

BLIGHT REMEDIATION



Presented by: **The City of Hartford's
Blight Remediation and Property Maintenance Program**

Judith Rothschild, Michael Perez and Gustavo Espinoza

Presented to: The CT Association of Housing Code Enforcement Officials, Inc.

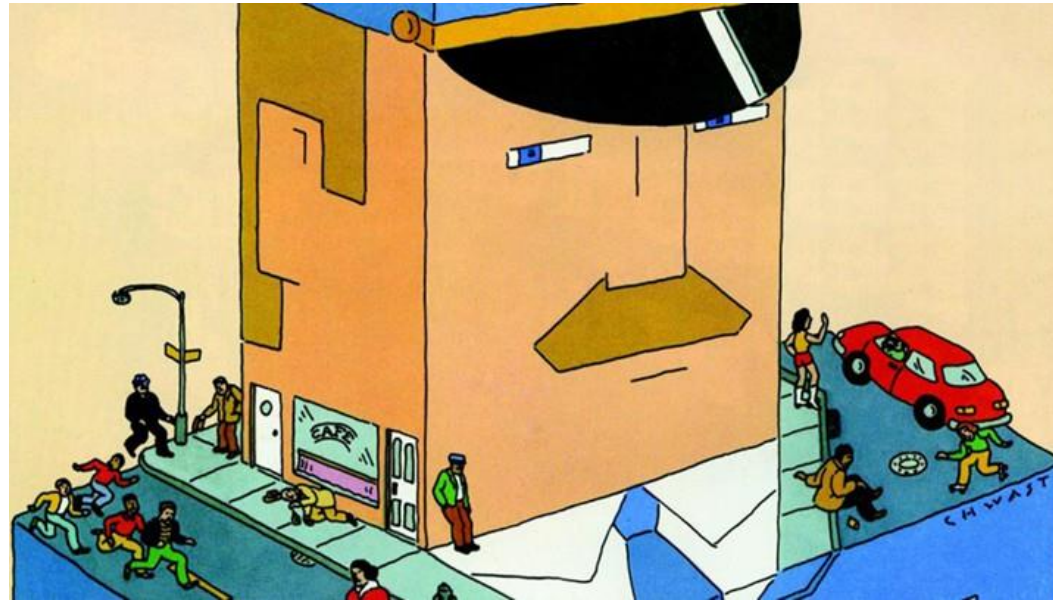
Grand Oak Villa, Watertown, CT

April 1, 2022

“Broken Windows” Theory (1982)

Political Scientist James Q. Wilson
and Rutgers Criminologist George Kelling

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1982/03/broken-windows/304465/>



Consider the Theory

(The famous evocation of how disorder begins)

A piece of property is abandoned, weeds grow up, a window is smashed. Adults stop scolding rowdy children; the children, emboldened, become more rowdy. Families move out, unattached adults move in. Teenagers gather in front of the corner store. The merchant asks them to move; they refuse. Fights occur. Litter accumulates. People start drinking in front of the grocery; in time, an inebriate slumps to the sidewalk and is allowed to sleep it off. Pedestrians are approached by panhandlers.

Look again at the first steps...

*A piece of property is abandoned,
weeds grow up,
a window is smashed.*



What if...

- What if the authors of “Broken Windows” and policy makers who heeded them had taken another track?
- What if vacant and neglected property had received the attention that, for thirty years, was instead placed on petty criminals?

CT's Aging Housing Stock

- **33% of CT's housing stock was built prior to 1940.**
- **27% of CT's housing stock was built 1940-1969.**
- **30% of CT's housing stock was built 1970-1999.**
- **9% of CT's housing stock was built after 2000.**
- **30% of CT housing is renter occupied.**
- **10% of CT housing is vacant.**

(American Community Survey 2018, 5-year estimates)

Dilapidated and Abandoned Property

- **CRIMINAL ASPECTS:**
 - Easy place to hide criminal acts and fire arms
 - Notoriously useful in drug dealing
 - Susceptible to arson
- **COMMUNITY ASPECTS:**
 - Causes preventable injury and illness
 - Dangerous nuisance to children
 - Decreases area property values
 - Promotes fear and destabilizes the community



LACK OF HOUSING STANDARDS – *THE EFFECT*



[Driving Public Health 3.0 in the Motor City](#)

07/12/2016 10:53 AM EDT

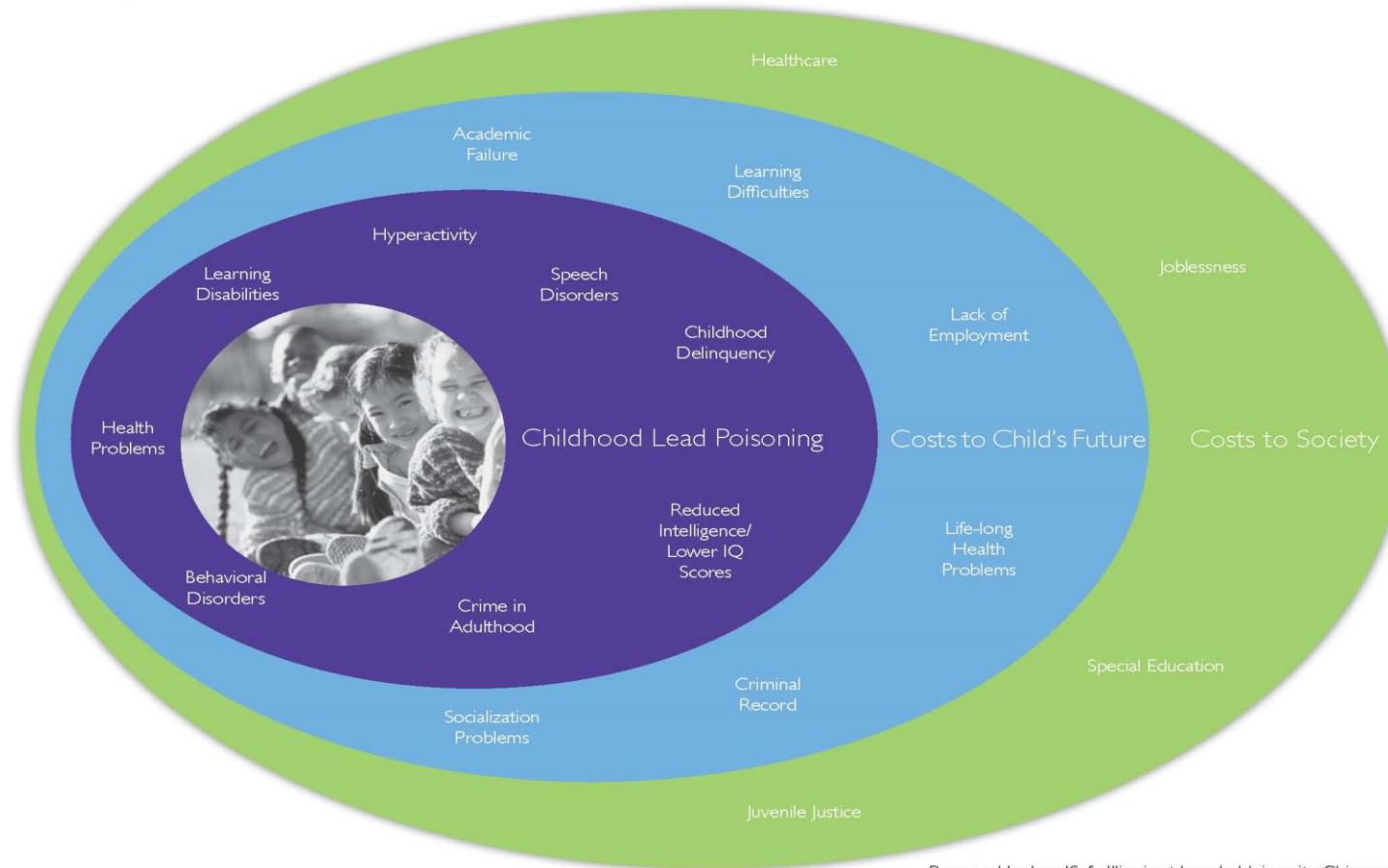
If you start at City Hall and drive 15 minutes east to Gross Pointe, a wealthy suburb of Detroit, you'll cross a difference of nearly 12 years in life expectancy and 10 percent in teen pregnancy rates. Detroit's children continue to suffer infant mortality, asthma, and lead exposure at higher rates than their counterparts elsewhere.

Source: Office of the United States Assistant Secretary of Health with support from Healthy People 2020

Preventing Lead Poisoning

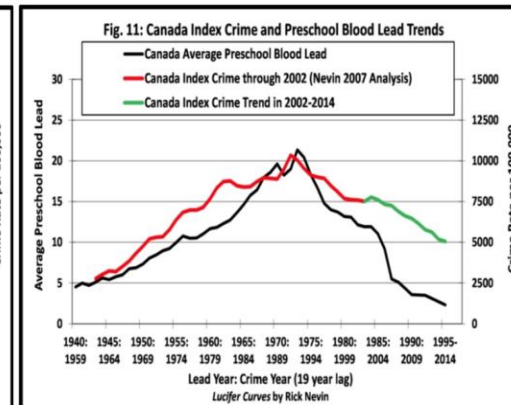
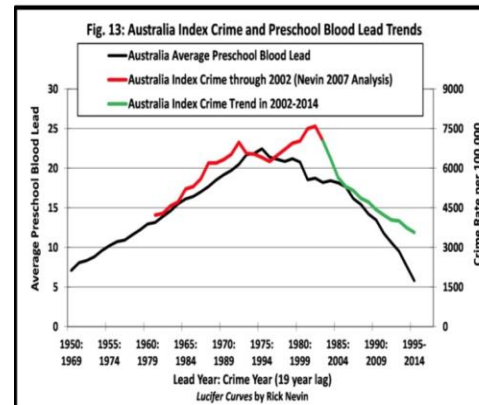
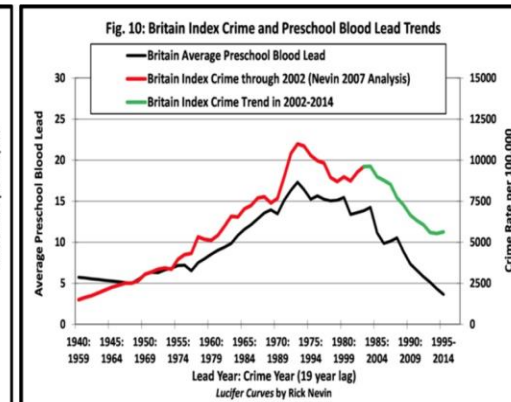
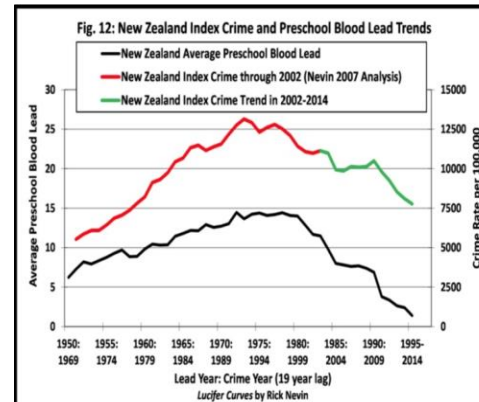
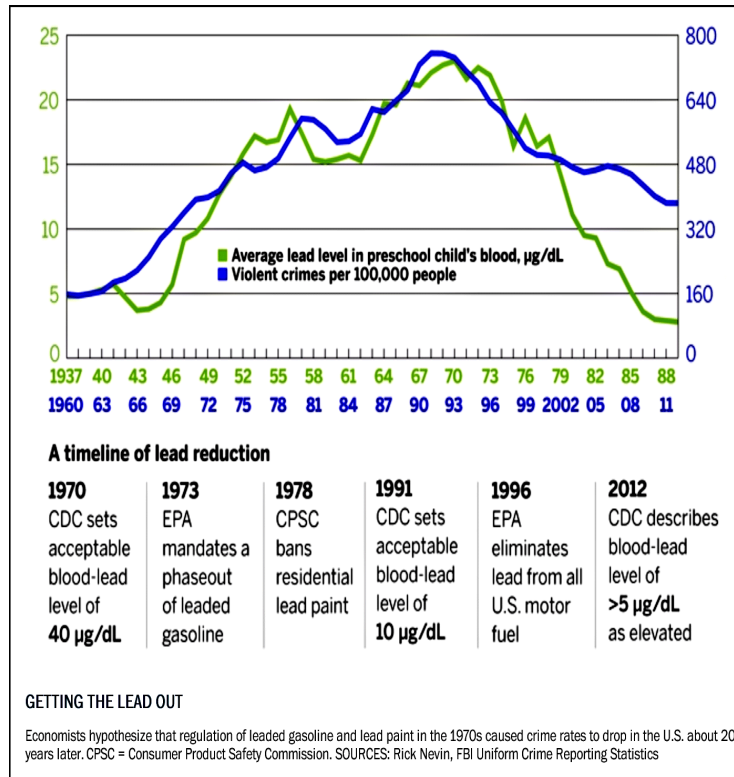
<http://www.lead-safeillinois.org/uploads/documents/ripple-effects.pdf>

The Ripple Effects of Childhood Lead Poisoning



Prepared by LeadSafe Illinois at Loyola University Chicago
Civitas ChildLaw Center and Policy Institute

Lead Poisoning and Violent Crime



<https://www.motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2018/02/an-updated-lead-crime-roundup-for-2018/>

Asthma in Connecticut

Asthma is a chronic disease of the respiratory system that is characterized by reversible obstruction of the airways and airway hyper-responsiveness to a variety of stimuli.

It has been found that the following population subgroups are disproportionately affected by asthma: children, females, Hispanics, non-Hispanic Blacks, and residents of the state's five largest cities.

Connecticut Statistics:

- Among Connecticut residents surveyed in 2018, **62,400 (9.7%) children (10.3%) adults** suffered from asthma.
- Asthma is the single most avoidable cause of hospitalization, yet it is consistently one of the most common admitting diagnoses in pediatrics. It is also the number one reason children miss school.
- In 2018, Connecticut incurred **\$102 million** acute care charges due to asthma as a primary diagnosis, of which **\$74 million (73%)** were charged to public funds (Medicaid or Medicare).
- Residents from the five largest cities (Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Stamford, and Waterbury) account for 18% of Connecticut's total population, yet they account for nearly half (**44% or \$43 million**) of the **\$102 million** asthma acute care charges in 2018.



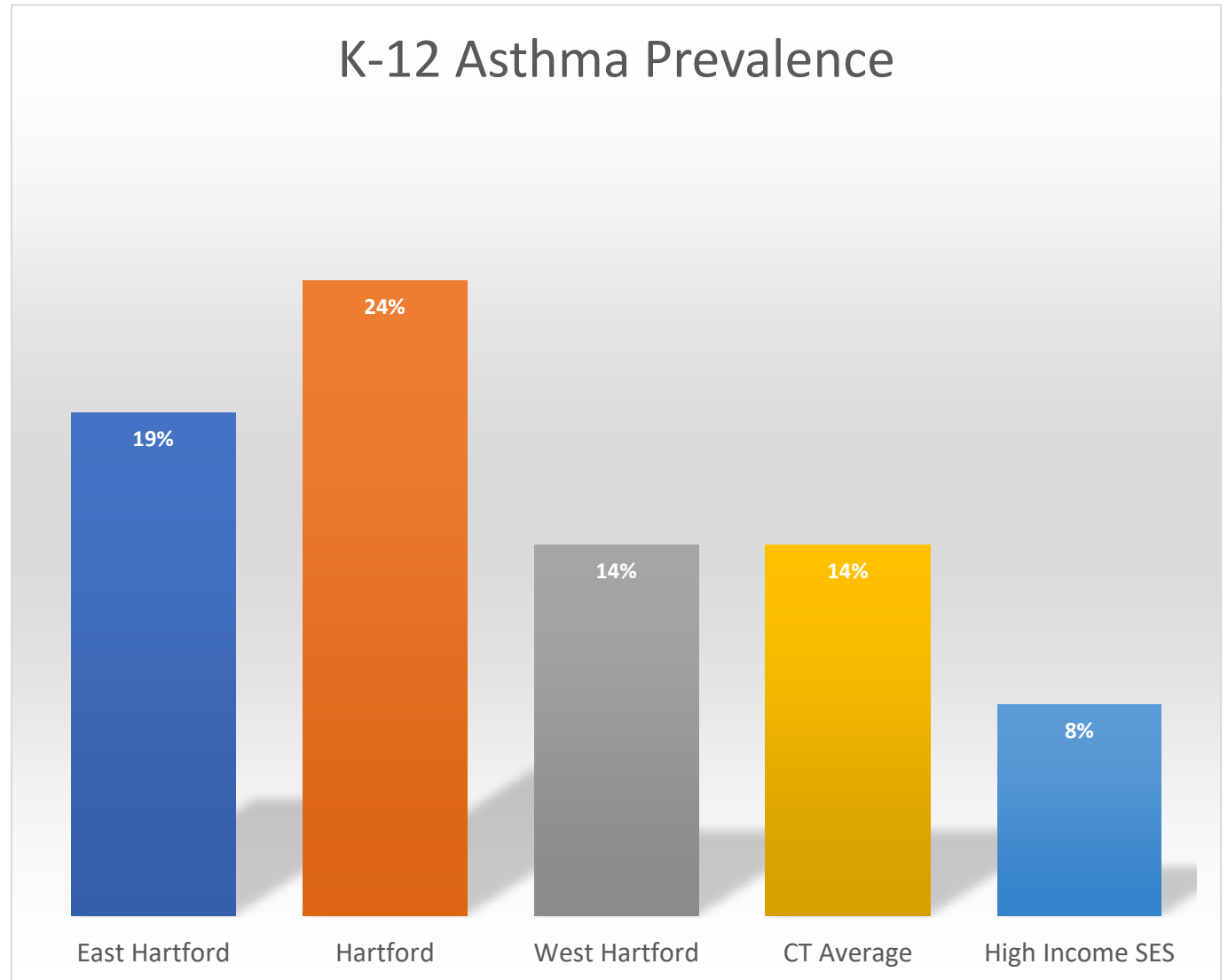
High asthma rates in Hartford vs. state

In Hartford (includes west and east Hartford)

Over 7,300 child and adult asthma ER visits and 2,785 hospitalizations 2010-14.

Average 1,800 ER visits/year and 670 hospitalizations annually for adults and children.

Asthma hospital costs 2010-14 of \$21 million, roughly \$5M/yr.



Sources: CT Dept. Health. Connecticut School-based Asthma Surveillance Report 2014 & (CHIME) ED and Hospitalization Data; US Census Bureau Data (2010)

Abandoned Housing/Crime Studies

- 1993- Criminologist William Spelman in Austin, TX : Crime rates on blocks with open abandoned buildings were twice as high as rates on matched blocks without open buildings.
- 2005 – Sociologist Lance Hannon in NYC: in high poverty areas, the number of abandoned houses in a given census tract correlated with homicide levels.

Remediating Abandoned, Inner City Buildings Reduces Crime and Violence in Surrounding Areas

http://www.safeguardproperties.com/News/Industry_Updates/2015/07/Remediating_Abandoned_Inner_City_Buildings_Reduces_Crime_and_Violence_in_Surrounding_Areas.aspx



MacArthur Foundation
HOW HOUSING MATTERS

macfound.org/HousingMatters

POLICY RESEARCH BRIEF

Poor Quality Housing Is Tied to Children's Emotional and Behavioral Problems

Parents' stress from living in poor quality housing takes a toll on children's well-being

by REBEKAH LEVINE COLEY, TAMA LEVINE, ALICIA DOYLE LYNCH, AND MELISSA K. LEVINE

SEPTEMBER 2013

A family's home is their haven, but for families living with leaking roofs and mold, it's not always a safe place. For those who have to choose between paying for rent or for food, or for families who repeatedly move in search of a more affordable home, one's place of refuge is not always very homey.

This brief examines how housing characteristics affect children and families' well-being.¹ Among the variables tested, poor housing quality was the most significant and strongest predictor of emotional and behavioral problems in low-income children and youth. It also had a significant association with school performance among children. Housing affected children because the stress of living in unhealthy and unsafe conditions affected parents' ability to care for their children.

Advantages of the Current Study

Past research has identified several aspects of housing that are thought to be associated with children's well-being.² Researchers, for example, have found that poor housing—exposed wiring, peeling lead paint, rodent infestation, and the like—may contribute to physiological stress in children, inhibiting their emotional stability and learning. Similarly, residential instability may interrupt peer

- Poor housing quality strongest predictor of emotional and behavioral problems in low-income children
- Much of association between poor housing quality and children's wellbeing operates through parental stress and parenting behaviors
- Housing impacts mental health on two generations

...home or receiving government subsidies may increase family stability and social connections, helping to improve children's school success.

Housing Quality Impacts Mental Health

Most municipalities have created their own unique frameworks for addressing safety, nuisance, blight, and other quality of life issues using the various powers granted to municipalities under CGS.

Hartford's Blight Remediation Team has a limited reach when it comes to problems that holistically affect housing conditions and a neighborhood's quality of life.

State law and our blight ordinance restrict us from entering dwelling units in order to gather evidence for enforcement under the blight Code, so our blight inspectors generally collect evidence from exterior inspections and other data sources such as our database of building permits.



Out of necessity we foster and promote working relationships with our partners, both inside and outside of the City.

We rely on other municipal employees such as the Department of HHS nuisance inspectors to issue orders regarding overgrown vegetation and accumulations of garbage and debris on private properties and we often make referrals to them. If these orders are not complied with, the City will send a DPW cleanup crew to cut back vegetation and pick up accumulations of garbage & debris.

(CGS 12-169b allows municipalities to add these expenses onto the taxes owed for these properties / CGS 47a-73b allows municipalities to lien properties for expenses incurred in remediation work to clean or make properties safe and secure).

Health Department investigations of rats and infestations on the exterior of properties can lead to orders issued to owners or occupants.

Municipal Directors of Public Health have wide ranging authority to order the abatement of public nuisances.



Close collaboration is a force multiplier which can increase any department's effectiveness. So, it's important to clearly delineate everyone's roles in enforcing code violations and in achieving the desired end result.

We strive to work effectively with our frontline building code inspectors, nuisance inspectors, fire marshals, HPD community service officers, and our Housing Code Enforcement inspectors, among others, to address problem properties and other pervasive conditions that are bringing down residential neighborhoods.

Zoning Enforcement Officers, mental health professionals, and even Parking Authority personnel can play a valuable role in an overall plan to restore safety and vibrancy to any neighborhood.

PARTNERS OUTSIDE OF THE MUNICIPALITY INCLUDE: Office of the State's Attorney, CDFI's (Hartford Community Lone Fund), Habitat for Humanity, Hartford Land Bank, and other local non-profit organizations.



We want to build stronger bonds with our colleagues in other departments, and not seek to operate solely within our own silos.

- Building Code Inspectors issue orders for unsafe structures, unsecured vacant buildings, work being performed without appropriate permits, and other violations under the State Building Code.
- Boarding up unsecured vacant structures helps keep the rest of the community safe, while a solution is reached to restore such buildings to constructive use.
- Buildings with serious structural deficiencies are taken down. Costs associated with board-ups and lawful demolitions on private properties can be recouped by municipalities (12-169b *and* 47a-73b)



What tools does the Blight Remediation Team directly use to combat blight and property-maintenance issues

-Blight Liens under CGS 7-148aa (not to be confused with the Special Blight Assessment under 7-148ff).

PROS: Blight liens have a high priority in the pecking order of liens. At \$100 per day per violation, these fines and liens are likely to get the attention of an owner or mortgage holder/lien holder.

CONS: Due to their super-priority status, these liens can easily become padlocks on a property, deterring future development and exacerbating the debt saddled on the property.



Useful features to any blight lien enforcement ordinances

The blight ordinance can be crafted to include avenues for settling blight liens in order to facilitate a future renovation of the property by the owner or a sale of the property to a prospective purchaser that does have the capability to carry out a full renovation.

The City of Hartford has used blight lien forbearance agreements in furtherance of facilitating transfers and remediation by owners of properties with blight liens.

Our Code allows us to settle blight liens in situations where the owner or a subsequent owner remediates the violations.

Subordination instruments can be put in place to facilitate financing of repairs and construction loans on properties with blight liens.



Important Resources

CGS Sec. 7-148aa: Blight liens are enforced in the same manner as tax liens.

CGS Sec. 7-148o: Non-compliance with orders issued under your blight ordinance can be referred to the Office of the State's Attorney, which can impose civil penalties of \$250 per day.

Creation of hearing procedures and administrative appeals. Giving owners an opportunity to appeal a Blight Citation before an independent hearing officer provides for a useful carrot vs. stick approach. CGS § 7-148c gives the statutory framework for a Citation appeal process.

The owner can be given a way out if certain remediation milestones are met during the hearing process.



Other Indispensable Resources

- Mortgage foreclosure Registrations – required to be filed with Town Clerks pursuant to CGS Sec. 7-148ii.
- Notice to lien holders –CGS § 7-148gg.
- Office of the Secretary of the State.
- Land Records provide access to deeds and mortgages.
- State of Connecticut Judicial Website www.jud.ct.gov
- Permit History, Building Plans, and other Municipal Records from your town and surrounding towns
- GIS Mapping
- Sandborn Maps



BEFORE





AFTER



City of Hartford Blight Remediation Team

Contact Info:

Judith H. Rothschild, J.D.

Director of Blight Remediation and
Housing Code Enforcement
City of Hartford
Department of Development Services
260 Constitution Plaza
Hartford, CT 06103
860-757-9086 Office
860-560-6507 Cell
Judith.Rothschild@Hartford.gov

Michael D. Perez

Blight Remediation Enforcement Official
860-757-9033 Office
860-490-4076 Cell
Michael.Perez@Hartford.gov

Gustavo Espinoza

Senior Project Manager
(860)-757-9230 Office
(860) 424-7351 Cell
Gespinoza@Hartford.gov