

Keystone CORE Services

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MENU



Do you have a property in town that you don't know what to do with?

Do you have a building that you know will soon vacate and you don't want it to remain vacant too long?

Pennsylvania Downtown Center's subsidiary organization, **Keystone CORE (Community Oriented Real Estate) Services**, provides technical assistance to communities who have a real estate project in their commercial or neighborhood

district that the market has not addressed. Keystone CORE Services may be able to help your community by providing the following menu of services:

- SITE FEASIBILITY STUDIES
- DEVELOPER'S REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS / PROPOSALS
- ASSISTANCE WITH PROFESSIONAL SERVICE STUDIES
- ASSISTANCE WITH PROJECT SPECIFIC MARKET ANALYSIS
- ASSISTANCE WITH CONSERVATORSHIP PROJECTS
- ASSISTANCE WITH DRUG NUISANCE PROJECTS
- BLIGHTED PROPERTY INVENTORY
- BLIGHTED PROPERTY PRIORITIZATION ASSISTANCE
- PROPERTY REVITALIZATION ACTION PLAN
- PROJECT FUNDING PLANS
- ASSISTANCE WITH FUNDING APPLICATIONS
- ASSISTANCE WITH ZONING ISSUES
- PATIENT REAL ESTATE PRE-DEVELOPMENT LOAN PROGRAM (PREPD LOAN)



The mission of KCS is to act as a redevelopment partner for the reclamation and rehabilitation of blighted and deteriorated properties in which the private sector has not reinvested or redeveloped.



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Site Feasibility Studies

The most requested KCS technical assistance service is that of a property-specific “Site Feasibility Study” (SFS). Almost every community has one or more properties that they just don’t know what to do with. The property may be in the possession of a private sector owner, may be up for tax sale or may be in the possession of the local municipal government or a non-profit organization. While usually in a state of significant disrepair, the property is far from needing to be demolished. When facing the decision as how to move forward with dealing such a structure, the obvious first question is where do we begin? And the obvious answer is to determine if the project is feasible. Feasibility however is not just an architectural or financial question. In providing this technical assistance, KCS uses the Feasibility Manual for Reusing Historic Buildings, authored by Donovan Rypkema, the principal of Place Economics. This extensive and intensive multi-month process helps the local organization to determine if a proposed project is feasible, where feasibility is defined as the project having “a reasonable likelihood of satisfying explicit objectives when a selected course of action is tested for fit to a context of specific constraints and limited resources.” This service is the most comprehensive offered by KCS and includes many of the activities detailed in this technical assistance menu. The SFS includes 1) a determination of the “participants” objectives, 2) identification of the legal limitations the project is facing, 3) constraints imposed by the participants, 4) national, regional and local market factors, 5) real estate market factors, 6) identification of target customers for the proposed uses, 7) political factors impacting the project, and 8) physical and technical constraints on the project, 9) intervention tools available, 10) a preliminary financial synthesis of the project and finally 11) a set of conclusions as to the feasibility of the project. This service does not include architectural rendering of the proposed completed project, but such services may be added for an additional charge.

Developer’s Request for Qualifications / Proposals

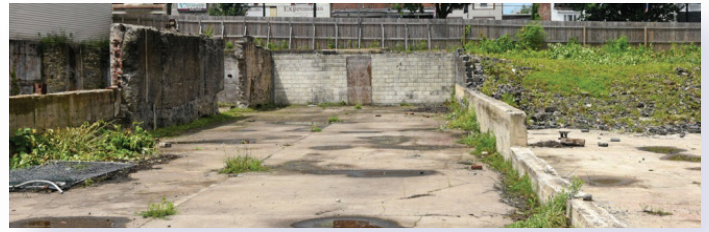
Expanding upon the work undertaken through the Site Feasibility Study, KCS can transform the report generated through the SFS process into a developer’s request for qualifications (RFQ) or request for proposals (RFP). This is accomplished by preparing a set of weighted criteria desired from developer’s who may be interested in rehabilitating or redeveloping the specific property question. The developers RFQ/ RFP is then distributed to an extensive list of private sector developers to solicit their interest in the project. A development submission format is prepared as part of this process. KCS staff then work with the local organization to review, score, and interview potential developers for the property in question. While the final decision rests solely with the local organization as to which, if any developer, will be selected for the project, KCS staff will provide input and guidance to assist the local organization with making the best possible decision in selected a project developer.

Assistance with Professional Service Studies

Many site-specific projects require up-front specialized up-front technical assistance. These services may include architectural, engineering and/or environmental, as well as other services from licensed or certified technical assistance providers. Often, these services carry a hefty front-end, “pre-development” cost. Ensuring that the local organization is getting the services it requires at the best possible price is an important part of this pre-development phase. Making sure that the local organization is comparing “apples-to-apples” is accomplished by putting together a well-thought out and comprehensive work scope for such services. KCS staff will assist the local organization with crafting such a work scope, a contract template and a scoring system for such services. KCS will then assist the local organization with advertising the professional services opportunity, helping to ensure that funding source contractual requirements are met including Minority, Women-Owned, Veteran, and other disadvantaged business advertising and outreach requirements are met. KCS staff will then assist the local organization with making the appropriate decision for the required professional services. Finally, KCS staff will assist the local organization through the final contract development-negotiation process.

Assistance with Project Specific Market Analysis

No property-specific project exists in a vacuum. Every project should have a target customer base and geographic area that it intends to serve. These potential customers and the area(s) that they are drawn from, are defined by households within the projected “trade area” or “capture zone.” These households exhibit not only specific socio-economic characteristics, but equally specific “lifestyle (psychographic) preferences.” Utilizing data from national data-mining companies, KCS staff will prepare a defined-geography specific report that details both the socio-economic and psychographic profile. By having access to such data, the developer should be able to craft a better mix of business uses for the site as well as more targeted marketing efforts. KCS staff will assist in defining the trade area, prepare a socio-economic/psychographic “data-run” for that particular trade area, draft a report and assist the local organization with interpreting the data. It is important to note here that this information is only available to the local revitalization working with a developer on a property specific site. Developers may not request this information without a defined connection to a local revitalization organization’s effort.



Assistance with Conservatorship Projects

In certain circumstances, an area may be negatively impacted by virtue of the neglect of a property owner to adequately maintain, market or otherwise take responsibility for a property that they own. In those cases where such neglect on the part of the property owner exists, and in accordance with ACT 135 of 2008, the KCS staff may assist the local revitalization organization with initiating legal action against the property owner in Common Pleas Court.

Assistance with Drug Nuisance Projects

In certain circumstances, a property may be negatively impacted by the presence of illicit drug activity on the site. In those cases where such illicit drug activity exists, and in accordance with ACT 140 of 1992, the KCS staff may assist the local revitalization organization with initiating legal action against the property owner in Common Pleas Court.

Blighted Property Inventory

The only service “group” offered by KCS that is not tied to a specific property deals with collecting and analyzing data of the condition of the building stock within a defined geographic area. Utilizing definitions from various Pennsylvania Commonwealth laws, including Act 79 of 2019 and the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC), this service is provided to assist a local organization in determining the extent and severity of blight within a defined geographic area. Using a 1 to 5 rating scale, where 1 is a “dilapidated” property and 5 is a property in “good” condition, each property is given a numeric rating across the various IPMC criteria. These ratings are then used to further detail the extent to which any individual property meets the blight/distress criteria associated with any number of PA laws including the Conservatorship Law, The Drug Nuisance Law, the Urban Redevelopment Law, etc. By so doing, the local organization will be able to determine the magnitude of the blight remediation effort it would have to undertake to mitigate blighting influences within the defined geographic area.

Blighted Property

Prioritization Assistance

In communities with many blighted properties, one of the most formidable challenges is where to begin. Initiating a blight mitigation strategy in a time of scarce financial and human resources to deal with blight can be a daunting task. A sensible approach to crafting a comprehensive blight mitigation strategy is to prioritize the inventory of lighted properties using a weighted criteria system. KCS, utilizing a system developed in cooperation with Carnegie Mellon University and the Western PA Brownfield Center, has a quantifiable solution to this problem. The Multi-Attribute Decision Matrix (MADM) process allows KCS staff to work with a local revitalization organization to develop a series of evaluation criteria that compares community goals and objectives with the “attributes” of blighted properties. By so doing, blighted properties can then be rank ordered to ascertain which properties will show the best return on investment given the overall revitalization goals of the community.

Property Revitalization Action Plan

Utilizing the Blighted Property Inventory detailed above, KCS staff, working with the local revitalization organization, will assist with developing a “thumb-nail” action plan for each property within the defined revitalization area. The thumb-nail plan is a very brief description of the action that should be considered for each property inventoried. Typical actions might include, “façade improvements needed,” “acquire and demolish,” “consider Conservatorship Act effort,” etc. The completion of the Blighted Property Inventory is a prerequisite to undertaking this activity.

Project Funding Plans

No property-specific revitalization effort succeeds without adequate funding. Utilizing their knowledge of Federal, Commonwealth, county, non-profit and other funding sources, KCS staff members will help to craft a POTENTIAL funding plan to meet the physical revitalization needs of a given property specific project. Attention is called to the fact that the Funding Plan will include the programs, application windows, application requirements, maximum and average amounts of funding awards, and other pertinent information designed to assist the local revitalization organization with making a decision as to which funding sources to pursue. It should be noted here that this service DOES NOT include the submission of any individual funding application but is a detailed roster of programs that the local organization may choose to apply for.

Assistance with Funding Applications

While the preparation of a “Funding Plan” as defined in item 10 above may significantly advance a property-specific revitalization effort, often times the submission requirements of funding programs can be overwhelming, particularly for smaller organizations with limited staff time and limited knowledge of the grant writing process. For those organization’s desiring assistance, KCS staff will assist with preparing funding applications. This technical assistance may run the gamut from providing coaching to the local organization in preparing and submitting an application, to actually preparing the funding application, to acting as the fiduciary agent on behalf of the local organization.

Assistance with Zoning Issues

Often, a property-specific project will be stymied by the fact that local zoning ordinances are not compatible with the proposed project. This may be particularly true for more recent project types such as makerspace, coworking space, commercial kitchens for rent, micro-breweries and micro-distilleries, live-work space and other more recent and more modern land uses. KCS staff will assist the local property-specific project effort by working with the local revitalization effort to conduct an evaluation of the extent to which the current zoning ordinance either helps or hinders the proposed project. Once this evaluation has been conducted, KCS staff will assist the local revitalization organization and local planning commission in considering fixes to the local zoning ordinance that will address the concerns, not only from the property-specific project perspective, but from the perspective of improving the overall investment environment in the municipality.

Patient Real Estate Pre-Development Loan Program (PREPD Loan)

KCS does have available a VERY limited pool of financial resources to assist with any of the above detailed services. Such financial resources are offered as a longer-term, “patient-capital” pre-development loan to the project. By this we mean that there is no immediate repayment of the loan and there is no defined time frame within which the loan must be repaid. As long as the project is moving forward, the KCS Board of Directors may let the loan sit. The loan becomes repayable to KCS when the project stalls with no likelihood of getting back on track or when the project advances to the construction stage. A minimum of a 50% match is required by the organization requesting the funding assistance.

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