Environmental Injustice & Redlining in Springfield, Ohio

Introduction:

Springfield has seen many changes to its population over the past ten years. The population has decreased since 1970, and the population living in poverty has decreased along with it. In 2017 it was found that one in four people live in poverty. In 2015 the city found that there were 3,805 low-income renters while only 2,585 rental units for low income families. This leaves 1,220 citizens without homes in their price range. Springfield has also found a problem of vacant homes in the city. In fact, 2,750 homes in Springfield are currently vacant. If some of these homes were able to be lived in it could reduce the number of people without homes in the community dramatically. While vacant homes and homelessness are problems felt in today's city, they are symptoms of red lining practices used in Springfield and across the country years ago.

1 IN 4 SPRINGFILED RESIDENCE LIVE IN POVERTY

Redlining:

Throughout the United States, redlining practices took over cities between 1935 and 1975. The hope was in increase home ownership while protecting banks at the same time. Banks assessed the risk of lending to a potential homeowner based on the location of the home. Areas that were classified as "D" or redlined areas were "hazardous" for banks to lend leading to high interest rates. While "A" areas were considered minimal risks and loans were easy to obtain. The "B" and "C" areas we in between with "B" areas being a little riskier for the bank than "A" and "C" being a little safer for the bank than "D". In most areas the predominant race of the homeowners was taken into account when giving out classifications. This made it harder for African Americans to get fair loans because most lived in the "C" or "D" areas. During this time in the United States racial segregation of housing was in full force and the implementation of

redlining practices made it nearly impossible for African American families to integrate in to the wealthier and whiter neighborhoods. Redlining practices were banned at a federal level in 1975 but the impact from the policies can still be felt and seen today in many American cities, including Springfield.

Vacant Homes:

One way that redlining practices are showing up today is in the number of vacant homes in each of the four redlining districts. While understanding the number of vacant homes is important in the city, it is also imperative to understand where these homes are located. The table below shows the number of vacant homes in each classification area and the number of homes per square mile in those areas. The figure underneath shows the location of each vacant home in the city.

2,750 HOMES IN SPRINGFIELD ARE CURRENTLY VACANT

Area	Number of Vacant Homes	Vacant homes per square mile
A	88	109
B	154	89
C	1403	360
D	1105	753

Table 1: This table shows the number of vacant homes in the A, B, C and D areas of Springfield. The majority of the vacant homes are in the C districts with the second most located in the D districts. If families could move into homes in one of these districts the problem of homeless citizens of Springfield could be solved. Of all the vacant homes, 51% are in the C district while 40% are in the D areas. When looking at the number of vacant homes per square mile the contrast is even greater. There are more than twice as many vacant homes in D than C.

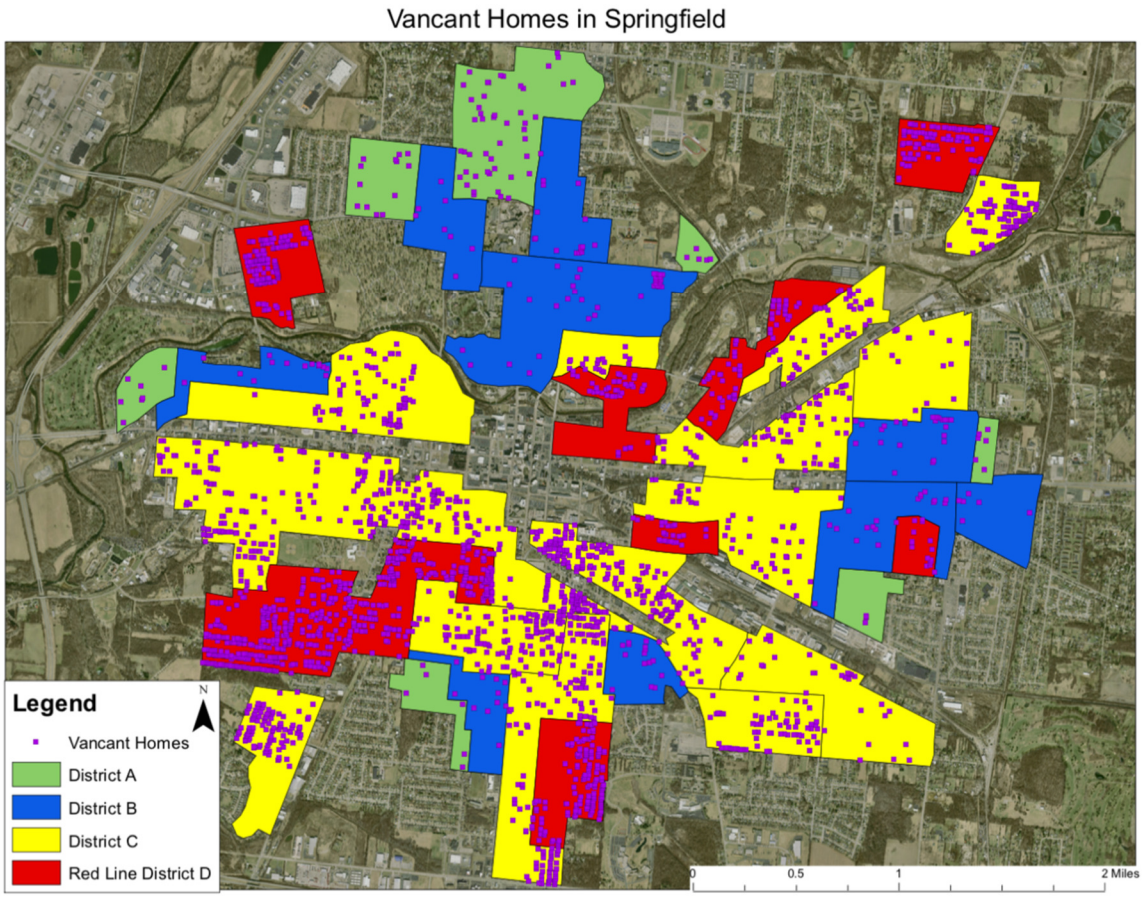

Figure 1: An aerial view of Springfield, Ohio with the area classifications highlighted. Each vacant home is identified, and the concentrations of highest vacancies are the in the C and D areas on the south side of Springfield. Vacant homes can be looked at as an investment into the future of the area.

The number of vacant homes and the high concentrations in certain areas can be problematic. Different national studies done by the Department of Housing and Urban Development found that crime rates increased 250 feet from a property that looks abandoned or vacant. Figure 2 shows the crime reported in Springfield in 2013 within 250 feet of a vacant home. Of the crimes committed in Springfield, 57% of them were within 250 feet of a vacant home. This theory is known as "broken window" where when one person sees a broken window or a disturbance to the home, they are more inclined to cause more destruction in the area. HUD also found that the price of a home decreases with vacant properties nearby, finding that the price of a home could be decreased in value by as much as 8.7 percent. The decrease of a home

THE PRICE OF A HOME CAN BE LOWERED BY AS MUCH AS 8.7 PERCENT IF THERE IS A VACANT HOME NEAR BY.

by 8.7 percent might not be as noticeable in higher class areas but in C and D district and 8.7 percent decrease could be detrimental to the community and the seller. A third factor that HUD looked at was the impact of vacant homes on the city government. Cities were spending valuable time and money on boarding up homes and maintain them for no one to live in them. This hundreds of thousands of dollars could be money that the city is spending on services for the city like fixing roads, investing in education or removing lead from pipes and paint.

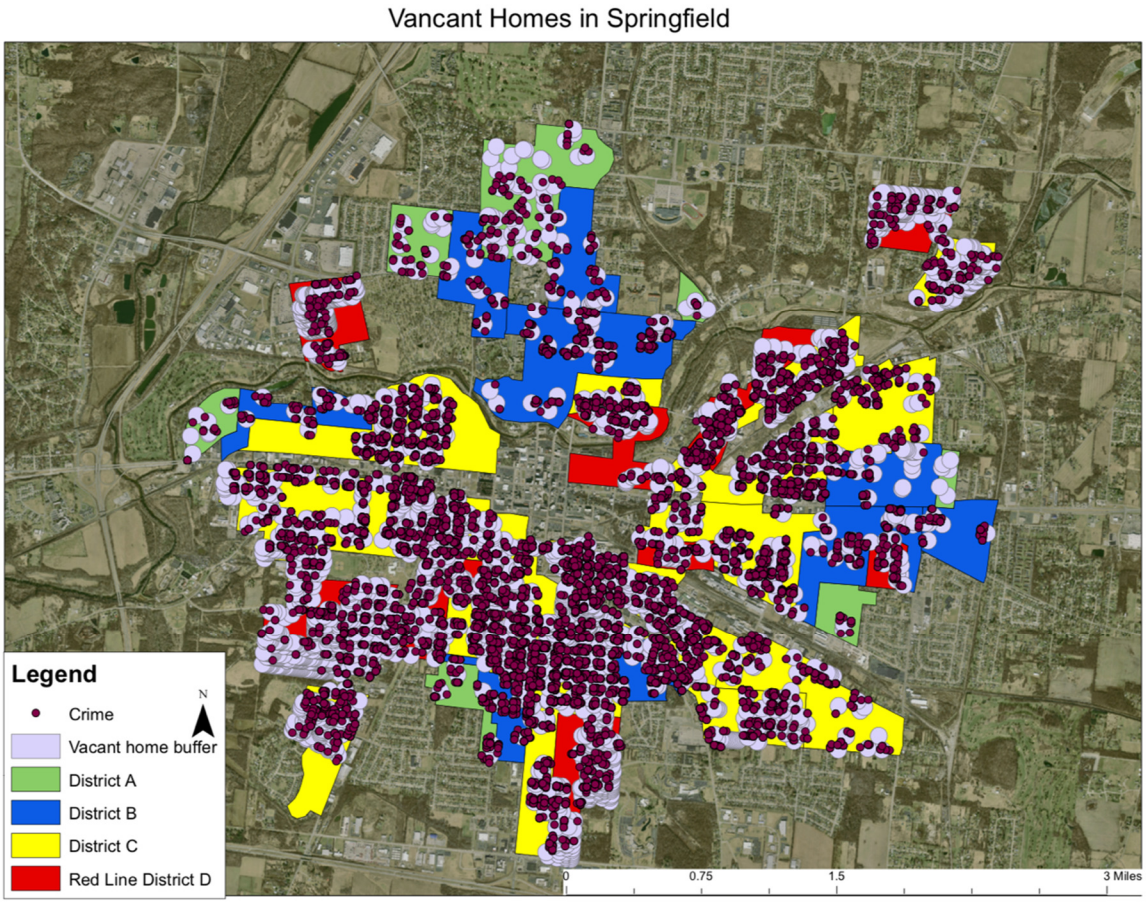

Figure 2: A aerial view of the city of Springfield with a buffer zone of 250 feet from each vacant home highlighted in light purple. The purple dots represent crimes committed within the 250-foot buffer. Of the crimes committed in Springfield, 57% of them were committed within 250 feet of a vacant home. The high concentration of crimes occur in the same areas as the highest concentrations of vacant homes.

Soil Lead:

Springfield has a lead problem in the city. Because of this, children are exposed to it while playing, the paint in their homes and the pipes that carry their water. Lead levels need to be under 200 parts per million to be considered safe for gardening. The figure below showcases the gardens that are safe or unsafe for gardening. The gardens that have higher than 200 ppm of lead should not be used for gardens but continue to be used. A national study looking at lead levels in children and following them through life found that there was a link between higher lead levels in elementary school and lower graduation rates. This means that if a child has higher levels of lead in their blood as a child, they are less likely to graduate high school. The study found that children with elevated lead levels also were more likely to commit a crime. Being able to lower the level of lead in children could raise the Springfield high school graduation rate, increasing the overall knowledge of the workforce. It could also help lower the crime rate in the city.

GARDENS SHOULD NOT BE USED IF THE LEAD LEVEL IS ABOVE 200 PPM

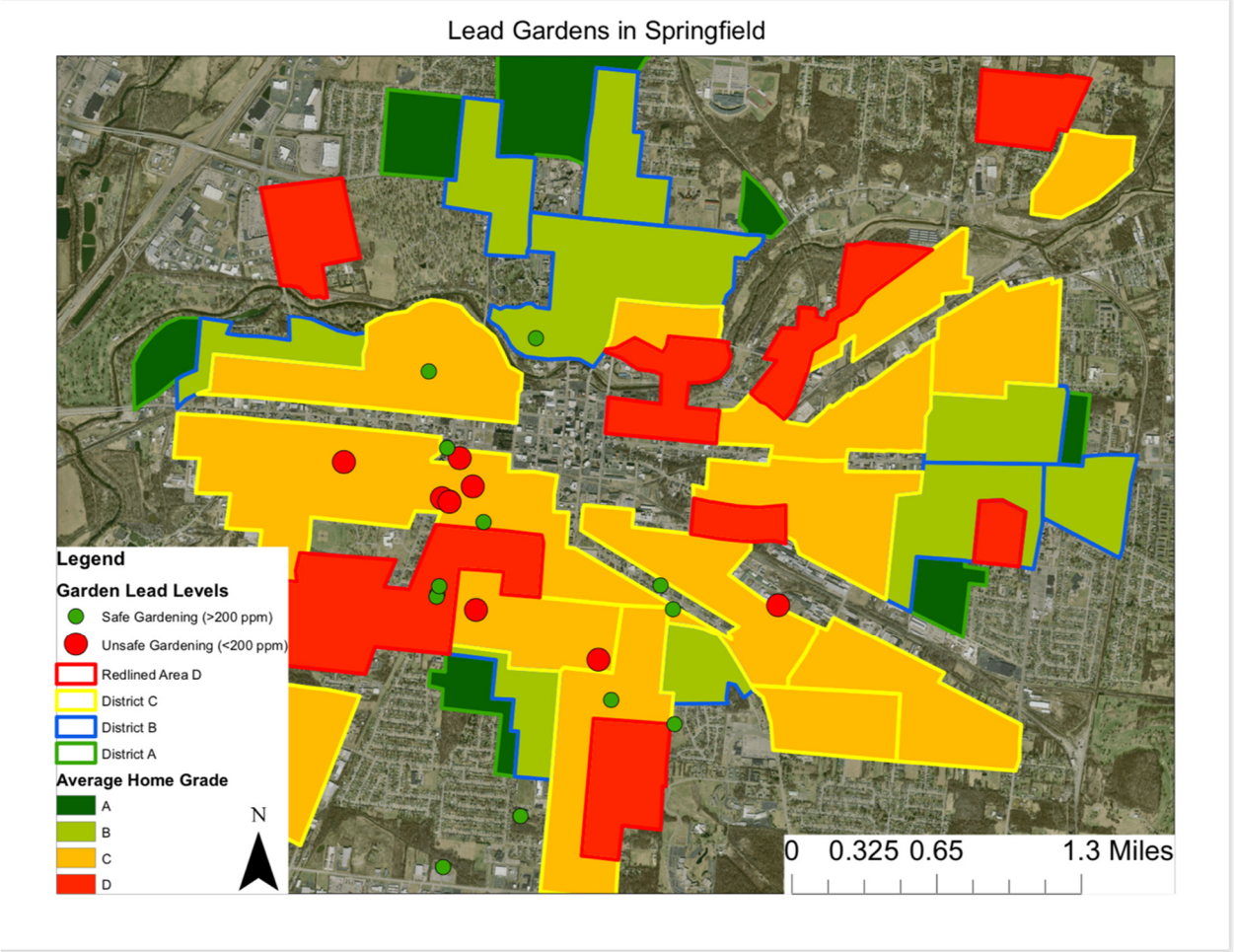

Figure 3: Shows the location of the community gardens that tested positive for unsafe gardening. While some people might view community garden soil levels as inconsequential, their impact can be felt. There is a link between high lead levels and crime which when paired with the number of vacant homes in Springfield could cause massive crime rates in the C and D districts. Another impact of having high lead levels in the garden is that homeowners and landlords cannot use the community garden as a selling point for the home. So, while having a garden close might be a positive for potential families the high lead levels could make the gardens unusable and therefore not attractive.

Solutions for Springfield:

The vacant homes will be hard to fix in the short term if at all but instead of the city spending money to board them up and keep them from falling down it might be worthwhile to allow a private company to come in a fix up the houses to either sell or rent after. If pursued, a contract with terms that are fair to the residents of Springfield should be enforced. Another

possible idea is to demolish some of the homes that are clustered together and expand the park system in Springfield, especially on the South side. By being able to create parks and recreation areas that are low cost and upkeep for the city, the city will save money over the long term by not having to upkeep the vacant homes. In addition to the parks being added the possibility of a pool should be explored, having different payment programs depending on household income. This would help keep kids out of trouble during the summer and could be a small source of revenue for the city. The city could allow families living in poverty free access where others might pay for membership based on income. There are many options for vacant homes that will better serve the community than they are currently doing. Related to the lead levels of the gardens, the city needs to keep citizens up to date on the lead levels in the gardens. The city government should be actively working to reduce lead in these gardens and across the city. Another solution to help is providing the support and funding for children to be tested for high lead levels at school. This would allow for easier detection and a plan to be developed to help the children succeed and graduate high school. To help this problem more the city should invest in removing lead paint from all public areas including schools, businesses and playgrounds. Being able to do this will increase the health benefits for all involved.

Right now, Springfield needs to invest in the lower income area of the city because it will make the city as a whole better. Being able to address certain challenges faced in the community will be hard but it is doable and will make a difference in people's lives.

Vacant lots can be greened and repurposed for new uses, such as this play area in Pittsburgh's East Liberty neighborhood.
Photo courtesy: Sara Innamorato

Figure 4: Children play on repurposed land in Pittsburgh. A HUD strategy for vacant properties is to transform them into recreational areas for the community to enjoy. This helps the city with the cost of upkeep, increase the price of homes and gives children areas to play and stay out of trouble. Source: HUD

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