



Town of Ware

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Understanding a “Slum and Blight” Designation

What does this mean for my property?

The simple answer is “nothing”. The longer answer is that it makes the Town eligible and more competitive for federal funding. Under the federal Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG), one of three CDBG National Objectives must be met in order to be eligible for funding. These are 1) Benefit to Low and Moderate Income Persons 2) Prevention and/or the Elimination of Slum and Blight or 3) Urgent or Critical Need.

Unfortunately, not all desired projects predominately benefit persons of low and moderate income and projects deemed as urgent or critical are typically the result of an unforeseen disaster such as a flood, tornado, or hurricane. However, an area which meets the Commonwealth’s definition of a “substandard, blighted, or decadent” area qualifies under the federal CDBG National Objective of the Prevention and/or Elimination of Slum and Blight. **It does not mean the area designated is a slum.** Under the federal standard, a mere 25% of properties must be in observable, deteriorating condition and/or abandonment. Properties built prior to 1978 are presumed to have lead and are considered to be a deficiency. Similarly, known brownfield sites, deteriorating public facilities (streets, sidewalks, water, sewer, drainage) and high turnover and/or vacancy rates are contributing factors to meeting the Commonwealth’s definition of a substandard, blighted, or decadent area.

If my property is included in the designated area, does that mean my home or business is “blighted”? No. Blight is a legal term used solely for the purposes of determining whether a community can qualify for certain funding for redevelopment. Some areas that qualify for redevelopment have well-maintained homes and businesses interspersed among deteriorating structures.

Is Ware alone in this designation? Absolutely not! Spencer, Montague, Adams, and other towns have similarly-designated areas of those communities in order to make them more competitive for funding and to allow them to do projects which they could not do otherwise, such as demolition and redevelopment. A number of years ago, Hardwick designated a section of Gilbertville as “slum and blight” which allowed the town to purchase a vacant and abandoned lot and convert it into a landscaped parking lot for area residents and businesses. Spencer is looking at numerous downtown improvements as a result of their designation, and more recently, South Hadley considered the same for the Falls area, but fell short of qualifying.

Looking beyond Massachusetts: Wilton, ME, South Norwalk, CT, and Steamboat Springs, CO have areas designated as slum and blight. The following are excerpts from local news articles:

Wilton, Maine

Listed as fourth among the ten prettiest villages in central Maine in a *Kennebec Journal* feature in 2012, Wilton, recently voted to accept the designation “slum and blight” because it was the only way to qualify for Community Development Block Grant funding—much needed federal funds to improve the infrastructure of the downtown area.



South Norwalk, Connecticut



Norwalk City Council designated South Norwalk as a slum/blighted area in accordance with the guidelines set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Although some council members were not pleased with doing so, they realized it was a way “to open the window of opportunity” to bring in federal funding. At stake is millions of dollars to remediate environmental contamination and redevelop abandoned and/or underutilized properties.

Steamboat Springs, Colorado



Poor pedestrian lighting, missing sidewalks, peeling paint, crumbling windows and some crumbling foundations in downtown, inadequate curbing and sidewalks, and the presence of a flood zone are some of the things that have helped downtown Steamboat Springs join Colorado's long and growing list of blighted areas.

According to local officials, Steamboat Springs and several other places across the state have sought out the designation because of the significant benefits a blight designation brings. Main Street Steamboat Springs Manager, Tracy Barnett recognizes that the word "blight" conjures up



images of abandoned buildings and slums like you see in urban places such as Detroit. However, in the context of urban renewal, to authorities in Colorado, the word's meaning is more complex and open to interpretation. Under the law, "blight" is anything that "substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of the municipality".

So what does this all mean?

It means that slum and blight are dirty words that most cities and towns would seem to want to avoid. It does not mean that a city or town is, in fact, a slum. Steamboat Springs, Wilton, Norwalk and, yes, the Town of Ware, as well as hundreds, if not thousands, of places across the country have sought out this designation because of the significant redevelopment benefits and that can result. The goal now is to use this designation to make those improvements and show that Ware is truly "The Town That Can't Be Licked"!