

# Blight Remediation

Learning briefs describe the goals of major programs and strategic initiatives, what we have learned through monitoring and evaluation, key conclusions and examples of impact.

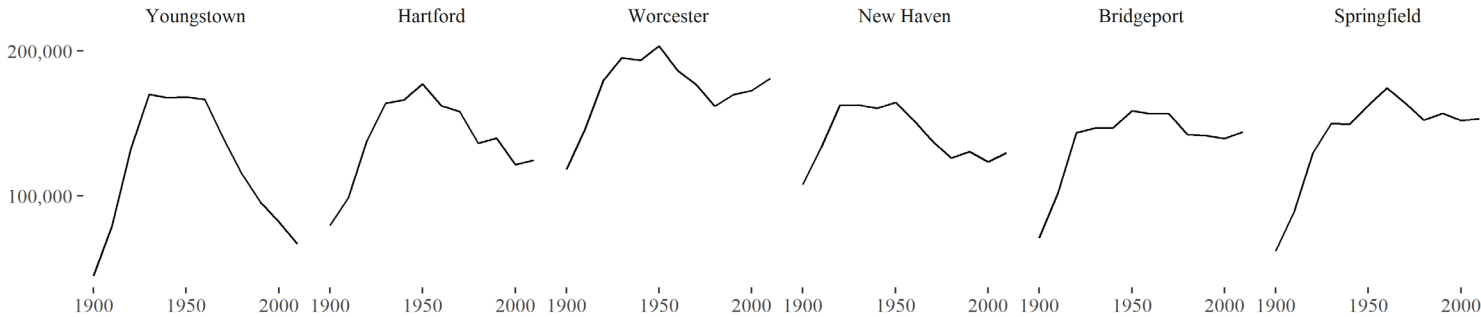
## WHAT IS BLIGHT?

There is no single definition of or metric for blight – towns often focus on the conditions for *blighted premises*, rather than *blight* itself. Many groups have a role in reducing blight, including planning and zoning, health departments, building officials, fire marshals, neighborhood associations, nonprofits, property owners and private investors.

## BLIGHT IN THE HARTFORD REGION

Blight is the direct result of population loss.<sup>1</sup> As cities lose population, excess buildings are left behind. Hartford and other older, industrial cities had rapid population loss after 1950.

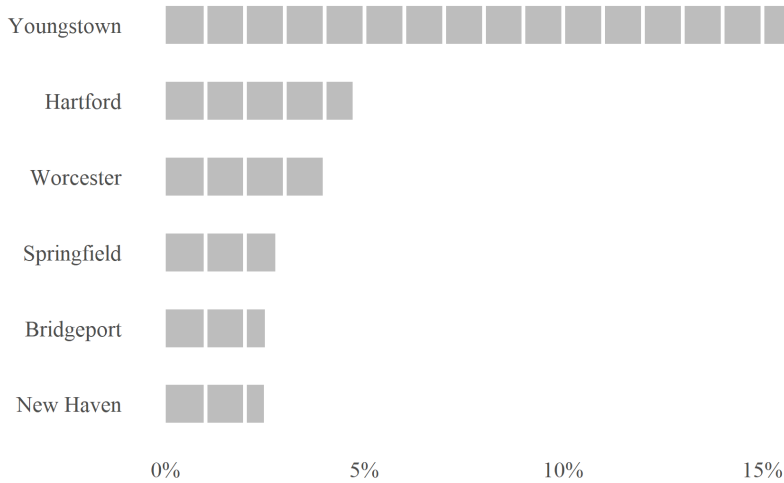
Population trends since 1900 (selected older industrial cities)



50,000 fewer people live in Hartford today than in 1950, 70% of the peak population. That is a higher rate of population loss than other cities in Connecticut, although lower than Youngstown, Ohio, which lost over 60% of its population.

Current vacancy levels correspond to the level of population loss – residential surveys identify 4.7% of properties as vacant in Hartford (roughly 2,500 units). East Hartford has about 2.2% vacant residential units (roughly 500 units), followed by Manchester at 1.4%.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, a strong housing market and a vibrant economy are necessary for sustainable blight remediation.

Residential vacancy (% , Q4 2017)



<sup>1</sup> “Optimizing Blight Strategies Deploying Limited Resources in Different Neighborhood Housing Markets,” Greater New Orleans Community Data Center and Urban Institute, Annual Report 2010.  
<sup>2</sup> Q4 2017 stats from Valassis residential vacancy data, courtesy of Hartford Community Loan Fund access to PolicyMap.

## Blight Remediation

### WHAT ARE PROMISING STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS BLIGHT?

Since 2000, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving has made more than 20 grants totaling over \$4.6 million that focus on remediating blight and revitalizing neighborhoods in the Greater Hartford area. These examples of grants to fight blight fall into three categories:

**Rehabilitation of individual properties**, either through volunteers or by providing support to property owners:

- **Hartford Area Habitat for Humanity** received general operating support. Part of their goals include housing 10-12 families per year through construction and repairs and preserving 16-18 existing homes for elderly or special needs families through repairs or maintenance.
- **Rebuilding Together Manchester** purchased supplies for home renovations, like installing 10 handicap ramps, 5 roof repairs, 6 emergency repairs, plus paint jobs, yard cleanups and other repairs.
- Community greening through **Knox Foundation**, including neighborhood tree planting, landscaping of blighted properties, operation of community gardens and various beautification projects.

**Larger scale redevelopment** of clusters of properties, often leveraging additional private or public support:

- The LISC **Hartford Neighborhood Development Support Collaborative** transforms vacant and abandoned buildings into affordable housing. Current projected outcomes include rehabilitating 12 blighted properties in Hartford, and developing 435 units of affordable housing and managing another 1,100 units.
- **Upper Albany Main Street's Albany and Homestead Avenue Building Improvement Program**, focuses on improving the external features of 37 properties, as well as creating a more uniform, cohesive look to the Upper Albany neighborhood.
- **Hartford Preservation Alliance** provided technical assistance to economic development directors about adaptive re-use of blighted historic properties.
- **Northeast Neighborhood Partnership**, working with Community Solutions, developed plans for the Swift Factory's redevelopment and for a green neighborhood around it.

**Cross-cutting strategies** like community engagement and research can support efforts to address blight. Resident engagement - neighborhood associations, Family Centers, block watches, community organizing and participatory budgeting - helps to engage residents and identify opportunities to address blight. Data is necessary to target resources effectively. In 2012, we supported the Blue Hills Feasibility Study to identify development opportunities in the Blue Hills neighborhood.