

## 5.0 OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

The previous sections provide a thorough description of the changing demographics of the East Side. It is important to recognize the implication of the demographic characteristics and changing demographics of the neighborhood. Many of the residents of the East Side are long term residents that are concerned about the future of their neighborhood. This should be viewed as an asset because this population can be leveraged to provide the leadership and organizational structure for grassroots neighborhood investment of time, talent, and sweat equity in order to realize true neighborhood revitalization.

The demographic analysis identified an increase to the percentage of young people in the East Side. It also identified an increase to educational attainment. The East Side currently has fewer young people without high school diplomas, or the equivalent than in 1990. The potential of these young people is a tremendous asset to the community. Young people are filled with creativity, energy, and ideas that when directed and mentored can result in significant change. The City's Youth Bureau should continue to work with the East Side's young people to help them achieve their potential and help them become engaged in the neighborhood revitalization process.

The high rate of home-ownership is another asset for the East Side. Although homeownership is declining in the neighborhood, it remains strong when compared to other parts of the city. Residents of owner-occupied housing tend to be more engaged and involved in the community. The City should work with local housing developers, financing institutions, and non-profits to take steps to reverse the trend of declining home-ownership.

Vacant properties are often viewed as a challenge to neighborhood revitalization, however, when is should be considered as a great asset to the community. **Figure 5.1 Laurel Avenue Community Garden**

Vacant properties provide an opportunity for in-fill residential development. The City's Healthy Neighborhood Collaboration, a collaboration of local housing developers, trades people, non-profits, realtors, educators, and others with the purpose of creating new affordable housing opportunities and rehabilitation properties, should identify suitable in-fill projects in the East Side. The reuse of vacant properties can also help engage community members and create a sense of



community. Vacant parcels can be developed a community gardens, recreational areas, or green space.

The existing grid layout of the East Side is another valuable asset. The grid pattern has the potential to create a walkable community with linkages for pedestrians and bicyclists. The neighborhood commercial establishments along the Robinson Street corridor and upper Court Street also allow for increased pedestrian and bicycle use.

The East Side has many assets and opportunities for positive change. Unfortunately it also has a number of constraints and challenges. The East Side, and the city as a whole, has felt the impacts of a decreasing population. A smaller population in a city built for a population that at its peak was almost double, means fewer resources to maintain the existing infrastructure and level of services the community has come to expect. The increase to the number of people living in poverty is a challenge and should be of great concern to the City due to the increased resources required to support people living in poverty. The East Side is also experiencing an increase in the number of vacant housing units. If not properly maintained vacant housing units can lead to blight. Code enforcement should be actively involved in working with property owners to ensure properties are compliant with the City's building and zoning code. Section 6.0 of this document provides an in-depth analysis of the quality of the housing stock in a significant portion of the East Side.

The current land use regulations for upper Court Street create a challenge to providing a walkable, livable community. At present upper Court Street is designed around the automobile in a traditional strip commercial development pattern. Buildings are set back from the street, parking is located at the front of the parcel, there is little green space and vegetation. Upper Court Street is a gateway to the City of Binghamton and land use regulations should be amended to allow for development that is more sustainable and livable.

Revitalization strategies must reflect the current nature of the neighborhood and how the community envisions its future. It is clear from the demographic data and land use data presented above that the East Side has changed, dramatically in some cases, while experiencing little change for other characteristics. The East Side is filled with cultural, commercial, educational, and community assets. The City and the community need to work together to address the challenges and constraints in order to effectively revitalize the East Side.