



WILMINGTON

SOLVING THE REAL ESTATE CRISIS

RED FIELDS TO
green fields

*Urban Greening
Program*

Revitalizing neighborhoods into
vibrant, healthy communities



Presented by the
Georgia Institute of Technology



RED FIELDS TO
green fields

Urban Greening Program

Revitalizing neighborhoods into
vibrant, healthy communities



Introduction

The City of Wilmington, Delaware is uniquely positioned to embrace an urban greening program as part of the City's ongoing efforts to revitalize its neighborhoods. Wilmington, which is Delaware's largest city, is a local and national center for commerce and financial services. However, a number of Wilmington's urban neighborhoods struggle with vacant properties, low property values, and underutilized commercial corridors. Many of these neighborhoods also lack safe and accessible green space, limiting residents' opportunities for outdoor play and recreation that are necessary for a healthy lifestyle.

The current real estate crisis and flood of foreclosures is threatening the stability of many of Wilmington's at-risk neighborhoods. Yet, this crisis also offers the City an opportunity to incorporate greening into community development by transforming derelict, vacant and foreclosed properties into public green spaces that will serve as recreational and social hubs. Turning vacant spaces from eyesores into neighborhood assets will improve the health of residents as well as their quality of life.

Wilmington's West Side is an ideal target area for a pilot project to test the viability and impact of integrating greening into a comprehensive revitalization strategy that fosters healthy living. The West Side currently has the capacity and momentum to rebuild urban real estate markets, increase green space and renew parks. The West Side also includes one of Wilmington's highest concentrations of vacant and foreclosed properties, located in its southwest quadrant, an area that also has a critical shortage of greenspace.

Goal: Transform West Side neighborhoods currently struggling with low property values, high rates of vacancy, and lack of access to parks into vibrant, healthy communities that promote active living and attract residents, businesses, and capital.

Strategy: Coordinate community development and greening efforts in an integrated strategy.



Creating a Green Foundation for Quality Neighborhoods

The City of Wilmington, Delaware, is uniquely positioned to embrace an urban greening program as part of its ongoing efforts to revitalize its neighborhoods.

Wilmington is Delaware's largest city, with a population of just over 72,000. It is a local and national center for commerce and financial services. Many US and international banks, including Bank of America, Chase, Barclays and ING, headquarter their credit card operations downtown.

Wilmington's early leaders created a public park system that today anchors some of the city's strongest neighborhoods. The vision of urban living they promoted was based on the principle that green space is central to the health and well-being of the community and the environment. This vision is as relevant today as it was then.

Green space is central to the health and well-being of the community and the environment.





Problem #1:

Vacant buildings undermine the neighborhoods and the real estate crisis is undermining revitalization.

Vacant Buildings Undermine Neighborhoods

As in many cities, several of Wilmington's urban neighborhoods face major challenges: concentrations of vacant and boarded houses, declining property values, rising crime rates, and underutilized commercial corridors.

Over the past ten years, Wilmington's city government has collaborated extensively with community-based organizations and residents to address these issues. Efforts have been concentrated primarily in housing rehabilitation, commercial district redevelopment and crime reduction. Many commercial properties are still dormant and a nuisance. Addressing the City's core access to greenspace in conjunction with reducing vacant commercial land is an integrated approach to improving the neighborhoods' quality of life.





- West Side's Southeast Quadrant
- FORECLOSED
 - FOR SALE COMMERCIAL
 - VACANT BUILDING
 - VACANT LAND
 - INACCESSIBLE GREEN SPACE
 - GREEN SPACE
 - WEST SIDE STUDY AREA
 - WILMINGTON CITY LIMITS
 - RAILROAD

Real Estate Crisis Undermining Revitalization

Wilmington's West Side is representative of the city's densely populated urban neighborhoods. Although reinvestment efforts have stabilized a large portion of the West Side, the current real estate crisis threatens to undermine the progress underway in the community.

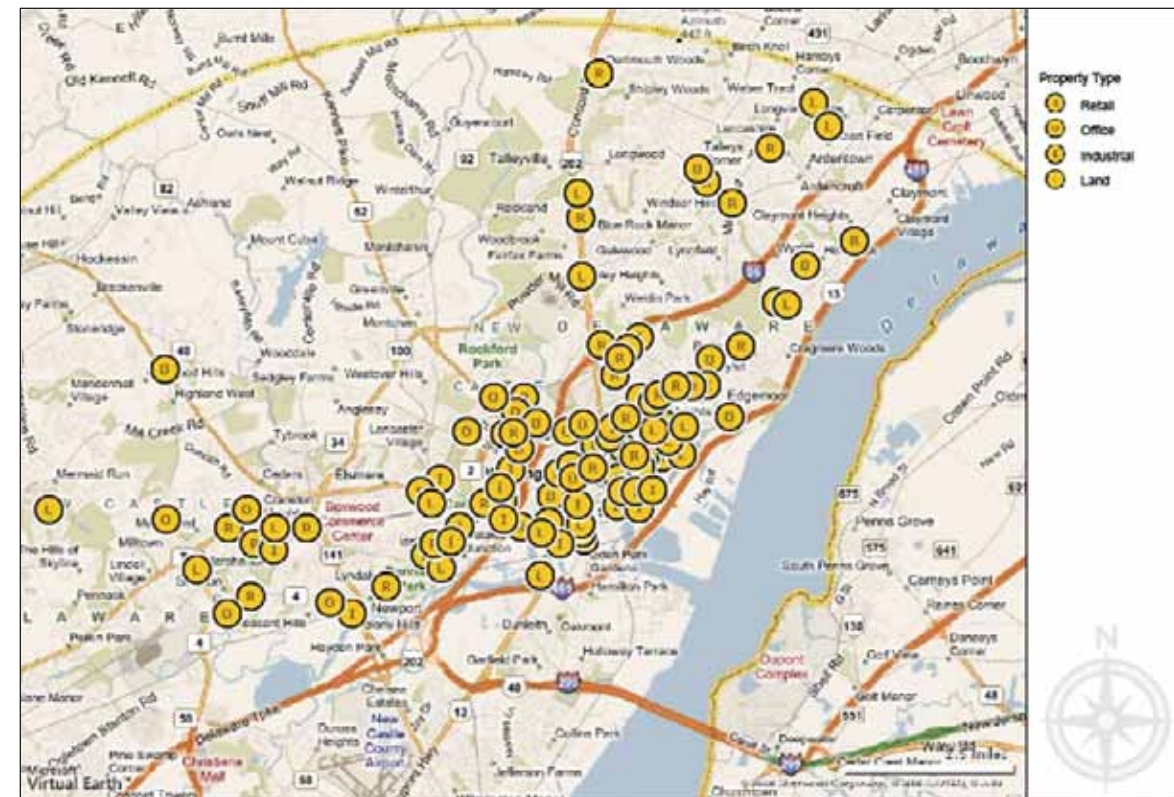
Foreclosures have had the most impact on the West Side's southeast quadrant, which has the area's weakest real estate market.

Snapshot of a Weak Real Estate Market

High Rates of Vacant Properties

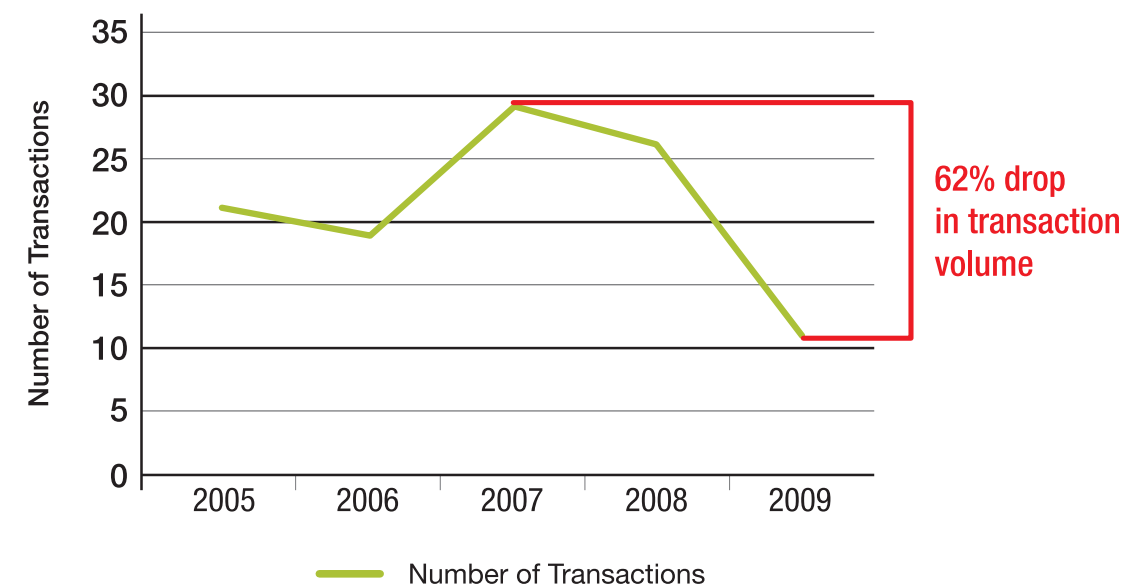
The highest proportions of the West Side's vacant, foreclosed, and for sale homes are located in its southeast quadrant. In November 2009, 12% of all properties in the West Side's southeast quadrant were vacant, compared to 3.6% of total properties in the City of Wilmington.

Additionally, 15% of the properties in the West Side's southeast quadrant were either for sale, foreclosed, and/or vacant at the end of 2009.



- Office Vacancies: 26.2%
- 15% of the properties shown on the map in Wilmington are vacant, for sale, or foreclosed

Transaction Volume & Median Price Per Acre



Low Property Values

Southeast quadrant properties for sale in December 2009 had an average list price that was less than half the average list price for West Side properties not in this quadrant.

Comparision of West Side For Sale Properties

	West Side	
	Number	Average Price
West Side For Sale Properties	128	\$ 159,093
In Southeast Quadrant	69	\$ 105,217
Not in Southeast Quadrant	59	\$ 222,100

Among for sale properties in the southeast quadrant, vacant properties had an average list price that was 30% less than the average for occupied properties.

Comparision of Vacant and Occupied For Sale Properties

	Southeast Quadrant	
	Number	Average Price
Total For Sale Properties	69	\$ 105,217
Vacant	20	\$ 72,000
Not Vacant	49	\$ 105,380



Unattractive Neighborhood “Hardscape”

The residential neighborhoods in the West Side’s southeast quadrant are characterized by a dense housing stock. On some blocks, homes are set directly on the sidewalk. Street trees are minimal.

The southeast quadrant’s commercial corridors along W. 4th St. and Lancaster Avenue also suffer from a lack of landscaping or street trees. Vacant storefronts undermine the vitality of these shopping districts.

Cycle of Disinvestment

The concentration of vacant properties in the southeast quadrant of the West Side is both a symptom and a trigger of a weak real estate market.

Widespread abandonment is often a function of regional trends. In contrast, localized concentrations of vacant properties such as those in the southeast quadrant of Wilmington’s West Side are produced when owners perceive that the cost of maintenance and operation exceeds the apparent value of the property.

As property values fall, increasing numbers of property owners reach the conclusion that their properties are not worth investing in, leading to deterioration and eventual abandonment, despite the fact that the market may be capable of supporting continued use of a given property. At the same time, research shows that vacant properties exert a downward pressure on real estate prices, leading to a vicious cycle of disinvestment and abandonment that further depresses real estate values in the neighborhood.



Vacant properties exert a downward pressure on real estate prices, leading to a vicious cycle of disinvestment and abandonment that further depresses real estate values in the neighborhood.

Problem #2:
Lack of green space leaves residents with few opportunities for outdoor play and active recreation, which are critical to a healthy lifestyle.



ACRES OF OPEN SPACE PER 1000



Limited Parks and Open Space Offer Few Opportunities for Physical Activity

The West Side as a whole has just two acres of green space per 1,000 residents. This is extremely low when compared to the national average for cities with similar population density of six acres of park land for every 1,000 people.

In the two census tracts that are part of the southeast quadrant, one has .91 acres of green space per 1,000 residents, while the other has a mere .36 acres per 1,000 residents. Young people under the age of 18 make up more of the population in these two census tracts than almost anywhere else in the city. Lack of green space leaves residents of all ages with few opportunities for outdoor play and active recreation, which are critical components of a healthy lifestyle.

Health Consequences of Inactivity

A lack of opportunities for physical activity can have serious health consequences for communities. To maintain a healthy weight, children are recommended to engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, in addition to consuming healthy food and beverages.

As in other states, obesity is reaching epidemic proportions in Delaware. Approximately 36% of Delaware children are overweight or at risk of being overweight. Obese children are developing chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, at a young age and are at greater risk for developing health problems later in life such as heart attacks, strokes, and hypertension.

Children living in neighborhoods like the southeast quadrant of the West Side, where approximately 2,000 children share a little more than three acres of green space, face a particular challenge finding safe and accessible outdoor spaces where they can engage in the play and physical activity recommended to stay healthy and avoid becoming overweight.





What if we invest \$22 million
in Wilmington to convert
Red Fields to Green Fields?



We could reduce the oversupply
of non-performing real estate
and transform the city.

Making Greening Part of the Solution

The current real estate crisis, and the rising number of foreclosures and vacant properties it brings, threatens to undermine Wilmington's neighborhoods and the achievements of the last ten years in promoting revitalization. However, the stressed condition of the real estate market also offers a rare opportunity to incorporate the strengthening of the city's green infrastructure, including its parks, playgrounds, community gardens, and street trees, into a comprehensive community development strategy.

By developing a proactive approach in the face of the current real estate crisis, Wilmington can transform derelict, vacant and foreclosed properties into neighborhood assets and create well-utilized public green spaces that promote active living and serve as recreational and social hubs.

The impact would fulfill the vision of Wilmington's early leaders: neighborhoods that draw and sustain residents and businesses with an attractive combination of quality housing, walkable commercial districts, proximity to jobs and culture, and beautiful nearby parks.



Piloting a Greening Strategy: Focus on the West Side

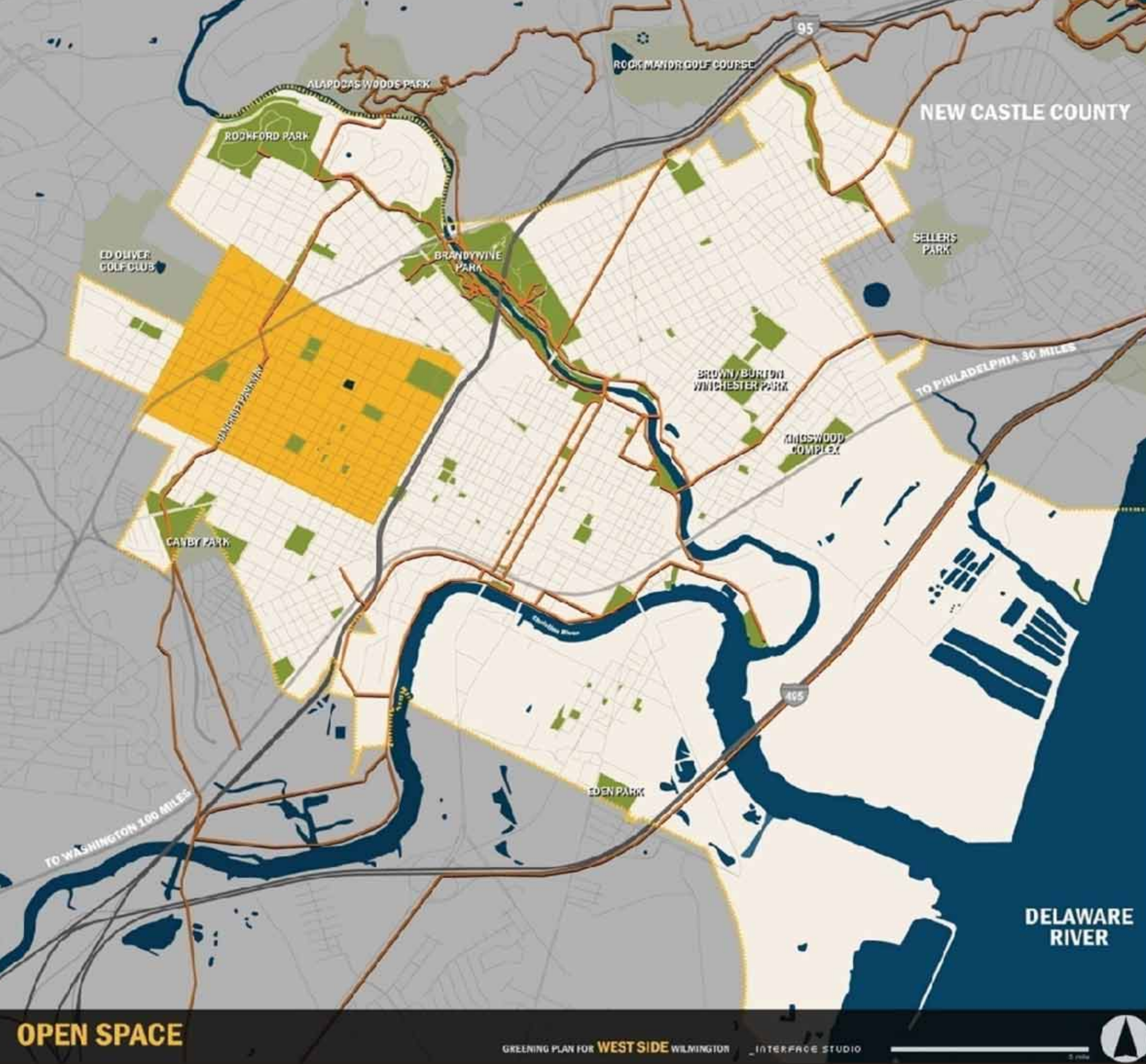
The West Side of Wilmington is ideally positioned to serve as the target area for a pilot project to test the viability and impact of integrating greening into a comprehensive community revitalization strategy.

The West Side has strong existing capacity and momentum around rebuilding urban real estate markets and renewing parks.

Sections of the West Side are affected by a weak real estate market that has been exacerbated by the foreclosure crisis. At the same time, the condition and distribution of parks and other green space on the West Side leaves many residents without access to recreational opportunities and public outdoor spaces.

A successful program for integrating urban greening into community development in the West Side can be replicated city-wide and may serve as an example for other cities facing similar issues.





NEW CASTLE COUNTY

TO PHILADELPHIA 30 MILES

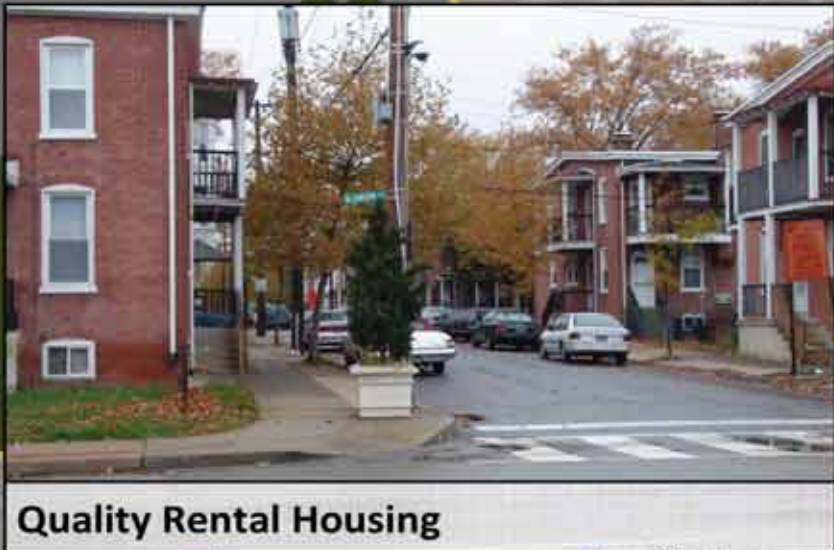
TO WASHINGTON 100 MILES

DELAWARE RIVER

- GREENWAY
- OPEN SPACE
- WEST SIDE STUDY AREA
- WILMINGTON CITY LIMITS
- RAILROAD

OPEN SPACE

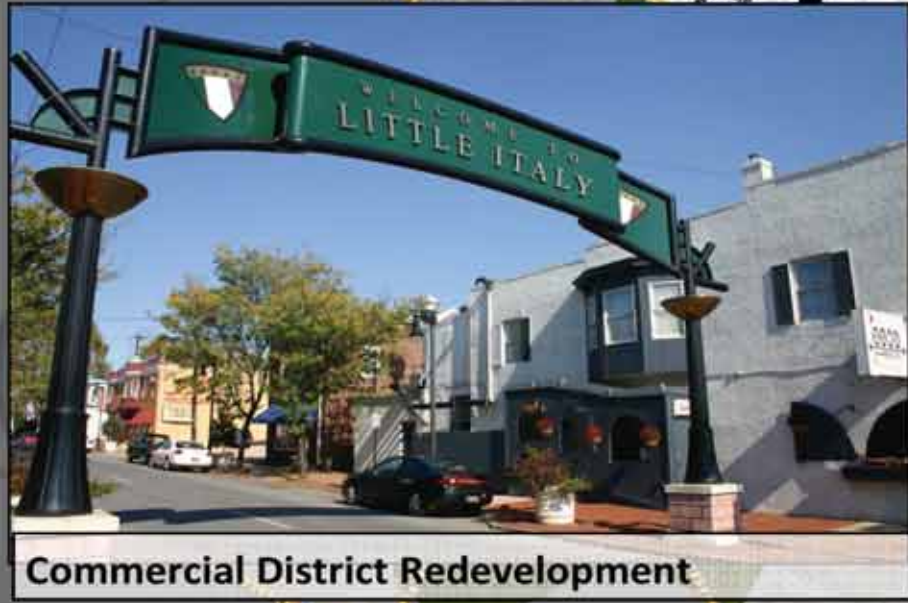




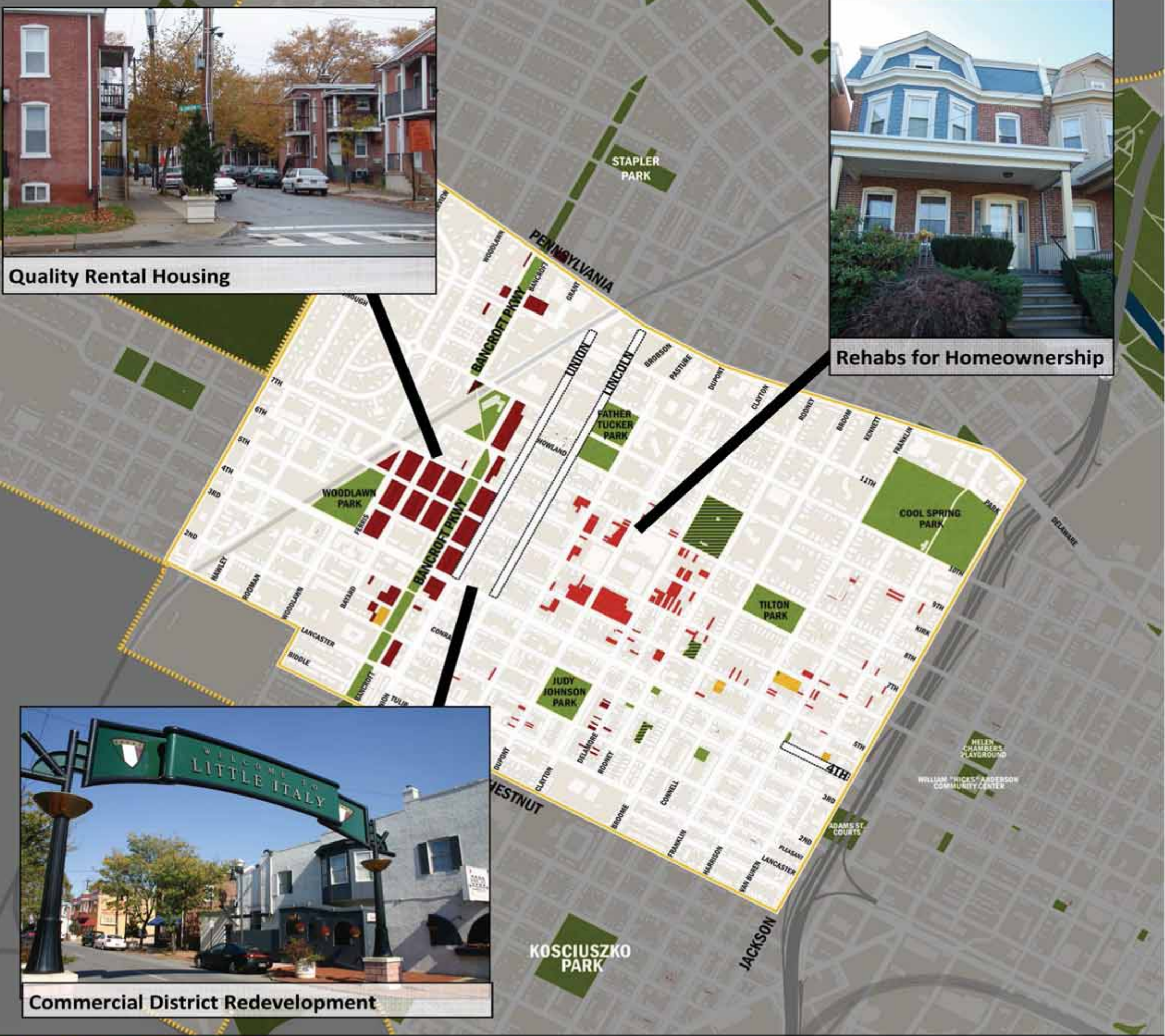
Quality Rental Housing








Rehabs for Homeownership



Commercial District Redevelopment



-  STREETScape IMPROVEMENT
-  WOODLAWN TRUSTEES
-  CORNERSTONE WEST
-  OTHER INVESTMENT
-  INACCESSIBLE GREEN SPACE
-  GREEN SPACE
-  WEST SIDE STUDY AREA
-  WILMINGTON CITY LIMITS
-  RAILROAD

RECENT INVESTMENT



Recent Investment: West Side Community Development

The West Side has a developed network of institutions, community-based organizations, and local leaders with significant capacity for rebuilding neighborhoods.

Components of Existing Community Development Strategy

Housing Rehabilitation and Home Ownership

Wilmington's West Side has led the City in its community redevelopment efforts. Over the past ten years, twenty-four city blocks in the center of the West Side have been stabilized through the renovation of 130 homes and over 80 rental units. Over \$50 million has been invested in West Side affordable housing and redevelopment projects. Housing rehabilitation efforts have been spearheaded by Cornerstone West, a non-profit formed in collaboration with St. Francis Hospital and West End Neighborhood House.

Quality Rental Housing

Complementing home ownership efforts, Woodlawn Trustees owns and operates almost 500 units of quality rental housing that provide a solid anchor to the western portion of the West Side. Woodlawn Trustees is a unique organization with a dual mission to manage affordable rental housing and maintain open space. In a model that is instructive today, the housing it owns and operates was built around green space, including a neighborhood park and Bancroft Parkway, a leafy boulevard that provides links to the city's larger park network.

Commercial District Redevelopment

The Blueprint Communities Delaware program, sponsored by the Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh and the University of Delaware's Center for Community Research, has provided a framework for the development of a comprehensive approach to revitalizing the West Side's commercial corridors. Current efforts focus on supporting small business development and promoting the area's commercial districts as regional destinations based on their distinctive ethnic identities.

In addition, over \$3 million in streetscape improvements have been completed as part of Wilmington Initiatives, a multi-agency partnership between DelDOT, the City of Wilmington and WILMAPCO. The Little Italy Merchants Association was instrumental in advocating for streetscape improvements to N. Union St. and N. Lincoln St., the West Side's two main north-west corridors. Improvements to a portion of W. 4th St. were spearheaded by the Latin American Community Center.





WOODLAWN PARK
1 BASEBALL FIELD
1 BB COURT
2 PLAY STRUCTURES

WOODLAWN LIBRARY
2 PLAY STRUCTURES

BANCROFT PARKWAY
0.8 acres

FATHER TUCKER PARK
1 BASEBALL FIELD
2 BASEBALL PRACTICE FIELDS
3 PLAY STRUCTURES

JUDY JOHNSON PARK
1 BASEBALL FIELD
1 BB COURT
5 PLAY STRUCTURES

TILTON PARK
2.85 acres
2 PLAY STRUCTURES

COOL SPRING PARK
1 PLAY STRUCTURE
NEW PLAZA

STREET TREES AND OPEN SPACE



-  GREENWAY
-  INACCESSIBLE GREEN SPACE
-  GREEN SPACE
-  WEST SIDE STUDY AREA
-  WILMINGTON CITY LIMITS
-  RAILROAD

West Side Park Restoration and Greening Efforts

A strong network of public-private partnerships, city government, grassroots leaders, and committed volunteers has worked together to maintain and develop the West Side's parks and green space.

Components of Existing Park Restoration & Greening Efforts

Public-Private Partnerships

Wilmington's Mayor Baker appointed the Wilmington Beautification Commission in 2004 to encourage people in the residential and business areas to beautify their urban landscape. Chaired by the Delaware Center for Horticulture in collaboration with the City of Wilmington Department of Parks and Recreation and other government and community representatives, the Wilmington Beautification Commission coordinates public and private resources and leverages the energy of local residents to restore urban green spaces. The West Side's Cool Springs Park, Tilton Park and Father Tucker Park, as well as Bancroft Parkway, have benefited from improvements as part of this program.

Neighborhood Volunteers

Local activists have provided strong grassroots support for improvements to West Side parks. For example, Friends of Tilton Park has tirelessly advocated for improvements to park infrastructure and worked closely with the Wilmington Beautification Commission to plant trees and bulbs. Local residents have also been the driving force in the development of Cool Spring Reservoir Plaza, located in the northeast corner of the West Side. A former reservoir was scheduled to be covered and fenced before a coalition of local residents, neighborhood associations, and institutions collaborated with the City of Wilmington's Department of Public Works and advocated for design changes that resulted in a spacious new green space.



Components of Existing Park Restoration & Greening Efforts

Trees for Wilmington

A working group of the Wilmington Beautification Commission staffed by the Delaware Center for Horticulture, Trees for Wilmington has set ambitious goals for expanding the urban tree canopy. Trees for Wilmington has identified the West Side as a priority area to target its efforts.

Community Gardening

Delaware Center for Horticulture's Community Garden program supports gardens in vacant lots and public spaces in Wilmington. Delaware Center for Horticulture maintains a number of gardens and green spaces in and around the West Side.

Municipal Investments

West Side parks vary in terms of maintenance and programming. The City of Wilmington has invested in many infrastructure improvements. For example, Judy Johnson Park, a neighborhood park that has struggled with deteriorating facilities and criminal activity, has recently benefited from major renovations supported by the 7th District Neighborhood Planning Council and the City of Wilmington Department of Parks and Recreation.





City Garden
Contest
Entrant
LOCALITY
CENTER FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
658-6265
Sponsored by (B) (P) (T)

Implementation

Intergrate Greening and Community Development

The current real estate crisis offers an opportunity to integrate greening and community development efforts in the West Side to create livable, vibrant and healthy communities.

West Side Greening Collaborative

The following organizations have formed the West Side Greening Collaborative to develop a coordinated approach to revitalizing West Side parks and neighborhoods:

City of Wilmington Department of Parks and Recreation
Cornerstone West
Delaware Center for Horticulture
Latin American Community Center
Nemours Health and Prevention Services
University of Delaware
West End Neighborhood House
Woodlawn Trustees

Strategy Overview

The Collaborative's strategy will include the following components:

- Vacant properties, currently undermining neighborhood vitality, will be captured as a resource for revitalization activities.
- Greening investments, including enhancements to parks, gardens, and open spaces, streets and boulevards, will improve the overall appearance and "curb appeal" of the community and help attract private investment.
- Property investments, including rehabilitation and new construction, will help promote neighborhood stability, which is necessary for successful parks.
- Attractive parks and green space will foster community health and contribute to the quality of life in the neighborhood by creating opportunities for outdoor recreation, physical activity, and socializing that are essential for healthy lifestyles and community cohesion.
- Neighborhoods with a good quality of life will attract new residents and businesses, increasing property values, reducing vacancies, and adding to the tax base, ensuring the long term sustainability of the community.



Transform obsolete commercial and residential buildings...



...into community assets.





**TARGET AREA
VACANT, FORECLOSED,
FOR SALE PROPERTIES**

278 PARCELS (12% OF PARCELS)
8.76 ACRES (9% OF LAND AREA)

8.76

1

- TARGETED PROPERTIES
- VACANT LAND
- INACCESSIBLE GREEN SPACE
- GREEN SPACE
- WEST SIDE STUDY AREA
- WILMINGTON CITY LIMITS
- RAILROAD

OPEN SPACE TARGET AREA



Activity #1: Establish Site Control

The West Side Greening Collaborative will create a land bank to facilitate the acquisition of West Side properties, with a focus on properties in the southeast section of the West Side where the real estate market is weakest and the need for parks and open space is the greatest. By providing a mechanism for reclaiming the worst properties within the neighborhood, a land bank will enable the West Side community to actively promote the strategic re-use of vacant land and property.

How a Land Bank Works

Land banks are independent, nonprofit, or quasi-governmental entities created to:

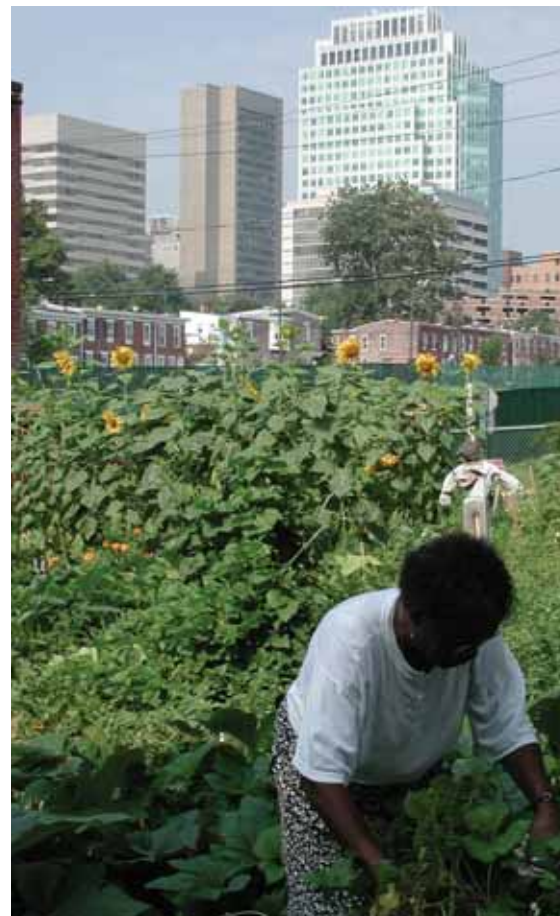
- Acquire vacant and abandoned property through purchase, donation, or foreclosure;
- Market property to individuals and nonprofit entities that will rehabilitate or redevelop it consistent with community-driven neighborhood plans;
- Hold and maintain property over time to position the community to take advantage of future opportunities; and
- Assemble obsolete and deteriorated property and vacant land into larger parcels suitable for redevelopment.



Activity #2: Convert Obsolete Vacant Properties to Green Assets

The West Side Greening Collaborative will identify concentrations of obsolete and deteriorating structures as target areas to assemble properties to convert to green space.

Collaborative member organizations with expertise in developing community green spaces will work with neighbors, businesses and institutions to develop and maintain parks, playgrounds, community gardens and other green spaces that meet community needs.



Activity #3: Redevelop Pivotal Vacant Properties to Strengthen Existing Green Space

Collaborative member organizations with capacity in housing development will rehabilitate vacant properties located around or near parks. The highest priority for strategic re-use will be vacant homes that are substantially intact on blocks with few vacancies.

Strong neighborhoods contribute to park and neighborhood safety by developing a sense of collective ownership for neighborhood assets.



An aerial photograph of Judy Johnson Park, a large green field with a baseball diamond, surrounded by a dense residential neighborhood. Numerous orange dots are placed on the roofs of houses in the surrounding area to indicate vacant properties. The text 'JUDY JOHNSON PARK' is overlaid in the center of the park field.

JUDY JOHNSON PARK

● = Vacant Property

Activity #4: Enhance Linkages

Reinforcing investments in parks and real estate, the West Side Greening Collaborative will link neighborhoods, parks, commercial areas, schools and other destinations by extending greening efforts all the way to the street. As vacant properties are rehabilitated or transformed into community green spaces, the “hardscape” of the neighborhood’s streets will be softened by adding street trees, sidewalk plantings, and landscaped planters. Right of way improvements will enhance the safety of bicyclists and pedestrians.

Green streets offer environmental benefits such as reducing storm water run-off, capturing greenhouse gases and reducing the cost of cooling buildings. Green streets also increase property values and promote safety, attractiveness and livability. Perhaps most importantly, green streets provide the foundation for the neighborhood to be an active community by offering safe and attractive routes for people to walk or bike to work, school, shops or a park.



Activity #5: Promote Community Engagement and Active Living

For community transformation, it is not enough to improve the physical landscape. It is just as important to engage the community. The West Side Greening Collaborative will collaborate with neighborhood residents and employees to design and implement a wide range of activities that connect people to the natural environment and each other.

Collaborative member organizations with youth programs and with experience developing and delivering health and wellness programs will work together to organize park and work-place based health promotion activities such as lunchtime or monthly walks, races and fun runs, running and biking clubs, and youth sports leagues.

The West Side Greening Collaborative will also work with residents to enhance opportunities for greater routine physical activity through Safe Routes to School and other walkability initiatives. By engaging with residents to collectively shape the future of the community, the West Side Greening Collaborative will foster neighborhoods that support community health and offer conditions where individuals, families and communities can thrive.



Project Cost

Acquisition

The land bank will focus its resources on acquiring vacant properties in the West Side's southeast quadrant. Initial targets for acquisition include:

- 20 vacant properties (.59 acres) that are for-sale at a total asking price of \$1,500,000.
- 33 vacant properties (.92 acres) that were tax or mortgage foreclosed in 2009, and are now city- or bank-owned, at a 50% discount from the current market price per acre.
- 112 properties that are currently vacant but not for-sale (3.63 acres) at prices comparable to today's for-sale properties.

Total estimated cost: \$11,650,000

Acquisition Overview

	Number	Area (acres)	Average Price Per Acre	Total Aquisition Price
Vacant Properties				
For Sale	20	0.59	\$ 2,500,000	\$ 1,500,000
Bank or City-Owned	33	0.92	\$ 1,250,000	\$ 1,150,000
Other	112	3.63	\$ 2,500,000	\$ 9,000,000
Total	165	5.14		\$ 11,650,000

Green Space Development

An estimated 30 properties (20% of total) will be obsolete and deteriorating structures will be demolished and converted to green space, totaling approximately one acre. Green space development costs include demolition (\$12,000 per property) construction (\$1.50 per square foot), and maintenance (\$1.50 per square foot for five years).

Total estimated cost: \$750,000

Real Estate Development Anchored by Existing Parks

It is anticipated that 135 properties (80% of total), including existing commercial properties, homes and vacant land, will be suitable for rehabilitation or new construction. An estimated \$60,000 subsidy per property will be necessary to meet the gap between the sale price for new homeowners and the cost of rehabilitation/construction.

Total estimated cost: \$8,100,000

Park Programming

Park activities will require an estimated \$100,000 per year for five years. The impact of these resources will be strengthened through coordination with existing programs serving youth and other constituencies in the community.

Total estimated cost: \$500,000

Green Streets

Strengthening the tree canopy in the West Side's southeast quadrant will demand the planting of an estimated 1,200 new trees at a cost of \$550 per tree for planting and the first year of follow-up care.

Total estimated cost: \$650,000

Total Project Costs Overview

	Estimated Cost
Acquisition	\$ 11,650,000
Green Space Development	\$ 750,000
Real Estate Development	\$ 8,100,000
Park Programs	\$ 500,000
Green Streets	\$ 650,000
Total	\$ 22,050,000





Impacts

Economic

- Remove from the market 50% of the distressed real estate and vacant properties in the West Side, including 60% of the vacant properties in the West Side's southeast quadrant.
- Potentially increase property values in the southeast quadrant by \$36,000,000, reducing the causes of vacant property, generating local wealth, and increasing the city tax base.
- Recover 300 jobs from those lost in the recession.

Environmental

- Double the greenspace in the community. Create a complete street tree canopy in the southeast quadrant, reducing storm water run-off, capturing green-house gases, and shading streets and buildings.

Health

- Ensure that every resident lives within 500 feet of a park. Create opportunities for residents to make healthy choices, reducing risks for obesity and the health consequences it brings, by putting every resident of the West Side's southeast quadrant within 500 feet of a park or open space.



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