

Municipal Focus Groups

1



Developing and Implementing A Comprehensive Blighted Property Strategy For Bucks County

June 8 and June 12, 2023

Agenda

2



- **Welcome**
- **Discussion About the Nature and Extent of Blight in Bucks County**
- **What Will Success Look Like?**
- **Sharing a Few Tools Available to Address Blight**
- **Summary of the Process Moving Ahead**

Begin With End in Mind!

3

Overarching Goal

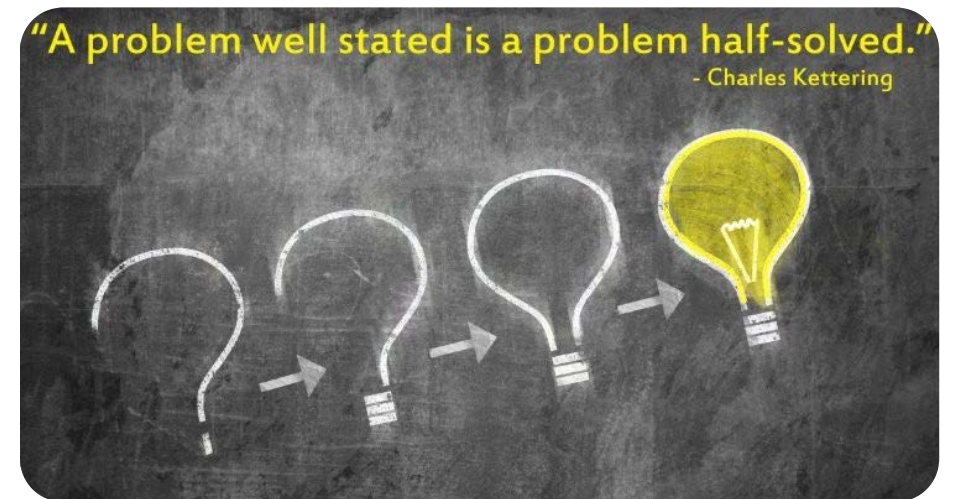
Develop a Comprehensive Plan for Implementing Effective Strategies to Address Blight in the County



Nature and Extent of the Problem

4

- **How do we define blight? What are the characteristics of a blighted property?**
- **What is known about the extent of the blighted property problem?**
- **How is information gathered about the number and status of blighted properties?**



Nature and Extent of the Problem

5

How is Blight Defined?

A property is considered blighted when...

- **It endangers the health and safety of residents and has been declared a public nuisance by the municipality *or*,**
- **It is an attractive nuisance due to allowing unauthorized entry; or due to dangerous conditions such as abandoned wells, shafts, basements, or unsafe fences or structures *or*,**
- **A structure is vacant and has not been rehabilitated within one year of a notice of violation/corrective action sent to the owner *or*, (cont. next slide)**



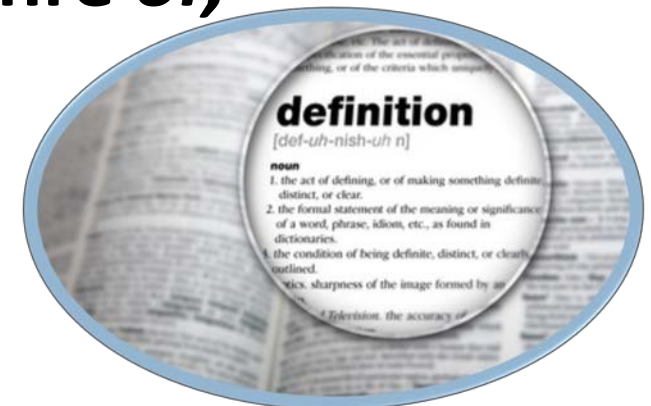
Nature and Extent of the Problem

6

How is Blight Defined? (cont.)

A property is considered blighted when...

- **A parcel of ground has become a place for accumulation of trash and debris or a haven for rodents because of the owner's neglect or lack of maintenance *or,***
- **The structure is a fire hazard or could easily catch fire *or,***
- **The structure has otherwise been declared by the municipality as unfit for human habitation**



Nature and Extent of the Problem

7

Results of Municipal Survey

- **37 Respondents**
- **41% (15) Feel Blighted Properties are a Problem**
- **59% (22) Feel that Blighted Properties are *Not* a Problem**



Nature and Extent of the Problem

8

Results of Municipal Survey (cont.)

- **59% (17) Have 3 or Fewer Blighted Properties**
- **24% (7) Have 4-10 Blighted Properties**
- **17% (5) Have More than 10 Blighted Properties**



Nature and Extent of the Problem

9

Results of Municipal Survey (cont.)

Challenges in Addressing Blighted Properties

- **Insufficient Staff (7)**
- **Need for More Information about Best Enforcement Tools (6)**
- **Landlords/Condition of Rental Properties (5)**
- **Obtaining Compliance from Owners on Fixed Incomes (12)**
- **Owners who are Chronic Violators of Codes (18)**
- **Court System too Lenient in Resolving Cases (5)**
- **Absentee Owners (15)**
- **Owner is Deceased (8)**



Nature and Extent of the Problem

10

Results of Municipal Survey (cont.)

Challenges in Addressing Blighted Properties, Other:

- **Lack of Property Maintenance Code/Property Maintenance Code NOT Enacted (2)**
- **Township Policy of Only Responding to Complaints/Legal Process is Long and Expensive for Compliance (1)**
- **Owners with Mental Illness (1)**
- **Foreclosure Price Too High (1)**
- **Lack resources (1)**



Nature and Extent of the Problem

11

Questions to Consider:

- To what extent does the problem involve residential properties or both?
- Does the problem include owner occupants as well as residential rental units?
- Does the problem involve vacant properties, occupied properties or both?
- To what extent are the blighted properties tax delinquent? At what stage?



Nature and Extent of the Problem

12



Questions to Consider, cont.:

How long has the property been blighted?

- **Less than 1 year?**
- **1-2 Years?**
- **3-5 Years?**
- **11-19 Years?**
- **20 Years or More?**
- **Not Sure**



Nature and Extent of the Problem

13

Questions to Consider, cont.:

How long has the current owner owned the blighted property?

- **Less than 1 Year?**
- **1-5 Years?**
- **6-10 Years?**
- **Over 10 Years?**



Nature and Extent of the Problem

14

Blight Risk Factors

- Vacant Properties
- Age of Housing
- Lower Median Housing Values
- Higher Percentage of Rental Housing



Nature and Extent of the Problem

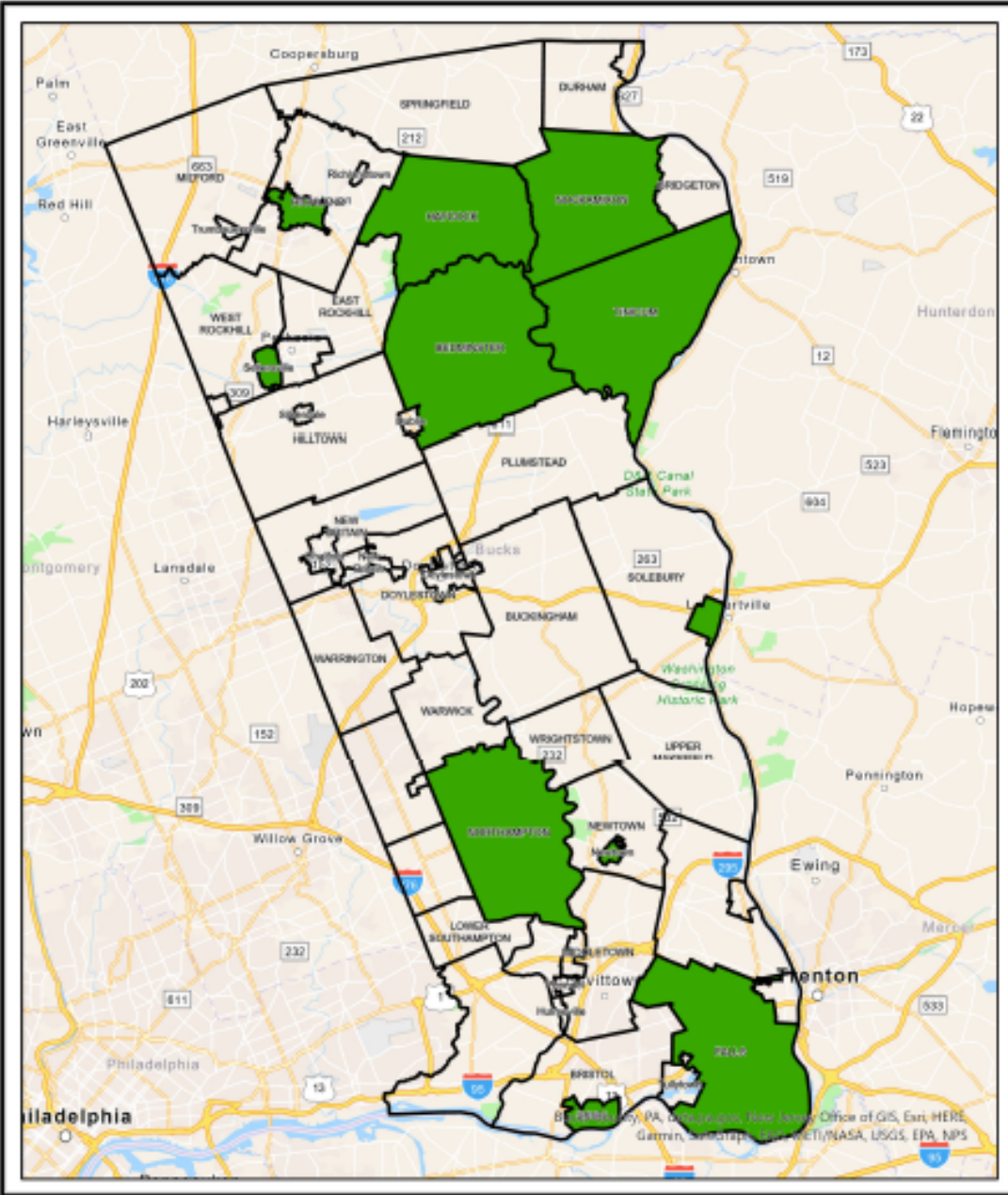
15

Blight Risk Factor: Vacant Properties

- Why is this important?
- USPS Data regarding longer term vacancies (over 36 months)
- American Community Survey Data



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Municipalities Where the Number of Residential Addresses that are Vacant for Over 36 Months Exceeds 1% of All Residential Addresses

Source: USPS Data, 4th Quarter 2021

Nature and Extent of the Problem

17

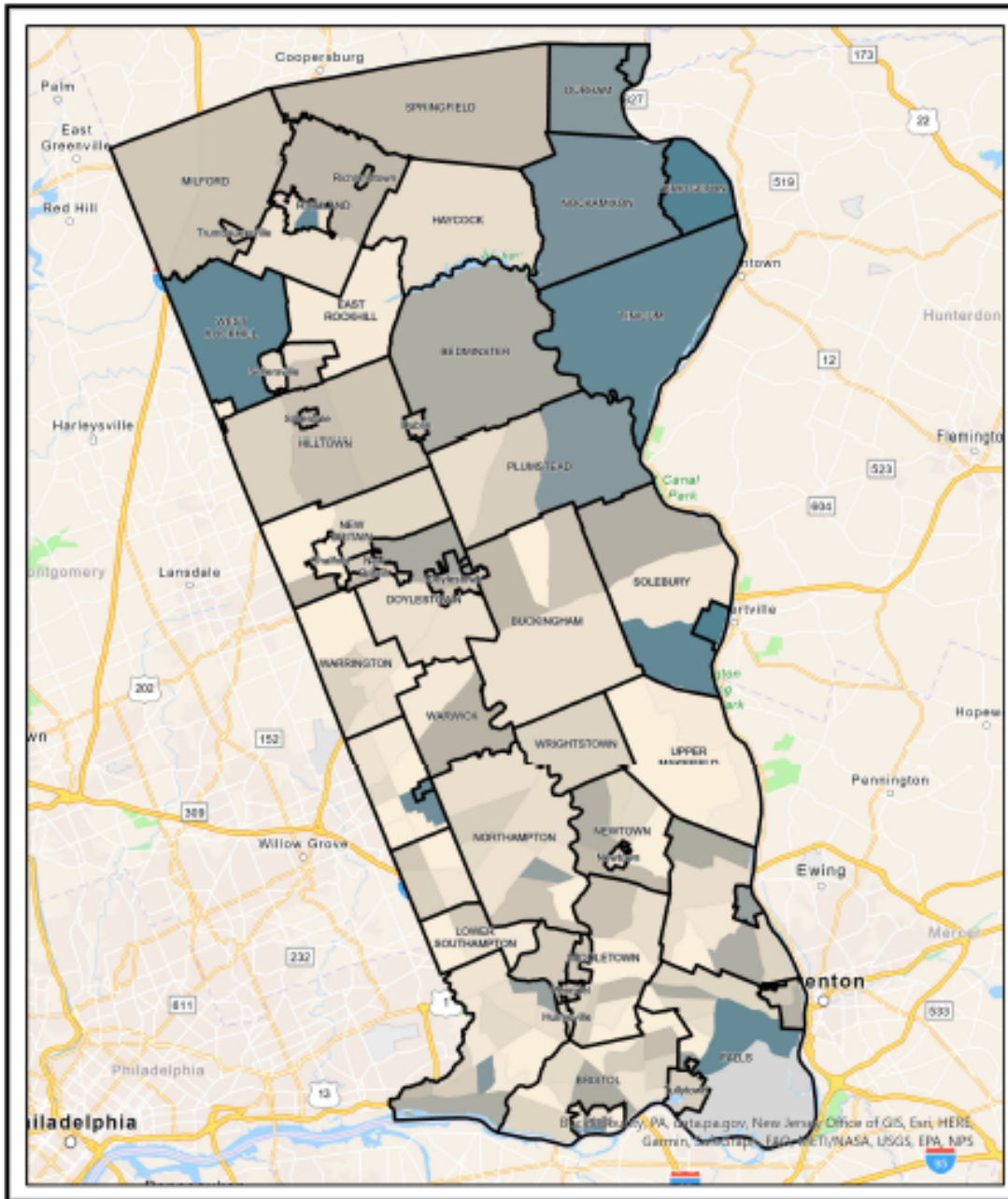
Municipalities with the Highest Number of Residential Addresses That Have Been Vacant for Over 36 Months:

- Falls Township (313)
- Bensalem Township (273)
- Northampton Township (225)
- Bristol Township (112)
- Warminster Township (91)



Municipalities With the Highest Percentage of Vacant Housing Units

American Community Survey 2021 Five Year Estimates



Percent of housing units that are vacant



**Bucks County
Blight Study**

2023



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19

Municipalities with the Highest Percentage of Vacant Residential Structures (Non-River Towns*)

- **West Rockhill Township (11.7%)**
- **Bedminster Township (6.9%)**
- **Doylestown Borough (6.1%)**



**River towns historically have higher vacancies due to second homes.*

Nature and Extent of the Problem

20

Blighted Property Risk Factor: Age of Housing

- Why is this important?
- ACS Data: Houses Built 1939 or Earlier



Nature and Extent of the Problem

22

Municipalities with the Highest Percentage of Housing Built Prior to 1939

- **Langhorne Borough (60.8%)**
- **Riegelsville Borough (57.3%)**
- **Bristol Borough (56.4%)**
- **Newtown Borough (51.1%)**
- **Trumbauersville Borough (44.5%)**
- **Langhorne Manor Borough (40.7%)**



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23

Blighted Property Risk Factor: Lower Median Housing Values

- **Why is this important?**
- **ACS Data: Median Household Income in Relation to Household Incomes**



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Nature and Extent of the Problem

25

Municipalities with Comparatively Higher Median Housing Values and Comparatively Lower Household Incomes

- Sections of Warrington Township
- Sections of Bristol Township
- Many of the Boroughs



Significance: Difficulty of households on fixed incomes maintaining properties and paying taxes

Nature and Extent of the Problem

26

Municipalities with Comparatively Lower Median Housing Values and Comparatively Higher Median Household Incomes

- **Sections of Lower Bucks**
- **Most Boroughs**

Significance: Gentrification of neighborhoods may be in progress



Nature and Extent of the Problem

27

Municipalities with The Lowest Median Housing Values

- Bristol Borough (\$186,000)
- Quakertown Borough (\$214,400)
- Morrisville Borough (\$215,400)
- Richlandtown Borough (\$224,600)
- Bristol Township (\$225,300)



**Highest: Upper Makefield Township (\$745,900)*

Nature and Extent of the Problem

28

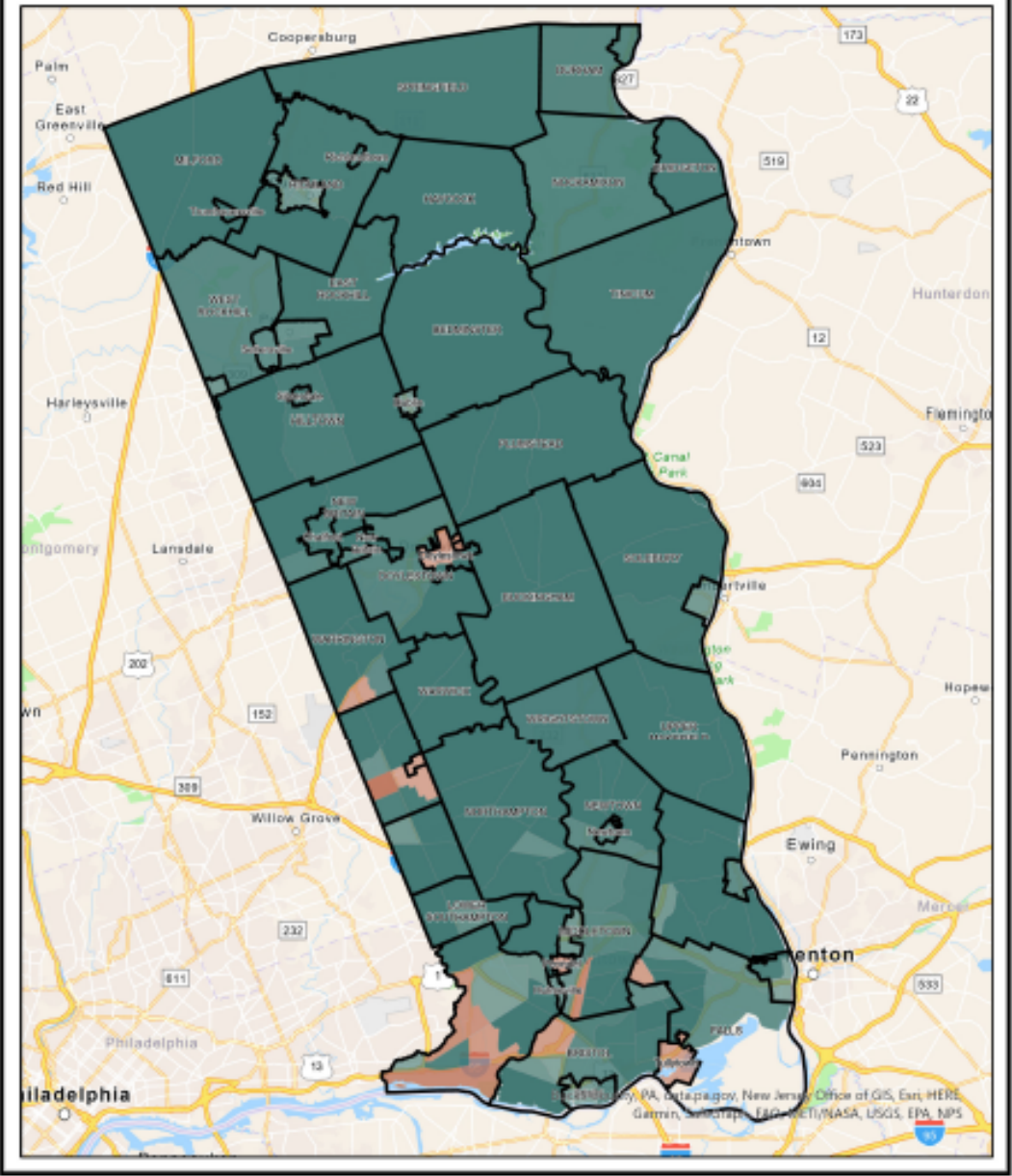
Blighted Risk Factor: Higher Rental Housing Percentage

- **Why important?**
- **ACS Data: Rental Housing**



Municipal Map Depicting Owner- vs. Renter- Occupied Census Tracts

*Source: American Community Survey 2021
Five Year Estimates*



Predominant Occupied Housing Units
■ Owner-Occupied Housing Units
■ Renter-Occupied Housing Units

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Blight Study**
2023



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Nature and Extent of the Problem

30

Municipalities with the Highest Percentage of Rental Housing

- **Penndel Borough (57.7%)**
- **Tullytown Borough (52.1%)**
- **Langhorne Borough (50.9%)**
- **Dublin Borough (43.1%)**
- **Quakertown Borough (40.8%)**



Nature and Extent of the Problem

31



Worth Noting:

- Taken together, the data for these blight risk factors may mean that your municipality needs to ratchet up its efforts to prevent blight even if you don't feel you have a blighted property problem now.
- In addition, if you do feel that you have a blighted property problem, addressing factors such as stepped up code enforcement of vacant properties and providing assistance to households for home repairs may be appropriate.

What will Success Look Like?

32

Outcomes:

- What are the desired outcomes?
- How will success be defined?
- By 2025, the results of the implementation of this comprehensive strategy to address blight will be (fill in the blank!):



Sharing a Few Tools to Address Blight

33

Act 90 of 2010
*Neighborhood Blight
Reclamation and
Revitalization Act*

Act 135 of 2008
Blighted and
Abandoned Property
Conservatorship Law

**Urban Redevelopment
Law**
*Spot Condemnation of
Blighted Properties*



**Failure to Comply
with a Code
Requirement**
Criminal Sanctions

**Act 5/Act 133 of
1998**
Prohibited Purchases at
Tax Sales

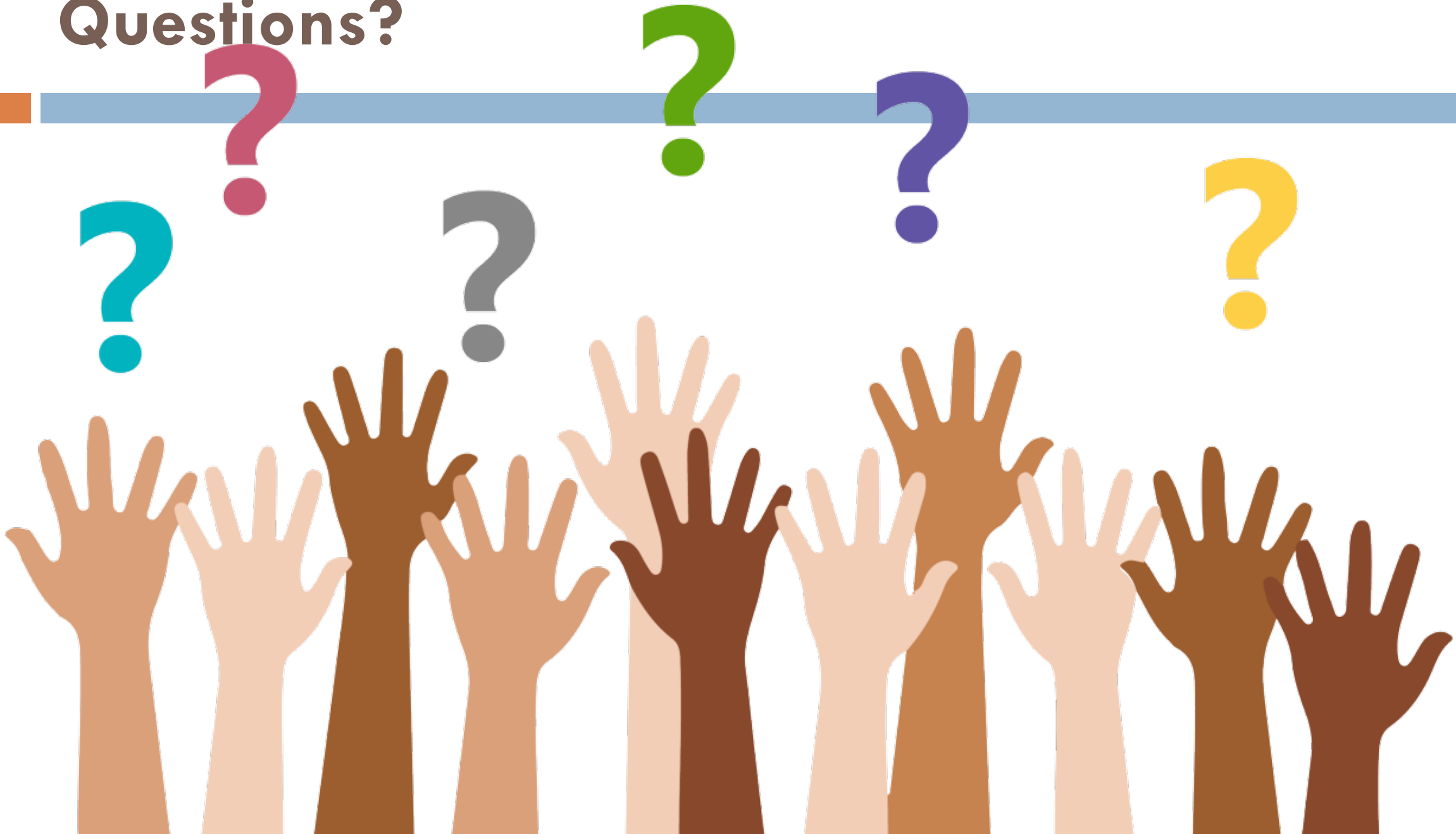
Process Moving Forward

34

- **Completion of Part I Report (Description of Nature and Extent of Problem) September 2023**
- **Completion of Part II Report (Strategies/ Solutions) December 2023**
- **Municipal Workshops on Tools (Spring 2024)**



Questions?



Contact Information

36

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