



Beaver Falls Ecodistrict Vision Statements

August 2020 | Version 1.0



Beaver Falls

Beaver Falls is located along the Beaver River, 6 miles north of the confluence of the Beaver and Ohio Rivers. By the 20th century, Beaver Falls had become home to a variety of manufacturing companies, including companies that refined primary steel and created steel products. The City's location along the river and flat floodplain along the river banks provided easy means for rail and river transportation. The river also became essential for power generation as well as waste disposal. The establishment of Geneva College in 1880 gave the community a dual character as both a "mill town" and a "college town." The population in Beaver Falls peaked in 1950 at approximately 17,300 people. A decline in population began following World War II and accelerated in the 1980s as the steel industry and related industries started to collapse. Declining population led to an increase in vacant industrial buildings, empty homes, and closing businesses, leading to fiscal challenges for the City government.¹²

Today, the population of Beaver Falls is approximately 8,790 people. The median household income is about \$31,000 per year and 25% of all households are at or below the poverty level. While the city still suffers from a high vacancy rate, the population is getting younger. Even as rents rise, incomes are rising as well resulting in a lower rent burden.^{3,6}

Despite these challenges, a sophisticated collection of activity is occurring, both from the municipal government and from the private and nonprofit sectors. Numerous groups, often with overlapping membership, have been meeting for some time and have developed varied levels of plans and dreams for the city. From the municipal standpoint, there is substantial strength in Beaver Falls, even as the municipality recognizes the need to connect further to the wide array of community organizations in the city. Additionally, Beaver Falls has both an active Community Development Corporation and a Director of Community Development, both of which are contributing in distinct and complementary ways. This collaborative model, led by the Beaver Falls Community Development Corporation (BFCDC) and municipal government, has so far proven successful and has numerous ambitious projects planned for the future.⁷

Looking forward, the Beaver Falls Ecodistrict has established several priorities to focus on over the next three years, including:

1. formalizing the governance relationship between RiverWise and Beaver Falls stakeholders
2. community capacity building and growing support for the ecodistrict initiative
3. exploring and articulating the alignment between existing Beaver Falls activity and organizations and the ecodistrict initiative
4. engaging in ongoing storytelling about community initiatives
5. assisting with the development of the News Tribune Building and March Park, located on 13th Street next to the library

2020 Beaver Falls Snapshot^{3,4,5}

8,790
people

3,390
households

\$31,000
median household
income

27.3%
minority population

25%
of households at or
below the poverty
level

50%
homeownership

35
median age

359
businesses

¹ City of Beaver Falls Planning Commission, 2013.

² Downtown Redevelopment Services, 2018.

³ ESRI forecast for 2019, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010 Summary File 1.

⁴ ESRI, InfoGroup, 2019.

⁵ ESRI, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Surveys 2016 and 2017.

⁶ CZB, 2020.

⁷ RiverWise, 2018.



EQUITY

Beaver Falls is a proud community that is equitable and inclusive for all.



FOOD

Beaver Falls is a food-secure community where residents are connected to all aspects of the food system.



WATER

Beaver Falls is an activated community that protects, integrates, and celebrates water as an asset.



ENERGY

Beaver Falls is a resilient community that leverages energy independence to improve quality of life.



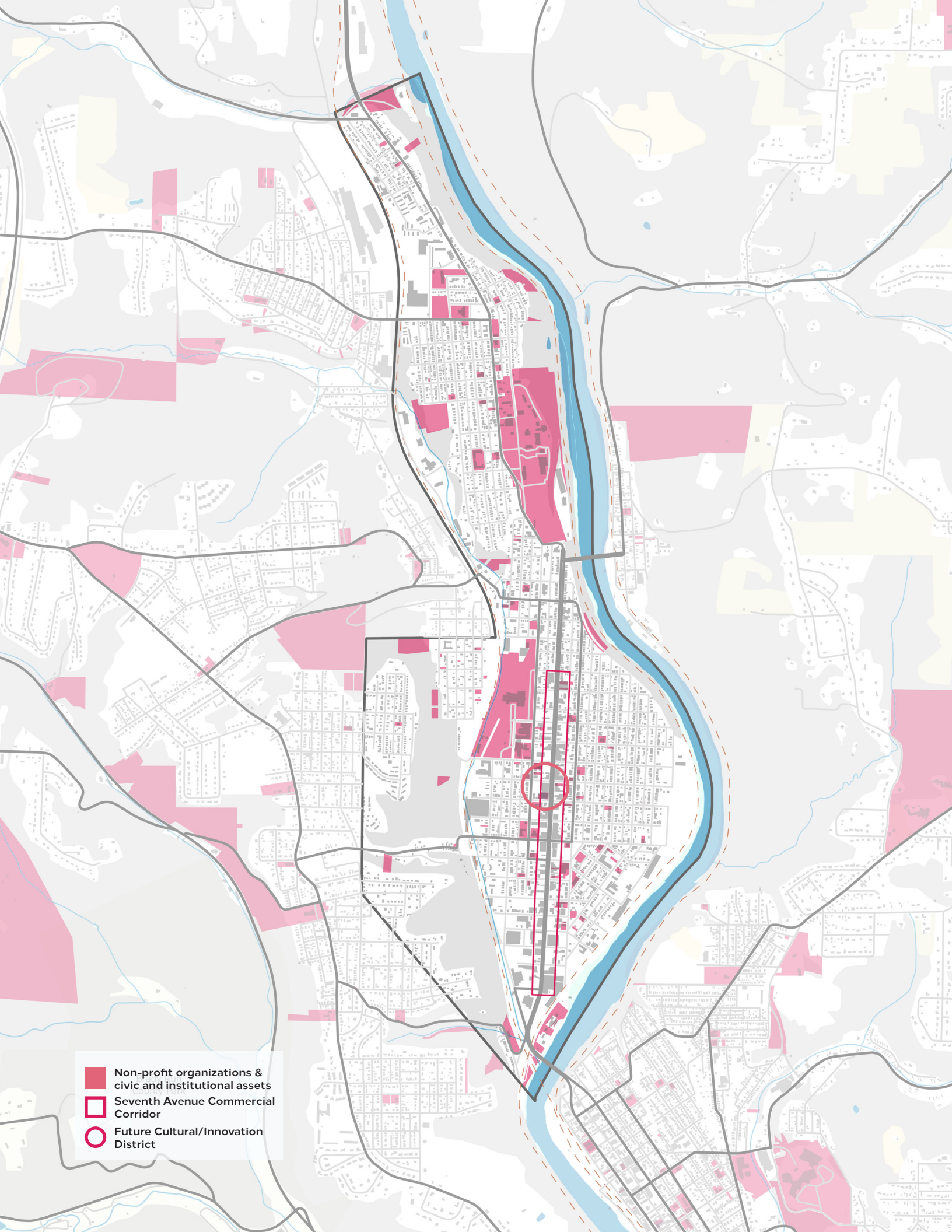
AIR

Beaver Falls is a guardian community that champions clean air in the city and the region.



MOBILITY

Beaver Falls is an active community with a diversity of accessible, safe, and affordable mobility options.



- Non-profit organizations & civic and institutional assets
- Seventh Avenue Commercial Corridor
- Future Cultural/Innovation District



BEAVER FALLS

EQUITY

Beaver Falls is a proud community that is equitable and inclusive for all.

ASSETS

Human service agencies and faith-based initiatives, including soup kitchens, after school tutoring, re-entry programs, drug and alcohol recovery, as well as numerous nonprofit organizations

With the strong leadership of the Beaver Falls CDC paired with an engaged community, Beaver Falls has a motivated group who wants to revitalize Beaver Falls

Strong educational assets, including the Carnegie Library (which acts as a community hub) and Geneva College

Strong and dedicated City staff and municipal services

Affordable real estate that is attractive to young and diverse families

A growing concern for vulnerable populations, spurring a new spirit of collaboration and activism

CHALLENGES

Feelings of hopelessness, internalization of negative stereotypes, and lack of neighborhood pride

Health insurance is one of the single largest expenses for residents

Significant poverty and unequal access to upward mobility

Limited tax base which puts Beaver Falls at a disadvantage when compared to other communities

PRIORITIES

Revitalize key historic properties, including the News Tribune Building and Portobello Building

Utilize the middle neighborhoods approach as a unique strategy for neighborhood revitalization

Develop a cultural/innovation district centered around the Carnegie Library and future Neighborhood North: Museum of Play. This multi-block corridor would also include the Penn State Innovation Hub and Portobello Cultural and Life Center

Initiate a community storytelling campaign

Strengthen existing and create new recreational assets, such as the wave pool and riverfront trail



Community weeping wall in Beaver Falls, created in response to the killing of George Floyd

Beaver Falls has already...

Convened local stakeholders to establish the **Beaver Falls Ecodistrict**

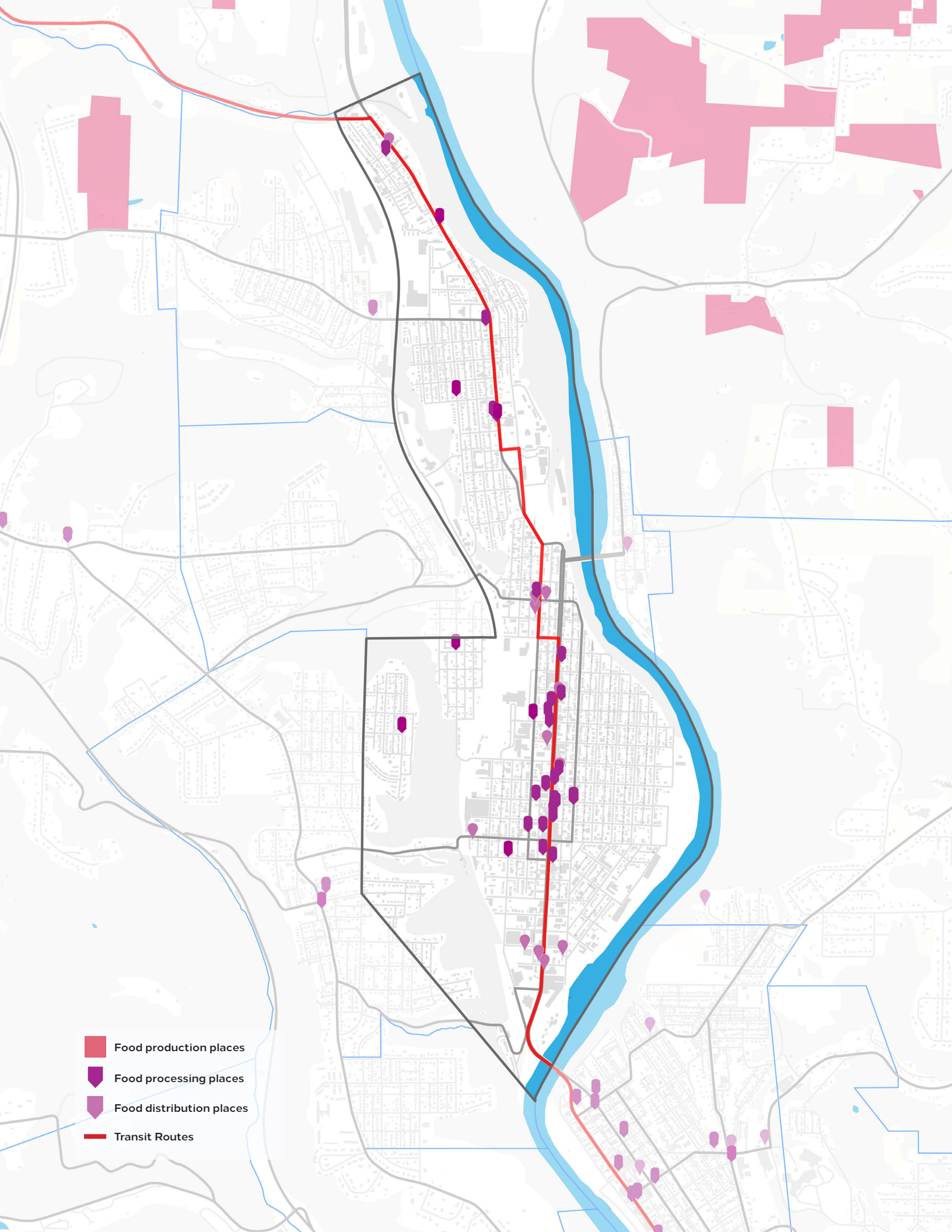
Received a **Neighborhood Assistance Program Grant** to assist with downtown revitalization

Been selected as a **Heart & Soul Community**, allowing further community organizing and storytelling

Pursued a **Home Rule Charter** to replace their status as a 3rd Class City

Established a **Community Arts Council, Neighborhood Watch, Business Council, and Downtown Beaver Falls Group**

Held numerous city wide **Block Parties**



- Food production places
- Food processing places
- Food distribution places
- Transit Routes



BEAVER FALLS

FOOD

Beaver Falls is a food-secure community where residents are connected to all aspects of the food system.

ASSETS

Existing food-related markets, such as Save-A-Lot, Giles Town & Country Market, and Beaver Supermarket

Existing food production and distribution sites, such as the Beaver Falls Community Garden and Beaver County Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association Farmers Market

Local organizations that provide free or reduced cost food to residents, such as the Salvation Army food bank

CHALLENGES

Lack of time, resources, and education related to cooking results in unhealthy eating habits

The Farmer's Market is underutilized

Limited public transportation to access existing food related businesses

PRIORITIES

Expand the existing community garden by converting underutilized land into gardens

Expand the existing farmers market into a public market with a food retail incubator, indoor food court, and outdoor vendor space

Create an expanded food to farm cooperative between area farmers and city consumers



Oram's Donuts, a long time staple of the food scene in Beaver Falls

Beaver Falls has already...

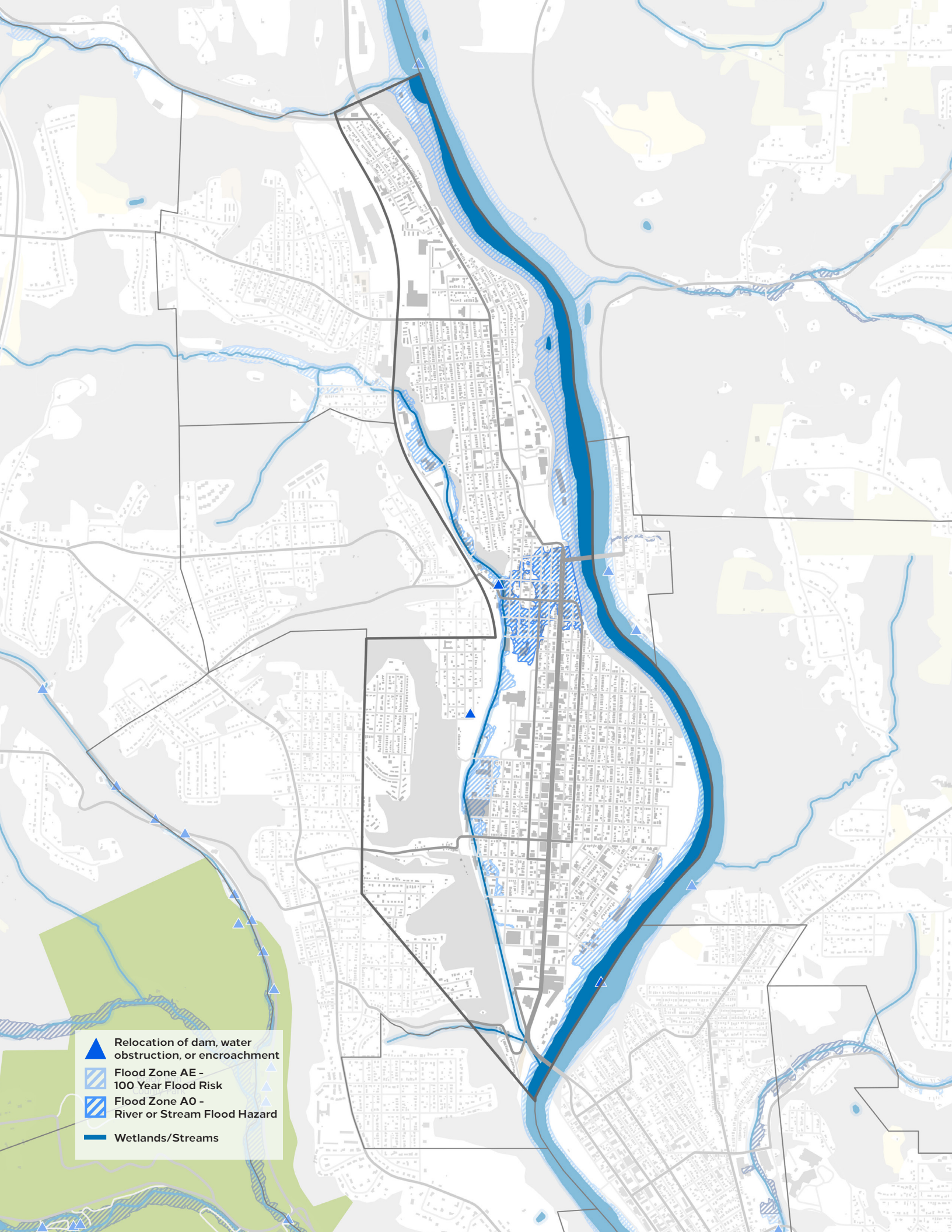
Created a **Community Gardening Tool Shed**

Engaged in **Regional Food Coalition conversations**

Established the **River Town Food Alliance**

Organized daily **soup kitchens**

Coordinated weekly **farmer's markets**



- ▲ Relocation of dam, water obstruction, or encroachment
- ▨ Flood Zone AE - 100 Year Flood Risk
- ▨ Flood Zone A0 - River or Stream Flood Hazard
- Wetlands/Streams



BEAVER FALLS

WATER

Beaver Falls is an activated community that protects, integrates, and celebrates water as an asset.

ASSETS

Adjacent access to the Beaver River

Beaver River at Canal Dam is an aquatic habitat of state significance (core habitat area) that supports a population of the dusky dance (a damselfly species of concern in PA)

Existing Beaver River Trail

The Beaver Falls Wave Pool

Homewood Falls (also referred to as Buttermilk Falls)

Considerable riverfront property exists in Beaver Falls, with easy access to the Ohio River

Geneva College students and faculty have spent time studying the local water supply

College Hill Spring

CHALLENGES

Lack of public riverfront access - the railroad acts as a barrier and there is a need for legal crossings

Inadequate capacity of the storm drains on Fourth Street just south of the Eastvale bridge occasionally results in flooding

Periodic flooding of Walnut Bottom Run causes backups in the storm sewer system

Lack of public confidence in the quality of the drinking water supply

No public boat launches in Beaver Falls

Public uncertainty about the health and safety of being in the Beaver River

PRIORITIES

Create public riverfront access, expand the Beaver River Trail, and create a riverfront park

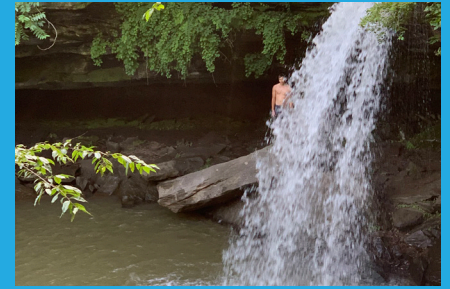
Create distributed stormwater management sites in key locations to increase infiltration and reduce the quantity of stormwater entering the sewer system, especially from upstream communities

Create water-related recreation opportunities, such as the Beaver River Trail and wave pool

Increase public understanding of water testing and quality

Engage in messaging about how best to access the beauty of the Beaver River

Coordinate with the railroads to reopen existing access points to the river



Homewood Falls, one of Beaver County's most beautiful sites; located just minutes north of Beaver Falls

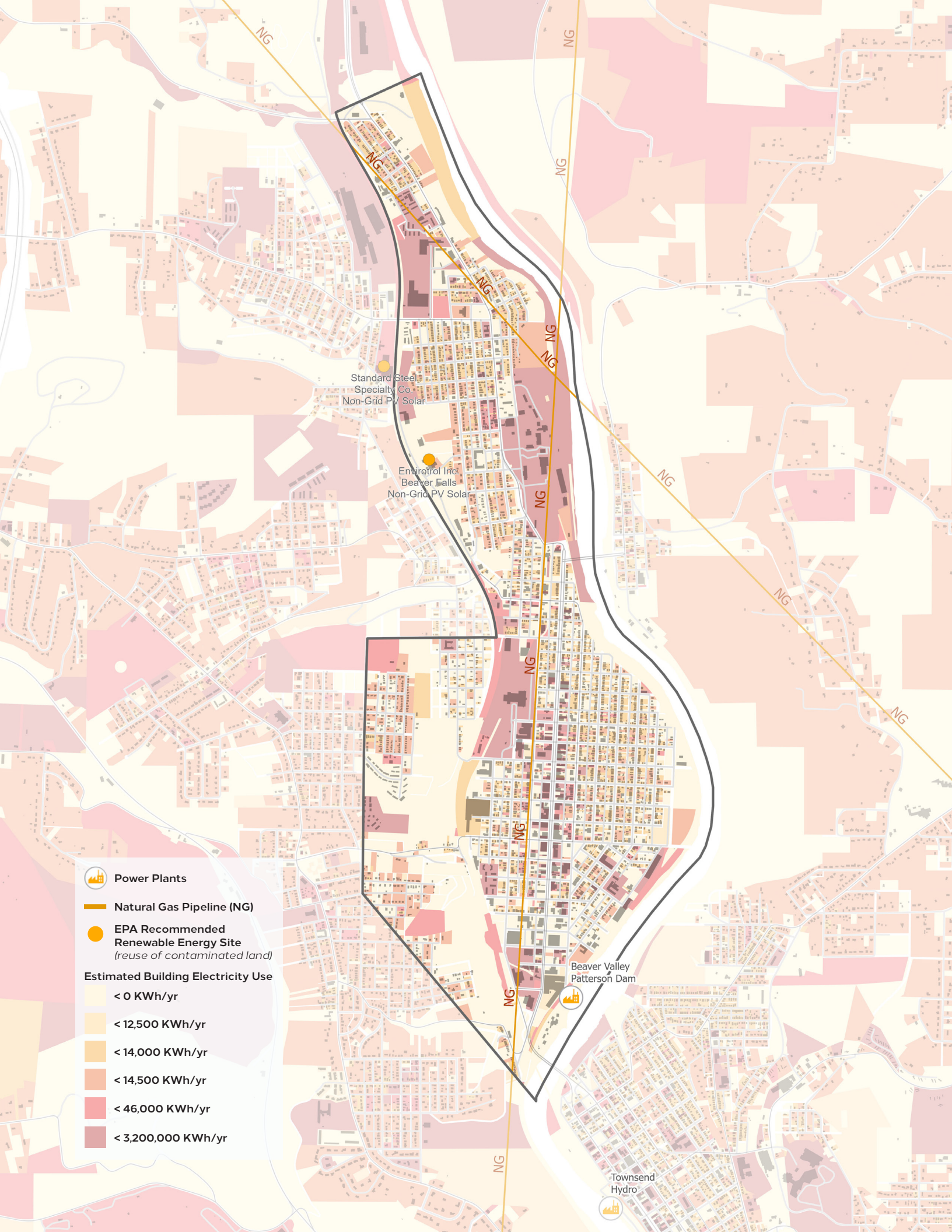
Beaver Falls has already...










Partially completed the **Beaver River Trail**

Raised considerable funding to renovate the **Beaver Falls Wave Pool**

Established the **Welcome Center at Homewood Falls**

Begun exploring how to create a network of **regional water quality monitors**



-  Power Plants
-  Natural Gas Pipeline (NG)
-  EPA Recommended Renewable Energy Site
(reuse of contaminated land)
- Estimated Building Electricity Use**
 -  < 0 KWh/yr
 -  < 12,500 KWh/yr
 -  < 14,000 KWh/yr
 -  < 14,500 KWh/yr
 -  < 46,000 KWh/yr
 -  < 3,200,000 KWh/yr

Standard Steel
Specialty Co.
Non-Grid PV Solar

Envirotrol Inc.
Beaver Falls
Non-Grid PV Solar

Beaver Valley
Patterson Dam

Townsend
Hydro



BEAVER FALLS

ENERGY

Beaver Falls is a resilient community that leverages energy independence to improve quality of life.

ASSETS

High potential for renewable energy, such as hydroelectricity along the falls, solar energy, wind energy, and potentially geothermal energy

Growing interest in solar energy among residents and select businesses

Numerous tall, flat-roofed buildings in the downtown corridor that are excellent candidates for solar installations

Opportunity for significant redevelopment using energy efficient building standards

CHALLENGES

Regional dependency on the fossil fuel industry for jobs, which discourages adoption of alternative energy solutions

Relatively old building stock that is in need of weatherization improvements

Currently lacks funding, knowledge, and community interest to invest in building weatherization improvements, electric vehicles, and renewable energy projects

PRIORITIES

Upgrade Seventh Avenue street lighting from high-pressure sodium lights to LEDs to reduce energy consumption, save money, and improve aesthetics

Rehabilitate existing housing while implementing weatherization improvements that will help residents save energy and reduce their utility bills

Investigate the potential of a waste to energy cogeneration plant and the potential of harnessing energy from the falls

Support alternative means of transportation with biking, pedestrian, public transportation, and electric vehicle infrastructure



Future home of The Portobello Cultural Center, the first certified green building in Beaver County; located on 7th Avenue in Beaver Falls













Beaver Falls has already...

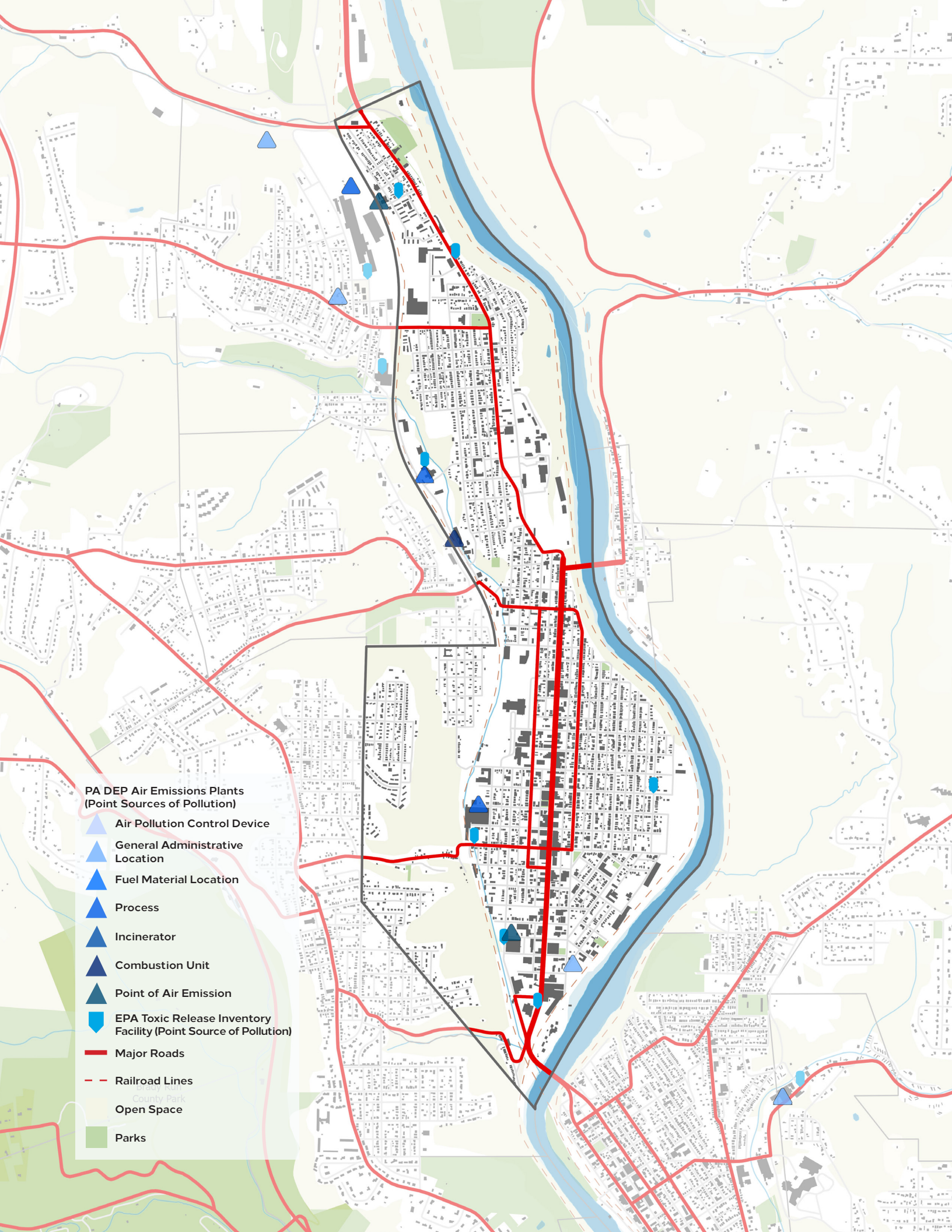
Implemented a **solar installation at the Felician Sisters building**

Promoted the **Beaver County Solar Co-op**

Attracted over \$3 million in funding for **The Portobello Cultural Life & Arts Center**, the first certified green building in Beaver County

**PA DEP Air Emissions Plants
(Point Sources of Pollution)**

-  Air Pollution Control Device
-  General Administrative Location
-  Fuel Material Location
-  Process
-  Incinerator
-  Combustion Unit
-  Point of Air Emission
-  EPA Toxic Release Inventory Facility (Point Source of Pollution)
-  Major Roads
-  Railroad Lines
-  Open Space
-  Parks





BEAVER FALLS

AIR

Beaver Falls is a guardian community that champions clean air in the city and the region.

ASSETS

Wooded hillsides, green spaces, and trees that sequester air pollution

Close proximity to regional parks, such as Brady's Run Park

Consistent street trees along Seventh Avenue sequester pollution and beautify the commercial corridor

Growing community concern to become educated about air quality and monitoring

CHALLENGES

Air quality is currently poor and is likely to become worse as the region reindustrializes

The majority of residents travel by car, which contributes to air pollution

Many residents continue to lack awareness or concern about issues related to air quality

PRIORITIES

Protect and enhance natural areas, including steep, undevelopable wooded hillsides, natural habitat areas, and natural habitat corridors

Complete the Beaver River Trail and develop a riverfront park

Construct an air quality monitoring station to measure air pollution and educate residents about air quality

Create a gateway park at the northernmost point of the city to sequester air pollution and beautify the entrance into Beaver Falls

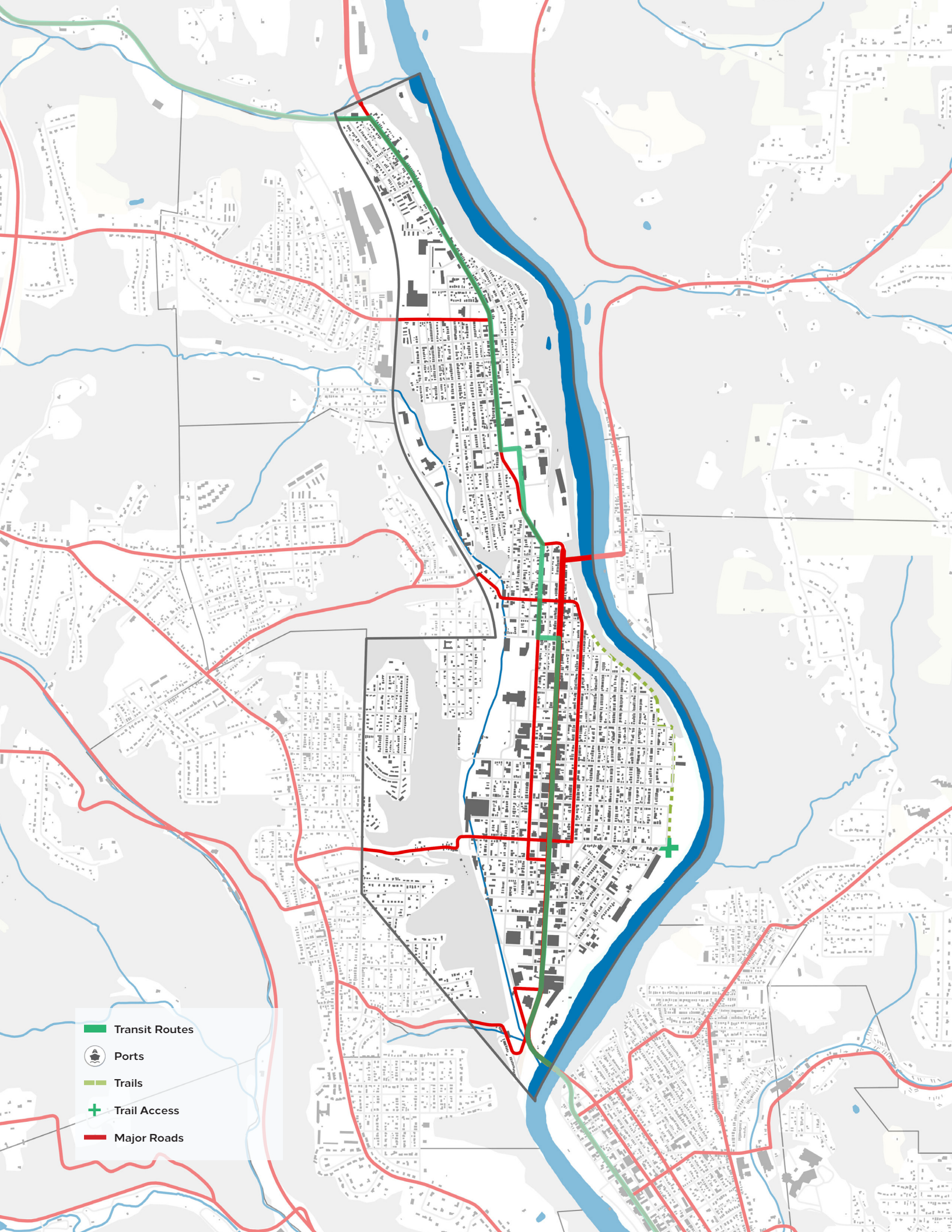







The Beaver Falls News Tribune Building, future site of air quality monitoring and Neighborhood North Children's Museum

Beaver Falls has already...

Committed to the **AirWise Air Quality Monitoring Coalition**

Initiated plans to have **air quality monitoring stations** on the rooftop of the News Tribune Building and Arts Center



-  Transit Routes
-  Ports
-  Trails
-  Trail Access
-  Major Roads



BEAVER FALLS

MOBILITY

Beaver Falls is an active community with a diversity of accessible, safe, and affordable mobility options.

ASSETS

Existing Beaver River Trail

Walkable community with amenities in close proximity to housing

Accessible road network for vehicles, including easy access to Routes 18, 551, 588, and 65, and close proximity to Routes 76 and 376

Bike lanes through the downtown commercial corridor

CHALLENGES

Deteriorating curbs in some areas do not properly channel stormwater and provide poor definition of the roadway for vehicles and pedestrians

Fading crosswalks make for unsafe conditions for pedestrians trying to cross the street

Deteriorating ADA ramps and sidewalks in some areas are in need of repairs

Limited connectivity between Geneva College's campus and downtown Beaver Falls

Inability to access the river due to the railroads

PRIORITIES

Implement complete streets improvements along Seventh Avenue, including widened sidewalks, bike lanes, bike racks, improved curbs and crosswalks, curb bump-outs, improved street furnishings, public art, and landscaping

Investigate the feasibility of a formal pedestrian or vehicular rail crossing to gain recreational access to the Beaver River

Expand the Beaver River Trail and connect it to the Ohio River Trail and other existing trails

Incentivize property owners and assist with sidewalk improvements throughout the city



Newly installed bike lines along 7th Avenue in Beaver Falls

Beaver Falls has already...

Implemented **diagonal, back-in parking** along **Seventh Avenue**

Created dedicated **bike lanes** through the downtown corridor

Begun **improving the southern end of Geneva College's campus**, making it more connected to downtown

Completed a portion of the **Beaver River Trail**



13th Street Park existing conditions

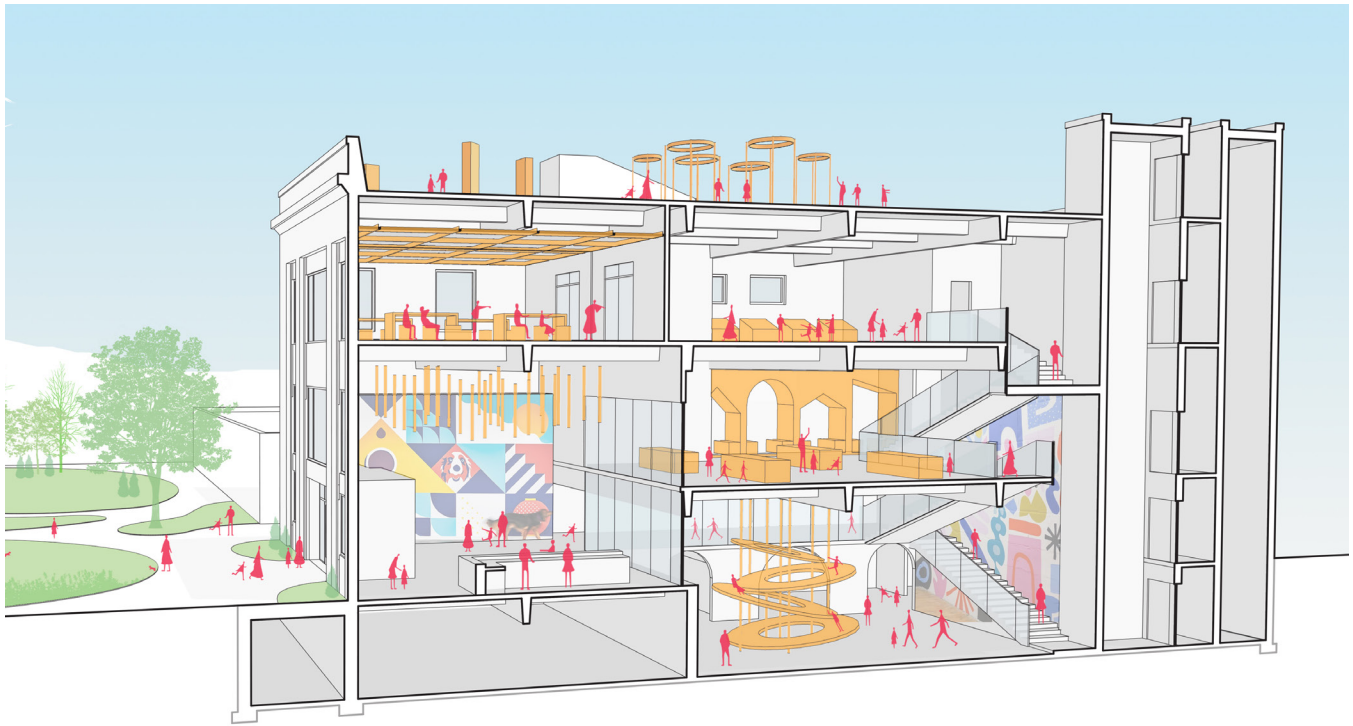


BEAVER FALLS CATALYTIC PROJECT

News Tribune Building & March Park

RiverWise and Beaver Falls stakeholders have selected a vacant building and adjacent park to act as a catalytic ecodistrict project that will be transformed into the Neighborhood North Museum of Play Children’s Museum.

In 2014, after sitting unoccupied for over three decades, the historic News Tribune Building was acquired by the Beaver Falls Community Development Corporation. Thanks to the visionary leadership and substantial investment of three local families, the roof of the structure was entirely replaced in 2017, stabilizing the building while also providing a beautiful rooftop view of the downtown and the hillside across the Beaver River. Engineering assessments of the facility have been conducted, gutting of the building has commenced, and a team of committed residents have been meeting in earnest throughout 2019 and 2020 to envision future uses for the space. The building is slated to house Neighborhood North: Museum of Play, a growing children’s museum being led by a committed group of local visionaries. The building provides endless opportunities to dream and enact principled, sustainable design that contributes richly to the life of the community. The News Tribune Building is located on 13th Street, adjacent to the Carnegie Free Library of Beaver Falls. In 2018, Beaver Falls City Council voted to discontinue use of 13th Street so that it could be turned into a park adjoining the library’s property. When completing their submissions, designers will be asked to consider both the News Tribune Building and March Park as their site of intervention. The intent is to create an integrated amenity, blurring the boundaries between indoor



Neighborhood North Museum of Play proposed conceptual design, image: evolveEA

and outdoor space, all the while utilizing sustainable building principles and green design throughout.

In May 2020, Beaver Falls engaged evolveEA to produce a conceptual design for the building. A conceptual design plan for the park was completed by Klavon Design Associates in May 2020. The News Tribune Building design incorporates elements to represent each of the six quality of life issue areas, including:

- Equity: children’s Museum
- Food: cafe and cooking classes
- Water: stormwater management practices
- Energy: green construction practices and demonstration projects and potential use of solar energy
- Air: green construction practices and demonstration projects, pollinator gardens, on site air quality monitoring, and considerable green space
- Mobility: location within a walkable community, along a major arterial road

Next, Beaver Falls will solicit for community feedback on the proposed design and will work to acquire funding to construct the Park and renovate the building.

Sources

Key findings from existing documents produced by Aliquippa, Beaver Falls, Monaca, Beaver County, and RiverWise were integrated into this report. This includes:

Aliquippa

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RiverWise

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