
I. INTRODUCTION



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REASON FOR PREPARING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The City of Cortland has developed this Strategic Plan to improve the conditions in an area referred to hereinafter as the East End Neighborhood. The delineated study area can be viewed in the map at the end of this section. The preparation of this document served as a conduit for the following:

- A collaborative planning process that allowed the neighborhood to identify issues facing the East End today, its strengths, opportunities, challenges, threats, and community preferences.
- Exploring current and changing physical, social, and economic conditions in the East End, as well as understanding the forces behind such conditions and trends.
- Encouraging the neighborhood to think about the principles, policies, and building blocks that should be implemented to revitalize the East End Neighborhood in the future and how to prioritize its revitalization goals and implementation measures.



Upon completion of the Strategic Plan, a step-by-step process for achieving a healthy, vibrant East End Neighborhood was developed that addresses goals for providing the following:

- Quality living conditions in a safe environment.
- Basic goods and services to local residents and employees.
- Opportunities for business growth and future employment.
- Green spaces for recreational pursuits and aesthetic appeal.
- Energy conscious development.
- An attractive neighborhood for visitors and future investors.
- An area that welcomes a diverse group of residents and businesses alike.

The projects included in the *Existing Conditions and Analysis* in Chapter IV, and as summarized in the *Action Agenda* in Chapter V of this document, identify the actions for positive change based upon the priorities identified during the strategic planning process. This plan should be continually updated as progress on identified projects is made and issues affecting the East End change.

FUNDING SOURCE

To fund the City of Cortland's East End Strategic Plan project, a request of \$25,000 in grant funds was made to the Technical Assistance Program of the New York State Office of Community Renewal. These funds were awarded to the City in 2007. The City provided \$17,000 worth of cash and/or in-kind services as match for the grant.

CONSULTANTS

Thoma Development Consultants (Thoma) was hired by the City of Cortland to assist in the preparation of the plan. C & S Companies of Syracuse provided design sketches for the Riverside Plaza. Cynthia Teter, Registered Landscape Architect, provided a design rendering for the abandoned gas station at the Exit 11 area of Interstate 81.

STEERING COMMITTEE

Work on the Strategic Plan began in the spring of 2008. To assure local priorities were met, it was important to provide local oversight to guide the process. Accordingly, the Mayor of the City of Cortland appointed a Steering Committee to oversee this work. This Steering Committee provided significant assistance in the development of this Plan through participation in work sessions, assisting in reviewing surveys, and guiding the direction of the Plan. More on this committee is included in Chapter II. Multiple avenues of participation afforded the public full opportunity for citizen participation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The core of the East End still retains vestiges of its past: a small town sense of character inhabited by persons with strong ties to their European heritage who welcome diversity. It has always been an area where industry and residents have co-existed.

In the year 2010, the City of Cortland East End Neighborhood, perhaps more than any other part of the City, is being pressured by commercial development, particularly the commercial expansion of the Exit 11 area of Interstate 81. A strip mall, a number of fast food establishments, hotels, and national franchises have continued to settle around the exit area which is quickly approaching total build out. Since I-81 attracts many travelers seeking quick on/off access, there has



Green Arch Restaurant c. 1940's

been pressure to convert residential sites to commercial. While these new businesses grow the tax base for the City and provide residents with needed and wanted services, the City needs to carefully examine the impact on the residential character of the East End.

As detailed herein, the City of Cortland was once heavily reliant on a manufacturing based economy. This economy supported the City from pre Civil War days, and the ensuing industrial revolution, through the early 1970's. Unfortunately, three decades of huge fluctuations in the Cortland County manufacturing environment have wreaked havoc with local employment. This has affected individual household incomes. Less disposable income and competition from malls have made it harder for small businesses, such as those found in the East End, to survive.

The buildings in the East End are some of the oldest in the City of Cortland. With some approaching 175 years of age, maintenance is a huge concern. A stagnant economy and dwindling personal wealth only serve to compound the degradation of some of the residential and commercial building stock.

Despite the challenges facing the East End Neighborhood, the area has many assets that make it an attractive place to live and do business. There is a neighborhood park, a number of service and convenience businesses, an affordable housing stock, some of the City and County's largest industrial employers, easy highway access, low crime, and a determined group of residents and business owners that want to see the East End maintain its sense of place, while allowing for smart growth in the future.

The Goals and Implementation Measures included herein have been given careful consideration so that the neighborhood preserves what residents and businesses enjoy most about the East End Neighborhood while planning for inevitable change in the future.