

# Vacant Property Reclamation and Neighborhood Change in Southwest Center City Philadelphia



2112 Catharine Street in 1998 and 2008

Fels Institute of Government  
University of Pennsylvania

Hallie Mittleman and Catherine Lamb

July 2008

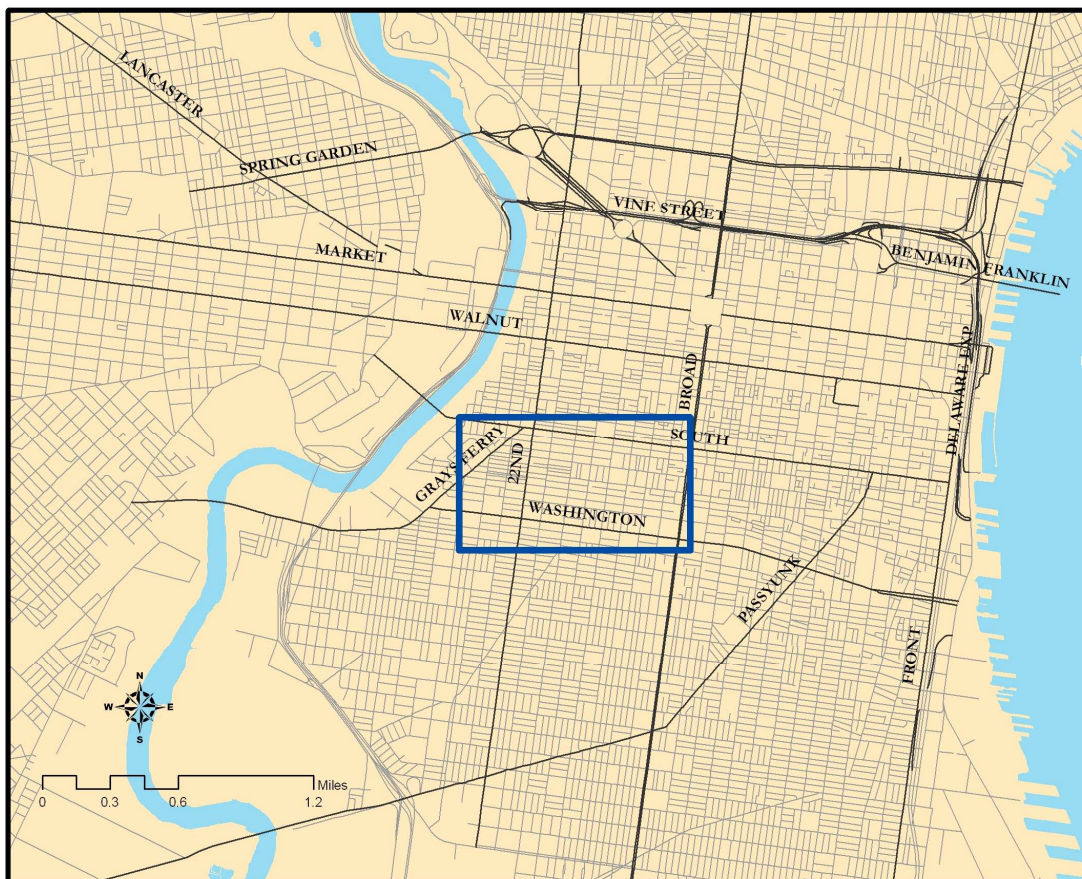
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report, along with data and photographs from the 2008 survey on which this project is based, can be found at <http://www.cml.upenn.edu/parcelbase>.

Thanks are due to the University of Pennsylvania's Cartographic Modeling Lab (CML) for displaying this information and for providing data that was essential to the completion of this project.

Special thanks to John Kromer, Senior Consultant at the Fels Institute of Government, who organized this project.

### Southwest Center City, Philadelphia



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
SUMMARY FINDINGS.....	2
BACKGROUND: THE 1998 VACANT HOUSE INVENTORY.....	3
THE 2008 SURVEY UPDATE .....	3
PART I: HOUSES .....	4
KEY FINDINGS.....	4
Visual Survey of Current Conditions .....	4
Neighboring Property Characteristics.....	25
Tax Delinquency.....	27
Sales Transactions .....	28
Tax Abatements.....	31
Multiple Property Owners .....	33
Owner-Occupancy.....	34
Aggregated Addresses and Other Anomalies .....	36
PART II: RESIDENTS .....	38
THE 2008 RESIDENTIAL SURVEY.....	38
KEY FINDINGS.....	40
Age Characteristics.....	40
Expected Length of Residence.....	40
Household size .....	41
Prior ownership.....	41
Prior Residence.....	42
Employment Locations .....	45
CONCLUSION .....	46
APPENDICES .....	47





## INTRODUCTION

A survey conducted by the City of Philadelphia in 1998 identified 553 vacant houses located within the area known as Southwest Center City (Broad Street to Grays Ferry Avenue, South Street to Washington Avenue). Results of the survey (referred to in this report as the “1998 survey” or “1998 inventory”) were published in a directory that included, for each property, a fact sheet and photograph. The fact sheet provided information on ownership, purchase date, and tax delinquency status.

Since 1998, the survey area has changed dramatically, as Southwest Center City has been influenced by new investment, development in adjacent downtown-area neighborhoods, and the wide use of the ten-year tax abatement development incentive. As a result, many houses that had been identified as vacant in the 1998 survey are now occupied.

This project, conducted in the spring of 2008 by the Fels Institute of Government of the University of Pennsylvania, revisited each of the vacant properties surveyed in 1998 to better understand the changing neighborhood. Each property was photographed and a database was compiled with information about occupancy, purchase date and price, tax delinquency, and ownership. In addition, a short-form postcard survey was sent to owner occupants to understand more about who is living in the area. Ultimately, this project revealed that the changes in this neighborhood over the last ten years are remarkable.

The purpose of the survey is to provide a longitudinal look at neighborhood transformation. As a compilation of inventory information, as opposed to an evaluation or assessment, this report is intended to serve as an information source for planning and evaluation and to inspire further discussion to support strategic planning and policymaking associated with vacant property use in Philadelphia.

This report consists of two parts. Part I, Houses, describes changes in the visual status, occupancy, purchasing patterns, and ownership of the houses vacant in 1998. Part II, Residents, describes characteristics of owner-occupants living in what were once vacant houses.

## SUMMARY FINDINGS

<b>1998 Vacant House Inventory</b>	<b>2008 Vacant House Inventory</b>
0 renovated and occupied houses	307 renovated and occupied houses (56 percent of 1998 inventory)
553 vacant houses	49 vacant houses (9 percent of 1998 inventory)
194 tax delinquent houses (40 percent) owing a total of \$3,302,454	14 tax delinquent houses (3 percent) owing a total of \$27,330
Between 1990-1998, there were 152 sales transactions involving these properties	Between 1999- 2008, there were 403 sales transactions involving these properties

### Other Highlights of 2008 Inventory Update

#### *Current House Characteristics*

The researchers performed a visual survey, and collected information from city real estate records to determine the current conditions of the houses surveyed in 1998. The key results from this study are as follows:

- 66 houses (12 percent) are unoccupied but under development. An estimated 35 of these houses were torn down for infill new construction.
- 89 houses (16 percent) were demolished with no subsequent construction, and are now vacant land.
- 21 houses (4 percent) were demolished and developed as improved open space.
- 15 houses (3 percent) were developed for other uses, both residential and nonresidential.
- 157 of the occupied houses (51 percent of 307) are owner-occupied.

#### *Current Resident Characteristics*

The researchers surveyed residents of owner-occupied houses to collect data on characteristics of the residents. The sample data provided the following results:

- 84 percent are under 46 years old, and half are between 25 and 35 years old.
- Nearly 60 percent plan to stay in their homes for more than five years.
- Over half moved to their current homes from other parts of central and south Philadelphia.
- Nearly all are professionally employed.
- Just over half were renters before they purchased their current houses.
- About two-thirds of households are between one and two members.

## **BACKGROUND: THE 1998 VACANT HOUSE INVENTORY**

The vacant property inventory compiled in February, 1998 is part of a larger series, PHILADELPHIA SNAPSHOT, an inventory of vacant houses and lots in Philadelphia neighborhoods. The series combined on-site photographs and field data with city agency information about tax delinquency, ownership, and sales data obtained through the Neighborhood Information System operated by the University of Pennsylvania's Cartographic Modeling Lab (CML). The inventory information was shared and distributed among community based groups, city agencies and educational institutions.

The survey was completed under direction of the Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD) in cooperation with other city agencies and the University of Pennsylvania. Contained in the appendices of this report are the letter of introduction and a sample page published from the original directory.

## **THE 2008 SURVEY UPDATE**

During the spring of 2008 a Fels Institute graduate student updated the 1998 inventory. This project consisted of three parts.

**Visual Survey** A visual survey of each property from the 1998 inventory was completed to assess the current vacancy and rehabilitation status. Each property was photographed and an on-site assessment was conducted using a numerical classification system.

**City Real Estate Records** The 1998 data was transferred from its original printed format to an electronic database. Fields from the 1998 survey incorporated into the database are: 1998 owner, last transfer date and sale price as documented in 1998, and amount and duration (number of years) of tax delinquency amount.

The database also contains current data on the properties, gathered from the City of Philadelphia's Board of Revision of Taxes Property Search Service. The data includes: ownership information (owner name and address), market value, last transfer price and date, real estate tax amount, and dollar value of property tax abatements. In addition, researchers collected information regarding tax delinquency from the Cartographic Modeling Lab's parcelbase application.

**Short Form Postcard Survey** Residents of current owner-occupied houses that had been identified as vacant in the 1998 inventory were sent a postcard questionnaire. Survey responses provided information about the number of years in residence at the house, prior residence, views about the block and neighborhood environment, and expected length of residence at the address.

# PART I: HOUSES

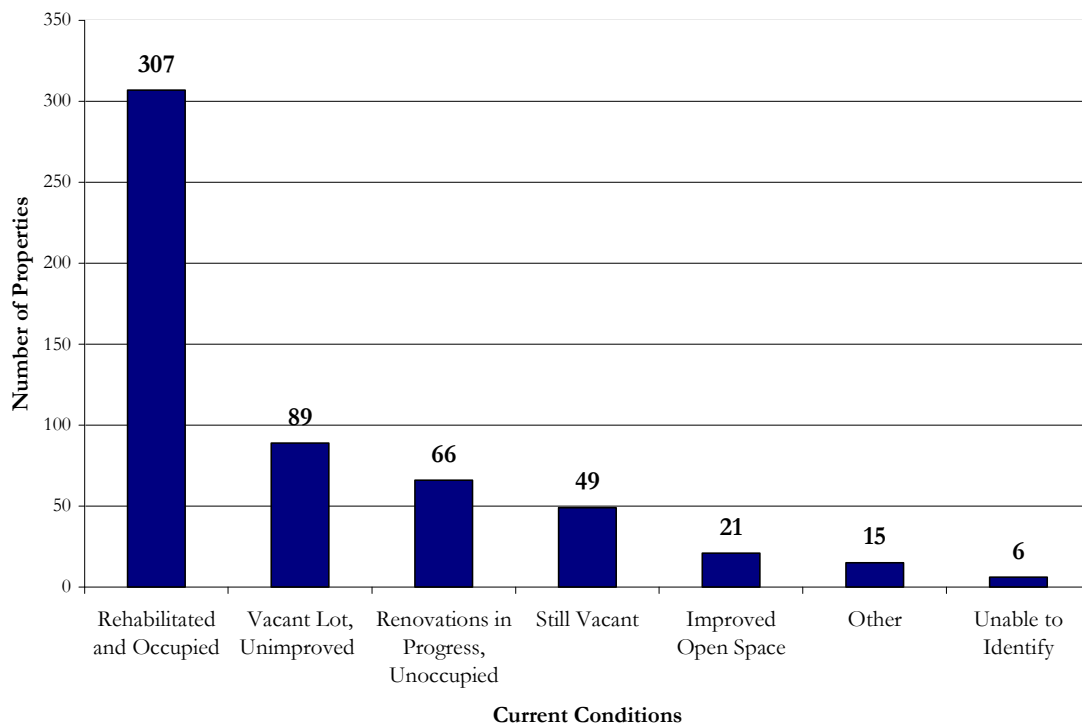
## KEY FINDINGS

### Visual Survey of Current Conditions

In the ten years since the City conducted the original inventory of vacant houses in Southwest Center City, much has changed in the neighborhood. Ninety percent of the once-vacant houses have been improved in some manner. Some are fully renovated with new inhabitants while others were torn down to create development-ready open space.

The scale of property transformation can best be illustrated through the results of the visual survey performed in this project. Researchers revisited and photographed each house inventoried in 1998 and classified current property conditions relative to their 1998 status in seven categories. The categories and survey results are summarized in Chart 1.1.

*Chart 1.1 Current Conditions of Houses from the 1998 Vacant House Inventory*



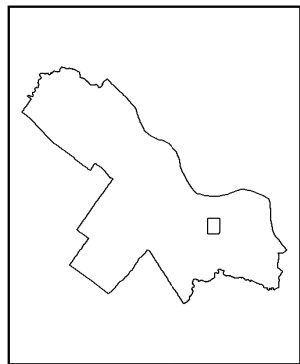
Notes for Chart 1.1:

- Six properties were classified as “unable to identify” because the surveyor was unable to find addresses for the properties. Five of the properties are located on the 1500 block of Webster St.

The following section provides pictures, maps and narratives for all categories listed in Chart 1.1, except for the “unable to identify” category. Additional information is provided to illustrate two other interesting improvement characteristics: properties that have been renovated as non-residential structures, and properties that have been torn down and rebuilt from the ground up.



Map 1.1 Current Conditions of Houses from the 1998 Vacant House Inventory



Legend

- 2008 Status
- Rehabilitated and Occupied
  - Unimproved Vacant Lot
  - Renovations In Progress, Unoccupied
  - Still Vacant
  - Improved Open Space
  - Other

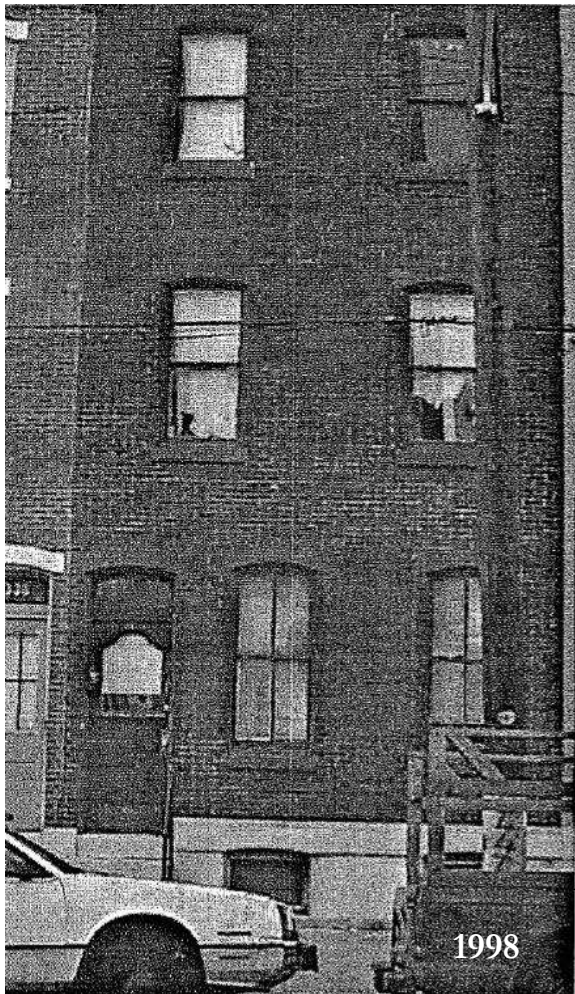


**307 houses (56 percent of 553-house inventory) are now renovated and occupied**

The majority of houses that had been vacant in 1998 are now renovated and occupied. Renovations ranged from minor to major improvements. Major renovations include large façade and roof improvements, and new windows and doors. The overwhelming majority of these houses look dramatically different from their 1998 appearances.

For the properties shown below and on the pages that follow, the black and white image is a photograph taken at the time of the 1998 survey, and the color image was taken in 2008.

**2338 Catharine Street**



Map 1.2 Property Characteristics 2008: Rehabilitated and Occupied



- Legend**
- Other Houses, 1998 Inventory
  - 2008 Status: Rehabilitated and Occupied



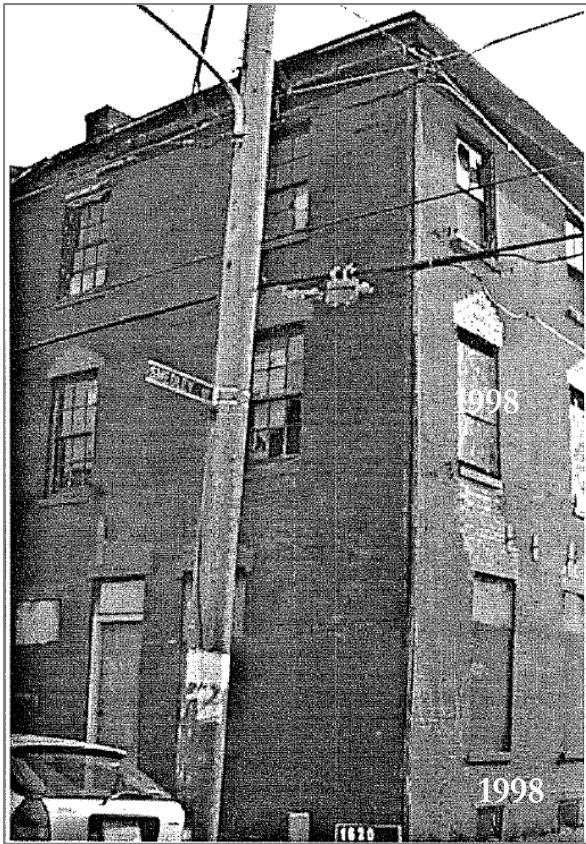
Among the 307 houses renovated and occupied, the degree of renovations ranged from minor to major improvements. For example, 2215 Madison Square, shown below, has new windows and doors, façade repairs, and a new roof. In comparison, shown on the adjacent page is 1620 Bainbridge Street, which exhibits a greater degree of renovation. In fact, it is most likely the property was completely torn down and rebuilt

### 2215 Madison Square





1620 Bainbridge Street





## 89 houses (16 percent) were demolished and are now vacant land

This category includes houses that have been demolished and are now unimproved vacant lots. Though often vacant lots are adjacent to other vacant lots, together creating one large open space, each lot is counted separately. For example, in the images below, a cleared site that consisted of five adjacent legal addresses is counted as five vacant lots.

### 1000 Block South 17<sup>th</sup> Street (west side)



**Map 1.3 Property Characteristics 2008: Unimproved Vacant Lots**



**Legend**

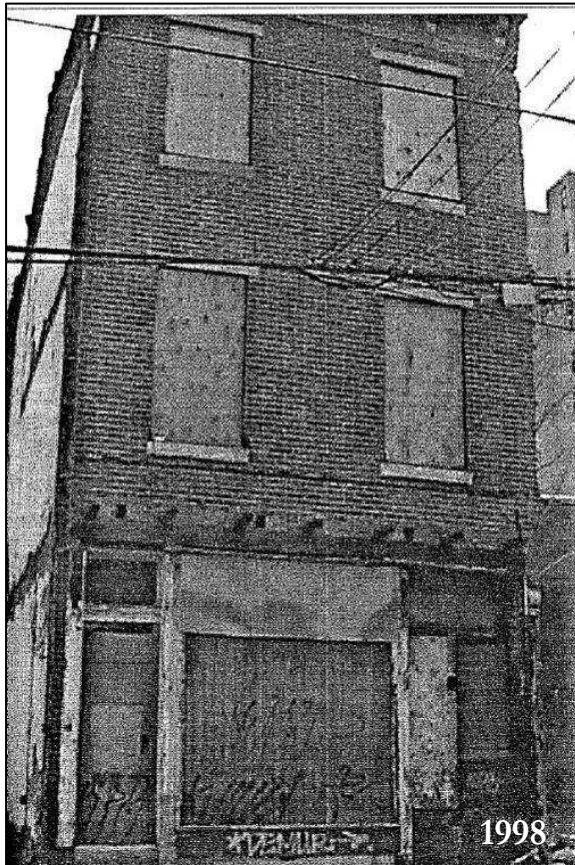
- Other Houses, 1998 Inventory
- 2008 Status: Unimproved Vacant Lots



**66 houses (12 percent) are in the process of being rehabilitated or rebuilt but are not yet occupied**

This category includes unoccupied houses in the process of being renovated, signaled by scaffolding and work crews, or obvious recent renovations. Often houses in this category are posted for sale.

### 1514 Bainbridge Street



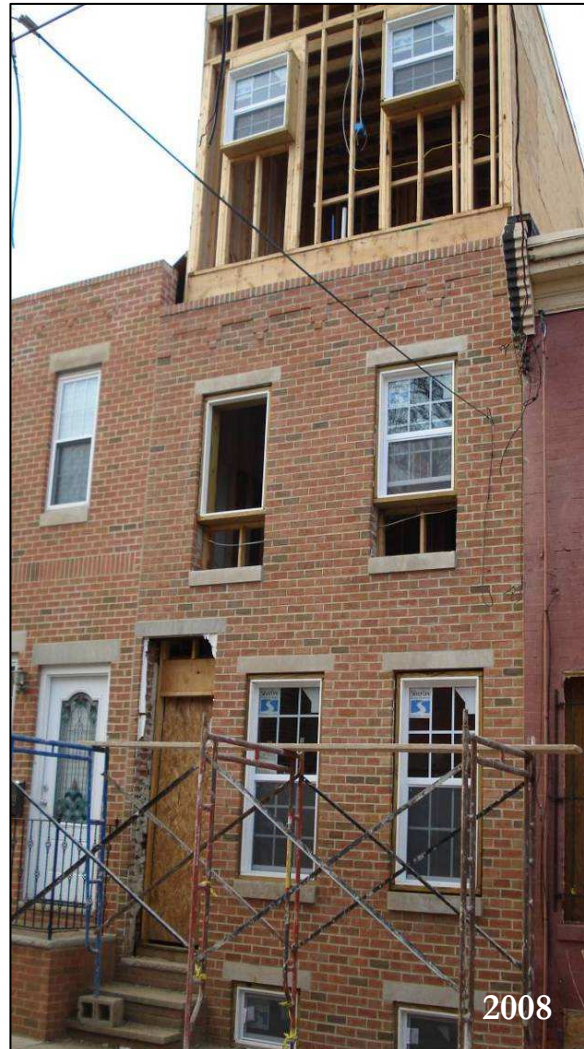


Map 1.4 Property Characteristics 2008: Renovations In Progress, Unoccupied



The following pictures show unoccupied properties in various stages of renovation. These properties are another example of the significant extent to which some of the surveyed houses have been renovated.

### 2207 Kimball Street





1700 Catharine Street



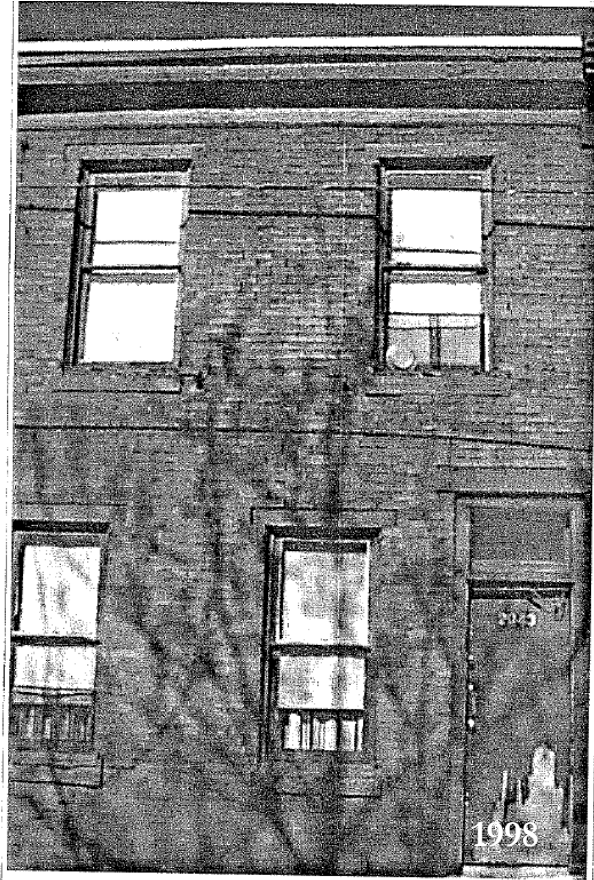
2238 Kimball Street





49 houses (9 percent) inventoried in 1998 as vacant are still vacant

2043 Kimball Street



Map 1.5 Property Characteristics 2008: Vacant Houses



**Legend**

- Other Houses, 1998 Inventory
- 2008 Status: Vacant House

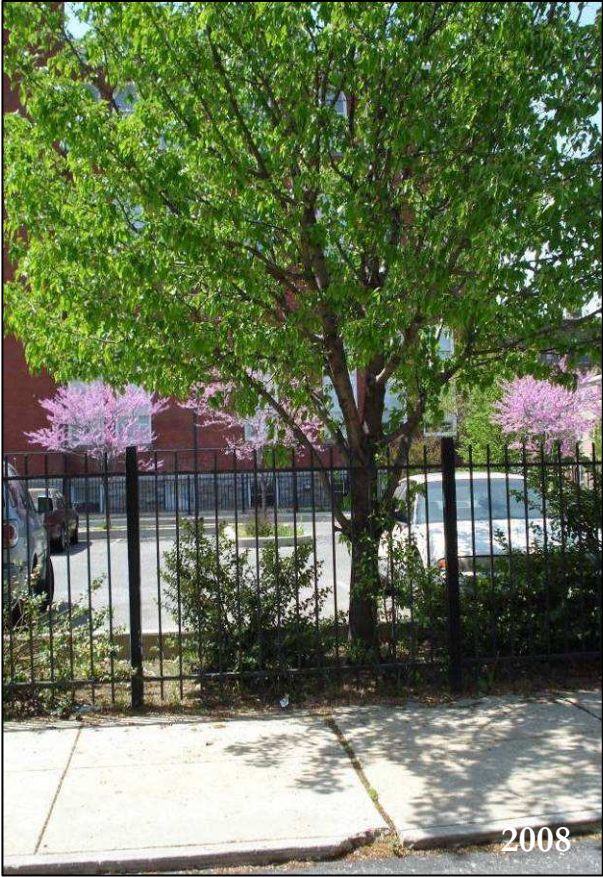
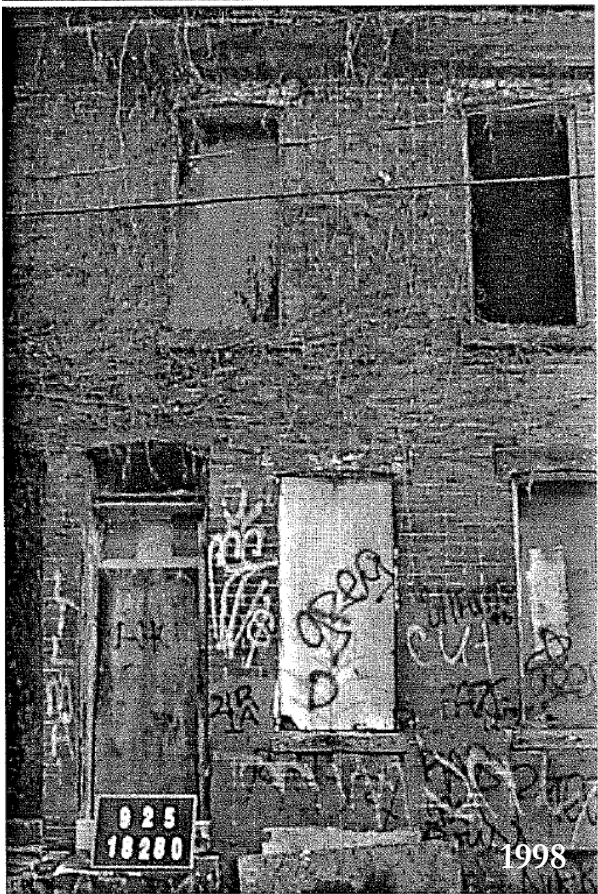




**21 properties (4 percent) are now improved open space**

This category includes houses that were torn down to become paved parking lots, yards, and community gardens.

**925 S. Bonsall Terrace**



Map 1.6 Property Characteristics 2008: Improved Open Space

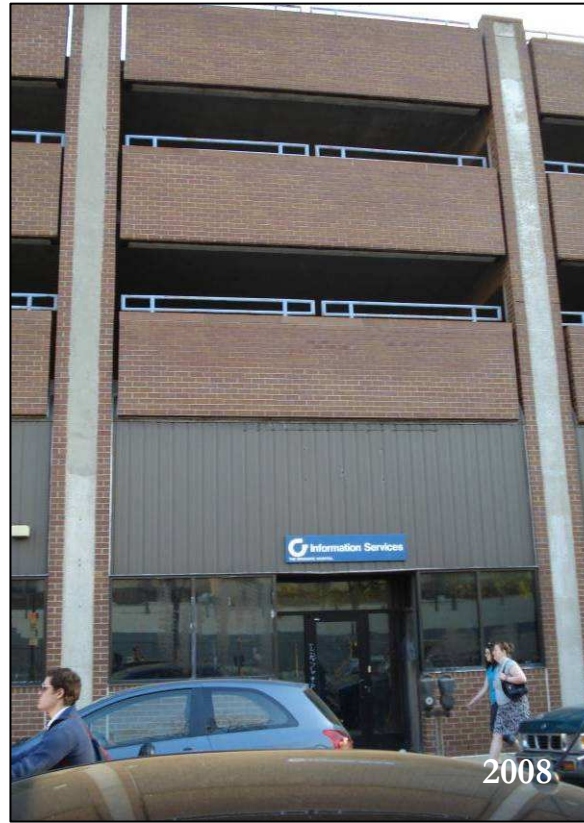




## 15 properties (3 percent) are developed for other uses

Some of the once-vacant houses in the 1998 inventory were developed for other uses. Properties in this category include the Graduate Hospital Parking Garage, pictured below, and properties rehabilitated for institutional use, such as Universal Community Schools and a church.

### 1702 South Street



**Map 1.7 Property Characteristics 2008: Other**

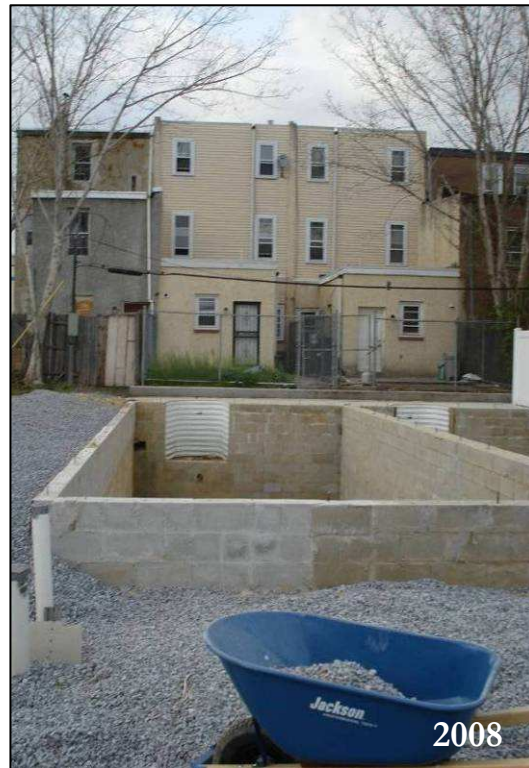
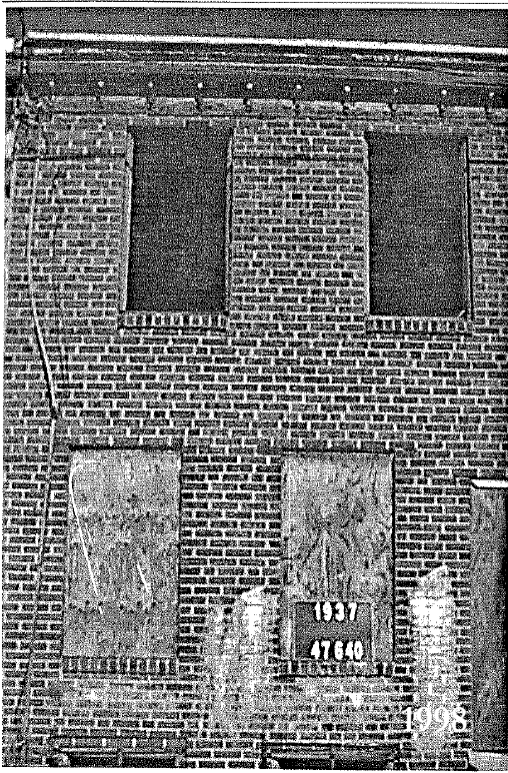


## 35 of the properties (6%) have been torn down and rebuilt from the ground up

Interestingly, some properties surveyed had been torn down and rebuilt from the ground up. These properties are classified in the “rehabilitated and occupied,” “in process of being rehabilitated but unoccupied,” or “other” categories. These buildings differ from houses with entirely new facades (as in the example of 1514 Bainbridge on page 12), but the same original structure. They include houses and non-residential structures.

Tear-downs were not classified as a distinct, mutually exclusive category because of the difficulty in positively identifying the properties. The researcher was able to identify some of the ‘tear-down’ properties from conversations with workers and residents during field work. Examples of these buildings are included here because often these properties signal a greater extent of neighborhood transformation.

### 1937 Kimball Street





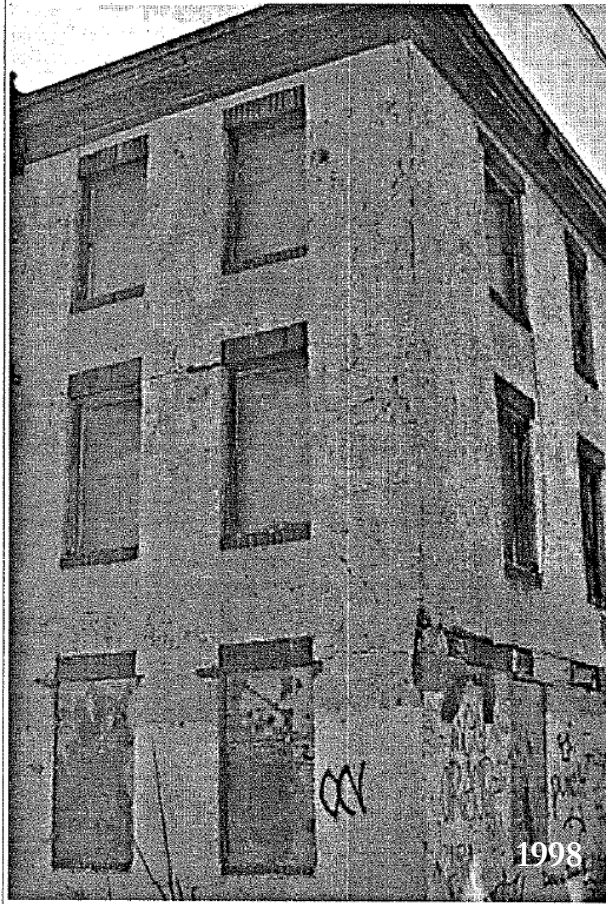
Map 1.8 Property Characteristics 2008: Tear Down Properties



- Legend**
- 2008 Status: Tear Down Properties
  - Other Parcels, 1998 Inventory

The pictures below show a particularly dramatic instance of property rehabilitation. Almost half of the houses on the 1000 block of S. Dorrance Street were torn down and rebuilt.

### 1000 S. Dorrance Street



## Neighboring Property Characteristics

In addition to an examination of the condition of properties from the 1998 inventory, the 2008 updated survey also assessed the condition of neighboring properties. For each of the revisited 2008 houses, the surveyor evaluated the condition of properties adjacent to the right and left. Table 1.1 summarizes the data collected on the neighboring properties.

The survey found that the condition of adjacent properties was often similar or identical to the condition of the 1998-survey property. For example, vacant houses were often found next to other vacant houses. The key findings from the neighboring property assessment are:

- Vacant lots are more likely to be next to a vacant lot than an occupied house
- Houses in the process of being renovated are less likely to neighbor vacant houses, and more likely to neighbor vacant lots
- Occupied, renovated houses are most likely to neighbor other occupied houses

*Table 1.1 Conditions of Adjacent Properties in the 2008 Inventory*

2008 Survey Property Conditions	Adjacent Property Conditions			Corner Property (No Neighbor on One Side)
	Vacant House	Vacant Lot	Occupied House	
Still Vacant	16.3%	17.3%	56.1%	10.2%
Vacant Lot	5.3%	54.7%	33.5%	6.5%
Rehabilitated and Occupied House	3.6%	6.2%	87.3%	2.9%
In Process of Renovation	4.1%	24.4%	66.7%	4.9%
All Properties	5.2%	17.7%	72.6%	4.5%

## City Agency Data

In addition to assessing the visible physical condition of vacant houses included in the 1998 inventory, researchers examined the current tax delinquency, recent sales, tax abatement, and ownership status of each property.<sup>1</sup> The following sections compare city agency data available in 1998 with 2008 data. A brief overview is also included describing the role of city agencies and non-profit entities in neighborhood development.

Comparing 1998 and 2008 city agency data further demonstrates the significant changes in neighborhood characteristics established by the visual survey. The key findings are as follows:

- Fewer properties have outstanding taxes. In 1998, nearly forty percent of the properties were tax delinquent in amounts greater than \$1,000; in 2008 only three percent were more than \$1,000 tax delinquent.
- Sales activity, nearly dormant between 1988 and 1998, occurred at a faster pace between 1998 and 2008. Of the 827 sales transactions associated with these properties since 1970, over half occurred in the last decade.
- Forty-six percent of the houses sold after 1998 sold for more than \$100,000.
- The median sales price for the decade spanning 1999 to 2008 is roughly nine times larger than the median sales price from 1990 to 1998. (\$140,000, compared to \$15,000).
- At least fourteen percent of properties sold since 1998 utilized the tax abatement incentive. Unfortunately, the precise number of properties scheduled to receive a tax abatement could not be determined because an updating of Board of Revision of Taxes property records had not been completed at the time of this project.<sup>2</sup>
- Owners of multiple properties do not appear to have had a great influence on the changing characteristics of the neighborhood.
- Twenty-four percent of the houses are owner-occupied.

The legal addresses of some properties have changed since the 2008 survey, based on development that has taken place during the past decade. Some individual property addresses have been aggregated with other property addresses in connection with larger-scale development, such as the construction of the Graduate Hospital parking garage. Other individual property addresses have become multiple addresses, as some properties have been subdivided into condominium units. The net result of these changes is that the 553 addresses that appeared in the 1998 survey became 566 addresses as of 2008. A more detailed explanation of these anomalies is included at the end of this section.

---

<sup>1</sup> The data was obtained using the City of Philadelphia's Board of Revision Taxes search service and the University of Pennsylvania's Cartographic Modeling Lab Neighborhood Information System.

<sup>2</sup> See Tax Abatement section for detailed information on this number, it is misleading.



It is important to note that not all of the information about property characteristics, as described above, could be obtained for every property. Some property-characteristics information that was available for properties in the 1998 inventory could not be found for those properties in 2008, and vice versa. Notes are included in each section detailing available information.

## Tax Delinquency

One result of the neighborhood transformation in Southwest Center City is a decrease in the amount of unpaid property taxes. In 1998, 194 of the inventoried houses (39 percent) were significantly tax delinquent, defined here as owing more than \$1,000 in unpaid taxes.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, nearly half of the owners of significantly tax delinquent houses owed more than \$5,000, and nearly one out of four were delinquent for two or more years. The total amount of unpaid taxes for the 194 significantly delinquent properties was \$3,302,454.

Ten years later, the number of significantly tax delinquent properties has diminished considerably. Only 14 properties (3 percent) are significantly tax delinquent, and all of these properties owe less than \$5,000. Only eight properties (4 percent) of the 194 houses that were significantly tax delinquent in 1998 are still tax delinquent. In total, the city is owed \$27,330 in unpaid taxes from the 2008 significantly tax delinquent properties.<sup>4</sup> Table 1.2 presents the tax delinquent data from both the 1998 and 2008 surveys.

**Table 1.2** *Degree of Tax Delinquency by Dollar Amount and Number of Years Delinquent*

Amount Owed	Number of Years				1998 Total	2008 Total
	1	2 to 5	6 to 9	10 +		
\$1,001 to \$5,000	94	5	0	0	99	14
\$5,001 to \$10,000	36	6	1	0	43	0
\$10,001 to \$50,000	8	17	8	2	35	0
\$50,001 to \$100,000	0	1	5	4	10	0
\$100,000+	0	2	0	5	7	0
Total	138	31	14	11	194	14

Notes for Table 1.2:

- 1998 tax delinquency information available for 499 of the 553 houses because data was not recorded for all properties.
- 2008 tax delinquency information available for 482 of the 566 properties because records were missing from CML parcelbase.
- 2008 data was not available for 12 of the tax delinquent properties in the 1998 inventory.
- Of the 194 tax delinquent 1998 properties, seven are part of multiple properties in 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Properties owing less than \$1000 are not considered significantly tax delinquent in this survey. This distinction was made to isolate properties that were more likely to be owned by long-term offenders. In 1998, 3 houses owed less than \$1000, totaling \$1,805. In 2008, 69 properties owed less than \$1000, totaling \$19,505. 23 of the 69 properties owed less than \$100.

<sup>4</sup> The 2008 Vacant Property Survey used the most recent tax delinquent data available from September 28, 2007. Data obtained from ParcelBase, a resource of the Cartographic Modeling Lab at the University of Pennsylvania.

## Sales Transactions

The 2008 vacant property survey shows that there has been a dramatic increase in property transfers during the past ten years. Since 1970, there have been at least 827 sales transactions, over half of which occurred in the last decade.

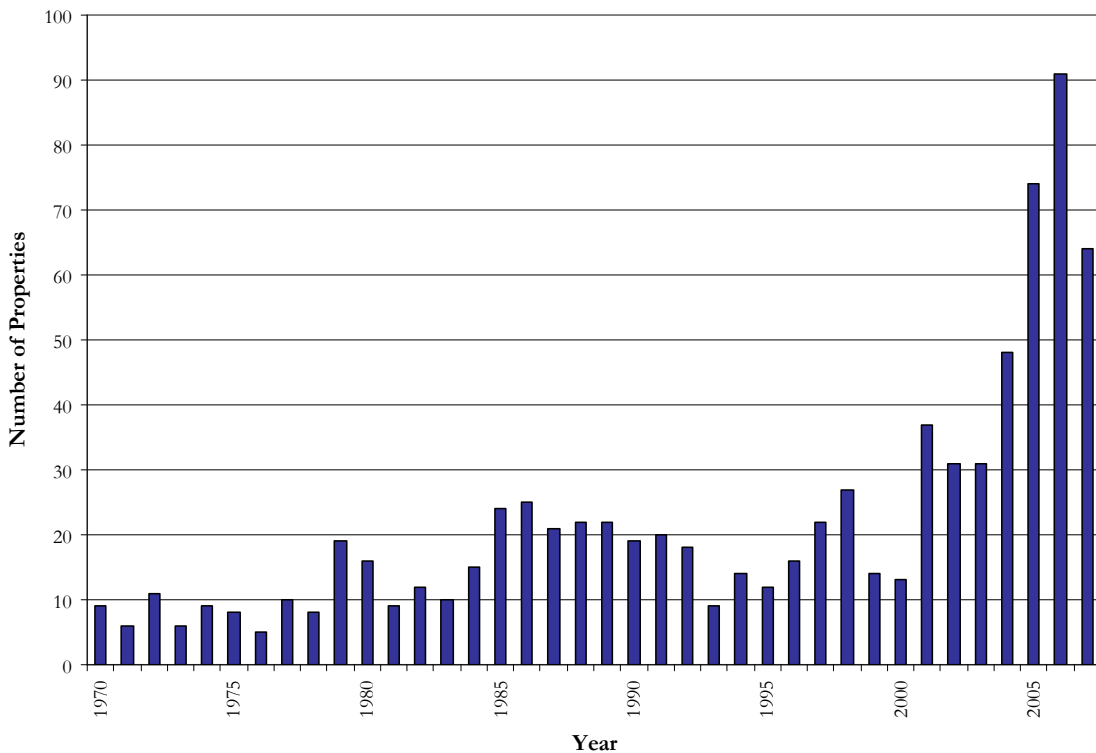
Chart 1.2 shows the increasing trend in number of sales between 1999 and 2008.

The complete sales history for each property surveyed was unavailable; therefore the data in Chart 1.2 does not include multiple sales of the same property.



Rehabilitated houses for sale at 728 S. 15<sup>th</sup> Street

*Chart 1.2 Number of Sales Transactions per Year*



Note for chart 1.2:

- Most recent sales date recorded at the time research was conducted was October 24, 2007. The most recent sales date data was available for 503 of the 565 properties in 2008. Data was not available for 42 properties. Properties listed in the survey set that are now a single property are counted only once. There are 20 such properties.

Prior to 1998, the rate of sales transactions for the inventoried houses was much lower than in the decade between 1998 and 2008. At the time of the 1998 inventory, more than seventy percent of the houses inventoried had remained under the same ownership since 1980, and only 30 percent of the houses were sold in the eight years before the survey was conducted (1990-1998). Table 1.3 illustrates the pace of turnover when the survey was conducted in 1998.

**Table 1.3**      *Number of Houses Sold by Last Sales Transaction Date*  
*1998 Survey Data Inventory*

<b>Last Sales Date</b>	<b>Number of Properties</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
1990-1998	152	30.5%
1980-1989	167	33.5%
1970-1979	85	17.0%
Before 1970	95	19.0%

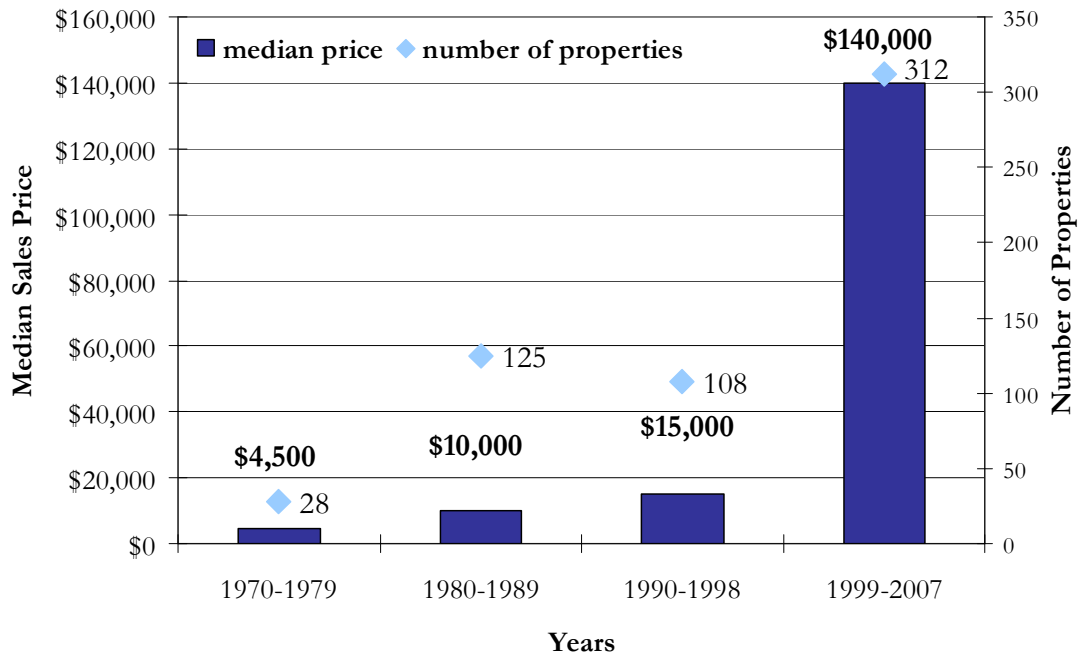
Notes for Table 1.3:

- This table does not include data for all 553 properties surveyed in the 1998 inventory because information was not available about the last sales date for 54 houses; therefore the table only includes data from 499 properties.
- The 1998 inventory was compiled in February of that year, and therefore did not capture sales that occurred from March to December of that year. Data gathered in 2008 documented 26 properties were sold during that time. These 26 properties are included in the 1990 to 1998 totals, and their last sales date recorded in the 1998 inventory is excluded. For example, nine properties were documented in the 1998 inventory with a last transfer date between 1980 and 1989, but the 2008 inventory showed their last sale date occurred in 1998. Therefore, the last sales date for the properties is between 1990 and 1998, not between 1980 and 1989.



In the last ten years, both sales prices and the number of properties sold have increased substantially. Chart 1.3 shows that the median sale price for surveyed vacant houses from 1990 to 1998 was \$15,000. In contrast, the median sale price in the last ten years has been \$140,000, nearly nine times more than the prior decade.

**Chart 1.3** *Median Sale Price for all Transactions*



Notes for Chart 1.3:

- Transfers in the amount of \$1 were omitted from data. The total number of transfers included in the data set is 573. Number of sales omitted due to dollar transfers is 236. These transactions occurred in the following years: 61 in 1970-1979, 41 in 1980-1989, 45 in 1990-1998, and 89 in 1999-2007.

Before 1998, only two houses sold for \$100,000 or more. In contrast, 188 properties sold for \$100,000 or more between 1999 and 2007, 115 of which (23 percent) sold for \$250,000 or more. Table 1.4 shows the last sale price by the most recent sale date from the 2008 data.

**Table 1.4 Last Sale Price by Most Recent Sale Date 2008 Survey Properties**

Sale Amount	Last Sale Date					Total	Percent
	Before 1970	1970 - 1979	1980 - 1989	1990 - 1998	1999 - 2007		
\$500,000 or greater					30	30	6.0%
\$250,001 to \$500,000				7	75	82	16.3%
\$100,001 to \$250,000			2	2	83	87	17.3%
\$50,001 to \$100,000				5	43	48	9.6%
\$10,001 to \$50,000			7	20	57	84	16.7%
\$2 to \$10,000		3	10	7	39	59	11.8%
\$1	12	11	5	9	75	112	22.3%
Total	12	14	24	50	402	502	
Percent	2.4%	2.8%	4.8%	10.0%	80.1%		

Notes for Table 1.4:

- No data available for 64 properties of the 566 properties in the 2008 sample.

### Tax Abatements

Local legislation that took effect in 1997, 2000, and 2003 authorized ten-year abatements from real estate taxes associated with the value of certain new residential construction, rehabilitation, home improvement, and modernization activities across the city. The abatement period is ten years, beginning after the completion of improvements or the conveyance of the property following development.

Apparently due to a lag in the updating of Board of Revision of Taxes (BRT) records accessed through a public online database, the BRT web site showed that only 58 of the properties surveyed in 2008 had taken advantage of the tax abatement program, representing 11.5 percent of the total properties in the 2008 inventory, and just over 14 percent of the properties sold since 1999. The total amount of tax dollars abated equaled \$3,327,453. Table 1.4 shows the amount of tax dollars abated by the number of properties.

BRT is in the process of installing new software that will provide real-time data in the future. When the BRT web site is updated, it is anticipated that all or nearly all of the houses for which rehabilitation has been completed will be shown to have obtained the tax abatement. This expectation is based on the fact that the availability of the tax abatement was widely known by property developers active in Southwest Center City between 1998 and 2008 and because the abatement was promoted in marketing information associated with newly developed properties in Southwest Center City and nearby areas during this time.

In addition to the lag in online database, another reason the 2008 survey does not show widespread use of the tax abatement is because the BRT would not have issued and recorded an abatement approval for properties that were in the process of being renovated or that were unsold (based on visual survey data, 66 properties had this characteristic). Approval and the start of the ten-year abatement period do not occur until improvements are complete.

*Table 1.5 Tax Abatement Status, data from 2008 survey*

<b>Tax Exempt Amount</b>	<b>Number of Properties</b>	<b>Percent of Tax Abated Properties</b>
\$1 to \$10,000	17	29.3%
\$10,001 to \$50,000	11	19.0%
\$50,001-\$100,000	20	34.5%
\$100,001 or greater	10	17.2%



## Multiple Property Owners

In distressed urban areas with a large number of vacant houses, a particular individual, organization or corporation may hold title to multiple vacant houses. Within such areas, the action or inaction of these multiple-property owners can strongly influence development potential and development activity.

Table 1.6 presents data on the top multiple-property owners from the 1998 and 2008 inventories. The data indicates that ownership of multiple properties was not a major factor influencing development in Southwest Center City from 1998 to 2008 because the number of properties held by multiple-property owners in both 1998 and 2008 was relatively small.

*Table 1.6 Top Owners of Multiple Properties, 1998 and 2008*

<b>Top 1998 Owners</b>	<b>Number of Properties</b>	<b>Top 2008 Owners</b>	<b>Number of Properties</b>
Philadelphia Housing Authority	12	Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia	14
Kenneth Gamble	7	Residences of St. Anthony	13
Karl S Krumholz	7	Universal Community Homes/ Universal Real Estate	12
City of Philadelphia	7	Philadelphia Housing Authority	7
Godfrey Corporation	6	Small Girl Real Construction	7
Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation	6	City of Philadelphia	5
Lorene H Carey Jackson	6	Everbest Properties, LLC	5
South Central Development Corporation (acquisition for Residences of St. Anthony project)	4	Jamira Real Estate Holding	4
Universal Community Homes	4	Henry Mazzola	4
Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia	3		

Notes for Table 1.6

- A number of other multiple-property owners held title to two or fewer properties in 1998 and three or fewer in 2008.

Five out of the top six multiple property owners in 2008 are city agencies or city-supported development entities. The following is a review of their respective roles in neighborhood redevelopment.

**Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia** - 14 properties

Southwest Center City is designated by the City as an urban renewal area, in which the City's Redevelopment Authority has acquired property (primarily vacant houses and lots) for conveyance to nonprofit and private developers.

**Residences of St. Anthony** - 13 properties

Vacant properties in the vicinity of the former St. Anthony's School (2317-33 Carpenter Street) were acquired and rehabilitated by a private developer as part of a plan to convert the school complex into subsidized rental housing for elderly persons and to rehabilitate nearby row houses for rental reuse.

**Universal Community Homes/ Universal Real Estate** - 12 properties

Universal Community Homes is a nonprofit developer that has acquired and developed vacant properties within Southwest Center City and adjacent areas for many years.

**Philadelphia Housing Authority** - 7 properties

The Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA), which develops mixed-income housing and owns and operates federally financed public housing in Philadelphia, owns an inventory of "scattered-site" properties—consisting of occupied and vacant row houses and some vacant lots. Many of the properties have been upgraded by PHA, or nonprofit and private developers selected by PHA, as high-quality housing and are now occupied. Most or all remaining vacant scattered-site PHA properties are being prepared for future development.

**City of Philadelphia** - 5 properties

Although the City does not actively seek to acquire properties for subsequent development, the City owns scattered-site properties that have been acquired through tax foreclosure sale or donations. The City works in coordination with the Redevelopment Authority and municipal housing and development agencies to identify the best opportunities to convey these properties to developers.

**Owner-Occupancy**

Because the houses inventoried in 1998 were all vacant, the number of owner-occupants at that time was zero. In the Fels Institute's research of real estate records in 2008, properties were determined to be owner-occupied in those instances in which the property address and the owner of record's address were the same (properties were not included as owner occupied if the owner name indicated a business). In 2008, 157 properties are considered owner-occupied, representing 51% of the occupied properties. These properties are shown in Map 1.9 on the following page.

Map 1.9 Property Characteristics 2008: Location of Owner Occupied Houses



**Legend**

- 2008 Status: Owner Occupied Houses
- Other Houses, 1998 Inventory



## Aggregated Addresses and Other Anomalies

Through a review of BRT records, the Fels Institute identified instances in which properties that had been individual addresses in the 1998 survey were subsequently divided or aggregated.

Some properties, such as 1814 Christian Street, were divided up into condominiums. In the 1998 inventory, this property was a single address; by 2008, however, the property had become three condominium units (See Table 1.7). As a result of this change and similar changes involving three other houses in the 1998 inventory, four properties that had individual addresses in 1998 became fifteen individual addresses by 2008.

*Table 1.7 Example of a Property Divided into Condominiums*

<u>1998 Address</u>	<u>2008 Addresses</u>
1814 Christian St.	1814 Christian St. Unit 1
	1814 Christian St. Unit 2
	1814 Christian St. Unit 3

### 1814 Christian Street



Other properties were combined with adjacent parcels or merged into one larger consolidated developments. For example, a number of properties were torn down and paved to become a parking lot to support the St. Anthony's rental housing development venture. In addition, some properties were combined to create larger residences. For example, 2317 Montrose Way and 2319 Montrose Way, pictured on the below, were listed as separate properties in 1998, but are now listed as one property, 2317-2319 Montrose Way. As a result of changes of this kind 27 individual property addresses from the 1998 inventory are now part of eight addresses involving aggregated properties.



**2317-2319 Montrose Way is an example of two 1998 properties (above) that became a single property in 2008 (below).**



## PART II: RESIDENTS

### THE 2008 RESIDENTIAL SURVEY

Data presented in the first part of this report shows the extent to which Southwest Center City has experienced a tremendous amount of reinvestment and transformation during the past decade. However, this data provides only limited insight into the characteristics of the residents who now occupy houses that were vacant in 1998.

In an attempt to gather data on the residents, the researchers sent a short form postcard to current owner-occupants of the vacant houses included in the 1998 inventory (Survey format shown in Figure 2.1). The survey questions were designed to elicit basic information from the residents while minimizing the amount of time needed to complete the responses. Included with the postcard was a letter of introduction explaining the project and a picture of the addressee's residence from the 1998 inventory, included to personalize the survey and improve the response rate.<sup>5</sup>

In total, 179 surveys were sent to owner-occupied residents, of which 22 were undeliverable by the US Postal Service.<sup>6</sup> The response rate from the 157 surveys delivered was 28 percent (44). Key findings from the survey show that of the respondents:

- The majority are young working professionals
- 84 percent are under 46 years old
- Nearly 60 percent plan to stay in their houses for more than five years
- Nearly two-thirds moved from housing in other parts of central and south Philadelphia
- More than 90 percent are employed persons
- Just over half were renters before they purchased their current properties

The following section expands on the key findings by summarizing data on the current residents' age, expected length of residence, household size, prior ownership, prior residence, and current employment locations.

---

<sup>5</sup> Thank given to Dennis Culhane of the Cartographic Modeling Lab for this strategy.

<sup>6</sup> Most of the 22 surveys returned by USPS were marked as, "vacant" (12) or "attempted not known" (5). The visual survey data indicated that of the 22 letters returned, seven of the houses were in process of being rehabbed or recently rehabbed, for sale and unoccupied; five were vacant lots; two were still abandoned; and the remaining eight properties were moderately rehabbed.



*Figure 2.1 Postcard Survey, sent to 179 Owner Occupied Properties*

What is the zip code of your prior residence? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you own or rent ?

How long do you expect to stay at your current residence?

*1-2 years      2-4 years      5-10 years      10 or more years*

Job Status (please check one)

*Employed; please indicate job title \_\_\_\_\_*

*Student*

*Retired*

*Homemaker*

*Unemployed*

What is the zip code of your place of work? \_\_\_\_\_

Your age:    *18-24      25-35      36-45      46-65      65+*

What is the total number of people in your household? \_\_\_\_\_

How many are 18 or under? \_\_\_\_\_

***Thank you!***

## KEY FINDINGS

### Age Characteristics

Data presented in Table 2.1 shows that the survey respondents are primarily younger adults; half the respondents (22) are between 25 and 35 years old. Approximately one-third are between 36 and 45 (15). Only one participant is over 65.

*Table 2.1 Age Characteristics*

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number of Respondents</u>	<u>Percent</u>
25-35	22	50%
36-45	15	34%
46-65	6	14%
65+	1	2%

### Expected Length of Residence

Over half the survey respondents plan on living in their current Southwest Center City houses for more than five years, as shown in Table 2.2. Only five percent (2) expect to leave their homes within two years. Forty percent (17) of the respondents predicted they would stay in their houses for five to ten years. Over one-third (15) expected to stay between two and four years. Fewer than twenty percent (8) predicted they would stay for ten or more years.

*Table 2.2 Expected Length of Residence*

<u>Number of years</u>	<u>Number of Respondents</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1 to 2 years	2	5%
2-4 years	15	36%
5-10 years	17	40%
10 + years	8	19%

Notes for Table 2.2:

- Two participants did not indicate a response to this question.

## Household size

The majority of respondents are from small households; about two-thirds (28) of the respondent households are one to two members. Sixty-six percent (29) of the households do not have any members under eighteen. Twenty-seven percent (12) have one child under 18, and five percent (2) have two household members under eighteen.

*Table 2.3 Household Size*

Household Size	Number of Respondents	Percent (rounded)
1	13	30%
2	15	34%
3	13	30%
4	3	7%

## Prior ownership

The division between prior renters and owners was nearly equal. Twenty out of forty-four (44 percent) owned their residences previously and twenty-four out of forty-four (55 percent) rented.

The majority of 25-35 year olds previously rented (over 80%). Conversely, the majority of respondents 36 and older previously owned their homes (73%).

*Table 2.4 Prior Ownership by Age Group*

Age Group	Own	Rent
25-35	4	18
36-45	10	5
46-65	5	1
65+	1	0
Total	20	24

Many of the first time homebuyers plan to stay living in the neighborhood for more than five years, while most prior owners do not plan on remaining in their homes as long. Of those that previously rented, thirteen (54%) plan to stay in the residences for five to ten years, and three (12%) plan to stay for ten or more years. Half (10) of those who were previously owners plan to stay for two to four years, while one quarter (5) plan to stay more than ten years.

## Prior Residence

Survey respondents came from a variety of geographic locations prior to purchasing their Southwest Center City residences, as shown in Table 2.5. The majority of participants indicated that they moved from within the Philadelphia area. Several others, however, moved to Southwest Center City from outside the Philadelphia region and from other parts of the country.

One-third (13) of respondents moved from within the 19146 zip code, which is the survey area zip-code. Just over twenty percent (10) moved from other Center City residences. Approximately one in ten (5) moved from the 19147 zip code, which is directly east of the survey area). For the purposes of this report, the 19146 and 19147 zip codes are categorized as “South Philadelphia” rather than “Center City.”

Just under one-third (14) moved from areas outside Philadelphia. Nine percent (4) moved to Philadelphia from within Pennsylvania. Nearly twenty percent (8) moved to Southwest Center City from Connecticut, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New York and Vermont.

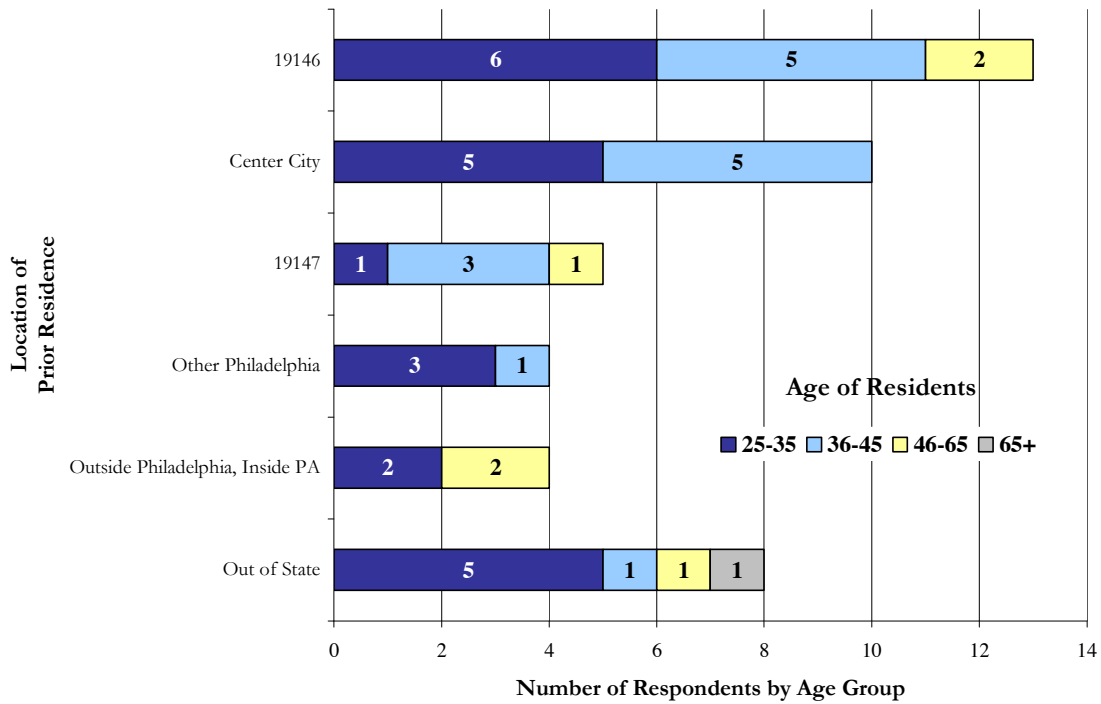
*Table 2.5 Location of Prior Residence*

<b>Location of Prior Residence</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent</b>
19146	13	30%
19147	5	11%
Center City	10	23%
Other Philadelphia	4	9%
Outside Philadelphia, Inside PA	4	9%
Out of State	8	18%



The survey results also showed patterning in the distribution of age groups and the location of prior residence, presented in Chart 2.1. Specifically, respondents who moved from farther away tend to be younger, and this age group also has the greatest geographic distribution of prior residence locations. Approximately one quarter (5) of the 25-35 year olds moved from out of state. While the 25-35 age cohort was the most mobile, the 36-45 age cohort was the least; the majority moved to their homes from other Center City locations.

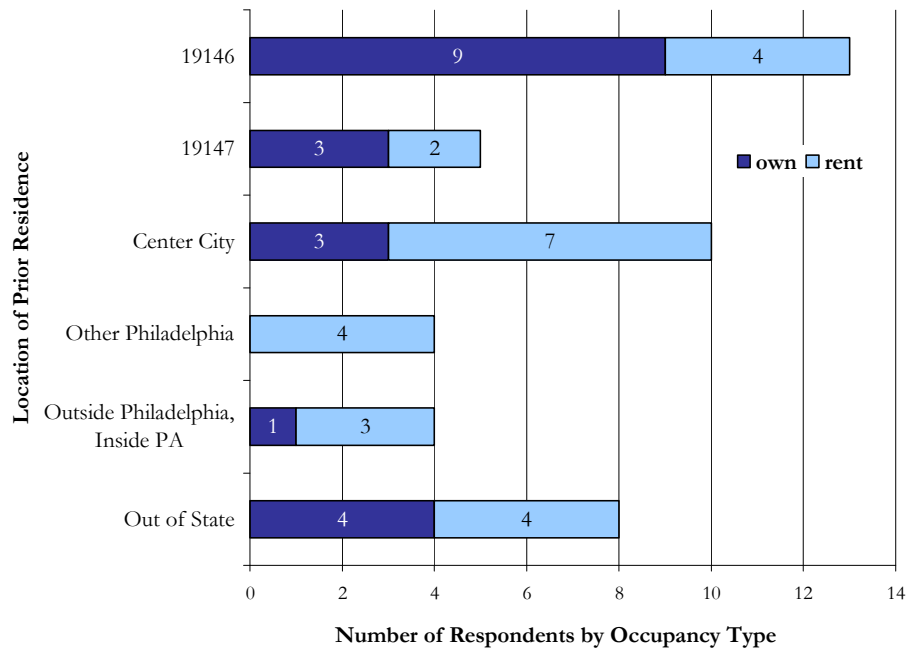
**Chart 2.1** *Prior Residence Location and Age Groups*



Comparing prior residence location and ownership also reveals trends within the respondents, shown in Chart 2.2. The majority of residents who moved from areas furthest away were renters before they bought homes in the survey neighborhood. All respondents who moved from “other Philadelphia” locations (4) were renters. Three-quarters (3) of those who moved from outside Philadelphia but inside Pennsylvania were renters. In addition, many of the Center City migrants were renters before their home purchase in Southwest Center City. Seven out of ten who moved from Center City were renters. Seven out of ten who moved from Center City were renters.

In contrast, the majority of respondents who previously owned houses (12 of 20) moved from within the South Philadelphia area (zip codes 19146, 19147). The next largest number of respondents who previously owned houses (4) moved from out of state.

**Chart 2.2** *Prior Ownership and Prior Residence Location*



## Employment Locations

Table 2.6 presents data on the employment locations of the survey respondents. The majority of respondents work close to home. Two-thirds (29) work in Center City, University City or the same zip code as their homes, areas which are all within approximately a 2 mile radius of the neighborhood. Just under one quarter (12) commute to areas in other parts of Philadelphia or outside Philadelphia.

**Table 2.6** *Employment Locations*

Work Location	Number of Respondents	Percent
19146	7	16%
Center City	14	33%
University City	8	19%
Other Philadelphia	5	12%
Outside Philadelphia	7	16%
Retired	2	5%

The survey data also shows trends in employment location and age of respondents, shown in Chart 2.3. The majority of participants who work in University City (7) are between 25-35 years old. None of the residents over 45 work in University City. Of the 36 to 45 year olds, one-third work in Center City and one-third work in the same zip code they live (19146). Again, this cohort seems less likely to travel far distances. The commuters to employment outside Philadelphia are the younger (4) and the older (2).

**Chart 2.3** *Age and Employment Location*



## CONCLUSION

Southwest Center City is a neighborhood transformed since 1998. In less than ten years, seven out of every ten houses that were once vacant are now renovated and occupied, or in the process of being renovated. Median housing prices are nine times what they were in the prior decade.

Many of the residents now residing in the once vacant houses are young first-time homebuyers who work in Center City and University City. The new owner-occupants to the neighborhood moved from as close as the same zip code, to as far as the Northeastern and Midwest United States.



## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Letter of Introduction, Southwest Center City Vacant Property Inventory, February, 1998



## CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

OFFICE OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION  
1234 MARKET STREET, 17TH FLOOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19107

JOHN KROMER  
DIRECTOR

### SOUTHWEST CENTER CITY Vacant Property Inventory as of February 1998

#### INTRODUCTION

This publication is one of the products of The PHILADELPHIA SNAPSHOT Series, a special project undertaken by the City of Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD), in coordination with other City agencies and with support from the City Policy and Neighborhood Strategies Studio of the University of Pennsylvania Department of City and Regional Planning.

PHILADELPHIA SNAPSHOT is a neighborhood-specific, vacant-property inventory approach that combines on-site photographs and field-survey data with information from City agency records. Vacant lots and vacant houses are included in the inventory, as are mixed-use properties with upstairs residential use and ground-floor non-residential use. Not included are midrise and highrise apartment buildings and non-residential properties such as factories, warehouses and supermarkets.

This publication documents the inventory of the Southwest Center City area, located between South Street and Washington Avenue, Broad Street and Grays Ferry Avenue. The results of the inventory project include a database organized by OHCD and two published documents: Directory of Vacant Houses and Directory of Vacant Lots. Inventory products are being made available to public agencies, elected officials, Southwest Center City community-based organizations and the University of Pennsylvania Department of City and Regional Planning.

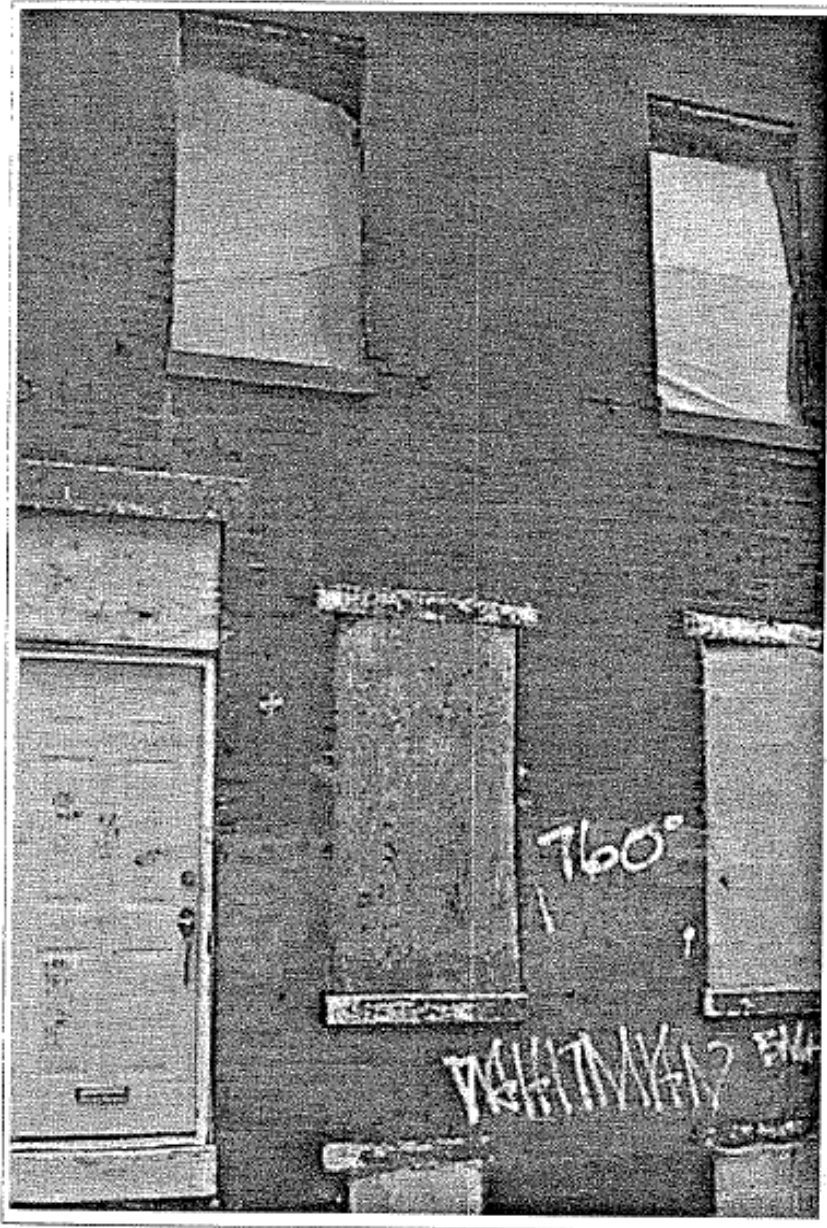
This publication and other inventory products are intended as a "snapshot:" a detailed illustration of conditions of vacancy as of February 1998, when field work was completed. OHCD anticipates that community-based organizations and City agencies will be updating this information as neighborhood conditions change. However, OHCD will not be regularly updating this information on an ongoing basis, and OHCD is not responsible for any erroneous, incomplete or outdated information reproduced in this publication.

OHCD intends to support additional vacant property inventory projects in other Philadelphia neighborhoods to advance vacant property planning on a neighborhood basis and to encourage continued coordination between City agencies and neighborhood-based organizations concerned about problems of abandonment and disinvestment in Philadelphia neighborhoods.

  
John Kromer  
Director

APPENDIX B: Example page from 1998 survey

749 S HICKS ST



- 2 story building
- Row house
- Single family residential
- Cracks visible from street
- Visible roof problems
- Most openings sealed
- No visible fire damage
- No apparent illegal activity in/outside house
- House not posted for sale or rent

Owner of record (BRT): HOWARD JAMES  
Last transfer date: Jan 08, 1990  
Sale price: \$1,000.00  
No VPRC file  
Not on L&I demolition list

Total taxes due: \$3,243.00  
Years tax delinquent: 1

## APPENDIX C: Visual Survey methodology

Each property was photographed and an on-site assessment was conducted. Properties are classified by the following numerical coding system:

- 1 Still Vacant
- 2 Now Vacant Lot- unimproved
- 3 Occupied with Minor Renovations (evidence that some renovations completed and property is occupied, but evidence of cracking roof, comparison with 1998 data) or Occupied with Major Renovations (comparison with 1998 data i.e. new façade, dramatic exterior improvements)
- 4 Renovations in Progress, unoccupied (Evidenced by work crews, scaffolding) or Major Renovations Complete, unoccupied (Evidenced by for sale signs and no evidence of furniture, blinds, etc)
- 5 Improved Open Space (paved parking lot, yard, or garden)
- 6 Other- see notes (New non-residential structure or use such as Graduate Hospital parking garage, Universal Communities building, New residential building occupying multiple lots (1747 Christian))
- 0 Unable to identify property (streets that did not have any properties numbered, appeared to be the back of buildings, see 1500 block of Webster)

During the course of conducting the visual survey, conversations between the researcher and people working on house revealed that some survey houses had been completely torn down and were in the process of being rebuilt. The researcher felt this would be important to note, even though it was not possible to positively identify all properties that were subjected to this degree of rehabilitation. When possible, the researcher identified these properties as (1) torn down and built as new residential, (2) torn down and in process of being built as new residential, and (3) torn down and built as new institutional.

In addition, the researcher collected data on the status of the properties to the right and the left of the surveyed properties. The adjacent properties were classified as follows: not vacant, vacant, lot, improved lot, and corner property.

All data and photographs from this survey will be available through the University of Pennsylvania's Cartographic Modeling Lab's Neighborhood Information system.