



Dallas Area
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build louder

UNT Blight Study Could Lead to a Better Dallas

Data Based Decision Making and Evaluation the Key

Deteriorating neighborhoods and blight are a costly drag on all of Dallas, as they are in cities nationwide. It is time to use the mountains of data that the City collects to better target limited public resources to resolve this issue. A recent study by four Public Administration researchers at the University of North Texas (UNT) provides the City of Dallas the tools to do just that and in the process set the standard nationally for tackling this serious problem.

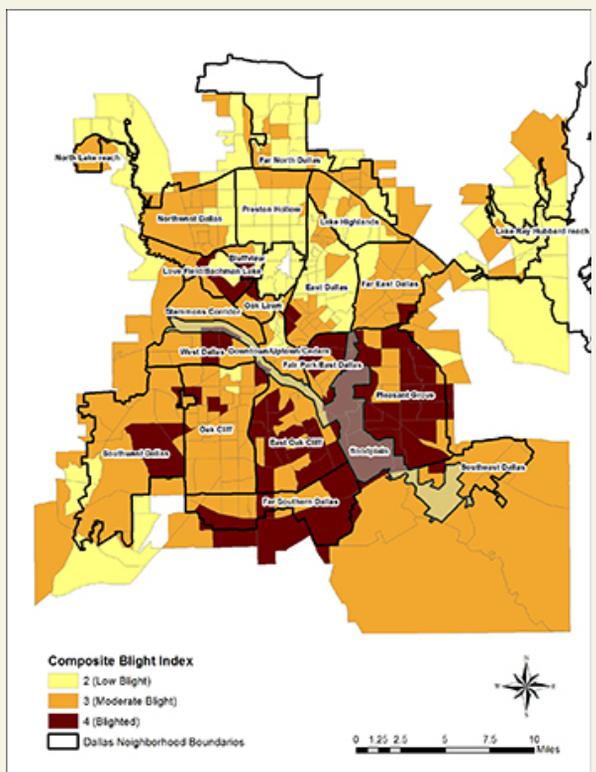
Neighborhood blight consists of those conditions that threaten the health and safety of neighborhood residents, depress an area's quality of life, and jeopardize the social and economic viability of an area.

Blight to Light: Assessing Blight in the City of Dallas

Blight has been a focus issue for Dallas Habitat for years. It directly affects our families and our neighborhoods – especially our [Dream Dallas](#) communities. About 18 months ago we issued a Request for Proposal for a study of blight in Dallas. We hoped that the study would 1) yield a way to measure and monitor the problem, 2) begin to quantify the public and private costs associated with neighborhood blight, and 3) produce a formula to inexpensively measure progress year over year. Four faculty members from UNT – Praveen Maghelal, Simon A. Andrew, Sudha Arlikatti, and Hee Soun Jang – were awarded the contract and began the complicated process of data collection and analysis. Last week, UNT issued a [press release](#) about the completion and findings of the study.

While there will be plenty of ways to analyze this year's study results, we think it is critically important to emphasize the need to apply data analysis and evaluation to this and other challenges facing the City: data driven decision making. The researchers created a blight index from public data and secondary data sources, which can be a tool for Dallas to map out strategy and evaluate progress.

The analysis makes clear: there is a big cost to doing nothing. For the first time the cost of blight to Dallas in the form of non-tax liens, unpaid property taxes, code enforcement, police and fire expenditures were calculated, allowing the City to take a serious look at resource allocation. Knowing that 86% of non-tax liens are not collected and cleared and there is a high incidence of repeat violations, perhaps tells us a better use of public resources would be to fund programs aimed at transferring the property to productive uses instead of continuing to maintain property at taxpayer expense. The study examined how the City's housing programs respond to needs in our most neglected neighborhoods, but concluded that it was impossible to know if the City was using its limited resources successfully because there had been no evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs. We think that collectively Dallas can and should do better.



We hope that you will join us the morning of [August 29th](#) to learn about the results of the UNT study and participate in a community discussion of potential next steps. City officials and community leaders will be part of a panel discussion on how we can best tackle the problems of blight in the city. An on-line registration will go out to readers of this newsletter in the next few days.

Sincerely,

Dallas Habitat Lauches "Build Louder Dallas"

[Build Louder Dallas](#) is an educational program created to raise awareness about affordable housing. It was adapted from Habitat for Humanity International's advocacy program. Build Louder Dallas is a great source for national research, local maps and data, and opinion about the issues most impacting our neighborhoods.

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