



The New Planner — Fall 2012

Campus Spotlight

University of New Orleans Students Collaborate on WhoData.org

By Mike Madej

Students from the University of New Orleans Department of Planning and Urban Studies (UNO PLUS) have taken to the field to support a mapping campaign to help New Orleans residents' fight blight.

Through a successful collaborative partnership among UNO PLUS, the Regional Planning Commission (RPC), GISCorps, numerous neighborhood organizations, and volunteers, residents citywide began to see the extent of blight and its impact on their quality of life. In February 2011, **WhoData.org** (with a web address of www.whodata.net) was launched to allow people and organizations to contribute and track information on the progress and potential of New Orleans's neighborhoods. WhoData has successfully mapped property conditions in several Orleans Parish neighborhoods at the parcel or lot level. The field experience provides students with an opportunity to apply course work to practice, develop and expand professional skills, and become acquainted with agencies and community groups throughout the city while working to improve the quality of life of New Orleanians.

"WhoData.org is a public participation geographic information systems (PPGIS) program that will encourage our students to work closely with community-based organizations and municipal leaders to integrate neighborhood and regional data for mutual understanding and access," says Michelle Thompson, assistant professor in the University of New Orleans Department of Planning and Urban Studies and WhoData program manager.

Information collected by students, residents, and volunteers is entered into the WhoData website, which features online mapping tools that allow residents and organizations to assess neighborhoods, highlight blighted properties, create their own maps, and share information with the public.

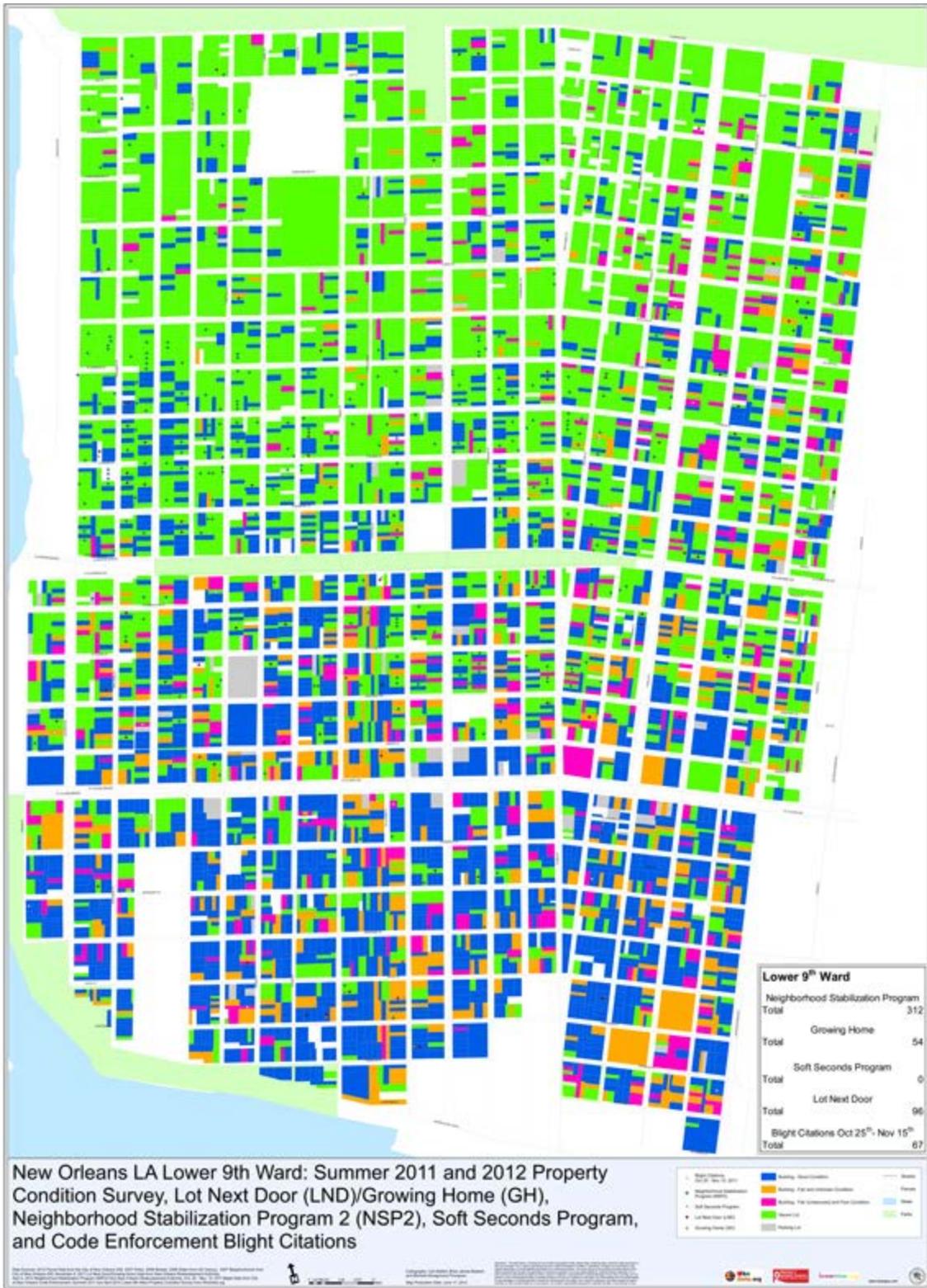
Lynn Dupont, principal planner and GIS coordinator for the RPC, believes the data display on the site will help eliminate some of the redundant data-gathering efforts that have occurred in the past while providing a categorization methodology that allows all users to track rebuilding efforts and analyze changes. A key feature included in the website is publicly available survey data that can be downloaded in Excel format from WhoData and joined to the city's GIS parcel layer.

WhoData.org has already exceeded 1 million unique hits since its launch. Input from users and partners has proven valuable in addressing concerns about creating transparency and expanding data resources for the city's citizen participation program. Such data collaboration allows WhoData to provide pertinent information for organizations and individuals interested in measuring the progress of economic and community development throughout New Orleans.

WhoData provides free access to the data and website, available to all. To learn more, visit www.WhoData.org or contact Dr. Michelle Thompson at mmthomp1@uno.edu or 504-280-6593.



*Mike Madej recently earned a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the University of New Orleans. As a graduate assistant at the Regional Planning Commission, he worked in conjunction with **WhoData.org** in conducting a property survey for the Lower Ninth Ward.*



WhoData provides a comprehensive property map detailing the condition (good, fair, or poor) of each parcel in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans. Image courtesy of WhoData.org.