

November 9th, 2020
Mr. Daniel Ortiz, City Manager
City of Wasco, California

Re: Nuisance and Blighted Property Conditions at 650 H Street—Farm Workers Housing Complex

The City of Wasco is currently pursuing a claim under Title VI against California’s High-Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) to cover the costs to abate and remediate the property conditions caused by the vacant and abandoned housing units and related structures that were once farm worker housing for more than 200 families.

Based on conversations with you and your director of community development, I have been engaged by the City of Wasco to render an expert opinion about the conditions of this property, its immediate and long term impacts, and then determine whether these conditions, impacts and relevant facts support a conclusion that 650 H is a blighted property. Below I explain in more depth why and how the Farm Workers Housing Complex satisfies the classic definition of a blighted property, outline the current and future threats it poses to the health, safety and welfare of Wasco and its nearby residents and businesses and the short and longer term costs associated with remediating the property. I also outline how the Complex’s current blighted condition poses a social equity/environmental justice responsibility for the HSRA.

In the following letter I share my expert credentials, the specific questions that I seek to answer, my findings and a list of the evidence that I relied upon. I note that I offer this expert opinion letter and analysis in my capacity as the co-founder of the [Vacant Property Research Network](#) that represents 10+ years of collaboration with and among researchers, policymakers and practitioners exploring the past, present and future implications of vacant, abandoned and blighted properties.

Credentials and Qualifications

As my attached CV demonstrates, I have spent more than 35 years working directly with policymakers and practitioners around the issues of urban regeneration/neighborhood revitalization and the policies and programs to prevent, abate and reclaim vacant, abandoned and blighted properties. By exploring blighted properties through my different and diverse professional positions, I have a comprehensive and systematic perspective about the multiple dimensions of blighted properties. For example, as a Director of the City Attorney’s Code Enforcement Unit for the City of San Diego, I inspected dozens of substandard, vacant and abandoned properties and brought hundreds of criminal prosecutions and filed dozens of civil injunctions for violations of relevant state and local building, housing and health codes. Several of these code enforcement cases involved large apartment complexes and commercial properties similar in scale to the Wasco Farmworkers Housing Complex. I also drafted local ordinances, analyzed relevant state laws, and prepared legal and policy memoranda for city officials, including the mayor and city council.

During my seven years as Director of Community and Economic Development for the International City County Management Association (ICMA), I worked with dozens of diverse cities across the country

providing technical assistance around a wide variety of land use and urban planning issues, such as the redevelopment of brownfields (vacant and abandoned former industrial and commercial properties) and the reclamation of vacant properties. Based on this firsthand experience working with practitioners and policymakers I wrote dozens of policy reports and case studies and led numerous practitioner workshops and trainings.

I left ICMA to become an assistant research professor (professor of practice) for the Urban Planning Program at Virginia Tech (Northern Virginia Campus) where I began to take a deeper dive into the academic and policy research around vacant, abandoned and blighted properties. I also authored several academic articles for urban planning and policy journals as well as taught special courses on the urban regeneration of legacy cities, brownfields redevelopment, the foreclosure crisis and vacant properties. Thanks to support from the Ford Foundation I founded the [Vacant Properties Research Network](#) (VPRNetwork) as a virtual hub for researchers, policymakers and practitioners to collaborate, share lessons learned, brainstorm innovative solutions, and develop a national community of practice.

Among my extensive body of work through the VPRNetwork, I want to highlight four reports that have special relevance to this case, and reinforce my credential as a national expert on blighted properties: 1) [Charting the Multiple Meanings of Blight](#)—A National Literature Review of Addressing the Community Impacts of Blighted Properties (2015); 2) [The Basics of Blight](#) (2016); 3) [Urban Blight and Public Health](#) (2017); and 4) [Strategic Housing Code Enforcement and Public Health](#) (2018).

In addition to policy reports and articles, I continue to provide technical assistance to local government officials and their nonprofit partners in shaping specific strategies for addressing blighted properties. I am especially proud of my work in Memphis (2015-2016) in helping community leaders design and develop the nation's first [Blight Elimination Charter](#) and also my close partnership with Neighborhood Preservation, Inc. and the University of Memphis School of Law that led to the creation of the [Strategic Code Enforcement Management Academy \(SCEMA\)](#).

Evidence Relied Upon

Because of the COVID-19 Pandemic I could not travel to tour the property and meet in person with the relevant stakeholders and actors within and outside of city hall. However, I was able to virtually tour the property and talk with the key actors via Zoom calls. Thanks to technology and solid documentation organized by the City of Wasco, I had sufficient evidence to support my expert opinion. Below are the major sources that I relied upon:

- Conversations with City of Wasco—City Manager, Director of Community Development, and Code Enforcement Officers.
- Documents: the Title VI complaint, crime report summaries, [press releases](#), community/business owner statement, a detailed map of the site and city map, etc.
- Websites: The [City's web page](#) devoted to the plight of the Farmworkers Housing Complex and local [news reports](#) about the relocation of the farmworkers.
- Videos and Photos: [in-depth property inspection video](#), including drone footage of the complex and neighborhood; associated photos of the interior and exterior of the property provided by

city officials; and a tour via Google Earth before relocation when the Complex was well maintained and not a blighted property.

Questions and Findings

1) **BLIGHTED PROPERTY: Is the former Wasco Farmworkers Housing Complex at 650 H Street currently a blighted property?**

As a national expert in the practice, policy and research surrounding vacant and abandoned properties, I conclude the Wasco Farmworkers Housing Complex is a blighted property.

Below I outline three critical dimensions that together form the basis for determining whether a property is blighted—property conditions, property status, and behaviors on the property. In many respects, the interaction of these three elements can quickly transform a particular property into a blighted property. As I discuss below, all three elements are present at the Wasco Farmworker Housing Complex. Based on my 25+ year career and experience, I would also rank the Wasco Farmworker Housing Complex as an 8 on a blighted property severity scale of 1-10, with 10 representing imminent threats to life and safety.

Property conditions: Within the academic and policy literature, a blighted property often refers to property conditions that pose threats to the health, safety and general welfare of the occupants and surrounding residents. The underlying policy and legal foundation of blighted property can be found in the general concepts of public nuisance. A public nuisance is defined as any activity/behavior or use of property that affects an entire community or neighborhood, that injures the community's health and welfare, and/or interferes with the free use of property (e.g., California Civil Code section 3480). The conditions of the property itself can become a public nuisance by overt action or lack of action to maintain the property.

Many state statutes and local ordinances provide more specific applications of these concepts and terms by classifying certain types of deteriorating, dilapidated buildings and the surrounding premises as unsafe, substandard, and/or uninhabitable. Common property conditions found across these laws and policies include lack of utilities, broken windows/doors, infestations of vermin, fire risk, structural problems, etc. A critical factor is whether the property is vacant and/or abandoned, not occupied by lawful tenants and thus, would require substantial repairs and rehabilitation to make it habitable. [A good example is New Jersey's Abandoned Properties Rehabilitation Act.](#)

The definition of blighted properties within the academic and practice literature builds on these legal and policy foundations and relies on some of the same concepts, conditions, and terms. For example, California Health and Safety Code Section 33031 identifies buildings that are unsafe or unhealthy for persons to live in or work in and the conditions often include serious building code violations, dilapidation and deterioration caused by neglect, obsolescence, or construction, etc.

The gradual and then rapid deterioration of the Wasco Farmworkers Housing Complex exhibits many of the property conditions of a blighted property. All housing units, (except for two units with remaining holdover tenants), are not secured and most units have become vandalized with broken windows and doors. Thefts of major appliances and fixtures (stoves, refrigerators, water heaters, etc.) have left significant damage to interior walls. Spray painted graffiti and gang markings dot many of the interior walls. Most of the relocated tenants left behind furniture, clothes, books and

other personal belongings, (as they cleaned out and sorted through items they no longer needed), that now has become trash. Some of this trash, former belongings and appliances now dot the outside landscape of the complex.

Another critical step in my analysis involves information about the condition of the Wasco Farmworkers Housing Complex before or at the outset of the tenant relocation. According to my conversations with City of Wasco code enforcement officers who knew the complex well, they felt the overall property maintenance was good, normal, consistent with community standards in early 2018. I confirmed their assessment with a cursory review of the Complex via Google Earth that showed well kempt and green lawns, intact doors and windows, stucco exterior without any signs of graffiti or disrepairs, patio furniture, clothes on the lines, cars and trucks parked in the parking places, etc., all the indicators of a well maintained and occupied apartment complex.

While it is an old complex (built sometime in the 1940s), the city's code enforcement officers felt the property owner and manager (the Public Housing Authority) did a good job in making necessary repairs and keeping the grounds and public spaces generally clean. The city's code enforcement department had minimal cases or complaints except for isolated incidents of a junk, trash or debris and occasionally complaints from tenants. If the City received complaints about the complex, they would refer those to the PHA who had jurisdiction over the property. The city's code enforcement officers felt the PHA was responsive to any code enforcement related issues on the property. As tenant relocation began in January 2018 they recall the property was still pretty stable, but as more tenants left, the deterioration of the vacant and abandoned housing units and neglect of the property accelerated the complex's overall decline, putting it on a seemingly inevitable pathway to becoming a blighted property.

Property status: Whether a property is blighted often hinges on if the property is vacant and/or abandoned and the general neglect and lack of maintenance, control and/or possession of the property. Although occupied/partially occupied properties can be unsafe and/or substandard, once a property becomes vacant and/or abandoned it can drive and then accelerate its deterioration. Thus, a critical trigger for becoming a blighted property is when the property owner and/or property manager no longer takes care of/manages the property itself. Several reasons might drive property abandonment. Sometimes its market driven, like the 2008-2015 mortgage foreclosure crisis or sometimes its individual financial considerations or even the death of the property owner. Communities across the country saw similar situations/similar behaviors of property abandonment during the mortgage foreclosure crisis when homeowners walked away from their homes and banks/lending institutions were overwhelmed with the number of foreclosures.

Behaviors on the vacant property: All these factors come together and have perhaps the most visible and pernicious impact when the vacant and abandoned property becomes a haven for illicit, illegal and dangerous behaviors. Under the rubric of the Broken Window theory, social science researchers for the past 30+ years have examined the social and psychological dimensions of blighted properties and its relationship with crime, safety, and social order. They examine the relationship of environmental cues that attract criminal behavior and illicit activities. This includes *physical disorder* (such as abandoned buildings, graffiti, overgrown lots and litter) and how it can spawn or interact with *social disorders* (e.g., conduct and people such as panhandlers, drug sellers, prostitutes, or others who break the law or some social norm). Allowing a neglected or blighted

property to remain in such a condition means that no one cares or oversees the property and thus, this neglect sends signals for the potential opportunities for social disorder and criminal behavior.

In many respects the former Farmworker Housing Complex has become a textbook example of the Broken Window Theory. According to conversations with city officials and code enforcement officers and summaries of crime data that I reviewed, it seems the complex is now informally and illegally occupied by different groups (e.g., homeless, gang members, drifters, etc.) that routinely congregate at the complex. These groups engage in a range of illicit and illegal behaviors such as vandalizing the exterior and interior of the buildings and apartment units, the dealing and using of illegal drugs, stealing appliances, tagging gang symbols with graffiti, etc. Per the Broken Window Theory, the physical disorder empowers and emboldens the social disorder behaviors in a continuous cycle that can easily spin out of control; thus, the longer the property remains in a blighted condition, the greater the risks for serious illegal activities and injuries. Already city employees fear for their safety should they have to visit the property to make repairs or investigate complaints. For example, public works division staff have been accosted by the illegal tenants that now occupy the Complex. The same holds true for the employees of the surrounding businesses that are predominately minority and low incomes workers. In both cases the illegal behavior and occupancy of the property makes it difficult for these employees to do their jobs.

2) IMPACTS: Assuming you find the former Wasco Farmworkers Housing Complex at 650 H Street to be a blighted property, what are the short and longer-term impacts on individuals, the community and the city?

Research shows that blighted properties can cause a range of social, economic, and environmental health impacts. City officials, property owners, and community members in Wasco have begun to document the relatively recent impacts they have suffered as a result of the blighted conditions of the abandoned Farmworkers Housing Complex. Allowing the property to remain in its current condition, without immediate abatement and stabilization of the site, will only magnify these and other impacts. Thus, its important to not only consider and address the short-term harms, but document and take steps to address the longer-term impacts.

Economic impacts: Vacant, abandoned and blighted properties can cause different types of short- and longer-term economic harms. In the short term the City of Wasco has incurred a wide range of costs to stabilize the property and eventually abate/demolish the former Farmworker Housing Complex. Given the costs the city continues to incur, the Complex will have adverse economic reactions throughout the entire city. City officials are already shifting their budgets to cover these immediate, short term abatement costs. This means they may have to delay other funding priorities (such as capital improvements) as well as increase the risk of fiscal instability. For example, the estimated demolition costs of \$5-6 million would impinge on critical infrastructure projects, such as the drilling of four new municipal water wells at a total cost of \$18.5 million. Funds from this project would have to be diverted to demolish the Complex. The demolition costs could also adversely impact the city's law enforcement budget of only \$4.1 million and public safety costs for fire response and mitigation are projected to increase by 105% in the next year or two.

Beyond local government, property and business owners adjacent or nearby the blighted property at 650 H Street may also incur new costs related to loss of business, maintaining/keeping their own properties clean and safe, and in some cases theft and vandalism caused by the temporary and often illegal tenants who reside in some capacity on the blighted property. For example, the owner

of the business across the street (Asphalt Costings Engineering at 851 H Street) estimates over \$10,000 related to increases in theft and vandalism over the past 6-8 months caused by individuals who hang out/illegally reside at 650 H Street. They have also incurred \$5,000 in new lights and security camera to help minimize future losses.

The economic costs from this blighted property may likely reverberate for years to come. For example, research unequivocally demonstrates that vacant properties decrease the value of adjacent and nearby properties, this might be especially true in a smaller city in the Central Valley like Wasco where property values are already low. Lower property values eventually mean decreases in municipal tax revenue for the local government at a time when they will have incurred additional costs to abate this vacant and blighted property at 650 H Street.

Environmental health impacts: the presence of vacant, abandoned, and blighted structures also generates a host of public health concerns. Research documents that vacant dwellings are at a higher risk of fires and most of these fires are intentionally set by individuals looking for temporary shelter and/or who engage in illegal behaviors. Studies further show that occupied dwellings located near or adjacent to abandoned properties have a much higher risk of fire. These greater risks can also cause increases in fire and property insurance for the occupied structures. Vacant and abandoned properties are also associated with health-related diseases such as allergies caused by vacant lots with ragweed, mosquito-borne illnesses (e.g., West Nile virus) caused by pools of stagnant water, and illnesses associated with rats and other vermin that flourish on and within vacant properties.

Crime presents perhaps the most common and dangerous environmental health impact connected with vacant, abandoned and blighted properties. Numerous public health studies document that vacant properties are associated with criminal assaults, burglary/theft, gun assaults, graffiti, etc. And the impact extends further to community perceptions, fear of crime and physical assaults. Research shows that trash build up, vegetation overgrowth and vacant structures make community members fearful to even walk or drive within their neighborhood or pass by vacant and abandoned properties.

With respect to the Farmworker Housing Complex, according to city officials four fires have already been set on the property in the last 18 months including one that destroyed an entire structure that will have to be demolished at additional expense. Given that most of the housing units remain open, the risk of future fires that could also result in injury or even death of the illegal tenants that now routinely occupy the premises remains high. Crime, such as theft, trespassing, and vandalism, has increased on the property over the last year (November 2019 to October 2020) compared with the same period the year before. Collectively these conditions on the property pose serious environmental health risks to the surrounding neighborhood and community at large.

3) REMEDIATION COSTS & RESOURCES: What are reasonable and customary remediation costs to abate the blighted property and public nuisance conditions for a large housing complex like the former Wasco Farmworkers Housing Complex at 650 H Street?

When it comes to abatement costs many communities either underestimate the complete costs and/or have more vacant, blighted properties than they have resources and capacity to address. As the “first responders” to vacant, blighted properties, local governments and their housing and code enforcement departments may lack one or more of the requisite capacities, (e.g., infrastructure,

technical, staffing, legal etc.), and have insufficient resources to abate the vacant properties within their communities. For smaller cities that have fewer staff and small/modest budgets, tackling more than half dozen vacant properties can easily strain department workloads and budgets.

A typical small-to-mid sized city (e.g., population in the range of 50-150K) might annually allocate anywhere from \$500,000 to \$2 million for cleaning, securing/boarding, and demolishing vacant properties that might arise from fires or other unsafe conditions. If the structure is still sound and worth saving, the city might spend \$2500 to \$5,000 per house to board and secure the windows and doors depending upon the size of the house. Demolition estimates for vacant properties vary dramatically depending on the region of the country, the structure's age, condition, materials, etc., the nature of the violations, and the relative location and priority of the structure. For example, the cost to demolish a 1950s-1970s wooden, single-family house that has been abandoned for years might range from \$10,000 to \$50,000. Thus, many cities then plan and budget for cleaning/boarding and perhaps demolishing anywhere from around 10-15 vacant homes a year. Legacy cities, such as Flint or Detroit, Michigan or Cleveland or Youngstown, Ohio that have inventories of thousands of vacant, abandoned homes have a different scale that requires federal and state resources to address.

As the case here in Wasco, local governments typically do not plan or budget for the abatement and eventual demolition of large complexes and/or commercial properties. Not only are the costs too great to realistically budget for, it is not feasible to predict and/or anticipate these types of large-scale blighted properties. Given the complexity and difficulty to estimate and determine the total costs necessary to stabilize, demolish and eventually reclaim vacant, blighted properties, communities across the country are searching for new, creative funding vehicles, such as [Pay for Success](#). Let's now take a brief look at the range of current and prospective stabilization, demolition and reclamation/redevelopment costs associated the Farmworkers Housing Complex in Wasco:

Stabilization Costs: these include short term activities to protect public safety, restrict access, etc., such as installing fencing around the property's perimeter, boarding and securing the property's doors and windows, removing trash, debris, etc. from the exterior or interior if they pose imminent health and safety; hiring a security guard to evict trespassers, etc. Below are a few of the stabilization costs incurred/estimated by the City of Wasco for the Farmworkers Housing Complex:

- From December 2019 through August 2020 the city spent \$30,000 for one private security guard to help stabilize the property.
- More permanent fencing is estimated to cost around \$175,000 as the temporary fencing (cost of \$16,000) was vandalized and eventually removed.
- Initial boarding and securing done by the public housing authority at a cost of approximately \$10,000 also proved ineffective as it only encouraged illegal occupants and transients to illegally secure themselves inside the vacant housing units along with stolen property; thus, the local Sheriff's Office requested that all doors and windows from the Complex be removed for public safety concerns.
- Time and materials costs estimated at \$150,000 for City Staff to cap water lines, abate bulky waste/illegal dumping, and remove doors and windows to keep illegal occupants from securing themselves inside vacant buildings.

Demolition Costs: before the actual demolition work can start, it often requires somewhat elaborate planning and testing to ensure the demolition not only follows relevant government rules and

regulations, but also to ensure the demolition happens in a way that does not cause new problems. Common costs include tenant relocation, utility shut offs, asbestos testing, environmental contamination assessment, etc. For the Farmworkers Housing Complex, the City of Wasco estimates the following costs:

- Asbestos testing around \$45,000
- Demolition between \$5-6 million that includes asbestos abatement.
- Relocation of the remaining two tenants.

Maintenance and Reclamation Costs: once demolition of 650 H Street is done and the site becomes a vacant lot, the city and HSRA must consider and calculate the additional costs to maintain and even reclaim the property. At this stage it appears the city will be forced to bear the ongoing maintenance costs that could stretch from months to years depending on the prospects for eventual reclamation and reuse. These maintenance costs typically include construction and repair of fencing and more permanent barriers to prevent illegal dumping and trespassing. The costs should also consider the reassignment of city staff (e.g., law enforcement and code enforcement officers) to monitor the property. Costs to remove illegal dumping along with weed abatement (current estimate is close to \$3,000 per month) are also common vacant lot maintenance cost. Plans and costs for mitigating potential stormwater runoff and other environmental hazards (such as dust) should be put in place. For example, how the contractors do the final grading after demolition of all structures and removal of foundations can cause substantial silting. Given these maintenance costs might stretch over many months or likely several years, it would be prudent and strategic for the city and HSRA to have preliminary conversations about short term reclamation costs and even longer-term potential reuse and repurposing ideas.

4) ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE & EQUITY IMPLICATIONS: Are communities of color and low-income communities more or less likely to be impacted by blighted conditions at the former Wasco Farmworkers Housing Relocation Complex at 650 H Street?

Although one can find blighted properties in virtually any community across the U.S., whether it's urban, suburban or rural, research now documents the uneven distribution of blight across cities and the unequal social and racial impacts that flow from it. Blighted properties do not affect all neighborhoods or populations equally. Black and brown residents of cities are disproportionately affected by the concentration of potentially contaminated, tax delinquent, or vacant properties. Low-income neighborhoods are also more vulnerable to increases in property abandonment and blighted properties after natural disasters. Blight predominantly affects neighborhoods where marginalized populations live. Residents in blighted areas are politically, economically, and socially marginalized and exposed to greater-than average safety and environmental contamination issues.

The City of Wasco's Title VI complaint establishes that 75% of the city's population are Hispanic or Latino and over half of the residents live in neighborhoods designated by Cal EPA as "disadvantaged communities." Therefore, the now blighted property at 650 H Street (the former Farmworker Housing Complex) causes "defacto" environmental injustice as the research above illustrates. More importantly, the current physical and social disorder at the Complex exposes the neighborhood that it surrounds to the additional socio-economic and environmental burdens. The condition and neglect of the property, the unlawful activities that it attracts, and the costs and impacts to the city

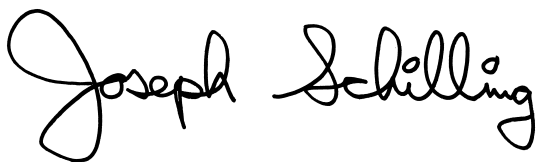
government, adjacent property owners/businesses and the community at large essentially impose new burdens on a community of color that already suffers from the cumulative weight of decades of structural racism and environmental injustices.

One could consider HRSA's initial relocation of the tenants/families from this site as a strategy to prevent or preempt the potential exacerbation of environmental injustice that would arise once the new high-speed rail line became active. However, by not doing their due diligence and more thoughtfully considering all the socio-economic impacts and implications of the relocation, including how to clean, secure and abate the remaining structures, as well as how to pay for it, the HRSA's decisions and/or lack of action have caused a more current and pressing environmental injustice.

Conclusion

The Wasco Farmworker Housing Complex presents a textbook example of a blighted property. Its rapid decline demonstrates that blighted properties are more than dilapidated buildings or neighborhood eyesores. They dramatically disrupt how communities, businesses, local governments, and people function. Blighted properties act like a contagion or disease dispersing their damage beyond the property boundaries while posing serious threats to public safety, neighborhood stability, local businesses, and residents. The Complex generates a host of socio-economic and environmental costs, but the longer-term impacts may not surface for months or years to come. Many of these burdens continue to fall on the shoulders of Wasco's brown, black and poor communities thus, generating environmental justice impacts. Given its current conditions, it becomes critical to take immediate action to not only stabilize this blighted property, but to abate the conditions, secure the property and then start down the path for remediation and eventual reclamation.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph Schilling". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joseph Schilling
Co-Founder, Vacant Property Research Network

APPENDIX A—Schilling Curriculum Vitae

JOSEPH M. SCHILLING
Senior Policy Associate
Research to Action Lab and
Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center
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(202) 261-5982 Jschilling@urban.org @EcoCityJoe
<http://www.urban.org/author/joseph-schilling>

EDUCATION

LL.M., Environmental Law and Policy, George Washington School of Law
JD, Law, Hastings College of the Law, San Francisco
BA, Social Sciences, Minor in Speech Communications & Debate, San Diego State University

CAREER PROFILE

As a strategic advisor and national expert on reclaiming vacant properties, urban sustainability, and municipal/civic capacity building, Schilling collaborates with public officials and community leaders in the design and development of dynamic models of cohort and collaborative learning that facilitates equitable urban regeneration and neighborhood revitalization. “My research explores the policy and planning intersections of diverse place-based programs and how collaborative policy making can catalyze collective impact.”

His field work serves as a living laboratory for applied research, policy storytelling, and technical assistance by capturing the drivers behind policy innovation and then curating the diverse narratives through case studies, translation briefs, and roundtables. An accomplished public policy facilitator, Schilling has led dozens of research, policy and community forms. “The art of research and policy translation enables practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to develop a common understanding about the benefits of stronger, evidence-based policy decisions and programs.”

Schilling was a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Fellow (2016-2019) with the [Interdisciplinary Research Leaders program](#) where his team completed a [health impact assessment](#) on strategic code enforcement and [substandard housing](#) in the city of Memphis. Over the past two years, he has facilitated high level, collective impact projects with local leaders in Detroit (Detroit Neighborhood Housing Compact) and Fresno, CA (Kresge Foundation’s Shared Prosperity Initiative). With support from the Gates Foundation, in 2019 Schilling led three “road testing labs” to solicit feedback from practitioners, public officials, and researchers on a set of metrics that can measure economic and social mobility in their communities.

As the founder of the [Vacant Properties Research Network \(VPR Network\)](#), Schilling is known as a national expert on a wide range of policy issues (e.g., urban greening, code enforcement, public health, substandard housing, etc.) related to reclaiming vacant and blighted properties. He currently leads the Network’s technical assistance engagements in Memphis and Youngstown and in the last two years published two policy translation briefs—[strategic code enforcement](#) and [public health and urban blight](#). In 2016 he helped local leaders in Memphis develop the nation’s [first Blight Elimination Charter](#) and completed a comprehensive literature synthesis on the [Multiple Meanings of Blight](#) for the national nonprofit Keep America Beautiful.

As part of the [White House's Strong Cities, Strong Communities Initiative](#), Schilling partnered with the German Marshall Fund and Cleveland State to design, manage and evaluate the SC2 fellowship program for the first round of seven SC2 cities (2012-2015). Schilling served as mentor to the 17 mid-career fellows while also leading the internal program assessment to document the fellows' impact and influence in their communities. By serving as catalyst for policy and program change, the report found that mid-career fellows can provide short- and long-term capacity for city government and nonprofit organizations undergoing tremendous change and distress. With support from the Kresge and Knight Foundations in November 2014 Schilling designed and facilitated a two-day symposium at the Urban Institute on the promise of urban fellowship programs that brought together fellows and program directors from four leading urban fellowship programs. Proceedings from the symposium can be found at www.promiseofurbanfellows.com, a [dynamic web platform](#) that serves as a hub for this emerging community of practice among current and past urban fellows.

Before joining Urban, Schilling was Associate Director and Senior Fellow for Virginia Tech's Metropolitan Institute where he taught graduate students in urban planning. Schilling holds a Masters of Environmental Law (LL.M.) from [George Washington University](#) and a J.D. from [Hastings College of the Law](#) in San Francisco.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

February 2016 – present

SENIOR POLICY & RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, URBAN INSTITUTE

Managing cohorts of cross sector leaders and trans-disciplinary researchers in the collaborative design and development of policy initiatives, strategic policy plans, research agendas, etc.; curating their collective knowledge and wisdom into policy initiatives and research projects; documenting the legacy and impact of policy movements; designing and developing policy—practitioner networks; facilitating cohort learning across communities; researching local capacity building and technical assistance models; examining the diffusion of state and local policy innovation; conducting blight and vacant property policy and program analysis.

- [Greening America's Legacy Cities—Greenventory 2.0](#)
- [Built Environment Policies, Plans, and Programs in Mid-size and Small Cities—promising health and equity impacts](#)
- [Reimagining the Civic Commons Capstone](#)
- [Fresno DRIVE Initiative 2019 Investment Plan](#)
- [Strategic Policy Health Impact Assessment of Substandard Housing in Memphis](#)
- [Fresno Shared Prosperity Partnership \(SP2\) Roundtable](#)
- [Detroit Neighborhood Housing Compact](#)

Synthesizing the latest research and developments in the field and then translating the research/evidence in a format that is accessible to policymakers and practitioners across a wide array of professional networks.

- [Urban Blight and Public Health](#)
- [Vacant Property Research Network](#)
- [Brownfields, Urban Sustainability, and Smart Growth Networks](#)

August 2004 – January 2016

SENIOR FELLOW & ASSISTANT RESEARCH PROFESSOR

METROPOLITAN INSTITUTE AT VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY, ALEXANDRIA, VA.

During his 12 years Schilling generated over \$1.5 million in sponsored research grants from and contract work for federal agencies, national and regional foundations, community and non-profit organizations, government and business leaders. As the Institute's Interim Director from 2012-2014 Schilling managed a full-time staff of 6 along with 3 visiting fellows and 21 Virginia Tech faculty fellows. He helped fashion the Institute's mission to serve as a collaborative hub for conducting, translating, and promoting applied research into innovative policy actions that support more sustainable, resilient, and livable communities.

November 1997 – August 2004

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION (ICMA), WASHINGTON, D.C.

Managed 12 person program with an annual budget between \$500-750K that conducted policy and programmatic research, outreach, training and technical assistance on local government roles in smart growth, brownfields and superfund redevelopment, military base reuse, and active living; raised more than \$2.5 million in foundation grants and federal agency cooperative agreements.

September 1983 – August 1994

DEPUTY CITY ATTORNEY, PLANNING, LAND USE ENFORCEMENT, AND CODE COMPLIANCE UNIT

CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Managed 15-person unit that enforced state/local building and zoning codes; advised mayor, city council, and city manager on planning, land use, zoning, and other municipal law issues; co-founded innovative program in partnership with USD School to mediate neighborhood nuisance and code cases.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

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- Erika Poethig, Joe Schilling, Laurie Goodman, et. al. (March 2017). The Detroit Housing Market—Challenges and Innovations for a Path Forward. Urban Institute Report.
- Schilling, Joseph and Kermit Lind. 2016. “Abating Neighborhood Blight with Collaborative Policy Networks—Where Have We Been? Where are we Going?” *University of Memphis Law Review*, Vol.46, pgs. 803-855.
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- Schilling, John Kromer, Katie Wells, and Jimena Pinzon. [Charting the Multiple Meanings of Blight—A National Literature Review on Addressing the Community Impacts of Blighted Properties](#). (Keep American Beautiful and the Vacant Property Research Network/Metropolitan Institute (May 2015).
- Schilling, Megan Heckert and Fanny Carlet. [Greening Legacy Cities—Relevant Research on Local Strategies for Reclaiming Vacant Land](#). (Translation Brief No. One, Vacant Properties Research Network/Metropolitan Institute (May 2015).
- Schilling, Nicole Dupuis and Mariia Zimmerman. [The Arc of Collaborative Sustainability Leadership](#) (Alexandria, VA: Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech (January 2014).
- Schilling and Raksha Vasudevan. [Strategic Lessons in Sustainable Community Building—the Groundwork USA Network](#). (Groundwork USA Yonkers, NY, March 2013).
- Schilling, Joseph and Raksha Vasudevan. *The Promise of Sustainability Planning for Regenerating Older Industrial Cities. The City after Abandonment*. Margaret Dewar and June Manning Thomas, eds. (Philadelphia, PA: Penn Press, 2012).
- Joseph Schilling. *Blueprint Buffalo—Using Green Infrastructure to Reclaim America’s Shrinking Cities*, in *The Future of Shrinking Cities: Problems, Patterns, and Strategies of Urban Transformation in a Global Context*, Karina Pallagst, editor. (Institute of Urban and Regional Development, University of California at Berkeley, May 2009).

- Schilling, Joseph and Jonathan Logan. *Greening the Rust Belt—Right Sizing America’s Shrinking Cities*. Journal of the American Planning Association. Vol. 74, No. 4 (Autumn 2008).

SELECTED ENGAGEMENTS

Facilitations, Consensus Building, Strategic Planning, Training & Technical Assistance

- *Strategic Code Enforcement Management Academy (SCEMA)*. Developed and led 3 three-day executive level managerial trainings for 3-11 member teams from more than 20 cities; teams included local elected officials, CE directors, senior inspectors, lawyers, judges, community partners, etc. University of Memphis School of Law and Neighborhood Preservation Inc. with support from the Kresge Foundation. (March 2017, 2018, 2019).
- *Shared Prosperity Roundtable—Fresno*. Supported by the Kresge Foundation; designed and facilitated a roundtable for 70+ local civic, public, private and philanthropic leaders to leverage existing capacities in developing what inclusive economic growth means to Fresno together with a series of policy and programs actions. Fresno, CA. (August 2018).
- *Housing Futures—Southeast Michigan*. Supported by the JP Morgan Chase Foundation; designed and facilitated three workshops as part of the release of the Housing Future report that assesses three regional housing trends/issues and identifies a range of potential solutions. University of Michigan Dearborn, MI. and Detroit. (July 2018).
- *Beyond Bankruptcy—A Researcher/Practitioner Dialogue on the Challenges and Opportunities for the Next Phase of Detroit’s Regeneration*. Supported by the Kresge Foundation; designed and facilitated a one-day roundtable that brought together roughly 35 local practitioners and researchers to discuss the impending policy issues confronting Detroit and dissect the ingredients for successful research collaboration. Detroit (October 2016).
- *Memphis Blight Elimination Charter*. Led a 9+month strategic planning project for a local nonprofit intermediary and its 35+ person advisory group comprised of local leaders to develop the vision, mission, principles and action steps in support of the nation’s first blight charter. Memphis, Tenn. (June 2015—March 2016).
- *Vacant and Abandoned Properties Action Council Retreat*. Led a two-day retreat and scoping meeting to establish critical baseline ground rules, processes, and procedures for VAPAC as supporting by the Thriving Communities Institute and Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland. Cleveland, Ohio (June 2015).

Invited Lectures, Panels, and Webinars

- Housing Matters Webinar for the National Association of County Officials. *Housing Quality, Vacant Properties and Health*. (June 2019).
- Municipal Arts Society of New York City. *The Multiple Dimensions of Property Blight—The First Chapters of an American Story*. KEYNOTE. (March 2019).
- Center for Disease Control’s Healthy Peoples and Law and Health Policy Webinar—Exploring Evidence-Based Legal and Policy Strategies to Prevent Fatal Injuries and Violence. *Vacant Property Reclamation and Reuse—Exploring the Intersections of Housing and Health Laws, Policies and Programs*. (November 2018).

- The Center for Community Progress' Learning Roundtable. *The Built Environment's Impacts on Health and Safety*. Moderator and Presenter. Emory University Conference Center. (October 2018).
- Government Law Center—Albany Law School. Edwin L. Crawford Memorial Lecture on Municipal Law. *The Multiple Dimensions of Property Blight—The First Chapters of an American Story*. KEYNOTE. (November 2017).
- Cities RISE Learning Workshop for the NY State Attorneys General Office and Enterprise Community Partners. *The Constellation of Strategic Code Enforcement*. Syracuse, NY. (September 2017).
- National Association of Realtors' Government Affairs Directors' Institute. *A Systematic Approach to Addressing Blighted Properties*. (July 2017).
- Detroit Neighborhood Forum—Kresge Foundation. *Substandard Housing and Public Health Can we connect the dots?* (June 2017)
- FOCUS 2015 Symposium on Sustainability and Climate Change, French Embassy, Washington, DC. *Building a sustainable bridge over the Atlantic - Bilateral programs on sustainable cities* panel presentation (March 2015).
- Building Resilient Cities (<https://fordspgconference.wordpress.com/past-conferences/2015-building-resilient-cities/>), Ford School of Public Policy, Ann Arbor. *Policy Lessons from Regenerating Legacy Cities*. KEYNOTE speaker. (March 2015).
- Sustainable Smart Cities Symposium: Revitalizing Cities. Sustainable Smart Solutions. University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham AL. *A Resilient Policy System for Regenerating Legacy Cities*." KEYNOTE (June 2014).

Academic Conferences

- American Collegiate Schools of Planning Annual Conference, Philadelphia. Convened research roundtable on "Resilient Policy Models for Reclaiming Vacant Properties and Regenerating Legacy Cities." (October 2014).
- City Futures III, Urban Affairs Association and EURA, Paris, France. "Remaking French and American Cities in Transition—Comparative lessons in green and creative urban regeneration strategies. Organized and facilitated panel and co-authored paper in conference proceedings (June 2014).
- City Futures III, Urban Affairs Association and EURA, Paris, France. "Regenerating Shrinking Cities Through Community Based Urban Greening Organizations." Presentation and published paper in conference proceedings (June 2014).

AFFILIATIONS AND CERTIFICATIONS

Member of the American Planning Association

Member of the Urban Affairs Association

Member of the California Bar (Inactive)

Certificate in Mediation, Community Mediation Centers of San Diego

Certificate in Public Management, City of San Diego's Management Academy

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph Schilling". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J" and a distinct "S" for the first letter of the last name.