

# The Northern Venango County Comprehensive Plan

## CORNPLANTER TOWNSHIP, CITY OF OIL CITY, AND THE BOROUGH OF ROUSEVILLE



2011

# The Northern Venango County Comprehensive Plan

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# Community Development Objectives

## Basic Plan Philosophy

There are three overarching philosophies of this Plan:

1. Use existing resources first—physical, governmental, or institutional. They should always be the primary options.
2. Choose a few projects from the many presented by this Plan to accomplish in the first year to give the Plan implementation traction.
3. Explore, use, and promote avenues to regional cooperation.

## Quality of Life

The study area is regarded as a beautiful, affordable community, as well as a safe and excellent place to raise a family. This Plan is dedicated to preserving, improving, and fostering these qualities.

**The Study Area is a beautiful, affordable community, as well as a safe and excellent place to raise a family.**

## Land Use

In general, this Plan does not recommend wholesale changes to the existing land use patterns in the three municipalities. Current zoning ordinances do need technical updating to reflect various changes to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (PaMPC). And, in keeping with the Quality of Life goal, some down zoning of residential districts in Oil City is a key element. Finally, the additions of new zoning techniques, especially the option of the Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND), are recommended. Both the Route 62 Study and the Waterways Study contain recommendations for improving design appearance in the South Side Business District. This Plan’s recommendations for the Oil Creek and Allegheny River areas are consistent with the special Waterways Study.

## Housing

**The Plan objectives for housing require dramatic action.**

The Plan objectives for housing require dramatic action. It is the pivotal point for the area’s future. The overall Plan goal is to change the area’s housing market to a stable one with reasonable costs and steady sales—one where the purchase of a home is a sound investment. A complementary goal is to provide housing options to the age 55-plus market. To accomplish this goal, the following activities are needed:

- Elimination of dilapidated units, with priority given to those that have the most blighting influence.
- Remediation of housing through the encouragement or implementation of rehabilitation or modernization programs, both public and private.
- Aggressive code enforcement, coupled with the rental inspection program.

- Changes to zoning to prevent the overcrowding of land.
- The promotion of 55-plus housing at market, or near market, rates.

## **Transportation**

The basic framework of the area’s transportation network is sound. What is needed is its enhancement to optimize its functioning:

- Implement the Route Corridor 62 Study recommendations.
- Corridor studies for Grandview Road and selected portions of Route 8 are needed.\*  
*\*Essentially safety and road geometry*
- Evaluate and alleviate safety concerns identified in this study.
- Preserve railroad service.
- Institute bus service to Rouseville, and if feasible, to the Village of Plumer.

## **Community Facilities and Services**

### **Water**

Oil City should undertake the improvements to its water system, as set forth by this Plan. Its viable functioning is a very important regional resource. Rouseville should continue its program of waterline replacement and conduct an evaluation of its overall system.

### **Sewer**

Both Oil City and Rouseville need to implement their respective Act 537 Plans. Oil City has completed its first two steps and will soon enter into its monitoring phase. Rouseville’s 537 Plan calls for a new plant to be constructed. Both municipalities need to also pursue “I&I” reduction programs.

### **Public Safety**

**Police:** Oil City must continue to support its police department, especially its community policing and foot patrol initiatives. An option of contract police services to Cornplanter, Rouseville, or other communities should be available.

**Fire:** At this time, the three departments have positive working relationships, and that asset should be fostered. There are individual department needs, addressed in this Plan, which merit support.

**Emergency Services:** These services appear to be functioning well. No changes are suggested.

## Parks

There are abundant recreational resources in the area which can, and do, meet local needs; and in some instances, foster tourism:

- Oil City should maintain its parks and recreational resources, as noted in the Plan, and shed unused facilities. Hasson Park and the Nelles Pool deserve special support. One new small neighborhood park is suggested in Oil City.
- Rouseville has an attractive park for the young. Its continuance and modest improvements are recommended.
- Existing recreational cooperation between the City, the Borough, the School District, and the YMCA must be a priority for all participants.
- Cornplanter – The Oil Creek State Park provides many recreational resources for the Township; but until the State’s budgets improve, this resource must be watched and protected.



## The Library

A true regional resource, the Library was given the most positive rating in the Community Survey. Its continuing service improvement is a priority of this Plan.

**The Oil City Library is a true regional resource, while the ARTS initiative is a cultural and economic asset.**

## The Oil City ARTS

The ARTS initiative is a cultural and economic asset that should be continued and expanded.



# Northern Venango County Multi-Municipal Plan

## Preface

This area—the heart of the original “Oil Country”—is facing problems—problems of housing, out-migration, and its economy. But, the region is hardly a stranger to adversity. Local histories are replete with disasters—floods, fires, and its economy. Each time, this area has recovered, often improving itself. Today, that same spirit of determination is needed. And, as in the past, there is no reason why the future cannot be better than the past.

*The region’s assets are its people.*

## Format

Recognizing its obligations to Cornplanter, Oil City, and Rouseville, the following format is presented. First, a brief overview of the issues and proposed actions for each of the three municipalities, along with a summary, which highlight activities, will be offered. Municipalities are taken in alphabetical order, and the relative Plan length is a product of issues and solutions.

This is a multi-municipal plan, and, as such, it combines three sovereign municipalities into a single comprehensive plan document. Though one of this Plan’s fundamental purposes is to promote common goals and expand cooperative action, it also recognizes its responsibility to provide the three individual communities with viable planning recommendations. To achieve this goal, a separate section for each municipality is presented, followed by the Regional Vision.

As previously noted, a Plan element is called Regional Initiatives. Included in this element are: Land Use, Housing, Community Facilities, and Public Safety. Also are economic and bike trail plans as well as the Arts and Culture Plan.

**Grants should not dictate policy—commonsense should.**

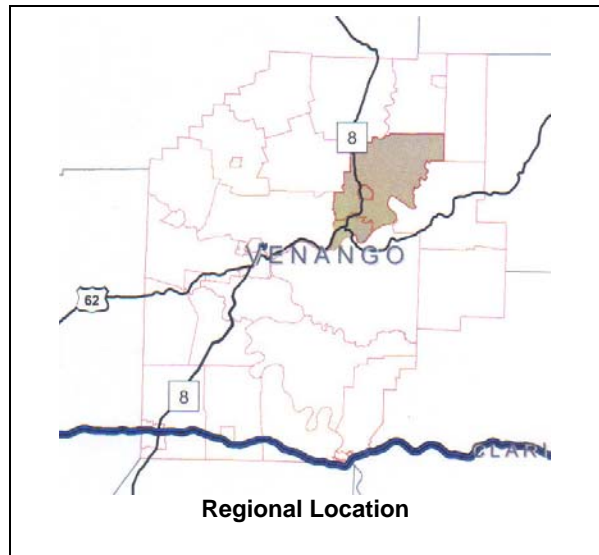
This presents opportunities for these three closely bound

neighbors to work with each other in a cooperative and positive mode. A cooperative attitude is a real imperative if the entire region can expect to regain its former viability.

Unfortunately, little in the way of Commonwealth assistance can be expected.

Budget crises have reduced the much publicized “regional” policies of Pennsylvania to a few small initiatives. Moreover, **grants** should **not** dictate policy—commonsense should.

The regional approach just makes sense—from an administrative, economic, and political point of view. With honest, ongoing cooperative action, the future is promising. Fortunately, the base for this approach even now exists. Frequent, formal, and informal cooperation now is practiced—and that base needs only to be built upon and fostered.



## Cornplanter Township

Cornplanter is a second-class township, with a population of 2,687. It is on the northern border of the three municipalities and is geographically the largest (47,616 acres). The Oil Creek Valley runs through the Township. Cherry Run is the second major stream, while the Allegheny River, with Pithole Creek, makes up much of its eastern border.



### Plan Issues and Recommendations

#### Historic Preservation – Current Status

To determine current historic assets in Cornplanter, two sources on the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission website were consulted—ARCH\* and CRGIS (Cultural Resources Geographic Information System).

*\*No longer available.*

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission database “ARCH” listed only the site of Pithole City, while the Commission’s CRGIS database has 19 entries. However, only one is listed on the National Register, Pithole City, with three others listed as eligible. Of these, two are bridges and the remaining is Coal Oil Johnny’s home, which is now restored and located at Rynd Farm.

### Actions



Pithole

The site of Pithole City is owned by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Though owned by the Commonwealth, it is manned by volunteers whose fundraising activities usually meet its modest operating budget. Past plans have suggested enhancing Pithole with additional interpretive material (\$150,000 to \$165,000), but there is no funding.

The very strength of Pithole, concerned volunteers, is also a weakness. As long as the current group of volunteers remains dedicated and active, Pithole will continue its existence. But, it is a precarious future. The loss of even a few of these dedicated individuals could be a catastrophe for this unique place that once was a boomtown of 15,000 people.

The salvation for Pithole is more tourists. If visitations increase, State support can be expected to continue, perhaps even to increase.

The Coal Oil Johnny home at Rynd Farm has been restored both outside and inside. Currently, the Oil Heritage organization is accepting appropriate antiques for the interior. The home is on land owned by DCNR, and the Oil Regional Alliance (ORA) is in the process of negotiating a lease. Once a lease can be secured, the facility will be open to the public. Rynd Farm is slated for interpretive visual panels. These will provide informative visuals on early oil families and the preservation of the Coal Oil Johnny house.



In addition, DCNR is restoring the Egbert Home at Petroleum Center. There are other historic assets in the Oil Creek State Park (Blood Farm, etc.), but much of the physical remnants from the oil boom days are gone.

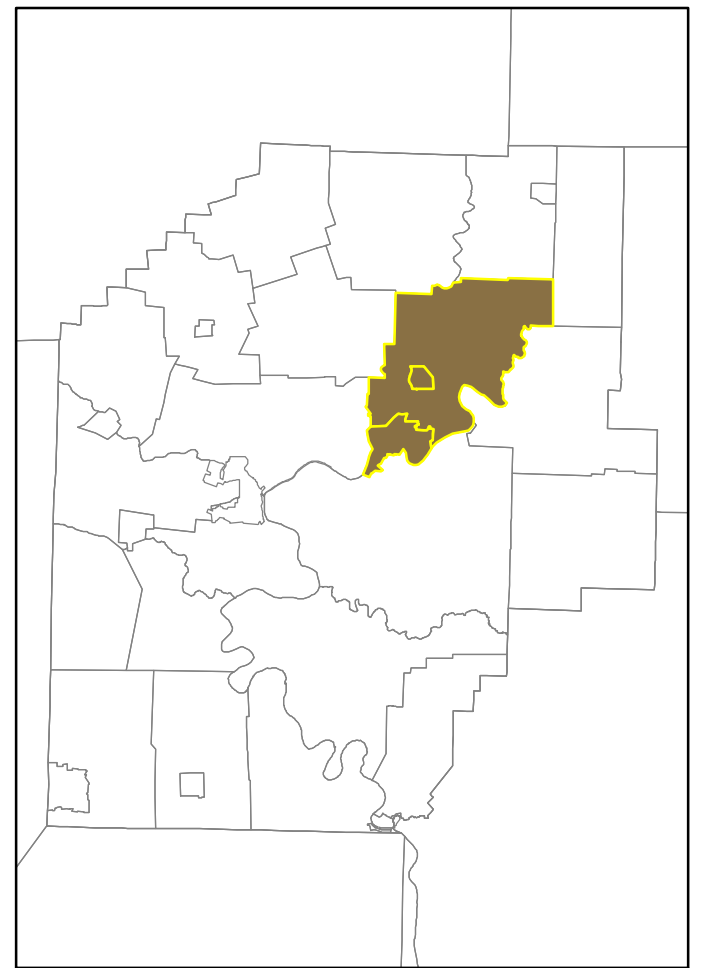
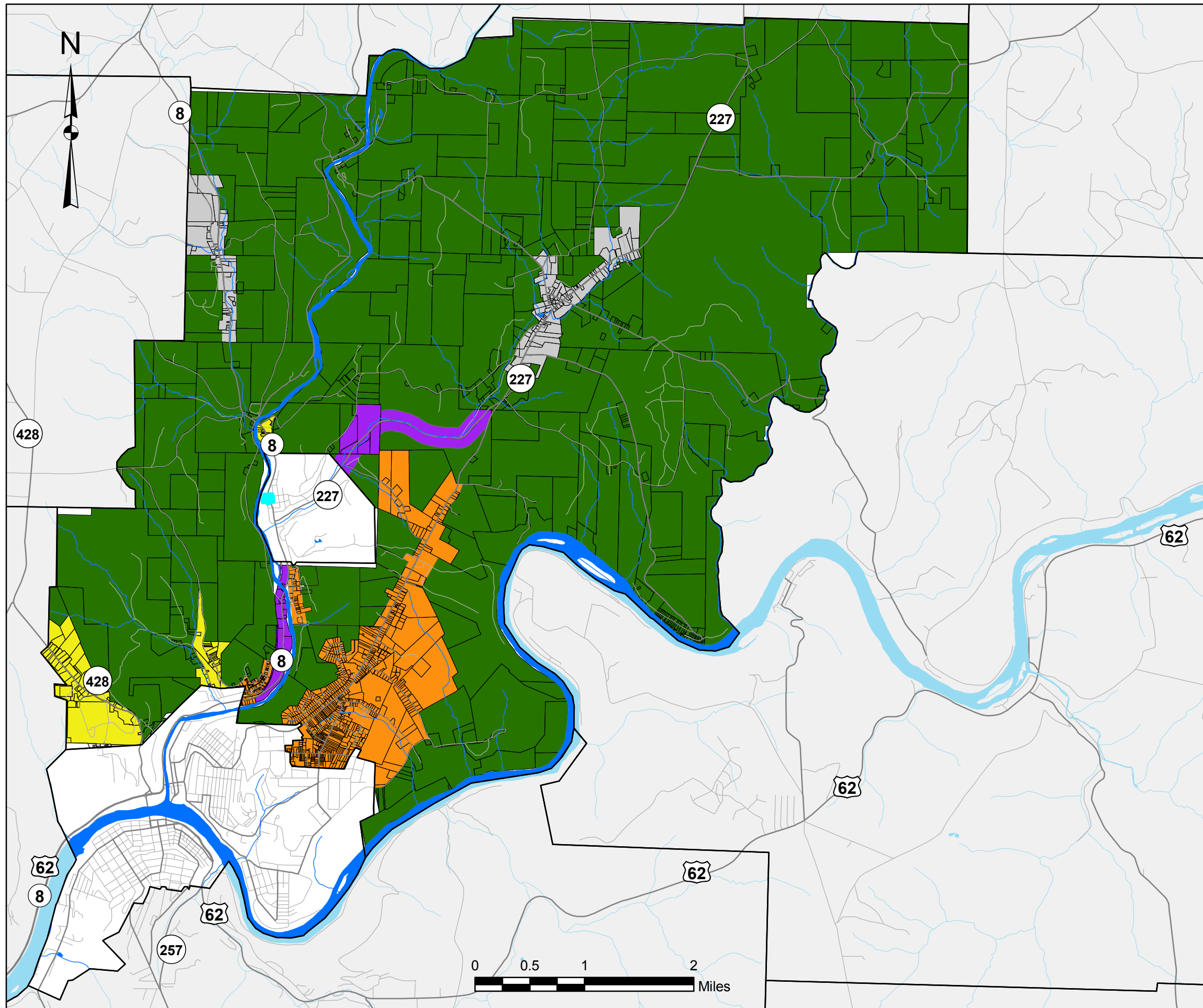
The great majority of historical assets are in State or ORA ownership, and they are important to Cornplanter Township. The Township supports the preservation and improvement of these valuable historical/tourist assets and looks to the ORA, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and DCNR to accomplish this goal.

### Land Use



As noted in the Background Report, much of Cornplanter is lightly settled, with extensive areas of publicly owned land (Oil Creek State Park, Game Land 253). Residential development is focused along Grandview, in Plumer Village, at Oleopolis, Kaneville; along Route 428; or scattered along Route 8. The remaining homes are in very low-density rural settings. Existing commercial/industrial uses are along Route 8 (south of Rouseville), with more limited activity along Route 227. Scattered cottage developments, such as Oleopolis, are found along the Allegheny River.

The Township has its own zoning ordinance, adopted in 1994, while relying on the County's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO). Continuous reliance on the County SALDO is recommended, given current development levels.



### Legend

- Conservation
- Industrial
- Village
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential

### Northern Venango County Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan Plan Map 1: Future Land Use Cornplanter Township

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), 1998, 2001 and 2008, U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2005, Venango County GIS, 2007  
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic, North American, 1983

A technical review of the Township’s zoning was completed as part of the Plan background activity. Although the recommendations cover some two-and-one-half pages, most were quite modest in nature. Detailed suggestions were prepared and reviewed with the Township’s Planning Commission.

### **Future Land Use Policies**

Based upon current economic conditions, limited growth is seen for Cornplanter over the next decade. The County Housing Market Report (2009) estimated new homes are constructed in Cornplanter at a rate of 5 to 6 per year. In the immediate future, this level of growth may decline, but, over the term of this Plan, it should rebound. This leads to the following recommendations:

- Traditional suburban residential, to the extent possible, should be in the Colonial Village, Horne Lane, and Rockwood areas where utility extensions (water and sewer) can be most easily accomplished. Given slope considerations, the areas east of Grandview are the most likely candidates. Much of the expected residential development over the next decade can be accommodated within the current “R” zoning districts.
- The existing development nodes of Clapp Farm, Kaneville, Plumer, and McClintockville will likely experience only limited infill development in the future. Both Clapp Farm and McClintockville will need housing rehabilitation actions to encourage such development.
- Low-density development—single, scattered homes on larger tracts—will likely be seen throughout Cornplanter and should follow past trends.
- Commercial and Industrial: Historically, these uses have been focused along Route 8 from the Oil City line, north, to the bridge over Route 8. This Plan believes that focus should remain. Much of this land was used for the Pennzoil Refinery. It is being reclaimed. However, FEMA is redrawing its flood maps (now in draft form) and much of this corridor may be designated as floodway. It must be noted that a small area just to the south of the McClintockville Bridge on Route 8 is zoned commercial; but due to scale, it is not visible on the maps in this report. Moreover, the Cornplanter zoning ordinance does allow some commercial uses in the Conservation District. Secondary potential industrial areas are along Route 227, just north of Moody Run Road. Currently, they are unsewered and best fit for low-intensity development. The 1992 Comprehensive Plan also identified a potential industrial development node east, on Route 227, just south of Pithole Road. Given the distance from utilities, its development is still likely years off.
- Second Home-Cottage Development: There is little doubt that a quality second-home development would be an attractive addition to the Township. The area across from Rockmere (Horse Creek) would be an excellent location. However, road access is an issue. Oak Grove Road and Horne Lane are the closest Township roads. There is a private road leading to the Allegheny River area. A second option would be the use of the abandoned Conrail right-of-way of Colbert Avenue in Oil City. If a second-home development is to become a reality, a well-financed developer is needed. A special seasonal home overlay district should be considered, likely as a TND zoning option. This approach would allow the Township to work with developers to achieve quality design standards.

- Some questions were posed relative to the Township’s zoning map. The Township’s solicitor should be consulted on this matter and, if necessary, the map readopted.

**Long-Term Land Use Recommendations**

- If major subdivisions such as Colonial Village are once more experienced in Cornplanter, the Township should consider adopting its own SALDO.
- Prepare/consider the following zoning actions:
  - Update the Mobile Home Standards in the zoning ordinance. Current Township zoning standards are inadequate for today’s mobile home units.
  - Prepare regulations to control development on steep slopes and riparian areas.
- Review the “C” Conservation Zone to determine its effectiveness, as intended.

**Transportation**

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, there are 74.5 miles of road in Cornplanter; 32.7 on the State system with 41.8 on the Township system. State roads are classified by function. Key roads are arterials and collectors. The primary roads in the Township are:

Road	Classification	Volume*
Route 8 (William Flynn Highway)	Rural Arterial	7,400-3,200
Route 227	Arterial	2,300-2,100
Grandview Road	Arterial	5,700-1,000
Route 428 (Halyday Run Road)	Collector	2,400
Oleopolis Road	Collector	150
Petroleum Center-Eagle Road	Collector	100-200
Pithole Road	Collector	150
*AADT – Annual Average Daily Traffic Source: PennDOT		

Based upon current traffic conditions, the arterial roads appear to have the theoretical capacity to handle expected traffic flows.

In addition to its highway system, there are also two rail companies in the Township. Between Rynd Farm and Titusville, a single line is shared by a tourist rail operation (OC&TRR) and the freight “short line” (OCTL). The former is a seasonal tourist operation; the latter is a short line hauling hardwoods, plastic resins, petroleum wax, and fertilizer. Physically, the OCTL interconnects with the WNYP railroad at Rynd Farm. No current rail customers are known in the Township; however, the potential for these customers exists, especially along the Route 8 corridor from Rouseville south to Oil City.

**Recommendations**

Following are a series of transportation recommendations for Cornplanter Township. *Please Note: The bikeway project is being addressed in a separate Plan element. See Map 9, Transportation Plan, following Page 41.*

As reported in the Background section, highway projects are governed by a federal, state, regional, county, or local process which results in both a long-range plan and a short-term action element, the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). This element of the transportation recommendations will focus on projects already in the “TIP.”

- Waitz Road Bridge and McClintock Bridge on Route 8: Due to their proximity, PennDOT is planning to bid these two structures together. The Township’s concern is that Waitz Road is a logical alternative to Route 8 for local traffic. If bid together, construction should be staged so one bridge remains open at all times. At this time, PennDOT understands that concern. Construction is slated for 2012.
- Sportsman Curve on Route 8: This is a vital part of the overall Route 8 “North” improvement scheme and must remain a regional priority. Currently, the TIP lists this project over a three-year period for needed reviews and design. Construction is estimated in the 2011-2018 period.
- Route 8 – Bridge over Cornplanter Run: Scheduled for 2010-2011.
- Route 227 – Cherry Hill Bridge: Bid 2009. Due to school bus issues, it should be a 2010 summer project (started and completed in 2010.)
- Petroleum Center Bridge (SR 1004): Design is scheduled for 2011.

**Safety Concerns:** The following areas were listed with a “High” crash rating by PennDOT and consequently are a continuing concern:

- Route 8, north of Rynd Farm\*
- Route 428, Route 8 to Lawrence Drive\*

In addition, the following areas have been identified by local officials as areas of safety concern:

- Grandview: The road has been identified locally and by PennDOT data (medium accident rating) as a safety concern. The entire length from Route 227 into Oil City should be examined for alignment and sight distance. Volume counts are also recommended. Special attention must be paid to the area near the Cornplanter Volunteer Fire Department, the Hasson Heights Elementary School, the Golden Living Nursing Home, Moody Run Road, and the Route 227 intersection. Due to terrain and curves, this road has earned a bad reputation with local motorists. Standard sight distance criteria, such as the AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) guidelines, should be used for safety evaluations in the study.\*



- Rattlesnake Curve, Route 227, and Old Warren/Russell’s Corners Roads\*
- Water Trough Curve-Route 227, near the Grandview Road intersection.\*

*\*These projects are to be presented to the Venango County Planning Commission and the “RPO” (Northwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission) as safety or corridor projects.*

**Local Road Projects**

These are the Township projects:

- Harper Road Bridge (T589)
- Old Bankson Road – pave from Route 8 to Coal Oil Johnny’s house
- Gaugh Road – pave (estimate 620 feet)

**Transit**

Currently, the VenanGo bus has a route on Grandview, with the Golden Living Nursing Home as the turnaround point. Presently, there is no service to Rouseville. Given the financial status of transit in Pennsylvania, any service expansion would be difficult to realize. However, if possible, a “loop” via Route 8 into Rouseville and a return via Moody Road should be a common goal of the two communities that would add only a few miles to the current route system. In the longer term, service to Plumer should be considered, especially if the Rouseville loop is successful.

**Sidewalks**

In the 1992 Plan, a sidewalk program was recommended around the Hasson Heights Elementary School. This Plan concurs that sidewalks in the Hillcrest, Fairview, Oak Road, and Grandview areas make sense, as do sidewalks in the Colonial Village area. As a first step, an informal liaison with the school is needed to determine potential student use. In addition to the use, issues with traffic safety are a concern. Any crossing of Grandview by school children must pay close attention to the traffic concerns previously noted.

**Housing**

There is detailed background information on housing, both in the general Background Report as well as the special housing report produced by the County. These reports show a modest decline in housing count from 1990 to 2000, per the Census. But, new housing starts in the past decade were estimated at 5 to 6 annually. This brings the accuracy of the Census housing figures into question.

**The housing quality in Cornplanter was judged good— with the Colonel Village area identified as one of bright spots of the Venango County housing market.**

Overall, the housing quality in Cornplanter was judged as good, with the exception of two pockets of problem homes. In fact, the Colonial Village area is identified as one of the bright spots of the Venango County housing market. Census data from 2000 indicates the estimated value of owner-occupied homes at \$64,100 (median) was the highest within the three study communities.



In Cornplanter, about 90% of the housing is single family, with the next largest category mobile homes (8.7%). In all, less than 3% of the housing stock is some type of multiple-family unit.

The Township has adopted the International Property Maintenance Code and uses the Oil City Code Officer for enforcement. It consequently has the legal power to remediate problem homes.

## **Recommendations**

Consistent with the Land Use Plan, housing development should be encouraged, primarily in the Colonial Village-Hasson Heights area, where water and sewer services are reasonably available.

Though the Township's problem homes are proportionally a small percentage of its total housing stock, remedial action is warranted. This Plan recommends the Township institute a housing "rehab" and intense code enforcement program. Ideally, the Township could partner with Oil City or Venango County in such a program. It is further recommended that the Clapp Farm area be the first priority of this program and McClintockville Village the second priority. A goal of 20 to 25 "rehabbed" units should be set.

## **Protection of Natural Resources**

Most of the threats to the environment focus on mineral extraction. Given the history of the area, gas and oil extraction are likely conflict points. According to online records, DEP had issued 108 drilling rig permits for 2009 in Venango County (up to 10/09). Two were issued in Cornplanter. This activity is under DEP control. Generally, Cornplanter can only monitor activities. However, there are also other concerns in the Township—areas where the Township can act. These include protection of steep slopes, wetlands, and riparian areas via zoning regulations.

## **Recommendations**

- Monitor well drilling activity. (*Note: Rig permit data is available by way of the DEP website.*)
- Support the ongoing oil well plugging program at the Oil Creek State Park.
- Review Section 412 of the current Township zoning ordinance re: steep slopes.\*
- Consider the adoption of riparian regulations in the Township zoning ordinance (stream setbacks usually depend on slope characteristics).\*
- If Marcellus Shale exploration appears likely, the zoning ordinance should be amended to require larger lots, provide for isolation distances of any processing structure, and protect Township roads from heavy equipment.

*\*Both the American Planning Association and DEP provide guidelines for such regulations.*

## **Community Facilities and Services**

### **Community Services**

One of the most important community services is public safety. In Cornplanter Township, that is the Cornplanter Township Volunteer Fire Department. This is an active, vital service. They are constructing a new fire station at the current site. In addition, since July of 2010, they now have ambulance service.

## Recommendations

- **Public Safety:** Continue the Township's current financial support of this service. Further, it should assist the Department in its construction of a new fire station.\* The new station is currently planned just north of the current facility on Grandview. However, final funding has not yet been finalized.
- **Library:** Cornplanter has long been a financial supporter of the Oil City Library. This Plan recommends that support be continued.\*
- **Parks and Recreation:** The Oil Creek State Park is a valuable asset to Cornplanter Township. Its trails, picnic and play areas provide local residents with recreational resources that would typically be a municipal activity. Continued support and cooperation with that entity is this Plan's policy. Of special interest is Cornplanter's continued support to complete the bike trail in the park from Petroleum Center to Rynd Farm.\* The section from Waitz Road at the McClintock well site, south to Oil City, is scheduled for construction in 2011. Trailheads are planned at Rynd Farm and the McClintock oil well sites.
- **Township Building:** The Township Building is the former Plumer Elementary School. Overall, the building is sound but will benefit from ongoing improvements and maintenance.

*\*High priorities*

## Water and Sewer Facilities

These facilities are the key to maintain current development and attracting new residential, commercial, and industrial development. Currently, the Township has sewage collection systems and water distribution systems. Sewage treatment is provided by Oil City and water is supplied by both Rouseville Borough and Oil City (see Background Report for details).

This Plan has two sets of recommendations. The short-term recommendation is for the next five-plus years. The medium long-term sections are for longer-range activities.

**Short Term:** Projects proposed under this scenario will start in 2011 and expected to be completed in 2012. All short-term projects will rely on Oil City for water supply or sanitary sewage treatment.

### High-Priority Projects

- **Water:** Route 8 corridor (Oil City line to Waitz Road) – estimated cost \$1.5 million. This project services the Township's prime economic development corridor.
- **Sewer:** The industrial corridor from the Oil City line to Waitz Run along Route 8 – cost \$1.4 million.\*
- **McClintockville:** This will be a combination of gravity, force main, stream crossing (Oil Creek) project servicing the Village of McClintockville – \$576,000.

- Clapp Farm: Gravity flow collection system to service this 1895 subdivision – \$1.1 million.\*

*\*Combined projects*

### **Medium-Range Projects\***

- Plumer: A small flow facility for three users – Cost – \$94,900.

*\*Act 537 projects*

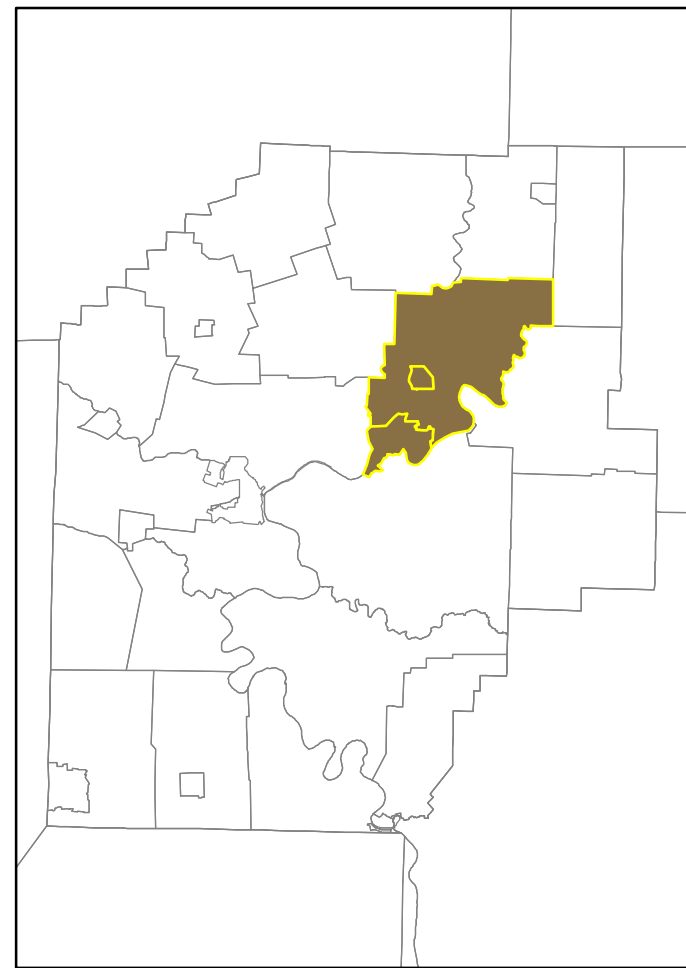
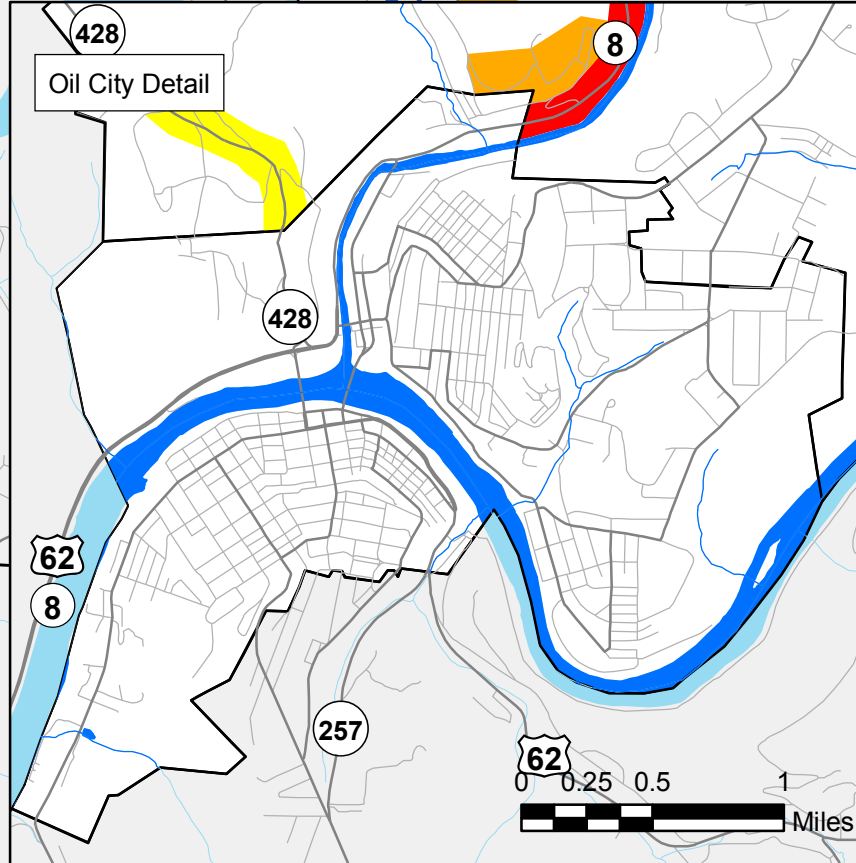
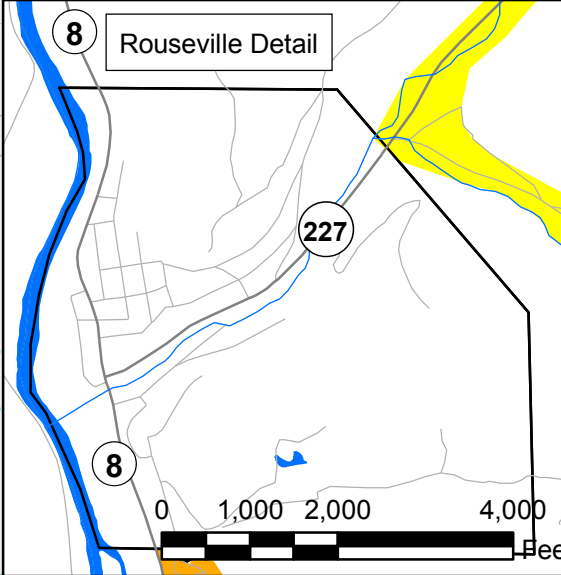
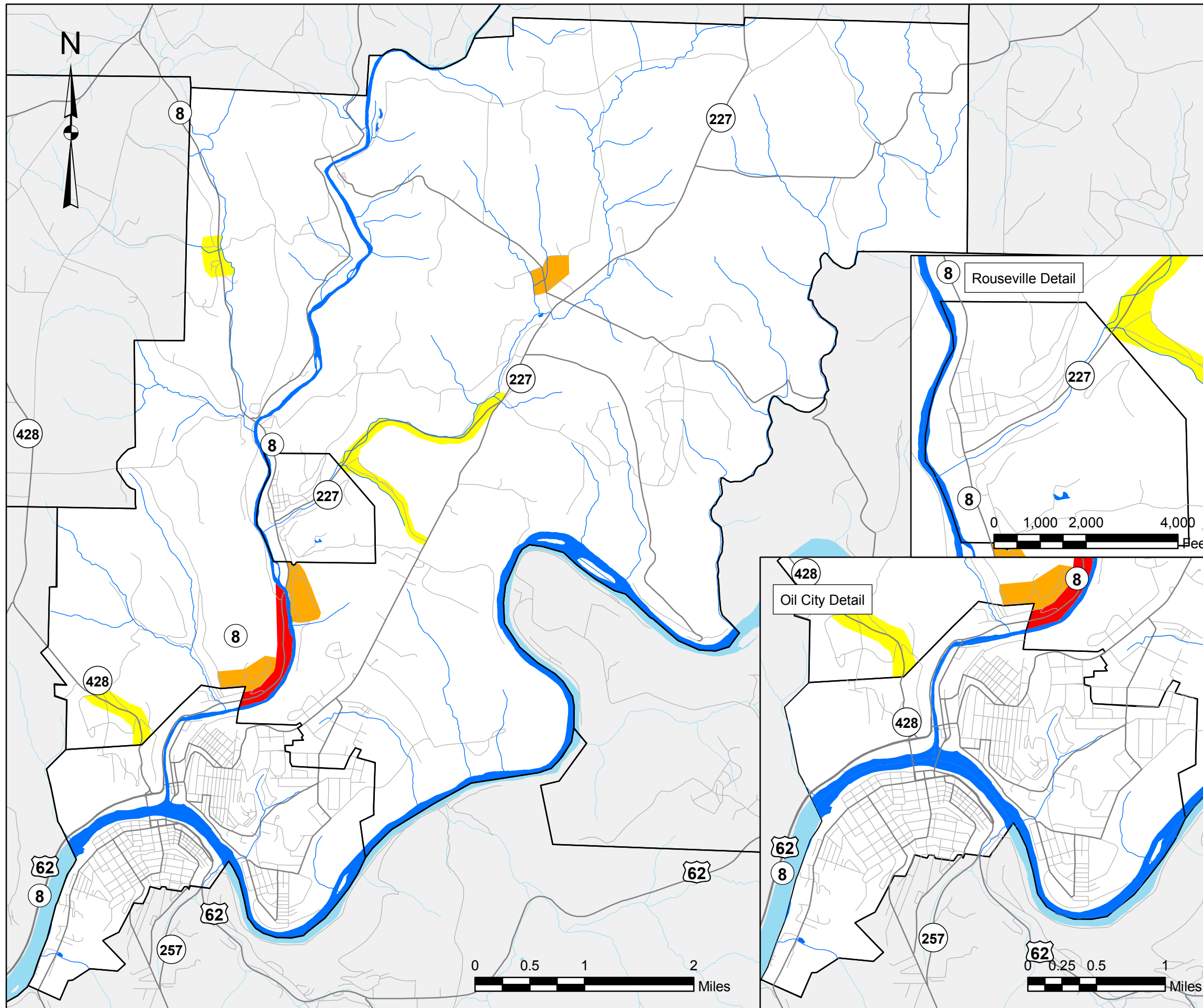
It is expected there will be relatively short extensions to developments off Grandview Road in the Colonial Village-Horne Lane-Rockwood-Hasson Heights area. No cost estimates are available. These extensions should primarily be funded by developers.

### **Medium- to Long-Range Projects**

- Halyday Run Road: Essentially residential, sewer
- Moody Run Road: Residential, water and sewer
- Route 227 Industrial Corridor: Moody Run Road to the Masonic Hall (sewer)
- Plumer: Essentially residential (sewer)
- Kaneville: Essentially residential (water and sewer)
- Rynd Farm: Water and sewer

### **Summary**

With few exceptions, Cornplanter is a very pleasant suburban/rural community. If its pockets of problem housing are remediated and new commercial/industrial development constructed along Route 8, the community should continue to thrive as an attractive place to live, with an improving tax base.



**Legend**

- High Priority Water and Sewer Projects
- Medium Priority Water and Sewer Projects
- Long Range Water and Sewer Projects

**Northern Venango County  
Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan  
Plan Map 2: Future Corplanter Water  
and Sewer Infrastructure Priorities**

Source: Pennsylvanian Department of Transportation (PennDOT), 1998, 2001 and 2008, U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2005, Venango County GIS, 2007  
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic, North American, 1983

# City of Oil City

## Introduction

Of the three municipalities, in many ways, Oil City presents both the greatest opportunities as well as the greatest problems. Yet, the good news is that there is no reason why Oil City cannot achieve the goals set forth in this Plan. However, to do so, it needs one important resource—its people. It is absolutely imperative for this Plan to have the full backing of the citizens if this is to succeed.

The Plan for each individual municipality has particular emphasis. So, it is for Oil

**The two elements of emphasis for Oil City are housing and economic development.**

City. The two

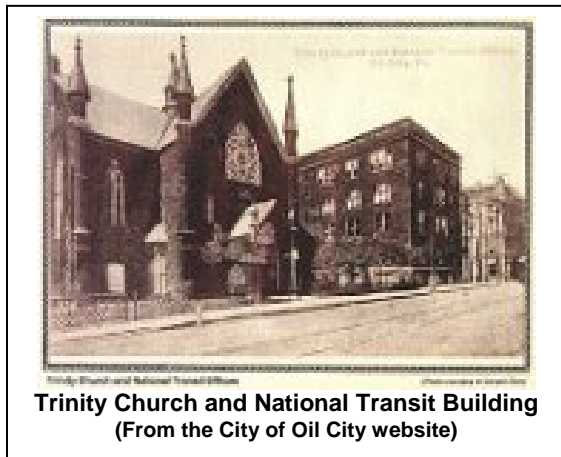
elements of emphasis for Oil City are housing and economic development. Economic development in this context is more than the traditional concept. It also includes both tourism and the ARTS program.



## Historic Preservation

Currently, there are some 497 acres of Oil City that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This translates to about 17% of its entire land mass. This situation is both a benefit and a practical problem.

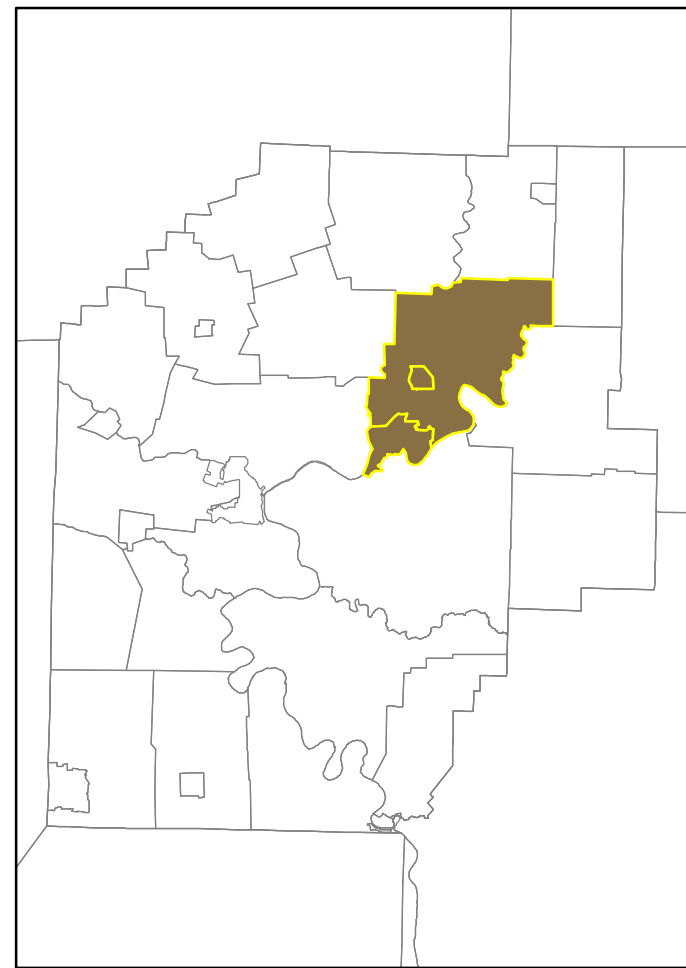
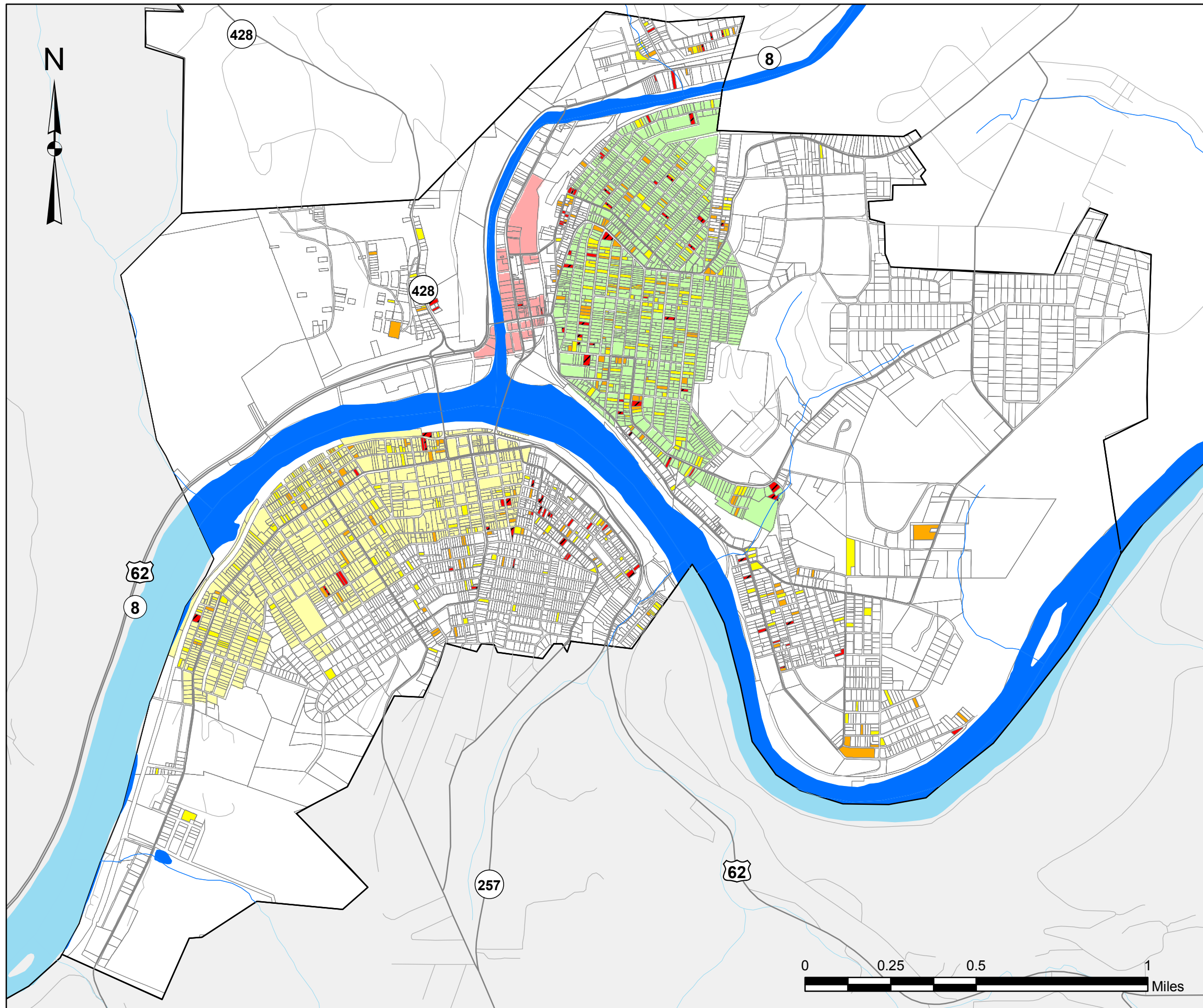
It is a benefit to help preserve elements of the past that have significance to the community. Such assets as the National Transit complex, the Oil City Library, the Trinity Church, and Christ



Episcopal Church are all structures of special merit and certainly deserve protection, as do many others. For commercial structures within these areas, there are potential additional benefits—Federal tax credits. The rehabilitation of commercial properties that follow proper guidelines (see the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission website) can receive up to 20% tax credit from the Internal Revenue Service.

However, the sheer size of the three historic districts has created a problem. For example, on the “North Side,” there are over 1,100 structures included in the inventory. The great majority of

these homes were built as inexpensive worker housing, constructed on small lots. They were frame construction, lacking modern insulation, double-pane windows, etc. Many of these homes



**Legend**

**Housing Rehabilitation Needs**

- Parcels Not Deemed To Have Housing Deficiencies
- Minor Rehabilitation Needed - 250 Units
- Major Rehabilitation Needed - 153 Units
- Demolition Recommended By Consultant - 20 Units
- Condemned By The City of Oil City - 68 Units

**Historic Districts**

- Downtown Commercial
- Northside
- Southside

**Northern Venango County  
Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan  
Plan Map 3: Oil City Housing  
Conditions With Historic Districts**

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), 1998, 2001 and 2008, U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2005, Venango County GIS, 2007  
 Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic, North American, 1983

are now over 100 years old. Most lack the design cachet of popular Victorian architecture. It is from historic neighborhoods that many of the City's problem homes are located (see Housing section). In addition, this is an area identified in the County Housing Study as a very weak market.

These generally are also "LMI" neighborhoods. LMI is an acronym which indicates households are determined to be income eligible for certain Federal assistance. Specifically, grant funds under Federal programs—CDBG and HOME. Yet, due to the age of the structures and the fact that they are listed historic resources, efforts to rehabilitate or demolish them can, and do, create a bureaucratic nightmare. To demolish a home that is a blighting influence requires letters, documentation, and delay.

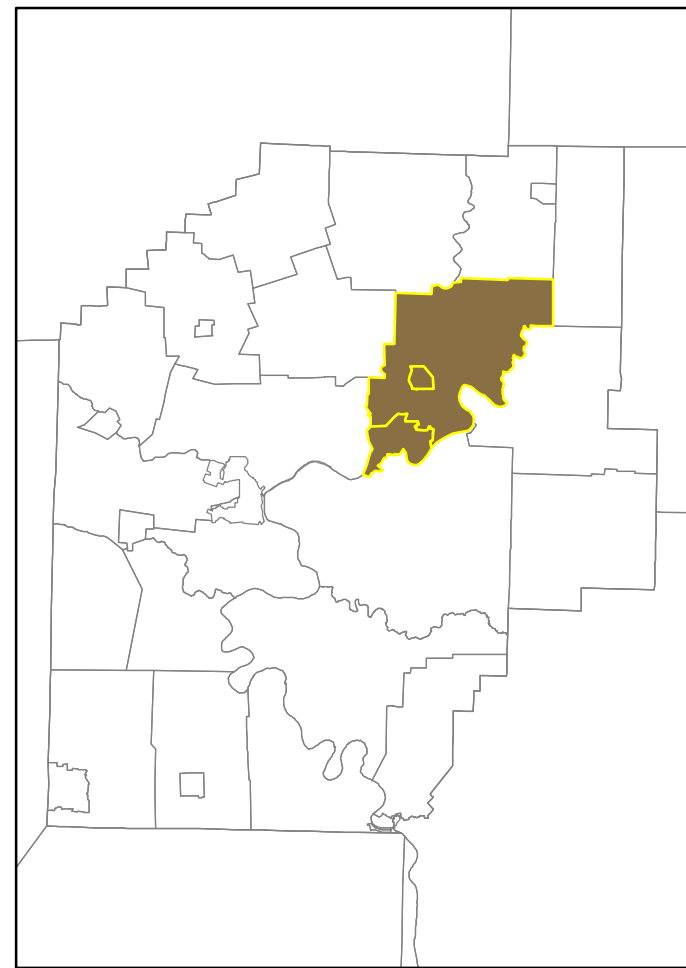
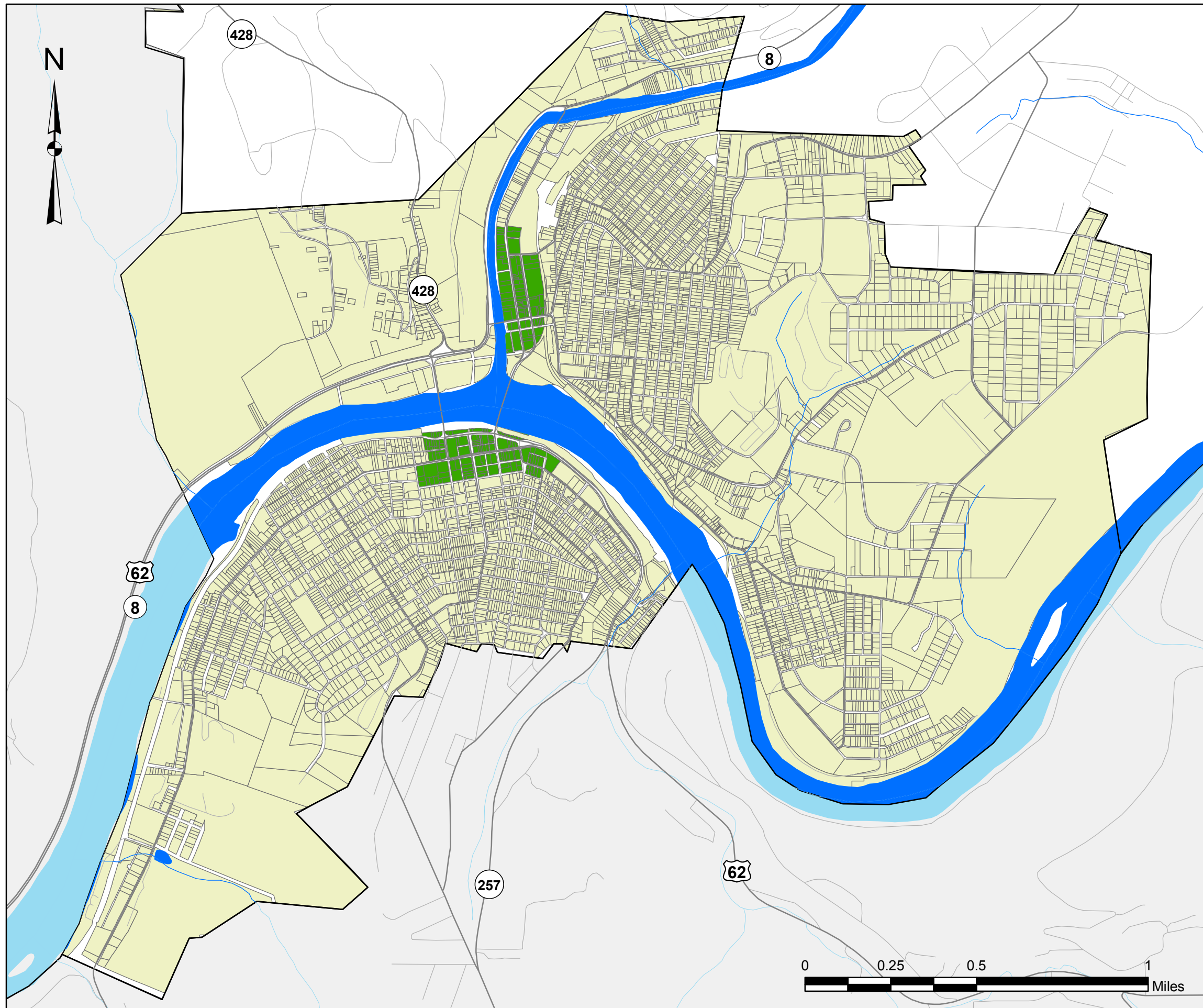
The real-world dilemma is how to protect legitimate historic resources and, yet, facilitate the removal of blighted structures is critical to this Plan. The recommendations in this Plan element recognize the following facts and analysis:

- In the Venango County Housing Study, it clearly states there is an over supply of housing (5,312 units) for lower-income families in the County.
- Oil City is in a cluster of the poorest-ranked housing markets (especially the North Side).
- According to a 2009 housing survey, there were an estimated 550 to 560 housing units in Oil City that were judged deteriorated or dilapidated.
- Some 62% of all identified substandard homes in Oil City are in registered historic districts.

Obviously, something must be done to facilitate Oil City's efforts to demolish or rehabilitate its problem homes within the context of responsible historic preservation.

The following actions are recommended:

- Extend the LERTA tax abatement in the Downtown areas (both North and South sides) to encourage reinvestment from five to ten years.
- The Resource Inventory for the three historic districts should be "vetted" and any truly significant historic structures placed on a special "watch list." This arrangement is needed to protect valuable historic resources. It is further recommended that historically minded citizens be "drafted" to participate in this process as a cost-saving measure.
- In order to facilitate the demolition of unsafe structures or the rehabilitation of homes, a "historic mitigation agreement" is a must between Oil City and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), which administers the key Federal CDBG and HOME programs. There are various actions which could be offered to facilitate this mitigation agreement. One would be the creation of a "model" Polish immigrant home tied to the "Assumption" Church on Pulaski Street.
- Sell the tax-credit concept. One of the reasons for the original historic district initiative was to generate tax credits. Has it been used? Since 1976, in Pennsylvania, nearly 2,200



**Legend**

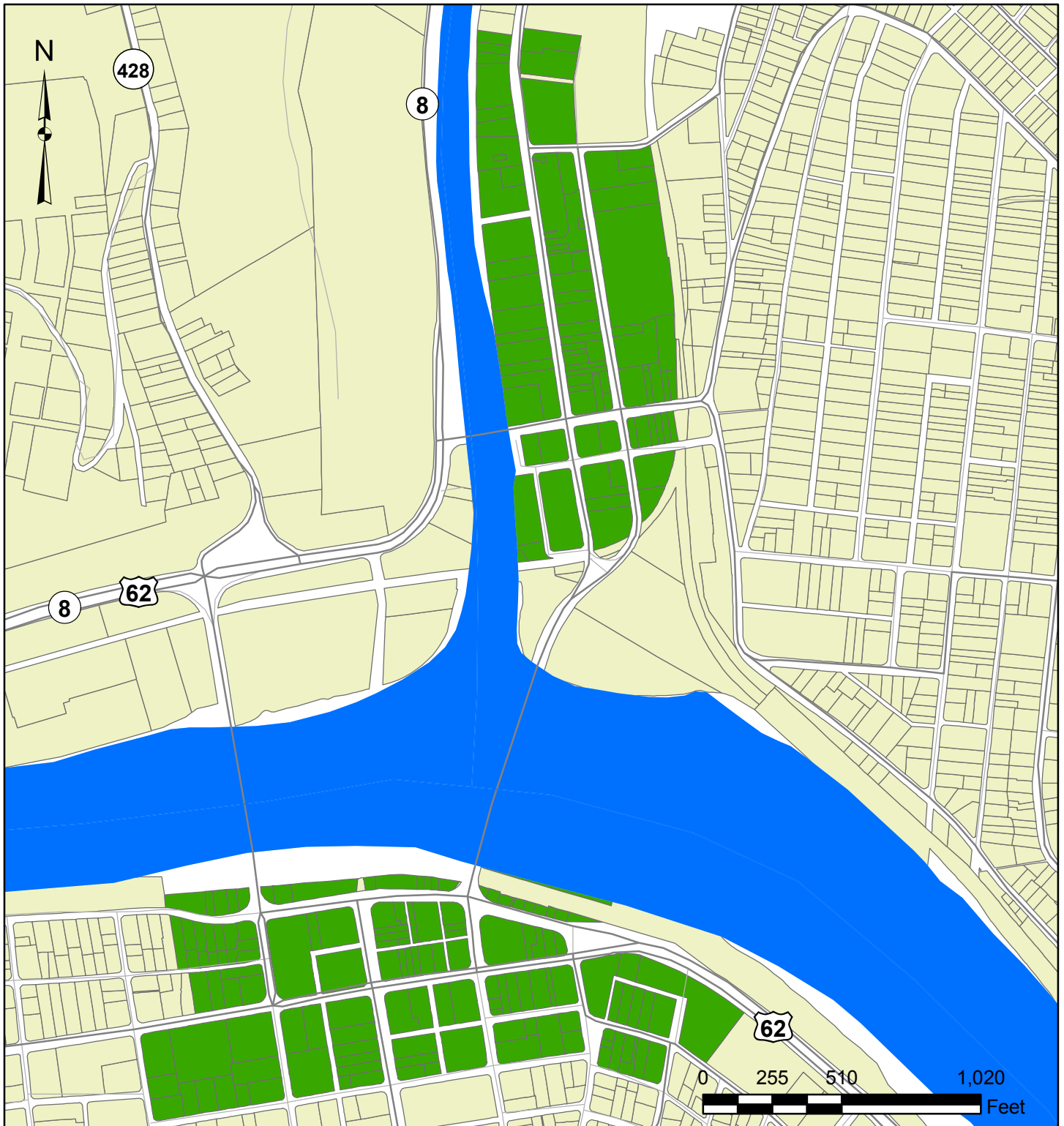
 Special LERTA Areas


**Northern Venango County  
Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan  
Plan Map 4: Special LERTA  
Districts, Oil City**

Source: Pennsylvanian Department of Transportation (PennDOT), 1998, 2001 and 2008, U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2005, Venango County GIS, 2007  
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic, North American, 1983







 Special LERTA Areas

## Northern Venango County Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan Plan Map 4A: Special LERTA Districts, Oil City Detail

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), 1998, 2001 and 2008, U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2005, Venango County GIS, 2007, Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic, North American, 1983

tax-credit projects have been approved, generating \$3.9 billion in activity. Oil City entrepreneurs should explore this option. A tax-credit workshop is a good idea.



Pennsylvania Historical  
& Museum Commission



pennsylvania PA

The historic issues certainly go beyond programs to improve the City's housing stock; however, once more, the size and diversity of the

historic district create a problem. In all three areas, the really significant historic resources are not necessarily of a single architectural style. This fact was noted in the 1996 application for the Downtown District. Essentially, it means that a traditional historic zoning district tied to a single design style may not be feasible.

From a practical standpoint, detailed design control presents a second problem—the housing market. If strict historic standards are put in place to govern either new construction or rehabilitation, will the market absorb such costs? Generally, and especially on the North Side, the housing market is identified as poor; and it is quite likely stringent design controls will be seen as another negative.

It is this Plan's further recommendation that the City identify areas within its three historic districts, which merit protection and are reasonable in size. TND (Traditional Neighborhood Development) sections in the zoning ordinance can be developed along with general design guidelines to protect such resources. These guidelines should focus on the traditional values; see the *Fundamentals of Urban Design*\*:

- Building silhouettes, as compared to neighboring structures (essentially height).
- The primary facade plane.
- General characteristics of windows and doors.
- Building height relative to the distance between opposite building facades (primarily for commercial areas).
- If there is a dominant architectural style, it could be part of the standards.
- A simple compilation of acceptable and unacceptable design as shown via digital photographs is one quick and inexpensive way to develop a design manual. Simply put, in the context of a neighborhood, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable? A ranch home in a Victorian area is clearly not acceptable.

\**Fundamentals of Urban Design*, Hedman and Jaszewski (1984 Planners Press), and *The Small Town Planning Handbook*, Third Edition (2007, American Planning Association), pages 301 through 333, in particular.

The goal of such regulations must be a balance between the community's need for design input with the realities of the marketplace. The use of special zoning districts should not be limited to primarily commercial uses. Selected corridors, especially along West 1<sup>st</sup> Street and East Bissell Avenue, are also visually important. One further neighborhood that deserves special consideration is delineated by the "South Side Walking Tour" brochure.

## Housing Plan

**Oil City's housing issues are one of the centerpieces of this Comprehensive Plan.**

Oil City's housing issues are one of the centerpieces of this Comprehensive Plan. In analyzing the background element of this Plan, three basic issues emerge. First, the extent and number of problem homes. Second, a generally weak housing market—

which, if the County's Market Study is read—is partially due to an oversupply of homes. Third, a lack of options for older residents (those aged 55 and over). Based on these issues, there are several goals to consider. The goals are presented below and given code designations to relate to proposed actions:

- Remove blighting influences; demolish dilapidated structures; rehabilitate deteriorated homes; rigorously enforce the Property Maintenance Code. Make the housing stock a community asset. Code B
- Create a positive real estate market environment so homes can be bought and sold at reasonable values. Code M
- Promote condo, townhouse, or apartment options for the aged 55-plus market. Code 55
- Deal positively and innovatively with the Tax Title "Repository" properties. Code R
- Clearly identify corridors and neighborhoods for priority action consideration. Consider priorities based upon a total neighborhood evaluation. Certainly, dangerous structures must be eliminated, regardless of their location. But, given the limited funds normally available, consider upgrading units before blight has spread, as well as areas with a preponderance of problem homes. Code PR



How can these goals be achieved? It will not be easy. Rather than a narrative litany, this Plan presents a "Toolbox" of options which is coded to the above-stated goals. If these goals are acceptable, and the tools are appropriate, numbers of units are then needed. These numbers must be tied to realistic budget figures. Generally, these tools are grouped by function; but, there is overlap, and, there are connections.

### The Housing Toolbox

#### Codes and Regulations

- **Code Enforcement:** The International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC), the Rental Housing Ordinance, and the Uniform Construction Code all fall under this heading. All are important; yet, the IPMC deserves special support. A liaison between the Code Officer and the housing rehabilitation program is needed. Where income-eligible persons (especially retired or disabled) live in a code violation unit, some priority in the "rehab" program is recommended. As part of the Code program, the Rental Inspection program is

key element. This Plan recommends that Oil City, like other western Pennsylvania municipalities, charge a modest fee for inspection rental units. Also, a second full-time Code Officer is needed for the foreseeable future. **The fees generated by the rental unit inspections should be used to offset the salary of the second code officer.** Code B, Code M

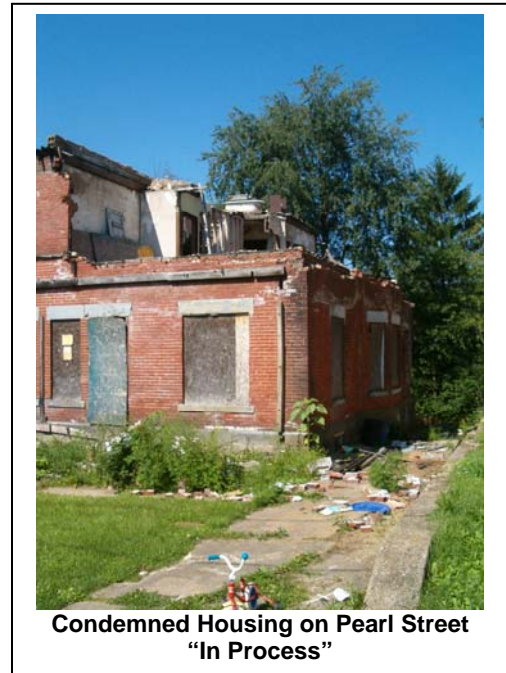
As part of the Code program, the IPMC Section 107.5 should be enforced upon all sales, including tax-title properties. This requires that the new owners of properties with code violations be notified of these violations and acknowledge them.

- Zoning: There are two zoning initiatives which can be easily accomplished and will require only minimal expense. Their purpose is to discourage the unneeded crowding of structures on small lots. The first priority must be to “downzone” significant areas of the City to a “single-family” designation. Some areas can simply revert to R-1; other sectors will need a new R-1 District. The downsizing initiative will need additional and close scrutiny by both the Oil City Planning Commission and City Council. On the South Side, many of the parcels now zoned R-2 could be downsized, using the current R-2 lot size (5,000 square feet) and yard configurations, but R-1 use patterns. However, on the North Side, the downsizing of lots becomes more difficult. For example, lots off Cornplanter Avenue and Gay Street are nominally 37 feet by 120 feet, or 4,440 square feet. A sampling of areas will be necessary to determine if two separate “down zones” are needed, or a single zone, perhaps at 4,400 square feet is best. Regardless of the approach used, a two-family dwelling should require at least 6,000 square feet of lot area. Once more, it is important to emphasize the strategy is to stabilize residential neighborhoods and prevent overcrowding. (See the Future Land Use Map)

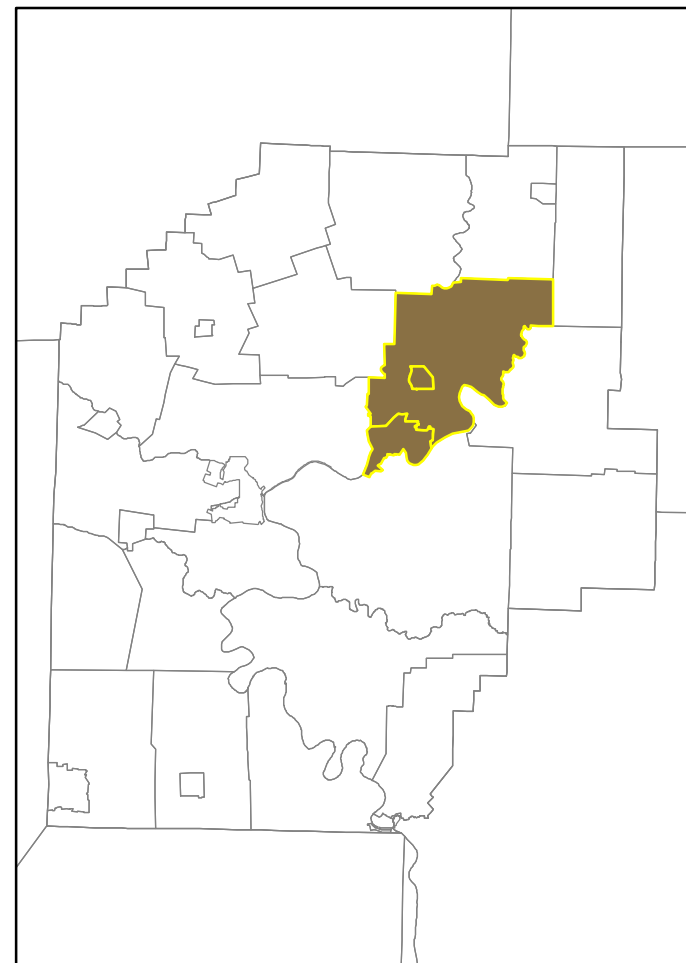
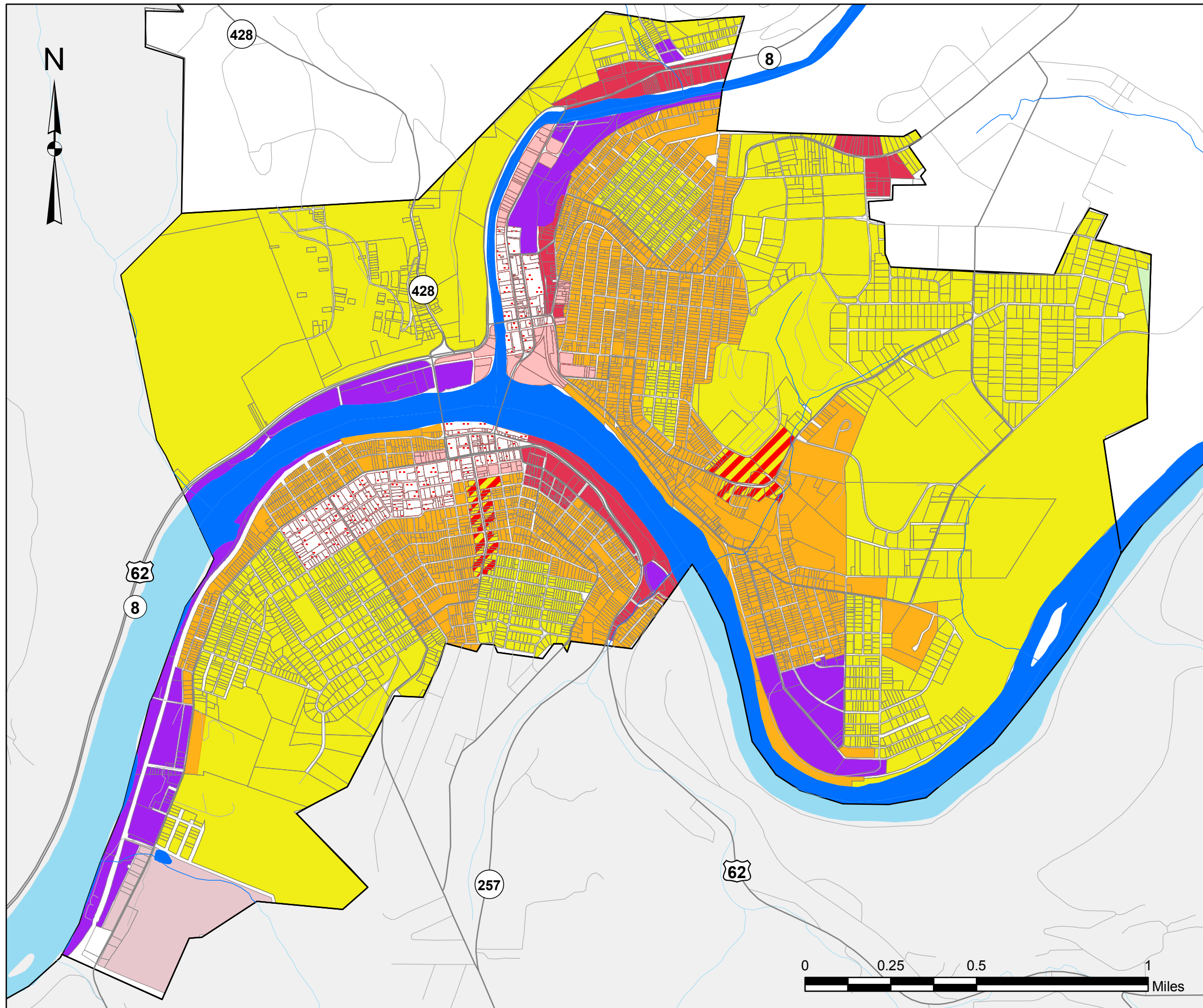
**The first priority must be to “downzone” significant areas of the City to a “single-family” designation.**

The second zoning tool would be the creation of Traditional Neighborhood Development districts. This device allows for innovation, use variations, and design control. This Plan recommends **simple** design controls. Controls driven by current neighborhood development—not a formal architectural pattern book. In a straightforward manner, it could accomplish the goals of this Plan. To study this option in more detail, please see Article VIII-A of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. The TND option allows both innovation and flexibility in keeping with some prior zoning initiatives of the City. (See above comments on “TNDs” in the Historic Preservation section.) Code B, Code M

(See the “Proposed Zoning Map” for possible TND districts.)



**Condemned Housing on Pearl Street  
“In Process”**



**Legend**

- Commercial
- Downtown Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- Residential Limited Business
- Traditional Neighborhood Development

**Northern Venango County  
Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan  
Plan Map 5: Future Land Use  
Oil City**

Source: Pennsylvanian Department of Transportation (PennDOT), 1998, 2001 and 2008, U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2005, Venango County GIS, 2007  
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic, North American, 1983

- Demolition: Based upon the 2009 Housing Survey and the 2009 list of condemned properties, there were 88 properties identified as dilapidated/condemned. A review of the condemned list is now underway by the City Code Office and a new one not yet published. A goal of 10 properties per year for demolition should be set. Priorities should be set relative to:
  - Public safety – condition of unit, proximity to neighboring structures
  - Appearance – visual appearance of unit
  - Location – impact on the neighborhood

#### Code B

- Housing Rehabilitation Programs: The 2009 Housing Survey identified approximately 550 problem units. If Venango County had been awarded Federal NSP2 funds, much of the City’s problem homes would have been rehabilitated. However, this did not occur. Consequently, reliance must turn to the traditional source—the HOME program. Using this limited funding, the City has hard choices to make. At best, the HOME program could be counted on for 10 to 20 homes per year. Depending on a variety of factors (eligibility, ownership, staff capacity), it would take over 25 years to address current needs, using that program alone. This means the City will not have the resources to resolve the housing problem with current resources. The following set of program priorities are appropriate:
  - Set aside funds for 1 or 2 units for Code Officer hardship referrals.
  - Set aside funds for 1 or 2 units for other hardship cases.
  - Use about 70% of the funds on a **targeted housing rehabilitation program** (see next entry).

Introduce “appearance” rehabilitation. Often, the improvement of a home’s appearance can generate similar private activity in neighboring homes.

Finally, the City’s priority system and “appearance rehab” must be sold to the State’s Department of Community and Economic Development.

In addition to the HOME program, the USDA does offer a grant-loan program. The USDA 502 and 504 programs are geared for low-income homeowners. A 33-year, 1% loan is available (up to \$20,000), with some grants to those over 62 (up to \$7,500). The programs operate directly between the USDA (Meadville, Pennsylvania office) and the homeowner. It is a useful option for Oil City “rehab” applicants who cannot be covered by the HOME grant.

Finally, there are programs available from the Pennsylvania Finance Housing Agency (PHFA). Generally, they have low fees and interest rates. PHFA programs are also more accessible to middle-income persons than those of HUD or the USDA. However, they are *loan* programs—some supplement other governmental programs—others direct loans. Among the potential benefit is reduced mortgage insurance costs and other “front-in” fees. In addition, PHFA has a variety of programs available to homeowners, especially to assist in energy efficiency. Code B, Code M

- The Oil City Targeted Housing Rehabilitation Program Guidelines:

Neighborhood Preservation: Given the scope of the need, *there are not enough* grant funds to help everyone in need. Recognizing this, the City must prioritize neighborhoods, realizing that blight spreads. In a transparent process, the City should be divided into a three-tier priority system. Essentially, sound neighborhoods with only a few problem units would be in Tier I—the first priority. Tier I would also include areas with high-profile visual impact. This includes high-volume road corridors heavily used by visitors to the City. Tier II would consist of areas where deterioration is more evident but not pervasive. Tier III would be areas where problem units are abundant. See the Housing “Rehab” Priority Map. *Note: These priorities are from those funds administered by the City.* Code B, Code M

Suggested Corridor Priorities:

- A. Harriott from Spring to Bissell\*
- B. East Bissell from Harriott to Forest Place\*
- C. West 1<sup>st</sup> from Petroleum to Mayer
- D. The Colbert Avenue area, as set forth by the Waterways Study

*\*Identified, as they are gateways to the VTC and the Oil City High School complexes.*

Code PR

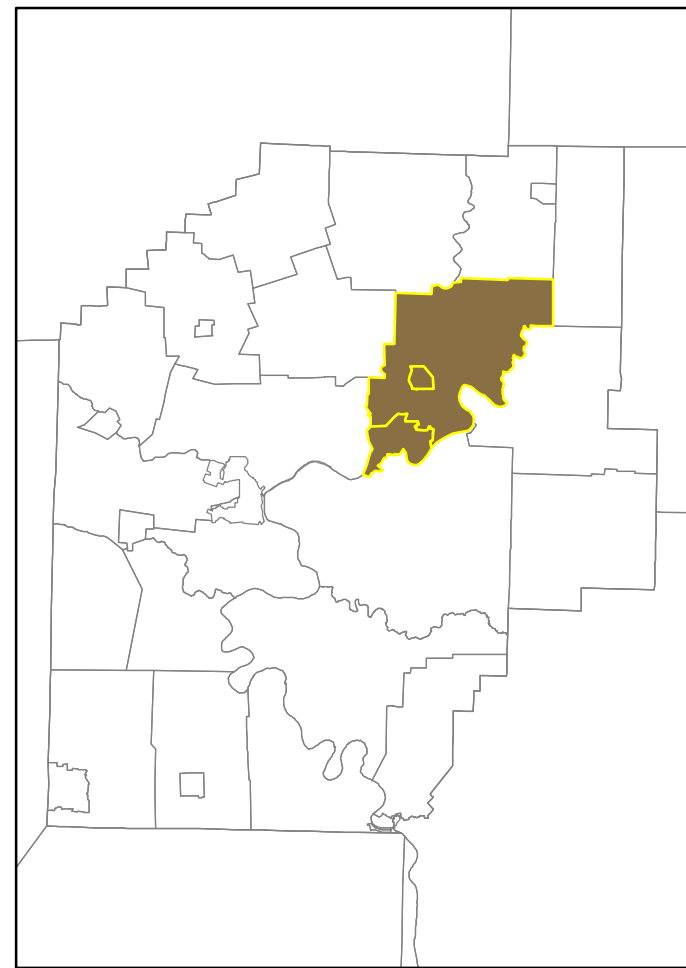
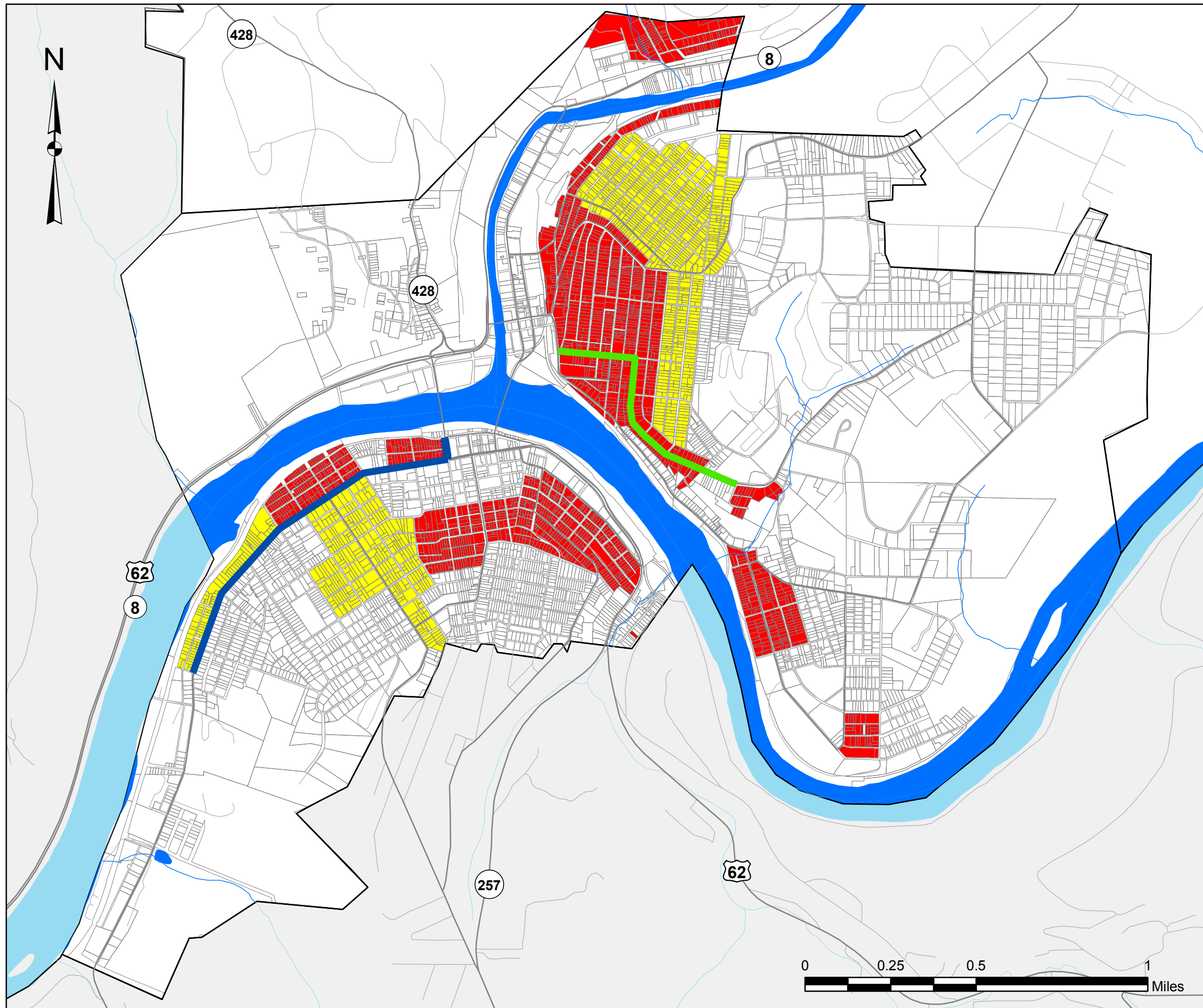
- Private Initiatives: To be successful, the Housing Plan must have active support, as most public agencies realize code enforcement is not popular. The following are public-private initiatives:

- Enlist churches and service clubs for neighbor-to-neighbor assistance with minor home repairs, maintenance, and yard work. Groups with such programs in place now could share their expertise.
- Neighborhood organizations should monitor worst-case homes, especially condemned units and request timely updates on remedial steps.
- Engage the Private Market: Ultimately, the marketplace will judge the efficacy of housing efforts in the City. Periodic meetings with local real estate offices and the City would be helpful to both receive suggestions and explain the City’s program. Their support is needed.

**An identified housing need is market-rate 55-plus housing units, either apartments or rentals.**

One of the identified housing needs is market-rate 55-plus housing units, either apartments or rentals. Survey comments indicated some homeowners would welcome such units. If the private market supports such developments, this is a key opportunity facing the City. Code B, Code M, Code 55

Special Opportunities: There are two areas which must be considered for such housing developments. Both are on the North Side. The most obvious one is on East Bissell; the former Oil City Hospital location. The second is the former school site off Gay Street. The City’s Redevelopment Authority is the best agency to implement such programs.



**Legend**

- Southside Priority Corridor
- Northside Priority Corridor
- Rehab Tier 1
- Rehab Tier 2
- Rehab Tier 3

**Northern Venango County  
Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan  
Plan Map 6: Oil City Housing  
Rehabilitation Priority Detail**

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), 1998, 2001 and 2008, U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2005, Venango County GIS, 2007  
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic, North American, 1983



They can investigate options, set up design and use standards (via a redevelopment plan), and sell property based upon project needs—not the highest bid. Code 55

- Promote 55-Plus Housing: Meet with real estate personnel and potential developers to develop a market “wise” strategy, concerning locations and type of unit.
- Housing LERTA: Many cities—Erie for example—have used the LERTA, tax abatement process, to encourage either development or assessable improvements to existing housing. In their “target areas,” Erie City extends 90% tax forgiveness on properties for five years. The abatement then continues for a full ten years, but at a reduced level. Programs vary by municipality, but LERTA is a time-tested successful approach. Code B, Code M
- Rental Units: Public “rehab” funds for rental units have never fared well in western Pennsylvania. However, some effort to start one is recommended, tied to the code inspection program. It should be a low-interest rate program, but operated on a business-like basis.
- Other Initiatives: Continue the policy of police surveillance on problem or abandoned housing units.
- Housing Bond Issue: One of the biggest impediments to housing rehabilitation lies with the typical grant source. Federal money is limited and brings with it a multitude of regulations that complicate, delay, and increases the cost of that program. Municipal bond issues for housing have been around for decades. Originally for new homes, they can also be used for housing acquisition, demolition, and rehabilitation. And, they are not encumbered with “regs.” The feasibility of this approach would require legal and fiscal expertise.

But, it is an idea worth investigating!

- The Law: There are four key initiatives that would aid Oil City and other Pennsylvania communities in similar situations:
  - Develop a program similar to that of Beaver County to return selected tax title properties to the marketplace. This would involve consulting with neighbors to identify potential usable properties; search title and ownership information; clear title and sell. (In the fall of 2010, Oil City initiated this program, in partnership with Clarion University.) The City should establish geographic priorities in its efforts to deal with repository properties, based upon title and market potential.
  - Require that Section 107.5 of the IPMC (or similar codes) be rigorously applied to foreclosed and tax-title properties.
  - Promote laws that facilitate the return of tax-title “repository properties” to active use. This would require changes to Pennsylvania’s law on “Adverse Possession.”
  - If legal changes cannot be accomplished, petition the Commonwealth to offer title insurance for reclaimed repository properties meeting certain conditions. This is a complicated concept, but potentially very useful. Lawyers, real estate, and housing experts will be needed to draft real-world solutions.

## Land Use Plan

**The City of Oil City can be described as a classic western Pennsylvania river-town development.**

The City of Oil City can be described as a classic western Pennsylvania river town. Its development was primarily shaped by two events. First was the discovery and exploration of oil. This not only saw the oil boom in the Oil Creek Valley but also helped to develop Oil City as an early trading and shipping center. The second influence was the development of heavy industries and the resulting extensive railroad infrastructure.

This history not only set the pattern of commercial and industrial land use but also influenced much of the residential development. Typically, worker housing in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was located so people could walk to work. This accounts for the small lots and modest homes of the North Side and East Side. It also explains the fact that there are numerous housing units along the City's alleys. They are often seen above garages or as small homes tucked into narrow lots, often as a second home on a lot originally intended for only one dwelling. Many of these homes were built for a housing market that no longer exists. This is illustrated by the poor state of many homes along areas of Colbert Avenue.

Given this background, what is the role of the Land Use Plan; more specifically, Oil City's land use ordinances in this Comprehensive Plan?

The first step is a simple, but vital, one. It is to set forth a basic land use philosophy. The purpose of the land use ordinances in the City should:

- Manage residential densities.
- Aim for quality development within the realities of the marketplace.
- Provide the City with practical land use tools to achieve its goals.

### **Manage Residential Densities**

Though the City's ordinance has been updated many times, its core rests in a 1960s document where the accommodation of growth was seen as the key function. This was reflected in the amount of land zoned as R-2, allowing intense residential development. Given its recent population losses, the City does not need to crowd land, especially for residential purposes.

This Plan proposes a change to that policy. It promotes lowering overall residential densities to complement the Housing Plan in a comprehensive strategy to stabilize neighborhoods. Guidelines for land use policy follow.

**Residential:** Oil City is essentially a community of primarily single-family homes. Yet, the largest single zoning district is the R-2 Medium Density District. This Plan believes much of the current R-2 land should be in a single-family designation.

### **Recommendations**

- Create a new R-1 zoning district(s) designation for older areas of Oil City with single-family lots that are smaller than the standard R-1 designation.\*

- Downzone much of the current R-2 District to either an R-1 or a new R-1 designation (see Proposed Land Use map).\*
- Require any new duplexes in the R-2 District to have 6,000 square feet of lot area.
- Examine the Clapp Farm/Selden Avenue area. Consider new R-1 zoning districts to control future densities.
- Halyday, Clark’s Summit, Dwyer, Hogback: This entire area is currently zoned R-2; rezone to R-1 or a new R-1 District. Due to limited utility access and slope considerations, these areas are best suited for light development.

\*See the discussion in the Housing Plan for zoning.

Mixed Use: The City currently has an R-O Residential/Office District that was designed to complement the now defunct Oil City Hospital. Many communities use a similar approach to facilitate the adaptive re-use of larger, older homes along busy streets. A new Residential Limited Business (RLB) District should be re-configured to include such uses and be considered for selected areas along East Bissell (Harriott to Hone), West First, Grandview, and Central (north of the fire station). See the Future Land Use map.

**Facilitate the adaptive re-use of larger, older homes along busy streets.**

Commercial: No changes in district boundaries are recommended; however, see “Special Zoning.” See comments below.

Industrial: No changes are recommended.

Special: Unused railroad properties should be identified and potential reuse identified.

### **Special Zoning**

Article VII-A of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code allows for the creation of TND districts. It is an ideal tool for Oil City. And, it need not be a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Rather, they can be crafted for one specific area. In the TND zoning district, residential and commercial uses can be mixed. Furthermore, design standards and a design manual prepared by the municipality are allowed. Characteristics of the TND are listed below:

- Can be a conditional use.
- Can be an overlay or outright zoning district.
- Can mix commercial and residential.
- Should be pedestrian-oriented.
- Can relate to natural features, such as *waterways*.
- Allows for a positive interaction between public and private actions.
- Can vary developmental density.
- Allows for a sketch plan with an informal presentation of same.

The only problem for Oil City is its lack of its own SALDO, as the TND also allows for variations in SALDO regulations.

- Select areas for application of TNDs. The West First, North and South Side Downtowns, and the Bissell corridors are suggested. Both the Route 62 and Waterways studies suggest special design concepts in the South Side Downtown. The use of form-based codes is one approach. This study recommends that concept be blended into TND zoning. It is important that tourist-oriented retail be included.
- A TND should be a mixed-use district where various types of residential options can be integrated with typical downtown commercial activities, or it could be an essentially residential area. The TND is the *only* zoning district where design guidelines are specifically permitted (See PaMPC 708-A) in Pennsylvania. This district can be used as either an “overlay” zone or a standalone district.
- Expand the current R-O District concept to encourage non-retail, low-impact, daytime uses as the RLB District.
- Develop a simple “design” manual appropriate for specific areas.
- Waterways Zoning: One or two possibilities for river-trail-based locations need to be addressed. The first suggested location is near the Marina; another is in the East Siverly area.

**Updates:** In addition to the substantive changes listed above, the current ordinance does require a variety of updates to be consistent with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, and modern practice. (*Note: Those updates have been already initiated.*) Another update will only apply to areas of the City where there is no sanitary sewer service. The zoning ordinance should note that all such lots must be approved for on-lot septic systems by the City’s Sewage Enforcement Officer. A one-acre lot minimum is recommended, though, often, such lots require nearer two acres.

## Community Facilities Plan

The Plan will follow the same format as the Background Report—that is public safety, education, recreation, the Oil City Library, and miscellaneous resources. The Bike Trail is a separate Plan element. The cost of public services, especially water and sewer facilities, is a tremendous burden to all local governments. In many instances, improvements to water and sewer systems are mandated and perhaps are environmentally justified. But, the result is to pass on yet additional costs to local residents.

### Public Safety

**Fire Department:** The Oil City Fire Department is an evolving organization. It is now more than fire fighting. Its services include fire fighting, code enforcement, traffic signal maintenance, emergency services, and water rescue. At this time, the Plan’s only service expansion recommendation would possibly be additional assistance in general code enforcement over the next five years. Current staff levels should be maintained.

The physical needs of the Department have been identified and are presented below.

In priority, needs are as follow:

- Replace Snorkel (\$900,000)\*
- Turnout Gear (\$40,000)
- Replace 1987 Pumper (\$350,000)
- New Central Fire Station House\*\*

*\*Purchase initiated 2010*

*\*\*This is a multi-million dollar undertaking and must be considered as a long-term project.*

**Police:** The Oil City Police Department should be kept at its current levels and its “community” policing philosophy continued. Its presence is a valuable resource to Oil City beyond the obvious element of immediate public safety. For example, its liaison with the Code Officer helps to discourage the property crimes rampant in some western Pennsylvania communities. The police foot patrol program is another community benefit. Both the Downtown areas and some of the public housing units see real benefits from this activity.



The police do have some capital needs, as are listed below:

- Programmed-steady vehicle replacement – 1 per year
- Secure impoundment area
- Parking area for police cars
- 911 Repeater System
- Live scan fingerprinting
- Video arraignment system

At least one local business, the Arlington Hotel, must be complimented, as it does allow some of the police units to use their nearby parking facility.

The police should develop costs and a model contract to allow neighboring communities to purchase police services.

### **Weed and Seed**

One of the Police Department’s key initiatives is its weed and seed program; a program to “weed” out drugs and crime and to “seed” educational, recreational, social, residential, and economic opportunities. The goals of the Strategic Revitalization Plan are:

1. Reduce drug traffic and increase arrests in the target areas.
2. Prevent juvenile delinquency
3. Improve referral processes between police and social agencies to respond to immediate needs within the target area.
4. Develop cooperative relationships between police officers and residents.
5. Reduce neighborhood blight.

Funded through local and State funds, the program supports a coordinator and officer. But, the essence of the program is close community work within the target area. Actions vary from saturation patrols to safe havens, referrals, working with neighboring groups, and code enforcement, among other matters. The program is focused on target areas (Siverly, East Side, and North Side) within the City that had significant criminal arrests.

This is an excellent example of how various programs (i.e., code enforcement, housing rehabilitation, and land use policies) are complemented by other City efforts. The “Weed and Seed” program deserves continued support.

### **Education Resources**

Both the Oil City Area School District and the Venango Technology Center have completed, or have projects, underway to physically upgrade their facilities. Consequently, this Plan does not suggest additional physical improvements.

**Both the Oil City Area School District and the Venango Technology Center, and their ties with the Venango Campus of Clarion University, represent a unique asset of great value.**

However, as noted in the Economic Development Plan, these institutions and their ties with the Venango Campus of Clarion University represent a unique asset of great value. The recognition of education, and especially technical/job skill training, deserves enthusiastic support.



**Robert W. Rhoades Center  
Venango Campus of Clarion University**

Though the Clarion, Venango Campus has a policy of using existing resources rather than building new classrooms/labs, the policy may need to change in future years. Once again, wholehearted support of this unique resource is a major Plan goal.

Though not as large as the foregoing institutions, the DuBois Business College is a valuable contributor to the local educational infrastructure, and local officials should work cooperatively with it to facilitate its improvement program. Historically, the

educational resources in the area do meet regularly and cooperate on activities. This Plan recommends that practice continues.

## Recreational Resources

Oil City has an extensive park/recreation system. This Plan follows the listing contained in the Background Report. There must be one caution. If the history of recreation in Pennsylvania has provided one lesson, it is that parks and playgrounds *must be maintained!* A second lesson is that park budgets, particularly for operations and maintenance, are the first to be cut. With these concepts in mind, the recommendations of the Plan are conservative.

### Individual Park Recommendations

- Mitchell Avenue: This complex includes ball fields, tennis courts, and a “Land of Laughter” playground. These facilities appear well used and a continued high level of maintenance is needed.
  - Consider limited night lighting on a “players-pay” basis for the tennis courts.
  - If the tennis courts lack use, consider their conversion to a hard-court basketball facility or skate park.
- Innis Street: A small park, but seems to be a well-used playground. The “Y” provides summer programs here. Maintain as is.
- The Marina: A wonderful facility, with great potential for expanded use. See the Tourism section of the Economic Development Plan. The “Waterfront Study” is recommending improvements and expended uses; this Plan concurs. (See the “Special” Section)



**Innis Street Park**

- Pierce Avenue: Due to topography, it is difficult to maintain and parking is nearly non-existent. The Siverly Neighborhood Association has officially adopted this facility in July of 2010. It was renamed in honor of local football standout, now businessman, Jim Shaughnessy. This project was also supported by the “Weed and Seed” program.
- Halyday Playground: Mothball, and, if possible, sell.
- Justus Park: The key City central park. No new facilities are suggested, but continued maintenance is needed. This is an important facility for Downtown activities. Also, given the park’s location, it is near to the bike trail, with a large parking lot adjacent to it. With little investment, it would be a first-rate trailhead. (See also the Bike Plan)
- Charlton Street Playground: The revitalization of this facility is already a “CDBG” project.
- Hasson Park and Related Facilities: A sprawling complex of passive (for example, Rhododendron Arboretum) and active recreational use, from picnicking to play apparatus. Ball fields, Dek hockey, and a skate park are yet other resources. This is a widely used facility. It must always receive a priority for maintenance.
- Ramage-Hasson Public Pool: The pool itself saw a \$1.6 million reconstruction. In a typical year, the pool attracts 15,000 to 20,000 visitors. Now, the bathhouse should be rejuvenated and a new roof installed.
- Harriott Avenue Playground: This includes a playground and a hard-court basketball court. The court needs repaired. It is well used and well placed. It should be a maintenance priority. The “Land of Laughter” playground also sees active use and is a valuable resource to Oil City’s North Side.
- Little League Fields: City-owned (Ridge/Traction) but maintained by the Little League. No changes are suggested.
- East 3<sup>rd</sup> and Walnut: This is a new vest-pocket playground serving the East Side in the City. Due to its relative small size, this new facility should make minimal maintenance demands. It will service an area which now lacks public recreation.
- The Siverly Neighborhood Association: The Siverly Neighborhood Association is also looking to improve a small park at Colbert and Wabash, on land owned by the Oil City Redevelopment Authority. Their intention is to add fencing and play apparatus.
- See also the Waterways Plan in the Special Section for recreational improvements along Oil Creek and the Waterways Plan.



*Note: The Bike Trail is a separate section.*

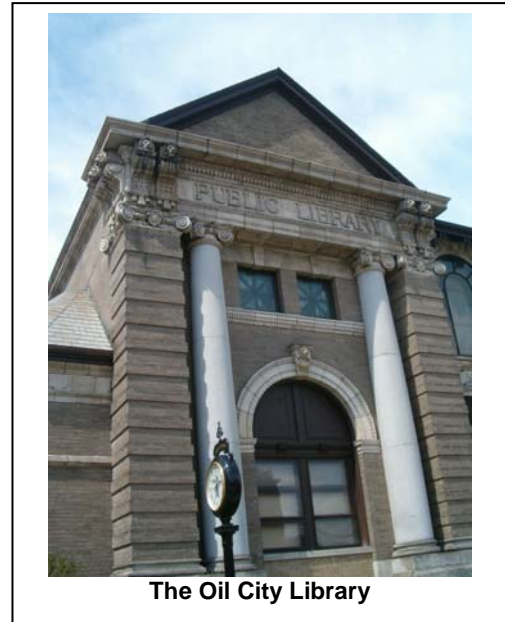
One of the needs identified by the Community Survey was for an indoor facility, especially one focused on youth. Given budget realities, the three municipalities cannot afford such an undertaking. A special task force representing all three municipalities, the YMCA, the YWCA, and local churches, should be formed to examine this issue. Rather than a single, expensive solution, perhaps the solution lies in a coordinated programmed use of existing facilities.



## The Oil City Library

Though a City department, the library must be considered as a regional asset. In fact, both Rouseville Borough and Cornplanter Township—partners in this Plan—are contributing members. This Plan recommends:

- **First Priority:** The roof, fortunately, is secured with assistance from the Peter’s Foundation, the Justus Trust, as well as from the Library endowment fund. Work has not yet started, but is scheduled for 2011. The repair of the roof is the critical first step before any other significant work to this structure can proceed.
- **Replacement of the Handicapped Ramp/Central Avenue Stairs:** Once more, a mixture of grant funds (Commonwealth Libraries grant, DCNR and CDBG) will go toward these projects. (Scheduled for 2011)
- **“The Structures Study”:** This is a \$2,500,000 project which would include electric, HVAC, and weatherization (see below). The two projects listed above are part of the Structures. Key elements are bringing the second floor auditorium into use as well as the unfinished basement area (see Library website for details). The Library is hoping for Federal and/or State funding for this undertaking. To better facilitate the implementation of the “Structures Study,” phasing is a strong possibility. Once it is completed, the Library will have much larger, usable space and be a real showplace for the area.
- **Window Replacement:** A major project (\$368,657) is part of a County Capital Assistance grant (an element of the Structures study).
- **Personnel:** Although grants from government and foundations can help to resolve the physical issues with this popular asset, personnel are a separate issue. That issue is a concern for qualified replacements if retirements occur. This issue is now regarded as the key Library problem.



## National Transit Building

At this time, the National Transit Building is a functioning facility of the Oil City Civic Center, Inc. It traditionally has received ongoing assistance from the City in terms of maintenance. This Plan recommends such assistance continue within the capacity of the City’s budget. However, it is unlikely that the Civic Center’s long-term capital needs can be met via City funds. Fortunately, the structure and its annex are now in sound condition.

Consequently, it is important that this facility look to attract either additional art-related tenants, or compatible non-profit/governmental organizations to realize income levels future enhancements may require. (See also ARTS section)

## Oil City Parking Garage



This facility provides 560 parking spaces for the North Side downtown area. As noted in the Background Report, the facility’s lifespan should extend until 2025 to 2050. However, that projection is based upon making significant repairs to the structure of \$2 million to \$2.5 million.

Parking garages should be “pay as you go.” This Plan recommends that improvements to the structure be based upon projected income. Current income from the ramp is estimated at about \$30,000 to \$35,000 per year. If the income is not sufficient to meet the estimated expenditures, a compromise approach is called for.

## Public Utilities

As little to limited growth is projected in Oil City over the next decade, the recommendations in this section are predicated upon these priorities:

- State-mandated\*
- Activities where grants or very low-interest loans can make the improvements affordable to City residents
- Projects that increase system reliability and lower operational costs
- Projects which enhance worker safety

*\*Primarily aimed at the sanitary sewerage collection and treatment system*

Any improvement to furnish capacity or service to other users should be borne by those users, with costs fairly and transparently developed. It is important that cost data be clearly communicated to surrounding communities that use Oil City water services.

There is, however, one caveat. The City’s Public Works Department does provide contract services to Cornplanter Township for water and sewer maintenance and repair. This Plan recommends that practice continue as long as the Department can meet its primary obligations within the City. If it cannot, that practice may need to be changed. But, no change should occur without giving the Township sufficient notice (at least six months) so they can reasonably arrange for alternative services.

## Recommended Improvements – Water System Capital Program

- Line Replacement and Enhancement: Some 14,391 feet of new water main are scheduled. New lines will be primarily 12 inches in size. In all, 11 new projects are planned. The total cost is estimated at \$1,338,200.
- River/Creek Crossings: Two river crossings are slated for renewal, and a new Oil Creek crossing is scheduled. Estimated cost is \$159,500.

- **Booster Stations:** Three booster (pump) stations are scheduled for reconstruction. Estimated cost is \$1,075,000.
- **Storage Tanks:** The majority of the system’s water storage tanks are scheduled for repair, cleaning, and recoating.

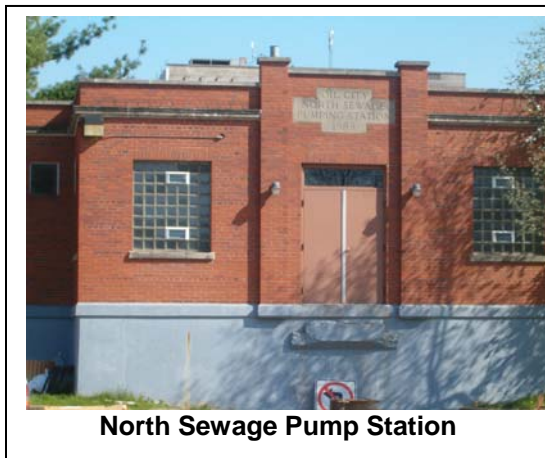
In addition to this formal improvement program, there are several other improvements that would improve the water system operations. These can be generalized as follows:

- New river crossing at the main plant
- Retention tank/wet well for chlorination
- Security fences – install or improve fences at the main plant and around tanks
- Road improvement to the main plant
- Refurbish the water plant
- Security cameras – various locations
- Additional truck for maintenance with needed gear
- New valves – Clark Summit, West End, Hogback
- New SCADA system

It must be stressed that many of the City’s water lines are over 100 years old and are subject to breakage. Consequently, repair of the water lines is not just to reduce the loss of water—as important as that is. Usually, line breaks require road repair as well, incurring, over time, costs. So, the expense of poor lines is more than the loss of finished water. Projects to identify and electronically map waterlines are needed.

For years, Oil City has had a safe and apparently limitless supply of water. Yet, this resource needs protection. This Plan fully endorses the Water Resources Protection Plan, recently outlined for the area.

### **Sewer System Recommendations**



**North Sewage Pump Station**

As noted in the Background Report, the City sewer treatment plant has a practical capacity of 11 million gallons a day (mgd). This is nearly a threefold increase in plant capacity from 2007. Why? Infiltration and inflow to the collection system during rain storms often overwhelm both collection and treatment capacity. As a result, the City prepared the needed “537 Plan” and has worked with the State to rectify its problems. This first step was to upgrade the treatment plant’s capacity. That step has been completed.

The second step was completed in 2010. That involved the reconstruction of and improving the combined sewer overflows (CSOs) into the

Allegheny River and Oil Creek. The reconstruction will help to reduce overflow volumes and capture floating debris.

After the CSO work is done, the system must be monitored for a period of time. The goal of the system improvements is to treat 85% of influent, regardless of the source of the wastewater. This is an EPA/DEP-mandated goal. If this goal is not met, the City likely faces additional system improvements that could run in to millions of dollars. The City has ordered the needed monitoring phase, and it will start in 2011.

To somewhat complicate this issue, both Cornplanter and Cranberry townships will be increasing their contributing flows. However, City consulting engineers, and its engineering department, are taking these future flows into consideration as they work on system improvements.

Meeting the 85% treatment standard is the first priority. However, there are other needs at the treatment plant. These are:

- Grinders for the plant digester and pump station
- Belt press for sludge
- Flow meter for Hogs Hollow
- Pickup truck with a snow plow for site maintenance
- Identify and map sewer lines in the City

## **Public Works**

### **The Public Works Department**

This department provides a wide scope of services but has very limited resources. As it is unlikely that additional personnel will be added soon, as an alternative, needed equipment can be purchased that will facilitate operations. Listed below are the priority items for the Public Works operation:

- New excavator on tracks (\$90,000 to \$100,000)\*
- Leaf removal equipment – 16- to 25-yard capacity
- Street sweeper (\$200,000)\*

*\*Estimates*

## Transportation – Oil City

There is a separate Transportation section for each municipality, with an overall Plan element focusing on PennDOT projects. This section highlights Oil City’s needs.

**Roads of Local Impact:** The following roads/highways have been identified by the Citizens Survey or local sources as needing repair, repaving, or upgrading:

- Central Avenue (to 9<sup>th</sup> Street)
- Innis Street
- East Second Street
- Oak Grove Street
- Route 8 – City line west to Center

The most dangerous intersections:

- First and Wilson
- 2nd and Central
- 7th and Innis

In the 1989 Oil City Comprehensive Plan, the widening of the Route 8 “Bypass” (Center Street Bridge) to the White Bridge was recommended. This Plan continues that recommendation. It further recommends that in lieu of the current stop sign arrangement at the White Bridge, the feasibility of a traffic circle should be investigated.

The Route 62 Study focuses on the transportation system on Oil City’s South Side. This includes a traffic circle at Wilson and signal enhancements, as well as strategies to increase in pedestrian traffic. Both the Route 62 and Waterways studies embrace the extension of hike/bike trails. (See Special Section)

### Rail

It is important to continue local rail service. There have been suggestions to reestablish rail service to the Oil City Industrial Park. Preliminary cost estimates for this project are at least \$600,000. However, no details have been obtained relative to needed car volume to institute active service to this facility.

At the current time, rail service through the City appears sound. However, some properties may be surplus, and there is the possible abandonment of lines. The City should acquire such properties. In this manner, they can be secured for bike/hike trails or kept for other future needs.

### Transit/Bus

In view of the precarious transit funding, this Plan recommendation is modest – keep the current routes and the Demand/Response system. If possible, a loop from the White Bridge along Route 8 to Rouseville should be instituted, then up Moody Run Road to Grandview and the Golden Living Center, where it would intersect with the current route for Oil City. This modest route

change is suggested for Cornplanter/Rouseville. (See also Cornplanter and Rouseville sections.) Cornplanter would also like to see service to Plumer by the transit service.

### **Pedestrian**

The Route 62 Study addresses pedestrian needs in their study area. However, sidewalk needs are prevalent through many areas. Neighborhood associations should be asked to prioritize sidewalk needs in their respective areas and the City institute a sidewalk repair program. In limited instances, State (PennDOT) funding may be available.

### **Special Projects**

There has been much discussion to transform the unused section of the Wye Railroad Bridge between Siverly and the East Side as a pedestrian crossing. In fact, it now serves as an informal one. Both special studies—Waterways and Route 62—also recommend pedestrian use of this structure, as does this Plan\*. However, two important conditions are made:

First: The pedestrian portion of the bridge must be properly fenced and made safe.

Second: Safe, convenient access to the bridge from both Siverly and the East Side must be provided.

*\*It must be noted that the bridge is railroad property and its cooperation is a must.*

# Rouseville Borough

## Introduction

Rouseville’s current comprehensive plan is now about 20 years old. Some of the pressing issues identified in that document no longer exist. Others have been solved, some have changed, and some have remained.



Rouseville Borough Building

The principal change to the Borough over these past two decades was the closure and demolition of the Pennzoil refinery and offices. The presence of the refinery historically engendered mixed results. On one hand, it was the economic base of Rouseville. Conversely, it often could be intrusive, impacting on the quality of life.

Once again, the former Pennzoil site is at the economic heart of Rouseville. But, in lieu of a current asset, it is in the role of its future economic base. The development of that cleared land is singularly important to Rouseville; however, the lessons of history must never be forgotten. Responsible development allowing a productive coexistence between residential and industrial or commercial land is a must.

Perhaps the three overarching needs of Rouseville are economic development, housing, and attracting new residents. These last two are interrelated. For the past several years, the housing

**Three overarching needs of Rouseville are economic development, housing, and attracting new residents.**

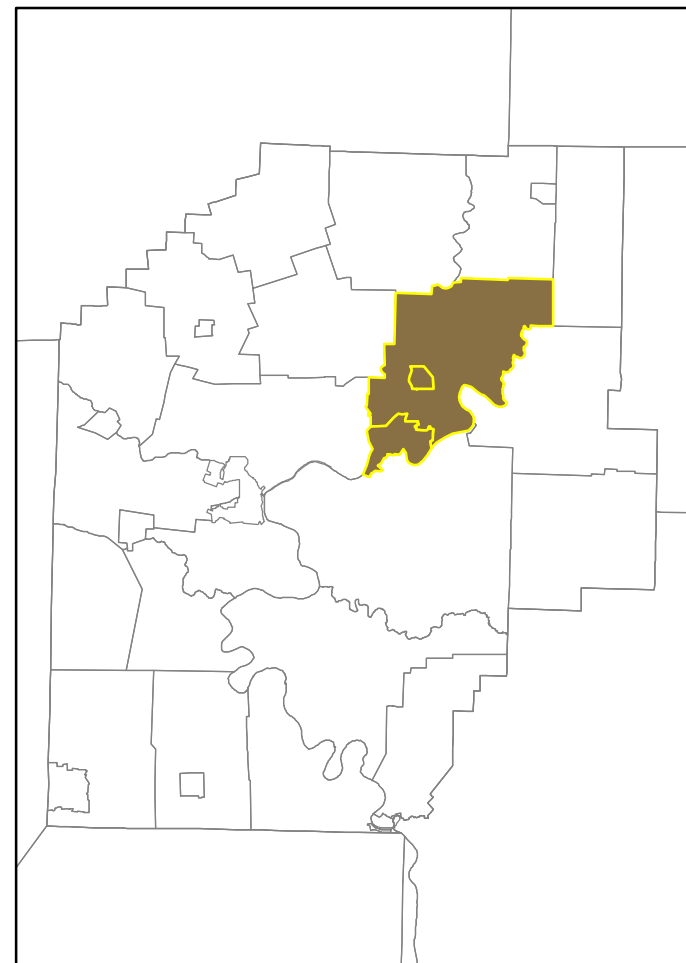
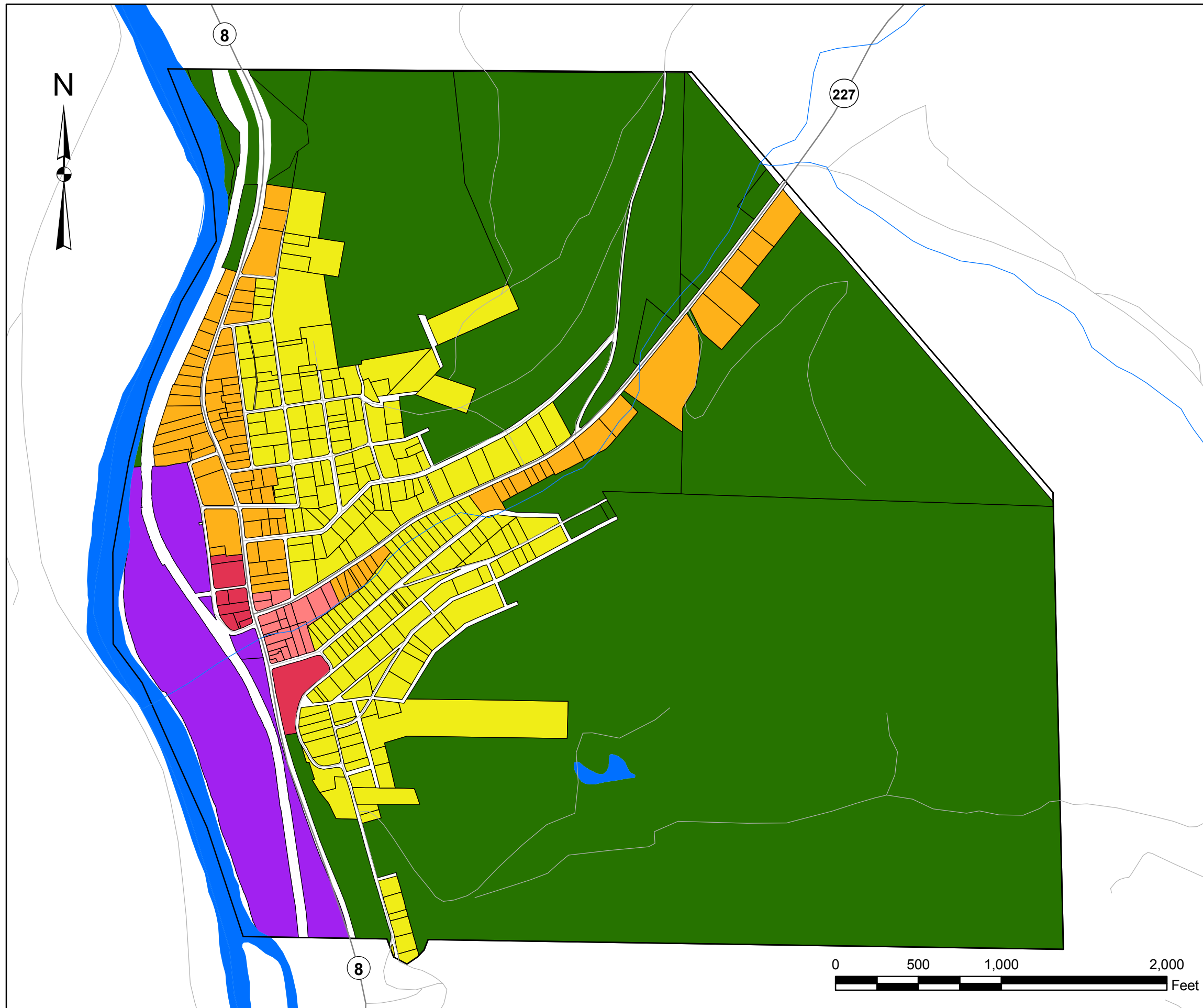
market in Rouseville has been very slow. Policies must focus on making the Borough a more attractive place to buy a house and to raise a family. A better housing market would also enable older residents to sell their home. This leads to another expressed need—condo or apartment units for the aged 55-plus housing consumer. Attractive homes with limited maintenance responsibilities are a plus for older citizens.

The primary focus on the Rouseville element of the Plan emphasizes these needs. However, there are other items of importance—water, sewer, roads, public safety, and recreation.

## Historic Resources

Though much of Rouseville’s built environment is over 50 years old, no listing in the State “ARCH”\* historic database has been found. Consequently, no actions are recommended.

*\*Since discontinued by the State.*



Legend

- Central Business
- Community Business
- Industrial
- Conservation
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential

Northern Venango County  
 Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan  
 Plan Map 7: Future Land Use  
 Rouseville Borough

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), 1998, 2001 and 2008, U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2005, Venango County GIS, 2007  
 Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic, North American, 1983



## Land Use

Rouseville is essentially a residential community. Most of its housing development is east of Route 8 and north of Route 227, with a smaller residential area found south of Cherry Run and east of Route 8. To a large extent, steep slopes and floodplains have limited development patterns in other areas. As noted in the Background Report, there is little commercial use remaining in the Borough. Most of its existing commercial property is now vacant. Industrial land has a similar characteristic. It is present, but largely undeveloped. An existing warehouse structure on Route 8 is the largest industrial use. However, the vacant Pennzoil property, now controlled by the Borough, does have great potential; and a local industrial firm has purchased a large parcel there. Development is eminent. That, or any, development will primarily be guided by the Borough's zoning ordinance.

Generally, the current zoning ordinance fits Rouseville fairly well, but this Plan does have some recommendations:

- The zoning ordinance is about 20 years old, and there have been several changes to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code that should be incorporated into the Borough's ordinance. (*Note: Suggested amendments were forwarded to the Borough in February of 2010.*)
- Consider restricting uses in the Conservation District. Even though this district requires large lots, its lack of infrastructure and slope characteristics calls for low-impact uses. A review of current permitted uses is recommended to eliminate inappropriate uses and to focus on a few low-impact uses.
- Focus the R-1 District to a true "single-family" district—delete intense uses.
- If a "55-plus" housing project is a goal of the Borough, the zoning ordinance needs to be amended to reasonably allow this. Given current regulations, a 40-unit low-rise apartment complex would require a parcel of nearly 5 acres. A provision to allow multi-family development as a conditional use with some modest design criteria (landscaping, lighting, etc.) is recommended.
- Develop new landscaping standards for industrial uses, especially along Route 8, which is Rouseville's "face" to those traveling through. Such standards should be reasonable, and allow for safe sight distances at driveways (look at PennDOT HOP requirements, 67 Pa Code 441.8). A Beatification Committee has been formed to help with such standards.

The Borough does not have its own subdivision and land development ordinance. Given the limited new development in the Borough, the Plan does not recommend a subdivision and land development ordinance be adopted, and Rouseville should continue to rely on the County SALDO.

## Housing

A review of “multi-list” housing sales from 2002 to 2008 showed 27 housing sales (four changed hands twice during that time). The average sale price was \$27,718, and the average number of days on the market was 190 days. This is dramatic proof that the current Borough housing market is weak. The following actions are suggested to strengthen this situation:

**55-plus  
housing is a  
priority.**

- Continue working with Oil City and Cornplanter in an all-out code enforcement blitz. Poorly maintained housing seriously depresses the market.
- Facilitate housing rehabilitation efforts. The following options are recommended:
  - Join with the County of Venango in a HOME application grant. Request the County or a consultant to file and administer the program.
  - Join with Cornplanter and/or Oil City in a HOME application. Request the County or a consultant to file and administer the program.
  - Promote the USDA housing program. This program operates directly between eligible homeowners and the USDA Meadville office. Low-interest loans and some grants (for older homeowners 62-plus) are available.
- Promote a 55-plus housing development. **THIS WILL NOT BE EASY.** First steps:
  - Get a sponsor—normally church groups or similar nonprofit organizations.
  - Visit communities that have attractive market rate, or near market rate, 55-plus housing. Learn from their experience. (Suggestions: Erie; Meadville; Neshannock Trails; Indiana, Pennsylvania)
  - Shop for a developer. Such groups as HANDS of Erie; NCR (National Church Residents) of Columbus, Ohio; and Lutheran Social Services of Western Pennsylvania all have various types of 55-plus developments in western Pennsylvania.
  - Note: The above organizations usually focus on government-assisted units. Unfortunately, assisted housing has a bad reputation. This is primarily due to the restrictions that HUD places on units that it finances. Too often, they are soulless slabs. It need not be the case. There are some very attractive government-assisted units. The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency has sponsored some excellent projects in western Pennsylvania. Private developers are also available.
  - Locate a site for the development in the Borough.

**Demolition:** Even the best code enforcement program cannot remediate all housing problems. The Borough must consider a demolition program, and, likely, needs to expect two or three units may warrant this action. Prior to beginning a demolition effort, Rouseville should consult with their solicitor and the Oil City Code Office on procedures and problems.

## Community Facilities

### Water

The Borough has been progressively upgrading its water distribution system over the past few years, usually with CDBG assistance. The following areas still need to have lines replaced:

- Second Street
- First Avenue
- Church Street

In addition, an evaluation of finished water treatment and storage facilities are suggested as a preventive measure.

### Sanitary Sewers

This is an older system. Borough officials believe using a surge storage tank in the Borough should be the next priority. The Borough completed its Act 537 Plan on June 29, 2010. The centerpiece of this Plan is a new sewer treatment plant at the current location. The cost is \$1.7 million. Currently, the Borough is in the process of finalizing its financing plan. However, once the plant is constructed, the Borough should continue the process of updating the system and eliminate all the “I&I” possible.

### Borough Park

The Borough has a small park for youngsters, off of Second Avenue, near the Rouseville Volunteer Fire Department Social Center. Its continued maintenance is recommended. Some simple landscaping with low maintenance shrubs would improve this facility’s appearance.



### Rouseville Volunteer Fire Department

The Fire Chief reports that new recruits have been found and the Department should have sufficient personnel for the future. They are active and well trained. The Department is financially sound and no immediate capital needs are reported.

### Library

Historically, the Borough has supported the Oil City Library. This Plan recommends a continuation of that policy.

### Transportation

With the rebuilding of the Route 8/Route 227 intersection, no major projects are suggested. However, an improvement to the turn radius of that intersection (northeast quadrant) would facilitate truck left turns from Route 8 (south bound) to Route 227.

In addition, the Borough is looking into State and Federal grants relating to sidewalk programs. In the previous comprehensive plan, a sidewalk program was suggested; it remains a need. Many

Borough sidewalks are in poor condition. Rather than a mandated program, a cost-sharing approach is suggested. Some communities have instituted “50-50” sidewalk programs. The municipality furnishes the cement and the homeowner the contractor. This program would have two primary benefits. First, it would allow Borough residents and their children a safe place to walk or play. Second, it would help promote the housing market. In the early 2000s, the National Association of Realtors did an in-depth study of homebuyers. Sidewalks were a top attraction. This program is another initiative to promote the Borough’s housing market.

Finally, there should be consideration of re-instituting bus service to Rouseville. County officials indicate the Rouseville stop was terminated due to a lack of ridership. But, if a senior housing development is a potential, bus service will certainly be a plus. A new loop could begin near the White Bridge in Oil City, proceed to Rouseville along Route 8, and then proceed up Moody Run Road to Grandview. This route could then connect with the current VenanGO route on Grandview, at the Golden Living Nursing facility.

### **Economic Development**

To be able to realize some of the suggestions in this Plan, dollars are needed. Historically, the Borough has relied on grants for some of its infrastructure needs. However, the ongoing State budget crisis is an illustration that the grant options are not always available. The other option is to begin enhancing the Borough’s real estate tax base. Two primary actions are suggested:

- Join with Oil City, Cornplanter, and the ORA in actively promoting the sale and use of the Route 8 property and the former Pennzoil laboratory building.\*
- Work positively with potential developers to determine if funds are available to assist with new development.

*\*See also the Economic Plan.*

### **Summary**

Many of the issues facing Rouseville have been building for years and will not be resolved by mere words on paper, nor will solutions occur quickly. But, the actions suggested are both doable, and will make a great difference to the Borough.

## Regional Initiatives

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has been fostering regional, multi-municipal activities for the past fifteen years. Such a policy makes sense for both economic reasons and to enhance citizen services. This Plan embraces that concept and sets forth the following regional initiatives,

**Regional activities take time and effort. Actions that foster regional solutions do not need to be complicated.**

both general and specific. No plan is self-executing. And, regional activities take time and effort. Actions that foster regional solutions do not need to be complicated.

A series of four task forces are to be formed. All three municipalities are to be members of these groups, with neighboring municipalities and the County asked to participate, as needed. The process should be as open and transparent as possible. The basic goals should be to identify regional needs where cooperation is vital, identify discrete actions, and take them. However, where agreement on actions cannot be mutually agreed on, those issues should be put to one side. COOPERATION can accomplish much—disagreement little.

### Steering Committee

In order to oversee the suggested “Task Forces” listed below, a steering committee is needed, composed of members from all of the municipalities. It is recommended two or three members be appointed from each municipality (at least one elected member of the governing body) to meet on a quarterly basis. The initial task would be to discuss common problems and set up the Task Forces described below.

### Task Force #1 – Land Use

At this time, no policy of “land-use sharing” or “specific plan” is suggested (see Planning Code). However, these options may become more attractive in the future. The immediate goals of this group would be to discuss the current land use policies of all three municipalities, keep the respective ordinances updated, and promote common land use policies. At this time, only four meetings per year are suggested. (See Map 8, Future Land Use)

### Task Force #2 – Housing

This is one of the key groups to implement this Plan. There are four major goals of this Task Force:

- **Code Enforcement:** Fortunately, all three municipalities use the Oil City Code Office and have adopted the International Property Maintenance Code. Aggressive, strict enforcement in all municipalities is a must.
- **Demolition:** Unfortunately, there are units in all three municipalities which warrant demolition. The Oil City Code Officer can advise on the process of demolition. All three municipalities would benefit by cooperative actions and bidding.
- **Appearance:** Public and private renovations are needed to restore a viable regional housing stock. The USDA, HOME, PHFA programs as well as private initiatives are needed.

- **The Market:** This goal is to measure the impact of the prior three actions on the regional housing market. The return of a viable market is a central Plan goal. In addition, this group should cooperatively look to initiate and promote the successful construction of 55-plus housing. Local real estate offices should be included in this Task Force.

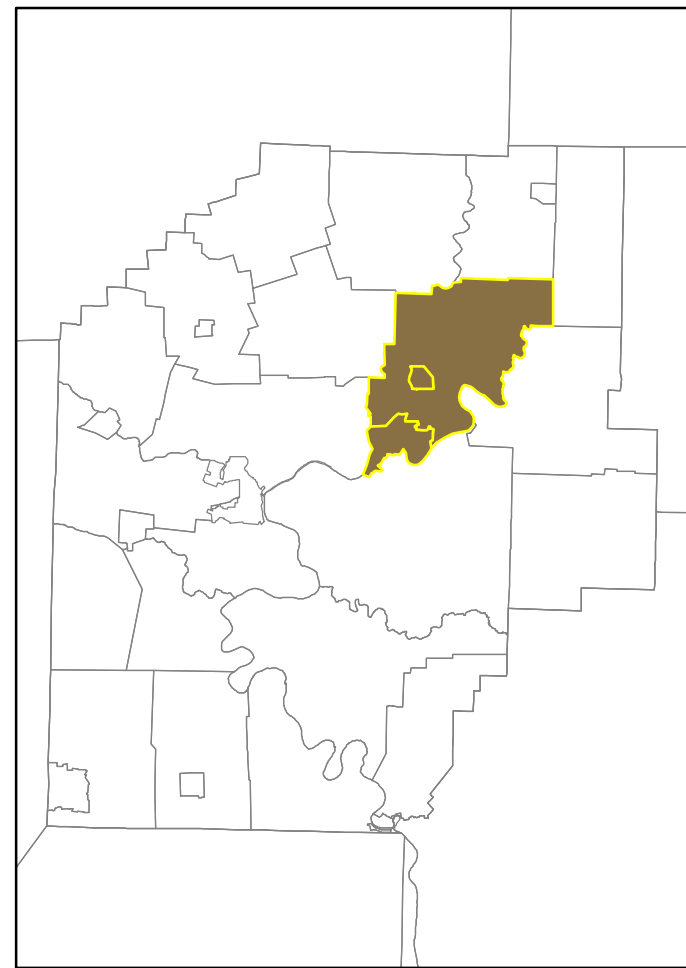
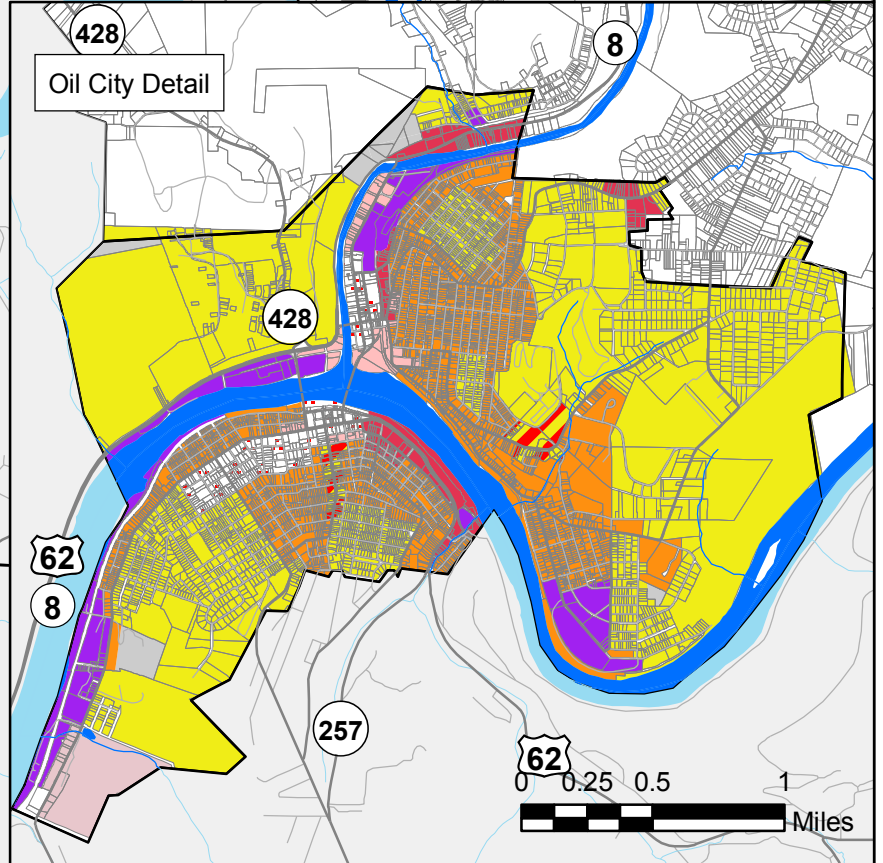
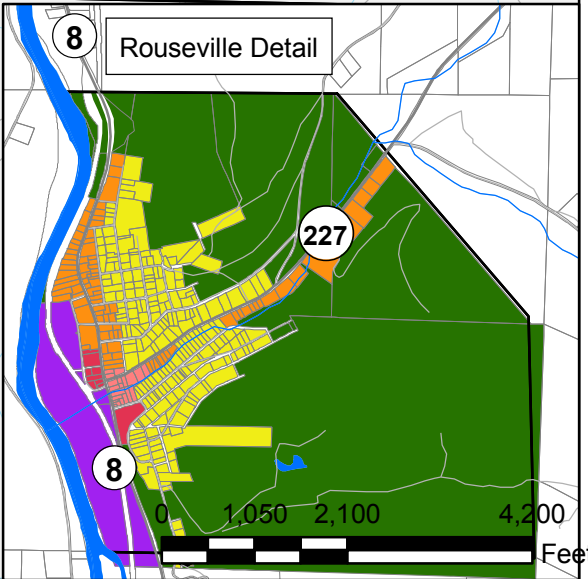
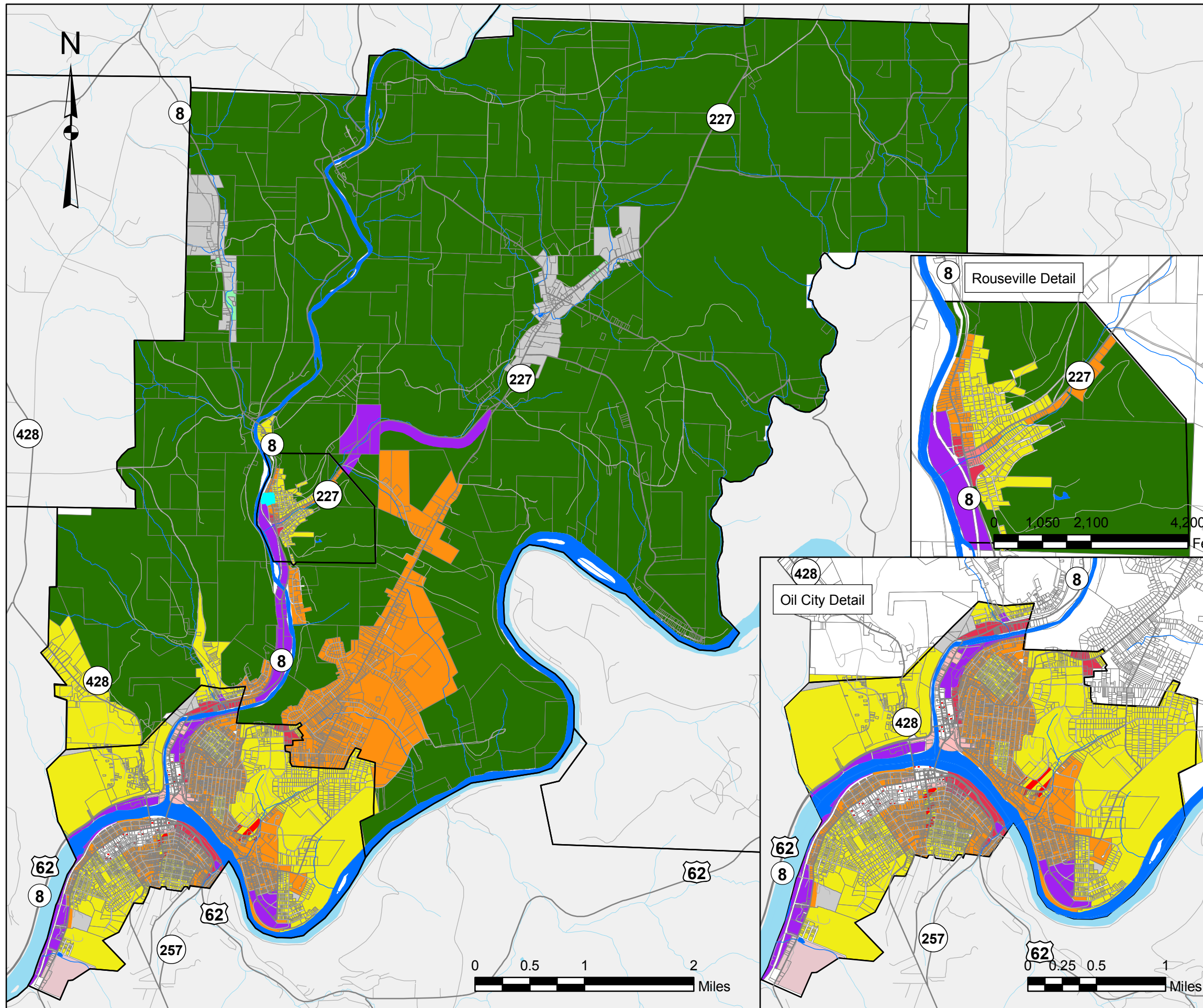
### **Task Force #3 – Community Facilities**

This task force would have a wide-range mandate. Its obvious goal is to improve the provision and services for essential services, especially water and sewer. But, it should also include any services where heavy equipment and special services are needed.

Some consideration of a Regional Municipal Facilities and Service Authority is warranted. The question is whether local resources can be economically grouped for better, less expensive service? Only objective/open cooperation will answer this question.

### **Task Force #4 – Public Safety**

Though this Plan does not foresee any immediate changes to current public safety arrangements, continuing cooperation is a must. Though only Oil City has police services, all communities have fire departments and share emergency services. Oil City should establish a format to offer contract police services, if requested, from other Plan communities.



**Legend**

- Conservation
- Industrial
- Village
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- Commercial
- Downtown Commercial
- Institutional
- Traditional Neighborhood Development
- Residential Limited Business

**Northern Venango County  
Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan  
Plan Map 8: Future Land Use**

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), 1998, 2001 and 2008, U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2005, Venango County GIS, 2007  
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic, North American, 1983

## The Regional Transportation Plan

As noted in the Background Report, the primary source for transportation funding is the United States Department of Transportation. Generally, their funds are funneled through the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. Eligible funding categories include transit, air lines, rail, as well as roads and highways.

The planning project for selecting projects is based upon Federal law. Over the past ten years, that law has gone through a series of name changes, starting as “Ice Tea” and now bearing the name “SAFETEA.LU.” Regardless of the acronym, the planning process has remained essentially the same.

- Projects are suggested, nominated, etc. by local communities to individual county planning agencies. Roads and highways, airports, rail lines, transit, and even bike/hiking trails can also be involved.
- Under the auspices of the regional planning mechanism (Northwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission), a “Rural Planning Organization (or RPO), project lists are developed. This is done in concert with the District PennDOT office in Oil City.
- The process is budget-constrained. This leads to rounds of processing and compromise locally and with the Harrisburg office of PennDOT—even the Federal Highway Administration is involved.
- This result is two basic documents. The first is the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the list of projects to be accomplished over a 5-year period. The second is the Long-Range Transportation Plan. That plan has a 25-year horizon.

The current TIP lists the following projects:

- Waitz Road Bridge\* (Cornplanter Township) and Bankson Road Bridge (Cornplanter): To be let in 2011.
- Sportsman Curve Project – Route 8: Design is authorized; construction not schedule yet. It is now listed 2011-2018 at \$5,000,000 for construction.
- Route 8, Cornplanter Run: This is a small bridge near the intersection with Union Street. Estimated let date is 2011.
- Route 8 Bypass Wall: Let April of 2009 to repair the retaining wall along the Route 8 bypass in Oil City. (Completed)
- Route 227 – Bridge over Cherry Run in Cornplanter Township: designed and bid April 2009. (Completed)
- Petroleum Center Bridge (SR 1004): This is on the TIP, but no let dates have been set.



Route 8 Bypass Wall

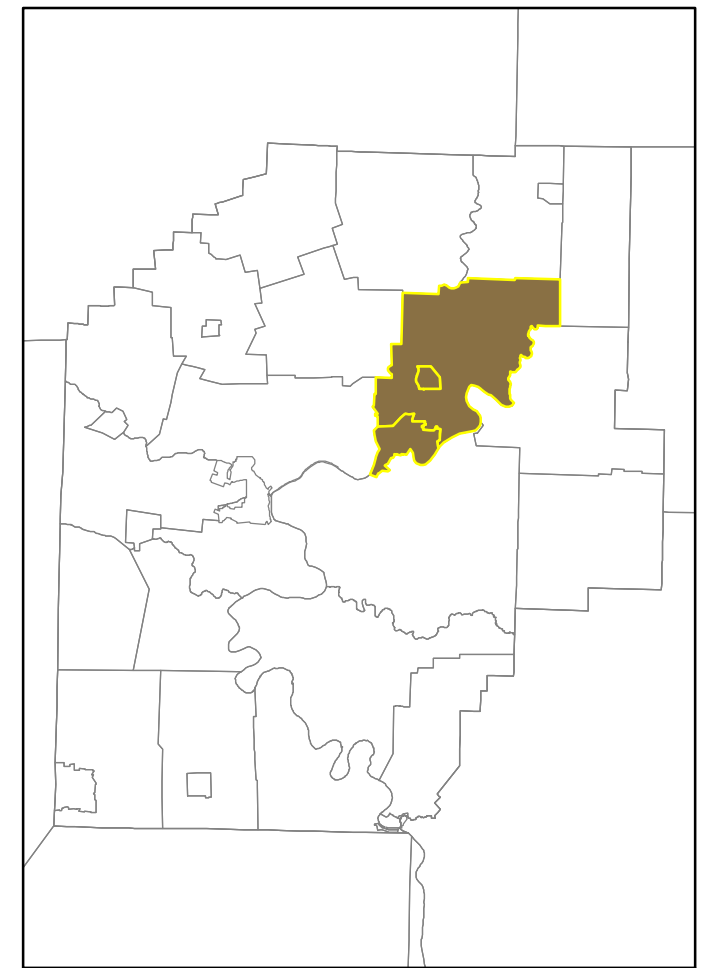
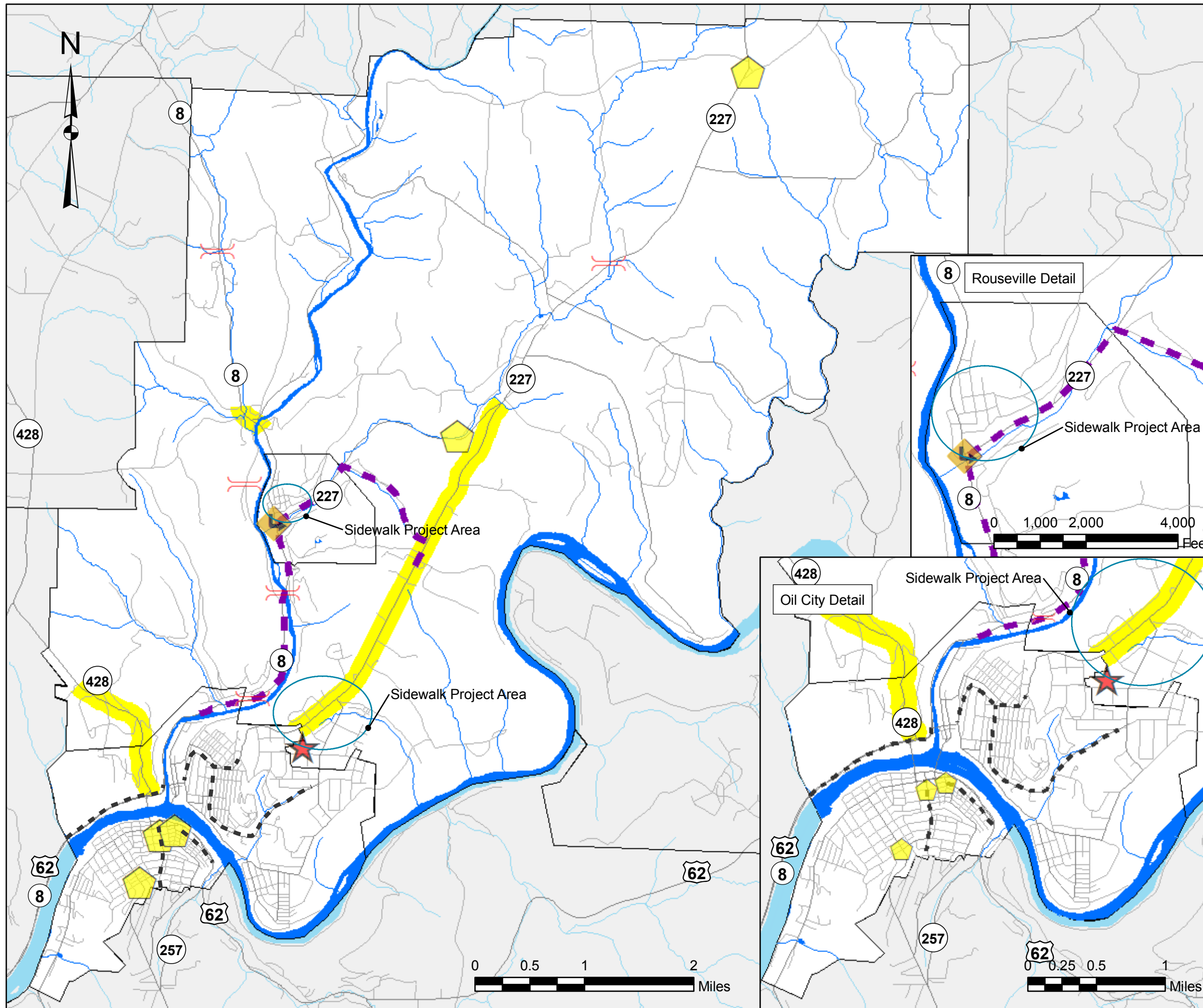


- McClintock Bridge on Route 8 (Cornplanter, just below Rouseville\*): Due to be let 2011-2012. In excess of \$7 million.
- Oil City, Rynd Farm Trail: This is a Federal “earmark.” Design is underway. Will connect the Waitz Road bike trail section with Oil City – \$1.5 million – construction 2011.
- Railroad: Bridge rehab and construction. About \$200,000 per year – 2011 to 2014.
- Transit: Buses, shelters, and signage.
- Bankson Road Bridge: Cornplanter (\$550,000).
- Route 62 Corridor Study recommendations (traffic circle, signalization, pedestrian enhancements, etc.).

*\*These two are scheduled to be let together.*

In addition, there appears to be over \$7.6 million scheduled for the Routes 62/257 intersection. Physically, this project is in Cranberry Township; yet, this intersection is vital to Oil City and its South Side, in particular. Also, it must be noted that Route 62, from the Petroleum Street Bridge to the City line is, the subject of a special study; its recommendations are part of this Plan.

There are several additional projects discussed under the individual headings. Map 9, “Transportation Plan,” shows an overview of all projects. See the Route 62 Study also for its transportation recommendations.



**Legend**

- Road Repaving
- Bridge Projects
- Safety Projects
- ★ Municipal Road Projects
- ◀ Turning Radius Project
- Bus Route Extension
- Corridor Safety Projects

**Northern Venango County  
Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan  
Plan Map 9: Transportation Plan**

Source: Pennsylvanian Department of Transportation (PennDOT), 1998, 2001 and 2008, U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2005, Venango County GIS, 2007  
 Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic, North American, 1983

# An Economic Plan for the Cornplanter-Oil City-Rouseville Area The COR

The economy of any area is not monolithic, but is composed of a myriad of interconnected relationships. Every community has a unique set of assets—qualities which present opportunities. Thus, it is locally. There are unique qualities which should enable the COR area to re-energize its economic base. We must stress this is not a full-blown economic plan—such as the specialized Downtown Plan—nor those prepared for the Oil Regional Alliance (ORA) or Northwest Regional. Rather, it seeks to capitalize on existing assets where municipal level assistance can be most effective.

**Every community has a unique set of assets—qualities which present opportunities.**

One of the primary assets of the region is a constellation of superior educational resources. Technical training—of all sorts—is a primary requisite for competing in today’s economy. Such training must be contemporary, and be able to quickly adapt to market conditions. The “big three” locally (Clarion University—Venango Campus, the Oil City Area School District, and the Venango Technology Center) recognize this need. They talk and cooperate on this task, which is an asset few communities possess.

## Current Conditions

A detailed analysis of the local economy was contained in the Background Report. A brief synopsis follows:

- Between 1990 and 2000—on an adjusted basis—Cornplanter (-\$735) and Rouseville (-\$8,032) saw decreases in median household income in constant dollars, while Oil City experienced a modest increase (+637).

**Table 1: Median Household Income – Census 2000**

Cornplanter Township	\$36,066
Oil City	\$29,060
Rouseville Borough	\$22,917
Venango County	\$32,267
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania	\$40,106
<i>Source: Census 2000</i>	

As can be seen, Cornplanter’s incomes are higher than those of Venango County as well as Oil City and Rouseville, but all areas lagged behind State-wide figures. This is a typical situation for western Pennsylvania.

- Poverty levels were high in Rouseville (25.2%) and Oil City (19.1%), per Census 2000.
- According to State data, annual average wages in Venango County were about 75% of the State’s level.

**Table 2: Average Wages – Top Five Employment Sectors – 2008**

Sector	Employment	Average Wage
Manufacturing	4,457	\$46,145
Health Care and Social Assistance	3,478	\$32,172
Retail	2,896	\$19,672
Local Government	1,879	\$33,309
State Government	1,502	\$44,700

*Source: WIA, State of Pennsylvania*

- County income was derived from earnings (53.3%); transfer receipts—usually retirement and Social Security (33.3%); and dividends, interest, and rents (13.4%). Over the past 10 years, transfer receipts have increased, indicating more retirees. (Data: U.S. Department of Labor, 2007)
- Retail Trade: Data is only available for Oil City for 1997 and 2002. It showed sales did increase, just slightly less than the rate of inflation. Retail payrolls (adjusted for inflation) experienced a 23% decline.
- According to local sources, industrial employment was significantly below 2009 levels; but there were some positive signs. Locally, SMS Millcraft, Schake Industries, and Electralloy all are expanding their facilities.

## The Plan

The issue relative to economic development strategies is basically in what areas are local strengths most apparent and how can the three communities positively impact the various economic sectors. Plan recommendations will be done by economic sector. They will identify appropriate lead agencies and what role the three municipalities could play.

## Tourism

Tourism is traditionally touted as one of Pennsylvania’s major industries. According to a report prepared by Global Insight for the Pennsylvania Tourism Office (2007), tourists spent \$27.81 billion in the Commonwealth. This reportedly generated \$18.96 billion in wages. Venango County is included in Pennsylvania’s “Great Lakes” Region, and that region was credited with \$1.25 billion in tourist income.

Tourism impacts primarily two economic areas: NAICS\*, Sector 71 (Arts, Entertainment and Recreation) and Sector 72 (Accommodations and Food Services). In Venango County, these two sectors employed about 1,400 persons (7%) of the County’s 20,420-person workforce (2008 data). These sectors have relatively low wage rates (\$10,000 to \$11,000 annual average)—about one third that of the County average. Yet, they



provide important “second” jobs. In addition, private tourist-based businesses do help stabilize property assessments. Where possible, tourism efforts should be enhanced.



Additional tourist assets would be useful; for example, a bait “concession” stand located along the Allegheny River, near the Marina, and handy to the bike trail. In addition to snacks and fishing needs, a potential for bike, boat, and canoe rentals exist. This recommendation echoes that of the concurrent Waterways Study. River access points at East Siverly, as also recommended in that Plan, would be a benefit. Finally, the Waterways Study recommends a “white water” attraction, starting near the Veterans’ Bridge on the South Side. (See Waterways Study)

Another strategy is the grouping of attractions. The “Tyred Wheels” Museum, a privately owned resource, is for sale. It presents an opportunity to purchase and locate it in a central location, more attractive to tourists. This concept should not focus on one attraction. The study area with the Venango Area Chamber of Commerce and Oil City, in particular, should form a committee to look for similar opportunities.

Traditionally, tourism is the purview of the Chamber of Commerce. In this region, tourism is also aided by the Oil Region National Heritage Area. Between these two agencies, tourist promotion is professionally handled. The continuing success of the annual Oil Heritage Days in Oil City is witness to this fact. This Plan suggests no change to the current tourism policies. Municipal cooperation and support are warranted.

Where can the area help? It is also critical the three municipalities support tourist assets as well as promotional activities. Here, their support could be quite effective. One of the primary tourist resources is the Oil Creek State Park, which was threatened with a shutdown during the 2009 State Budget crisis. Though the shutdown was avoided, this resource merits continued protection. Just as important as the Oil Creek Park— or perhaps more so—are the regional bike trails. Though this resource is covered by a separate Plan element, its completion would provide a continuous trail system from Titusville to Emlenton, well over 50 miles in length—enough for the most enthusiastic cyclist.

*\*North American Industry Classification System*

## **Retail**

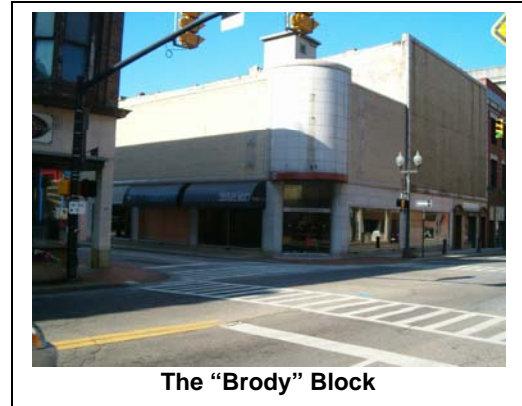
Most of the retail activity in the study area is within Oil City and is focused in either the North Side or South Side Downtowns. As noted in the Background Report, retail trade has been declining in Oil City. Retail activity, however, has at least three benefits: employment, tax base, and community identity.

The recently completed Downtown enhancement programs have created a pleasant, welcoming environment. But, the basic need is a revitalized commercial base. For some time, various groups have been working on that issue—the retail vigor of Oil City. They have coalesced into a

working group assisted by the Chamber, the ORA, and the Northwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission. Based on current initiatives, the Plan suggests the following:

- A “Main Street” application has been prepared for Oil City, with active support by the ORA. If funded, financial support will be needed from the City.

- Anchor Building Grant: In addition to the Main Street program, an Anchor Building nominee should be considered by the Main Street working group. Grants of up to \$500,000 are available—for 30% to 50% of eligible project costs (see State website). Selection of an “Anchor” building should be the task of the Oil City Main Street program.



- Problem buildings in the Downtown are a serious issue that needs to be addressed. The “Brody” block is now condemned. The demolition of this building, however, presents real challenges. The primary one is the presence of asbestos. Proper removal of this hazardous waste is an estimated cost of \$200,000. In addition, there is an accumulation of bird waste on the upper floor, presenting yet another health hazard. The Downtown Group envisions a “greenspace” here, in lieu of the current structure. This greenspace would serve as a land bank, waiting for an appropriate developer. It could be used temporarily for a number of uses. Even a synthetic ice rink has been suggested.

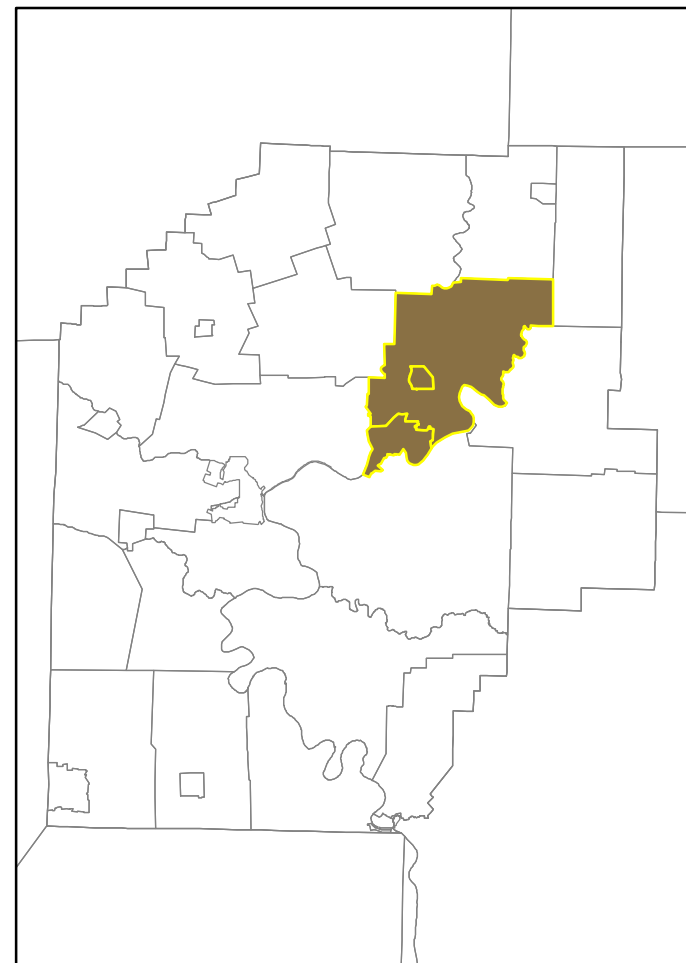
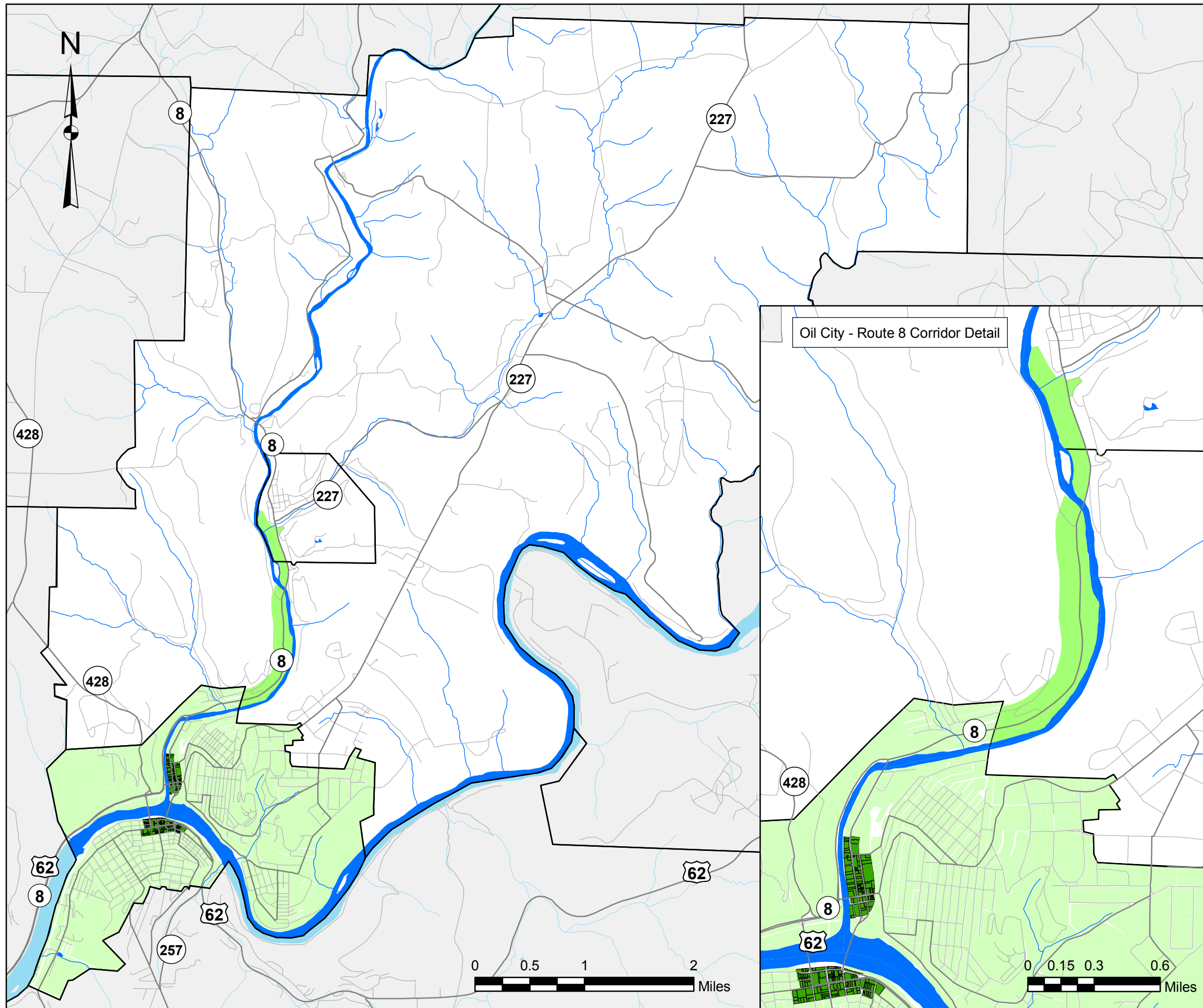
- The largest physical challenge is “Cornplanter Square.” The former Mellon Bank Building has been vacant for years. Its location is a key one in the North Side Downtown.

- Analysis of Downtown Buildings, both the North and South Sides: As an initial activity to the Main Street program, a cursory analysis of the structures in the Downtowns would be useful. The inventory could use the database of Downtown structures already completed as part of the Main Street application. It is suggested the Oil City Redevelopment Authority be involved in this effort. There may be obstacles to such an activity; yet, it would be of great benefit to any Downtown initiatives.

- There are other projects the Oil City Main Street program could pursue. These include shared elevator access of multiple buildings and a Venango Campus bookstore in the Downtown.



- For highway commercial development, the Route 8 corridor from Oil City to the Route 227 intersection in Rouseville should be the area’s focal point. At a minimum, a list of



**Legend**

- Route 8 Corridor LERTA
- Oil City LERTA (Commercial/Industrial)
- Oil City Special LERTA Parcels

**Northern Venango County  
Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan  
Plan Map 10: Proposed LERTA  
Districts, Oil City and PA 8 Corridor**

Source: Pennsylvanian Department of Transportation (PennDOT), 1998, 2001 and 2008, U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2005, Venango County GIS, 2007  
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic, North American, 1983

available properties, contacts, asking prices, utility availability, zoning, and traffic counts should be made available. A **joint** LERTA district is recommended. LERTA is a tax abatement of assessable improvements to real estate. The Oil City pattern of a five-year program is recommended, using a 100%, 80%, 60%, 40%, 20% declining abatement approach. Rouseville and Cornplanter should adopt similar schemes for the corridor. *(Note: Oil City has only limited space in this corridor, from the “White Bridge” north, to the City line.)* (The change of FEMA floodplain areas on Oil Creek has limited the attractiveness of this proposal.)

**Manufacturing:** In 2008, manufacturing was the top employment sector in Venango County, with an average wage of \$46,145 (about 40% higher than the County average). The traditional inducements used in Pennsylvania to help manufacturers expand or to relocate focus on land, capital, and labor. Oil City has abundant water resources. Marketing efforts should promote this resource, both for processing needs and as a potential geothermal energy source.

**Land and Buildings:** A long-time approach to economic development is developing or redeveloping industrial land and/or buildings. Sometimes, the land is sold or leased at below-market rates. A successful local example is the Oil City Industrial Park. The park is full, and employers there are paying good wages.

Its very success is a problem, as all available manufacturing space has been let. And, as a result, one of the recommendations of this Plan is for the City to consider the development of a “spec” building on the site. Such a building should consist of a metal shell, with a gravel floor and minimal electric connections. Usually, these structures are 10,000 to 12,000 square feet in size and are easily expandable. The benefit of such buildings is they can be quickly finished to accommodate a specific user. Concrete floors, electric, plumbing, insulation, and HVAC can be installed typically in 30 to 45 days. Other initiatives would include upgrading the unused section of the Innovation Building and redoing the parking area.

The Route 8 corridor also has available industrial land; though, sufficient acreage is not available for the development of a traditional industrial park. One of Route 8’s major advantages is the rail lines, which can be accessed by many of its parcels. Most of the available space is in Cornplanter and Rouseville.

**Capital:** ORA is the County’s lead economic development agency with access to a variety of loan programs, including the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority (PIDA). The funds provide below-market interest rates for machinery, equipment, land, and buildings. Though current interest rates are low, this option will be helpful when the prime rate is above 6 percent.

In addition to potential below-market loans, the LERTA program, previously mentioned, would be another inducement for manufacturing. There is no need to create another agency to compete with the ORA. Rather, local leaders should do everything possible to work with the group.

**Labor:** America is now in an era of exponential technology changes. This is true especially in manufacturing. Low skilled jobs are often sent overseas, while there always seems to be slots for workers with advanced or special skills. And, this applies to more than factory work. The healthcare sector is another prime example of technical change. As medicine becomes more complex, and as people live longer, the need for skilled caregivers, from technicians to nursing,



is an ever-increasing labor market. In fact, the medical services area is projected as a major employment growth area (see BLS employment projections). New technologies and changing workforce demands require nontraditional solutions.

It is for this emerging demand for a well-trained workforce that Oil City can capitalize on its **most valuable assets**. There is a unique combination of educational institutions in the area that look forward. Institutions that realize new approaches and new thinking are needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That combination is a unique force that could assist this area to, once more, gain its economic vigor and be a leader, breaking away from its long role as dependence upon economic cycles.

These institutions realize new thinking is needed for new times. And, training must react quickly to a changing marketplace. Educating workers for a new economy cannot wait for endless committees to review new curriculums. It must act promptly, often using a variety of sources to accomplish its goal. It is upon this concept that the area can regain an economic initiative. The capacity to train a variety of people in a variety of sectors can be as much an attraction to industry today as oil was in the 1860s.

**Who should head this effort?** Already identified are the three organizations: the Venango Technology Center, the Oil City Area School District, and the Venango Campus of the Clarion State University. The “Vo-Tech” has long been in the forefront of traditional job training. The Oil City Area School District has committed to a 21<sup>st</sup> century education approach.

### **Build a Future Economic Base**



Traditionally, western Pennsylvania communities build their economic development programs on one or two primary elements—manufacturing and tourism being typical. In Oil City, a broader approach is possible. In addition to these traditional aspects, the ARTS program is a unique asset. Even more exciting are the resources of the Venango Campus of Clarion University, which could make the area the premier site for technical training in this part of the State. And, perhaps that is understating the potential of this resource, which already has a multi-state presence.

And, what areas are the most promising? Certainly, there is a myriad of new techniques that look favorable. Perhaps the most promising arena—one that is locally appropriate—is energy. The much talked about Marcellus black shale requires new drilling techniques, quite different from traditional oil and gas drilling in Pennsylvania. Furthermore, wind energy, with its associated technologies, is rapidly moving from a “green” dream to a practical reality. For example, on December 10, 2009, General Electric signed a \$1.4 billion contract to construct 338 turbines from Caithness Energy. Another potential energy source is water. Both the Allegheny River and Oil Creek are possible energy sources. In fact, the Venango Campus is already active in basic “high” growth job areas. Current Federal policy is also witness to this. Based on local capacity

and the Federal High Growth Training Initiative, the following sectors appear particularly good foci:

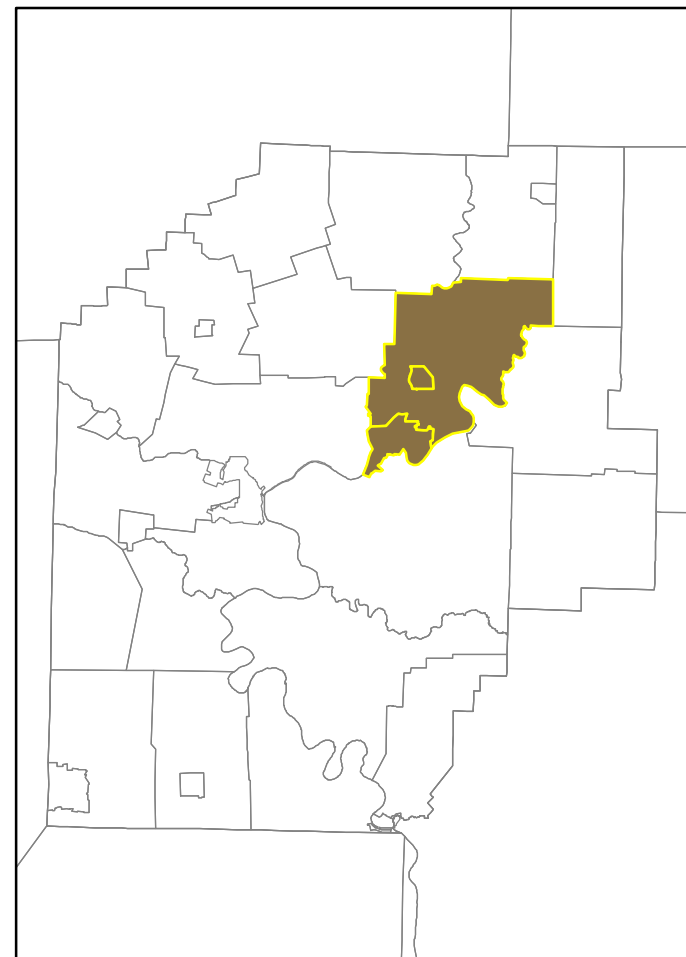
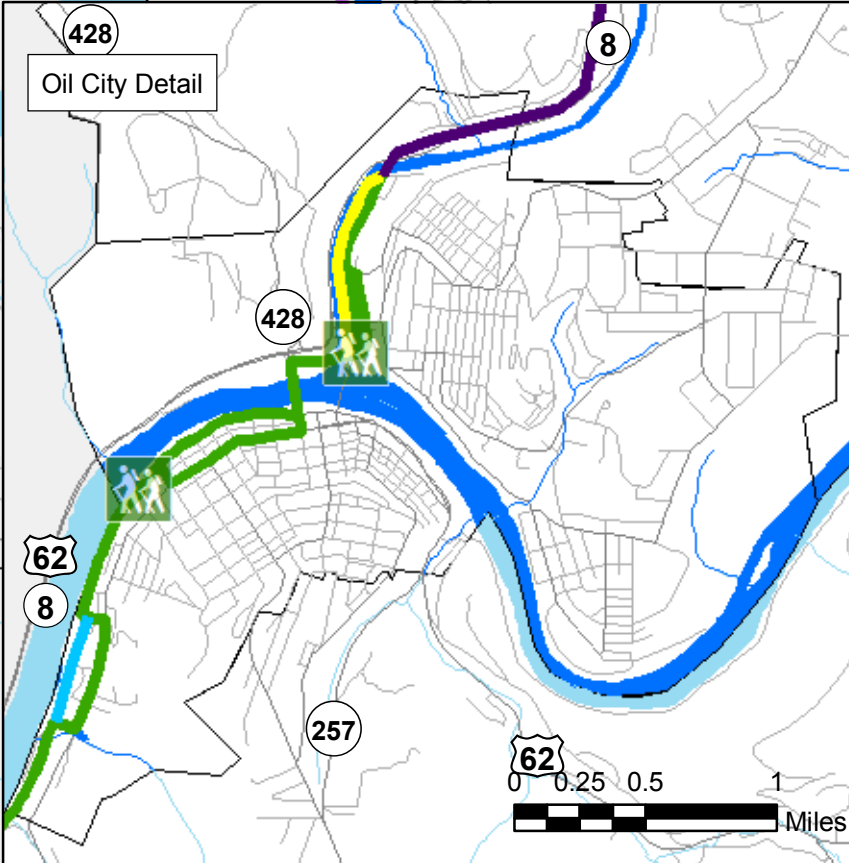
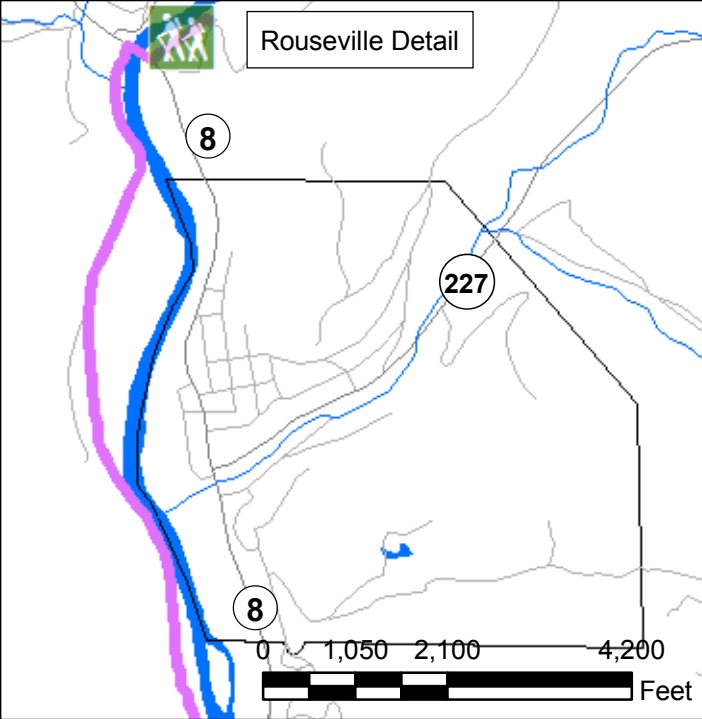
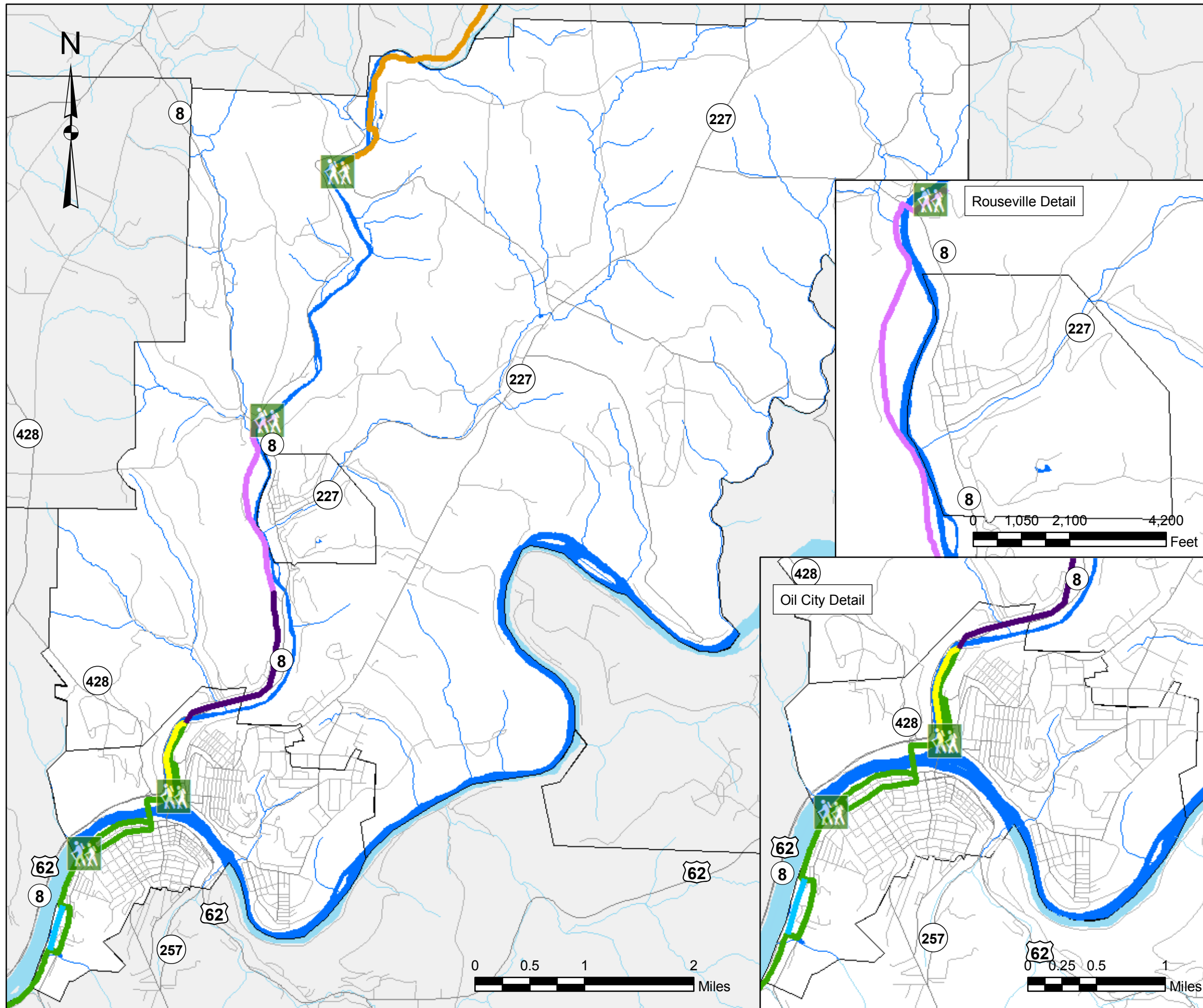
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Health Care
- Energy







As the Clarion Campus expands its programs, its enrollment—both on line and residential—will expand. Resident students make good consumers. If this area expects to return to vitality, education is one asset that can, and must, be exploited. But, it will require real local support and wholehearted cooperation. Education and training must be a full partner in this area’s economic plans.

**Education is one asset that can, and must, be exploited, which will require real local support and wholehearted cooperation.**

### **Broadband**

Using the ORA, any current needs for broadband access should be identified and remediation projects started.



- Legend**
-  Trail Heads
  -  Oil Creek Relocation
  -  First Street Relocation
  -  Existing Waitz Road Trail
  -  Waitz Road Trail Extension
  -  Justus Trail
  -  Oil Creek State Park Trail

**Northern Venango County  
Multimunicipal Comprehensive Plan  
Plan Map 11: Trail/Bikeway Plan**

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), 1998, 2001 and 2008, U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2005, Venango County GIS, 2007  
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic, North American, 1983

## The Bike Trail

Recently, the bike trail has become a priority for the Oil Region Alliance, and this Plan does not suggest a change. It has proved its capacity to secure needed funds for a critical trail gap. This Plan suggests some positive additions to the current bikeway plans.

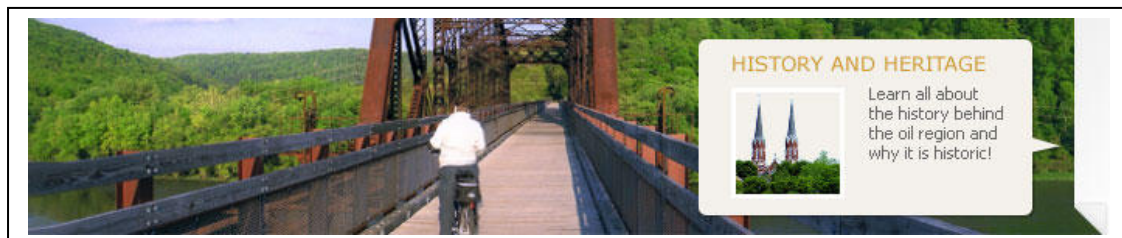
Though nominally part of the recreation element, the local bike trail is one link in a system that eventually could link Lake Erie to the Pittsburgh area. In the short term, a trail of nearly 50 miles is possible within a few years.

This Plan has the following recommendations:

- Support construction of the missing link of three miles from the trailhead at Petroleum Center to the Rynd Farm area, via DCNR funding.
- Support the ORA in its current project to design and construct the trail from the Waitz Road (McClintock #1) termination to Oil City. Construction is scheduled in 2011. Included in this concept are trailheads at Rynd Farm and the McClintock well.
- Relocate the trail in the north side of Oil City to the Downtown side of Oil Creek.
- Make Justus Park, with its restrooms, and the adjacent parking area as a major trailhead option. Use informational kiosks to highlight Downtown business attractions for bikers.
- Relocate all trail segments in the South Side of Oil City to the Allegheny River from West First.
- Put a concession stand/boat canoe rental at the Marina to complement the viability of both features.
- Repair the Bike Trail Bridge over Oil Creek (proposed for 2011).



This initiative will require the cooperation of the City, Cornplanter, and the ORA.



## ARTS and Culture Plan

### ARTS Oil City Economic Impact Statement

In the three years from July 2006 to July 2009, ARTS Oil City has had a visible economic impact on Oil City's Downtown. The City investment of \$67,000 over the three-year period, plus a \$15,000 marketing grant from the Venango Area Community Foundation, has resulted in one new downtown business, 17 home purchases, and the development of a downtown art studio incubator in the National Transit Building, which now houses 25 artist tenants. That constitutes more than a ten-fold return on investment.

The new business, a gallery café on Seneca Street, has become a magnet for other businesses. Classy Catering and Classic Salon relocated to the Downtown, and the old Singer's building next door has been purchased with an eye toward arts development. The artists in the National Transit Building are planning a second nonprofit gallery in the Annex. ARTS Oil City partners wherever possible with the North Side Business Association, and events like the Second Saturday Open Studios, weekly Pipeline Alley lunchtime concerts, and the Oil Region Indie Music and Arts Festival draw visitors downtown.

### Oil City Investment

Year 1: \$18,000 (salary for 15 hours/week and office expenses)

Year 2: \$22,000 (salary for 20 hours/week and office expenses)

Year 3: \$27,000 (salary, fringe, and office expenses, plus \$2,000 marketing)

**Total City Expense: \$67,000**

Venango Area Community Foundation Grant funds over 3-year period:

Years 1 to 3: \$15,000 Marketing

**Total Expense: \$83,000** (Over period from June 2006 to date)

Economic Impact on Oil City: 17 homes purchased by artists @ \$48,000 (Median home value in Oil City)

\$816,000: 17 households paying local taxes, purchasing local goods and services

\$26,000: 2009 – 23 artists paying rent @ .49/square foot x 4,451 square foot = \$2,181 x 12 =

\$20,000 (rough estimate for 2008)

Total rents since 2007: \$46,000

**Total Economic Impact: \$862,000**

The ARTS program was started locally in 2006. It has multiple goals. Certainly one is to foster the arts in the Oil City area. Yet, perhaps, the more important aspect is to make Oil City a destination for artists and to encourage these artists to both live and work in the City.

To promote this latter goal, there are two primary incentive programs. The first is to offer studio space in the Transit Building Annex, at very attractive rates. This program element has been so successful that all studios are now rented and the rental income, even at such reduced rates, covers insurance and utility costs.

The second aspect, in concert with the First National Bank of Pennsylvania, is to offer 100 percent housing mortgages in a designated Arts Housing district. To date, 19 new artists have moved to Oil City. They work here, shop here, and pay taxes.

The total benefit to the area, over a three-year-plus period, is estimated great (see prior page). This was accomplished for an investment of some \$87,000. The ARTS program has done much, and promises much.

Yet, in spite of its success, this program is now at crossroads. The initial surge is losing momentum. The outreach must expand and services become full time, so the Oil City area becomes a destination for artists, a destination not just because of inexpensive housing and studio space. Rather, it must become a destination because artists want to locate here. That means the continued recruitment of artists to build up a critical mass of professional artists. In this manner, the needed cultural and support services will begin to emerge, bringing with its emergence, a new economic base for the local economy. A second key is to enhance the Oil Heritage Art Show so it becomes a truly prestigious event.

It is now time to take ARTS Oil City to the next level. The ARTS Council has set forth an ambitious program that is part of this Plan and is summarized below:

- Expand the hours and, hence, the impact of the ARTS office to recruit more artists for the area.
- Expand the marketing budget for both the national market and to attract more local participation.
- Better connect the ARTS effort to the City's day-to-day operations.
- Improve/better fund the Oil Heritage Art Show to attract more artists of wider prominence.



Finally, for a longer-term strategy, a “Master Plan” for the ARTS is needed—one completed by professionals in this specialized field.

Such a plan could include:

- Pottery studio (Transit complex)
- Develop third floor of Annex
- Roof of Annex use for a greenhouse and dining area
- Energy-efficient windows for the Transit complex
- New elevators for the Transit complex and Annex
- Arts (sculptor) on streets and regional gateways
- First-rate theater next to the Annex

If these steps are successful, the Oil City area will become a destination for artists—a destination that needs less subsidy.

In addition to its external program to attract new artists, there are ongoing events which provide entertainment and cultural activities for the residents of the Plan area—in reality, for the entire County. These include:

Arts in the Transit Building

Arts in Justus Park

Arts in Various Venues – music of all types as well as the Oil Heritage Art Show

Music in Pipeline Alley

First Night

These programs truly help make this area a “special blend.”

This is the time to take:

**“Oil City ARTS to the Next Level.”**

## Special Section

Concurrent with the development of the Comprehensive Plan, the City of Oil City was engaged in two parallel planning activities—a Comprehensive Waterways Plan and the Route 62 Corridor Smart Transportation Study. These studies were the products of Mackin Engineering Company (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), and Johnson Mirmiran & Thompson (York and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania). These studies and their recommendations are hereby wholly incorporated into this Plan by reference.

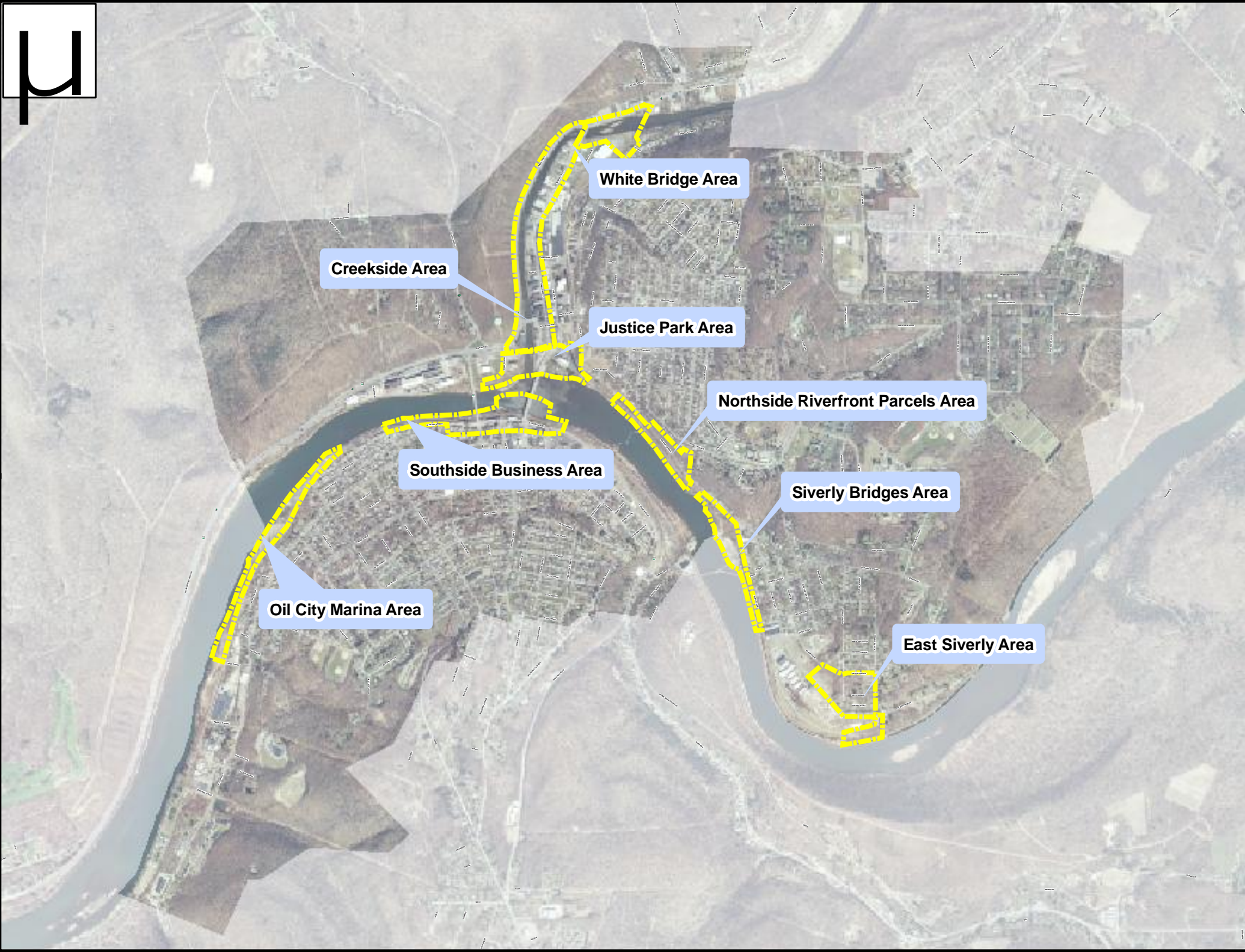
### **Oil City Comprehensive Waterways Study (Mackin Engineering)**

The Oil City Comprehensive Waterways Study is being completed concurrently with the City’s comprehensive plan. The Plan is a comprehensive approach to identify opportunities and develop strategies that would enhance the portions of the waterfronts of the Allegheny River and Oil Creek, located within the City limits. Eight areas along the creek and river have been identified in this effort (see map insert), with a variety of recommendations for each. In addition, general corridor-wide recommendations are also included in the Plan. This Plan adopts, by reference, that efforts result. In this Plan, only the highlights of each area are given.

1. Marina Area: As shown by the map, this area extends along the Allegheny River in Oil City’s “South Side,” where the existing Marina is located.
  - Improve boat launch
  - RV parking
  - Primitive camp sites
  - Improved fishing access (pier and riverside)
  - Kayak storage and bike facilities
  - Interpretive wetland area
  - Concession and exhibition pavilion
  - Dog park
  
2. Creekside: This area includes the section from SR 8 to Seneca Street, from the confluence of the creek and river to approximately the Seneca Street Pizza Hut.
  - Sponsor creek-oriented community events
  - Fishing enhancements
  - Improve visual Gateway to Oil City
  - Building façade program
  - Outdoor café/art shop, Center Street Bridge
  - Creekside boardwalk
  - Decoration and fencing



3. **East Siverly:** This area is just north and east of the Oil City Industrial Park and includes some of the parking lot for the Innovation Center.
  - Establish a boat, canoe, kayak launch area with support facilities
  - Picnic areas
  - Improve river access – trails
  - Community market area
  - Improve Colbert – planting, sidewalks
  - Improve/renovate playground areas
4. **Justus Park Area:** This area includes both the east and west banks, at the confluence of Oil Creek and the Allegheny River.
  - Establish a trailhead at Justus Park with support services
  - Bridge walkers loop
  - Signage and information
  - Dog park; picnic facilities (VFW area)
  - Season concession
  - Improve river access
5. **White Bridge Area:** This includes both sides of Oil Creek, from the White Bridge upstream to the Railroad Bridge.
  - Picnic areas
  - Improve creek access (kayaks, inner tube, canoes)
  - Bike/hike trail loop and connection
6. **South Side Business:** This area extends from Division upstream to the fountain area at Wilson.
  - Designate a white-water loop under the Veterans’ Memorial Bridge
  - Improve river access (fishing and boating)
  - Redevelop, strengthen the South Side; institute a consistent façade program
7. **Siverly Bridge:**
  - Passive camping
  - Extend the hike/bike trail along Allegheny (from Justus Park area)
  - Improve river access – trailhead facilities
  - Dog park
  - Designate conservation area



**White Bridge Area**

**Creekside Area**

**Justice Park Area**

**Northside Riverfront Parcels Area**

**Southside Business Area**

**Siverly Bridges Area**

**Oil City Marina Area**

**East Siverly Area**

8. **North Side River Area:** This area is along Colbert and is largely undeveloped.
- Rails-to-trail connections – Justus Park to Siverly
  - Fishing access points

Some general corridor-wide improvements include the elimination of invasive species, the opening up of viewsheds, and improving water access. Pedestrian and bike access is also an important element of the Waterways Plan. The main theme is to refocus the City’s attention on the waterways and reconnect the residents and visitors with invaluable and unique resources available in Oil City. Where possible, “CSOs” are to be eliminated.

### **Route 62 Smart Transportation Study (JMT)**

This study focuses on Route 62, from the Petroleum Street Bridge to just past Pumphouse Road.

By way of consulting with the business people of the South Side, the project Steering Committee and the public, some ten “Issues and Concerns” were identified. These were:

- Antiquated traffic signal; accidents; right burns (W)
- Poor sight distance at major intersections (W)
- Blighted properties (T)
- Need for pedestrian enhancements (O)
- Traffic speed (W)
- Enhance safety and pedestrian signage (O)
- Traffic calming – roundabout (O)
- Local economy – lack of funding (T)
- Pedestrian trails, paths, and sidewalks; the Railroad Bridge (O)
- Bike lanes along roadways (O)

W = Weakness  
T = Threat  
O = Opportunity




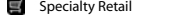
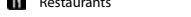
The study has established the following priorities:

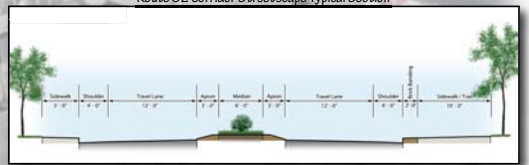
The various projects that contribute to fulfilling the vision for Smart Transportation solutions along the Route 62 Corridor and surrounding South Side area have been analyzed in terms of cost, impact to the community, financing, necessary partnerships, and improvement to the local economy. Through the analysis, the following project implementation and prioritization strategy has been developed:

# Route 62 Smart Transportation Study

## Oil City, Pennsylvania

### Legend

-  Pedestrian Circulation
-  Traffic Signal Improvement
-  High Priority Area
-  Outdoor Farmer's Market
-  Specialty Retail
-  Restaurants



## Project Prioritization and Implementation

- **High-Level Priorities**

- *Central Avenue Streetscape Improvements:* Central Avenue improvements would provide necessary infrastructure improvements and an aesthetically pleasing upgrades to the pedestrian and roadway facilities between the limits of Front Street and Second Street. The improvements will accomplish these goals without impact to the existing cannon and monuments within the central island area.
- *Central Avenue and First Street Signal Improvements:* Accessible (or Audible) Pedestrian Signal (APS) improvements at the intersection of Central Avenue and First Street will provide a safer crossing condition for the visually impaired pedestrian, as well as all pedestrians. The goal of an APS is to provide an audible notification of when it is safe to cross at an intersection. In addition, most modern devices are equipped with brail to provide additional directions for operating the pedestrian push button.
- *Second Street Streetscape Improvements:* Streetscape improvements along the Second Street corridor, from Wilson Avenue to Front Street would provide functional and aesthetic improvements to the existing pedestrian facilities along the commercial/residential corridor. The improvements should be completed in coordination with access management improvements along the commercial side of the corridor, as well as infrastructure upgrades to the existing public water facilities.
- *Front Street (Route 62) Corridor:* A “road diet” project along the Route 62 corridor will establish a transportation facility that is consistent with existing and projected traffic volumes while promoting alternative modes of transportation through the inclusion of pedestrian facilities.
- *First Street Roundabout:* A single-lane roundabout at the intersection of First Street/ Wilson Avenue and Front Street will provide a gateway into the business district of the south side of Oil City. The roundabout will also provide a means of traffic calming and improve the overall safety of motor vehicles and pedestrians.
- *Land Use Initiatives:* Incorporation of the various revitalization strategies identified in the previous section with a focus of balancing the transportation and land use initiatives to enhance the Downtown core of the South Side Business District.

- **Middle-Level Priorities**

*Downtown Core Streetscape:* Streetscape improvements within the downtown core area will provide an impact related to the Smart Transportation goals and objectives that were used as guidance through the development of the Corridor Study. The streetscape improvement would be focused on safety and aesthetic improvements to the pedestrian facilities. These improvements could be completed at once or packaged as smaller, more affordable projects.

*Railroad Bridge:* Currently, the railroad bridge is posted for no pedestrians; however, the bridge is commonly used as an access means between the north side and south side of Oil City. Bridge safety improvements, as well as upgraded pedestrian and bicycle facilities would provide a safe and convenient access between the residential area on the North Side and the commercial area on the South Side. Implementation of these improvements will require coordination and buy-in from Western New York and Pennsylvania Railroad.

*Rail Trail:* Open space along the southern banks of the Allegheny River provides a convenient opportunity for a hiker/biker trail within the study area. The proposed trail could stretch from the Veterans' Memorial Bridge to the Wye Railroad Bridge and connect to future trail extensions. The goal of this improvement is to create a pedestrian facility that promotes pedestrian and bicycle use, serving as recreational purposes, as well as transportation purposes. Implementation of these improvements will require coordination and buy-in from Western New York and Pennsylvania Railroad.

*Public Plaza:* The proposed public plaza is located adjacent to the First Street and Front Street intersection. The goal of this improvement is to create a beautiful pedestrian gathering facility within the study area in a location that is located within close proximity to the Downtown core area of the South Side, as well as access to the views and potential recreation opportunities along the Allegheny River.

## Consistency

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code states (Section 301.4) that municipal comprehensive plans shall be generally consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan, which was adopted on January 5, 2010.

This analysis follows the goals as set forth by the County Plan's Executive Summary (pages 15 through 41).

**Goal No. 1:** To sustain the highest quality of rural residential, suburban, and urban life for the residents of Venango County. The Plan is consistent with the County Plan:

1. To provide for a planned mixture of residential, agricultural, commercial, recreational, and industrial land uses throughout the County.
  - All municipalities have zoning ordinances to rely on the County's SALDO, and this Plan recommends that process continue.
  - Zoning designations are compatible at the borders with the minor exception of land in Cornplanter, west of Route 8. It is zoned residential and abuts industrial land. (*Note: Current land use is a sewer plant.*)
  - The Plan recommends that both Oil City and Cornplanter adopt "TND" provisions in their zoning to ensure development is consistent with policy.
  - This is a multi-municipal effort.
2. To preserve, to the greatest extent possible, the rural character of Venango County by focusing commercial and residential development in or near the established villages or downtowns.
  - This Plan keeps the focus on growth in established areas. Municipal land use ordinances allow for a mixture of uses in commercial areas and adaptive reuse in selected residential areas.
3. To promote alternatives to residential and commercial strip development along major highways, such as Routes 8, 62, 257, and 322, and to encourage scenic roadways on various State and local roads in rural areas.
  - This Plan promotes the use of approved access management standards along major highways.
  - Most of the roadway corridors are already developed in the study area.
  - Street standards are generally found in SALDOs. The study area relies on the County SALDO.
4. To promote higher-density development where roads and utilities are capable of sustaining service to such development.

- Most new development is scheduled in Cornplanter Township. The Plan analysis concluded that projected growth could be concentrated in areas already appropriately zoned.
5. To maintain and strengthen the agricultural and forestry economy.
    - The only community with agricultural or forestry activities is Cornplanter Township. No changes to current zoning, which allow these activities, are suggested in the Plan.
  6. To encourage economic growth by industries and businesses related in the natural, economic, and educational resources of Venango County.
    - This Plan recognizes the Oil Regional Alliance as the primary economic development agency.
    - The Plan identified the Route 8 as its prime economic corridor.
    - The Plan supports the Oil City Main Street effort. It also recommends expanded LERTA in the Oil City Downtown as well as along the Route 8 corridor in all three municipalities.
    - This Plan recommends the emphasis on training programs as an economic development tool.
  7. To identify opportunities for inter-municipal cooperation in the delivery of public services.
    - This Plan recommends the formation of four multi-municipal task forces; two of these deal directly with public service and public facilities.
  8. To promote public/private partnerships in identifying and solving problems.
    - This Plan recommends the inclusion of the private sector, especially in housing—one of the key Plan priorities.

**Goal No. 2:** To provide policies, plans, and proposals to municipalities for the physical, economic, and social development of their communities while protecting the natural, historic, and built environments.

1. To encourage all municipalities in Venango County to adopt local or multi-municipal land use plans, and, if recommended in those plans, to adopt local land use ordinances.
  - This is a multi-municipal plan. All municipalities have land use ordinances.
2. To promote the form of development called “Conservation Subdivisions” throughout the County. (Conservation Subdivision is a form of subdivision design that preserves 40% or more of the total land area of a parent tract as permanently undeveloped land.)
  - Given the modest level of development forecast over the next decade, the Conservation Subdivision option was not regarded as viable.



*Note:* Items 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, and 23 essentially County Commission, County Planning Commission, or ORA activities.

20. To encourage municipalities to regularly review and revise sewage facility plans, comprehensive plans, and capital improvements plans.
  - Act 537 Plans for all municipalities were initiated prior to the funding of this Plan and are essentially complete.
22. To encourage County and municipal governments to maintain public safety facilities, resources, and personnel at the highest degree of readiness.
  - All public safety organizations were contacted and expressed needs included in this Plan.

**Goal No. 3:** To promote conditions providing for the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of Venango County.

The first eleven items under this Goal were County Planning Commission, County, or other agency activities.

12. To encourage municipal and county governments to establish regular ongoing training for employees and to establish standards of professionalism for such employees. The County and its municipalities should establish mechanisms for sharing highly specialized management, technical, and enforcement personnel.
  - The three municipalities do encourage training and already share personnel (Code Officer).

*Note:* Items 13 and 14 are identified as County Planning Commission, the Parks Authority, and Conservation District activities.

15. To explore the creation of a Venango County Library System and establish formulas to provide consistent levels of public funding for such a system.
  - The Oil City Library is a de facto regional facility and provides offices for a regional, county, state library function.

**Goal No. 4:** To provide equal opportunities for all residents to obtain safe, affordable, housing. Affordable housing is defined as housing that annually costs no more than 35% of the median household income, as defined in the most recent United States Census Information.

- Items 1 and 2 are essentially County functions.
- Items 3 and 4 involve zoning map and ordinance provisions, a priority in this Plan, to enhance area housing conditions.
- Items 5 and 6 involve bonus densities and the development of Planned Residential Developments (PRDs) or TNDs. After a review of the County Housing Market Plan, it

was concluded the local market was not yet robust enough to utilize a PRD option. However, TNDs have been recommended.

- Items 8, 9, 10, and 11 are identified as County Planning Commission or County Commissioner functions.

**Goal No. 5:** To provide equal opportunities for all residents to obtain meaningful employment.

- Most of these activities are designated for organizations other than the three members of this Plan.

**Goal No. 6:** To promote the enhancement of the agricultural and forest areas of Venango County in an economically sound manner.

- Most of the actions recommended are by the County Planning Commission, the County Conservation District, or the ORA.

**Goal No. 7:** To provide a framework for cooperation within Venango County and the region.

- Most of the actions recommended are by the County Planning Commission, the County Commissioners, or other County organizations.

Based on the forgoing, this Plan is found to be generally consistent with the County Plan.

## Plan Interrelationships

The following are the key interrelationships between Plan elements:

1. The primary linkage is between the Housing and Land Use elements. This linkage is essentially a remedial one which uses the zoning ordinance as a tool to stabilize and improve the area's housing stock and market.
2. The second key linkages are Land Use, the Economic Plan, the Bike Trail, and the ARTS. Land use can provide for viable attractive commercial areas, while the bike trail and ARTS program support tourism as well as the area's overall viability.
3. Community facilities, especially water and sewer systems, are needed elements to allow for housing development and foster economic development. The provision of adequate water and sewer facilities along Route 8 is a key prime example of such linkages.
4. Transportation – A safer and efficient transportation system is essential for all Plan elements.

## Implementation

The implementation of many recommendations in this Plan consist of activities that are relatively standard and do not require a detailed explanation. In some other instances, projects are set forth in enough detail to facilitate implementation. This section highlights two elements: high-priority activities and “Quick Start” projects.

### Quick Starts Projects (QSP)

- Justus Park Trailhead – Oil City
- 3<sup>rd</sup> and Walnut Park – Oil City
- Water and sewer lines, Route 8 – Cornplanter
- New sewer plant – Rouseville
- Paving Old Bankson Road – Cornplanter

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### High-Priority

#### Historic Preservation

- Institution of TND\* zoning – Oil City Downtown
- Downtown LERTA – Oil City

#### Land Use

- Amend ordinance to allow reasonable multi-family “55-plus” development – Rouseville
- Update zoning ordinances – All municipalities
- Prepare TNDs for residential and second-home areas – Cornplanter and Oil City

#### Transportation

- Promote all TIP projects – All municipalities, Venango County, RPO

#### Housing

- Code enforcement – All municipalities
- Demolition – All municipalities
- Rehabilitation – All municipalities
- “Down zoning” – Oil City

#### Natural Resource Protection

- Zoning – All municipalities

#### Community Facilities

- Implement Act 537 Plans – All municipalities
- Water projects – All municipalities

## **Economic Development**

- Institute the training center concept – All municipalities
- Route 8 priorities – All municipalities
- ARTS – Oil City

Throughout the body of this Plan, there are recommendations for specific actions, usually identifying pertinent actions/programs. In addition, an “Implementation” workshop was held to better acquaint participants with available resources.