

June 27, 2012

**To:** Chair Ruble and CPED Committee Members.  
CPED Committee  
District 5 Planning Council

**From:** Nancy Finch

**Re:** Developer proposal for 697 E. Cook Avenue  
Payne/Phalen neighborhood.

I attended the previous CPED meeting (June 5, 2012) during which a proposal was introduced to permit BB Housing to rehab an HRA property at 697 E. Cook Avenue. The few remaining homeowners and I have serious concerns about this proposal and respectfully request that the committee evaluate the potential ramifications of this plan.

I am a 30-year resident of the Payne/Phalen neighborhood and I have witnessed the deterioration of my community over time. My neighborhood has changed from significant home ownership to a majority of absentee-landlord properties. The majority of these absentee landlords rent to Section 8 tenants. The reason for this is that Section 8 is a government voucher program which guarantees housing subsidy payments directly to landlords. It is a guaranteed income. Documentation of the current percentage of Section 8 rental housing pertaining to zip code 55106 (Payne/Phalen) can be seen in the attached graphs and maps.

As the volume of rental housing has increased exponentially, we have seen a significant rise in drug dealing, vandalism, gun violence, murder, gangs, and nuisance noise. All types of crimes have been well documented through 911 calls and police reports, and are a matter of public record. The property at 697 E. Cook Avenue, in particular, has had at least three tenants over approximately eight years, and during that time there have been 160 calls to the address and 329 to the intersection (per Senior Commander Neuberger, Eastern District).

Aside from issues of crime, absentee-landlord properties bring with them the problem of infrastructure deterioration. These rental properties tend to be recycled over and over again, "and are frequently leased by dysfunctional families who have never lived outside public housing" (Source: "Subsidizing Blight" <http://www.governing.com/topics/health-human-services/housing/Subsidizing-Blight.html>). The pattern seems to be that the absentee landlords make a significant profit over time and then let the property disintegrate, resulting in uninhabitable, vacant housing.

In an article titled "Subsidizing Blight" (Source: <http://www.governing.com/topics/health-human-services/housing/Subsidizing-Blight.html>), Ed Rutkowski, who heads a community development corporation in Baltimore, Maryland states, "Section 8 is suppose to deconcentrate poverty. It actually reconcentrates it—in struggling

neighborhoods such as his. At best, this has a destabilizing effect. At worst, it can drive middle-class residents out and turn the entire area into a slum. Once a neighborhood has some problems, Section 8 accelerates those problems”.

I have serious concerns about the BB Housing rehab proposal. This would continue the cycle of rental property on my block, and it is quite possible that the same problems will continue regardless of the nature of the rehab. In a 2011 Heritage Preservation Commission meeting, Michael Buelow, developer, BB Housing, was asked by Commissioner Trimble why he (Buelow) did not consider turning a particular property in the Dayton's Bluff neighborhood, back into a single-family home, “which is what the District Council has been hoping to work with HRA on to increase home ownership”.

(Source: Minutes of Heritage Preservation Commission, page 2, 5/26/2011). Mr. Buelow stated, “The only properties BB Housing rehabs for rentals are properties that are currently zoned as multi-family because they want to work with the neighborhood”. Clearly, this is contrary to working with the Dayton's Bluff neighborhood, as Commissioner Trimble had stated that the District Council has been “hoping to work with HRA to increase home ownership”. This clearly indicates that Mr. Buelow's only interest is in making a profit from multi-family housing.

Committee members, we need more owner-occupied homes here, and I would like you to consider a different vision for this property. Several years ago, I and my neighbors advocated for a home to be built across the street from my home, and Habitat For Humanity answered the call. A very nice single-family home was constructed there (701 E. Cook Avenue), and it has been thriving ever since. This is what I wish for this neighborhood, and in particular, my immediate block. I have contacted Mike Nelson at Habitat For Humanity, and he did express interest in the property at 697 E. Cook Avenue. I also spoke with Faithbuilders, Inc. which is another potential resource for this type of project.

I would like to propose that you consider this type of property conversion for 697 E. Cook Avenue, and I ask the Committee to facilitate communication between Habitat For Humanity and Faithbuilders, Inc, to bring back East side home ownership and thereby truly redevelop the neighborhood.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

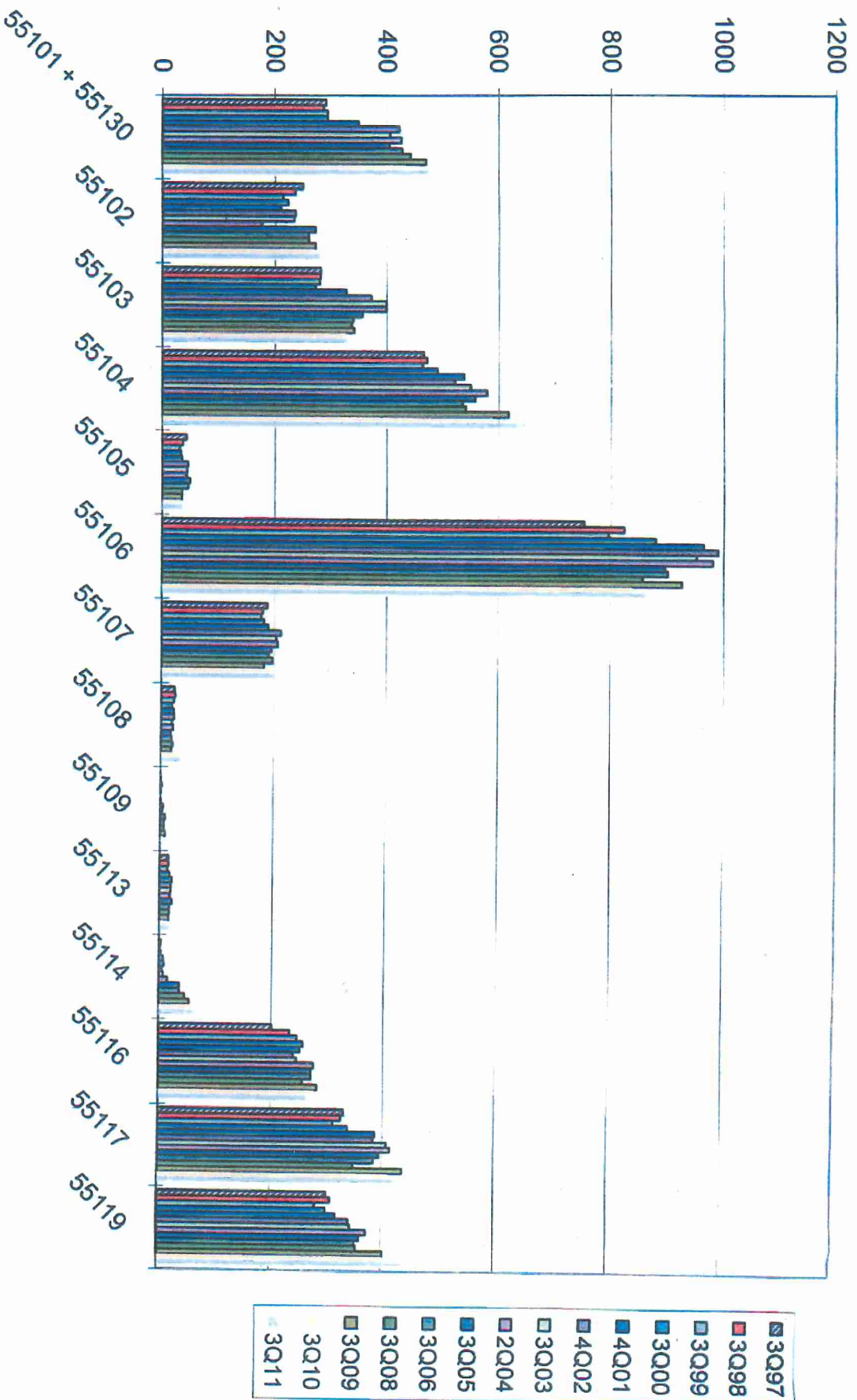


Nancy M. Finch  
Payne/Phalen Resident

Attachments.

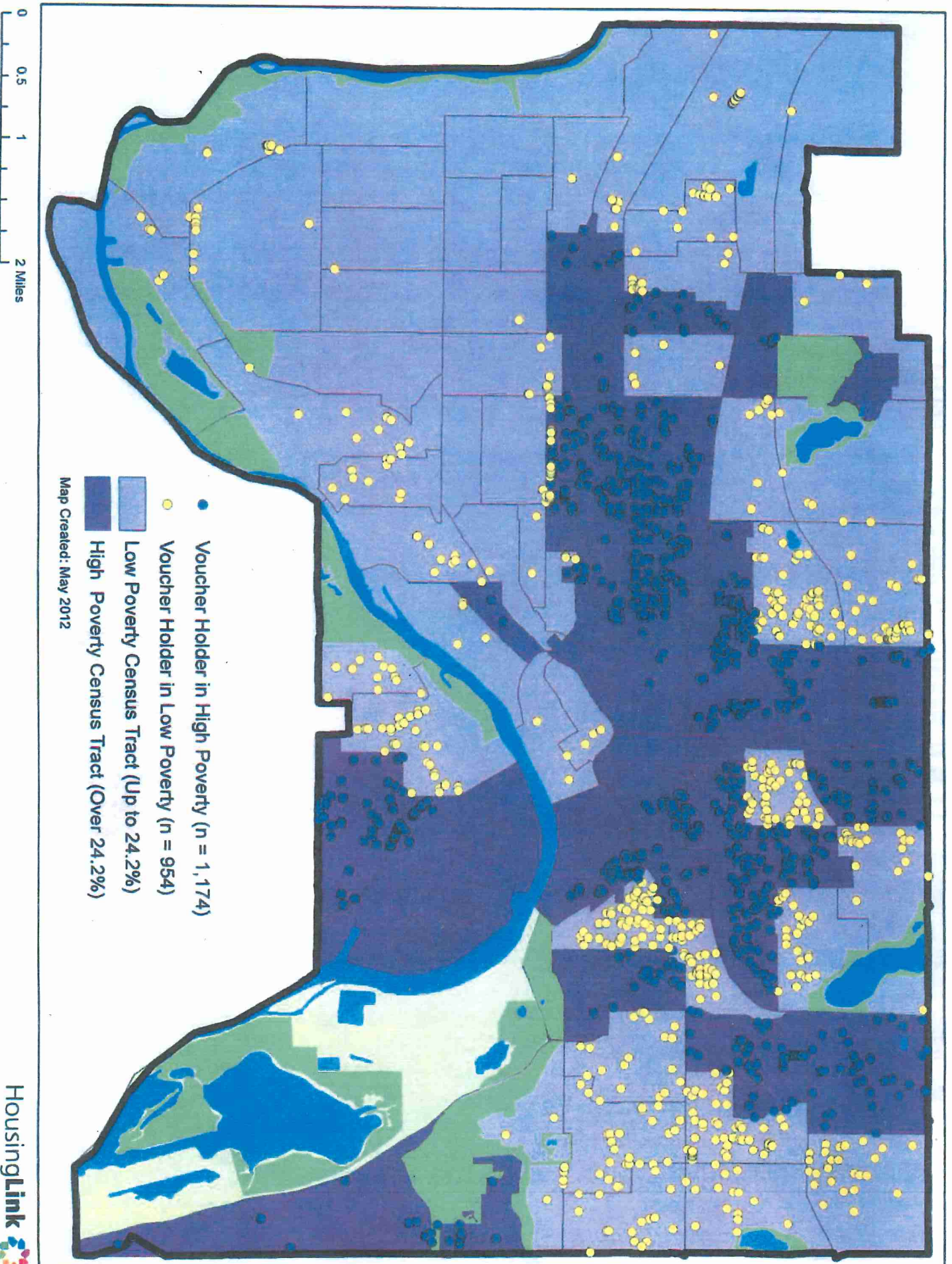


# SECTION 8 UTILIZATION BY ZIP CODE



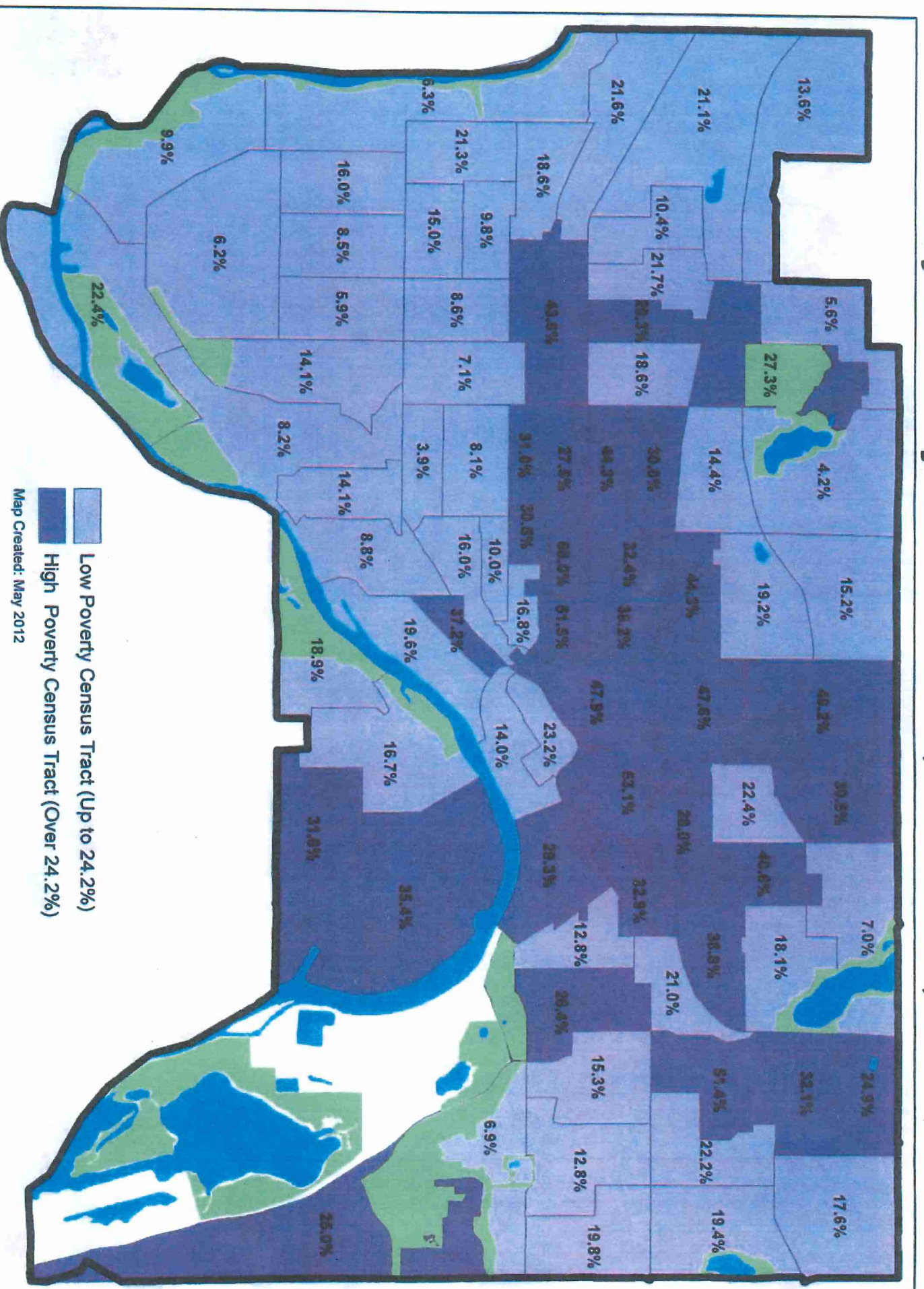
# 2011 Section 8 Voucher Holders with Children

## In High and Low Poverty Census Tracts

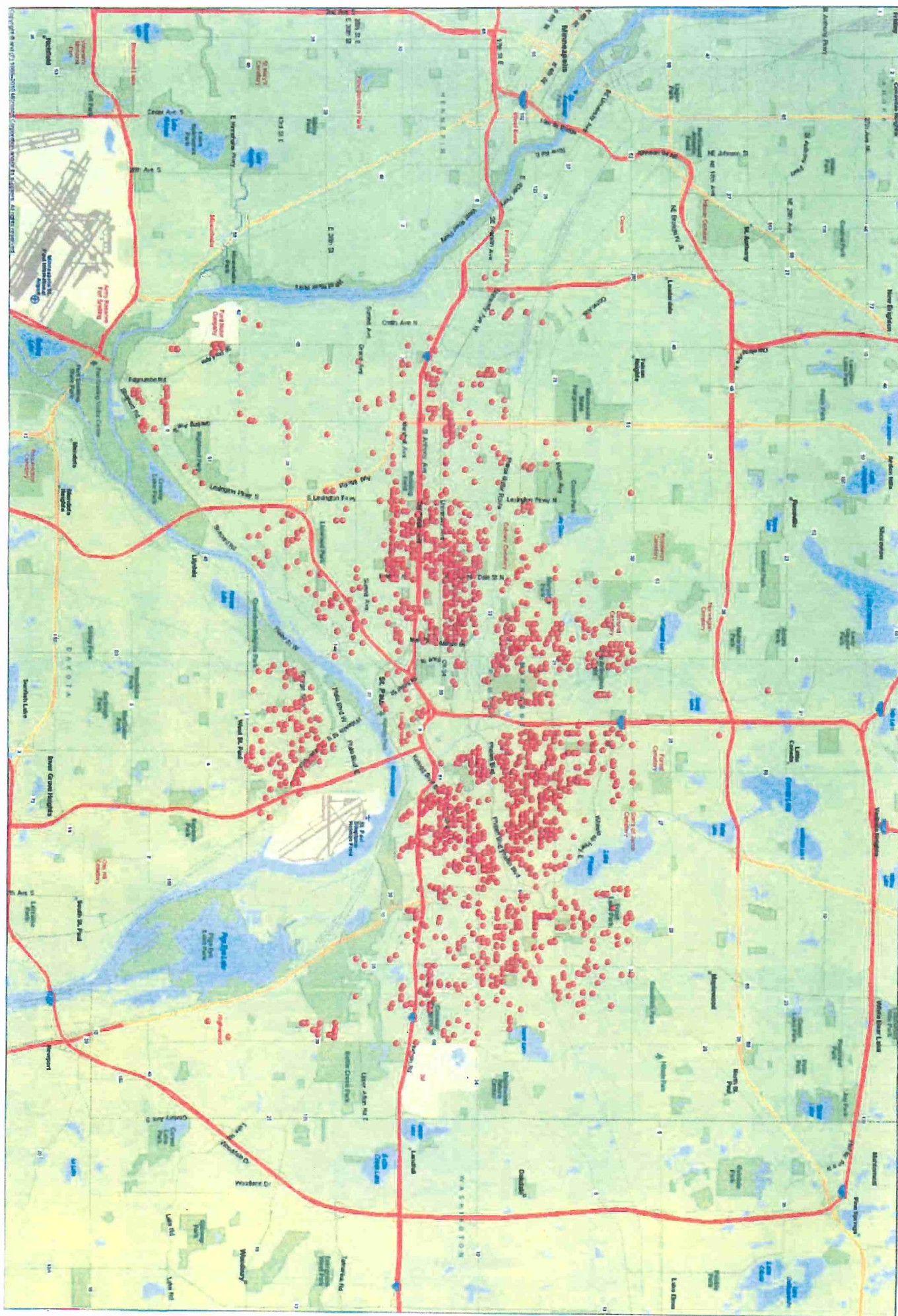




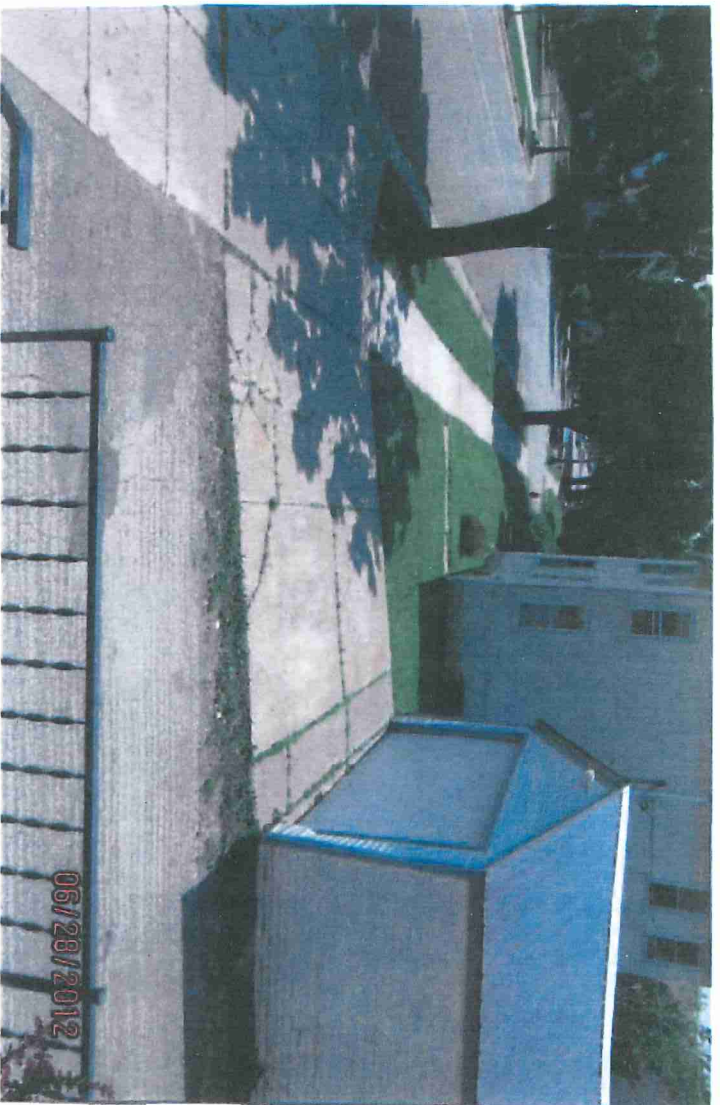
# 2010 Poverty Rates by Census Tract, Saint Paul, MN







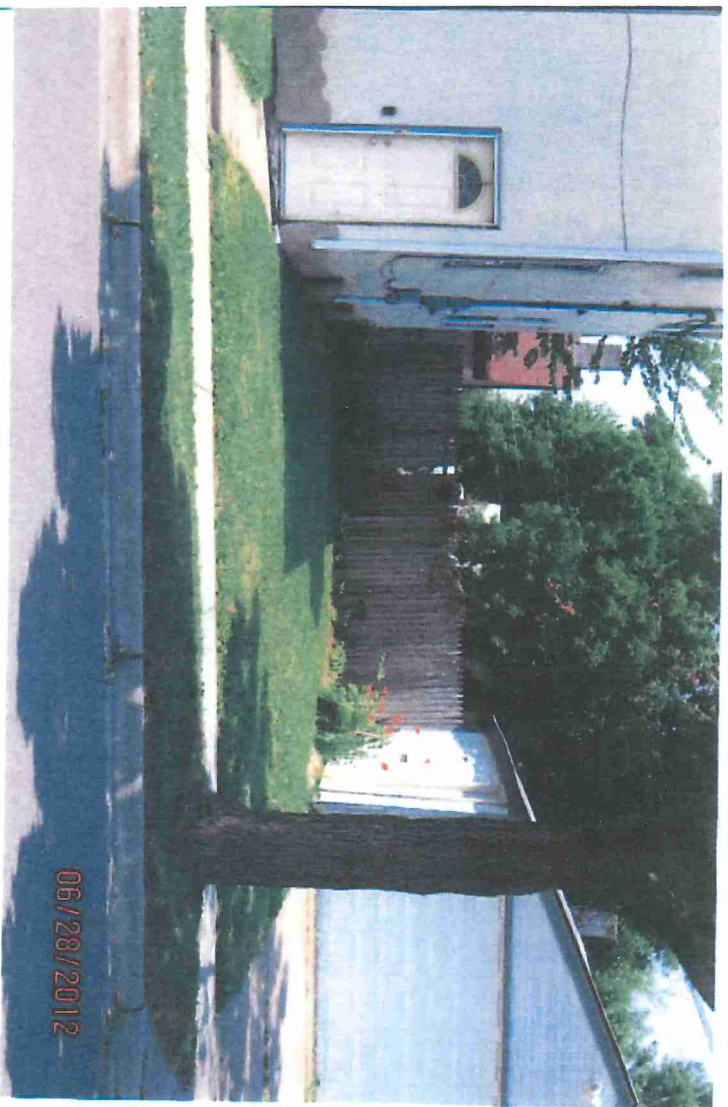




View of proximity of Nancy Finch's front porch from public sidewalk at Greenbrier St. side door of 697 E. Cook.

View of 697 E. Cook from Nancy Finch's front door. Proximity is just the distance of the alley. Noise and nuisance behaviors (ie., slamming car doors, working on cars in garage, parties, etc.) affect Nancy Finch's quality of life—unable to enjoy living in her own home.

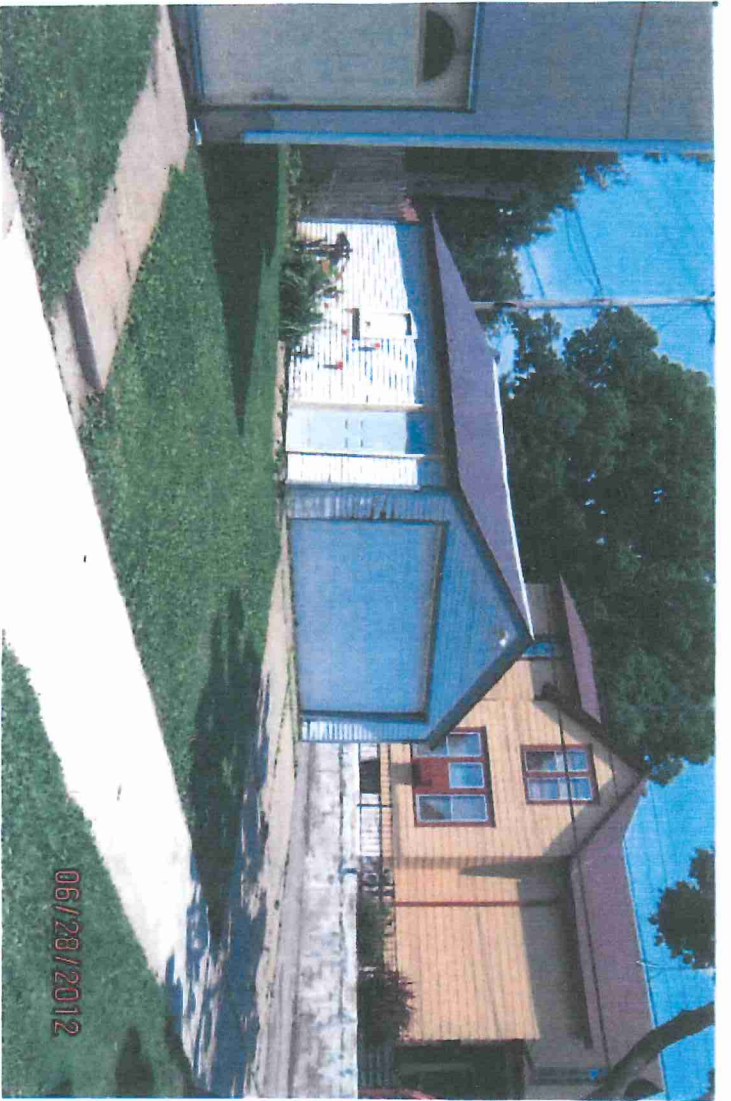




Tiny backyard at 697 E. Cook. Not enough room for two families, especially if they have children. No place to play. Nuisance noise and behaviors spill over onto Nancy Finch's property.







Typical example of how too many rental properties in one neighborhood elicits illegal dumping. Illegal dumping is chronic on my block due to majority of rental properties.



# Old house, new home

*Pioneer Press 6/29/12*



PIONEER PRESS PHOTOS: JEAN PIERI

Troy Luedke talks to a co-worker while driving a Swift Housemoving truck that pulled a 300-ton, two-story brick triplex from 384 S. Smith Ave. in St. Paul on Thursday. The vacant house, built in 1905 and donated to the city by Kraus-Anderson Construction, was moved a few blocks away to make room for development. It will be renovated into a single-family home.

This triplex will be renovated into a single-family home. Conversion of 697 E. Cook Avenue from a duplex to a single-family home, is possible!!



Calls for Service  
for Magnolia and Cook between Payne and Greenbrier 6/22/11-6/22/12

Incident Type	Total Number of calls	Percentage of Calls
Agg. Assault	5	2%
Agg. Ass. Domestic	1	0%
Arson	0	0%
Auto Theft	9	3%
Burglary	6	2%
Discharge of firearms	4	1%
Graffiti	1	0%
Narcotics	10	4%
Rape	3	1%
Robbery	0	0%
Domestics.	16	6%
Theft	7	3%
Vandalism	4	1%
Disordery/Sus act	102	38%
Fireworks	15	6%
Traffic/accidents	84	31%
Total	267	