



West Side Blight Designation



City of Laramie
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AVI, PC.

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Introduction



The State of Wyoming authorizes communities to create Urban Renewal Agencies and summarizes the Urban Renewal Powers in Wyoming Stat. § 15-9-101 through § 15-9-137. The powers authorized in the Wyoming Urban Renewal Code allow municipalities to declare areas as blighted and use tools, such as tax increment financing, to reinvest in these blighted areas. The City of Laramie established an Urban Renewal Agency (URA) in September of 2022 through an amendment to City Code outlining the duties and abilities of the URA and an initiative resolution determining blight, fulfilling Wyoming Stat. § 15-9-106. The creation of the URA led to the North 4th Street Plan and Project Area being adopted and the commencement of the first Urban Renewal Project in the City of Laramie.

In order for an area to be eligible to be an Urban Renewal Project, it must be determined blighted or slummed per Wyoming Stat. § 15-9-107. This blight study serves to overview and establish West Side as an area of the community that is eligible for an Urban Renewal Project.

The study will outline requirements as defined in State Statutes, overviews the methodology for determining blight, overviews where blight has been identified, and draws conclusions that the rehabilitation of the blighted area is within the best interests of the community. It is important to note that Urban Renewal Projects may occur in more areas than those identified in this study and this study and resolution do not define a specific Urban Renewal Project or Plan.

State Statutes

The State of Wyoming authorizes communities to create Urban Renewal Agencies and utilize the power of the agency in Wyoming Stat. § 159-101 through § 15-9-137. However, the sections relevant to this blight study expansion include WY Stat. § 15-9-103 and WY Stat. § 15-9-107. WY Stat. § 15-9-107 explains:

An urban renewal project for an urban renewal area shall not be planned or initiated unless the governing body, by resolution, has determined the area to be a slum area or a blighted area or a combination thereof and designated it as appropriate for an urban renewal project. A municipality shall not acquire real property for any urban renewal project unless the local governing body has approved the urban renewal project in accordance with W.S. 15-9-110.

- WY Stat. § 15-9-107

To aide in determining what constitutes a slum or blighted area, WY Stat. § 15-9-103 contains the definition of “blighted area” and “slum area”. Specifically, the section describes a blighted area as:

(iii) “Blighted area” means an area which by reason of the presence of a substantial number of slums, deteriorated or deteriorating structures, predominance of defective or inadequate street layout, faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility or usefulness, unsanitary or unsafe conditions, deterioration of site or other improvements, diversity of ownership, tax or special assessments, delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land, defective or unusual conditions of title, or the existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes, or any combination of those factors, substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of a municipality, retards the provision of housing accommodations or constitutes an economic or social liability and is a menace to the public health, safety, morals or welfare in its present condition and use. However, if the blighted area consists of open land, the conditions contained in W.S. 15-9-110(b) apply and any disaster area referred to in W.S. 15-9-112 constitutes a “blighted area”;

- WY Stat. § 15-9-103

And goes on to define a slum area as:

(xvi) “Slum area” means an area in which there is a predominance of buildings or improvements, whether residential or nonresidential, which by reason of dilapidation, deterioration, age or obsolescence, inadequate provision for ventilation, light, air, sanitation, or open spaces, high density of population and overcrowding, or the existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes, or any combination of those factors is conducive to ill health and is detrimental to the public safety, morals or welfare;

- WY Stat. § 15-9-103

This study uses the definitions to support the findings that WY Stat. § 15-9-107 requires. The remainder of the Wyoming Urban Renewal Code details the powers permitted by the Urban Renewal Agency and do not maintain substantial relevance to the resolution determining blight; however, staff recommends the Governing Body familiarize themselves with these statutes.

Methodology

To identify blight areas and slum areas in the community, the project team surveyed the nine (9) conditions of blight identified in the definitions section of the Wyoming Urban Renewal Code. Staff did not utilize the conditions of slum areas as they were similar to those of blight. The nine conditions with one option of “Other” include:

- *Deteriorated or Deteriorating Structures*
- *Predominance of Defective or Inadequate Street Layout*
- *Faulty Lot Layout in Relation to Size, Accessibility or Usefulness*
- *Unsanitary or Unsafe Conditions*
- *Deterioration of Site or Other Improvements*
- *Diversity of Ownership, Tax or Other Special Assessments*
- *Delinquency Exceeding the Fair Value of the Land*
- *Defective or Unusual Conditions of Title*
- *The Existence of Conditions which Endanger Life or Property by Fire and other causes*
- *Other*

The other option pertained to the section of the definition that stated, “*or any combination of those factors, substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of a municipality, retards the provision of housing accommodations or constitutes an economic or social liability and is a menace to the public health, safety, morals or welfare in its present condition and use,*” (WY Stat. § 15-9-103(iii)). Unlike other neighboring states, notably Colorado, the Wyoming Urban Renewal Code does not establish a threshold for the number of blight conditions that must be found to qualify an area for Urban Renewal. Based on this, if any one of the nine conditions are identified on the site, it is sufficient to determine the area as blighted.



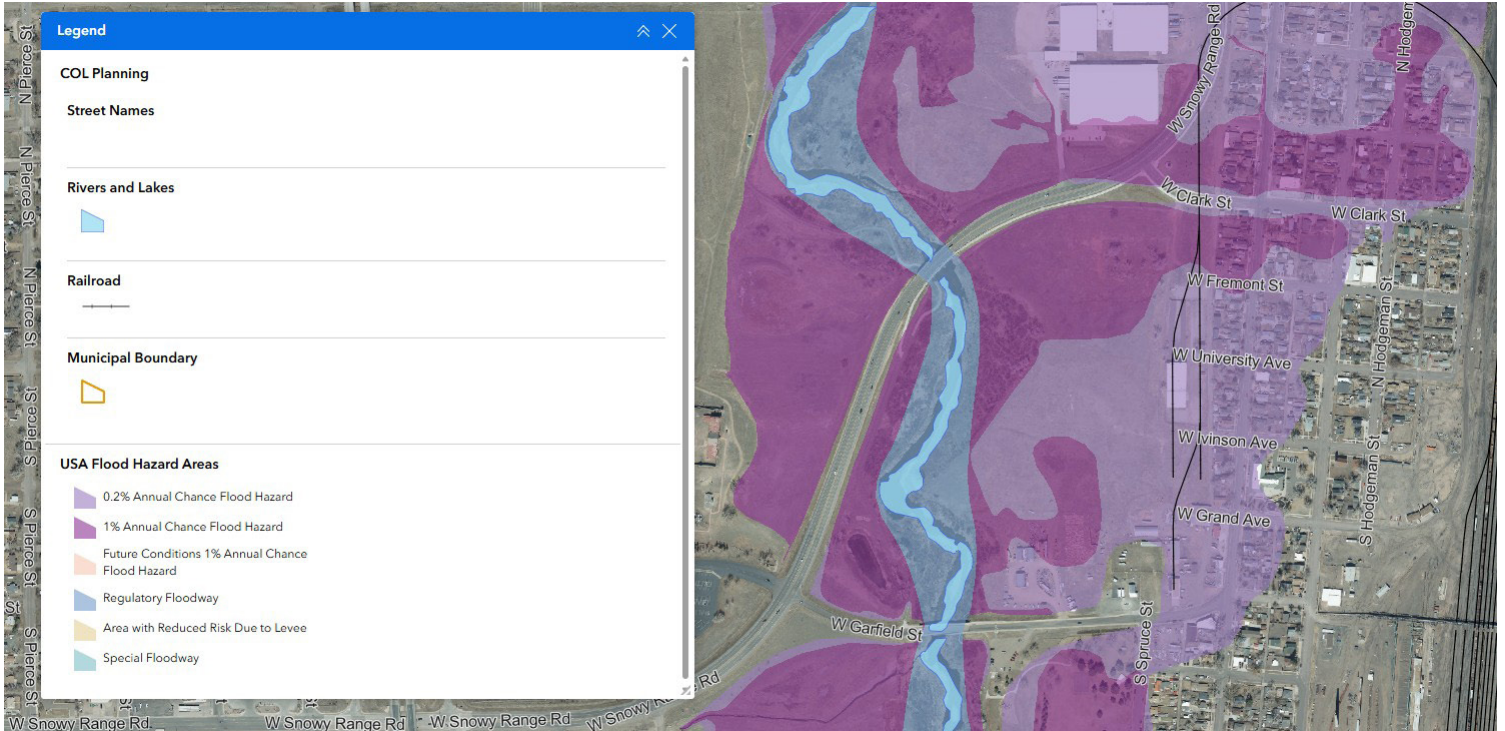
Conditions Survey

The initial resolution identifying blight in Laramie states: “That the Governing Body of the City of Laramie, Wyoming hereby finds and declares “blight,” as defined by Wyoming Statute §15-9-103(iii), exists within the boundaries of the City of Laramie and that the rehabilitation, conservation, redevelopment or a combination thereof of the area or areas is necessary in the interests of public health, safety, morals or welfare of our residents. “ This yields that an Urban Renewal Plan and Project may occur anywhere within the community. However, to illustrate the need for Urban Renewal assistance in the area, the image below illustrates the conditions of blight for the subject property. The overview shows that the site contains predominance of defective or inadequate street layout; faulty lot layout in relation to size, accessibility or usefulness; and unsanitary or unsafe conditions. The description of each condition on the blight study can be found on the following page.



Conditions Survey

The following conditions of blight at the bottom of the page are exhibited on the subject property. The image below shows the extensive nature of the floodplain on the property. An urban renewal plan may be used to mitigate flooding concerns on and adjacent to the subject property.



1. Predominance of Defective or Inadequate Street Layout

The subject area includes defective street layout with limited through connections to support new investment. The West Side street network is largely built out without connections to the subject property. The lack of an adequate street layout through the area not only lends itself to poor connectivity, but also yields poor utility connections in the area as they are often located within street right-of-ways.

2. Faulty Lot Layout in Relation to Size Accessibility or Usefulness

Directly related to the inadequate street layout is the faulty lot layout in relation to size, accessibility, and usefulness. New development may build off the existing network in West Laramie to remedy the accessibility of the entire site.

3. Unsanitary or Unsafe Conditions

The prevalence of the floodplain yields unsanitary or unsafe conditions on the subject property. Any development on site would require extensive mitigation efforts and stormwater enhancement to remedy this condition of blight. The floodplain can be seen as a condition that is unsafe to property and life.

Conclusions

The West Side study area exhibits the existence of blight in the community. Although largely undeveloped, the lack of utilities and existence of the floodplain yield conditions that the property is likely cost prohibitive to develop without the use of the powers outlined in the Wyoming Urban Renewal Code. The rehabilitation, conservation, or redevelopment of the subject property would not only benefit the community, but is necessary to for the health, safety, welfare, and morals of the community. The use of the Wyoming Urban Renewal Code can facilitate the development of the area through several of the tools enabled by the legislation, namely tax increment financing. Staff is satisfied the report meets and exceeds the mandate for the establishing blight and slum by the governing body found in WY Stat. § 15-9-107 and recommends approval of the resolution.

