

Village of Johnson City, NY

Downtown Revitalization Initiative Request



Figure 1 Main Street, Johnson City, c. 1910. Source: Binghamton University Libraries Special Collections.

BASIC INFORMATION

Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region: Southern Tier

Municipality Name: Village of Johnson City

Downtown Name: Johnson City

County: Broome

Downtown Description

Nestled in a verdant river valley lies the Village of Johnson City, host to approximately 15,000 residents. Downtown Johnson City is poised to be the health and cultural heart of the Triple Cities. Not only is the village at the nexus of innovation today, set to become a new center for medical advancements, it epitomizes the American dream – of rising to independence and success through hard work. The village has been called a memorial to its namesake, George F.

Johnson, a man who arrived penniless looking for work in a shoe factory and through hard work and inventive thinking rose to lead a workforce of thousands – and to build them a community. The village of Johnson City was, and is a “Square Deal Town” – where employment opportunities are available for anyone willing to work. A heritage of proactive diversity began with the Endicott-Johnson (EJ) company, known for hiring immigrants at a time when businesses hung signs turning various ethnic groups away. This concept of inclusiveness continued into the 1970s, when the area became home to refugees from Southeast Asia. The village continues to enjoy a rich and diverse cultural capital today, offering an amount of cultural opportunities not found in other small municipalities. The village is currently home to approximately 1,100 foreign born residents, and offers a variety of faith-based organizations and international markets to support these immigrant communities.

The village maintains an inventory of resources:

- Compact and defined downtown
- Largely existent historic built environment
- Streets laid out before WWII – built for pedestrians and public transportation
- Diverse population - especially for its small size
- Beautiful river-valley setting
- Affordable real estate market
- Flood-free downtown

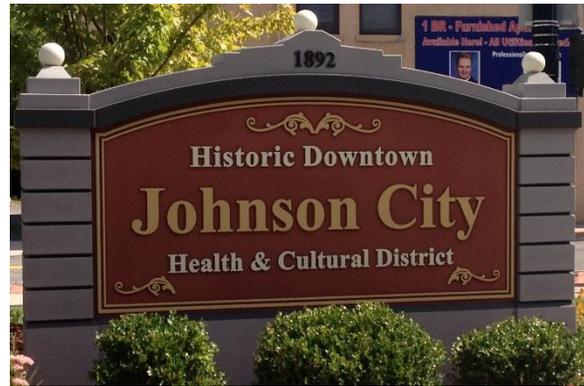


Figure 2 New village sign was part of the Main Street Grant streetscape work.

At its core sits the Central Village neighborhood – a multi-use area featuring a Historic District, a Main Street with many intact turn-of-the-century buildings, a residential area with one and two

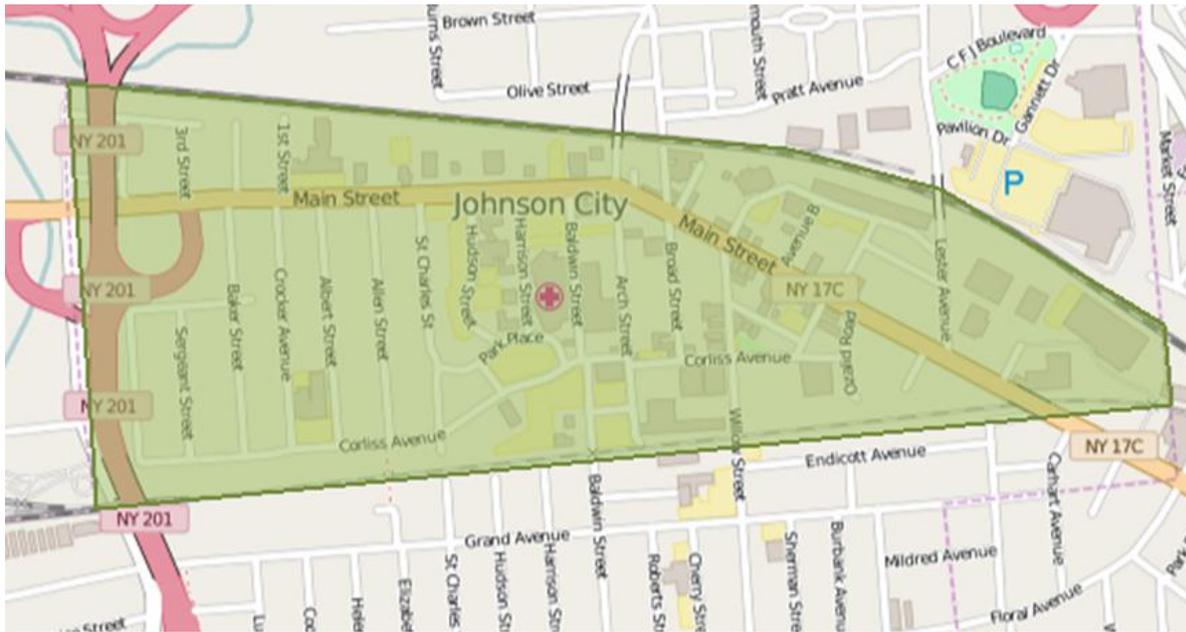


Figure 3 Central Village Neighborhood

family homes, and a concentration of cultural and medical businesses and institutions. The central village is defined physically by railroad tracks on both the north and south edges, by the 201 Highway on the east and by the Square Deal arch on the western border. Figure 3 shows the central village neighborhood in green. It is defined statistically as census tract 139. Almost 17% of the village lives within this neighborhood's 249 acres.

The central village has an affordable housing market, well suited to first time homeowners as well as renters. Housing opportunities range from single family detached homes to multi-unit apartment buildings. Both student and market-rate housing is present in the neighborhood. Additional affordable housing is planned along the southern edge of the area.

Main Street features multiple business space opportunities; unfortunately, many of the buildings require façade repairs. Multiple business incentives are available through the Town of Union Economic Development Department which has designated Main Street in Johnson City as a 485-b Property Tax Exemption Zone. Downtown also falls within a Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) Zone, an Empire Zone and a Brownfield Opportunity Area, creating many opportunities for business development support.

Downtown Johnson City has been designated a health and cultural district, poised to be the center of medical innovation and research - the 25+ acre United Health Services campus, supported by various private practices, and Binghamton University's incoming Pharmacy School and Decker Nursing School, are all located in the central neighborhood. The new university sites are expected to host approximately 1400 students, professional and support staff.



Figure 4 Artist's illustration of completed Goodwill complex. Source: goodwilltheatre.org.

The Goodwill Theatre is growing into an entertainment and educational institution. They are projecting attracting over 50,000 patrons annually. Also located in the

central village neighborhood is the Spool Mfg. gallery, which host numerous art and cultural events throughout the year. The neighborhood has been defined as a Health and Cultural iDistrict due to current and planned development in these sectors.

This combination of factors makes this the opportune time for revamping neighborhood infrastructure. DRI support in downtown Johnson City would enable the municipality to capitalize on past, current and planned development opportunities to most effectively leverage the \$150+million in public and private funds currently being invested to create a pattern of sustainable growth and development, enhancing the quality of life for current residents while creating a welcoming environment for new residents and entrepreneurs.

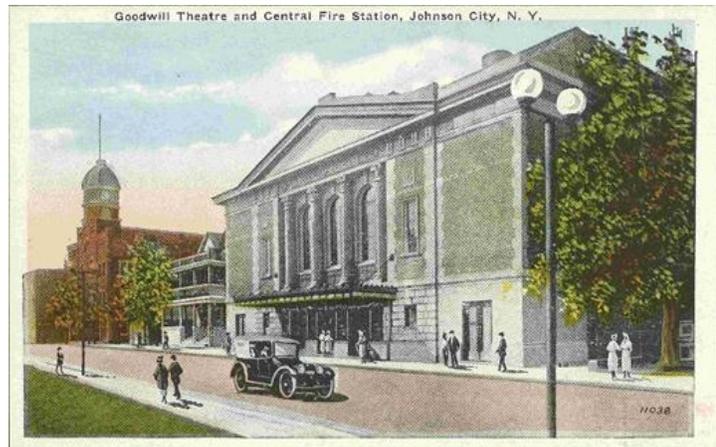


Figure 5 Goodwill Theatre and Firehouse postcard. Source Binghamton University Special Collections.

Access to the planning expertise and funding available through this Downtown Revitalization Initiative would allow the village to bring multiple plans together into a single, consistent, actionable strategy. This will foster an environment welcoming to additional employment opportunities.

Neighborhood Boundaries

The downtown neighborhood, also referred to as the central village neighborhood, is compact and defined, bounded north and south by railway lines (one has high potential to become a rail trail), to the east by the nationally recognized historic Square Deal Arch, and to the west by the 201 highway. The central village covers an area of 249 acres. Within this census tract lie overlapping districts: a Commercial and Central Business District; a Health and Cultural District; and a Historic District.



Figure 6 Downtown is highlighted in pink.

Main Street runs through the center of this neighborhood, and for approximately 5 blocks is composed primarily of multi-story mixed-use building built before 1940 (many pre-1900). Figure 6 illustrates the boundaries of the downtown area.

Size

Approximately 2,500 people reside in the 249 acres of the central village. Many more work and travel through the central village; 2,200 people work on the UHS campus; the Binghamton University schools are expected to host approximately 1,400 students and staff; The Fire House Stage (The Goodwill Theatre's currently running venue) seats 150, and features weekly performances throughout the year. Over 18,000 vehicles travel along Main Street daily, and downtown Johnson City is easily accessed by route 17 and the 201 bridge, making downtown an easily reached destination for people both from and outside the Broome County area. The village's central location, at the heart of the Triple Cities, gives easy access to the 198,797 people living in Broome County. Our location at the northern end of the 201 Bridge across the Susquehanna River also allows easy access by residents of northern Pennsylvania. The village is located at the second exit from the I86/81 highway interchange. The village's downtown would be the primary downtown for students living on the Binghamton University campus (approximately 5,000), directly across the river, in Vestal. The majority of off-campus students live in Binghamton's West Side, and for many of them, downtown Johnson City is their nearest downtown.

Past Investments & Future Investment Potential

The village of Johnson City, and most clearly the central village, was designed as a factory town, with amenities to be available within walking distance of workplaces and homes. Wide streets with sidewalks along both sides are prevalent. Also left from this era are community park spaces, historic architecture and dramatic public facilities including a nationally recognized historic library and the dramatic NYPENN building (a former high school). The village is working to capitalize on prior investments through blight reduction, parks improvements, sidewalk improvements and creating a downtown property inventory. During the past year the village began a Master's internship partnership with Binghamton University's College of Community and Public Affairs; the first intern has created an inventory of downtown assets and project plans focused on integrating new students and residents expected in response to current/future developments (See Appendix 1-2 for examples). Efforts at blight reduction to remove the unusable building has already begun, with two derelict properties in downtown set to be razed and made shovel-ready in the next year (through Broome County Industrial Development Agency actions). In 2011 the village was selected to receive a \$457,000 Main Street grant, facilitated through the Johnson City Partners, a local economic development nonprofit organization. An additional \$250,000 in private investments enhanced the impact of that grant. \$150+ million in public and private investments are currently ongoing in downtown Johnson City.



Figure 7 Infants and Cartons Factory, aka the Pioneer Annex as it appeared c.1950. Photographer Frank Chetko.



Figure 8 Rendering of planned Binghamton University pharmacy and nursing campus. Source: Binghamton University.

Job Growth

Current area employment opportunities are increasing on both the UHS and Binghamton University campuses. Broome County has plans to redevelop the former BAE site, located on the neighborhood's western border, into a commercial and residential space expected to create both temporary construction jobs as well as long-term permanent positions. Current development projects are slated to employ hundreds of tradesmen and tradeswomen during their construction phases, and projections estimate 200+ permanent full-time positions of

which approximately half will be high-level professionals. Already existent employment opportunities offer skilled, unskilled and professional levels work in a variety of industries, including medical, service and retail.

Multiple incentives are in place to drive job growth in downtown Johnson City. Downtown Johnson City is within a Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) Zone. This offers federal contracting preferences to small businesses that obtain HUB Zone certification by ensuring that 35% of their employees live in a HUB Zone. The company must also maintain a principal office (though not a headquarters) in one of these specially designated areas and be a US owned business. The Town of Union has designated the portion of Main Street running through downtown Johnson City as a 485-b Property Tax Exemption Zone for commercial and industrial properties. Essentially, this allows Town, Village and School property tax abatement on new construction and/or substantial renovation of real property to promote redevelopment in the urban core area.

The Town of Union Economic Development Department will leverage local economic development funds to support programs developed as part of the DRI planning process. These funds could be used to support downtown development and to supplement State DRI funds to further encourage redevelopment of buildings, retention of existing businesses, and promoting entrepreneurship in the downtown, especially in consideration of New Americans.

Attractiveness of the Downtown

Quality of life amenities are present throughout downtown Johnson City, but they are ready for enhancements to bring them into line with the needs of today's citizens. Johnson City's downtown features still visible historic turn-of-the-century architecture, as well as buildings which have had facades added but which could very easily be returned to their former glory. Multiple structurally sound buildings are vacant and prepared for development, some of which are single story, but most of which are three or more story multi-use buildings, featuring shop, office or restaurant spaces on the first floors with apartments and offices above. Housing in downtown and its surrounding central village neighborhood includes single family detached homes, 2-3 family homes and multi-unit dwellings. The central village is a walkable neighborhood, with most tasks accomplishable by foot. The neighborhood feature both a discount grocery store, Save-A-Lot, as well as Healthbeat, a long-established health foods store. All of the streets within the central village are equipped with sidewalks, and when road width allows bike lanes are frequently present.

Broadband access is available throughout the central village neighborhood. Broome County is in the beginning stages of installing dark fiber along the Main St. Corridor.

The village has been working closely with the Town of Union and the Broome County Industrial Development Agency to remove blighted and structurally unsound properties to make them

shovel-ready for development. The village is currently working with a Binghamton University intern to create a vitality plan, which includes a multi-modal pathway as well as streetscape improvements and a downtown map and guide, to encourage greater use of the downtown. Discussions have begun with local nonprofit VINEs (Volunteers Improving Neighborhood Environments) to utilize FEMA designated “forever green” village-owned properties as community gardens.

Entertainment and dining venues are diverse and increasing. To date, downtown offerings include:

- Small-batch brewery and tasting room
- Comic book store
- Games shop
- Thai restaurant
- Vietnamese restaurant
- Classic rail-car style diner
- Art gallery
- Irish pub
- Monthly antique car show
- Annual Labor Day “Field Days” festival

Multiple vacant storefronts are already set-up as restaurants, pubs and entertainment venues, providing opportunities for new businesses. These buildings are primarily brick and stone 2-5 story mixed-use properties, and many feature decorative masonry. Their historic architectural beauty is largely hidden now by boarded windows and crumbling facades. All are structurally sound, and could easily be brought back to their former glory.

Downtown Johnson City is eligible for Community Development Block Grant funding, administered through the Town of Union. These funds can support initiatives created as part of downtown revitalization.

Dotted with pocket-parks, the central village neighborhood includes a small park with a playground, the Baker Street Park. Downtown is also adjacent to CFJ Park, which features a historic carousel. There is potential for the development of a Farmer’s Market sited at the JC senior center or in the vacant lots left post removal of blighted buildings, adding to the downtown’s access to fresh, nutritious foods. Healthcare is easy to access due to central village location of UHS campus and supporting medical offices.

Policies to Enhance Quality of Life

The village has officially adopted Complete Streets recommendations as their guide for all new developments, and strives to add multi-modal enhancements to existing streetscapes

whenever funding is available. The village recently worked to create a consolidated code shared with neighboring municipalities within the Town of Union to create a business-friendly environment throughout the area. Code changes focused primarily on the expansion of mixed-use areas.

Downtown Johnson City also falls within the Endicott Johnson Industrial Spine Brownfield Opportunity Area. Work to redevelop the sites is underway, led by the Broome County Department of Planning and Economic Development. The steering committee is actively working toward the creation of reuse plans, design alternatives and marketing for the sites, and developing design guidelines for Johnson City. They are proactively ensuring that all new development will be based in smart growth principles.

Village, town and county officials are in talks with Swift Tram to be host a prototype of a new suspended automated transit network, which would carry passengers from the Binghamton University Center for Technology and Innovation across the Susquehanna river to the United Health Services campus. This energy-efficient people-mover is supported by Smart Cities. Along with hosting the prototype, Johnson City is a potential location for Swift Tram's manufacturing facility.

Local Support

Mayor Gregory Deemie will act as initial lead, and will work with outside experts to convene a local planning committee to oversee the plan itself. Many stakeholders have already expressed interest in participating in the process. The local planning committee will be composed of representatives from public and private organizations in and adjacent to the village's downtown, including but not limited to:

Government Entities:

- The Village Board
- Town of Union Economic Development Department
- Broome County Department of Planning and Economic Development
- Village of Johnson City Historian

Educational Institutions:

- Johnson City School District
- Binghamton University Administration
- Binghamton University Students (through student boards and organizations)
- Binghamton University Alumni Association

Social/Public Organizations:

- United Health Services
- Handicapped Children's Association
- Johnson City Senior Center
- Family Enrichment Network
- Johnson City Police Department
- Johnson City Fire Department
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- VINEs

Development Organizations:

- The Johnson City Partners
- Broome County Industrial Development Agency

Cultural Institutions:

- The Goodwill Theatre Inc.
- Spool Mfg Gallery
- Preservation Association of the Southern Tier
- Mason's Lodge
- Knights of Columbus
- Your Home Public Library

Faith-based Organizations

- Islamic Association of the Southern Tier
- Sarah Jane Johnson Memorial Church
- St. James Catholic Church

Local Property Owners & Developers

- Regan Development
- Downtown Residents
- Downtown Business Owners
- Village Residents

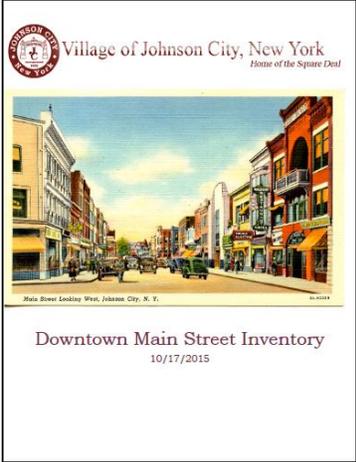
The committee will begin meeting as soon as the award is announced. Meetings will be hosted at the centrally located village hall. Additional public participants will be recruited following announcement of grant receipt.

Conclusion

Downtown Johnson City's solidly built infrastructure, historic character, cultural diversity, central location and current development activity make it a wise choice for effective use of funds. Investment would drive growth throughout the village and promote additional private investments in Broome County as a whole. Downtown Johnson City is ready for a downtown management plan, infrastructure enhancements, and any policy modernization required to best shape a sustainable future. This would facilitate the progress of the Greater Binghamton Innovation Ecosystem, and maintain the downtown's historic character while allowing sustainable economic development principles to guide the process. The village and its constituents are poised to take the reins of expanding development – we could be on the cusp of a new day for this long-depressed area, and indeed region. Strategic investment on the part of the state now could be expected to make this community a regional economic driver, providing long-term returns on investment in the terms of increased property values and tax base, as well as bringing new businesses and residents to New York. An investment in the economic development of downtown Johnson City would make a high impact on the entire Southern Tier, helping to propel it toward becoming upstate New York's innovation center.

Appendix I.

Sample pages from the



1

Main Street, Johnson City, NY



3

263 MAIN ST 143.57-2-19



42

18,000 vehicles travel on Main Street DAILY

Downtown Main Street Property Inventory

265 MAIN ST 143.57-2-8



Property Details

Year Built: 1891-1895
Parcel Size: 0.04
Sq. Footage: 5,364
Bldg Type: commercial
Stories: 3
Zoning: CBD
Owner: Allegro East
Annual Tax: \$6,992

Assessed Value: \$5,900
Full Value: \$135,831
Current Use: vacant
Potential Use: dining, retail, office, appts
Notes: structure = masonry load-bearing walls, brick & stone



48

290 MAIN ST 143.57-3-4



Property Details

Year Built: 1885
Parcel Size: 0.05
Sq. Footage: 6,120
Bldg Type: commercial
Stories: 3
Zoning: CBD
Owner: XLTB Inc
Annual Tax: \$5,153.48

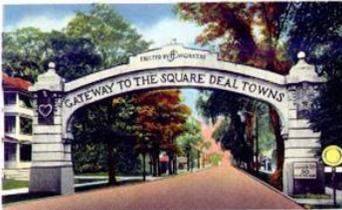
Assessed Value: \$3,900
Full Value: \$67,816
Current Use: vacant
Potential Use: retail, offices
Notes: masonry load bearing walls



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Appendix II.

Sample pages from Downtown Johnson City Vitality Plan created by the village intern



ABSTRACT
This plan offers an outline of easily implemented actions which the Village of Johnson City can undertake to increase downtown vitality, welcome incoming developments and capitalize on available improvement opportunities. The actions focus directly on movement through the area and feature benefits which are economic, social and environmental.

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Master of Public Administration,
Binghamton University,
Intern, Village of Johnson City, New York.

DOWNTOWN JOHNSON CITY VITALITY PLAN

Simple Solutions to Support Development

Projects included were selected from multiple revitalization action options based on the fulfillment of the following criteria:

- Provide neighborhood access and connections.
- Be financially and administratively feasible at the village level.
- Offer high value for investment.
- Fit within guiding documents' goals and priorities.
- Offer grant funding opportunities.
- Offer community collaboration opportunities.
- Benefit the entire community, both existing and expected.
- Offer improvements across three primary areas of sustainability – society, the economy and the environment.
- Support planned and future economic development.

In this light, three project plans have been selected: a Neighborhood Map and Guide; Streetscape Improvements; and a Central Village Multi-Use Path. Each is outlined in a separate following section.

These projects were selected because they also fit within the visions and guidelines set out in multiple local, regional and national plans.

Guiding Plans:
Town of Union 2015-2019 Consolidated Plan and Federal Fiscal Year 2015 Annual Action Plan.
2013-2017 Broome County Community Health Assessment.
Village of Johnson City's Park's Master Plan 2004.
Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Sustainable Healthy Community Design Guide, 2012.
Johnson City Health and Cultural District Conceptual Master Plan, 2013.
Environmental Protection Agency Smart Growth Principles.
Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study, Transportation Tomorrow: 2035, Creating a Sustainable Future, Main Street Corridor Study, 2012.

Populations Impacted: residents, students, business owners, area visitors.

Project Plan Summary: Complete Streets design concepts are required for new developments, but elements could be added to streets supporting new development as well. At its most basic level, Complete Streets simply means designing streetscapes to accommodate all forms of travel, pedestrian, bicycle, public and cars. Multiple small upgrades can be made throughout the central village to achieve increased accessibility for all. Install LED lights at a pedestrian-scale lighting and improve sidewalks and street crossings along streets expecting or desiring student and resident activity in the evening hours, especially main thoroughfares such as Willow Street, Baldwin Street, Cortiss and Grand Avenue. Repair sidewalks as needed. Install natural drainage and pedestrian barriers when possible, primarily along Willow and Baldwin Streets between Cortiss and Grand Avenue. Work will include pavement/sidewalk repair and pedestrian lighting installation, as well as creation of additional crosswalks. Raingardens, street trees and vegetative swales should be added when sidewalk warrants complete removal and repair, or if village-owned area stretches beyond sidewalk.

Street Trees: Selecting, planting and maintaining street trees can be a challenge, but street trees offer benefits economically, socially and environmentally at little cost. It is recommended that the village look to best practices guides, and to other New York State municipalities and agencies. For example, New York City Parks has a guide for street trees (www.nycgovparks.org), and the Urban Horticultural Institute at Cornell University offers a guide entitled "Recommended Urban Trees: Site Assessment and Tree Selection for Stress Tolerance." The village has minimal excess street side space and limited maintenance budget, therefore, selections should be small trees (under 20 feet at full size) attractive year round with little maintenance, require a small tree pit space (less than 3 feet), have environmental tolerance to drought and salt, such as the crabapples, Schubert Cherry (*Prunus virginiana*, Schubert), European Plum (*Prunus domestica*) and Japanese Tree Lilac (*Syringa reticulata*). It should be noted that the growing season burgundy leaf-color of both the Schubert Cherry and the Purpleleaf Plum reflect the village and school district colors, adding the benefit of enhancing community pride if they are selected.





Central Village Multi-Use Trail



Project Summary
This project plan creates multi-modal transportation options in a growing community, and increases walkability and bikeability both within the downtown and connecting the downtown to surrounding neighborhoods. The project site focuses on an unused Northland-Southern Railway spur which currently acts as a physical barrier between the Floral Park neighborhood and the Central Village. An unsightly physical barrier will be removed which currently prohibits safe pedestrian movement between downtown, the United Health Services medical campus, nonprofits serving children and housing the elderly and the planning Binghamton University Nursing and Pharmacy Schools. This stretch of wasteland blocks drastically limits travel for the 2,905 students and long-term residents currently living in Floral Park and trying to reach the village downtown, but it also blocks 2,492 residents and students in the Central neighborhood from reaching the community park on the southern edge of the Floral Park neighborhood². Also facing travel hindrances will be students at the new nursing and pharmacy schools from living in the residential neighborhood of floral park. The facilities the spur previously connected to a mainline are in the process of demolition and dismantling. The railway line itself is covered in trash and the surrounding shoulder embankments are overgrown and littered with broken glass. The pedestrian passage at Allen Street is unmaintained, and

² According to American Community Survey 2014 5 year estimates.