



2024 STRATEGIC ACTIONS AND INVESTMENTS PLAN

Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network

INTRODUCTION



The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN) is a lifeline for six census tracts across the heart of the City of Erie. Founded in 2000 to directly address the immediate needs of residents in Little Italy, the organization has grown to cover additional neighborhoods within 2.5 square miles, and evolved through a range of impactful initiatives that include home renovations, teen work force development, community gardens, and direct and collaborative housing programs, among others.

The organization’s strategy of addressing needs in a holistic way has demonstrated the power of incremental investments that build to a greater whole. This is reflected in the concentration of projects on the west side of the service area and primarily in the Little Italy neighborhood where community gardens, murals, a farmers market, food pantry, and numerous housing renovation projects have served to strengthen the area. The network’s primary office is also located here, but an east side office reflects SSJNN’s commitment for programs and investments to be more equitably-located throughout their expanded service area. Due to the amount of need within this service area and its size,

there are many citywide and regional partners and programs that support this work. The SSJNN service area has been the focus in many plans, both municipal and internal, to address larger issues. This Strategic Actions and Investments Plan is organized to provide an understanding of how these initiatives align, identify gaps in types of services and locations, and put forth a strategy that identifies areas of focus and key project types that set the groundwork for additional investment. This work also recognizes the need for larger-scale investments that are beyond the scope of the SSJNN but are critical infrastructure investments needed to support safety and livability.

The following sections provide an understanding of the neighborhood that begins with its residents – aligning with the focus of the organization.



Erie Cemetery, 2116 Chestnut St.



SSJNN office, 425 W. 18th St.



Three Sisters Park, 430 W. 19th St.



International Flavors Garden, W. 18th St.



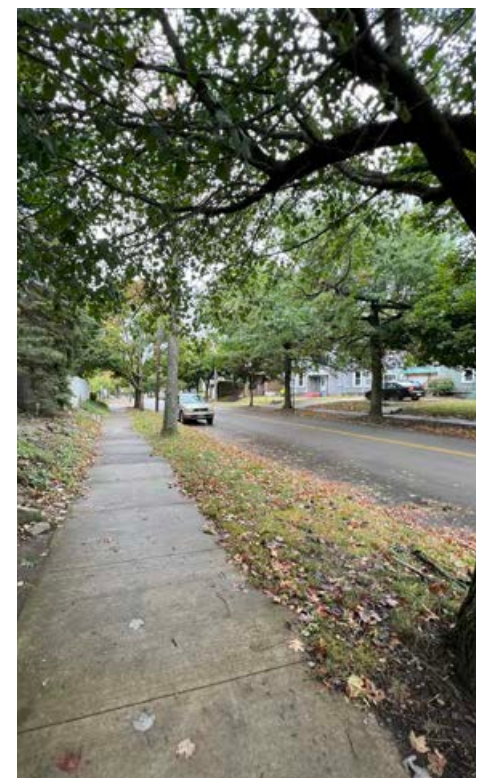
Federal Hill neighborhood, Peach St.



19th and Chestnut St.



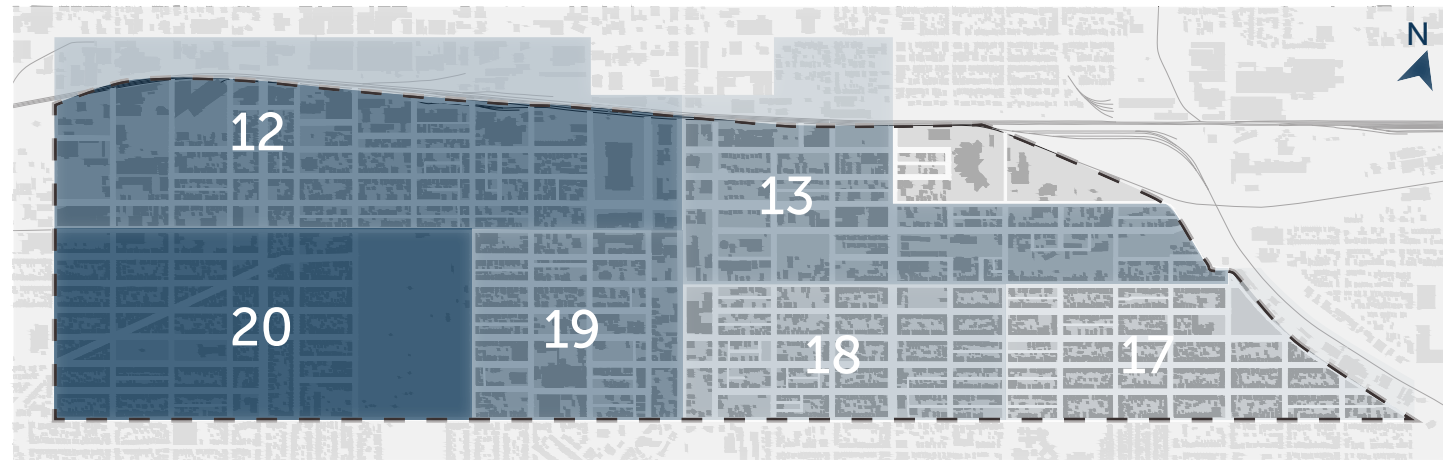
W. 21st St., toward Chestnut St.



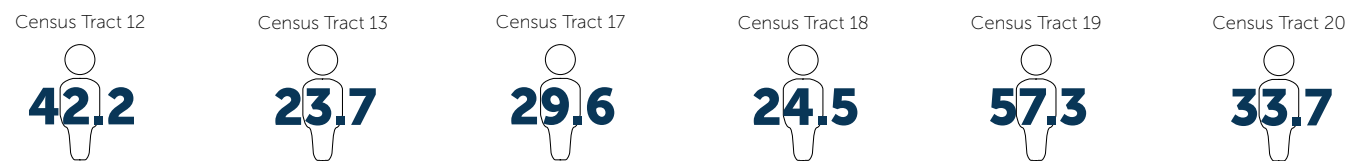
W. 22nd St. and Myrtle St.

DEMOGRAPHICS

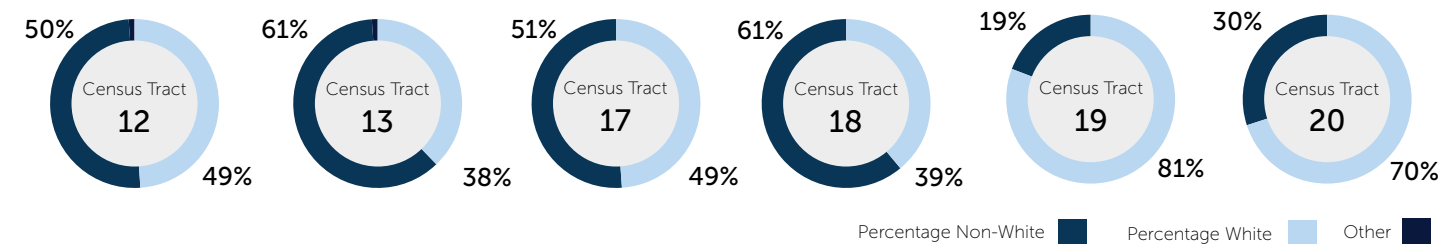
CENSUS TRACT MAP



AVERAGE AGE (CITY OF ERIE AVERAGE - 34.5)

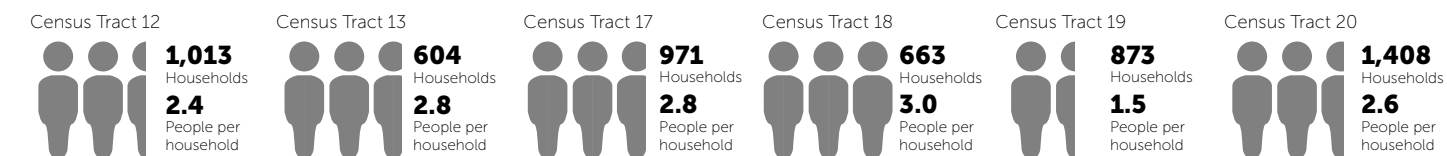


PERCENTAGE WHITE VS. NON-WHITE (CITY OF ERIE AVERAGE - 70.8% WHITE)

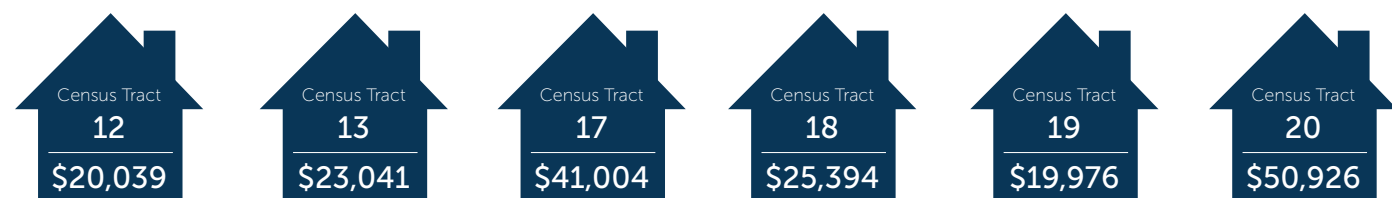


NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS VS. PERSONS PER HOUSEHOLD

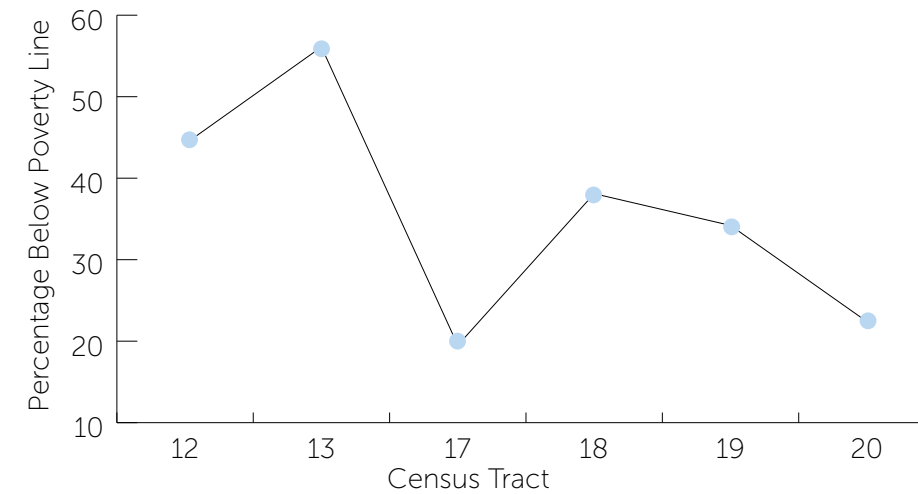
(CITY OF ERIE AVERAGE - 38,992 HOUSEHOLDS, AVERAGE OF 2.31 PERSONS PER HOUSEHOLD)



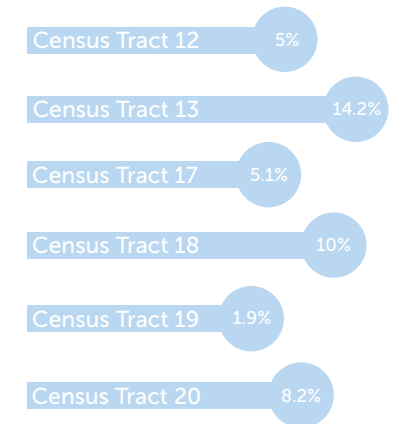
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (CITY OF ERIE AVERAGE - \$40,201)



PERSONS BELOW POVERTY LINE PERCENTAGE (CITY OF ERIE AVERAGE - 24%)

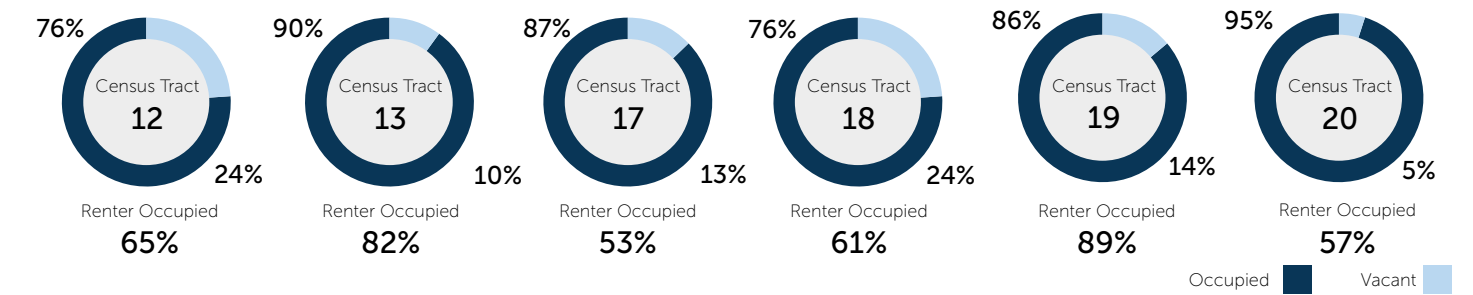


FOREIGN BORN POPULATION (CITY OF ERIE AVERAGE - 7%)



OCCUPIED VS. VACANT PERCENTAGE

(CITY OF ERIE AVERAGE - OWNER-OCCUPIED: 24%, RENTER OCCUPIED: 47.9%)

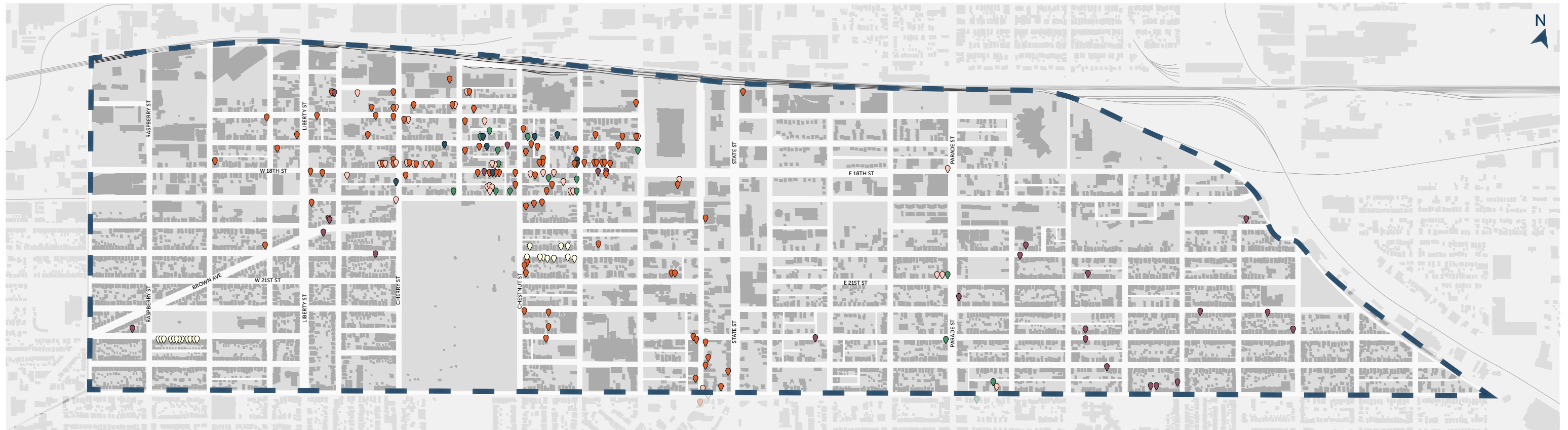


An understanding of community demographics helps to provide a foundation for responsive initiatives and can be a tool to guide planning and decision-making. The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN) service area is comprised of six census tracts through the center of Erie. The demographic information for these census tracts helps to demonstrate the high level of need focused within this community:

- While the City of Erie is 70.8% white, the SSJNN service area reflects a much more diverse population from a racial and ethnic standpoint: in some areas percentages of foreign-born residents are double the city average. These New Americans are less likely to drive and depend on safe pedestrian, bike, and public transportation networks.
- Levels of renter-occupied housing are significantly higher in the service area than the City of Erie's average of 47.9%, with census tracts 13 and 19 nearly doubling that number. This impacts stability within the neighborhoods and can help to identify focus areas for targeted home-ownership programs.
- Most census tracts within the planning area have a younger median age and larger household size than the City of Erie (34.5 years and 2.31 people per household, respectively). This reflects a larger number of families concentrated in these areas. Food stability, safe school access, and recreational programming are important considerations.
- The SSJNN service area includes high levels of residents who live below the poverty line, particularly in the northern half of the service area (census tracts 12 & 13), where the poverty rates double the city average. The historic focus of services and initiatives in this area reflects the concentrated need here.

Many of the programs SSJNN has started have been repurposed to meet community need. The main mission of the neighborhood network is to provide leadership, advocate for local residents, and partner with the broader community to develop opportunities for both personal growth and neighborhood revitalization. To meet contemporary needs in the area, the organization works alongside the residents and empowers them to take the lead in addressing their needs while building programs and relationships that support the growth of the community. The community members are the experts.

SSJNN CURRENT INITIATIVES



The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN) has continuously invested in the communities around Erie, PA since their founding in 2000. The organization expanded in 2014 to include the current area east of State Street. SSJNN has made investments to help each aspect of life, ranging from addressing food security to housing and neighborhood revitalization. Due to the organization's historical ties to the west side of their current service area, there is a denser distribution of projects and aid there. Part of the emphasis of this plan is to spread the range of influence on the east side of the community. Aiding and building around the existing assets and investments in the area will provide the opportunity for influential and widespread growth.

This map displays the extent of the organization's past and current neighborhood revitalization projects throughout the service area as of the time this plan was created.

ART AND MURAL INSTALLATIONS
 SSJNN has installed many murals and art pieces throughout the service area. These installations range from small sculptures to murals that cover the entire length of a building's side. These murals are community markers and a reflection of both historic and current cultures that live in the area.

BLOCK GRANTS
 Designed to improve the physical image of a neighborhood, SSJNN provides grants to eligible blocks, neighborhoods, and corridors. Grants can be used for façade improvements, exterior improvements, lighting improvements, sidewalk repair, and landscaping enhancements.

FAÇADE GRANTS
 To reduce blight and improve perception of the neighborhood, SSJNN has successfully sought out and implemented façade grants. These changes range from businesses to single family homes and help to transform the visual perception of the area.

GARDENS & GREENSPACE
 The gardens throughout the area provide both food and community engagement to the service area. Due to a lack of walkable and bike-able grocery stores, the gardens are an essential part of providing food to families in the community. SSJNN has 10 gardens throughout the service area, mostly concentrated in historic Little Italy and near Parade Street. Weekly from June through September, local and regional farmers sell produce at the SSJNN's Little Italy Farmers Market.

GENESIS HOUSING
 SSJNN provides quality, below-market rentals for families who aspire to home ownership. Families have the opportunity to buy a home after working with SSJNN to repair personal credit, budget and pay bills, get bank approval, save for downpayment, and learn how to maintain their home after purchase.

HOME REPAIR GRANTS
 Home repair grants are awarded to qualified property owners in the service area. These grants aim to stabilize structures, reduce blight, and improve the perception of the neighborhoods.

CENSUS TRACT 12

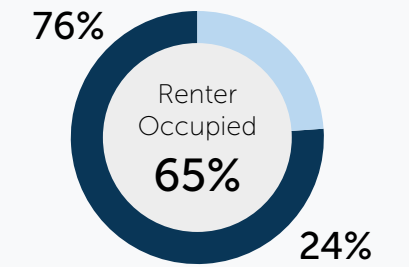


CENSUS TRACT 12: Bounded by Cranberry Street on the west, State Street on the east, 12th Street on the north, and West 19th Street on the south.

Average Age:



Occupied vs. Vacant Housing:



Foreign Born Population:



Historic Little Italy resides in census tract 12 and has received the most investment both by way of social services and neighborhood improvements. With an average age of 42.2 years old and the second largest number of households, significant changes have been made to preserve the history of the area and position it to prosper in the future. The area has the second largest percentage of residents below the poverty line, as well as a 24% vacancy rate. Investments should be pursued to bring new residents and help market the area as a safe and community-based place to reside.

There are two parks within Little Italy. The municipal Columbus Park is a popular destination for kids and teenagers due to the attached skate park. SSJNN owns Three Sisters Park, which provides a beautiful resting space and walking path connecting West 19th to 18th Street. St. Paul's Church is an historic neighborhood anchor and also a vital resource: SSJNN holds a weekly soup kitchen there.

The volume of investment in this area has helped to move the community in a positive direction, but there are further steps to ensure SSJNN's work presents a cohesive neighborhood and has influential longevity.

- Key:**
- Art/Mural Installations
 - Block Grants
 - Façade Grants
 - Gardens & Greenspace
 - Genesis Housing
 - Home Repair Grants
 - Park
 - Hospital
 - School
 - Photo Location

CENSUS TRACT 20

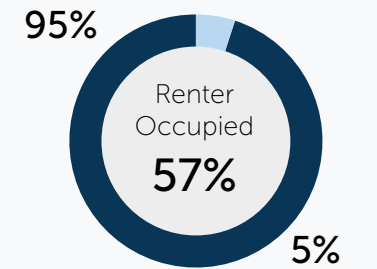


CENSUS TRACT 20: Bounded by Cranberry Street on the southwest, Chestnut Street on the northeast, West 19th Street on the northwest, and West 26th Street on the southeast.

Average Age:



Occupied vs. Vacant Housing:



Foreign Born Population:

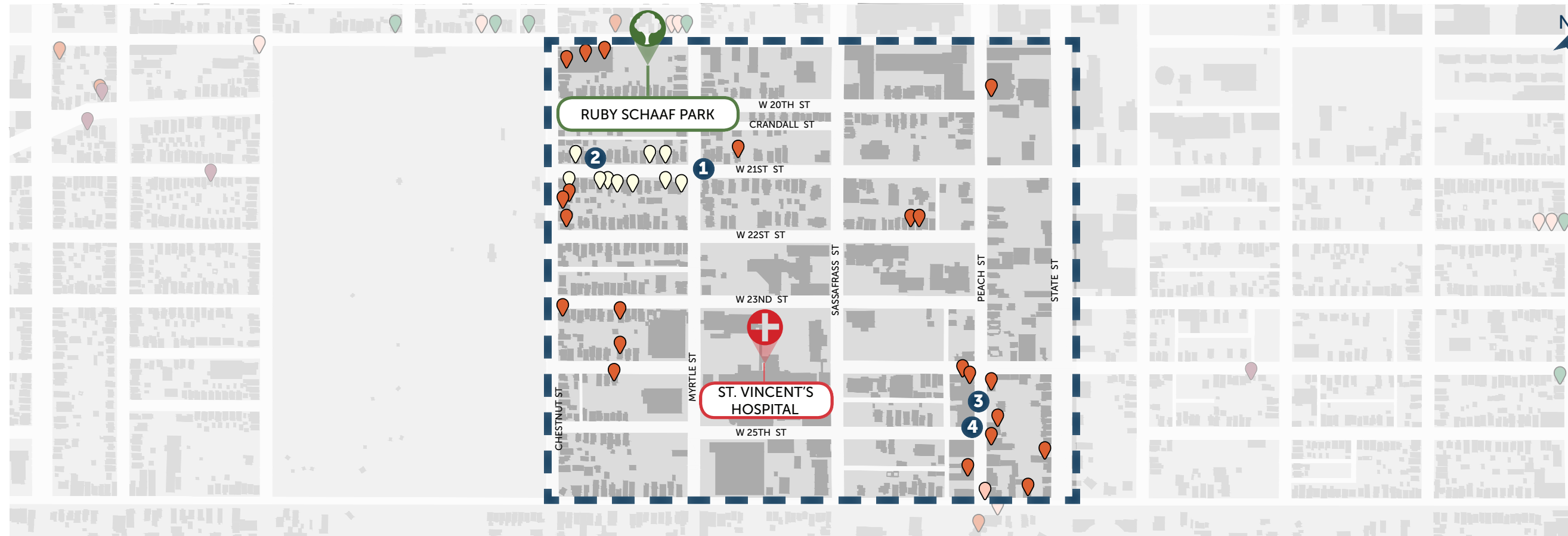


Census tract 20 serves as a gateway from the west side and is the most stable of all the census tracts in the service area. This census tract is the most populated, with 1,408 households, and has the highest median household income at \$50,926 per year. This sector also has the highest occupied housing percentage as well as the second lowest percentage of people below the poverty line. As a result, the area has not received exceptional investment by SSJNN, but has received minor improvements through façade and home repair grants. This positions the neighborhood as an area capable of stability in which residents maintain both their own and surrounding property.

The region has two main green spaces. Municipally-owned Washington Park serves as a community gathering space in this census tract. Events such as literary festivals are held here, and residents regard it as an integral amenity to the community. Erie Cemetery is also a common destination for walkers and hospital workers on break. SSJNN should encourage foot and bike traffic, invest in safety measures, and post neighborhood identification markers to guide the large amount of traffic that flows through every day.

- Key:**
- Art/Mural Installations
 - Block Grants
 - Façade Grants
 - Gardens & Greenspace
 - Genesis Housing
 - Home Repair Grants
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 - Hospital
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 - Photo Location

CENSUS TRACT 19

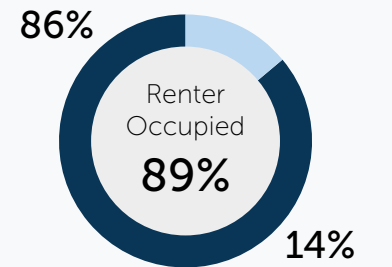


CENSUS TRACT 19: Bounded by Chestnut Street on the southwest, State Street on the northeast, West 19th Street on the northwest, and West 26th Street on the southeast.

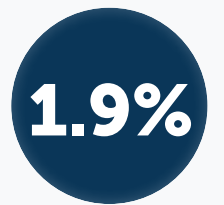
Average Age:



Occupied vs. Vacant Housing:



Foreign Born Population:



- Key:**
- Art/Mural Installations
 - Block Grants
 - Façade Grants
 - Gardens & Greenspace
 - Genesis Housing
 - Home Repair Grants
 - Park
 - Hospital
 - School
 - Photo Location



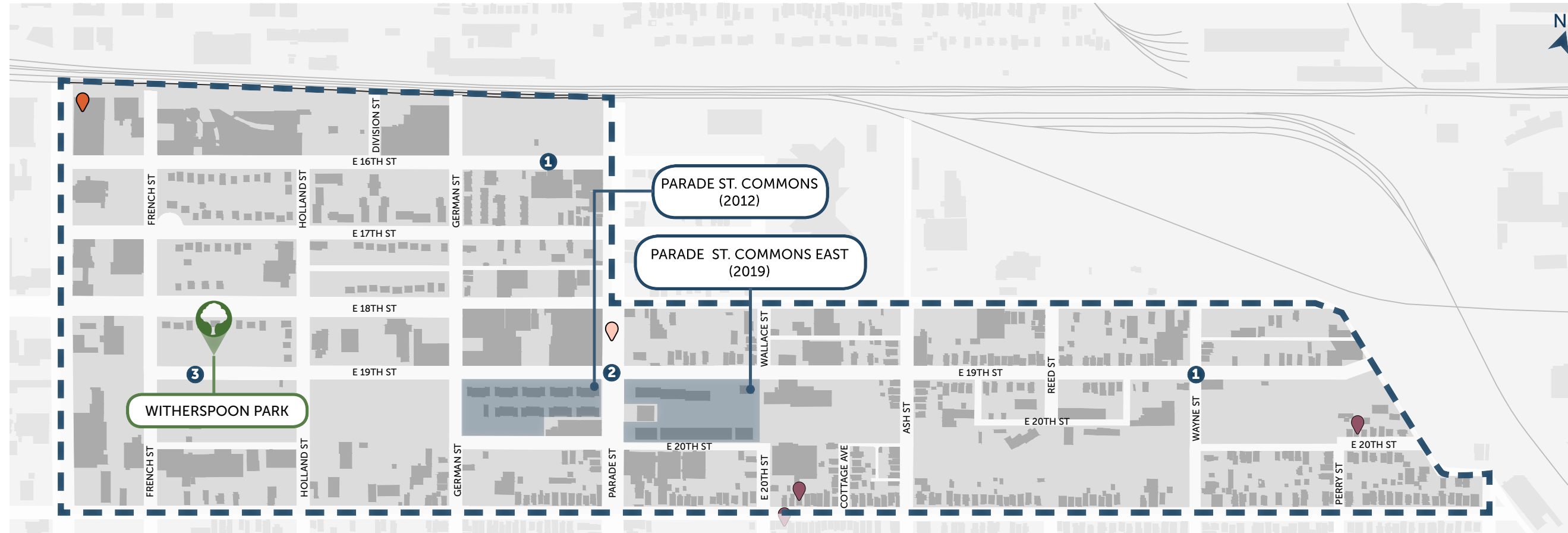
Census tract 19 is a central location and gateway from the south for the service area. Several main roads travel through, which makes the area an ideal place to pursue more investment. This is the oldest census tract in the service area, with an average age of 57.6 years old and the lowest persons per household at 1.5.

The historic Federal Hill, a small business district along Peach Street, is a vibrant, stable community with potential for further development. AHN St. Vincent Hospital also resides in this area, which brings more traffic and congestion. Many hospital employees park along streets due to the lack of adequate garage parking. Many also take walks to the cemetery on their lunch breaks. Improving pedestrian travel conditions to accommodate the vast amount of people that flow through the area every day is imperative.

A City-proposed historic preservation overlay district calls attention to the historic homes and unique architecture on West 21st Street .

A vibrant art community is also emerging at The Shop at 19th and Chestnut streets, which has the potential to be tied in with the current Little Italy community. Ruby Schaaf Park is the only municipal park in this census tract and should be a focus for investment due to its existing basketball courts and playground.

CENSUS TRACT 13

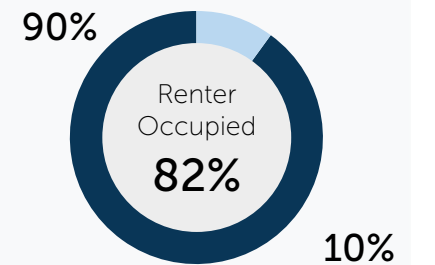


CENSUS TRACT 13: Bounded by State Street on the southwest, on the northwest by the railroad from State Street to Parade Street, then East 18th Street east of Parade Street to Buffalo Road, and East 21st Street on the southeast.

Average Age:



Occupied vs. Vacant Housing:



Foreign Born Population:



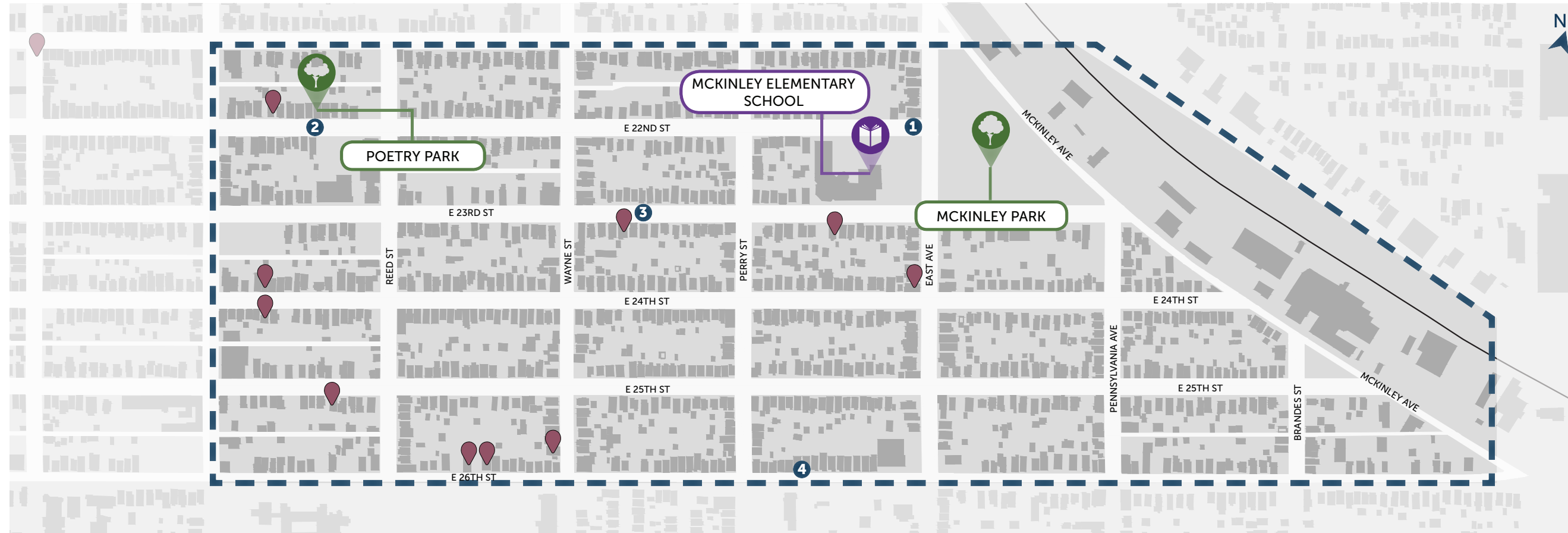
Census tract 13 sits in the northeast corner of the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN) service area and has the highest foreign-born population in the area, predominantly from Asia and Latin America. This area has the youngest average age at 23.7 and the highest percentage of residents below the poverty line at 56%, over half of the population in the area. Young neighborhoods can naturally become more stable as the population ages, so investments in this area have a high potential for success.

The area contains a number of industrial businesses and services, including the City of Erie Fire Department, Erie Streets Bureau, and Erie Sewer Collection Maintenance. These are interwoven with residential areas which have seen some development over the last ten years. Private investments have introduced new and affordable housing to a 2-block-wide portion of East 19th Street in 2012 and 2019, including Parade Street Commons single family homes, multi-unit town homes, and net-zero homes.

Witherspoon Park is the only municipal park in this census tract, highlighting the need for a greater balance and introduction of more residential supportive amenities to this sector.

- Key:
- Art/Mural Installations
 - Block Grants
 - Façade Grants
 - Gardens & Greenspace
 - Genesis Housing
 - Home Repair Grants
 - Park
 - Hospital
 - School
 - Photo Location

CENSUS TRACT 17

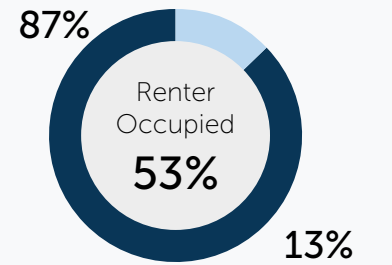


CENSUS TRACT 17: Bounded by Ash Street on the southwest, East 21st Street on the northwest, McKinley Avenue on the northeast, and East 26th Street on the southeast.

Average Age:



Occupied vs. Vacant Housing:



Foreign Born Population:



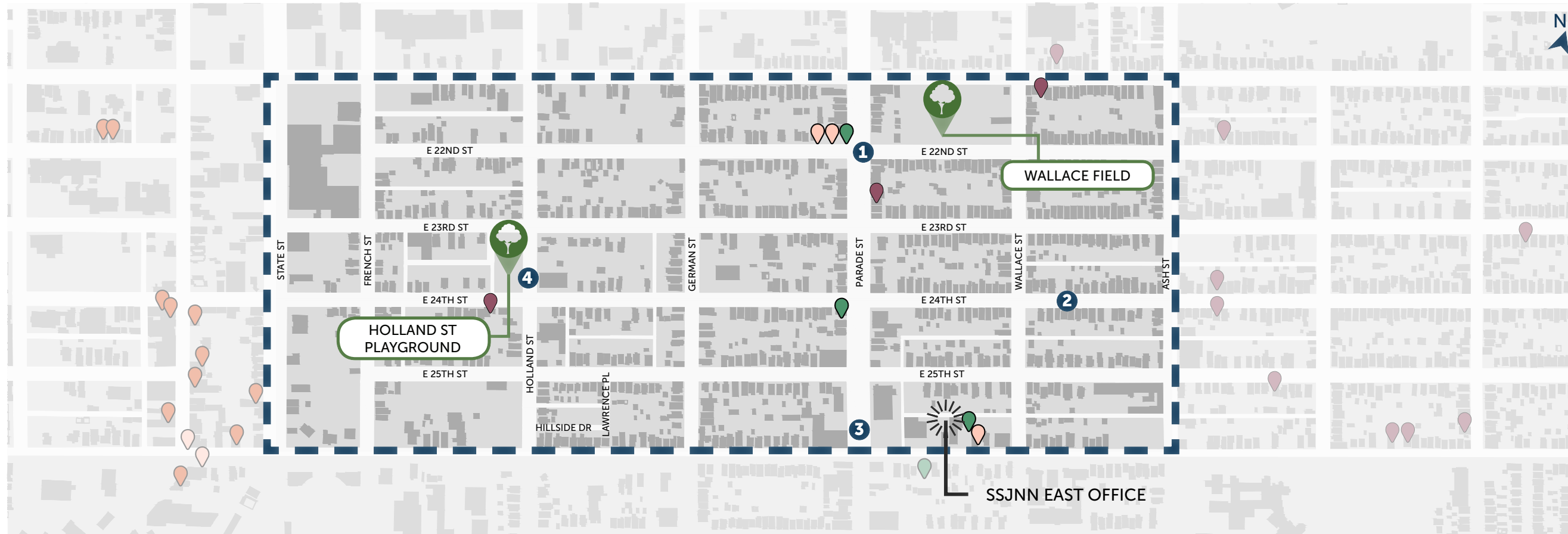
Census tract 17 is located in the southeast corner of the service area and is a gateway from the east side. This service area consists of mainly single family residential housing and has the third largest household population. The average age is 29.6 years old. Census tract 17 has a majority non-white population and has an average household income of \$41,004, as well as the lowest percentage of persons below poverty line. With a large amount of households, this neighborhood should be considered a stable and promising area that can benefit from deliberate and unifying investments.

There are two parks in the area: municipally-owned McKinley Park and Benedictine-owned Poetry Park. Due to the close proximity to the school and residential blocks, further investments should focus on tying these areas together.

McKinley Elementary School, the only school within the service area, serves about 450 students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Due to the considerable number of students in the area, investments and programming should focus on creating safe environments and routes for kids to travel to and from school.

- Key:**
- Art/Mural Installations
 - Block Grants
 - Façade Grants
 - Gardens & Greenspace
 - Genesis Housing
 - Home Repair Grants
 - Park
 - Hospital
 - School
 - Photo Location

CENSUS TRACT 18

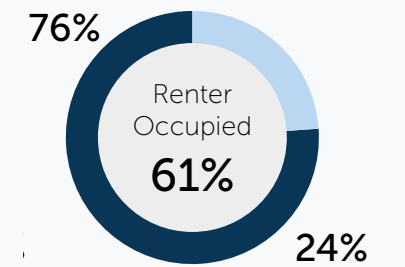


CENSUS TRACT 18: Bounded by State Street on the southwest, East 21st Street on the northwest, Ash Street on the northeast, and East 26th Street on the southeast.

Average Age:



Occupied vs. Vacant Housing:



Foreign Born Population:



E. 22ND ST. & PARADE ST. GARDEN 1



E. 24TH ST. TOWARDS ASH ST. 2



PARADE ST. TOWARDS E. 25TH ST. 3



HOLLAND ST. PLAYGROUND 4

Census tract 18 contains the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN) East Office. This census tract is also very young, with an average age of 24.5 years old. It has a significant vacancy rate: almost a quarter of the homes are vacant. This presents an opportunity for focused investments in affordable housing such as more Genesis homes, façade improvements, and pursuit of home repair grants.

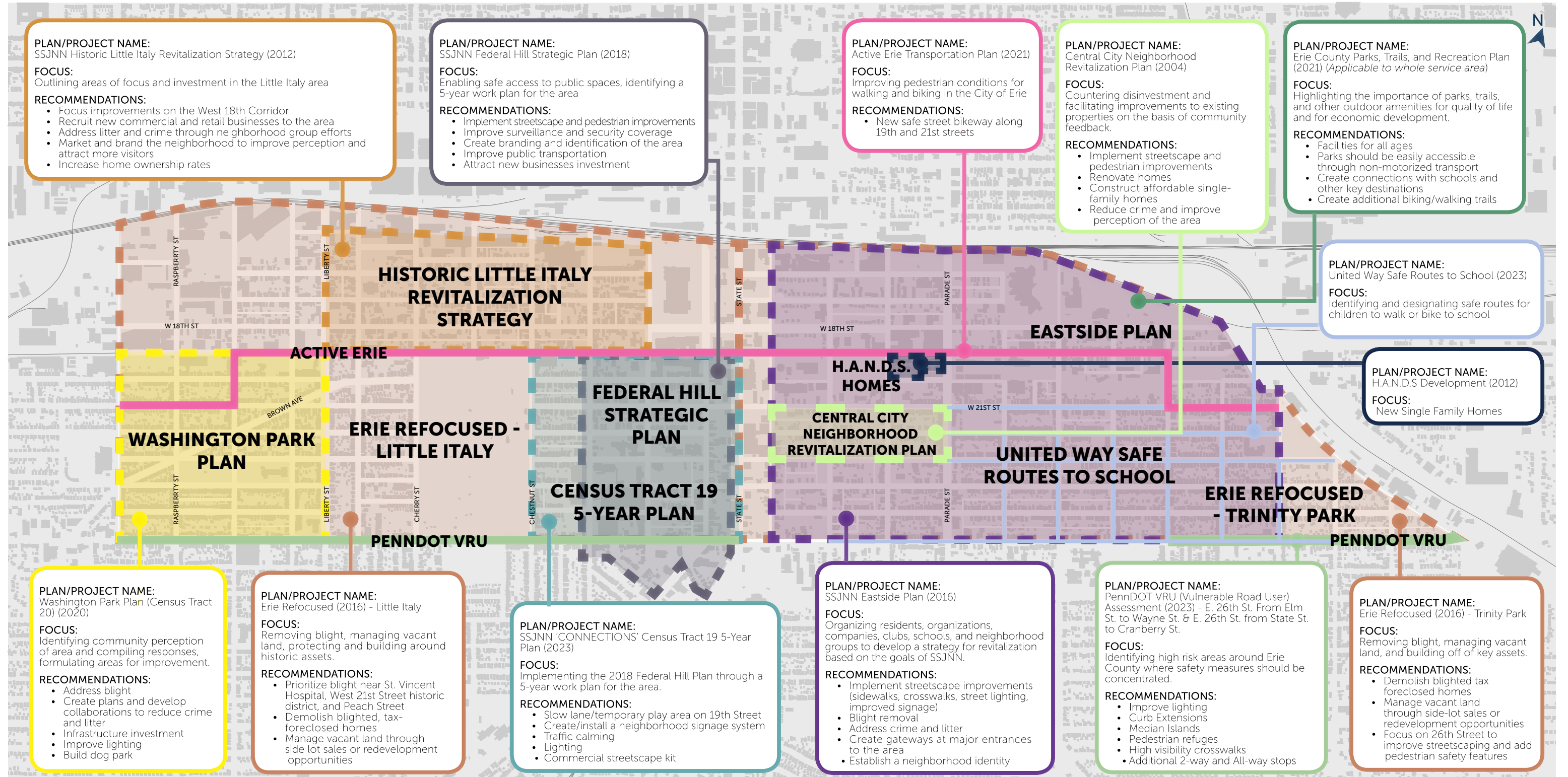
The area is mostly residential with a few commercial businesses. There are two parks, Erie School District's Wallace Field and municipal Holland Street Park, which are popular for both kids and adults for playing soccer.

The SSJNN East Office administers a bike program that has been influential in the east side census tracts. Many New Americans are referred by the three Erie resettlement agencies and rely on this program for a source of transportation; thus, improving biking and walking conditions in this area should be a main objective.

Key:

- Art/Mural Installations
- Block Grants
- Façade Grants
- Gardens & Greenspace
- Genesis Housing
- Home Repair Grants
- Park
- Hospital
- School
- Photo Location

CURRENT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES & PLANS



PRIORITY INITIATIVES

The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN) has recently completed a strategic plan for the organization that identifies five key areas of focus and expertise. A study of other recent local planning initiatives identified each document's relevance to SSJNN's priority initiatives. Recommendations from these existing documents can inform actionable steps and identify future investments that support the goals of the network. Outlined below are SSJNN's discussion around these five priority initiatives.

Physical Image: Recommendations to improve the appearance of neighborhoods include removing and preventing blight, making streetscape improvements, managing current community and urban farms, and creating new urban art. Plans also recommend new maintenance initiatives, such as community clean-up programs.

Crime Prevention and Safety: Neighborhoods in the network tend to have higher rates of crime than adjacent areas. Recommendations to mitigate crime and improve safety include installing security cameras and porch lights, as well as creating prevention-focused neighborhood initiatives and collaborations. SSJNN emphasizes the importance of creating and fostering relationships among neighbors and residents of the service area.

Economic Development: This section outlines collaborations with business owners and investors, applications for grants and other funding sources, and job stability programming for teens and young adults.

Affordable Housing: Priorities to grow and improve the affordable housing stock include façade improvement, property rehabilitation, first time home ownership programs, treating and reinventing blighted properties, and providing safe and affordable rental units.

Neighborhood Conservation and Community Engagement: This section highlights provision of basic needs, civic engagements, enrichment programs, and community needs, and explains how to identify and address systemic community needs.

Plan Name	Physical Image	Crime Prevention/Safety	Economic Development	Affordable Housing	Neighborhood Conservation/Community Engagement
Central City Revitalization Plan (2004)	●	●	●	●	●
Historic Little Italy Revitalization Strategy (2012)	●	●	●	●	●
Erie Refocused Plan (2016)	●		●		●
Eastside Plan (2016)	●	●	●	●	●
Federal Hill Strategic Plan (2018)	●	●			●
Erie County Parks, Trails, and Recreation Plan (2020)	●		●		●
2021 Active Erie Transportation Plan (2021)	●				
Washington Park Plan (Census Tract 20) Plan (2020)	●	●	●	●	●
PennDOT VRU (2023)		●			
United Way Safe Routes to School (2023)		●	●		
2023 Census Tract 19 5-Year Work Plan (2023)	●	●	●		●

KEY TAKEAWAYS

There is a high level of need in this planning area.

The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN) has been extremely successful in creating targeted investments that meet a range of individual and smaller group needs. In most cases, SSJNN works to address both the immediate need of their neighbors and the root cause of why that need exists. By responding to the source of community needs, SSJNN hopes to create more significant changes that will eliminate the need for emergency assistance in the long term. Much of this evolution has been addressed in the organization's strategic plan. The recommendations included in the next section are intended to tie potential programming and initiatives to the physical areas in which they are likely to be most impactful.

- The Sisters of St. Joseph started SSJNN in 2000, but it's only been 8 years since the organization has spread east of Peach Street to the current service area footprint. There is a need to balance programming and investments across the area. A centralized headquarters location can support this and reduce the costs and inefficiencies associated with maintaining an east and west office.
- Targeted investments are critical for meeting individual and smaller group needs, but a strategic approach to larger initiatives can begin to pull these together in meaningful ways that encourage additional investment by others.
- SSJNN began writing grants for neighborhood beautification and public art when they realized the impact that neighborhood presence and investment have on residents. There is a desire to transition beyond the mural program to new and additional high-impact efforts to improve perceptions, including expanded renovation and home-ownership work.
- Expanded home ownership within the footprint is a primary need to support community stability and positive growth – particularly in census tracts 13 and 19.
- The community gardens and farmers market are examples of programming and physical development that achieve multiple, complementary outcomes: Each ensures that residents in the neighborhood have access to fresh produce through a market match program, engages local farmers (between 10-14 regional partners weekly), provides employment opportunities for local teens, and brings people into the neighborhood who don't live in the neighborhood - improving perceptions.
- Little Italy benefits from name recognition, but more must be done to fully support this neighborhood branding through placemaking. An identity conversation around the neighborhoods in the eastern service area would be beneficial to build increased community awareness.
- When looking at Erie broadly, the main driver of current population growth is the New American and refugee community. This is a community with which SSJNN has extremely deep ties.
- Partnerships are important in expanding impact for non-profit organizations like SSJNN that are stretched thin. There are many organizations working within the service area, and residents are best served when these services do not overlap. A satellite approach of focusing support in areas of greatest need and strengthening connections between services can maximize impact by allowing partner organizations to lead with their strengths to provide higher quality and non-duplicative assistance.
- Larger infrastructure initiatives such as road resurfacing, intersection safety improvements, sidewalk improvements, public transit accessibility, and increased street lighting throughout should be priorities for the City of Erie and local utilities. These have been identified as immediate needs.



International Flavors Garden, W. 18th St.



SSJNN Community Engagement Event



Topsy Bean Federal Hill



Little Italy Farmers Market



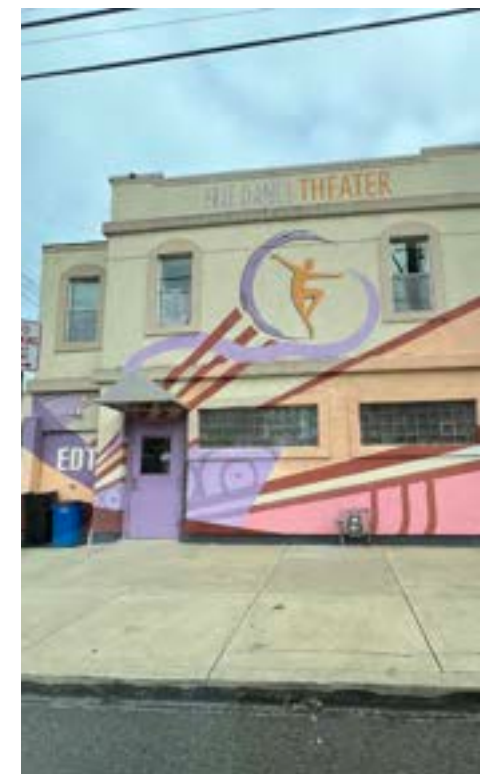
Poetry Park 636 E. 22nd St.



International Flavors Garden, W. 18th St.



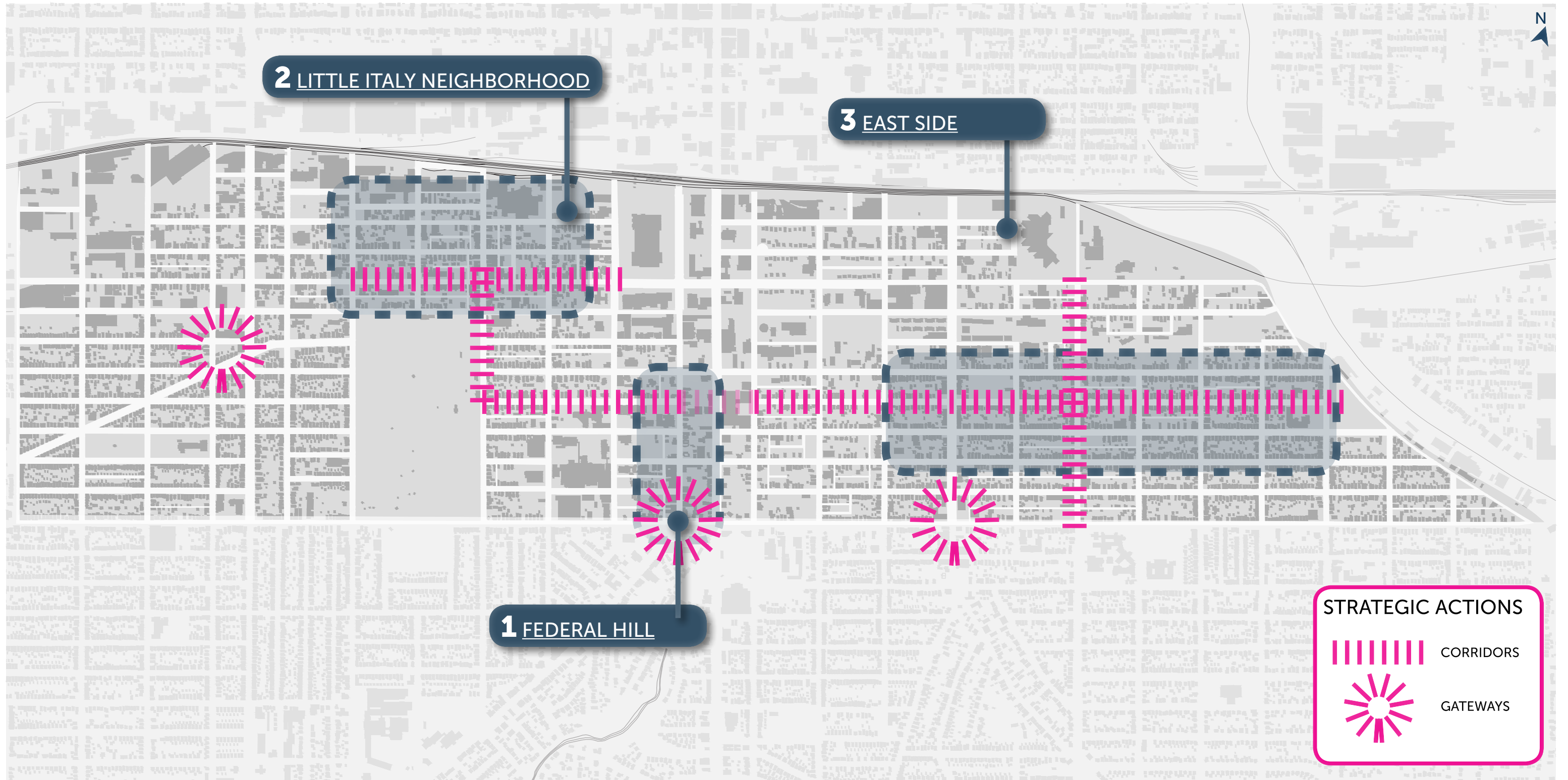
Seeds of Hope Garden, 2126 Parade St.



Erie Dance Theater, 1603 Cherry St.

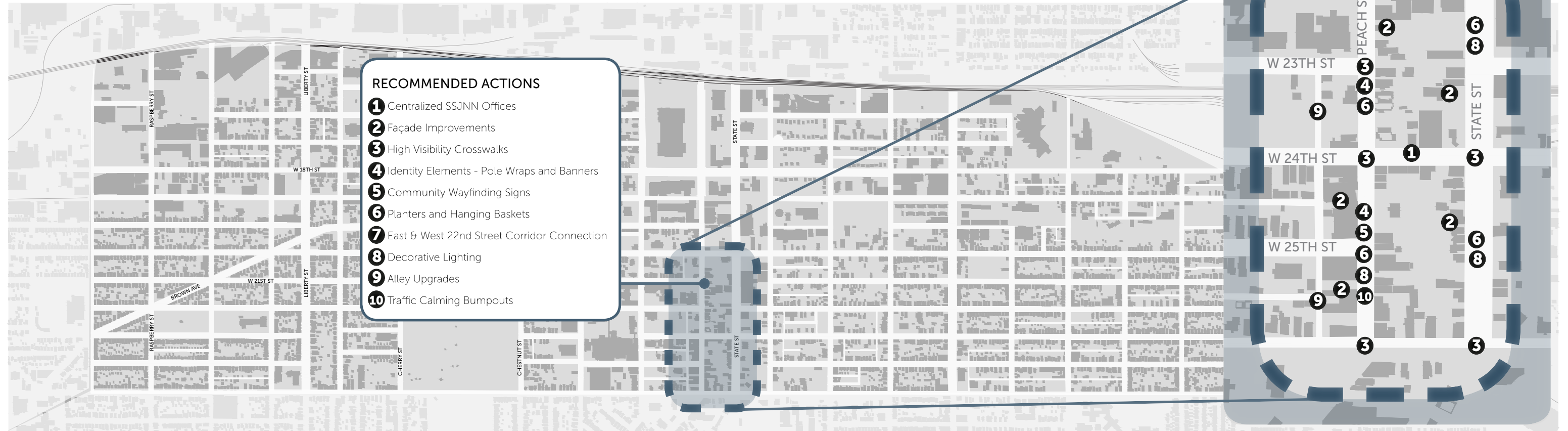
PRIORITY AREAS OF FOCUS

The following pages detail a series of strategic actions and recommended areas of focus to guide allocation of resources. Key corridors, gateways, and focus areas are intended to address identity and connectivity, and to build upon previous investments.



FOCUS AREA 1: FEDERAL HILL

CENSUS TRACT 19



FAÇADE IMPROVEMENTS & MIXED-USE RENOVATIONS

Federal Hill has been transformed through façade improvements made in the past few years. Pursuing several more transformations along the main business block on Peach Street from West 26th Street to West 24th Street can help the area become more attractive to both residents and new businesses.



PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS

Placing more distinction between pedestrian and vehicular spaces by replacing curbs, raising sidewalks, and adding decorative bollards can improve pedestrian safety. Installing more decorative and prevalent lighting, such as string lighting, can make the area more distinguishable. Additional art installations could be marketed as “postable” social media photo locations to increase the knowledge and intrigue of the area.

EAST & WEST 22ND STREET CONNECTION

East and West 22nd streets do not connect across State Street, terminating instead at French Street and Peach Street, respectively. New development between East and West 21st and 24th streets should introduce a pedestrian path across the block, or else provide wayfinding signage around the block.



LANDSCAPING

The Federal Hill corridor feels devoid of natural elements, which make an area appealing to residents and visitors. Planters attached to the sides of buildings or to new light poles can introduce vegetation to limited sidewalk space. Landscaped curb bumpouts with trees and other plants can give the illusion of a narrower roadway, thus reducing traffic speeds and improving pedestrian safety.

CENTRALIZED LOCATION FOR SSJNN

Federal Hill is the commercial hub and an important entry point to the City of Erie. Additional mixed-use and commercial renovations will continue to strengthen this evolving district. SSJNN has determined a need for at least 7,500 square feet for their organization to fully optimize their programming and efforts. Positioning the SSJNN offices within this main strip of their service area will help centralize their point of outreach and allow the scope of their network to be unified in one place within the neighborhood.



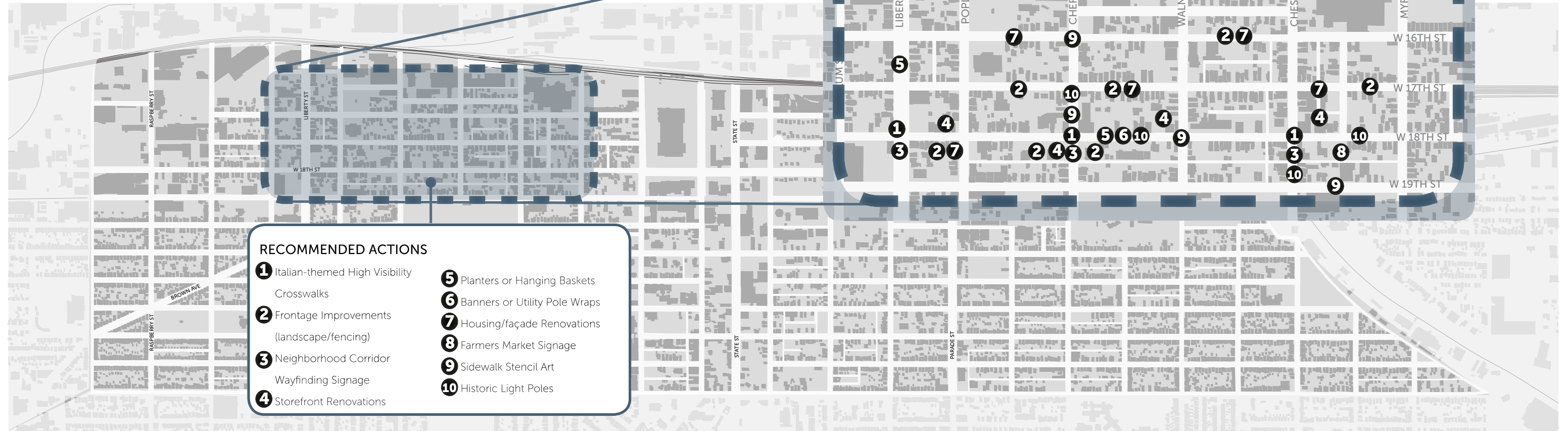
TRAFFIC CALMING FEATURES

Due to the nature of one-way roads, traffic calming is needed along the Peach Street corridor. The creation of deliberate spaces for parking through new concrete bumpouts or curb extensions that complement new crosswalks would encourage cars to slow their speeds and become more aware of pedestrians around them – especially children walking to the Northwest Pennsylvania Collegiate Academy. “Faux brick” crosswalks should be considered to improve visibility because they require less maintenance than painted crosswalks. Converting the road to a two-way street should also be a long term goal.



FOCUS AREA 2: LITTLE ITALY

CENSUS TRACTS 12, 20



- RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**
- 1 Italian-themed High Visibility Crosswalks
 - 2 Frontage Improvements (landscape/fencing)
 - 3 Neighborhood Corridor Wayfinding Signage
 - 4 Storefront Renovations
 - 5 Planters or Hanging Baskets
 - 6 Banners or Utility Pole Wraps
 - 7 Housing/façade Renovations
 - 8 Farmers Market Signage
 - 9 Sidewalk Stencil Art
 - 10 Historic Light Poles

NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY

The Little Italy neighborhood is very active with the weekly soup kitchen and farmers market, as well as several locations showcasing public art and murals. The gardens throughout this part of the neighborhood are flourishing and support the immediate neighbors. With all of these intentional actions taking place, there is a need to tie all them together and create an identity for the Little Italy neighborhood as a whole.



ST. PAUL'S CHURCH & PARTNERSHIPS

St. Paul's Church is an important asset to the efforts of the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN). The soup kitchen held there feeds residents weekly and creates a space for the organization to make connections with the people they serve. Continuing to create partnerships with other organizations who support the community is vital in continuing the success of their network.



WALKABILITY & SAFE ROUTES

Continuing to improve the vitality, safety, and overall enjoyment of neighborhood spaces is an important part of serving a community. Accessible crosswalks and sidewalks for all people in the neighborhood make communities safer, but they are also opportunities for creativity. Residents can participate in creating painted or brick sidewalks and wayfinding elements, which allows locals to define and create their sense of identity within the neighborhood.



ESTABLISH A MAIN CORRIDOR

West 18th Street serves as the main commercial corridor for the Little Italy neighborhood, while surrounding streets serve a more residential role. Adding intentional streetscape amenities, signage, and lighting can help establish identity, unify the space, and create a "Main Street" on West 18th Street. These adjustments can also mitigate the public perception that the neighborhood is unsafe by creating an inviting atmosphere for visitors.

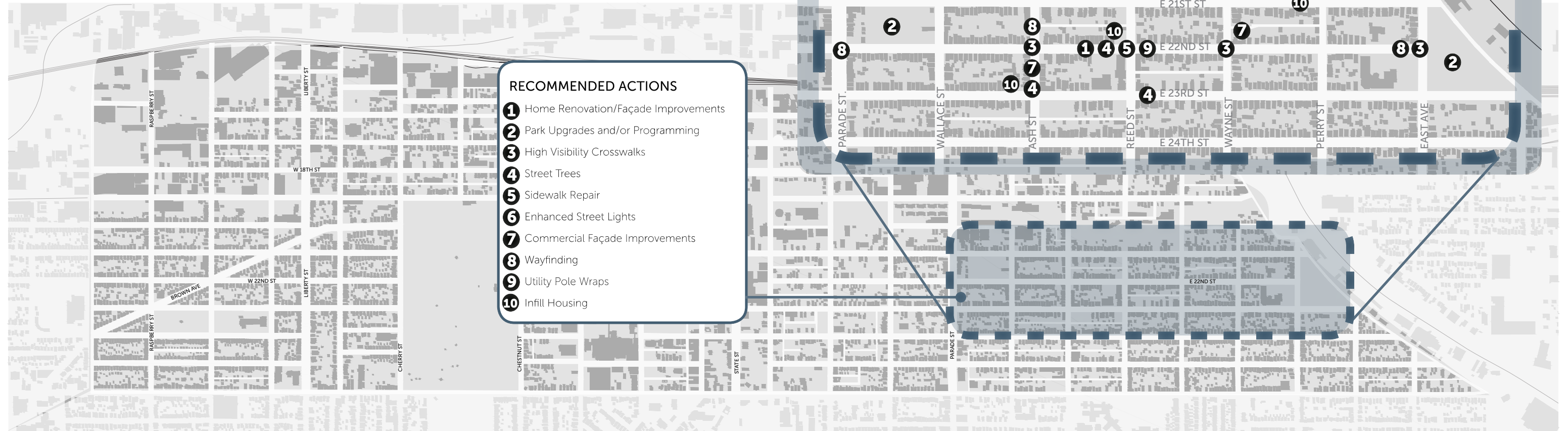
SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Creating safe routes to schools, like those already designated by United Way of Erie for McKinley Elementary School in SSJNN's east side focus area, can help show care and appreciation to the students, teachers, and parents within the neighborhood, many of whom must now cross major traffic corridors to reach elementary, middle, and high schools. Simple signage or marked paths along the sidewalks can easily direct old and new residents to the community and make drivers aware of increased pedestrian activity in these areas.



FOCUS AREA 3: EAST SIDE

CENSUS TRACTS 17, 18



- RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**
- 1 Home Renovation/Façade Improvements
 - 2 Park Upgrades and/or Programming
 - 3 High Visibility Crosswalks
 - 4 Street Trees
 - 5 Sidewalk Repair
 - 6 Enhanced Street Lights
 - 7 Commercial Façade Improvements
 - 8 Wayfinding
 - 9 Utility Pole Wraps
 - 10 Infill Housing



STABILIZE HOUSING

Targeted renovation is most impactful in blocks that have some stability and investment upon which to build. The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network (SSJNN) should identify blocks where focused investments and renovations will have the most impact. For example, the houses facing Wallace Field next to the Pulaski Club represent a good opportunity for façade improvements. The installation of new windows to a home or a coat of fresh paint to the exterior can create an attractive scape for the block with minimal changes to existing conditions of the neighborhood. Stabilized and consistent upkeep of homes can help unify the neighborhood, build a sense of confidence and belonging for its residents, and attract new families.



SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES

Providing opportunities for façade improvements (painting, signage, awnings, etc) for local businesses along the main corridors like Parade and Ash streets can help the neighboring districts feel more cohesive and attract both residents and visitors to local shops and restaurants.



COMMUNITY PARKS

Parks are vital community places that support recreational fitness and social activities – they provide “third” spaces where residents create a stronger social fabric. The trees and green spaces are important contributors to physical and mental health. Safety, design, and access are key to regular use. Small investments can make the spaces more attractive and support regular programming.

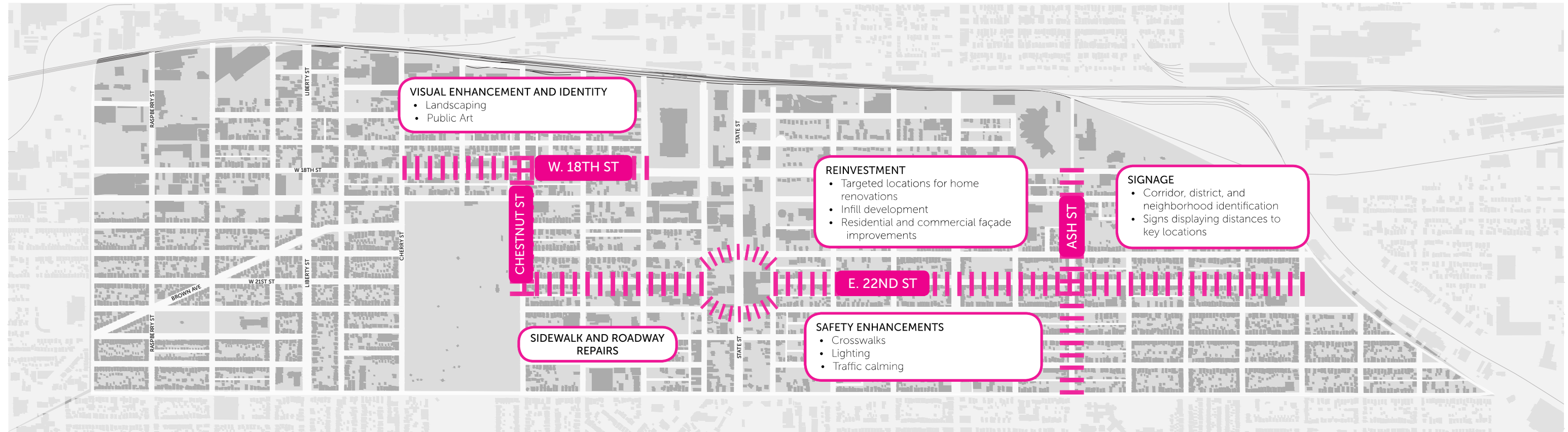
THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

As SSJNN continues to move into a more active role in the eastern side of its service area, the ability to build on the foundational work of other partners in the area will support improved and expanded service here. Through these partnerships, the organization can create spaces and support systems that are easily accessible to its residents.



STRATEGIC ACTIONS: CORRIDORS

The corridors identified for strategic actions connect assets and other key locations within the community. They are areas where some investment has already begun and additional investments are planned. A concentrated focus on strengthening these corridors will have a positive impact on surrounding blocks.



VISUAL ENHANCEMENT AND IDENTITY

Uniting and empowering the community through art both enhances the presence of neighborhood streets and creates functional, safe routes for residents to schools, the hospital, churches, and commercial districts. This can be easily done by painting existing streetscape structures like light poles or sidewalks. There is also an opportunity to invite the community into the process by allowing residents to help paint. The practice of using stencils to paint is also a way to promote wayfinding and organization branding within the community. Due to the large number of New Americans who live in the service area, art-based street elements can provide guidance that transcends language differences.



REINVESTMENT

These corridors are optimal locations for home renovations, residential and commercial façade improvements, and infill development – the practice of developing new construction on vacant and underutilized lots in existing urban areas. Targeted housing investments will be most successful on blocks where initiatives have already begun. There must be a strategic approach to selecting the lots used for neighborhood investment, such as providing new housing opportunities. Small gestures in commercial improvements (such as paint, new signage, and awnings) can change the dynamic of the business presence within the neighborhood, making it a place where people want to walk, gather, spend time, and invest.



SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING

The identification of key corridors, districts, and destinations is an important part of helping people orient themselves. Wayfinding is the use of signs, color, and other elements to help people navigate through a neighborhood. These components are also important for helping to communicate an area's identity. Considerations should be given to creating multilingual signage to reflect the various cultures here.



SAFETY ENHANCEMENTS

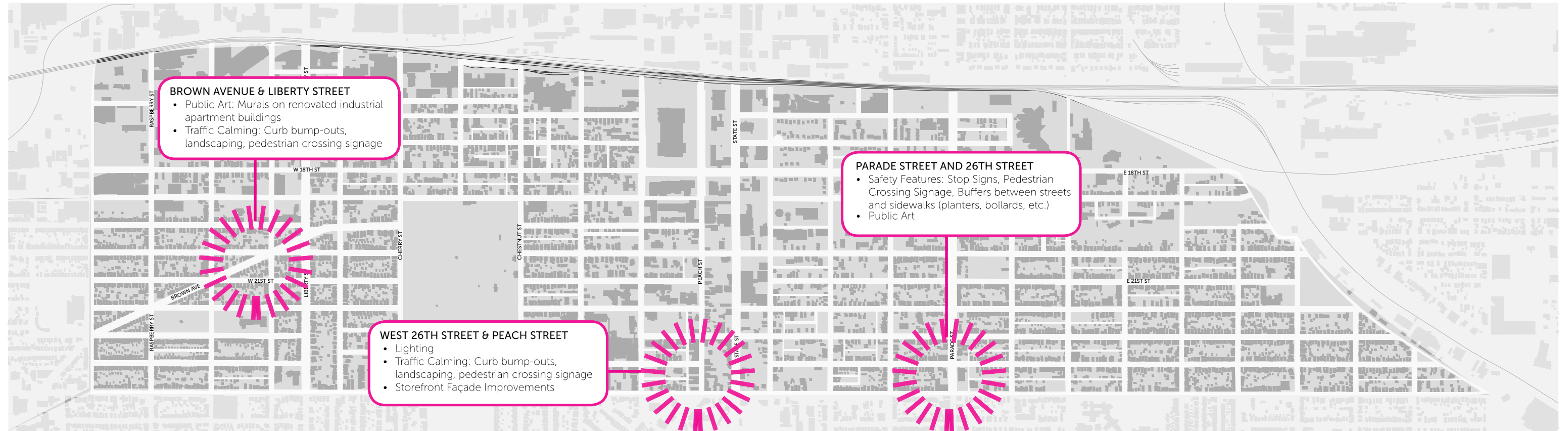
Improvements in accessibility and mobility for those who do not drive must include safety enhancements. Intersections along the path require high-visibility crosswalks. The incorporation of street trees can help calm traffic. Enhanced lighting along these paths can improve visibility and perceived safety.



STREETScape & LIGHTING IMPROVEMENTS

Large sections of the service area are badly in need of sidewalk and road repairs. In multiple locations along these corridors, sidewalks are missing or damaged to the point of being unusable for residents with mobility challenges. As infrastructure funding becomes available, these corridors should be prioritized for investment.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS: GATEWAYS



BROWN & LIBERTY INTERSECTION

The private investor-planned adaptive reuse of industrial buildings and those buildings' façades provide opportunities for murals and wayfinding elements to create a sense of place at this intersection where many sides of the city are coming together. Simple features such as strung Edison lights between the renovated buildings can help create a sense of arrival and activity as people enter into the neighborhood. Focused landscaping and signage can support a strong sense of arrival.



PARADE & 26TH INTERSECTION

The Parade and 26th Street intersection is surrounded by businesses that are valuable to the service area. This intersection can serve as a more identifiable gateway to the service area through increased artistic identity. Façade improvements and a mural that pays homage to the rich history of the business on the side of Pulakos Chocolates would improve the physical image of the intersection and attract more customers to the establishments. Enhanced crosswalks, landscaping, wayfinding, and community signage in this area, in addition to public art, can support a strengthened sense of arrival.



26TH & PEACH INTERSECTION

The commercial hub of this community is Federal Hill with the intersection of Peach Street and West 26th Street being a main entry point. Traffic calming features such as crosswalks and intentional landscaping can help welcome people into this main corridor. While this area's unique presence provides a welcoming environment, traffic calming and identity/wayfinding signage can help to strengthen the experience.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY

The SSJNN Service Area community is a vibrant and culturally rich area, which is one of its strengths. A mural, physical gateway, or art installation that reflects this culture can help create identity and instill a sense of pride in the residents.



SAFETY, TRAFFIC CALMING, & LANDSCAPING

New crosswalks, crosswalk indicators, and updated traffic lights will calm traffic and improve safety as the high concentration of vehicular traffic meets increased pedestrian traffic en route to local essential businesses. The wide sidewalks on Parade Street also provide room to plant trees that will slow traffic and visually narrow the expansive view of the wide street. This also provides a more distinct buffer between road and sidewalk, increasing safety for pedestrians in the area.

PRIORITY INITIATIVE CHART

Priority Initiative	Anticipated Time Frame		
	Immediate (0-2 years)	Near term (3-5 years)	Long term (6-10 years)
LITTLE ITALY NEIGHBORHOOD	ITALIAN-THEMED HIGH-VISIBILITY CROSSWALKS		
	FRONTAGE IMPROVEMENTS (LANDSCAPING AND FENCING)		
	NEIGHBORHOOD CORRIDOR WAYFINDING SIGNAGE		
	STOREFRONT RENOVATIONS		
	PLANTERS/HANGING BASKETS		
	BANNERS/UTILITY POLE WRAPS		
	HOUSING/FAÇADE RENOVATIONS		
	FARMERS MARKET SIGNAGE		
	SIDEWALK STENCIL ART		
	HISTORIC LIGHT POLES		
FEDERAL HILL	CENTRALIZED SSJNN OFFICE LOCATION		
	FAÇADE IMPROVEMENTS		
	HIGH VISIBILITY CROSSWALKS		
	IDENTITY ELEMENTS, POLE WRAPS, AND BANNERS		
	COMMUNITY WAYFINDING SIGNS		
	PLANTERS AND HANGING BASKETS		
	EAST/WEST 22ND STREET CONNECTOR CORRIDOR		
	DECORATIVE LIGHTING		
	ALLEY UPGRADES		
	TRAFFIC CALMING BUMPOUTS		
EAST SIDE NEIGHBORHOOD	HOME RENOVATION/FAÇADE IMPROVEMENTS		
	PARK UPGRADES AND/OR PROGRAMMING		
	HIGH VISIBILITY CROSSWALKS		
	STREET TREES		
	SIDEWALK REPAIRS		
	ENHANCED STREET LIGHTS		
	COMMERCIAL FAÇADE IMPROVEMENTS		
	WAYFINDING		
	UTILITY POLE WRAPS		
INFILL HOUSING			

Priority Initiative	Anticipated Time Frame		
	Immediate (0-2 years)	Near term (3-5 years)	Long term (6-10 years)
CORRIDORS	SIDEWALK REPAIRS		
	ROADWAY REPAIRS		
	WAYFINDING SIGNAGE AND MARKERS		
	LANDSCAPING (STREET TREES AND PLANTERS)		
	PUBLIC ART		
	TARGETED HOME RENOVATIONS		
	INFILL DEVELOPMENT		
	RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL FAÇADE IMPROVEMENTS		
	BRANDING EFFORTS (BANNERS, PAINTED LIGHTPOLES, ETC)		
	IMPROVED AND MORE PREVELANT STREET AND SIDEWALK LIGHTING		
GATEWAYS	PUBLIC ART (MURALS, SCULPTURES, ETC)		
	HIGH VISIBILITY CROSSWALKS		
	UPDATED AND ADDITIONAL LIGHTING		
	CURB BUMPOUTS		
	LANDSCAPING		
	WAYFINDING SIGNAGE AND MARKERS		

INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

As SSJNN works to meet the needs of the community, there is a limit to the scale and type of projects the organization can undertake. There are several needs outside of SSJNN's strengths and control that are critical for the neighborhood's growth and success. These needs have been requested and addressed in multiple plans and initiatives, but the City of Erie and utilities are required to support the SSJNN neighborhoods through funding and implementation.

These are primarily larger-scale infrastructure projects that include:

- Sidewalk replacement/reconstruction
- Road repaving
- Street light and traffic light updates
- Excess/orphaned utility pole removal
- Street tree maintenance, replacement, and planting
- Public transit