

# **Morningside Neighborhood ACTION PLAN**

## **September 2006**

Prepared by the  
Morningside Initiative Steering Committee  
in cooperation with the  
City of Pittsfield Department of Community Development

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## **The process of creating this plan**

In May of 2004 a group of neighborhood residents and the City came together at a meeting to begin forming the Morningside neighborhood initiative. These neighborhood residents began to structure a steering committee to identify neighborhood issues that needed to be addressed. The priority issues identified were crime and safety, physical appearance of the neighborhood, the loss of a neighborhood identity and community spirit. During 2004, Morningside's first action plan was prepared. That plan contained specific activities to address the priority issues.

Over the next 18 months the steering committee focused on implementing the highest priority activities.

In the fall of 2005, Professor Robert Shibley, Professor of Architecture and Planning and Director of the Urban Design Project at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York visited Pittsfield with a team of architects from the American Institute of Architects. Their Sustainable Design Assessment Team envisioned Pittsfield – and specifically downtown and the Westside and Morningside neighborhoods as a sustainable urban community in the heart of the Berkshires. This team outlined a strategy for achieving this vision.

Professor Shibley returned to Pittsfield in early 2006 to share ideas on how to improve walkability in downtown Pittsfield and connect the neighborhoods and downtown.. Members of the Morningside Initiative Steering Committee used the occasion of his visit on March 18, 2006 to begin updating the neighborhood action plan by identifying small, medium and large projects that would foster neighborhood revitalization.

Using these efforts as the foundation, the City encouraged the initiative to update its plan. An action planning session was held on April 5<sup>th</sup> and a portion of the May 10<sup>th</sup> Initiative Steering Committee meeting was devoted to action planning as well. This document is the result of these efforts.

While this plan is designed to make improvements in the neighborhood, it is recognized that the neighborhood has positive aspects such as: good housing stock, local business corridor with excellent restaurants, strong church communities, and an antique business niche.

Recruitment will need to continue to fill all the slots on the steering committee as well as the subcommittees. The subcommittees are: Crime Prevention and Public Safety; Physical Appearance; Samuel Harrison House Society; Business Community; and Community Spirit and Outreach. The key role of the Crime Prevention and Public Safety subcommittee is to create street by street crime watch groups to address ongoing issues of crime prevention and public safety.

The Physical Appearance committee's major role is to help in providing information to the City for code enforcement procedures and to establish a yearly neighborhood clean up. The Neighborhood Identity and Spirit committee will attempt to return an identity to the neighborhood. The committee will work on social events for the neighborhood as well as assisting with educational forums that can help members of the neighborhood.

The following is a prioritized list of action items the neighborhood steering committee plans to tackle over the next 2-5 years. Many require the help and commitment of neighborhood residents and businesses. Some require partnerships with the City and other organizations.

## **Action Steps (Projects) – Narrative and Table**

### **SMALL PROJECTS**

- **Recruit more people.** It is important for the steering committee to recruit members of the neighborhood and business owners to join committees to assist. Actions that need to be taken are: 1. Engage the Tyler Street business district, the school community, and civic associations; and 2. Getting more residents involved in all of the activities is a high priority for the Morningside Initiative Steering Committee and Subcommittee members. Many of the events and activities offer opportunities for recruitment.

**Establish an active crime watch.** To address the area of crime and drugs in the neighborhood, the subcommittee of Crime Prevention and Public Safety is working to create a street by street crime watch network. The purpose of this is to help police with being the eyes and ears in the neighborhood. We need to work with the police department to increase patrols in the high targeted crime areas of the neighborhood

- **Spread the word about activities, events and successes.** It is important to market the positive activities, events and accomplishments of the Initiative. One way for this to happen is through letters to the Editor. Press releases are another important way. Any opportunity to get press coverage should be taken.
- **Get the word out re: Housing Rehab Programs.** There are various housing rehab programs offered by private lenders and the public sector. A series of workshops are being offered by Greylock Federal Credit Union, the first of which was held at Pride Night on August 15<sup>th</sup> at Morningside Community School. This is an attempt to educate members of the neighborhood of some of the benefits that exist for them. We must also reach out to other financial institutions for assistance.
- **Continue the Annual Pride Night** will be an annual event held at Morningside Community School. The purpose of this event is to show the neighborhood that we care and that we will not accept illegal activities within our initiative boundary. We will work closely with the Police Department and our subcommittee of Crime Prevention / Public Safety.
- **Continue the annual Block Party** is an opportunity to collaborate with the Westside Initiative and Partners Four Youth. This event will be an annual event that will take place in September.
- **Improve walkability on Fenn St. and Tyler Street.** Undertake small, simple, quick, beautification actions.

- **Undertake a beautification project at Pittsfield Common and improve safety at the skate park.** There is an interest in the neighborhood in getting young people more actively and genuinely involved in positive activities. There was a suggestion to build a new skate park, with the involvement of neighborhood youth. Since there is a skate park at Pittsfield Common already, it was decided that priority should be given to improving its safety and beautification, perhaps with youth involvement.

## MEDIUM PROJECTS

- **Continue Code Enforcement.** The most important role for residents in this action item is to continue prioritizing streets, houses, etc. for the building inspectors and other City officials to focus their efforts. We must continue to work with members of the neighborhood to report problems so that we can assist the City in the enforcement process.
- **Annually sponsor a neighborhood clean up.** This is another annual event sponsored by the initiative. The purpose of this event is to help residents dispose of items that would not be accepted at the curbside pickup.
- **Improve lighting in the area of Morningside School. Advocate for the City to conduct a lighting study of the school and vicinity.** There is a wish for improved lighting for the purpose of improved safety around the school.
- **Improve lighting and streetscape on Fenn and Tyler Street.** Lighting and tree plantings would help to improve the overall look of the main thoroughfares in the Morningside neighborhood. It is important that Tyler St be ready for the role as the main artery to the Stanley Business Park.

## BIG PROJECTS

- **Housing development.** There is an interest in additional mixed income housing in the neighborhood. A strategy could be developed to focus on a targeted area. A focus should be in redevelopment of existing housing stock if found to be in stable condition.
- **Springside Pond renovations.** The fountain in Springside Pond has been repaired, which also helps with aeration for pond maintenance. The steering committee will work with the Parks Department and Parks Commission to attempt to restore the beauty of the old Springside Pond. Long-term goal would be to develop the complete stretch of the Park from the pond to the boundless playground.
- **Demolitions.** There were none in the most recent round of demolitions, since the properties were not deemed structurally unsound by the Board of Survey inspectors. Encouragement should be given for developers to buy vacant

properties and redevelop them. This has happened in the Lake Street area and should be used as a guide for the future.

- **Harrison House District.** The Samuel Harrison House Committee is working on the renovation of the 82 Third Street property that was the home of Rev. Samuel Harrison. This is a long-term project, with some intermediate milestones, such as a proposed walk connecting 82 Third Street with the original site of Second Congregational Church near the First Street bridge (near Downtown) and the current site of Second Congregational Church on Onota Street (in the West Side neighborhood). This committee works closely with the Morningside Initiative Steering Committee.
- **A plan for St. Mary's and Mt. Carmel Sites.** While these sites are the property of the Catholic Diocese, it is important for neighborhood residents to give some thought to the future use of these sites before they become vacant.

### Morningside Initiative Actions

| <b>SMALL PROJECTS (in prioritized order)</b>   | <b><u>WHO</u></b><br>(lead person)            | <b><u>WHEN</u></b> | <b><u>\$\$\$</u></b> |
|--|---|--------------------|----------------------|
| Recruit more people<br>Engage Tyler Street business district<br>Engage school community and civic associations | Pete Marchetti<br>Lou Costi<br>Pete Marchetti |                    |                      |
| Establish active crime watch   | Pete White                                    | monthly            |                      |
| Spread the word, more positive press coverage on successes, including letters to the Editor                    | Pete Marchetti                                |                    |                      |
| Get the word out re: Housing Rehab Programs  | Gloria Beraldi                                |                    |                      |
| Pride Night – August 15 <sup>th</sup>  | Pete White                                    | Annually           |                      |
| Block Party – September 16   | Merle Ferber                                  | Annually           |                      |
| Fenn and Tyler Street – improve walkability  | Steering Com.                                 |                    |                      |
| Pittsfield Common safety (skate park) and beautification   | Steering Com.                                 |                    |                      |

| <b>MEDIUM PROJECTS (in prioritized order)</b>                          | <b><u>WHO</u></b>            | <b><u>WHEN</u></b> | <b><u>\$\$\$</u></b> |
|--|------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Continuing code enforcement<br>keep prioritizing streets, houses, etc. | Residents<br>Dept. Com. Dev. |                    |                      |
| Clean-up   | Dawn Bartlett                | annually           |                      |
| Lighting study of the school and vicinity                              | Pete White<br>Chris Burke    |                    |                      |
| Fenn and Tyler Streets – lighting and tree planting                    | Dept. Com. Dev.              |                    |                      |

| <b>BIG PROJECTS (in prioritized order)</b> | <b><u>WHO</u></b> | <b><u>WHEN</u></b> | <b><u>\$\$\$</u></b> |
|--|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Housing development                        | Don Atwater       |                    |                      |
| Springside Pond renovations                | Dawn Bartlett     |                    |                      |
| Demolitions                                | Dept. Com. Dev.   |                    |                      |
| Harrison House District                    | Gail Atwell       |                    |                      |
| A plan for St. Mary's and Mt. Carmel Sites | Steering Com.     |                    |                      |

### **Neighborhood demographics**

The Morningside neighborhood represents an area of Pittsfield, Massachusetts bounded by East Street, North Street, and Springside Avenue with its eastern boundary formed by Benedict Road south to Tyler Street, west to Woodlawn Avenue, south to Kellogg Street, west to Fourth Street, south to Fenn Street, and east to East Street. Most of the Morningside neighborhood resides entirely within Census Tract 9002 Less than 10 percent of the Morningside population lives within Census Tract 9001, Block Groups 100 and 200.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Pittsfield's Morningside neighborhood trails behind the City significantly in terms of owner occupancy, household income, poverty rate, and median home value. It has nearly twice as many renters as the City and more than twice the poverty rate. The neighborhood's median household income is only two-thirds as high as the City's. In addition, Morningside has a significant concentration of the city's vacant and abandoned buildings, vacant lots, and buildings at risk of abandonment.

The neighborhood also has a number of positive features, including its proximity to downtown, its core of commercial services, a relatively good stock of housing, and a major new economic development initiative at the site of the former General Electric facility.

This Neighborhood Revitalization Action Plan proposes specific steps to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood to a point where it is a more attractive location for homeownership and for private investment in rental housing. The Action Plan represents a specific set of recommendations, developed by neighborhood residents, to address key concerns, foster positive change and encourage the existing positive energy in the neighborhood.

To help the neighborhood monitor the results of its efforts, a base line of demographic information has been gathered. As the neighborhood moves forward it is expected that these demographics will improve.

The following chart compares key demographic information concerning the Morningside neighborhood, both over time and geographically with the city of Pittsfield. The key demographic variables for this plan include: Population, Housing Tenure, Median Household Income, Poverty Status, Median Gross Rent, Percent Paying 35% of Income for Rent, Median Home Value, Racial Composition, and Single Parent status (see Appendix D). All information in these figures derives from the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census of Population & Housing, ST-3.

## Economic and Demographic Comparison

Pittsfield & Morningside Neighborhood,  
1990-2000

| City of Pittsfield                                | 1990      | 2000      | % Change |
|---|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Population  | 48622     | 45793     | -6%      |
| Percent Owner Occupancy                           | 60%       | 61%       | 2%       |
| Median Household Income                           | \$29,987  | \$35,655  | 19%      |
| % Persons Below Poverty Level                     | 10%       | 11%       | 8%       |
| Median Gross Rent                                 | \$461     | \$503     | 9%       |
| Percent Paying 35+% of Income for Rent            | 32%       | 29%       | -10%     |
| Median Value of Owner Occupied Housing            | \$110,700 | \$100,800 | -9%      |
| Racial Composition: Percent Non-white or Hispanic | 5%        | 7%        | 40%      |
| Percent of Families w/ Children: Single Parent    | 26%       | 41%       | 58%      |
| Percent Moved to Pittsfield in last 5 years       | 17%       | 16%       | -7%      |
| Percent Families with No workers in Household     | 17%       | 18%       | 5%       |

From 1990 to 2000, the City of Pittsfield's population and home values declined by six and nine percent respectively. The poverty rate jumped 17 percent and single parent households grew by more than 58 percent. Median household income grew by 19 percent, median gross rents by nine percent, and the percentage of renters paying 35 percent or more of income for rent dropped by 10 percent. The overall homeownership rate increased slightly from 60 to 61 percent. The City as a whole saw a relatively small change in the racial composition of residents and in the percentage of residents living in the City for five years or less.

The City of Pittsfield varies significantly from the state in several key demographic indicators. For example, the City's median household income in 2000 was only 71 percent of Massachusetts.

Eleven percent of Pittsfield residents live in poverty compared to 9.3 percent statewide. Pittsfield's median home value in 2000 was \$82,000 more affordable than for the state as a whole.

Within the context of Pittsfield economic and demographic character, the Morningside neighborhood experienced trends with both similarities and differences from the City as a whole. Among the differences, Morningside's population grew by 3 percent while the city's was declining. The neighborhood's growth during the 1990s largely represented increases in renting households. The percentage of residents reporting their race as non-White or Hispanic increased from eight to 30 percent of the neighborhood population compared to an increase from five to seven percent of the population citywide. Morningside's Hispanic or Latino population increased by nearly 150 percent while Black and Asian residents also registered substantial gains. The neighborhood's poverty rate grew at twice the city's rate. The neighborhood also saw a 22 percent drop in the percent of families with no workers present compared to a five percent increase for the City as a whole.

Median household income in Morningside grew by just under 20 percent from 1990 to 2000, while median rents grew by nine percent. The percentage of renters paying more than 35 percent of their household income for rent dropped by 18 percent. Median home values also dropped by 10 percent. In these respects, the neighborhood and the City experienced similar changes.

| <b>Morningside Neighborhood</b>                | 1990      | 2000     | % Change |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|
| Population                                     | 6739      | 6958     | 3%       |
| Percent Owner Occupancy                        | 31%       | 32%      | 5%       |
| Median Household Income (est.)                 | \$ 19,810 | \$23,734 | 20%      |
| Percent Persons Below Poverty Level            | 22%       | 25%      | 17%      |
| Median Gross Rent                              | \$445     | \$485    | 9%       |
| Percent Paying 35+% of Income for Rent         | 38%       | 31%      | -18%     |
| Median Value of Owner Occupied Housing (est.)  | \$ 83,500 | \$75,000 | -10%     |
| Racial Composition: Non-white or Hispanic      | 8%        | 30%      | 275%     |
| Percent of Families w/ Children: Single Parent | 49%       | 68%      | 38%      |
| Percent Moved to Pittsfield in last 5 years    | 24%       | 23%      | -7%      |
| Percent Families with No Workers in Household  | 25%       | 20%      | -22%     |

The Morningside neighborhood trails behind the City significantly in terms of owner occupancy, household income, poverty rate, and median home value. It has nearly twice as many renters as the City and more than twice the poverty rate. The neighborhood's median household income is only two-thirds as high as the City's. Among the most alarming statistics provided in the Census, single parents head two-thirds of Morningside families with children. This compares to 41 percent for Pittsfield.

| <b>Morningside as Percent of Pittsfield</b>    | 1990 | 2000 |
|--|------|------|
| Population                                     | 14%  | 15%  |
| Percent Owner Occupancy                        | 51%  | 53%  |
| Median Household Income                        | 66%  | 67%  |
| % of Persons Below Poverty Level               | 215% | 229% |
| Median Gross Rent                              | 97%  | 96%  |
| Percent Paying 35+% of Income for Rent         | 119% | 107% |
| Median Value of Owner Occupied Housing         | 75%  | 74%  |
| Racial Composition: Percent White Only         | 97%  | 75%  |
| Percent of Families w/ Children: Single Parent | 189% | 165% |
| Percent Moved to Pittsfield in last 5 years    | 143% | 142% |
| Percent Families with No workers in Household  | 147% | 109% |

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