

11.0.0 IMPLEMENTATION

The East Side of Binghamton has experienced economic, demographic, and aesthetic decline in recent years. The good news is that the area really is in very good condition when compared to many other parts of the City. For the most part, it is a wonderful residential area that offers affordable housing. Residents feel that efforts at revitalization of the East Side should focus on the Robinson Street corridor, especially the area immediately adjacent to the Cameo Theater. While we believe that the Robinson Street Corridor can become a flourishing commercial area, we also recognize that it will not be easy. The trend of decreasing investment and deteriorating housing value on the East Side are formidable obstacles to overcome. The demographic changes also pose some challenges. From 1990 to 2000, the area saw a decrease in the total population. The median household income increased for the time period; however it did not keep pace with inflation. As a consequence, most households experienced a reduction in buying power. The proportion of the population living below poverty increased as did the number of single parent families. As far as housing is concerned, the East Side saw a decrease in the number of housing units, an increase in the number of vacant housing units, a decline in the number of owner-occupied housing units, and a slight increase in the number of renter-occupied units. These trends apparently suggest that fewer people are willing to commit to living on the East Side for the long term as fewer families own their residences, causing higher vacancy and rental rates.

Essentially, the East Side of Binghamton presents a unique challenge due to the combined effects of a declining population that has become increasingly transient, an increasing number of blighted properties that serves as a deterrent to potential investment, and a depressed economic attitude caused by past misfortune. However, there are numerous opportunities for revitalizing the area. The recommendations presented in this document are directed toward that revitalization. An Implementation Matrix has been developed (Figure 11.2) to assist in the implementation of the recommendations. It is hoped that that the recommendations are not a list from which to pick and choose, but rather present a comprehensive package that, cumulatively, will lead to the changes sought.

Even with these recommendations, other actions are required. In order to revitalize this area, the City must work with property owners to prevent additional deterioration and provide incentives to improve the appearance of their properties. The City, County, and State also need to provide incentives to attract additional businesses to the Robinson Street corridor. However, how these initiatives are to be funded is a daunting question. Three approaches are recommended. The first approach is to leverage the City's municipal and zoning powers.

The first step to revitalizing the East Side is to increase code enforcement. By hiring additional code enforcement officers, the City could reduce the deterioration of buildings on the East Side while improving the aesthetics of the area. This would have the additional benefit of increasing the residents' perception of safety. Next, the City must implement weight-limits on the East Side streets with the exception of Broad Ave. This change will help to decrease the commercial traffic currently using and causing congestion on the East Side, a problem that will become even more pronounced if left unchecked after the implementation of traffic-calming devices. Finally, the City should increase its use of mixed-use zoning to allow the East Side's commercial district to expand slowly, as the area develops, without forcing a radical change in property use along the corridor.

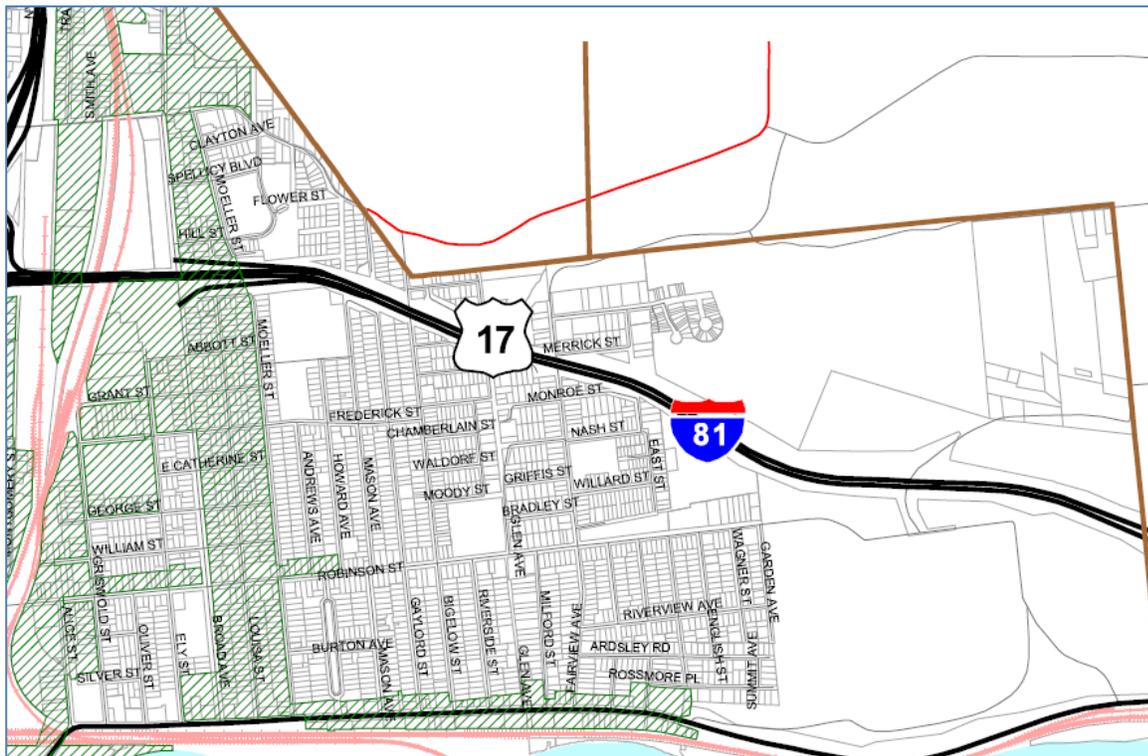
The most expensive recommendation will be the redevelopment of the traffic and transportation infrastructure. While the local government will be responsible for a large share of these costs, it cannot pay for improvements with tax increases. So other funding sources must be leveraged. The City must take advantage of all possible grant opportunities to fund the revitalization efforts. For example, the Department of Transportation is a potential provider of a significant amount of the funding for the overhaul of the transportation infrastructure and roadways. In addition, the Keep America Beautiful campaign can help offset the costs of installing public utilities like trash receptacles and benches as well as the development of Creek Park. Finally, using government resources to leverage community resources through programs such as the aforementioned brick drive and community mural-painting programs will be important to off-set the costs of the finishing touches for this project. In concert with government spending, incentives for private investment in the area must be offered to see the revitalization through to completion.

In order to attract private investment, it is first important to achieve investor buy-in. The City should host a number of forums for East Side residents and businesses so that they view the improvements the City has in mind for the area. If local business owners and entrepreneurs see that the City is investing in the area, it may make them more willing to invest as well. In addition, the forums will enable local residents to become engaged in the planning process and to help develop a sense of place. The staff of the Small Business Development Center should be invited to these forums to provide local residents with information on the resources available from the agency. Additionally, the City could create a "walking map of the East Side" in order to advertise the various improvements made to the area by the City and to inform people as to what businesses are located on the East Side. This map should be distributed to all city residents as well as potential investors; it can also be used at the community information center.

Increasing private investment on the East Side, either by residents or business owners, will require incentives. The most important incentive that the city can provide is to create partnerships with existing residential and business property owners that invest in their property's "curb appeal". These partnerships could take the form of a 50 – 50 split of the cost of improvements.

Increasing new private investment should be another important goal for the area. This possibly could be accomplished through enlarging the Empire Zone that currently terminates at Howard Avenue (see Figure 11.1) to include both sides of Robinson Street to Fairview Avenue. The various incentives offered through the Empire Zone program could act as a catalyst for entrepreneurs to open small businesses along the corridor. With the proposed expansion of the Upstate Medical Center, and the expected increase in the number of students, incentives should be targeted to businesses that will cater to students.

Figure 11.1 Proposed Expansion of Empire Zone



Source: <http://www.broomezone.com/ezbinghamton2006.pdf>

10.1 Conclusion

The East Side of Binghamton provides a unique opportunity to recreate a sense of place in what many residents view as a declining neighborhood. This document provides recommendations to attain the goal of making the East Side a more live-able and walk-able community. By implementing the projects described above, an environment of improved livability through positive growth can be created. We are optimistic that revitalization of this area into a flourishing community is certainly possible. The community centered initiatives should appeal to residents and help gain resident approval; while the incentives offered will encourage residents and business owners to follow the City's lead and invest in their neighborhood. In addition, attracting new, small businesses to the Robinson Street corridor will help create a thriving commercial area. While the East Side is already a good place to live, we believe it can be transformed into a "great" place to live and work.

Figure 11.2 Implementation Matrix

Action	Timeframe	Agency
Policy		
Continued adherence to adopted Complete Streets Policy	on-going	City
Increase community participation in City projects	on-going	City
Work with city government to proactively undertake economic redevelopment	on-going	City
Implement weight restrictions for Robinson Street	mid term	City, BMTS
Regulatory		
Amend zoning regulations to require bicycle racks at commercial, community services, and public facilities	short term	Planning, Zoning, PC, CC
Amend zoning regulations to promote appropriate signage and eliminate flashy and gaudy signs	short term	Planning, Zoning, PC, CC
Develop and adopt design guidelines for upper Court Street	mid term	Planning, Zoning, CAUD, PC, CC
Amend zoning regulations to allow mixed-use zoning	mid term	Planning, Zoning, PC, CC
Amend zoning regulations to require additional landscaping and buffering requirements for commercial and residential uses	mid term	Planning, Zoning, PC, CC
Amend zoning regulations to restrict location of billboards	mid term	Planning, Zoning, PC, CC
Programs		
Establish rehabilitation program for residential properties	on-going	PHCD, BHN
Utilize the efforts of the Binghamton Healthy Neighborhood Collaboration to increase affordable housing options, attract first-time homebuyers, infill housing	short term	PHCD, BHN
Develop neighborhood beautification program	short term	CD, NA
Create partnerships to promote curb appeal	short term	CD, NA

Action	Timeframe	Agency
Work with local artists and CAUD to increase public art and murals	mid term	CD, CAUD, Community
Develop Yellow Bike program to promote bicycle use	mid term	CD, NA, YB
Façade improvement program for commercial and retail establishments	mid term	PHCD, ED
Prepare and initiate a plan to repair and add sidewalks throughout neighborhood	mid term	Engineering
Develop street festivals and community activities	mid term	NA, NP, CO
Work with utility companies to bury electric and telephone wires	long term	DPW, ENG, Utility Companies
Expand existing Empire Zone to increase private investment	long term	ED, NY State
Develop program to remove existing billboards	long term	Planning, Zoning, PC, CC
Projects		
Incorporate Complete Streets Policy to reconstruction projects for East Side corridors	on-going	ENG
Explore funding opportunities	on-going	City
Increase green space along streets to reduce impervious area and improve storm water management	on-going	ENG
Create incentive program for commercial façade improvements	short term	PHCD, ED
Transform vacant lots into pocket parks and community gardens	short term	CO, NA, Planning
Create East Side walking map	short term	PHCD, NA, CO
Design and implement streetscape improvements including street trees, decorative street lighting,	short term	Planning, ENG
Incorporate traffic calming devices	short term	ENG
Install covered bus stops along public transit routes	mid term	BC Transit, NA
Increase tree canopy; use native species	mid term	STC, Parks

Action	Timeframe	Agency
Renovate Fairview Park	mid term	Parks
Create pocket park along Robinson Street	mid term	Planning, Parks, CO, NA
Install amenities such as benches and green space	mid term	ENG, Parks
Renovate exterior of Cameo Theater and reprogram the space for community use	mid term	Developer, NA, CO
Create walking trail along Chamberlain Creek	long term	Planning, Parks
Install gateway signs for Robinson Street corridor welcoming people to the East Side	long term	DPW, NA, CAUD
Improve aging infrastructure	long term	City, BMTS, DOT
Develop/Improve area surrounding Chamberlin Creek to allow appreciation of nature	long term	Planning, Parks, Environmental groups

CC = City Council; PC= Planning Commission; CAUD = Commission on Architecture and Urban Design; STC = Shade Tree Commission; NA = Neighborhood Assembly; CO = Community Organizations; NP = Non-profits; PHCD = Dept. of Planning, Housing, and Community Development; ED = Economic Development Department; ENG = Engineering Department; DPW = Department of Public Works; BMTS = Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study