




North East Area Comprehensive Plan Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis

February 11, 2022

Prepared for the North East Area by
The Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development



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Introduction

In May of 2021, the Borough of North East and North East Township began working to update the North East Area Comprehensive Plan.

The plan will be a joint planning effort between the two municipalities. The primary purpose of this planning effort will be to identify a shared vision for the future of the North East Area, determine the North East Area's top 3 or 4 priority issues, develop action plans to address those priorities, and to achieve the desired results. The action plans will be incorporated into the comprehensive plan, and will be the primary focus of the plan.

This Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis has been prepared for the North East Area by the Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development. It is summarized to include only the most relevant information, and has been developed in support of Phase 1 of the planning process. It provides a summary of existing conditions within the North East Area, and provides some initial recommendations for the community's consideration.

This analysis is intended to help inform the community's decision making process as it works to identify its top priority issues.

Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis

Population and Demographics

As an initial step to this planning process, the characteristics and composition of the North East Area's population were considered. Demographic information such as total population, age, sex, educational attainment, median household income, household size, and other factors help to determine the needs of a community and its residents. A study of recent trends and a forecast of future changes is a prerequisite for any planning program.

The United States Census Bureau provides detailed information concerning population and housing. This information is available online at <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>. There is no need to duplicate all of the available demographic information within this plan. Instead, the discussion of population and demographic information will be limited to a few of the most relevant considerations. It is noted that at the time of this analysis, July of 2021, the 2020 decennial census data is not yet available, and that it is not expected to become fully available until March of 2022. This analysis utilizes the most recent data available, which in most cases is from the 2019 American Community Survey.

Population & Population Trends

Population (2000 - 2019)				
Geographic Area	2000	2010	2019	Change 2000-2019
North East Borough	4,601	4,294	4,108	-12%
North East Township	6,613	6,315	6,264	-6%
Girard Borough	3,164	3,104	2,975	-6%
Greenfield Township	1,909	1,933	2,022	6%
Harborcreek Township	16,267	17,234	17,340	6%
Erie County	280,843	280,566	273,835	-3%
Pennsylvania	12,281,054	12,702,379	12,791,530	4%
<i>Sources: ACS 19 5YR DP05; DEC 10 SF1 P1; DEC 00 SF1 P001</i>				
<i>Note: Harborcreek 2000 population per DEC 00 SF1 (15,178) corrected to 16,267, and North East Township population (7,702) corrected to 6,613 due to Penn State Behrend census tract error</i>				

According to the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS), North East Borough's current population is approximately 4,108, and North East Township's current population is approximately 6,264. As shown in the chart above, the North East Area's population numbers have slowly, but steadily declined since 2000, as did Erie County's population. However, during the same time period, the adjacent municipalities of Greenfield and Harborcreek Townships experienced some modest population growth. The Borough of Girard has been included in this analysis for purposes of comparison with North East Borough.

Population Projections

Erie County Data Center Population Projections (2019-2040)					
Geographic Area	2010	2019	2030	2040	Change 2019 - 2040
North East Borough	4,322	4,108	3,816	3,568	-13%
North East Township	6,337	6,264	6,112	5,977	-5%
Greenfield Twp	1,775	2,022	2,393	2,790	38%
Harborcreek Twp	16,992	17,340	17,777	18,183	5%
Girard Borough	3,088	2,975	2,843	2,728	-8%
Erie County	279,234	273,835	267,485	262,556	-4%
<i>Source: ACS 5YR (2010-2019); Forecast (2020-2040) by Erie County Data Center</i>					

The Erie County Data Center has provided population projections for Erie County, the North East Area, and surrounding municipalities for 2020 through 2040. The projections are based on an arithmetic increase/decrease analysis. It is noted that the smaller the population, the more difficult it is to accurately project future population numbers. Small changes in total population can result in large changes based on percentages. This tends to limit the accuracy of projections made at the municipal level. However, the projections suggest that the population in both Erie County and the North East Area are likely to decrease through 2040, and this is not surprising, given the population decreases that have occurred over the previous two decades.

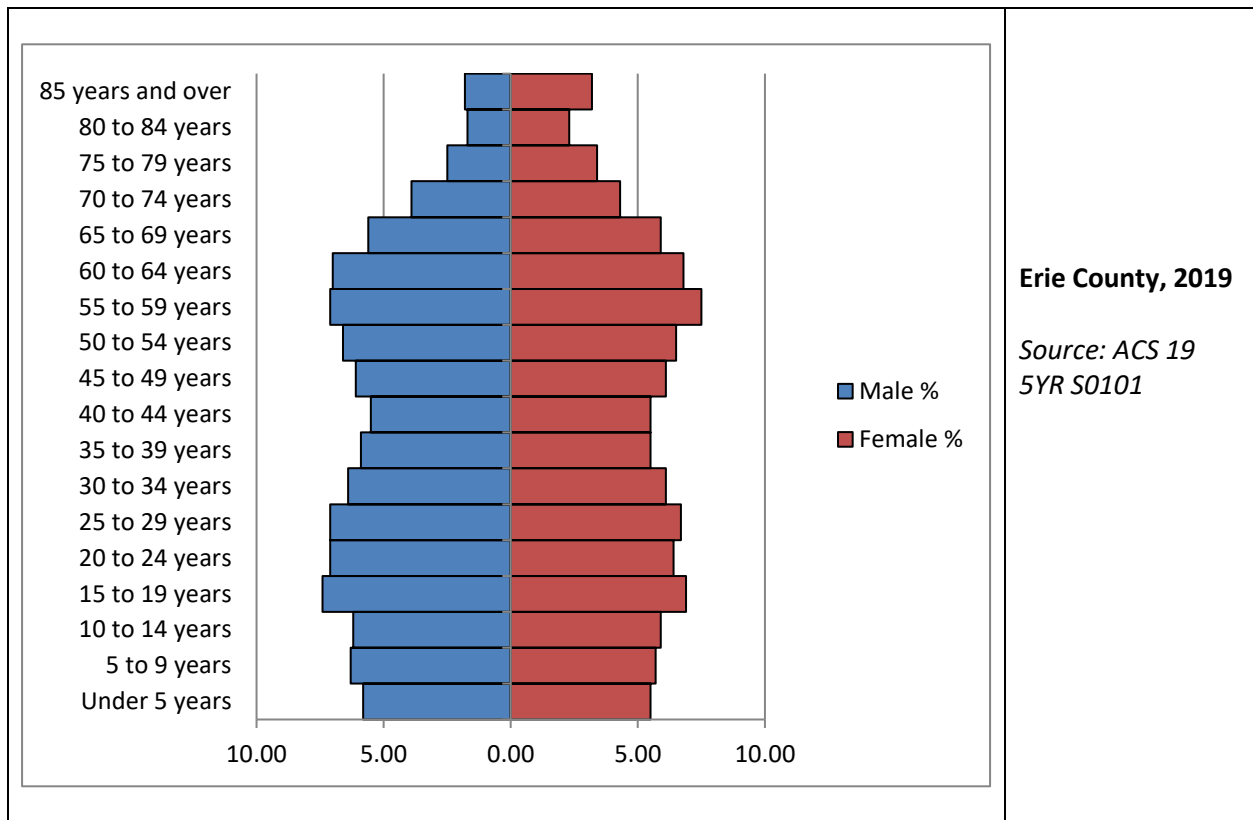
The Erie County population numbers are especially relevant. The County has a much larger population than its municipalities, and the larger scale allows for a more reliable population projection. At the county level, a population decrease of four percent (-4%) is being projected. It is noted that not all Erie County municipalities are anticipated to experience population declines. Some are likely to experience increases in population, while others experience declines.

Unlike population forecasts, projections are based solely on a mathematical analysis that relies on past trends, without the incorporation of speculation or judgement regarding possible future trends or events which could impact future population growth. It has been suggested by some, that the abundant water supply in the North East Area may be a significant draw for water-intensive businesses, and that could lead to population growth. While that is plausible, it has not been a trend in the recent past. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, most of the population migration over the past couple of decades has been to major metropolitan areas and to the Sunbelt, while many areas within the northeast region of the United States have suffered declines in population.

While the results of this analysis are not encouraging, the good news is that these are only projections. The North East Area has an opportunity to take positive steps to influence its future population numbers. Despite the projected population decreases, there will still be some in-migration of new residents into Erie County. Additionally, some Erie County residents will be migrating within the County. The North East Area has an opportunity to compete with other Erie County municipalities to attract and retain residents.

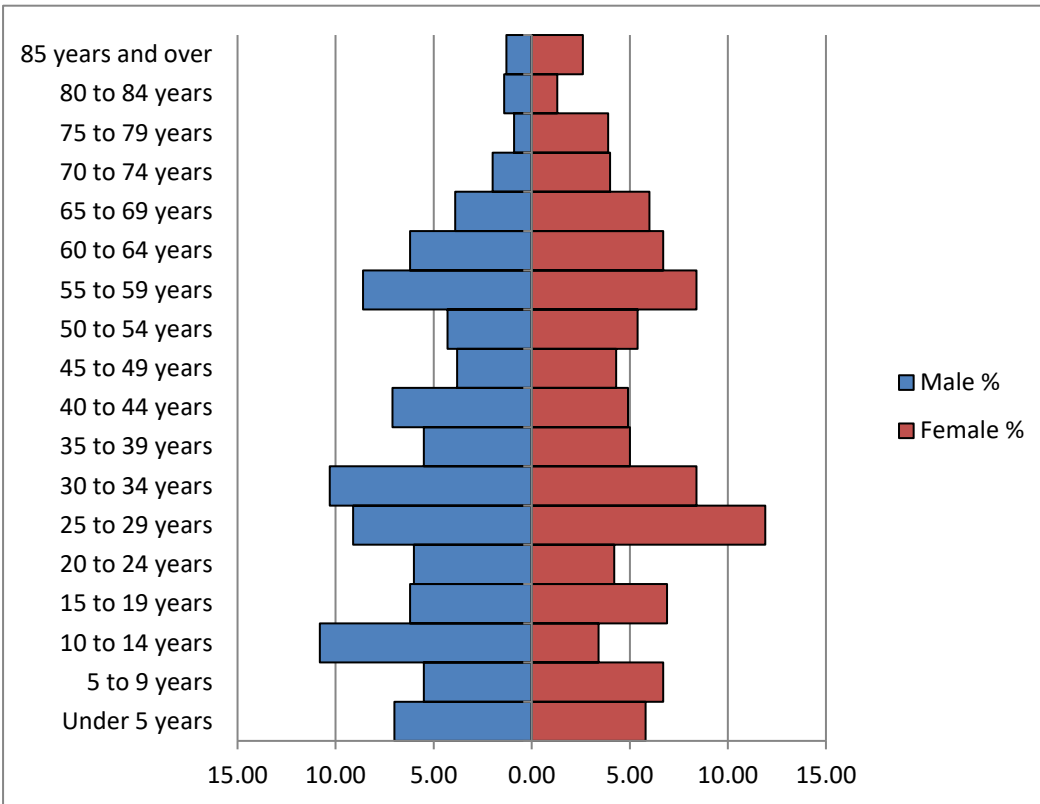
Population Age & Sex

Erie County



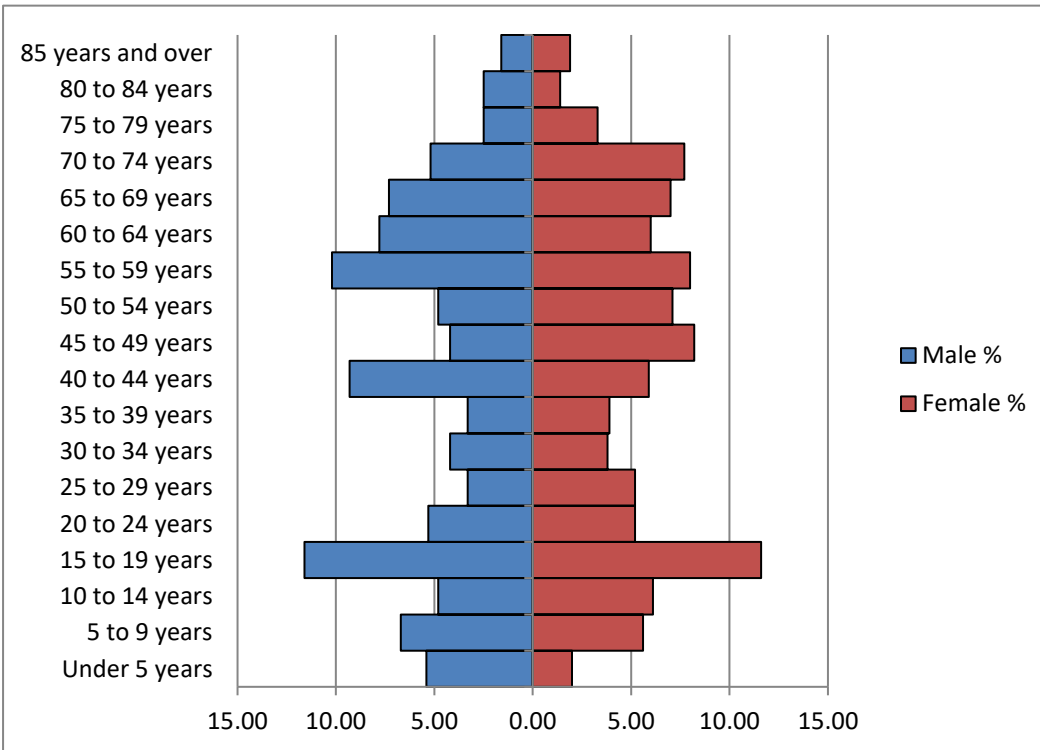
This chart illustrates how Erie County's population is distributed by age and sex. This type of chart is referred to as a population pyramid or age-sex pyramid because the distribution of the various age groups typically forms the shape of a pyramid when the population is growing. In Erie County, there is a notable reduction in the population of young and middle age adults from ages 20 through 55. The lower numbers of young adults is likely contributing to smaller numbers of children, 15 years old and younger. The lower numbers of "working age" adults is concerning since these are often the most productive years of a person's life.

North East Borough & Township



North East Borough, 2019

Source: ACS 19 5YR S0101



North East Township, 2019

Source: ACS 19 5YR S0101

The age-sex pyramids for North East Borough and Township illustrate the distribution of the North East Area's population by age and sex. As with Erie County as a whole, both municipalities suffer some apparent population loss of "working age" adults. It appears that many young adults are leaving the North East Area after high school, perhaps in order to pursue employment opportunities located elsewhere. This is most noticeable in the Township. A comparison of the pyramids demonstrates that the Borough has larger percentages of young adults in the 25 to 35 year age groups, and this most likely accounts for the larger percentages of children in the Borough.

Median Age

Median Age			
Geographic Area	2000	2010	2019
North East Borough	34.2	36.7	34.5
North East Township	33.0	43.3	43.7
Greenfield Township	36.5	41.7	47.3
Harborcreek Township	40.4	41.5	42.2
Girard Borough	35.8	39.7	40.1
Erie County	36.2	38.6	39.7
Pennsylvania	38.0	40.1	40.8
<i>Sources: ACS 19 5 YR S0101; DEC 10 SF1 P13; DEC 00 SF1 P013</i>			

As the chart above illustrates, the median age has been steadily increasing in Erie County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Median age has also been increasing in most of Erie County's municipalities. The Borough of North East is an exception. Based on the data, the Borough's median age appears to have been more or less stable over the previous 20 years. The Borough's median age (34.5) is also much lower than the county (39.7), state (40.8) and other municipalities in the area.

Race

Race				
	North East Borough	North East Township	Erie County	Pennsylvania
One Race	96.1%	98.9%	96.8%	97.5%
Two or more races	3.9%	1.1%	3.2%	2.5%
One Race Percentages				
White	93.2%	96.7%	86.5%	80.5%
Black or African American	2.3%	1.7%	7.2%	11.2%
Asian	0.1%	0.4%	1.7%	3.4%
Other	4.4%	1.2%	4.6%	4.9%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Source: ACS 19 5YR DP05				

According to 2019 ACS estimates, the North East Area is predominately one race, and white. There is less racial diversity than within Erie County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Household Types and Sizes

Household Types

2019 Percentages - Occupied Housing Units				
Household Type	Pennsylvania	Erie County	North East Borough	North East Township
Family Households	64.0%	62.1%	62.0%	72.4%
Nonfamily-Householder Living Alone	29.7%	30.5%	33.5%	24.4%
Nonfamily-Householder Not Living Alone	6.3%	7.4%	4.6%	3.2%
Source: ACS 19 5Yr S2501				

Household Sizes

2019 Percentages - Occupied Housing Units				
Household Size	Pennsylvania	Erie County	North East Borough	North East Township
1-person household	29.7%	30.5%	33.5%	24.4%
2-person household	35.0%	35.3%	27.7%	42.3%
3-person household	15.2%	14.1%	17.2%	9.4%
4-or-more-person household	20.1%	20.1%	21.7%	23.9%
Source: ACS 19 5Yr S2501				

Average Household Size

Average Household Size of Owner-occupied Units			
Geographic Area	2000	2010	2019
North East Borough	2.86	2.69	2.57
North East Township	2.70	2.59	2.53
Erie County	2.69	2.55	2.47
Pennsylvania	2.64	2.57	2.56

Average Household Size of Renter-occupied Units			
Geographic Area	2000	2010	2019
North East Borough	2.06	2.14	2.18
North East Township	2.26	2.12	2.21
Erie County	2.10	2.16	2.15
Pennsylvania	2.09	2.16	2.20
<i>Sources: ACS 19 5YR DP04; 2000 DEC SF4 HCT007; 2010 DEC SF1 H12</i>			

According to Census data, average household size of owner-occupied units has been slowly, but steadily decreasing since 2000 in Erie County, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the North East Area. As household sizes decrease, this impacts the types and sizes of housing units that are desired by the market. The 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) estimates that 61.2% of the Borough's households are either 1-person households (33.5%) or 2-person households (27.7%), and that 66.7% of the Township's households are either 1-person households (24.4%) or 2-person households (42.3%). Based on 2019 ACS estimates, the average household size of renter-occupied units has increased slightly since 2010. However, the average household sizes of renter-occupied units are smaller than that of owner-occupied units.

Median Household Income

Median Household Income			
Geographic Area	2000	2010	2019
North East Borough	\$ 36,431	\$ 36,875	\$ 50,014
North East Township	\$ 42,696	\$ 53,320	\$ 66,841
Greenfield Township	\$ 44,922	\$ 56,250	\$ 78,523
Harborcreek Township	\$ 47,294	\$ 59,346	\$ 62,855
Girard Borough	\$ 33,977	\$ 40,372	\$ 49,875
Erie County	\$ 36,627	\$ 43,595	\$ 51,529
Pennsylvania	\$ 40,106	\$ 50,398	\$ 61,744
<i>Source: ACS 19 5YR S1901; ACS 10 5YR DP03; DEC 00 SF3 P053</i>			

Income levels have social and economic impacts. The purchasing power of residents impacts housing choices and values, the ability of residents to maintain their homes, the types of assistance programs that are needed, and other factors. In 2019 the Township's median household income was estimated at \$66,841 which was higher than Erie County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, while the Borough's median household income of \$50,014 was slightly lower than that of Erie County as a whole.

Poverty Rates

Percent below poverty rate							
Geographic Area	North East Borough	North East Township	Greenfield Township	Harborcreek Township	Girard Borough	Erie County	Pennsylvania
Population	15.9%	4.6%	6.4%	8.9%	13.5%	16.0%	12.4%
Families	14.1%	2.2%	3.8%	3.5%	7.6%	10.8%	8.4%
Families with related children under 18	23.8%	5.6%	2.6%	5.2%	11.8%	18.9%	14.3%
Source: ACS 19 5YR S1701; S1702							

Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months of Families						
	Erie County		North East Borough		North East Township	
	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
All Families	68,493	10.8%	1,058	14.1%	1,734	2.2%
With related children of householder under 18 years	31,038	18.9%	627	23.8%	673	5.6%
Married-couple Families	48,622	4.2%	656	1.5%	1,395	1.0%
With related children of householder under 18 years	17,926	6.3%	327	3.1%	445	3.1%
Female householder, no spouse present	14,369	31.7%	235	46.0%	271	8.9%
With related children of householder under 18 years	9,738	40.8%	171	63.2%	195	12.3%
Source: ACS 19 5YR S1702						

Poverty rates within North East Township are significantly lower than within Erie County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. However, poverty is more of a concern within the Borough. The percentage of the population below the poverty rate in the Borough (15.9%) is comparable to the poverty rate within Erie County (16%), but the percentage of families below the poverty rate in the Borough (14.1%) is higher than within the County (10.8%) and the Commonwealth (8.4%).

American Community Survey (ACS) data shows that within the Borough, families with children experience the highest rates of poverty. The ACS estimates that 1,058 families live in the Borough, that 627 families have children under 18 years old, and that approximately 23.8% of families with children are in poverty. This equates to approximately 149 families with children that are in poverty.

The ACS data also shows that poverty status is less prevalent among married-couple families, and a much bigger issue with female householders, with no spouse present.

Education

Education - Population 25 years or older				
	North East Borough	North East Township	Erie County	Pennsylvania
Percent high school graduate or higher	90.8%	96.7%	91.3%	90.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher	18.6%	31.5%	27.9%	31.4%
<i>Source: ACS 19 5YR S1501</i>				

According to the 2019 American Community Survey, 90.8% of Borough residents are high school graduates. This is comparable to that of both Erie County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. However, only 18.6% of Borough residents have a Bachelor's degree or higher. This is lower than the Commonwealth (31.4%) and Erie County (27.9%). Educational rates within the Township exceed those of both Erie County and the Commonwealth.

Recommendations and Observations

The following recommendations and observations are made concerning population and demographics:

- Population projections provided by the Erie County Data Center suggest that Erie County's population will decrease by approximately four percent through 2040. Although projections at the municipal level are typically less reliable, a population decrease is also projected for the North East Area. While this is not encouraging, the good news is that these are only projections. The North East Area has an opportunity to take positive steps to influence its future population numbers. Despite the projected population decreases, there will still be some in-migration of new residents into Erie County. Additionally, some Erie County residents will be migrating within the County. The North East Area has an opportunity to compete with other communities to attract and retain residents. It is recommended that the North East Area strive to attract and retain young adults and families. Efforts should be made to maintain the quality of the school system, to attract and retain businesses and employment opportunities, and to provide residents with the best possible quality of life. This will require attention to such things as housing quality, public parks, recreational opportunities, municipal services, high speed internet, the transportation system, etc. This comprehensive planning process will give the North East Area an opportunity to plan for a better future.
- The North East Area's population is aging, and most people 45 and older want to stay in their homes for as long as possible. This is called "aging in place". In order to effectively accommodate an aging population, the North East Area will need a variety of affordable, accessible housing options; a range of transportation choices; and easy access to shopping, health and social services, and recreational opportunities.
- As noted previously, the North East Area's population has been declining, and the median age has been increasing in the Township. Statistics also show that household sizes for owner-occupied

housing units are decreasing in both the Borough and the Township. While it is unlikely that the North East Area will need to significantly increase its supply of housing, the types of housing desired by its residents will most likely change over time. There will likely be an increased demand for senior housing, assisted living developments, smaller unit sizes, more 1 bedroom units, condominiums, rental units, and “visitable” units that are designed for persons with physical disabilities.

Housing

Housing Choice and Variety

Number of Units in Structure					
North East Township			North East Borough		
Units in Structure	Estimate	Percentage	Units in Structure	Estimate	Percentage
Total housing units	2,701		Total housing units	1,781	
1-unit, detached	2,161	80.0%	1-unit, detached	988	55.5%
1-unit, attached	68	2.5%	1-unit, attached	65	3.6%
2 units	51	1.9%	2 units	273	15.3%
3 or 4 units	19	0.7%	3 or 4 units	237	13.3%
5 to 9 units	18	0.7%	5 to 9 units	66	3.7%
10 to 19 units	37	1.4%	10 to 19 units	9	0.5%
20 or more units	86	3.2%	20 or more units	126	7.1%
Mobile home	261	9.7%	Mobile home	17	1.0%
Boat, RV, van, etc.	-	0.0%	Boat, RV, van, etc.	-	0.0%
Source: ACS 19 5YR DP04					

Housing Units - Number of Bedrooms					
North East Township			North East Borough		
Bedrooms	Units	Percentage	Bedrooms	Units	Percentage
Total housing units	2,701		Total housing units	1,781	
No bedroom	17	0.6%	No bedroom	19	1.1%
1 bedroom	204	7.6%	1 bedroom	246	13.8%
2 bedrooms	476	17.6%	2 bedrooms	422	23.7%
3 bedrooms	1,254	46.4%	3 bedrooms	747	41.9%
4 bedrooms	625	23.1%	4 bedrooms	289	16.2%
5 or more bedrooms	125	4.6%	5 or more bedrooms	58	3.3%
Source: ACS 19 5YR DP04					

The 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) estimates that North East Township has 2,701 housing units. This includes 2,161 single-family, detached homes (80%), and 261 mobile homes (9.7%). The remaining 279 housing units (10.3%) are located in multiple-family structures of varying densities. The Borough has an estimated 1,781 housing units, of which 988 (55.5%) are single-family, detached homes. Approximately 776 units (43.5%) are located in multiple-family structures of varying densities. The ACS also estimates that 61.4% of the Borough's housing units, and 74.1% of the Township's housing units, have 3 or more bedrooms.

According to the public survey, most North East Area residents appear to be satisfied with the variety of housing options (houses, apartments, senior living, etc.) available at the present time. Over seventy

percent (70.8%) of survey respondents rated housing variety as either good (20.9%) or adequate (49.9%). However, nearly twenty percent (19.7%) of respondents rated housing variety as poor, while the remaining 10.5% didn't know or didn't have an opinion. The relatively high percentage of poor ratings (19.7%) may be a reflection of demographic changes that are slowly taking place, and the associated changes in housing needs.

Population and demographics are expected to influence the future housing market in the North East Area. As discussed in the population and demographics section of this plan, population growth within Erie County and the North East Area is projected to decline through 2040. In addition, the population is aging, and household sizes are decreasing within both the Township and Erie County. As a result of these factors, it is anticipated that the demand for new construction of large, single-family homes may be limited. However, there will likely be an increased demand for senior housing, assisted living developments, smaller unit sizes, more 1 and 2 bedroom units, condominiums, rental units, and "visitable" units that are designed for persons with physical disabilities. The North East Area has an opportunity to maximize its attractiveness to the housing market by zoning, where appropriate, to allow for more housing types/choices, including apartments, condominiums and senior housing.

Housing Occupancy and Tenure

Housing Occupancy			
Geographic Area	Total Housing Units	Occupied Housing Units	Vacant Housing Units
North East Borough	1,781	95.8%	4.2%
North East Township	2,701	88.6%	11.4%
Greenfield Township	764	95.7%	4.3%
Harborcreek Township	6,835	93.0%	7.0%
Girard Borough	1,210	95.2%	4.8%
Erie County	121,362	90.9%	9.1%
Pennsylvania	5,693,314	88.8%	11.2%
Source: ACS 19 5YR DP04			

According to 2019 American Community Survey estimates, the Township's occupancy rate (88.6%) is slightly lower than that of Erie County, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the adjacent municipalities of Greenfield and Harborcreek Townships, and as a result, the corresponding vacancy rate is slightly higher. However, according to the Township's Planning Commission, there does not appear to be a vacancy problem. It is noted that the ACS estimate of 88.6% occupancy has a 4.6% (+/-) margin of error, and this offers a possible explanation for the lower occupancy rate reported for the Township. The Borough's occupancy rate (95.8%) is greater than that of Erie County and the Commonwealth, and comparable to adjacent municipalities. Girard Borough is included for purposes of comparison with North East Borough, and both boroughs have comparable occupancy and vacancy rates.

Housing Tenure			
Geographic Area	Occupied Housing Units	Percent Owner Occupied	Percent Renter Occupied
North East Borough	1,707	49.8%	50.2%
North East Township	2,394	82.4%	17.6%
Greenfield Twp	731	95.2%	4.8%
Harborcreek Twp	6,359	78.8%	21.2%
Girard Borough	1,152	60.3%	39.7%
Erie County	110,318	66.1%	33.9%
Pennsylvania	5,053,106	68.9%	31.1%
Source: ACS 19 5YR DP04			

North East Township's percentage of owner-occupancy (82.4%) is greater than that of Erie County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It is slightly higher than in Harborcreek Township, but lower than in Greenfield Township. The Borough has a much lower percentage of owner-occupancy (49.8%), and a higher percentage of renter occupancy (50.2%) than Erie County and the Commonwealth.

Housing Age and the Demand for New Construction

Year Structure Built				
	North East Borough		North East Township	
	Units *	Percentage	Units	Percentage
Total housing units	1,781		2,701	
Built 2014 or later	-	0.0%	10	0.4%
Built 2010 to 2013	-	0.0%	86	3.2%
Built 2000 to 2009	33	1.9%	243	9.0%
Built 1990 to 1999	42	2.4%	478	17.7%
Built 1980 to 1989	197	11.1%	268	9.9%
Built 1970 to 1979	220	12.4%	373	13.8%
Built 1960 to 1969	166	9.3%	363	13.4%
Built 1950 to 1959	145	8.1%	261	9.7%
Built 1940 to 1949	160	9.0%	188	7.0%
Built 1939 or earlier	818	45.9%	431	16.0%
Source: ACS 19 5YR DP04				
* Note, Per Erie County Bureau of Assessment records, 18 single family dwellings have been constructed in the Borough since 2010.				

According to the 2019 ACS, only 23% of North East Township's housing units were built prior to 1950, while 46.8% were built between 1950 and 1990, and 17.7% were built between 1990 and 2000. New housing construction appears to have slowed since 2000. However, it is noted that based on Erie County Bureau of Assessment permit data, the number of permits for new, single family homes has averaged about 5 per year since 2015. This suggests that the actual number of new homes built since 2015 is greater than ACS estimates. Most of the new home construction in the Township appears to be "scattered-site"

development. However, some construction activity is taking place in existing subdivisions such as Paper Mill Hollow Estates and Windswept Acres.

Housing stock in the Borough is much older than within the Township. Approximately 45.9% were built prior to 1940, and 63% were built prior to 1950. Although the ACS estimates no new construction activity since 2010, this is inaccurate. In recent years there has been some new construction, primarily located in Whistle Run Subdivision. According to Erie County Bureau of Assessment records, 18 single family homes have been built in the Borough since 2010.

Although there is demand new home construction in the North East Area, the construction of new housing has slowed since 2009. As discussed in the population and demographics section of this report, the populations of both Erie County and the North East Area are projected to decline through 2040. This is expected to limit the demand for new housing construction in the near future. At present, the supply of residentially zoned, vacant land in the North East Area is considered adequate to meet the demand for new housing.

Housing Quality and Condition

As part of the public survey associated with this plan, respondents were asked how much priority should be given to deteriorated housing and abandoned buildings (rehabilitation programs, property maintenance codes, etc.) during the next 5 years. Eighty-nine percent responded that it should be either a high (59.2%) or moderate (29.8%) priority, while only 8.7% rated it as a low priority. The remaining 2.2% didn't know. However, as part of the same survey, the majority (57.6%) of respondents rated the quality and condition of housing as adequate, while 19.1% rated those good and only 6.3% rated them poor. Seventeen percent either didn't know or didn't have an opinion. The low percentage of "poor" ratings (6.3%) suggests that concerns about deteriorated and abandoned buildings are most likely associated with non-residential properties. A housing condition field survey taken within the Borough adds strength to this assumption, as do conversations with municipal officials from both municipalities.

Housing Condition Survey

As part of this planning process, Borough officials worked with the Erie County Department of Planning and Community Development to conduct a housing condition field survey. The primary purposes of the survey were to document existing housing conditions and to identify abandoned, unsafe and deteriorated properties that are in need of priority attention. The survey took place in late July through October of 2021.

The survey teams inspected all housing structures from the street, and rated property condition based on the following criteria:

- Excellent – Excellent overall condition with no apparent maintenance needs.
- Good – A few minor or typical maintenance items are needed.
- Average – In need of upgrades and maintenance, with some signs of neglect.
- Poor – In need of major repairs; significant issues, but still recoverable.
- Unsound – Unsafe, deteriorated, and rehabilitation does not appear to be feasible.

The field survey rated 1,211 properties. Parcels of vacant land, and properties which could not be viewed from the street were skipped, and are not included in the analysis. The survey was focused solely on housing. Commercial and industrial structures were not rated. The results of the property ratings were as follows:

Condition Rating	Number	Percentage
Excellent	323	27%
Good	508	42%
Average	342	28%
Poor	38	3%
Unsound	0	0%

Surveys of this type involve some subjectivity. Many properties have characteristics falling in the middle, between categories. For example, the difference between an excellent property and a good property is not always easy to determine. Ratings, in these cases, involved some subjectivity and judgement. However, despite this drawback, the condition survey still provides useful information. It will serve as a baseline upon which to measure changes in the condition of the Borough's housing stock in the years to come. This can be accomplished by comparing the results of this survey against the results of similar surveys to be done in the future.

In addition to providing baseline information, this survey also gives the Borough a place to start regarding prioritization of properties that are in need of attention. The following recommendations and observations are made:

- The survey did not identify any properties that appeared unsound, with no rehabilitation feasibility. That's good news, and the Borough should continue its efforts to help prevent its housing stock from declining into the unsound category. In the event that properties do become unsound, they should be a priority for potential acquisition and demolition, most likely in partnership with the Erie County Land Bank and/or another governmental agency or non-profit organization.
- The Borough should monitor the 38 properties that were rated in poor condition. Rehabilitation of these properties by the property owners should be encouraged. The close proximity of poorly maintained, inferior properties has been shown to negatively affect the values of surrounding properties. Should the properties become tax delinquent, they should be considered for possible acquisition and either rehabilitation or demolition. It is recommended that this should be done in partnership with the Erie County Land Bank and/or another governmental agency or non-profit organization.
- The survey defines "average" as "In need of upgrades and maintenance, with some signs of neglect", and 342 properties (28%) received an "average" rating. While these properties are generally in sound condition, some attention should be given to them, and an effort should be made to prevent them from slipping into the poor condition category. Owners should be

encouraged to rehabilitate and maintain them through a combination of public outreach/education efforts, homeowner assistance efforts and property maintenance codes.

- The majority of properties (69%) were rated in good (42%) or excellent (27%) condition. These properties are generally healthy. However, continued maintenance should be encouraged, and homeowner assistance programs should be made available to the extent possible.

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.

North East Township has also codified its ordinances. Chapter 100, Dangerous Buildings and Structures declares dangerous buildings to be public nuisances. In addition, it includes some yard maintenance requirements that regulate the height of grass. The Township has not adopted any property maintenance codes other than the dangerous buildings and structures ordinance.

Building Codes

North East Borough and North East Township have both adopted, administer and enforce the Pennsylvania Construction Code (a.k.a. the Uniform Construction Code).

Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA)

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.

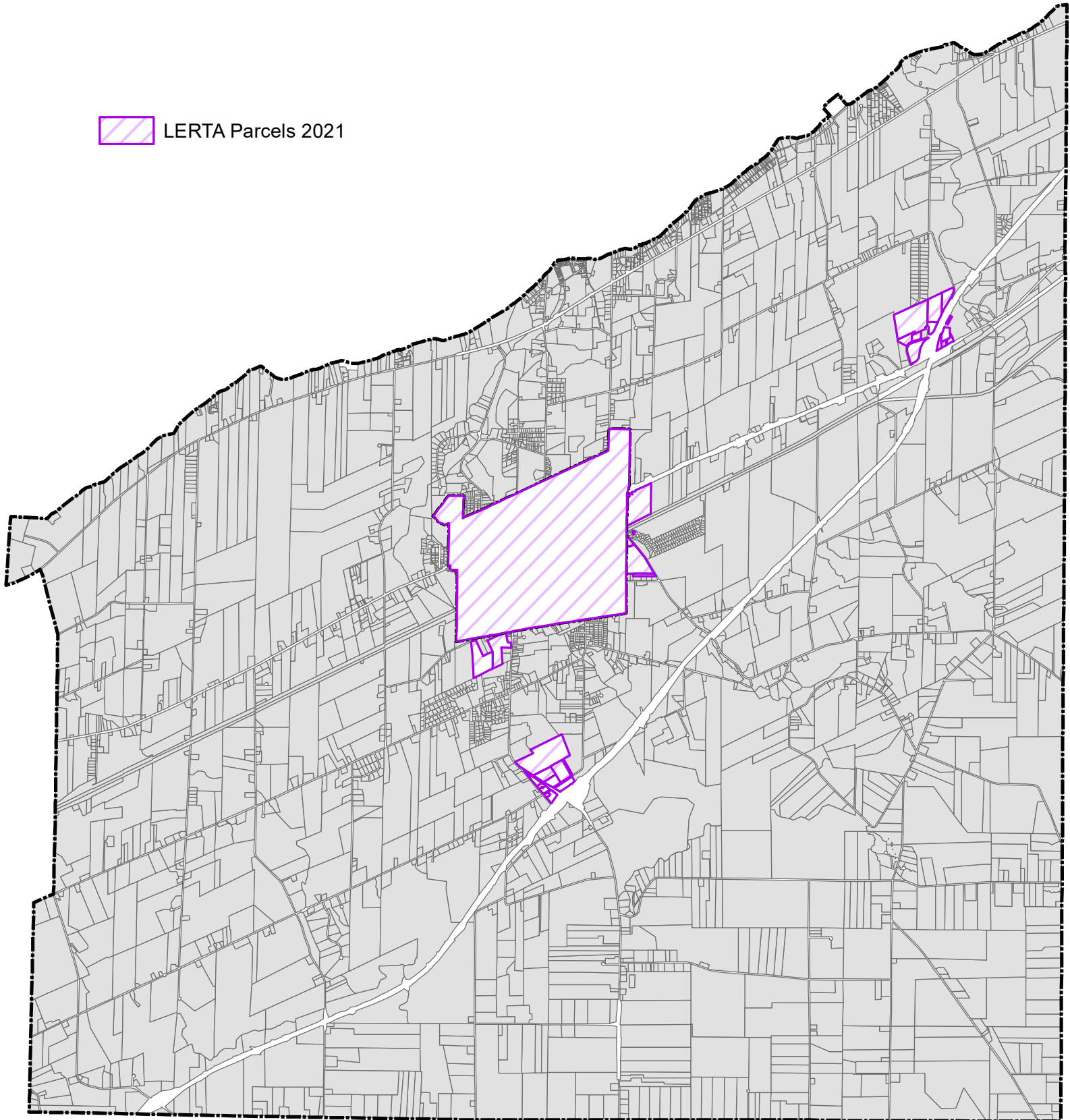
North East Township adopted a LERTA ordinance in 1991. The Township's ordinance provides tax abatement relief for qualifying, commercial and residential improvements or new construction, but is limited to specifically identified properties.

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.

North East Area

LERTA Parcels

 LERTA Parcels 2021



Rental Registrations and Inspections

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.

The Township adopted a rental unit and tenant registration ordinance in 2004 that requires landlords to file an annual report with the Township. However, the ordinance does not require inspections or include any regulations related to maintenance of the rental units.

Erie County Land Bank

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.

The Land Bank is also actively working with North East Township. A few deteriorated properties have been identified for possible acquisition, and the Land Bank is currently working to acquire its first property within the Township. In November of 2021, the Land Bank submitted the winning bid to acquire 12009 Kerr Road through the judicial tax sale. The Land Bank hopes to finalize its judicial tax sale acquisitions within the next few months.

Median Home Value

Median Value Owner-Occupied Housing Units			
Geographic Area	2000	2010	2019
North East Borough	\$ 93,300	\$ 109,300	\$ 127,600
North East Township	\$ 97,800	\$ 134,200	\$ 172,500
Greenfield Township	\$ 96,000	\$ 140,000	\$ 172,400
Harborcreek Township	\$ 105,400	\$ 146,500	\$ 165,900
Girard Borough	\$ 85,000	\$ 99,400	\$ 129,800
Erie County	\$ 82,500	\$ 111,300	\$ 134,100
Pennsylvania	\$ 94,800	\$ 159,300	\$ 180,200
<i>Sources: ACS 19 5YR B25077; ACS 10 5YR B25077; DEC 00 SF3 H085</i>			

The median values of homes in the North East Area have been increasing. According to the American Community Survey (ACS), the median home value in North East Township in 2019 was \$172,500. This was up 28.5% from 2010 and up 76.4% from 2000. The Borough's median home value was \$127,600 in 2019, which was up 16.7% from 2010 and 36.8% from 2000.

The Borough's median home value is lower than that of Erie County, but is more or less comparable to Girard Borough. The Township's median home value is significantly higher than Erie County's, but is only slightly greater than Harborcreek Township, and more or less comparable to Greenfield Township.

Housing Affordability

For purposes of this planning study, housing affordability in the North East Area was analyzed for both owner-occupied units and rental units. The analysis of owner-occupied units includes a review of the purchase price index (PPI) and a review of selected monthly owner costs as a percentage of household income (SMOCAPI). The affordability of rental units examines rent-to-income ratios as well as gross rent as a percentage of household income.

Housing Affordability – Owner Occupied Units

Purchase Price Index (2019)			
Geographic Area	Median Household Income	Median Home Value	Purchase Price Index (Years)
North East Borough	\$ 50,014	\$ 127,600	2.55
North East Township	\$ 66,841	\$ 172,500	2.58
Greenfield Township	\$ 78,523	\$ 172,400	2.20
Harborcreek Township	\$ 62,855	\$ 165,900	2.64
Girard Borough	\$ 49,875	\$ 129,800	2.60
Erie County	\$ 51,529	\$ 134,100	2.60
Pennsylvania	\$ 61,744	\$ 180,200	2.92
<i>Sources: ACS 19 5YR B25077; ACS 19 5YR S1901; PPI calculated</i>			

The purchase price index (PPI) provides an indication of housing affordability. It is calculated by dividing a community's median home value by its median household income. The lower the PPI is, the more affordable the housing. In 2019, North East Township's PPI was 2.58 and the Borough's PPI was 2.55. This suggests that housing affordability in the North East Area is more or less consistent with that of Erie County and other municipalities in the area.

Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income (SMOCAPI)							
	North East Borough	North East Township	Greenfield Township	Harborcreek Township	Girard Borough	Erie County	PA State
Housing units with a mortgage	562	1,238	386	3,132	462	42,026	2,083,557
Less than 20.0 percent	61.2%	42.7%	53.6%	55.2%	58.4%	52.9%	49.0%
20.0 to 24.9 percent	15.8%	22.3%	15.0%	13.3%	5.4%	15.6%	15.8%
25.0 to 29.9 percent	4.6%	12.0%	14.8%	11.0%	12.3%	10.4%	10.2%
30.0 to 34.9 percent	10.9%	4.9%	5.4%	4.1%	8.9%	5.2%	6.4%
35.0 percent or more	7.5%	18.0%	11.1%	16.5%	14.9%	15.9%	18.6%
<i>Source: ACS 19 5YR DP04; Housing units with a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)</i>							

Selected monthly owner costs are calculated from the sum of payments for mortgages, real estate taxes, various insurances, utilities, fuels, mobile home costs, and condominium fees. When the total of these costs are evaluated as a percentage of household income, they provide a measure of housing affordability and excessive shelter costs. Many government agencies consider costs to be excessive when they exceed 30% of household income. According to the 2019 ACS, North East Borough has an estimated 562 housing units with a mortgage, and North East Township has an estimated 1,238 housing units with a mortgage. Most of these, 81.6% and 77%, respectively, fall below the 30% threshold, which suggests that selected monthly owner housing costs should be manageable for most households. The remaining households, approximately 103 (18.4%) in the Borough and approximately 284 (22.9%) in the Township must budget 30% or more of their household income to pay for housing.

Based on the purchase price index, and a review of selected monthly owner costs for owner occupied units with a mortgage, the North East Area's housing appears to be affordable for most home owners. However, the selected monthly owner costs suggest that some households are struggling with housing costs that exceed 30% of their household income.

Housing Affordability – Rental Units

Rent-to-Income Ratio (2019)				
Geographic Area	Median Household Income	Median Gross Rent	Annual Gross Rent	Rent-to-Income Ratio (%)
North East Borough	\$ 50,014	667	8,004	16.00
North East Township	\$ 66,841	747	8,964	13.41
Greenfield Township	\$ 78,523	642	7,704	9.81
Harborcreek Township	\$ 62,855	843	10,116	16.09
Girard Borough	\$ 49,875	587	7,044	14.12
Erie County	\$ 51,529	753	9,036	17.54
Pennsylvania	\$ 61,744	938	11,256	18.23
<i>Source: ACS 19 5YR S1901; ACS 19 5YR DP04; Annual Gross Rent & Rent-to-income Ratio calculated</i>				

The rent-to-income ratio provides an indication of rental housing affordability. It is calculated by dividing a community's median annual rent by its median household income. Gross rent is the contract rent plus the estimated cost of utilities (electricity, gas, water, sewer) and fuels (oil, coal, kerosene, wood, etc) if they are paid by the renter. The lower the rent-to-income ratio is, the more affordable the rental housing. In 2019, North East Borough's rent-to-income ratio was 16.00 and North East Township's rent-to-income ratio was 13.41. This suggests that in general, rental housing is more affordable in the North East Area than the state and Erie County average.

Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income (GRAPI)							
	North East Borough	North East Township	Greenfield Township	Harborcreek Township	Girard Borough	Erie County	PA State
Occupied units paying rent	810	379	27	1,172	457	34,659	1,451,566
Less than 15 percent	24.4%	17.9%	66.7%	10.3%	18.6%	15.0%	14.8%
15.0 to 19.9 percent	13.7%	16.1%	22.2%	3.4%	22.1%	12.5%	13.5%
20.0 to 24.9 percent	11.2%	7.7%	0.0%	7.2%	7.0%	13.2%	12.6%
25.0 to 29.9 percent	10.1%	21.6%	0.0%	15.5%	11.2%	12.3%	11.3%
30.0 to 34.9 percent	4.1%	14.8%	0.0%	10.9%	17.7%	8.5%	8.7%
35 percent or more	36.4%	21.9%	11.1%	52.6%	23.4%	38.5%	39.0%
<i>Source: ACS 19 5YR DP04; Occupied units paying rent (excluding units GRAPI cannot be computed)</i>							

Many government agencies consider housing costs to be excessive when they exceed 30% of household income. According to the 2019 ACS, North East Borough has an estimated 810 occupied rental units, and North East Township has 379 occupied rental units. Of these, 40.5% (328) of renting households within the Borough and 36.7% (139) within the Township must budget 30% or more of their household income to pay for rent. This is significantly lower than that of Erie County (47.0%), the state (47.7%) and Harborcreek Township (63.5%). Greenfield Township was significantly lower (11.1%), but has very few rental units.

Although the North East Area's rent-to-income ratios and GRAP are both encouraging when compared to Erie County, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and even other municipalities, it is noted that it also suggests that many families are struggling with household rental costs in the North East Area. There are approximately 328 households in the Borough and 139 households within the Township that must budget 30% or more of their household income to pay for rent.

Recommendations and Observations

The following recommendations and observations are made concerning housing:

- The construction of new housing in the North East Area has slowed since 2009, and as discussed in the population and demographics section of this report, the populations of both Erie County and the North East Area are projected to decline through 2040. This is expected to limit the demand for new housing construction in the near future. At present, the supply of residentially zoned, vacant land in the North East Area is considered adequate to meet the demand for new housing.
- Population and demographics are expected to influence the future housing market in the North East Area. The population is aging, and household sizes are decreasing within both the Township and Erie County. As a result of these factors, it is anticipated that the demand for new construction of large, single-family homes may be limited. However, there will likely be an increased demand for senior housing, assisted living developments, smaller unit sizes, more 1 and 2 bedroom units, condominiums, rental units, and "visitable" units that are designed for persons with physical disabilities. The North East Area has an opportunity to maximize its attractiveness to the housing market by zoning, where appropriate, to allow for more housing types/choices, including apartments, condominiums and senior housing.
- As part of the public survey associated with this plan, respondents were asked how much priority should be given to deteriorated housing and abandoned buildings (rehabilitation programs, property maintenance codes, etc.) during the next 5 years. Eighty-nine percent responded that it should be either a high (59.2%) or moderate (29.8%) priority, while only 8.7% rated it as a low priority. After considering the results of a housing condition field survey in the Borough, and input from residents and public officials, it is considered likely that the issue of deteriorated and abandoned buildings is associated primarily with non-residential properties. It is recommended

that additional research, perhaps including a field survey of non-residential properties, should be undertaken in order to determine the extent of the problem. The North East Area municipalities should then plan and implement an appropriate blight mitigation strategy to address the issue. Both municipalities are currently working with the Erie County Land Bank to address blighted properties, and this partnership should continue.

- The housing condition survey gives the Borough a place to start regarding prioritization of properties that are in need of attention. The Borough should monitor the 38 properties that were rated in poor condition. Rehabilitation of these properties by the property owners should be encouraged. The close proximity of poorly maintained, inferior properties has been shown to negatively affect the values of surrounding properties. Should the properties become tax delinquent, they should be considered for possible acquisition and either rehabilitation or demolition. It is recommended that this should be done in partnership with the Erie County Land Bank and/or another governmental agency or non-profit organization.
- The North East Area's housing appears to be affordable for most households. However, a review of selected monthly owner costs and gross rent as a percentage of household income suggest that some households are struggling with housing costs that exceed 30% of their household income. Moving forward, it will be important to pay close attention to the potential impacts that tax rates and fees for services may have on housing affordability within the North East Area.

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Community Facilities & Utilities

Water Supply & Water Service

The Borough's public water system is owned and operated by the Borough, through the North East Borough Water Authority. The system serves approximately 4,300 Borough residents and approximately 4,000 Township residents. Approximately 92% of the drinking water is drawn from Lake Erie through an approximately five mile long pipeline. The system is also served by three surface water reservoirs, including the Howard Eaton, Smith, and Grahamville reservoirs. The water system distributes approximately 7.5 million gallons of water each day through approximately 28 miles of water mains. According to the Borough, the water system has ample capacity to accommodate additional growth and development in North East.

The water department is regulated by numerous entities which include both the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and the Environmental Protection Agency. The water department voluntarily joined the Partnership for Safe Water which is a national organization that holds the department to an even higher-than-normal standard.

System maintenance and improvements have been on-going. In recent years, improvements have included updates to the supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) system, replacement of a water main on Eastwood Drive, cleaning and maintenance of the service reservoir, and construction of an equipment storage building at the water plant. Currently, the Borough is working to implement a GIS mapping system to improve management of the system.

Additional investments are being planned for the near future, including fencing and additional security features; paving projects at the water plant, Eaton reservoir and Smith reservoir; upgrades to all nine filters, upgrades to the SCADA system, upgrades to some of the pump stations, and replacement of some of the water distribution lines. Perhaps the most significant investment that will be needed will be upgrades to, or replacement of, the four million-gallon service reservoir. The estimated cost is approximately \$3.1 million.

The North East Township Water and Sewer Authority operates and maintains the water distribution system within the Township. The system uses Borough water. Like the Borough, the Township is also working to implement a GIS mapping system.

Individual water wells are commonly used in areas within the Township that are not served by public water. In general, these wells appear to be adequate for domestic use. However, there are a few areas within the Township that are experiencing problems with inadequate water yields or water quality problems. This includes areas along the Route 20 corridor, west of the Borough, as well as areas along the Route 89 corridor, south of I-90. According to the Township, extensions of public water service to these areas are not considered to be financially feasible at this time.

Sewer System & Sewage Facilities

The Borough's public sewer system is owned and operated by the Borough, through the North East Borough Sewer Authority. The system includes two wastewater treatment plants and approximately 20 miles of sanitary sewer lines. The plants are capable of treating 2.9 million gallons per day, and according to the Borough, have ample capacity to accommodate additional growth and development in North East. The system serves the entire Borough, with the exception of Concord Drive which is located in the northeast corner of the Borough. The service area also extends into North East Township.

The two treatment plants are identified as "Site 1" and "Site 2". The site 1 plant is located on Tannery Street and is a pretreatment plant. It accepts most of the flows from the Borough, including Welch Foods, Inc., Better Baked Foods, Ridg-U-Rak, Inc. and other significant industrial customers. The site 2 plant is located east of North Mill Street, south of Route 5, and adjacent to Sixteen Mile Creek. In 2010, \$30 million was invested in plant expansions and improvements. The capacity of the site 2 plant was expanded to 2.9 million gallons per day, and a second aerated lagoon and chemical feed system improvements were made to site 1. All flows from site 1 are delivered to site 2 via gravity interceptor lines for final treatment. Currently, after treatment, discharges are to Sixteen Mile Creek. However, in 2020, approximately \$14 million was invested in the "lake line project". As of October 2021, this project is nearing completion. When the lake line becomes operational, the discharge point will be relocated from Sixteen Mile Creek to a point approximately 2,000 feet off the shore of Lake Erie. It is noted that all discharges are treated in accordance with strict regulatory standards in order to ensure that there are no adverse environmental impacts.

Currently, the Borough is studying a possible sewer service extension to serve Concord Drive as well as a possible sewer line upgrade to East Main Street.

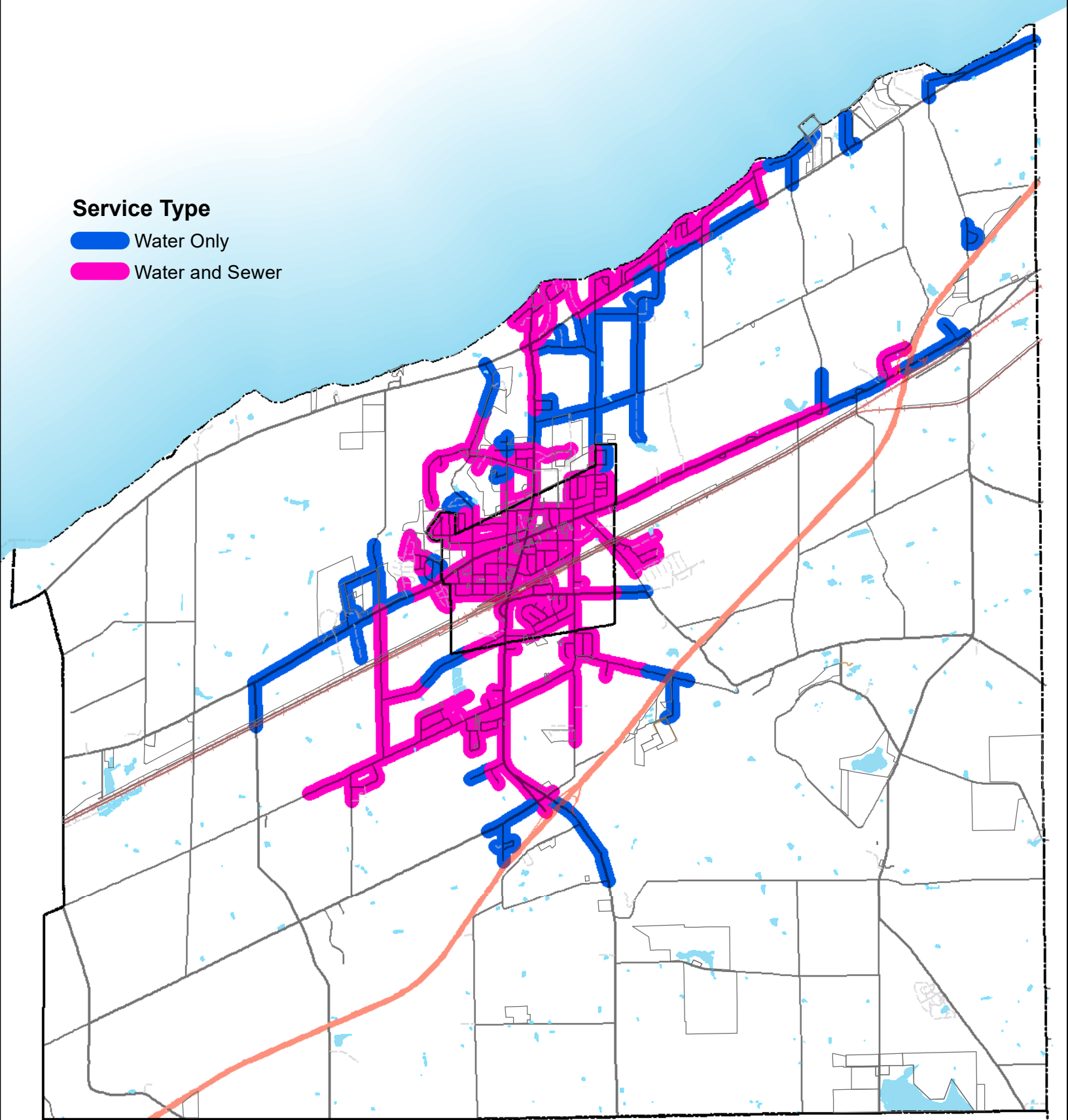
The Township operates and maintains the wastewater conveyance system within the Township. The Township system transfers wastewater to the Borough's facilities. One of the recommendations included in the Township's Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plan (December 2003), is that *"The Township and Borough should continue to actively consider the formation of an operating Regional Sewer Authority. Such an organization with a focused mission and purpose could likely more efficiently and cost-effectively address the regional public sewage disposal needs of the North East Community."* The potential establishment of a regional sewer authority, or the potential consolidation of the Borough and Township water and sewer has been a topic of interest over the years. However, as of this time, no action has been taken.

On-lot sewage disposal systems are commonly used in areas within the Township that are not served by public sewer. However, soil conditions in some areas are not ideally suited for these systems, and this can limit the intensity of development in those areas. According to the Township, these areas are located primarily in the central and southern portions of the Township, as well as along the lake shore, east of the marina.

North East Area

Water and Sewer Service Areas

- Service Type**
- Water Only
 - Water and Sewer



Waste Management & Recycling

The Borough's Streets Department provides municipal trash and recycling collection programs which are mandatory for Borough residents. Trash is collected once a week during winter, and twice a week from June through September. Recycling is collected twice a month, year-round. Borough ordinances prohibit the burning of trash and recyclable materials.

Recycling within the Borough is single-stream. However, glass is not collected. As an alternative, a drop off center for glass is available at the Township's Gravel Pit Park. The Borough collects E-cycling materials the same day as "normal" recycling. The exception is that televisions and computer monitors are collected during special collection events during which they can be dropped off at the Streets Department garage.

Residential trash collection is not mandatory within the Township, but curbside collection of trash is available by subscription through Waste Management and Raccoon Refuse. Since participation is voluntary rather than mandatory, there are likely gaps in the service area coverage and costs to residents using the service may be higher. The Township provides residents with free curbside recycling collection every two weeks. Participation is voluntary. The Township also has a drop off location for yard waste (leaves, small branches and brush) at Park Pit Lane and a drop off for cardboard at Gravel Pit Park.

The Township has partnered with Prism Glass Recycling to provide a drop off center for glass. This center is available for use by both residents and non-residents.

The Township holds special collection events for some household hazardous waste items, such as refrigerant items, auto and light truck tires, televisions and computer monitors, and auto batteries. No liquids are collected.

In addition to special collection events held by the Borough and Township, North East area residents may also participate in e-waste and household hazardous waste collection days held by the Erie County Recycling Program. Most of these events are held on specified Saturdays in Millcreek Township. The County also holds special collection events in Corry and Albion.

The lack of mandated garbage and recycling collection within the Township tends to promote the practices of burning or burying wastes, and may also lead to illegal dumping. However, according to Township officials, there have been no serious problems or complaints regarding these issues.

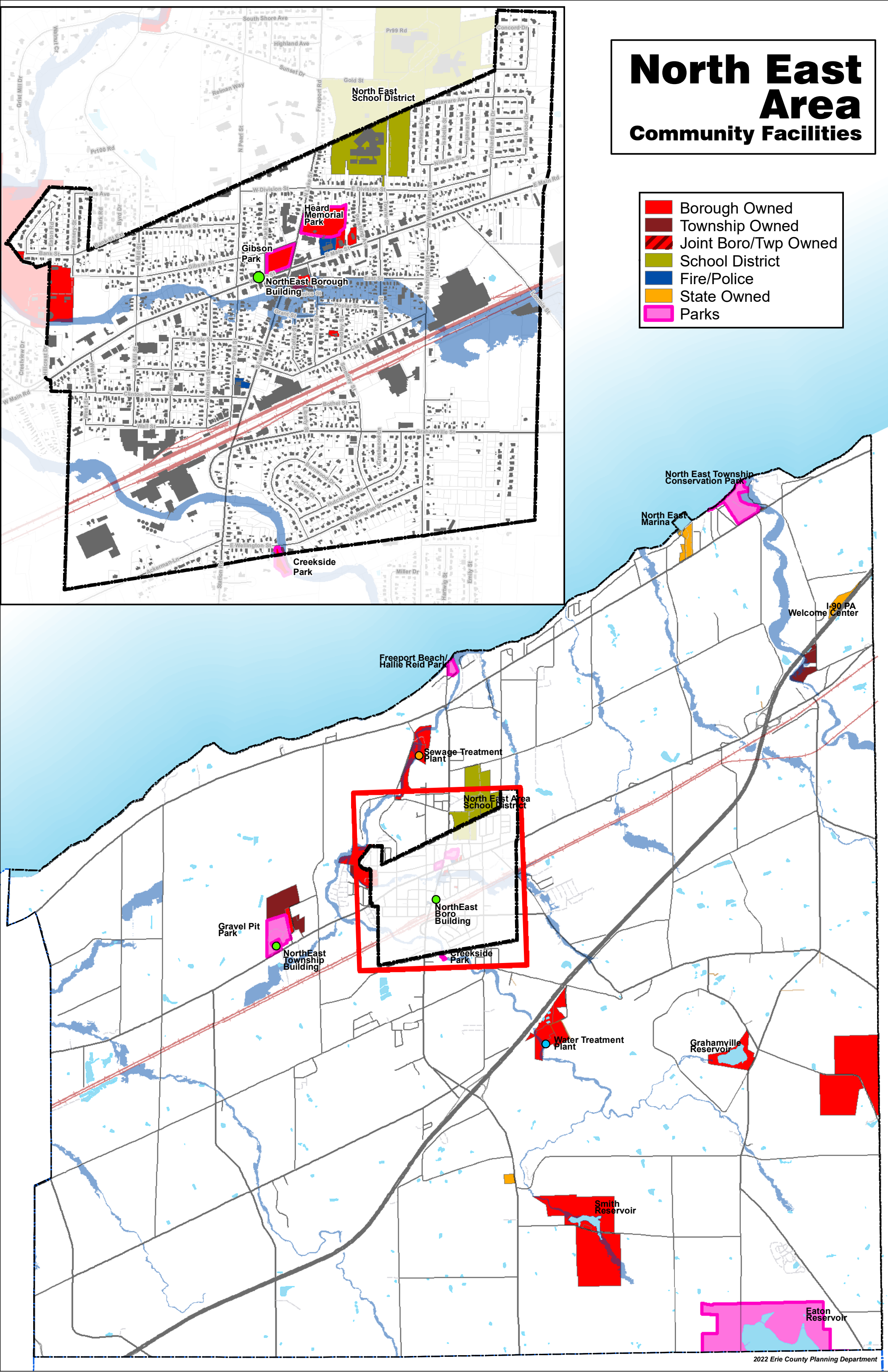
Public survey results suggest that most residents are satisfied with residential trash collection and recycling options. Most of the respondents to the public survey rated residential trash collection as either good (57%) or adequate (32%). Only 5.5% rated it poor, while the remaining 5.5% didn't know. Residential recycling options scored slightly lower than trash collection, but was still rated good by 40% of survey respondents and adequate by 41% of respondents. Only 11.8% rated recycling options as "poor". The remaining 7.3% didn't know.

When asked about the priority of curbside trash collection for all properties, only 64.7% indicated that it should be a high priority (26.6%) or a moderate priority (38.1%). Almost thirty percent (29.8%) felt that it should be a low priority. The remaining 5.1% didn't know.

North East Area

Community Facilities

- Borough Owned
- Township Owned
- Joint Boro/Twp Owned
- School District
- Fire/Police
- State Owned
- Parks



Municipal Buildings

The Borough's municipal building is located at 31 West Main Street. It was built in 1935, and was formerly the post office. According to the Borough, the building is in good condition, and is adequate to meet the Borough's needs. The Borough's Streets Department is located at 101 Clay Street. The main garage was built in 1991. There is also an older warehouse building on the property. According to the Borough, the building has some age related maintenance issues and functional obsolescence. While there are no immediate plans, the Borough recognizes that at some point in the future, it may need to limit the use of this building to cold storage. The North East Borough Sewer Authority owns a maintenance garage on Tannery Street that is used to house Borough vehicles. The maintenance building is relatively new, and is in good condition.

The Township's municipal building and service garages are located at 10300 W. Main Road. The municipal building was built in 1976, but has been remodeled since that time. It is in excellent condition, and is adequate to serve the Township's needs. Two of the service garages were built in 1963 and 1972, respectively. A third was added in 2020 for use by the water and sewer department. The Township property consists of approximately 67 acres, and also serves as the location of Gravel Pit Park.

Public Parks and Recreation

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 Borough of North East maintains three parks that are located within the Borough limits, and the Township maintains two parks that are located within the Township. The two municipalities jointly operate Freeport Beach/Halli Reid Park which is a third park located within the Township.

Almost eighty-seven percent (86.8%) of respondents to the public survey rated the North East Area's parks and recreational facilities as either good (45.6%) or adequate (41.2%). Only 10.1% rated them as poor. The remaining 3% didn't know.

When asked about the priority of improving 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. Survey respondents also included numerous written comments about the need for park improvements, especially at Freeport Beach and Heard Park.

Public survey responses related to recreational activities were less favorable. Recreational activities for the elderly, the youth and for families were the 4th, 5th and 6th lowest rated areas of satisfaction, respectively. In a typical year, the North East Community holds numerous festivals and recreational programs and events. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these events have been

cancelled or scaled down during the past couple of years. It is possible that this may have influenced the number of “poor” responses on the public survey. Regardless, the availability of recreational activities is a clear area of dissatisfaction that warrants some attention.

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.

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. It is jointly owned and operated by the Borough and Township, and has 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 is currently has many stones, as opposed to beach sand.

The municipalities are aware of the need to improve Freeport Beach, as well as other public parks. Currently, the Borough, Township, Downtown North East and the North East Area Chamber of Commerce are working to acquire grant funding needed for park master plans for Freeport Beach and Heard Park.

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.

The Township may pursue grant funding for a park master plan in the near future. There is also interest in pursuing grant funding for a new picnic pavilion for the park.

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 area, 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 farmer’s

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 a swimming pool, basketball courts or splash pad.

As noted previously, the Borough is currently seeking funding for a park master plan.

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.

Festivals & Annual Events

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.

In addition to the Cherry Festival and WineFest, there are numerous other events held throughout the year. This includes Gibson Days, North East Uncorked, Pet Parade, Picnic in the Park, Erie Philharmonic concerts, and other events.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these events were cancelled and/or scaled back in 2020 and 2021 due to public health concerns. However, the North East Area looks forward to a resumption of these and other events in the near future.

North East Marina

The North East Marina has 220 seasonal and transient boat slips and docks, and two launch ramps. It offers a full range of products and services, including boat storage, slip sales, fishing equipment, and a restaurant. The boat launches are open to the public. Fishing charters are also available.

More information about the marina is available online at <https://www.northeastmarina.com/>.

North East Senior Center

The North East Senior Center is located at 50 East Main Street, and is operated by the Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC). It offers many different activities such as daily lunches, three types of exercise classes, computer classes, craft and sewing classes, card games and bingo. The Center also has monthly parties, hosts educational and health speakers, and offers one-day bus trips to various places twice a year. All seniors are welcome to join.

More information about the Center is available online at <https://www.gecac.org/work/aging/senior-centers/north-east-senior-center>.

McCord Memorial Library

The McCord Memorial Library is located on 32 W. Main Street. Library cards are free of charge to all Erie county and Pennsylvania residents.

The library offers a wide range of materials and programming for people of all ages. This includes, but is not limited to activities for children, a “Teen Science Club”, “Krafts with Kathy” and a library book club. In addition to books, newspapers and magazines, the library also offers audiobooks, DVDs, music CDs, and laptops for GED training. The library has 8 computers and offers free Internet access.

The library is partially funded by a direct library tax levied by the Township and Borough. It also receives private contributions.

More information about the library is available online at <https://mccordlibrary.org/>.

Police Protection

The North East Police Department is a full-time police agency operating twenty-four (24) hours a day, seven (7) days a week. The department works cooperatively with the Pennsylvania State Police and other law enforcement agencies. The department offers community services, such as vehicle lockouts, home checks for vacationing residents, bicycle registration, the Safety Town Bike Program, and bad check investigations for local businesses. The department is located at 58 East Main Street. The building was built in 1980 and is adequate to serve the current and anticipated future needs of the department.

Police protection in North East Township is provided by the Pennsylvania State Police. Currently, the State provides this coverage at no cost to the Township. In addition, the Borough police patrol all Borough and

Township owned properties, including those that are located within the Township. This includes the public parks, water reservoirs, and other community facilities.

Police protection was one of the top 10 highest rated areas of satisfaction according to the results of the public survey. Eighty-eight percent of respondents to the public survey rated police protection as either good (53.1%) or adequate (34.9%), while only 6.7% rated it as poor. The remaining 5.3% didn't know.

Fire Protection and Emergency Services

Fire and ambulance services received the highest satisfaction rating as part of the public survey. Almost ninety-five percent (94.8%) of respondents rated them as either good (76.3%) or adequate (18.5%). Only 2.8% rated them as poor. The remaining 2.4% didn't know.

Fire and emergency protection is provided by two, all-volunteer fire companies. Fuller Hose Company No. 1 and Crescent Hose Company No. 2. The fire companies are separate entities, but work together as the North East Fire Department, which is an unincorporated cooperative association between the companies. Emergency medical services (EMS) are provided by Crescent Hose Company and Emergycare, Inc.

Fuller Hose Company is located at 68 S. Pearl Street. It has 4 high volume tankers, pumpers, and 2 auxiliary vehicles for fighting brush fires. It also has a certified dive team. Crescent Hose Company is located at 36 E. Main Street. It operates a 75' aerial, a heavy-duty rescue apparatus, one engine, and the two BLS ambulances that serve the Borough.

The Borough and Township governments both provide funding support for the fire department. However, one of the primary funding sources for both fire companies is the North East Fireman's Cherry Festival which is held annually during July. In addition, firemen also canvas the Borough and Township for donations.

In addition to funding support, the Borough also supports the fire department through its Volunteer Service Credit Program. The goal of the program is to encourage membership and service in the community's volunteer fire companies and nonprofit emergency medical service agencies. The program is available to residents of the Borough who serve as volunteers, and includes an earned income tax credit as well as a real property tax credit.

In 2021 an assessment of the North East Area's fire and EMS service was conducted by "peer consultants", Daniel P. Wauthier and Peter Melan. Daniel Wauthier is the Fire Chief of the Presto Volunteer Fire Department in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, and Peter Melan has over 20 years of experience as an EMT. According to the study, the two departments are "already "Functionally Consolidated". Each company is legally separate but perform as if they are one department." As part of the study, the consultants made numerous observations and recommendations, including, but not limited to the following:

- "From an outside perspective and reviewing, as related to the delivery of fire and rescue services, the training, emergency responses, emergency equipment, and leadership, the FHC and CHC are already acting as one entity. Finalizing a full consolidation as one company will eliminate

duplication of equipment, standardize equipment and procedures, reduce expenses, maximize safety, and provide one clear path in leadership, direction, and company goals. This will insure the residents of North East Borough and North East Township a strong united emergency services organization.”

- “Continued fund-raising places a tremendous strain on volunteer's time and takes away from family, training, and incident responses.” “Financial support for the Fire Department needs to be increased, at a minimum, to cover the annual operating expenses incurred. A committee composed of borough, township, and fire department officials should be formed to address these expenditures and ongoing increased financial support to assure the viability of this much needed and municipally required service.”
- “The author recommends separating the EMS segment from the merger of both fire departments to formulate a new entity that is entirely paid, with volunteers supplementing the career staff. The benefits of having a paid department are voluminous in nature; ranging from maintaining an adequate level of service for residents to significantly reducing the number of missed calls due to a drop in coverage.”
- “The EMS program has shown to have the volume to possibly support a separate entity with a paid 24/7 staff and would greatly benefit the community. But, a full financial work up must be completed in order to insure its vitality and longevity, as there will be more costs associated with this venture than the current set up.” “Retain an independent consultant or contact DCED for technical assistance to conduct a more comprehensive study focusing on EMS.”
- “Currently, Crescent Hose does not provide Advanced Life Support (ALS) care to its patients.” “The concept of migrating the current BLS service to an ALS service is attractive, yet potentially cost-prohibitive.” “Costs associated with migrating the agency to ALS require a significant injection of funding to acquire equipment to pass licensure.”

Public Schools

The North East School District consists of one high school, one middle school, one intermediate elementary school and one primary school. Enrollment is approximately 1,600 students, with 40% of the student population residing in the Borough and 60% residing in the Township.

The school district has a rich tradition in academic success, extracurricular activities, and the arts. It has consistently achieved high academic success, and is ranked in the Top 100 Best school districts in the State of Pennsylvania. The district offers a variety of competitive sports programs. One of the most successful sports is cross-country, as the school has won the state championship in Pennsylvania seven different times since 1971. The arts are very strong as well, especially in music, both instrumental and vocal. The marching band has been crowned the LMBA champions in eight of the last nine years, and placed sixteenth in the nation at the national finals which were held in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The North East School District offers a variety of Community Education Classes twice a year, once in the fall and again in the winter/spring. Some of the personal enrichment classes offered in the past include self-defense, yoga, PiYo, home landscaping, computer, healthy cooking, quilting, golf, financial planning and a number of arts and crafts classes.

According to the school district's comprehensive plan, funding continues to be an issue for the school district due to the increased demands resulting from unfunded mandates, additional state initiatives and requirements, increased health care costs, and retirement costs.

The school district has experienced an increase in the needs of the special education students who are being educated on campus. The district added an autistic classroom at the elementary school to meet the increased needs in this area.

The school district's plan also notes an increase in the number of families who qualify for free and reduced meals. All four school buildings would qualify for Title I services should the district choose to seek designation for a school-wide program. With this comes increased demands for programming above and beyond what is offered academically. According to the plan, it is not yet clear what this will mean for the district moving forward.

The school system and its buildings and facilities both received strong ratings of satisfaction from respondents of the public survey. Almost eighty-eight percent (87.9%) rated the school system as either good (61.3%) or adequate (26.6%), while 87.8% rated the school buildings and facilities as either good (60%) or adequate (27.8%).

More information about the North East School District is available on the school district's website at <https://www.nesd1.org/>.

Public Communications and Information Systems

As part of the public survey, the majority of respondents (45.2%) rated municipal communications (websites, social media, newsletters, etc.) as adequate. Twenty-nine percent rated them as good, while 17.6% rated them as poor. The remaining 8.1% didn't know.

The Borough and the Township both maintain municipal websites, but neither issues a municipal newsletter. The Township utilizes social media, including Facebook and Savvy Citizen. The Borough does not currently use social media.

In addition to the municipal websites and social media platforms, the school district, community organizations and the local media also help to keep residents informed about issues and events that are important to the North East Area community. Community organizations include the North East Area Chamber of Commerce and the North East Community Foundation. Local media services include North East PA Online, <https://northeastpaonline.com>, which covers both North East municipalities, the school district and Greenfield Township; and the North East News-Journal, <https://www.northeastnewsjournal.com>, which provides local news, mailed weekly to 6,500 homes in North East and Harborcreek.

Internet Service

Internet service was identified as one of the North East Area's "Top 10 Lowest Rated Areas of Satisfaction" by the public survey. A full 32.7% of respondents rated access to high speed internet service as poor, while only 27.7% rated it good, and 32.5% rated it adequate. The remaining 7.1% didn't know. When asked how much priority should be given to access to high speed internet during the next 5 years, 81.1% of survey respondents rated it as either a high (51.9%) or moderate (29.2%) priority, while only 13% rated it as a low priority. The remaining 5.9% didn't know.

Internet service providers to the North East Area include Armstrong, Spectrum, and Velocity.net. However, there are internet coverage gaps in some areas, especially in some of the rural locations. In addition, the speed and quality of the service can also be an issue in some areas. Satellite and wireless service options are generally available everywhere. However, many businesses and residents need a high speed internet option such as cable or fiber optic.

Both municipalities have discussed these issues with the internet service providers, and have urged them to provide improved and expanded internet service within the North East Area. However, service providers are private businesses, and any expansion of service areas or improved service options need to be profitable, and make good, business sense. Unfortunately, the rural characteristics and low population densities within some areas limit the potential customer base. That, combined with the costs associated with providing internet service, have limited the economic viability of providing improved internet service.

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.

Cell Phone Service

Seventy-two percent of public survey respondents rated the availability and quality of cell phone service as either good (33.5%) or adequate (38.5%). However, not everyone is satisfied. Over twenty-five percent (25.6%) of rated it poor. According to municipal officials, there are some coverage issues that result from complications related to the area's close proximity to Canada. This has been noticeable at Freeport Beach, which until recently, lacked cell phone coverage. Coverage is now available at the beach, but only through wifi.

Small wireless facilities are subject to state and federal regulations. This includes FCC Ruling 18-133, which became effective in January of 2019. The intended purpose of the ruling was to remove regulatory barriers that would unlawfully inhibit the deployment of infrastructure necessary to support new services and/or technology, including the deployment of 5G. In support of the FCC ruling, the PA Small Wireless Facilities Deployment Act (PA Act 50 of 2021), was adopted in June of 2021. It is noted that the North East Township Zoning Ordinance also regulates wireless communications service facilities. However, the federal and state regulations will supersede any Township regulations that may conflict with the federal and state regulations.

It is noted that the unlike the Township's ordinance, the Borough's zoning ordinance does not appear to regulate small wireless facilities. Instead, the Borough adopted a stand-alone, Wireless Telecommunications Facilities Ordinance (Ordinance No. 865) on September 6, 2011. As with the Township's zoning, the Borough's stand-alone ordinance predates current state and federal regulations concerning small wireless facilities. It is recommended that the Borough review and update its regulations for improved consistency with state and federal regulations.

Electric and Gas Service

Penelec/First Energy provides electric service within the North East Area, and National Fuel Gas (NFG) and the North East Heat and Light Company provide gas service within the most densely populated areas. Expansion of natural gas service areas will likely continue to occur pursuant to demand. Those not served by NFG use propane, fuel oil, electric or wood.

Recommendations and Observations

The following recommendations and observations are made concerning community facilities & utilities:

- One of the recommendations included in the Township's Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plan is that *"The Township and Borough should continue to actively consider the formation of an operating Regional Sewer Authority. Such an organization with a focused mission and purpose could likely more efficiently and cost-effectively address the regional public sewage disposal needs of the North East Community."* The potential establishment of a regional sewer authority, or the potential consolidation of the Borough and Township water and sewer has been a topic of interest over the years. However, as of this time, no action has been taken. It is recommended that the municipalities should continue to hold discussions, consider the options available, and work to determine if a consolidation would result in cost savings or operational efficiencies and advantages, and if it would benefit both municipalities and their residents.
- As part of the public survey, recreational activities for the elderly, the youth and for families were the 4th, 5th and 6th lowest rated areas of satisfaction, respectively. To some extent, the low ratings may have been influenced by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless, the availability of recreational activities is a clear area of dissatisfaction that warrants some attention.
- Currently, the Borough, Township, Downtown North East and the North East Area Chamber of Commerce are working to acquire grant funding needed for park master plans for Freeport Beach and Heard Park. Additionally, the Township is interested in a park master plan for Gravel Pit Park, and if grant funding becomes available, would like to add a new picnic pavilion to the park. It is clear, based on the public survey results, that area residents value their parks and would like to see some improvements and investments made. They also desire more options for recreation. The park master plans are highly recommended. These plans are often needed in order to pursue and acquire grant funding for capital improvements. In addition, proper planning will help to ensure that investment dollars are spent wisely.
- In 2021 an assessment of the North East Area's fire and EMS service was conducted by "peer consultants". The study observed that Crescent Hose Company and Fuller Hose Company are functioning as one fire and rescue unit already, and recommends that forming one company "will greatly benefit everyone involved." It also recommends establishing a separate EMS agency with

paid staff in order to maintain an adequate level of service for residents and to significantly reduce the number of missed calls. In addition, it recommends increased financial support of the fire department by the municipalities so that volunteer firefighters will be able to spend less time on fundraising, and more time on training and responding to incidents.

- Small wireless facilities are subject to state and federal regulations. This includes FCC Ruling 18-133, which became effective in January of 2019, and the PA Small Wireless Facilities Deployment Act (PA Act 50 of 2021), which was adopted in June of 2021. It is noted that both municipalities also regulate wireless communications service facilities. However, the federal and state regulations will supersede any municipal ordinance regulations that may conflict with the federal and state regulations. The municipalities may want to consider updating their ordinance regulations for consistency with the state and federal regulations.

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Transportation

Existing Transportation Plans

This comprehensive planning process has benefited from two existing transportation plans that have recently studied transportation in the North East Area. This includes the North East Smart Transportation Initiative and the Erie County 2042 Long Range Transportation Plan. These plans have helped to inform this comprehensive planning process, and many of their findings and recommendations are presented in the following sections of this report.

North East Smart Transportation Initiative

In 2012, North East Borough received grant funding through the Pennsylvania Community Transportation Initiative (PCTI) to complete a study based on Smart Transportation principles that would evaluate traffic and safety issues in the Borough and Township. The resulting study, the North East Transportation Initiative, was completed in 2014 by Whitman, Requardt & Associates, LLP (WR&A). The study provided numerous recommendations, as well as a plan for project implementation.

Erie County 2042 Long Range Transportation Plan

In 2017, the Erie Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (Erie MPO) adopted the Erie County 2042 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The county-wide plan was completed by WR&A, and its recommendations for the North East Area appear to have been based, to a large extent, on the recommendations of the North East Smart Transportation Initiative. That's important because inclusion of the recommended and desired transportation projects in the LRTP provides additional support for the projects, and may be beneficial for future grant applications needed for project funding.

Transportation Safety Issues & Concerns

The North East Smart Transportation Initiative (study) identified several “areas of concern”, and most of these were related at least in part to safety issues. Some of those concerns, such as the intersection of US Route 20 and State Route 89, the intersection of State Routes 5 and 89, and access management issues along Route 20 are discussed in other sections of this report. In addition to these, the study also expresses safety concerns about the State Route 89 underpass, Clinton Street, and a few other locations. The Erie County 2042 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) adds support for these concerns, and includes potential projects to address them. The identified concerns include the following:

- SR 89 Underpass and SR 89 at SR 426: According to the study, “The pedestrian network in this area is missing a direct sidewalk link from the SR 426 underpass to Kwik Fill along the west side of SR 89. The pedestrian crossings where the sidewalk ends present a challenge for pedestrians to cross SR 89. There is a metal barrier that runs along the east sidewalk beneath the underpass and is in deteriorated condition.” “Kwik Fill has a continuous driveway opening onto both SR 89 and SR 426 that is not clearly marked, and has no pedestrian facilities across the driveway opening.” The LRTP includes a potential project to “Construct missing sidewalk link along SR 89 and install curb cuts at the Kwik Fill driveway to properly denote the gas station parking lot and improve safety for motorists and pedestrians.”

- Clinton Street: According to the study, “Clinton Street was an area of concern due to lack of sight distance and pedestrian crossing difficulties at the intersection with SR 89, as well as operational issues at the intersection with Pearl Street.” The LRTP includes a potential project to “Construct improvements to the Clinton Street at Pearl Street intersection including enhanced crosswalk striping and an all-way stop analysis or reversal of major and minor flows to improve safety and accessibility.”
- Pearl Street: “Pearl Street near Mercyhurst University lacks sidewalk facilities on the west side to the medical center and had speeding concerns.” The LRTP recommends a local project to “Construct traffic calming measures and provide sidewalks along Pearl Street near Mercyhurst North East to improve safety.” However, with the recent closure of the Mercyhurst campus, and pending change in property ownership to Blue Ocean Investments, which owns the S.P.I.R.E. Institute, it is unclear if this will remain a priority safety issue.
- US 20 at Stinson Road: According to the study, “Stinson Road has poor visibility of oncoming traffic due to the sharp angle at which these roads intersect.” The LRTP included a betterment project to “Construct roadway connection to improve sight distance at the intersection of US 20 and Stinson Road when state route is due for a betterment.” According to the Township, paving has been done to improve the turning radius at this intersection.

The North East Area municipalities and the Erie Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (Erie MPO) have been working to address transportation related safety issues. Most, if not all, of the safety issues that were identified in 2014 by the North East Smart Transportation Initiative have either been addressed, or have been included in the Erie County 2042 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). Inclusion in the LRTP project list is an important step towards project funding and eventual correction of the issue. The North East Area should continue to proactively address any transportation related, public safety hazards that may become evident in the future.

Quality and Condition of Roads and Bridges

The North East Area has approximately 145.68 miles of public roads. This includes approximately 129.02 miles within the Township and 16.66 miles within the Borough. Of these, 75.6 miles of roads are owned and maintained by the Township, and 13.4 miles of roads are owned and maintained by the Borough. The State owns and maintains approximately 53.42 miles of roads within the Township, and 3.26 miles within the Borough.

As part of the public survey, residents were asked to rate the quality and condition of the roads and winter road maintenance. Most of the survey respondents (84.2%) rated the quality and condition of the roads as either good (34.7%) or adequate (49.5%), while 14.4% rated them poor. This suggests that although the majority of residents are satisfied with the current level of road maintenance, there are still some roads that need attention. Road maintenance is always an on-going concern for municipalities, and that appears to be the case within the North East Area.

Winter road maintenance was one of the “Top 10 highest rated areas of satisfaction” on the public survey. Over eighty-eight percent (88.4%) rated winter road maintenance as either good (51.7%) or adequate (36.7%). Only 8.9% rated it poor. The remaining 2.6% of survey respondents didn’t know.

There are two bridges in the North East Area that have been identified as structurally deficient. The first is the Wellington Street bridge over Sixteen Mile Creek in the Borough. The second is located on Bort Road in the Township, and crosses over railroad tracks. The Wellington Street bridge is included on a list of bridge repair and replacement projects that are waiting to be funded by the \$5 local use fee that is attached to car registrations. Although it is considered to be deficient, the bridge is considered to be safe at the present time, and is therefore relatively low on the list for funding. However, it is inspected regularly, and if its condition or safety deteriorates, it will become a higher priority. The Bort Road bridge is not currently included on the list for future funding by the \$5 local use fee funds. It appears that replacement of that bridge may be more complicated due to the presence of the railroad tracks that pass underneath the bridge.

In addition to the structurally deficient bridges, two other bridges are scheduled for repairs. One is located on Main Street, near the intersection with Robinson Street. The other is located on US Route 20 as it crosses Twenty Mile Creek. It is anticipated that the bridge near Robinson Street will be repaired in the near future. The bridge over Twenty Mile Creek is scheduled for repairs in 2025.

Traffic Congestion & Commuting Times

According to Erie County's 2042 Long Range Transportation Plan, traffic congestion is the number one most reported, transportation related area in need of improvement in Erie County. This contrasts somewhat with the results of the North East Area public survey. Over eighty-four (84.3%) of survey respondents rated traffic flow/commuting times as either good (38.7%) or adequate (45.6%). Only 11% rated them poor. The remaining 4.7% didn't know.

The North East Transportation Initiative identified the intersection of US Route 20 and State Route 89 as "an area of concern due to traffic operations at its two closely-spaced signals, tight roadway geometry, lack of pedestrian amenities, and its role in the character of the historic district downtown." The tight geometry makes it difficult for tractor trailers to turn, and according to the study, "in peak periods, Main Street backs up between the two intersections and vehicles must wait through multiple cycles to complete their turns from Vine Street." The study recommended improvements to the traffic signals in this area, as well as signals for pedestrians. The Borough has completed the recommended upgrades in an effort to reduce congestion at this intersection as well as to improve pedestrian safety.

The North East Transportation Initiative also identifies two locations along US Route 20 as areas of concern due to access management issues. According to the study, "the first location is the intersection of US 20 and Mill Street, which has many driveway openings from businesses very close to the intersection, causing driver confusion and increasing the number of potential areas for vehicle conflicts. US 20 in the Valley is the second area with access management issues due to limited sight distance caused by the vertical curve at Clinton Street, vehicle speeds, and numerous continuous driveways opening directly onto US 20."

The Erie County 2042 Long Range Transportation Plan also addresses the US Route 20 access control issues and recommends "coordinating with business owners along US 20 in the Valley to consolidate driveways by striping or installation of curbing along US 20 to improve safety by reducing conflict points between

traffic on US 20 and parking lots”. The LRTP recommends doing this when the state route is due for a betterment (a.k.a routine roadway improvements or maintenance).

As noted above, there are some existing access control issues. However, both municipalities have established some basic access management controls in their zoning ordinances which should help to prevent additional problems from developing in the future. Access management is a series of techniques that limit the number, location, spacing and design of road access points. They help to improve safety and reduce or prevent traffic congestion by helping to maximize road capacity, reducing potential traffic accidents and improving overall road conditions. Both municipal zoning ordinances limit access to off-street parking areas to a few well-defined locations, and prohibit unrestricted access along the length of the street.

Walking and Bike Trails

Walking and bicycle trails are becoming more and more popular, and can benefit a community’s health, wellness, and overall quality of life. As part of the public survey, respondents were asked what priority should be given to walking and bike trails over the next 5 years. Over seventy-six percent (76.7%) rated walking and bike trails as either a high (35.3%) or moderate (41.4%) priority. However, 19.7% felt that they should be a low priority. The remaining 3.7% didn’t know.

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. Unfortunately, the North East Smart Transportation Initiative identified some concerns associated with the Trail. According to the study, the Trail “lacks pavement markings, a clear gateway to identify nearby recreational assets or Downtown to passersby, and a physical safe connection to downtown North East for bicyclists and pedestrians.”

The North East Smart Transportation Initiative also 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 2042 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.”

The North East Smart Transportation Initiative and the Erie County LRTP both recommend connecting the Seaway Trail to Downtown North East. The North East Smart Transportation Initiative offers 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. The L RTP includes the SR 89 Hiker-Biker Path to Seaway Trail as a potential pedestrian & bicycle project. The project would “construct a separated hiker-biker path to the Seaway Trail and Freeport Beach from Downtown North East along the alignment of SR 89”. Unfortunately, the L RTP project was based on a funding source related to the Seaway Trail, and that funding source is no longer available. As a result, funding availability will likely be an obstacle to construction of the proposed trail.

Sidewalks

The public survey asked respondents to rate the quality and condition of sidewalks. Over seventy percent (70.2%) rated them as either good (25.6%) or adequate (44.6%). However, 19.3% rated them poor, and the remaining 10.5% didn’t know. It is noted that the Borough has sidewalks, and the Township does not. This appears to have had some effect on the survey responses. The “good” and “adequate” ratings did not vary significantly between Borough and Township respondents. However, almost twenty-eight percent (27.9%) of Borough respondents rated the quality and condition of sidewalks as poor, compared to only 13.9% of Township respondents. The percentages of respondents who “didn’t know”, or didn’t have an opinion also varied significantly, with 16.1% of Township respondents compared to only 2.2% of Borough respondents.

The North East Smart Transportation Initiative 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.

The North East Borough Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance requires developers to install sidewalks within one year after the construction of a principal building on a lot of record. The Borough’s sidewalk ordinance, which was adopted in 2001, places the responsibility of sidewalk maintenance and/or replacement on the landowners of the abutting property. However, placing the full responsibility on abutting landowners may not be practical, given the extent of the problem. The 12% of sidewalks rated in poor or very poor condition equate to 3.7 miles of sidewalks, and the map demonstrates that they are located in numerous areas throughout the Borough. Additionally, it is typically more practical to replace entire sections of sidewalk as part of a single project.

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 also be responsible for the cost of engineering work associated with the projects. The Borough is aware of the CDBG funding opportunity, and has made efforts in recent years to utilize this funding for sidewalk replacement projects. However, accomplishing the LMI surveys has been an obstacle, as many residents have not cooperated by completing and returning the required surveys.

The following recommendations are made concerning sidewalks in the North East Area:

- The Borough should continue to pursue CDBG grant funding for replacement of sidewalks in poor condition and/or for the installation of sidewalks where needed. It is recommended that an entire block should be done as part of the project(s), rather than limiting the project(s) to individual segments within a block.
- 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).
- It is recommended that for purposes of sidewalk replacement/installation prioritization, the Borough should consider the condition of the existing sidewalks, availability of grant funding (LMI qualifying locations, etc.), safety issues, pedestrian access to the downtown area and schools, and completion of any missing segments to the sidewalk system.
- It is noted that sidewalks are not required within the Township, and that as a result, there are few, if any sidewalks. Unless residents voice a strong desire for sidewalks, and/or there is a safety concern or other need for sidewalks in existing neighborhoods, they are not recommended to be a priority at this time. However, it is recommended that the Township consider requiring them for new residential subdivisions. This could be accomplished by adding an amendment to the North East Township Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance, or by adopting a stand-alone ordinance.

Public Transportation

Public transportation provides transit choices and mobility for people who do not have access to personal motor vehicles or prefer not to drive. 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. Therefore, it is probably not surprising that public transportation was the lowest rated area of satisfaction by respondents to the public survey. Over forty percent (40.4%) rated public transportation poor, while only 6.7% rated it good, and only 26% rated it adequate. A large percentage (27%) of survey respondents didn't know or didn't have an opinion.

At the present time, it is still unclear if or how the recent closing of Mercyhurst North East may impact bus service. However, 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. Fortunately, the LIFT Program is available to help address some of the bus service limitations.

The LIFT Program is a paratransit, shared-ride, advanced-request transportation system. It is available for residents of Erie County who are unable to utilize fixed route bus service. Several different LIFT programs are available. These include a senior citizen program-paratransit program, a rural transportation program for persons with disabilities, a medical assistance transportation program, and a customers with

disabilities program. More information about these programs is available on the EMTA's website <https://www.ride-the-e.com/paratransit-service/>

Parking

The North East Borough Zoning Ordinance regulates off-street parking and loading within the Borough. The ordinance was last updated in 2018, and the parking and loading requirements appear to be adequate and reasonable. The ordinance establishes some basic access management standards such as limiting access to off-street parking areas to several well-defined locations, and prohibiting unrestricted access along the length of the street. The design standards for parking lots are minimal. Parking lots are required to be paved. Lighting is permitted, but not required. Screening and landscaping is required when the parking lot adjoins or faces any residential district. Other than that, the ordinance does not appear to require any parking lot interior or perimeter landscaping. The ordinance does not appear to provide for shared parking which can be a useful technique to reduce parking requirements in cases where one or more uses will be generating a demand for parking spaces primarily during periods when the other use or uses is not or are not in operation. The ordinance requires parking to be located on the same lot as the principal use unless an exception is approved by the Zoning Hearing Board. However, it does not regulate the location of the parking in relation to the buildings. A common "best practice" is to limit or prohibit parking in front of the principal building, and require that it be located to the side or rear. This provides for better aesthetics, and is especially important within older, historic downtown areas where buildings front along the street. A redevelopment in such an area, with off-street parking located in front, would be inconsistent with the historic character of the district.

Like the Borough, the Township also regulates off-street parking and loading through its zoning ordinance. As with the Borough's ordinance, the parking and loading requirements appear to be adequate and reasonable. The ordinance includes basic access management, surface paving, lighting, and location requirements that are similar to the Borough's regulations. It does not appear to include any screening or landscaping requirements, and as with the Borough's ordinance, it does not provide an opportunity for shared parking, and does not regulate parking to the sides and/or rear of buildings.

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 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 the following:

- 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.
- 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.

The Borough is working to address parking concerns in the downtown area. 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 overly 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.

Railroad Crossings

Two railroads, Norfolk Southern and CSX run east and west through the North East Area, including the Borough. As part of the North East Smart Transportation Initiative, field visits were made to the railroad crossings, and according to the study, “a general observation was that pavement quality in the immediate vicinity of the railroad tracks was deteriorated. In addition, many locations had faded pavement markings and missing signs. The Bort Road intersection lacked gate arms.” The study also expressed safety concerns about the Smedley Street crossing.

In June of 2021, a public meeting was held as part of this comprehensive planning process, and residents voiced concerns about the Loomis Street and South Washington Street railroad crossings, and their impact on truck routes. Due to uneven pavement, large trucks are unable to safely cross the tracks. As a result, they often use Grahamville Street as an alternative route.

The North East Smart Transportation Initiative recommends a railroad crossing improvement program in order to increase safety and pavement conditions at railroad crossings. It calls for updates to pavement markings and signage, installation of gate arms where missing, and maintenance of pavement quality in between tracks.

The North East Area municipalities and the Erie Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) have been working to address concerns associated with the railroad crossings. Railroad crossing signal improvements to railroad crossings located on Moorhead Road, Williams Road and Gulf Road are currently listed as part of the Erie County Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The North East Area municipalities should continue to work with the MPO to address the safety and operational issues associated with the railroad crossings.

Gateway Enhancements & 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. When public survey respondents were asked about the importance of promoting North East through improved gateways, signage, festivals, events, etc, almost eighty-three percent (82.9%) rated it as either a high (30.4%) or moderate (52.5%) priority. Only 14.2% felt that it should be a low priority. The remaining 2.8% didn't know.

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

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

The Erie County 2042 Long Range Transportation Plan includes a project recommendation for gateway enhancements to the Route 89 underpass, including community art/mural, welcoming gateway signage

and lighting. It is noted that the “Project 89” group is currently fundraising for a mural to be located at the underpass.

Proposed Future Road Right-of-ways

An “official map” is a combined map and ordinance that can be used to identify specific parcels or portions of private property where future public right-of-ways or public easements are envisioned. This would include proposed public streets, including road widenings, narrowings, extensions, openings and/or closings. While the map identifies lands for possible, future public use, it does not impose eminent domain. The municipality must use methods authorized under law to acquire property reserved on the official map. This may include friendly negotiations or condemnation proceedings.

Neither the Borough nor the Township have an official map ordinance. However, it is a useful tool that is available, if needed in the future. As an example, during this planning process, an area resident suggested that due to the volume of truck traffic, the intersection of US Route 20 and Loomis Street should be widened. The resident suggested “Maybe the Borough should get a right of first refusal on the house in the southeast corner and have it removed when possible, so that the right turn for trucks can be widened.” Acquiring the “right of first refusal” can be accomplished with the adoption of an official map ordinance.

Recommendations and Observations

The following recommendations and observations are made concerning transportation:

- The North East Area municipalities and the Erie Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (Erie MPO) have been working to address transportation related safety issues. Most, if not all, of the safety issues that were identified in 2014 by the North East Smart Transportation Initiative have either been addressed, or have been included in the Erie County 2042 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). Inclusion in the LRTP project list is an important step towards project funding and eventual correction of the issue. The North East Area should continue to proactively address any transportation related, public safety hazards that may become evident in the future.
- The North East Smart Transportation Initiative and the Erie County 2042 Long Range Transportation Plan have both identified vehicular safety and multimodal accessibility concerns related to the intersection of State Route 5 and State Route 89/Freeport Road. The Erie County 2042 Long Range Transportation Plan 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 the crossing distance across Route 5 when state route is due for a betterment.”
- Based on input received from the public survey, most residents are generally satisfied with the quality and condition of the roads, and with winter road maintenance. The Borough and Township should continue to monitor the condition of their streets, and maintain them, as needed.
- The Erie County 2042 Long Range Transportation Plan addresses the US Route 20 access control issues and recommends “coordinating with business owners along US 20 in the Valley to consolidate driveways by striping or installation of curbing along US 20 to improve safety by

reducing conflict points between traffic on US 20 and parking lots”. The LRTP recommends doing this when the state route is due for a betterment (a.k.a routine roadway improvements or maintenance).

- The North East Smart Transportation Initiative and the Erie County LRTP both recommend connecting the Seaway Trail (Route 5) to Downtown North East with a walking/bicycling trail. Unfortunately, this will require a substantial investment, and funding will most likely be an obstacle. Should funding become available, this connection would improve pedestrian and bicycle access to both Freeport Beach and Downtown North East.
- The North East Smart Transportation Initiative recommended a sidewalk improvement program for the Borough. The study inventoried the Borough’s sidewalks, and identified sidewalks that were in poor or very poor condition. It is recommended that the Borough continue to pursue CDBG funding opportunities and/or other grants that may become available, as a means of implementing the program.
- North East Township currently lacks a public sidewalk system, and does not currently mandate sidewalks for new subdivisions. Unless residents voice a strong desire for sidewalks and/or there is a safety concern or other need for sidewalks in existing neighborhoods, they are not recommended to be a priority at this time. However, it is recommended that the Township consider requiring them for new residential subdivisions. This could be accomplished by adding an amendment to the North East Township Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance, or by adopting a stand-alone ordinance.
- The Borough and Township zoning ordinances do not appear to require any parking lot interior or perimeter landscaping. It is recommended that both municipalities consider added parking lot landscaping requirements to improve the aesthetics of new and/or expanding developments within their communities. Landscaping also provides environmental benefits, and will help to improve the compatibility of new development with existing land uses in the surrounding area.
- The Borough and Township zoning ordinances do not appear to provide for shared parking which can be a useful technique to reduce parking requirements in cases where one or more uses will be generating a demand for parking spaces primarily during periods when the other use or uses is not or are not in operation.
- The Borough and Township zoning ordinances do not appear to regulate the location of off-street parking in relation to the buildings on the lot. A common “best practice” is to limit or prohibit parking in front of the principal building, and require that it be located to the side or rear. This provides for better aesthetics, and is especially important within older, historic downtown areas where buildings front along the street. A redevelopment in such an area, with off-street parking in located in front, would be inconsistent with the historic character of the district. Regulating parking to the side and/or rear of buildings along commercial corridors, such as US Route 20, would also help to improve aesthetics.
- The North East Area municipalities and the Erie Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (Erie MPO) have been working to address concerns associated with the railroad crossings. Railroad crossing signal improvements to railroad crossings located on Moorhead Road, Williams Road and Gulf Road are currently listed as part of the Erie County Transportation Improvement Program

(TIP). The North East Area municipalities should continue to work with the MPO to address the safety and operational issues associated with the railroad crossings.

- The North East Smart Transportation Initiative makes several recommendations related to gateway improvements and wayfinding signage, including gateway improvements to the Route 89 underpass, implementation of a signage program, and wayfinding signage along the Seaway Trail and in other strategic locations. These efforts will help to promote the North East Area and its businesses.
- An “official map” is a combined map and ordinance that can be used to identify specific parcels or portions of private property where future public right-of-ways or public easements are envisioned. Neither the Borough nor the Township have an official map ordinance. However, it is a useful tool that is available, if needed in the future.

Natural Resources

Lake Erie

The Importance of Lake Erie

Lake Erie is a source of endless beauty, with scenic sunsets and breathtaking views. It is perhaps the North East Area's most important natural resource, and provides numerous economic, social and environmental benefits.

The lake is a favorite destination for tourists, especially during the summer months. Recreational activities are numerous, including swimming, boating, bird watching, and a variety of water sports. Sport fishing is very popular. The lake supports the highest fish production of all the Great Lakes, and is considered to be the walleye capital of the world. It is also a popular destination for diving due to a large number of shipwrecks. In 2016, Erie County submitted a nomination for the proposed Lake Erie Quadrangle National Marine Sanctuary (NMS). Designation as a NMS will most likely bring additional awareness to the area, and may attract additional tourism.

The lake provides an abundant water supply for residential, commercial and industrial uses. According to the Borough, it currently provides approximately 92% of the Borough's drinking water. This abundant water source is a significant asset, especially given the water supply shortages that are becoming more prevalent in other areas of the United States. In the future, the water supply may help to attract water intensive industries and other forms of development to the area.

The benefits of the lake extend beyond its shoreline. As discussed in the agricultural resources section of this report, the lake creates a unique micro-climate that is especially well suited to growing grapes, cherries and other fruits and vegetables. This has led to a heavy concentration of grape vineyards and fruit orchards. North East is well-known for its robust viniculture industry, which includes the production of wines, jellies and juices. Welch Foods, Inc. is one of the area's top employers, and there are also numerous wineries located throughout the area.

Public Access Points

The North East Area is located along the southern shore of Lake Erie, and has three public access points to the lake. This includes Freeport Beach/Halli Reid Park, Conservation Park, and the North East Marina. These are discussed in greater detail in the community facilities section of this report.

Natural Heritage Areas

The Erie County Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) was last updated in 2012. The report presents the known outstanding natural features in Erie County, and provides maps of the best natural habitats and all the known locations of animal and plants species of concern (endangered, threatened, or rare). According to the NHI, there are nine Natural Heritage Areas (NHA) that are located, at least partially, within North East Township. These are identified as:

- Cemetery Road Bluffs NHA
- Fourteen Mile Point Bluffs NHA
- Howard Eaton Reservoir NHA

- Northeast Lake Bluff Seeps NHA
- Sixteen Mile Creek Gorge NHA
- Twenty Mile Creek NHA
- Twenty Mile Creek Beach NHA
- Twenty Mile Creek Gorge NHA
- Vineyard Swamp NHA

The NHI report also identifies potential threats and provides suggestions for the protection of the rare plants or animals within each NHA. While recommendations are specific to the needs of each NHA, some examples of recommended practices include the following:

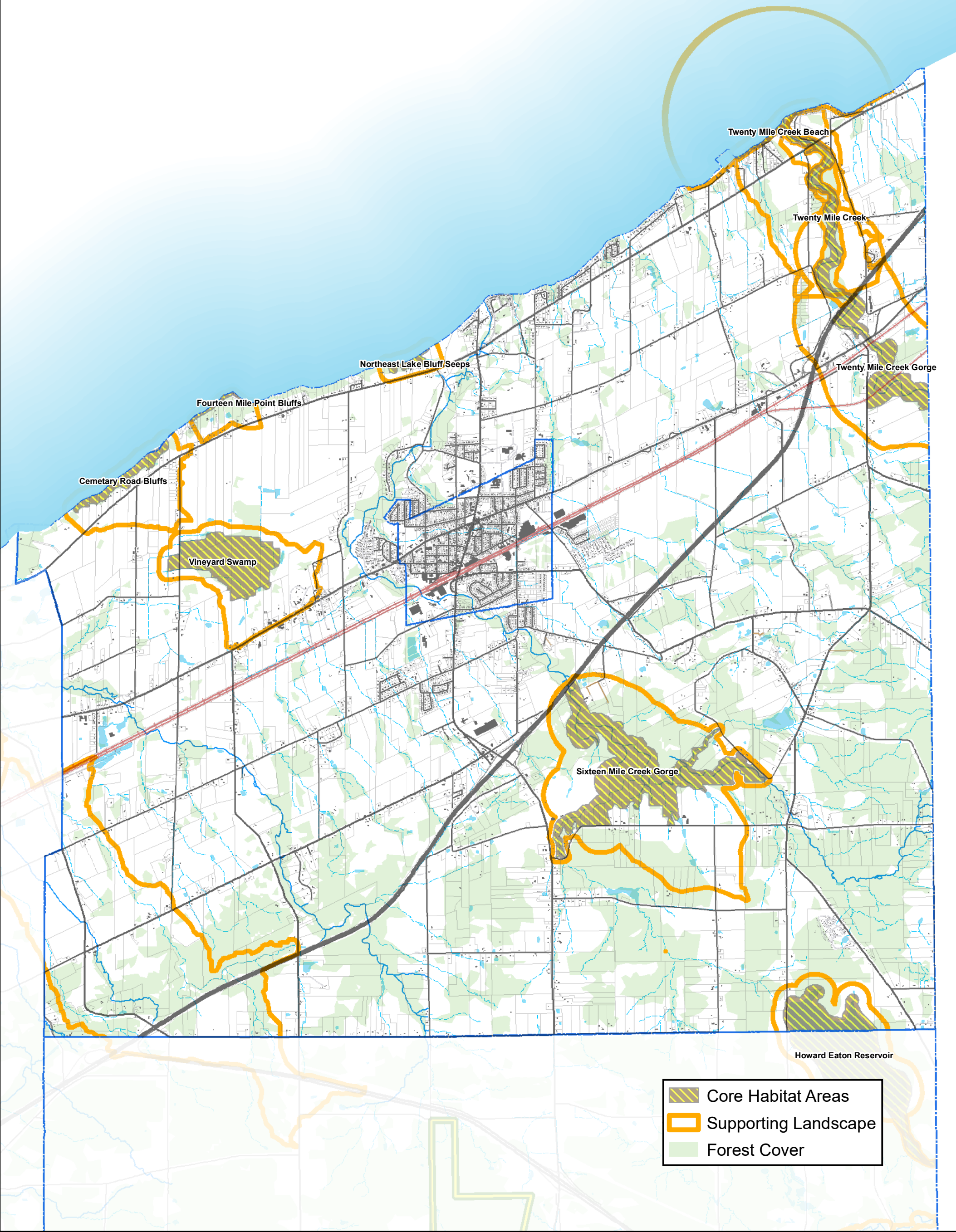
- Great Lakes bluffs are sensitive habitats, and as steep slopes are frequently attractive to hikers and climbers, care should be used when accessing these sites. Upslope disturbances to the deep glacial soils or bedrock could destabilize these habitats and should be avoided.
- Development and timber harvesting within the NHA should be avoided.
- A natural vegetation buffer should be allowed to develop along the stream valley crests within the NHA site's boundary in order to reduce the threat of human-induced erosion and to protect surface water quality and quantity entering the NHA. Trail construction along the top of tributary gorges should be limited to avoid impacting the NHA.
- Property owners can contribute to ground water quality and quantity protection by reducing or avoiding the application of pesticides and/or fertilizers within NHA site boundaries and by avoiding artificial drainage of subsurface waters.
- Conserve and expand the forested riparian buffers of Twenty Mile Creek and its tributaries. Streams through forested areas should be considered high priority for conservation. The forested riparian corridor helps to regulate the temperature of the stream and creates streamside conditions that contribute to improved water quality and aquatic habitat. Streams through non-forested areas should be restored with native trees and shrubs appropriate to the habitat. Establish at least a 100 foot (30 meter) buffer of woody vegetation along the creek and its tributaries to help reduce erosion, sedimentation, and pollution.
- Care should be taken to control and prevent the spread of invasive species.

In addition to the recommendations noted above, the NHI notes the Township's 2003 acquisition of the Conservation Park property, which is located adjacent to Twenty Mile Creek, and which includes a significant portion of the Twenty Mile Creek NHA. A major focus of the park is passive recreation, including angler access. The NHI recommends the development of a management plan for the site that takes into account the presence of the rare species.

The NHI is available online at http://www.naturalheritage.state.pa.us/cnai_pdfs/erienhi_update2012.pdf

North East Area

Natural Heritage Areas



Agricultural Resources

Agriculture in the North East Area

Agriculture in the North East Area can be divided into two distinct areas which are roughly divided by the Interstate 90 ridgeline. The lake plain area, which is located to the north of I-90 is characterized by a relatively flat topography and milder temperatures than the area to the south of the Interstate. 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. As a result, grape vineyards and fruit orchards are heavily concentrated in this area. North East is well-known for its robust viniculture industry, which includes the production of wines, jellies and juices. Welch Foods, Inc. is one of the area's top employers, and there are also numerous wineries located throughout the area.

The area to the south of Interstate 90 is characterized by a hillier topography and less moderate weather, particularly during the winter. Crops such as corn and grains are more prevalent in this area.

Farms are important to the North East Area economy, and also help to create and retain the rural character that many North East Area residents love. They are best protected when there is a supportive economic climate that values working farms and a development climate that promotes the conservation and responsible use of the natural landscape. North East Township has worked to support and protect agriculture through its zoning, the establishment of an Agricultural Security Area, and its support of the Erie County Agricultural Land Preservation Program. Farmland is also protected by the State's Clean & Green program.

Agricultural Zoning

The North East Township Zoning Ordinance permits agriculture "by right" in all zoning districts. However, it has two zoning districts that are designated primarily for agricultural use. These are the A-1, Preservation and A-2, Agricultural districts. In addition, its R-1, Rural Residential district is also supportive of agriculture. All three of these districts allow for a mix of agriculture, low-density residential and other compatible land uses. Other uses of natural resources, such as mineral extraction and renewable energy are also permitted, but require conditional use approval.

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, "scattered site" residential development leads to fragmentation of agricultural lands. The Township may want to consider requiring the use of *Growing Greener: Conservation by Design* for large subdivisions. 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 farmland or open space.

Agricultural Security Area

The Agricultural Security Area (ASA) program is as a tool for strengthening and protecting agriculture in Pennsylvania. Farm landowners, working together, initiate the process of establishing such Areas in which agriculture is the primary activity. Participating farmers are entitled to special consideration from local and state government agencies, and protection from “nuisance” challenges, thus encouraging the continuing use of the land for productive agricultural purposes.

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. Agricultural security areas are created by local municipalities in cooperation with individual landowners who agree to collectively place at least 250 acres in an agricultural security area.

In 1993, North East Township created an Agricultural Security Area. As of October 2021, a total of 331 parcels totaling approximately 8,449 acres have been enrolled.

Clean & Green Program

The Pennsylvania Farmland and Forest Land Assessment Act of 1974, also known as the Clean and Green Act, protects farmland, forestland and open space by allowing for land taxation according to its use value rather than the prevailing market value. The effect of Clean and Green on the overall farmland preservation effort is widespread, as affordable property taxes are essential to maintaining viable farms.

The program has widespread participation, with 9.4 million acres enrolled statewide. The average reduction in fair market assessed value for enrollees is nearly 50 percent, and this provides a great incentive to keep the land undeveloped. The program is voluntary and generally requires a minimum of ten acres remaining in one of three designated use categories – agricultural use, agricultural reserve and forest reserve.

The Erie County Bureau of Assessment administers the Clean & Green program at the county level. Within the North East Area, as of August 2021, a total of 756 tax parcels, having a total of approximately 16,855 acres, are enrolled in the Clean & Green program. The majority of these parcels are located in the Township. The Borough has only 5 parcels, totaling 34 acres that are enrolled in Clean and Green.

Agricultural Conservation Easements

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 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and Erie County to purchase conservation easements from farmers. The long term goal of the program is to permanently preserve farmland. The holder of the easement has the right to prevent development or improvements of the land for purposes other than agricultural production.

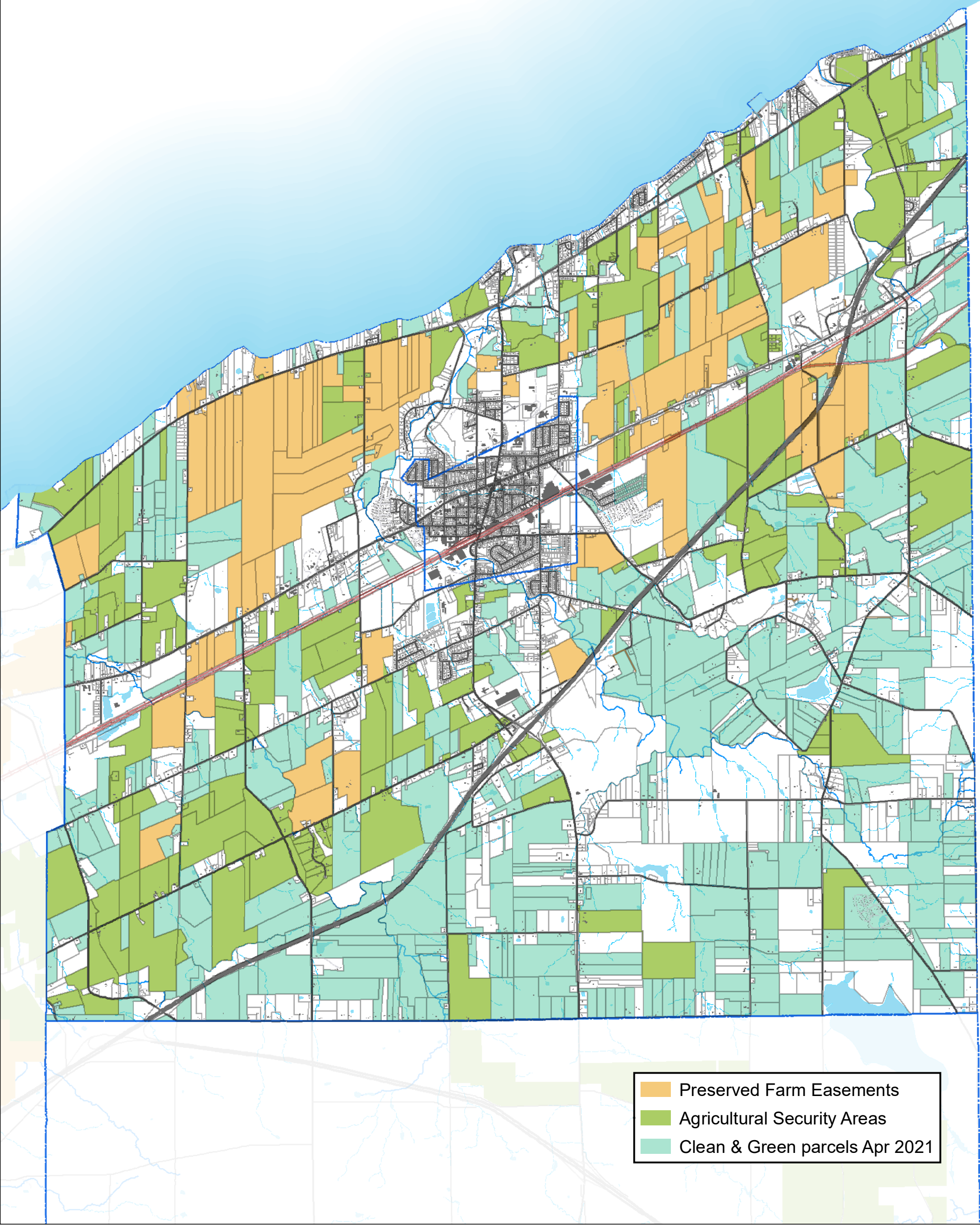
The Erie County Agricultural Land Preservation Program is a competitive program. The County Program accepts applications from interested landowners every other year. In order to be eligible for preservation, farms must be enrolled in the municipality’s agricultural security area (ASA) in addition to meeting other

minimum program eligibility requirements. Farms are ranked and scored against other eligible farm applicants. The highest ranking/scoring farms are selected for preservation based on funding availability.

As of October 2021, approximately 3,246 acres of farmland have been preserved within North East Township.

North East Area

Agricultural Resources



Mineral Resources

The term “mineral resources” refers to raw materials used in the construction and manufacturing industries or in energy production. The known raw materials in the North East Area are sand, gravel and natural gas. There are numerous, conventional gas wells located throughout the Township. However, due to the overlying prime agricultural soils and existing development, the extraction of sand and gravel is not prevalent.

Natural gas extraction, especially from unconventional wells associated with the Marcellus Shale has been a topic of debate in recent years. On the positive side, there are potential economic benefits. On the negative side, there are also environmental impacts from gas wells and the potential for secondary impacts such as increased demand for municipal services.

Unconventional wells are drilled for the production of oil or natural gas from an unconventional formation. An unconventional formation is a geologic formation where energy generally cannot be extracted except by horizontal or vertical wells stimulated by fracking.

To a large extent, the Pennsylvania Oil and Gas Act preempts local regulation of gas drilling and extraction, and puts regulatory authority into the hands of the PA Department of Environmental Protection. The Act preempts local regulations of any kind except those enacted under the Municipalities Planning Code and the Floodplain Management Act. And in those cases, local regulations are preempted where they 1) regulate the same features of oil & gas well operation regulated by the Oil & Gas Act; or 2) accomplish the same purposes as set forth in the Oil & Gas Act.

Based on regional maps depicting the thickness of the Marcellus shale and the Utica shale, Erie County and the North East Area do not appear to be located in a prime location for unconventional natural gas wells related to either of these shale beds. Therefore, within the near future, these wells are not anticipated to become an issue within the North East Area. As of October 2021, there are no unconventional gas wells within Erie County.

The Township’s zoning ordinance includes regulations applicable to mineral extraction, including the excavation of sand, gravel or other solid material from the ground and drilling for natural gas, crude oil, brine or other fluid material. These uses are permitted within all zoning districts, but require conditional use approval.

Renewable Energy Resources

Wind Energy Facilities

Wind energy facilities are a clean and renewable source of energy. However, development proposals for utility-scale facilities can sometimes be controversial.

Approximately a decade ago, Pioneer Green Energy (PGE) pursued development of a wind farm in North East Township, along the Interstate 90 ridgeline. However, residents expressed concerns about turbine noise, shadow flicker, visual and environmental impacts and safety. This led to delays in the project, and in 2015, PGE abandoned its plans when federal tax credits for energy expired.

In recent years, the interest in developing land-based, wind energy facilities appears to have declined. However, there is now growing interest in the potential for offshore wind energy facilities located in Lake Erie. Winds tend to be stronger and more consistent over the lake, and the offshore location would help to mitigate many of the potential conflicts posed by land-based wind projects, such as visual impacts, noise and shadow flicker. However, the concept is polarizing among environmental groups. Some groups are concerned about potential environmental impacts, especially to birds, while other environmental groups are supportive, and feel that the environmental benefits far outweigh the potential negatives.

At the present time, offshore development in Lake Erie has been focused on the Cleveland, Ohio area. Lake Erie Energy Development Corporation's (LEEDCo) Icebreaker Wind Project was fully permitted in December of 2020. However, it still faces some legal challenges before development can begin. The project proposes the construction of six wind turbines, to be located approximately 8 miles northwest of Cleveland. This is a small-scale project intended to demonstrate the safety, economic viability and environmental impacts of offshore wind facilities. If successful, this project could lead to other offshore projects in Lake Erie.

Before offshore wind energy development can become a reality in Pennsylvania, additional studies will need to take place and some regulatory and legal obstacles will need to be addressed. This includes such things as a wind turbine placement favorability analysis, clarification of the submerged land lease structure and improved regulatory permit guidance.

In 2013, North East Township adopted a "Wind Energy Facility Ordinance" to regulate land-based wind energy facilities. However, the North East Area municipalities have no control over the offshore wind energy development in Lake Erie. This development is under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Solar Energy Facilities

Solar energy facilities use sunlight to generate electricity, and are gaining in popularity due to technical advances that are increasing their productivity and decreasing installation costs. They have environmental benefits in that they do not generate carbon dioxide or produce noise or odor; and offer economic benefits, such as employment opportunities, lease payments to landowners, and potential savings accrued by customers of the facilities.

There are two basic categories of solar energy systems, and they are not based on the size of the facility, the number of solar panels, or the amount of energy that is generated. Rather, the two types are based on the purpose and user of the energy. One type primarily serves a single residence or business. These facilities are often, but not always, relatively small scale. The other type is designed for the sale and distribution of energy. These are often large, utility-scale facilities.

Municipalities can regulate solar energy facilities through zoning and/or stand-alone ordinances in order to establish responsible development criteria, and to ensure that the location of these facilities is consistent with the municipality's future land use plans.

The North East Township zoning ordinance defines and regulates solar energy as a "renewable energy source". It is permitted within all zoning districts, but requires conditional use approval. The ordinance specifies that the use may be denied within the R-1 and R-2 zoning districts unless it is compatible with the residential character of the neighborhood. Interest in large, utility-scale solar farms has increased in recent years throughout Erie County. Although the requirement for conditional use approval may be adequate, the Township may desire to strengthen its zoning regulations related to solar energy development.

The North East Borough zoning ordinance also defines and regulates solar energy as a "renewable energy source". It is permitted within all zoning districts, but requires approval by the Zoning Hearing Board as a special exception. The ordinance specifies that the use may be denied within the R-A and R-B zoning districts if it is not compatible with the residential character of the neighborhood. The ordinance does not require special exception approval for roof-mounted solar panels.

Environmental Issues and Concerns

Preservation of Open Space, Farms and Natural Areas

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. Nearly eighty 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. The remaining 4.7% didn't know. This was a slightly higher priority within the Township (80.1%) than within the Borough (78.7%).

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 municipal ordinances. As noted previously, the Erie County Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program enables the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and Erie County to purchase conservation easements from farmers. As of October 2021, the program has preserved approximately 3,246 acres of farmland within North East Township. The Township has been supportive of the program, and this has helped contribute to the program's success.

At the municipal level, the acquisition of lands and/or conservation easements is not always practical due to the high costs involved. However, the use of reasonable and well-designed regulations is a viable option

for preserving open space, farms and natural areas. If regulations are used, care must be taken to ensure that they effectively address the Township's goals, while still being fair to developers and landowners.

Growing Greener: Conservation by Design is an approach that was originally developed by Randall Arendt and Michael Clarke of the National Land 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.

It is recommended that the Township consider the use of *Growing Greener: Conservation by Design* to supplement the preservation efforts of the Erie County Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program. Implementation of this approach will require amendments to the Township's zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances.

Lake Erie Bluff and Shoreline Erosion

The majority of the Lake Erie shoreline in North East Township consists of high bluffs that overlook the lake. Bluff erosion and recession results from wind, waves, runoff from ground water and surface water caused by rain and melting snow, and other natural forces. The erosion can be especially significant during storm events. Although bluff erosion will occur with or without human influences, human activities, including the construction of new homes and other development, can significantly increase the problem. Anytime trees and other vegetation are removed, this can result in the bluff becoming less stable, and can contribute to erosion.

The Pennsylvania Coastal Zone Management Program (CZM) monitors bluff erosion along the entire shoreline in Erie County, including within North East Township. It also provides technical advice and assistance to landowners who own properties affected by bluff and shoreline erosion.

In 1980, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania adopted the Bluff Recession and Setback Act. The intent of this Act is to minimize shoreline erosion and bluff recession. In accordance with the Act, North East Township has adopted and enforces bluff setback regulations that establish minimum bluff setback distances for new developments that are located along the bluff.

Sixteen Mile Creek and Twenty Mile Creek Sedimentation Problems

The waves of Lake Erie do not flow directly toward the shoreline. Instead, they usually strike the shoreline at an angle from west to east. This is due to the prevailing winds which typically blow from southwest to northeast. Because of this, sand and sediment particles are moved eastward along the shore. This is natural process called littoral flow or littoral transport. The sediment material that is moved is called littoral drift.

This sedimentation, or littoral drift, is accumulating at the mouths of both Sixteen Mile Creek and Twenty Mile Creek where they enter Lake Erie. Some dredging has been done at these locations. However, according to the PA DEP, dredging is not a cost-effective, long-term solution. The PA DEP recommends

pursuing CZM grant funding for a planning project to evaluate the problem and to identify potential solutions.

Sixteen Mile Creek Water Quality Impairment

The PA DEP lists Sixteen Mile Creek as an impaired stream. According to the Erie County Natural Heritage Inventory, siltation from residential runoff affects one of the major tributaries to the creek, including the section that flows through North East Borough. While much of the creek supports aquatic life, the lower reaches and one polluting tributary cause the creek to be ranked as an impaired stream as it enters Lake Erie.

Urbanization is the leading cause of surface water impairment in Erie County. This is a broad category that includes runoff from residential development, storm sewers, roads, and other urban uses. When development activities replace forests, fields, and meadows with impervious surfaces, the quantity of runoff increases, and the landscape's capacity to filter pollutants from the runoff is greatly reduced. In addition, the increased rate of water flow can result in increased stream bank erosion and lead to sedimentation in areas where waters slow down.

Water quality impairments are addressed most effectively through watershed wide planning and implementation. There are several best practices that are generally recommended to reduce urban impacts and to improve and protect water quality. These include riparian buffers, low impact development, streambank restoration, reducing impervious surfaces, and the use of appropriate and effective stormwater management facilities. A qualified watershed planner can help to accurately identify problem areas and provide technical guidance on how best to address them. It is noted that the Township's zoning ordinance establishes a 50 foot, riparian buffer setback along streams and creeks, including Sixteen Mile Creek. This should help to address the impairment. However, other efforts may also be needed.

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.

Municipal Ordinances Related to the Protection of Natural Resources

Municipal ordinances, such as floodplain management, stormwater management, zoning, subdivision and land development and official map ordinances can be used to help protect the North East Area's natural resources. These ordinances, as they relate to the protection of natural resources, are reviewed in the following sections.

Floodplain Management Ordinance

North East Borough adopted a Floodplain Management Ordinance on February 3, 2014 (Ordinance No. 877), and North East Township adopted a Floodplain Management Ordinance (Ordinance No. 2017-002) on May 1, 2017. These ordinances regulate construction or development within areas subject to flooding. Their intent, among other things, is to "minimize flood damage in the future", and "to minimize the danger to public health by protecting water supply and natural drainage". The ordinances appear to be comprehensive and up-to-date. No updates or revisions are recommended at this time.

Stormwater Management Ordinance

North East Borough adopted a Stormwater Management Ordinance (Ordinance No. 863) on August 1, 2011, and North East Township adopted a Stormwater Management Ordinance (Ordinance No. 2011-003) on September 6, 2011.

These ordinances are consistent with the Erie County Act 167 Stormwater Management Plan. They help to "manage accelerated runoff and erosion and sedimentation problems close to their source", "preserve the natural drainage systems as much as possible", "maintain existing flows and quality of streams and watercourses", and "preserve and restore the flood-carrying capacity of streams and prevent scour and erosion of stream banks and streambeds".

Both ordinances are based on Erie County's Model Stormwater Management Ordinance. Article VI of the model ordinance includes some optional riparian buffer standards for consideration by municipalities. The Borough ordinance includes these optional standards. The Township ordinance does not. However, as an alternative, the Township has included riparian buffer setback regulations in its zoning ordinance. It is noted, that in the case of the Borough ordinance, the riparian buffer standards are applicable only "Where a regulated activity requiring a permit under PA Code Title 25, Chapter 102 is proposed." Chapter 102 addresses erosion and sedimentation control (E&S) requirements.

Overall, the ordinances appear to be adequate and up-to-date. No updates or revisions are recommended at this time.

Zoning Ordinance

Zoning ordinances provide municipalities with an opportunity to not only protect their natural resources, but to also enable them to be used productively. Through its zoning, the Township has established agricultural zoning districts. The ordinance also provides for the responsible use of natural resources such as forestry, mineral extraction and renewable energy. The ordinance establishes a 50 foot, riparian buffer setback along streams and creeks, including Twelve Mile Creek, Sixteen Mile Creek and Twenty Mile Creek.

As noted previously, there are additional opportunities that the Township may want to consider incorporating into its zoning ordinance. The most notable are *Growing Greener: Conservation by Design* and stronger regulations related to solar energy.

The Borough's zoning places less emphasis on natural resources. The Borough is almost fully built-out, and as a result, natural resource uses such as agriculture, mineral extraction, wind energy and large, scale solar energy developments are less of an issue. The Borough ordinance does include some regulations associated with renewable energy and natural gas production.

Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance

A subdivision and land development ordinance is a useful tool that municipalities may use to help implement their plans. It is recommended that the Township consider the use of *Growing Greener: Conservation by Design* to help preserve open space, farms and natural areas. Subdivisions designed using *Growing Greener* are often referred to as conservation subdivisions, and this design method is not currently provided for in the Township's zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances. If the Township desires to require conservation subdivision design, or even permit it on a voluntary basis, amendments to the Township's zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances will be needed.

Official Map Ordinance

An "official map" is a combined map and ordinance that can be used to help implement the goals of this comprehensive plan. An official map shows the locations of planned future public lands and facilities such as transportation, recreational parks and trails, and open space. A more specific application that may be worth consideration would be to identify and target flood prone areas or upstream areas that substantially impact flooding within the Borough. The official map expresses the municipality's interest in acquiring these lands for public purposes sometime in the future. At the present time, neither of the North East Area municipalities have an adopted, official map ordinance.

Recommendations and Observations

The following recommendations and observations are made concerning natural resources:

- The Erie County Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program enables the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and Erie County to purchase conservation easements from farmers. The Township has been supportive of the program, and this has helped contribute to the program's success. It is recommended that the Township continue to support the program in order to help preserve its farms and rural character.
- The Township should encourage its farm landowners to enroll in the North East Township Agricultural Security Area, and to consider applying for the Erie County Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program.
- It is recommended that the Township consider the use of *Growing Greener: Conservation by Design* to supplement the preservation efforts of the Erie County Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program. Subdivisions designed using *Growing Greener* are often referred to as conservation subdivisions. If the Township desires to require conservation subdivision design,

or even permit it on a voluntary basis, amendments to the Township's zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances will be needed.

- The North East Township zoning ordinance defines and regulates solar energy as a “renewable energy source”. It is permitted within all zoning districts, but requires conditional use approval. The ordinance specifies that the use may be denied within the R-1 and R-2 zoning districts unless it is compatible with the residential character of the neighborhood. Interest in large, utility-scale solar farms has increased in recent years throughout Erie County. Although the requirement for conditional use approval may be adequate, the Township may desire to strengthen its zoning regulations related to solar energy development.
- Sedimentation, otherwise known as littoral drift, is accumulating at the mouths of both Sixteen Mile Creek and Twenty Mile Creek where they enter Lake Erie. Some dredging has been done at these locations. However, according to the PA DEP, dredging is not a cost-effective, long-term solution. The PA DEP recommends pursuing CZM grant funding for a planning project to evaluate the problem and to identify potential solutions.
- The PA DEP lists Sixteen Mile Creek as an impaired stream. Water quality impairments are addressed most effectively through watershed wide planning and implementation. There are several best practices that are generally recommended to reduce urban impacts and to improve and protect water quality. These include riparian buffers, low impact development, streambank restoration, reducing impervious surfaces and use of appropriate and effective stormwater management facilities. A qualified watershed planner can help to accurately identify problem areas and provide technical guidance on how best to address them. It is noted that the Township's zoning ordinance establishes a 50 foot, riparian buffer setback along streams and creeks, including Sixteen Mile Creek. This should help to address the impairment. However, other efforts may also be needed.
- North East Borough adopted a Floodplain Management Ordinance in 2014, and North East Township adopted a Floodplain Management Ordinance in 2017. The ordinances appear to be comprehensive and up-to-date. No updates or revisions are recommended at this time.
- Both North East Area municipalities adopted Stormwater Management Ordinances in 2011. The ordinances appear to be comprehensive and up-to-date. No updates or revisions are recommended at this time.

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Historic & Cultural Resources

When choosing a place to live, people look for more than just access to employment opportunities. Quality of life is a key consideration. Many people desire to live in interesting places that offer unique and diverse cultural experiences.

The North East Area community values and appreciates its 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 section discusses some of the Area's historic and cultural resources, and offers some recommendations for the community's consideration.

North East Historical District

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 in 1990, and the listing opens up some possible grant funding opportunities. 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.

Properties Listed or Eligible for National Historic Register

Short's Hotel, also known as the Palace Hotel, is located at 90 S. Pearl Street, and was listed on the National Historic Register in 1983. It is currently the only listed property that is located in the North East Area. However, the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway Station, located on Wall Street, has received a Determination of Eligibility (DOE) for the National Register. The property includes a railroad station which is in good condition, and which currently serves as the Lake Shore Railway Historical Society Museum, as well as a freight house that is in poor condition and in need of rehabilitation. In 2015, Kidder Wachter Architecture & Design prepared a Building Assessment and Renovation Plan for the freight house. The desire is to renovate the structure for use by the museum as an exhibit and storage facility.

In 2014, Preservation Erie retained Wise Preservation Planning, LLC to provide a survey of historic buildings in Erie County. Based on the architectural significance and integrity of their exteriors, 29 North East Area properties were identified as being potentially eligible for the National Register. Of these, 22 are located in the Borough and seven are located in the Township.

The survey also identified numerous properties in the North East Area that are historically important due to their architectural significance and integrity. While these properties do not appear to meet National Register criteria for architecture, they are still considered to be among the more historically important buildings in Erie County.

The results of the historic buildings survey are available online at <http://www.eriebuildings.info/background.php>, and the associated project report is available at <http://www.eriebuildings.info/pdf/survey-report2015.pdf>.

North East Area Museums

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 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".

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

Downtown Revitalization Efforts

As part of the public survey, respondents were asked how much priority should be given to improving the downtown area (supporting businesses, encouraging historic preservation, building rehabilitation and maintenance, streetscape, arts, pedestrian amenities, addressing the flooding issues, etc.) during the next 5 years. Over ninety percent (90.5%) responded that it should be either a high (57%) or moderate (33.5%) priority, while only 6.1% rated it as a low priority. The remaining 3.4% didn't know.

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.
- 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. These organizations are also working to create 4’ by 6’ murals for display in empty storefronts and other appropriate locations.

Arts and Culture

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. Many of these are discussed in other sections of this report, including events like the Cherry Festival and WineFest which celebrate the Area’s agricultural heritage and resources. Gibson Park and Heard Memorial Park host concerts and other cultural events. The Downtown Historic District is a source of historic and cultural pride. Murals painted on the sides of buildings celebrate the cultural history of the North East Area.

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/>.

Public Awareness Efforts and Opportunities

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 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.

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 another mural at the Route 89 underpass, and fundraising efforts are in progress. This project offers 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 the North East Area and the Borough's historic district. 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>.

Wine Country Historic District

Not all of the North East Area's historical and cultural resources are located in the Borough. The Township also has many important cultural resources, and perhaps the most obvious relate to its connection to agriculture, and specifically to the wine and grape industries.

In 2014, Preservation Erie retained Wise Preservation Planning, LLC to provide a Historic Resource Study for Erie County. Although the study focused primarily on urban areas, it did note the potential for a "Wine Country" historic district. According to Wise, the district could potentially stretch from Harborcreek Township to the New York border (although it could cross state lines). It would be located mainly between the lake shore and I-90, and North East would be at its center.

According to Preservation Erie, a National Register listing could consist of scattered, related buildings, such as some of the older wineries, barns, etc. Another possible option for consideration would be to expand the focus of the district beyond just the wine industry. For example, a "Concord Grape Heritage Area" might also include fruit stands, Welch's Foods, Inc., and other related historical resources.

Century & Bicentennial Farm Program

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture recognizes Pennsylvania families who have been farming the same land for 100 and 200 years through the Century and Bicentennial farm programs. These programs emphasize the importance of our economic and rural heritage and traditions. More information about these programs is available online at

https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Plants_Land_Water/farmland/cbfp/Pages/default.aspx.

Historic District Ordinances and Regulations

At the present time, neither the Borough nor the Township have adopted historic district ordinances or regulations. Efforts to preserve historic buildings have been encouraged, but have been on a voluntary basis.

In the absence of historic district ordinances or applicable zoning regulations, historic buildings and properties are not protected. These ordinances and/or regulations can help to prevent inappropriate building alterations or new construction that would substantially or negatively affect the community's cultural and historic character. Ordinances that protect historical properties can be in the form of a zoning overlay district, local historic district ordinance, or other municipal code provisions such as demolition delay ordinances, stronger code enforcement and property maintenance provisions, and/or conditional use permit processes.

Recommendations and Observations

The following recommendations and observations are made concerning historic resources:

- Property owners of historically important and/or architecturally significant buildings should be encouraged to maintain the historic appearance and integrity of these buildings.
- The Borough should consider protecting its downtown historic district by adopting historic district land use regulations with design standards to ensure that future building renovations and/or new construction will be compatible with the historic character of the district.
- The Borough should continue to work with, support and encourage the efforts of Downtown North East, Inc. (DNE) and/or other non-profits and community organizations to provide economic incentives for historically appropriate building façade improvements, especially within the downtown historic district.
- The Borough should continue to work with, support and encourage the efforts of DNE, Sustain North East and/or other non-profits and community organizations to acquire, renovate and preserve historic buildings and other historical and cultural resources. Renovations should be historically appropriate to the greatest degree practicable. Care should be taken to ensure that any transition of ownership is to a responsible, civic-minded individual or entity. Within the downtown area, an effort should be made to promote the use and occupancy of historic storefronts by economically viable businesses.
- The Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway Station, located on Wall Street, 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.
- Property owners of buildings that are potentially eligible for the National Register should be encouraged to pursue nominations to the National Register. Property owners may contact the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) for more information.
- The Historic US Route 20 Association offers educational programs to 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 small towns. The North East Area should pursue potential partnerships and projects with the Association. 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.
- In 2017 Erie County adopted the Erie County Cultural Heritage Plan. The Township should cooperate with the County on future implementation efforts associated with that plan. That may include such things as helping the County to identify priority historic assets, and assisting with public awareness and outreach. The Erie County Cultural Heritage Plan is available online at <https://www.eriecountypa.gov/county-services/county-offices/planning-department/regional-planning/planning-documents/erieculturalheritageplan.aspx>.

Economic Development

Economic Development for Small Towns and Rural Communities

The North East Area is not alone in its struggle to attract and retain local businesses. Many small, rural municipalities face similar problems. Small population numbers limit the size of the customer base available to support local businesses, and in some cases lower than average median income levels further complicate the problem by limiting the disposable income and purchasing power of that customer base. To make matters worse, these municipalities often have limited resources available to implement robust business attraction and retention programs.

Although economic development strategies and initiatives are often most effectively addressed with a regional approach, there are some things that can be done at the local level to support and promote economic development. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) makes several planning tools and publications available online, including *Framework for Creating a Smart Growth Economic Development Strategy: A tool for Small Cities and Towns* (https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-01/documents/small_town_econ_dev_tool_010516.pdf).

The EPA advocates a “place-based” approach to economic development that is based on the fundamental concepts of “supporting businesses”, “supporting workers” and “supporting quality of life”. Attention to all three of these components provides for an effective, well-balanced, and holistic approach to economic development.

The North East Area has numerous assets that it can build upon as part of an economic development strategy. These assets give it an economic advantage over other small communities. It has abundant water available from Lake Erie, a strong agricultural and viniculture industry, and a beautiful, historic downtown business district. It also has a strong, K-12 public school system, an active Chamber of Commerce, Downtown North East, Inc., the North East Community Foundation, and numerous community groups, all interested in contributing to the economic success of the community.

The following sections present a basic overview of some of the North East Area’s economic resources and opportunities, as well as some of its challenges.

The Core Components of an Economic Development Strategy

Three core components of an economic development strategy are business development, workforce development and community development, or as the EPA refers to them, “supporting businesses”, “supporting workers” and “supporting quality of life”.

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, encouraging local entrepreneurs to start new businesses, and helping existing businesses to grow can often be even more rewarding to 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 a strong agricultural base, a beautiful historic business district, energetic and engaged community organizations, and other assets to build upon.

Work Force Development

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 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.

Community Development

Community development is an often overlooked, yet critical component of an effective economic development strategy. Quality of life considerations are important to both residents and businesses. When individuals and families choose where to live, they consider quality of life. Likewise, when businesses decide to locate or expand within a community, they also consider quality of life factors. A thriving downtown business district, a variety of housing options, access to restaurants and shopping, a variety of recreational options, parks and green space, transportation options including well-maintained roads, sidewalks and bicycle paths, a quality school system and other factors all contribute to a good quality of life, and a stronger and more desirable community.

Economic Plans, Studies and Initiatives

There have been some relevant plans, studies and initiatives in recent years that provide some insight and recommendations related to economic development in the North East Area. These are summarized in the following section.

North East Area Public Survey, 2021

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 3.9% didn't know.

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.

Downtown Revitalization Plan

The *Downtown North East Revitalization Plan* was prepared in 2019 by Downtown North East, Inc., 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 plan also provides numerous recommendations. It 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”.

The plan’s recommendations include the following:

- Acquire site control of key underutilized or vacant buildings, or buildings that are in dire need of significant upgrading.
- Retain architectural and contractor services to evaluate buildings, provide cost estimates, draw renovation plans, and assist with acquiring building and other permits.
- Acquire financing and/or grants to renovate these buildings and bring them up to code.
- Recruit people to take ownership of these buildings.
- Mentor and help new owners finance the acquisition of these buildings.
- Identify private investors to assist with these efforts.
- Create a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) to accept funds and reuse them for future projects.
- Work with ECGRA on the North East Community Capital Fund to assist with this effort.
- Work with the ECF to acquire blight funds for this effort.
- Provide access to upper floors to enable senior/veteran housing and or ADA access to offices.
- Maintain a list of potential new building owners and tenants.
- Acquire information on current sale/lease prices and all costs associated with building ownership.
- Meet with local funding agencies and private companies to garner their financial and technical support.

- Pursue Low Income Housing Tax Credits and Historic Preservation Tax Credits for any housing projects on upper floors.
- Pursue assistance from the Federal Home Loan Bank and the PA Housing Finance Agency, as appropriate.

Sustain North East Initiative

Sustain North East is a partnership that includes North East Borough, North East Township, the North East Area Chamber of Commerce, Downtown North East (DNE) and the North East Community Foundation.

The Sustain North East Initiative, announced in 2019, focuses on five key areas, and each of these areas contribute to economic development in a meaningful way. One of these focus areas was Mercyhurst North East Campus. At the time, Mercyhurst had announced plans to close its campus, and there were concerns about the future of the campus property and the impact of the closure on the North East community. Since that time, Blue Ocean Investments, which owns the S.P.I.R.E. Institute has expressed an interest in the campus property, and it is anticipated that ownership will be transferred in the near future.

The remaining four focus areas are as follows:

1. Downtown Revitalization, including streetscape improvements and building renovations.
2. Gateway Improvements at the Interstate 90 interchanges with U.S. Route 20 and State Route 89, the Route 89 underpass and other strategic locations.
3. Community Recreation Improvements, including improvements to Freeport Beach/Halli Reid Park and Heard Park.
4. Baker Creek flood mitigation efforts, and the need to address high flood insurance rates for businesses and property owners in downtown North East.

North East Smart Transportation Study

In April of 2012, Whitman, Requart & Associates, LLP (WR&A,) was retained by North East Borough to evaluate traffic and safety issues in the North East Area. The resulting study, *The North East Smart Transportation Initiative* was completed in 2014.

The primary focus of the study was to evaluate improvements to traffic flow and safety for all modes of travel within the study area while enhancing the quality of life for residents and strengthening the economic vitality of North East Borough and North East Township.

There is a strong connection between economics and transportation. Economic conditions influence transportation needs, and the availability of transportation infrastructure is a strong influencing factor on the type and location of development. Strategic transportation improvements can contribute to economic revitalization and development.

Some of the study's recommendations include identifying strategies to revitalize the downtown area, including pedestrian and streetscape improvements and a master plan for Gibson Park; improving wayfinding signs to bring people into the downtown area and to provide effective links to other area

attractions; and the evaluation of multimodal access related to traffic, parking and pedestrian access during festivals and special events.

Competitive Realities within Erie County

In January 2019, the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership (ERCGP) retained Garner Economics, LLC to craft *A Competitive Realities Report and Target Industry Strategy for Erie County, Pennsylvania* in order to help it focus its economic development efforts. This report is available online, and provides a strategy that will help Erie County attract and retain job creating businesses by leveraging the region's strengths and assets (https://www.eriepa.com/uploads/resources/618475_erie-final-tis-report-05142019.pdf).

The report identifies “target business sectors” that are recommended for the county to pursue, including life sciences, high value-added manufacturing, food & beverage processing/agriculture, high-value business services, tech/gaming/digital, and year-round experiential recreation (hospitality/quality of place). Page 70 of the report provides a summarized list of specific business types within each target sector.

According to Garner Economics, “The availability of industrial and office space and sites may be Erie’s most significant Achilles’ heel. There are few shovel-ready sites in excess of 50 acres, which has a direct impact on attracting large distribution centers and certain types of manufacturing facilities. There are limited office park developments that will allow for Class A office space development. The mantra of “no product—no project” is being realized in Erie until there is more investment in product.” “This limited inventory of available sites and quality buildings suitable for the targeted industries will cause Erie to be passed over on projects that need options on available, quality sites with the necessary infrastructure in place and under control (for sale or under option).”

The findings and recommendations provided by this report point to some potential opportunities for the North East Area to pursue. Much of the area along the Route 20 corridor and near the Route 20 and Route 89 interchanges with Interstate 90 are sparsely developed, so large parcels can potentially be made available for future development. Remaining needs include the availability of supporting infrastructure such as public water and sewer, supportive zoning, and the willingness of landowners to make their lands available for future development.

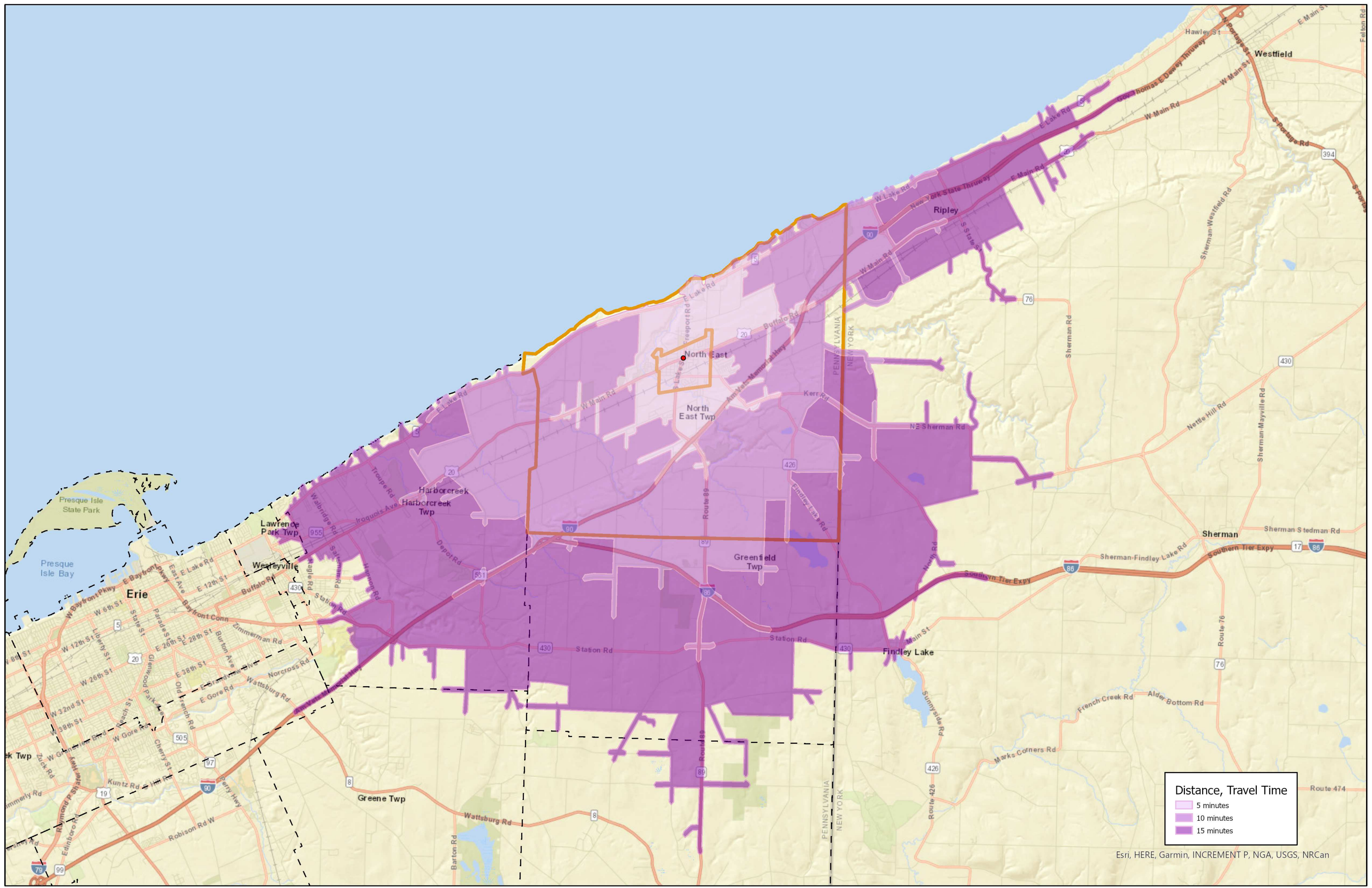
Trade Area Population

The Erie County Data Center provided information related to the North East Area's trade area population. This included an estimate of the trade area population, as well as mapping in terms of travel time. These population numbers are essential to determining the viability of various types of commercial retail. The intersection of U.S. Route 20 and State Route 89 was selected as the center point for the analysis. Based on available data, approximate population density within 5 minute, 10 minute and 15 minute drive times from that intersection is as follows:

Driving Time in Minutes	Approximate Population
0-5 minutes	10,000
5-10 minutes	15,000
10-15 minutes	30,000

The rural characteristics of the North East Area are reflected in the population numbers. Although the trade area within a 15 minute drive extends well into Harborcreek Township, Greenfield Township and Chautauqua County, the population is inadequate to support a regional shopping center, which would typically require a population of 150,000 or more within a 20 minute drive.

The population numbers do, however, appear to be adequate to support some types of smaller, neighborhood style centers. The requirements for these smaller centers vary depending on the specific characteristics of the development. However, they generally require between 3 and 15 acres, and a trade area population of between 3,000 and 40,000 people within an approximate 5 to 10 minute drive.



Distance, Travel Time

- 5 minutes
- 10 minutes
- 15 minutes

Economic Assets and Opportunities

Agriculture and Food Processing

Agriculture and the food processing industries are important segments of the North East Area economy. The combination of soil types, topography, and the moderating effect of Lake Erie help the area excel at growing grapes, cherries and other fruits that are prone to frost damage.

Welch's Food, Inc. is a co-op owned by farming families in the North East Area and across the country. It is one of the area's top employers, and utilizes the area's Concord and Niagara grapes to produce juices, fruit spreads and snacks.

The North East Area is also a tourist destination for wine lovers. Lake Erie Wine Country is a group of more than 20 wineries that promotes the area's wineries through tours, tastings and special events. More information is available on its website <https://www.lakeeriewinecountry.org>.

In addition to Welch's, other food processors located in the area include Better Baked Foods, LLC, which provides high-quality, nutritionally sound, frozen food products; and Bay Valley Foods which is a leading supplier of shelf stable foods such as pickles, salad dressings, BBQ sauces, and numerous other products.

Local Businesses and Industries

As noted previously, the North East Area excels in agriculture. However, agriculture is not the only industry in the North East Area. The North East Area is fortunate to have numerous local businesses and industries that provide employment opportunities and help to create a stronger, and more stable economic base.

Other significant local businesses include, but are not limited to Ridg-U-Rack, the Electric Material Company (TEMCO), WavePoint Logistics, Barnhart Transportation, and Sanders Market. In addition to these, there are numerous small businesses, all of which are important to the Area's economy.

Downtown Business District

The North East Area values its historic downtown business district, and recognizes its importance, not only to the area's economy, but also to the quality of life of its residents. 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, and the many small businesses provide employment, shopping and dining opportunities for residents. As noted throughout this report, there have been several plans and projects devoted to the revitalization of the downtown business district. The Borough, Downtown North East (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.

Downtown North East, Inc.

Downtown North East, Inc. (DNE) was established in 2009 and received 501c3 non-profit status in 2010. Its mission is "To stimulate economic growth and vitality; continually improve the aesthetics of our historic downtown and its many entranceways; enhance and preserve the uniqueness of Gibson Park; preserve our agriculturally-driven heritage; capitalize on our local cultural offerings, talents and recreational opportunities; promote and expand beautification initiatives; foster the ever-growing community

partnerships; and enhance our unique quality of life; while fostering a vibrant and prosperous downtown North East.”

DNE has numerous accomplishments. Perhaps the most notable was the acquisition and renovation of 17 West Main Street, a former bank building and Mercyhurst NE classroom building. About \$350,000 was invested to upgrade all electrical, plumbing, and HVAC systems; replace the roof and west wall; preserve the wood floor; add a commercial kitchen; and convert the vault into a dining area. A local restaurant opened in the west portion of the building, and DNE started the Grape Country Marketplace in the east portion. Later, a local business purchased the building from DNE, and started a new restaurant and tavern utilizing the entire facility. DNE moved the Marketplace to 15 West Main Street and continued operations featuring local artists and artisans. DNE eventually sold the Marketplace, and building is currently being used as a meadery. Loans from First Niagara Bank and Erie County Redevelopment Authority assisted with this effort, in addition to several local grants and a lot of time, effort and hard work.

DNE has also facilitated a façade improvement program in the downtown area. Through the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA)’s Mission Main Street grant program and matching grants from the North East Community Foundation, DNE has provided 36 façade grants to 27 different businesses and non-profit organizations in the downtown over the past eight years. This has helped these businesses and organizations with façade and energy-related improvements to their buildings, including new windows, doors, signage, roofs, painting, gutters, ADA ramps, etc.

DNE also worked to facilitate the installation of an art mural on the west wall of 17 West Main Street, window replacements on the second floor of the Cultural Center, and improvements to Gibson Park.

North East Area Chamber of Commerce

The mission of the North East Area Chamber of Commerce is to serve the community by providing economic, educational and legislative information and assistance in order to maintain and enhance the community’s uniqueness and quality of life. It has three, primary areas of focus, (1) service to its members, (2) community building, and (3) tourism promotion.

As a membership based business organization, the Chamber provides valuable networking opportunities and other services to its membership. The Chamber is the primary tourism promotion organization in North East. It works to position North East as a destination for wine and agricultural goods, recreational pursuits, shopping, dining, and historical landmarks.

The Chamber hosts the annual Wine Country Harvest Festival, known locally as WineFest. This 3-day festival attracts upwards of 15,000 residents and visitors each year for a celebration of music, art and the fruits of the vine.

North East Community Foundation

The mission of The North East Community Foundation (NECF) is “to assist a diverse group of donors in improving the quality of life in and around North East, Pennsylvania”. The NECF is affiliated with the Erie Community Foundation, and provides funding to charitable organizations for projects which benefit the North East community. It prefers funding requests for specific, tangible items or projects in which the funds provided by the Foundation will have a substantive impact.

Ehrenfeld Companies

For decades, Mercyhurst University’s North East campus has been a significant economic, educational and cultural asset to the North East Area and the surrounding region. The 84 acre campus was formerly St. Mary’s Seminary. In August of 2019, University officials announced the intent to consolidate its educational programs to its Erie campus. This would effectively close 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, the University was able to find a buyer for the campus property, and the future outlook is very promising.

On January 26, 2022 Mercyhurst University announced the sale of the campus property to Ehrenfeld Companies (eCos), led by Jonathan Ehrenfeld, the founder and CEO of Blue Ocean, a real estate investment and asset management firm based in Baltimore, Maryland.

At this time, details about the property’s future are not yet available. However, in recent years the eCos group has been expanding its portfolio in the service industry, hospitality, and athletic development space. In 2019, it acquired the SPIRE Institute & Academy in Geneva, Ohio, which is an elite sports boarding school and Olympic training facility. More recently, the group added the Panther Performance Center in Hampstead, Maryland.

Water Supply and Capacity

One of the advantages of being located on the south shore of Lake Erie is the availability of an abundant water supply. Currently, droughts and shortages of water supply have been a concern in other regions of the United States. This is adversely impacting agriculture, industry and residents within those regions.

The North East Area’s water system, which is under the control of the North East Borough Water Authority, has made substantial investments over the past decade, including the installation of a 5-mile long pipeline to draw water from Lake Erie. As a result, approximately 92% of the area’s drinking water comes from Lake Erie, and there is adequate capacity for new growth and development in the area.

Marketing and promotion of the North East Area’s water supply capacity may help to attract water intensive industries to the area.

Erie County Community College

The mission of the Erie County Community College of PA is “to provide increased access to higher education for the people of Erie County, Pennsylvania, to assist them in achieving their educational goals, to provide a competent workforce for area employers and to increase both the baccalaureate and associate degree holders in Erie County”.

The College provides Erie County residents affordable education through increased access to vital workforce and academic education options. These options include a combination of two-year degree programs, post-secondary career certificates and technical courses that prepare graduates to meet the critical needs of this region’s workforce and success in a complex global society.

More information about the College is available online, at <https://www.ecccpa.org>

Challenges to Economic Development

All communities face challenges, and the North East Area is no exception. Some of the challenges faced by the community include the flooding of Baker Creek, a limited inventory of suitable and available development sites, and the age and physical characteristics of commercial buildings in the downtown area.

Baker Creek Flooding

The North East Borough downtown area suffers from the recurring flooding of Baker Creek. This 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 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. These issues present a challenge to business development in the flood prone areas. See the natural resources section of this report for additional information related to Baker Creek flooding.

Limited Inventory of Adequate Sites Available for Development

Most of the commercially and industrially zoned land in the North East Area that is undeveloped is located in the Township, and there appears to be an ample supply of vacant land available. However, after considering site characteristics, such as topography, site accessibility, supporting transportation infrastructure, and the availability of water and sewer, much of the available land does not appear to be ideally suited for meeting the needs and requirements of businesses and developers.

In its report, *A Competitive Realities Report and Target Industry Strategy for Erie County, Pennsylvania*, Garner Economics, LLC identifies a significant need for development sites of at least 50 acres. The North East Area does not appear to currently have any sites of this size that are suitable and available.

There are some smaller, undeveloped parcels, including a few in the 15 to 50 acre range. However, most of these sites appear to have some drawbacks such as a lack of public water and/or sewer, less than ideal topography, limited or inadequate site access, locational disadvantages or other issues that limit their desirability. Additionally, the most desirable sites may not always be available for sale by current landowners.

If the North East Area desires to pursue any of the targeted industries identified by Garner Economics, the community will need to consider zoning revisions and infrastructure upgrades to help encourage and attract these types of regional-scale economic development. It may also be advantageous to create partnerships with area economic development agencies to help secure and market suitable properties.

Age-Related Issues of Downtown Buildings

The historical, downtown business district is a significant asset to the North East Area. However, that doesn't mean that it comes without challenges. The historical buildings add a special character and charm, but also have some functional issues that are common with buildings of this age. These challenges include ADA accessibility, energy efficiency and inadequate second floor access. Renovations and remodeling projects are often complicated by building codes that are not designed to accommodate the physical characteristics of these older structures.

Providing for adequate second floor access to these buildings would permit upper floors to be used as apartments, offices or other business uses. This would provide additional revenue opportunities for building owners, and would make building renovations more viable. Downtown North East retained Bostwick Design Group to evaluate the potential of adding an exterior elevator and elevated walkway to the rear of buildings located along East Main Street and South Lake Street. The project cost was estimated at approximately \$1 million.

Energy efficiency is also a common challenge for older buildings. 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.

Recommendations and Observations

The following recommendations and observations are made concerning economic development:

- Business attraction efforts are often most successful when tailored to business sectors aligned with a community's strengths and assets. The North East Area has a strong agricultural base, a beautiful historic business district, and other assets to build upon.
- Although business attraction efforts are important, encouraging local entrepreneurs to start new businesses, and helping existing businesses to grow can often be even more rewarding to 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.
- When businesses decide to locate or expand within a community, they typically consider quality of life factors. A thriving downtown business district, a variety of housing options, access to restaurants and shopping, a variety of recreational options, parks and green space, transportation options including well-maintained roads, sidewalks and bicycle paths, a quality school system and other factors all contribute to a good quality of life, and a stronger and more desirable community. This comprehensive planning process is an opportunity for the North East Area to evaluate and

strengthen quality of life factors that will help the Area to attract and retain residents and businesses.

- There have been some relevant plans, studies and initiatives in recent years that provide some insight and recommendations related to economic development in the North East Area. This comprehensive planning process has an opportunity to learn from these plans and their recommendations.
- The *Downtown North East Revitalization Plan* provides numerous recommendations. It 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”.
- If the North East Area desires to pursue any of the targeted industries identified by Garner Economics, the community will need to consider zoning revisions and infrastructure upgrades to help encourage and attract these types of regional-scale economic development. It may also be advantageous to create partnerships with area economic development agencies to help secure and market suitable properties.

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Land Use

Generally, land use evolves over time as a community grows and changes. Numerous factors can impact land use, including economic activity, population growth and demographics, transportation facilities and environmental resources. Careful land use planning is necessary in order to promote compatible land use patterns and discourage the haphazard use of land. Many of the issues and considerations that affect land use, including housing needs, transportation, natural resources, and the availability of water and sewer, have been discussed in previous sections of this report.

Existing Land Uses

An important first step to land use planning is to document and study existing land uses. This information helps with the establishment of land use districts that will serve as a guide to future development. The North East Area Existing Land Use Map documents existing land uses within the North East Area. It also includes an overlay of the FEMA flood hazard areas, since they are an important consideration for land use planning.

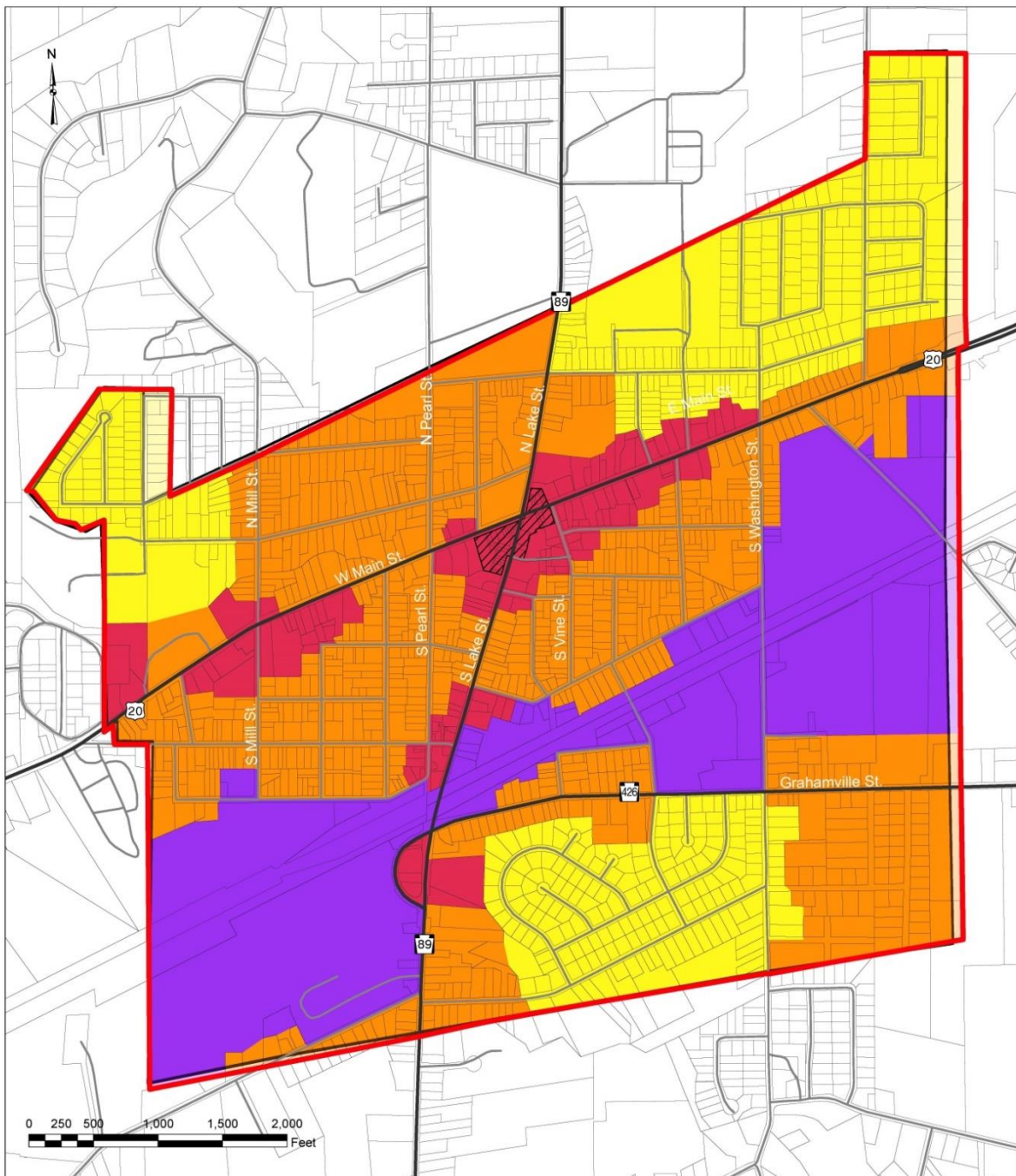
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Municipal Zoning Districts

Zoning Districts and Acreages

The North East Area has a total of 10 zoning districts. The Borough has four districts, and the Township has six districts. The zoning districts, along with their acreages, are shown on the chart below. For purposes of this analysis, these districts are grouped, based on their characteristics and intended purposes, into five general categories.

North East Area Zoning Districts & Acreages			
North East Borough			
Code	District Name	Acre	Percentage
R-A	Single Family Residential	218.74	26.29%
R-B	Multiple Family Residential	328.38	39.47%
C-1	Commercial	67.81	8.15%
M-1	Industrial	216.95	26.08%
Total Borough		831.88	
North East Township			
Code	District Name	Acre	Percentage
A-1	Preservation	2,484.04	9.15%
A-2	Agricultural	8,051.13	29.66%
R-1	Rural Residential	12,234.27	45.08%
R-2	Suburban Residential	2,787.90	10.27%
B-1	Commercial	554.72	2.04%
B-2	Industrial	1,029.60	3.79%
Total Township		27,141.66	
North East Area			
General District Categories		Acre	Percentage
Agriculture		10,535.17	37.66%
Low Density Residential		12,453.01	44.52%
Medium and High Density Residential		3,116.28	11.14%
Commercial		622.53	2.23%
Industrial		1,246.55	4.46%
Total North East Area		27,973.54	



Borough Zoning

- C-1
- M-1
- R-A
- R-B
- Parking Overlay

North East Borough Detail Zoning Districts

ZONING

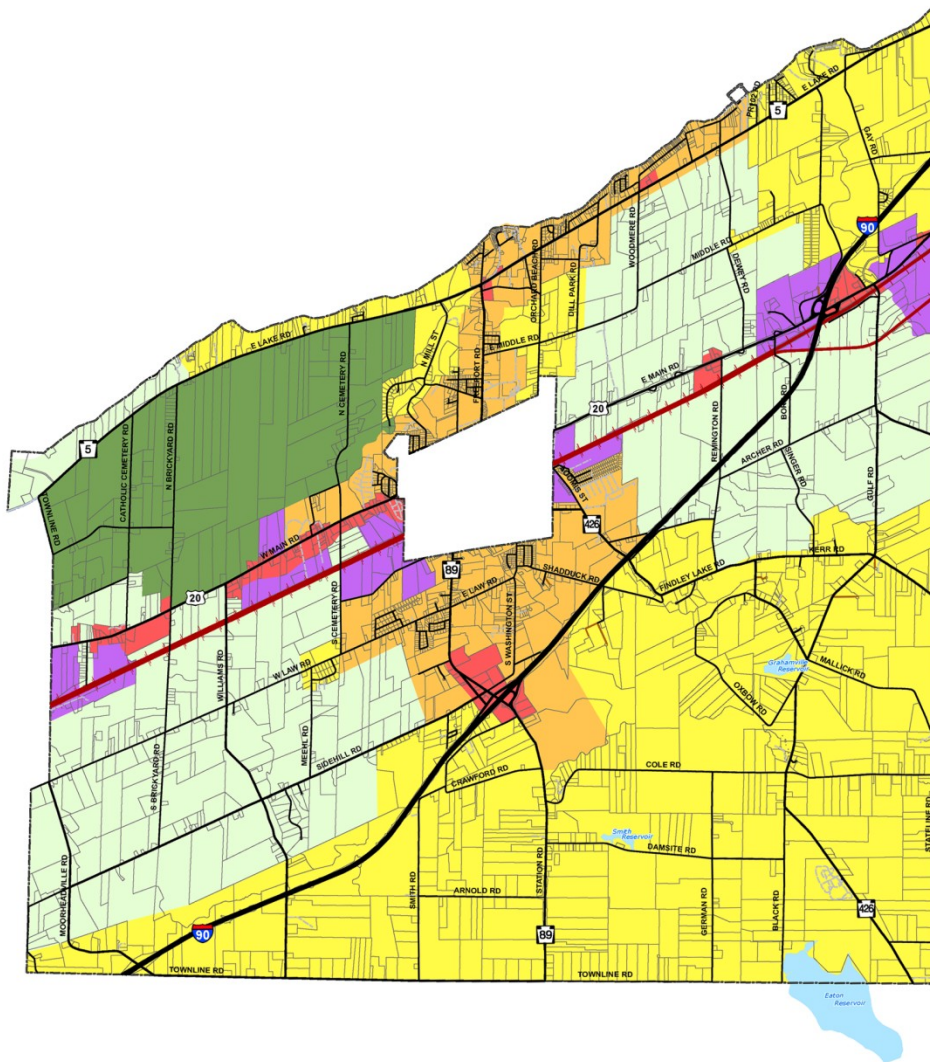
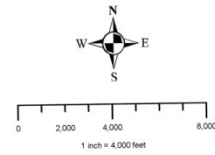
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Township of North East

North East Township Zoning Map

Zoning Districts

- A-1 Agricultural Preservation
- A-2 Agricultural
- B-1 Commercial
- B-2 Industrial
- R-1 Rural Residential
- R-2 Suburban Residential



Agricultural Zoning Districts

Farms are important to the North East Area economy, and also help to create and retain the rural character that many North East Area residents love. As discussed in the natural resources section of this report, the North East Area has a unique microclimate, which is particularly well-suited for growing grapes, cherries and other fruits and vegetables. As a result, grape vineyards and fruit orchards are heavily concentrated in this area. North East is well-known for its robust viniculture industry, which includes the production of wines, jellies and juices.

The North East Township Zoning Ordinance permits agriculture “by right” in all zoning districts. However, it has two zoning districts that are designated primarily for agricultural use. These are the A-1, Preservation and A-2, Agricultural districts. Combined, these districts include approximately 38.8% of the Township’s total land area. They allow for a mix of agriculture, low-density residential and other compatible land uses. Other uses of natural resources, such as mineral extraction and renewable energy are also permitted, but require conditional use approval.

Residential Zoning Districts

The Borough and Township both allow for a wide variety of residential uses. Each municipality has two residential zoning districts, including one district that is primarily for low-density residential use, and a second district that permits higher densities and a wider variety of housing types.

The Borough’s residential zoning districts include the R-A, Single Family Residential, and the R-B, Multiple Family Residential districts. These districts comprise approximately 26.3% and 39.5% of the Borough’s land area, respectively. As its name implies, the R-A district is established to support single-family residential land use. The R-B district provides for a wider variety of uses, including multiple family dwellings. Density within the R-B district is limited to a maximum of 16 dwelling units per acre for multiple-family dwellings, and six dwelling units per acre for single-family detached dwellings.

The Township also has two residential zoning districts. This includes the R-1 Rural Residential district, which comprises approximately 45.1% of the Township’s land area, and the R-2 Suburban Residential district, which comprises approximately 10.3%. According to the Township’s zoning ordinance, the intended purpose of the R-1 district is to “offer a midpoint range between the residentially diversified suburban district and the specialized agricultural districts.” This district is supportive of agriculture, but also permits single-family and two-family dwellings. The Township’s R-2 district is a much smaller district in terms of land area, and its area is largely influenced by the availability of public water and sewer, which are often needed to support more intensive types of development. This district permits multiple family dwellings “by right” and mobile home parks by conditional use. Density within the R-2 district is limited to a maximum of 8 dwelling units per acre for multiple-family dwellings, and three dwelling units per acre for single-family dwellings.

Commercial and Industrial Zoning Districts

Both municipalities have districts zoned to permit commercial and industrial uses. The Township's zoning includes the B-1, Commercial district (2% of its land area) and the B-2, Industrial district (3.8% of its land area). The Borough's ordinance includes a C-1, Commercial district, and a M-1, Industrial district, which comprise approximately 8.2% and 26.1% of the Borough's land area, respectively.

Despite the district names, the Township's B-1, Commercial and B-2, Industrial districts both permit a mix of both commercial and industrial uses. The primary difference is the intensity of the uses permitted within each district. The B-1 district is primarily a commercial use district, but also permits various light industrial uses. The B-2, Industrial district permits industrial uses, as well as a wide variety of commercial uses, including retail businesses, eating and drinking establishments and professional offices. Heavy industrial uses, junkyards and salvage yards, and landfills are restricted to the B-2 district, and require conditional use approvals.

The Borough's C-1, Commercial district is dedicated primarily to commercial uses. It permits retail and food establishments, personal, professional, and entertainment services, and a variety of other commercial uses. In addition, it permits some higher density residential use. The maximum density of residential units in commercial/residential buildings is 24 dwelling units per acre. Permitting a mixture of commercial and residential use is common within older, historical business districts, and allows for productive use of upper floors that may be located over first floor retail and other commercial uses.

The Borough's M-1, Industrial district permits heavy commercial, wholesale, warehousing, processing, and light and heavy manufacturing establishments. However, much like the Township's B-2 district, it also permits a variety of commercial uses, such as retail businesses, eating and drinking establishments, convenience stores, professional offices, and others.

Land Use Ordinances

Municipal land uses ordinances, including zoning ordinances, subdivision and land development ordinances, and official map ordinances are essential tools that can be used to implement municipal plans, including the North East Area Comprehensive Plan.

Zoning Ordinance

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.

Both municipal zoning ordinances appear adequate to suit the needs of the individual municipalities. However, depending on the priorities and goals of the North East Area Comprehensive Plan, which have yet to be determined, amendments may be desired in order to help support plan implementation.

It is also noted that since state and federal laws, best management practices and current trends change over time it is important for both municipalities to periodically review and update their ordinances, as needed, to ensure that they remain current.

Specific recommendations concerning zoning regulations, are included throughout this report, including the community facilities and utilities, natural resources and transportation sections.

Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance

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.

Official Map Ordinance

An “official map” is a combined map and ordinance that can be used to help implement municipal plans and goals. An official map shows the locations of planned future public lands and facilities such as transportation, recreational parks and trails, and open space. The official map expresses the municipality’s interest in acquiring these lands for public purposes sometime in the future, but it does not impose eminent domain. The municipality must use methods authorized under law to acquire property reserved on the official map. This may include friendly negotiations or condemnation proceedings.

Neither the Borough nor the Township currently have an official map ordinance. Adoption of an official map is a plan implementation tool that is available to both North East Area municipalities.

Recommendations and Observations

The following recommendations and observations are made concerning land use:

- Both municipal zoning ordinances appear adequate to suit the needs of the individual municipalities. However, depending on the priorities and goals of the North East Area Comprehensive Plan, which have yet to be determined, amendments may be desired in order to help support plan implementation.
- State and federal laws, best management practices and current trends change over time. Therefore, it is important for both municipalities to periodically review and update their ordinances, as needed, to ensure that they remain current.
- Specific recommendations concerning zoning regulations, are included throughout this report, including the community facilities and utilities, natural resources and transportation sections.
- The North East Borough Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance was adopted in 2000, and the North East Township Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance was adopted in 1983. Given the age of these ordinances, updates are recommended.
- An “official map” is a combined map and ordinance that can be used to help implement municipal plans and goals. Neither the Borough nor the Township currently have an official map ordinance. Adoption of an official map is tool that is available, should it be needed for plan implementation.