Assessing Property Blight on Oakland's Public Lands

Recommendations to Incentivize Interagency Community Investment

A Report Commissioned by the Office of the City Auditor

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Executive Summary

Oakland residents are reporting high levels of property blight in their communities. The Office of the City Auditor commissioned this report to better understand the extent to which properties owned by public agencies in Oakland are contributing to increasing rates of blight. This study is the first of its kind commissioned by the City. Past research on property blight in Oakland has focused on the extent and effects of blight across private properties. This report fills a needed gap in the literature and provides a foundational perspective on the extent, type, and intensity of property blight on lands held by public agencies in Oakland.

Findings

Forty-six percent (46%) of publicly-owned properties surveyed had any level of blight. This includes low, medium, and high blight designations. Across all agencies included in the analysis, the median rate of observed property blight across owner-specific parcels was 29%. While roughly half of surveyed properties were found to have any level of blight, certain public agency landowners were observed to have higher-than-average rates of blight, and Caltrans in particular was observed to have considerably higher (83%) rates of underlying property blight on its parcels.

Blight determinations were made on the basis of a parcel constituting an attractive nuisance, being in a state of deterioration, or suffering from inadequate maintenance.

Recommendations

The report proposes four categories of recommendations to the City Auditor that can work in concert with each other. The diverse suite of policy recommendations addresses various levers, from reporting processes to enforcement mechanisms. These policy alternatives were selected for their potential to improve transparency and incentivize stronger community investment on the part of public agency landowners. Each recommendation is scored on the degree to which it meets criteria for administrative feasibility, enforceability, cost-effectiveness, and equity.

1. Develop a parcel data information system

   The City of Oakland should develop a parcel data information system to track and monitor public lands within City limits. The purpose of such a data information system is to gather, consolidate, and synthesize the meaning of real property data for agency stakeholders and community members, so that the former understands that this is now a front-facing policy concern and the latter understands where and to what extent these lands are located in Oakland.

2. Improve reporting processes

   The City of Oakland should add an additional data field to SeeClickFix service requests to identify the parcel owner. The reporting process should also be amended to include “nudges” to increase agency accountability on the back-end. This automated system would sum service requests made in response to property blight on each public agency’s lands at a given interval and relay this figure to the agency.

3. Create an interagency task force

The City should convene an interagency task force to set parcel standards. Since Oakland cannot enforce the anti-blight language of its Municipal Code across agency jurisdictions, this task force will set its own parcel standards using an opt-out model. Agencies will be required to publicly opt-out if they decline to adhere to these standards.

4. Make changes to jurisdictional and/or enforcement mechanisms

Expand code enforcement

Update Oakland Municipal Code Chapter 8.24.010 to include “lands owned by public agencies.”

Develop a comprehensive public landowner policy

The City of Oakland should develop a comprehensive public landowner policy that sets out minimum requirements for land stewardship and stipulations for public landowner behaviors.

Introduction

Oakland Residents are Reporting Higher Levels of Property Blight

For the first time in the City of Oakland, property blight has surpassed crime as the primary policy concern for City officials and residents alike. Blighted areas are a fast-growing source of problems for Oakland: The City struggles to curtail homeless encampments and address widespread illegal dumping, two visible indicators of property blight and community disinvestment.

The trend graphs shown in Figures 1 and 2 below illustrate the increasing rates at which Oakland residents are reporting illegal dumping and homeless encampments in their community over a five-year and nine-year period, respectively. These reports were all made as service requests to the Oakland Public Works Call Center. As Figure 1 shows, illegal dumping service requests made in fiscal year (FY) 2016-2017 increased by 71% compared to the 2012-2013 baseline rate.

Figure 2 captures the geographical distribution of illegal dumping service requests between 2013 and 2017. These heat maps depict the relative intensity of illegal dumping across neighborhoods in Oakland over time. Since FY 2013-2014, illegal dumping has been reported at higher rates overall and at relatively equivalent rates across most areas with the exception of the Oakland Hills, with slightly higher concentrations in the Central Business District and West Oakland.

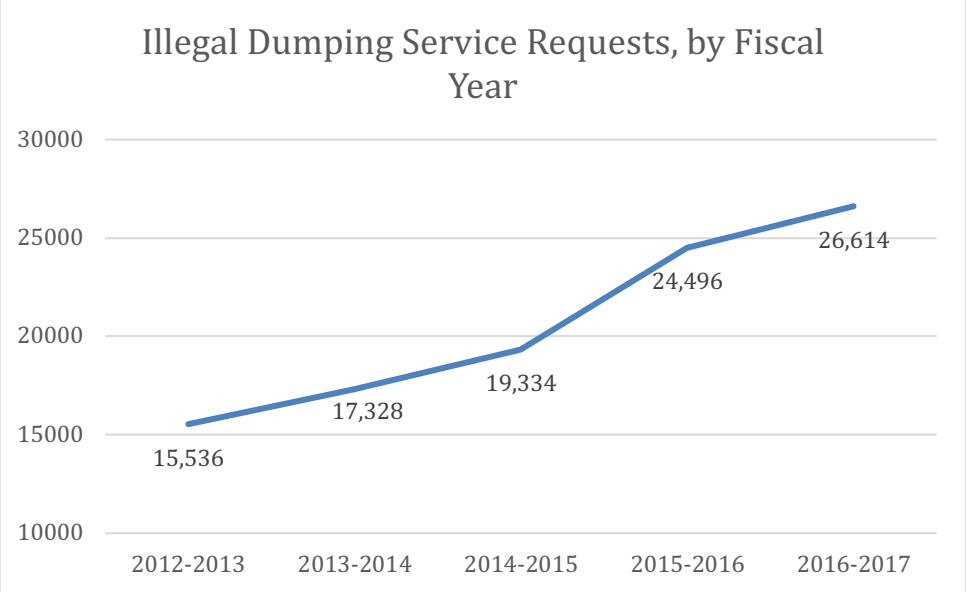

Figure 1: Trend map of illegal dumping service requests processed by the City of Oakland Public Works Call Center, by fiscal year

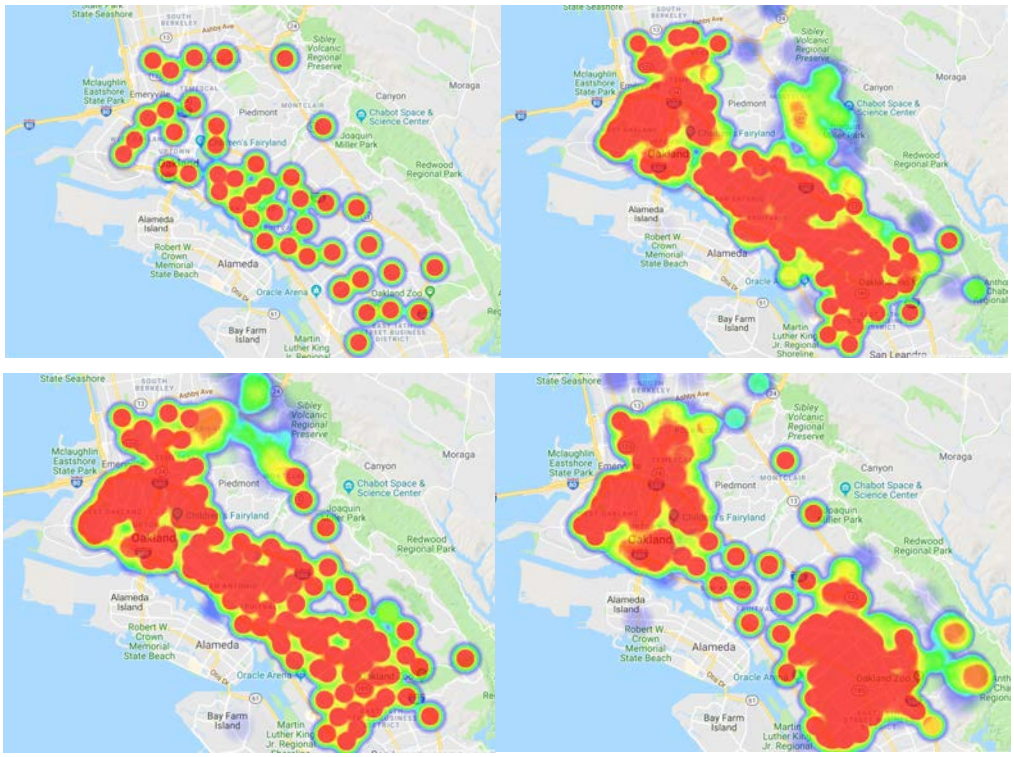

Figure 2: Illegal dumping heat maps, clockwise from top left: FY 2013-2014 (N = 17,328); FY 2014-2015 (N = 19,334); FY 2015-2016 (N = 24,496); FY 2016-2017 (N = 26,614)

Oakland residents have also been reporting more homeless encampments in recent years. Figure 3 below illustrates the nearly twenty-fold increase in service requests made to report homeless encampments between 2009 and 2017. Figure 4 compares changes in both the geographical distribution and intensity of homeless encampment service requests between 2012 and 2017.

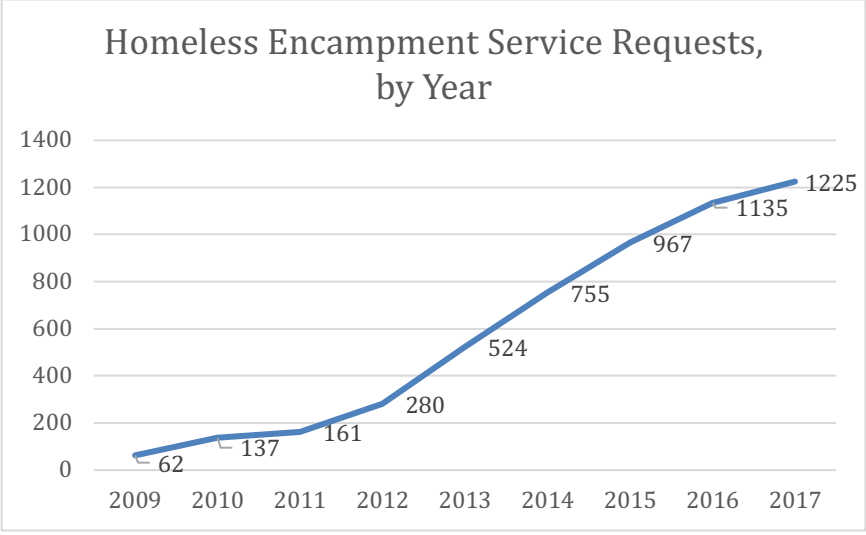

Figure 3: Trend map of homeless encampment service requests processed by the City of Oakland Public Works Call Center, by calendar year

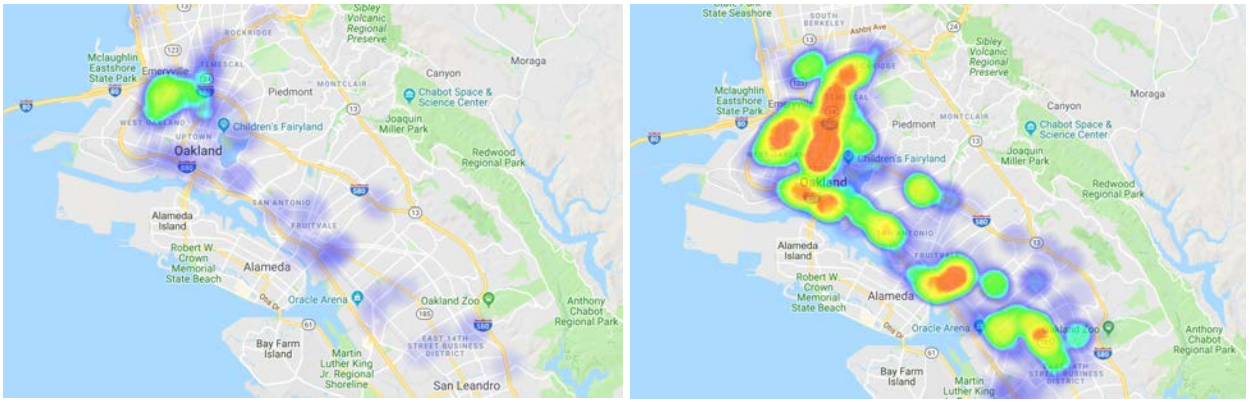

Figure 4: Homeless encampment heat maps, left to right: 2012 (N = 280); 2017 (N = 1,225).

Illegal dumping and homeless encampments are two highly visible indicators of property blight. Moreover, the City has maintained relatively good data on these indicators for roughly a decade. Yet illegal dumping and homeless encampments are just two of many de jure blight indicators as defined by the City of Oakland Municipal Code, and the collective presence of all of these indicators can also be mapped. Figure 5 illustrates the nearly 25,000 blight-related service requests processed by the City of Oakland Public Works Call Center in 2017. These service requests comprise approximately one-third of the 80,000 service requests received by the Call Center throughout the year. While service requests made to the Oakland Call Center fall under dozens of categories, many of which are not necessarily indicative of property blight, the 25,000 blight-related service requests were made in response to varied blight indicators, such as weed abatement and animal and insect control issues. For a complete list of blight-related service request categories, see Appendix 3.

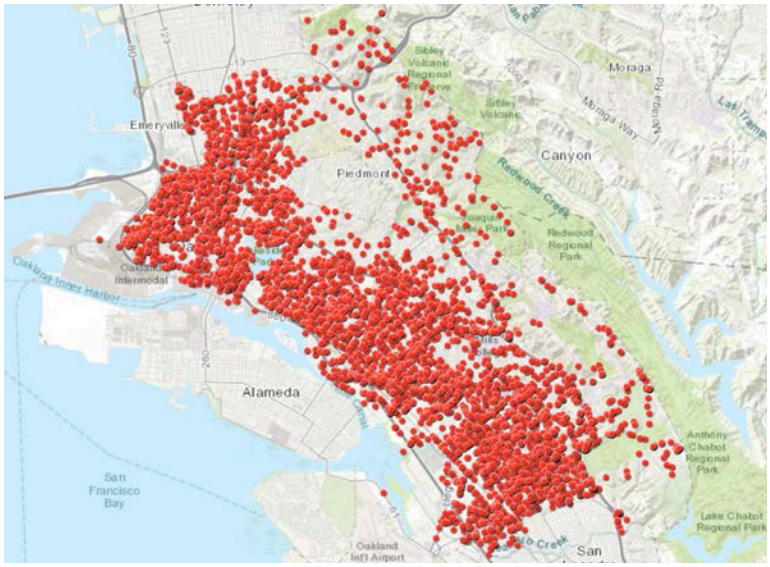

Figure 5: Blight-related service requests processed by the City of Oakland Public Works Call Center, 2017 (N = 24,805)

Why the Oakland City Auditor Commissioned This Report

The maps above illustrate trends, but they are also indicative of the mounting underlying burdens imposed on community members by property blight. While Oakland residents as a whole are critical stakeholders in this work, so too are property owners. The Office of the City Auditor (hereafter "City Auditor") commissioned this report to better understand how certain property owners are or are not contributing to the problem of increasing blight across real property in Oakland.[1] The City Auditor is both concerned by the potentially harmful effects of increasing property blight and interested in exploring the policy implications around this issue. To this end, the City Auditor is interested in the potential for this report to both increase transparency regarding which property owners are contributing to the problem of rising blight, and to increase equity considerations by understanding the geographic distribution of blight and whether or not certain populations are disproportionately experiencing property blight in their neighborhoods. The City Auditor commissioned this report as a first step in gathering data on the scope of property blight in terms of number of sites, proportion of acreage, and other metrics so that any disproportionate effects can be appropriately addressed in policy recommendations.

Although a preponderance of property blight is thought to occur across private properties, past research has already focused on the extent of blight and abandonment among private homes in Oakland.[2] Moreover, stakeholder groups, such as local nonprofit San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR), have released proposals for blighted, vacant, or underutilized lands owned by the City.[3] The City Auditor commissioned this report to fill a needed gap in the literature: To determine the extent of blight among Oakland properties owned by *public agencies*. In the context of this report, "public agencies" refers to non-City public agencies that fall within local, regional, state, or federal jurisdictions.

Problem Definition

The problem is therefore defined as too much property blight across all lands—including public lands—in Oakland, and a lack of information around the extent of property blight among parcels owned by public agencies specifically. Understanding the scope of this problem requires a clear, working definition of blight and a determination of the extent and intensity of underlying rates of property blight on lands owned by public agencies.

[1] Real property is fixed property, like land and buildings.
[2] Stetson, N. (2017). Assessing the Extent and Effect of Property Abandonment: A Report Commissioned by the Department of Housing and Community Development of Oakland, California. Retrieved from the Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley.
[3] A Downtown for Everyone. (2015). San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association. Retrieved from https://www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2015-09-09/downtown-everyone

Background: Why Property Blight Matters

Defining Property Blight

When used in agricultural contexts to describe the condition of crops, the label "blight" indicates that the crops are diseased, dying, or dead. Blighted crops produce diminished or inviable yields; in short, they can no longer perform their anthropocentric function. City planners think of blighted buildings in a similar way—a blighted building is structurally unsound, deteriorating, or potentially hazardous. While an understanding of the functional repercussions of property blight is a helpful foundation, policymakers are concerned with property blight for other reasons. Property blight is associated with harmful public health outcomes and economic disinvestment. For these reasons, property blight is an unwelcome presence nationwide. In the United States, blight is statutorily defined in all fifty states across twelve categories of factors.[4]

In the context of this report, property blight is defined in accordance with the City of Oakland Municipal Code (Chapter 8.24) and refers to urban parcels with characteristics that indicate an attractive nuisance, inadequate maintenance, deterioration, and/or abandonment.[5] These parcels may be vacant and/or undeveloped (e.g. an asphalt lot or a grassy field) or developed (e.g. a parcel containing office buildings or highway infrastructure). See Appendix 1 for the long-form definition and Appendix 4 for a full description of the diagnostic criteria used to make determinations of blight.

Property Blight Has Implications for Oakland's Health

A growing body of research continues to demonstrate the troubling effects that property blight—particularly in urban environments—has on social determinants of health. For instance, blighted areas have been found to differentially affect physiological stress responses. Compared to greened lots, blighted areas trigger significantly higher dynamic stress responses in urban settings.[6] Property blight is associated with decreases in educational attainment and increases in chronic illness. Young children living near vacant buildings, abandoned homes, and vacant lots are more likely to have lower literacy scores, and residents living near blighted areas are more likely to experience chronic illness and higher rates of violence.[7]

Blight also impacts the economic health of communities. An important qualifier to add is that this correlation has unfortunately been exploited by U.S. politicians for decades. At the peak of the urban renewal movement in the mid-20th century, local politicians propagating harmful land use policies used racialized dog whistles couched in economic vitality

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[4] Luce, H. (2000). The Meaning of Blight: A Survey of Statutory and Case Law. Real Property, Probate and Trust Journal, 35(2), 389-478. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/20782215

[5] Historically in the United States, local jurisdictions have had the discretion to define and prohibit blight as they see fit. This report's use of a definition adapted from the Oakland Municipal Code is a nod to the historical precedent of local discretion.

[6] South, E. C., Kondo, M. C., Cheney, R. A., & Branas, C. C. (2015). Research and Practice. Neighborhood Blight, Stress, and Health: A Walking Trial of Urban Greening and Ambulatory Heart Rate. American Journal Of Public Health, 105(5), 909-913. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2014.302526

[7] Leon, E. D., & Schilling, J. (2017). Urban Blight and Public Health. Retrieved from https://www.urban.org/research/publication/urban-blight-and-public-health

arguments to advance their development agendas.[8] Performed under the auspice of fixing blight or "urban decay," urban renewal often entailed razing low-income black and brown neighborhoods in order to make room for white-owned businesses and redlined private housing developments. Despite this problematic historical relationship, extensive property blight is in fact associated with negative economic indicators, such as depressed home values[9], decreased tax revenues, and increased city service expenditures for the maintenance and repair of these properties.[10]

In addition to its impacts on public health and economic development, property blight is often positioned as an indicator of underlying crime rates.[11] For this reason, some policymakers invoke the "broken windows" philosophy of crime mitigation when pushing anti-blight initiatives and community reinvestment policies.[12] The broken windows theory of policing argues that cleaning up visible signs of disorder, like graffiti and illegal dumping, deters more serious criminal activity.

It is important to note that for residents living in highly-blighted environments, the negative outcomes associated with extensive property blight are not experienced in isolation. These externalities compound and can have far-reaching consequences, such as the lifelong effects experienced by an individual with low educational attainment living with a chronic illness who experiences frequent acute stress responses.

Using blight-related service request data as a proxy for the presence of both property blight and its effects in Oakland, Figure 5 above illustrates the extent and intensity of blight experienced by residents. While instances of property blight cut across Oakland's neighborhoods, blight-related service requests become sparser in the Oakland Hills and along the City's southeastern border. Many highly-blighted areas are found in Oakland's most vulnerable communities—historically marginalized black and brown communities. These residents already disproportionately experience socio-economic pressures, such as rising housing costs and cutbacks in public transportation, that interact with and compound the negative health outcomes associated with property blight.

Understanding the far-ranging negative externalities associated with property blight is critical, as understanding these relationships enables policymakers to reframe property

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[8] Akers, J. (2017). A new urban medicine show: On the limits of blight remediation. In Doucet B. (Ed.), Why Detroit matters: Decline, renewal and hope in a divided city (pp. 95-116). Bristol: Policy Press at the University of Bristol. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1t896c9.10

[9] Gordon, C. (2004). Blighting the Way: Urban Renewal, Economic Development, and the Elusive Definition of Blight. Fordham Urban Law Journal, 31 (2). https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/ulj/vol31/iss2/2

[10] Carpenter, A., Mitchell, E., & Price, S. (2015). Blight Remediation in the Southeast: Local Approaches to Design and Implementation. Retrieved from https://www.frbatlanta.org/community-development/publications/discussion-papers/2015/05-blight-remediation-in-southeast-2015-12-01.aspx

[11] Rothstein, R. (2018). Color of Law: A forgotten history of how our government segregated America. Liveright Publishing.

[12] Vedantam, S. et al. (2016). How A Theory Of Crime And Policing Was Born, And Went Terribly Wrong. NPR. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2016/11/01/500104506/broken-windows-policing-and-the-origins-of-stop-and-frisk-and-how-it-went-wrong

blight as an issue with a meaningful stake in racial equity, economic development, and community health.

Past Research on Blight in Oakland Has Focused on Private Properties

There is an expansive body of policy and legal research on private property ownership, particularly in urban environments. Recent research in this area often examines policy questions related to the widespread problems of vacancy, blight, and abandonment following the Great Recession. Similarly, blight among privately-owned properties throughout Oakland has been documented in previous literature. For instance, abandonment is a critical factor in the spread and escalation of property blight across private lands in the City. A report commissioned by the Department of Housing and Community Development estimates that there are between 2,000 and 6,000 abandoned private dwellings in Oakland.[13] However, while privately-owned blighted properties are certainly a pressing concern for Oakland and the economic and health impacts of blight do not discriminate based on parcel owner or tax status, property blight on privately-held lands is not the policy focus of this report. The distinction between private and public lands holds particular importance from a policy perspective, as there are different jurisdictional limitations to consider when proposing recommendations for blight mitigation policies designed for private versus public owners. Certain options traditionally available to municipalities interested in addressing blight on private lands (e.g. nuisance abatement authority for occupied units or vacant property ordinances for vacant or abandoned units) are not a viable recourse for addressing blight on lands held by public agencies.[14]

The policy pathways for addressing property blight on lands owned by public agencies are different and, in many cases, unclear. Dozens of diverse indictors—ranging from problems with the physical building itself, such as structural deficiencies, to public health concerns, such as hazardous waste dumping—are all expressly prohibited in the City of Oakland Municipal Code. However, the enforcement potential of Chapter 8.24 is limited by the fact that the jurisdiction of the City of Oakland can only make such determinations of blight for "residential, commercial, and industrial property," not parcels owned by non-municipal public agencies.[15] This jurisdictional limitation is only an issue, though, if parcels owned by public agencies in Oakland are, in fact, blighted. If determinations of blight on lands owned by public agencies are made, then a critical barrier to the implementation of blight mitigation policies will be the absence of any viable enforcement mechanism.

Limited Research on Blight and Public Lands Ownership

Oakland is far from alone in focusing its blight mitigation efforts and land use policies predominantly—or even exclusively—on private lands. There is a paucity of research on

[13] Stetson, N. (2017). Assessing the Extent and Effect of Property Abandonment: A Report Commissioned by the Department of Housing and Community Development of Oakland, California. Retrieved from the Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley.
[14] Hirokawa, K., & Gonzalez, I. (2010). Regulating Vacant Property. The Urban Lawyer, 42(3), 627-637. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/27895816
[15] While "industrial property" may not necessarily exclude certain public agencies, the interpretation of municipal statutory law is out of the scope of this research.

property blight among lands owned by public agencies, and no clear precedent for a study on differential rates of blight across public agency jurisdictions within the same city.

Research exists on federal lands holdings in the United States, ranging from studies on the regional dependency effect of federal land ownership to surveys of natural resource management programs on federal lands.[16] Federal ownership of real property in the United States, and the regulatory frameworks that such ownership is bound by, is analyzed at length in land use literature, arguably due to its political visibility and the perception that federal land holdings are substantial. Public agency ownership of real property within U.S. cities has not received commensurate attention in academia or among policymakers.

In one of the few published studies of public lands ownership and urban development, Gabriel Eidelman, Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto's School of Public Policy and Governance, offers that one reason for this lack of scholarship is the assumption that "public lands ownership in North American cities is so rare."[17] However, as Eidelman emphasizes, this assumption is not based in reality. Public lands ownership across North American (and more specifically U.S.) cities is not a rare phenomenon.

Just as public lands ownership is not rare across the U.S. more generally, nor is it rare in Oakland specifically. Within Oakland, public agencies hold over 3,369 acres totaling more than 6.5 square miles. This land is subdivided among approximately 1,400 individual parcels owned by 31 agencies. The following analysis of property blight across these parcels fills a needed gap in the literature and provides a foundational perspective on the extent of blight on lands held by public agencies in Oakland.

Methodology: Service Request Data Used to Identify High-Risk Parcels

Identifying Parcels Owned by Public Agencies

The following methodology is designed to produce an unbiased inroad to the identification of publicly-held parcels that may be at-risk for property blight. The analysis is meant as an explorative assessment of the extent of blight across these properties.

The Alameda County Assessor's Office and Oakland's Department of Information Technology furnished public landowner data. This dataset catalogues numerous variables (e.g. agency owner, APN, location) on all publicly-owned properties and represents the underlying population of interest. This data was used to identify the number and locations of parcels owned by public agencies. An analysis of this data revealed that a total of 31 public agencies own 1,416 parcels within the City of Oakland. Figure 6 lists these public agencies by number of parcels owned. Most of these agencies own 10 or fewer parcels. The eleven top land-owning agencies collectively own 94% (N = 1,334) of the total parcels, with the

[16] Don Seastone, A. (1970). The Regional Dependency Effect of Federal Land Ownership. Land Economics, (4), 394. doi:10.2307/3145510

[17] Eidelman, G. (2016). Rethinking public land ownership and urban development: A Canadian perspective. Cities, 55(1), 122-126. Retrieved from https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264275115300263

Housing Authority owning the greatest number of parcels, followed by the State of California and Oakland Unified.

Public Agency Owner	Number of Parcels Owned
HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF OAKLAND	344
STATE OF CALIFORNIA	271
OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT	176
ALAMEDA COUNTY FLOOD CONTROL	130
EAST BAY MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT	113
EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT	109
BAY AREA RAPID TRANSIT DISTRICT	103
COUNTY OF ALAMEDA	32
PERALTA COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT	24
REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA	19
ALAMEDA CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT	13
OAKLAND STATE BUILDING AUTHORITY	10
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	9
NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER CORPORATION	8
STATE OF CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION	8
REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF THE CITY OF EMERYVILLE	7
CALIFORNIA AFFORDABLE HOUSING INITIATIVES INC	6
CITY OF EMERYVILLE	6
LEONA QUARRY GEOLOGIC HAZARD ABATEMENT DISTRICT	6
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE	6
ALAMEDA COUNTY JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY	3
CITY OF OAKLAND & COUNTY OF ALAMEDA	3
OAKLAND 14TH OFFICE INC	2
AMERICAN NATIONAL RED CROSS	1
CITY OF HAYWARD	1
COUNTY ALAMEDA WASTE MANAGEMENT	1
COUNTY OF ALAMEDA MANAGEMENT ENTERPRISES	1
D W A FED-OAK INC	1
METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION	1
PORT OF OAKLAND	1
STATE OF CALIFORNIA & OAKLAND STATE BUILDING AUTHO	1

Figure 6: Public agency landowners in Oakland listed by number of parcels owned

Ideally, this analysis would include site-specific information regarding the blight status of all 1,416 parcels. However, time and resource constraints make this approach infeasible. Given these constraints, a proxy variable was used to identify parcels considered to be at the highest risk for property blight.

Identifying High-Risk Parcels

Each year, Oakland's Department of Public Works receives tens of thousands of service requests from residents via the City's "SeeClickFix" application. By using SeeClickFix, residents can make service requests in response to both urgent infrastructure issues (e.g. flooding) and routine maintenance issues (e.g. potholes). Many of these service requests

also happen to be made in response to indicators of property blight (e.g. illegal dumping, vandalism, unsecured areas, hazardous waste, weed abatement). A complete list of blight-related service request categories is included in Appendix 3.

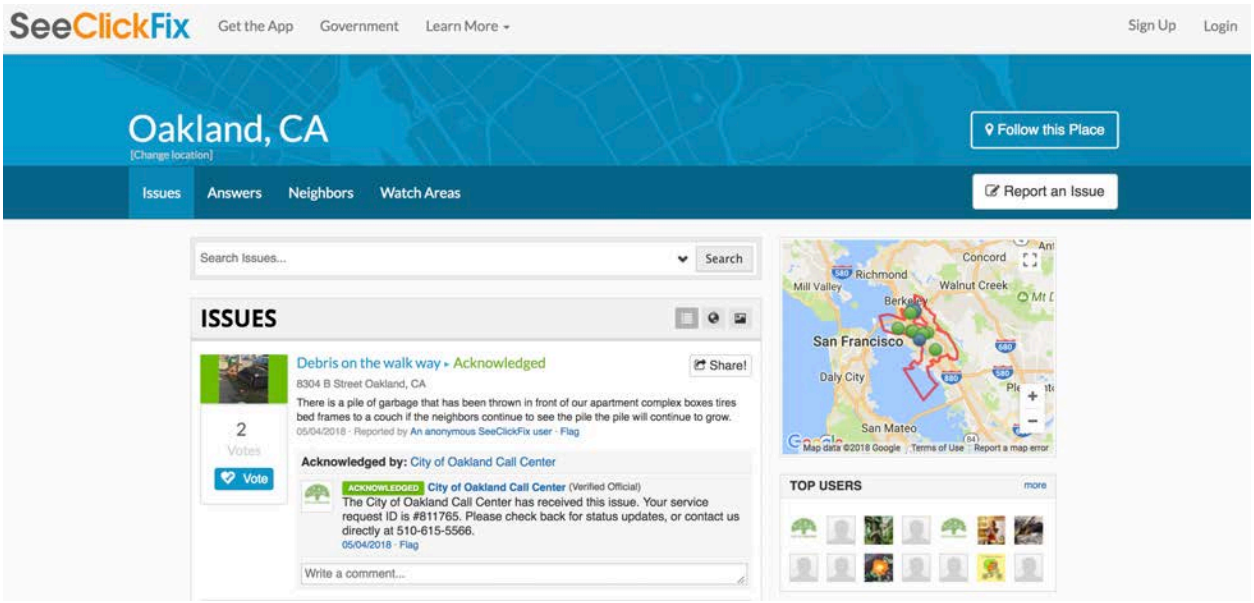

Figure 7: Oakland's "SeeClickFix" user interface

Service requests made in response to property blight indicators comprised the proxy variable used to identify publicly-owned parcels considered at high risk for property blight. While other types of sampling methods, such as a simple random sample of all publicly-owned parcels or a clustered sample randomized by agency owner, may be used for this type of analysis, the proxy variable approach was used due to its ability to accomplish the goals that the City Auditor had for this project. In short, the City Auditor was interested in identifying where and to what extent and intensity, not if, property blight on publicly-owned lands was occurring in Oakland.

Any parcel in the underlying population of public lands located within 50 feet of a blight-related service request made in 2017 was considered to be at high risk for property blight. Additionally, public agencies owning <30 parcels were scoped out of the analysis at this stage. A total of 458 "high-risk parcels" were identified using this methodology. Of these, 57 were selected for site visits through randomized sampling. An additional seven parcels were evaluated at the request of the City Auditor for a total sample size of 64 parcels.

Making Blight Determinations

Determinations of property blight were made during site visits by the author to each of the 64 parcels. The diagnostic framework used to make blight determinations is nuanced and responsive to the language in Chapter 8.24 of the Oakland Municipal Code. Each parcel was assessed according to diagnostic criteria covering four domains of property blight indicators.

The author used the diagnostic criteria shown in Figure 8 to assess each parcel for blight. During site visits I recorded each parcel as exhibiting low, medium, or high property blight.[18] It is important to note that the diagnostic criteria are inclusive of conditions found on both developed and undeveloped properties, meaning that vacant lots were not omitted from nor made ineligible for the analysis at the determination stage.

A determination of "N/A" was made for parcels on which none of the below conditions were observed. Parcels received a "low blight" designation if one of the listed conditions was visible in one area of the property. For example, a parcel presenting a low level of blight may contain a building with graffiti on one of its exterior surfaces. Parcels received a "medium blight" designation if one or more of the listed conditions were observed in more than one area of the property. A parcel presenting a medium level of blight may be unsecured and contain an accumulation of debris or an overgrowth of vegetation in one or more areas of the property. Finally, highly-blighted parcels present one or more of the listed conditions to a considerable extent. An example of a parcel with a high level of blight is an unsecured property that contains a homeless encampment and/or widespread illegal waste dumping.

Criterion 1: Abandonment	
Description	*Diagnostic Question(s)*
A building or structure which is not occupied, inhabited, used, or secured.	Is the structure unsecured? Can the public gain entry without the consent of the property owner?
Any partially constructed, reconstructed or demolished building or structure upon which work is abandoned.	Does construction work appear to have been abandoned on this property? Does the property have a valid building or demolition permit?

Criterion 2: Attractive Nuisance	
Description	*Diagnostic Question(s)*
Property which is in an unsecured state so as to potentially constitute an attraction to children, a harbor for vagrants, criminals, or other unauthorized persons.	Does the property attract unauthorized persons as a result of being in an unsecured state or another indication of abandonment?

[18] A parcel owned by East Bay MUD is labeled "medium high" due to an encampment alongside the roadway adjacent to the parcel but not contained on the property itself. Even without the encampment, extensive illegal dumping and hazardous waste along the parcel qualified the parcel as blighted.

Criterion 3: Deterioration	
Description	*Diagnostic Question(s)*
Any building or other structure which by reason of rot, weakened joints, walls, floors, underpinning, roof, ceilings, or insecure foundation, or other cause has become dilapidated or deteriorated.	Are any structural elements of the building in a state of disrepair?
Buildings or structures with broken or missing windows or doors which constitute a hazardous condition or a potential attraction to trespassers.	Are there broken windows, missing windows, or missing doorways visible upon the structure?
Buildings or structures that are substantially defaced (e.g. blistering, flaking, graffiti) to the extent that the disrepair visually impacts on neighboring property or presents a risk to public safety.	Are any surfaces of the building clearly defaced?

Criterion 4: Inadequate Maintenance	
Description	*Diagnostic Question(s)*
Property which is not kept clean and sanitary and free from all accumulations of vegetation, litter, or debris, including hazardous or otherwise offensive matter or odor.	Is trash, debris, and/or overgrown vegetation apparent on the property?
Property which constitutes a fire hazard or a condition considered dangerous to the public health, safety, and general welfare.	Does an accumulation of trash, debris, and/or vegetation present a fire hazard or pose a risk for the health and safety of community members?
Property which substantially detracts from the aesthetic and economic values of neighboring properties.	What is the aesthetic and/or economic value of this property relative to those of neighboring parcels?

Figure 8: Diagnostic criteria used for determinations of property blight

Limitations

SeeClickFix Service Request Data

While SeeClickFix service request data, for a few reasons, provides a "best guess" of the underlying true extent of blight across Oakland's properties, the dataset still presents limitations. Two main limitations are that the data is a noisy estimator and there are concerns regarding how well individuals using SeeClickFix represent the average Oakland resident experiencing the effects of property blight.

The first limitation of the SeeClickFix service request data is that the data could potentially be a noisy proxy for underlying rates of property blight. However, this limitation can only be confirmed ex post and there were no other City-owned and accessible datasets that collected as much data over as many years on as many property blight indicators. With this being said, the recommendations included in this report touch on strategies for addressing the noise in SeeClickFix data.

Another limitation is the inability to determine to what degree SeeClickFix users are representative of the average Oakland resident experiencing property blight and its effects. All SeeClickFix data is generated by service requests made and does not include those calls or complaints never voiced. This reporting system is available to residents with access to technologies such as smart phones, personal computers, and a reliable Internet connection. In addition, due to the potential barriers imposed by language and technological literacy requirements, service requests processed by SeeClickFix may not capture a representative sample of residents actually affected by blight indicators such as illegal dumping or vandalism.

Despite these limitations, this analysis found that blight-related service requests made to SeeClickFix are not disproportionately made in higher income, higher wealth, or higher opportunity areas of Oakland. In fact, the data shows a "tapering off" in rates of blight-related service requests in higher income neighborhoods. With this being said, it is possible that individuals from higher opportunity areas are still disproportionately using SeeClickFix to report instances of property blight outside of their neighborhoods of residence, but service requests track relatively well on to where instances of property blight are actually occurring despite the profile of the individual submitting the service request. Moreover, since there is no mechanism to identity complaints never voiced, this remains a sound method by which to identify property blight across lands owned by public agencies in Oakland.

Site Visits

Site visits were identified as an appropriate method for data collection given the lack of baseline data on property blight across parcels owned by public agencies, the variable of interest. To obtain baseline data and establish a reference point for future data collection and analysis, a fieldwork-oriented, on-the-ground data collection methodology was used. Each site visit included a blight assessment using the diagnostic framework above along with photographic data collection.

Like any other data collection methodology, site visits presented unique limitations. For example, while a representative random sample was generated from the population of high-risk parcels, the final number of site visits completed for each agency is not always representative of the actual proportion of high-risk parcels owned by the agency. This is because safety concerns arose, truncating the number of site visits that could be completed. These safety concerns were related to both the physical conditions of the roadways along these parcels and the conditions of the environments in which many of the parcels are located. For these reasons, not all site visits originally planned were completed.

Stakeholder Interview Data

Qualitative data from stakeholder interviews was used to supplement the above methodology to better understand the full landscape of the causes and potential solutions for property blight on Oakland's public lands. Due to confidentiality concerns on the part of select interviewees, information from these interviews will be presented in aggregate and no direct attribution will be used.

Findings: Roughly Half of Properties Surveyed Found Blighted

Extent of Property Blight on Properties Owned by Public Agencies

Public Agency Owner	Number of Parcels Owned	Number of High Risk Parcels	% of Parcels Considered High Risk	Sites Sampled	Rate of Property Blight
ALAMEDA COUNTY FLOOD CONTROL	130	19	15%	2	N/A
BAY AREA RAPID TRANSIT DISTRICT	103	46	45%	14	29%
COUNTY OF ALAMEDA	32	13	41%	3	67%
EAST BAY MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT	113	23	20%	13	23%
EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT	109	8	7%	1	N/A
HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF OAKLAND	344	152	44%	14	29%
OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT	176	116	66%	5	60%
STATE OF CALIFORNIA	271	81	30%	12	83%

Figure 9: Results of site visits, by public agency landowner

Over the course of multiple days of site visits, blight determinations were recorded for all 64 parcels. Figure 9 describes the outcomes of blight determinations made for public agency landowners owning >30 parcels. These public agency landowners include local, regional,

and state agencies.[19] Eight different public agencies comprised the property owners of the surveyed parcels: Alameda County Flood Control, BART, County of Alameda, East Bay Municipal Utility District (East Bay MUD), East Bay Regional Parks (Regional Parks), Housing Authority of the City of Oakland (Housing Authority), Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), and the State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). While a representative random sample was generated, the limitations presented by site visits, described above, resulted in certain public agency landowners being over- or under-sampled.[20] The Housing Authority and OUSD were under-sampled. BART and East Bay MUD were over-sampled.

Among high-risk parcels, 46% of properties owned by public agencies had any level of blight. This includes low, medium, and high blight designations. Across all eight agencies, the median rate of observed property blight is 29%. Among all assessed parcels,[21] 41% were determined to have any level of property blight. The 5% decrease is a result of the fact that the seven requested parcels were not blighted (they also happened to not be high-risk). This is a potentially interesting finding, as it presents an argument for the SeeClickFix service request data as a valid proxy that could in the future be used to point resource-constrained researchers to areas more likely to be hotspots for property blight.

While roughly half of surveyed properties were found to have any level of blight, certain public agency landowners were observed to have higher-than-average rates of blight, and Caltrans in particular was observed to have significantly higher (83%) rates of underlying property blight on its parcels. Of the agencies for which ten or more parcels owned were assessed, Caltrans and East Bay MUD were found to own parcels with rates of property blight higher than the levels predicted by the service request data. For the most part, however, rates of property blight predicated by service request data overestimated the underlying rates observed on site visits.

All determinations of property blight were mapped and coded at the parcel level. Figures 10 and 11 show select blight determinations in West Oakland and Downtown (Figure 10) and Fruitvale (Figure 11).

[19] Although the federal government does hold properties within Oakland, no individual federal agency owns more than 10 parcels.
[20] Here, defined as a difference of more than one between the representative *N* versus actual site visits completed.
[21] This includes parcels not identified as high-risk evaluated at the request of the City Auditor.

Figure 10: Individual parcel blight determinations, West Oakland and Downtown

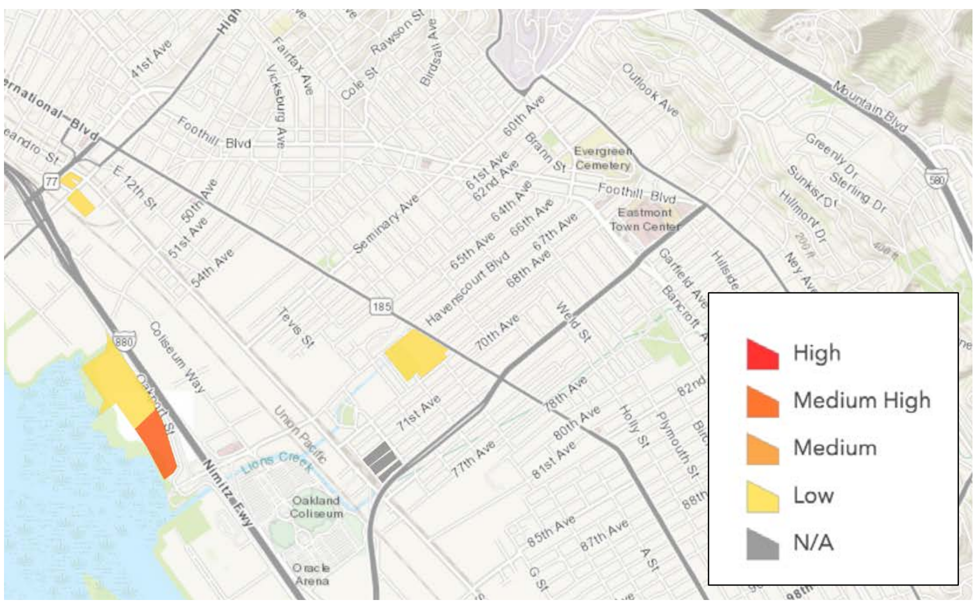

Figure 11: Individual parcel blight determinations, Fruitvale

Determinations of blight were made using a multitude of property blight indicators across four larger domains: abandonment, attractive nuisance, deterioration, and inadequate maintenance. Abandonment is an frequent criterion used when making blight determinations on private homes, but in the context of this research was the least-used criterion. The majority of low, medium, or high blight determinations were made due to a parcel constituting an attractive nuisance, being in a state of deterioration, or suffering from

inadequate maintenance. Figure 12 below shows examples of an attractive nuisance, or unsecured property, and of an inadequately maintained property.

Figure 12: Photographs showing blight determinations made on the basis of the parcel being inadequately maintained (left, East Bay MUD) and constituting an attractive nuisance (right, Caltrans)

Public Agency Landowners are Unique in Important Ways

While all public agency landowners in Oakland were, for the purposes of the analysis, grouped together as a single and homogeneous population, there are important differences in the number, location, and function of the properties owned by each agency. The lands owned by each public agency fall in a unique pattern across Oakland, each collection of properties telling a different story. Some agencies, like the Housing Authority and OUSD, own parcels predominantly ensconced in residential contexts and distributed relatively evenly throughout most areas of the City. Other agencies, like BART and Caltrans, own properties in primarily industrial areas that are supporting or adjacent to central highways and thoroughfares (Figure 13 below shows select BART properties along the 880 and 980). Still other agencies, like East Bay Regional Parks, own reserves of land with niche traits and functionality: Regional Parks lands are relatively few yet vast in terms of acreage, undeveloped, and located along the City's perimeter (Figure 14 below illustrates this pattern). Moreover, the way in which users of these lands—a BART commuter, a visitor to a regional park—differentially understand the property's function is critical. Collective understanding of land use may disproportionately expose certain types of properties to phenomena like illegal dumping, thus leading certain public agency landowners to face higher levels of blight on their properties.

Figure 13: Select BART properties in Oakland

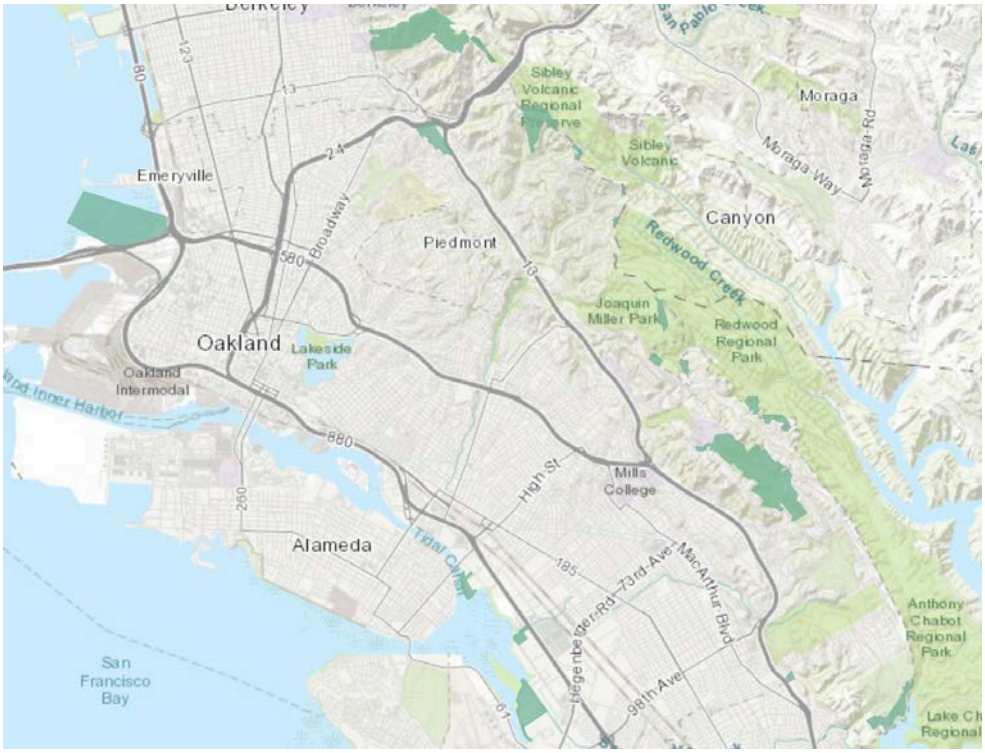

Figure 14: East Bay Regional Parks properties in Oakland

These unique characteristics can be used to inform a more nuanced analysis. To this end, an analytical deep-dive into the specific findings on the lands owned by two public agencies—Caltrans and OUSD—are presented as case studies below.

Case Studies: Caltrans and OUSD

Caltrans

Caltrans-owned lands not only had the highest rate (83%) of property blight, but also the highest number of parcels with medium and high blight designations. Blight on Caltrans properties includes property deterioration, inadequate maintenance, and attractive nuisances. Among blighted Caltrans properties, 40% contain homeless encampments. The extent, type, and intensity of property blight on Caltrans-owned parcels in Oakland present particular challenges for mitigation.

One meaningful characteristic of Caltrans properties from a policy perspective is that many of them either border or are in close proximity to City properties, such as parks. Figure 15 illustrates this phenomenon. The map shows a Caltrans parcel (shaded in red to indicate high blight) overlapping Mosswood Park along the MacArthur Freeway. The photograph in the map's interior depicts a homeless encampment that sits on both Caltrans and City of Oakland property. On the Caltrans side, there is also a fairly extensive accumulation of debris and litter that has piled up across the fencing along Webster Street. Figure 15 offers evidence of one quality inherent to property blight: it spreads. Property blight spills over to surrounding parcels, regardless of whether or not the property owner remains the same. Therefore, there is an opportunity for collaborative policy solutions to be delivered at the nexus of real property between Caltrans and City properties.

Figure 15: Caltrans parcel bordering Mosswood Park along the MacArthur Freeway

While the potential for collaborative solutions exists in theory, City leaders and employees spoke about the historically fraught relationship between Oakland and Caltrans as a consequence of disputes over land stewardship. One goal of this research is to provide a baseline rate of property blight to reference along with policy recommendations that, if implemented, can engage stakeholders across agencies and reduce this baseline rate over

time. It is critical that stakeholders find common ground, as an 83% rate of property blight holds serious implications from a public health perspective. To be clear, only properties already considered to be at high risk for blight were included in the analysis. However, on-the-ground evidence of the extent, type, and intensity of property blight on Caltrans parcels indicates significant underlying risks for both health and safety. During a site visit to a Caltrans property across from Jefferson Square underneath the 980, an individual encamped on the property started a fire by setting alight various materials and belongings. A California Highway Patrol (CHP) officer responded and assisted in extinguishing the fire. This parcel contained extensive debris accumulation and was situated underneath a highway at the intersection of three busy streets. This vignette illustrates the importance of blight mitigation from a public health and safety perspective in a densely-populated and highly-trafficked urban setting. While public agency landowners like Caltrans may view blight mitigation initiatives with trepidation from a cost-savings perspective, it is worth noting that other agencies such as CHP are directing dollars and resources in the form of staff time to these parcels as a consequence of the externalities produced by property blight spilling over into the purview of these other agencies.

OUSD

OUSD owns 176 parcels throughout Oakland, the majority of which are shown in Figure 16 below. These include school campuses and administrative properties. Both school and administrative sites were included in the analysis, which found a 60% rate of blight on OUSD properties. This figure is admittedly limited and likely noisy, as OUSD was under-sampled and only five OUSD parcels are counted in the final sample. However, despite this statistical noise, OUSD properties still tell a compelling story.

Out of all public agency landowners included in the final analysis, OUSD had the highest proportion (66%) of properties located within 50 feet of blight-related service requests made in 2017. These reports span service request categories such as animal and insect control, vandalism, fire, human waste in public right-of-way, illegal dumping, and hazardous waste (a complete list is found in Appendix 3). Here, the 66% should be considered apart from its additional analytical function as a proxy variable, but instead as a number capturing real characteristics of the physical environments in which the majority of Oakland's students are educated.

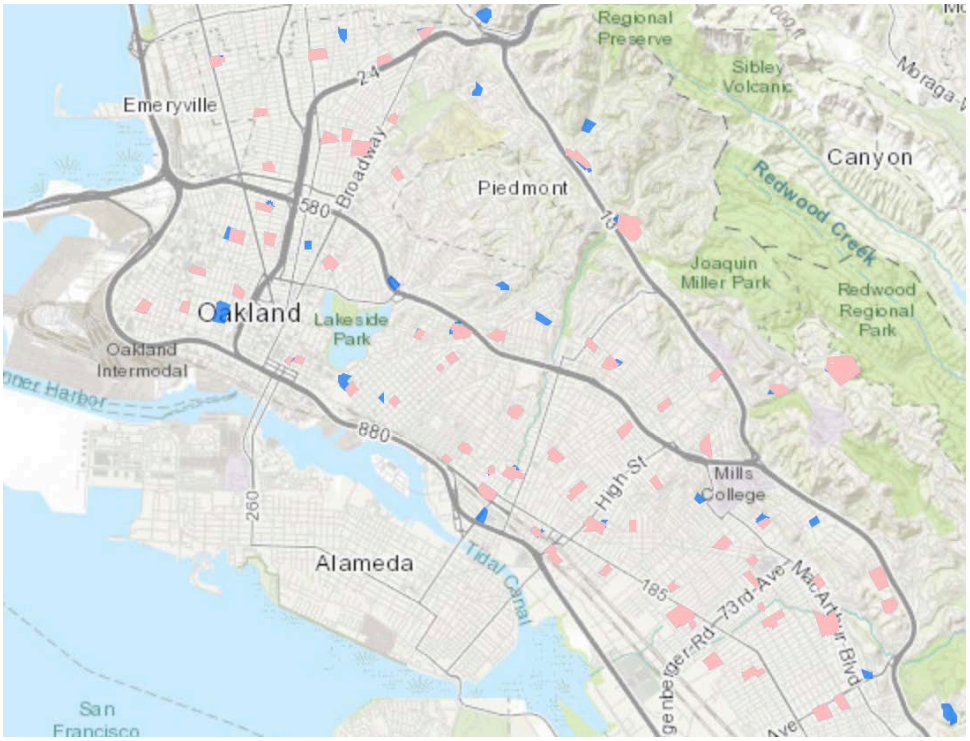

Figure 16: OUSD properties in Oakland (high-risk properties shaded pink)

Although a two-thirds majority of OUSD parcels were identified as high-risk, that leaves a third of sites outside of the high-risk classification. Figure 16 shows the locations of both subgroups. On the map, OUSD properties are shown in blue and the high-risk among those are shaded pink. Figure 16 shows that there can be meaningful differences at the parcel level for each public landowner, just as there are key differences between landowners at the agency level. All but a few of the blue parcels are located in the north and east quadrants of the City, with the fewest around Fruitvale and along the International Boulevard corridor.

Three of the OUSD schools included in the random sample received blight determinations during site visits. Of these three, only one—Lockwood Elementary on International Boulevard—was observed as having any level of blight. The other two parcels assessed were administrative buildings. One of those buildings is shown in Figure 17 below. This parcel received a low blight designation due to extensive peeling of paint on the building's exterior. This qualified it under the "deterioration" domain as described in the Oakland Municipal Code.

Figure 17: OUSD administrative building

The differences in the type, extent, and intensity of blight determinations between the properties described in these two case studies underscore a larger message: not all property blight is created equal. No single policy lever can best address the causes driving widespread illegal dumping and at the same time incentivize public landowners to recommit to the structural and aesthetic integrity of buildings on their parcels. For this reason, a diverse suite of policy recommendations that address disparate levers, from reporting processes to enforcement mechanisms, are described below. These specific recommendations are included for many reasons, but chiefly for their potential to incentivize stronger community investment on the part of public agency landowners.

Recommendations

Criteria

The City Auditor identified four criteria that are responsive to both the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study. Each policy alternative is scored on each criterion using a simple ordinal scale. The three criteria are *administrative feasibility*, *enforceability*, *cost-effectiveness*, and *equity*.

Administrative feasibility

This criterion describes the degree to which the implementation of a policy alternative can be accomplished with minimal administrative lift. A policy with exemplar administrative feasibility could be integrated as seamlessly as possible into existing organizational systems, would not require additional ongoing administrative support, would be achievable using existing personnel capacity, and would cohere to organizational norms and values to ensure buy-in, encourage participation, and facilitate maintenance.

Each policy alternative will be scored as having high, moderate, or low administrative feasibility, indicated by the following:

Enforceability

This criterion describes the degree to which a policy alternative is able to build a coalition among public landowners around addressing property blight. This criterion is critical, as the City Auditor does not have enforcement capabilities within any of these agencies' jurisdictions. The City of Oakland does not have clear enforcement authority across these jurisdictions either. In short, there is no statutory code or anti-blight ordinance that these public agencies must adhere to. Therefore, this criterion recognizes the strategic potential of policies that incentivize stronger stewardship among public landowners. A policy with high enforceability potential meets these agencies where they are at in terms of the time, resources, and political interest they have and/or can make available for blight mitigation efforts.

Each policy alternative will be scored as having high, moderate, or low enforceability potential, indicated by the following:

Cost-effectiveness

This criterion describes the relative cost to implement a given policy alternative as measured against the status quo. This criterion is important due to the limitations that high-cost alternatives impose on administrative feasibility and enforceability. Cost-effective recommendations are crucial, particularly for resource-strapped government agencies. In order to fully capture projected costs, each alternative should be assessed in terms of whether or not its relative benefits offset the costs associated with property blight. While a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis (CBA) of policy alternatives is outside the scope of this report, such an analysis should be considered as a next step in the research. Therefore, this criterion is scored only on the basis of relative implementation costs rather than on the basis of comprehensive CBA metrics.

Each policy alternative will be scored as high-cost (costing more to implement than the status quo), cost-neutral (equivalent to the status quo), or low-cost, indicated by the following:

Equity

This criterion describes the degree to which a policy alternative results in more equitable outcomes for communities disproportionately affected by the harmful externalities imposed by property blight. These communities include Oakland's historically marginalized black and brown communities and Oakland's children and student communities, who are more susceptible to longer-term impacts of harmful health outcomes associated with property

blight. Additionally, as was stated above, OUSD is the public agency most likely to have property in close proximity to blight indicators. A policy with exemplar equity outcomes is able to incentivize community investment and land stewardship in the neighborhoods most affected by property blight and produce meaningful decreases in the underlying rates of blight among public lands in those neighborhoods.

Each policy alternative will be scored as having high, moderate, or low equity potential, indicated by the following:

Limitations of Recommendations

The following suite of recommendations address disparate policy levers and were selected for their potential to incentivize stronger community investment on the part of public agency landowners. However, including policies to address or in any way mitigate homelessness is out of the scope of this report. Although homeless encampments are a highly visible indicator of property blight and more general community disinvestment, these policy recommendations are not designed to tackle the complex drivers of homelessness. While some of the below recommendations may reinvigorate interagency conversations around homelessness that are already taking place, they are not built to singlehandedly address this issue.

Maintain the Status Quo

The City of Oakland can take no action on this issue and maintain the status quo. Maintaining the status quo will likely result in either a stable or increasing underlying rate of property blight on lands owned by public agencies. This outcome is projected on the basis that service request trends for blight indicators (e.g. illegal dumping, homeless encampments) have rose steeply for the better part of a decade. Absent an intervention, these trends will likely continue.

This recommendation scores well on administrative feasibility because no changes to existing systems are required. However, this means that no further information is collected on property blight on public lands, imposing strict limitations on the degree to which the City can track this problem. Maintaining the status quo is considered cost-neutral for the purposes of this analysis. Taking no action scores low on both enforceability and equity, as there is currently no robust coalition around this issue, so maintaining the status quo will likely not unify public agency landowners around this problem. Maintaining the status quo will likely not positively affect equity indicators, as existing patterns of property blight may intensify, causing at-risk communities to continue to disproportionately bear the burden of the health and economic impacts associated with property blight. For these reasons, taking no action is not recommended.

Recommendation: Develop a Parcel Data Information System

The City of Oakland should develop a parcel data information system to track and monitor public lands within City limits and make this database available to the public. The purpose of such a data information system is to gather, consolidate, and synthesize the meaning of real property data to agency stakeholders and community members, so that the former understands that this is now a front-facing policy concern and the latter understands where and to what extent these lands are located in Oakland.

This data information system can be simple or complex. The simplest version of this recommendation would look like the most appropriate City department annually reviewing and/or updating the underlying database (citywide parcel by owner data) at a given interval. The simplest version of making this database available to the public would look like reuploading it upon review to OakData.

The more complex approach would involve adding new data fields to this information system to include the findings of this report and to make the database available to the public in the form of a public lands dashboard that tracks the status of blight remediation efforts across blighted parcels.

Depending on the approach the City adopts, this recommendation scores high on administrative feasibility, low on enforceability, and low on equity. The latter two hold low potential here because there is still no change in enforcement or jurisdictional reach to incentivize interagency buy-in. This recommendation is considered cost-neutral for the purposes of this analysis because it will not require substantive changes to administrative processes or data infrastructure.

Recommendation: Improve Reporting Processes

When an individual submits a service request to SeeClickFix, the website asks for information across specific data fields (e.g. location and description of service request). However, the website does not ask for or track property owner data. It is recommended that the Oakland Call Center work with SeeClickFix to append an additional data field that captures the parcel owner to increase transparency in the reporting process. The most conservative iteration of this would look like requiring the parcel owner to be identified prior to the request being closed.

In tandem with this change to increase transparency on the front-end, the reporting process can be amended to include “nudges” to increase accountability on the back-end. The simplest version of this recommendation would look like the most appropriate City department developing an automation system that totals service requests made in response to property blight on each public agency’s lands at a given interval and communicating this

to the agency. These two changes to the service request process would leverage SeeClickFix's existing data infrastructure to improve transparency for residents and accountability for public landowners. Although the administrative lift could be front-loaded in developing the algorithm to count and communicate blight requests made to each agency's lands at intervals, it would still require a change in how the database is used, making this recommendation moderately feasible in terms of administrative capacity required. However, meaningfully improving accountability for blight remediation on the part of public landowners has the potential to be a de facto enforcement mechanism. This recommendation is considered cost-neutral for the purposes of this analysis because it will not require substantive changes to administrative processes or data infrastructure.

Recommendation: Interagency Task Force

Property blight is linked to community disinvestment. The fact that there is an underlying 46% rate of property blight on lands owned by public agencies in Oakland corresponds to a shift away from community investment on the part of these agencies. In order to incentivize stronger levels of community investment from the agencies that collectively own over 6.5 square miles of the City, it is recommended that the City convene an interagency task force to set parcel standards. This approach does not rely on changes in code enforcement or jurisdiction to require blight mitigation; rather, it advocates for an agency-led commitment to land stewardship. Since Oakland Municipal Code cannot enforce its anti-blight ordinance across agency jurisdictions, this task force will set its own parcel standards. Because it is agency-driven, this recommendation scores high on enforceability. It brings public landowning agencies to the table to build a coalition around this issue with the goal of addressing underlying rates of property blight across Oakland's public lands. This recommendation scores moderately well on equity because it requires that agencies commit to finding workable solutions to address property blight on their parcels. This recommendation scores lowest on administrative feasibility because it requires the development and maintenance of a new interagency entity. This recommendation is considered high-cost as it requires funding for the task force and will likely increase administrative costs.

While the important characteristic of this alternative is that it brings agency stakeholders on board as co-authors of the solutions process, there are certain approaches that are recommended in order to maximize administrative feasibility and equity outcomes. Firstly, it is advised that the interagency task force identify and target high priority parcels. These could be parcels with the highest levels of property blight regardless of agency, or they could be high-risk parcels that each agency is committed to beautifying and maintaining. This approach will facilitate administrative feasibility because it will substantially reduce the number of parcels that the task force needs to beautify and monitor. Secondly, it is recommended that the task force use an opt-out model for adopting parcel standards. In other words, task force members will set standards for all public agency landowners in the City of Oakland, and agencies will be required to publicly opt-out if they decline to adhere to these standards. Lastly, it is recommended that this task force include City and community stakeholders to ensure equity outcomes are achieved.

Recommendation: Make Changes to Jurisdictional and Enforcement Mechanisms

As the previous recommendation describes, there are no parcel standards to which public agency landowners in Oakland are held accountable. The previous recommendation models an agency-led approach to incentivizing stronger stewardship of these lands. This recommendation offers a City-driven approach.

Interviews with agency stakeholders elicited a common theme: public agencies respond to legal precedent, cost, and liability. The interagency task force does not set a statutory precedent, includes upfront costs, and does not immediately affect liability. Moreover, as discussed in a previous section of this report, there are important differences between both public agency landowners and the types of property blight occurring on public lands. Using a jurisdictional or enforcement mechanism to incentivize blight mitigation establishes a minimum set of standards most applicable to all parcels. Parcel standards set by an interagency task force could well accomplish a similar "floor" of blight rates, but doing so via a change in jurisdiction or enforcement gives the policy teeth. The two recommendations in this domain are as follows:

Expand code enforcement

Update Oakland Municipal Code Chapter 8.24.010 to include "lands owned by public agencies."

> "The purpose of this chapter is to promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens by requiring a level of maintenance of residential, commercial, ~~and~~ industrial property, and *lands owned by public agencies,* which will protect and preserve the livability, appearance, and social and economic stability of the city and which will also protect the public from the health and safety hazards and the impairment of property values which results from the neglect and deterioration of property."

Develop a comprehensive public landowner policy

The City of Oakland can develop a comprehensive public landowner policy that sets out minimum requirements for land stewardship and stipulations for public landowner behaviors. Such a policy should include a mechanism for annual reporting from public landowners to the City on stewardship indicators like current property blight rates, changes in property blight rates, and whether goals for blight reduction in the current year were met or not.

These policies are scored collectively against the criteria. They both have low administrative feasibility, as they require changes to municipal statutes. Both score high on equity, as either could ensure that the City's desired equity outcomes for property blight on public

lands are written into law as enforceable policy. While these recommendations are projected to achieve moderate enforceability, this outcome has a high degree of uncertainty. Public agencies may respond by addressing property blight as per City policy, or they may respond in a collective backlash. Furthermore, this recommendation is considered high-cost because it will require substantive expansions in enforcement capabilities. This will likely translate into increases in city service expenditures. However, it is again important to note that this does not factor in any benefits of these policies that may offset costs imposed by property blight.

Conclusion

The study of property blight on public lands is an emerging policy focus in urban planning and development. Limited research prevents a clear understanding of national, state, or regional rates of property blight on public lands. This study fills a needed gap in the literature and provides a foundational perspective on the extent and intensity of blight on lands held by public agencies in Oakland.

Although the status quo is always an option for policymakers, the status quo leaves wide-open gaps both in jurisdiction and code enforcement with no recourse for residents experiencing the brunt of the compounding effects of blight in their communities. It is therefore recommended that the City Auditor push for the adoption of one or more of the above recommendations in order to move Oakland in a direction more oriented toward equitable public lands policies. As the recommendations tap into different administrative and policy levers, they work in concert to tackle the problem comprehensively. The City Auditor can pursue an immediate or phased implementation of one or more of these recommendations.

Appendix 1: Definition of Property Blight

For the purposes of this report, property blight is defined as the following (definition adapted from Oakland Municipal Code Chapter 8.24):

A. Abandoned Building or Structure
    1. A building or structure which is not occupied, inhabited, used, or secured. For purposes of this chapter, a building or structure is unsecured when it is unlocked or the public can gain entry without the consent of the owner,
    2. Any partially constructed, reconstructed or demolished building or structure upon which work is abandoned. Work is deemed abandoned when there is no valid and current building or demolition permit or when there has not been any substantial work on the project for six months;

B. Attractive Nuisance
    1. Property which is in an unsecured state so as to potentially constitute an attraction to children, a harbor for vagrants, criminals, or other unauthorized persons, or so as to enable persons to resort thereto for the purpose of committing a nuisance or unlawful act;

C. A Building or Structure Which is in a State of Disrepair
    1. Any building or other structure which by reason of rot, weakened joints, walls, floors, underpinning, roof, ceilings, or insecure foundation, or other cause has become dilapidated or deteriorated,
    2. Any building or other structure with exterior walls and/or roof coverings which have become so deteriorated as to not provide adequate weather protection and be likely to, or have resulted in, termite infestation or dry rot,
    3. Buildings or structures with broken or missing windows or doors which constitute a hazardous condition or a potential attraction to trespassers. For purposes of this chapter "window" shall include any glazed opening, including glazed doors, which upon a yard, court, or vent shaft open unobstructed to the sky,
    4. Buildings or structures including, but not limited to, walls, windows, fences, signs, retaining walls, driveways, or walkways which are obsolete, broken, deteriorated, or substantially defaced to the extent that the disrepair visually impacts on neighboring property or presents a risk to public safety. For purposes of this chapter "defaced" includes, but is not limited to, writings, inscriptions, figures, scratches, or other markings commonly referred to as "graffiti" and peeling, flaking, blistering, or otherwise deteriorated paint.

D. Property Inadequately Maintained
    1. Property which is not kept clean and sanitary and free from all accumulations of offensive matter or odor including, but not limited to, overgrown or dead or decayed trees, weeds or other vegetation, rank growth, dead organic matter, rubbish, junk, garbage, animal intestinal waste and urine, and toxic or otherwise hazardous liquids and substances and material.

2. Property which constitutes a fire hazard or a condition considered dangerous to the public health, safety, and general welfare,
3. Property which is likely to or does harbor rats or other vectors, vermin, feral pets, or other non-domesticated animal nuisances,
4. Property which substantially detracts from the aesthetic and economic values of neighboring properties including, but not limited to, personal property and wares and foodstuffs, premises garbage and refuse receptacles, and commercial and industrial business activities which are inadequately buffered from any street, sidewalk, or other publicly trafficked area or such buffering which is inadequately maintained. For the purposes of this section, "buffered" shall apply to the provisions set forth in Chapter 17.110 of the Oakland Planning Code,
5. Property including, but not limited to, building facade, window, doorway, driveway, walkway, fence, wall, landscaped planter or area, sidewalk, curb and gutter, and edge of street pavement on which dirt, litter, vegetation, garbage, refuse, debris, flyers, or circulars have accumulated,

Appendix 2: Data Sources

Data Owner	Data	Purpose
City of Oakland Planning & Building, via data sharing agreement with Alameda County Assessor's Office	Publicly-owned parcels by agency owner, City of Oakland "Public Parcels by Owner"	This dataset contains information (e.g. owner, APN) on all publicly-owned properties in Oakland. This dataset represents the underlying population of interest.
City of Oakland Public Works / Department of Transportation (OakData)	Service requests received by the Oakland Call Center "Oakland Call Center Service Request Data"	This dataset includes all service requests made to the City via SeeClickFix, phone, email, and the "Report a Problem" webpage. Importantly, this dataset contains service requests related to indicators of blight. Blight-related service requests comprised the proxy for identification of at-risk publicly-owned properties.
Consultant/OCA	Random sample of publicly-owned parcels "Random Sample"	This dataset comprises the randomly selected sample of publicly-owned parcels that will be assessed through site visits using the Diagnostic Assessment Framework.

Appendix 3: Property Blight Service Request Categories

Property Blight-indicative SeeClickFix Service Request Categories
• Animal and insect control • Board up • City building - painting, pest, structural issue, vandalism • Fire • Graffiti • Hazardous waste • Homeless encampment • Human waste in public right-of-way • Illegal dumping • Litter in parks • Parks - pests, vandalism, maintenance • Tree - diseased • Watershed - illegal dumping • Weed abatement

Appendix 4: Diagnostic Criteria

Criterion 1: Abandonment	
Description	*Diagnostic Question(s)*
A building or structure which is not occupied, inhabited, used, or secured.	Is the structure unsecured? Can the public gain entry without the consent of the property owner?
Any partially constructed, reconstructed or demolished building or structure upon which work is abandoned.	Does construction work appear to have been abandoned on this property? Does the property have a valid building or demolition permit?

Criterion 2: Attractive Nuisance	
Description	*Diagnostic Question(s)*
Property which is in an unsecured state so as to potentially constitute an attraction to children, a harbor for vagrants, criminals, or other unauthorized persons.	Does the property attract unauthorized persons as a result of being in an unsecured state or another indication of abandonment?

Criterion 3: Deterioration	
Description	*Diagnostic Question(s)*
Any building or other structure which by reason of rot, weakened joints, walls, floors, underpinning, roof, ceilings, or insecure foundation, or other cause has become dilapidated or deteriorated.	Are any structural elements of the building in a state of disrepair?
Buildings or structures with broken or missing windows or doors which constitute a hazardous condition or a potential attraction to trespassers.	Are there broken windows, missing windows, or missing doorways visible upon the structure?
Buildings or structures that are substantially defaced (e.g. blistering, flaking, graffiti) to the extent that the disrepair visually impacts on neighboring property or presents a risk to public safety.	Are any surfaces of the building clearly defaced?

Criterion 4: Inadequate Maintenance	
Description	*Diagnostic Question(s)*
Property which is not kept clean and sanitary and free from all accumulations of vegetation, litter, or debris, including hazardous or otherwise offensive matter or odor.	Is trash, debris, and/or overgrown vegetation apparent on the property?
Property which constitutes a fire hazard or a condition considered dangerous to the public health, safety, and general welfare.	Does an accumulation of trash, debris, and/or vegetation present a fire hazard or pose a risk for the health and safety of community members?
Property which substantially detracts from the aesthetic and economic values of neighboring properties.	What is the aesthetic and/or economic value of this property relative to those of neighboring parcels?