

Technical Land Use Plan

Land Use Planning and Land Use Regulation

Chapter Contents

<i>Basic Growth Trends</i>	2
<i>Housing and Household Trends</i>	3
<i>Land Use Patterns</i>	4
<i>Land use and Tax</i>	6
<i>Land Use Plan</i>	8

Summary

This Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan explains the City's Policies for future growth and development in order to support the zoning ordinance and provide the planning commission with an informational benchmark for consideration of future rezoning requests.

Comprehensive planning in America was first employed as a means to study urban growth and development prior to the enactment of protective zoning and other development regulations. A Comprehensive Plan in Pennsylvania still must provide such rationalization. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code states that "*Municipal zoning, subdivision and land development regulations and capital improvement programs shall generally implement the municipal and multimunicipal comprehensive plan or, where none exists, the municipal statement of community development objectives.*"

It is further required under the code that the comprehensive plan address both land utilization in general and housing in particular. Plans must contain:

A plan for land use, which may include provisions for the amount, intensity, character and timing of land use proposed for residence, industry, business, agriculture,



When buildings are close to each other, protective zoning policies are crucial to preservations of secure property and whether revitalization or decline will occur.

major traffic and transit facilities, utilities, community facilities, public grounds, parks and recreation, preservation of prime agricultural lands, flood plains and other areas of special hazards and other similar uses.

A plan to meet the housing needs of present residents and of those individuals and families anticipated to reside in the municipality, which may include conservation of presently sound housing, rehabilitation of housing in declining neighborhoods and the accommodation of expected new

housing in different dwelling types and at appropriate densities for households of all income levels.

This chapter of the plan thus contains some actions and recommendations, but is primarily a means to support public policies that will protect residents and add value to private land. In areas of dense development, these policies are crucial fostering revitalization and preventing decline.

Basic Growth Issues

"The City has Struggled with a long term pattern of population loss."

Much of Pennsylvania planning and zoning case law has been based upon the idea that a municipality has an obligation to both provide for all reasonably anticipated land uses, and to provide room for their fair share of regional growth. This is summarized as the "path of growth" argument. It rests upon an assumption that if a region's population rises, no community can shut its door to growth. Thus, an essential part of land use planning is to try to estimate how much growth might be expected and how great an area of land would be necessary to accommo-

date the persons expected to reside in the community in the future. Beaver Falls actually has fewer total residents today than in 1950, or even 1920. The City has struggled with a long term pattern of population loss. Total population and change over each Census are depicted in Table 3-1 below. As the table illustrated, the City has 7,455 fewer residents today than in 1950. This is typical for older urban centers in the greater Beaver Valley area, as well as the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Area. However, there

are some signs of a potential reversal of Beaver Falls' demographic decline. Classic "Rust Belt" demographics are typically caused by younger people leaving town and older people dying. In such cases, the numbers of persons over 65 increases. Beaver Falls is actually getting younger, not older. From 2000 to 2010, the proportion of persons under the age of 65 decreased and all younger age cohorts increased (see Table 3-2 below). While this does not necessarily mean the City will grow, it will not decline as fast as many other similar cities.

Table 3-1 Population Change in Beaver Falls 1950-2010

Year	Total City Population	Percent Change in Population
1950	17,375	1.6%
1960	16,240	-6.5%
1970	14,635	-9.9%
1980	12,525	-14.4%
1990	10,687	-14.7%
2000	9,920	-7.2%
2010	8,987	-9.4%

Table Source: United States Census Bureau

Table 3-1 Population by Age: Beaver Falls 2000-2010

Age Cohort	2000	2010
Under 5	5.8%	6.4%
Ages 6-19	21.9%	20.8%
Ages 20-34	22.1%	23.8%
Ages 35-64	32.7%	34.0%
Age 65 and Over	17.5%	15.0%

Table Source: United States Census Bureau

Housing and Household Trends

The City has a fairly high proportion of single person households. This is reflected in part by the skewing effect of Geneva College students upon Census returns. Students are counted as the Census occurs in April, when the college is in session. These same students have a slight effect on the age of population discussed on the previous page.

While residents are young, the housing stock is old. The website www.city-data.com rates Beaver Falls as number 26 in the nations top 100 Cities with the oldest housing stock. Over 61



Only a few new homes have been built in the City in the past three decades.

percent of the Cities housing stock is pre-1940, and only 4 new homes are reported to have been built in the City since 1997 (Census Building Permits Records from City-Data.com)

The age of housing stock also tends to cause higher vacancy rates. As the table illustrates, nearly 16 percent of all housing units in the City are vacant.

Table 3-3 Household Statistics

Households	3,436
Family Households	1,980 (57.6%)
Single-Person Household	2,226 (35.7%)
Single-Person Household Over 65	466* (13.6%)
*Male 120, Female 346	
Average Household Size	2.28
Average Family Size	2.93
Source: 2010 Census	

Table 3-4 Housing Statistics

Housing	
Total Housing Units	4,085
Vacant Units	649 (15.9%)
Occupied Units	3,436
Owner-Occupied	1,670 (48.6%)
Renter-Occupied	1,766 (51.4%)
Source: 2010 Census	

“Nearly 16 percent of all housing units in the City are Vacant”

Land Use Patterns

Based upon demographic and housing trends, it is clearly established that the City of Beaver Falls is not within the path of growth. This negates a need to provide land resources for new housing at various densities. Housing affordability is not an issue for either renters of homebuyers, and the number of persons expected to reside in the city will likely stay about the same.

The City still must provide for all reasonably anticipated land uses within its limits. These include residential, commercial (offices and shops), Industrial uses, and Institutions (schools churches libraries). Planners attempt to determine current allocations by mapping these various development types and noting any vacant land resources as well. This allows for planning to begin to be tied to potential zoning district that will protect property by allowing security of use, while still allocating sufficient land for all development types. The results of this mapping are attached as the Existing land use Map (Map 3-1). The Map show that the City has a mix of most development types. There are no major tracts of vacant land remaining, with the exception of



Panorama of the City (credit: Wikimedia Commons)

some hillside areas that would be difficult to develop, and some brownfield areas. Brownfields, are former industrial properties that may have remains of older buildings, debris or contamination.

These land use patterns in Beaver Falls are a result of transportation, the economy, geography, and time.

It is obvious that the City's location along major rail lines, access to abundant water, and its proximity to major manufacturing centers brought about a period of economic prosperity, especially in manufacturing. The Babcock and Wilcox plant and such other fore-

runners as Republic Steel, as well as Ingram and Richardson generated employment and prosperity.

As Route 18, in past decades, had no interstate competition, the growth of business along this road was natural. And, of course, Geneva College did much to influence business development of the "College Hill" area.

Prior to the 1950s, the one-car family was the rule. However, with the advent of multi-car families, the Interstate System and other major roads, such as the Beaver Valley Expressway, much of the influences that shaped Beaver Falls decades ago have changed. Current

"The number of persons expected to reside in the city will likely stay about the same."

Land Use Patterns, continued

land use patterns are summarized below:

Industrial land and zoning remains clustered along railroad corridors, although many acres of such land are now unused.

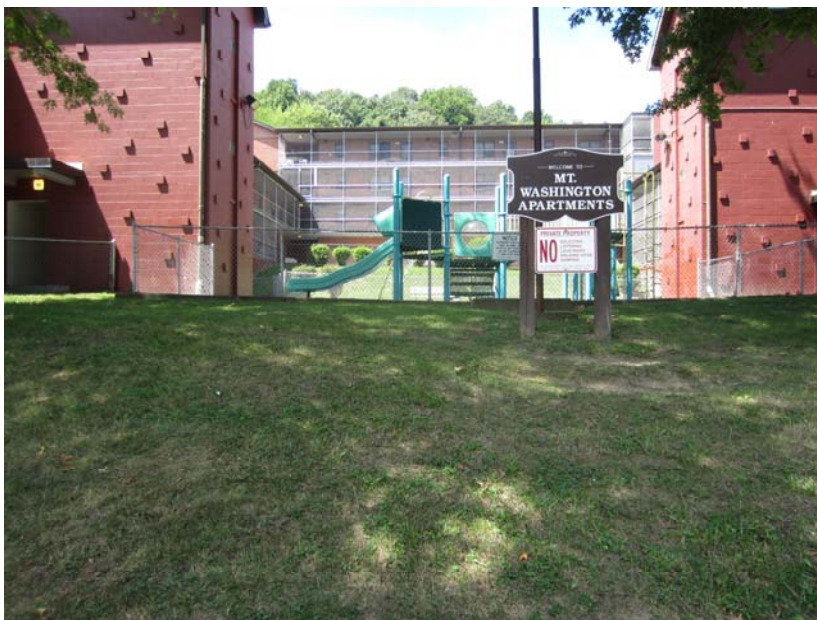
Land use along Route 18 still has numerous commercial structures, but, once more, a great many are vacant. The Downtown has many vacancies.

Residential development remains in the same pattern it has seen historically:

- College Hill is stable.
- Morado is dominated by public housing and contains generally stable homes/ neighborhoods.
- Mount Washington housing varies. Often units on steep slopes, once attractive when workers walked to the plant, have now lost their market, and this is reflected in conditions.
- Pleasantview seems more a suburban extension of Patterson Township.

Much of the steep slope land is wisely zoned R-3 Conservation, limiting development.

In the heart of the City, the public schools take up much of the land with downtown



When land use analysis is combined with Census data, the City has more than adequate land resources devoted to housing at various densities for its citizens.

commercial, residential, and industrial uses interspersed. Once again, housing quality varies. There are micro neighborhoods of stability; other times, just the opposite. This is influenced largely by condition and home-ownership patterns.

Land Use Changes: As the City has not conducted regular land use surveys, it is difficult to precisely determine how land use patterns of changed in recent decades. However, a number of patterns seem evident. Industrial land use has declined. In addition to the aforementioned brown-fields, there are several large

vacant industrial buildings. Residential decline is documented by housing counts conducted by the Census. Commercial Land Uses seem to be shifting, with modest growth in the northern portion of the City and decline in the downtown. The only form of land utilization that has grown has been institutional land use, such as the School District, churches, nonprofits, and Geneva College. Many institutions have bought homes or business and converted the land to parking lots or public use buildings. This has implication for both land use and public finance, as discussed on the following page.

"The only form of land utilization that has grown has been institutional land use, such as the School District, churches, nonprofits, and Geneva College. "

Land Use and Tax Base

Most Pennsylvania Municipalities finance government operation through a combination of real estate taxes and earned income tax. This means that the type of development can have a very direct effect on the ability of local government to provide public services. Starting in the 1990's, Penn State economist Tim Kelsey began to study the relationship between land use and tax base, versus the cost of municipal services. Kelsey tended to focus on rural and small towns, but his work has implications for small cities as well. In general, Kelsey found that most bedroom communities have a less favorable tax base to public service ratio than communities that have significant industrial or commercial tax base. In many cases, a median priced home requires as much in public services as it generates in taxes. Sometimes, large expensive homes, occupied by wealthy households can generate public revenue surpluses, but family apartments and mobilehome parks can require more in services than the taxes they pay. Normally, commercial or industrial land and buildings need fewer services than they pay in taxes, so in effect they subsidize residential services. A simple example of



Geneva College is comprised of large, well built, buildings, that add value to the built environment, and social life of the City, but are tax exempt.

this, is a large industrial building that pays school taxes, but never directly needs public school services.

The City of Beaver Falls government functions in the black without significant revenue from either property or earned income taxes. This is truly remarkable. While combined school and

City millage is high, it is remarkable that Earned Income and Property Taxes area relatively small proportion of City Revenues. The City is literally staying in the black only through its very diverse approach to local government financing. A summary table of Municipal Finance can be seen on the next page.

"The City of Beaver Falls government functions in the black without significant revenue from either property or earned income taxes. This is truly remarkable. "

Land Use and Tax Base, continued

City-Data.com reported ratios of per capita earned income are \$90.69 and per capita property Tax is only \$165.91. Yet the City managed to take in revenues of \$9,907,351 in 2010 while only spending \$9,428,135. While this represents some significant financial savvy on the part of City leadership, it is an unenviable and difficult situation. A number of factors combine to depress the two typical sources of municipal revenue.

Factors that depress Earned Income Tax Revenue:

In Pennsylvania, unearned

income, such as pensions, interest, and social security, is not taxed. Earned income tax only affects the working elderly.

The Geneva Student Population pays virtually no earned income tax.

Low median income is a factor

Factors that Depress Property Tax Revenue

Non taxable Property, such as Geneva College- assessed value on 19 parcels: \$7,128,400.00. The theoretical Taxes on Geneva College holdings; were it a private, for profit entity would amount to \$828,320 each year.

Deindustrialization-median Property Tax in 2009 was \$1,556.00. New large scale commercial and industrial buildings are a major support to the School District and City; there simply are not enough such buildings.

It can be fairly stated that tax exempt entities like Geneva College Churches and the School District are community assets. They are simply not municipal financial assets and force the City to seek nontraditional means to fund basic public services.

Table 3-4 Beaver Falls Municipal Finance Summary

Property Tax	\$1,928,705
Earned Income Tax	\$1,230,679
Realty Transfer	\$34,867
Local Services Tax	\$134,066
Per Capita	\$34,901
Business Gross Receipts Tax	\$167,231
Sewer and Solid Waste	\$3,716,028
Other Sources (parking, fines, intergovernmental revenue , etc.)	\$2,660,874

(Source: PA Department of Community and Economic Development. All Data for 2010)

Land Use Plan

For the purposes of Future Planning and Zoning, The City is divided into Nine planning areas. These are the basis upon which future zoning and related policy decisions will be made. This Section of the Plan text relates to **Map 3-2, Future Land Use Plan**. Land use policies are based upon three important key trends. This section also serves as a statement of Community Development Goals and Objectives for the purposes of Future Growth and Development Under the Pa Municipalities Planning Code.

Key Trend#1 Beaver Falls has seen consistent demographic decline that has affected many aspects of the City

While this represents a challenge on the surface, there is an advantage in terms of comprehensive planning and zoning. Analysis shows that the City is clearly not in the “path of growth”. This lessens the need for the city to plan adequate areas for future housing needs, and can potentially lessen the need to plan for all conceivable using in zoning.

Key Trend #2: In Spite of challenges, Beaver Falls had been able to maintain its municipal services and infrastructure.

Extensive analysis by the consultants show that the City did not allow its basic urban facilities and services to deteriorate. This is remarkable in that many cities without favorably growth and development are also contenting with crumbling infrastructure. Beaver Falls has done an exemplary job at maintaining emergency services, sewer, and street services with a very limited budget. For the purposes of the plan, this means that these areas will not need significant attention. It also means that recent fiscal policies have been effective.

Key Trend #3 This City needs to tackle the issue of “rightsizing” to ensure its land use patterns match demographic patterns.

Because of sound fiscal management, Beaver Falls may not need to downsize its community facilities and services, but trends do require revisiting land use assumptions that underlie the zoning ordinance. In simple terms, the city has more housing units and commercial buildings than it is likely to need. This does not mean that urban “renewal” clearance activities are needed on wide scale. It does mean that in some areas, removal of deteriorated va-

cant homes could be completed to offer neighbors larger lots. Zoning could also be revised in some areas to encourage re-use of existing buildings, or their removal and replacement for other uses. The City will use Three basic approaches to “rightsizing”:

1. Preserve and protect existing conditions: If the buildings and land uses are sound, policy change may not be necessary, with the exception of protection.

2. Create policies to encourage re-use of existing buildings: sometimes deterioration is caused by land use conflict, but existing buildings may be sound, or of historic value. Zoning can be crafted to encourage adaptive re-use, rather than demolition, where neighborhood context warrants it.

3. Create Policies to encourage demolition of buildings and replacement by new structures and new land uses: Zoning, tax, and other policies can encourage deteriorated buildings to be removed, small lots to be consolidated, and new development to locate on the site. This can prevent underutilization (which fosters blight) and improve tax base.

Because of sound fiscal management, Beaver Falls may not need to downsize its community facilities and services, but trends do require revisiting land use assumptions that underlie the zoning ordinance.

Planning For Conservation and Greenways

Were the City to be planned from scratch today, the most valuable areas would be the waterfront along the scenic Beaver River and the steep hillsides along the western border. Woodland and water add tremendously to the value of private land for residential purposes. By maintaining and improving conservation areas the city can offer these amenities as a means to enhance the value of residential neighborhoods. It is further good news that unlike developed recreation (such as sports fields and ice rinks), the improvement and stewardship of conservation lands is not expensive.

These areas include steep slopes that cannot be developed easily, and areas that are near the Beaver River that area part of a floodplain, so there is no imperative to develop. Some land is already owned by the City, or is part of the Rail Trail network. There is also some industrial development. Historically rail lines needed flat land near rivers, and industry needed the river to dump waste. The result is that natural resources that can add value to residential land were ignored. The River and hillside green areas need to be understood as resources that can help cre-



The City already has a gateway park that can offer an inviting front door to the Community.

ate the kind of neighborhoods people want to live in.

Policy Recommendations:

- Maintain City owned land for forestry, including sustainable harvest of timber
- Consider low maintenance conservation parks on hillsides
- Look at feasibility of formal pedestrian or vehicular rail crossing to gain recreational access to Beaver River.
- Create a gateway park at the northern most point of the City. Remove vegetation to open up

views to the Beaver River.

- Emphasize “safescaping” (landscaping and design to make areas safer) on the trail and in parks to minimize concerns about crime (natural surveillance, reinforce territory, ensure constant maintenance presence)
- Recommended Zoning Classification- Conservation/low density residential

A crucial change will be mindset. Residents must see local assets as worthy of conservation.

The Beauty of Beaver Falls: Areas Worth Conserving



While the rail line is a possible impediment to river access, it also enhances scenic vistas.



What if views like this became one of the first things that came to a visitor's mind about Beaver Falls?



Inexpensive and volunteer driven activities, such as brush clearing and clean up can make views like these something to attract new residents and investment.



Planning For Business Parks and Industry

Much of this area of the City was traditionally used for industrial production, due to its railroad access. While rail access is less important to industry today, this area has an advantage for heavy industry today. For the most part, existing industrial development in this area is isolated from residential neighborhoods. There is even potential for transportation access by heavy truck to avoid residential areas by connecting To Pa Route 251 outside the City.

Zoning policies for this area should emphasize heavy industrial zoning classification. Good potential future development for this area would include both light and heavy manufacturing, warehousing and truck terminals, and even quasi industrial use, such as natural gas processing. This area can also serve as an appropriate place for other high impact uses that might have a negative impact on other commercial uses.

There are both underutilized buildings and vacant underutilized parcels of land. Public policy for this area should emphasize redevelopment of these areas for new industrial uses that will create tax base surplus and jobs. Policies choices include:

- Road access improvements



A priority site for business park development.

- Tax abatements on improvements to real estate

- Brownfield redevelopment grants

Business Park

One tract of underutilized property is uniquely positioned to serve as a future site for business and industry. It is free of slope and other environmental limitations and has good access to both Pa. Route 251 and Pa. Route 18. If undertaken with good site planning, a business park on this site would have tax base and job benefits with few impacts upon the local street system.

One concern would be that there are nearby single family and multifamily residential dwellings that could be impacted by light noise and traffic. It is essential that if this site is developed as a business park buffering and screening should be employed to minimize off-site noise, light and traffic im-

pacts.

Policy Choices:

- Examine possibility of gaining site control through the City and or a local non-profit community development corporation.

- Examine use of tax abatements for a short period of time for beneficial new development.

- Explore cogeneration plant as central feature of a business park

Zoning Policies: The City should create a new business park zoning district that sets a high standards for screening and buffering around the perimeter of this priority site. This will help minimize land use conflict with neighboring residential uses. It will also ensure that the business attracted will be lower impact than many heavy industrial zoning classification uses.

Planning For Institutional and Related Developments

This land use designation encompasses both school district property and Geneva College. Both these entities provide essential services to the community. Geneva College brings in capital from outside the community that is spent in local businesses. Each also brings vitality to the community through the presence of young people.

Some Geneva graduates have even chosen to make lives in the City after graduation, and this trend should be encouraged in every way. However, neither entity contributes to the tax base necessary for the City to provide services. Both are also large scale developments that can overwhelm single family residential neighborhoods with traffic, light, and other impacts. Historically, Geneva College has expanded towards residential neighborhoods in the College Hill area, where conflicts with stable residential neighborhoods are likely. This plan recommends that Geneva College not expand further westward into the College Hill residential district. The wide expansion of Geneva College along the western side of Route 18 would also increase pedestrian/vehicular collision hazards. The expansion of tax ex-



By their nature, institutions generally maintain property in an exemplary manner and can be expected to develop responsible within their sphere. (photo credit Geneva College).

empt property is also a great concern for the City's continued financial sustainability. It is instead recommended that priority areas for college expansion be on the same side of Route 18 towards the north.

Within proper geographical limits, both Geneva College and the School district area benefits to the Community. They can also be expected to act as very responsible developers and stewards of the buildings and property that they own. The use of institutional educational zoning should be to prevent uncontrolled geographic expansion of tax exempt property while protecting institutional property from land use conflict by incom-

patible private development. The City should not create unnecessary barriers to flexible use of school or college facilities within these areas. Implementing regulations should allow great freedom for institutional development to meet their chartered purposes. Finally, it must be recognized that these institutions can actually create good business opportunities on neighboring properties.

Policy Choices:

Create and maintain Public institutional zoning district to control the growth of tax exempt property.

Allow both the College and School District great freedom to develop within designated geographic limits.

Planning For Institutional and Related Developments

Protect both the College and the School District properties from land use conflict.

Institutional Related Development

As previously mentioned, large scale institutions, such as Geneva College and the School District contribute vitality to the life of the City and have a tangible economic benefit, but this does not happen without a cost. Both entities require City services, but contribute no direct taxes. This future land use category is established to encourage off campus developments that add value to Geneva college while benefitting the City's tax base. High quality off campus development can help Geneva recruit students. This area is also a good candidate for revitalization as there are some underutilized buildings, but significant vehicular traffic. Part of this area is also a significant community crossroads as well, with good access to both residential neighborhoods and the downtown.

Policy Choices

- Encourage private sector residential and commercial development that serves Geneva College in this area. This might include newly



Good planning For institutional uses can create opportunities for enlargement of tax base by private businesses that serve institutions.

constructed off campus housing, and a carefully considered number of retail businesses.

- Expansion of institutional entities into this area would be preferable to other areas of the City, but should be allowed only with a careful analysis of cost benefit ratios. Loss of crucial property tax must be weighed against any benefits.
- Prioritize further development of community recreation resources in this area. If a new community swimming pool is financially feasible, this area should be explored as a site. This area would also be a possible candidate for a

partnership between Geneva College and the City to develop some sort of outdoor amphitheater or other outdoor public festival space.

Zoning Policies: The core area of Geneva College and the Beaver Falls School District should have the protection of Educational Institutional Zoning designation. Such zoning should give these entities some freedom within their geographic core from unnecessary regulatory barriers. Areas around the cores should emphasize private development, but maintain strict quality controls to protect the institutional setting and high quality of design.

Planning For Commercial and Retail Developments

The City needs to foster places for Commercial business to flourish as this type of tax base will also aid the School District and even help Geneva College recruit students. In a similar fashion to housing, there are many vacant and underutilized commercial structures in the City. Map 3-3 divides commercial development into Active business, vacant commercial buildings, and vacant commercial lots. This can assist in micro level planning around the three designated Commercial business areas (The Downtown, Retail Commercial Corridor and Heavy Commercial areas).

Downtown

This area has been the historic retail heart of the Community. It has increasing vacancies and deterioration of older buildings. In the midst of this there has been both individual revitalized buildings and new buildings developed with on lot parking and drive throughs (Fast food chains and a chain drug store). Unlike many downtowns, there are few buildings with architectural or historical significance (most significant buildings are owned by public or nonprofit entities, such as the City Hall and the Library). The downtown



The most vibrant block or downtown business are those near

is regarded with great affection by most residents, but is hampered by excessive length (too long to comfortably walk for the average shopper) and spot blight. This plan recommends a mixed approach to downtown development that is receptive to both people and cars. Chain businesses which have chosen to build in the downtown have created beneficial spillover to smaller businesses. This should be encouraged by policies that encourage redevelopment. Policy Choices:

- Allow tax abatement for newly constructed buildings.

- Use design regulations to ensure that new buildings can provide parking, but still fit among pedestrian oriented older buildings.
- Use the wide street and angle parking for community events (Car trunk yard sales)
- Create a combination farmers market/food retail incubator in the downtown
- Install outdoor business directories and wayfinding signage.

Planning For Commercial and Retail Developments, continued

- Find affordable vacant land within one block of PA 18 for outdoor amphitheater/ community festival space.

Retail Commercial Corridor

From a market standpoint, some of these areas have significant development potential for new retail, restaurants, and similar service business enterprises. They are all either adjacent to The Pa. Route 18 traffic corridor and/or a customer base in both residential neighborhoods and Geneva College. The main concern in these areas is that business development in these areas will harm downtown development opportunities. There is also a potential that excessive commercial development could create harm to neighboring residential uses. Careful land use policies can negate concerns in these areas. Policy options include:

- Allowing commercial uses, but using design regulations to minimize impacts. These regulations can ensure that retail development fits a residential context. A design manual can be adopted as an adjunct to zoning or land development regulations.

- Allow commercial uses, but do not subsidize them at the same priority as the Downtown.
- Allow commercial uses by a carefully regulated process that emphasizes reassembly of small lots into larger ones, and creation of buffers.
- Create limited commercial zoning designations that only allow small scale commercial developments.

Heavy Commercial/Light Industry

This area in the southern part of the City was once part of the downtown. While a few older downtown buildings remain, there are also many large scale commercial uses, such as a remodeling business, wholesaler, and auto and motorcycle dealers. This area provides the City with a significant tax base, yet requires little with respect to public services. There is no need to subsidize business in this area, but the City should not create excessive boundaries to entrepreneurs in this district.

Policy Choices

- Zoning in this area should encourage new construction, but not penalize retrofit of older

buildings.

- Both carefully defined light industry and large scale commercial development can be accommodated here.
- Downtown uses, such as restaurants, should not be encouraged here.
- Conversely, light industrial uses should not be permitted to front on the Seventh Avenue Corridor. While this is not a traditional downtown pedestrian area anymore, poor development on the main street could negatively impact the downtown.
- Wayfinding signage should direct patrons of heavy commercial businesses to the downtown.

Planning For Residential Development

Land use planning is largely about balance between various forms of development. Some communities need more areas of housing to meet the demands of regional growth or provide forms of housing not previously available. Other communities need commercial development to create a favorable tax base to public services ratio. Beaver Falls needs business development, but it must also maintain a suitable infrastructure to keep its residents. This can be a difficult task with limited budgets. Since each potential homebuyer is a potential “customer”, the task for a community is to learn what their customers want and provide those amenities in a cost effective manner.

Nationwide real estate preference surveys show that homebuyers look at the amenities of each individual home, its cost, and proximity to their place of employment. Crime statistics are of great importance as well. Homebuyers with school age children look at the School District. For community amenities, the following are the highest priority:

- 1.Highway access
- 2.Walking/jogging/biking trails



The City has a number of residential neighborhoods where public policy should revolve around protecting current development.

- 3.Sidewalks
- 4.Parkland
- 5.Playgrounds

These top five national homebuyer community amenities are all present in Beaver Falls. In addition, younger homebuyers are often less enamored with newer houses in the suburbs, and place higher premiums on unique community heritage and walkability.

In order to foster a rational public policy, that can take advantage of the City’s assets, residential planning areas are divided into areas for preservation and areas for revitalization.

Residential Preservation Areas

These areas tend to have lower rates of deterioration, though spot blight remains a challenge. What these neighborhoods need most is protection from land use conflict, whether by an industrial use or a large scale institution.

Policy Choices:

- Strong Protective Zoning. These areas should have some form of zoning that allow only the type of home predominate in the neighborhood, and clearly compatible uses, such as churches.

Planning For Residential Development

- Discourage conversion apartments, but allow newly construction apartments in select areas. The City could benefit from newly constructed apartments marketed towards young professionals or market rate senior citizens.
- Discourage or carefully regulate expansion of existing industrial uses.

Residential Revitalization Areas

This title does not mean that all neighborhoods in these areas are deteriorated. In fact, there are both some very well maintained homes, and pleasant tree lined streets in these areas, as depicted in the photograph on the right. . The policy designation is that these are areas where public investment in residential neighborhoods has the greatest potential.

Neighborhood deterioration in Beaver Falls has two main causes macroeconomic forces (the population loss and de-industrialization of Western Pennsylvania) and localized land use conflict (homes are often devalued when they are near high traffic streets, or industrial land uses). These areas are those where reinvestment for residential purposes



It should not be implied that all homes or streets in Residential Revitalization Areas are deteriorated. These areas contain some fine homes but may lie near potential land use conflicts or deteriorated areas.

should be prioritized.

Policy Choices:

- Development of a local housing rehabilitation program with grant funds
- Development of homeownership programs
- Demolition of vacant dilapidated structures followed by re-platting to give abutting homeowners larger lots
- Elm Street Grant Program to revitalize sidewalks and streets
- Tax abatement for residential investment

Zoning Policy:

These policies should be largely the same as Residen-

tial Protection Areas. Single family residential protective zoning can encourage homeownership and investment. Allowing older homes to be split into numerous apartments changes density patterns and is a detriment to neighborhood stability.

One particular challenge in a densely developed community such as Beaver falls is land use conflict between residential neighborhoods and commercial or industrial development. As mentioned on the previous page, Beaver Falls needs both residents and business development. Where possible buffering should be employed between businesses and homes.

“Allowing older homes to be split into numerous apartments changes density patterns and is a detriment to neighborhood stability”