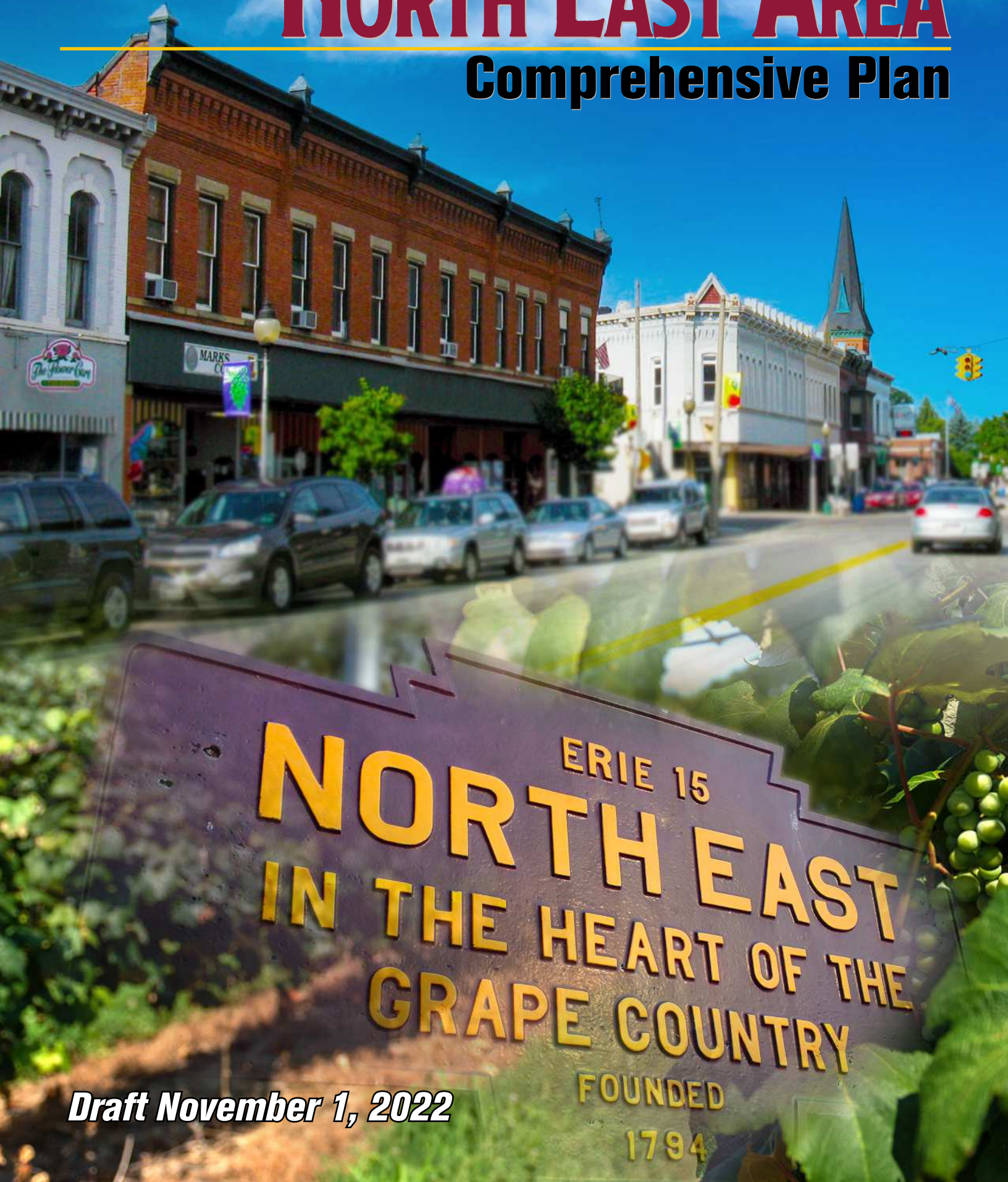


NORTH EAST AREA

Comprehensive Plan



Draft November 1, 2022

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Introduction

Two Municipalities, One Community, Working Together on One Shared Vision

The Borough of North East and North East Township are proud to introduce this update to the North East Area Comprehensive Plan. Our municipalities have been working together for decades to make the North East Area a great place to call home, visit, work or own a business. This multi-municipal comprehensive plan renews our commitment to identify a shared vision for the future, to work together to solve problems and pursue common goals, and to ensure a bright and prosperous future for the North East Area.

Planning for our community's future has never been more important. With the availability of the internet, people and businesses can now locate just about anywhere they choose, so quality of life issues have become increasingly more important. In order to compete with other communities, and to retain and attract residents and businesses, the North East Area must do everything possible to recognize its full potential.

North East is already a great place to call home. We recognize that, and want to capitalize upon the qualities that make it so special. This plan is about making the North East Area an even better place to live for its current and future residents. And it's about doing more to support our local businesses so that they can thrive and prosper. We have a beautiful, historic downtown area; a friendly, small town atmosphere; an abundance of natural beauty with farms, vineyards and direct access to Lake Erie; and wonderful public parks. We have so much to appreciate and be thankful for. By implementing this plan, our community will take important steps to protect, improve, and maximize the potential of our community's most precious assets and characteristics.

Borough and Township officials and staff have embraced this plan, and are looking forward to working towards its implementation. However, they won't be able to implement this plan on their own. The successful implementation of this plan will require the support and active participation of our entire community, including our business owners, community leaders, and residents.

How will this plan be different?

The unfortunate reality is that historically, municipal comprehensive plans have had a poor track record for success. You may be familiar with the old adage, "another plan sitting on the shelf".

There are a few factors that often contribute to this lack of success. Many of these plans are very broad in scope, and include an excessive number of goals. This can lead to confusion and indecision. "Where do we start?" In addition, the goals often lack specifics, and the plans seldom provide the details or specific information needed to successfully implement them. "How do we get started?" "What's the first step?" And perhaps the biggest downfall is the misperception that the process is completed when the plan is finished and adopted.

The Borough of North East and North East Township recognized that in order to be successful, we needed to avoid these common pitfalls, and that a fresh approach to planning was needed. A decision was made to follow a planning process known as an "Implementable Plan". This process is advocated by the Pennsylvania Governor's Center for Local Government Services. There are 5 keys to an implementable plan.

1. Focus the plan on relevant, real community issues.
2. Organize the plan the way local officials and citizens think.
3. Devise practical and workable recommendations.
4. Recruit partners and create capacity to implement the plan.
5. Get local ownership of the plan and commitment to implement it.

The primary purpose of this planning process was to identify and focus on the North East Area's top three or four priorities. Action plans were then created to address each of the priorities. These action plans provide the details needed to implement the plan and achieve the desired results. The action plans have been vetted to insure they are realistic and financially feasible.

The North East Area has made a commitment to implementation of this plan. There is recognition that adoption of this plan is not the end of the process. Instead, this plan is an important first step in a larger process, and is a tool that will be used to get results. Following plan adoption, progress will be reviewed on a regular basis to make sure that everything possible is being done to ensure the successful implementation of this plan.

The Planning Process

In October 2020, the North East Borough Council and the North East Township Board of Supervisors both passed resolutions supporting the development of this multi-municipal comprehensive plan, and formally requested the assistance of Erie County's Department of Planning & Community Development. The County agreed to assist the two municipalities by helping to facilitate the planning process and by providing technical assistance. The County provided these services to the municipalities at no cost.

The municipalities created a Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) to guide the development of this plan. The PAC included municipal officials from both municipalities, as well as representatives from the North East Area Chamber of Commerce and the North East Community Foundation.

The planning process was divided into four phases, as follows:

Phase 1: Identify Priority Issues

Phase 2: Develop Action Plans to Address Priority Issues

Phase 3: Draft Comprehensive Plan and Initiate Implementation of Action Plans

Phase 4: Monitor Plan Implementation, and Amend Action Plans, as needed.

The process was initiated in May 2021, and the first ten months (Phase 1) were devoted to identifying the North East Area's top priorities. During this phase, public input was collected, and background research was completed.

On June 22, 2021, a public meeting was held at Heard Memorial Park to formally announce and provide information about the planning process, as well as to receive public input. Approximately 61 people attended, and attendees were divided into a total of six discussion groups. Each discussion group was asked to list what they like most about North East, what they like the least, and what the Area's most pressing needs are. Attendees were then asked to prioritize their listed responses. Although responses and recommended priorities varied between the groups, some common themes emerged. Attendees tended to like the friendly, small town atmosphere, the vineyards and natural beauty, school system, festivals and community events, local businesses, and the close proximity and access to Lake Erie. Common dislikes included inadequate internet service, empty storefronts, and a lack of recreational activities, especially activities for children. When it came to identifying the North



East Area's most pressing needs, common responses included improved internet service, downtown improvements, attracting and retaining businesses, and increasing employment opportunities.

In order to give all residents an opportunity to participate and provide input, a public survey was taken from July 13th through August 13th of 2021. Paper copies of the survey were distributed by the North East News-Journal, and were also made available at several local business locations. An online version was also available via a link posted on both municipal websites. A total of 493 responses were received. Of these, 319 responses were submitted online, and 174 responses were submitted on paper forms. Respondents to the survey were asked to rate the North East Area in several different areas. They were also asked to provide their opinions about several potential priority areas. The results of the public survey are available in a separate report, *The North East Area Comprehensive Plan Public Survey Results, August 2021*.

During Phase 1, the Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development prepared an Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis. This report was completed in February 2022, and provided a summary of existing conditions within the North East Area as well as some initial recommendations for the Area's consideration. Its intended purpose was to help inform the North East Area's decision making process as it worked to identify its top priority issues.

In March 2022, the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) reviewed and evaluated the public input that had been received during the public meeting, as well as the results of the public survey and the existing conditions summary & analysis. After considering all factors, the PAC identified the North East Area's top three (3) priorities as:

- **Improve Our Downtown Area**
- **Preserve the North East Area's Rural Characteristics**
- **Improve Our Parks**

The governing bodies of both municipalities as well as both municipal planning commissions were consulted regarding the identified top priorities. They agreed with the PAC's recommendations, and were supportive of focusing the plan on those priorities.

During Phase 2 of the planning process, action plans were developed to address each of the priority issues, and to achieve the North East Area's desired results. The anticipated time frame for implementation of the action plans will be 5 years or less.

Early in September 2022, an initial, "text only" draft of the comprehensive plan was completed, and was made available for review to the Planning Advisory Committee and municipal officials. Approximately one month later, a fully formatted draft was made available for public viewing and comment via the municipal websites. Following the release of the draft plan, a public meeting was held to present the proposed plan to the public, and to receive public comments prior to its adoption by both municipalities.

As noted previously, adoption of this plan is not the end of the process. Both municipalities have committed to implement the plan, and to achieve the desired results. Phase 4 of this process will follow the plan's adoption by both municipalities. During this phase, the PAC and the municipal planning commissions will continue to meet in order to review the progress being made towards plan implementation, and to evaluate results. If obstacles to implementation are being encountered, or if satisfactory results are not being obtained, it may be necessary to make adjustments to this plan so that the desired results can be achieved. Phase 4 will be an on-going process for 1 to 5 years following plan adoption.

Summary of Goals

Improve Our Downtown Area

1. Encourage and support business development.
2. Maintain an attractive, well designed downtown area.
3. Promote the downtown area and its businesses.
4. Build collaboration, cultivate partnerships and secure financial resources.

Preserve North East Area's Rural Characteristics

1. Preserve our open space, farms and natural areas.
2. Encourage agriculture and other appropriate uses of natural resources.
3. Focus infrastructure investments on future growth areas and away from rural areas.

Improve Our Parks

1. Establish a Parks and Recreation Board.
2. Build community support for the parks and increase citizen involvement.
3. Increase usage of the parks.
4. Supplement municipal funding for park related needs.
5. Develop park master plans.

Improve Our Downtown Area

- 1** Encourage and support business development.
- 2** Maintain an attractive, well designed downtown area.
- 3** Promote the downtown area and its businesses.
- 4** Build collaboration, cultivate partnerships and secure financial resources.



Improve Our Downtown Area

Introduction

Why is this important?

The North East Area values its Downtown Area, and recognizes its importance, not only to the Area's economy, but also to the quality of life of its residents. Its historical characteristics and small town charm are a big part of what makes North East so special. The historical buildings preserve and reflect the history and culture of the area, and the many small businesses provide employment, shopping and dining opportunities for residents.

Our Downtown Area includes the former Mercyhurst University North East campus. For decades, the campus was a significant economic, educational and cultural asset to the North East Area and the surrounding region. In August of 2019, University officials announced the intent to consolidate its educational programs to its Erie campus, and this resulted in the closure of the North East campus. The resulting loss of jobs, economic impacts resulting from a loss of the student population, and the potential vacancy of the campus became immediate concerns to the North East Area. Fortunately, Ehrenfeld Companies purchased the campus property in 2022, and the future outlook is very promising. This planning process has given the North East Area community an opportunity to plan for a successful transition of the former campus property to new uses under the ownership of Ehrenfeld Companies.

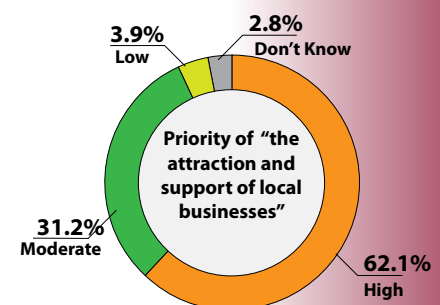
As noted in the *Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis*, there have been some prior plans and projects devoted to the revitalization of the downtown business district. The Borough, Downtown North East, Inc. (DNE), the North East Area Chamber of Commerce, and the North East Community Foundation have all been actively working to revitalize the downtown area, and to maximize its potential. This plan supports and builds upon those prior plans and revitalization efforts. It also recognizes the value of numerous projects that are currently planned or in progress. Most of all, it memorializes the North East Area's commitment to improving one of its most important and cherished assets.

Public input/Public Survey Results

On June 22, 2021 a public meeting was held. Attendees were divided into small discussion groups, and were asked to provide input regarding what they liked and disliked about the North East Area, as well as what they thought were the Area's most pressing needs. The desire for economic development and downtown improvements were common responses. The public survey that was taken in July and August provided similar results.

As part of the public survey, respondents were asked how much priority should be given to various issues during the next 5 years. Of all of these, the attraction and support of local businesses received the highest priority ranking. Over ninety-three percent (93.3%) of respondents rated the attraction and support of local businesses as either a high priority (62.1%) or a moderate priority (31.2%). Only 3.9% rated it as a low priority. The remaining 2.8% didn't know or didn't have an opinion.

In addition to the attraction and support of local businesses, the public survey also asked about several other issues that contribute to economic development. These included improving the downtown area (90.5% favorable), access to high speed internet (81.1% favorable), and promoting the North East Area (82.9% favorable). The survey also asked respondents to



rate the North East Area in 28 different areas. Of these, “shopping opportunities” was the second lowest rated area of satisfaction, with 39.4% of respondents rating them as “poor”. Business opportunities, employment opportunities, and the attractiveness of storefronts downtown also made the list of the top 10 lowest rated areas of satisfaction.

Identifying Our Downtown Area

For purposes of this plan, the Downtown Area boundaries are identified by the North East Downtown Focus Area Map. The area includes the Borough’s central business district, but is expanded to also include the former Mercyhurst University campus, which is now owned by Ehrenfeld Companies. It is also extended south, along South Lake Street to the railroad underpass and the Lake Shore Railway Historical Society Museum. Gibson Park and Heard Park are key assets located within the Downtown Area.

The intent of defining a focus area is to help direct municipal and community resources to where they are needed the most, and to where they will have the greatest impact towards addressing one of the Area’s top priorities. However, it should be made clear that these are not intended to be “hard” boundaries. Some of the goals and action items included in the plan, especially those intended to support, retain and attract local businesses can and will be applied throughout the North East Area. Both municipalities recognize the importance of promoting economic and business development within their commercial and industrial areas.



Long Term Vision for Our Downtown Area

Year 2040 – North East and its Downtown Area are thriving, and so are its businesses. The Downtown Area is the heart of the community. It is loaded with small town charm, and provides a quaint and cozy atmosphere that draws residents and visitors to the area. Some enjoy the quiet, peaceful and well landscaped parks. Others come to patronize the many small businesses, including a variety of restaurants, a bakery, ice cream parlor, and numerous “boutique style” retail and service oriented businesses. Some of these businesses feature goods produced locally including art, specialty foods, and wines. Buildings are attractive and well-maintained, and care has been taken to retain their historical character. The area is pedestrian friendly and inviting. Sidewalks are clean, the area is well lighted and safe, storefronts are decorated, and adequate public transportation is available.

The Downtown Area is an activity center not only for business, but also for recreation and cultural opportunities. Gibson Park serves as the Borough’s town square, and is the location of many community events, including WineFest, Picnic in the Park, Erie Philharmonic concerts, and a farmers’ market. Heard Park provides a location for larger events, such as the annual North East Firemen’s Cherry Festival. Walking tours are available for residents and tourists, and highlight the Downtown’s historic buildings and sites, arts and culture. The Lake Shore Railway Historical Society Museum is a popular tourist destination, and has completed the renovation of a former freight house that is

located on the museum property. The former Mercyhurst campus, which is now known as Granite Ridge, has been redeveloped and its transition to a conference and event center has also helped to make Downtown North East a destination. Each year, thousands of visitors participate in sporting events and attend conferences and other events that are located on the former campus property.

Goals and Objectives (Tasks)

Goal #1

Encourage and Support Business Development.

Economic development strategies and initiatives are often most effectively addressed with a regional approach. However, there are some things that can be done at the local level to encourage and support business development.

Business attraction and retention efforts, as well as efforts to encourage entrepreneurs to start new businesses are important to an effective, economic development strategy. Business attraction efforts are often most successful when tailored to business sectors aligned with a community's strengths and assets.

Although business attraction efforts are important, helping existing businesses to grow, and encouraging local entrepreneurs to start new businesses can often be even more rewarding for small communities. Business owners who live in a community have a vested interest in the community, and are less likely to relocate to other areas.

The North East Area has five primary objectives to accomplish its goal to encourage and support business development. These are:

- (1) Help existing businesses grow and prosper.
- (2) Support entrepreneurs and new business "start-ups".
- (3) Attract new businesses.
- (4) Establish a central business zoning district.
- (5) Support the development and re-use of the former Mercyhurst University campus.

While the downtown is the primary focus area of this plan, efforts to support, retain and attract local businesses can and will be made throughout the North East Area.

Objective 1.1 - Help existing businesses grow and prosper

Attracting new businesses to a community can be very difficult. The number of communities recruiting businesses far exceeds the number of businesses that are interested in relocating or expanding to new locations. As a result, competition can be intense.

While business recruitment efforts should continue to be made, strategies that focus on helping existing businesses to grow and prosper are often more successful in strengthening the local economy and creating job growth. Most of the businesses in the downtown area are locally owned. The business owners and their families are members of the community. They support the schools, local charities and other local businesses, and profits from their businesses often stay in the area.

Task 1.1.1 - Build relationships with business owners.

Municipal officials and community leaders from both the Borough and the Township value and support North East Area businesses, and have been making an on-going effort to build and maintain relationships with business owners. There is an understanding that open lines of communication are necessary in order to effectively identify and address the needs of the business community. Both municipalities are actively involved with Downtown North East, Inc. and frequently partner with the

North East Area Chamber of Commerce on projects and events designed to support area businesses. Both municipalities also have staff available to consult with business owners who are interested in business development or expansion within the North East Area.

Moving forward with the implementation of this plan, it will continue to be important to keep communication lines open. This will help to ensure that the municipalities and community organizations are using their time, money and other resources wisely. When business owners are consulted and informed, they will be more likely to invest in their businesses and their community.

In addition to current efforts, the municipalities may find it productive to designate a municipal official or assign a staff person to establish and maintain regular contact with business owners by visits or check-ins. This “hands-on” approach will send a positive message to business owners that they are important to the community.

Task 1.1.2 - Continue to advocate for and pursue improvements in broadband internet service.

High speed internet service is a necessity for today's businesses, and is critical infrastructure that needs to be available in order for North East Area businesses to be competitive. Although the downtown area has internet service available, there have been numerous complaints about the speed and quality of this service.

The speed and quality of internet service has been a problem throughout the North East Area. Both municipalities have been working to address the problem, and both have continuously urged internet service providers to improve and expand internet service within the North East Area. However, the service providers are private businesses, and any expansions or improvements to services need to be profitable, and make good, business sense. Unfortunately, the relatively low population within the North East Area limits the potential customer base. That, combined with the costs associated with providing improved internet service, has limited the profitability and economic viability of providing improved internet service in the North East Area.

In November 2021, the federal government passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The legislation included \$65 billion to improve broadband internet access in rural areas and make broadband more affordable for lower-income households across the U.S. At this time, it is unclear how or when this may impact the North East Area. However, it is anticipated that this investment may help lead to improved internet service within the North East Area. Both municipalities will continue to advocate for improved internet service, not only with the internet service providers, but also with county, state and federal government officials.

Task 1.1.3 - Offer an e-marketing grant program.

Due to the internet, businesses are now able to locate anywhere, and still market their products and services world-wide. North East Area businesses have the opportunity to expand their customer base and grow their businesses through online commerce by setting up a website or by using social media platforms.

Unfortunately, not all business owners have the time or the knowledge needed to set up and/or maintain a website or social media platform. Professional consulting assistance and step-by-step training is often needed.



The North East Area plans to help its business owners take advantage of e-marketing opportunities by making grants available for website and social media design and/or by retaining a professional consultant to offer step-by-step training in e-marketing.

Task 1.1.4 - Help businesses reduce operational costs.

The North East Area is committed to helping businesses reduce operational costs to the extent that it is able to do so. Spreading the word about the County's C-PACE program, and pursuing reduced flood insurance premiums through the National Flood Insurance Community Rating System are two examples of how the municipalities and/or community organizations can help. Another example is the work the Borough is doing to pursue infrastructure improvements that will help to mitigate flooding in the downtown area.

Sub-Task 1.1.4A - Promote the Erie County Energy Efficiency (C-PACE program).

Energy efficiency is a common problem for older buildings, and high energy costs can be challenging for businesses. Erie County is aware of this, and is currently in the process of establishing a Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy financing (C-PACE) program in accordance with PA Act 30 of 2018. Landowners of commercial properties in the North East Area will be eligible to utilize C-PACE to finance an energy efficiency, clean energy, or water conservation project. Repayment of the funding will be in installments added to county real estate tax bills.

The North East municipalities and North East Area Chamber of Commerce can help the County by helping to promote the C-PACE program to North East Area businesses.

Sub-Task 1.1.4B - Pursue infrastructure improvements to help mitigate property damage associated with Baker Creek flooding.

North East Borough suffers from recurring flooding in its downtown area. The cause of the flooding is Baker Creek, which is prone to flooding during storm events and during periods of heavy snowmelt. Many sections of the creek are lined with riprap or concrete retaining walls, and a few sections are tubed and travel underground. The age and condition of the existing infrastructure varies. Some sections of the creek are prone to erosion, which adds to the problem.

The flooding results in property damage and the disruption of businesses. Property owners are burdened with repair costs and the high cost of flood insurance. This can have a negative impact on property values, and can make them more difficult to rent or sell. Bank financing can be more difficult to obtain for properties located within the flood hazard area.



At the present time, there is no clear solution to this problem. According to the Borough, upgrades could be made to some of the retaining walls and box culverts. However, a more “long term” solution will most likely require more extensive improvements such as installation of additional tubing, or possibly even a potential diversion of the main water flow. Some preliminary engineering has been performed, and the cost of the work is estimated at approximately \$6 million.

Sub-Task 1.1.4C - Pursue reduced flood insurance premiums through the National Flood Insurance Program's Community Rating System.

In addition to infrastructure improvements to help mitigate the flooding of Baker Creek, the Borough can help to reduce flood insurance premiums for property owners by participating in the

National Flood Insurance Program's Community Rating System.

The Community Rating System (CRS) is a voluntary incentive program that recognizes and encourages community floodplain management practices that exceed the minimum requirements of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Over 1,500 communities participate nationwide.

In CRS communities, flood insurance premium rates are discounted to reflect the reduced flood risk resulting from the community's efforts that address the three goals of the program:

1. Reduce and avoid flood damage to insurable property.
2. Strengthen and support the insurance aspects of the National Flood Insurance Program.
3. Foster comprehensive floodplain management.

More information is available online at

<https://www.fema.gov/floodplain-management/community-rating-system>

Task 1.1.5 - Buy local. Patronize downtown businesses.

"Buying local", and patronizing downtown businesses is perhaps the most important way to support and encourage North East Area businesses. Throughout the planning process, residents have expressed a desire for more shopping and employment opportunities. The best way to help local businesses succeed, and to help make more shopping and employment opportunities a reality is to "buy local".

The concept of "buying local" doesn't just apply to residents. The municipalities, local businesses, and school district should also support their businesses, workers and community by "buying local" whenever practical.

Task 1.1.6 - Encourage coordinated business hours.

Public input received during this planning process expressed the need for coordinated business hours in the downtown area. It was noted that many stores close at 5 p.m. Concerns were also expressed that during evening events at the parks, "nothing is open".

The lack of coordinated business hours can deter potential customers from shopping in the downtown area. Not only can they cause confusion, but customers also experience frustration when they don't know what is open.

Downtown area businesses should be encouraged to maintain coordinated business hours, including staying open at least one evening during the week. Businesses are also encouraged to take advantage of the increased customer traffic that can result from special events and promotions that are designed to bring people to the downtown area.



Task 1.1.7 - Create a Revolving Loan Fund.

Revolving loan funds (RLF) can be used to encourage and promote small business development and expansion. They provide a source of capital that business owners can use for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to, operating capital, the acquisition of land and buildings, building renovations, and the purchase of machinery or equipment. In many cases, RLF are used in combination with funding from other sources, such as conventional bank financing. RLF are "self-replenishing". As loans are paid off, the principal and interest are re-used for new loans.

There are three steps that the North East Area will need to take in order to establish a RLF. The first step is to develop the RLF program and its guidelines. Decisions will need to be made concerning the purpose of the RLF, eligibility requirements, loan terms, etc. It's possible that a local lender/financial institution may agree to administrate the program, and a committee should be established to review loan applications. It is recommended that a financial consultant, or perhaps one of the local financial institutions, should be retained to assist with development of the RLF program.

Following development of the RLF program and its guidelines, the second step will be to acquire the initial funding needed to capitalize the program. Often, capitalization funds come from a combination of sources, including local, state or federal grants, donations from philanthropic organizations, etc.

The third step, after the RLF program is capitalized, is to start granting loans to local business owners. It is recommended that a local lender/financial institution should be retained to administrate the granting of loans.

More information about revolving loans programs is available online. One good source is the Council of Development Financing Agencies (CDFA)

<https://www.cdfa.net/cdfa/cdfaweb.nsf/pages/revolving-loan-funds.html>

Task 1.1.8 - Connect local workers with job opportunities.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses in the North East Area, as well as throughout the nation, have had difficulties with recruiting and retaining employees. This has been the case for both skilled and unskilled positions. Offering competitive wages is important, but is not always the full solution to the problem. Sometimes the workforce lacks the necessary skills. In other cases, transportation issues may be a concern for potential workers.

The first step to addressing the shortage of workers is to determine the cause of the problem. This will differ depending on the type of business and the job skills and qualifications needed. The extent of the problem and costs of the various options will also be a consideration. However, some options that local business owners may consider are to partner with local job training programs, to improve outreach and connect with local workers, and to provide transportation options.

Sub-Task 1.1.8A - Partner with Local Job Training Programs.

The availability of a skilled workforce with a wide range of skills and education levels is a key component necessary to support economic development. Qualified workers are needed to help businesses grow and to attract new businesses.

The North East Area benefits from a strong K-12 public school system, as well as numerous universities and trade schools located within Erie County. Recently, an Erie County Community College was created. The Community College is especially important for providing affordable educational programs that target the needs of the Erie County region's businesses.

Local businesses who require workers with specific training or job skills are encouraged to form partnerships with the Erie County Community College, the North East School District, area universities and/or trade schools in order to recruit qualified graduates or to help facilitate workforce training that provides candidates with the necessary job skills.

Sub-Task 1.1.8B – Host a job fair or similar event to help connect local workers with job opportunities.

In addition to traditional employment advertisements, businesses can expand their efforts to connect with potential workers. For example, hosting a job fair may be a good option. The job fair could be hosted by one or more businesses, perhaps in partnership with the North East Area Chamber of Commerce or one of the local schools or universities.

Sub-Task 1.1.8C – Improve transportation options for workers.

In some cases, and especially for lower-paying, unskilled jobs, transportation and/or transportation costs can be an obstacle. Improved public transportation, local circulators and/or ride sharing programs would expand commute options for local workers.

The Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority (EMTA) Route 16 provides weekday and Saturday bus service to the Borough of North East. However, the number of stops is limited, and this is a drawback. Unfortunately, given the North East Area's outlying location, relatively small population and the economics involved, it is considered unlikely that more extensive bus service will become available within the foreseeable future.

In the absence of adequate public transportation, business owners, either individually or in partnership with other businesses, may want to consider facilitating and coordinating local circulators and/or ride sharing programs for workers. Depending on the severity of the worker shortage, the needs of the business, and costs associated with the program, the service area could be expanded to the City of Erie or other urban areas where greater numbers of potential workers may live.

Task 1.1.9 – Maintain Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) Program.

In 1983, the Borough of North East adopted its first Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) Ordinance. LERTA ordinances encourage residential and business development and expansions, as well as property maintenance and revitalization. The Borough's ordinance provided tax abatement relief for qualifying, commercial and residential improvements or new construction, but was limited to specifically identified properties which were generally located at or near the intersection of Route 20 and Route 89.

In 2021, the Borough adopted a new LERTA ordinance that expanded the LERTA program to the entire Borough. It provides tax abatement relief for qualifying improvements or new construction for a period of 5 years. For the first year, the amount of relief is 100% of the eligible assessment related to the qualified improvement or new construction. The amount of relief gradually declines to 20% in the fifth year.

It is noted that North East Township also has a LERTA ordinance. It was adopted in 1991, and provides tax abatement relief for qualifying, commercial and residential improvements or new construction.

In order to promote business expansion and development, it is recommended that both municipalities maintain their LERTA programs. LERTA requires the approval of all taxing bodies. The North East School District and the County of Erie are partnering with the Borough and the Township to make the LERTA programs available.

Objective 1.2 - Support entrepreneurs and new business "start-ups".

Business owners who live in the community have a vested interest in the community, and are less likely to relocate their businesses in the future. As with supporting existing businesses, encouraging entrepreneurship and new business "start-ups" is often more rewarding than working to recruit new businesses. Many of the tasks associated with Objective 1.1, helping existing businesses to grow and prosper, also apply to the new businesses. In addition, the North East Area will work to support entrepreneurs and new business "start-ups" by helping to promote and encourage business training and mentoring programs, and by encouraging entrepreneurs and new business owners to network with local lending institutions and/or "angel investors".

Task 1.2.1 – Establish a small business training and mentoring assistance program or partner with an existing program.

The North East Area wants its small business owners to succeed, and recognizes that many businesses, especially new businesses, may benefit from some technical assistance designed to help them reach their full potential. There is interest in establishing a mentoring program for local businesses in

the North East Area. The desired program will provide mentoring and technical assistance in areas such as marketing, accounting, and finance. The program could potentially be established by the North East Community Foundation, and administrated by the North East Chamber of Commerce. The technical assistance would be provided by volunteers, including retired business owners and/or other qualified professionals. The establishment of this type of program would be a significant asset to entrepreneurs and new business “start-ups” in the North East Area.

In addition to the potential establishment of a local program, entrepreneurs and small business owners will also be encouraged to take advantage of other, existing programs that are available within the North East Area.

Gannon University’s Small Business Development Center (SBDC) offers no-cost consulting services to entrepreneurs and small business owners. Services include assistance with market identification and business plan development. More information about the SBDC is available online at <https://www.sbdcgannon.org/>

The Northwest Pennsylvania Innovation Beehive Network provides entrepreneurial support and business guidance at four coordinated university labs, including PennWest Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, Gannon University, Mercyhurst University, Penn State Behrend, and an affiliate lab at Erie County’s Blasco Library. More information is available at <https://www.gannon.edu/shareworthydetail.aspx?id=942>

Task 1.2.2 - Facilitate and improve access to capital by encouraging entrepreneurs and new business owners to network with local lending institutions and/or “angel investors”.

The creation of a revolving loan fund was discussed previously (see Task 1.1.7). However, given its importance to entrepreneurs and new business “start-ups”, it is being mentioned again here. In addition to providing a source of capital for existing small businesses, the North East Area’s desired revolving loan fund program can also provide a source of capital for entrepreneurs and new business “start-ups”.

In addition to providing direct access to capital through a revolving loan fund, the North East Area can also help facilitate access to capital by encouraging networking events for entrepreneurs and new business owners with local lending institutions and/or “angel investors”. Angel investors are private investors who provide financial backing for small business “start-ups” or entrepreneurs, typically in exchange for ownership equity in the business. The Angel Capital Association (ACA) and the Angel Messenger Forum (AMF) are angel organizations that may be able to help connect angel investors with small business start-ups in the North East Area.

Objective 1.3 - Attract new businesses to the Downtown area.

Public input received during this planning process identified the community’s desire for improved access to needed goods and services, including restaurants, medical services and day care. Some residents recommended a focus on “boutique style” shops. Others noted the recent acquisition of the former Mercyhurst University campus by Ehrenfeld Companies, and suggested a need for supporting businesses such as restaurants, a hotel, and possibly a sporting goods store.

It is difficult for small communities to attract and recruit new businesses. However, there are some things that can be done. Many of the previously mentioned objectives and tasks of this plan that are designed to encourage and support businesses or to support entrepreneurs and new business “start-ups” also apply to business attraction efforts. This section lists a few more tasks that can be continued, expanded, and/or implemented in order to help attract new businesses to the North East Area.

Task 1.3.1 - Continue to provide a designated point of contact for business recruitment and support.

Business recruitment and support is time consuming and requires a lot of work and dedication. It requires effort to build relationships, identify and respond to the needs of businesses, and

effectively market the North East Area to business owners and investors. At the present time, the Borough does not have anyone designated solely to business recruitment and support. However, the Borough manager has been serving as the Borough's point of contact in addition to his many other responsibilities. The North East Area Chamber of Commerce has been assisting with business recruitment efforts in the North East Area.

Task 1.3.2 – Establish and maintain a comprehensive, online directory of business resources and supportive services.

The Borough's website currently has a web-page dedicated to business. This provides businesses with some basic information, and helps to send a message that the Borough is "open for business". However, the Borough and the North East Chamber of Commerce are currently exploring the possible development of a comprehensive, online directory of business resources and supportive services. The new or upgraded website will expand upon the information provided by the Borough's current website. The idea is for the new or upgraded website to function as a "common landing page", with links to government agencies, supportive services and organizations, and other resources available in the North East Area.

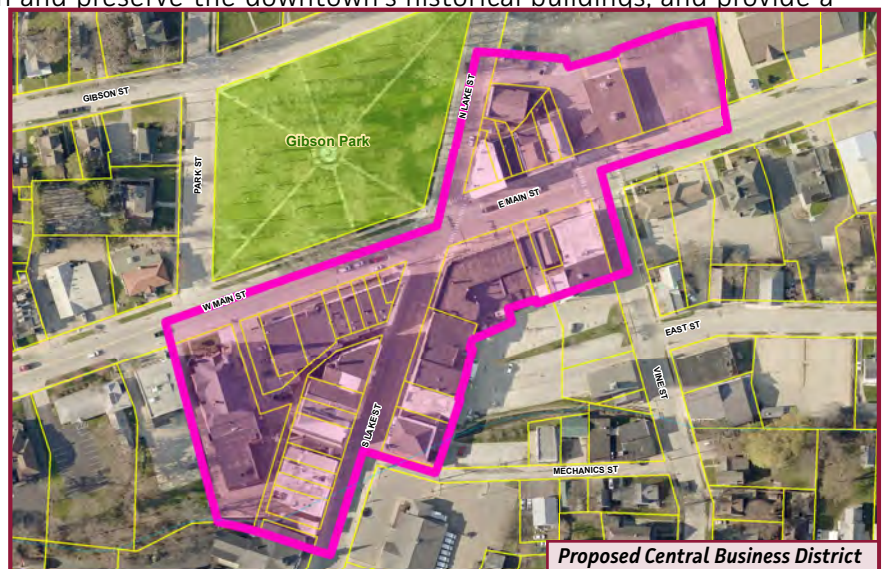
Task 1.3.3 - Identify and maintain an inventory of available commercial spaces.

The Borough's website lists the "Top 7 Reasons to do Business in North East Borough". One of these reasons is available space. However, the site does not provide any information on the space that is available. Providing new or relocating businesses with information about available commercial spaces may help to encourage them to consider the North East Area. The specific information does not necessarily need to be posted to the website, but an available site inventory will be helpful. It is recommended that the Borough should maintain an up-to-date inventory of available commercial spaces, including their size, zoning and other characteristics.

Objective 1.4 – Establish a Central Business Zoning District.

Improving the downtown is a priority for the North East Area. Residents expressed a desire to attract and support businesses, maintain and preserve the downtown's historical buildings, and provide a safe, vibrant and attractive pedestrian environment. The implementation and enforcement of reasonable, appropriate, and context sensitive zoning regulations will help the North East Area to recognize its vision for the downtown area.

The intersection of Main Street and Lake Street is at the center of the Borough's current, C-1 Commercial zoning district. The C-1 district extends in all directions from the intersection, and includes part of the Borough's historic district. Many of the buildings in this area were constructed in the latter third of the 19th century. Lots are typically small and narrow. Most of the buildings front on the sidewalk and are two stories in height. Many share common walls. Off-street parking is limited.



Many of the buildings in this area were constructed in the latter third of the 19th century. Lots are typically small and narrow. Most of the buildings front on the sidewalk and are two stories in height. Many share common walls. Off-street parking is limited.

Another, much more modern section of the C-1 district is located to the west, in the area around the intersection of Main Street and Mill Street. Commercial development in this area differs significantly from the older, historic district. Buildings are much newer. They have a more modern design, and most are one story in height. Lot sizes are typically much larger, and include ample parking areas. In most cases, buildings are located away from the road, with parking in the front.

Although the types of development and the character of these two commercial areas differ significantly, they are located in the same C-1 zoning district. The Borough has recognized that the areas have different needs, and the zoning ordinance attempts to address some of them. For example, it includes a parking overlay district that grants some relief to parking requirements in the older, historic district. However, for the most part, the zoning regulations apply uniformly, throughout the entire C-1 district.

Both of these commercial areas will benefit from zoning that is designed to better address and accommodate their different characteristics and needs. Some types of commercial uses may be appropriate in one district, but not the other. Minimum lot sizes and setbacks can be tailored to maintain compatibility with neighboring properties and to ensure that they are adequate to support the type of commercial development that is desired. Lighting, signage and other requirements can also be regulated on a context sensitive basis.

It is recommended that the Borough zoning ordinance should be amended to include two separate commercial zoning districts. A central business district should be established to include and support the historic business district and any appropriate surrounding areas. A general commercial district should also be retained in order to permit a more modern, generalized type commercial development in appropriate areas. See the Future Land Use Plan district descriptions and Future Land Use Plan Map for more information concerning the recommended commercial districts and their proposed locations.

Objective 1.5 - Support the development and re-use of the former Mercyhurst University campus.

In 2022, the former Mercyhurst University campus property was acquired by Ehrenfeld Companies, and it is now known as Granite Ridge. As of June 2022, the details related to the new owner's future plans for the property are not yet entirely known. However, the North East Area is anticipating that the development and re-use of the campus property will have a positive impact on the community. Both municipalities are optimistic about the future. They recognize the need to work closely with the new owners, not only to support their efforts and to help them be successful, but also to help ensure that any future development is compatible with surrounding neighborhoods.



Task 1.5.1 – Establish a Mixed Use Zoning District.

The Granite Ridge property crosses municipal boundaries. Most of the property is located in the Township, but some of it is located in the Borough. Each municipality has its own zoning ordinance and regulatory requirements, and this adds a layer of complexity to the future development of the property. Fortunately, both municipalities support the future development of the property, and desire to work together to simplify the development process. One way to help support and simplify the future development of the property is to establish consistent and compatible zoning in each municipality.

Although the new owner's future plans for the property are not yet fully known by either municipality, it is believed that the new owner desires to develop the property with several different uses that will maximize the potential of the property and its existing buildings. Potential plans include a 70,000 square foot sports facility to be used to host sporting events such as basketball and volleyball tournaments. The property will also be used as a conference and event center. Some residential development in the form of cottage style houses and/or townhouses may also be proposed.

Currently, the campus property is zoned for residential use in both municipalities. The former use as a school campus was permitted by both municipal zoning ordinances. However, the existing zoning may not permit all of the desired future uses of the property, and zoning amendments may be necessary.

In order to simplify the development process, and avoid the potential need for numerous zoning amendments, it is recommended that both municipalities amend their existing zoning to establish a mixed use zoning district. The new district and its list of permitted uses should be developed with input from the new owner in order to help ensure that desired future uses are considered and regulated, as appropriate.



Task 1.5.2 – Consider Establishing a Tax Increment Financing District (TIF).

During the drafting of this plan, details regarding the future development and use of the Granite Ridge property were not yet available. However, substantial new development is anticipated. Tax increment financing may be an option for funding some of the new development or public infrastructure upgrades that may be needed to support it.

The Commonwealth’s Tax Increment Financing Guarantee Program is designed to promote and stimulate the general economic welfare of communities in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and to assist in the development, redevelopment and revitalization of brownfield and greenfield sites through the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF). TIF captures the increase in tax revenues associated with new investment in areas designated for redevelopment, and those increases are then used to fund additional improvements. The program is part of an effort by the Commonwealth Financing Authority (“CFA”) and the Department of Community and Economic Development (“DCED”) to provide credit enhancement for TIF projects to improve market access and lower capital costs through the use of guarantees to issuers of bonds or other indebtedness.

According to DCED’s website, TIF funding can be used for environmental projects, infrastructure and site development for business or local government. All municipalities and their authorities, including boroughs, townships, and counties that issue TIF bonds to fund local economic development projects are eligible. Projects must meet the following criteria:

- Project must be located in a blighted area (containing the characteristics of blight as described in the Urban Redevelopment Law).
- Project must be located within a TIF district.
- Project must be located on previously utilized property or on undeveloped property that is planned and zoned for development.
- Project must demonstrate its ability to comply with the TIF law prior to the issuance of bonds or other indebtedness.
- Applicants must show that the revenue to be realized as a result of the project will be sufficient to offset the amount of the debt service.
- Business or private developers must agree to create a certain number of permanent full-time jobs within the TIF district.

Depending on the type and scope of future development associated with Granite Ridge, it may or may not be worthwhile to create a TIF district and pursue TIF. For more information about TIF, visit DCED’s website at <https://dced.pa.gov/programs/tax-increment-financing-tif-guarantee-program/>

Task 1.5.3 – Amend the North East Area municipal zoning ordinances and/or municipal subdivision and land development ordinances (SALDO) to require traffic impact studies for proposed, traffic generating developments.

Proposed new uses of the Granite Ridge property include conferences, weddings and other events, as well as the construction of a sports facility for hosting tournaments. It is likely that there may be some traffic impacts associated with some of these uses. If so, it is recommended that a traffic impact study should be obtained. The purposes of a traffic impact study are to insure that the proposed development does not adversely affect the transportation network and to identify any traffic problems associated with access between the site and the existing transportation network. These studies also propose solutions to potential problems and recommend improvements, such as traffic signals, that should be incorporated into the proposed development.

Many municipalities require developers to provide traffic impact studies in cases where the proposed development is anticipated to generate a significant amount of new traffic. The requirement for a traffic impact study is often required as a condition of approval under the municipal zoning ordinance and/or the municipal subdivision and land development ordinance (SALDO). Unfortunately, neither the Township's nor the Borough's ordinances appear to specifically require traffic impact studies.

It is recommended that both municipalities amend their zoning ordinances and subdivision and land development ordinances to require traffic impact studies as a condition of approval for new, traffic generating developments. In cases where the zoning requires a conditional use approval or a special exception approval, it is recommended that a traffic impact study should be required as a condition of the approval, if reasonable and appropriate.

Goal #2

Maintain an attractive, well-designed Downtown Area.

Downtown revitalization and economic revitalization are mutually supportive. An attractive, well-designed downtown area that is friendly and inviting will attract residents and visitors. Public and private investments will send a message that business owners and the community care about the downtown. This will help the North East Area retain and attract both residents and businesses.

The North East Area will maintain an attractive, well-designed downtown area by

- (1) preserving the downtown's historic character,
- (2) celebrating the area's historic and cultural heritage,
- (3) maximizing the appeal and vibrancy of public spaces, and
- (4) encouraging and supporting the maintenance, rehabilitation and reuse of existing buildings.

Objective 2.1 - Preserve the Downtown's historic character.

The North East historical district forms the central core of the Borough. It surrounds Gibson Park, and includes a mixture of residential and commercial properties. The historical characteristics and charm of the district are a big part of what makes downtown North East so special. The district and its historical buildings preserve and reflect the history and culture of the area. It is a significant asset to the North East Area and its downtown business community.

The district was listed on the National Historic Register of Historic Places in 1990, and the listing opens up some opportunities for tax incentives. However, the listing, on its own, does little to protect historical properties located within the district. The only time that an historic designation impacts properties is in cases where they are being altered or demolished with programs using Federal funds.

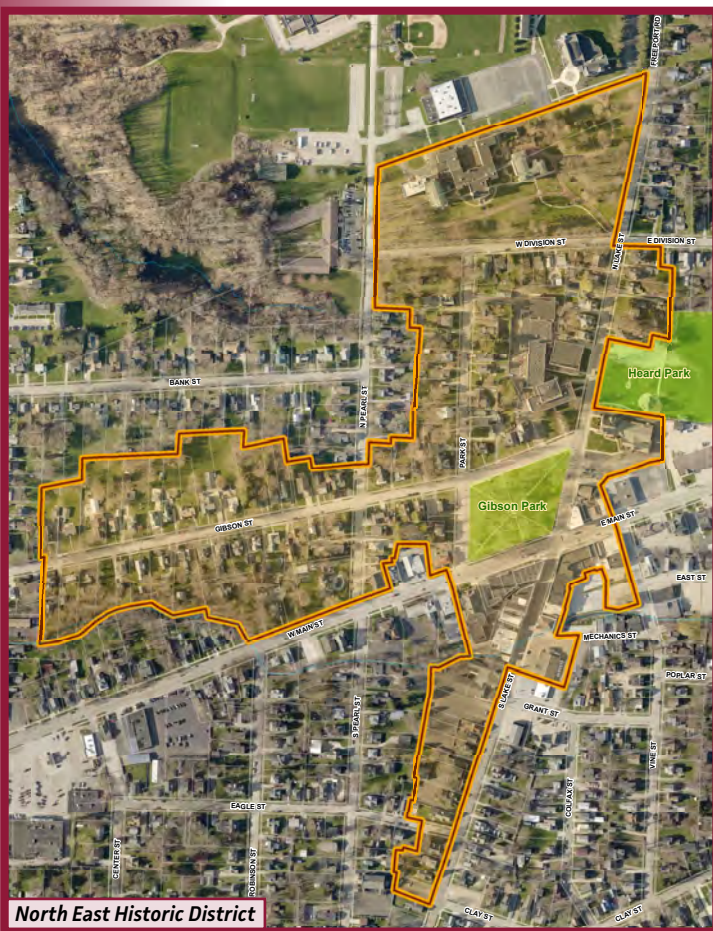
The North East Area community values and appreciates its historic district and other historic and cultural resources. This is apparent based on the numerous projects, programs and efforts that have

been made, and that are currently being made to protect, rehabilitate and maximize the potential of these assets. This plan recommends the continuation of the community's efforts to preserve the downtown's historic character.

Task 2.1.1 - Adopt design guidelines for the historic district.

Design guidelines are recommendations about repairs, improvements, and alterations to existing buildings, new construction, site and streetscape improvements and other changes within a defined location. They are often used within historic districts, and typically include photographs and drawings to illustrate the architectural features, lighting styles, types of signage, etc. that are appropriate for the area and reflective of the historic time period. They are not ordinances or regulations, and do not dictate design choices. Their purpose is to provide guidelines to help property owners, developers and others understand and evaluate design choices so that they can make informed decisions.

It is recommended that design guidelines should be developed for the historic district, and adopted by the Borough. The intent would be for these guidelines to be advisory, in order to educate and encourage property owners and others to make design choices that are consistent with the historical characteristics of the district.



While these guidelines will be advisory, rather than regulatory, formal adoption by the Borough, following a process that encourages and considers public input, is recommended in order to help give the guidelines some validity and strengthen support for their use. It is also recommended that the adopted guidelines should be considered as part of grant programs associated with facade improvement programs, renovations of historic buildings, etc.

Downtown North East, Inc. (DNE) has already created design guidelines for the Borough to consider. Therefore, much of the work needed to establish design guidelines has already been completed. It is suggested that property owners, the public, and the Borough's Planning Commission should be given an opportunity to review and comment on the DNE guidelines. Following any desired revisions or additions to the DNE guidelines, they should be forwarded to the Borough's governing body for consideration of adoption.

In order to maximize the use of the guidelines, they should be posted to the Borough's website so that they will be easily available to property owners and the public.

Task 2.1.2 - Encourage, facilitate and support the preservation, restoration, maintenance and re-use of historic buildings.

Historic preservation and economic revitalization are mutually supportive. It is well known that preservation activities improve the physical conditions of neighborhoods, stimulate struggling areas, reduce building vacancies, slow demolitions, and draw residents, visitors, investment, and jobs.

Downtown revitalization efforts have been on-going in North East. These efforts include, but are not limited to the following:

- Downtown North East, Inc. (DNE) has assisted approximately 35 building owners with façade improvements, using grant funding obtained from the North East Community Foundation (NECF) and the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA).
- DNE acquired and renovated 17 West Main Street. This was a former bank building and Mercyhurst NE classroom building. After being renovated, it was ultimately sold, and is now the location of the Skunk and Goat Tavern.
- The Borough, Township, North East Area Chamber of Commerce, DNE, and the North East Community Foundation have created a group called “Sustain North East”. The goal is to acquire funding to purchase, renovate and resell buildings in the downtown area, similar to what DNE accomplished with 17 West Main Street. Altair Real Estate Services was retained to help evaluate some potential building acquisitions. ECGRA has agreed to partner on investments in the community.

This plan recommends the continuation of these and other efforts to encourage, facilitate and support the preservation, restoration, maintenance and re-use of historic buildings.

Objective 2.2 - Celebrate the North East Area’s historic and cultural heritage.

Celebrating historic and cultural heritage helps to bring community members together, and creates a sense of community pride. There’s a lot to celebrate in the North East Area including its beautiful, downtown historic district, local art, agriculture and the wine and grape industries.

Task 2.2.1 – Increase public awareness and community pride.

Like many areas throughout Erie County, the North East Area has a wealth of cultural and historic assets. Unfortunately, however, many of these are not widely known about or appreciated as much as they should be. An increased understanding of these assets will help to promote community pride, and will also help to attract interest from visitors and investors.

The Erie County Cultural Heritage Plan, which was adopted by the County in 2017, identifies the need and importance of increasing public awareness of historic and cultural resources throughout Erie County. It recommends doing this through the use of signs and markers to identify important places, the installation of art projects to interpret history and express culture, and by delivering learning opportunities that engage the youth.

Some of these public awareness strategies are already being implemented in North East. The North East Historical Society is in the process of adding plaques to buildings on Main Street. The plaques list all of the previous businesses that have occupied the structures since the fire of 1844, which destroyed most of the downtown area. This project is planned to continue on Lake Street.

The North East Historical Society and North East In Bloom (NEIB) have been working on aesthetic improvements including historic wraps on electric boxes in Gibson Park, and the intersections of Main Street with Vine Street and Mill Street. In addition, they have also been working to create and display 4’ by 6’ “historic postcard” murals in empty storefronts and other appropriate locations.

Historical murals also decorate some of the buildings in North East. This includes a mural located at 17 West Main Street that was completed by a local artist, Ehren Knapp. The mural depicts some of the area’s historic and cultural heritage including its vineyards, octagon barn, railway station, Mercyhurst University, and a beautiful Lake Erie sunset. Currently, there is a desire to locate additional murals in appropriate locations, and fundraising efforts are in progress. These murals will offer another opportunity to showcase the North East Area’s cultural history.

Although public awareness efforts are currently being made, there are still some other opportunities that warrant consideration. These include bringing additional awareness to Historic U.S. Route 20 as well as to agriculture and the wine and grape industries.

Historic U.S. Route 20

According to the Historic US Route 20 Association, its mission is “to promote travel along the original 1926 alignment of US Route 20. This alignment avoids interstate highways and bypasses. We wish to bring people back into small town America, to shop locally and support local businesses to boost economic development in communities that may be bypassed by interstate highways or other more popular routes. The Association offers educational programs to these communities and works with local organizations and community leaders to discuss and implement the placement of historic markers indicating the original route to guide travelers and bring much needed attention to many small towns. The goal is to make US Route 20 a popular alternative to its more famous cousin, Route 66.”



Historic US Route 20 stretches 3,365 miles, from Boston, MA to Newport, OR, and passes through North East and its downtown area. Promotion of the route is an opportunity to bring additional tourism to the North East Area, as well as to highlight the Area's many historical resources and other attractions.

More information about the Historic US Route 20 Association and Historic Route 20 is available online at <https://www.historicus20.com/index.html>

Task 2.2.2 – Celebrate the North East Area's cultural heritage with festivals and events.

Arts and culture are important to any community, and the North East Area benefits from its rich cultural heritage and a wide variety of programs and events that celebrate its culture. The Cherry Festival and WineFest celebrate the Area's agricultural heritage and resources. Gibson Park and Heard Memorial Park host concerts and other cultural events.

The North East Arts Council works to “bring the arts to North East”. It presents artistic and cultural programs throughout the year to engage its members, area artists and the public. A diverse range of activities are provided, including but not limited to, “Picnic in the Park” events featuring entertainment and children's crafts, a local theater group, gallery nights featuring regional artists, a monthly art club for children, and classes for experienced and inexperienced artists. More information about the Arts Council is available online at <https://www.northeastarts.org>

Task 2.2.3 – Support the North East Area's museums.

There are two museums located in the Borough of North East. Both of them work to preserve, celebrate, and tell the story about North East's history. The North East Area supports its museums and their missions, and continued support is recommended by this plan.

North East Historical Society Museum

The North East Historical Society Museum is located at 25 Vine Street, and occupies the first floor of what was historically the town hall. It is open on Fridays and Saturdays, from June through December, and admission is free. The museum's collections tell the stories of the North East Area's past. The building is shared with the North East Arts Council, which occupies the second floor.

More information about the North East Historical Society and its museum is available online at <http://www.northeasthistoricalsociety.org/>

Lake Shore Railway Historical Society Museum

The Lake Shore Railway Historical Society Museum (LSRHS) is located at 31 Wall Street. The museum occupies the grounds of the former New York Central Railroad passenger depot. The grounds are open to the public from daylight to dusk, year round, and admission to the museum is by donations.

According to the museum's website, its mission is “to preserve, enjoy and share the memory, history and experience of railroading, particularly that of northwestern Pennsylvania, western New York and northeastern Ohio, as it has been and as it is now. LSRHS maintains a special collection with

emphasis on General Electric rail transportation products, Heisler Locomotive Works products, Pullman Standard Car Company products and all local railroad companies (past & present) due to the economic, social and historic impact they have had on the local area. LSRHS strives to accomplish its mission by preserving railroad and transportation artifacts of local, regional and/or industrial significance”.

The Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway Station, within which the museum is located, has received a Determination of Eligibility (DOE) for the National Historic Register. The Lake Shore Railway Historical Society Museum should be encouraged to pursue this listing, and to continue its plans and efforts to renovate and rehabilitate the freight house that is located on the museum property.



More information about the Lake Shore Railway Historical Society Museum is available online at <https://lakeshorerailway.com/>

Objective 2.3 - Maximize the appeal and vibrancy of the Downtown area's public spaces.

The North East Area's desired vision for its downtown area is for it to serve as an activity center for business, recreation and cultural opportunities. In order to recognize this vision, it is essential to maximize the downtown's appeal to pedestrians. Attention needs to be given to streetscape improvements, including sidewalks, lighting and pedestrian amenities. Parking must be adequate. Art and decorations will add to the area's attractiveness and visual appeal.

This section of the plan focuses on improvements needed to the physical environment, including coordinated streetscape amenities. Branding, festivals and events will also contribute to the appeal and vibrancy of the downtown. However, they are discussed in other sections of this plan, and are not revisited here. Additionally, future plans and improvements related to Gibson Park and Heard Memorial Park are more fully addressed in the "Improve our parks" section of this plan.

Improving the downtown's streetscape will require an investment by the North East Area community. In order to maximize the impact of this investment, additional planning is recommended (see task 2.3.1). This will help to coordinate the timing and design of future improvements. It is strongly recommended that a streetscape plan (Task 2.3.1) should be completed first, so that it will help to inform and contribute to the other tasks in this section.

Task 2.3.1 – Develop and implement a streetscape plan to coordinate future improvements within the Downtown Area.

The Borough has steadily been investing in streetscape improvements in the downtown area. For example, pedestrian crosswalks have been upgraded to improve safety. Sidewalks have been added around the perimeter of Gibson Park. Street lights are also being replaced.

Streetscape investments are important, but funding availability and limitations influence the timing, types and extent of improvements that can be made. In order to maximize the effectiveness and impact of the Borough's investments, it is recommended that the Borough retain a qualified consultant to prepare a streetscape plan for the downtown area. The streetscape plan will help to identify and prioritize improvements that are needed, and will provide design recommendations so that the improvements will be coordinated. Its implementation will help to ensure that the downtown area and its streets are safe, inviting, and pedestrian friendly.

Task 2.3.2 – Establish and implement a sidewalk improvement program.

The North East Smart Transportation Initiative (2014) recommended a sidewalk improvement

program for the Borough. As part of that study, a sidewalk inventory was performed in order to identify the physical condition of sidewalks and maintenance needs. Based on the inventory, 49% of the sidewalks were rated in very good or good condition, 40% were rated in fair condition, and 12% were rated in poor or very poor condition. The study includes a map that illustrates the location and condition of the sidewalks. Since the inventory was taken in 2014, it is recommended that it should be reviewed, and updated as needed to reflect current sidewalk conditions.

A safe, well-maintained sidewalk system that is free of gaps should be a priority within the downtown area. The sidewalk inventory rated most of the downtown area's sidewalks as good or very good. However, the map shows segments that were rated as fair and poor, and these should be prioritized. The transportation initiative also makes recommendations for sidewalk improvements along Route 89 and the underpass, as well as the installation of sidewalks along Pearl Street, near the former Mercyhurst University campus (now Granite Ridge).

Although it is recommended that sidewalks located within the downtown area should be a priority, this plan recommends that all sidewalks within the Borough should be addressed, as funding allows. An established sidewalk improvement program will help the Borough identify priorities and make the most of available funding.

One potential source of grant funding is the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. In order to be eligible for CDBG funding, the Borough will need to document that the new sidewalks will serve low to moderate income (LMI) residents. This is accomplished by a LMI survey of residents in the area to be served.

The Borough will need to actively pursue the LMI surveys that are required for CDBG funding. It is likely that not all areas will qualify since not all areas within the Borough will qualify as low to moderate income. This will most likely be an influencing factor during prioritization of the projects. It may be necessary to survey several different areas in order to find an eligible project area(s).

Task 2.3.3 – Improve the safety and aesthetics of the alley.

In addition to the sidewalks, the alley that is located to the rear of buildings fronting the south side of West Main Street is also a frequently used transportation corridor for pedestrians. The Downtown North East Revitalization Plan (2019) recommended the revitalization of the alley, and suggested that it could be utilized for events such as a future “Rally in the Alley”. At the present time, the rear wall of one of the buildings adjacent to the alley is deteriorating, and there is some concern that falling debris presents a safety issue for pedestrians. The Downtown North East Revitalization Plan also recommended repainting the grapevines on the walls and circles on the pavement, as well as addressing stormwater issues.



Task 2.3.4 –Enhance the downtown’s visual appeal with art, decorations, and greenery.

Public art, holiday decorations, street banners, creative storefront displays and attractive plants and greenery all add to the downtown’s visual appeal and make it more inviting to residents and visitors. The North East Area is fortunate to have a number of community organizations working to maintain and enhance the downtown’s visual appeal. Some recent projects, and potential future efforts include the following:

- Street banners are used throughout the year, with designs decorated for various holidays. There is some interest in incorporating some community branding, perhaps based on

the North East Area Chamber of Commerce's "Enjoy North East" theme. It has also been suggested that the Borough consider adding banners along North Lake Street and the entrance to Granite Ridge.

- A public art mural, located at 17 West Main Street, depicts some of the area's historic and cultural heritage, and there are also murals located on the NE Glass Building on Main Street, as well as on the Cultural Center building. Currently there is a desire to locate additional murals in appropriate locations, and fundraising efforts are in progress.
- The North East Historical Society and North East In Bloom (NEIB) have been working on aesthetic improvements including historic wraps on electric boxes in Gibson Park, and



the intersections of Main Street with Vine Street and Mill Street. In addition, they have also been working to create and display 4' by 6' "historic postcard" murals in empty storefronts and other appropriate locations.

- Numerous improvements have been made to Gibson Park. Lighting has been added to showcase the Lady in the Fountain, and some new landscaping that includes shrubs, greenery and trees has been added. North East in Bloom works to maintain the plantings.
- North East in Bloom decorates the Borough with flowers and greenery. This includes hanging flower baskets at Gibson Park and West Main Street, numerous planters, and a rose garden and arborvitae in Heard Memorial Park. Funding for the flower baskets is donated by the Hirtzel Memorial Foundation and the North East Community Foundation.

These and similar efforts should continue. The proposed streetscape plan may be able to provide additional ideas, as well as recommendations on how to coordinate them.

Task 2.3.5 - Improve parking in the downtown area.

Sub-Task 2.3.5A - Continue to monitor effectiveness of parking meter removals and reduced parking requirements for businesses. Consider modifications or additional options, if needed.

As part of the 2014 North East Smart Transportation Initiative (study), a parking occupancy survey was conducted for all metered parking surrounding the Borough's downtown business district and Gibson Park. The survey revealed "a lack of parking availability during peak periods at specific locations, parking meter inconsistencies, permit parking confusion, and general public concern with inadequate parking. Special event parking is also not clearly defined." The study presented potential parking alternatives including upgrades to parking meters, potential removal of meters and enforcement of a 2 hour parking limit, and reconfiguration of pavement to accommodate back

in angle parking along US 20 at SR 89. In 2020 the Borough removed the parking meters at the request of business owners and residents.

At this point, the meter removals appear to have helped to mitigate some of the parking problems. However, the Borough plans to continue to monitor and evaluate the success of this effort.

In addition to removing the parking meters, the Borough has also made amendments to its zoning ordinance to help provide flexibility in parking requirements for businesses located in the central business district. This flexibility was needed since the downtown area is fully developed, and little or no space is available for new parking or loading spaces. As a result, new or expanding businesses were often unable to meet the additional parking or on-site loading requirements of the Borough's zoning ordinance. In order to address this problem, the Borough amended its zoning ordinance in 2018 to establish a parking overlay district (POD) within the historic downtown business district. The POD provides an exemption from off-street parking and loading requirements for "uses that now or later occupy buildings in the Parking Overlay District", "where no possible parking may be added or developed, and where ample parking is available on the street or in off-street lots.

The Borough will continue to monitor the effectiveness of its prior efforts to improve parking in the downtown area, and will consider taking additional actions, if needed.

Sub-Task 2.3.5B – Identify and secure long-term, off-street, parking locations in the Downtown Area.

In 2019, Downtown North East's Revitalization Plan provided additional observations and recommendations that built-upon the parking recommendations made by the North East Smart Transportation Initiative. According to the plan, "An earlier survey was conducted for both borough and township residents. Results indicated that residents visited downtown primarily for groceries/specialty foods, the post office, banking, restaurant and bars, pharmacies and events and festivals. Over 80% felt that parking was NOT a problem, except during peak hours and for events." The plan makes several recommendations, including "Long-term off-street parking for owners and tenants should be identified, and may include contracts with downtown churches and organizations with existing parking lots. The "perception" that there is not adequate parking should be addressed."

Sub-Task 2.3.5C - Implement a parking signage system to identify where the public can and cannot park.

The 2019, Downtown North East's Revitalization Plan also recommends that "A parking signage system should be instituted that identifies where the public can park and where it cannot. This should include identification of long-term, off-street parking for tenants and owners, contracts with the various churches and other organizations that could provide parking when not in use for their business, and possibly a permit system."

Objective 2.4 - Encourage and support the maintenance, rehabilitation and re-use of existing buildings.

The Downtown North East Revitalization Plan was prepared in 2019 by Downtown North East, Inc. (DNE), North East Borough and the North East Area Chamber of Commerce. The plan focuses on the downtown business district and its surrounding area.

According to the plan, some of the downtown's most pressing issues include the need for building repairs and improved building maintenance, the lack of sprinkler systems, high utility bills resulting from the age of the buildings and their older, less efficient heating systems, inadequate access to upper floors that prevents them from being used for senior/veteran housing or viable offices, unrealistic rents and ineffective property management by some of the landowners.

The North East Area community is fortunate to have groups such as DNE, the North East Area Chamber of Commerce, the North East Community Foundation, and others that are committed to improving the downtown area. These groups are working together on common goals, and have already had a lot of success working to implement them.

The Borough has also been working to encourage improved property maintenance, rehabilitation and re-use. It has and enforces property maintenance codes, has established a rental registration program, supports tax relief through its LERTA program, and has partnered with the Erie County Land Bank.

This section of the plan highlights and memorializes some of the most prominent efforts that are being made to encourage and support the maintenance, rehabilitation and reuse of existing buildings. It also recognizes a commitment to pursue additional sources of funding. To this point, funding limitations have been the biggest obstacle to success. It is noted that the Borough's LERTA program, the County's C-PACE program and the Borough's efforts to address and mitigate the flooding of Baker Creek have been discussed elsewhere in this plan, and are not revisited in this section.

Task 2.4.1 - Improve the quality, condition and safety of buildings.

Sub-Task 2.4.1A - Encourage property owners to maintain and improve their properties.

In order to successfully implement the North East Area's goals for improving the downtown area, the support, cooperation, and involvement of property owners and business owners will be needed. It is essential that strong efforts be made to engage with these groups through outreach and education.

Conversations with property and business owners will help the Borough, DNE and others to better understand their problems and needs. It will help to identify obstacles that may be hindering efforts related to property maintenance or safety issues, and once these obstacles are identified, it will be easier to identify and pursue effective solutions.

Educational efforts are also important. Information related to assistance programs and grant opportunities needs to be available, communicated, and easily accessible. Improving awareness concerning property maintenance code requirements is likely to improve voluntary compliance.

Sub-Task 2.4.1B - Continue the facade grant program.

In recent years, Downtown North East, Inc. (DNE) has facilitated and administered a façade improvement grant program in the downtown area. This program has been very successful, and to date, approximately 35 building owners have made façade improvements. Funding for the program has been obtained from the North East Community Foundation (NECF) and the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA).

This has been a popular and effective program, and demand for these grants continues to be strong. Some have suggested that it should be a permanent program. It is recommended that the program should be continued for as long as there is a demand for this type of assistance, and for as long as adequate program funding can be obtained.

Sub-Task 2.4.1C - Continue to enforce property maintenance codes.

The Code of Ordinances of North East Borough is a codification of numerous Borough ordinances. Chapter 358, Property Maintenance, addresses the maintenance of buildings as well as yards, open lots and parking areas. Chapter 188, Unsafe Buildings declares dangerous buildings to be public nuisances, and includes standards for their repair, vacation, or demolition. The Borough has two code enforcement officers on staff who administrate and enforce these ordinances. According to Borough officials, the current property maintenance codes appear to be adequate at the present time.

In the future, if code revisions are needed or desired, it is recommended that the Borough consider the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC). The IPMC provides clear and specific property maintenance standards, as well as enforcement procedures. It is not necessary for the Borough to adopt the entire IPMC. The Borough may wish to modify the IPMC to better suit its needs.

Sub-Task 2.4.1D - Continue the rental inspection program.

North East Borough established a rental inspection program in 2021, with the adoption of Ordinance No. 916. The ordinance sets standards for the inspection and maintenance of residential rental units, and was adopted in order to improve the quality and condition of rental units within the Borough. It is recommended that this program should be continued, not only within the downtown area, but throughout the Borough.

Sub-Task 2.4.1E - Partner with the Erie County Land Bank to address unsafe, abandoned and deteriorated buildings and structures.

When code enforcement efforts have been ineffective, land banks offer a potential solution for addressing abandoned and deteriorated properties that pose a threat to the health and safety of communities. They acquire, inventory, market, hold and transfer interests in properties that are vacant, abandoned, and in most cases, tax delinquent. The purpose is to rehabilitate or demolish the properties or get them into the hands of new owners who will improve them in accordance with the long-term interests of the community and surrounding properties. Land banks do not have the power of eminent domain. Most of the properties acquired are by donations from property owners or from tax sales of tax delinquent properties.



In order for Erie County communities to partner with the Land Bank, a cooperative agreement is needed between the Land Bank and all taxing bodies, including the municipality, the school district and the County of Erie. Both North East municipalities are currently working with the Land Bank. To date, the Land Bank has acquired two properties located within the Borough, and is in the process of acquiring a third property. The first was located at 60 Wall Street, and the second was located at 59 W. Main Street. The Land Bank has demolished the existing building at 60 Wall Street, and it's currently for sale as a vacant lot. The property at 59 W. Main Street has been structurally evaluated, and will likely be renovated by a new owner once community-centric plans for the location are finalized. In November of 2021, the Land Bank submitted the winning bid to acquire 39 S. Washington Street through the judicial tax sale.

Sub-Task 2.4.1F - Explore the use of conservatorship to address abandoned and blighted properties.

Pennsylvania's Abandoned and Blighted Property Conservatorship Act took effect on February 1, 2009. It offers non-profits, neighboring property owners and municipalities a way to acquire and improve a blighted property without the need for condemnation. In cases where the landowner fails to maintain a building in accordance with municipal codes or standards of public welfare or safety, the Act provides a process for the appointment of a conservator to make the necessary improvements before the building deteriorates further. It can be effectively used against absentee property owners who allow their properties to become blighted.

Notice is given to owners and lienholders of property that is being considered for conservatorship, and the absentee owner may agree to take action. Usually, any abatement by the owner is under Court supervision. In cases where the owner or senior lienholder does not respond or is unwilling to perform repairs, the Court can appoint a Conservator, who develops a plan to abate the blight. Regardless of whether the owner or the Conservator abates the blight, the community benefits when the property is returned to productive use.

The conservatorship process is complex and is not suitable for all blighted properties. However, it can be an effective tool, and is worth considering, especially when other options such as condemnation, tax sales and code enforcement efforts are not available or are ineffective.

Task 2.4.2 - Encourage, facilitate and support the economically viable use and re-use of vacant or underutilized properties.

Sub-Task 2.4.2A - Continue to pursue the acquisition, rehabilitation and re-use of vacant or underutilized properties.

The Downtown North East Revitalization Plan (2019) provides numerous recommendations, but states that “Of all the initiatives discussed in the plan, the most critical is the acquisition, renovation, and preservation of the historic buildings in the downtown, and transitioning these buildings into the hands of civic-minded individuals who will maintain them in good condition, while recruiting and maintaining economically viable businesses”.

In 2012 Downtown North East, Inc. (DNE) acquired 17 West Main Street from Mercyhurst University. This was a former bank building and Mercyhurst classroom building. After DNE renovated the building, it was ultimately sold, and is now the location of the Skunk and Goat Tavern. This was a highly successful project, and is a great example of what the North East Area would like to emulate in the future.

The Borough, Township, North East Area Chamber of Commerce, DNE, and the North East Community Foundation have created a group called “Sustain North East”. One of the group’s goals is to acquire funding to purchase, renovate and resell buildings in the downtown area, similar to what DNE accomplished with 17 West Main Street. Altair Real Estate Services was retained to help evaluate some potential building acquisitions, and ECGRA has agreed to partner on investments in the community.

DNE and Sustain North East were planning a potential second acquisition and renovation project involving the former PNC bank building. However, the project became unnecessary when the property was acquired by a private owner in 2022.

The greatest obstacle that these groups face is securing the funding needed for their projects. Moving forward, they intend to continue to identify potential vacant or underused properties, and pursue their acquisition, renovation and re-use. Care will be taken to ensure that the properties are transitioned to new owners who will be good stewards.

Sub-Task 2.4.2B - Continue to pursue improved access to the upper floors of commercial buildings.

The Downtown North East Revitalization Plan (2019) identifies the need to provide improved access to the upper floors of commercial buildings located within the downtown area. Inadequate access to upper floors is a common problem in older buildings due to difficulties with ADA and building code requirements. The inability to use the upper floor areas reduces the economic potential of these properties, and often makes renovations less viable due to the high costs involved.

The plan recommended a possible public elevator to provide access to upper floors of buildings for senior/veteran housing and/or viable offices. It noted that this could potentially be located at the rear of the buildings, with an elevated walkway connecting the various buildings. Some preliminary design work and cost estimates were done later. The project would require the moving of electric utility poles. The cost of the entire project was estimated at \$1 million (2019).

The next steps in the process will be to secure funding for the project, and to complete the design work.



Sub-Task 2.4.2C - Maintain zoning that supports and encourages the economically viable use and re-use of buildings in the downtown area.

Zoning is perhaps the most important and effective regulatory tool that municipalities have to help implement their plans. Through their zoning, municipalities have an opportunity to support and encourage the economically viable use and re-use of buildings and properties in the downtown area.

Perhaps the best example is the proposed establishment of mixed-use zoning districts in both the Borough and the Township that are needed to support and encourage the future development of the former Mercyhurst University campus. The proposed zoning district was previously discussed. See plan objective 1.5, task 1.5.1 for more information.

Another good example is the need to establish a central business zoning (CBD) district that will complement the Borough's current C-1 commercial district. The proposed CBD zoning district was also discussed previously in this plan (objective 1.4).

The Borough and Township Planning Commissions should play a leading role in establishing the proposed, new zoning district(s) within their respective municipality. Within the Borough, the planning process for the CBD will be an opportunity to consider permitting mixed-uses that would be appropriate within the new district. It is recommended that within the CBD, residential and office uses should be permitted on the upper floors of commercial buildings located within the district. In addition, it is recommended that residential uses on the ground floors of commercial buildings within the CBD should be discouraged or prohibited.

Goal #3

Promote the Downtown Area and its Businesses.

The North East Area currently works hard to promote its downtown area and businesses. However, it also recognizes that more needs to be done. This plan memorializes the North East Area's commitment to promote itself, its downtown area, and its businesses. Ultimately, the intent is to strengthen the downtown's position as the center of the community, improve business activity, and maintain and improve upon a positive image. The North East Area will accomplish this goal by continuing to hold special events and festivals, encouraging people to visit the downtown and patronize its businesses, and by building a community image through branding.

Objective 3.1 – Build a community image with branding.

Branding can help people feel more connected with a community, and can help to encourage them to live, visit, or invest in a place. The brand should establish an identity that will highlight the positive and unique characteristics of the community, and once established, it should be the foundation of all marketing and promotional activities.

The North East Chamber of Commerce has taken the lead on developing and implementing community branding. It's "Enjoy North East" brand encourages people to visit and enjoy North East, and draws attention to the area's outstanding wineries and fishing opportunities.

Objective 3.2 - Promote North East as a regional destination by planning and holding special events and festivals.

The North East Firemen's Cherry Festival and the North East Wine Festival are signature events for the North East Area. In a typical year, both of these events attract thousands of visitors. The Cherry Festival is held in July, and is a primary fundraising event for the fire companies. It includes a firemen's parade, rides, games, food tents, and of course, is known for its cherry pies. The Wine Festival, also known as WineFest is held in September. It has a "fair like" atmosphere, with great food, arts and crafts, and live music. The festival features wine tastings from many of the North East Area wineries.

These festivals are both well-known and have been very successful. They benefit the North East Area and its businesses by drawing visitors from far beyond the Area's municipal boundaries. The North East Area will continue to organize, hold, and support these and similar festivals and events in the future.

Objective 3.3 - Encourage people to visit the Downtown area, and patronize local businesses.

The North East Area will encourage people to visit the Downtown area by holding a variety of special events and activities. Businesses will be encouraged to coordinate and hold business and retail promotions. Wayfinding signage will be used to attract the attention of visitors, and guide them to the downtown area. Events and activities will be posted to a community events calendar, and the media will be encouraged to help promote the downtown area and its events and activities.

Task 3.3.1 – Hold a variety of special events and activities.

Planning and holding special events and activities that bring people to the downtown area will help to support businesses by increasing their customer base. In addition to the Cherry Festival and WineFest, the North East Area holds a wide variety of other events throughout the year. This includes Gibson Days, North East Uncorked, Pet Parade, Fourth of July fireworks, Picnic in the Park, Erie Philharmonic concerts, Light up Night, Sugar Plum Sunday, and other events.

This plan recommends that the North East Area continue to plan and hold a wide variety of special events and activities designed to draw people to the downtown area. It is also recommended that downtown businesses should be encouraged to remain open so that they will be able to benefit from increased customer traffic that may result from the events.

Task 3.3.2 – Hold business and retail promotional activities.

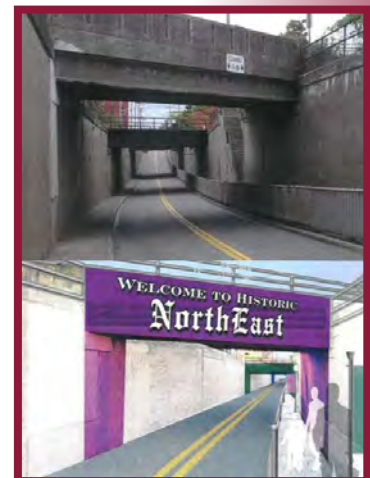
Downtown businesses are encouraged to work together to hold coordinated sales, retail promotions and other events. A coordinated expansion of business hours to include evenings should also be considered. Public input received during this planning process included concerns that most business close at 5 p.m. This can be frustrating to customers. Remaining closed during community events held during the evening hours also represents a lost opportunity. Business owners may want to consider coordinated evening hours, even if only one day a week.

Task 3.3.3 – Welcome visitors with gateway enhancements and wayfinding signage.

As part of the public outreach that was conducted during phase 1 of this comprehensive planning process, residents voiced their desire for improved gateways and wayfinding signage to help welcome visitors to the North East Area as well as to direct tourists to the Area's businesses and attractions. Specific locations that were identified included the Route 89 underpass, the Route 89 interchange with Interstate 90, the Interstate 90 bridge over US Route 20, and the intersection of State Routes 5 and 89.

The North East Smart Transportation Initiative (2014) makes several recommendations related to gateway improvements and wayfinding signage, including the following:

- R 89 Gateway Enhancements:
 - o "Phase 1: Design, locate, and install bridge-mounted community gateway or welcome signage. New metal sign to be lighted, with design in accordance with Downtown North East, Inc.'s visual standards.
 - o Phase 2: Design, locate, and install landscaping at the southern approach to the underpass.



- o Phase 3: Coordinate, design and paint underpasses to further enhance North East gateway. Upgrade lighting to match North East, Inc.'s visual standard (wall-mounted lights with banners)."
- Signage Program: "Establish a formal signage committee and conduct a comprehensive study of existing signage types. Establish master design signage guidelines within North East, Inc.'s visual standards, setting a consistent brand and message throughout the North East Borough making it easier to attract visitors and help them navigate the community and its assets."
- Seaway Trail: "Effectively connect Seaway Trail users to the North East community. The initiative should include a community visioning exercise to develop ideas to improve bicycle tourism along the trail, as well as strategies for more effectively publicizing the amenities that North East can offer to bicycle tourists. These ideas may include physical improvements, such as welcome centers and bicycle racks, additional wayfinding, or addressing specific safety concerns."

Task 3.3.4 – Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing strategy.

The North East Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Borough, Township, North East Community Foundation, and Downtown North East, Inc. is currently working to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy to promote the downtown as a center of commerce, culture, and community life for residents and visitors alike. Community branding has been discussed previously, and will be incorporated into this effort. The marketing strategy will include advertising on television, radio, social media, billboards, and print.

Goal #4

Build collaboration, cultivate partnerships and secure financial resources.

Partnerships and collaboration will be critical for the successful implementation of the North East Area's goal to improve its downtown area. The public and private sectors both need to play a role, and community support will be needed. It will be important to stay organized so that the efforts of community organizations and volunteers, and the use of available funding sources will be coordinated and used effectively.

Objective 4.1 - Build a strong foundation for success by building collaboration and cultivating partnerships.

Good communication and coordination between the municipalities, businesses, and community organizations will help to ensure that the North East Area remains focused on its goals to improve its downtown area. Coordinating the efforts of these organizations will help to avoid redundancy and conflicting efforts, and will help ensure that limited resources will be used strategically and result in meaningful improvement.

The North East Area has already had success in forming partnerships and successfully implementing projects in the downtown area. Therefore, the continuation, strengthening and productive use of these partnerships is the primary objective. Downtown North East, Inc. is a great example of a successful and effective partnership. Its members include the Borough, Township, North East Chamber of Commerce, North East In Bloom, and the North East Community Foundation.

Partnerships will also be necessary in order to help secure the funding needed to undertake projects associated with the implementation of this plan. In recent years, the North East Community

Foundation, the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority, the Hirtzel Memorial Foundation, the Miller Foundation, the PA Department of Transportation (PennDot) and the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) have partnered with North East Area organizations to provide funding for various projects.

Objective 4.2 - Involve the entire community, including residents, business owners and property owners.

Community engagement can be hard work. However, it is needed in order to secure the support and “buy-in” of residents, business owners and property owners. These groups have a direct interest in the downtown area. They need to have a voice, and need to be given an opportunity to get involved and participate in efforts to improve the downtown.

These groups can be a great source of information. What do they like and dislike about the downtown area? What improvements are needed? What’s missing from the downtown area? What types of businesses do they patronize? What events and activities would they be most interested in? Community meetings, online surveys, social media, and focus groups are ways to engage with these groups, and get their input on a wide variety of topics.

In addition to engaging these groups through improved outreach efforts, it’s also important to get them involved in projects and efforts to improve the downtown. For example, business owners should be encouraged to participate in coordinated marketing efforts, and to consider keeping their businesses open during community events in the downtown area. Residents can be given an opportunity to participate in downtown “clean-up” days, and to volunteer to help with special events or projects.

Objective 4.3 - Secure the financial resources needed to improve the Downtown by identifying and pursuing funding opportunities.

Many of the goals and objectives designed to improve the downtown area will require significant financial investments. This includes, among other things, building acquisitions and renovations, a revolving loan program, improving upper floor access to the buildings on Main and Lake Streets, a façade grant program, beautification efforts, and infrastructure improvements to mitigate flood damage associated with Baker Creek. It will be necessary to supplement municipal funds with funding from other sources, such as grants, foundation donations and fundraising events.

Task 4.3.1 – Research and pursue available grant opportunities and foundation donations.

In recent years, the North East Area has done a good job of researching and pursuing various grants and foundation donations. For example, Downtown North East, Inc. has used funding provided by the North East Community Foundation (NECF) and the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) in order to implement a façade improvement program in the downtown area. Pursuing, acquiring and administering grants and/or foundation donations has not been the sole responsibility of any one municipality or community organization. Rather, the lead agency for each specific project has assumed that responsibility.

As noted above, partnerships are recommended for large projects associated with the implementation of this plan. And they can be especially helpful when it comes to pursuing funding. Eligibility for some grants may be limited to municipalities or other government entities. Likewise, sometimes only non-profit organizations are eligible. It is recommended that when partnerships are formed, and desired projects are identified, that the partnership determine which municipality or organization will take the lead in pursuing, acquiring and administering available grant opportunities and/or foundation donations.

Funding sources and opportunities will vary depending on the project. Some potential funding sources include the following:

- Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA)
- North East Community Foundation
- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
- Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC)
- Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT)
- Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED)
- Hirtzel Memorial Foundation
- Miller Foundation
- Erie Community Foundation
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA)

For more information on potential funding sources, refer to the “Potential Funding Sources” section of this plan.

Task 4.3.2 – Plan and hold fundraising events/activities.

In addition to grant opportunities and foundation donations, fundraising events/activities are another source of funding that should be considered. The North East Firemen’s Cherry Festival is a primary fundraising event for the fire companies. The same concept can be applied to fundraising for downtown area improvements. The fundraising effort can be another, large “signature” event, or it can be a series of smaller, regularly scheduled events.

It may be appropriate to consider incorporating product sales into the event. Some examples include T-shirts and sweatshirts, baked goods, etc. Product variety is only as limited as the imagination.

The purpose of these events/activities is to make money. Therefore, they need to be carefully planned, and run like a business in order to ensure that they are successful and as profitable as possible.

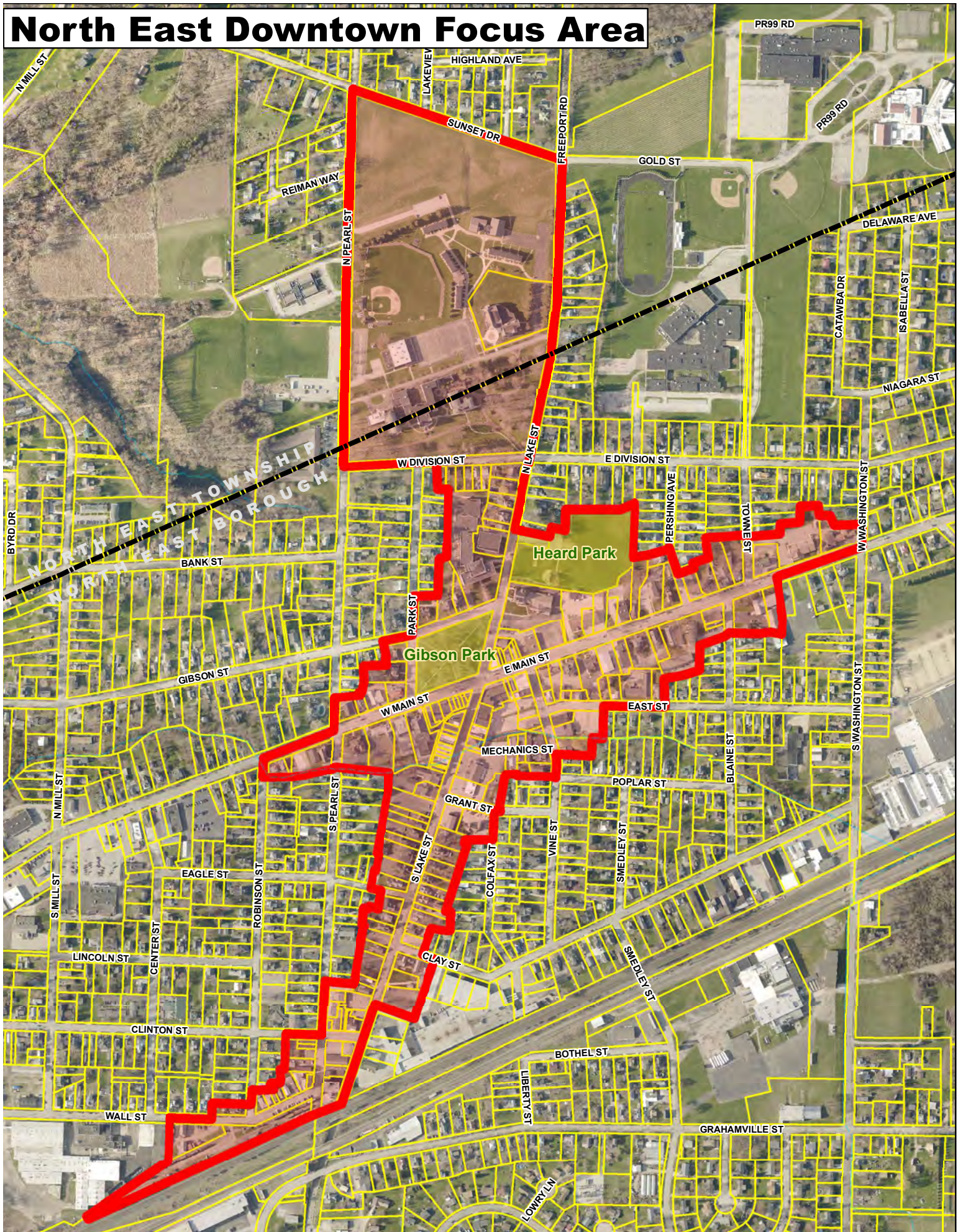
Objective 4.4 - Get organized, and implement a holistic and balanced approach to improving the Downtown area.

The North East Area’s plan to improve its downtown area is conceptually based on Main Street America’s four guiding principles of economic vitality, design, promotion and organization. The application of those principles, as well as the goals set forth in this plan, will get the best results when implemented with a holistic and balanced approach. They are all tightly inter-related. No single focus, such as supporting businesses, maintain an attractive streetscape, or endless promotional events, can by itself, revitalize the downtown area.

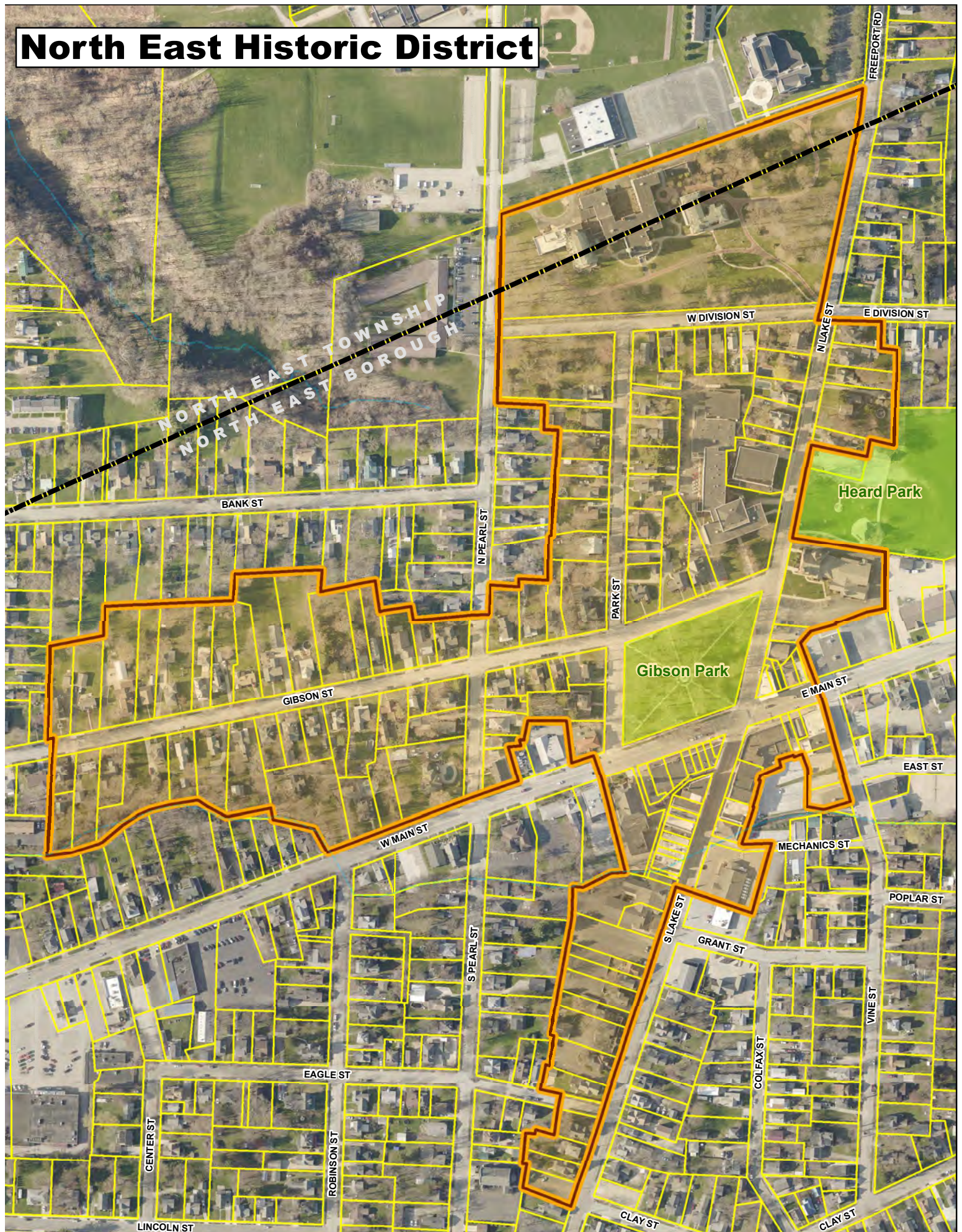
In addition to Main Street America’s four guiding principles, this plan is also informed by the Elm Street program’s principle of “Clean, Green and Safe”. That principle is applied in goal number two of the action plan, “Maintain an attractive, well designed Downtown Area”.

It is recommended that the North East Area municipalities and the community organizations that are partnering to “Improve Our Downtown Area” should hold regular meetings, quarterly or as needed, in order to prioritize and coordinate projects, and to identify and address any challenges and/or obstacles that may be hindering a holistic and balanced approach to plan implementation.

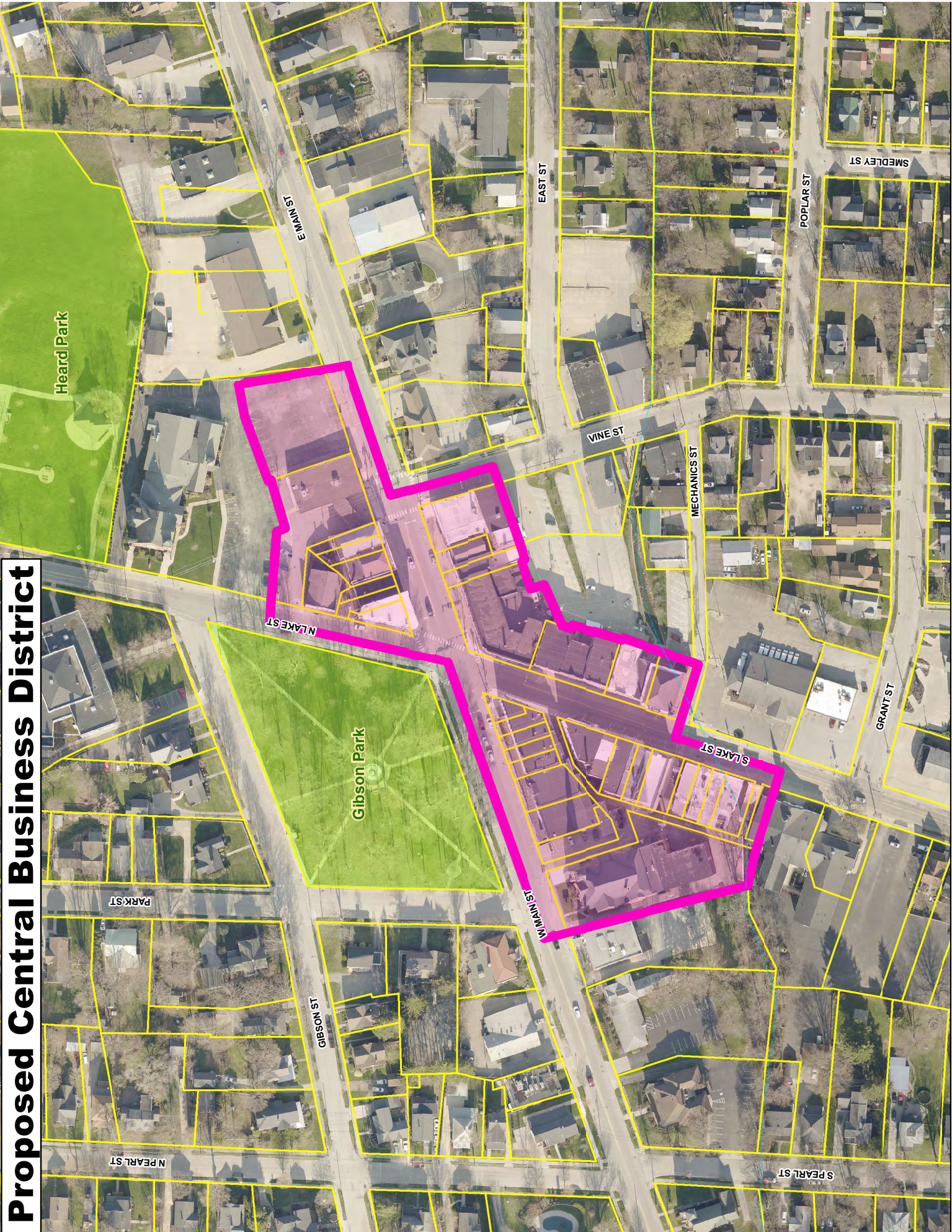
North East Downtown Focus Area



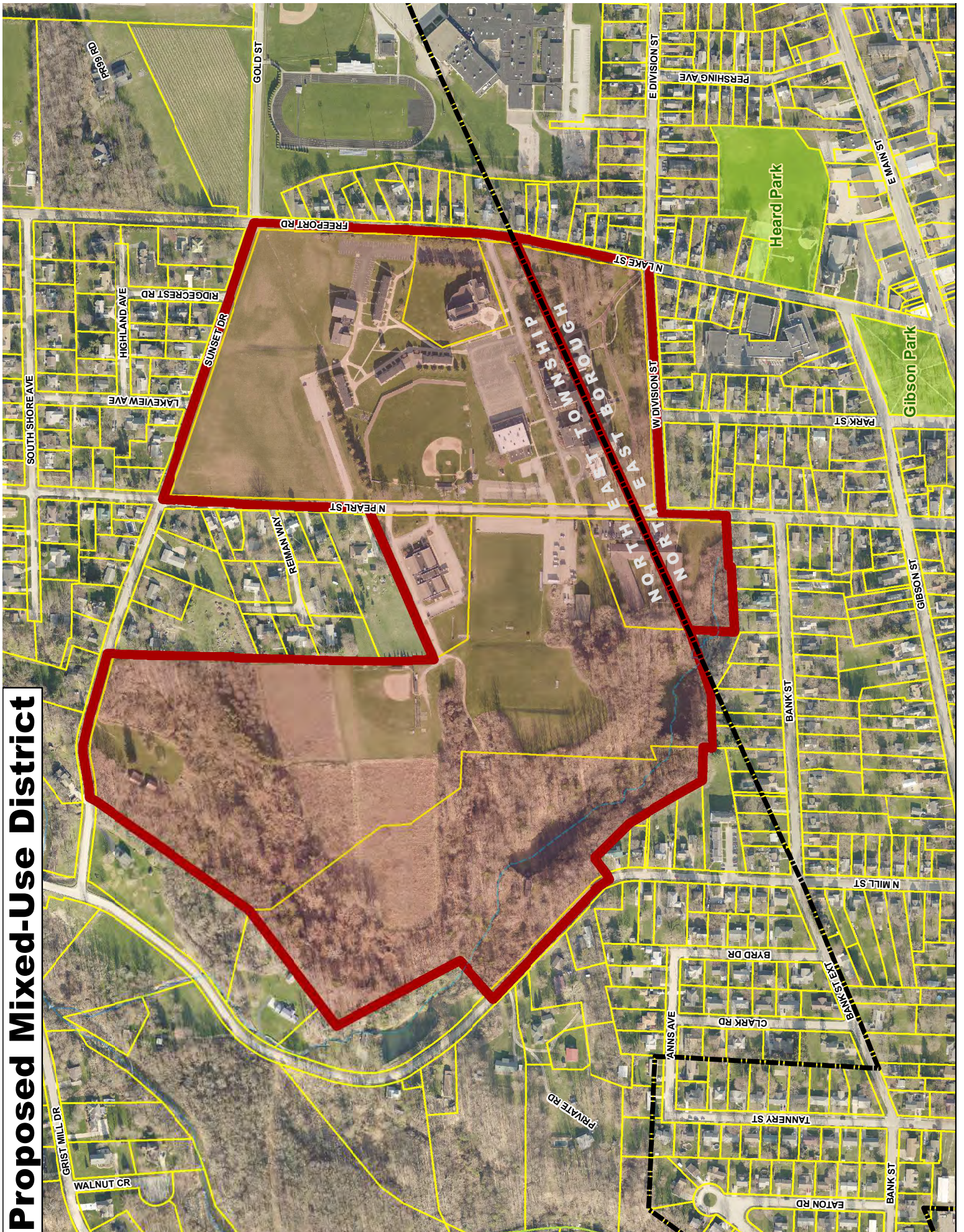
North East Historic District



Proposed Central Business District



Proposed Mixed-Use District



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Improve Our Downtown Area Action Plan						
Goal #1	Goal / Objective	Responsible Party	Assistance Provided By	Time	Funding Needs	Potential Funding Sources
Objective 1.1	Encourage and Support Business Development. Help existing businesses grow and prosper.					
Task 1.1.1	Build relationships with business owners.	North East Area Municipal Officials	North East Area Chamber of Commerce and other Community Organizations	On-going	Staff time	n/a
Task 1.1.2	Continue to advocate for and pursue improvements in broadband internet service.	North East Area Municipal Officials	North East Borough Staff	On-going	Staff time	n/a
Task 1.1.3	Offer an e-marketing grant program.	Downtown North East, Inc. (DNE)	North East Area Chamber of Commerce	Year 1	Moderate	PA Department of Community & Economic Development (PA DCED), Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), Matching contributions by participating businesses
Task 1.1.4	Help businesses reduce operational costs.	North East Area Municipal Officials; North East Area Chamber of Commerce	Variable, based on sub-task or other method used.	On-going	Funding needs (if any) will vary depending on sub-task or other methods used.	PA DCED, Erie County Redevelopment Authority (ECRA)
Sub-Task 1.1.4A	Promote the Erie County Energy Efficiency (C-PACE) program.	North East Area Chamber of Commerce	Erie County C-PACE Program Administrator	Year 1	None	n/a
Sub-Task 1.1.4B	Pursue infrastructure improvements to help mitigate property damage associated with Baker Creek flooding.	North East Borough Officials	North East Borough Staff	On-going	\$6 million (2020 estimate)	PA DCED, PA Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP), ECRA, Municipal bonds
Sub-Task 1.1.4C	Pursue reduced flood insurance premiums through the National Flood Insurance Program's Community Rating System.	North East Borough Officials	North East Borough Staff	Year 1	Staff time	n/a
Task 1.1.5	Buy local. Patronize downtown businesses.	North East Area Residents	Entire North East Community, including municipal governments, businesses, and school district.	On-going	Little or no additional cost to residents, municipalities, businesses or school district.	n/a
Task 1.1.6	Encourage coordinated business hours.	North East Area Chamber of Commerce	Downtown business owners	On-going	Little or no cost	n/a
Task 1.1.7	Create a Revolving Loan Fund.				Little or no cost if a local lender will agree to assist with development and administration of the RLF.	n/a
Sub-Task 1.1.7A	Develop the RLF program and its guidelines.	DNE, Inc.	Financial consultant or local lending institution	Year 1		
Sub-Task 1.1.7B	Acquire the initial funding needed to capitalize the RLF program.	DNE, Inc.	Financial consultant or local lending institution	Year 2	High	USDA, ARC, North East Community Foundation (NECF)
Sub-Task 1.1.7C	Grant loans to local businesses, and administer the RLF.	Local lending institution	n/a	Year 3, then on-going	No cost to municipalities	n/a
Task 1.1.8	Connect local workers with job opportunities.					
Sub-Task 1.1.8A	Partner with local job training programs.	Business Owners	North East Area Chamber of Commerce, Erie County Community College, North East School District, Local universities and/or trade schools	As needed.	No cost to municipalities	n/a
Sub-Task 1.1.8B	Host a job fair or similar event to help connect local workers with job opportunities.	Business Owners	North East Area Chamber of Commerce, local schools and universities	As needed.	No cost to municipalities	n/a
Sub-Task 1.1.8C	Improve transportation options for workers.	Business Owners	North East Area Chamber of Commerce, EMTA	As needed.	No cost to municipalities	n/a
Task 1.1.9	Maintain Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) Program.	North East Area Municipal Officials	North East School District, Erie County Government	On-going	None	n/a
Objective 1.2	Support entrepreneurs and new business "start-ups".					
Task 1.2.1	Establish a small business training and mentoring assistance program or partner with an existing program.	North East Area Chamber of Commerce, North East Community Foundation	Volunteers, including retired business owners and/or qualified professionals	Year 1	No cost to municipalities	n/a
Task 1.2.2	Facilitate and improve access to capital by encouraging entrepreneurs and new business owners to network with local lending institutions and/or "angel investors".	North East Area Chamber of Commerce	Local Lending Institutions, ECGRA	Year 1, then on-going	No cost to municipalities	n/a
Objective 1.3	Attract new businesses to the Downtown area.					
Task 1.3.1	Continue to provide a designated point of contact for business recruitment and support.	North East Borough Officials	North East Borough Staff, North East Area Chamber of Commerce	On-going	Staff time	n/a
Task 1.3.2	Establish and maintain a comprehensive, online directory of business resources and supportive services.	North East Borough Officials	North East Borough Staff	On-going	Staff time	n/a
Task 1.3.3	Identify and maintain an inventory of available commercial spaces.	North East Borough Officials	North East Borough Staff, North East Area Chamber of Commerce	Year 1, then on-going	Staff time	n/a
Objective 1.4	Establish a Central Business Zoning District.	North East Borough Planning Commission, North East Borough Governing Body	Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development (ECDP)	Year 1	Legal fees and costs associated with ordinance adoption	Borough general fund
Objective 1.5	Support the development and re-use of the former Mercyhurst University campus.					
Task 1.5.1	Establish a Mixed Use Zoning District.	North East Borough and Township Planning Commissions and governing bodies.	ECDP	Year 1	Legal fees and costs associated with ordinance adoption	Borough and Township general funds
Task 1.5.2	Consider Establishing a Tax Increment Financing District (TIF).	North East Area Municipal Officials	North East School District, Erie County Government, Participating Landowner(s)	As needed.	Legal and/or consulting fees to establish TIF., Increase in real estate tax revenue used to repay bond.	PA DCED, Commonwealth Financing Authority
Task 1.5.3	Amend the North East Area municipal zoning ordinances and/or municipal subdivision and land development ordinances (SALDO) to require traffic impact studies for proposed, traffic generating developments.	North East Borough and Township Planning Commissions and governing bodies.	ECDP	Year 1	Legal fees and costs associated with ordinance adoption	Borough and Township general funds

Improve Our Downtown Area Action Plan						
Goal #2	Goal / Objective	Responsible Party	Assistance Provided By	Time	Funding Needs	Potential Funding Sources
Objective 2.1	Maintain an attractive, well designed Downtown Area.					
Task 2.1.1	Preserve the Downtown's historic character.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	DNE, Inc.	Year 1	Little or no cost	n/a
Task 2.1.2	Adopt design guidelines for the historic district.	DNE, Inc.	Sustain North East, North East Community Foundation	On-going	Moderate to high, depending on the project.	PA DCED, PA SHPO, ECGRA, NECF, Fundraising Events/Efforts
Objective 2.2	Encourage, facilitate and support the preservation, restoration, maintenance and re-use of historic buildings.					
Task 2.2.1	Celebrate the North East Area's historic and cultural heritage.	DNE, Inc.	North East Historical Society, North East In-Bloom, and other North East Area Community Organizations	On-going	Low to moderate, depending on the project or method.	PA Council on the Arts, National Trust for Historic Preservation, VisitErie, Fundraising Events/Efforts
Task 2.2.2	Increase public awareness and community pride.	DNE, Inc.	North East Area Community Organizations, North East Area Fire Departments	Year 1	Funding needs will vary depending on the size, type, and requirements of the festival or event.	ECGRA, PA Council on the Arts, Erie Arts & Culture, NECF
Task 2.2.3	Celebrate the North East Area's cultural heritage with festivals and events.	North East Area Community Organizations, North East Area Fire Departments	North East Area Municipal Officials	Year 1	Funding needs will vary depending on the size, type, and requirements of the festival or event.	PA DCED, ECGRA, PHMC, PA SHPO, National Endowment for the Humanities, Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), NECF, USDA
Objective 2.3	Support the North East Area's museums.	North East Historical Society, Lake Shore Railway Historical Society	Entire North East Community	On-going	Funding needs (if any) will vary depending on the type and extent of support.	
Task 2.3.1	Maximize the appeal and vibrancy of the Downtown area's public spaces.					
Task 2.3.1	Develop and implement a streetscape plan to coordinate future improvements within the Downtown Area.					
Sub-Task 2.3.1A	Retain a consultant to develop a streetscape plan.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	DNE, Inc.	Years 1-2	Consulting Fees	PA DCED, Erie MPO, Fundraising Events/Efforts
Sub-Task 2.3.1B	Implement the streetscape plan.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	North East In Bloom (NEIB); DNE, Inc.	Years 3-5	Moderate to high. To be determined by streetscape plan.	PA DCED, PennDOT, ECGRA, Erie Community Foundation (ECF), Fundraising Events/Efforts, Municipal General Funds or Bonds
Task 2.3.2	Establish and implement a sidewalk improvement program.					
Sub-Task 2.3.2A	Establish a sidewalk improvement program.	North East Borough Planning Commission	North East Borough Governing Body	Years 1-2, coordinated with Task 2.3.1.	Little or no cost	n/a
Sub-Task 2.3.2B	Implement the sidewalk improvement program.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	North East Borough Planning Commission, North East Borough Staff	Years 3-5, coordinated with Task 2.3.1.	High; \$45/linear foot (2022)	Erie County Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), PA Infrastructure Investment Authority (PennVest), PA Department of Transportation (PennDOT), Municipal bonds, Borough General Fund
Task 2.3.3	Improve the safety and aesthetics of the alley.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	North East Borough code enforcement officers, Property owners, DNE, Inc.	Coordinate with Task 2.3.1.	Funding needs will vary depending on projects and/or methods used.	PA DCED, PA Council on the Arts, Erie Arts & Culture, NECF, Erie Community Foundation (ECF)
Task 2.3.4	Enhance the downtown's visual appeal with art, decorations, and greenery.	NEIB	North East Area Community Organizations, North East Borough Municipal Officials	On-going, coordinated with Task 2.3.1.	Funding needs will vary depending on projects and/or methods used.	PA DCED, PA Council on the Arts, ECGRA, Hirtzel Memorial Foundation, NECF, ECF
Task 2.3.5	Improve parking in the downtown area.					
Sub-Task 2.3.5A	Continue to monitor effectiveness of parking meter removals and reduced parking requirements for businesses. Consider modifications or additional options, if needed.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	n/a	On-going	Little or no cost	n/a
Sub-Task 2.3.5B	Identify and secure long-term, off-street, parking locations in the Downtown Area.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	DNE, Inc., Downtown Area Landowners	Year 1	Parking leases, if needed.	Borough general fund
Sub-Task 2.3.5C	Implement a parking signage system to identify where the public can and cannot park.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	n/a	Year 2	Signs and installation costs.	Borough general fund
Objective 2.4	Encourage and support the maintenance, rehabilitation and re-use of existing buildings.					
Task 2.4.1	Improve the quality, condition and safety of buildings.					
Sub-Task 2.4.1A	Encourage property owners to maintain and improve their properties.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	Borough Code Enforcement Officers, DNE, Inc.	On-going	Staff time	n/a
Sub-Task 2.4.1B	Continue the facade grant program.	DNE, Inc.	Landowners	On-going	Moderate to High	PA DCED, ECGRA, NECF, Fundraising Events/Efforts
Sub-Task 2.4.1C	Continue to enforce property maintenance codes.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	Borough Code Enforcement Officers	On-going	Staff time	n/a
Sub-Task 2.4.1D	Continue the rental inspection program.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	Borough Staff	On-going	Staff time	n/a
Sub-Task 2.4.1E	Partner with the Erie County Land Bank to address unsafe, abandoned and deteriorated buildings and structures.	North East Borough Governing Body	Erie County Land Bank, North East Township School District, Erie County Government, Borough Staff	On-going	Staff time	n/a
Sub-Task 2.4.1F	Explore the use of conservatorship to address abandoned and blighted properties.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	Borough Staff	Year 1	Staff time	n/a
Task 2.4.2	Encourage, facilitate and support the economically viable use and re-use of vacant or underutilized properties.					
Sub-Task 2.4.2A	Continue to pursue the acquisition, rehabilitation and re-use of vacant or underutilized properties.	Sustain North East	DNE, Inc., North East Borough Officials	On-going	High	PA DCED, NECF, Fundraising Events/Efforts
Sub-Task 2.4.2B	Continue to pursue improved access to the upper floors of commercial buildings.	DNE, Inc.	North East Borough Officials	On-going	\$1 million (2019)	PA DCED, ECGRA, PA SHPO, Fundraising Events/Efforts
Sub-Task 2.4.2C	Maintain zoning that supports and encourages the economically viable use and re-use of buildings in the downtown area.	North East Area Planning Commissions	North East Area Municipal Governing Bodies	On-going	Little or no cost	n/a

Improve Our Downtown Area Action Plan

Goal #3	Goal / Objective	Responsible Party	Assistance Provided By	Time	Funding Needs	Potential Funding Sources
Objective 3.1	Promote the Downtown Area and its Businesses. Build a community image with branding.	North East Area Chamber of Commerce	DNE, Inc., North East Area Municipal Officials	On-going	Possible funding needs include consulting support, public outreach, market analysis (if needed/desired). Funding needs will vary depending on the type of event or festival.	ECGRA, PA DCED, NECF, Fundraising Events/Efforts ECGRA, Donations, Sponsorships, Admission Fees, Fundraising Efforts
Objective 3.2	Promote North East as a regional destination by planning and holding special events and festivals.	North East Area Community Organizations	North East Area Municipal Officials	On-going		
Objective 3.3	Encourage people to visit the downtown area, and patronize local businesses.					
Task 3.3.1	Hold a variety of special events and activities.	North East Area Community Organizations	North East Area Municipal Officials	On-going	Funding needs will vary depending on the type of event or activity.	ECGRA, PA Council on the Arts, Erie Arts & Culture, Donations, Sponsorships, Admission or Participation Fees, Fundraising Efforts
Task 3.3.2	Hold business and retail promotional activities.	Business Owners	North East Area Chamber of Commerce	On-going	No cost to the municipalities.	ECGRA, VisitErie
Task 3.3.3	Welcome visitors with gateway enhancements and wayfinding signage.	NEIB	DNE, Inc., North East Area Chamber of Officials	On-going	\$3 million (2019)	ECGRA, PA DCED, PA Council on the Arts, NECF, Fundraising Events/Efforts
Task 3.3.4	Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing strategy.	North East Area Chamber of Commerce	DNE, Inc., North East Community Foundation, North East Area Municipal Officials	On-going	Funding needs will vary depending on the type and scope of the marketing strategy.	ARC, PA DCED, ECGRA, NECF, ECF, Fundraising Events/Efforts
Goal #4	Build collaboration, cultivate partnerships and secure financial resources.					
Objective 4.1	Build a strong foundation for success by building collaboration and cultivating partnerships.	North East Area Municipal Officials	North East Area Community Organizations, Businesses, Funding Partners	On-going	None	n/a
Objective 4.2	Involve the entire community, including residents, business owners and property owners.	North East Area Municipal Officials	DNE, Inc., North East Area Chamber of Commerce	On-going	Little or no cost	n/a
Objective 4.3	Secure the financial resources needed to improve the Downtown by identifying and pursuing funding opportunities.					
Task 4.3.1	Research and pursue available grant opportunities and foundation donations.	Responsible party will vary depending on task or project, and funding sources and opportunities available.	DNE, Inc., North East Area Municipal Officials and Staff	On-going	Staff time	n/a
Task 4.3.2	Plan and hold fundraising events/activities.	Responsible party will vary depending on task or project, and funding sources and opportunities available.	North East Area Community Organizations, North East Area Municipal Officials	Year 1, then on-going	Self funding	Revenue generated from the fundraising event or activity.
Objective 4.4	Get organized, and implement a holistic and balanced approach to improving the Downtown area.	DNE, Inc.	North East Area Community Organizations, North East Area Municipal Officials	Year 1, then on-going	None	n/a

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References & Resources

- *Downtown North East, Inc. Design Guidelines & Façade Improvement Grant Program*, Downtown North East, Inc.
- *Downtown North East Revitalization Plan, 2019*, prepared by Downtown North East, Inc., North East Borough and the North East Area Chamber of Commerce
- *Sustain North East Initiative*, Power Point prepared by Sustain North East
- *Celebrate Downtown North East, 2014*, Power Point prepared by Downtown North East, Inc.
- *North East Smart Transportation Initiative, July 2014*, Whitman, Requardt & Associates, LLP (WR&A)
- *Place Value, How Communities Attract, Grow and Keep Jobs and Talent in the Rocky Mountain West*, by the Sonoran Institute https://communitybuilders.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/PlaceValue_11lowresa.pdf
- *Indiana Main Street Program Guide & Handbook*, by the Indiana office of Community and Rural Affairs https://www.in.gov/ocra/mainstreet/files/IndianaMainStreet_Program-2019.pdf
- *The Main Street Approach: A Comprehensive Guide to Community Transformation*, by Main Street AmericaTM <https://www.crt.state.la.us/Assets/OCD/hp/mainstreet/Resource-Page-Documents/A%20Comprehensive%20Guide%20to%20Community%20Transformation.pdf>
- *Framework for Creating a Smart Growth Economic Development Strategy: A Tool for Small Cities and Towns*, by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-01/documents/small_town_econ_dev_tool_010516.pdf
- *Tax Increment Financing Guarantee Program Guidelines, December 2017*, by the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED) <https://dced.pa.gov/programs/tax-increment-financing-tif-guarantee-program/>
- *Principles and Standards for Design Guidelines in Pennsylvania Communities*, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/About/Documents/DesignGuidelines_Standards_FINAL.pdf
- FEMA – NFIP, Community Rating System: <https://www.fema.gov/floodplain-management/community-rating-system>
- Council of Development Finance Agencies (CDFA) – Revolving Loan Funds & Development Finance: <https://www.cdfa.net/cdfa/cdfaweb.nsf/pages/revolving-loan-funds.html>
- Forbes Advisor, What are Angel Investors? <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/investing/what-are-angel-investors/>
- Angel Investor Forum <https://www.angelinvestorforum.com/>
- Angel Capital Association <https://www.angelcapitalassociation.org/about-aca/>
- Gannon University Small Business Development Center <https://www.sbdcgannon.org/>
- Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) – Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Guarantee program <https://dced.pa.gov/programs/tax-increment-financing-tif-guarantee-program/>

Potential Funding Sources

Task 1.1.3, Offer an e marketing program.

Appalachian Regional Commission Area Development Program

<https://www.arc.gov/area-development-program/>

PA DCED Keystone Communities Program

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/keystone-communities-program-kcp/>

ECGRA Mission Main Street Grant

<https://www.ecgra.org/impact-neighborhoods-communities/mission-main-street-grants>

USDA Rural Business Development Grants

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/rural-business-development-grants>

In lieu of a financial grant program, consider forming partnerships with entities such as the NWPA Innovative Beehive Network <https://www.nwpabeehive.com/> or Gannon's Small Business Development Center <https://www.sbdcgannon.org/> to provide technical assistance.

Task 1.1.4, Help businesses reduce operation costs.

PA DCED Alternative and Clean Energy Program

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/alternative-clean-energy-program-ace/>

Erie County Redevelopment Authority Micro-Enterprise Loan Program

<https://www.ecrda.net/services/access-to-capital/>

Erie County Redevelopment Authority Business Loan Fund

<https://www.ecrda.net/services/access-to-capital/>

Sub Task 1.1.4B, Pursue infrastructure improvements to help mitigate property damage associated with Baker Creek Flooding.

PA DCED Flood Mitigation Program

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/flood-mitigation-program-fmp/>

PA DCED H2O PA Flood Control Projects

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/h2o-pa-flood-control-projects/>

PA DCED H2O PA Water Supply, Sanitary Sewer and Storm Water Projects

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/h2o-pa-flood-control-projects/>

PA DCED Watershed Restoration and Protection Program

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/watershed-restoration-protection-program-wrpp/>

PA DEP Growing Greener Plus

<https://www.dep.pa.gov/Citizens/GrantsLoansRebates/Growing-Greener/Pages/default.aspx>

PA DCED Small Water and Sewer

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/pa-small-water-sewer/>

Erie County Redevelopment Authority Municipality Loans

<https://www.ecrda.net/services/access-to-capital/>

Sub Task 1.1.7B, Acquire the initial funding needed to capitalize the RLF program.

ARC Business Development Revolving Loan Fund RLF Grant

<https://www.arc.gov/resource/arc-business-development-revolving-loan-fund-grant-guidelines/>

USDA Rural Business Development Grants

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/rural-business-development-grants>

North East Community Foundation <https://www.necommunityfoundation.org/>

Task 1.5.2, Consider establishing a tax increment financing district TIF.

Pennsylvania Commonwealth Financing Authority

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs-funding/commonwealth-financing-authority-cfa/>

Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development DCED

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs-funding/>

Task 2.1.2, Encourage, facilitate and support the preservation, restoration, maintenance and re use of historic buildings.

PA DCED Business in Our Sites Program

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/business-in-our-sites-grants-and-loans-bos/>

PA DCED / PA SHPO Historic Preservation Tax Credit

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/h20-pa-flood-control-projects/>

PA DCED Keystone Communities Program

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/keystone-communities-program-kcp/>

ECGRA Anchor Building Program

<https://www.ecgra.org/impact-neighborhoods-communities/anchor-building-program>

PA SHPO Keystone Historic Preservation Grant Program Planning/Construction

<https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/Grants-Funding/Pages/Construction-Projects.aspx>

PA SHPO Certified Local Government Program

<https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/CLG-Grant-Program/Pages/default.aspx>

PA DCED Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program

<https://www.budget.pa.gov/Programs/RACP/Pages/Main%20Page.aspx>

Task 2.2.1, Increase public awareness and community pride.

PA Council on the Arts Creative Catalyst Grants

<https://www.arts.pa.gov/WHAT%20WE%20DO/FUNDING/apply-for-a-grant/Pages/default.aspx>

PA Council on the Arts Creative Communities Initiative

<https://www.arts.pa.gov/Pages/Creative-Communities.aspx>

National Trust for Historic Preservation Henry A. Jordan, M.D., Preservation Excellence Fund - Mid-Atlantic States

<https://forum.savingplaces.org/build/funding/grant-seekers/specialprograms/jordan-fund>

Explore all opportunities for members with VisitErie

<https://www.visiterie.com/>

Task 2.2.2, Celebrate the North East Area's cultural heritage with festivals and events.

ECGRA Special Events Grants

<https://www.ecgra.org/impact-place/special-events-grants>

PA Council on the Arts Arts in Education Artist Residency

<https://www.arts.pa.gov/WHAT%20WE%20DO/FUNDING/apply-for-a-grant/AIE-Residencies/Pages/default.aspx>

Erie Arts & Culture Ignite Arts Grants

<https://www.erieartsandculture.org/programs-and-services/capacity-building/organizational-support/>

North East Community Foundation

<https://www.necommunityfoundation.org/>

Task 2.2.3, Support the North East Area's museums.

PA DCED Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/educational-improvement-tax-credit-program-eitc/>

ECGRA Community Assets Grant – Arts, Culture, and Heritage

<https://www.ecgra.org/impact-place/community-assets-arts-culture-heritage>

PHMC Historical & Archival Records Care Grant

<https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/Grants-Funding/Pages/Records-Care-Grants.aspx>

PA SHPO Keystone Historic Preservation Grant Program Planning/Construction
<https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/Grants-Funding/Pages/Construction-Projects.aspx>

National Endowment for the Humanities Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions
<https://www.neh.gov/grants/preservation/preservation-assistance-grants-smaller-institutions>

IMLS Museum Assessment Program
<https://www.imls.gov/grants/available/museum-assessment-program-map>

North East Community Foundation
<https://www.necommunityfoundation.org/>

USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Grants & Loans
<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program>

Sub Task 2.3.1A, Retain a consultant to develop a streetscape plan.

PA DCED Municipal Assistance Program
<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/municipal-assistance-program-map/>

Erie Metropolitan Planning Organization – Studies
<https://eriecountypa.gov/departments/planning-and-community-development/programs/metropolitan-planning-organization/>

Sub Task 2.3.1B, Implement the streetscape plan.

PA DCED Multimodal Transportation Fund
<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/multimodal-transportation-fund/>

PennDOT Multimodal Transportation Fund
<https://www.penndot.pa.gov/ProjectAndPrograms/MultimodalProgram/pages/default.aspx>

PennDOT Transportation Set-Aside
<https://www.penndot.pa.gov/ProjectAndPrograms/Planning/Pages/Transportation%20Alternatives%20Set-Aside%20-%20Surface%20Trans.%20Block%20Grant%20Program.aspx>

ECGRA Mission Main Street Grant
<https://www.ecgra.org/impact-neighborhoods-communities/mission-main-street-grants>

Erie Community Foundation Shaping Tomorrow Grants
<https://www.eriecommunityfoundation.org/>

Sub Task 2.3.2B, Implement the sidewalk improvement program.

Erie County Community Development Block Grant CDBG Program
<https://eriecountypa.gov/departments/planning-and-community-development/programs/community-development-block-grant/>

Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority PennVest
<https://www.pennvest.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
<https://www.penndot.pa.gov/about-us/funding/Pages/default.aspx>

Task 2.3.3, Improve the safety and aesthetics of the alley.

PA DCED Keystone Communities Program
<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/keystone-communities-program-kcp/>

PA DCED Neighborhood Assistance Program
<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/neighborhood-assistance-program-nap/>

PA Council on the Arts Creative Catalyst Grants
<https://www.arts.pa.gov/WHAT%20WE%20DO/FUNDING/apply-for-a-grant/Pages/default.aspx>

PA Council on the Arts Creative Communities Initiative
<https://www.arts.pa.gov/Pages/Creative-Communities.aspx>

Erie Arts & Culture Ignite Arts Grants
<https://www.erieartsandculture.org/programs-and-services/capacity-building/organizational-support/>

North East Community Foundation
<https://www.necommunityfoundation.org/>

Erie Community Foundation Shaping Tomorrow Grants
<https://www.eriecommunityfoundation.org/>

Task 2.3.4, Enhance the downtown's visual appeal with art, decorations, and greenery.

PA DCED Keystone Communities Program
<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/keystone-communities-program-kcp/>

PA Council on the Arts Creative Catalyst Grants
<https://www.arts.pa.gov/WHAT%20WE%20DO/FUNDING/apply-for-a-grant/Pages/default.aspx>

PA Council on the Arts Creative Communities Initiative
<https://www.arts.pa.gov/Pages/Creative-Communities.aspx>

PA Council on the Arts Arts in Education Artist Residency
<https://www.arts.pa.gov/WHAT%20WE%20DO/FUNDING/apply-for-a-grant/AIE-Residencies/Pages/default.aspx>

ECGRA Mission Main Street Grant
<https://www.ecgra.org/impact-neighborhoods-communities/mission-main-street-grants>

North East Community Foundation
<https://www.necommunityfoundation.org/>

Erie Community Foundation Helping Today Grants
<https://www.eriecommunityfoundation.org/>

Sub Task 2.4.1B, Continue the façade grant program.

PA DCED Keystone Communities Program
<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/keystone-communities-program-kcp/>

ECGRA Mission Main Street Grant
<https://www.ecgra.org/impact-neighborhoods-communities/mission-main-street-grants>

North East Community Foundation
<https://www.necommunityfoundation.org/>

Sub Task 2.4.2A, Continue to pursue the acquisition, rehabilitation and re use of vacant or underutilized properties.

PA DCED Keystone Communities Program
<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/keystone-communities-program-kcp/>

PA DCED Local Share Account – Statewide
<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/local-share-account-lsa-statewide/>

Sub Task 2.4.2B, Continue to pursue improved access to the upper floors of commercial buildings.

PA DCED Business in Our Sites Program
<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/business-in-our-sites-grants-and-loans-bos/>

PA DCED / PA SHPO Historic Preservation Tax Credit
<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/h20-pa-flood-control-projects/>

PA DCED Keystone Communities Program

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/keystone-communities-program-kcp/>

ECGRA Anchor Building Program

<https://www.ecgra.org/impact-neighborhoods-communities/anchor-building-program>

PA SHPO Keystone Historic Preservation Grant Program Planning/Construction

<https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/Grants-Funding/Pages/Construction-Projects.aspx>

PA SHPO Certified Local Government Program

<https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/CLG-Grant-Program/Pages/default.aspx>

PA DCED Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program

<https://www.budget.pa.gov/Programs/RACP/Pages/Main%20Page.aspx>

Objective 3.1, Build a community image with branding.

Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority ECGRA

<https://www.ecgra.org/>

North East Community Foundation

<https://www.necommunityfoundation.org/>

Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development DCED

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs-funding/>

Objective 3.2, Promote North East as a regional destination by planning and holding special events and festivals.

ECGRA Special Events Grants

<https://www.ecgra.org/impact-place/special-events-grants>

Task 3.3.1, Hold a variety of special events and activities.

ECGRA Special Events Grants

<https://www.ecgra.org/impact-place/special-events-grants>

PA Council on the Arts Arts in Education Artist Residency

<https://www.arts.pa.gov/WHAT%20WE%20DO/FUNDING/apply-for-a-grant/AIE-Residencies/Pages/default.aspx>

Erie Arts & Culture Ignite Arts Grants

<https://www.erieartsandculture.org/programs-and-services/capacity-building/organizational-support/>

Task 3.3.2, Hold business and retail promotional activities.

ECGRA Mission Main Street Grant

<https://www.ecgra.org/impact-neighborhoods-communities/mission-main-street-grants>

Explore all opportunities for members with VisitErie

<https://www.visiterie.com/>

Task 3.3.3, Welcome visitors with gateway enhancements and wayfinding signage.

ECGRA Mission Main Street Grant

<https://www.ecgra.org/impact-neighborhoods-communities/mission-main-street-grants>

PA DCED Keystone Communities Program

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/keystone-communities-program-kcp/>

PA Council on the Arts Creative Catalyst Grants

<https://www.arts.pa.gov/WHAT%20WE%20DO/FUNDING/apply-for-a-grant/Pages/default.aspx>

PA Council on the Arts Creative Communities Initiative

<https://www.arts.pa.gov/Pages/Creative-Communities.aspx>

<https://www.erieartsandculture.org/programs-and-services/capacity-building/organizational-support/>

North East Community Foundation

<https://www.necommunityfoundation.org/>

Task 3.3.4, Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing strategy.

Appalachian Regional Commission Area Development Program

<https://www.arc.gov/area-development-program/>

PA DCED Keystone Communities Program

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/keystone-communities-program-kcp/>

ECGRA Mission Main Street Grant

<https://www.ecgra.org/impact-neighborhoods-communities/mission-main-street-grants>

North East Community Foundation

<https://www.necommunityfoundation.org/>

Erie Community Foundation Shaping Tomorrow Grants

<https://www.eriecommunityfoundation.org/>

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Preserve the North East Area's Rural Characteristics

1

Preserve our open space, farms and natural areas.

2

Encourage agriculture and other appropriate uses of natural resources.

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Focus infrastructure investments on future growth areas and away from rural areas.

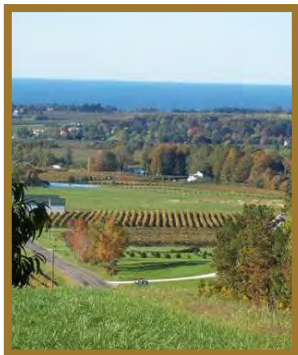


Preserve the North East Area's Rural Characteristics

Introduction

Why is this important?

What is “rural character”? Most people know it when they see it. However, it can be difficult to define, and the perception of “rural character” will often vary from person to person. To some people, it may be the Area’s abundance of natural beauty, with farms, vineyards and wooded areas. Others may associate rural character in terms of privacy, quiet and peacefulness. It may also be associated with the pleasant aroma of Concord grapes during the fall harvest, the presence of roadside fruit stands, a lack of traffic or the ability to raise chickens or keep horses.

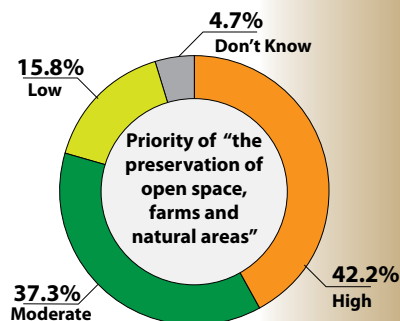


Regardless of how “rural character” may be perceived or defined, one thing is certain, these qualities are in danger of disappearing over time. Some new development is inevitable. Within our rural areas, it will most likely be gradual and consist primarily of low density, “scattered site” residential development. Unfortunately, new homes don’t always fit in with existing rural character. They can adversely impact nearby farms, spoil scenic views of the natural landscape, and intrude into environmentally sensitive land.

Fortunately, it is possible to grow and develop while still maintaining rural character. With planning and zoning, the North East Area can encourage responsible land uses and development within its rural areas, protect and preserve its most important natural resources, and minimize any adverse effects of new development on its rural areas.

Public Input/Public Survey Responses

As part of the public survey, North East Area residents were asked what priority should be given to various issues during the next 5 years. Over seventy-nine percent (79.5%) of respondents rated the preservation of open space, farms and natural areas as either a high priority (42.2%) or a moderate priority (37.3%). Only 15.8% rated it as a low priority, while the remaining 4.7% didn’t know or didn’t have an opinion.



Identifying the Location of North East's Rural Areas

The first step towards protecting and preserving the North East Area’s rural areas and rural character was to identify the location of the rural areas. The North East Township Planning Commission recommended that for planning purposes, the “rural areas” should be identified by the Township’s agricultural zoning districts. The agricultural districts were considered to be the logical choice based on their existing rural character, the presence of farms, and climate and soil conditions which are favorable to agriculture.

Long Term Vision for North East's Rural Areas

Year 2040 – In the long term, the North East Area has maintained its rural character and strengthened its rural economy while still seeing some gradual, residential growth and development. There is an abundance of natural beauty, including farms, vineyards, mature woods, wildlife habitats, and beautiful Lake Erie sunsets. Most of the new homes have been designed and built to blend into the rural environment. Residents enjoy the quiet, privacy and peacefulness that comes with living in such a beautiful setting.

There have been a few conservation subdivisions of new homes. These have been well-designed, and have provided a balance between new development and the preservation of open space and natural areas. Homeowners appreciate the privacy and scenic beauty of their neighborhoods.

Township residents support their local farmers, wineries, and other rural businesses. Farmers' markets and roadside stands are busy during the growing season. Wineries are popular with both residents and tourists. The number of farms enrolled in the Township's agricultural security area has increased, and several farms have been preserved with conservation easements.

Goals and Objectives

Goal #1

Preserve our open space, farms and natural areas.

Objective 1.1 – Encourage the preservation of open space, farms and natural areas by amending the Township's ordinances to incorporate conservation subdivision design.

The preservation of open space, farms and natural areas can be accomplished either through the acquisition of lands and/or conservation easements, or through regulation via the Township's ordinances. Like most municipalities, the Borough and the Township have limited financial resources available for implementing their planning goals and objectives. Given the high costs, land acquisition by the municipalities will rarely, if ever, be a viable option. As a result, the use of reasonable and well-designed regulations is the best option for preserving open space, farms and natural areas. Care must be taken to ensure that the regulations effectively address the North East Area's goals, while still being fair to developers and landowners.

Since the North East Area's rural areas are located within the Township, the Township and its Planning Commission will need to play the leading role in drafting and adopting amendments to the Township's zoning and subdivision ordinances. It is recommended that these ordinances should be amended to incorporate best management practices such as conservation subdivision design in order to promote the preservation of open space, farms and natural areas.

Tasks 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 – Amend the North East Township Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) to incorporate conservation subdivisions.

Growing Greener: Conservation by Design is an approach that was originally developed by Randall Arendt and Michael Clarke of the National Lands Trust, and since the mid-1990's, it has been used successfully by numerous municipalities throughout Pennsylvania. This is a "density-neutral" approach to subdivision design that provides a fair and equitable way to balance conservation and development objectives. It allows the same number of homes to be built, but requires new subdivisions to be designed so that half (or more) of the buildable land is set aside as open space.

Growing Greener provides a "menu" of five options for developers to choose from. One is density-neutral, with a requirement for at least 50% undivided open space. Two options allow for an increase in density, provided that additional open space is preserved. The remaining two options are for developers who prefer large lot subdivisions with average lot sizes of 4 acres and 10 acres, respectively. The large lot options have no open space requirements, but the trade-off is a reduction in density. Two or more options can be combined on a single large property. It is noted that the maximum density permitted by the zoning ordinance can only be achieved when open space is protected.

The open space required by *Growing Greener* is never taken for public use. The open space is most frequently owned and maintained by a Homeowners' Association. Other ownership options include dedication to a land trust or the municipality. In some cases, the open space is retained by the original landowner, provided that an agreement is in place that restricts further development of the open space.

The following recommendations are made concerning the inclusion of the *Growing Greener: Conservation by Design* approach in amendments to the Township's zoning ordinance and subdivision and land development ordinance.

- Conservation subdivision design should not be required for "minor" subdivisions of less than 10 acres or less than five (5) lots. This will allow farmers and other landowners to subdivide a few lots without the need to go through the conservation subdivision design process. Additionally, small parcels of less than 10 acres limit design choices, and homeowners' associations often need a minimum of five members to be functional.
- In order to be effective, conservation subdivision design should be mandatory for all residential subdivisions of 10 or more acres that result in five (5) or more lots within the Township's agricultural zoning districts. Allowing for optional use of this design approach will be less effective.
- Conservation subdivision design should be permitted as an optional design choice within the Township's residential zoning districts.
- Conservation subdivision design may not be a good fit for all zoning districts, and some of the options available may not be appropriate in all areas.
- The density-neutral option and a large lot option should be considered for use within the Township's agricultural zoning districts.
- An enhanced density option, which would allow more development sites, but would also require a higher percentage of preserved open space, may not be a good fit for areas that are not served by public sewer. However, it would be worth consideration for residential areas served by public sewer.
- *Growing Greener Version 2.0* provides model ordinance regulations for zoning and subdivisions. The strict application of this model is not recommended because some sections and regulations may be inappropriate for use in North East Township. The model should be tailored to meet the specific needs of the Township.



For more information, see *Growing Greener: Conservation by Design* or one of the other references listed at the end of this section.

Identification of Primary & Secondary Conservation Areas

Through this planning process the North East Area has set a goal to preserve its open space, farms and natural areas; and public input has confirmed the public's support for this goal. However, not all open space, farms and natural areas are of equal value and importance. Therefore, the Township has established a hierarchy of primary and secondary conservation areas.

The primary conservation areas are a priority, and include the most severely constrained lands, where development should be prohibited or at least restricted. The secondary conservation areas include other locally significant or noteworthy features of the natural or cultural landscape that warrant some protection to the extent practicable. As part of the *Growing Greener: Conservation by Design* process, all primary conservation areas will be preserved; and some, but generally not all, of the secondary conservation areas will be preserved.

North East Township's primary conservation areas are identified as the following:

- Stream corridors, floodplains, wetlands, ponds and reservoirs and other lowland areas, including adjacent buffer areas which may be required to insure their protection. Buffer zones should generally be a width of at least 100 feet along all perennial and intermittent streams.
- Significant natural areas of species listed as endangered, threatened or of special concern, such as those listed in the *Erie County Natural Heritage Inventory*.
- Moderate to steep slopes, particularly those adjoining watercourses and ponds, where disturbance and resulting soil erosion and sedimentation could be detrimental to water quality.
- Bluff recession hazard areas located along the Lake Erie shoreline.
- Archaeological sites, cemeteries and burial grounds.

North East Township's secondary conservation areas are identified as the following:

- Prime agricultural lands of a least five (5) contiguous acres. Prime agricultural lands are identified by the U.S.D.A. Erie County Soil Survey.
- Existing healthy, woodlands of at least one contiguous acre.
- Other significant natural features and scenic view sheds such as fence rows, ridge lines, peaks and rock outcroppings, particularly those that can be seen from public roads.
- Significant historic and cultural features such as historic buildings, structures, plaques, markers, or monuments.
- Existing trails that connect the tract to neighboring areas.

Objective 1.2 - Encourage and support the efforts of conservation organizations working to preserve open space, farms and natural areas within the North East Area.

The acquisition of lands and/or conservations easements is perhaps the most effective way to preserve and protect the North East Area's most valuable open space, farms and natural areas. As noted previously, the costs associated with land acquisition projects limit or negate the North East Area's municipalities' ability to acquire lands and/or conservation easements on their own.

Fortunately, there are conservation organizations and governmental entities that work to preserve and protect farmland and important natural areas. This includes the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC), the Lake Erie Regional Conservancy (LERC), and the Erie County Agricultural Land Preservation Board.

The mission of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) <https://waterlandlife.org/> is to protect and restore exceptional places to provide our region with clean waters, healthy forests, wildlife habitats, and natural areas for the benefit of present and future generations. According to WPC's website, the Conservancy owns and manages more than 13,000 acres of land that are open to the

public, free of charge, for nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy. These lands have special conservation significance and are rich with features such as rare plants and animals, wetlands, streams, meadows, wild areas and forests. All of these areas support various forms of recreation, such as fishing, hiking or hunting, in accordance with WPC's Visitor Guidelines or preserve-specific guidelines. To date, the Conservancy has not preserved any lands in the North East Area. However, it has preserved approximately 2,200 acres of land throughout Erie County.

The mission of the Lake Erie Regional Conservancy (LERC) <https://www.lakeerieregionconservancy.org/> is to identify, conserve, and protect the Lake Erie region's unique natural and cultural resources. The Conservancy works to preserve land and water resources for public access and recreational use. They also promote sustainable development through research and outreach. The Conservancy owns nine properties totaling 208 acres, and holds easements on another five properties totaling 142.5 acres. The Conservancy is active throughout Pennsylvania's Lake Erie Watershed, but does not currently own any properties or easements within the North East Area. In addition to preserving lands through purchase or the acquisition of easements, the Conservancy has also assisted with the transfer of nine properties to state agencies and local municipalities totaling 1,346 acres.

The Erie County Agricultural Land Preservation Board preserves and protects farmland throughout Erie County, including the North East Area. The Erie County Agricultural Land Preservation Program is discussed in greater detail later in this plan.

The North East Area and its municipalities should support and encourage the work of these organizations. If opportunities arise, the municipalities should help to facilitate partnerships between these organizations and landowners who may be interested in preserving their lands. It is also noted that organizations of this type make excellent stewards of open space required by conservation subdivisions. In cases where a developer proposes a conservation subdivision, but does not desire to establish a homeowners' association to own and manage the required open space, one of these organizations may agree to serve in that role.

Goal #2

Encourage agriculture and other appropriate uses of natural resources within our rural areas.

Objective 2.1 - Ensure that future growth and development within the our rural areas is compatible with agriculture and other rural uses, supportive of the needs of current and future residents, and consistent with the North East Area's desire to preserve its rural characteristics.

Farms are not only important for our local economy, but they also help to create the special character of our rural areas. Unfortunately, many farms are struggling to stay in business, and as we lose our farms, we also begin to lose our rural way of life and the rural character that we value so much. Farmers and other rural landowners must be able to use their lands productively and receive some economic benefits from them. When farms and other rural enterprises are encouraged to prosper, there is less pressure to sell these lands for residential development.

Farms and other rural resources are best protected when there is a supportive economic climate that values working lands and a development climate that promotes the conservation and responsible use of the natural landscape.

Task 2.1.1 - Maintain agricultural zoning and other land use regulations that support the responsible use and development of our rural areas.

North East Township has two agricultural zoning districts which are identified as A-1, Agricultural Preservation and A-2, Agricultural, respectively. The districts are similar, with only a few differences

in terms of the types of land uses permitted. The A-2 district is slightly more intensive, allowing for uses such as two family residential, campgrounds and schools.

In the future, if/when the Township considers any amendments related to its agricultural zoning districts, the Township should give careful consideration to the types of land uses permitted within the districts. The uses should ideally be compatible with, and supportive of, the rural character that the Township desires to preserve. It is recommended that the districts permit agriculture and compatible rural uses such as agricultural related businesses, forestry, campgrounds and similar uses.



Farmers and other rural landowners often face economic challenges. Secondary sources of income can be helpful. The Township should continue to permit home occupational uses, bed and breakfast operations, and other low impact, compatible uses within its agricultural zoning districts.

Low-density, residential development has historically been permitted within the agricultural districts. It is not considered practical, or even reasonable, to discontinue this practice. However, residential uses are typically not compatible with agriculture. “Scattered site” residential development leads to fragmentation of agricultural lands, and new residents sometimes complain about normal farming operations, including noise and the application of fertilizers. Higher density residential uses are not recommended within the agricultural districts. The Township can also take some reasonable steps to control residential development, such as requiring the use of *Growing Greener: Conservation by Design* for large subdivisions and by limiting extensions of public sewer and/or public water.

Industrial uses and intensive commercial uses, especially those that may require extensions of public water and/or sewer, are not recommended within the agricultural districts.

Task 2.1.2 - Strengthen zoning regulations for large scale, solar energy development.

Interest in renewable energy development, such as wind energy and solar energy, has been increasing in recent years. These opportunities can provide farmers with an economic incentive to keep their “working lands” working. However, reasonable and appropriate regulations are important in order to ensure that these uses are compatible with the surrounding area, and that they are not detrimental to the area’s rural character.

In 2013, North East Township adopted a “Wind Energy Facility Ordinance” to regulate land-based wind energy facilities. The ordinance included a map of appropriate locations for wind energy development within the Township.

The Township’s current zoning ordinance permits renewable energy sources, including solar energy, within all zoning districts as a conditional use, contingent upon the approval of the Board of Supervisors. However, due to the current level of interest in large scale, solar energy developments, and since solar farms may not be appropriate within all areas of the Township, it is strongly recommended that the Township review and amend its current zoning regulations in order to better address solar energy development. In addition to incorporating appropriate and reasonable solar energy regulations, the Township should also specify the zoning districts or locations where large scale, solar energy developments will be permitted.

Task 2.1.3 - Encourage responsible development within our rural areas through Township policies and community outreach.

In many rural areas, new development is often gradual, and has a tendency to take place in a haphazard manner. Much of it is in the form of low-density, “scattered site”, residential development. Over time, this development can erode an area’s rural character. The development fragments agricultural lands, consumes woodlands and natural landscapes, impacts scenic views, and can lead to increased traffic.

With proper planning, and the implementation of some reasonable policies and regulations, the negative impacts of new development can be mitigated, and rural character can be preserved. As with most regulatory options, the Township should consider its options carefully, and determine the appropriate balance between the regulation of new development and the preservation of its rural character.

The following “best practices” can be used to help preserve the Township’s rural character. They can be “encouraged” by Township policies and/or through community outreach, or they can be “required” through implementation of its zoning and subdivision ordinances.

- Encourage or require new developments to avoid the unnecessary removal or destruction of trees and understory vegetation.
- Encourage the retention of woodlands, existing tree lines, and scenic views.
- Encourage or require the site design of new developments to minimize the view of the development from existing roads. This can be accomplished by utilizing existing site topography, locating homes behind existing tree lines or away from the road, or by screening with naturally designed landscaping. Ideally, new homes or buildings should be located on the least visible areas of the tract.
- New roads should be designed to follow the natural contours of the land, and to compliment the area’s rural character.
- Limit the impact of driveways on public roads by maximizing the spacing and minimizing the number of access points onto rural roads.
- New homes or buildings should be architecturally compatible with their surroundings. Encourage new construction to utilize architectural styles, building materials, roof pitches, window sizes and colors that are appropriate for a rural setting and in harmony with the surrounding area.
- Encourage the preservation of historic homes and structures and their surrounding landscapes as much as possible.
- Require naturally designed, landscaped buffers to minimize the visual impact of new development and to reduce conflicts between neighboring properties.

Objective 2.2 - Encourage eligible landowners to enroll their agricultural lands in the Township’s Agricultural Security Area (ASA).

The North East Township Agricultural Security Area (ASA) was established in 1993 in order to help strengthen and protect agriculture in the North East Area.

Agricultural security areas are intended to promote more permanent and viable farming operations over the long term by strengthening the farming community’s sense of security in land use and the right to farm. Farmers participating in the ASA are entitled to special consideration from local and

state government agencies, and gain some protection against “nuisance” challenges. Enrollment in an ASA does not place any limitations the landowner’s property rights or restrict the future development or use of the enrolled land.

The Township recognizes the importance of agriculture and its contribution to the Township’s rural character. The Township will continue to support farm landowners who choose to enroll and participate in the ASA program. Eligible farm landowners may enroll in the Township’s ASA at any time. As of July 2022, a total of 331 parcels totaling approximately 8,449 acres have been enrolled.

The Township’s website can be used to encourage eligible landowners to enroll their farms in the Township’s ASA. An effort to promote ASA enrollments should be made on at least a biennial basis, perhaps in conjunction with application periods for Erie County’s Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program.

Objective 2.3 - Encourage eligible landowners to consider conservation of their agricultural lands with an agricultural conservation easement.

The preservation of farmland not only helps to protect an area’s rural character, but also offers economic and fiscal benefits. Working farms contribute to the local economy, and preserved areas have been shown to help protect property values. In addition, since preserved areas remain undeveloped, they tend to require less municipal services. As a result, they tend to cost local governments less than they contribute in property taxes.

The Pennsylvania Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program was developed to strengthen Pennsylvania’s agricultural economy and protect prime farmland. Erie County has participated in this program since 1992. The program enables Erie County to purchase conservation easements from farmers. The long term goal of the program is to permanently preserve farmland. The conservation easements prevent the development of the land for purposes other than agricultural production.

The Erie County Agricultural Land Preservation Program is a competitive program. The County Program accepts applications from interested landowners every other year. In order to be eligible for preservation, farms must be enrolled in the municipality’s agricultural security area (ASA) in addition to meeting other minimum program eligibility requirements. Farms are ranked and scored against other eligible farm applicants. The highest scoring/ranking farms are selected for preservation based on funding availability.

As of July 2022, the County program has preserved 3,291 acres of farmland in North East Township. The Township can use its website to help promote the County program, announce its application periods, and to encourage eligible landowners to apply.

Objective 2.4 - Support the North East Area’s agricultural community by supporting local farmers’ markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs.

Farmers can increase their profits by marketing their products directly to consumers. Farmers’ markets, wineries and roadside stands provide a place for farmers to sell their products, and have grown in popularity in recent years. Another form of direct marketing is community supported agriculture (CSA). In a CSA program, farms sell shares of their fresh produce or other products to individuals to be delivered on a regular basis throughout the growing season.



The North East Area municipalities and community organizations can help to support CSA programs and farmers' markets via their newsletters, websites and social media; and the Township's zoning should permit farmers' markets and roadside stands in appropriate locations. Perhaps more importantly, all Township residents can help to support local farmers by patronizing farmers' markets and roadside stands, participating in CSA programs, and buying locally.

Objective 2.5 - Promote Agritourism within the North East Area.

Lake Erie Wine Country extends roughly 50 miles along the Lake Erie shoreline from Silver Creek, New York in Chautauqua County to Harborcreek in Erie County. It includes the North East Area, and is home to over 20 commercial and estate wineries. The Lake Erie Wine Country organization promotes the area as a premier tourist destination for wine lovers and travelers alike. It holds wine tastings and other events throughout the year. In addition, member wineries hold special events such as music or holiday celebrations.

Agritourism events and opportunities can be promoted by the North East Area municipalities and community organizations via their newsletters, websites and social media.

For more information, visit the Lake Erie Wine Country website:

<https://www.lakeeriewinecountry.org/>

Goal #3

Focus infrastructure investments on future growth areas and away from rural areas.

Extensions of public services, and especially public water and sewer, often act as a catalyst for future development. For this reason, they are tools that can be used to shape future growth patterns. Strategic investments will help direct growth to the most appropriate locations.

The North East Area should focus its public infrastructure investments on its targeted, future growth areas. This includes the entire Borough as well as the Township's R-2, suburban residential, B-1, commercial, and B-2 industrial zoning districts. In the future, it is anticipated that population density may increase in some areas within the Township's R-1, rural residential district. As this occurs, public water and/or sewer extensions into those areas may also become necessary and appropriate.

During this planning process, the North East Area has established the preservation of its rural areas as one of its top priorities, and it has defined its rural areas as the Township's A-1 agricultural preservation and A-2 agricultural zoning districts. The expansion of public infrastructure (water and/or sewer) into these districts is not recommended because it would most likely lead to more intensive future growth and development that would be incompatible with the Area's desired rural character.

The Township should discourage any expansion of public water or public sewer within its agricultural zoning districts, except as necessary for public health, safety and welfare.

Preserve the North East Area's Rural Characteristics Action Plan						
	Goal / Objective	Responsible Party	Assistance Provided By	Time	Funding Needs	Potential Funding Sources
Goal #1	Preserve our open space, farms and natural areas.					
Objective 1.1	Encourage the preservation of open space, farms and natural areas by amending the Township's ordinances to incorporate conservation subdivision design.					
Task 1.1.1	Amend the North East Township Zoning Ordinance to incorporate conservation subdivisions.	Board of Supervisors, North East Township Planning Commission	Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development (ECDP)	Year 1	Legal fees and costs associated with ordinance adoption	Township general fund
Task 1.1.2	Amend the North East Township Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) to incorporate conservation subdivisions.	Board of Supervisors, North East Township Planning Commission	ECDP	Year 1	Legal fees and costs associated with ordinance adoption	Township general fund
Objective 1.2	Encourage and support the efforts of conservation organizations working to preserve open space, farms and natural areas within the North East Area.	Board of Supervisors	North East Township Planning Commission	On-going	No cost to the municipalities.	n/a
Goal #2	Encourage agriculture and other appropriate uses of natural resources.					
Objective 2.1	Ensure that future growth and development within the our rural areas is compatible with agriculture and other rural uses, supportive of the needs of current and future residents, and consistent with the North East Area's desire to preserve its rural characteristics.					
Task 2.1.1	Maintain agricultural zoning and other land use regulations that support the responsible use and development of our rural areas.	Board of Supervisors, North East Township Planning Commission	ECDP	On-going	Minimal or no cost to the municipality.	n/a
Task 2.1.2	Strengthen zoning regulations for community scale, solar energy development.	Board of Supervisors, North East Township Planning Commission	ECDP	Year 1	Legal fees and costs associated with ordinance adoption	Township general fund
Task 2.1.3	Encourage responsible development within our rural areas through Township policies and community outreach.	Board of Supervisors, North East Township Planning Commission	ECDP	On-going	Minimal or no cost to the municipality.	n/a
Objective 2.2	Encourage eligible landowners to enroll their agricultural lands in the Township's Agricultural Security Area (ASA).	Board of Supervisors, North East Township Planning Commission	North East Township ASA Advisory Committee, Erie County Agricultural Land Preservation Board	On-going	Minimal costs associated with processing ASA enrollment applications.	Township general fund
Objective 2.3	Encourage eligible landowners to consider conservation of their agricultural lands with an agricultural conservation easement.	Board of Supervisors, North East Township Planning Commission	Erie County Agricultural Land Preservation Board	On-going	No cost to the municipalities.	n/a
Objective 2.4	Support the North East Area's agricultural community by supporting local farmers' markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs.	North East Area Residents	North East Area Municipal Officials; North East Area Community Organizations	On-going	No cost to the municipalities.	n/a
Objective 2.5	Promote Agritourism within the North East Area.	North East Area Chamber of Commerce	North East Area wineries and farm owners, North East Area Municipal Officials; North East Area Community Organizations	On-going	Low to moderate depending on methods used.	ECGRA and/or other sources. Funding requirements (if any) and funding sources will vary depending on promotional methods used.
Goal #3	Focus infrastructure investments on future growth areas and away from rural areas.	Board of Supervisors	North East Township Planning Commission, North East Borough Water and Sewer Authorities, North East Township Water and Sewer Authority	On-going	No cost to the municipalities.	n/a

References & Resources

Growing Greener, Conservation by Design – Natural Lands Trust

<http://www.greenerprospects.com/PDFs/growinggreener.pdf>

Growing Greener, Version 2.0 – Natural Lands Trust

https://conservationtools.org/library_items/470-Growing-Greener-Model-Ordinance-Version-2-0-

Conservation by Design – Pennsylvania Land Trust Association

<https://conservationtools.org/guides/9-growing-greener-conservation-by-design>

Conservation Subdivision Design Handbook – Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation & Development, Inc.

https://conservationtools.org/library_items/349-Conservation-Subdivision-Design-Handbook

Essential Smart Growth Fixes for Rural Planning, Zoning and Development Codes – United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/documents/essential_smart_growth_fixes_rural_0.pdf

Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities –

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA)

https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-01/documents/10-180_smart_growth_rural_com.pdf

Improve Our Parks

1

Establish a Parks and Recreation Board.

2

Build community support for the parks and increase citizen involvement.

3

Increase usage of the parks.

4

Supplement municipal funding for park related needs.

5

Develop park master plans.



Improve Our Parks

Introduction

Why is this important?

When individuals and families choose where to live, they consider more than just the quality of the school system, the condition of the roads, and the safety of the neighborhoods. Close-to-home, affordable, recreational opportunities are also an important consideration. When businesses decide to locate or expand within a community, they consider quality of life factors. That includes things like parks and recreational options.

The North East Area is fortunate to have six municipal parks, with Howard Eaton Reservoir serving as a seventh. The parks differ in size, offer a variety of active and passive recreational opportunities, and are located throughout the area so that most residents are within a reasonable distance to a park. The parks serve as a location for numerous festivals and events held throughout the year. They provide residents and visitors with a place to relax, meet their neighbors, develop friendships, and enjoy life.

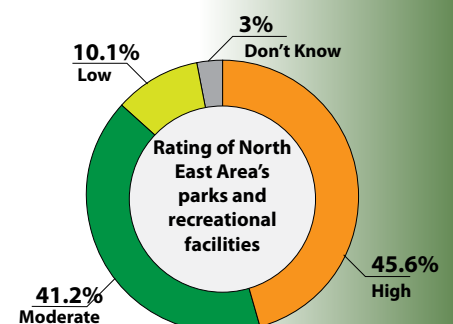
Despite the quality of the North East Area's park system, there is still work to be done to bring the parks to their full potential. Park maintenance has been a challenge, and many residents feel that the parks are underutilized. Many of the park amenities are aging, and are in need of updating or replacement. There is a desire for new amenities such as a public swimming pool, a skate park, basketball courts and an upgraded picnic pavilion for large events. Improved recreational programming and more planned community events are needed to more fully utilize the parks.

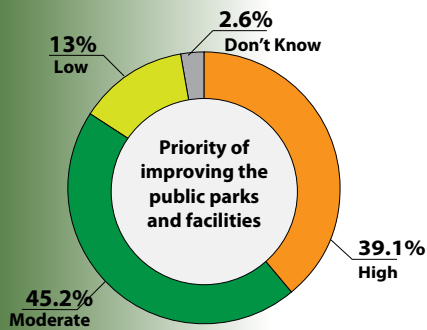
This section of the plan sets the stage for "Improving Our Parks". It recommends the creation of a Parks and Recreation Board to oversee this effort. It addresses the need to build community support for the parks, and to encourage volunteers to get involved. It establishes a plan to increase park usage, and recommends ways to supplement the limited municipal funding that is available for park maintenance and improvements. Finally, it recognizes that this plan is just the starting point. Park master plans will be needed in order to maximize the community's investments in its parks, and to ensure that the parks are well designed so that they not only recognize their full potential, but also adequately address the future needs of the North East Area.

Public Input/Public Survey Responses

During the June 2021 public meeting, the North East Area's public parks generated a lot of discussion. Residents love their parks, and especially the beach access that is available at Freeport Beach and Conservation Park. However, some residents expressed disappointment in the level of park maintenance, especially with beach debris, and suggested that improvements are needed. Many also believe that the parks are underutilized. The consensus appeared to be that the North East Area needs more recreational activities for people of all ages, and the parks could be better utilized to help address that need. There appears to be a strong desire for new and/or improved walking and bicycling trails. Other recommendations included tennis and basketball courts, playground equipment, a skate park, and a public swimming pool.

The public survey that followed, in July and August of 2021, supported the comments received during the public meeting. Over 86 percent (86.8%) rated the North East Area's parks and recreational facilities as either good (45.6%) or adequate (41.2%), while only 10.1% rated them "poor". The remaining 3% didn't know, or didn't express an opinion. However, at the same time, recreational activities for youth, the elderly, and for families were among the





lowest rated areas of satisfaction, with “poor” ratings exceeding 26%. Written comments received as part of the survey also noted some dissatisfaction with park and beach maintenance, as well as a desire for improved utilization of the parks, both in terms of park amenities, and also as sites for more events and recreational activities.

When asked about the priority of improving the public parks and facilities, such as playgrounds, beach areas, recreation options, picnic pavilions, and renovations to existing buildings, 84.3% of survey respondents indicated that it should be a high priority (39.1%) or a moderate priority (45.2%). Only 13% felt that that it should be a low priority. The remaining 2.6% didn’t know or didn’t express an opinion.

North East Area Public Parks Inventory

The North East Area has six municipal parks. In addition, Howard Eaton Reservoir is also available for recreational use. Three of the parks, including Gibson Park, Heard Memorial Park, and Creekside Park are owned and maintained by the Borough. The Township owns and maintains two parks, including Gravel Pit Park and Conservation Park. The sixth park, Freeport Beach/Halli Reid Park, is jointly owned and operated by the municipalities.

Freeport Beach/Halli Reid Park

Freeport Beach/Halli Reid Park was named in honor of Halli Reid, who in 1993 became the first woman to swim across Lake Erie. Its amenities include picnic facilities, a public beach, restrooms, and a playground. The beach is staffed during the summertime with fully certified lifeguards.

As part of the public survey, numerous comments were made about the need to improve and maintain this park. Perhaps the most frequent comment regarded the quality of the beach, which currently has many stones, as opposed to beach sand.



Gravel Pit Park

Gravel Pit Park is located at 10300 West Main Road, adjacent to the Township’s municipal building. The park grounds consist of approximately 15 acres. Park improvements include picnic pavilions, public restrooms, a playground, and basketball courts.

Conservation Park

The Township acquired the Conservation Park property in 2002. The park is located off of Route 5, just west of the New York state line. It is approximately 27.6 acres in size, has frontage on Lake Erie, and is adjacent to Twenty Mile Creek. The park provides green space for passive recreation. It features a walking trail, a beach front to enjoy the great sunsets, and fishing access to Twenty Mile Creek. An ADA accessible fishing pier has recently been completed.

Gibson Park

Gibson Park is located at the intersection of Main and Lake Streets, and serves as the Borough’s town square. It is surrounded by historic buildings, unique shops and restaurants; and is the location of many community events, including WineFest, Picnic in the Park, Erie Philharmonic concerts, and a farmers’ market. Its facilities include a central fountain, a war memorial, an information kiosk, benches, lighting, shade trees, and open grassy areas.

The park is well-maintained. Recent renovations include underground electric, new light poles with electric outlets and banner and basket adaptations, security cameras linked to the Police

Department, new benches and trash receptacles, new sidewalks on the north side of the park and around the information kiosk, upgrades to the information kiosk, an ADA approved drinking fountain, additional lighting around the Lady in the Fountain, ADA parking spaces, and some new landscaping that includes shrubs, greenery and trees. North East in Bloom works to maintain the plantings.

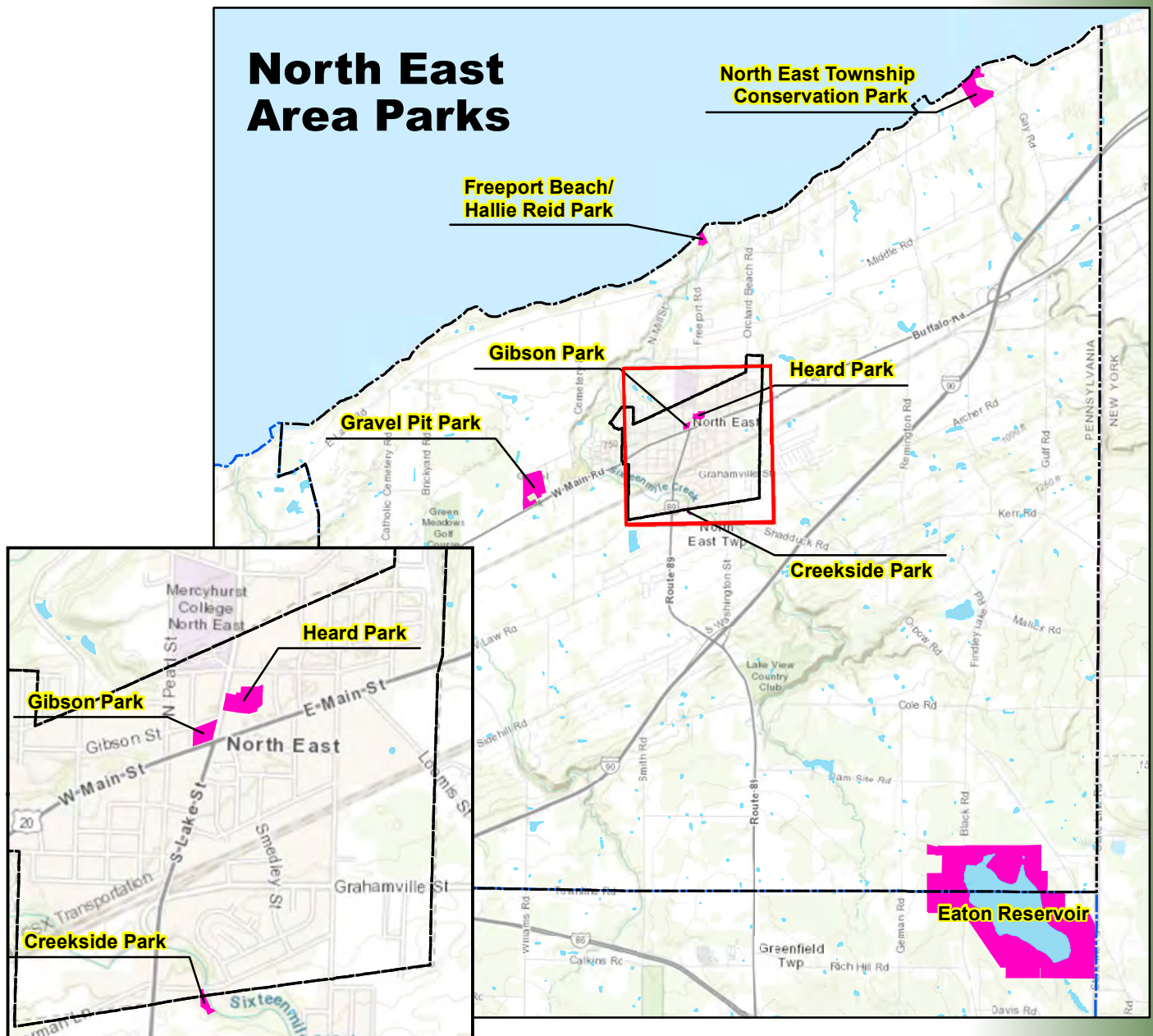
Heard Memorial Park

Heard Memorial Park is located on North Lake Street, and provides a location for larger events, such as the annual North East Firemen's Cherry Festival. This park boasts a playground for young children, a full concession stand, a stage for plays and music, and a large restroom facility.

Heard Park was the topic of several comments received as part of the public survey. In most cases, respondents voiced their opinions that the park is under-used. They would like to see it used as the location of more recreational events. They'd also like to see park improvements focused on recreational activities such as basketball courts, and a swimming pool or splash pad.

Creekside Park

Creekside Park is tucked away off of Wellington Street, and along the bank of Sixteen Mile Creek. It is less than a quarter acre in size, but provides a quiet and peaceful setting for picnics and passive recreation. The park is undeveloped, but the grounds are maintained and picnic tables are available.



Howard Eaton Reservoir

The Howard Eaton Reservoir and its surrounding lands are owned by North East Borough and its Water Authority. Although the property is not designated as a public park, the Borough does allow public access for passive recreational use such as hiking, snowshoeing and cross country skiing. A boat ramp is available.

Long Term Vision for Our Parks

Year 2040 – The North East Area parks have seen numerous improvements over the years, and have become some of the community’s most cherished assets. Perhaps the most notable improvement is the multi-purpose trail that provides a safe, pedestrian and bicycle connection between Freeport Beach and the Borough’s downtown area. This trail gets a lot of use, especially during the summer months. Residents enjoy the easy access to the guarded beach, and many visit the park just to enjoy the views of the lake and breath-taking sunsets.



Master plans have been completed and implemented for many of the parks. As a result, the parks are beautiful and well designed. They provide a variety of active and passive recreational opportunities for residents of all ages. Some people enjoy the walking trails at Conservation Park or Howard Eaton Reservoir. Others take advantage of the swimming pool at Heard Memorial Park, or the new basketball courts and skate park at Gravel Pit Park. Creekside Park provides a quiet, peaceful setting for families to enjoy. Gibson Park continues to function as the Borough’s town square.

The Parks and Recreation Board and Friends of the Park Organization are active, and play a leading role in the successful operation of the parks. Each year, they plan and conduct numerous recreational programs and events, and organize fundraisers to help pay for not only the cost of these programs, but also to help with the cost of park maintenance and capital improvements.

Goals and Objectives

Goal #1 Establish a Parks and Recreation Board

At the present time, the Borough and the Township have limited staff capacity available to improve the parks and associated recreational opportunities. Creation of a Parks and Recreation Board is a solution to this problem. Board members will be citizen advocates of the parks, and will serve without pay. The Board will serve the municipalities in an advisory role. It will help to relieve municipal staff from some of the day-to-day operational responsibilities and concerns of the parks, and will compliment and expand upon the North East Recreation Commission’s efforts by planning and conducting recreational programs and special events. The Board will play a leading role in implementing this plan. It will help to promote the parks, solicit public input, help to get citizens involved in volunteer efforts, help to raise funds to supplement the municipal budgeted funds, and oversee the development of park master plans.

The Recreation and Parks Board Handbook, Fourth Edition, authored by Susan E. Landes, CPRE, provides guidance on how to establish an effective Parks and Recreation Board. This reference is available online at http://www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_002301.pdf

Objective 1.1 - Adopt municipal ordinances to create a multi municipal, Parks and Recreation Board.

The Pennsylvania Borough Code, Sections 2708 - 2710, gives the Borough the authority to create a Parks and Recreation Board, and Sections 2204-2205 of the Pennsylvania Second Class Township Code, give the Township a similar right. Both codes appear to permit the municipalities to enter into intergovernmental cooperation agreements. The Board will be established by ordinance, and will possess the powers and duties that are delegated to it by the municipalities.

Objective 1.2 - Recruit and appoint Board members.

Finding and recruiting the best candidates for Board membership will be critical to the parks' future as well as the successful implementation of this plan. Board members should be advocates of the parks who are friendly and people-oriented, enthusiastic, have time to give, and have the talents and qualifications that fit the needs of the Board. In accordance with the codes, membership should consist of between 5 and 9 persons, and members will be appointed by the municipal governing bodies.

In order to find and recruit the best possible board members, it's important to look in the right places. Professional organizations, local civic groups, the school district, youth sports organizations, area businesses, the religious community, and parent-teacher organizations are often great sources. Recruitment can be done through direct contact with these organizations, announcements at meetings or special events, in newsletters or by use of the municipal websites.

It is recommended that the Board roster should be filled with members whose skills and talents match up with 4 proposed committees, as follows:

- **Finance Committee** – The Board will need at least 1 or 2 members who are skilled with fundraising, and will be comfortable seeking donations, discussing event sponsorships with local businesses, etc. It would be ideal to have at least 1 member with some book keeping experience.
- **Programming Committee** – These are the “party planners”. The Board will need at least 3 members who enjoy planning and conducting recreational programs, activities, and special events. Ideally, they will also be good at recruiting and working with volunteers needed for these events.
- **Public Relations Committee** – The Board will need at least 1 or 2 members who will be comfortable being its spokesperson(s), and who are talented with promotional and marketing efforts.
- **Buildings & Grounds Committee** – The Board will need at least 1 or 2 members who have the skills needed to oversee buildings and grounds maintenance. It will be essential that they are able to work with volunteers on various maintenance projects.



Since communication and a strong working relationship with the municipal governing bodies will be essential, it is recommended that one Borough Council member and one Township Supervisor should serve as either a Board member or as a liaison to the Board.

Objective 1.3 – Provide Orientation & Training.

In order to be effective, it is important that Board members understand their roles and responsibilities. Once the Board is established, existing Board members will be available to help orient and train new members. However, when the Board is initially established, other alternatives for orientation and training will be needed.

Fortunately, help is available. Here is a list of some options and resources:

- DCNR's Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, Northwest Regional Office

- Other Municipal Parks and Recreation Boards – Reaching out to other municipal park and recreation boards, and establishing good relationships with them will be beneficial. They will most likely be willing to provide advice and may also be willing to offer some assistance. The sharing of ideas and information between boards will benefit everyone.
- There are many reference materials available online. See the “references” noted at the end of this section.

Training should not be limited solely to an initial orientation session(s). It should be continual and on-going. It will be important for the Board to stay up-to-date, with the most current information and ideas relating to parks and recreation. Networking with other municipal park and recreation boards is recommended.

For on-going assistance, networking and training opportunities it is recommended that the Board join the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society (PRPS). PRPS is a state-wide, non-profit, membership organization that promotes quality recreation and parks opportunities for all Pennsylvania citizens through education and training, technical assistance, information on funding opportunities and other support to local, county, regional, state and federal recreation and parks providers. More information is available online at <https://www.prps.org/>

Objective 1.4 - Draft and adopt Board bylaws.

Once the Parks and Recreation Board is established, it should develop its own bylaws. The bylaws should then be reviewed periodically to make sure they are still effective. The bylaws should be approved by the municipal governing bodies.

The Recreation and Parks Board Handbook, Fourth Edition, authored by Susan E. Landes, CPRE, provides guidance on how to develop bylaws, and includes a sample that can be used as a template. Refer to pages 17-18 and Appendix D (pages 129-136). This reference is available online at http://www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_002301.pdf

Objective 1.5 - Create Board committees for finance, buildings & grounds, programming, and public relations.

In order to be most effective, the Parks and Recreation Board should create committees for finance, buildings & grounds, programming, and public relations. At least 1 or 2 board members should serve on each committee, and each committee should be chaired by a board member.

The PA Borough and PA Second Class Township Codes limit the number of board members to between 5 and 9 persons. Given the amount of work that needs to be done, board members will need additional support. It is recommended that non-board members, perhaps “friends of the park”, should be given an opportunity to participate on these committees.

The roles of these committees are as follows:

- **Finance** – Advise municipal governing bodies on funding needs. Help plan and conduct fundraising events, seek donations, and approach businesses regarding sponsorships of events.
- **Buildings & Grounds** – Advise municipal governing bodies on maintenance needs. Help recruit volunteers. Plan and conduct “clean-up” days, and other volunteer maintenance projects.
- **Programming** – Plan and conduct programs, activities and special events. Recruit volunteers needed to support these activities and events.

- **Public Relations** – Act as the Board’s spokesperson(s). Promote the parks, programming and events. Keep residents informed about the parks, collect public input, and work to get public support. Help recruit volunteers needed to support the parks and their recreational opportunities. Work to develop and maintain partnerships with the North East Recreation Commission, school district, businesses and community organizations.

Objective 1.6 – Partner with the North East Recreation Commission.

The North East Recreation Commission was jointly formed by the Borough, the Township and the North East School District. Its membership is comprised of three Borough residents, three Township residents and three school board representatives. The Commission meets monthly, and sponsors recreational activities for all North East residents on a year-round basis. This includes, but is not limited to soccer, basketball, and swimming. The Commission also provides life guards at Freeport Beach.

The proposed Parks and Recreation Board is not a replacement for the North East Recreation Commission. Rather, the Board’s work will compliment and expand upon the Commission’s efforts. Cooperation and partnerships between the Board and the Commission will help both organizations to effectively address the recreational needs of the North East Area.

Objective 1.7 – Partner with the North East School District, Granite Ridge, and other community organizations.

The North East Area community recognizes the value of partnerships, and understands that they are essential in order to effectively and efficiently optimize recreational opportunities for North East Area residents. Through partnerships, community organizations can share resources, avoid the unnecessary duplication of efforts, and work to ensure that recreational opportunities are available for people of all ages and income levels.

Early in 2020, representatives from the Township, Borough, North East Chamber of Commerce, North East Recreation Commission, YMCA, North East School District, and the North East Little League met to discuss the North East Area’s park and recreational needs. It was determined that numerous facility improvements were needed. This included maintenance needs, as well as new facilities needed to improve and expand upon recreational opportunities and options. For example, it was noted that the community needed a place for tournaments and other events, the School District needed an auxiliary gym, and the Little League needed a concession stand with restrooms.

At the time of this meeting, the Mercyhurst campus property was in an ownership transition, and had not yet been acquired by Ehrenfeld Companies. The possible donation of Mercyhurst’s swimming pool and other recreational facilities for community use was discussed. A lot has happened since then. The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted attempts to form and utilize partnerships. Ehrenfeld Companies acquired the Mercyhurst campus, and it is now known as Granite Ridge.



Moving forward, the North East Area desires to renew discussions between these and other organizations, and it wants to continue pursuing partnerships. According to municipal officials, Granite Ridge desires to be part of these discussions, and it is anticipated that they will be a strong partner in efforts to improve parks and recreation in the North East Area.

Goal #2

Build community support for the parks and increase citizen involvement

Objective 2.1 - Organize a volunteer base and provide volunteer opportunities to help meet the needs of North East Area parks.

Improving the parks needs to be a community effort. The municipalities and the Parks and Recreation Board will need the support of a strong, volunteer base.

A “Friends of the Park” organization should be established to provide the Parks and Recreation Board with the support needed. Members of the “Friends of the Park” should be encouraged to participate on all of the Board committees.

Volunteer needs should be identified and inventoried. The jobs should be specific and meaningful. Rather than simply asking for “volunteers”, ask for event organizers, program instructors, help with fundraising, help with park clean-up, etc. Ideally, the inventory list of volunteer needs should include a wide variety of different opportunities so that all interested citizens will have an opportunity to participate, regardless of their skills or areas of interest.

Use the municipal websites and/or social media to recruit volunteers. Some potential sources of volunteers include schools, businesses, religious institutions and other community organizations. In cases where volunteers are in contact with children, they will typically need child clearances. It is recommended that any fees associated with obtaining these clearances should be paid by either the municipalities or with funds raised for this purpose by the Parks and Recreation Board or the Friends of the Park.

Be sure to recognize and acknowledge the work and accomplishments of volunteers.

Objective 2.2 - Build a positive image by keeping park facilities well-maintained.

Providing clean, safe and well-maintained park facilities will enhance peoples’ recreation experiences, save money, reduce liability and help to build and maintain a positive public image.

In order to accomplish this, a park maintenance plan needs to be developed and implemented. An inventory of maintenance needs should be created, along with a schedule of when and how often maintenance work should be performed.

Park maintenance plans typically include routine, regularly scheduled tasks (mowing grass, weeding & watering flower beds), repairs needed to help prevent excessive wear and more expensive repairs, daily custodial housekeeping (cleaning restrooms, emptying trash cans, etc), hauling/set-up and tear-down & clean-up for recreational programs and special events, scheduled improvements (roof replacements, painting), and emergency repairs (vandalism, accidents, weather damage).

As part of the maintenance plan, at least one “park clean-up day” should be held each year. Keep Erie County Beautiful provides support for “clean-up” days and events throughout Erie County. Contact the Erie County Department of Planning and Community Development for additional information. Special volunteer projects or events can also be conducted for park maintenance needs or improvements such as playground upgrades, painting park facilities, etc.

Objective 2.3 - Increase public awareness of the parks and park programs.

The success of the parks and recreation program can be measured by the number of people it serves. Therefore, it’s important to get the word out, and keep the public informed about the recreational opportunities available, special events being held, accomplishments of volunteers, new park facilities available, and any other important items of interest that are relevant to the parks.

The Parks and Recreation Board can promote the parks, recreational opportunities and events through the use of newsletters, a website and/or social media. The Board's public relations committee should also submit information to the municipalities and the media on a regular basis.

The Parks and Recreation Board may want to consider tracking the number of park visitors as a performance measure of its success.

Goal #3

Increase usage of the parks

Some of our best memories are from times spent enjoying life and attending recreational events with family and friends. This goal may be one of the most rewarding goals of this plan.

Objective 3.1 - Provide a variety of affordable recreational programs and opportunities suitable for all age groups.

The public survey results and public comments received during development of this plan make it clear that area residents desire more recreational opportunities for families and for people of all ages. They also recognize that the parks provide an ideal location for some of those activities.

There are many types of recreational programs. These include arts & crafts, educational, fitness & wellness (aerobics, yoga), performing arts, social recreation (dances, board games, and preschool events), special events (festivals, fairs), sports, and games & athletics (volleyball, basketball, softball). Recreational programs can also be offered in several different formats. Examples include classes, workshops, clubs/interest groups, competitive, drop-in, one-day only, or weekend.

A public survey(s) can be used to help determine the feasibility and amount of interest for various types of recreational programs prior to offering them. This will help to ensure that the recreational programs and activities being offered will be successful and that they meet the needs of area residents.

Objective 3.2 - Plan and hold at least one family oriented special event per season (minimum of 4 each year).

The North East Area community plans and holds numerous family oriented special events throughout the year, and is committed to continuing this practice in the future. These events are held at various locations, and are diverse in order to appeal to a wide range of interests and to people of all age groups. Examples include the Cherry Festival, WineFest, Gibson Days, Erie Philharmonic concerts, the Pet Parade, Fourth of July fireworks, Saturday open markets, Light up night, and Sugar Plum Sunday. These events not only provide recreation for area residents; they also benefit businesses by drawing visitors from outside of the area.

Objective 3.3 - Promote the parks for use as a gathering place for families, community groups, and organizations.

The North East Area parks and park facilities are ideal for picnics, family reunions, birthday parties and other special events. Gravel Pit Park and Freeport Beach/Halli Reid Park both have numerous picnic pavilions. Freeport Beach offers a guarded beach during the summer months, and Gravel Pit Park offers an exceptional playground for small children, as well as a basketball court and open space for other recreational



activities. The picnic pavilions are available on a first come, first serve basis, although reservations are recommended for the Gravel Pit Park facilities. Within the Borough, both Gibson Park and Heard Memorial Park are available for use. Heard Memorial Park offers a concession stand, bandstand and restrooms. Registration and a small deposit are required for use of these facilities. Conservation Park does not have any picnic pavilions, but there are a few picnic tables available for small family outings. And despite its small size of less than a quarter of an acre, Creekside Park also has picnic tables available.

Both municipalities mention the parks and their availability on their municipal websites. However, it is recommended that a greater effort should be made to promote these facilities. Increased use of the parks has public health advantages, and in addition, park users will most likely have a greater appreciation for the parks. As a result, they will often be more supportive of park improvements and park maintenance initiatives.

Objective 3.4 - Continue to pursue a safe, pedestrian/bicycle connection between North East Borough and Freeport Beach.

The North East Area community desires a safe connection between the Borough and Freeport Beach for use by pedestrians and bicyclists. This will involve the construction of a multi purpose pedestrian walkway and bicycle path as well as safety improvements at the intersection of Routes 5 and 89. Ideally, this project will be coordinated with gateway improvements at the Routes 5/89 intersection.

Task 3.4.1 – Connect the Borough and Freeport Beach with a multi-purpose pedestrian/bicycle trail.

The Great Lakes Seaway Trail is a National Scenic Byway that parallels the St. Lawrence Seaway and Great Lakes in New York and Pennsylvania. It passes through North East Township, along Route 5, and is also part of BicyclePA Route Z. It is a source of recreation and tourism for the North East Area, but unfortunately, the *North East Smart Transportation Initiative* (2014) identified some concerns with the Trail. One of these concerns was the lack of “a physical, safe connection to downtown North East for bicyclists and pedestrians.” It should be noted that although the Smart Transportation Initiative focused on the connection between Route 5 and the downtown, the North East Area community desires to expand the project to also extend the trail connection from Route 5 to Freeport Beach. The end result will be a safe, pedestrian and bicycle connection between the downtown and Freeport Beach.



The *North East Smart Transportation Initiative* (Initiative) identifies several different options, consisting of trails and bicycle paths of varying widths, and offers the Route 89 corridor and Orchard Beach Road as locational options. Of these two options, the Route 89 corridor offers the most direct connection, especially given the fact that the community desires to extend the trail north, along Freeport Road, to the beach.

The Initiative describes the “SR 89 Hiker-Biker Path to Seaway Trail” project in two phases. Phase one is to “Conduct detailed feasibility study and engineering for a 10-foot-wide shared use hiker/biker path with a 2-foot-wide barrier along the western side of SR 89 (Freeport Road). The shared use path will include two pedestrian bridges at the northern end of the project near the intersection of SR 89 and SR 5 (E. Lake Road).” Phase two will be to “Construct the hiker/biker path and bridges.”

The Initiative estimated the project cost to be \$810,000 for Phase one and \$9,086,000 for Phase two. These were 2014 cost estimates, and do not appear to include the extension from Route 5, north to Freeport Beach. Given the high cost of this project, funding availability has been an ongoing obstacle to construction of the proposed trail. In order to make this project a reality, it will be necessary to pursue and acquire the necessary funding.

Task 3.4.2 – Improve pedestrian safety at the intersection of Routes 5 and 89.

The *North East Smart Transportation Initiative* expressed vehicular safety and multimodal accessibility concerns related to the intersection of State Route 5 and State Route 89/Freeport Road. The study noted that a 1.5 mile long section of the Route 5 roadway was built out to two lanes in each direction, and suggested that high vehicular speeds and the lack of any refuge in the large pavement section has presented difficulties for pedestrians and cyclists who desire to access Freeport Beach by crossing Route 5. *The Erie County 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan* (LRTP) has listed the intersection as a “betterment project”, which is defined as “upgrades to be considered during routine roadway improvement or maintenance projects along identified routes”. The recommended project is to “construct a road diet along the US 5 corridor near its intersection with SR 89 to reduce travel speeds through corridor, improve traffic and multimodal connectivity between downtown North East and Freeport Beach, and reduce crossing distance across Route 5 when the state route is due for a betterment.”

Completion of these safety improvements will become even more important with completion of the desired multi purpose trail (see Task 3.4.1). Ideally, the safety improvements to the Routes 5/89 intersection should be completed either before, or in conjunction with, installation of the proposed trail.

The *North East Smart Transportation Initiative* recommends three phases for the “SR 5 at SR 89 Road Diet” project. Phase one is to “Conduct engineering design to decrease the number of through lanes on SR 5 from 4 to 2, and add a center turn lane. Add dedicated left turn lanes on SR 5 and N. Mill Street, Sunset Beach Road, Orchard Beach Road, and Chestnut Street. Add dedicated left turn lanes and right turn lanes on SR 5 and SR 89 (Freeport Road).” The estimated cost, as of 2014, was \$550,000.

Phases 2 and 3 consist of acquiring the right-of-way needed and construction of the roadway redesign, respectively. The cost of the right-of-way acquisition is unknown. The 2014 cost estimate for the construction was \$4,140,000. As a precursor to commencement of this project, funding will need to be secured. The North East Area municipal officials should continue to work closely with the Erie Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in order to advocate for the importance of this project, and to help secure the funding needed to make it a reality.

Task 3.4.3 – Welcome visitors to the North East Area with gateway enhancements at the intersection of Routes 5 and 89.

The desire for improved gateways and wayfinding signage to help welcome visitors to the North East Area, and to direct them to the Area’s downtown and attractions was previously discussed in the “Improve Our Downtown Area” section of this plan (see Task 3.3.3 in that section). As part of that discussion, the intersection of Routes 5 and 89 was recommended as a good location for gateway improvements. It is being revisited here since it would make sense to add gateway improvements to this intersection in conjunction with the completion of the multi-use trail and safety improvements to the intersection.

This is another project that was recommended by the *North East Smart Transportation Initiative*. The estimated project cost, as of 2014, for the design, location and installation of a community gateway, welcoming signage and related landscaping was \$61,000.

Goal #4

Supplement municipal funding for park related needs

In Pennsylvania, most of the funding for public parks and recreation comes from the general funds of local municipalities. Unfortunately, at the present time, the North East Area municipalities have limited funding available to expand park operations and/or activities. The good news is that there are many opportunities to supplement municipal budgeted funds with grant funding, user fees and fundraising efforts.

Financing Municipal Recreation and Parks, Second Edition, authored by Susan E. Landes, CPRE is a great source of useful information. It is available online at:

http://www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_002283.pdf

Objective 4.1 - Research and pursue available grant opportunities.

There are numerous grant opportunities available for parks and recreation. The Park and Recreation Board, its finance committee, and members of the “Friends of the Park” should take the lead in researching and pursuing these opportunities.

Objective 4.2 - Pursue sponsorships of special events and recreational programs by area businesses, community groups and organizations.

Offering sponsorships of recreational programs and special events is a great way to help offset the associated costs. It’s important to offer participating businesses a return on their investment, such as visibility. For example, the name of the business should be included in all advertisements associated with the event.

Objective 4.3 - Charge user fees and admission fees to help cover costs associated with specific recreation programs and events, when appropriate.

Many recreation programs and activities can be funded on a break even basis through user fees paid by the participants. For example, it is common practice to charge fees to offset the costs of things like supplies need for an arts & crafts class, hiring an instructor for a yoga or aerobics class, or renting a park facility for a club meeting. In some cases, fees can even bring in additional funds that can be used to help offset the costs of park maintenance and other services.

Objective 4.4 - Plan and hold fundraising events/activities.

There are endless possibilities for fundraising events and activities. It is recommended that rather than simply asking for donations, something of value should be given in return. Pancake breakfasts, raffle tickets and bake sales are just a few ideas. Many more ideas are available online.

Objective 4.5 - Partner with a business(s) to earn income from concessions sold at the parks.

Partnering with a local business to earn additional income for the parks can be as simple as adding some vending machines. Other possibilities include leasing a concession stand during special events, bringing a farmers’ market to the park, and Christmas tree sales.

Goal #5

Develop park master plans

During this planning process, public comments have suggested various capital improvements for the parks. This includes walking trails, a public swimming pool, skate park, basketball courts, upgraded picnic pavilions and other amenities.

Before investing a lot of time and money, more extensive planning should be done. Currently, the Borough, Downtown North East, Inc. and the North East Area Chamber of Commerce are working to acquire grant funding needed for park master plans for Freeport Beach and Heard Memorial Park. In addition, the Township is interested in a park master plan for Gravel Pit Park. These plans will ensure that future investments in the parks are done wisely. In addition, it is often necessary to have a master plan in order to be eligible for park rehabilitation and development grants.

A professional consultant with experience in park planning should be retained to prepare the park master plans. At the present time, the cost of a master plan is estimated at between \$40,000 and \$60,000. However, it may be possible to arrange grant funding to cover part of this cost.

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Improve Our Parks Action Plan						
	Goal / Objective	Responsible Party	Assistance Provided By	Time	Funding Needs	Potential Funding Sources
Goal #1	Establish a Parks and Recreation Board.					
Objective 1.1	Adopt municipal ordinances to create a multi-municipal, Parks and Recreation Board.	North East Area Municipal Officials	Municipal Solicitors	Year 1	Legal fees and costs associated with ordinance adoption	Municipal funds
Objective 1.2	Recruit and appoint Board members.	North East Area Municipal Officials	n/a	Year 1	None	n/a
Objective 1.3	Provide Orientation & Training.	North East Area Municipal Officials	DCNR Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, Parks and Recreation Boards from other municipalities, Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society	Year 1, then on-going	Little or none. Funding needs will vary depending on the type and extent of training provided.	Municipal funds
Objective 1.4	Draft and adopt Board bylaws.	Parks and Recreation Board	North East Area Municipal Officials	Year 1	None	n/a
Objective 1.5	Create Board committees for finance, buildings & grounds, programming, and public relations.	Parks and Recreation Board	n/a	Year 1	None	n/a
Objective 1.6	Partner with the North East Recreation Commission.	Public Relations Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, North East Recreation Commission	Year 1	None	n/a
Objective 1.7	Partner with the North East School District, Granite Ridge, and other community organizations.	Public Relations Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, North East School District, Granite Ridge, and other North East Area community organizations	Year 1	None	n/a
Goal #2	Build community support for the parks and increase citizen involvement.					
Objective 2.1	Organize a volunteer base and provide volunteer opportunities to help meet the needs of North East Area parks.					
Task 2.1.1	Establish "Friends of the Park" organization.	Public Relations Committee	Parks and Recreation Board	Year 1	None	n/a
Task 2.1.2	Identify (Inventory/list) volunteer needs and opportunities.	Public Relations Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, Friends of the Park	Year 1, then on-going	None	n/a
Task 2.1.3	Recruit "Friends" to help address volunteer needs of the parks.	Public Relations Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, Friends of the Park	Year 1, then on-going	None	n/a
Objective 2.2	Build a positive image by keeping park facilities well-maintained.					
Task 2.2.1	Develop a parks maintenance plan.	Building & Grounds Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, North East Area Municipal Officials	Year 1	None	n/a
Task 2.2.2	Plan and hold at least one "parks clean-up day" each year to get citizen volunteers involved, and to help address the maintenance needs of the parks.	Building & Grounds Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, Friends of the Park, North East Area Municipal Officials, Keep Erie County Beautiful	Year 1, then on-going	Possible equipment and/or supply costs, lunch for volunteers, etc.	Municipal funds, Fundraising efforts.
Task 2.2.3	Plan and hold at least one "parks maintenance day" each year to get citizen volunteers involved, and to help address the maintenance needs of the parks.	Building & Grounds Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, Friends of the Park, North East Area Municipal Officials	Year 1, then on-going	Funding needs (if any) will vary depending on the type and extent of support.	Municipal funds, Fundraising efforts.
Objective 2.3	Increase public awareness of the parks and park programs.	Public Relations Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, Friends of the Park, North East Area Municipal Officials	Year 1, then on-going	Little or none. Funding needs will vary depending on the type and extent of the public awareness program.	Municipal funds, Fundraising efforts.
Goal #3	Increase usage of the parks.					
Objective 3.1	Provide a variety of affordable recreational programs and opportunities suitable for all age groups.	Programming Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, Friends of the Park, North East Recreation Commission	On-going	Program specific	Fundraising efforts; User fees and admission fees, if appropriate for the recreational program or activity.
Objective 3.2	Plan and hold at least one family oriented special event per season (minimum of 4 each year).	Programming Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, Friends of the Park, North East Area Community Organizations	On-going	Funding needs will vary depending on the type of event or festival.	Fundraising efforts; Sponsorships
Objective 3.3	Promote the parks for use as a gathering place for families, community groups, and organizations.	Public Relations Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, Friends of the Park, North East Area Municipal Officials	On-going	Little or none.	n/a
Objective 3.4	Continue to pursue a safe, pedestrian/bicycle connection between North East Borough and Freeport Beach.					
Task 3.4.1	Connect the Borough and Freeport Beach with a multi-purpose pedestrian/bicycle trail.					
Sub-Task 3.4.1A	Pursue and acquire funding needed for the trail project.	Finance Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, Friends of the Park, North East Area Municipal Officials, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)	On-going	None	n/a
Sub-Task 3.4.1B	Conduct a detailed feasibility and engineering study of the desired trail project.	North East Area Municipal Officials	Parks and Recreation Board, Erie MPO	Year 2, or upon funding availability	\$510,000 (2014 estimate)	State/Federal Funds, DCNR C&P2, PennDot Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Erie County Greenways Program, Northwest Commission Greenways Block Grant Program; Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA), North East Community Foundation (NECF), Borough/Township Funds,
Sub-Task 3.4.1C	Construct the trail.	North East Area Municipal Officials	Parks and Recreation Board, Erie MPO	Year 3, or upon funding availability	\$9,086,000 (2014 estimate)	State/Federal Funds, DCNR C&P2, PennDot Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Erie County Greenways Program, Northwest Commission Greenways Block Grant Program, ECGRA, NECF, Borough/Township Funds

Improve Our Parks Action Plan

	Goal / Objective	Responsible Party	Assistance Provided By	Time	Funding Needs	Potential Funding Sources
Task 3.4.2	Improve pedestrian safety at the intersection of Routes 5 and 89.					
Sub-Task 3.4.2A	Pursue and acquire funding needed for safety improvements to the intersection of Routes 5 and 89.	North East Area Municipal Officials	Erie MPO	On-going	None	n/a
Sub-Task 3.4.2B	Conduct engineering design work for the project.	North East Area Municipal Officials	Erie MPO	At time of Route 5 betterment	\$550,000 (2014 estimate)	Township Funds, State/Federal Funds, PennDot, Pennsylvania Infrastructure Bank
Sub-Task 3.4.2C	Acquire right-of-way needed for the project.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	Erie MPO	At time of Route 5 betterment	Unknown	Township Funds, State/Federal Funds, PennDot, Pennsylvania Infrastructure Bank
Sub-Task 3.4.2D	Construct the roadway redesign.	North East Borough Municipal Officials	Erie MPO	At time of Route 5 betterment	\$4,140,000 (2014 estimate)	Township Funds, State/Federal Funds, PennDot, Pennsylvania Infrastructure Bank
Task 3.4.3	Welcome visitors with gateway enhancements and wayfinding signage.	North East Area Chamber of Commerce, North East in Bloom (NEIB)	DNE, Inc, North East Area Municipal Officials, Parks and Recreation Board	On-going	\$61,000 (2014 estimate)	ECGRA, NECF, Fundraising Efforts, PennDot Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Erie County Greenways Program, Northwest Commission Greenways Block Grant Program
Goal #4	Supplement municipal funding for park related needs.					
Objective 4.1	Research and pursue available grant opportunities.	Finance Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, Friends of the Park, North East Area Municipal Officials	Year 1, then on-going	None	n/a
Objective 4.2	Pursue sponsorships of special events and recreational programs by area businesses, community groups and organizations.	Finance Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, Local businesses	Year 1, then on-going	None	n/a
Objective 4.3	Charge user fees and admission fees to help cover costs associated with specific recreation programs and events, when appropriate.	Finance Committee	Parks and Recreation Board	Year 1, then on-going	None	n/a
Objective 4.4	Plan and hold fundraising events/activities.	Programming and Finance Committees	Parks and Recreation Board, Friends of the Park, North East Area Municipal Officials	Year 1, then on-going	Funding needs will vary depending on the type of events/activities, but should never exceed costs associated with the events/activities.	n/a
Objective 4.5	Partner with a business(s) to earn income from concessions sold at the parks.	Finance Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, North East Area Municipal Officials, Local businesses	Year 1, then on-going	None	n/a
Goal #5	Develop park master plans.					
Objective 5.1	Identify, pursue and acquire funding needed for the master plans.	Finance Committee	Parks and Recreation Board, North East Area Municipal Officials, DNE, Inc., North East Area Chamber of Commerce	On-going	None	n/a
Objective 5.2	Retain a professional consultant to develop the master plans.	North East Area Municipal Officials	Parks and Recreation Board	Year 1, or upon funding availability	\$40,000 to \$60,000 per plan	Municipal funds, DQNR, Erie County Greenways Program, Erie County CZM Program, Fundraising efforts

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References & Resources

Community Recreation and Parks, Second Edition, authored by Susan E. Landes, CPRP.

Available online at http://www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_002280.pdf

The Recreation and Parks Board Handbook, Fourth Edition, authored by Susan E. Landes, CPRE.

Available online at http://www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_002301.pdf

Financing Municipal Recreation and Parks, Second Edition, authored by Susan E. Landes, CPRE.

Available online at http://www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_002283.pdf

PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Bureau of Recreation and Conservation; Northwest Regional Office; www.dcnr.pa.gov

Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society (PRPS); <https://www.prps.org/>

North East Smart Transportation Initiative, July 2014, Whitman, Requardt & Associates, LLP (WR&A)

Potential Funding Sources

Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) <https://www.ecgra.org/>

North East Community Foundation <https://www.necommunityfoundation.org/>

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR), Community Parks and Recreation Grants (C2P2) <https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Communities/Grants/CommunityParks%20andRecreationGrants/Pages/default.aspx>

Northwest Commission Greenways Block Grant Program

<https://www.northwestpa.org/greenways-block-grant-program/>

Erie County Greenways Program

<https://eriecountypa.gov/departments/planning-and-community-development/programs/greenways/>

Erie County Coastal Zone Management Program (CZM)

<https://eriecountypa.gov/departments/planning-and-community-development/programs/coastal-zone-management/>

Erie County Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program

<https://eriecountypa.gov/departments/planning-and-community-development/programs/community-development-block-grant/>

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Transportation Alternatives Set Aside Program

<https://www.penndot.pa.gov/ProjectAndPrograms/Planning/Pages/Transportation%20Alternatives%20Set-Aside%20-%20Surface%20Trans.%20Block%20Grant%20Program.aspx>

Pennsylvania Infrastructure Bank

<https://www.penndot.pa.gov/ProjectAndPrograms/Planning/Pages/PA-Infrastructure-Bank.aspx>

Other Considerations



Other Issues and Considerations

Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis

During Phase 1, the Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development prepared an Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis. This report was completed in February 2022, and provided a summary of existing conditions within the North East Area as well as some initial recommendations for the Area's consideration. Its intended purpose was to help inform the North East Area's decision making process as it worked to identify its top priority issues.

The *Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code* (Act 247, Article III, Section 301) requires municipal comprehensive plans to include some basic elements, including the following:

- Land Use
- Housing
- Transportation
- Community Facilities and Utilities
- Natural and Historic Resources

During this planning process, the North East Area and its municipalities have considered and addressed all required elements. Most of the required elements, including land use, housing, transportation, community facilities and utilities, and natural resources are addressed as part of one or more of the North East Area's top three priorities. *The North East Area Comprehensive Plan Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis* covers additional topics that are not specifically addressed in this document, such as population and demographics. It also provides supplemental information on each of the required basic elements, and includes recommendations that build upon, compliment and support the issues addressed within this planning document. *The North East Area Comprehensive Plan Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis* is incorporated by reference into this comprehensive plan.

Community Development Objectives

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (Act 247, Article III, Section 301) requires municipal comprehensive plans to include "A statement of objectives of the municipality concerning its future development, including, but not limited to, the location, character and timing of future development." These policy goals are referred to as community development objectives. Municipal zoning, subdivision and land development regulations and capital improvement programs should reflect and serve to implement these objectives.

The Community Development Objectives of the North East Area municipalities are as follows:

- A. Provide for a rational and orderly pattern of land use within the North East Area.
- B. Encourage quality, attractive, and economically sound residential, commercial and industrial development.
- C. Provide diverse housing opportunities, including housing that is affordable.
- D. Ensure that proposed development and public facilities are consistent with the character and environmental limitations of the area.
- E. Preserve and protect the North East Area's natural resources to the extent possible.
- F. Preserve and protect the North East Area's agricultural lands and the viability of agricultural operations to the extent possible.
- G. Protect and maintain the aesthetic qualities and rural character of the North East Area.
- H. Guide development within the North East Area in order to provide the most efficient use of existing and planned public facilities and utilities.
- I. Ensure adequate and safe roads and other public facilities by limiting land use intensity to the capacity of the roads or facilities.
- J. Promote economy in local government expenditures.
- K. Protect landowners from potential adverse impacts of adjoining developments.

Future Land Use Maps and Districts

Introduction

The future land use map and land use district descriptions are intended to help guide land use decisions in the North East Area. They consider projected community and economic growth, the location of existing or proposed infrastructure, and environmental characteristics. Based on a consideration of all factors, they identify the most desirable locations for future development, as well as areas that should be protected for agriculture and other rural uses. The future land use map does not regulate development. Instead, it provides the basis for municipal zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances.

To a large extent, the future land use district purposes and boundaries are based on existing municipal zoning districts. However, this plan recommends the creation of two new zoning districts which will help the North East Area accomplish its priority to improve the downtown area. The recommended new zoning districts are a central business district and a mixed use district. The rationale for creating these districts has been presented in the “Improve the Downtown Area” section of this plan.

It is noted that the Township currently has two agricultural zoning districts. For purposes of the future land use plan map, these zoning districts have been combined into a single agricultural district. However, the intention of the Township is to retain both of its agricultural zoning districts, and that is consistent with this plan.

The future land use map also identifies FEMA flood hazard areas. The location of the flood areas is of critical importance for land use planning purposes. Both municipalities have flood plain ordinances that regulate development within the flood areas.

The following charts identify the future land use districts for each municipality, and list the supporting zoning districts.

North East Township Future Land Use Districts	
Future Land Use Plan Designation	Comparable Zoning District
Agricultural	A-1 and A-2
Rural Residential	R-1
Suburban/All Purpose Residential	R-2
Business	B-1
Business (High Impact Business)	B-2
Mixed Use	n/a – proposed new district
Floodplain Overlay	n/a – regulated by flood ordinance

North East Borough Future Land Use Districts	
Future Land Use Plan Designation	Comparable Zoning District
Suburban/Low Density Residential	R-A
Suburban/All Purpose Residential	R-B
Central Business District	n/a – proposed new district
Business	C-1
Business (High Impact Business)	M-1
Mixed Use	n/a – proposed new district
Floodplain Overlay	n/a – regulated by flood ordinance

North East Area Future Land District Descriptions

Agricultural: The purpose of the agricultural district is to protect and encourage the continued use of prime farmland within the lake-plain area for agriculture and viniculture. This area has a unique microclimate, which results from the moderating effect of the lake, and which is particularly well-suited for growing grapes, cherries and other fruits and vegetables. Areas designated as agricultural are to be used primarily for agriculture, viniculture, and compatible residential, non-residential and accessory uses.

Rural Residential: The purpose of the rural residential district is to accommodate low density, residential growth while protecting and preserving the Township's rural characteristics. The intent is to accommodate the needs of residents who desire a rural environment. Land uses include low density residential, agriculture and other rural uses.

Suburban/Low Density Residential: The purpose of the suburban/low density residential district is to accommodate low density, residential development, and is intended primarily for single-family detached dwellings. Land uses include low density residential, and associated public, institutional and recreational uses.

Suburban/All Purpose Residential: The purpose of the suburban/all purpose residential district is to accommodate all basic forms of housing including single-family detached dwellings and housing structures for more than one family. It includes single family attached dwellings (such as duplexes, townhouses, and condominiums), patio homes, apartment buildings, and similar uses.

Central Business District: The purpose of the Central Business District is to encourage the development and expansion of the Borough's traditional central business district in a manner that allows the existing character of development to be preserved to the greatest extent possible. The intent is to allow for sidewalk-fronting buildings and a dense development pattern that allows common walls; and to accommodate parking in a convenient manner that does not interfere with street traffic. The district allows for a wide variety of commercial, service, office, retail, and related uses. Residential uses are permitted on the upper floors of mixed use buildings.

Business: The purpose of the business district is to provide land for the purpose of supplying commodities or services to the general public. Included are uses relating to both retail and wholesale trade, professional and personal services, general office facilities, sales and service, entertainment, restaurants, motels or hotels, and similar uses. Although the primary purpose of the district is to provide for the previously stated uses, compatible light industrial uses are also permitted within the Township. Heavy commercial, heavy industrial and other high impact uses are excluded in order to limit undesirable or incompatible situations and/or conflicts between land uses within this district.

Business (High Impact Business): The purpose of the high impact business district is to provide land for commercial, institutional, and industrial uses, including heavy commercial, heavy industrial and other high impact uses.

Mixed Use: The purpose of the mixed use district is to accommodate the development and re-use of the former Mercyhurst University campus. This district is intended to accommodate a mix of commercial and residential uses that together will draw residents and visitors to the downtown area. The intent is to foster an active and vibrant downtown environment. Land uses include indoor and outdoor commercial recreation, sporting events, conferences, banquets, and similar events, as well as supportive commercial, medical and residential uses such as hotels, restaurants, medical offices, housing and other uses.

Floodplain: The Floodplain district is an overlay designation that consists of all floodplain areas identified by FEMA. The desire is to mitigate the risk of damage to property and loss of life due to flooding within these areas.

Ordinance Update Recommendations

Municipal land uses ordinances, including zoning ordinances and subdivision and land development ordinances are essential tools that can be used to implement municipal plans, including the North East Area Comprehensive Plan. These ordinances should be coordinated to compliment and support each other. In this way, they can be used together to help the North East Area achieve its goals.

Zoning Ordinances

Zoning protects and enhances property values, preserves neighborhood character, and protects against incompatible land uses. The North East Borough Zoning Ordinance (Ordinance No. 903) was adopted on September 4, 2018. The North East Township Zoning Ordinance (Ordinance No 2005-001) was adopted on June 6, 2005, but has had some updating/amendments since its original adoption date, including an update in 2014.

Despite recent updates that have been made to both municipal zoning ordinances, this plan proposes the creation of two new zoning districts and the implementation of conservation subdivision design. Plan implementation will require amendments to both ordinances. In addition, there is interest in updating regulations related to solar energy facilities, addressing short term rentals, and allowing more opportunities for garden homes and townhouses in appropriate locations.

The process of amending the zoning ordinances should be guided by the municipal planning commissions. The amendment process will be an opportunity for each municipality to review all aspects of its ordinance, and update it as needed. State and federal laws, best management practices and current trends change over time. Therefore, the periodic review and update of these ordinances is needed in order to ensure that they remain current. Specific recommendations concerning zoning regulations are included throughout this plan.

Subdivision and Land Development Ordinances

Subdivision and land development ordinances ensure that sites for development are adequate in terms of size, shape, availability of water and sewer, etc. In addition, they regulate design and construction standards for public improvements such as roads and water and sewer systems, and help to control municipal costs by ensuring that the costs of any required site improvements are paid by the developer and not by the municipality.

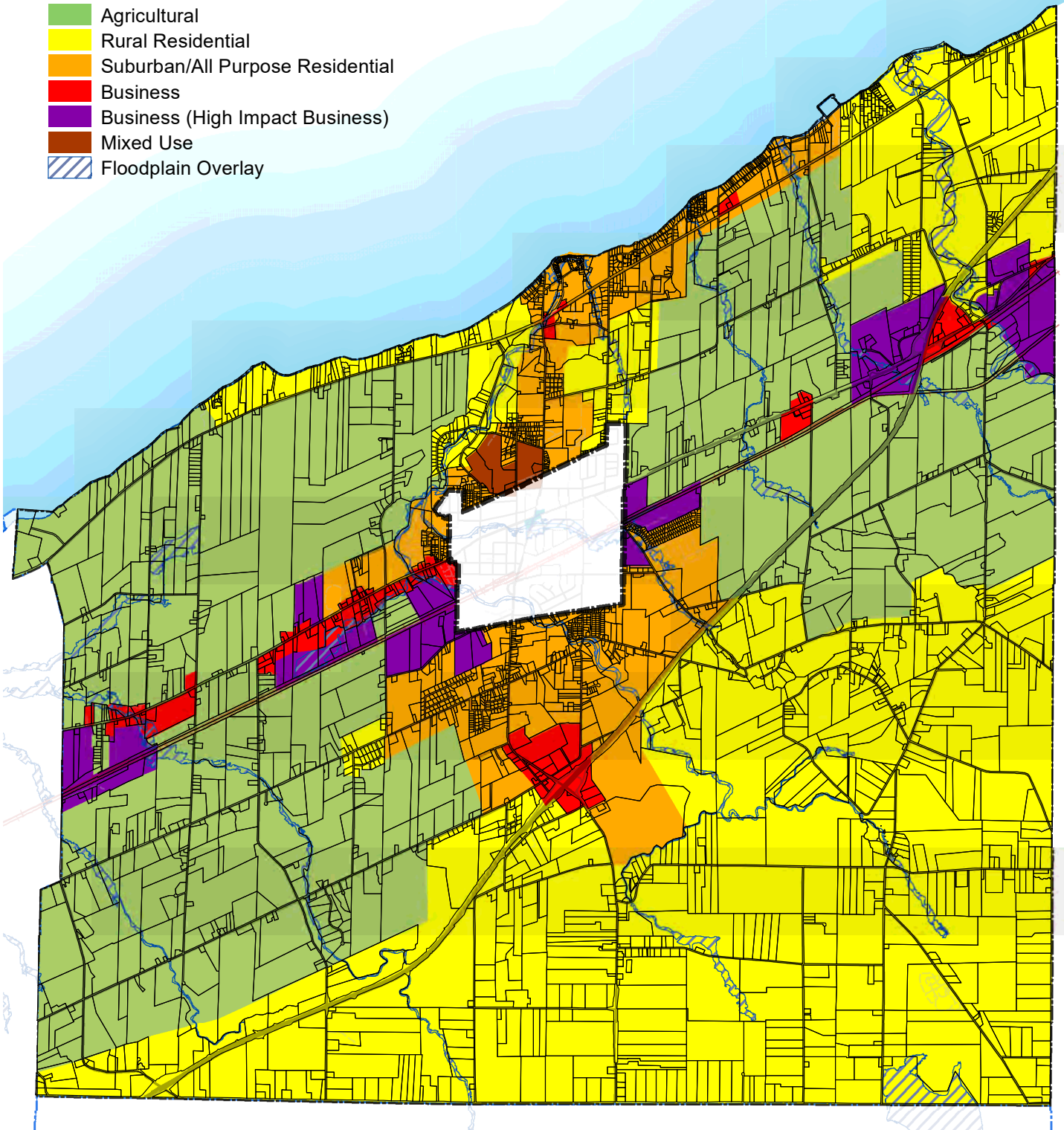
The North East Borough Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (Ordinance No. 796) was adopted on July 6, 2000, and the North East Township Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (Ordinance No. 83-005) was adopted on September 28, 1983. Given the age of these ordinances, updates are recommended.

The Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development maintains a model subdivision and land development ordinance template for the use of Erie County municipalities. The template is designed to be tailored to the specific needs and requirements of the municipality. The Planning Department also provides technical assistance and consulting services associated with the development of ordinances, free of charge to Erie County municipalities.

NorthEast Township

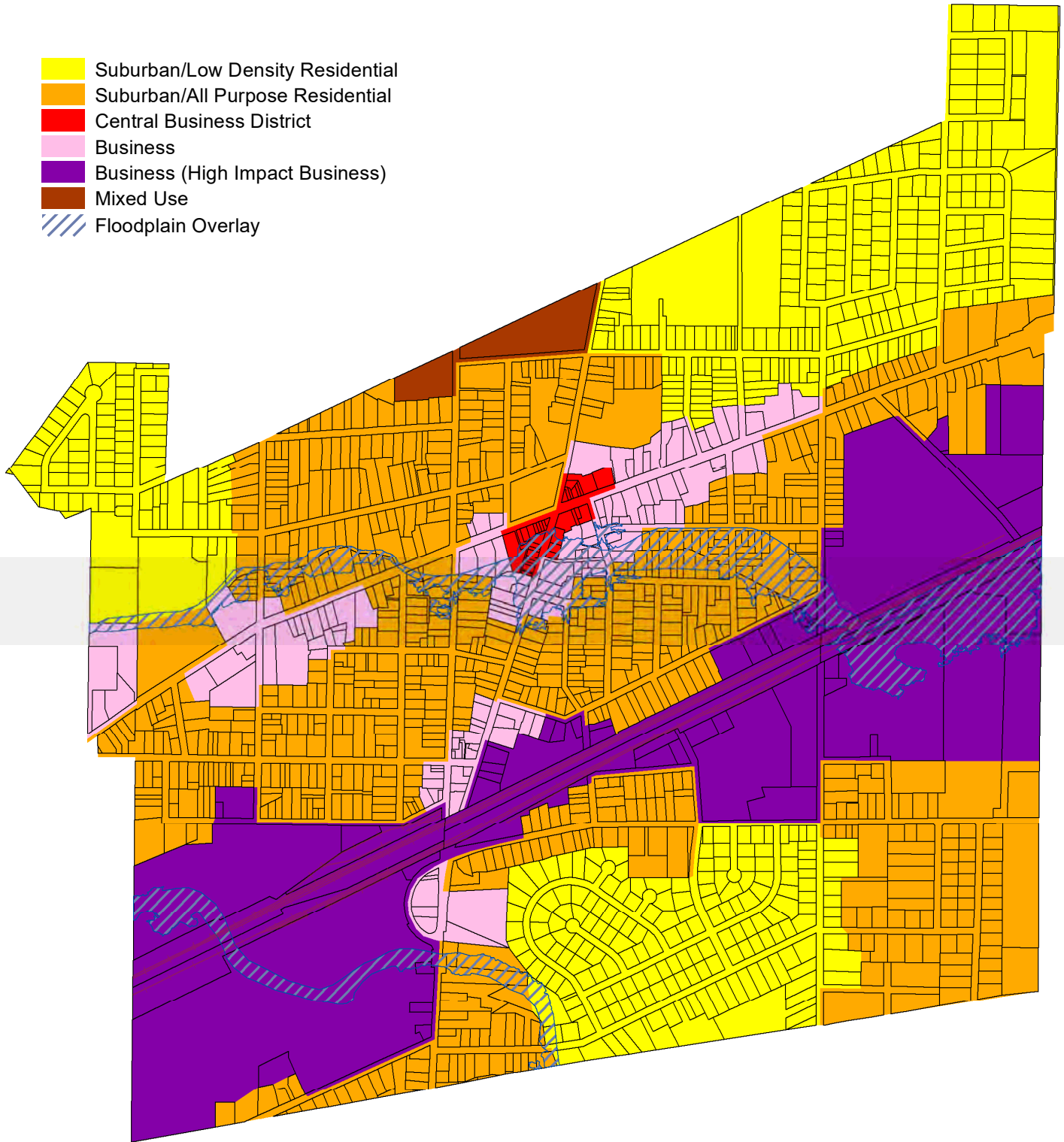
Future Land Use

- Agricultural
- Rural Residential
- Suburban/All Purpose Residential
- Business
- Business (High Impact Business)
- Mixed Use
- Floodplain Overlay



NorthEast Borough Future Land Use

- Suburban/Low Density Residential
- Suburban/All Purpose Residential
- Central Business District
- Business
- Business (High Impact Business)
- Mixed Use
- Floodplain Overlay



Interrelationships of Plan Components

The *Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code* (Act 247) requires municipal comprehensive plans to include a statement of interrelationships among the various plan components. The purpose of this is to ensure that the plan's components and goals complement and support each other, and that the implementation of one section or component of the plan will not conflict with the goals or implementation of any other components of the plan.

This plan has three primary components, each addressing one of the North East Area's top priority issues. All three components, or top priorities, interrelate, complement one another, and work together to move the Area forward to achieve its desired future.

All three top priorities ultimately focus on improving the quality of life for North East Area residents. They work together to make the area an even better, even more desirable place to live. Plan implementation will help to attract and retain both residents and businesses. Many of the individual goals and objectives also complement each other, and in some cases work to simultaneously implement more than one top priority. For example, creating a multi-purpose trail connection between Freeport Beach and the downtown area will work to increase park access and usage, while at the same time working to attract visitors to the downtown area and its businesses. Increasing the number and variety of recreational activities, special events and festivals supports the goals of both the "Improve Our Parks" and "Improve Our Downtown Area" components of the plan.

The "Improve Our Downtown Area" and "Preserve the North East Area's Rural Characteristics" components complement each other by focusing on different geographical areas. One aims to preserve the Area's agricultural lands and other natural resources, while the other aims to direct growth and investment to the downtown area.

The three components of this plan complement and support each other, and are designed to be implemented together. Implementation of any one section or component of the plan will not conflict with the goals or implementation of any other component of the plan.

Consistency with Other Plans

The *Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code* (Act 247) requires municipal comprehensive plans to include a statement indicating that the existing and proposed development of the municipality is compatible with the existing and proposed development and plans in contiguous portions of neighboring municipalities, and a statement indicating that the existing and proposed development of the municipality is generally consistent with the objectives of the county comprehensive plan.

The Borough of North East is bordered on all sides by North East Township. The municipalities have worked together on this multi-municipal comprehensive plan in order to help ensure that their plans are compatible, unified, and mutually supportive of each other.

North East Township is bordered by four municipalities, including Harborcreek and Greenfield Townships in Erie County, Pennsylvania, as well as the Towns of Mina and Ripley in Chautauqua County, New York. Each of these municipalities have comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances. North East Township's existing and proposed development are compatible with the existing development and all known proposed development and plans in contiguous portions of these neighboring municipalities.

The Erie County Department of Planning and Community Development has provided consulting services associated with the development of this plan. This plan is generally consistent with Erie County's plans and policies, including the Erie County Comprehensive Plan.

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