

VI. HOUSING

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Some 40 to 50 years ago, the City of Cortland was divided into small residential neighborhoods, each typically within walking distance of a City park, elementary school, and small local grocery store. Many people lived in the same neighborhood in which they worked. The City's junior/senior high school was centrally located adjacent to downtown on Central Avenue, and the Main Street served the retail, commerce, and other needs of the community.



The suburbanization that occurred in the United States beginning in the late 1950's changed development patterns across the country and in the City of Cortland as well. This change caused a deviation from the traditional grid pattern of development found in most City neighborhoods to housing developments with larger building lots, no sidewalks, and no grid pattern. In Cortland, this occurred mostly along the periphery of the City where larger parcels of land could accommodate such development. These areas were built to be more accessible by car than by foot. Today the grid pattern development still dominates the City, with more suburban housing found in areas such as the Hickory Park development, Sunnyfield Slopes, Kellogg Road, and the Hillcrest area of the City. These areas tend to be the site of the limited new housing development that has taken place in the City over the last three decades and tend to be the housing in the best condition.



Despite the lack of significant new housing initiatives, there are a number of factors that have affected the City's housing stock. These are discussed following.

RECENT HOUSING STUDIES AND EFFORTS

Cortland County Consolidated Plan

In the early 2000's, SUNY Cortland received a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the goal of which was to tap the talent, expertise, and manpower of the college and extend it to the community. There were six core programs that the grant required the community to investigate and develop goals and implementation measures



for: community planning, housing, crime prevention, economic development, job training, and education. A Blue Ribbon Committee was established to oversee this project and community leaders volunteered their time to work on the six core areas under individual committees.

As a result of the grant, housing was focused on in-depth. It became readily apparent that a number of agencies were involved with housing issues but that there was a weak network when it came to information sharing. Additionally, a number of agencies that rely on grant funding were more and more challenged by the lack of a housing plan, or vision, which is often a requirement in submitting competitive housing-related grant requests. An outgrowth of this was the development of a housing plan or *Cortland County Consolidated Plan* that was completed in 2002. It is a comprehensive study of the housing needs in the County, including the City of Cortland. Regarding the City, some of the highlights of the plan are noted following:



- The City of Cortland is the poorest community in Cortland County, with the lowest per capita and median household incomes compared to the other political subdivisions in Cortland. The City's poverty percentage of 24.7% is more than double the next highest percentage of any municipality in the County.
- The City is the only municipality that has a higher rate of income property housing units (56.3%) compared to owner-occupied housing units (43.7%).
- 65-75% of the City's housing units were determined to be in substandard condition, using a State definition for "substandard", included in Appendix I.
- A major gap in the County's housing market was the lack of available, quality, moderate-to-high end housing choices for both purchase and rent.

Some of the Recommendations included in the plan included the following:

- Improve the condition of the community's housing stock.
- Renovate existing rental and owner-occupied properties through rehabilitation programs.
- Initiate more aggressive code enforcement.
- Coordinate inspection of student housing with code enforcement to ensure that student housing meets housing code standards, at a minimum.
- Initiate a more proactive code enforcement program.
- Increase the level of homeownership.
- Promote homeownership for low-to-moderate income first-time homebuyers.
- Limit the conversion of single family homes to rental properties.
- Increase access to affordable, quality income properties.
- Income property rehabilitation programs should be conditioned on rent subsidies or affordable rents.
- Increase the availability of rental and homeownership opportunities for middle and upper-middle class owners.



- Build a stronger working relationship and coordination of efforts between SUNY Cortland and the community to mitigate the impact of student housing on neighborhoods and to ensure safe student housing.
- Develop more quality transitional/special needs housing units.
- Reduce housing barriers to residents with physical disabilities.
- Evaluate the older housing stock for lead based paint and other environmental hazards.

Housing Confabs

The lack of community networking spawned the development of a series of “Housing Confabs”. Since early 2005, Housing Confabs have been held every year in the City of Cortland to update the community on the progress that has been made in the housing sector. This is a local grassroots effort to bring attention to the housing problems throughout Cortland County, including the City of Cortland. A number of consensus building activities completed by attendees at the early Confabs noted that housing is not only a quality of life issue, it can be an attraction and retention tool for local employers, and a municipal economic issue, as most Cortland County communities derive a significant amount of tax revenue from residential properties. The Housing Confabs identified pressing Cortland County housing issues and developed a broad-range of solutions via a brainstorming session. Attendees voted for those issues that were most important to them. The number in parentheses next to the following list indicates the number of votes each issued received. The higher the number, the greater the importance of the housing issue to the group.

- PILOT incentives for housing improvements or converting housing from income property to owner occupied (14)
- Consequences for non-compliance with codes (12)
- Articulate rules such as assessment (10)
- Awareness of programs available on a community-wide basis (10)
- Create "one-stop-shop" for housing or reorganize existing housing network (10)
- Continue rehabilitation efforts for low income or where needed (7)
- Homeownership Programs (6)
- Create business tax credits for businesses that provide housing incentives (5)
- Provide education for homeownership (5)
- Provide more frequent trash amnesty days (5)
- PR campaign to have public officials relate the rules (4)
- Work with TC3 and SUNY Cortland to invest themselves/students in the community (3)
- Compliment those who "do it right" and/or make a difference in the community (2)
- Fix the landlords association
- Provide a rating system for student housing (1)
- Provide assistance with housing colors (0)
- Disposal system for hazardous waste (0)
- Solicit businesses to pay for housing work/materials (0)
- Better zoning (0)
- Create more specialized housing (0)
- Increase landlord security deposit (0)



It was agreed upon by the Cortland Housing Assistance Council (CHAC), that they would devote 10% of a newly created staff position to being the one-stop-shop for housing information. As of the date of this plan, this has not come to fruition. One major project to come about as a result of the Confabs was the Housing Visions Limited project on South Main Street in the City. This Syracuse-based not-for-profit developer invested \$8M in their “Crown Housing Project” through rehabilitation and demolition and reconstruction of dilapidated income property housing. The City worked hand-in-hand with the developer to make this project a financial reality. It transformed a significant portion of the neighborhood and created 30 new affordable housing units.



South End Neighborhood/East End Neighborhood Strategic Plans

The City was fortunate to receive two separate Technical Assistance grants from the NYS Office for Community Renewal to develop strategic plans for the City’s delineated South End Neighborhood (2007) and its East End Neighborhood (2010). These plans cover a wide range of development opportunities and needs that must be addressed to bring about a revitalization of these areas, including housing. Poor housing conditions in the South End Neighborhood, and a high number of absentee landlords, were identified as serious concerns.



In total, 257 structures were surveyed from the exterior in the South End to determine their condition using a NYS definition of standard/substandard (Appendix I). Of the 122 income property structures, only 10 were determined to be in standard condition. These 122 structures contained 345 residential income units. Most of these structures were occupied by lower income tenants.

In association with the East End plan, the City inspected the exterior of all residential and mixed commercial/residential structures in the neighborhood. It was determined that 400 out of 491 structures (82%) were in substandard condition, although the degree of substandardness was much less that found in the South End. There were 142 income properties that contained 355 housing units; 120 structures (84.5%) were determined to be substandard to some degree. Due to the large number of two and three family owner-occupied structures in the neighborhood, absentee landlords were not a significant concern.



Clearly, substandard housing is one of the core issues of these neighborhoods and their rehabilitation is a key component in recovery efforts planned for the areas.

AGE AND CONDITION OF THE CITY'S HOUSING STOCK

The City of Cortland's housing stock is aged, with 83% built prior to 1960. More than half the housing was built prior to 1939, with many over 100 years old. According to the 2000 Census, over 40% of the housing structures are one unit detached structures. The typical house in the City is a 19th century two-story wood frame construction. Many of these structures are architecturally significant. These homes were not built for energy efficiency and their large size makes many structures difficult and costly to maintain. As a result, a large percentage, as detailed previously, would not be considered "standard" according to the NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal's definition of substandard, included in Appendix I, even though they may not appear significantly decayed. Many would not meet present building code standards but are grandfathered under the code regulations imposed at the time of construction unless significant rehabilitation is undertaken. "Newer" housing as noted above, is generally in better condition and located in the suburban development areas.



Since the late 1970's, the City has sponsored numerous grant applications to various entities, such as the NYS Office of Community Renewal under the Community Development Block Grant Program, and the NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal under the HOME Program, to rehabilitate substandard owner-occupied and income properties. In addition, to both combat the condition of housing and promote homeownership opportunities, the City has garnered numerous homeownership grant programs for both new construction and the purchase/renovation of the existing housing stock. The majority of these grants have focused on the housing needs of lower income populations. The City needs to continue these efforts and seek new funding streams, in addition to seeking housing partners that share a vision with the City.

POPULATION/HOUSEHOLD TRENDS

While the population in many upstate New York communities continues to dwindle, many experience an increase in the number of households. Household increases follow a national trend based on human longevity, marital disruption, and postponements in marriage. While the City shows small increases in its number of households, the number is basically stagnant.



**TABLE 3
POPULATION TRENDS 1980-2000**

Municipality	1980	1990	2000	% Change 90-00
Cortland County	48,820	48,963	48,599	-1.8%
Cortland, City	20,138	19,801	18,740	-5.4%

**TABLE 4
HOUSEHOLD TRENDS 1980-2000**

Municipality	1980	1990	2000	% Change 90-00
Cortland County	16,324	17,247	20,116	16.6%
Cortland, City	6,868	6,911	6,922	0.16%

INCOME AND HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Declining Incomes

The City’s overall population has decreased over the last two decades, while the percentage of those living in poverty has escalated, from 19.7% in 1980, to 20.2% in 1990, to 24.7% in 2000. The City outpaces all other County communities in this regard. Concurrently, the percentage of those living at or below 80% of the Cortland County median household income has risen from 44.4% in 1990, to 51.8% in 2000. Living at or below 80% of median household income is a yardstick used by many funding sources to gauge the economic standing of households in need.

Housing Affordability

Housing values in the City have historically been lower than the balance of the County, and home purchases prices are relatively low compared to many nearby areas. This may be due to the aging housing stock in the City and suburbanization trends that have occurred across the country over the past 50 years. While this increases the affordability of homes in the City, it also means that the investment potential is less. As detailed below, property taxes increase the burden of property ownership in the City. Nevertheless, much of Cortland’s for-sale market remains affordable to the average home purchaser.

The same is not true in the rental market. The percentage of renter households paying more than 30% of their income for housing costs is 44.4%. The high cost of housing as it relates to income in the County has resulted in Cortland County being designated as a *Difficult Development Area* by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This means



the ratio of fair market rents to area median income is within the top 20% of all metropolitan counties in the United States. The percentage of homeowners paying more than 30% for housing costs is 19.4%.

As noted in more detail under *Student Housing* below, the student rental housing market in the City is very enticing for many housing developers because they can exact higher rents from students. This creates a competition for quality affordable housing units in the City.

County and local property taxes combined in the City of Cortland are the highest in Cortland County. The 2009 rate was \$27.54 per \$1,000 of assessment. Loss of industry and a significant number of tax exempt properties make it difficult for the City to generate sufficient revenue for needed expenses. This situation also transfers more of the tax burden to residential properties, making it more difficult to afford property in the City.

LACK OF HOUSING CHOICES

Market Rate Housing

The attention being paid to student housing development, as noted below, and the fact that most housing related grants focus on a low-to-moderate income households, has created a gap in the development of housing desired by middle and upper income families. While much of this information is anecdotal, information culled at public visioning meetings, and information provided by entities such as realtors, the college, and the City School District would indicate a lack of quality market choices in both the owner-occupied and income property housing market sectors. As indicated above, there has been little new housing constructed in the City in the last decade. Most of the apartment complexes located in the City exceed 30 years in age. As discussed previously, there is no townhouse development in the City and market rate housing options are almost non-existent on the upper floors of the downtown. If the City is to maintain an economically balanced ratio of middle to upper middle class households, it needs to work with developers willing to invest in the future housing needs of this segment of the population.

Aging Population and Housing Needs

The City of Cortland's over-65 population, per the 2000 Census, is 12.9%, which accounts for 2,418 persons. Twenty-one percent (21%) of all the households in the City have a member who is aged 65 or older. Nationally, the Baby Boomer population, generally those born between 1945 and 1960, will have a major impact on local economies. While this age cohort is thought to be one of the richest in the country because of protected pensions and conservative saving habits, the dependency of this population in terms of health and other issues will be a concern to local governments.



As noted previously in this Section, the typical City house is a large, wooden structure that was built prior to 1960. These homes are typically harder to maintain, consume high energy levels, and may not be handicap accessible, making it difficult, especially for older homeowners, to remain living in these dwellings as they grow older. Surveys by the AARP show a desire among more than 80% of those aged 50 and over to continue living in their homes as long as possible, even if they need assistance to do so. Most senior citizens, however, bought their homes as young or middle-aged adults who valued a bigger house and yard for raising a young family. Now they are one or two person households who do not maneuver stairs as well, cannot do routine housing maintenance on their own, and typically live in homes that don't have features that would allow them to remain safely in the home such as widened doorways for handicap accessibility, grab bars, and a physical layout that is conducive to an older homeowner.



As indicated above, there has been very little housing development in the City since 2000, including no new single family housing construction. The City is lacking housing options for the elderly such as townhouse development with maintenance provided by the developer or ranch style houses that are easier to navigate. In fact, in all of Cortland County, there has been very little townhouse development with the notable exceptions being *The Park* and *Walden Oaks* in the Town of Cortlandville.

The rental market is also lacking in the types of apartment units that are attractive to those aging adults. Many of the rental developments that were built exclusively for senior citizens, such as Creamery Hills in the Town of Harford, Friendship House in the City, and Ellis Pines in the Village of Homer, have both income and age restrictions and do not meet the needs of seniors in somewhat higher financial brackets.

The City should seek to keep its aging population and provide housing and other amenities that this population desires and needs.

RENTAL HOUSING MARKET

The City's rental housing market has received a significant amount of public attention in recent years. Most of the City's substandard housing is rental housing. While there are many landlords who own properties that are well maintained, there are many rental properties that are in poor or very poor condition. These same properties are often those that receive the highest number of complaints or arrests via the Code Office and/or Police Department, so poor quality



housing and poor tenant behavior often go hand-in-hand. The two exterior surveys recently completed in the City for the South and East End Neighborhoods detailed above are testament to the housing conditions found throughout many neighborhoods in the City, particularly in the rental market.

Sentiments expressed at Housing Confab meetings include the overall opinion that absentee owners do not have a vested interest in the community and therefore are derelict in maintenance. Many landlords counter that with escalating property taxes and a poorer population that cannot afford fair market rents, there is little money left over in which to invest back into the property. Landlords also point to the fact that they provide needed and desired housing options and that they positively impact the economy through the purchase of local goods and services.

Student Housing

The State University of New York at Cortland is presently the County's largest employer with approximately 1,300 employees. The present undergraduate and graduate enrollment is approximately 7,500 students.



In recent years the quality of much of the student housing stock has improved, however, many structures, even if they have no building code violations, detract from neighborhood character with a lack of architectural detail, little landscaping, and large percentages of building lots used for parking. The nexus between one's surroundings and behavior is well documented, and enhancing the physical character of neighborhoods around the college can help to alleviate the behavioral problems that are a complaint of many residents.

The college has an enormous regional and local economic impact. The SUNY Cortland Economics Department completed a study in 2008 and detailed how the college's \$150M in direct spending by students, visitors, and staff resulted in a multiplier effect of \$278M in Cortland, Tompkins, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Broome Counties. Clearly, the City of Cortland reaps a significant financial benefit from having the college within its borders. Students inject a vitality into the community and lend their time to both voluntary causes such as working for non-profits, community cleanup days, and fundraising; and required course work such as teaching in local schools or interning in local businesses.

Despite the positive benefits derived from SUNY Cortland, no other segment of the City's housing market has raised the public consciousness to the extent of the off campus student rental market. While the State University of New York at Cortland has been located at its present site on the City's West Hill since 1923, and students have always lived both on and off-campus, the college enrollment has increased



dramatically without a concurrent increase in the number of on-campus beds. Firm statistics on the number of off campus students is complicated by a number of factors such as:

- Non-traditional students that live in the community all year round.
- The number of students that may be studying abroad, completing internships, or student teaching
- There are more students attending classes in the fall than the spring.

While the number of off campus students is akin to a moving target, the overall population of the college is an easier number to quantify, as are the number of on campus beds. The table following cites statistics on the changing off/on campus population during the last 40 years. The 10% variation was calculated to account for the number of students who would be neither on campus nor off-campus at any given time (for instance, a student studying abroad). This was discussed with a SUNY statistician who commented that the deviation was more than generous. The calculation results in an off campus population of approximately 4,000 students. This number is exclusive of Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3) students. There is anecdotal information to suggest that the City is also becoming more attractive to TC3 students who find college town living attractive.

**TABLE 5
SUNY CORTLAND ON/OFF CAMPUS STUDENT POPULATION BY DECADE**

	1970's	1980's	1990's	2000's
Headcount	5,820	6,557	6,750	7,286
On Campus	2,363	2,363	2,687	2,732
Off Campus	3,457	4,194	4,063	4,554
Variation (-10%)	3,112	3,775	3,657	4,099
% Change		+21%	-3%	+12%

With a struggling economy that makes it more difficult for families to afford college, statistics suggesting a decline in the number of college bound high school students and physical barriers to increasing its current population, SUNY Cortland believes that its enrollment will not increase in the near future, therefore the off campus population is not expected to significantly increase.

In addition to the increase in students living off campus, lifestyles of college students have changed over the years including a desire for their own bedroom and the ability to drive their cars to school. Additionally, in 1978, the City enacted legislation to limit the number of unrelated persons living in a single dwelling unit to no more than three persons. The need for more individual student living space, the need to provide more paved areas for cars, and the fact that no more than three unrelated persons can live in a single dwelling unit have more than likely contributed to the student housing population splaying into more housing structures in the City, particularly into neighborhoods within walking distance of the college. It has also resulted in more greenspace being paved for parking. A concerned citizens group, the Hill Neighborhood



Association has long been concerned with the expansion of student housing into traditional single family neighborhoods.

Thoma Development Consultants worked with a group of students from the college's Urban Sociology Department, the City's Assessor, a group of local landlords, and the Hill Neighborhood Association to attempt to identify the properties on the "college hill" area that primarily house students. The structures are indicated in Map 12 following this Section, although there are likely additional properties used for student housing that are not identified.

In 2009, United Development based in Troy, NY constructed two apartment buildings with a total of 92, four bedroom units for students on Route 13 in the Town of Cortlandville. When totally occupied, this project will accommodate the housing needs of 370 students, or approximately 9% of the off campus population. While this development will relieve some of the pressure on traditional single family neighborhoods, it has a negative aspect too. Cortlandville will most likely reap the economic benefits of having students residing in the Town, potentially siphoning student spending from downtown Cortland.

Also during 2009, a local developer constructed two student housing structures on a vacant site on Tompkins Street, within easy walking distance of the college. This project houses 54 college students and provides on-site parking. Together, the Cortlandville and Tompkins Street projects will house 10% of the student off campus population. It is anticipated that the Tompkins Street project will be more attractive to students, as opposed to the Cortlandville project, given its close proximity to campus and the downtown.

Higher Density Student-Centric Neighborhoods - As temporary residents in the community, college students deserve safe, decent, affordable, and desirable housing choices, and should be made to feel welcome as City residents. As mentioned, they bring vitality to the community and are an important part of the social and economic fabric of the City. However, the lifestyle of many college students, and their transient nature, can be a poor mix with many of the traditionally single family and owner occupied neighborhoods near the College. As aforementioned, the conflicts between year-round residents and students have escalated in recent years as previously owner-occupied homes transition to student rentals. The community, students, and landlords must abandon the commonly held paradigm that "student" housing will, by its nature, be poor quality housing and create bad neighborhoods.

In order to protect valuable single family neighborhoods and to reduce development pressures on them, limit the inevitable conflicts between students and permanent residents, and to provide SUNY Cortland and TC3 students with high quality and interesting places to live, the City should work to foster high quality student-centric neighborhoods within walking distance of both the downtown and the College. Such neighborhoods would provide housing, services, and amenities needed and desired by young adults. The character of various neighborhoods could, and should, vary from high-density urban living, to trendy and artistic, to recreation-centered living.



The City needs to develop zoning and land use regulations, and an overall housing policy, that gradually reduces the number of students living in single family residential neighborhoods, while providing housing developers with an attractive housing incentive for higher density development in designated areas of the City nearer to campus and the downtown. As more detailed in Section XIV. *Land Use and Zoning*, in order to achieve its goals, the City should consider creating housing density overlay districts in areas of the City already predominated by a student population. The overlay districts would allow more than three unrelated persons per unit, perhaps greater unit densities, and be tied to stricter design, landscaping, and maintenance ordinances crafted to create the desired character. This should include amenities that are attractive to young adults, such as on-site parking, exercise rooms, and places to congregate.



Multi-story masonry apartment buildings set close to the street, such as this, is the type of redevelopment recommended for eastern Groton Avenue.

One recommended location for developing a student-centric neighborhood would be the eastern portion of Groton Avenue from approximately Homer Avenue to just west of Main Street. As part of the downtown, this area should be developed with an urban character. This includes attached multi-story masonry apartment buildings that may, or may not, include commercial space. The concept sketch following this Section illustrates the type of desired redevelopment. Such redevelopment would not only create more housing for students, young adults, and others, but would enhance the character of the downtown. Other neighborhoods should provide very different living experiences, while preserving and enhancing the fine architecture many of these neighborhoods possess.

Code and Law Enforcement

As off campus living has burgeoned in the City, it has resulted in a number of legislative actions needing to be undertaken. Two efforts include the recent adoptions of a Nuisance Party Law and a Rental Housing Permit Law.

The escalating number of students living off campus, partnered with an under-21 year old population that cannot go downtown to drink, has resulted in more parties occurring in private homes in City neighborhoods. Concerned about the number of students who were being injured at parties, escalating noise levels, littering, the collapse of a floor of a house from an over-occupancy party, public drunkenness, etc., SUNY Cortland and the Cortland Police Department partnered on a Nuisance Party Law that would give the police the enforcement power to break up a party that was becoming disorderly or posed a threat to the neighborhood



or the party-goers. In addition, more legal onus is placed on the landlord for the behavior of his/her tenants. This enactment of the law was a good example of the town/gown relationship that was forged between the police and the college that could be used to address other issues related to student life in the community. Students who are charged under the Nuisance Party Law are also subject to an appearance before the college judicial system that could result in expulsion from the college. While this law is not solely intended for the student housing population, the origins of the law started with off campus housing.

While the Rental Permit Law is not exclusively targeted to the off campus housing market, it is recognized that many of the violations related to three unrelated persons living in a single dwelling unit emanates from student housing. Up to this point in time, no property owner has been prosecuted for over occupancy in City Court. This has resulted in a situation whereby many student rental units are illegally over-occupied with no financial or legal disincentives imposed on landlords. As a consequence, one of the areas where student housing has expanded is into previously single family homes, with more than three students occupying these houses.

Students typically pay between \$2000-\$3,000 per semester for off campus housing. If three students occupy a 3-bedroom dwelling unit, this translates to approximately \$6,000-\$9,000 in gross rent for a semester, or \$1,200-\$1,800 per month. These rents are above the average rents typical in Cortland County for a 3-bedroom apartment (\$750 including utilities), which is why student rental housing is appealing to many developers and why over-occupancy is rampant. A recently enacted Rental Permit Law will likely provide the City with better information and tools to enforce laws limiting the number of unrelated persons per dwelling unit. The City Council is trying to work with the Code Office on its technology and staffing needs so that the implementation of the law goes smoothly and the law is effective.

CORTLAND REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER



Cortland County's only hospital is the Cortland Regional Medical Center (CRMC), whose main campus is located in the City on the corner of Homer Avenue and West Main Street. The hospital is another main economic driver in both the City and the County, as it employs 700 full time employees. The hospital has been in operation for 115 years, most of it at its present location.

In light of CRMC's need to remain competitive and to attract quality doctors and staff, the hospital has embarked on a number of significant expansion projects since 1993, with more expansions to its main campus in the City anticipated in the near future. For example, in 1990, the hospital opened a 9,800 square foot daycare facility, *Here We Grow*, on the east side of Homer Avenue. In 1993, it added an 80-bed



Nursing and Rehabilitation Facility. In 2003, it added 12,000 square feet to its Emergency Room.

To accommodate its expansion plans, the hospital has acquired approximately 20 single family homes and some commercial properties along Alvena, Loope, and Van Hoesen Streets, in addition to Homer Avenue. Some of the homes have been converted to physicians' offices and some have been demolished, mainly for parking. Due to monetary constraints, the hospital has chosen to expand its surface parking instead of opting to create underground parking or a parking garage. This hospital's overall need for more space has prompted concern in the West Side Neighborhood, and the City Planning Board, because of the amount of paved surfaces and the number of single family homes being converted to non-residential use and/or demolished. The City's present zoning does not address site plan review for demolition and single family homes are exempt from site plan review. Since the hospital is an example of the cumulative impact of a significant acquisition of properties, and subsequent demolition or conversion to another use can have on a neighborhood, the City needs to review its present land use regulations for both demolition and site plan review, particularly in R-1 and R-2 zoning districts.



The City Planning Board held a work session on December 14, 2009 to discuss the need for the hospital to submit a site plan so the City gets a holistic view of the hospital's future plans. The City hopes to facilitate the hospital's need for more room to expand while maintaining the character of the surrounding residential neighborhood.

CMRC Focus Group

Concerned by the public outcry that has been occurring as a result of the hospital's acquisitions and development, and the impact on this primarily residential neighborhood, the City appointed a Hospital Focus Group that was comprised of West Side Neighborhood local residents, government representatives, and West Side business owners. This group met with hospital officials on January 28, 2009. The following were the concerns and comments voiced at the meeting by both parties:

NEIGHBORHOOD/HOSPITAL CONCERNS

- Zoning must be strictly enforced
- Degradation of neighborhoods
- Lack of nicer housing; nowhere to build new housing
- Location of the floodplain in area



- Lack of pedestrian access; need traffic calming
- Too much smoking
- Hospital noise
- New parking lots need better design: lighting, trees, greenspace
- General appearance of new hospital construction: need to clean up quicker
- Unreliable public transportation
- Better communication between neighbors and hospital needed
- Traffic safety needed: there are more cars and school buses in the area
- Condition of Homer Avenue buildings
- Number of homes torn down and turned into parking lots
- Impervious surfaces are a burden on the stormwater system
- Loss of tax base
- A parking garage may be more detrimental than surface parking
- Hospital must weigh location/accessibility with competitive positioning when selecting places to expand

POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES OF THE WEST SIDE NEIGHBORHOOD

- Residential atmosphere: great neighbors, nice side of town
- Cortland School District
- Suggett Park
- Services that the hospital provides: prompt care, Teenage Volunteer Services, Youth services, daycare and nursing home: intergenerational care, its location in the City
- Hospital's economic impact: \$130M; employs 825 persons
- Hospital is good for other businesses such as Hyde's Diner
- Hospital attracts doctors' offices and these businesses patronize other local businesses
- Hospital is helping to clean up the area by buying rundown and other properties

NEIGHBORHOOD/HOSPITAL DESIRES FOR THE FUTURE

- Move more outpatient services off the main hospital campus
- Move future hospital development to the north instead of the west, i.e., Homer Avenue
- Increase communication between the hospital and the neighborhood by forming an Advisory Committee comprised of the two entities
- New hospital buildings should blend more with the architecture of the neighborhood
- Increase traffic safety
- Provide more greenspace, especially trees with a large canopy
- Provide more privacy fencing between hospital and residential properties
- Promote such activities as Health Fairs; promote other activities that engage the neighborhood and the hospital



EXIT 11 COMMERCIAL HIGHWAY EXPANSION

The Exit 11 Highway Commercial area is discussed more fully in Section IV. *Commercial Resources*. One of the concerns with this area is the continued encroachment of commercial development into nearby residential neighborhoods. This is particularly an issue along Clinton Avenue, Pomeroy, and River Streets and streets that intersect them. While this development is an opportunity for the City to expand its commercial tax base, the City must recognize that this commercial development is incrementally changing the face of some neighborhoods. It is imperative that the City limit the impact of any further commercial encroachment into these neighborhoods.

IN-REM FORECLOSURES

Beginning in the spring of 2010, the City will have the opportunity to offer for sale or auction properties seized for non-payment of back taxes (in rem properties). This includes both residential and commercial properties. Approximately \$1.7M in back taxes are owed to the City. It is hoped that property sales, for the first year in particular, will put Cortland on firmer financial footing.

The City is working with Habitat for Humanity so that perhaps several properties can be used by them to continue their work of rehabilitating or building housing for needy families. While the City is anxious to settle its debts on all of these properties, and return them to the tax rolls, it is important that the City consider larger community development goals. It is recommended that the City develop a long-term housing strategy. One of the tenets of the strategy should consider the fact that there are more income property units in the City than there are owner-occupied housing units. The City also has a significant poverty stricken and lower income population. In order to achieve economic balance in Cortland as noted in the Market Rate housing above, it is important to continue to focus on market rate housing development, both income and owner-occupied to entice the middle and upper class to reside in the City. The in-rem process could provide an opportunity for professionals such as police officers, teachers, and nurses to acquire homes at reduced costs. In exchange, the new buyer would be required to renovate the property within a specified time period and to live in the home for a pre-determined number of years.

GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

GOAL 20: Ensure all dwelling units are safe, habitable, affordable, and available to all income, age, and disability segments of the population.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Seek financing sources to renovate existing housing through rehabilitation programs and incorporate facilities for the physically challenged as is feasible.



- B) Continue to develop housing rehabilitation programs that benefit both financially struggling owner-occupants and housing tenanted by lower income tenants. Income property rehabilitation programs, where the majority of tenants are lower income, should be conditioned on rent subsidy programs or affordable rents.
- C) Support comprehensive housing code enforcement efforts in the City to maintain owner-occupied and income property units in conformance with the NYS Property Maintenance Code. Stricter local maintenance codes should be adopted as needed.
- D) Implement and enforce the Rental Housing Law as a means to improve the City's rental housing stock and to preserve single family residential neighborhoods.
- E) Work with local, State, and federal housing agencies and organizations regarding the housing needs of special needs populations, including but not limited to, those with mobility impairments; the frail elderly; those with mental impairments; the homeless; victims of violence and disasters; marital/family disruption; and recovering substance abusers. Provide handicap access where required, promote visitability of housing units, and assist with advocacy efforts when needed.
- F) Partner with Cortland County and other agencies devoted to addressing housing safety and environmental issues such as lead based paint, radon, asbestos, smoke and carbon monoxide detection, and child, occupant, and elderly safety issues. The City will be a part of the referral and advocacy network.
- G) Work with existing private developers to encourage and support private investment in the City. This includes, but is not limited to, rehabilitating the existing housing stock, providing tax incentives for new housing development when appropriate, and creating a formalized housing group to discuss housing issues, with a focus on creating a positive climate for housing investment.

GOAL 21: Increase the percentage of owner occupied housing units in the City.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Increase home ownership through programs that provide assistance to qualified first time homebuyers. Partner with lending institutions in this endeavor.
- B) Increase home ownership through programs that target professionals, including but not limited to, nurses, police officers, teachers, and college professors.
- C) Strictly adhere to zoning regulations and prohibit the conversion of single-family homes to multifamily, particularly in R-1 zoning districts.



- D) Work to ensure that residential occupancies, particularly in R-1 and R-2 Districts, are limited to no more than three unrelated persons except in defined housing density overlay districts.
- E) Limit the encroachment of large commercial development into traditional residential neighborhoods, e.g., the hospital's expansion into the single-family neighborhoods surrounding the hospital campus and commercial development expansion around the I81 Exit 11 interchange.
- F) When seizing properties for back taxes, develop guidelines for prioritizing the development/redevelopment of single-family homes.

GOAL 22: Create more housing choices in the City.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Work with qualified developers who share a common vision with the City to create new living units in order to meet emerging needs, such as an increasing senior population. Such housing should in keeping with the character of the City, and include options such as condominiums and townhouses that are scarce in the City.
- B) Partner with financing sources to provide financing for developers to create market rate housing and/or more housing options. This housing will be created via new construction or the rehabilitation of existing residential, commercial, or mixed commercial/residential structures.
- C) Develop a proactive approach to the development of new rental units for all income, age, and disability segments of the population as demand and developable properties are identified. Avoid overpopulating certain geographic areas of the City with lower income housing developments.

GOAL 23: Promote energy efficiency for new or existing housing units such as green build standards, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards, alternative energy sources, and/or new energy saving technologies. Energy saving or alternative energy appliances, technology, materials, or other apparatus shall be of such a nature that it will not interfere with any neighboring properties and/or will not negatively impact the City environment, quality of life, and/or aesthetics.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Encourage development of housing that conserves energy, including measures such as green build components or higher density development that reduces the need for



significant investment in infrastructure. Such development, and its benefits, will be detailed in new zoning regulations.

- B) Remain cognizant of emerging housing and energy conservation trends. While the City will promote energy conservation measures, it may be necessary to prohibit structures, appliances, and/or equipment that are harmful to adjacent properties, to the City environment or aesthetics, or are determined to be unsafe.
- C) Provide land-use incentives to developers that incorporate green build standards in housing construction/development.

GOAL 24: Provide high quality rental housing while preserving City neighborhoods.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Create vibrant, higher-density neighborhoods that are geared toward students and are located within walking distance of both the campus and the downtown.
- B) Establish design guidelines for Groton Avenue housing development that creates an urban character with attached, multi-story masonry apartment buildings that may or may not have first floor commercial space (*draft site plan sketch attached*).
- C) Develop housing density overlay districts that allow more than three unrelated persons per unit in exchange for stricter controls over design and landscaping.
- D) Work with developers to provide amenities that are attractive to students such as open space, basketball courts, gathering areas, workout areas, and cafes.
- E) Seek funding for programs to help preserve single-family housing and neighborhood green spaces and landscapes.
- F) Partner with SUNY Cortland to entice faculty and staff to live in the College Hill Neighborhood.
- G) Strictly adhere to lot coverage restrictions in residential neighborhoods, particularly in R1 and R2 districts, with specific emphasis on limiting parking expansions.



GOAL 25: Institutionalize the town/gown relationship with respect to housing and College Hill neighborhood issues.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Create a town/gown committee consisting of representatives of SUNY Cortland, TC3, City government, Cortland College Foundation, student landlords, City and campus police, code enforcement, students, and neighborhood residents. The committee will work to increase communication among all parties, and to cooperatively address College Hill neighborhood issues including, but not limited to, personal safety; behavior; social activities; student/landlord relationships and responsibilities; property maintenance; neighborhood preservation and revitalization; and enticing college faculty, staff, and other full-time residents to live in the neighborhood.
- B) Develop an off campus housing strategy that includes, among other things, mapping the location of student housing, developing parking strategies, supporting the Rental Permit Program, maintaining student housing in or within walking distance of the downtown, creating new student housing, and increasing the density of student housing in some neighborhoods/zoning districts while reducing it in others.

GOAL 26: Link new housing development via interconnected sidewalks, roadways, and/or trails.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Require sidewalks, trails or multimodal connections in residential areas so that the City is a walkable community. Such infrastructure will be accessible by all.

GOAL 27: Encourage the development of home businesses outside of the R-1 zoning district.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Update the City's zoning and land use regulations to allow for home businesses outside the R-1 district. This will include, but not be limited to, a definition of a home business and requirements that businesses in residential zoning districts be compatible with, and not disturb, the character of residential neighborhoods (see also Section XIV. *Land Use and Zoning*).



GOAL 28: Periodically update land use regulations, particularly with respect to housing.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Update the City's land use regulations, especially those related to housing, so that they are reflective of the goals and vision of the Comprehensive Plan.
- B) Support the implementation of the Rental Permit Program to create a well designed and cost effective program that maintains safe and attractive rental units throughout the City of Cortland while ensure the rights and concerns of property owners.

