

“BEATING BLIGHT”: STRATEGIES FOR NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION AND REDEVELOPMENT



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**Joshua DeVries*, AICP
Jeffrey Chamlis
Christopher V. Hawkins, Ph.D.**

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University of Central Florida
School of Public Administration
Master of Science in Urban and Regional Planning Program**

*Please address correspondence to Joshua J. DeVries at jdevries78@knights.ucf.edu

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Introduction

The word blight brings many images to mind including broken windows, graffiti, crime, abandoned vehicles, among others. According to the Florida Statutes Section 163.340 (8), a “Blighted area” is one with a “substantial number of deteriorated, or deteriorating structures, in which conditions, as indicated by government-maintained statistics or other studies, are leading to economic distress or endanger life or property” (Florida Legislature, 2015, 163.340(8)).

Neighborhoods can be affected in a number of negative ways by blight, and beating it can be an effective strategy in neighborhood revitalization and redevelopment. In order to “beat blight,” there must be an understanding of its origins or causes, an understanding of the different manifestations or indicators, and an understanding of its true impacts on neighborhoods. Finally, in order to beat blight, there must be a clear understanding of different neighborhood level as well as individual level strategies to counter blight.

Origins of Blight

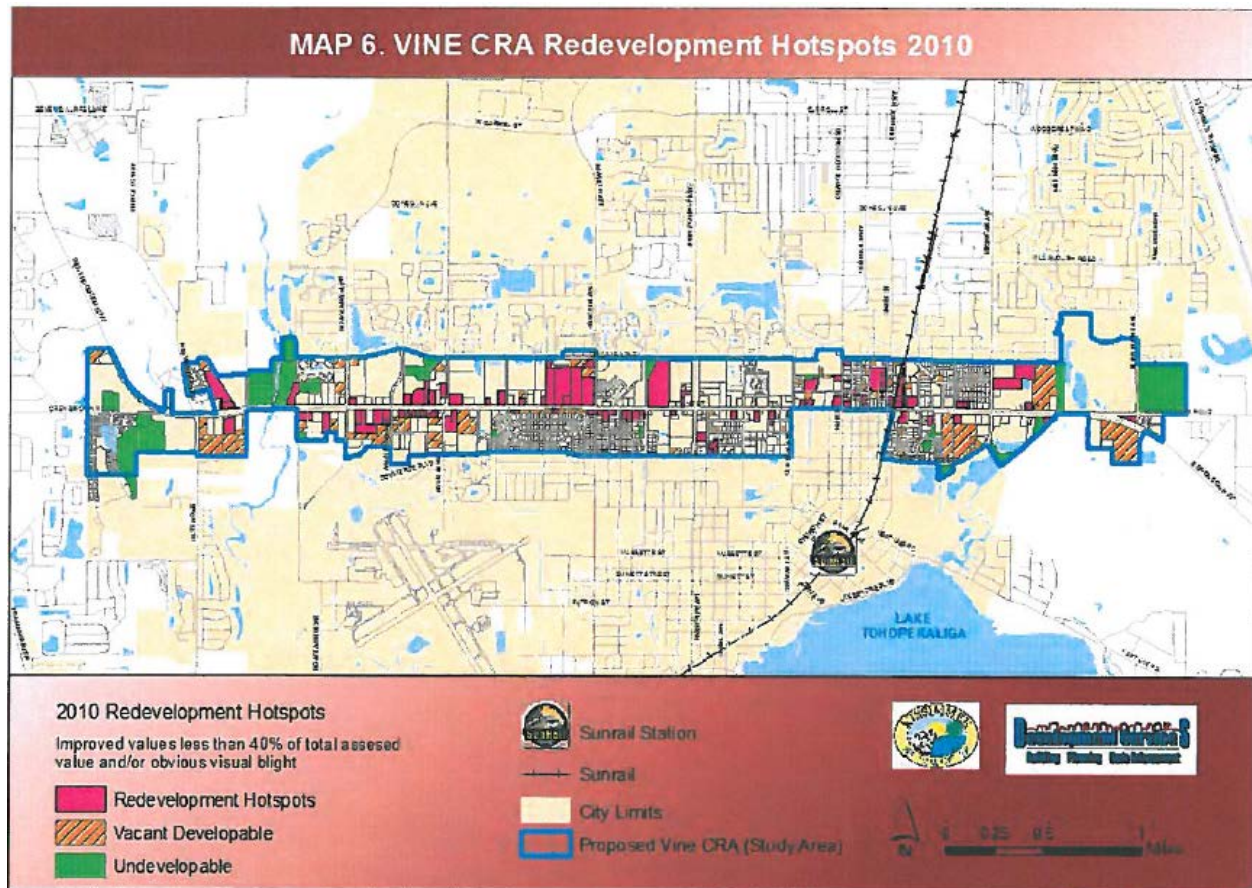
There are many origins of blight. The primary cause, however, is neighborhood disinvestment. The causes of this disinvestment can vary greatly. The Parramore neighborhood in Orlando, Florida, can be used as a case study. The community of Parramore is an 819-acre area just west of Orlando’s Central Business District, which is a historically a predominantly African-American community (City of Orlando, 2015).

Disinvestment in this area began in the 1940’s with the development of new suburban cities and segregation. These two events resulted in the loss of a large number of middle-income black residents, decline of the thriving commercial district, and a reduction of half of the population. The construction of Interstate 4 and other elevated highways from the 1950s to 1970s further tore away the urban fabric (Larsen, 2005). This neighborhood is one in which



disinvestment has created an extremely low median household income of only \$15,500, which is only at 37 percent of Orlando's median household income. The homeownership rate is at only nine percent and the unemployment rate is nearing 24 percent (City of Orlando, 2015).

Figure 1. City of Kissimmee Vine Street Redevelopment Hotspots.



This disinvestment over time has had a multiplier effect. As one property diminishes, the neighboring property owner's lose incentive to keep their property maintained to a certain level as well. An example of how the effect of this can be quantitatively measured is by analyzing the assessed value of improvements on a parcel of land versus the total assessed value of the overall property. In City of Kissimmee, FL, for example, hotspots for redevelopment are generally



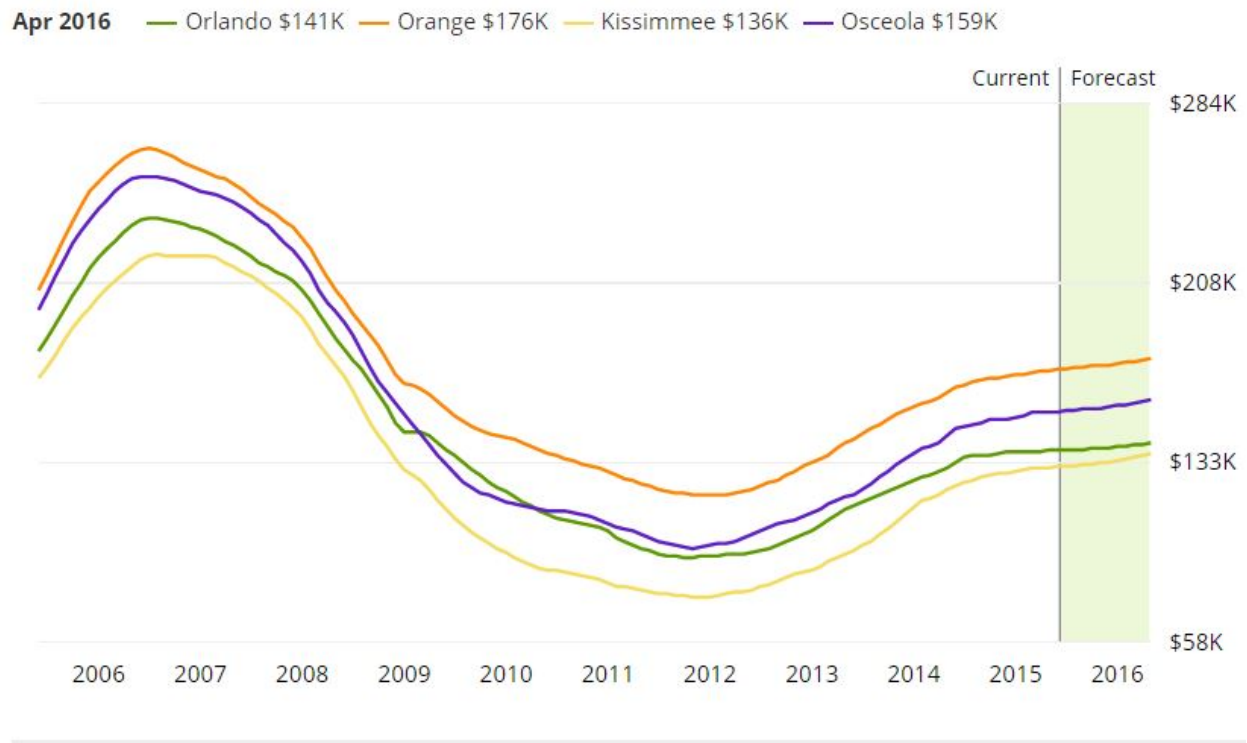
clustered in certain nodes due to this multiplier effect. These clustered areas were mapped utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to find properties with improved values of 40 percent or less than the total assessed value.

Redevelopment hotspots, or areas with a high likelihood of blighted conditions, can be caused by a number of factors, with economic conditions being a large contributor. The Great Recession is still fresh in the minds of many people, making it a great target for further research. According to Zillow, there was a very large deflation of home values starting in 2006 with a high “Zillow Home Value Index” nearing \$280,000, and bottoming out in early 2012 between \$100,000 and \$50,000 (Zillow, 2015). This trend can be seen in Figure 2, and is a good example of how the Great Recession negatively affected home values.

A major contributor to the drastic decline of home values was the number of foreclosures and foreclosure sales. According to Bloomquist (2012), (as cited in Bennett, 2012) between January 2007 and December 2011, there were over four million properties that had completed the foreclosure process, and more than eight million that had started the process. These large numbers of foreclosures can have external effects, such as increased crime rate, loss of tax revenue for municipalities, increased social impacts on families, and other factors leading to blight (Bennett, 2012).



Figure 2. Zillow Home Value Index from actual 2006 values to projected April 2016 values for Orlando, Orange County, Kissimmee, and Osceola County Florida



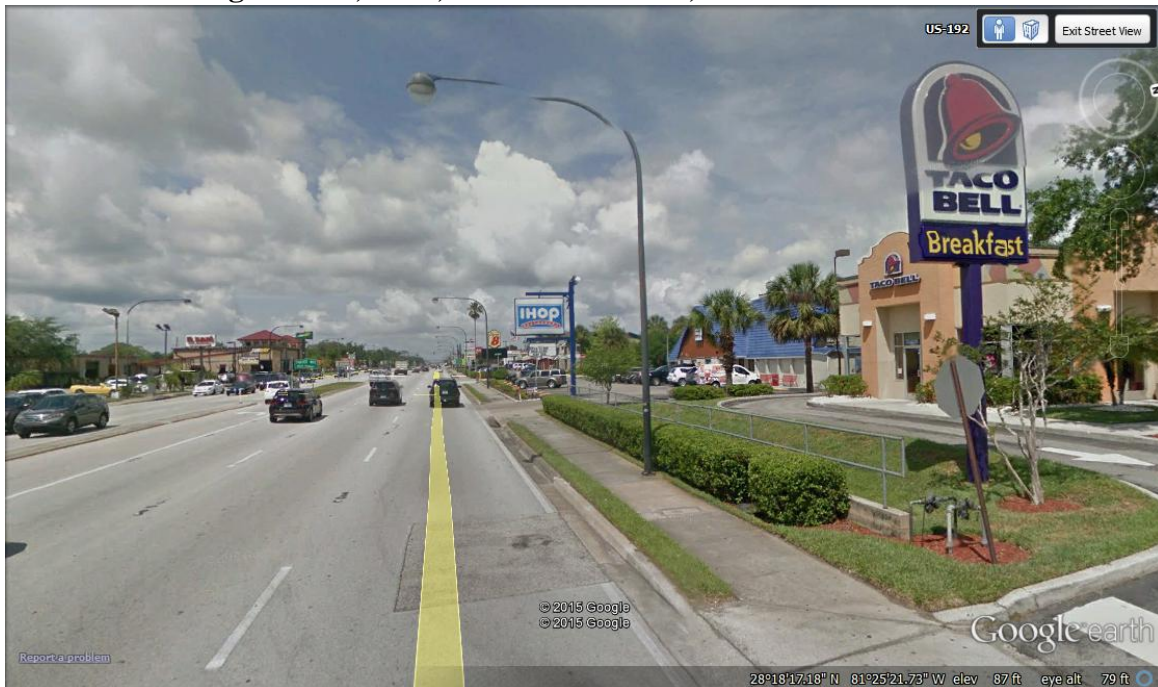
Although foreclosures and the economy can have a large impact on blight, so can public investment, private investment, as well as signage and development regulations. Although this is a slow process, the picture comparison in Figure 3 shows a highly blighted commercial portion of U.S. 192/Vine Street in Kissimmee near Thacker Avenue in January of 1985 and compares it to current conditions as of April 2015. While the current conditions can still be categorized as blight, there are noticeable improvements that have resulted from public investment, private investment, as well as improved regulatory controls (Google Earth, 2015; Orlando Sentinel, 2013).



Figure 3. Kissimmee Florida U.S. 192/Vine Street and Thacker Avenue January, 1985 and April, 2015



Source: Google Earth, 2015; Orlando Sentinel, 2013.



Manifestations of Blight

The identification of blight is often done by many Central Florida cities through the completion of a Finding of Necessity Report. The existence of blight is addressed in a very serious manner in Florida Statutes 163.355 (1), where:

It is hereby found and declared that there exist in counties and municipalities of the state slum and blighted areas which constitute a serious and growing menace, injurious to the public health, safety, morals, and welfare of the residents of the state; that the existence of such areas contributes substantially and increasingly to the spread of disease and crime, constitutes an economic and social liability imposing onerous burdens which decrease the tax base and reduce tax revenues, substantially impairs or arrests sound growth, retards the provision of housing accommodations, aggravates traffic problems, and substantially hampers the elimination of traffic hazards and the improvement of traffic facilities; and that the prevention and elimination of slums and blight is a matter of state policy and state concern in order that the state and its counties and municipalities shall not continue to be endangered by areas which are focal centers of disease, promote juvenile delinquency, and consume an excessive proportion of its revenues because of the extra services required for police, fire, accident, hospitalization, and other forms of public protection, services, and facilities (Florida Legislature, 2015).

The official “findings of necessity,” mentioned above, are based on the definition of blight from Florida Statutes Section 163.340(8), and measure the degree of blight in the area through the application of blight indicators. These blight indicators are derived from factors such as inadequate transportation facilities, stagnant property values, faulty lot layout, unsanitary or unsafe conditions, deterioration of site improvements, outdated density patterns, falling lease



rates, backed taxes, high vacancy rates, high crime rate, high number of fire and medical service calls, high number of building code violations, unusual conditions of title, and adverse environmental conditions. These indicators are typically measured on a scale of good, minor, major, and critical. With this scale, a rating of “good” indicates no blighting conditions, and “critical” rating indicates an extreme example of blight for that specific indicator (Florida Legislature, 2015; Osceola County, 2011). Examples of properties containing major and critical blight conditions are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Examples of Blight



Defective Parking: Not enough parking, cars in the drive aisle (City of Kissimmee, 2012).



Inadequate Public Transportation: No sidewalk or bus facilities at bus stop (Google Earth, 2011).



Faulty Lot Layout: Hazardous Development Pattern (City of Kissimmee, 2012).



Unsanitary Unsafe Conditions: Vacant commercial building under demolition (DeVries, Camera Roll, 2015).



Unsanitary Unsafe Conditions:
Missing sidewalk along major roadway (City of Kissimmee, 2012).



Deterioration of Site
Improvements: Extremely damaged fence (DeVries, Camera Roll, 2015).



Deterioration of Site
Improvements: Leaky roof left unrepaired (City of Kissimmee, 2012).



High Incidence of Crime: Visual evidence showing history of crime in area (City of Kissimmee, 2012).



Impacts to the Neighborhood

While blight can affect an entire transportation corridor, as illustrated by Figure 1, typically it will be concentrated within specific nodes. These nodes are often associated with particular neighborhoods, therefore narrowing the issue and impacts of blight down to the neighborhood level. Neighborhoods that are disadvantaged and have a high proportion of blight indicators often have poor access to health services, transportation and communication resources, conventional role models, jobs, job networks, and quality schools (Haines, Beggs, & Hurlbert, 2011).

This disinvestment can lead to increased crime over time. In many areas of the country, crime has shown to be a driving factor for “urban flight”, suburbanization, and a general disinvestment of certain areas. This disinvestment has acted as a multiplying effect on the severity and occurrences of criminal activity (Jargowsky & Park, 2009).

In a study of a blighted community in Flint Michigan, researchers have tried to understand neighborhood level impacts of disorder, what the neighborhood members perceive is the cause of such disorder, and how area residents respond to these conditions of disorder. Disordered physical environment, which is characterized by abandoned buildings and neglected properties has been shown to give rise to fear, incidence of crime, and an impression of the loss of social control by authorities (Johansen, Neal, & Gasteyer, 2014).

The Spread of Disorder

A similar study was conducted in the Netherlands and determined that “when people observe that others violated a certain social norm or legitimate rule they are more likely to violate other norms or rules, which causes disorder to spread” (Keizer, 2008, p.1681)

Researchers designed six case studies to determine whether environmental surroundings had any



effect on participant behavior. The results of this study are detailed in Table 1 and show a positive correlation between the presence of blighting factors such as graffiti and litter, and the incidence of petty crimes such as littering and trespassing.

Table 1. Deviations from Social Norms in Presence of Disorder

Disorder Variable	Behavioral Test	Control Group Violations	Disorder Group Violations
Case 1: Graffiti near bike park	Litter	33%	69%
Case 2: Bikes parked where prohibited	Trespassing	27%	82%
Case 3: Shopping carts in parking garage	Litter	30%	58%
Case 4: Illegal use of fireworks	Litter	52%	80%
Case 5: Mailbox with graffiti	Theft of mail	13%	27%
Case 6 Mailbox with litter	Theft of mail	13%	25%

Results from this study are closely related to, but do not necessarily support the broken windows theory (BWT). BWT was popularized by the New York City Police Department in the 1980s, as they targeted small violations in an effort to curb more serious crimes. Critics of BWT have argued that the drop in violent crime that followed the implementation of broken windows may have been aided by other external factors – not just increased policing of petty offenses. While crime rates did drop in the above Netherlands experiment, Keizer is quick to question whether the decline in criminal activity was directly linked to the broken windows approach.



Instead, Keizer suggests that targeting quality of life issues may be more effective in preventing the escalation of disorderly conduct in the community rather than reducing it (2008).

A 2009 report by the Boston Globe examined a social experiment in Lowell, Massachusetts. Beginning in 2005, researchers and local authorities teamed up to identify 34 high crime areas. Half of these neighborhoods would be used as the control group, and simply monitored over the course of the study. The remaining 17 neighborhoods were divided into three separate treatment groups – blight removal, increased policing of misdemeanor offenses, and increased social services such as mental health and homeless aid.

Between the treatment groups, researchers saw a 20 percent drop in calls to the authorities. According to the report “cleaning up the physical environment was very effective; misdemeanor arrests less so, and boosting social services had no apparent impact” (Johnson, 2009). Community cleanup initiatives included trash removal, securing abandoned buildings, code enforcement, fixing streetlights, and combatting loitering. The Lowell experiment shows that while more arrests may have an impact on the number of more serious crimes, improving the neighborhood environment maybe the more effective and economical alternative.

Impacts to the Individual

Increasing evidence is becoming available showing a positive correlation between neighborhood disadvantage or blight, and the health of the area’s residents. Neighborhoods with a higher incidence of reported crime, drug use, vandalism, trash and debris, graffiti, unsupervised youth, and abandoned buildings have been shown to have a negative effect on resident’s health. People living in areas with unsanitary or unsafe conditions such as dirty and dangerous streets, dilapidated buildings, and excessive public drug and alcohol abuse causes anxiety, fear, and arousal followed by demoralization and depressed lassitude. These psychological and



sociological impacts caused by the social disorder can actually undermine physical health (Hill, Ross, & Angel, 2005).

When crime, violence, decay, and dilapidation become part of everyday life, peoples' bodies will likely pay the price. Psychosocial stress caused by environmental factors increase the likelihood of a person's immune system being negatively affected and can become a widespread multiplier effect on viral infections, as well as the reactivation of dormant viral infections according to Cohen, Tyrrell, & Smith (1991), as cited in (Hill, Ross, & Angel, 2005).

According to Hill et al. (2005), a study of over 2,400 disadvantaged women within the Welfare, Children, and Families project from low-income neighborhoods in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio was conducted through the use of census data collection and face-to-face interviews that reinforced these theories. The majority of the participants were single and un-employed with an average age of 33 years and high school education or less. Observations and findings of this study led researchers to conclude that social disorder or blight "stimulates a psychophysiological stress response that undermines health" Hill et al., 2005, p.180). Neighborhood disorder, a factor of blight, is associated with increased physiological and psychological distress, and is an adjoining cause of poor overall health (Hill et al., 2005).

In 2012, researchers conducted an in depth survey of 29 Philadelphia residents in one of two urban neighborhoods effected by high instances of vacant lots and blighted properties. Interviews began with a series of broad questions such as "what is it like to live here" and "tell me what your neighborhood looks like". Initial responses were then followed up with more specific questions about particular properties and their effect on the mental and physical wellbeing of the individual and community (Garvin, Branas, Keddem, Sellman, & Cannuscio, 2012).



Nearly two-thirds of respondents mentioned the abundance of abandoned and decaying properties in their free response. Even participants who began by describing their community in a positive manner tended to venture towards negative characteristics by the conclusion of the interview. Further questioning revealed that the presence of vacant, unmaintained lots contributed to an overall feeling of ambivalence and disconnection amongst neighbors. An overarching sense of helplessness and lack of control prevented many from taking steps to improve the neighborhood. Beyond the impact on individual mental health, the presence of blight seemed to be dividing the communities into separate camps (e.g. employed/unemployed, owners/renters) as residents tried to assess blame for the current state of their neighborhood. Residents further withdrew from the community because of the perceived criminal activity – specifically drug activity, prostitution, and gambling – associated with vacant properties (Garvin et al., 2012).

Regarding physical health impacts, residents were most concerned with the accumulation of trash on vacant lots, and its propensity to attract animals. Others voiced concerns about the risk of fires in abandoned homes. Some noted injury risks posed by the presence of needles and weapons hidden around vacant properties (Garvin et al., 2012).

Participant suggested solutions included the conversion of empty lots into playgrounds for children or park space for the elderly. Many noted that vacant lots maintained by the community as gardens or open space were a source of pride and were effective in deterring criminal activity. Residents also suggested converting abandoned homes into homeless shelters or subsidized housing. In contrast to the bleak mindset and divisions amongst neighbors reported in the survey, the solutions proposed by participants seemed to be community-centric and focused on the need to strengthen societal bonds (Garvin et al., 2012).



A similar study published in 2009 examined many of the same variables. Here, researchers sought to demonstrate a relationship between the presence of neighborhood disorder and the prevalence of distress and social alienation. In their study, researchers interviewed participants from a 1995 and 1998 survey on community crime and health.

Researchers hypothesized that distress would be associated with neighborhood disorder, and that various types of social alienation would be tied to both neighborhood disorder and distress. As was predicted, disorder was in fact strongly correlated with social alienation manifestations in the forms of powerlessness, mistrust, and normlessness (the belief that people are dishonest and corrupt). Other results showed that feelings of powerlessness and mistrust were positively correlated with agitation and mistrust. “Neighborhood disorder creates emotional distress in large part because it evokes mistrust of others and a sense of powerlessness to control one's own life” (Ross & Mirowsky, 2009, p.59). The authors put it bleakly by stating:

Apparently, individuals living amidst neighborhood disorder tend to think that most people are honest only because they are afraid of being caught, that in order to get ahead you have to take everything you can get, that most people don't always do what is right, and that for some to succeed others must fail (Ross & Mirowsky, 2009, p.60).

However, what surprised researchers the most was the strong negative correlation between neighborhood disorder and isolation. Similarly, isolation was also inversely related to feelings of agitation.

All else being equal, neighborhood disorder is associated with greater emotional and practical support. The overall pattern suggests that neighborhood disorder tightens social networks a ‘circling the wagons’ effect. Individuals are less trusting in general, but



nevertheless feel more strongly that they have others they can rely on when in need (Ross & Mirowsky, 2009, p.60).

The “circling the wagons” affect runs counter intuitive to the prevalence of mistrust, powerlessness, and normlessness. But the consolidation of social networks “in response to ambient threat brings with it a measure of anxiety and anger, shadowed by depression” (Ross & Mirowsky, 2009, p.60).

There have been a number of studies indicating the potential adverse effects of housing quality within a neighborhood on the social and emotional development of children. Educational performance also has a strong tie with housing quality. This has been measured by linking the standardized test scores of slum dwellers before and after moving into better housing compared to similar families who remained living in the slum conditions. Further, it was found that the longer students were exposed to the slum or blight conditions, the stronger the association became between housing quality and school performance (Evans, 2006).

A study published in 2013 examined the relationship between neighborhood characteristics and their effect on African American adolescents internalizing symptoms of depression and anxiety. Neighborhood characteristics were studied using block level census data and included percentage of African American residents, residential stability, poverty rate, and unemployment rate. Nearly 600 youths were interviewed to assess individual variables such as perceived social support, neighborhood cohesion, symptoms of depression or anxiety, and demographics. For the first five individual metrics, participants were given a series of statements and asked to rate their response on a numeric scale (e.g. 1 to 5, “not at all” to “extremely”).

Results from the study supported the researcher’s initial hypothesis. Researchers predicted that as the percentage of African American population and residential stability



increased, so too would social support factors and perceptions of neighborhood cohesion – both identified as indirect factors to internalizing mental health symptoms. In keeping with this theory, researchers further predicted that higher concentrations of African American residents and higher percentages of stable homesteads would inversely correlate to symptoms of depression and anxiety. Conversely, higher rates of poverty and unemployment would negatively impact adolescent perceptions of social support and neighborhood cohesion, which would lead to both higher occurrences of depression and anxiety as well as the internalizing of symptoms.

While direct factors, such as poverty and unemployment rates, were positively correlated with instances of depression and anxiety, they were not as strongly related as the indirect factors identified previously. Essentially, the presence of strong social support and neighborhood cohesion will to some extent mitigate the effects of poverty and unemployment. However, in the absence of these social structures, “researchers argue that the additional stressors faced by urban, economically disadvantaged, African American late adolescents may exacerbate stressful experiences associated with developmental transitions and result in elevated internalizing symptoms among African American youths during this developmental period” (Hurd, Stoddard, & Zimmermand, 2013, p. 859).

Neighborhood Level Strategies

Some of the most successful strategies for addressing blight take place at the neighborhood level. Examples of general strategies can include Crime Prevention through Environmental Design, Community Redevelopment Agencies, Neighborhood Improvement Districts, Brownfield programs, housing programs, social capital, and public private partnerships.



CPTED Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a set of theories that outline how architects, planners, interior and landscape designers, law enforcement officers, and resident volunteers can work collaboratively to create a safer environment from the beginning stages of development. The goal of CEPTED is to prevent crime by designing a physical environment that positively influences human behavior. The theory is based on four principles: natural access control, natural surveillance, territoriality, and maintenance (National Crime Prevention Council, 2015).

The first three principles are preventative in nature. Access control focuses on site, building, and landscape design that provides a clear delineation between public, semi-private, & private spaces. Surveillance focuses on designing these improvements for maximum visibility. Finally, territorial reinforcement is intended to design communities in a manner that will promote “eyes on the street” by creating inviting public spaces that address the pedestrian rather than the automobile as the primary user of the area, and doesn’t isolate pedestrians to the backyard. The forth principle, maintenance, will be addressed later, as proper upkeep of landscape, hardscape, and buildings are more individual strategies (National Crime Prevention Council, 2015).

Community Redevelopment Agencies The Community Redevelopment Act enacted in 1969 outlines a comprehensive program providing a legal framework and financing mechanisms local governments can undertake in order to address the complex and unique task of overcoming the contributing factors causing slum and blight. The Community Redevelopment Act outlined in Chapter 163, Part III, Florida Statutes allows for the creation of a Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) through the completion of a finding of necessity or blight study. The CRA is an area designated by the local government as a means to encourage reinvestment in the area, and ensure coherent development pattern throughout the district (Florida Legislature, 2015).



Once the CRA boundary is established, an Agency or Board is created, a Master Redevelopment Plan is adopted, and a Redevelopment Trust Fund is created. The trust fund is created as a place for the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) revenue to go, and for expenditures to implement the Master Redevelopment Plan are taken from. Creation of a TIF does not create an additional tax. It instead locks the property tax revenue going into the local government general fund at the rate when adopted. As taxable property values increase, the revenue above that locked in amount will be deposited into the trust fund to be utilized specifically for redevelopment activities within the area and outlined in the Master Redevelopment Plan (Florida Legislature, 2015).

These redevelopment activities can include both residential and commercial grants for façade improvements, interior design improvements, site acquisition, demolition of unsafe/unsanitary structures, and other such activities. A CRA Board can also adopt enhanced design criteria for the area, which the local government will have the authority to enforce. Enhanced design standards will help to ensure the coherent development patterns for new development, and will act as a guide for other redevelopment activities.

Neighborhood Improvement Districts Neighborhood Improvement Districts (NID) can be established as potential tool for redevelopment in accordance with Florida Statutes 163.501 through 163.526. These can be established as a special district, which allow for the opportunity to secure Federal Neighborhood Improvement Grants and encourage the creation of a Safe Neighborhood Improvement Plan. In addition to this, the special district can also establish a special taxing district as part of the NID boundary for additional municipal initiated redevelopment activities.



Brownfields Redevelopment Brownfields are defined as real property, where expansion, redevelopment, or reuse is potentially complicated by the presence or potential presence of a pollutant, hazardous substance, or contaminant. Reinvesting and cleanup of such properties reduces blight, protects the environment, and promotes infill development (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2015). Brownfield redevelopment has been imperative to governmental efforts for redevelopment in the United States since the mid-1990s. Many programs, policies, and funding initiatives have been devised then implemented by all levels of government to attract private development back to properties that have been considered blighted or economically unattractive. While the role of state and federal government in brownfield redevelopment is important, ultimately the tasks of identifying eligible properties and projects, managing specific efforts, attracting private investment, and keeping an inventory of such brownfield activities falls on the local government (De Cousa, 2005).

There are a number of funding opportunities available through the Brownfield Program including:

- Area-Wide Planning Pilot Program,
- Assessment Grants,
- Revolving Fund Grants,
- Cleanup Grants,
- Environmental Development and Job Training Grants,
- Multi-Purpose Pilot Grants,
- Training, Research, and Technical Assistance Grants, and
- Targeted Brownfields Assessments (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2015).

In a case study of Brownfield redevelopment activities within Milwaukee County Wisconsin, an examination of governmental reporting data and stakeholder interviews revealed that brownfield redevelopment is positively progressing, and that governments are becoming more effective at removing barriers of private-sector redevelopment. There were three phases to



the research including gathering data from the state remediation and redevelopment agency, the second phase included gathering data from nine municipalities within Milwaukee County, and the third phase included interviews with public and private stakeholders (De Cousa, 2005).

The respondents from phase three were asked a series of 13 questions broken into three main topics including, the nature of their involvement in brownfield redevelopment, the effectiveness of various government agencies' redevelopment policies, and the effectiveness of an array of brownfield benchmark measures. The top three measures resulting included costs to the public compared to private redevelopment dollars leveraged, influencing local economic activity & income, and enhancing the aesthetic image of the local community. Through this study, the role local government's play in brownfield redevelopment was revealed to be successful, especially in addressing the main economic barriers to redevelopment (De Cousa, 2005).

Two examples of successful brownfield programs include the Orlando Economic Enhancement District (OEED), and the West 192 Brownfield Area Designation. The OEED is an economic development tool encouraging redevelopment of properties by businesses and property owners. OEED is a State of Florida Brownfield designation and includes sites that have the perception of contamination and/or blight the incentives offered within the OEED include:

- Job creation bonus refund of up to \$2,500 per job for QTI applicants,
- Tax credit of 35% on voluntary cleanup costs (10% additional credit during the final year of cleanup),
- Low-interest loans for the purchase of liens, tax certificates or other claims,
- Risk-Based Corrective Action principles,
- Sales tax credit on building materials used for the construction of a residential or mixed use redevelopment project,
- Up to five years of state loan guarantees of loan loss reserves, and
- Grants/loans available for cleanup (City of Orlando.net).



According to DeVries (2014), there was also a Brownfield designation given in mid-2013 to the U.S. 192 Development Authority District in Kissimmee, FL. The District moved forward with designation to capitalize on the State's efforts to address redevelopment of Brownfield sites. Incentives created for the area include sales tax credits on building materials, job bonus refunds, 50 percent voluntary cleanup tax credits, 25 percent additional tax credits for affordable housing, and guaranteed state loans for qualifying projects.

Housing As neighborhoods redevelop and strategies to beat blight are successful, it is very likely that real-estate values will rise. While this is a positive effect that is beneficial in many aspects, it is also important to ensure a balance of residents across the income spectrum in order to minimize gentrification.

According to Dwarka (2014), advocates for gentrification argue that the key to successful revitalization of an area is to attract affluent urban professionals, enhance the public realm, and incentivize new business. While these actions can be beneficial, affordable housing advocates make an important argument saying that maintaining and preserving affordable housing is essential to neighborhood revitalization. Federal programs such as the New Market Tax Credit, Low-income Housing Tax Credit, and HOME Investment Partnership help to keep these revitalized areas affordable by helping private developers to overcome the cash-flow loss created by income restrictions on housing.

Another approach to affordable housing is through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. This is a federal program administered locally to qualifying areas of a CDBG entitlement community. Through the CDBG entitlement program, larger cities and urban counties are able to have programs that provide a suitable living environment, decent housing,



and expanded economic opportunities, primarily for low and moderate-income residents (HUD, 2015).

Social Capital Support of social capital through programmatic improvements, such as creation, improvement, or enhanced maintenance of public, civic, and park spaces can also be an effective strategy. According to research, many neighborhood groups see these type of programs as more achievable with smaller budgets than larger infrastructure, mixed income housing, and demolition activities. These activities in East St. Louis had positive impacts on creation of place attachment related to neighborhood parks (Strzelecka,, Sorensen, & Wicks, 2010).

Another study by Taylor, McGlynn and Luter (2013) identified the importance of school reform and redevelopment occurring simultaneously. In this study, the multiplier effects of redevelopment and school reform were measured through comparison of standardized test scores, which showed a positive correlation between the two initiatives. Student's standardized test scores from schools with reformed curriculum and more interactive policies were tracked. The study showed the importance of both redevelopment and school reform, as the students who lived in the redeveloped areas performed better than their comparable peers in areas that were yet to be redeveloped. (Taylor Jr., McGlynn, & Luter, 2013).

A study of black business owners in Fort Greene, Brooklyn looked at how this group of "Old-Timers" successfully fostered political clout, established civic alliances, promoted the commercial district, and participated in neighborhood planning to bring about commercial revitalization (Sutton, 2010). In this study, the Old-Timers settled their businesses along three primary commercial roadways of an area of Brooklyn known for high crime and blight. Rather than the typical site selection approach of researching landlords, proximate vacancies, and fair



lease terms, the Old-Timers relied on personal experiences with the neighborhood as either residents or through recommendations from friends living in the neighborhood (Sutton, 2010).

The Old-Timers enhanced the corridor through more simple approaches such as improved signage, trash removal, storefront lighting, and sweeping in front of the store. While this approach was successful, the potential for long term success and economic sustainability can be further improved if the small business owners are able to collectively explore the utility of new and unorthodox approaches such as employee sharing, bartering of services, incubator development, and collaborating to have a collective voice in political planning and decision making situations (Sutton, 2010).

Public-Private Partnerships A 2010 report by the University Of Pennsylvania Institute of Government examined the city of Philadelphia's long-running programs for reclaiming and improving vacant lots. The study focused specifically on vacant lots in Eastern North Philadelphia from 1998 – 2010 and both public and private approaches to redevelopment. The three major players in redevelopment were the Asociación de Puertorriqueños en Marcha, Inc (APM), Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA), and the Philadelphia Horticulture Society (PHS). APM is a non-profit organization established in the 1970s that now focuses on providing affordable housing options and the delivery of supportive services. During the 12-year span of this study, APM was responsible for the majority of new construction, redeveloping 259 lots. The PHA accounted for another 133 redeveloped properties with new construction.

From 1998 – 2010 over 900 lots have been redeveloped as improved open space. The PHS has cleaned and maintains nearly 300 lots, and private owners account for the remaining approximately 600 lots. The PHS has taken a more aggressive approach to reclaiming open



space, eschewing the traditional practice of erecting a chain link fence for one of monthly maintenance and good aesthetics (Kromer & Kingsley, 2010).

The important thing to note is that these efforts, while undertaken by independent agencies, were approached in a collaborative manner. With APM serving as the lead organization, they established partnerships with both the PHS and PHA to bolster redevelopment efforts in northeast Philadelphia. For example, the PHA owned lots that APM needed for a major housing project. In turn, APM agreed to let PHA count that land towards the Housing Authority's HOPE VI initiatives.

Observations

If there is one central theme between the proliferation and the effects of blight it is this – blight begets blight. The presence of blighting factors encourages further disinvestment. Physical manifestations of blight contribute to a perceived lack of community ownership and, as noted in the Netherlands study, can promote the spread of additional blight. The physical presence of blight has been shown to have a negative impact on individual and community mental health. As social disorder increases so do incidences of depression, anxiety, and stress, which further lead to feelings of helplessness and mistrust of neighbors. Through this combination, a self-perpetuating loop is created that promotes future blight and accelerates a neighborhood's downward trend into disarray.

The neighborhood level solutions examined in the literature review showed promise for reversing the effects of blight using a large-scale, wholesale redevelopment approach. The Philadelphia study cited focused on three well-established, large community organizations: Asociación de Puertorriqueños en Marcha, Inc, Philadelphia Horticultural Society, and the Philadelphia Housing Authority. While successful, these efforts represent a significant



investment of time and capital, and are best suited to address areas where blight has already become a significant issue. In the downtown Kissimmee example of a Community Redevelopment Agency being created in 1993 was also an example of a successful neighborhood and community level approach, however one that takes time and dedicated staff to succeed. If a local government is to be proactive rather than reactive when addressing blight, small-scale adaptable approaches that engage the community will be more successful in stopping blight in its early stages, thus limiting the need for expensive across-the-board redevelopment projects.

For residents, major redevelopment initiatives are complex and slow moving issues that can be overwhelming. Such is the case with the Parramore community redevelopment in Orlando. Parramore is a predominately African-American community that has been besieged by blight over the past several decades. As part of the planning process, monthly community meetings were held at the neighborhood community center, and intended to solicit input from residents and keep them informed of progress.

Parramore residents entered the process with a healthy dose of skepticism – understandably so as this was not the first publicly led redevelopment of the neighborhood. Meetings were attended by a small but vocal handful of residents, along with representatives of the local government, planning professionals, and university students. The overall tenor of the community meetings was a mix of collaborative and combative. Efforts to engage local residents in the redevelopment process yielded positive results such as community input on project components and design standards, but ultimately failed to overcome the us versus them mentality in which many residents were entrenched. Residents were unsure about what could be expected from their participation and when they could expect to see results. The perceived lack of clarity



to realistic expectations fueled citizen (and one county commissioner's) dissatisfaction with a program intended to improve the area.

Experiences from the July 18, 2015 presentation of this report (see Appendix A) at the 2015 Orange County Community Conference further underscore the need for a comprehensive, grassroots, and responsive approach to battling and beating blight. Following the presentation of our findings, a number of residents asked questions about reporting blight and expressed concerns regarding the slow or non-response of local agencies. Specific issues addressed included accumulation of litter and illegal dumping, the presence of condemned vacant buildings in neighborhoods, and potential partnerships between local agencies and community organizations. Residents that reported issues voiced additional frustrations with what they perceived as runaround treatment received when attempting to file a report. Apparent uncertainty or an unwillingness to assume responsibility on the part of local authorities has led to confusion amongst all parties, and most likely contributed to the perceived lack of feedback from the county. There was however interest in some of the neighborhood and community approaches discussed with questions such as, "how is a CRA started" and "where do we go to find more information regarding Brownfield grants."

Conclusion

In conclusion, the issue of urban blight is complex and difficult to boil down to a singular cause, manifestation, or solution. The primary origin of blight, as discussed here, is disinvestment in a neighborhood or region. Disinvestment, like blight itself, can take many forms and can be part of either a prolonged process such as urban flight, or a sudden event like the foreclosure crisis of the late 2000s. Furthermore, blight is in itself a cause of blight, as the



presence of urban distress tends to have a negative multiplier effect on the surrounding community.

Manifestations of blight can take many forms – physical, physiological, socio-economic. Physical occurrences of blight are most commonly associated with the overall concept as they are simplest to identify – dilapidated buildings, faulty infrastructure, accumulation of trash, etc. These physical signs of distress can negatively impact community well-being and economic stature, which feeds back into a continuous loop of advancing blight within a given area.

The strategies researched here included an extensive review of top-down and broad-scale approaches that are typically spearheaded by the local government. Examples include the redevelopment of blighted or contaminated lots, public housing initiatives, and community redevelopment districts. Other public-private initiatives, such as the Philadelphia case study, engaged non-profit resources and collaborated with public agencies to revitalize entire districts.

While some neighborhood level strategies were presented, further research is needed to examine case studies of grassroots approaches to combatting blight. In a presentation to Orange County Neighborhood Services, several local programs were identified as potential citizen engagement points. Citizen leaders at the meeting expressed their desire to work with local authorities in their efforts to curb the spread of disorder. Establishing an agreed upon quantitative method for evaluating cooperative programs will enable local officials to monitor returns on investment from existing neighborhood improvement programs. In closing, these collaborative efforts represent a significant opportunity to efficiently and effectively prevent and/or beat blight, while growing social capital.



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APPENDIX A

PRESENTATION TO THE 2015 ORANGE COUNTY COMMUNITY CONFERENCE



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Origins of Blight

Condition of Redevelopment Hotspots (Site and Other Improvements)

Need for repair/replacement	Major Site Improvements* (Parking, Landscaping, & Trash Enclosures)	Fences or Walls	Major Building Components (Roof, Façade, & Windows/Doors)
Critical	19.67	2	6.00
Major	30.67	5	13.33
Minor	24.00	14	17.00
Sound	26.67	10	62.67
Total Properties	101	31	99
Total percentage needing at least minor repairs	73.60%	67.74%	36.70%

* Average condition of existing major site and building improvements/components (Kissimmee, 2012)

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Origins of Blight

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Origins of Blight

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Figure 2: Zillow Home Value Index from actual 2006 values to projected April 2016 values for Orlando, Orange County, Kissimmee, and Osceola County Florida (Zillow, 2015).

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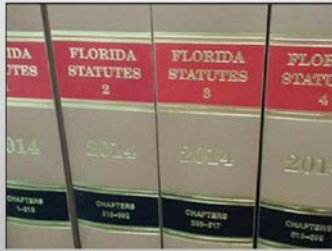



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<p>UCF SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>Manifestation, Effects, or Demonstration of Blight</p>  <p>http://dos.myflorida.com/library-archives/records-management/</p> <p>13</p>	<p>UCF SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>Inadequate Transportation Facilities: Failing intersection (City of Kissimmee, 2012).</p>  <p>14</p>
<p>UCF SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>Defective Parking: Too much parking (DeVries, 2015).</p>  <p>15</p>	<p>UCF SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>Defective Parking: Not enough parking, cars in the drive aisle</p>  <p>16</p>
<p>UCF SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>Inadequate Public Transportation: No sidewalk or bus facilities at bus stop</p>  <p>17</p>	<p>UCF SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>Faulty Lot Layout: Hazardous Development Pattern (City of Kissimmee, 2012).</p>  <p>18</p>

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<p>UCF SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>Unsanitary Unsafe Conditions: Vacant commercial building under demolition</p> 	<p>UCF SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>Unsanitary Unsafe Conditions: Poorly maintained commercial properties</p> 
<p>19</p>	<p>20</p>
<p>UCF SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>Unsanitary Unsafe Conditions: Missing sidewalk along major roadway & poor lighting</p> 	<p>UCF SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>Deterioration of Site Improvements: Extremely damaged fence (DeVries, 2015).</p> 
<p>21</p>	<p>22</p>
<p>UCF SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>Deterioration of Site Improvements: Residential and Neighborhood Blight</p> 	<p>UCF SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>High Incidence of Crime and higher number of Fire & EMS Calls</p> 
<p>23</p>	<p>24</p>



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Social Impacts of Blight



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Impacts of Blight

Individual Impacts

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Personal / Unintentional Injury
- Feeling of being Powerless
- Reduced childhood development potential


Neighborhood Impacts

- Perceived Loss of Neighborhood Cohesion
- Limited Social Support
- Increased Crime

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Blight & Crime



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Blight and Crime

Boston

- Identified 34 hotspots for criminal activity
- Half were selected for test group
- Best results came from cleaning up and securing vacant properties

Netherlands

- Researchers tested six scenarios
- Social Order vs. Disorder
- In all cases, disorder promoted illicit behavior
- Tested: littering, trespassing, petty theft

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Blight & Crime

Variable	Behavior Test	Un-blighted Group Violations	Blighted Group Violations
Case 1: Graffiti near bike park	Litter	33%	69%
Case 2: Bikes illegally parked	Trespassing	27%	82%
Case 3: Shopping carts in parking lot	Litter	30%	58%
Case 4: Illegal use of fireworks	Litter	52%	80%
Case 5: Mailbox with graffiti	Mail theft	13%	27%
Case 6: Mailbox with litter	Mail theft	13%	25%

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Neighborhood Level Strategies to “Beat Blight”

- Community Redevelopment Agencies
- Neighborhood Improvement Districts
- Public Private Partnerships

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Neighborhood Level Strategies to "Beat Blight"

- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CEPTED)
 - Access Control (design to clearly define public, semi-private, & private spaces)
 - Surveillance (design for maximum visibility)
 - Territorial Reinforcement (design for "eyes on the street")
 - Maintenance (proper upkeep of landscape, hardscape, & buildings)
- Brownfield Redevelopment
- Housing and Human Services
- Support Social Capital

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Neighborhood Level Strategies to "Beat Blight"

- Land Banking
- Clear or Secure Vacant Buildings
- Maintain Vacant Lots
- Love Your Block – Cities of Service
 - <http://www.citiesofservice.org>



citiesofservice.org

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Neighborhood Level Strategies to "Beat Blight"



Fels Institute of Government, 2

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637 W. Oxford Street – Vacant in 1998 637 W. Oxford Street – Redeveloped by PHA

Fels Institute of Government,

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Individual Strategies



cityoforlando.n

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Individual Strategies to "Beat Blight"

- Adopt a Street
 - Report illegal dumping
- Establish a neighborhood watch
- Orlando Cares
 - Cities of Service initiative
- Neighborhood Social Networking
 - Such as the Nextdoor App
- Report needed repairs and code violations to Public Works
 - Be familiar with local codes and ordinances

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Orange County Code Violations

ABANDONED OR DISABLED VEHICLES
Violations might include:
• Fuel leaks
• Smelly exhaust
• Broken glass
• No license plate
• Exposed wiring

ILLEGAL RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS
Residential buildings are structures which are used, designed, or intended for use as a dwelling. These buildings, which contained a fire hazard, are prohibited unless structures are subject to demolition.

MAINTENANCE CODE
Proper repairs must ensure that buildings and structures are maintained in a safe and sanitary condition. The code includes standards for electrical, plumbing, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and other building systems.

3 WAYS TO REPORT A CODE VIOLATION
Call 311
Email
Online

Source: <https://www.ocfl.net/Portals/0/Storage/NeighborsHousing/Docs/CodeViolations brochure.pdf>

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Reporting – OCFL 311 App

Category

- Animals & Pets
- Neighbors & Housing
- Traffic & Transportation
- Other

New Report Details

400 E South St
Orlando, FL 32801-0916

Traffic signal not working

Jane Doe

Submit

Source: <https://www.ocfl.com/ocflapps/ocfl-311/0331286/00706-6>

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Reporting - Other

- Orange County Government Information
 - Call 311 (non-emergencies)
 - TTY 407-836-4250
- City of Orlando Code Enforcement
 - 407-246-4444
 - Report illegal dumping and other code violations
- Orange County Code Enforcement
 - 407-836-3111
 - <https://www.ocfl.net/NeighborsHousing/CodeEnforcement.aspx#VZS2UvViko>
- Form a Neighborhood Watch
 - 407-246-2369 for more information
 - <http://www.cityoforlando.net/police/neighborhood-watch/>

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Conclusion “Beating Blight”

Before
After

City of Kissimmee CRA Annual Report 2014
<http://redevelopment.net/cra-resources/reporting-requirements/>

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Questions...
“Beating Blight”: Strategies for Neighborhood Revitalization and Redevelopment

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Joshua DeVries, AICP
University of Central Florida
jdevries78@knights.ucf.edu

Jeffrey Chamlis
University of Central Florida
jpc13c@knights.ucf.edu

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