

# **Abandoned Buildings and Lots**

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# Overview of the Presentation

- General Description of the Problem
- Harms Caused by Abandoned Buildings and Lots
- Factors Contributing to the Problem
- Understanding Your Local Problem
- Responses to the Problem
- Obstacles to Implementation
- Limitations of Situational Prevention

# General Description of the Problem

- Subcategory of physical disorder
  - May attract vandals, homeless and squatters
  - May be used as "stash houses"
  - Intentional damage may accelerate deterioration
- Related problems may require separate analysis

# General Description of the Problem

- **Definition**
  - No universal definition
  - Terms such as "property," "vacant," "lot," "evidence of vacancy" and "building" delimit legal remedies (e.g., Chula Vista, CA)
    - May not include "accessory structures"
  - Typically includes a time element to allow for repairs
  - Rely on a broad definition

# General Description of the Problem

- Estimates on Prevalence and Cost
  - No national estimates, only regional
  - Counting relies of definitions, which differ
  - U.S. Census estimated 19 million (end of first quarter of 2010)

# General Description of the Problem

- **Estimates on Prevalence and Cost**
  - **2000-2005:** St. Louis, MO \$15.5 million to raze buildings
  - **2008:** 8 cities in Ohio 25,000 properties; \$15 million direct city services; \$49 million lost tax revenue
  - **2010:** Detroit , MI 33,500 vacant houses; 91,000 vacant lots; \$28 million to raze remaining buildings

# Harms Caused by Abandoned Buildings and Lots

- As a Crime Attractor and Crime Enabler
  - Criminals are drawn to the property
    - Hiding places
    - Shelter
    - Easy access
  - Reputation as a suitable environment grows
  - Primary reason: Lack of controls

# Harms Caused by Abandoned Buildings and Lots

- Blight, Crime and Fear
- Arson and Accidental Fire
- Burglary and Theft
- Pet Displacement
- Property Values
- Public Health
- Squatting

# Harms Caused by Abandoned Buildings and Lots

- Tenant Displacement
- Trespassing
- Vandalism

# Factors Contributing to Abandoned Buildings

- Lending Practice and Foreclosure
- Costs of Commercial Compliance and Remediation
- Rising Property Taxes and Tax Delinquency
- Job Loss and Population Loss
- Older Housing Stock

# Factors Contributing to Abandoned Buildings

- Absentee Owners
- Real Estate Speculators
- "Demolition by Neglect"

# Understanding Your Local Problem

- **Stakeholders**
  - Share responsibility for the response
    - Government
    - Private
    - Community and Nonprofit
- **Collecting and Analyzing Data**
  - Grants; influencing public policy; crafting responses
  - No data collection standards

# Understanding Your Local Problem

- A Framework for Asking the Right Questions

- I. Magnitude

- A. Number of properties by type
- B. Total abandoned acreage
- C. Period of abandonment for each property before reuse (expressed in days)
- D. Spatial distribution (i.e., "hot spots")
- E. Cost of services in money and manpower hours
- F. How your problem compares with other cities of similar size and character, in state and out of state

# Understanding Your Local Problem

## II. Seriousness and Priority

- A. Economic losses
  - 1. Retail sales
  - 2. Tourism
  - 3. Tax revenue
  - 4. Property values
- B. Residents' and business owners' perceptions
- C. Injuries and deaths
- D. Other crime and disorder conditions at these properties and the disposition
- E. Physical condition
  - 1. Top 10 properties in each neighborhood that need immediate attention (e.g., contamination levels)
  - 2. Danger of collapse
- F. Age, functionality and marketability of each property

# Understanding Your Local Problem

## III. Rate of Change

- A. Is abandonment increasing, decreasing, or remaining stable?
- B. Abandonment rate over the last 1, 3, 5, 10, 15 and 20 years

## IV. Persons and Institutions Affected

- A. Residents
- B. Business owners
- C. Tourists
- D. Children
- E. Schools
- F. Elderly

# Understanding Your Local Problem

## V. System Responses?

- A. What has been done in the past?
- B. What was the outcome?
- C. Which responses should be replicated?
- D. What is the status of existing mitigation efforts at each property?

## VI. Forecasting

- A. If you do not do anything, then what state will you be in next year?
- B. What is the problem expected to be like in the next 6 months? 1 year? 5 years?

## VII. Origins/Causal Assumptions for Abandonment

# Understanding Your Local Problem

- **Measuring Your Effectiveness**
  - Collect baseline measures
  - Take measurements in the target area and surrounding area
  - Two types of measures:
    - **Process Measures:** Response to the problem (+)
    - **Outcome Measures:** Impact on the problem (-)

# Understanding Your Local Problem

## Sample Process Measures (+)

- Increased percentage of fines and fees collected
- Increased percentage of property taxes collected
- Increased number of enforcement actions
- Increased employee training in addressing abandoned buildings and lots
- Increased grant funds secured to address abandoned buildings and lots
- Increased new building and construction permits issued

# Understanding Your Local Problem

## Sample Outcomes Measures (-)

- Reduced percentage of workload
- Reduced percentage of the budget allocated to address abandoned properties
- Reduced number of injuries and deaths
- Reduced citizen fear
- Reduced need for stabilization efforts: 1) cosmetic improvements; 2) board ups; 3) clean ups; 4) fencing; 5) demolitions; 5) environmental changes
- Increased property values

# Responses to the Problem

- General Considerations for an Effective Response Strategy
  - Prevention: Aimed at keeping the current homeowner in the house
  - Management: Aimed at enforcement action and seizure
  - Reuse: Aimed at restoring it as a tax-generating parcel

# Responses to the Problem

- Streamlining and Coordinating Local Bureaucracy, Reporting Mechanisms and Infrastructure
  - Co-locate equipment and staff
  - Cross-train staff
- Observing Due Process, and Developing Capacity and Support
  - Assumption-based planning: Identify assumptions, vulnerabilities, opportunities and future states to create contingency plans

# Responses to the Problem

- Specific Responses to Abandoned Buildings and Lots
  - 29 responses categorized according to the 5 opportunity-reducing principles
  - Categories are not mutually exclusive
  - Responses are most effective when layered

# Responses to the Problem

## Opportunity-reducing Principles

- Increasing Effort (2)
- Increasing Risks (5)
- Reducing Rewards (8)
- Removing Excuses (6)
- Reducing Provocations (1)
- Responses with Limited Effectiveness (7)

# Responses to the Problem

## Increasing Effort

1. Physically securing abandoned properties
2. Altering environmental features

# Responses to the Problem

## Increasing Risks

1. Initiating privatized public nuisance lawsuits
2. Aggressively enforcing building codes
3. Establishing a mortgage fraud task force
4. Creating incentives for responsible ownership and occupancy of abandoned buildings
5. Training interagency task force members

# Responses to the Problem

## Reducing Rewards

1. Acquiring properties through tax foreclosure
2. Acquiring properties through an order of possession
3. Promoting responsible ownership through special tax sales
4. Acquiring properties through asset forfeiture
5. Acquiring properties through eminent domain

# Responses to the Problem

## Reducing Rewards

6. Maintaining and abandoned property master list
7. Acquiring properties through a land bank program
8. Razing abandoned buildings

# Responses to the Problem

## Removing Excuses

1. Registering foreclosed properties
2. Establishing an abandoned property early warning system
3. Educating owners/landlords/place managers to facilitate voluntary compliance
4. Conducting will planning and family heirs workshops

# Responses to the Problem

## Removing Excuses

5. Establishing capital rehabilitation programs
6. Conducting public education campaigns

# Responses to the Problem

## Reducing Provocations

1. Creating urban homesteading programs

# Responses to the Problem

## Responses with Limited Effectiveness

1. Conducting city-initiated cosmetic improvement and clean-up campaigns
2. Conducting additional police patrols and enforcement crackdowns, and continually arresting offenders at problem properties
3. Offering property-tax incentives
4. Holding property owners criminally liable for illegal conduct on their property

# Responses to the Problem

## Responses with Limited Effectiveness

5. Increasing formal surveillance through closed circuit television (CCTV)
6. Operating a specialized housing/problem-property court
7. Charging service fees for police response

# Obstacles to Implementation

1. Unanticipated technical difficulties
2. Inadequate supervision of implementation
3. Failure to coordinate action among different agencies
4. Competing priorities
5. Unanticipated costs

# Limitations of Situational Prevention

1. Intervention may not be deep enough
2. Intervention too easily defeated by offenders
3. Too much vigilance expected from others
4. May provoke escalation
5. May facilitate rather than frustrate crime
6. Inappropriate intervention from poor analysis
7. Preventive measures have a limited life

# Abandoned Buildings and Lots

**Thank You**

Guide is available at  
[www.popcenter.org](http://www.popcenter.org)

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