



Blight Remediation Guide

*Do you live in a neighborhood with blighted properties, vacant homes, and the like?
Have you ever considered ways **you** might be able to address this issue
from a neighborhood standpoint?
This guide is for you!*

The Neighborhood Blight Remediation Guide is a reference tool for resources and steps you need to fight neighborhood blight at the neighborhood level. This guide provides a more comprehensive – ground level approach to help make working through a large number of blighted properties feel less overwhelming. It offers steps, resources, action items, and ideas on how to tackle blight. If you have any questions, comments, or feedback for this guide, please contact the Office of Neighborhood Empowerment at dsharp@knoxvillekn.gov or (865) 215-3232.

Scenario:

At a neighborhood meeting, a neighbor brings up their concern over the boarded up, empty, and blighted properties in the area. You walk your dog through the neighborhood every evening and have noticed many of these homes, yourself. Another neighbor mentions calling 311 to let them know about the properties, but you wonder if there might be something the group can do on a neighborhood level. You ask the neighborhood if they are open to looking into ways to tackle this issue as a group, and everyone is ready for action.

Step One: Define Your Boundaries:

To start a Long-Term Blight Remediation process, you first need to designate an area to start with. Talk to your neighbors about what area you would like to tackle. Are you looking at the whole neighborhood? Should you start with a certain street or block? Which area or street has the most vacant or blighted houses?

When defining your boundaries, you can take one of two approaches:

1. **Start Big** – Start by taking inventory of the entire neighborhood based on its defined boundaries. If your neighborhood does not have set boundaries, talk to your neighbors about what the group feels the boundaries should be. Note: When defining your boundaries, talk with the Office of Neighborhoods to see if your boundaries overlap with any other groups' boundaries in the area.

Once you have your neighborhood boundaries in place, designate block captains to walk each section of the neighborhood with a scrap map. While walking, have block captains note which addresses seem vacant, are boarded up, and are blighted – overgrown yards, rundown, or junked up. Make sure block captains write down each property's issues and their address to assess later.

2. **Start Small** – Pick a street or block that the neighborhood would like to focus on and start there. Meet with your neighbors and decide which area seems to have the worst blight problem

and/or might be the easiest place to start and work out from. Rank the top three sections, and start at the top.

Start with tackling the worst section as a group, making note of which homes are vacant, boarded up, or generally blighted. Write down these properties' addresses and issues. Plan to come up with an action plan to address all noted homes in this section before moving forward to the next section.

Other things to consider: Whether starting big or small, have block captains also look out for signs of blight the city may be able to address, such as broken sidewalks, missing street signs, and blown out street lights, etc. Making note of these items can be useful to report to 311. While you work to address private property-related blight, the city can also help by cleaning up these city-related issues.

Step Two: Mark Your Map

Once you have your initial neighborhood walk through complete, get together with your block captains and put the properties on a map. Use a scrap map, printed from KGIS, etc., to make notes and keep up with all noted properties. If you need a large neighborhood map for reference, reach out to the Office of Neighborhood Empowerment (ONE) at 215-3232 or dsharp@knoxvilletn.gov. The ONE can get a large roll-out map of your neighborhood printed for you.

Once you have the map, sit down with your neighbors and mark each vacant, boarded up, and blighted property. Add in areas that need infrastructure improvements, such as sidewalk repairs. Come up with a color-coding or other such systems to mark the different issues. Keep detailed notes to help neighbors reference issues with each marked property. Be sure to date your data; it will be helpful to mark progress or regress in the future.

Step Three: Do Your Research

Once you have your map laid out, it's time to dig a little deeper. Visit www.KGIS.org to look up each of the properties in question. Look up properties in the KGIS address bar. KGIS will bring up the address on the map with a small blurb of information. Click the picture of the little silhouette of a person in the information box or the red "i" at the top of the page to see the information card and further details on the property.

This information card will list who owns the property, when the property was purchased, and the address of the owner. Using this information, you will be able to get an idea of whether the owner lives at the residence or not, if the property may have changed hands, etc.

In this phase, you can also decide whether to start big or start small. Starting big will be more work on the front end, but can give you a whole picture of what the neighborhood faces moving forward. Whereas, starting small allows you to focus on one area and build out. If you choose to start small, discuss with your neighbors which area you would like to address first. Choose the area with the most issues, or the area you feel will be the easiest to make a difference.

If you choose to start big, still meet with your neighbors and create a list of priority blocks, sections, or properties. This priority ranking will help you establish a starting place moving forward. Pick five or six properties you would like to start with. Decide if you want to start with the five worst properties, or if you would like to work with a certain section, etc.

Step Four: Set Up a Meeting

Now that your neighborhood has laid the groundwork, it's time to create your Blight Remediation Team. Plan a meeting with the city and other important blight-busting partners, getting everyone together in a room to help the neighborhood determine what properties can be handled best in which different ways.

Reach out to the ONE to help you set up this meeting. Discuss with the ONE that you are initiating the Long-Term Blight Remediation process, and would like to meet and discuss next steps.

The ONE may want to meet with you initially to discuss the information you have collected so far, give you follow up action items, and help determine who should be in the room for the upcoming meeting. The ONE can help you make connections with the right people and set up the meeting at the City County Building, if that works best for you and your neighborhood group. Setting up a meeting in your community can also be effective to view some of the blighted properties.

Who should be in the room? Addressing large-scale blight is a team effort and works best with help from various partners. The following groups can be instrumental in turning blight remediation into action:

[Office of Neighborhood Empowerment:](#) The ONE can help you connect the dots and figure out the pieces together. The ONE is your partner and direct contact for the city. We can work to connect you with other city officials, pass along your questions, and advocate for your group throughout the process. The ONE can also help with initial steps, such as organizing your neighborhood group, defining your boundaries, and printing your neighborhood map.

[Neighborhood Codes Enforcement:](#) Codes can help you learn more about the properties on your list. They can tell you the history of some properties; let you know which are currently owned by the city. Codes can help you contact the property owner, enforce codes violations to any occupied properties, and potentially take city action on blighted properties not yet on the city's radar.

[Community Development Homemaker's Program:](#) The Homemaker's Program will purchase blighted properties and sell them at affordable prices to non-profit organizations, public and private developers, and individuals who will own and occupy the home. To qualify for the Homemaker's Program, properties must be identified as blighted and be suitable for City acquisition. The purchaser is required to revitalize the current structure and bring it up to code or build a new structure on the property within one-year of receiving the deed. Homemaker's program staff is familiar with working with blighted properties, neighborhoods, homeowners, and developers. They can be a very useful resource as you move through the blight remediation process.

[Public Service Department:](#) The Public Service department significantly assists with blight remediation in several ways. Public Service handles all Codes remediation: boards up blighted buildings, handles Codes related demolitions, etc. If your neighborhood plans a Neighborhood Give Day clean-up, Public Service can provide courtesy trash bins and roadside organic waste pick-up.

[Knox Heritage:](#) If your neighborhood contains a [historic overlay](#) district or includes any historic structures, contact Knox Heritage. Knox Heritage can provide preservation and restoration advice to homeowners, and can offer small grants to help owners of historic structures make minor repairs to their property. Additionally, when appropriate, Knox Heritage may purchase and restore blighted historic homes. If any of the blighted homes or buildings on your list are historic, Knox Heritage may be able assist in the situation. To see if a property is historic, visit knoxmpc.org/historic to check the National Registry or see if it is under a Historic Overlay.

Set up a meeting with all of these groups to determine how to act on each of the properties. Each group may be able to work with you on different parcels or with different stages of the process. Moving forward, meeting with, and staying in contact with this team will be beneficial to continuing your neighborhood long-term blight remediation process.

Step Five: Action

During this phase, you will want to meet with the blight remediation team regularly to stay on track. While different members of the team may be working on certain aspects of some properties, it is the neighborhood's job to stay up on these action items and work on the pieces the neighborhood can handle.

If there are properties that can be handled through a Neighborhood Give Day (NGD), look at that guide and work to set up a NGD in your area. This day can show your neighbors that you can take action as a group and make improvements in only a few hours.

The quicker neighbors see improvements, the more neighbors you will entice to get on board to continue helping the neighborhood through the process. Keep the process positive to engage new members and continue forward momentum.

The Neighborhood Blight Remediation Process can be a long and ongoing process. However the more neighbors you involve and closer you work with your city and non-profit partners, the more the trickle effect of positive change will start to appear throughout the neighborhood.

Expect this process to take time, stay positive, avoid shaming neighbors for any "problem" properties, and try to encourage inclusivity to those who might need help. Good things come with time, and working together makes all the difference.