HEALTHY- WALKABLE- SUSTAINABLE

South Side, New Castle

10,000 Friends Community Assessment

Issue Date: 12.15.2016
Page Intentionally Left Blank
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Healthy & Walkable Community Assessment and Plan from 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania is the culmination of a nearly year-long collaborative engagement and learning process in the South Side neighborhood of New Castle, PA. Our profound thanks go to the citizens, business community, non-profit institutions, and city government of New Castle, for bringing their insights, imagination, and passion for the neighborhood to our planning process. Our assessment and plan was enriched by the input and participation of many individuals and community groups in New Castle and from across our networks at 10,000 Friends.

This effort to make the South Side healthier would not be possible without the leadership and generous financial support of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, the UPMC Health Plan and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. We are very grateful for their support.

10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania would like to gratefully acknowledge the following individuals and organizations for their contributions.

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
   Mayor Anthony Mastrangelo

NEW CASTLE CITY COUNCIL

CITY OF NEW CASTLE
   Stephanie Dean, Business Administrator
   Tamara Gibson, Coordinator of Economic Development
   Michael Rooney, Public Works
   Robert Salem, Police Chief
   Brian XXXXXX, Public Works

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH MEDICAL CENTER
   Scott Lammie, UPMC Health Plan
   Maris Bondi, UPMC Health Plan
   Douglas Danko, UPMC Jameson

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
   Kim Thomas, Regional Director

LAWRENCE COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP
   Tom Scott, CEO
   Jennifer Elliott, Special Assistant

   Gussie M. Walker Community Outreach Organization
   Members of the South Side business community
   Linda Nitch, Lawrence County Economic Development Corporation
   D. Lynn Richardson, Lawrence County Economic Development Corporation
   Gene DiGennaro, Housing Authority of the County of Lawrence
   Dave Richards, New Castle Area Transit Authority
   New Castle Blueprint Communities Committee
   Kimberly Koller-Jones, Arts & Education at the Hoyt
   U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
   Lawrence County Board of Commissioners
   Lawrence County Department of Planning & Community Development

10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania would like to credit and thank, for their ongoing and dogged efforts on behalf of our Healthy & Walkable Communities initiative, our team of visionary professionals working on this South Side New Castle engagement:

   Jack Machek, 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania
   Tom Hardy, Palo Alto Consulting
   Cindy Gormley, Cynthia Gormley Consulting
   John DiMuccio, Plus Two Consulting
   Dan Wofford, 10,000 Friends Consultant
   Isabelle Wozniak, 10,000 Friends Consultant
   Joe Hackett, LaQuatra Bonci Associates
   Jeremy Brown, LaQuatra Bonci Associates
   RAR Engineering
   Ron Rizzo
   10,000 Friends Board of Directors
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary ............................................................................................................. 3  
Introduction .................................................................................................................. 3  
Process & Methodology ................................................................................................. 3  
Neighborhood Conditions .............................................................................................. 3  
Priority Recommendations ............................................................................................ 4  
Introduction .................................................................................................................. 7  
10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania ...................................................................................... 7  
“Healthy & Walkable Communities” Framework .......................................................... 8  
Process & Methodology ................................................................................................. 11  
Review of Existing Plans & Initiatives ........................................................................... 12  
Neighborhood Assessment ............................................................................................ 13  
Assets ............................................................................................................................ 13  
Demographics ............................................................................................................... 13  
Housing Conditions ...................................................................................................... 14  
Recommendations ......................................................................................................... 16  
Priority Recommendations ........................................................................................... 16  
Future Opportunities & Long-Term Recommendations .................................................. 24  
Future Southside Project Opportunities Summary ....................................................... 37  
Appendix A .................................................................................................................... 39  
Works Cited .................................................................................................................. 40  
Map Reference .............................................................................................................. 45
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

As part of its Healthy and Walkable Community Action Team, 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania engaged New Castle stakeholders in an initial planning process for the City’s South Side neighborhood. The engagement was supported by the Pennsylvania’s Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) through its Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) and an investment by UPMC Health Plan. This initial planning process gathered data and established priorities for implementation. This document should be used as a resource guide -- additional land use planning work directed by New Castle stakeholders will occur in future phases.

Process & Methodology

10,000 Friends staff and consultants drew from previous planning efforts as well as primary research. A basic conditions assessment was completed of residential properties, and interviews with a broad range of stakeholders were completed. Consultants were engaged to illustrate initial concepts, with the expectation that these could assist with fundraising for implementation. 10,000 Friends staff screened potential longer-term opportunities using its Healthy and Walkable Framework of twelve eligible project categories. While many of these opportunities that stakeholders mentioned are aspirational, they provide the basis for a compelling long-term vision.

Neighborhood Conditions

Like many of Pennsylvania’s older mid-sized cities, New Castle suffers from continuing population loss and economic weakness. The South Side neighborhood epitomizes New Castle’s challenges and opportunities. South Side’s housing stock suffers from deferred maintenance, and a high degree of vacancy. Within the neighborhood, however, there are pockets of well-maintained owner-occupied homes. The neighborhood continues to lose population, and those that remain tend to have incomes that are below the City’s average income.

The South Side benefits from a number of assets which can serve as the core of a revitalization strategy. The neighborhood is home to the New Castle Playhouse, a nearly seventy-year old theatre company that draws visitors from throughout the region. Two well-known restaurants, Mary’s and Big Pauly’s Sports Bar, anchor the small business district centered around the Mill Street and Long Avenue intersection. There are several strong and growing businesses such as Nick’s Auto Body and Central Heating and Plumbing. The Gussie Walker Community Outreach Organization is a non-profit on the South Side that offers important after-school programming to children.
Priority Recommendations

New Castle’s South Side reflects the conditions typically found in a weak market near the urban core. These conditions are not quickly or easily reversed. Much of what 10,000 Friends staff and consultants heard from stakeholders in the community planning process was the desire to improve the quality of life in the South Side. As a result, the initial recommendations reflect early stage community improvement tactics.

Priority areas include: 1) Improve the physical condition of the neighborhood, 2) Expand existing services for neighborhood residents and stakeholders, and 3) Capitalize on site specific opportunities. See Figure 1.

Improve the Physical Condition of the Neighborhood Residential Revitalization Strategy Area

As seen in Figure 1, 10,000 Friends recommends designating and prioritizing an informal but targeted Residential Revitalization Strategy Area, bounded by Big Run Creek, Grimes Street, City Line Street, and East Long Avenue. Within the Residential Revitalization Strategy Area, priority recommendations are to:

- **Focus on Owner Occupied Home Rehabilitations / Expansion of Lawrence County Community Action Program (LCCAP)** – This existing program targets blocks adjacent to Big Run Creek in an area bound by Galbreath Street and Carl Street. We suggest expanding this to include a slightly larger geography that would extend up to East Long Avenue, which helps connect the housing improvements to the business district. Targeting transitional blocks that have an existing base of stable homes will help to prevent further decline. Work includes both owner occupied-rehab and lead-paint abatement programs.

- **Undertake Selective Demolition** – The City’s funding for demolition is not sufficient to address the number of existing condemned properties. Targeting these resources towards highly visible properties in the Residential Revitalization Strategy Area, particularly in collaboration with other complementary efforts such as housing rehabilitations will maximize the impact of limited funding.

- **Secure Vacant or Under-Utilized Properties Not Scheduled for Demolition** – Structures deemed in sufficiently good condition to be rehabilitated must be secured to prevent vandalism and further deterioration of the property. If owners are absent or can’t be located, buildings may need to be secured with City forces.

- **Ensure an Operational Land Bank** – A functional land bank helps address the issues of property abandonment and tax delinquency. The City has explored the formation of a land bank, and operationalizing this entity is an important first step in returning properties to the tax rolls and productive use. An immediate short-term application of the land bank is to create a side yard program allowing existing homeowners to purchase adjacent vacant lots, and return them to the tax rolls.

- **Address Stormwater Management along the Big Run** – Previous flooding along the Big Run damaged adjacent homes and businesses. Stormwater management solutions in this area should include the use of green infrastructure, to protect the surrounding area from future flooding.
Figure 1 – Healthy & Walkable Community Project Map
Expand Existing Services for Neighborhood Residents and Stakeholders

- **Formation of a Business Association** – The South Side's strong business community is one of the neighborhood's strongest assets. Previously there was a neighborhood business improvement association, but that no longer exists. We recommend re-establishing this organization to create a level of civic engagement that can oversee the implementation of neighborhood improvements.

- **Gussie Walker Outreach Organization** – The Gussie Walker Outreach Organization is a non-profit organization operating on the South Side. The Outreach Organization provides after school enrichment and other services to school aged children. The Outreach Organization is looking for opportunities to expand into a larger space which could serve as an important anchor building for the neighborhood.

- **Project Oasis** – This program is operated by the District Attorney's office and is focused on effecting neighborhood change by coordinating various law enforcement, human service, and public works agencies. Project Oasis helps address the social and economic issues in the neighborhood, which helps to complement the other site specific recommendations.

Capitalize on Site Specific Opportunities

- **Earl A. Muff Sallie Field** – Discussions with local stakeholders prioritized the replacement of outdated and damaged playground equipment, along with increasing programming of the park. The United Way of Lawrence County is one potential partner in programming youth activities for the park. With updated equipment and programming, the field can serve as an important asset for the neighborhood, connecting with the adjacent residential area that has been targeted for home improvement funding.

- **Long Avenue and Mill Street Streetscape and Multi-Modal Improvements** – The intersection of Long Avenue and Mill Street serves is the center of the South Side’s neighborhood business district. Several stakeholders expressed concern about the speed of traffic down East Long Avenue and the need for pedestrian safety improvements. In addition, the opportunity should be seized to create a bicycle connection to downtown and the Neshannock Creek trail via the addition of a bike lane along Mill Street. Streetscaping improvements along West Long Avenue and Mill Street (north to Lutton Street) should include pedestrian safety and crosswalk features; traffic calming bump outs; street trees, street furniture, and lighting; new sidewalks incorporating green infrastructure features; and other improvements consistent with a Complete Streets policy.

- **UPMC Jameson Hospital South Side Campus Site-Specific Assessment** – UPMC Jameson's South Campus has more than 300,000 square feet of building space occupying over four acres of land. UPMC Jameson is consolidating services into its North Hill location. Assisting with the relocation of the remaining services, including a privately operated personal care home, to ensure that they continue to operate is important. Additionally, a feasibility study and plan for the donation and re-use of the site will help in marketing the site to potential new users.
INTRODUCTION

10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania

10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania is a statewide non-profit organization focused on creating great places to live, work, and play. Our Healthy Communities initiative focuses on urban areas that have lost population and market strength yet retain many of the building blocks necessary for redevelopment. These include access to public transit and local employers, parks, and a decent and affordable housing stock. We chose New Castle’s South Side neighborhood as a pilot project based on the existence of these characteristics as well as the ground work that elected officials and community leaders have done to improve the quality of life in the community.

Our planning work is asset based. We worked with local stakeholders to define strategies and related projects based on the identification of assets and evaluation of markets. Projects typically fall in any one of the following twelve focus areas, all of which are related to the core idea of community health and walkability.

Healthy & Walkable Community Focus Areas:

1) Affordable, Safe, & Mixed-Income Housing
2) Business District Commercial & Retail Development
3) Art, Cultural, and Historic Assets & Districts
4) Blight Removal Strategies
5) Multi-Modal Transportation & Walkability Improvements
6) Inclusionary Land Use, Shared Transportation, & Complete Streets Programs
7) Greenspace, Parks, Trails & Playground Improvements
8) Better Access to Fresh & Healthy Foods
9) Neighborhood School Preservation or Re-Use
10) Green Infrastructure
11) Community Services & Partnerships
12) Public Safety and Municipal Policies & Codes

Most early stage projects focus around physical improvements, particularly blight removal and providing additional greenspace and improvement to parks and other basic amenities. These are the basic building blocks that can help stabilize markets, and help improve the quality of life for the existing population base. As population stabilizes, future phase projects often include market-rate housing and business development.
Why 10,000 Friends Developed a “Healthy & Walkable Communities” Framework for its Community Development Technical Assistance

In 2015, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a new and urgent “Call to Action to Promote Walking and more Walkable Communities in the United States.” This Call to Action was issued in response to years of mounting research evidence that community design that encourages sedentary lifestyles was contributing mightily to a growing obesity epidemic. The Surgeon General made the case, stating:

“One out of every two U.S. adults is living with a chronic disease, such as heart disease, cancer, or diabetes. These diseases contribute to disability, premature death, and health care costs. Increasing people’s physical activity levels will significantly reduce their risk of chronic diseases and related risk factors. Because physical activity has numerous other health benefits—such as supporting positive mental health and healthy aging—it is one of the most important actions people can take to improve their overall health.

The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Promote Walking and Walkable Communities recognizes the importance of physical activity for people of all ages and abilities. It calls on Americans to be more physically active through walking and calls on the nation to better support walking and walkability. Improving walkability means that communities are created or enhanced to make it safe and easy to walk and that pedestrian activity is encouraged for all people. The purpose of the Call to Action is to increase walking across the United States by calling for improved access to safe and convenient places to walk and wheelchair roll and by creating a culture that supports these activities for people of all ages and abilities.

The Call to Action includes strategic goals to promote walking and walkable communities in the United States: make walking a national priority; design communities that make it safe and easy to walk for people of all ages and abilities; and promote programs and policies to support walking where people live, learn, work, and play. Action by multiple sectors and professions working in a community, as well as by families and individual residents themselves, are needed to achieve these goals.

Physical Activity: An Essential Ingredient for Health

Being physically active is one of the most important steps that people of all ages and abilities can take to improve their health. Increasing people’s physical activity level will significantly reduce their risk of chronic disease and premature death and support positive mental health and healthy aging.

Chronic Disease in the United States

Chronic diseases are the leading causes of death in the United States and major contributors to disability. In 2012, almost 50% of U.S. adults, or 117 million people, were living with a chronic
disease, and of this group, about 60 million were living with two or more chronic diseases.¹ Chronic diseases also ranked as four of the top five most costly medical conditions.⁷

**Benefits of Physical Activity**

Physical activity can reduce illness from chronic diseases and premature death.⁴,⁵ Regular physical activity helps prevent risk factors for disease (such as high blood pressure and weight gain) and protects against multiple chronic diseases (such as heart disease, stroke, some cancers, type 2 diabetes, and depression).⁴,⁵ In children and adolescents, physical activity can improve bone health, cardio respiratory and muscular fitness, and body composition.⁴,⁵

People living with chronic disease also benefit from being physically active.⁴,⁸-²⁰ For example, physical activity can lessen the severity of their condition, as well as prevent disease progression and premature death,⁴,¹²-¹⁶ help manage or reduce symptoms,⁸-¹¹ and improve mobility.¹³,¹⁶

Among adults, physical activity is associated with improved quality of life,⁴,²¹,²² emotional well-being,⁴,²³,²⁴ and positive mental health.⁴,²³-²⁵ Regular physical activity is also important for healthy aging⁵ and may delay the onset of cognitive decline in older adults.⁴,²⁶-²⁸

In children and adolescents, some evidence suggests that physical activity can lower levels of anxiety and depression.⁴,²⁹-³¹

**Physical Activity in the United States**

Despite the health benefits, only one-half of U.S. adults reported levels of physical activity consistent with the guideline for aerobic physical activity in 2013.³⁴ Adults who were male, younger, white, or Asian or who had higher levels of education were more likely to have met the aerobic physical activity guideline.³⁴

Only 27% of high school students reported levels of physical activity that met the guideline for 60 minutes of physical activity a day in 2013.³⁵

**Why Focus on Walking as a Public Health Strategy?**

Strong evidence exists that physical activity has substantial health benefits.⁴,⁵ People can get these benefits through brisk walking or by adding brisk walking to other physical activities.⁵ Walking is an excellent way for most Americans to increase their physical activity. It is also a powerful public health strategy for several reasons.

Walking does not require special skills, facilities, or expensive equipment and is an easy physical activity to begin and maintain as part of a physically active lifestyle.³⁶ Most people are able to walk, and many people with disabilities are able to walk or move with assistive devices, such as wheelchairs or walkers. Walking has a lower risk of injury than vigorous-intensity activities.⁵,³⁷ Walking also may be a good way to help people who are inactive become physically active because walking can be easily adapted to fit one’s time, needs, and abilities.⁵,³⁷
Walking is a common form of physical activity. In 2010, more than 60% of adults reported walking 10 minutes or more in the past week for transportation or leisure. Adults with more education, those who were white or Asian, and those who were younger were more likely than their counterparts to report any walking.

People walk for many purposes, such as for transportation to get to school, work, a store, or the library or for leisure to have fun, socialize with friends or family, walk their dog, or improve their health. Because walking is multipurpose, it provides many opportunities for people to incorporate physical activity into their busy lives. In 2010, about half of U.S. adults reported walking during their leisure time and less than one-third reported walking for transportation.

Communities can benefit when they implement strategies that make them more walkable and when more people walk. Communities designed to be walkable can improve safety not only for people who walk but for all community members. Walkable communities and communities where more people walk offer opportunities for personal interaction and social involvement. Communities designed to be walkable have the potential to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gases because people may choose to walk or bike rather than drive. Finally, walkable communities are attractive places for businesses to locate, which may help local economies thrive.

Why Don't People Walk More?

Although walking is a popular form of physical activity and can be easily done by most people, barriers to walking do exist.

People report lack of time as one challenge that prevents them from walking or doing other kinds of physical activity. People may struggle to meet the current guideline for regular aerobic physical activity as they cope with competing demands of work, school, home, and caring for themselves and others.

Safety concerns can be a barrier to walking. Several factors can influence pedestrian risk, such as unsafe driver and pedestrian behaviors and challenging physical environments. Perceived traffic dangers may also be barriers to walking. In surveys of parents, the most commonly reported barrier for walking to school was distance to school, followed by traffic-related dangers. Fear of crime or perceptions of an unsafe neighborhood may also be potential barriers to walking.

In addition, the ways in which communities are designed and built can present barriers to walking. When everyday destinations are located too far away from home, walking will not be a convenient option. Because people are more likely to walk when they use public transportation, the lack of an adequate public transit system may mean that opportunities to walk are lost.
10,000 Friends’ planning process included collecting and analyzing a broad range of information from a variety of sources. This information formed the basis for an initial set of priorities and recommendations that appear later in this document. The process and methodologies used are as follows:

1. **Review of Existing Plans** – New Castle is currently designated as a Blueprint Community and has engaged stakeholders across the City in this planning effort. Other recent planning initiatives include New Castle’s Act 47 Amended Recovery Plan. This plan focuses primarily on fiscal issues; however, it does address the provision of services such as economic development and code enforcement. A Pedestrian Riverwalk and Riverfront Plan was completed by Mackin Engineering.

2. **Review and Analysis of Existing Demographic Data** – Data from a variety of sources including the American Communities Survey was reviewed and benchmarked to provide important information for the planning process.

3. **Review of Market Information** – A full blown market analysis was beyond the scope of this project; however, information regarding home sale prices was accessed and reviewed.

4. **Field Work** – A basic conditions assessment was conducted to evaluate each residential property from the outside in terms of condition. A rating of 1 (excellent condition) to 4 (poor condition) was assigned to each home. This information was mapped in order to identify particular blocks with high concentrations of vacancy and blight.

5. **Stakeholder Interviews** – Our team met with more than two dozen local business owners, community leaders, and other stakeholders to get their perspective on the neighborhood and explore both challenges and opportunities.
REVIEW OF EXISTING PLANS AND INITIATIVES

New Castle was declared a financially distressed municipality by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania under the Municipalities Financial Recovery Act (Act 47) in 2007. An Amended Recovery Plan was filed in 2012. The Plan focuses on resolving the City’s financial challenges which are similar to those facing many of Pennsylvania’s older municipalities. These challenges include unfunded pension obligations, declining tax base, and increasing costs to providing basic services. The Plan includes a comprehensive set of financial strategies, and the most relevant for our planning purposes include recommendations to consolidate the City’s Economic Development Department and to electronically track code enforcement activity.74

New Castle was selected as one of six Blueprint Communities across Pennsylvania. The program is funded in part by the DCED and is focused on developing leadership and strategies that will promote investment and revitalization. The work to date in New Castle is led by local leaders and concentrates on community and economic development. In particular, expansion of a riverfront trail is seen as an anchor for tourism and economic development. Developing physical connections between the trail and adjacent neighborhoods is highlighted as an important strategy. The South Side could serve as a logical neighborhood connection to the downtown segment of the trail, given the neighborhood’s proximity and flat topography.

New Castle’s Blueprint Community planning process highlighted the importance of fostering home ownership. This goal is aligned closely with what we heard from stakeholders on the South Side as being critical to stabilizing the neighborhood. In particular, the work that LCCAP is doing to assist low-income homeowner do housing rehabilitation advances this objective and helps keep homeowners in place. Slowing the conversion of former owner occupied homes into rental property depends upon being able to retain existing homeowners and creating improvements in the neighborhood that make the neighborhood more attractive to new homeowners.

New Castle also engaged a Pedestrian Riverwalk Plan in 2011 which was completed by Mackin Engineering and McCollof Development Strategies. The plan capitalizes on the fact that New Castle has more riverfront property than Pittsburgh—a city that utilized trail development to help reinvent itself. The Plan provides over twenty recommendations to improve walkability downtown including public space improvements and enhanced river access. The plan follows a Complete Streets approach, which focuses on incorporating people and place in designing improvements to streets and other transportation networks.

The Pedestrian Riverwalk Plan complements the Blueprint Community planning process as well as to our planning work on the South Side neighborhood. The improvement of New Castle’s riverfront and trail network not only spurs economic development through a potential tourist attraction, it also creates an important amenity for existing residents. Trails typically are utilized by a broad demographic, and create an opportunity for residents to exercise while enjoying a natural asset within their community.
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSESSMENT

Assets

A neighborhood’s assets form the base upon which a successful revitalization program can be built. South Side is fortunate to have a number of assets that include both regional draws to the neighborhood and provide services to local residents and businesses. The New Castle Playhouse located on East Long Avenue is a unique attraction that brings people from throughout the region to the South Side. In addition to the community theater program, the Playhouse has other programs that serve the community.

The Playhouse has a large youth theatre program, in which participants perform all over the Lawrence County. There is also a youth theater camp which provides scholarships to participants who otherwise would not be able afford the camp fee. The core activity of the Playhouse is the community theater program that puts on nine plays throughout the year. Many patrons plan for dinner before the show and patronize one of the local restaurants.

Two well-known restaurants, Mary’s and Big Pauly’s Sports Bar, located near the center of the Long Avenue business district serve a large lunch and dinner business. Both restaurants draw patrons from outside of the neighborhood. Mary’s does a significant catering and delivery business as well, which helps connect an even broader customer base to the South Side.

South Side has a strong business community with a number of independently owned businesses. These include larger businesses such as Nick’s Auto Body and Central Heating and Cooling, along with smaller but well-known businesses including Two Fat Guys and an Oven Bakery and Cialella & Carney Floral Designs. The South Side used to have a Business Association, and we recommend that the business community organize again to help provide civic leadership in the neighborhood.

Demographics

Economic conditions in the neighborhood reflect a significant level of distress. Median income for the neighborhood is well below both the City and County medians. The vacancy rate is high, and home sale prices are low. A summary of key demographics and indicators appears below in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>South Side Neighborhood</th>
<th>City of New Castle</th>
<th>Lawrence County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1,540</td>
<td>22,748</td>
<td>89,308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Population non-white</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Income</td>
<td>$23,310</td>
<td>$29,559</td>
<td>$43,546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Below Poverty</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Home Values</td>
<td>$32,100</td>
<td>$57,800</td>
<td>$96,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeownership Rate</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Key Demographic Indicators

Source: U.S. Census Bureau
Housing Conditions

New Castle has a significant number of vacant housing units. The Amended Recovery Plan noted that the number of vacant units increased 36.2% between 2000 and 2010. According to the most current data, the housing vacancy rate sits at 13.6%. High vacancy rates place downward pressure on market prices and also lead to a decline in owner-occupied purchases. Many of the stakeholders that we met with indicated that the conversion of owner-occupied property to rental housing is a concern. The current rate of homeownership for New Castle is 58.5% compared with 74.2% for Lawrence County.

As part of the scope of our work, we completed a basic conditions assessment of residential properties within the South Side. Working with maps provided by RAR Engineering, we made an assessment of the exterior condition of each house on a scale of 1 (Excellent) to 4 (Poor). A summary of the overall conditions is summarized in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Condition</th>
<th>Number of Properties</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Maintenance</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>69.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Maintenance</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: South Side Housing – Basic Building Conditions

These conditions were also mapped to help identify clusters with high concentrations of blighted property. In addition to concentrations of blight, we were also interested in identifying area that had a high degree of housing stability, but are starting to see an increase in the number of vacant and deteriorated homes. Over time increasing blight can threaten otherwise stable blocks and discourage homeowners from investing in their properties. The first step in reversing the South Side’s decline is protecting areas that have not fallen into disrepair.

From our assessment, we noted that in spite of high numbers of homes that had deferred maintenance, there were also a significant number of homes in very good condition. These homes have well maintained exteriors and landscaping. Most often, the owners have lived in them for many years. Keeping the owners in place, and providing them with the resources to maintain their homes as they age in place is an important component to maintaining the existing housing stock. In addition thinking through a strategy to ensure these homes do not flip to rental property after elderly homeowners pass away will help maintain existing homeownership stock.
Figure 2 - Vacant home in disrepair at 1012 Agnew St.

Figure 3 - Well maintained home at 1308 Hamilton St.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority Recommendations

New Castle’s South Side reflects the conditions typically found in a weak market near the urban core. These conditions are not quickly or easily reversed. As a result, the initial recommendations reflect early stage community improvement tactics. Priority areas (are identified as “Priority Projects” in Figure 1) and include: 1) Improve the physical condition of the neighborhood, 2) Expand existing services for neighborhood residents and stakeholders, and 3) Capitalize on site specific opportunities.

Priority 1: Improve the Physical Condition of the Neighborhood Residential Revitalization Strategy Area

As seen in Figure 4, 10,000 Friends recommends designating and prioritizing an informal but targeted Residential Revitalization Strategy Area, bounded by Big Run Creek, Grimes Street, City Line Street, and East Long Avenue. Within the Residential Revitalization Strategy Area, priority recommendations are to:

1. **Focus on Owner Occupied Home Rehabs / Expansion of Lawrence County Community Action Partnership** – Renovations of existing properties play an important role in arresting decline and stabilizing home values. Our fieldwork identified that the majority of South Side homes have some level of deferred maintenance. Addressing this before the home gets to the point where it is no longer economically feasible to renovate is critical. We recommend targeting transitional blocks that have a solid base of stable homes, in order to help prevent these blocks from becoming unstable. Specific blocks that should be targeted include areas adjacent to the Big Run Creek -- including Pennsylvania Avenue and Hamilton Street – and extend up to East Long Avenue, which will connect the housing improvements to the business district. Work will include both owner-occupied rehab and lead paint abatement programs secured through the HOME program, other federal programs, or FHLB Affordable Housing program and operated by the Lawrence County Community Action Partnership. Within the targeted area identified in Appendix A, at least five (5) homes should be rehabilitated and have lead paint abated, and at least five (5) dilapidated vacant structures demolished, every year for the next several years. There is a need for this targeted neighborhood rehabilitation work to continue for the next three to six years.

Figure 4 – Residential Revitalization Strategy Area Enlargement
2. **Undertake Selective Demolition** – The City of New Castle’s financial resources for demolition are not sufficient to address all of the blighted and condemned houses in the City. Targeting existing resources towards condemned properties in the Residential Revitalization Strategy Area that are highly visible, or threaten to undermine the stability of otherwise strong blocks, will maximize the neighborhood impact of blight remediation activities. Demolitions should be further targeted within the area delineated in Figure 4 and, when possible, in blocks containing housing rehabilitations—which will further complement and leverage efforts and maximize the impact of limited funding. Within the targeted area identified in Appendix A, at least five (5) dilapidated vacant structures should be demolished every year for the next several years. There is a need for this targeted neighborhood blight removal work to continue for the next three to six years. In addition, where condemned properties have potential re-use as side yards to adjacent owner-occupied properties a portion of the demo cost may be recovered in the sale of the side yard.

3. **Secure Vacant or Under-Utilized Properties Not Scheduled for Demolition** – Structures deemed in sufficiently good condition to be rehabilitated must be secured to prevent vandalism and further deterioration of the property. If owners are absent or can’t be located, buildings may need to be secured with City forces.

4. **Ensure an Operational Land Bank** – New Castle is currently looking to establish a Land Bank, and this entity could assist with holding title to foreclosed parcels. A Land Bank is a priority because it provides the means to control the disposition of vacant land, and return formerly tax delinquent properties to the tax rolls. Since the market for new development in the neighborhood is currently weak, allowing existing owners to consolidate adjoining vacant parcels with their own property is a logical strategy. Therefore, and immediate priority for the Land Bank once operational is to create a side yard program allowing existing homeowners to purchase adjacent vacant lots, thus greening and beautifying the neighborhood while returning vacant parcels to the tax rolls.

5. **Address Stormwater Management along Big Run Creek** – RAR Engineering has been working with the City to design a stormwater solution that eliminates the flooding that occurred along the creek. Previous flooding damaged adjacent homes as well as some businesses. 10,000 Friends is working with RAR Engineering, and the Army Corps of Engineers to evaluate the utility of stormwater management techniques that would incorporate green infrastructure. This is an important focus area as it is adjacent to both the Residential Revitalization Strategy Area and Earl Muff Sallie Field.

**Priority 2: Expand Existing Services for Neighborhood Residents and Stakeholders**

1. **Form a New Business Association** – New Castle’s South Side has a strong collection of businesses, many of which are growing and serve the entire region. These businesses are key assets in the neighborhood. While the area has had a Merchant’s Association in the past known as the South Side Association, but one does not currently exist. We encourage the formation of an Association which would help advocate and oversee the implementation of important initiatives, including transportation, safety, neighborhood, and business district improvements.
2. **Gussie Walker Outreach Organization** – The Gussie Walker Outreach Organization provides after school enrichment, tutoring, and meals or snacks for elementary school children, operating out of a location on West Reynolds Avenue near Moravia Street. This provides an important service for many food-insecure children in the neighborhood, and provides them with a structured environment. They also run a summer camp and their program site includes a youth garden that children plant and harvest under the supervision of volunteers. Like many non-profits, the demand for Gussie Walker Outreach Organization’s services exceeds their resources to provide them. A new, larger facility would allow the Outreach Organization to serve more children, and could also serve as an important anchor building for the South Side neighborhood. An ideal location for a new Gussie Walker facility would be on West Long Avenue, potentially on a site now owned by the defunct Jagielly Club. Potential resources for expansion include the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program, state tax credit programs, and local philanthropic support.

3. **Project Oasis** – The Lawrence County District Attorney’s office operates this program designed to effect neighborhood change through coordinated agency action. Partners include local law enforcement agencies, code enforcement, public works and human services agencies. The first step involves targeted police and narcotic works. This is followed by intensive code enforcement and public works improvement. The third phase introduces social service agencies to the neighborhood and works to provide necessary assistance in terms of job training, home improvement resources, and eligibility screening for benefits. Partner agencies include Office on Aging, Career Link, Jail-to-Jobs, and Medical Assistance.

The coordinated approach employed by Project Oasis is an effective way to combat the multiple issues that confront blocks with a high degree of crime and blight. Expanding this program is a priority. Currently the program involves working within existing agency budgets, and there is an opportunity to work with the District Attorney’s office to select and prioritize targeted blocks in the South Side neighborhood for this program, while seeking funding to expand the program’s budget and reach.

**Priority 3: Capitalize on Site Specific Opportunities**

1. **Long Avenue and Mill Street Streetscape and Multi-Modal Improvements** – Long Avenue serves as the South Side’s business district. It is anchored by the New Castle Play House, which serves as a regional draw. Mary's Restaurant and Big Pauly's Sports Bar are two popular restaurants. This area is highly traveled, and several stakeholders expressed concern about the speed of traffic on Long Avenue. The intersection of Long Avenue and South Mill Street is a logical place to initiate comprehensive streetscaping improvements to improve the placemaking and welcoming environment of the business district, make this heavily-trafficked area more accommodating of pedestrians (particularly children and the elderly), and add traffic calming features and crosswalks. Streetscaping improvements along West Long Avenue and Mill Street (north to Lutton Street) should include pedestrian safety and crosswalk features; traffic calming bump outs; street trees, street furniture, and lighting; new sidewalks incorporating green infrastructure features; and other improvements consistent with a Complete Streets policy. See Figures 5 & 6.
As redevelopment efforts move forward, it is important to continue planning and designing greater multi-modal transportation options within New Castle. In particular, the approval of the City Riverwalk by City Council and future construction of the Riverwalk connecting downtown to the wider regional trail network (through a
A generous grant by the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources highlights the need for expanded bicycle infrastructure and connections between downtown and adjacent neighborhoods, including the South Side.

One specific connectivity recommendation is to plan for and eventually provide a marked bicycle lane along South Mill Street (see Figure 7) – connecting to the downtown Riverwalk. This would provide safe multi-modal access to downtown, the Neshannock Creek Trail, and the Riverwalk, and also link the South Side with regional recreational tourism efforts.

![Figure 7 – Existing Conditions photo looking South on South Mill Street](image)

This project should be planned and designed along with the Priority Project streetscape, even if bicycle lane construction is a longer-term project.

Currently, South Mill Street is approximately 32 feet wide curb to curb, and in addition to the travel lanes is often used in both directions for parking. The recommended curb-to-curb standard for two vehicular travel lanes and two parking lanes by the National Association of Transportation Officials (NACTO) is 36 feet. One alternate design for the streetscape improvement (to meet NACTO road design recommendations) would be to shift all parking to one side, creating one 8 foot parking lane and two (2) 12 foot travel lanes. To promote bicycle use under this strategy, a “shared street” approach (often referred to as a “sharrow”) would be adopted where markings and signage are installed throughout the length of the road to reinforce to drivers the intended shared use of this road. This form of bicycle infrastructure is usually reserved for roads which do not have enough right-of-way (ROW) to accommodate bike lanes, as this is the least desirable option from a cyclist’s safety and accessibility perspective.
The second – and recommended – alternative would be to remove all parking along South Mill Street and stripe a bike lane on both sides of the street (see Figure 8). Because the parking volume along South Mill Street is low, it is estimated this would have minimal impact on drivers whose parking could easily be accommodated by the abundance of street parking on directly adjacent side streets. This road re-design and cross-section would result in one bike lane (6’) and one vehicular travel lane (10’) in either direction (meeting NACTO standards). Because this option creates a separate zone for cyclists, which protects riders from sharing road space with vehicles, this is the safer and more desirable of the two types of bicycle infrastructure.

Funding for the streetscape, pedestrian features, and this bicycle lane connection could be sought through Pennsylvania’s Multi-Modal Transportation Fund, or through the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) in Pittsburgh.

2. **UPMC Jameson Hospital South Side Campus Site-Specific Assessment** – The Jameson Hospital site is the largest building complex within the South Side -- a site which has more than 300,000 SF of space occupying more than four acres of land. UPMC recently purchased Jameson Health system and indicated that it intends to relocate most of its functions to the hospital campus on the North Hill. Evaluating the potential reuses of this key parcel of land for new uses is a critical next step in the planning process for the South Side. This work should include a site and topographical assessment and market analysis, initial site and infrastructure planning, and a plan for donation of the land that will assist in marketing the site to potential new users.
3. **Earl A. Muff Sallie Field** – The field is adjacent to the Big Run Creek (see Figure 9) and suffers from limited and outdated playground equipment (see Figure 10). Through discussions with stakeholders, the field was prioritized for basic improvements to make it more usable and accessible. Residents cited damaged or outdated playground equipment. There is also an opportunity for potential green infrastructure features and a pavilion for use by neighborhood residents for events. We recommend working with a landscape architect to develop a plan and renderings that could be used to fundraise for project implementation. 10,000 Friends plans to be a partner in the continued effort to make physical improvements to the Field in year two of our engagement. In addition to physical improvements at the Field, however, enhancing programming and thereby opportunities for park use is key. The United Way of Lawrence County already operates programming in the City, and is a potential partner in this effort. This project is important as the playground is adjacent to and serves the homes within the Residential Revitalization Strategy Area as defined by 10,000 Friends, and thus is an important component for our integrated revitalization strategy (see Figure 11).
Figure 10 – Earl A. Muff Sallie Field existing conditions

Figure 11 – Earl A. Muff Sallie Field proposed improvements character sketch
Future Opportunities & Long-Term Recommendations

We have organized these further recommendations to capitalize and maximize the potential of longer-term opportunities into discrete categories according to 10,000 Friends’ proprietary Healthy and Walkable methodology. Each of these categories contributes to the overall health of the community. Prominent health experts, such as Dr. Richard Jackson, Chair of the UCLA School of Public Health, have conducted research that links the quality of the built environment to a variety of health indicators including obesity, depression, asthma, and diabetes. Only by taking a comprehensive view towards community health, will these issues be addressed. The twelve focus areas that 10,000 Friends has developed in our Healthy and Walkable program represent the types of projects that address community health.

The identified opportunities in each of these focus areas are aspirational and should be evaluated over time, particularly after the priority projects have been completed.

10,000 Friends Healthy & Walkable Communities Framework: Long-Term Focus Areas

1.) Affordable, Safe, & Mixed-Income Housing

Goals:

- Provide sufficient housing units affordable for those households below area median income
- Ensure housing units are safe—i.e., meet current building codes and are free from lead-based paint
- Implement strategies to ensure that long-time neighborhood residents of modest means are not displaced from their homes as property values rise
- Promote truly mixed-income, mixed use neighborhoods with housing of different types and price points
- Promote home ownership

Future South Side Opportunities:

Market values currently prevent non-subsidized new housing units from being constructed in the neighborhood. Cost of construction would be far greater than potential market sale prices.

Data from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Transportation indicate that because of modest incomes and the cost of private vehicle transportation necessary to commute to job opportunities far outside the neighborhood, family budgets can be strained by housing + transportation costs. Data from the Center for Neighborhood Technology’s Location Affordability Index Tool is provided in the following Figures 12 & 13 for both owners and renters:
Figure 12 – Owner Housing+Transportation Affordability Map and Data for South Side. Source: www.cnt.org

Figure 13 – Renter Housing+Transportation Affordability Map and Data for South Side. Source: www.cnt.org
Many stakeholders highlighted the fact that existing housing in New Castle is affordable, and there is a desire to create more of a mixed-income community. One particular opportunity that was identified is new housing for seniors, particularly those households that may not want to maintain a large house.

When sales prices are low, even for quality homes in a neighborhood, there is an opportunity for qualified borrowers, or those who may become qualified, to purchase a home with lower monthly housing costs than comparable available rental properties. Given this fact and the number of vacant houses in the South Side, there is a longer-term opportunity to promote home ownership. Strategies to accomplish this could include Closing Cost Assistance programs, Employer Assisted Housing benefits targeted to those employees buying a home in New Castle, or programs targeted to attract a specific population – such as first-time home buyers or creation of Artist District Housing such as was done in Paducah, KY.

In addition to the Priority Recommendations for owner-occupied rehab, lead paint abatement, selected demolition, and side yard programs in the targeted Residential Revitalization Strategy Area, continued coordination with the Housing Authority is important. The Sciota Street properties are consistently near 100% occupancy, and the Authority recently reduced eligibility for its designated senior housing units to 50 years of age. The Housing Authority has a capital improvement plan across its portfolio that is being implemented over the next few years, and their continued efforts to maintain and improve building stock while continuing effective tenant screening can work well with other concurrent community revitalization efforts.

2) **Blight Removal Strategies**

**Goals:**

- Target blight removal funds and coordinate blight removal activities for maximum impact
- Promote rehabilitation of owner-occupied homes
- Increase efforts to ensure that housing units are safe, meet building and fire codes, and are free of lead-based paint
- Demolish unsafe structures
- Create a side yard or reverse subdivision program(s) for owner occupants to add vacant adjacent land to their properties and thus restore those parcels to the tax rolls
- Secure vacant structures that can be rehabilitated, to prevent unsafe conditions and further deterioration
- Institute a Land Bank to provide the means to control the disposition of vacant land, and return formerly tax delinquent properties to the tax rolls
Future South Side Opportunities:

Blight removal is an immediate priority. New Castle’s market is not strong enough to support significant immediate commercial or residential activity. Blight removal helps improve the quality of life for current residents and helps set the stage for future development. Specific blight removal strategies are covered in the “Priority Recommendations” section of this report.

3) Greenspace, Parks, Trails & Playground Improvements

Goals:

- Urban communities are healthier when all residents and neighborhoods are located within one half-mile of quality greenspace
- Continuous efforts should be made to upgrade the quality of community greenspace, including passive parks, plazas and town squares, playgrounds, recreational fields and facilities
- All greenspace renovation or construction planned should incorporate green infrastructure features, including where appropriate rain gardens, swales, retention ponds, permeable paving, green roofs, detention basins, and bio retention vegetation
- To promote maximum usage of any greenspace, there must be safe options to access the space, particularly for children and pedestrians, and walkable connections to adjacent neighborhoods.

Future South Side Opportunities:

Short-term priorities include improvements to Earl Muff Sallie field. The field is located next to Big Run Creek and a residential neighborhood that has been targeted for housing improvements. Targeted improvements to the Big Run watershed, field, and housing stock can create impact in an area of the neighborhood that has a high concentration of homes in poor condition.

Longer term, renovations to the Long Avenue Playground, owned by the City of New Castle, can be considered. This project may be particularly important if the proposed new Gussie Walker Community Outreach center project becomes a reality in the immediate vicinity of along West Long Avenue. Further coordination with the Housing Authority will also be important for this project component as the Authority executes its capital improvement plan, as this playground potentially serves children living in the Housing Authority properties.

Any significant park or playground improvements or renovations planned should investigate the feasibility and benefits of incorporating green infrastructure features within the planned park space – including swales, natural vegetation, etc.
4) Green Infrastructure

Goals:

- Improving management of stormwater in our communities is an essential part of efforts to promote water quality and quantity—clean water that is essential to all.

- Stormwater management and rainwater harvesting on site is particularly important in most urban Pennsylvania communities, which are burdened with ancient and aging combined sewer systems that overflow during storm events.

- Green Infrastructure features are a cost-effective, efficient way to address combined sewer systems and should be integrated into all public space, greenspace, public works, streetscape, and sewer projects.

- Tree planting, tree canopy and shade tree programs add to the sense of place and help to clean the air in urban neighborhoods, and should be a long-term programmatic strategy to advance healthy communities.

- Green Infrastructure provides economic, social and community benefits and are a critical component of placemaking that renews neighborhoods.

Future South Side Opportunities:

Green Infrastructure is an approach to water management that follows the natural water cycle. This approach minimizes the construction of pipes, catchment basins and other built solutions. A green infrastructure strategy helps alleviate pressure on the existing waste treatment facility, and minimizes disturbance to the landscape.

Specifically, we recommend that Green Infrastructure features should be designed into all playground, park, and streetscape and sidewalk projects planned in the neighborhood, including the “Priority Recommendations” cited in this report.

We also recommend that the improvements to the Big Run watershed incorporate green features into the stormwater management program. These features can include the plantings that help minimize run-offs, along with bio-swales and other natural features.

5) Business District Commercial and Retail Development

Goals:

- A neighborhood business district is an asset to be nurtured, improving walkability and providing community-serving retail services.

- Improving building conditions, street face, and streetscape can increase the chance of business viability and success at affected locations.
• Promote strategies including façade improvements, green building, preservation of historic buildings, and infill development to fill in “missing teeth” in the street face

• Successfully employing healthy communities strategies can realize the long-term goal of a healthy business district that minimizes vacant space, activates the street, and provides shops and storefronts that serve community needs

**Future South Side Opportunities:**

New office and retail development is a challenge in the short-term given the current market and existing high vacancy levels at both Plaza South and in the downtown business district. In the short-term, the development of new space will likely need to be anchored by an existing public sector or non-profit organization. Such efforts should be focused at infill locations along the West Long Avenue business district if at all possible, filling in gaps in the street face. One possible project is the proposed new Gussie Walker Outreach Center – which could be an anchor along West Long Avenue.

Longer term opportunities could include infill development along Long Avenue, in addition to the proposed Gussie Walker Community Outreach Center, and include renovation of the Long Avenue Playground with green features, and continued capital improvements of Housing Authority building stock and facilities in the immediately adjacent area.

6) **Multi-Modal Transportation and Walkability Improvements**

**Goals:**

• The goal of multi-modal community transportation improvements is to create travel options and choices to connect all residents to important destinations both within and outside the neighborhood—destinations such as work sites, schools, universities, shops, medical facilities, and grocery stores

• A successful transportation system accommodates all users of all abilities – including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit users

• Walkability improvements must connect at the neighborhood scale, and include pedestrian safety infrastructure, crosswalks, sidewalks, streetscapes, street furniture, trail connections, green streets, and shared transportation options

• Neighborhood transportation improvement strategies should be focused on the needs of people not of vehicles; for example, strategies to “right size” parking requirements are aimed at reducing parking requirements to free space for pedestrians, bicyclists, and parklets
Future South Side Opportunities:

Potential improvements along Long Avenue and Mill Street were previously described “Priority Recommendations.” These improvements, including traffic calming features, pedestrian safety improvements, along with an extension of the existing streetscape (lights, curb & sidewalk, street furniture), can potentially be funded through state programmatic funding sources.

One specific connectivity recommendation is to provide marked bicycle lane along Mill Street connecting to the downtown Riverwalk and Neshannock Creek Trail. This project should be planned and designed along with the Priority Project streetscape, even if bicycle lane construction is a longer-term project.

The South Side is well-served by the New Castle Area Transit Authority (NCATA) which serves both downtown and surrounding townships. Updating route signage is needed, and something that NCATA is planning on including in a future capital budget. Additional medium-term transit recommendations include new bus shelters, and one priority bus shelter for upgrade is the stop at Pennsylvania Avenue in front of Earl Muff Sallie Field.

Also of note is the traffic and safety of Moravia Street – several stakeholders have highlighted the need for a traffic signal at Division and Moravia Streets.

7) Better Access to Fresh and Healthy Foods

Goals:

- A great many low-income residents of urban areas do not have access to grocery stores or other sources of fresh fruits and vegetables within a reasonable distance of their homes and neighborhoods – these residents live in “food deserts”

- Healthy communities programs should assist in recruiting grocery stores to food deserts when analysis shows such stores to be financially feasible

- In neighborhoods without sufficient population and economy to support a full grocery store, other strategies to make fresh foods available in the neighborhood include creating farmer’s markets, community gardens, urban farming initiatives, and/or bringing healthy foods to existing retailers to create “healthy corner stores”

Future South Side Opportunities:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Economic Research Service provides data mapping tools for identifying “Food Deserts” that meet criteria including low family income, low access to privately owned vehicles, and no qualifying vendor or seller of fresh fruits and vegetables within one mile on foot or by bicycle.
Figure 14 – Low Income census tracts where residents are more than 1 mile from the nearest supermarket

Figure 15 – Census Tracts with more than 100 households have no access to a vehicle and located more than ½ mile from the nearest supermarket
As seen in preceding Figures 14 & 15, the South Side neighborhood west of Cunningham Avenue meets all criteria and qualifies as a Food Desert using USDA using 2015 data.

This data comes as no surprise, as there is no full-service grocery store anywhere within City of New Castle boundaries. Households in the South Side have limited access to fresh and healthy food options in the neighborhood. Although current population and income levels will not support a full service grocery store, there are creative ways to provide increased access to food. The local YMCA has a feeding program that operates in the South Side and provides and important service.

Future opportunities to address the lack of fresh food in the South Side neighborhood do exist and should be pursued. These opportunities include expanding the existing Farmer's Market to a South Side location, restoring the community garden that once existing in the area of Reynolds and Moravia Streets, and coordinating with the Blueprint Community committee on their ideas for a “Food Innovation Zone” and/or mobile Food Wagon program and ensuring that the South Side is included in those potential initiatives. Community Gardens or larger urban farming enterprises are also a potential option for increasing access to fresh food to be investigated over the medium term.

A further option would be to stock fresh produce at existing neighborhood locations such as the existing Dave’s Market on Long Avenue or Mary’s Restaurant.

8) Community Services and Partnerships

Goals:

- Provide the neighborhood the community social services that residents need to improve their lives
- Engage residents in creating community organizations and partnerships to advance their own vision and interests and provide neighborly “eyes on the street”
- Expand programs to provide after school and youth services, transportation access, community primary health services, intensive services to combat crime and drug abuse, and a range of supportive social services are essential for the well-being of all communities
- Develop locally-driven and engaged community organizations formed by residents and stakeholders to advance their visions and interests is a priority for healthy communities – organizations such as a community business association, neighborhood watch and crime watch groups, and business improvement districts are organic ways for community residents to help each other and themselves

Future South Side Opportunities:

Expansion and/or creation of three specific service organizations, the Gussie Walker Community Outreach Organization, Project Oasis of the District Attorney's office, and formation of a new Business Association of business owners were included earlier in this report as “Priority Recommendations.”
The coordinated approach employed by Project Oasis is an effective way to combat the multiple issues that confront blocks with a high degree of crime and blight. Expanding this program is a priority. Currently the program involves working within existing agency budgets, and there is an opportunity to work with the District Attorney’s office to select and prioritize targeted blocks in the South Side neighborhood for this program, while seeking funding to expand the program’s budget and reach.

There is a longer-term opportunity to work with UPMC Jameson on the issues identified in their Community Health Needs Assessment to make the neighborhood healthier. Shared transportation services, such as bike share or car share, should be evaluated, as the need does exist. These opportunities should be studied further for financial viability long-term, and evaluated periodically as demand dictates.

Further developing locally-driven and engaged community organizations, formed by residents and stakeholders to advance their visions and interests, such as a Neighborhood Watch group to help keep “eyes on the street” in the neighborhood, should also be an aim going forward.

9) Art, Cultural, and Historic Assets & Districts

**Goals:**

- A community’s artistic, cultural, and historic assets are a critical component of the sense of place and connection that residents have to the community and its history, and must always be preserved and nurtured
- Cultural assets such as theatres, playhouses, libraries, memorials, public squares and plazas should be carefully protected and maintained
- Public art and places/opportunities for public art should be created and encouraged
- Historic buildings should be preserved, working with appropriate preservation resources, and where appropriate historic districts should be pursued and designated
- The creation of art, artist, and/or cultural districts has been a strategy used successfully to recruit leaders and jump start community revitalization efforts

**Future South Side Opportunities:**

The New Castle Playhouse is a significant neighborhood asset. The Playhouse draws visitors to the South Side, and helps support demand for nearby restaurants. Community Theaters must constantly fundraise, and face increased competition to capture local entertainment spending dollars. Supporting both the operational and capital needs of the Playhouse should be a priority in the upcoming years.

The South Side does not contain a local or national historic district, or a building on the National Register. The most architecturally significant buildings center on the Long Avenue and South Mill Street intersection. These buildings include the New Castle Playhouse and the building at 1230 South Mill Street that contains Lombard’s Apothecary. Maintaining and re-using existing buildings is not only environmentally responsible, it
also maintains the character and fabric of the neighborhood and strengthens residents’ connection to the “place” and its rich history.

10) Inclusionary Land Use, Shared Transportation, and Complete Streets Programs

Goals:

- These programs advance the key objectives of making the community more walkable; providing more, better, and safer transportation options within the neighborhood for all users; and providing better access to important destinations outside the neighborhood to all residents of all incomes

- Inclusionary land use promotes the provision of housing options that are affordable for all residents, including low-income and disadvantaged populations, while also promoting mixed-use walkable corridors that serve community needs for services, shops, and stores

- Shared transportation services make autos, bicycles, or rides available to all residents, and are particularly important in small communities, rural areas, and areas without sufficient population size to allow for robust public transit service

- Complete Streets are streets ‘designed for all users—everyone. They enable safe access for all, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easier to cross the street, walk to the store, or bicycle to work’

Future South Side Opportunities:

10,000 Friends advocates for a “Complete Streets” approach that integrates people and place in the planning and design of streets. Additionally, we encourage mixed-use development that helps create walkable communities. The closest thing that South Side has to a mixed-use area is the small business district centered on the intersection of Mill Street and Long Avenue. Short-term priorities for this area include continuation of streetscape and pedestrian improvements, along with the addition of a dedicated bicycle lane along Mill Street that would connect South Side with downtown and the Neshannock Trail.

Longer term opportunities could include infill development along Long Avenue, including the proposed Gussie Walker Community Outreach center, renovation of the Long Avenue Playground with green features, and continued capital improvements of Housing Authority building stock and facilities in the immediately adjacent area.

Given the frequency and low-cost of the existing transit service that serves the South Side, we see a need for car or bike sharing. Numerous stakeholders raised the issue of mobility – particularly the need to have an easier connection to Downtown New Castle services and stores. These opportunities should be studied further for financial viability long-term, and evaluated periodically as demand dictates.
11) Neighborhood School Preservation or Re-Use

Goals:

- Wherever public neighborhood schools remain open, advocacy efforts should be made so that they remain open.
- All schools located in a neighborhood or dense urban setting should have safe routes to access them for school children walking or bicycling to school.
- Neighborhood schools that have been shuttered but remain in viable physical condition, should be re-purposed for appropriate residential or commercial purpose in the neighborhood.
- Operational neighborhood schools should be encouraged to participate in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s Green Schools program.

Future South Side Opportunities:

No opportunities for projects within this category were noted in the South Side at this time. The former Lincoln Garfield Elementary School building along East Long Avenue has fallen into significant disrepair and does not seem a suitable opportunity for adaptive reuse.

12) Public Safety and Municipal Policies & Codes

Goals:

- For a neighborhood to be truly healthy and support redevelopment, the rate of serious crimes must be low – the neighborhood must be safe from violent crime.
- For a neighborhood to be truly healthy and support redevelopment, in addition to actually being safe from violent crime, residents and potential visitors must feel safe and perceive the neighborhood to be safe.
- Law enforcement professionals should work with community based organizations to continuously work to reduce so-called “nuisance crimes” to protect the neighborhood’s safety, vitality, and quality of life for residents.

Municipal policy and Ordinance Goals:

Healthy communities are those whose municipal leaders and government adopt policies promoting:

- Inclusionary Housing
- Complete Streets
- Sustainable Stormwater Management adopting Green Infrastructure
• Mixed Use development districts
• Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) districts
• Coordinated and aggressive building and maintenance code enforcement
• Interagency cooperation between law enforcement, code enforcement, public works, and social service agencies to address neighborhood safety, blight, and human service needs

Future South Side Opportunities:

The South Side neighborhood is relatively safe from violent crimes, according to the New Castle Police Department. Overall crime call volume is low, and though the neighborhood is not violent several small isolated problem areas have been identified and are being eradicated. Less than 10% of the drug arrests in the City of New Castle are in the South Side neighborhood or South Side residents. However, there are some instances of prostitution and other “nuisance” crimes that must be abated in the neighborhood. The City Police Department and the District Attorney’s office continue to work to that end. Efforts should continue to ensure that residents feel that the neighborhood is safe.

Municipal Policy and Code Opportunities:

10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania will communicate any recommendations to institute policies consistent with the Healthy & Walkable Communities framework directly with the Mayor’s Office and City Council.
Future South Side Project Opportunities Summary

Affordable, Safe & Mixed-Income Housing
- New senior housing for home owners wishing to downsize but stay in the area
- Strategies to promote homeownership instead of renting
- Continued coordination with the Housing Authority on neighborhood physical improvements and resident screening

Business District Commercial & Retail Development
- Pursue infill commercial business district building projects on West Long Avenue, led initially by public sector or non-profit sector uses
- Gussie Walker Outreach Center is a prime opportunity
- Address vacancy and/or land use and design of the Plaza South site

Blight Removal Strategies
- Create a new side yard program once Land Bank is established and operational
- Identify, apply for, and secure additional funds to supplement existing targeted demolition activities in the neighborhood

Better Access to Fresh & Healthy Foods
- Explore all short, medium, and longer term options to increase availability of fresh foods, fruits, and vegetables in the neighborhood; these options include:
  - Expanding the Farmer's Market to a neighborhood location
  - Restoring the neighborhood Community Garden
  - Coordinating with the Blueprint Community committee's plans for Mobile Food Wagons
  - Stock healthy foods at existing neighborhood locations
  - Explore, longer term, larger urban farming initiatives

Greenspace, Parks, Trails, & Playground Improvements
- Renovations to Long Avenue Playground, particularly in conjunction with Gussie Walker Outreach Center if that project moves forward
- Incorporate green infrastructure stormwater capture features in any new significant park or playground redesign
- Complete on-street bicycle lane on Mill Street connecting South Side to downtown

Multi-Modal Transportation & Walkability Improvements
- Pursue Priority streetscape and pedestrian safety recommendations
- Provide marked bicycle lane along Mill Street connecting to the downtown Riverwalk and Neshannock Creek Trail
- Work with NCATA on small scale capital improvements such as new route and stop signage, as well as new bus stop shelters
- Study the need for a new traffic signal and Division and Moravia Streets
Green Infrastructure

- Continue ongoing efforts to address flooding at Big Run; incorporate green infrastructure features into the Big Run solution
- Incorporate green infrastructure stormwater management into future sidewalk, streetscape, crosswalk, intersection projects, as well as future playground and park projects
- Consider improvements to public works efforts to keep street debris out of storm sewers through possible new street cleaning or street sweeping initiatives

Community Services & Partnerships

- Work with UPMC Jameson on issues identified in their Community Health Needs Assessment to make neighborhood residents healthier
- Explore shared transportation services, as a documented need exists
- Develop locally-driven and engaged community organizations, formed by residents and stakeholders to advance their visions and interests, such as a Neighborhood Watch group to help keep “eyes on the street”

Art, Cultural and Historic Assets & Districts

- Support the New Castle Playhouse’s ongoing operational and Capital financial needs
- Maintain and re-use existing buildings, to maintain neighborhood character and history
- Consider feasibility and desirability longer term of marketing the neighborhood as an artist or cultural district

Inclusionary Land Use, Shared Transportation, & Complete Streets Programs

- The City of New Castle, as an urban community, should adopt a Complete Streets policy and ordinance
- The key, and largest, land use and development opportunity in the neighborhood long term is the UPMC South Campus site-- Evaluating the feasibility of re-purposing the site (building condition, holding and operating costs) for new uses is a critical next step in the planning process for the South Side
- Assist in the successful relocation of services remaining in the existing building, including a privately-operated personal care home that provides critical services to area residents

Neighborhood School Preservation or Re-Use

- Former Lincoln Garfield Elementary School building along East Long Avenue has fallen into significant disrepair and does not seem a suitable opportunity for adaptive reuse
- No other school building opportunities exist in the neighborhood

Public Safety and Municipal Policies & Codes

- The South Side neighborhood is relatively safe from violent crimes and overall crime call volume is low, according to the New Castle Police Department
- Priority is to work with District Attorney to bring his Project Oasis program to the neighborhood
- The creation of a Neighborhood Watch organization should be pursued; this effort will ensure that residents continue to feel that the neighborhood is safe
- Continue efforts with the New Castle Police to abate “Nuisance” crimes such as soliciting prostitution in the neighborhood
APPENDIX A

A basic conditions assessment of residential properties within the South Side has been completed as part of this project. Working with maps provided by RAR Engineering, 10,000 Friends made an assessment of the exterior condition of residential properties on a scale of 1 (Excellent) to 4 (Extremely Poor). The conditions of housing structures were then mapped to help identify clusters with high concentrations of blighted property. In addition to concentrations of blight, we are also interested in identifying areas that had a high degree of housing stability, but are starting to see an increase in the number of vacant and deteriorated homes. Over time, increasing blight can threaten otherwise stable blocks and discourage homeowners from investing in their properties. The first step in reversing the South Side’s decline is protecting areas that have not fallen into disrepair. We recommend the following blocks be targeted for housing rehabilitation activities.

Special emphasis in the near term should be focused on:

- 1600 – 1700 blocks of Pennsylvania Ave.
- 1700 – 1800 blocks of Hamilton St.
- 400 block of Galbreath St.
WORKS CITED


Figure 1 – Healthy & Walkable Community Project Map