

Housing and Neighborhoods



VIII. Housing and Neighborhoods

A snapshot of comments from Sidney Survey Respondents:

"Sidney is a wonderful community. It needs help to regain its neighborhoods and that feeling of being part of a community."

"Improve the historic residential areas around downtown. There are so many once beautiful homes that have been allowed to deteriorate significantly. It gives a poor impression of the city as a whole."

"We need to be firmer and unapologetic about asking homeowners and landlords for better upkeep of their properties (to be honest, we shouldn't even have to ask)."

"Please bring back neighborhood meetings to get residents involved in the issues."

"It was hard to find a decent place that I could afford that wasn't low income housing. I do enjoy working and living in the same town. There isn't much for a young, single adult to do in Sidney."

Introduction

Safe and tranquil neighborhoods attract and retain residents, and residents are central in attracting employers and commercial service providers.

Sidney's neighborhoods are the essential building blocks of the Sidney community. Many neighborhoods in the City are old and historic. Approximately 30% of the housing stock was built after 1959, while less than 15% was built after 2000. For a more detailed understanding of Sidney's housing characteristics see *Chapter: Demographics*.

Due to its proximity to other communities, Sidney is finding itself at the crossroads of finding the right tools to attract and retain residents. While existing residents believe that Sidney is an attractive location to raise a family, a general shortage of newer, diversified housing and shopping opportunities, and proliferation of property maintenance issues in selected neighborhoods have created a number of concerns.

To address these concerns in a timely manner, it may be necessary for the City to pursue additional mechanisms that promote its housing arena.

Planning Conditions

The rate of homes sold across Ohio reached a best-ever in October 2016, increasing 7.8 percent from the level recorded during the month a year ago. According to the Ohio Association of REALTORS, activity throughout the Ohio housing market was beyond positive in October, as the pace of sales has reached the highest rate for any monthly period in 19 years.

The residential real estate market in Sidney has improved as the economic drivers have improved, but only slightly. The neighborhoods that surround the downtown are replete with blight and other issues that residents indicate keep them from going there.

Absentee landlords around the downtown and in the City's older neighborhoods are the primary reason for pockets of deteriorating and condemned housing, and these areas are now well over 50% rentals (See Map: *Neighborhood Conditions*).

Sidney should work jointly with civic organizations and churches to create rehabilitation programs similar to successful programs in other similar communities. Many residents and stakeholders interviewed over the

past several comprehensive plan update efforts all supported the City's proposal to adopt improved housing maintenance requirements. However, to date, none of these programs have been developed and the code enforcement office, which is part of a planning and economic development department, has been undermanned for its level of responsibility when compared to peer communities.

Areas of deteriorated housing often attract criminal activity which further perpetuates the deterioration of a neighborhood. Many communities have petitioned for grant money from the U.S. Justice Department for the Federal Weed and Seed program for funds to sweep an area to address code enforcement (building, zoning, health, fire) and identify and eliminate criminal activity. Other communities have taken the initiative to develop county land banks and develop local tools to mitigate these issues.

The housing market and growth trends of new housing within Sidney have been stagnant. The financial hiccups caused by the recession that began in 2007 helped to cool the housing market and opened up more of Sidney's housing stock to fall into foreclosure (See

Map: Housing Foreclosures). Since 2008, it is estimated that over 1500 homes have been foreclosed upon.



Strategies

The planning stakeholders selected the following strategies for implementation:

1) Rigorously enforce existing city codes and develop new tools to revitalize and protect neighborhoods.

Due to the recession that began in December 2007, a variety of neighborhoods have witnessed an increase in property maintenance issues. While some of these issues were caused by the lack of reinvestment in the City's base of existing multi-family residential neighborhoods, other issues were caused when residents began to rent the homes they couldn't sell.

It is recommended that City officials could support and encourage the core value of home ownership and recognize the long-term benefit of owner-occupied dwellings as vital to the overall well-being of any community.

According to a study entitled "Impact of Rental Properties on the Value of Single Family Residences" (Journal of Urban Economics 30, 152-166, 1991), Wang, et al sum up their conclusions:

"The accumulation of single-family rental properties in a residential neighborhood seems to have the same negative impacts as the intrusion of apartments or other types of undesired properties. This study demonstrates that there is perhaps a need for city planners, or others, to regulate the number of single-family rental properties in a given residential neighborhood."

City officials adopted property maintenance standards in 1993 (Chapter 1333), but suspended the "fees" section in 2005. Today, housing inspections and nuisance abatement activities are handled by City staff, but the caseload and existing resources severely limit a proactive approach.

Addressing these housing issues will require additional attention in the future. Grassroots efforts will only be as effective as the governmental mechanisms that support them.

One major step to protect Sidney's neighborhoods would be to require additional oversight on the City's rental stock, with all rental properties receiving planned interior/exterior inspections. In addition, rental owners

could be required to annually obtain a Certificate of Occupancy.

Additional remedies to reduce these issues could come from:

- a) Allocating the appropriate resources to property maintenance and enforcement.
- b) Pursuing the feasibility of point of sale inspections.
- c) Identifying sources of financial and other assistance that can be used by property owners facing code enforcement actions for major renovations. City officials could increase the fees for new residential and commercial development and allocate a percentage of the new fees towards additional inspection services.
- d) In order to minimize the conversion of single-family homes into rentals, a Neighborhood Preservation Overlay District could be used. This tool should be neighborhood-driven, and one possibly pursued by neighborhood associations. Point of sale inspections could be used in these target neighborhoods.

2) Utilize the new Land Bank to expedite the acquisition process of blighted properties.

In 2016, the Shelby County Land Reutilization Corporation (commonly known as the Shelby County Land Bank) was created to help address delinquent properties. The benefits of the Land Bank will help to:

- Reduce the time it takes to take control of vacant, abandoned and tax delinquent properties
- Reduce flipping
- Repurpose properties through demolition or rehabilitation
- Put properties back on the tax rolls



It was recently awarded \$2.5 million in federal Neighborhood Initiative Program (NIP) funding. These funds will be vital in acquiring and demolishing vacant and blighted residential housing in designated neighborhoods in Shelby County.

It is recommended that City officials could utilize its GIS to identify and target eligible properties. For a better understanding of where these properties could be located see *Map: Residential Vacancies & Condemned Housing*.

Parcels with razed structures will be leveled and greened prior to disposition. Typical recipients of the properties are adjacent neighbors under a “side lot” program, local governments for public purposes, nonprofit organizations, and various private persons or entities.

These funds will expire in 2019 so it is absolutely important that the organization establish self-funding mechanisms that allow it to perpetuate its mission. It is recommended that City officials could work closely with County officials in developing a plan and criteria to select which properties will be targeted. This program

should not be operated on a “first come, first served” policy or the visual impact of the funds will not be realized.



3) Encourage diversified housing opportunities that allow residents to “age in place.”

Although a function primarily of the private sector, it is recommended that City officials could continue to support efforts to expand housing options for “empty nesters”. While sufficient and affordable multi-family opportunities may exist in the community, senior housing options appear to be limited in Sidney, but might be improving with the addition of age-restricted

lifestyle housing. As the community's population continues to age, sufficient opportunities to retain empty nesters will help to make the community more marketable and well-rounded.

4) Encourage grassroots efforts and public/private partnerships that promote neighborhood quality of life.

It is recommended that City officials encourage the development of neighborhood associations and organize community forums to address housing strategies and opportunities. This could assist City officials and Sidney's community services department to identify issues and concerns, and suggest solutions.

Many residents noted a preference in the community survey that maintenance of private properties and code enforcement were needed in their neighborhoods. Private, more localized, efforts could help make the job a bit easier and result in greater impact and more successful enforcement. These groups could ensure that the rental and other property owners in their neighborhoods are abiding by the law and are reporting all rental properties to city officials.

These neighborhood groups could work not only with City officials and neighborhood associations, but also with the School District; businesses, churches and agencies within their neighborhoods; civic and fraternal groups in the community; the Sidney's Police, Parks, service departments; local banks; and, residents of the neighborhoods. Sidney could earmark funds to support the neighborhood groups with mailings, newsletters, flyers, announcements, and other communication and administrative tasks.

5) Utilize incentives and tools for maintenance and improvement of housing and public infrastructure in targeted neighborhoods.

Various programs and resources exist to promote neighborhood revitalization. It is recommended that City officials could utilize and target the CRA Program to specific neighborhoods to provide for property tax abatement for existing residential property investments (for a better understanding of the location of the CRA areas, see *Map: Economic Development Tools*). Sidney utilizes the CRA program for eligible commercial and industrial projects. The same program could also be used to help promote revitalization in neighborhoods where there is blight and a lack of

residential reinvestment or to promote the development of "green" or age-friendly developments.

City officials and neighborhood groups should also discuss the feasibility of utilizing special improvement districts and tax increment financing to improve and update vital public infrastructure.

Some neighborhoods are in need of critical street and other neighborhood updates. One key tool to help fund these improvements is through the utilization of a Residential Improvement District (RID). A RID, if agreed upon by the majority of the property owners, would assess a fee to properties within the RID. Funds raised from this self-assessment would be placed in a special city account to finance specific area projects. The formula to determine that fee would be decided upon and agreed to by the property owners.

Certain neighborhoods and households may be eligible for CDBG funds to mitigate slum and blight issues and to assist LMI neighborhoods, among other issues. For a better understanding of these eligible CDBG census block groups see *Map: CDBG-Eligible Areas*.

6) Promote and encourage preservation of historic properties.

Some of Sidney's neighborhoods that surround the downtown are comprised of properties rich with history and unique architecture. In fact, approximately 30% or more of the housing stock could qualify for historic status because it was built before 1950, although variables other than age are required to qualify like historical significance and unique architecture. There are a variety of methods Sidney could use to promote the preservation of historical homes among its existing

housing stock, which could include historic overlay zoning and using an architectural review committee to review all improvements to ensure historic features of the property are improved or not affected. For a better understanding of these historic assets, or the location of those assets that were demolished (See *Map: Historic Assets*).

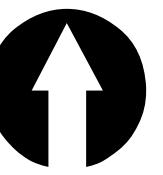
Sidney could also work with Ohio History Connection (formerly the Ohio Historic Preservation Office) to become a Certified Local Government. Being one

would allow Sidney to apply for matching grants for eligible projects that identify their historic, architectural, and archaeological resources through surveys, nominate eligible properties and districts to the National Register of Historic Places, further community education on historic preservation; and preserve and rehabilitate historic properties.

In order to become a Certified Local Government, a political jurisdiction must have the following:

- An ordinance designed to protect historic resources.
- A commission of at least five members who designate historic properties, review proposed changes to the historic environment, and encourage citizens to participate in the community's historic preservation program.

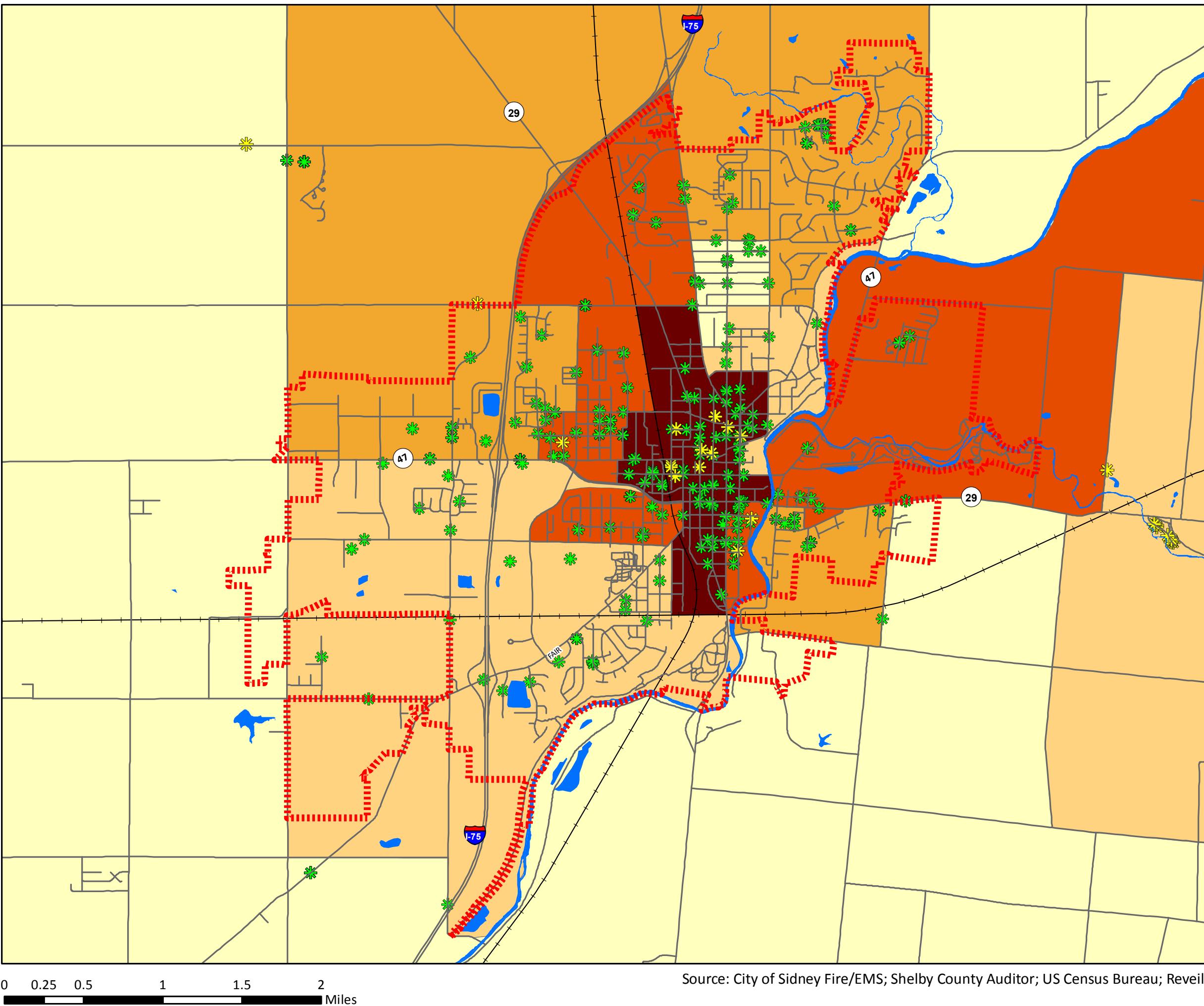




Neighborhood Conditions

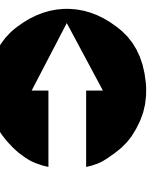
Legend

- Corp Boundary
- Great Miami River / Open Water
- Streets
- Condemned Housing
- EMS Drug Incidents, 2016
- 10-15% Rentals
- 16-25% Rentals
- 26-36% Rentals
- 37-50% Rentals
- 51-95% Rentals

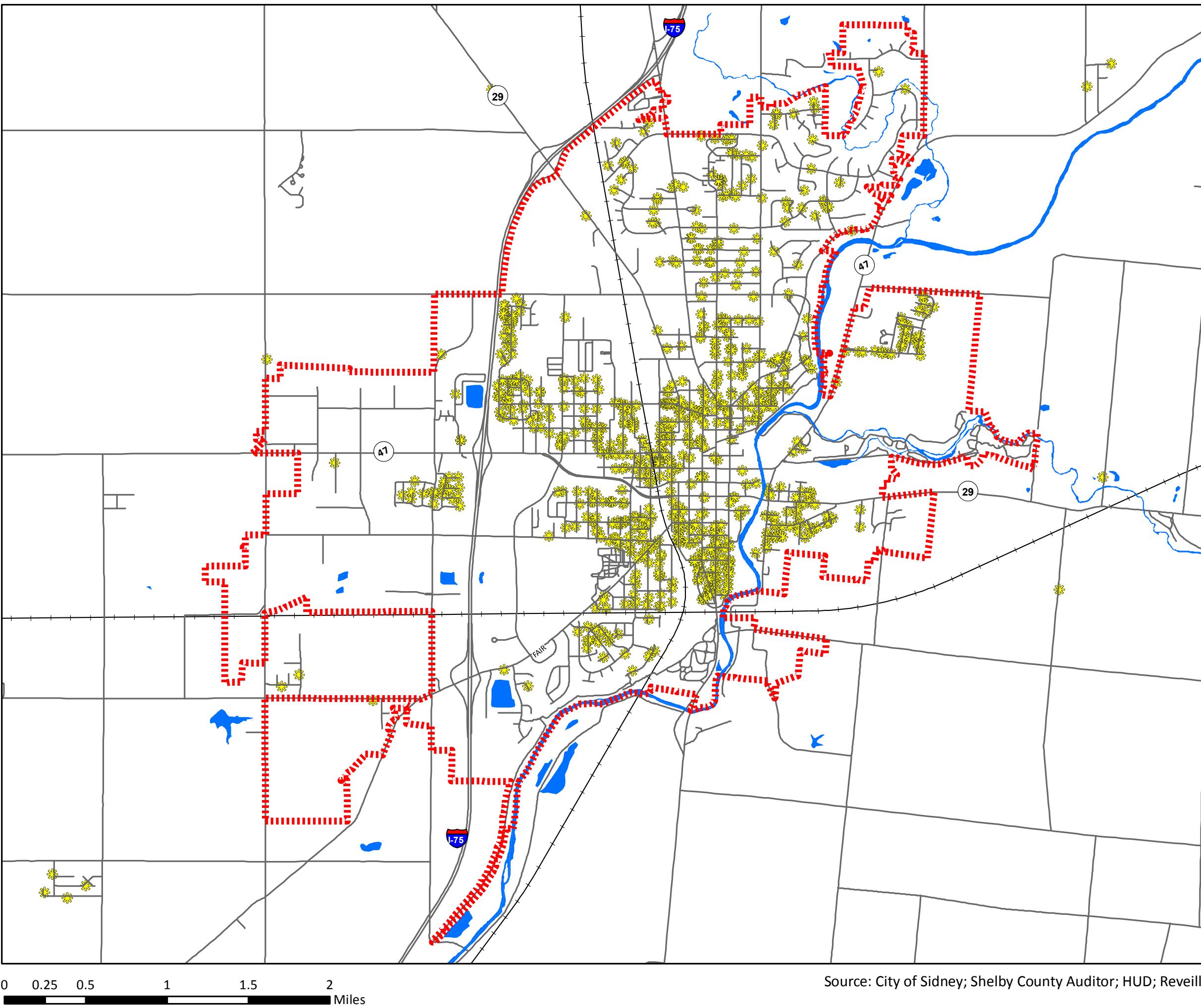


Source: City of Sidney Fire/EMS; Shelby County Auditor; US Census Bureau; Reveille

0 0.25 0.5 1 1.5 2 Miles

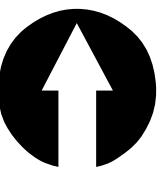


Housing Foreclosures



Legend

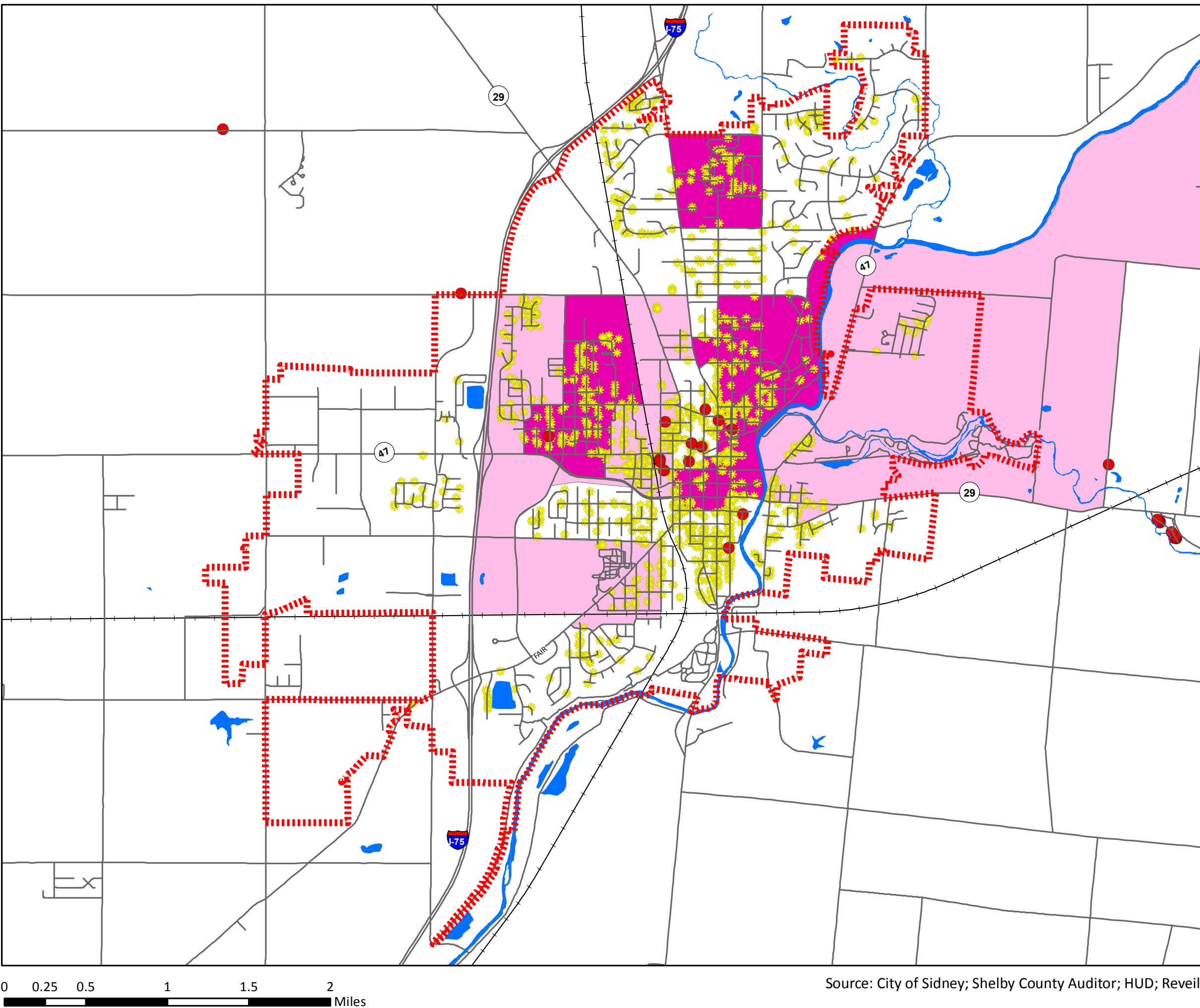
- Corp Boundary
- Great Miami River / Open Water
- Streets
- Foreclosures (2008-2016)

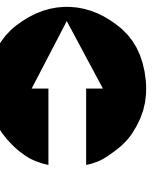


Residential Vacancies & Condemned Housing

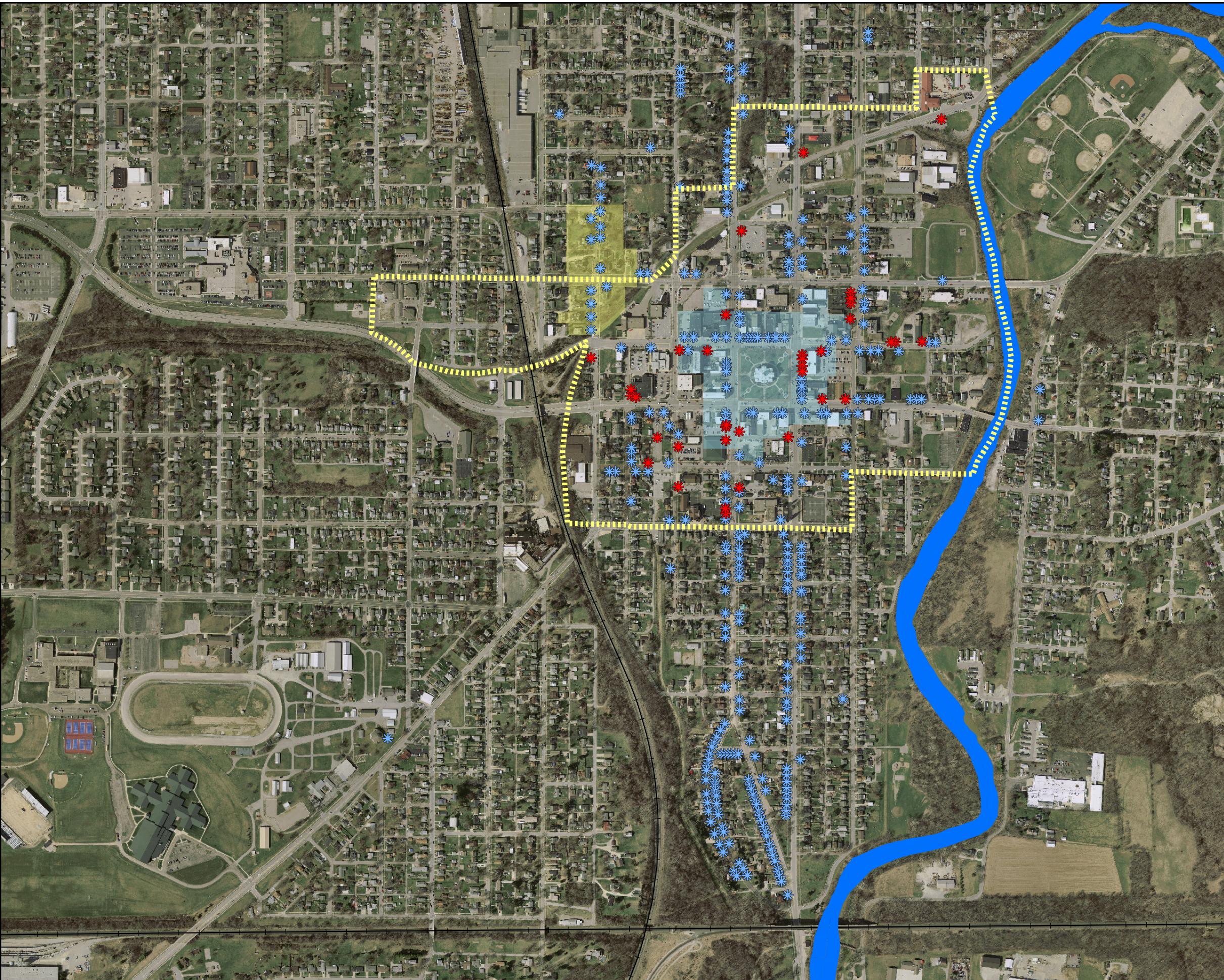
Legend

- Corp Boundary
- Great Miami River / Open Water
- Streets
- Condemned Housing
- * Residential Vacancies (Since 2012)
- % Low-to-Moderate Income Block Groups**
- 51% - 67%
- 67 - 100%





Historic Assets



0 0.05 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4
Miles

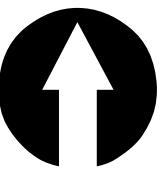
Source: OGRIP Aerials (2014); Sidney; Reveille

Legend

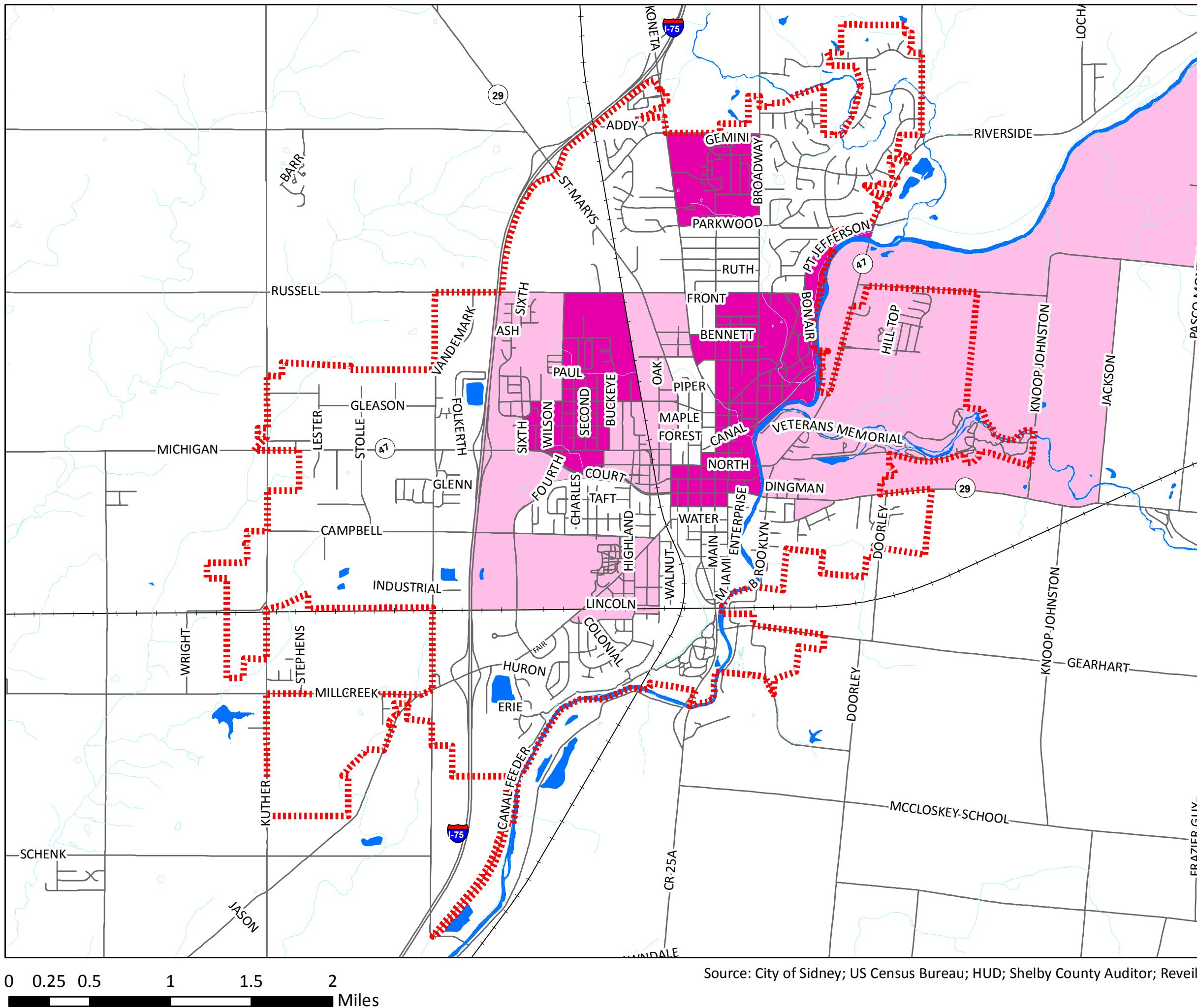
- Downtown CRA (Pre-94)
- Great Miami River / Open Water
- * Remaining Historic Assets
- * Demolished Historic Assets

Historic Districts

- Downtown Historic District
- Walnut Avenue Historic District



CDBG-Eligible Areas



Legend

- Corp Boundary
- Great Miami River / Open Water
- Creeks / Ditches
- Streets

% Low-to-Moderate Income Block Groups

- 51% - 67%
- 67 - 100%