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## II. PROCESS



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### STEERING COMMITTEE

The East End Neighborhood Strategic Plan Steering Committee, appointed by then-Mayor Tom Gallagher of the City of Cortland, was comprised of representatives with ties to the East End Neighborhood, including the alderpersons from the City's Common Council representing the area, business and property owners, and residents of the East End community. The Committee designed the Strategic Plan, in part, by guiding the process through consultation, participation, public outreach, discussion and articulation of possibilities. The Steering Committee meetings also served as a setting for developing the common goals and objectives that were ultimately detailed in the Plan. Membership of the City of Cortland East End Neighborhood Strategic Plan Steering Committee was as follows:

Tim Armstrong – Resident/Business Owner  
Richard Couch - Resident  
Louis Falso – Resident  
Susan Feiszli – Alderperson Ward 6, current Mayor  
Linda Ferguson – Alderperson Ward 7  
Bob Risavi – Resident/Business Owner  
Judy Risavi – Resident/Business Owner  
Barbara Ryan – Resident/City Planning Board  
Richard Stock – Business Owner  
Jamie Yaman – Business Owner

### STUDY AREA

The City of Cortland's East End Neighborhood is bounded by Interstate 81 on the north, with the exception of an extension of the northern boundary to include the Comfort Inn/Perkins Restaurant/ Holiday Inn Express (under construction) on the north side of I-81; on the east by the Tioughnioga River; bounded to the south by Central Avenue, including the Marietta Packaging Plant; and to the west via Pendleton Street to Clinton Avenue and northward along Rickard Street, including those properties on the east side of Rickard Street. A map outlining the study area boundaries follows on page 12-A.

### STUDY METHODOLOGY

#### A. PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

An important component of this planning process is to include a review of other relevant planning processes that have taken place, to ensure consistency among the various plans. These are:

**City of Cortland Master Plan (1989)** - The City of Cortland's Master Plan was completed in 1989 and is presently being updated. The new plan will be adopted during 2010; however, portions of the 1989 remain relevant.



The 1989 document was completed with input from Neighborhood Planning Groups (NPG's) representing each ward of the City. The City's East End is located entirely within Ward 7, with a very small portion included in Ward 6. In 1989, the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward NPG took it upon themselves to do a survey of ward residents to obtain feedback on pressing neighborhood issues. Listed following is a summary of some of the major 1989 concerns, which relate to the current conditions in the East End.

1. Addressing code concerns, especially rental property.
2. Create a maintenance program for all utilities including water, sewer, and storm water.
3. Create a City ordinance defining nuisance housing (currently the ordinance only covers unsafe structures), i.e., nuisance houses would be those vacant and not cared for over a long period of years and other violations – grass cutting, snow removal, creating a nuisance.
4. Implementation of a traffic control program – especially one that will designate specific truck routes.
5. Improve City streets, sidewalks, and bridges.
6. Creation of more housing.
7. Reevaluate and identify the zoning areas of the City.
8. Promote and encourage industry within existing industrial zones of the City and County.

In conclusion, the NPG noted that the main priorities of the neighborhood are (1) addressing code violations, (2) the creation of a “nuisance housing” ordinance, and (3) the creation of more housing.

**City of Cortland Comprehensive Plan (2010)** – As of the date of this Strategic Plan, a draft of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan had been sent to the Steering Committee, the Common Council, and the City Planning Commission. The following recommendations related specifically to the East End Neighborhood are included in the draft:



1. Highway Commercial: The Exit 11/Clinton Avenue (Route 13) is typical highway commercial development. Riverside Plaza dominates this area. The new owner (2008) has been investing in the site and significant improvements were made in 2009. This included building and parking improvements, landscaping, and building a portion of the Tioughnioga River Trail.

Large signs cover the viewshed. A welcoming sense of place needs to be created for the exit area. The gateway should help to brand the City and give the impression of a vibrant, progressive, and modern 21<sup>st</sup> century community. Recommendations call for tougher sign ordinances to reduce the height of highway signs, revise site plan review to require more landscaping and greenspace, and develop minimum design guidelines to provide a consistent and attractive character to commercial areas. Embrace waterfront development. Improve streetscapes. Pay special attention to the vacant gas station.

2. Housing: Limit the encroachment of large commercial development into residential areas around the Exit 11 interchange.
3. Natural Resources: Create a greenway and linear park that would connect Beaudry Park, to Dexter Park, and then to Yaman Park. The greenway would accommodate playgrounds, community gardens, exercise trails, sculpture gardens, and picnic facilities.



4. Transportation: The East End has been concerned about truck traffic through the neighborhood. The City should establish preferred truck routes and then work with local businesses to insure that the designated routes are followed.
5. Trails: With the exception of walkways through City parks, there are no trails located within the City of Cortland. The future of the Tioughnioga River Trail, a portion of which would be constructed in the East End, has an uncertain future due to lack of political backing at the County level. Construction of the trail is supported in the Comprehensive Plan. There is also a designated bicycle trail in the East End, the Millennium Trail, which commences in Yaman Park and traverses the City and beyond to the Lime Hollow Nature Center in the nearby community of the Town of Cortlandville. Provisions for trails such as bike racks are also supported in the Comprehensive Plan.
6. Land Use: In spite of growth at the Exit 11 area there are vacant buildings, underused properties, and vacancies, including the Riverside Plaza. Redevelopment is needed, not only to cure the visual blight but to prevent further encroachment of commercial uses into the residential zones on Clinton Avenue.



**Cortland County Consolidated Plan** - The contents of a Consolidated (Housing) Plan are dictated by the federal government. The proscribed outline encourages a community to take a close look at its housing issues such as its owner-occupied and income property housing stock, housing affordability, accessibility, safety, and a myriad of other housing-related concerns. Cortland County, and a number of other County municipalities and housing agencies, believed they were at a disadvantage in competing for housing funds without a housing plan. Therefore a Consolidated (Housing) Plan was commissioned in 2002. Each municipality and major housing provider in Cortland County was solicited for input into the Plan and a series of public meetings were held. Regarding the City of Cortland, it was noted that the 60% of the City's housing stock was constructed prior to 1939 and 75% was constructed prior to 1950 (Source: 2000 Census). The typical City structure is a late 19th/early 20th century two-story wood frame structure. Many of these larger homes have been converted to multi-family apartment houses. The City's population is economically disadvantaged, with one in four persons living below the poverty line and almost 52% living at or below 80% of the County's median income. With an aging housing stock and many lower income residents, the City's housing is deteriorated. The Consolidated Plan notes that an estimated 65-75% of the housing stock is in substandard condition.

The Consolidated Plan recommendations call for the rehabilitation of the City's existing housing, including both owner occupied and rental housing. More aggressive code enforcement should be undertaken to maintain housing units as "standard". Homeownership opportunities should be sought, especially since the City of Cortland has more renter housing units than owner-occupied. The Plan further recommends seeking ways to keep housing affordable; increasing rental and ownership opportunities for the middle class population; cultivating improved tenant/landlord relationships; and developing a stronger working relationship between the City and SUNY Cortland with respect to off campus housing.

## **B. Visioning Session**

The City of Cortland held one public Visioning Workshop where the entire East End neighborhood was invited to participate. The visioning meeting was held in the Ramada Inn, which is located in the East End Neighborhood. The meeting focused on introducing the strategic planning process and having those in attendance complete a SWOT analysis. The SWOT allowed participants to concentrate on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats in the East End. Approximately 30 people attended the meeting on February 26, 2009. The goal of the meeting was to gather information that would contribute to the overall vision for the neighborhood.

**STRENGTHS the “Here and Now”**  
**Strengths need to be maintained, built upon, or leveraged**

- Tioughnioga River
- Rte 81 exit brings business in
- Rte 81 exit “easy on easy off”
- Strong sense of East End community i.e. Italian heritage, St. Anthony’s
- Open space
- Parks: Dexter, Yaman
- East End Community Center
- Industrial (factories)
- Larger yards on residential properties
- Lower traffic flow (residential areas)
- Safety (low crime rate)
- Range of choices in housing
- Affordable housing
- Riverside Plaza, restaurants, hotels
- Daycare center
- Family-owned businesses
- Sidewalks (walkability)
- Railroad (development potential)
- Bus service
- Room for more development
- Farmer’s market
- Tree-lined streets

**WEAKNESSES the “Here and Now”**  
**Weaknesses need to be remedied or stopped**

- Degrading streets, esp. NYS roads
- Lack of business signage
- Conflicts between land uses: commercial, industrial, residential
- Noise, truck traffic, lighting, lack of buffers
- Gateway at Clinton St.
- Lack of places to eat outside (picnic tables, etc) at Riverside Plaza
- Chain restaurant designs
- Pockets of dilapidated housing
- Lack of commercial development
- Overall improvement to Dexter Park
- Condition of Riverside Plaza
- Vacant buildings: residential, commercial, and industrial
- Lack of landscaping around industrial uses
- Rte. 81 northbound exit sign not visible enough

## OPPORTUNITIES

**Future opportunities that may be influenced by forces external to East End; opportunities need to be prioritized and optimized**

- Link the commercial at I81 (exit 11) to area businesses within East End
- Draw travelers further into the East End (past businesses immediately adjacent to exit)
- Redevelopment of Clinton Ave (like Skaneateles; maintaining residential character)
- Capitalize on Italian heritage: develop “Little Italy”
- Tioughnioga River Trail
- Home ownership initiative/funding
- Develop winter home for Cortland Repertory Theatre
- Available buildings and land
- Possibility of mixed-use in-fill development
- Future home for (expanded) farmer’s market
- Space for a year round location for Farmer’s market/flea market
- Space for a community garden
- Tree planting program on private property
- Location for outlets for local businesses
- Redirect traffic flow from Exit 11 to East End and to downtown
- Pomeroy Street/Elm Street intersection
- Redevelop dilapidated housing

## THREATS

Forces that threaten the East End that may be controlled by external events; threats need to be countered or minimized

- Chains/franchise stores
- Spot zoning
- Chain stores in Riverside Plaza
- Clinton Avenue sprawl/commercial encroachment
- Substandard housing
- Vacant commercial buildings
- Heavy traffic volume/congested circulation
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- Location of Marietta
- Lack of funding (government and otherwise)
- Increasing crime due to economy
- Lack of local jobs
- Lack of signage for businesses

### C. Steering Committee Meetings

Steering Committee members were apprised of all public meeting dates and were encouraged to attend them. In addition to the public meetings, the Steering Committee met regularly to compose a vision statement, review pertinent data culled from the surveys and the public meetings, and to engage in a number activities aimed at identifying their own perceptions regarding the East End Neighborhood.

The Steering Committee developed the following vision statement, which is the focus of the suggested actions in this plan and serves as a shared sense of direction for future neighborhood decisions.

*In 2020, the City of Cortland's East End will be a welcoming, friendly, and vibrant neighborhood that acknowledges and celebrates its rich heritage and community values. The East End will embrace its small town charm by integrating clean, tree-lined streets, family neighborhoods, quality housing and green space, while supporting commercial development that contributes to a prosperous business community. With active community involvement, the East End will maintain its diversity and sense of place while preserving its historic past.*

## Photo Exercise

The Steering Committee also participated in a photography exercise. Using disposable cameras, they were given instructions to take pictures throughout the East End Neighborhood that portrayed a positive image of the area, or visual representations that did not bode well for the East End. The committee convened and split into groups to discuss the photos they had taken. They shared their observations, thoughts, and feelings with other group members. Upon the mutual decision of the group, they pasted the “best” of the negative and positive images on poster boards and then each group shared their pictures with the rest of the Steering Committee. Positive images included well-kept houses, small mom and pop businesses, St. Anthony’s Church, and well-kept commercial buildings. With regard to negative images, the poor condition of commercial properties, particularly those with little or no landscaping, poor road conditions, and blighted residential properties were the most pervasive negative physical features of the neighborhood.



## D. Surveys

### Residents' Survey

Thoma Development Consultants conducted two mail surveys for the East End Neighborhood Strategic Plan. The first survey was sent to all identified households in the target area. The survey included a number of household demographic questions such as tenure of the unit, size of the household, age of the occupant, and whether or not the household was headed by a single female. This was followed by a series of questions meant to gauge the respondent's attitude towards conditions in the East End. Finally, a number of open-ended questions were posed to allow the respondent to further explain his or her feelings regarding certain conditions or their hopes for the future. A total of 660 surveys were mailed and 230 were returned, a 35% response rate. Some of the survey highlights are listed following. The full survey results can be viewed in *Chapter VI, Appendices*.

### SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS

- Of the 230 responses to the survey, 74% of respondents own their home and 22% rent (the difference between 100% is based on non responses to the question). 25% of the respondents are aged 65 or older.
- 23% of the households who responded have a member who is unemployed. 22% of households have a handicapped member. 37% of respondents are single female heads of household.
- 25% of respondents have lived in the East End for 1 to 5 years. Another 20% have lived in the East End for 11-20 years, and 18% have lived in the neighborhood for more than 30 years.



## OVERALL NEIGHBORHOOD PERCEPTION

- 28% of survey respondents believe their neighborhood has become a less desirable place to live since they moved there and 29% say it has not changed since they moved in.

## NEIGHBORHOOD ISSUES

- 32% of respondents think that truck traffic is the number one neighborhood issue. This is followed by housing conditions (27%), and stray animals (22%).
- When asked what improvements need to be made to the neighborhood, 58% of respondents think that the need for better roads, sidewalks, and lighting is the number one needed improvement. This is followed by the need for more jobs (53%), and the need for better housing conditions (43%).
- 22% strongly disagree that landlords take care of their properties.

## SERVICES

- 24% of respondents strongly disagree that there are enough stores in the neighborhood, however, 28% believe they can get to the stores they want.

## CRIME

- 26% of respondents agree that it is safe to walk in the East End during the day, while only 7% feel safe at night. Only 10% feel there is enough police protection.

## Business Owners Survey

A second survey was conducted that solicited opinions from East End business owners. A total of 26 responses was received out of a mailing of 59 businesses (44%). Many of the positive comments of doing business in the East End centered on the neighborhood's nearness to major transportation routes, particularly Interstate 81. The friendliness of the people, sense of community, and its heritage were often cited as plusses.

Some of the negative comments included rundown buildings, the poor condition of streets, truck traffic, and the need for the Riverside Plaza to improve.

## Building Conditions Surveys

Thoma Development Consultants also conducted exterior inspections of all buildings in the study area. The results of these inspections are included following in the *Building Conditions* section of *Part IV, Existing Conditions and Analysis*.



# MAP 1: EAST END NEIGHBORHOOD AERIAL VIEW

