

# CITY OF WARREN

Implementable Comprehensive Plan

Final Plan: February 2023





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The Comprehensive Plan was prepared with assistance from:



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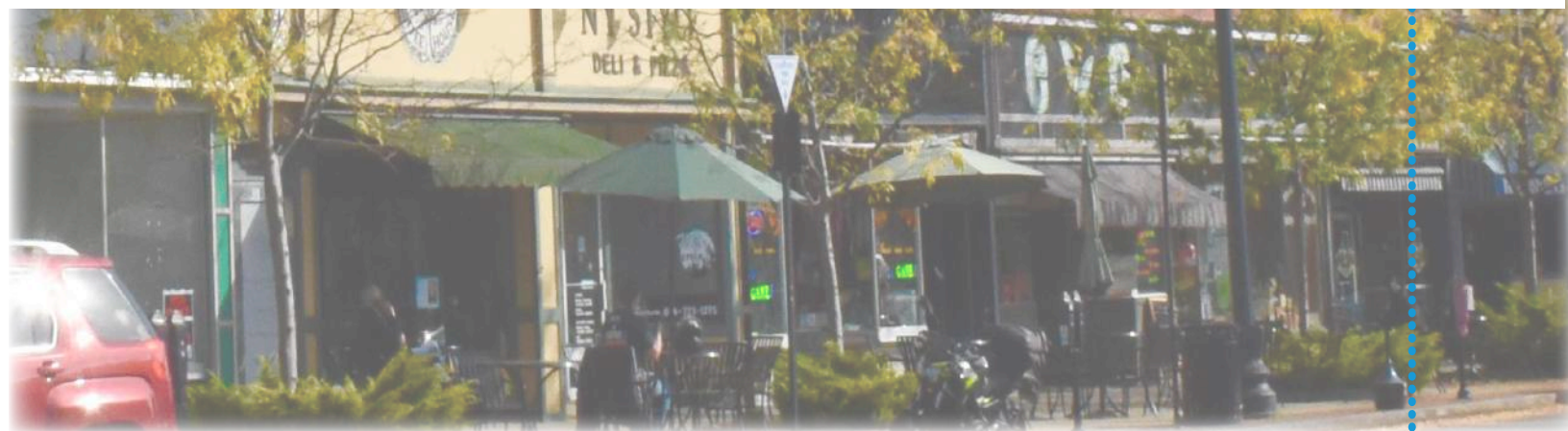


# INSERT RESOLUTION

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# Introduction



*2nd Avenue, Photo Courtesy of: Gary Lester*

# Using the Plan

## What's all this, anyway?

Authorized by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC), a community's Comprehensive Plan lays out strategies for the nature, pace and location of physical development as well as plans for future economic and social conditions.

In short, a comprehensive plan is:

- An educational tool for understanding current conditions, issues and opportunities
- An assessment and prioritization of needs
- A statement of the optimally desirable vision of future growth and development
- A public policy guide to community decision-making adopted by the governing body.

Unlike traditional comprehensive plans of the past, which studied topics in isolation (housing, transportation, etc.), the City of Warren's updated plan is organized to address priority community issues. In keeping with the implementable plan model promoted by Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), the plan frames key issues within the context of all of the planning topics it covers.

## Form and function

This document is designed primarily as

a decision-making guide for elected and appointed officials of the City. It is a playbook of projects and strategies that will help the City become the best possible future version of itself.

In addition to "Using the Plan", the Introduction includes details on the planning process and public input that was gathered during the process. The Context and Principles section includes a summary of exiting trends and the vision statement and guiding principles. The Priority Focus Areas section is dedicated to four focus areas, that the public and stakeholders determined to be especially important to the future that — *and this is key* — the City intends in earnest to address. These focus areas are: Downtown, Business Development, Preserving Assets and Targeted Areas for Development/Redevelopment. The priority focus areas were developed with associated recommendations and actions. The focus areas examine key ways in which the City can immediately begin moving forward to make the future vision for the City of Warren a reality. They are a blueprint for community prosperity and sustainability.

The Implementation Tools section provides detail on the immediate actions that should be taken to put this plan into motion as well as the Targeted Areas for Investment Map, a summary of zoning recommendations,

an Implementation Table that outlines all the recommendations from the plan and a description of the Neighborhood Assistance Program, which is an additional funding sources for the City to consider if appropriate in the future.

## Previous plans

Existing planning documents are very important when undertaking a Comprehensive Planning Process. For the City of Warren, the 1998 Comprehensive Plan, the 2017 Lodging Feasibility Study, the 2017 Experience Warren Strategic Downtown Plan, the 2018 Early Intervention Program Report and the 2021 Warren City Recreation, Parks and Open Space Plan were all reviewed to determine what is still relevant for this process as well as to help to identify trend data.



Image Courtesy of: Gary Lester

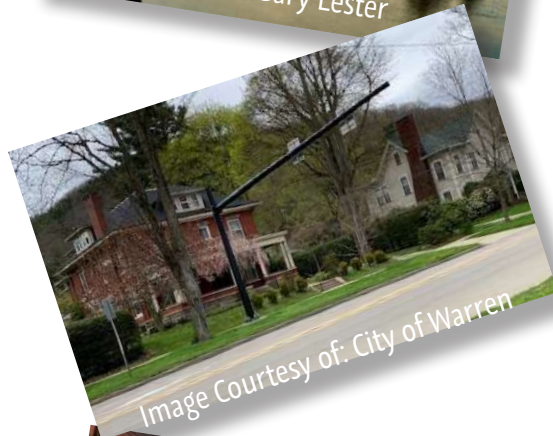


Image Courtesy of: City of Warren



Image Courtesy of: Gary Lester



Image Courtesy of: City of Warren

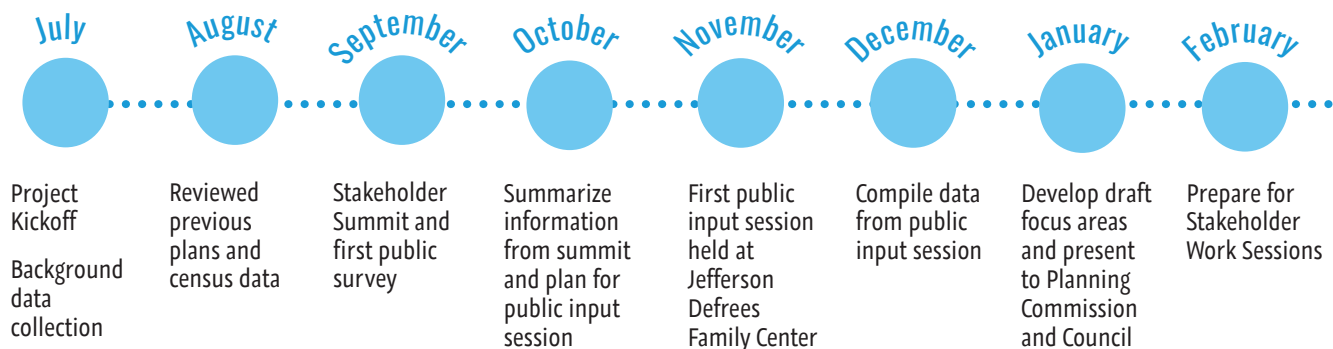
# The Planning Process

City staff, elected and appointed officials and community stakeholders worked together on this update to the Comprehensive Plan with assistance from Mackin Engineering & Consultants and Denny Puko. The project kicked off in the summer of 2021. A timeline of project milestones appears below.

The City undertook the plan as an update to its last Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 1998, recognizing a need to plan for changing priorities and needs in the City. The plan was designed to serve as a guide for:

- Policy changes
- Land use planning
- Budget preparation
- Economic development initiatives
- Capital improvement programs

## Timeline of milestones



Following the City’s selection of Mackin as a planning consultant, the project began as the Planning Commission identified a wide range of community stakeholders whose points of view should be reflected in developing an understanding of current conditions, developing community goals and devising practical, effective strategy alternatives.

Initial research included demographic analysis, an inventory of local resources and amenities and a review of previously adopted planning and regulatory documents for the City.

The Planning Commission drew upon information from elected and appointed municipal officials, staff, community leaders, business owners and residents to develop a vision for the plan update. The planning process was also used to prioritize recommendations and strategies developed during the planning process.

The input collected during public outreach, stakeholder interviews and focus group meetings was used to help identify the key long-term issues or needs facing the City of Warren and to guide recommendations that address each of the key issues. The strategies presented in this document were developed to provide guidance to municipal officials, to direct development / redevelopment to appropriate areas, and to plan for the future.

The information gathered through the visioning process helped to build the Comprehensive Plan and will direct development/redevelopment and conservation efforts for the City as well as the priority focus areas. The priority focus areas represent initiatives that the City recognizes as especially important undertakings in the short- to mid-term, while the additional actions (located in the Appendices) are lower-priority steps the City should implement as time and resources allow.



# Public and Stakeholder Outreach Summary

In addition to regular meetings with the City's Planning Commission and staff, the planning process included a variety of outreach methods designed to publicize the plan, generate excitement and get people involved in determining what the City of Warren's future should be.

## Stakeholders

The Planning Commission and staff developed a list of more than 50 people they believed could provide insight and perspective on the plan, all of whom were contacted to participate. Some represented agencies and organizations while others were long-standing business owners or community leaders. Others were large businesses with a stake in the City's future development. The primary goal of all stakeholder input was to collect information that would help the City understand and prioritize local issues and formulate practical, well-calibrated strategies to address them.

Stakeholder input was gathered in a variety of ways including:

- Surveys
- Stakeholder Summit: held early on to gather issues and needs for the plan
- Four Work Sessions with City staff, stakeholders and the consultants: held later in the process to help identify solutions to the identified issues and needs



## Website

The project website, [warrencitycomprehensiveplan.mystrikingly.com](http://warrencitycomprehensiveplan.mystrikingly.com), went live at kickoff and was updated as the project developed to provide information and solicit feedback. The website was advertised through flyers, comprehensive plan events, email blasts, local newspaper articles, etc.



## Public Input Sessions

Two Comprehensive Plan events were held to allow the whole community to participate in the planning process. An initial public input session was held at the Jefferson Defrees Family Center in September of 2021; and an additional public open house was held at the Allegheny Community Center in May 2022. The first event was designed to ask residents about their vision for the future and key issues that need to be addressed. After the goals were drafted, the second event was held to present them and solicit feedback, asking residents to vote for key priorities. This vote helped with the selection of the plan's priority recommendations.



## Surveys

An initial online survey was made available to the general public early in the planning process to gain information about key local priorities. There were 223 responses to this survey and results showed that respondents felt that safety, parks and recreation and walkability were major strengths and access to regional transportation, shopping/retail, job opportunities and access to high speed internet were major weaknesses. A second online survey was conducted later in the process to allow people who were unable to participate in the second public input session to vote on priority recommendations.

### City of Warren Public Survey

#### The City of Warren wants to hear from you!

The City is updating its Comprehensive Plan, which will be the blueprint to direct investment over next 10-15 years. Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions to tell us what the priorities should be for the City. If you would like to be kept informed as the Comprehensive Plan develops, please click [here](#) to visit the project website.

1. Indicate if the following options are a strength or weakness for the City of Warren

	Great Strength	Somewhat a Strength	Neutral	Somewhat a Weakness	Weakness
Location	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of neighborhoods	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing cost	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing options	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parks/recreation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Schools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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# Context and Principles



*Warren Municipal Building, Photo Courtesy of: Gary Lester*

# Existing Trends & Conditions

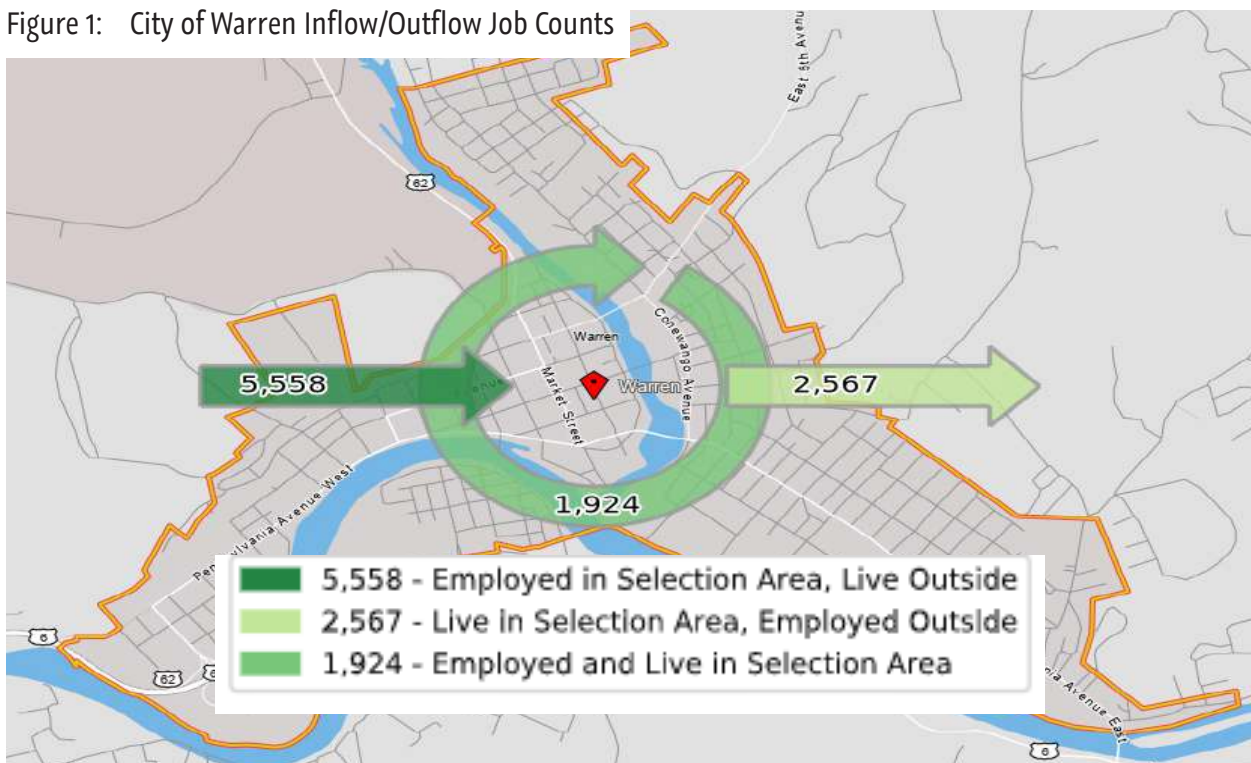
**The City of Warren and Warren County is known for the vast natural and recreational assets** by virtue of its location near the Allegheny National Forest, Kinzua Dam and waterways such as the Allegheny River and Conewango Creek. The City is capitalizing on this location through development of its riverfront and new entrepreneurial businesses serving users of the natural and recreational resources.

In addition, the City's Downtown and surrounding residential neighborhoods,

encompassing 28 blocks and 25 historical building styles is designated on the National Register of Historic Places.

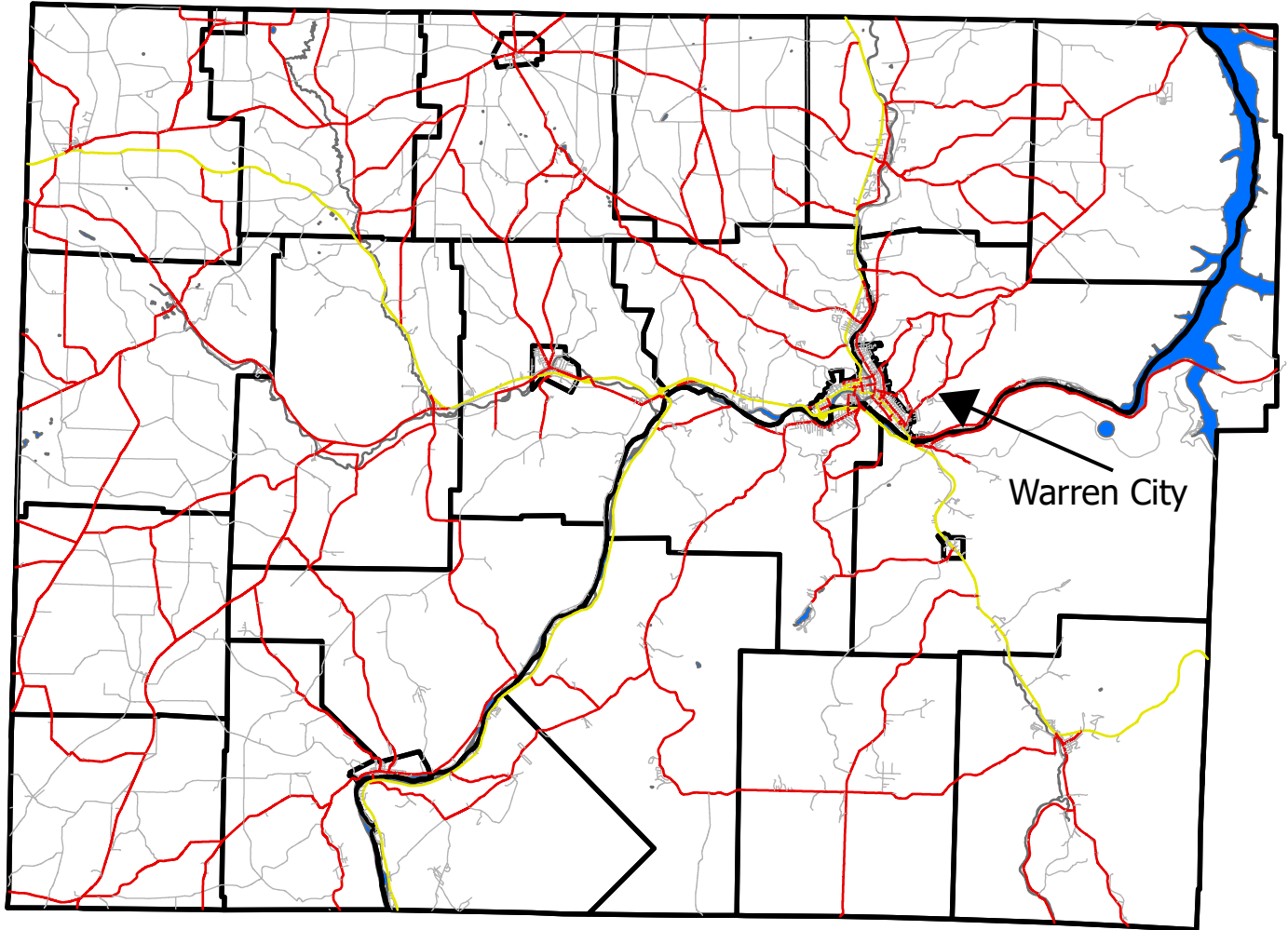
Demographic highlights for the City appear on pages 18 and 19. They reveal a community that reflects the socio-economic trends of its region: Declining population and rising median age. However, the City is a hub of employment, culture and dining/retail in the County. The City is a receiver of jobs as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: City of Warren Inflow/Outflow Job Counts








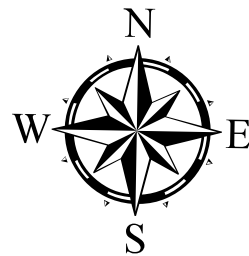
Data Source: US Census Bureau, 2019

Figure 2: Reference Map



### Legend

-  Local Roads
-  State Roads
-  US Highway
-  Municipalities
-  Water Features



0 2.75 5.5 11 Miles





Data sources: PASDA and Warren County

# Data trends summary

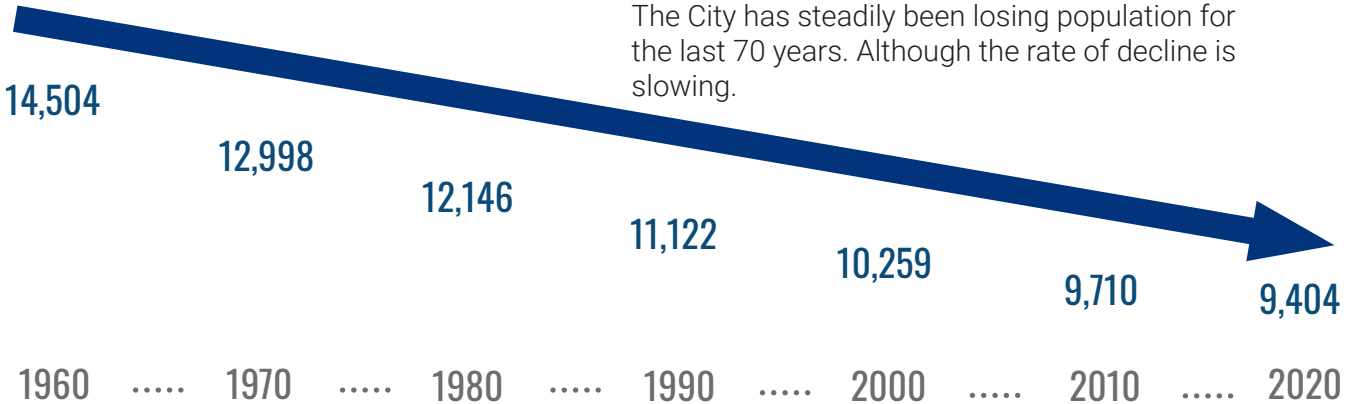
The City of Warren is like many other small cities of similar size and character across the region.

The Census figures here describe characteristics and trends for the City using the most recent 2020 data when available.

### 2020 Census:

-  **Population: 9,404**
-  **Land area: 2.9 sq. miles**
-  **Households: 4,409**
-  **Median household income: \$43,117**

### City population



The City has steadily been losing population for the last 70 years. Although the rate of decline is slowing.

### Age and families

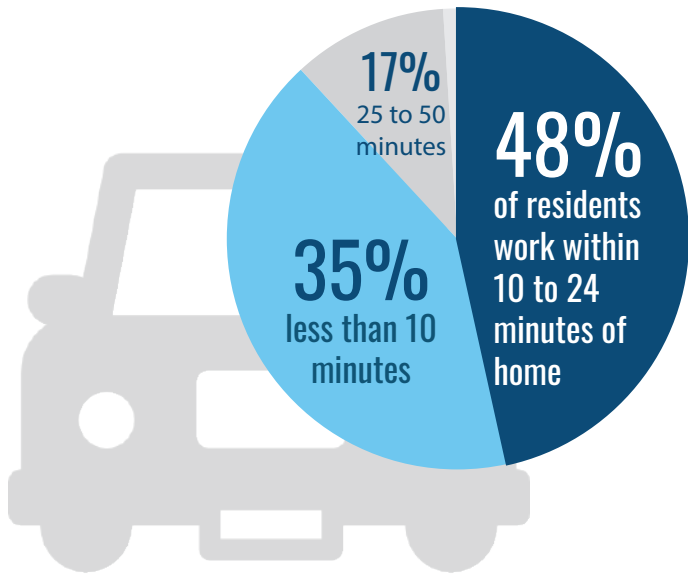
The median age of residents in the City increased from 38.5 in 2010 to 46.6 in 2020.

The number of residents age 60 and up increased by **9%** since 2010.

Since 2010, the average family size has decreased slightly from **2.8 to 2.7**

The percentage of households with children has also decreased in the past ten years from 25% to 22%.

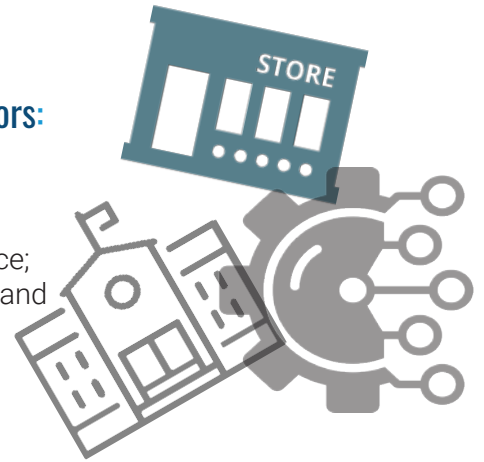
**Local economy**



Throughout the planning process, participants consistently discussed the fact that there are a lot of jobs available in the City, but there is not a qualified workforce to fill these jobs.

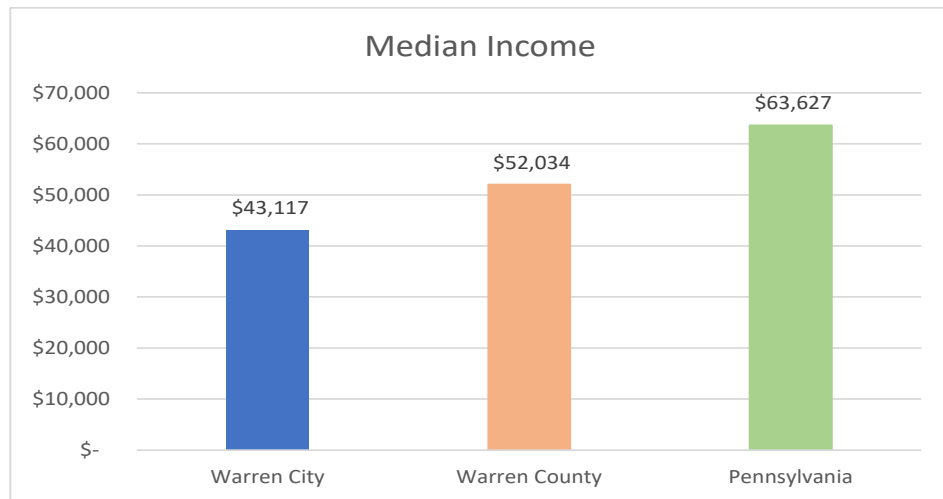
**Strongest sectors:**

Educational Services and Health Care/ Social Assistance; Manufacturing; and Retail Trade.



**74%** of the 7,482 jobs in the City in 2019 were held by workers who live outside the City.

The unemployment rate in the City of 4.6% is comparable to the County's rate of 4.4% and slightly less



**Housing**



**95%** of the housing units in the City were built prior to 1980

**The City's homes are 42% renter-occupied.**

The City will need to consider adding a variety of additional housing stock to attract new workers and residents.



# Vision & Guiding Principles

Warren's plan begins with a vision. The vision expresses what is important to the community, its core values, and its aspirations.

The vision presented here was voiced repeatedly by the citizens, leaders, and business people that participated in comprehensive plan work sessions, meetings, and surveys.

It was the foundation for the priority focus areas and recommendations hereinafter proposed in the plan.

And, it should be the strategic benchmark or "test" for actions going forward. "Does a proposed community project or initiative contribute to the city's vision?"

The Vision was developed primarily around the City's assets. It's assets make Warren unique. They define Warren's outstanding community character. They are integral to attracting residents and visitors which in turn are integral to keeping neighborhoods vital, growing customers for local businesses, and providing employees for the city's industries, businesses, and institutions.

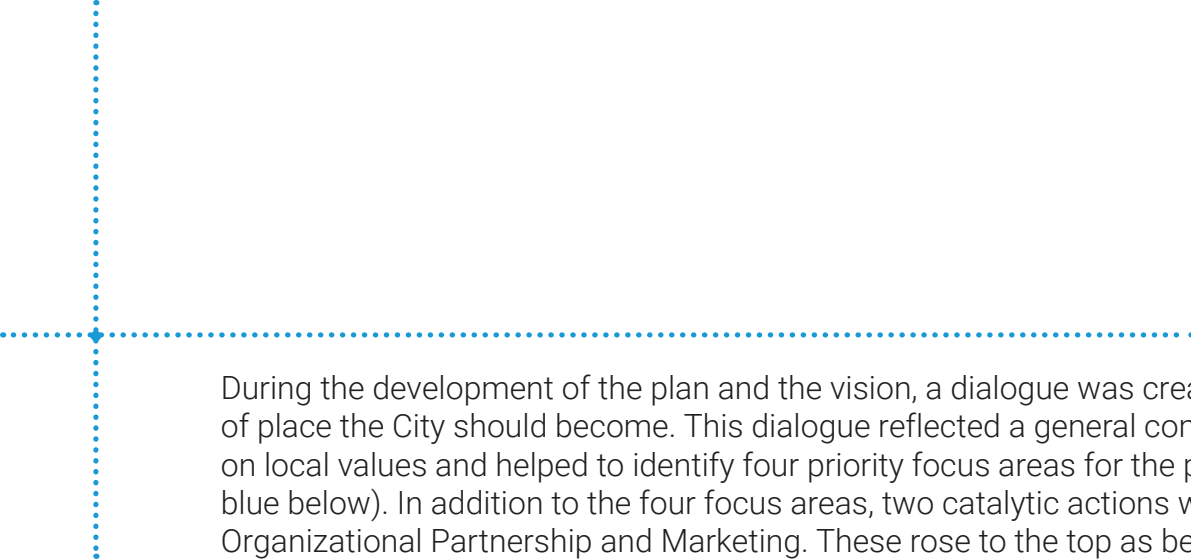
Warren's assets must not be taken for granted. There must be stewardship of and reinvestment in the assets. The community should take positive actions to capitalize on, strengthen, and market the assets. The City and partners must create and maintain organizational capacity to do this, and to help provide the opportunity for any interested group or citizen to be an entrepreneur adding to the City's assets.

## “ The Vision:

*Warren is a community of enviable assets, and a hub of a region of outstanding amenities. The city's past is represented in, and its future is tied to these assets:*

- *The scenic and unspoiled Allegheny River*
- *A region of world-class natural areas and outdoor recreation*
- *Treasured small-town quality of life – safe, peaceful, friendly, walkable*
- *A real downtown offering business opportunities and experiences with history, culture, and the arts*
- *A hub of diverse businesses and employment*
- *Active parks and public spaces inviting to people and families*
- *Pride in my community and my home*

”



During the development of the plan and the vision, a dialogue was created about the type of place the City should become. This dialogue reflected a general community consensus on local values and helped to identify four priority focus areas for the plan (listed in blue below). In addition to the four focus areas, two catalytic actions were identified: Organizational Partnership and Marketing. These rose to the top as being important for the successful implementation of all the recommendations within the focus areas.

Each of the priority focus areas list generally accepted planning principles that helped to inform the vision and all the recommendations that followed.

## Downtown

Promote “organic growth” - Entrepreneurism

Support the beautification of upper stories

Market the City to new residents and business owners

## Business Development

Provide improved quality of life in the evenings and on weekends to attract population

Provide electric vehicle charging stations

## Preserving Assets

Establish a central organization for marketing and resources

Build and market attractions

Focus on a positive message

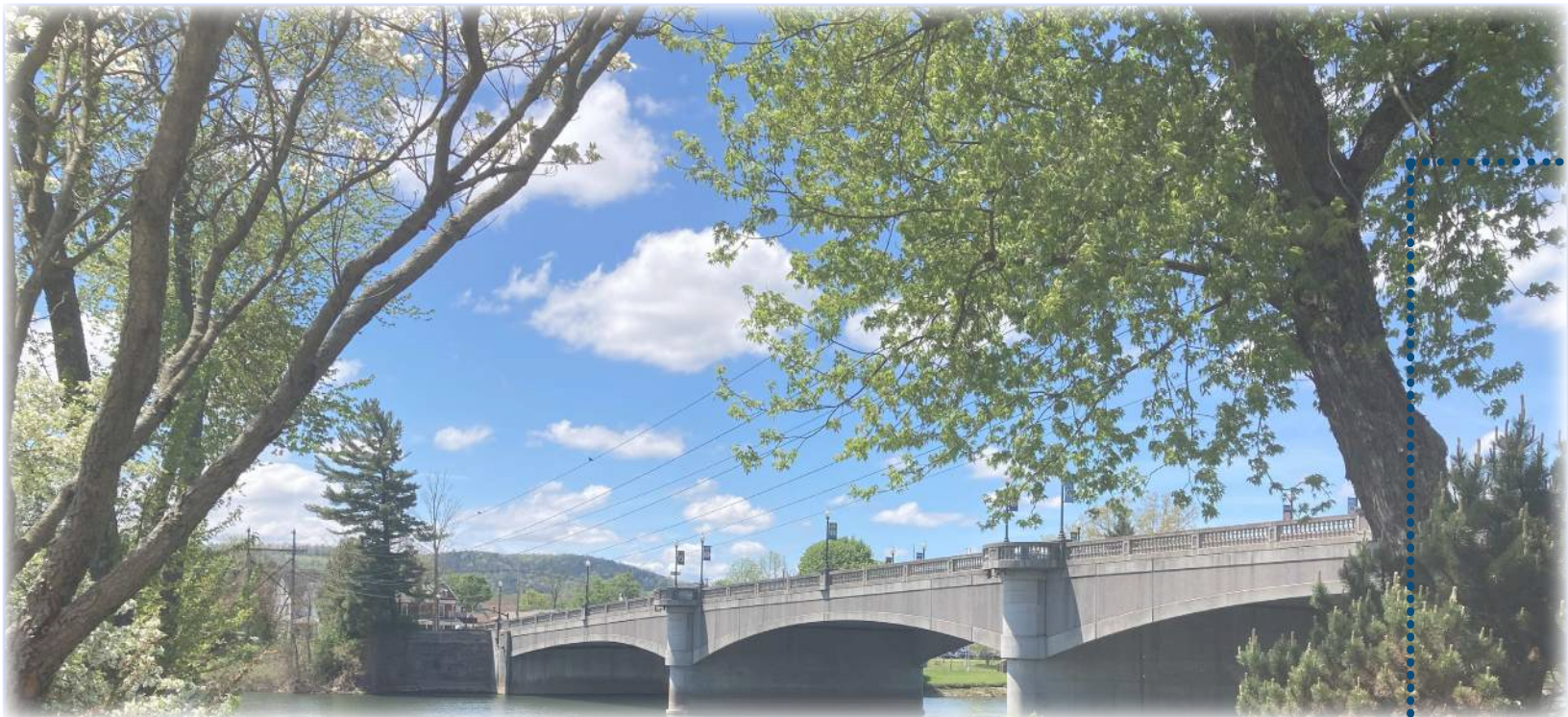
## Target Areas

Develop the riverfront as a mixed use hub

Address buildings in disrepair

Enhance the City’s gateways

# Priority Focus Areas



*Hickory Street Bridge, Photo Courtesy of: Randy Gustafson*

# Catalytic Action:

## Establish an organizational partnership and resource hub

Warren has a lot of opportunities on its plate: the Riverfront Redevelopment project, Trestle to Trestle Task Force initiatives, the new Parks and Recreation Plan, and unfinished business from the 2017 Experience Warren Downtown Strategic Plan. This comprehensive plan presents even more opportunities including a call to proactively steward and add to the city's enviable assets in the years ahead.

The City government cannot successfully pursue these opportunities on its own. Experience shows it takes organizational strength and a partnership of the City and community groups to implement plans as ambitious as Warren's.

As a catalytic action impacting all recommendations in the comprehensive plan, Warren should establish an organizational partnership that brings community groups together to pursue opportunities as a team and create real clout for results.

### ***The partnership should have two roles:***

1. To spearhead and be the forum for collaborative work on community improvement projects. It will take the work of partners and regular communication and coordination to successfully undertake planned projects, and to regularly provoke new ideas for community improvements and work for their completion.
2. To provide a resource hub that connects residents and businesspeople to information, help, and funding sources to undertake their own community improvement efforts from starting a business to restoring a historic home to sprucing up a vacant lot.

An organizational partnership can be informal, ad-hoc. It can base itself on a verbal agreement to regularly meet, communicate, and coordinate. Partners would voluntarily commit to roles in completing projects and prop-up each other in overcoming obstacles and making progress. Or, an organizational partnership can be formal, based on a written agreement, even having a decision-making board.

A Warren partnership should start informally. The focus should be on assembling and sustaining the clout of multiple groups working together in good faith to get things done, not on creating a new organization. There may need to be some formality, for example, in creating the resource hub. The hub will need partners to pitch in funding and/or staff work to assemble information, make connections with resource providers, respond to inquiries, and organize learning events.

The City of Warren and the Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry (WCCBI) are the two organizations best positioned to convene other organizations and initiate an organizational partnership. Innovault Coworking is an ideal collaborative workspace in which to convene and nurture a partnership, and a potential physical presence for a resource hub.



Innovault

“Every community needs a ‘go to’ organization ... one that’s always looking for new opportunities, and is flexible and adaptable enough to respond when those opportunities present themselves.”

Steve Bishop, Former President, Impact Corry

## Two Case Studies:

### ***Kane Area Development Center:***

Kane Area Development Center is the title given to a partnership of the Kane Chamber of Commerce, the Kane Area Industrial Development Corporation (KAIDC), and the Kane Area Revitalization Enterprise (KARE). They work together to provide economic opportunities and revitalize Kane, and they provide a “one stop shop” supporting residents, tourists, and new and existing businesses. Also, Kane has a “coffee shop partnership.” Borough, business, and community leaders regularly meet for coffee to plot the next community improvement project, large or small, and agree on responsibilities to complete the project.

### ***Impact Corry:***

Impact Corry is a formally organized non-profit community development organization. Its board consists of members of the community and community organizations. Impact Corry facilitates the work of public, private, and charitable partners to have first completed a strategic plan to revitalize Corry and now to implement the plan’s community improvement projects.

(Impact Corry is modeled after the Aspen Institute’s Rural Development Hub concept. More information at <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/rural-development-hubs/>).

# Catalytic Action:

## Develop a strategic approach to marketing the City of Warren's quality of life and assets to bring in new residents and businesses.

The City of Warren has a lot to offer residents, business owners and visitors. The City has an active downtown with local businesses, cultural activities and beautiful historic buildings; pleasant walkable neighborhoods, an expansive park system as well as being located on the Allegheny River and nearby to world class outdoor recreation amenities such as the Allegheny National Forest.

Continuing to find ways to promote what makes the City a great place to live and visit, will help solidify the City as a unique regional destination. The City and its partners, including the Warren County Visitors Bureau, have made tremendous progress in promoting Warren and its assets as well as hosting a variety of concerts and community events and developing a beautiful park/trail system. There is more to do, however, to continue to market the City as a premier destination.

Marketing Plans vary greatly depending on the needs and resources of the user. The City of Warren has already started to think about a Marketing Plan and has developed a Marketing Committee to develop ideas. The committee has identified immediate and longer term action items including but not limited to:

- Establish a communications channel among the City and its partner organizations for marketing and events discussions
- Establish an online presence, which would include updating the City's website
- Explore monthly newsletter
- Develop signage

The City should continue these efforts and make marketing a priority in order to increase the visibility of the City and attract additional residents and businesses. In addition to the actions already begun by the Marketing Committee, the City should determine its "Brand" and this should be used on all marketing material, signage, etc. throughout the City (see branding case studies on next page).

## Community Branding Case Studies:

Denison, Texas, sought to distinguish itself from similar communities along the shore of Lake Texoma, one of the nation's largest lakes. Like Warren, Denison is situated in a region rich with outdoor recreation attractions but needed to determine the local assets and advantages that made it a unique destination.

Research during the community branding process revealed what set the community apart: Denison was not only a lakeside resort, but could draw upon a storied history as the home of Dwight D. Eisenhower, wine industry hero Thomas Volney Munson and famed pilot Sully Sullenberger.

Thus Denison's identity became a combination of "get-it-done gumption with a relaxed, easy-going nature that makes getting ahead a lot more fun." The City adopted a slogan of "moving forward, kicking back" and a sailboat logo that incorporates the letter D and symbolizes forward progress "in an easy, breezy way." The logo appears on all communications and on its website, in advertising materials and in gateway signage, as shown below.



More than 90 years ago, The Wall Drug Store in Wall, South Dakota used the promise of free ice water to jump start a marketing campaign that has turned into an enterprise that attracts millions of visitors each year. The owner of the local drug store and his wife determined that the numerous visitors to Mt. Rushmore, etc. need a drink of water on their long journey so they developed signage to be put on the highway indicating that travelers could stop in to the drug store for a glass of ice cold water. This led the store becoming a stop for thousands of travelers, who can still get a free glass of water.



# Downtown:

## Remove regulatory barriers to businesses and development

Participants in comprehensive plan workshops said there have been instances where existing regulations and permitting acted as a barrier to downtown development. To a person starting a business or redeveloping a property, regulations provide a challenge and a potential barrier. Workshop participants said it is important for the City to do its part to lessen the burden.

A preliminary evaluation reveals that zoning regulations are reasonable compared to similar municipalities. Permit applications are not complex. Information is available on the city's website and for the most part can be readily found. City staff has made efforts to reduce permit process barriers around the catchphrase, "All we ask of people is to follow the rules."

Still, it will be valuable for the City to perform a deeper evaluation of regulations affecting businesses and development, and to stay the course in easing the burden of compliance.



*Downtown Businessess, Photo Courtesy of: Gary Lester*

## Related findings

### ■ ***How do local ordinances present barriers?***

- Regulations can be complex and permit processes can be hard to follow. Both frustrate citizens and City staff.
- Regulations can be vague making it hard to tell what standard must be met to gain approval.
- Rules for the sake of rules add cost to development without benefiting the public interest.
- Although primarily the responsibility of a 3rd party organization and not the City, the permit processes can be time consuming, adding cost.
- Excessive permit fees inhibit legitimate applications.

### ■ ***Do local regulations discourage development?***

According to surveys, most developers and business people do not consider local regulations promoting quality development to be obstacles. The two most significant obstacles are:

- Time it takes to gain approval.
- Unpredictability of regulations, processes, and multiple parties involved in review and approval.

### ■ ***Case Study***

The City of Greensburg in 2019 undertook an effort to reduce regulatory barriers. It evaluated the code of ordinances, permit processes, forms, and public information. It held listening sessions with businesspeople, developers, and economic development professionals. The outcomes were consolidation of permits and applications, fixing of troublesome regulations, lessening the number of applications needing extra reviews, and offering more positive and helpful customer service. The City also instituted monthly open meetings for prospective applicants to present project ideas and ask questions of the city's development review team.

# Removing Barriers Strategy steps

## Conduct a deeper evaluation of regulatory barriers

A second phase in the process to update the City of Warren's comprehensive plan will be to update the city's zoning ordinance. With that, the City and its consultant should conduct a deeper evaluation of regulatory barriers including:

- Fixes for regulations that are complex, vague, and excessive without adding public benefit.
- Optimization of zoning districts and permitted uses to accommodate desired businesses, emerging uses, and development/redevelopment opportunities.
- Streamlining of permit processes that add obstacles and time without adding value to the review.

### Implementation plan:

- Responsible Party: City of Warren and its planning consultant
- Partners: A focus group, appointed by the City, consisting of businesses and development professionals invited to help identify barriers and fixes.
- Cost: N/A, will be completed with the zoning update process
- Funding Sources: N/A
- Time Frame: Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)

### IN WARREN, WE WILL

Cut red tape.

Help applicants through the permit process.

Approve development that meets our requirements and enhances our community.

## Sustain and add to the city's best practices in permitting

The City should not let up in its efforts to eliminate permit process barriers. Below are recognized best practices in local permitting processes. The City has instituted some, which it should endeavor to sustain, and it should institute others. The City should even be bold and market its streamlining and customer service approach.

### Implementation plan:

- Responsible Party: City of Warren
- Partners: N/A
- Cost: Staff time
- Funding Sources: N/A
- Time Frame: Ongoing for instituted practices, Medium Term for other best practices

#### BEST PRACTICES IN LOCAL PERMITTING

- Single point of contact for development applications.
- Consolidated and easily-accessed permitting information, including a user's guide and checklists.
- Adequate trained and accessible staff.
- Use of website and e-technology for application filing, permit tracking, and interaction between local staff and applicants.
- Internal coordination of reviews involving multiple departments and boards that is seamless to applicants.
- Consistent (predictable) administration of rules, process steps, and timelines.

# Downtown:

## Enhance upper stories of older buildings

Downtown Warren has an abundance of beautiful, historic buildings. As the population of the City has decreased, the amount of space needed for businesses and residences downtown has also decreased. The City still has a strong business base in downtown with few completely vacant buildings, but an area that has struggled is upper story development in downtown buildings.

As the amount of space needed has decreased and cost of rehabilitating an older, historic building, has increased, upper stories in downtown buildings have been suffering.



*Vacant Building, Photo Courtesy of: City of Warren*

## Related findings

- In a general public survey released as part of the Comprehensive Plan process, one of the most common answers to the question “What would you most like to change about the City of Warren?” was addressing vacant buildings and blight.
- Vacant buildings and blighted upper stories were identified as priority needs in a stakeholder summit held as part of the Comprehensive Plan as well as in two of the four work sessions held as a follow up to the summit.
- According to a 2021 report by SCG developers, downtown redevelopment can benefit a community by:
  - Increasing tax revenue
  - More environmentally friendly
  - Increase jobs
  - Assist with housing shortages (many participants in the Comprehensive Planning process have discussed the fact that there are not a lot of available housing options in the City)
  - Help with attracting younger population
- Developers and property owners noted in Stakeholder sessions that a lot of cost is added to redeveloping older buildings due to state and federal regulations. Unfortunately the City does not have control over these, but can be an advocate and partner for redevelopment projects.

# Enhance Upper Stories Strategy steps

## Encourage Simple Solutions

Improving the look of upper stories in downtown Warren does not have to always include expensive or difficult solutions. Some simple actions can go a long way to improve the look of downtown buildings. Participants at a public meeting for the Comprehensive Plan mentioned murals or window coverings as a way to address blighted areas as they await future redevelopment or until funding is acquired for a full redevelopment.

The City should work with willing property owners of downtown buildings to enhance upper stories with applications of curtains or blinds or work with local artists to commission murals or paintings for the upper stories.

### Implementation plan:

- Responsible Party: City of Warren
- Partners: Downtown Property Owners, Local artists, Summer Music and Art Program
- Cost (if applicable): Dependent on property
- Funding Sources: Local businesses
- Time Frame: Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)



Example of mural on upper story window, Photo Courtesy of: kinsleyks.com

# Enhance Upper Stories Strategy steps

## Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Other communities, including the City of Corry in Erie County, have begun programs to redevelop upper stories in their downtown areas. The program in Corry is being led by Impact Corry, a local nonprofit. They have completed 14 properties with 25 more on a waiting list once more funds are available. Impact Corry is utilizing funds from various sources and serves interested property owners first. They only purchase buildings that do not have owners that can be easily located. Contacting Impact Corry and starting a similar program in Warren would be greatly beneficial to reinventing upper stories in the downtown.

In addition, upper story redevelopment is already begun in Warren. Several developers have purchased property in the downtown (including the infamous Brick House) and have plans for residential, hotel and office uses in upper stories with retail on bottom floors. Providing resources and supporting these developers will also go a long way to improving the downtown.

### Implementation plan:

- Responsible Party: City of Warren
- Partners: Impact Corry; local developers and business owners; PA Department of Labor and Industry
- Cost (if applicable): Staff time
- Funding Sources: US Department of Agriculture Housing Assistance Program; Keystone Community Program; PA Housing Finance Agency Loan Programs
- Time Frame: Medium Term (within 1-3 years)

# Business Development:

## Promote entrepreneurship and collaboration opportunities

An important business development strategy in Warren is to support entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are people with ideas willing to put time, sweat, and money into starting and growing a business. They are most often local folks with sincere interest in their community. They are also out-of-towners, seeing Warren's potential and wanting to invest in and become part of the community. As their businesses grow, entrepreneurs employ local people and patronize local businesses for equipment, signs, accounting services, and more. Being a hub of Pennsylvania Wilds and its outstanding natural and heritage assets, Warren has significant opportunities for start-up and growth of tourism and outdoor recreation businesses.



Riverfront Development, Photo Courtesy of: Mackin

## Related findings

### ■ Entrepreneurism tips from Strongtowns.org

Think differently about entrepreneurs. An entrepreneur is a person who starts a doughnut shop in a vacant storefront with only a deep fryer, folding table, and cell phone, not a person who buys a Dunkin Donut franchise. To help entrepreneurs, communities should:

- Understand the nature of small bets. Many entrepreneurs fail, at least in the first attempt. Accept those small setbacks as the cost of large future gains.
- Tolerate a degree of messiness. Entrepreneurs can come across as disorganized, difficult, and counter-culture.
- Get out of the way. Ask entrepreneurs, “what are you struggling with,” then help ease the struggle.
- Don’t personalize failure. Be prepared for finger-pointing when entrepreneurs fail. Give attention and celebrate when they succeed.

### ■ Make space for entrepreneurs

There are ways local government regulations and permitting can accommodate entrepreneurs:

- Allow pop-up commercial spaces.
- Waive home occupation requirements.
- Ease up on permitting and rules for reuse of vacant building spaces.
- Allow and promote use of makerspaces and co-work spaces.

### ■ Entrepreneurism by the numbers

- 88% of millionaires in the US are self-made entrepreneurs. (Fidelity Investments)
- 97% of self-employed people don’t plan to return to traditional work. (FreshBooks)
- 32% of people who quit their jobs in the “Great Resignation” intended to start their own businesses. (Digital.com)
- 30% of entrepreneurs have only a high school degree (Guidant Financial)
- Tourism accounts for 11% of the economy and \$1.7 billion annually in visitor spending in the region. (PA Wilds Center)

# Entrepreneurism Strategy Steps

## Connect potential and existing business owners to technical and financial resources

A challenge for entrepreneurs is finding resources. There are many government agencies and private organizations that offer help to entrepreneurs, but they are not well-known and most are not located in Warren.

A coordinated, collaborative effort is needed to network the many agencies and organizations that offer assistance to entrepreneurs, and to offer a single point of access to resources.

Roles for the network include:

- Seek out potential entrepreneurs. Despite perceptions that entrepreneurs are go-getters, many will not have a first idea of where to find help.
- Connect entrepreneurs to resource providers. Arrange opportunities to bring out-of-town resource providers to Warren.
- Connect entrepreneurs to local support teams of banks, accountants, attorneys, and insurers, and to each other.
- Help entrepreneurs learn about the local and regional market.
- Help entrepreneurs learn about regulations and permits affecting their businesses and how to successfully navigate approval processes.

### Implementation plan:

- Responsible Party: Warren “hub” organization (see Catalytic Actions)
- Partners: Resource providers (see page 39)
- Cost (if applicable): N/A
- Funding Sources: N/A
- Time Frame: Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)

### **Entrepreneurism resource providers**

- Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry (WCCBI) – technical assistance, access to other providers
- PA Department of Community and Economic Development – PA Business One-Stop Shop, Entrepreneur’s Guide
- Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Gannon University – business planning and other consulting services, seminars, online information
- The Progress Fund – small business loans, technical assistance
- US Small Business Administration (SBA) – online information, SBA-guaranteed loans through local banks
- Northwest Commission – technical and financial assistance, access to other providers
- PA Wilds Center – technical assistance, regional marketing and branding, access to other providers
- SCORE – mentor assistance, workshops, online information

# Business Development:

## Prioritize providing quality of life amenities and community events to attract new residents & businesses

Community events bring citizens together and create more vibrant, healthy communities. The occasional closure of downtown streets for events (such as “Open Streets”) could help reinforce this gathering place as a well-known inviting public realm and enhance mobility. Vacant and underutilized spaces can house temporary pop-up shops, restaurants, art galleries or other events. Providing new events should build upon past and ongoing efforts in the City such as the annual Fourth of July celebration, a 3-day event including a parade (which is about to celebrate its 75th year), vendors, music at Betts Park and a fireworks display. Other existing events include performances at the Library Theater, Warren Farmers Market, shows at the Creary Art Gallery, and summer music in the park. Local businesses, like Wicked Warren and Bent Run, also sponsor outdoor events. These should be encouraged as they provide additional opportunities without requiring additional resources at the City level.



Music in the Park, Photo Courtesy of: Gary Lester

## Related findings

### ■ **Enhance what you have**

Providing additional community events and activities ranked as the second highest action item overall at the May public input session and ranked as one of the highest business development goals at a Stakeholder Work Session held during the Comprehensive Plan.

### ■ **Attract people to you**

Research has indicated that events and festivals are one of the fastest growing forms of tourism. They are especially becoming more popular in rural areas as a way to revitalize local economies and bring in visitors. These events play a special role in marketing communities, providing catalysts for other developments, increasing quality of life and increasing economic development for existing businesses.

### ■ **How to plan a successful event**

- Establish a budget and potential donors
- Determine the basics: name of event, date, communication strategy, etc.
- Line up vendors
- Enlist help - identify volunteers
- Make a list of everything you need
- Do as much as possible before the event
- Last minute shopping for items that have to be bought right before the event
- Give plenty of time for set up
- Follow up with a survey and thank you notes

# Amenities and Events Strategy Steps

## Generate excitement year-round for additional community events, festivals and pop-ups

Planning for events can be fairly time consuming and it is important to have an individual or group that is responsible for the logistics. The City does not have an over abundance of staff or a department that is dedicated to event planning. In order to make this endeavor successful, a committee of volunteers should be formed. The City could issue a call for volunteers through the local media and other outlets, but should also work with local organizations to identify potential volunteers. Once the committee is formed, it should meet regularly to identify and plan for community events, which can be held in City parks and other areas that will not cost money for a venue. Events should be reviewed to determine success and possibility of hosting again in the future. Additionally, surveys should be conducted at events and through the local media annually to determine what additional events people would like to attend.

One idea is an Open Streets event. The City could work with the Police Department to study the feasibility of staging an Open Streets event on a Sunday. Local businesses and community organizations could be partners to add fun and creative programming on the day and market the event regionally.

### **Implementation plan:**

- Responsible Party: City appointed committee
- Partners: Local businesses, Community organizations (such as WCCBI, Warren County Visitor's Bureau)
- Cost (if applicable): Dependent on event
- Funding Sources: Local businesses, Local foundations
- Time Frame: Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)

## Streets are for People!

These case studies present Open Streets events that could be adapted for Warren to reinforce the suitability of its main thoroughfares for active transportation, attract visitors and spur local economic activity.

### OpenStreetsPGH

Hosted by BikePGH, OpenStreetsPGH is a community-building, family-friendly, city-transforming event series held every summer in Pittsburgh. The events connect neighborhoods together with safe spaces where friends and families can experience the best the City has to offer on a summer day. All programs are free of charge and open for all to participate.

The annual event brings together tens of thousands on the last weekend of May, June and July to run, walk, bike and skate in some of Pittsburgh's most iconic streets. OpenStreetsPGH offers something for everyone, from fitness workshops to kids' activities, shopping, brunch, community arts, and special promotions presented by over 100 local businesses and organizations. Three event hub stages around the routes feature free fitness classes by the YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh providing dance, strength and mind/body workshops.

### Philly Free Streets

Philly Free Streets is a people-powered initiative of the City of Philadelphia. Managed by the City's Office of Transportation & Infrastructure Systems, the event temporarily closes streets to cars, inviting people to walk, bike and play. Free Streets Philly provides an opportunity to educate participants on how street design can promote, "healthy, livable neighborhoods," by making walking and biking in the City easier. Organizers also include educational programming on benefits of good street design.

<http://www.phillyfreestreets.com/>

### Open Streets Carnegie

Open Streets Carnegie offered residents and visitors an opportunity to see what Main Street looks like without vehicles. The event closed West Main and East Main Streets to allow individuals to choose what they would like to do in a safe environment such as walking, running, biking, skating, etc. Many local and surrounding businesses and organizations offered demonstrations and lessons that included yoga, dance, physical therapy, skateboarding, bicycling, and other activities, including a scavenger hunt.



[openstreetspgh.org](http://openstreetspgh.org)

# Preserving Assets:

## Continue to invest in City Parks

The City has an extensive recreation network and owns and operates two community parks, six neighborhood parks and a number of mini parks (park designations are set by the National Recreation and Park Association). These assets are heavily used by Warren City residents as well as visitors and residents in the surrounding Warren County region.

Due to the importance of the park system, the City applied received a grant from the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) to complete a planning process to create it's first Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan. This plan, completed in June 2021, outlines a mission and road map for Warren City's parks for the next 5-10 years. The City has already begun implementation of this plan through the following projects:

- Crescent Park: Completed upgrades
- Lacy Park: Installing multi-sensory playground
- Beaty Park: Painted tennis courts and added two pickle ball courts
- Betts Park: Developing eight pickle ball courts; replacing small playground and softball field fence; applying for grant to develop an all season building
- Mulberry Park: Applied for funding to address drainage issues
- Washington Park: Developed conceptual plan
- Offered two summer playground programs

This Comprehensive Plan was created to be consistent with the Parks Plan and it is included as a companion document.



Entry signage to Betts Park - Image Courtesy of: Mackin

# Related findings

## Local gems

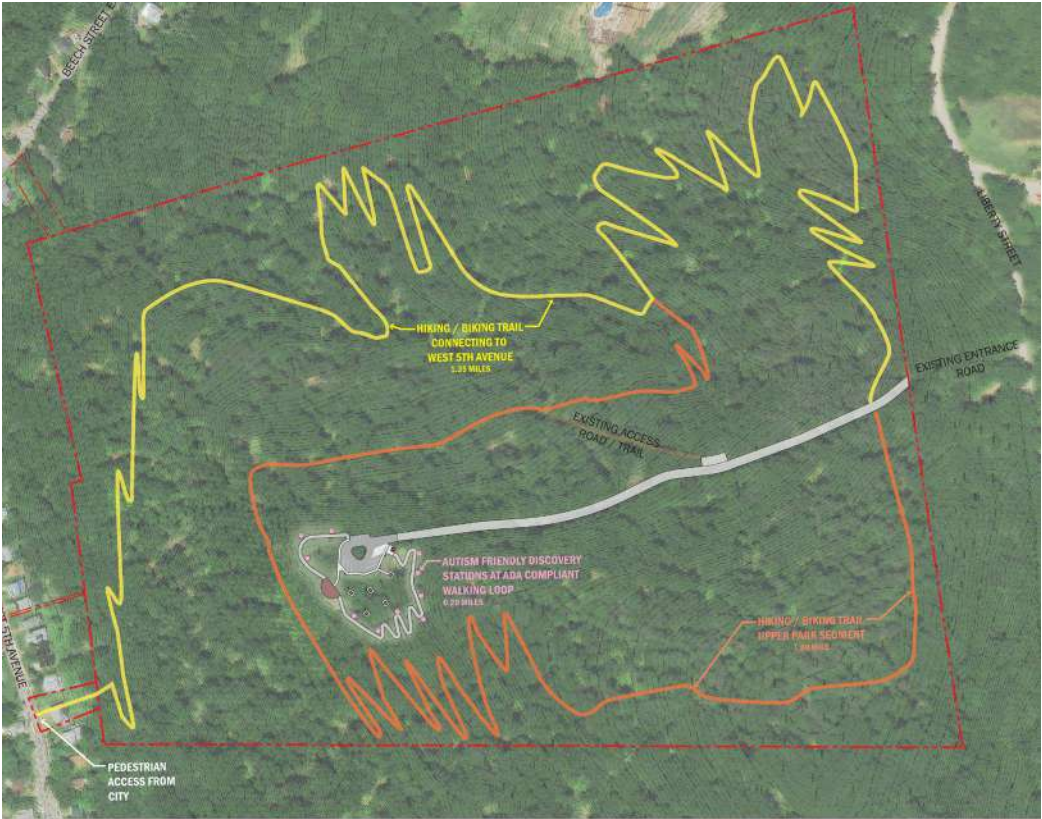
The City of Warren’s parks consistently ranked as one of, if not the, highest asset in the City across all of our public outreach methods. This includes public surveys, stakeholder outreach and public input sessions. In fact, City Parks (Betts Park in particular) ranked the highest as a favorite place in the City according to results from a public survey completed for the Comprehensive Plan.

## Updates needed

According to the City’s Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan, there are 27 short-term action items that should be addressed to improve and enhance the City’s park and recreation facilities and administration.

## Early Implementation

The planning process for the City’s Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan identified an early implementation project, which allowed the City to access additional funds from DCNR to prepare a conceptual plan for a passive trail system in Washington Park.



Rendering of potential trail system in Washington Park- Image Courtesy of: Mackin

# Continue to invest in Parks Strategy steps

## Implement the high priority action items from the City's Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan

The City's Park and Recreation Plan identifies priority recommendations for:

- Parks and Facilities
- Trails and Connectivity
- Administration and Maintenance

The City should continue to implement the recommendations of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan and keep track of the progress.

### **Implementation plan:**

- Responsible Party: City of Warren
- Partners: Identified in Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan
- Cost (if applicable): Dependent on project
- Funding Sources: Identified in Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan
- Time Frame: Identified in Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan

# Preserving Assets:

## Improve pedestrian access/ safety to and from parking and downtown destinations

The City benefits from a multi-modal transportation network, involving roads, local trails and pedestrian sidewalks and pathways. At the same time, the planning process revealed gaps in the network: primarily for pedestrians between parking areas and City destinations such as downtown.

Additionally, the City must ensure that it provides safe, inviting routes that support neighborhood and economic development and meet the needs of all users. A city's streets represent public spaces with the potential to stimulate investment and social inclusion. High-quality public spaces can generate tangible economic benefits, increasing property values, local business activity and the number and frequency of visitors.



*City Parking Garage, Photo Courtesy of: Gary Lester*

## Related findings

### ■ **Active transportation is a key to the City's future**

The City of Warren's ability to grow in distinction as a regional tourism destination hinges on the strength of connections between the riverfront and the City's business districts and neighborhoods.

### ■ **Priority one: Riverfront to Downtown**

Providing safe and convenient access from the Allegheny Riverfront and parking areas into the Downtown is very important to increasing visibility and use of the downtown attractions and businesses.

### ■ **Sidewalks and crosswalks vary**

While the City is mostly served by sidewalks, the condition and maintenance varies widely. This is also true of crosswalks. There are a number of high profile areas that should have improved crosswalk amenities like the intersection of Pennsylvania and 2nd Avenues near the Veterans' Memorial Bridge.

### ■ **People need to know where to go**

As the redevelopment of the riverfront area continues to expand, more people are going to be coming into the City from the river as well as other gateways. Currently there is no consistent signage directing visitors to the downtown businesses and other recreational and cultural amenities.

# Pedestrian Access & Safety Strategy Steps

## Implement the recommendations in the conceptual plan

Expanding amenities such as crosswalks and sidewalks is key to improving pedestrian safety. Providing consistent signage is key to directing visitors to where you want them to go in the City.

A conceptual rendering (on the following page) was developed to highlight areas for these improvements. As mentioned in the marketing catalytic recommendation, the City should work to build a marketing plan that develops direction signage options and place them in key areas. Sidewalk and crosswalk amenities should also be improved in areas identified in the rendering to make it easier for pedestrians to move through the City.

### Implementation plan:

- Responsible Party: City of Warren

- Partners: Trestle to Trestle Task Force; Business Owners

Cost (if applicable): Wayfinding Signage: \$3-\$5K each; Gateway Feature: \$10-\$50K; Ornamental Lighting \$10K each; Intersection Improvements: \$200K each

- Funding Sources: US Department of Transportation Transit, Highway and Safety Funds; PA Department of Community & Economic Development Multimodal Transportation Fund; PennDOT Pennsylvania Infrastructure Bank; PennDOT Automated Red Light Enforcement Program; PA WalkWorks

- Time Frame: Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)

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**LEGEND**

←-----→ PEDESTRIAN TRAVEL

**SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS AT INTERSECTION  
STAMPED ASPHALT AND  
IMPROVED CROSSWALKS**

**PEDESTRIAN  
WAYFINDING  
SIGNAGE**

**SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS AT  
INTERSECTION  
STAMPED ASPHALT AND  
IMPROVED CROSSWALKS**

**PEDESTRIAN  
WAYFINDING  
SIGNAGE**

**PEDESTRIAN  
WAYFINDING  
SIGNAGE**

**PROVIDE  
SAFE PEDESTRIAN  
CONNECTION TO  
MARKET STREET**

**FUTURE  
PUBLIC  
PARKING FOR  
BOATS AND  
TRAILERS**

**ORNAMENTAL  
STRING  
LIGHTING**

**GATEWAY  
FEATURE**

**PUBLIC  
PARKING**

**PUBLIC  
PARKING**

**PUBLIC  
PARKING**

**FUTURE  
BOAT DOCKS**

**FUTURE  
BOAT LAUNCH**

**PEDESTRIAN  
WAYFINDING  
SIGNAGE**

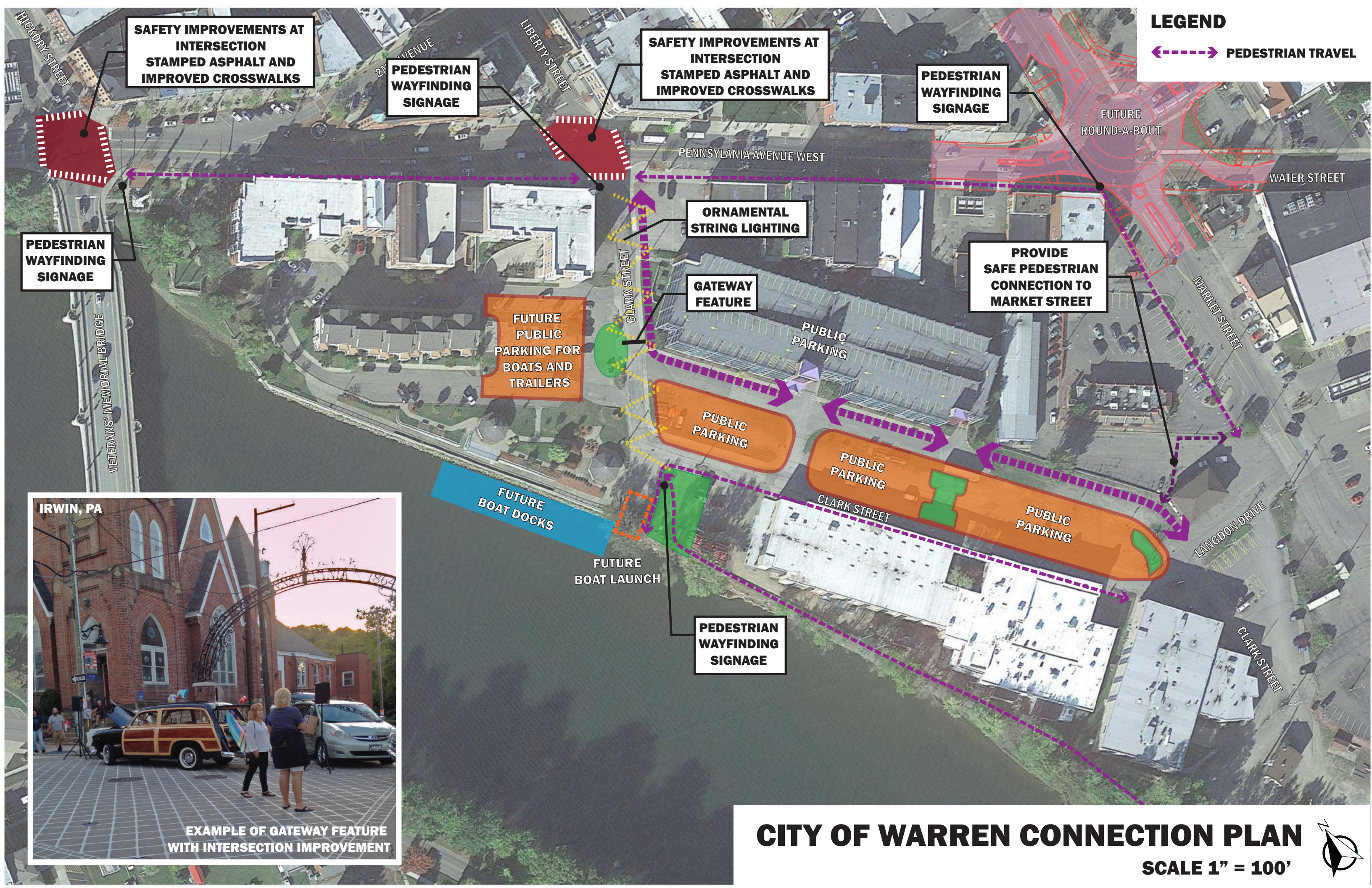
**FUTURE  
ROUND-A-BOUT**



**EXAMPLE OF GATEWAY FEATURE  
WITH INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENT**

**CITY OF WARREN CONNECTION PLAN**

**SCALE 1" = 100'**



# Target Areas:

## Encourage mixed use development and a recreation hub on the riverfront

Warren is in the enviable position of being located right on the Allegheny River. This beautiful amenity offers many possibilities to increase tourism, enhance business development and attract new residents. A lot has happened in recent years to enhance the riverfront in the City. Businesses such as Bent Run Brewery and Allegheny Outfitters are located right on the river and riverfront condos along with a walking path were developed right next door enhancing a mixed use feel in this area.

There are plans for further redevelopment and enhanced access, which should be prioritized for the City and its partners.



*Riverfront redevelopment area, Photo Courtesy of: Mackin*

## Related findings

### ■ Favorite Places

The Allegheny riverfront was consistently ranked as one of the most important assets to the City in public outreach efforts for the Comprehensive Plan. The river was the third favorite place identified in the Comprehensive Plan public survey and encouraging mixed use development on the river was the highest ranked action item at the May public input session.

### ■ More than just Recreation

Riverfront development provides scenic values; attracts individuals, families, and the community to public spaces as well as provides economic benefits in terms of rising property values and increased business opportunities. An interview with RealizeBradenton reveals that a riverwalk project in downtown Bradenton has provided many community benefits including increased community events, and an expected 8.1% increase in property values.

### ■ Provide Outdoor Options

Developing recreation and housing along waterways is not a new concept and many communities are reclaiming what was once industrial or non accessible riverfront areas for other uses. However, this need has dramatically increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. Many more people are looking for ways to spend time outdoors and enjoy nature. Providing these options, opens up opportunities to attract new residents and businesses.

*Each new investment along the rivers encourages activity, unleashes vitality and increases land value, while providing places for people to enjoy.*

*- Pittsburgh Riverlife*

# Riverfront Development Strategy Steps

## Support additional mixed use and recreational development/redevelopment along the Allegheny River

In early 2022, the City along with other partners submitted a grant application for the Build Back Better Grant to continue development along the riverfront in the City of Warren. The grant application was for over \$7 million to undertake a multi-faceted, mixed use development project, which would include:

- Construction of a multi-use river access ramp
- Development of a boat tie-up docking system
- Development of a stepped, river-bank viewing/access area
- Realignment of Liberty and Clark Streets and Langdon Drive for improved traffic flow/access and upgraded parking areas
- Extension of the riverwalk and ramp east
- Construction of a bicycle pump track and skills park

Unfortunately, the grant was not awarded, but the City is researching other funding options at this time. The project may not include all the pieces of the original grant, but the Comprehensive Plan process fully supports applying for funds to support mixed use and recreational redevelopment in the riverfront area.

### **Implementation plan:**

- Responsible Party: City of Warren
- Partners: Trestle to Trestle Task Force; Warren County Chamber of Business & Industry; PA Wilds, Local Businesses
- Cost (if applicable): Project costs included in grant application
- Funding Sources: PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources; PA Department of Community & Economic Development; Appalachian Regional Commission; US Economic Development Administration; US Department of Agriculture
- Time Frame: Medium Term (within 1-3 years)

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# Target Areas:

## Develop attractive gateways into the City

Gateway signs and features represent ways to signal key entrances to a community, support local branding and provide navigational information. This is an opportunity to provide a clear and strong first impression of the City of Warren to visitors, as well as a way to increase community pride among those who live and work in the City.

Gateway signs do not necessarily need to mark the precise City boundary along major routes into Warren, especially if those places are topographically prohibitive, held by owners who do not wish to participate or are visually unappealing. The City should identify its most important entrance points and then look for ideal points nearby where signage could be installed and easily seen.

In the long term, the City would benefit from a larger network of signage, including smaller directional signs in its most walkable areas, including the downtown and riverfront area, denoting attractions; restaurants; retail; etc. This would help support branding efforts as well as increase the comfort and appeal of the public realm.



*Example of Gateway Signage, Photo Courtesy of: Mackin*

## Related findings

### ■ Existing gateways need improvement

It was consistently mentioned during the planning process that most of the existing entrances into the City need improvement and that there is not consistent signage or messaging to let visitors and others know they are entering the City of Warren.

### ■ Community branding starts with wayfinding

Gateway, directional, and identification signs are often the first contact a visitor has with your community. These are crucial touch points for brand awareness. More importantly, a signage program is a cost-effective way for communities to announce their character and direct people into their neighborhoods.

### ■ What we heard

During the planning process, developing attractive gateways into the City ranked as one of the highest action items at a public input session and one of the top 3 action items at a stakeholder work session.

# Gateways Strategy Steps

## Develop strategy for improving gateways into the City

Several steps should be taken in order to properly plan for gateway improvements within the City of Warren:

- Determine feasible and appropriate priority gateway locations. Negotiate with property owners as needed to obtain permission, easement or other arrangement to install and maintain gateway signage.
- Select a concept for welcome signage that incorporates and is visually consistent with City branding/marketing efforts discussed earlier in the plan.
- Install signage and complementary landscape features in locations that enhance public safety and are visually prominent.
- Create a plan for ongoing maintenance, either through the public works department or by creating a partnership with a local school or community organization willing to volunteer.

### Implementation plan:

- Responsible Party: City of Warren
- Partners: School District; Local Artists
- Cost (if applicable): Dependent on project, but gateway signage can cost between \$3-\$5K
- Funding Sources: Local philanthropic organizations/foundations; PennDOT Adopt and Beautify
- Time Frame: Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)



Example of gateway art in Connellsville, PA (along the Great Allegheny Passage)  
Photo credit: Howderfamily.com. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

# Target Areas:

## Assist with resources to redevelop buildings in disrepair throughout the City

While the City of Warren, for the most part, has beautiful neighborhoods and a quaint downtown with beautifully maintained historic buildings, it does have blight scattered throughout the City. There are blighted houses in some neighborhoods and the downtown has buildings that are in disrepair, primarily in the upper stories.

The cost of blight at any level is high. Blighted buildings present safety hazards, lower property values and reduce community character. These items translate into a smaller tax base and less funding to provide and maintain necessary services. Blight can also discourage new residents from moving into a community.

The City's Code Enforcement Office does work to address buildings in disrepair, but there are not enough resources to fully address the problem.



*Building in disrepair, Photo Courtesy of: City of Warren*

## Related findings

### ■ **What the public is saying**

Vacant buildings and blight ranked fourth as the thing responders would most like to see change about the City of Warren in a public survey conducted as part of the Comprehensive Plan. Additionally, during the first public meeting, attendees identified vacant buildings and blighted upper stories as two of the most important issues to address in Warren's downtown. During work sessions with stakeholders business owners and other community leaders reported that deteriorated and inadequately maintained buildings in downtown deter investment.

### ■ **Cost of blight is high**

In a study conducted by the Tri-COG Collaborative in 2013, results showed that the economic impacts of blight and vacant properties results in a total impact to the Tri-COG Communities of over \$19.3 million in direct costs, with an estimated loss in property value of between \$218 and \$247 million.

### ■ **Blight threatens neighborhood health**

Blight is often defined different ways, but generally refers to objectively determinable signs of deterioration that are sufficient to constitute a threat to human health, safety and/or public welfare. According to the National Library of Medicine a study of 107 US cities showed vacant and boarded up housing to be associated with poor health including increased physical and mental ailments.

### ■ **Organized Code Enforcement is key**

The City is making great progress in enforcing its property maintenance code and addressing blighted properties. This work will continue to be important as the City develops a blight mitigation strategy, especially detecting and staying on top of minor problems before they get out of control.

### ■ **The City must be aware of changing demographics and housing needs**

The City of Warren's median age is increasing over recent decades, reflecting the aging Boomer generation. The City will need to find ways to preserve the quality of life for households as their needs change and mobility is limited, making the option to age in place a viable one supported by adequate and accessible infrastructure, programs and services. The City is also characterized by beautiful older homes that in many cases are much larger and more demanding of maintenance than today's smaller householder prefer.

# Buildings in disrepair

## Strategy Steps

### Work with the County on a land bank

Warren County is starting the process to develop a land bank. According to the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, “A land bank is a tool available to municipalities to facilitate the return of vacant, abandoned or tax delinquent properties to productive use.”

The City of Warren should work with the School District to become a member of the County’s land bank once it is operational. This will allow the City to acquire problem properties, clear back taxes and remove liens, which will make the properties more attractive to prospective new owners.

Additionally, the City’s Redevelopment Authority (RDA) is a key player in the fight against blight and provides funds to purchase and demolish properties that have been declared blighted and are in the process of considering joining the County land bank.

#### **Implementation plan:**

- Responsible Party: City of Warren
- Partners: Warren School District; Warren County; RDA
- Cost (if applicable): Staff time
- Funding Sources: N/A
- Time Frame: Immediate (once the land bank is operational)

# Buildings in disrepair

## Strategy Steps

### Create a Blight Plan

Blight and abandonment are expensive and if left unaddressed can undermine the social and economic quality of life for a community. Developing a plan to fight blight helps communities prioritize strategies and target resources to improve blighted properties, which in turn will increase home values and tax revenue and support thriving and healthy communities.

The City is currently submitting a grant application to the PA Department of Community and Economic Development for the Keystone Communities Program. This program provides grants to eligible applicants to support local initiatives that help to address a particular need or circumstance within a community. For the City's purposes, the grant, if awarded, would fund a Blight Study. This study would include:

- Data collection and analysis to determine what properties are blighted within the City
- Blight strategy development and prioritization to target resources
- Development of an action plan to identify recommendations to address the areas of blight.

If the grant is funded, the City should allocate matching resources in order to undertake the study. If it is not, the City should still undertake the study in order to identify and address blighted properties.

#### **Implementation plan:**

- Responsible Party: City of Warren
- Partners: Warren County; WCCBI; Trestle to Trestle Task Force; RDA; City Blighted Property Review Committee
- Cost (if applicable): \$25,000 (matching funds)
- Funding Sources: Keystone Community Grant
- Time Frame: Medium Term (within 1-3 years)

# Buildings in disrepair

## Strategy Steps

### Support funding for downtown building improvements

The City has had a facade program in the past when funds were available. The program provided \$5,000, which had to be matched by the building owner, to improve building facades within the City. The City has applied for funds to continue the program. If awarded, the program will be administered by the RDA and the funds will be utilized to provide a maximum of \$5,000 to commercial properties located in the C-1 and C-2 commercial zoning districts along Pennsylvania Avenue including several blocks to the north and south. The applicants will be required to provide matching funds and the money may be used to make facade improvements to the primary, street facing exterior of commercial buildings. Improvements may include signage, painting of the exterior and window replacement.

In addition, the City has applied for funds to assist with the redevelopment of Liberty Street. The former “Brick House Bar” was consistently identified as one of the major eye sores and issues in Warren’s Downtown. This property was purchased as part of a larger redevelopment along Liberty Street which will include a boutique hotel, affordable housing, studio apartments and retail/office space. The funding will support the redevelopment of a blighted property in the Downtown Historic District that has been vacant for 20 years. This model should be utilized for other blighted properties in the Downtown when the opportunity arises.

- Responsible Party: City of Warren
- Partners: RDA; Local business and property owners
- Cost (if applicable): Staff time
- Funding Sources: Keystone Communities Grant
- Time Frame: Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)

# Implementation Tools



# Overall Implementation

## What comes next?

Successful implementation of the Comprehensive Plan will require continued commitment from the City and each of the priority recommendations has an associated time frame, but what should the City do first?

- Assign the Planning Commission to oversee the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. The commission would not be responsible for directly carrying out actions, but would initiate tasks and coordinate with agencies, volunteers, City staff, local organizations and/or other groups to help carry them out.
- Initiate the two catalytic recommendations, organizational partnership and marketing to jump start implementation for the rest of the priority recommendations.
- Update the City's zoning ordinance to achieve consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. Specific updates to implement the vision are included throughout the plan and summarized later in this section.

In addition to the immediate steps listed above, the City should do the following to keep implementation moving and help to track success:

- Submit priority implementation projects as part of the City budget discussions. If projects require municipal approval and/or funding, ensure that they are presented to Council with plenty of time for deliberation.
- Annually evaluate implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, documenting actions taken during the past year to help achieve the vision, address community development objectives and make recommendations to City Council of modifications to the Comprehensive Plan. Append the annual update to the Plan document to create an ongoing record of progress.

# Targeted Areas for Investment Map

**The City of Warren’s Targeted Areas for Investment Map represents a long-range vision of how the City should develop over time.** It is a guide for future decisions to encourage orderly growth and redevelopment, not to be confused with current mechanisms for regulating development (such as the zoning ordinance). The realization of the City’s vision will be gradual, particularly where current development patterns are inconsistent with what is envisioned for the future. However, this map establishes a picture of the City that local leaders can begin to focus resources in desired directions, as would result from the successful implementation of other recommendations in the plan.

## Park Improvements

The City’s Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan has identified a number of priority improvements for the City’s park system. These improvements should be completed in order to preserve these valuable assets.

## Historic District

The boundaries for the City’s Historic District are 7th Avenue to the north, the Allegheny River to the south, Water Street to the East, and Laurel Street to the West. Protecting the historic nature of these buildings is very important therefore, one of the additional recommendations is to institute a requirement that allows for public input when redevelopment is proposed for a building within the District.

## Gateways

One of the first impressions of a community are its entrances. Warren has a number of key entryways that could use signage and beautification.

## Key Redevelopment Area

Downtown Warren is a tremendous asset to the City and has a lot of positive attributes. There are key areas, primarily along Pennsylvania Avenue where vacant and blighted buildings need attention.






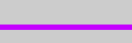



## Riverfront Redevelopment Area

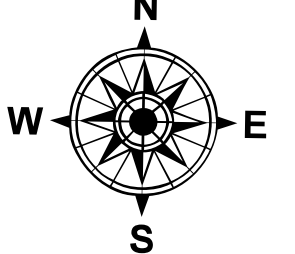
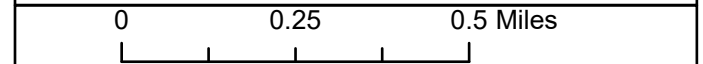
The Allegheny River is another priority asset for the City. Building upon the successful businesses that are located there as well as improving access to the river will provide great opportunities for the City.

## Facade Improvement Area

Warren has applied for a grant through the Keystone Communities Grant to continue its facade program. If awarded, eligible properties need to be located within the C-1 and C-2 Zoning Districts.

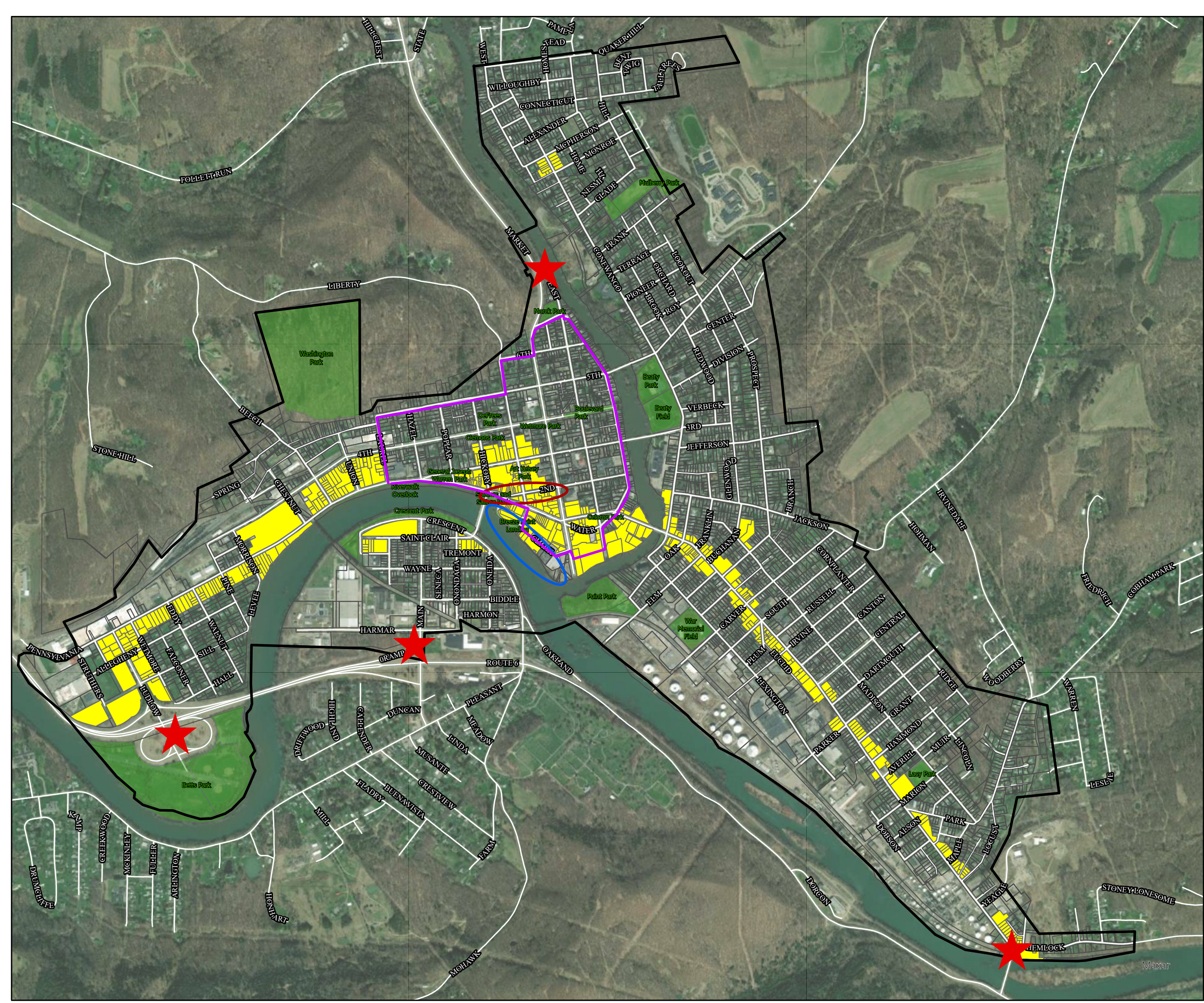
# Targeted Areas for Investment

-  Façade Improvement District
-  Park Improvements
-  Gateway Improvements
-  Key Redevelopment Area
-  Riverfront Redevelopment
-  Historic District
-  City Boundary
-  Parcels
-  Roads

Spatial Reference  
 Name: NAD 1983 StatePlane Pennsylvania North FIPS 3701 Feet  
 PCS: NAD 1983 StatePlane Pennsylvania North FIPS 3701 Feet  
 GCS: GCS North American 1983  
 Datum: North American 1983  
 Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic

Date: 1/13/2023



# Summary of Zoning Ordinance updates

Warren can make improvements in zoning regulations, in addition to those with the regulatory barriers recommendations, to achieve comprehensive plan objectives. Instituting several best practices will help the City accommodate small businesses, provide more housing choices, and enhance community character that makes Warren unique and attractive.

## Accommodate small businesses

- Add new and emerging permitted uses to the zoning ordinance. Examples include specialty food and local alcohol production establishments, artisan industrial establishments, and expanded home occupations including low-impact cottage industries.
- Review and change if needed categorical uses like retail and service establishments so they are flexible enough to accommodate new business ideas without time-consuming amendments or variances.
- Allow short-term permits and streamlined processing to accommodate temporary uses like pop-up businesses, pop-up events, and food trucks. Provide incentives for pop-up establishments to occupy vacant storefronts.
- Provide off-street parking breaks, such as an exemption for the first 3,000 square feet of business floor area or an exemption for adaptive reuse of an existing building.

## Provide more housing choices

- Permit housing types that are growing in demand by an aging population such as ADUs (accessory dwelling units) and ECHOs (elder cottage housing opportunities).

## Enhance community character

- Add form-based regulations to the zoning ordinance, particularly in the C-1 (downtown) district. Form-based regulations address the physical form and appearance of buildings. Examples which Warren can consider for C-1 are:
  - Require windows along street fronts.
  - Require front-facing main entrances.
  - Prohibit off-street parking in front of buildings.
  - Require a two-story minimum building height.
  - Minimize curb cuts and width of driveways.
  - Set a preference for projecting wall signs
- Provide an incentive for building renovations, façade improvements, and new buildings to following the Pennsylvania Wilds Design Guide.
- Allow flexibility of uses for adaptive reuse of existing buildings, including small business in residential neighborhoods, where users will maintain historic character and compatibility of the building.

### PA Wilds Design Guide

The award-winning Design Guide illustrates how buildings can be renovated or newly built to match the unique and special character of the Pennsylvania Wilds region. The Design Guide is full of ideas and photographic examples for

- Architectural Styles
- Building Materials
- Historic & Cultural Themes

The Design Guide is available for viewing and download at: <https://www.pawildscenter.org/programs-and-services/community-character-stewardship/>



# Additional Funding Source

## Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP)

An overall funding source (for multiple projects) that the City should continue to monitor is the NAP. The NAP provides state tax credits to businesses that contribute to community improvement projects. NAP offered \$36 million in tax credits in state fiscal year 2021/2022. It has become the most significant community development program administered by the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED).

One or more local businesses can earn tax credits by making donations to nonprofit organizations for projects that assist distressed areas or low-income populations. Donations can be made for single-year or multi-year projects. Projects have included affordable housing, crime prevention, job training, neighborhood services, recreation, arts, cultural and historic facilities, and improvements to vacant lots and deteriorated buildings.

Warren has benefited from recent NAP projects assisting the Struthers Library Theater and the YMCA. There is potential for additional projects given the recent doubling in statewide NAP allocation and DCED's interest in increasing NAP utilization in non-urban counties. The city should be proactive in regularly looking for matches of private donors and potential projects for NAP funding.

For more information NAP, contact the Northwest Office for DCED.

# Implementation Matrix

## Bringing it all together

The Implementation Matrix on the following pages, outlines all the priority recommendations with the supporting information for each. This is to allow easy access to all the recommendations in one place.

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Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsible for Implementation	Potential Partner Organizations	Cost	Funding Sources
<b>CATALYTIC ACTIONS</b>					
Establish an organizational partnership and resource hub	Immediate	City of Warren	WCCBI; Innovault	N/A	N/A
Develop a strategic approach to marketing the City's assets to bring in new residents and businesses.	Immediate	City of Warren	WCCBI	Dependent on project	City Budget
<b>DOWNTOWN</b>					
<i>Objective = Remove regulatory barriers to businesses and development</i>					
Conduct a deeper evaluation of regulatory barriers	Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)	City of Warren & planning consultant	Focus Group, appointed by the City	N/A	N/A
Sustain and add to the city's best practices in permitting	Ongoing for instituted practices, Medium Term for other best practices	City of Warren	N/A	Staff Time	N/A
<i>Objective = Enhance upper stories of older buildings</i>					
Encourage Simple Solutions	Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)	City of Warren	Downtown Property Owners; Local Artists; Summer Music & Art Program	Dependent on property	Local businesses
Don't Reinvent the Wheel	Medium Term (within 1-3 years)	City of Warren	Impact Corry; Local Developers & Business Owners; PA DLI	Staff Time	USDA; Keystone Community Program; PHFA
<b>BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT</b>					
<i>Objective = Promote entrepreneurship and collaboration opportunities</i>					
Connect potential and existing business owners to technical and financial resources	Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)	Warren "hub" organization (see Catalytic Actions)	Resource Providers (see page 39)	N/A	N/A
<i>Objective = Prioritize providing quality of life amenities and community events to attract new residents &amp; businesses.</i>					
Generate excitement year-round for additional community events, festivals and pop-ups	Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)	City Appointed Committee	Local businesses, Community organizations (such as WCCBI, Warren Visitor's Bureau)	Dependent on event	Local businesses, Local foundations
<b>PRESERVING ASSETS</b>					
<i>Objective = Continue to invest in City Parks</i>					
Implement the high priority action items from the City's Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan	Identified in Park & Recreation Plan	City of Warren	Identified in Park & Recreation Plan	Depends on Project	Identified in Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan
<i>Objective= Improve pedestrian access/ safety to and from parking and downtown destinations</i>					
Implement the recommendations in the conceptual plan	Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)	City of Warren	Trestle to Trestle Task Force; Business Owners	Wayfinding Signage: \$3-\$5K each; Gateway Feature: \$10- \$50K; Ornamental Lighting \$10K each; Intersection Improvements: \$\$200K each	USDOT Transit, Highway and Safety Funds; PADCED Multimodal Transportation Fund; PennDOT Pennsylvania Infrastructure Bank; PennDOT Automated Red Light Enforcement Program; PA WalkWorks

Recommendation	Timeframe	Responsible for Implementation	Potential Partner Organizations	Cost	Funding Sources
<b>TARGET AREAS</b>					
<i>Objective = Encourage mixed use development and a recreation hub on the riverfront</i>					
Support additional mixed use and recreational development/redevelopment along the Allegheny River	Medium Term (within 1-3 years)	City of Warren	Trestle to Trestle Task Force; WCCBI; PA Wilds; Local Businesses	Project costs included in grant application	DCNR; DCED; ARC; EDA; USDA
<i>Objective = Develop attractive gateways into the City</i>					
Develop strategy for improving gateways into the City	Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)	City of Warren	School District; Local Artists	Dependent on project, but gateway signage can cost between \$3-\$5K	Local philanthropic organizations/foundations; PennDOT Adopt and Beautify
<i>Objective = Assist with resources to redevelop buildings in disrepair throughout the City</i>					
Work with the County on a land bank	Immediate (once the land bank is operational)	City of Warren	Warren School District; Warren County	Staff Time	N/A
Create a Blight Plan	Medium Term (within 1-3 years)	City of Warren	Warren County; WCCBI; Trestle to Trestle Task Force; Blighted Property Review Committee	\$25,000 (matching funds)	Keystone Community Grant
Support funding for downtown building improvements	Short Term (within 6 months to 1 year)	City of Warren	Local Business & Property Owners	Staff Time	Keystone Community Grant

# Appendices



*Allegheny River, Photo Courtesy of: Gary Lester*



## Additional Actions

The planning process revealed a variety of ways the City can achieve its future vision, but it cannot implement everything at once. The City has a finite amount of available resources, in terms of both budget and the time that elected officials, staff and volunteers can spend advancing any one given goal. For that reason, this plan identified four priority areas and described the high priority action items in more detail. The public ranked those recommendations highly in importance, and the City agreed that they should and could begin to address those issues in the short- to medium-term, starting with the adoption of this plan. The actions in this section are no less relevant but ranked lower in priority.

## Downtown

- Promote short term rentals (Airbnb and Vrbo) in the downtown buildings
- Address perceived parking issues through dedicated free short-term parking, permit parking in neighborhoods, business patron parking areas, additional angle parking or demolishing buildings to create additional parking lots

## Business Development

- Promote coordination between educational providers and businesses to identify skills needed for the workforce
- Install and promote electric vehicle charging stations
- Promote business start ups and growth and other collaboration opportunities by working with partners such as Gannon University, the Northwest Commission , the WCCBI and the Innovault space

## Preserving Assets

- Focus City regulations and messages on the positive (what can be done)
- Encourage more support from philanthropic resources on preserving assets
- Promote community pride by providing education and resources regarding City assets
- Continue with the update to the City Cellular Tower Ordinance to include 5G regulations

## Targeted Areas

- Improve and expand the facade renovation program
- Expand on Historic Walking Tour (install signage and kiosks)
- Add regulation requiring public review of projects affecting historic properties

# Additional Provisions

This section includes themes and language incorporated into the City of Warren’s plan to comply with Pennsylvania’s Municipalities Planning Code (MPC). The Code was the primary framework for the plan’s formulation, and its process was designed to satisfy and exceed MPC requirements.

## **Adjacent communities**

As per Article III, Section 301 (5) of the MPC, the relationship of the existing and proposed development in the City should be analyzed in relation to the existing and proposed development in adjacent communities and the region. The planning process for the City involved review and consideration of the following documents:

- 2006 Columbus Township Comprehensive Plan
- 2021 Warren County Comprehensive Recreation and Open Space Plan
- Coordination with the Warren County Comprehensive Plan process

## **Interrelationship**

The synthesis of interrelated activities to resolve issues and problems is an important foundation to good community planning. In this regard, there are linkages among the elements, goals and action items of the City of Warren Comprehensive Plan. All are related and should further the overall vision.

## **State water plan**

In recognition of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, Article III, Section 301 (b), the City of Warren Comprehensive Plan supports efforts to provide a reliable supply of water and provisions aimed at adequately protecting water supply sources. These should be developed in consideration of current and future water resources availability and its uses and limitations. The Comprehensive Plan is in conformance with the Pennsylvania State Water and recognizes that:

- Lawful activities such as extraction of minerals impact water supply sources and such activities are governed by statutes regulating mineral extraction that specify replacement and restoration of water supplies affected by such activities.
- Commercial agriculture production impact water supply sources.

