CITY OF OIL CITY THREE YEAR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

2024 Update

Public Comment will be accepted from July 11th through August 12th, 2024

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The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) requires a Community Development Plan accompany Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) applications. This requirement aims to ensure all Entitlement Communities, such as Oil City, design annual CDBG programs to meet community development needs based on a set of short-term (one year) and long-term (three years) objectives. Due to the nature of the grant, activities proposed in this Community Development Plan address the identified needs of low and moderate income (LMI) persons living in the City of Oil City.

INTRODUCTION

Situated along the Allegheny River in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains of Northwestern Pennsylvania, the picturesque City of Oil City is well known for its rich history in the petroleum industry. When the first successful oil well was drilled in nearby Titusville, Crawford County, several small towns came to life in Venango County. Oil City was one of these boomtowns, eventually hosting the headquarters for Pennzoil, Quaker State, and Wolf's Head motor oil companies, making it central to petroleum production in the nation. The city flourished in these times, measuring prosperity in barrels of crude oil. As resources dried up however, Oil City's prosperity plummeted, marking the beginning of rough economic times for the city and the region. Although the tourism industry based on Oil City's oil heritage plays a prominent role in the area, hard economic times, to some extent, have not left the region.

INCIDENCE AND CONCENTRATION OF LOW AND MODERATE INCOME PERSONS AND HOUSEHOLDS

In 2020, the American Community Survey (ACS) determined 2,576 people in a population of 9,408 were living below poverty in Oil City, PA (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a). This constitutes 27.4% of Oil City's population. The stagnation of Oil City's economy has resulted in this poverty which is above the state average of 23.3% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a). In 2017, for the very first time, the Oil City Area School District reported that 100% of their students are classified as economically disadvantaged, qualifying them to receive free or reduced-price breakfasts and lunches (Oil City Area School District, 2017). This data is still accurate today. The 2020 ACS data also shows the adjusted median household income in Oil City as \$41,591, which is 19% below the median for Venango County and 35% below the median for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b). Table 1 below shows the configuration of the City's Census Tracts and Block Groups from the 2020 Census. Of the eleven Census Tract Block Groups in Oil City, five are currently identified as low to moderate income areas (i.e., over 50% LMI; Table 1).

Table 1. Data from the 2016 - 2020 ACS indicate the percent of low to moderate income persons in Oil City, PA's entire Census Tract Block Groups. Gray coloration indicates a census tract block group that is LMI.

Census Tract	Block Group	2016-2020 ACS Data Percent LMI	2016-2020 ACS Data Hispanic/Latino	
2007	1 2	69.00%	30	
2007		83.40%	4	
2008	1	58.00%	28	
2008	2	33.10%	28	
2008	3	29.10%	15	
2009	1	51.70%	19	
2009 2 2009 3 2010 1		36.90%	8 11 23	
		80.50%		
		40.80%		
2010	2	25.30%	19	
2010	3	47.60%	17	

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Priorities identified in several City of Oil City and Venango County plans have been used to assist in developing Oil City's Three-Year Community Development Plan. The Northern Venango County Comprehensive Plan was adopted by City Council early in 2011. This multi-municipal comprehensive plan encompasses Oil City and two adjoining municipalities, Cornplanter and Rouseville, in an effort to highlight individual opportunities for economic regrowth and occasions for economic cooperation between the municipalities. The Oil City Comprehensive Waterways Plan was also adopted in 2011. It outlines projects to advance the local community economically and socially by utilizing the waterfronts of the Allegheny River and Oil Creek. In 2014, the City's Community Development Department updated the City's Capital Improvement Plan to identify fifty potential capital investment projects totaling more than \$32 million. In 2017, the Oil City Community Strategic Plan was adopted by City Council. This community wide strategic plan focused on economic development, housing, tourism, community engagement, and attraction/retention of residents. Each plan is available for review in the Oil City Community Development Office.

I. Housing

Current statistics from the 2020 ACS characterize Oil City as having 59.4% owner-occupied dwelling units, 40.6% rentals and 15% vacancy (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020c). The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has 69% owner-occupied, 31% rentals and 10.6% vacancy (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020c). These statistics indicate that Oil City has fewer owner-occupied housing units and greater rental occupants than the state average. Even though the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has reduced funding for Section 8 Housing Vouchers over the last several years, the Oil City Housing Authority's records show a total of 169 persons/households on its current waiting list (Table 2). The Public Housing waiting list, comprised of Moran Towers, Siverly Apartments, Century Terrace, Scattered Sites and Cherry Hill is 90% one and two-bedroom applicants. The Oil City Housing Authority is currently experiencing an occupancy issue with 17 vacant units, as leasing the units utilizing the approved applicants on the waiting lists is increasingly difficult when applicants will not respond to offers or cannot afford the security deposit with first month's rent when offered a unit. Out of 561 vouchers/slots for Section 8 Housing voucher assistance, there is currently enough federal funding for

approximately 295 families and 302 are housed as of July 29, 2024. Due to over leasing that was realized when HUD released the 2024 funding in June, which unfortunately provided less funding than the estimate based in 2023, the need to reduce housing assistance payments occurred.

The Section 8 Voucher waiting list has been closed since June 24, 2024, due to expending all available funding. While 78 people were on the waiting list prior to its closing, only 44 have vouchers and are searching for suitable housing. As participants drop out of the program, new participants are added, in order to keep leasing within the funding. Lack of landlords willing to participate in HUD programs and lack of one- and two-bedroom units continue to be issues in Oil City and Venango County. The Oil City Housing Authority reports that they have been desperately seeking landlords willing to participate in their HUD programs, however, more property owners have been shifting to NO HUD rentals. This change is in large part due to the Eviction Moratorium/COVID policies they endured, as well as the continued fallacy that individuals requiring federally assisted housing are not good tenants because they are using a HUD voucher.

Table 2. Persons/households on the Oil City Housing Authority's waiting list as of July 29, 2024.

Housing Unit	Type	# of units	# on waiting list
Moran Towers	Elderly	48	2.4
Siverly Apartments	Elderly	30	7 34
Century Terrace	LMI	50	57
Scattered Sites	LMI	20	
Cherry Hill	LMI	20	
Section 8 Voucher	Very LMI	302	78
Total on waiting list			169

The Community Development Department has worked with the Oil City Housing Authority and private developers in the past to design projects addressing local housing needs, one of which is a 24-unit senior housing complex, Seneca Court. Seneca Court, along with Luther Place and Towne Towers, elderly-only complexes, are private facilities that require individuals to meet federal income guidelines.

Table 3. Persons/households on private developer's waiting lists as of July 31, 2024.

Housing Unit	Type	# of units	# on waiting list
Seneca Court	LMI	24	4
Luther Place	Elderly	49	unknown
Towne Towers	Elderly	100	11
Total on waiting list			15

In 2009, the Venango County Housing Study indicated that there are a large number of deteriorated and dilapidated units within Oil City due in part to an aging population, infrequent reinvestment in property, population loss, and excess housing supply. The 2011 Northern Venango County Comprehensive Plan reiterated this point and also identified five goals to deal with the increasingly deteriorating housing stock in Oil City. These goals included removal of blighting influences; creating a positive real estate market; promotion of condos, townhouses, or apartments for the 55 plus market; addressing the repository properties; and identification of corridors and neighborhoods as priority areas. The City has made it a priority to remove blighting influences and address repository properties in two concentrations of substandard housing areas located in Census Tract 2007 (North Side) and Census Tract 2009 (South Side). CDBG funds may be used in these areas, with spot blight demolition as the national objective.

The County of Venango is also addressing deteriorated housing units with a program called the Venango County Housing Rehabilitation Program, in which Oil City homeowners can participate. The

project promotes the health and safety of residents by mitigating blight through a certifying LMI grant to bring structures up to code.

Most residents residing in substandard housing though, are tenants. Because they are not owner occupants, many of these residents are ineligible for existing housing rehabilitation assistance programs. To assist in correcting inadequate properties, the City of Oil City recently passed a Nuisance Abatement Ordinance in July 2019. This new ordinance is a tool enabling the Code Enforcement Office to address properties that present grave health, safety, welfare, and financial concern to the citizens of Oil City. The ordinance outlines corrective action that can be taken by the City when the property owner has failed to deal with inferior structures and most importantly, hold the property owner personally responsible for the abatement of the nuisance.

In June of 2020, the City of Oil City entered into an agreement with Keystone Core Services for technical assistance in conducting a residential Blighted Property Inventory in the East End of town between Route 62 and East Third Street from Wilson Avenue to the Cranberry Township line (Census Tract 2009, Block Group 3 at 80.5 % LMI). This priority corridor is a mix of residential and commercial uses along the heavily traveled State Route 62 and serves as one of three gateways to Oil City proper. Approximately twenty commercial establishments exist along State Route 62 including a grocery store, two pharmacies, a laundromat, a gas station/convenience store, an auto parts store, the US post office, a restaurant, a tavern, a beer distributor, and more, making it a highly traveled, significant part of the city. The intent of the Blighted Property Inventory was to determine the extent of blight in this predominately LMI area and assist with implementing a residential Redevelopment Area Plan designed to mitigate those visibly blighting influences. Remediation efforts identified could be evaluated in relation to several PA laws designed as tools to alleviate blighting influences such as the Conservatorship Law, the Drug Nuisance Law, and the Urban Redevelopment Law. The City of Oil City will continue to emphasize efforts which enhance the condition of the existing housing stock in this area, and encourage an increase in owner-occupied housing, leading to greater stability in the community.

II. Public/Community Facilities and Improvements

Street, Sidewalk, and Curb Improvements

A major priority for public infrastructure in Oil City continues to be the reconstruction of streets, sidewalks, and curbs throughout the community. Street reconstruction with curb improvement evaluations are conducted yearly by the City's Public Works, Engineering, and Community Development Departments. The evaluation includes the condition of the roadway, ADA accessibility, plans for utility replacements, and CDBG eligibility. The static nature of funds from State Liquid Fuels allocations and a restrictive City General Fund budget has left much of Oil City's infrastructure in a deteriorated condition. Many of the deteriorated streets and sidewalks are located within LMI neighborhoods. Guide rails, handicapped accessible corners, new water mains, and drainage improvements are also a necessary part of the infrastructure reconstruction process. With citizen participation, the City typically sets aside part of the CDBG funds allocated each year for street, sidewalk, and curb improvements. Recently, CDBG funds were used to mill and reconstruct Jefferson and Murray Streets. These projects benefited Census Tract 2007. The streets under contract to be reconstructed in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 using CDBG funding are W. Front Street from Wyllis to Petroleum and Reed & Lincoln Streets from W. Front to W. First Street, benefiting the LMI community in Census Tract 2008 & 2009 Block Group 1. Streets under future consideration include Clearfield, Petroleum, Division, and Pine Streets. Beneficial parties of these proposed activities include LMI Block Groups in Census Tracts 2007, 2008 and 2009.

While heaved and deteriorated sidewalks worsen, and difficulties for the residents, elderly, and disabled who must travel these areas daily remain evident, Oil City has increased its efforts to reconstruct these heavily traveled pathways. In 2021, the City of Oil City applied for and received an award from the PennDOT Highway Transfer Turnback Program to fund a project in the East End. This project is now

finished and allowed for the complete reconstruction of a commercially valuable section of East Second Street, including underground infrastructure improvements to water and sewer lines, and above ground infrastructure improvements to sidewalks and handicapped accessible corners. The efforts made in this 80.5% LMI block group area is a huge attempt to stabilize this worn-out neighborhood. As the City works to become more walkable, and recreational trail use increases, sidewalk reconstruction and accessibility improvements in our downtown commercial areas are a higher priority.

Water Improvements

One of the primary functions of a community is to provide safe drinking water to its residents. The City's Water Department has in recent years undertaken some pipe replacements in-house. Future activities using CDBG funding will require demographic surveys to qualify potential projects as outlined below.

- First Street (Central to Wilson): The water main in this downtown street is an old cast iron pipe which has been subject to increased breakage in recent years. The section between Central and Wilson was laid in 1900+/-. It is only a 6" main serving a commercial district and providing a feeder main to a residential district. This main needs to be increased in size to a 12" PVC line to provide reliability and capacity.
- East Third Street (Wilson to East 2nd): This 3,170' length of 6" pipe needs replaced due to numerous breaks.
- Clark Summit Pressure: Some areas of Clark Summit have low water pressure, which can be
 attributed to the fact that the tank elevation limits the system's ability to provide pressure, and
 that the lines serving these areas are old and small in diameter. The water distribution department
 has replaced part of the lines in this area; however, engineering services are needed to analyze
 other options for increasing pressure, and then to develop a project.
- First Street (Petroleum to Central): The water main in this downtown street is an old cast iron pipe, which has been subject to increased breakage in recent years. This section was laid in 1872. It is only a 6" main serving a commercial district and providing a feeder main to a residential district. This main needs to be increased in size to a 12" line to provide reliability and capacity.
- Washington Ave. (Seeley to Harriott): This 904' length of 6" cast iron pipe installed in 1872 has
 had numerous breaks. A hi/lo valve within this block separates the low and intermediate service
 areas. A break on the intermediate portion has the potential to cause backflow problems for some
 customers.

Sanitary Sewer Improvements

Another primary function of a community is to collect and treat sanitary sewage, address storm water drainage, and dispose of residual wastes in an environmentally friendly fashion. Recently major operational upgrades have been made to the primary Wastewater Treatment Plant and the Northside Pump Station. No specific sewer system improvements have currently been identified using CDBG funding, however, future sewer system improvements would be qualified using a demographic survey.

Handicapped Access Improvements

The City's Section 504 self-evaluation has identified the need for modifications to some City owned facilities to better accommodate our disabled citizens. Projects regularly undertaken in the city

include the installation of ADA compliant curbs when reconstructing any road and adding handicapped accessible equipment to the City's playgrounds as appropriate. Recent playground upgrades have occurred at Hasson and Justus Parks, Siverly neighborhood, Harriot Avenue, and Mitchell Avenue. Improvements to public restrooms in several city parks are still a concern. The Oil City Marina Restroom will receive an ADA upgrade through a Department of Conservation and Natural Resources grant. Construction is slated to begin in the spring of 2025. The Hasson Park and Justus Park facilities are still in need of rehabilitation to bring them to the current 2010 ADA standards. These improvements may involve CDBG funds in the future as the City continues to conduct facility upgrades.

Recreation Improvements

In keeping with our goals, Oil City has put tremendous effort into developing its' hiking, biking, and waterway trails. In 2011, the city completed a Comprehensive Waterways Study to formally outline projects that capitalize on our existing natural water resources in Oil Creek and the Allegheny River. One of the first projects to be completed was repairs to the pedestrian walkway adjacent to the railroad bridge in the City's downtown using CDBG funds in Census Tract 2007 with an LMI status of 69.0%. The walkway acts as a connection between the north and south sides of Oil City on the greater Erie to Pittsburgh Bike Trail that follows Oil Creek and the Allegheny River through town.

The City's many playgrounds/parks have been a high priority in recent years for structural improvements and ADA updates. When determining the future use of CDBG funding, recreation will be considered along with the ACS data and LMI status of the Census Tract.

III. Public Service

On occasion, the city receives suggestions or proposals for specific public service activities. These proposals are considered carefully and prioritized along with other suggested projects. Particular concentration is placed on health and safety activities. CDBG funds are regularly used for clearance of vacant and condemned houses to reduce blight and address public health and safety hazards in neighborhoods throughout the city. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Venango County has been working on behalf of the region toward implementing broadband internet services throughout the county.

IV. Economic Development

The economic decline of Oil City since its founding has been immense. Just since the year 2000, the City's population has decreased by 16% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). In an effort to make the community more alluring, Oil City intends to continue making improvements with assistance from the CDBG funds. These endeavors should encourage individuals and businesses to reinvest in Oil City and reverse the negative trends of economic decline, lack of capital investment, and limited growth opportunities. Efforts were reinforced with a Main Street certified designation in 2011 and re-designation in 2019. The Main Street mission has been to create attractive and vibrant downtown business districts in Oil City, while providing a foundation for the healthy growth and success of current and future businesses and residents. The Main Street Program footprint includes the two primary business districts separated by the Allegheny River. Both business districts are located in LMI Census Tracts (2007 – 69% and 2009 51.7%), as well as Federal Opportunity zones. To date, over 50 applicants have received façade grant funding, thereby improving the look and feel of the downtown. The newest round of façade grant funding has just been completed. Since the start of the Main Street Program, over 25 million dollars has been reinvested into downtown Oil City via building improvements, new construction, volunteer hours, new businesses, job growth, and more.

Other recent efforts have also produced positive economic results in the city.

- The Historic National Transit Building now houses the establishment of an Arts Revitalization Artist Relocation Program, the result of a suggestion from a Shepstone Consulting study. This program has drawn artists from across the nation to Oil City, creating a much-needed economic boost.
- Through a cooperative effort between Venango County and the City, a Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) grant was awarded from the Commonwealth to purchase a historic building on the brink of decay, the Cornplanter Square building, now renamed 100 Seneca (Census Tract 2007, Block Group 2 at 83.4% LMI). This development project will capitalize on a state-of-the-art fiber optic network winding its way through our region. Once the network is completely installed, the user will have a direct optimum connection to Chicago, making Oil City a 10-gigabyte city, similar to the connection found in Pittsburgh. With this in mind, the plans for the 100 Seneca building include the hospitality industry in some fashion on the first and second floors, with a high-tech business incubator space on the three upper floors. The whole project is a 15-million-dollar investment in the revitalization of Oil City and is currently underway.
- A grassroots effort spearheaded by the partnership between the Colonel Drake Cultural Alliance and Community Playhouse, Inc. has resulted in multiple large grant awards (RACP, ARC, LSA, & private charitable trusts) that will preserve and restore a historic 1917 vaudeville theatre located in the heart of the north side commercial district (Census Tract 2007, Block Group 2 at 83.4 % LMI). To date, no specific use of CDBG funds is planned. The Lyric Theatre will promote tourism, create jobs, and strengthen the economics of Oil City when completed. Construction is slated to begin in 2024.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

I. Housing

- Continue the Clearance/ Demolition Program in Oil City to eliminate blighting influences in certain residential neighborhoods. CDBG funds could be used to clear dilapidated and dangerous structures in the City's LMI neighborhoods.
- Assist in the development of LMI housing opportunities which supplement the publicly financed housing programs.
- Improve the stock of LMI rental housing through code enforcement.
- Undertake a program of exterior rehabilitation to residential structures that will create a sense
 of pride in LMI neighborhoods.

II. Public/Community Facilities and Improvements

- Continue the street reconstruction program in LMI neighborhoods.
- Continue the addition of ADA curb cuts along with street reconstruction projects.

- Address sidewalk reconstruction in LMI neighborhoods.
- Replace and modernize deteriorated public infrastructure, particularly relating to the City's water, sewer, and storm water management facilities in qualifying LMI areas.
- Address handicapped accessibility problems in public buildings and facilities throughout the city.
- Renovate existing recreational facilities within the city that add to the safety and quality of life for area residents in qualifying LMI areas.

III. Public Service

 Assist in the development of innovative or expanded public services that address particular social problems in the community.

IV. Economic Development

- Further initiatives that will increase tenancy and employment opportunities.
- Improve the downtown area to attract developers and entrepreneurs.
- Cooperate with other Venango County entities in an effort to both retain and attract manufacturing industries to the region.
- Support the Main Street Program efforts to improve Oil City's commercial facades. Assist in the attraction of developers, entrepreneurs, and relocating artists.
- Support commercial revitalization projects.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The plans developed below are indicative of the immediate needs of the community and are designed to support solutions to the most pressing problems of Oil City and its LMI population.

I. Short term - Year One

- Housing
 - o Demolition of deteriorated structures contributing to blight
- Public/Community Facilities and Improvements
 - Street improvements
 - Curb (ADA) improvements
 - Sidewalk improvements
 - Handicapped Access improvements
- Public Service

Economic Development

II. Long term - Years Two and Three

- Housing
 - Demolition of deteriorated structures contributing to blight
 - Improvement of LMI rental properties through stricter code enforcement
 - Support other Venango County entities in Home Rehabilitation and Exterior Structure Rehabilitation programs
- Public/Community Facilities and Improvements
 - Street improvements
 - o Curb (ADA) improvements
 - Sidewalk improvements
 - o Water, Sewer, and Storm Water System improvements
 - o Handicapped Access improvements
 - Recreation facility improvements
- Public Service
 - Health and Safety Projects
- Economic Development
 - o Commercial Revitalization projects
 - Adaptive reuse of underutilized and abandoned commercial/industrial sites
 - o Cooperate with other Venango County entities to attract developers to the area

Local and area-wide plans incorporated into this Three Year Plan include: the 2017 Oil City Community Strategic Plan, the 2016 Oil City Marina Master Site Development Plan, the 2014 Oil City Capital Improvement Plan, the 2011 Northern Venango County Multi-municipal Plan, the 2011 Oil City Comprehensive Waterways Plan, the 2011 Oil City Main Street Strategy, the 2009 Venango County Housing Study, the 2009 Venango County Greenways Plan, and the 2005 "Downtown Economic Development Strategy" developed by Shepstone Management Company and Fairweather Consulting.

Attachments:

A. LMI map by Census Tract/Block Group

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