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Disposition and Development Strategies for Vacant Property in Petersburg, Virginia

A Professional Plan
Presented to the Academic Faculty
by

Grace N. Stankus

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Master of Urban and Regional Planning in the
VCU Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

Virginia Commonwealth University
Spring 2021

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Disposition and Development Strategies for Vacant Property in Petersburg, Virginia

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Reginald Tabor for allowing me the opportunity to work with the City of Petersburg and suggesting such an interesting and important project for the City. Working with you has been a pleasure and I'm so grateful for the time you've spent providing feedback and direction for this plan. And thank you to Cynthia Boone and Clay Mansell for your input and Petersburg expertise. This plan pushed me out of my comfort zone and has been the most formative and rewarding experience of my time in graduate school.

Thank you to Frederick Wheat from the City of Akron, Kelly Baccala and James Ashford from the City of Baltimore, and Angel Rodriguez from the Philadelphia Land Bank for sharing your time, knowledge, and advice for Petersburg. And to Kim Chen, Dave Johannas, Lynn McAteer, and Dave McCormack for your time, feedback, and valuable regional perspective and expertise. This plan was greatly influenced and has benefited immensely from my discussions with each of you.

Dr. Accordino, thank you for all of your guidance and patience throughout this entire process. Your support and confidence in me and this plan has meant so much. And to Dr. Verma for providing recommendations for the plan and encouraging me to think outside the box.

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Executive Summary

Petersburg, Virginia has weathered population and industrial decline which has resulted in an abundance of City-owned vacant property. Recently, the Richmond metropolitan area has experienced rapid growth and Petersburg is well positioned to capitalize on the growth momentum occurring throughout the rest of the region, beginning with the disposition and development of City-owned land.

The purpose of this plan is to provide findings from a study of City-owned land and propose recommendations that complement the City's existing policies to provide a strategic, neighborhood scale approach for the disposition and development of City-owned land. To inform Petersburg's approach, this plan considered precedent disposition policies and development plans in five mature cities throughout the East Coast and Midwest to identify and compare trends with disposition and development strategies.

The recommendations presented in this plan are intended to guide the City of Petersburg and reposition itself within the region through a targeted approach, strategies for individuals and developers, and specific tools for disposition and development. A deliberate and proactive land disposition and development approach is necessary for Petersburg to capitalize on regional growth trends to increase revenue and economic stability, and ultimately revitalize the city.

Introduction

Beginning in the 1970s, American cities began experiencing rapid decline due to suburbanization and deindustrialization. Industry leaving urban cores in favor of cheap labor abroad and offices relocating to suburban office parks, combined with the subsidization of suburban development led to the decline of inner cities (Bacher & Byerly Williams, 2014; Cisneros, 1996; Kondo et al., 2016; Tisher, 2013). Post-industrial cities were left to compete with the suburbs for taxpayers (Accordino & Johnson, 2000; Hughes, 2000) and struggled to generate enough revenue to sustain operations, let alone provide amenities to residents.

Petersburg, Virginia is a post-industrial city that has experienced the effects of deindustrialization and struggled to retain job opportunities and residents. Currently, there are several hundred vacant parcels in the City of Petersburg that are not generating tax revenue and are expensive to maintain. Many of the properties are owned by the City, and others are vacant privately-owned properties declared uninhabitable by the City. The City of Petersburg regularly receives proposals for the acquisition and development of City-owned properties; however currently, there is no plan with a clear vision, goals, and objectives to develop these properties. The City's 2014 Comprehensive Plan and 2021-2025 Strategic Plan outlines general redevelopment goals for combating the abundance of City land, and a disposition process outlines an administrative framework for selling City-owned property. However, the City of Petersburg does not have detailed, consistent processes and procedures for how to handle the disposition of vacant land or development strategies that attract and facilitate growth.

Plan Purpose

The City of Petersburg is interested in analyzing vacant parcels to determine levels of developability and best uses for these parcels through creating specific criteria to evaluate proposals for disposition and development. The criteria will cover the entire vacant land disposition and development process, starting with the legal and financial process of land disposition and then outlining strategies for development. The goal of outlining this criterion is to assist the City in how to work with developers to help turn vacant City-owned property into catalytic development for the city.

The purpose of developing cohesive disposition and development strategies is to provide City officials with neighborhood scale commercial and residential development tools and criteria to streamline the revitalization process in Petersburg and align with current plans.

Plan Client

The client for this professional plan is the Department of Planning and Community Development in the City of Petersburg, Virginia. The mission of Petersburg's Planning and Community Development department is to, "preserve and enhance the quality of life of all residents of the city by encouraging and promoting the orderly use of land for redevelopment and growth through intermediate and long range comprehensive and strategic planning, by implementing the city's Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Ordinance, and other land use regulations and policies, and by fostering neighborhood revitalization and stability" (City of Petersburg, 2020).

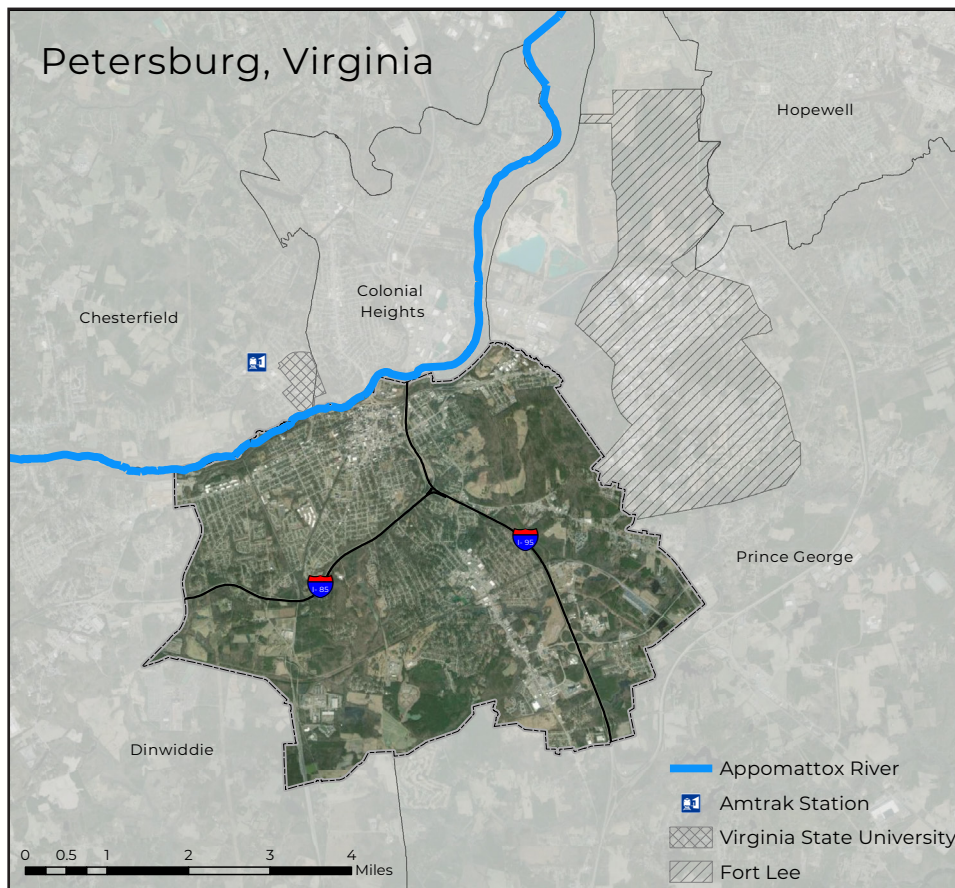
The City is currently in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan, last updated in 2014, to revisit the City's long-term goals and objectives. In addition to the Comprehensive Plan, the City updated its HUD Consolidated Plan and recently released its Strategic Plan, with an emphasis on coordination between the three plans. This professional plan aims to align with the department's mission and position itself within these three documents to achieve a cohesive vision for the City of Petersburg.

Overview

Location

The City of Petersburg is a 23.1 square mile city located approximately 25-miles south of Richmond, the capital of Virginia and approximately 131-miles south of Washington, D.C. Located within the Richmond Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), Petersburg is ideally situated within the region (see *Figure 1*).

Both I-95 and I-85 run through the city, connecting Petersburg to the entire East Coast and Southeastern United States, and the Petersburg Amtrak Station, located across the Appomattox River in Ettrick, connects the city with the Northeast Corridor by rail. The city is located along the Appomattox River which connects to the James River, ultimately connecting the city to the Atlantic Ocean.



*Figure 1. Petersburg, Virginia and Surrounding Localities. Author: Grace Stankus
Source: U.S. Census Bureau*

History

Petersburg, originally called “Peter’s Point”, was first settled by Europeans in 1607; however, it was previously occupied by the Appamatuck tribe of the Powhatan confederacy long before the settlers arrived (Burnett et al., 2017). The area was initially a fur and Indian trading post and soon arose as a flourishing tobacco region through the 17th and 18th centuries (Burnett et al., 2017). Pocahontas Island was established as one of Petersburg’s earliest predominantly African-American enclaves due to the increase of slaves brought to the area in the 1700s to work in the tobacco industry. Beginning in the early 1800s, the neighborhood became one of the nation’s oldest settlement of free African-Americans (City of Petersburg, 2014; National Park Service, 2017).

In 1850, the City of Petersburg became the third independent city in Virginia and by 1860, it was the second- largest city in Virginia (Burnett et al., 2017). Petersburg’s early success can be attributed to its location along the Appomattox River which enabled the development of industry and trade along the river (see *Figure 2*). The city soon established itself as a tobacco and cotton manufacturing powerhouse and by 1879 had the second largest tobacco factory in the United States (Historic Petersburg Foundation, Inc, 2020).

In the middle of the 19th century, Petersburg emerged as a regional rail hub that connected central Virginia with North Carolina, Richmond, Norfolk, and Lynchburg (Barnes, 1999). The transportation advantages enabled the city to expand manufacturing operations and retail trade (Burnett et al., 2017). Petersburg’s economy was highly specialized in the manufacturing sector and this was solidified with the opening on the Seward Luggage Company, Titmus Optical Company, and the Arnold Pen Company at the end of the 19th century (City of Petersburg, 2014). These three companies were integral to the success of Petersburg’s economy in the early 20th century and beyond. Petersburg’s industrial success gave way to the city’s thriving downtown commercial district, Old Towne, with retail stores along Sycamore Street and further south in the Halifax Triangle (City of Petersburg, 2014).

In 1972, the City of Petersburg annexed fourteen square miles from Dinwiddie County to the east and Prince George County to the west (Burnett et al., 2017). The annexation nearly tripled the physical size of the city and increased the amount of vacant developable industrial land. The city’s population peaked at 46,267 in 1975 (Burnett et al., 2017) but as job opportunities relocated from urban cores, the population has continued to decline. The city was hit particularly hard by suburbanization and deindustrialization with industries moving overseas to cut costs. The decline of opportunities in Petersburg led to residents leaving the city for the suburbs, contributed to an abundance of vacant properties.

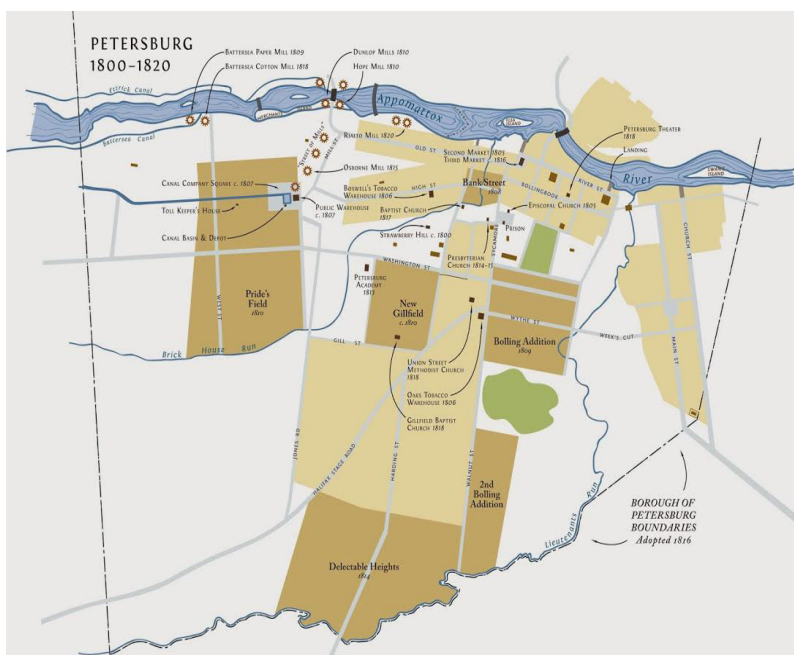


Figure 2. Historic Petersburg, 1800-1820. Source: Worsham, 2014

Petersburg's Economy

Healthcare and Social Assistance is the largest, and most rapidly growing employment sector in the city, accounting for nearly 33% of all jobs in Petersburg (VEDP, 2021) and has a projected annual growth rate of 2.13% (Virginia Employment Commission, 2021). Southside Regional Medical Center, a 300-bed hospital and medical provider operated by Bon Secours, is one of the largest employers in the city and a regional attractor. Government, particularly Local Government, and Retail Trade are the second and third largest sectors, representing 16.4% and 10.7%, respectively (VEDP, 2021). Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services is projected to grow 1.77% annually, with Educational Services growing at the third fastest rate with 1.15% annual growth (Virginia Employment Commission, 2021). Utilities and Manufacturing are the two employment sectors projected to decline (Virginia Employment Commission, 2021).

Current Population and Housing Conditions

Population

In the early 20th century, Petersburg's population began to grow at a steady rate (see *Figure 3*). The population decreased slightly around the time of the Great Depression, but continued to increase until the mid 1970s. After the city's peak in 1975, Petersburg began experiencing population loss and the population continues to decline today.

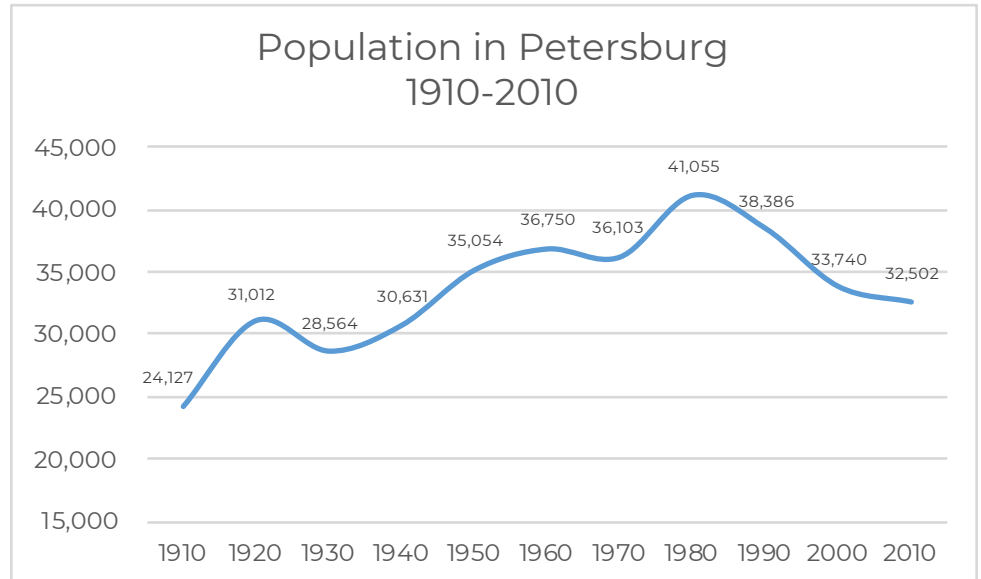


Figure 3. Population in Petersburg, 1910-2010. Source: World Population Review

In 2000, the city's population was 33,740 and between 2000 and 2010, the city lost nearly 1,500 residents or about 4% of the population (see *Figure 4*). Between 2010 and 2018, the city's population still experienced a decrease, however, at a lower rate than years prior. Petersburg's population in 2018 was 31,827. Though the number of residents identifying as Black or African American is decreasing, in 2018, Black or African American residents comprised over 78% of Petersburg's population. As of 2018, White residents represent 19% of the total population of Petersburg, Asians represent less than 1%, and those identifying as Hispanic or Latino comprise 4.8%, an increase from 3.5% in 2010. Residents identifying as White, Asian, Hispanic or Latino are all groups that have seen increased population in Petersburg.

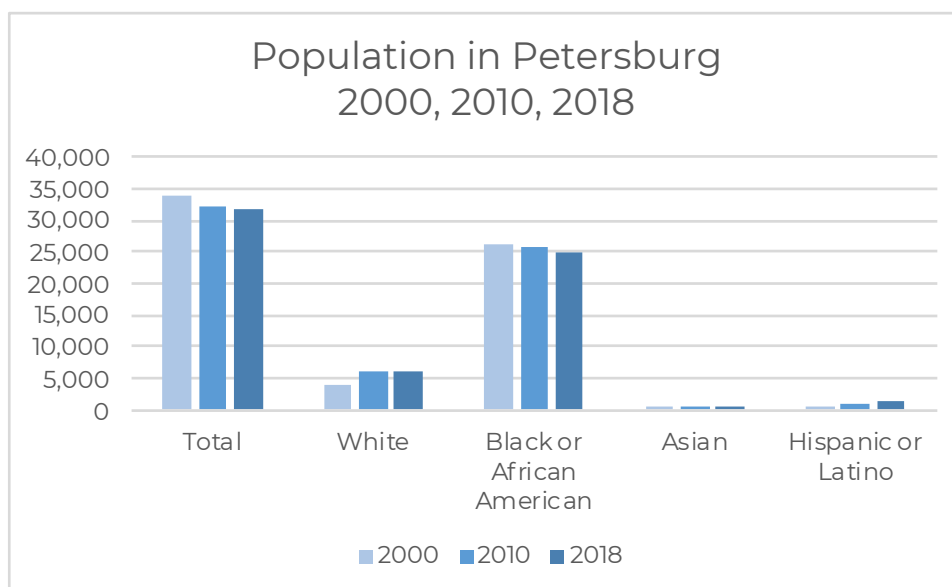


Figure 4. Population in Petersburg, 2000-2018. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census, 2010 & 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Income

Incomes in Petersburg are considerably low when comparing them with the statewide median income in Virginia. In 2018, the median income in Petersburg is just over \$36,000, compared to the statewide average of \$71,564. Between 2010 and 2018, the median income in Virginia rose over \$10,000 whereas the median income in Petersburg decreased approximately \$300 (see *Figure 5* and *Figure 6*). Asian residents have the highest median income in Petersburg, earning nearly \$50,000 a year. Black residents have the lowest median income, earning just over \$34,000 a year. The median income for Black or African American and Asian residents fell between 2010 and 2018, while it increased for White and Hispanic or Latino residents. Across the board, residents in Petersburg earn between 30% and 51% less than their counterparts in the rest of Virginia.

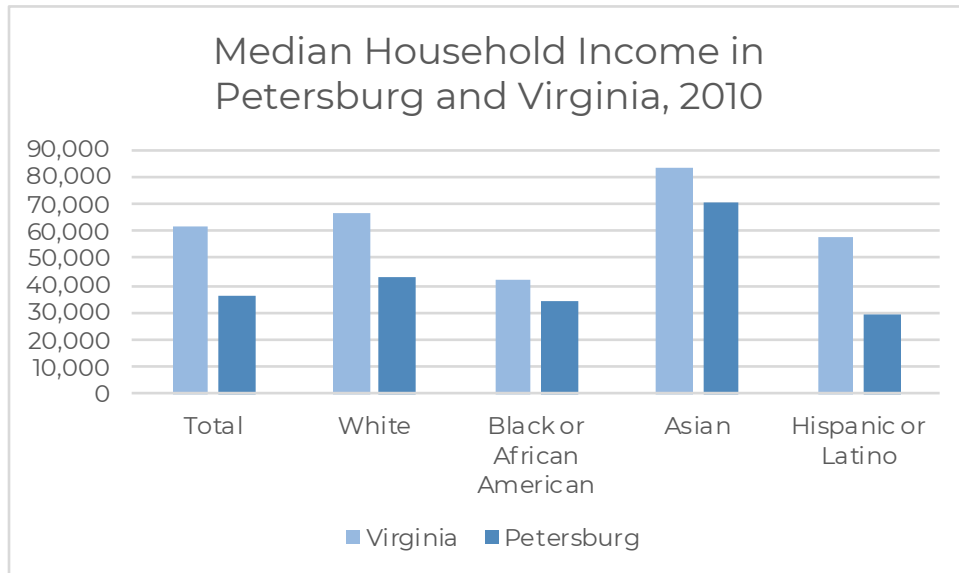


Figure 5. Median Income in Petersburg and Virginia, 2010. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

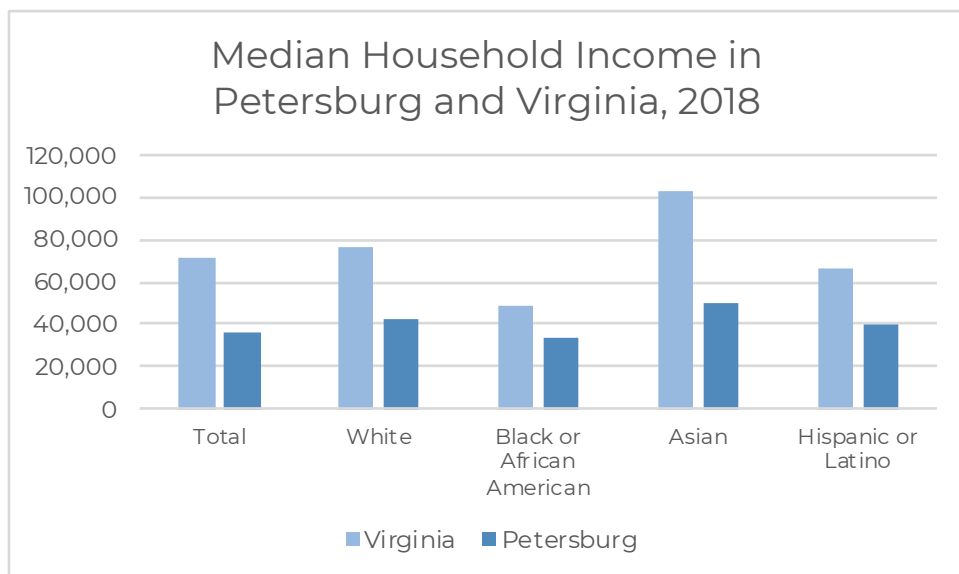


Figure 6. Median Income in Petersburg and Virginia, 2018. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Education

Educational Attainment in the City of Petersburg is relatively low in comparison to educational levels in Virginia as a whole. Petersburg has nearly double the rate of residents who have less than a high school degree than Virginia, and less half as many residents who have obtained a bachelor's degree by comparison (see *Figure 7*). In Petersburg, 20% of the population has less than a high school education, compared to 10.7% in the Commonwealth. Conversely, 21.7% of residents in Virginia have obtained their bachelor's degree, whereas 10.7% of those in Petersburg have a bachelor's degree. Petersburg also has fewer residents with a graduate or professional degree with 7.3% compared to 16.4% in Virginia.

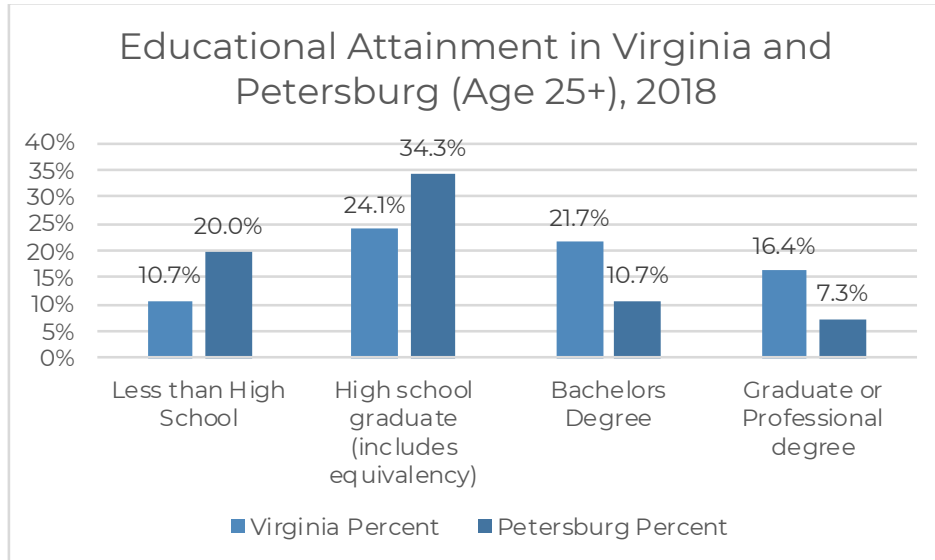


Figure 7. Educational Attainment in Petersburg and Virginia (Age 25+), 2010.
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Housing

Housing stock in the City of Petersburg increased nearly 1,000 units between 2010 and 2018. In 2010, 40.5% of units were renter occupied and 50.8% were owner-occupied (see *Figure 8*). In 2018, the number of renter-occupied units increased by nearly 20% to 59.5%. Owner-occupied units decreased 10% to 40.5% over the eight-year period. This shift to more renter-occupied units could signal a more transient population, low housing inventory available for purchase, or the inability to purchase permanent housing.

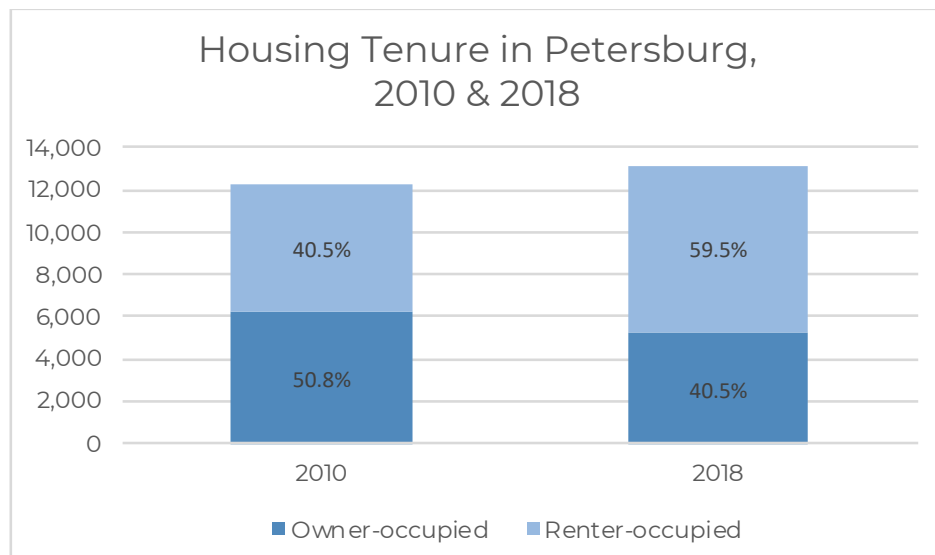


Figure 8. Ownership and Rental Rates in Petersburg, 2010 & 2018. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 & 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Building Occupancy

Petersburg has struggled to keep residential and commercial buildings occupied. In 2010, nearly a quarter of all properties were vacant (see *Figure 9*). In 2018, the percentage of vacant properties decreased to 19% (see *Figure 10*). The increase in occupied properties between 2010 and 2018 could potentially signal new interest in redevelopment in Petersburg.

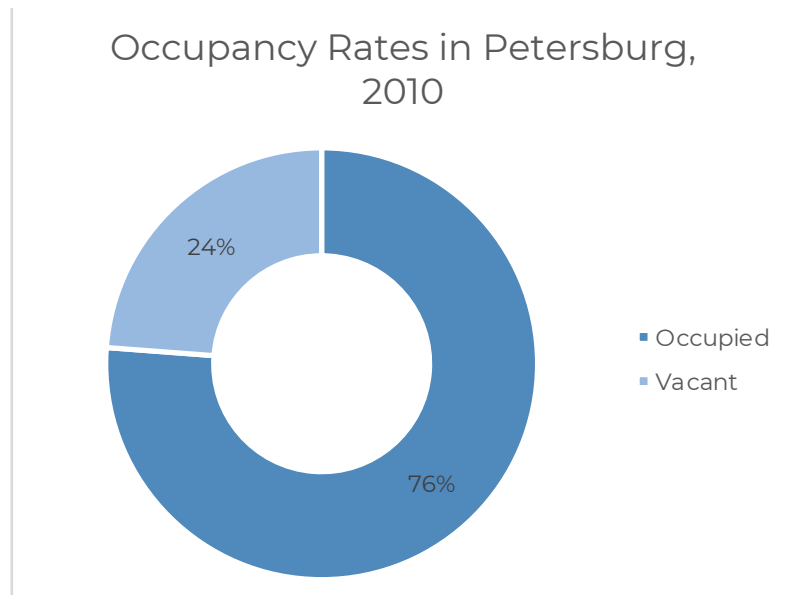


Figure 9. Occupancy Rates in Petersburg, 2010. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

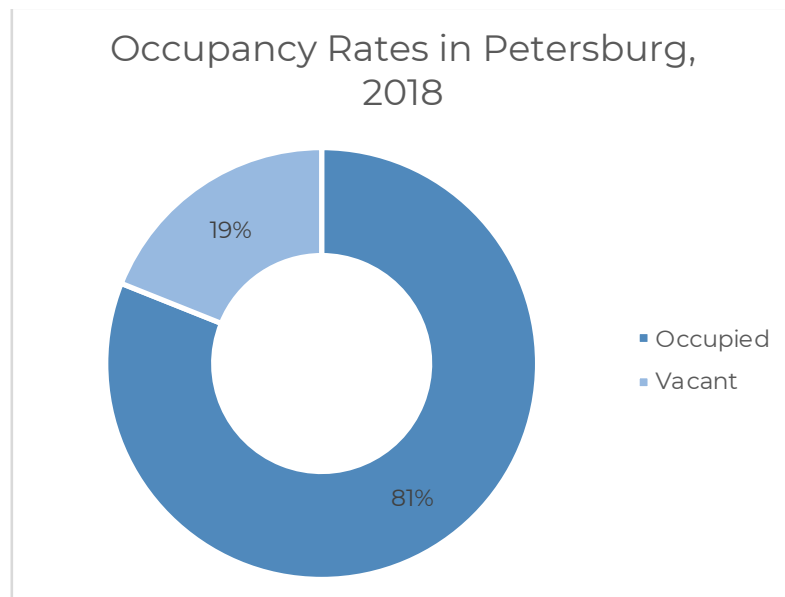


Figure 10. Occupancy Rates in Petersburg, 2018. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

City-owned Vacant Property

Currently, there are over 150 City-owned vacant properties in Petersburg (see Figure 11). These properties include both undeveloped land and vacant buildings and structures. The properties are scattered throughout the city and include both commercial and residential uses. The parcels range between 0.02 acres and 172.68 acres and many of the properties are situated adjacent each other. The majority of commercial property is in or around the Olde Town Historic District of the city and much of the residential property is clustered around the Halifax Triangle.

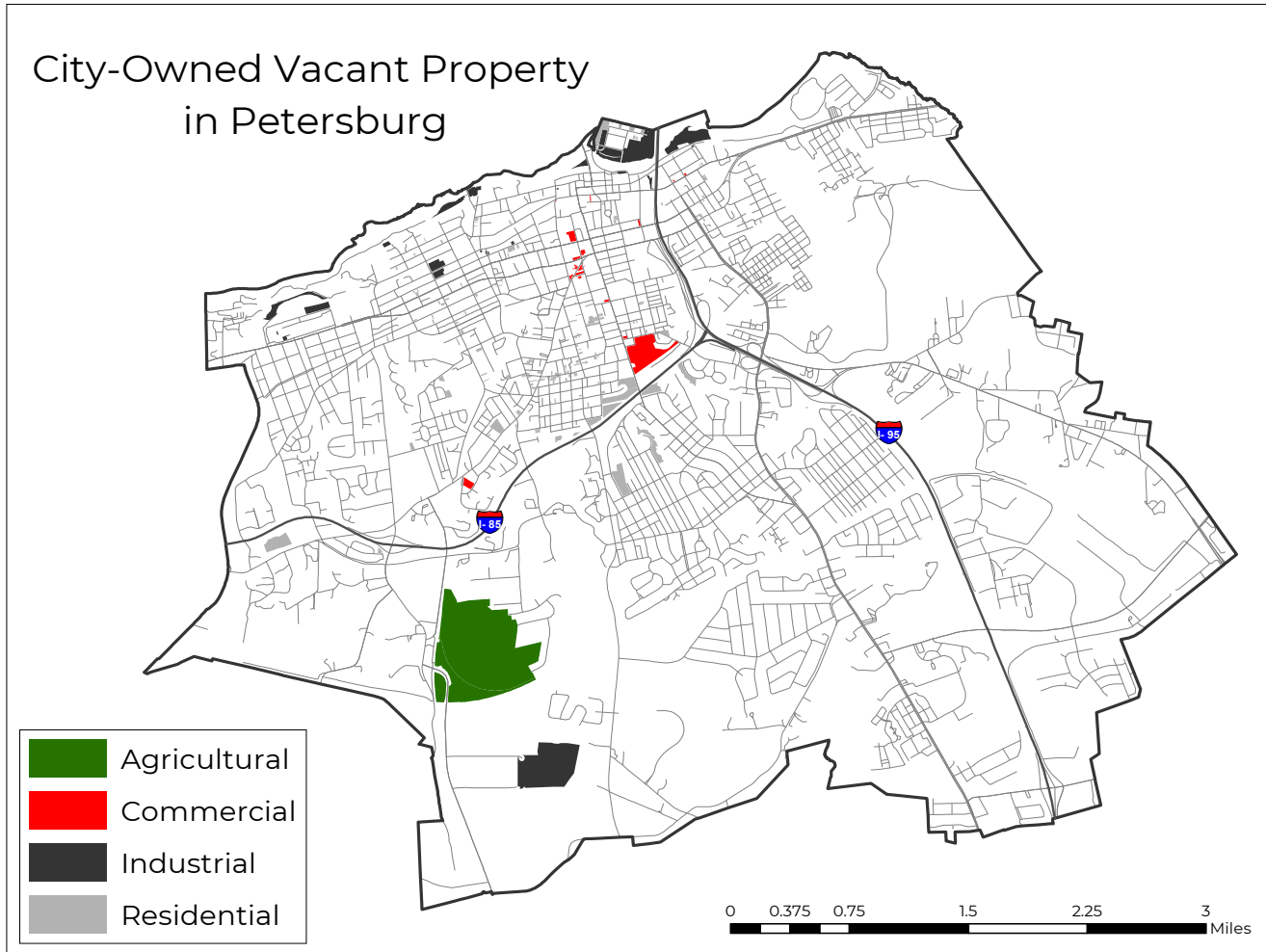


Figure 11. City-Owned Vacant Property in Petersburg. Author: Grace Stankus. Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Petersburg and the Region

The Richmond MSA is growing rapidly and projected to outpace the average expected population growth in Virginia. The Richmond MSA is projected to grow nearly 21% between 2010 and 2030 (Proximity One, 2019) (see *Table 1*). Chesterfield County, neighboring Petersburg north of the Appomattox River, is projected to grow 24%, Prince George County to the east is projected to grow 19%, the City's of Colonial Heights and Hopewell are projected to grow by 9% and 3% respectively. Despite the regional growth trends, Petersburg's population has declined and is projected to continue to decline nearly 7% between 2010 and 2030.

Despite decades of population and industrial decline in Petersburg, these growth trends present an opportunity for Petersburg to capitalize on momentum and re-establish itself within the region. Petersburg has several advantages that make the city an attractive location for development.

Table 1. Projected Growth in the Richmond Metropolitan Statistical Area, 2010-2030.
Source: ProximityOne, Situation & Outlook Report

	2010	2020	2030	2010-2030	2010-2030 (%)
Chesterfield	317,342	353,651	393,587	76,245	24.03%
Prince George	35,633	38,527	42,541	6,908	19.39%
Colonial Heights	17,359	18,126	18,869	1,510	8.70%
Hopewell	22,646	23,159	23,254	608	2.68%
Dinwiddie	28,021	28,388	28,546	525	1.87%
Petersburg	32,522	31,393	30,294	-2,228	-6.85%
Entire MSA	1,210,272	1,329,791	1,462,245	251,973	20.82%

Petersburg is situated between two regional attractors that draw people to the city. Fort Lee, an Army training installation in neighboring Prince George County, is located approximately five miles east of Petersburg. The post is the third largest training site in the Army (Military Installations, 2020). Over 70,000 troops take classes at Fort Lee annually, and there are approximately 27,000 service members, their families, civilians, and government contractors on Fort Lee daily (Military Installations, 2020).

Virginia State University (VSU), an historically Black public land-grant university is located across the Appomattox River in the Town of Ettrick, approximately one and a half miles from Petersburg. In 2017, VSU had an enrollment of 4,713 graduate and undergraduate students (Virginia State University, 2017). These two regional attractors bring thousands of people into the city each year and there's potential for Petersburg to retain these transient populations as permanent residents.

Petersburg has several existing assets that make the city a desirable place for development. The existing historic fabric in Historic Downtown creates a quaint, walkable downtown destination that has already received considerable development attention and efforts. Additionally, the waterfront access to the Appomattox River provides recreation amenities to residents and visitors alike furthering Petersburg as a destination.

Aggressive revitalization anchored by a strong land development strategy is crucial for Petersburg to benefit from regional growth trends. Implementing policies and strategies specific to Petersburg will help the city attract and retain development.

Current Plans

In 2014, the City of Petersburg updated their Comprehensive Plan, outlining a long-range vision and goals for the city. The Plan recognizes the issue of housing vacancies throughout Petersburg, particularly in the older areas of the city. The Eastgate section of the city, University Boulevard, Battersea neighborhoods, and the Halifax corridor are prime for infill and redevelopment of vacant property (City of Petersburg, 2014).

The City acknowledges the need for private investment for residential and commercial development, particularly in designated growth areas throughout Petersburg. There are abundant vacant parcels available in these areas, however, the City doesn't have a plan to assemble the parcels for redevelopment. The Comprehensive Plan has an optimistic outlook that the city needs "seeds of revitalization" (City of Petersburg, 2014) that can grow and gain momentum to encourage growth outwards from the nodes of redevelopment.

In addition to the City's Comprehensive Plan, a 2021- 2025 Strategic Plan was recently unveiled and will serve as a roadmap for how the City will work to achieve its goals and objectives over the next five years. Two of the four goals outlined in the Strategic Plan have components that address the abundance of vacant land throughout the city. The first goal aims to promote economic development to attract new businesses and strengthen the city's tax base (City of Petersburg, 2020) and the third objective specifically addresses vacancies by:

- developing a plan to transfer or sell City-owned property to investors
- developing policies and procedures for disposition of City-owned properties
- creating incentive packets and products to promote the city at economic events to attract development
- evaluating opportunity zones and enterprise zones

The second goal addresses neighborhood vitality and the first objective is aimed at preventing blight and deterioration (City of Petersburg, 2020). The relevant objectives for this second goal include:

- developing policies and procedures to address blight and launch a blight prevention initiative
- working with property owners to comply with code ordinances
- identifying unrepairable noncompliant housing that needs to be demolished
- identify and address noncompliant blighted lots

These action items are divided between multiple departments within the City of Petersburg including the City Manager's Office (CMO), Economic Development (ED), Neighborhood Services (NS), and Planning and Community Development (PCD). Approaching the problem of vacant properties as a multifaceted issue requiring citywide collaboration is an effective strategy for cohesion between plans. The Strategic Plan's goals and objectives complement the 2014 Comprehensive Plan and provide a cohesive vision and road map for the City to utilize as it endeavors to tackle stagnant development and vacant property.

Approaches to Revitalization

Understanding existing research surrounding the history of vacant properties in American cities and strategies used to combat the problem will help inform the research and methodology for creating a targeted land use plan for Petersburg. This literature review synthesizes extant research regarding the impact vacancies have on neighborhood vitality and outline strategies to address and develop vacant properties.

Impact on Neighborhood Vitality

Shabby appearances caused by overgrown foliage, graffiti, and deteriorated buildings on vacant property are clear physical indicators of how vacancies can affect aesthetics in a neighborhood. But beyond aesthetics, vacant properties can impact a neighborhood's vitality. The presence of vacant or abandoned buildings can lead to what is described as the Broken Window syndrome: the idea that if one broken window is left unrepaired, then soon more windows will be broken as the feeling that anything goes spreads throughout the area (Kelly, 2004) and can be viewed as an advertisement for lack of community control (Hirokawa & Gonzalez, 2010). Broken windows, or other signs of decay and neglect, in vacant properties can become sites for criminal activity or be perceived as dangerous areas where crime occurs.

Deferred maintenance of vacant properties negatively impact neighborhoods and their vitality. When property owners fail to maintain their property, the burden inadvertently falls on the community and the municipality to maintain public safety. Vacant properties have an increased risk of fire (Accordino & Johnson, 2000; Kondo et al., 2016), which is a risk to public safety, particularly in dense areas where dwellings are attached. Municipalities struggling to stay afloat as tax revenue declines must choose between, "ignoring the problems associated with property vacancy or allocating law enforcement, fire, and other services in disproportionate measures to areas surrounding vacant buildings" (Hirokawa & Gonzalez, 2010).

An abundance of vacant land "depresses land prices, property values, and tax revenues" (Schilling & Logan, 2008, 452). Properties adjacent to vacant lots or structures can have lower property values and lower assessed values (Accordino & Johnson, 2000; Kondo et al., 2016; Tisher, 2013) which in turn decreases municipal tax revenues. Lost tax revenue often lead to cities having no choice but to cut public services as a way to stay afloat and communities can be left with diminished services (Hirokawa & Gonzalez, 2010; Tisher, 2013). The extent to which vacancies impact municipal budgets varies, however, "cities with static or declining populations are more likely to experience negative effects on assessed property values than other cities" (Accordino & Johnson, 2000, 306).

Short-term Strategies

There is an abundance of literature discussing the many different ways cities and municipalities combat their vacant land problem. These strategies can be divided into two categories: short-term and long-term strategies. Short-term strategies tend to focus on cosmetic improvements such as lawn mowing, exterior painting, and the installation of lights to give the impression that someone is caring for the property. Cosmetic improvements are a cost-effective way for an area to avoid the broken window phenomenon.

Long-term Strategies

Shrinking cities are often identified as older industrial cities with persistent population loss and increased levels of vacant and abandoned properties (Schilling & Logan, 2008). "Right sizing", defined by Schilling and Logan as a strategy to stabilize "dysfunctional markets and distressed neighborhoods by more closely aligning a city's built environment with the needs

of existing and foreseeable future populations by adjusting the amount of land available for development” (Schilling & Logan, 2008, 453) is a long-term strategy employed to scale a city to serve a smaller population. In post-industrial cities that have experienced a shrinking population, “recognizing the incongruence between existing social and market demands and city plans” (Kondo et al., 2016) is imperative when thinking about revitalization efforts.

Over the past twenty-five years, land-banking has emerged as an innovative redevelopment tool to convert vacant and abandoned land into usable space that contributes to the social and economic vitality of a city (Alexander, 2020; Bacher & Byerly Williams, 2014; Tappendorf & Denzin, 2011). Land banks, “arose from the recognition that an increasing number of parcels of land, whether privately owned or held by the local government as a result of foreclosure procedures, were not being reclaimed or redeveloped by market forces” (Alexander, 2020, 142) and seek to shift vacant properties from liabilities to community assets. The organization and structure of land banks can vary widely depending on local laws and the goals for the program. Transferring properties to responsible owners through a land bank can benefit local governments by avoiding the financial burden of maintenance while also gaining increased property tax revenue and potentially increase funding with an increased tax base.

Selling City-owned property to non-profit developers is another strategy localities employ to encourage development or consistent maintenance on a lot. Community Development Corporations (CDCs) can serve as a way to redevelop lots with a community-oriented goal as they have a vested interest in the area. CDCs can often have a competitive advantage over outside investors since they have strong relationships with the community and are willing to involve them (Kelly, 2004). Cities grappling with an abundance of privately-owned vacant land can utilize a vacant property receivership strategy.

Theoretical Framework

The City of Petersburg has struggled to attract and retain businesses and residents which has led to an abundance of vacant property and a decline in tax revenue. The purpose of this plan is to provide the City of Petersburg with tools and strategies to reference when working towards developing vacant land into usable land. This plan will draw from community revitalization theory and a place-based vacant property reinvestment strategy. Place-based strategies “focus on improving the conditions in specific neighborhoods or urban areas as a route to change people’s lives.” (Grodach & Ehrenfeucht, 2016) with the goal of catalyzing social and economic change. This plan will center around two dimensions: place attractiveness to improve urban design and public spaces; and economic competitiveness to attract, develop, and support businesses and entrepreneurs (Grodach & Ehrenfeucht, 2016). Centering the plan around these two place-based strategies will place the physical, historical, and economic context of Petersburg at the forefront of this land disposition plan and help determine which good practices are conducive to Petersburg and the current revitalization plans.

Research Questions

In order to develop strategies to address Petersburg’s revitalization goals, this research aims to answer:

1. How are other post-industrial cities combating their vacant property? How can good practices be incorporated into Petersburg’s plan?
2. How can Petersburg’s disposition plan and development strategies align with current revitalization plans?
3. What are some ways Petersburg can revitalize vacant lots with little development interest or potential?

Methodology

The research will culminate in a final disposition and development plan that the City of Petersburg can use to guide the property marketing and development process. The first step is to understand and inventory existing conditions in the City of Petersburg and learn the City's visions for the future based on existing plans. The second step is to learn about what other cities have successfully done to handle their vacant land disposition. The third step is to apply relevant policies and ideas from other cities to Petersburg.

Identifying gaps in Petersburg's current vacant land disposition process is an important component of the research. The City already has documentation outlining the administrative processes of City-Owned land disposition but learning where the City needs additional attention to their processes will guide and inform the plan. Another important aspect to the research is determining how the City should prioritize and market properties that will be catalytic to redevelopment in the city.

The bulk of the research for this plan comes from analyzing how five cities along the East Coast handle vacant land disposition and requests for development. Reviewing precedent plans through a case-study helps inform the approach best suited for Petersburg through various strategies and features of these plans. The five cities: Akron, Ohio; Baltimore, Maryland; Buffalo, New York; Detroit, Michigan; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania were chosen because they are all post-industrial cities that have had similar struggles as Petersburg regarding vacant land and uneven redevelopment. The research is a combination of secondary research from each city's website and following up with City representatives to fill in any gaps unavailable online.

Representatives from all five cities were initially contacted through email. Interviews were scheduled with three cities- two were conducted virtually through Zoom and one was an email interview. Interview questions were tailored to each city depending on information found through each disposition plan and information available online. Four questions were asked to each interviewee:

1. If the City has a targeted approach, how are targeted areas determined?
2. How are outcomes and impacts (on development) from these initiatives being evaluated?
3. Which programs are working ? What isn't working as well?
4. Is there any advice to give Petersburg as it sets up its own initiative?

Good practices from each city were organized into six categories to compare the cities' practices. Learning about how these cities handle revitalization and requests for purchase and development on City-owned land has directly influenced the creation of Petersburg's plan and lent itself to a place-based approach.

The methodology is based on an iterative planning model. A multiple feedback strategy is appropriate for this process as it will ensure the land disposition policies and development strategies align with Petersburg's existing revitalization plans. Feedback from Petersburg officials from the City's Planning and Community Development (PDC), developers familiar with Petersburg, and regional housing and community revitalization professionals, will be incorporated. Continual revisions to the plan based on feedback from City officials add specific Petersburg context to the recommended policies and strategies.

Research Findings: Disposition and Development Policies

Akron

Governance

The City of Akron's Department of Planning and Urban Development, Development Services Division is responsible for the marketing and disposition of City-owned vacant land. City Council and the Akron Planning Commission are also involved in the approval process.

The Urban Neighborhood Development Corporation (UNDC) is a non-profit administered by the Department of Planning and Urban Development that builds and sells new homes throughout Akron. The goal of UNDC is to revitalize previously blighted areas and make homeownership possible for those with low-moderate incomes. A majority of the homes built by UNDC are priced under \$90,000.

Applicant Criteria

To be eligible to purchase or receive City-owned land, applicants must not be delinquent in real estate taxes or in foreclosure.

Methods

Vacant lots for sale are defined by two categories: buildable and unbuildable. Buildable parcels have a minimum 50-foot frontage and a lot size greater than 5,000 square feet. All available City-owned property is available for viewing on an interactive web mapping application.

The City of Akron's "**A Lot for a Little**" program allows residents to purchase buildable City-owned property if the lot is adjacent (or at least in the near vicinity) to the prospective buyer's property. Applicants are responsible for identifying an eligible, abutting City-owned property. Preference is given to a prospective buyer constructing a new home or providing economic development. Properties are eligible to be subdivided in the case of two interested parties, however priority will be given to commercial uses.

Applicants interested in purchasing through the "A Lot for a Little" program must complete the application available on Akron's Planning and Urban Development website. The application only requires applicant contact information and the parcel number of interest. The City then prepares a Purchase Agreement which is then presented to the Akron Planning Commission and City Council for passage. The City coordinates a land survey and once the survey is complete, the property is transferred to the buyer.

In early 2020, the City of Akron unveiled their "**Mow to Own**" program. The City identified City-owned vacant land that is eligible for conveyance to property owners who maintain the property for six months. Maintenance can include mowing, weeding, snow removal, litter removal. Throughout the six months, City inspectors will visit the site to ensure the lot is being properly maintained. At the end of the six months, the property will be conveyed to the new owner and they will become responsible for the taxes and continued maintenance. This program helps to legitimize ownership for residents who've long maintained vacant lots in their neighborhood.

In early 2021, the City of Akron released a new



program aimed to increase owner-occupancy and activate underutilized city land. **Welcome Home Akron** markets City-owned lots ready for development by either housing developers or individual purchasers looking to build in the city. The purpose of Welcome Home Akron is to increase housing supply and revitalize established neighborhoods.

Market Value

Both buildable and unbuildable parcels are listed for sale at a flat square foot rate. Buildable parcels are offered for sale through the Community Development Program are available for \$0.50 per square foot. Buildable parcels purchased through the Land Reutilization Program (property acquired by the City that was foreclosed due to non-payment of taxes) are \$2,500. All unbuildable parcels are available for \$0.05 per square foot. All buyers are responsible for the \$42 recording fee upon purchase of either buildable and unbuildable parcels.

Development

The buildable lots are offered to the UNDC or private developers before being offered to neighboring land owners. The City of Akron will determine the best use for the lot with preference given to residential and economic development activities. The applicant is responsible for obtaining all permits and any proposed construction should be submitted to the Department of Urban Planning and Urban Development for approval. If the proposed use is zoned something other than residential, the proposed zoning change will be brought to the Akron City Planning Commission. All proposed construction must comply with Akron's Building Code and Zoning Regulations and must commence within 90 days of title transfer. In the case that construction has not begun in the first 90 days, the City has the right to take possession of the property unless an extension has been granted.

Development through the Welcome Home Akron program must commence within three months of acquisition and be completed within twelve months from acquisition. Owners are required to occupy the property for a minimum of five years. The final design, site plan, and construction proposal must be approved by the Office of Integrated Development.

Other Features

Welcome Home Akron offers a 15-year tax abatement for new homes constructed in the city. Purchasers can finance the purchase price of the lot in the form of a lien for five years. As long as the purchaser lives on the property, they will not pay for the lot.

Baltimore

Governance

The City of Baltimore's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), Development Division is responsible for marketing and disposition of City-owned vacant land. A panel with the Mayor's office, Comptroller's office, and the City Council President approves the sale of City-owned property.

Applicant Criteria

All available City-owned vacant properties are listed on an interactive mapping application on the City website for the public. This tool can be used to inventory property and see where development is happening.

Buyers in the "**Vacants to Value**" (V2V) program must not have any current housing code violations and current on City taxes. The buyer must also be able to demonstrate the financial capacity and feasibility to complete the project through presenting W-2's or bank statements. If buyers plan on new construction, they must show that financing has been secured. Buyers interested in the Side Yard program only need to present proof of funds to purchase the property.



Methods

The City of Baltimore has three main programs aimed at streamlining the disposition of City-owned land. The city-wide **V2V** program was unveiled in 2010 with the goal to streamline the disposition process and target redevelopment efforts in distressed areas. The City is divided into five areas with a Neighborhood Development and Outreach representative from the City to assist prospective buyers in the V2V process. Each area has one or two Neighborhood Impact Investment Areas. Closing costs, sale price, and development incentives are available in for properties located within these areas. City approval hinges on a feasible timeline and construction plan for the development of the property and verified funds.

The Department of Housing and Community Development has a **Side Yard** program that provides an opportunity for homeowners to purchase vacant City-owned lots adjacent to their property. The properties available for the Side Yard program have been determined to be incapable of development per local zoning and code enforcement. After the title transfer, the new owner is then responsible for all taxes and maintenance going forward. Property purchased through the Side Yard program is subject to a ten-year development moratorium where buyers may be permitted to build accessory uses but are not allowed to build a large building such as a house. The intended use of the lot, be it a community garden, parking pad, or deck is subject to the Laws and Regulations of Baltimore City.

For City-owned vacant land larger than five lots and large buildings, the DHCD makes the decision about whether to market the property to an individual buyer or open for Request for Proposal (RFP).

Market Value

All reasonable offers are considered for properties eligible for V2V (contingent upon a completed application). Properties valued over \$20,000 require an appraisal to be paid for

by applicant. If a property is being sold for less than the appraised market value, DHCD must make a convincing argument for why the property is being sold for less to the panel. If an applicant proposes a use that is determined to be the highest and best use for a parcel (aligns with a neighborhood urban renewal plan or master plan), the City may sell it for less than the established market value.

Side Lots

Vacant lots eligible for the Side Yard program are available at a fixed rate. Lots adjacent to an owner-occupied property at \$500 per 1,500 square feet (\$0.33 per square foot). Lots adjacent to non-owner-occupied property are \$1,000 per 1,500 square feet (\$0.66 per square foot). The cost will increase as the lot size increased however the maximum size for a side yard is 5,000 square feet. The City covers the cost of settlement so the buyer only pays a flat rate for the land.

Baltimore's Department of Housing and Community Development has an "**Adopt-A-Lot**" program where residents, organizations, school groups, businesses, or neighborhood groups can care for a vacant lot in the city. These lots can be used for community gardens, communal green space, or any other non-profit use. The Adopt-A-Lot program is an opportunity for residents to get involved in neighborhood stewardship without tax or financial obligations. Applications to adopt-a-lot can be submitted between February and November and are finalized within 60 days. Applicants can also apply to bring water access to the lot for \$120 if the space will be used for an agricultural purpose. The Adopt-A-Lot and HOMEGROWN programs are successful in giving community members who have long been maintaining vacant lots a sense of ownership through a formal lease.

Development

The development of a V2V property must begin within 90 days of title transfer and be completed within 12 months.

Other Features

DHCD has five Neighborhood Development and Outreach Representatives for five areas throughout the city (East, West, Northeast, Northwest, and Southwest) whose responsibilities are two-fold. The first is to market City-owned property through workshops and events to help get the word out about properties available within the community. Outreach Representatives serve as a main point of contact to develop relationships with repeat developers and community members. The second is to ensure coordination between all City departments involved in the disposition and development of land. Increased coordination with City offices such as the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) and the Department of Transportation (DOT) helps with marketing to pinpoint areas where infrastructure improvement is happening.

The Planning Department offers pro-bono predevelopment meetings where developers or prospective buyers can review site, design, or regulatory issues with a planner and urban designer to help buyers determine what is possible for a certain property or area.

For privately-owned vacant property, the City can appoint a building "receiver" for property that has unresolved code violations through issuing Vacant Building Notices. If the owner fails to comply with the notice, the City can appoint One House at a Time (OHAAT), a non-profit that sells properties to qualified buyers, to become the receiver. Property owners and other stakeholders have the opportunity to retain the property if they can prove to the Court they have the financial means and capability to manage a building rehabilitation. If the invested parties fail to demonstrate this, the property can be received by OHAAT and will be sold to someone qualified to undertake a rehab project.

Buffalo

Governance

Buffalo's disposition policies are found on the City of Buffalo's website in the 'Real Estate' section. The disposition of City-owned vacant land is handled by the Office of Strategic Planning Division of Real Estate and the Land Use Planning Committee. The Office of Strategic Planning also works closely with the Buffalo Urban Development Corporation (BUDC). Funding for the HOMEGROWN program can also be provided by the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency (BURA).

Applicant Criteria

The City lists four stipulations regarding Purchaser qualifications: 1) purchaser must be current on all financial obligations to the city (taxes, utilities, violations, ect.); 2) any other property owned by the purchaser must be free of any code violations; 3) must be able to provide evidence of financial ability to acquire, repair, and maintain property; 4) must be able to provide verification of current source of income.

Methods

If the interested purchaser is determined to be qualified, they must fill out the application to purchase city-owned property available on the website. The interested purchaser is to briefly describe their intended use for the property. The submitted application is then reviewed by the Division of Real Estate and the Land Use Planning Committee determines if the property is eligible for release. The City can choose not to release a property if it's needed for public purpose or development.

If the purchaser intends to make physical changes to a residential or commercial structure, they must submit a detailed Repair/Rehabilitation/Redevelopment Proposal form available on the website. The purpose of this form is to submit a budget for the acquisition/rehabilitation of the structure and evidence of the financial ability to complete project.

The City has a homeownership program called **HOMEGROWN** to support a first time, low-income homebuyers. The City identifies and lists an inventory vacant homes and duplexes available for purchase at a lower price and receive funding for renovations and repairs to make the home code compliant. Buyers are required to use a SONYMA Remodel NY Rehabilitation Mortgage and approved funding can be provided through a deferred payment or 0% interest loan. The City partnered with the Matt Urban Center to assist homebuyers navigate the homebuying process through this program.



Source: Alana Semuels, Los Angeles Times



The City also has an **Urban Homestead** Program wherein houses and lots in designated Urban Renewal areas can be purchased for \$1. There are three ways to participate in the program. The first is the purchase of a vacant lot next to an existing resident. The applicant must own and occupy the residential property adjacent to the City-owned lot as a primary residence. The second way is to purchase a vacant lot for new construction. Purchasing vacant property with the intent to rehabilitate an existing residential structure is the third way to participate in the Urban Homestead Program. The criteria for eligibility through these two paths are the same as those with a direct sale while also providing proof of at least \$5,000. In addition to the minimum criteria for development listed above, the buyer must occupy the newly-constructed residence for a minimum of thirty-six months.

Market Value

Buyers interested in purchasing City-owned land may need to have the property appraised by a licensed real estate appraisal and are responsible for the cost of the appraisal. The Division of Real Estate establishes an appraised value for HOMEGROWN properties in their current condition and determines an estimated appraised value after repairs and renovations are complete.

Development

If the purchaser plans to use the vacant land for development purposes, the applicant must provide a sketch with dimensions, detailed cost estimates, and proof of finances to construct and maintain a structure. All required permits and approvals must be obtained by the purchaser and the structure(s) must be constructed on the premises within twelve months from the title transfer.

Detroit

Governance

The City of Detroit is responsible for marketing and selling City-owned commercial properties which are available on the City's website. The Jobs & Economy Team in the Mayor's Office, the Housing and Revitalization Department, the Planning and Development Department, the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, City Law Department, Detroit Building Authority, Detroit Land Back Authority (DLBA), and the Department of Neighborhoods are all involved in the disposition process in different capacities. City Council makes final decisions regarding City-owned land disposition.

The DLBA markets and sells City-owned residential property and select vacant homes and lots on their website.

Applicant Criteria

Prospective buyers must be in "good standing" meaning current on all personal/corporate income taxes, property taxes, water bills, and have no code violations. Applicants must also be able to provide proof of funds for any estimated costs associated with renovating or developing the property.

Applicants are also able to lease property for temporary use or maintenance. In addition to the requirements outlined above for buyers, applicants must also provide additional forms regarding income tax and accounts receivable clearances.

Methods

Available property owned either by the City of Detroit or the DLBA can be viewed on an interactive Detroit Development Opportunities map. Interested buyers and lessees must complete a Property Application form and detail the proposed use for the property. When evaluating applications, the City is looking for proposals that are consistent with City objectives, a use that is consistent with current zoning or could be reasonably rezoned, a competitive offer price, and if applicable, the applicant owns the adjacent property. The entirety of the application to sale process takes about four months to complete (barring any major hang-ups).

In high demand areas, the City will market available land on the City real estate marketing website or package it as a Request for Proposals (RFP). During the marketing or RFP process, the City's real estate committee will consider the offered purchase price, proposed use, and the capacity of the applicant.

In 2016, the City identified several key areas with strong housing markets and commercial activity as Targeted Multifamily Housing areas. Developers are encouraged to build market-rate and affordable housing that increases residential density and promotes a walkable environment.

Individuals, community groups, or for-profits are eligible to purchase land to use for Land Based Projects (LBP) such as urban agriculture, gardening, and beautification. The criteria to purchase land for LBP is the same as to purchase a parcel of land for development (outlined above).

Side Lots

The DLBA oversees the disposition of small lots in the **Side Lot** program. For the first 180 days of marketing, side lots less than 7,500 square feet are available for purchase by eligible buyers who own property adjacent to the vacant lot. After the 180 days, the side lots become

available for purchase by any eligible buyer. All side lots are available for \$100. Side lots with accessory structures no larger than 750 square feet, such as a garage or shed, can be purchased for \$250 unless the DLBA determined the lot's value exceeds \$2,500.

Market Value

Generally, property is sold at market value. Purchase price incentives are occasionally granted for adjacent property owners, sales that will directly encourage job growth, and local non-profits.

Incentives

The DLBA has a Community Partner Program to support neighborhood initiatives by community-based organizations. Organizations can apply for Community Partnership status which comes with some advantages. Community Partners can endorse homeowners who have demonstrated the ability to live in the community as good neighbors so endorsed bidders will receive an automatic 20% increase on their bid amount. Community Partners are also eligible to purchase property at a cost 20% less than the determined market value for up to nine properties. Proposals for ten or more DLBA properties will be negotiated on a case by case basis.

The DLBA also offers a 50% discount on DLBA auction homes to Detroit Public School Teachers, City Employees, members of trade unions that participate in the City's Skilled Trade Employment Program (STEP), and a 20% discount to purchasers who completed a homebuying counseling course through participating CDC's and housing non-profit agencies.

Other Features

The DLBA actively promotes available land through Building Block community events hosted virtually via Zoom. Resources for prospective buyers and rehabbers is also available through bi-weekly lunch and learn sessions that discuss various programs and initiatives the Land Bank and the City offer.



Source: Jack Eidt, Detroit Fields



Source: Jason Margolis, NPR

Philadelphia

The City of Philadelphia's land disposition plan, adopted in 2017, outlines nine guiding principles to consider throughout the disposition process of City-owned land. These goals focus on increasing the City's tax base, revitalizing neighborhoods while supporting affordable housing and open space, and streamlining the disposition and development process.

Governance

The City, the Philadelphia Land Bank, Redevelopment Authority, and Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation are the main governing bodies involved in the land disposition process. The City-owned property available for public purchase are those that are not dedicated to a public use or held for City programs or projects.



Source: Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations

Applicant Criteria

The City outlines three criteria for "Qualified Purchasers" (QP) who are in good standing with the City and eligible to purchase City-owned property. A QP must be current on City taxes (or have a current payment agreement), current with City utilities (or have a current payment agreement), and must not own or have interest in any project that is in violation of City codes and ordinances. Purchasers can submit a Qualified Bid (QB) that must include specific plans for the property, ensuring consistency of proposed uses with City plans and demonstrate financial and operational capacity to fulfill the proposal.

Methods

The City uses three different processes to sell property:

1. General Sale- the City reviews individual requests for property on a rolling basis. In the case that the City receives more than one QB, the City can give first preference to a QP whose plan provides a public purpose. If a public purpose is not proposed in any QBs, the City will determine the most qualified applicant or can use a Competitive Sale approach.
2. Competitive Sale- process where the City invites bids on properties, oftentimes using advertising methods such as broker listings, Multiple Listing Service (MLS) or other advertisements to encourage broad participation.
 - Applications are scored on Economic Opportunity & Inclusion (30%), Development Team Experience & Capacity (20%), Financial Feasibility (20%), Public Purpose/Social Impact (15%), Project Design (10%), and Offer Price (5%).
3. Direct Sale- process where the City sells a property or properties to an entity without entering a competitive sale process as part of a bundle. The purchaser must own a significant amount of property adjacent to the City property and intend to develop the parcels together. Procedures for direct sales vary depending on whether the purchaser is a for-profit entity, non-profit entity, or an individual.

If a potential buyer wants to purchase multiple parcels that require assemblage to

complete the proposed development, the buyer or the Land Bank must own at least 50% of the desired parcels in order for a purchase to be made outside of a competitive sale process. For large scale development projects, the Land Bank will issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for qualified contractors.

Property available to the public, record of all property conveyed, and the details about property sales are made available on the Philadelphia Land Bank's website. Every three to five years, the Land Bank identifies areas throughout the city that are targeted for development and affordable housing through market trend analysis such as income and housing changes.

Side Lots

The plan also outlines policies for the open space programs the City offers for vacant land where the purchaser does not intend to develop: the **Side and Rear Program** and **Individual Garden Agreements (IGA)**. Both programs aim to convey vacant City-owned land to stakeholders invested in the neighborhood. The Side and Rear Program is limited to vacant lots in Census block groups where the median sales price of homes is less than \$75,000. The Land Bank is responsible for listing eligible lots on an annual basis.

The goal of the IGA program is to increase the quality of life in urban neighborhoods through the support of urban agriculture initiatives on vacant land. Both individual gardening and community gardening is eligible for IGA conveyance. The IGA lasts for one year and can be renewed annually at the discretion of the City.

Lot leases for individuals, nonprofit community gardens and community managed open space, and urban farming initiatives are available through the Land Bank. Leased property is restricted to one-year leases. Lot lease programs are successful in giving community members who have long been maintaining vacant lots a sense of ownership through a formal lease agreement.

Market Value

Property prices are established using an Automated Valuation Model, a competitive market analysis, or an appraisal. Once a deal is reached, the Redevelopment Authority and the Land Bank provide a development agreement to the QP. The sale price is only valid if the QP executes the development agreement within six months of receiving it. The City can choose to sell a property at a discounted price if the project serves a public purpose.

Development

Development should begin within three months from the deed conveyance and should be completed as defined in the written agreement on the deed. Proposed development must be consistent with Philadelphia's 2035 Comprehensive Plan and other approved City plans.

Other Features

Philadelphia City Council identifies areas eligible for inclusionary zoning bonuses through either the creation of affordable housing or a contribution to the Philadelphia Housing Trust Fund. Affordable and Workforce Housing, Community Development Projects such as libraries, recreation centers, infrastructure improvements, community centers used for secular purposes, etc. can be eligible for discounted pricing. If a property is deemed eligible for discounted pricing, the City may deed restrict the property and/or provide a self-amortizing mortgage for the difference between the market value and sale price. The plan outlines conditions and characteristics of the self-amortizing mortgage.

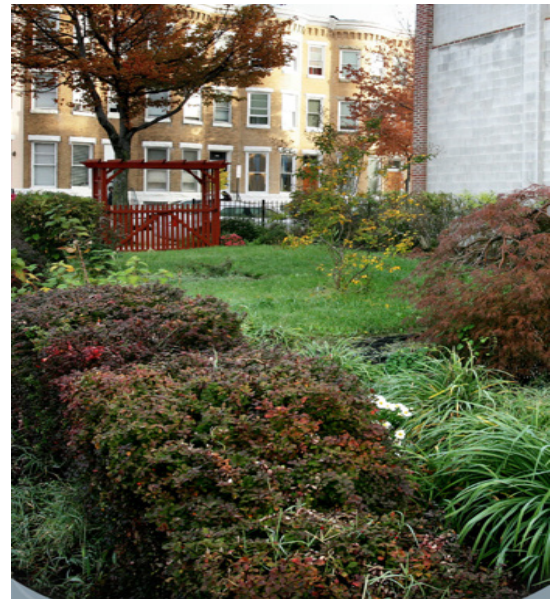
Side Lots

Side lots located in residential areas that have been determined to be unbuildable, due to small lot size or irregular shape, or have little development interest, present many opportunities for neighborhood and community enrichment. Petersburg has many small lots that cannot support development but could provide benefits for the community through beautification efforts. These lots have the potential to turn into extended private outdoor space, a parking pad, community garden, neighborhood park, or green infrastructure for environmental benefits. Selling these properties to dedicated Petersburg residents, many of whom have likely maintained these lots for years, is a small way to make a big impact.

Figure 12 shows the side lot programs and policies for four of the study cities (Buffalo does not have a specified side lot program so it is not included in the table). Comparing good practices from different side lot disposition programs can help inform a program for unbuildable lots in Petersburg.



Source: Carlos Osorio, AP, Bloomberg CityLab



Source: Baltimore DHCD



Source: Michelle & Chris Gerard, Curbed Detroit



Source: Matthew Lewis, Next City

	Akron	Baltimore	Detroit	Philadelphia
Program	Mow-to-Own	Side Yard	Side Lot	Side and Rear
What is a side lot?	Determined on a case-by-case basis	A lot that is determined incapable of development per local zoning and code ordinances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maximum 5,000 sq ft lot 	A lot no larger than 7,500 sq ft	A lot that is determined to be incapable of development per local zoning and code ordinances
Applicant Criteria	Applicants must own property adjacent to eligible lots. If the adjacent owner is not interested, residents up to 300 ft from the lot can apply	Applicants must own property adjacent to eligible lots	For the first 180 days on the market, applicants must own and occupy property adjacent to eligible lots. After the 180 days, the side lots can be purchased by anyone	Applicants must own and occupy property adjacent to eligible lots and have a plan for proposed improvements on the lot
Price	Sweat equity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lot is conveyed to new owner after six months of maintenance (mowing, weeding, snow removal, etc) If owner is not in good standing (ie. owe on real estate taxes, code violations, ect) then parcel may be purchased for market price	Fixed rate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$500 per 1,500 sq ft (\$.33 per sq ft) for owner occupied adjacent property • \$1,000 per 1,500 sq ft (\$.66 per sq ft) for non-owner occupied adjacent property. Cost increases as lot size increases (up to 5,000 sq ft) City covers settlement costs	Fixed rate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$100 for side lot • \$250 for side lot with accessory structure unless the DLBA has determined that the parcel value exceeds \$2,500 	Side lots are eligible for discount and nominal pricing depending on the location Buyer pays settlement costs
Parcel Limitations	Development restrictions can be placed on the lot at time of conveyance.	Accessory uses such as a community garden, parking pad, or deck are subject to local laws and regulations of Baltimore		Buyers can only purchase one parcel Program is limited to lots in Census block groups where the median sales price is less than \$75,000. Exceptions can be made in outside block groups for residents who have maintained residence for seven years
Other Disposition Factors		Lots are subject to ten-year development moratorium where large development is prohibited		Buyer is encouraged to consolidate the primary residence and side lot parcels into one parcel within a year

Figure 12: Side Lot Programs at a Glance

*Note: Buffalo does not have a specified side lot program so it is not included in the table

Key Findings

All five study cities have strong disposition policies and development strategies with elements that can influence and guide Petersburg's redevelopment plans.

Aggressive targeting strategy such as those implemented in Baltimore, Buffalo, Detroit, and Philadelphia are key to jumpstarting development in distressed areas. Targeted areas can be determined for a variety of different reasons. Detroit targets areas along commercial and transit corridors and encourages developers to build multi-unit development within these areas. Baltimore's Vacants to Values program incentivizes disposition and development in key areas in distressed neighborhoods through financial incentives. Looking at market trends such as housing prices and incomes can be a way to determine which areas are suitable for development incentives, a targeting method used in Philadelphia.

Designating parcels as either buildable or unbuildable is an important step in determining how to dispose of the property. Buildable lots, determined by size and land use, have a higher market value than unbuildable lots. Akron, Baltimore, Detroit, and Philadelphia all have various disposition methods for how to handle unbuildable land, many in a side lot program. These cities have seen enormous success selling vacant side lots to neighboring property owners, conveying the lots to invested residents who keep up with maintenance, and allowing neighbors and community groups to tend and maintain the land on a rental basis.

Distinguishing between individual buyers and larger scale, multi-unit developers is also a common theme within the cities. Disposition and development policies vary depending on whether the purchaser is an individual property owner, small scale developer, or a large multi-unit developer. Programs and incentives need to be an appropriate scale depending on the intended purpose and scope of the proposed development.

All five of the study cities experienced decades of population and industrial decline which resulted in an abundance of City-owned vacant land, just like in Petersburg, however through intentional and proactive land disposition and development strategies, each city has been able to catalyze development and revitalize distressed areas of the city.

Recommendations for Petersburg

Based on the research findings from five post-industrial study cities, Petersburg can move towards becoming a vibrant historic city through moving City-owned property into productive use. The city already has considerable assets and is in an ideal location but it needs to take advantage of regional growth trends. Implementing a targeted land disposition and development strategy, and creating and expanding specific tools that help developers and individuals take ownership and responsibility of City-owned land is the first step towards revitalization. If the City does this consistently while soliciting partnerships for development, private investment will be self sustaining and will evolve and shift throughout the city. The following recommendations are intended to complement current disposition practices and expand development strategies as Petersburg works to revitalize and attract development.

Goal 1: Create a Targeted Approach for Disposition and Development

Dividing the city into strategically targeted areas where Petersburg can implement programs to incentivize private development is a key to revitalizing the city. Prioritizing targeted areas for a certain time period and providing infrastructure and public improvements to establish growth can persuade investors that investing in Petersburg is a good investment. If these strategies are successful and reinvestment occurs, the targeted areas can shift and move over time.

Objective 1.1: Determine the market value for City-owned land

The market price for City-owned land should be determined through a professional appraisal process and each property be listed for the appraised value. The City may decide to sell the property for less than market value if the proposed use provides an economic benefit or aligns with the City's Comprehensive and/or Strategic Plan.

Market value is also an important element to consider when targeting areas prime for development and deciding when to shift targeted areas to other neighborhoods. Evaluating current market values and then once property values increase to a predetermined level that indicates self sustaining investment is occurring, the City can move to the next targeted area and repeat the process.

Objective 1.2: Prioritize Capital Improvements in targeted areas

Aging and failing infrastructure such as roads, sidewalks, and utilities can be a deterrent to prospective buyers and developers. Necessary infrastructure improvements can incur major institutional costs and cause the overall development costs to increase to levels that make the project financially unfeasible. The City can consider prioritizing and budgeting for Capital Improvements in targeted areas to spur private development.

In 1999, the City of Richmond piloted the Neighborhoods in Bloom program to direct public and nonprofit investment in targeted distressed neighborhoods in an effort to attract private investment. Petersburg can implement a similar program targeted at infrastructure improvements. The City of Petersburg could match Capital Improvement dollars to the targeted redevelopment areas as a way to incentivize private development and investment.

Objective 1.3: Prioritize neighborhood beautification funding in targeted areas

Implementing a façade improvement program in targeted areas is another way to attract private investment. Improving the appearance of storefronts and other buildings furthers the marketability and potential of areas struggling to attract development. To facilitate aesthetic improvements, the City could assist property owners through grant funding. Similarly, neighborhood beautification projects such as urban greening and streetscape improvements

is another way to make a big impact and attract investment in distressed areas.

Objective 1.4: Capitalize on the recent development momentum in Historic Downtown

Historic Downtown Petersburg has experienced increased development interest in the past decade and with the redevelopment of Demolition Coffee, Trapezium Brewery and Lofts, and the Bosco apartments, among others. The area is situated to become a self-sufficient, walkable community and increased development in the downtown core, particularly over surface parking lots, could have reverberating effects throughout the city.

Positioning Historic Downtown as the first targeted area to direct investment into can spur development momentum throughout the city. The City of Petersburg owns approximately 54 commercial and industrial vacant parcels throughout Historic Downtown and surrounding area (see *Figure 13*) presenting the opportunity to continue redevelopment on City-owned land. There are also numerous, large industrial parcels on Pocahontas Island, along the Appomattox River just north of the Historic Downtown. These parcels are ideally situated for redevelopment opportunities and offer the potential for industry and increased economic activity in the city.

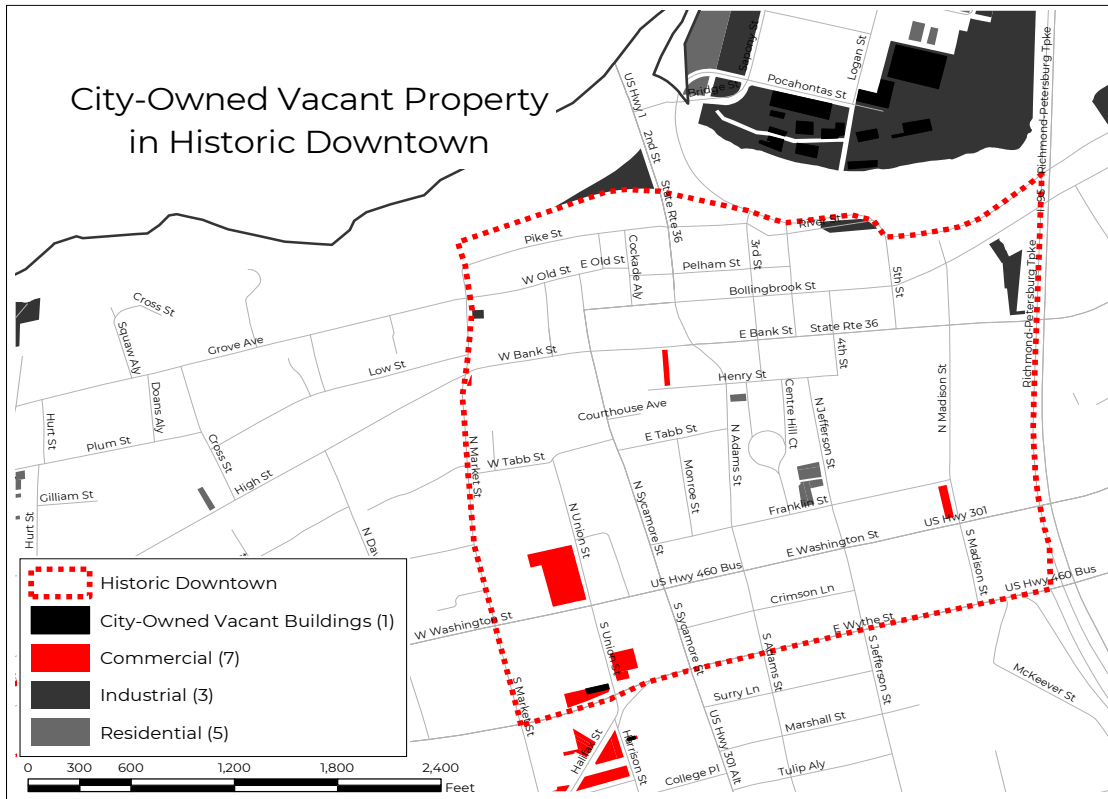


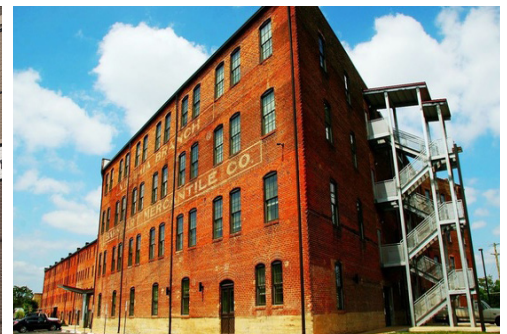
Figure 13. City-Owned Vacant Property in Historic Downtown. Author: Grace Stankus. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, City of Petersburg.



Source: Trapezium Lofts



Source: Best Part of Virginia



Source: Landing, Mayton Transfer Lofts

Objective 1.5: Target the Halifax Triangle and Battersea neighborhoods

The Heights neighborhood is a neighborhood bound by Halifax Street to the west, South Sycamore Street to the east and I-85 to the south. Within the Heights, the Halifax Triangle, the area where Halifax Street, South Avenue, and Harrison Street meet, was historically Petersburg's African-American business center until the 1970's (Virginia Tourism Corporation, 2020) when the city began experiencing decline due to industry leaving the city and residents moving out to the suburbs. Since then, the area has experienced continued population and neighborhood decline, resulting in an abundance of vacant property in residential zones.

The Halifax Triangle, just south of the Historic Downtown, is an ideal area to channel public investment and incentives in the second phase of a targeted approach. A majority of the City-owned residential parcels are located in the Heights with a few commercial properties scattered throughout (see *Figure 14*). The Heights has an abundance of vacant property, particularly vacant lots, and this area could benefit from a robust side lot program to transfer ownership to residents in the neighborhood interested in maintaining the lots. There is also ample commercial development potential around the Halifax Triangle, once a thriving commercial district, to increase amenities and other economic activity in the neighborhood.

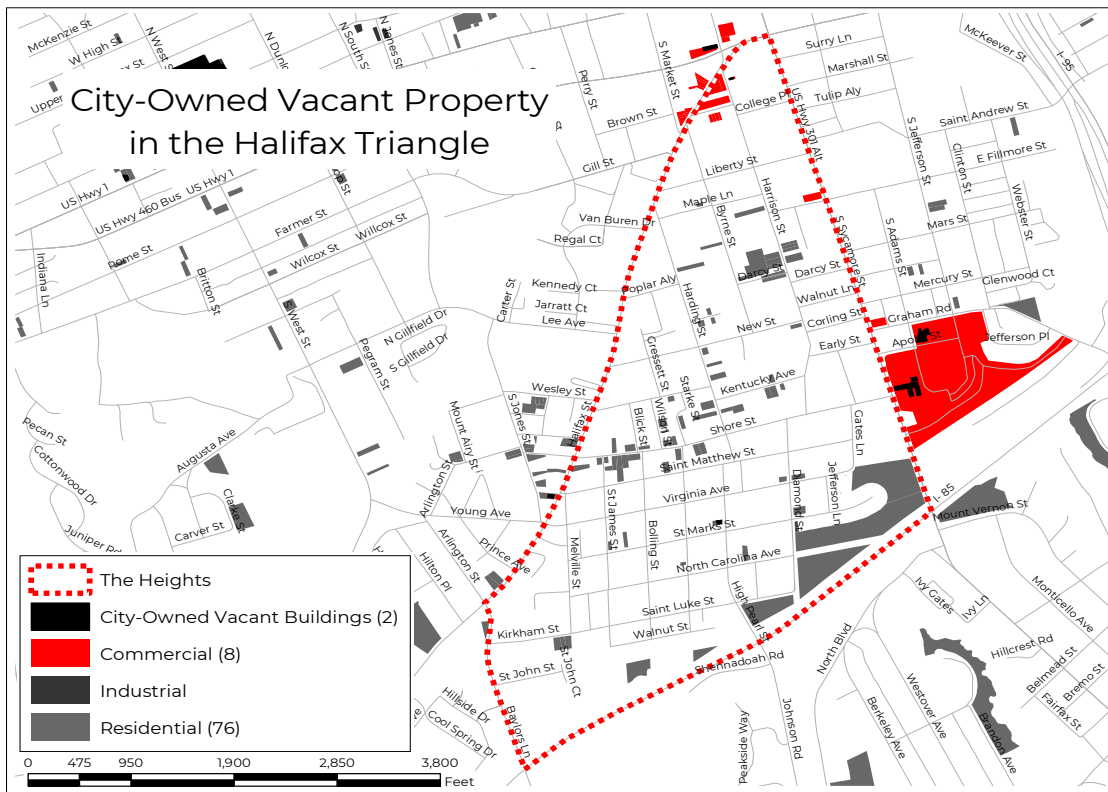


Figure 14. City-Owned Vacant Property in the Halifax Triangle. Author: Grace Stankus. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, City of Petersburg.



The Battersea area, located just west of Historic Downtown, is another neighborhood poised for development. After targeting downtown and the Halifax Triangle, shifting focus to Battersea should be the City's next priority. There are multiple City-owned, residential and commercial parcels scattered throughout the Battersea/University Boulevard section of the city (see *Figure 15*). Located between Virginia State University and downtown Petersburg, this area can attract VSU students, graduates and other residents. The neighborhood can also capitalize on visitors to the Appomattox River. Redevelopment has already started occurring and there are multiple loft style apartment buildings that have been redeveloped increasing housing and density in the neighborhood.

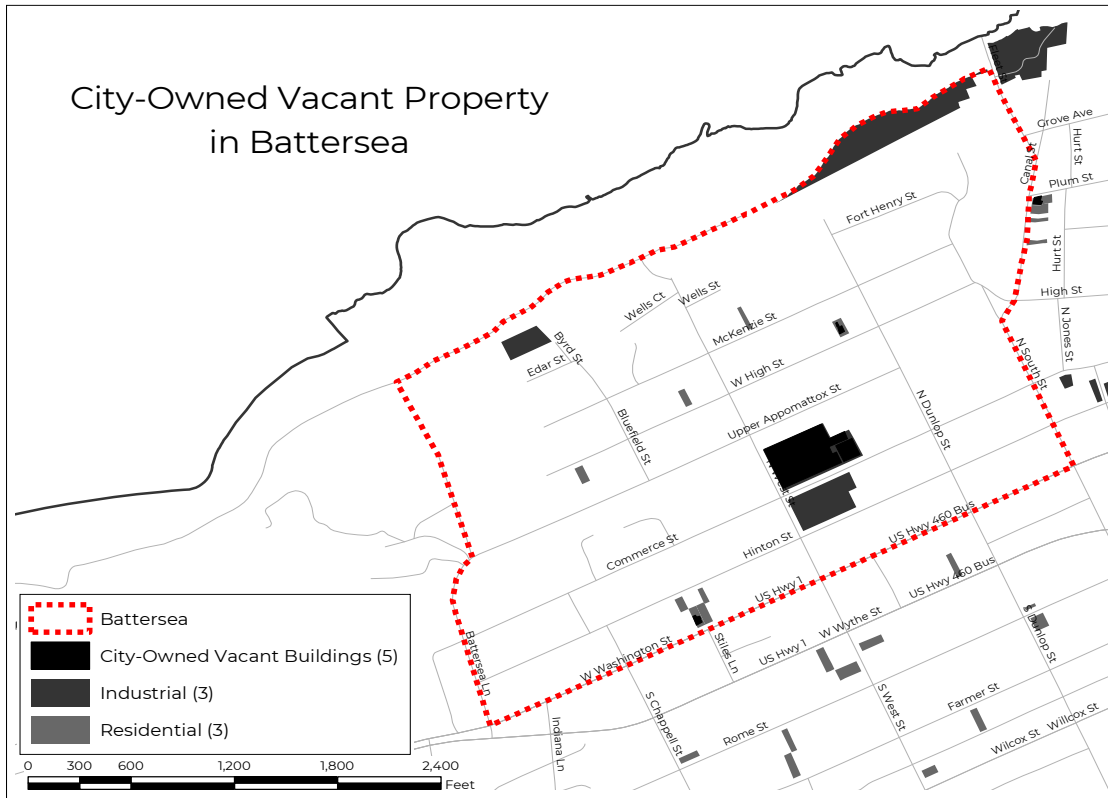
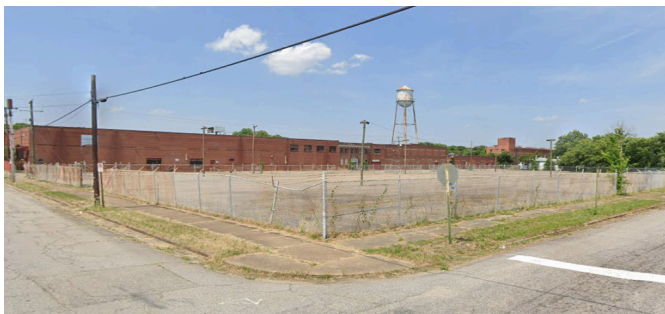


Figure 15. City-Owned Vacant Property in Battersea. Author: Grace Stankus. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, City of Petersburg.



Objective 1.6: Focus on Designated Growth Areas

The availability of City-owned vacant land creates exciting potential for redevelopment and revitalization throughout the city. The City has identified seven designated growth areas where the city is driving residential, commercial, and mixed-use development (City of Petersburg, 2014). To encourage development in the designated growth areas, the City should direct economic development activities and infrastructure facilities to these areas. Petersburg should market these areas for development through incentives such as Enterprise Zones, lessening parking restrictions, and expediting review for site plans and building permits. There are approximately 25 City-owned parcels located within current Designated Growth Areas, and nearly 65 additional parcels within a block of these target areas (see Figure 16). The ability to assemble these parcels for development is necessary to spur private development.

Vacant property located in Petersburg's seven Designated Growth Areas (five development corridors and two development districts) may be eligible for discounted pricing. Targeting certain areas for incentivized pricing will appeal to buyers and developers, while also aligning with Petersburg's growth and development goals.

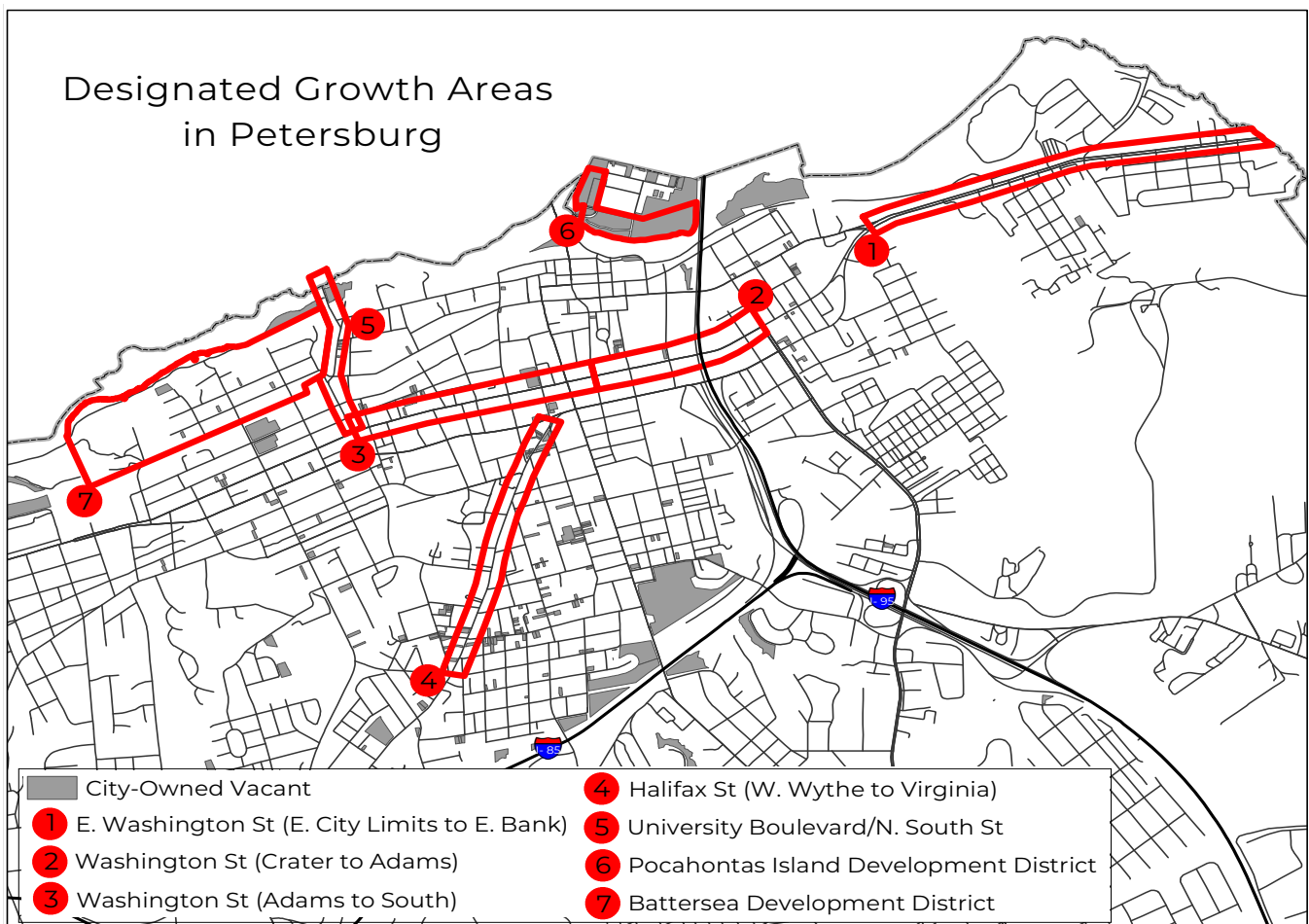


Figure 16. Designated Growth Areas in Petersburg. Author: Grace Stankus. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, City of Petersburg.

Goal 2: Focus on Individual Property Strategy

There are differences in scale between individual buyers and medium-large scale developers and there is a need for specialized approaches for each.

Objective 2.1: Create a comprehensive, user friendly inventory system

One impediment to the disposition of City-owned land is that though the City advertises available vacant land, the current system is not very user friendly. This makes it difficult for buyers and developers to know what's available and where. Having a centralized inventory system of all available City-owned vacant property on an interactive map can give the community and prospective buyers an idea of where vacant land is available and development is happening. Relevant property information such as the list price, zoning, pictures, and any eligible incentives should also be listed on the site.

Objective 2.2: Develop a community outreach process for property marketing and development

Petersburg may consider offering a Community Outreach Representative (COR), either through the City or as a consultant, to market available properties, programs, and guide applicants through the acquisition process. The COR can market land and development opportunities through workshops and community events. The goal of the COR is to be a trusted contact for residents and developers for a smooth acquisition and development process.

The Community Outreach Representative can also serve as a liaison between the Economic Development Department and other relevant City departments to ensure communication and consistency throughout the disposition and development process.

The City may also consider providing pro bono consultations to prospective buyers and developers to assist with navigating local codes, regulations, and site issues to help the buyer understand what can be developed in certain areas. Having access to free and trustworthy assistance may encourage residents who are invested in the community but have limited development experience feel empowered to get involved with development in their community.

Objective 2.3: Create a side lot program for unbuildable lots

Creating a streamlined and efficient side lot program is integral to Petersburg's goals in increasing neighborhood vitality and addressing blight. Vacant side lots located in residential neighborhoods that are determined to be unbuildable can be available for purchase as an extension of a backyard, a parking pad, community garden, or other not-for-profit uses. These parcels provide an opportunity for homeowners to extend their property or take ownership of land on their block. Selling side lots either for a flat fee for the entire lot or an fixed rate per square foot can benefit the City by transferring maintenance responsibilities and getting the land back into tax generating status.

Mow-to-Own type programs where adjoining property owners can receive ownership of vacant property for free just for maintaining the lot for a predetermined time period can address blight by incentivizing neighborhood beautification efforts and incentivizing ownership status. Petersburg may consider a Mow-to-Own program for lots in neighborhoods that have a large amount of vacant land as a way to convey Another option is to offer a Mow-to-Own program in low income Census Tracts to incentivize maintenance responsibilities and ownership.

Goal 3: Incentivize and Leverage Bundled Property to Attract Large-scale Development

The abundance of City-owned property is an asset to the City and provide an opportunity to leverage funds and enables large scale development. Small, individual lots are not valuable to developers looking to construct multi-family or mixed use buildings. Creating a bundling system has the potential to attract developers to the city and sends a message that the City is determined to achieve revitalization.

Objective 3.1: Create a bundling system for City-owned property

Bundling or assembling property, the process of grouping multiple adjacent parcels to sell as one entity, is an important aspect of large scale development. To attract developers, establishing a bundling system where the city handles all titling and lien issues, and utilities for a large parcel would create conditions that incentivize and make development feasible.

In areas with limited City-owned vacant land but still the presence of privately owned vacant land, the City could work with property owners to make the disposition process as easy as possible for owners and then that land can be added to a bundle.

Objective 3.2: Engage in collaboration to create developments of scale

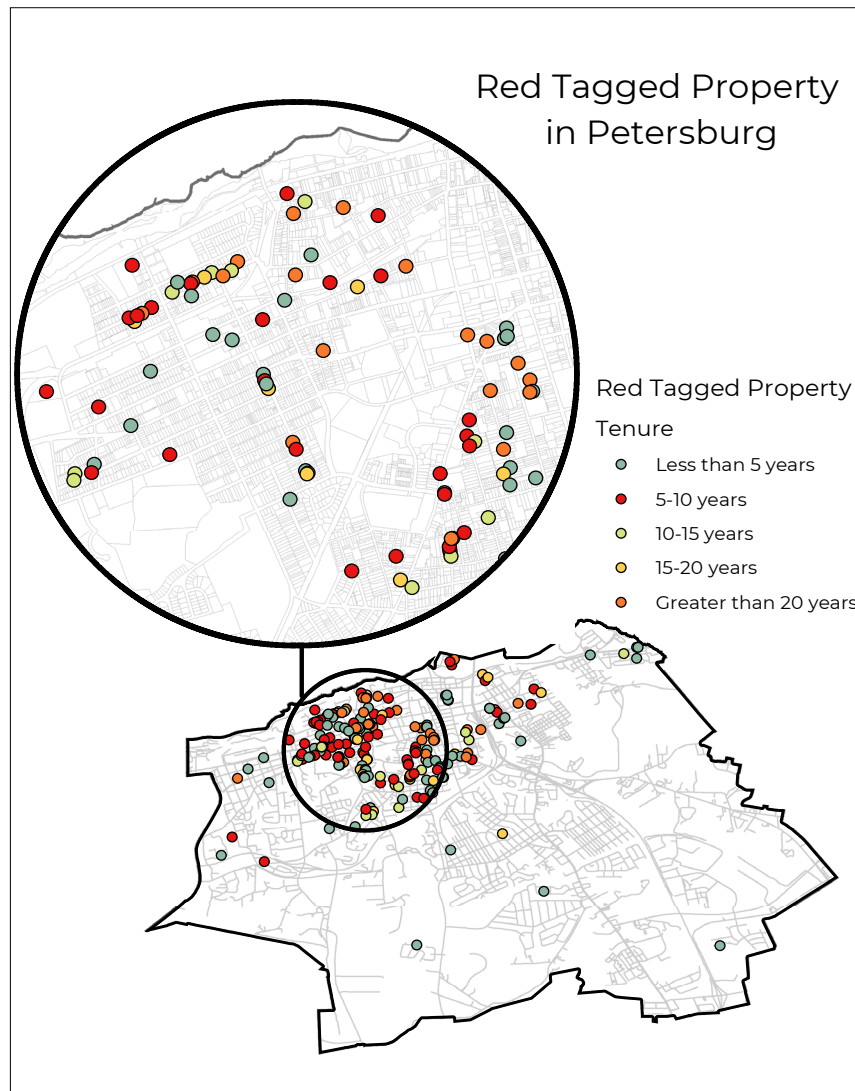
The City of Petersburg's EDA can collaborate with private developers who can create multi-unit projects of scale that catalyze additional private-market development within the target area. The EDAs role within these partnerships is multifaceted and has four main components to attract high-quality developers. The first is to assemble multiple parcels of property. Some of the property may be City-owned but the City may need to negotiate with private owners to complete the bundle. The EDA must also ensure the property title is clear of all liens and any other issues that could encumber a clean transfer of ownership. The EDA can complete all pre-development work that the developer would normally pay for, as well as utility hook-ups and other infrastructure improvements. To further incentivize development, the EDA could potentially invest a portion of the development cost.

In order to get the necessary funds to invest in some of the development cost, the EDA can obtain a short-term loan from a bank. The EDA will be a small investor in the project, so the loan will be for a low amount, relative to the project's finished value. Once the project is finished, the EDA can sell its interest in the project, repay the bank, and start the process over again with another project.

Objective 3.3: Aggressive code enforcement on Red Tagged property

Red Tagged Property is property that is deemed unsafe and potentially uninhabitable by the City of Petersburg's Code Compliance Division within the Neighborhood Services (NS) department. Petersburg's Code Compliance officers are responsible for enforcing the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code set forth in the Code of Virginia. Buildings and structures can be considered unsafe for a multitude of reasons: fire damage, tree damage, foundation damage, or dilapidated conditions.

Currently, the City of Petersburg has 212 red tagged properties (see *Figure 17*). These properties are scattered throughout the northern section city with significant clustering in the Battersea, University Boulevard, and the Halifax Triangle neighborhoods. The properties vary in their tenure as unsafe buildings or structures. There are 36 red tagged properties that have been deemed unsafe for more than 20 years with the oldest red tagged property cited in 1985. 70 properties, 33% of the total red tagged properties, were cited within the past five years.



*Figure 17. Red Tagged Property in Petersburg. Author: Grace Stankus.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, City of Petersburg*

These vacant properties provide redevelopment opportunities in key areas throughout the city. Increasing vacant property inventory also increases the possibility of bundling multiple parcels in a block for larger scale development. There are several methods the City can utilize to transfer privately owned abandoned property into City ownership through bold code enforcement. The City could consider forgiving any unpaid taxes on Red Tagged property if the owner forfeits the property. Another strategy is to enact a receivership statute wherein a Community Development Corporation (CDC) or local housing non-profit can receive vacant property after a series of unpaid fines. If the owner fails to pay fines within a certain timeframe, then the property can enter receivership and the CDC or non-profit has the opportunity to take ownership.

Goal 4: Create and Expand Tools and Programs to Streamline Disposition and Development

Objective 4.1: Expand the Tax Exemption program

Tax abatement or exemption programs are a way to entice development by excluding the improvement value from property tax assessments. Currently, the City of Petersburg offers a five-year Rehabilitation Tax Exemption. Expanding the time period where the exemption is valid to ten or 15 years would make projects more financially feasible and encourage development where potential profit margins are slim. The City could choose to expand the Rehabilitation Tax Exemption program city-wide or apply increased exemptions to the targeted redevelopment areas.

Objective 4.2: Provide assistance with the Historic Tax Credit process

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources administers Federal and State Historic Tax Credits. Eligibility for Federal and State funding is available for Certified Historic Structures (CHS). For the Federal program, a CHS must be either individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places or certified as contributing to a district that is listed. For the State program, a CHS must be either individually listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register or certified eligible for listing, or certified as a contributing structure to a district that is listed. Currently, Petersburg has ten historic districts, mainly in the northern section of the city.

The Historic Tax Incentives application process is difficult to navigate, particularly for first time developers. Property owners must have their application approved by the National Park Service and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Providing assistance throughout the application process either through technical consultants or workshops with City staff is a way to encourage the redevelopment and adaptive reuse of historic residential and commercial property.

Objective 4.3: Promote timely development

To prohibit real estate developers from purchasing discounted City-owned vacant land and holding on to it until market factors and neighborhood trends improve, the City of Petersburg should consider instituting development conditions to hold developers accountable for timely development. Construction must be completed within 36-months of acquisition (unless there are extenuating circumstances). If construction continues past the initial 36-months, the City has the ability to re-acquire the property again through a claw-back provision.

Objective 4.4: Institute design controls and constraints

Petersburg has a mix of architectural features such as building sizes, shapes, facades, and massing, and these unique features should be preserved and expanded upon. The City of Norfolk provides six neighborhood pattern and plan books specifically designed for individual neighborhoods throughout the city. The purpose of these books is to serve as a guide for owners and developers to refer to when making repairs, renovations, or redeveloping while maintaining current patterns and ensuring compatibility in the future.

As a way to manage the look and form of future development, the City could consider adopting design controls and constraints as a condition to receive City assistance on projects. The scope of these controls can vary from five or six neighborhood specific design constraints to entire design plans aimed at preserving Petersburg's character and aligning with City development goals.

Implementation

As the City of Petersburg works to attract development, the implementation of the goals and objectives set forth in this plan are intended to be a jumping off point to help guide the City to achieve revitalization. Each objective has been designated a timeframe: short-term (less than five years), mid-term (five to seven years), or long-term (five to fifteen years). Many of the objectives are intended to be ongoing initiatives that occur throughout each timeframe.

In an effort to capture some of the development interest occurring in neighboring areas in the region, many of the objectives can and should be implemented within the next two years. Establishing an aggressive and consistent land disposition and development strategy in the short-term is crucial in positioning Petersburg to capitalize on regional growth trends and momentum.

Table 2. Implementation Chart

Goals and Objectives	Timeframe
Goal 1: Create a Targeted Approach for Disposition and Development	Ongoing
Objective 1.1: Determine the market value for City-owned land	Ongoing; within a year
Objective 1.2: Prioritize Capital Improvements in targeted areas	Ongoing; every 5 years
Objective 1.3: Prioritize neighborhood beautification funding in targeted areas	Ongoing; every 5 years
Objective 1.4: Capitalize on the recent development momentum in Historic Downtown	Short-term: 3 - 5 years
Objective 1.5: Target the Halifax Triangle and Battersea neighborhoods	Mid to Long-term: 5 - 15 years
Objective 1.6: Focus on Designated Growth Areas	Ongoing
Goal 2: Individual Property Strategy	Short-term: within 2 years
Objective 2.1: Create a comprehensive, user friendly inventory system	Short-term: within a year
Objective 2.2: Develop a community outreach process for property disposition and development	Short-term: within 2 years
Objective 2.3: Create a program for unbuildable lots	Short term: within a year
Goal 3: Incentivize and Leverage Bundled Property to Attract Large-scale Development	Short-term: within 2 years
Objective 3.1: Create a bundling system for City-owned property	Ongoing
Objective 3.2: Engage in collaboration to create developments of scale	Ongoing
Objective 3.3: Aggressive code enforcement on Red Tagged property	Short-term: within 2 years
Goal 4: Create & Expand Tools and Programs to Streamline Disposition and Development	Short-term: within 2 years
Objective 4.1: Expand the Tax Exemption program	Mid-term: 5 - 7 years
Objective 4.2: Provide assistance with the Historic Tax Credit process	Ongoing
Objective 4.3: Promote timely development	Ongoing
Objective 4.4: Institute design controls and constraints	Short term: within 2 years

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Appendix A: Disposition and Development Programs in Akron

	Akron	
	A Lot for a Little	Welcome Home Akron
Description	Vacant, undeveloped City-owned parcels available for purchase either for development or for a yard extension. Available parcels are either buildable or unbuildable depending on lot size.	In an effort to increase owner-occupancy and activate City-owned land, the City markets lots ready for development by either housing developers or individual purchasers looking to build in the city through an online interactive map. The purpose is to increase housing supply and revitalize established neighborhoods.
Applicant Criteria	Purchasers must: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> own adjacent property (or be within the near vicinity) not be delinquent in real estate taxes or in foreclosure 	Purchasers must not be delinquent in real estate taxes or in foreclosure
Price	Fixed rate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$.50 per sq ft for buildable lots (50-ft frontage and minimum 5,000 sq ft lot size) \$.05 per sq ft for unbuildable lots <p>Land purchased through the Land Reutilization Program (property acquired by the City that was foreclosed due to non-payment of taxes) is \$2,500</p> <p>Buyer pays \$42 recording fee (all purchases)</p>	Fixed rate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$.50 per sq ft for buildable lots (50-ft frontage and minimum 5,000 sq ft lot size) <p>Land purchased through the Land Reutilization Program (property acquired by the City that was foreclosed due to non-payment of taxes) is \$2,500</p> <p>Buyer pays \$42 recording fee (all purchases)</p>
Limitations	Development must commence within three months of acquisition	Development must commence within three months of acquisition and be completed within twelve months from acquisition
	Property can be divided among two owners if two eligible purchasers are interested in the same parcel	Developers must sell the homes to owner occupants. Owners must occupy the property as a primary residence for at least five years
Other Disposition Factors	Preference given to applicants constructing a new home or providing economic development	All necessary permits must be acquired by the purchaser
	15-year tax abatement for new homes constructed in the city	15-year tax abatement for new homes constructed in the city. Purchasers can finance the purchase price of the lot in the form of a lien for five years. As long as the purchaser lives on the property, they will not pay for the lot

Appendix B: Disposition and Development Programs in Baltimore

	Baltimore	
	Vacants to Value	Adopt-a-Lot/HOMEGROWN
Description	The City markets developable City-owned property to individuals and developers with goal to streamline the disposition process and target redevelopment efforts in distressed areas.	A land lease opportunities for residents to get involved in neighborhood stewardship without tax or financial obligations. Eligible lots can be used for community gardens, communal green space, or any other non-profit use.
Applicant Criteria	Purchasers must: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. not have any current housing code violations 2. current on City taxes 3. demonstrate financial feasibility to complete project (W-2s/bank statements) 4. have feasible timeline and construction plan 	Residents, organizations, school groups, businesses, or neighborhood groups interested in getting involved with neighborhood stewardship
Price	The City determines market value through appraisal All reasonable offers are considered <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if proposal is the highest and best use, the City may be willing to sell for less than market value 	No cost- land is leased <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • applicant pays for \$120 water hook up (if used for an agricultural purpose)
Limitations		Applications only accepted between February and November
Other Disposition Factors	Development must begin within 90 days of acquisition and be completed within 12 months of acquisition	HOMEGROWN: can to use the land to grow goods to sell Adopt-a-Lot: cannot use the land for profit purposes

Appendix C: Disposition and Development Programs in Akron

	Buffalo	
	HOMEGROWN	Urban Homestead
Description	The City markets select vacant single family and duplex homes that are not code compliant and, with the assistance of six community development organizations, guides homebuyers through the homebuying and renovation process. The program supports first time, low-income homebuyers through the sale of below market value fixer uppers and financial assistance to make necessary repairs to the property.	The City markets select properties and developable lots located in designated Urban Renewal Areas for buyers to purchase for a low cost. Buyers can purchase a lot for new construction or purchase an existing residential structure with the intent to rehabilitate the property.
Applicant Criteria	<p>Purchaser must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. be a first time homebuyer or have not owned a home in the last three years 2. be prequalified for a SONYMA Remodel NY mortgage 3. complete a HUD certification homebuyer education course 4. have a household income between 50%-80% of the area median income 	<p>Purchaser must be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. current on all financial obligations to the city (taxes, utilities, violations, ect.) 2. any other property owned by the purchaser must be free of any code violations 3. must be able to provide evidence of financial ability to acquire, repair, and maintain property 4. must be able to provide verification of current source of income and access to \$5,000 <p>Purchase must provide detailed sketches, cost estimates and financial plans to complete the construction or rehabilitation.</p>
Price	Properties are available for below market value. The Division of Real Estate establishes an appraised value for HOMEGROWN properties in their current condition and determines an estimated appraised value after repairs and renovations are complete	<p>Eligible homes can be purchased for \$1</p> <p>Buyers cover settlement costs</p>
Limitations	<p>Homes are not move-in ready upon purchase.</p> <p>Purchaser must reside in the property for ten years.</p>	Buyers must fix all code violations within 18 months of purchase and occupy the property as a primary residence for at least 36 months
Other Disposition Factors	Buyers are required to use a SONYMA Remodel NY Rehabilitation Mortgage and approved funding can be provided through a deferred payment or 0% interest loan. If the buyer resides in the home for the duration of the loan, the full loan amount to be forgiven (no repayment)	All necessary permits must be acquired by the purchaser