



Lower East Side New Castle

Elm Street Plan

April 2020



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Chapter 1

Introduction



Project Overview

The What

Pennsylvania offers the Keystone Communities program to help core communities with revitalization efforts. The Keystone Community program offers four designations: Main Street, Elm Street, Keystone Communities Enterprise Zone Designation and Keystone Community Designation. The Elm Street program provides funding and technical assistance for residential and mixed use areas in proximity to central business districts.

Designated areas must be in a residential neighborhood in existence since at least 1961, within 1/2 mile of a commercial district, displaying signs of deterioration and be in need of revitalization. In order for a community to receive this designation, the first step is to develop an Elm Street Plan.

The Where

The City of New Castle is the county seat of Lawrence County, Pennsylvania, approximately an hour northwest of the City of Pittsburgh. The City last adopted a Comprehensive Plan in 2005, which divided the City into various planning districts. One of those planning districts was Planning District E, which is described in the Plan as:

“The mostly medium-residential Planning District E is situated between Washington Street and Neshannock Creek east of Downtown. District E features the lowest median housing value and median income within the City. This District possesses the greatest population density and one of the oldest housing stocks within the City. One of the issues facing the City is the low visibility/recognition of the County Seat/Regional Center. Because this District contains the County Seat and other government uses, it is in the unique position to directly address this issue. The Government Center is in a key position for linking the proposed Washington Boulevard, which passes through this District, to the Downtown.”

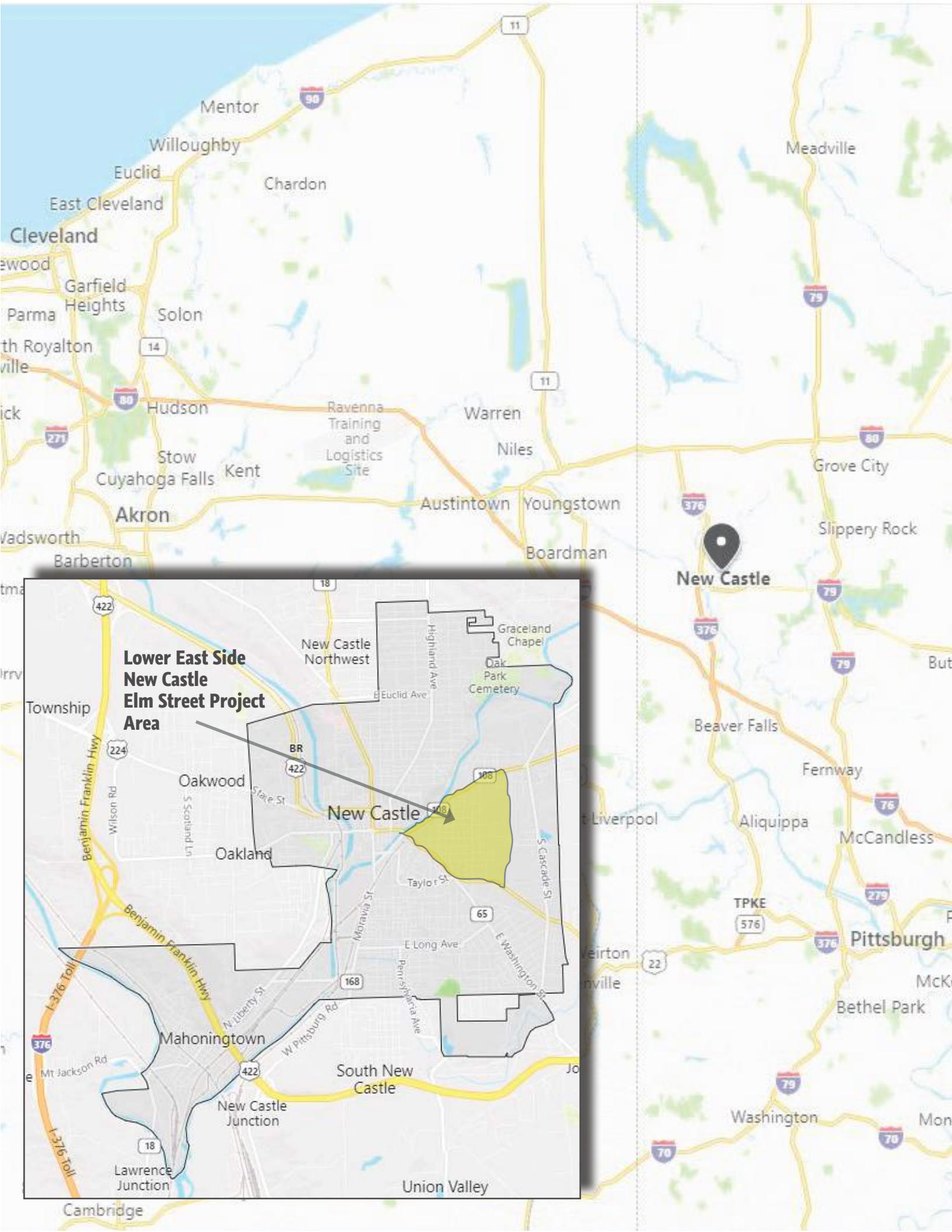
This is the Lower East Side neighborhood, which was chosen for the Elm Street Plan.



“Too many of the nation’s urban neighborhoods have fallen into disrepair. Disinvestment, outmigration and aftershocks of urban renewal have left many of these history-rich communities battling for survival. In these “core communities,” Pennsylvania has a major untapped asset, and with help from an Elm Street program, these historic, authentic and unique neighborhoods can once again thrive, supporting the downtowns and commercial districts that they surround.

The Elm Street Program is committed to the revitalization of Pennsylvania’s older residential areas bordering Main Streets and central business districts.”

- PA DCED Website



**Lower East Side
New Castle
Elm Street Project
Area**

This inset map provides a detailed view of the project area. It shows the following streets and landmarks:

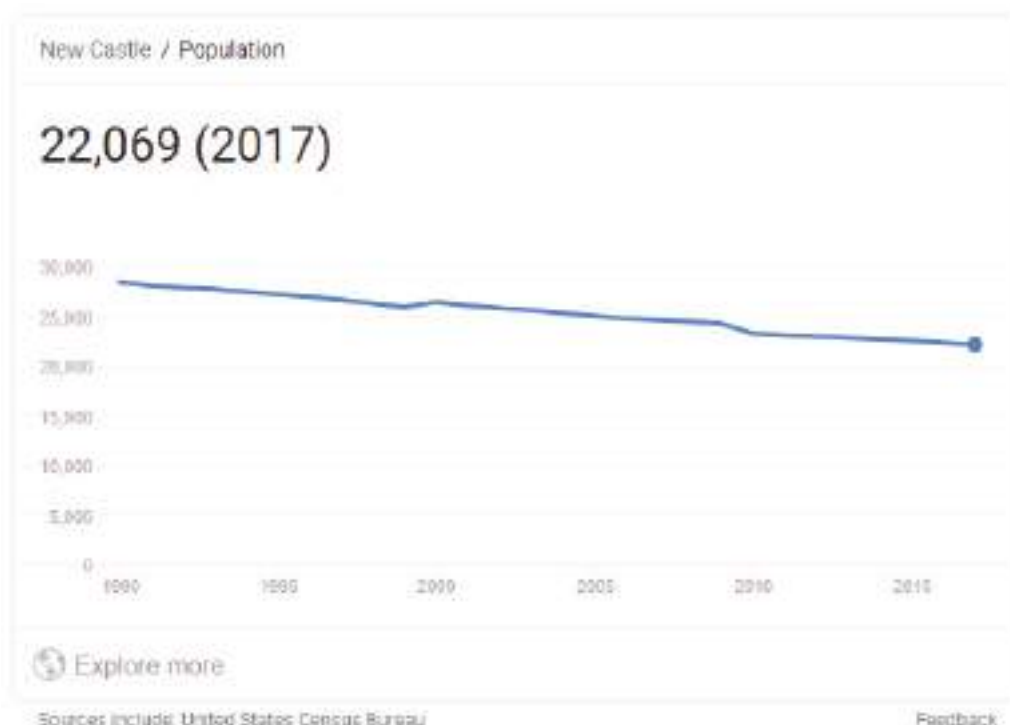
- Streets:** Benjamin Franklin Hwy, Wilson Rd, S Scotland Ln, State St, Moravia St, N Liberty St, W Pittsburg Rd, E Long Ave, E Washington St, S Cascade St, Taylor St, and Pennsylvania Ave.
- Highways:** I-376 Toll, I-76, I-422, I-18, and I-65.
- Landmarks:** Graceland Chapel, Oak Park Cemetery, and the Ravenna Training and Logistics Site.
- Neighboring Areas:** New Castle Northwest, Oakwood, Oakland, Mahoningtown, South New Castle, New Castle Junction, Lawrence Junction, and Union Valley.

The Why

Unfortunately, like so many cities in western Pennsylvania, New Castle has experienced population losses and overall decline due to the de-industrialization of the region.

The City of New Castle was laid out in 1798 by John Carlisle Stewart, a civil engineer. Business in New Castle began to flourish in the early 1800's with the construction of the canal system which made its way through the city. Numerous manufacturing plants located in New Castle because of the availability of transportation facilities and ready access to raw material markets. By the turn of the century, New Castle was one of the fastest growing cities in the country as it became the tin plate capital of the world. New Castle's population grew from 11,600 in 1890 to 38,280 in 1910, as immigrants flocked to the city to work in the mills.

As the steel mills and other manufacturing plants closed, people began moving out of western Pennsylvania in search of jobs. In 1950, the population peaked at 48,834, but became part of the rust belt, with population dwindling to 28,334 by 1990. As of 2018 U.S. Census estimates, the city had a population of 21,797. This is an approximate decline of 1476 residents since the 2010 U.S. Census.



The Road to Revitalization

2002

Downtown revitalization efforts are underway, starting with streetscape improvements.

2005

City of New Castle adopts a Comprehensive Plan.

2014

City of New Castle becomes a Pennsylvania Blueprint Community.



2017

City of New Castle creates a blight task force to address vacant properties and housing concerns.

In 2002, the City of New Castle began to focus on downtown revitalization. With new streetscape improvements along East Washington Street and Mill Street, the Riverplex opening in 2008, the New Castle Area Transit Authority opening the public transit transfer station at the corner of East Washington Street and Croton Avenue and the development of the Riverwalk, the Downtown was turning a corner.

In 2005, the City completed a Comprehensive Plan, which established a long-term vision and recommendations to guide future investment and policy. The Plan identified the City's vision as "The City of New Castle will become more attractive as a place to live; create more jobs; leverage past investments in infrastructure (sewer, water and roads); shift negative perceptions; and enhance quality of life."

In 2014, New Castle became a Pennsylvania Blueprint Community, which is a revitalization initiative for improving business climate and livability. The five-year strategy includes objectives aimed at reducing blight; increasing walkability through the Riverwalk and other trail connections; increasing safety through increased lighting, police patrols and video surveillance; offering more programs to increase foot traffic in the downtown; rehabilitating neighborhoods to offer improved and safer housing choices; and increasing the green space within the City through improved parks, community gardens and trail connections.

In 2017, the City of New Castle proposed a vacant property ordinance to address vacant property issues in the City's neighborhoods. The ordinance was controversial and after hearing opposing testimony, the City created a Blight Task Force to address these issues. Through the work of the Task Force, several organizations (such as the Lawrence County Board of Realtors®, Blueprint Communities and Disability Options Network (DON) Enterprises, Inc.) and community members joined forces with City officials to tackle the issue of blight.

Throughout the process, the task force became more engaged with community members learning about the variety of efforts other organizations were also contributing to the myriad of problems the City faced.

When the blight task force presented recommendations to the City, they did not have the funding necessary to begin these efforts. So DON stepped up and began spearheading revitalization projects in the Lower East Side neighborhood. Court Street (from Walnut Street to Ray Street) was chosen as the target area in order to demonstrate community impact. Revitalization projects recently completed and/or underway include:

- DON received three blighted properties on or near Court Street from the Lawrence County Land Bank. One was demolished and the other two were renovated, which included making them fully accessible to persons with disabilities.
- In 2018, DON received a grant from FHLBank of Pittsburgh for five new home builds and another nine will be built through a 2019 grant. All new home builds are single-story energy efficient homes with two bathrooms and a garage. All homes are energy efficient and universally designed.
- There are plans for three housing demolitions that will then be repurposed.
- DON partnered with the City to apply for a multimodal grant to pave Court Street and Mulberry Street and construct new sidewalks and curb cuts. Unfortunately, the application was denied at this time.

In 2019, DON partnered with Lawrence County Department of Planning and Community Development, the City of New Castle and the Lawrence County Board of Realtors® to help fund the effort and hired Mackin to complete an Elm Street Plan for the Lower East Side. The purpose of the Elm Street Plan is to provide a basis for DON to apply for Elm Street designation and bring in more grant opportunities to help with the revitalization efforts.

2018

The Lawrence County Housing Plan identified the Lower East Side as a “distressed” neighborhood, characterized by blight but having a foundation for redevelopment.

2019

DON Enterprises, with funding from Lawrence County and the Lawrence County Board of Realtors hired Mackin to complete the Elm Street Plan for the Lower East Side



2020

Elm Street Plan is adopted and the City/DON Enterprises apply for Elm Street designation



Implementation

The Elm Street Planning Process

The Lower East Side New Castle Elm Street Plan followed the Five Point Approach¹ for Elm Street plans that is outlined by PA DCED and the Pennsylvania Downtown Center.

¹ https://padowntown.org/assets/pdfs/resources/Introducing_TheElmStreetApproach-1573143829.pdf



The Five Point Approach

The Pennsylvania Downtown Center (PDC) is a Main Street America® Coordinating Program that provides technical assistance, board and committee support and education to designated programs while the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) provides access to funding opportunities and oversight of designated Elm and Main Street Programs in Pennsylvania.²

- **Clean, Safe, & Green** deals with the stewardship of a neighborhood. Without question, the most important factor in a neighborhood's health is how safe and pleasant people believe it to be. Dealing with the crime, cleaning up the neighborhood and completing small community enhancement projects are the first steps in changing a community for the better.
- **Neighbors & Economy** relates to the economic relationship between residents and businesses with their neighborhood. Underlying economic factors, such as employment rates and homeownership levels, heavily influence neighborhood health. Depending on the level of distress, a neighborhood may require interventions to stabilize aspects of its economy.
- **Design** handles the physical elements within the neighborhood. Elm Street neighborhoods are pedestrian oriented and often have an architecturally significant housing stock. It is important that neighborhoods understand, develop, and cultivate these physical assets.
- **Image & Identity** looks at and seeks to improve the neighborhood's perception from both inside (identity) and outside (image) the neighborhood. Creating and maintaining a positive perception builds community pride and fosters private investment.
- **Sustainable Organization** involves getting everyone working towards common goals. The common-sense formula of a volunteer-driven program and an organizational structure of boards and committees assisting professional management can ease the difficult work of building consensus and cooperation among the residents and varied groups with a vested interest in the neighborhood.

² https://padowntown.org/assets/pdfs/resources/Introducing_TheElmStreetApproach-1573143829.pdf



Lawrence County Board of Realtors, Inc.



NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES

Lower East Side Neighborhood Watch



Public Outreach Summary

A number of different methods were utilized to gather input from residents and organizations about what should be done within the Lower East Side neighborhood.

Steering Committee

DON and the Lawrence County Department of Planning and Community Development formed a Steering Committee to help guide the process. The Committee included representatives from the key organizations that could play a role in implementing the Elm Street Plan.

The first meeting was held in May 2019 and served to introduce the plan to the steering committee and review possible outreach methods and project tasks.

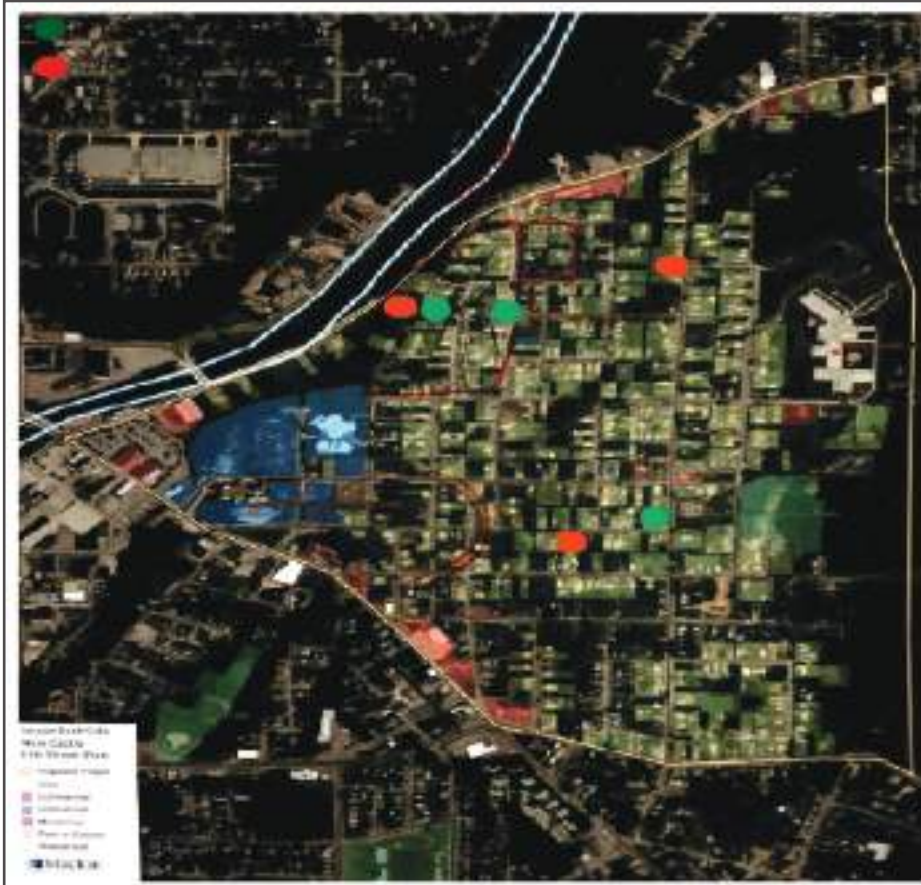
During the summer months, Committee members assisted the planning consultant with the detailed property inventory of the neighborhood.

A second meeting was held in October to review the results of the property inventory, stakeholder interviews, public meeting and public survey. The Committee also helped to develop the goals and strategies for the plan.

A full summary of the meetings can be found in Appendix A.

Public Meeting

A public meeting was held for the project in October of 2019 as part of the Lower East Side Neighborhood Watch meeting at the Bible Way Church of God in Christ. Over 30 people were in attendance at the meeting. Attendees helped to identify assets, opportunities, weaknesses and challenges in relation to the elements within the Elm Street Approach as well as Friendly Places and Neglected Spaces. A full summary of the meeting can be found in Appendix A.



Friendly Places: locations where people feel safe, and are desirable places to go

- Lower East Side Community Garden
- McClain Ave Park
- Lockley Elementary School

Neglected Spaces: areas that are not as popular, but could be more inviting with improvements

- S. Crawford Ave - many burnt and neglected homes
- Alley behind Richilieu / Crawford - flooding issues
- Poorly lit areas (i.e. parking lot across from Bible Way Church)

Stakeholders

In addition to meeting with the Steering Committee and the public, the planning consultant interviewed a number of stakeholders identified by the Committee. These stakeholders included:

- City of New Castle Police Department
- City Code Enforcement Department
- City Department of Community and Economic Development
- Alliance for Nonprofit Resources
- Arts and Education at the Hoyt
- Lawrence-Mercer Recycling/Solid Waste
- Lawrence County Board of Realtors
- Lockley Elementary School
- Lower East Side Neighborhood Watch

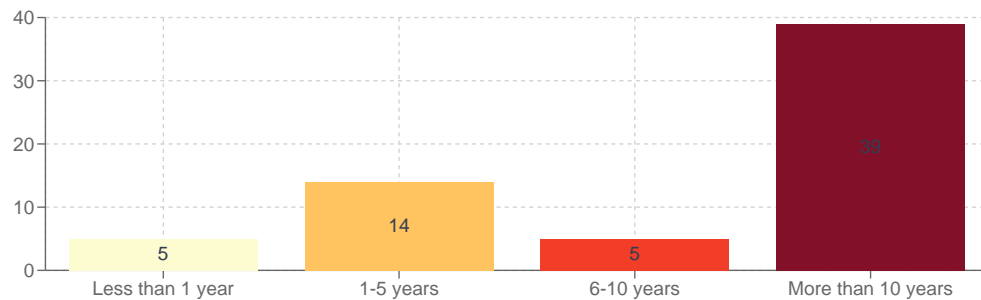
Neighborhood Survey

Staff from DON delivered paper surveys to every property in the Lower East Side neighborhood (a total of 600). A link to the online version was also made available and advertised in the local newspaper and via social media. Despite this, only 78 surveys were returned.



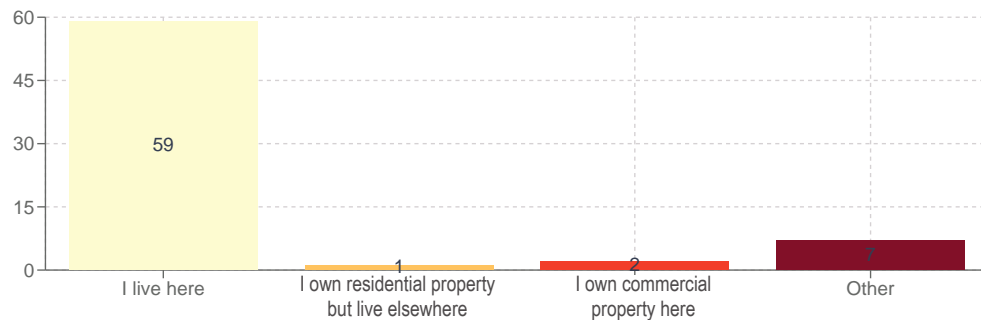
62% of respondents have lived here for **10+ YEARS**

Question 1. How long have you lived or owned property in the Lower East Side neighborhood?



86% of respondents **LIVE** in the Lower East Side

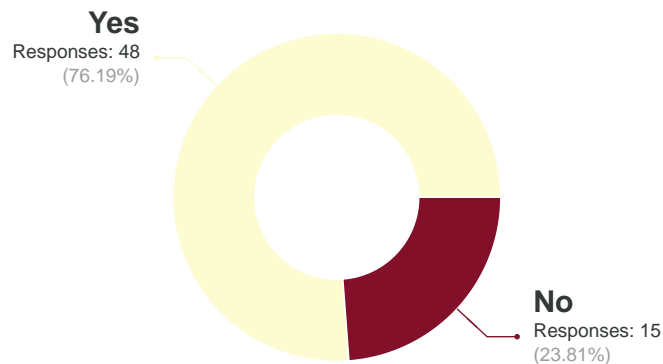
Question 2. Which of the following best describes you?



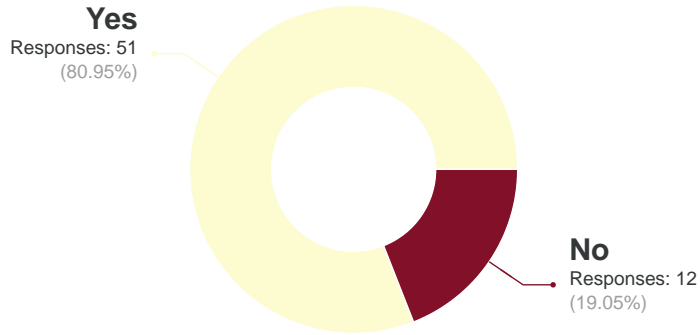
Question 3. Do you like the Lower East Side neighborhood?



76% of respondents **LIKE** the neighborhood

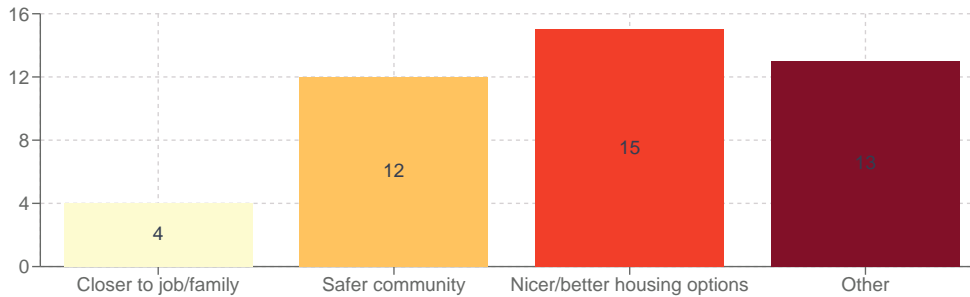


Question 4. Do you plan to stay in the neighborhood?



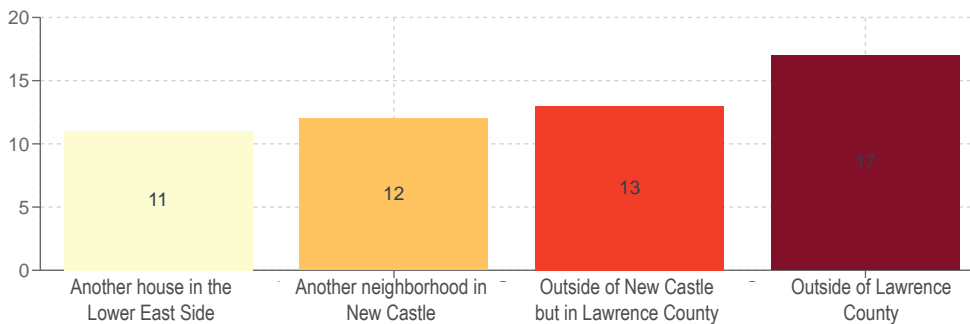
81% of respondents plan to **STAY** in the neighborhood

Question 5. If not, which of the following best describes why you would leave?



Most people would leave for a **SAFER** community or **BETTER HOUSING**

Question 6. Where would you consider moving to?

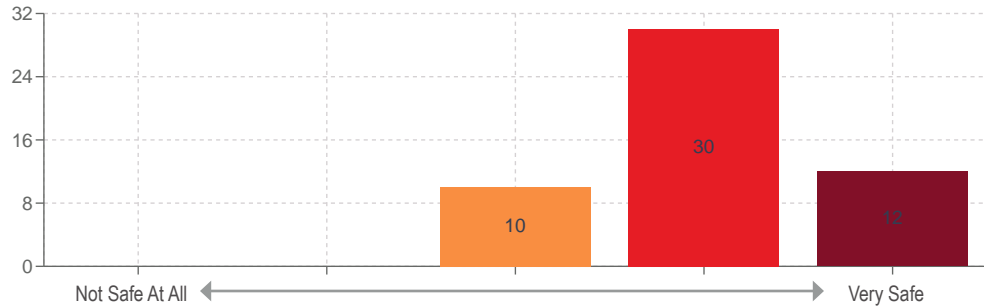


Respondents are divided as to **WHERE** they would move



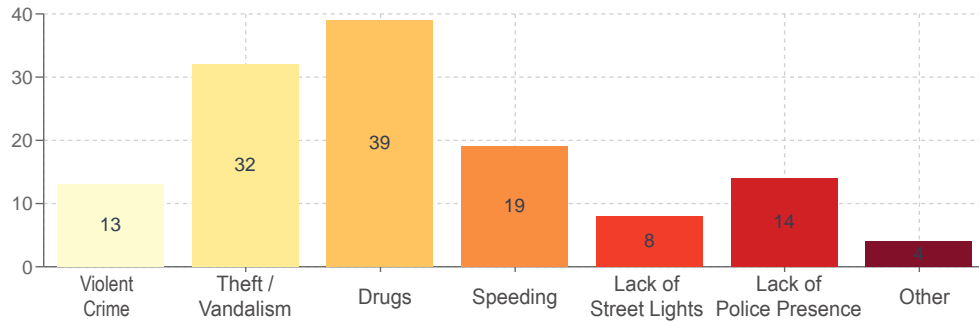
The overwhelming majority of respondents feel **SAFE**

Question 7. How **SAFE** do you feel the Lower East Side is?



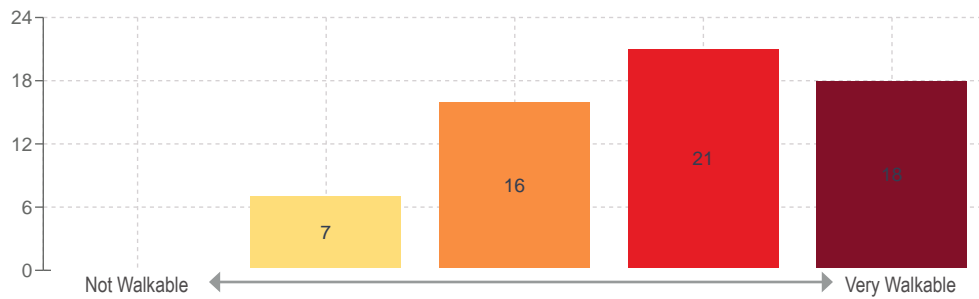
Question 8. Which of the following factors affect your opinion of safety in your neighborhood the **MOST**?

Factors affecting safety the **MOST** include **DRUGS & THEFT / VANDALISM**

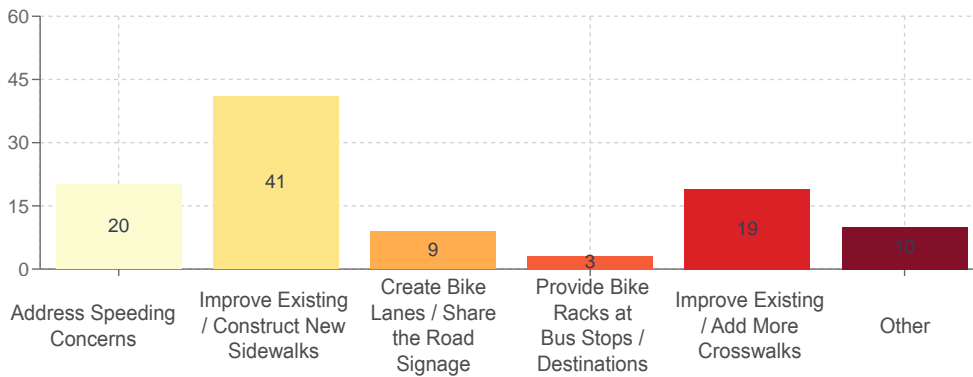


63% of respondents find the neighborhood to be pretty **WALKABLE**

Question 9. How would you rate the walkability and accessibility of your neighborhood?

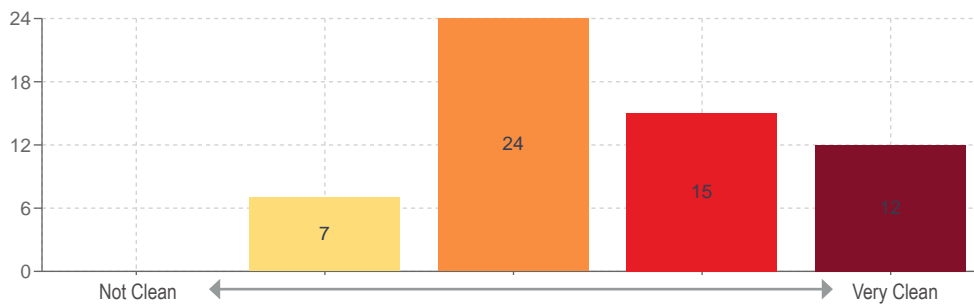


Question 10. Which of the following would improve your ability to walk or bike around your neighborhood the most?



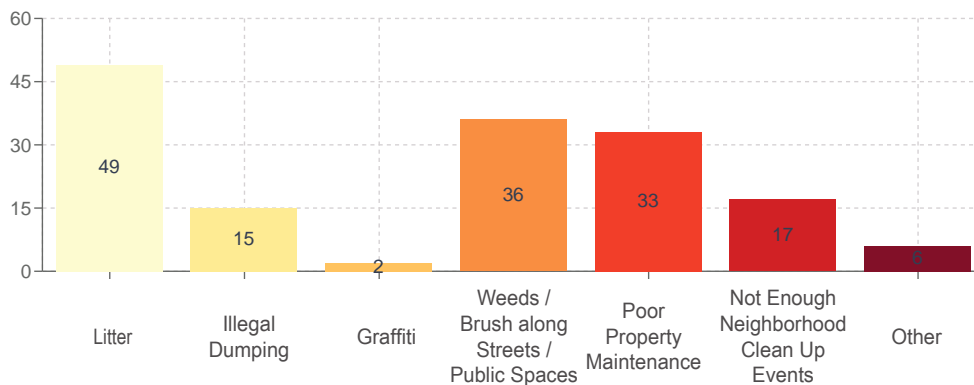
40% of respondents want new or improved **SIDEWALKS**

Question 11. How clean is your neighborhood?



41% of respondents find the neighborhood to be **SOMEWHAT CLEAN**

Question 12. Which of the following factors affect the cleanliness of the Lower East Side the MOST?

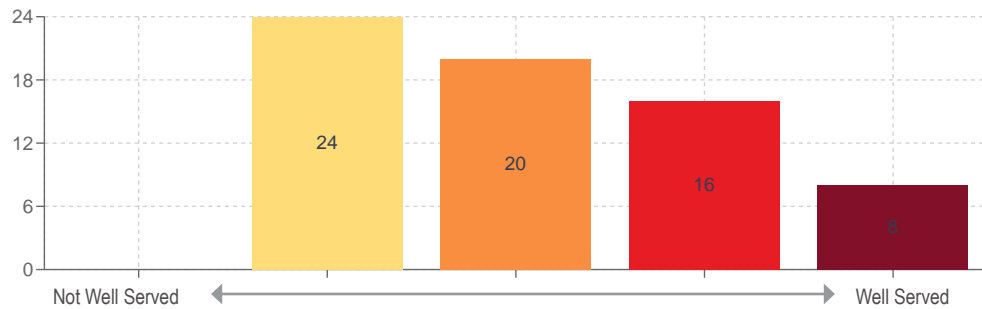


Factors affecting cleanliness the MOST include **LITTER** followed by **WEEDS** and poor **PROPERTY MAINTENANCE**



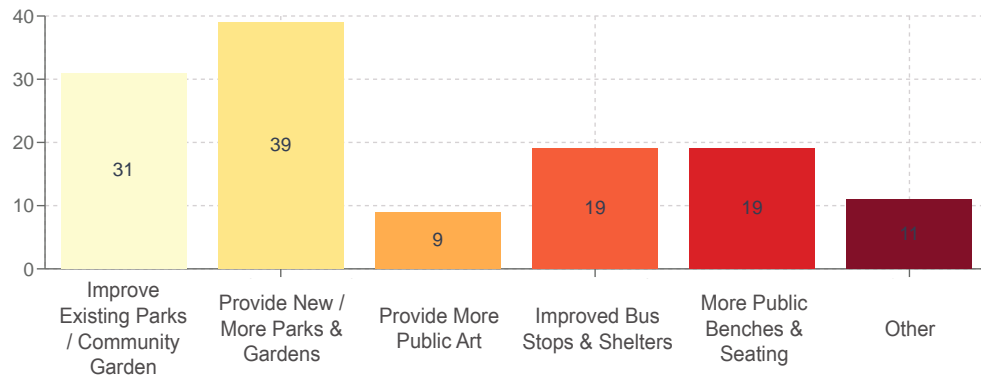
Only 1/3 of respondents think that they are well-served by **PUBLIC SPACES**

Question 13. How well do you think your neighborhood is served by public parks and spaces (i.e. McClain Ave Park, Community Garden)?



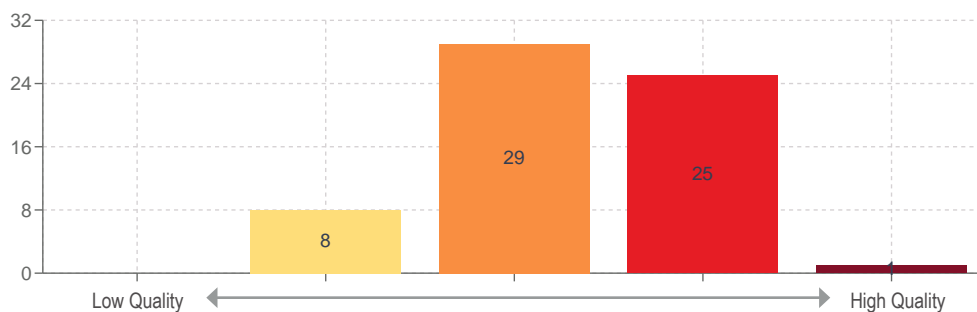
The majority of respondents want to see **NEW PARKS / GARDENS** and to **IMPROVE EXISTING**

Question 14. Which of the following would you like to see the most in your neighborhood? (Please select 2)

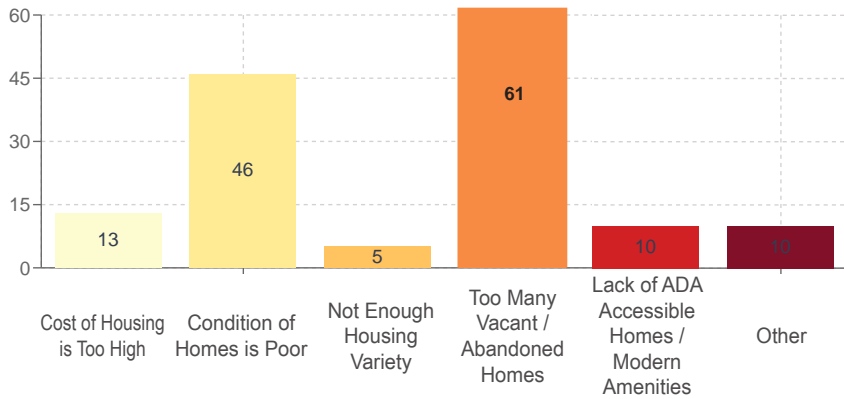


The majority of respondents think the neighborhood has **AVERAGE HOUSING QUALITY**

Question 15. How would you rate the overall quality of housing in the Lower East Side?

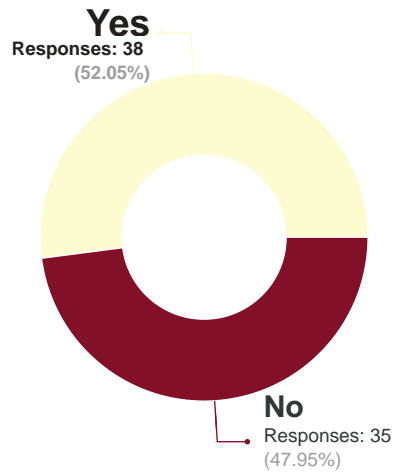


Question 16. What are the biggest issues regarding housing in the neighborhood?



The biggest issues with housing are too many **VACANT HOMES** and **POOR CONDITION**

Question 17. Do you feel that the name "Lower East Side" gives a negative image of the neighborhood?



Respondents are **DIVIDED** as to whether or not the **NAME** of the neighborhood gives a **NEGATIVE IMAGE**

Question 18. Do you have any suggestions for a new name for the neighborhood?



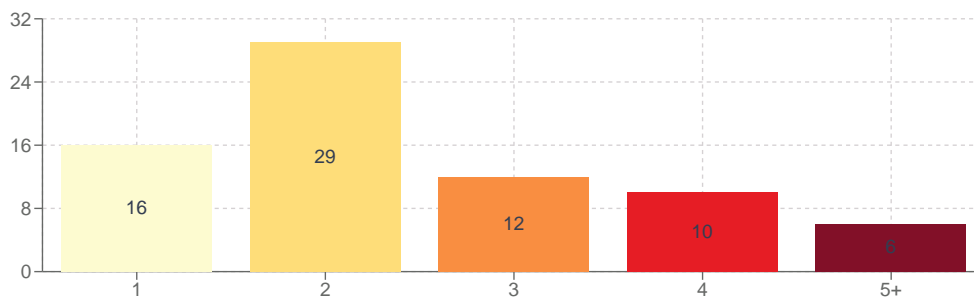
Suggested names for the neighborhood include

**EAST SIDE,
COURT HOUSE HILL,
COURT HOUSE HEIGHTS**

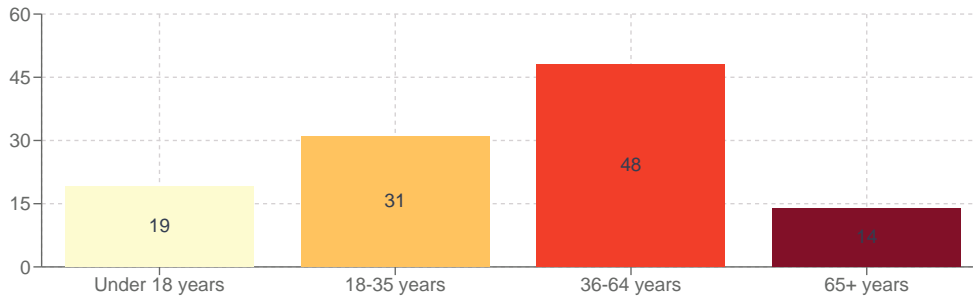


40% of respondents live in a **TWO PERSON HOUSEHOLD**

Question 19. How many people live in your household?

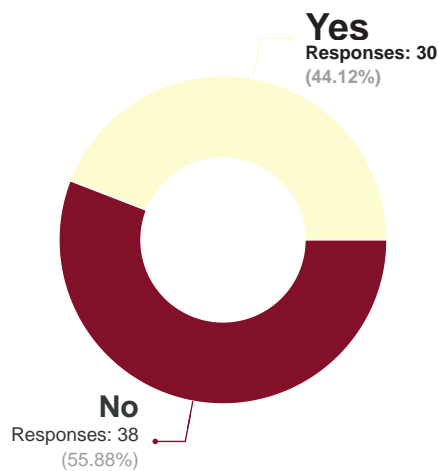


Question 20. What are the ages of the people living in your household?



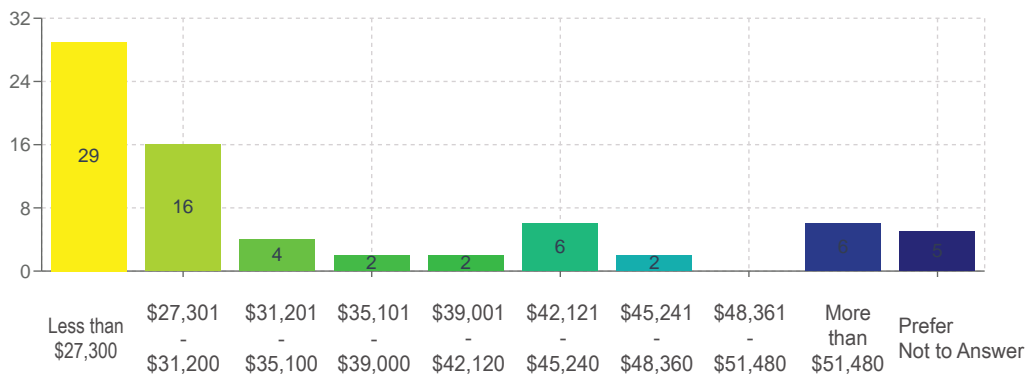
16% of households have **CHILDREN** and 13% have **SENIOR CITIZENS**

Question 21. Is anyone in your household living with a disability?



44% of households have a person living with a **DISABILITY**

Question 22. What is the total annual income of your household?

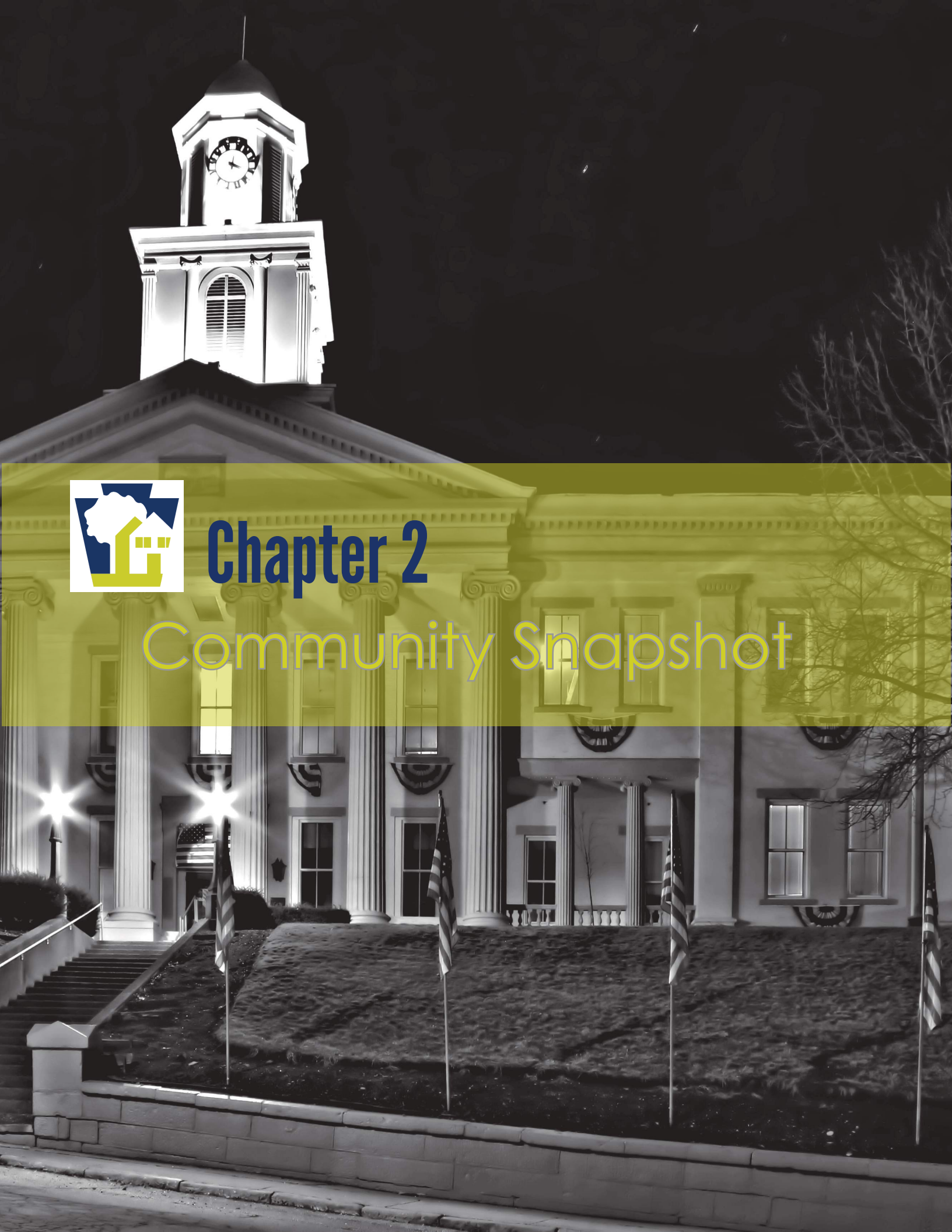


40% of households have an **ANNUAL INCOME** of less than **\$27,300** which is 50% of the County's median income



Chapter 2

Community Snapshot

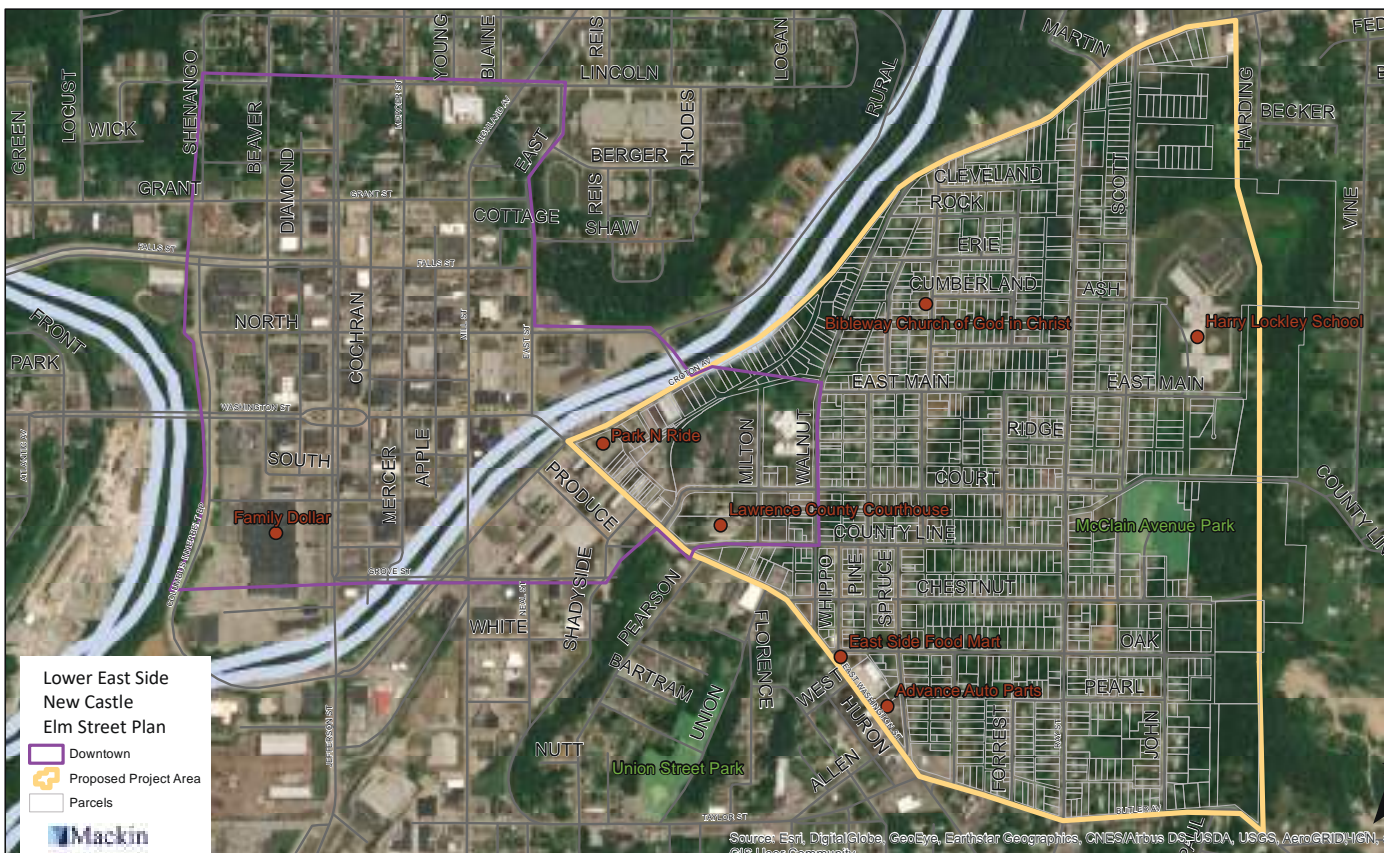


Neighborhood Description

The Lower East Side is a very dense neighborhood located just east of Downtown New Castle. Although it is separated from the heart of Downtown by the Neshannock Creek, the western edge of the neighborhood is home to the Lawrence County Courthouse Complex.

Both the City and the County have made significant improvements to this neighborhood in recent years with the development of the Neshannock Creek Trail and the connection to the City's Riverwalk Trail. The City's 2005 Comprehensive Plan notes that the neighborhood is uniquely poised for revitalization due to the presence of the government center; however, there is low visibility / recognition of this. The Plan recommended a streetscape for the Washington Street corridor, enhanced zoning regulations for building placement and marketing of the area for government-related uses.

Outside of the Courthouse Complex, the New Castle Area Transit Transfer Station and some commercial uses along Washington Street, the neighborhood is primarily high density residential (the Comprehensive Plan notes that it is home to the greatest population density) and one of the oldest housing stocks in the City.





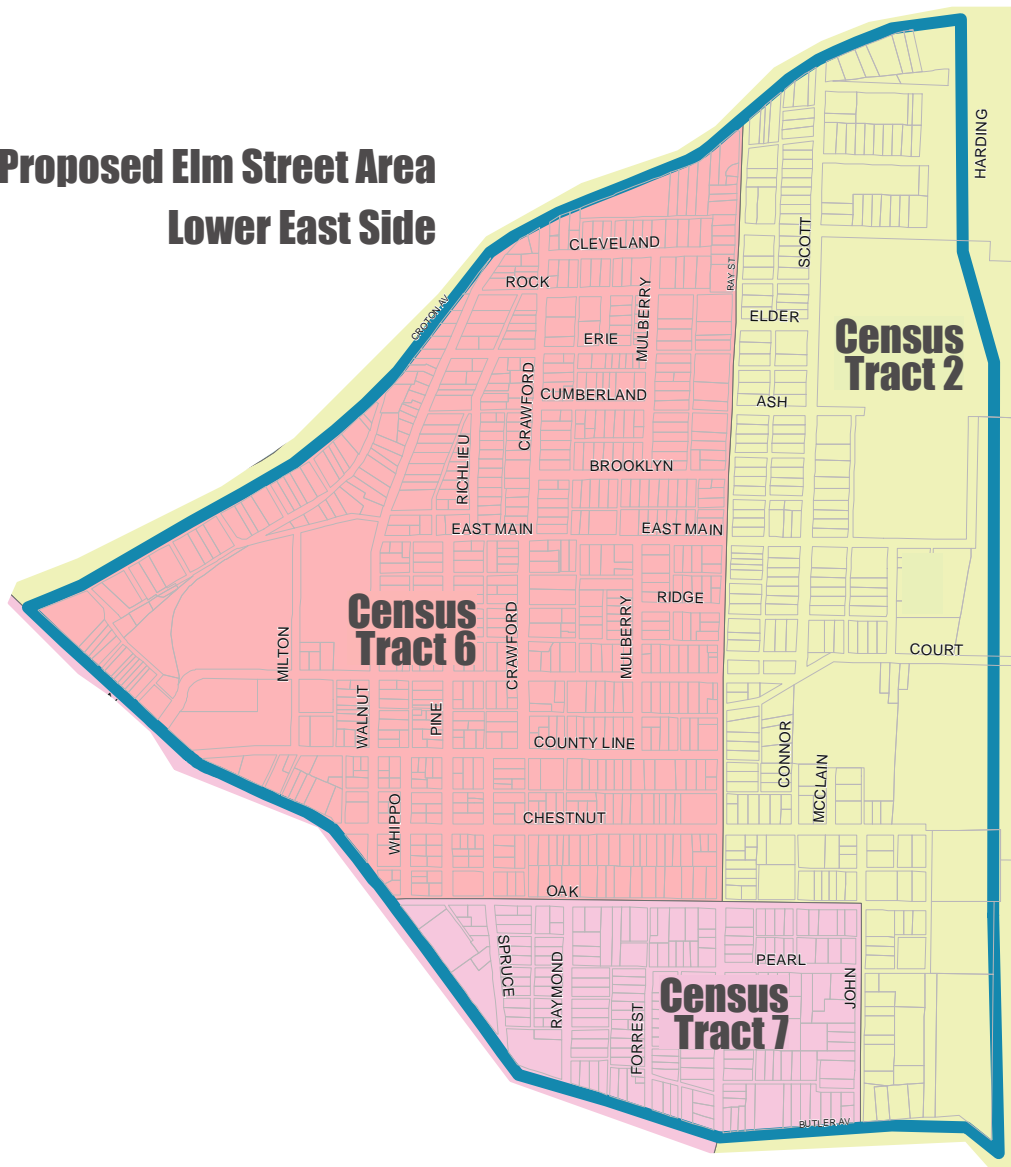
1,269

**Total Population
(est. 2017)**

Who lives here?

For purposes of documenting who lives in the Lower East Side neighborhood, data is from the US Census Bureau 2017 American Community Survey for Census Tract 6. Although the proposed Elm Street area is larger than Census Tract 6, it offers the best data to provide a summary of existing neighborhood demographics.

Proposed Elm Street Area Lower East Side





35
Median Age

The neighborhood has a lower median age than that of New Castle overall (42 years) and Lawrence County (45). 25% of all households have children under 18 living at home (compared to only 20% in the City and County).

The neighborhood has a diverse population, with 13% identifying as nonwhite. It is slightly less diverse than the City (17%) but more diverse than the County (7%).



13%
Diverse Population

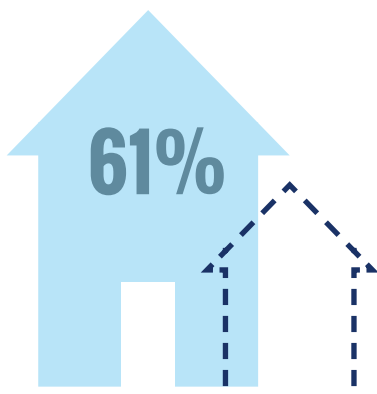
An icon showing four stylized human figures of different heights and colors (blue, light blue, and white) representing a diverse group of people.

3.55



Average Family Size

The neighborhood has a larger average family size than the City (2.81) or the County (2.87).



61%
Owner-Occupied Housing Units

An icon of a light blue house shape. Inside the house, the number '61%' is written in a darker blue. A dashed line outlines a smaller house shape inside the main house, representing a comparison.

The neighborhood has 61% of their housing units owner-occupied vs. renter-occupied, compared to 56% in the City and 74% in the County.



The neighborhood had the third highest **median household income** (\$33,977) in the City in 2017, compared to sixth in 2013.



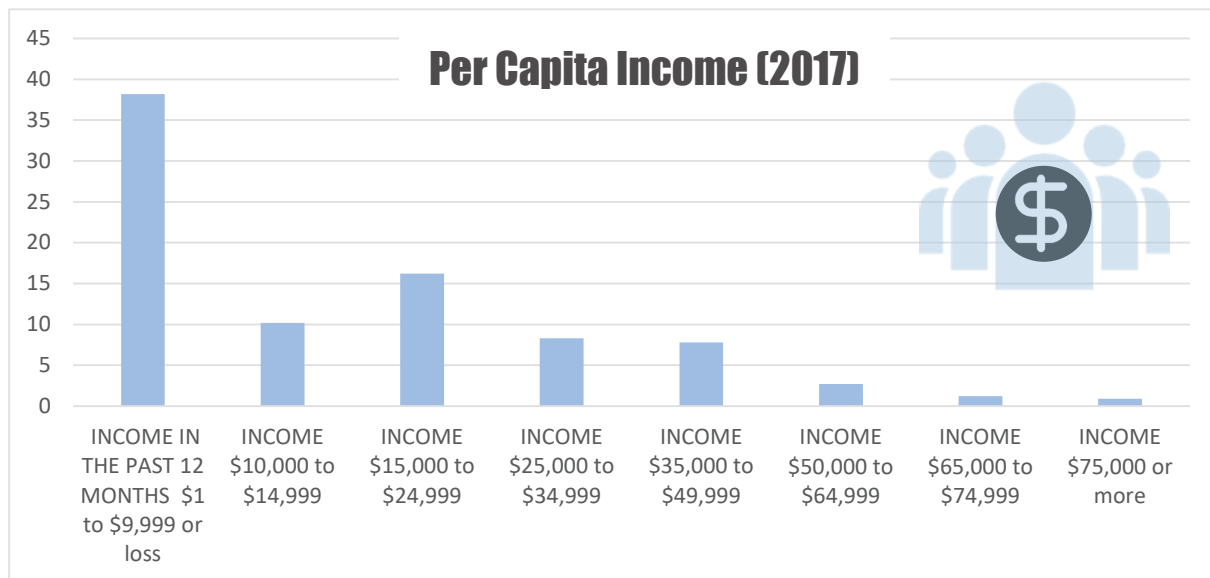
27% **Living BELOW the poverty line**

The neighborhood has a lower percentage of residents with at least a 4-year degree (8%) than the City (15%) or County (21%).



8%
College Degree

Despite the median household income increasing in recent years, there are still **almost a third of all residents living below the poverty level.**



In looking at per capita income, almost 40% of residents earned less than \$10,000 a year. The second highest category was between \$15,000 and \$24,999.

Existing Land Use

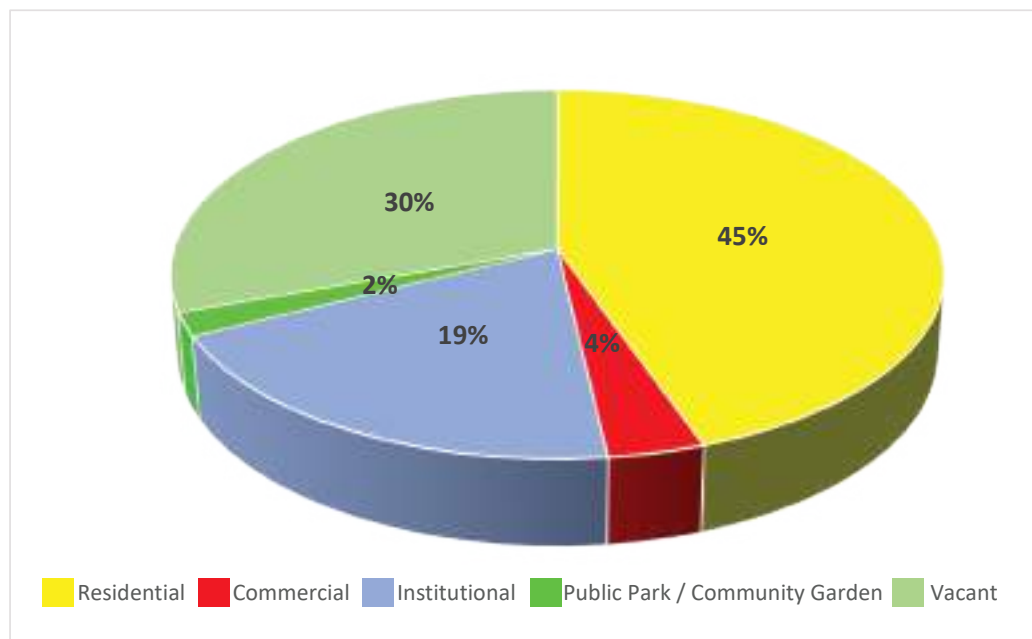
Existing land use was collected at the parcel level within the Lower Elm Street neighborhood from a combination of GIS data provided by the Lawrence County Department of Planning and Community Development and an on-the-ground property inventory conducted over the summer of 2019. The property inventory was completed by Mackin staff, DON Enterprises staff and Steering Committee volunteers.

Residential

The largest land use within the Lower East Side is residential, accounting for 45% of all land use. The majority of these dwellings are detached, single-family two-story dwellings. Lots are fairly small (6,000 square feet is average). There are also a number of properties classified as residential side lots, meaning that they do not have a primary dwelling located on them but are used as a side lot for a garage, shed, etc.

Commercial

Commercial land use occupies just 4% of the neighborhood. Primarily, these uses are concentrated along East Washington Street and Croton Avenue, although there are a few scattered throughout.



There are also a few mixed-use properties, which means the building is used as both a residence and commercial/retail.

Institutional



Institutional land uses include government uses, public schools and churches, which occupy 19% of all land. As stated earlier, the Lower East Side is home to the Lawrence County Courthouse Complex, which includes the Courthouse, the Government Center, Central Court, County Jail, Krause Youth Shelter and Mental Health and Development Services (MHDS).



The Harry W. Lockley Elementary School is another large institutional use, located in the northeastern part of the neighborhood, at the intersection of East Main Street and North Scott Street.



The last major institutional use is the New Castle Area Transit Authority Downtown Transfer Center / Park and Ride, located at the corner of South Croton Avenue and East Washington Street.

Public Parks / Community Garden



The Lower East Side is home to one park - the McClain Avenue Park, which is located at the intersection of Court Street and Connor Avenue.



The Lower East Side Community Garden is located between North Walnut Street and Richlieu Avenue.



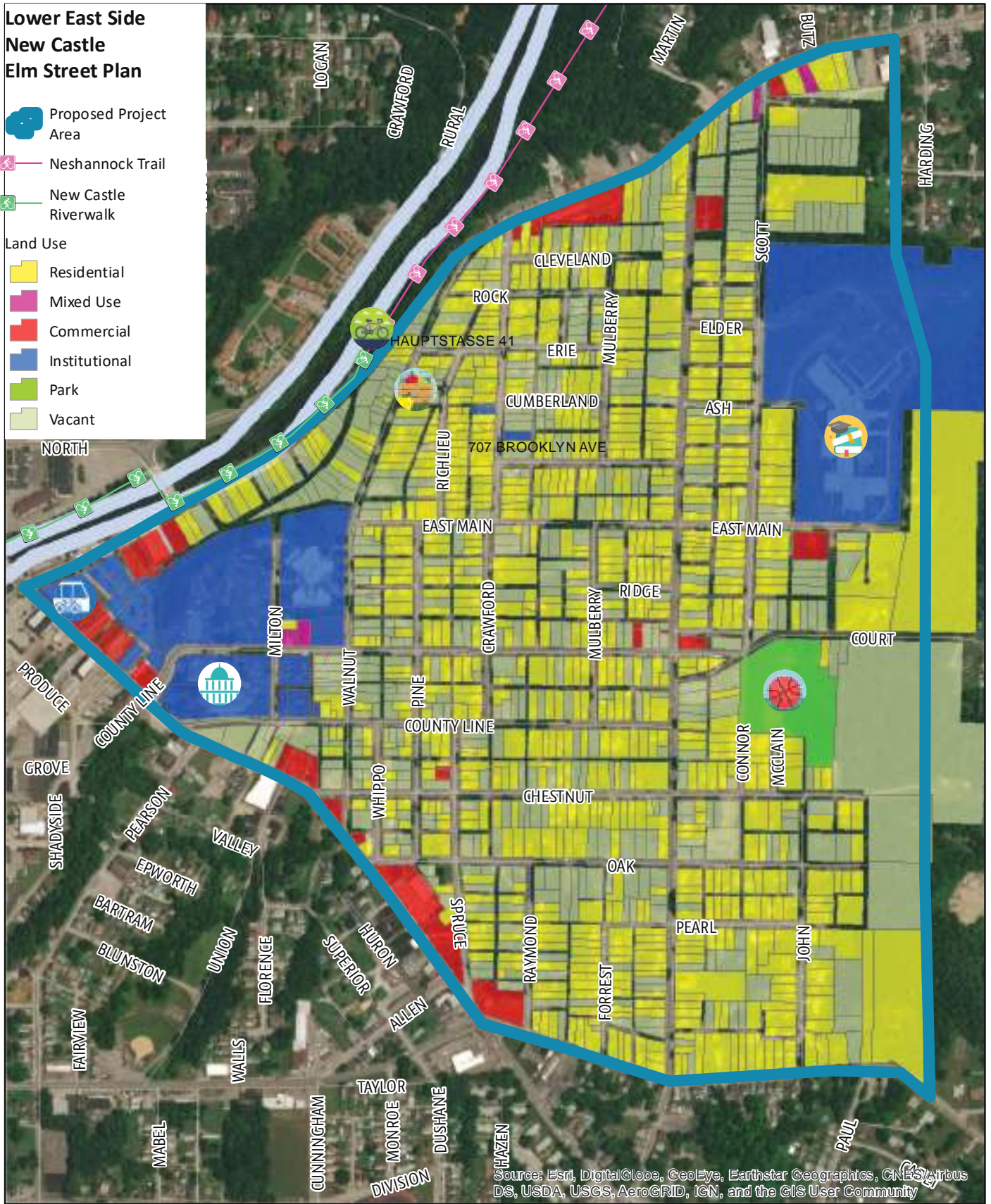
The New Castle Riverwalk Trail is a mixture of trail and signed on-road route that comes across the North Street Bridge along Croton Avenue. It joins the Neshannock Trail at a trailhead off Croton, which is a multi-use off-road trail that runs along the Neshannock Creek.

Vacant

Vacant land accounts for the second most land use in the neighborhood. Although there are a few large vacant parcels located in the eastern edge of the neighborhood, the majority of these parcels are just vacant lots scattered throughout the neighborhood.

**Lower East Side
New Castle
Elm Street Plan**

-  Proposed Project Area
-  Neshannock Trail
-  New Castle Riverwalk
- Land Use**
-  Residential
-  Mixed Use
-  Commercial
-  Institutional
-  Park
-  Vacant



Map Created On: 1/22/2020

Data Sources:

Lawrence Co Dept of Planning & Community Development: Roads, Parcels
Mackin: Land Use



0 500 1,000 Feet









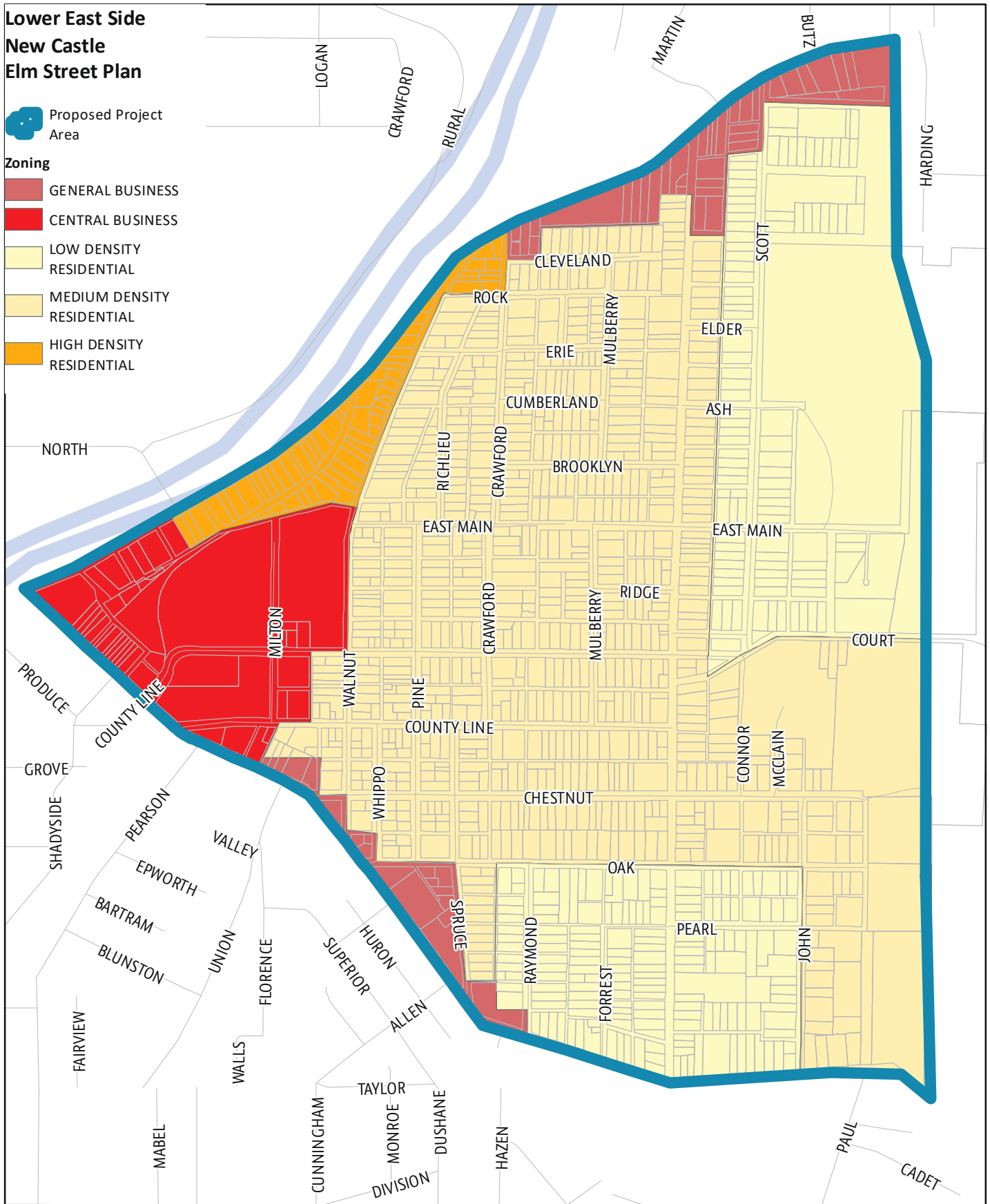
Zoning

The City of New Castle last enacted its zoning ordinance in 2009. The Lower East Side Neighborhood encompasses the following five zoning districts, as shown on the map to the right:

- C-1 General Business District is are for all retail establishments which normally occur within shopping centers, including space for automobile-oriented businesses and services and other business activities.
- C-2 The Central Business District is for major shopping facilities, offices, entertainment facilities and related uses which serve the entire area. In certain instances apartment houses will be permitted. The purpose of this district is to satisfy the unique needs and to promote the sound development of the Central Business District.
- R-1 Low Density Residential District is are generally for single-family low density residential developments.
- R-2 Medium Density Residential District is are for single and two-family residential developments, in certain instances multi-family developments are permitted.
- R-3 High Density Residential District is for multi-family residential developments on valuable centrally located property or property where good access, public utilities and community facilities warrant a higher density of population. Higher densities would be accommodated primarily through apartments or other multiple-family dwellings.

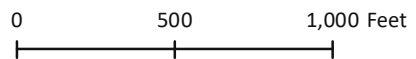
**Lower East Side
New Castle
Elm Street Plan**

-  Proposed Project Area
- Zoning**
-  GENERAL BUSINESS
-  CENTRAL BUSINESS
-  LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
-  MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
-  HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL



Map Created On: 1/22/2020

Data Sources:
Lawrence Co Dept of Planning & Community Development: Roads, Parcels
Mackin: Land Use





Chapter 3

Readiness Assessment

Using the Five Point Approach, the Lower East Side Neighborhood was assessed to see how it fares within each of the categories. The readiness assessment is based on extensive data collection from the steering committee meetings, stakeholder interviews, public meeting, neighborhood survey, digital mapping, census data, and property inventory.

Neighbors & Economy

- Jobs & Businesses
- Community Programs
- Home Ownership & Housing Options

Design

- Building Conditions & Renovations
- Vacant Lots & Property Maintenance
- Streetscape

Clean, Safe & Green

- Safety
- Parks & Community Gardens
- Streets & Connectivity

Image & Identity

- Branding & Communication
- Community Events

Sustainable Organization

- Lead Organization
- Partner Organizations

The Lower East Side neighborhood was ranked on the strength and direction of each element of the Elm Street Approach. The property inventory and results from the public outreach methods, such as community survey results and input from the public meeting, were all taken into consideration when assessing the community. Ordered from best to worst, the four rankings are:



Strong and improving



Strong but declining



Weak but improving



Weak and worsening



Readiness Assessment:

Weak but improving

Assets:

- Lawrence County Courthouse Complex - major employment center
- Housing rehabs completed and/or underway by DON Enterprises
- Strong community partnerships between organizations
- Higher rate of home ownership than other City neighborhoods

Challenges:

- Low income levels
- Low Property Values
- Absentee Property Owners

Neighbors & Economy

“Underlying economic factors—such as employment rates and homeownership levels, among others—heavily influence neighborhood health. Obviously, low income and high unemployment can lead to lower homeownership rates and to poor property upkeep. Income levels can also influence crime rates. Anecdotally, stories of the decline of a block or neighborhood happening hand-in-hand with the increase of criminal activity are common in community revitalization.

A major indicator of neighborhood desirability and health is home values; for many residents, their home is a primary factor in their net worth. A neighborhood’s economy is related to proximity to and the availability of jobs. Some neighborhoods do well, despite being inconvenient to job centers. Often, these are neighborhoods with a high quality of life that attract residents to their amenities and characteristics, ensuring a stable tax base. A neighborhood with a mix of incomes may be more desirable than one populated primarily by the poor or solely by affluent residents. For many distressed neighborhoods, gentrification may be more of a mythical fear than a reality. In some cases, where sudden change is leading to displacement of older residents or those on fixed income, strategies to retain an economically diversified population are often employed.

Depending on the level of distress, a neighborhood may require interventions to stabilize aspects of its economy—special homebuyer programs, gap financing for housing rehab, new job skills training, and other initiatives are all commonly used to improve a neighborhood’s economic conditions.”¹

¹ https://padowntown.org/assets/pdfs/resources/Introducing_TheElmStreetApproach-1573143829.pdf

Jobs & Businesses

Although the Lower East Side neighborhood is predominantly residential, it is home to several key employers and business assets.

- The Lawrence County Courthouse Complex is one of the most visible and identifying features of the Lower East Side Neighborhood. The County owns a number of properties in the Lower East Side and is the sixth largest employer in the County.
- The Lawrence County Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC) is headquartered in the Lower East Side, next to the Transit Center at 325 East Washington Street. The LRCC is a result of the Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce, the Lawrence County Chamber Foundation, and the Lawrence County Economic Development Corporation merging together in 2017. While all three organizations are legally and financially separate, LRCC staff strives to work as a single entity focused on providing needed organized economic, community, and leadership development programs meant to create opportunities capable of transforming the lives of Lawrence County’s residents.
- Additional businesses located in the Lower East Side include gas stations, pharmacies, automotive parts and repair, funeral homes and law offices.



27% Living **BELOW** the poverty line

Despite the median household income increasing in recent years, there are still **almost a third of all residents living below the poverty level.**

Community Programs

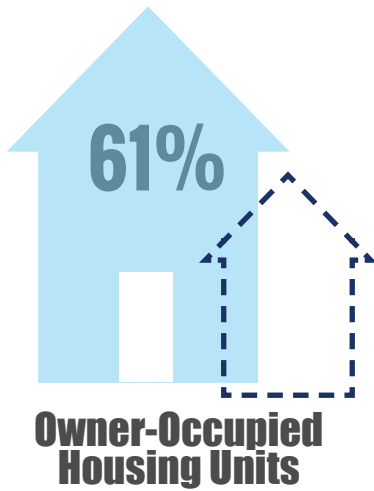
Overall, low income levels and high rates of poverty are concerning factors that threaten the vitality of the neighborhood. The Lawrence County Community Action Partnership (LCCAP) offers a summer food program, which provides free meals for anyone ages 18 and under with no registration required. Within the Lower East Side, lunch is provided at the Bible Way Church of God in Christ on Crawford Avenue and the Croton United Methodist Church on Croton Avenue.



Ben Franklin LLC 85 Cunningham Ave New Castle M-F: June 18 - August 16 Lunch 12 p.m. - 1 p.m.	Chen Moore Presbyterian Church 220 E. Chen Moore Ave New Castle M-Thurs: June 18 - August 15 Lunch 12 p.m. - 1 p.m.	Grant Street Community Center 404 W. Grant St New Castle M-F: June 18 - August 16 Lunch 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.	New Castle Public Library 207 E. North Street June 18 - August 16 Lunch: Thursday 11:00 - 12:00 p.m. June 19 - August 15 Lunch: Wednesday & Fridays 11:00 - 12:00 p.m.
Westhammock Village 402 Westhammock Ave New Castle M-F: June 18 - August 16 Lunch 12 p.m. - 1 p.m.	Church of the Redeemer 303 N. Croton St New Castle M, W, F: June 18 - August 16 Lunch 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Big Boy 1501 S. Jefferson St New Castle M-F: June 18 - August 16 Lunch 11 a.m. - 12 p.m.	YMCA 20 W. Washington St New Castle M-F: June 18 - August 16 Breakfast 8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. Lunch 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Harbor Heights 725 Harmon Rd New Castle M-F: June 18 - August 16 Lunch 12 p.m. - 1 p.m.	Croton United Methodist Church 100 N. Croton Ave New Castle Tues, Thurs: June 18 - August 15 Lunch 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Oak Leaf Gardens 1100 Pine Oak Dr New Castle M-F: June 18 - August 16 Lunch 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Westview Terrace 300 W. Grant St New Castle M-F: June 18 - August 16 Lunch 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Prayer Chapel 25 E. Long Ave New Castle Sat and Sun: June 17 - August 11 Lunch 12 p.m. - 1 p.m.	Bible Way Church of God in Christ 115 Crawford Ave New Castle Tues, Thurs: June 18 - August 15 Lunch 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.	Word of Life 205 S. Grant St, New Castle M-F: June 18 - August 16 Lunch 1:15 p.m. - 1:45 p.m.	

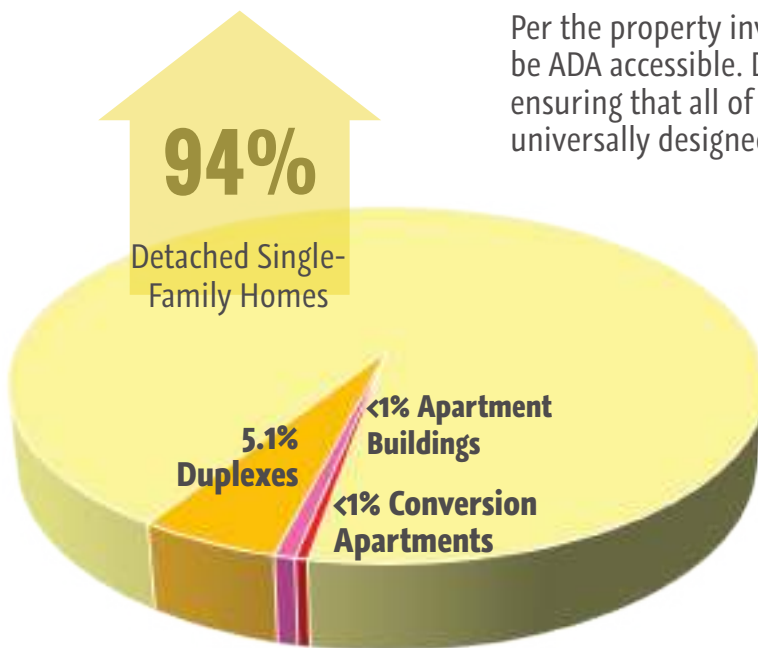
MOBILE BUS ROUTES

Lincoln Terrace Cafe Bus 250 Lincoln Ave New Castle M-F: June 18 - August 16 Lunch 2 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Twilight Mobile Home Park Cafe Bus Carol Lane, Edinburg M-F: June 18 - August 16 Lunch 2 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.
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The neighborhood has 61% of their housing units owner-occupied vs. renter-occupied, compared to 56% in the City and 74% in the County.

Housing Type



Home Ownership

The Lower East Side has a homeownership rate around 60%. 94% of the structures are detached, single-family dwellings (624 homes). Many residents and stakeholders have mentioned the difficulty of dealing with most of the landlords in the community, some of which have a reputation as absentee landlords. For those that do own their properties, many residents are either low income (employment rates in the Lower East Side are about half the rate of Pennsylvania and Lawrence County), older or disabled, which can make it difficult to maintain their properties.






Housing Options

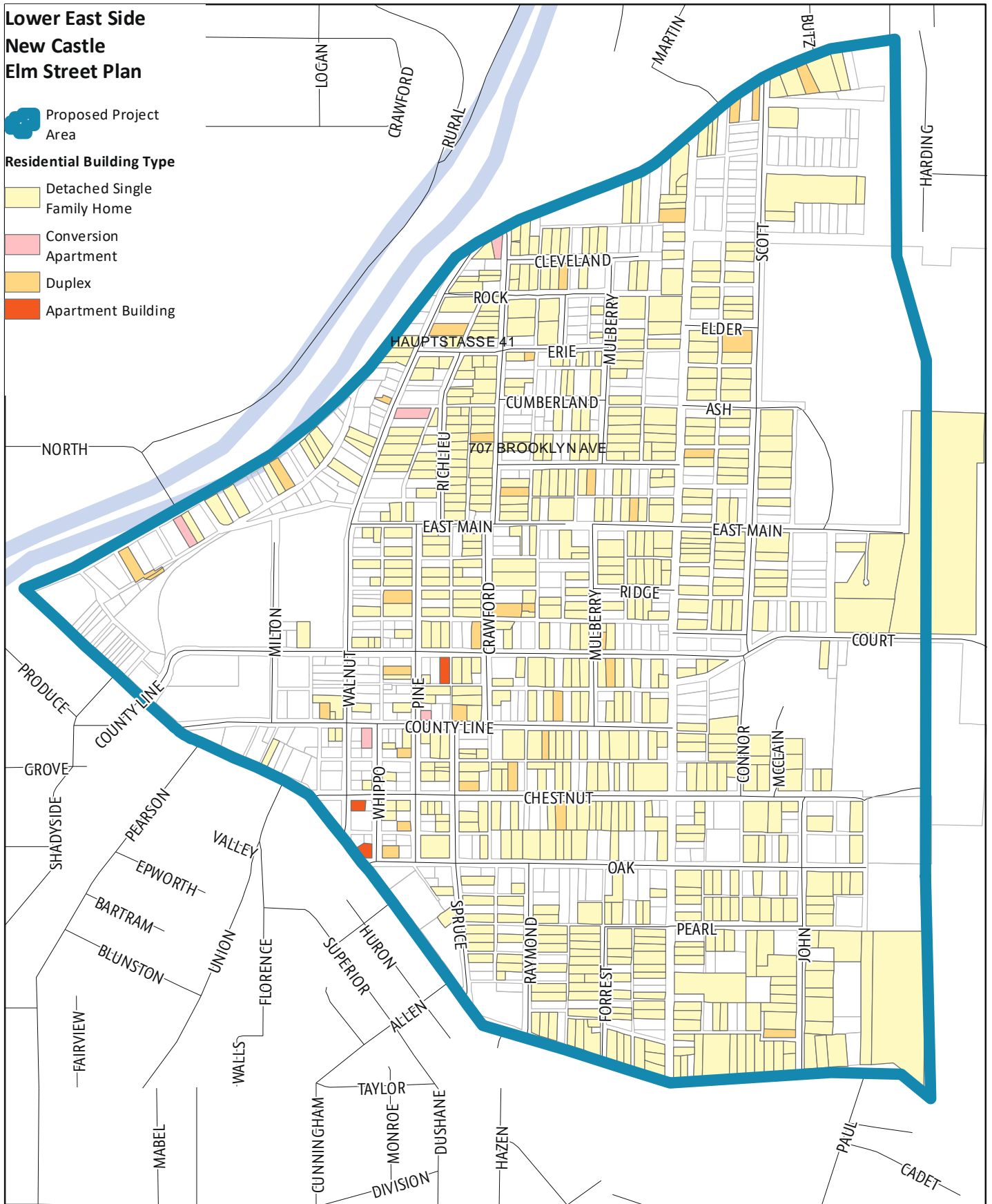
There is very little diversity in terms of the types of homes offered in the Lower East Side. Detached, single-family homes account for 94% of all residential buildings. The average lot size is 6,561 square feet and the median year the homes were built is 1920.

Multi-family dwellings (buildings containing two dwellings or more) account for the remaining 6% of residential buildings. The overwhelming majority (34) are duplexes (two-family) but there are three small apartment buildings and five homes that have been converted into a couple of apartments.

Per the property inventory, there are 25 houses that were noted to be ADA accessible. DON Enterprises is working to increase this by ensuring that all of the housing that they renovate or construct is universally designed.

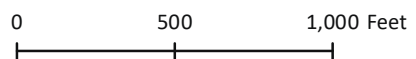
**Lower East Side
New Castle
Elm Street Plan**

-  Proposed Project Area
- Residential Building Type**
-  Detached Single Family Home
-  Conversion Apartment
-  Duplex
-  Apartment Building



Map Created On: 1/22/2020

Data Sources:
Lawrence Co Dept of Planning & Community Development: Roads, Parcels
Mackin: Land Use



\$20,100

Assessed Value



Using 2019 Lawrence County Tax Assessment data, the median assessed value of single-family dwellings in the Lower East Side is \$20,100 (includes building and land value).



\$13,751

Sales Price

The same source has the median sales price for single-family homes at just \$13,751.

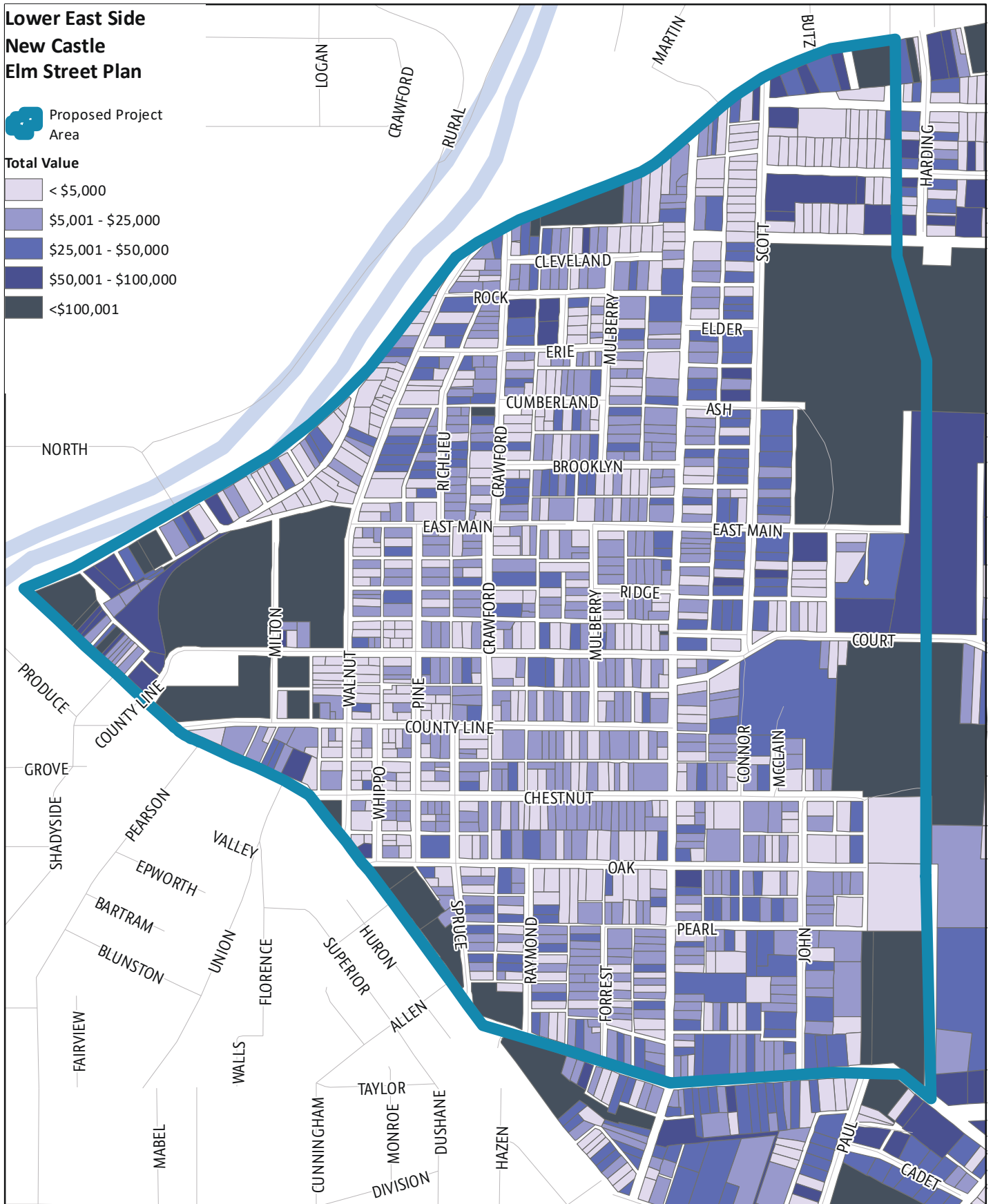
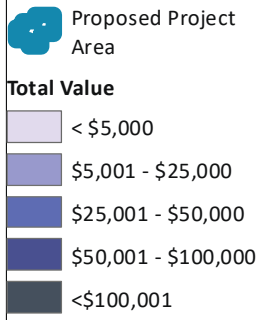
Housing Value

Using 2019 Lawrence County Tax Assessment data, the median assessed value of single-family dwellings in the Lower East Side is \$20,100 (includes building and land value). The same source has the median sales price for single-family homes at just \$13,751.

Although the low assessed values keep property taxes low, the low property values are negatively affecting not only homeowners, but the neighborhood.

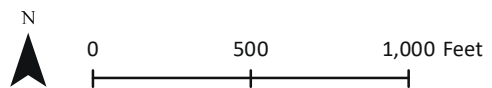
Often, homeowners depend on obtaining home equity loans from banks to pay for various home improvement projects. These loans are based on current assessed values and how much equity the homeowner has (i.e. how much of their mortgage they have paid vs. the value in which their home is assessed). When the home values are declining, even homeowners that have paid down their mortgage do not have enough equity to obtain a loan. Thus, the homeowners cannot pay for improvements such as a new roof, siding or windows.

**Lower East Side
New Castle
Elm Street Plan**



Map Created On: 1/22/2020

Data Sources:
Lawrence Co Dept of Planning & Community Development: Roads, Parcels
Mackin: Land Use





Readiness Assessment:

Weak but improving

Assets:

- Housing rehabs completed and/or underway by DON Enterprises

Challenges:

- Property maintenance
- Vacant lots
- Lack of garages / sheds

Design

“The character of a neighborhood is often the difference that makes a place special. The overall “feel” of a neighborhood street and the familiar appearance of its houses can signal the unique atmosphere of the community not only to its own residents but also to citizens in the larger region. Design includes a range of features; it is about everything that is visible when walking or driving through the neighborhood.

Architecture is the most obvious aspect of design. Not only consistency of architectural style but also general features like number of stories, roof shape (hipped, gabled, etc.) and the prevalence of building features—such as porches or stoops, bay or dormer windows, and garages—can influence the overall design rhythm of a neighborhood.

The importance of non-architectural design elements should not be underestimated. Property site plans have a fundamental impact on how the neighborhood appears and feels. The distance buildings are set back from the street, the inclusion of sidewalks or trails, the width of side yards, the placement of garages at the rear of a property or the front, and the number of curb cuts along a street—all these and more can change the way a property or street appears and functions.

Streetscape, including landscaping, also plays a role in a neighborhood’s design features. From street trees to planting pits to traffic circles or parking bump-outs, the vegetation or lack thereof in a neighborhood can make a significant difference in the appearance of a street. For example, planted median strips can make a street appear more “green” while also creating a narrowed appearance that tends to slow down through-traffic. It is not uncommon for consistent site plans, landscaping, and mature street trees to unify a neighborhood even if the architectural styles are eclectic.”¹

¹ https://padowntown.org/assets/pdfs/resources/Introducing_TheElmStreetApproach-1573143829.pdf

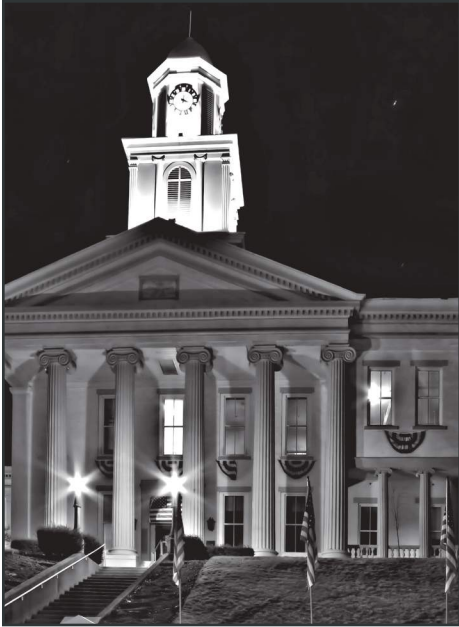
Architectural Style

The Lower East Side has mostly single-family two-story residential properties. The high number of blighted properties deter a consistent neighborhood design. Court Street has the most design appeal as the properties that remain feature some Victorian Revival style homes with wraparound porches, hip and valley style roofing, gables and Eastlake trim. While many of the other homes in the Lower East Side vary, a large number of the remaining homes are an American Foursquare or a two-story variation of a shotgun style home. The majority of properties have no garage. Most homes are setback from the street 25-30 ft.

A Pennsylvania Historical Resource Survey was completed in 1987 by a former member of the Lawrence County Historical Society. Although many homes in the neighborhood have been demolished, the following houses included in the survey are still standing today:

- 910 E. Main Street (originally 911 Court Street) This brick residence was built circa 1840. A Plan called A. Butler's Lots was approved in 1893 by the City Council but not recorded until 1908. All of the lots in that Plan are now part of the Harry W. Lockley School property. The main house is still standing today in great condition and is an excellent representation of semi-rural architecture from the Canal Era (1833-1870).
- 504 and 508 Croton Avenue - these houses were probably built before 1855 on property once owned by J. Nelson and are both representative of the residential development which occurred in New Castle's Canal Era period (1833-1870). Neither is in very good shape but they are still standing and are examples of the 2/3 Georgian house type.
- 1005 Butler Avenue - this Second Empire residence was built between 1877 and 1890 for Jacob Genkinger and his family on the site of his original 1850's farmstead home. Among Mr. Genkinger's interests were a grist mill in Mahoningtown which he owned in 1865, but he also owned his own distillery and was a retail liquor dealer, a real estate developer and owned the New Castle Opera House.





Other buildings found through research that were not part of the 1987 survey are as follows:

- 430 Court Street - one of the most significant historical buildings in this area is, of course, the Lawrence County Courthouse. The land upon which the Courthouse sits was donated by David Crawford in 1850, a year after Lawrence County was formed out of part of the southern portion of Mercer County and part of the northern portion of Beaver County. Construction of the Courthouse began in August, 1850 and was completed in 1852. Some renovations were done over the years, but the initial building still stands.
- 703 Oak Street - this house represents an Italianate residence and was built about 1870 by Henry Fisher who was a contractor and bricklayer. The lots upon which the house sits were once part of the Whippo Addition of 1863. Mr. Fisher owned the house until 1903 and it has changed ownership many times since. It was on the verge of being tom down in 2013, when it was purchased by its current owner.
- 725 and 727 County Line Street - once part of David Crawford's farmland, these residences were once owned by Harry W. Lockley. The home remained in ownership of the Lockley/Cramer families until 1984 and is still standing today. Unfortunately, the home at 725 was tom down. The Harry W. Lockley Elementary School was built in 1954 and was named after him.
- 513 S. Ray Street - this home was once part of the James A. Ray property and was the home of Daniel T. Ray and his wife. It is still standing although the front was remodeled and closed in and was once the Duds N Suds Laundromat. This may be the original homestead as there is no evidence of any demolition from the time it was owned by the Rays.

Resources:

New Castle Historic Survey 1987 Prepared by Julie Turner and Beverly Zona for the Lawrence County Planning Commission

1872 Atlas and 1877 History of Lawrence County, PA by Samuel W. Durant

Book of Biographies/Biographical Sketches of Leading Citizens of Lawrence County, Pennsylvania 1897

20th Century History of New Castle and Lawrence County, Pennsylvania 1908 by Hon. Aaron L. Hazen

Deed Searches at Lawrence County Courthouse

Other online research done by Volunteers at the Lawrence County Historical Society

There are three Churches in this area that have historical significance: The Second United Presbyterian Church, the First United Brethren Church, and the Croton Methodist Church.

- The Second United Presbyterian Church - the congregation began in 1884 on Pittsburg St. (now East Washington Street) but moved to its current location of 439 Countyline Road on April 27, 1913. It closed due to dwindling numbers in April 2009, but was purchased by Lawrence County and renamed “The Albert P. Gettings Government Center” and is still being used as an annex of the Courthouse today as well as the office of New Visions, an organization seeking to revitalize Lawrence County.
- Bible Way Church of God in Christ located at 125 N. Crawford Avenue - this Church was the former home of the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Zion Church. In 1940, it was home to the Church of United Brethren in Christ a/k/a First Church of United Brethren and renovated and enlarged in 1959 - that congregation moved to another Church on Eastbrook Road in 1970. In 1974, it was home to Calvary Temple who sold it in 1985 to the Bible Way Church of God in Christ under Elder John E. Young III. Elder Young was voted one of the 100 most influential pastors in The National Churches of God in Christ.
- Croton Methodist Church - originally the Croton Methodist Episcopal Church, this congregation included members of the Crowe family, founders of Crowe Town (now Croton) and was first located on Dewey Avenue (the church is still standing but is outside of the parameters of the subject area). In 1893, a new Church was designed by S. W. Foulk, a well-known architect who designed many other buildings in New Castle, and was built in its current location of 910 Croton Avenue. In 1968, after a denominational merger, the name was changed to Croton United Methodist Church and is still in use today.





Building Conditions

A property inventory was conducted during the summer of 2019. Members of Mackin's staff along with volunteers from DON Enterprises and the Steering Committee conducted a walking survey for all structures. Photographs were taken of each structure along with many of the vacant lots. A full spreadsheet will be provided to DON Enterprises so that they can track renovations and neighborhood improvements.

Excellent

- Buildings that need little or no exterior improvements.
- There were 261 structures classified as in "excellent" condition.

Needs Repairs

- Buildings that need minor exterior improvements, such as paint, siding, gutters, roof.
- There were 300 structures classified as in "need of repair."

Disrepair


- Buildings that need major exterior improvements, includes those that have been condemned and scheduled for demolition.
- There were 42 structures classified as being in "disrepair."

Vacant

- There are 68 vacant structures. It should be noted that there were an additional 34 that staff thought might be vacant but could not tell for sure. These are not shown on the map.



**Lower East Side
New Castle
Elm Street Plan**

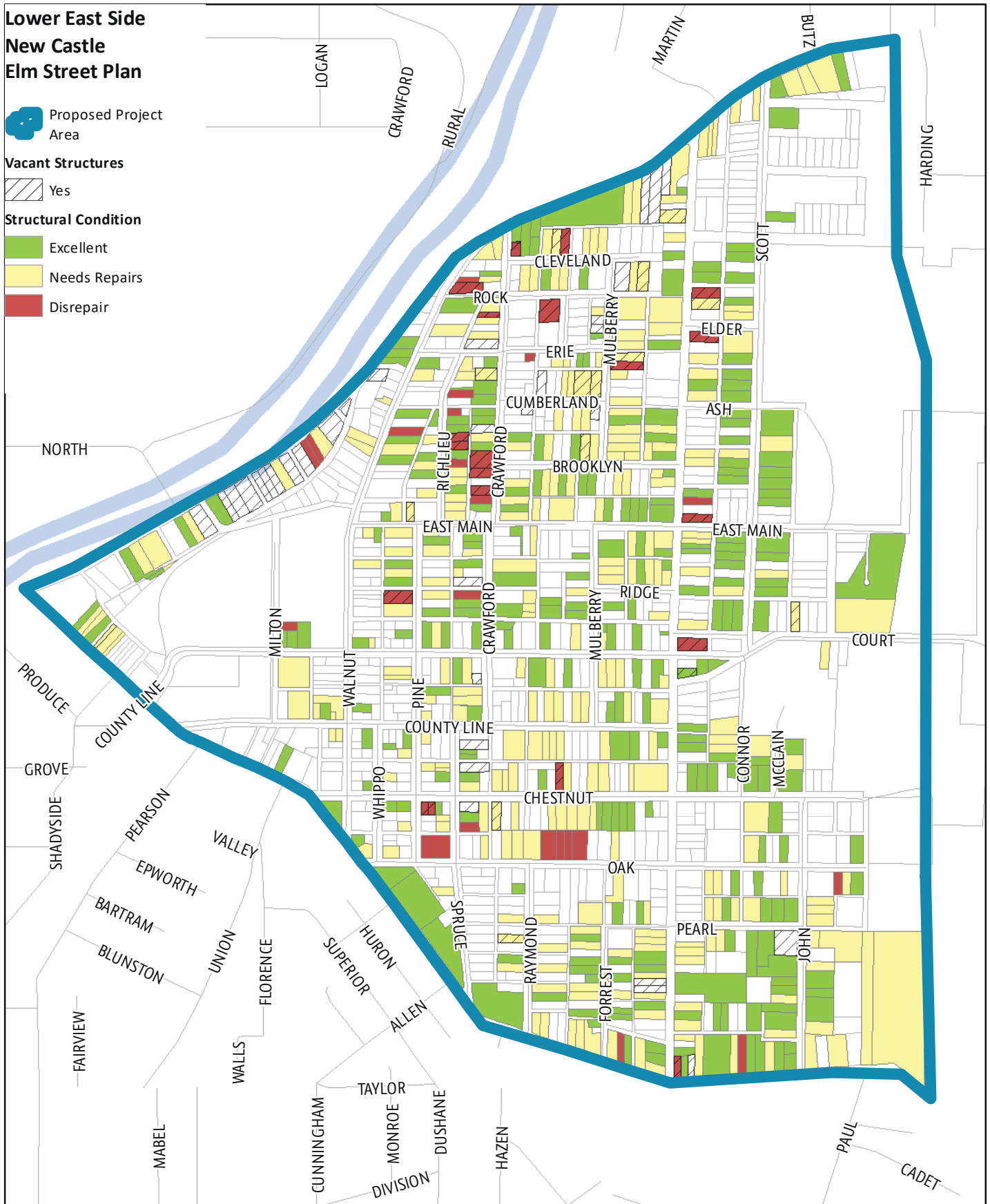
 Proposed Project Area

Vacant Structures

 Yes

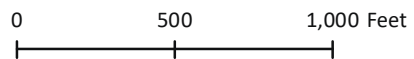
Structural Condition

 Excellent
 Needs Repairs
 Disrepair



Map Created On: 1/22/2020

Data Sources:
 Lawrence Co Dept of Planning & Community Development: Roads, Parcels
 Mackin: Land Use





The majority of respondents think the neighborhood has **AVERAGE HOUSING QUALITY**

The biggest issues with housing are too many **VACANT HOMES** and **POOR CONDITION**

Housing Renovations

Over the past few months DON and its community Partners have progressed in revitalizing the Lower East Side. The goal was to construct six new homes and at this point two homes are completed: one closed in November of 2019 at 206 Mulberry Street and the second completed home will close at the end of January 2020 at 311 Pine Street. In addition, three other homes are in different phases of construction. Two are up under roof and one the foundation was just completed. Each of these three homes have identified buyers that are going through pre-counseling training. Five of these households have persons with disabilities and one family has been identified as homeless and fleeing domestic violence.

On November 21, 2019, DON received an award of \$190,000 in tax credits from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development Special Program Priorities Program to fund three primary activities: owner occupied rehab, demolition of vacant properties and rehabbing vacant blighted property for homeownership.

On December 19, 2019, the FHL Bank of Pittsburgh approved and awarded two affordable housing project grants to DON. DON received the maximum grant of \$750,000 to build nine additional homes on the Lower East Side and a second grant of \$180,553 to build two new homes on the South Side of New Castle.

Finally, DON has helped several homeowners with home repairs over the last couple of months.








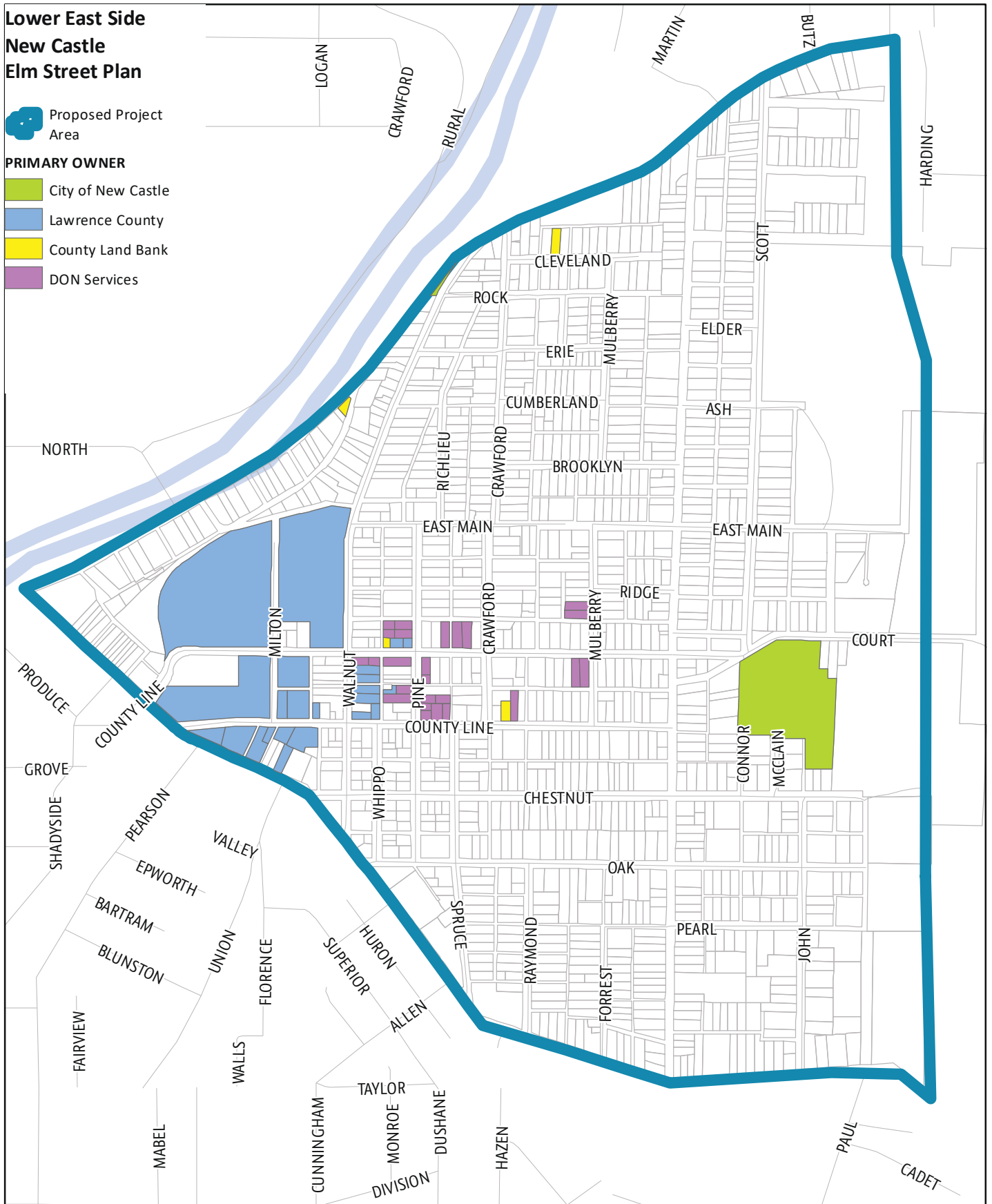
206 Mulberry Street



311 Pine Street

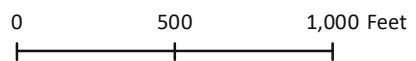
**Lower East Side
New Castle
Elm Street Plan**

-  Proposed Project Area
- PRIMARY OWNER**
-  City of New Castle
-  Lawrence County
-  County Land Bank
-  DON Services



Map Created On: 1/22/2020

Data Sources:
Lawrence Co Dept of Planning & Community Development: Roads, Parcels
Mackin: Land Use





Readiness Assessment:

Weak but improving

Assets:

- City of New Castle Police - camera program
- Lower East Side Neighborhood Watch
- Lockley School
- Lower East Side Community Garden
- McClain Avenue Park
- Urban Conservation Areas

Challenges:

- Drugs
- Vandalism
- Lack of Street Lights
- Litter

Clean, Safe and Green

“Arguably the most important factor in a neighborhood’s health is how safe and pleasant people believe it to be. Perception and reality can sometimes differ, and a neighborhood with relatively little crime, but an unsafe image, will often have problems attracting new residents and motivating current residents to buy homes and stay. It will also be a challenge to attract even neighborhood- serving business to an area viewed as unsafe. Dealing with crime and cleaning up features in the neighborhood that are, or seem to be, unsavory/unsafe is a critical first step in changing the community for the better.

Even more challenging is the neighborhood with a higher than average occurrence of crimes, especially violent crimes. The effects of crime on neighborhoods and their efforts to revitalize are clear—crime breeds fear and isolation, instability and transience in the residential population, and disinvestment, which provides opportunity for more criminal activity.

Another facet of neighborhood safety deals with movement to and through the area. Part of ensuring safety in a neighborhood includes providing safe routes for children to walk/bike to school, for residents to access commercial developments, and for recreation.

Clean is a bridge between safety and greening. Littered vacant lots, illegal dumping areas, and the like are often opportunity zones for crimes to take place. In addition, a filthy and untended neighborhood has been shown in studies to signal that no one cares, leading to increased discord, petty crime, and eventually more serious crimes and systemic disinvestment. Cleaning up trash and chaos also reduces the perception of crime.

Greening is relevant to a neighborhood’s image, appearance, and health issues. Landscaping, trees, and other plantings impact the visual appeal of residential and commercial streets alike, with mature trees and healthy, maintained landscaping elements creating a consistent and cared-for appearance.”¹

¹ https://padowntown.org/assets/pdfs/resources/Introducing_TheElmStreetApproach-1573143829.pdf

Safety

While the majority of survey respondents stated that they feel safe in the Lower East Side, safety has been a concern of the Lower East Side for a long time. Out of the various factors affecting safety; theft, vandalism and drugs were the largest concerns. These concerns encouraged the community to take initiative in improving the safety of their community.

Residents came together and created the Lower East Side Neighborhood Watch. The Watch hosts monthly meetings in the Bible Way Church of God in Christ. Through the meetings, the neighborhood residents have established a cooperative partnership with the City Police Department as well as Code Enforcement.

The City Police Department encourages residents to share and document crimes and suspicious information, light their properties and be more vigilant. Because of this, many residents feel that safety has improved and police data supports this sentiment. The Police Department has obtained a grant to install surveillance cameras that run from the WiFi of consenting property owners in the community.



The overwhelming majority of respondents feel **SAFE**

Factors affecting safety the MOST include **DRUGS & THEFT / VANDALISM**



41% of respondents find the neighborhood to be **SOMEWHAT CLEAN**



Factors affecting clean and green the MOST include **LITTER** followed by **WEEDS** and poor **PROPERTY MAINTENANCE**



63% of respondents find the neighborhood to be pretty **WALKABLE**

40% of respondents want new or improved **SIDEWALKS**



Safe Connections

Safety is not just about crime. It is about safe connections - via roads, sidewalks and transit.

Roads

The Lower East Side is bounded by two state roads: Croton Avenue (SR 108/168) and East Washington Street (US Business 422/SR 65). The rest of the roads are local roads, maintained by the City of New Castle.

Streetlights

While many of the streets within the neighborhood have street lights, they are fairly spread out on the roads (with the exception of the state roads - Croton Avenue and East Washington Street). Many residents felt there were areas that are not well lit and contributes to crime/vandalism.

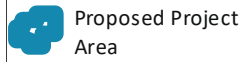
Sidewalks

Overall, the Lower East Side has a well-established sidewalk network. Not only are they found along the main streets, but the vast majority of internal roads also have sidewalks.

Sidewalk conditions however, vary greatly. As part of water line replacements, sidewalks were replaced along Crawford Street. The City and DON Enterprises applied for a multimodal grant to replace sidewalks along Court Street in 2019 but was unsuccessful.

The sidewalk network was mapped utilizing existing data provided by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) and then field verified and inventoried for condition by volunteers. The assessment was completed in December 2019 via a drive through sidewalk assessment of the Lower East Side. The surveyors used an enlarged map of the neighborhood with all sidewalks highlighted in red. The surveyors traversed each street examining the sidewalks to determine condition. A “poor condition” determination was awarded for sidewalks that were heavily cracked, heaved/uneven, and/or greatly deteriorated.

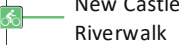
**Lower East Side
New Castle
Elm Street Plan**



Proposed Project Area



Neshannock

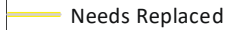


New Castle Riverwalk

Sidewalk Condition



No Sidewalk



Needs Replaced



Good Condition

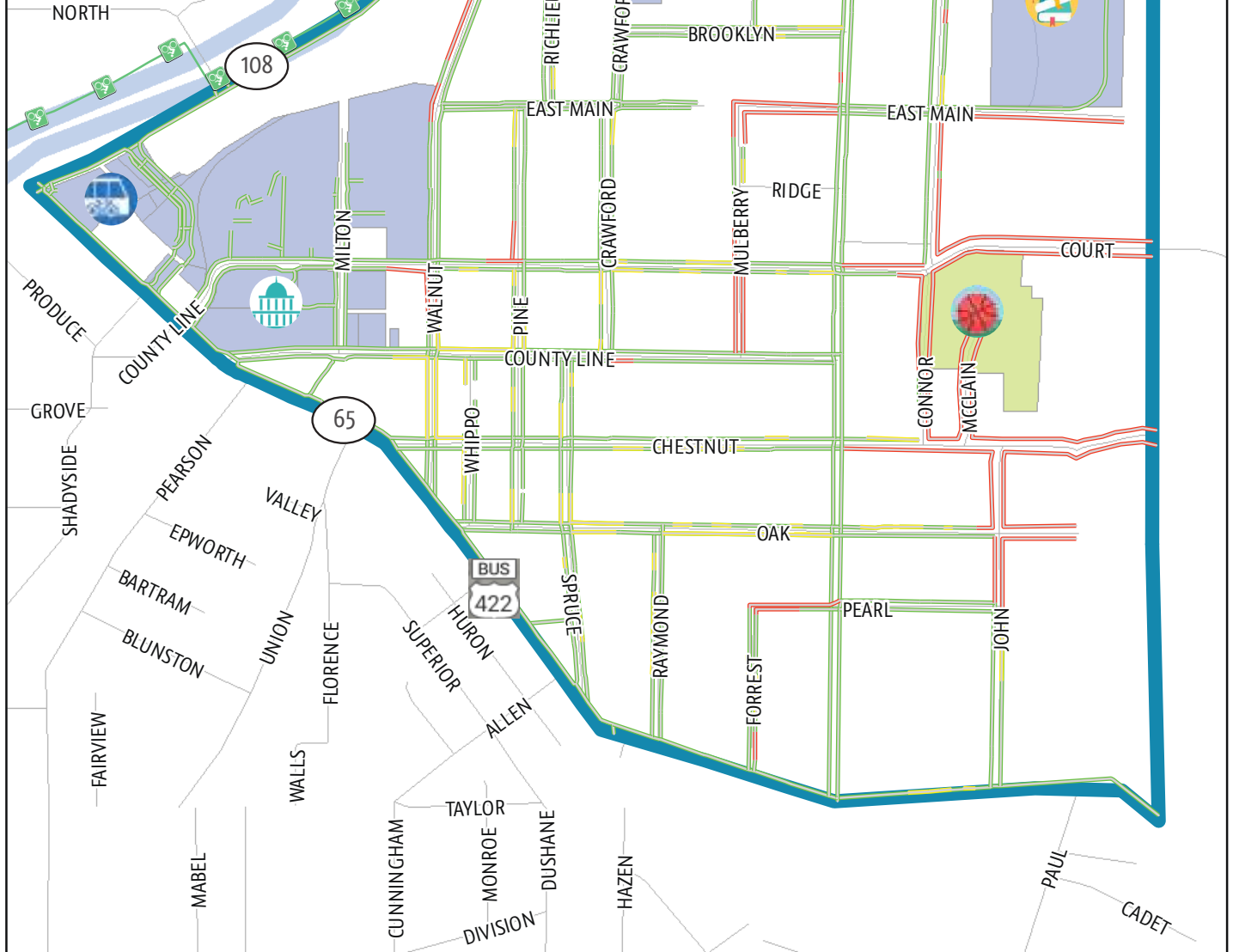
Land Use



Park/Garden



NORTH



Map Created On: 1/22/2020

Data Sources:

Lawrence Co Dept of Planning & Community Development: Roads, Parcels

Mackin: Land Use



0 500 1,000 Feet





Trails

The Riverwalk is a linear park along Neshannock Creek in downtown New Castle and a signed trail that connects to the Neshannock Creek Trail via the North Street Bridge and Croton Avenue. The City added bike lanes to the Bridge and replaced the sidewalks along Croton Avenue as part of ongoing efforts to implement the Riverwalk project.

The Riverwalk Trail joins the Neshannock Creek Trail at the trailhead on Croton. The Neshannock Creek Trail opened in 2015 and is a 0.7-mile rail-trail. The Lawrence County Conservation District recently improved Neshannock Creek Extension through the Dirt and Gravel Road Program to create a two-mile walking/biking loop.



Public Transit

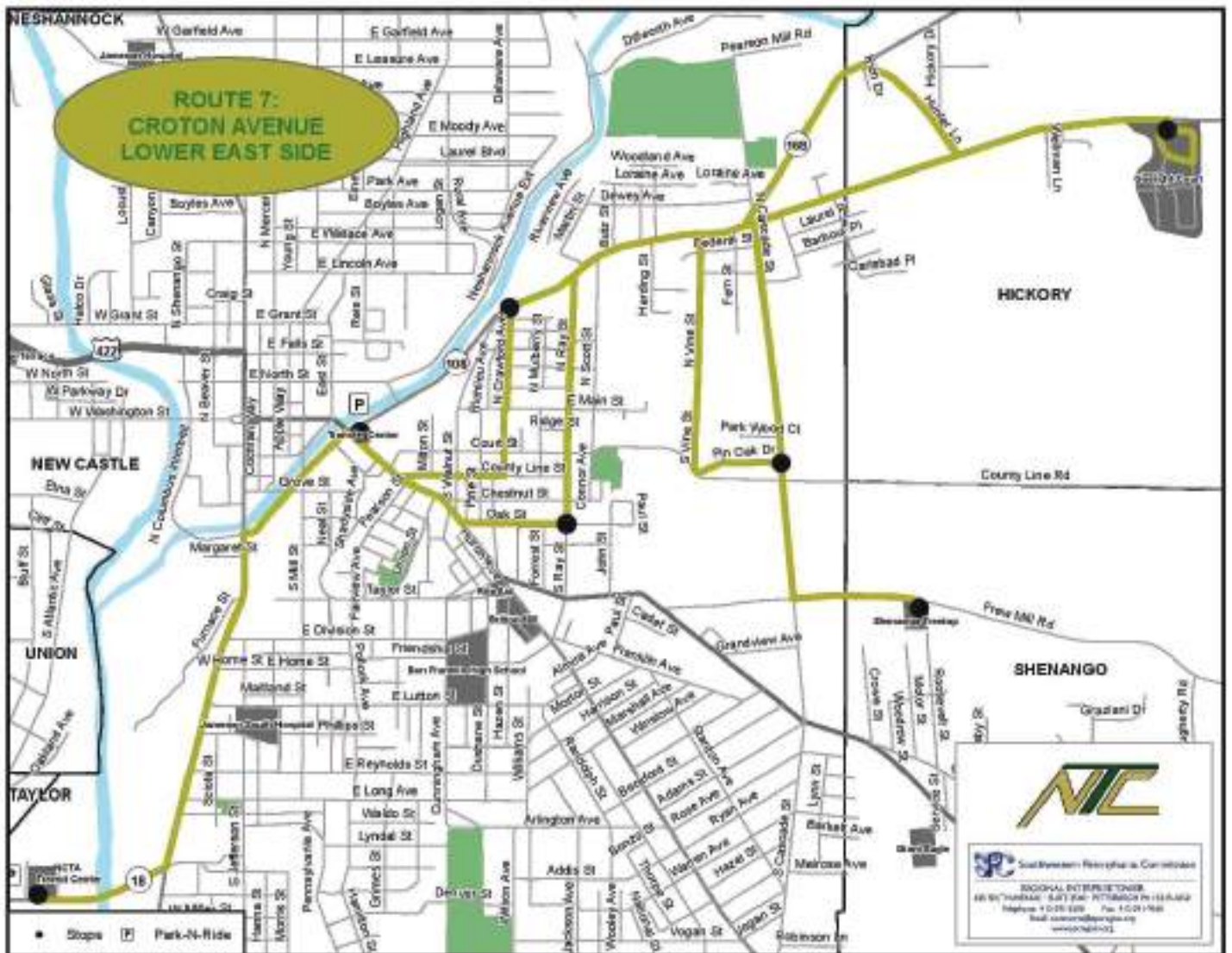
The New Castle Area Transit Authority (NCATA) provides fixed-route service to the City of New Castle and its surrounding areas and to the City of Pittsburgh. The Lower East Side is served by Route 7, as shown on the map to the right. The Lower East Side is also home to one of the three NCATA Park & Rides, the Downtown Transfer Center, located at the corner of Croton Avenue and East Washington Street. All of the buses are equipped with bike racks.

Interviews with the NCATA stated that the neighborhood is well-served by transit; buses run every half hour between 6:15am-6:15pm. The NCATA has plans to replace all signage for bus stops in 2020 and the only issue is some streets are hard to navigate due to on-street parking (i.e. Ray Street) but



Green Spaces

The Lower East Side is pretty green, home to the McClain Avenue Park, the Lower East Side Community Garden and a number of urban conservation areas.



<https://newcastletransit.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Croton-ES.jpg>



Only 1/3 of public survey respondents think that they are **well-served** by **PUBLIC SPACES**

They want to see **NEW PARKS / GARDENS** and to **IMPROVE EXISTING PARKS**



McClain Avenue Park

The McClain Avenue Park is very hidden, located off McClain Avenue (a dead end street) and at the intersection of Court Street and Connor Avenue. The park offers a playground, basketball court and swingset. There are no signs for the park and many of the courts/facilities are in need of improvement.

Lower East Side Community Garden

The Lower East Side Community Garden is located between North Walnut Street and Richlieu Avenue. The Rice family purchased the lots a few years ago with the idea of feeding families in need for free. Since April 2019, the family and Tri-County CleanWays have worked together, along with DON Enterprises and neighbors, to transform the previously abandoned lots into a community garden that include an edible rain garden and compost area. In 2019, the crops have helped feed over 50 families.

A second garden — this one to be designated a pumpkin patch — is planned for Court Street.

Urban Conservation Areas

Lawrence County established urban conservation areas on vacant lots throughout the City of New Castle. The County worked with the Lawrence County Conservation District to plant trees on the lots and now has a maintenance agreement with the City. The County is the trustee of the lots, which are in the County Repository. The program was funded by the Pennsylvania Department of



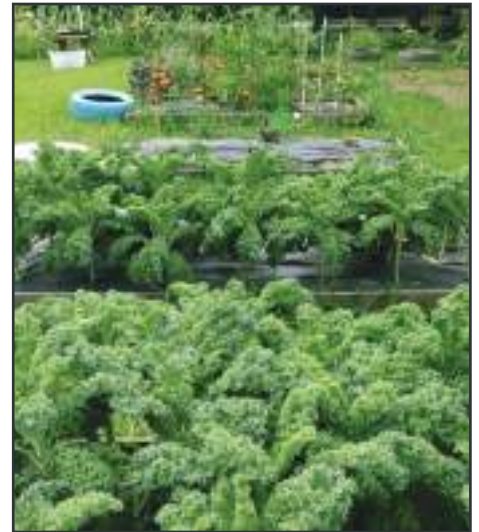
Conservation and Natural Resources (PA DCNR).

Stormwater Management

Stormwater is the runoff of rain and snow melt from impervious surfaces such as roofs, driveways, sidewalks, parking lots, and streets. Unmanaged stormwater causes flooding, combined sewer overflows and soil erosion.

The City of New Castle (the City) has established a Stormwater Program and User Fee to create a dedicated funding source for the operation and maintenance of the City's extensive stormwater infrastructure. All developed parcels in the City will be required to pay the fee, which is based on the impervious coverage of the parcel. Single Family Detached Residential Homes will be billed at a flat rate of \$72 per year. All other property owners, including businesses, churches, government buildings, and non-taxable organizations will be assessed a fee based on impervious area.

A credit program has been developed per the City of New Castle Ordinance Article 933-Stormwater Management Program and User Fee to allow owners to apply for a credit for implementing and maintaining stormwater best management practices (BMPs), such as rain gardens, bioswales and wetlands, on their parcel(s). By implementing such measures, parcel owners are helping to reduce the demand on the existing system or related City services. More information is available online at http://www.newcastlepa.org/Departments/Stormwater/Credit_Manual_with_Forms.pdf.



Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful's 2019 Affiliate Volunteers of the Year!



Tri-County Cleanways (serving Butler, Lawrence and Mercer counties) - **Kenneth Rice, Sr.**, first volunteered with Tri-County CleanWays for a cleanup of the Lower East Side Community in April 2019. Since then, he and Tri-County CleanWays have worked together, with neighbors, to transform previously abandoned lots into a community garden that include an edible rain garden and compost area. The Rice family purchased the lots a few years ago with the idea of feeding families in need for free. In 2019, the crops have helped feed over 50 families. Ken spends a significant amount of time researching ideas on maintaining and improving the gardens and has plans to offer composting seminars and sessions on how to prepare some of the vegetables grown. The family has already purchased an additional abandoned lot in a different section of New Castle with the goal of creating another active community garden project to empower those residents.



Readiness Assessment:

Weak but improving

Assets:

- Positive media coverage of neighborhood activities
- Community cleanups and events

Challenges:

- Property maintenance
- Lower East Side name has a negative connotation

Image & Identity

“Image refers to how the neighborhood is viewed by non-residents: Main Street / downtown business owners, regional citizens, daytime workers, city employees and local officials, and residents of adjacent or nearby neighborhoods. Identity describes how residents view or feel about their own neighborhood—for example, whether they view it as safe, friendly, and attractive. It is not uncommon for the identity of a neighborhood to contradict its image in the region.

A neighborhood’s image will often impact the perceived desirability of homes in the neighborhood and the level of investment in the area. It can also influence the application of revitalization or other programs, as a neighborhood generally thought to be “hopeless” or too “tough” could have a harder time attracting program dollars. It can also impact how residents feel about their own community over time, especially if the area receives a lot of media attention for criminal activity.

Identity is more closely tied to whether residents become engaged in their own community, whether they desire or plan to stay, and whether they invest in updates and repairs to their own properties. Just as image can affect neighborhood identity, identity can impact image over time, especially when property owners and residents see their neighborhood as a good place to live. Residents with a strong sense of neighborhood identity translate this vision into regular home maintenance, care in selecting tenants for rentals, the sustenance of an active neighborhood association, and well-attended neighborhood events.”¹

Branding & Communication

All of the efforts over the last few years have really started to make a difference with regard to the image and identity of the Lower East Side neighborhood. Residents are starting to see investments made into their community and it is snowballing. Vacant lots have become community gardens. Abandoned homes have been

¹ https://padowntown.org/assets/pdfs/resources/Introducing_TheElmStreetApproach-1573143829.pdf

rehabbed into new housing. New sidewalks line the streets. And this is all making the news. One only has to do an internet search for “Lower East Side New Castle” to see many news articles pop up about the various projects and events that have been happening in the neighborhood.

However, there continue to be a few challenges facing the neighborhood with regard to image and identity.

Property maintenance is a challenge for some residents. Not because they do not want to do it, but many cannot afford to improve their homes/properties. In addition, many residents are worried that if they improve their property, their taxes will go up.

Another issue that was raised at the initial Elm Street meeting was the image presented by the name “Lower East Side.” Many feel that the word “lower” presents a negative connotation in that the neighborhood is less than and downtrodden. The public survey asked what the residents felt about the name, but the results were mixed. Suggestions to change the name mostly focused on the Courthouse as the central figure of the neighborhood.

Communication is almost always an issue. How do people find out about community events? Many do not read the newspaper. The City of New Castle has an active Facebook group and the Lower East Side Community Garden started its own Facebook page in 2019, which has 500+ followers.

Community Events

Tri-County CleanWays coordinates cleanups with residents, groups and communities where there is interest/local ownership throughout the year (usually spring). Many residents expressed a desire to see these occur more often and Tri-County expressed an interest in assisting with making this an annual event.

The Lower East Side Community garden hosted an unveiling of its rain collection unit in September of 2019.

The Bible Way Church of God in Christ hosts an annual community day near the end of summer.



Respondents are **DIVIDED** as to whether or not the **NAME** of the neighborhood gives a **NEGATIVE IMAGE**





Readiness Assessment:
Strong and Improving

Assets:

- DON Enterprises
- Strong relationships with local community organizations, Lawrence County and the City of New Castle

Challenges:

- Funding



Sustainable Organization

“Neighborhood revitalization requires the knitting together of many varied threads of activity. Factors as distinct as safety, building conditions, income levels, public school performance, cleanliness, and residents’ level of engagement, to name a few, play a significant role in neighborhood stability. Coordinating activities and programs that can identify and address problems across this diverse spectrum calls for an organization capable of operating flexibly and efficiently, often through partnering with other groups and public agencies.

One of the most difficult challenges of the Elm Street Program is ensuring that efforts in a given community continue after public funding for operations end. For most organizations, this means a five-year stretch of support. Because neighborhood revitalization is generally a much longer-term effort, Elm Street organizations need to be able to continue beyond the state program’s projected funding cycle. Thus, the Elm Street Program is giving priority to identifying and increasing sustainability in the local implementing organizations. Sustainable means having stability in leadership, governance, finances, and staffing.”¹

Elm Street Organizations

One of the assets in the community is that there are many organizations and people in the Lower East Side that are willing to help. One of the challenges listed was that the organizations sometimes can work independently of each other.

DON has partnered with various organizations in the Lower East Side on multiple projects, including the funding of the Elm Street Plan. Additionally, DON has proven themselves by the homes they have built, their participation in the blight task force, their successful acquisition of funding sources and their amazing rapport with the local residents, property owners, and New Castle officials. These qualities make DON the ideal candidate to lead the Elm Street Program and be the sustaining organization in the Lower East Side.

¹ https://padowntown.org/assets/pdfs/resources/Introducing_TheElmStreetApproach-1573143829.pdf

Partner Organizations

- Lawrence County Department of Planning and Community Development (LCDPCD) has been a longtime partner in community revitalization and assisting the City of New Castle, DON Enterprises and other organizations with projects in the Lower East Side, including funding assistance, grant writing, technical assistance and conservation efforts. (<https://co.lawrence.pa.us/departments/planning-community-development/>)
- The Lawrence County Land Bank (LCLB) has also played an integral role in the revitalization efforts in the Lower East Side. Since their creation in 2016, they have provided several of the properties to DON Enterprises for housing demolition and rehabilitation. The mission of the LCLB is to strategically acquire distressed properties and return them to productive, tax-paying use. The LCLB helps to reduce blight; stabilize neighborhoods and property values; promote neighborhood reinvestment and economic development opportunities; and improve the quality of life in Lawrence County. (<https://co.lawrence.pa.us/departments/land-bank/>)
- The Lawrence County Board of Realtors prides themselves in helping its local communities when they are in need. The Board advocates to protect property rights and homeownership. Realtor members joined New Castle's Blight Task force which made recommendations to the City to begin revitalization. As they are one of the main supporters of the Elm Street Plan, their work and involvement have been invaluable. (<http://lcb.org/HomePage.php>)
- New Visions for Lawrence County is a New Castle based non-profit with a mission to "establish Lawrence County as a more desirable community in which to live, work and play." They work to increase pedestrian activity in downtown New Castle, partner with other organizations towards a better community and motivate locals to help. They also have a beautification program where they plant flowers and clean up their communities. (<https://www.newvisionslc.org/>)





- The Lawrence County Community Action Partnership is an agency that provides education, employment, transportation, housing and childcare services to the citizens of Lawrence County. Their specific programs include free income tax services, GED/HSE testing services and parenting classes. Specific to housing, they provide weatherization services, rental subsidies and housing rehabilitation programs. (<https://lccap.org/>)



- Tri-County CleanWays is a grassroots 501(c)(3) charitable organization serving Butler, Lawrence, and Mercer Counties. They work with people who want to clean and beautify their communities. Tri-County CleanWays coordinates illegal dump and litter cleanups, recycling events for hard-to-dispose items, beautification projects, and public education efforts. The group was an integral part in the creation of the Lower East Side Community Garden and other efforts to clean the neighborhood. (<https://www.facebook.com/TriCountyCleanWays/>)



- The Hoyt Art Center offers a variety of arts and educational programs and events, with a mission to expand and enrich the life of the community through participation in the arts. They use events, programs and classes to help local residents cultivate their artistic abilities. Their program helped with the rain collection units at the community garden in the Lower East Side. (<https://hoytartcenter.org/>)



- Lawrence County Habitat for Humanity is Lawrence County's local Habitat affiliate, organized in 1995. In June 2019, they completed construction on their 26th home in the County. Habitat for Humanity seeks to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness from the world, and to make decent shelter a matter of conscience and action. Habitat invites people of all backgrounds, races and religions to build houses together in partnership with families in need, and then sell the houses to the homeowner partners. Homeowners are selected by local affiliates based on their need for housing, ability to repay a no-profit mortgage, and willingness to partner with Habitat. Mortgage payments contribute to a Fund for Humanity, which in turn provides the money to build more

houses. Because of Habitat's no-interest, no-profit loans, and because the houses are principally built with volunteer labor, mortgage payments are affordable for low-income partners. (<http://www.lawrencecountyhfh.org/>).

- The United Way of Lawrence County (UWLC) operates with the mission to increase the organized capacity of people to care for one another. The UWLC hosts a number of community events as well as programs in New Castle throughout the year, including the Summer Food Program, Day of Caring and an annual blanket drive. (<https://www.uwlawcty.org/>)
- The Neighborhood Legal Services, Lawrence County Office, serves to meet the civil legal needs of the poor and vulnerable in the community through effective legal representation and education. This office of Neighborhood Legal Services provides free legal representation to eligible clients in Lawrence County. (<http://www.nlsa.us>)
- Bibleway Church of God in Christ, located in the Lower East Side, is a church that gives back to its local community. The church is the venue for community meetings and they also hold several events such as their Annual Community Day. (<http://bibleway.church/>)





Chapter 4

Goals & Strategies



The goals of this Elm Street Plan reflect the assets and challenges identified in the previous chapter. The same public input and information gathering that was used to determine the existing conditions was used to establish the goals and strategies for each of the areas in the 5-Point Approach.

A 5-year implementation strategy was then created to help DON Enterprises and its partners with the specifics of carrying out the strategies. The implementation strategy identifies:

- What will get done. The strategies and potential actions that should be completed to achieve the goal.
- Who should DON Enterprises partner with? The organizations were provided with the draft plan and asked to identify which strategies align with their mission and where they see the best fit for partnerships.
- What is the priority level? High priorities are those that should be undertaken within the first two years; Medium are those that should be undertaken within the first four years; Low priorities are those that should be undertaken starting in year five and beyond. The priorities were assigned with input from the Steering Committee.
- What level of effort is required? Each strategy was assigned a code to reflect the amount of planning, coordination, partnership and/or funding required.



Easy to accomplish with minimal partners and little or no cost.



Three months coordinated planning, requires partners and funding.



Six months or more extensive planning, partners and/or funding are required.

ACRONYMS FOR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS:

- City = City of New Castle
- Hoyt = Hoyt Art Center
- LCBR = Lawrence County Board of Realtors
- LCCAP = Lawrence County Community Action Partnership
- LCCD = Lawrence County Conservation District
- LCDPCD = Lawrence County Department of Planning and Community Development
- LCLB = Lawrence County Land Bank
- LCHH = Lawrence County Habitat for Humanity
- LCTPA = Lawrence County Tourist Promotion Agency
- LMR - Lawrence-Mercer Recycling/Solid Waste Department
- NCASD = New Castle Area School District
- NLS = Neighborhood Legal Services, Lawrence County Office
- PennDOT = Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
- PA DCED = Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development
- PA DCNR = Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- Regional Chamber = Lawrence County Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Tri-County = Tri-County CleanWays
- UWLC = United Way of Lawrence County



Neighbors & Economy

Potential Partner Organizations

Effort Required

Priority Level

GOAL 1: Increase homeownership rates and housing values.

1A: Sponsor an annual homeowner workshop.
 - Provide seminars on home maintenance; homeownership and renovation programs; façade programs; weatherization services; financial management; transportation; rent/mortgage/food/utility assistance; education; employment; etc.
 - Educate residents about rent-to-own and other potential homebuying programs so they can make educated and informed choices

City; LCDPCD; LCCAP; LCBR



High

1B: Provide more affordable housing through partnerships with developers and housing agencies to pursue infill development opportunities.

City; LCCAP; LCHH



High

GOAL 2: Increase the occupancy of the commercial buildings/storefronts in the neighborhood.

2A: Market the available buildings/storefronts
 - Utilize the existing Regional Chamber of Commerce website.

Regional Chamber



Medium

2B: Conduct an annual inventory of commercial properties to track occupancy..

City; LCBR



Medium

GOAL 3: Encourage a more diverse housing stock.

3A: Consider revising the zoning ordinance to increase the area that is zoned as R-3 Multi-Family Residential.
 - Most of the area is zoned as either R-1 or R-2. The only area that is R-3 is along North Croton. Discussions should take place to determine community support for re-zoning the R-2 District to R-3.

City; LCDPCD



Low

3B: Work with the County Land Bank to assemble a larger site that can accommodate townhouses or a small multi-family housing development.

City; LCDPCD; LCLB



High

3C: Continue to develop universally designed single-story homes that are ADA accessible.

City; LCCAP









High



Design

	Potential Partner Organizations	Effort Required	Priority Level
Goal 1: Create a system to provide consistent code enforcement of all properties.			
1A: Review existing process of reporting and investigating code violations.	City	◆	High
1B: Develop a working relationship between the (proposed) Elm Street Manager and City Code Enforcement Department. - Utilize the Elm Street Manager as a point of contact for neighborhood complaints about possible code violations (weeds, lack of permits, etc.). - Code Enforcement should report back to the Elm Street Manager for follow-up measures.	City	◆◆	Medium
1C: Develop a brochure explaining process for investigating code violations, follow up procedures, court process and penalties for violators. - Hold informational meetings for residents to increase understanding of the process, limitations and responsibilities of the City and property owners.	City	◆	Medium
1D: Establish a pre-registration process through the Tax Claim Bureau so that those with code violations can be disqualified for tax sales.	City	◆◆	Low
1E: Increase rental housing inspections.	City	◆◆	Medium
Goal 2: Improve curb appeal.			
2A: Improve gateway entrances into the neighborhood. - North Croton Avenue at North Street Bridge - Near the NCATA Transit Station - Near the Courthouse (vacant lot at 422/Countyline Street)	PennDOT PA DCED PA DCNR	◆◆	High
2B: Extend the streetscape efforts from Downtown into the Neighborhood. - East Washington Avenue from the East Street Bridge to Countyline Street. - North Croton Avenue from the East Street Bridge to the North Street Bridge.	PennDOT PA DCED	◆◆◆	Low

Design	Potential Partner Organizations	Effort Required	Priority Level
Goal 3: Increase private and public investment in the neighborhood.			
3A: Establish a Façade improvement program for homeowners.	City		Medium
3B: Review and inventory existing housing assistance programs currently available to the residents of the Lower East Side. - Develop a resource manual for existing programs and identify gaps. - Obtain more funding for existing programs. - Establish new programs to address gaps.	City; LCDPCD		High
3C: Develop programs to encourage general property maintenance (painting, pressure washing, weeding) and assist persons unable to complete regular maintenance. - Partner with the New Castle School District and/or Adult/Youth probation to assist in minor maintenance (weeding, painting projects, snow removal, litter removal). - Create a “community tools” program providing basic maintenance equipment for residents’ use at reduced fee (ie: pressure washer, ladders, air compressor, etc) - Sponsor summer faith based youth groups to assist residents in basic maintenance programs. Residents can register for assistance based on age, income, etc.	City; LCDPCD; NCASD; UWLC		Medium
3D: Identify and apply for Neighborhood Improvement Programs	City; PA DCED		Medium
Goal 4: Rehabilitate vacant/unoccupied properties for property review .			
4A: Establish a vacant property review system. - Create a Property Review Board to determine if vacant homes are blighted (utilize the Elm Street property inventory as a base resource) and decide if: a) the homes should be condemned and resold/renovated, b) demolished with a lien on the property to help recoup demolition costs or resold to adjacent property owners or c) converted to public open space.	City; LCDPCD		Medium
4B: Secure funds and implement recommendations of the Property Review Board.	City; LCDPCD		Low



Clean, Safe & Green

	Potential Partner Organizations	Effort Required	Priority Level
GOAL 1: Deter crime and criminal activity.			
1A: Increase awareness of the Lower East Side Neighborhood Watch. - Post signs throughout the neighborhood. The Watch has the signs but has not yet installed them. - Request that the Watch be added to the City of New Castle Police Department website to be recognized as an official Watch group. - Continue to hold monthly meetings and encourage more residents to join. - Create a Lower East Side Neighborhood Watch Facebook Group to post news / events.	City; Lower East Side Neighborhood Watch		High
1B: Install police cameras throughout the neighborhood. - Support the Police Department in future grant efforts for more cameras. - Encourage property owners to partner with the Police to utilize their WiFi for the cameras.	City		High
1C: Provide more streetlights. - Identified priority areas include McClain Ave Park, Bible Way Church of God in Christ (parking lot across the street).	City		Medium
1D: Create a campaign to encourage residents to light their homes - Encouraging residents to turn on their outdoor lights would provide a lot of necessary lighting in the neighborhood.	City; Lower East Side Neighborhood Watch		Low
GOAL 2: Improve connectivity.			
2A: Work with the Water Authority and Gas Company to plan sidewalk replacement projects with planned waterline/gas line replacement projects.	Water Authority; Gas Company		High
2B: Develop a prioritized multi-year sidewalk improvement/replacement plan. - Work with the City to utilize a GIS-based system to trace improvements and plan for replacement projects. - Work with the City to utilize CDBG funds for sidewalk improvement/ replacement projects.	City; LCDPCD		High








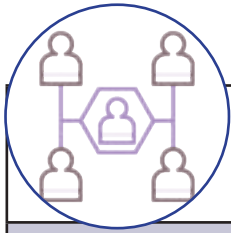
Clean, Safe & Green	Potential Partner Organizations	Effort Required	Priority Level
2C: Determine the feasibility of developing a formal trail between the Courthouse and North Croton Avenue. -There is an informal trail that people have used in the past but it is dangerous (steep hillside, unlit).	City LCDPCD		Medium
2D: Utilize PA Safe Routes to School and Safe Routes to Parks to improve the sidewalk connections to the Lockley School and McClain Avenue Park.	City; LCDPCD		Low
2E: Create visible bus stops and/or shelters throughout the neighborhood.	NCATA		Medium
GOAL 3: Improve the appearance and effectiveness of public spaces.			
3A: Improve McClain Ave Park - Create an entrance near the intersection of Court Street and Connor Avenue. - Trim overgrown brush / shrubs along Court Street and Connor Avenue. - Install signs at entrances to the park. - Resurface the basketball court and replace fencing. - Develop a master site plan for the park to determine what additional facilities may be warranted and provide an overall design. - Host community events and programs at the park to increase public awareness and park usage. Consider holding a summer playground program.	City LCDPCD; PA DCNR		High
3B: Acquire vacant property and create more community gardens, pocket parks and/or more Urban Conservation Areas. - Make sure the sites are in well-lit and high traffic areas. - Determine the ability of the City Public Works Dept and/or volunteers to maintain additional sites.	City LCCD PA DCNR		Low
3C: Continue to host semi-annual cleanup events. - Publicize hard-to-recycle events. - Continue to host events and programs on stormwater management at the community garden.	City; Hoyt; LCCD; LMR; Tri-County; UWLC		High
3D: Create a sustainable waste management and recycling collection system.	City; LCCD; LMR; Tri-County		Medium



Image and Identity

	Potential Partner Organizations	Effort Required	Priority Level
Goal 1: Actively engage and educate neighborhood residents about community events and programs.			
1A: Market the available programs re: legal services, home ownership, home improvement loans, homeowners insurance, code enforcement, healthy living.	City; LCCAP; NLS	◆	High
1B: Install community bulletin boards / kiosks at gateways, parks and community gardens to disseminate community information.	City; Hoyt	◆◆	High
1C: Host semi-annual community events (i.e. block parties) to unite the community, celebrate neighborhood revitalization/promote accomplishments, recruit volunteers and educate residents on available programs and resources.	City; All Community Organizations	◆◆	High
1D: Develop a website to promote, educate and inform the neighborhood about projects, programs, grants and resources. - Develop partnerships and coordinate efforts/activities, resources and volunteers. - Utilize the Bible Way Church of God in Christ as a neighborhood resource center that offers educational information, pamphlets, etc.	City	◆◆◆	Medium
Goal 2: Improve the overall perception of the Lower East Side.			
2A: Rebrand the community. - Consider changing the name to something more reflective of the Courthouse and develop a logo. - Install banners along the main corridors. - Include the name on all public signs (i.e. parks, community gardens).	City; LCTPA	◆◆◆	High
2B: Develop a neighborhood flyer to provide to realtors that promotes positive aspects of neighborhood (school, park, garden, etc.).	City	◆	Low
2C: Continue to work with the local media to publicize revitalization efforts and positive news coverage of the neighborhood.	City	◆	Medium
2D: Design and install banners throughout the area.	City; LCTPA	◆◆◆	Low



Sustainable Organization

	Potential Partner Organizations	Effort Required	Priority Level
Goal 1: Obtain Elm Street Designation.			
1A: Submit an application to become an Elm Street Community.	City; LCDPCD	◆	High
1B: Create permanent Elm Street Committees. - Establish a Committee for each of the Five-Point Approaches.	City; All Community Organizations	◆◆	High
1C: Join the PA Downtown Center	City	◆	Medium
Goal 2: Formalize current efforts			
2A: Designate a liaison to work with the City of New Castle. - Report to City Council - Communicate with City Departments - i.e. Community and Economic Development, Code Enforcement, Police Department, Public Works	City	◆	High
2B: Designate a volunteer coordinator. - Establish an office with phone, web and e-mail address to serve as a clearinghouse for all volunteer activities. - Establish training schedule for volunteer coordinator to include topics such as: management of volunteers, interviewing techniques, media training, and recruitment techniques. - Conduct assessment of volunteer strengths and weaknesses to ensure efficiency and assist in keeping volunteers motivated. - Conduct a "Volunteer Fair" to highlight successes to date and further recruiting efforts. - Establish recognition program for volunteers.	City; Regional Chamber	◆◆	Medium
2C: Establish sponsorship programs. - Develop presentations specific to corporate sponsors. Discuss different types of sponsorship to include man hours/ products or services, cash support, and underwriting events.	City; Regional Chamber	◆◆	Low

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Lower East Side New Castle

Elm Street Plan