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# OLD ALLENTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT PLAN



**City of Allentown, Pennsylvania**

**April 2004**

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# Old Allentown Neighborhood Improvement Plan

Old Allentown Preservation Association  
Old Town Neighborhood Watch

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## Introduction

The Old Allentown Neighborhood, comprised mainly of Allentown's first historic district which was established more than twenty-five years ago, is at an appropriate time in its history to reflect and plan for the future. The neighborhood's importance as a means to not only preserve period architecture, but to provide a strong and cohesive residential community on downtown's northern edge are as compelling today as when its founders met in the neighborhood's brick town homes in the early and mid-seventies. More importantly, Allentown is richer for both the cumulative improvements that historic preservation has brought to Allentown's center city area, and the interest and activity of its residents.

As important as the historic qualities of the neighborhood are however, so too are a number of quality of life issues that affect the day-to-day livability of the neighborhood. All center city neighborhoods have experienced varying degrees of change since the formative years of Old Allentown. These changes are manifested in the neighborhoods' demographic, housing and physical characteristics. The influx of new residents with diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, pockets of blighted housing with fewer owner-occupied units, and a variety of nuisance issues are representative of the change that is occurring. Changing lifestyles, the allure of the suburbs and, to a certain degree, the loss of large center city employment opportunities are also dynamics that will continue to have an impact on the future of these areas.

The basic building blocks of these urban communities are virtually unchanged, however. That is, they remain livable, self-contained communities. Small grocery stores, restaurants, and other service-oriented businesses can be found on many neighborhood streets and corners. In Old Allentown alone, there are three neighborhood elementary schools, two hospitals within 5 blocks, and downtown's largest employer within one block. Arts, entertainment and cultural offerings are also in close proximity. Perhaps most importantly, there are two community groups operating within its boundaries that are committed to neighborhood improvement.

The purpose of this planning exercise was to engage the neighborhood community in a process that would help them recognize the continuing assets of the neighborhood; identify issues and changes that cause stress and to develop a community based strategy for problem solving and asset enhancement. This document represents the results of that process.



## Background

### About the Neighborhood

The Old Allentown neighborhood is located in Allentown's center city immediately adjacent to the City's Central Business District and Seventh Street, a 7-block long commercial corridor. Taken together, these two commercial areas form the southern and eastern boundaries of the neighborhood respectively. The neighborhood's southern boundary lies within one block of the CBD's prime address, 9th and Hamilton Streets, the focal point of downtown revitalization efforts. This intersection is the location of the headquarters of PPL Corporation, the site of a new multi tenant office building completed in 2003, downtown's only full service hotel and other downtown development projects that are currently underway or in the planning phases. The easternmost block of Old Allentown is within the City's federally and state-designated Weed and Seed area. (See Figure 1.)

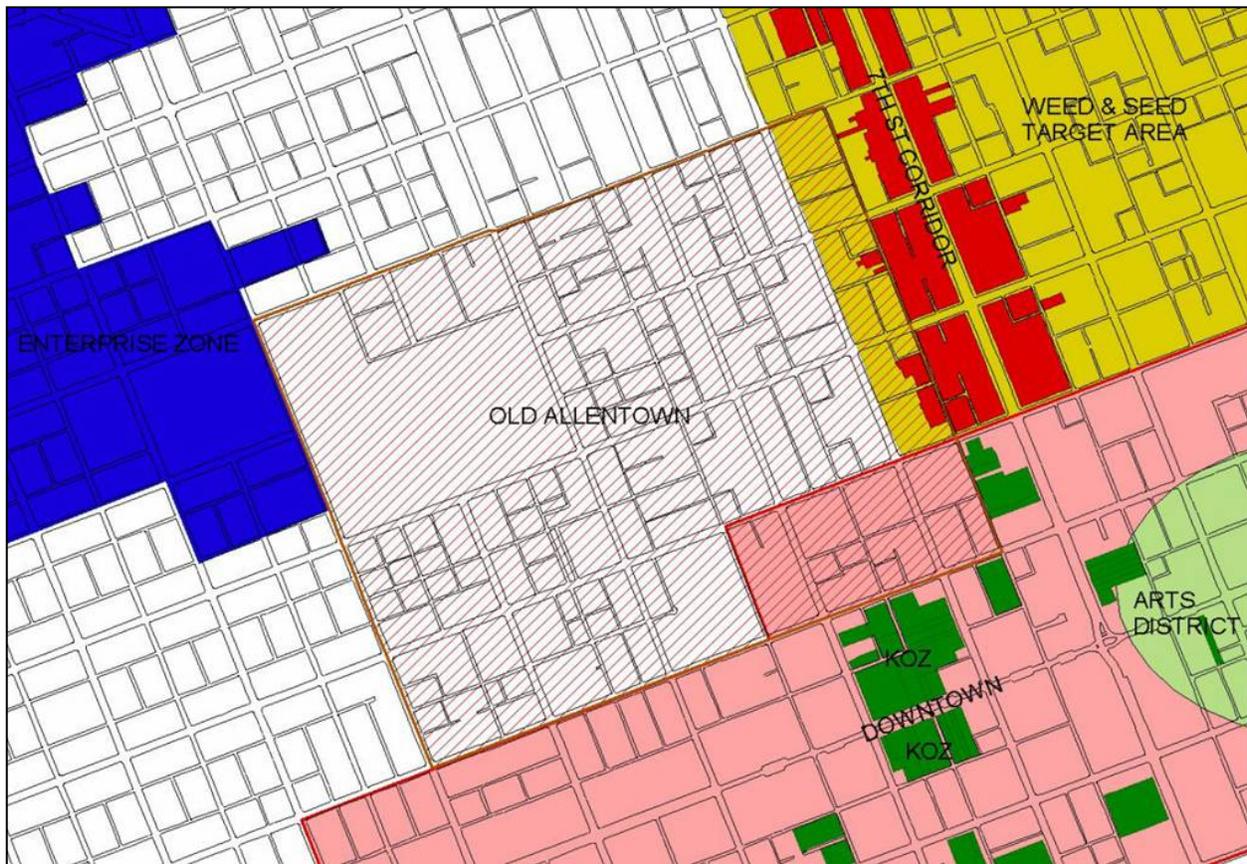


Figure 1: Old Allentown Neighborhood in Context

The neighborhood extends over a 12-block area, consisting of about 1200 structures and home to over 4000 persons. Primarily residential in nature, the area is defined by its brick row houses on tree-lined streets, interspersed by small neighborhood scale commercial and business establishments. The neighborhood is home to three elementary schools and numerous churches of all denominations. Two historic cemeteries are significant features, providing the neighborhood with passive green space and opportunities to draw visitors. (See Figure 2.)

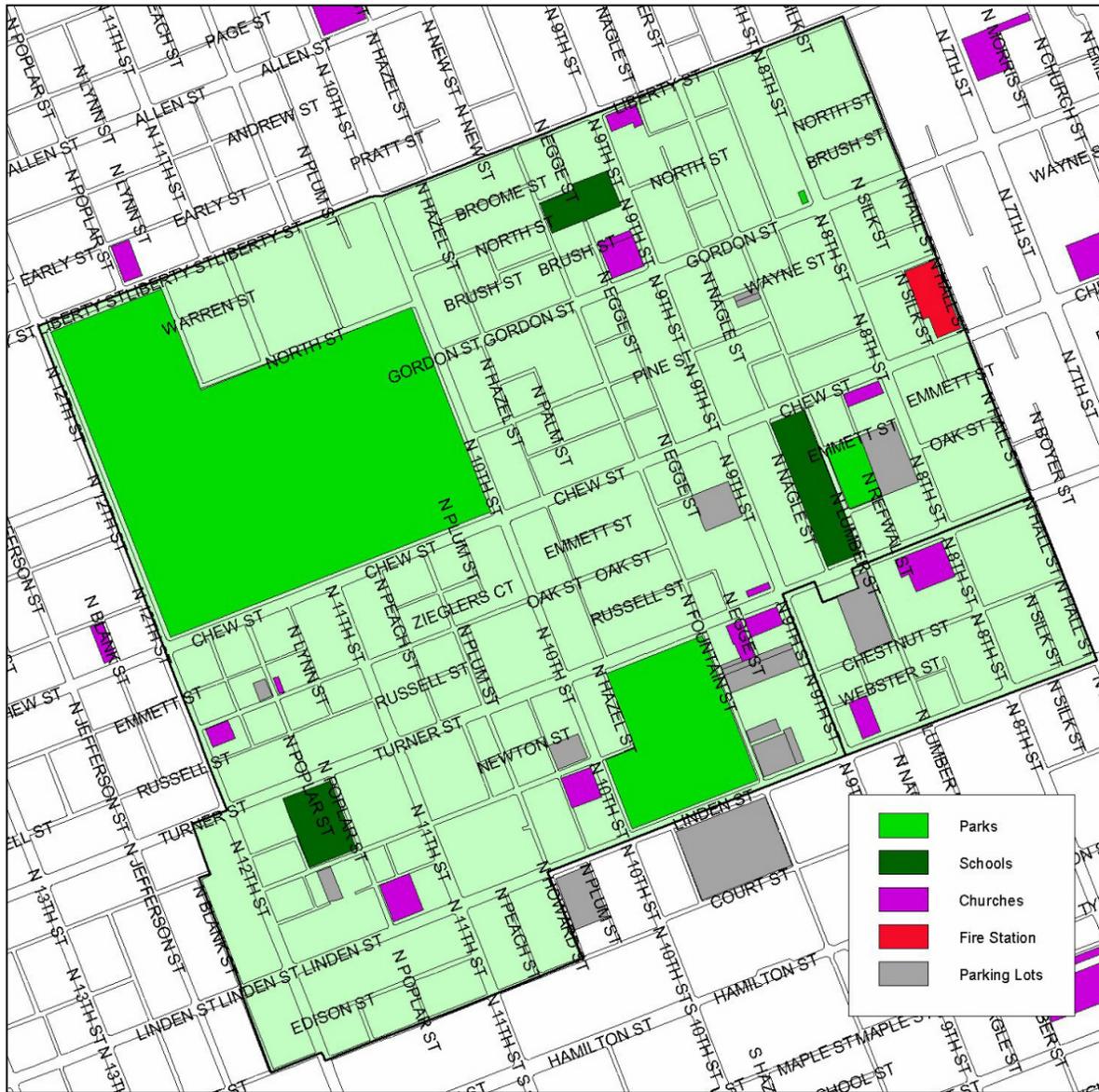


Figure 2: Community Facilities

Old Allentown is among the City’s older neighborhoods, and in 1978 was established as a local historic district, the City’s first. Over the more than 25 years of the district’s existence, the City Historic Architectural Review Board has reviewed more than 1600 applications in Old Allentown.

The district’s preservation interests were and continue today to be promoted by an active resident based organization, the Old Allentown Preservation Association (OAPA), a motivated, and vital group. In addition to OAPA, the Old Town Neighborhood Watch, a local crime watch group and a valuable partner during the preparation of this plan, also serves the neighborhood.

### History and Architecture

The boundaries of Old Allentown are contiguous with early City development and its first westward expansion in 1867. Dating to the City’s inception, Old Allentown was the northwest quadrant of the original plan of Northampton Town, which was surveyed in 1762 by order of the founder, William Allen. The significance of Old Allentown as a historic district lies in the retention of the Northampton Town Plan and the architectural developments during the Victorian Period, dating from 1840-1910. The original plan, inspired by William Penn’s plan of Philadelphia, was laid out in a grid pattern and became the mode that continued throughout the City in subsequent years. (See Figure 3.)

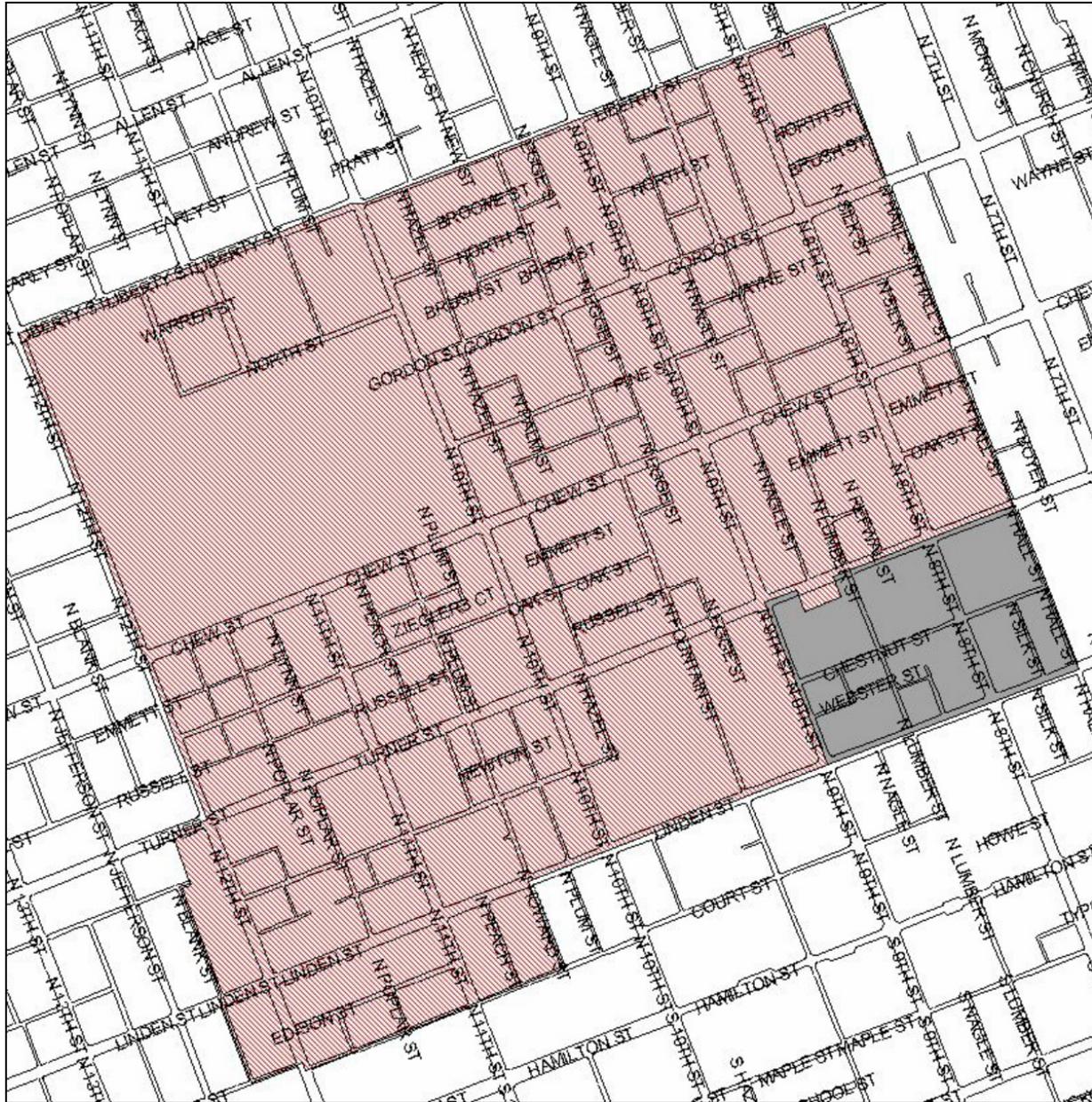


Figure 3: Neighborhood Layout



Builders and contractors of Old Allentown were inspired by the architecture of Philadelphia and Baltimore. Early structures and residences were simple, lacking ornamentation. They were constructed of local brick while the only ornamentation was a corbeled or dentilated brick cornice, window shutters and blinds, arched doorways, and six or four paneled doors.

As time progressed, motifs of Italianate and French modes overlaid the early plain brick facades. These styles included bracketed cornices, mansard roofs, ornamental window and door lintels, and bay and oriel windows of wood and copper.

Ornamentation culminated in the closing years of the nineteenth century when technological changes in the building and construction trades occurred. Porch spindles, balustrades and columns, curved brackets and wood shingles in a variety of shapes and forms, all of which exemplified both the Eastlake and the Queen Anne Styles, displayed new creative uses of wood. Also found were turrets, spires, finials and stained and beveled glass.

### **The People Who Live Here**

The Old Allentown neighborhood has undergone significant demographic change in the 1990 - 2000 decade. Though its total population remained about the same (a loss of 8 persons), its age and racial composition changed substantially. For example, the neighborhood population became younger as the proportion of the population under the age of 18 increased from 21% to 29%. Conversely, the population over the age of 64 decreased from 13% in 1990 to 7% in 2000.

The neighborhood also became increasingly diverse with increases in Hispanic and black residents, and reductions in white residents. For example,

- Hispanic residents increased from 15.7% of the neighborhood's population in 1990 to 38.6% in 2000. Comparatively, the Hispanic population citywide is about 26% of the total city population.
- The Black population increased from 7.1% in 1990 to 12.8% in 2000.
- The White population decreased from 81.6% in 1990 to 60.7% in 2000.
- The total of all other races also increased from 11.3% in 1990 to 26.6% in 2000.

Household income is lower and grew at a slower rate than incomes citywide. For example, the neighborhood's median household income was lower (\$25,208 vs. \$32,016) than the City's as a whole, and rose 20.2% compared to a citywide increase of 23.2% over the 1990 - 2000 decade. However, compared to other center city neighborhoods where the average increase was only 9%, with some neighborhoods showing decreases, the median household income in Old Allentown was higher by as much as \$5,000 to \$10,000. The distribution of income shows that 25% of all Old Allentown households had incomes of \$15,000 or less. Twenty percent had incomes above \$50,000.

### **Some Facts About the Housing Stock**

In 2000, there were 1944 housing units in the Old Allentown neighborhood. The number of units actually decreased by 153 from 1990, a phenomenon that can be attributed to an active de-conversion (the conversion of multi-family buildings to single unit structures) program more so than a significant number of demolitions. Of concern however, is an increasing vacancy rate that reached 16% in 2000, as compared to a little over 9% in 1990. The citywide vacancy rate stood at 8.5% in 2000. Further, the housing stock is showing signs of distress. Based on a preliminary neighborhood survey, 20 properties have been identified as vacant and secured, usually indicating an uninhabitable unit or a foreclosure. The greatest concentration of these properties occurs in the area around 9th and Chew Streets.

Another dynamic in the housing market is the conversion of owner occupied units to renter occupied. In this regard, the percentage of renter occupied units increased from 65% of the total housing stock in 1990 to 68% in 2000.

Overall, the neighborhood housing market is fairly active. For the 12-month period of April 2003 to April 2004, a total of 76 residential properties were sold. The average sales price of these transactions was \$55,375. The average cost of a single-family home was \$52,025 in 2003 compared to \$50,445 in 1993.

### **Old Allentown and Downtown**

Old Allentown's proximity to the city's central business district is significant and provides each area with a unique opportunity. For the neighborhood, the downtown employee base of about 8,000 workers provides a potential market of homebuyers and new residents. Further, the availability and accessibility of downtown's entertainment, cultural venues and restaurants are amenities sought after by those looking to live in an urban environment.

For the business district and its base of business, cultural and commercial enterprises, the neighborhood provides an attractive and stable setting and provides affordable and distinctive housing choices for those who seek it.

## The Elm Street Program

While this plan was being prepared, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania created a program that could potentially have a significant impact on the neighborhood's ability to carry out the plan's recommendations. The Elm Street Program enables residential neighborhoods that lie adjacent to their community's main business district to be designated as an "Elm Street Community" and thus be eligible for state funding assistance for a number of initiatives. First, the community can hire a manager to administer the program and pursue the implementation of a five-year strategy and second, the neighborhood is eligible to apply for funds to assist in the plan's implementation. Under this second initiative, funds are available to implement such programs as façade improvement projects, neighborhood infrastructure upgrades and housing rehabilitation activities. Because of the proximity in time to this announcement, this plan has been prepared in the format that will be required of the program. This will put the neighborhood in the best possible position to participate in the Elm Street program.



## The Planning Process

### The Process

In the spring of 2003, the leadership of the Old Allentown Preservation Association (OAPA) approached the City Planning staff for assistance in preparing a Neighborhood Improvement Plan. The following process was agreed upon for the preparation of the plan.

- Identification of neighborhood issues
- Prioritization of issues
- Organization of volunteer planning committee
- Background study and analysis of issues
- Development of recommendations
- Discussion and modification of alternatives
- Preparation of recommended draft plan
- Public review of draft plan
- Final plan preparation, including action plan for implementation

The purpose of the initial steps was to provide direction for the remainder of the process and provide a framework for the activities of the planning committee.

### The Neighborhood Plan Committee

The process was managed by a planning committee comprised of various partners committed to improving the quality of life in the Old Allentown Neighborhood with the assistance of City planning staff. The initial membership of the committee included representation of the following agencies/organizations:

- Old Allentown Preservation Association (OAPA) - a community group established in 1976 for the purpose of promoting historic preservation in the Old Allentown neighborhood. The organization fosters the neighborhood's development and design interests through its acquisition and rehabilitation and facade programs, and showcases the neighborhood in its annual house tour and other community events. It has 200 members and an eleven-person board of directors.
- Old Town Neighborhood Watch (OTNW) - a crime watch group that is active in the Old Allentown Neighborhood. The group prepares a neighborhood newsletter with a distribution to 1500 households. The group also holds regular monthly meetings and conducts walks with the police to review problem areas and interest residents to participate in improvement efforts.
- Neighborhood Housing Services of the Lehigh Valley (NHSLV) - a non-profit housing group, located in the Old Allentown neighborhood with a national reputation for providing homeownership assistance, rehabilitation, and other services throughout the Lehigh Valley.
- Tri-Ministry - a church related group representing interests in area churches and cemeteries located within the Old Allentown neighborhood.
- Interested Residents and Institutions, including citizens, Saint Michael's Church and the Salvation Army.

### The Mission

Based on a series of goals and objectives established early in the process by the Neighborhood Planning Committee the following mission statement was developed:

***“To prepare a neighborhood based improvement plan that enhances the historic character of the neighborhood; improves the overall quality of life; capitalizes on existing neighborhood assets; and, takes advantage of the proximity of the downtown business area as a source of entertainment, culture, commerce, employment and residential marketing opportunities.”***

### Issues and Assets

It was decided early on that the planning effort would follow a more self-directed or strategic approach rather than a formulaic one. That is, the plan’s components would be defined through a combination of resident involvement strategies and the input of the planning committee, rather than following a pre-defined list of topical areas to study. To assist in setting the agenda of the plan, to increase participation throughout the district and gain more minority resident involvement, two public meetings were held and a neighborhood survey was conducted.

### Public Meetings

Two public meetings were held in the spring and summer of 2003. The first involved neighborhood and community leaders, while the second was open to the residents at large throughout the neighborhood. At each meeting, time was taken to explain the need for the plan, the interrelationship of the Old Allentown neighborhood with the City’s business district and 7th Street Corridor and the planning process. Most importantly, the participants were asked to express their views as to the neighborhood’s liabilities and assets. Following is a summary list of those discussions:

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Assets</b>	<b>Issues</b>
Neighborhood Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Architecture</li> <li>+ Central location</li> <li>+ Housing value</li> <li>+ Green space</li> <li>+ Strength of neighborhood associations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Noise, litter (basic quality of life issues)</li> <li>- Lack of presale housing inspection program</li> <li>- Parking</li> <li>- Lack of consideration to smaller “alley” streets</li> <li>- Vacant units</li> <li>- Absentee landlords</li> </ul>
General Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Housing stock</li> <li>+ Diversity of population</li> <li>+ Neighborhood-based organizations</li> <li>+ Convenient location</li> <li>+ Green space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Crime/drugs</li> <li>- Nuisances (quality of life issues)</li> <li>- Noisy people</li> <li>- Absentee landlords</li> <li>- Isolation among diversity</li> <li>- Eyesore buildings</li> <li>- Cars vs. pedestrians</li> <li>- Parking</li> </ul>

## The Survey

Committee members and teens from the local Boys and Girls Teen Center interviewed over a hundred residents. A smaller survey of institutions and businesses was also undertaken. The survey instrument and compiled responses are included in Appendix A. A summary of the top responses to each of the questions follows:

**Question #1: "Why do you live in this neighborhood?"**

1. Housing costs
2. Friends and relatives live here.
3. Convenience to shopping etc.
4. Architecture
5. Closeness to church

**Question #2: "What are the issues in this neighborhood?"**

1. Litter
2. Street noise
3. Lack of parking
4. Crime
5. Property maintenance

**Question #3: "How would you rate the following City services in this neighborhood?"**

(Note: the responses are shown in order of those listed as most needing improvement.)

1. Snow removal
2. Code Enforcement
3. Police Protection
4. Street Cleaning
5. Enforcement of Ordinances

**Question #4: "What are the most important improvements, services, or programs that would make this neighborhood a better place to live?"**

1. Address quality of life issues
2. Increase number of neighborhood stores and services
3. Increase police presence
4. Additional parks or recreational opportunities

**Summary**

After review of the results of this initial public involvement phase, the Planning Committee developed the following list of neighborhood assets and issues:

<b>Assets</b>	<b>Issues</b>
+ Housing Value	- Litter
+ Convenient Location	- Noise
+ Architecture	- Parking
	- Crime

These lists served as the basis for a series of workshop sessions with the Planning Committee, though additional issues emerged during the discussions. One session involved a walking tour of the neighborhood to identify potential sites for the development of green space and/or additional neighborhood parking. During these sessions, appropriate resource people gave information to serve as background and to provide a basis for the committee to begin to develop the plan’s strategy.



## The Strategy

The following strategy focuses on a number of areas that are seen as key to advancing the continued vitality of the Old Allentown neighborhood. It is based on an examination of neighborhood trends, the public input discussed earlier and the work of the planning committee. As noted previously and as will be seen on the matrices that can be found at the end of this section, the organizational structure and format of the strategy has been modified to be consistent with the Commonwealth's new Elm Street initiative. This was accomplished without compromising the spirit or substance of the recommendations of the committee.

The strategy depends on the on-going commitment of the two existing neighborhood groups, the continuation of existing partnerships and the solidification of other opportunities that emerged during the planning process. It recognizes that the past efforts of the Old Allentown Preservation Association, the neighborhood's history and architecture and its strategic location with respect to the City's business district are assets upon which to build.

Major activities that are included in this multi-year strategy range from the development of a marketing and promotional campaign of the neighborhood to activities intended to unite the residents of the neighborhood and reinforce the neighborhood's history. Physical improvements include the development of a focal point in the neighborhood to serve as the site for neighborhood gatherings and events, more robust housing rehabilitation and façade improvement programs and the enhancement of the two prime sources of neighborhood open space – the two historic cemeteries. In recognition of the necessary relationship between the neighborhood and the business district and the 7th Street corridor, the strategy encourages collaboration and identifying opportunities for cross programming and marketing.

The following is a summary of the major elements of the strategy inclusive of their respective goal statements, brief discussion and activity highlights.

### ***A Vision for the Neighborhood***

*"The vision of the Old Allentown Neighborhood Plan builds upon Old Allentown's convenient location and favorable housing costs, quality and architecture. It seeks to improve its quality of life through cleaner and quieter streets, improved public facilities, and greater attention to Old Allentown's history and period design. Resident involvement, partnerships with the City and other community groups, such as faith communities, will be critical elements in Old Allentown's future."*

**Program Area: Organization**

**Goal:** *To broaden the involvement of all neighborhood residents in neighborhood improvement plan activities.*

The committee understood that for neighborhood improvement to be truly successful, they were going to need neighborhood-wide support. In order to develop this support, new efforts would be needed to secure the participation of a changing and relatively new population that includes the ethnic and faith communities and neighborhood businesses. This element recognizes those changes and the need to be proactive in communicating with all segments of the neighborhood.

<b>Objectives (Tasks)</b>	<b>Year</b>					<b>Responsibility</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
1. Increase outreach efforts to all components of the Old Allentown community including churches, businesses, minority communities, etc.	X	X	X	X		OAPA/OTNW
2. Hold block parties and other neighborhood events in an effort to bring people together.	X	X	X	X		OAPA/OTNW
3. Implement a “new resident awareness” program designed to inform new residents of neighborhood initiatives as well as to provide information on municipal services, regulations, etc.	X	X				OAPA/OTNW/City
4. Translate key neighborhood information items into Spanish.	X	X	X	X		OAPA
5. Involve and communicate with neighborhood landlords in the neighborhood revitalization process.	X	X	X	X		OAPA
6. Develop partnerships with adjoining proposed Main Street area (N. 7 <sup>th</sup> Street Corridor) and downtown.	X	X	X	X		OAPA
7. Designate the Old Allentown Planning Committee as the Elm Street Committee, establish by-laws, create committees, and formalize relationship with Old Allentown Preservation Association and City of Allentown.	X					OAPA/City
8. Update neighborhood on progress of plan implementation in neighborhood newsletters and annual meeting.	X	X	X	X		OAPA
9. Set up network of “block captains” to enhance neighborhood communication and problem solving.		X				OAPA/OTNW

**Program Area: Promotion**

**Goal:** *To promote the qualities of the Old Allentown neighborhood as a place to live, especially to the existing and future downtown workforce.*

Old Allentown has a story to be told. Its people, events and historic locations all played a role in the development of Allentown and make this a unique place in the city. This component of the strategy seeks to ensure that this story is understood by new residents and used to renew interest in Old Allentown. The neighborhood’s linkage to downtown and the revitalization that is occurring there presents a ready market of potential homebuyers.

There appears to be renewed interest in downtown living. Initially a phenomenon experienced by larger cities across the country, this trend appears ready to impact downtown Allentown based on several recent residential project proposals in the downtown area. Old Allentown needs to position itself to tap into that emerging market and promote itself throughout the Lehigh Valley and possibly beyond.

The basic objective of this component is to develop a marketing strategy built around the residential, architectural and historic qualities of the neighborhood.

<b>Objectives (Tasks)</b>	<b>Year</b>					<b>Responsibility</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
1. Develop marketing strategy built around the residential, architectural and historic qualities of the neighborhood.						
a. develop new logo	X					OAPA, City
b. prepare electronic presentation/mobile display to deliver to area schools, various groups and at community events.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, City
c. identify and highlight significant buildings and events in neighborhood history and install interpretive displays.	X	X				OAPA, LCHS
d. enlist the cooperation of area realtors in marketing neighborhood.	X	X	X	X		OAPA
e. prepare 30th anniversary celebration of the creation of the Old Allentown neighborhood.			X			OAPA, City
2. Conduct walking tours, school field trips and other historical programs, and develop printed materials, especially to attract daytime office workers into the neighborhood.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, LCHS
3. Create marketing materials	X					OAPA, City, CCA
4. Continue annual neighborhood House Tours.	X	X	X	X		OAPA
5. Web site enhancement	X					OAPA



**Program Area: Clean, Safe and Green**

**Goal:** *To improve the appearance and increase the perception of safety throughout the neighborhood.*

This is a multi-faceted component, containing activities to address the basic quality of life issues expressed at the public meetings and through the neighborhood survey. In this regard, the Planning Committee considered litter, crime, and traffic issues as they relate mainly to pedestrian safety.

**Litter**

The Old Allentown neighborhood is not alone in its concern over the unkempt appearance of the streets that are sometimes littered with paper and improperly secured garbage. This is an issue that plagues other center city neighborhoods and the downtown area as a whole.

**Crime and Nuisance Issues**

Based on the summary of the public meetings and neighborhood survey, nuisance issues such as excessive noise and others that are best categorized as “quality of life” issues appeared to emerge above crime as key issues in the neighborhood. Double parking, unleashed pets, noise, litter and other similar issues disrupt the peace and enjoyment of the neighborhood. To a certain degree, renewed efforts to increase involvement in neighborhood activities will instill a sense of ownership and pride in the neighborhood. This, as well as working with city officials to address those problems that can’t be resolved at the neighborhood level, should help to abate these issues.

Pursuant to the city’s district policing concept, this neighborhood is included in three separate police districts, providing for a certain amount of overlap in coverage. The Old Town Neighborhood Watch has established an excellent rapport with the Police Department and attempts to actively engage neighborhood residents in crime prevention activities.

**Traffic and Pedestrian Safety**

The Old Allentown neighborhood is defined by the city’s grid system of streets. Since there are no limited access or spur routes that lead traffic into and out of the city, the downtown street system has been designed to help move through traffic in all directions. For example, in the neighborhood 8th Street, and to a lesser extent 10th Street, facilitate northbound traffic flow, while 9th Street and 7th Street (to the immediate east of the neighborhood) carry southbound traffic. Similarly, east-west traffic is provided for on Linden, Turner and Chew Streets. This system is accommodated through the synchronization of traffic signals to enable the continuous flow of traffic at a set speed – in this case, approximately 30 mph.

At the same time, the neighborhood streets have to meet the parking needs of a variety of users including tractor-trailers as well as neighbors and their guests. Potential safety issues arise when vehicles are parked too close to intersections and tractor-trailers obstruct views and damage street trees. The strategy encourages the neighborhood to work with the appropriate city offices to undertake the following activities.

<b>Objectives (Tasks)</b>	<b>Year</b>					<b>Responsibility</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
1. Organize block clean-ups periodically throughout the neighborhood.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, OTNW
2. Pursue multi-agency education and enforcement program for littering and solid waste disposal that includes the following activities:						
a. a consistent awareness program in neighborhood newsletters.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, OTNW
b. distribute bi-lingual informational brochures on litter and rules pertaining to garbage collection.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, OTNW
c. encourage storeowners to maintain property in front of stores. Provide annual awards for "cleanest storefront."	X	X	X	X		OAPA, OTNW
d. work with the City Health Bureau on more vigorous targeted enforcement activities.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, OTNW, City
3. Create planting programs and contests, such as window boxes, tree wells and containers.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, NHSLV
4. Expand program that encourages plantings to attract birds and butterflies	X	X	X	X		Bonnie and Jim Brasted
5. Install streetlights on blocks where none exist.	X					City
6. Install security lighting in Union/West End cemeteries.	X					Union/West End Cemetery Association
7. Support district policing and be active participants in community problem solving.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, OTNW
8. Encourage City to enforce noise ordinance and other ordinances such as leashes, litter, etc.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, OTNW, City
9. Determine feasibility of reducing vehicular speed along major traffic corridors by retiming synchronized traffic signals.	X					City
10. Investigate methods to control the on-street parking of tractor trailers.	X					OAPA, City, Parking Authority
11. Paint curbs to better identify no-parking zones.	X	X	X	X		OTNW

**Program Area: Design**

**Goal:** *To enhance the appearance and neighborhood quality of life through the implementation of various design and streetscape enhancements.*

Although one of the identified neighborhood strengths is its architecture, the planning committee identified several needed public and private improvements to the area’s streetscape, parking areas, and cemeteries. It is hoped that these improvements will complement the private investment in property rehabilitation activities that will be presented in the following section.

In addition to these enhancement projects, the committee identified a need to create an architectural and functional neighborhood focal point that would serve as a “neighborhood square.” This area would be designed to accommodate neighborhood gatherings and events, while providing space for passive recreation activities. The committee deferred making any recommendations regarding the provision of active play space, opting instead to await the recommendations of a citywide Parks and Recreation planning process that will focus on center city recreation needs.

This element also works with the promotional section of the strategy by providing for the design and installation of entrance “gateways” at key entry points into the neighborhood. Identification of these gateways could range from the placement of banners and street signs depicting the new neighborhood logo to a more structural element resembling an arch which bridges the street right-of-way.

<b>Objectives (Tasks)</b>	<b>Year</b>					<b>Responsibility</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
1. Create a neighborhood green space that can accommodate outside events, gatherings and provide passive recreation space.	X	X				OAPA/City
2. Fill in gaps in street tree plantings and prune existing trees.	X	X				OAPA/City
3. Install identifying neighborhood banners and /or street signs (based on newly created logo) at key entryways into the neighborhood.	X	X				OAPA
4. Paint, repair and replace where necessary, iron fences around historic cemeteries.		X	X	X		City/Union & West End Cemetery Association
5. Create neighborhood parking lots where opportunities arise and the demand has been demonstrated.			X			City/Parking Authority
6. Promote existing residential Façade Improvement Program and expand to include multi-unit and commercial properties.	X	X	X	X		OAPA
7. Encourage owners of parking lots to provide screening and landscaping.			X			OAPA

Objectives (Tasks)	Year					Responsibility
	1	2	3	4	5	
8. Conduct periodic workshops on historic design guidelines.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, APL, HARB
9. Conduct a survey of the condition of public improvements (curb, sidewalk, street trees, street lights, etc) throughout the neighborhood and develop a capital improvements plan.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, City
10. Reprint <i>Historic District Design Guidelines and Preservation Resource Guide</i>	X					OAPA, APL, City
11. Pursue reduction of number of unused cable and other utility service lines and guide placement of satellite dishes.	X	X	X	X		OAPA
12. Consider mural program on selected exposed walls of buildings.			X			OAPA
13. Develop and promote preservation resource center located at offices of OAPA.		X	X			OAPA, APL, LCHS
14. Undertake improvements and enhancements to the historic cemeteries			X			City



**Program Area: Neighborhood Restructuring**

**Goal:** *To maintain and enhance the quality of the housing stock and to increase the rate of homeownership in the neighborhood.*

Individual property rehabilitation efforts and the architectural protection afforded by the City’s Historic District Ordinance have resulted in substantial improvements to the neighborhood’s building stock. However, there needs to be a greater distribution of improvements throughout the neighborhood, a reduction in the vacancy rate and renewed efforts to stabilize the declining rate of homeownership.

This element combines the recommendations of the planning committee that deal with increasing neighborhood stability by improving the housing stock, encouraging more homeownership and eliminating blighting influences. The success of this element will depend upon the collaboration of the neighborhood, the City of Allentown, financial institutions, property owners and housing agencies to continue that track record of investment in the neighborhood’s housing stock.

<b>Objectives (Tasks)</b>	<b>Year</b>					<b>Responsibility</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
1. Update inventory of vacant, blighted properties.	X	X	X	X		OAPA
2. Pursue compliance of blighted properties through code enforcement and/or blighted property review procedure. Focus on areas that may contain a concentration of blighted properties.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, City, ARA
3. Supplement existing programs to acquire vacant properties that are in need of rehabilitation and partner with housing agencies to rehabilitate and resell.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, ARA, ABC, NHSLV, HADC
4. Apply to Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation through NHSLV for acquisition/rehabilitation funds.	X					NHSLV
5. In conjunction with Keystone Nazareth Bank and other financial institutions, implement outreach program targeting non-occupant owned properties for rehabilitation loans.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, City
6. Work with PPL, Allentown School District and City of Allentown toward the acquisition and reuse of two PPL owned parking lots.	X					City, ASD, OAPA
7. Partner with NHSLV’s Homeownership Program to increase homeownership in the neighborhood.	X					NHSLV
8. Conduct annual homeownership and rehabilitation fair.	X	X	X	X		OAPA, NHSLV, City

9. Work with Allentown Preservation League to promote salvage warehouse.	X	X	X	X	OAPA, APL
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**The Resource Base**

The accomplishment of the preceding strategy will require the dedication and commitment of the neighborhood organizations and community at large. It will also require the commitment of a number of resources and cooperation among various organizations. Fortunately, Old Allentown’s has established an excellent track record in marshalling these resources.

The strategy relies on the involvement of the following groups and agencies, coordinated by an “Elm Street Manager” as provided for by the state program.

- The Old Allentown Preservation Association
- The Old Town Neighborhood Watch
- The City of Allentown and its various bureaus and offices
- The Allentown Redevelopment Authority
- Lehigh County Historical Society
- Allentown Preservation League
- Neighborhood Housing Services of the Lehigh Valley
- The Center City Association
- Weed and Seed Committee
- The Union and West End Cemeteries
- Tri-Ministry
- The Salvation Army
- Neighborhood Residents

The following financial resources are potential opportunities to help support the implementation of the strategy.

- Elm Street Program
- Community Development Block Grant Program
- City of Allentown
- Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation
- Local financial institutions
- The Trexler Trust
- The Century Fund
- Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

## Implementation

The strategy matrix provides a useful tool for the neighborhood to manage the implementation of the plan. Typically left to a group of neighborhood volunteers to oversee, Old Allentown is fortunate in that the organization already has a paid director and an established committee that has accepted responsibility for implementation and keeping the plan current. The Commonwealth’s Elm Street Program also provides resources to assist in this management effort.

It is recommended that the Planning Committee meet regularly for the purpose of reviewing progress on the completion of the various tasks. This meeting will also provide the committee with the opportunity to program the implementation of new tasks as time and resources permit. Finally, an annual meeting should be held at which a report to the community is provided and input accepted for adjustments to the plan.

