

Conditions Survey

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The following report, the *Midtown Conditions Survey*, was completed in August 2005. The purpose of this work was to analyze conditions on all parcels located within the Midtown Study Area, generally located south of 17th Avenue, between Terry and Kimbark Streets, and north of Longs Peak Avenue (the “Study Area”), in order to determine whether factors contributing to blight are present and whether the Study Area is, therefore, eligible as an urban renewal area under the provisions of Colorado State Statutes. Establishment of an urban renewal area would allow the City of Longmont, through its urban renewal authority, to use designated powers to assist in the redevelopment of properties and improvements within its boundaries.

This study represents a step towards achieving goals set out in the *Longmont Area Comprehensive Plan*. An important component of future redevelopment in the area will be identification of development programs which effectively leverage public investment, as well as funding mechanisms to complete the necessary infrastructure improvements.

Definition of Blight

Redevelopment and investment within the Study Area may be accomplished through the implementation of an urban renewal process. The first step in this process is to determine if the area qualifies as a “blighted area” eligible for urban renewal. The determination that an area constitutes a blighted area is a cumulative conclusion attributable to the presence of several physical, environmental, and social factors. Indeed, blight is attributable to a multiplicity of conditions which, in combination, tend to accelerate the phenomenon of deterioration of an area. For purposes of the study, the definition of a blighted area is premised upon the definition articulated in the Urban Renewal Law, as follows:

“Blighted Area” means an area that, in its present condition and use and, by reason of the presence of at least four of the following factors, substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of the municipality, retards the provision of housing accommodations, or constitutes an economic or social liability, and is a menace to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare:

- (a) *Slum, deteriorated, or deteriorating structures;*
- (b) *Predominance of defective or inadequate street layout;*
- (c) *Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness;*
- (d) *Unsanitary or unsafe conditions;*
- (e) *Deterioration of site or other improvements;*
- (f) *Unusual topography or inadequate public improvements or utilities;*
- (g) *Defective or unusual conditions of title rendering the title non-marketable;*
- (h) *The existence of conditions that endanger life or property by fire or other causes;*
- (i) *Buildings that are unsafe or unhealthy for persons to live or work in because of building code violations, dilapidations, deterioration, defective design, physical construction, or faulty or inadequate facilities;*
- (j) *Environmental contamination of buildings or property;*
- (k.5) *The existence of health, safety, or welfare factors requiring high levels of municipal services or substantial physical underutilization or vacancy of sites, buildings, or other improvements;*
- (l) *If there is no objection of such property owner or owners and the tenant or tenants of such owner or owners, if an, to the inclusion of such property in an urban renewal area, “blighted area” also means an area that, in its present condition and use and, by reason of the presence of any one of the factors specified in paragraphs (a) to (k.5) of this subsection (2), substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of the municipality, retards the provision of housing accommodations, or constitutes an economic or social liability, and is a menace to the public health, safety, morals or welfare. For purposes of this paragraph (1), the fact that an owner of an interest in such property does not object to the inclusion of such property in the urban renewal area does not mean that the owner has waived any rights of such owner in connection with laws governing condemnation.*

Source: Colorado Revised Statute 31-25-103(2).

Since this definition is a general overview pertaining to all sites, it is important to clarify its intention as it applies to the Study Area. According to state law, it is unnecessary for every condition of blight to be present in order to be eligible as an urban renewal area. Rather, an area can be qualified as blighted when as few as four or more conditions are present (or five conditions, in cases requiring the use of eminent domain). The conditions

need not be present in each parcel, but must be found in the Study Area as a whole. With this understanding, the *Midtown Conditions Survey* presents an overview of factors within the Study Area including a review of physical conditions sufficient to make a determination of blight. The “Summary of Findings” provides conclusions regarding the analysis and presence of blight in key areas; however, the Longmont City Council will make a final determination of blight for the entire Study Area based on the extent to which conditions constitute a liability for the Study Area.

Study Methodology

The *Midtown Conditions Survey* includes a detailed analysis of site, building and public improvement deterioration as well as dangers from environmental contamination, crime, flood and fire. Qualifying blight conditions throughout the Study Area were identified and analyzed on a parcel-by-parcel basis to produce maps showing blight conditions present in the Study Area .

Leland Consulting Group personnel conducted parcel-by-parcel field investigations in August of 2005 to document physical conditions within the categories of blight set out in the state statute. Pertinent Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data was obtained from the City of Longmont, Boulder County, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and analyzed by Leland Consulting Group. Additional supplemental and updated information was obtained through meetings and interviews with City staff, as well as other experts on local and regional market conditions.

Report Format

The *Midtown Conditions Survey* is presented in four sections and an Appendix. Section I presents an overview of the project, a definition of “blight,” and the Study methodology. Section II presents a description of the Study Area and an overview of existing conditions. Section III defines the primary categories of blight and documents conditions which are present within each category. Section IV summarizes the findings from the research.

The Appendix includes maps of parcels exhibiting conditions contributing to blight, as well as a parcel-by-parcel synthesis of qualifying conditions found during the field survey.

Section II

Area Overview and Description

Study Area Description

As described above, the conditions survey reported here covers properties located generally south of 17th Avenue, north of Longs Peak Avenue, between Terry Street on the west and Kimbark Street on the east; excluding the Mountain View Cemetery, Roosevelt Park and block due north of the park, and block between Mountain View Avenue and 15th Avenue between Terry Street and Coffman Street. Exact Study Area boundaries are depicted on the maps in the Appendix to this document.

The Study Area comprises approximately 120 acres, with 84 of those acres 205 parcel located within legal parcels (excluding rights-of-way). The Study Area is entirely located within the city limits of Longmont.

Study Area Context

The Study Area contains a mix of new construction and building retrofits along with a few buildings dating from the early 1900s and before. Single-family residences in the Study Area average approximately 50-100 years old, but also include some older construction units.

Main Street has historically been, and continues to be, a commercial hub for the City and other communities in the region. Today, the area continues to be dominated by urban and suburban form commercial buildings, single and multi-tenant. While some residences are located directly on the Main Street corridor, the majority are located a block off of Main Street on Terry, Coffman and Kimbark Streets. Light industrial uses tend to be concentrated north of Mountain View Avenue and South of 17th Avenue on the west side of Main Street. Vacant commercial and industrial facilities, as well as

undeveloped and underdeveloped lots, located throughout the Study Area contribute to a general appearance of deterioration.

Existing Land Use and Zoning Districts

Dominant land uses within the Study Area include commercial, retail and service buildings, auto repair, offices, and various light industrial uses. Detached residential structures are common, especially on the streets off Main Street, with many used for dual commercial/residential purposes. The heaviest industries include a junkyard/salvage operation and an organic dairy. A few single family homes are also located along Main Street, as well as government facilities, open space, and vacant buildings and land.

Zoning throughout the Study Area is Commercial, with the exception of a block on the east side of Terry Street between 9th and 10th Avenues, which is zoned R2 (for medium density residential). The *Longmont Area Comprehensive Plan* calls for commercial, residential, service office and mixed-use development throughout the entire Study Area.

Section III

Determination of Study Area Conditions

Significant findings of the *Midtown Conditions Survey* are presented in this discussion which follows. These findings are based on a review of documents and reports, interviews, field surveys, and analyses conducted throughout August of 2005. The field surveys occurred at various times throughout a one-week period and at different times of the day in order to observe a variety of conditions. Properties and buildings, along with public improvements adjacent to the properties, were evaluated and deficiencies noted. As previously explained, the purpose of this Study was to determine whether conditions of blight as defined by the Colorado State Statute exist in the Study Area. The principal categories reported here and in line with the statute include: building conditions, site conditions, unusual topography or inadequate public improvements, endangerment from fire or other causes, unsafe or unhealthy work/live conditions, environmental contamination, and high municipal requirements or site underutilization. The Appendix section of this report includes a map of parcels exhibiting the conditions, and a parcel-by-parcel synthesis of qualifying conditions found during the field survey.

Building Conditions

Slum, Deteriorated and Deteriorating Structures

The condition of deteriorating or deteriorated structures was primarily established through field survey work and observation of exterior physical conditions among 205 parcels within the Study Area. No interior inspections were conducted. Building deterioration rating criteria considered included the following: primary structure (roof, walls, foundation); secondary structure (fascia/soffits, gutters/ downspouts, exterior finishes, windows and doors, stairways/fire escapes); and, exterior structure (mechanical equipment, loading areas, fences/walls/gates, other structures).

Although structural deterioration is most pronounced and obvious at certain vacant structures in the northern third of the Study Area, examples of this condition can be

found within properties throughout the Study Area. The most common examples of structural deterioration found in the Study Area involved poorly maintained exterior finishes, and fascia and roof deterioration. Many properties were observed to have outbuildings in disrepair. Some older properties were also found to have window, roof, and wall deterioration. Other Study Area structural problems, though less common, include deterioration of exterior walls, gutters, fences, mechanical equipment and loading areas. Examples of properties affected by Condition (a) are shown in the photos below.



Site Conditions

The evaluation of site conditions is divided into four categories according to the definition of blight: 1) defective or inadequate street layout; 2) faulty lot layout; 3) unsafe or unsanitary conditions; and 4) deterioration of site or other improvements.

Representative conditions among each category of site deterioration are described as follows:

Faulty Street Layout - Conditions typically associated with faulty street layout include poor vehicular access and/or internal circulation; substandard driveway definition and parking layout (e.g. lack of curb cuts, awkward entrance and exit points); offset or irregular intersections; substandard or nonexistent pedestrian circulation.

Faulty Lot Layout - Conditions typically associated with faulty lot layout include faulty lot shape and/or layout; and inadequate lot size. Poor access is also considered to be an indicator of faulty lot layout.

Unsanitary or Unsafe Conditions - Conditions typically considered unsafe or unsanitary include: poorly lit or unlit areas; cracked or uneven sidewalks; poor drainage; environmental contamination; buildings located within a floodplain; uneven grading or steep slopes; and, the existence of trash, debris, weeds, abandoned vehicles, high incidence of reported crime, graffiti or other forms of vandalism or vagrant activity.

Substandard Improvements - Site improvements typically considered to be substandard or undesirable include: the presence of billboards, neglected properties, and unscreened trash or mechanical storage areas; deterioration of parking surfaces; lack of landscaping; and, other general site maintenance problems.

Each of these conditions of blight as they apply to the Study Area is discussed separately in the following paragraphs.

Defective or Inadequate Street Layout

As described above, there are several conditions used to determine whether a Study area is blighted based on faulty street layout. During numerous on-site investigations and field surveys, these conditions were observed throughout the Study Area. Properties

limited to on-street parking only (primarily along Main Street) were not flagged as having inadequate street layout. However, properties that had a small adjacent parking lot with awkward or dangerous access to and from the street were considered to have this condition.

Another important indicator of faulty street layout is high levels of traffic accidents. The Longmont City Transportation Engineer uses police department data on traffic accidents to develop a “hazard index” for major intersections and mid-block locations in the city. This index takes information on both injury and non-injury accident frequency (with a higher weight placed on injury accidents), and compares that frequency to an expected rate given the level of traffic volume for each location. Using this methodology, the City has developed a list of High Accident Locations within Longmont. This list includes two intersections and four non-intersection locations within the Study Area. All parcels along Main Street north of 11th Avenue and South of 9th Avenue are designated as High Accident Locations in the city’s report.

For purposes of mapping for this conditions survey, those properties adjacent to those intersections and mid-block locations are highlighted as having faulty street layout per the state statute. As mentioned in the Transportation Engineer’s report, mid-block locations indicated as “high accident locations” may have problems related to more to intersections on either end of the block, rather than access or layout problems in the middle of the block.

Faulty Lot Layout

There are specific conditions that can be used to determine whether a Study Area is blighted based on faulty lot layout. Among these conditions are lot shape, layout and size, as well as conformity of use. On-site investigations and field surveys, review of public records and discussions with City staff suggest that these conditions can be found throughout the Study Area.

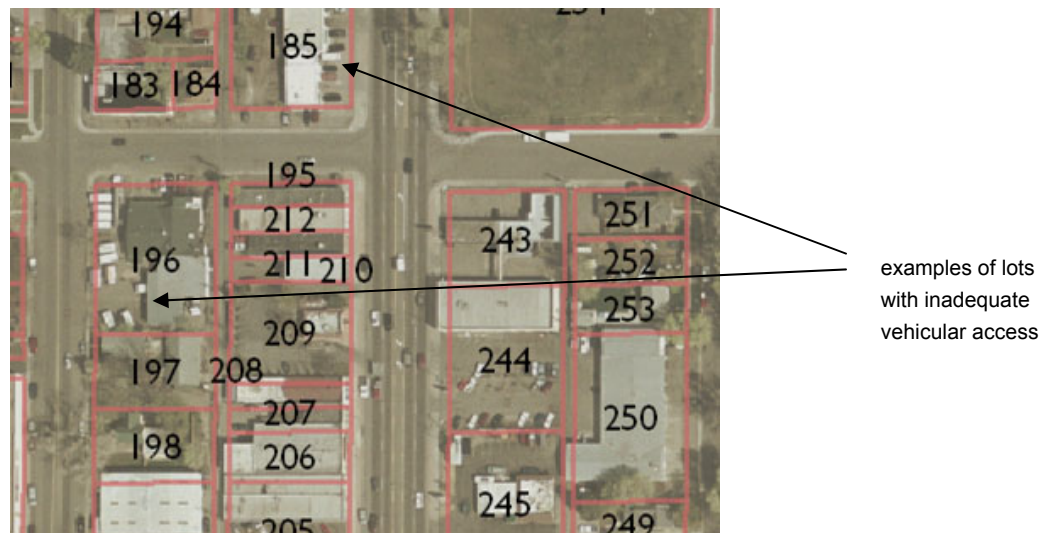
There are many lots within the Study Area smaller than 0.25 acres (and in fact, many as small as one-tenth acre). Normally, these would be considered to of inadequate size to permit sound development and redevelopment. However, because of the Main Street location, and the historical precedence for dense, urban street-side development, this criterion was ignored in the present analysis.

Lot layout is deemed to be faulty if the configuration relative to the street is contrary to what is desired for development. Lot shape is considered faulty if the shape is unusual to an extent that it deters or constraints development options. Platting within the Study area was relatively regimented and tended to avoid such irregularities. Only nine parcels were found to have faulty layout because of shape or configuration problems.

As with “faulty street layout”, properties with awkward, dangerous, or inadequate access to and from public streets were considered to have faulty lot layout. There were 24 such properties within the Study Area – usually because of small side parking lots with narrow access points and poor internal circulation.

The aerial photograph presented below illustrates examples of faulty lots in the Study Area, as per the statute Condition (c).

Examples of Condition (c)



Unsafe or Unsanitary Conditions

There are several locations within the Study Area exhibiting unsafe or unsanitary conditions. The most prevalent Study Area conditions considered unsafe or unsanitary include: poorly lit or unlit areas; unscreened trash or mechanical equipment; abandoned vehicles; and flood hazard.

Poorly lit areas are prevalent throughout the Study Area particularly in large vacant parcels, parking lots in front of or behind older businesses, and industrial parcels in general. Problems with unscreened trash and mechanical equipment can be found throughout the Study Area as well, most commonly on property around industrial and older commercial facilities and in some vacant areas.

Another indicator of both “unsafe or unsanitary conditions” (and of “high levels of municipal services”) is the presence of an elevated rate of calls for police service. Call data supplied by the Longmont Police Department for January 2004 through August 2005 was analyzed to help determine if a given property had crime levels suggesting “unsafe” conditions.

Calls for non-threatening and non-dangerous reasons -- such as missing persons, loud music, traffic-related complaints, alarm calls, and fraud – were removed from the analysis, as were all “assist” and “follow-up” calls. Remaining call types in the analysis included all calls for violent offences, threats, suspicious activity, warrants, property crime, drug/alcohol offences, drunk driving, and disturbances. Cross-streets and specific addresses from the database were examined to determine what locations had multiple threatening/dangerous calls. For a given property to be flagged as having “unsafe or unsanitary conditions,” per the statute, it had to have received 20 or more such calls for police service over the 19 month observation timeframe (or more than once per month). Locations given as an intersection or hundred-block only were flagged if they received

40 or more calls in that timeframe. Each of these properties is also considered to qualify under condition K.5, given that high rates of calls for police service equates to “high levels of municipal service requirements”.

In general small apartment developments, motel/apartments, trailer courts, and taverns had the highest incidence of reported crime as indicated by calls for service. Note that properties flagged in this survey as unsafe or unsanitary using this methodology may not necessarily be the source of the criminal activity, since persons calling the police may be doing so from adjacent properties. Calls for service can still be considered an indicator of unsafe conditions in the general vicinity, however, with a negative impact on the overall welfare and sound development of the area. Across the Study Area, there were 26 parcels found to have elevated crime levels according to this analysis.

Examples of parcels exhibiting condition (d) are shown below:



Deterioration of Site and Other Improvements

A variety of blight conditions were observed within the Study Area related to the deterioration of the site and non-primary improvements. These conditions which negatively affect the appearance and utilization of the area, most commonly include parking surface deterioration, trash, weeds and general site neglect. Several sites were found to have site maintenance problems, a lack of landscaping, or signage problems. Although this condition was most prevalent in older properties, examples of site deterioration problems are found throughout the Study Area, as shown in the photographs below and detailed in the maps and field inventory.

Examples of Condition (e)



Unusual Topography/Inadequate Public Improvements

Unusual topography is considered, in this study, to exist on parcels with steep slopes or undulating terrain. Because the Study Area is predominantly flat, there were no instances of unusual topography.

The condition of inadequate public improvements is said to exist in areas with deteriorating street surfaces, presence of overhead utilities, lack of sidewalks, curb and gutter deterioration, inadequate street lighting, lack of water service, or lack of sewer service.

A primary condition related to inadequate public improvements involves street pavement deterioration and lack of paved streets. Additionally, all parcels are considered, for purposes of this analysis, to have outdated power and phone system provision because of the reliance on overhead utilities. This is considered to be an impediment to modern development and redevelopment in the current real estate market.

Because the unit of analysis in this conditions survey is the parcel (and because public streets within the Study Area are not individual parcels) the condition of faulty street layout is referenced in the maps and tables as occurring in the adjacent parcel or parcels, rather than on the streets themselves.

Other instances of inadequate public improvements across many other parcels in the Study Area stem from the lack of adequate sidewalks or from the absence of overhead street lighting. Adequate street lighting was found to be absent in 41 Study Area parcels.

Danger to Life or Property from Fire or Other Causes

Fire safety information pertaining to the parcels in the Study Area was not gathered for this Conditions Survey as the data was not available.

High incidence of reported crime, as measured by levels of police call for dangerous or threatening situations (as described under Unsafe and Unsanitary Conditions) was considered to be an indicator of Danger to Life or Property, per the statute, for this analysis. There were 26 parcels with elevated levels of police activity using this measure. These properties are shown in the map and in the detailed parcel-by-parcel summary found in the Appendix.

Unsafe or Unhealthy Building Conditions

Unsafe or unhealthy building conditions are said to be present in parcels with environmental contamination, fire safety problems, or obviously unsafe structures or facilities.

Environmental contamination is either known or observed to exist on four parcels in the Study Area however, no separate environmental assessments were done for this Conditions Survey. Because the contamination has been identified and mitigation plans are in place for those properties, however, they are not considered to qualify as unsafe or unhealthy building conditions for this analysis.

Fire safety information was not available on Study Area properties for this analysis.

Although no interior inspections were conducted as a part of this analysis, three properties were considered sufficiently dilapidated and unsafe, based on outside appearance, as to qualify under this condition (independently of fire or environmental problems). These properties are shown in the map and in the detailed parcel-by-parcel summary found in the Appendix.

Environmental Contamination

Again, environmental contamination is known to exist on four properties in the Study area, all in relation to older underground storage tanks. No separate environmental assessments were done for this Conditions Survey, although all four properties are known to be engaged in mitigation activities to reduce contamination over time. These properties are shown in the map and in the detailed parcel-by-parcel summary found in the Appendix.

High Service Demands or Underutilized Sites

This statutory category considers two different conditions that can impact the welfare of an area. Sites (in this case parcels) exhibiting “health, safety, or welfare factors requiring high levels of municipal services” may include areas of high crime or repeated fire code violations. Areas characterized by “substantial physical underutilization or vacancy of sites, buildings, or other improvements” may include vacant lots, parcels with vacant structures, or parcels for which the value of improvement is disproportionately small in relation to the land value.

For this analysis, underutilization of parcels, as evidenced by site or building vacancy, was considered as an indication of this condition. The Study Area includes 24 parcels with either vacant land or vacant buildings-- a sizable portion of the total inventory, totaling approximately ten percent of the total Study Area parcels. These properties are considered underutilized for the purposes of this analysis.

Properties having high rates of traffic accidents,(as discussed under Faulty Street Layout) are considered to require “high levels of municipal services” due to safety factors, as per the statute. Across the Study Area, 71 total parcels are thus affected.

Finally, properties exhibiting high rates of reported crime (as discussed under Unsafe or Unsanitary Conditions) are likewise considered to be a burden on municipal services as outlined in the statute. There are 26 parcels with this Study Area with a history of high

levels of police calls (more than 20 calls for dangerous or threatening situations over a 19 month period).

These properties are shown in the map and in the detailed parcel-by-parcel summary found in the Appendix.

Section IV

Summary of Findings

The presence of blight “...substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of the municipality, retards the provision of housing accommodations, or constitutes an economic or social liability, and is a menace to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare...” [Colorado Revised Statute 31-25-103(2)]

It is the conclusion of this survey that within the Study Area, as described in this report, there is a presence of adverse physical conditions sufficient to meet criteria established in the state statute. Although some portions of the Study Area are in adequate or sound condition, there exist deteriorated and substandard conditions throughout the Study area as a whole, which could lead the City Council to a finding that this area is blighted. The conclusion of this study is based on the following summary of qualifying conditions found in the Study Area and described in this report.

LCG did not perform a title search on any properties within the Study Area, therefore Condition G (defective or unusual title rendering property unmarketable) was not identified.

(a) and (i): Deteriorating or deteriorated structures and buildings identified as unsafe or unsanitary were evident within the Study Area. Several buildings exhibit deterioration in primary or secondary structures. Additionally, problems exist with the physical condition of older structures. Instances of blight, due in part to apparent neglect, were evident on several sites.

(b) and (c): Conditions of faulty street and lot layout existed throughout the Study Area. The conditions that did exist concerning faulty street and lot layout included problems associated with poor vehicular access, traffic accident history, and faulty lot layout, shape and size.

(d) and (h): Unsanitary or unsafe conditions and endangerment were prevalent throughout the Study Area. Conditions found included poorly lit or unlit areas; curb and gutter deterioration, unscreened trash and machinery, and abandoned vehicles, as well as areas of elevated police calls for dangerous situations.

(e): Substandard site improvements were prevalent throughout the Study Area. Conditions included parking surface deterioration, neglect and site maintenance problems, trash/debris/weeds.

(f): *Unusual topography and inadequate public improvements* were evident throughout the Study Area. Inadequate public improvement in the form of direct water and sewer connections were present in the blocks east and west of Main Street and north of Mountain View Avenue. Street pavement (and shoulder) deterioration, lack of sidewalks, curb & gutter, and particularly, overhead utilities was present at various locations within the Study Area.

(j) *Environmental contamination* is either known or observed to exist on four parcel within the Study Area.

(k.5): *High Services Demand or Site Underutilization* could be found at several sites throughout the Study Area due to vacant land and buildings.

Ten of the eleven qualifying blight conditions specified by state statute were found in this Study Area. In all, there were 38 parcels totaling 26 acres with at least five qualifying conditions present.

Table 1 summarizes blight qualifying conditions present in the Study Area.

Table 1
Southeast Longmont Conditions Survey - Summary of Findings

	<i>Blight Qualifying Conditions</i>										
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)	(h)	(i)	(j)	(k.5)
Study Area	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes		Yes	yes	yes	yes

Source: Leland Consulting Group.

- (a) *Slum, deteriorated, or deteriorating structures;*
- (b) *Predominance of defective or inadequate street layout;*
- (c) *Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness;*
- (d) *Unsanitary or unsafe conditions;*
- (e) *Deterioration of site or other improvements;*
- (f) *Unusual topography or inadequate public improvements or utilities;*
- (g) *Defective or unusual conditions of title rendering the title non-marketable;*
- (h) *The existence of conditions that endanger life or property by fire or other causes;*
- (i) *Buildings that are unsafe or unhealthy for persons to live or work in because of building code*

violations, dilapidations, deterioration, defective design, physical construction, or faulty or inadequate facilities;

- (j) *Environmental contamination of buildings or property;*
 - (k.5) *The existence of health, safety, or welfare factors requiring high levels of municipal services or substantial physical underutilization or vacancy of sites, buildings, or other improvements*
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Appendix A:

Maps of Conditions Survey Findings

Appendix B:

Field Survey Ledger
