Vacancy in Kansas City

Developing a Systems Approach

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Developing a Systems Approach

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Vacancy in Kansas City

Vacant land and vacant properties in Kansas City, MO are a “wicked” problem…
Vacancy in Kansas City

Scope of the Challenge:

US Census Bureau (2012), Kansas City is *not* in the top 25 cities in terms of vacancy rate and total number of vacant units.

*However* – according to the City there are:

**18,860 Parcels** coded as “vacant” (9500, 9600) in the City’s Planning GIS database (Land Use)

18,818 South of the river…. (over 99 percent)

5,051 – Land bank and dangerous buildings

Source: City of KCMO, Neighborhood Housing Services
Vacancy in Kansas City

Map of properties with delinquent taxes and no water consumption…
Vacancy in Kansas City

Typical representation of the problem of vacancy...

Individual data points

Lack of context
Vacancy in Kansas City

*Given the scope of the challenge – what data matter?*
Sample list of desired variables and data...
Typical Approach

A Patterned-Based Approach to Vacancy

How to address vacancy?

Event-based

- Considers 1 or 2 parcels at a time; makes no conscious attempt to connect...

- Actions taken at one parcel to all other parcels
- Actions taken at one parcel to the larger urban context

LESS EFFECTIVE
Course Approach
A Patterned-Based Approach to Vacancy

How to address vacancy?

Event-based
Considers 1 or 2 parcels at a time; makes no conscious attempt to connect...
Actions taken at one parcel to all other parcels
LESS EFFECTIVE

Pattern-based
Consciously attempts to connect what happens on one parcel to all other parcels and to the larger urban context
Actions taken at one parcel to the larger urban context
MORE EFFECTIVE
What does a Patterned-Based approach to Vacancy require?

1. **Governance**: coordination of activities at multiple sites

2. **Patterned Responses**: a range of solutions that apply at different scales and in different contexts

3. **Embedded Solutions**: Vacancy strategies must advance a coherent vision for sustainable development:
   - *Rebuild Urbanism or Restore Ecosystems*

4. **Vision**: A coherent, long-term plan for (re)development informed and shaped by a set of values – what matters to the City + Citizens

5. **Framework**: A supporting policy framework to implement the vision
What kind of opportunity is Vacancy for Kansas City Missouri?

Rebuild Urbanism

Restore Ecosystem Services
Vision

Principles for Ecological Democracy

**Enabling Form**
1.) Centeredness
2.) Connectedness
3.) Fairness
4.) Sensible Status Seeking
5.) Sacredness

**Resilient Form**
6.) Particularness
7.) Selective Diversity
8.) Density & Smallness
9.) Limited Extent
10.) Adaptability

**Impelling Form**
11.) Everyday Future
12.) Naturalness
13.) Inhabiting Science
14.) Stewardship
15.) Pacing
Physical Planning Strategies

- Centers & Density – *importance of critical mass, loss of population density, density for transit*

- Limited Extent – *need for some growth management, urban growth boundary at the regional scale, slow down sprawl, encourage urban reinvestment before greenfield growth... Increase demand for reuse of vacant land by limiting growth outward*

- Green Infrastructure – *reuse of vacant land for stormwater retention and filtration, air quality improvement, other green solutions*

- Urban Agriculture & Food Systems – *reuse of vacant land to produce more food locally, increase access to local food*
Vision

Selected Principles of Ecological Democracy that apply directly to Vacancy:

Cultural Planning Themes
• Sacredness
• Stewardship
• Sensible Status Seeking
• Fairness

Physical Planning Strategies
• Centers & Density
• Limited Extent
• Green Infrastructure
• Urban Agriculture & Food Systems
Current Conditions

Concentrations of Vacancy

**Vacant Parcels per Square Mile**

- 300 or fewer
- 301 to 600
- 601 to 900
- 901 to 1200
- More than...
Current Conditions

Demolition without Replacement

Construction Permits 2000 - 2010
- Demolition
- New Construction
- Area of Focus

Demolition Without Replacement

1886
773
Neighborhoods on the east side of Kansas City have experienced years of disinvestment, decline and population loss.

This is consistent with national research which shows that there is a correlation between areas of high amounts of vacancy today and the location of African-American neighborhoods in 1970.

Vacancy is an equity planning issue...
Current Conditions

Suburban Sprawl in the region continues to drain urban neighborhoods in KCMO and KCK of residents...

Loss of residents fuels housing abandonment, decline, disinvestment and ultimately demolition of housing units...

Source: MARC
Current Conditions
Three Study Areas

Vine Street Green  Blue River Country Fingers  Town Fork Creek
Current Conditions

Study Areas

Vine Street Green

Large area south of 18th and Vine

Strong center that needs more population density to support a vibrant, historic neighborhood

Opportunity to rebuild density and restore the function of area creeks, streams while creating new amenities to attract residents
Blue River Country Fingers

Large area between Paseo and the Blue River. . . .

Includes several stream and creek tributaries that have been impacted by urbanization. . . .

Opportunity to stabilize the Benton Blvd corridor while increase environmental health of the area. . . .
Current Conditions

Study Areas

Town Fork Creek

Large area south of Brush Creek along the Town Fork Creek corridor

Area of emerging vacancy badly in need of a strategic approach

Diverse landscape, great opportunities to enhance the greenway along the creek
The Vine Street Green area extends from Truman Road to Linwood North and South and the Paseo to I-70 Hwy East and West.
Concentrated areas of vacant land were brought together to create a greenway.  

18th and Vine Historic District  
Vine Street Lofts  
Community Garden in  
Spring Valley Park
The continuous greenway creates a limited extent for development, protecting natural systems.
The continuous green space is about connecting activity centers with urban agriculture, residences, and parks.
Two Neighborhood Centers
Teaching Farm – Stewardship
Sacredness
Vine Street Green

The Green

Multi-Family Housing Enveloping the Park Space

“Eyes on the Street”
Sensible Status Seeking and Fairness

Bike networks supply alternative job access

Promotion of healthy communities

Streets should be about more than just moving cars
Sensible Status Seeking and Fairness

Transit that is convenient, frequent, and rider oriented supplies a true option for mobility.

Streets should be about more than just moving cars.
Vine Street Green

Strategic Increase of Density

Supports effective and convenient transit

Strengthens the markets ability to create vibrant and resilient neighborhood centers

Programs Specific areas for new development
Conclusion

Restoring Ecosystems

Restoring Food Systems

Restoring Neighborhoods

Building Spaces for Communities that are sustainable, resilient, and fair
Lessons learned…

Vacancy in Kansas City
*Developing a Systems Approach*

*How and why we collect data matters...*
- Participatory processes and social learning
- Purpose, motivation, intention...
- Asset-based community development and planning

*Data collection is only the beginning, and it’s the “easy” part...*
- From data to knowledge...
  - Data visualization and imagery
  - Narrative and meaning = from data to meaningful knowledge
- From collection to use...
  - Getting people to use it: the politics

*Data alone won’t tell you what to do...*