

Study of Blighting Factors within the Harrisonville Square Neighborhood Redevelopment District

Introduction.

In accordance with Chapter 353, this analysis of factors within the Redevelopment District (the “District”) described in that certain development plan entitled “Harrisonville Square Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan” (the “Plan”) has been prepared to assist the Harrisonville Board of Aldermen (the “Board of Aldermen”) in determining whether the District constitutes a “blighted area,” as that term is used and defined in the Urban Redevelopment Corporations Law, Chapter 353 of the Revised Statutes of Missouri, as amended (“Chapter 353”). This analysis was conducted in March and April of 2023.

Methodology.

We conducted a visual survey of the proposed redevelopment area. We also reviewed information provided by the City of Harrisonville and other information that was publicly available. In addition, we compared the findings to peer-reviewed studies indicating the effects of the visually observed defects on the surrounding environment, the area as a whole, and on the City of Harrisonville.

Description of Redevelopment District

The District is located in the heart of the City of Harrisonville, Missouri, as depicted on **Exhibit A** attached to the Plan and incorporated by reference in this analysis. The redevelopment area is located in an area generally known as the Harrisonville Square and the surrounding neighborhood, which is described in the Development Plan.

This area consists of mostly single-family residences occupied by at least 55% low to moderate-income households according to HUD’s 2021 Low and Moderate-Income Summary Data Sets.

The dominant land use in the plan area is residential. Single-family structures make up the bulk of the housing stock, followed by some multifamily structures, in addition to the

area's commercial and retail corridors.

DEFINITION OF BLIGHT

Chapter 353 requires as a prerequisite to the undertaking of proposed redevelopment activities, including the granting of real property tax abatement, that the Board of Aldermen make a determination that the District is a "blighted area," as that term is used and defined in Chapter 353. A "blighted area" is defined by Chapter 353 to have the same definition as § 99.805(1) which reads:

"(1) "Blighted area", an area which, by reason of **[1]** the predominance of insanitary or unsafe conditions, **[2]** deterioration of site improvements, or **[3]** the existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes, **[4]** or any combination of such factors, retards the provision of housing accommodations or constitutes an economic or social liability or a menace to the public health, safety, or welfare in its present condition and use;

(§ 99.805(1) RSMo 2021 (numbering added)).

If the property contains one or more of these three conditions and either retards housing accommodations or constitutes an economic liability or constitutes a social liability or is a menace to the public health, safety, or welfare, then the property is a blighted area.

The determination of statutory "blight" need not encompass the entire District. Rather, Chapter 353 expressly provides that "any such area may include buildings and improvements not in themselves blighted, and any real property, whether improved or unimproved, the inclusion of which is deemed necessary for the effective clearance, re-planning, reconstruction, rehabilitation of the area of which such buildings, improvements, or real property form a part."

Based on the analysis detailed below, the Board of Aldermen has a sufficient factual basis to support a determination that the District is indeed a "blighted area" under Chapter 353.

DETERMINATION OF BLIGHT

The following factors demonstrate that the District is a “blighted area” as that term is defined and used in Chapter 353 and applicable judicial determinations:

Blight factors present within the District include:



(1) “insanitary or unsafe conditions”

(2) “deterioration of site improvements”

(3) “the existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes”

Each is discussed below.

Deteriorating sidewalks create safety hazards and barriers to access.

1. The District is Characterized by “insanitary or unsafe conditions”

The Meriam-Webster dictionary defines “insanitary” to mean “unclean enough to endanger health.” Illegal dumping of trash, broken building materials, and deteriorated pavement have been found to constitute “unsafe and insanitary conditions.” (*City of Kan. City v. Chung Hoe Ku*, 282 S.W.3d 23, 31 (Mo. App. 2009).).

Most of the streets and sidewalks in the area do not meet the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This makes those streets and sidewalks largely inaccessible to persons with disabilities and parents with strollers. This means fewer people on the streets which has been linked to crime and vandalism. (Wilson and Kelling 1982) As such the streets, and especially the sidewalks, constitute an unsafe condition in the area.

Much of the area was built before the bans on asbestos and lead paint. Asbestos was used for a variety of things, including insulation, paint texture, and floor tiles. Lead, which may accumulate in the bloodstream and cause organ damage, was allowed to be used as a paint component until 1978. Unless proven otherwise, any structure built before 1977 is assumed to have these two chemicals, necessitating costly mitigating procedures to isolate them for removal. Visual surveys of the area suggest that most residential and commercial properties fall into this category.



Standing water and unauthorized dumping create health and crime issues.



2. The District is Characterized by Deterioration Of Site Improvements:

Improvements in the District suffer from significant physical deterioration. Peeling paint, broken windows, and other maintenance issues are clearly visible.

In particular, deteriorating infrastructure is closely associated with crime and vandalism. In their famous work “Broken Windows” Kelling and Wilson wrote:



“Social psychologists and police officers tend to agree that if a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken. This is as true in nice neighborhoods as in rundown ones. Window-breaking does not necessarily occur on a large scale because some areas are inhabited by determined window-breakers whereas others are populated by window-lovers; rather, one unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares, and so breaking more windows costs nothing.”
((Wilson and Kelling 1982))

Broken sidewalks make the city less accessible, especially for the blind and those who use wheelchairs, canes, or walkers (Shoup, Donald 2010, Access vol. 36).

As curb appeal diminishes, a residential property will be slower to sell and have decreased value (Elam and Stigarll 2012) Therefore these maintenance issues on individual properties create an anchor, weighing down the values of all the properties in the area. As such they are a clear economic liability to the community.



3. The Property is Characterized by the Existence Of Conditions Which Endanger Life Or Property By Fire And Other Causes

Eleven vacant properties have been identified within the redevelopment area. However, this reflects only those properties which have been identified as vacant to the City of Harrisonville. It is likely, based on our survey, that the number is much higher.

Abandoned properties have been directly correlated with higher crime and social



disruption (Cui and Walsh 2015).

Studies have shown that

“Abandoned houses are magnets for vandalism, theft, fires, drug trafficking, and more serious crimes, all of which require more and better municipal services.”

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That same report points out that abandoned properties require more municipal services while at the same time paying lower municipal taxes. In this case, the property pays no property tax and

generates no sales tax. Abandoned buildings and empty storefronts act as an economic drag on the area and increase crime. According to a report issued by H.U.D.,

“Vacant and abandoned properties have negative spillover effects that impact neighboring properties and, when concentrated, entire communities and even cities. Research links foreclosed, vacant, and abandoned properties with reduced property values, increased crime, increased risk to public health and welfare, and increased costs for municipal governments.”
(HUD 2014)

In addition, it has been shown that the longer a property remains abandoned, the more significant the economic impact is on surrounding properties and the further away the

negative impacts reach (Han 2014).

Vacant properties are also associated with an increased arson rate, both for them and for surrounding buildings (Schachterle 2012). Thus abandoned properties, by their very nature, encourage crimes and fires, both on the property and nearby.

4. The Blighting Factors Of The Property Constitute An Economic Or Social Liability or a Menace to the Public Health, Safety, or Welfare In Its Present Condition and Use.

As detailed above, the blighting conditions found on the property are directly linked to health, safety, and welfare concerns. Missouri's Courts have previously found that abandoned properties create a social liability by encouraging loitering, juvenile delinquents, and crime. (*Land Clearance for Redevelopment Auth. v. Inserra*, 284 S.W.3d 641, 647-48 (Mo. App. 2009).). The Han study cited above indicates that the longer a property remains abandoned the greater the impact on the

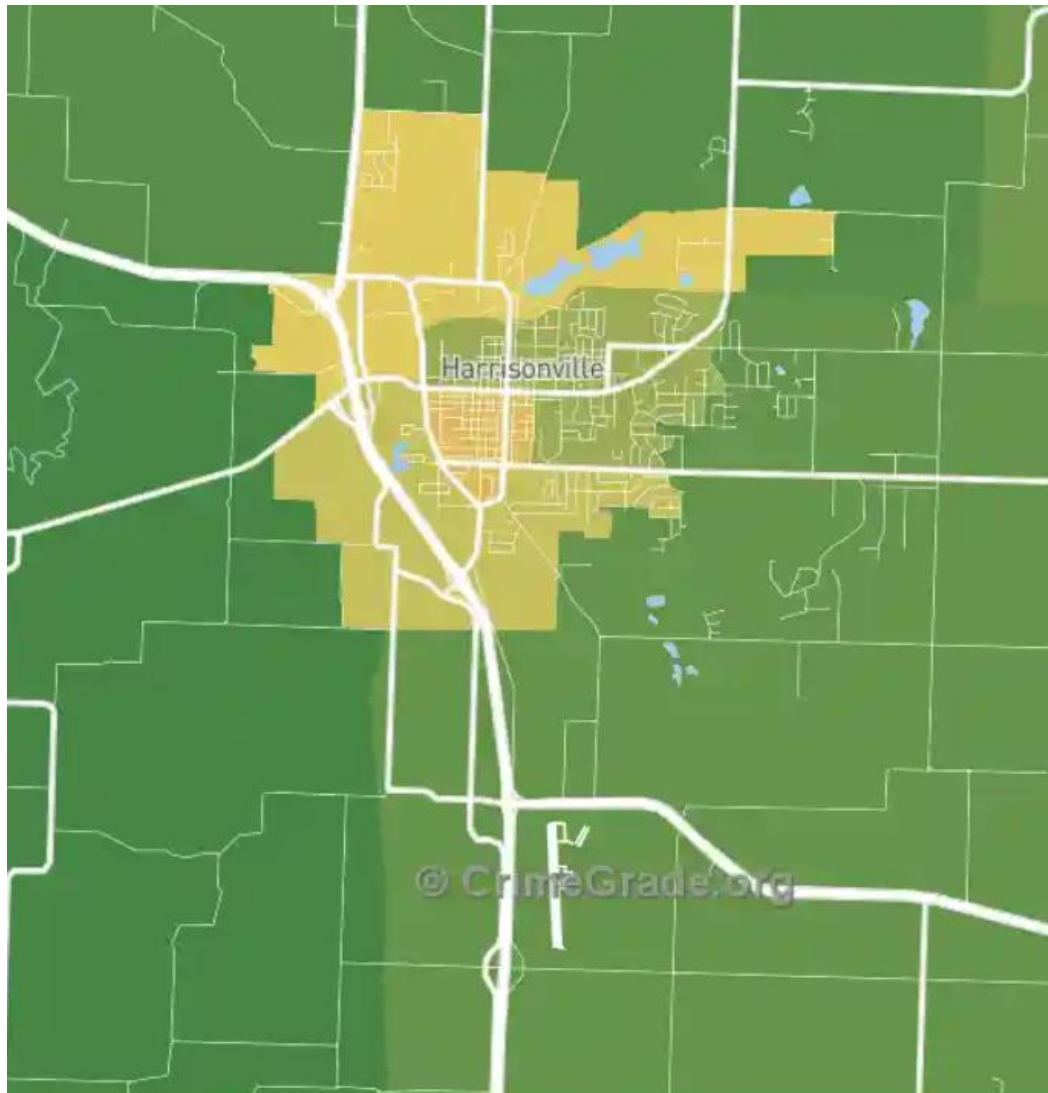


surrounding community (Han 2014). The Land study indicates that abandoned properties disproportionately burden municipal services (Lind 2015). The HUD study connects vacant properties directly with crime as does the Lind study (HUD 2014).

The HUD study also directly links abandoned properties with decreased property values in the area. A more recent study shows that vacant and blighted properties decrease the value of surrounding properties by between 0.04% and 3.5% depending on the distance between them (Furio and Voith 2016).

Not surprisingly, crime is generally higher in the redevelopment area. Although crime rates in Harrisonville are generally higher than the rest of the nation, in the redevelopment

area they are significantly higher than surrounding areas, as shown below:



Crime Grades



A+ (dark green) areas are safest

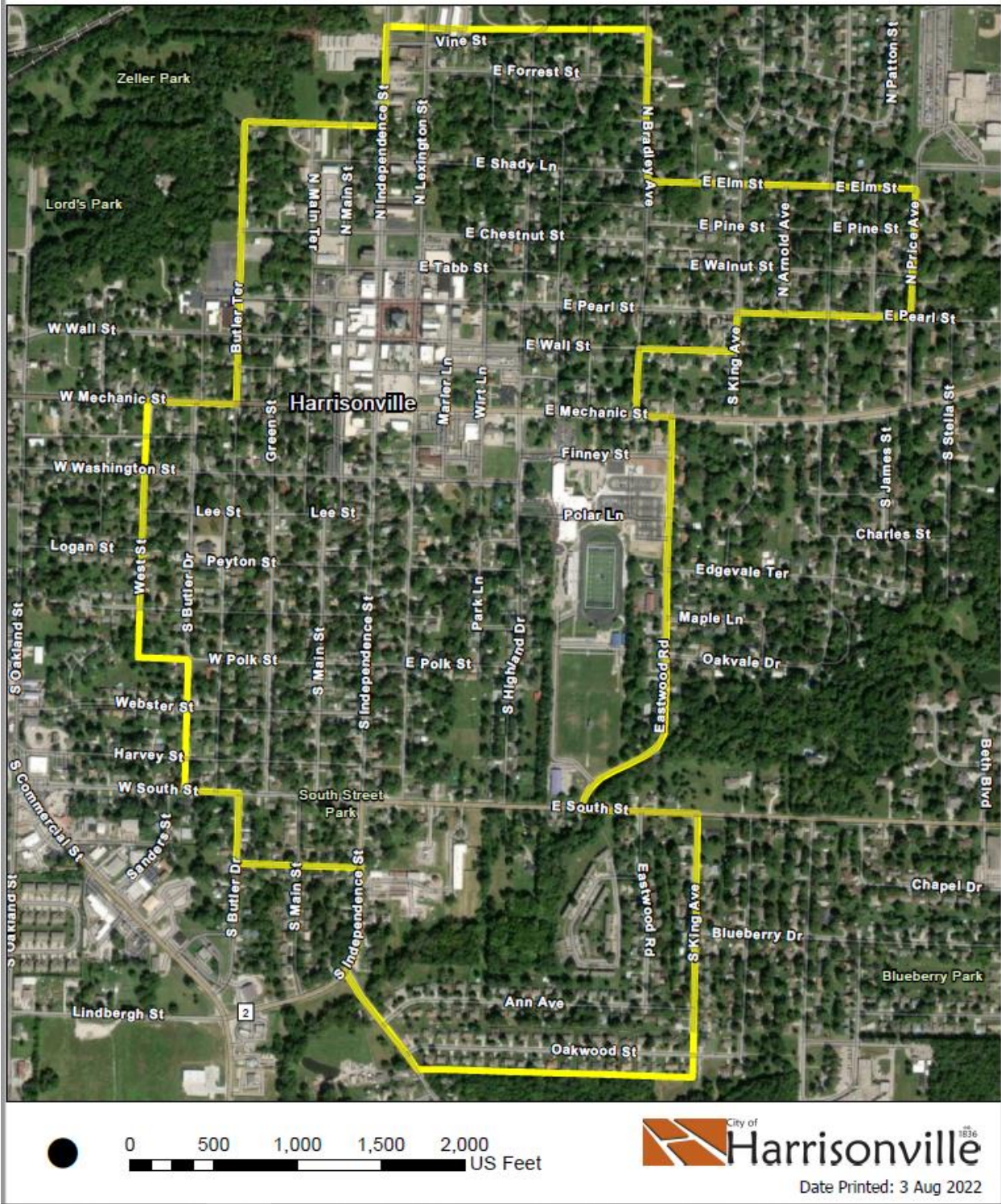
CONCLUSION:

This analysis demonstrates that the District exhibits conditions that meet statutory definition of blight. The District is characterized by all three blighting factors listed in the statute (1) “insanitary or unsafe conditions” (2) “deterioration of site improvements” (3) “the existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes” These factors can be directly linked to clear and proven social harm as well as an increased risk of physical harm by fire or crime. While not every property in the district would meet the definition of ‘blight’ there are enough to so characterize the entire area.

There is clear evidence supporting a determination by the Board of Aldermen that the Redevelopment District constitutes a “blighted area” so that the clearance, re-planning, reconstruction, or rehabilitation of the Redevelopment District is necessary to effectuate the purposes of Chapter 353, as amended. This analysis recommends that the Board of Aldermen so find and determine.

EXHIBIT A

Chapter 353 Boundaries



Sources

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