

***CITY OF LEOMINSTER
COMB & CARRIAGE NEIGHBORHOOD
REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE***



***PREPARED BY:
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OFFICE OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY
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I. Executive Summary

This neighborhood plan has resulted from a collaborative effort that included the Mayor's Office, the Office of Planning and Development, the Spanish American Center and the residents and businesses of the Comb & Carriage Neighborhood.

The Comb and Carriage Neighborhood directly abuts Main Street and the Downtown area. The current neighborhood is comprised of an old industrial area, a mixed-use area, and a large neighborhood of single family and multifamily homes. This neighborhood is home to the Spanish American Center that has operated in Leominster for over 30 years and is an active participant in the revitalization plans for the neighborhood. It is also the location of a 104 unit elderly public housing project owned by the Leominster Housing Authority.

This old industrial area was the location of some of the first plastic factories in the country. These factories made ladies hair combs and another factory produced the first baby carriages made in the United States. At a later date a large shirt manufacturing company located here. These companies were surrounded by worker housing and many, if not most, of the residents walked to their jobs at these factories. This was a familiar pattern for many New England neighborhoods. Today most of those wooden factory buildings are gone, but some wooden factory buildings from this era are still standing in the neighborhood, many sitting vacant for years.

There is over ½ a million square feet of factory space concentrated in this neighborhood in antiquated wooden and brick structures. All of the structures are deteriorated and under-utilized and three are vacant. The Monoosnoc Brook flows through this factory area with a significant portion of it under the pavement.

The Comb and Carriage Neighborhood is a part of Leominster's Downtown and linked to many other projects that are currently taking place in the City. Starting at Fourth Street the Comb and Carriage Neighborhood is only ½ mile from a large project that has just started building two new 4-story office buildings (Fidelity Bank) at the corner of Mechanic Street and the Leominster Connector. This project abuts the City's proposed baseball field and is directly across the street from the Mall at Whitney Field: a large shopping area that includes a Home Depot, a large mall and the entire area consists of integrated strip malls and restaurants. The City has a walking and Biking Trail from this area into the Comb and Carriage Neighborhood on its Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) filed with the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission.

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I. Executive Summary (Continued)

Starting at Water Street the Project directly abuts Main Street and is less than 1/10 of a mile from the \$ 11 million dollar downtown library renovation and construction project. Comb & Carriage is about ½ mile to the new Leominster Housing Authority Project a 14 unit home ownership project that this past November was awarded a \$700,000 Affordable Housing Fund Grant. It is also within a ½ mile of a \$1.9 million City project that will fix existing sewer lines and repair the Rockwell Pond Dam.

II. Current Conditions



MECHANIC STREET (EAST)



MECHANIC @ WHITNEY STREET (WEST)

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MECHANIC & WHITNEY STREET (NORTH)



SPRUCE & WHITNEY STREET (WEST)



39 SPRUCE STREET (WEST)

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SPRUCE STREET – FORMER MASS ELECTRIC SUB-STATION

III. Neighborhood Meeting

The City of Leominster hosted a neighborhood meeting on March 18, 2006 to discuss the City's vision and potential revitalization plans for the Comb & Carriage Neighborhood. Prior to creating any redevelopment strategies for the area, the City wanted to gain input from the neighborhood residents with regard to their concerns and views on the status of the neighborhood. The City wanted to hear first hand what the resident's sought to see occur for a healthier neighborhood.

The event, which was well attended, featured a diverse group of Comb & Carriage residents, Mayor Dean J. Mazzarella, members of the Leominster Planning & Community Development Department, as well as staff from the Spanish American Center and the Twin Cities CDC. *(A detailed list of participants / attendees can be seen below)*

City and Public Service Representatives

*Dean Mazzarella
Kate Griffin-Brooks
Andy Taylor
Kerrie Salwa
Joe Cataldo
Marianne Graham
Migdalia Velez
Mickey Guzman*

*Mayor
Leominster OPD
Leominster OPD
Leominster OPD
Leominster OPD
Twin Cities CDC
Spanish American Center
Spanish American Center*

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*Joe Cannon
Gene Capoccia
Elizabeth Irvine
Jim Lanciani Jr.
Mary Anne Cormier*

*Spanish American Center
Leominster Housing Authority
Leominster Mayor's Office
Leominster City Councilor
Leominster Zoning Board of Appeals*

Neighborhood Residents

*Ed Horan
Phyllis & Paul Girouard
Francine Gaudet
Mr. & Mrs. Napoleon Babineau
Carol Moore
Emily & Emelia Amico
Dennis Loiselle
Lisa Crawford
R.J. L'Homme
Pauline & John Courmier
Claire & Laurie Babineau
Ernest Charpentier
Raymond Allard
Henry Allard
Marissa Donelan
Doris Gallant
Donald Cormier
Beanche Louselle*

To assure that everyone in attendance was able to participate and provide valuable information the event was designed as an interactive charette. After opening remarks from various City Officials, everyone in attendance was then divided into small break-out groups and were asked to discuss the neighborhoods current Strengths & Weaknesses. (A comprehensive list of Strengths & Weaknesses can be seen below) Each group had a spokesperson who shared their table's responses with everyone else in attendance.

Strengths

Good neighbors
East Side Neighborhood
Spanish Center
Close to downtown

Several small businesses
Senior High Rise
Great kids in neighborhood
Clean property

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Strengths (Continued)

Close to mall	Great city response
Buildings well maintained	Valuable housing investment
Monoosnoc Brook (could be focal point)	Family oriented
Diversity	Several youths
City involvement	Faith based residents
Good to elders	

Weaknesses

Need more police coverage (bicycles)	Sidewalks
Street lights	Speeding
Noise level control	No children's parks/facilities
Need more crosswalks	Abandoned/neglected buildings
Poor East Side Neighborhood participation (Lack of info to recruit new members)	Litter
Lack of parking at Senior High Rise	Polluted rivers
Parking on sidewalks	Need to rezone to allow more retail with
Afordable leasing	Drug Activity

At the conclusion of the break-out session participants were then asked to prioritize their neighborhood goals by placing small blue adhesive dots that they received when arriving on a presentation board that highlighted neighborhood improvements such as streetscape improvements, increased law enforcement, improved lighting and enhanced sidewalks. (A detailed list of Possible Neighborhood Improvements can be seen below.)

Possible Neighborhood Improvements

<i>Crosswalks</i>	40
<i>Safety/Safe Streets</i>	32
<i>Traffic Calming</i>	26
<i>Drug Patrolling</i>	115
<i>Trees/Landscaping</i>	6
<i>Green Spaces</i>	8
<i>Walkways</i>	13

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<i>Benches/Small Parks</i>	14
<i>Restaurants/Pubs</i>	7
<i>Access to Public Transportation</i>	8
<i>Improved Fencing</i>	9
<i>Sidewalks</i>	46
<i>Affordable Housing/Owner Occupied</i>	19
<i>Trash Receptacles</i>	20
<i>Better Signage</i>	7
<i>Improved Lighting</i>	12
<i>Job Creation</i>	17
<i>Fountain/Water Parks</i>	10
<i>Garden Areas</i>	44
<i>More Enforcement Assignment</i>	<u>39</u>
Total Dots / Resident Feedback	492

In addition to the Comb & Carriage Neighborhood event, the City also mailed a survey to the residents of the neighborhood specifically highlighting

IV. Goals

Upon hearing the comments and concerns of the neighborhood residents, and reviewing the data collected during the public participation process of the neighborhood meeting, as well as the survey, the following Goals were determined for the success of the Comb & Carriage Neighborhood and the satisfaction of its residents:

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V. Goals (Continued)

- *Strive to create a safe and walk able neighborhood*
- *Help create re-use opportunities for old industrial buildings (i.e. Residential loft and mill housing; new business space)*
- *Reduce crime / drug activity*
- *Improve existing neighborhood housing stock*

VI. Actions

After examining and compiling the resident feedback from the Neighborhood Meeting and the Neighborhood Survey the initial Actions to be taken in the revitalization and redevelopment process of the Comb & Carriage Neighborhood are as follows:

- *Increase Police Presence & Drug Enforcement Operations*
- *Aggressively target the neighborhood with CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Funding which in turn increases Code Enforcement efforts in the area*
- *Partner with the Leominster Housing Authority / Leominster Development Corporation, the Spanish American Center, and the Twin Cities CDC to utilize HOME Funds in the neighborhood for the creation of new, safe affordable housing.*
- *Rebuild public infrastructure (i.e. water / sewer system upgrades.) (Basis for CDAG)*

VII. Current Projects & Future Possibilities

The City of Leominster due to its enthusiasm for this neighborhood revitalization has performed a façade improvement to Desilets Market located at 172 Spruce Street. This neighborhood fixture has been servicing the residents of Comb & Carriage for years with all their grocery and convenience market needs. This project received a complete façade makeover with the help of the City of Leominster Storefront Improvement Program. The project cost approximately \$40,000 and included new siding, windows, and decorative awnings. To accompany the storefront improvements the City of Leominster also plans to rehabilitate the attached residential rental units through the Leominster Housing Rehabilitation Program.

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VII. Current Projects & Future Possibilities (Continued)

The aforementioned rehabilitation project signifies the ongoing commitment of the City's housing rehabilitation efforts in the Comb & Carriage neighborhood. Other projects in the neighborhood include but are not limited to 4 Fifth Street, 13-15 Fifth Street, 272, 232, 200 and 70 Water Street, and 60 Fourth Street. This effort will continue as the City of Leominster makes the Comb & Carriage a target area for housing rehabilitation funding.

In addition to the Desilets project the City has recently approved a plan which will see the renovation of 126 Mechanic Street (aka Bolio & Sargents). The proposed project is the conversion of an existing 14,409 square foot building into 2-3 smaller retail / commercial businesses. Currently the building is visually unappealing but upon completion of this project, the neighborhood will have 2-3 new businesses housed in an esthetically pleasing building in the heart of Comb & Carriage.

39 Spruce Street is a blighted, underutilized building located in the heart of the Comb and Carriage District. Primarily used as a warehouse for a local plastics manufacturer over the past decade, the majority of the building, specifically the older part, has fallen into major disrepair, with the majority of it not being habitable. Newer sections have been added on to the building which are *relatively* modern to the rest, but, since these additions were done approximately in the 1960s, they do not meet present day requirements for industrial uses. The older sections of the building are contaminated with lead paint and asbestos, making the entire building unusable for much more than the current warehousing which is being done there.

After a recent sale, the City of Leominster has been aggressively working with the new property owner to revitalize the building in part with the overall renovation of the Comb and Carriage District. We have assisted in the application for a lead paint and asbestos abatement grant, run through the MassDevelopment Brownfield Fund. Unfortunately, this grant was not awarded to the project, but will be reapplied for during the next funding round. The City has also committed funds from its Sign and Façade Program to assist in the external renovation of the building with regard to installation of new windows, and signage for the businesses proposing to move into the location. Presently the property has three letters of intent from retail businesses looking to locate there. Business uses that will be utilizing the site include a custom hot rod accessory shop, electric supply company, and a forklift repair shop.

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VIII. Next Steps for Comb & Carriage

The City of Leominster Planning & Community Development Department is attempting to develop an Action Plan that will be utilized by City Departments such as Police, Fire, Planning & Community Development and other pertinent departments. The intent of the City is to have this process be a partnership between City departments and the residents of the Comb & Carriage Neighborhood. Below, please find the steps needed to develop an effective Action Plan.

Components of the Comb & Carriage Neighborhood Plan

1. Request volunteers (5-7 people) from Neighborhood to be the Action Plan Committee
2. OPD Staff to meet with Department Heads to formulate actions that can be taken in the neighborhood in one year (short term), year one to three (medium term), and year three to five (long term)
3. Review actions from step #2 with Neighborhood Committee
4. Neighborhood Committee presents plan to Mayor, Planning Board, and City Council
5. Request that the City Council adopt the Comb & Carriage Plan

Individuals interested in participating and becoming part of the Neighborhood committee can contact Kate Griffin-Brooks, Planning Director at 978-534-7526, Ext. 256 or Andy Taylor, Asst. Planning Director / Community Development Coordinator at Ext. 261. The 5-7 person Committee will be established utilizing a First Come First Serve approach.

On Behalf of the City of Leominster Planning & Community Development Department and the Honorable Dean J. Mazarella we thank you for your participation thus far and look forward to working with you in the future as we continue with the Comb & Carriage Revitalization Initiative / Action Plan.