Reevaluation, Development, and Community Outreach on Pittsfield’s West Side

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INTRODUCTION

In an effort to gain a better understanding of the communities under their jurisdiction, the City of Pittsfield commissions neighborhood assessments to evaluate the maintenance of the buildings in their city and work to highlight potential priority areas for grant money and city resources. The City has commissioned us to follow up a previous assessment (Christofferson et al., 2014) performed in the Morningside neighborhood of Pittsfield by Williams Students in 2016 with a similar assessment in the City’s West Side neighborhood.

This assessment involved us traversing the neighborhood and evaluating properties in the neighborhood on 11 criteria, 7 of which will be used to give the property a score from 1 to 4 based on its condition. These criteria include the quality of the roof, windows, signage, parking lot, walls, stairs, foundation, and signage, as well as other data points like whether the property is for sale or rent or appears vacant.

Cornelius Hoss and Nathaniel Joyner, our clients with the City of Pittsfield, made it clear that their priority in this project is acquiring the highest quality data on the quality of structures and properties in their jurisdiction. While additional work from us may be valuable, they cemented that this data was their primary priority. To that end, our scope of work for them was inherently limited and we worked to find creative ways to expand the scope of the project to more effectively meet the city’s goals.

PROJECT GOALS

Our clients, CJ and Nate, made it clear that their main goal for this project is to gather more information for their database on building conditions in Pittsfield. The data we collect will
contribute to a larger database that is used to evaluate building conditions across the entire city.

The purpose of this evaluation was to follow up on a study conducted by a previous Environmental Planning class in 2016 of the Morningside neighborhood in Pittsfield (Christofferson et. al, 2016).

Upon completion of the initial surveying, we were tasked with identifying specific clusters of houses that should be targeted for improvement using city funds. The homes we targeted were to be based off of multiple criteria, including our slum/blight scores, status in the city’s tax title program, and vacancy.

One of our goals as a group that was not explicitly stated by the clients was to get a better feel for the neighborhood culturally and potentially be able to contribute information for community development through chance encounters and formal interviews. This goal was the lowest priority because it had the least tangible results, and we were constrained by the timeline of this project.

**PHYSICAL SITE**

Figure 1 shows the outline of the site in which we conducted the building structure surveys. The northern boundary of our site is Turner Avenue, which runs along Wahconah Park (pictured). The western boundary is Dewey Avenue, which runs along the
river, the southern boundary is Columbus Avenue, and the eastern boundary is Center Street/
Seymour Street. The West Side neighborhood is located to the west of North Street, Morningside
is located on the eastern side of North Street for reference. Our site did not encompass the
totality of the West Side, as the neighborhood extends farther to the West on the other side of
the river.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Part of our background research for this project was to familiarize ourselves with the
community profile of the West Side neighborhood in order to have a better understanding of the
demographic that we were servicing. This research was two-fold, we looked at both the census
data for the specific neighborhood, and how the West Side was represented in the local news.

We used census data that was compiled by
Statisticalatlas.com¹ because it provided the
data broken down into
specific neighborhoods in
Pittsfield, so we were
able to get a more
accurate sense of the data
specific to our site. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of race and ethnicity in the neighborhood and
how it compares to the entire population of Pittsfield. The negative and positive percentage bars

show the deviation from the total population of Pittsfield. There is a relative 18.4% smaller white population in the West Side than the rest of Pittsfield, a relative 3.7% greater Hispanic population, a relative 12.7% greater black population, and a 2.5% greater mixed race/ethnicity population. The “%” column to the right of the bar graph shows the total percentage of each group in the West Side. The “ref.” column shows the percentage for each group in the total population of Pittsfield. We were told in our initial client meetings that the West Side neighborhood was a historically black neighborhood in the City of Pittsfield (Hoss and Joyner, 2018), and while this graph does show that the majority of the populations of Pittsfield and specifically the West Side are white, the West Side does have a relatively larger black population.

We also looked at the age distributions of the population of the West Side in order to better identify the need for any age-specific resources, as well as just to get a general feel for the neighborhood. Figure 3 shows the age distributions broken down in the age groups. This data also came from Statisticalatlas.com², but we made the graph ourselves to make it easier to understand. The largest age group is the 40-64 years-old cohort, followed by the 22-39, 0-17, 65+, and finally 18-21. We had no preconceived notion of the age breakdown of the neighborhood, but nothing we found was particularly shocking. It is fair to say that the majority of people we encountered while surveying fell under the top three age cohorts.

The final data set that we looked at to gather demographic data on the West Side was family household type. Figure 4 shows the breakdown of household types with children under the age of 18. The three different categories that were recorded are married, single moms, and single dads. Similarly, to the Relative Race and Ethnicity graph, the Family Household Types graph shows the percentages compared to the rest of the population of Pittsfield. In the entirety of Pittsfield, almost 50% of homes with children have married parents, compared to 19.5% in the West Side neighborhood. Just over 40% of households in Pittsfield are single mother homes, while 64.5% of West Side households are single mother homes. Overall, there are significantly fewer single fathers in both Pittsfield and the West Side, around 10% of Pittsfield and 16% of the West Side neighborhood. We chose this data set after seeing how many children reside in the neighborhood. This was intended to show that there are significantly more single-parent homes in the West Side neighborhood than two-parent homes, which may indicate a greater need for childcare during working hours.

These three charts together provide us with useful background knowledge for the steps after we completed the surveying. The surveying was very straightforward, but having a better knowledge of the demographic of residents of the West Side not only informed our conversations we had with other pedestrians and stakeholders, but helped us compile the data we collected from the conversations and interviews into comprehensible recommendations.
We also looked to local news sources for more information about the neighborhood beyond the census data. This gave us a better understanding of what issues were important to the residents and the City beyond what the demographic data may have indicated. Most, if not all, of the headlines for the West Side had to do with safety concerns. This helped us develop a multifaceted idea of what kinds of issues residents of the West Side may be facing, and what to look for in our interviews.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

To better understand the context of our project, we worked with CJ and Nate to determine some readings that would offer background on the city’s existing priorities for the West Side. They suggested that we explore the city’s Master Plan, the 2016 report by ENVI 411 students on the data collection project in Morningside and the West Side Neighborhood Action Plan (Hoss and Joyner, 2018).

The city of Pittsfield Master Plan was useful as it revealed the city’s existing priorities for the West Side Neighborhood. The West Side is categorized as a “Downtown Residential Area,” which had priorities that included creating tax incentives for physical home improvements and to protect historic structures and maintain neighborhood character (Pittsfield Master Plan and Master Plan Map, 2009).

The Pittsfield TDI Data Collection and Analysis was a very similar project conducted on the Morningside Neighborhood of Pittsfield. This report was useful because it provided insights into their difficulties and limiting factors, as well as giving us a framework for representing the data we collect effectively (Pittsfield TDI Data Collection, 2016).
In addition, the 2015 draft West Side Neighborhood Action plan from the City of Pittsfield gave a strong background into the desires of the community. Specifically, it identifies the community’s top three priorities for a revitalized West Side as cleanliness, a new West Side Riverway Park, and better lighting throughout the neighborhood (West Side Neighborhood Action Plan, 2015). While it is unlikely that our project has a whole lot of impact on these priorities, it shows the values and desired action items of a key stakeholder group.

**METHODS**

The first part of our project was very straightforward. We surveyed all of the properties in the area shown in Figure 1. This took us approximately 20 hours on foot. We rated each property based on 10 criteria: condition of roof, condition of windows and doors, condition of exterior walls and siding, condition of porches and stairs, condition of foundation, condition of storefront signage, condition of parking lots and driveways, vacancy, for sale/rent, and land use. The conditions of different aspects of the structures were used to determine the slum/blight score, while vacancy and land use were important features to look for when making our recommendations besides the physical structure. We created a Google Form that we were all able to access from our own phones as we completed the surveying, making an efficient use of our time. We rated each structure on a scale of 1-4, based on the Community Development Block Grant Standards that were provided to us by our clients, detailed below.
Community Development Standards:

**Excellent** – Buildings that require little to no exterior work. Buildings that are in excellent condition may be of any age or style. They demonstrate consistent, planned maintenance and repair, components appear to be code-compliant and energy efficient.

Average ratings: 3.5-4.0

**Good** – Buildings that have cosmetic deficiencies or other early signs of aging and wear. Building components appear to meet code, but energy efficiency improvements such as storm doors and windows and caulking may be needed. Decorative features may need to be secured, but items are in place. Materials do not need replacements but do need some minor maintenance and repair.

Average ratings: 2.5-3.5

**Fair** – A rating of fair for a building component means that the extent of the defective or deficiencies applies to at least 25% of the component. Buildings with this designation show clear signs of deterioration indicative of a property that has not been maintained for 5 to 10 years. Some building components may be nearing the end of their serviceable life.

Average ratings: 1.5-2.5

**Poor** – A rating of poor for a building component means that the extent of defective conditions or deficiencies applies to at least 50% of the component. This category includes buildings that appear not to have been maintained for at least 10 years and have components which are beyond the end of their useful life.

Average ratings: 0-1.5
Scoring properties presented a challenge at first because we were unsure about how to rate each feature of the homes, but Nate and CJ spent time in the field with us to calibrate our scoring with their expectations.

To make our data easy to integrate with Pittsfield’s existing data on these parcels, we matched our assessments with the parcel’s property ID which was available through the City of Pittsfield’s website. The outcome was a spreadsheet derived from our responses to the Google Form, from which we were able to manipulate the data to create maps to compare with other data provided to us by the clients.

To provide a more understandable explanation for the rating system that we used, below are examples of houses rated 1, 2, 3, and 4, along with a sample survey. Because the final scores for each structure are averages of all the criteria listed, they rarely ever come out to a whole number.

105 Daniels Avenue - 1

105 Daniels Ave, Pittsfield, MA
95 Turner Avenue - 2

95 Turner Avenue, Pittsfield, MA (taken from Google Street View)

17 Seymour Street - 3

17 Seymour Street, Pittsfield, MA (taken from Google Street View)
140 Bradford Street - 3.8 (the only property ranked a 4 was a parking lot)

Example Survey:
105 Daniels Ave

Vacant: yes

Land Use: Residential

Roof: 1

Windows/Doors: 1

Exterior walls and siding: 1

Porches and stairs: 1

Foundation: N/A

Storefront signage: N/A

Parking lots and driveways: 1

For sale/rent: Unsure
INTERVIEWS

We had approximately 10 conversations with residents of the West Side while we were surveying. This mostly consisted of other pedestrians stopping us to ask what we were doing. We refrained from stopping people ourselves because we did not want to disturb people who may have somewhere to be, but we tried to make sure we made eye contact and smiled at people to seem more approachable. The people who approached us were genuinely curious to hear what we were doing and gave us some useful insight about what the community needs were.

One thing that we had to be mindful of while interviewing people was that if we said we worked for the City, then they would begin to tell us about all the things that needed to be fixed, like potholes, etc., which was not productive to our project, nor could we make such promises. We had little direct power to actually enact change in the neighborhood other than providing the information we gathered to our clients, which was important to keep in mind when talking to people. For every encounter, we introduced ourselves as students working with the City of Pittsfield on identifying community development needs and we were trying to get a feel for the neighborhood architecturally and culturally, and then would follow up by asking them if there are any resources they feel that the neighborhood lacked. Often, we wouldn’t even have to ask the follow up question because the residents were eager to share their opinions. We chose to say “getting a feel for the neighborhood architecturally” instead of “we are rating your homes on a slum/blight scale” to keep the conversations positive, and to refrain from frightening residents.

This procedure worked well, and we did hear some interesting anecdotes and opinions from people. Many of the people we spoke to mentioned the need for a larger police presence in the neighborhood, and a community center of some sort. Residents are aware of the prospective
police substation in the neighborhood, and they hope that it will reduce the crime in the neighborhood. We understand that the feeling of lack of police presence may not be true, but it is what the residents feel. We were able to get more information about the substation in a more formal interview with a reporter from the Berkshire Eagle.

Many residents also slated the need for a community center, which we noted there was a lack thereof in the West Side. This need came from a variety of different people, not just working parents. One woman, named Ava Mungin, stopped us near Turner Ave and when we explained what we were doing, she was very intrigued and appreciated the effort that was being directed towards her neighborhood. She told us that her children were older, but as a paraprofessional in the local school district, she knew there was a need for after school activities for children, especially in the winter when it gets too cold to go to the local parks. She said that after school activities have the potential to reduce youth and teen delinquency by giving them something to occupy themselves with (In-Person Conversation with Ava Mungin, 2018). We were able to reach out to her via email, but unable to connect over the phone for a formal interview.

Additionally, we connected with approximately 5 community members at the West Side Legends Halloween block party. Many of these conversations focused on the Proposed West Side Riverway park, as the block party featured a booth to discuss the park. However, in spite of the park-focused discussion, one community member (Harvey, 2018) extensively discussed his vision for a community center. He wanted a place that adults in the neighborhood could connect with the youth with spaces for arts and crafts and rooms for discussion. Most importantly, he felt it was important that there was enclosed, safe-feeling space that community leaders could put on
programming that catered to the young people of the West Side. Harvey cited his own experiences with similar community centers in Philadelphia as a child as being major drivers of his development as a youth (Harvey, 2018).

While Harvey’s experience was certainly not universal, it was broadly indicative of many of the conversations we had at the block party. Community members generally talked about community decline and the need to connect with young people as a potential long-term strategy for combating the crime that they saw on the West Side. In the city’s long-term thinking, evaluating how to build programs for young people and connect young people to existing programs in and around the community could have extraordinary benefits for the neighborhood long-term.

In addition to the conversations we had while surveying and at the Halloween Block Party, we conducted a few more formal interviews over the phone. We reached out to numerous stakeholders in the neighborhood and tried to schedule a call with all of them. This was relatively unsuccessful because we started the interview process around the Thanksgiving holiday, and while many people expressed interest, we were unable to find a time that worked before the end of the project timeline. There were also instances where we emailed multiple times with no answer and didn’t have a phone number to call them on. We did have a few informative phone calls with people with varying perspectives, which mostly supplemented the information we gathered from informal conversations. We did not have a specific formula for these interviews, but rather tailored the questions to fit each person, for example, we did not ask a reporter from the Berkshire Eagle what she thought of the lack of community center because she had been reporting mostly on the safety of the neighborhood. We were able to connect with Amanda
Drane of the Berkshire Eagle, Nate Joyner, our client and permitting coordinator and community development specialist at the City of Pittsfield, Kerry Light, the Principal at Conte School.

We found Amanda Drane’s contact information at the end of an article she wrote for the Berkshire Eagle about the police substation that is in the works for the West Side neighborhood. She was unable to provide her personal opinions about the matter, but did give us some valuable information about why there is a demand for a substation. The original idea for the substation arose after a stabbing on Dewey Avenue, and people began to fear for their safety in the neighborhood. She also said that people feel as though the police pass through the neighborhood but don’t have a strong presence. They hope that a more permanent police presence in the neighborhood will reduce crime. We do not have the data on how much time the police do spend in the neighborhood, and it very well could be more than is commonly perceived. The substation will also hopefully provide a place where residents of the West Side can walk to file reports. Many residents of the West Side do not own cars, so walking distance is a must-have for them (Conversation with Amanda Drane, 2018). This conversation informed our project because it was important to understand what measures are being taken to address the safety concerns in the neighborhood as the majority of news coverage of the West Side has to do with crime. Habitat for Humanity has offered to donate a room in one of their buildings in the West Side for the substation. This is located across the river to the west of our surveying area.

As permitting coordinator and community development specialist Nate Joyner has wealth of knowledge of the city of Pittsfield and the Westside Neighborhood. We reached out to Nate to better understand what he saw as the biggest challenges for the neighborhood. According to Nate the area has always been a working-class neighborhood but has suffered from a lack of
investment in recent years. The city has tried to direct investment into the neighborhood with the creation of new parks but moving forward Nate thinks it will be difficult to change the neighborhood (Conversation with Nate Joyner, 2018).

We received contact information for Kerry Light during our interview with Nate. Kerry has been the principal at the Conte school since 2014. The school is not within our study area, but it does serve many of the children who live within our study limit. Principal Light did not share in the belief that a community center was what the neighborhood needed (Conversation with Kerry Light, 2018). She pointed out that the school provides lots of programming including summer meals available to kids at both breakfast and lunch, and afterschool programming during the winter (Light, 2018). Instead of a community center, Principal Light suggested creating more wraparound services that could be connected with the school. In Ms. Light’s eyes this could become a sort of one stop shop for families that could include doctors, dentists, therapists and adult education (Light, 2018). These services go beyond what most would consider to be typical after-school services and highlight the This conversation was important for our research because it really helped us understand the variety of programming that already exists for children and families in the neighborhood.

There are some individuals who we unfortunately failed to reach. Erin Sullivan of Berkshire Children and Families had responded to our initial emails, but we were not able to connect again via phone. We reached out to Linda Kelley, Chairwoman of the West Side Initiative, but she has not responded to our emails, and we could not find a phone number to contact her from. We also reached out to Joseph McGovern of the Boys and Girls Club for more
information about their prices and transportation to and from the West Side, but unfortunately did not receive a response.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

In light of the conversations we had with both community members on the street, community members at the block party and community stakeholders it is clear that there are a variety of services provided to the neighborhood. Despite this, many members do not feel these services are adequate. Based on our research we feel that there could be an awareness campaign about available services would be the most effective way to support those members of the community that are not satisfied with the resources available.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Upon completion of the surveying, we were able to export the data from Google Forms to an Excel spreadsheet. We ran data validation to ensure that we had surveyed every property, and that the assessor ID’s matched up with the addresses. To do so, we used Excel to cross-reference the assessor ID’s we collected in the survey with the city’s underlying parcel data. If there were errors, we worked to identify if a property had been incorrectly coded by comparing the assessor ID number to nearby ID’s and cross-referencing the addresses. Ultimately, we were able to find a match for all of the properties in the study area, with the exception of 4.

We determined that the average score was a 2.63, and the median was a 2.66. This was as expected, and shows that there were no outliers, which we also did not expect because of the scale we were using. These two values fall under the “good” rating on the slum/blight scale. We
had observed during the surveying that the structures were better than CJ and Nate (Hoss and Joyner, 2018) had expected based on their knowledge prior to the 2016 Morningside survey.

**Land Use**

Figure 5 shows the breakdown of properties by land use, which was one of the criteria of the survey. The category with the most properties is residential, followed by vacant land, and parks. This was important to note because it adds to our general understanding of the feel of the neighborhood. Because the neighborhood is mostly residential, it is important to keep in mind the needs of the residents. Figure 6 shows a map of the land uses by individual properties. It represents the same data as Figure 5, but shows where different land uses are located in the neighborhood.

Given the predominance of residential land uses in this neighborhood, no other land uses have a sufficient number of scored properties to get a broad understanding of the score by land use. However, while these values are not particularly scientific, most of the other land uses have similar scores to the residential land uses in the neighborhood. The only exceptions are vacant structures, which have lower scores on average, and public buildings, which have markedly higher scores on average.
As can be seen in Figure 6, the neighborhood’s land uses are primarily residential. However, there are pockets of vacant land, particularly on the South and West sides of the neighborhood. There are some commercial and public building land uses along Seymour and Center streets, as well as a stretch of commercial buildings along Linden Street and a restaurant along Columbus Avenue. However, in building policy for this neighborhood, focus should be placed primarily on residential land uses, as these uses make up the vast majority of the parcels in this neighborhood.

**Scores: Geographic Trends**

Based on our data, slum/blight conditions were broadly distributed geographically across the neighborhood, but tended to clump near other properties with low scores. Additionally, low scoring properties tended to be more likely to be proximate to properties classified as vacant land.
The potential drivers of these trends are numerous. CJ and Nate mentioned that they have found that one person on the street cleaning up their house tends to lead to their neighbors also making improvements to their home (Hoss and Joyner, 2018). If the reverse of this is true, then properties surrounded by other stagnant properties are less likely to make upgrades of their own, leading to high densities of blighted properties.

Another potential explanation could be that there is a lurking variable that helps govern property maintenance that is separate from the slum/blight status of the property itself. If, for example, properties owned by the same landlord were frequently proximate to one another, and some landlords are negligent while others are not, this same clumping could occur. While this was an idea postulated by CJ and Nate, our analysis on this issue was broadly inconclusive.

Going forward, having clarity on the spatial dimensions of blight could go a long way in informing city policy on funds distribution. If, for example, blight is a first-mover problem, wherein the key to encouraging others to clean up their properties is having a neighbor do it first, the policy implications are very different from the case where blight is driven by absentee
landlordism. Our data, coupled with this understanding, could go a long way in strategically targeting funding to improve property conditions in the most resource-efficient manner.

**Vacancies**

As part of our assessment, we tried to use our best judgement to determine if a property could reasonably be classified as vacant based on its external characteristics. We looked for visible holes in the roof or walls, along with notices from the city on doors that the property had no water, or other signs that it was unlikely that there would be habitation of the property.

The results of that assessment are in Figure 8 below.

We observed that there were areas with high concentrations of vacant land, particularly West of Daniels Ave, as well as pockets of vacant structures or areas with of uncertain status. Per discussions with our clients, they view slum/blight status and vacancy as closely tied, with vacant properties far more likely to be blighted (Hoss and Joyner, 2018). As a result, many of the same drivers of slum/blight conditions from the previous section likely apply here.
Overall, vacant lots were far more common than vacant structures, indicating that the city’s demolition and rehab programs have been effective in removing vacant properties, but may not have been as successful in putting properties back into productive use once they were vacant. While some of these vacant properties make up yards for proximate homes or makeshift parking lots, some appear to be completely unused and overgrown. While vacant buildings are certainly an issue in this neighborhood, a strategy for finding productive uses for vacant land should also be a priority in determining the best path uses of city funds.

**Tax Title**

After completing our surveying, Nate and CJ supplied us with the city’s data for properties that were in Pittsfield’s tax title program. These properties were delinquent on their taxes and eligible for repossession by city officials. These properties are mapped below.

Like in previous maps, there is a slight trend that shows more properties in the tax title program on the Western half of the neighborhood than the rest. While there are properties in the program across the West Side, these geographic differences are visible in the above map. Delinquency on taxes can be driven by many factors and affects properties across land uses. Per CJ and Nate, the tax title program is a long-term program with ample notification for delinquent
landowners (Hoss and Joyner, 2018), so there’s little to indicate that lack of knowledge is driving properties into tax title.

From a development perspective, these properties can be repossessed by the city and placed into more productive use if they are currently vacant and can minimize the city’s land acquisition costs. While they may not all be properties in poor condition, utilizing tax title maps in conjunction with slum/blight data and vacancies can help identify properties that the city can easily repossess and work to place into productive use.

EVALUATION MATRIX

Given our clients’ prioritization of the data collection component of our project, we worked with our clients to iterate on the most productive recommendations and alternatives we could evaluate. In the end, we determined that using the data to develop recommendations for concentrations of city funds on specific areas of the West Side would be of the most use to our clients.

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<th>Alternative</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Funds on High Vacancy Areas</td>
<td>- Minimizes disruption to current inhabitants</td>
<td>- Supply vs. Demand: Does assisting vacant properties lead to fewer, or just different vacant properties?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Revitalizes currently unused housing stock</td>
<td>- Fails to directly assist current residents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Brings vacant property into productive use</td>
<td>- Fails to directly assist owner-occupied units</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus Funds on High Slum/Blight Areas</td>
<td>- Directs funds to properties in the worst condition</td>
<td>- Moral hazard for absentee landlords</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Assists current residents in dangerous conditions</td>
<td>- Improvements could be disruptive to current residents</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Likely highest overall increase to tax base</td>
<td>- Could improvements lead to increased rents, harming current residents?</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- Helps support elderly homeowners who no longer have funds to support homes</td>
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While all of these approaches have pros and cons, our discussions with CJ and Nate, as well as our own understanding of neighborhood dynamics, made us expand our view to focus on an integrated approach that used components of all four recommendations. In turn, we landed on an approach that emphasized prioritizing areas with generally high vacancy, low scores, and tax title that encompassed a large enough swath of the neighborhood to ensure that there were enough people affected by the policy.

To process this integrated approach, we first identified pockets of areas with low slum/blight scores, high vacancies, and high levels of tax title on each of our three maps. Those areas are outlined in pink below.
Having identified the areas with the highest concentrations of low slum/blight scores, high vacancies, and high levels of tax title, we worked to find a significant area wherein the city could direct funds that could help alleviate some of these concerns simultaneously. While this particular screen is susceptible to our own biases, we determined that the area outlined in purple on the map below had high levels of blighted properties, vacancies and tax title that could benefit significantly from city funds. This integrated approach ensures that all elements of city data are accounted for in some way.

That being said, our particular approach is far from perfect and building a process that removes our ingrained biases, be it with software or with people with limited experience with the neighborhood, would likely provide a more objective process for deriving recommendations through an integrated approach. Given access to our data, we hope the city of Pittsfield can leverage their existing tools and processes to marry this data with the city’s existing data to develop better allocations and provide resources more efficiently to help this community.

CONCLUSIONS

As stated in the previous section, focusing funding on areas that meet multiple criteria could help amplify the impacts of city funds by transforming entire blocks. Given more time, we
would have liked to develop an informational program for the housing rehab program that targets properties in the worst condition to ensure that funds go to properties in the worst condition. In terms of community development recommendations, the needs of residents vary, and in order to make more informed recommendations, we need more information on the safety and childcare/community center needs in the neighborhood. Greater outreach is needed to communicate the programs that are already in place for children and families.

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