

JULY
2024



ALTOGETHER ALTOONA

A Comprehensive Plan for Our Future



**Adopted
July 8, 2024**

Prepared for the City of
Altoona, PA by czbLLC



Acknowledgments

This plan was developed under the guidance of City Council, the Altoona City Planning Commission, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, and City Staff, as well as with the thoughtful input from the citizens of the City of Altoona.

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Introduction

Altoona the intentional city.
Altoona the haphazard city.
These contradictory qualities marked the city's development for over a century after its founding by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1849.

From the start, Altoona served a highly strategic purpose for the company, which turned the city into one of the world's largest centers for building locomotives, passenger cars, and box cars, and for testing new railroad technologies. Over time, this role gave rise to far-sighted city-building: the extensive water works built by the railroad, neighborhoods of charming storybook homes for company managers and their families, the bucolic landscape of Highland Park, and the enduring social and religious institutions that emerged and took impressive form—the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament and Jaffa Shrine among them—all reflected a high degree of long-term intention.

But Altoona's dependence on a single dominant company, one that was always riding the peaks and valleys of the national economy, also gave rise to the haphazard Altoona: homes built quickly and cheaply to meet the basic shelter needs of arriving laborers, streets with incomplete sidewalks and curbing, a downtown lacking a clear center, neighborhoods with chronic subsidence and flooding, and major streets with little or no aesthetic value—all reflected shorter term, utilitarian thinking dictated by times of austerity and cost-cutting, or the need to get something done quickly if temporarily.

In recent decades, the intentional and haphazard cities have coexisted as historical but active layers in a third Altoona: **the hesitant city**. With a diminished sense of purpose during the railroad's long decline, stung by past mistakes, and worn by cycles of financial hardship, the Altoona community became less tolerant of risk, less bold, and more likely to wait for someone else to make the first move—a role the railroad once reliably played. Caution and holding back became an engrained mindset, extending even to basic municipal operations and services.

Today, there is a recognition that the path of the hesitant city is a path that can only produce marginal results on a range of issues where marginal results are no longer enough to maintain even the status quo. A new path is needed to make transformations happen that can be sustained over the long term—a path that draws on the strengths of the intentional city, the inherent grit and resourcefulness of the haphazard city, and the growing awareness of Altoona's abundance of natural, historic, and social assets.

All Together Altoona is a comprehensive plan that defines this new path for the community to collectively work towards. Rather than the railroad or the state and federal governments, it is a path that requires the City of Altoona and its people to be the vanguards of change—to spearhead new initiatives, to embrace new ways of addressing longstanding problems, and to align expectations for better performance with the resources necessary to achieve better performance.



All Together Altoona defines a vision for a more entrepreneurial, bold, and inclusive city that invests in itself and successfully competes for new households and businesses. It does so by giving clarity to key areas of work that require focus—better public spaces that instill pride and confidence, and healthier neighborhoods that are sought out by Blair County households and where property owners are willing to improve properties to higher standards.

As a guide for making—and taking ownership of—decisions that align with the community's vision, All Together Altoona will help Altoona's public officials, residents, business stakeholders, and institutional leaders make sound decisions in the coming years when confronted with predictable and unforeseeable choices. Whenever a decision can be tied to a collective understanding of what is most important to Altoona and its ability to become a place of choice for future generations, the All Together Altoona vision will be one step closer to reality.



What does our future look like if we move in the direction of the All Together Altoona vision?

Altoona in 2035 is a place where...

Our decisions consistently reflect our core values



We are forward-looking and proactive in our approach to solving problems and making the most of our opportunities



We have continued to be...

Resourceful

Self Reliant

Gritty

We are becoming more...

Entrepreneurial

Inclusive

Bold



We have 'skin in the game'

We demand and maintain higher standards



We embrace risk-taking and new approaches

We protect and strengthen Altoona's inherent assets





Our public spaces and the experiences they provide to residents and visitors are much improved



Downtown Altoona is stronger and more vibrant



Our streets are safer and more beautiful



Our parks and trails have an excellent reputation and form a cohesive network

Neighborhoods in all parts of Altoona show greater levels of pride and have stronger housing options



Neighborhoods of all types feel healthier and more stable



Blight is being effectively managed and property conditions are improving



Housing that is both appealing and affordable is easier to find



Our actions, collectively, have created the conditions within which Altoona is successfully competing for young people and a talented workforce

By carefully investing in ourselves through stronger public spaces and healthier neighborhoods, we have made Altoona a place where households and businesses choose to be because they see a confident community on the rise. They recognize—as many long have—that this is a place worth caring about and worth putting down roots.

As we invest in our community, and as more households and businesses make similar commitments, our tax base is expanding and it is becoming easier to set and maintain standards that make us proud.

A new comprehensive plan for Altoona

Comprehensive plans provide the legal basis for enacting and enforcing zoning regulations and other policies that shape where and how development happens. In Pennsylvania, local planning and zoning must be consistent with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code.

More broadly, comprehensive plans have the potential to provide local governments with strategic direction on any number of issues that are deemed important. As the successor to the award-winning Positively Altoona Comprehensive Plan (2013), All Together Altoona provides strategic direction to the City and its partners by following Pennsylvania's implementable comprehensive plan model. In particular, it has been guided by the three hallmarks of great plans:



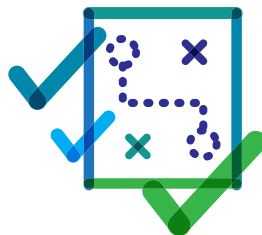
It plans for what is known

A great plan creates clarity around trends and issues that are measurable, allowing a community to make well-informed choices that are likely to achieve desired outcomes.



It gets the 'Big Things' right

A great plan identifies a few issues that are so important to a community's future that they require focused attention and resources to ensure they are handled correctly. When attention is scattered or resources are spread too thin, inaction or half-measures become the norm.



It creates a decision making framework for what is unknown

A great plan recognizes that the unforeseen happens everyday and provides a decision-making framework (tied to core values) for circumstances that cannot be predicted.

How does a plan become reality?

If the City Council and other community leaders are truly willing to make decisions consistent with the comprehensive plan, it will be reflected in the following:

Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

CIPs involve the annual allocation of resources to pay for improvements to public facilities, equipment, and infrastructure. The comprehensive plan should provide significant direction for CIPs.

Land Use and Design Regulations

The comprehensive plan is the legal basis for the zoning code, which determines land use, density, and other characteristics of the built environment. After the plan is adopted, the code should be updated to reflect the plan.

Housing and Neighborhood Policy

Goals related to housing can be realized through the zoning code, as well as the allocation of resources to encourage specific types of investments in new or existing housing.

Economic Development Policy

Actions to promote economic activity of specific types and in specific places—to create jobs, build the tax base, or provide desired services—can be molded to reflect goals, trends, and conditions described in the plan.

Transportation and Infrastructure

The comprehensive plan should influence how federal, state, and local transportation and infrastructure dollars are allocated to improve conditions, boost capacity, or change how infrastructure is used.

Parks and Recreation

The CIPs, general fund, and zoning code can all be used to support investment to or expansion of parks and recreational facilities to meet quality of life goals expressed by the plan.

Small Area Plans

The comprehensive plan cannot provide detailed direction for what should happen on every block. But subsequent plans or updated plans for specific neighborhoods, corridors, and communities can be developed to apply the overall goals of the comprehensive plan at a more granular level.

Part 3 of this plan provides guidance on how to shape future plans and policies to align with the All Together Altoona vision and how to pay for better outcomes.

A community-driven process

The **All Together Altoona** planning process began in May 2023 and was informed and guided by the Altoona community through several methods of engagement.



Steering Committee



Kitchen Table Conversations



Online Survey



Open Houses

A **steering committee** of local stakeholders worked closely with project consultants throughout the process.

Steering committee members hosted **Kitchen Table Conversations**—small, facilitated discussions that aided the identification of important issues and how the community makes decisions.

Approximately 150 members of the community participated in two rounds of these conversations during the early summer and fall of 2023.

An **online survey** in July sought broad public feedback on important questions that shaped the plan.

Over 700 people participated in the survey, which was also made available in a hard copy format.

Open houses in July and December of 2023 provided an opportunity for residents to learn about the planning process and have in-depth conversations with steering committee members and project consultants about issues important to them.

Approximately 100 people attended these events, and the posters used were made available for wider access at the project website.

How to Use This Plan

To support the use of All Together Altoona as a strategic decision-making guide for the entire Altoona community, this document is organized into three parts that outline the components of the All Together Altoona vision and how to make choices as a community that will help to advance that vision.



Altoona's Current Path

It is difficult to chart a new direction for a community if its current path is poorly understood. **Part 1 uses a wide range of data sources to distill existing conditions and recent trends into a portrait of Altoona's baseline direction.**

On a number of fronts, the central takeaway is this: if Altoona maintains its current path, it is unlikely to make meaningful progress on issues that matter most to Altoonans.



Altoona's Path Forward

Part 2 defines the core components of All Together Altoona's vision for the future. It identifies the community's top priorities—which are centered on the attraction and retention of young people and a talented workforce—as well as the values and principles that should guide consistent decision-making.

It concludes by outlining a limited set of measurable outcomes that will indicate progress toward the All Together Altoona vision.



Altoona's Plan for Action

Part 3 defines a set of processes, tools, and strategies that constitute a responsive and implementable action plan for Altoona—responsive to the existing conditions and limitations described in Part 1 and the desired direction described in Part 2.

The action plan is designed to be adaptive—to help Altoona adjust how it operates to achieve different outcomes. And the plan itself is designed to adapt—to be modified over time as implementation efforts reveal new challenges and opportunities.

PART 1

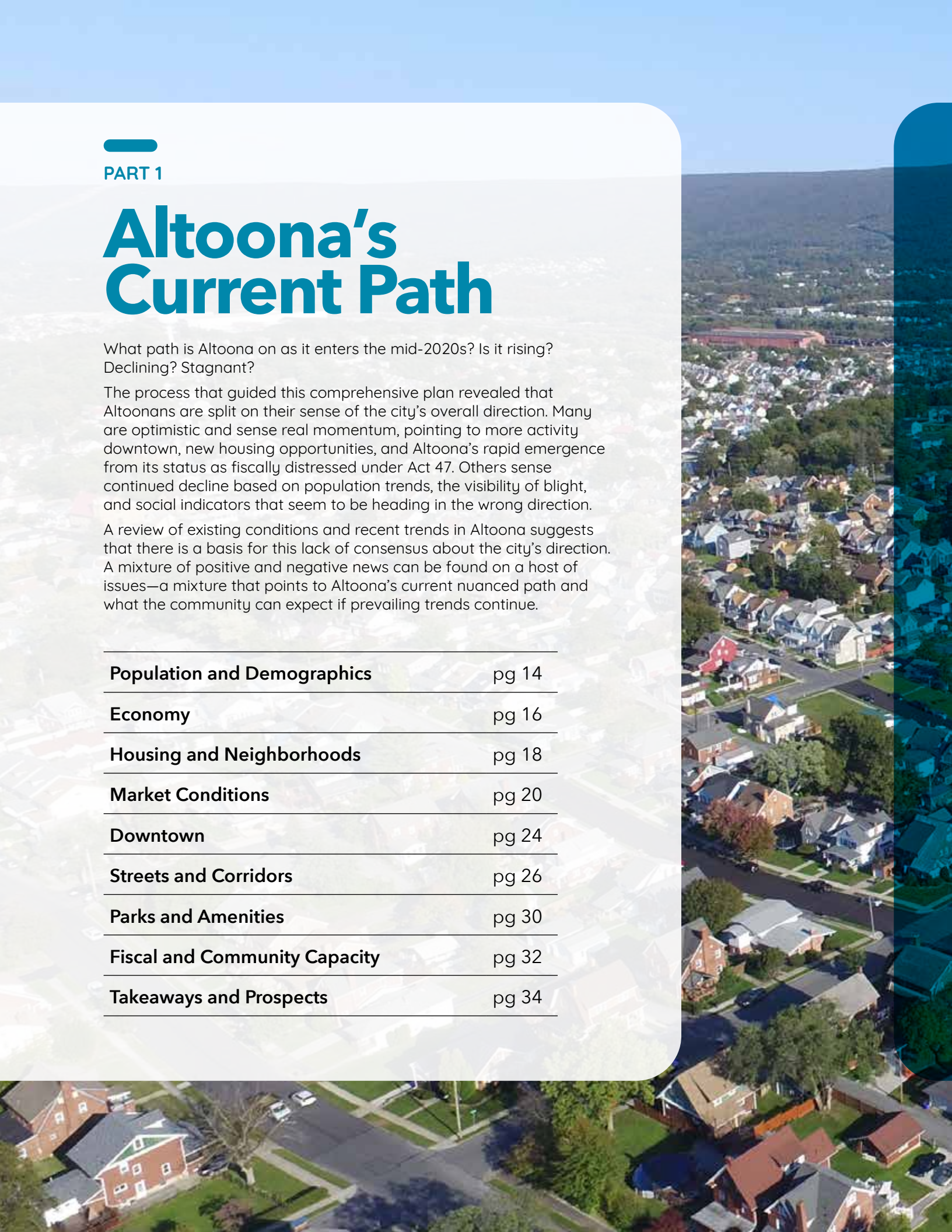
Altoona's Current Path

What path is Altoona on as it enters the mid-2020s? Is it rising? Declining? Stagnant?

The process that guided this comprehensive plan revealed that Altoonans are split on their sense of the city's overall direction. Many are optimistic and sense real momentum, pointing to more activity downtown, new housing opportunities, and Altoona's rapid emergence from its status as fiscally distressed under Act 47. Others sense continued decline based on population trends, the visibility of blight, and social indicators that seem to be heading in the wrong direction.

A review of existing conditions and recent trends in Altoona suggests that there is a basis for this lack of consensus about the city's direction. A mixture of positive and negative news can be found on a host of issues—a mixture that points to Altoona's current nuanced path and what the community can expect if prevailing trends continue.

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PART



Population and Demographics

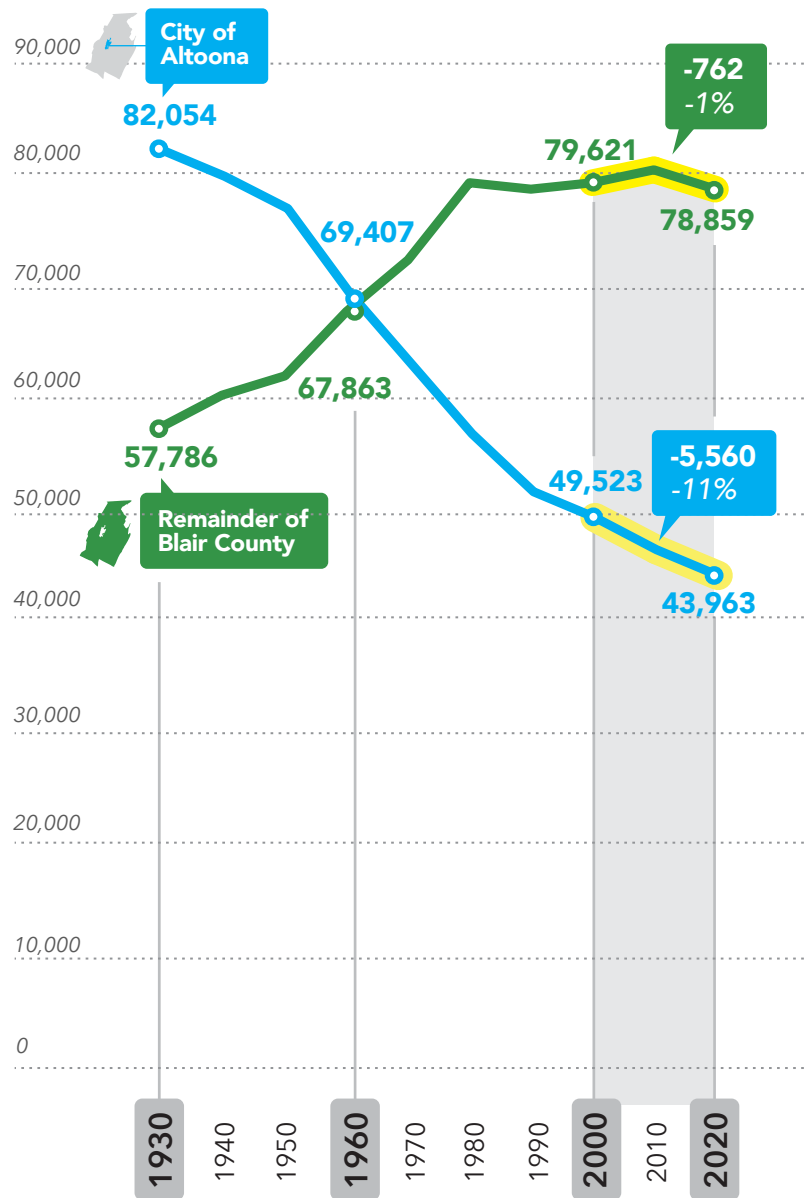
Population loss in Altoona continues amid stability in the rest of Blair County

In 2030, Altoona will be exactly 100 years past its historical population peak of 82,000. That number has fallen ever since, reaching just under 44,000 by 2020—a 46% drop from the 1930 peak and an 11% decline from the start of the 21st century.

As a whole, the rest of Blair County has been on a very different trajectory. The city's decline after 1930 was mirrored by growth beyond the city's limits as population shifted to newer housing in the townships. By 1980, the population in the rest of Blair County plateaued at around 80,000, where it has now hovered for over 40 years.

The combination of continued decline in the city and flat population growth in the rest of Blair County has meant that Blair County is now in its fifth straight decade of population decline—a pattern shared by several neighboring counties in the region.

Population Trends in Blair County and Altoona, 1930-2020



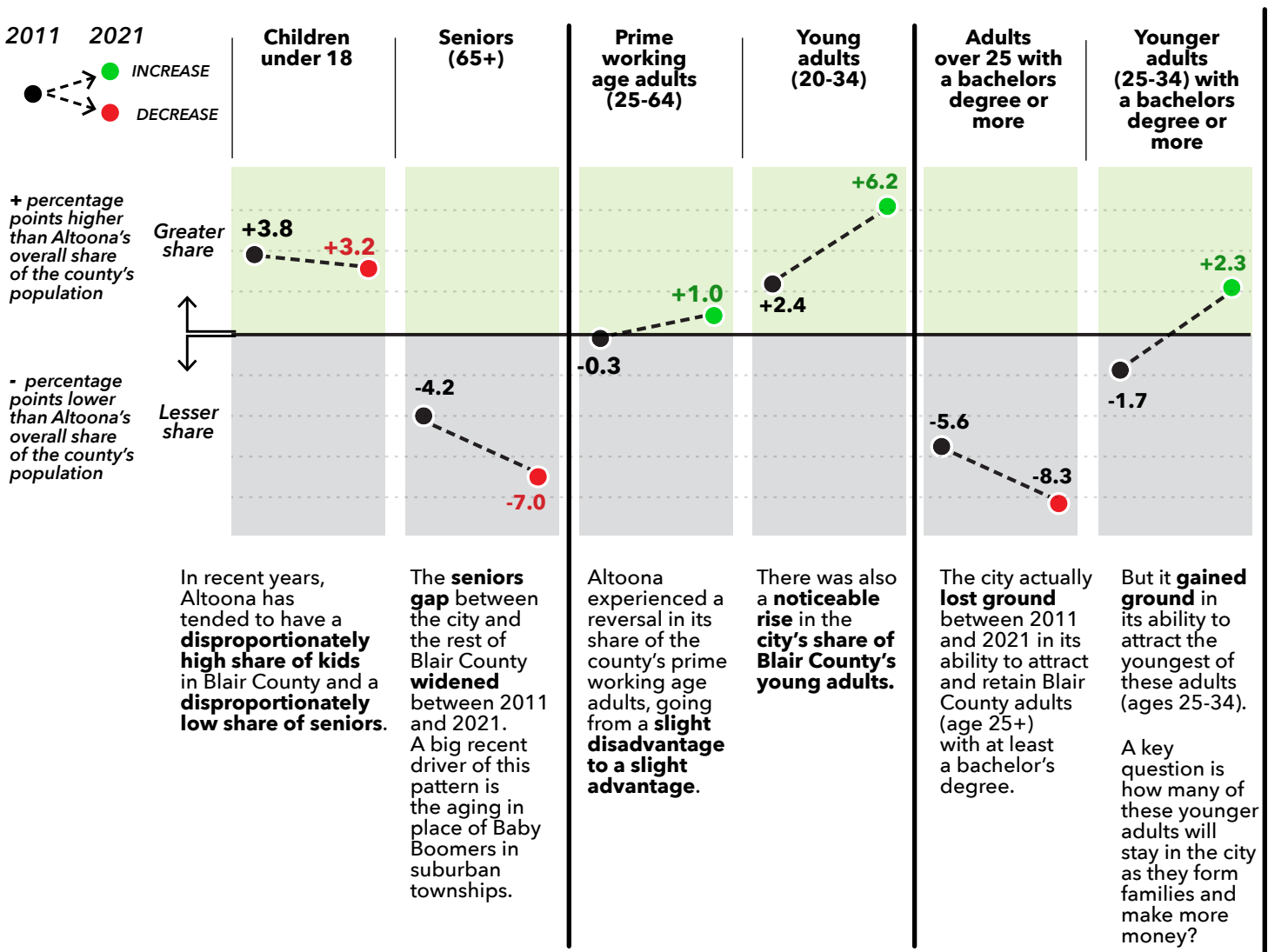
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census

Despite population losses, Altoona has shown recent signs of successfully competing for key demographics in Blair County

The suburbanization of Altoona’s population during the latter half of the 20th century—especially to Logan, Frankstown, Allegheny, and Blair townships—was spearheaded by the movement of families to newer, more spacious housing and by subsequent generations of families making similar choices. Those patterns meant that the city had a decades-long tendency of having fewer than its fair share of the county’s young families—especially those with incomes high enough to afford newer housing—while doing a better job of holding onto non-family and older households.

Today’s distribution of specific demographic groups across Blair County reflects a number of forces—including the aging in place of empty nest Baby Boomers in the townships, declining birth rates across the board, and the growing dominance of small (1- or 2-person) households. Over the past decade, some of these trends have worked in Altoona’s favor, especially the growing tendency of younger adults to delay marriage and family formation and to choose city locations and housing options.

Altoona’s Share of Key Age Groups in Blair County Compared to Its Share of Total Population



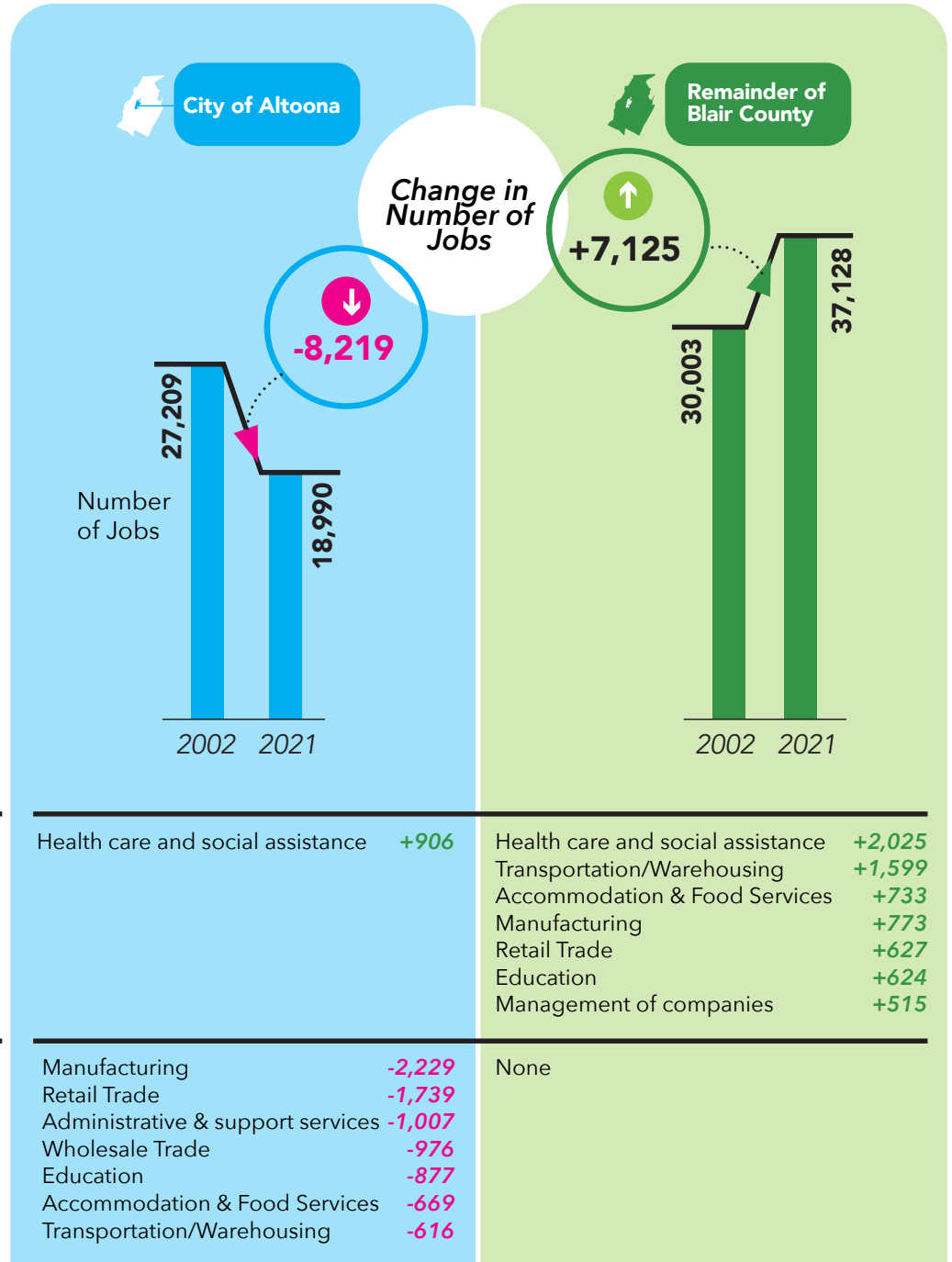
Source: czb analysis of American Community Survey 5-year estimates for 2011 and 2021

Economy

Altoona's role as a regional employment center has continued to erode

While the population shift from Altoona to the townships began before the 1950s, it took much longer for jobs to follow suit. In fact, the city remained the dominant employment center in Blair County through the 1990s and still had nearly half of all jobs in the county as late as 2002.

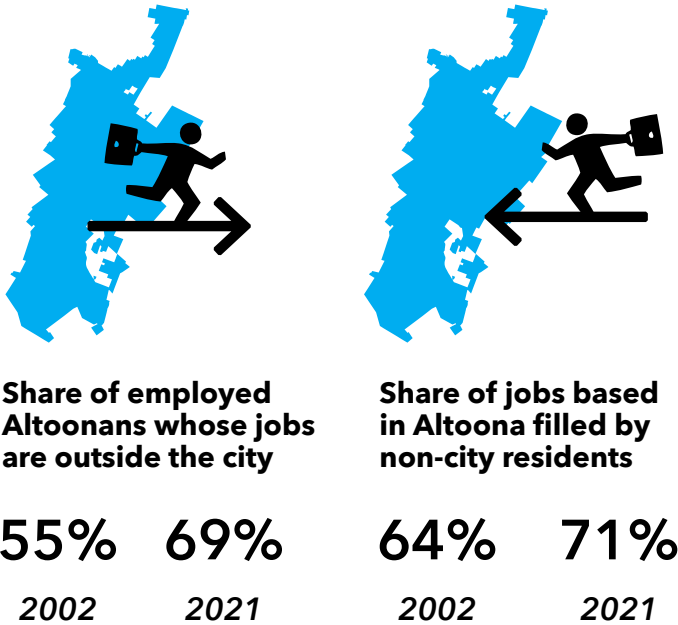
A dramatic shift has played out over the past 20 years. The number of jobs based in Altoona fell by 8,219 between 2002 and 2021 while rising by 7,125 in the rest of Blair County. Much of this can be attributed to economic activity shifting from older, outmoded city facilities—especially in the manufacturing sector—to newer, more efficient facilities not far from the city.



Source: czb analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics

As job locations have shifted, more people are crossing municipal lines to get to work

The steep decline in the number of jobs based in the city has been bad for Altoona’s property tax base and demand for older commercial and industrial properties. But it has not resulted in an economic collapse or sharp increases in poverty because people are simply traveling a bit further to get to jobs in nearby communities. In 2002, 55% of employed Altoonans were already commuting beyond the city for their jobs—a figure that hit nearly 70% by 2021. Conversely, just over 70% of jobs based in Altoona in 2021 were held by non-Altoonans—mostly by people commuting in from elsewhere in Blair County.



Source: czb analysis of U.S. Census Bureau’s Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics :

Incomes and poverty rates in the city have remained remarkably stable

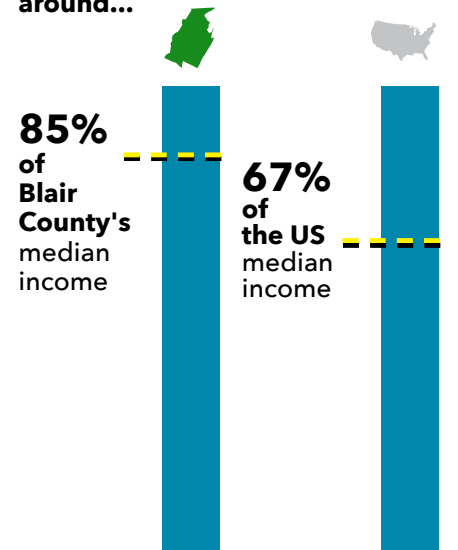
The relative stability of Blair County’s economy over the past few decades—despite the dramatic changes in where jobs are based and the size of certain sectors—is reflected in stable income and poverty figures within the city.

Between 2000 and 2021, Altoona’s median household income outpaced inflation and did not lose ground to incomes in the rest of Blair County or the U.S., though it remained just two-thirds of the national median. And the city’s poverty rate in 2021 (20%) remained below the levels experienced in most of Pennsylvania’s larger cities

Household Incomes in Altoona
\$46,010
 median in 2021

Outpaced inflation by 5% since 2000

Since 2000, Altoona's median income has remained around...



Source: czb analysis of U.S. Census Bureau’s Decennial Census (2000) and American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2021)

Housing and Neighborhoods

Households have declined faster than housing units, resulting in rising vacancies

With 8% fewer households in Altoona today compared to 2000, there are nearly 1,600 fewer households to occupy city homes and apartments. And because the number of housing units only declined by 800 over the same period, the number of vacancies in Altoona rose from 1,600 in 2000 (7.3% of all units) to 2,400 by 2022 (12%).

But not all vacancies are the same. An estimated 60% of Altoona's vacant housing units in 2022 (or nearly 1,500 units) were considered chronically vacant and were not for sale or for rent, an increase from 30% of all vacant units in 2000. In many cases, these chronically vacant units have fallen into such disrepair—and are so unmarketable—that they can no longer be considered an active part of the city's housing supply without substantial upgrades that would be hard to financially justify in Altoona's soft market.

Compared to 2000, Altoona has...

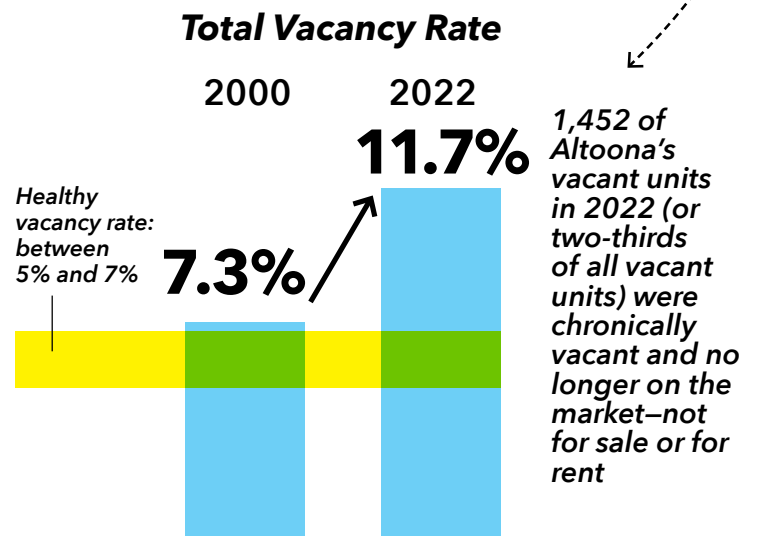


8% fewer households
(-1,641 households)



4% fewer housing units
(-832 housing units)

Consequently, vacancies have risen.

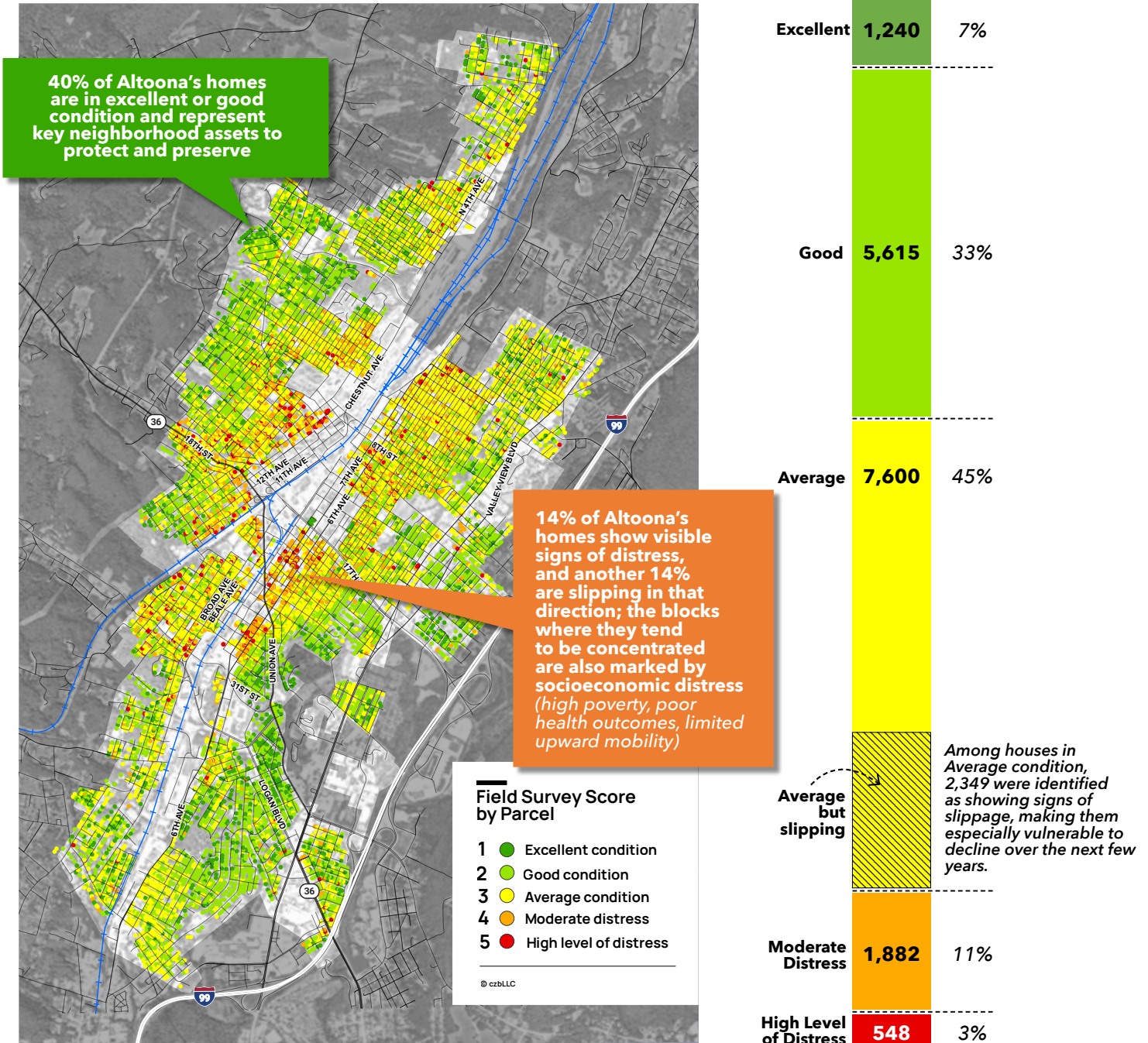


Source: U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census (2000) and American Community Survey (2022 5-year estimates)

Nearly 2,500 residential properties show visible signs of distress, and many more may be slipping in that direction

A comprehensive windshield survey of Altoona’s nearly 17,000 residential structures during the summer of 2023 revealed that nearly 2,500 individual structures showed signs of moderate or severe distress due to deferred maintenance and disrepair. Noted as red and orange dots in the adjacent map, these were most concentrated in the older, working-class housing stocks close to downtown and near remnants of Altoona’s railroad-driven economy.

The same survey found that nearly 45% of Altoona’s residential properties were in “average” condition and could be seen as largely stable. But 2,300 of these average properties were identified as showing early hints of disinvestment and are highly vulnerable to decline—especially those located closer to concentrations of already distressed properties.



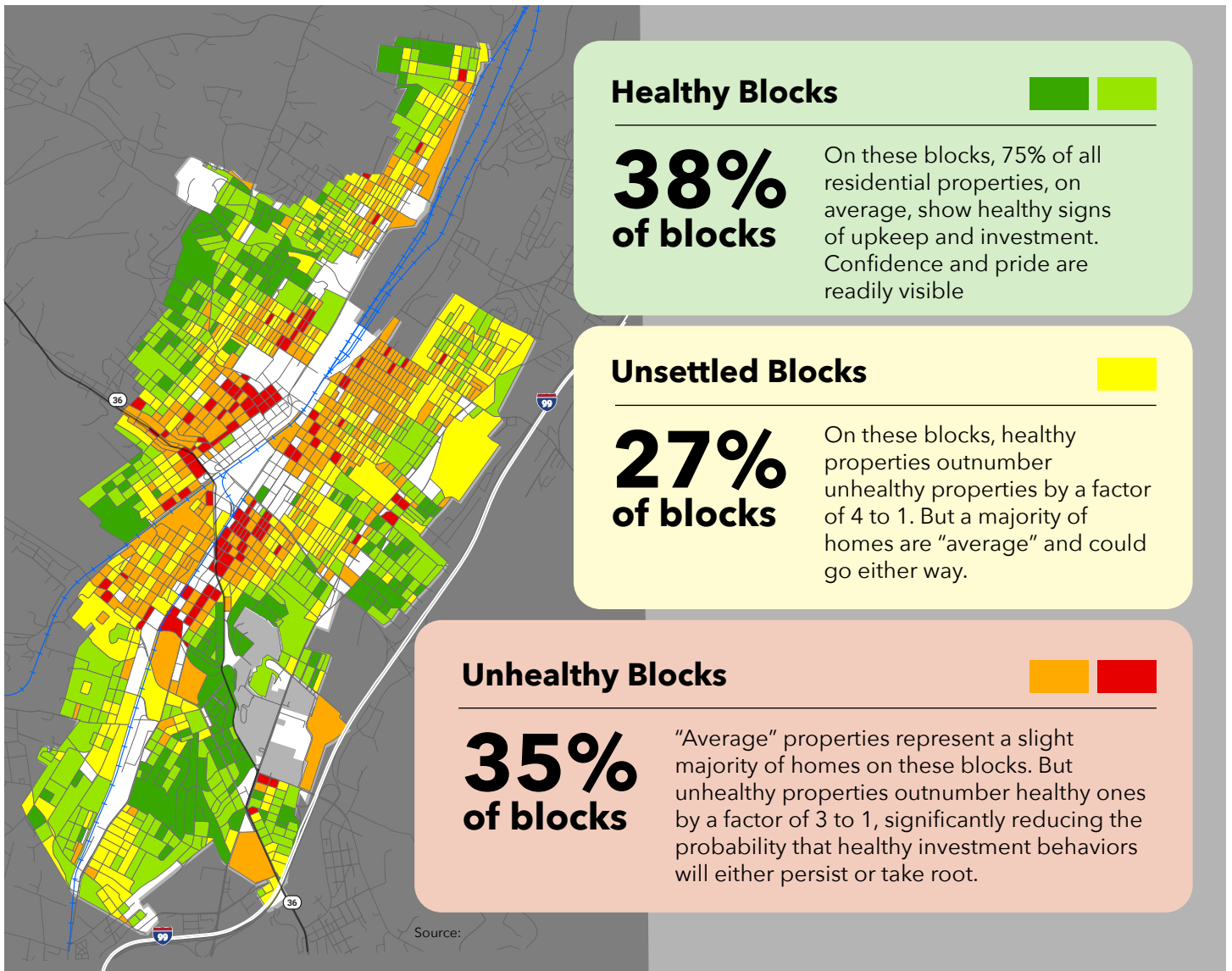
Source: czb residential field survey

Housing and Neighborhoods

Conditions in Altoona's neighborhoods vary considerably, from consistently healthy blocks to blocks overwhelmed by neglect

Altoona's 17,000 residential structures are distributed across roughly 1,400 blocks. Those blocks are where investment behaviors, positive and negative, become established and influence the direction of entire sections of the city—and they are also the best way to think about neighborhood goals and interventions.

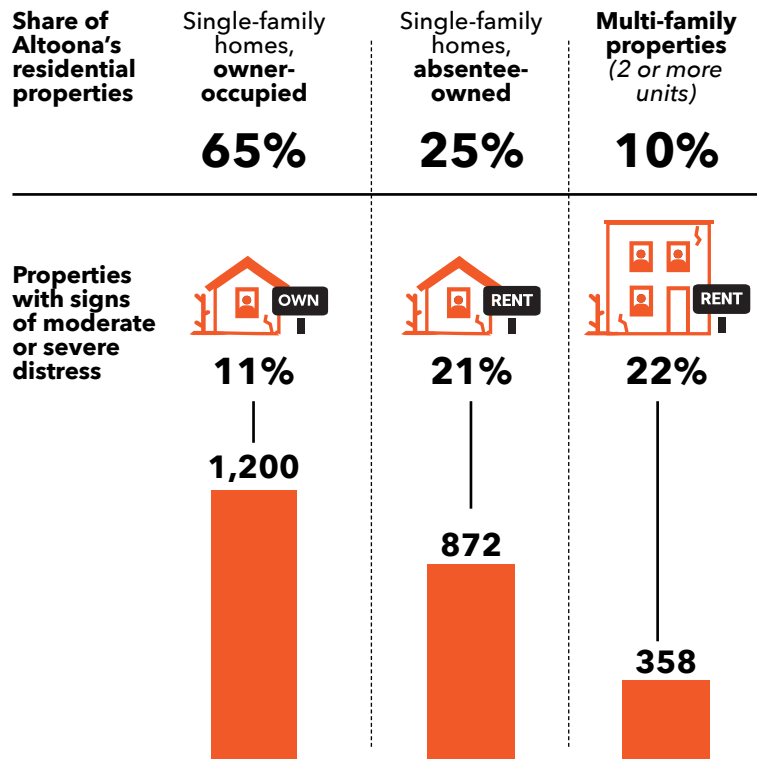
Based on the 2023 property condition survey, Altoona can be organized into three general block types: healthy, unsettled, and unhealthy. Currently, healthy blocks represent the largest category of blocks in Altoona (38%)—places where most homes are either in excellent or good condition. But they are not the majority, and their numbers are nearly offset by the number of unhealthy blocks in the city where negative investment behaviors predominate.



Rental properties are twice as likely to show signs of neglect as owner-occupied properties, and single-family rentals represent the vast majority of neglected rental properties

Altoona is dominated by single-family homes (90% of all residential structures) and has maintained a very consistent rate of homeownership for decades, with around two-thirds of all housing units being owner-occupied. In most cities, owner-occupied properties tend to be maintained more reliably and to a higher standard than rental properties—and that is certainly the case in Altoona. While just over 20% of rental properties in Altoona showed signs of moderate or severe distress in 2023, the same could be said of just 11% of owner-occupied single-family homes.

But because single-family homes dominate the city's residential landscape, they also dominate the city's inventory of properties with visibly deferred maintenance. Nearly 900 single-family rental properties showed signs of distress in 2023 compared to 358 multi-family properties (everything from duplexes to apartment buildings) showing similar signs. And the largest single group of distressed residential properties, due to sheer volume, was owner-occupied single-family homes.



Source: czb analysis of City of Altoona assessment records and the 2023 property conditions survey

One cost of blight is steeply lower sales prices for single-family homes on blocks with multiple distressed properties

Regardless of the ownership status of the city's single-family houses, the presence of blight on a given block is highly correlated with significantly lower prices paid for those homes in recent years. Between 2018 and 2023, single-family homes on blocks with little or no blight sold for \$55,000 more, on average, than single-family homes on blocks with multiple blighted properties. While other factors may play into this discount on specific blocks—such as age and size of homes—the reduction in the market's willingness to pay for homes due to negative signals has a significant cumulative impact on the City's tax base.

Average sales price of single-family homes, 2018-2023

\$116,761

Blocks with 0 or 1 residential property showing signs of moderate or severe distress



\$61,354

Blocks with 2 or more residential properties showing signs of moderate or severe distress



Source: czb analysis of City of Altoona assessment records and the 2023 property conditions survey

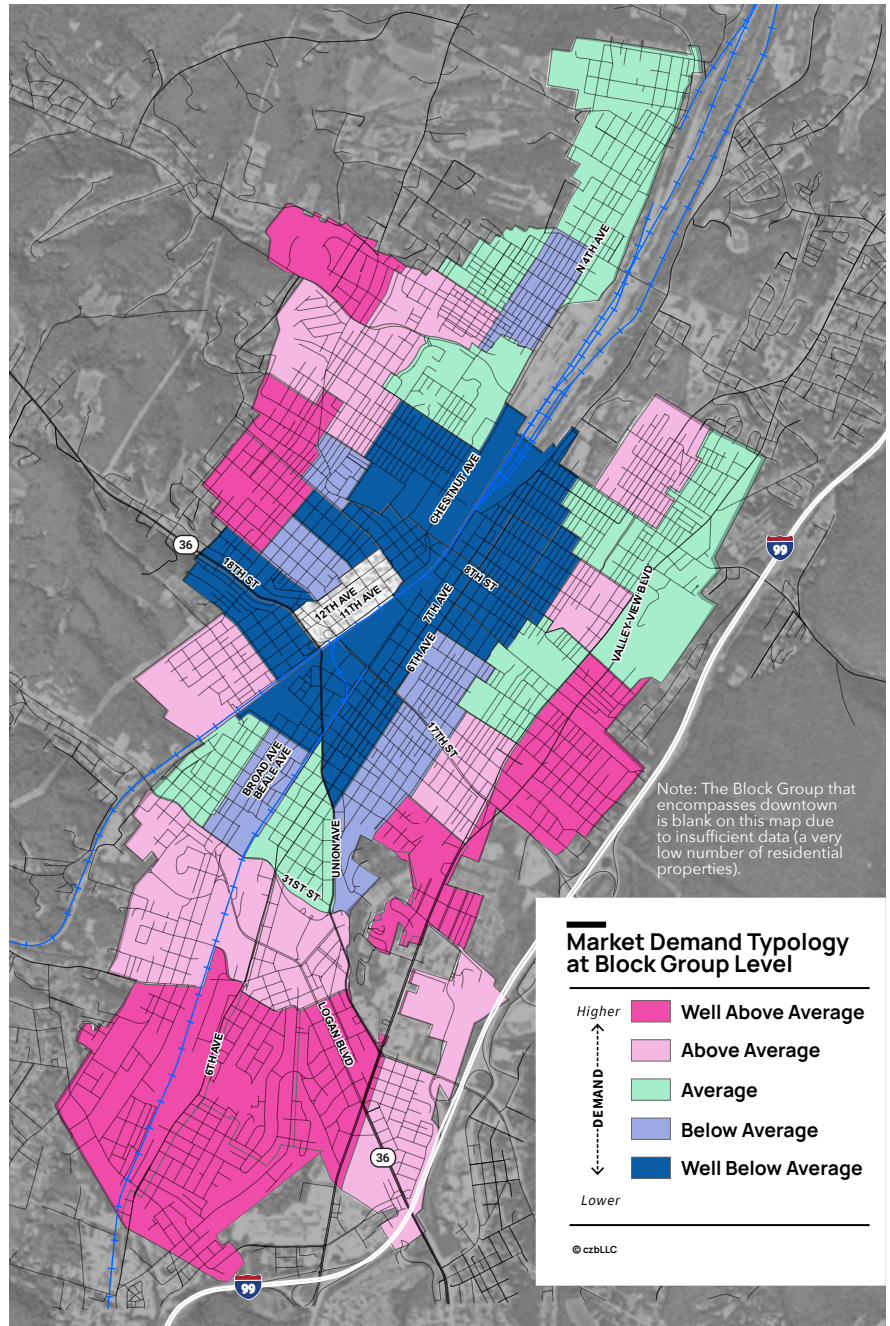
Market Conditions

Altoona is a soft market, and areas where demand is relatively strong (where private investment is most likely to flow) are concentrated south of downtown

As the recent housing strategy for the Southern Alleghenies region demonstrates, Altoona is a soft market within a soft regional market. Demand for housing—based on prices and rents that households are able and willing to pay—is far below national levels in most of the region, and especially in Altoona and other older urban centers.

Within Altoona, levels of demand vary considerably from one place to another. A map of demand in Altoona’s submarkets—based on the property condition field survey, sales prices, vacancy rates, and other indicators of demand—reveals that the largest areas of relative strength in Altoona are concentrated in the city’s southern half, along the axis between downtown Altoona and Hollidaysburg that has long been the market’s favored path and is home to such neighborhoods as Llyswen and Highland Park. A notable exception to this rule is the smaller area north of downtown that includes Fairview and the PSU campus.

Meanwhile, areas with the softest levels of demand within Altoona—and some of the weakest areas in the entire region—surround downtown Altoona and are often very close to the city’s strongest neighborhoods.

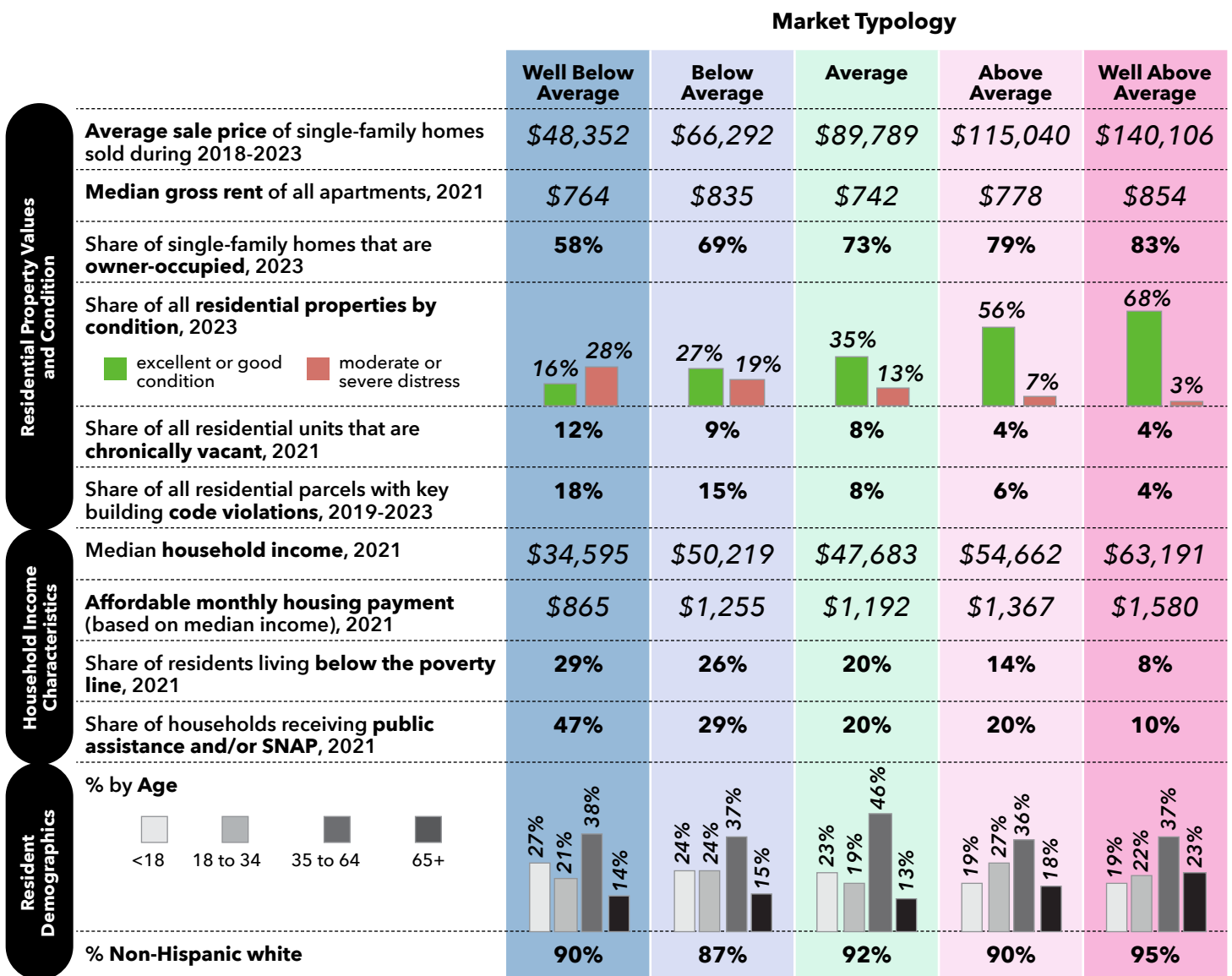


Source: Market demand typology is based on czb analysis at the Census Block Group level of average property conditions from the 2023 field survey, single-family homeownership rates, average single-family sales prices between 2018 and 2023, the share of all properties with key code violations between 2019 and 2023, and the share of all properties with permitted construction valued at \$2,500 or more between 2019 and 2023.

Real estate market conditions within Altoona mirror household financial capacity and levels of need

Poor physical conditions and low property values in areas with the lowest demand coincide with the highest concentrations of poverty, highest housing cost burdens, and lowest health and educational outcomes in the city and county—social conditions that have now been embedded for many decades.

Poverty rates in the city’s weakest markets, in fact, are three to four times higher than rates in Altoona’s strongest markets. And with nearly 30% of residents living in poverty in those areas, social conditions have become “sticky” - meaning that those living there, as well as their children, have a low probability of climbing the socioeconomic ladder.



Source: czb analysis of Census Block Groups in each market demand category using data from 2021 American Community Survey, assessment data, and code violation data.

Downtown

Downtown Altoona has been improving, but still has a long way to go

While Altoonans are split on the overall direction of their city, they are fairly consistent in their impression that downtown is much better now than it was in 2010. The cluster of businesses and activity along 11th Avenue—Altoona’s best designed street—are an important indicator of this progress, as is the slow but steady introduction of new market-rate apartments.

Despite these strides, downtown Altoona is still in a very fragile position, with several factors working against the emergence of a truly vibrant and healthy district.

A starting point for success, still in its infancy

A small but important node of **vitality has emerged on 11th Avenue**, home to a high-quality streetscape and a collection of local businesses that contribute positively to the downtown atmosphere (coffee shop, breweries, restaurants, art galleries).

The actual number businesses in this cluster remains very small, however, and so is the foot traffic at any given time. This node risks being set back considerably by just a few business closures.

Redevelopment costs a high hurdle for a soft market

Downtown Altoona still has several large historic buildings that are good candidates for redevelopment and adaptive reuse, from **Penn Central, to Gable’s, to the Penn Alto**.

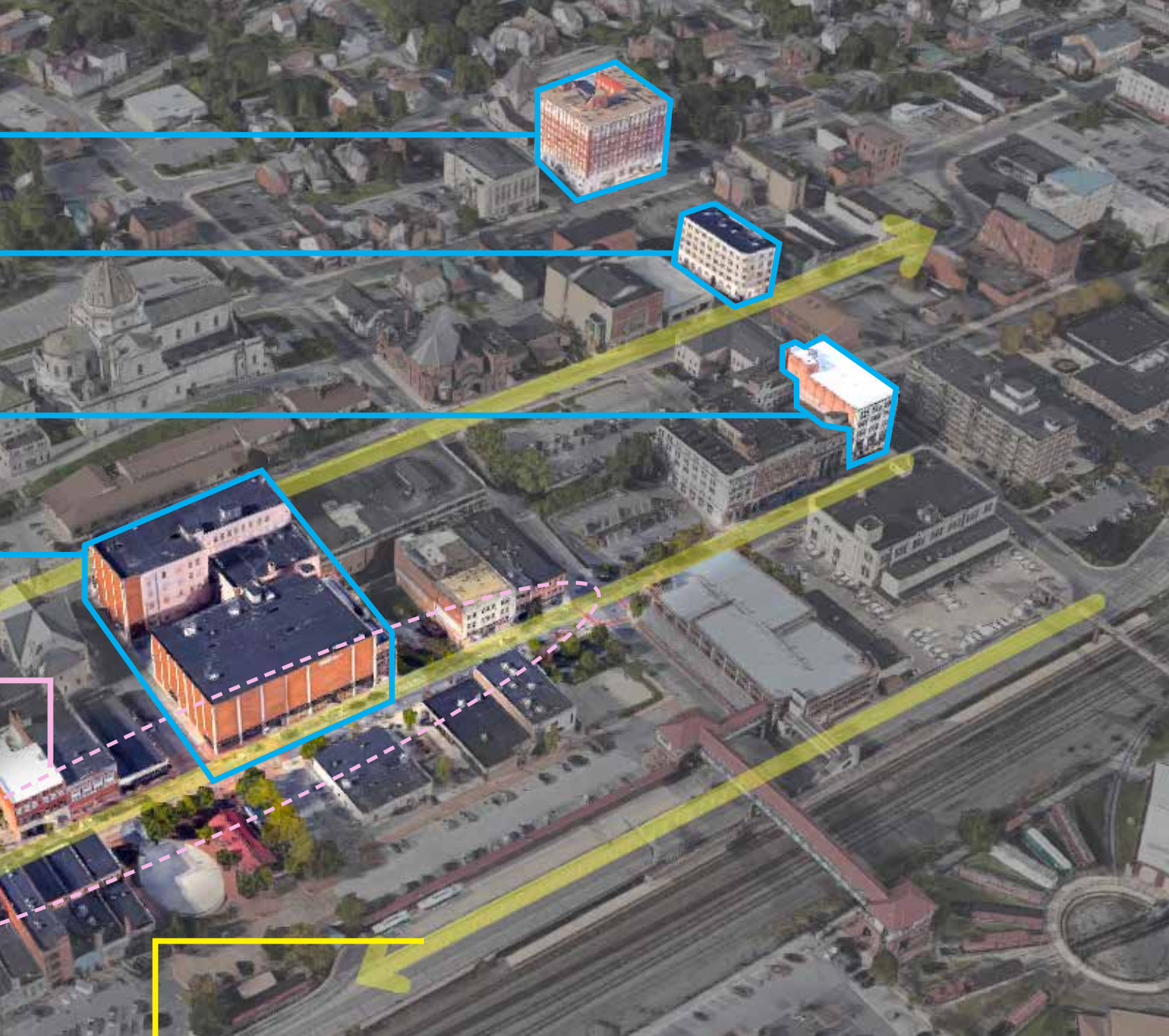
Redeveloping these and other properties to a high standard, however, would require rents that exceed what Altoonans are generally willing to pay. Without targeted assistance, such projects are too risky for most private developers and their investors to touch on their own.

Streets that confuse drivers and repel pedestrians

A confusing and unnecessary system of **one-way streets** makes downtown difficult to navigate by car. These one-way streets also contribute—along with large areas of surface parking and other “dead space”—to a lack of comfort and safety for pedestrians.

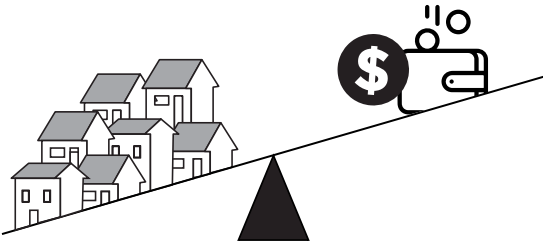
Even though downtown does not have a parking problem—as proven by periodic studies—there is a prevailing sense that it does because downtown is not a pleasant or interesting place to walk.



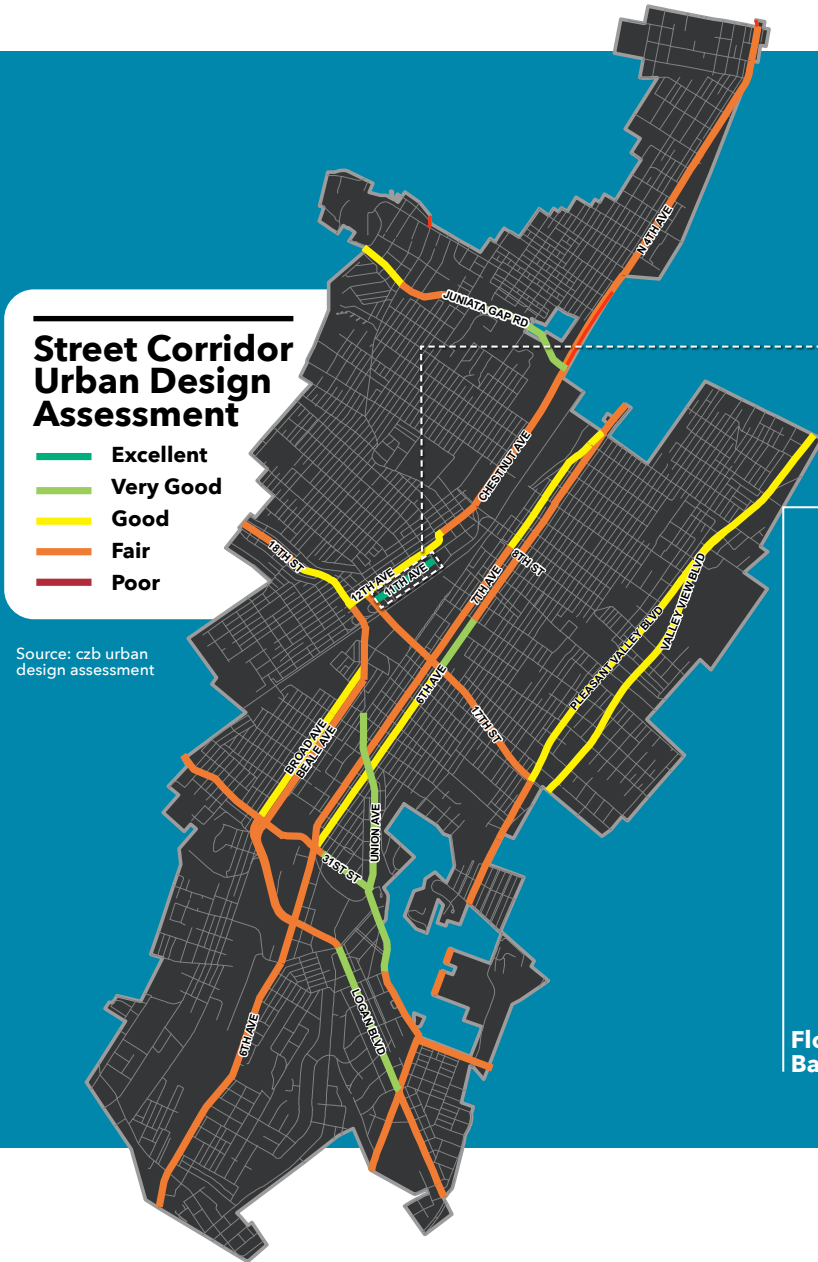


Low levels of disposable income to support downtown businesses

Downtown residential development has been the key to revitalizing downtowns across the country over the past two decades. And while Altoona has a few hundred downtown apartments, they are almost all income-restricted. More housing and a greater variety of household incomes will be needed to support a healthy downtown business environment.



Streets and Corridors



Flower Baskets

Pedestrian Level Street Lighting

Adequate Sidewalk Width

Street Trees

On-street Parking

Many of Altoona's major corridors are not pleasant, safe, or attractive places and set a bad tone for the city

For many people, Altoona's major corridors have an outsized impression on what they think about the city. And as an assessment of these corridors in the summer of 2023 demonstrated, most of them lack the physical and aesthetic attributes that make a major street feel special, safe, and worth investing in. Most rated as "Fair," the second lowest ranking, on the 2023 assessment.

Many of the design shortcomings on these major corridors stem from being seriously overbuilt and able to accommodate far more traffic than they actually carry—a vestige of 20th century highway engineering and pre-I-99 traffic volumes. While transportation planners today regard 16,000-18,000 vehicles as the daily



**Dedicated
Bike Route -
Shared Use
Street**

**Mid-block
Pedestrian
Crossings**

**Buildings
that Relate
to and
Engage
the Street**

**Trash
Receptacles**

**First Floor
Transparency**

A well designed urban street that comfortably accommodates all modes of travel - especially pedestrians - leads to a mix of businesses and public spaces where people want to be. This is evident on 11th Avenue.



count needed to justify four-lane arterial highways (on a single road, or on tandem one-way streets), only Pleasant Valley and Valley View boulevards north of 17th Street reach this threshold, and just barely.

This makes many of the city's corridors feel wide, colorless, and (most of the time) empty, with vast paved areas that could contribute to better storm water retention and pedestrian access.

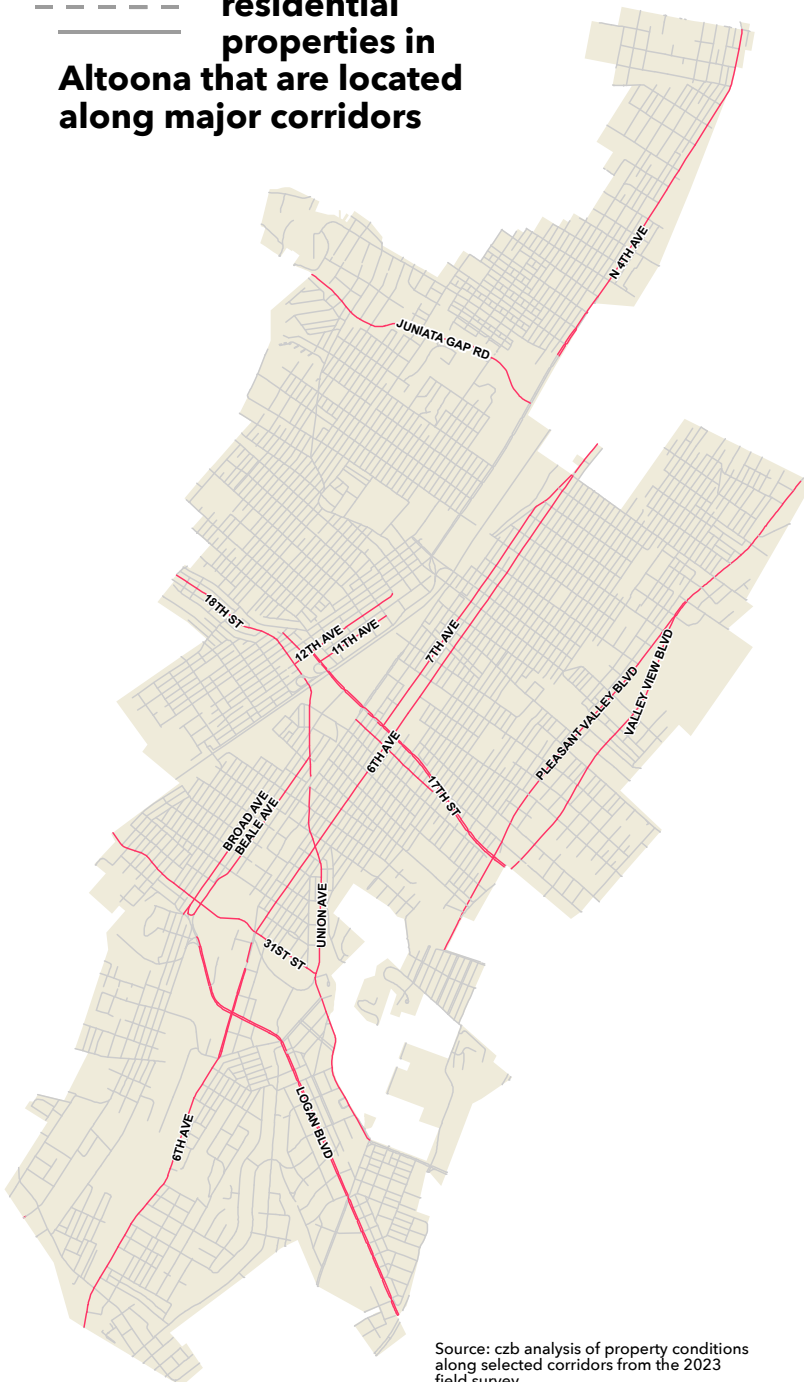
There are exceptions to this, however, including 11th Avenue in Downtown Altoona, which exhibits nearly all of the attributes that contribute to excellent urban design.

Streets and Corridors



Share of the 2,450 visibly distressed residential properties in Altoona that are located along major corridors

36%

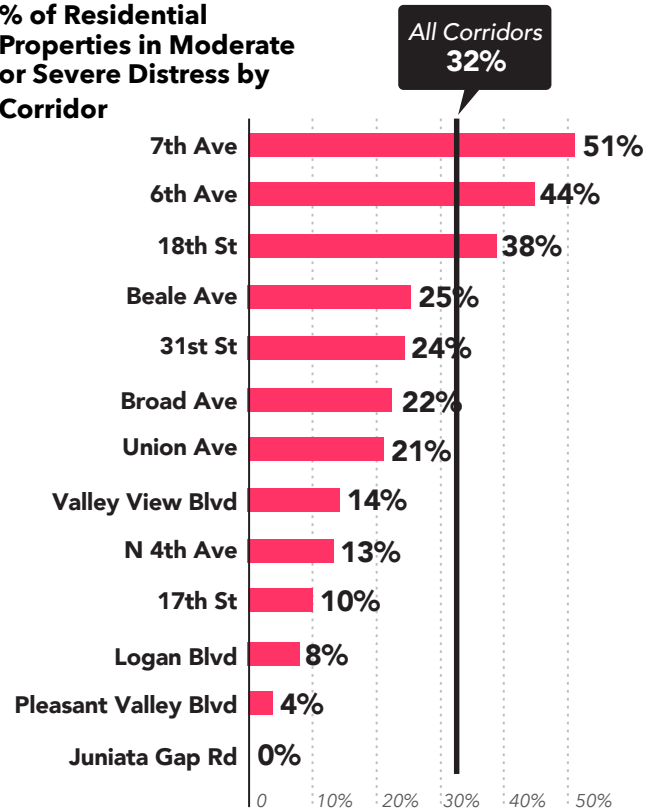


Several of Altoona’s major corridors are home to highly visible blight

Independent of the urban design factors that contribute to the visual appeal and function of Altoona’s major corridors is the condition of private property along those corridors. And a look at residential property alone reveals that an **outsized share of residential blight in Altoona is concentrated in locations where it is highly visible**—visible enough to influence standards and investment choices citywide.

While 14% of all residential properties in the city showed signs of moderate or severe distress on the 2023 property condition survey, most of the major corridors with residential properties had rates far exceeding that citywide average. Indeed, 32% of properties across all of these corridors showed some level of distress.

% of Residential Properties in Moderate or Severe Distress by Corridor



Source: czb analysis of property conditions along selected corridors from the 2023 field survey

Only 36% of sidewalks in Altoona are in good or satisfactory condition, and almost 20% of Altoona's curbs do not have sidewalks

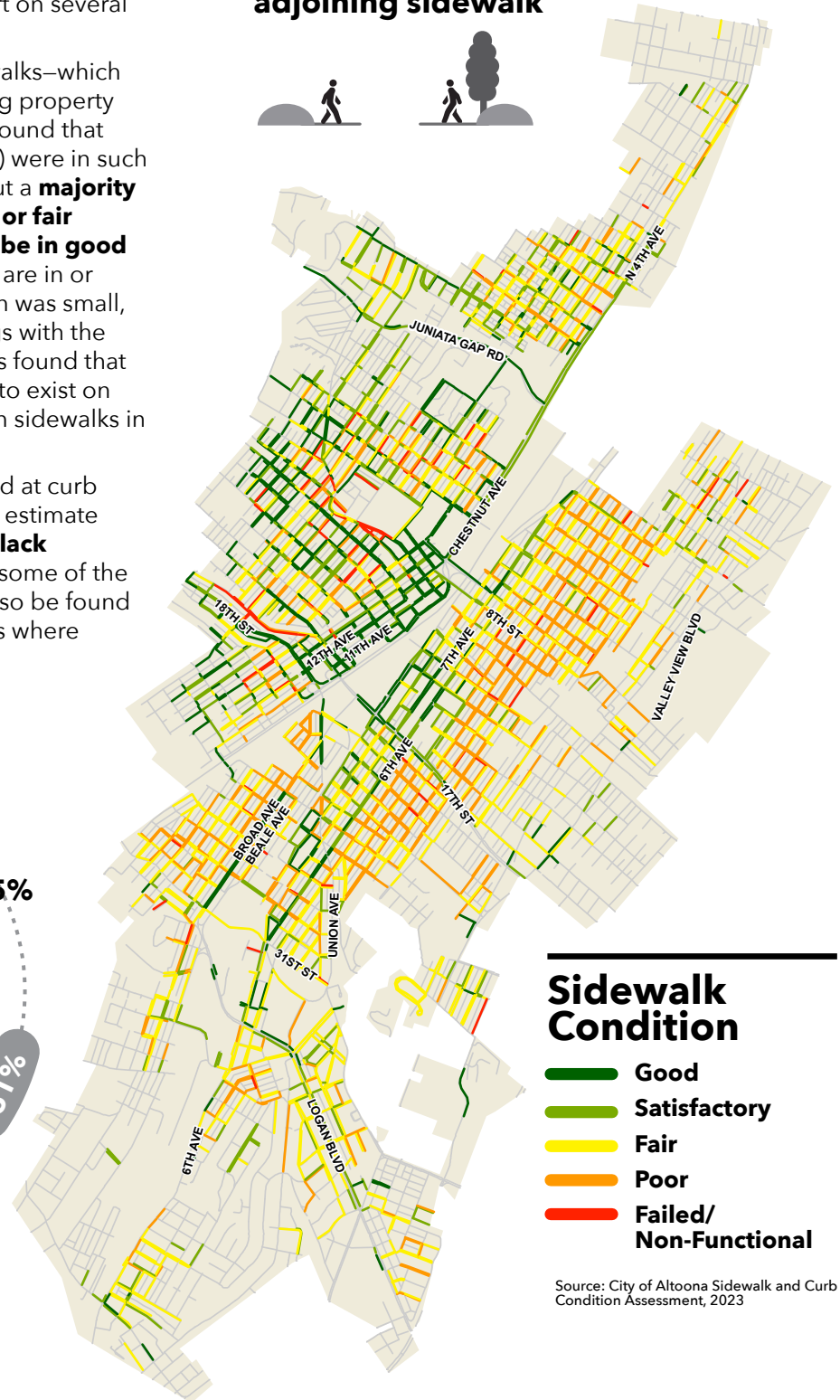
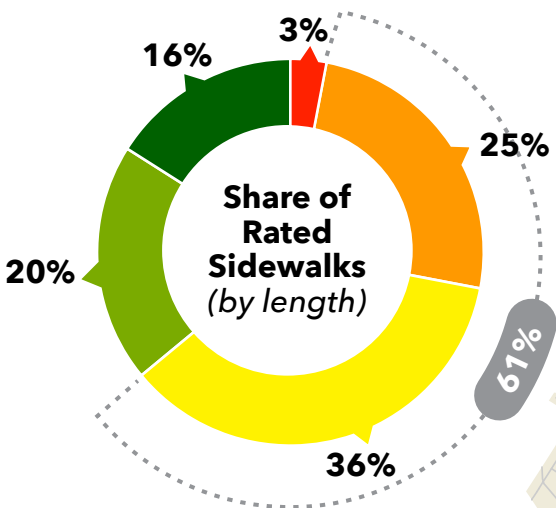
Sidewalks are a critical part of urban neighborhood infrastructure, and Altoona comes up short on several fronts when it comes to sidewalks.

In terms of the condition of existing sidewalks—which are primarily the responsibility of adjoining property owners—a City of Altoona survey in 2023 found that only 3% of sidewalks in the city (by length) were in such poor condition as to be non-functional. But a **majority (61%) were found to be in merely poor or fair condition**, and **only 36% were found to be in good or satisfactory condition** (many of which are in or near downtown). And while the correlation was small, a comparison of sidewalk condition ratings with the 2023 residential property condition scores found that sidewalks rated “failed” or “poor” tended to exist on blocks with worse housing conditions than sidewalks in better condition.

The city's 2023 sidewalk survey also looked at curb conditions, and the results can be used to estimate that **20% of Altoona's curbs (by length) lack sidewalks**—something that is common in some of the city's youngest neighborhoods, but can also be found in older and lower density neighborhoods where sidewalk networks are highly fragmented.

Estimated percentage of existing curb length in Altoona that does not have an adjoining sidewalk

20%



Sidewalk Condition

- Good
- Satisfactory
- Fair
- Poor
- Failed/Non-Functional

Source: City of Altoona Sidewalk and Curb Condition Assessment, 2023

Parks and Amenities

Altoona's parks and trail network is small and underfunded, making it difficult for the community to capitalize on significant opportunities

Altoona has some outstanding recreational assets and public spaces—from Highland Park with its mature tree canopy and WPA-era stone walls, to the hiking trails around Penn State, to Heritage Plaza at the heart of downtown's most vibrant corridor.

These assets and others, however, do not form anything resembling a coherent system. And as planning efforts for the Central Blair Recreation and Parks Commission recently found, Altoona's recreational system is very small on a per capita basis and grossly underfunded when compared to other cities in Pennsylvania. Analysis completed for All Together Altoona found, in fact, that despite recent upticks in funding for parks by the City of Altoona, it lags far behind the national median for small city investments in capital improvements and operations.

Barely having enough resources to maintain what it currently has puts the Altoona community behind when it comes to seizing opportunities to tap into the considerable natural assets surrounding the city—such as implementation of concepts in the Blair County Greenways Plan and the potential to build out trail systems on Altoona Water Authority lands.



City of Altoona



Median for U.S. Cities with 20,000-50,000 Residents

Spending on Capital Improvements to Parks Over Past Five Years

\$1.1
million

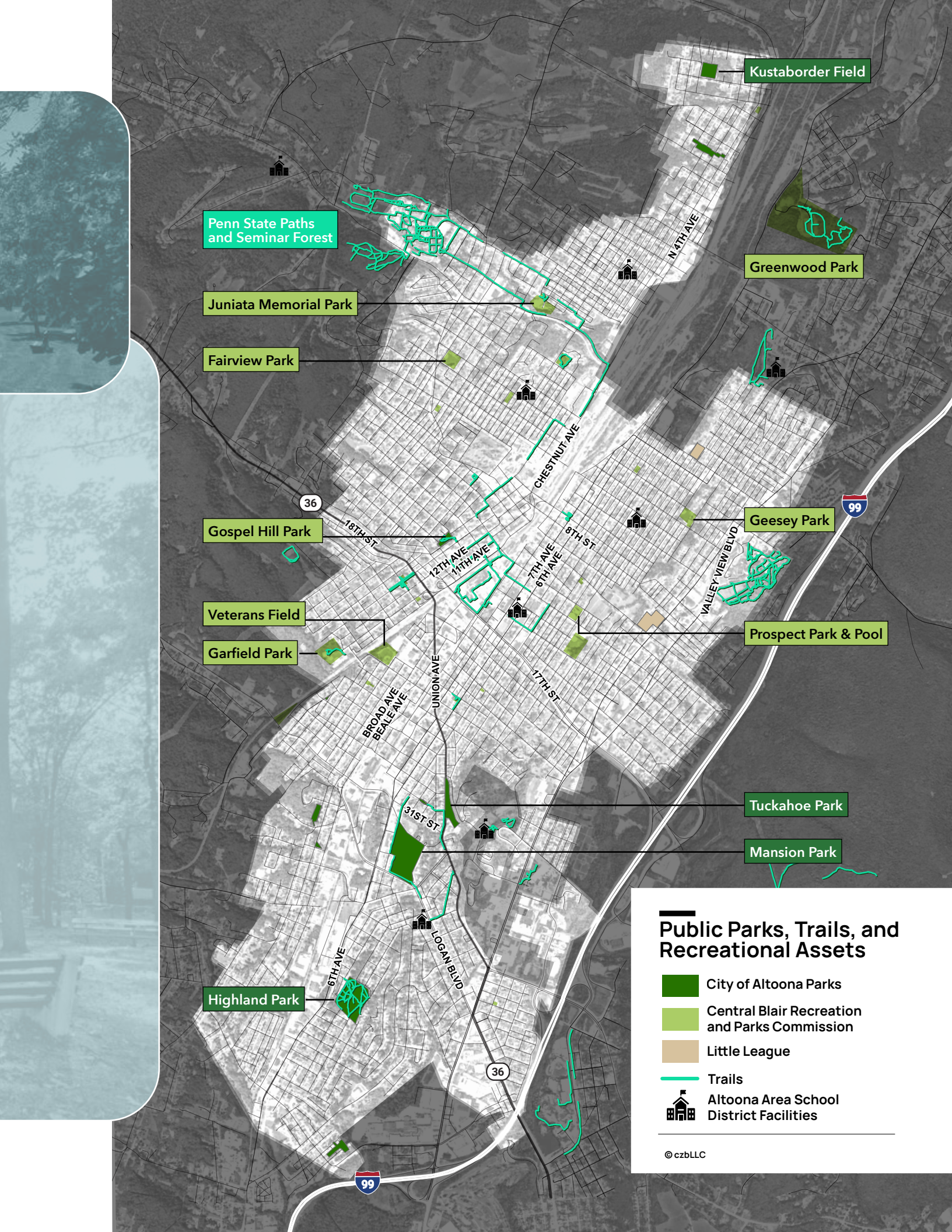
\$2.9
million

Per Capita Operating Budget for Parks in 2022

\$16
per resident

\$95
per resident

Source: czb comparison of recent City of Altoona spending with peer data reported by the National Recreation and Park Association's 2023 Agency Performance Review



Penn State Paths and Seminar Forest

Juniata Memorial Park

Fairview Park

Gospel Hill Park

Veterans Field

Garfield Park

Highland Park

Kustaborder Field

Greenwood Park

Geesey Park

Prospect Park & Pool

Tuckahoe Park

Mansion Park

Public Parks, Trails, and Recreational Assets

- City of Altoona Parks
- Central Blair Recreation and Parks Commission
- Little League
- Trails
- Altoona Area School District Facilities

Fiscal and Community Capacity

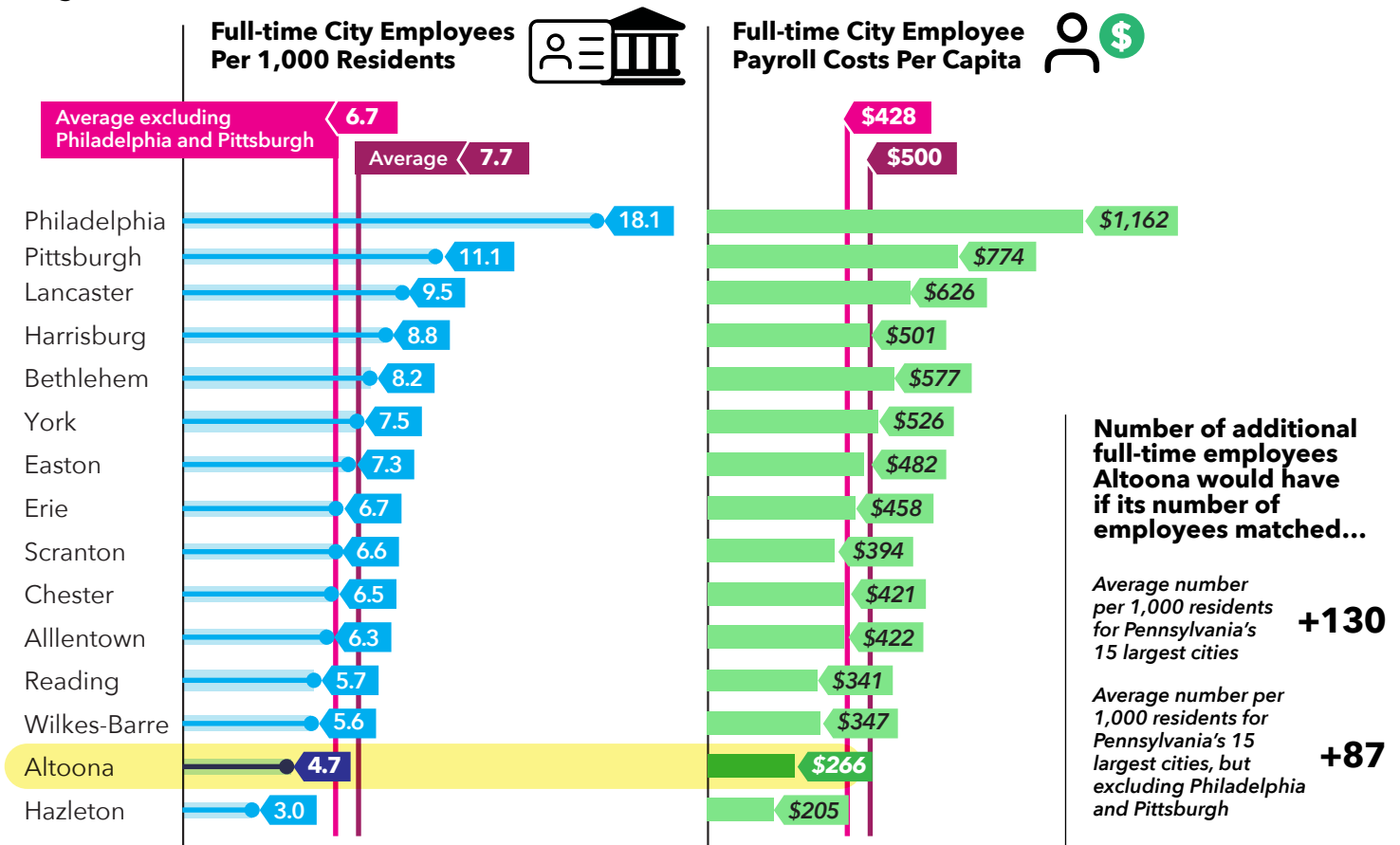
The City of Altoona is a bare-bones operation at best, which limits its capacity to be proactive about key issues

Years of fiscal hardship and austerity have sharply limited the city's capacity to meet the very basics of municipal service delivery. In fact, budgets and staffing have long been so constrained that the city has struggled to keep up on a number of pressing issues and has had very little ability to be truly proactive and enterprising about long-term challenges and opportunities. This has been true even in the years after Altoona's designation as financially distressed under Act 47 (2012-2017), which brought about key structural reforms.

A comparison of Altoona to Pennsylvania's 15 largest cities (a group it is still part of) crystalizes the city's situation. Even though all of these cities face similar challenges, Altoona is well below average in terms of staff capacity. The number of full-time employees per 1,000 residents is second lowest and nearly 40% lower than the group average (30% lower if Philadelphia and Pittsburgh are excluded). The same is true when looking at per-capita payroll costs.

Put a different way, if the City of Altoona had as many full-time employees per capita as the average for the state's 15 largest cities, it would have at least 87 more employees in a workforce that currently numbers in the low 200s.

Comparison of City Employees and Payrolls Across Pennsylvania's 15 Largest Cities



Source: czb analysis of data from U.S. Census of Governments, 2022, for Pennsylvania's 15 largest cities



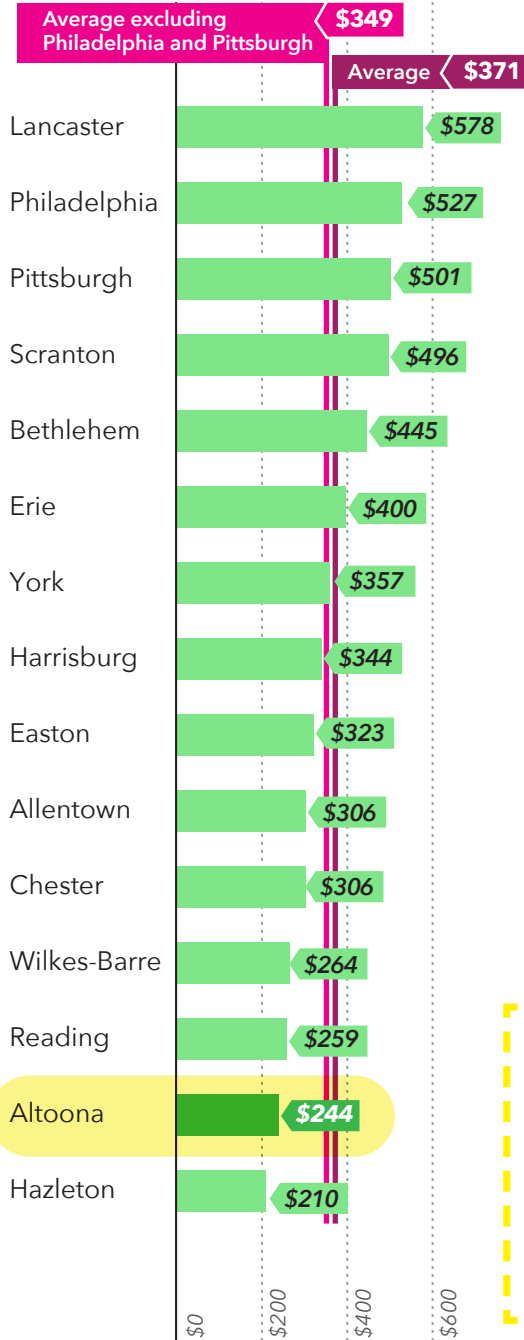
The City of Altoona's diminished capacity has been influenced by forces beyond its control—but it is now in a position to shape its future direction

There is no doubt that Altoona's fiscal hardships have been shaped by forces beyond the city's control—from stagnant real estate demand during the transition to a post-industrial economy, to the erosion of federal municipal aid starting in the 1980s.

But Altoona's fiscal austerity has also been a choice in recent years, especially since the structural reforms made under Act 47 and Blair County's 2018 reassessment project. Together, those changes gave the City of Altoona the fiscal breathing room that it had lacked for decades—including the ability to raise its millage rate.

As analysis for All Together Altoona shows, Altoona's per capita property tax levy in 2024 (\$244) is far below the average for the state's 15 largest cities—even after a rate increase of 0.5 from 2023. If the city were to raise its property tax levy to match the average for this group, its millage rate (8.629) would still be far below the maximum allowed by the City Charter (25.00) and would represent \$300 in added annual taxes on a house assessed at \$100,000.

Property Tax Levy Per Capita in 2024 for Pennsylvania's 15 Largest Cities



Millage increase from 2024 Rate of 5.629	Approximate additional revenue generated per year	Additional taxes, per year, on an Altoona home assessed at \$100,000
0	\$0	\$0
0.25	\$463,000	\$25
0.50	\$925,000	\$50
0.75	\$1.4 million	\$75
1.00	\$1.9 million	\$100
1.50	\$2.8 million	\$150
2.00	\$3.7 million	\$200
2.50	\$4.6 million	\$250
3.00	\$5.6 million	\$300
3.50	\$6.5 million	\$350
4.00	\$7.4 million	\$400

A 3.0 millage rate increase above the 2024 level would give Altoona a property tax levy per capita that matches the current average for Pennsylvania's 15 largest cities (\$371)

Source: czb analysis of property tax levies in adopted 2024 budgets for each of Pennsylvania's 15 largest cities

Takeaways and Prospects

Based on the existing conditions and trends presented here in Part 1, **what is likely to happen in the future—especially if Altoona continues to follow its current path and does nothing differently?**

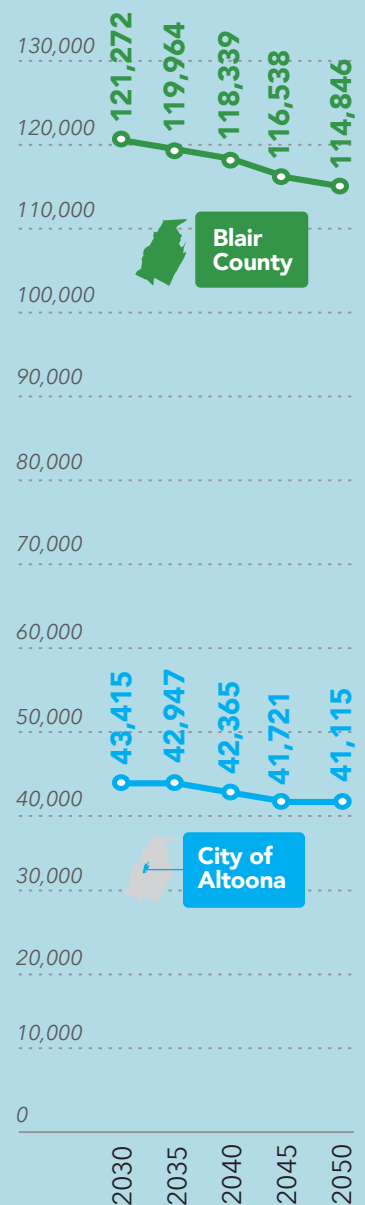
The following are educated guesses about how Altoona may experience the coming few decades and critical **questions for any long-range planning process** if the community wishes to bend established patterns.

The city and county will continue to see their populations shrink

Population trends presented in this section suggest that the city and county are in line for continued population losses, especially as the nation experiences slow growth due to low birth rates and rapid aging. Projections recently released by the PA State Data Center suggest the same, forecasting that Blair County will have just under 115,000 people by 2050—the population it had around the outbreak of World War I.

If Altoona maintains its 2020 share of Blair County’s population through 2050, the city would continue to experience a very gradual loss of population—more gradual than recent decades, but still resulting in fewer people to fill houses, work jobs, and pay taxes.

Population Projections, 2030-2050



Source: PA State Data Center’s county-level projections through 2050; city projections assume that Altoona maintains its 2020 share of Blair County’s population through 2050.



Question for long-range planning

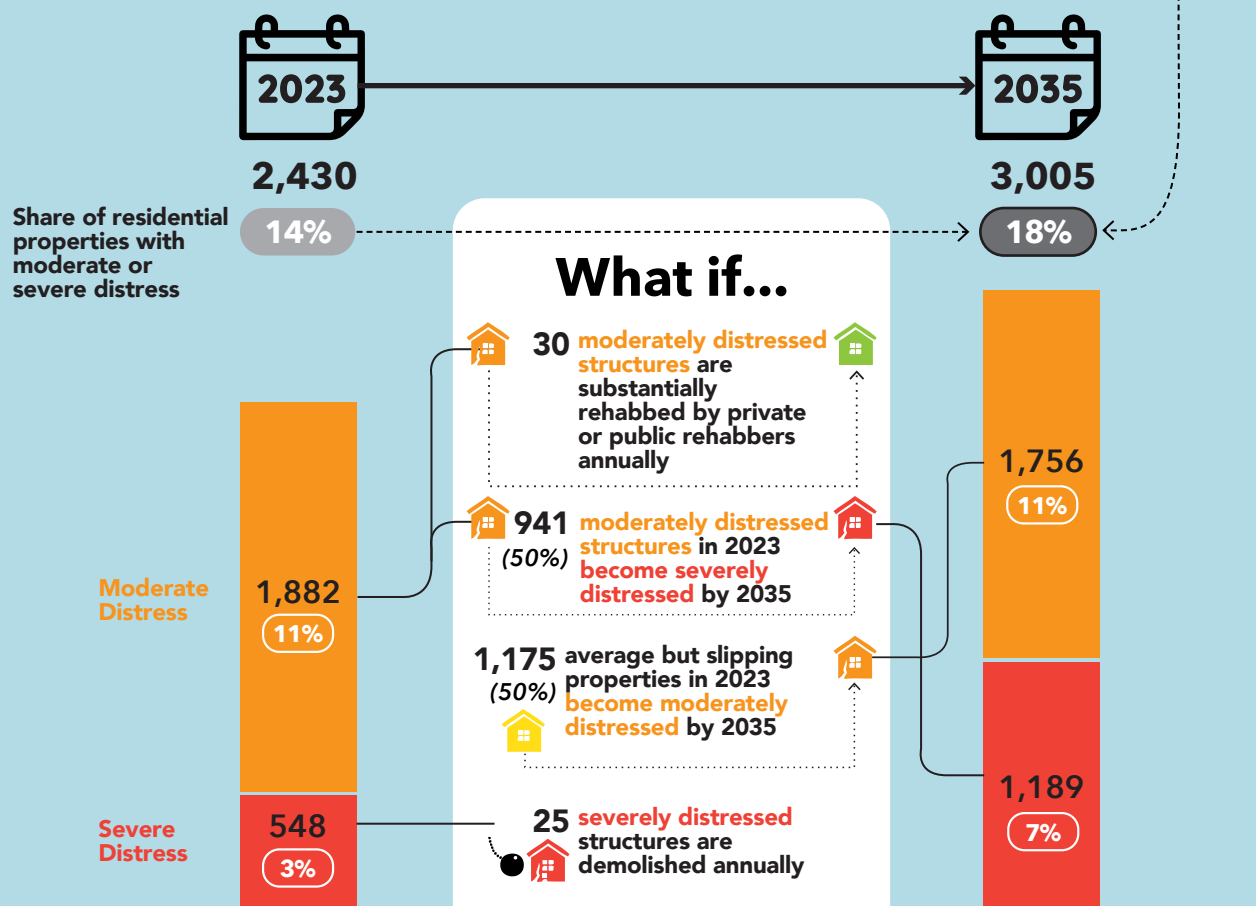
Altoona is very likely to be a city of around 40,000 residents, or possibly lower, into the middle of the century. **If such an outcome is demographically hard to avoid, how can Altoona improve the odds that it will be a stronger, healthier, and more competitive city of 40,000?**

Housing vacancies and the share of properties in distress will climb, putting serious pressure on today's 'unsettled' blocks

As it stands, Altoona has been removing housing from its supply (roughly 40 units per year since 2000 across 25 individual structures) at a slower rate than it has been losing households (around 75 per year). This imbalance is an important force behind the rise in vacancies and worsening conditions.

Vacancy rates can be expected to remain at 12% or higher for the foreseeable future if this imbalance persists, and a share of the properties that are now in average condition but are visibly slipping will become blighted—especially on unsettled blocks where confidence is already precarious.

The thought experiment below demonstrates the potential consequences. If declining properties continue to experience incremental declines, **the share of residential properties that are visibly distressed in Altoona could climb from 14% in 2023 to roughly 18% by 2035—despite several hundred demolitions and rehabs.**



Question for long-range planning

Dealing with blighted properties has been and may continue to be like playing whack-a-mole: you take care of one and two pop up elsewhere. **How can Altoona keep up with this problem so that blight is less of a threat in the years ahead?**

Progress in downtown Altoona will continue, but slowly—too slowly for it to yet emerge as a potent economic force

While downtown Altoona is stronger than it was a decade ago, there is no doubt that it has a long way to go to fill the role that downtowns are now playing in cities throughout Pennsylvania and the country—as income generators, lifestyle amenities, and true neighborhoods.

On Altoona’s current path, the hurdles that continue to stand in the way of accelerated progress will largely remain. Mixed-use redevelopment of underutilized structures and infill development of empty lots will remain low in volume due to high risk and insufficient tools to help private developers and investors manage risk. And the public realm will remain largely outdated and unfriendly to pedestrians.

There will continue to be positive news here and there. Overall, though, there will not be a sense that a particular vision is being achieved or that a critical mass is being cultivated.



Question for long-range planning

There is a lot to accomplish in downtown Altoona with limited resources and demand. **Where should work be focused to accelerate progress as much as possible?**

There will be spot improvements to some corridors, amenities, and other public infrastructure, but most will continue to send lackluster signals about Altoona as a community of choice

Without some significant pivots, Altoona in 10 and 20 years will continue to be characterized by overbuilt and uncharming corridors, by a parks system that is small and underfunded, and by improvements that age poorly for want of sustainable revenue for upkeep.

The maintenance of this status quo might not be a problem for those who see major streets and parks as purely functional and not in need of fuss or refinement. But it will be noticed by prospective businesses or households who will look for higher standards and a rising quality of place before they decide to make a major investment.



Question for long-range planning

It will take time to upgrade infrastructure to higher standards and to meet modern needs and expectations. **How can the work of the next decade be strategically targeted so that it radically transforms impressions of Altoona and sets the stage for rising standards going forward?**

City government will continue to be in constant “catch up” mode on most challenges and opportunities, lacking the capacity to keep up or get ahead

Doing more with less has been the theme for the City of Altoona for some time—partly out of necessity, but partly by choice. On Altoona’s current path, having substantially underfunded and understaffed departments facing mounting challenges will not put city government in a position to be proactive, enterprising, and able to attract and keep talented people.

The best efforts of committed staff and officials will, at best, yield results that are too small or temporary to move the needle. This will fuel frustration, high turnover, and the erosion of remaining capacity.



Question for long-range planning

The City of Altoona presently has limited capacity to implement new or expanded programs and projects in response to priority issues.

How should it begin the work of rebuilding its ability to commit serious resources and attention to priority issues over a prolonged period of time?



PART 2

Altoona's Path Forward

While the planning process revealed that Altoonans are split on their sense of the city's current direction, it also revealed broad recognition from leaders and the public that the current path—while generating positive results on some fronts—will not produce the transformative outcomes that many would like to see in the years ahead.

If not the current path, what path should Altoona take?

All Together Altoona presents a path forward based on the community's core values, planning principles that can be drawn from those values, and priorities that Altoonans have identified as the "Big Things" for the community to rally around. It also presents specific, measurable outcomes that would indicate progress towards those priorities.

Together, these values, principles, priorities, and outcomes represent the decision-making guardrails that will help keep Altoona on its chosen path.

Shaping the Future By Applying Our Values pg 40

Making Progress by Focusing on Our Priorities pg 42

Measuring Our Progress pg 44



A Decision-Making Framework to Keep Altoona on Its Chosen Path

We will use our core values and planning principles to inform the decisions we make, especially about our utmost priorities.

Core Values



Planning Principles



Big Things



We will know we're on the right track if we make progress on measurable outcomes.

Outcomes



PART



Shaping the Future By Applying Our Values



VALUES

We will commit ourselves to making decisions that reflect the innate resourcefulness, self-reliance, and grit that have been part of life in Altoona for generations. What served Altoona well as a railroad and mountain community 100 years ago can continue to serve us well in the 2020s and beyond.

To overcome our tendency as a community to become stagnant and stuck, and to hesitate when hard decisions need to be made, we will marshal our ingrained resourcefulness, self-reliance, and grit to become more creative and entrepreneurial, more inclusive, and more bold so that we can make noticeable and sustainable progress on our priorities.

Altoona’s core values are deeply-held, widely-shared beliefs that serve as building blocks for the community’s vision of the future. They reflect what residents are willing to defend and fight for as well as their aspirations. Altoona is at its best when it acts in ways that are consistent with these values.

The values listed and defined here are based on work by the All Together Altoona steering committee, conversations held in the community, and input from public open houses and surveys. Three represent longstanding or “legacy” values that have served the community well and should be embraced into the future. The other three represent values that are more aspirational; there are glimpses of these values at work in the community already, but there is recognition that commitment and practice will be needed for Altoona to consistently operate by them.

We have a history of being...

Legacy values to carry forward

Resourceful

We have experienced hard times. We know how to work with what we have and how to take advantage of the assets in our midst.

The decisions we make going forward should reflect that we respect our historic and natural resources, abhor wastefulness, and take pride in finding creative solutions that improve our community.

Self-Reliant

We are proudest when we overcome adversity, determine our own course, and tap into the skills and experiences that exist at our community’s fingertips.

The decisions we make going forward should reflect that we are willing to do our own heavy-lifting and will be the first to invest in our utmost priorities.

Gritty

Hard work and determination built the railroads that criss-crossed Pennsylvania. They kept those railroads running. And they built a city of engineering marvels that has persisted through thick and thin.

The decisions we make going forward should reflect that we don’t shy away from hard, patient work, and that taking on a difficult task and seeing it through is what we do.

We will strive to become more...

Aspirational values to cultivate

Entrepreneurial

Altoona has long been and continues to be home to enterprises that reflect the talent and risk-tolerance of its people. But we recognize that these enterprising tendencies have not been consistently applied toward achieving civic goals, and that risk-aversion can sometimes prevent us from considering a solution unless it has proven successful somewhere else.

The decisions we make going forward should reflect that we have an entrepreneurial ethos in our community. We recognize that taking risks, trying something new, and putting our best foot forward is part of being adaptable and resilient.

Inclusive

We are a proud community of pioneers and immigrants. But we recognize that we sometimes struggle to welcome newcomers and to reach out to new voices and perspectives.

The decisions we make going forward should reflect active inputs from a much wider cross section of Altoona to ensure that we benefit from all of our community’s strengths and share ownership of what we collectively achieve.

Bold

Bold decisions made by previous generations are visible across Altoona’s landscape, from a cathedral dome, to a majestic theater, to one of the world’s most complex water systems. But we recognize that boldness has receded in recent generations, giving way to hesitation and inaction.

The decisions we make going forward should reflect our awareness that big accomplishments cannot happen without a willingness to act boldly and stand by our choices. If we flinch whenever the stakes are high, we will struggle to achieve outcomes that will make us proud.



PRINCIPLES

Our planning principles are rules that govern what we do and help us translate our values into actions. When the community is making decisions, it should pause to ask: "Does this reflect our values? Does it reflect a faithful application of our planning principles?" Thoughtful consideration of these questions can help to shape or re-shape a final decision so that the answers are a confident "yes."



Have 'skin in the game'

To advance our priorities and have control over the outcomes we want, we will invest our own resources and energies and not depend on others to do the heavy-lifting.

Make the first dollars into a project local in order to leverage and shape the use of other resources (federal and state).

Be prepared to go it alone if something is important but there are no federal or state grant programs that are good fits.

Pursue a program or activity merely because there is federal or state money on the table; it has to be a good strategic fit for Altoona first and foremost.



Demand and maintain higher standards

We will hold our community to standards that truly make us proud and create long-term value. If we don't show respect for ourselves, no one else will.

Use development regulations and incentives to ensure that future projects meet a standard that makes Altoona proud.

Demonstrate high standards with publicly funded projects.

Mistake cheapness for thrift; a city that comes across as cheap does not attract businesses and households that are interested in long-term value.



Embrace risk-taking and new approaches

An entrepreneurial community takes risks and learns from failure. We will tap into our ingenuity and resources to seize opportunities.

Have the patience to experiment, evaluate, and tinker.

Take collective ownership of risks and outcomes; risk taking is easier if everyone sticks their necks out together.

Use the question "Has this been done elsewhere?" as a way to avoid the work of inventing solutions that match Altoona's specific problems and opportunities.



Protect and strengthen Altoona's inherent assets

We have important assets—historical, cultural, artistic, natural—that we will protect and build from to advance our priorities.

Use assets as way to prioritize where and how Altoona will focus its scarce resources.

Be open-minded about what counts as an asset in Altoona, because assets may have a history of being overlooked.

Assume that critical assets can be safely ignored or taken for granted.

Be shortsighted or cursory about decisions that will impact major assets.

Making Progress by Focusing on Our Priorities

If Altoona's attention in the coming decade is scattered across a dozen or more issues and a far larger number of individual goals, the community is guaranteed to succumb to half-measures that fail to "move the needle" in a noticeable way. Focusing Altoona's limited resources, therefore, is a prerequisite for a plan that stands any probability of being implemented.

The All Together Altoona planning process gathered input on the community's top priorities and found remarkably consistent answers from a range of stakeholders. Those priorities are organized as follows, with **one central priority and two branches that each have three distinct layers.**

CENTRAL PRIORITY



Competing for and retaining young people and a talented workforce is Altoona's central priority.

More than anything else, Altoona's actions have to be in service of making the city appealing to households and businesses that have choices and could locate anywhere in the region or beyond. This will improve the city's chances of being fiscally healthy and economically competitive in the long-run.



To advance Altoona's central priority, focused attention is required on two categories of work...



Better public spaces designed with people in mind



Neighborhoods with pride and opportunity

This category of work has three distinct layers

What will progress look like?

Why is this important?



Cultivate a vibrant downtown

Downtown has an increasingly recognizable set of “core” blocks, more residents with a healthier mix of incomes and ages, a growing number of businesses, and steadily rising property values to bolster the city’s tax base.

High-quality public spaces and amenities can no longer be viewed as frivolous or non-essential if a city wants to seriously compete for economic activity and households that seek a high quality of life.

They are also investments in fiscal viability through the bolstering of demand and property values. A stronger tax base supports the proper maintenance of good amenities and investments in other community goals.



Make Altoona’s streets safer and more beautiful

Major streets in Altoona have rising levels of good urban form that make them increasingly walkable and desirable places to be: good sidewalks and crosswalks, good trees and lighting, comfortable bike facilities, and well-designed transitions between public and private spaces.



Provide first-rate and well-connected parks and trails

Investment in parks and trails is rising, resulting in spaces that have higher quality infrastructure and equipment, are well-used by residents, and represent a well-connected system.



Promote neighborhood health and stability

Neighborhoods of all types are showing signs of progress. Strong neighborhoods remain strong, neighborhoods in the middle are showing a recovery of confidence, and those with the highest concentrations of disinvestment have noticeably stabilized.

Residential neighborhoods represent the vast majority of Altoona’s geography and have the biggest influence on how Altoonans feel about their city and their quality of life.

It is also where individual households can have the most tangible impact on the city’s future if they see the city’s future and their own aspirations align.



Catch up and keep up with blight

The total volume of properties showing signs of distress is falling (especially in very visible areas), making neighborhoods impacted by blight feel safer and giving owners the confidence to invest in their blocks.



Expand appealing and affordable housing options

Homebuyers with options in Blair County—especially younger families—are increasingly likely to find an appealing home in an appealing neighborhood when they look at Altoona.

Affordable housing opportunities are improving in quality and accessibility, and can be found in healthy neighborhoods.

Measuring Our Progress

If Altoona is making progress on the areas of work that will help it compete for and retain young households and a talented workforce, the proof will not be in the completion of a handful of projects or the initiation of a new program or two. Instead, the proof will be in a series of measurable outcomes that show that patient work is having a sustained impact.

The following are recommended outcomes to track over the next decade that will help to inform the implementation of strategies in Part 3.



Better public spaces designed with people in mind



	Baseline	2028	2033
Market value of downtown property is rising twice as fast as inflation	\$35.4 M (2023)	\$44.4 M	\$56.7 M
Share of major corridors with Excellent or Very Good urban design is rising	14% (2023)	20%	33%
Per capita operating budget for parks and recreation is rising and closing the gap with peer cities	\$16 (2022)	\$40	\$90



Market value of downtown property is rising twice as fast as inflation

This will indicate that desirability and demand for downtown space are rapidly improving.

\$35.4 M **\$44.4 M** **\$56.7 M**
(2023)

Assumes an average inflation rate of 2.5% between 2024 and 2033



Share of major corridors with Excellent or Very Good urban design is rising

This will indicate that major corridors are becoming consistently more appealing to all users.

14% **20%** **33%**
(2023)

Based on linear miles of corridors assessed by the 2023 urban design assessment for All Together Altoona



Per capita operating budget for parks and recreation is rising and closing the gap with peer cities

This will indicate a sustained change in historical investment behaviors.

\$16 **\$40** **\$90**
(2022)



Neighborhoods with pride and opportunity



Baseline 2028 2033



The share of residential properties in excellent or good condition is rising

40%
(2023)

41%

45%

This will indicate rising confidence and improving community standards.



The share of residential properties that are visibly distressed is stable and beginning to shrink

14%
(2023)

14%

12%

This will indicate that blight removal is occurring on a sufficient scale and that investment in housing is rising.



Median home values are keeping up with, or beating, inflation

Median Value of Owner-Occupied Homes
\$110,700
(2022)

Median Value of Owner-Occupied Homes
\$135,000

Median Value of Owner-Occupied Homes
\$170,000

This will indicate that demand to live in Altoona is improving, the balance between supply and demand is stabilizing, and the willingness to pay for housing in the city is rising.



The share of households that are cost-burdened is stable or declining

27%
(2022)

26%

24%

This will indicate that incomes are improving and that the housing needs of low-income households are increasingly being met by an accessible supply within Altoona and the rest of Blair County.

Measuring Our Progress

If measurable progress is being made over the coming five and ten years on public spaces and neighborhoods—resulting in changes to investment behaviors and how Altoona is perceived by current and potential residents and businesses—the probability that Altoona will experience longer-term demographic dividends will improve.

The following are measurable outcomes that reflect progress on Altoona’s central priority.



Competing for and retaining young people and a talented workforce is Altoona’s central priority.



Baseline

2033



Altoona’s share of Blair County’s young adults is rising

41%
(2022)

44%



Altoona’s share of Blair County’s labor force is rising

35%
(2022)

37%



Altoona’s share of Blair County’s college-educated adults is rising

28%
(2022)

32%



Altoona’s share of all jobs in Blair County has stabilized or is rising

34%
(2021)

36%

Build on What's Working

Helping to shape new or expanded efforts will be an important function of the All Together Altoona decision-making framework, and Part 3 outlines recommended policies and activities on that front. But the framework is likely to have its biggest impact as it helps to refine and reframe the use of existing resources and **identify activities that are already aligned with the values, principles, and priorities of this plan.**

As the community organizes for implementation, calling attention to and celebrating what's already working will help to build momentum and generate confidence. A fundamental task of the All Together Altoona Coalition, recommended as a Foundational Step in Part 3, should be the identification of programs and projects that contribute to this Plan's vision for Altoona to ensure that those efforts are part of the Coalition and have an opportunity to influence implementation.

Identify existing efforts in Altoona that...

- Organize or promote community clean-ups
- Assist homeowners in need with repairs and maintenance
- Beautify streets and parks
- Draw people downtown, or elevate the downtown experience
- Promote the use of public spaces
- Find solutions for individual blighted properties
- Maintain key cultural and historic assets
- Engage neighborhood residents to work together
- Guide newcomers to city neighborhoods and housing opportunities
- Get young people interested and engaged in civic improvement

Recognize them as critical parts of the vision for All Together Altoona

Strive to coordinate existing efforts alongside new activities and approaches

PART 3

Altoona's Plan for Action

To follow Altoona's Path Forward, more resources will be needed—and committed patiently over time—to make more than marginal progress.

There is no magic pot of money in Washington or Harrisburg to rely on for these resources. If the community wants to attract and retain households and businesses that could locate anywhere in the region, and if it wants property owners to invest in the future of their homes and neighborhoods, it will need to demonstrate "skin in the game" to give them confidence that they are making good choices.

Part 3 provides the action plan to implement the All Together Altoona vision, starting with foundational steps that include resource commitments, capacity-building, and partnerships. These and other steps will help to unlock a series of strategies, tools, and processes that will point the community in the direction of this plan's vision.

Foundational Steps for Implementation pg 50

Better public spaces designed with people in mind

Create a strong and vibrant downtown pg 58

Make safe and beautiful streets for everyone pg 64

Invest in a first-rate and well-connected parks and trails system pg 70

Neighborhoods with pride and opportunity

Promote neighborhood health and stability pg 74

Catch up with blight pg 80

Expend appealing and affordable housing opportunities pg 84



PART

Foundational Steps for Implementation

All Together Altoona envisions a community that is making substantial, measurable strides on issues that have long been a source of frustration—from a downtown that is making progress but still falls far short of true vitality, to the perennial challenge of dilapidated buildings, to the steady drip of households and businesses making location decisions within Blair County and having Altoona far down on their list of choices.

To overcome these frustrations, and to achieve results that are substantially—not just marginally—different from prevailing outcomes, this action plan must look and feel different from previous blueprints followed by the city and its partners.

The key differences:

Short but Ambitious

This action plan includes no more than 15 individual goals and 15 specific tools and strategies—all organized under the priorities and areas of work presented in Part 2. The purpose behind keeping the action plan short is to keep attention as focused as possible and to not let an overwhelming list of goals be a source of paralysis.

Focus will be necessary because the tools and strategies in the action plan, while responsive and realistic, are also ambitious—and they are designed to reinforce one another.



Adaptive

There is no simple technical solution—no ordinance to modify, no unnoticed federal grant program to tap into—that will advance this plan’s vision. Rather, the vast majority of implementation work proposed here centers on the hard work of changing behaviors, adapting systems, and doing things differently—the hardest work for a community anywhere to take on.



This action plan is really a demonstration of the decision-making framework in Part 2, which calls for doubling-down on Altoona’s most helpful habits and committing every day to change less helpful habits.

To start Altoona on this journey of adaptation, this action plan begins with a few critical foundational steps that will be an important test of the plan’s vision. Taking these steps early in the implementation process will pave the way for the rest of the action plan and be a clear signal that movement towards the All Together Altoona vision is backed by words as well as action.

Expansion of Resources

One of the clearest takeaways from the analysis of Altoona’s current path in Part 1 is the degree to which the City of Altoona is under-resourced and understaffed. Years of austerity have stripped the city down to less than the barest essentials—putting even the Police Department in a situation where it operates with roughly two-thirds as many officers as other cities of its size in the Mid-Atlantic region. This level of operational restriction is mirrored, or worse, throughout City Hall.

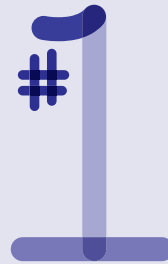


This lays bare the clearest and most fundamental step the Altoona community must take if it wishes to achieve different outcomes: **Is it willing to pay for the capacity and tools that would finally put the City of Altoona in a position to be proactive and far-sighted—much like the region’s most successful businesses?**

If this willingness exists, one way to express it is through the creation and capitalization of an All Together Altoona Fund that would serve as the primary and highly flexible funding source for tools and activities related to implementation of the comprehensive plan. In line with the decision-making framework in Part 2, the key to starting the fund would be a demonstration of “skin in the game” by the City of Altoona. The city’s contributions, however, could be used to leverage funding from corporate, philanthropic, and other public sector partners.

\$50 million over 15 years is estimated to be a sufficiently robust amount to support implementation. If 60% of that were derived from the City’s General Fund through a full (1.0) dedicated mill each year, a serious message would be sent to private and other public partners that want to be part of an Altoona transformation.

SPECIFIC STEPS



Upon adoption of All Together Altoona, begin the work of determining how an implementation fund would work in practice and the city’s realistic level of contribution.



Convene potential Fund partners from the region’s corporate and philanthropic communities, as well as potential state agency partners, to talk about the new comprehensive plan and the city’s interest in implementation partnerships.



Strongly consider housing the Fund at an independent philanthropic entity capable of receiving contributions from numerous sources and managing assets.



60%
from city's
General Fund

\$2 million per year

coverable by a dedicated 1.0 "implementation mill" equivalent to \$100 per year for a home assessed at \$100,000; part of this could be used to pay for bonds issued to cover relevant capital projects

40%
from private
and other
public sources

\$1.3 million per year

leveraged from corporate, philanthropic, and other public sector sources to support specific programs and activities

Capacity and Partnerships

Partnerships have become an important part of the community's operational fabric. Indeed, the Altoona Area School District is a rare and successful example of a city-suburban educational partnership that has helped Altoona compete for families in ways that most cities in the state can't.

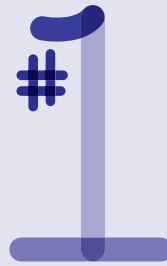


Some partnerships in Altoona, however, reflect operational weaknesses more than strengths. The Central Blair Recreation and Park Commission, for example, is a smart but very under-resourced concept. Rather than making shared assets stronger, it has become a way for two municipalities to offload local responsibilities and hope for successful grant-writing.

Use of the Blair County Planning Commission's capacity within City Hall is another idea that looks groundbreaking on its face. But a means to fill a void during a period of financial distress has become a reason for the city to not develop its own internal planning capacity, making it the largest city in Pennsylvania without a single city planner on staff.

Partnerships will be vital to the implementation of All Together Altoona. But they have to be healthy, functional partnerships that are more than the sum of their parts. Key to making this work will be **the formation of a broad-based All Together Altoona Coalition** to champion and guide implementation work, a coalition comprised of major traditional partners (Altoona Area School District, UPMC, and Penn State, for example), smaller neighborhood-based partners, and the designation of a single entity that will have the capacity to effectively coordinate implementation and manage several of the programs and activities that would utilize resources from the All Together Altoona Fund.

SPECIFIC STEPS



Upon adoption of this plan, establish and convene the All Together Altoona Coalition to serve as the plan's implementation steering committee. Use the formation of the coalition as a way to demonstrate the decision-making framework of the plan—including its emphasis on values such as inclusion and entrepreneurship.



Designate a single agency or department to serve as implementation coordinator and ensure that the entity will have sufficient staff capacity to function as such over time.



As the designated coordination entity begins its work, it should tap into the relationships and skills of Coalition members to build creative task forces around elements of the Action Plan and delegate certain activities to well-positioned partners. Use annual events to recognize and celebrate accomplishments and maintain a clear agenda for the year ahead.

Updated Development Regulations

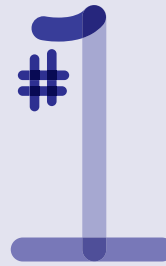
In a growing and expanding city, the zoning code and development regulations have a significant influence on where and how growth takes place and the future shape of the community. As Part 1 makes clear, this is not the case in Altoona—and won't be for the foreseeable future.



However, the dozens of redevelopment projects that happen each year that are shaped by the zoning code and development regulations represent critical opportunities to ensure that those projects contribute to the momentum towards the All Together Altoona vision of better public spaces and appealing neighborhoods that help Altoona attract and retain households.

These regulations are outdated—receiving their last substantial update nearly 20 years ago. And at that time, the updates were viewed as temporary fixes that would be followed by a more comprehensive modernization, which never happened.

SPECIFIC STEPS



Upon adoption of All Together Altoona, initiate a comprehensive modernization of the zoning code and the subdivision and land development ordinance (SALDO).



Use the modernization effort to fully align the zoning code and SALDO with the vision of the comprehensive plan.



Engage the development and business community, along with the broader Altoona community, to help shape the updated ordinances. Ensure that the new ordinances reflect community goals while also providing clarity, predictability, and streamlined processes for the private sector.

An “Editing” Approach to Altoona’s Housing Supply

A final foundational step for implementing the All Together Altoona Action Plan—one that draws on the other foundational steps—is acceptance that Altoona’s housing supply will require continuous editing on multiple fronts to advance the plan’s vision. Every year, there need to be a combination of demolitions, rehabs, and new housing units put into service to make the city’s housing supply and neighborhoods healthier and more responsive to the needs of existing and future residents.

Since Altoona’s population is likely to continue to decline, this combination of activities needs to be intentionally calibrated to result in a smaller number of housing units over time—but units that are in better overall condition and reflect higher standards that will help Altoona compete for households and generate healthy levels of reinvestment by property owners.

Direct interventions facilitated with public resources



Of course, all three of these “editing” activities currently take place in Altoona. But on Altoona’s current path, with its current practices and resource levels, these activities are not occurring at a sufficient scale to make the housing supply better or more competitive over time. They are also not being coordinated in a manner to maximize their collective impact.

As the conclusion to Part 1 explains, maintaining the current path is likely to result in even greater levels of blight as deferred maintenance continues to mount and interventions fail to catch up with the problem—despite a continuous stream of demolitions and rehabs. A substantially expanded pace of intervention on all three fronts—rehab, demolition, and new construction—are needed to put Altoona on a path that results in a healthier housing market with much stronger levels of private investment.

Current Path

average annual activity over the past five years

15 units



Private rehabs directly assisted by the city and its partners each year with federal funds

10 units



Additions to the housing supply each year, most with some form of development subsidy from federal, state, or local sources

30 units



Housing units removed in the city each year, funded by federal grants, private owners, and the city's General Fund

Path Forward

average annual activity proposed

35 units



Private rehabs assisted by the city and its partners each year, with a combination of federal and local resources

20 units



Additions to the housing supply each year, including affordable units assisted by federal and state funds and market-rate units assisted by local funds

50 units



Housing units removed by the city and its partners each year, boosted by expanded local resources for proactive blight removal

Improved neighborhood conditions and housing opportunities that result from this expansion and coordination of housing “edits,” combined with other All Together Altoona investments in the quality of public spaces, would stimulate greater levels of private, unassisted reinvestment across the city as confidence climbs.

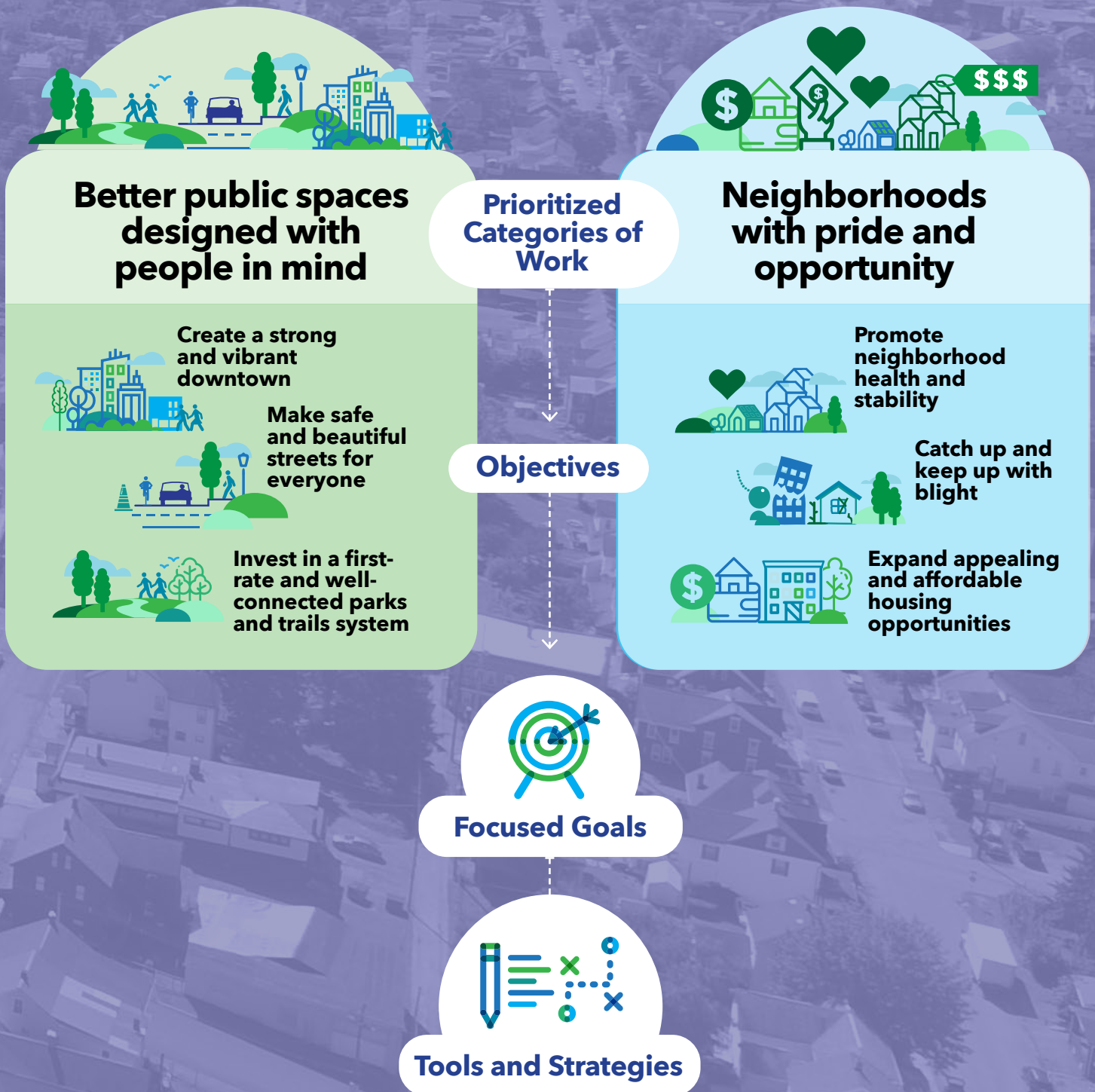
All Together Altoona Action Plan

Taking the foundational steps toward implementation will be some of the hardest work to accomplish along the path to All Together Altoona's vision. But the changes brought about in taking those steps and making hard choices will set Altoona up for the patient, day-to-day, year-to-year work outlined in this Action Plan.

This Action Plan is organized according to the **two prioritized categories of work** presented in Part 2: better public spaces designed with people in mind, and neighborhoods with pride and opportunity.

Within each category, there are **three distinct objectives**. For each objective, **focused goals** are defined and a set of responsive **tools and strategies** are outlined.

These tools and strategies should be considered "additive" in nature. Work already being performed by the city and its partners should continue, with adjustments occurring as needed to complement the All Together Altoona vision.



Better public spaces
designed with people in mind



Create a strong and vibrant downtown



What will progress look like?

Downtown has an increasingly recognizable set of “core” blocks, more residents with a healthier mix of incomes and ages, a growing number of businesses, and steadily rising property values to bolster the city’s tax base.



Focused Goals

#1

Build on the success and energy of 11th Avenue by working from the inside out

#2

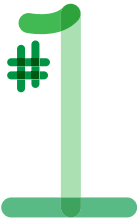
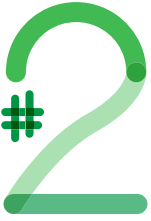

Get more people living downtown with a wider range of household incomes

#3

Prioritize great urban design



Tools and Strategies

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	HOW?
	<p>Focused Investment Initiative for public and private investments along 11th Avenue and 12th Avenue between 12th Street and 16th Street</p>	<p>Leverage the assets and energy along 11th Avenue to build the critical mass necessary to sustain local businesses</p>	<p>City of Altoona, ABCD Corp, local developers, etc.</p>	<p>Create a Focused Investment Area linked to development incentives and public realm improvement commitments</p>
	<p>Downtown Ahead Housing Program offering a simple per unit grant to encourage downtown housing development that meets certain conditions</p>	<p>Existing and future downtown businesses - retail, restaurants, entertainment, etc. - are strengthened by their proximity to nearby customers with disposable income</p>	<p>City of Altoona, ABCD Corp, local developers, etc.</p>	<p>Set aside resources to help cover the financing gaps that limit downtown residential development</p> <p>Market-rate residential infill will require financial incentives until the private market can justify the risk on its own</p>
	<p>Urban Design Standards included in the zoning code and reward projects that meet those standards with speedy approvals</p>	<p>Improve the quality of place, character, and resident / visitor experience in downtown</p>	<p>City Codes & Inspections Department, Blair Planning</p>	<p>Budget for professional services provided by consultant and for planning staff to administer the updated code</p>



#1

Focused Investment Initiative along 11th Avenue and 12th Avenue

A mistake many cities make when revitalizing downtown is to sprinkle investments across several downtown locations rather than focusing investments near core assets and market energy. Focused investment helps to build critical mass and greatly increases chances of long-term success.

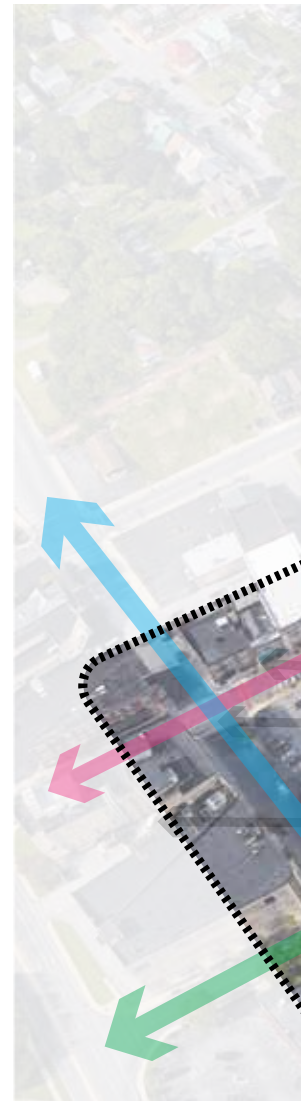
The focus in downtown Altoona should be on 11th Avenue and 12th Avenue between 12th Street and 16th Street. This area has existing assets including a handful of well-established businesses and civic uses such as the Sheetz Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence, the US Post Office, and the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art. In addition, 11th Avenue is Altoona’s most walkable and best designed mixed-use street. However, the number of assets is relatively small and currently doesn’t generate the foot traffic necessary for businesses to thrive. Focused investments in both business development and public realm improvements will help to generate more foot traffic, sending signals to the market that downtown Altoona is on the rise.

Utilize incentives to encourage a vibrant business mix

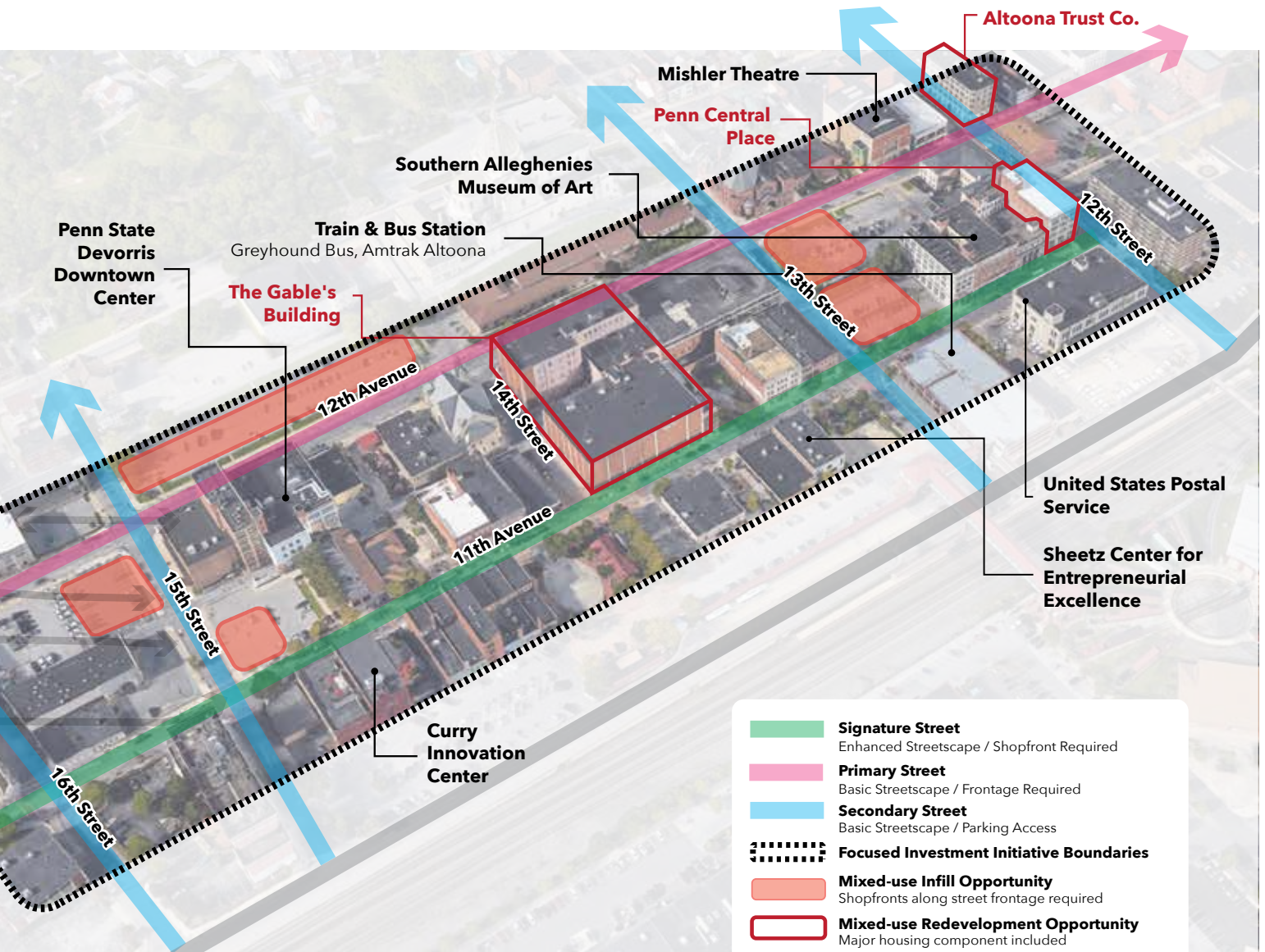
Collaborate with the Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation (ABCD) to develop an incentive program for business development. The program should consider existing incentives such as the Enterprise Zone Tax Credit Program and the Local Economic Revitalization Assistance (LERTA) Program which are aimed at reconstruction and new construction. Other small business loans, grants, and tax incentives should be considered for such things as signs, façade and storefront improvements.

Create great streetscapes along key downtown corridors

Pay close attention to public realm improvements such as sidewalks, street trees, crosswalks, lighting, and furnishings along 11th Avenue and 12th Avenue as well as 16th Street, 15th Street, 14th Street, 13th Street and 12th Street. Each street should be evaluated individually, and appropriate trees and other components should be included based on local context. A streetscape plan for this area will help to create a detailed implementation plan.



The purpose of this graphic is to identify and emphasize the relationships between existing assets and key opportunities in the 11th Avenue area. The Focused Investment Initiative area is not intended to be a rigid or legal boundary, although it could be. Rather it's a compact area to focus resources to leverage and build upon the internal assets. Once the market energy is maximized within this focused area, it could be expanded slowly. The idea is to grow the assets and energy from the inside outward.





#2

Downtown Ahead Housing Program

For several years now, plans have identified market-rate housing as a critical part of making downtown Altoona a more vibrant place with an improving tax base and a growing roster of services and retail. The previous comprehensive plan (Positively Altoona), a detailed housing study (Ahead of the Curve), and the region’s new housing strategy (Alleghenies Ahead on Housing) all identify the need for and strategic importance of high-quality downtown housing, and a handful of projects that have materialized over the past decade prove the market’s appetite.

Proof of concept is not enough, however, to ensure a steady stream of housing production. As the regional strategy demonstrates, the development cost of new housing (especially downtown) will generally require rents that are higher than the Altoona market is used to—creating risks for developers and their investors that have to be overcome with public support. But the major sources of subsidy available, historically, have been for income-restricted housing rather than market-rate products.

LERTA is part of the current toolkit to support market-rate housing production, providing local property tax relief for a period of time to reduce development and operating costs. This should be augmented by a **per unit subsidy** (estimated to require \$100,000 per unit, on average) to further reduce costs and manage private risk.

A Downtown Ahead Housing Program would make this per-unit subsidy available to qualifying developments that reinforce the All Together Altoona vision. And it is recommended that it do so in the simplest and most straightforward way possible—as direct grants.

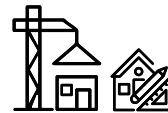
Downtown Ahead Housing Program



Per-unit grant to projects that meet All Together Altoona’s strategic conditions



Location within boundaries of Focused Investment Initiative



Adaptive reuse/rehab or new construction



Project adheres to all applicable downtown design standards



Assisted units have no income restrictions, advancing downtown's emergence as a mixed-income neighborhood



Income-restricted units (using other sources of subsidy) make up no more than 20% of units in a participating project

How many units should the community aim to support through this program?

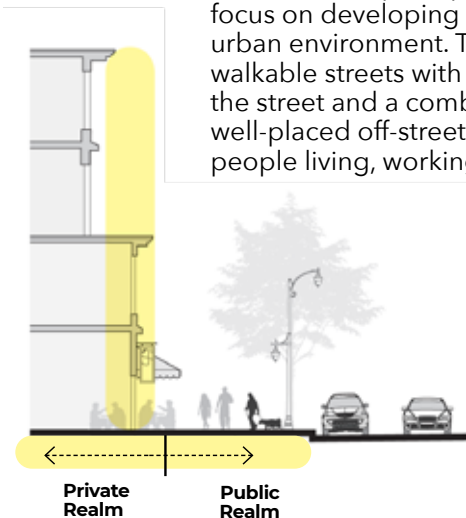
There is no danger of this subsidy spurring too many market-rate apartments in downtown Altoona, and every new unit produced will be a critical step in the right direction. If an average of at least five new units per year can be assisted in the Focused Investment Initiative area over the next decade, the impact on downtown vitality will be noticeable.



#3 Urban Design Standards included in zoning code

Remote work and modern communication tools provide people the ability to choose where to live more than ever. The physical environment along with amenities impact our quality-of-life and can play an important role in why people live where they do. If things like walkability are important to people, they will likely choose places to live that are walkable. And walkable places don't happen by accident. They are planned and include more than a sidewalk. Things like street trees, buffers from cars, safe access to buildings, and other physical characteristics play an important role. It will be important for Altoona to improve its quality-of-place to be able to attract a skilled workforce and entice more people to live downtown, which is a requirement for building a modern and vibrant city.

As part of a citywide zoning update, Altoona should include standards and guidelines aimed at creating a high-quality urban form especially in the downtown and along key corridors. Urban design standards are principle-driven requirements that focus on developing a fabric conducive to a quality urban environment. This includes creating inviting walkable streets with buildings that actively engage the street and a combination of on-street and well-placed off-street parking that accommodates people living, working, and shopping.



For a city to have vibrancy and sense of place, it is crucial that it has great streets

The public realm (streets and other public spaces) and the private realm (buildings and other private space) must seamlessly integrate. The treatment of this "interface" between the public and private realms is a key ingredient in great streets. This is true for both commercial / mixed-use and neighborhood streets, in both a suburban and urban context..

Topics to address in standards include but are not limited to:

- ✓ **Frontage typologies** that coordinate with street types.

For example, it might be desirable to require shopfront buildings on streets with ground-floor retail, such as 11th Avenue
- ✓ **Principle-based building form standards:** base, mid-section and crown

Minimum and maximum height

Entryways fronting streets with connecting sidewalks

First floor transparency requirements
- ✓ **Build-to-zones** to create a consistent building street wall with exceptions for public spaces such as pocket parks, plazas and outdoors seating

Parking permitted in rear and side yards only.

If parking needs to front a street it must be buffered with a hedge or a decorative wall or fence
- ✓ **Large parking lots** broken down into smaller "blocks" or "pods"; Pedestrian alleyways connecting streets and public spaces to parking areas
- ✓ **Shared parking provisions**



Better public spaces designed with people in mind

Make safe and beautiful streets for everyone



What will progress look like?

Major streets in Altoona have rising levels of good urban form that make them increasingly walkable and desirable places to be: good sidewalks and crosswalks, good trees and lighting, comfortable bike facilities, and well-designed transitions between public and private spaces.



Focused Goals

#1

Prioritize the development of complete streets - those that accommodate walking, biking, driving, and transit use

#2

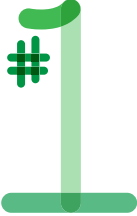


Improve the look, function, and feel of the city's gateway streets

#3

Coordinate public realm improvements with private sector investments



Tools and Strategies





	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	HOW?
	Comprehensive Streetscape Initiative that considers trees, pedestrian scaled lighting, sidewalks, furnishings, high visibility crosswalks, and bike facilities in all street projects	Adding streetscape improvements to street repaving/reconstruction projects provides economies of scale that would not exist if those same improvements were made as a separate project	City of Altoona Public Works Department, Blair Planning, PennDOT	Supplement county and State resources with local resources as needed
	Strategic Sidewalk Replacement Program aligned with neighborhood and housing programs and initiatives	Sidewalks are generally in poor condition, which impacts walkability, accessibility and people's perception of Altoona	City of Altoona Public Works Department, local property owners and developers, PennDOT	Require new sidewalks as part of all development projects and utilize powers provided by the State to the city to replace the sidewalks
	Partnership With PennDOT focused on developing complete streets and right-sizing roadways - reallocating space for pedestrians, bikes, and transit users	Create multi-modal streets by reallocating excess pavement to safely accommodate bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users	City of Altoona Public Works Department, PennDOT, Blair Planning (MPO), etc.	Set aside Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) funds through the local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to evaluate and access Altoona streets with a special focus on gateway Use the assessment to guide improvements, changes and/or space reallocation



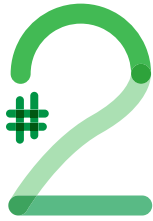
#1 Comprehensive Streetscape Initiative

Streets are our primary public space. Typically, the acreage dedicated to streets far outweighs that of all parks and other public spaces combined. Although all streets are important not all streets are equal. Some are designed primarily for moving automobiles. These auto-centric roadways or ‘thoroughfares’ often include high volumes of vehicular traffic at higher speeds and are not ideal for walking and biking. The focus of these streets is not likely to change much over time. It doesn’t mean that walking and biking should not be accommodated, but that the primary focus is getting automobiles from point A to B. Conversely, some streets are designed primarily for pedestrians. These “pedestrian priority” streets tend to be compact and fronted by multi-story buildings with retail storefronts on the first floors and other uses above. Automobiles are accommodated but pedestrian traffic is the focus and the development along these streets relies heavily on foot traffic. On-street parking and furnishings such as benches, trash receptacles and bike racks are often included along these streets.

Street types should be based on context and the fit and finish are often different from one another. Each type has a relationship to transportation mode, land use and other development regulations, and streetscape design. Considering the relationship between these components will help to strengthen the quality-of-place in Altoona and consequently make it more inviting for everyone.

Street Type	Regional Thoroughfare	City Thoroughfare
<p>General Description</p> <p>The Regional Thoroughfares are high intensity commercial corridors that serve the regional community. They tend to be major commuter routes that travel across the entire city and provide access to regional destinations and shopping areas. It is not uncommon for these roadways to include several travel lanes and large intersections.</p> <p>Example: Pleasant Valley Blvd / W. Plank Rd</p>	<p>The City Thoroughfare provides access and connects city districts and neighborhoods. They can be one-way and include on-street parking and a mix of land uses. They are multi-modal streets that accommodate pedestrians, bicycles, and transit users.</p> <p>Example: Pleasant Valley Blvd</p>	
<p>Adjacent Development</p> <p>Large setback Front yard parking - 1 row max Drive-through facilities</p> 	<p>Shallow setback No front yard parking On-street parking Parking garage access Drive-through facilities</p>	
<p>Pedestrian Facilities</p> <p>Multi-use Trail Sidewalk - Standard Crosswalk - High visibility</p> 	<p>Sidewalk - Standard Sidewalk - Wide Crosswalk - Standard Crosswalk - High visibility Pedestrian level lighting</p>	
<p>Bicycle Facilities</p> <p>Multi-use Trail Cycle track Bike Lanes</p> 	<p>Cycle track Bike Lanes</p>	
<p>Streetscape Components</p> <p>Street trees Tree lawns / buffer Bikes racks, benches and trash receptacles are limited</p> 	<p>Street trees Tree lawns / buffer Bike racks Benches and trash receptacles Wayfinding signs</p>	

Downtown Pedestrian Focus	Downtown Connector	Neighborhood Commercial	Neighborhood Residential
<p>The Downtown Pedestrian Focused Streets are the premier “A” streets in downtown. They are generally smaller in scale than the City Thoroughfare, and serve residents, visitors, and workers. They include traditional multi-story urban buildings and support high levels of walking with on-street parking to serve local retailers storefronts and restaurants. Parking entrances, utilities, and other facilities that do not support the pedestrian retail nature of the street should not front the street.</p> <p>Example: 11th Ave</p>	<p>Downtown Connectors are “B” level district streets that often connect to Thoroughfares and Downtown Pedestrian Focused Streets. They are pedestrian and bike friendly and have a mix of uses that front the street. In addition to on-street parking, the Downtowns Connectors should be two-way and can provide access to surface and garage parking, which is undesirable on Downtown Pedestrian Focused Streets.</p> <p>Example: 13th St</p>	<p>Neighborhood Commercial Streets are typically located in the heart of a residential part of the city. Characterized by dense single floor commercial and retail use, they are often concentrated in an area only a few blocks long. On-street parking and transit stops are often included.</p> <p>Example: 13th St</p>	<p>Neighborhood Residential Streets provide immediate access to Altoona’s residential fabric. They are used primarily for local trips and are characterized by lower vehicle volumes and speeds.</p> <p>Example: Coleridge Ave</p>
<p>Shallow setback No front yard parking On-street parking</p>	<p>Shallow setback No front yard parking On-street parking Parking garage access</p>	<p>Shallow setback No front yard parking On-street parking Parking garage access</p>	<p>Shallow setback On-street parking</p>
<p>Sidewalk - Wide Crosswalk - Standard Crosswalk - High visibility Pedestrian level lighting</p>	<p>Sidewalk - Standard Sidewalk - Wide Crosswalk - Standard Crosswalk - High visibility Pedestrian level lighting</p>	<p>Sidewalk - Standard Sidewalk - Wide Crosswalk - Standard Crosswalk - High visibility Pedestrian level lighting</p>	<p>Sidewalk - Standard Crosswalk - Standard Pedestrian level lighting</p>
<p>Bike Lanes Sharrows (shared use lanes)</p>	<p>Bike Lanes Sharrows (shared use lanes) Bike Boulevards</p>	<p>Bike Lanes Sharrows (shared use lanes) Bike Boulevards</p>	<p>Sharrows (shared use lanes) Bike Boulevards</p>
<p>Curb extensions Street trees Bike racks Benches and trash Wayfinding signs</p>	<p>Curb extensions Street trees Bike racks Benches and trash Wayfinding signs</p>	<p>Sharrows (shared use lanes) Bike Boulevards</p>	<p>Street trees Tree lawns / buffer</p>




Strategic Sidewalk Replacement Program


Walking is more than good exercise. For many it's a necessity. Approximately 12% of Altoona's households have no access to a vehicle and more than 3% of workers rely on walking as their primary way to work. Although topography makes Altoona a more challenging walk in some places, a good chunk of the city is reachable within a 20-to-30-minute walk from downtown. However, despite these characteristics walking in the city is difficult. A 2023 sidewalk condition survey found that more than 60% of city sidewalks are in poor or fair condition. In addition to impacting walkability and accessibility challenges for people with disabilities, areas with poor sidewalks also


have street curbs in poor condition and are typically along streets that don't have street trees. These characteristics together with poor building conditions contribute to poor perception of the city, which negatively impacts value and homebuyer confidence.

A major challenge in addressing poor sidewalk condition is the fact that sidewalks are the homeowner's responsibility. This is likely why sidewalks have fallen into such disrepair. However, the city does have options for funding a sidewalk replacement program. Long-term, addressing this challenge sooner than later is in everyone's best interest.

Strategic Sidewalk Replacement Program considerations:

-  **Develop strategic focus areas for sidewalk replacement** using the 2023 sidewalk condition survey as a guide. The State has granted several powers to the city to address sidewalk replacement and recoup repair costs including:
 - *2015 Act 67 - CHAPTER 130 - SIDEWALKS - Power to lay out and grade sidewalks and compel construction of sidewalks and recoup repair costs*
 - *2000 Act 130 - NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT ACT - Neighborhood improvements, includes the replacement of sidewalks*

-  **Create an Altoona General Sidewalk Fund** - A dedicated sidewalk fund could be set up and funded by money paid and escrowed by development / redevelopment applicants with approved hardships. The fund known as the "Altoona General Sidewalk Fund" can be used to fund sidewalks in various locations as directed by the city in accordance with the sidewalk program. Grants and loans for property owners could also be included.

-  **Coordinate with neighborhood improvement strategies** including the Whole Block Method and the Housing Rehab Program to maximize return on investment. Both are outlined later in Part 3.

-  **Require sidewalks in the zoning code** on both sides of the street as part of development and redevelopment projects

Two ways to address a "sidewalk to nowhere" or a recognized hardship:

1. Recognize that there might not be anything to walk to now, but gaps will eventually be filled. The sidewalk should be built.
2. If a demonstrable hardship exists, require a **fee-in-lieu-of-construction**. Base the fee according to local bid prices and direct it to the Altoona General Sidewalk Fund to support sidewalk building elsewhere in the city. Findings of hardship and the fee-in-lieu should be entered into the record as part of the resolution and conditions of approval for land development.



#3 Partnership With PennDOT

Multi-modal transportation planning has gained traction in recent years. Historically transportation planners focused attention on expanding roads to deal with congestion. However, the understanding of induced demand along with the desire by cities and their residents to have more walkable, bikeable and transit friendly communities have shifted the focus from just moving cars to evaluating how multimodal options can be part of a more efficient transportation hierarchy.

As outlined by PennDOT in a 2019 newsletter called PennDOT Connects, it's important for communities to be proactive when it comes to multimodal transportation planning, and it highlights the comprehensive plan as an important tool. It recognizes that communities should coordinate with regional and state planning partners and modify local policies and ordinances to better align with multi-modal objectives including mixed-use development, reduced parking requirements and better connections between the public and private realms.

Many of Altoona's major corridors are overbuilt and were designed to accommodate far more traffic than they carry leaving them excessively wide and auto-oriented with little to no accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists. It will be important for Altoona to work with Blair Planning - the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and PennDOT to study and outline strategies to retrofit and right-size key corridors for multi-modal travel.

Key steps include:

✓ **Initiate acknowledgment by transportation partners** that the All Together Altoona Comprehensive Plan, as an "implementable plan," recognizes that multi-modal streets and corridors along with enhanced streetscapes are critically important to the long-term success of the City of Altoona.

- *Set aside Unified Planning Work Program funds through the local MPO to evaluate and assess Altoona streets with a special focus on gateway corridors*
- *Use the assessment to guide improvements, changes and/or space reallocation for pedestrian, bicyclists and street trees*

✓ **Adopt and implement local policy and regulations:**

- *Complete Streets Policy*
- *Zoning code and SALDO updates that align with multi-modal objectives*

"Transportation planning has grown more considerate of various modes of travel – walking, cycling, automobile, ridesharing, public transit – and the connections between them."

- PennDOT Connects, Summer 2019



Better public spaces
designed with people in mind

Invest in a first-rate and well-connected parks and trails system



What will progress look like?

Investment in parks and trails is rising, resulting in spaces that have higher quality infrastructure and equipment, are well-used by residents, and represent a well-connected system.



Focused Goals

#1

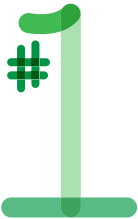
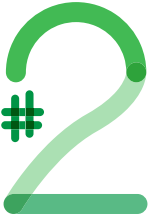
Align capital and operational budgets for parks with best practices for small cities in the U.S.

#2

Partner with other local jurisdictions and organizations to expand the regional trail network with connections to Altoona



Tools and Strategies

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	HOW?
	Capital and Operating/Maintenance Budget allocations expanded each year for city parks and trails	Parks are an important quality-of-life amenity, and they require the necessary funding to maintain, program and improve them	City of Altoona departments, Central Blair Recreation and Parks Commission	Allocate local funding needed to align annual parks budget with best practices
	Regional Trails Initiative in partnership with Blair County aimed at creating a long-term regional trail plan	A comprehensive long-term strategy for the development of a trail system. Trails can contribute to a regional economic development strategy as well as provide a quality-of-life amenity	City of Altoona departments, Central Blair Recreation and Parks Commission, Blair Planning	Work with Blair Planning (MPO) to allocate UPWP funds along with local funds from participating municipalities to retain planning consultant to develop plan



#1 Capital and Operating/Maintenance Budget

Community parks offer more to our quality-of-life than passive and active recreational opportunities. Studies have shown that spending time in parks is as good for our mental health as it is for our physical health. Recent reports by the National Parks and Recreation Association point out that more time spent in parks and green spaces can help individuals fight against mental health issues like depression, anxiety and stress. In addition, studies also have shown that owning a home near a park - when the park is well maintained - adds economic value.

As Altoona continues to compete to retain and attract residents and a skilled workforce, it will be important to invest in its park system. Additional money to fund park operations and capital improvements is needed. Based on best practices reported by the National Parks and Recreation Association Altoona spends significantly less than other comparable sized cities. It should look to find additional funding either within existing budgets, raising taxes or from local partners.

Allocate additional resources for capital improvements and operation and maintenance of parks to reach spending levels closer to the median for small cities in the U.S.

Over the last 5 years the city spent approximately \$1,100,000 on capital park improvements and approximately \$400,000 of that was allocated in 2023. In addition, the city spends approximately \$4,411 for each of its 153 acres of park land on operations and maintenance, according to 2022 budget numbers. As illustrated in the table below, an additional \$200,000 annually over what was allocated in 2023 for capital improvements will align the city with its peer cities. An additional \$300,000 over the 2022 budget for operations and maintenance will move it closer to peer cities.

Use stepped up investment in parks and trails as an impetus for an Altoona Parks Master Plan and to re-evaluate the governance of parks

Increased funding for park operations and capital improvements can immediately go towards a backlog of projects. But a renewed emphasis on parks is a good opportunity to create a new parks and trails master plan to guide future investments and ensure that they reflect modern needs and what residents want from their parks.

It is also a good opportunity to assess the governance of parks within the City of Altoona and whether existing arrangements should be maintained or adjusted.

	Spending on Capital Improvements to Parks...		Operating Budget for Parks...	
	Over Past Five Years	Over Next Five Years	in 2022	in 2025+
City of Altoona	\$1.1 Million → \$2.9 Million		\$4,411 per acre → \$6,380 per acre	
Median for Cities with 20,000-50,000 Residents	\$2.9 Million		\$8,522 per acre	



#2

Regional Trails Initiative

Trails have become an important quality-of-life component in many of our communities. Homeowners seek easy access and proximity, developers often look to make trail connections, and local businesses realize the value of being connected to walking and biking patrons. As active living emerges as a top priority for many of us - both from a recreation and health standpoint - a well-connected trail network enhances the attraction to live in a particular location. Health, economic development, transportation, and environmental stewardship are among the vast array of benefits a trail network contributes to our communities.

The goal of a Regional Trails Initiative is to develop a comprehensive and achievable action plan for a safe, accessible, and highly functional regional trail system. There are several trail projects in the early planning stages. Altoona Water Authority has been working on a project with other local and state stakeholders to develop a 20-mile network of mountain bike trails on 3,500 acres above the Horseshoe Curve. There are also discussions about a bike and pedestrian trail from the end of a proposed trail in Antis Township to the existing trail on Juniata Gap Road. A regional trails plan should look to coordinate and leverage these trail discussions and get everyone collaborating and working toward a broad vision for a trail network that could be a distinguishing feature for the region.

Work with Blair Planning (MPO) to allocate UPWP funds along with local funds from participating municipalities to develop regional trails plan

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is the program of federally-funded transportation planning activities undertaken each year by local Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). Projects funded through the UPWP must reflect the priorities and direction of the region as represented by the goals and objectives of the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The level of study generally does not go beyond concept-level planning (UPWP funds cannot be used for preliminary engineering, final design, or construction projects). These are often used for transportation related studies and plans.

A regional plan should provide community leaders with both short-term and long-term recommendations as well as a framework for creating a network of trails that accomplishes the following:

- ✓ **Provides safe, healthy, and economical transportation options for all ages, abilities, and incomes;**
- ✓ **Contributes to the region's recreational opportunities;**
- ✓ **Constitutes a critical element of the overall effort to improve the attractiveness of this region and its ability to attract and retain the skilled workforce it needs to prosper.**



Neighborhoods with pride and opportunity

Promote neighborhood health and stability



What will progress look like?

Neighborhoods of all types are showing signs of progress. Strong neighborhoods remain strong, neighborhoods in the middle are showing a recovery of confidence, and those with the highest concentrations of disinvestment have noticeably stabilized.



Focused Goals

#1

Use market conditions to shape appropriate interventions and expectations in all neighborhoods

#2

Develop the capacity and flexibility to proactively intervene at a comprehensive scale on vulnerable blocks

#3

Nurture existing levels of pride to build confidence at the block level



Tools and Strategies

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	HOW?
	Citywide Neighborhood Strategy Guidance to shape existing and new interventions in Altoona's residential areas according to market demand	Altoona already intervenes in a number of different ways in its neighborhoods with a variety of tools and resources. To advance positive local and citywide outcomes, those tools need to be used in ways that respond to localized market conditions.	City of Altoona departments, boards, and commissions; the city's public and non-profit partners who perform work in Altoona	Use All Together Altoona's Citywide Neighborhood Strategy Guidance as a process tool for deciding whether or how to deploy certain tools and resources in neighborhoods across the city
	Use of the Whole Block Method to shape neighborhood planning and improvement	Altoona's combination of limited resources and market softness require that activities and resources be focused as much as possible to advance positive outcomes. Applying the Whole Block Method ensures that a range of factors are being considered any time.	City of Altoona departments, boards, and commissions; the city's public and non-profit partners who perform work in Altoona	Use All Together Altoona's Whole Block Method as a process tool to shape the total package of work that the city and its partners (including residents) commit to in a given geography
	Proud Neighborhoods Program to support groups of neighbors with visible property and block-level improvements	Substantial levels of resident and homeowner pride are already evident in many of Altoona's neighborhood. Tapping into this pride to support small but visible improvements by residents can boost confidence, feed a positive cycle of reinvestment, and empower neighborhood leaders.	City departments working with corporate sponsors and not-for-profit partners	Establish a small fund of flexible resources to serve as matching grants for groups of engaged and proactive residents



#1

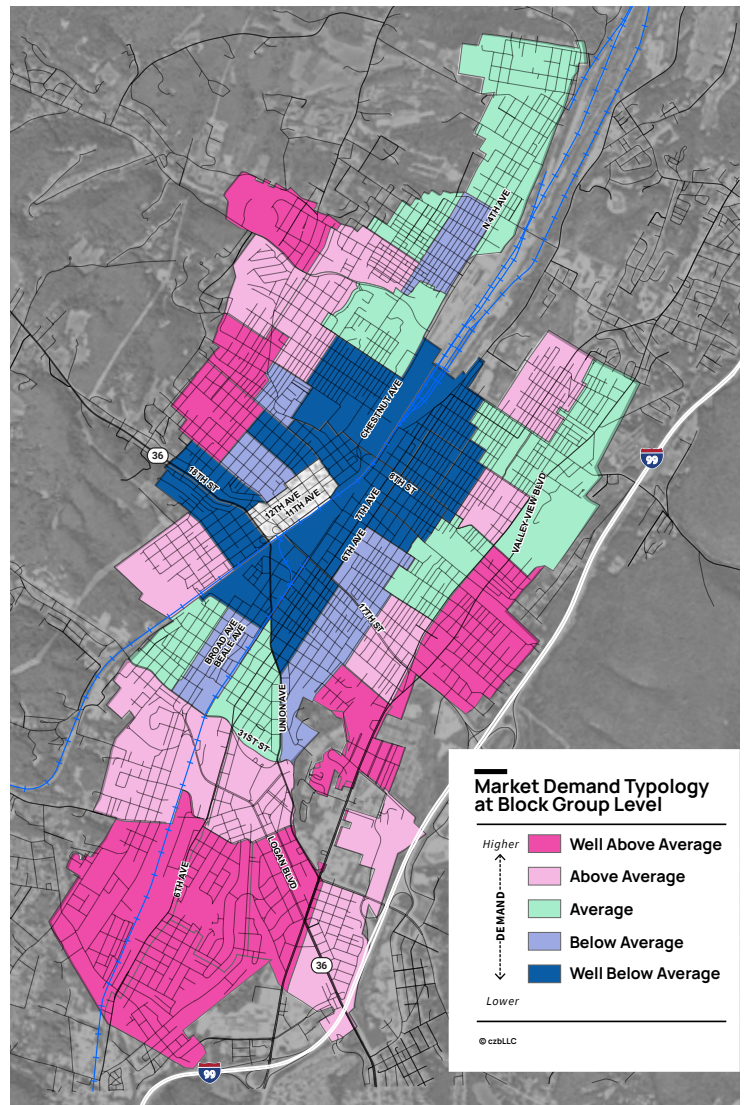
Citywide Neighborhood Strategy Guidance

The different levels of market demand in Altoona that are presented in Part 1—which are closely correlated with socioeconomic conditions—can and should have a significant influence on how the City of Altoona and its partners approach everything from code enforcement, to affordable housing, to what to do with vacant lots.

Why? The levels of demand that exist in a neighborhood influence the degree to which private actors (including individual homeowners) are willing and able participants in the work of neighborhood improvement. Where demand is relatively strong, the private sector is already displaying a willingness and ability to invest. Where it is low, public investments have to play a much bigger role to overcome high levels of perceived risk.

Different levels of demand also reflect existing distributions of poverty and household income in Altoona. Where poverty is high, the wrong interventions at the wrong time can make poverty ever more concentrated and intractable.

The matrix on the opposite page is designed to provide high-level guidance on the use of existing or new resources that are deployed in Altoona’s neighborhoods. This guidance should be paired with the values and principles in Part 2 to make decisions that are consistently aligned with the All Together Altoona vision.



Source: Market demand typology is based on czb analysis at the Census Block Group level of average property conditions from the 2023 field survey, single-family homeownership rates, average single-family sales prices between 2018 and 2023, the share of all properties with key code violations between 2019 and 2023, and the share of all properties with permitted construction valued at \$2,500 or more between 2019 and 2023.

General Direction for Public Intervention

Market Type	Strategic Aim	Affordable Housing	Code Enforcement	Blight Abatement and Vacant Land	Housing Rehab
Well Above Average Demand	Protect and maintain existing strength; do not allow to slip	Target new income-restricted housing units in mixed-income projects on transit corridors	Proactive code enforcement to spot issues before they become a recurring source of neighbor complaints	Have the flexibility to find near-term solutions for a blighted property on an otherwise strong block, including acquisition and negotiated resale	Support targeted, high-quality rehab of distressed single-family housing to ensure future owner-occupancy
Above Average Demand	Prevent decline on vulnerable blocks where one or two properties pose a threat to stability and confidence	Target new income-restricted housing units in mixed-income projects on transit corridors	Proactive code enforcement to spot issues before they become a recurring source of neighbor complaints	Have the flexibility to find near-term solutions for a blighted property on an otherwise stable block, including acquisition and negotiated resale	Support targeted, high-quality rehab of distressed single-family housing to ensure future owner-occupancy
Average Demand	Prevent decline on vulnerable blocks where one or two properties pose a threat to stability and confidence	Target new income-restricted housing units in mixed-income projects on transit corridors	Proactive code enforcement to spot issues before they become a recurring source of neighbor complaints is critical, as is the use of compliance assistance resources for income-eligible homeowners	Strategically acquire and demolish distressed properties at the most visible locations	Prime focus for high-quality single-family rehab for first-time homeowners
Below Average Demand	Revitalize in a targeted manner, especially near community assets; stabilize poverty rates	Only add new income-restricted units if they are part of a mixed-income project that primarily serves households at or above 80% AMI; focus on improvement to what currently exists	Rental inspections are the most critical tool: use it to build a firm floor in the rental market, shut down unhealthy housing, and build relationships with good landlords	Reduce excess and obsolete housing supply by demolishing blighted structures; prepare for long-term management of land, including temporary community-focused uses	Support private rental rehabs and reinvestment in existing income-restricted housing supply near major community assets and high-visibility corridors
Well Below Average Demand	Cultivate stability; nurture a sense of agency and pride; stabilize poverty rates	Do not build new income-restricted housing units; focus on maintenance and improvement of what currently exists	Rental inspections are the most critical tool: use it to build a firm floor in the rental market, shut down unhealthy housing, and build relationships with good landlords	Reduce excess and obsolete housing supply by demolishing blighted structures; prepare for long-term management of land, including temporary community-focused uses	Support reinvestment in existing income-restricted housing supply near major community assets and high-visibility corridors



#2 Whole Block Method

Using existing and new tools in the right ways and in the right places—aided by the Citywide Neighborhood Strategy Guidance—will be one important way to have a variety of efforts all pulling in the direction of the All Together Altoona vision.

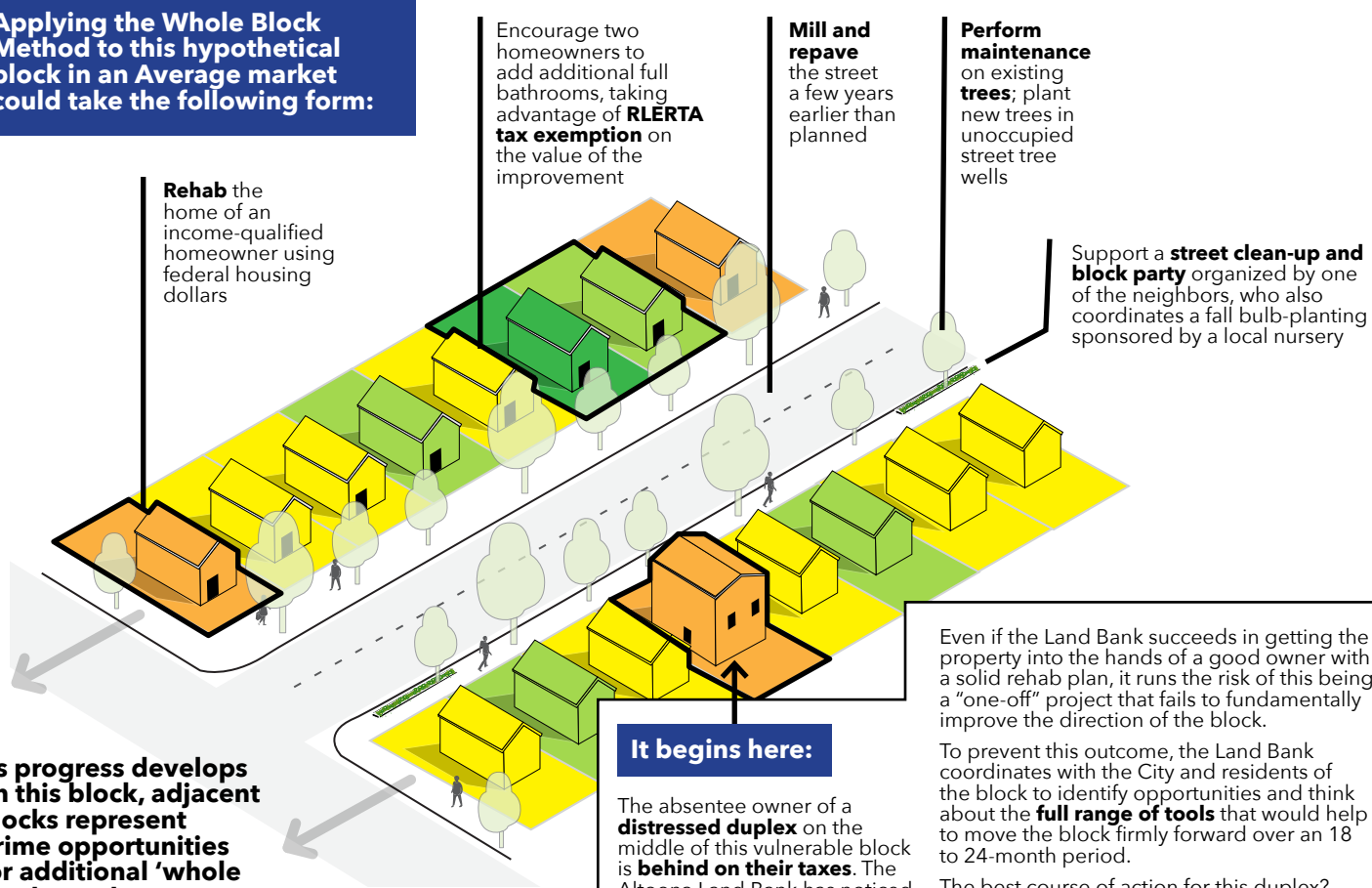
But using individual tools correctly and according to market conditions won't be enough. Whenever possible, they should be used together on entire blocks or groups of blocks to realize outcomes that transcend just one or two properties.

This Whole Block Method is really a process, and one that requires capacity and coordination to

understand the opportunities on a given block and to bring several partners together to shift a block's trajectory. Entities with significant physical assets in neighborhoods, such as the Altoona Area School District, are among the partners that will be critical to this focused work.

The level of resources needed for this method to yield sustainable improvements is directly tied to market conditions. Stronger blocks will require fewer resources to fully engage private actors in healthy investment behaviors. Below Average and Well Below Average blocks will require considerably more resources and patience, and should involve multiple blocks at once.

Applying the Whole Block Method to this hypothetical block in an Average market could take the following form:



As progress develops on this block, adjacent blocks represent prime opportunities for additional 'whole block' work

It begins here:
The absentee owner of a **distressed duplex** on the middle of this vulnerable block is **behind on their taxes**. The Altoona Land Bank has noticed the property and would like to exercise its power to obtain it before it goes to auction.

Even if the Land Bank succeeds in getting the property into the hands of a good owner with a solid rehab plan, it runs the risk of this being a "one-off" project that fails to fundamentally improve the direction of the block.

To prevent this outcome, the Land Bank coordinates with the City and residents of the block to identify opportunities and think about the **full range of tools** that would help to move the block firmly forward over an 18 to 24-month period.

The best course of action for this duplex? Sell the tax delinquent property to a buyer who will be contractually obligated to rehab the house and be an owner-occupant for a minimum of five years.



#3

Proud Neighborhoods Program

Confidence is a fundamental ingredient of strong neighborhoods. When a homeowner or renter sees that their neighbors are maintaining their properties and looking out for the block, they are much more likely to invest their own time, effort, and resources into making the neighborhood better.

Substantial pride already exists in Altoona. Even on blocks that are experiencing distress, there tend to be at least a few houses that exhibit pride of place. This is a key asset that can be protected and leveraged to advance the All Together Altoona vision.

Proud Neighborhoods would be a simple program designed to encourage groups of neighbors to get together, agree to make visible improvements to their properties (painting, porch repair, landscaping, for example), and apply for support in the form of matching grants.

To make the most of this program's potential impact, a collaborative project or activity should be a mandatory part of participation—such as a block party or a tree planting.

Within Altoona's market context, this program would have the biggest impact in or adjacent to Average markets, and if used as part of the Whole Block Method.

Small matching grants for visible home improvements



Similar programs in Pennsylvania and New York offer small matching grants of up to \$3,000, regardless of income, to support visible (exterior) home improvements.

Flexible funding sources—usually from philanthropic or corporate sponsors—are needed to make this program work. Capacity to promote and administer the program is also required.

Block-wide beautification or collaboration project



Requiring participating blocks to identify and execute a collaborative project of some kind is crucial because it encourages neighbors to work together, make decisions together, and grow the skills of neighborhood leaders.

Pennsylvania Examples



Erie County Renaissance Blocks program run by the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority



Beautiful Blocks Program in Scranton run by NeighborWorks Northeastern Pennsylvania



Neighborhoods with pride and opportunity

Catch up and keep up with blight



What will progress look like?

The total volume of properties showing signs of distress is falling (especially in very visible areas), making neighborhoods impacted by blight feel safer and giving owners the confidence to invest in their blocks.



Focused Goals

#1

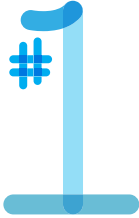
Allocate more resources to proactively remove obsolete housing supply

#2

Prioritize blight removal where it will have the biggest impact (highly visible; asset adjacent)



Tools and Strategies

WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	HOW?
 <p>Addition By Subtraction Demolition Initiative that allocates additional local resources to accelerate the pace and strategic impact of demolitions</p>	<p>Given the likelihood that the population of Blair County and Altoona will continue to decline, All Together Altoona estimates that the number of blighted properties in the city will grow over the coming decade unless there are more demolitions, more rehabs, and a higher strategic impact from all housing interventions</p>	<p>City of Altoona, Altoona Redevelopment Authority, Altoona Land Bank</p>	<p>Augment existing demolition resources from the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program with other resources, including from the city's general fund</p>



#1 Addition By Subtraction Demolition Initiative

Current Practices

In a strong and growing market, there is limited need for the public sector to demolish blighted or otherwise troubled properties. Structures either do not reach that state to begin with, or, if they do, the private sector reliably intervenes because there is money to be made by refurbishing or redeveloping the site.

This passive mindset tends to stick with most communities, even when it becomes clear that market conditions prevent the private sector from solving the problem on its own. Instead, the tendency has been to use code enforcement to police conditions—a tool that becomes less effective as markets weaken—and wait until properties reach the end of the line and are certifiable health and safety hazards before they are demolished. At that point, they have had years to exact a negative influence and further soften the market.

Altoona is currently doing the most that can be expected under this more passive model—removing roughly 25 residential structures per year, mostly on a worst-first basis. This has not been sufficient to turn the tide on blight, and it will not be sufficient over the coming decade.

To truly catch up with this problem, the pace of demolition needs to nearly double each year, and resources need to provide flexibility to be more proactive, so that properties that are clearly on the path to demolition are acquired and removed sooner than later.

Fifty years ago, federal funding for urban renewal enabled large-scale demolition. While this cleared some of Altoona’s most obsolete and blighted housing supply, it was a very bluntly used tool that often left swaths of vacant land and torn community fabric in its wake.

This Action Plan proposes a more surgical approach that continues to remove the biggest health and safety hazards while using larger local funding commitments to take on selective and strategic blight removal that advances the objectives of All Together Altoona.

Funding	\$150,000	\$75,000	\$75,000
Source	Community Development Block Grant allocation (Federal)	City of Altoona General Fund	Owners of condemned properties reimbursing the City, or owner-elected demolitions

Volume (per year)	12-15	6-8	6-8
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Approach	Worst First
	Remove properties that have become the biggest public health & safety hazards and are declared blighted, with the pace of removal dictated by availability of funding and the speed of code enforcement and judicial processes

Proposed Practices

Federal resources have been the single largest source of demolition funding for Altoona, but allocations are always subject to change

\$150,000

\$75,000

\$675,000

Community Development Block Grant allocation (Federal)

Owners of condemned properties reimbursing the City

All Together Altoona Fund (including City General Fund)

12-15

6-8

30-35

Worst First

Remove properties that have become the biggest public health and safety hazards, with the pace of removal dictated by funding and the speed of code enforcement and judicial processes

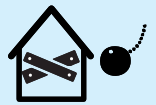
Properties that should be demolished are sometimes occupied, requiring extra care and good relationships with social service and housing agencies. They also reinforce the importance of comprehensive housing "editing" that includes expanded rehab and new construction.

Proactive

Supplement the necessary removal of public health and safety hazards with a parallel program that selectively acquires and demolishes distressed properties with the highest strategic impact

Significant local funding commitments, each year and every year, will be needed to catch up and keep up with blight. Greater city capacity will also be needed to oversee a larger pipeline of demolitions and to properly maintain a larger inventory of vacant lots.

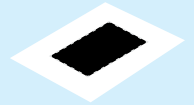
How should we select candidates for proactive acquisition and demolition?



The best candidates for acquisition and demolition will be those that meet most of the following criteria:

- ✓ Adjacency to a community asset
- ✓ High visibility
- ✓ Worst property on an otherwise stable block
- ✓ Proximity to other community investments (to housing, public spaces, or infrastructure)
- ✓ Not a viable candidate for rehab due to limited marketability

How should empty lots be handled?



Some vacant lots will be ideally located for near-term redevelopment or a transition to serving as green infrastructure that captures and stores stormwater runoff. Most lots, however, will be in the city's softest markets and should be expected to remain vacant for some time. The strength of the market, therefore, should be a key factor in deciding the proper disposition of vacant land.

Market Type	General Guidance for Residential Lots
Well above average	Market the lot for new construction. If it fails to sell within two years, consider disposition to a neighboring owner(s) in good standing.
Above average	Disposition to a neighboring owner(s) in good standing.
Average	Disposition to a neighboring owner(s) in good standing.
Below average	"Clean and green" the lot and assume long-term maintenance/banking by the City and/or its partners. If adjacent to industrial or commercial corridors, consider zoning changes.
Well below average	"Clean and green" the lot and assume long-term maintenance/banking by the City and/or its partners. If adjacent to industrial or commercial corridors, consider zoning changes.



Neighborhoods with pride and opportunity

Expand appealing and affordable housing options



What will progress look like?

Homebuyers with options in Blair County—especially younger families—are increasingly likely to find an appealing home in an appealing neighborhood when they look at Altoona.

Affordable housing opportunities are improving in quality and accessibility, and can be found in healthy neighborhoods



Focused Goals

#1

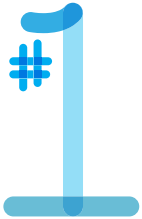

Develop capacity to support high-quality home improvements to boost standards and turn around tired properties

#2

Encourage investment in the existing private rental supply to preserve and improve affordable housing opportunities



Tools and Strategies

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHO?	HOW?
	<p>Raising the Bar Housing Rehab Program with capacity to acquire, rehab, and resell 12-15 houses per year, particularly in average markets</p>	<p>Over time, soft market conditions have dampened both routine levels of maintenance and the extent to which property owners invest in high-quality property upgrades. The result is a standard for housing in Altoona that makes it challenging for the city to compete for households that want modern, move-in ready properties</p>	<p>Altoona Redevelopment Authority</p>	<p>Create the capacity to acquire, rehab, and resell single-family properties in order to upgrade the housing supply and set higher standards.</p> <p>Allocate resources to cover the appraisal gap that exists in Altoona—the distance between the cost to fully upgrade a property to a high standard and the resulting market value of the finished product.</p>
	<p>Healthy Rentals Rehab Program offering simple per unit matching grant for substantial rehab of existing rentals in small multi-family structures if specific conditions are met by the landlord</p>	<p>Existing rental properties in Altoona are an important source of affordable housing. But relatively low rents, historically, have prevented capital upgrades and other improvements, resulting in a rental supply that is increasingly unappealing.</p>	<p>Altoona Redevelopment Authority</p>	<p>Establish a simple program that offers landlords in good standing a per-unit matching grant to support major upgrades; in return, landlords must keep rents affordable for the Altoona market for a set period of time</p>



#1 Raising the Bar Housing Rehab Program

Altoona has long been in the business of rehabbing single-family homes. However, this has almost exclusively been done with federal resources that have income-restrictions. And the work, while providing long-needed upgrades that make a home much more livable, is not the same as reinvestment intended to dramatically upgrade the marketability of a house or its block.

Such a program focused on raising standards and marketability is an important tool for Altoona to have in place as it works to compete for and retain households that have choices in the region. But it is a tool that cannot be funded with the city's usual stream of federal housing dollars because the aim is not to have income restrictions on the end user. It will require local, flexible funding, an enterprising approach to selecting properties, and a focus on elevating the market value of properties and blocks.

All Together Altoona recommends that the community have the capacity to assist with 12 to 15 rehabs each year that 'raise the bar' on housing and neighborhood standards—in addition to the rehabs currently performed using federal housing dollars. This will require a pool of working capital overseen by a reinvestment entity (potentially the Altoona Redevelopment Authority) with capacity to promote and manage two lines of work:

Owner-Occupant Home Improvements

For the Owner-Occupant line of work, the reinvestment entity would partner with a property's current owner-occupant.

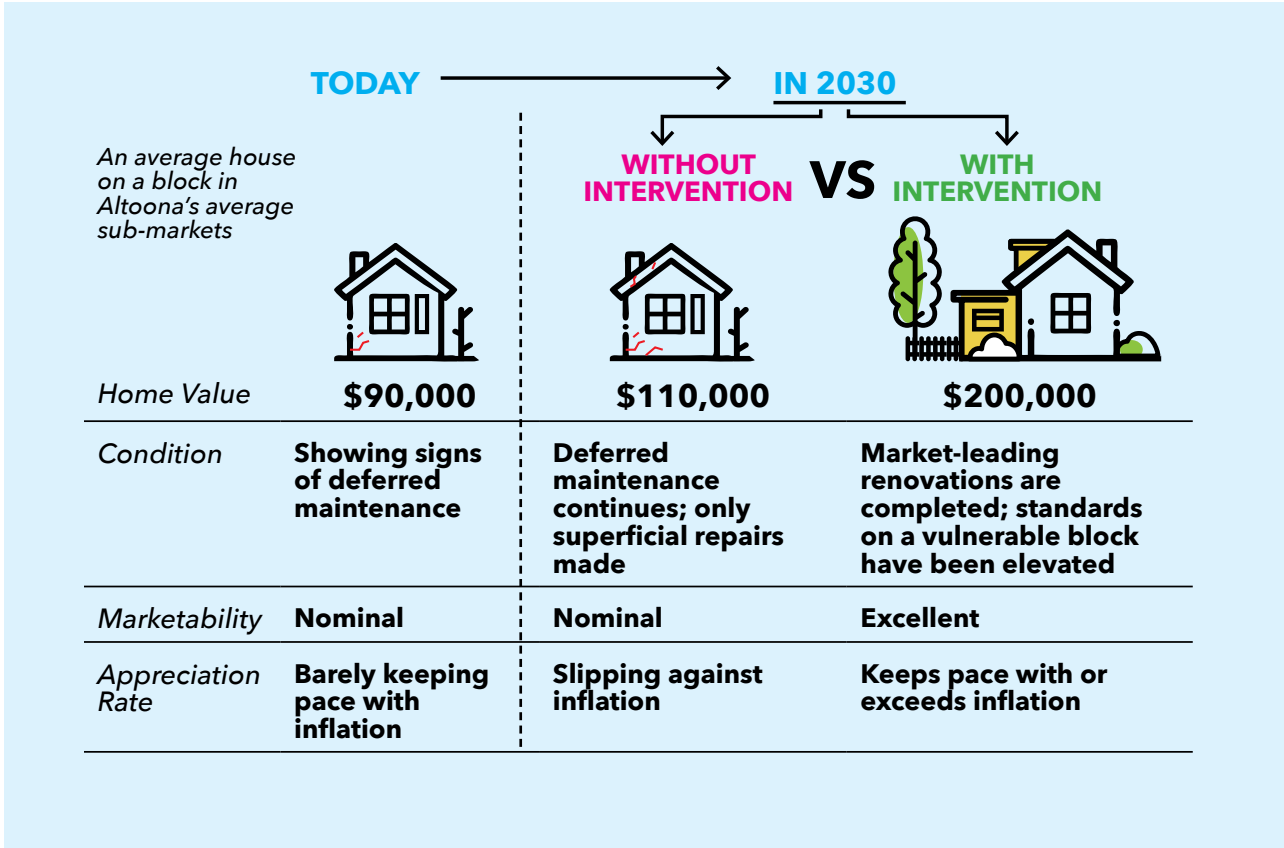
In this hypothetical example, a scope of work would be drawn in collaboration with the owner that adds a bathroom and pantry, remodels the kitchen, and improves the exterior. The entity would oversee contractor selection and ensure that the work is to specification. The \$80,000 value of the improvements would be covered by a \$40,000 home improvement loan from the owner's bank and a \$40,000 loan from the reinvestment entity that converts to a grant if the owner stays in the house for another five years.

Home Turnaround

For the Home Turnaround line of work, the reinvestment entity would acquire a house to keep it from being purchased by an absentee owner—a common trend for small houses in Altoona.

In this hypothetical example, an \$80,000 investment would be made after acquisition by adding a bathroom and pantry, remodeling the kitchen, and improving the exterior. After the improvements are made, the entity would sell the house on the open market and require that the buyer be an owner-occupant.

The pool of capital available to the entity would be used for acquisition (for Home Turnarounds) and construction. Proceeds from sales and loans would help to replenish the pool to some extent, but it should be assumed that most projects will result in net losses due to soft market conditions—thus requiring that the pool of capital be routinely infused with new resources. An initial infusion of \$1.5 million would be needed to begin work, followed by annual infusions of roughly \$500,000.



Where should Raising the Bar Rehabs occur?

For maximum impact from a dozen or so rehabs each year, it will be important to focus the work to the greatest extent possible, and to do it where the results are very likely to spur complementary private investments.



The strongest opportunities will be:

- 

Properties in average or above-average markets
- 

Properties close to community assets
- 

Properties close to other investments being made by the city
- 

Properties with motivated owners willing to invest (for Owner-Occupant Home Improvements)
- 

Properties in distressed or slipping condition on an otherwise stable block (for Home Turnaround)
- 

A property in or nearing an ownership transition, such as tax or bank foreclosure, or on the market (for Home Turnaround)

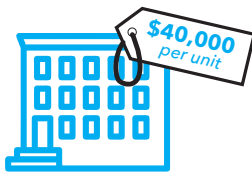


#2 Healthy Rentals Rehab Program

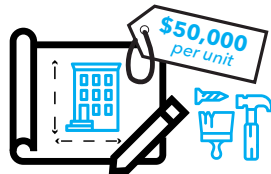
As with single-family home rehabs, Altoona has also long been in the business of rehabbing privately-owned rental units with federal resources—helping to ensure that around 8 rental units each year get basic upgrades while remaining affordable to their income-qualified occupants. It also steers some federal resources each year to assist with unit upgrades at the Altoona Housing Authority and units managed by not-for-profit agencies.

Increasing the volume of rental rehabs each year, however, will be critical to achieve All Together Altoona’s vision. And this will not be possible without an infusion of local resources to augment existing federal funding.

With this in mind, All Together Altoona recommends that a locally funded Healthy Rentals Rehab Program be established and funded that:



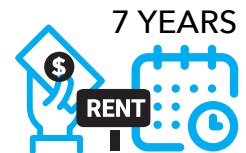
Provides a 1:1 matching grant of up to \$40,000 per unit to owners of small multi-family properties (six or fewer units) for substantial upgrades to systems and unit finishes.



Requires that the upgrades go beyond basic, barebones improvements by setting a minimum project cost of \$50,000 per unit.



Requires that the owner also make exterior upgrades to improve the curb appeal of the property.



Requires that rents of rehabbed units be maintained at a level no higher than 100% of the fair market rent established by HUD for a period of seven years.

An entity, potentially the Altoona Redevelopment Authority, would be needed to oversee this program, forge partnerships with landlords, and ensure that work is being performed to spec. To assist with substantial rehabs to at least 15 rental units per year at 3 to 5 multi-family properties, it is estimated that approximately \$450,000 would have to be allocated annually.



Participating Landlord Gets...

Help with making significant upgrades that:

- ✓ improve the value of their asset
- ✓ makes their units more competitive in the Altoona rental market



City of Altoona Gets...

Help with making:

- ✓ the rental supply more appealing and competitive
- ✓ surrounding property owners more confident
- ✓ neighborhoods healthier
- ✓ high-quality rental units more accessible to working households

Where should Healthy Rental Rehabs occur?



For maximum benefit to households and neighborhood conditions, the strongest opportunities for partnerships with landlords will be:

- Properties on or near blocks where the Whole Block Method is being applied
- Properties close to community assets or other investments being made by the city
- Properties with motivated landlords willing to invest in their asset for the long-run
- Properties in average or slipping condition on an otherwise stable block, but where the owner is demonstrating a good-faith commitment to improvement

Implementation Timeline

Pennsylvania advises municipalities to update their comprehensive plans every 10 years. While All Together Altoona is designed to provide the city and the community with a solid decade of strategic guidance, it cannot remain useful unless it is actively reviewed on an annual basis and adjusted as needed.

Given the ambitious nature of the Foundational Steps outlined at the beginning of Part 3, much of the first 12 to 24 months after adoption will be spent taking those steps in preparation for the recommended programs and activities. As those Foundational Steps are taken, roles, resources, and processes will come into greater focus, and more detailed implementation plans will need to be crafted on an annual basis—with oversight by the Altoona City Planning Commission. As years go by, experience and experimentation will shape how implementation happens, but it should always be guided by this plan’s overarching vision.

The following Implementation Timeline provides general guidance on how to phase work over the coming decade and relates to specific steps and activities outlined throughout Part 3. **Starting in early 2025, the timeline should be amended by an annual implementation plan developed collaboratively by the City and All Together Altoona Coalition, and accepted by both the Altoona City Planning Commission and City Council.**

2024-2025

ACTIVITY	RESPONSIBILITY
<p>Foundational Step Initiate and complete an update to the zoning code and SALDO, inclusive of Downtown Urban Design Standards and streetscape guidance tied to the Comprehensive Streetscape Initiative</p>	City Council and Altoona City Planning Commission; supported by City Manager’s Office and Department of Community Development
<p>Foundational Step Assemble the All Together Altoona Coalition; develop processes and structure for the Coalition to function effectively as a public-private implementation partnership</p>	Mayor’s Office and City Council
<p>Foundational Step Designate an entity to coordinate implementation; identify coordination resource requirements and potential programmatic partnerships with Coalition member organizations</p>	Mayor’s Office, City Council, and Altoona City Planning Commission
<p>Foundational Step Establish the All Together Altoona Fund and formalize where the Fund is located, oversight and reporting requirements, and the mechanics of disbursement; obtain provisional commitments from public and private sources</p>	Mayor’s Office and City Council
<p>Identify a timeline for ramping up funding for park operations within the General Fund (outside the All Together Altoona Fund)</p>	City Council
<p>Continue ongoing efforts with existing resources, but begin to make use of process guidance from the action plan to guide ongoing efforts: Focused Investment Initiative’s boundaries, Comprehensive Streetscape Initiative’s street hierarchy, Partnership with PennDOT, Citywide Neighborhood Strategy Guidance, and Whole Block Method</p>	All City of Altoona Departments, City Council, and the All Together Altoona Coalition’s implementation partners

2026-2028

2029-2033

ACTIVITY

RESPONSIBILITY

Continue to make use of process guidance from the action plan to guide work throughout the city: Focused Investment Initiative’s boundaries, Comprehensive Streetscape Initiative’s street hierarchy, Partnership with PennDOT, Citywide Neighborhood Strategy Guidance, and Whole Block Method

All City of Altoona Departments, City Council, and the All Together Altoona Coalition’s implementation partners

ACTIVITY

RESPONSIBILITY

Continue to make use of process guidance from the action plan to guide work throughout the city: Focused Investment Initiative’s boundaries, Comprehensive Streetscape Initiative’s street hierarchy, Partnership with PennDOT, Citywide Neighborhood Strategy Guidance, and Whole Block Method

All City of Altoona Departments, City Council, and the All Together Altoona Coalition’s implementation partners

Maintain engagement within the All Together Altoona Coalition by using local knowledge and expertise to guide program design and implementation

Mayor’s Office and Coalition leadership

Maintain engagement within the All Together Altoona Coalition by using local knowledge and expertise to refine program design and build from early successes

Mayor’s Office and Coalition leadership

Design and incrementally roll out Action Plan programs as capacity to coordinate, administer, and pay for those activities emerges among implementation partners:

- *Strategic Sidewalk Replacement Program*
- *Addition by Subtraction Demolition Initiative*
- *Downtown Ahead Housing Program*
- *Proud Neighborhoods Program*
- *Raising the Bar Housing Rehab Program*
- *Healthy Rentals Rehab Program*

Mayor’s Office, City Council, and Altoona City Planning Commission

Continue Action Plan programming, making refinements as needed to respond to on-the-ground implementation experience

Designated implementation coordinator in partnership with relevant public and private partners

Begin annual reviews of implementation progress and evaluation of the action plan to determine if modifications are necessary; celebrate early accomplishments to bolster momentum and awareness and sustain contributions to the All Together Altoona Fund

Altoona City Planning Commission in partnership with implementation coordinator and Coalition

Continue annual reviews of implementation progress with an eye towards identifying challenges that need to be addressed or new opportunities that should be considered; continue to celebrate accomplishments to bolster momentum and awareness

Altoona City Planning Commission in partnership with implementation coordinator and Coalition

Appendix

This Appendix provides supplemental information in support of the All Together Altoona Comprehensive Plan and describes how the Plan is responsive to the comprehensive planning elements outlined by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s Municipalities Planning Code. It includes references to other plans that are relevant to the work outlined by the Plan and should be considered part of its implementation framework.

The comprehensive planning elements addressed in this Appendix include:

- Regional Planning Context
- Land Use
- Housing
- Transportation
- Community Facilities and Utilities
- Natural and Historic Resources

Regional Planning Context

All Together Altoona was developed using the same implementable comprehensive planning model that was used for Alleghenies Ahead (2018), the Southern Alleghenies region's shared six-county comprehensive plan. This plan also aligns with several of the county-level priorities that were outlined in Alleghenies Ahead, including:

Collaboration and Coordination

Alleghenies Ahead recognizes that limited public resources requires an 'all-hands-on-deck' approach to plan implementation. All Together Altoona calls for a highly collaborative implementation process, including the cultivation of an All Together Altoona Coalition and a public-private funding mechanism to help pay for recommended activities.

Housing and Blight

Alleghenies Ahead recognizes the close relationship between the quality of the region's housing opportunities and the growing problem of blighted housing and neighborhoods. All Together Altoona's prioritization of "neighborhoods with pride and confidence" is reflected in activities to stimulate reinvestment in existing housing (owner-occupied and rental) and to demolish blighted properties before they do further damage to neighborhood investment behaviors. Simultaneously, the plan's promotion of better public spaces calls for investments in new market-rate housing to advance downtown vitality.

Public Health and Safety

Blair County's Alleghenies Ahead Action Plan recommends activities and policies that will promote active lifestyles. All Together Altoona calls for the cultivation of mixed-use environments that make it easier to walk and bike (especially downtown), streets and sidewalks that are more conducive to multi-modal mobility citywide, and significant increases in parks and recreational infrastructure. Combined, these support will support broader regional efforts to encourage active living and active transportation.

Due to limited foreseeable changes in land use patterns, road networks, and other systems that extend to and beyond Altoona's boundaries, this Plan is generally aligned with the comprehensive plans of Altoona's two neighboring jurisdictions: Logan Township and Allegheny Township.

Land Use

The City of Altoona is a mostly built-out community with a population that is projected to remain in the low 40,000s over the coming decade, and which may decline into the high 30,000s based on demographic and migration patterns that persist in West Central Pennsylvania. Consequently, this comprehensive plan does not anticipate significant changes to land use patterns within city limits.

Small changes to land use patterns, however, may result from the implementation of strategies and recommendations outlined in Part 3. These changes include:

Expansion of Vacant Land

Under a status quo scenario, Altoona would experience an increase in vacant parcels due to the prevailing pace of demolition. The implementation of All Together Altoona would result in a doubling of parcels becoming vacant on an annual basis (from 25 to nearly 50), most of which are likely to remain vacant for the foreseeable future due to insufficient demand for redevelopment.

Maintenance of vacant residential lots by either private landowners (including adjacent homeowners) or by the city and its partners will depend on neighborhood context. Part 3 provides guidance on vacant lot disposition based on market conditions.

Expansion of Land Designated for Parks and Recreational Use

Substantial increases in parks and recreational investments are recommended by this comprehensive plan. While master planning will be needed to determine where and how those investments should be made, some investments may include the acquisition of land for the development of new public spaces or of lands to link existing assets.

Minor Reductions in Land Used for Transportation

This comprehensive plan identifies overbuilt arterial roadways as an opportunity for the development of multi-modal infrastructure and to convert paved space into greenspace—including land to absorb stormwater runoff.

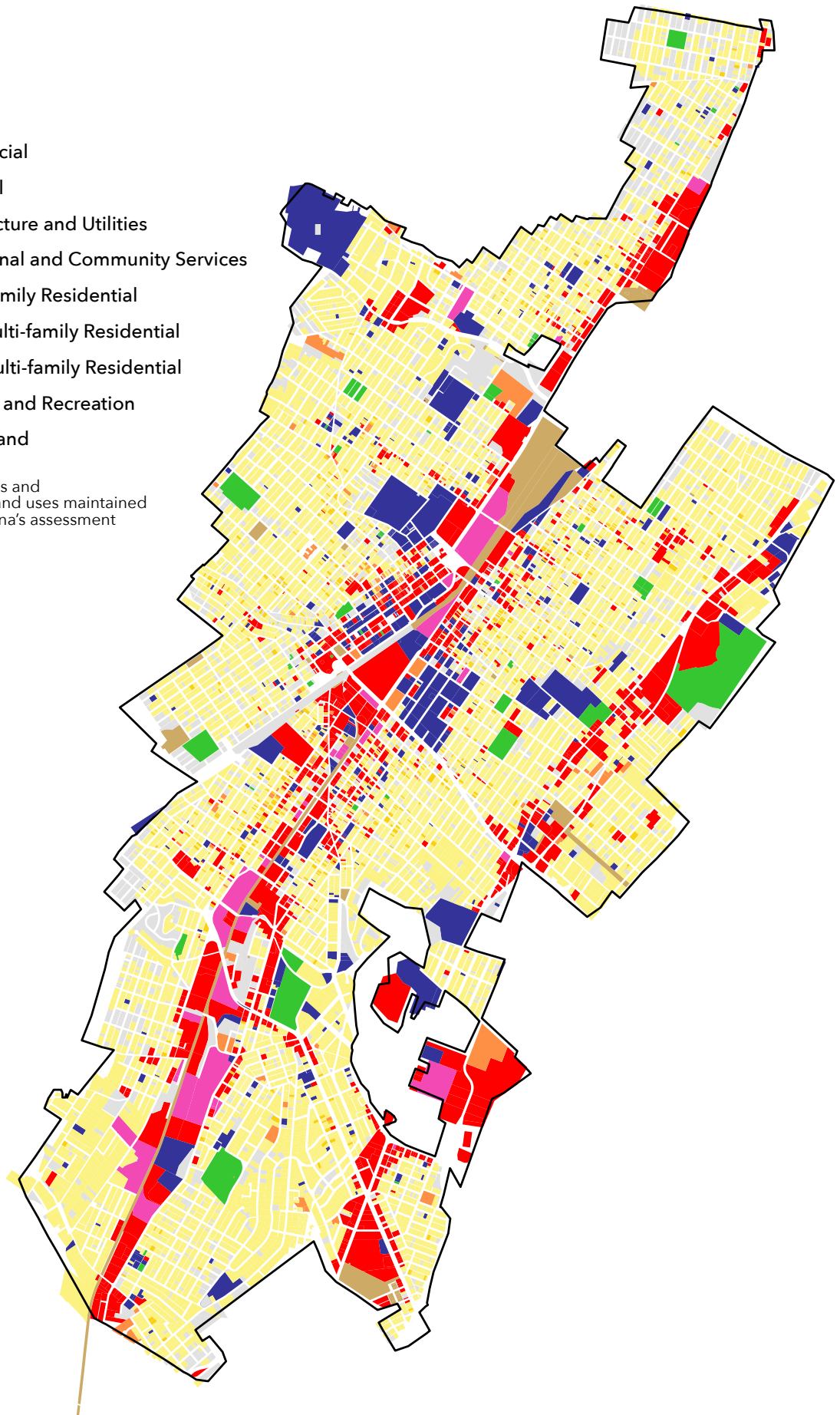
Greater Land Use Flexibility

An updated zoning code and subdivision and land development code (SALDO) are recommended by this comprehensive plan. It should be anticipated that updated codes will reflect emerging best practices by providing greater land use flexibility than Altoona's current or previous codes—with more emphasis on form and physical character and less prescriptiveness on land use.

Land Use

- Commercial
- Industrial
- Infrastructure and Utilities
- Institutional and Community Services
- Single-family Residential
- Small Multi-family Residential
- Parkland and Recreation
- Vacant Land

Source: czb analysis and categorization of land uses maintained in the City of Altoona's assessment database



Housing

This comprehensive plan provides the most in-depth analysis of housing conditions in Altoona—both physical and market conditions—in over a generation. The project included a full windshield survey of all residential structures in the city and a market analysis that utilized recent sales data, building permits, code violations, and a wide range of housing data provided through the American Community Survey. And it builds on the regional housing context framed by Alleghenies Ahead on Housing—the regional housing strategy adopted by Blair County in 2023.

The emphasis on housing and neighborhood analysis is reflected in this plan's priorities and recommendations. The focus on downtown vitality includes an emphasis on market-rate housing to repurpose underutilized buildings and expand the levels of discretionary income available to support a healthier downtown business mix.

The focus on neighborhood health and pride also emphasizes housing—particularly reinvestment in Altoona's existing housing supply and the use of demolition as a tool to support reinvestment through a healthier balance of supply and demand. The Altoona Land Bank will be an important resource on this front, as the work that went into the City's Comprehensive Blight Strategy Plan.

A key part of realizing broader housing aims in Altoona, Blair County, and the region is the strategic use of federal and state housing resources to improve access to affordable housing opportunities. In line with Blair County's adopted housing strategy, this comprehensive plan recommends that the net addition of income-restricted housing units be avoided in neighborhoods where concentrated poverty is already high. Those investments should be made, instead, in parts of Altoona and Blair County where poverty rates are closer to the regional average and where access to economic opportunity is stronger.

Investments in programs that assist low-to-moderate income households should follow the general location guidance of this Plan, and should be guided in detail by the City of Altoona's Five-Year Consolidated Plans and its Annual Action Plans.

Transportation

Improvements to Altoona's mobility infrastructure are integrated into several parts of this comprehensive plan. Key examples include:

Create a Strong and Vibrant Downtown

Recommendations related to downtown improvement include a re-examination of downtown Altoona's antiquated system of one-way streets, which are confusing for motorists to navigate and promote high rates of speed. They also include an emphasis on using the Complete Streets model demonstrated by 11th Avenue in other parts of downtown and Altoona.

Make Safe and Beautiful Streets for Everyone

Transitioning from a network of overbuilt arterial roadways to a safer, multi-modal, and more cost-efficient network of streets is advised by this comprehensive plan. This includes strategic application of road diets, the conversion of unnecessary traffic lands into multi-use paths or greenspace, and focused investments in a better and more complete sidewalk network.

The planning principles and targeted work outlined by this plan can be expected to result in a community with greater transportation options, safer and more appealing streets, and higher densities in key areas to promote walking and biking. All of these goals are aligned with the region's transportation plans, including the current Blair MPO 2021-2045 Long Range Transportation Plan and Active Transportation Plan.

Community Facilities and Utilities

The absence of population growth anticipated by this plan suggests a focus on long-term maintenance and strategic reinvestment in existing facilities and systems will be a proper course of action for service and utility infrastructure within the City of Altoona. Indeed, healthy levels of investment in existing assets will be an important part of promoting neighborhood and downtown reinvestment, and in accelerating momentum generated by work performed directly under the guidance of this plan.

This Plan recognizes that capital investment planning by the Altoona Water Authority for water and wastewater services include proper maintenance of existing facilities to fulfill the current and long-term water and wastewater needs of the City of Altoona.

City of Altoona departments that maintain community facilities and systems are encouraged to plan for future service provision and systems upgrades in accordance with the values, planning principles, and priorities outlined in this comprehensive plan. They should also be guided, as necessary, by other relevant plans, including Blair County's Hazard Mitigation Plan (Blair Resilience: Addressing Vulnerability and Exposure, or BRAVE).

Parks and recreational facilities receive special emphasis in this plan due to a history of investment at levels well below the national average for cities of Altoona's size, and for their influence on the residential location decisions of households with choices. Significant expansion of resources devoted to existing parks is advised by this plan, along with consideration of new park and recreational assets.

Natural and Historic Resources

The priorities and recommendations in All Together Altoona emphasize the importance of creating conditions that will encourage households and businesses in the region to choose Altoona. The protection and promotion of Altoona’s natural and historic assets are fundamental to this overarching goal are integrated throughout this plan.

Emphasis on Parks and Recreational Investments

Boosting the community’s dedication of resources to parks and recreation are a key element of this plan. Additional resources may create opportunities for Altoona to protect natural features—especially those that relate to the city’s hilly topography—while creating new or expanded parks and trails.

Reduction in Overbuilt Transportation Footprint

This plan acknowledges that many of Altoona’s primary roadways have far greater capacity than contemporary traffic levels and recommends consideration of road diets and new multi-modal infrastructure, which would encourage a larger share of trips by foot or bicycle. Road diets could also result in additional greenspace, with areas for additional tree plantings and bioswales for stormwater retention.

Encouragement of Downtown Reinvestment

This comprehensive plan provides guidance for targeted investments in Downtown Altoona to build on the momentum of the 11th Avenue corridor. A critical outcome of this targeted work would be long-overdue investments in downtown’s existing building stock—much of which is included in the Downtown Altoona Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places.

Market Stabilization to Support Reinvestment in Existing Structures

An overarching aim of this comprehensive plan is to stabilize real estate markets in Altoona by (1) improving demand and (2) reducing excess supply. This will improve market values and appreciation, which are needed to justify healthier levels of reinvestment in existing structures, including those with documented historic value and those that contribute to Altoona’s neighborhood vernacular.

Due to chronically high levels of vacancy and the blighted conditions documented by the All Together Altoona planning process, an important part of market stabilization is the acceleration of demolition activity. This will, unavoidably, result in the loss of some of Altoona’s oldest building stocks, especially older residential properties with overwhelming levels of deferred

maintenance. The demolition of properties with documented historical value (including locally-designated landmarks) should be avoided whenever possible, especially when historic preservation stands to serve a role in multi-faceted “whole block” improvements. It must also be recognized, though, that market stabilization through demolition will, over time, prevent other properties from demolition by neglect.

Other plans that should guide decision-making that impacts natural and historic resources in Altoona include Blair County’s Hazard Mitigation Plan (Blair Resilience: Addressing Vulnerability and Exposure, or BRAVE).

ALTOGETHER ALTOONA

A Comprehensive Plan for Our Future



Prepared for the
City of Altoona,
PA by czbLLC

JULY 2024