

To: Members of the North East Borough Council

From: Bobbi Jo Morey, Mayor

Date: May 27, 2025

Subject: Proposal for the Establishment of a Community-Based Blight Task Force

1. Introduction & Vision

This proposal outlines a plan to create the North East Borough Blight Task Force, a proactive, community-driven group dedicated to improving the beauty, safety, and economic vitality of our Borough. While the Borough's Code Enforcement is essential for addressing violations, its role is primarily reactive and punitive. This Task Force will serve a different purpose and offers a "neighbor helping neighbor" approach.

The vision is to foster a community where residents and business owners are empowered and assisted in maintaining their properties, thereby preventing properties from deteriorating to the point of requiring formal enforcement. This initiative focuses on collaboration, support, and resource connection, addressing the root causes of blight rather than just its symptoms.

2. Rationale: Why a Task Force is Needed

Property blight—which includes neglected homes or buildings, overgrown lots, and vacant storefronts—has far-reaching negative impacts. It can decrease surrounding property values, discourage investment, and diminish community pride.

However, the reasons behind property decline are often complex. They can stem from an owner's financial hardship, physical limitations due to age or health, mental health challenges, or a lack of awareness of available resources. A purely enforcement-based approach does not solve these underlying issues and can sometimes place a heavier burden on our most vulnerable residents.

The Blight Task Force is designed to fill this gap and identify challenges, build trust, and implement creative, compassionate solutions that formal government action cannot achieve alone.

3. Mission and Goals

Mission Statement: To foster community pride and enhance the quality of life in North East by proactively identifying the root causes of property blight and connecting residents and business owners with collaborative, community-based solutions.

Primary Goals:

1. **Assess and Understand:** To conduct a comprehensive, street-level assessment to identify the current scope and nature of blight within the Borough.
2. **Connect and Support:** To develop a resource network that links property owners with local volunteer groups, social programs, and financial assistance to help them address maintenance challenges.
3. **Engage and Mobilize:** To organize community-wide initiatives, such as neighborhood clean-up days, to foster volunteerism and shared responsibility for our Borough's appearance.
4. **Revitalize Commercial Spaces:** To research and propose creative solutions for vacant or underutilized commercial properties and storefronts.
5. **Advise and Recommend:** To provide the Borough Council with insights and policy recommendations aimed at preventing future blight.

4. Proposed Structure and Membership

To ensure a balanced and representative perspective, the Blight Task Force will be composed of the following members:

- **Mayor:** To serve as a liaison between the Task Force, Community, and Borough Council and communicate the Task Force's initiatives.
- **Code Enforcement Officer:** To provide expert knowledge of Borough ordinances and identify properties where a supportive approach may be more effective than immediate enforcement.
- **Borough Council Representative:** To ensure alignment between the Task Force's work and the Council's goals for the community.
- **Resident Homeowner Representative:** To provide the perspective of long-term residential stakeholders.
- **Resident Landlord Representative:** To offer insights into the unique challenges and opportunities within the rental property sector.
- **Borough Business Owner Representative:** To represent the commercial sector and provide input on revitalizing local business and filling vacant storefronts.

This diverse membership ensures that solutions are practical, well-rounded, and have broad community support.

5. Key Areas of Focus and Mandate

The work of the Task Force will be centered on three key areas:

A. Community Assistance & Resource Connection:

- Create and maintain a confidential inventory of properties where owners may need assistance.

- Partner with local service clubs, church groups, and non-profits to create a volunteer corps for residents who are physically unable to perform yard work or minor exterior repairs.
- Develop a "Community Resource Guide" for property owners, with information on local social services, mental health support, home repair grant programs, and other relevant aid.

B. Community Engagement & Revitalization:

- Plan and promote an annual "North East Community Clean-Up Day" or a series of smaller, neighborhood-focused events.
- Look into creating a recognition program, such as a "Beautification Award," to celebrate residents and businesses who make significant improvements to their properties.

C. Commercial & Downtown Vitality:

- Inventory all vacant commercial storefronts and buildings.
- Explore solutions such as "pop-up shop" programs, partnerships with real estate agents to better market vacant properties, and working with the Borough Manager on identifying potential facade improvement grant opportunities.
- Engage with owners of vacant commercial properties to understand their plans and encourage active use or sale.

6. Proposed Timeline & Next Steps

- **Month 1:** Borough Council passes a resolution to formally establish the Blight Task Force and its membership.
- **Month 2:** The Task Force holds its first meeting to elect a chairperson, establish a meeting schedule, and finalize its operational guidelines.
- **Months 3-6:** Conduct a "windshield survey" and blight inventory of the Borough. Begin building the Community Resource Guide and making initial contact with potential partner organizations.
- **Ongoing:** Implement pilot programs, such as assisting a few property owners or planning a clean-up event. Provide quarterly progress reports to the Borough Council.

7. Formal Request

The creation of a Blight Task Force represents a low-cost, high-impact investment in the future of North East. It leverages our greatest asset—our community itself—to create a more beautiful, supportive, and prosperous Borough for everyone.

I respectfully request that the North East Borough Council consider this proposal and pass a resolution to formally establish the Blight Task Force as outlined above. I am confident that by working together, we can make a meaningful difference in our community.