

Streetscape Enhancement

# Historic Little Italy REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

2012 Updated  
Executive Summary



## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>i/iv</b>
• Annual Goals.....	(12 Pages)
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction and Purpose</b> .....	<b>1/4</b>
• Purpose of the Project.....	1/3
• Vision Statement .....	3
<b>Chapter 2: Historic Context &amp; Existing Land Use</b> .....	<b>5/12</b>
• The Neighborhood .....	5/7
• Past Studies and Reports .....	7
• Current Development Plans .....	7/9
• Land Uses within the Neighborhood .....	9/10
• The West 18 <sup>th</sup> Street Corridor .....	10/12
○ Positives of the West 18 <sup>th</sup> Street Corridor and the Neighborhood .....	11
○ Negatives of the West 18 <sup>th</sup> Street Corridor and the Neighborhood .....	11
<b>Chapter 3: Public Input</b> .....	<b>13/19</b>
• Stakeholder Visioning Session #1 .....	13
• Key People Interviews .....	14
• Stakeholder Visioning Session #2 .....	14
• Little Italy Festival Survey .....	15
• West 18 <sup>th</sup> Street Walk .....	15/16
• Saint Paul’s Parish Council Meeting .....	16/17
• Business Owners Meeting.....	17/18
• Neighborhood Presentation.....	18
• Additional Draft Plan Presentations.....	18
• Other Publicity .....	19
<b>Chapter 4: Organization</b> .....	<b>21/30</b>
• Sustainable Organization .....	21/23
• Design Committee .....	24
• Economic Development Committee .....	24/26
• Marketing Committee .....	26/28
• Clean, Green & Safe, and Housing Committee .....	28/29
• The Neighborhood Manager .....	29
<b>Chapter 5: Design and Physical Improvements</b> .....	<b>31/44</b>
• Initial “Clean-Up, Green-Up” Campaign .....	31/32
• General Neighborhood Design Issues .....	32/33
• The West 18 <sup>th</sup> Street Corridor .....	33/40



- General Design Scheme Recommendations .....34/35
- Property- Specific Recommendations .....36
- Liberty Street to Poplar Street .....36
- Poplar Street to Cherry Street .....37
- Cherry Street to Walnut Street .....37/38
- Walnut Street to Chestnut Street .....38/39
- Chestnut Street to Myrtle Street .....39/40
- Myrtle Street to Sassafras Street .....40
- Other Streetscaping Elements .....40/41
- Gateways .....41/42
- Piazza .....42
- Planning and Zoning Issues.....42/43
- Code Enforcement .....43

**Chapter 6: Neighbors & Economy ..... 45/52**

**Chapter 7: Image & Identity ..... 53/56**

**Chapter 8: Clean, Safe & Green and Housing..... 57/62**

**Appendices**

- 2-1 Summary of *Little Italy Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan 2005*
- 2-2 Summary of Erie Police Department Incident Report 5/15/06 – 5/15/07
- 2-3 Observations on Little Italy Traffic Counts from January 2007
- 2-4 Summary of Feb. 2006 *City of Erie Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy*
- 2-5 Summary of *City of Erie 2005 Consolidated Plan*
- 2-6 Summary of SSJNN Program November 2000 Survey Results
- 2-7 Summary of *The Journal of Erie Studies*
- 2-8 Positives and Negatives of the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor and the Neighborhood
  
- 3-1 Stakeholder Visioning Session #1
- 3-2 Key Person Interview Results
- 3-3 Stakeholder Visioning Session #2
- 3-4 Festival Survey summary
- 3-5 Notes from the 8/28/07 Walk of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street
- 3-6 Business Owners Meeting Notes
  
- 4-1 Neighborhood Revitalization Program Models
  
- 6-1 Little Italy Real Estate Market Analysis and Development Analysis



## Plates

- ES-1 Recommended Revitalization Strategies
- 2-1 Existing Land Use Plan
- 2-2 Key Land Uses
- 3-1 West 18<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Recommendations
- 5-1 Computer Enhancement of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street Streetscaping Improvements
- 5-2 Computer Enhancement of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street Streetscaping Improvements
- 5-3 Concept Plan for Piazza at West 16<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets



## Executive Summary

The Erie Redevelopment Authority (ERA), the City of Erie, the Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN), the Housing and Neighborhood Development Services (HANDS), the Neighborhood Watch Group, and Saint Vincent Health System worked as a Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) for to develop this *Little Italy Elm Street Neighborhood Revitalization Plan*. The overall goal of this group is to initiate a **comprehensive revitalization effort** for the Historic Little Italy neighborhood which, understandably, will take many years to complete. Poggemeyer Design Group, Inc. (PDG) of North East and Kidder Wachter Architects of Erie facilitated the planning process. Boulevard Strategies of Columbus, OH provided market research data.

As a result of significant public input and the hard work of many volunteers representing these groups, this Plan contains numerous recommendations for the neighborhood to consider and implement over the next decade. The Plan is meant to generate ideas and enthusiasm for the revitalization process.

During this planning process, a considerable amount of **public input** was obtained from neighborhood residents, stakeholders and businesses through a variety of means, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 3: Public Input.

Due to the importance placed on implementation throughout the planning process, a considerable amount of attention has been given to identifying the appropriate **“sustainable organization”** critical to spearheading the revitalization effort. This is explained in Chapter 4. Many volunteers will be needed to successfully implement this Plan, and continued cooperation among stakeholder groups is vital, as is hiring a Neighborhood Manager.

Chapters 4 through 8 contain numerous recommendations for the revitalization of the neighborhood, based on the input received during the public sessions and PAC meetings. Since the comprehensiveness of this Plan may seem overwhelming, this Executive Summary was prepared to prioritize the recommended goals and strategies that the neighborhood intends to concentrate on during the next three years. They are categorized by the committees that would be responsible for implementing them.

This Executive Summary should be used as the Neighborhood’s **WORK PLAN** for the recommended Historic Little Italy Advisory Council and its four committees, and it should be updated annually. The *Historic Little Italy Elm Street Neighborhood Revitalization Plan* is intended to provide detailed information about current issues in the neighborhood and a roadmap for achieving the following vision for the neighborhood:



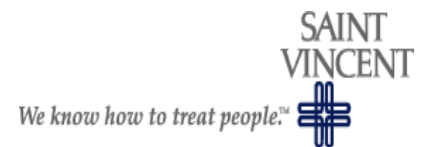
### Executive Summary

# Historic Little Italy

The PAC developed the following vision statement for Historic Little Italy: *“To restore the Historic Little Italy neighborhood to its original viability and character, infusing new energy, capacity, and business, based on its ethnic diversity; increasing home ownership; re-establishing West 18<sup>th</sup> Street as a key commercial corridor; and providing a safe, clean, and green neighborhood that is an asset to the City of Erie and neighborhood residents and businesses.”*

The revitalization opportunities for the Historic Little Italy neighborhood are numerous and very exciting! Capitalizing on the development projects that are summarized below, and happening in the neighborhood at this time, is critical to continued redevelopment.

- The **new homes** constructed by HANDS are having a very positive impact.
- The new and renovated **commercial buildings** completed by the ERA are attracting new investment to the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street corridor.
- The planned expansion of **Saint Vincent Health System**, just south of the neighborhood, is a positive influence to Little Italy.
- The **Bosnian Community Center** and the **new Bethesda Cultural facility** provide more activities for families and young adults in the neighborhood.
- The **\$2 million gift to the Community Shelter** services will enhance its operations and facilities.
- Proposed retail and housing developments around **Griswold Park**, just north of the neighborhood, will provide new opportunities for Little Italy residents and will **attract more residents and shoppers to the area**.
- **Proposed plans** for the redevelopment of the **former Continental Rubber Works facility** on the southwest edge of the neighborhood will provide additional housing and retail alternatives for residents of the neighborhood.
- The **new skatepark** in Columbus Park bring sports enthusiasts and their families into the neighborhood.



## Executive Summary

# Historic Little Italy

There is no time like the present, based on these developments, to commence an intensive revitalization effort in Historic Little Italy. In addition to capitalizing on existing and proposed redevelopment projects, this Plan emphasizes dealing with the following key issues in order to insure a successful revitalization effort. All of these issues were repeatedly identified as VERY important to residents and PAC members:

- First and foremost, clean up and revitalize the **West 18<sup>th</sup> Street corridor**, with streetscaping, redirecting as much truck traffic as possible to West 12<sup>th</sup> Street, addressing parking issues, and recruiting new businesses.
- Develop the **sustainable organizational capacity** to direct revitalization activities in the neighborhood.
- **Recruit new** commercial and retail **businesses** to the neighborhood, especially a grocery store, a branch bank, and more restaurants, not only to provide these services for the neighborhood, but also to bring non-residents to the neighborhood on a regular basis.
- Increase **home ownership** and reduce the number of rentals in the neighborhood.
- Emphasize the **cultural history** of the neighborhood, while acknowledging the current diversity.
- Make the neighborhood **safer**.
- Begin **Clean-Up, Green-Up** efforts ASAP.
- Improve the **physical image** of the neighborhood, then market that new image to the City and the region.
- Once a new image is created, and the neighborhood has additional attractions to offer, work with existing City organizations to **market the neighborhood** to a variety of local and tourism venues.



## Executive Summary

# Historic Little Italy

Annual goals are summarized in the following pages and discussed in detail throughout the Plan. Plate ES 1 illustrates the recommended strategies for revitalization of the neighborhood.



This logo has been selected by the PAC and the neighborhood to represent the Historic Little Italy area.





## Introduction and Purpose

The Erie Redevelopment Authority (ERA) and its partners, the City of Erie, and the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN), retained the services of Poggemeyer Design Group, Inc. (PDG) of North East to prepare this Revitalization Strategy. PDG utilized the services of Kidder Wachter Architects of Erie to assist with mapping and design issues, and Boulevard Strategies, Inc. of Columbus, Ohio to analyze the market conditions of the neighborhood.

Funding for this project was provided to the ERA by a Land Use Planning and Technical Assistance Grant (LUPTAP) from the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), as well as grants from the Erie Community Foundation and Saint Vincent Health System to the SSJNN.

The Planning Team worked closely with a Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) which included representatives from ERA and its various partners and neighborhood groups. The PAC met numerous times with the Planning Team to guide the direction of the study and to review materials and provide local insight. Members of the PAC included:

- Pat Cappabianca, Erie City Council
- David Deter, City of Erie, Department of Economic & Community Development (DCED)
- Eddie Ocasio, Hispanic American Council
- Kim Green, City of Erie, DCED
- Sr. Mary Herrmann, Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN)
- Tom Maggio, Erie Redevelopment Authority (ERA)
- Denis O'Brien, Saint Vincent Health System
- Chuck Scalise, Housing & Neighborhood Development Service (HANDS)
- Shay Meinzer, HANDS
- Wally Brown, SSJNN and Neighborhood Watch

### **Purpose of the Project**

The Little Italy neighborhood was one of the few areas within the City of Erie that were prioritized for neighborhood revitalization activities. Together with three other areas, Little Italy was identified in the City's *Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area* (NRSA) submitted to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Inclusion in the NRSA resulted in a reduction in some of the restrictions normally placed on HUD program funds. This priority status within the City provides the neighborhood with the opportunity to request other funding, grants, and technical assistance from the City, State, and Federal government, as appropriate.



The Erie  
Community  
Foundation

*Helping today... Shaping tomorrow.*



*We know how to treat people.™*

---

**"Slowly Little Italy is starting to tell a new story..."**  
**Chuck Scalise, Executive Director of HANDS**  
**Erie Times – News April 30, 2010**

---



The major objectives of this project, which were identified through previous initiatives and reaffirmed during this Little Italy planning process, include the following:

- Increase the percentage of owner-occupied residential units;
- Improve the quality of life and housing;
- Increase employment opportunities for residents;
- Increase the number and quality of retail stores and service providers;
- Reduce crime;
- Form a neighborhood development corporation to facilitate grants and development;
- Remove blighted and dangerous properties;
- Build new market rate homes; and
- Capitalize on existing assets such as cultural and ethnic diversity, history, and geographic location.

Several new initiatives have been underway in the neighborhood in recent years. The ERA has recently completed a mixed-use, in-fill commercial development project (new construction) and a mixed-use commercial rehabilitation project at 504/506 West 18<sup>th</sup> Street, including a new parking lot. Both buildings are proceeding toward sales and tenants are currently being recruited. A ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrated the completion of these buildings on September 4, 2007.

The ERA is also assisting several income-qualified homeowners with rehabilitations of their homes. Thirteen homes have been renovated by ERA over the past three years, with three additional home rehabs underway at this time. The ERA has also provided Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for several storefront improvement projects for businesses along the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street commercial corridor. In addition, several buildings have been declared blighted, purchased, and demolished. The vacant lots have been sold to neighboring property owners, or await an appropriate end user.

HANDS has recently completed the construction of four new homes in the neighborhood and a 10 unit apartment complex for people with mental illness. In addition, HANDS has acquired and rehabilitated three houses in the neighborhood and made those homes available for ownership. The new in-fill homes were designed to complement the existing housing stock in the area. Both the new homes and the renovated homes provide a positive influence for redevelopment efforts and are helping to advance the goal of increased home ownership.



---

**“ Change for the Better...”**

**Erie Times – News April 26, 2010**

---



Local investment in the neighborhood in the past four years has exceeded several million dollars. Investors involved in the HANDS projects include: the City of Erie, HOME Investment Partnership Program; DCED through Erie County, Brownfields for Housing Program; Erie County, Act 137 Affordable Housing Trust; Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh, Affordable Housing Program; National City Bank and ERA, Walnut Street Partnership; Erie Community Foundation; and the Erie Redevelopment Authority, Lead Hazard Control funds.

Financial investors in the ERA project included: National City Bank (loan), DCED through its New Communities and Brownfields for Housing Programs (grants), HUD (Lead Grant), and the City of Erie (CDBG funds for sidewalks and façade improvements).

In addition, several private property owners have invested in their own properties. Hardinger Transportation Company demolished an old incinerator, the Arnone family renovated a vacant building into an Italian Restaurant, recent immigrant Bosnians are developing a social club for the Bosnian community, Bethesda Children's Home is investing in a cultural facility in the 300 block of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street, and others have invested and/or are investing in the neighborhood.

In 2010, Cathedral Prep's constructed a sports facility at West 12<sup>th</sup> and Cherry Streets and County Councilwoman Jessica Huran-Kunco advocated and recruited funding for the construction of a competition-level skateboard park north of Columbus Park. Recently the City of Erie announced plans for the Midtown Redevelopment project near Griswold Park, north of the neighborhood at 13<sup>th</sup> and Peach Streets. All these activities have positive impacts on the area, with the strong potential for adding stability and renewed vitality to Historic Little Italy. The Midtown Redevelopment project involves 143 housing units and new retail development, for about a \$51 million investment.

In 2010 the SSJNN installed the International Flavor Community Garden on a vacant lot on West 18<sup>th</sup> Street with 14 raised beds. Community members and school children adopt a box and plant and reap the harvest of fresh fruits and vegetables. Later that year the SSJNN commissioned a mural on the East wall of the garden that adds a three dimensional component to the garden and deters graffiti vandalism.

In 2012, the SSJNN was approved for a \$150,000 Neighborhood Partnership Tax Credit Program consisting of \$50,000 donations from three local companies: Eriez Magnetics, Northwest Savings Bank and St. Vincent Health enhancing revitalization efforts.

---

**" Sister Love, Group aims to revitalize inner city..."**

**Erie Times – News December 21, 2011**



---

**" Fruits of their Love, Community plots reap big rewards for urban gardeners..."**

**Erie Times – News September 2, 2010**



# Historic Little Italy

These and other recent activities of various neighborhood groups have served to help stabilize the neighborhood; however, the neighborhood is still at a crossroads. The goal of this planning process is to provide a strategy that can be implemented in the neighborhood to successfully continue the stabilization and revitalization process, and provide a basis for obtaining local, state and/or federal funding assistance.



### **Vision Statement**

The PAC recognized that the current population in Little Italy is comprised of many ethnic groups in addition to the traditional Italians. In an attempt to acknowledge the diversity of ethnic groups in the neighborhood today, while emphasizing what the neighborhood is historically most well-known for, the name “Historic Little Italy” was agreed upon.

The participants in the planning process developed the following vision statement, as a reflection of the goals and initiatives discussed during the various public input sessions and PAC meetings, as well as previous planning and development efforts. This vision statement embodies the goals of the redevelopment effort in the Historic Little Italy neighborhood:

**“To restore the Historic Little Italy neighborhood to its original viability and character, infusing new energy, capacity, and business based on its ethnic diversity; increasing home ownership; re-establishing West 18<sup>th</sup> Street as a key commercial corridor; and providing a safe, clean, and green neighborhood that is an asset to the City of Erie and neighborhood residents and businesses.”**

---

**“What it shows is that there’s ongoing investment in the Little Italy neighborhood,” said John Elliott, Executive Director of the Erie Redevelopment Authority.**

**Erie Times – News May 25, 2007**

---



## Historic Context and Existing Land Use

### The Neighborhood

The Little Italy neighborhood has been defined for this project to include approximately 18 square blocks on the City's near west side (Census Tract #12) from Sassafras Street on the east to Liberty Street on the west, and from 16<sup>th</sup> Street on the north to 19<sup>th</sup> Street on the south. Areas surrounding the neighborhood were also considered during the study due to their impact on the neighborhood, especially north to the railroad tracks, west to Cranberry Street, and south to Brown and 21<sup>st</sup> Streets. This area is entirely within Zip Code 16502, although this Zip Code covers a much larger area.

The Little Italy neighborhood has experienced significant changes and cycles over the past century. German immigrants populated the neighborhood in the 1880's and built many of the houses, commercial buildings, and churches. The proximity to Erie's significant manufacturing facilities resulted in the neighborhood being populated with factory and mill workers who were able to walk to their jobs at the nearby factories. The proximity of the neighborhood to Erie's central business district was also an asset for immigrants to the area.

Italian immigrants arrived in Erie around 1900, settling mainly in the area bounded by the Nickel Plate Railroad to the south (now West 19<sup>th</sup> Street), Sassafras Street to the east, Cranberry Street to the west, and the factories that lined the railroads to the north, primarily along West 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Many of the Italians were employed in the mills and factories, while others started small businesses. The area gradually took on an Italian influence as the Germans migrated south and east of the neighborhood. St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church was constructed by the Italian residents, and the small Italian businesses flourished by catering to the needs of the Italians.

After World War II, residents of the neighborhood began moving to larger homes in the newer parts of the City. The proliferation of the automobile hastened the out-migration of Italian residents from the neighborhood, and other ethnic groups began moving into the area. Area manufacturing jobs attracted this next wave of immigrants, as did the availability of lower-cost housing.

In an October 2007 presentation to the St. Paul's Italian-American Women's Group, City Council Member Pat Cappabianca reminisced about life in Little Italy in its golden days. He recounted the number of businesses present in the neighborhood, mostly along West 18<sup>th</sup> Street: Italian newspapers, pharmacies, an undertaker, many grocery stores, cafes, shoe stores, photographers, an optical shop, an ice cream shop, nine Italian clubs (each representing a different section of Italy), five doctors, many



*Heisler Locomotive Works*



*Erie Electronics*

---

**“ German immigrants populated the neighborhood in the 1880's...”**

---

---

**“ Italian immigrants arrived in Erie around 1900...”**

---

---

**“ After WWII, residents ...began moving to larger homes in the newer parts of the City.”**

---



# Historic Little Italy

movie theaters (movies were 10 cents!), two banks (one the Bank of Italy), and several department stores. Members of the audience fondly remembered AK Lunch, where you could buy 5 Greek Hamburgers for 25 cents!

Mr. Cappabianca mentioned that Saint Paul's was the only nationality church in Erie at the time, that it was the heart of the Little Italy area, and that 16<sup>th</sup> and Walnut was the core of the neighborhood. St. Paul's ladies laughed as he reminded them of the many fragrant smells from the restaurants and homes, and the various dialects greeting folks as they passed the shops and businesses (and expressed expertly by Mr. Cappabianca). Going back in time to stick ball games in the streets, all the festivals celebrating various saints, the Feast of the Wine, and confessions with Father Marino brought back many great memories for the audience. These Italian immigrants left many positive impacts on the City of Erie in a wide variety of professions and enterprises. Those were indeed the golden years of Little Italy.

In the 1960's, as the remaining Italians got older, the social fabric of the Little Italy neighborhood began to deteriorate. The children of the Italian shopkeepers and other small businesses left the family businesses along the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street commercial corridor for other pursuits. Newer shopping centers that were now accessible by automobile competed successfully for local consumer dollars, adding to the demise of many local neighborhood shops. Many social clubs, restaurants, and neighborhood churches lost their memberships and patronage, and private investment in the area began to evaporate.

During the 1970's, various attempts were made to resurrect the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street commercial district by emulating the suburban auto-oriented model. Setbacks were changed to accommodate parking in front of the buildings. The percentage of owner-occupied homes decreased during this time, as did the rate of investment and routine maintenance of housing and properties. To compound problems, many of the manufacturing jobs in local plants and factories were lost to other parts of the country.

As would be expected, the neighborhood began to experience increased crime and drug problems. By the 1980's and 1990's, much of the housing stock became extremely deteriorated due to lack of maintenance. Absentee landlords dominated the neighborhood and 20% of the families were below the poverty level. Residents could not support local businesses. Social service agencies gradually replaced shops and restaurants to provide high quality support services to local residents. These agencies helped create a family-friendly environment that continues to attract diverse ethnic

**"...St. Paul's was the only nationality church in Erie at the time...it was the heart of the Little Italy area, and...16<sup>th</sup> & Walnut was the core of the neighborhood..."**



*St. Michael's Catholic Church*



*Naale Enaine & Boiler Works*



*Spadacene Co. Cafe*



groups, especially those that are new to the Erie area. These agencies provide educational services, art and music classes, home ownership counseling and other critical activities and skills.

In 2002, efforts began in earnest to demolish deteriorated structures and to encourage home ownership. A Weed and Seed program and the Little Italy Neighborhood Watch program became active and were successful in reducing crime. The Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network partnered with the Housing and Neighborhood Development Service to rehabilitate homes and make them more available to qualified homeowners. Improvements to the neighborhood were beginning.

### Past Studies and Reports

To begin this planning process and to eliminate redundancies with past efforts, available past studies and plans were reviewed, and the relevant information contained in them has been used as baseline data for this process. These reports that were reviewed early in the planning process (summaries of which are attached in **Appendix 2**), include:

- *Little Italy Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan, (2-1)*
- *City of Erie Police Department Incident Report—Little Italy Neighborhood (2-2)*
- *Little Italy Traffic Counts from January (2-3)*
- *City of Erie Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area (NRSA), February 2006-2010 (2-4)*
- *City of Erie Consolidated Plan (as related to Little Italy) (2-5)*
- *SSJNN Program Survey Results, November 2000 (2-6)*
- *The Journal of Erie Studies (2-7)*

### Current Development Plans

Several organizations and companies within the neighborhood and/or the City of Erie have current plans for growth that will have positive impacts on the neighborhood, as discussed in more detail below. These include:

- Saint Vincent Health System (expansion)
- Lake Erie College of Medicine (LECOM) (expansion)
- Greater Erie Industrial Development Corporation (GEIDC) (plans for the Continental Rubber Works site)
- Penn State Behrend (potential radio tower site)
- Owens Brockway (expansion)
- Cathedral Prep (new athletic center)
- Berry Plastics Expansion
- Midtown Redevelopment Project (Griswold Park area)
- HANDS (new home construction)

---

#### **“Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Plan recommendations:**

- **Have a project chairperson to lead the effort and create smaller subcommittees to achieve the goal set by the overall committee.”**
- 

---

#### **“City of Erie NRSA:**

- **Purpose: Create opportunities for employment; Improve the housing stock; Provide necessary human services.”**
- 

---

#### **“City of Erie Consolidated Plan re Little Italy neighborhood:**

- **Both Columbus Park and Myrtle Park “require improvements”.**
  - **81.6% of housing units were constructed prior to 1950 - vs. 58.2% City-wide.”**
- 

---

#### **“Traffic Counts:**

- **...18<sup>th</sup> Street, Liberty, Cherry and Sassafras appear to be almost exclusively through streets.”**
- 





# Historic Little Italy

- ERA (housing rehabilitation)

Saint Vincent Health System, located just south of the neighborhood, has plans to expand its campus with additional buildings, green space, and parking within the area around the current hospital. As it continues to expand northward, the hospital provides a positive impact on the Little Italy neighborhood.

LECOM has purchased a vacant lot west of the new parking lot (which was constructed by ERA for use by tenants in the renovated buildings at 506 and 504 West 18<sup>th</sup> Street), for a proposed parking lot for its clients and students. LECOM also owns two vacant lots across the street from its current facility, and plans to use these lots for parking or expansion of its facilities, as it continues to expand its operations.

GEIDC is currently investigating potential re-uses for the Continental Rubber Works building and site in the block bounded by Plum, 19<sup>th</sup>, Liberty, and 20<sup>th</sup> Streets. The re-use of this property, which is adjacent to the southwest corner of the study area, could have a significant impact on the Little Italy neighborhood. Also, the results of this study could help direct the efforts of GEIDC in recruiting potential uses for the property.

Penn State Behrend may be purchasing a site north of Columbus Park for a radio tower. This could prove to have a very positive impact on the neighborhood, as well as on Columbus Park.

Local industries such as Owens-Brockway and Berry Plastics continue to grow their businesses in the neighborhood. Working with them to help them achieve their goals, while being sensitive to the goals of the neighborhood, is critical.

HANDS in collaboration with the SSJNN has announced plans to purchase and develop a vacant property on 18<sup>th</sup> Street at Myrtle to complete a large rehabilitation of structure adding three new housing units for low income families.

The Midtown Redevelopment Project planned for the area around Griswold Park at 13<sup>th</sup> and Peach Streets is also very close to the neighborhood. The planned 143 market-rate housing units and new retail development will provide new opportunities for Little Italy, in terms of providing new consumers and shoppers, as well as providing new shopping and service opportunities close to home for neighborhood residents.



# Historic Little Italy

HANDS plans to acquire four additional lots in the neighborhood and construct four more single-family homes for ownership. The response to their first new homes was overwhelming, encouraging them to consider additional investment in the neighborhood.

The ERA plans to continue rehabilitating at least four homes per year in the Little Italy neighborhood. As funds are available, ERA will also continue the business façade program, and acquisition and demolition of blighted properties.

ERA plans to continue to work with the SSJNN to identify and remove blighted properties throughout the area. This property will be land banked for future projects.

The demographics of the Little Italy neighborhood have changed significantly over the past decade. These demographic changes are discussed elsewhere in this study, especially in the market analysis and Appendices.

## Land Uses within the Neighborhood

A windshield survey of existing land uses was undertaken and compared with the land use map in the NRSA. In addition, a PAC walk along West 18<sup>th</sup> Street from one end of the project area to the other was completed and land uses verified for all properties facing West 18<sup>th</sup> Street.

Little Italy reflects the true definition of a neighborhood, with a mix of primarily residential, commercial, and industrial land uses. It includes churches, parks, civic groups, social service agencies, a cemetery, automotive shops, service businesses, ethnic food stores, and restaurants, many of which are ethnic. Many formerly single-family homes have been converted to duplexes, and there are several buildings in the area that were originally designed as duplexes. Many of the industries are long-time tenants of the neighborhood, providing places of employment for local residents. Most blocks have alleys, which may or may not be used appropriately today for a variety of reasons.

Land uses were recorded for the area between Liberty and Sassafras Streets (west to east) and 20<sup>th</sup>/Brown Streets and the railroad tracks (south to north) in February of 2012. Previous survey was completed in early summer 2007 and again in November 2007.

Key Land Uses are indicated on Plate 2-1.



# Historic Little Italy

The neighborhood consists of:

- Saint Vincent Multi-Use Medical Building
- LECOM Physicians Office
- Saint Paul's Free Clinic
- Approximately 20 industries (Refer to Plate 2-2)
- Approximately 28 commercial and office facilities (excluding those identified below)
- 19 auto-related commercial businesses
- 9 restaurants/bars
- 7 churches
- 4 social service organizations (Columbus Shelter Services, Bethesda Community Care (of Meadville), Trinity Center, and the Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network)
- 3 civic clubs (Nuova Aurora, Circole Nazionale and the new Bosnian Cultural Center)
- 2 parks
- Triangle Technical School
- Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority's Lift Facility, and
- The northern part of Erie Cemetery.

There are approximately 97 vacant lots, as well as 15 vacant commercial buildings, and 15 vacant residential units. The ERA owns about 18 lots. The two commercial buildings recently constructed and renovated by ERA on West 18<sup>th</sup> Street are ready to be sold to new owners.

The blocks between Liberty and Cherry Streets contain the fewest vacant buildings and vacant lots. The blocks between Chestnut and Myrtle Streets contain the highest percentage of vacant buildings and lots.

## **The West 18th Street Corridor**

The key people interviews and stakeholder public input sessions identified the revitalization of the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street commercial corridor as THE most important initiative required to revitalize the economic viability of Historic Little Italy. One entire stakeholder brainstorming session was devoted solely to discussing the positives and negatives of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street, and the steps required to bring the corridor back to an aesthetically pleasing and economically viable commercial and retail life.

The results of that stakeholder meeting were integrated with other information compiled to date from PAC meetings and research, to generate a list of positives and negatives of the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street corridor, as well as for the neighborhood in general. The entire list is included in **Appendix 2-8**. Key points include:



### Positives of the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor and the Neighborhood

- Existing anchors.
- Ethnic Restaurants/Food Providers.
- The new recreational and community center.
- It is a walkable and safe neighborhood.
- The new streetscaping on West 19<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Erie Cemetery.
- Religious organizations.
- Location.
- New commercial buildings and homes.
- The City's new Rental Inspection Program and the Blighted Properties Program.
- Programs for kids.
- Many auto-related businesses.
- Employment opportunities.
- The heritage.
- The overall potential of the area.
- Good people live here; homeowners are good people and care about the neighborhood.
- Cathedral Prep's proposed athletic field.

### Negatives of the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor and the Neighborhood

- Too much rental property.
- Low homeownership.
- Housing is in bad shape.
- Current reputation and perception of crime.
- Traffic, especially trucks.
- Lack of adequate and convenient parking.
- Pedestrian crosswalks need attention.
- Lack of small business community.
- No elementary school.
- Columbus School is a homeless shelter and attracts transients.
- Too much non-taxable property (social service agencies and churches).
- The electric lines and poles are obtrusive.
- Columbus Park is not well kept.
- Lack of maintenance of alleys.
- Continental Rubber Works site, which is deteriorated and overgrown.



As evidenced above, a lot of previous effort has gone into studying and analyzing the Little Italy neighborhood. Understanding the neighborhood's historical development helps put its current condition in perspective, and hopefully, helps chart a path to recovery and revitalization. This previous information, as well as input from stakeholders and residents as discussed in **Chapter 3**, was critical in developing this Revitalization Strategy.

---

**“ Sister Mary Herrmann has done work in the Little Italy neighborhood for seven years. During that time, she and others have seen a need for a comprehensive plan for revitalization. Work on that plan is now underway...”**

**Erie Times – News June 28, 2007**

---



### Public Input

As part of any community planning process, significant input from the affected residents is desired and encouraged. This process involved a Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) that consisted of stakeholders in the community, as mentioned earlier. These individuals played a key role in providing historical and relevant current data to the process, and in relaying existing conditions, past and current revitalization efforts, and other key information to guide the process.

The PAC members identified other key individuals and stakeholders in the community who were interviewed and asked for their opinions on a variety of topics regarding the neighborhood. In addition, two public stakeholder meetings were held and a survey was conducted at the Little Italy Festival during August 2007 at Saint Paul's. A meeting was held with representatives from Saint Paul's Parish Council to discuss issues pertinent to them, and a meeting was held with business owners at the Nuova Aurora Club for the same purpose. The final plan and illustrations were presented to the public on December 4, 2007 at Saint Paul's Community Center to acquire neighborhood approval.

#### **Stakeholder Visioning Session #1**

Residents and stakeholders in the neighborhood were invited to attend a meeting at Arnone's Restaurant on June 28, 2007. Approximately 48 people attended. The purpose of this meeting was to inform the residents about the future planning and revitalization process and to solicit their input and opinions. Key issues were identified during this meeting, and these issues would be the focus of the balance of the planning effort. Key issues, which are summarized in **Appendix 3-1**, included:

- The West 18<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor,
- No indication that you are in Little Italy,
- Too much substandard rental housing,
- Too few home owners,
- Vacant and unkempt lots, businesses, and homes,
- Poor perception (crime) of the neighborhood by outsiders,
- No central focal point,
- Heavy traffic and truck traffic on West 18<sup>th</sup> Street,
- Alleys,
- Parking,
- Poor condition of sidewalks,
- Retail shops and services that are needed, and
- No branch bank and no grocery store.



Picture courtesy of WSEE TV



Picture Courtesy of WSEE TV



WSEE TV Crew



### **Key People Interviews**

The PAC identified 20 individuals to be interviewed by PDG and ERA staff. Assisting in this effort was a LECOM intern with the SSJNN. Interviews were held in June and July 2007, and most were held at the interviewee's office, the ERA offices, or at SSJNN offices.

Thirty (30) questions about Little Italy were asked, as well as three (3) demographic questions. The results of the interviews were tabulated and are summarized in **Appendix 3-2**. Key common responses include:

- The importance of the revitalization effort.
- Changing the perceived image of the neighborhood.
- Decreasing the number of vacant lots and buildings.
- Recruiting new businesses to the neighborhood.
- Resolving parking issues.
- Reducing truck traffic on West 18<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Increasing home ownership.

### **Stakeholder Visioning Session #2**

Neighborhood residents and other stakeholders were invited to attend a Visioning Session held at Holy Trinity Church on August 2, 2007 at 5:30 PM. The primary purpose of this session was to discuss in detail the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street commercial corridor, and what could be done to improve it. Nearly fifty (50) individuals attended the session.

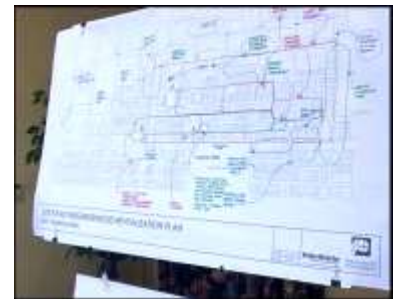
A variety of streetscaping concepts were discussed, based on a computer enhancement provided to empower residents to visualize how new design elements could improve the visual impact of the area. Key topics discussed included:

- The need for a streetscaping concept that would include trees, shrubs, flowers, new sidewalks, street lighting, street furniture, trash receptacles, improved signage, hanging baskets, window boxes or concrete planters, and streetscaping in parking lots.
- The need for better pedestrian crosswalks including pedestrian signals, crosswalk markings, security cameras, and maintenance.
- The potential for public gathering areas, especially a piazza.
- The desire for gateway entrances into the neighborhood and where these might be located.
- Ways to slow or remove traffic.
- Other issues of concern to residents and stakeholders.

A summary of this second visioning session is included in **Appendix 3-3**.



Picture courtesy of WSEE TV



Picture courtesy of WSEE TV



### Little Italy Festival Survey

PDG and ERA staff attended the Festival at St. Paul's on Saturday and Sunday, August 11 and 12. Display boards illustrating potential enhancement efforts on West 18 Street, and a proposed improvement map of Little Italy were displayed for review by festival attendees. 21 people took the time to complete the survey form after speaking with staff members about the planning process.

Most of the people completing the surveys no longer live in the neighborhood, but had at one time, and always come back for the Festival. They had many fond memories of the neighborhood and many hopes and ideas for its revitalization. Some volunteered to assist in the planning and revitalization effort.

The most important issues expressed by the respondents were:

- Safety and reduced crime levels,
- Maintenance of residential properties,
- Condition and maintenance of alleys;
- Lack of street lighting; and
- Maintenance of business properties.

A summary of the Festival survey results is included in **Appendix 3-4**.

### West 18<sup>th</sup> Street Walk

On August 28, 2007, several members of the PAC met at Luigi's and walked the entire length of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street from Liberty Street to Sassafras Street. The intent of the walk was to make a detailed review of existing conditions, while visualizing and discussing the best potential future use of each parcel of land. The ideas are illustrated on **Plate 3-1** and the issues discussed are summarized in **Appendix 3-5**.

Key issues presented and discussed included:

- The potential for a new building to be constructed in the Rite Aid parking lot on the corner of West 18<sup>th</sup> and Liberty Streets, and the impact of that on neighborhood parking.
- The potential use of EMTA property for neighborhood parking.
- Potential new commercial buildings east of Luigi's.
- Converting the former bike shop into an Italian American museum.
- Improvements to the three auto shops west of Arnone's restaurant.
- Landscaping of several existing parking lots.
- Addition of green space in several areas.





- The potential for an old fashioned, 50's style, diner in the vacant lots east of Arnone's deli and bakery.
- The potential renovation of 524 West 18<sup>th</sup> Street, to compliment the renovations recently completed by ERA.
- Improvements around LECOM's building.
- Vacant lots that should be converted to parking lots.
- The potential for row houses and loft apartments in Romeo's building and the lots to its east.
- Buildings that should be demolished.

### **Saint Paul's Parish Council Meeting**

On September 11, 2007, a small meeting was held with two members of the St. Paul Parish Council. St. Paul Church has a rather large list of parishioners, although most of them no longer live in the neighborhood. The parish council members, however, have a long history with the neighborhood and have a good handle on what the neighborhood needs, how St. Paul's fits into the revitalization picture, and how their parishioners might be able to assist.

Some of the key issues addressed during the meeting included:

- The high number of substandard rentals and the need to increase home ownership. Counseling is needed to assist renters with bad credit, as well as basic education about what it means to own a home. Most renters are on SSI and SSD.
- Although everyone says that the neighborhood needs a grocery store, we should be sure to work with Larry's Central Market and complement his services, as opposed to competing with him, as he has been a solid anchor in the neighborhood for decades. Also, a new grocery store should complement Country Fair's and Dollar General's services and products.
- Mention has been made of starting a Farmer's Market. However, there is an existing market at Griswold Park from May through October. With the proposed improvements in the Griswold Park area (the Midtown project), that Farmer's Market may serve the needs of Little Italy. Any Farmer's Market or similar efforts should be coordinated with Erie County Farms, as they have been very generous to the neighborhood and to St. Paul's Church. Once again, we should try to complement or enhance their services and products as opposed to competing with them.



- A second hand furniture store in the neighborhood would be beneficial.
- Some people will never be homeowners and we should be sure to provide quality rental units for them. Well-built and well-managed rental housing is needed.
- A Business Association and a Homeowners or Residents Association should be started. The Homeowners Association should work with residents and existing housing agencies to enhance home ownership efforts in the neighborhood.
- The Little Italy community should ask the County for financial assistance, possibly through some of the gaming money.
- 90% of St. Paul's parishioners do not live in the neighborhood any more. Efforts are needed to attract parishioners from within the neighborhood, as well as to keep existing parishioners active. Many are interested in assisting in the neighborhood revitalization effort.
- The idea of a piazza outside St. Paul's is something the church would likely be interested in.
- Many City business owners and influential people grew up in Little Italy and may be interested in participating in its revitalization.

### **Business Owners Meeting**

On September 26, 2007, a meeting was held with local business owners at the Nuova Aurora Club. About 60 businesses were notified of the meeting, and 20 people attended.

Key issues discussed at this meeting included:

- The potential for a skatepark in the neighborhood.
- What could be done to reduce or remove truck traffic from West 18<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Other traffic related issues, including one-way streets and existing alleys.
- The potential for a piazza at the 16<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets intersection.
- The image of Little Italy.
- The potential for restarting a Business Association for Little Italy.



- Plans for developing and implementing a revitalization strategy in the neighborhood, including hiring a neighborhood manager, the cost to do that, and the opportunities for donations of staff time or services, or financial donations on the part of businesses.

The businesses that were present expressed very positive comments about the revitalization effort. They agreed that there were options available to them, with some help from the City, County, and/or State, to direct their trucks to West 12<sup>th</sup> Street, given adequate access to it.

They also agreed that restarting the Business Association would be a positive move, and that development of a piazza in front of St. Paul's could have a positive impact on the entire neighborhood.

### **Neighborhood Presentation**

On December 4, 2007, the PAC presented the Historic Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy to the neighborhood for final review and comment. Six stations were visited by attendees before and after a powerpoint presentation of the Executive Summary of the plan.

Attendees were asked to vote on a potential logo from several designed by a class at Edinboro University (and enhanced by PDG's graphic artist). They were also asked to vote for two of the top 16 goals from the plan. Enthusiastic support for the plan and the revitalization process was evident. All three TV stations and The Erie Times News were present and covered the meeting in their respective media.

### **Additional Draft Plan Presentations**

On November 29, 2007 and December 10, 2007 respectively, PDG presented the Draft Plan to an Erie City Council work session and the Erie Redevelopment Authority Board. Both presentations focused on the Executive Summary and Annual Goals, and included display boards highlighting various aspects of the Plan and the Neighborhood.

City Council members asked lots of questions and offered many favorable comments about the Plan and its importance to both the Historic Little Italy Neighborhood and the City of Erie and its overall revitalization efforts. Since 2007, these goals are reviewed and updated annually with results being presented at the Little Italy Revitalization Committee meetings and announced to the public through the Neighborhood Watch, Weed and Seed meetings and through the media when appropriate.



# Historic Little Italy

At the conclusion of the presentations to the ERA Board, and after numerous questions and comments, the Board unanimously voted to approve the Plan, updated goals and encouraged the members of the PAC to keep the revitalization momentum going in and around the Neighborhood.

## **Other Publicity**

Several TV news stations, and the *Erie Times News*, were present at stakeholder visioning sessions, as well as the presentations to City Council and the ERA Board, and subsequently covered the meetings on the local news that evening and the next morning. ERA's work on the two buildings in the 500 block of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street was addressed in several newspaper articles. HANDS held open houses for their new homes in the neighborhood. Thus, news of revitalization efforts in Little Italy has been in the forefront, although much more will be needed as the plan is accepted and implementation formally begins.



(Page intentionally left blank)



## Organization

Most programs regarding downtown or neighborhood revitalization emphasize the need for a strong sustainable organization to spearhead any grassroots effort. Several of these programs were investigated as part of this planning process. They are summarized in **Appendix 4-1**.

The PAC reviewed the various neighborhood organization approaches and incorporated elements of all three programs (Main Street, Elm Street, and Blueprint Communities) in this revitalization effort, determining that this was the best way to achieve the desired neighborhood goals and also to establish the organizational framework and revitalization strategy that will help qualify the neighborhood for future funding from a variety of sources.

The PAC understands that other Erie neighborhoods are also in the process of planning and requesting funding assistance, and several are further ahead in their organization and planning efforts than Historic Little Italy. However, this strategy should prove extremely useful for qualifying the neighborhood for future funding from a variety of sources, as well as for generating local funds to support the revitalization efforts.

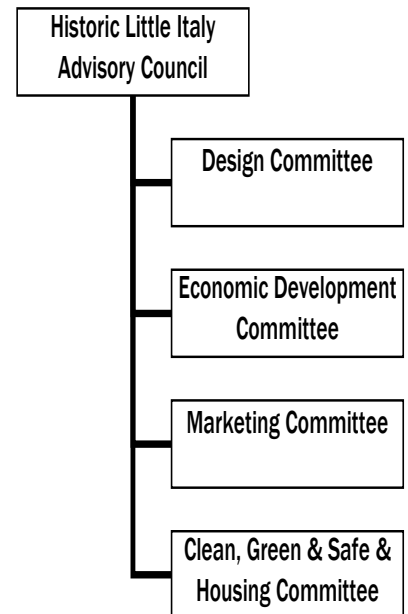
Recommendations for the revitalization of the Historic Little Italy neighborhood are divided into five areas, each of which should be led by a designated committee for implementation. These include:

- Organization,
- Design,
- Economic Development,
- Marketing, and
- Clean, Green & Safe, and Housing.

Fundamental to any revitalization process is the creation of a **“Sustainable Organization”** to coordinate the effort, and the dedicated resources for a **Neighborhood Manager** to lead and organize the revitalization efforts. The SSJNN has a Neighborhood Manager already in place to coordinate efforts as these efforts are part of the heart of its mission.

### Sustainable Organization

There are several existing organizations within the Little Italy neighborhood that provide specific and high-quality services to the community in their specific areas of interest. For instance, the Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network has been extremely active in the neighborhood for many years and is credited with much of the positive change that has occurred to date.



No one organization, however, is charged solely with spearheading efforts to implement the recommendations of this Plan, which would include: coordinating efforts of existing organizations to maximize impact and reduce redundancies, accessing all potential funding sources, being the voice for the neighborhood, organizing promotional activities, and recruiting businesses, as well as other activities.

The most critical step in the revitalization process is that the Historic Little Italy neighborhood must establish a solid neighborhood revitalization organization called, for example, the **Historic Little Italy Advisory Council**. This Council would be comprised of representatives from:

- Faith-based organizations (e.g. SSJNN, Bethesda/ Trinity Center, Saint Paul Church and other churches)
- Institutions (e.g. Saint Vincent, LECOM)
- For-profit organizations (e.g. local business owners, industries)
- Non-profit organizations (e.g. HANDS, Neighborhood Watch)
- Residents
- Property owners
- Local governments (e.g. City of Erie, ERA)

As the primary neighborhood revitalization organization for the neighborhood, the **HLI Advisory Council would be responsible for:**

- **Adopting, updating, maintaining, and implementing the *Historic Little Italy Revitalization Plan*.** As a result of this planning process, Historic Little Italy will have a vision, goals, and revitalization strategy to carry it forward over the next 10 to 15 years. The organization will need to constantly monitor the strategy, measure its results against the recommendations, and update the strategy every two to three years to reflect accomplishments and new goals.
- **Establishing the other four committees** to work with the HLI Advisory Council and the Neighborhood Manager to organize and manage the neighborhood, and to network with other neighborhoods and business districts in Erie. These committees (which are discussed in more detail on the following pages) are:
  - Design Committee
  - Economic Development Committee
  - Marketing Committee
  - Clean, Green & Safe, and Housing Committee

**“ the most critical step in the revitalization process is that the HLI neighborhood must establish a solid neighborhood revitalization organization...”**



- **Developing a strong volunteer base** and coordinating staff, volunteers, and projects. Organizing residents to provide volunteer services is critical to the success of any neighborhood revitalization program. As evidenced in public sessions to date, there are many residents of the neighborhood and local businesses that are prepared to volunteer their time and resources to the betterment of the area. The Advisory Council should capitalize on these expressions of interest as soon as possible.
- **Coordinating activities with HANDS, SSJNN, the Neighborhood Watch Group, the City of Erie Department of Economic and Community Development, ERA, and other housing and service providers, who are currently working successfully in the neighborhood.** The Advisory Council and Neighborhood Manager should become familiar with what these organizations do, and assist in coordinating efforts to increase home ownership, renovate houses, construct new homes, and provide home ownership and other counseling services.
- **Advocating for neighborhood residents with the City.** The Historic Little Italy Advisory Council and Neighborhood Manager should work with the various City of Erie departments to address zoning, building codes, trash removal, street maintenance and lighting, parks and recreation, water and sanitary sewer, storm drainage and other issues affecting residents of the neighborhood.
- **Developing relationships with local businesses.** The HLI Neighborhood Manager should maintain a list of all local businesses, key contact people, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail addresses, and work through the Economic Development Committee to maintain a local Retention, Expansion, and Recruitment program.
- **Attracting resources** to finance Historic Little Italy and its Committees. A critical aspect of any organization is to assure its longevity. Thus, attracting adequate resources to pay for the Neighborhood Manager, as well as HLI's various activities, is an important responsibility of the organization. Undertaking a **fund-raising campaign** may be necessary.

- 
- **Developing volunteers...**
  - **Coordinating activities...**
  - **Advocating...**
  - **Developing relationships...**
  - **Attracting resources...**
- 





## Design Committee

This Committee should spearhead efforts to undertake streetscaping and other enhancement projects throughout the neighborhood. Responsibilities of this committee would include:

- Coordinating efforts to **design and implement a streetscaping project** along the West 18th Street corridor, as described in Chapter 5 of this Plan. This will involve working with the City, ERA, design professionals, property owners, and residents to acquire consensus on a design scheme, acquire funding, and construct the project.
- Coordinating efforts to **implement gateways** at key entrances to the neighborhood, as also discussed in Chapter 5.
- Addressing **other streetscaping and physical design improvements**, as presented in Chapter 5, throughout the neighborhood.
- Working with the Advisory Council, ERA, and the City to develop, adopt, and enforce **design standards** for the West 18th Street corridor.
- Addressing **sidewalks and pedestrian walkways** throughout the neighborhood.
- Working with property owners, local businesses, and City partners to **address parking** issues throughout the neighborhood.

## Economic Development Committee

This Committee would be responsible for coordinating with the local businesses in the neighborhood, identifying their needs, and working to help improve their work environments so that they can grow their businesses. Some initial activities could include:

- **Regularly visiting each business** in the neighborhood to discuss their needs, problems, and prospects. Following up on issues with the companies is key to the success of the Economic Development Committee and its mission.
- **Connecting people with resources and opportunities.** This Committee and the Neighborhood Manager should help people and projects find the appropriate funding whenever possible.

- 
- **West 18<sup>th</sup> Street streetscaping...**
  - **Gateways...**
  - **Design standards...**
  - **Pedestrian walkways...**
  - **Parking...**
  - **“Adopt a Park”**
  - **Visit businesses...**
  - **Connect people with resources...**
  - **Empower local residents...**
- 



- **Empowering local residents to form for-profit companies** that can offer property and grounds maintenance, as well as delivery, handyman, and yard services for the elderly and others who cannot undertake the work themselves. Gannon College and the Small Business Development Center should be able to assist interested entrepreneurs with these efforts, as should the Weed & Seed, Micro-enterprise Program.
- **Approaching the apprenticeship program** at the Union Hall to undertake projects such as sidewalk replacements, leveraging those services with available funds to increase the overall impact.
- **Working with Triangle Technical School** for hands-on projects like plumbing and electrical repairs and/or upgrades in the neighborhood.
- **Aggressively pursuing funding for neighborhood improvement projects.** This Committee should work with the Neighborhood Manager to be the mouthpiece for the neighborhood, requesting funds from City, State, and federal funding sources; completing applications and other documentation; speaking to foundations and civic groups on behalf of HLI; publicizing the needs and activities of the neighborhood, and performing other activities that will identify and secure funds for neighborhood projects.
- **Pursuing innovative and exciting development or redevelopment projects.** Through the Neighborhood Manager, this Committee should work closely with the ERA, HANDS, City of Erie, and local stakeholders to identify and implement new projects for the neighborhood. Once identified, the Neighborhood Manager should strive to keep projects on schedule, find financing, coordinate various parties, and otherwise assure successful completion.
- **Exploring all options to raise funds** for the neighborhood and to expand the façade and building renovation, housing rehab, and new construction programs. HLI may be able to recoup fees for various activities that it undertakes.
- Establishing a **local fund** for projects.
- **Exploring ways for banks to participate** in neighborhood revitalization, including direct support to management of HLI.
- **Using third party intermediary institutions** to add financing options to the local housing market.

- 
- **Use Union Apprenticeship program...**
  - **Work with Triangle Tech...**
  - **Pursue funding...**
  - **Pursue development or redevelopment projects...**
  - **Raise funds...**
  - **Get banks involved...**
  - **Establish a Neighborhood Improvement District...**
  - **Coordinate an R&E & Recruitment Program...**
- 



- At some point after the neighborhood becomes more economically viable, **establishing a Neighborhood Improvement District (NID)** to generate funds for continued revitalization and management of HLI.
- **Coordinating with existing agencies' Retention, Expansion, and Recruitment efforts.** This Committee and the Neighborhood Manager should work with the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership, the ERA, GEIDC, the City's Economic & Community Development Department, Gannon's Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and other economic development organizations to coordinate activities and to assure that HLI is getting its share of attention and potential companies.
- **Promoting financing alternatives and tax incentives** to businesses for expansions, including LERTA and TIF opportunities. The HLI Neighborhood Manager should work with providers to understand existing financing and tax incentive programs, so that these issues can be presented, as needed, to local businesses.
- Establishing a **Lender Commitment Program** with local banks, to provide lower-interest loans to businesses in the neighborhood which meet certain prerequisites, such as new job creation, hiring from the neighborhood, providing funds to HLI, etc.
- Starting a **small business revolving loan fund** program, or work with an existing programs, that will place some emphasis on businesses in Historic Little Italy.

### **Marketing Committee**

This Committee would be responsible for creating and marketing a new image of Historic Little Italy to its residents, the City, the region, the State, and eventually the nation. Relationships with existing organizations within the City that market Erie are critical. As HLI is revitalized, this Committee should encourage and promote its inclusion in other City-wide venues. Some activities for this Committee and the Neighborhood Manager include:

- 
- **Promote financing & incentive programs...**
  - **Establish a Lender Commitment Program...**
  - **Start a Revolving Loan Fund...**
  - **Enhance/establish entertainment & tourism venues...**
  - **Sponsor educational & cultural events...**
- 



- **Enhancing existing and establishing new entertainment and tourism venues.** As the neighborhood transitions into a viable economic area, this Committee should identify new entertainment venues that can successfully and frequently attract local residents, as well as outsiders, into the neighborhood. This will be especially important as the developments mentioned elsewhere in this report are completed. HLI should work with other Erie neighborhoods and Downtown Erie to coordinate events and establish new events and promotional activities, and to extend existing activities into the HLI neighborhood.
- **Coordinating with other providers to sponsor educational and cultural events** for residents. As mentioned earlier, several organizations already provide excellent services to the neighborhood. HLI should be intricately aware of all the services being provided and assure that residents are guided toward the appropriate providers to meet their needs. Working together, this Committee and these providers should continue to offer new and needed opportunities for local residents to improve their situations, expand their opportunities, and enjoy the best cultural and educational events possible.
- **Working with St. Paul's Church Parish Council.** As a hallmark of the neighborhood, St. Paul's Church has a lot to offer to, and a lot to gain from, this revitalization effort. Working together, the Parish Council and this Committee should solicit support and participation from the parishioners, most of whom are former residents of the neighborhood. Programs to **"buy a bench"** (tree, brick, light, planter, etc.) in memory or honor of parishioners who were former residents of the neighborhood, could be attractive to parishioners and beneficial to the revitalization efforts. In addition, new parishioners from the neighborhood should be recruited.
- **Ensuring communication** within and outside the neighborhood. In order to be successful, this Committee must communicate its activities, its vision and goals, and its accomplishments with the neighborhood, the City, and other partners.
- **Promoting joint advertising and promotions** among local businesses. Working with neighborhood retailers and/or wholesalers, this Committee should strive to promote joint advertising among similar or complimentary businesses that would save advertising dollars and reach wider audiences. Special promotions for the neighborhood should be encouraged, along with special events and activities.

- 
- **Work with St. Paul's Parish...**
  - **Communicate...**
  - **Promote joint advertising & promotions...**
  - **Shop local...**
  - **Create new programs to raise funds...**
- 



- **Initiating a “Shop Local” campaign.** As the neighborhood becomes more economically viable, a “Shop Local” campaign should be strongly promoted to make everyone in the neighborhood aware of the services and products that are available locally, and to encourage local businesses to purchase good and services from other local businesses.
- **Creating a program** (as mentioned above) to “buy a bench (tree, brick, flower pot, street light)” and encourage former and current residents to purchase and dedicate these design elements to a loved one, famous Italian American person, or themselves. Dedicating green spaces, pocket parks, benches, etc. to former Italian American residents who have achieved some success could also provide some program funding.

### **Clean, Green & Safe, and Housing Committee**

The Clean, Green & Safe, and Housing Committee would be an **enhancement of the existing Neighborhood Watch group**, since this group is already a successful, recognized, and established organization. It has its place in the hierarchy of neighborhood groups within the City of Erie, has an established board, and has a clear mission and goals. Enhancing the activities of this group, by adding the Neighborhood Manager to help coordinate the new responsibilities, is seen as the easiest way to jump start this neighborhood revitalization effort.

This Committee would have the following responsibilities, at a minimum:

- Empowering and organizing local homeowners, as well as residents who want to become homeowners, to **take control of the destiny of the neighborhood.**
- Establishing a **Neighborhood Development Corporation** (if needed) to participate in, and take advantage of, specific programs and projects, some of which may be able to generate funds for the organization.
- Working with the Design Committee to spearhead a Spring “**Clean-Up, Green-Up**” program to kick-off the Revitalization Plan implementation process and to get the community excited about what is to follow. Coordination with other organizations that sponsor similar activities is critical for greatest impact. Suggestions for this event are addressed in Chapter 5.
- Working with housing partners to enhance housing rehabilitation and new housing construction programs, emphasizing home ownership and including market-rate and upscale housing alternatives.

- 
- **Empower & organize residents...**
  - **Establish Neighborhood Development Corporation...**
  - **Spearhead a “Clean-Up, Green-Up” Program...**
  - **Increase housing programs...**
  - **Make the neighborhood safer, cleaner & greener...**
- 



- **Enhancing Neighborhood Watch Group** activities and programs.
- Striving to make HLI a **safer and greener** neighborhood.
- Working with the Design Committee to **assure that greenery is included** in all streetscaping and other design plans.
- Working with the Police Department to continue to **address and reduce crime** in the neighborhood.
- Immediately establishing programs like **“adopt a park”** or **“adopt a block”** to provide long-term commitments for maintenance, and to acquire ownership of the neighborhood.

### **The Neighborhood Manager**

Paramount to operating a successful organization is having a top quality person in charge of coordinating and managing it. As mentioned earlier, the PAC is proposing that a Neighborhood Manager be hired to work with the HLI Advisory Council and be responsible for implementing the recommendations of this Plan.

Initially, the Manager should be employed under contract with the ERA and provided an office and benefits through the ERA. It is anticipated that the Manager may spend no more than one day per week at the ERA office location. A local office should be provided with the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network, or other acceptable location, and the Manager should spend about four days per week working from that office. The Manager should report directly to HLI Advisory Council.

The Neighborhood Manager would direct all activities of the four committees and provide the required staff support to the Advisory Council. The Manager would use the committees for advice and direction for their specific areas of concerns.

The manager must be an aggressive and self-directed individual with strong skills in consensus building, organization, project implementation, and communication.

---

**“The Manager must be an aggressive & self-directed individual...”**

---



(Page intentionally left blank)



## Design & Physical Improvements

The Design Committee is responsible for enhancing the physical appearance of the neighborhood by capitalizing on its unique assets and traditional layout. This includes its historic character, design and types of in-fill development, codes and regulations that dictate design, and enforcement of the codes and regulations that are adopted for the betterment of the neighborhood. The Design Committee must work closely with the Marketing Committee in implementing the design scheme that the neighborhood wishes to embrace.

### Initial “Clean Up, Green-Up” Campaign

Prior to trying to access the large sum of money that it would take to undertake a comprehensive streetscaping project in Little Italy, the neighborhood needs to prove to the community at large, and funders in particular, that it is committed to improving the overall standard of living in Little Italy, and that it is taking matters into its own hands.

HLI should begin design activities by recruiting long-time, committed residents to kick-off a major “Clean-up, Green-Up” effort. This effort should work in conjunction with existing clean-up efforts but extend into front yard maintenance, gardening, painting, storefront window displays, tree lawns, weeding, trimming, park maintenance, sidewalks, and vacant lots. It could even extend onto private properties, emphasizing cleaning up front porches, front facades of homes, front window treatments, and all other areas visible from the streets.

The initial “Clean-up, Green-up” effort should be held over one week in early Spring and involve not only residents but business owners, churches, service agencies, clubs, and industries. Businesses and agencies should be recruited to adopt a park, a vacant lot, or a block; provide their staff as maintenance supervision and/or help; supply dumpsters or garbage trucks; provide supplies, tools, or rolling stock to the effort; or contribute funds to support the effort.

Local college groups should be encouraged to participate and volunteer time and energy. Special T-shirts could be provided to all volunteers and /or participants. These commitments should be made before the event and all activities should be well-planned for the entire week, with all of them commencing and ending at the same time to provide the greatest impact.

A list of supporting businesses should be published in the paper. The media should be involved in promoting the event before and during the project. A party should be planned for the end of the week, and awards provided for specific activities, for example:





- Best private garden enhancement
- Most attractive commercial façade improvement
- Most improved vacant lot
- Most inviting front porch
- Best landscaped parking lot
- Most innovative and attractive sign
- Most attractive flower pot, hanging basket, or window box
- Hardest working volunteer
- Best corporate sponsor

Special clubs, such as a Garden Club, should be started or asked to participate in this event, and given specific tasks to undertake. One neighborhood resident has volunteered to head up a Garden Club, and HLI should capitalize on this opportunity. Local nurseries should be asked if they can participate in the Clean-Up, Green-Up event by donating planting materials or providing them at cost.

This event could be the kick-off for the Historic Little Italy revitalization effort. Funds should be requested from any/all potential sources (including the Neighborhood First Step Program, local businesses and industries, etc.) to offset the costs of supplies, food and beverages for workers, T-shirts, dumpsters (maybe these could be donated by a local company), and other costs.

This event should be coordinated in partnership with the United Day of Caring, a national United Way project.

### **General Neighborhood Design Issues**

Once the initial kick-off efforts are completed, and the neighborhood is spruced up considerably, HLI should begin looking at longer-term issues that need design attention.

Design areas of concern, which would not only help HLI get organized, but would also help prepare the neighborhood to be eligible for funding programs, include:

- Property inventories to establish a baseline database for the neighborhood including abandoned and/or blighted properties, businesses, vacant lots, and other neglected properties.
- Surveys of private residential and commercial building stock and needs,
- Survey and prioritization of public improvement needs,
- Review of planning and zoning ordinances; and
- Review of parking and traffic calming methods.



These issues are addressed to some extent within this study. The Neighborhood Manager should work to acquire this and other information from the sources that maintain it now, and compile these data into an easily accessible database, for continual update and monitoring.

### **The West 18th Street Corridor**

The West 18<sup>th</sup> Street commercial corridor is by far the #1 priority as identified by stakeholders and residents of the neighborhood. There was overwhelming consensus that the 18<sup>th</sup> Street corridor needs attention and that it should have the highest priority of public improvement projects in the neighborhood.

**General recommendations** for the corridor include:

- Emphasize the West 18th Street corridor in the Spring 2008 Clean-up, Green-Up campaign, as it is the most visible area to outsiders, who need to know that the area is beginning a revitalization effort. Banners identifying Historic Little Italy, flower pots, hanging baskets, trash receptacles, and other inexpensive design elements should be added as soon as possible to create a renewed sense of place in the neighborhood.
- Longer-term, HLI needs to create an attractive West 18th Street corridor that is walkable, safe, clean, and pedestrian-friendly. It should be commercial/retail in nature, with no new residential development permitted between Sassafras and Plum Streets, unless it is above commercial/retail uses, or part of a larger residential or mixed-use (re)development project, such as row houses, loft apartments, or condominiums. A good example of an acceptable residential project is the Little Italy Family Townhomes Lease-to-Purchase Program
- Design a streetscaping project that includes a design scheme that could be implemented in phases, either as a public project, or as individual private projects, with the goal that within a certain period of time, the entire streetscape would be completed. Computer enhanced concepts that, during stakeholder visioning sessions, served to generate ideas and enthusiasm for a more-aesthetically pleasing West 18<sup>th</sup> Street are included as **Plates 5-1 and 5-2**. It is understood that the streetscaping design concept will be refined in the future when actual design services are authorized.
- Develop gateways to Historic Little Italy (as discussed later) beginning with the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street entrance at Sassafras Street.

### **West 18<sup>th</sup> Street Commercial Corridor**

- **Emphasize West 18<sup>th</sup> Street In Spring 2008 Clean-Up, Green-Up**
- **Create attractive safe, walkable, clean and pedestrian-friendly corridor**
- **Design a streetscaping project for West 18<sup>th</sup> Street**



### General design scheme recommendations for West 18<sup>th</sup> Street include:

- New or repaired sidewalks along the entire corridor with a preference for some change in color and/or texture. Provisions for maintenance and snow plowing should be made.
- All intersections along West 18<sup>th</sup> Street should be upgraded as part of the streetscaping project. This should include pedestrian crosswalks and lights, where appropriate, a change in texture and/or color to slow traffic, and other provisions to emphasize the importance and safety of pedestrian traffic.
- New curbs and gutters where needed to assure proper storm water drainage and to physically and visually delineate vehicular and pedestrian traffic areas.
- Decorative pedestrian-level street lighting that would be selected to symbolize Little Italy and provide adequate light for safety. Light fixtures should be spaced appropriately between trees so that the light is not blocked. Lights should be placed in adjacent parking lots as well, and alleys as appropriate.
- As many street trees as possible to provide a consistent canopy and shade over the street and sidewalks. Trees should be selected carefully to best suit the environment. More than one specimen should be selected to guard against losing all trees if a certain specimen is hit by a disease. Flowers could be planted around the trees. Maintenance and proper trimming must be provided.
- Benches designed to include a Historic Little Italy logo. These could be donated in memory of family members, as mentioned earlier.
- Shelters or enclosures at intersections with EMTA stops to protect riders from rain and snow, as well as to provide shade. Benches should also be provided in the enclosures. 18<sup>th</sup> and Sassafras Streets should be the first intersection to get a bus stop shelter.
- Trash receptacles that are consistent with the design theme, are identified by a logo, and are appropriately spaced throughout the neighborhood. Maintenance of the receptacles is imperative.

- 
- **Fix sidewalks.**
  - **Upgrade Intersections.**
  - **Add decorative lighting.**
  - **Add street trees.**
- 



- Banners for light poles that carry a consistent theme. These could be paid for by local businesses in exchange for their name or logo at the bottom of the banner.
- Concrete flower pots and/or hanging baskets located throughout the corridor to provide color and/or to prevent vehicles from traveling in certain areas.
- Bollards if needed to separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic (e.g. outside main entrances to bars). Bollards could be lighted to provide an additional safety feature.
- Uniform signage for public places, as well as a signage system for private businesses that evokes a sense of place for the neighborhood.
- A new street identification signage system that is unique to Historic Little Italy (logo, special color). All streets should have the same type of street identification signs.
- Streetscaping design elements in all parking lots facing West 18<sup>th</sup> Street.
- If at all possible, burying of electric lines. If not possible on both sides, then at least on one side of the street. Moving the lines to the alleys should be pursued as an alternative.
- Off-street parking areas in every block along West 18<sup>th</sup> Street for both residents and consumers.
- Locations for murals, which could depict early scenes of Little Italy or prominent Italian Americans.
- Demolition of dilapidated buildings and conversion of vacant lots into parking lots or in-fill commercial development, or divided between adjacent property owners.
- A standard fence design for any private properties requiring them along the West 18th Street corridor. Incentives may be needed to entice owners to use the selected fence.
- Historical markers where appropriate—(use Lake Shore Industries and/or DeSantis Signs to produce them!).

- **Design and use banners.**



- **Design a signage system.**
- **Bury electric lines if/when possible.**



- **Use historical markers.**



### Property-Specific Recommendations

Although the PAC understands that they have little control over the development or redevelopment of private properties, recommendations for specific properties along West 18<sup>th</sup> Street were discussed during the PAC walk on August 28, 2007. PAC members visualized what the corridor could look like if the resources and desire were available. These ideas are presented here with the hope of empowering property owners to envision more viable uses of their properties and/or what their property could look like, making suggestions to absentee landlords regarding revitalization, and/or providing information to public funders regarding potential redevelopment opportunities. These ideas are illustrated on **Plate 3-1** and include:

### Liberty Street to Poplar Street

- Explore alternatives for enhancing parking and/or retail opportunities in the NE corner of the intersection of **Liberty and West 18<sup>th</sup> Streets**.
- **Building and façade renovations** for those buildings on the north side of 700 block of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street, including potential residential units on the upper floors.
- The four lots **east of Luigi's** on the south side should be acquired and consolidated into **one larger redevelopment project**, including a green space for outdoor seating for Luigi's, adjacent to the existing restaurant. New construction could include retail, housing or multi-use facilities.
- The solid brown fence at 715 should be removed and replaced with a more attractive, neighborhood friendly **fence**.
- Lots 701 and 657 – 663 should be redeveloped as **green space and parking, or as a mixed use area**. Since the latter area is larger, it is more conducive to a well-designed parking lot.
- **705** should be considered for the blighted properties program, and sold to an interested neighboring property owner.

- 
- **Wouldn't it be great if....**

- **The corner at Liberty and West 18<sup>th</sup> was enhanced?**



- **New development occurred east of Luigi's?**



- **Green spaces and parking were improved.**
  - **Historic buildings were used for public purposes?**
- 



### Poplar Street to Cherry Street

- 653 is a former bike shop currently used by Lake Shore Industries as storage. It should be considered for conversion to an **Italian American Museum or Cultural Center**. In addition, 615 (an old theater also owned and used by Lake Shore Industries as storage) should be used as part of the museum property. (As an alternative, the Italian American Museum may be better located near the proposed piazza at 16<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets, or within an existing facility.)
- Homes between 640 and 650 should be preserved and renovated.
- **The façade at 628/630** should be renovated and the site should be landscaped. (Potential Garden Club project.)
- The **three auto shops** west of Arnone's Restaurant should be required to pave their lots, finish the exteriors of all buildings, plant attractive tree lawns, combine their signs, and properly maintain their sites. The rusted guard rail to the east should be removed and the area landscaped and maintained. (Potential Garden Club project.)
- **Arnone's Restaurant and the International Bakery parking lots** should be landscaped, repaved, and striped. A tree lawn should be added and the Arnone's corner used for a green area with a bench facing the intersection. (Potential Garden Club project.) Specific entrances and exits should be designated to eliminate confusion for motorists and pedestrians.
- The four apartments above Gelateria should continue to be maintained.

### Cherry Street to Walnut Street

- A small portion of the **corner of Skip's Tire Shop** could also be used as green space to complement the one proposed across Cherry Street at Arnone's. (Potential Garden Club project.)
- **Planter boxes** in front of Arnone's Deli should be planted and maintained to add greenery. (Potential Garden Club project.) Window treatments should be used to screen interior operations from the public.

- **Wouldn't it be great if....**

- **Homes and facades were renovated?**



- The vacant lots east of Arnone’s should be used for an **old-fashioned diner**, with limited parking behind or beside the diner, and tables and chairs in front. The diner should offer sandwiches, hamburgers, French fries, breakfast, and light dinners, as well as ice cream fountain favorites. Juke boxes could play golden oldies and Italian or other ethnic music. The site should be attractively landscaped. (Potential Garden Club project.)
- The **two vacant lots east of DeSantis Sign** are owned by LECOM and should be used as College expansions or parking.
- **Buildings 524 and 528** should be renovated and continued in commercial uses. 524 has arched windows on its east wall that replicate those of the west wall of Building 506 and together form attractive “book ends” for the parking lots (for 506 and LECOM), which lie between them. The parking lots should be landscaped and lighted, (LECOM’s still needs to be paved), with entrances that match and clearly denote private parking. (Potential Garden Club project.)
- A more neighborhood-friendly enterprise should be recruited for **Building 502**.
- The facades of **Buildings 546 and 548** should be renovated.
- **501**, a 4-unit apartment building, should be improved.
- **LECOM** should acquire adjacent properties when appropriate, and add parking and landscaping to its site, including a tree lawn along West 18<sup>th</sup> Street.

### Walnut Street to Chestnut Street

- **Bethesda Community Care and Trinity Center** require additional **parking**, which could be acquired in lots 461 and 459 across the street, which are owned by ERA. If adequate parking were acquired off-street, it would be nice if the parking area in front of the building could be a converted to additional **green space** to match that to its west. This green space needs to be better maintained. Tall trees should be added to provide shade. (Potential Garden Club project.)

- **Wouldn't it be great if....**
- **Commercial uses were added to West 18<sup>th</sup> Street?**



- **LECOM continued to expand its office facilities?**
- **Bethesda and Trinity Center continued to expand?**



- **Adaptive re-use and in-fill construction continued**



- **Building 428**, which is currently used for storage, is a great building that should be renovated, its fake fronts removed, and possibly a second floor added to the west side. A viable business (commercial or retail) should be recruited for the first floor and residential units should be provided on the second floor.
- The **vacant lot east of Bldg. 428** should be new in-fill construction, possibly row houses or condos for commercial or office use on the first floor and residential on the upper floor. Or, if rehabilitation is not feasible for the **two multi-family buildings east of this lot**, these should be demolished and a three-lot **in-fill development** should be designed for a mix of office, retail, and residential uses.
- **415** and the empty lot next to it should be purchased by ERA, demolished, and redeveloped possibly with **row houses or condos**, with parking behind them.
- **Quik Stop** should have a planted area along the alley on the west. Also, the SE corner area should be landscaped, and a tree lawn should be added along West 18<sup>th</sup> Street. Curb cuts for vehicular entrances and exits should be defined and minimized. The dumpster should be screened with an attractive fence and/or shrubs.
- **447** should be purchased and demolished, and sold to property owners on either side for additional green space or parking.

### Chestnut Street to Myrtle Street

- The former **Erie Coin building (lots 364 to 354)** should be renovated into **loft apartments with commercial on the first floor**. The vacant lot to the east and the white building to its east should be used for parking for the loft apartments and businesses, with appropriate lighting, landscaping, and signage.
- The **four lots (319 through 331)** which are owned by ERA should be marketed for a creative in-fill redevelopment project either mixed-use or upscale or market-rate residential, or as part of the town homes project. The building at **332 (J&E Tavern)** and the vacant lot at **326** (across West 18<sup>th</sup> Street from lots 319 through 331) should be purchased and incorporated into the town homes project.

- 
- **Wouldn't it be great if....**
  - **More alternative housing options were available?**
  - **Tree lawns were created?**



- **Mixed-use and market rate housing were developed?**
- **Existing homes in good condition were maintained?**



- **Gateways were created?**





- The **remaining residential units** on this block should be maintained or renovated and continued in use as residential property, until and if commercial and/or retail opportunities require additional space on the corridor.

### Myrtle Street to Sassafra Street

- This area is **primarily residential** and homes should be renovated and maintained. Vacant lots should be sold to neighboring property owners for green space, garages and driveways, parking areas, and/or home expansions. Or these lots should be developed as common parking areas with assigned spaces for residents.
- The **two corners** on Sassafra Street should be landscaped and signed as **gateways** into the Historic Little Italy neighborhood. Signage, trees, shrubbery, flowers, uplighting, statuary, signage and/or banners should be incorporated into an attractive gateway entrance that welcomes people into this very special neighborhood.

### Other Streetscaping Elements

After West 18<sup>th</sup> Street is adequately addressed from a streetscaping perspective, and additional funds become available, other streets in HLI should be redeveloped in the same manner.

- **Liberty Street**, which is another major neighborhood thoroughfare, is in relatively good condition, although it should be enhanced. Ideas include:
  - **Sidewalks along the east side** of Liberty Street at 18<sup>th</sup> Street are too wide. Tree lawns or stamped brick treatment would provide some variety. Street trees and decorative lighting would help make the street more pedestrian-friendly. Benches could also be added in this area.
  - **Attractive mast arms** for signals should be considered to replace the existing wires. They should be of the same design as decorative street lights.
  - The **same streetscaping elements** as on West 18<sup>th</sup> Street should be added to Liberty Street, where needed.
- **Cherry Street** should be considered next for similar streetscaping treatment.

- **Enhance Liberty Street.**



- **Add Gateways.**



# Historic Little Italy

- Streetscaping should be continued **throughout the neighborhood** when financially feasible, or when private developers are constructing new projects.

## Gateways

Gateways are important to identify the boundaries of the Historic Little Italy neighborhood and should indicate that people are entering or leaving a special place. These gateways can be the signal to the general public to slow down, and to alert travelers that the area is home to many pedestrians.

Gateways can include:

- Signage denoting “Historic Little Italy” including its logo and any adopted tag line.
- Trees, shrubs, and flowers planted in the ground and/or in large concrete pots or hanging baskets.
- Statuary, fountains, or other works of art.
- Decorative lighting to match that in the streetscaping scheme and/or used to illuminate the signage.
- Other symbols or memorabilia denoting the HLI neighborhood.
- The gateway could also be an arch over the roadway in specific areas (similar to the one by Gannon University) although it would have to be high enough to accommodate trucks.

The PAC discussed potential gateways into the neighborhood that should be created and recommend the following:

- Add an east gateway on **West 18<sup>th</sup> Street at Sassafras**. Due to space limitations and for greater impact, it is recommended that an arch be designed and constructed over West 18<sup>th</sup> Street, just west of Sassafras Street. An archway similar to the one at Gannon is desired, and would be tall enough to allow safe entry for trucks. If this is not possible, an alternative could be to use the tree lawn on the north side of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street between Peach and Sassafras Streets.
- Add a similar arched gateway on **West 18<sup>th</sup> Street at Liberty Street**.

Add north gateways on **Liberty Street and Cherry Street at the railroad**, possibly by painting a mural on the railroad bridges, and providing more efficient and more attractive lighting along the pedestrian walkways under the bridges. Lighting also needs to be addressed under the Sassafras Street railroad bridge.



# Historic Little Italy

- **Cherry Street at 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> Streets**, on the west side of the cemetery would be an appropriate place for a secondary gateway, possibly a smaller scale archway over the streets.
- Signs denoting entry into Historic Little Italy could be placed at **other secondary entrances** to the neighborhood as funds become available.

## Plaza

The neighborhood residents and stakeholders expressed the concern that there was no central gathering area in the neighborhood or no public focal point. Given that the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street corridor was historically the major roadway through the neighborhood, some thought was given to creating an Italian style “piazza” on West 18<sup>th</sup> Street.

However, during one stakeholder meeting, it was pointed out that early development plans for Little Italy included a piazza at the intersection of Walnut and West 16<sup>th</sup> Streets, in front of Saint Paul’s Church, which, as mentioned earlier, was the heart of the Little Italy community in its golden years.

It is recommended that HLI further investigate the potential for creating a piazza at this location, working closely with Saint Paul’s Church and the Nuova Aurora Club, as well as the owners of the apartment in the SW corner.

A concept of a potential piazza is illustrated in **Plate 5-3**. The concept includes brick pavers throughout the piazza, benches, landscaping, a fountain or sculpture, controlled vehicular traffic patterns, and other amenities to make the area attractive as a neighborhood gathering space.

An Italian American Museum, highlighting former residents of the neighborhood as well as other famous Italian Americans, could be developed adjacent to the piazza.

## Planning and Zoning Issues

Planning and zoning are critical to the revitalization process. Issues with existing regulations should be aggressively addressed to assure that recommendations in this Plan can be properly implemented. Many issues arose during the planning process that require additional research and potential action. These include:

- **Resolving issues with Penelec** regarding the inability to build or work within 10’ of the high transmission line on West 18<sup>th</sup> Street, which means there can be no buildings over two stories high.



- Developing **design standards** for the whole neighborhood, and/or for the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street commercial corridor that address facades, building materials, lighting, signage, streetscaping, etc.
- Requiring **preservation and enhancement of the tree canopy**, selection of appropriate trees, use of pervious surfaces when possible, and using landscaping to reduce heat islands (e.g. in parking lots). Becoming a “green” neighborhood should be a high priority.
- Adopting an attractive fencing style, and working with property owners to remove unsightly or unnecessary fences.
- Requiring safe and marked pedestrian crosswalks at all intersections, with pedestrian crossing signals where appropriate.

### **Code Enforcement**

Consistent and prudent code enforcement is critical to achieving the desired results of the revitalization effort. The City has taken many steps recently to increase enforcement of local codes, including the new Rental Inspection Program. District Judge Carney is also taking steps to encourage compliance with local codes and regulations. These efforts need to continue in order to assure that the neighborhood has the greatest chance of meeting its revitalization goals.

Stakeholders suggested that the community:

- Continue to work with District Judge Carney to apply stricter punishments (and greater incentives) regarding enforcement of codes and rules in the neighborhood.
- Work with the City to preserve single-family homes and discourage or prevent conversion to multi-family uses.
- Assure that the zoning in the neighborhood provides for additions to existing homes, including replacement and/or addition of front porches, expansions to living space, additions of garages, and renovations to return the homes to their original designs. Zoning or design guidelines should also encourage removal of poorly designed and/or constructed additions.



(Page intentionally left blank)



### Neighbors & Economy

Historic Little Italy should develop and/or enhance partnerships that will assist in its revitalization efforts. The Economic Development (ED) Committee is charged with identifying and fostering these relationships for the benefit of the neighborhood and its economy. Its goal is to strengthen the quality of existing housing and commercial building stock in the area and to develop a strategy to foster the viability of the area with a mix of commercial, civic, employment, and residential uses.

Some partnerships that should be pursued, and proposed activities with them, include:

- Erie Main Street/Downtown Improvement District. In the future, some joint activities could be planned to attract visitors to both Downtown Erie and Historic Little Italy.
- Erie Public Schools. Little Italy should:
  - Pursue an elementary or charter school for the neighborhood.
  - Work with the School District to maintain the presence of Roosevelt Middle School in the neighborhood.
- Churches. As major organizations within the neighborhood, churches should be partners in the revitalization effort, especially Saint Paul's, which has long been the heart of HLI. They should be recruited to participate in all events. Hopefully, the resulting revitalized neighborhood will hopefully add new parishioners to their churches.
- City Hall. The revitalization cannot be completed without the City's support. Several references made during the process include:
  - Police—increasing the visibility of the foot and bicycle patrol in the neighborhood. Maybe a resident corps could be developed with the police department to help patrol the area.
  - Sanitation—more cooperation regarding garbage collection is needed.
  - Public works—streetscaping, street and alley improvements, storm drainage, and water and sanitary sewer upgrades and replacements may be needed during the revitalization process.
  - Parks and recreation—maintenance is also an on-going issue.

**The Economic Development Committee should:**

- Pursue partnerships.



- GEIDC, ERA, and the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership. These organizations are already providing business retention, expansion and recruitment efforts for the greater Erie area. HLI needs to make them aware of the opportunities and needs of the neighborhood, and make sure that HLI is constantly in their scope as needing economic development attention, having available buildings and sites, and being a willing economic development partner.

A critical aspect of the revitalization effort is to assure that **existing jobs** are preserved and **new jobs** are created. Working with businesses and industries in the neighborhood and recruiting new businesses to the neighborhood are critical to the overall success of the revitalization effort. In addition to new businesses, new attractions and activities are needed to entice people to regularly visit or move into the neighborhood. Constant contact and coordination with GEIDC, ERA, and the Growth Partnership are needed to accomplish these goals.

As part of this study, Boulevard Strategies, Inc., a nationally-known market analysis firm from Columbus, Ohio, prepared an analysis of the neighborhood from a market perspective. The firm reviewed the history of the area, past market studies completed for the Downtown and Central City, regional trends, and local demand and supply, for both the retail and housing markets.

The Little Italy Real Estate Market Analysis and Development Analysis (September 2007) is included as **Appendix 6-1**. Key findings include:

- Regional trends in urban environments that should be considered are:
  - A renewed emphasis on health and environment issues;
  - The desires of the “Do-it-for-me” generation;
  - The rise of “Lifestyle” retail;
  - Parking, parking, parking; and
  - Continuing integration of clicks and bricks.
- Popular lifestyle activities for Erie residents, compared to the typical American households, ranked in the order of popularity, include:
  - Hunting/fishing
  - Golf
  - Needle work/knitting/crafts
  - Camping and hiking
  - Pets
  - Gardening
  - Grandchildren
  - Collectibles
  - Automotive work

### The Economic Development Committee should:

- Assure that existing jobs are pursued and new jobs created.



- Pursue market analysis.
- Regional trends should be considered.
- Popular lifestyles should be accommodated.



- Casino gambling
- Wildlife/environmental causes
- Extreme sports

Enthusiasm for these types of activities is suggestive of niche retail opportunities.

- Most of Little Italy's spending on Home, Fashion, and Leisure Goods, as well as Dining and Entertainment, occurs outside the neighborhood, indicating potential opportunities.
- Little Italy could support more retail space, such as a full-line supermarket with a pharmacy, fast casual restaurants, finely-focused specialty stores in categories such as crafts, fabrics, pet supplies, gardening, and other niches.
- Little Italy retailers are capturing only about 42% of the overall retail market potentially within their grasp, especially in convenience goods and services, home goods, fashion goods, and leisure goods.
- Condominiums have been the hottest segment nationally in residential real estate over the past ten years, serving three primary market segments: empty nesters, echo boomers, and single women without children. Condominium product is very limited in Erie.
- A recent national survey indicates that a segment known as "lifestyle" renters is emerging in urban markets. These are people with the financial means to purchase a home but who prefer to rent. Upscale, quality rental opportunities are needed to serve this niche.
- Live/work space, loft space, and home offices are becoming more popular nationally; thus, "third places" such as coffee shops, lunch counters, and support services (copy centers, office/computer supply stores) are needed.

---

**The Economic Development Committee should:**

- **Recruit Home, Fashion and Leisure Goods companies.**
  - **Recruit more retail, supermarket, restaurants...**
  - **Consider condos.**
  - **Provide upscale rental options.**
  - **Add "third places".**
- 





- Baby boomers will ease into retirement more gradually than today's seniors. They will prefer to "age in place" rather than move to sunbelts. They will continue to play hard and will seek outdoor activities such as golf, aerobics, and shopping. Retired baby boomers will have a toxic reaction to anything labeled "senior" or "mature". Downtown and urban environments can provide robust opportunities for senior boomers stay active and connected to their communities. Self-help cooperatives, and nonprofits that collect dues for transportation, home-cleaning and repair, companionship, security, and other services will continue to grow. Volunteer labor and barter exchanges are used in moderate income areas for these services.
- A growing number of childless households have pets (especially in Erie). Places that are pet-friendly have a distinct emotional edge in attracting young singles and couples as well as empty nesters and retirees. Dogs also provide a measure of security in neighborhoods perceived to be less safe.

These issues should be considered in the future revitalization efforts for Historic Little Italy, as they provide specific redevelopment opportunities.

In reviewing and analyzing all of the information collected to date, a number of initiatives and recommendations arose. These include:

- **Work with Lake Shore Industries**, the owner of the former bike shop and theater at 18<sup>th</sup> and Poplar Streets, to develop an Italian American museum in the building to highlight areas of local interest, such as products made in the area in earlier times, famous Italian Americans and other former residents of Little Italy, etc. Another alternative location for this Italian American Museum is adjacent to the proposed piazza at Walnut and West 16<sup>th</sup> Street. If that should occur, an alternative use for the former bike shop and theater should be considered to preserve their historic significance.
- The Economic Development Committee should work with the ERA and other existing economic development partners to **recruit new commercial and retail businesses to the area**. Committee members should be trained to assist other ED partners and provided with the appropriate information to assist them in their efforts. Businesses that should be considered for recruitment include:
  - Grocery store (#1)
  - Restaurants—breakfast/lunch, Italian (#2)

### The Economic Development Committee should:

- Prepare for the baby boomers to retire.
- Include pets.
- Explore options with Lake Shore Industries.



- Recruit new commercial & retail businesses



# Historic Little Italy

- Coffee shop (#3)

- Branch bank (#4)
- Retail shops
- Book store
- Video rentals
- A 50's style diner
- A bowling alley
- Office supply store
- UPS/Kinkos
- Recreation center for kids—arcade
- Antique /collectibles/art/jewelry shops
- Specialty (ethnic?) clothing
- Cinema/ theater
- Bowling alley
- Additional ethnic food stores and restaurants
- Pet store/aquarium
- Sewing/knitting/crafts
- Garden shop
- Home decorating
- Wholesale stores
- Flea market/Farmers market—on 18<sup>th</sup> Street, with lighting
- Outdoor gathering space
- More parks
- Additional parking lots
- Local museum

- With GEIDC and ERA, explore **an alternative mixed-use project for the Continental Rubber Works block**. This site, which is bounded by Plum Street on the west, West 19<sup>th</sup> Street on the north, Liberty Street on the east, and West 20<sup>th</sup> Street on the south, is critical to the future revitalization of HLI. The Greater Erie Industrial Development Corporation is undertaking environmental studies on the site to prepare it for future redevelopment. They are looking at this study to provide ideas regarding its potential reuse.

The block contains two buildings on the south side that are currently being used for warehousing and by Triangle Tech (in addition to its main facility at 20<sup>th</sup> and Brown Streets), and a hardware store in the NE corner, which is still a viable business. The balance of the block is vacant and unkempt. The block north of this block, between 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Streets, is occupied primarily by the EMTA Lift Facility. There is a church in the far NE corner.

## The Economic Development Committee should:



- Explore a mixed-use project.



The Continental Rubber Works block presents exciting opportunities for a new mixed-use development, possibly centered around a small neighborhood grocery store. (Work with Larry's Market regarding any grocery store recruitment efforts, to respect the legacy of that store's history in the neighborhood.) A branch bank, some retail shops and offices, and market rate or upscale condos, artist lofts, and/or apartments could provide a strong transition area from the nicer residential areas south of Brown Avenue to the industrial uses north and west of HLI. It could also provide much-needed services to the residents of Little Italy. The hardware store could be included in a new space in the redevelopment plan.

- Work closely with the **City and EMTA to explore alternatives for that area** of the neighborhood. If the EMTA should opt to relocate its facilities to a consolidated site outside the neighborhood at some point in the future, that block would provide additional opportunity for development similar to that discussed above for the Continental Rubber Works block. In the short-term, explore shared parking options, especially if the Rite Aid parking lot is redeveloped.
- **Market and expand existing niches:** auto-related services and ethnic foods/restaurants.
- **Pursue improvements for the north 200 Block of West 16<sup>th</sup> Street.** There is a vacant area (possibly a brownfield) in the center and west side of the block bounded by West 16<sup>th</sup> Street on the south, Sassafras Street on the east, Myrtle Street on the west, and the railroad tracks on the north. Given the poor access to the existing businesses on Sassafras Street, and the total lack of parking space or garages for all the homes on this stretch of West 16<sup>th</sup>, it is recommended that this parcel of land be acquired and redeveloped.

Future uses of this parcel would be first, a road or alley to provide access to the businesses on Sassafras Street, as well as access to a proposed parking area. Second, parking should be provided along the south side of the parcel for residents in homes on both sides of West 16<sup>th</sup> Street. Garages may also be a possibility. Spaces could be assigned, and possibly funds could be identified to assist property or home owners in constructing a row of similarly-designed garages. Third, a surface parking lot could also be provided for second or third cars or visitors, as well as for customers of the businesses on Sassafras Street.

### The Economic Development Committee should:

- **Work with EMTA**



- **Expanding existing niches.**



- **Pursue parking for the north 200 block of West 16<sup>th</sup>.**



If the area is large enough, a green space should be incorporated, along with a pedestrian path between Sassafras and Myrtle Streets. Attractive street lighting would be required to assure the area is safe, and a buffer, preferably green, from the scrap shop should be included.

**Blighted property** needs to continue to be addressed, with greater emphasis placed on expediting the removal of dilapidated buildings. This must be a priority.

- Commercial buildings should be constructed in several vacant lots between Cherry and Walnut Streets in lieu of parking lots, in order to recreate a continuous façade of storefronts to entice consumers.
- Vacant lots should be used for creative uses:
  - Convert vacant lots into a bocce ball court or a pet park.
  - Add parks but maintain them. Encourage local businesses to adopt a park.
  - Continue to offer vacant lots to neighboring homeowners for private gardens, yards, parking, or garages.
  - Convert vacant lots into community gardens for residents. They could also grow food for a farmers' market.
  - Construct new in-fill housing.
  - Add parking lots in some vacant lots as needed.
  - Establish connectivity through the neighborhood—bike paths, walkways, green space. Incorporate a bike path in Columbus Park and vacant lots. Provide bike racks in the area.
  - Provide a skateboarding area in Columbus Park or in a nearby vacant lot.
- Continue, expand and enhance the commercial building and façade renovation grant program. Some suggestions might include:
  - Identify and pre-qualify contractors to simplify the process.
  - Incorporate design guidelines into the funding program.
  - Address window treatments—hold seminars, offer artistic services, etc. (Possible new for-profit, local company?)

Explore connectivity between storefronts (inside) whenever possible. (Storeowners can help each other on breaks, providing more flexibility for small store owners.)

### The Economic Development Committee should:

- Convert vacant lots to creative uses.



- Enhance façade renovation grant programs.



(Page intentionally left blank)



## Image & Identity

The Marketing Committee is charged with improving the image of the neighborhood, creating an identity for Historic Little Italy that is inviting, enticing, and indicative of the new neighborhood resulting from this revitalization effort, and marketing the unique aspects of the area to potential residents, investors, new businesses, tourists, and others. Recommendations include:

- Create a logo for **Historic** Little Italy. Utilize neighborhood heritage to create a logo/image—lots of potential. Expand that into a branding campaign, accommodating the ethnic diversity that is prevalent today.
- **Incorporate the selected logo design** into lighting fixtures or poles, benches, trash receptacles, fences, crosswalks, banners, signs, etc.
- **Improve the image** of the neighborhood to what it was in the past, and then market Historic Little Italy and its businesses to the City, new residents, past residents, and diverse ethnic groups
- Increase the number and type of neighborhood **events**:
  - Eventually add a **walking tour**.
  - Establish an **International Food Market** (different from the Farmers Market)—possibly in Saint Paul’s Church parking lot, or create a permanent one in a building. (Work with Erie County Farms and existing Farmers Markets before beginning this effort.)
  - Initiate a **public art program** and/or a banner program that could honor famous residents or famous Italian Americans.
- **Create a piazza**, or open public gathering area, at the intersection of Walnut and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets, in front of Saint Paul’s Church.

The **bocce ball court at the Nuova Aurora Club should be included** in the design of the piazza or relocated, and the fence should be removed and replaced with something more flexible and open (such as bollards with chains; the chains can be up for private events and removed for public use at other times). This will take the cooperation of the Nuova Aurora Club, of course.

### The Marketing Committee should:

- **Create a logo.**



- **Improve the neighborhood image.**
- **Increase neighborhood events.**
- **Create a piazza.**



- The **parking lot in the NE corner** would be the primary location for the piazza, which would also encompass the current roadways.
- The piazza should be designed **similar to those in most Italian towns**, made of stamped pavement or brick pavers, with a fountain, greenery, trees for shade, benches, tables and chairs, artwork, etc.
- **Vehicular traffic should be included** in the design, although heavy traffic should be discouraged. Traffic could be slowed by use of a partial roundabout, with a fountain in the center of the area.
- HLI should work with Saint Paul's to **identify additional parking opportunities** for parishioners if/when the piazza is constructed.
- **The house** to the north of the parking lot (1523 Walnut Street) should be **evaluated for re-use** as possibly an Italian American Museum or some other use related to the piazza.
- Consider starting a **concert program**, using local churches, the piazza, Arnone's parking lot, and Columbus Park for settings.
- **Promote cross-selling** of Historic Little Italy businesses.
- Enhance marketing efforts regarding **existing children's programs** to kids and their parents.
- **Develop a joint advertisement program**, especially one for all restaurants ® and food vendors (V), including:
  - Larry's Central Market – (V) specialty meats
  - Majestic Bakery (V)
  - International Bakery (V)
  - Arnone's Bakery/Deli – ® (V) Italian foods.
  - Luigi's ®
  - Hector's ®
  - Gellateria Barbara ®
  - Erie Beer (V)
- Develop a **common calendar of events** for the neighborhood and advertise it on various web sites.
- Consider **Bocce Ball tournaments** as a fund raiser/social event.

**The Marketing Committee should:**



- **Start a concert program.**
- **"Shop local".**
- **Enhance children's programs.**
- **Develop a calendar of events.**



- Develop an **Historic Little Italy map** identifying all businesses and public places. Get local businesses to advertise in it to pay for the cost.
- Organize local businesses to **advertise and promote jointly** and aggressively.
- **Awards**—Reward local businesses, best gardens, best renovation project, etc. Place a sign at the site for a week or so.
- Establish an **Historic Little Italy newsletter** to relay communications about events, people, awards, etc. in the neighborhood.
- **Develop a web site** for Little Italy similar to BEST's.
- **Work closely with potential investors** in the neighborhood, which could include:
  - Owens-Brockway
  - Erie Beer
  - LECOM
  - Saint Vincent
  - Banks
  - Other Industries
  - Businesses (e.g. Country Fair)
  - Insurance companies

These companies should be pursued for further investment in the neighborhood, and especially to assist with funding a sustainable organization to implement the revitalization plan.

### The Marketing Committee should:

- **Develop a map.**
- **Start an awards program.**
- **Establish a newsletter.**
- **Develop a web site.**
- **Work with potential investors.**





(Page intentionally left blank)



## Clean, Green and Safe and Housing

The Clean, Green and Safe and Housing Committee is responsible for those activities that provide for a cleaner, safer and greener community. This committee should spearhead the initial “Clean-Up, Green-Up” activity recommended for spring. In addition, it should be the committee that recruits members for a Garden Club to help spruce up the neighborhood and educate folks about planting and gardening. Many of the recommendations in Chapter 5 could be undertaken by this Garden Club.

Recommendations for this Committee include:

- Explore the improvement and better use of alleys.
  - Acquire and demolish unused and dilapidated outbuildings to get wider Right-of-Way.
  - Provide a program for the construction of garages off alleys for homeowners who agree to renovate their properties.
  - Provide adequate lighting.
  - Control speeds.
- Add decorative, pedestrian-scale street lighting throughout the neighborhood, starting with the West 18th Street corridor and working through the rest of the neighborhood, especially between Sassafras and Myrtle Sts., where lighting is deficient.
  - Encourage residents to keep porch lights on at night.
- Work with the City to explore the potential to install a traffic signal at Cherry and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets.
- Work with the City to improve garbage collection practices.
- Work with the City and the companies whose trucks use West 18<sup>th</sup> Street the most, to slow, remove, or redirect truck traffic around the neighborhood.
  - Traffic coming from the west should be directed to 12<sup>th</sup> Street west of Liberty Street (Raspberry or Cascade), and traffic coming from the east should be directed to use Sassafras or Peach Streets.
  - Or lower the road under the Liberty Street overpass and direct trucks to Liberty to 12<sup>th</sup>.
  - Or smooth out the at-grade crossings at Raspberry and Cascade to eliminate high-centering.
  - Work with the City to enforce speed limits and/or reduce the speed limits.

**The Clean, Green and Safe and Housing Committee should:**

- **Explore better use of alleys.**



- **Pursue better lighting.**



- **Work on redirecting truck traffic.**



- Use streetscaping to create a “sense of place” that indicates a need to slow down.
- Use bump outs (curb extensions), speed humps, stop signs to slow traffic.
- Add more cops on the street—on foot or bicycle.
- Explore additional parking alternatives.
  - Pursue shared parking at EMTA parking lot, which would require the moving of their fences. This is especially important if the Rite Aid parking lot is developed in the future.
  - Identify vacant lots that could be converted to common parking for residents by permit, in exchange for their maintaining the parking lot. Several have been identified in Chapter 5, especially along West 18<sup>th</sup> Street.
  - Develop designated parking lots for shoppers and store owners/employees.
  - Keep parking lots small and many (as opposed to large and few). Add one parking lot to each block, and reserve spots for homeowners.
  - Recruit assistance to redevelop the vacant lot in the center of the 200 block north of West 16<sup>th</sup> Street, to provide off-street surface parking, garages or parking shelters for residents of West 16<sup>th</sup> Street, as discussed earlier.
- Improve all pedestrian crossings along West 18<sup>th</sup> Street, with:
  - Textured, stamped, lined, or colored walkways to delineate pedestrian space.
  - ADA ramps to meet current regulations.
  - Security cameras to deter crime.
  - Pedestrian crossing signals, where appropriate.
  - Develop an attractive transit stop that is off the street, has a pergola and benches, and trees for shade. Sassafras and 18<sup>th</sup> Streets is a critical location for this type of transit stop.
  - Explore the potential for an exercise/physical fitness walking trail through neighborhood.
- Consider establishing an “Adopt a Park” program to address maintenance at the two existing parks and any future green spaces. (A local company has offered to adopt Columbus Park; this could be the model.)

### The Clean, Green and Safe and Housing Committee should:

- Explore parking options.



- Improved pedestrian crossings.



- An initiative should be developed to assist property owners and tenants with maintenance and design of front yards and gardens. Possibly a Garden Club could be started and local nurseries could work with the Garden Club to provide products and services, as well as educational events. Establish a pet-friendly environment (dog parks, water dishes in front of stores, etc.)
- Work with the Design Committee to design and construct a “piazza” (“an open square especially in an Italian town”) as a main gathering area and focal point for the neighborhood in front of Saint Paul’s Church at 16<sup>th</sup> and Walnut, as discussed earlier.
  - The piazza should contain permanent benches, substantial amount of trees to shade the area, a fountain or sculpture, shrubs and flowers, tables and chairs, decorative lighting, and other elements that will attract residents to socialize with their neighbors. It should be very accessible.
- Add some green spaces throughout the neighborhood. Potential locations include:
  - The empty lot(s) east of Arnone’s Deli, in conjunction with an old-fashioned 50’s style diner.
  - SE corner of Poplar and 18<sup>th</sup>.
  - East of Luigi’s.
  - Other appropriate empty lots.
- Convert vacant lots into green space, community gardens, bocce ball courts, pet parks, etc., and identify a maintenance plan.
- Provide safe walking paths, bike paths, and other connectors through the neighborhood.
- Enhance Columbus Park and work with other organizations to provide a skateboarding area.

**The Clean, Green and Safe and Housing Committee should:**

- **Start an “Adopt a Park” program.**



- **Convert vacant lots.**



- **Provide safe connectors.**
- **Enhance Columbus Park**



- Preserve and enhance the tree canopy, and promote a “green” neighborhood.
- Continue to expand and enhance the Block Watch program.
- Develop and implement a maintenance system must be developed and implemented for public areas. This should include maintenance of green areas and parks, tree trimming, emptying of trash receptacles, sweeping sidewalks, spraying for weeds and insects, maintaining the piazza, maintaining the alleys (if they remain public), etc.
  - A maintenance initiative should be developed for private properties. Absentee landlords must be addressed in the initiative.
  - Consider having the City/housing providers support the elderly in their homes with improvement and maintenance in exchange for receiving the property upon their deaths.
  - Educate homeowners regarding proper home maintenance.
  - Resolve maintenance of alleys.

**Increasing home ownership** in Little Italy is critical to its renaissance and survival. This Committee is also responsible for coordinating housing activities. Some recommendations include:

- Work with existing housing partners, the City, and funding agencies to develop and adopt a goal of 70/30 for home ownership vs. rentals. (Make it official!) Encourage homeownership:
  - North of Saint Vincent, between Sassafras and the Cemetery, north to 18<sup>th</sup> Street, where appropriate land is available.
  - On lots facing West 16<sup>th</sup> and West 17<sup>th</sup> between Sassafras and Liberty, excluding the properties facing Sassafras and Liberty.
  - On the Continental Rubber Works site.
  - Housing should be preserved and protected in the Brown Avenue/West 20<sup>th</sup> Street area.
- Develop new, and enhance existing programs to increase home ownership, including an employee-assisted housing program if local employers agree.

### The Clean, Green and Safe and Housing Committee should:

- Think “green”.
- Enhance Block Watch activities.
- Develop a maintenance program.



- Increase homeownership opportunities.



- Adopt a “cottage” (or similar consistent) style neighborhood plan using New Urbanism concepts to provide some continuity in design:
  - Front porches
  - Alleys
  - Garages in back
  - Simple, smaller, compact homes
  - Some zero lot lines
  - Common green space
- Work with the ERA, HANDS, and private developers to construct additional homes for ownership.
- Lobby the City to maintain control of the alleys that are needed for access within the neighborhood.
- Work with local banks to enhance home mortgage loans in the neighborhood (and help them meet their CRA requirements).
- Continue to build new homes /condos on vacant lots, and expand the acquisition/demolition process.
- Provide affordable, attractive, energy-efficient rental units for residents who may never be home-owners. The apartment owner must be a conscientious, civic-minded individual who will properly maintain the facility.
- Provide incentives to convert former single-family (SF) homes back to SF homes.
- Continue to explore and increase efforts at combining or deeding vacant lots to neighboring property owners so that they can add onto their homes, add gardens and/or yards, provide off-street parking, or create larger lots for new in-fill development.
- Continue, expand, and enhance the housing rehab program.
- Provide housing options for LECOM students & Saint Vincent residents and target them for home purchases, and explore opportunities with Saint Vincent and LECOM to invest in housing for their students and residents. (Purchase/rehab/sell or rent; new housing). Also, pursue initiatives with Erie Beer and Owens-Brockway, who are very interested in the neighborhood.

---

### The Clean, Green and Safe and Housing Committee should:

- Adopt a “cottage” style plan.



- Maintain control of alleys.



- Provide affordable & attractive rental units.
- Convert former SF homes back to SF.
- Combine Lots.



- Explore opportunities with LECOM & Saint Vincent.



- Enforce rental property maintenance & provide incentives or subsidies for renovations. Affordable and decent rental units will always be required in the neighborhood. The goal is to make them attractive enough that renters will take pride in their maintenance.
- Pursue market rate housing for the neighborhood. Potential locations for market rate housing include:
  - 300 block of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street—ERA owned property.
  - West 19<sup>th</sup> Street.
  - Vacant warehouses.
  - On the Continental Rubber Works property.
  - At the EMTA Lift Site.
  - Along Huron Street—an existing quiet street.
- Introduce some upscale housing, possibly in the southwest section of neighborhood. This could include condos, row houses in a period design, and/or loft apartments.
- Design some higher-density housing to bring more people into the neighborhood, especially those with higher incomes. Vacant lots in the 300 block of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street may be suitable.
- New housing should provide for pets in a pet-friendly environment. Pets should be permitted in some, if not all, of the new rental units being provided and green space for pets should be provided in residential complexes.
- Recruit housing developments that are suitable for seniors.

---

**The Clean, Green and Safe and Housing Committee should:**

- Enforce property maintenance.
  - Introduce upscale housing.
  - Design some higher-density housing.
  - Plan for senior housing
- 



## Appendix 2-1

**Summary of**  
***Little Italy Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan (2005)***  
Matt Monteson & Anthony Simonetti  
(Gannon University MPA Program – With SSJNN Assistance)

This study focused on several of the same issues that have been identified repeatedly as problems in the Little Italy neighborhood – unsafe streets – especially after dark, drugs, prostitution, absentee landlords who don't maintain their properties, low home ownership, alcohol abuse and “slum bars” in the neighborhood, high unemployment, and to a lesser extent, the lack of local jobs. The most important assets were identified as the Little Italy Neighborhood Watch organization and the increased level of attention by the Erie Police Department. Other cited assets include: the local churches, the neighborhood service providers, and local businesses and business owners.

The study was supported by thirty-two survey returns (out of seventy distributed randomly throughout the neighborhood), thirty-four interviews of people at one of the soup kitchens, a focus group meeting, and regular input from the Sisters of Saint Joseph.

The primary conclusion of the mostly academic study was that if anything was going to be done to revitalize the Little Italy Neighborhood, it would have to be done by the local stakeholders – business owners and residents, not an outside group – especially not the City of Erie which already had too many other, more pressing issues to deal with. The authors recommended using the Neighborhood Watch Group as the prime organization to spearhead this focused local effort to take back the neighborhood. Others, both public and private, were encouraged to collaborate with the Neighborhood Watch Group to deal with the identified issues. To be successful in this redevelopment effort, the residents and other stakeholders are advised to:

- Empower the stakeholders.
- Arrive at a consensus as what the mission and goals with a proactive mindset.
- Develop an easily-implemented plan that is broad and will serve the entire community.
- Meet regularly over the next several months to insure a continued focus.
- Have a project chairperson to lead the effort and create smaller subcommittees to achieve the goals set by the overall committee.

Clearly, with no specific goals or implementation strategies defined, this was more a study of the plight of the neighborhood than an actual redevelopment plan.



## Appendix 2-4

### Summary of

### City of Erie Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area

Prepared by City of Erie Department of Economic and Community Development  
(Primarily excerpts relevant to Little Italy Neighborhood summarized)

Goal: To formalize and prioritize existing planning and community development efforts, including, but not only:

- The City's Weed and Seed initiative
- The ERA's Central City housing plans
- The City's Main Street and Enterprise Zone programs

Purpose:

- Create opportunities for employment
- Improve the housing stock
- Provide necessary human services

Within an NRSA:

- Employers don't need to track LMI statistics for hires or job applicants.
- For LMI purposes, housing units assisted as part of the strategy may be considered to be a part of a single structure – provides greater flexibility.
- Increased flexibility for program design and reduced record-keeping requirements.
- Public services may be exempt from the public services cap.
- Must be predominately lower income and residential in nature.
  - 70.6% of parcels in Center City NRSA are residential.
  - 71.7% of the NRSA population are LMI.
- Multiple previous City plans and documents were reviewed and incorporated into the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy.
- Comparing overall NRSA demographics with Little Italy only:
  - Population – NRSA – 20,183, Little Italy 2,728
  - LMI – NRSA 71.1%, Little Italy 76.1%
  - Population change 1990 to 2000 – NRSA +2.8%, Little Italy -6.9%
  - Vacant housing units in 2000 – NRSA 13.4%, Little Italy – 19.3%
  - Renter-occupied housing – NRSA 66.6%, Little Italy – 70.1%
  - Multi-family housing units (% of total) – NRSA 66.4%, Little Italy 69.3%
  - Median Housing Value – NRSA \$38,671, Little Italy \$27,900 (City \$65,900)
  - Median Household Income – Little Italy \$20,085, City \$28,387
  - MHI increase 1990 to 2000 – Little Italy \$56.9%, City 28.8%
  - Unemployment – NRSA 7.9%, Little Italy 7.9%, City 4.9%
  - Not in labor force – NRSA 46%, Little Italy 44%, City 39%
  - High school degree or higher – NRSA 57.8%, Little Italy 57.7%, City 75.3%
- Land use and building conditions statistics in Little Italy neighborhood:
  - Over 65% of all structures are single-family residential
  - Almost 10% are commercial
  - 20% are considered to be in “Good Condition – No Rehab Work Required”
  - 44% are classified as “Minor Rehabilitation Needed”

- Over 20% (about 220 structures) classified as “Major Rehab Needed”
- Over 1% (10+ structures) classified as “Economically Infeasible to Rehab”
- 9% of the parcels in the Neighborhood were vacant
  
- Primary Little Italy Neighborhood Assets include:
  - Holy Trinity Lutheran Church and Community Center
  - St Paul’s Catholic Church
  - St Paul’s Neighborhood Free Clinic
  - The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network
  - Community Shelter Service
  - The Bethesda Trinity Center
  - Other neighborhood assets:
    - Proximity to downtown
    - Strong neighborhood watch group
    - Active business district
    - Abundant, affordable housing stock
    - Home to a diverse population
    - Infusion of new developments
    - Proximity to Saint Vincent’s Hospital
    - Abundant vacant infill development opportunities

## Appendix 2-4

### Summary of February 2006 - 2010 City of Erie Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area

Prepared by City of Erie Department of Economic and Community Development  
(Primarily excerpts relevant to Little Italy Neighborhood summarized)

Goal: To formalize and prioritize existing planning and community development efforts, including, but not only:

- The City's Weed and Seed initiative
- The ERA's Central City housing plans
- The City's Main Street and Enterprise Zone programs

Purpose:

- Create opportunities for employment
- Improve the housing stock
- Provide necessary human services

Within an NRSA:

- Employers don't need to track LMI statistics for hires or job applicants.
- For LMI purposes, housing units assisted as part of the strategy may be considered to be a part of a single structure – provides greater flexibility.
- Increased flexibility for program design and reduced record-keeping requirements.
- Public services may be exempt from the public services cap.
- Must be predominately lower income and residential in nature.
  - 70.6% of parcels in Center City NRSA are residential.
  - 71.7% of the NRSA population are LMI.
- Multiple previous City plans and documents were reviewed and incorporated into the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy.
- Comparing overall NRSA demographics with Little Italy only:
  - Population – NRSA – 20,183, Little Italy 2,728
  - LMI – NRSA 71.1%, Little Italy 76.1%
  - Population change 1990 to 2000 – NRSA +2.8%, Little Italy -6.9%
  - Vacant housing units in 2000 – NRSA 13.4%, Little Italy – 19.3%
  - Renter-occupied housing – NRSA 66.6%, Little Italy – 70.1%
  - Multi-family housing units (% of total) – NRSA 66.4%, Little Italy 69.3%
  - Median Housing Value – NRSA \$38,671, Little Italy \$27,900 (City \$65,900)
  - Median Household Income – Little Italy \$20,085, City \$28,387
  - MHI increase 1990 to 2000 – Little Italy \$56.9%, City 28.8%
  - Unemployment – NRSA 7.9%, Little Italy 7.9%, City 4.9%
  - Not in labor force – NRSA 46%, Little Italy 44%, City 39%
  - High school degree or higher – NRSA 57.8%, Little Italy 57.7%, City 75.3%
- Land use and building conditions statistics in Little Italy neighborhood:
  - Over 65% of all structures are single-family residential
  - Almost 10% are commercial
  - 20% are considered to be in “Good Condition – No Rehab Work Required”
  - 44% are classified as “Minor Rehabilitation Needed”

- Over 20% (about 220 structures) classified as “Major Rehab Needed”
- Over 1% (10+ structures) classified as “Economically Infeasible to Rehab”
- 9% of the parcels in the Neighborhood were vacant
  
- Primary Little Italy Neighborhood Assets include:
  - Holy Trinity Lutheran Church and Community Center
  - St Paul’s Catholic Church
  - St Paul’s Neighborhood Free Clinic
  - The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network
  - Community Shelter Service
  - The Bethesda Trinity Center
  - Other neighborhood assets:
    - Proximity to downtown
    - Strong neighborhood watch group
    - Active business district
    - Abundant, affordable housing stock
    - Home to a diverse population
    - Infusion of new developments
    - Proximity to Saint Vincent’s Hospital
    - Abundant vacant infill development opportunities

**\*\*NOTE: The City of Erie chose not to update the NRSA in 2010 due to budgetary constraints.**

## Appendix 2-5

### Summary of City of Erie 2011 Consolidated Plan (Primarily as related to Little Italy Neighborhood)

Little Italy Neighborhood Demographics summary (2000 Census data):

- Has largest Hispanic population percentage in the City
- Median Household Income is \$20,085
  - 25.8% below poverty level
- 76.1% LMI (Low-Moderate Income)
- Total of 1,293 Housing Units in Neighborhood
  - 397 Single-Family units
  - 896 Multi-Family units
  - 0 Mobile Homes
  - 1043 Total occupied units
  - 312 units are owner-occupied (30%)
    - \$27,900 Median value
  - 731 renter-occupied (70%)
    - \$306 Median contract rent
    - Fair-Market Rents (City-wide):
      - Efficiency \$372
      - 1 Bedroom \$420
      - 2 BR \$542
      - 3 BR \$648
      - 4 BR \$737
  - 250 Vacant (19.3%)
  - 1085 units constructed before 1950 (81.6%) (City-wide – 58.2%)

Both Columbus Park and Myrtle Park “require improvements”.

Per PA Urban Redevelopment Law, the City of Erie’s Community Development Impact Area extends from 26<sup>th</sup> Street north to the Bay, and from Cranberry Street east to the City limits (Byrd Drive and Franklin Ave).

Economic Development programs available within the City of Erie:

- Keystone Opportunity Zone (KOZ)
- Keystone Opportunity Expansion Zone (KOEZ)
- Enterprise Zone
- Main Street

City of Erie Housing-related organizations:

- Housing Authority of City of Erie (HACE)
  - Administers public housing program and Section 8 rentals (2000 units)
- Redevelopment Authority of City of Erie (RACE or ERA)
  - Administers
    - Slums & Blight removals
    - Rental rehabs
    - Commercial rehabs
    - Housing rehabs

- First-time home buyer program
  - Economic Development
  - Planning
- Community Housing Development Organizations:
  - HANDS (Housing and Neighborhood Development)
  - BEST
  - Martin Luther King Center
  - Booker T. Washington Center
- Emergency Shelters
  - Erie City Mission
  - Erie DAWN
  - Community Shelter Services
  - Hospitality House for Women
  - St. Patrick's Haven
  - The Refuge
  - Mercy Center for Women
  - SafeNet

### Summary of SSJNN Program November 2000 Survey Results

In November 2000, eleven months after the founding of the Sisters of St. Joseph Network Neighborhood (SSJNN), the organization began to conduct a door-to-door interview survey of Little Italy Neighborhood residents. The target area was defined as the area between 12<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Streets from State Street to Cranberry Street.

According to the US Post Office mailing list, there were 2,078 potential mailing addresses in the target area, but many were found to be empty houses or businesses. By count, there were actually 980 buildings in the target area, some with multiple housing units. SSJNN estimated that there were about 1,500 households, acknowledging that the actual number fluctuates due to the transient nature of many of the residents.

The survey itself was developed by a sub-committee of the West Side Partnership, a “loosely organized group” including three Neighborhood Watch Groups, church groups, Trinity Center, Saint Vincent Health Center, SSJNN, and various businesses and interested parties. Interviews were conducted over a six-month period primarily by SSJNN staff in conjunction with members of the Neighborhood Watch Groups and employees of Trinity Center. 350 households were contacted yielding 296 completed surveys.

The major categories focused upon in the survey were:

- Age
- Race/Ethnic Background
- Religion
- Marital Status
- Language
- Household Income
- Home Ownership
- Crime
- Health Care
- Social Services/Economics

One key observation that emerged from the interviews as a whole was the “**great need for food**” among area residents. Similarly, the following four issues were identified as major challenges for neighborhood residents:

- Adequate housing
- Nutritional needs
- Drug trafficking/prostitution
- Access to education – including basic life and job skills

Based on the survey input, there was an average of 2.46 persons per household in the Neighborhood. Given the estimated 1500 households, that computes to a target area population of 3,690. Again, based on the survey input percentages -

- 35% are under 18
- 51% are between 18 and 60
- 14% are over 61

- 82% are Caucasian
- 16% are African American
- <1% each are Native American or Asian
  
- 50% are Protestant
- 44% are Catholic
- 3% are Muslim
  
- 35% are Single
- 37% are Married
- 9% are Divorced
- 18% are Widowed
  
- 40% own their homes
- 60% rent

While the majority of the residents are of Italian, German or Irish heritage, there are over 23 other ethnic backgrounds represented within the Neighborhood, most recently including immigrants from the Balkans.

Nearly 60% of the households interviewed had household incomes less than \$14,150 (in 2000).

44% of the households surveyed had no one with steady employment. Of that 44%,

- 54% are retired
- 21% are disabled
- 25% are “simply unemployed”

60% felt that the neighborhood was unsafe, with **drug trafficking and prostitution** being the crimes of most concern.

While the majority of the residents indicated that they do have health insurance (mostly government-funded programs such as Medicare or Medicaid), 7% indicated that they do not have a physician and 26% that they do not have a dentist.

When asked to identify needed or desired social services in the area, the top five services mentioned were:

- Home Repair
- Educational Programs
- Substance Abuse Counseling
- Child Care
- Social Activities

97% of those surveyed indicated that one of the greatest needs in the area was a **low-cost grocery store**.



As a result of the neighborhood needs identified through this survey and other inputs, in the Fall of 2000, SSJNN began several assistance programs including:

- A soup kitchen in partnership with parishioners of St. Paul's Church
- Responding to emergency needs for food
- Offering English as a Second Language instruction in peoples' homes
- Serving as advocates in assisting persons
  - Find ways to pay their rent
  - Obtain clothing for children
  - Work with utilities and landlords
  - Communicate with the public assistance office

In 2000, future plans for SSJNN included:

- Continuing with the soup kitchen
- Expanding the English as a Second Language program
- Explore "housing concerns" at several levels
  - Collaboration with Habitat for Humanity and/or HANDS
  - Explore opportunities for educational programs for simple home repairs and upkeep
  - Explore a mentoring program in conjunction with landlords to assist residents with home maintenance skills
  - Work with City officials to demolish abandoned houses and clean vacant lots
- While continuing to focus on education for basic life skills, define additional educational needs of area residents
- Continue the survey process to help establish relationships and respond to residents' needs.

### **Summary of *The Journal of Erie Studies*, Fall, 1983, Article “Erie’s Italian People: The Genesis and Development of Little Italy”**

This article in *The Journal of Erie Studies* was written by Dr. David L. Hood, a professor in the Political Science Department at Washington State University. Before focusing his attention on Erie and the “Little Italy” neighborhood, Dr. Hood traced the history of Italian emigration back to 1876 when the Italian government first began maintaining emigration records. Prior to 1900, most of the Italian overseas emigration was to Latin America, especially Argentina and Brazil.

Early emigration from Italy was dominated by northern Italians, many of whom were literate professionals or skilled farmers, as compared to the later emigrants mostly from southern Italy who were “largely illiterate, land-less peasants”. Many of those from the south who came to the United States were more interested in making their fortunes and returning to Italy, then becoming permanent residents. Between 1899 and 1910, 2,300,000 Italians immigrated to the US, 1.9 million of whom (83%) were southern Italians. The majority of these immigrants settled in the northeast, especially in New York and Pennsylvania.

According to Dr. Hood, the first known person of Italian descent settled in Erie in 1864; his name was Raffaele Braccacini. After the civil war, more Italians arrived, including Vitale Spadacene, who became the “first ethnic leader of the growing Italian community”. As a Union army veteran, Spadacene could speak English and understood the political system in this country. For many years he was the main contact between the Italian immigrants and city hall and was known throughout Erie as the counselor and advisor of the early Italian people. His son, Charles, continued in his father’s role until about 1915.

By 1891, there were several hundred Italians in the city, and most of them settled on the city’s west side, in the area of West 16<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets, with that part of the city becoming known as “Little Italy” about that same time. By 1911, the Little Italy settlement area had grown to include nine blocks – from Huron Street south to West 17<sup>th</sup>, and from Chestnut west to Poplar Street. By 1920, the Little Italy population was estimated to be 8,000. Most of the early Italians who came to Erie were illiterate, but after 1910 the community had sufficient numbers to support a professional group of journalists, doctors, musicians, bankers, attorneys and businessmen. By 1935, there were 19 Italian-owned grocery stores in the City.

During the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Italians were displacing the Germans in Little Italy, who had begun settling in this area of the city in the 1830’s. By 1900, the Germans were moving to the south of the neighborhood to better housing. After 1920, the Italians were also beginning to move south and west of the neighborhood. By 1960, the core of Little Italy remained, but those of Italian descent were scattered throughout the Westside and Millcreek.

The churches, both Catholic and Lutheran, were the social centers of the community. St. Paul’s dates back to 1891, when \$1,800 was pledged for the purpose of building a Catholic church (\$100 each from each male guest at a May afternoon christening in the rear of Thomas Rossi’s fruit store in Little Italy). The original building was a former Presbyterian church at the corner of Chestnut and West 17<sup>th</sup> that the Presbyterians sold after building a new church. This building was moved to the current St Paul’s location on Walnut and 16<sup>th</sup> Street, renovated and consecrated in 1891. Plans and fund raising for a new church began in 1926, and a ground-breaking ceremony for the new structure was held on August 19, 1928. With the onset of the great depression in 1929, work ceased on the new structure for five years, but it was eventually completed in 1935.

Most of the Italians in Erie that weren't Catholic were Lutherans. In 1922, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church was established by Reverend Fortunato Scarpitti, a 1908 Italian immigrant who was also a stonecutter. Reverend Scarpatti served as pastor for 42 years. In the 1920's, he organized a youth center, an idea that was so novel for the times that "Life" magazine considered publishing an article about it. Both of these churches have played a vital role in the spiritual and social development of the Little Italy neighborhood. Of the many social and mutual aid societies that developed in Little Italy in the late 1800's and early 1900's, the oldest two were St Paul's Society (for men) and the Order of Sacred Heart of Mary (for women), founded in 1892.

The oldest non-church mutual aid society was La Nuova Aurora, founded in 1907. By 1938, there were 25 Italian lodges and societies in the City. In August, 1933, the first Italian Day was held at Waldameer Park, having been organized to raise money to resume construction of the new St. Paul's church. After WW II, club memberships began to decline and by 1960 there were only eleven Italian clubs in the City.

Dr. Hood concluded his 1983 article with the following summary:

"The Italian people in Erie began arriving shortly after the Civil War. Most were illiterate and unskilled, coming from south Italy. The colony was divided into four settlements – the largest being Little Italy in the Third Ward. The Italian community quickly developed its own ethnic leaders who served as contacts with city hall. These leaders helped the immigrant adjust to his new setting.

"The colony grew slowly at first. By 1900 there were about 350 Italians living in the city. In 1911, their numbers had risen to over 3,000 and in 1920 to about 11,000 people. Accompanying this growth was the development of a business and professional class.

"The two churches in Little Italy – St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church and Holy Trinity Lutheran Church – have played an active role in the colony's development. Both churches were strongly supported in the early settlement, differing from the experiences of Italian communities in Buffalo and Boston. The experience of the Erie group is explained in part by the social activities both churches have sponsored and by a low political profile.

"The colony also had many social and cultural organizations. These groups have organized plays, car parties, fetes and bazaars. There were also many mutual aid societies which offered sickness and death benefits. Italian social clubs reached their zenith in the 1930's and 1940's, subsequently declining after World War II."

*(Dr. Hood's article makes footnote reference to a host of books and other writings, including one written by a young Patrick S. Cappabianca, "The Advancement of the First Generation Italian in Erie Since 1920," an unpublished M.A. thesis completed at Allegheny College, 18 August 1961. Among his many other accomplishments and involvements, Mr. Cappabianca served as a member of the 2007 Little Italy NeighborHood Revitalization Plan's Project Advisory Committee, representing the Erie City Council.)*

## Appendix 2-8

### Positives and Negatives of the 18<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor and the Neighborhood

#### Positives

- **Existing anchors**

- \$ Northgate Commons medical facilities
- \$ Sassafras Medical Building
- \$ Saint Vincent and its expansion northward

- \$ **Restaurants/Food Providers**

- \$ International Bakery
- \$ Arnone=sBboth deli and restaurant
- \$ Gelateria Barbara
- \$ Ethnic restaurants/ foods (Hector's, Luigi's, Lugo's)
- \$ Larry's Central Market
- \$ Other restaurants

- \$ Families from Bosnia bought the former tavern at 16<sup>th</sup> and Cherry Streets and are converting it into a **recreational and community center** for families from Bosnia.

- \$ **Antiques/arts emerging**; shops and restaurants opening.

- \$ It is a **walkable and safe** neighborhood; it is not dangerous.

- \$ There is a police presence.

- \$ The removal of railroad and **new streetscaping on West 19<sup>th</sup> Street** show what West 18<sup>th</sup> Street could look like.

- \$ **Erie Cemetery.**

- \$ The presence of **alleys**. They were constructed for fire protection years ago, now adjacent owners are using them as their own property, in some instances.

- \$ **Religious organizations**

- \$ St. Paul=s Catholic Church (this is a neighborhood anchorBcapitalize on parishioners)
- \$ St. Paul Neighborhood Free Clinic
- \$ Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
- \$ Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network
- \$ Other churches

- \$ **Location**Bclose to Downtown Erie and other neighborhoods, shopping & entertainment

- \$ Easy access to I-90 and the Bayfront Connector.

- \$ On EMTA bus route

- \$ The construction of **new commercial buildings and homes**, and the rehabilitation of older homes.

- \$ The City's new **Rental Inspection Program** and the **Blighted Properties Program**.

- \$ **Programs for kids** (need more outreach to children and parents to reach more kids)

- \$ Bethesda sport court

- \$ The potential for additional parks.

- \$ Many **auto-related businesses** in the neighborhood—family-owned, tradition, staying.
- \$ Industries and businesses in the area provide **employment opportunities**.
- \$ The **heritage** of the neighborhood.
- \$ The **overall potential** of the area.
  - \$ The Continental Rubber Works site (which is undergoing a Phase I Environmental Assessment) has potential as a redevelopment site.
- \$ **Good people** live here; homeowners are good people and care about the neighborhood.
- \$ Cathedral Prep's **proposed athletic field** at Cherry and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets.

### **Negatives**

- \$ **Too much rental property:**
  - \$ Rental property is not maintained well; enforcement not strict enough;
  - \$ Lots of transients;
  - \$ Absentee /slum landlords and property owners;
  - \$ Renters—too much subsidy, no respect for property, no accountability (esp. younger generation); and
  - \$ Junk in yards.
- \$ **Low homeownership** (only 30% now--need goal closer to 70% owners/30% renters)
  - \$ Need more quality affordable housing.
- \$ **Housing is in bad shape.**
  - \$ Housing is too close together.
  - \$ Housing is deteriorated.
  - \$ Too many vacancies.
- \$ **Current reputation and perception** of crime. Feeling that this is an unsafe area, and the stigma of crime/drugs/prostitution;
  - \$ It is too dark in areas;
  - \$ Graffiti.
- \$ **Traffic, especially trucks**, including noise, and speeding. Speed limits are not enforced.
  - \$ Use north-south streets to get traffic off 18<sup>th</sup> Street, especially Cranberry and Peach Sts., to West 12<sup>th</sup> Street.
  - \$ Liberty Street overpass is too low; grade crossings on Raspberry and Cranberry need upgrading (trucks get stuck on tracks).
  - \$ The poor condition of streets.
- \$ **Parking** problems in many areas:
  - \$ Even/odd parking is a burden to older folks;
  - \$ Inadequate off-street parking;
  - \$ Parked cars cause blind spots;
  - \$ Parking is needed in residential areas, along 18<sup>th</sup> Street, and by St. Paul's.
- \$ **Pedestrian crosswalks** need attention, especially at Liberty & 18<sup>th</sup>, Cherry & 18<sup>th</sup>, and Liberty & Brown, but also at all intersections.
  - \$ ADA compliance is still needed at several intersections;
  - \$ Sidewalks are in horrible condition and are too narrow in places;
  - \$ There is no green space along the sidewalks;
  - \$ 19<sup>th</sup> Street sidewalks too narrow (4') too.

- \$ **Lack of small business community:**
  - \$ Lack of a grocery store & branch bank;
  - \$ Locals don't patronize restaurants;
  - \$ There are enough bars and clubs; and
  - \$ Some taverns are nuisance bars (drugs/prostitution).
  
- \$ **No elementary school**, therefore students go anywhere, no common school spirit
  - \$ Roosevelt Middle School likely to be closed?
  - \$ This results in a lack of families in the neighborhood.
 (Many neighborhood kids go to Irving Elementary at 23<sup>rd</sup> & Plum. Beginning in September 2007, all children are going to Irving.)
  
- \$ Columbus School is a **homeless shelter** (provides service but attracts transients) and adds to the unsafe or uncomfortable perception of neighborhood visitors.
  
- \$ **Too much non-taxable property (social service agencies and churches).**
  
- \$ **Columbus Park is not well kept** (it needs to be adopted) and is not well utilized.
  - \$ Park at 19<sup>th</sup> & Myrtle is not maintained.
  - \$ Parks need more things for kids to do.
  - \$ Parks being used by drug dealers – kids are easy prey.
  
- \$ **Electric lines and poles**—can they be moved to alleys or can the lines be buried?
  
- \$ **Building codes and zoning:**
  - \$ Codes are not consistent between old and new owners;
  - \$ Codes need to be more flexible;
  - \$ There is too much spot zoning;
  - \$ Codes are confusing, vague, the process is slow and poorly administered (or do residents need more education regarding codes?);
  - \$ Need complete review of codes; get rid of obsolete rules.
  - \$ Look at requiring code updates with change of use, not change of ownership.
  
- Maintenance of alleys.
  
- \$ **The Continental Rubber Works site**, which is deteriorated and overgrown.
  
- \$ Whether real or perceived, the area has an **image of being unsafe**, especially 18<sup>th</sup> Street. Dark areas, crime, drugs, etc. need to continue to be addressed to reverse this image.



# Stakeholder Visioning Session #1

# Appendix 3-1

## **Key Issues in Little Italy:**

Based on PAC meetings to date, research and review of existing plans and studies, and the input from the stakeholders and residents at the first visioning session, key issues were identified as follows:

### 1. West 18<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor:

- Truck traffic.
- Noise.
- Unattractive—sidewalks, curbs, streets, lighting, very few trees, no furniture, no uniform signage, weeds.
- Unsafe perception—lighting, parking, groups of people “hanging out,” trucks.
- Vacant lots and buildings.
- Unkempt buildings.
- No strong concentration of retail.

#### **Other observations:**

- No indication that you are in “Little Italy.”
- No “central focal” point.
- Perceived or real parking problems in areas.
- High tension power lines, cobra head light fixtures, traffic lights on wires.
- Variety of sizes/types of signs, not necessarily attractive.
- Lots of concrete and asphalt...same color & texture, heat generators.
- Doesn't “connect” many places or activities, especially for pedestrians.
- No branch bank and no (full) grocery store (no consensus).

### 2. Housing:

- Too much rental housing, attracting transient population.
- Too few homeowners.
- Absentee landlords.
- Lack of adequate property maintenance, poorly designed and/or constructed additions.
- Vacant homes and lots.
- Small lots, close together.

#### **Other Observations:**

- SF homes converted to duplexes or apartments.
- Fences—poor condition, obtrusive.
- Lack of homeowner parking options.
- Housing is not necessarily historic or otherwise significant.
- No neighborhood elementary school.

### 3. Image:

- Perception by outsiders is poor: unsafe neighborhood.
- Unkempt vacant lots.
- Private and public properties (Columbus Park) are poorly maintained.
- Too many social service organizations vs. the need to provide the services.
- Not well lit, too many dark places, therefore perceived as unsafe.

#### **Other Observations:**



- No “gateway” into or identification of the neighborhood.
- No logo or brand.
- Some organized activities and marketing, but not much.
- No design standards or neighborhood theme.
- No central focal point.
- No sign of historic heritage.
- The City park at 19<sup>th</sup> & Myrtle is not maintained; the fence inhibits activity.

#### 4. Traffic/Transportation/Utility Issues:

- Heavy traffic and trucks on 18<sup>th</sup> Street.
  - Inadequate turning radii for trucks at most intersections.
  - Speeds not enforced.
  - Overpass on Liberty too low for semi trucks.
  - At grade crossing on Raspberry St. is poor.
- Alleys are too narrow and therefore not used as they could be.
- Lack of pedestrian crossing amenities (lights, paths, signals).
- Sassafras St. is one-way...creates issues—mostly speed of traffic.

##### **Other observations:**

- Inadequate parking for residents and consumers.
- Inability to build over 2 stories near the high power transmission line.
- Traffic signals on wires (not mast arms).
- No way-finding signage.
- No connectivity among key areas.
- No provision for bicycles, skates or skateboards.

#### 5. Organization/ Capacity Issues:

- No single umbrella organization to promote and organize the neighborhood as a commercial, housing, and retail center. (Several client or issue-oriented organizations serve their purposes well.)
- No designated person to spend full-time organizing and promoting Little Italy, or to recruit businesses.
- No business organization.

##### **Other observations:**

- No sophisticated Main Street or Elm Street program.
- Rely on ERA and City for leadership and funding.
- No local funding program.

<b>Plan Approval and Organizational Issues</b>
<b>Completed</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make appropriate <b>presentations and obtain support</b> of the <i>Historic Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy</i> from City Council, ERA, and DCED's local office.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule several <b>presentations to the residents and businesses</b> within the neighborhood.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Make the Plan available</b> to residents and others on-line and/or at neighborhood centers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Establish a Historic Little Italy Advisory Council</b>, to be comprised of faith-based organizations, institutions, for-profit and non-profit local organizations, residents, and local governments.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Appoint representatives to the Council.</li> <li>○ Establish by-laws.</li> <li>○ Elect officers as needed.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Begin the recruitment process to hire a Neighborhood Manager.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prepare a job description and an evaluation mechanism.</li> <li>▪ Follow-through with interviews and hiring.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Establish four committees</b> to direct the activities of the neighborhood and to work with the HLI Advisory Council and the Neighborhood Manager. These four committees should include:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Design</li> <li>○ Economic Development</li> <li>○ Marketing</li> <li>○ Clean, Green &amp; Safe, and Housing                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Appoint members and chairs.</li> <li>▪ Make initial assignments.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Note:</b> The Neighborhood Manager should spearhead all activities for the Advisory Council, working with volunteers on each of the four committees (unless specified otherwise) to <b>undertake the goals listed on the following pages:</b></p>

# Historic Little Italy

## ANNUAL GOALS

## Historic Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy

Design Committee		
Year One – 2012	Year Two – 2013	Year Three - 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The HLI Advisory Council and the SSJNN should plan a major, initial <b>“Clean-Up, Green-Up” week for Spring 2012</b>, focusing on the West 18th Street corridor between Sassafras and Liberty Streets, to kick-off the revitalization efforts.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Pursue funding through the <b>Neighborhood First Step</b> program.</li> <li>○ Provide specific goals and tasks,</li> <li>○ Recruit volunteers and team captains,</li> <li>○ Coordinate with other clean-up efforts in the City,</li> <li>○ Promote the effort,</li> <li>○ Acquire funds and/or donations of materials and equipment,</li> <li>○ Involve local businesses and industries,</li> <li>○ Acquire donated beverages and snacks or meals, etc.</li> <li>○ Involve and coordinate with the Block Watch Group and the Weed and Seed program.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with the Clean, Green &amp; Safe, and Housing Committee, repeat the <b>Clean-Up, Green-Up</b> week. Make it an annual event and improve/expand it each year.</li> <li>• Coordinate activities with the <b>National Organization of Churches</b> and its <b>“2013 Blitz”</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with the Clean, Green &amp; Safe, and Housing Committee, hold the <b>third annual Clean-Up, Green-Up</b> event, expanding its scope and breadth.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin working with the City and/or a consultant to <b>develop design standards</b> for the West 18th Street corridor through the use of an overlay district.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ These standards should be adopted by the HLI Advisory Council and the City of Erie, and enforced by the appropriate staff at the City.</li> <li>○ Conduct <b>educational programs</b> to make property owners and City staff aware of the design standards.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin promoting the use of the HLI <b>logo and tag line</b> in Neighborhood design elements.</li> <li>• Work with businesses or property owners on West 18<sup>th</sup> Street to <b>renovate facades</b> using CDBG funds from the City.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue with educational programs with West 18<sup>th</sup> Street property owners annually as needed.</li> </ul>	

Design Committee		
Year One – 2012	Year Two – 2013	Year Three - 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquire consensus on a <b>more detailed streetscaping concept</b> for the West 18th Street corridor, which should include improvements to all intersections along the corridor. This should include street lighting and furniture design elements, use of hanging baskets, concrete flower pots, banners, and street trees.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquire enough preliminary design detail from a design professional to develop a good cost estimate.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin the process to <b>secure funding</b> for the detailed design and construction of the West 18th Street corridor <b>streetscaping</b> improvement project.</li> <li><b>Begin detailed design plans</b> for the <b>streetscaping</b> project, addressing:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sidewalks and curbs</li> <li>Lighting</li> <li>Trees &amp; streetscaping</li> <li>Location and design of shelters for EMTA stops</li> <li>Parking lots – public and private</li> <li>Intersection improvements</li> <li>Entrances and exits for parking lots</li> <li>Infill development</li> <li>Utility poles and overhead wires/cables</li> </ul> </li> <li>If possible, <b>begin construction</b> of the West 18th Street <b>streetscaping</b> improvements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin planning and design improvements for the <b>Liberty and West 18th Street Intersection</b> (if not already addressed in the West 18th Street improvements). Improvements could include enhancement of the Rite Aid parking lot and the EMTA lot, adding a tree lawn on the east side of Liberty north of the intersection, adding a transit shelter, adding mast arms for traffic signals, upgrading sidewalks, addressing curbs and turning radii, etc.</li> <li>Complete the <b>West 18th Street streetscaping</b> project.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquire consensus on a <b>gateway design</b> for the archways over West 18th Street, and begin planning for the first two gateways along West 18th at Sassafra and Liberty Streets.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain a professional design firm to design and estimate the cost of the gateway.</li> <li>Begin pursuing funding and/or donations for the gateway.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin the planning and design of <b>two additional gateways</b>, preferably the murals and lighting related to the two <b>railroad overpasses</b>.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Pursue funding</b> and/or donations.</li> <li><b>Construct</b> the first two gateways on W. 18th Street.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create the two gateways at the underpasses.</li> <li>Begin planning for minor gateways/signage at the remaining gateway locations.</li> </ul>

# Historic Little Italy

## ANNUAL GOALS

## Historic Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy

Design Committee		
Year One - 2012	Year Two - 2013	Year Three - 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan for at least one new <b>parking area</b> along <b>West 18<sup>th</sup> Street</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan and construct <b>one additional parking area</b> along <b>West 18<sup>th</sup> Street</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add <b>one new parking area</b> within the neighborhood.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a local <b>Garden Club</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand membership and activities of the Garden Club.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin initial planning for the redevelopment of the north side of the <b>200 block of West 16<sup>th</sup> Street</b> for additional parking for residents and local businesses, including preliminary discussions with the property owners regarding obtaining site control.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin <b>designing</b> the parking area on <b>north side of 200 block of West 16<sup>th</sup> Street</b>.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin negotiations with property owners to <b>gain site control</b>.</li> <li>Have <b>discussions with property owners</b> on West 16<sup>th</sup> Street regarding the potential for garages and/or parking areas.</li> <li>Have <b>discussions with business owners</b> regarding parking and access issues.</li> <li><b>Pursue funding</b> for private garages and/or parking areas.</li> <li><b>Prepare preliminary plans</b> for parking, garages, pedestrian walkways/bikepath, vehicular access, green space, etc.</li> <li>Acquire a <b>cost estimate</b> for the project.</li> <li>Investigate potential <b>funding sources for the parking</b> improvements, walkways, and green space.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With the Clean, Green &amp; Safe, and Housing Committee, prepare final design plans and construction documents for the <b>north side of the 200 block of West 16<sup>th</sup> Street</b>.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure site control.</li> <li>Acquire financing.</li> <li>Bid and construct the project.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Design Committee		
Year One - 2012	Year Two - 2013	Year Three - 2014
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Identify a public gathering area</b> along West 18<sup>th</sup> Street, possibly as part of the proposed diner development east of Arnone's deli. (See E.D. Committee Year Two goals.)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Work with the E.D. Committee and the diner developer</b> to design and implement a comfortable, safe, green, well-lit public space.</li> <li>○ Consider <b>adding a kiosk</b> to this area for public notices, bulletins, and other general notices.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Begin approaching property owners</b> along West 18<sup>th</sup> Street regarding recommendations for their individual properties, as noted in this Plan. Be prepared to discuss ideas, options, financing assistance, relocation opportunities, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Continue approaching property owners</b> along West 18<sup>th</sup> Street regarding potential re-uses of their site or building, per the recommendations in Chapter 5 of this Plan.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the City and EMTA regarding the <b>addition of transit shelters</b> at key locations within the neighborhood. Prioritize and begin planning for the construction of at least one transit shelter.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Construct a second transit shelter.</b></li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Begin discussions regarding walking and biking trails</b> through the neighborhood.</li> </ul>

# Historic Little Italy

## ANNUAL GOALS

## Historic Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy

Marketing Committee		
Year One – 2012	Year Two – 2013	Year Three - 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider the potential for a <b>neighborhood arts program and/or a neighborhood concert program.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish an arts program and/or concert program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand the offerings of the arts and/or concert program.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin the feasibility study for developing an <b>International farmers-type market</b>, promoting ethnic eateries and vendors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If feasible, begin planning for the Farmers Market and hold the first event.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If feasible, continue the Farmers Market each year; expand and enhance it.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet with local businesses to discuss the potential for <b>joint advertising</b> through combining of individual advertising budgets.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assist businesses with the <b>commencement of joint advertisements.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add more neighborhood businesses to the <b>joint advertising</b> efforts.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop HLI's first annual "<b>Calendar of Events.</b>"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Enhance the calendar of events</b> to include more information, more events, better dissemination, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to enhance the <b>Calendar of Events.</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare an <b>HLI neighborhood map</b> as a handout that can be distributed easily.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update and enhance the <b>neighborhood map</b> as needed annually.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop the first <b>HLI newsletter.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance the HLI newsletter, <b>and increase its circulation</b> to outside the neighborhood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to enhance the <b>HLI newsletter</b> and expand its distribution.</li> </ul>

# Historic Little Italy

## ANNUAL GOALS

## Historic Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy

Marketing Committee		
Year One - 2012	Year One - 2013	Year One - 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop an HLI web site, link it to the City's web site, and add business and property information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update the HLI web site and its links (annually).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update and expand the HLI web site and its connections with other local web sites, including local businesses.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sponsor one new activity or program in the neighborhood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sponsor another new event or program in the neighborhood.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider the potential for Bocce Ball tournaments, possibly at the Nuova Aurora Club.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If successful, make these tournaments annual events.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin actively marketing HLI assets to the City at large.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet with VisitErie, Celebrate Erie, the Bayfront Convention Center and others regarding synergies among the groups, their schedule of events, what HLI has to offer, joint advertising when appropriate, etc.</li> <li>Improve efforts at marketing HLI and its assets.</li> </ul>



# Historic Little Italy

## ANNUAL GOALS

## Historic Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy

Economic Development Committee		
Year One - 2012	Year Two - 2013	Year Three - 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compile a comprehensive and accurate <b>list of all vacant and/or available properties</b> in HLI.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update the list and provide it to appropriate Economic Development agencies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update the list and redistribute it to appropriate E.D. agencies annually.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a <b>comprehensive, electronic listing</b> of all businesses, industries, organizations, property owners, and key renters in HLI.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore ways to <b>expand existing market niches</b>: primarily the ethnic foods and eateries and automotive repair business niches.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the Marketing Committee, work with local businesses and EbizitPA (Penn State Behrend) regarding <b>e-marketing</b>, opening up other avenues to increase profits for local businesses.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In conjunction with the City-sponsored retail development specialist, <b>begin a local Retention and Expansion Program</b>, visiting each business in the neighborhood at least once a year to determine needs and issues. Follow-up on these meetings in critical. (Local ED partners may be able to assist in this effort.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue the local <b>Retention &amp; Expansion</b> program efforts.</li> </ul>	

# Historic Little Italy

## ANNUAL GOALS

## Historic Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy

Economic Development Committee		
Year One – 2012	Year Two – 2013	Year Three – 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Neighborhood Manager should work with City ED partners, especially the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership, The SBDC at Gannon University and the Weed &amp; Seed Micro Enterprise grant program, to <b>begin recruitment of desired businesses</b>. Prioritized, these are:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grocery store</li> <li>Restaurants</li> <li>Coffee shop</li> <li>Branch Bank</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with ED partners, especially Gannon's Retail Recruitment Specialist, to actively <b>recruit new businesses</b> into the neighborhood.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider talking with successful <b>local businesses</b> in other sections of the City regarding starting a branch in HLI.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to <b>recruit the desired new businesses</b> into the neighborhood.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Develop an RFP</b> for a developer for a <b>diner</b> on lots 542-548 West 18<sup>th</sup> Street, including the market study and Revitalization Strategy, and disseminate it to local developers and other interested parties.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold a <b>pre-proposal meeting</b> with prospects.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with ERA, <b>recruit a developer for the new diner</b>, and begin negotiations, site control, design, financing options, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with the developer and other three committees as necessary to insure the new diner meets the <b>objectives of the plan</b>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue with new <b>commercial building construction</b>.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up a small <b>Revolving Loan Fund</b> program for façade renovations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remind business owners regularly about the Revolving Loan Fund program.</li> </ul>	

# Historic Little Italy

## ANNUAL GOALS

## Historic Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy

Clean, Green & Safe, and Housing Committee		
Year One – 2012	Year Two – 2013	Year Three - 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with the Design Committee on the annual <b>Clean-Up, Green-Up week</b>.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish an <b>“Adopt a Park”</b> (block, lot) program.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit a local industry/business to “Adopt” Columbus Park and keep it properly maintained, lighted and monitored.</li> <li>Identify other blocks or lots that need attention and recruit other businesses to adopt them.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add more participants to the program annually.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin a simple <b>West 18th Street corridor beautification effort</b>, by planning and purchasing:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Banners</li> <li>Flower Pots</li> <li>Hanging Baskets</li> <li>Trash Receptacles</li> <li>Benches</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Plant trees!</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Plant more trees!</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement a mural art project completing 4 murals in the first year in collaboration with CHAMPS and Juvenile Probation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue mural development annually (2 murals per year)</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet with the City of Erie to discuss the importance of alleys to the neighborhood and get assurance that key alleys will not be closed or sold.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clean and/or upgrade one key <b>alley</b> in the neighborhood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clean and upgrade <b>one additional alley</b> in the neighborhood.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to <b>eliminate blighted and abandoned buildings</b> throughout the neighborhood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to remove <b>blighted properties</b>.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to <b>convert vacant lots</b> into positive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Convert one vacant lot</b> into a positive use.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Convert another vacant lot</b> into a positive</li> </ul>

# Historic Little Italy

## ANNUAL GOALS

## Historic Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy

Clean, Green & Safe, and Housing Committee		
Year One – 2012	Year Two – 2013	Year Three - 2014
uses.		use.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with the Design Committee regarding plans for a parking area for residents and area businesses on the vacant property on the north side of 200 block of West 16<sup>th</sup> Street.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In coordination with the Design Committee, continue discussions with the owners to gain site control of the property and begin design of a parking area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With the Design Committee, prepare final design plans for the parking improvements on the <b>north side of the 200 block</b> of West 16<sup>th</sup> Street.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure site control.</li> <li>Acquire funding.</li> <li>Bid and construct the project.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with the Economic Development Committee, begin meeting with the City of Erie Traffic Engineering Department and local industries regarding <b>truck traffic</b> and ways to <b>reduce or redirect</b> it from West 18<sup>th</sup> Street to West 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Also, work with the City to remove the Little Italy section of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street from the truck route list.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement positive changes to <b>redirect truck traffic</b> to West 12<sup>th</sup> Street.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to encourage <b>truck traffic</b> to use West 12<sup>th</sup> Street, and implement other positive measures to encourage the redirection of truck traffic off of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin discussions on creating a neighborhood <b>maintenance program</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and <b>adopt a maintenance code</b> for the neighborhood and begin promoting it and educating residents about it.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with City officials regarding <b>enforcement</b> of the code.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to enforce the new maintenance codes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cooperate with the ERA and HANDS in securing funding for the <b>townhomes project</b> on lots 319-332 of West 18<sup>th</sup> Street (both sides of the street).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with HABITAT and the ERA, <b>begin construction of the townhomes</b> on West 18<sup>th</sup> Street.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete the <b>townhomes</b> project and market it.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue with <b>new housing construction</b> and assisting homeowners with <b>residential rehabilitation</b>, working with ERA, HANDS, Habitat, the City of Erie, and other partners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet with LECOM and Saint Vincent Health System to identify ways to recruit students and interns to new housing within the neighborhood. Also, explore any interests they may have in supplying housing.</li> <li><b>Continue to work</b> with HANDS, ERA, and the City on <b>housing rehabilitation, home ownership programs, and employer-</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with HANDS, ERA, and the City to recruit a market-rate housing developer to <b>construct at least one new housing project annually</b>.</li> <li>Continue to work with ERA, HANDS, and the City on <b>housing rehabilitation, home ownership projects, and employer-assisted housing</b>.</li> </ul>

# Historic Little Italy

## ANNUAL GOALS

## Historic Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy

Clean, Green & Safe, and Housing Committee		
Year One - 2012	Year Two - 2013	Year Three - 2014
	<b>assisted housing.</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish an aggressive program to increase <b>home ownership.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate and enhance the <b>home ownership program</b> annually.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with the City to successfully <b>implement the rental inspection program</b> in the neighborhood.</li> </ul>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet with the owners of <b>Lake Shore Industries</b> to discuss:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential issues with <b>parking and green space</b> on lots 663 and 701.</li> <li>Potential <b>alternative uses</b> for the bike shop and theater.</li> <li><b>Their capabilities</b> to supply signage, historic markers, and other elements of the streetscaping or gateway plans.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand <b>Community Garden</b> Initiatives including creating a second community garden.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop initiatives for community gardeners to participate in a farmers market.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand community garden concept to instruction on development of edible landscaping gardens throughout the neighborhood.</li> </ul>

**Little Italy Revitalization Plan  
Key Person Interview Questions  
June/July 2007  
Summary of Comments to Questions  
(20 Interviews)**

Please be prepared to answer and discuss the following questions regarding the Historic Little Italy Neighborhood and its Revitalization Plan.

**1. The revitalization of the Historic Little Italy Neighborhood is critical to the future preservation and redevelopment of Erie's historic areas.**

It is "Vital" all over the City.

Needs to be a concerted effort, work in harmony, to make things happen.

Has always been a melting pot.

Weed and Seed program has been effective.

Things have turned around a lot, in Erie and the neighborhood.

Definitely!

Strong emotional ties to area from people living elsewhere now – they want to see improvements.

Get a grip and do something!

Removal of RR tracks caused home improvements on 19<sup>th</sup> Street – proof that residents respond to help from the City.

Agree strongly. Base of customers with nostalgic ties to the area.

**2. How would you rank the importance of the dealing with the following issues in the Neighborhood? Are there others? Have things improved in the last two years?**

**Safe streets/crime levels**

Need more lighting and well-maintained green spaces – will help reduce prostitution.

18<sup>th</sup> Street has stigma of crime, drugs and prostitution.

Foot patrols would help make it safer.

The perception is bad.

Fixing the sidewalks alone would be big plus!

People are afraid to come here – need to clean-up area.

Somewhat improved – drug-related shootings a concern.

**Residential property maintenance**

Due to lower incomes.

Tenants and residents need to do a better job – Big issue!

People reluctant to invest in properties – no return.

Absentee landlords a big issue.

**Business property maintenance**

Bars must be better maintained.

Too many junk stores.

**Maintenance of Parks**

Not great, but better.

Columbus – neglected.

### **Home ownership – rental property ratio (30/70)**

To early to tell what the impact of new landlord regulations will be.  
55% of the property in the City is tax exempt.  
Was probably 60/40 up through the 1950's.  
Reverse the ratio.

### **Commercial/truck traffic on 18<sup>th</sup> Street**

Bad and gotten worse.  
Longer trailers and overweight trucks.  
Waste Management and Hardingers  
Hardingers and the asphalt plant.  
Too fast.

### **No local elementary school**

Charter schools are filling the gap.  
Tough to make happen (new neighborhood school).  
Might have really hit on something!

### **Decreasing the number of vacant lots**

High grass a major problem.  
Provide incentives to buy and improve.  
If called for – ok.  
Turn into parking or green space.  
Shouldn't be used as dumps. Split property and give half to neighboring homes as yard.

### **The number of vacant buildings**

Slightly better than it was. x  
Graffiti is a growing issue.  
City's new regulations will make owning rental properties less attractive – will increase blighted properties (counter productive).  
Recently better – Johnson & Flick building should be put to use.

### **Lack of retail shops**

Rite Aid and Country Fair filling the gap.

### **Others:**

Traffic in Sassafrass too fast – need more traffic lights.  
Lighting of streets. xx  
Sidewalk maintenance. xx  
Affordable housing – rental and owner.  
Access to healthcare.  
Job opportunities with Little Italy – for residents without transportation.  
There are more vacant lots, but fewer blighted properties.  
Eliminate housing on 18<sup>th</sup> – make it retail only.

### **3. The following businesses should be recruited for the Neighborhood.**

#### **General comments:**

Listed businesses would be helpful in the future as neighborhood turns around – focus on housing.)  
Competition for existing stores is a good thing.  
Junk shops need to go!

**Branch Bank**

Bank Erie at 10<sup>th</sup> & Peach.

Most residents on Social Security or welfare.

**Restaurants**

Locals don't support restaurants.

Casino opening has impacted restaurants.

Not a chain.

Lunch/casual dining.

Low-budget eateries.

**Grocery Store**

Especially if walk-to location.

Badly needed.

**Antique Shops**

Plenty of them in neighborhood.

Worry about break-in of an upscale store.

**Book Store****Coffee Shop**

Not now.

**Video Rental**

Cable ruining rental business.

Obsolete, non-viable.

**Office Supply**

Office Max delivers.

**UPS/Kinkos**

Would be good for public, students and business uses.

Later, after more businesses come. x

**Other Retail (Specific suggestions):**

Specialty clothing xx

Arcade for kids – teens and younger.

Breakfast/lunch restaurant. x

Priority – bring people back to neighborhood; need low-income housing on 18<sup>th</sup> Street.

Ice cream shop

Thrift store (e.g. Dollar General) xx

Fast food restaurant. x

Lunch/snack stand (hot dogs).

Gallery

Asian Market.

Indian/French restaurant

Locally-owned businesses that promote foot traffic.

Party/Gathering hall.

Pizza place



Fish market  
Attorneys  
Physicians

**Which of the above could be most successful?**

Have several combined at one location (book store, coffee shop, DVD/video rental).

Grocery.       xxxxx

If 18<sup>th</sup> Street is revitalized – Antiques and Book Store

Restaurant

Bank

Coffee shop   x

Video rental

Book store

Bank

**Which would probably have a tough time?**

Antique shop xx

Coffee shop

UPS

Grocery

Office supply (without more businesses)

Expensive restaurants

**4. Parking is an issue, especially on specific streets or in certain areas.**

All over – especially on 18<sup>th</sup> Street.   xx

Next to St. Paul's & Nova Aurora.

Mostly in residential areas – especially in the winter.

There are now 3-5 people with cars in what used to be 1-car family houses.

New parking lot code requirements are prohibitive.

Need parking lots – on-street parking is tough.

18<sup>th</sup> Street.       xxxxx

Renters and residents have no place to park.

Cherry Street.

16<sup>th</sup> Street.       xxx

17<sup>th</sup> Street.       xxxx

Odd/Even day parking affects homeowners.

Chestnut Street.

Perceived as a problem, therefore people don't come to the neighborhood.

More on-street parking forces traffic to slow down.

Walnut.         x

**5. Commercial development should be focused along:**

**The 18<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor**

**Sassafras**

**Liberty Street**

A grocery store and other chain-type stores would do well on Liberty.

**Cherry Street.**

Too small.

**Comments/Other areas?:**

Focus should be on 18<sup>th</sup> Street (like State Street). x

Need information/education on services and assistance available for rehab.

Typical City lot sells for \$8,000.

Corner of Liberty & Sassafras – capitalize on commuter traffic.

A Commercial “H” formed by Liberty, 18<sup>th</sup> and Sassafras, would benefit from commuter traffic and bring people into the neighborhood.

To be successful, access to retail and parking must be improved.

**6. Industrial development should be concentrated on the west and north sides of the Neighborhood.**

Concerned about impact of proposed Prep football field at 12<sup>th</sup> and Cherry.

Are people walking to work?

Industry is not promoted in Erie.

Should be bragging about industrial and other anchors in the neighborhood, and using them as a springboard for more.

Preserves neighborhood quality.

Keep close to RR.

More industry will provide jobs and customers.

**7. Industrial sites should be properly buffered from adjacent conflicting land uses.**

Strongly agree.

Not necessary if properties are maintained. x

**8. There are existing clusters of both ethnic foods businesses and restaurants, and automotive-related businesses in the neighborhood. This should be further developed and enhanced to create destination shopping draws in the Neighborhood.**

Auto-related businesses or mostly family-owned – should be promoted – no real auto dealer in the downtown.

Anything but automotive.

Food – yes. Not many neighborhood residents have cars.

Businesses need help – especially smaller businesses.

Junk stores shouldn't keep junk outside all the time – perpetual yard sale.

Encourage restaurant owners to add ethnic dishes to menus for diversity of neighborhood.

**Other niches for similar consideration?**

Clothing.

Collectibles (baseball cards).

Small shops.

**9. Truck traffic should be routed/directed to 12<sup>th</sup> Street, to help minimize commercial traffic on 18<sup>th</sup> Street. If so, using what streets?**

With Sassafras one-way, need to route traffic north on Peach to 12<sup>th</sup>; use Cranberry on west.

Raspberry. – all the way through. xxx

Commercial traffic is ruining the streets in neighborhood.

Maybe 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> could be one way in opposite directions.

All major N-S streets.

Not a big issue, less truck traffic now than 3 years ago.

If possible.

Liberty & Peach. xx

Liberty. xxx (But underpass to low for trucks)

Not Peach.

West of Liberty if better developed.

Keep to large streets to minimize congestion/stops.

Not a bad idea.

Cherry Street. x

Add traffic lights on 18<sup>th</sup> to discourage truck traffic.

Cranberry.

Could use 26<sup>th</sup> Street too.

**10. The one-way streets in the Neighborhood (16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and Sassafras) should be kept as one-way streets.**

Would create major parking issues on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. xxx

Well-known with the neighborhood.

Maybe Sassafras should be two-way; no room on 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup>.

Keep Sassafras one-way. xx

? on 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup>.

Change 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup>

One-way on Sassafras important to traffic flow out of city.

Change Sassafras to two-way for trucks to use.

**11. A better or more complete availability of high-speed fiber/Broadband throughout the Neighborhood is important.**

Use RoadRunner and Verizon – no problem.

Always an asset.

Encourage college students to live in area.

Internet is available and functional. x

Available but not affordable to residents.

Can't get DSL in store, but cable internet is ok.

**12. We need to continue to use Federal and/or State housing assistance programs to help improve the housing stock in the Neighborhood.**

Owners take better care of property.

Government programs can be restrictive to potential homeowners and often more costly than using private funds.

Definitely.

Applies to renters – not just homeowners.

Help non-profits develop housing for poor, rather than landlords.

Increasing home ownership is very important. X

Whatever it takes – tear down old and start new.

What we are doing now isn't working – too many empty rehabbed houses.  
Help people buy homes as is, allow funding to help them rehab house slowly.  
Make sure money is used properly – check up on landlords.

**13. In order to be more successful in encouraging better property maintenance, develop a sense of pride that comes with ownership, and reduce vacancies, it is important to increase home ownership (and decrease the number of rental properties) in the Neighborhood.**

Responsible landlords also contribute to revitalization.

There are non-resident landlord issues.

Lower income people don't want to own.

Top priority! x

Disagree – renters also have pride. Increase long-term renters.

Decrease transient population to encourage pride.

Balance must be maintained – homeowners can't be recruited if rental properties aren't better maintained. One step at a time.

Provides stability.

At least encourage owner occupancy.

**14. The Neighborhood needs more parks.**

Gathering places with fountains.

Specialize for kids.

Maintain the ones we have better. xxxxxx

Add more things to do – swingsets, basketball, etc.

Should have two more – assemble several neighboring vacant parcels.

Existing parks not being utilized.

Make them more visible and accessible.

Kids need safe places to play.

Useless to have more parks if not maintained.

Youth Center – not necessarily as park.

No more non-taxable properties.

**15. What do you consider to be the main strengths and weaknesses of the Neighborhood?**

**General comments:**

Improvements to the East Side of Erie have resulted in a trickle-down effect into this neighborhood – “troublesome” crowd is now here not there.

**Strengths**

Heritage xx

Potential x

People who live here. x

Hardy people (residents and business owners) hanging in there. xxxxx

Diverse. xx

Shops and restaurants opening.

Police presence.

Home owners are good for neighborhood.

History xxxxx

Presence of SSJNN

St. Paul's Church

Proximity to Saint Vincent

Plaza 18  
Social Services/Church collaboration.  
Neighborhood identity as Little Italy.  
Neighborhood Watch.  
Better publicity, attention, effort by City, Police, and ERA.  
Established businesses.  
Low-income housing stock for very poor.  
Convenience for commuters.  
Traffic brings people into the neighborhood.  
Transition point for immigrants.  
City atmosphere.  
Churches

### **Weaknesses**

Stigma – current reputation  
Lack of small business commitment.  
Need more affordable housing for those with generally lower incomes.  
300-400 homeless in Erie – less visible with all the shelters, but still a problem.  
Younger generation – renters subsidized too much, no respect for property, no accountability.  
Perception of crime. xxx  
Housing – generally bad shape, too close together.  
Rental housing is especially run-down; yards are a mess.  
Vacant houses – make them very affordable.  
Renters and gangs.  
Need more streetscaping.  
Lack of families.  
Deteriorating properties.  
Too much rental – tenants don't care/slum landlords. (Ten 18-23 year olds living in one house.) x  
Traffic – especially 18<sup>th</sup> Street.  
Transient population x  
Apathy among residents. x  
Poverty. x  
Homeless.  
Tough family life (multiple jobs, etc.).  
Crime.  
Lack of businesses. x  
Too many bars. x  
Lack of home ownership.  
Safety and lighting – start here!  
Drugs and prostitutes. X  
Broken promises.  
Streets and sidewalks.  
Unemployment  
Cleanliness  
Slum landlords.  
Infrastructure – poles, streets, etc.  
Code enforcement.

**16. If you were opening a new business in Little Italy, what could be done to help make the process easier and/or improve your likelihood for success?**

Advertising assistance. x  
Low-interest loans. xxxx  
Facade improvement program – help building buyers get started. xxx  
Sidewalks  
Street lighting x  
Attractive incentives  
Would never open a new business in Erie due to City bureaucracy.  
Lower taxes  
More available parking  
Positive media coverage.  
Reduce rental properties and transients to increase security and customer base.  
Improved safety.  
Decrease blighted properties.  
Less convoluted codes.  
More centralized and available information to help with “how-to’s”.  
\$52 occupational privilege fee inhibits hiring of new business startup.  
More City cooperation – hard to deal with.  
Better LERTA management.

**17. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current zoning or building codes?**

**Strengths**

The City is revisiting all ordinances to make sure they are in compliance with State and Federal regulations. (Should help get rid of old ordinances.)  
Land that is zoned commercial should remain as such – encourage influx of business.  
Unnecessary utility standards and high price of improvements.

**Weaknesses**

Code requirements due to ownership change with no change of use. X  
Confusing, vague.  
Slow process.  
Inconsistent direction.  
No flexibility – needs to be more flexible, especially in center-city neighborhoods.  
Inspectors in Erie are big issue – many unqualified and untrained – hired by relatives – old-boy network in City departments.  
Not well enforced – should have at least safety inspections of rental properties.  
Problem with non-permanence of permits. Hard to want to invest in property.  
Big issue – Who do you know?  
Occupancy permits difficult to obtain - expensive and tedious process.  
18<sup>th</sup> should be made commercial only.  
Parking lot codes – difficult to convert vacant lots.  
Too many fees, ordinances.  
Zoning enforcement is weak.

**18. How would you grade each of the following within the Neighborhood:**

**A Police protection**

Big improvement lately.      Xxx  
Visible presence.  
Understaffed – too long for response.

**B Fire protection**

Worried about more lay-offs.  
Critical for LI neighborhood (with buildings so close to each other).

**C Emergency Medical Services**

**D Parks**

Not maintained.      x  
Not supervised.  
“Hoods”, needles, drugs, dog crap.

**E Roadways**

**F Sidewalks**

Terrible.  
Homeowners and business owners can't afford to fix.  
Provide assistance grants to business owners who want to improve sidewalks.

**G Water**

Cost too much  
Poor pressure      xx

**H Sanitary Sewer**

Old

**I Storm Sewers**

Issues with freezing.  
Good job getting leaves out.  
Neglected.  
18<sup>th</sup> Street ok – others not maintained.  
Need bigger pipes for drainage.  
18<sup>th</sup> & Cherry floods.

**J Electricity**

Power outages – restarts for equipment.  
Occasional outages.  
Power lines in street – ugly.  
No problems – good response for repairs.  
Utilities should be underground.

**K TV Cable**

**L Phone**

Not enough options.  
Poor quality, poor service.  
Verizon is awful – won't spend \$'s here.

**M High-speed Internet**

Critical for future development – but don't subsidize.  
Works fine at Church.  
DSL is unreliable.

**N Street Lighting**

Too few and far between.  
Don't consider it a distinct problem.  
Not maintaining.

**O Alleys**

Terrible  
Possible crime sites.  
Provide access to off-street parking.  
Could be made attractive with creative landscaping.  
Light better, maintain and supervise.       xx  
Not plowed, not maintained.  
Too narrow, too many.  
Will buy mine if City will sell it.

**P Parking**

Terrible  
Develop lots into parking lots.  
Dashed lines for parking on 18<sup>th</sup>.  
Adequate for business, but customers think it is a problem.

**19. With regard to social services being provided in the Neighborhood, are there Not enough, too many, or about the right amount?**

Too many in this neighborhood – concerned about Bethesda/Trinity Center expanding.  
Could use more – Community Shelter Services doing a good job.

Too many – except medical.

Concerned about concentration of people in Columbus apartments, SRO's and emergency shelters.

Inability to control emotionally/mentally challenged persons, therefore their presence is a detriment to family-friendly environment.

Right number of agencies; not enough funding to meet needs.

Great need in neighborhood – services located in right spots.

Better meal provision? Add a soup kitchen...

Too many for one area – causes grant and donation \$'s to be distributed in smaller amounts and limits the scope of ability to help.

People have no excuse to go hungry.

Possible to consolidate?

Move away from 18<sup>th</sup> Street corridor.

The more you provide, the more will be needed – expectation of service is high.



**20. How would you rank the following service providers, institutions, and other assistance organizations in, or active in, the Neighborhood? Comments?**

**Little Italy Neighborhood Watch**

Great effort, but not enough.  
Neighborhood is safer.  
No one to back them up, renters don't care.  
May people who really care.

**Sisters of St. Joseph**

Built good relationships.  
Too fixed on ownership.  
Work hard, but small organization, naive to way things work, narrow focus).  
Good catalysts in neighborhood.

**Bethesda/Trinity Center**

Effective, but more a regional center that is located in the neighborhood – not necessarily a neighborhood center.  
Good for kids, but focus is on getting money, not using it well.  
Uncomfortable with new boxing center – no taxes on business now.

**Community Shelter Services**

Lack of funds.  
Good work with limited resources.  
Good for business, too.  
I hear that conditions are inadequate.

**HANDS**

Not much in neighborhood yet.  
Rent criteria is unrealistic for people who need housing – not meeting needs of neediest people.  
Was more visible and involved in neighborhood than it is now.  
Potential to do a lot of good here.  
Lack of follow-through, broken promises, process too complicated.

**Saint Vincent's**

Expensive, though service is good.  
Concerned about effect on area tenants parking – must have (and pay for) permits to park in front of their own homes.  
Apathetic ER approach.  
Expensive – don't cater to poor population.

**LECOM/Mill Creek Comm. Hospital**

5<sup>th</sup> in the Country.  
Only well-known provision of mental health, drug and alcohol in-patient.

**St. Paul's Church**

Not doing much aside from soup kitchen.  
Feels that investments in community are declining.  
Health clinic is wonderful.

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church**

Lots of meal/food provision – do lots with little funding. x

**Erie Redevelopment Authority**

Should do more/do better. xx

Needs to be more consistent in dealing with individuals.

Could provide more access to good properties to service organizations.

This survey is good effort.

Showing interest now – will it last?

New, empty buildings look nice, but don't really help. x

More action recently.

**Others?**

Local business owners not contributing.

Odessa's Place – what does it actually do?

**21. How important (desirable) do you consider each of the following for redevelopment of Historic Little Italy?**

**A Ethnic Restaurants**

**B Bars/Clubs**

Already enough.

Get rid of them – clubs for seniors ok.

Depends on maintenance.

Nuova Aurora good.

**C Outdoor Gathering Places**

Piazzas

**D Cultural Facilities (Museum, etc.)**

Museum featuring local-built products (e.g. Bikes). Display historic pictures of buildings and residents.

Not yet. x

Galleries.

**E Entertainment Facilities (Theater, Cinema, etc.)**

Movie theater would be nice, but tough to make it work financially. x

**F Improved Parks**

Must be monitored and maintained. X

Don't see many children around.

**G Bowling Alley**

Not yet. (\$'s)

Interest in bowling is waning.

**H Improved Parking**

Everywhere possible. X  
Even/Odd parking rules are burden for older people.  
18<sup>th</sup> & Cherry. x  
18<sup>th</sup> Street.  
Depends on location of new businesses.  
In select empty/vacant lots.

**I Improved Intersections for Pedestrians**

Walk signals for pedestrians.  
Liberty & 18<sup>th</sup> x  
Cherry & 18<sup>th</sup> xx  
Liberty & Brown  
Especially for ADA.  
Blind spots between cars/trucks.  
17<sup>th</sup> & Sassafras.  
All crossings on 18<sup>th</sup>. xx  
Sassafras and cross streets. x  
All along 18<sup>th</sup>, need lines and lights at crossings.  
Major issue!  
Stop signs for pedestrians – help slow traffic down.

**J More Retail**

Like to see, but things need to change to make it practical.  
Grocery store.

**K Any other...**

Miniature golf, video, food – safe and well –lighted.  
Destination spot – history/food.  
More advertising/aesthetics to define Little Italy as a distinct area.  
Supervised gathering places to attract college-age kids to area (non-alcoholic).  
Foliage and flora.  
Make it attractive to walk along 18<sup>th</sup>.  
Little Italy banners.  
Skating Rink  
Add garbage cans throughout the neighborhood.

22. What do you think is the prevailing image or perception of the Neighborhood as a whole?  
(From a **resident's** point of view and from an **outsider's** point of view.)

**Residents:**

Stigma of a bad neighborhood, unsafe.  
Nice place to live but have to be careful.  
Issues with upkeep in neighborhood.  
OK neighborhood.  
Convenient, safe, comfortable.  
Poor housing.  
Not enough social service assistance.  
Not safe.  
Positive among long-term residents.  
Run down – all they can afford.  
Needs improvement.

Distressed – too many promises broken.  
Inconsistent – patchy safety.  
Sense of loyalty from working class, stability.  
Want to be here and want to see improvements – have doubts.  
Cheap, lots of services, easy place to live.  
Affectionate – community is good, neighborly and friendly.

**Outsiders:**

Bad, unsafe neighborhood, stigma. xxxx  
Lots of crime. xx  
Safety/crime.  
Not welcoming to outsiders.  
Rough neighborhood but safer now.  
Perception – in decline. (Reality is businesses here are doing well – those that couldn't make it are gone.)  
Deteriorating, unsafe, depressing. x  
Crime, Drugs, Prostitution – “I don't want to go there.”  
Avoid at all costs.  
Bad neighborhood, but improving.  
Trouble, blighted undesirable.  
The hood, combat zone, wild side.

**23. How well is the local community as a whole dealing with the increased diversity in the Neighborhood's population? If necessary, how could it be improved?**

A lot of the diversity comes from outside the neighborhood – to Trinity Center.  
Very well. xxxxxx  
The new boxing center is an intimidating place to whites.  
Could be more open to new immigrants.  
In and out so fast – not an issue (fight among themselves).  
Fairly well. x  
Need more multicultural education to foster appreciation.  
Don't see much mixing between ethnic groups.  
Not an issue – all identify with each other and unified because of poverty.  
Not well – groups at odds with each other, sense of community lacking.  
Diversity breeds noise & disrespect.

**24. What do you think would be the top three things that could or should be done to attract more residents and businesses?**

**Residents:**

“Target Area” commitment to making changes from City.  
Available financing. x  
Education on how to apply for assistance.  
Home ownership. x  
Housing improvements  
More selective landlords.  
Tenants made to obey laws.  
Reduce unsafe perception.  
Decrease truck traffic.  
Aesthetic improvements to sidewalks and streets. x  
Public elementary school.

Grocery store. x  
Increase safety. x  
Affordable housing.  
Rehab rental properties.  
Give aesthetic incentives to landlords and business owners.  
Shops.  
Better buildings.  
Clean up. x  
Oust transients.  
Lower taxes/reduce tax base – not eliminate taxes.  
Lighting.  
Safety – for walking.  
Reduce blight – new homes.  
Façade variation.  
Implement revitalization promises.  
Streets/sidewalks – Start on 18<sup>th</sup> Street with aesthetics.  
Home repair.

**Businesses:**

Co-op advertising.  
Little Italy newsletter.  
Incentives for improvements to facades and window replacements.  
Available financing. x  
Education on how to apply for assistance.  
Local business owners get involved in the process.  
Improve residential  
Sidewalks! x  
Parking improvements.  
Reduce unsafe perception  
Sense of cooperation among business owners and City.  
Increase security/safety. x  
Upgrade housing stock and general area.  
Beautification.  
Less taxes.  
Incentives.  
Eliminate housing on 18<sup>th</sup> Street.  
Property improvements on existing structures.  
Lighting. x  
Unify existing business plans.  
LERTA/tax breaks.  
Incentives for hiring people from neighborhood.  
Assistance for rehab of properties.  
Demonstrate need.  
Repair/rehab buildings on 18<sup>th</sup> Street.

**25. How many employees do you have now? / How many live in the Little Italy neighborhood?**

4/1  
30/5  
12/2  
2/0  
2/2  
9/1  
19/1  
4/0  
2/0  
32/4  
4/2  
6/3  
4/0  
6/2  
77/1  
4/4  
4/4  
3/0

**26. Do you try to hire people who live in the Little Italy neighborhood?**

Not particularly, minor consideration.

Yes.

Yes, but need to be good.

Hire based on qualifications, not residence.

Sort of – try to hire those that shelter serves and will hire qualified people from the neighborhood.

Hire family.

Yes. X

Hire based on qualifications – staff would move into area but can't afford it.

All x

**27. Do you have plans for expansion? If so, where, when, how many more employees?**

No. xxxxxx

If we had room available.

Land locked.

Yes but not at present time/location.

Hope & dreams, but no plans – no funds.

Yes, but not without permanent zoning.

Yes – in August.

Yes – 3-4 more (4 now)

Some – if City cooperates.

**28. Do you have issues with traffic?**

**For customers – vehicular and/or pedestrian?**

Speed of traffic on 18<sup>th</sup> Street. x

People cutting through our parking lot to avoid intersection.

Parking, ingress/egress. xx

Yes – both vehicular and pedestrian.

Only sometimes with one-way streets; otherwise not really.

One-way streets.  
Just no parking.  
Too many trucks affects general flow of traffic.  
Truck traffic on 18<sup>th</sup> is bad.

**Company vehicles?**

Delivery trucks on side streets.  
People parked in wrong places – tough for trucks.

**Employees?**

**29. How is the general business climate for you, compared to the last 2-5 years? Does the future look better, worse or about the same?**

Better – more stable.  
Much better than 5 years ago; steady for last two years.  
Same. If expand it will be on internet. Future looks better.  
Down slightly.  
Better.           xx  
Church has grown in number of parishoners; potential for future growth exists.  
Funding has been cut – makes future look shakey.  
Future looks good.   xxx  
Good.  
Same – wouldn't stay if looked bad.  
No change in climate – future looks steady.           xx

**30. Any other comments?**

Erie Beer does a lot of business in neighborhood – could be contributing more.  
Good luck – love to be involved.  
Create more opportunities for community to gather and socialize with family in affordable, friendly atmosphere.  
Increase well-kept, affordable housing.  
Stop parking commercial trucks in lots.  
Abandoned vehicles left in streets – eyesores.  
Problem with ERA's façade grant – paid for own new storefront but wanted to use grant \$'s for repaving his parking lot.  
Develop universal philosophy for what kind of neighborhood we are trying to build before recruiting businesses (hometown/local business vs. strip plazas).  
Have a marketing project to promote area businesses – provide for buying in to advertising potential.  
Identify neighborhood patron (e.g. LECOM) that will be an investor of time, \$'s and interest.  
Please address winter alley maintenance.  
Love design concepts from meeting.  
Move! Stop wasting time.  
City is uncooperative when businesses try to make changes – indecisive and too many ordinances and fees.  
Taxes are too high.

**Demographic Information:**

1. Age

<30  
30's xxxx  
40's xx  
50's xxxxxxx  
60's xxxxxxx  
70+ x

2. How long have you lived in the Erie Area/Little Italy Neighborhood?

13 years/0  
x/7 years  
51 years/0  
14 years/0  
7 years/0  
All my life/20  
Life long/x  
20 years/0  
1 year  
10 years  
28 years – moved away two years ago due to drugs.  
37 years  
4 years  
11 years  
1 year  
12 years  
Family been here for 100 years.

3. **Where do you work/live? (locations)**

Little Italy/10<sup>th</sup> Street  
Little Italy/Mill Creek  
Little Italy/Mill Creek & Fairview  
Lord - 12<sup>th</sup> Street/Mill Creek  
X/32<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Little Italy/35<sup>th</sup> Street  
Little Italy/Mill Creek x  
Little Italy/W. 37<sup>th</sup> Street  
Little Italy/Lower west side – Bayfront.  
Little Italy/East side  
Little Italy/30<sup>th</sup> Street (SW Erie)  
Little Italy/28<sup>th</sup> Street  
Little Italy/Lower East Side.  
Little Italy/Little Italy x



## Appendix 4-1

### Neighborhood Organization Programs

The National Trust for Historic Preservation and its National Trust Main Street Center developed a comprehensive commercial district revitalization strategy (the **Main Street** program) that has been widely successfully in towns and cities nationwide. The State of Pennsylvania, through its *New Communities Program*, adopted a Main Street Program, and established an **Elm Street Program** and an **Enterprise Zone Program** to complete the package of new community development initiatives.

**Pennsylvania's Main Street program**, which is coordinated through the *PA Downtown Center*, emphasizes four points which work together to build a sustainable and complete community revitalization effort. These include:

- Organization,
- Promotion,
- Design, and
- Economic Restructuring.

In establishing the Elm Street component of its New Communities Program, the State integrated the Main Street downtown revitalization program with a neighborhood renewal strategy, and added a *Clean, Safe, and Green* element. The Elm Street program is designed to provide assistance and resources to those mixed-use and residential areas in proximity to central business districts, to further enhance the downtown area and to improve the viability of older neighborhoods.

Both the Main Street and the Elm Street programs incorporate volunteer support, leveraging of private dollars, strategic planning, rehabilitation and reuse of existing buildings, and streetscape improvements into a coordinated revitalization effort. The State provides a model approach for both programs, understanding that each community or neighborhood is unique and may vary slightly from the recommended approach. To be eligible for Main Street or Elm Street Program funds, communities need to closely follow the program guidelines.

Another popular approach to neighborhood revitalization is ***Blueprint Communities***, which was launched by FHLBank of Pittsburgh and 16 funding program partners. *Blueprint Communities* initially involved 22 urban and rural communities across Pennsylvania during 2005. The program has since expanded to other states.

*Blueprint Communities* is designed to serve as a catalyst to revitalization by fostering strong local leadership and collaboration, focusing on planning and goal-setting strategies, and building local program capacity to sustain community growth. Its process is based on sound local and regional planning that includes a clear vision for the community or neighborhood, and provides a comprehensive implementation strategy. *Blueprint Communities* encourages coordinated investments in targeted neighborhoods by public and private funders.

**LITTLE ITALY  
REAL ESTATE  
MARKET ANALYSIS  
AND  
DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS  
  
ERIE, PENNSYLVANIA**

**SEPTEMBER 18, 2007**

**Prepared By:**

**BOULEVARD STRATEGIES  
Columbus, Ohio  
blvd@iwaynet.net**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**PAGE**

<b>A.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	.....	<b>3</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>RETAIL OUTLOOK</b>		
	• Regional Trends	.....	<b>4</b>
	• Local Retail Demand	.....	<b>9</b>
	• Local Retail Supply	.....	<b>13</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>HOUSING OUTLOOK</b>		
	• Regional Trends	.....	<b>15</b>
	• Local Housing Demand	.....	<b>19</b>
	• Local Housing Supply	.....	<b>20</b>

## A. INTRODUCTION

- Little Italy is a historic neighborhood located adjacent to the central business district in Erie, Pennsylvania. This industrial port on the shore of Lake Erie is centrally located between Cleveland (west), Pittsburgh (south), and Buffalo (northeast). With a population of about 280,000 persons, Erie ranks as the 135<sup>th</sup> largest metropolitan statistical area (MSA) in the United States, but the fourth largest in Pennsylvania (behind Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Allentown). Population in the Erie MSA peaked at about 320,000 persons in the early 1970's. The City of Erie absorbed most of the population losses as sprawling suburbs and townships surrounding it added housing, roads, and shopping centers. However, this exodus to the hinterlands appears to be dwindling as the population in the City's central neighborhoods is showing increases again, according to recent demographic data compiled by City-Data.com.
- Once bustling with assembly line workers, fishermen, and railroad cars, Erie has a much smaller industrial sector today. Plastics, steel, locomotive engineering, and shipbuilding still play important, if reduced, roles in the local economy. Meanwhile, Erie's emerging industries are in its service-producing sectors such as healthcare, insurance, and tourism. The Bayfront Convention Center is a brand new 154,000 square foot facility, linked to a full-service Sheraton hotel and restaurant, which will open in April 2008. Presque Isle State Park, seven miles of public beaches, a flock of small wineries, and a brand new casino and horse track (Presque Isle Downs) draw millions of visitors and tourists to Erie each year. Tourism has boosted Erie's once-dormant \$3+ billion per year retail market in recent years.
- Erie has a strong ethnic influence, as many of its people are of European descent. The region is tolerant of diversity and enjoys community and cultural festivals. Catholics outnumber Protestants by about 2 to 1 in Erie County, according to the Association of Religion Data Archives. The latest wave of immigrants in Erie is Hispanics, who have settled in Pennsylvania in much greater numbers in this decade than previously.
- Little Italy is one of Erie's oldest ethnic enclaves, though it is much more diverse than just those of Italian heritage today. Little Italy is located in Zip Code 16502 which has over 600 firms and 7,500 employees, the highest concentration of jobs and companies in Erie outside of downtown, according to Demographics USA. Over half of its jobs are in the services sector. Manufacturing accounts for only 23% of Zip Code 16502's jobs but this is relatively high compared to the Pennsylvania state average (10%). Its labor force is 65% blue collar vs. 46% statewide. The Little Italy area still represents Erie's traditional working class image to a large degree.

## B. RETAIL OUTLOOK

### Regional Trends

- Boulevard Strategies tracks trends in retailing, particularly in urban environments. Several trends that we have been following in recent months are briefly described below:
  - **Renewed emphasis on health and environmental issues:** As baby boomers begin to reach their 60's, more and more retailers are addressing their growing concerns about their health and well-being. Pharmacies are proliferating across the retail landscape, from drive-thru's at high traffic corners to units within grocery stores and discount stores, not to mention the Internet. The latest trend is the addition of walk-in health clinics for minor ailments that need immediate attention. Posh day spas, state-of-the-art fitness centers, and alternative medicine and healing centers are emerging as new growth industries. Organic foods and products have gone mainstream as even Wal-Mart now offers organic goods to mothers worried about what their children are eating. Farmers markets are growing by 10% per year nationally as "locally-grown" is the buzzword today. Meanwhile, Wal-Mart is seeking to boost its image by pushing environmentally-friendly products (compact fluorescent bulbs, for example), elimination of excessive packaging, use of alternative construction materials and energy sources in building its stores, and the offer of Ethanol at selected locations. Today's customers want to feel good while they save money.
  - **The Do-It-For-Me Generation:** Drug stores that are adding walk-in health clinics are a good example of how retailers, especially "category-killers" that specialize in one merchandise line, are adding services that are an extension of their product mix. The home improvement centers that used to advertise to "do-it-yourself" homeowners now also offer a wide range of installation services. Best Buy uses its "Geek Squads" to allay consumer fears about repairs to the complicated products it sells. Americans eat about 45% of their meals outside of the home on average, according to National Restaurant Association, and this percentage is steadily increasing. Prepared take-home meals are also on the increase, as fewer households are cooking for themselves. Independent retailers that offer better or more service can compete with the big guys.
  - **The Rise of Lifestyle Retail:** The shift from products to services has impacted the retail industry at the shopping center development level as well. Enclosed super regional malls with department store anchors and look-alike fashion chains are a dying breed. Sterile mall environments contrived to increase impulse product purchases have been replaced by faux town centers that offer "experiences" at lively dining and entertainment venues with outdoor patios in mixed-use settings.

## B. RETAIL OUTLOOK

### Regional Trends (Cont'd)

Upscale restaurants are one of the fastest growing segments of the retail industry and serve as the new “anchors” for both lifestyle centers and urban retail strips, provided shops near them stay open in the evenings. The “fast casual” sector experienced a 14% growth rate in 2006, according to Chicago-based Technomic, Inc. (compared to a 6% growth rate for all chain restaurants). Fast casual concepts where you order at the counter and go sit down, such as Chipotle Grill, Boston Market, Panera Bread, and Panda Express, offer a trade-up to better food and more service to fast food customers and a trade-down to lower prices to budget-conscious fine diners. In addition to restaurants, lifestyle retail includes entertainment venues such as cinemas, clubs, bars, and arcades, and leisure-oriented retail such as consumer electronics, books/music/DVDs, sporting goods, toys/hobbies, pets, arts, lawn and garden items, and other specialty categories. Lifestyle retail is as much about how people spend their time as it is how they spend their money.

- **Parking, Parking, Parking:** More than any other factor, parking problems (or perceptions thereof) pose the greatest threat to the viability of urban commercial districts in this country today. There are very few independent retail businesses today that can make a living from impulse pedestrian traffic alone. They require adequate amounts of cheap and convenient parking for their customers to compete against the chain stores with seas of asphalt surrounding them out on the highway. Mixed-use projects are increasingly popular but they can pose parking conflicts if not properly designed and managed. Parking enforcement is a key economic development tool. Its only legitimate purpose is to induce optimal turnover among the most coveted parking spots in the district to stimulate retail activity. It is not just a way to provide a profit center for the City (i.e., fines and collections minus labor and equipment costs). Parking is the lifeblood of retail and must be carefully managed.

## B. RETAIL OUTLOOK

### Regional Trends (Cont'd)

- **Continuing Integration of Clicks and Bricks:** E-commerce did not replace bricks-and-mortar stores as many experts predicted about ten or twelve years ago when retail websites such as Amazon.com and ebay.com emerged as commercial forces. Today, 40 of the top 50 grossing retail websites are owned by traditional retailers such as Wal-Mart, The Gap, and Barnes & Noble. These companies do not view Internet and store retailing as an either-or proposition but instead look for opportunities to synergize the channels. Retailers can shift slow-moving but high-margin items to their websites and give more space for faster-moving inventory in their stores. Some run specials on their websites after their stores are closed to attract the third shift crowd. Most retailers will ship merchandise ordered on the website to the nearest store free-of-charge. Niche retailers in urban storefronts have the opportunity to sell to finely-focused sub-markets scattered across the country to supplement local store traffic. Companies large and small are taking advantage of Internet marketing, which is still in its childhood.
- According to the National Research Bureau, Inc. the Erie MSA has 19 shopping centers totaling 5.8 million square feet of retail space. Erie has 20.5 square feet of shopping center space per capita vs. the USA average of 16.5. However, 14 of Erie's 19 shopping centers are over 30 years old and only one, Erie Marketplace, a power center that features Target and several big box category killers, was built within the past 10 years. Millcreek Mall is an "old school" enclosed 2 million square foot super-regional mall with traditional department store anchors (Macy's, Elder Beerman, JC Penney, Sears, and casual dining outparcels) opened by Cafaro in Millcreek Township in 1975. Along with nearby Peach Street Square, featuring Wal-Mart, Kohl's, Home Depot, Lowe's, Circuit City, and TGI Friday, Millcreek Mall attracts a high percentage of Canadians in addition to locals when the exchange rate is favorable.
- All in all, except for its tourism boost, Erie is a relatively sleepy retail market that lingers on the outskirts of the larger Cleveland, Buffalo, and Pittsburgh markets. Chain activity could accelerate in Erie over the next several years as superstores continue to aggressively seek expansion opportunities in places previously overlooked. However, Erie's topography, the lake, and roads may limit its number of retail-ready sites.

## **B. RETAIL OUTLOOK**

### **Regional Trends (Cont'd)**

- While the City of Erie has lost population, the central business district of the City actually gained new residents in small numbers over the past 20 years. According to a July 2006 Downtown Erie Market Conditions report compiled by Urban Partners of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, downtown had nearly 100 retail businesses occupying about 450,000 square feet of space garnering more than \$80 million a year in retail sales, or about \$180 per square feet. About half of its establishments are full and limited service restaurants/bars that generate about \$35 million per year in sales. Another 30 or so businesses serve the Convenience Goods and Services needs of local residents, including those living in Little Italy. There is some overlap between the Little Italy and downtown retail submarkets since they are so close to each other.



**SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS  
LITTLE ITALY/ERIE, PENNSYLVANIA POPULATION**

	<b>(CT 12) Little Italy Neighborhood Trade Area</b>	<b>(Zip Code 16502) Little Italy Community Trade Area</b>	<b>City of Erie</b>	<b>State of Pennsylvania (000)</b>
<b><u>POPULATION</u></b>				
<b>2012 Projected</b>	2,490	17,266	100,116	12,759
<b>2007 Estimated</b>	2,586	17,351	101,332	12,560
<b>2000 Census</b>	2,728	17,470	103,717	12,281
<b>1990 Census</b>	2,931	17,300	108,718	11,882
Avg. Annual Growth Rate	-20	-17	-391	+40
<b><u>AGE DISTRIBUTION</u></b>				
% Under 20	33.8%	28.5%	28.9%	26.6%
% 20-44	39.8%	37.6%	36.5%	34.6%
% 45-64	16.5%	21.1%	19.2%	23.1%
% 65+	<u>9.9%</u>	<u>12.8%</u>	<u>15.4%</u>	<u>15.7%</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Median Age	29.7	33.8	34.0	36.5
<b><u>EDUCATION</u></b> (Adults Age 25+)				
H.S. Diploma +	56.9%	N/A	75.3%	76.0%
College Degree+	5.8%	16.8%	17.4%	22.4%
<b><u>OCCUPATION</u></b>				
% White/Blue Collar	30.8/69.2	35.4/64.6	52.2/47.8	53.7/46.0
<b><u>RACIAL DISTRIBUTION</u></b>				
% White	68.8%	83.2%	80.6%	85.4%
% Black	19.3%	10.0%	14.2%	10.0%
% Other/Mixed	<u>11.9%</u>	<u>6.8%</u>	<u>5.2%</u>	<u>4.6%</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
% Hispanic	13.0%	5.8%	4.4%	3.2%

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, City of Erie Planning Department, Demographics USA 2007 Zip Edition, and Boulevard Strategies

## **B. RETAIL OUTLOOK**

### **Local Retail Demand**

- Demographic data was collected from Census Tract 12, which includes the boundaries of Little Italy, and Zip Code 16502 which represents a majority of customers for most Little Italy retail businesses.
- There are approximately 17,350 persons living in Zip Code 16502, at present, down slightly from 17,470 in 2000. About 2,600 persons live in Census Tract 12, which is slowly losing about 20 residents per year. Population density in Zip Code 16502 is nearly 6,500 persons per square mile (vs. 276 per square mile statewide). Retailers prefer densely populated locations for more efficient marketing and distribution.
- The population in Zip Code 16502 is relatively young with a median age of 33.8 years, 4 years below the Pennsylvania median. About two-thirds of Zip Code 16502's population is under age 45 (vs. 61% statewide). The population in Little Italy itself (CT 12) is even younger, with a median age slightly below 30 at 29.7 years.
- Zip Code 16502's 2000 racial distribution was nearly identical to that of Pennsylvania overall: 83% white (vs. 85% statewide), 10% black (same as statewide), and 7% mixed/other (vs. 5% statewide). About 6% of the area's residents are of Hispanic descent (vs. 4% statewide) but this percentage is on the increase. However, Little Italy itself has a much higher concentration of Hispanic households at 13%, as well as black households at 19%, than does the rest of Erie or the State.
- In spite of high number of minors, only 53.5% of Zip Code 16502 is family households (vs. 67.3% statewide). Family households are households with two or more related persons. This means that the area has fewer, but larger, families among its 7,100+ households.
- Median household income in Zip Code 16502 is about 35% below the state median, in spite of the area's larger families. Boulevard Strategies estimates that neighborhood residents collectively spent about \$110 million on purchases of non-automotive retail products and services in 2006. This is enough spending to support about 440,000 square feet of retail space by itself if it could all be captured in one place.
- The Little Italy neighborhood, as represented by Census Tract 12, has a median household income just below \$27,000, according to our estimates. Although its median household income is 45% below the state median, incomes, on average, are rising at a much faster pace in Little Italy than elsewhere. Households in Little Italy spend enough to support only about 50,000 square feet of retail space. Thus, Little Italy's shops and restaurants must draw from beyond the local neighborhood to be profitable.

**SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS  
LITTLE ITALY/ERIE, PENNSYLVANIA HOUSEHOLDS**

	(CT 12) Little Italy Neighborhood Trade Area	(Zip Code 16502) Little Italy Community Trade Area	City of Erie	State of Pennsylvania (000)
<b><u>HOUSEHOLDS</u></b>				
2012 Projected	882	7,067	47,389	4,995
2007 Estimated	949	7,139	45,523	4,904
2000 Census	1,043	7,239	40,938	4,777
1990 Census	1,197	7,414	35,275	4,496
Avg. Annual Growth Rate	-14	-16	+551	+23
Avg. HH Size, 2000	2.57	2.36	2.39	2.48
Avg. HH Size, 1990	2.34	2.22	2.57	2.57
% Family Households	N/A	53.5	N/A	67.3
<b><u>HOUSING</u></b>				
% Vacant	19.3%	N/A	9.0%	9.0%
Occupied Units	1,043	7,239	40,938	4,777,003
% Owner Occupied	29.9	34.3	56.2	71.3
% Renter Occupied	70.1	65.7	43.8	28.7
Median Housing Value	\$27,900	N/A	\$65,900	\$97,000
Median Monthly Rent	\$373	N/A	\$424	\$531
<b><u>HOUSEHOLD INCOME, 2006</u></b>				
Estimated Median				
Household Income	\$26,942	\$32,157	\$65,900	\$97,000
% Change, 1990-2000	+56.9%	+32.8%	+28.8%	+38.0%
<b><u>RETAIL SPENDING, 2006</u></b>				
Estimated Millions				
Supportable Sq. Ft.	\$12	\$110	\$605	\$95,000
	50,000	440,000	2,400,000	380,000,000

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, City of Erie Planning Department, Demographics USA 2007 Zip Edition, and Boulevard Strategies

## B. RETAIL OUTLOOK

### Local Retail Demand (Cont'd)

- Lifestyle activities and preferences, in addition to demographic and economic composition, influence how households spend their retail dollars. **Popular lifestyle activities for Erie residents**, compared to the typical American household include the following:

	<u>Index Score</u>
- Hunting/shooting	160
- Golf	129
- Needle work/knitting/crafts	123
- Camping & hiking	121
- Own a cat or dog	119
- Gardening	117
- Grandchildren	117
- Collectibles	117
- Automotive work	115
- Casino gambling	115
- Wildlife/environmental causes	114
- "Extreme" sports (skateboarding, etc.)	110
<b>US Average</b>	<b>100</b>

(SOURCE: The Lifestyle Market Analyst 2006)

Enthusiasm for such activities is suggestive of **niche retail opportunities in categories such as fabrics/crafts, pet supply/toys, gardening/wild birds/nature, children's clothing, collectibles, auto supplies, and specialty sporting goods**. Pets, in particular, represent a huge growing business as 63% of all American households own at least one dog or cat (this figure is closer to 75% for Erie). U. S. pet-related food, products, and services topped \$40 billion in revenues last year.

- However, the bulk of Zip Code 16502's retail spending, about \$60 million per year, occurs in the Convenience Goods and Services retail merchandise group. Census Tract 12 residents spend about \$8 million annually on basic goods and services. The Convenience Goods and Services retail merchandise group include the following basic everyday purchase categories:
  - Grocery/deli/bakery
  - Pharmacy/health and beauty aids
  - Retail services (dry clean, hair copy/print/etc.)
  - Cards/gifts/flowers
  - Fast food

## B. RETAIL OUTLOOK

### Local Retail Demand (Cont'd)

Little Italy's community trade area spends enough to support about 200,000 square feet of space for basic retail goods and services per year. However, Census Tract 12 spends enough to support only 25,000 to 30,000 square feet of Convenience Goods and Services retail space if it could all be captured in one place. This **reinforces the need for convenient and ample parking** in Little Italy to serve nearby neighborhoods not within easy walking distance.

- Boulevard Strategies estimates that residents of Zip Code 16502 spend another \$40 million per year, including \$5 million by Census Tract 12 residents, on Home, Fashion, and Leisure Goods (enough to support about 200,000 square of shopping goods space). Zip Code 16502's remaining \$10 million (\$2 million by CT12 residents) in annual retail spending occurs at dining and entertainment venues, enough to support about 40,000 square feet of indoor space. However, most of Little Italy's spending on comparison shopping goods such as those offered in the **Home, Fashion, and Leisure Goods categories** occurs outside of the neighborhood. The same is true of **Dining and Entertainment** spending.
- In addition to the 17,350 persons who live in Zip Code 16502, another 7,500 persons work at regular positions in the Little Italy community trade area. About 35% (2,600) of these persons work in white collar occupations and will spend significant retail dollars near the workplace at lunch and other breaks and on the way to or from work. Boulevard Strategies estimates that those who work in Zip Code 16502 add another \$15 million to retail expenditures per year that occur in the Little Italy area. About 40% of this spending will occur at sit-down dining and entertainment venues and another 40% will be spent on Convenience Goods and Services, including fast food, pharmacy items, hair salons, and other popular workday stops.
- Other visitors to the Little Italy neighborhood account for up to another \$5 million per year in retail sales, according to our estimates. This could increase significantly if Little Italy can attract more conventioners to its unique ethnic restaurants for a night on the town after the new Bayfront Convention Center and hotel are marketed, and Little Italy has something to offer..

## B. RETAIL OUTLOOK

### Local Retail Supply Analysis

- There are about 50 retail and restaurant/entertainment businesses in Little Italy, many of which are clustered along West 18<sup>th</sup> Street. These businesses collectively employ over 600 persons (about 20% of whom live in the Little Italy neighborhood) and occupy about 240,000 square feet, according to estimates derived from zip code level data and a 2006 inventory of businesses by Urban Partners in their downtown Erie planning study. Little Italy is especially well-known for its ethnic delis and restaurants and its blue collar taverns.
- Boulevard Strategies estimates that Little Italy's retailers and restaurants had 2006 sales of about \$55 million, or about \$220 per square foot. If \$15 million in sales came from daytime workers and \$5 million came from other outside visitors, only \$35 million was generated by local residents (ZC 16502), according to our calculations. This compares to \$75 million that Zip Code 16502 residents spent at retailers and entertainment venues outside of Little Italy. (Census Tract 12 residents collectively spend \$8 million of their annual total of \$15 million in retail purchases inside of the neighborhood, a respectable percentage but only enough to account for 15% of typical 18<sup>th</sup> Street retailer's annual sales.) An outflow spending percentage of 73% (20-40% is typical) indicates that the Little Italy community level trade area (Zip Code 16502) **could support more retail space, perhaps as much as 150,000 square feet of new space.** To be more specific, the community surrounding Little Italy could support a **full-line supermarket with a pharmacy** as well as lifestyle-oriented retail such as more and/or better **sit-down and fast casual restaurants** and **finely-focused specialty stores in categories such as crafts, fabrics, pet supplies, gardening/wild birds, and other niches.**
- As shown in the exhibit on the following page, Little Italy retailers are capturing only about 42% of the overall \$130 million retail market potentially within their collective grasp. They are holding their own in the dining and entertainment group but are **losing over half of their potential customers to outside competitors in most convenience goods and services, home goods, fashion goods, and leisure goods categories.** If Little Italy performed more like a typical dominant shopping district in capturing about 60-70% of its potential market, it would have about \$25-\$35 million more in sales revenues.

**RETAIL SPENDING/SALES MATRIX  
LITTLE ITALY 2006**

**Sales By LI Businesses  
(Millions Per Year)**

<b>Spending By</b>	<b>Convenience Goods &amp; Services</b>	<b>Shopping Goods</b>	<b>Dining &amp; Entertainment</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
CT 12 Residents				
In Little Italy	\$4	\$2	\$1	\$7
Outside of Little Italy	\$4	\$3	\$1	\$8
Subtotal	\$8	\$5	\$2	\$15
All Residents in Little Italy Trade Area (ZC 16502)	\$20	\$10	\$5	\$35
Outside of Little Italy	\$40	\$30	\$5	\$75
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$60</b>	<b>\$40</b>	<b>\$10</b>	<b>\$110</b>
Workers (ZC 16502) In Little Italy	\$6	\$3	\$6	\$15
Visitors to Little Italy	\$1	\$2	\$2	\$5
<b>Total Potential Market</b>	<b>\$67</b>	<b>\$18</b>	<b>\$18</b>	<b>\$130</b>
Little Italy Market Share	\$27	\$15	\$13	\$55
%	40.3	33.3	72.2	42.3

SOURCE: Boulevard Strategies

## C. HOUSING OUTLOOK

### Regional Trends

- According to U.S. Census data, Erie County added 5,737 housing units between 1990 and 2000, and is on pace to deliver about 6500 units in this decade, but only about 5% of those units are being built in the central sections of the City of Erie (including downtown, Little Italy, and nearby neighborhoods). In terms of occupied units, Erie County increased its number by 4,939 while the central section lost 297 households, during the 1990's. As previously mentioned, the Erie market has suffered from suburban sprawl in spite of a declining overall population. Unfortunately, this was a fairly common pattern in U.S. metropolitan areas in the 1990's. Communities across the USA are fighting sprawl in this decade by strengthening their older historic neighborhoods, such as Little Italy.
- One solution to sprawl that is being implemented is a **return to traditional neighborhood design (TND)**. TND refers to a pattern of land planning and development that emulates the towns and suburbs built in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. TND relies on interconnecting street networks, town centers and civic squares, parking and garages to the rear, and projects that allow for higher densities while requiring developers to adhere to stricter design standards.
- Regardless of overall housing market conditions, **condominiums have been the hottest segment in residential real estate over the past ten years**. Condominium sales currently account for about 13% of all home sales in the United States (vs. 9% in 1995). As a rule of thumb, new condominium units sell at a price point about 70% of the average selling price of detached, single-family homes in the same area. Desired amenities include dedicated parking (new attached garages are a plus), washer/dryer hookups, upscale finishes, one bathroom per bedroom and community features such as fitness centers, swimming pools, clubhouses, security presence, and wireless capabilities. Some creative builders are offering "free" fireplaces and kitchen and bath upgrades to compete in this growing market. Also, the resale market is active for condos, which turn over at about the same rate as do single-family homes in today's market.



## C. HOUSING OUTLOOK

### Regional Trends (Cont'd)

- The **condominium market serves three primary segments: empty nesters, echo boomers, and single women without children**, each with different needs that condominium products can often fill.
  - Empty nesters are generally age 55 or over, that recently saw their youngest child leave home or recently retired, or both. They are on the leading edge of the baby boomers and are the fastest growing segment of Erie's population. Empty nesters generally prefer garden units or mid-rises in relatively upscale locations (golf communities are popular with this segment but not everybody plays golf).
  - Echo boomers are young singles and couples in their 20's and 30's, i.e., the sons and daughters of the baby boom generation. Condos represent starter home opportunities for this segment. They prefer townhouses and rehabbed buildings near entertainment uses. Erie is struggling to retain its young adult population, especially those who are college-educated; cool housing options would help this situation.
  - An often overlooked condo-buying segment is single and divorced women in their 30's or 40's without children. Over 57% of single female heads of households own their homes and the number of single female adults is growing as women put off marriage longer than ever before. Women are amenity-conscious buyers with a variety of needs but most value low maintenance, security, and locations close to work. Little Italy is located close to most of Erie's major employment centers.
  
- A recent survey by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) indicates that a segment known as **"lifestyle" renters is emerging in urban markets**. A "lifestyle" renter is **someone with the financial means to purchase a home but prefers to rent**. Such renters account for about 15% of the rental market according to the NAHB versus 5% ten years ago. Meanwhile, the size of the average apartment has grown to over 1,200 square feet.

## C. HOUSING OUTLOOK

### Regional Trends (Cont'd)

- **“Live/work” spaces** comprise a small but growing slice of the housing market, as there are 20 million home-based businesses in the United States, according to the National Association of Home-Based Businesses.
  - **Loft spaces** have long been popular with creative types and business proprietors have lived in apartments above their storefronts for decades.
  - **“Live/work” is going white collar** (or “no collar” since they’re at home). Many new live/work arrangements have been made feasible by the advent of the Internet. Most computer-based jobs can be effectively performed just about anywhere, especially with wireless networks.
  - Working from a **home office** is becoming more popular for sole practitioners and consultants, traveling salespeople, parents with small children, cost-conscious start-up entrepreneurs, and semi-retired executives. It is eco-friendly (no commute), cost-effective (with tax breaks, in some cases), and laid-back (no office politics).
  - It can be lonely though, so **“third places”** like coffee shops and lunch counters and support services such as copy centers and office/computer supply stores are needed nearby for “live/work” spaces to thrive.
- According to the AARP, the first wave of the baby boomers, 3 million nationwide hit age 60 last year. Another 20 million will reach 60 in the next five years, 50 million total by 2020. And, baby boomers are expected to live longer than today’s seniors as medical advances, healthier diets, more exercise, fewer wars, and less hazardous occupations allow for advancing the average age. (However, obesity and diabetes are on the rise, and may cancel out these gains.) The typical person who is 65 today will live until age 83, according to actuarial tables. About 25% of those aged 65 to 74 still work, up from 20% in 2000, according to the U. S. Census Bureau.
- **Baby boomers will ease even more gradually into retirement** than today’s seniors. Boomers, especially those with college degrees, will work longer in the job market, for their identities are wrapped up in their careers. More boomers will gradually phase into retirement by lightening workloads but not officially retiring (i.e., many will never retire by choice). They will prefer to **“age in place”** rather than move to Florida or Arizona upon retirement. They will continue to **“play hard”** even after retirement in traveling, and seeking outdoor activities such as golf, aerobics, and shopping. They will seek out social experiences with all ages, not just their peers. Regardless of official retirement plans, boomers will seek lifelong learning experiences and second careers.

## C. HOUSING OUTLOOK

### Regional Trends (Cont'd)

- Retired baby boomers will (still) be in age denial. They are already spending record amounts on health club memberships, home exercise machines, cosmetic surgery, health foods, vitamins, organic foods, bottled water, hair color, Botox, and Viagra. Baby boomers will have **a toxic reaction to any product or service (including housing) that is labeled: “senior” or “mature,”** or other similar terms. This is a sensitive issue. **Active downtown and urban environments can provide robust opportunities for senior boomers to stay active and connected to their communities after retirement.** There is a growing movement toward the formation of nonprofit corporations that collect membership dues in exchange for provision of transportation, home cleaning and repair, companionship, security, and other services. Such self-help co-operatives will help seniors stay in their homes longer. In some moderate income areas, the co-ops are set up by social services organizations which can tap into volunteer labor and barter exchanges to keep costs down (although the use of volunteers may present the need for liability insurance).
- The best candidates to move into market-rate urban housing are singles and couples (both young and older) currently without children. However, **a growing number of these childless households have pets (especially in Erie).** Furthermore, pets are gaining status as full-fledged family members (even as surrogate children in some households). Places that are pet-friendly have a distinct emotional edge in attracting young singles and couples as well as empty nesters and retirees. Also, dogs provide a measure of security in neighborhoods perceived to be less safe.

## C. HOUSING OUTLOOK

### Local Housing Demand

- The Little Italy neighborhood is losing about 14 households per year, according to U.S. Census data. Most of the occupied units are renter-occupied (70% in 2000). Market rate rents for a two-bedroom unit generally run about \$400 to \$600 per month in Little Italy. Houses generally sell for between \$30,000 and \$70,000 with a median price of about \$50,000 (compared to \$95,000 countywide). Housing prices in Erie have been appreciating by about 3.2% per year since 2003, according to PNC Financial Services Group, Inc.
- Urban Partners surveyed 256 downtown Erie employees about their interest in living in central Erie if attractive and affordable housing were made available. Though geared toward downtown living, the survey's findings are informative for Little Italy, as well. Key conclusions are summarized below:
  - As expected, those showing greatest interest are young people in their 20's and 30's and empty nesters in their 50's and 60's
  - Over 50% of single-person households expressed strong interest in living downtown vs. only 25% of households with 2 or more persons.
  - Two-thirds would prefer to own; about 47% of the respondents currently rent. This indicates the likelihood of attracting a high percentage of first-time homebuyers.
  - Preferred housing types, include single family detached homes first, followed by a three-way tie for second among renovated historic row houses, new townhouses, and low-rise garden apartments.
  - Amenities that are most important include on-site parking, storage space, new kitchens/bathrooms, outdoor sitting space/green space, nearby shopping and restaurants, and historic charm. Not important are skylights, swimming pools, exercise rooms, and fireplaces.

## C. HOUSING OUTLOOK

### Local Housing Supply

- The Little Italy neighborhood is, of course, distinguished by its Italian heritage as one of Erie's first settlements. Today, its historic housing stock is inhabited by persons from a wide variety of ethnicities and cultures. It is known for its churches that provide a range of social and spiritual services. According to a land use study conducted by the City of Erie two years ago, Little Italy had 711 single family residences, of which 647 were occupied and 64 (9%) were vacant. (The 2000 Census showed this percentage to be about double, at 19%). Most structures (64%) were judged to be in need of minor (44%) or major (20%) rehabilitation.
- There are a number of initiatives underway in Little Italy to increase opportunities for home ownership, to upgrade the neighborhood's aging housing stock, and to leverage public resources created to improve housing in blighted areas. The Redevelopment Authority of the City of Erie (RACE), Housing & Neighborhood Services (HANDS), the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network, and others have banded together to clear blighted structures, rehabilitate salvageable structures, and build on infill lots in Little Italy. These programs use a wide variety of federal, state, and local financing sources to assist and educate first-time homeowners. After witnessing the success of these non-profit and government efforts, private developers are showing increasing interest in building new market-rate housing units in the Little Italy neighborhood.
- **Condominium product is very limited in Erie**, accounting for less than 1% of the County's housing stock (compared to 13% of all new housing nationally). This is a prime opportunity in the Erie housing market right now and one that Little Italy can position itself to serve. Attraction of smaller households without school-age children will boost local retail spending while balancing the neighborhood's demographics, which are weighted toward large young families. Creating a safe environment and positive image to outsiders is a key prerequisite for attracting residents of choice that can afford market-rate housing.