

# An Assessment of the Former Libbey High School Neighborhood:

*Jobs, Education and Recreation*



Prepared for Representative Marcy Kaptur's Office

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the City of Toledo and its public school system have had to make difficult and impactful decisions on the fate of several school buildings. In a trend many cities are experiencing, population loss in the city and other demographic shifts lead to changes in enrollment levels in school districts and in specific buildings. While school districts in the State of Ohio have benefited from funds from the state tobacco settlement that could be used to update or replace dilapidated buildings, in some cases the districts have had to examine whether the cost of repairing or replacing a certain building is efficient, given the current enrollment level.

These decisions have led Toledo Public Schools (TPS) to two hotly contested plans, one to demolish the historic Jessup Wakeman Scott High School building on Collingwood Avenue, and one to demolish the Edward Drummond Libbey High School building on Western Avenue. While alumni and neighborhood residents were able to rally to save Scott High School, the fate of Libbey was sealed in what some argue was a highly charged political battle. Libbey held its last classes in the spring of 2010, with students in the district attending Bowsher, Scott or Waite High Schools the following year.

Once the decision to close Libbey was final, the next question was what would become of the building. Many alumni and neighborhood residents felt the structure was historic, and believed that, a few needed repairs notwithstanding, the building was generally in sound shape. Toledo Public Schools, however, was not in a position to pay for maintenance and upkeep on the building, and had it slated for demolition. In April of 2011, TPS and the City of Toledo proposed a plan to retain Libbey's Field House, skills center and football stadium and demolish the rest of the structure. This would have required a one million dollar loan from the city to TPS. The city ultimately determined that the building was too expensive to renovate, and the plan was scrapped. The Libbey Preservation Committee had discussions with local nonprofits and businesses for possible uses for the building, including afterschool and GED programs, a voting site, a small manufacturing area, a computer training center, day care programs, a green technology site and vocational training. A proposal to get the school listed on the National Register of Historic Places succeeded, but that effort along with a series of community meetings and visits from supporters including Representative Marcy Kaptur were not enough to spare the structure, which was demolished in January of 2012.

The former Libbey High School district and the neighborhood immediately surrounding the now vacant site are characterized by socioeconomic characteristics that are cause for concern. The loss of a community focal point and the addition of a large vacant parcel led to this research project, asking the following questions: 1) how, if at all, have residents been impacted by the closure; 2) what services are lacking in this area, and 3) what do residents want to see go into the former Libbey site?

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The former Libbey site is at the intersection of Western and Hawley, within census tract 40. The district is bounded by the Maumee River to the south and east, Washington Avenue and Dorr Street to the north, and a jagged boundary to the west marked in part by Brown Avenue, Emery Street and Nicholas Street (figure 1).

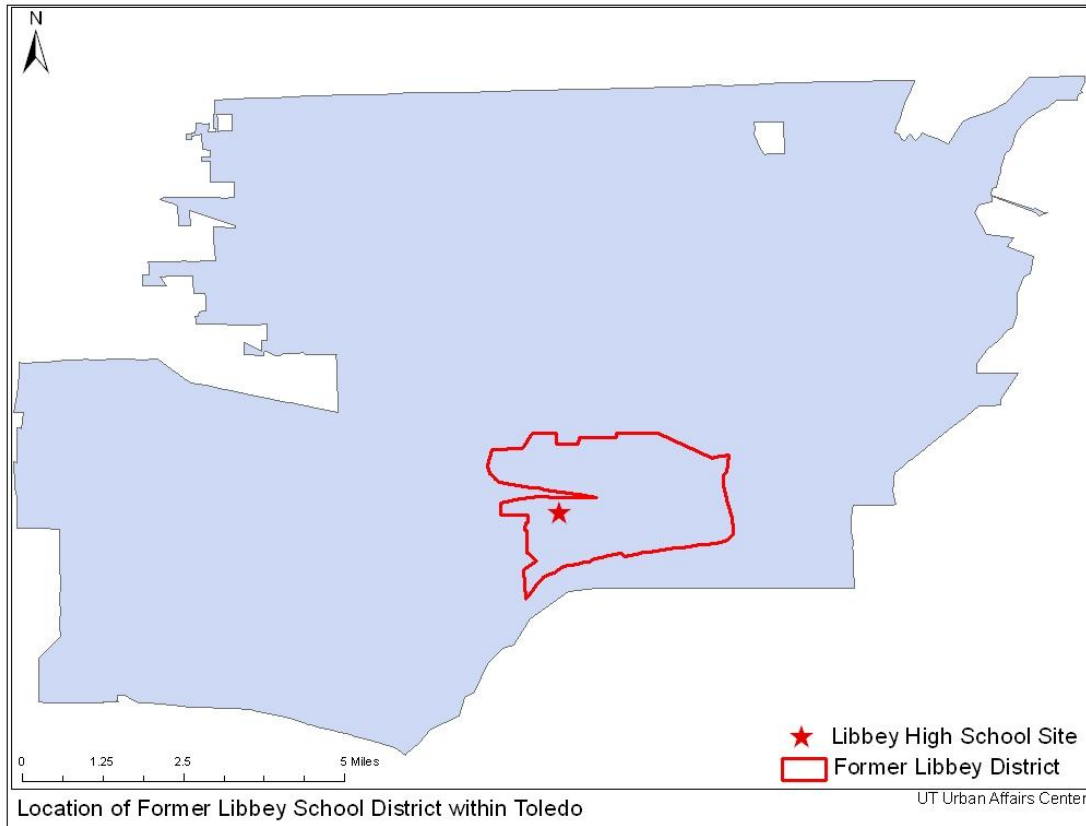


Figure 1

The neighborhoods included in what was the Libbey district are some of Toledo's most economically depressed (table 1). Eleven census tracts are completely or mostly within the former Libbey district (figure 2). The former district is primarily represented by Toledo City Council districts three and four.

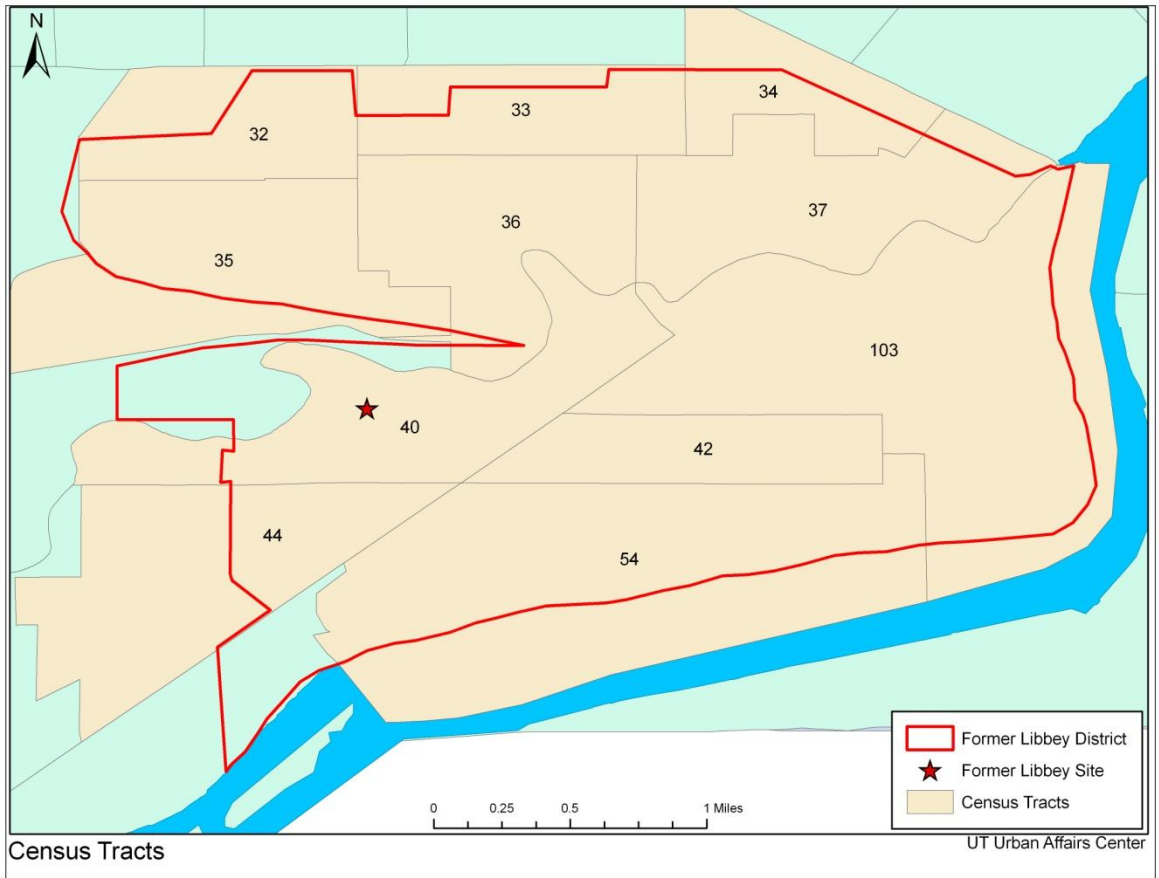


Figure 2

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Census Tracts Located Fully or Mostly Within Former Libbey District**

<b>Census Tract</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>Total</b>
Total Population	1,412	1,701	775	1,529	1,666	1,409	2,184	1,926	4,138	3,227	2,256	22,223
Number of Households	588	660	334	618	651	669	794	665	1,512	1,242	774	8,507
Percent Single Mother Households	15.6	28.0	33.5	15.9	18.0	33.9	19.1	23.5	15.8	15.5	16.1	19.9
Percent White Population	3.3	2.5	17.3	4.7	5.4	18.9	52.0	61.7	68.9	65.2	60.8	41.9
Percent Black Population	92.5	93.5	76.1	92.8	91.4	74.6	34.3	23.1	18.0	17.2	18.0	46.7
Percent Latino Population	2.0	0.9	7.1	1.8	1.6	4.0	13.6	25.1	11.1	22.3	33.4	13.2
Percent Children	31.9	27.7	31.9	29.2	40.1	48.6	29.3	22.6	33.2	30.4	25.7	31.4
Percent Population Over Age 25 with no High School Diploma	16.6	13.7	14.6	22.2	20.3	11.9	18.6	8.5	13.3	22.0	27.1	17.4
Median Household Income (\$)	21,085	26,663	9,621	25,385	20,076	8,118	20,140	22,692	46,395	33,274	21,468	23,174
Percent of Households Below Poverty Level	34.7	25.9	56	28.2	46.8	76.7	44.6	33.7	9.4	37	44.4	39.8
Percent of Households Receiving SNAP	30.4	40.8	65.6	38.7	53.6	75.2	47.4	28.3	12.6	40.5	53.0	44.2

Source: 2010 Census and 2010 American Community Survey

## INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS

To understand the point of view of those working on the ground in these neighborhoods, community activists, community center volunteers, and Libbey alumni were interviewed, on the condition of confidentiality. The stories from various parts of the district were similar, telling of political and economic disinvestment, vacant properties, and lack of opportunities for residents. Many of these concerns predate the closure of Libbey, but some new problems have arisen as a result.

Interviews with those involved in the fight to save Libbey depicted an intriguing series of events, and cited political disinvestment as the primary reason that the structure was ultimately demolished. One advocate for saving the building recalled being removed from a property auction at the site for politely pointing out that furniture being dragged out of the building was destroying the floor. In another incident, one advocate told of an exchange with a Toledo Public Schools representative. The Libbey advocate asked why TPS was not willing to accept a potential offer of \$100,000 in exchange for the property, and was told that it was because the property was worth more than that. The advocate then asked why it was not better to receive \$100,000 as opposed to paying the high cost of demolishing the structure, to which the TPS representative refused to respond and ended the conversation.

While those who tried to save Libbey point to poor communication from TPS and city officials and a politicized, non-representative planning process as the primary causes for the eventual demolition of Libbey, Toledo Public Schools tells a different tale. While advocates say they were not given enough time to line up a buyer and that there were interested parties, TPS says there were no interested parties and that they needed to act quickly in order to benefit from having the Ohio School Facilities Commission fund the majority of the demolition, which cost nearly one million dollars.

In the end, one thing that is certain is that residents and activists in the former Libbey district feel disenfranchised. On the whole, they are angry that a compromise could not be reached, and feel as though their local political representation did not, and does not currently, have the best interest of their neighborhoods at heart. They believe that their neighborhoods are not only not being invested in by local entities (the City of Toledo, The University of Toledo, Toledo Public Schools, and Lucas County were all listed by name), but that what little capital they do have is being drained, by schools being closed, parks not being maintained, and little to no business activity. These feelings are especially strong in the ONYX community. Activists' concerns are further discussed in a later section.

## SURVEY OF RESIDENTS

It proved a difficult task to engage neighborhood residents in providing input into the needs of their neighborhoods. Working through community centers, grocery incentives were offered to encourage residents to complete a brief, confidential survey asking about the service needs of the neighborhood, their experiences with the Libbey closure, and what they wanted to see happen with the site. While this survey was not random, the goal was to reach those populations who are most at risk and most in need of supportive services. In all, two dozen residents from the south and central parts of the district responded to the survey, and in general, their answers were similar and unsurprising.

The household type varied, with many respondents reporting living with a spouse or unmarried partner. One third of respondents were the head of a single mother household. Eighty three percent of respondents had children in the home. Several households had three generations living in the home, and a few had family members such as cousins, nieces or nephews living in the home. Of the respondents, the highest annual income reported was \$26,000. Three respondents reported that they received no income. Only three surveys listed all adults in the household as having a high school diploma or equivalent. One survey listed a household member as reaching only the fourth grade. No survey respondent indicated that they had college experience. A more detailed description of resident concerns appears in the next section.



## DISCUSSION OF CONCERNS

### *Jobs, Education, and Recreation*

The results of the survey were not surprising. After all, it is not news that people who live in these distressed neighborhoods need jobs, life skills, and are concerned about crime in their neighborhood. One community activist who was interviewed for this project disregarded the need for such a survey, stating plainly: “Check them all off—if you listed it, they need it.”

In both the surveys and the interviews with those working in the communities, two major themes were revealed: jobs and recreation. The lack of job opportunities for central city residents, especially in current economic times, is well documented. With few businesses operating in the neighborhood where they live, and lack of transportation to reach a job outside of the neighborhood residents feel their opportunities are limited. The Source was mentioned as the primary place that these residents turn to in their search for a job.

It was also noted that lack of jobs for teenagers in these areas is a problem. While crime (specifically gang activity and, to a lesser extent, prostitution) was cited as a major problem in the neighborhoods, residents and activists alike believe that a primary cause of this crime, particularly among youth, is that no one will employ them. This is particularly true in the central and northern portion of the former Libbey district, where there are few businesses operating and even fewer small, mom-and-pop stores, which some stated would be more likely to hire neighborhood teens. Activists in this neighborhood reported that most pizza places will not deliver to the area due to fear of crime.

Lack of recreation was another serious concern. Residents and activists believe that lack of safe opportunities for physical activity and other recreations leads not only to crime due to idleness, but also contributes to the growing epidemic of childhood obesity. And activists pointed out that the occasional basketball hoop is not sufficient, as, despite stereotypes, not all young African American children enjoy basketball. Residents want clean, safe places for their children to play, and activists cite a continued decline in those types of facilities in the neighborhood, as evidenced by the closure of the Boys and Girls Club and the YMCA that were in the area, and the recent decision to demolish four of the city pools. It is acknowledged that these types of facilities exist in other parts of the city, but again the roadblock of transportation arises. Furthermore, residents complain that existing park space is in disrepair, defaced with graffiti, and a center of gang activity.

## *Food*

All but one of the survey respondents somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement “It is difficult for me to find fresh, affordable food items in my neighborhood”. No markets carrying affordable fresh produce items were identified in the ONYX neighborhood. The Broadway Food Center was identified by activists, however, as a potential partner is bringing quality, fresh food items to the Old South End neighborhood. Survey respondents who answered the question on where they shop for groceries overwhelmingly cited Walmart, which is not located in the Libbey district. Forty two percent of respondents stated that they used emergency food sources such as food pantries.

## *Adult Education and Literacy*

As evidenced in the course of asking residents to complete a survey, many adults in this district struggle with literacy. One respondent initially refused on account of not being able to read, but completed the survey verbally. The written responses on many of the surveys also indicate difficulties in literacy and writing. Sixty seven percent of respondents had at least one person in the home that either had no high school diploma, had gotten a GED, or was in need of assistance in getting their GED.

## *Libbey Students*

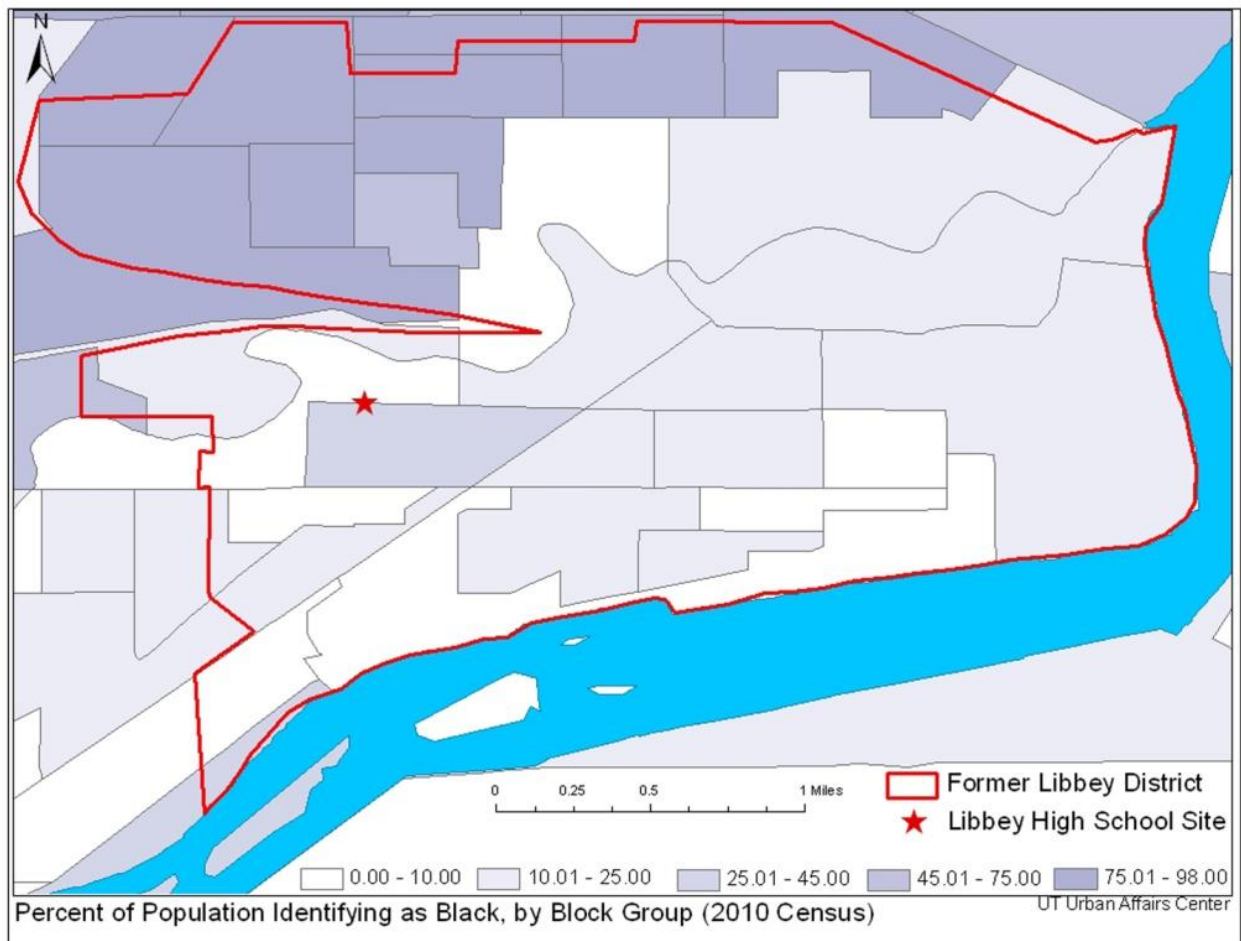
With regard to any concern over the impacts on Libbey students from the closure and transition to another school, in general the survey respondents reported that while those children who were attending Libbey were initially bothered by the transition, they have adjusted well and have suffered no negative consequences. These parents all rated their children’s experience at the new school as “about the same” compared to Libbey. While there is very little research that examines the educational impacts on students when their school is closed, that which exists indicates that the future educational performance depends on the new school—if students are transferred to a poorly-performing school, then educational performance may decline. If they are transferred to a school that performs the same as or better than their previous school, then there may not be a decline, but there is also no evidence that supports any guarantee that performance will improve.<sup>1</sup> Of course, each student is unique and there are additional factors such as the student’s home life and social circle.

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<sup>1</sup> Sunderman and Payne, 2009. Does Closing Schools Cause Educational Harm? A Review of the Research. Mid Atlantic Equity Center, George Washington University. De la Torre and Gwynn, 2009. When Schools Close: Effects on Displaced Students in Chicago Public Schools. Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute.

One concern over the closure was brought up by an activist in the Old South End, who stated that one family she works with has a student who now attends Waite, and transportation has become an issue. This activist reached out to TARTA for a free bus pass for this student and reports that she was told that there were no longer any available. This particular family is struggling with the additional transportation costs compared to when they were within walking distance to Libbey. Those in the southern part of the district, where the Maumee once served as a natural boundary, now need to cross the river to reach Waite High School, which drastically changes transportation needs for some of these students.

In April of 2009, Libbey students held a forum to address the TPS board, and among other concerns, claimed that the then proposed and now implemented breakup of the Libbey district fell along racial lines and amounted to segregation. TPS vehemently denies these allegations, yet one can see that the new district lines do indeed fall along neighborhood lines that separate the predominately African American neighborhoods from the Latino neighborhoods to the south (figures 3-5). There is no evidence that the new districts were drawn along racial lines, however, but the new lines do, in effect, segregate what once was a more racially diverse high school.



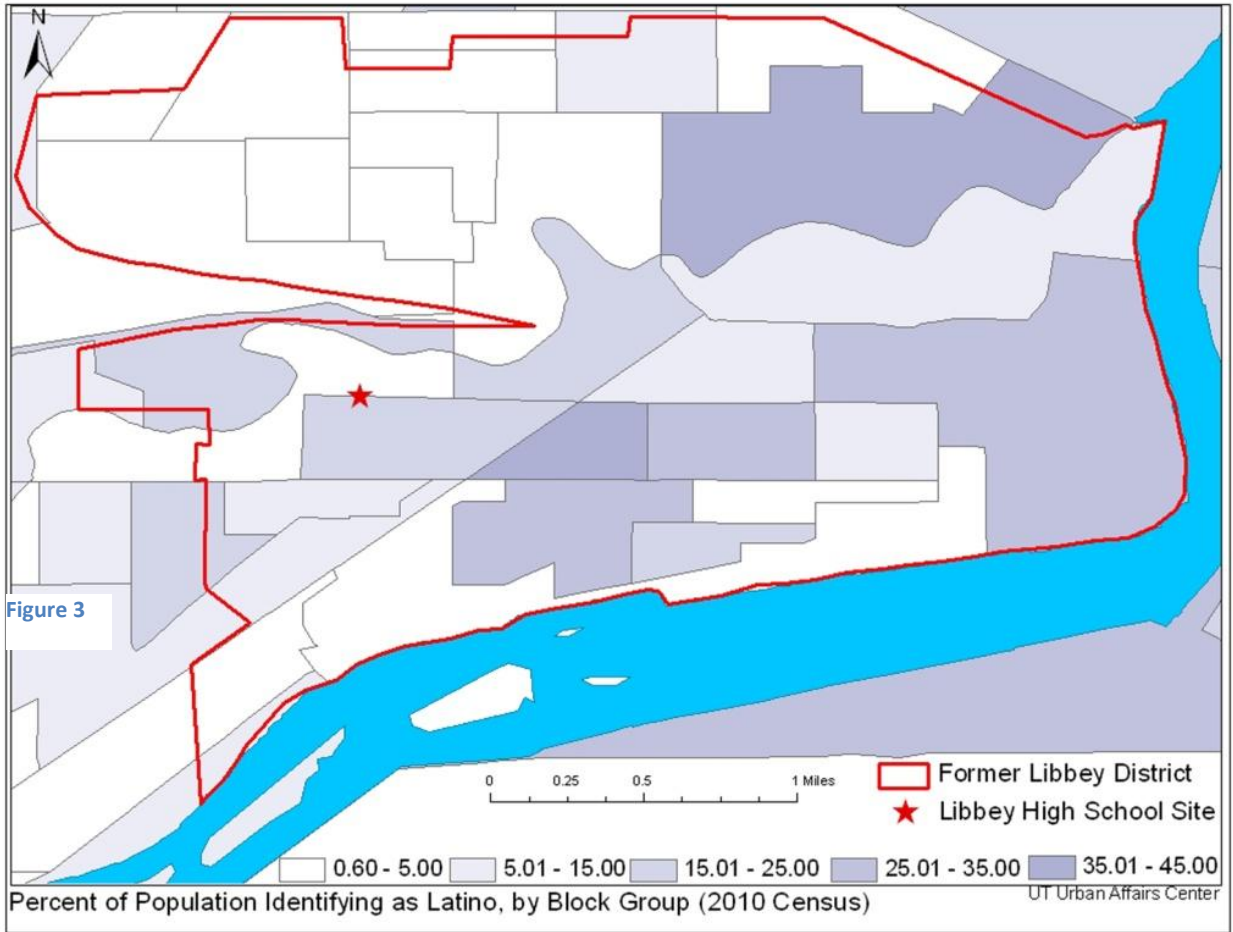


Figure 4

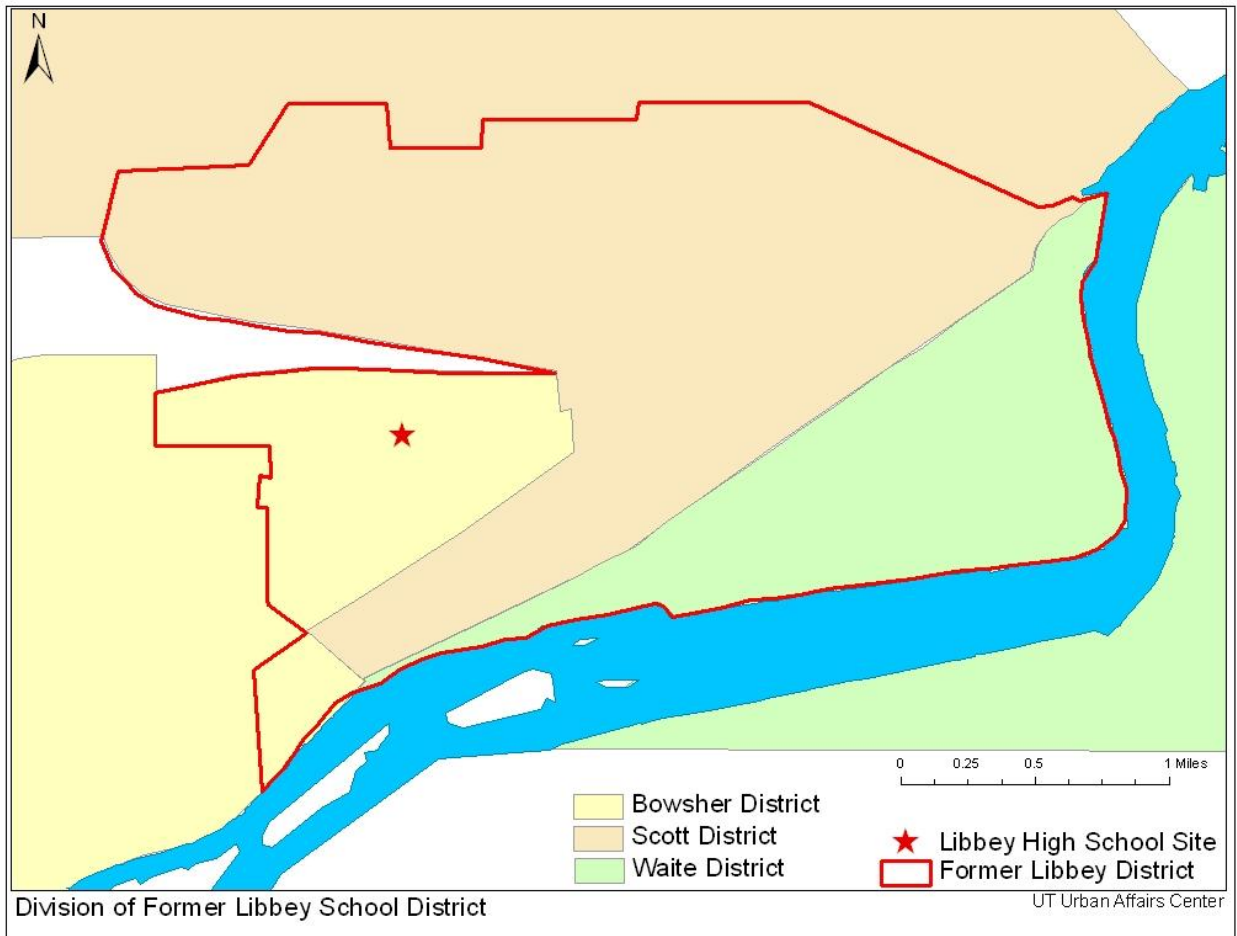


Figure 5

## POTENTIAL

Despite the struggles of residents in the former Libbey district, there are strong existing assets and great potential.

### *Old South End:*

In the Old South End, a string of community assets exists, including the Sofia Quintero Art and Community Center (SQACC), the South Toledo Community Center (STCC), and the Promise Center, which recently moved into the building vacated when the Boys and Girls Club left the neighborhood. These centers provide support groups, meals, food pantries, educational opportunities, and promote a strong sense of pride in the area and in the local Latino culture.

In recent years, a series of colorful murals have been installed in the neighborhood, highlighting the neighborhood's culture, creating a sense of pride, and revitalizing a section of the city that has been hit hard by blight. SQACC also has a vibrant community garden, and there is an authentic Mexican restaurant and grocery store. The Broadway Food Center has been identified as a potential partner in a healthy corner store initiative, and talks are underway to determine the feasibility of that. A few small businesses are located along Broadway, and existing buildings tell of a time when there were many more.

In addition, the Broadway Corridor Coalition (BCC) recently incorporated. The BCC aims to revitalize the Old South End via a collection of nonprofit groups. The BCC meets monthly to discuss plans, concerns in the neighborhood, and potential funding opportunities.

### *ONYX Neighborhood:*

The Dorr Street corridor, at the northern border of the former district, was once a vibrant African American main street. It possesses a poignant history and has been a focal point of plans for revitalization, most recently with the addition of landscaped medians.

A bright spot with a great deal of potential is the Frederick Douglass Community Association (FDCA), located in the Simmons Neighborhood Facilities Building at the intersection of Indiana and Hawley. Situated in a residential neighborhood at the northern edge of the former Libbey district, the building is within walking distance for residents, yet it is vastly underutilized. A city owned building, it features a gym and classroom settings. It serves as a summer feeding site for Toledo's children, where a recent visit observed that none of the children, who were eating lunch on the gym bleachers as opposed to at tables, were from that neighborhood, at least on that particular day.

The FDCA restructured its board in January 2012 with a goal of renewing its relevancy. Several programs take place in the building, including adult education classes, the Self Expression Teen

Theater program (SETT), and Junior Achievement. At one time the building was a Head Start site, but the program left the building due in part to the fact that the playground area does not meet requirements for the program. Plans are in the works to begin addressing this shortcoming. There is also an Empowering and Strengthening Ohio's People (ESOP) office and a food and clothing pantry.

Also housed within the building is the Woodberry Park Inventors and Art after School Program, a jewel in this neighborhood that aims to give kids something to do, get them thinking about history, and express themselves through art. In addition, there are plans for a soccer field, a community garden, and a small library was recently installed. Warren Woodberry, the director of this program, was a leader in the fight to save Libbey High School.

*The Libbey District as a Whole:*

Generally speaking, vacant lots and abandoned houses are a source of blight and crime in the former Libbey neighborhood (figure 6). A boarded up house, which residents described as once being one of the nicest houses in the neighborhood, sits overlooking the soon-to-be improved recreation area outside of the FDCA. Currently used as a drug house according to residents, the house is slated to be demolished. Burned out and boarded up houses are common sights throughout the former district. Demolition of condemned houses, maintenance of vacant lots, and

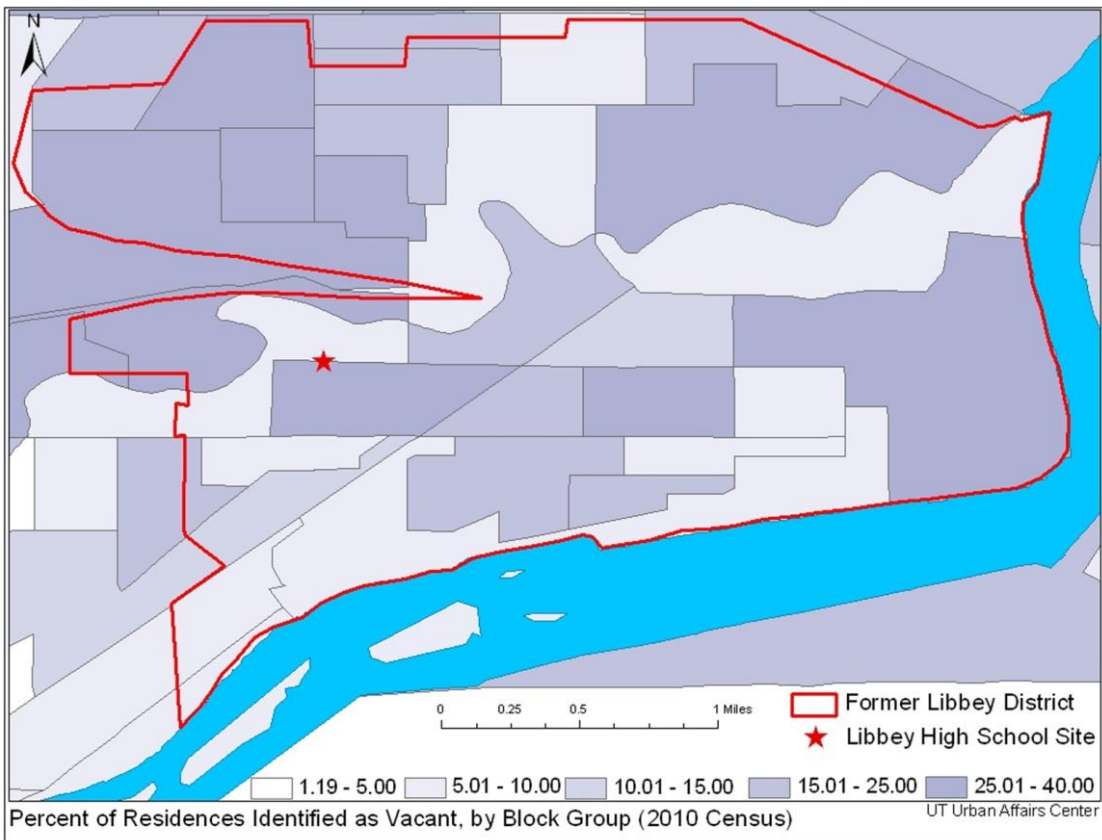


Figure 6



promotion of opportunities available through the Lucas County Land Reutilization Corporation would go a long way toward improving resident safety and pride in the neighborhood.

In the South End, activists spoke of tool sharing programs which allowed residents in need of cash to make ends meet to use a lawnmower to tackle vacant lots in exchange for cash. Many residents are also taking initiative and voluntarily maintaining vacant lots on their blocks.

There are dozens of churches dotted throughout the district, each likely offering some collection of services, such as food pantries and hot meals. Churches are ideal locations for implementing community services and for conducting outreach to residents.

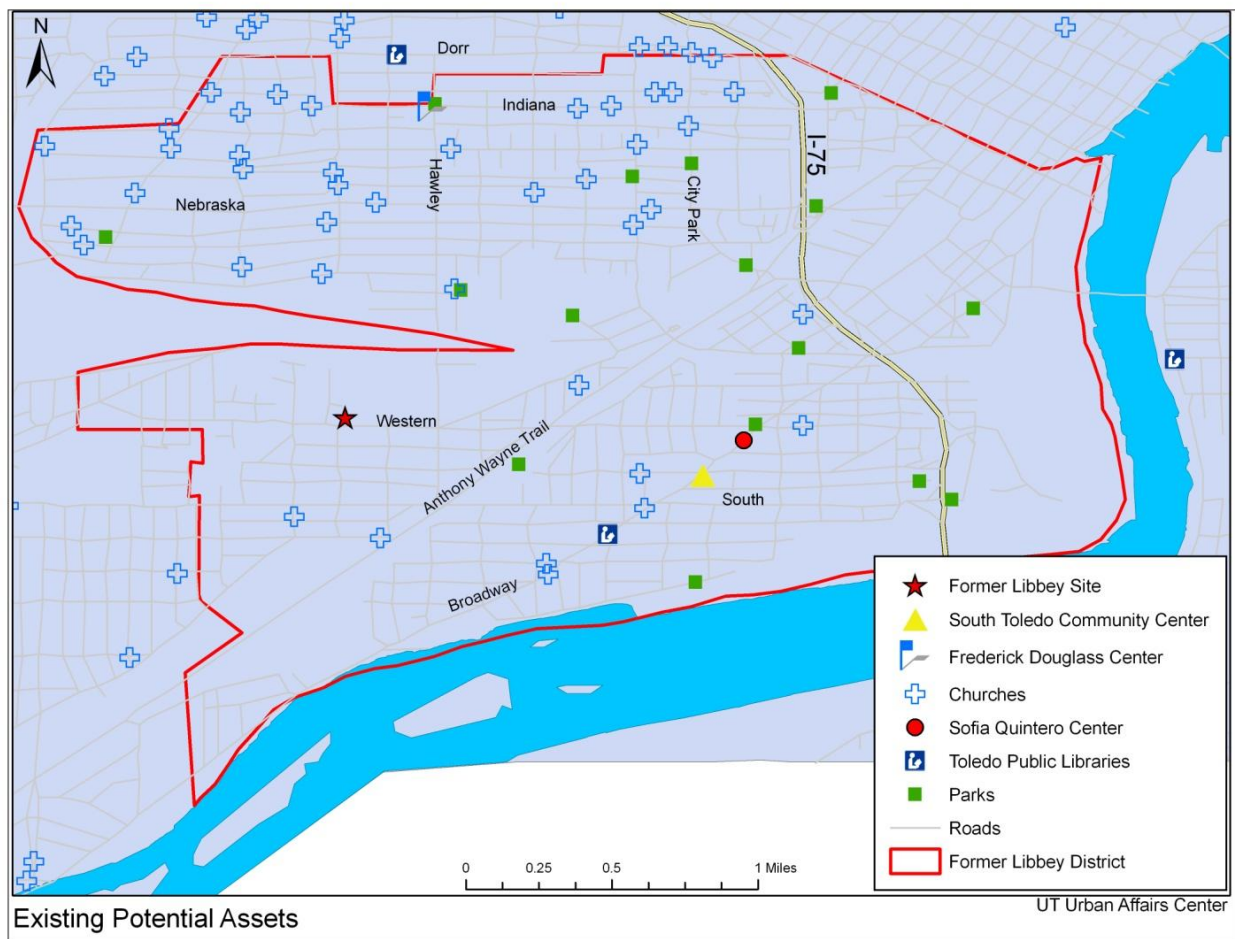


Figure 7

Of course, the largest piece of potential, literally, is the former Libbey site itself. Now a large vacant lot, everyone interviewed or surveyed for this project would have preferred the building stay up; if not as a school, then as a community center or some other community asset. One respondent, who was apparently unaware that the demolition had taken place, stressed a desire to keep the structure. Some residents express a sense of sadness upon looking at the vacant site.



There were mixed responses when residents and activists were asked what they would like to see go into the site. Activists, many of whom foresaw a use for the Libbey building as a community center, housing a variety of services and opportunities for recreation and education, would still like to see something to that end go into the site. Some residents wanted a Walmart, or a similar place to buy food, clothing and household items. Many residents stated they would like to see “something for the kids”, such as a park and recreation, but other residents stressed that this was exactly what they didn’t want, fearing it would simply be taken over by gangs and other criminal activity. Anything that would provide jobs in the neighborhood would also be welcome. The one universal answer, however, is that no one is satisfied with it being a vacant site, and all are concerned it will not be appropriately maintained, and may even become a dumping ground.

The parcel itself is located in Toledo City Council district three, represented by Michael Craig. Some in the Libbey area described feeling somewhat neglected by their councilman, claiming his priorities are with East Toledo across the river, which is also included in his district. They would like to see Mr. Craig become a greater champion for the Libbey site and surrounding neighborhood. Mr. Craig was quoted in the Toledo Free Press in December 2010 as expressing interest in saving at least portions of the school, saying “The field house is an excellent field house. That’s definitely something that should be saved,” he said. “The building itself is historic. It does anchor the neighborhood. I don’t know if they should rush into demolishing this building.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Stainbrook, December 16, 2010. “Libbey could meet wrecking ball in February.” Toledo Free Press

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the residents of the former Libbey district have a sense of pride in their neighborhoods and harbor a belief that they could be revitalized into something better. On the other hand, many feel as though their political representation is failing them, and they do not know how to make a reality out of the potential they see without support from the City of Toledo and other local institutions. Many harbor resentment over the demolition of Libbey, but see an opportunity to replace it with something else that will bring the community together and benefit residents.

The primary needs of the residents, as stated by them, would be jobs, education, and recreation. They not only need help in preparing for and finding jobs, but also job opportunities located within their neighborhoods. They want small businesses and economic development firms to invest in their neighborhoods. They also want opportunities for their children, especially opportunities for safe physical activity. They want recreation areas that are well maintained and not occupied by gang members or other criminal activities. And they want quality education for their children.

There are existing groups working to tackle the problems at hand. The recent incorporation of the Broadway Corridor Coalition should serve as a strong voice for bringing together nonprofits and residents to enact change in the Old South End. In the northern part of the district, in the ONYX neighborhood, Warren Woodberry at the Fredrick Douglass Center has shown much dedication to the neighborhood and has taken great initiative to provide services and quality education opportunities for area children and their families. These are two great starting points for local investment in these areas.

At the end of the day, what these residents and community groups need are to have their voices heard, to have political support, and to have access to funding opportunities to make the visionary plans they hold into reality. Disinvestment by the city, by local institutions, and by political representation was an underlying theme in the discussions over the course of this project. One exception to this was that most activists, particularly in the ONYX area, recognized Representative Kaptur's efforts to save Libbey. They also acknowledged her commitment to local veterans, and her enthusiasm for encouraging access to healthy, locally produced foods and community gardens as a source of physical activity, education, community pride and, of course, good food. They believe that Representative Kaptur has the ability to encourage investment in their neighborhoods.

While there is no evidence that Libbey students were negatively impacted by the closure, we know that schools serve as community hubs. This is the reason so many wanted to save the building. This site is now an opportunity to show the community that they are valued, and that they are being heard.

APPENDIX

**LIBBEY HIGH SCHOOL NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICE ASSESSMENT**

1) Including you, how many adults live in your household?

\_\_\_\_\_

2) For each **adult**, please tell us the following:

Age	Gender	Relationship to you	Currently employed (Yes/No)	Highest level of education completed

3) How many children live in your household? \_\_\_\_\_

4) For each **child** under 18, please tell us the following:

Age	Gender	Relationship to you	Enrolled in school (Yes/No)

5) What is your annual household income? \_\_\_\_\_

6) Did you or your children attend Libbey High School?

I did       My child/children did

7) If you have children who were attending Libbey at the time of its closure, how do you believe the closure and change of schools has affected your children?

My child was negatively impacted, and has struggled socially and/or academically

My child was upset, but has adapted and has not been negatively impacted

My child was not bothered by the closure

My child was happy about and/or has benefited from the closure

8) If you have children who were attending Libbey at the time of its closure, what school did they attend following the closure of Libbey?

- Bowsher
- Scott
- Waite
- A different TPS high school: \_\_\_\_\_
- They graduated from Libbey
- They stopped attending school altogether after the closure
- Private school
- Other

9) Compared to your child's experience at Libbey, do you feel like the new school is:

- Better
- Worse
- About the same

10) Please indicate if you or someone in your household is in need of any of the following services, and whether or not you have been able to access the service:

Service	Check if in need of this service	Check if you have access to this service
Adult education/GED		
Career/technical education/job skills		
Help with job search		
Financial education/credit counseling		
Affordable health care		
Counseling for disease/health problem		
Affordable dental care		
Affordable child care		
Transportation		
Family counseling		
Drug/alcohol counseling		
Tutoring/educational help for child		
Mental health services (adult)		
Mental health services (child)		
Emergency food (food bank, pantry, etc.)		
Help paying rent/mortgage or utilities		
Emergency housing/shelter		
Help with domestic violence situation		
Affordable vet care for pets (including spay/neuter)		

Any service not listed above:

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11) Where do you shop for groceries?

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12) Indicate your agreement with the following statement: It is difficult for me to find fresh, affordable food items in my neighborhood. (circle one)

Strongly agree   Somewhat agree   Don't know  
Somewhat disagree   Strongly disagree

13) What do you think is the biggest problem in your neighborhood?

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14) If you could choose any one type of business, store or service provider to open in your neighborhood, what would it be?

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15) What would you like to see happen to the former Libbey High School site?

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16) Additional comments (about the Libbey closure and/or about any other concerns you have in your neighborhood):

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If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please contact Jeanette Eckert at the University of Toledo Urban Affairs Center at 419-530-6048 or [jeanette.eckert@utoledo.edu](mailto:jeanette.eckert@utoledo.edu).