



---

# BEAVER FALLS FORWARD

MAY 2020

**A Revitalization Strategy for the  
Beaver Falls Community Development Corporation**





# BEAVER FALLS FORWARD

A Revitalization Strategy for the  
Beaver Falls Community Development Corporation  
MAY 2020



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**2019-2020 Corporate Sponsors of the Beaver Falls Community Development Corporation**

UPMC  
Duquesne Light

### Beaver County Partnership

Special thanks to John Hayward and the Housing Council

### City of Beaver Falls

Special thanks to City Manager Charles Jones and Community Development Director Bethany Williams

### Beaver Falls Community Development Corporation

Special thanks to the Board of Directors

### Project Volunteers

Akyera Alexi  
Rochelle Burks  
Karrisa Collins  
Sue Frey  
Rebekah Knab  
Ethan & Kara Masters  
Carmita McGeary  
Tom & Cathy Wooley



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION** | **4**  
CHARTING A  
NEW COURSE FOR  
REVITALIZATION

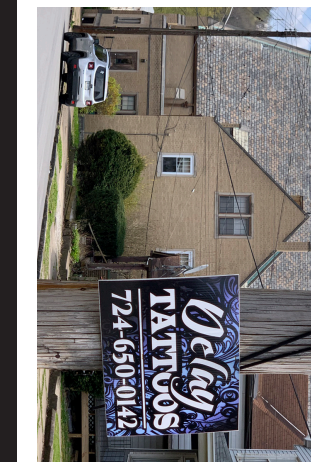
**PART 1** | **10**  
CONDITIONS,  
TRENDS,  
AND THEIR  
IMPLICATIONS FOR  
BEAVER FALLS

**PART 2** | **18**  
PRINCIPLES  
FOR A STRONGER  
BEAVER FALLS

**PART 3** | **24**  
STRATEGY  
FOR A STRONGER  
BEAVER FALLS

**PART 4** | **40**  
TAKING THE  
NEXT STEPS

# CHARTING A NEW COURSE FOR REVITALIZATION



**Like a one-two jab and cross to the face, the decline of the steel industry—along with suburbanization—in the mid-to-late 20th Century sent Beaver Falls reeling, as it did so many communities in the Pittsburgh region. Now, as Beaver Falls plants its feet in 2020 and works to become a revitalized community with stronger, healthier neighborhoods, two major consequences from these historical shocks linger.**

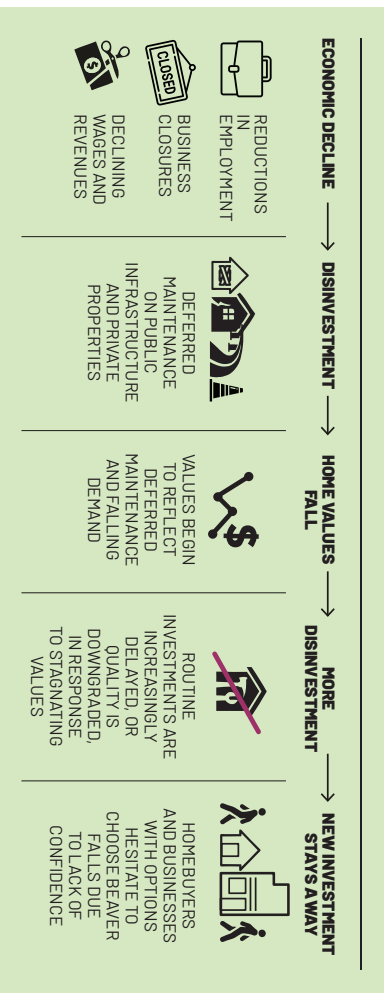
One is the long-term wave of disinvestment in private property and public infrastructure that was set in motion decades ago by reductions in employment and local spending due to business closures and downsizing. Smaller household incomes and lower

municipal revenues meant less money for home painting, roof replacement, street repair, and park improvements. The other is stagnant or falling home prices resulting from people leaving Beaver Falls and the accumulation of surplus housing. With falling home prices came lower expectations for homeowners and greater skepticism about the wisdom of routine home investments, even ones that could be easily afforded. Property maintenance that had been considered a requirement became optional, or deferred until next year, or the year after, or put off completely, compounding the disinvestment stemming from fewer jobs and spending.

While some blocks have clearly weathered these consequences better than others, no street in Beaver Falls has been spared sequential declines over the past half century in demand, prices, and optimism.



**While some blocks have clearly weathered these consequences better than others, no street in Beaver Falls has been spared.**



Alongside these patterns, an unfortunate paradox of weak housing markets has also been at work. Whereas areas of inexpensive and declining housing in a city with a strong housing market are apt to be recovered at some point as investment gravitates from pricier neighborhoods to “buy low” opportunities, such a recovery never happens in a weak market. Instead, these neighborhoods are destined to become weaker without an intervention aimed first at stabilization and followed by intentional efforts to grow the market.

### The Need for a New Approach

The combination of regional job loss plus suburban development—and the consequences of those two shocks—meant that the 85% of adults in the Beaver Falls area that were still employed and had financial means in the late 20th Century became more and more concentrated in stronger areas such as College Hill, or along important corridors like 6th and 8th Avenues, or in the new suburbs. Meanwhile, vulnerable households with few options remained within or gravitated to the Lower End, east of 5th in River Trail, and west of 8th.



This process of household sorting had a big impact on the fortunes of individual blocks. Those that were strong in the 1970s suffered in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, but those that were already weaker in the 1970s really took a hit between 1985 and 2005. While a moderately strong block on College Hill might have had one vacancy, a block on the margins at 16th and 4th or 3rd Avenue would have had several, and a weak block like 9th and 25th would have been devastated by the mid-2000s.

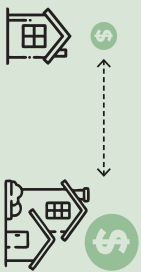
Much as the COVID-19 pandemic is hitting vulnerable populations the hardest and the Great Recession took a greater toll on weaker markets, the exodus of the middle class from Beaver Falls left vulnerable neighborhoods even more at risk. In Beaver Falls as elsewhere, household capacity to tend to property upkeep declined, and on blocks in the city where homes were built to lower standards a century ago, wear and tear has been especially punishing.

The advent of community and human services outlets in the vicinity of Beaver Falls' most vulnerable families were meant to address these growing concentrations of economic need and have long been viewed as steps to neighborhood improvement. They were a positive in that they put essential life services—food and housing and medical assistance—near those in need. But the need for an economy of scale in social services delivery has a marked downside. As scale is achieved in one location, making it easier for struggling families to get help, concentrations of poverty tend to be reinforced. *The only thing worse than poverty is concentrated poverty.*

In many respects, as the Lower End and River Trail have been to Beaver Falls, Beaver Falls has been to much of Beaver County in terms of housing the most vulnerable. Regrettably, the historic response to this dilemma across Pennsylvania, and indeed the country, has been to focus on fixing problems. The old way to address blight in River Trail or in the Lower End was to tear down distressed properties and, in their place, build new housing for the poor. Decades of such

**A BETTER WAY TO ADDRESS BLIGHT**

Neighborhoods must be economically diverse to avoid concentrations of poverty



Existing strengths and assets must be polished, leveraged and connected to residents already leading with high standards



Bring champions together to create blocks where pride is strong from end to end



ill-conceived strategies have demonstrated nothing so much as the fact that shiny, new housing for the poor in 1960 would be neither new nor shiny a few years later. Unchanged, if not worsened, was the concentration of poverty.

Empirically, the better way has several distinct and related parts. First, for a neighborhood to be healthy, it must be economically diverse. No matter how new the housing might be, concentrations of poverty are problematic and to be avoided. Second, to become healthy, a neighborhood's existing physical strengths must be polished and leveraged and connected to a neighborhood's

most important asset: residents already exercising leadership on their blocks by their high standards and expectations. Third, the work of connecting existing and potential physical assets to community champions is essential and closing the distance between strengths is a must. Just as no one wants to walk a long distance between their car and the store, there cannot be big gaps on a block between neighborhood champions. Bringing champions together to create blocks where resident pride is strong from end to end is the foundational work of transforming struggling neighborhoods.

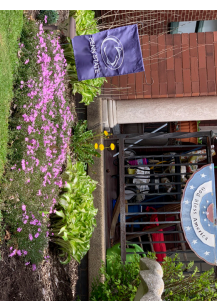
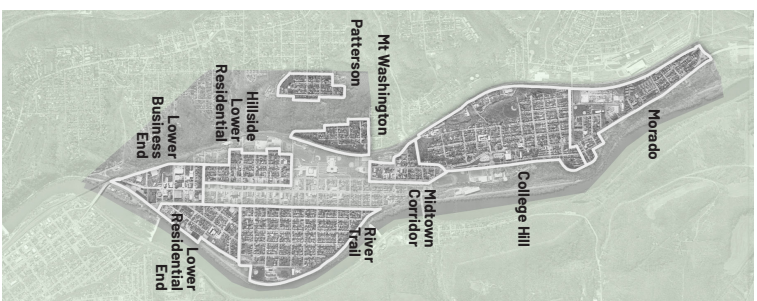
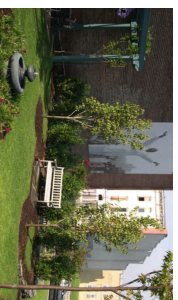
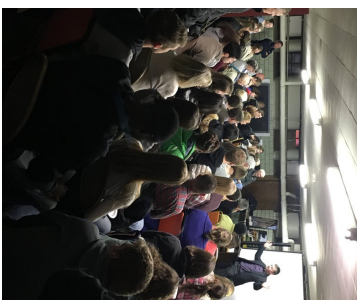
most important asset: residents already exercising leadership on their blocks by their high standards and expectations. Third, the work of connecting existing and potential physical assets to community champions is essential and closing the distance between strengths is a must. Just as no one wants to walk a long distance between their car and the store, there cannot be big gaps on a block between neighborhood champions. Bringing champions together to create blocks where resident pride is strong from end to end is the foundational work of transforming struggling neighborhoods.

**The Critical Role of the BFCDC**

This is where the Beaver Falls Community Development Corporation comes in. Its emergence as one of several shining lights in Beaver Falls points the way towards the forthcoming transformation of River Trail, the Lower End, and, over time, all of Beaver Falls into one of Beaver County's true communities of choice. Bringing attention in Beaver Falls to existing strengths—strong blocks where optimism is already rooted such as Lincoln Place or part of 8th Avenue or 16th—and working to stabilize larger areas of incipient potential like the River Trail neighborhood must comprise the long-term strategy for the CDC. As the CDC expands its membership to include as many Beaver Falls residents as possible, and as it begins to communicate a vision of resident pride in homes and on blocks and in neighborhoods, and as it translates that vision into successive small and then larger actions, confidence is going to root, and home prices will reflect that.



The leadership exercised by the CDC has been remarkable. The activation of voices, volunteer talent, and the restoration of Beaver Falls by bringing the community together is going to be the difference maker. A promising future is already beginning to show itself. From the Beaver Falls Coffee and Tea Company and its stalwart curbside service during the pandemic to the McDonald's employees cheerfully working the drive-thru wearing mother-and-daughter sewn homemade masks, Beaver Falls is a truly optimistic place. On most every block in Beaver Falls, there's someone doing a little extra. Hanging a seasonal flag. Planting tulips. Promoting the Tigers. The CDC is actively connecting stars—gifted people, proud homes, potential assets—and in the process and in partnership with leadership from the City Hall and Geneva College, mobilizing resources so Beaver Falls moves into the future with optimism and to end.





## HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

**THIS DOCUMENT IS A STRATEGIC GUIDE** for the Beaver Falls Community Development Corporation and its municipal and other partners. It is designed to assist the community in the work of strengthening currently stable or relatively stable parts of the city and stabilizing others that continue to struggle.

As a guide, it is also designed with both process and outcome in mind. The CDC must be vigilant about mobilizing the community to further strengthen the city's existing assets—**Geneva College, Downtown, First Presbyterian, the College Hill neighborhood, Beaver Falls High School**—because the city has an existential imperative to succeed. It must take a leadership role in the improvement of the city's hidden charms, such as Lt. Calvin Smith Park, the residential blocks along 8th and 6th, and historic homes at key intersections. It must identify and bring block champions together, enlarging the number of blocks in Beaver Falls where homes can hold their value and neighborhood life can be vibrant and healthy. And it must work to stabilize blocks where there's been too much neglect.

But it also must endeavor to do these things in ways that are consistent with the community's core values. In ways that enhance resident dignity, and that are grounded in optimism for Beaver Falls' future. This guide, then, is meant to be flexible and is organized accordingly.

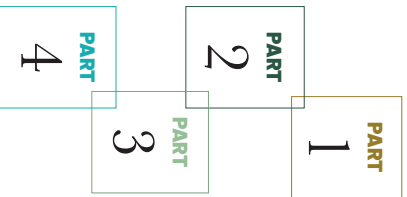
It is vital that the community truly know and understand how Beaver Falls has been changing and where it stands today—that is the focus of **Part 1**. Shocks to the regional economy in the 1970s and 1980s have rooted for decades. Now, Beaver Falls must pivot. To do that it has to know what its baseline reality is, what strategies are not likely to work (and why) and what the resulting challenge boils down to.

This guide includes and is based upon principles—the focus of **Part 2**—that have been developed over time by czd across hundreds of communities nationwide. For a stronger Beaver Falls, it is imperative that the CDC maintain fidelity to these principles even as it adapts to changing circumstances.

**Part 3** of this document is the strategy itself. What to do where. And **Part 4** lays out the first steps to take towards implementation.

By understanding and coming to terms with where Beaver Falls is today, without any sugar-coating, the community will have a fighting chance. For 50 years, the region ignored what economists plainly said with a certainty—the collapse of steel. One of many consequences of such a failure to adapt is that it has taken every bit of the last 25 years to dig out and there is still much to do. Facts matter. By embracing baseline reality, Beaver Falls can step into the future with justifiable confidence.

By a commitment to the revitalization principles contained here, the CDC and its partners can be assured of having the tools to respond to changing circumstances. And by following the strategy but doing so with the self-confidence to call an audible at the line of scrimmage, the CDC and its partners will be able to seize unanticipated opportunities, more confidently string together activities, and mobilize the Beaver Falls community to adapt successfully.



## WHAT IS A 'HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD'?

Use of the term 'healthy neighborhoods' in this document and in connection to strategies within the target area refers to four inter-related characteristics that define a healthy neighborhood.



### Strong Market

Demand for property in the neighborhood is robust and prices are rising. When a home is put up for sale, it finds a good buyer quickly.



### High Capacity

The capacity for residents to work together, manage problems, and advocate for attention and resources exists at a high level. Human capital is well-organized.



### Good Conditions

Private property and public infrastructure is in good condition and reflects the existence of standards that residents are willing to uphold.



### Positive Image

Due to the combination of good conditions and high capacity, the neighborhood projects a positive image to the regional market, thus helping to drive demand.



# CONDITIONS, TRENDS, AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR BEAVER FALLS

Plotting a path forward requires an honest assessment of how Beaver Falls and its neighborhoods have been changing in recent decades, conditions on the ground today, and how trends that are long in the making matter to the development and implementation of effective responses.

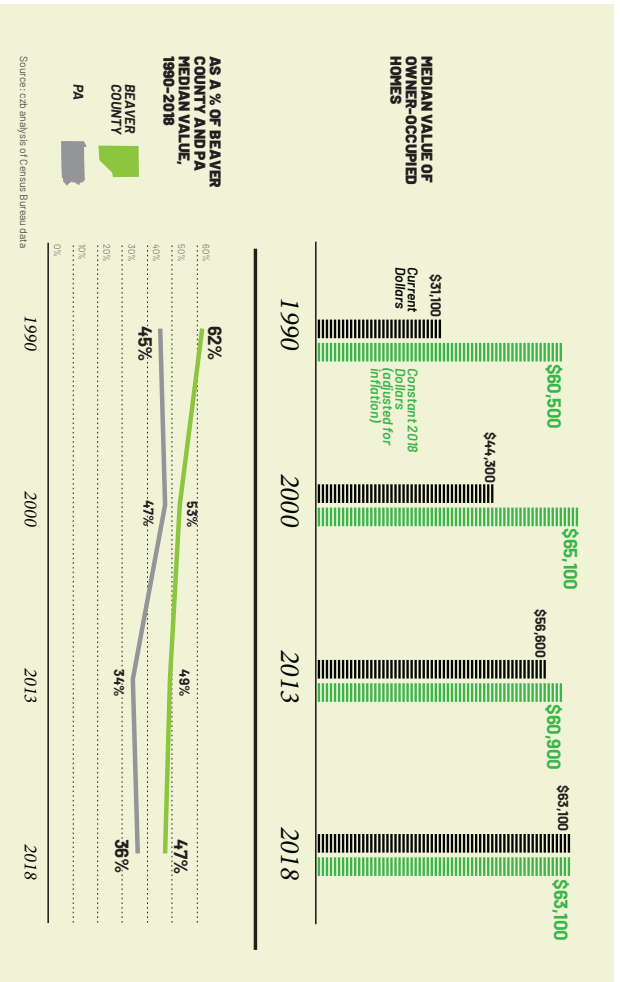
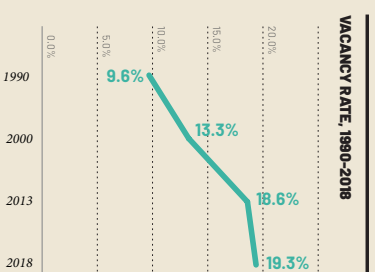
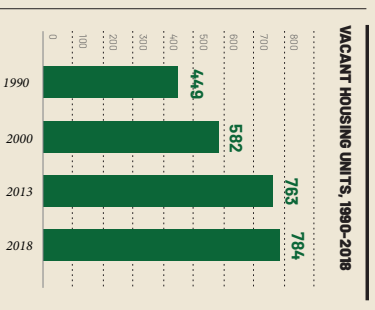
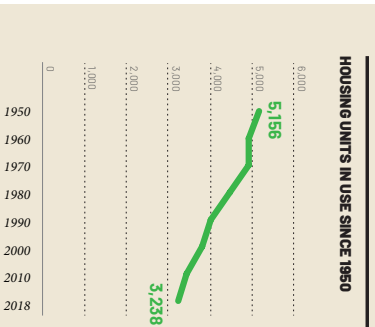
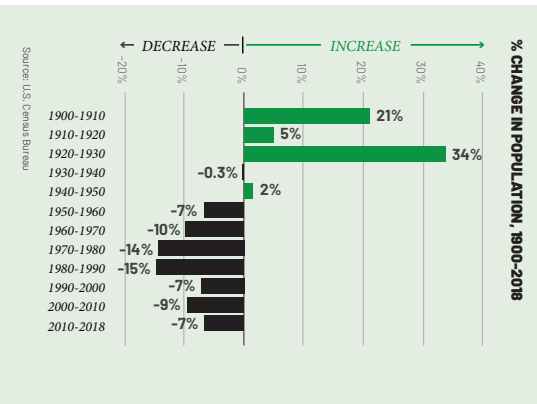
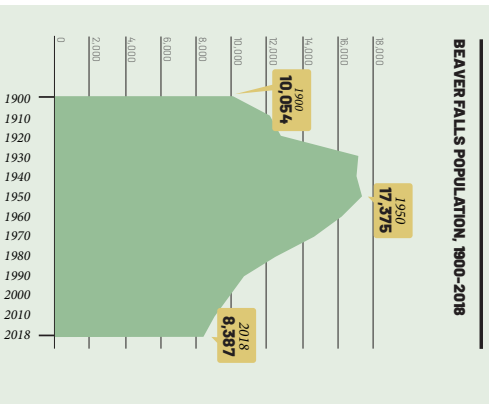
## HOW HAS BEAVER FALLS BEEN CHANGING, AND WHERE DOES IT STAND TODAY?

### A MARKET SOFTENING OVER DECADES

The 1920s—now a century ago—was the last time the City of Beaver Falls experienced population growth. It grew by over 4,000 residents that decade before plateauing at 17,000, where it stood through the Great Depression and World War II.

Population losses began in the early 1950s and have continued through today, with the estimated 2018 population of 8,387 representing a 52% decline from the peak figure.

Population loss is an important part of understanding the current state of Beaver Falls' housing market and neighborhoods because it equates to fewer households and fewer housing units being occupied. Since 1930, there has been a 37% decline in the estimated number of housing units in active service, a number that is smaller than the decline in total population because of





## FALLING FURTHER BEHIND IN THE REGION

The erosion of housing values in the City of Beaver Falls in comparison to Beaver County — going from 62% of the countywide median value in 1990 to 47% by 2018 — is especially remarkable considering that Beaver County has been losing population since 1970 (down 21% from its peak) and is itself a soft housing market.

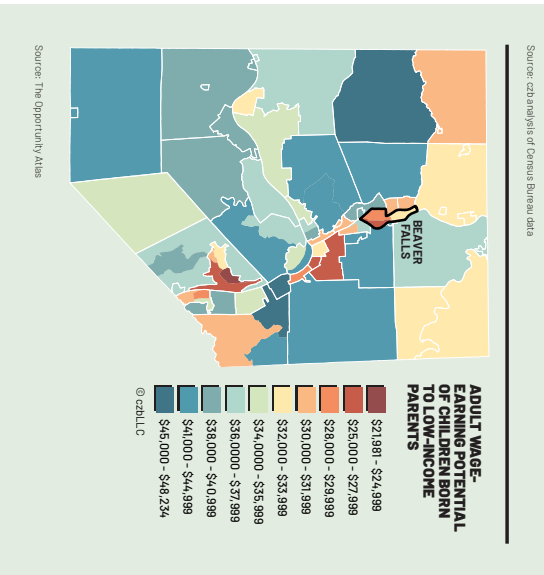
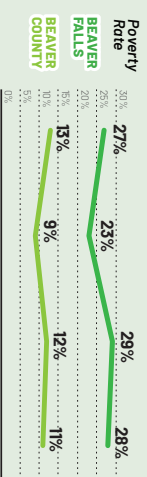
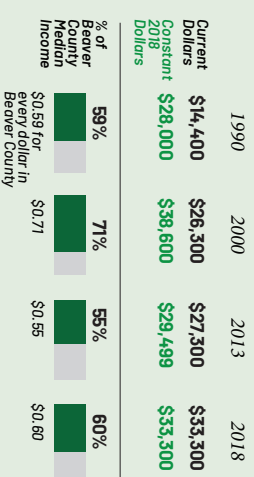
But this erosion is a symptom of demographic and socioeconomic trends that are only reinforced as the market weakens. Inexpensive housing in declining condition deters many homebuyers and renters who have options and choose to look elsewhere in the region for neighborhoods that they feel more confident about. Over time, this pattern of choice-making results in high concentrations of low-income households who lack the buying power to compete in healthier housing markets.

This dynamic has been at work in Beaver Falls since suburbanization into Beaver County began on a large scale in the 1950s and accelerated with deindustrialization through the 1970s and 1980s. By 1990, the poverty rate in Beaver Falls was already twice as high as the county's rate, and the typical household made only .59 cents for every dollar earned by a county household. After recovering some ground during the 1990s, Beaver Falls struggled again following the 2000-01 recession and the Great Recession of 2009-10. By 2018, it's poverty rate was 2.5 times higher than the county's.

Of course, high concentrations of poverty in weakening neighborhoods have more than just an impact on market conditions. As emerging research is showing nationwide, some places offer much lower levels of economic mobility to children of low-income parents than others.

According to the Opportunity Atlas, children born to low-income parents in high-poverty Census Tracts of Beaver Falls and Alleghippa have the lowest levels of upward economic mobility in Beaver County, with far reduced earning potential as adults compared to similar children raised elsewhere in the county.

### MEDIAN INCOME AND POVERTY, 1990-2018



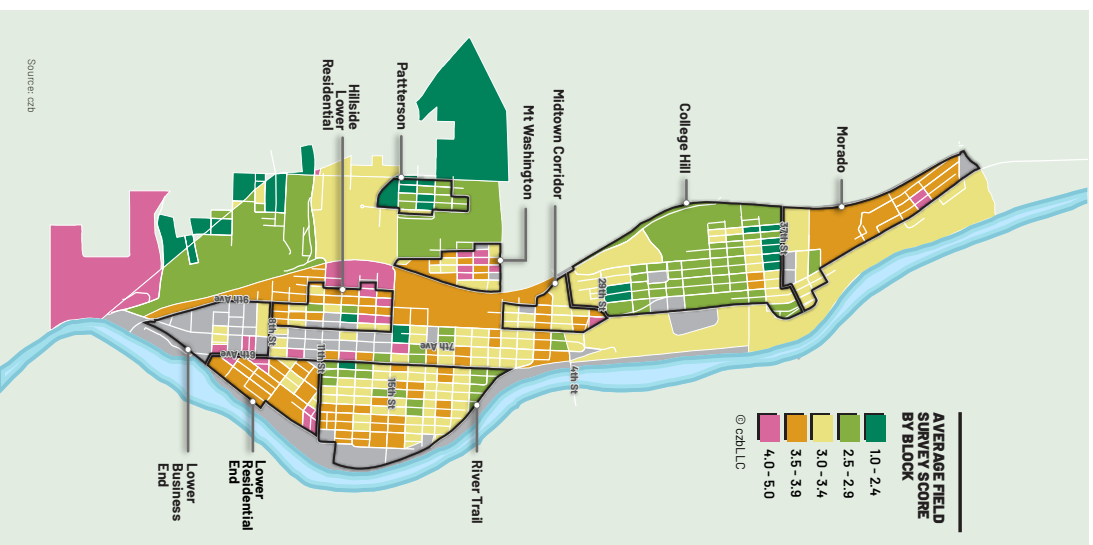
## WIDE VARIATIONS FROM BLOCK TO BLOCK

While data describing Beaver Falls as a whole clearly point to longstanding market weaknesses, the city's housing market is far from monolithic.

As a field survey by community volunteers in the spring of 2020 demonstrated, residential property conditions vary from neighborhood to neighborhood, and even from block to block within some neighborhoods. In College Hill and Patterson, for example, the average home on most blocks is in good condition. But in most other neighborhoods, conditions vary more significantly, and a higher share of blocks are dominated by homes exhibiting signs of distress.

Overall, the field survey found that just under 20% of residential properties in Beaver Falls are in excellent or good condition as of spring 2020. Conversely, 33% showed signs of moderate or severe distress. Importantly, 48% of all residential properties received an average score — indicating that they look neither distressed nor particularly cared for. Without intervention, a large share of these average properties could easily be at-risk of becoming distressed over the next few years.

FIELD SURVEY SCORE	CONDITION	RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY COUNT	% OF RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES
1	EXCELLENT	117	4%
2	GOOD	417	15%
3	AVERAGE	1,329	48%
4	MODERATE DISTRESS	713	28%
5	SEVERE DISTRESS	201	7%





## DIFFERENT MARKET ENVIRONMENTS WITH DISTINCT ISSUES TO ADDRESS

When the 2020 field survey of residential conditions is combined with property valuation data and owner-occupancy rates for single-family homes, a more complete picture of market conditions and comparative levels of demand comes into focus.

The adjoining market typology map shows how demand for housing is distributed at the block level in Beaver Falls—with levels of demand serving as a reflection of the extent to which households are competing for housing and choosing to invest in their properties. Where demand is stronger, the probability that a house will be purchased at a fair price by an owner capable of actively investing in the property—and willing to do so—is higher than in areas where demand is lower.

Each of these general market types comes with a distinct set of prevailing market conditions, along with issues to address:

### WHAT ARE THE KEY ISSUES TO ADDRESS IN THESE TYPES OF MARKET TYPE

**WELL ABOVE AVERAGE AND ABOVE AVERAGE**  
 Most homes are in visibly good condition; almost all single family homes are owner-occupied; values are near the top of the Beaver Falls market but are generally at or below the median for Beaver County.

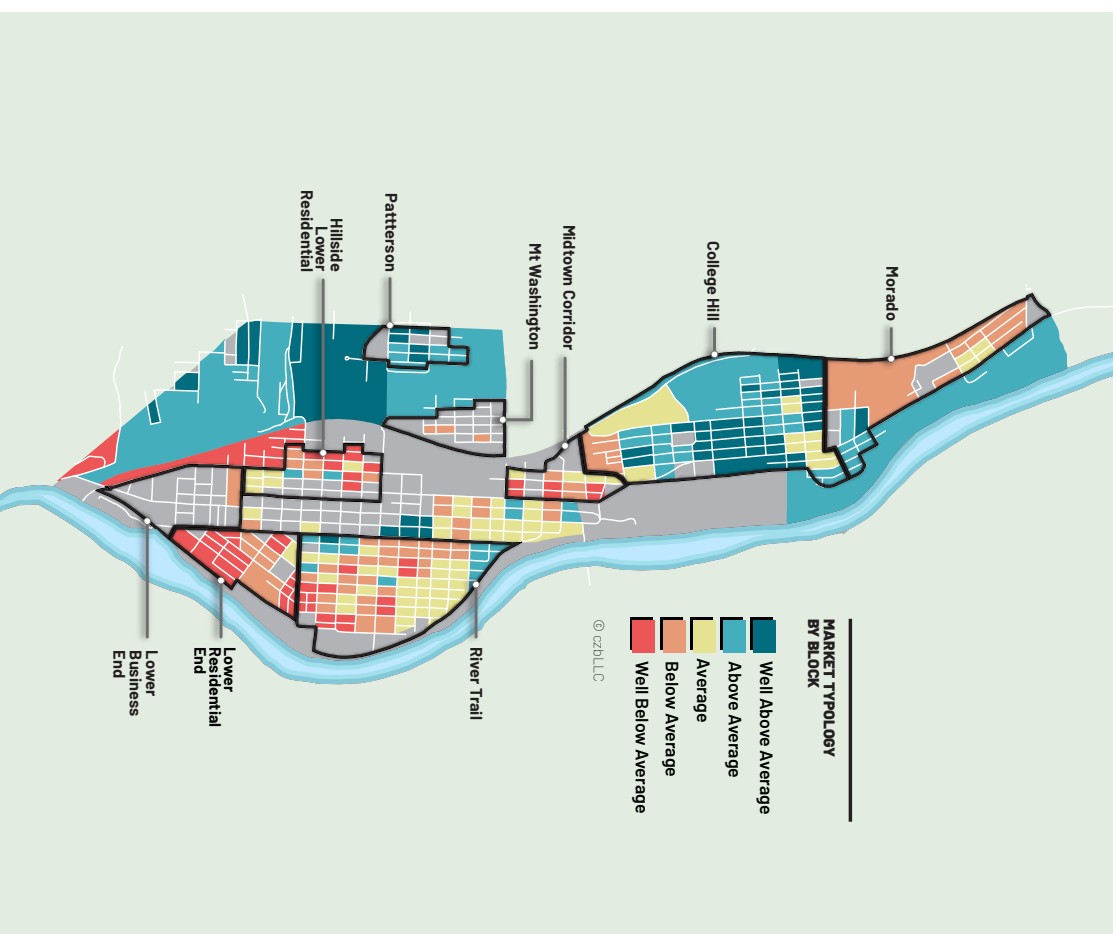
**WELL ABOVE AVERAGE AND ABOVE AVERAGE**  
 The relatively high levels of confidence and pride on these blocks could easily diminish if they haven't already (due to the proximity of distressed corridors and blocks. Maintaining the health of these blocks is vital to the City's tax base and ability to compete in the regional housing market.

**AVERAGE**  
 Homes exhibit a mixture of conditions from good to distressed, with a preponderance of homes in average condition; a trend towards investor-ownership of single-family homes is on the rise; values are average for Beaver Falls but well below the median value for Beaver County.

**AVERAGE**  
 Disinvestment and apathy are becoming key issues on these blocks; many of which have a few good or excellent properties mixed with declining homes.

**BELOW AVERAGE AND WELL BELOW AVERAGE**  
 Nearly every home is exhibiting signs of deferred maintenance from decades of underinvestment; pride of ownership or residency is absent; low valuations and conditions steer away potential owner-occupants and reflect high levels of negative equity (where the cost to improve the property exceeds the probable post-improvement value).

**BELOW AVERAGE AND WELL BELOW AVERAGE**  
 Concentrated poverty, low economic mobility, and poor physical conditions are the key issues on these blocks and have been for some time. Coordinated anti-poverty efforts and physical stabilization are necessary precursors to revitalization.










## WHAT DO THESE CONDITIONS AND TRENDS IMPLY ABOUT BEAVER FALLS' FUTURE IF THE COMMUNITY DOES NOTHING DIFFERENTLY? AND WHAT WOULD A NEW DIRECTION REQUIRE?

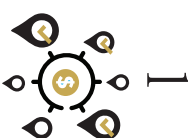
The population, socioeconomic, and housing trends illustrated here all point to the presence of a powerful decades-long cycle of disinvestment begetting further disinvestment. Disrupting this cycle through the usual means at the community's disposal has not worked, and the likelihood that this will suddenly change is extremely low.

Consider, for example, what the findings of the 2020 field survey of residential conditions imply about the costs over the next 10 years of resolving deferred maintenance throughout the market and maintaining positive maintenance and investment behaviors where they currently exist. The estimated price tag is \$108 million, or over \$10 million per year. Clearly, the scale of resources required to address these issues—with either public or private resources—is enormous. Existing approaches are ill-suited to addressing something on this scale and with the nuance required to both encourage investment in the best properties while curbing the decades of accumulated neglect that weigh down such a substantial share of Beaver Falls' residential stock.

### ESTIMATED COSTS THROUGH 2030 TO CATCH-UP ON DEFERRED MAINTENANCE AND KEEP-UP POSITIVE INVESTMENT BEHAVIORS

GOAL	NUMBER OF PROPERTIES IN 2020	AVERAGE COST PER PROPERTY TO ACHIEVE GOAL	AGGREGATE COST
 Excellent properties remain in excellent condition	177	\$10,000	\$1,770,000
 Good properties remain in good shape or become excellent	417	\$15,000	6,255,000
 Average properties remain average or become good; none slip into distress	1,329	\$30,000	\$39,870,000
 Moderately distressed properties are rehabilitated to become marketable	713	\$80,000	\$57,040,000
 Severely distressed properties are demolished	201	\$20,000	\$4,020,000
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$109,355,000</b>

Increasing the probability that Beaver Falls can successfully disrupt the cycle of disinvestment—especially in light of these resource and capacity constraints—will require close attention to the following:



**1 MAKING THE MOST OF SCARCE RESOURCES AND ALWAYS CONSIDERING OPPORTUNITY COSTS**  
A strategy for revitalization in Beaver Falls must be centered on realizing the greatest possible impact from the resources and energy expended, and on ensuring that every public or CDC-dollar expended will leverage investment and engagement from property owners and residents whose confidence in the community has been boosted. However, worthy a particular expenditure may seem, opportunity costs must always be considered carefully in an environment where there are 10 worthy projects for every one that can be funded.



**2 ACCURATE IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEMS**  
Making the most of scarce resources means intervening in a way that will achieve an expected result. Misdiagnosis of the problem or condition that is the basis for the intervention is the surest way to waste those scarce resources, including time.  
What is holding a block back? Is it owners who have the ability to invest in their properties but are unwilling given a lack of confidence? Is it owners who lack the financial capacity to make critical upgrades? Is it one or two landlords who know how to do just enough to stay in business and not an inch beyond that? Is it a combination of these factors? Applying the right interventions and getting the desired results begins with accurate diagnosis.



**3 STEERING CLEAR OF COMMON MISTAKES**  
Revitalization efforts across Pennsylvania and the country have for decades repeated the same mistakes, leading to inaccurate identification of problems that need solving—resulting in the deployment of resources of the wrong type or scale and the waste of scarce resources. The most common mistakes include:  
**Not making proper distinctions between need and demand:** Housing demand involves the presence of options and households actively exercising their options by choosing where to live and how to invest. Housing need describes an absence or lack of options on the part of a household with very limited financial resources. Revitalization of a market, by definition, is first and foremost about cultivating demand.  
**Seeing affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization work as one and the same:** When communities fail to make the distinction between need and demand, it is common to see affordable housing (a treatment of need) as a revitalization tool. While it has a role to play in creating a diverse and healthy housing market, there is often an expectation that improved affordable housing conditions will revitalize a market. This is never the case and risks hindering revitalization efforts in neighborhoods where poverty and need are already high.



# PRINCIPLES FOR A STRONGER BEAVER FALLS

**As the Beaver Falls Community Development Corporation begins to implement the revitalization strategy outlined in Part 3, it will be engaging in a number of side-by-side activities.**

It will begin identifying key physical assets in the recommended target area, such as noteworthy homes in excellent condition. It will be trying to connect resident leaders who may live six or eight blocks from one another and whose collective energies need to be harnessed. Having been able to secure acquisition and demolition monies from private foundations or through state grants, the CDC might be attempting to acquire an especially distressed property to alleviate neighbors of its negative impacts.

As the CDC and its partners are making progress on these and many other fronts, circumstances will change. A proud owner of a significant property might pass away without a will and the home might be stuck in probate. Interest or unemployment rates may change. A bank long assumed to have a presence in Beaver Falls might close a branch. One thing the CDC can absolutely count on is that conditions will be fluid.

An excellent example of what the CDC can expect is that the local, regional, and state economies will undergo significant stress in 2020-2021, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is likely that unemployment will remain high. It is likely that rent and mortgage payments will be delayed, leaving rental property owners and mortgagees having to cope with late or entirely delinquent payments. In response it is likely that Pennsylvania will establish an array of policies and programs aimed at helping local jurisdictions cope with reduced tax revenue and related problems.

The following principles are guidelines to stay the course while remaining flexible.



**INVEST IN STRENGTHS**



**INVEST PATIENTLY**



**STAY GEOGRAPHICALLY FOCUSED**

A seasoned community developer will know to be both on the lookout for and wary of state and federal programs shaped not according to Beaver Falls realities but an amalgam of the problems faced by other communities. Therefore, what works in Philadelphia may not work in Pittsburgh. What Altoona is struggling with may be different than what Somerset is trying to address. And what Beaver Falls is confronting may fit into such frameworks. But it might not.

For these reasons, the CDC is strongly encouraged to adhere to the set of guiding principles in this document. If, for example, a program materializes to address blight in Pennsylvania cities and boroughs with populations of less than 15,000 by financing demolition of distressed property as well as new, inflated affordable housing, the CDC will have to think about whether that is an approach consistent with the principles contained here. In another example, it is entirely plausible that a limited liability corporation based in Rochester, NY, owns two dozen homes in Beaver Falls and, upon learning that the CDC is trying to revitalize parts of Beaver Falls, will offer to sell them to the CDC at a great price. What if those properties are not in the recommended target area but seem like a wise acquisition? How will the CDC evaluate that situation?

The following principles are guidelines to help the staff and board and CDC members stay the course while remaining flexible. They are principles for strategy development and decision-making in Beaver Falls and relate to the conditions presented in Part 1, the realities of resource scarcity, and the community's commitment to breaking the grip of its soft-market cycle.



## INVEST IN STRENGTHS

It costs far less to upgrade an average home to an above-average condition than to take a distressed home and make it marketable. It takes far less to take a whole block of 20 average homes and give their owners a nudge so they truly “pop” and are inspiring than to take a block of severely distressed homes and turn them around. If the CDC has infinite resources, this point would be less relevant. But because the CDC will have limited dollars and won't have unlimited numbers of volunteers, it will have to make the most of the dollars it does have and the people it is working with. Thus, resource allocation invariably becomes a challenge of making hard tradeoff decisions. If the CDC could afford to turn around two blocks of 10th Avenue or four blocks of 9th or five blocks of 8th or six blocks of 6th, what should it do? Strengths come in many forms.

Property in good condition is certainly a strength. Attributes like favorable topography or views, as one finds up on 36th, 38th, and 39th east of 4th Avenue, are strengths. Architecturally significant homes like those on the 400 block of 11th Street are notable strengths, if not in their current condition than certainly at a future, potentially higher level of finish. Every effort must be made to identify existing strengths along with those that with a bit of polish and TLC might truly shine. These efforts have to be strategically linked so there are several assets near to one another, each exhibiting their strengths and creating a powerful sense of place and promise and confidence.

Important though property is, the success of this strategy hinges not on homes but on resident leadership. Every home that has a lawn has a lawn that needs mowing in June and raking in November. Every house with nice details needs the sidewalks swept and snow shoveled, the trash bins brought in on time, and the car neatly parked. Every front porch that has a nice railing needs nice mailboxes and house numbers and lights lit in the evening to let everyone know someone is home. Lawns don't mow or rake themselves, snow doesn't magically disappear on a cold day, trash sometimes gets missed in garbage collection and the cola and beer bottles on the sidewalk don't put themselves where they belong. Someone does these things and that someone is a resident leader, a champion who has the self-respect and fortitude to take care of their homes in ways that respect the community around them.

More vital than the best property or the largest grant the CDC might win are the residents of River Trail and the Lower End who have shown they are willing to step forward and lead by example. Nearly every block in the city has someone who has a Nittany Lion flag out front or a flowerpot. The work that the CDC must engage in is the work of connecting resident leadership to the positive sweep of pride. The job of the CDC is not to fix people's porches or to give people housing subsidies or to grant people money for new roofs. Instead, the job of the CDC is to link financial assistance for small but vital things like house numbers and flowers and porch lights and porch rails and new sidewalks to the shared, community building work of goal setting, standard setting, installation, and then long-term maintenance and care.

### DO

1. Prioritize champion homeowners and renters alike who are active in the ongoing caretaking of their yard and home. They are out. They are scraping and painting. Planting flowers. Mulching. Sweeping. They know their neighbors, love their city, and know what's going on.
2. Connect residents who are champions to one another.
3. Assist resident champions in working together on small projects such as fence or light porch repair, shrub removal, collection and distribution of mulch, or other such activities.
4. Buy and upgrade significant properties when resources allow. Hold steady until a future time when upgrading may be possible if that's not the case immediately.
5. Work hard to diversify the block and neighborhood economically. If there's a chance to acquire the home of a senior who has passed, upgrade it, and sell it to a strong middle-income buyer, that's a significant win.



**6.** Engage residents to decide what the new standards will be. The CDC should actively and energetically support resident leadership development through the process of facilitating neighbor-to-neighbor interactions that result in agreements about block and neighborhood norms. These can be everything from shared mailbox design to times when porch lights come on. Whatever it is, the job of the CDC is to engage residents to make decisions and take action.

## DON'T

**1.** Spend too much time or effort ridding a block of problem properties. All blocks have them. Because moving a negative is far more costly in time and money than leveraging pre-existing strengths, the "trick" is to tend to the fewest number of problems that need fixing so as to create a flywheel effect where the rest of the block takes over voluntarily and carries the effort forward. By all means acquire and demolish especially odious problems that are just eyesores. But always weigh the cost in time and money addressing fixes against what might have been possible if resources were spent alternatively. The same amount of sweat and tears spent to acquire 300 11th Street because it is an eyesore might be better spent on something else.

**2.** Undertake any effort or spend any money if the immediate output is not a growing sense of accomplishment or a new upgraded property on the market, or if the outcome is not a measurable increase in market value. The name of the game is to grow the desire of strong households to want to stay in or move to the neighborhood.

# INVEST PATIENTLY



Beaver Falls has been steadily losing population since the 1950s, first to the decline of steel, then to suburbanization, and then to a failure to adapt through right-sizing and energetic protection of key assets. Regardless of the rearview perspective, it took a long time for the population to fall by 50% and it will take time to right the ship.

No matter how well CDC applies these principles and implements the strategy, it will take time for confidence gained through the connection of strengths and the cultivation of neighborhood leaders to become strongly apparent in home prices, levels of investment by homeowners and landlords, and stabilization of municipal coffers. Some indications of improvement will move faster than others—the number of blocks with engaged volunteers, for example, may rise faster than assessed values or owner-occupancy rates—which will make it critical to identify and celebrate short-term wins while keeping the collective mindset on the long horizon.

Fortunately, extensive work has begun and Beaver Falls isn't starting from scratch. Some eyesore properties have been demolished. Geneva College is a great institutional partner with a keen eye on the future. Entrepreneurs are starting new businesses.

## DO

1. Buy and hold as many properties in strategic locations as resources allow.
2. Focus as much attention as possible on the management of space as anything else. A lot cleared of a derelict house can be an opportunity to set new standards by the installation of a garden. It can also be a problem if the lot becomes untended and overgrown.
3. Seek partners who are patient and understand that turning around a soft market is retail work in the deepest sense. A single acquisition from a reluctant seller can take years. Properly restoring a single home can take a year from acquisition to spec writing to permitting to rehabilitation and then occupancy. It can and often does take months to organize a block party, or to plan and execute the work of stringing outdoor lighting across a street so that a dozen neighbors can enjoy a shared summer dinner.

## DON'T

1. Prematurely expand work beyond the target area boundaries set in this strategy. With limited resources there's only so much the CDC, the city, and any partners can attain, even over many years. As it is, the target area in this strategy contains more than 200 properties and any one of them has an average minimum catch-up cost of about \$25,000. Every enlargement of the area needs to be understood as an impatient diffusion of impact unless it is accompanied by a parallel increase in resources.
2. Synonymize all ambitions. There are many in Beaver Falls who have affordable housing needs. Meeting those needs sometimes can, but rarely will, also improve a neighborhood. In strong markets, affordability gaps are a function mainly of high housing costs—or rising land values that outpace wages. In weak markets such as Beaver Falls, where land values are effectively at zero, affordability problems are a function of too little income. The problem to solve is income inadequacy. Lowering housing costs to meet purchasing limitations in weak markets is a recipe for further market decline. Likewise, addressing poverty is not the same as strengthening a neighborhood. If the ambition is to revitalize parts of Beaver Falls, that ambition needs to be oriented towards demand-inducing interventions. Other ambitions of equal or greater importance, such as helping the most vulnerable, must occur. But they need to occur alongside revitalization work. This is no mere distinction without a difference. If Beaver Falls gets this right, it may recover; if it gets this wrong and adds the wrong supply to a bottom-heavy market on behalf of the most vulnerable, Beaver Falls will simply not recover.



# STAY GEOGRAPHICALLY FOCUSED

Addressing all of the housing, poverty, weak market, Main Street, and other challenges is too big a job for the CDC. Doing any one of these on a citywide basis is as well. It is critical that the CDC and its partners adopt an area to work within, and be disciplined in keeping its dollars and time focused on positive, lasting change inside a finite area of a manageable size.

This will not be easy. There are a dozen places across Beaver Falls where important work can be done, is needed, and would benefit many. The Morado neighborhood north of College Hill is just as important as Hillside, the Lower End and College Hill to the future of the city. Each neighborhood in Beaver Falls, indeed each block, has a contribution to make to the future success of Beaver Falls.

The residents of College Hill have to maintain and even raise their high standards, as the future of Geneva College will depend heavily on the vibrancy of surrounding blocks and the impression they give to prospective students and faculty. Midtown residents are an important asset to Beaver Falls High School, which depends on strong residential blocks nearby. In every community there are sheet metal workers and cardiologists, plumbers and librarians, beer distributors and accountants. Every one of us at some point has been a renter, at some point single, and over the course of our lives will look for different kinds of housing to suit our family needs at the time. In different kinds of settings. What's vital is that all the neighborhoods of a city have some housing that many kinds of households can make work. The greater the ability for a city's neighborhoods to be attractive, the more people across the region will want to live there. When that happens, residential and commercial life become vibrant, the city's tax base becomes stable, and a city can provide the services some need.

With a sizable number of neighborhood challenges on the horizon—abandoned property, vacancies, empty lots, substantial levels of disorder, low levels of property upkeep across too large an area—the Beaver Falls Community Development Corporation isn't sufficiently large or well enough capitalized to work successfully across an area too large. And while Beaver Falls—unlike more distressed communities such as Alquippa or Flint—has excellent assets ready to be polished and leveraged, the diffused

location and under-maintained condition of Beaver Falls strengths also means the CDC cannot afford to spread its efforts too thinly. After examining the entire city, a confluence of factors argued in favor of focusing on several possible areas.

College Hill was evaluated for its importance to the city existentially. Beaver Falls cannot afford to lose College Hill, slowly much less at all. But it was determined that College Hill has enough residual strength, in housing stock quality, location, and in the presence of Geneva College to be counted on to continue as a strong neighborhood without an overt intervention. Main Street—7th Avenue—was evaluated for its importance as one of the city's vital organs. But 7th Avenue's future, it was determined, rests as much on the demographics and socio-economic portrait of the residential areas immediately west (along 8th Avenue) and east (along 6th and 5th) as on anything.

Consequently, parts of River Trail, the Lower End, and Hillside Lower all were determined, inside of the area bound more or less by 9th to 14th and 8th to 4th, to be vulnerable yet also empirically recoverable. Blocks further west than Cedar Alley or east than Grant Alley were indeed at risk, but not likely recoverable with the limited resources available to the CDC and its partners at this time. **Inside these boundaries, a concerted, sustained, all-out effort for no less than 10 years is likely to turn these blocks around.**

By turning these blocks from at risk to healthy over a 10-year period, it is estimated that positive spillover can be presumed to occur in the future outside the target area's boundaries. Because pressure to color outside the lines may be intense, it is imperative the CDC be disciplined for the long haul.

## DO

1. Be disciplined with the target area. Work inside to revitalize.
2. Find partners to stabilize outside.
3. Significantly address the edges so that entry into the target area communicates a special place, with significance.
4. Develop an interior code to guide infrastructure, so that sidewalks, street trees, street lighting, streets, and wayfinding all reinforce one another.
5. Ensure there are no actions undertaken too far from others.

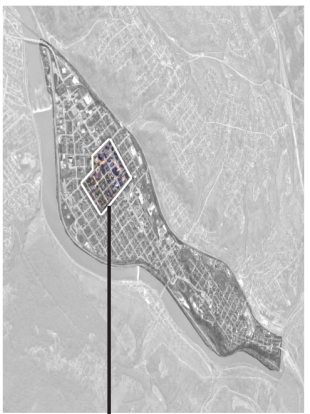
## DON'T

1. Expend resources outside the boundaries except to guide partners in their work and how their work would support work within the boundaries.
2. Work everywhere at once in the target area. Small though it is compared to the whole city, it is nonetheless quite large. At 52 acres, with more than 200 properties inside, there's enough work to keep a high performing community development corporation busy around the clock for two decades. If the CDC has the ability to positively impact just a few properties a year, they cannot be spread out. Grant Alley to Cedar Alley is a full third of a mile, and the target area perimeter is a bit more than a mile. Every positive intervention should be easy to see from the location of another.



# STRATEGY FOR A STRONGER BEAVER FALLS

This strategy translates the findings from Part 1 and the principles from Part 2 into an implementable set of actions and goals for the CDC, the City, and their partners within a well-defined target area at the core of Beaver Falls. This target area features a number of important assets and opportunities to leverage over the next decade.



## ASSETS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Stable Residential Blocks with Strong Potential

The residential blocks between 8th and 4th Avenues, from 11th to 14th Streets, offer an opportunity to create a distinctive residential district that builds on the architectural character and urban fabric of the building stock.

### Essential Community Landmarks

The Carnegie Library and other key legacy assets of Beaver Falls are located within the target area. They have the potential to stimulate interest and investment on adjacent blocks and to be strengthened by investments made around them.

### City Within a City

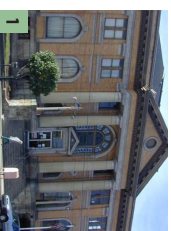
The target area is really a microcosm of Beaver Falls that can function as a city within a city. Its diverse components—residential, commercial, institutional—will require collaborations between and resources from the full range of Beaver Falls stakeholders.

### Downtown Beaver Falls

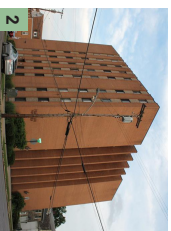
The core blocks of the 7th Avenue commercial district fall within the target area. Efforts to polish and revitalize this shared space will reinforce nearby residential blocks and make Beaver Falls more competitive for regional households and businesses.

### Visibility and Connectivity

As the traditional core of Beaver Falls, the target area is highly visible and well connected to the rest of the community. Improvements here will be noticed and can send ripples of confidence into neighborhoods across the city.



1 Carnegie Free Library of Beaver Falls



2 Franklin Towers



3 Harvest Cathedral



4 Lt. Calvin Smith Park

## CATEGORIES OF WORK WITHIN AND AROUND THE TARGET AREA

### TWO STRATEGIC ZONES OF WORK

The diverse land uses and property conditions within the target area will require the CDC to be strategic about what it does where. Specifically, two zones exist within the target area that call for very different tools and resources:

#### Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area

On these six blocks east of 6th Avenue, resident leadership development and physical improvements to private and public property have the potential to generate pride and stimulate investment by new or existing property owners.



#### Legacy Preservation Area

On blocks west of 8th Avenue, supporting the preservation of important community assets will accelerate investment in the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area and boost the broader community's self-image and the image it projects to the region.



### SUPPORTIVE CATEGORIES OF WORK

In addition to the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area and the Legacy Preservation Area, there are supportive categories of work that will be critical to the success of revitalization in the target area.

#### Investments in High-Quality Public Spaces

One category of work revolves around investment in high-quality public spaces to help raise standards and expectations that will filter down to the decisions made by individual property owners. Within the target area this should take two forms:

##### Beaver Falls Great Streets Initiative

starting with a focus on 7th Avenue between 10th and 13th Streets, 6th Avenue between 10th and 14th Streets, and 8th Avenue between 11th and 14th Streets.



##### Lt. Calvin Smith Park Beautification

to establish this triangular park as a stunning urban design asset and amenity.



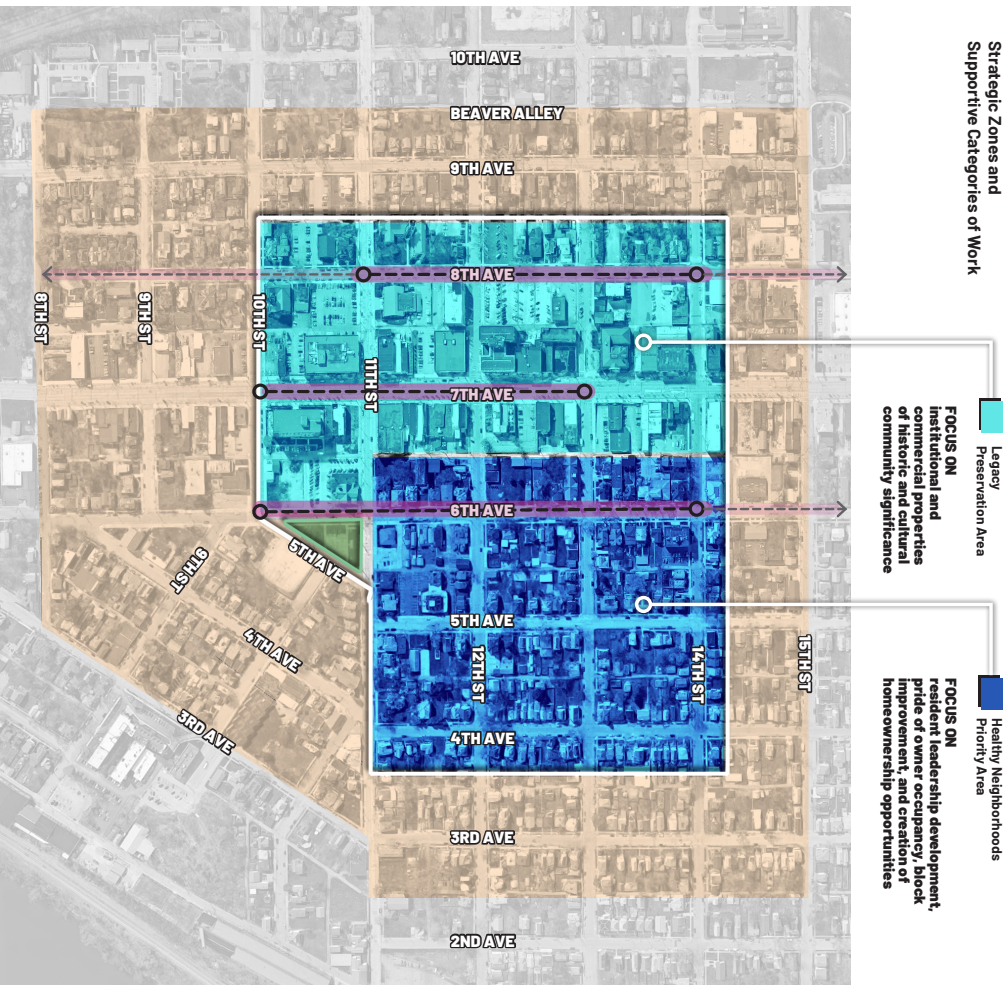
##### Stabilization Area

Another supportive category of work stems from recognition that residential property conditions are generally poor on blocks surrounding the target area. On these blocks, **stabilization of declining conditions** will accelerate the success of other strategies, especially within the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area.



Stabilization work can take a number of forms, including demolition of the most distressed properties, management of vacant parcels, securing abandoned buildings, and other steps that will create a sense that a floor has been established and decline has been halted.

### Strategic Zones and Supportive Categories of Work

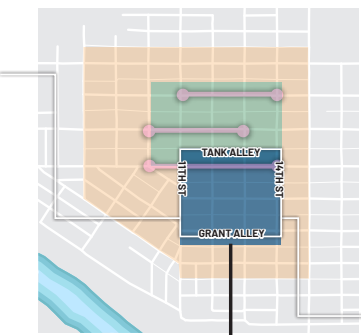




## HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS PRIORITY AREA

### MISSION

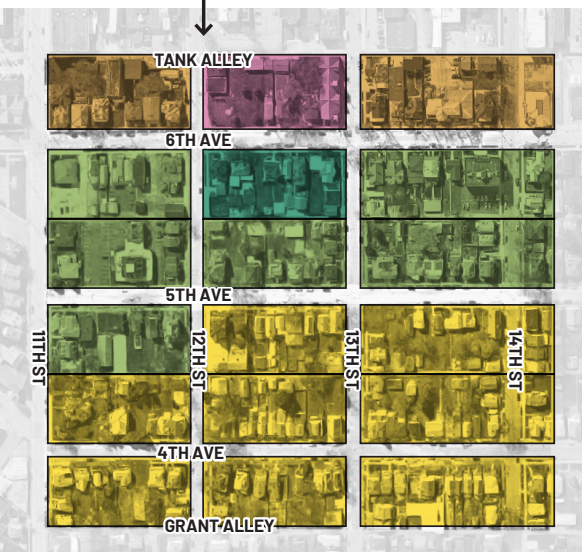
Focus on resident leadership development, pride of ownership, block improvements, and the creation of homeownership opportunities.



The **Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area** comprises 27 acres between Tank Alley to the west, Grant Alley to the east, 11th Street to the South and 14th Street to the north.

BY THE NUMBERS	
NUMBER OF SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES	139
OWNER-OCCUPANCY RATE	55%
AVERAGE ASSESSED VALUE OF SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES	\$31,055
AGGREGATE ASSESSED RESIDENTIAL VALUE	\$1,813,300
RATIO OF AVERAGE ASSESSED VALUE TO CITYWIDE AVERAGE	1.05

### AVERAGE FIELD SURVEY SCORE BY BLOCK



This area has 140 residential properties that were rated by the spring 2020 field survey. Compared to citywide conditions, this area had fewer properties in visibly distressed condition, but also fewer properties that were considered in excellent or good condition. Fully 60% of the properties were rated as 'average.'

140 residential properties				
FIELD SURVEY PARCEL	# OF PROPERTIES	SHARE OF PROPERTIES	CITYWIDE SHARE FOR COMPARISON	
1	3	2%	4%	Most Healthy
2	20	14%	15%	
3	84	60%	48%	
4	26	19%	26%	
5	7	5%	7%	Least Healthy

## WHO DOES WHAT?

### CDC

The CDC should occupy the lead coordinating role in the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area due to the nature of the work involved—especially the relationship-building with residents and support for homeownership. The core elements of this work include the following:

- Start by identifying owners who are already committed and invested—who are exercising leadership through actions that demonstrate neighborhoodness.

- Bring these neighborhood champions together as partners to upgrade already strong homes to an even higher standard, and to help owners of average homes bring their homes up a notch.

- Through porch treatments, landscaping, and a general focus on exterior improvements performed by neighbors working together—mobilized and assisted by the CDC—higher standards will get set and begin to take root.

- Through scheduled activities like right-of-way tree plantings, BBQs among neighbors, and seasonal activities from football Saturday celebrations, to Halloween, to Historic Home Tours during the Christmas holidays, the blocks comprising the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area will begin to proudly represent Beaver Falls at its best.

### CITY OF BEAVER FALLS

For the CDC's work to endure, the City of Beaver Falls must also play an important role in the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area on the following:

- Infrastructure upgrades to bring streets, curbs, sidewalks, and lighting into a state of repair that appropriately augments exterior improvements to private property.

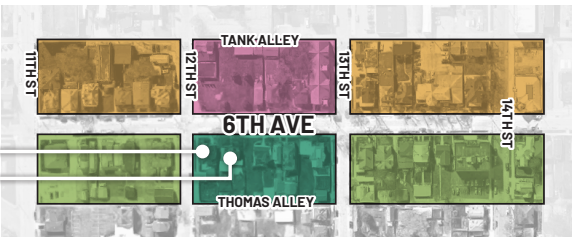
- Code enforcement to ensure that all properties adhere to minimum standards for safety and good repair, working with the CDC as necessary to provide compliance assistance.

## HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS PRIORITY AREA STREET-BY-STREET FOCUS



### 6TH AVE BETWEEN 11TH AND 14TH STREET

**46**  
RESIDENTIAL  
PROPERTIES  
TO ADDRESS



The east side is quite strong between 12th and 14th, so the priority should be to strengthen it further, starting initially between 12th and 14th where 6th Avenue is especially stable and there are a handful of outstanding homes with high levels of care shown.

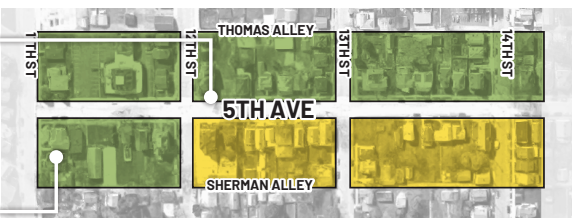
By 2030, there should be zero 5s and zero 4s on these blocks.

By 2030, there should be at least two "1" properties on each of these six blocks.



### 5TH AVE BETWEEN 11TH AND 14TH STREET

**41**  
RESIDENTIAL  
PROPERTIES  
TO ADDRESS



Each of the three blocks along 5th Avenue between 11th and 14th are in good condition and have the capacity to become among the best blocks in the city. Most homes were built between 1900-1920 and many were built very well and have retained a significant amount of architectural character and heritage. With emphasis on rehabilitating these into landmark homes, 5th Avenue can become a great corridor.

By 2030, there should be zero 5s and zero 4s on these blocks.

By 2030, there should be at least 3 "1" properties on each of these six blocks.



### 4TH AVE BETWEEN 11TH AND 14TH STREET

**51**  
RESIDENTIAL  
PROPERTIES  
TO ADDRESS



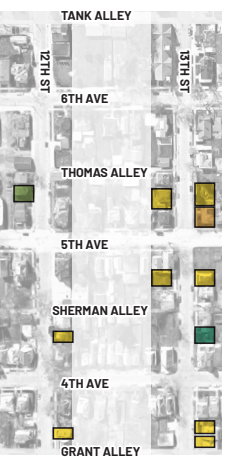
The 1100, 1200, and 1300 blocks of 4th Avenue are in rough shape. There are some bright spots, however. 404, 11th is an magnificent 1800s brick home in excellent condition. As such it is a powerful building block for stabilizing 4th Avenue. 1920s cottages at 1302 and 1304 also exhibit significant pride and are potential building blocks for strengthening 5th Avenue from 11th to 14th.

By 2030, there should be zero 5s and zero 4s on these blocks.

By 2030, there should be at least 3 "1" properties on each of these six blocks.



### POSITIVELY ADDRESSING THE FEW HOMES ON 12TH AND 13TH ST



### 11 RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES TO ADDRESS

Generally these were homes built to a very modest standard between 1910 and 1920. They were placed on modest lots leftover after developers parceled out more generously proportioned property along the Avenues.

These are potentially excellent starter homes once upgraded to a marketable standard but are challenged by unconventionally shallow lots.

The CDC should not view these as an immediate priority, but should endeavor to ensure each of the 11 homes achieve a solid "3" score within five years, and that as much landscaping as possible is upgraded as well.

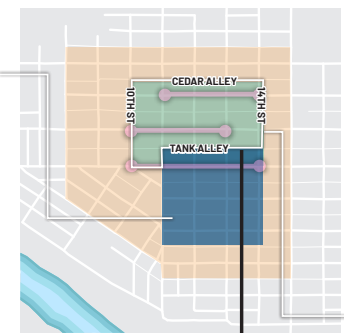


## LEGACY PRESERVATION AREA



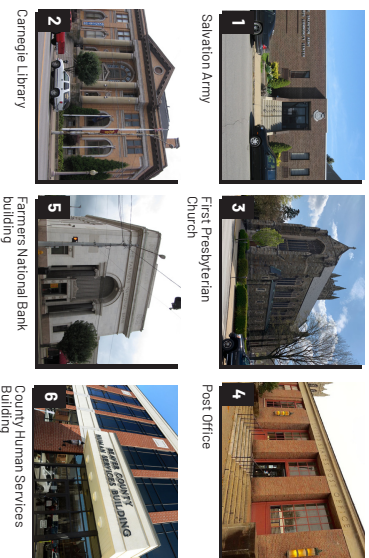
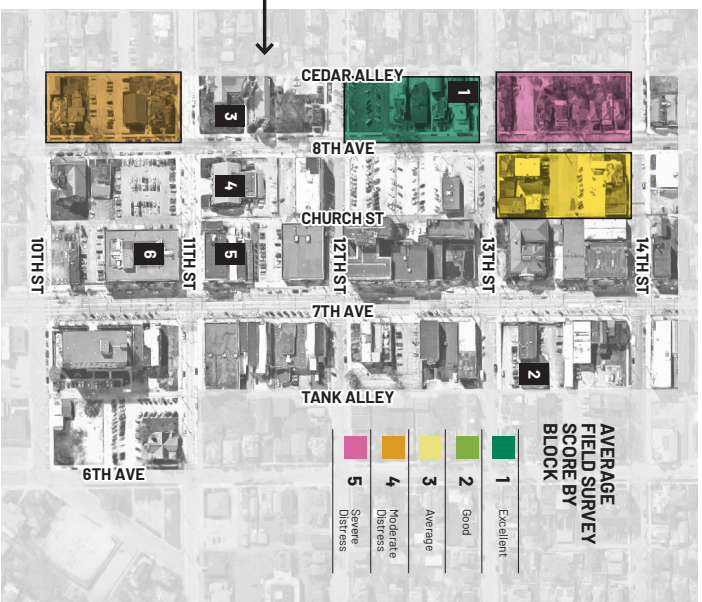
### MISSION

Focus on institutional and commercial properties of historic and cultural community significance



The **Legacy Preservation Area** comprises 25 acres between Cedar Alley to the west, Tank Alley to the east, 10th Street to the south, and 14th Street to the north. Whereas the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area is 95% residential, the Legacy Preservation Area is about 80% commercial and institutional, with considerable control over conditions in the area under the control of a handful of owners.

BY THE NUMBERS	
NUMBER OF COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES	39
AGGREGATE ASSESSED COMMERCIAL VALUE	\$6,760,000
SHARE OF CITYWIDE COMMERCIAL VALUE	24%



## WHO DOES WHAT?

### CDC AND CITY OF BEAVER FALLS

As in the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area, the **CDC should occupy the lead coordinating role** in the Legacy Preservation Area, but the **City of Beaver Falls and institutions in this area will play critical partnering roles**.

The core elements of work here are the following:

**Along 7th Avenue**, the critical stretch to get right is the two-block run from the intersection at 13th—anchored by the Carnegie Library—to the intersection at 11th, which is anchored by the County's Human Services building on the southwest corner and the old Farmers National Bank building. This is an essential, impression-setting area that needs to be elevated to a higher level of care and finish to boost the image of the target area and Beaver Falls as a whole.

**8th Avenue** consists of numerous large parcels, with several that are prominent corporate, nonprofit, ecumenical, or government institutions. As such, they have a special and outside role to play in exercising leadership in Beaver Falls and setting higher standards in the future.

The grandest and best maintained property in Beaver Falls is the First Presbyterian Church at the corner of 11th and 8th. It speaks to a previous era when it, the Farmers National Bank, and the Carnegie Library communicated confidence and pride to residents and the wider market passing through Beaver Falls. These, plus the Post Office, the Salvation Army, the County, and the Housing Authority altogether occupy parcels of more than 4 acres. These institutions exert a potentially massive amount of influence on the local market, and can be beacons of high standards.

## LEGACY PRESERVATION AREA STREET-BY-STREET FOCUS

**8TH AVE**  
BETWEEN 10TH  
AND 14TH STREET  
**34**  
PROPERTIES  
TO ADDRESS

There are 34 properties to be addressed along 8th Avenue between 10th and 14th Streets.

Many of the properties are really the backs of properties fronting 7th, like the Salvation Army Food Bank at Marginal Alley (Church Street) and 8th, or the parking lot behind the Broadhead building (Headstart). These are charming but vast expanses of real estate that undermine what 8th Avenue could be. The City must take the lead in partnering with all of the owners on 8th, especially on the east side, where parking lots and in-between spaces in their current condition weaken this part of Beaver Falls.

There are some significant residential properties along 8th now, and several that could be upgraded and become signature homes. But this will require that the commercial properties are likewise improved.

By 2030, there should be only 1s and 2s on these blocks.



### AVERAGE FIELD SURVEY SCORE BY BLOCK



## BEAVER FALLS GREAT STREETS INITIATIVE



In conjunction with property-focused work in the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area and the Legacy Preservation Area, a focus on high-quality infrastructure in specific rights-of-ways will be needed to further bolster the confidence of property owners and establish higher standards. For this work, the City of Beaver Falls must play the lead coordinating role with property owners, utility companies, and PennDOT.

What this means is attention to getting the basics right and doing them really well: healthy and well-trimmed trees in every available space, attractive lighting, good sidewalks, and well-maintained streets and curbs. This is an expensive proposition, but it demonstrates the type of commitment to place that will be needed to communicate pride and confidence to existing and potential property owners. This work should be focused, initially, on the three major north-south avenues that run through the target area. Improvements to these corridors will be highly visible to residents city-wide and the broader market, so their impact will by no means be limited to the surrounding blocks.

### 8TH AVENUE

Initial focus: With prominent legacy buildings located on 8th Avenue, the streetscape should express a complementary sense of institutional dignity.

Future steps: Extending streetscape upgrades northward and southward of the target area, with more of a residential character, will help connect surrounding parts of the city to the target area improvements.

### 7TH AVENUE

Focus: The entirety of the focus on 7th Avenue should be on getting the core section from 13th to 11th right—which means working with PennDOT to implement best practices for a state route through a downtown corridor.

### 6TH AVENUE

Initial focus: 6th Avenue is the city's grandest residential street, and it will be important to establish a great residential streetscape for 6th within the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area. Future steps: Extend the improvements northward from the target area to stimulate pride and investment in architecturally appealing homes that can be found along the full length of this corridor.



## Lt. CALVIN SMITH PARK BEAUTIFICATION

Given the prominent wedge-shaped parcel that it occupies at the corner of 6th Avenue and 11th Street, Lt. Calvin Smith Park has the potential to become a highly visible statement about rising community standards as well as serving as an amenity for residents of surrounding blocks.

Currently, the message that the park sends is neither strong nor negative. Rather, it feels like a half-forgotten space that isn't especially welcoming. An investment in this space to make it more visually attractive and inviting would strongly augment the Great Streets Initiative along 6th Avenue as well as the efforts to boost pride and confidence in the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area.

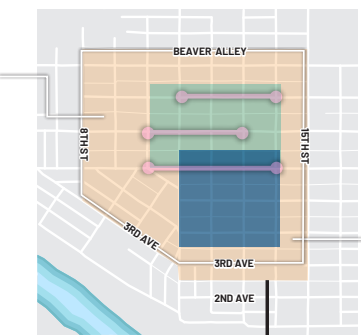


## STABILIZATION AREA



### MISSION

Focus on halting the slippage of property conditions on these blocks in order to instill a sense of stability and reinforce revitalization efforts in the target area.



The **Stabilization Area** is a ring-shaped 80-acre buffer surrounding the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area and the Legacy Preservation Area. It has approximately 400 residential properties that were rated during the spring 2020 field survey.

BY THE NUMBERS	
NUMBER OF SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES	<b>320</b>
OWNER-OCCUPANCY RATE	<b>50%</b>
AVERAGE ASSESSED VALUE OF SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES	<b>\$26,480</b>
AGGREGATE RESIDENTIAL VALUE	<b>\$3,146,350</b>
RATIO OF AVERAGE ASSESSED VALUE TO CITYWIDE AVERAGE	<b>0.89</b>

Compared to the city as a whole, the Stabilization Area has a much higher percentage of homes exhibiting distress—with 45% receiving a score of either 4 or 5. Fewer than 10% of homes currently exhibit signs of routine maintenance and pride of ownership. It is estimated that most of the 181 properties that were rated in average condition are rapidly on their way to becoming distressed—that means that upwards of 75% to 80% of homes could be visibly in decline within a few years without intervention.

### 400 residential properties

FIELD SURVEY SCORE BY PARCEL	# OF PROPERTIES	SHARE OF PROPERTIES	CITYWIDE SHARE FOR COMPARISON
1	4	1%	4%
2	28	7%	15%
3	178	47%	48%
4	130	35%	26%
5	35	9%	7%

Of the 320 single family homes within the Stabilization Area, only 50% are currently estimated to be owner-occupied, compared to the 62% owner-occupancy rate for single-family homes citywide.

## WHO DOES WHAT?

### CITY OF BEAVER FALLS

In general, the **City of Beaver Falls will be the lead entity** on work in the Stabilization Area, and this will mainly entail code enforcement, demolitions, and police work. The **CDC may be able to play a supporting role** if there is a good home someone wants to buy and it needs rehab work, or if there are vacant lot management opportunities or disposition opportunities.

The core elements of work in this area include the following:

- Stabilize unhealthy and unsafe conditions through code enforcement, an increased community police presence, and fire prevention services.

- Condemn and demolish the most deteriorated properties. An estimated 45 demolitions should occur by 2030—this will require a system for identifying the properties in greatest distress (and which pose the greatest challenge to the neighborhoods stabilization) and managing the condemnation process. Demolition funds—estimated to be \$20,000 each—need to be raised, which equates to a need for about \$90,000 per year for ten years.

- Once decrepit property moves through the magistrate and is demolished, sites should be conveyed to the CDC for on-going positive management or disposition, mainly in the form of green open space. In time, as the market recovers and returns, lots can be conveyed to responsible developers for infill activities.

- Presently there are 32 residential properties that were rated in excellent or good condition on the 2020 field survey, along with a few dozen additional properties rated in average condition that do not appear to be slipping. Protecting these properties and the investments of their owners is a priority. When determining where to address abject blight first, efforts should take into consideration whether a distressed property is surrounded by other properties in poor shape or is adjacent to a property that is being actively and conscientiously maintained.

- Trees need to be planted to promote the emergence of desirable residential streetscapes and improve quality of life.



# TARGET CONDITIONS FOR 2030

As the CDC, City of Beaver Falls, and their partners pursue the strategies outlined in this Part 3 and apply the principles established in Part 2, private property conditions will begin to evolve in ways that will both reinforce and be reinforced by the leadership development and confidence building efforts in the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area, the infrastructure and asset improvements in the Legacy Preservation Area, and the distress alleviation efforts in the Stabilization Area.

The following tables demonstrate this evolution and how condition assessments over the next 10 years can be used to evaluate progress. Between the Target Area and the Stabilization Area, a pace of around seven to eight demolitions per year, or 76 over 10 years, will put the CDC and the City on a solid course of removing the most blighted conditions at the City's core. At the same time, having a hand in approximately 50 home upgrades over the next 10 years will begin to set new standards and build confidence in new and existing property owners throughout the Target Area.

HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS PRIORITY AREA	LEGACY PRESERVATION AREA	2020		2030	
		# OF PROPERTIES	SHARE OF PROPERTIES	# OF PROPERTIES	SHARE OF PROPERTIES
FIELD SURVEY SCORE	1 Retain as 1s	3	2%	28	22%
	2 Upgrade to 1s	10	15%	23	18%
	Retain as 2s	13			
	3 Upgrade to 1s	10	55%	77	60%
	Upgrade to 2s	10			
	Retain as 3s	67			
	4 Upgrade to 1s	5	22%	0	0%
	Upgrade to 2s	0			
	Upgrade to 3s	10			
	Demolish	20			
	5 Demolish	9	6%	0	0%
<b>TOTAL PROPERTIES</b>		<b>157</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>2020-2030</b>		<b>TARGET PACE</b>			
Demolitions	29	3 per year			
Upgrades	45	4-5 per year			

STABILIZATION AREA	2020		2030		
	# OF PROPERTIES	SHARE OF PROPERTIES	# OF PROPERTIES	SHARE OF PROPERTIES	
FIELD SURVEY SCORE	1 Retain as 1s	4	1%	9	3%
	2 Upgrade to 1s	0	7%	28	9%
	Retain as 2s	28			
	3 Upgrade to 1s	0	47%	178	52%
	Upgrade to 2s	0			
	Retain as 3s	178			
	4 Upgrade to 1s	5	35%	115	36%
	Upgrade to 2s	0			
	Upgrade to 3s	0			
	Retain as 4s	115			
	Demolish	10			
	5 Demolish	35	9%	0	0%
<b>TOTAL PROPERTIES</b>		<b>375</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>2020-2030</b>		<b>TARGET PACE</b>			
Demolitions	45	5 per year			
Upgrades	5	1 every two years			

# TAKING THE NEXT STEPS

Like so many places in America eager for long-denied fiscal health, Beaver Falls wants to become the city it has the capacity to be. It also wants to know what's in the 'secret sauce' of successful communities, or what magic ingredient has been missing.



## IT TURNS OUT THAT THERE'S NO SINGLE X-FACTOR BEHIND SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION, BUT SEVERAL.



- First, a community champions who can imagine a different future and are ceaseless in their drive to mobilize those around them to first share and then work towards that vision.
- Second, a community must have a healthy respect for the value of looking in the mirror and soberly determining what hasn't worked in the past, what may not be working in the present, and being able to let go of old ways.
- Third, a community must have a plan to follow, but one that is flexible enough for a community's champions to interpret when conditions require a shift in strategy.
- And finally, in the face of challenges, a community can neither resort to fight or flight in response to anxiety, nor, like a deer in the headlights, allow itself to be paralyzed; it must put one community foot in front of the other.

## WHAT WILL APPEAL TO FAMILIES SO THEY CHOOSE TO LIVE IN BEAVER FALLS WHEN THEY CAN AFFORD TO MAKE THEIR HOME ELSEWHERE?



For Beaver Falls the work, bottled down to its essence, is to make the city a place where people choose to live. Not because it is the least costly option in the area, but because it is a truly desirable one. These are not one and the same. They are not even second cousins. Making Beaver Falls a truly desirable place for families to choose to stay in, and move to, is the work for which everyone in the city must get on the same page.

- The discovery that those already in Beaver Falls love their community, love their neighborhood, love their block, and love the city so much that they take good care of their homes. With such care they show they are good neighbors.
- The sense that conditions are stable if not getting better. That the city and the neighborhoods and the blocks and the homes are noticeably and sustainably improving.
- The belief, based on what they begin to see day in and day out, that they can invest themselves in Beaver Falls, and that it makes sense to do so. That it makes sense for them to invest their time and their energy and their money in a home in Beaver Falls.

## THE WORK AHEAD IS SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY

Transitioning from a city with too many blocks undermined by too much disorder, too much disinvestment, too much deferred maintenance, and too much abandonment—both of property and self-respect—is really hard work. The Strategy for a Stronger Beaver Falls is best described as a simple one to follow, but not an easy one.



### FIRST STEPS OUT OF THE GATE

#### STEP 1

**Begin by formalizing an implementation committee co-chaired by the CDC and City of Beaver Falls** to oversee detailed implementation planning and processes. Populate the implementation committee with known champions in Beaver Falls who have been exercising leadership in the community and, importantly, on their blocks through the conditions of their homes. Have the committee tear the strategy apart and begin working together to improve it from day one but figuring out where to start and with whom.

#### STEP 2

**Educate stakeholders across Beaver Falls.** Reach out to business owners, teachers, resident leaders, and advocates to talk through what the plan entails so there is a broad-based understanding of the need to focus on a target area and to strengthen the target area by stabilizing its perimeter.

#### STEP 3

**Task the implementation committee with developing short-term action plans.** Using the guidance offered in Part 3 of this report, drill down to who does what and when. Who, and with what resources, will focus on the Healthy Neighborhoods Priority Area? Who, and with what resources, will focus on the Legacy Preservation Area? Who will take the lead on Lt. Calvin Smith Park? Who will reach out to the Master Gardeners? Who will be writing and submitting grants to DCED? Who will be leading a group to speak with local foundations and corporations for support? Which parts of the Stabilization Area will be prioritized and who will lead this work?

#### STEP 4

**Design and schedule a coordinated evaluation process.** It is important to identify actions taken, progress made, barriers that need to be addressed, and adaptations that might be needed based on new conditions or resource opportunities. This is the proper domain of a partnership of the CDC and City Hall. Extensive coordination is key. The decision to upgrade a street in Beaver Falls is expensive. One linear mile of genuine upgrades can cost \$1 million or more, and so during the time needed to raise those funds, coordinating future infrastructure upgrades with resident leadership development and block improvement projects is vital.

There is one final, noteworthy anecdote. The guts of this strategy can be summed up as a change in behaviors. This comes neither easily nor quickly. It's a slow grind. It is *always* the case that taking a city's strength such as a proud homeowner—who always takes her leaves and always turns her porch light on in the evening and always has nice holiday decorations—and helping her become an even better neighbor will pay huge dividends, stretch the CDC's and the City's limited budgets the furthest, and have the greatest positive impact on others. Find them. Cultivate their continued love for Beaver Falls. Invest in them. More often than not, it is the littlest house on the most marginalized street where citizenship flourishes, being a good neighbor is important, and good neighbors are visible.



---

# BEAVER FALLS FORWARD

**A Revitalization Strategy for the  
Beaver Falls Community Development Corporation**

**MAY 2020**

