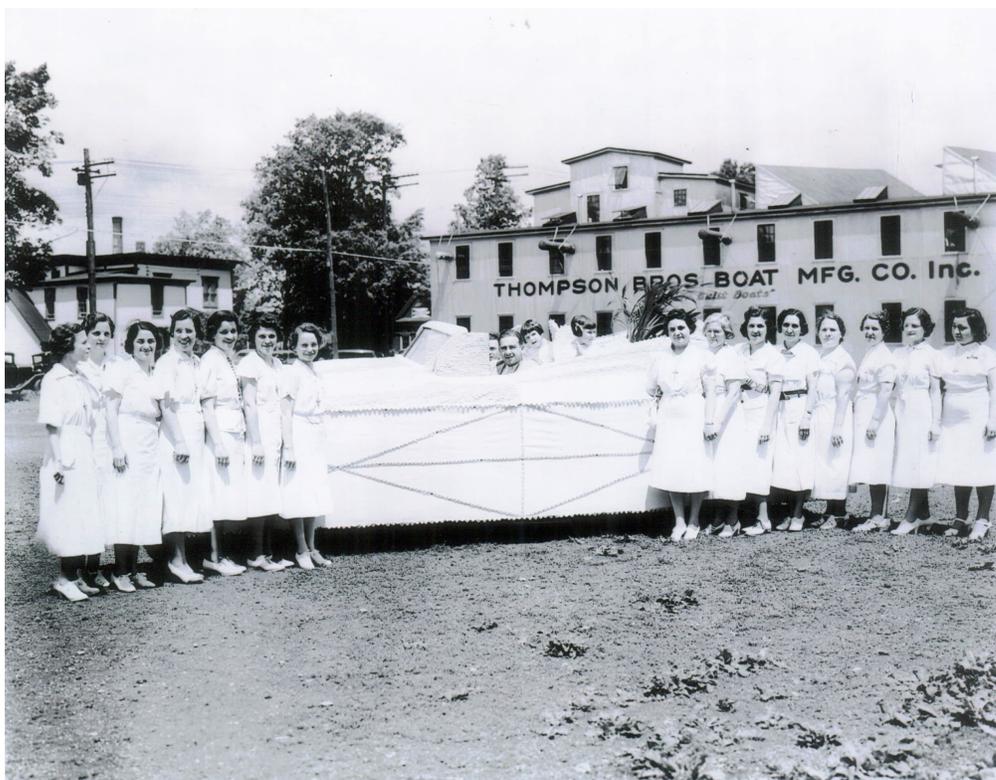

III. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: THEN AND NOW



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HISTORY OF THE EAST END NEIGHBORHOOD

The City of Cortland is the sole City in Cortland County. The County was founded in the late 1700's as a military tract, a reward for service made to enlistees of the Revolutionary War. The earliest settlement in Cortland County was located on the Tioughnioga River, north of the City, in the Town of Homer. Small settlements in the City of Cortland, such as the Village of Port Watson, also sprang up along the river. Eventually development moved inland. These settlements were combined, recombined, and renamed over the years. The early economy was mainly agricultural-based, which spawned mills and tanneries along the Tioughnioga.

Eventually the area that was to become the City of Cortland was chosen as the Cortland County seat. The City was incorporated as an official village in 1853 and remained as such until it was chartered as a City in 1900. Today the City is home to a population of 18,740 persons, or almost 39% of the County population.

During the 1800's, particularly during the post-Civil War Industrial Revolution, Cortland's agrarian economy quickly transformed into a strong industrial market, with ample work for many. Cortland was one of the earliest communities to support the construction of the railroad, which brought many immigrants to the area to work in the factories. The Syracuse, Binghamton, and New York railroad (eventually the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western railroad) was constructed in the East End. This contributed to the industrial growth of



Pomeroy School 6th Grade in 1927

the neighborhood since industry benefitted immensely from the presence of the railroad and its connections to regional, State, and national markets. At the turn of the 20th century, immigrants of Italian descent began arriving in the East End Neighborhood where many, and their offspring, have now lived for decades. In 1917, St. Anthony's Italian Roman Catholic Church was constructed in the neighborhood and it quickly became not only a centerpiece for religious observances but for social and heritage exchanges as well (*Italian* has since been dropped from the name). Small mom and pop businesses also dotted this area. One of the Cortland Enlarged City School District's elementary schools, Pomeroy School, was also centrally located in the East End. The brick structure that served the community for over 60 years was built in 1915. It closed in 1979 and was eventually converted to its present use, subsidized apartments for the elderly.

During the 100-year+ span of the City's strong industrial economy, major industries sprang up throughout the City and the East End. If one industry closed, another soon took its place. Some of the more notable companies included Smith Corona Marchant (SCM), once the world's largest portable typewriter manufacturer; Wickwire Brothers, a foundry where wire screen was invented and mass produced; Brockway Motors, manufacturer of the Husky truck;

and many other industries too numerous to mention. The East End also was the site of many of the City's industrial employers. Some of the early industries included the Cortland Wagon Company; Cortland Line Company, a premier fishing and tennis line manufacturer; Howe Stoves; and Brewer Harness Company, a foundry and early precursor to Brewer-Titchener/Cooper Tools. Worker housing sprang up in the area resulting in a mixed residential, industrial, and commercial neighborhood. After World War II, the area near the Tioughnioga River on River Street and due east, known as the "Flats", was developed mainly for small, single story ranch style housing which started to spring up in the 1950's.

As mentioned, the industrial economy of Cortland thrived well into the first half of the 20th century. Following a national trend, the City and County's manufacturing base started to unravel in the early 1970's. As a result, the City suffered greatly as local companies closed, relocated, or consolidated out of the area. Early industries that succumbed included Wickwire's, Brockway Trucks, Wilson Sporting Goods, Durkee Bakery, and Champion Sheet Metal, to name a few. The more recent loss of companies such as Rubbermaid (which occupied a sizeable building in the East side), SCM, Buckbee Mears, E-One, and countless others has resulted in Cortland, in recent times, experiencing the highest unemployment rate in the State. These industrial job losses have been offset with lower paying service sector jobs with few fringe benefits. Cortland's manufacturing employment rate has been cut in half: from 32.8% in 1970, to 27.1% in 1980, to 21% in 1990, to only 14.8% in 2000. The New York Department of Labor indicates that Cortland County had 6,000 manufacturing jobs in 1990. By 2000, the number of manufacturing jobs was only 3,400, a 43% drop in ten years.

Per the 2000 Census, the City of Cortland's poverty rate has risen to a staggering one in four persons (24.7%). The City's low to moderate income population (those living at or below 80% of median income for Cortland County) is 51.8%. This economic demise has challenged the social service network and transferred more and more of the tax burden to residential property owners, hampering the City's ability to raise the taxes needed for adequate services, equipment, and programs.

THE EAST END NEIGHBORHOOD TODAY

It is clear from the public meetings and mail surveys held in conjunction with this Strategic Plan that the residents of the East End Neighborhood are trying to hold onto the sense of heritage and community that has been a hallmark of the area.

One of the greatest challenges in the neighborhood is the downward economic spiral of the City noted above. As also mentioned, the City's low-to-moderate income percentage is nearing 52%. The Census Block that encompasses most of the East End, Census Block 9905-5, has a low/mod rate of 72.2%. Unemployment in Cortland County has reached unprecedented levels, with double-digit unemployment plaguing the County.

This economic reality is compounded by the fact that the East End Neighborhood includes some of the City's oldest housing stock which is predominantly wood, two-story single family and duplex homes. When personal incomes dwindle and businesses are struggling or closing, it stifles reinvestment and precludes homeowners from maintaining their properties. When owner occupied residential property values decline, it makes them ripe for conversion to rental properties. Census data indicates the homeownership rate in the East End is only 36% compared to the City's already anemic rate of 44%. A housing conditions study completed in

conjunction with the Plan notes that 82% of the residential structures are in substandard condition.



The East End is still home to some of the City's largest industrial employers. Marietta Packaging, a homegrown manufacturer of hotel amenities, with local headquarters on Huntington Street in the City, purchased the former Rubbermaid building on Central Avenue to accommodate its expansion plans. Its East End site is 450,000 square feet and is located in the heart of the target area. In 1984, Brewer-Titchener consolidated its Port Watson Street finishing operations into one site on Cleveland Street in the East End where the company's forging division was located. In 1985 the company became a division of Cooper Tools. It occupies 175,000 square feet on 7.8 acres in the study area and has been doing business in the City for 176 years. While the Marietta Packaging building is more modern construction, most of the East End industrial buildings are older brick structures built around the time of the City's original smokestack industry.

They tend to lack greenspace and landscaping and have large expanses of blacktopped or gravel parking areas. These manufacturing companies provide needed jobs in the community. Conversely, they also are a source of truck traffic in the neighborhood. For years there has been a struggle to balance the need for well paying jobs with adequate fringe benefits, with the calm and respite of the surrounding neighborhood.



By contrast, the highway commercial area adjacent to Exit 11 of Interstate 81 consists of modern, "big box" architecture. This area has been a hotbed of development for at least 20 years. It is obvious to the observer that this area caters to travelers on the interstate, with densely built fast food and casual dining franchises, a gas station, several chain hotels (one under construction), and auto parts and service retailers dominating the area. Two prominent buildings remain vacant, a former gas station, a community eyesore for decades, and a former Bob Evans restaurant. The Riverside Plaza is also located at the exit area. It is a 135,000 square foot strip mall located on 9.9 acres. It languished for decades: previously owned by a developer intent on minimal investment in the property.



Former Bob Evans Restaurant

Because of the need to attract travelers off the interstate, the need to direct visitors to SUNY Cortland, to Cortland's downtown, and to the Finger Lakes region via NYS Route 13 (Clinton Avenue), there is an intensity of visual clutter at the exit area including both low and high

rise commercial and directional signage. Properties have very few mature trees and few right-of-way trees exist.

The services located in the Exit 11 area do benefit the East End Neighborhood, especially the P & C supermarket (presently owned by Tops) located in the plaza. Unfortunately, there is limited developable land remaining, so commercial development is starting to encroach upon the neighborhood. This was evident when the newly constructed Advance Auto store re-located from the Riverside Plaza to the corner of Pomeroy and River Streets and when a Tim Horton's restaurant was built on the corner of Cleveland Street and Clinton Avenue (see Map 1, page 12-A). The Advance Auto developers requested, and were granted, a change to the zoning map. The project required the acquisition and demolition of some residential properties. For the Tim Horton's project, the City had previously changed the zoning to General Business, from just west of Kost Tire to the southeast corner of Cleveland Street in the early 2000's to accommodate expanding commercial development.



Dexter Park provides a community focal point for recreational pursuits and community gatherings. Dexter Park's grounds are well-maintained, however, its facilities are in poor condition, including its community building, fencing, and kiddie splash pool (this was closed in 2010). The layout of the park has been done in piecemeal fashion and therefore it does not function to its highest and best use.

With losses in industrial and commercial properties and a significant percentage of tax-exempt properties on City rolls, the City is struggling financially. It realizes, however, that taxes cannot be solely recouped through higher taxes for the average homeowner. As of 2010, the



City has a hiring freeze; new programs, services, and equipment purchases are scrutinized closely or are on hold. Needed street repairs, upgrades to Dexter Park, and the continuation of the East End Community Center, investments that the East End Neighborhood are interested in, cannot be addressed at this time.

Mary's, also located in the City. It has been discussed and debated that if one of the two churches were to close, it would be St. Anthony's. This would leave a significant empty building in the East End that would be difficult to retrofit and re-use, and it would end an institution that been part of the fabric of the community.

Another potential issue for the East End community is the proposed closing of St. Anthony's Church. Under the Diocese of Syracuse, the management of the Church has been merged by the Diocese with that of St.

RECENT/PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

There are certainly challenges facing the East End, however, there are also a number of opportunities. During the time period that this Strategic Plan process was being undertaken, the East End of the City was the site, or proposed site, of a number of activities that have/will have, the potential to positively impact the neighborhood. These include:

- The Riverside Plaza was purchased by a new developer. Within a very short time period under new ownership, the facades were painted and landscaped medians were installed in the parking lot. A new tenant was located in the plaza: the Cortland Line Company store. The developer also completed a portion of the riverwalk trail along the Tioughnioga River. The developer has indicated his desire to develop rental housing in the East End.



- P & C Supermarkets, which owned two sites in the City, went bankrupt. The company was purchased by Tops Markets which announced that the P & C in the Riverside Plaza would remain open. Anti trust law rulings are dictating that Tops must sell one of its stores which will most likely be the market in the plaza.



improvements. This recent opportunity has resulted in the City extending in-kind and volunteer labor to repaint and landscape the site. Donations have also been accepted. Improvements began in late spring of 2010. This has been a decades old issue for the neighborhood and the City.

- The owner of the vacant gas station gave permission for the City to rent the site as a welcome center for Jets fans. The Jets football organization has inked a five-year deal with SUNY Cortland to hold pre-season practice at the college. 2009 was the first year the team held practice under a one-year agreement. Previous conversations with the gas station owner indicated no intentions to work with the City on site

- A Farmer's Market began in Dexter Park in 2009 under a cooperative agreement with the City. This was the type of development that many East Enders expressed through public meetings that they would like for their neighborhood. At the present time, the City and the Farmer's Market organization have agreed to a year-to-year agreement.



- There has been ongoing development at Exit 11 for at least 20 years. Fast food franchises such as Wendy's, McDonald's, Arby's, Subway, and Tim Horton's, and casual dining such as Friendly's and Perkins' restaurants densely populate the exit area. At one time, the only hotel at the exit was a Holiday Inn which is now a Ramada Inn. Within the last 10 years, a Comfort Inn, Econo Lodge, and Hampton Inn have been built. A new Holiday Inn Express is under construction. Advance Auto constructed a new building on the corner of River and Pomeroy Streets, having vacated its location in the Riverside Plaza.
- An ear, nose, and throat specialist purchased the vacant Pomeroy Place building on Pomeroy Street the study area. This includes the doctor's offices and a sleep clinic.



Hilary of Elm Street Emporium

- The Elm Street Emporium, a commercial site on Elm Street with businesses that cater to improving the mind and body, including a masseuse, hairdressers, a counselor, and manicurist, has been expanding in the neighborhood. The building has also been undergoing a renovation, complete with façade and signage improvements.

- The Elm Street Bakery opened which offers a wide array of baked goods, pizzas, salads, and wings. The owner hopes to expand its menu.
- The East End Steering Committee members are very interested in making their neighborhood more of a walkable community and support the development of a riverwalk, in addition to making sure sidewalks are in good condition. As mentioned, the new owner of the Riverside Plaza has constructed a small portion of a riverwalk on the plaza's property. The Steering Committee would like to see this continued along the river to Yaman Park. This would provide greater access to the riverbanks, allowing people to walk, run, and fish. It is hoped that local hotels, motels and restaurants could also provide access to the riverwalk, making it a tourism destination.



Tim Armstrong of Elm Street Bakery

- The Mobil Gas Station on the corner of Clinton Street and Route 13 is tripling the size of its convenience store and including a donut franchise.
- Country Kitchen II opened in the former Waffle Works site on Clinton Avenue.