



# Connellsville Next City Comprehensive Plan

Adopted April 2019





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*Refer also to companion documents:*

Background Studies

Walk/Bike Audit

Implementation Workbook



# Acknowledgements

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## City of Connellsville

### Mayor

Honorable Greg Lincoln

### City Council

Tom Karpiak, Public Works

Melissa Tzan, Public Buildings and Grounds

Bob Topper Jr., Health and Public Safety

Ethan Keedy, Accounts and Finance

## Connellsville Redevelopment Authority

Michael Edwards, Director

Many residents, business owners and other stakeholders contributed to the plan through completing surveys or participating in interviews, focus groups or public meetings. The plan would have been impossible without such valuable local guidance.

*Cover art: Iconic architecture of Connellsville depicted in City Hall plaque honoring Paul V. Mahoney, City Solicitor, 1984.*

## Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee

Hon. Greg Lincoln, Mayor

Tom Curry, City Health/Code Officer

Michael Edwards, Redevelopment Authority

Tom Karpiak, City Council

Leigh Ann Lincoln, Redevelopment Authority

Kathy Mitchell, Redevelopment Authority

Vern Ohler, City Clerk

Nick Tzan, Planning Commission

Denise White, Planning Commission

The Comprehensive Plan was prepared with assistance from:



Mackin Engineering Company  
117 Industry Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15275-1015  
[www.mackinengineering.com](http://www.mackinengineering.com)

and



Duane Morris Government Strategies, LLC  
600 Grant Street, Suite 5010  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219-2802  
[www.dmg.com](http://www.dmg.com)

**Be it resolved by the City Council of the City of Connellsville, "A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF CONNELLSVILLE, COUNTY OF FAYETTE, COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA ADOPTING THE CITY OF CONNELLSVILLE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

Whereas, a copy of the Comprehensive Plan, which includes the text, maps, charts and any other items which form the whole of the comprehensive plan and was made available for public review is attached hereto as exhibit "A"

Whereas, the plan was sent to all contiguous municipalities, the Connellsville Area School District and the Fayette County Department of Planning, Zoning and Community Development for review and comment on February 6, 2019; and,

Whereas, the City received no substantial comments from contiguous municipalities, the Connellsville Area School District or the Fayette County Department of Planning, Zoning and Community Development within forty-five (45) days of submission; and,

Whereas, notice of a public hearing was forwarded to the Uniontown Herald Standard, to be advertised and published on March 29th and April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019,

Whereas, City Council held a public hearing on April 16, 2019 to hear and consider public comments, and that the comments received at the public hearing were duly noted; and,

Whereas, City Council, after consideration of comments received (or lack thereof, as the case may be), has determined that the plan should not be substantially revised in whole or in part; and,

Whereas, City Council has found that the Comprehensive Plan is beneficial to the health, safety and welfare of the City's citizens.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF CONNELLSVILLE AND HEREBY RESOLVED AND ENACTED BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE SAME:

SECTION I. Connellsville City Council by this resolution adopts the City of Connellsville Comprehensive Plan as attached hereto as Exhibit "A", as pursuant to Article III and Article XI of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code.

SECTION II. Any and all previous comprehensive planning documents are hereby repealed.

Resolved and enacted this 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2019.

Adoption moved by hr

Seconded by ER [signature]

VOTE:

	YEA	NAY	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
TOPPER	<u>X</u>	_____	_____	_____
KARPIAK	<u>X</u>	_____	_____	_____
TZAN	<u>X</u>	_____	_____	_____
KEEDY	<u>X</u>	_____	_____	_____
LINCOLN	<u>X</u>	_____	_____	_____

ADOPTED THIS 16<sup>th</sup> DAY OF April 2019

[signature]  
MAYOR, CITY OF CONNELLSVILLE

ATTEST:

[signature]  
CITY CLERK

# About the Plan

## What is this document?

Authorized by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC), a community's Comprehensive Plan lays out strategies for the nature, pace and location of physical development as well as plans for future economic and social conditions.

In short, a comprehensive plan is:

- An educational tool for understanding current conditions, issues and opportunities,
- An assessment and prioritization of needs,
- A statement of the optimally desirable vision of future growth and redevelopment, and
- A public policy guide to community decision-making adopted by the governing body.

Connellsville's new plan is organized to address priority community issues that involve multiple planning topics (housing, historic preservation, environment, etc.). In keeping with the implementable plan model promoted by Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development, the plan frames each key issue within the context of all of the planning topics it touches.

## Using the plan

In addition to identifying a desired future vision for Connellsville, this document represents a playbook of projects and strategies that will help the City realize its vision. The plan will function as a decision-making guide for the City's elected and appointed officials.

The project's Steering Committee spent roughly 12 months gathering input and research to identify and characterize key issues and devise strategies to address them. Details on the planning process, including stakeholder and public participation, appear in the appendices.

The **vision statement** appears in the following section. Four **focus areas** establish community development objectives that the public and stakeholders determined will be especially important to Connellsville's future. The focus areas lay out targeted goals and action steps that the City can use to immediately begin moving forward to make the future vision a reality.

The **Implementation Tools** section provides detail on how the City can set this plan into motion.

The plan has three companion documents:

- The **Background Studies** present a detailed overview of the latest available demographic, housing and economic data as well as an inventory of community services, facilities and conditions.
- The **Walk-Bike Audit** contains specific analysis and recommendations for improving the safety and accessibility of bicycle and walking systems throughout the City for residents and visitors.
- The **Implementation Workbook** is intended to be a living document that assigns responsible parties and timelines to each recommended task. This item should be revisited and updated at least annually.

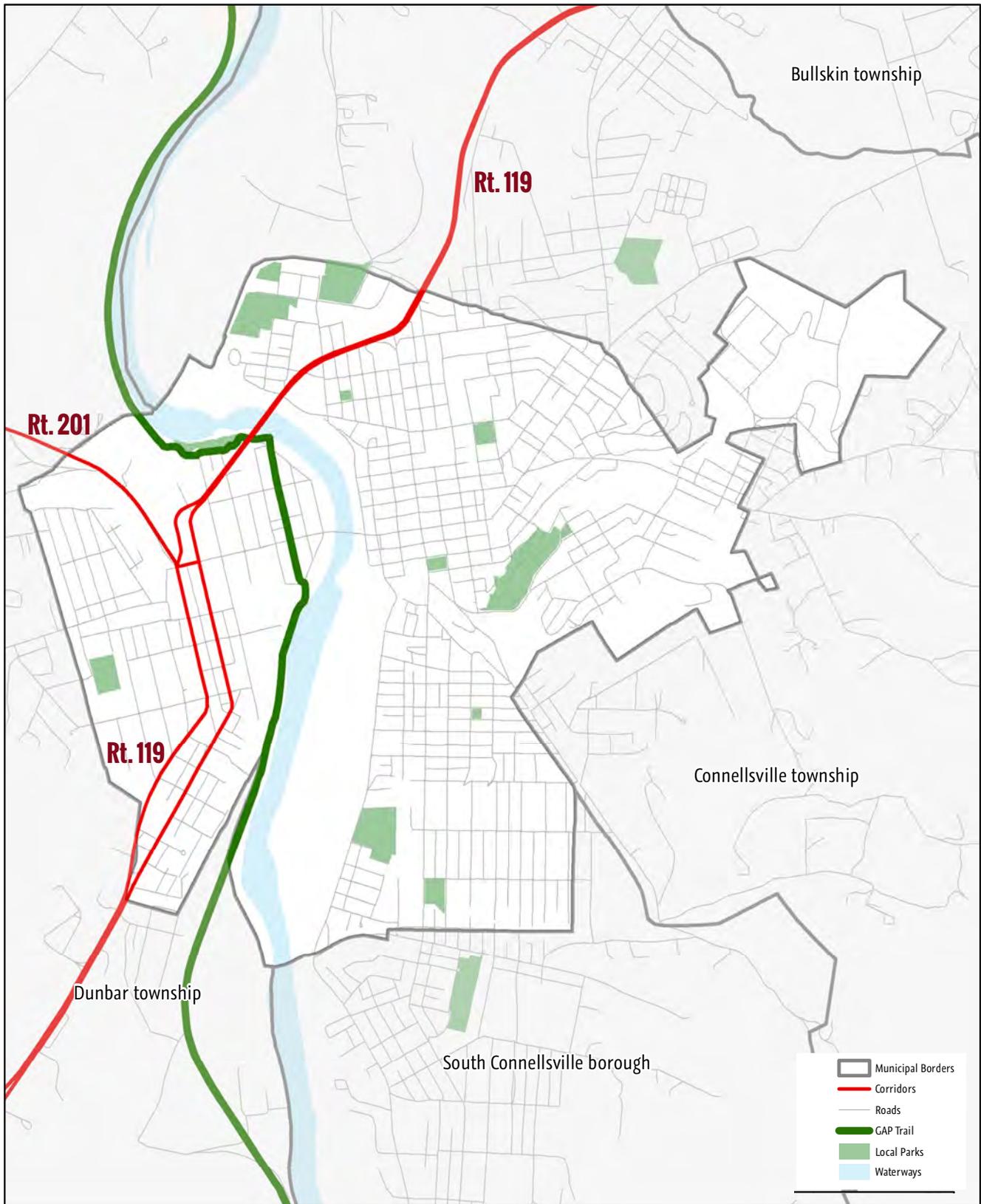




# Foundations



City Reference Map



# Planning Context

## Previous studies

The Comprehensive Plan incorporates and builds upon the research and direction established by various planning studies completed on behalf of the City of Connellsville. Recommendations from these documents were considered and, where relevant, have been carried forward into the analysis and recommended action steps for this project.

These documents included, but were not limited to:

### Community Design Workshop (2008)

This three-day workshop leveraged public input to formulate four primary concepts for the City's future:

- GAP trail visitors create demand for economic opportunities along Crawford Avenue and Downtown Connellsville
- A community catering to outdoor recreation, particularly bicycling, should have activities and areas that are pedestrian in scale and accessibility
- Connellsville should be viewed as a gateway to the Laurel Highlands and as a hub for recreation and tourist activities and tourism support
- While tourism and the Great Allegheny Passage are tremendous catalysts for Connellsville, revitalization efforts must first meet the needs of the local residents and businesses.

Recommendations included façade and streetscape improvements, new public spaces and pedestrian and bicycle improvements to the Crawford Avenue Bridge.

## Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan (2009)

Connellsville's latest Comprehensive Plan was completed in cooperation with Connellsville Township and South Connellsville Borough. The plan outlines goals and objectives for housing, community facilities, land use, parks and recreation, open space, energy conservation and natural resources. It included a core area revitalization strategy for the City.

Many of the themes in the last Comprehensive Plan are carried forward into this plan, such as enhancing pedestrian and bicycle safety, preserving cultural and natural resources, expanding housing options and integrating the Great Allegheny Passage with the Downtown business district. However, the action steps in the new plan represent the next stages in the advancement of these aims, building on all of the progress that the City has since achieved.

### Gateway to Gateway Master Plan (2009)

This plan was created to guide future decisions related to City projects associated with the Great Allegheny Passage. It established a master plan for the First to Third Street corridor area.

### Downtown Master Plan (2009)

This component of the multi-municipal Comprehensive Plan called for commercial and mixed-use redevelopment, historic restoration, bicycle facility and streetscape improvements in a core area defined by Prospect Street, Fairview Avenue, Water Street and Apple Street.

## Main Street Building and Design Guidelines (2009)

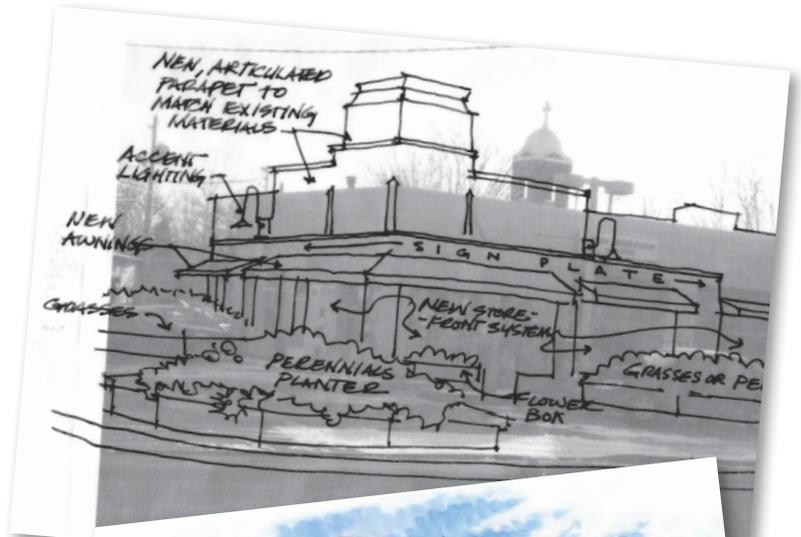
This document established a set of design guidelines to improve the attractive qualities of Connellsville's downtown through the preservation and appropriate rehabilitation of original and historic buildings. It recognized that "while growth and development of the city is essential for its vitality and success, this growth and development must maintain and enhance the character of the place."

## Bicycle Master Plan (2014)

This document established a vision for Connellsville as a world-class biking community. It evaluated current conditions across the City's entire street network, laid out goals and objectives particular to strengthening the infrastructure available to cyclists and included a set of recommended projects with cost estimates.

## An Action Plan for Local Foods, Local Places Initiatives (2016)

This document represents an action plan for advancing Connellsville's local food system, continuing to strengthen the economic activity Downtown and improve public health outcomes.



## Milestones since 2009 Plan

The City and its partner agencies have made tremendous accomplishments in the implementation of the last Comprehensive Plan. The plan's vision included the following items, each annotated to demonstrate the related progress made.

*Our central business district has experienced revitalization, appropriate in-fill development and creative re-use of historic structures.*

- Commercial, church and other civic buildings experienced substantial renovation. The Carnegie Free Library received a new roof, furnace, windows, a renovated theater and handicapped-accessible equipment.
  - The Connellsville Downtown Promotions Committee organizes various unique local events, including the Mum Festival and It's a Connellsville Christmas.
  - A summer concert series and farmers market bring crowds and excitement to the business district.
  - Local Foods Local Places visited Connellsville in 2016 and provided technical assistance to integrate local foods and healthy downtown economic development activities by strengthening the farmers market, improving walking and biking infrastructure, expanding local food access at restaurants and lodging, and enhancing local foods access for low-income and senior populations.
  - The Greater Connellsville Chamber of Commerce is active, organizing ribbon cuttings, job fairs, special events and community engagement projects.
- The former P&LE Train Depot has undergone a full historic restoration to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.
  - 30 concrete flower planters were placed around Connellsville's downtown. These planters were provided by the Neighborhood Partnership Program, PNC Charitable Trusts, Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau and Downtown Connellsville.

*Underutilized sites (Aaron's and Anchor Hocking) have been revitalized, redeveloped and adapted for use by new businesses.*

- The Aaron's Building, after a multi-million-dollar renovation, is a fully restored historic icon and popular event facility.
- Blighted structures along Route 119 were cleared and replaced.
- The Fayette County Trust collaborated on the Neighborhood Partnership Program with Connellsville Area Community Ministries, Carnegie Free Library, Wesley Health Center, Somerset Trust, Tri-State Capital and UPMC Health Plan.
- Proactive code enforcement and demolition work cleared condemned structures and prepared sites for reuse.
- The former Zac Connell school has been repurposed as the Highlands Hospital Center for Autism and Blended Care Center for Women.

## Kickstand Kitchen: Open for Business

Private investment has drastically brightened up Crawford Avenue in the form of Kickstand Kitchen, a popular cafe known for creative fresh fare and its convenient location for Great Allegheny Trail users.



*Amenities such as new restaurants, lodging facilities and shops exist to attract area tourists and travelers into Connellsville for lodging, dining and shopping.*

- The Cobblestone Hotel opened in 2017, thanks to support from the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau, Benedum Foundation, The Reinvestment Fund, Fay Penn Economic Development Council, Bridgeway Capital, McKenna Foundation and local investors.
- The Facade Improvement Program has revitalized the local streetscape in the vicinity of the Great Allegheny Passage route through the City.
- New businesses have taken root and created jobs, including multiple restaurants and a winery.

*An arts incubator links local artists with art space, resources, classes and potential markets for their wares.*

- The Fayette County Cultural Trust opened the Connellsville Canteen, a World War II Museum and Café that features Harry Clark's Indian Creek Valley Railroad Display. Since opening, the Canteen has won the State Award from the Downtown Center for downtown asset enhancement.
- Students from Connellsville Career and Tech School created public artwork to be featured Downtown.

*The Amtrak Train Station has been rebuilt and serves as a great resource to connect residents, tourists and travelers to recreational amenities.*

- Connellsville's new Amtrak Station, serving the Capital Limited Line, represented a \$1.25 million project. The City has one of only 24 Amtrak stations in the state. Amtrak's "Bring Your Bike on Board" accommodations allow riders to carry bikes on, making the route especially attractive to Great Allegheny Passage riders.

*The roads and bridges are upgraded to provide for a range of uses.*

- Crosswalks and curb cuts have been upgraded in the business district.
- PennDOT continues design work to improve the Crawford Avenue Bridge.

*Yough Park has been transformed and is more integrated with the Great Allegheny Passage running through it, better connected with the river, and more user-friendly for cyclists and families using the playground and picnic facilities.*

- Yough Park was upgraded with new playground equipment (funded by DCNR & CDBG) and restroom improvements (funded by the McKenna Foundation).

*Residents have access to adequate parks and playgrounds which are well maintained and equipped.*

- In addition to the improvements at Yough Park, playgrounds throughout the City have been updated with new playground equipment, tennis, basketball & volleyball courts.
- The WalkWorks program created a walking route map of the City as part of its "Steps Toward a Healthier Fayette County" initiative.

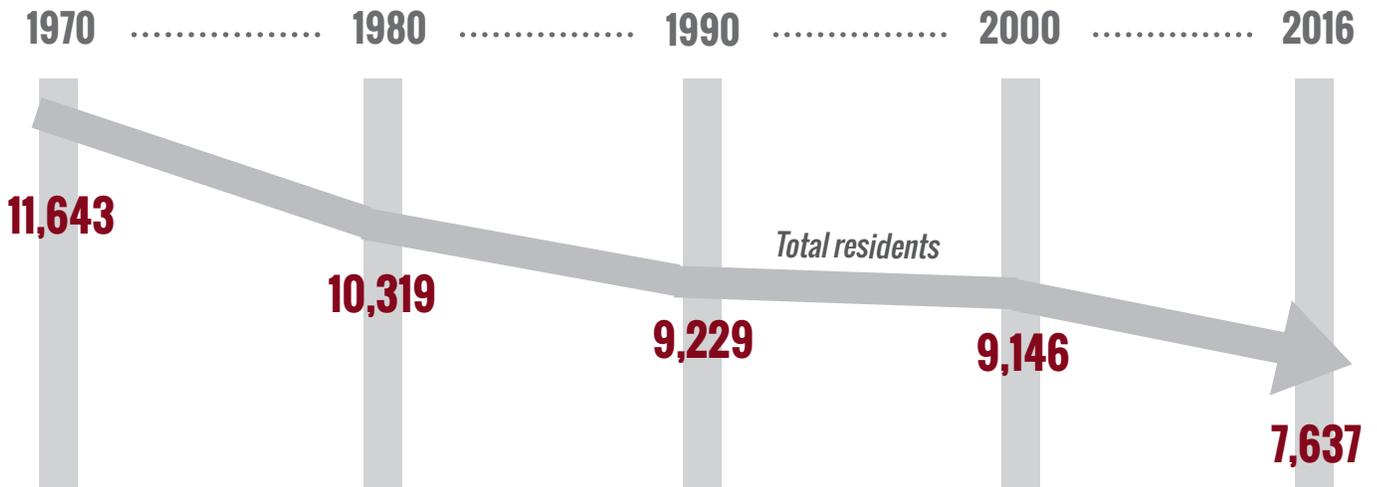
## City population

Settlement patterns in Connellsville have followed the trajectory of economic trends within the larger region. The City has hollowed out in the decades since its boom as the “Coke capital of the world” in the early 20th century, when workers flocked to the city to take part in coal mining and coke production. Some residents moved farther afield in search of prosperity, and others have fallen from the middle class. The City’s estimated 2016 population is roughly half its peak in 1940 of 13,608.

The composition of residents has also changed according to larger trends, such as households becoming smaller (young couples deferring or deciding against having children, more people living alone). However, the City bucks one prevalent trend: Instead of shifting older as the Baby Boomer generation moves toward retirement, Connellsville’s population remains comparatively young.

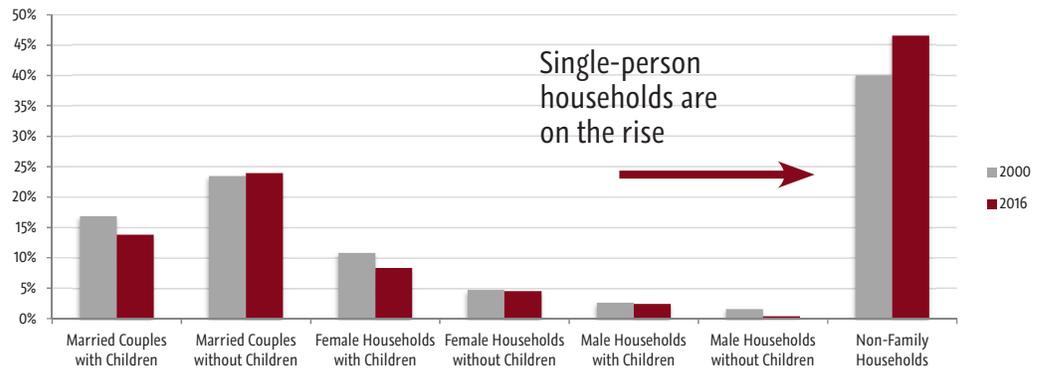
### 2016 Census estimates:

-  **Population: 7,516**
-  **Land area: 2.2 sq. miles**
-  **Households: 3,281**
-  **Median household income: \$28,618**



## Age and household type

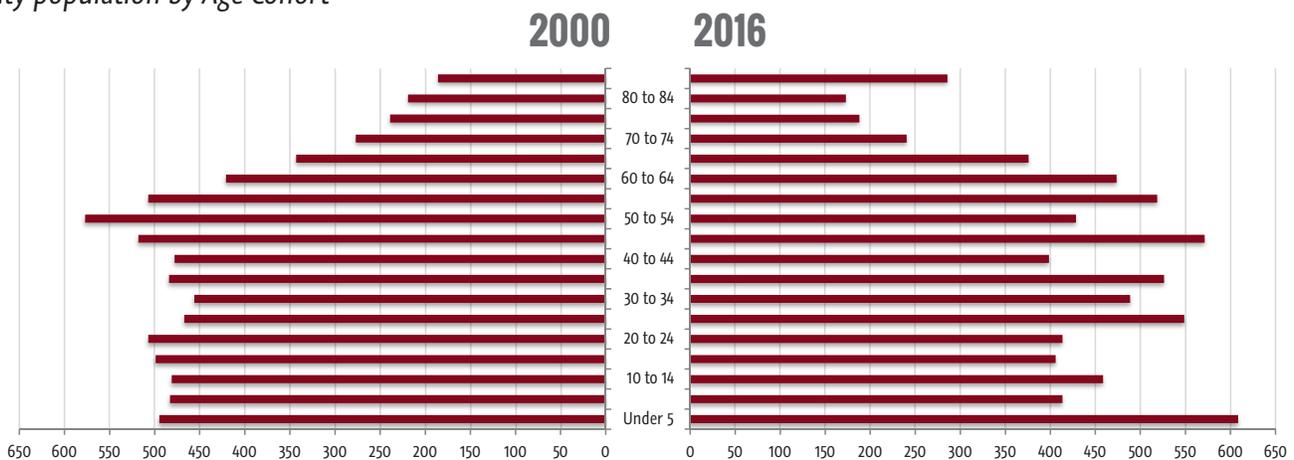
In keeping with a regional and national trend, non-family households represent an increasing share of all Connellsville households. These include non-related people living together and people living alone. Non-family households now represent 47%, compared to 40% in 2000. At the same time, the total number of households with children fell from 1,199 in 2000 to 807 in 2016. Fayette County similarly experienced a decline in households with children and growth in non-family households.



Within the overall context of a 1.6% population loss between 2000 and 2016, the City's age distribution remained relatively steady, gaining 45 working-age people (25 to 64) while losing 187 young adults (ages 15 to 24) and adding 51 senior citizens. Whereas Fayette County is trending older as Baby Boomers retire, Connellsville's median age was 38 in both 2000 and 2016.

While the population in most Western Pennsylvania jurisdictions is aging, Connellsville's remains relatively young.

City population by Age Cohort



See the companion documents for full analysis.

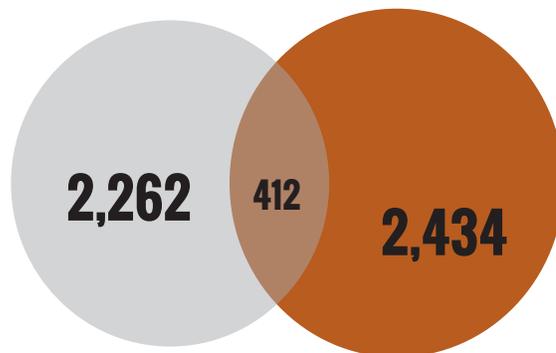
## Local Economy

While the primary source of employment for City residents was traditionally industrial or resource extraction work associated with nearby mills, people who live in Connellsville today work in a much wider assortment of fields, more focused now in areas such as health care, education and the service sector.

The census estimates that there were 2,674 total jobs in Connellsville in 2015, 85% of which were filled by people who lived elsewhere. The number of workers who commute into the City was roughly equivalent to the number of residents who commute out each day.

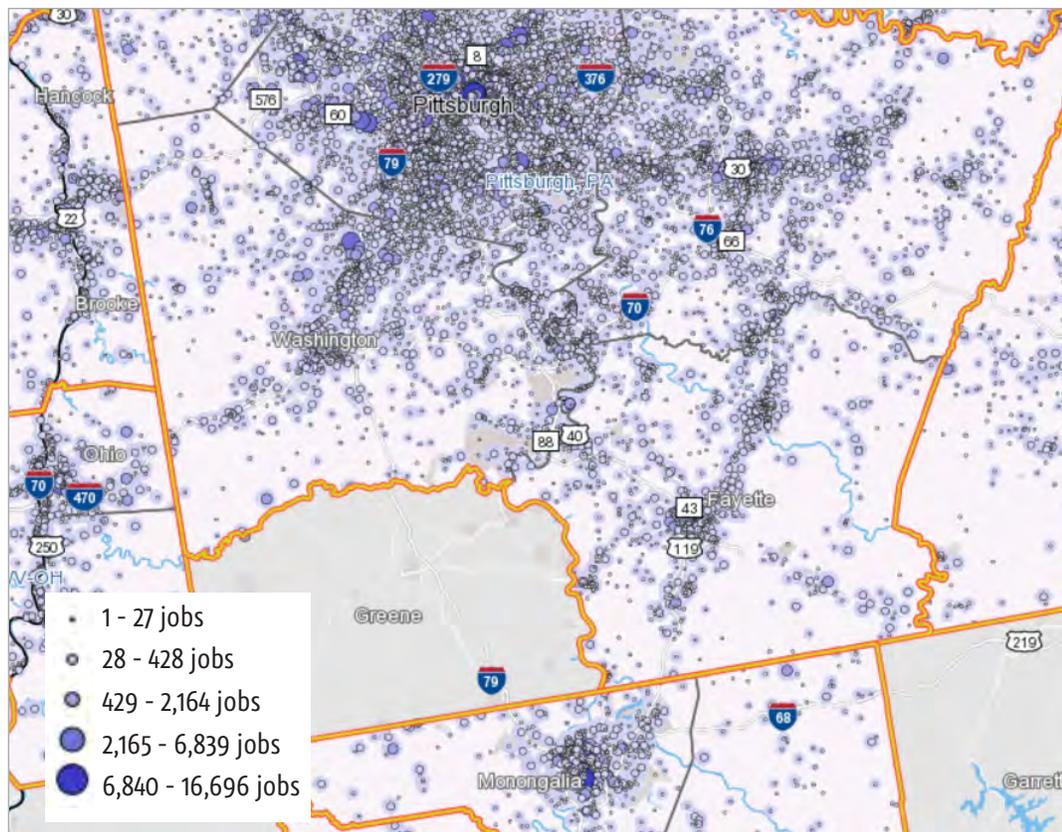
When it comes to educational attainment, Connellsville residents are representative of Fayette County on the whole, with 87% of those age 25 and over having attained at least a high school diploma and 13% with an associate or bachelor's degree (compared to 87% and 15%).

**85%** of people who work each day in Connellsville live elsewhere.



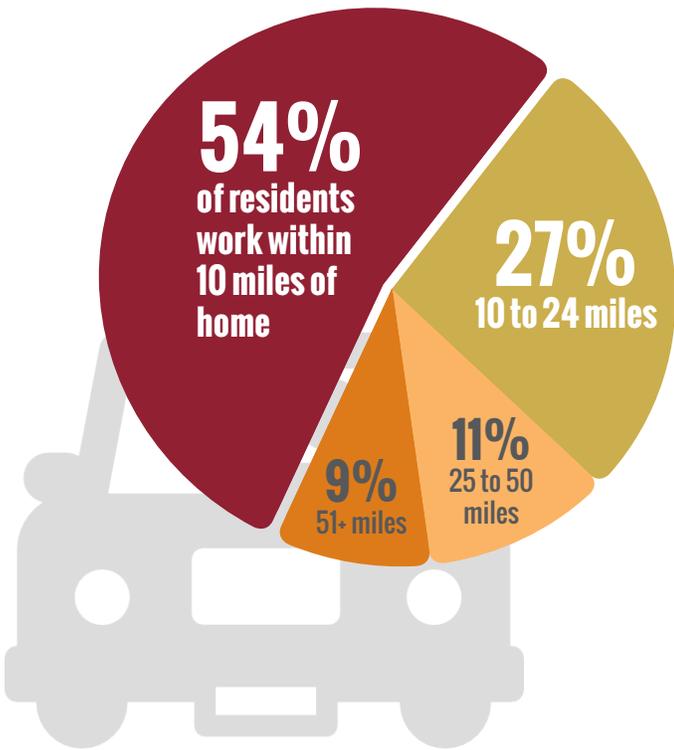
- Live in Connellsville and work elsewhere
- Live and work in Connellsville
- Work in Connellsville and live elsewhere

### Regional Job Distribution, 2015



Note: Greene County data not available, but Waynesburg represents an additional job destination for City residents.

## Commute



The City's workers scatter to a variety of destinations across the region, including county seats (Greensburg, Uniontown), regional employment hubs such as Pittsburgh, and nearby municipalities such as South Connellsville, Scottdale and Mount Pleasant. The City's highway connections afford its workers access to a variety of job markets. However, as shown at left, more than half of employed residents have less than 10 miles to commute each day.

### Strongest sectors:

Health care and social assistance, retail, accommodation and food services, manufacturing



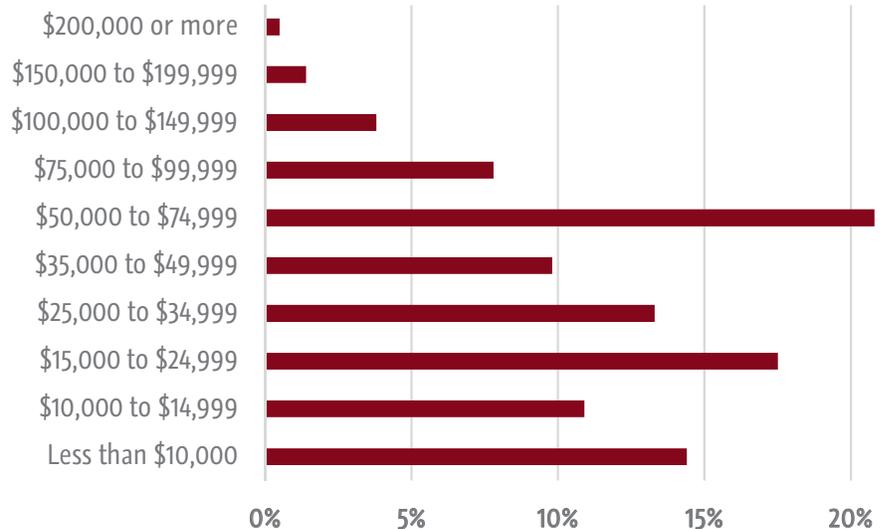
## Income

About half of household incomes in the City fall between \$25,000 and \$100,000 per year, as shown at right. An additional 43% of households made less than \$25,000, and 6% make more than \$100,000.

The median income across the City households was \$28,618 in 2016, much lower than the Fayette County median (\$40,511).

In 2016, 20.1% of City residents age 18 and over fell under the poverty threshold, compared to 15.9% at the County level. This translated to an income below \$12,071 for a single person or \$24,230 for a family of four.

Households by income level, 2016



## Housing Stock

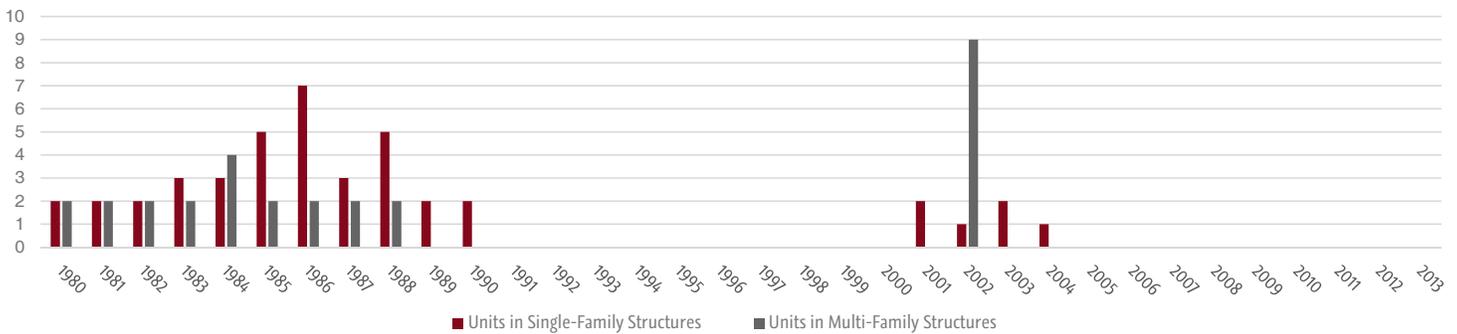
The Census Bureau counted 3,665 total housing units in Connellsville in 2016, compared to 4,434 in 2000, a loss of 17% that could be due to abandonment/demolition, conversion or other factors. Local officials noted that this percentage seems high, but these are the numbers reported by the Census.

As the graph below illustrates, permits locally issued for new housing starts have remained at minimal levels. The census estimates that most of the City's homes (55%) were built prior to 1950 and only an estimated 40 homes (2%) were built in 2000 or later.



The City's homes are **51%** renter-occupied.

## Building permits issued for new housing have been sluggish:



## Costs

Across the region, household incomes have not kept pace with rising housing costs since 2000, which has caused an increasing affordability problem for many. By contrast, Connellsville has remained comparatively affordable, as self-reported housing values fell by an inflation-adjusted 1.6%, at a rate similar to household incomes (3.2%). Renting a home or apartment in the City cost about the same in 2016 as it did in 2000, after adjusting for inflation.

### Housing costs v. income, 2000 and 2016

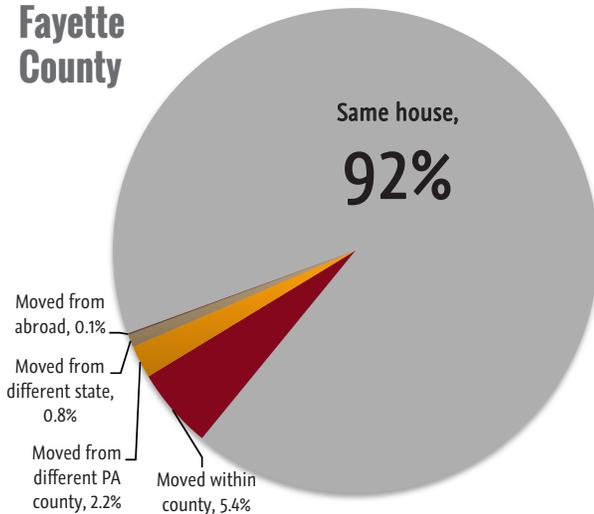
	Median housing value	Median gross rent	Median household income
<b>2000</b>	\$83,089*	\$477*	\$29,572*
<b>2016</b>	\$81,800	\$482	\$28,618
<b>Change</b>	-1.6%	1%	-3.2%

\* Adjusted for inflation

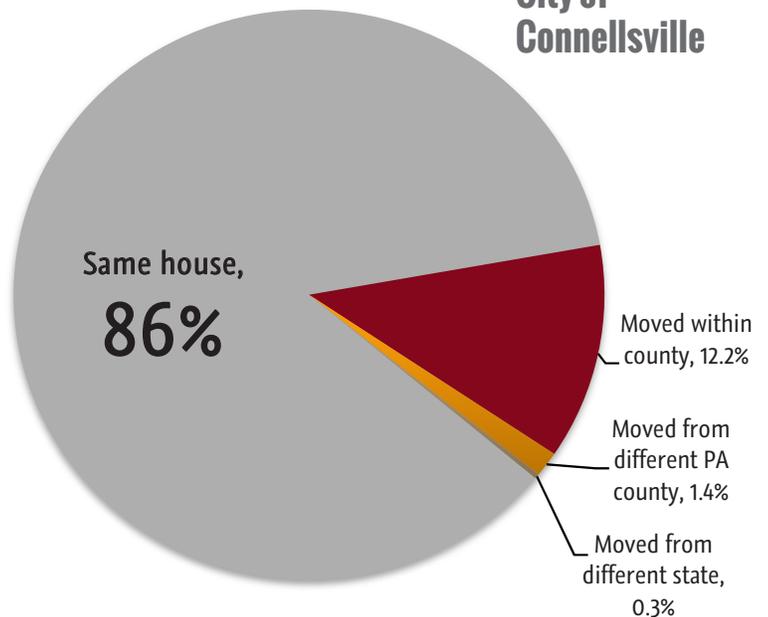
## Mobility

The Census Bureau estimates that 86% of Connellsville residents remained in their homes between 2015 and 2016, while 12% moved in from elsewhere within Fayette County and 1% moved in from a different county. The migration rate is higher than across the county, where 92% of residents had been in their homes for at least a year.

### Fayette County



### City of Connellsville



## Housing type and occupancy

Just over half of Connellsville homes are single-family detached structures. The next most common type is units in buildings with three or four apartments, of which there are 519 (14%), followed by duplex units (271, 7%). There were 71 units in buildings with 20 to 49 units, and 251 units in large buildings with 50 or more units. Overall, the City's housing is 38% multi-family. Additionally, the Census Bureau reports a handful of mobile homes.

As of 2016, there were 384 vacant homes in the City, comprising 10% of all homes. Half of these were vacant for purposes such as being for sale or rent or for seasonal use, while half were vacant for "other" reasons, a category that tends to correlate with abandonment.

# Vision and Guiding Principles

The vision statement for a community's comprehensive plan should satisfy (at least) the following three purposes:

- Providing guidance to elected and appointed officials and staff in determining the priority and degree of evaluation of future projects.
- Guiding City employees in the provision of quality municipal services.
- Most importantly, creating a common understanding among City Council, its advisory bodies and the community as a whole of the shared values and priorities that will shape Connellsville for years to come.

## *The Vision*

Connellsville will be a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable city that provides:

- Complete **multimodal infrastructure** that enables safe, convenient travel and access for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists of all ability levels
- A wide range of **economic opportunities** for established businesses and new entrepreneurs
- Safe, secure **neighborhoods** that are inclusive and respectful of every generation, with diverse housing stock that meets the needs of all household types and income levels within the history-rich context of the existing built environment
- Urban **amenities and culture** that enhance its appeal as a recreational haven, promoting the arts in addition to use of the area's river, trail, parks and neighborhood walking paths

Connellsville's vision represents a community consensus on the type of place the City is and intends to become. The visioning process spanned months, involving the Steering Committee collecting and analyzing community input to distill shared values and priorities. The vision sets up long-term goals that can be advanced by short-term actions.

In general, the vision is the foundation upon which all other plan elements were formed. The following generally accepted planning principles informed the vision and all the plan elements that followed:

## **Land use:**

### **Use land efficiently**

Support the preservation of land and natural resources and compact, dense development patterns that shorten trips, lessen vehicle dependence and make infrastructure cost-effective. Integrate land use and development planning with improvements to transportation, water/sewer and utility services.

### **Mix compatible land uses**

Provide spaces where stores, offices, homes, schools and recreation can exist in relatively compact neighborhoods.

### **Redevelop first**

Prioritize the reuse and redevelopment of previously developed sites for economic activity that creates jobs, housing, mixed-use development and recreational assets.

## **Markets:**

### **Integrate sustainable job opportunities**

Attract, retain and help to develop businesses that offer jobs with living wages and that are located near existing infrastructure capacity, housing, existing workforce and transportation access.

### **Expand housing choice**

Support the construction and rehabilitation of housing of all types to meet the needs of people of all incomes, household types, ages and abilities.

## **Public assets:**

### **Create transportation options**

Seek ways to improve the convenience and safety of the travel network, including roads as well as routes for walking and cycling. Route heavy traffic around residential neighborhoods to the greatest extent possible.

### **Provide efficient infrastructure**

Fix it first – use and improve existing infrastructure capacity; require private and public expansions to be consistent with adopted plans and implementing ordinances.

### **Enhance recreational and heritage resources**

Maintain and improve recreational and heritage assets and infrastructure.

### **Restore and enhance the environment**

Conserve and restore environmentally sensitive lands and natural areas for ecological health, biodiversity and wildlife habitat.

## **Design:**

### **Require thoughtful, human-scaled design**

Promote privacy, safety and visual coherency through ensuring that development and redevelopment are compatible with existing or desired neighborhood character. This involves consideration of the massing of buildings, orientation to the street and access for bicycles, vehicles and pedestrians. Windows, porches, landscaping and similar architectural elements can create visual compatibility.

## **Governance:**

### **Plan regionally; implement locally**

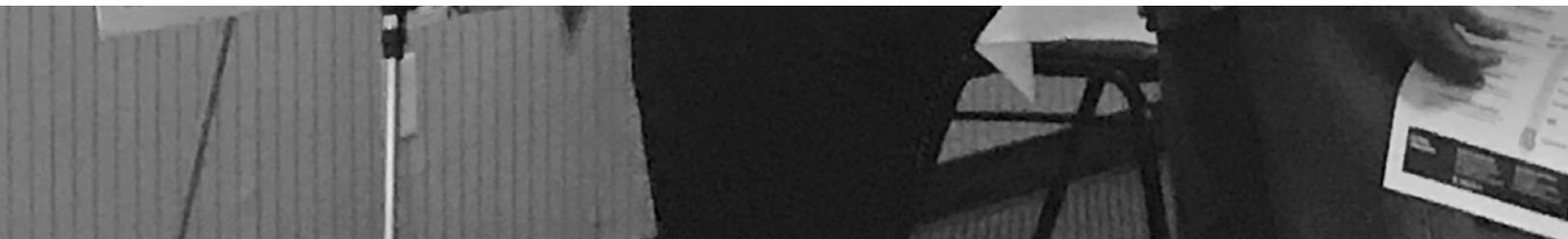
Support multi-municipal, county and local government planning and implementation that has broad public input and support and is consistent with these principles.

### **Be fair**

Ensure that the benefits and burdens of development are equitably shared.



# Focus Areas



*The plan's April 2018 public meeting gathered direction from residents and business owners*

# Moving

## Key Principle:

**The City's transportation network should balance the needs of all of its users, creating thoroughfares and routes that, beyond conveying vehicles efficiently, represent a safe, inviting public realm.**

### Enhanced connections, both internally and to destinations throughout the region, will strengthen Connellsville.

The City benefits from a truly multi-modal transportation network, involving roads, passenger rail, waterways, the Great Allegheny Passage trail and other bicycle and pedestrian pathways. Connellsville connects to the region via U.S. Route 119, the City's primary north-south corridor and highest-volume route; State Route 711, the primary east/west corridor; and State Route 201, connecting the City to communities to the west and northwest.

At the same time, the planning process revealed significant gaps in the network: modes to commute to jobs in other areas, ride-sharing, connections between local attractions such as the train station and hotel, bike/ped connections and shuttle service to recreational features.

Additionally, the City must ensure that it provides safe, inviting routes that support neighborhood and economic development and meet the needs of all users. A city's streets represent public spaces with the potential to stimulate investment and social inclusion. High-quality public spaces can generate tangible economic benefits, increasing property values, local business activity and the number and frequency of visitors.



*Safety problems currently represent barriers to bicycle and pedestrian mobility within Connellsville. The Crawford Bridge crossing shown here is one example, combining heavy vehicle volume, slope, narrow sidewalks and low safety railings.*

## Related findings

### ■ Active transportation has become key to the City's identity

Connellsville's ability to grow in distinction as a regional tourism destination hinges on the strength of connections between the Great Allegheny Passage trail and the City's business districts and neighborhoods.

### ■ Priority One: Crawford Avenue Bridge

The deficiencies of the Crawford Avenue Bridge continue to impede economic development, particularly as the bridge represents an important connection to Downtown and is unsafe for non-vehicle traffic. The Walk-Bike Audit identified improvements to this bridge as a No. 1 priority.

### ■ Prioritizing pass-through traffic harms the quality of the public realm

Connellsville's streets must represent safe and inviting space for all users, not only a means of conveying vehicles quickly elsewhere. Heavy traffic and high speed along major roads, particularly Route 119, represent safety risks in densely developed areas with frequent access points, where pedestrians, cyclists and traffic entering/exiting lanes travel at a variety of speeds.

One-way streets (North 6th Street and North and South Third Street, Eighth Street, West Fayette Street) tend to speed up traffic, reduce driver focus and pile on additional miles traveled for drivers circling in search of parking. Drivers on one-way streets also tend to stop less often, resulting in fewer visits to businesses and attractions along the way.<sup>1</sup> City staff have noted that barriers such as narrow rights-of-way prevent conversion to two-way traffic. In the absence of conversion, traffic calming and streetscape design must aim to make these corridors more walkable.

### ■ Need for more alternatives

Public and stakeholder input emphasized a strong need to broaden the array of transportation options available within and beyond Connellsville. Transit service, particularly to Pittsburgh, is extremely limited, and ride-sharing and taxi service do not exist within the City. Visitors need a means of travel between local attractions, such as the Amtrak station, the hotel and recreation sites.

### ■ Sidewalks vary

Sidewalks do not exist everywhere within Connellsville. The City's Subdivision and Land Development ordinance contains only limited regulations for their installation and specifications, so they vary in width, material and quality where they exist. Maintenance also varies. The City's downtown and western side are its most pedestrian/bike-friendly areas, given the prevalence and condition of sidewalks and crosswalks and the density of destinations.

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1 Jaffe, Eric. "The Case Against One-Way Streets." CityLab, January 1, 2013.



**High-Priority Goal**

# Goal 1:

Increase the safety and appeal of active transportation within the City and the strength of connections to the regional trail system.

## **Action** Get serious about sidewalk requirements.

### **1a**

Ensure that sidewalk requirements within the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) include design specifications and maintenance standards, and that they are enforced.

- Work with the Solicitor or consultant to create a new SALDO for the City. The Fayette County SALDO can be used as a basis. During the process, efforts should be made to add clarification and flexibility that will fortify the sidewalk network, such as:
  - Requiring sidewalks along both sides of all roadways in commercial and industrial areas, along all arterials and collectors in residential areas, and along local streets with at least one unit per acre in residential areas
  - Requiring sidewalks along at least one side of the street in residential areas with less than one unit per acre
  - Allowing developers to propose alternative pathways, i.e. crushed stone/permeable material trails, in areas where sidewalks may not be necessary (industrial parks, for instance).

Once the new SALDO is enacted, avoid granting sidewalk requirement waivers, especially on the basis of expected low pedestrian activity. For sites where physical hardships would make sidewalk installation infeasible, allow applicants to provide equal or greater pedestrian circulation through amenities such as off-street trails.



A gravelly shoulder along Route 119, which has a posted speed limit of 35 mph, makes for an uninviting route from 7th Street to Memorial Bridge..

## Action Improve crossing safety.

### 1b

Incorporate pedestrian crossing signals, crosswalks, ADA-compliant ramps and other features on all legs *at all signalized intersections*.

- Mid-block crosswalks could also be appropriate in some areas, provided that none should be installed where vehicles travel at or above 40 mph, and that accompanying features would need to be more intense on collectors than local roads. For example, a collector might require advance yield markings and accompanying lights, while pedestrian warnings signs could be sufficient for a calmer local road.
- Consider adding/maintaining these safety features as a part of the City's street maintenance program, as well as seeking additional funding for their implementation.
- PennDOT, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission and the federal CDBG program represent potential sources for grants or low-interest loans to undertake this type of improvement.



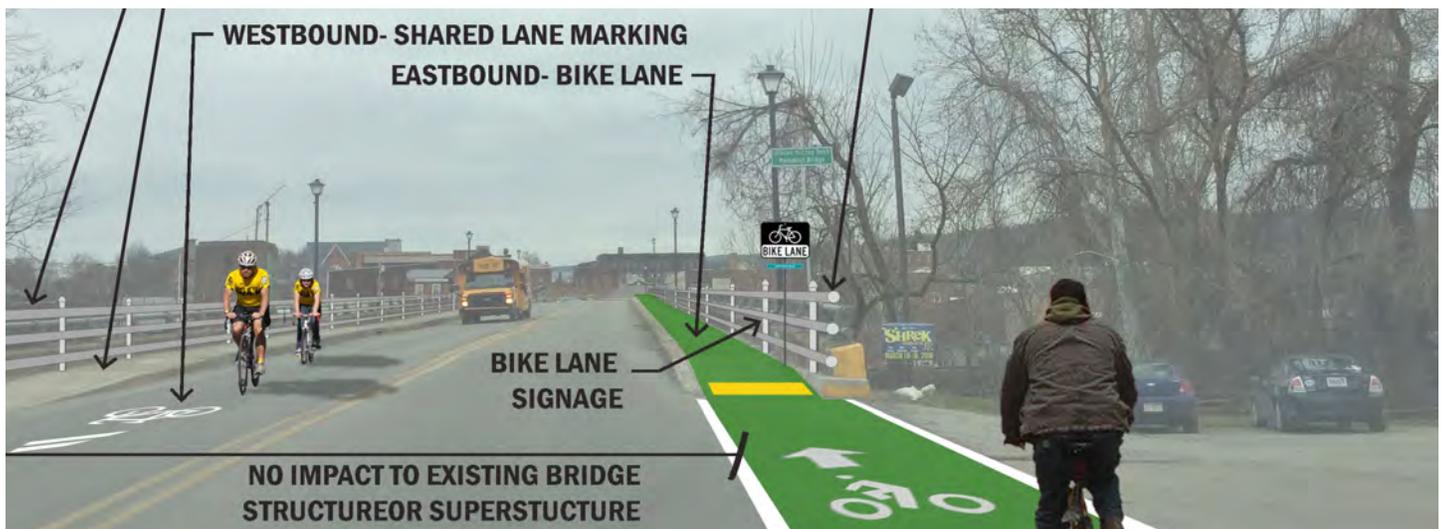
Pedestrian improvements take various forms: At left, a curb ramp compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, at center, a warning sign alerts drivers in advance of a crosswalk, and at right, lateral crosswalk lighting increases pedestrian visibility.

**Action**    **Implement the recommendations of the Walk/Bike Audit.**

**1c**

The Audit, a companion document to this report, builds upon past planning efforts in Connellsville that uniformly support a need to make the City’s street network more people-oriented — not only because getting residents and visitors on foot or bike makes good sense for the environment and public health, but because the City’s long-term prosperity depends on it. The audit examined three routes within the City based on feasible connections between key destinations.

- Priority projects include improvements to the Crawford Avenue Bridge and vicinity, a separated two-way shared-use path at Connellsville Shopping Center and improvements to Memorial Boulevard Bridge. Additional recommendations address pedestrian and bicycle facility needs along three key routes within the City. The audit includes cost estimates and suggested funding sources.



This partial rendering from the Walk/Bike Audit shows suggested improvements to the Crawford Avenue Bridge.

## Comparative costs: Ped/bike improvements

The following table estimates the inflation-adjusted costs of various bike/ped infrastructure features in 2013 dollars, based on bid letting sheets and cost summaries from states and cities across the country. It is useful for getting a general comparative idea of cost, though the cost of any specific intervention will vary widely with location and actual project specifications. The figures below include engineering, design, mobilization and installation.

More precise, Connellsville-specific estimates for particular recommended interventions are included in the Walk/Bike Audit, a companion document to this report.

Improvement	Median	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Unit	Number of Sources (Observations)
Bike Lane	\$89,470	\$133,170	\$5,360	\$536,680	Mile	6 (6)
Concrete Sidewalk	\$27	\$32	\$2.09	\$410	Linear Ft.	46 (164)
High-Visibility Crosswalk	\$3,070	\$2,540	\$600	\$5,710	Each	4 (4)
Multi-Use Trail (paved)	\$261,000	\$481,140	\$64,710	\$4,288,520	Mile	11 (42)
Multi-Use Trail (unpaved)	\$83,870	\$121,390	\$29,520	\$412,720	Mile	3 (7)
Pedestrian Signal	\$980	\$1,480	\$130	\$10,000	Each	22 (33)
Raised Crosswalk	\$7,110	\$8,170	\$1,290	\$30,880	Each	14 (14)
Shared Lane Marking	\$160	\$180	\$22	\$600	Each	15 (39)
Signed Bicycle Route	\$27,240	\$25,070	\$5,360	\$64,330	Each	3 (6)
Striped Crosswalk	\$5.87	\$8.51	\$1.03	\$26	Linear Ft.	12 (48)
Wheelchair Ramp	\$740	\$810	\$89	\$3,600	Each	16 (31)

*Source: Bushell, Max; Poole, Bryan; Rodriguez, Daniel; Zegeer, Charles. (July, 2013). "Costs for Pedestrian and Bicyclist Infrastructure Improvements: A Resource for Researchers, Engineers, Planners and the General Public."*

# Goal 2:

Mitigate congestion and speeding in identified problem areas.

## Action 2a

**Incorporate traffic-calming measures on local streets where speeding is an ongoing safety problem.**

Various physical design measures can improve safety as well as enhance the street environment for non-motorists, regarding the street as something more than a conduit for vehicles to shoot through a neighborhood as quickly as possible.

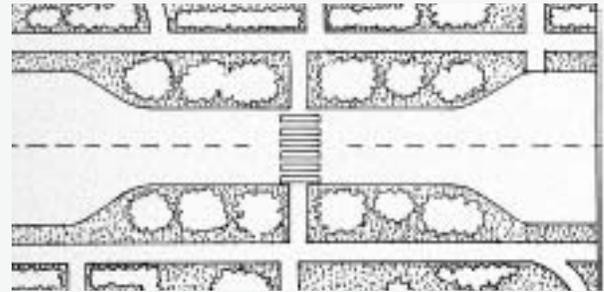
- When creating a new Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO), consider including flexibility for traffic-calming measures such as those pictured on the opposite page.
- Verify with the Fire Chief that any new specifications would accommodate emergency equipment. (Or, ideally, work with the Fire Chief to ensure that the department has vehicles that can navigate nine- or 10-foot lanes, emphasizing that city design should drive public vehicle selection, not vice versa.)
- Work with the Police Department and local officials to identify local road stretches where speeding is a known concern. Invest in signs, markings and/or configuration changes to heighten awareness of safety and improve travel conditions. These strategies work best in combination.
- Measure speed before and after changes to evaluate effectiveness.

<sup>1</sup> See “It’s Time to Redesign the Big Old Red Fire Truck,” Linda Poon, CityLab, January 21, 2016. <https://www.citylab.com/design/2016/01/firetruck-design-smaller-city-street/425142/>

## Traffic-calming tools

### Bulbs, chokers and neckdowns

Extensions of sidewalk and/or landscaping at intersections narrow the road to about 20 feet for two-way traffic, which improves pedestrian safety and typically reduces speeds by up to 14%. Some applications use an island that allows drainage and bicyclists to continue between the choker and original curb line. Islands also represent an opportunity to incorporate stormwater infiltration features.



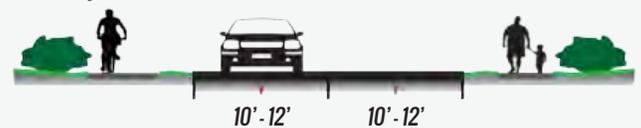
### Narrowing streets and traffic lanes

Lane widths on a local road should be determined by intended function, traffic volume, intensity of adjacent uses and neighborhood design (lot sizes, setbacks, parking needs, etc.). Local and internal roadways tend to fall into one of three categories:

- **Primary distributor:** Moves traffic from neighborhoods or subdivisions to larger arterial or collector roads at speeds of 25-45 mph and daily volumes of 750-2,500. Access should be more limited than on the following two local road types. On-street parking is inappropriate except in more dense villages.
- **Secondary distributor:** Moves traffic through a neighborhood or subdivision to a primary distributor, or directly to larger roads, at speeds of 15-25 mph and daily volumes of 200-1,500.
- **Local access:** Speeds should be 15 mph or less, daily volumes below 500. Design features will vary: A narrow cartway would be appropriate for a subdivision of large lots with off-street parking, but not necessarily for a local access street serving large commercial or industrial development.

Lanes as narrow as nine feet can still be safe for driving on certain local roads, particularly local access. Primary and secondary distributors can carry traffic safely in lanes of 10-12 feet.

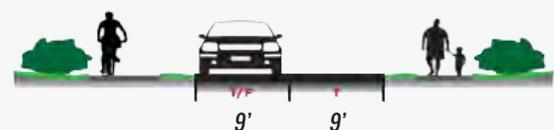
#### Primary distributor



#### Secondary distributor



#### Local access



### Neighborhood traffic circles

Small roundabouts can replace intersections of local or collector streets to reduce mid-block speed by about 10% and impact an area about 200 feet upstream and downstream. Traffic is only minimally diverted, and collisions are typically sharply reduced by this configuration.



## Action 2b

### Simplify access and circulation.

Prohibit excess driveways and coordinate with PennDOT on the access and circulation implications of land development proposals along major routes. A high concentration of driveways or a proliferation of especially wide driveways increases the conflict points between pedestrians and vehicles, in addition to creating confusion for drivers — access becomes a free-for-all. It also translates to less space available for sidewalk amenities such as trees, benches or planters.

- When creating a new SALDO, consider the following:
  - Curb cuts are discouraged in pedestrian-intensive areas. The City could, in collaboration with PennDOT, prohibit or limit new curb cuts along Crawford Avenue or other target areas.
  - Commercial, industrial and large residential properties should consolidate driveways wherever possible by interconnecting parking lot and loading area entries and by sharing parking among uses.
  - Driveway curb cuts for two-way traffic should not be wider than 18 feet. An exception should be made on industrial streets in locations requiring frequent access for large trucks or semi-tractor trailers, where two-way driveway curb cuts may be up to 24 feet in width.
  - Driveway curb cuts for individual residential properties should not be wider than 7 feet with 1.5-foot wings (10 feet total width). Where truck loading is the dominant activity, they should not be wider than 8 feet with 1.5-foot wings (11 feet total).
  - In areas where alleys provide access to the rear of properties, curb cuts onto streets are strongly discouraged; all parking and service access should be provided via the alley.
  - Driveways may be bounded by permeable paving, curb extensions or landscaping areas that extend from the sidewalk into the parking lane, eliminating the need for driveway aprons.

# Goal 3:

Broaden access to other transportation choices.

## Action 3a Stay active in regional planning efforts.

### 3a

Maintain involvement in Fayette Area Coordinated Bus Transportation route planning activities, as well as initiatives of the Fayette County Planning Commission, PennDOT and Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) that impact Connellsville.

- Appoint a City representative as point person to participate in Fayette Area Coordinated Bus Transportation route planning activities, ensuring that the needs and preferences of Connellsville residents and employers factor into decision-making about stop locations, frequency and timing. Lobby for better connections to employment centers (Pittsburgh, Morgantown, Greensburg).
- Stay updated on opportunities to become involved with County and SPC programs, particularly those regarding resources that could benefit Connellsville and strengthen its transportation connections both internally and to the region. For example, an expansion of SPC's CommuteInfo service could coordinate ride-sharing for City residents working elsewhere.

## Action 3b Get a shuttle bus.

### 3b

Work with Fayette County and transit agencies to negotiate a shuttle bus for recreation visitors – for instance, pickup and drop-off for day-trip cyclists or paddlers.

- A dedicated bus with a trailer that could take cyclists or paddlers and their equipment to designated trailheads or river access points would further legitimize Connellsville as a regional recreation attraction. It would also increase the likelihood of visitors staying in and spending money in the City.
- Competitive awards of regional hotel room tax revenue via the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau represent one possible funding source for a shuttle. User fees could help offset costs, though the service would likely require ongoing subsidy.

## Action 3c

### Encourage the growth of ride-sharing within the City.

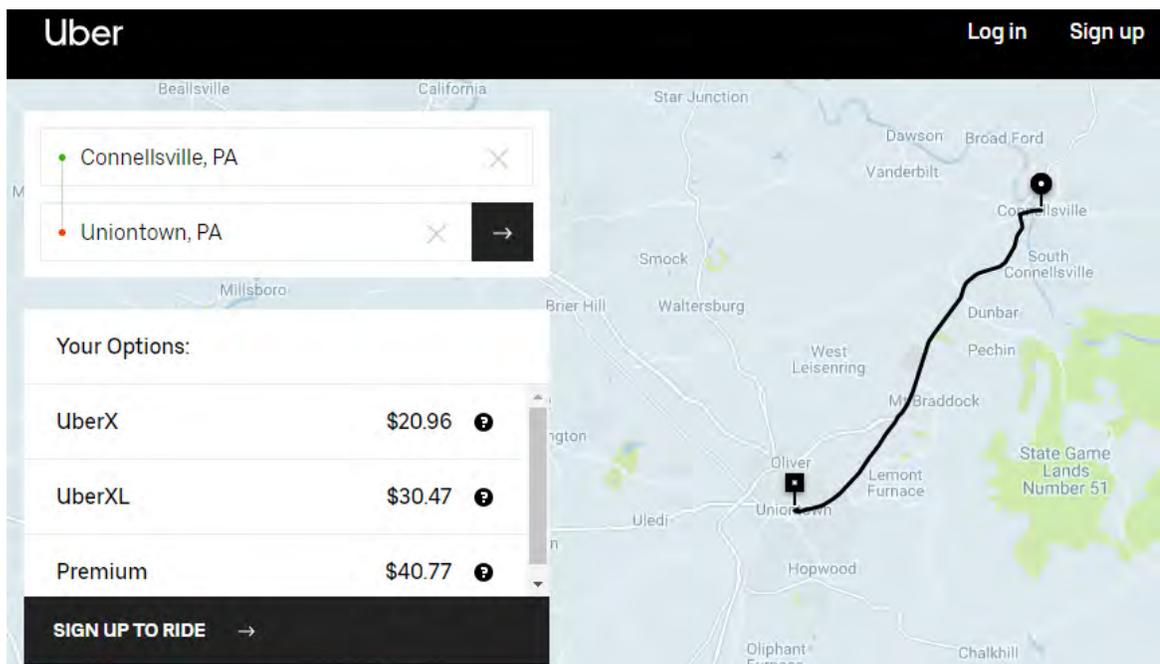
Connellsville lacks taxi service, and it is not reliably possible to hail an Uber or Lyft ride-share in the City via a mobile app, an option that has democratized ride service in more densely populated areas.

Ride-share app companies offer service according to population as well as the reliability and affordability of existing transportation options. Uber considers, according to one executive, “the number of riders that have opened the app in that city looking for a ride,” as well as the number of people who attempt to sign up to drive in a city where the service is not currently offered.<sup>1</sup>

According to Uber’s website, Connellsville falls within the Pittsburgh service area, meaning that it is technically possible to hail a ride to, from or within the City. However, stakeholders reported that pulling up the app within Connellsville consistently results in no available rides, suggesting that the area lacks enrolled drivers.

- Spread the word about app-based ride-sharing. Connellsville can signal demand to companies offering this service by increasing the number of app users attempting to hail rides as well as the number of would-be drivers who register with the service.
- Contact Uber and Lyft to determine whether they can offer resources to expand service available in Connellsville.

<sup>1</sup> See: “What it Takes to Lure Uber to Your Small Town,” Leif Johnson, Motherboard, May 26, 2016. [https://motherboard.vice.com/en\\_us/article/vv734x/what-it-takes-to-lure-uber-to-your-small-town](https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/vv734x/what-it-takes-to-lure-uber-to-your-small-town)



An Uber ride from Connellsville to Uniontown would cost around \$20, if a driver were available. This is seemingly never the case.

# Investing

## Key Principle:

**The City should further enhance the local business environment to attract entrepreneurs and retain existing employers.**

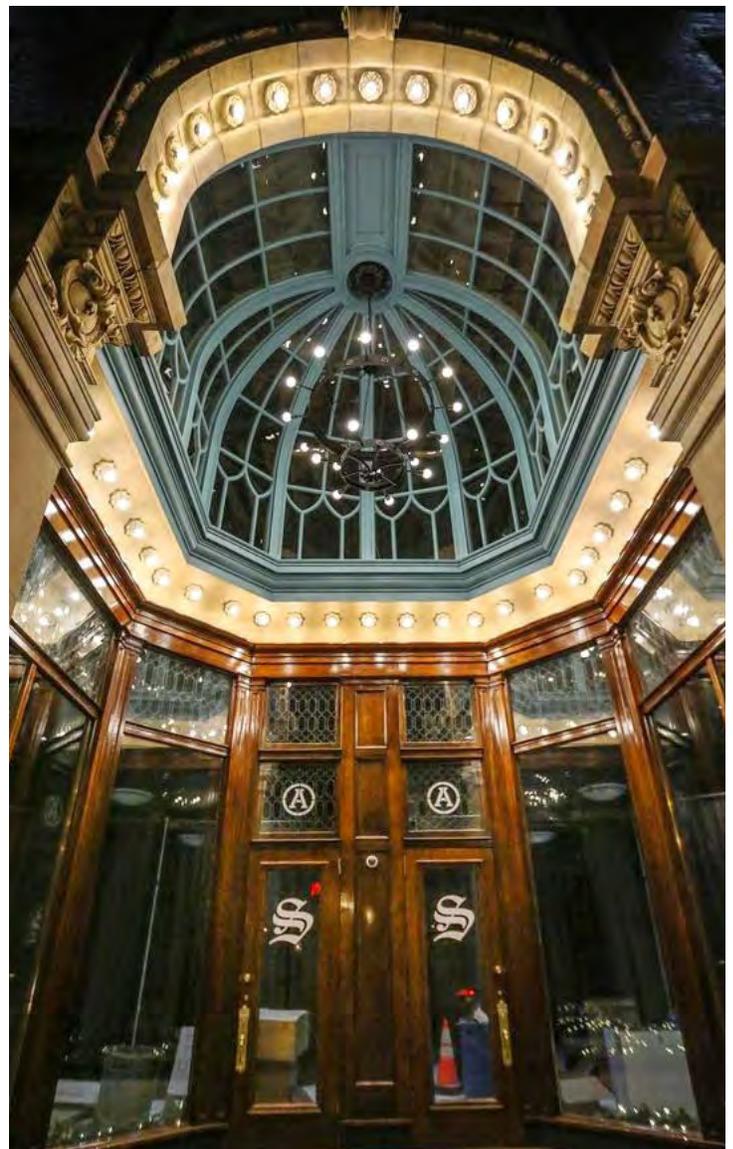
### Connellsville must capitalize on its unique competitive strengths to prosper in the long term.

Residents seek quality of life. Companies seek access to a skilled workforce. Retail establishments seek a market for their goods and services. To attract investment, Connellsville must remain viable as a destination to live, work, shop and play.

Connellsville is strategically located along the PA Route 119 corridor and serves as a gateway to the Laurel Highlands region. The City seeks to further capitalize on its location, natural resources and heritage.

Economic development initiatives must focus on providing opportunity to existing residents while also attracting the additional workforce necessary to sustain prosperity. The City must continue to work with stakeholders to encourage entrepreneurial activity and support the growth of existing businesses, particularly where they contribute to the character of Downtown and the West Side. As a key gateway to the Laurel Highlands region, Connellsville can leverage natural resources and outdoor recreation to further enhance the local business environment.

*Revitalization of historic structures, such as the Aaron's Building pictured at right, circa 1906, strengthen the cultural character that makes the City a unique destination. The Aaron's Building was slated for demolition in 2010 before local businessman Terrance "Tuffy" Shallenberger purchased and restored it to create a memorable event rental space.*  
Photo credit: Christine Pocratsky



## Related findings

### ■ **Generating jobs will require workforce preparation**

The public has identified job creation as a major issue that impacts quality of life in the City. Connellsville residents need access to jobs that pay a sustainable living wage. However, far too many in the local workforce lack the 21st-century skills employers value most. The region's youth also need improved access to the modern STEAM education (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) curriculum.

### ■ **Create a creative hub**

Residents note the lack of shopping and entertainment options in Connellsville. Anchors within the central business district can generate employment opportunities, expand the local tax base and remediate blight. Many small cities and towns have turned to the creative economy as a new economic development strategy.

### ■ **Blight is a drag**

The City's central business district and other commercial corridors suffer from pockets of blight. These distressed properties present a challenge due to higher cost and complexity of redevelopment efforts, especially when taking into account local market constraints. Connellsville must compete for new investment with nearby municipalities that have developable greenfield land. While Connellsville does not have a historic district, it has many historic buildings at threat of demolition.

### ■ **Some vacancy is speculative**

Plan participants noted that handful of property owners control a large number of properties in the City, some of which sit vacant due to a refusal to sell, possibly due to overvaluation. The City, one person suggested, doesn't have available storefronts to put businesses in.

### ■ **Parking needs attention**

Stakeholders reported that parking is a limited commodity in certain areas, such as the West Side, during peak hours on weekends. All street parking in Connellsville is free. Meters exist along some spaces Downtown, but they are not enforced. Meters previously along Crawford Avenue have been removed. Given the perception that more parking is needed, the City should carefully manage the dedication of public space for private vehicle storage in a way that supports commercial district viability by increasing turnover.

### ■ **A strong streetscape supports economic activity**

An attractive, functional public realm along key streets supports the quality and appeal of the built environment, which serves to bolster community pride and identity, improve perceptions of public safety, encourage economic development and encourage travel via bicycle or foot. People are more likely to visit and spend time in pleasant, safe streetscapes with engaging attractions. Connellsville's efforts to improve the functionality and beauty of its main thoroughfares will continue to be important to the City's revitalization.

# Goal 1:

## Revitalize vacant and underutilized properties

### **Action** Promote redevelopment of targeted sites.

#### **1a**

As a built-out city, Connellsville offers no large tracts of greenfield property available for development. Future growth must be accommodated through the redevelopment of existing buildings and infill of vacant lots. It is important to address speculation by acquiring strategic properties. The following represent priority sites that should be targeted as cornerstones of the City's revitalization strategy. See the Investment Priority Map in the Implementation Tools chapter for locations.

#### ■ **West Side**

- Bradley Paints (608 W. Crawford Ave.)
- Foundry Site
- Vacant land at Widewaters Plaza
- Mongell Site (224 W. Crawford Ave.)
- Allen Property (223 N. 3rd St.)

#### ■ **Downtown**

- Brimstone Building (101 N. Pittsburgh St.)
- Oddfellows Building (109 S. Pittsburgh St.)
- Former Connellsville Area School (110 N. Prospect St.)
- 119 W Crawford Ave.

#### ■ **Other areas**

- Gibson Terrace
- Vacant land adjacent to former Zachariah Connell Elementary School (Highlands Hospital)
- Armory Site

### **Action** Consider dedicating code enforcement fine proceeds to support new occupants.

#### **1b**

The City could use this funding source to incentivize use of its empty buildings. Greensburg, for example, allocated \$50,000 in code enforcement violation fees to create a flexible grant program for business owners to take up residence in vacant spaces. Funds can be used for purposes such as redesigning or retrofitting space for new uses. Officials evaluate proposals on a case-by-case basis.

# Goal 2:

## Create opportunities for small business development and entrepreneurship

### **Action** Market prime opportunities to attract anchor businesses and entertainment options.

#### **2a**

Unique businesses and entertainment venues can anchor Main Street revitalization efforts. A concentration of arts and culture attracts residents, visitors and new business to Connellsville. Exciting destinations, such as microbreweries, can further stimulate the local economy.

- Develop three-way communication among the Main Street Program, owners of targeted properties and potential businesses to discuss strategies for and benefits of creating a critical mass of clustered anchor attractions Downtown
- Continue to develop and promote financial incentives to counter market deficiencies
- Hire a consultant to conduct a market analysis to fine-tune a targeting strategy and learn where gaps are greatest (demand among trail users, tourists, residents, etc.)
- Consider advertising direct solicitation to attract most desired anchor businesses

### **Action** Identify and prioritize opportunities for tourism and outdoor recreation, capitalizing on Connellsville's connections to the trail, river and mountain region.

#### **2b**

Tourism and outdoor recreation can greatly enhance the City's economic vitality. The Great Allegheny Passage, Youghiogheny River and proximity to related attractions, such as the Ohiopyle area, represent tremendous opportunities for business development and entrepreneurship. Connellsville's natural resources serve as assets that can be leveraged not only to further enhance quality of life, but as a tool to attract economic activity to the region.

- Work to enhance riverfront access. Connellsville should work to create a network of connected multi-use spaces that focus on its natural resources, expanding public access to the river and enhancing its appeal as a destination for outdoor recreation.

This does not necessarily mean acquiring and developing riverfront property; it does mean working with property owners to ensure that community goals are served as properties are developed or redeveloped. Ideally, sites along the river should connect to one another and treat water access as an inherently public asset. Access could allow visitors to interact with the water in various ways: Outdoor dining, fishing, launching boats or rafts, observing wildlife or other activities.



Abandoned N&W/P&WV railroad bridge over the Youghiogheny north of Downtown.  
Photo credit: Flickr user JosephA, Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

- Provide additional trail amenities and circulation. The Walk/Bike Audit completed as a companion document to this report proposes strategies to strengthen connections between the Great Allegheny Passage and Connellsville's business districts, luring trail users into the City to patronize local establishments and enjoy the City's cultural offerings.
- In addition to physical improvements to the safety and appeal of pedestrian and bike routes, additional trail amenities should include clear signage, coordinated with the Allegheny Trail Alliance, to direct trail users to Connellsville's amenities.
- A publication showing routes around Connellsville, showing points of interest and places to stay and eat, should be published on the City's website and made available along the trail.
- Improve connections to other Laurel Highlands attractions. This could involve a recreational destination shuttle, as proposed on Page 35.
- Facilitate the purchase or lease of property along the Great Allegheny Passage trail for creation of a permanent venue for local vendors to sell food and other local items.

## Case Study: Pittsburgh Public Market

Based on the concept of European markets and the market houses that served pre-1950s American cities, Pittsburgh's Public Market was built in 2010 as a 12,000 square-foot-space in the city's Strip District Produce Terminal. The market relocated three years later to a nearby space three times that size and continues to operate Wednesday through Sunday each week, with some vendors open Monday and Tuesday as well. The market is affiliated with roughly 100 vendors who sell everything from ice cream, kombucha, beer and gluten-free baked goods to hand-crafted gifts.



Photo credit: www.foodcollage.com

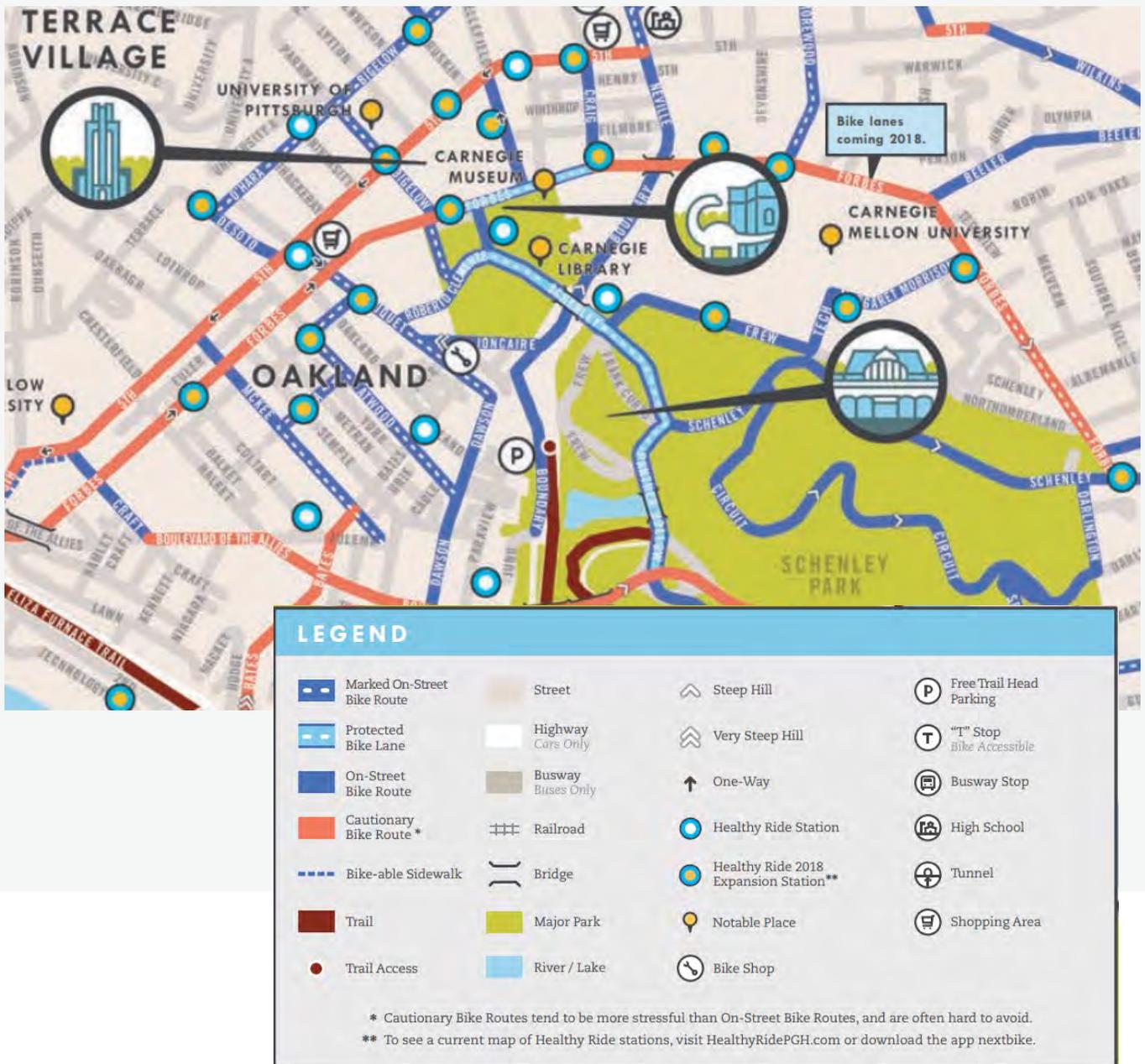
# Bikeways and Trails Mapping

## Pittsburgh Bike Map

BikePGH recently released its 7th edition of the Pittsburgh Bike Map, a resource “designed with the commuter and urban explorer in mind, in the hopes that folks can learn some safer routes between neighborhoods, as well as explore some new territory.” In addition to the features shown in the legend below, the map has an interactive online version that contains details on landmarks and the opportunity to view routes in satellite mode.

Connellsville could both increase its appeal as a cycling destination and strengthen the connection between the Great Allegheny Passage Trail and its business districts by undertaking a similar effort, providing cyclists with an overview of the City’s key attractions and best places to visit.

Creating such a map for Connellsville could involve collaboration with a cycling advocacy organization. BikePGH created the Pittsburgh-area map.



## Action 2c

### Evaluate feasibility of a new Entrepreneurial Center.

Small businesses sustain rural areas by helping diversify the local economic base. In Fayette County, they employ between 53 and 61 percent of workers.<sup>1</sup> It is critical to ensure existing businesses have access to the skilled labor and capital for growth. Rural communities must also encourage entrepreneurial activity to remain competitive.

Entrepreneurship creates wealth, not just wages. This wealth is retained by a community through reinvestment. In addition to economic benefits, entrepreneurs contribute other intangibles through their innovation and creativity.

Local entrepreneurs lack access to capital and other professional services. Connellsville should evaluate the potential to develop a new collaboration and community center for innovators. The facility can offer resources, training, services and amenities designed to support entrepreneurs. This center should also include flexible maker and co-working spaces to accelerate the growth of new businesses.

- Initiate discussions with potential private and institutional partners: Federal and state agencies, Fayette County, the regional workforce development board, small business development centers, higher education, community/regional banks and local industry.
- Conduct analysis to determine potential project scope (capital, operations and programming) and cost.
- Determine appropriate location and develop funding strategy. See Funding Strategy section for possible resource options specific to a potential Entrepreneurial Center.

## Empowering Creators

The following examples illustrate collaborations that have created makerspaces and supported entrepreneurship to strengthen local economies.

### Columbus Idea Foundry

Located in a renovated 100-yr old shoe factory, the Idea Foundry includes 60,000 SF of tool shops and assembly spaces, offices and coworking desks, classrooms and communal spaces. It features classes, meetups, private & public events, workshops and speakers. The workshop includes labs and shop areas dedicated to woodworking, blacksmithing, laser cutter/engraving, CnC machining, welding, bronze & aluminum casting, 3D printers (filament and resin based), glass cutting, wood turning, electronics, vacuum forming, metal milling and machining, vinyl cutting and more.

Membership structure and resources: <https://ideafoundry.com/membership>

Funding: Launched a \$1.25 million fundraising campaign in early 2014. Received a \$350,000 grant from ArtPlace America and \$84,000 from the Columbus Foundation. Operating proceeds fund expenses.



[ideafoundry.com](https://ideafoundry.com)

1

<https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/advocacy/2018-Small-Business-Profiles-PA.pdf>

## Empowering Creators (continued)

### Oak Hill MakerSpace

Oak Hill MakerSpace is a major part of the Oak Hill Collaborative, Inc., a 501(c)3 located in Youngstown, OH that aims to revitalize communities through small business development and neighborhood beautification. Available to incubator participants, residents of the neighborhood and other interested parties, the MakerSpace is a “community center with tools.” It provides access to a wide array of equipment and tools including several 3D printers, computers, wood working equipment, assorted hand tools, air compressors and the like with more being donated, borrowed and otherwise acquired all the time. The Oak Hill MakerSpace supports start-up businesses in the incubator that cannot afford to own and maintain expensive, but essential, equipment.

Resources: <http://oakhillcollaborative.org/makerspace/>

Funding: Received a \$10,000 grant from the Youngstown Foundation, along with smaller grants from other funders. Much of the equipment has been donated.



[oakhillcollaborative.org](http://oakhillcollaborative.org)



Photo credit: Corinne Coulson  
[news.psu.edu](http://news.psu.edu)

### The Corner

Operated by Penn State New Kensington, The Corner bills itself as Alle-Kiski's destination for entrepreneurial learning, coworking and community activity. The facility offers coworking, private office membership, professional meeting rooms, community event space and entrepreneurship development, a 10-week accelerator program powered by PSU INVENT.

Resources: <https://thecorner.place/>

Funding: Seed grant of \$150,000 from Invent Penn State, membership fees

### Prothaven

Prothaven is a PA nonprofit founded to serve the public good by providing space, tools, knowledge and community for creation and innovation. Located in Wilkesburg, PA, it was founded by members and staff of the former TechShop Pittsburgh. The new model will: 1) be more civic-minded and inclusive, 2) better match equipment and facilities to this community's interests, 3) offer more private workspace and storage 4) offer more in-depth courses.

In May 2018, Prothaven announced plans for an expansion that will triple their size to 12,500 SF. The facility will be a multidisciplinary shop with areas including laser cutters, a

wood shop, a metal shop, etc. They will also be working with members and instructors to determine equipment purchases to match the interests of the community.

Membership structure - [www.prothaven.org/product-category/memberships/](http://www.prothaven.org/product-category/memberships/)

Funding: Fundraising for new members, rentals and sponsors. Recently received a \$165,000 grant from the Henry L. Hillman Foundation that will facilitate expansion. Also received a \$50,000 grant from Google.

## Action 2d

### Connect residents with programs and opportunities to gain workforce skills.

Rural communities have struggled to keep up with positive national economic trends. Many areas have seen traditional industries stagnate or decline over the past several decades. The resulting economic downturns have led to “brain drain” as talented young residents have left in search of better economic opportunities.

Fayette County’s civilian labor force has declined by approximately 12 percent since 2000, leaving many local companies struggling to fill available positions.<sup>1</sup> A skilled workforce is necessary to retain existing businesses and facilitate their growth. Employment opportunities can also attract new residents to help stabilize neighborhoods and increase the local tax base.

- Market available workforce development resources. The Fayette County Chamber of Commerce has a committee focused on workforce development that may provide useful options (see below).
- Work with the business community and other partners to develop additional training programs.
- Improve access to employment centers, including regional business parks. This ties into transportation recommendations related to expanding the commute mode options available to Connellsville residents.

## Fayette County Workforce Development

### Chamber Education Council

The Fayette County Chamber of Commerce’s Education Council sponsors programs to provide career-focused and practical information and guidance for students and professionals in a wide variety of fields, seeking to understand and meet the business community’s need for a skilled and talented workforce.

The Chamber’s Education Council works closely with the Fayette Business Education Partnership. The Council is funded by members and by grants provided through the Chamber’s non-profit arm, The Redstone Foundation.

Current programs include:

- EducationWorks! Education Excellence Recognition Program, currently encompassing the Fayette County Educator of the Year Awards, Junior Students of the Month Awards, 8th Grade Extra Effort Awards
- Senior Scholarship Program
- Fayette County 8th Grade Career Awareness Fair

<sup>1</sup> <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/PAFAYEOLFN>



Connellsville's annual Savor the Avenue event, hosted by the Greater Connellsville Chamber of Commerce, replaces traffic on Crawford Avenue between Pittsburgh and Arch streets with the longest dinner table in Fayette County. The event showcases local food establishments, connects residents in a creative and fun way and promotes the community. Photo credit: Joel Brewton, Herald-Standard

## Action 2e

### Generate excitement year-round Downtown with festivals, events and popups that promote local art, history, culture and small business.

These gatherings can bring citizens together in an effort to create a more vibrant, healthy community. The occasional closure of Crawford Avenue for events (such as "Open Streets") could help reinforce this gathering place as a well-known inviting public realm and enhance mobility. Vacant and underutilized spaces can house temporary pop-up shops, restaurants, art galleries or other events.

Such events build upon past and ongoing efforts in Connellsville that have sparked interest and momentum in Downtown as a gathering place, such as the 4th of July Rib Fest (one of Connellsville's largest events), farmer's market, Chili Festival, Soup Walk, the Lion's Square concert series, the Geranium Festival, Golden Reunion, Mum Festival and It's a Connellsville Christmas.

- Build upon the momentum and success of ongoing and past events programming to envision and plan new events. The planning process revealed a need for year-round activities, thus a winter arts carnival or holiday market could help attract foot traffic and business to the urban core during what is now the off-season.
- Work with the Police Department to examine the feasibility of staging an Open Streets event on a Sunday. Engage local groups and businesses to add fun and creative programming to the day and market the event regionally to attract visitors.

## Streets are for People!

These case studies present Open Streets events that could be adapted for Connellsville to reinforce the suitability of its main thoroughfares for active transportation, attract visitors and spur local economic activity.

### OpenStreetsPGH

Hosted by BikePGH, OpenStreetsPGH is a community-building, family-friendly, city-transforming event series held every summer in Pittsburgh. The events connect neighborhoods together with safe spaces where friends and families can experience the best the city has to offer on a summer day. All programs are free of charge and open for all to participate.

The annual event brings together tens of thousands on the last weekend of May, June and July to run, walk, bike and skate in some of Pittsburgh's most iconic streets. OpenStreetsPGH offers something for everyone, from fitness workshops to kids' activities, shopping, brunch, community arts, and special promotions presented by over 100 local businesses and organizations. Three event hub stages around the routes feature free fitness classes by the YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh providing dance, strength and mind/body workshops.

<https://openstreetspgh.org/>

### Philly Free Streets

Philly Free Streets is a people-powered initiative of the City of Philadelphia. Managed by the City's Office of Transportation & Infrastructure Systems, the event temporarily closes streets to cars, inviting people to walk, bike and play. Free Streets Philly provides an opportunity to educate participants on how street design can promote, "healthy, livable neighborhoods," by making walking and biking in the city easier. Organizers also include educational programming on benefits of good street design.

<http://www.phillyfreestreeets.com/>

### Open Streets Carnegie

Open Streets Carnegie offers residents and visitors an opportunity to see what Main Street looks like without vehicles. The event closes West Main and East Main Streets to allow individuals to choose what they would like to do in a safe environment such as walking, running, biking, skating, etc. Many local and surrounding businesses and organizations offer demonstrations and lessons that will include yoga, dance, physical therapy, skateboarding, bicycling, and other activities, including a scavenger hunt.



[openstreetspgh.org](https://openstreetspgh.org)

# Goal 3:

Develop policies, programs and regulations that stimulate investment

## Action 3a Make the Zoning Ordinance more flexible and business-friendly.

### 3a

In order to create the types of development it would like to see, Connellsville should make those types of development easier to accomplish. The most direct way to achieve this is reviewing the City's Zoning Ordinance to ensure that it is simple to interpret and administer and, more importantly, that it does not unnecessarily impose costs, delays and difficulty that impede investments the City needs.

- Ensure that the ordinance builds in flexibility to building height and parking minimums that allow for desired development types to “pencil out,” or become economically feasible.
- Update the use table and districts as appropriate to encourage compatible mixed uses. See Implementation Tools for detailed recommendations.
- Examine zoning variance requests – if a type of variance is always granted, it should not have been prohibited.
- Require relatively small setbacks between adjacent business uses.
- Consider providing density bonuses in exchange for desired design features or amenities.

## Action 3b

### Enforce and Renew the Vacant Property Ordinance.

Connellsville adopted a very thorough Vacant Property Ordinance in 2014, however this ordinance is set to expire in September of 2019. The City should continue to enforce this ordinance and consider extending it once it expires.

This type of ordinance can be very effective in deterring blight through registration of vacant properties. The ordinance was adopted to:

- (1) Assist the City in protecting the public health, safety, and welfare;
- (2) Protect the safety of emergency services personnel;
- (3) Monitor the number of abandoned properties and vacant buildings / structures;
- (4) Assess the effects of the conditions of those buildings on nearby businesses, buildings, structures, properties, and the neighborhoods in which they are located;
- (5) Address the deterioration and blight of City neighborhoods caused by abandoned properties and vacant buildings / structures, and to identify, regulate, limit, and reduce the number of abandoned properties and vacant buildings / structures;
- (6) Require the owners, interest holders, or local agents of such abandoned real properties and vacant buildings and structures to register and pay related fees;
- (7) Establish a registration process as a mechanism to protect neighborhoods from becoming blighted due to the lack of adequate maintenance and security of abandoned real properties and vacant buildings / structures;
- (8) Promote substantial efforts to rehabilitate such abandoned properties and vacant buildings / structures; and
- (9) Offset the cost and expense associated with addressing and remediating the public nuisance resulting from abandoned property and vacant buildings / structures.

## Connellsville's Vacant Property Ordinance

In 2014, the City of Connellsville enacted a vacant / abandoned property ordinance requiring property owners to register vacancies within 180 days, and annually if the property remains vacant. Within 90 days of registration, the City's Code Enforcement Officer inspects the property. Vacant properties must be maintained, and secured and shall conform to all property maintenance codes enforced in the City.

Registration Fees range from \$30 for one or two family dwellings to up to \$1,000 for non-residential properties. All annual fees collected under this ordinance shall be allocated to and accounted under a separate line item, the allocation, disbursement, and use of which shall be

limited only to the rehabilitation, demolition, repair, or improvement of abandoned real property or vacant buildings or structures by the City or any land bank in which the City belongs or participates.

The City may grant waivers for a current year if a "good faith effort" is shown to rent, lease or sell the space or if a valid architectural or renovation plan has been submitted to the City and Fayette County.

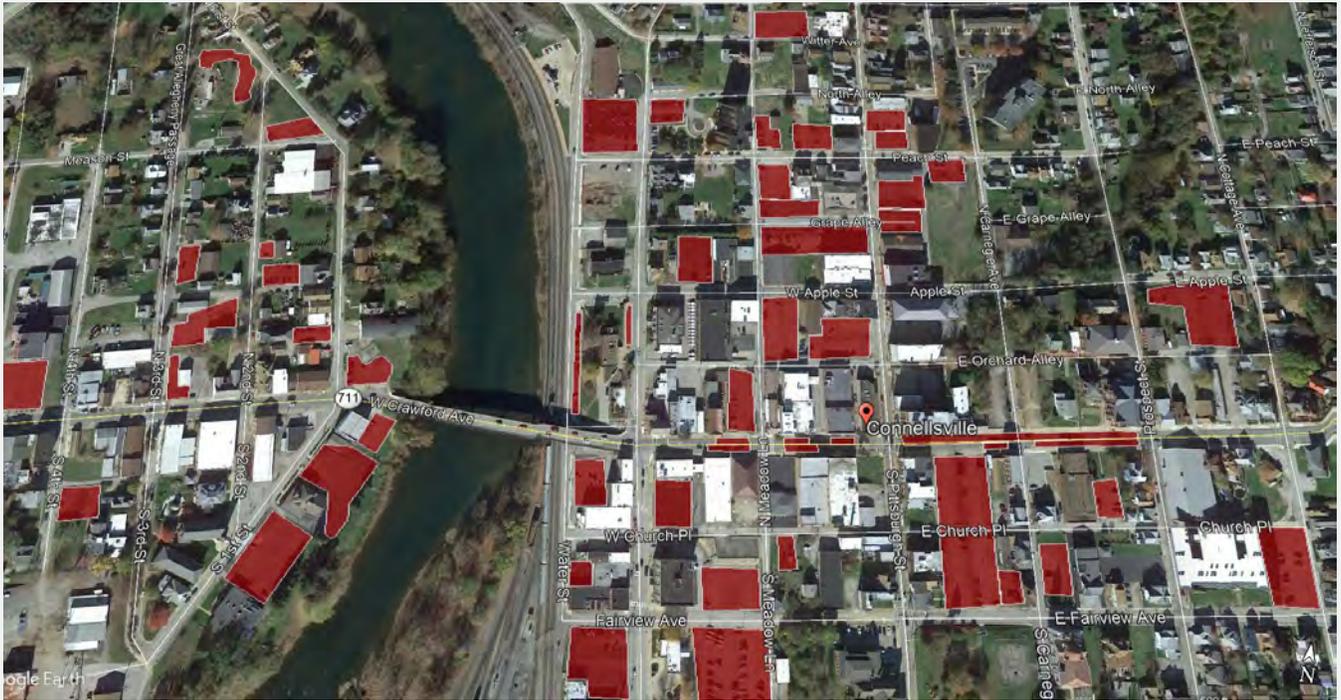
## Action 3c

### Evaluate existing and needed parking to balance the highest and best use of land with the needs of businesses in various neighborhoods.

Free parking is taken for granted in all but the most densely urban areas of the region. However, it is almost always a public decision (by way of either the provision of public parking or requiring a minimum number of spaces per development). A parking spot does not always represent the highest, best or most economically productive use of space: It should be weighed against the opportunity cost of alternatives it would replace: a parklet, a bike lane, a storefront generating taxable revenue.

In order to effectively address its perceived parking problems, the City needs more data about the nature of the shortage:

- Who is having trouble finding parking: Those who work in the area, customers or residents?
  - Is there redundancy between private lots that are not shared? (For instance, a tavern lot that sits empty all day but is full in the evenings adjacent to an office lot that is full during the day and empty at night.)
  - What is the economic value and opportunity cost of additional land that the City would consider acquiring and devoting to free parking?
- Remove parking minimum requirements from the Zoning Ordinance, at least Downtown. This allows the market (as opposed to arbitrary or outdated ratios) to decide what is needed for a particular development. Removing minimums doesn't prevent anyone from building parking, but it helps to ensure that unnecessary parking spaces are not built, saving investors money and preserving land for other uses.
  - Conduct a utilization study to determine peak usage of surface parking spaces Downtown and on the West Side. This data should drive future right-sizing decisions and whether proactive parking management (via meters or pay stations) would create desired conditions, in terms of turnover and reliably available spaces. The study could take the form of a walking audit or more detailed data collection effort, such as logging vehicle occupancy of certain spaces/lots at certain times of day.



## Parking is not a public good.

The map above depicts a rough estimate of land devoted to surface parking Downtown and in the West Side. This includes street parking, which in Connellsville is free (the meters still standing are not enforced), as well as public and private lots. It amounts to a vast area devoted to the storage of private vehicles.

Perceptions of a parking shortage in areas of the City amount to there being a market in which priority users—in the case of retail areas, these would be customers—do not have priority access. Generally speaking, the price for parking on a given downtown block is right when 15% of the total spaces are available at any given time. This means that a limited public resource (space) is being efficiently used, but it also ensures that customers know they can conveniently find a space near their destination.

Changing parking behavior in Connellsville's highest-demand areas – getting the right types of parkers into the right types of spots, in terms of how long people visit their destinations – will require creating a market for parking. The most efficient way to accomplish this is to install meters that regulate street parking.

If Connellsville pursues an active parking management strategy to keep spaces turning over in its busy retail areas, the City may need to reintroduce pricing, but in a targeted way. Achieving the 15-percent space availability threshold would require performance pricing – potentially using smart meters to set different prices at different times of day and in different locations, or keeping rates the same by location but varied by time of day.

## Action 3d

### Enhance the Redevelopment Authority's ability to revitalize property and support business development.

To implement recommendations and plan priorities, the City should continue to leverage technical and financial assistance from available sources. More detail on programs and resources is available in the Funding Strategy section of this report.

- Seek additional support through DCEd's Neighborhood Assistance Program. The Cultural Trust has applied for this funding in the past, since the applicant needs to be a non-profit.
- Develop a Qualified Opportunity Zone (OZ) strategy. The 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act created the Qualified Opportunity Zone program, which provides a tax incentive for private long-term investment in select economically distressed communities. Connellsville is the only OZ in Fayette County.

While the program is new and thus its implications for Connellsville are still developing, it represents a strong opportunity for the City to attract investment. The City should begin proactively assessing ways it can leverage the benefits of designation, such as marketing projects to investors/funds or examining the feasibility of establishing a local OZ fund.

The City of Erie has developed an OZ investment prospectus that can offer guidance: <https://goo.gl/ptyGgg>

- Renew LERTA tax exemption. The City's current authorizing legislation expires in 2021, providing an opportunity to evaluate the way the program works for the City and make any needed changes. For instance, the City currently extends the exemption to all commercial and industrial property citywide, so it should consider whether targeting specific areas instead would maximize the program's effects.

The City should also consider removing certain geographic areas from the LERTA program that could benefit from tax-increment financing (TIF), as the two are incompatible. For instance, a TIF could become part of a redevelopment strategy for Gibson Terrace, providing cash up front for site preparation and infrastructure.

- Consider implementation of a Business/Neighborhood Improvement District (BID/NID). These districts, enabled by state law, enable property owners and businesses in a defined geographic area to jointly plan and manage a funding source (special assessments) for improvements that will benefit the area.

A BID in Connellsville's Downtown or West Side could finance features and services beyond what the City can afford, such as capital improvements, streetscape beautification or marketing/research services, while promoting a sense of unity and pride among participants.

# Living

## Key Principle:

**Connellsville's neighborhoods should be improved and supported to offer a wide variety of high-quality housing types and amenities to meet the existing and future needs of all generations, while respecting the City's unique historic character.**

### Strengthening Connellsville's neighborhoods requires a multi-faceted approach.

Neighborhoods are complex systems. It is fairly easy to sense the status of a neighborhood by simply walking or driving through it: Are there people around? Are buildings occupied and well cared for? Does this place feel safe? Is it beautiful? It is much more difficult to determine why certain places do or do not prosper.

There are nine principles of healthy neighborhoods, according to the University of Virginia's Center for Design and Health: Smart location, nature integration, mixed

land uses, alternatives to driving, encourages pride of place, healthy food access, enables lifelong learning and incorporates sustainable development.<sup>1</sup>

In Connellsville, pride of place is especially important, in both the form of respect for the City's architectural heritage and in promoting property maintenance and improvement. The City will also need to prioritize broadening its mix of housing options and building infrastructure and programs that will allow all of its current and future residents to maintain a high quality of life.

<sup>1</sup> [www.harthowerton.com/pdf/DesigningtheHealthyNeighborhood.pdf](http://www.harthowerton.com/pdf/DesigningtheHealthyNeighborhood.pdf)



*New upgrades to Yough River Park make this recreation asset enjoyable for all types of visitors.*

## Related findings

### ■ **Blight threatens neighborhood health**

Blight is often defined different ways, but generally refers to objectively determinable signs of deterioration that are sufficient to constitute a threat to human health, safety and/or public welfare. Plan stakeholders identified neighborhood blight as a major issue in Connellsville, as run-down, often abandoned properties pose safety problems and pull down property values for surrounding homes.

### ■ **Proactive, organized code enforcement remains key**

The City has made great progress during the last decade in enforcing its property maintenance code and clearing condemned structures. This work will continue to be important as the City develops a blight mitigation strategy, especially detecting and staying on top of minor problems before they get out of control.

### ■ **Changing demographics makes imperative the need to serve all**

While Connellsville's median age has remained steady in recent years, the City exists within a county, region and nation that is getting older, reflecting the aging Boomer generation. The City will need to find ways to preserve the quality of life for households as their needs change and mobility is limited, making the option to age in place a viable one supported by adequate and accessible infrastructure, programs and services.

### ■ **The City must lead the repositioning of its housing inventory**

Connellsville is characterized by beautiful old homes that in many cases are much larger and more demanding of maintenance than today's smaller households prefer. The market favors more compact, energy-efficient and easily maintained housing options with strong connections to walkable neighborhoods. The City must work to both cultivate housing demand by achieving the vision established in this plan, and it must create clear and simple opportunities for developers to build or retrofit the housing the City needs by removing regulatory red tape and strategically developing incentives.

### ■ **Deconcentrating poverty will make neighborhoods stronger**

Economic stratification within Connellsville, as within all urban jurisdictions, is apparent in the differences in investment among its neighborhoods. Neighborhoods that are socioeconomically integrated tend to be the most civically cohesive, providing opportunity to the lowest-income households that is unavailable when the most affordable housing is concentrated and isolated. The Gibson Terrace public housing site operated by Fayette County Housing Authority represents a key opportunity for mixed-income redevelopment.

# Goal 1:

## Improve property maintenance and beautification

### Action 1a

#### Improve compliance with the property maintenance code.

Connellsville's housing stock includes a wide variety of home sizes and ages, with many large homes constructed more than 100 years ago. Larger and older homes require serious maintenance, including the replacement of major systems.

Maintenance is a housing cost often deferred for both homeowner and renter households with limited incomes. Landlords whose units command the modest rent levels of a relatively weak market often will not see returns on investments in improved housing condition. Absentee out-of-town landlords are, on the whole, more motivated by profit than by a sense of pride in contributing to neighborhood value, thus they are less likely to invest in upkeep. Without proactive maintenance, units tend to deteriorate in a variety of ways.

Recognizing that residential code violations can be products of limited resources as well as limited effort, Connellsville's enforcement program must be organized, flexible and use all available tools to help property owners keep conditions safe and attractive.

- Evaluate the current City system for logging and tracking violations. The City should have a database that details complaints and violations as well as ownership records, permits and public safety reports. This information would help the City track owners of multiple problem properties, analyze the most common violations and strengthen cases before judges.
- Follow through on minor violations (overgrown grass, abandoned vehicles, etc.) to establish community standards and potentially prevent the manifestation of more serious violations.
- Train public works and other City employees to recognize and report code violations.
- Develop a resource guide that the zoning/code officer can provide to violators. The guide should provide information and resources to help address the situation, such as a summary of key local standards, contact information for services (landscaping, towing, junk removal, etc.) and other related items.
- Meet with the local magistrate to determine how property owners, the City and the legal system can work together to resolve property maintenance issues, with a goal of empowering owners who are making a good-faith effort to comply with standards.

- Utilize tools available through recent legislation to increase enforcement of the property maintenance code. Including:
  - Municipalities can file actions against property owners for failure to repair deteriorating property and to deny municipal permits due to deteriorating property and failure to pay property taxes or municipal claims.
  - Under the Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act (Act 90), persons with at least two convictions for the same code violation where the violation remains unabated; threatens health, safety, property; and no reasonable attempt to abate may be charged with a 2nd degree misdemeanor (1st degree for three or more convictions).
  - Under the Municipal Code and Ordinance Compliance Act, any purchaser of a building with known code violations must correct the violations or demolish the building within 12 months (or longer by agreement with the municipality), a requirement enforceable with fines ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000. Inspection of property is required at sale and again at 12 months from date of sale to enforce abatement. This law would only apply if Connellsville enacted an ordinance requiring pre-settlement inspection of properties.
  - Under the Blighted and Abandoned Property Conservatorship Law, a court-appointed third party (municipality, nonprofit or nearby neighbor or business owner) may take control of a blighted property when the owner has died or refuses to act.
  - Under the Real Estate Delinquency Act, municipalities may coordinate the waiver of municipal, school and county tax claims upon receipt by one of them of donated tax delinquent property.

## Action 1b

### Implement a local blight strategy.

Blight and abandonment are expensive and contagious and, left unaddressed, can undermine the social and economic fabric of a community. Attacking the challenge of fighting blight can be overwhelming. Developing a plan to fight blight helps communities prioritize proven strategies and target resources to turn around blighted properties and, in doing so, increase home values and tax revenue, reduce crime, and support thriving and healthy communities.

With support from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania is working with the City of Connellsville Redevelopment Authority and the Fayette County Cultural Trust to develop a comprehensive plan for addressing blighted properties in the City and returning them to productive use. The plan will recommend and prioritize strategies and best practices for preventing and remediating blighted properties and redeveloping those properties in accordance with local needs and priorities.

Components of the plan include:

1. Examination of existing conditions relating to housing, vacancy, and blighted properties
2. Review of current City and community-based programs and tools being used to address blighted properties
3. Recommended strategies and actions

A successful blight plan must be community-driven. Interviews with City leaders and staff, community leaders and other key stakeholders will inform the development of the plan and recommended action steps for implementation.

- Engage meaningfully with the development of the blight strategy, providing all relevant data and information.
- Put the completed plan into action.

# Goal 2:

Ensure that the City meets the needs of a growing senior population

## Action Proactively plan to serve people of all ages and abilities.

### 2a

As reported in the Background Studies document, Fayette County's population is getting older on the whole, with the large Baby Boomer cohort entering retirement age and younger generations marrying and having children at significantly lower rates. While Connellsville's median age has held steady during the last decade, the City should anticipate a need to adapt to age-related implications for its housing market, community services, amenities and infrastructure.

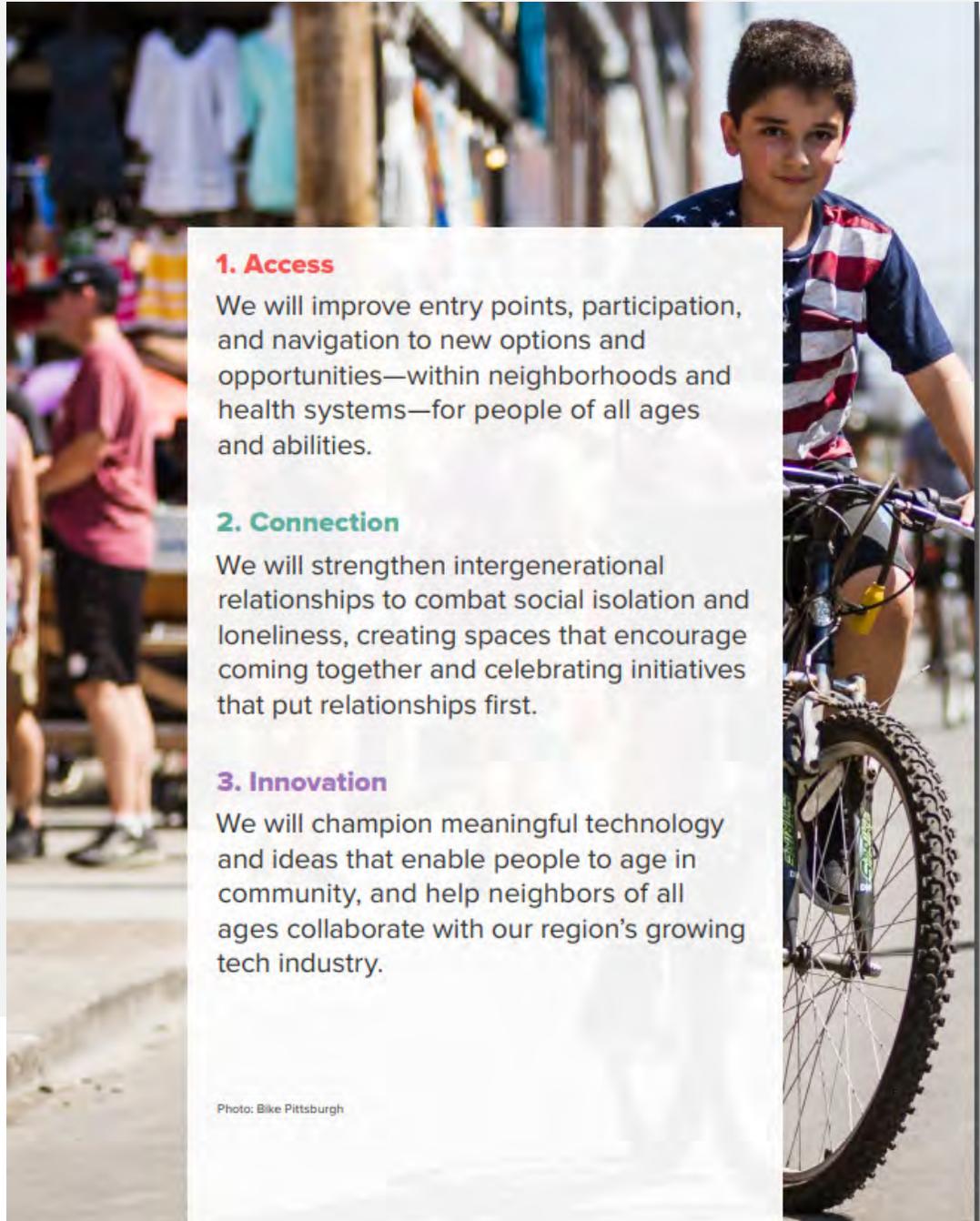
Connellsville, as a place to live, work, visit and play, should work for residents of all ages and ability levels, ensuring that everyone has access to a high quality of life.

- Improve the safety and accessibility of public rights-of-way. A good first step is implementation of the recommendations of the Walk/Bike Audit, introducing infrastructure upgrades to make active transportation more appealing and accessible.
- As noted previously, the City's sidewalk network is inconsistent, with relatively few areas fully compliant with the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Beyond the routes identified in the Audit, sidewalk improvements should focus on connecting key destinations, particularly areas where people currently walk that are unsafe.
- Make sure the needs of people *without* cars are represented as the City participates in regional transportation planning discussions.
- Find ways to provide information about available resources, such as transit and paratransit serving Connellsville or volunteer agencies that provide assistance to seniors. Posting information on the City's website or other locations online is necessary, but not necessarily sufficient to reach seniors or those with limited internet access. Brochures and flyers should be available in well-visited locations such as City Hall, the library and the senior center.
- Encourage (and if possible, incentivize) developers to include visitability features (such as a no-step entrance, 36"-wide hallways and wheelchair-accessible restroom with lever handles) in new construction or rehabilitation.
- Cultivate gathering spaces and programs that offer cultural, arts or other events that can bring together older and younger residents.
- Ensure that the Zoning Ordinance permits progressive solutions for affordable housing, such as patio homes and accessory dwelling units, and allows non-traditional households to live together.
- Invite representatives from retirement communities around the region to visit Connellsville and talk to officials about locating similar facilities in the City.

## Age-Friendly Communities

The age-friendly movement recognizes that people all want the same things: Safe, affordable places to live where it's easy to get around, proximity to our daily destinations, the opportunity to fully enjoy life by doing what interests us. However, providing equal access to these things requires a proactive examination of how communities are built. The Age-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh Action Plan for 2017-2020, based on robust public and stakeholder participation, established 30 action items in three focus areas that will make the region more livable and open to all.

— [www.swppa.org/agefriendly](http://www.swppa.org/agefriendly)



### 1. Access

We will improve entry points, participation, and navigation to new options and opportunities—within neighborhoods and health systems—for people of all ages and abilities.

### 2. Connection

We will strengthen intergenerational relationships to combat social isolation and loneliness, creating spaces that encourage coming together and celebrating initiatives that put relationships first.

### 3. Innovation

We will champion meaningful technology and ideas that enable people to age in community, and help neighbors of all ages collaborate with our region's growing tech industry.

Photo: Bike Pittsburgh

# Goal 3:

## Deconcentrate poverty within the City.

### Action 3a Bring opportunity to low-income neighborhoods, bring mobility to higher-income areas

## 3a

Connellsville, like many urban core communities within the region, houses a disproportionate number of low-income households. The City's population peaked at 13,293 in the 1940s, and from that point on, many of those who moved away were those who could afford to, reflecting the postwar exodus to the suburbs happening nationwide.

In 2016, 23% of Connellsville's population fell under the poverty line, compared to 15% to 18% in surrounding townships. Connellsville and Uniontown combined represent 19% of the County's poverty, though they represent only 13% of its total population. Within Connellsville there is notable variation in housing value and price among neighborhoods, indicating a degree of segregation by income level.

A growing consensus among researchers indicates that socioeconomic integration makes neighborhoods stronger in ways both obvious and intangible: It opens economic mobility to more lower-income households, but also fosters a high degree of civic cohesion that benefits households of all income levels.<sup>1</sup>

Promoting economic integration, within Connellsville and beyond its borders, needs to work in two ways: Bringing opportunity into high-poverty neighborhoods and providing affordable housing opportunities in low-poverty neighborhoods.

- Create an incentive program to help bridge the gap between rehabilitation costs and value for owner-occupied housing. Stimulating private investment often costs less in public funds than financing rehabilitation, and incentives can take a wider variety of forms (credits, abatement) than direct fund allocation.

Example: Some cities (Richmond, VA; Port Huron, MI; Baltimore, MD) have versions of an "urban pioneer" incentive program that provides funds to homebuyers forgivable for a given term of owner-occupancy, usually five to seven years. Such programs are typically funded with federal or state housing program sources but can also benefit from foundation or private grantors.

- Facilitate redevelopment of the County Housing Authority's Gibson Terrace property into a mixed-income neighborhood. The City should be a partner in this effort, which would be led by the County Housing Authority and subject to federal approvals. An early step would be master-planning the site, as well as exploring financing options with the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency.
- Provide support to both housing authorities in expanding the variety of landlords and properties participating in the Housing Choice Voucher program. The City and/or Redevelopment Authority may be able to provide referrals or information to property owners.

<sup>1</sup> Rothwell, Jonathan. "Sociology's Revenge: Moving to Opportunity (MTO) Revisited." Brookings Institute Social Mobility Memos, May 6, 2015. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2015/05/06/sociologys-revenge-moving-to-opportunity-mto-revisited/>

## Public Housing in Connellsville

Some of poverty's concentration is related to federal policy directives of the 1940s, which caused the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to site public housing in the area of perceived greatest need. This was an approach of least resistance, as land was relatively cheap in urban areas and such projects faced less neighborhood opposition than they would have in wealthier suburbs. This had the effect of warehousing the poorest households in isolated neighborhoods where they had little opportunity to thrive. Such concentrations also tend to exacerbate crime and other social conditions.

Connellsville has multiple public housing developments operated by two authorities. The Connellsville Housing Authority owns and manages Greenwood Heights (118 units in 29 buildings), North Manor (100 units in 20 buildings) and Riverview (100 units of senior housing in an 11-story building). The Fayette County Housing Authority owns and manages Gibson Terrace, 165 units near the stadium.

Within the last decade, federal policy has shifted to affirmatively furthering neighborhood choice: Bringing higher opportunity levels (mixed-income development, more amenities) to neighborhoods in need as well as empowering participants to live in any area of their choosing through the Housing Choice Voucher program. Thus, HUD is now less in the business of building low-income housing towers and more in the business of providing housing assistance that supports economically integrated neighborhoods. This new approach could translate to repositioning Connellsville's public housing in the long term.



*Gibson Terrace received upgrades in 2007, when 24 units in four buildings were demolished and replaced with 16 modern units.*

# Goal 4:

Adjust the composition of the local housing inventory to meet changing household needs and preferences

## Action 4a

**Work with developers, housing advocates and other partners to broaden the variety of housing available in the City.**

Both the housing analysis in the Background Studies and community input indicate that Connellsville's housing stock is currently ill-suited to accommodate an expanding number of small households. This includes seniors that demand accessible, low maintenance affordable units that will help them sustain independence as well as Millennials, who in general have deferred marriage and child rearing and are less likely to buy a home than previous generations.

Market research for both groups indicates a preference for smaller energy-efficient, easily maintained living spaces in walkable communities. The City's housing stock has many large older homes that come with relatively high utility bills and demanding maintenance needs.

- Work with developers to promote residential infill that both respects the architectural context of existing buildings and meets anticipated demand for smaller, manageable, energy-efficient housing.
- Partner with the County Redevelopment Authority to identify opportunities to reposition the housing stock through its administration of a land bank.
- Fortify relationships with partner agencies who can expand the physical accessibility of housing and help find housing solutions for people with various types of disabilities.

## Action 4b

### Ensure that the Zoning Ordinance allows for smaller and less expensive housing types.

- Allow the construction of accessory dwelling units (ADUs), which would empower owners to build “granny flats” or rent out garage apartments, for example. This is a means of expanding affordable housing opportunity without materially changing a neighborhood’s character.
- Add flexibility to the ordinance to increase density in areas where it is most appropriate, such as Downtown and the West Side. Priority areas for the City to reduce or eliminate lot size minimums, allow taller buildings and/or providing density incentives should be those where affordable housing could leverage access to jobs, amenities and transportation.

## Action 4c

### Expand capacity for housing rehabilitation and other initiatives

- Seek funding to add a staff member to the Connellsville Redevelopment Authority to focus on housing initiatives, such as implementation of the blight strategy, coordinating with builders/developers to position and promote housing development opportunities and explore the feasibility of launching a housing rehabilitation program at the City level.
- Ensure that City households are aware of and apply for the Homeowner Rehabilitation Program run by the County Redevelopment Authority, with resources from the federal HOME, CDBG and USDA Rural Development Service programs and County Act 137 funds. City households may also benefit from the County Redevelopment Authority’s Lead Hazard Control Program. Details available at [www.racfpa.org/housing-programs.html](http://www.racfpa.org/housing-programs.html).

# Thriving

## Key Principle:

**Connellsville should further develop an identity and reputation as a healthy, desirable living environment rich in civic life and a full complement of cultural and recreational amenities.**

### **Connellsville is rich with amenities and culture that enhance its appeal as a recreational destination.**

Continuing to find ways to promote the arts, as well as the trails, parks and neighborhood walking paths that make the City a great place to live and visit, will help solidify Connellsville as a unique regional destination. The City has made tremendous progress since the 2007 Comprehensive Plan in restoring venues, staging festivals, hosting a variety of concerts, festivals and community events and becoming involved with initiatives such as Local Food Local Places and the state's Nature-Based Placemaking program. In order to build upon these accomplishments, the City needs to both continue these creative efforts and to market the great things happening here.

Connellsville has grown its identity as a lively arts and culture scene, carving out a competitive niche within the larger Laurel Highlands region, which markets itself as “a magnificent mountainous region” with “spectacular natural scenery, outstanding outdoor recreation venues, historic sites and attractions,” among other draws. The City will next need to clearly identify and strategically communicate what makes it one of the region's premier destinations.



*The Porter Theater, circa 1916, was renovated in 2012 to enhance original features and add state-of-the-art production systems. It is part of Connellsville's Community Center, along with a dance studio, basketball court, swimming pool and various small shops.*

## Related findings

### ■ **A higher and better use exists for flood-ravaged Dutch Bottom**

In August 2016, a severe flooding event caused catastrophic damage to Connellsville's streets, vehicles and homes. The City has since demolished 23 homes in the hardest-hit Dutch Bottom neighborhood through a Hazardous Mitigation Grant from the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). After clearance, the sites will have limited future use potential based on FEMA requirements. However, the area is adjacent to existing public recreation amenities and the river, suggesting that it could hold significant public value in supporting and supplementing recreational use.

### ■ **Marketing messaging is currently inconsistent, limited**

The best things about Connellsville are secrets too well kept. Great Allegheny Passage trail users passing through the City's West Side patronize businesses along their path, but stakeholders uniformly agreed that more could be done to connect them to other City attractions and capitalize on the potential business they represent. In general, the City should compete with Fayette County's most popular tourist attractions, benefiting from the economic activity spurred by visitors from around the world. In order to bolster its reputation as a premier destination, Connellsville must determine how to market itself.

### ■ **Leveraging outdoor assets to grow the local economy will require strategy**

The planning process revealed a strong desire among participants to continue to develop the City as a year-round hub for outdoor recreation, arts and culture. Connellsville will need to strategically enhance its existing recreation assets and links, building a place where urban amenities and recreation activities are mutually supportive and reinforcing.



*The Summer 2016 flood event destroyed many structures in Dutch Bottom, resulting in the demolition of 23 homes, including this one.*

# Goal 1:

## Redevelop Dutch Bottom.



High-Priority Goal

### Action 1a

#### Determine and implement new land uses for Dutch Bottom that are compatible with FEMA requirements.

Through federal hazard mitigation assistance, the City has acquired property in Dutch Bottom to demolish 23 homes severely damaged by the August 2016 flood event. These properties are now deed-restricted in perpetuity to open space uses that restore and conserve natural floodplain functions. The restrictions allow for uses such as active or passive parks, multi-use greenways or wildlife habitat, but not for permanent structures, with a few exceptions.

Within these guidelines, the City should restore value to the property by using it to support and expand neighboring recreation functions.

- Implement a Master Plan for Dutch Bottom. The concepts on the following page represent one configuration for activities that the Steering Committee determined would be compatible and complementary at the site, including various types of active recreation for all ages, parking (on a permeable surface) for nearby fields, facilities for recreational vehicles and restrooms, the only type of structure permitted by FEMA regulations.
- Engage remaining Dutch Bottom property owners and other residents in review of conceptual ideas, gain community buy-in. Revise as needed.
- Apply for funding for master site planning and construction from sources such as PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). More information is available at <https://goo.gl/Y8Wifx>.
- Begin construction.

# Dutch Bottom Concept Plan Key

## Community Garden



Four photographs showing community garden activities: people working in raised garden beds, a person using a shovel in a garden bed, a row of RVs parked in a lot, and a close-up of an RV.

## Recreational Vehicle (RV) Park

## Multi Use Fields



Four photographs of sports activities: a group of people playing flag football, a football game in progress, a lacrosse game, and a soccer game.

## Adventure Play Area



Two photographs of an adventure play area: one showing large logs on the ground and another showing a person climbing a tree structure.

## Spray Park



Two photographs of a spray park: one showing children playing in a water fountain and another showing a person climbing a colorful structure.

## Exercise Stations



Three photographs of exercise stations: a group of people using various fitness equipment, a person using a specific exercise machine, and a group of people walking on a paved path.

## Walking Trails

## Restrooms



Two photographs of restrooms: one showing an outdoor exercise station and another showing a modern restroom building.

# Dutch Bottom

## CONCEPT PLAN

- Proposed Sites
- Proposed Walking Route
- Picnic Area  
- Lighting, water service, outdoor grill, shade trees

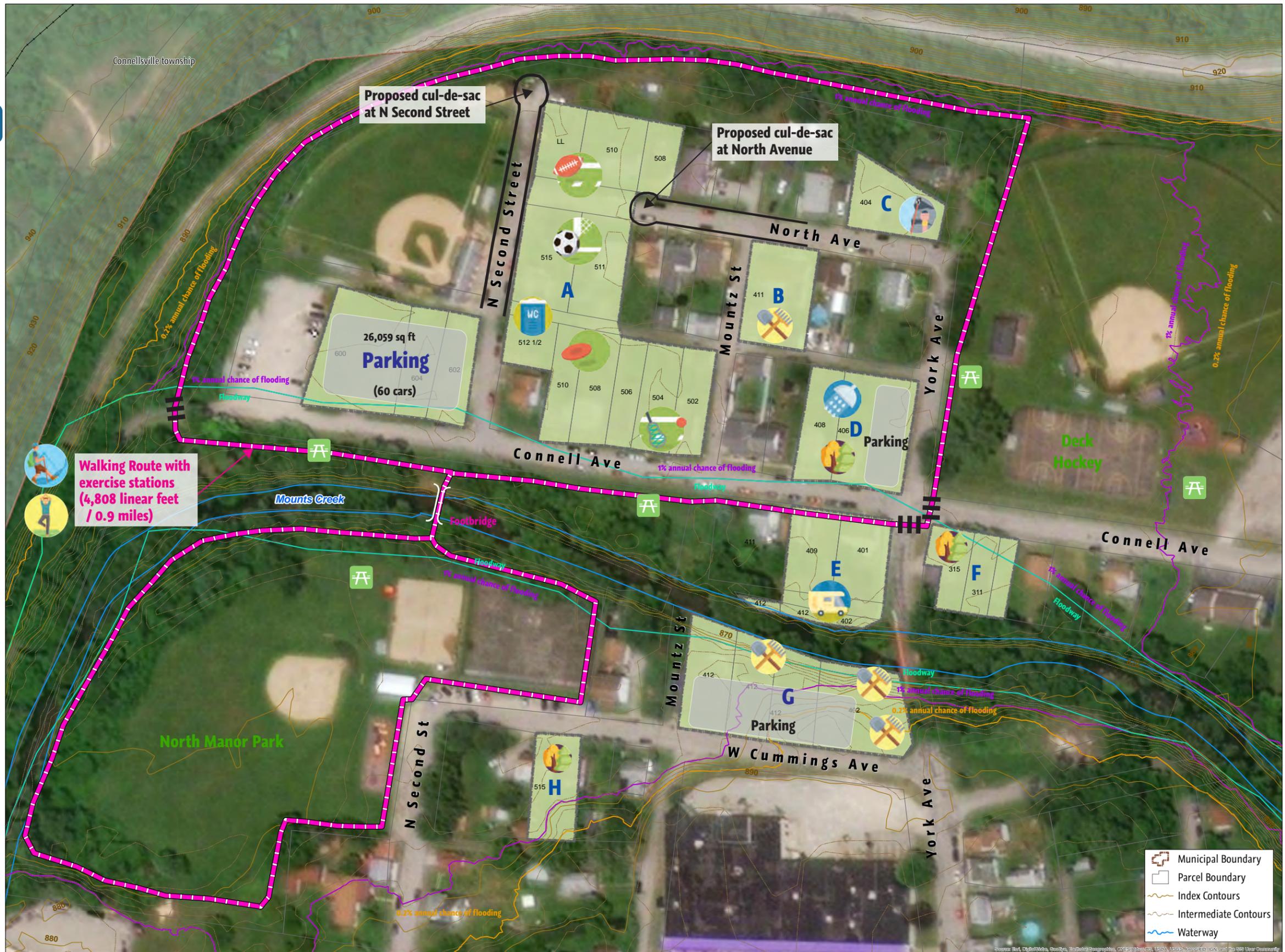
- A** Multi Use Fields (68,029 sq ft / 1.5 ac)  
- Rectangular grass multi use play fields for use as soccer, football, lacrosse, field hockey, ultimate frisbee, etc.  
- Restroom Facility
- B** Community Gardens (9,997 sq ft / 0.3 ac)  
- Storage sheds, composting corrals, water service, pavilions
- C** Adventure Playground (7,929 sq ft / 0.2 ac)  
- Shade trees, pavilion
- D** Spray Pad / Garden / Parking (18,105 sq ft / 0.4 ac)  
- Spray pad, tot lot playground  
- Shade trees, perennial garden  
- Pavilion, lighting, water service  
- Gravel parking lot (4,400 sq ft); accommodate 12 cars
- E** RV Campground (16,929 sq ft / 0.4 ac)  
- 10 pads (20'x40' parking pads with 5' setbacks on each side)  
- Utility hook-ups
- F** Open Space (9,576 sq ft / 0.2 ac)
- G** Community Garden & Parking (31,278 sq ft / 0.2 ac)  
- Gravel parking lot (15,000 sq ft) with middle aisle; accommodate 40 cars  
- Sidewalk connection to park & foot-bridge  
- Storage sheds, composting corrals, water service, pavilion
- H** Open Space (7,188 sq ft / 0.2 ac)

Note: Parking areas are not to scale

N  
1 inch = 50 feet

Data sources:  
Fayette County Assessment Office (parcels),  
PASDA (LiDAR, flood hazards, contours)

Map Date: **Mackin**  
OCTOBER 2018



# Goal 2:

Promote a unified and unique community identity.



## **Action** Market Connellsville using a unified logo, slogan and website.

### **2a**

The Comprehensive Plan process afforded Connellsville’s elected and appointed officials, stakeholders and residents an opportunity to establish a consensus vision for the future of the City, an ideal version of Connellsville toward which the City will work during the next 10 years. This process revealed that Connellsville intends to become a unique destination within the region, a well-connected civic, cultural and outdoor recreation hub that offers desirable neighborhoods and economic opportunity.

The first step in achieving this vision is formally articulating it, telling the world what Connellsville is and what it will become.

The City should use themes from this plan to develop a brand, an understanding of the “product” that Connellsville represents in attracting visitors and potential investors. What will Connellsville be known for? What are its distinct competitive advantages over other destinations? What does Connellsville have that is worth a day trip or weekend to experience? Connellsville’s brand must set it apart from other attractions within the Laurel Highlands.

- Initiate a branding and marketing process to create a unified and distinctive set of communications materials that will characterize and promote Connellsville, including an intentional look and feel that convey a sense of community pride and excitement.

This could include (but is certainly not limited to): graphic concepts, taglines/slogans, marketing messages, marketing opportunities, gateway signage and web and social media updates. Most importantly, the process must determine how Connellsville can own its brand, how the City can wield these new tools to truly stand out.

## Community Branding Case Study

Denison, Texas, sought to distinguish itself from similar communities along the shore of Lake Texoma, one of the nation's largest lakes. Like Connellsville, Denison is situated in a region rich with outdoor recreation attractions but needed to determine the local assets and advantages that made it a unique destination.

Research during the community branding process revealed what set the community apart: Denison was not only a lakeside resort, but could draw upon a storied history as the home of Dwight D. Eisenhower, wine industry hero Thomas Volney Munson and famed pilot Sully Sullenberger. Denison was also home to the engineers who created Lake Texoma by controlling the Red River.

Thus Denison's identity became a combination of "get-it-done gumption with a relaxed, easy-going nature that makes getting ahead a lot more fun." The city adopted a slogan of "moving forward, kicking back" and a sailboat logo that incorporates the letter D and symbolizes forward progress "in an easy, breezy way." The logo appears on city communications and on its website, in advertising materials and in gateway signage, as shown below.

1 More info at <http://www.northstarideas.com/case-studies/denison-texas>



## Action 2b

### Develop attractive gateway entrances at select locations.

Gateway signs represent ways to signal key entrances to a community, support local branding and provide navigational information. This is an opportunity to provide a clear and strong first impression of Connellsville to visitors, as well as a way to engender communitiy pride among those who live and work in the City.

Gateway signs do not necessarily need to mark the precise City boundary along major routes into Connellsville, especially if those places are topographically prohibitive, held by owners who do not wish to participate or are visually unappealing. The City should identify its most important entrance points and then look for ideal points nearby where signage could be installed and easily seen.

In the long term, Connellsville would benefit from a larger network of signage, including smaller directional signs in its most walkable areas denoting attractions, restaurants, restrooms, etc. This would help support branding efforts as well as increase the comfort and appeal of the public realm.

- Determine feasible and appropriate priority gateway locations. Negotiate with property owners as needed to obtain permission, easement or other arrangement to install and maintain gateway signage.
- Reach out to Allegheny Trail Alliance, which stewards the Great Allegheny Passage trail, to determine how the City could most effectively provide information to users entering Connellsville.
- Select a concept for welcome signage that incorporates and is visually consistent with City branding/marketing efforts.
- Install signage and complementary landscape features in locations that enhance public safety and are visually prominent.
- Create a plan for ongoing maintenance, either through the public works department or by creating a partnership with a local school or community organization willing to volunteer. The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy's Community Gardens and Greenspace program also represents a possible resource.

## Action 2c

### Leverage the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau as a means of promoting the City.

Connellsville has benefited in many ways from grants provided by the Bureau, which provided 35 grants totaling nearly \$400,000 across Fayette County in 2018. The Bureau's Tourism Grants program is funded by 50 percent of revenues generated by Fayette County's 3% hotel room tax. Since its inception, the program has awarded more than \$4.1 million in tourism grants.

Many recommendations within this plan relate to strengthening Connellsville's appeal as a regional tourism destination, which in turn will fortify its local economy. Thus the Bureau, its grant program and other resources and connections it provides will continue to be a valuable source of support for the City's ongoing rebirth.

- Maintain relationships with administrative staff as well as County Commissioners, who help to determine award funding, in order to keep Connellsville's priorities on the radar and take advantage of all marketing and other resources available through partnership with the Bureau.
- Continue to apply for tourism grants and encourage organizations within the City to seek funding.

## Action 2d

### Promote the creation of neighborhood gathering spaces.

The City can serve many purposes by increasing the number of "third spaces" beyond home and work where people can gather, relax and socialize. Ray Oldenburg introduced the concept in a 1999 book, describing neutral, low-stress hang-out places such as cafes, parks and barber shops "the core settings of informal public life," essential for social cohesion.

Neighborhood gathering spaces such as community gardens, libraries, parklets or walking paths can promote intergenerational interaction, increase public safety (eyes on the street) and promote enjoyment of the natural environment. They can also host activities that make people feel more engaged in community life.

- Creating public "third spaces" does not necessarily call for the acquisition of parcels and installation of expensive features, though this represents a use for City-owned parcels with development limitations. The City can look for sites within existing public spaces that could be enhanced as gathering spaces — for instance, adding seating, lighting and art to a streetscape or additional programming at a park.
- Where potential does exist for site control and development for something like a community garden, find and empower neighborhood champions to take ownership of marshaling volunteers to create and maintain the space. People who want to use the space should play an active role in shaping it.

# Goal 3:

Continue to build and promote offerings in local art, history and culture.

**High-Priority Goal**

## Action 3a

**Work with agency partners and funders to facilitate events, installations and venues (both traditional and non-traditional) within the City.**

Connellsville's understanding of the value that art and culture provide to City life is evident in the wealth of attractions and events available today. The planning process revealed how important this value will continue to be to the City's future development and identity as it works to distinguish itself as a place to visit, to invest and to live.

- Continue to support and promote existing venues, attractions and events. As an example, existing walking tours of the City (such as the public art tour and the mobile app walking tour, "Connellsville: Art and Architecture Abound") should be more widely publicized, especially to trail users. Events and festivals that reinforce Downtown and the West Side as fun and lively gathering spaces are especially important.
- Create a priority list of spaces where public art (mural, sculpture, mosaic, etc.) is needed and would be appropriate. Seek funding sources that would provide small grants to artists for this work.
- Seek ways to sustain arts and cultural attractions during the winter months to establish Connellsville as a year-round tourism destination.
- Support the incubation of artists and the involvement of community members in learning about and creating art and music, through partnership with arts and culture organizations and possibly through the creative temporary use of available space (i.e. pop-up galleries or classes).
- Capitalize on opportunities to connect vacant industrial or warehouse space with civic, artistic or culturally significant uses.



The 25' by 50' Indian Creek Valley Railroad display, hand-crafted by Harry Clark, wows visitors to the Connellsville Canteen. The Fayette County Cultural Trust built the Canteen in 2012 to resemble the City's old B&O Station. The Canteen is a premier local attraction that also hosts a cafe, WWII museum and various events and shows. Photo credit: Fayette County Cultural Trust

## Action 3b

### Prioritize preservation of the City's existing historic assets and expand opportunities for residents to learn and engage with them.

The City's history remains one of its most important assets. While Connellsville does not have a historic district, it has many buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places (including the Colonial Bank Building, McClenathan House, Armory, Post Office and Carnegie Free Library) and others that are eligible (including the Aaron's Building, and Railroad Freight Station). Additionally, the City's rich architectural context and many treasured stories are resources with immeasurable value.

The Fayette County Cultural Trust, the Connellsville Redevelopment Authority, Connellsville Area Historical Society and other local groups work to preserve and enhance local history. This should continue to be a high priority.

- Prioritize preservation of the Brimstone, Oddfellows and Armory buildings.
- Use the zoning ordinance as a tool to preserve neighborhood character. This relates most obviously to lot size and the orientation of buildings on sites, but can also involve lighting, window placement and other design parameters that can help infill development or redevelopment support and emphasize the most defining features of what is already in place.
- Evaluate the feasibility of establishing a local historic district and Historic Architectural Review Board for a defined area. Deeming an area significant to the City's cultural fabric adds a layer of protection against insensitive or inappropriate change. This would involve a historic preservation ordinance with a design review process and guidelines. The benefits of creating a historic district are significant. For one, properties within historic districts appreciate at much greater rates than local markets overall.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "10 Benefits of Establishing a Local Historic District," National Trust for Historic Preservation. <https://savingplaces.org/stories/10-on-tuesday-10-benefits-of-establishing-a-local-historic-district#.XALItmhKhhE>



*This stone and stained glass arch is one of many public art installations along Connellsville's portion of the Great Allegheny Passage.  
Photo credit: Howderfamily.com. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.*

# Goal 4:

Continue to maintain and enhance outdoor recreational amenities and activities.

## Action 4a Proactively enhance and connect key recreation attractions.

### 4a

Connellsville's recreation system includes 10 local parks that provide a variety of ballfields, walking paths, playgrounds and other amenities, in addition to regional assets such as the Youghioghney River and Great Allegheny Passage trail. Residents and visitors have a wide array of outdoor activities from which to choose. As established previously, the City's future prosperity is closely tied to the quality and experience these attractions provide and how well they tie into the rest of the local economy. Thus the continual improvement of these resources will remain important, and even more so, finding ways to leverage them to enhance Connellsville's position within the region.

- Pursue Nature-Based Placemaking in partnership with the Pennsylvania Downtown Center and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. (See passage on following page).
- Consider undertaking a Comprehensive Recreation, Park, Open Space and Greenway Plan. This project, for which the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources grant program could provide a 50% funding match, would allow the City to establish a cohesive policy and set of strategies specific to its provision of recreation facilities and services in the long term.
- Support efforts to rehab and convert (to pedestrian and bicycle use) the existing railroad bridge over the Youghioghney River to improve connections between the GAP Trail and the Westmoreland County Trail system.
- Cameron Court has been a component of previous planning efforts in the City. Recent improvements include the planing of new trees through a TreeVitalize Grant; new water and electric lines via an LSA grant; front wall restoration via LSA and LHVB grants. Connellsville should continue to support efforts to renovate Cameron Court as an improved recreation area in the City.

# Nature-Based Placemaking

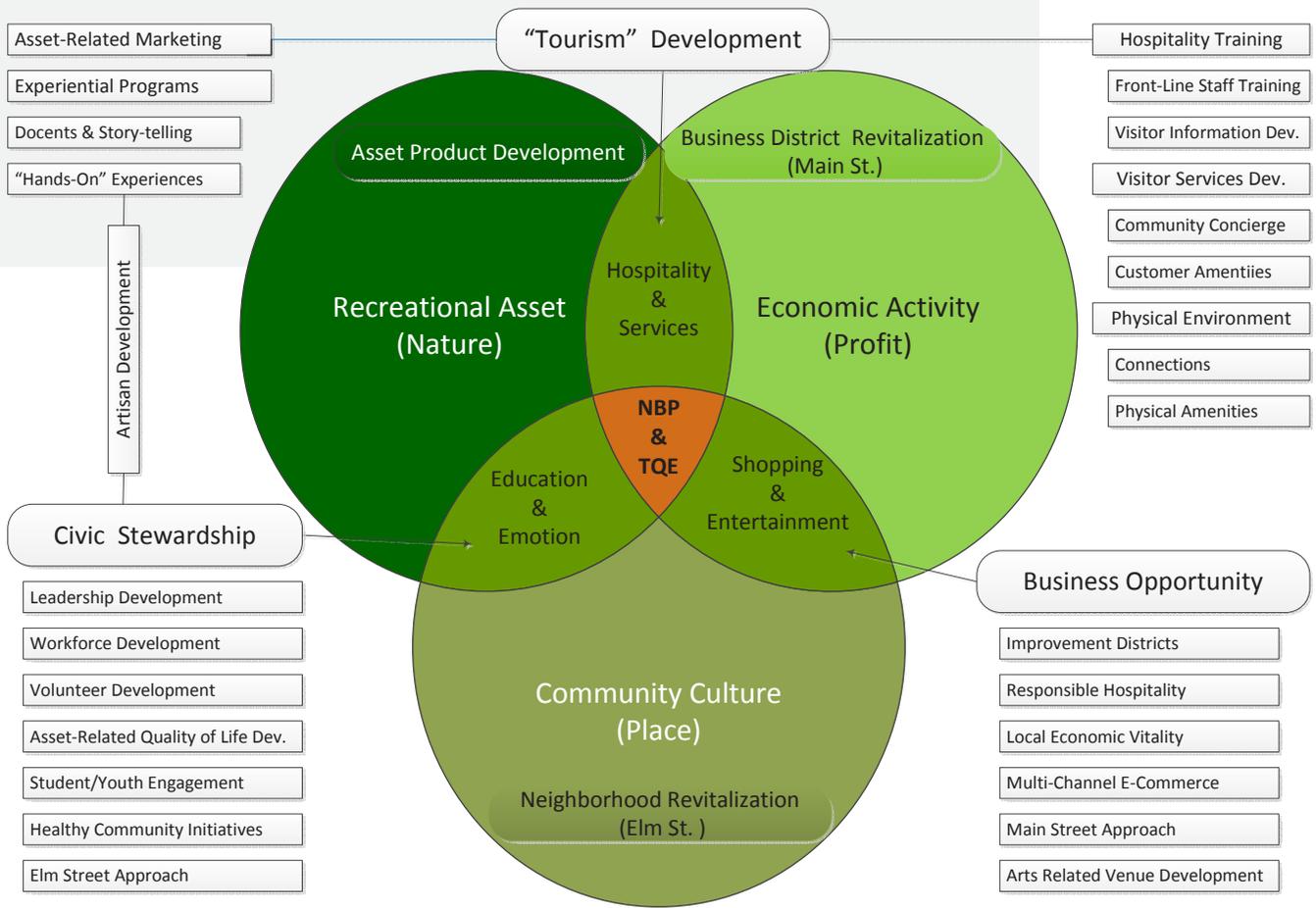
Connellsville has initiated work with the Pennsylvania Downtown Center, a statewide nonprofit focused on the revitalization of the Commonwealth’s core communities, to advance nature-based placemaking in the City.

As the Center describes it:

The first step in creating a nature-based place is to recognize and embrace the natural asset as a generator for economic activity. Nature-based placemaking is about the connection and collaboration among the focus areas of civic, tourism and business in the following ways:

- Civic, where the focus is on education and emotion
- Tourism, where the focus is on hospitality and guest services
- Business, where the focus is on shopping and entertainment.

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) has engaged Pennsylvania Downtown Center (PDC) to develop a strategy that will address these opportunities and provide communities with the ability to develop them to their fullest potential.



— [padowntown.org](http://padowntown.org)

# Goal 5:

Cultivate civic engagement a spirit of volunteerism.

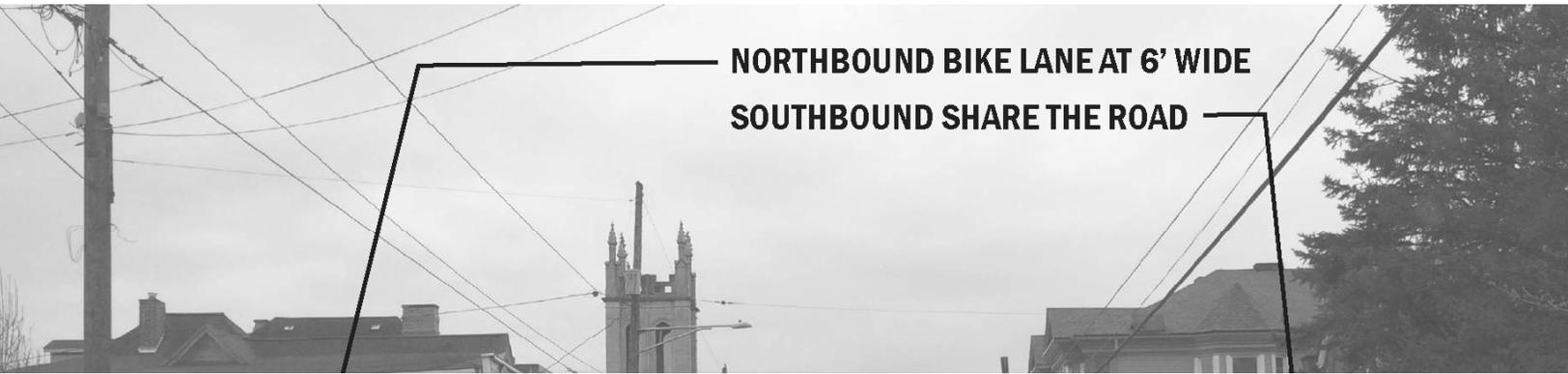
## **Action** Build capacity for plan implementation by inspiring and marshaling volunteers.

### **4a**

Building interest in helping with local projects and initiatives is not only helpful —at times critical — in making projects happen, given ever-shrinking resources. It can also engender a sense of pride in residents and give them a feeling of ownership, a sense of shared purpose, the impression that everyone shares responsibility for improving the community.

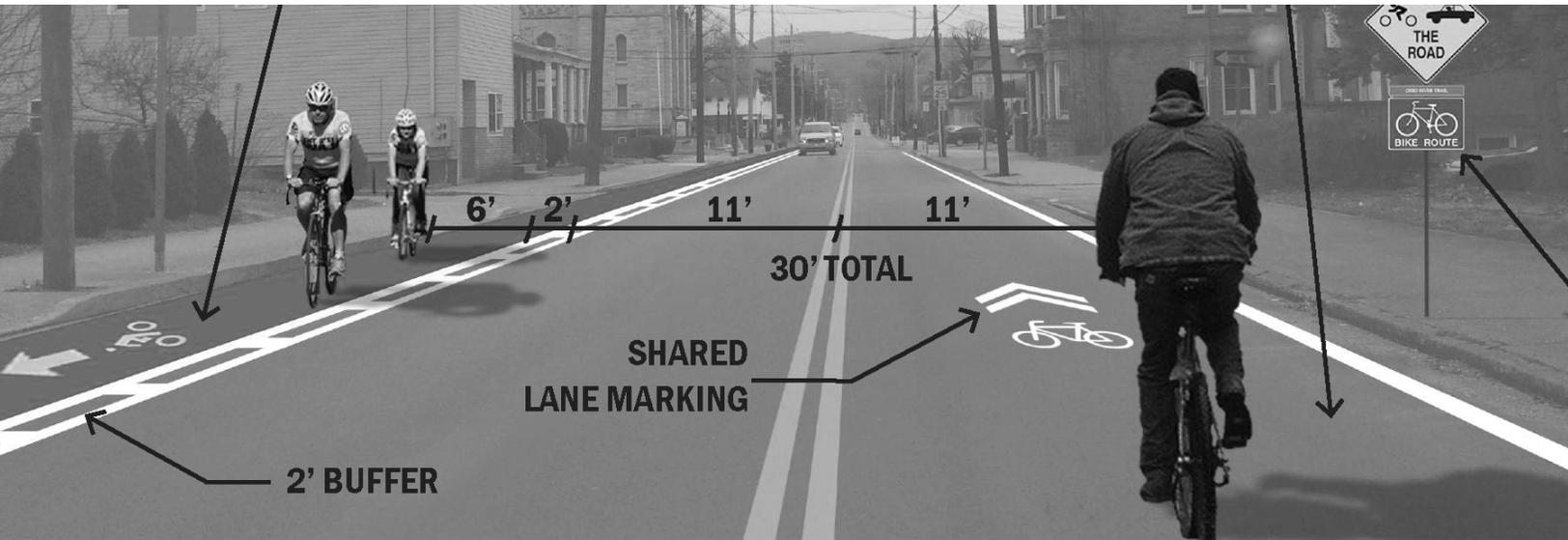
- Appoint a committee or City staff person to design and develop a volunteer program for civic projects. Determine which projects could benefit from volunteer leadership and/or support.
- Partner with schools, clubs and local organizations to recruit volunteers for specific projects with well-defined roles and goals.
- Coordinate logistics for volunteer projects with partnering department or agency. Acquire necessary materials, lead volunteers through orientation, assist with arrangements for any food or transportation (costs for which can be incurred by the volunteering group, if it is corporate or otherwise formally organized, or offset through sponsorship).
- Market the success of volunteer efforts along with future opportunities to become engaged.





NORTHBOUND BIKE LANE AT 6' WIDE  
SOUTHBOUND SHARE THE ROAD

# Implementation Tools



*This figure from the Walk/Bike Audit envisions a more bike-friendly Pittsburgh Street.*



# General Action Steps

## Overall Implementation

Successful implementation of the Comprehensive Plan will require continued commitment from the City, specifically the following:

- Assign the Planning Commission to oversee the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. The commission would not be responsible for directly carrying out actions, but would initiate tasks and coordinate with agencies, volunteers, staff, local organizations and/or other groups to help carry them out.
- Submit priority implementation projects as part of City budget discussions. If projects require municipal approval and/or funding, ensure that they are presented to Council with plenty of time for deliberation.
- Continue efforts to secure funding for projects and initiatives through lobbying state/federal officials and agencies.
- Annually evaluate implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, documenting actions taken during the past year to help achieve the vision and address goals, and make recommendations to Council of modifications to the Comprehensive Plan. Append the annual update to the Plan document to create an ongoing record of progress.
- Use the subdivision and land development application process as a means of implementation, requiring that applications demonstrate consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. This could involve revising applications to expressly require an explanation of consistency, or a checklist to ensure that the application addresses the Plan's objectives.
- Update the zoning ordinance to achieve consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. Specific methods to implement the Plan's goals are included in this chapter.

## Investment Priority Map

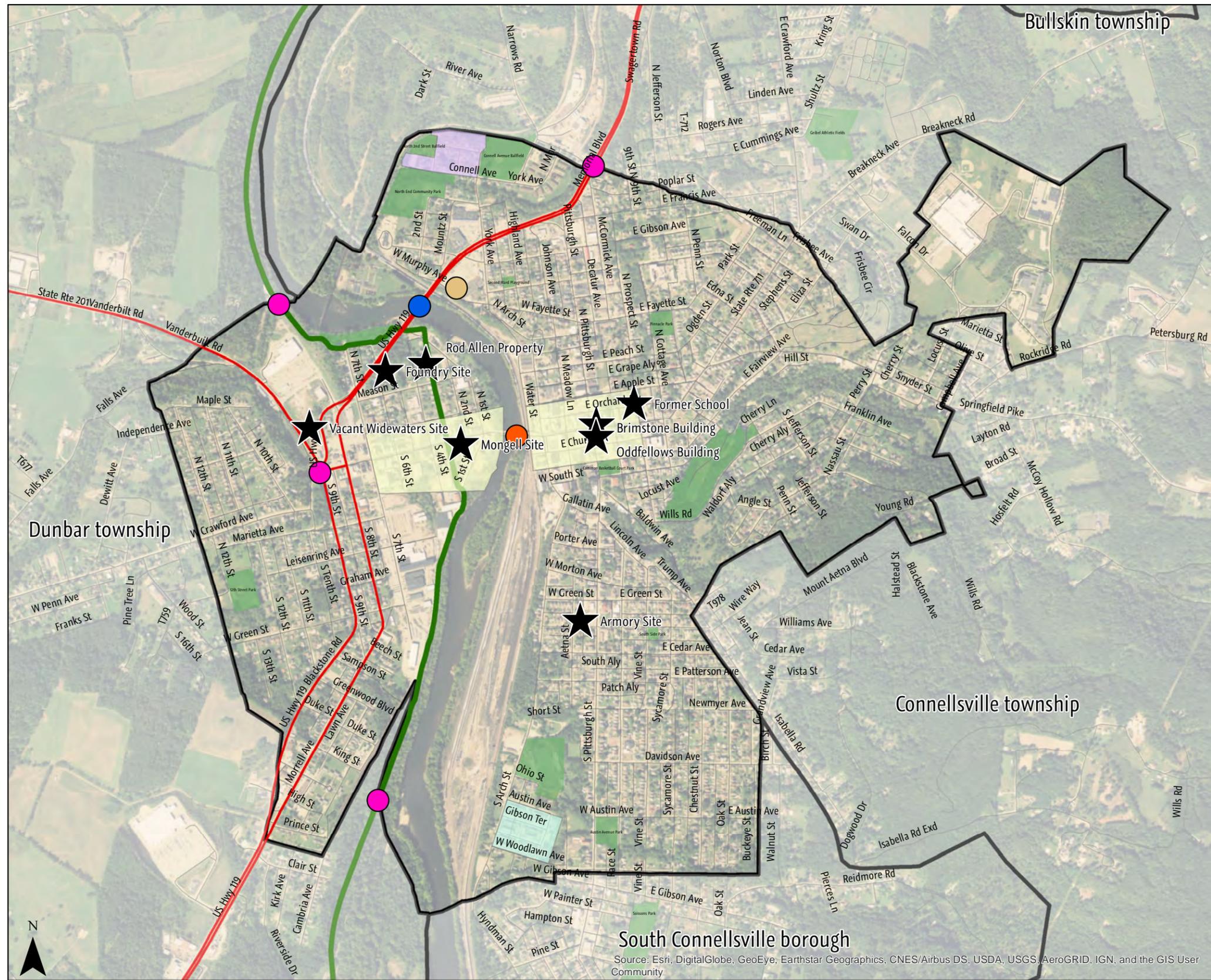
This map represents catalytic points for change. Not to be confused with current mechanisms for regulating development, such as the zoning ordinance, the Investment Priority Map identifies areas the planning process identified as ripe for redevelopment or improvements as indicated.

Because the City is effectively built out, the realization of its vision is necessarily gradual, at least as it relates to the built environment. This is particularly true where current development patterns are inconsistent with what is envisioned for the future. However, this map establishes a picture that local leaders can begin to create by channeling market forces in desired directions and by collaborating with partner agencies to focus funding and efforts in these targeted areas.

# Investment Priority Map

## City of Connellsville Comprehensive Plan

- Targeted Housing Improvements
  - Downtown Investment Area
  - Recreational Redevelopment
  - Corridors
  - GAP Trail
  - Municipal Borders
  - Roads
  - Local Parks
  - Gateway Signage
  - Priority Redevelopment Sites
- Walk Bike Audit Priority Projects**
- Connellsville Shopping Center Path
  - Crawford Ave Bridge Bike Lane
  - Memorial Blvd Bridge Improvements





## Funding Strategy

Rural communities struggle in the competition to attract investment. Small rural cities such as Connellsville lack the population density and infrastructure to support new development. A variety of funding tools exist to facilitate components of the plan recommendations — debt and equity — public and private. In some cases, it may be appropriate to utilize existing traditional funding resources. Implementing priority projects and programs will most likely require new and innovative funding approaches.

It is important to note that significant funding constraints continue to impact all levels of government. Public financial assistance is increasingly competitive with a larger number of projects seeking less available dollars. With that in mind, the planning process included a detailed investigation into innovative and emerging development finance tools.

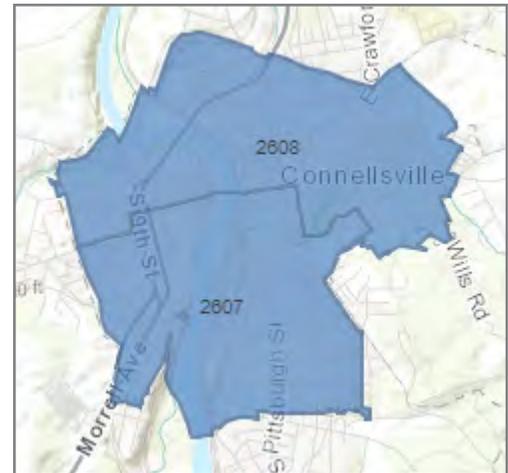
The City must continue to explore potential new funding mechanisms and strategies to fill the capital stack for priority projects. The following funding sources can be utilized to facilitate implementation of Connellsville’s revitalization efforts. Detailed summaries and strategies appear below.

### Qualified Opportunity Zones

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) created Qualified Opportunity Zones, a tool for promoting long-term investment in low-income communities. It enabled the Governor to designate certain census tracts as Opportunity Zones. Investments made by individuals through special funds in these zones can defer or eliminate federal taxes on capital gains. The Governor was given the opportunity to designate up to 25% of census tracts that either have poverty rates of at least 20% or median family incomes of no more than 80% of statewide/metropolitan area family income. The Governor designated 300 tracts based on economic data, recommendations from local partners and the likelihood of private-sector investment in those tracts.

Connellsville’s two census tracts were designated Opportunity Zones, with eligible areas shown in blue at right. In October 2018, the US Department of Treasury issued proposed guidance related to implementation of the new tax incentive. Additional program guidance is forthcoming.

- Review proposed program guidelines and submit any public comments.
- Develop Opportunity Zone investment prospectus to market the City.
- Preliminary discussions with local/regional Opportunity Zone Funds.



*Connellsville is the only Opportunity Zone designated within Fayette County.*

## **New Market Tax Credit (NMTC) Program**

The U.S. Department of Treasury Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI Fund) seeks to expand economic opportunity for underserved people and communities by supporting the growth and capacity of a national network of community development lenders, investors and financial service providers.

Established by Congress in 2000, the NMTC Program aims to attract the private investment necessary to revitalize struggling local economies. It attracts private capital into low-income communities by permitting individual and corporate investors to receive a tax credit against their federal income tax in exchange for making equity investments in specialized financial intermediaries called Community Development Entities (CDEs). The credit totals 39 percent of the original investment amount and is claimed over a period of seven years. CDE's then provide subsidized financing to qualifying entities in low-income communities.

The CDFI Fund allocates tax credit authority to CDE's through a competitive application process. NMTC Program allocatees have approved service areas that range from local to national in scale. Pennsylvania is currently serviced by 26 CDE's. Both census tracts within Connellsville are NMTC eligible.

The NMTC program is flexible with regard to project type and purpose. Recipients of NMTC investments can finance equipment, business operations or real estate. Each CDE has a specific investment strategy with regards to geography, project type and other factors. Eligible projects typically include community health clinics, charter schools and manufacturing facilities. The most recent report by The New Markets Tax Credit Coalition detailed that an increasing number of projects included the financing of business incubators and shared entrepreneurial space.

- Determine project eligibility.
- Preliminary discussions with CDEs active in Pennsylvania.

## Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP)

Pennsylvania's state constitution requires a capital budget in addition to the budgets that deal with agency operations and non-preferred appropriations. The Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) represents a portion of the Commonwealth capital budget. The program offers reimbursement grants for regional economic, cultural, civic and historical improvement projects throughout Pennsylvania. It is administered by the Office of the Budget in consultation with the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED)

A series of legislative actions has authorized General Obligation borrowing to fund the program. Eligible projects must be included in the Capital Budget Act as a line item authorization and can then apply for funding consideration (typically one funding cycle annually). RACP funds can only reimburse eligible hard construction costs, including public infrastructure. Projects must have a total cost of at least \$1 million, and at least 50% of the cost must be matched by non-state sources (including appraised land value). The grant contract special conditions mandate compliance with bidding, prevailing wage, steel procurement and other program requirements.

- Determine applicability of existing project authorizations:
  - » 2010: Acquisition, construction, renovation and other costs related to the establishment of year-round local markets - \$1.5 million
  - » 2010: Land and building acquisition, construction, infrastructure and other related costs for downtown Connellsville revitalization - \$1 million
  - » 2013: Construction, redevelopment, infrastructure and other related costs for the renovation of Behavioral Health Unit of Highlands Hospital - \$1.15 million
  - » 2017: Acquisition, infrastructure, rehabilitation, construction and other related costs for a Connellsville revitalization project, including rehabilitation of the downtown area and construction of a municipal complex - \$10 million
  - » 2017: Acquisition, infrastructure, construction and other related costs for community economic development in the City of Connellsville - \$2 million
  - » 2017: Acquisition, infrastructure, rehabilitation, construction and other related costs for redevelopment of commercial mixed-use buildings (Redevelopment Authority of Fayette County) - \$5 million
- Annual pre-application period in first quarter.
- Likely award range \$1-5 million (match required).
- Establish government affairs strategy, including outreach to the Governor's Office and Legislative Caucuses.
  - » Request additional line item authorizations in future Capital Budget legislation.

## Building PA

The Commonwealth Financing Authority Building PA Program provides loans to fund managers for investment in real estate projects within small to mid-sized Pennsylvania communities. The program was created in an effort to offer subordinate mezzanine capital for developers of industrial, commercial and mixed-use real estate projects. The use of fund proceeds must be consistent with or identified as a priority investment in a local or regional comprehensive or economic development plan.

- Determine applicability
  - » Review potential projects with program fund manager (Development Capital Investors, Inc.)
- Applications are made directly through fund managers with no set deadline
- Loan amount and terms vary, but amounts typically match developer/investor equity amount

## Property Assessed Clean Energy

A Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program may be created by a municipality or a county by adopting an ordinance/resolution. The ordinance/resolution would create the program, define the district to which the program applies and other operational standards and guidelines. A county that creates a PACE Program must notify any municipality that may be in the district of the municipality's possible inclusion in the district before the county approves the ordinance/resolution creating the district.

A qualified project is an improvement to real property that is a clean energy project, water conservation project or alternative energy system that generates measurable energy savings or reductions in water usage. Each qualified project in a PACE district requires a scope of work, energy or water usage baseline and the projected energy or water usage savings in order to establish the project's viability. Local financing of a PACE project can be done through bonds provided or facilitated by a governmental entity or authority (provided that the local financing bonds may not be general obligation bonds). An owner of real property in a district must sign an agreement with the applicable taxing authority or district agreeing to the assessment.

The assessments are collected by the applicable municipality or county using their present tax collection process and payments are remitted for payment of local or owner financings. Unpaid and delinquent assessments are collected in the same manner as delinquent real property taxes. Delinquent PACE assessments are a first lien on the real property. It is required that other lenders must consent to any financing.

- Discuss program creation with representatives from Fayette County.
- Review potential local financing alternatives, operational standards and program guidelines.
- Determine project eligibility.

## Pennsylvania Green Energy Loan Fund

By leveraging U.S. Department of Energy funds, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has been able to support low-interest loan financing for energy efficiency retrofits and the installation of energy conservation measures and high-performance energy systems in buildings throughout Pennsylvania. This financial tool, the Green Energy Loan Fund (GELF), is managed on behalf of the Commonwealth by the Reinvestment Fund. All projects must result in a 25% reduction in energy consumption. The baseline for the energy savings calculation varies depending on the type of project. GELF can also finance on-site renewable energy systems and on-site combined-heat-and-power systems only when they are part of a larger building energy efficiency project.

- Determine project eligibility.
- Applications accepted on a rolling basis.
- Loan amounts will generally range between \$100,000 and \$2,500,000.
- Projects must comply with various federal and state requirements.

## Tax Increment Financing

Tax increment financing (TIF) allows for the capture of increases in real property taxes resulting from new development to pay for public improvements like necessary infrastructure. All or a portion of new tax revenues generated above the initial tax base can be diverted to fund eligible project costs. Nonrecourse debt, typically a revenue bond, is issued via an eligible authority of the sponsoring municipality to provide upfront financing. Alternatively, investments can be reimbursed from the flow of annual tax revenues diverted and captured within the district ('pay-as-you-go' method).

Various past studies have explored potential redevelopment opportunities in the City's West End. The Gateway to Gateway Master Plan recommended strengthening West Crawford Avenue as a Main Street in an effort to further capitalize on the GAP trail. It also identified various infill development locations in the residential area to the north of Crawford Avenue. The area includes several large underutilized and vacant properties, but requires enhanced infrastructure. Sites must contend with significant flood plain issues.

Creation of a TIF District could facilitate implementation of these plans. TIF can be utilized to fund a portion of necessary public improvements including both site-specific and district-wide infrastructure upgrades. This local funding can be leveraged in an effort to attract other public funding assistance.

- Review feasibility of West End TIF District.
  - » Determine potential TIF net proceeds, financing structures and eligible uses.

## Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance

The Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) Act enables communities to facilitate revitalization of deteriorated properties within designated areas. It allows local taxing bodies to provide real estate tax incentives for new businesses and the expansion of existing businesses in an effort to create jobs and broaden the tax base. The program provides up to 10 years of real property tax exemption for all or a portion of increased assessment attributable to the cost of either new construction or improvements made to eligible properties.

In the early 1980s, Connellsville established a LERTA program in partnership with the County and School District. The taxing bodies subsequently approved several reauthorizations. The program offers exemptions for new construction or other improvements to properties within five designated zoning districts (Downtown Commercial, Highway Commercial, Corridor Commercial, Industrial and Mixed-Use). The most recent 5-year program extension was re-enacted in 2016.

- Reauthorize LERTA legislation to further incentivize new investment.
  - » Review program exemption schedule and eligible boundaries.

## Impact Investing

Unfortunately, public sector and philanthropic resources are insufficient to address the challenges faced by underserved communities. Impact investing is an emerging area of the capital markets that links desired societal outcomes to sources of capital. Beyond financial returns, investors seek to generate social and environmental benefits. These outcomes are measured and reported to investors. It should be noted that this is not a new source of capital for projects. However, it represents a strategy to attract additional investors and funding dedicated to sustainable development.

Foundations, governments and development finance institutions have started to collaborate in an attempt to leverage investments that will address society's greatest challenges. For example, the Rockefeller Foundation seeks to provide philanthropic risk capital to develop innovative financing mechanisms that will mobilize private sector capital in new and more efficient ways for projects that create a more resilient and inclusive world. The Kresge Foundation recently launched Kresge Community Finance, a \$30 million program-related investment offering available to development finance agencies working to expand opportunities for low-income people in America's cities. The Goldman Sachs Social Impact Fund is one of the first domestic impact investing vehicles sponsored by a major financial institution.

Impact investments can be made across asset classes, including but not limited to cash equivalents, fixed income, venture capital and private equity. Within Connellsville, impact investment strategies could focus on neighborhood revitalization, job creation/small businesses development, green infrastructure and the provision of social/educational services.

It is recommended that stakeholders explore a partnership with the local foundation community and major financial institutions operating in the region. They can further leverage commitments in an effort to seek additional support from the large national foundations actively seeking to further innovative finance mechanisms tied to social, economic and environmental outcomes. Several of Connellsville's priority projects closely align with the sustainable development policy goals of these organizations.

# Funding an Entrepreneurial Center

Below are sources that could make feasible the creation of an Entrepreneurial Center for Connellsville, as described in the Investing chapter.

## *Federal*

### **Economic Development Administration**

The EDA's mission is to lead the Federal economic development agenda by promoting innovation and competitiveness, preparing American regions for economic growth and success in the worldwide economy. The agency fulfills this mission through strategic investments and partnerships that create the regional economic ecosystems required to foster globally competitive regions throughout the U.S. EDA programs seek to develop initiatives that present new ideas and creative approaches to advance economic prosperity in distressed communities.

#### *Regional Innovation Strategies (RIS) Program*

The RIS Program catalyzes this community and regional capacity-building, ultimately helping to better identify and align assets to help manufacturers innovate, support businesses' export-related needs, attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and implementing strategies that create jobs. It provides grants that build regional capacity to translate innovations into jobs through proof-of-concept and commercialization assistance to innovators and entrepreneurs. The program funds initiatives that build regional capacity through 1) proof-of-concept and commercialization assistance to innovators and entrepreneurs, and 2) operational support for organizations that provide essential early-stage risk capital to innovators and entrepreneurs.

- 16 Challenge – national initiative designed to support the creation of centers for innovation and entrepreneurship that increase the rate at which innovations, ideas, intellectual property and research are translated into products, services, viable companies and jobs. Funding may be used for a variety of purposes, including but not limited to personnel, program development, and equipment; however, construction costs are not eligible. At least 50% of the total project cost must be matching non-Federal funding sources. Applications due 29 August 2018.

### *Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) Program*

The EAA Program assists state and local interests in designing and implementing strategies to adjust or bring about change to an economy. It focuses on areas that have experienced or are under threat of serious structural damage to the underlying economic base. The program provides a wide range of technical, planning, public works and infrastructure assistance in regions experiencing adverse economic changes including: plant closures, changing trade patterns, catastrophic natural disasters, military base closures or environmental changes. Regional eligibility for an EAA investment is based on the unemployment rate, per capita income or a special need the region in which the project will be located.

- Implementation Grants - support the execution of activities identified in a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), such as infrastructure improvements, site acquisition, site preparation, construction, rehabilitation and equipping of facilities. Grants range from \$100,000 to \$3 million. At least 50% of the total project cost must be matching non-Federal funding sources. There is no submission deadline, and applications are accepted on a rolling basis.

### **Small Business Administration**

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) delivers loans, loan guarantees, contracts, counseling sessions and other forms of assistance to small businesses.

#### *Growth Accelerator Fund Competition*

The Growth Accelerator Fund Competition was launched in 2014 with \$2.5 million in appropriated funds. The program is a national competition for accelerators, incubators, and other entrepreneurial ecosystem models that help support small businesses and startups to compete for monetary prizes of \$50,000 each (20 in total). Special consideration will be given to these accelerator models which support STEM/ Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR), women-owned or minority-owned small businesses, rural communities, and veteran communities. Legislation has been introduced to reauthorize and expand the program.

## Department of Labor

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration (ETA) seeks to contribute to the more efficient functioning of the U.S. labor market by providing high quality job training, employment, labor market information, and income maintenance services primarily through state and local workforce development systems.

### *YouthBuild*

The ETA has approximately \$85 million in grant funds available as authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). DOL will award grants through a competitive process to organizations providing pre-apprenticeship services that support education, occupational skills training and employment services to at-risk youth, ages 16 to 24, while performing meaningful work and service to their communities. In addition to construction skills training, YouthBuild applicants may include occupational skills training in other in-demand industries. This expansion into additional in-demand industries is the Construction Plus component, a priority in this grant competition.

In FY2018, DOL hopes to serve approximately 5,250 participants during the grant period of performance, with approximately 85 projects awarded across the country. Individual grants will range from \$700,000 to \$1.1 million and require a 25 percent match from applicants, using sources other than federal funding.

## Appalachian Regional Commission

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is a regional economic development agency that represents a partnership of federal, state and local government. Established by an act of Congress in 1965, ARC is composed of the governors of the 13 Appalachian states and a federal co-chair, who is appointed by the president. Local participation is provided through multi-county local development districts.

ARC invests in activities that address the five goals identified in the Commission's strategic plan:

- 1) Economic Opportunities - Invest in entrepreneurial and business development strategies that strengthen Appalachia's economy.
- 2) Ready Workforce - Increase the education, knowledge, skills, and health of residents to work and succeed in Appalachia.
- 3) Critical Infrastructure - Invest in critical infrastructure, especially broadband; transportation, including the Appalachian Development Highway System; and water/wastewater systems.
- 4) Natural and Cultural Assets - Strengthen Appalachia's community and economic development potential by leveraging the Region's natural and cultural heritage assets.
- 5) Leadership and Community Capacity - Build the capacity and skills of current and next-generation leaders and organizations to innovate, collaborate, and advance community and economic development.

Typically, project grants are awarded to state and local agencies and governmental entities (such as economic development authorities), local governing boards (such as county councils), and nonprofit organizations (such as schools). ARC expects grantees to contribute matching resources to projects, to the extent they are able to do so, and to seek additional non-ARC funding assistance in a diligent manner. Generally, ARC grants are limited to 50% of project costs; individual states may have additional match requirements.

## ***State***

### **Department of Labor and Industry**

Pennsylvania's workforce development system enables businesses and workers to compete in the worldwide, knowledge-based economy. The system enhances employer competitiveness and innovation while preparing Pennsylvanians for jobs that pay in an economy that grows, supports families and businesses and is effectively improving quality of life. The PA Department of Labor and Industry (L&I) prepares job seekers for the global workforce through employment and job training services for adult, youth, older workers and dislocated workers.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires the governor of each state to submit a two-year modification of the Combined State Plan outlining the state's workforce development strategies. Pennsylvania's 2016-20 WIOA Combined State Plan sets the framework for a workforce development system built on a foundation of alignment, innovation, employer engagement, accountability, and effective use of data. Various L&I grant programs utilize WIOA Statewide Activity Funds.

#### *Business-Education Partnerships Program*

L&I seeks opportunities to connect local businesses with school districts to promote job opportunities and career pathways. These programs increase awareness of in-demand technical careers for students, parents, guardians, teachers and school faculty. The partnerships connect schools, employers, and students with the goal of providing career-related experiences and exposure opportunities through soft skills development, internships, workplace shadowing, career mentoring and career tours to increase opportunities for all youth to participate in work based learning and other similar experiences.

Eligible applicants include Local Workforce Development Boards. To be considered for funding, an application must provide for direct student, career awareness and exposure activities. In addition, the partnership is required to include business entities, school districts, Intermediate Units, career and technical schools, and institutions of higher education. Additional partners can include community-based organizations such as non-profits, afterschool, summer learning programs, youth development centers, recreation departments, trade associations and economic development entities. Grants are funded competitively with an average of \$100,000 per award.

## *Strategic Innovation Grant Program*

The Program seeks to address the five broad goals for the Commonwealth's workforce development system:

- 1) Establish career pathways as the primary model for skill, credential and degree attainment, and provide all Pennsylvanians an opportunity to a job that pays.
- 2) Expand the state's pipeline of workers for targeted industry sectors from entry-level skills to middle skills through Next Generation Industry Partnerships, WEDnetPA, and other innovative strategies.
- 3) Increase opportunities for all youth to participate in work-based learning through summer employment, pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, and other similar experiences.
- 4) Engage employers directly to ensure we are closing the skills gap, and are able to more quickly upskill or reskill the workforce to meet the current and future needs.
- 5) Strengthen data sharing across state agencies and workforce development partners to understand education and employment outcomes and more effectively evaluate our efforts.

Proposals that seek to serve individuals with barriers to employment will be given preference for funding. Any training included as part of a proposal must be tied to a high priority occupation (HPO) or an occupation on the Pa in Demand Occupations List (PA IDOL). Eligible applicants are limited to Local Workforce Development Boards. Grants range from \$100,000 to \$300,000 with an average award of \$250,000.

## Department of Community and Economic Development

The Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) provides support and opportunity for every neighborhood and community in the Commonwealth.

### *Keystone Communities Program*

The Keystone Communities (KC) program is designed to encourage the creation of partnerships between the public and private sectors that jointly support local initiatives such as the growth and stability of neighborhoods and communities; social and economic diversity; and a strong and secure quality of life. The program allows communities to tailor the assistance to meet the needs of its specific revitalization effort.

Development grants are available to fund a variety of physical improvements. Eligible activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Revitalization of a neighborhood, downtown or specific targeted and strategic location in a community,
- Public infrastructure improvements such as road rehabilitation or construction, streetscape improvements, and water and sewer improvements,
- Acquisition costs to assist in the implementation of immediate reuse of a parcel or building,
- Rehabilitation or restoration of older or under-utilized buildings for immediate reuse supporting other community development goals,
- Extension of service through public rights-of-way (i.e. paving or widening of access roads and upgrading water, sanitary or storm sewers),
- Demolition of blighted structures with a plan for committed private or public development and/or site maintenance, and/or
- Redevelopment of an anchor building in a community.

Grants may not exceed \$500,000 or 30% of project costs, whichever is less.

### *Pennsylvania Manufacturing Training-to-Career Grant Program*

The Program is designed to help companies identify and train a skilled workforce while creating a workplace culture that allows the workforce to advance and the company to grow and compete in a competitive, global economy as a complement to existing programs. Grants will be provided to Pennsylvania's manufacturers (companies) who partner with technical and trade schools Pennsylvania's community colleges and those non-profit organizations who demonstrate both experience and expertise in the development and deployment of workforce development programs.

Grants shall be awarded to eligible fiscal agents who will oversee the day-to-day administration of the grant on behalf of a consortia of companies. Grants will be awarded on a competitive basis and capped at \$150,000. Applications that demonstrate both cash and in-kind match as well as a path to sustainability will be scored more favorably.

## Ordinance Updates

Recommendations to update Connellsville's Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) appear throughout the Comprehensive Plan according to the topic area to which they are most relevant. These revisions should be made as part of a single update to both documents in order to ensure consistency and save costs. Therefore, this section includes all of the zoning and SALDO updates mentioned elsewhere, as well as additional recommendations to strengthen and clarify both documents.

The City's Zoning Ordinance was updated in 2012, though the SALDO dates back to 1956. Both ordinances should be updated to achieve consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.

### Zoning

- Add a Table of Contents for easy reference and navigation.
- Consider online codification (of this and all other City ordinances) through a provider such as General Code. This would provide a one-stop shop for anyone seeking information about applicable City regulations.
- The City's lowest-density residential district (R-1, Low-to-Moderate Density Residential) permits duplex homes, as well as single-family attached homes. Examine the impacts of permitting other "missing middle" housing types such as triplex or four-plexes in R-1 and adding distinctions to "apartment building" so that at least smaller ones (up to eight units) could be built by right in R-2 (High-Density Residential). This could be a good tool for increasing the availability of senior housing in the City.
- Accessory Apartments are ostensibly permitted in all districts, though they are not in the use table. This option should stay and be promoted as a low-impact way of accommodating multi-generational housing and providing smaller, lower-maintenance housing alternatives.
- The ordinance currently allows dwellings in C-1 Downtown Commercial and some limited retail and restaurant uses in M Mixed Use. This should continue, and the City should consider adding further flexibility for compatible uses to coexist (i.e. those without appreciable negative externalities such as noise, odor, heavy traffic).
- Consider reducing or eliminating minimum lot sizes in residential, commercial and mixed-use districts to add flexibility. This would allow for options such as patio homes.
- Incorporate the City's separate Sign Ordinance (circa 2006) into the Zoning Ordinance. Review the ordinance in light of the 2015 *Reed vs. Gilbert* court decision regarding sign regulations to ensure that it regulates visual clutter within the legal framework created by the case. The most legally defensible basis for sign regulation is pedestrian and vehicle safety (as opposed to aesthetics).

- Create sign regulations specific to C-1 Downtown Commercial. For instance, pole signs are generally inappropriate in walkable downtown areas, while many communities encourage businesses to use a larger number of smaller signs (as opposed to one or two very large signs) to engage pedestrians, as well as other tools such as sandwich boards. The types and sizes of signs in a given area should correspond to the type and speed of traffic that is desired and appropriate there.
- Remove parking minimum requirements from the Zoning Ordinance, at least Downtown. This allows the market (as opposed to arbitrary or outdated ratios) to decide what is needed for a particular development. Removing minimums doesn't prevent anyone from building parking, but it helps to ensure that unnecessary parking spaces are not built, saving investors money and preserving land for other uses.
- The ordinance does not use the Conditional Use approval process for any land use or district, instead relying on the Special Exception process for potentially impactful uses. Allowing uses by Special Exception should be done carefully because, legally speaking, it represents a low bar for applicants to meet. The test for a Special Exception is whether it is a threat to public health, public safety or public welfare; such an exception cannot be denied on the basis of infrastructure or aesthetics. The City may want to consider using the Conditional Use process (which requires a public hearing and Council approval) to provide the opportunity to negotiate conditions for higher-impact uses, such as large retail, truck stop or bus/train terminal.
- Provide incentives (gross floor area increase, height increase or yard setback decrease) for surface parking areas located behind or beside buildings (as opposed to between a building and its street frontage). Focus design standards and guidelines specifically for C-1 Downtown Commercial that address amenities such as street trees, wide sidewalks and building design standards. The standards should be consistent with best practices in urban design and downtown revitalization, creating conditions that foster retail prosperity and attract pedestrian activity. Sample ideas appear on the next page.
- Evaluate performance zoning in certain areas, which would allow land development to respond flexibly to market forces while preserving public interests. Performance zoning de-emphasizes the separation of specific uses and instead controls impacts on the environment, neighboring properties and public infrastructure. This could encourage the vibrancy characteristic of flexible downtown districts where many types of activities comfortably co-exist.
- Consider ways in which the ordinance could be made more flexible and business-friendly, within the context of the character the City is working to create in its core and growth areas. This might include examining variance requests (if a type of variance is always granted, it should not have been prohibited), requiring only small setbacks between adjacent business uses, allowing taller buildings or building in density incentives to encourage desired design features or amenities.



## Design standard tools

### Reduce or eliminate setbacks

In walkable downtown areas, buildings are commonly required to be set at a build-to line, with exceptions for specified architectural elements, in order to create a cohesive street wall and sense of space. A consistent setback and continuity of building height would help reinforce this effect in Connellsville's business districts.



### Concentrate local retail

Select an area in which to target the location of smaller-scale retail to the exclusion of most other uses—for instance, allow general commercial to continue to serve highway commercial needs in areas where it already predominates, but cultivate another area for local retail by limiting the types and scale of businesses that are permitted by right.



### Let go of parking minimums

Avoid wasting land and unnecessarily expanding paved surface by requiring too much parking. Many communities set limited or no minimums for downtown off-street parking, allowing the market to determine what is actually needed. Update the Zoning Ordinance and/or SALDO to allow flexibility, including shared parking and reserve parking. Shared parking allows destinations with different peak times (such as an office, a restaurant and a church) to use the same parking spots to reduce overall need, and reserve parking allows a developer to leave some required parking spaces as unpaved green space unless it's later determined that they need to be built (which, in practice, they nearly never are).



### Demand quality form

Municipalities may impose certain architectural requirements, such as prohibiting blank facades along street frontages, the incorporation of recesses, projections, windows or other elements to break up wide facades and a minimum percentage of window coverage. Municipalities can also *suggest* specific design considerations that would advance neighborhood goals, such as the use of brick and the limitation of large logos and/or proprietary colors used over large expanses of buildings.



### Envision landscaping and lighting

Design standards should include specific provisions for the type and placement of amenities such as street furniture, landscaping and lighting in a downtown district.



## Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO)

- The City's existing SALDO is out of date and rarely used. The City should consider hiring a consultant to create a new updated SALDO for the City. Fayette County has a SALDO that can be utilized as a basis to begin the process.
- Items that should be considered when updating the SALDO include:

Add clarification and flexibility that will fortify the sidewalk network, such as:

- Requiring sidewalks along both sides of all roadways in commercial and industrial areas, along all arterials and collectors in residential areas, and along local streets with at least one unit per acre in residential areas
- Requiring sidewalks along at least one side of the street in residential areas with less than one unit per acre
- Allowing developers to propose alternative pathways, i.e. crushed stone/permeable material trails, in areas where sidewalks may not be necessary (industrial parks, for instance).

Build in flexibility for traffic-calming measures such as bulbs, chokers, neckdowns, narrow traffic lanes and neighborhood traffic circles. Verify with the Fire Chief that any new specifications would accommodate emergency equipment. (Or, ideally, work with the Fire Chief to ensure that the department has vehicles that can navigate nine- or 10-foot lanes, emphasizing that city design should drive public vehicle selection, not vice versa.)

Discourage new curb cuts in pedestrian-intensive areas:

- The City could, in collaboration with PennDOT, prohibit or limit new curb cuts along Crawford Avenue or other target areas.
- Require commercial, industrial and large residential properties to consolidate driveways wherever possible by interconnecting parking lot and loading area entries and by sharing parking among uses.
- Driveway curb cuts for two-way traffic should not be wider than 18 feet. An exception should be made on industrial streets in locations requiring frequent access for large trucks or semi-tractor trailers, where two-way driveway curb cuts may be up to 24 feet in width.
- Driveway curb cuts for individual residential properties should not be wider than 7 feet with 1.5-foot wings (10 feet total width). Where truck loading is the dominant activity, they should not be wider than 8 feet with 1.5-foot wings (11 feet total).
- In areas where alleys provide access to the rear of properties, curb cuts onto streets are strongly discouraged; all parking and service access should be provided via the alley.
- Driveways may be bounded by permeable paving, curb extensions or landscaping areas that extend from the sidewalk into the parking lane, eliminating the need for driveway aprons.

Add provisions allowing for low-impact development ("green infrastructure") approaches and stormwater best management practices that work with natural features to manage stormwater as close as possible to the source. These might include such options as permeable pavement, green roofs, rain gardens and bioretention facilities.

- Once the SALDO is updated, the City should consider online codification (of this and all other City ordinances) through a provider such as General Code. This would provide a one-stop shop for anyone seeking information about applicable City regulations.

## Benchmarking Implementation

The City should collect baseline data following the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan and revisit these benchmarks in future years to gauge the effectiveness of implementation. Should the completion of action steps fall short of achieving progress by the benchmarks, the City will know to re-evaluate its approach to realizing the vision for its long-range future.

### Moving

*The City's transportation network should balance the needs of all of its users, creating thoroughfares and routes that, beyond conveying vehicles efficiently, represent a safe, inviting public realm.*

Benchmarks:

- Number of crosswalks improved for pedestrian safety
- Linear foot of sidewalk improvements
- Number of ADA-compliant curb cuts
- Miles of bicycle lane created
- Completion of high-priority action steps in Walk/Bike Audit

### Investing

*The City should further enhance the local business environment to attract entrepreneurs and retain existing employers.*

Benchmarks:

- Number of new businesses opened
- City labor force educational attainment (Census measure)
- Percentage of commercial buildings in C-1 Downtown District occupied

# Living

*Connellsville's neighborhoods should be improved and supported to offer a wide variety of high-quality housing types and amenities to meet the existing and future needs of all generations, while respecting the City's unique historic character.*

## Benchmarks:

- Adoption of blight strategy
- Number of condemned properties
- Permits issued for housing types other than single-family
- Walk Score
- Number of code violations
- Public funds allocated for residential and commercial rehab

# Thriving

*The City should further develop an identity and reputation as a healthy, desirable living environment rich in civic life and a full complement of cultural and recreational amenities.*

## Benchmarks:

- Advancement of Nature-Based Placemaking strategy
- Number of trail visitors patronizing local businesses
- New community events, programs or venues
- Redevelopment of Dutch Bottom
- New branding/marketing materials developed

# Appendices



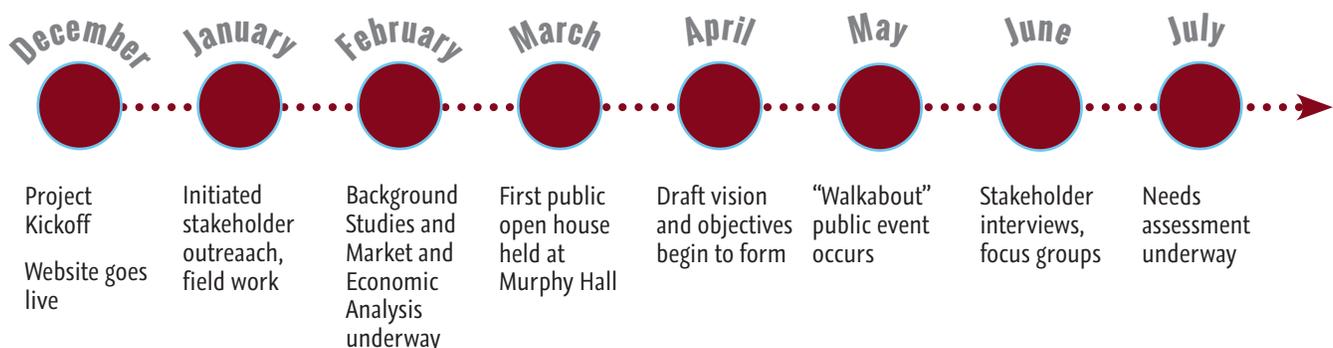
# The Planning Process

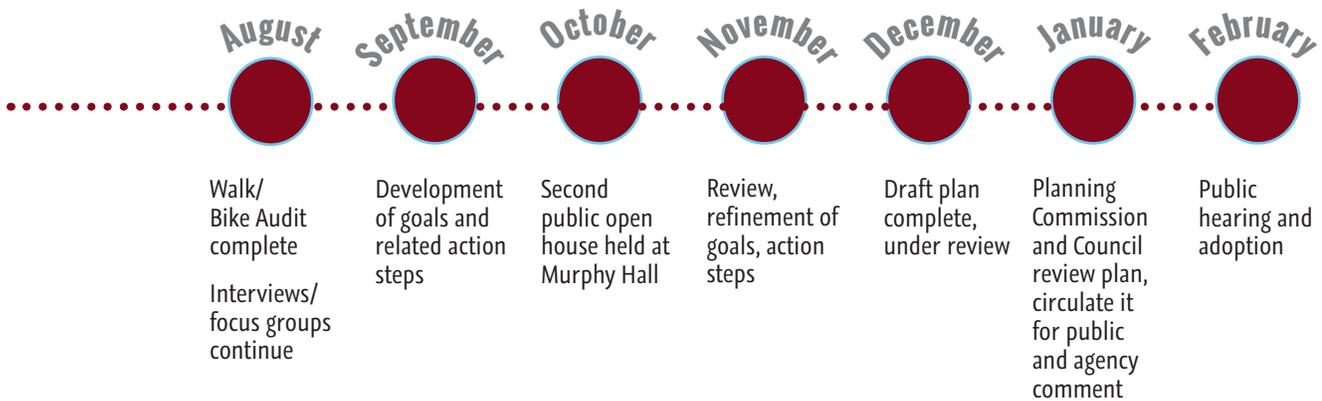
The City of Connellsville appointed a Steering Committee comprised of staff, elected and appointed officials and community leaders to lead the Comprehensive Plan update with assistance from Mackin Engineering Company and Duane Morris Government Strategies. The project kicked off in December 2017 with a timeframe of 15 months. A timeline of project milestones appears below.

The City undertook the plan as an update to its last Comprehensive Plan, which was a multi-municipal effort adopted in 2009, recognizing a need to proactively address redevelopment needs and multi-modal needs as well as other changes. The plan was designed to result in practical strategies related to these and other topics:

- Open Space/Greenways
- Bike/Walk Audit
- Housing Market
- Core Revitalization
- Community Facilities

## Timeline of milestones





The project began as the Steering Committee identified a wide range of community stakeholders whose points of view should be reflected in developing an understanding of current conditions, developing community goals and devising practical, effective strategy alternatives.

Initial research included demographic and socio-economic analysis, an inventory of local resources and amenities and a review of previously adopted planning and regulatory documents for Connellsville.

The Steering Committee drew upon information from elected and appointed municipal officials, staff, community leaders, business owners, students, the workforce and residents to develop a vision for the plan update. The vision was revisited throughout the planning process to ensure that it continued to reflect the input received. The vision was also used to prioritize recommendations and strategies developed during the planning process.

The input collected during public outreach, stakeholder interviews and focus group meetings was presented to the Steering Committee to help identify the key long-term issues or needs facing Connellsville and to guide recommendations that address each of the key issues. The strategies presented in this document were developed to provide guidance to municipal officials, to direct development / redevelopment to appropriate areas, and to plan for the future.

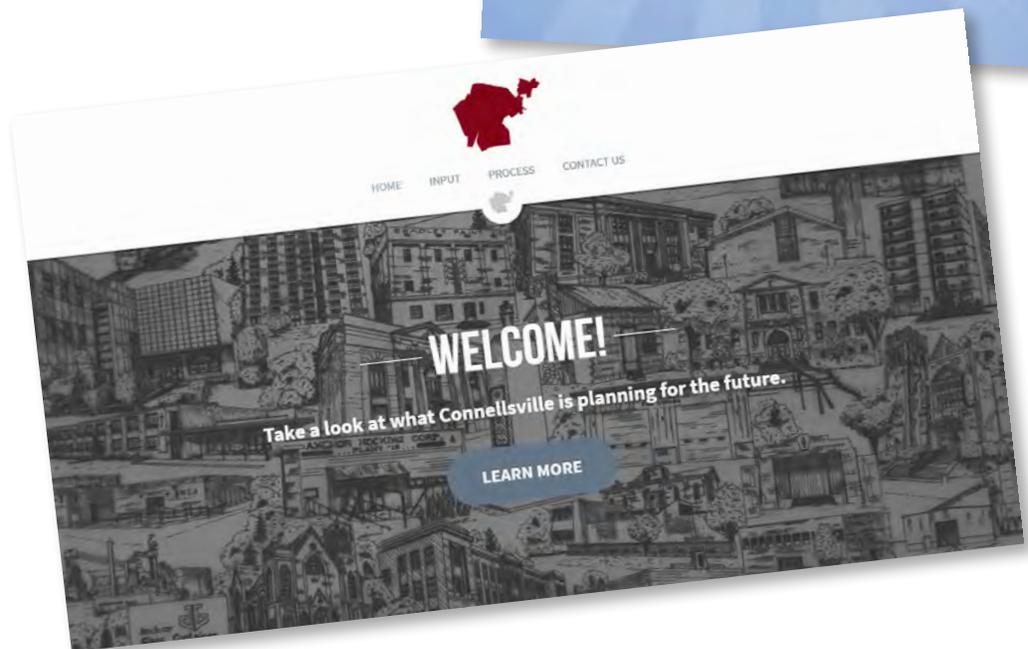
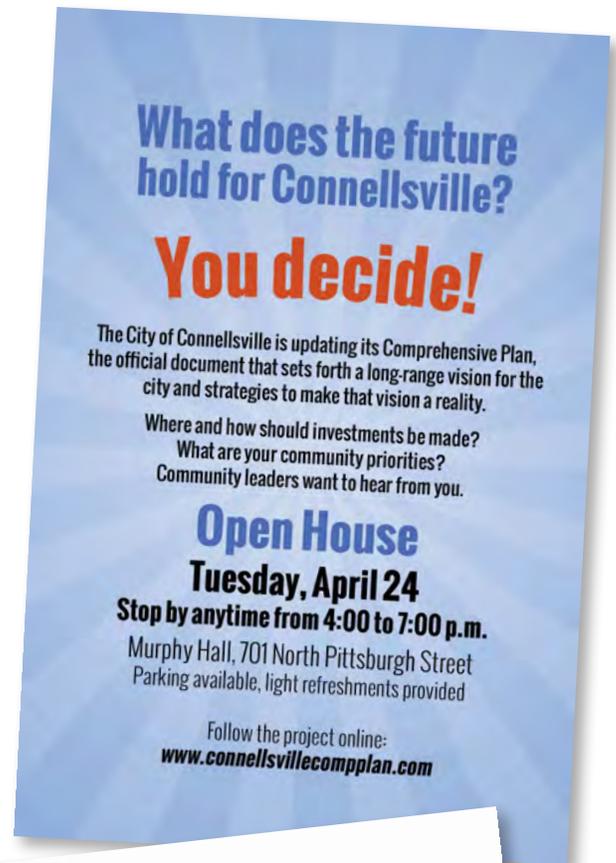
The information gathered through the visioning process helped to build the Implementation Plan that will direct development / redevelopment and conservation efforts for the City as well as the priority focus areas. The priority focus areas represent initiatives that the City recognizes as especially important undertakings in the short- to mid-term.

# Public and Stakeholder Outreach

In addition to monthly Steering Committee meetings, the planning process included a variety of outreach methods designed to publicize the plan, generate excitement and get people involved in determining what Connellville's future should be.

## Stakeholders

The Steering Committee helped to develop a list of people / organizations they believed could provide insight and perspective on the plan, all of whom were contacted to participate. Some represented City departments and agencies, while others were long-standing local institutions, business owners or community leaders. The primary goal of all stakeholder outreach was to collect information that would help the Steering Committee understand and prioritize local issues and formulate practical, well-calibrated actions to address them.



## **Focus groups**

The Steering Committee planned a series of focus groups to facilitate conversations about the plan among specific targeted groups. They included meetings of the Connellsville Rotary, Lions Club, Chamber of Commerce, Highlands Hospital and sessions with local business owners.

## **Website**

The project website, *connellsvillecompplan.com*, went live at the beginning of the process and was updated as the project developed to provide information and solicit feedback.

## **Events**

Two public events invited the entire community to participate in the planning process. An initial evening public open house was held at Murphy Hall in March 2018, and a presentation on the Comprehensive Plan along with an opportunity to provide feedback on priority goals was held in conjunction with the Downtown Connellsville Mixer in October 2018.

## **Surveys**

An online survey was developed and advertised early in the planning process to gain information about key local priorities.

## **Walk / Bike Audit**

As part of the Walk / Bike Audit (a companion document to the Comprehensive Plan), the public was invited to attend a field view of potential areas for connections within the City.

## **Public Comment Period and Public Hearing**

Once the draft plan was finalized, copies were sent to adjacent municipalities, Fayette County and Connellsville Area School District. The plan was also published online and in print for the general public to review and comment. Comments received during the review period were reviewed and considered prior to adoption and did not result in substantial changes to the draft plan document, though they can help guide its implementation.

Council held a public hearing on April 16, 2019, to solicit final comment on the plan prior to its adoption.

## Summary: Student Focus Group Connellsville Area High School

On February 27, 2019, Planning staff from Mackin Engineering met with students from Connellsville Area High School to gather opinions about the City of Connellsville from the younger population. The students discussed the things they love about the City as well as their hopes for its future.

These students reviewed the recommendations in the draft plan and voiced their opinions. They also detailed specific locations and places that were of importance to them. Generally, students felt:

- Connellsville is currently a safe community.
- Having entertainment options such as arcades, sports center or a drive-in theater would help make Connellsville more attractive.
- Parking in the West End should be addressed.

Comments specific to the plan's focus areas were as follows.

### Moving

- There is a lack of sidewalks in the Southside.
- Speeding at East Park discourages bike/ped travel.
- There is a lack of wayfinding signage.
- A shuttle bus would connect people with retail.

### Thriving

- Additional sports facilities and parks in Dutch Bottom are desired.
- The community is closely knit.
- The City's historic character is a major asset.
- Fishing and kayaking are additional assets.

### Investing

- Outdoor recreation opportunities are desired, such as an ATV trail and additional riverfront activities.

### Living

- Volunteers and those in the community can contribute to beautification efforts.
- Some sidewalks in key areas are in disrepair.
- New entertainment will attract residents.



# Additional Provisions

This section includes themes and language incorporated into Connellsville's plan to comply with Pennsylvania's Municipalities Planning Code (MPC). The Code was the primary framework for the plan's formulation, and its process was designed to satisfy and exceed MPC requirements.

## **Adjacent communities**

As per Article III, Section 301 (5) of the MPC, the relationship of the existing and proposed development in Connellsville should be analyzed in relation to the existing and proposed development in adjacent communities and the region. The planning process for Connellsville involved providing a copy of the draft plan to all adjacent communities surrounding Connellsville as well as to the Fayette County Planning Zoning and Community Development Department.

## **Interrelationship**

The synthesis of interrelated activities to resolve issues and problems is an important foundation to good community planning. In this regard, there are linkages among the elements, goals and action items of the Connellsville Comprehensive Plan. All are related and should further the overall vision, of the plan.

## **State water plan**

In recognition of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, Article III, Section 301 (b), the Connellsville Comprehensive Plan supports efforts to provide a reliable supply of water and provisions aimed at adequately protecting water supply sources. These should be developed in consideration of current and future water resources availability and its uses and limitations. The Comprehensive Plan is in conformance with the Pennsylvania State Water and recognizes that:

- Lawful activities such as extraction of minerals impact water supply sources and such activities are governed by statutes regulating mineral extraction that specify replacement and restoration of water supplies affected by such activities.
- Commercial agriculture production impact water supply sources.

