



MATTHEW BARR

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Acknowledgements

To my wife Bethany, I could not have done this without your constant support. For all the big and small things you do for me each day, thank you.

To my classmates and faculty, I am continually in awe of your skills, knowledge, and generosity. I look forward to seeing the amazing things each of you will go on to do.

And to all of the Baltimore residents I had the privilege of collaborating with throughout this process, you are doing what it takes to make this city great for all. Thank you for sharing what you do with me.

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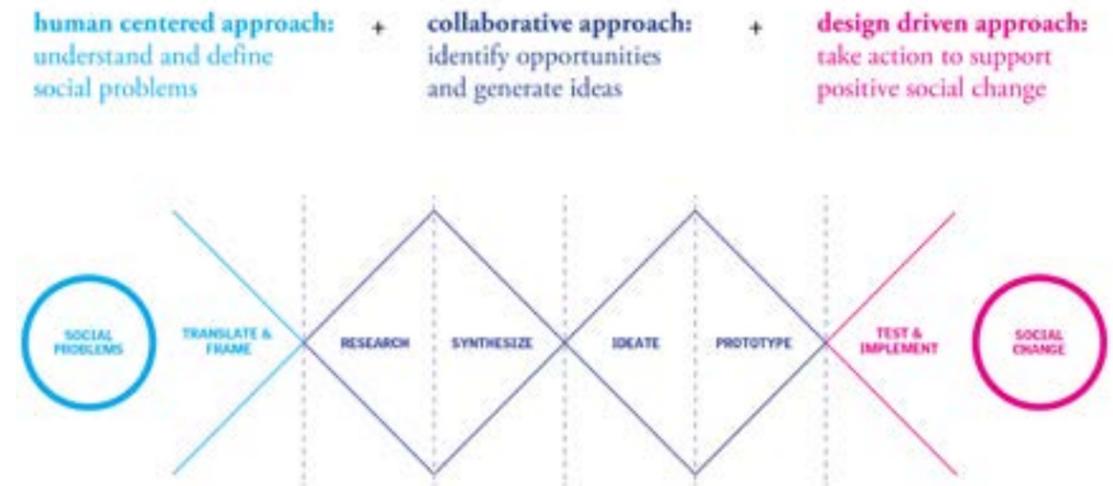
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Introduction



I love to dream big. For as long as I can remember, I have been inspired by asking “what if?” This curiosity and determined imagination has taken me down many different pathways. The most recent being the MA in Social Design (MASD) program at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). Prior to this, I was working at Ashoka, a nonprofit that is host to the largest network of social entrepreneurs addressing the world’s most challenging problems. While I was there, I helped shape online competitions designed to find and support cutting edge ideas for change, and facilitated collaborations between social entrepreneurs and corporate executives.

I am always searching for new ways to better understand the world. Through Social Design, I have been able to use methods to increase my social literacy of the root causes related to social problems, and build empathy for those most affected by them. During this program I also held a Fellowship position with the Johns Hopkins Social Innovation Lab, which is an accelerator that supports entrepreneurs looking to make a social impact in Baltimore. Additionally, I was as Designer in Residence with Humanim, a local non-profit that launches social enterprises to create career opportunities for individuals with barriers to employment. Both experiences allowed me to get a better understanding of Baltimore, the city’s strengths, and its opportunities. As I continue to see the world changing around me, I will use a social design approach that focuses on understanding the needs of others.



WHAT IS SOCIAL DESIGN?

Social Design is a creative problem solving process used to identify the needs, behaviors, and experiences of people in order to inform actions that strive towards positive social change. Interventions are made in collaboration with, and not for users, and are done so by receiving constant feedback from all stakeholders involved throughout the process.

The process is a series of convergent and divergent steps. In other words, during certain phases, a social designer is trying to observe as much as possible about a problem, but at others, trying to distill that information into actionable learnings. Additionally, it is important to remember the process isn’t strictly linear. Instead, designers often begin at one step in the process and jump between steps depending on the information gathered.

WHY VACANTS?

Seen below is a part of my route home from school each day. I pass through the Midtown neighborhood and enter East Baltimore. The only thing separating these two neighborhoods is a bridge over the I-83 highway, which is about the length of one street block.

Before moving to Baltimore, I put down a deposit on my apartment sight unseen. I still remember driving to my neighborhood for the first time and thinking that it looked so empty. The neighborhood was full of vacant homes with the windows and doors boarded up, and even some of the roofs had fallen in.

Amidst this, I also saw homes with flowers out on the front steps, newly built backyard fences, and other new home repairs in progress. Clearly, my neighbors were doing what they could to make their neighborhood a nice place to live. So while I drove through the area and first saw emptiness, I also saw so much potential. This publication documents my attempt to better understand the consequences surrounding highly vacant neighborhoods in Baltimore, and suggest possible points for interventions.

“When people come to East Baltimore, they ask, what’s wrong with these people? It’s not what is wrong with these people, it’s what happened to these people.”

- Glenn Ross

East Baltimore Urban Environmental Community Activist



EAST BALTIMORE

MIDTOWN

Problem

There are
16,000
vacant homes
in Baltimore

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Estimated Number of Vacant Homes in Baltimore



Baltimore has a minimum of 16,000 vacant homes. However, the city only counts a building as vacant if the property violates a building or fire code and/or appears to be unfit for human habitation. Therefore, if a house has no one living in it, but doesn't violate either of those conditions, it isn't counted as vacant. The Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance (BNIA), a trusted source from the University of Baltimore, uses a mix of city and census data to determine there are likely around 31,000 vacant homes in the city.

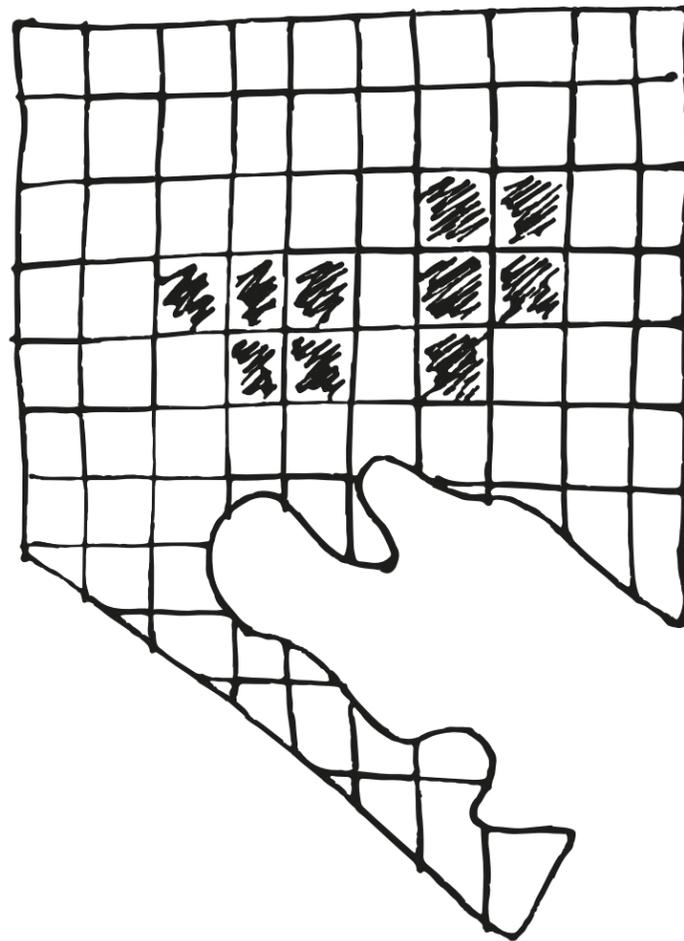
Other agencies such as the U.S. Census Bureau and Postal Office classify Baltimore as having closer to 50,000 properties. This figure is based on the number of properties that have not been delivered mail for over 90 days in a given year. Since the BNIA is focused specifically on Baltimore, but uses data from local and national sources, I believe their estimation is likely the most accurate.

Either way, each of these figures is alarming. But to truly understand the impact of this issue, it is important to recognize where these vacant homes are located.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Location of Vacant Homes in Baltimore

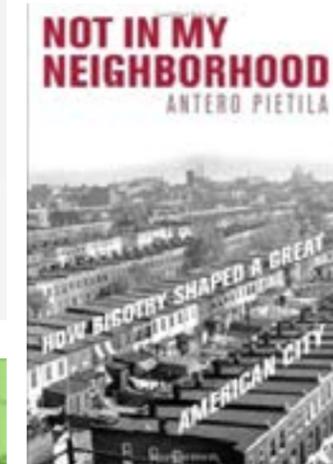
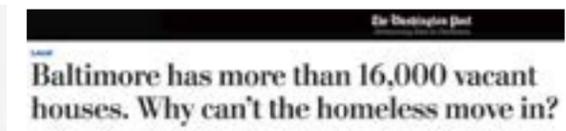
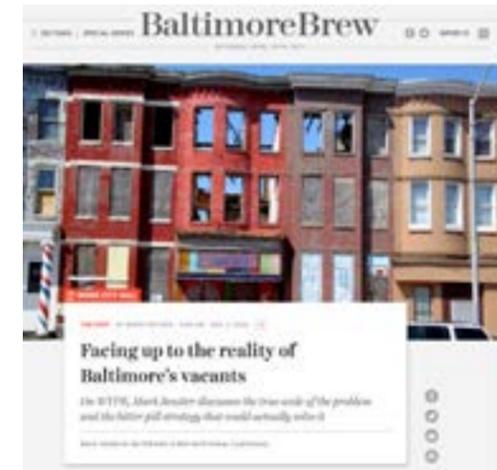
Baltimore = **80** square miles



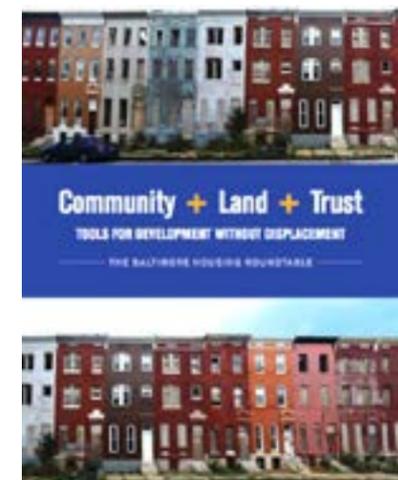
74% of Baltimore's vacant homes = **10** square miles

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

What Others Are Saying About Vacant Homes



Not In My Neighborhood by Antero Pietila describes a detailed history of Baltimore's neighborhoods as well as the individuals and housing practices that helped to shaped them.



Started by the United Workers, an advocacy group in Baltimore, the **Baltimore Housing Roundtable** is a membership coalition with a mission to ensure everyone's right to housing that is affordable, secure, and accessible. *The Community + Land + Trust* publication outlines their 20/20 vision for fair development in Baltimore, which requests \$20 million from the city to develop jobs for city residents to deconstruct vacants and another \$20 million to creating a community controlled housing sector.

The **Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance (BNIA)** located within the Jacob Frances Institute at the University of Baltimore provides meaningful, accurate, and open data about Baltimore's neighborhoods to help measure the city's progress towards a better quality of life for all residents. BNIA's data has been instrumental in helping researchers and students like myself use qualitative data to better understand Baltimore's living environment.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

What Others Are Doing About Vacant Homes

Vacants to Value

In November of 2010 Baltimore City made a commitment to grow the city by 10,000 families through the accrual and rehabilitation of vacant properties. The Vacants to Value initiative promised that more than 1,000 buildings would be rehabbed in just the first year, and it would ultimately “promote rehabilitation of more vacant, [and] boarded buildings than any previous blight elimination program to date.” Two and a half years after the initiative launched, the program had rehabilitated 728 homes. However in its first four years, more than 500 buildings became newly vacant.

Project Core

In January 2016, a demolition program called Creating Opportunities for Renewal and Enterprise (Project C.O.R.E.) launched in Baltimore. Through this program the state of Maryland is investing \$75 million and Baltimore City will contribute \$18.5 million to demolish as many blighted properties as possible over four years, focusing on half- and whole-blocks of blight in order to maximize neighborhood impact. This program is also scheduled to spend \$600 million to fund investment in challenged communities.

Streamlined Code Enforcement

In neighborhoods with relatively strong housing markets, scattered vacant properties left too long can undermine community progress. In the past, the Baltimore Office of Code Enforcement’s only option was to take unresponsive owners of vacant buildings to Housing Court, which could take months, or even years. In neighborhoods where the city is focused on tightening enforcement, *which generally exclude neighborhoods of high vacancy*, they are issuing more severe fines (which rise quickly if nothing is done), so owners are pushed to take action right away.

Receivership

Another tool for the city is the receivership process. If citations don’t get results, the local government can push a property into receivership, which is essentially an auction. This auction tries to sell properties to owners who are expected to rehabilitate the homes. The goal of this process is to prevent unoccupied homes from remaining in strong neighborhoods for too long.

Pro-Bono Law Support

The Community Law Center is a pro-bono law service center that collaborates with community associations and residents. Offering a wide range of services, the center helps neighborhood associations understand their rights, navigate the legal process, and access resources as it relates to remedying vacant houses.

Housing Our Neighbors

Housing Our Neighbors is a community group comprised of people experiencing homelessness, allies and advocates promoting the human right to housing. Working to end homelessness in Baltimore City the group is advancing the right to permanent affordable housing through education, leadership development, direct actions, political advocacy, and grassroots community organizing.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Disparities in East and West Baltimore Related to Vacant Housing

Crime

Studies have shown that increasing levels of vacancy are associated with increased risk of assaultive violence in that neighborhood. In Baltimore, city data suggests a strong correlation between vacant buildings and certain crimes such as shootings and homicides, and common assault. The frequency of these crimes increases from neighborhood to neighborhood as the number of vacant houses increases.

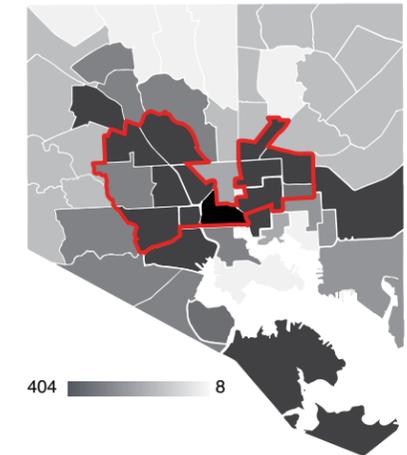
Health

For the Druid Heights and Roland Park neighborhoods, which are only three miles apart yet they have vastly different vacancy rates, there is a 20 year gap in average life expectancy. Besides trash, rodents, and the effects of lead paint, “boarded-up housing” has been found to be a predictor of gonorrhea, premature mortality, diabetes, and suicide rates.

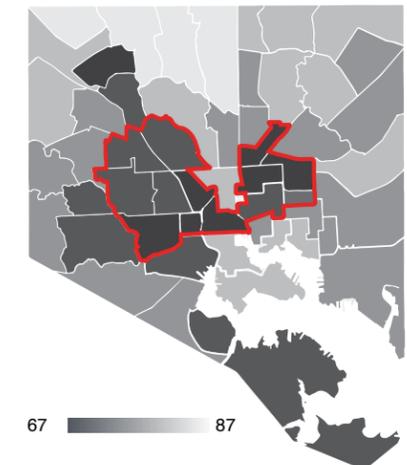
Vacancy

Seema D. Iyer, an assistant director at the Jacob Francis Institute, asserts that neighborhoods stop growing when 4% of its homes become vacant or abandoned. Based on my calculations, 55% of Baltimore’s neighborhoods are above this mark, while neighborhoods on the East and West side are as high as 35% vacant. Having to choose which neighborhoods to focus on, the city is using strategies that will address those that are closest to the 4% mark. This typically leaves high vacancy neighborhoods without an adequate plan to get rid of vacant homes, attract homeowners back into empty houses, or prevent more vacant homes from occurring.

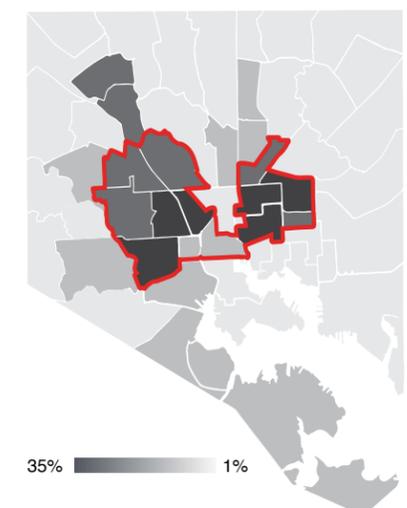
Common Assault Calls per 1,000 Residents



Average Life Expectancy



Percent of Residential Properties Vacant



CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Summary Finding

Vacant housing is a significant and highly concentrated problem that is affecting Baltimore's most vulnerable residents located in neighborhoods on the city's east and west side. After looking more closely at the research, I am convinced that vacant housing is correlated with poor health, crime, and other indicators that describe the overall well being of a neighborhood. However, it seems to me that vacant houses can be both the cause and effect of the socio-economic barriers faced by communities with high vacancy rates.

Due to this interconnectedness, it is unlikely that one approach will solve this problem.

VACANT HOMES
CAN BE BOTH THE
CAUSE AND EFFECT
OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC
DISPARITIES

There are 16,000 vacant homes in Baltimore because neighborhoods lack the local economy to provide residents what they need.

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

Who is Involved, and What Power Do they Have

Individual

- Landlords
- Owners
- Tenants
- Contractors

Owner occupied homes become vacant due to a series of events that cause owners to abandon, cease care, or be removed from their properties. However, non-owner occupied homes are either vacant or filled depending on what provides the owner with the most return on their investment. At times, an empty home is more valuable for owners.

Micro

- Neighborhood Block
- Community Associations

Property values are directly connected to a neighborhood's perceived value. As a neighborhood and its conditions change, the value of property evolves, for better and for worse. As resources and amenities begin to leave, neighborhoods residents leave with them. As residents leave, additional amenities can no longer sustain themselves, so they begin to depart as well. This cycle is crippling for neighborhoods of high-vacancy.

Institutional

- Balt Housing Depart.
- Development Firms
- Johns Hopkins
- Wells Fargo

While Baltimore City is the largest single owner of vacant properties, controlling around 25% of the metro's vacant homes, the overwhelming majority of vacant homes are owned by private developers, which include anchor institutions (such as hospitals and universities). These institutions and investors sometimes purchase vacant homes and wait until neighborhood conditions deteriorate in order to buy more property. Collecting these properties allows investors to cash in on large scale development plans in the future.

Localities

- City Politics
- National Corporations
- Rust Belt Cities

Like other rust belt cities across the U.S., Baltimore suffered from the departure of the American manufacturing industry. This contributed to a significant population loss for the city. Over 300,000 residents left Baltimore in the latter half of the 20th century alone. And while the remaining residents were desperate to find middle-class jobs in order to afford their mortgages, the city invested millions in the inner harbor, expecting wealth to trickle down. Instead, residents only found low paying, temporary jobs in the service industry.

Macro

- American Economy
- Race Relations
- Housing Policy

Race has played a dominant role in deciding where people live in Baltimore, which has a long and deep history of structural and systemic racism embedded within discriminatory housing practices. These policies, referred to as redlining, drastically devalued the homes of, refused services, and tendered unfair loans to black residents living in neighborhoods of east and west Baltimore. These same neighborhoods are now suffering from the long term consequences that come with a concentration of vacant homes, such as diminished access to health care, transportation, and educational resources.



REASONS

Potential Causes of High Vacancy Rates

PEOPLE DIE. Vacancies often occur when a homeowner dies and there is no transition plan in place that is in accordance with the local courts.

INVESTOR SQUATTING. Investors intentionally keep properties vacant until the neighborhood is scheduled for redevelopment. This drives out other current homeowners, making more property available for purchase.

MAINTENANCE COSTS. Living next to a vacant home is expensive. Water damage, increased risk of fires and other possible issues often make it difficult to get home insurance or loans for necessary property repairs.

WHITE FLIGHT. Throughout the middle half of the 20th century, white Americans fled from the cities, to the suburbs. This was fueled by economic incentives, but also racial bias towards minorities.

LACK OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITY. Baltimore City has the power to acquire homes from absentee landlords, but there are not enough lawyers to process and pursue each of these cases.

DISINVESTMENT. Baltimore city has spent millions investing in the Inner Harbor instead of neighborhoods on the East and West side of the city.

MANUFACTURING LEFT. Between 1950-1980 Baltimore lost over 30,000 manufacturing jobs. Without jobs and a decaying local economy, Baltimore saw over 300,000 residents leave the city in the latter half of the 20th century.

HIGH DEMOLITION AND REHABILITATION COSTS. Because of the rowhome structure and real estate market, given their cost, demolition and rehabilitation are often not viable options for eliminating vacant homes.

REDLINING. Launched by the National Housing Act of 1934, the Federal Housing Administration enacted policies which withheld mortgages and capital to minority homeowners.

TAX LIENS. Investors in Baltimore are able to purchase a lien against a property, typically an unpaid water bill. Owning this debt, they charge a high rate of interest, and if the resident cannot pay, they have the power to evict them.

REASONS

Summary Finding

Early in my analysis, it became clear that the vacant housing issue was an interconnected web, and simply demolishing or rehabilitating homes would not be enough to address the many issues at play. Knowing that I couldn't address all of these reasons, I decided to investigate approaches that focus on how the local economies in neighborhoods of high-vacancy affect the wellbeing of the people that currently live there.

Using the findings from my my analysis, I was able to realize the ripple effect that the departure of manufacturing jobs had on neighborhoods of high-vacancy. Small businesses that relied on the patronage from manufacturing laborers were no longer able to sustain themselves, and with their closure, the remaining residents have lacked the amenities to meet their daily needs.

Therefore, I moved forward by researching answers to the following question:

How might we build local economies that align with the needs of residents in high-vacancy neighborhoods?

HOW MIGHT WE
BUILD
LOCAL ECONOMIES
THAT ALIGN WITH
THE NEEDS OF
RESIDENTS IN
HIGH-VACANCY
NEIGHBORHOODS?

Research

To better understand the local economies of high vacancy neighborhoods, I spoke with a variety of stakeholders that are closer to the issue, its history, and the holistic strategies they are pursuing to improve conditions in these neighborhoods. I spoke with cafe owners, lawyers, community development corporation presidents, social enterprise leaders and more. The following includes a sample of what I heard, and based on those observations, my attempt to develop insights that inform my next steps.

Aisha Pew, Cafe Owner at Dovecote Cafe

Shana Roth-Gormley, Pro-bono Coordinator at Community Law Center

Becky Witt, Staff Attorney at Community Law Center

Chris Ryer, President at Southeast Community Development Corporations

Reni Lawal, City Planner

Annie Milli, Marketing Director Live Baltimore

Eli Pousson, Director of Preservation and Outreach, Baltimore Heritage

Christopher Bohaska, Senior Director of Operations Business Services, MICA

Seema Iyer, PhD, Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance

Gavin Schmitt, Hamilton Hills Neighborhood Association

Robin Jacobs, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Maryland Attorney General

Kate Titford, Associate Counsel, NeighborWorks America

Jeff Carroll, Vice President, Humanim

Robin MacFadden, Baltimore Corps Fellow, Details

Stephanie Geller, Community Wealth Building Strategist, Strong City Baltimore

Amanda DeStefano, Leadership Organizer with United Workers

WHAT I HEARD

Community Supporters

OBSERVATIONS

direct quote, or paraphrased statement

“Most people don’t know where the resource centers are for small business development, and where to find them.”
- Kurt Sommer

One local business owner feels low income minority americans are nomadic people because they are the victims of gentrification. When businesses try and attract other families, it implicitly implies that the residents currently living there were not worthy of them before.

If development is on private property and legal under zoning code, the community doesn’t have much control. Although, development teams know they don’t want to piss off the community members - especially if they want to do business there again. So communities get to negotiate for smaller things.

Businesses are an asset that bring people into neighborhoods. Someone just needs to build the first one, where profit is not the measure of success.

INSIGHTS

consideration based on the observation

Residents who need the most support are often the least connected to resources that are currently available.

Neighborhood assets must be as culturally relevant as possible to avoid being a gentrifying force.

Even without a legal obligation to meet their needs, it is in the best interest for community members to stay informed, involved, and vocal about development happening in their communities.

Traditional market structures are slow to reward businesses that invest in improving the quality of life for nearby residents.

Up to this point in my research, I spoke mostly with people who are not living in neighborhoods of high-vacancy. Therefore, it was important for me to speak with more residents living in, and near high-vacancy neighborhoods to better understand their perception of the problem, but also to learn more about their daily lives, experiences, and needs in relation to the current local economy.

- Ben Hamburger** Community Artist - MICA, East Baltimore Resident
- Five Anonymous Residents of East Baltimore**, Details Staff
- Candace Washington**, Administrative Coordinator at Humanim
- Eric Booker**, President New Broadway East Neighborhood Community Association
- Steve Brown**, New Broadway East Neighborhood Community Association
- Mashall Cullens**, Principal Owner of The Watchmen
- Charles Palmer**, Principal Owner of The Watchmen
- Leron (Corey) Gibbs**, Rehabilitation Coordinator
- Glenn Ross**, Urban Environmental Community Activist in East Baltimore

WHAT I HEARD

Residents

OBSERVATIONS

direct quote, or paraphrased statement

"I am an entrepreneur. I am always looking for new ways to make money. And new ways to try and help people. I want to be self employed, but I understand all of the different things that come with being self employed." - *Details Staff Member*

"People need more supports and scaffolding to run a business." - *Eric Booker*

One east side resident said that nobody really knows about the development happening in East Baltimore.

"We don't need to be taken care of...we need to be liberated." - *Glenn Ross*

INSIGHTS

consideration based on the observation

Entrepreneurship isn't a choice, it is a lifestyle for individuals living in neighborhoods of high-vacancy.

Resident's entrepreneurial endeavours are not on the quickest path to self-sufficiency.

Resident's are often unaware of development plans for their own community until they are finished.

Those with the most history and connection to the community, often have the least say in deciding its future.

RESEARCH

Summary Finding

Throughout my conversations, I went down many different paths, looking for a causal factor to isolate and focus on. This was difficult given the complex ecosystem related to vacant houses.

However, after taking a step back and looking at the range of my conversations, I realized at some point that each discussion had a common thread. Both community supporters and residents were describing different approaches for how to build community wealth within neighborhoods of high-vacancy.

Community Wealth Building (CWB) is distinctly different than what many cities like Baltimore have done for years to grow their economy. Instead of trying to attract large corporations to locate their operations in the city, CWB is focused on developing local talents, capacities and institutions.

With this development in my project, I realized I needed to amend my original "How Might We" prompt. I decided to replace the words "local economies" with "community wealth". After making this change, I began by looking at strategies that would offer the most holistic benefits to residents of high-vacancy neighborhoods.

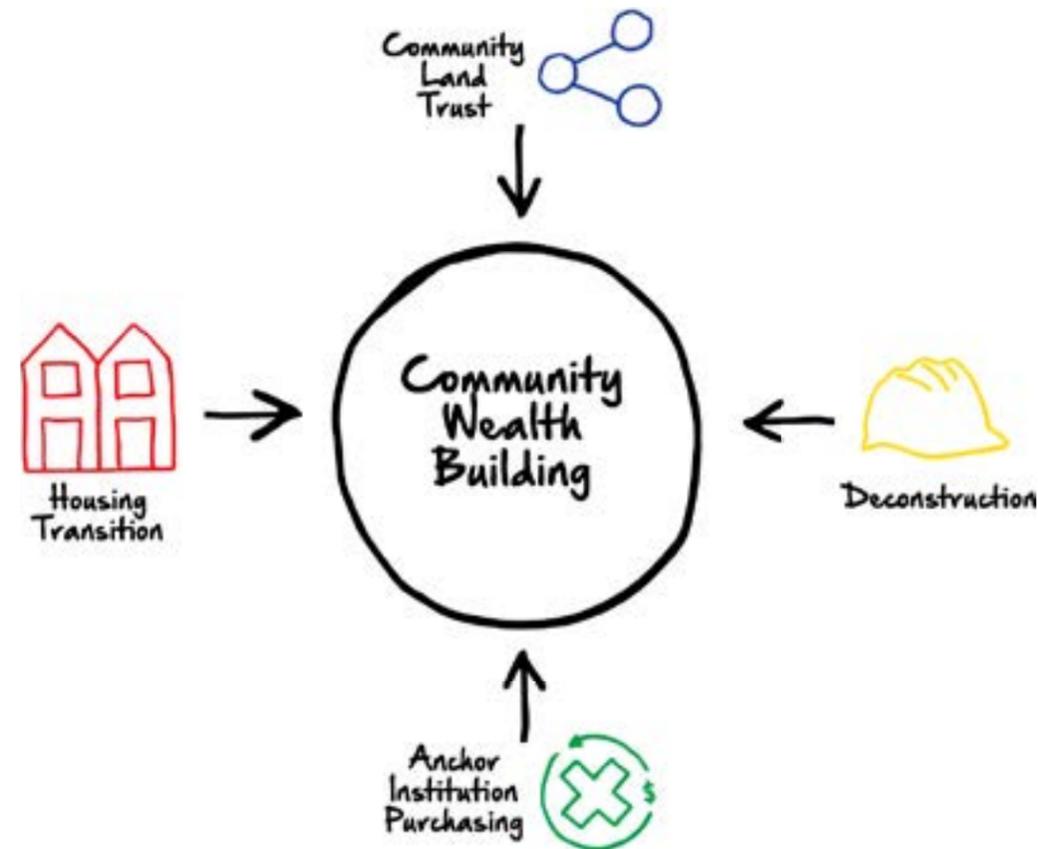
HOW MIGHT WE
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Strategy

Community Wealth Building Approaches:

1. Healthy Housing Transitions
2. Community Land Trust
3. Deconstruction
4. Anchor Institution Purchasing

With each community wealth building approach I investigated, I was also searching for a possible partner in the Baltimore whose work I could support as a social designer. This was important because academic projects outside the classroom, however genuine the intentions, have a tendency to only “take” from communities. Based on conversations with community members, this seemed to be particularly true in Baltimore. Instead, I wanted to collaborate with a partner organization whose work would be in line with and within scope of my thesis project.



COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING APPROACHES

Housing Transitions and Community Land Trusts



Approach: Healthy Housing Transitions

Learning: Interviewing an array of different attorneys, I learned about what happens to people’s homes when the owners pass away. Essentially, if residents do not go through the legal process of transitioning their homes, it is likely that home will eventually become vacant, and cease to be a ***maintained asset*** for the community.

Partnership Opportunity: There are no organizations working directly to facilitate healthy housing transitions, which seems to be the most predictable cause of vacant homes. I see this as a huge missed opportunity for the city of Baltimore, but after weeks of searching for a partner to collaborate with, I decided to look into another approach.



Approach: Community Land Trusts (CLT)

Learning: Community land trusts allow residents to steward local development and prevent speculative investments in their neighborhoods. Using this model, communities can prevent and fix up vacant properties by ***sharing asset ownership*** and decision making power over land and property in their own neighborhood.

Partnership Opportunity: The United Workers advocacy organization is a leader in Baltimore City’s housing revitalization efforts, and specifically in championing the community land trust model. After speaking with a representative of the organization it was clear that they were already putting in the necessary leg work to secure investment from the Baltimore City government, which is needed to help the concept scale. Since realizing that the organization was well on its way to executing their plan, I continued my search for the right partner organization.

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING APPROACHES

Anchor Institutions and Deconstruction



Approach: Anchor Institution Purchasing

Learning: I spoke with representatives and advisors of anchor institutions who are trying to leverage their purchasing power by procuring products and services locally as a means to grow small businesses in Baltimore. This approach allows institutions to **invest in small business assets** already in neighborhoods of high-vacancy. However, it is important to keep in mind that many of the items purchased by anchor institutions are done so at an unreachable scale for most small businesses in Baltimore, particularly small businesses in neighborhoods of high-vacancy.

Partnership Opportunity: While purchasing from small businesses in Baltimore is helpful, some of Baltimore's anchor institutions have been the absentee landlords in neighborhoods of high-vacancy, thus, contributing to the vacancy problems neighborhood residents are facing. Therefore, I wanted to continue searching for a partner whose history indicated they were more responsive to the needs of residents in high-vacancy neighborhoods.



Approach: Deconstruction

Learning: I spoke with local deconstruction company, Details, which hires residents to take apart vacant homes piece by piece, often in their own neighborhoods, and then sells the salvaged materials. Using this model, the enterprise is **transforming assets** into job opportunities for residents from high-vacancy neighborhoods. Details is only one social enterprise, and therefore has growing, but limited capacity to address all of the city's vacant properties and employment needs.

Partnership Opportunity: Throughout my search for a partner, I felt Details and its employees are at the closest intersection of addressing vacant homes, and building community wealth, all while focusing on local resident's needs. Therefore, I worked with management to set up multiple interviews with staff to better understand the needs of residents in high-vacancy neighborhoods. Some of their responses were included in the research section of this publication.

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING APPROACHES

Summary Findings

Similar to my findings during the research phase, as I learned more about the community wealth building approaches I recognized another pattern had emerged. The strength of each approach is that they are centered around supporting the **assets** already within communities of high-vacancy.

1. Heathy Housing Transitions - Maintains Assets
2. Community Land Trusts - Shares Asset Ownership
3. Anchor Institutions - Invests in Small Business Assets
4. Deconstruction - Transforms Assets into Job Opportunities

With this realization, I knew my "How Might We" question needed to evolve once more. Currently, I use the word build when describing what is needed for community wealth. However, build implies a focus on the need for something new, and de-values the work and talents that have always been in the community. When in fact, after hearing from community members, Details staff, and understanding different community wealth approaches, the word "revive" is a more appropriate description.

Using the word revive pays tribute to the entrepreneurial energy and community assets that are already embedded into neighborhoods of high-vacancy.

This new focus shaped the direction of my next phase, ideation.

HOW MIGHT WE
~~BUILD~~
REVIVE
~~LOCAL ECONOMIES~~
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Ideation



Entering the ideation phase, I focused on working with residents to generate ideas that provide support, infrastructure, and necessary capacity building for entrepreneurs in high-vacancy neighborhoods.

To do this, I facilitated a working session with current small business owners, managers, and aspiring entrepreneurs who have experience working in neighborhoods of high-vacancy.

Candace Washington, Future Business Owner

Charles, Owner of The Watchmen

Marshall, Owner of The Watchmen

Cory, Rehabilitation Counselor and Food Entrepreneur

Cindy Truitt, Chief Development Officer at Humanim

WORKING SESSION

Surveying the Current Situation of Small Business in Baltimore



To begin the brainstorm, I felt it was important for participants to articulate both the profile of being an entrepreneur and a resident in a high-vacancy neighborhood. So I asked them to create three different lists.

1. Businesses that current or aspiring self-employed individuals in East Baltimore typically operate.

- Landscaping
- Car wash
- Take out restaurant
- Barber shop or salon
- Church
- Light hauling
- Handyman
- Loan shark
- Cleaning

2. Businesses they would like to see more of in their neighborhoods.

- Community bank
- Grocery store
- Sit down restaurant
- Drug store

3. The type of support entrepreneurs in their neighborhoods need to start, and/or sustain their businesses?

Start:

- Capital
- Location
- Right product

Sustain:

- Marketing
- Advisory team
- Industry knowledge
- Payroll
- Insurance
- Certified or bonded
- Hire the right employees

WORKING SESSION

Sketch and Share

Next, I asked participants to generate ideas for possible intervention points based on three questions. These questions responded to the insights I had gained through my research phase. Participants were asked to sketch and share these ideas with the group.

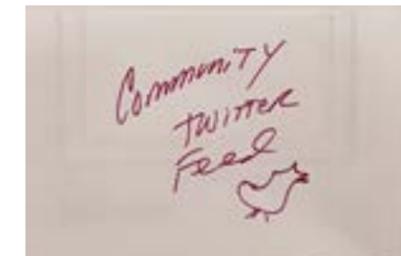
1. How might we build the infrastructure in East Baltimore that supports the entrepreneurial energy of its residents?

- Inclusive Small Business Center
- Accessible Loans
- Broadcast Signal for Business Opportunities
- Space to Network with Peers



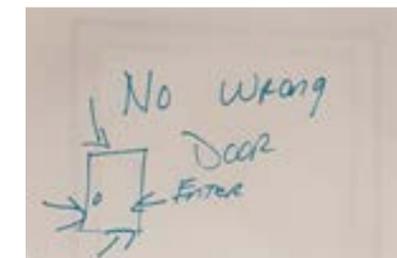
2. How might we ensure community residents are able to take advantage of the developments happening in their neighborhoods?

- Community Twitter Feed
- Community Revenue Goals
- Community Change Center
- Local investor pool



3. How might we make running a business in east and west Baltimore as easy as ordering at McDonalds?

- No Wrong Door
- Centralized System
- Create Standards
- Create a Menu
- Common Language
- Fast Service
- Convenient Location



IDEATE

Summary Finding

The ideas and suggestions generated during the working session confirmed much of what I had learned from previous conversations with residents and community partners.

Residents of high-vacancy neighborhoods have repeatedly expressed the need for support systems that allow them to grow as entrepreneurs and people. Suggestions include:

- Mentorship from other individuals from their neighborhood or background
- Local small business resources that are holistic, deal with real issues, and are actually located in their neighborhoods
- Back office supports that assist with the financials, insurance, human resources and other tasks to ensure their operations are efficient and up to code
- Networks that are broader and more interconnected
- Communication channels that are more open and available, allowing residents to easily identify new business opportunities

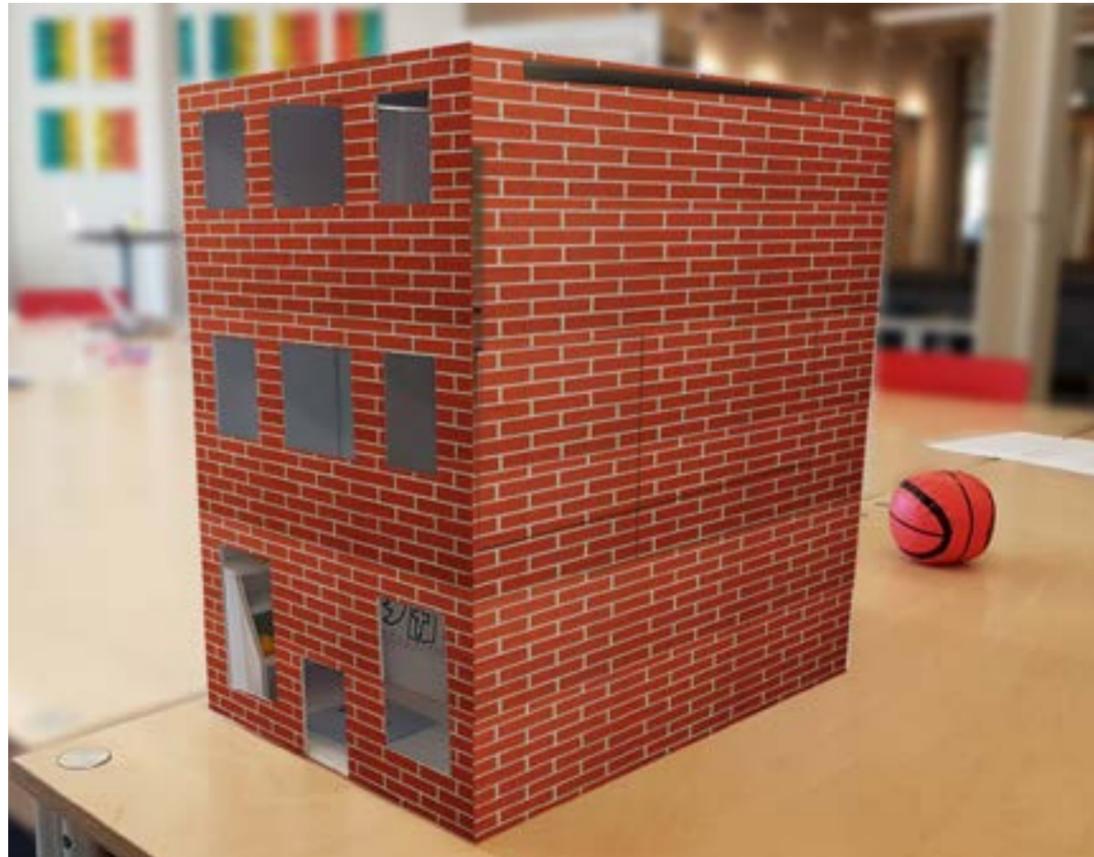
Prototyping

Since the brainstorming activity created ideas that validated my research, I was able to move on to the next phase, prototyping. Next, I will outline a few prototypes that consider the on-the-ground needs of residents in high-vacancy neighborhoods, with the higher-level strategic vision of community wealth building, while using local assets.

For this publication, prototypes are intentionally low fidelity, aspirational, and include suggestions for replicating different interventions already operating successfully in other parts of the country. These have not been shared with residents yet in order to receive their feedback, but would be the next step of the project moving forward.

REVIVE

Prototype #1



Revive is an all inclusive small business resource center, positioned in the heart of high vacancy neighborhoods. Located in a formally vacant home, this building is a one-stop-shop for the current entrepreneurs, aspiring entrepreneurs, or residents with one-off ventures and projects. The most important part of the Revive center is that it is run by and for residents of high-vacancy neighborhoods. They decide who they want to partner with, and how the partnerships are structured.

When designing the prototype, I was mindful to design Revive in a way that allows residents to utilize the space for both professional and personal needs. This way, residents will interact with the space as a part of their daily routine.



INTERACT - 1st Floor

- Tool Library
- Laundry Room
- Produce Stand
- Coffee, Bar, and Networking Lounge



LEARN - 2nd Floor

- Classroom
- Shared Offices
- Business Library



GATHER - 3rd Floor

- Event Space
- Storage
- Studio Space

SAMPLE USER JOURNEY: Sarah, is a resident in East Baltimore who wants to start a cleaning business. She hears about Revive and decides to check it out after she gets off work. She walks a couple blocks from her house and upon entering, is immediately greeted by Steve, who is working at the front desk and happens to be a member at her church. While they talk, she looks at the big screen tv in the lobby and notices it is displaying tweets and facebook posts from residents about recent development plans, safety concerns, and upcoming events. While Steve shows her around the space, they stop at the tool library, where Sarah can check out mops, brooms or other supplies that she will need for her business. On the second floor she meets Rob, who is Revive's microloan officer. Rob explains that if Sarah wants, he can help her crowdfund for the money that she will need to pay to create an LLC. Finally, Sarah decides to stay for a workshop happening on the third floor about business marketing basics.

SOUP

Prototype #2



SOUP started in Detroit, a city well known for its on issues with vacant housing. SOUP is a microgranting community dinner held monthly to celebrate and support creative projects focused specifically on the neighborhood or city level. For a \$5 donation attendees receive soup, salad, bread and a vote. The vote is cast after attendees hear from four different presentations that can range from art, urban agriculture, social justice, social entrepreneurship, education, technology and more. Each presenter has four minutes to share their idea and answer four questions from the audience. At the event, attendees eat, talk, share resources, enjoy art and vote on the project they think benefits the city the most. The winning idea takes home all the money that was collected at the evening's event.

I believe SOUP has a lot of what residents in high-vacancy neighborhoods are looking for, most of all, support from their community members. SOUP's mission is to promote community-based development through crowdfunding, creativity, collaboration, democracy, trust and fun. Similar to the community land trust model, SOUP allows residents to participate and make decisions about the types of projects and enterprises they want to see in their city. The venue is also an excellent chance to share information about recent developments, community issues, or other local news items that residents told me they want to learn about. With empty and open spaces being the best venues for SOUP events, my suggestion would be to find a safe, but bare bones vacant house, and utilize that space. If the Revive Small Business Resource center was built, it would be a perfect place to host SOUP.

Summary

The current number of vacant homes in Baltimore's neighborhoods has significant consequences for the residents that still live in these areas. Nearly three-fourths of the city's vacant homes are concentrated in East and West Baltimore. While there are many different reasons for this level of disparity, I choose to focus on understanding how local economies in these neighborhoods operate. My research led me to learn more about who the different stakeholders are, and where are the opportunities for intervention.

What I found is that instead of diverting investments away from these neighborhoods, or trying to attract new talent to the area, Baltimore and stakeholders in the city need to be investing in the assets that already exist within neighborhoods of high-vacancy. These neighborhoods are full of talented, hard working people, with a true entrepreneurial spirit. If they receive the right supports, current residents will play a pivotal role in reviving their local economy and improving the living conditions for all who reside in high-vacancy neighborhoods.

Creating support structures for the resident entrepreneurs of East and West Baltimore is not a "quick fix" to Baltimore's vacant housing problem. But based on my research, simply demolishing or rehabilitating buildings will not result in a lasting and positive change for current residents.

Living in East Baltimore for the past nine months hasn't made me an expert in understanding what it is like to live in a neighborhood of high-vacancy. I still have all the privilege that comes with being a white, college educated male, from a middle class family.

This year, and this project, has been about learning how to listen. I understand that the way I experience and interpret this city is vastly different than those who have grown up here. To me, that's what makes social design such a powerful practice. If I am truly engaged in the process, than I am simply listening, learning, and asking others if I am understanding their actual needs.

This is my suggestion for all who are invested in solving Baltimore's vacant housing problem. We need to keep listening, because the residents of East and West Baltimore have important things to say.

MANIFESTO

A Vision for Social Designers



As a cohort, my classmates and I collaborated to create this manifesto. These words have guided me throughout my time in the program, and will continue to do so as I develop my practice as a social designer.

We are empathic co-creators

Who confront social issues impacting the world

We make space to honor multiple ways of knowing, being, and going

We are committed to be present within the charm and grit of Baltimore

Our creative practice collectively engages in making, doing, trying, and failing

We are supportive, transparent, and accountable to one another

Our curiosity is reflective and inspires action

When challenges arise we search for the why instead of the who

We work with instead of for

We design mindfully and without fear of making mistakes

Sensitivity, laughter, patience and fun are the spirit of MASD 2017

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“We don’t
need to be
taken care of...
we need to be
liberated.”

- **Glenn Ross**

East Baltimore Urban Environmental Community Activist