

A transformation for Leominster's beloved East Side



Rebuilding a neighborhood through partnerships

*Community Compact—City of Leominster
Mayor Dean Mazzarella, Mayor*



A report prepared for the Department of Housing and Community Development
July, 2017

History of Leominster's East Side

The East Side of Leominster has been lovingly called "French Hill" due to its high concentration of French-Canadian immigrants. If you grew up on French Hill, you undoubtedly had a host of stories to tell about friends and neighbors and your wonderful adventures. So in the early 1990's when crime began to make its way into Leominster's East Side neighborhood, the neighbors were concerned and wanted action from their government.

And the City took action. Mayor Dean Mazzarella developed a unique approach to complete neighborhood revitalization. He formed a distressed properties committee to take a hard look at specific properties in the neighborhood. The committee, encompassing all major departments including health, fire, police, department of public works, code enforcement, building, assessors, planning and the school department, got to work on ranking the most troubled properties and making immediate decisions on their fate. Those that were too far gone were and are being torn down and playgrounds and parks have been created to make sure neighborhood kids have a place to go. Community Development Block Grant funds are used for those buildings that are troubled but salvageable. The program is unique in that it combines data from such a cross-section of departments in a single place to target resources and funds. In 1998, the City applied for and received a COPS hiring grant to put more officers directly in the neighborhood. Still in place today, officers are specifically used for a "park and walk" program which directs officers to do community policing outside of their vehicles to get to know the neighbors and to have a visible, more approachable presence in targeted areas. Those same officers also complete after hours business checks in which police check area businesses throughout the night. The officers have become a vital part of the neighborhood.



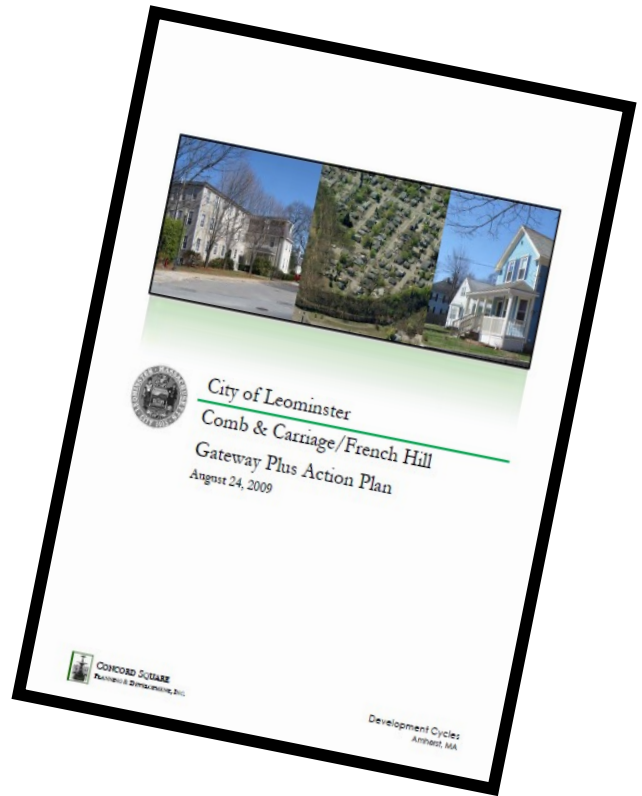
In 2009, the City started to see an uptick in drug activity on the East Side. We had a strong base of knowledge and a good system in place. We also knew how quickly a neighborhood can deteriorate. The City hired a crime analyst and started taking data from the various departments to put it into our GIS crime mapping software which was purchased with Economic Stimulus funds. We applied for and received another COPS hiring grant in 2010 to specifically address the danger of increased drug activity. The Police Department partnered with our Leominster chapter of Crimestoppers, the Massachusetts State Police, and the Worcester County District Attorney's office to share resources and information. Thanks to our strong system in place, we were more quickly able to eradicate the problem and the neighborhood remains on the path to revitalization.



Gateway Cities Action Plan

In 2008, the City applied for and received a technical assistance Gateway Action Grant that allowed the City to hire a consultant to develop an action plan for the East-side. Many of those goals and objectives have been accomplished including:

- Utilizing a Community Development Action grant and federal stimulus funds to improve the infrastructure around Whitney and Water Streets, spurring private development of 40 units of family housing and thousands of square feet of commercial/office space and eliminating blight.
- Directing federal Community Development Block funds to the East Side, HUD core area including using the HUD loan program for sidewalk improvements.
- Using state Gateway Park grant funds Creating a walkway along Monoosnoc Brook to help connect the downtown with the neighborhood through a multi-phase project.
- Adopting zoning changes that embrace commercial/residential development in a special Mechanic Street overlay district.
- Using local and state funds to create pocket parks and the redevelopment current recreation spaces.
- Improving access through additional sidewalks along Mechanic Street through a \$4,000,000 state project from Laurel Street to the Leominster Connector.



Community Compact: Mechanic & Laurel Street redevelopment

The City of Leominster selected the Housing and Economic Development – Preparing for Success Community Compact. So much ground work has been laid in on the East Side and this opportunity provided the City with a chance to specifically advance our goals for the Third Street/Mechanic Street area. In the past five years, through private investment, state funds were matched to provide 40 units of family housing at the historic Hartman Building and commercial/office development at the historic Whitney Building. The past two years have seen the following:

- The demolition of 10 Wells Court. This abandoned building was taken through the tax title process and the City paid \$100,000 for asbestos removal and demolition. This lot will now become part of our open space park between Laurel and Third Streets.
- A PARC grant in the amount of \$365,000.00 from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs paid for the purchase of three lots at 160 Mechanic Street from an estate. The grant also provided the funds for the redevelopment of the Third Street Playground. This grant provided 70% of the funding for both the playground and the purchase of land for the open space park. The City provided the funds to demolish the house on the lot and the 30% match.
- A \$4,000,000 MassDOT project was just completed that provided complete street scape for approximately one mile of Mechanic Street, the gateway to the city.
- A \$2,500,000 Massworks grant is currently underway to finish Mechanic Street street scape toward downtown, providing new lighting to the downtown area, and improving underground infrastructure. This project leverages private funds in the amount of \$11 million dollars with the renovation of 2 buildings and the building of two new buildings.

Thanks to the state Community Compact program, the city received \$25,000 to help pay for the cleanup of the key parcels of property at Laurel and Mechanic Streets as well as to pay for the design of the open space park through a consultant. Andrew Leonard, a successful landscape architect, has prepared the plan on the next page. The City had an opportunity to hold a public hearing right in the neighborhood about the redesign and the neighbors loved it. The City matched this grant with \$25,000 out of its general fund.

Next? The City has used the design to apply for a state PARC grant through the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs for final construction of the open space park.

10 Wells Court, now demolished



PARC grant public hearing



Playground at Third Street



Proposed Open Space Park



MECHANIC STREET PARK
LEOMINSTER, MASSACHUSETTS

Before and After

C DESIGN: FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

A. T. LEONARD & ASSOCIATES
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE PLANNING



EXISTING CONDITIONS AT MECHANIC STREET PARK GATEWAY



PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS AT MECHANIC STREET PARK GATEWAY



EXISTING CONDITIONS AT GATHERING / PLAY LAWN



PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS AT GATHERING / PLAY LAWN

PERSPECTIVES