GRACE HILL

College Hill Neighborhood
SOLUTIONS

A community-driven initiative

Presented at Grace Hill Settlement House on March 20, 2018 | Session Focus: Repurposing Vacant Lots

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of our project team from Grace Hill Settlement House, the College Hill Neighborhood Researchers, and For the Sake of All, Washington University in St. Louis:

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Antreé Spikener	Louis Jones
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FOR THE SAKE OF ALL
Improving the health and well-being of African Americans in St. Louis and why it matters for everyone

Washington University in St.Louis

GRACE HILL
everyday opportunity

Photo by Antreé Spikener, Neighborhood Researcher, titled, "Elton John—I'm still standing"

A little over a year ago Grace Hill Settlement House and *For the Sake of All* began envisioning what community-led action supported by research could look like in the College Hill neighborhood. With new initiatives taking shape in North St. Louis, we knew that partnering with a group of residents and supporting their collective decisions could help to create momentum within College Hill.

Armed with data from the *For the Sake of All* report and the lived experiences of residents, we embarked on a shared learning experience. After reviewing all of the recommendation areas from the report, residents settled on healthy neighborhoods as their focus. Then they taught us about their community and their lives. This merging of knowledge has resulted in a plan to repurpose vacant land within College Hill.

Over the course of 7 months residents collected information on their community by speaking with residents and business owners, reviewing community-level data, meeting with city leaders and community advocates, and reading about potential solutions. All of this data informed their plan. Collectively, they spent 315 hours attending workshops, completing homework, and building the action plan.

While we know that the needs of the community are many, we are very pleased to see this group decide on their first steps in making visible change in the College Hill neighborhood. We are inspired by the dedication of those who participated, and we are excited about the potential of their project.

Sincerely,

Laura Kozak & Jason Purnell

College Hill Neighborhood Researchers

Ms. Andrea Porter is a 40-year resident of the College Hill neighborhood. Through workshops offered by Grace Hill and *For the Sake of All*, Ms. Porter says she has learned more about local resources. She feels the program gave her the space to direct her interest in community development. She also believes that the most important task in College Hill is to get more neighbors to participate and take interest in their community. Ms. Porter is the president of her block unit and in her free time loves to garden and read.

Andrea Porter

"This is a gem of a neighborhood. . . . I would love to see our neighborhood become beautiful and safe again."

Ms. Antreé Spikener is a College Hill resident who believes her neighborhood is a thriving community, where she plans to continue raising her children. Workshops offered by Grace Hill and *For the Sake of All* were a way for her to gain more tools and resources for community involvement and entrepreneurship. Throughout the process she was most proud to learn that there were many people like her who also wanted to see change in College Hill. She would like to see more of her neighbors take ownership of their neighborhood. And she is leading by example. She is working to start a non-profit called #TRASHBAG, dedicated to neighborhood clean ups.

Antreé Spikener

"My community is my passion. It's not a just some jungle. It shouldn't be defined by the stereotypes placed on it."

Carmen Long

Ms. Carmen Long is a 10-year resident of the College Hill neighborhood. Working with Grace Hill and *For the Sake of All* has helped her find a new perspective on community development. She enjoyed learning what other communities have done and are doing to create positive change. In addition to their action plan, she hopes College Hill can find additional ways to address vacant land and buildings. In fact, she believes that the vacancies in College Hill can be used by neighbors for renting or owning safe and healthy homes. Ms. Long is often loving on and caring for animals in her free time. She is an animal groomer, with a dream of creating a space for neighbors to have access to affordable pet care.

When asked, "What are you most proud of in your neighborhood?" Ms. Long replied, "My neighbors."

Eric Porter

Mr. Eric Porter has been a College Hill resident for 5 years and is the youngest researcher on the team. As a senior in high school, Eric has a job, is engaged in his community, and even helped to start a neighborhood Youth Council through LinkSTL. Eric is very proud of all the community action currently taking place in College Hill. Working with Grace Hill and *For the Sake of All* has been life changing for him. He noted that this program has helped him envision a future where he has a role, in addition to being a role model, where children can get involved, have a safe place to play, and have access to great schools. Eric is committed to seeing the project through, and he plans to attend Ranken Technical College in the fall.

"I want to see a change. . . . We can create change when we put our mind in it."

Mr. James Gibson is a long-term resident of College Hill and is also currently raising his daughter in the neighborhood. Mr. Gibson decided to work with Grace Hill and *For the Sake of All* as a means to stay up to date on things happening in his community. He wants to play an active role in re-building College Hill, and he appreciated collecting data, communicating with neighbors, and creating the action plan. In his free time Mr. Gibson loves art and working with his hands.

James Gibson

"It's my neighborhood."

Ms. Lorine Pattin is proud to live in a community with access to libraries, parks, and people with aspirations for the future. She made the choice to work with Grace Hill and *For the Sake of All* to be more involved and learn about College Hill from a new perspective. Ms. Pattin wants to be an advocate for people. Her vision for the future is a neighborhood that takes action and pushes for change to create the community that neighbors want it to be.

Lorine Pattin

"It starts with L.O.V.E. to E.V.O.L.V.E., then move on to problem solve."

Louis Jones

Ms. Louis Jones is a proud homeowner in the College Hill neighborhood, where she has lived for 28 years. During this time, she has worked to have her own positive impact in her neighborhood. She has seen slow change for the better in her community. She is glad to have worked with Grace Hill and *For the Sake of All* because it showed her there are more groups working in her neighborhood for positive change. The project provided her with new tools to gather information and find solutions to continue working toward community improvement.

"I don't feel like I'm by myself now. . . .College Hill is worth investing in."
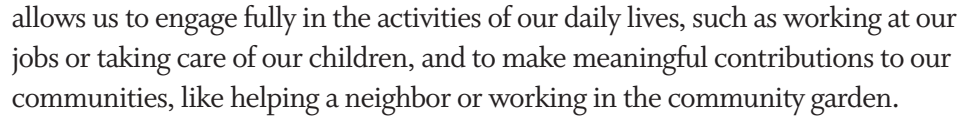
College Hill Neighborhood

Bissell Water Tower Hub[3]

College Hill is a historic community in the northern section of the City of St. Louis. In the mid-1800's the St. Louis University College Farm was located in this area, and thus, the neighborhood became known as College Hill.[1] The neighborhood is home to two of the three historic 19th-century water towers in St. Louis. Over the last century College Hill has seen significant transition. In 2015, College Hill was considered the most dangerous neighborhood in St. Louis.[2] However, the area has seen a dramatic reduction in crime over the last few years, and in partnership with community organizations, new facilities (banking and health care) and new housing were added to the neighborhood.

The College Hill neighborhood is located within the 63107 zip code, where a baby born can expect to live until age 68. That life expectancy is 17 fewer years than a baby born in Clayton's 63105, located just 9 miles away. Where we live, learn, work, and play can affect our health, and this is definitely reflected in our neighborhoods. Health is about more than what happens in a doctor's office or a hospital room. Health
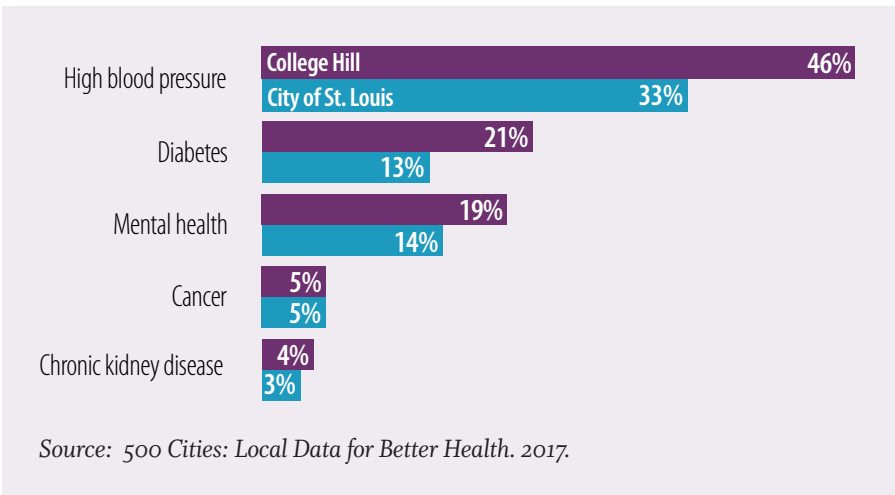
Map 1. Map of the City of St. Louis and College Hill

College Hill is bordered by Adelaide Ave. to the north, Interstate Highway 70 to the east, Ferry St. to the south, and Florissant Ave. to the west.[4]

allows us to engage fully in the activities of our daily lives, such as working at our jobs or taking care of our children, and to make meaningful contributions to our communities, like helping a neighbor or working in the community garden.
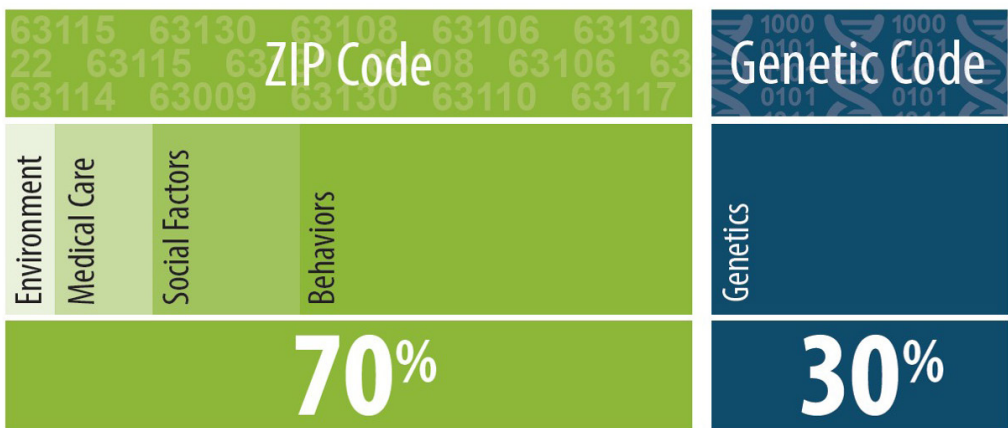
Disparities in College Hill

When comparing College Hill with the City of St. Louis (see Figure 1), we can see that there are some areas where College Hill has higher rates of negative health outcomes, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and poor mental health.[5] However, College Hill is similar to the City of St. Louis in areas such as cancer and chronic kidney disease.[5]

When most people think about what affects their health, their immediate thoughts turn to medical care. However, as shown in Figure 2, this only makes up a small portion of the factors that contribute to premature death.[6] The social determinants of health are factors like education, income, the quality and composition of neighborhoods, and access to community resources like healthy foods and safe public spaces. **An individual's zip code often has a stronger influence on their risk for disease than their genetic code.**

Figure 1. Health outcomes among adults, aged >18 years, in College Hill and the City of St. Louis

Condition	College Hill	City of St. Louis
High blood pressure	46%	33%
Diabetes	21%	13%
Mental health	19%	14%
Cancer	5%	5%
Chronic kidney disease	4%	3%

Source: 500 Cities: Local Data for Better Health. 2017.

Figure 2. Percent of factors influenced by zip code and genetic code that contribute to premature death

ZIP Code

Environment · Medical Care · Social Factors · Behaviors

70%

Genetic Code

Genetics

30%

Source: Braveman P, Egerter S, Williams DR. 2011

Behaviors

Maintaining a healthy weight, eating a healthy diet, engaging in regular exercise, and not smoking all go a long way towards preventing many of the leading causes of death. There is a lower percentage of adults who binge drink in College Hill than in the City of St. Louis (10% vs. 16%) but higher percentages of those who smoke (34% vs. 25%) and do not engage in physical activity (40% vs. 27%).[5] While making good decisions that lead to healthy behavior is important, sometimes one's surroundings make those decisions more difficult. It helps to understand the context in which health behaviors occur.

Environment

Even though African Americans and whites in St. Louis report relatively equal access to sidewalks and bike lanes for physical activity, there are differences in the perceptions of safety in neighborhoods where African Americans live.[7] Nearly two-thirds of African Americans in the City and one-third in the County do not consider their neighborhoods to be safe, making it less likely that they will engage in physical activity outside or let their children go out to play.[7] When a third of African Americans in the City and more than a quarter in the County cannot easily find healthy food to buy, that will impact their ability to eat a healthy diet.[7]

Social Factors

Social factors such as poverty, education, and housing also impact health. Unemployment is strongly linked to poor health and higher rates of death. Jobs are essential for bringing resources into households, but they also offer many other benefits beyond income, such as access to workplace wellness programs, family health insurance, and paid leave. Dealing with the realities of having limited resources is often stressful, and long-term stress can contribute to a variety of health problems. In 2016, the unemployment rate in College Hill (23%) was three times as high as the national average of 7%.[8]

Health and education are also closely related. Having more education is related to better health, and children and families in good health tend to have better education-related outcomes, such as attendance, behavior, and academic performance. People with less education often face more risk factors for poor health, higher rates of disease, and shorter lifespans. The proportion of residents with a college degree in the City of St. Louis is more than 10 times higher than in College Hill (32% vs. 3).[9] On the other hand, College Hill outperforms the City of St. Louis in terms of the proportion of those ages 16-19 years who have graduated or are enrolled in school (100% vs. 94%).[10]

Photo by Andrea Porter, Neighborhood Researcher, titled, "St. Peter Claver School"

"[The vacant school building] says our children don't need or deserve an education or a place to be, to learn." —Andrea Porter

Medical Care

As mentioned earlier, people tend to think of medical care when thinking about health. Though certainly not the only explanation for health outcomes, access to medical care still is important. Primary care is important for preventing disease and promoting well-being throughout life, and having insurance is essential for appropriate medical care. In comparison with the City of St. Louis, a higher percentage of adults in College Hill visit the doctor for an annual check-up (75% vs. 71%).[5] In College Hill, 67% of adults, ages 18-64, have health insurance, meaning a third of working-age adults do not have health insurance.[5]

Assets in College Hill

College Hill is home to many programs and resources working to improve the disparities described above.

- Community gardens increase access to healthy foods.

- Grace Hill's Water Tower Head Start provides education to 120 children ages 3-5 years and prepares them for kindergarten.

- Grace Hill's Water Tower Head Start family engagement specialists and Bryant Hill's Family Mentors provide a mutual support system to families and connect parents with resources to become healthy and financially stable.

- Grace Hill's Women's Business Center provides access to asset-building programs, such as Individual Development Accounts, helps with business development, and creates around 100 jobs per year.

- Connections to Success provides intensive and personal employment readiness services and graduates over 50 adults every year.

- Lutheran Housing Support has helped to deliver home repairs to 120 homeowners, is planning a new play space in the neighborhood, and is developing 14 new housing units.

- St. Louis Community Credit Union works with nearly 800 Grace Hill members, providing safe and affordable account services to low- and moderate-income individuals.

- The St. Louis Public Library Divoll Branch supports local families in lifelong educational and financial learning opportunities.

- Affinia Healthcare is a community health center that provides services for adults and children, including physical, behavioral, and dental healthcare, WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), and community outreach.

History of Partners and Partnership

With the significant challenges facing College Hill, it was apparent that creating long-term change in the neighborhood would require a collaboration of residents and partnering organizations working together to bring needed resources to the community. The collaboration would need to share knowledge, build trust, and spur action in order to be successful. *For the Sake of All* partnered with Grace Hill Settlement House to start a community-based participatory research project (CBPR) in the College Hill neighborhood. Using the research knowledge of *For the Sake of All*, the strong community ties of Grace Hill Settlement House, and the local expertise of residents, a partnership was formed and the College Hill Neighborhood Solutions initiative officially began in the spring of 2017.

For the Sake of All, Washington University in St. Louis, Partner

What began as an exploration of health disparities among African Americans in St. Louis has evolved into a mission to eliminate racial inequities and improve the health of all people in our region.

For the Sake of All (FSOA) began in March 2013 as a collaboration between scholars at Washington University and Saint Louis University to report on the health and well-being of African Americans in the St. Louis region. *For the Sake of All: A Report on the Health and Well-Being of African Americans in St. Louis—And Why It Matters for Everyone*, was released on May 30, 2014. The report made recommendations for increased attention and investment in the areas of economic opportunity, quality neighborhoods, early childhood, school health, mental health, and chronic disease.

These six recommendation areas have guided the subsequent work of the project to mobilize community members and key stakeholders in the private and public sectors for strategic implementation of the recommendations.

Grace Hill Settlement House, Partner

Since 1903, Grace Hill Settlement House has been rooted in place-based, comprehensive community support. Grace Hill was established by the Episcopal Diocese (Grace Church and Holy Cross Church) in 1903 to provide a comprehensive and coordinated complement of services and resources to immigrant populations, helping them "settle" into their new community.

What many people know as "Grace Hill" was actually two organizations: Grace Hill Settlement House and Grace Hill Health Centers. Grace Hill Health Centers changed its name in 2015 to Affinia Healthcare, though Grace Hill Settlement House and Affinia continue to work in partnership.

Today, the Settlement House spirit of support—of place-based opportunities to help

every child, family and community succeed—continues to improve lives. Grace Hill Settlement House works in partnership with neighbors and stakeholders to identify social and economic challenges in North and South St. Louis, supporting families and communities that are strong and self-sustaining.

College Hill Neighborhood Researchers, Partners

In the spring of 2017, community stakeholders were introduced to the principles of CBPR and FSOA's recommendations for alleviating health disparities through three community meetings held in the College Hill neighborhood. During this time, neighborhood residents shared their perspectives on the neighborhood and the challenges facing their community. After documenting and discussing each concern, residents voted on a priority issue to address through this community-academic partnership. Residents chose **unsafe structures and unhealthy housing conditions** as an issue to explore further through their own research and data collection. Seven neighbors completed the process of identifying health concerns within the community and designing an intervention to improve health outcomes in their neighborhood. The Neighborhood Researchers not only gained knowledge of the tools and methods to gather this information, but through grassroots engagement, they also were able to build skills and capacity to respond to health-related needs using data-driven, evidence-based approaches.

Details of the Process

Community-Based Participatory Research

CBPR is a collaborative and inclusive approach to research that equitably involves partners in all aspects of the research process, such as community members, organizational representatives, and academic researchers.[11] The CBPR approach is committed to benefiting participants directly and utilizing the research to inform action for change.[11] CBPR typically attempts to integrate the theoretical and methodological strengths of academic researchers with the knowledge and expertise of nonacademic partners to address complex social issues.[12]

Benefits of community-based participatory research include:

- Ensuring that the research topic comes from, or reflects, a major concern of the local community;

- Enhancing the relevance and application of the research data by all partners involved;

- Bringing together partners with different skills, knowledge, and expertise to address complex problems;

- Enhancing the quality, validity, sensitivity, and practicality of research by involving the local knowledge of the participants;

- Extending the likelihood of overcoming the distrust of research by communities that traditionally have been the "subjects" of such research; and

- Aiming to improve the health and well-being of the involved communities.

Source: Israel BA, Schulz AJ, Parker EA, Becker AB. 1998

Civic Engagement

College Hill residents were recruited to participate in an intensive process of research and community mobilization to develop an understanding of unsafe structures and unhealthy housing conditions in their neighborhood and to develop an action plan to address the issue. Over the course of 7 months and 9 workshops (see Table 1), residents came together to learn about the research process and used the techniques they learned to gather information to help move their ideas forward. Residents developed questions and asked their neighbors about their thoughts and experiences with the issue. They used their personal cameras and phones to take pictures, and used the photographs to describe their own experiences. They utilized

publicly available data to understand the size, scope, and historical trends of the issue throughout the neighborhood. They searched for evidence on the effects of vacant property and abandoned buildings on resident health and community well-being.

Residents identified solutions to issues of vacancy that had been implemented in other communities. After reviewing all of this information, residents identified the **redevelopment and repurposing of vacant land** as a starting point for their work and crafted an action plan rooted in their knowledge and expertise, the experiences of their neighbors, and the knowledge and expertise collected from academic journals and community reports from across the country.

Table 1. Workshop topics

Workshop	Topic area at at glance
1	Research process and conducting interviews
2	Analyzing interviews and utilizing photovoice
3	Collecting public data
4	Analyzing public data
5	Searching for literature
6	Analyzing literature
7	Reviewing findings and action planning
8	Planning for action
9	Planning for action continued

Guest Speakers:

- **Bernie Powderly, Neighborhood Improvement Specialist**

- **John Cruz, Rise Community Development Corporation**

- **Lisa Wolfe, St. Louis Public Library, Divoll Branch**

- **Don Roe, City of St. Louis, Planning & Urban Design Agency**

- **Bobbie Sykes, Voices of Women**

Findings

Throughout the process residents came to consensus on their community's needs and wants, its current status, and what they could feasibly do about it. This culminated in the creation of a plan that residents will implement, in partnership with Grace Hill, over the next year. Neighborhood Researchers collected information using multiple tools including a *windshield survey*, photo voice, interviews, and group discussions during workshops.

Understanding the community landscape

As residents surveyed their community, several themes emerged about what they saw, why the conditions exist, and what they can do about it.

College Hill Neighborhood
SOLUTIONS

9 Community Workshops

3 Community Meetings Held

315 Total number of hours worked by neighborhood researchers

75 Issues identified by residents

24 Interviews with Community Members

11 Solutions Identified

24 Articles and reports read

1 Neighborhood Action Team Formed

7 Neighborhood Researchers

What was seen

Neighborhood Researchers observed a neighborhood that mostly consists of residential properties. They assessed the occupied homes to be in fair or mixed condition. However, they also observed a number of homes and structures they described as **"crumbling," "abandoned," or "stripped."** These properties were boarded up, neglected, and unsafe, and led the Neighborhood Researchers to assume a lack of concern from the property owners. Despite these concerns, residents felt that the basic infrastructure of the College Hill neighborhood was in good shape. There were not many buildings that were beyond repair, just in need of restoration.

In addition to the neighborhood infrastructure, Neighborhood Researchers observed a lack of green space within the community. When green spaces were observed, they were often littered with various types of debris or reflected a lack of active maintenance. Observations included overgrowth and weeds, fallen trees, fallen bricks, dumped furniture, trash, rubble, and abandoned cars.

The Neighborhood Researchers expressed concerns about poorly maintained and disconnected sidewalks and public spaces. Although there are bike lanes, the streets are not in good condition. They concluded that College Hill is not a walkable community and is not a safe place for children to play. On behalf of the community, one Neighborhood Researcher said, **"We are in pain."**

Why the conditions exist

Neighborhood Researchers stated that the lack of accountability, code enforcement, resources, community ownership and crime all impact the liveability of their community. Residents felt like the lack of accountability and code enforcement is

because the city does not care about the College Hill community or the safety of its residents. One Neighborhood Researcher stated, **"No one cares that much on what's going on in our neighborhood."**

The Neighborhood Researchers shared a perception of a lack of adequate resources in their neighborhood. These included food access, health services, and spaces for leisure and physical activity. They also described that there is a lack of desire to remedy these issues. This was seen as a community-wide problem where the community as a whole needs to buy-in, hold people accountable, and start fixing the problems. Lastly, the Neighborhood Researchers expressed concern about crime in the neighborhood. They commented that violence and fear for safety attributed to the current conditions.

Photo by James Gibson, Neighborhood Researcher, titled, "Vacant building"

What can be done

The Neighborhood Researchers concluded that many issues affecting the College Hill neighborhood could be alleviated by holding landlords and local, state, and federal governments more accountable for the condition of the property they own and for the services they provide. They expressed a need for increased city resources allocated within the neighborhood for home improvement, street lighting, "safety" police presence, municipal dumping and trash collection, and weed and pest removal.

The Neighborhood Researchers shared a desire for unity, which they thought could be fostered by holding community block parties or cookouts and community members working together for neighborhood prosperity. It was believed that bringing people together could create the momentum needed to see sustainable change in the neighborhood. One Neighborhood Researcher said, **"[There is] a lot of potential [for the neighborhood]."**

Solutions based on research

After identifying assets and challenges within their community, Neighborhood Researchers began reviewing literature to identify possible solutions for vacant property. They documented how different solutions worked, if they were effective, and if the solutions were realistically adaptable to the College Hill neighborhood.

At initial community meetings neighbors identified several areas of concern (see Figure 3). During the CBPR process, vacant land was identified as a problem throughout the neighborhood. As the Neighborhood Researchers gained greater understanding of the evidence-based community solutions they decided that repurposing vacant land was an appropriate neighborhood-level intervention.

Figure 3. Identified areas of concern

Vacant Land

In 2017, there were 182 vacant buildings in the College Hill neighborhood; 175 of which were residential buildings, and eight were commercial buildings.[13] College Hill also contains 645 vacant lots, 401 of which are owned by the Land Reutilization Authority (LRA), the City of St. Louis' Land Bank.[13] From 2010 to 2017, 125 building demolition permits were issued within the boundaries of College Hill.[14]

Through research and personal experience, Neighborhood Researchers noted that dilapidated community buildings can lead to condemned buildings. They are hazardous, can serve as visually unappealing, and are often used to conduct illegal or dangerous activities. Vacant buildings and land also can harbor nuisances such as insects and rodents that can spread to neighboring inhabited homes. Residents noted that abandoned buildings and vacant property can impact neighborhood morale, especially impacting children who have to constantly pass by the deterioration in their surroundings.

Why focus on vacant land?

Evidence suggests that property vacancy is increasing across the U.S., from 7 million properties in 2000 to 10 million in 2010.[15] In 1970, St. Louis had one census tract with vacancy rates above 25%, compared to 34 tracts meeting this criteria in 2010.[16] Currently, there are over 25,000 vacant properties in the City of St. Louis.[17] The LRA owns 12,000 vacant properties and has 8.5 staff to manage them, representing the second lowest staff-to-property ratio in the country.[18] Although the City of St. Louis is

operating in a severely resource-constrained environment, there is growing interest in finding effective and sustainable solutions to the problem.[19]

While a great deal of vacancy is present in many urban communities across cities in the United States, its impact may be underestimated as merely an eye sore. When Neighborhood Researchers were asked to explain the impact that vacancy has on their community, they described being "abandoned," or living in a space that has been "stripped." In addition to how vacant land is perceived, research shows that vacancy in neighborhoods actually impacts health (physical and mental), social factors and safety, and even economics.[20]

Photo by Carmen Long, Neighborhood Researcher, titled, "Forest"

Health

The Neighborhood Researchers described their physical environment as dominated by decaying homes and overgrown vacant land that affect the well-being of the community. Vacant land is often unkempt promoting illegal dumping of waste and overgrowth of vegetation. These conditions harbor pests and expose children and adults to potentially hazardous objects. For example, vacant and abandoned property is associated with public safety risks such as fires, exposure to environmental toxins (*e.g.*, lead), and the spread of disease through habitation and contact with pests.[15,20] Research shows that vacancy can be linked to poorer health outcomes, "including cardiovascular disease (*e.g.*, hypertension and myocardial infarction) and mental illnesses (*e.g.*, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance abuse)."[20]
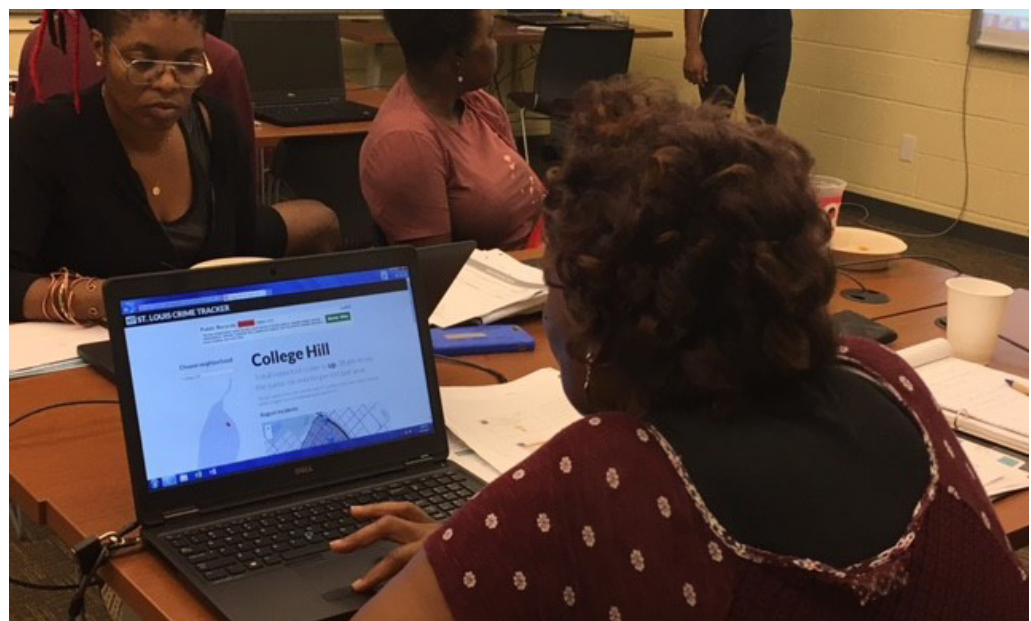
Social factors & safety

College Hill residents expressed concerns about safety within their neighborhood. Research has shown an association between vacancy and increased criminal activity.[20] Growing vacancy coupled with criminal activity can cause increased fear in a community.[20] Residents living in a community viewed as unsafe may become more withdrawn, leading to increased social isolation and inhibiting the ability to work together to solve community concerns.[20] Although vacancy within a neighborhood can signal that a community is not valued or cared for by its residents, this may not always be the case.

Economics

Vacant and abandoned properties impose substantial economic costs for local governments, communities, and neighbors. The economic costs of vacancy are profound and are estimated between $40-160 million dollars annually for older industrial cities.[15] Recent estimates suggest that a foreclosed home costs cities $170,000 in lost property value, with $85,000 of the costs directly associated with property vacancy and abandonment.[21] Vacant and abandoned properties are also potential fire hazards, costing cities roughly $29,000 in property damage and an additional $34,000 in maintenance and cleanup costs per property.[21] Left unabated, researchers find that vacancy has contagious effects, spreading to nearby areas and lowering property and appraisal values, decreasing the likelihood that banks will lend on the properties, and therefore, increasing future disinvestment.[15]

In order for residents in College Hill to thrive, we need to alleviate vacancy. Vacancy overshadows community assets while negatively impacting resident health, wealth, and social interaction.

Taking Action

Visions for Peace Park

Once the Neighborhood Researchers determined that they wanted to repurpose vacant land, they had to make a decision about which specific plot of land to address. They reviewed a map of vacant land in the College Hill neighborhood to identify areas where redevelopment would be visible to other community members. The team took photos of the identified vacant land and surrounding areas. The Neighborhood Researchers reviewed the photos and discussed the pros and cons of each area. Ultimately, they agreed to focus their efforts on revitalizing **Peace Park**. Peace Park contains vacant lots that have been previously used for a community garden. However, the residents noted that the space has not been maintained for the last few years. They wanted to make this space beautiful and vibrant and a place where the community would want to gather.

After conducting a site visit, the Neighborhood Researchers decided on a preliminary plan for Peace Park. They wanted the space to feature several art sculptures, a stage or pavilion to hold community events, games for neighbors to engage in (*e.g.*, horseshoes, bocce ball), and space allocated to the community garden. They wanted the land to be inviting and bridge the sense of division felt among community members. Below are preliminary renderings for repurposing Peace Park.

In order to make this vision a reality, residents developed an action plan to guide their efforts to revitalize Peace Park (see Table 2).

Table 2. Action plan

Strategy	Task	Timeframe
Identify and secure vacant lot/s for repurposing	Choose lot/s best suited for repurposing	February 2018
	Determine the best use for vacant lot/s	February 2018
	Determine the legal parameters necessary to take possession of the lot/s	February-April 2018
Gain community support	Network to gain support of businesses, non-profit organizations, funders, politicians, community leaders, and property owners	February- October 2018
	Raise awareness in the neighborhood and involve additional residents	April-October 2018
Create plan for implementation	Create a plan for the buildout	March- July 2018
	Determine the cost of repurposing the lot/s and overall project budget. Include options for work that can be completed by volunteers.	March-May 2018
	Create funding proposal to solicit funds for the project	March-September 2018
	Research alternative forms of funding (TIF, bonds, tax incentives, CBDG, capital improvement funding)	March 2018- January 2019
	Obtain possession of the lot/s	May 2018
	Obtain funds to begin the work (apply for grants, seek city funding, etc.)	July- December 2018
Repurposing of vacant lot/s	Gain media support	April 2018
	Recruit neighborhood volunteers to help with the work and assemble a team	June-July 2018
	Begin buildout of vacant lot/s	September 2018
	Ensure repurposing is responsive to community needs and doesn't promote displacement of residents	Ongoing
	Hold ground breaking and grand opening event	September 2018 & August 2019
Evaluate impact on the community	Create evaluation plan	March-September 2018
	Gather data	August 2017-ongoing
	Conduct evaluation and create a report	August 2017- August 2020

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