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The Repurposing of Abandoned Buildings in Gary, Indiana with Sustainable Design: The Revitalization of a Distressed City

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“The Repurposing of Abandoned Buildings in Gary, Indiana with Sustainable Design:
The revitalization of a distressed city.”

By

Tatiana Height

AN UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Environmental Studies Program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

Major: Great Plains Studies
With the minors of Environmental Studies, Community & Regional Planning, and
Entrepreneurship.

Under the Supervision of Dr. Rodrigo Cantarero and Dr. William Grange

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2015

Abstract

“The Repurposing of Abandoned Buildings in Gary, Indiana with Sustainable Design:
The revitalization of a distressed city.”

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University of Nebraska, 2015

Advisor: Dr. Rodrigo Cantarero

Abandonment has been a major problem plaguing the city of Gary, Indiana. The city saw its peak in the 1960's and has since been the site of pollution due to the steel mill, a general lack of investment, and seedy behavior in empty buildings. Based on information gathered, such as the Broken Windows Theory, citizen testimonials, expert interviews, government initiatives, and revitalization plans of other cities, restoring abandoned buildings will prove socially and economically beneficial to the city of Gary. This research provides suggestions for how to mitigate the abandoned building problems, suggestions for possible funding of the abandoned building revitalization plan, and reasons for hope in this urban area.

Acknowledgements:

There are several people that I would like to thank for the production of this thesis. I would like to thank Rodrigo Cantarero for advising me and generally offering support and encouragement. I would like to thank Dr. William Grange for providing his insights and being honest in the revision process. I would like the people who provided feedback for my data, my mother for not letting me give up in Gary's City Hall, Pat Anderson-Sifuentes for meeting with me and giving me her insights on neighborhood revitalization, and the people at the city of Gary offices who provided me with guidance and were candid with me during phone calls. I would like to thank Sara Cooper for having me start thinking about this research even as a freshman. Last, but not least, I want to thank Dr. Dave Gosselin for calming me down every time that I panicked during the research process. This thesis would not have been possible without the help of all of you.

Introduction:

There are numerous potential components of my research, but I will focus on one key aspect of the distress in Gary, Indiana. I will study what community revitalization looks like and putting abandoned buildings to use. Although my research will focus on the built environment there are many more related factors to revitalizing Gary such as: environmental racism, public involvement, zoning, the determinant factors of any revitalization plan, and politics.

Environmental racism is defined as “any environmental policy, practice or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intentionally or unintentionally) individuals, groups or communities based on race or color (Bullard 1999 pg. 6). The final goal is to produce a plan for the building revitalization in Gary, an image of what it could look like, and to present that plan to Gary’s decision makers. I will need some grassroots effort from the citizens and organizations affected by or concerned with the state of the city so that decision makers will listen to my ideas. Revitalizing the city will have some influence on the local community, but I don’t want it to be a negative influence. I don’t want the cost of living to be too high, and I do not want the minority or impoverished citizens to be displaced. That kind of displacement often goes by the term “gentrification” which officially is defined as “the arrival of wealthier people in an existing urban district, combined with a related increase in rents and property values, and accompanying changes in the district's character and culture” (“Flag Wars” premiered June 17, 2003, part of the Point of View Series of the Public Broadcasting System). The revitalization may also have positive impacts on the economy by putting abandoned buildings to use. The steel mill had been a source of about 10,000 jobs in Gary (Kromer 2010). When steel stopped being a major source of the jobs I believe that influenced other business closures in the area. The potential to bring new business can combat the urban poverty which has consumed the city. The

revitalization may also have positive impacts on the environment if developers are urged to implement sustainable design when repurposing the buildings, but that should be looked at during the implementation stage.

This topic is quite important to me for many reasons. It is important to learn and/or do something that one is passionate about, and that passion explains why I want to research my topic. One of the reasons this topic contains particular importance to me is that I went to high school in Gary. When I was 12 years old, my family moved there from Chicago, Illinois. In Chicago, I had grown used to well-developed infrastructure, buildings full of business, lots of city parks, and homes fully inhabited. I remember that our first house in Gary sat directly beside two abandoned residential buildings to our right, and one uninhabited house to our left. The other end of our block had additional abandoned homes and businesses. The downtown area was a few rundown blocks with little to no business activity. It was nothing like the downtown area in Chicago. During the years that I lived in Gary, I observed many business closures with no new business to take over the space. Public libraries shut down, shops closed, and even public schools went out of business. It saddened me to see how dreary the area had become. Although I went back to Chicago before my senior year of high school, I decided not to transfer schools. My father and siblings now live in Chicago, but my mother still lives in Gary.

I went to visit my mother this summer and nothing has changed. I can personally attest to some of the horrid things that take place in those abandoned buildings. Rape, drug deals, truancies, teens running away from home, murder and sexual behavior involving middle school/high school students. The list is long and no such dens of iniquity are of any value to the

community. They are indeed wasted space. It is clear that I retain a personal dislike for these spaces based on my own life experiences.



Statement of the Problem:

The predicament of Gary is related to an overall problem of urban poverty which has been going on for years. Gary is just one example. Urban poverty started from a move to the suburbs which began when jobs started to move, shifting income to the suburbs, and leaving behind pockets of poverty in urban areas (Barnes 2005).

Everyone who has studied the situation in Gary agrees that a majority of the city's populace is below the poverty line, and that businesses do not thrive in the area. As of 2010, the Federal Bureau of the Census reported that more than 80% of Gary's population was African American. That number is almost 10 times the percentage of African American citizens in the state overall (census.gov).

Quick Facts	Gary	Indiana
White alone, percent, 2010 (a)	10.7%	84.3%
Black or African American alone, percent, 2010 (a)	84.8%	9.1%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.3%	0.3%
Asian alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.2%	1.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent, 2010 (a)	Z	0.0%
Two or More Races, percent, 2010	2.1%	2.0%
Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010 (b)	5.1%	6.0%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010	8.9%	81.5%

In the above table, captured from the census website, the numbers on the left represent Gary. The numbers on the right represent the state of Indiana at large.

Quick Facts	Gary	Indiana
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2008-2012	82.2%	87.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2008-2012	12.4%	23.0%
Veterans, 2008-2012	6,008	468,648
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16+, 2008-2012	25.5	23.2
Housing units, 2010	39,531	2,795,541
Homeownership rate, 2008-2012	53.4%	70.6%
Housing units in multi-unit structures, percent, 2008-2012	24.6%	18.5%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2008-2012	\$66,900	\$123,400
Households, 2008-2012	30,770	2,478,846
Persons per household, 2008-2012	2.61	2.54
Per capita money income in past 12 months (2012 dollars), 2008-2012	\$15,764	\$24,558
Median household income, 2008-2012	\$26,956	\$48,374
Persons below poverty level, percent, 2008-2012	37.4%	14.7%

In the above table, captured from the census website, again the numbers on the left represent Gary while the numbers on the right represent all of Indiana. The census reported that Gary has higher poverty rates, lower per capita income, and fewer homeowners than the rest of the state. Over one third of Gary's population is below the poverty line. Only roughly 12% of the population over age 25, in Gary, have Bachelor's degrees or higher as of 2010 (census.gov). The crime rate in Gary is also high, with an index of 68% higher than the Indiana average.

Business QuickFacts	Gary	Indiana
Total number of firms, 2007	5,686	482,847
Black-owned firms, percent, 2007	68.8%	4.6%

The table above represents some of the business statistics for Gary as of 2010. Less than 6,000 is a drastic decreases from the 1970's and even more so than from the 1930's. The decrease in the

number of firms is related to the movement of jobs and the decrease in population from almost 175,000 in the 1970's to merely about 80,000 currently.

Purpose of the Study:

“Gary was not originally meant to be inhabited. No community planners were consulted, and only half of the area was formed into a city.” – Catlin 1993

Gary is nicknamed “The Steel City” due to the placement of the steel mill. In 1906 the construction of the largest United States Steel mill in the country. The United States Steel Corporation chose the site of its new steel mill for its close proximity to Chicago. The mill's developers then decided that housing should be nearby for the nearly 10,000 anticipated employees to have an easy commute to work. The housing was a good idea in theory, but since the city itself was not included in the planning, it was just the steel mill owners constructing the housing, the impact on Gary's development as a whole was a shabby one. The reason being that the infrastructure was poor and the city then grew around the original subpar framework. There was initially an economic boom, but eventually those who could afford to leave the city did because of the emissions stemming from the steel mill and the minorities moving to the area to work there. The “white flight”, or act of white people moving from an area becoming more inhabited by minorities (Blakeslee 1978), left behind a large pocket of urban poverty.

The primary purpose of my research is to address the abandoned buildings issue and help Gary to look like a city with founded in careful thought and full of citizens who care. The primary purpose is anticipated to stimulate the economy by occupying buildings with businesses and homes with employed tax-paying citizens. The strengthened tax base leads to my final

purpose. The secondary purpose is intended to improve the quality of life for the people living in The Steel City by fostering a more sustainable and viable community.

Goals/Objectives:

1. To create portion of a potential revitalization plan for the city of Gary, Indiana.
2. To provide recommendations for the remediation of abandoned homes/buildings.
3. To find possible funding sources with which to implement the plan.

Research Questions:

1. What economic factors influenced the abandonment of Gary?
2. How have other cities revitalized?
3. In what ways can citizens participate in the revitalization plan?
4. What is an ethically and statically reasonable percentage of gentrification based on respected literature on the subject?

Hypothesis:

- Abandoned buildings are a resource which can be utilized.
- Implementing sustainable uses for formerly abandoned buildings will have some positive influence on the community, and cause a positive change in Gary's economy- minimizing urban poverty.

Materials:

- Paper surveys (distributed to citizens).
- Envelopes (used to package the paper surveys).
- Postage (used to mail the surveys).
- Computer (primarily used in the literature review and emailing decision makers).
- Books (used in the literature review stage).

Methods:

- Conduct a literature review to find revitalization plans for other cities. What other locales revitalized destitute communities without displacing too many citizens, or putting a great economic strain on low-income citizens?
 - Review literatures on neighborhood revitalization.
 - Review literatures on urban poverty and planning.
- Research possible funding sources or economy boosters for the revitalization plan.
 - Research neighborhood grants.
 - Investigate the potential of Community Land Trusts.
 - Explore the possibility of funding from state of Indiana.
- Survey Gary residents for input and feedback on my intended revitalization plan and to gather any community input. I will work with people from the City of Gary, community leaders, teachers, and students to get the public involved. The surveys will not be

extensive and will merely be to support my plan if it is suggested for implementation.

The survey sample will ideally include 25 people.

- Obtain the input of citizens, input of organizations such as the Gary Citizens Workers Union, and photos of the area to be rehabilitated.

I sent out 100 letters to citizens in the 46404 and 46407 area codes using voter registration records. I chose these two areas because I went to school in one of those area codes, and lived in another so I saw the high abandonment in both areas. The letters served as a means to encourage people to attend the city council meeting and partake in my survey. As I signed the letters and mailed them out, I was concerned about the accuracy of the addresses that I had been given. For all I knew, the people who had registered under those address could have moved. I was very worried that the letters would not make it into the hands of a citizen or that they would see a strange envelope and toss it out as junk mail, but I took the chance anyway.

After the letters were sent out, I traveled to Indiana to collect the data. On March 3rd, I attended the city council meeting, gave my spiel, and requested people to fill out my survey but also had conversations with people over the phone and in-person. Some people were not inclined to wait and fill out the survey on the spot, but they were willing to complete the survey over the phone, at a later date. In addition, I asked friends and family who live in the area to fill out my survey. I utilized them only after I decided that the five surveys gathered at the city council meeting were not enough data.

I learned in a previous course, Environmental Leadership, that using incentives to persuade people often works. With that in mind, I offered the incentive that if people filled out my survey then they would be entered into a drawing to win a \$25 visa gift card.

It turned out that the incentive of using the visa gift card was actually not a significant motivator for my survey. I was very disappointed with the amount of people filling out the survey, but I was happy that the people who did fill it out, genuinely wanted to help me.

The questions from the survey were:

- 1.) What do you think are the biggest problems in Gary, Indiana?
- 2.) What do you believe caused abandonment in Gary, Indiana?
- 3.) Are abandoned buildings a problem? If so, why?
- 4.) What are the best things about your community?
- 5.) What are the worst things about your community?
- 6.) If you had a large sum of money to invest in Gary what is the first thing that you would spend it on?
- 7.) What does community revitalization mean to you?
- 8.) What is the best way to revitalize Gary?
- 9.) What area in Gary, do you believe, has the greatest need?
- 10.) Which local organizations would you suggest as partners in a revitalization project?

Significance:

“The FHA decision, at its inception in the 1930’s to follow the practices of Realtors and lenders in redlining poor and minority urban neighborhoods in its housing insurance underwriting policies had as devastating an impact on these neighborhoods as did the federal urban renewal clearance program to those neighborhoods later demolished for redevelopment and for highways.” – Keating & Krumholz 1999

Most of the research that I have uncovered on Gary has been about racial studies, the decay of the city, and the impact of urban degradation on education. Some authors made recommendations, but none have addressed the social implications of the entire city, and none have researched the harm of abandoned buildings. The lack of previous literature on abandoned buildings of the area may limit my findings, but overall I believe that my research will provide new insight to the information which already exists on Gary and on urban revitalization at large.

Discussion:

I met Pat Anderson-Sifuentes, who works in the areas of planning and community development here in Lincoln, Nebraska. She gave me some pearls of wisdom about measures to avoid or mitigate abandonment in communities. The biggest considerations that I took away from my conversation with her are: the best way to fight abandonment is to get it before it starts, everyone in the community needs to work together (police, low-income people, educators, and landlords), and getting investors who care is key to turning neighborhoods around. In his book, *The Art of Revitalization*, Sean Zeilenbach suggests that there are institutional, social, and

personal factors which play into the ability of a community to be revitalized (Zeilenbach, 2000, p. 223). Using her ideas, concepts from *The Art of Revitalization*, other community examples, and what I gathered from my conversations and surveys in Gary, I developed a list of goals for revitalizing the city.

- 1.) Create unity among banks (to gain capital), community development organizations (for the creation of partnerships), churches (for the services to the community, spiritual relief, and stability that they provide), social service agencies (to address the needs of individuals), foundations (for added investments and financial support), and city governments (police, policy makers etc.), as proposed by Zeilenbach, and landlords (to be held accountable in renting to worthy tenants, working to avoid abandonment, and holding some stake in the success of the community) as proposed by Anderson-Sifuentes. A great way to get landlord accountable for their actions, and preventing abandonment, is to implement laws such as those in Lincoln, Nebraska. The laws in Lincoln state that the landlord must keep residences in habitable condition, in compliance with local housing codes, and produce a checklist regarding the condition of the housing to the tenant (Beran 2010).
- 2.) Put active businesses in rejuvenated buildings by getting state, federal, and private support for entrepreneurs, and thus create jobs. One problem that was evident in the survey results was unemployment. The levels of poverty, as introduced by census records, in the introduction support this concern from citizens. Gary can follow the example of Boston's Dudley Square by putting new businesses in rejuvenated buildings and attracting a walking customer base. They were able to achieve this by attracting investors from remodeling, operating on a mixed-use design, and promoting the area to

tourists. Dudley square had many similarities to Gary in terms of unemployment, abandonment, disinvestment, and unequal environmental burdens (US Dept. of Urban Housing Development 2015). Gary can learn from their improvements in aesthetics, walkability, and usability.

3.) Minimize gentrification and maintain the minority population currently in the area.

Detroit has undergone significant revitalization efforts after a similar occurrence with the car industry as Gary experienced with the steel industry. They have been able to minimize gentrification by keeping affordable prices on rehabbed buildings so that low-income families are able to continuously reside there. They have also made significant efforts to make the neighborhoods mixed-use and promote economic activity (Project for Public Spaces 2015).

These goals address most of the results from the surveys. Everyone agreed that abandonment is a problem in Gary, three people listed unemployment as a problem, and one person noted the education system and youth development as major problems. Everyone but one person seemed to be really stumped by what the best method of revitalization is. The one person who was not stumped said that creating jobs is the best method of revitalization. Everyone also listed different areas of being the neighborhood with the most need. I believe that the neighborhood in most need being unclear is indicative of the city's vast need throughout.

During the course of my research Gary made a notable stride in the realm of abandoned buildings. The Sheraton Hotel, one of the abandoned building that I depicted in my research proposal, was knocked down. Initially, I was sad to find that out. I thought that all the research I had been doing would be pointless if someone else had already had the idea. Then I realized that

I should not worry about that. The fact that the Sheraton hotel was knocked down, using federal funds, shows that there is a push for community revitalization in regard to abandoned buildings. That stride only strengthens the findings of my research, and it still remains that 20% of the buildings in Gary, Indiana are abandoned with an addition 37% of buildings considered blighted (Harris 2015). There is still considerable work to be done. At the city council meeting that I attended, it was announced that the city would be holding a public gathering to celebrate the accomplishment, but also to get citizen feedback on what to do with the vacant space. I commended the city on those things and would like to see more of that occur in the city. It is great to knock down dilapidated wastes of space, but it is even better to take the vote of the community when deciding how the space should then be used.

I was not able to attend the event asking for the input of the public, but I do have some information on uses of vacant land in Boston. According to a HUD article “Dudley Square residents have spearheaded or been intimately involved in projects that repurposed abandoned or distressed neighborhood properties” (EDGE, 2014). They have even been able to keep the neighborhood affordable for low-income residents. Though Dudley Square is not exactly like Gary, the two areas have experienced very similar trends in loss of investment. Plans cannot be transplanted from neighborhood to neighborhood, but the plan can be looked at as a source of inspiration and motivation for Gary. The process basically fit the steps of demolition, construction, and renovation. That same basic model can be applied in Gary. Affordable housing can be placed where old blighted abandoned areas used to be and design them to LEED certification standards i.e. solar paneling, water recycling, green roofs, and natural light.

I got the city's perspective from talking to the City Planner for Gary, Indiana Dwayne Williams. He said that they would rather have buildings than anything because that is where the city gets its tax base from. Although the city planner did inform me that the comprehensive plan does not include a section on fixing the problem of abandoned buildings, he did not actually give me a copy of the comprehensive plan for the city.

Funding:

Boston was able to fund their revitalization project using federal bonds (U.S. Dept. of Urban Housing Development 2015). Gary was also able to fund their project to knock down the Sheraton Hotel using federal funding. The United States is very interested in helping to revitalize blighted areas right now with the Building Neighborhoods of Opportunity initiative introduced in 2011. The federal government has identified three measures to achieve the maximum impact from federal funding for revitalization projects. Those three measures are: Better align federal program requirements and timing, geographic targeting, and results frameworks for neighborhood revitalization activities; clarify federal rules and regulations and dispel myths that often hinder redevelopment efforts; and target flexible federal funding to support community capacity building, data management, and infrastructure development essential for neighborhood revitalization to succeed. (Whitehouse Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative Report 2011, page 13).

Limitations:

Revitalization, as one quickly realizes, has numerous considerations, relations, and hurdles. One cannot simply start the revitalization process without researching public desires, existing infrastructure and environmental needs of the region, current technology, policy, social norms, cultural dynamics, and economics. There are probably many more factors which have yet to be discovered. Due to time constraints I was not able to address all of the sensitive variables involved in the rehabilitation process. Sample size could have been another limitation in addition to time. The population in Gary is roughly eighty thousand people. The 8 surveys that I was able to collect will not completely represent the opinion and desires of the overall community, but it is a good start and will be suitable for the purposes of this research, in addition to case studies from other community revitalization plans.

Areas of Improvement and Suggestions for Future Research:

One thing that went wrong in this research was my timeline. I spent time trying to coordinate my own meeting instead of working within the confines of what already existed, which was difficult from a distance. By the time that I ended up deciding to survey at the city council meeting, it was less than 2 weeks away, and that moved my timeline forward by 3 weeks. I did send out letters, but I heard from at least one person that her letter did not arrive until after the meeting had already passed. That makes one wonder how many other people also did not receive their letters on time. I also only sent out 100 letters, due to financial constraints, and with

the goal of 25 surveys a better number of letter to send out would have been 500. I ended up receiving only 5 surveys from the city council meeting and an additional 3 from friends living in the area.

I think that there is a lot of room to add to the findings of this research, and for future research I would suggest being on-site. One of the constraints of this research was distance. It would have been easier to develop citizen engagement and to get meetings, if I were closer. Some of the best researches included living in the area of question.

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Appendix:

The following is a copy of the letter that was sent out to citizens.

2.25.2015

Dear Citizen of Gary,

Would you like the opportunity to gain money and help your city? If so, read on. My name is Tatiana Height and I graduated from Gary's West Side High School in 2011. I am currently a senior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduating in May. For my senior thesis, I am researching revitalizing Gary, Indiana by repurposing abandoned buildings and I want to hear from you. I will be at the Gary Common Council meeting on Tuesday March 3rd, 2015 to take surveys of your opinion on abandoned buildings and what can be done with them. The meeting is at 6 p.m. on the second floor of city hall. Please be in attendance in order to help with my research and influence what happens in the city. Everyone who completes a survey will be entered in a drawing for a \$25 visa gift card. Those who do not win the gift card will still gain the value of having your ideas potentially change the city of Gary for the better.

P.S.

These meetings are public and I am in no way affiliated with Gary's city government.

Thank you for your time!

Tatiana Height

