

North Side **C.A.R.E.S.**  
VISION Plan  
for the North Side Community,  
Binghamton, New York

Prepared for the New York State  
Department of State,  
Division of Coastal Resources,  
with funds provided under Title 11 of the  
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# Acknowledgements

The North Side Vision Plan is a product of the larger North Side Riverfront Revitalization Program, a partnership between the City of Binghamton, the North Side Communities of Shalom, the New York State Department of State, Cornell University and the State University of New York School of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF). Funding to support the development and preparation of both this Vision Plan and its accompanying North Side Riverfront District Plan, was generously provided by a \$140,000 grant under New York State's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)-Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, administered by the New York State Department of State. To match the EPF grant, a total of \$140,000 of in-kind and volunteer services were donated by local citizens, Cornell, SUNY ESF and the City of Binghamton.

Acting in concert with the City's initiative to update its Comprehensive Plan, the North Side Riverfront Revitalization Program set out in 2002 to establish a detailed long-term strategy for neighborhood revitalization within the City's North Side Riverfront District. This locally driven, community planning process identified short- and long-term goals for community revitalization.

The North Side Communities of Shalom provided the initial link for residents and stakeholders to communicate their needs and desires for sustained neighborhood reinvestment. From the outset, this group sought active participation in making change happen. In early January 2002, the Shalom group linked up with faculty and students in the departments of Landscape Architecture at SUNY ESF and Cornell University. Together they began working to examine and discuss the North Side neighborhood's history, values and future revitalization goals. A draft Vision Plan resulted from this initial six-month collaboration. Its vision statement, matrix, process documentation and design alternatives offered the first glimpse of ideas for undertaking community change and reinvestment in the North Side. Later in summer 2002, the group's efforts were producing results. The initial revitalization goals they'd set forth were immediately incorporated into the City's Comprehensive Plan which was by then nearing completion. Close partnering with the City of Binghamton's Department of Housing, Planning and Community Development allowed for the development of grant proposals aimed at moving the process forward.

In July 2002, North Side leaders stood at Confluence Park, with city and state officials, to recognize Binghamton as one of New York's twelve demonstration Quality Community Initiative (QCI) cities. The North Side Communities of Shalom was on hand to be acknowledged for their proactive grassroots planning and for the promise their vision was offering to Binghamton's future. By 2003, the City, North Side Communities of Shalom and University partners at SUNY ESF and Cornell, were gathered together again at Cheri Lindsey Park to launch a longer term visioning process into action. With funding assistance from New York State, the next two-year period (Fall 2003-Summer 2005), would see the formation of the North Side C.A.R.E.S. Coalition, the completion of the North Side Vision Plan and a comprehensive plan to develop the North Side Riverfront District.

The North Side Vision Plan was generated collaboratively, with oversight from Professor Paula Horrigan and Extension Associate, Jamie Vanucchi, in the Department of Landscape Architecture at Cornell University. Professor Cheryl Doble and Associate Maren King, from the State University of New York Environmental Science and Forestry,

played a major role in facilitating the vision planning process. Laurie Kimball, Community and Urban Designer, and Jennifer Taylor, Grants Administrator, from the City of Binghamton's Department of Planning, Housing and Community Development, managed project communication and documentation. The plan's distinct "voice," content and format comes from the dedicated guidance of the North Side CARES Coalition and the participation of those who organized and attended our many workshops, meetings and planning sessions. The plan's careful editing and finetuning is due to in large part to the steadfast efforts of Communities of Shalom members JP Duncan, Gary Doupe and Charles Cobb.

Were it not for the hundreds of hours of service provided by all the project's partners this project could have not been accomplished. This plan's vision speaks for the present and future wellbeing of the North Side community and the people and places that will continue to shape and sustain its unique identity and sense of place.

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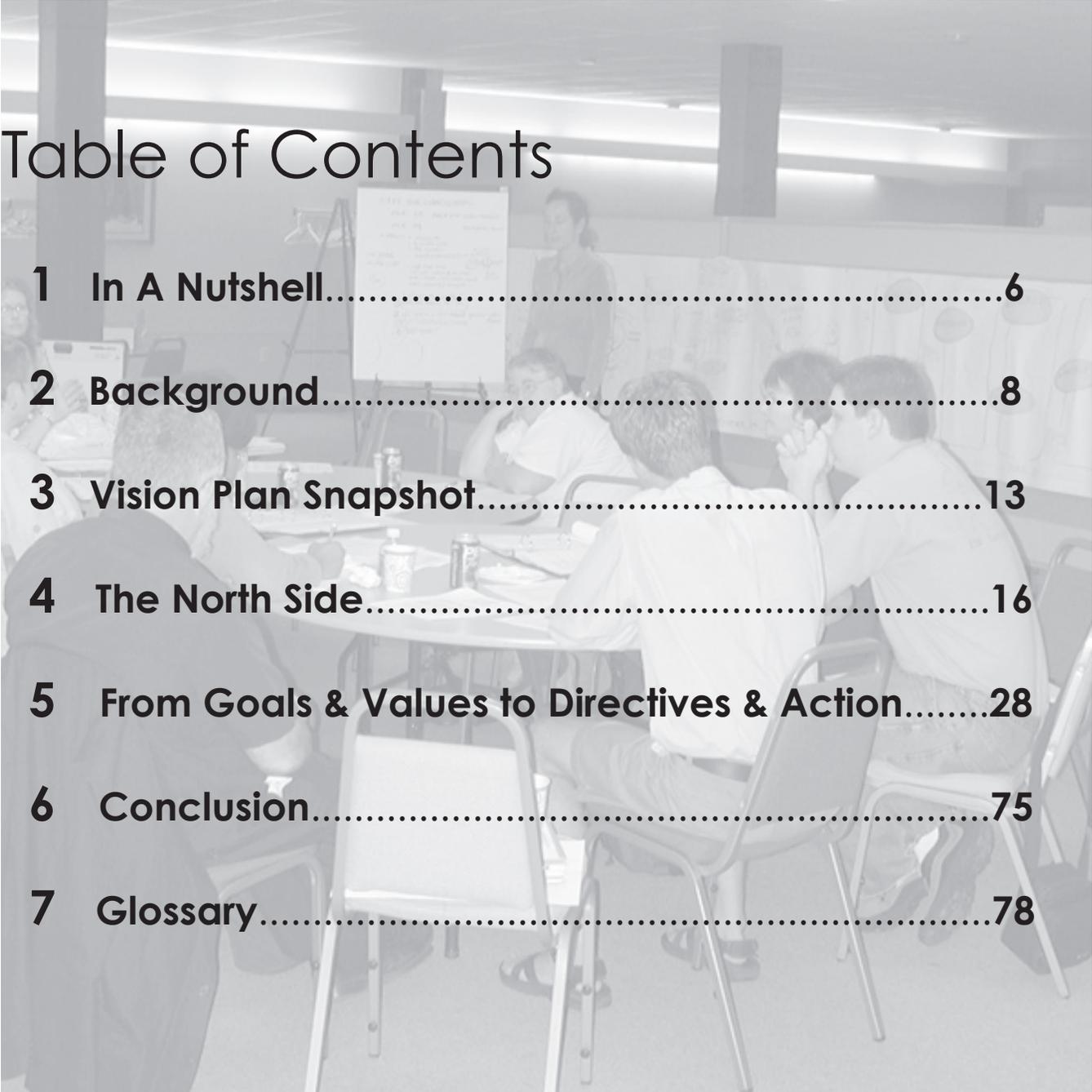
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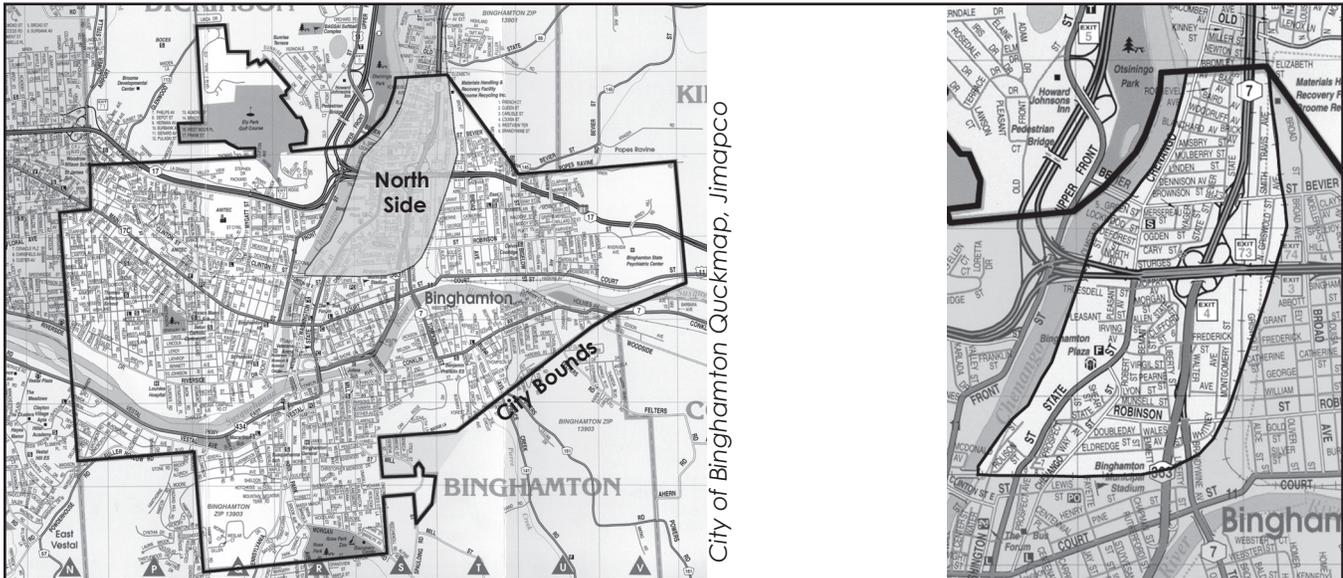


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# 1 In A Nutshell

## An Overview



The North Side neighborhood, home for approximately 4,500 people, is situated just north of downtown Binghamton, New York. Its boundaries are the Chenango River to the west, Binghamton City line to the north, just beyond Brandywine Avenue Extension to the east and the railroad tracks to the south.

Like so many neighborhoods, the North Side is a container of the history of the lives of the residents. The imprint of decades of decision making, for good or for ill, can be seen in our streets, buildings, patterns of land use, demographic shifts, and neighborhood morale. What was once a vital neighborhood on the Chenango Canal is sometimes seen as functionally isolated from the rest of the city and the region. Thriving economic centers have become marginal at best. Absentee landlords and impoverished

tenants have little incentive to adequately maintain or improve their homes; and increased crime and drug use have exacerbated the sense of isolation, making people even more afraid to act. Yet, longtime residents are proud of their neighborhood. Their memory is long and loyalty strong, though their sense of power to affect change is at low ebb. The North Side is at a critical turning point. Now our greatest priority is identifying and mobilizing our community strengths to reverse these trends and rebuild the North Side as a safe, beautiful, diverse and unified neighborhood.

### **North Siders are most capable of addressing our community needs**

In early community conversations we have learned that neighbors are deeply concerned about the vacant lots that dot our neighborhood, the homes in need of repair, the safety of our neighborhood- in the places where we live, work, and play. They have offered that by providing education, job training, childcare, and medical care, we can reclaim and strengthen the health and potential of our community. We have learned that by involving all residents in the process, we are building community relationships, drawing out our assets, and giving voice to the shared concerns of North Side citizens.

### **Rebuilding our community requires physical planning**

This Vision Plan seeks to educate us about the North Side now and in the future. It is a tool for advising the City of Binghamton about the issues we face, what we need, and what proposals to make for future change.



*North Side snapshots...*



# 2 Background

## *Vision Planning in the North Side*

### **COMMUNITY ACTION TIMELINE**

#### Winter 2001-2002

*Communities of Shalom training*

#### Spring 2002

*Communities of Shalom partners with SUNY ESF and Cornell University to conduct 4 community workshops where residents develop a cohesive vision for the North Side*

#### Summer 2002

*Communities of Shalom works with City of Binghamton and the universities to prepare a grant proposal to do further work in the community*

#### Summer 2003-present

*North Side CARES (Communities of Shalom, the universities, the City, and an expanded group of North Side residents and supporters) prepare a Vision Plan for the North Side, and hold community workshops to expand outreach and work toward a Riverfront District Plan and a riverfront project to be implemented in the near future*

### **Conceptual roots**

Effective community transformation emerges from a strong sense of identity, belonging, and the creative capacity of its residents. Communities are *whole* places comprising children, families, businesses, civic groups and institutions; each of which is an asset that contributes to the richness and strength of the whole. To create a 'vision' is to imagine a future of peace, wholeness, prosperity, and harmony that draws upon all the positive attributes of the community, and mobilizes them in an interconnected and interactive way to achieve that vision.

### **Formative stages**

In the winter of 2001-2002, residents of the North Side neighborhood in Binghamton began to consider ways to enhance the peace, wholeness, harmony and prosperity of their community. The residents, representing a variety of faith traditions, called themselves a "Community of Shalom" and undertook a five-month training program to help them learn how to be catalysts for transforming the neighborhood based upon the North Side's inherent positive attributes.

On hearing about the Shalom program, members of the New York State Quality Communities Initiative, including people from the Binghamton Planning Department and the landscape architecture departments of Cornell University and the State University of New York (Syracuse), offered their assistance. It was readily accepted.

Soon, the visioning initiative grew into a larger project guided by a jointly formed coalition called North Side CARES – the acronym means Community Action, Revitalization and Empowerment Strategies. This group of citizen leaders is continuing its work to refine the goals and action steps outlined in this Vision Plan.

## Where we've been

Binghamton faces challenges symptomatic of contemporary life in many U.S. cities. Changing economic trends have contributed to the city's steady loss of business, investment, and population. Employment has declined, as has the sturdiness of our housing and supportive infrastructure. Corrective measures such as large-scale transportation, renewal, and suburban development plans have met with marginal success – dramatically altering neighborhoods while not stemming the decline of the downtown center. Such programs have left many North Siders cynical toward City Hall and suspicious of planning decisions that are perceived as top-down programs that frustrate, rather than support, neighborhood stability.

## Where we're going

But our city government is responding and addressing its future with a new Comprehensive Plan and a Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP). Both plans focus on the North Side Neighborhood's unique attributes. Among the neighborhood's physical assets are its nearly 1.75-mile long Chenango riverfront edge, its housing and neighborhood structure, its advantageous proximity to downtown and its easy access via Chenango Street and State Street to State Route 17 and Interstates 81 and 88. The City hopes to reverse the neighborhood's physical decline, housing deterioration, crime and sense of environmental alienation through such things as community based planning, riverfront redevelopment, mixed use zoning, housing and economic reinvestment.

We're getting help for Binghamton at a state level too. Our designation as a New York State Quality Community in June 2002 means that the city joins eleven other NY State communities who are working closely with state agencies to identify doable and



*North Side assets include a 1.75-mile stretch of Chenango River frontage,*



*and closely knit and easily identifiable residential neighborhoods*



North Side residents participate in a series of community meetings in 2002.



fundable action projects to jumpstart their local economies and renew community vitality. The Quality Communities Initiative is advocating locally initiated and community-driven planning that grows from the bottom up. It is trying to be proactive by facilitating and linking technical assistance and funding programs to locally inspired projects. It is trying to foster multi-agency solutions to complex urban problems.

### The role of faith communities

The North Side's faith communities are its core institutions, enduring despite other visible losses in the neighborhood. They help to sustain the neighborhood by acting as welcoming and stabilizing agents as well as resource centers. By offering leadership, meeting space, and funding, the North Side congregations serve to mobilize local residents and individuals with longstanding ties to the North Side to act proactively on the community's behalf.

### The role of private citizens

The united strengths of common citizens combined with government and other regional institutions can achieve uncommon results. What you hold in your hand is not only a vision discerned by a growing number of people, but an invitation to become a vital part of the transformation of the neighborhood and the city. Your observations, interests, passions, and skills are part of the richness woven into the fabric of our community. Change is inevitable, but transformation is *optional*. It is part of the goal of this vision that you *opt in*.

A constant endeavor of the North Side CARES coalition is the generation of a Capacity Inventory – a short list of people, groups, and institutions with passion, dreams, skills, and commitment

to themselves, their neighborhoods, and sometimes the larger community. That list is never complete, and means little unless people are willing to get involved. As work progresses in making this Vision Plan, and subsequent versions of it, a reality, there will be many opportunities for you to speak your mind and demonstrate your strength.

### **The work so far**

In January 2002, the North Side Communities of Shalom, the City of Binghamton's Department of Planning, Housing and Community Development and students and faculty from the departments of Landscape Architecture at SUNY ESF and Cornell University began a community engagement process to understand the strengths and challenges of the neighborhood.

Five community meetings were held over the five-month period at area churches. Participants worked in teams made up of representatives from the Shalom Community, ESF and Cornell faculty and students. These three-hour sessions included dinner and intensive planning and design sessions where concerns and suggestions were voiced. Workshop activities included:

- Photo surveys
- Mapping sacred spaces  
(an activity to help residents discover what they value in the neighborhood)
- Sessions to propose potential uses for the riverfront
- Neighborhood inventory and site analysis
- Brainstorming sessions regarding community and funding resources
- Identification of North Side strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and concerns

### **2002 Community Meetings**

Meeting #1, March 2, 2002:

#### **Discovering community values**

*During this meeting, residents revealed the ways that they use and value their community, by identifying their favorite places, traditions and activities. Teams of residents and students then developed visions for North Side residential, commercial and riverfront realms.*

Meeting #2, April 2, 2002:

#### **Exploring Alternatives**

*Residents considered ways to use community opportunities and potentials to address neighborhood concerns. They also explored alternative expressions of their visions and identified actions that could help achieve those visions.*

Meeting #3, April 14, 2002:

#### **Evaluating Alternatives**

*Residents reviewed student design proposals that incorporated the visions and resident preferences. Strategies to implement ideas and get more residents involved were developed.*

Meeting #4, April 21, 2002:

#### **Celebrating the Process**

*Presentations were made to share the vision with the broader community. This meeting also allowed time for reflection, and allowed others to become engaged in the process of community renewal.*

In addition to producing conceptual plans, the process became a tool for community building and provided a springboard for working closely and strategically to make the visions and ideas become real. The results were presented to the larger North Side community at an April 21, 2002 public meeting in the Roosevelt Elementary School, and can be seen in some of the directives outlined in this vision plan.

That summer, realizing the value of the results of the visioning process and the potential for real community change, members of the Communities of Shalom, the City and the Universities worked to compile the results of those community workshops and prepare a grant application for the New York State Department of State's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). The grant was awarded later that summer, launching the next steps in the process of renewing the North Side neighborhood. The grant directs funding toward the drafting and publication of this Vision Plan and the North Side's Riverfront District Planning Guide and the design of one of the projects recommended as action steps within these documents.

Partners from the Communities of Shalom, the City and the Universities reassembled along with other members of the North Side community to create the North Sides CARES Coalition. This group met many times over the course of Fall 2002 - Spring 2005 to refine the ideas expressed in the Vision Plan, to work to increase community-wide participation and to plan a series of public workshops intended to gather community input and generate ideas about the redevelopment of the Chenango Riverfront and North Side Riverfront District. The publication of this Vision Plan and the North Side Riverfront District Planning Guide represents the completion of two primary community goals and has required substantial input by many dedicated people. Now it is time to put these ideas to work in the community.

# 3 Vision Plan Snapshot

## An Overview

The Vision Plan is a framework for redeveloping and rebuilding our neighborhood. Specific actions that initiate neighborhood change will likely come in many forms, either as action **projects**, action **programs**, or action **policies**. For example, the goal of neighborhood safety could involve an action project to get better-lit streets, an action program to develop a “walk to school” safety watch program, and an action policy to increase the police budget line in the North Side. With each type of action, whether a project, a program or a policy, we are looking for ways to accomplish our goals using either a maintenance, improvement or creation strategy.

We can often accomplish results quickly by using a **maintenance** strategy and saving or conserving things that are valuable to the North Side. Such an approach works with existing resources and generates shorter-term results. We can opt to use an **improvement** strategy for saving and reclaiming things that take more time, from two to five years, and are at risk of being lost or forgotten. Finally, we can use a **creation** strategy for making new proposals that result in long term changes. Redevelopment strategies typically take a good deal of time and money to implement. They also grow from the smaller incremental actions that unite in building a strong and enduring community foundation.

The North Side Vision represents a new beginning. It is up to the whole community to continue shaping, refining and acting on its goals and action steps. In the process we will build stronger relationships with each other, with the City of Binghamton and beyond.

### How does this plan relate to other recently completed planning documents?

*The City of Binghamton has recently completed two significant planning documents- The City of Binghamton Comprehensive Plan and the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP). These documents address city-wide programs and policies and do influence planning in the North Side. This document is different in that its focus is the North Side neighborhood, and most of the ideas presented herein were generated by the North Side community. All three documents share many of the same goals for the community and should be considered complementary.*

### Why a Vision Plan?

*“Vision-centered, place-based planning combines tools and participatory processes with an integrated approach to planning. It values economic, social and environmental conditions of place and shifts focus from rule-based to vision-based decision making. It helps communities move away from episodic planning to an ongoing process that creates more vibrant, effective communities and more engaged citizenry.”*  
(www.placematters.com)

## The North Side Vision

*The North Side of Binghamton will become a stronger community, living in diversity, growing in unity, and sharing a common experience of safety, beauty, and opportunity. A plan for the North Side will affirm the lives and dignity of all people who live here, foster inter-generational relationships, celebrate diversity and strengthen neighborhood unity.*

Here are the goals that have emerged from our visioning process to date. They will be explained in further detail in Chapter 5.

### GOAL #1: Engagement

*Mobilize broad-based community engagement by encouraging residents to participate actively and collaboratively, cultivate community partnerships and relationships, and become leaders in the community.*



### GOAL #2: Safety

*Create a safe and secure district for all ages and all aspects of community life.*

### **GOAL #3: Economic Opportunity**

**Generate more jobs and economic opportunities for the North Side and its residents.**



### **GOAL #4: Diverse housing**

***Develop and sustain a diversity of housing opportunities, housing mix, and housing types.***



### **GOAL #5: Accessible open spaces**

***Assemble a mosaic of safe, diverse, and accessible public open spaces in an interconnected network throughout the neighborhood, serving visitors and residents of all age groups.***



### **GOAL #6: Celebrate our identity**

***Celebrate the North Side's unique social, cultural, and environmental identity.***



### **GOAL #7: Holistic planning**

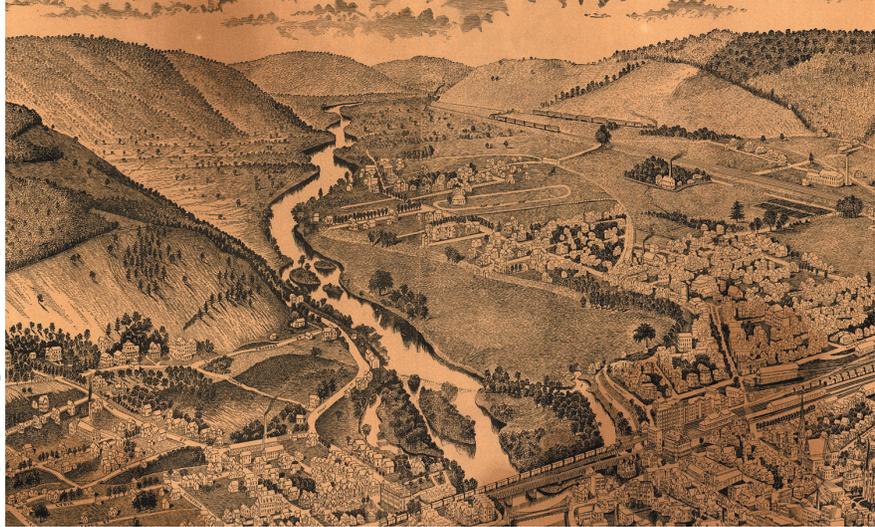
***Reconstruct an urban land use and development plan that strengthens desired patterns and practices of neighborhood and community life.***



# 4 The North Side

## *Yesterday and Today*

Library of Congress Bird's Eye View, 1882.



The North Side is a composite of circumstances and events that have been shaping it for three centuries. A once pristine haven for unique flora and fauna has become a transitional realm between city and suburb. At its northern end the North Side borders the popular Otsiningo Park and the Village of Port Dickinson, while at the south end it touches the railroad tracks and the heart of downtown. It has been going through growing pains and searching for stability from the beginning.

During the early 1800's it offered fashionable places to live "outside" the city overlooking the exquisite river valley. By the mid 1800s, it had become the most important growth area of the expanding city, physically delimited by water and rising valley walls. By the mid 1900's the North Side was being pressured from all sides as major urbanization and infrastructure changes reshaped the community to accommodate the City's local and regional vision. What the next century holds has yet to be seen.

## Early history

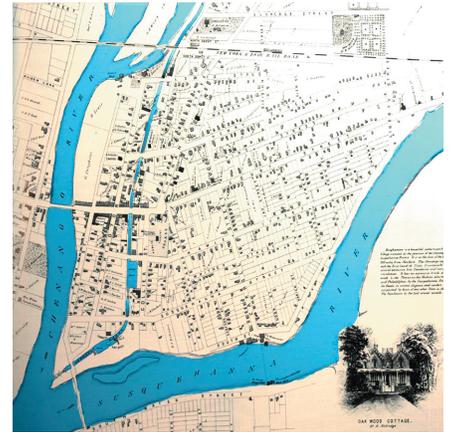
Glacial forces, tectonic movement and erosion all created Binghamton's beautiful setting at the confluence of the Susquehanna and Chenango rivers. Old hills, deep valleys, spectacular vistas and wide waterways attracted the first Native American residents. In these surroundings they settled until 1785 when their occupied lands were released to the State of New York.<sup>1</sup> Shortly thereafter, in 1800, patent holder William Bingham arrived and laid claim to the area that is now downtown Binghamton.

## The City grows with the Chenango Canal

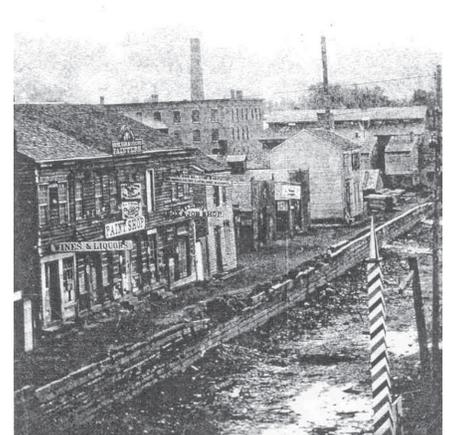
By the 1830's, natural waterways proved insufficient links to the regional marketplaces on which Binghamton's future growth and success depended. Construction of the Chenango Canal in 1834 instigated development and expansion into the North Side. Residential districts and businesses were soon lining the canal route, and worship centers were built in areas that were previously remote from the city center. East of the canal corridor the land sloped steeply, overlooking the trade and commerce activities that were developing in the river plain below. The flatlands west of the canal proved advantageous to development, and were soon burgeoning with industrial and commercial enterprises.

## The railroad brings change

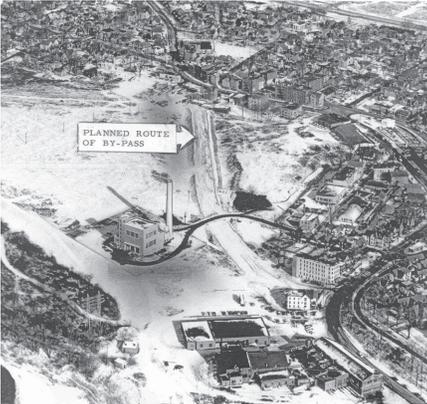
By 1876 the Chenango Canal ceased operation and was replaced by the railroad. Tracks, stations and yards separated downtown and the North Side while stimulating industrial and commercial growth around them to the east and west. Industries and worker housing developed along Robinson Street where elegant homes



*The route of the Chenango Canal.*



*Early growth of the North Side follows the route of the canal.*



*This historic photograph depicts the planned State Street bypass. Note the incinerator located centrally in the image, near the present location of Binghamton Plaza.*



*The Binghamton Plaza area is dominated today by a large expanse of mostly empty asphalt parking.*

and gardens once stood. The suburbs began to creep northward as the city encroached further into the North Side.

Along with development brought by the railroad, the North Side gained a new major land route when the canal was filled and transformed into West State Street. Parallel to Chenango Street, it became the second major thoroughfare in the neighborhood. These early acts of planning, building and development set the stage for land use patterns and other factors that characterize the North Side today. Over time State Street superseded Chenango as the main commercial conduit and downtown extension.

### **The automobile brings upheaval**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the region's growth and ever-increasing dependence on the automobile created the need for extended highway systems. These large-scale transportation efforts routed Interstate 81 and Route 17 directly through the northern section of the city to create better regional linkages. Once again the North Side's urban fabric and community dramatically changed in response to the times. Neighborhood road patterns were altered, housing blocks were torn down, streets dead-ended, and sites cleared for the highway's infrastructure, exits and on-ramps.

One part of the neighborhood, a low-lying section along the river now occupied by Binghamton Plaza, was ill suited to urbanization because of frequent flooding. For many years it was an open place where city dwellers attended fairs, amusements and races. In response to a vision to claim the land for future development, it was appropriated to receive the city's waste. From the early 1940's to the late 1950's the landfill received the refuse from the city. Binghamton Plaza, envisioned as a local and regional shopping

destination, was put in place as Routes 17 and 81 arrived in the mid 1960's. However, regional shopping centers, such as the Oakdale Mall and the Town Square Mall, have long since usurped the plaza's role as a major destination.

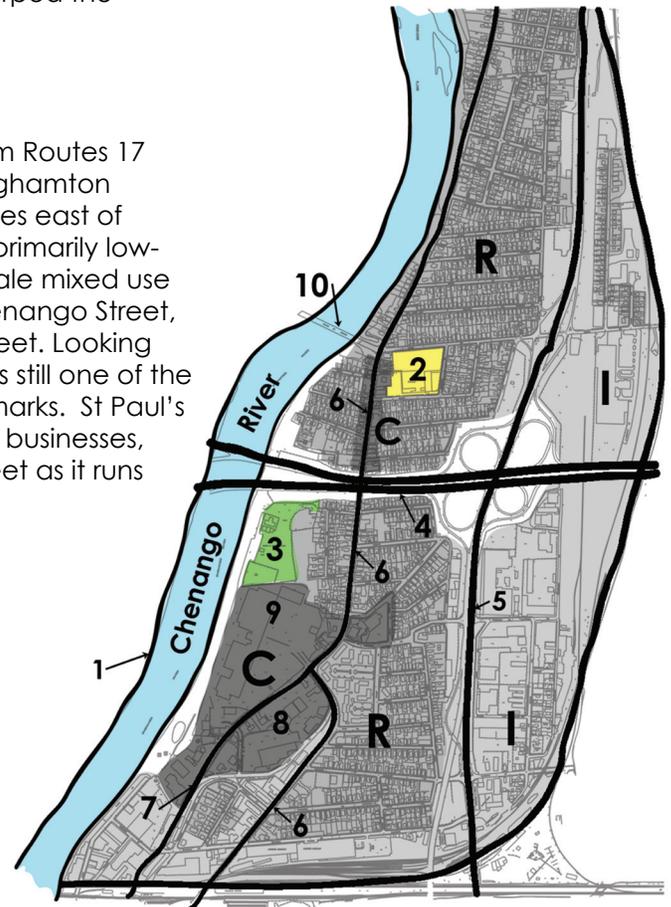
### The North Side today

Proximity to downtown and easy access to and from Routes 17 and 81 make the North Side a potentially major Binghamton gateway, and a premier focus for the City. Land uses east of Chenango Street and north of Frederick Street are primarily low- and medium-density residential areas. Two small scale mixed use business districts are found on upper and lower Chenango Street, the North Side's primary historic "neighborhood" street. Looking from Mount Prospect, the spire of St. Paul's Church is still one of the neighborhood's most important architectural landmarks. St Paul's is only one of many historic worship centers, homes, businesses, railroad station and bridges flanking Chenango Street as it runs from the City Courthouse to the Port Dickinson line.

#### Inventory Legend:

R- Residential  
C- Commercial  
I- Industrial

- |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1- Chenango River        | 6- Chenango Street       |
| 2- Roosevelt School      | 7- West State Street     |
| 3- Cheri A. Lindsey Park | 8- Colonial Plaza        |
| 4- Interstate 81/17      | 9- Binghamton Plaza      |
| 5- Brandywine Parkway    | 10- Bevier Street Bridge |



North Side Inventory Map



*The spire of St. Paul's.*



*Chenango Street commercial.*



*State Street commercial.*

State Street connects directly to downtown's busiest intersection and then travels northward, following the old canal corridor and carrying traffic to and from the hodgepodge of industrial and commercial services strung out along its edge. Between Robinson and Frederick Street, State Street's strip development stands in sharp contrast to the narrower neighborhood scale and character of historic Chenango Street. In addition, a steep topographic change separates West State Street—the former canal bed – from the higher prospect of Chenango Street.

Areas of overlap between the older and newer sections of the North Side are evident at the intersection of Chenango and State streets, at the Frederick Street exit from the Brandywine Highway, and in the neighborhood adjacent to Cheri Lindsey Park. In all these areas, streets are truncated, connections are awkward, and blocks are unconventional, all evidence of how changing land uses and circulation patterns have dramatically altered the neighborhood.

### **The people of the North Side**

Binghamton's population peaked in the 1950s at nearly 87,000 residents. Between 1950 and 2000 it declined by almost 45 %. This trend of diminishing population has occurred all across the Southern Tier. Today's regional population of 47,000 is almost equal to its 1900 level.

Residents of the North Side are significantly younger (median age 33) than the greater city population (median age 39.6), and their per capita income is 25% lower.<sup>2</sup> Many North Side households contain families with children. Many of these families use some form of public assistance. In order to support families we need to

ensure that they have access to education, jobs and job training, childcare, after school programs and medical care.

Jobs can be made available within the community by making the neighborhood and commercial districts attractive to new businesses and by increasing entrepreneurial opportunities for residents. Area congregations and Broome County Habitat for Humanity are among the active North Side groups and organizations providing assistance to residents.

### Home ownership

Home ownership, a key factor in predicting neighborhood and community stability, is also on the decline in Binghamton. The percentage of owner-occupied homes in the city is roughly 43% but only 25% on the North Side. Stable neighborhoods should have a minimum of 50% homeownership to cultivate the dynamics of community life, family and economic stability, and children's academic performance. The neglect and disinvestment in much of the North Side's housing stock may be attributable to the relatively low rate of home ownership. With 75% tenant-occupied homes and a large number of absentee landlords, there is little incentive for undertaking home and neighborhood improvements.

An essential component of transforming the North Side will involve increasing incentives for home ownership, and providing a range of housing so that ownership is available to people of a wide income range. (At \$11,339, the North Side has one of the lowest levels of per capita income in the city.) Home ownership is one way that individuals can build personal equity while making an investment in community.

## Census Trends in the North Side: 1990-2000

### Population Trends

#### 1. Declining Population

Binghamton 11% decrease  
North Side 14% decrease  
The North Side also saw a 38% decline in the 20-29 age group.

#### 2. Increasing racial diversity

40% increase African American  
27% increase Asian.

#### 3. Increasing poverty

23% Binghamton residents below poverty line, compared to 30% North Side residents.

### Housing Trends

#### 1. Aging housing stock

62% homes built pre-1940.

#### 2. Increasing vacancy

Number of vacant units increased by 77.9%  
12% units in Binghamton vacant  
16% North Side units vacant

#### 3. Decreasing home ownership

North Side % homeowners,  
33% in 1990, 28% in 2000

(Data compiled from the 2000 census)



*A North Side apartment building.*

### **Possibilities for abandoned and vacant properties**

Although abandoned buildings and businesses are evidence of a neighborhood in decline, people from the neighborhood have worked with the city to implement a program to demolish abandoned structures. This program should continue. Vacant properties have become sites for rebuilding by the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity. The construction of new homes and/or apartment buildings or businesses can serve to maintain neighborhood density. Other vacant lots provide opportunities to create neighborhood recreational spaces and places for community gathering and celebrations. A community center within the neighborhood would create a place to network, have daily face-to-face contact with residents, hold meetings and exchange resources.

### **Potential for integrated development**

Several significant commercial areas exist within the North Side. In its current state, Binghamton Plaza does little to enhance the neighborhood's relationship with the Chenango River. Nor does it provide the essential services and goods for residents' needs. The generic strip character of State Street detracts from the neighborhood and fails to provide the visual and physical amenities and connections to and from residential, river, and shopping areas.



*One of several neighborhood vacant lots.*

State Street, Chenango Street and the riverfront are three physical corridors running north-south through the North Side. To reinforce and capitalize on one another, they need better connections and interaction between them. Their identity and character needs to project a welcoming, beautiful, human-scaled image to the North Side, cultivating pride of place and local caring. By seizing on the opportunity to characterize the proposed Chenango Riverwalk

## North Side Analysis Map

**1-** The Chenango River is one of three major corridors that run on a roughly north/south axis through the North Side Community. The river is also a significant but largely unutilized North Side asset. As depicted in the analysis map, access to the river is currently very limited.

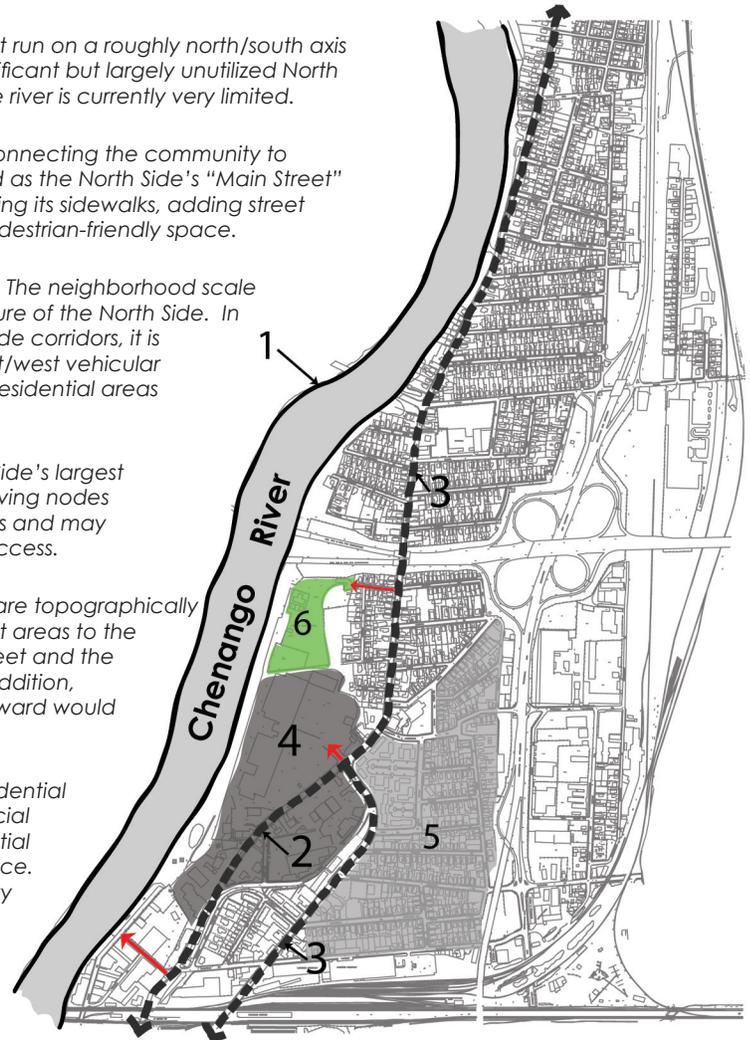
**2-** State Street is another important North Side corridor, connecting the community to downtown Binghamton. State Street could be developed as the North Side's "Main Street" by increasing building density along its length and widening its sidewalks, adding street trees, benches and lighting and promoting its edge as pedestrian-friendly space.

**3-** The third major North Side corridor is Chenango Street. The neighborhood scale and historic nature of this street makes it a significant feature of the North Side. In order to strengthen the unique role of these three North Side corridors, it is especially important to connect them with systems of east/west vehicular and pedestrian movement, so that residents in adjacent residential areas can freely move between and along them.

**4-** Binghamton and Colonial Plazas represent the North Side's largest commercial area. While these areas should represent thriving nodes of community activity, they are currently difficult to access and may also serve as barriers to pedestrian movement and river access.

**5-** Residential areas lying to the southeast of State Street are topographically and physically isolated from the commercial and riverfront areas to the west. They need direct and safe connections to State Street and the riverfront to reintegrate each area with one another. In addition, encouraging the spread of residential development westward would facilitate mixed use and reactivate this area.

**6-** Cheri A. Lindsey Park sits at the nexus between the residential areas of the North Side, the community's largest commercial area and the waterfront. This location elevates the potential of the park to be the significant community gathering space. Currently, however, lack of access and community identity hinder its development as such.





*State Street at the entrance to Binghamton Plaza.*



*Looking north to Cheri Lindsey Park from the rear of Binghamton Plaza.*

as a unique expression of the neighborhood's history and values, the North Side has a tremendous opportunity to conserve and enhance one of its greatest assets. By focusing on revitalizing its shopping and commercial areas, the city can transform State Street into a unique pedestrian-friendly boulevard that connects the river, lying to the west, with the neighborhoods lying to both the north and east.

### **The importance of green space and waterways' heritage**

The accessibility and quality of public green space has long been an important topic in the City of Binghamton. Unequal distribution of public parks between wealthier and poorer urban sectors can promote physical and social damage due to the appearance of disinvestment in poorer neighborhoods.

While Cheri Lindsey Park is a jewel in the North Side neighborhood and a source of city pride, it has limited ability to serve the needs of residents who do not live within safe walking distances. There are few smaller parks or playgrounds in other parts of the neighborhood. Creation of such parks or playgrounds would not only enhance the quality of life and sense of community here, but also generate enthusiasm for the city as a whole. They could be designed as a network of green spaces and a welcoming link between the neighborhood, river, and Cheri Lindsey Park.

The Chenango River is the North Side's greatest environmental asset. Fragments of Noyes Island and the river's edges are all that's left of the Chenango's natural meander. Cheri Lindsey Park is the most notable public recreational space along its edge and offers views to Mount Prospect and Otsiningo Park that still evoke romantic 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape scenes. Since the 1960's, when it

underwent extensive flood control engineering by the Army Corps of Engineers, the Chenango has been channelized by a straight levee embankment separating its water level from the city above.

A part of the North Side's history is the Chenango Canal. The legacy of the canal remains in the North Side's street orientation, topography, remnant building facades, walls and aqueducts. Remembering the canal is just one of the ways to cultivate a sense of shared history and community identity which also comes through community rituals, civic events, artifacts and public artworks.

### **Trend is not destiny**

Cities and neighborhoods are always changing. Housing stock is built, ages, requires repair and rehabilitation. Transportation routes are reconfigured, constructed and demolished. Stores and businesses come and go and global and regional marketplaces shift. The North Side has survived these types of changes, but now it must also counteract the predominant trends and demographics that mark it as a declining and destabilized community.

However, trend is not destiny. Important change will happen in the North Side with or without planning. However, effective and lasting transformation can happen if it builds on the strengths of those who live and work here, and responds to their pressing concerns. That process is called *Asset Based Community Development*,<sup>3</sup> which has greatly influenced this work. It holds that our families, businesses and institutions – some of whom have known the neighborhood for generations – best know the North Side's assets and challenges. Working collaboratively, everyone has a role in transforming our neighborhood into a stronger community, living in diversity, growing in unity, and sharing a common experience of safety, beauty, and opportunity. We will become a model for other communities too.



*Looking across the Chenango toward the North Side.*



*Chenango River's levee edge.*



*Representatives from the North Side show support for community participatory planning.*



*Lt. Gov. Mary Donahue names Binghamton a "Quality Community".*

## **Binghamton's Comprehensive Plan and Local Waterfront Revitalization Program**

The City of Binghamton has just completed two major planning documents that chart a course for the City's future. In both the Comprehensive Plan and the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP), the North Side figures prominently. Recommendations generated by these plans confirm the need to reclaim the social and economic well being of the North Side neighborhood by encouraging public and private reinvestment in mixed-use commercial, residential and recreational areas. They advocate the creation of people-friendly streets, public spaces and transportation systems.

Hand in hand with physical planning comes the need for locally based programs fostering community activities, education, independence, investment and ownership. One of the North Side's greatest assets, the Chenango River's edge, has been identified in both planning documents as a prime place to stimulate economic activity and civic identity while increasing recreational activities, community access and use. Already the city is acting to implement its river walk system connecting downtown to Otsiningo Park. The recent construction of a skateboard park in Cheri Lindsey Park is evidence of the City's commitment to broadening the recreational opportunities for the city – particularly the North Side.

## **The Quality Community Program and SUNY Network**

Place-based design and planning that is local, participatory and community engaged is the approach advocated by five

State University of New York (SUNY) Network schools helping to spearhead the **New York State Quality Communities Initiative (QCI)**. The QCI's goal is to identify and foster innovative urban design and planning projects *that grow from within the community*.

As the first step in directing state investment in holistic urban design projects, the SUNY Network is using their faculties and students to assist community visioning and neighborhood transformation. In the summer of 2002, New York Lieutenant Governor Mary Donahue proudly named Binghamton as one of 12 Quality Communities in the state, recognizing the City, the SUNY Network, Mayor Richard Bucci and the Community of Shalom as examples of collaborative community planning. Other important collaborators include the Department of State, Department of Transportation, Department of Environmental Conservation, Housing and Urban Development and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

### Turning plans into actions

Plans are futile without action. Successful planning is supported by zoning changes, aggressive financing, and networking the people, businesses, and institutions whose efforts will yield bountiful results. Vital to the process is a full commitment to broadening the field of participants and empowering their passions, interests and gifts to fulfill and expand the vision.

#### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, Charles Mumford. *Better Binghamton: A Report to The Mercantile Press Club of Binghamton, NY*, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> City of Binghamton DRAFT Comprehensive Plan

<sup>3</sup> John Kretzmann and John McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A path toward finding and mobilizing community assets*. Chicago: ACTA Publications, 1993.

# 5 From Goals & Values to Directives & Action

Each goal listed here is the result of the North Side community visioning process, and represents a means to achieve our vision of "a community living in diversity, growing in unity, and sharing a common vision of safety, beauty, and opportunity." The discussion of each goal is followed by a series of statements called "directives", marked with a  and meant to direct future action. Directives reflect the values of North Side residents and will guide planning decisions in the future.

Following the directives is a worksheet of action steps related to taking action to achieve each goal. The action steps are broken down into three categories. "**Maintain**" action steps can be undertaken immediately, and build on existing community resources. "**Improve**" action steps require additional resources, such as funding, and imply slightly longer periods of time necessary to achieve the action. Finally, "**Create**" action steps are considered somewhat long-term, and require substantial planning and/or resources. Each action step addresses a series of directives related to each goal, and contributes to completion of the vision. The issues that face the North Side are complex and resist clear and consistent categorization. Therefore, some action steps may address a number of goals and/or directives.

The action steps are presented in a worksheet format because we realize that making this vision a reality will require community input and idea generation over the months and years to come. Community members are encouraged to add to and amend the action steps listed on the worksheets in order to adjust to changes that occur in the North Side as this vision is gradually realized.

## GOAL #1:

### Community Relationships

#### *Our goal is to...*

**Mobilize broad-based community engagement by encouraging residents to participate actively and collaboratively, to cultivate community partnerships and relationships, and become leaders in the community.**

#### *Why community relationships?*

A community is more than a group of people living within a geographically defined area. It consists of people who have “social and psychological ties with each other and with the place where they live”.<sup>4</sup> From these ties emerge a community – a whole more potent and capable than the sum of its parts.

Individuals within the community can be empowered when supported or joined by others, and can reap the benefits of a well-connected community. These benefits can include anything from finding a job to increasing protection from crime for your home. The thread of strengthening community relationships is so powerful and pervasive that it is woven into the tapestry of all the goals and strategies in this vision plan. Its importance cannot be overstated.

#### ***What are the building blocks we need to make a neighborhood with strong community relationships and widespread public participation?***

Dialogue with North Side neighbors has identified four integrated approaches for fostering community engagement in the



*A young North Sider.*

## **Discovering Community Assets**

One of the major strengths of asset-based community development is that given a particular community problem, each group of people will derive a unique and different means of addressing that problem based on the particular capacities of that group. Therefore, asset-based thinking results in tailor-made solutions that allow a group of residents to work together to make positive change within their community using the resources they already have at their disposal.

*“Every single person has capacities, assets, and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed, and gifts given. If they are, the person will be valued, feel powerful, and well connected to the people around them. And the community around the person will be more powerful because of the contribution the person is making.”*  
(Kretzmann & McKnight, 13).

reshaping of the neighborhood. They are:

1. Shifting from ‘needs’ to ‘assets’
2. Discovering and inventorying community assets
3. Communicating with each other and with city government
4. Participating in the process of reshaping our community

### **1. SHIFTING FROM NEEDS TO ASSETS Builds Community Relationships**

Traditionally, agencies involved in helping distressed communities begin by identifying and cataloging needs within that community, assuming that *“help from the outside will arrive only when a convincing story of emptiness and need has been told.”*<sup>5</sup> As agencies target neighborhoods defined as the most “needy” in terms of crime, school dropouts, teen pregnancy, drug use and homelessness, the targeted neighborhoods take on a self-image of deficiency and decay. Such a focus tends to perpetuate co-dependent relationships that ignore strengths and reward weaknesses.

A different approach, called Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), builds on the *strengths* of communities, so that renewal comes from *inside* the community and builds outward.

## 2. DISCOVERING COMMUNITY ASSETS

### Builds Community Relationships

The foundation of a community's resources is in its people. Every individual has a particular set of skills, interests, experience and education that, when taken collectively, become a vital set of resources for strengthening the community. Identifying these assets is the first step in mobilizing a community's capacity to create change. Other important community assets are citizens groups, civic associations, public and private institutions, and even the gifts of strangers. All are important threads in the fabric of community.

As an increasing number of these assets are identified they are more likely to be mobilized on behalf of the community. This means that a resident with job skills experience may offer to teach a community course in resume writing, or a local school may offer its gymnasium space for a community meeting. A local university may provide student interns to paint a park fence or bring meals to homebound residents. A master gardener may help form a network of home 'victory gardens' that can be the nucleus of a neighborhood farmers' market. It is clear that a community's resource pool is tremendous once all its assets have been identified. When mobilized, that pool becomes a dynamic fountain of transforming energy for meeting community challenges and broadening the community strengths and creativity.

Community activities and programs that build individual and community success allow neighborhood residents to interact in new and constructive ways. The best partnerships provide mutual benefits for those groups involved, while addressing community challenges or issues in a creative and innovative way.



*North Side residents pool their skills and other assets.*



*North Side C.A.R.E.S. members use these collective skills to develop innovative solutions for hypothetical community issues.*

*“Start with your block, start with your neighbor. Find your leaders”  
Louise Stamper, Spokane, WA.*

### **3. COMMUNICATING WITH EACH OTHER Builds Community Relationships**

Residents and visitors should be kept well informed about community happenings, about resources available within the community, about meetings and gatherings, and especially about how they can get involved to offer their own resources or to draw from what is available. Information sharing is a critical component of community-based development.



*A North Side CARES meeting.*

Mass media are important sources of information, but not necessarily the most powerful. Interactive, or face-to-face, opportunities are also a vital component. Community celebrations, special events, faith-group festivals, school assemblies, and arts initiatives are some of the ways to increase interaction and information sharing. Even the way that public spaces such as parks, sidewalks, and commercial centers are designed can either foster or inhibit vital interaction that helps build the strength of the community.

### **4. PARTICIPATING IN THE PROCESS OF RESHAPING OUR COMMUNITY Builds Community Relationships**

Successful communities are founded on an active population of residents. Ideally, the body of people involved with local politics and neighborhood projects should reflect the same diversity found within the community. Providing more opportunities for participation by a broad spectrum of individuals and groups encourages a 'can-do' spirit. This Vision Plan represents one way to encourage neighbors to no longer sit back and wait for help, but to stand up and ask, “How can I contribute?” The list of directives that follows is only a hint of the creative power that can emerge from a sincere and **intentional effort to invite community participation.**

## **What We Value**

- Our North Side people of all races, ages, income levels
- A community voice in the design of the neighborhood
- Community assets, and the community itself as our most valuable resource

## **To build community relationships in the North Side, we will...**

-  Encourage personal contact among neighbors and residents to build social networks and community trust
-  Integrate Shalom Community Vision and Design proposals in the implementation of the comprehensive planning process
-  Encourage community voices and broad-based participation in planning and design of the North Side
-  Support a holistic planning and design approach
-  Identify the assets of the North Side's individuals, associations, and institutions, and mobilize those assets by building working relationships among them
-  Promote local pride and sense of belonging in the North Side
-  Design and relate the 'neighborhood center' to the local

# Community Relationships ACTION Worksheet

	<b>Maintain</b> Community Relationships with actions we take today building on our existing community resources	<b>Improve</b> Community Relationships with actions we take in the near future using modest additional resources	<b>Create</b> Community Relationships with actions we take over the long term using substantial additional resources
<b>Policy</b> Action Steps  to influence decision-making, planning or legislation.	✓ <i>Participate in city-wide planning process</i>		
<b>Program</b> Action Steps  to generate participation, community involvement and local services.	✓ <i>Encourage holiday decorating</i> ✓ <i>Rebuild neighborhood group</i> ✓ <i>Expand participation in National Night Out</i>	✓ <i>Organize a group responsible for planning activities</i>	✓ <i>Attract events to the area e.g. Special Olympics, Empire State Games, BMX competitions</i>  ✓ <i>Start a cultural arts program for families and children</i>
<b>Project</b> Action Steps  to create small and large scale improvements in our community.	✓ <i>Paint community murals on building backs along riverfront</i> ✓ <i>Publicize current community happenings in local newspaper, church bulletins, school newsletter, etc.</i> ✓ <i>Erect a "community happenings" bulletin board</i>	✓ <i>Create community gardens</i> ✓ <i>Prepare a community capacity inventory</i> ✓ <i>Hold events and festivals</i> ✓ <i>Publish North Side newsletter to discuss issues facing the community, upcoming events, and to let residents know how to get involved</i>	✓ <i>Build a community center</i>

Note: Action steps shown with a ✓ were generated by North Side residents during the 2002 North Side Visioning workshops

***Our goal is to...***

**Create a safe and secure North Side District for all ages and all aspects of community life.**

***Why safety?***

Most residents cite safety as a primary concern for the North Side. Traditionally, we respond to lack of safety by retreating from neighborhood streets, spending more time in our homes and avoiding public places – especially after dark. We rely on police to handle neighborhood crime, and are angry when we fail to see improvements. Ironically, safety issues have been addressed in cities around the United States by doing just the opposite – by encouraging residents to be more visible on neighborhood streets and in public places at all times of day, thereby discouraging crime.

***What are the building blocks that will make the North Side safe?***

Seven integrated approaches can help to build safe places for living, working and playing in the North Side at all times of day<sup>6</sup>:

1. Social Networks
2. Orientation and information
3. Evidence of care
4. Eyes on the street
5. Physical design
6. Traffic calming
7. Targeted and community-based policing

## **1. SOCIAL NETWORKS Build Safe Neighborhoods<sup>7</sup>**

Neighborhoods begin with the people who live there and the social networks they create. Safe neighborhoods have high levels of community trust, established social networks, and citizens that are actively engaged in local politics and organizations. Conversely, unsafe neighborhoods are socially disorganized with a high level of population turnover, where neighbors do not know each other, where local organizations are rare, and intergenerational relationships are weak.

A good percentage of North Side residents lack a high school diploma or other education. Many others of us are unemployed or economically disadvantaged. Therefore, social networks and civic participation are especially important to the future of our neighborhood. Social networks (including acquaintances among neighbors) can provide emotional and financial support for people, can allow for mentoring of children and teens, and supply community organizations with volunteers so that they are better capable of making positive change within the community.

Building social networks begins with neighbors meeting neighbors. Networks are built on acquaintances. As neighbors along a block come to know each other's names, they are more willing and comfortable to speak out if they see kids on the block misbehaving, or if they witness a potential crime against a neighbor's property. Social networks provide occasional support for community members, such as care for a sick child, help with a roofing project, a short-term cash loan, etc. Neighborhoods with strong social networks show decreases in violent crime and teenage troublemaking. Nurturing the formation of these networks builds trust within communities and provides the foundation for safe neighborhoods.

*"Its about building a service model instead of acting only on the protection side of the model." - Cops WEST*

## **2. INFORMATION & ORIENTATION Build Safe Neighborhoods**

Visitors and residents need to know where they are, as well as where they are going, in order to feel safe in their environment. Orienting drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists means providing clear and consistent signage throughout the neighborhood. Landmarks such as familiar churches, schools, buildings or sites provide visual references that help a visitor 'map' the environment.

## **3. EVIDENCE OF CARE Builds Safe Neighborhoods**

Management and maintenance and the general care of buildings and public spaces demonstrate the care associated with a healthy and safe neighborhood. Broken windows with plywood coverings, graffiti, and chipped and degraded sidewalks can cause residents and visitors to feel unsafe. Creating incentives that encourage residents to show evidence of care will help recast the North Side as an attractive and safe place to live, play, and work.

## **4. EYES ON THE STREET Build Safe Neighborhoods**

As mentioned earlier, one of the most important ways to maintain high levels of safety is to encourage the presence of people in streets, sidewalks, yards and porches. Collectively, these people monitor the safety of their neighborhood while their very presence deters crime.

Many residents recall a time when children played in North Side streets, and parents knew all their neighbors on their block. We all feel the loss of these social relationships and the strength they provided to our community. We now seek ways to rebuild these relationships with our neighbors by introducing ourselves to the family next door, by attending community gatherings, and



*A well-maintained home is a sign of a healthy neighborhood.*



*North Side residents provide 'eyes on the street'.*



*Clear signage...*



*and well defined crosswalks would increase safety for North Side pedestrians.*

organizing neighborhood watch groups. We also recognize that mixing land uses, such as residential and commercial, can keep eyes on the street both day and night.

### **5. PHYSICAL DESIGN builds safe neighborhoods**

The physical design of a neighborhood has a great impact on safety. Design of public spaces should enhance natural surveillance by allowing clear views into public areas from the streets, sidewalks, and nearby businesses or residences. Planting of shrubs and trees should not obstruct this surveillance or create dark, isolated areas. This means that compatible land uses and zoning directives are important components of promoting neighborhood safety.

### **6. TRAFFIC CALMING builds safe neighborhoods**

Safe neighborhood streets allow for the co-existence of cars, trucks, bicycles and pedestrians. Traffic-calming design techniques for streets may include raised crosswalks, planted street medians and narrowing of roadways. When introduced, these techniques cause drivers to slow down because the street is perceived less as a highway, and more as a neighborhood street. The creation of clearly marked bike lanes allows for safe cycling along roadways. Safety for pedestrians is increased through the use of well-marked crosswalks and properly maintained sidewalks.

### **7. TARGETED COMMUNITY-BASED POLICING builds safe neighborhoods**

The Weed and Seed Initiative, currently under way in an area that overlaps part of the North Side, is a national strategy that aims to “prevent, control, and reduce violent crime, drug abuse, and gang

*"We realized we had to let go of this attitude that it was up to the police to solve all our problems. We're part of the problem, and we need to be part of the solution"*

*-Cops WEST, Police-trained Citizen Volunteers*

activity..."<sup>8</sup> by helping a coalition of residents and law enforcement identify areas that need attention and target their community-building efforts accordingly. It allows residents to take a larger role in responding to conditions that emerge in the neighborhood. For example, a community task force can field complaints such as barking dogs, abandoned vehicles, broken windows or drug houses, and refer them to appropriate agencies or individuals.

Residents of the North Side have responded to issues of safety with a list of directives, in order to achieve our vision of a safe neighborhood for all residents and all aspects of community life.

### ***What We Value...***

- **Social networks of trust and support among residents**
- **Feeling oriented in our environment**
- **Residents' role in establishing neighborhood safety**
- **The role of design in promoting safety in our neighborhood**
- **An active community/police relationship**
- **Ways to reach at-risk youth as a means to prevent crime and protect our youth**

***To create a safe and secure North Side, we will...***

-  **Encourage personal contact among neighbors and residents to build social networks and community trust**
-  **Display care of the environment**
-  **Orient and inform residents and visitors in the North Side with way-finding and informational signage**
-  **Encourage residents to provide 'eyes on the street'**
-  **Use physical design and land use planning to promote safety in the North Side, including the safe coexistence of vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians on North Side streets**
-  **Maintain an active and mutually beneficial relationship with Binghamton Police, Fire and Code Enforcement Departments**
-  **Address the need for mentoring, recreational activities, and job-training for at-risk neighborhood youth**

# Safety ACTION Worksheet

	<b>Maintain</b> <small>Safety</small> with actions we take today building on our existing community resources	<b>Improve</b> <small>Safety</small> with actions we take in the near future using modest additional resources	<b>Create</b> <small>Safety</small> with actions we take over the long term using substantial additional resources
<p><b>Policy</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to influence decision-making, planning or legislation.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Create a long-term maintenance and management plan for public spaces</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>Program</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to generate participation, community involvement and local services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Encourage residents to meet their neighbors</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Encourage residents to be out on their lawns and front porches</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Request more problem-based foot and bike patrols</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Begin a community-based mentoring program for at-risk youth</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Start a neighborhood watch organization</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Tear down abandoned buildings and find new uses for vacant lots</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Work with Binghamton Police to establish a community-centered policing program</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Project</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to create small and large scale improvements in our community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Plan neighborhood activities to build social networks and community trust</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Develop a citizen's self-help brochure</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Install signage for way-finding and community information</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Install pedestrian scale lighting on neighborhood streets and along riverwalk</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Redesign streets to calm traffic and create safe zones for vehicles, bicycles &amp; pedestrians</i></li> </ul>

Note: Action steps shown with a ✓ were generated by North Side residents during the 2002 North Side Visioning workshops

## GOAL #3: Economic Opportunity

### *Our goal is to...*

**Generate more jobs and economic opportunities for the North Side and its residents.**

### ***Why jobs and economy?***

In recent decades Binghamton has experienced economic decline, especially due to a significant the loss of its economic base. Like many cities across the eastern United States, we've lost several major manufacturing plants and the jobs associated with them. While the city is diligently seeking to recover from these losses and recast its economic future, we affirm the importance of creating a diverse economic base so that a loss or decline in one sector will not unsettle the entire economy. That means we must cultivate a wide range of types and sizes of businesses, from international companies to the small business owned by a sole proprietor, thus increasing economic opportunities for all residents.

### ***What are the building blocks we need to build a neighborhood of economic opportunity?***

From a set of integrated approaches we can begin to build economic opportunity in the North Side. Building a prosperous and sustainable neighborhood economy will include:

1. Building on neighborhood assets
2. Identifying community assets
3. Investment from outside the community

## 1. NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS Build Economic Opportunity

Sustainable economic development requires that communities review their natural, social and cultural assets. What strengths are present that can be built upon? Where does our community agree to focus investment? Our neighbors have cited the Chenango River as a significant North Side asset. So has the city with its Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) for lands along the river. The overall design concept is “to establish desirable water-based uses for the City of Binghamton’s waterways and adjacent lands, resulting in the establishment of a “destination” that serves recreational, social and economic needs of residents and visitors.”

Part of the plan includes a riverwalk along the Chenango River, to span from downtown’s Confluence Park to the North Side’s Cheri A. Lindsey Park. We now have the opportunity to augment changes proposed by the city, and to focus economic growth toward lands along the river as part of a comprehensive vision for our neighborhood.

## 2. COMMUNITY ASSETS Build Economic Opportunity

Building upon on the ‘capacity inventory’ model that we advocate, new enterprises can be developed by identifying and cultivating the interests, skills, and passions of people in our neighborhood. Building relationships among residents with similar skill sets could promote new local businesses. For example, a number of residents may have experience in caring for children. If these residents are linked with each other, and with funding and other resources, they may be able to establish a community childcare center.



*The Chenango River, an underutilized North Side treasure.*



*North Side commercial, located on the river ‘flats’.*



*State Street commercial, a mix of local and chain businesses.*



*Local businesses line Chenango Street.*

The capacity inventory can be a tool for creative development that provides valuable services and supports the local economy and community residents. It can also link potential employers to employees by highlighting the skills and experience of residents. It may also increase the potential for residents to re-enter the local economy by identifying adequate support services that can be made available, such as job skills, education, work attire, day care for children and transportation to and from work – much of which could be provided by area residents for area residents. Alternative credit institutions can be established to offer incentives and support for small business owners, as well as agencies that can link people to these institutions while offering technical support and education for new entrepreneurs.

### **3. OUTSIDE INVESTMENT Builds Economic Opportunity**

While community resources are being fully mobilized, community leaders can begin to address the prospects for outside developers to invest in the community. A major asset for the North Side economy is the easy access to NYS Route 17 and Interstates 81 and 88, making it a gateway to Binghamton and a link to the Southern Tier region and beyond. This gateway status increases our potential for attracting developers from outside the community. It is imperative, however, that this outside investment be balanced with local business to ensure that a high percentage of the capital that is generated stays within the community.

Some ways that communities can ensure that their needs are met when dealing with larger companies and developers is to request that these companies hire and purchase products locally whenever possible. A portion of company profits can be reinvested in community-building projects. In this way, the community can partner with larger developers to create mutual benefits.

Most residents agree that Binghamton Plaza is a logical place to focus redevelopment efforts. A strategy to increase its value for investment and development might include a design that integrates the plaza with the Chenango riverfront, as well as adding residential uses. Such a strategy could transform this dying space into an active and vibrant hub of activity. Redevelopment of the plaza, coupled with revitalization of the Chenango Street commercial corridor, will boost the attractiveness of the North Side for further economic development.

The following list of directives contributes to our vision of a prosperous and sustainable economy for all aspects of community life.

### ***What We Value...***

- **Community as resource**
- **The community as the key to the North Side's renewal**
- **Diversity in economic development to increase stability of the neighborhood economy**
- **The input of money and resources from outside development, as long as community and development relationships are mutually beneficial**
- **Community and economic development that builds on and connects to natural and cultural assets**



*Binghamton Plaza, the North Side's largest shopping area,*



*and Colonial Plaza.*



*These commercial nodes contain local and regional chain businesses.*

***To build the economy of the North Side, we will...***

-  **Identify the community's collective skill sets, education and experience**
-  **Provide residents with community-based job skills training**
-  **Address the economic future of the North Side in conjunction with the development plan for the rest of Binghamton**
-  **Ensure that support services are available for residents seeking employment, such as childcare, business attire workshops, transportation, etc.**
-  **Diversify the commercial base of the North Side**
-  **Make the North Side attractive for investment by developers and existing landowners**
-  **Ensure a balance of local and regional commercial and service oriented needs**
-  **Encourage commercial uses to connect and contribute to the riverfront activities**

# Economic Opportunity ACTION Worksheet

	<b>Maintain</b> Economic Opportunity with actions we take today building on our existing community resources	<b>Improve</b> Economic Opportunity with actions we take in the near future using modest additional resources	<b>Create</b> Economic Opportunity with actions we take over the long term using substantial additional resources
<p><b>Policy</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to influence decision-making, planning or legislation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Identify neighborhood assets and target investment and economic development opportunities</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Work with city government to proactively undertake economic redevelopment</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Develop design guidelines for commercial development along the riverfront</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Ensure that economic policies address both local and regional needs</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>Program</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to generate participation, community involvement and local services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Assess the availability and cost of childcare services in the area</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Establish a community-based program to help residents identify abilities, prepare resumes and improve skills</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Work with local schools and universities to create educational incentives and tutoring programs</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Create a funded learning center</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Project</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to create small and large scale improvements in our community.</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Redevelop Binghamton Plaza and address environmental concerns</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Redevelop State Street as the North Side's "Main Street"</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Build a supermarket</i></li> </ul>

## Goal #4: Diverse housing



*The North Side's housing types include apartments,*



*townhomes,*



*and duplexes.*

*Our goal is to..*

**Develop and sustain a diversity of housing opportunities, housing mix and housing types.**

### ***Why housing?***

The North Side, like all neighborhoods, is in a constant state of change. Residents move in and out. Property values dip and surge. Some homes are remodeled while others are neglected. Crime rates go up and down. This cycle is normal for any neighborhood; yet the wide swings in these areas can be diminished when North Side residents address specific factors that affect the health and stability of the community. These include: vacant properties, the general maintenance and condition of housing stock, level of home ownership, and availability of affordable housing.

### ***What are the building blocks we need to support a diversity of housing opportunities in a stable and healthy North Side neighborhood?***

From a set of integrated approaches we can begin to stabilize and support a healthy neighborhood with a diversity of housing opportunities, including renter- and owner-occupied homes, an array of housing types, and housing mixed with other compatible land uses.

Building healthy, diverse housing in the North Side will address:

1. A vacant properties plan
2. Home maintenance
3. Increased home ownership
4. Affordable housing

### 1. A VACANT PROPERTIES PLAN Builds Healthy and Stable Housing

Vacant properties influence neighborhoods in a variety of ways.<sup>9</sup> Houses adjoining vacant lots may lose resale value. Vacant structures may pose fire hazards and attract crime. A high percentage of vacant properties may contribute to lower tax revenues, coupled with the increased costs of municipal services related to increasing fire hazards and crime. Homeowners' insurance rates may also be affected.

There are many ways a community can deal with vacant properties. First, an accurate portrait of the vacant properties within a neighborhood needs to be established. Information needed includes the number and location of these properties, their market value, and current zoning for each parcel. Then, working together, a community-led task force can develop a menu of strategies that reweaves the properties into the community fabric.

Such a menu might begin with simple code enforcement, to ensure that properties meet the community's safety and development directives. Some may be eligible for tax foreclosure; and the community may choose to take ownership of selected parcels, especially if they provide opportunities for redevelopment as community parks, centers, or sites for affordable housing. Other properties may have the potential to be split and sold to adjoining



*Vacant neighborhood houses may attract crime.*



*Found throughout the North Side, vacant buildings...*



*and vacant lots could be transformed into community spaces.*



*Well-maintained homes are signs of a healthy neighborhood.*



*Homes that are in good repair help express community pride.*

landowners. Some of these vacant or underutilized spaces can be redesigned as vibrant community gathering spaces, such as a community center or a pocket park. Such places improve the appearance of our neighborhood while strengthening the bonds among residents.

## **2. HOME MAINTENANCE Builds Healthy and Stable Housing**

Urban housing stock is often much older than houses found in the suburbs. In times of economic stress many families living within these older homes do not have the resources to keep them well maintained. Sometimes it is difficult to keep them safe, or in compliance with city codes. As the condition of houses declines, so does the appearance of the neighborhood and associated property values. The neighborhood also loses its attractiveness to new homeowners.

There are ways to combat housing stock decline. Low-income and/or elderly residents of homes needing repair can partner with agencies to receive funding and advice. A few such agencies are currently working within the North Side. A community education program can inform eligible residents about available resources. For other residents, it may be possible to draw from the assets of the community by bartering with a neighbor who has experience and skills in carpentry, or classes may be offered within the community to teach basic home repair skills to residents.

## **3. HOME OWNERSHIP Builds Healthy and Stable Housing**

Home ownership is a key factor relating to community health and neighborhood stability, mainly because homeowners invest in and committ to a community by buying a home there. Because of this, homeowners have more to lose if the neighborhood declines.

They are more likely than renters to become involved in community planning and neighborhood programs such as crime watches. Home ownership has also been linked to increases in family stability and improved property maintenance. Well-maintained properties mean that homeowners are more likely than renters to be satisfied with their residential life.

The national average home ownership rate is 66%. A home ownership rate of less than 30% indicates a neighborhood with little stability; 30-50% indicates a neighborhood in transition; and a neighborhood with more than 50% has the capacity to provide a strong core of committed residents.<sup>10</sup>

Currently, the home ownership rate in the North Side is 25%<sup>11</sup>. Raising this rate to approach 50% should become a priority for community leaders. Organizations already working toward this goal in the North Side include Habitat for Humanity, a group committed to the community, and to widening the range of people eligible to purchase their own home.

#### **4. AFFORDABLE HOUSING Builds Healthy and Stable Housing**

Affordable housing is an essential part of any stable community. Providing a diversity of housing types (apartments, condominiums, townhouses, single family homes, etc) typically ensures a range of housing costs, so that housing is available to both lower- and higher-income families. In the North Side it is essential encourage home ownership as a way to stabilize the community.

Increasing the number of owner-occupied homes means widening the range of prospective homebuyers, and requires addressing the issue from a number of perspectives. For example, low-income prospective homebuyers would greatly benefit from a program that allowed for decreased down payment requirements and/or reduced



*Building home ownership in the North Side will mean more residents whom are committed to improving the neighborhood.*



*Maintaining a diversity of housing types will ensure a range of housing costs.*

monthly payments. Likewise, programs that provide low-income homebuyers with increased access to credit would result in more homebuyers. Resources could also be provided to help families understand and plan for the responsibilities that come with home ownership including taxes, insurance, repairs and maintenance. Ensuring affordable housing within the North Side will allow housing opportunities for these elderly and low-income families, pushed out of neighborhoods undergoing renewal. It is essential that we optimize opportunities for a wide diversity of residents to contribute to the rebirth of our community.

Residents of the North Side have responded to issues of housing with a list of directives, in order to achieve our vision of a North Side where every resident has access to safe, attractive, and affordable housing.

### ***What We Value...***

- **Neighborhood stability**
- **Home ownership as a means to neighborhood stability**
- **Housing stock in good condition**
- **Housing available to a wide range of people, regardless of income level, race, age, etc.**
- **Interaction among community members as a means to build social networks and neighborhood stability**
- **Housing located nearby and linked to public open space**

*To develop diverse housing in the North Side, we will...*

-  **Work to increase neighborhood stability by increasing home ownership among residents**
-  **Rehabilitate or tear down abandoned residential buildings**
-  **Target vacant properties for residential development or other uses, such as community parks, a community center, etc.**
-  **Enable homeowners to repair, rehabilitate, and maintain their homes**
-  **Prepare a community-wide plan that provides a variety of housing types, ensures a range of affordable housing opportunities and encourages housing mixes for residents across age and income levels**
-  **Provide incentives for absentee landlords to rehabilitate their housing and improve tenant selection procedures**
-  **Link housing with a public open space network so that residents have safe and convenient access to recreational space**



*Housing in the North Side can be supported and re-created as a stable, diverse and thriving fabric of the community.*

# Housing ACTION Worksheet

	<b>Maintain</b> Housing with actions we take today building on our existing com- munity resources	<b>Improve</b> Housing with actions we take in the near future using modest ad- ditional resources	<b>Create</b> Housing with actions we take over the long term using substantial ad- ditional resources
<p><b>Policy</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to influence decision-making, planning or legislation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Review city housing code and address North Side housing stock</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Develop a neighborhood-wide approach to vacant properties</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>Program</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to generate participation, community involvement and local services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Identify and assess programs available for new home buyers</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Tear down abandoned buildings</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Bring all housing up to current NYS building code</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Identify programs available for housing rehabilitation and make info and credit accessible to homebuyers</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Encourage landlords to reinvest in their properties</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Initiate senior housing options and opportunities</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Project</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to create small and large scale improvements in our community.</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Develop neighborhood sidewalks, streetscapes and greenways to link residential, commercial and recreational spaces</i></li> </ul>

Note: Action steps shown with a ✓ were generated by North Side residents during the 2002 North Side Visioning workshops

## GOAL #5:

### Accessible open spaces

#### Our goal is to...

**Assemble an interconnected neighborhood network of safe, diverse, and accessible public open spaces serving visitors and residents of all age groups.**

#### Why open space?

Public open space can be defined as land that is not intensively developed for residential, commercial, industrial or institutional use. Open spaces can include parks, greenways, trails, community gardens, squares and plazas, wetlands, forests, shorelines, undeveloped scenic lands, etc., and can serve a variety of functions.

Open space within neighborhoods can lead to strong community identification with that space, improve an area's aesthetics, and encourage community pride. It can promote a sense of belonging, teach about the past, point to the future, and exemplify community values. Wild or natural areas can have spiritual impact, and support ecological health within the community. Conservation programs in these areas can link children and adults with their environment while teaching stewardship and encouraging other sustainable lifestyle choices.

Open spaces provide children with the play areas that are too often lacking within urban neighborhoods. Sports programs provide alternative activities for at-risk youth. Trails and greenways provide spaces for residents to improve their physical health through exercise. They can promote walking and cycling over other, more energy-consuming, forms of transportation.



*Cheri Lindsey Park, the North Side's major green, public, open space.*



*The BMX course attracts many visitors to the park.*



*Other park amenities include a pool,*



*little league baseball field,*



*and a new skatepark.*

The ecological benefits of green space include increased biodiversity, reduced noise, and reduction of air and water pollution. Economic benefits range from increased property values near well-cared for open spaces, to new business opportunities such as the logging of urban forests. Indirect effects include cleaner water and air and the decreased use of fuel.

### **What are the building blocks we need to support a public open space system in the North Side neighborhood?**

From a set of integrated approaches we can begin to build a safe, diverse and accessible public open space system in the North Side. Providing residents and visitors of all ages with open space requires:

1. Establishing an open space network
2. Providing open space opportunities for all
3. Formulating a plan to care for the network

### **1. ESTABLISHING A NETWORK Builds Public Open Space**

We are beginning to conceive of our community's public spaces as a system – a network of interconnected spaces that provide a variety of social, environmental and cultural functions. One example might be a small playground in a block that is not within easy walking distance to Cheri Lindsey Park, thus giving small children a safe place to play that is close to home. Another example might be a community garden, where residents may grow their own vegetables and flowers while also improving the neighborhood's beauty. The same garden might also generate income for a community group whose members open a small farm stand to sell their vegetables. These are only two examples of the diverse array of opportunities that open spaces can provide for the neighborhood.

A task force of North Side residents could begin to establish an open space system by gathering pertinent information to support the network. Such data includes mapping existing open spaces, documenting land ownership, mapping existing streets, trail systems and bike routes. It also includes identifying river access points, historic landmarks, scenic areas, unique neighborhood features and adjacent land uses (including parking). Other valuable information includes how residents are already using their parks and open spaces, and what new qualities and functions they desire. The neighborhood's particular set of environmental challenges provide another useful layer of information.

As the task force plans the open space system, some of the neighborhood's desires and challenges may be addressed in the location and function of each open space component. Community centers and gathering spots, parks, gardens, residential and shopping areas can all be linked in a network of streets, trails, bike lanes and green spaces reflecting the broad vision of the neighborhood.

The open space system's foundation should be the Chenango River and the planned riverwalk, connecting Confluence, Cheri Lindsey and Ostiningo Parks. There is great potential to design the portion that runs through the North Side to reflect the unique character of this neighborhood, and to reinforce the Chenango River as an integral focus of the North Side's identity.

## **2. PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL Builds Public Open Space**

Every community has a range of residents diverse in age, recreational interests, and abilities. The public open space system needs to provide a range of choices reflecting those interests and abilities. It needs to be easily accessible for elderly, wheelchair-



*The existing North Side riverfront is utilized for a variety of recreational uses...*



*We envision a riverfront where everyone from walkers to bikers to skateboarders feel safe and welcome...*



*and where space is made for non-human visitors as well!*



*Other play space within the community is limited to Roosevelt School,*



*and Country Towne Apartments.*



*Vacant lots could be used to disperse more park space throughout the North Side.*

bound residents, young children, teens and adults. Each should feel safe when choosing to enjoy an outdoor activity, whether it is skateboarding, gardening, fishing, or biking.

A well-designed open space network needs to encourage residents to walk or bike to school, shopping, or work, thereby increasing the overall physical health of the community while reducing street congestion. It could provide areas for small and large community gatherings, ranging from family picnics to an event such as a river festival that draws many visitors from outside the community. Providing accessibility for these non-residents means allotting adequate parking and/or shuttle services during events.

### **3. CARING FOR THE NETWORK Builds Public Open Space**

An open space network plan needs to contain provisions for ongoing maintenance and security. Some places, such as natural areas, require management rather than maintenance, and can be cared for by environmental groups, school groups, and volunteers. Residents can volunteer for tree plantings and occasional clean-ups. They can also partner with the City's Parks Department to obtain jobs doing park maintenance, or to create a youth program aimed at making summer jobs available for at-risk youth. Meanwhile, the careful design of public space can make it easier for residents and police to monitor activities and respond to security needs.

Residents of the North Side have responded to issues of open space with a list of directives, aimed at achieving our vision of a neighborhood where every resident has access to diverse and safe public open spaces.

### **What We Value...**

- Neighborhood open space that connects us to each other, the City and our natural assets
- The Chenango River as a key to our community identity, as a recreational resource and natural asset
- Open space that provides all residents with a diversity of recreational experiences

### **To make open space accessible in the North Side, we will...**

-  Create a network of public spaces in the North Side that connects neighborhood streets, riverwalk, community parks and gathering areas with commercial and residential areas
-  Increase the number of public gathering spaces to reinforce a sense of shared identity, health, and interaction
-  Ensure that neighborhood open space provides a diversity of users with a full range of passive and active recreational choices in a variety of settings
-  Rehabilitate the river as a major community asset, by celebrating its life and identity and enhancing physical and visual linkages to it
-  Reinforce the east-west connections to reintegrate residential, commercial, and riverfront areas
-  Assure safety and accessibility within all neighborhood public spaces



*Pedestrians in the North Side lack safe crossings and sidewalks.*



*Clearly marked bike lanes make shared roadways safer.*

# Open Space ACTION Worksheet

	<b>Maintain</b> Open Space with actions we take today building on our existing com- munity resources	<b>Improve</b> Open Space with actions we take in the near future using modest ad- ditional resources	<b>Create</b> Open Space with actions we take over the long term using substantial ad- ditional resources
<p><b>Policy</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to influence decision-making, planning or legislation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Appoint a North Side representative to the Riverwalk Planning Committee</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Establish design criteria for pedestrian walks and bike paths to ensure safety and maximize enjoyment and use</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Plan to establish connections between local, city and regional open space networks</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Program</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to generate participation, community involvement and local services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Organize a neighborhood cleanup day</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Survey inaccessible and underutilized open spaces to plan for future use</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Prepare and initiate a plan to repair and add sidewalks throughout neighborhood</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Work with relevant groups to develop a variety of educational programs</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Establish a volunteer committee to oversee community garden activities</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Initiate seasonal festivals and sporting events</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Expand Parks Dept. programs to create a variety of recreational offerings</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Project</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to create small and large scale improvements in our community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Improve accessibility to the river at key locations along its edge</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Plant street trees</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Create a Riverside performance venue to host concerts, festivals and theatrical productions</i></li> </ul>

Note: Action steps shown with a ✓ were generated by North Side residents during the 2002 North Side Visioning workshops

## GOAL #6:

### Celebrate our identity

**Our goal is to...**

**Celebrate the North Side's unique social, cultural and environmental identity.**

#### **Why community identity?**

Every city, town, and neighborhood has a unique story – the particular set of events, locales and people that, over time, produce its distinctive history. In this sense, every place has its own unique identity contained in its people and even in its physical spaces. While this identity is constantly evolving, many places maintain a strong sense of their uniqueness by deliberately safeguarding, preserving, strengthening and building upon the elements composing their distinctiveness.

Other places seem to have experienced a weakening of identity. These places may have seen a decrease in their population and accompanying loss of collective memory; and this decline may have led to a loss of influence in the planning of the neighborhood. Economic decline often leads to a shift in focus more toward individual survival, and less toward historic preservation or arts and culture. Other reasons for weakened identity may relate to demographic or political issues, such as recent growth beyond historic neighborhood boundaries, or a realignment of those boundaries by city authorities<sup>15</sup>.

Wherever possible, the North Side's stories should be incorporated as a *living* facet of neighborhood life that both remembers and promotes diverse community identity and engagement.



*The North Side churches are important community landmarks.*

### ***What are the building blocks we need to reinforce the North Side's unique identity?***

From a set of integrated approaches we can begin to celebrate the unique social, cultural, and environmental stories and assets that contribute to the identity of the North Side. They are:

1. Landscape setting and natural features
2. Neighborhood architecture and urban design
3. Public gathering spaces
4. Historic buildings, places and events
5. Arts and culture
6. Neighborhood schools
7. The people

#### **1. LANDSCAPE SETTING AND NATURAL FEATURES Celebrate Neighborhood Identity**

The landscape provides the setting for a neighborhood's development, directing the future of a place through the presence or lack of resources such as rivers and forests. Much of the North Side's identity comes from its relationship with the Chenango River. The Chenango River provided early transportation routes and a means to import goods to and from the developing city. As transportation modes shifted to the rail and automobile, the Chenango River gradually lost its immediate value to the community and became less integrated into the life of the North Side.

Reintegrating the Chenango River as an essential part of the community will be a significant step in the renewal of the North Side. Supporting or restoring native plant communities and important habitats can also contribute to the sense of place



*Looking toward the North Side from the west bank of the Chenango River.*



*Cheri Lindsey Park's BMX track is a unique North Side attraction.*

that ties a community to its landscape. Design of spaces within the neighborhood can enhance views to the larger landscape, providing a fitting backdrop for community life.

## **2. NEIGHBORHOOD ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN DESIGN** **Celebrate Neighborhood Identity**

Neighborhoods are constructed over time by a combination of the actions of individual residents, developers, and city planners. Planning and design of neighborhoods can support or detract from community identity. One of the most important contributions to the development of the North Side came from the historic Chenango Canal. Although it was abandoned decades ago, and filled in to form State Street, the canal's legacy is still felt in the street network that continues to affect patterns of life today. This important part of the North Side's identity should be carefully preserved.

The architectural styles of buildings often reflect a neighborhood's history. Architectural styles and elements can be preserved as buildings are remodeled or renovated. These existing styles can also be considered when planning new neighborhood additions, such as new buildings and streetscape design. Other factors that can contribute to the overall character and identity of the built environment include: height and density of buildings, setback distances from streets, walls and fences, street furniture and the design of parking areas.

## **3. PUBLIC GATHERING SPACES** **Celebrate Neighborhood Identity**

Residents are the most important contributors to community identity. Public gathering places provide a locus for people to get together and build a sense of their collective identity by sharing resources, stories and histories. These places may include worship



*Examples of North Side architecture.*

centers, schools, parks, plazas, sidewalks and streets. Design of these places should reflect the individual values of residents, while celebrating and reinforcing the collective community. They will also be key components of any open space network.

#### **4. HISTORIC BUILDINGS, PLACES AND EVENTS** **Celebrate Neighborhood Identity**

Landmark buildings dot the North Side, and their continued maintenance and upkeep should be a community priority. Informational signage and neighborhood tours identifying neighborhood landmarks can inform visitors of community history while reinforcing that identity and value for residents.

#### **5. ARTS AND CULTURE Celebrate Neighborhood Identity**

The arts in communities can provide for social gatherings, entertainment and educational opportunities. Binghamton has a growing arts culture, and this trend can be continued within the North Side community by supporting programs for promoting public art and creating spaces to display the work of local artists within the neighborhood.

#### **6. NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS Celebrate Neighborhood Identity**

Schools are important activity centers of communities, providing stability, educational, recreational and social opportunities. Programs established in neighborhood schools can contain service components that encourage children and their families to take part in community building efforts. They also reinforce a child's sense of belonging and worth to the community that, as they mature, builds a culture of care and affirmation that will be repeated for generations.



*Signs remind us and visitors of our community's unique history.*



*Roosevelt School and the Rainbow School are centers of community activity.*

*"Environments with a strong sense of place are distinctive. They connect residents and visitors with what is unique about their setting and their history. These places tell you stories...they tell you about the people that live there... about what they think is important" - University of Idaho Community Research*

## **7. THE PEOPLE Celebrate Neighborhood Identity**

A high rate of population turnover in the North Side has contributed to the loss of community identity. As residents move in and out in short periods of time, the stable base of the community is eroded, stories are lost and histories forgotten. Encouraging people to stay in the North Side and share their stories will help to preserve community identity.

Racial and ethnic differences can contribute to the richness and harmony of a community depending upon how they are recognized and valued. Respecting and celebrating our diversity, while mutually building upon what makes the North Side unique, will be essential to the recovery of our identity as a distinct and vibrant place.

Residents of the North Side have responded to issues of community identity with a list of directives aimed at achieving our vision of a unique North Side, alive with people and place.



*North Side people contribute to collective community identity.*

### **What We Value...**

- **The natural environment as part of our community identity**
- **Our history as key to our identity, including the Chenango Canal and landmark buildings**
- **Our unique people and cultural heritage**

*To celebrate the North Side's unique identity, we will...*

-  **Relate all plans to the surrounding environment**
-  **Celebrate natural context through interpretation and integration of urban space**
-  **Reinforce the Chenango River Valley identity by accentuating views to hills, river, and landscape development**
-  **Provide greater access and visibility to the Chenango River while developing the riverside as a unique and dynamic blend of natural and cultural features**
-  **Reclaim the river's identity by once again establishing native vegetation and habitat for fish and bird species in appropriate areas**
-  **Celebrate the old Chenango Canal corridor and its legacy as one of Binghamton's most vital influences**
-  **Strengthen our regional identity**
-  **Design a physical plan that builds on the identity, history, and sense of place of the North Side neighborhood**
-  **Make the North Side an attractive destination for living, recreation, shopping and visiting**

# Neighborhood Identity ACTION Worksheet

	<b>Maintain</b> Neighborhood Identity with actions we take today building on our existing community resources	<b>Improve</b> Neighborhood Identity with actions we take in the near future using modest additional resources	<b>Create</b> Neighborhood Identity with actions we take over the long term using substantial additional resources
<p><b>Policy</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to influence decision-making, planning or legislation.</p>	<p>✓ <i>Ensure that all historic landmark buildings are registered</i></p>	<p>✓ <i>Develop a design vocabulary for buildings and site features that supports neighborhood identity</i></p>	
<p><b>Program</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to generate participation, community involvement and local services.</p>	<p>✓ <i>Organize a "Friends of the Chenango" group to monitor and lobby for river health</i></p>		
<p><b>Project</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to create small and large scale improvements in our community.</p>	<p>✓ <i>Organize a walking tour highlighting significant community history and landmarks</i></p>	<p>✓ <i>Hold a cultural festival celebrating the North Side's unique heritage</i></p> <p>✓ <i>Develop interpretive signage, murals and markers telling the story of the North Side</i></p>	<p>✓ <i>Publish an informational map and brochure promoting the North Side's unique people, places, programs and businesses</i></p> <p>✓ <i>Initiate community-wide planting and beautification of the river's edge</i></p>

Note: Action steps shown with a ✓ were generated by North Side residents during the 2002 North Side Visioning workshops

## GOAL #7:

### Holistic planning

*Our goal is to...*

**Reconstruct an urban land use and development plan that strengthens desired patterns and practices of living.**



#### ***Why holistic planning?***

Settlements begin as people come to a place and begin to interact with each other and the landscape. As a result, changes in the environment are inevitable. Roads and paths are constructed, buildings raised. Land uses are sorted as industry typically establishes along rivers or near other natural resources, and commercial areas grow up around a central nucleus of activity, or along a transportation route.



*North Side CARES public workshops often included presentations on planning strategies by students.*

As a community grows, changes in its layout and character tend to reflect changes in our patterns of living – how we shop, work and play – as well as changes in our values and technology. Sometimes, the physical design of a neighborhood can readily be adapted to those changes. Other times the changes happen so rapidly, that even well intended design may inadvertently alter the physical space in ways that do not support a neighborhood's pattern of living.

Holistic land use plans can help to dramatically revitalize the North Side by promoting dynamic interaction between residential and commercial areas, diverse mixed land uses, physical connections between downtown and the riverfront, Binghamton Plaza and the community.

***What are the building blocks we need to construct a plan that supports desired patterns of living?***

From a set of integrated approaches the neighborhood we create today and what we plan for our future can be cultivated and integrated to support our vision for the North Side. Building an integrated neighborhood plan will include:

1. Infrastructure
2. Land use and zoning
3. Gateways and access to major highways
4. Linkage to natural assets

**1. INFRASTRUCTURE Builds an Integrated Neighborhood Plan**

In the North Side, as with many communities, the planning, design and construction of the neighborhood has lost sight of quality-of-life issues and certain patterns of living. For example, the overwhelming shift to automobile dependence resulted in an interstate highway bisecting the neighborhood, as well as the expansion of commercial strips and vast parking areas. This emphasis on car travel also resulted in a diminished focus on such community assets as well-connected sidewalks, pedestrian paths and bike paths.

Larger stores are often sited and built to be more accessible to people with cars than to people on foot. Street lighting is well beyond the scale of the pedestrian, and features such as benches and trash bins are often entirely lacking. Walking becomes devalued and unsafe as destinations become limited, and more people opt to use cars or busses. In this way, the physical design of the place is causing a shift in the patterns of life.



*Workshops also involved breakout work sessions where community members discuss planning ideas with City representatives, students and faculty.*



*Major infrastructure projects in the North Side include Interstate 17/81 and the levee along the Chenango River.*



*The landscape setting of the North Side. This view is from the ridge south of Chenango Street to Mount Prospect.*

Street networks can reflect more than the domination of the automobile. Design and layout of streets can be used to support historic identity, allow for easy orientation, and provide important linkages and gateways. In the North Side, State Street, currently dominated by strip development, can be reconceived as a mixed-use main street for the community. Constructing safe sidewalks, locating new buildings closer to the street, and adding benches and pedestrian-scale lighting can strengthen the pedestrian space within this street system. Streets that have an east-west orientation can be adapted to provide stronger links to the Chenango River.

## **2. LAND USE AND ZONING Build an Integrated Neighborhood Plan**

Rather than segregating land uses, zoning can be used to integrate compatible land uses. Planning places that cultivate dynamic interaction between commercial and residential uses can keep these areas active and supply mutual benefits by providing shopkeepers with a stable consumer base and residents with nearby shopping and services. Linking commercial spaces to residential spaces with a comprehensive open space system encourages walking and supports a healthy lifestyle.

## **3. GATEWAYS AND ACCESS TO MAJOR HIGHWAYS**

### **Build an Integrated Neighborhood Plan**

The North Side is advantageously located near the access to points to two major highways, Interstate 81 and NYS Route 17. In the past, transportation plans have bisected the North Side, isolating residential neighborhoods and dead-ending streets. These highways are here to stay, and future plans should build on their positive aspects while mitigating the negative.

Access to Route 17 and Interstate 81 means that the North Side can serve as a gateway to Binghamton. This gateway status, and links to regional and large-scale transportation routes, needs to be balanced with neighborhood-scale streets and uses. Establishing a hierarchy for all North Side streets can allow for increased capacity of vehicles arriving from the highways and their associated potential to increase economic activity, while maintaining the quiet and safe qualities of residential streets.

#### **4. LINKAGE TO NATURAL ASSETS** **Builds an Integrated Neighborhood Plan**

Healthy neighborhoods display a powerful relationship between their constructed and the natural landscapes. When properly valued and emphasized, natural features can become integrated in the patterns of life and the structure of a neighborhood. These natural assets can provide the foundation for a place's identity and character, while also contributing to its aesthetic quality and recreational and educational opportunity.

The Chenango River, once a valued asset in the North Side, has become disconnected with the place and the people. The river faces the blank service side of buildings, has little access, lacks much presence, and has fallen out of the patterns of residents' lives. Incorporating the Chenango River into the life of the North Side means building a riverfront district that encourages interaction with this tremendous community asset.

As we look to rebuild our community it is essential that each of the goals expressed in our vision be translated into its physical design. What we make should reinforce the quality of life we wish to obtain: that of a *community living in diversity, growing in unity, and sharing a common vision of safety, beauty and opportunity.*



Roosevelt students study North Side maps and offer suggestions for making their neighborhood a better place to live.

### ***What We Value...***

- A diversity of land uses
- Linking compatible land uses to encourage walkability
- A greater number of pedestrians
- Linking land use with natural assets

### ***To plan holistically in the North Side, we will...***

-  Preserve street patterns associated with the Chenango River and Canal
-  Reinforce east-west streets terminating at the Chenango River
-  Develop interaction between the community and the Chenango River at both the edge and inside the neighborhood and commercial areas
-  Plan for a diversity of uses along the riverfront, including recreational, commercial, and residential
-  Reshape and reinforce the neighborhood's block structure which has been disrupted by transportation networks
-  Ensure that local needs are met while addressing regional needs for shopping, services, and recreation

-  **Develop overlay and mixed-use zoning to encourage land use integration between districts**
-  **Recreate State Street as a vital community conduit and mixed-use main street**
-  **Develop clear access and linkages within the community, between districts and to the greater city**

#### **(Footnotes)**

<sup>4</sup> Mattessich, Paul and Barbara Monsey. *Community Building, What Makes It Work*, p56; Wilder Research Center

<sup>5</sup> Kretzmann, John P. and John L. McKnight. *Building Communities from the Inside Out*. The Asset-Based Community Development Institute. 1993.

<sup>6</sup> Building blocks for Safety derived in part from the “Seven Safescape Principles”, as described in *Safescape: Creating Safer More Livable Communities through Planning and Design*, by Dean Brennan, AICP, and Al Zelinka, AICP, and published by the American Planning Association.

<sup>7</sup> This discussion of social networks is derived from *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, by Robert D. Putnam. 2000. Simon & Schuster: New York, NY.

<sup>8</sup> United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, “Operation Weed and Seed”, [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/eows/](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/eows/).

<sup>9</sup> Based on information obtained from [www.vacantproperties.org](http://www.vacantproperties.org)

<sup>10</sup> Missoula Housing Coordinator, 1997. <http://www.co.missoula.mt.us/measures/HomeOwner.htm>

<sup>11</sup> City of Binghamton Comprehensive Plan, DRAFT, Saratoga Associates, .

<sup>12</sup> Local Government Resource Handbook, Nova Scotia Department of Housing and Municipal Affairs, May 2001.

## Holistic Planning ACTION Worksheet

	<b>Maintain</b> Neighborhood Planning with actions we take today building on our existing community resources	<b>Improve</b> Neighborhood Planning with actions we take in the near future using modest additional resources	<b>Create</b> Neighborhood Planning with actions we take over the long term using substantial additional resources
<p><b>Policy</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to influence decision-making, planning or legislation.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Seek a balance of local and regional scale businesses in the North Side</li> <li>✓ Promote zoning, site plan review and design guidelines that limit parking lot size and encourage pedestrian-friendly development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Zone areas for high density mixed-use commercial development to discourage sprawl and improve walkability</li> </ul>
<p><b>Program</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to generate participation, community involvement and local services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Establish programs through the schools, churches and Parks Dept. that reincorporate the Chenango River into the community's daily life</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Project</b> Action Steps</p> <p>to create small and large scale improvements in our community.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Transform vacant lots into pocket parks and community gardens</li> <li>✓ Work with developers to revitalize commercial areas</li> <li>✓ Work with City and local businesses to create the riverwalk as a destination and hub of North Side life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Infill vacant lots with new housing or commercial development</li> <li>✓ Develop a complete network of pedestrian-friendly streets and paths</li> <li>✓ Undertake the remediation of North Side brownfield sites</li> </ul>

Note: Action steps shown with a ✓ were generated by North Side residents during the 2002 North Side Visioning workshops

# 6 Conclusion

## *A Work in Progress*

The North Side Vision Plan, while lengthy and quite detailed, is a work in progress. It sets in motion a long-term process of directed change and development that will continually need to be reconsidered, evaluated, and redirected by those who are affected by it. The Plan's 7 Goals reflect the priority issues, values and actions set forth by North Side community citizens.

Each of the 7 Goals has been accompanied by Action Worksheets that are meant to be generative planning tools for taking action steps of varying magnitude and impact over both short and long timeframes. While presented separately, all seven goals are interconnecting and interweaving threads aimed at weaving and shaping a healthy, dynamic, economically prosperous, safe and attractive place to live, work and play on the North Side.

The North Side Vision Plan emerged from the combined commitment of several groups and individuals – many of whom didn't know each other when the planning process began. As each group sought, in its own way, to make its mark on the neighborhood, providence seemed to bring them together. Thus, this work reflects the sincere efforts of the City of Binghamton, North Side residents, faith and community groups represented in the North Side Community of Shalom and North Side C.A.R.E.S Coalition, SUNY ESF, Cornell University, the New York Department of State and the Quality Communities Initiative, local business owners and a myriad of public servants. Together, all of these partners have voiced a powerful future vision for our community "living in diversity, growing in unity, and sharing a common experience of safety, beauty and opportunity."

This Plan is not a top-down directive, but a hand-in-hand effort to make the North Side neighborhood a vivid example of what people can achieve by *working together* and *valuing one another*

### North Side VISION Goals

**1. Community Relationships:**

Mobilize broad-based community engagement by encouraging residents to participate actively and collaboratively, to cultivate community partnerships and relationships, and become leaders in the community.

**2. Safety:**

Create a safe and secure North side District for all ages and all aspects of community life

**3. Economic Opportunity:**

Generate more jobs and economic opportunities for the North Side and its residents

**4. Diverse Housing:**

Develop and sustain a diversity of housing opportunities, housing mix and housing types

**5. Accessible Open Spaces:**

Assemble a mosaic of sage, diverse, and accessible public open spaces in an interconnected network throughout the neighborhood, serving visitors and residents of all age groups

**6 Celebrate our Identity:**

Celebrate the north side's unique social, cultural and environmental identity

**7. Holistic Planning:**

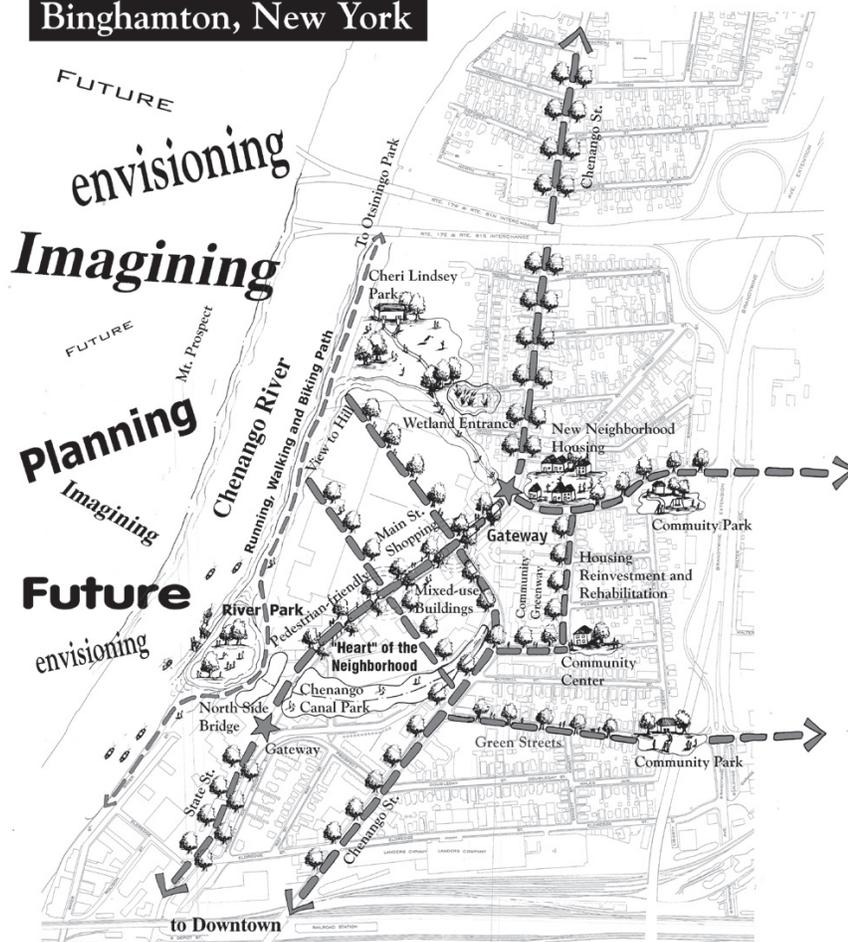
Reconstruct an urban land use and development plan than strengthens desired patterns of community life.



# North Side

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as important assets in achieving a vision for vibrant community life. We trust that, as our vision becomes a reality, other communities across the Empire State – and even the nation – will see this effort as a model of collaborative Asset Based Community Development and for creating places where citizens take part in generating plans to “strengthen neighborhood unity” and “affirm the lives and dignity of all people”.



...OUR neighborhood...

...OUR future...



# 7 Glossary

**Accessible:** easy to enter or reach physically; lacking physical, psychological, and social barriers.

**Asset:** skills, talents, gifts, resources and strengths of individuals, associations, and institutions that are present within the community.

**Association:** an informal or formal group of citizens working together to achieve a common goal; examples include charitable groups, business organizations, elderly groups, political organizations, school groups, sports leagues, and youth groups.

**Capacity:** the potential for sharing assets, resources, gifts, and talents.

**Capacity inventory:** a 'database' of collective assets, resources, gifts and talents potentially shared with the community at large.

**Community:** "people who live within a geographically defined area and who have social and psychological ties with each other and with the place where they live"<sup>13</sup>

**Community policing:** a law enforcement strategy that builds a relationship between police and community by encouraging residents to take responsibility for law enforcement through cooperation with police in their neighborhood.

**Cultural assets:** resources related to a group of people and the identity of a particular place.

**Institution:** more formal, public, private, for profit and non-profit organization, such as schools, parks, human service agencies, libraries, and universities.





**Natural assets:** environmental strengths and resources.

**Needs-based initiative:** an initiative to create change in a community that focuses on needs, deficits and *inability*, often building dependencies in residents.

**Neighborhood health:** relative social and physical conditions in a defined geographical area that support a certain quality of life for residents.

**Neighborhood stability:** the relative resistance to change of certain factors such as property values, physical condition of properties and infrastructure, and social conditions such as crime rate, within a given geographical area.

**Network:** a large and widely distributed group of people or things that communicate with one another and work together as a unit or system.

**Open space:** land that is not intensively developed for residential, commercial, industrial or institutional use.

**Physical assets:** a community's land and buildings, infrastructure, transportation, etc.

**Psychological ties:** feelings of attachment, identity, and a sense of belonging to a place, as well as a sense of commitment, respect, obligation, and camaraderie with fellow occupants of that place.<sup>14</sup>

**Quality Communities Initiative:** New York State's Governor George Pataki's Quality Community Initiative (Task Force Report Jan '01) calls for rethinking how and when communities need help and re-imagines ways to maximize resources through cooperative,



pro-active and integrated working processes that grow from the ground up. This new direction is in line with shifting practices in contemporary planning that acknowledge flexible, strategic and participatory processes.

**Social capacity:** the extent to which members of a community can work together effectively.

**Social capital:** “the resources embedded in social relations among persons and organizations that facilitate cooperation and collaboration in communities.<sup>157</sup>”

**Social ties:** “interactions based on kinship, friendship, and familiarity with other people in a geographic area, as well as joint participation in community-wide activities and some forms of economic exchange.”

**Social network:** a web of individuals connected through trust, support and/or common values.

**SUNY Network:** The State University of New York Network, under the leadership of Professor Cheryl Doble at ESF, set out to identify SUNY programs and centers that can provide outreach assistance to NYS communities. Five SUNY schools with departments, programs and institutes dedicated to design and planning began meeting in late 2001 with the goal of repositioning their studio and outreach efforts to align with the proactive and engaged goals of the Quality Communities Initiative. The SUNY Network's aims include:

- To foster new opportunities to facilitate collaborative work among SUNY schools
- To redirect and integrate teaching and research activities with the partnering state agencies and communities.
- To provide direct community planning and design assistance to twelve designated Quality Communities.





**Sustainable economy:** An economy that maintains itself and produces wealth and provides jobs for many human generations without degrading the environment.

**Vacant property:** “homes, factories, stores and lots – that are not legally occupied, show signs of neglect or pose a public nuisance. Typically, owners of such sites have failed to fulfill important responsibilities, such as paying taxes, maintaining the physical condition or appearance of the site, or safely securing the property.<sup>16</sup>”

**(Footnotes)**

<sup>13</sup> Mattessich, Paul and Barbara Monsey. *Community Building, What Makes It Work*, Wilder Research Center, p 56.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 62

<sup>16</sup> [www.vacantproperties.org](http://www.vacantproperties.org)