

Hello, my name is Bobby Weaver. I currently own numerous properties in Pottsville PA and numerous companies conducting business in Pennsylvania.

We purchased a severely blighted property in Pottsville - we utilized all programs available to us, including purchase assistance by the local Redevelopment Authority, low interest loans by our local Redevelopment Corporation, partnership with our local credit union, and even outside investment. The project total was approximately \$700,000 with other smaller grants applied and approved. (such as a matching facade grant)

From the very beginning we knew that bringing this building up to current code standards was going to be a challenge - but to what extent and how terrible the experience would be - we weren't prepared. Throughout this process, we've contracted 3 architects, 4 different lawyers, and hundreds of man hours and building capital to be only half renovated and for us to be left in a state of confusion - both us and the City of Pottsville code officials.

Here is my summary and proposed direction of future solutions:

- Local code officials and 3rd party code inspectors are not educated to help and say yes, they are conditioned by fear of repercussions and the ambiguity of how the code is written - even when the code gives them the direct authority to make a decision - they simply won't.
- I was able to study the "Building Code Official Manual" for only 3 hours and pass the test to become a licensed code official in the state of Pennsylvania - this is an appallingly low threshold for city code officers in blighted communities who are basically the only road block between developers and saving these communities.
- The IBC (International Building Council) who writes the UCC (Uniform Construction Code) book is NOT law in PA and everyone we've had discussions with from local officers to L&I refuse to accept this. Pennsylvania has its own "UCC" and there is SIGNIFICANT difference between the PA Uniform Construction Code and the IBC's Uniform Construction Code. When a code officer or 3rd party code inspector has a question they are taught to call IBC instead of consulting PA State Law. The best example of this is that the IBC UCC Code Book, Chapter 1, which discusses the scope of code wasn't even adopted by Pennsylvania, yet we have licensed code officers quoting from it since it's the IBC UCC Code Book. PA created their own scope and use chapter, referenced as chapter 403 "Administration.

I know that solutions are rare, but here's what I proposed to be discussed for legislation. There are already provisions in the PA UCC code to help with the revitalization of "Historic & uncertified" buildings. These are properties built prior to April 27th, 1927 and being "uncertified" effectively means that an occupancy permit has never been issued. It provides automatic options to install hardwired interconnected fire alarms instead of sprinkler systems in R-1 and R-2 occupancies (residential) and even offers that to other groups (such as E, I, and H) and it removes sprinkler requirements for key redevelopment occupancy groups such as M (mercantile) A (assembly) and B (business). You can view the section of code here.

The problem is that even though that exists in the PA UCC code - it requires a local ordinance to even become effective. We are currently working on getting that ordinance passed in Pottsville - but it doesn't go nearly far enough.

I propose that a section be added to the PA UCC to encourage massive investment in blighted communities. The issue with investing in blighted properties is that vacant buildings are expected to immediately be brought up to current code standards, where most occupied buildings have gone through consistent improvement over decades keeping them compliant with code and making the cost of occupancy changes and use changes possible.

Cities could designate buildings, districts, or development zones as "blighted" which would unlock a new section of code. There are numerous options that could be explored that would have an immediate effect on the development of our blighted communities

1. Allowing a blighted building to be brought up to a still effective and less limiting code, such as the Fire & Panic act that was law when most of the blighted buildings were built or starting to fall into disrepair. These could be temporary occupancy permits that only last 10-20 years and then can be brought up to modern code.
2. There needs to be a cap to the cost of Fire Prevention and even ADA compliance on these blighted properties - we regularly see projects that over 50% of the total project cost is just fire systems (sprinkler requirements) and ADA requirements.
3. Allowing any of the prior uses of the building to be accepted as an existing and prior use. There is a great need for downtown living to encourage buildings - but a vacant 2nd floor apartment that was a dwelling space for 50 years and was temporarily an office, makes returning that to apartments require a complete modern code compliance.

Frankly, my personal belief is that the leaders of these blighted communities should just declare the ENTIRE cities as historic, and with the exception of ADA compliance, it gives almost all of the power to the code officials who need to be less afraid of litigation and encourage businesses, living, and development.

From the top level, revitalizing a blighted property is its own type of construction and set of challenges and should be regarded as such with the PA UCC code.