% vacancy rate for the City of Hamilton (See Table 1). The USPS data identified 868 structures as vacant, only 87 of which were confirmed vacant by the surveyors. The reason for the significant vacancy count disparity between the survey team and the USPS data appears to be two-fold. First, many parcels recorded as vacant structures by the USPS were recorded as vacant lots by the surveyors, suggesting postal data was not collected post-demolition. Second, the majority of parcels recorded as vacant by USPS were recorded as occupied structures by surveyors. The high portion of vacant structures graded as “Fair” likely mislead surveyors to believe unoccupied structures were occupied as they likely did not display usual signs of vacancy. To more accurately determine vacancy, it is recommended to pool additional data from public utilities — specifically water, gas, and electric — into an index to formalize stronger vacancy indicators. This will improve accuracy of vacant data, as the surveyors in this inventory were only able to surmise vacancy status through a structure’s exterior.13

Overall, the quality of the city’s built environment is very good. In order to maintain the quality of the built environment, the City should consider targeting code enforcement to the 9.0% of occupied structures graded “C” (“Fair”). The remaining “D” and “F” occupied structures should be targeted for blight remediation. The City should consider the creation of a formal blight remediation protocol and preventative efforts. These efforts would support homeowners in funding repairs and rehabilitation to prevent distress and create safer structures with longer lifespans throughout the city via initiatives such as roof repair, paint and porch repair programs.

Hamilton’s occupancy rate as determined by the survey team is 97.5% with 89.4% of occupied structures graded as either “A” (“Excellent”) or “B” (“Good”). The count of occupied structures was completed through an on-the-ground analysis of property exteriors, and this number would be considerably more accurate with the addition of other vacancy indicator data, as discussed above. Notably, if a single unit in an apartment building is occupied, that building is also considered occupied.

Of the 547 vacant structures in Hamilton, 219 were rated as “D” or “F” and are therefore likely to be eligible for strategic demolition. 13.7% of the total number of parcels in Hamilton are vacant lots for which the City of Hamilton should consider implementing targeted land reuse strategies.

13 See Appendix for neighborhood-scale maps of vacancy and violations.
Table 1: Occupied and Vacant Structures and Vacant Lots in City of Hamilton

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Key Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Occupied &quot;A&quot; or &quot;B&quot; as a % of total structures 87.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>11,389</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>7,496</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1,953</td>
<td>Occupied “C” as a % of total structures 9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>Occupied “D” or “F” as a % of total structures 1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total Occupied Structures | 21,119 | Occupancy Rate 97.5% |
| Consider for demolition   | 219    |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>77</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>111</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total Vacant Structures | 547 | Vacancy Rate 2.5% |
| Total Structures       | 21,666 |

| Vacant Lot | 4,333 | Vacant lots as a % of total parcels 13.7% |
| With Adjacent | 3,430 | With Adjacent as a % of total parcels 10.9% |

Total Parcels 31,579
The survey team recorded the conditions of property characteristics (e.g. paint, downspout, chimney) to gauge potential code violations for each parcel. Each characteristic is graded on a scale from “Very Good” to “Very Poor.” Potential code violations, “Poor” or “Very Poor” conditions, were reported on 4.8% of Hamilton’s parcels, most frequently due to conditions related to landscaping, windows, or a boarded property. (See Appendix for code violations mapped by neighborhood).

Table 2: Potential Code Violation Frequencies for City of Hamilton (categorized as “Poor” or “Very Poor”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Code Violation Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Violations</td>
<td>3,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Parcels with Violations</td>
<td>2,474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Parcels with Potential Violations</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Potential Code Violations by Category

- Landscaping: 790
- Boarded property: 509
- Windows: 509
- Dumping: 464
- Porch: 452
- Paint: 432
- Vehicles on property: 314
- Roof: 183
- Garage: 150
- Chimney: 122
The 464 occurrences of illegal dumping in the city of Hamilton occurred throughout the city but most predominantly in east-central and south-east Hamilton (see map below). Dumping is the fourth most common potential code violation identified in the inventory, after landscaping conditions, windows, a boarded property, and porch conditions (see Figure 1).
One way to prioritize blight abatement is through analyzing the occurrence of vacant and distressed properties by geography. This property inventory did so using a neighborhood-by-neighborhood analysis.

In all, each neighborhood was ranked for a number of distress indicators made available by the inventory data. A summary “risk” score was calculated that can serve as a guide in strategically prioritizing blight abatement.

The indicators of distress include:

(1) the percent of structures graded as A/B in a neighborhood
(2) the percent of structures graded as C in a neighborhood
(3) the percent of structures graded as D/F in a neighborhood
(4) the percent of structures that are occupied in a neighborhood
(5) the percent of structures that are vacant in a neighborhood
(6) the percent of all Hamilton's vacant lots located within a neighborhood
(7) the number of code violations in a neighborhood
(8) the percent of total code violations by neighborhood
Structure grade is a synthesis of multiple external characteristics of the property. See page 9 for details.

Occupancy and vacancy are determined based on exterior conditions such as boarded up windows and overgrown landscaping. See page 44 for details.
Table 3: Property Inventory Analysis by Neighborhood (by percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>% A/B Structures</th>
<th>% C Structures</th>
<th>% D/F Structures</th>
<th>% Occupied Structures</th>
<th>% Vacant Structures</th>
<th>% of Hamilton’s Vacant Lots</th>
<th>% of Total Violations by Neighborhood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armondale</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>98.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Business District</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayton Lane</td>
<td>65.4%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East End</td>
<td>79.9%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>96.2%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise Park</td>
<td>99.3%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>97.5%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Village</td>
<td>81.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highland Park</td>
<td>97.3%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>64.1%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindenwald</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>98.1%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millikin</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New London</td>
<td>98.1%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>99.3%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>North End</td>
<td>75.9%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>96.0%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prospect Hill</td>
<td>88.3%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverview</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossville</td>
<td>89.0%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>94.2%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft Place / Governors Hill</td>
<td>97.4%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>97.4%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>99.2%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
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</table>

Comparative Level of Risk*

*The “Comparative Level of Risk” colors indicate the level of risk on a graded scale from low to high by category averages for the City of Hamilton for each neighborhood.
Table 4: Property Inventory Analysis by Neighborhood (by absolute number)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>A/B Structures</th>
<th>C Structures</th>
<th>D/F Structures</th>
<th>Occupied Structures</th>
<th>Vacant Structures</th>
<th>Hamilton’s Vacant Lots</th>
<th>Sum of Code Violations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Armondale</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>983</td>
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<td>Central Business District</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>738</td>
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<td>1093</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>644</td>
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<td>Taft Place / Governors Hill</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>1181</td>
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<td>132</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1655</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>50</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Comparative Level of Risk*  
*The “Comparative Level of Risk” colors indicate the level of risk on a graded scale from low to high by category averages for the City of Hamilton for each neighborhood.
Patterns of code violations, structural distress, and vacancy are better understood when analyzed geographically to inform the City of strategic locations to allocate resources to address each challenge.

The data shows higher indicators of risk of a distressed built environment, vacancy and code violations in Jefferson, Dayton Lane, and Riverview, compared to the rest of Hamilton’s neighborhoods. Also at moderate to high risk for distressed structures, vacancy and code violations are the East End and North End neighborhoods, as well as German Village (though code violations were not as prevalent in this neighborhood).

Hot & Cold Spot Analysis

![Hot and Cold Spots Map](image-url)
"C" Structures

The highest absolute number of “C” properties, 402, is in Lindenwald and the highest proportional concentration of “C” properties are in Jefferson and Dayton Lane, 27.7% and 25.9%, respectively (See Tables 4 and 5).

"D" and "F" Structures

The highest absolute number of “D” and “F” properties is located in Jefferson (94) and the highest proportional concentrations are in Dayton Lane (8.6%), Riverview (8.3%), and Jefferson (8.1%), followed by North End (5.1%) and East End (4.2%).

Vacant Structure Hot Spots

The highest absolute number of vacant structures is in Lindenwald (74), followed by East End (59), Jefferson (58), North End (54), and Riverview (53). The highest proportional concentrations of vacant structures are in the Central Business District (8.9%), Riverview (6.7%), and Rossville (5.8%).

Vacant Lot Hot Spots

The highest numbers of vacant lots are found in Jefferson (557), Riverview (548), and Lindenwald (517). The highest concentrations of vacant lots are in Jefferson (12.9%), Riverview (12.6%), Lindenwald (11.9%), and Prospect Hill (10.0%).
The survey, mapping and analysis teams found that over 10% of Hamilton's parcels fall under the category “with adjacent.” When a structure lies on more than one parcel, parcel data and property information are associated with one of the underlying parcels and the other(s) are categorized as “with adjacent.” This creates a pair or — less often — a group of parcels under a single structure, owned by the same entity. Although the number of “with adjacent” parcels is significant, they do not pose a significant threat to homeowners or the city. It is recommended the City gradually consolidate parcels when properties go on the market.

The Hamilton survey team encountered 4,544 parcels smaller than 2,000 square feet (generally an unbuildable lot) throughout the city in residential areas, commercial zones, and public spaces. Some fall under structure's footprint and are also “with adjacent” but not universally. Particularly in older, historic neighborhoods, the surveyors came across properties with multiple “splinter” parcels on the property perimeter without a known purpose. To more efficiently facilitate property transactions and property taxes going forward, Hamilton needs to address the with adjacent parcel issue and splinter parcel issue and begins a process to consolidate parcels throughout the City.

Image source: Regrid.com
“Many residents approached us as we walked the neighborhoods to ask us if we could conduct an official survey of their property, wondering why they had so many parcels and where their property line ended. They described the property taxes for their small parcels as insignificant in cost, from below a dollar to at most five dollars.”
While Hamilton’s built environment is considerably healthy today, without sufficient blight prevention and abatement efforts, deterioration, and vacancy can all arise. In addition to existing programs, it is recommended that Hamilton consider home repair loan programs to prevent against deterioration of occupied structures. To strategically invest fixed government dollars, it is recommended to target funds to neighborhoods with highest need for stabilization (See Table 4, Table 5, Appendix). For tax-filing and parcel management purposes, it is recommended that the City of Hamilton consolidate its “with adjacent” and unbuildable parcels gradually with property sales. This parcel-level inventory of the city’s housing disamenities provide data to support strategic investment of funds to maintain a healthy built environment and encourage adaptive re-use of vacant land.

In residential areas, demolition can be transformative for streets and neighborhoods in the worst conditions. If done strategically, costly demolitions can be worthwhile to support neighborhood vitality and quality of life. Strategic demolition maximizes cost recovery for property owners, integrates demolitions into broader revitalization strategies that benefit the neighborhood and city, and is cost-effective. While homes in hazardous or unsafe conditions can rarely be recovered, maintenance, rehabilitation, and lien programs can prevent the need for demolition in the future. For these reasons, it is critical to adopt a supportive, equitable, and strategic code enforcement program that can prevent “C” properties from deteriorating into “D” and “F”s.

15 See: https://www.communityprogress.net/read-more---strategic-code-enforcement-pages-265.php
Home Repair
- Rehabilitation loan programs
- Paint provision programs
- Brownfield remediation funds

Green Design
- Vacant property index
- Dumping prevention
- Land management strategies

Parcel Service
- Consolidate splinter parcels
Strategic Code Enforcement is the coordinated approach to build community stability and confidence through compliance for safe, healthy spaces to live and work. This contrasts with general code enforcement that ranges in function, efficiency, and effectiveness. To reach a healthy level of compliance, strategic code enforcement acts as a resource, rather than an adversary.16

Resources include programs to fund or incentivize porch repair, paint, and rental registration among other initiatives that support low-income homeowners with the capital to repair and safely stay in their home. This approach also acknowledges that while bad landlords are the problem in many cases when code enforcement issues arise, the entire landlord population is not the problem.17 There are examples of such programs across the country, but as a Cleveland-based organization, the below programs local to our county and city are those we are most familiar with.

Rehabilitation Loan Programs

The Linked Deposit Low-Interest Rehabilitation Loan Program is designed to benefit owners of one, two and three family dwellings within participating municipalities. Through this program, Key Bank will provide low-interest loans (of $4,000 or less) to eligible borrowers who qualify for certain housing rehabilitation loans. The program is quite flexible but includes limitations for luxury items and new construction, for example.18 Another model of homeowner loans through a public-private partnership is the home repair loan program between Cuyahoga County and CHN manages. Recipients of this loan can receive up to $20,000 for significant projects such as roof repairs.19

Housing Trust Funds (HTFs) are another recommended resource in Ohio that provides affordable housing opportunities, expands housing services, and improves housing conditions for low-income Ohioans and families. Spherically, HTF is used for housing development, emergency home repair, handicapped accessibility modifications, and services related to housing and homelessness. In addition, Ohio Housing Trust Fund dollars may be used for predevelopment costs, rental assistance, housing counseling, rehabilitation, and new construction. Ohio’s HTF target funds to support low-income Ohioans through eligible applicants, including local governments.20

In Lakewood, Ohio the Rental Restoration Loan program allows owners

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19 See: https://chnhousingcapital.org/homerepair/
20 See: https://development.ohio.gov/cs/cs_htf.htm
of one or more rental units for low- to moderate-income tenants to borrow up to
$14,000 per unit for kitchens, bathrooms, painting, windows, flooring, electrical and
plumbing repairs.

Similarly, the Housing Enhancement Loan Program (HELP) provides
homeowners of occupied or investment properties in eligible Cuyahoga County
communities with home improvement loans for home repair or remodeling projects
at three percent less than normal bank rates. HELP has no restrictions on a borrower’s
income and few limitations on what improvements can be made to a property. HELP
is a program of Cuyahoga County’s Department of Development in partnership with
Key Bank and Huntington Bank.21

Local Cleveland non-profit CHN Housing Capital is lending small-dollar
home loans to borrowers, often renters-turned-owners, looking for a $20,000 and
$250,000 mortgage in Cleveland. The program is called Believe Mortgage and
qualification include a credit score of at least 570 and 3% down, but this can be
supplemented by down-payment assistance program funds.22

The Cleveland Restoration Society’s Heritage Home Program offers low
fixed-rate financing and project guidance for repair, maintenance and rehab projects
for older homes in eligible Cuyahoga County communities. Residentially zoned
properties built in or before 1970 with three or fewer units and up-to-date property
taxes, that haven’t begun their project (most commonly new or repair of vinyl siding
or vinyl windows, luxury items such as hot tubs or swimming pools, new decks and
patios, landscaping) are eligible for a Heritage Home Loan. Lending partners Key
Bank and Third Federal provide loans ranging from $3,000 to $150,000 with a 2% to
3.5% interest rate for interior and exterior home repair and rehab projects.23

After the foreclosure crisis, the Department of Planning and Development
in Lakewood, Ohio instituted a Housing Financial Assistance Program to assist with
home improvements or bring properties into code compliance, largely for low- to
moderate-income homeowners.24 The Home Improvement Loan allows recipients
to borrow up to $25,000 for larger repairs. Home Improvement Rebates cover
50% (up to $10,000) for eligible repairs (e.g., roofs, exterior painting, porch repairs,
concreter, masonry repairs) and up to $5,000 for repairs to sewer line connections.
Home Weatherization Assistance Programs provide a free energy audit to income-
eligible homeowners and tenants and grants pay contractors employed by the state
to provide energy efficiency services to recipients to improve energy-use efficiency
and reduce energy bills.24 Housing finance assistance efforts such as this initiative
in Lakewood, Ohio provide financial support for a wide variety of common housing
maintenance needs that prevent homeowners without enough financial flexibility
from allowing their home to fall into disrepair.

21 See: https://cuyahogacounty.us/development/residents/home-repair-and-remodeling/housing-
enhancement-loan-program

22 See: https://www.crainscleveland.com/real-estate/filling-gap-believe-mortgage-helps-small-dollar-home-
loans

23 See: https://www.heritagehomeprogram.org/what-we-do/loans/

24 See: https://www.lakewoodoh.gov/community-vision/housing/housing-financial-assistance-programs/

25 See: https://development.ohio.gov/is/is_hwap.htm
Paint Program

The City of Cleveland operates an Exterior Paint Program that provides up to $1,500 worth of paint and materials for exterior home painting (labor not included). Homeowners and tenants who meet income guidelines can apply for the program. The program is administered on a first-come, first-serve basis.26

Brownfield Remediation Funding

The City of Hamilton may consider applying for the brownfield remediation grant program announced by the Ohio Senate on June 28, 2021. This program appropriates funds across the state of Ohio with each county eligible for $1 million in brownfields remediation funding for the calendar year. An additional $500,000 will be reserved for each county for the demolition of commercial and residential buildings and the revitalization of surrounding properties on sites that are not brownfields. After the first year when funds are divided and reserved by county, the remaining funds will be available for qualifying candidates on a first-come, first-serve basis.27 To compete for these funds the City of Hamilton needs to collaborate with Butler County Land Bank leadership, specifically the Board Chair and the Butler County Treasurer’s office, to apply for these funds on behalf of the city.


Example of a rehabilitated house in Cleveland, Ohio. Image source: Western Reserve Land Conservancy
Vacant Properties, Vacant Land, and Greening the City

Over one in ten parcels in the City of Hamilton are vacant, or 13.7% of the total parcels. This is a significant amount of the city that holds great land-use potential. Vacant land, if managed and cared for, can become an amenity with social, environmental, aesthetic, and economic benefits. If not managed and cared for, however, vacant land can easily become a disamenity and attract dumping. Western Reserve Land Conservancy’s Thriving Communities program works to create vibrant community spaces on vacant land in Cleveland through the Ground Work program and the Reforest Our City program.

Vacant and Foreclosed Properties

While land banks differ by county, Ohio Land Banks are able to put a lien on vacant and foreclosed properties to make improvements. Partnership with the Butler County Land Bank is encouraged in cases where acquisition and improvement of entire vacant properties is necessary. Specifically, the Cuyahoga Land Bank Deed-in-Escrow Improvement Program is a recommended grant program model to follow. This program successfully offers homeowners a non-repayable grant of up to $20,000 to renovate the home they’re purchasing.28

To improve vacancy data moving forward, it is recommended to create a strengthened vacancy index that integrates utility data (i.e. water, electrical, and gas data) by structure. Additionally, a Vacant Property Registration Ordinance is a tool that connects the City and interested parties with the owners of vacant properties, raises awareness of the obligations of ownership among owners of vacant properties, and ensures that owners meet minimum standards of maintenance.29

Dumping Prevention

Illegal dumping contributes to blight and is a disamenity to neighborhoods, particularly neighborhoods with high concentrations of vacancy. Dumping prevention requires measurement, investigation, reporting, enforcement, partnerships, clean ups, and support from local governing authorities. The City, the Environmental Crimes Task Force, and Code Enforcement need to evaluate local ordinances, laws, and regulations to study existing dumping prevention efforts and strategize future prevention efforts. Residents, local organizations, and block clubs need to be mobilized to prevent dumping through education around proper waste disposal and reporting of illegal dumping, and to organize community clean ups. Furthermore, to monitor dumping in Hamilton, instances of dumping need to be tracked and reported to measure trends and progress.

28 See: http://cuyahogalandbank.org/toRenovate.php#:~:text=The%20Deed%2Din%2DEscrow%20Improvement,exclusively%20to%20owner%2Doccupant%20buyers
Ground Work is a program of Western Reserve Land Conservancy implemented in urban vacant lots to create sustainable, beautiful green spaces in partnership with and for the benefit of the surrounding community. This program concentrates efforts on vacant lands most impacted by high concentrations of foreclosure, population loss, depleted tree canopy, and the urban heat island effect where there is community interest and support.

Essential to Ground Work projects are partnerships with nearby residents, community leaders, community organizations, and local municipal departments. Each project operates to transform a formerly vacant parcel of land that did not serve residents to create a vibrant, welcoming, and environmentally resilient use for the land that is in alignment with the surrounding community.30

For a cost-effective alternative to the high cost of mowing vacant lots maintained by the City, it is recommended that Hamilton consider planting creative groundcovers such as wildflowers or clovers rather than lawn-covered lots. Other innovative vacant land use and neighborhood stabilization programs are Detroit Future City and the Philadelphia LandCare program.31,32

30 See: https://www.wrlandconservancy.org/ground_work/
31 See: https://detroitfuturecity.com/our-programs/
32 See: https://phsonline.org/programs/transforming-vacant-land
Reforest Our City

Another program Western Reserve Land Conservancy utilizes in urban vacant lot projects is the Reforest Our City (ROC) initiative. ROC partners with residents and public, private, and community stakeholders to plant trees across the city, especially in low-tree canopy neighborhoods.

Geographic Information Systems allow our team to strategically concentrate ROC programing and inventory our work. In addition to tree giveaways, we provide Tree Steward Trainings to a cohort of volunteers to be trained in tree planting, care, and maintenance.33

Trees offer numerous benefits for neighborhood stabilization including noise reduction, heat-stress mitigation, water and air quality improvement, carbon sequestration, stormwater reduction, and natural hazard mitigation, excessive heat and flooding in particular.

33 See: https://www.wrlandconservancy.org/whatwedo/reforest-our-city/
The Sandusky Neighborhood Initiative is a strong model of how a smaller Ohio city can strategically target investment into specific neighborhoods. Neighborhoods were selected for this initiative based on economic, demographic, geographic, and architectural diversity.

Sandusky took the approach of targeting six neighborhoods and focusing on the following initiatives: Model Block Program, Anchor Program, Neighborhood Identity and Beautification, and Programming and Outreach. Homes in the Model Block Program were able to receive funding for exterior repairs, landscaping, and demolition.

The Anchor Project invested in existing public infrastructure for improvement, such as a park renovation, trail project, or a streetscaping plan for a major corridor. Programming and Outreach events included neighborhood cleanups and block parties. Each neighborhood-specific plan was developed at meetings with neighborhood residents.
Concept plans for the Sandusky Neighborhood Initiative,
Images on pages 38-39 sourced from report: https://issuu.com/ksucudc/docs/sandusky_final_report_issuu2
Administrative Recommendations

Problematic Parcel Configuration

Some of the most unique and noticeable characteristics of Hamilton's parcels that stood out on the ground and in Regrid were the thousands of “with adjacent” parcels and “splinter parcels” smaller than 2,000 square feet. In many cases, these parcels were driveways, residential backyards, side alleys, side yards, or railroad tracks. In cases where parcels did not qualify as “with adjacent” but were in fact owned by an adjacent property owner (the “splinter parcel” phenomenon), that owner receives an additional tax form for that small parcel of land.

To streamline property taxes for both property owners and government officials, the City of Hamilton would benefit from consolidating these parcels. The high prevalence of these small parcels can cause unnecessary complications and confusion. In at least one case, a driveway splinter parcel between two residential homes was owned by neither adjacent property owner.

A complete, immediate consolidation of parcels city-wide would be an expensive and unrealistic undertaking. Instead, it is suggested that the City gradually consolidate parcels as properties are put on the market.
Summary

The City of Hamilton can use the present analysis to create a vacancy and blight abatement strategy that:

1. Identifies housing disamenities, vacant land and dumping at the parcel level;
2. Organizes this information so it can lead to actionable, real-time strategies;
3. Implements abatement strategically to leverage public investment; and
4. Utilizes excess quality housing stock and vacant land as an asset, rather than a liability.

This property inventory provides an objective view of vacancy, distressed structures, hot spots for code enforcement programs, dumping in the City of Hamilton. A strategic approach to code enforcement to prevents against vacancy and structural distress through home repair and rehabilitation programs to support the historic built environment of the city, increase the quality of life for residents, and ensure that Hamilton remains a vibrant, desirable riverside community.
Appendix A:
Property Survey Questionnaire

1. Survey Category
   a. Occupied Structure
   b. Vacant Structure
   c. Vacant Lot
   d. Parking Lot
   e. Park
   f. With Adjacent
   g. Other

2. Have improvements been made?

3. Apparent property use?
   a. Residential
   b. Commercial
   c. Industrial
   d. Institutional
   e. Mixed Use
   f. Other

4. For Sale or Rent

5. Open to trespass?

6. Broken or boarded windows?

7. Roof condition?
   a. Very good
   b. Good
   c. Fair
   d. Poor
   e. Very Poor
   f. N/A

8. Paint/Brick/Siding condition?
   a. Very good
   b. Good
   c. Fair
   d. Poor
   e. Very Poor
   f. N/A

9. Porch/Stair condition?
   a. Very good
   b. Good
   c. Fair
   d. Poor
   e. Very Poor
   f. N/A

10. Gutter or downspout condition?
    a. Very good
    b. Good
    c. Fair
    d. Poor
    e. Very Poor
    f. N/A

11. Chimney condition?
    a. Very good
    b. Good
    c. Fair
    d. Poor
    e. Very Poor
    f. N/A

12. Garage condition?
    a. Very good
    b. Good
    c. Fair
    d. Poor
    e. Very Poor
    f. N/A

13. Driveway condition?
    a. Very good
    b. Good
    c. Fair
    d. Poor
    e. Very Poor
    f. N/A
14. Lawn/Landscaping condition?
   a. Very good
   b. Good
   c. Fair
   d. Poor
   e. Very Poor
   f. N/A

15. Survey Grade
   a. A
   b. B
   c. C
   d. D
   e. F
   f. N/A

16. Sidewalk condition?

17. Dumping (trash/debris)?

18. Is there an inoperable vehicle on site?

19. If there is an inoperable vehicle, where is it stored?
   a. Driveway
   b. In the yard or on grass
   c. Parked in the street

20. Street tree?
   a. No tree
   b. One tree
   c. Multiple trees
   d. Tree stump
   e. Dead or damaged tree

21. Is a car parked in the tree lawn?
Appendix B:
Questions to Determine Vacancy

1. Is the building open and unsecured? Are windows and doors missing?

2. Is the building boarded up?

3. Is there an accumulation of trash and debris on the property?

4. Is there an orange violation sticker displayed on the property?

5. Is the house for sale or rent? Many for sale and for rent homes are vacant.

6. Is the grass cut in the front and back?

7. Is the electric meter running and attached to the house?

8. Is the mailbox overflowing with mail?

9. Is the siding removed from the structure?

10. Are there any highly visible signs that people are living in the house?
Vacancy and Violations: Dayton Lane

- Dumping Location
- Inoperable Vehicle on Property
- Vacant Lot
- Vacant Structure