



COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

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MEMORANDUM

Date: May 17, 2022

TO: CHARLIE AMPAGOOMIAN, CHAIR BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Adam D. Gaudette, Town Manager

From: R. Gary Bechtholdt II, Town Planner

RE: **SLUM & BLIGHT INVENTORY (SBI) REPORT**
2020 CDBG Program -New Village & Rockdale Neighborhoods

Community Planning & Development, on behalf of the Town is working with Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (Consultant) to prepare Slum & Blight Inventories for New Village (Whitinsville) and Rockdale Neighborhood, as part of Northbridge's 2020 Community Development Block Grant program.

A Slum & Blight Inventory includes an analysis of existing physical conditions of public and private buildings, infrastructure, and facilities within a defined study area. The selected neighborhoods (within Rockdale & New Village) are located in Census Blocks with Low/Mod-Income populations exceeding 40%.

A preliminary survey of the study target area(s) was conducted in February 2020, as part of an initial windshield survey of housing conditions. Based on these observations, it appeared New Village and the Rockdale neighborhood may qualify as a "blighted area" using DHCD standards for such determination. It is important to note, the term "Slum & Blight" is not one of local choice but is a requirement of the State and Federal government.

In order to be considered as "Slum & Blighted" a target area must meet specific criteria, including Massachusetts' definition of substandard, blighted, or decadent area (-see MGL Ch 121B [Definitions] attached). The area must also have at least 25% of its properties experience one or more of the following conditions: physical deterioration of buildings or improvements, abandoned properties, chronic high occupancy turnover rates, significant declines in property values or abnormally low property values, or known/suspected environmental contamination; or public improvements throughout the area in general state of deterioration.

Arrangements have been made for the Board of Selectmen to hold a Public Hearing Monday, June 13, 2022 to review with Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (Consultant) and the public the completed SBI report and consider vote to accept its findings. Upon vote of acceptance by the Board, the Slum & Blight Inventories shall be provided to DHCD -Department of Housing & Community Development for approval and formal designation as substandard, blighted, or decadent areas. The approved SBI shall be valid for a 10-year period.

The completed inventories will provide the town with baseline information that may be used to identify strategies to revitalizing the neighborhood areas. Where an approved Slum & Blight Inventory may also create opportunities for Northbridge to pursue future CDBG funds to assist in those efforts. Specifically, infrastructure improvements, housing rehabilitation and other activities that support neighborhood revitalization of the target area.

Take care & be well.

Cc: /File



Town of Northbridge

Office of Community Planning & Development

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Understanding a “Slum and Blight” Designation

Introduction

The Town of Northbridge’s Office of Community Planning and Development has contracted with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) to complete two comprehensive slums and blight inventories. These inventories will be restricted to the New Village and Rockdale neighborhoods. Over the next few months you may see PVPC staff members conducting a parcel-by-parcel inventory and evaluation by photographing and documenting property and infrastructure conditions. Conducting this type of field survey work is a required part of the designation process to get the most accurate up-to-date information.

Please Note: Initial field survey reconnaissance may extend outside and beyond the target area(s).

What does slum and blight designation mean?

Designating an area as slum and blight makes the Town eligible for funding to make improvements that it might not otherwise have the ability to. Under the federal Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG), one of three CDBG National Objectives must be met in order to be eligible for funding. These are 1) Benefit to Low and Moderate Income Persons 2) Prevention and/or the Elimination of Slum and Blight or 3) Urgent or Critical Need.

An area which meets the Commonwealth’s definition of a “substandard, blighted, or decadent” area qualifies under the federal CDBG National Objective of the Prevention and /or Elimination of Slum and Blight. It does not mean the area designated is a slum. Under the federal standard, a mere 25% of properties must be in observable, deteriorating condition and/or abandonment. Properties built prior to 1978 are presumed to have lead and are considered to be a deficiency. Similarly, known brownfield sites, deteriorating public facilities (streets, sidewalks, water, sewer, drainage) and high turnover and/or vacancy rates are contributing factors to meeting the Commonwealth’s definition of a substandard, blighted, or decadent area.

What does this mean for my property?

Slum and blight designation means nothing for your property. If your property is located in the designated area that does not mean that your home or business is “blighted”. Blight is a legal term used solely for the purposes of determining whether a community can qualify for certain funding for redevelopment. Some areas that qualify for redevelopment have well-maintained homes and businesses interspersed among deteriorating structures.

So what does this all mean?

It means that slum and blight are dirty words that most cities and towns would seem to want to avoid. It does not mean that a city or town is, in fact, a slum. The Town of Northbridge, as well as hundreds of other places across the country, has sought out this designation because of the significant redevelopment benefits that can result. This designation will not only make more federal funds available to the town, but it will also make the town more competitive in receiving those funds.