DeKalb County
GEORGIA

Framework for Developing a Comprehensive Blight Strategy

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Defining the Problem

Causes of Blight

- Housing crisis in 2008 with large number of foreclosures and elevated number of property vacancies
- Aging housing stock and lower than average median income levels are prevalent in certain areas of the County
- Lack of sufficient County resources inhibits large scale abatement efforts
- Current legal framework provides insufficient tools, is lengthy and requires substantial time and expense to abate blighted properties
- Neighborhood and business engagement is low or absent in blighted areas
- Presence of litter at intersections and transit stops, insufficient frequency of median's grass cutting and lack of curb bumping and street sweeping programs

Definition of Blight

- §9.1.3: Structure "exhibits objectively determinable signs of deterioration sufficient to constitute a threat to human health, safety, and public welfare"

Blight conditions are multifaceted and encompass elements not explicitly included in the Code definition:

- Abandoned or incomplete development projects
- Fire-damaged structures
- Homeless encampments
- Littered and poorly maintained public environment

Blight is a deterrent to economic development

Contributors to perception of blight

The County addresses blighted sites as well as issues that contribute to the perception of blight including litter, overgrown grass, and clogged storm water drains.

These programs however have limited reach and are unable to maintain a pristine environment

- Litter pick up: In 2016, the County serviced 860 illegal dumping sites and collected 618 tons of trash.
- Grass Cutting: In 2016, the County mowed 3,243 miles of grass.
- Storm water drains cleaning: In 2015, the County cleaned 1,543 storm water drains. (Data for 2016 is being processed.)

The CEO has formulated a strategy to enhance and render these initiatives more effective.

Current Efforts to Address Blight are enhanced by Interdepartmental collaboration

Current Initiatives are Addressing Blight on Several Tactical Fronts:

- Enforcement of Interior Code Compliance Ordinance
- Multi-Family Housing Task Force
- Hotel/Motel Task Force
- Single Family Residential Demolitions
- Targeted Corridor and Neighborhood Sweeps
- Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP)
- Mobile Tool Lending Center – Under development and scheduled to launch in summer of 2017

Enforcement personnel from Fire Rescue, Beautification, Code Enforcement, Health, and Police partner with the following departments to combat blight:

- Law Department
- Planning and Sustainability
- Development Services
- Community Development
- Sanitation
- Solicitor's Office
- GIS

The County has focused on compliant response and enforcement activities as means to address blight

Initial Contact

- Perform periodic, compliant-response, or targeted sweep inspection
- Issue stop work order
- Issue warning notice and educate property owner
- Cite owner for property maintenance, life safety, health, or other violations

Chronic Offenders and Public Safety Threats

- Order the property to be vacated or secured
- Order fire watch
- Initiate *In Rem* Process
    - Abate property by demolishing, cleaning up or repairing, or securing the property*
    - Issue lien on property for amount equal to cost of demolition

Other Activities and Available Tools

- Revoke Alcohol or Business License (commercial establishments)
- Revoke Health Certificate (restaurant, hotel, and swimming pools)
- Disconnect utilities (working in concert with Georgia Power and others)
- Revoke Certificate of Occupancy

*Cleaning up, repairing, and securing properties has not been commonly utilized due to the time and resources required and the lengthy process involved in the *In Rem* process

Proposed legislation would substantially enhance the County's ability for quicker remediation and stronger enforcement

1. **International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC)**
   - Would give code officials greater authority to enter property and secure or repair complexes when necessary
   - Enables accelerated process for *In Rem* abatement hearings

2. **Hotel/Motel Ordinance**
   - Aims to more effectively define short term versus extended stay establishments and more effectively regulate their operations

3. **Business License Code Amendment**
   - Would provide the County with additional enforcement tools to revoke business licenses and shut down businesses operating with a suspended or revoked license

The County must comprehensively assess the scope of blight and create a plan, implementation timeline and defined resources

Step 1: Assess status of blight

- Blight exists for different types of properties and in varying levels of concentration. Plans for and efforts to remediate need to be appropriate to for each instance of blight.

Step 2: Prioritize inventory of blight

- Each property in the inventory must be scored according to multiple factors contributing to the prioritization process (level of threat, cost of remediation, etc.)

Step 3: Identify available resources and gaps

- After prioritization, the County must identify what resources are available to successfully remediate the properties (funding, legal tools, engagement of stakeholders, etc.)

Step 4: Define tasks and timeline for implementation

- Informed by the prioritized list of blighted properties and resources available, the County must develop a specific task list and timeline tor implementation (action items and objectives, allocation of funding, management and oversight, and reporting to stakeholders)

Additional initiatives under review or under way as part of the strategy to eradicate blight

- Regional land bank authority revitalization

- Neighborhood capacity building initiative

- Business community engagement (Chamber of Commerce, Council for Quality Growth, CIDs, etc.)

- Identification of emerging markets

- Examination of incentives for rehabilitation opportunity

- Creation of receivership program

- Utilization of property tax credits for sprinkler installation

- Implementation of fire safety lighting incentives

Participants

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Thank you!

- Questions?