



CITY OF MONESSEN COMPREHENSIVE BLIGHT PLAN

Adopted May 11, 2023



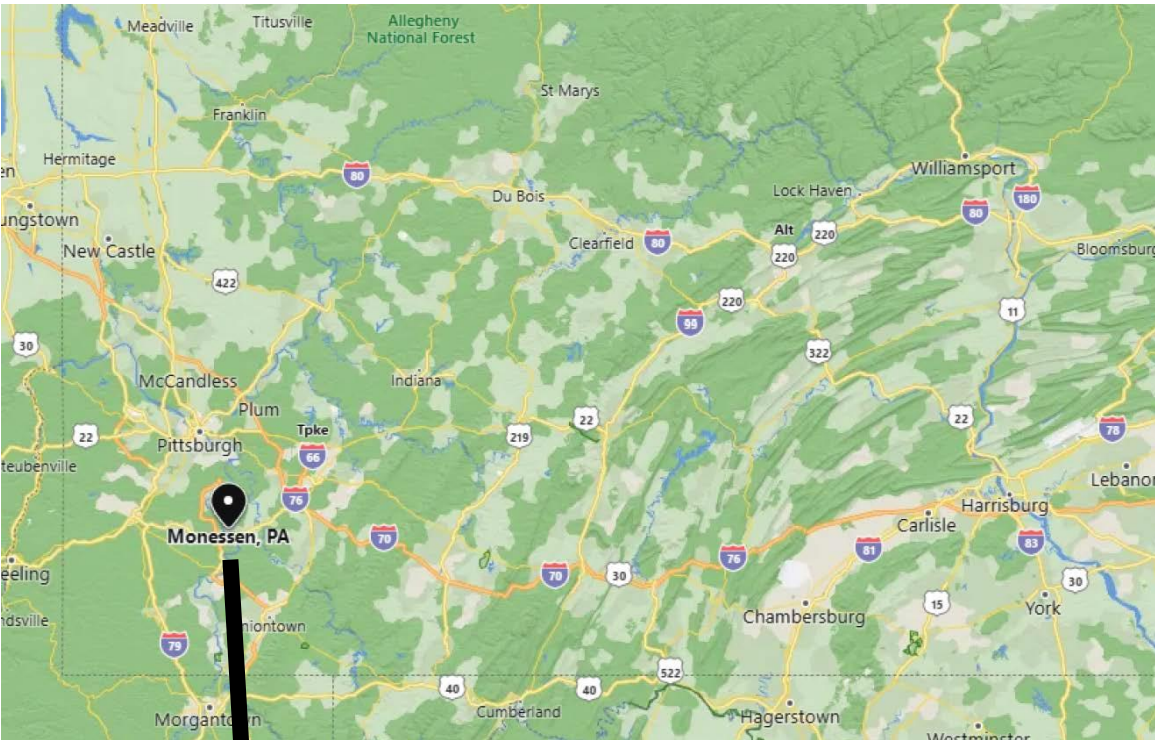
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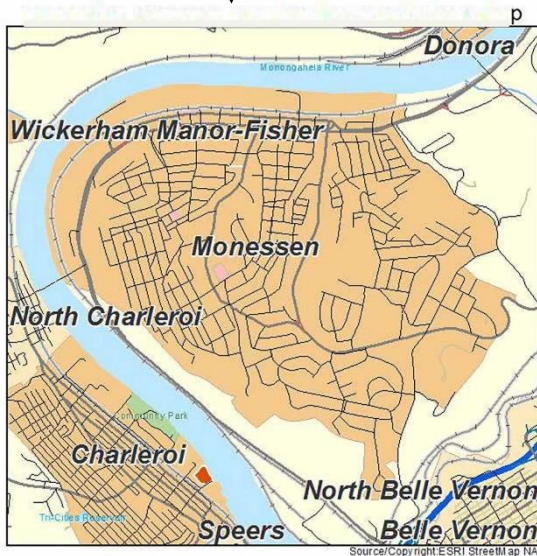
The City of Monessen wishes to thank the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development for its support and financial assistance to craft and carry out this Comprehensive Blight Plan.

Developed in Partnership with the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania and Palo Alto Partners, LLC

Map



Source: Bing maps



Source: ESRI

Monessen is the south-western most municipality in Westmoreland County. Monessen sits along the Monongahela River approximately 30 miles outside of Pittsburgh. The City is approximately three square miles. Monessen was incorporated as borough in 1898 and became a third-class city in 1921.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to those who provided input and assistance during the planning process:

City of Monessen

Ron Mozer, Mayor
Anthony Orzechowski, Councilman
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Lois A. Thomas, Councilwoman
Don Gregor, Councilman
Rosalie Nicksich, City Controller
Gerald Saksun, Treasurer
Cheryl Gordon, City Clerk
Joseph Dalfonso, City Solicitor
Dave Yuhasz, Police Chief
Delmar Hepple, Fire Chief
Michael Korposh, Acting City Administrator
Marvin Davis, Code Enforcement

Thank you to the residents, business owners, Non-profit and church leaders and other stakeholders of Monessen for participating in the planning process.

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Executive Summary

In its continuing effort to fight blight and promote community investment, the City of Monessen engaged in a blight planning process supported through Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). The plan is summarized below through the question-and-answer format.

Why Do We Need a Blight Plan?

Blight was a key issue identified in Monessen's Comprehensive Plan that was completed in 2016. The Blight Plan focuses specifically on addressing blight and goes into more detail than was possible in the Comprehensive Plan. The Blight Plan brings together all the data and public input in one document that is accompanied by an Action Plan that defines implementation steps.

What Methodologies Were Used to Complete this Blight Plan?

This Blight Plan uses a framework established by the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania that follows five steps to create an action-oriented blight plan. This document is organized around those five steps. The Blight Plan builds upon work that Monessen has already done including the recent completion of the Comprehensive Plan and the legislative programs it has already enacted as tools to fight blight. Recent data on property conditions collected as part of the comprehensive planning process was used. Additional economic, population, and market data were gathered and summarized. Public input in the process led to the prioritization of strategies appropriate for the conditions in Monessen.

Who Was Involved in the Planning Process?

The City of Monessen applied for and received a grant from DCED through which it contracted with the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania. The local consultant was Tom Hardy of Palo Alto Partners who facilitated the planning process. Elected and staff leadership from the City of Monessen were involved along with the Blighted Property Review Board and the Nehemiah of Monessen Community Development Corporation. Meetings were open to the public and included participation from residents and business owners. A representative of the Westmoreland County's Planning & Development Department also participated.

What Did We Learn Through Data Collection and Analysis?

Several key data findings include:

- Monessen's older housing stock is costly to maintain and suffers from high vacancy rates.
 - 97% of Monessen's housing stock was built before 1980.
 - 19% of Monessen's housing stock is vacant, roughly twice the countywide average.
- Housing values vary greatly, and median sale prices have increased significantly in the past two years.

- Monessen’s median housing income is \$45,658, which is 71% of the Westmoreland County’s.
- In 2014 Monessen’s median home price was \$40,000. In 2021, it was \$85,000.
- Blight is largely concentrated in Monessen’s downtown area and in the adjacent hillside residential neighborhoods.
 - 375 properties, or 7.5% of the total properties surveyed are in poor condition.

What Blight Strategies Were Prioritized?

Five strategies were prioritized through the process and include:

- 1) Expand Proactive Code Enforcement
- 2) Prioritize and Demolish Unsafe Structures
- 3) Connect Households with Small Mortgage Lending and Other Home Repair Resources
- 4) Support Capacity Building at the Nehemiah of Monessen Community Development Corporation
- 5) Partner with Qualified Developers on Rehabilitation and New Construction

Now That We Have a Blight Plan, What Comes Next?

The Blight Plan includes an Action Plan that is meant as road map for implementation. The Action Plan provides key tasks, responsibilities, and timelines. This is a document that is meant to be used and updated regularly. The Blighted Property Review Board will review the status of the Action Plan at its regular meetings.

Introduction

The City of Monessen completed a two-year comprehensive planning process in 2021. The adopted Monessen 2030 Comprehensive Plan prioritizes addressing blight. This Blight Plan builds upon the framework established in the 2030 Comprehensive Plan and formulates the strategy and plan for addressing blight in Monessen. In 2021 the City received a grant from the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to engage the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania for technical assistance in the blight planning process. Tom Hardy, of Palo Alto Partners was retained as the local consultant. Mr. Hardy has significant experience in community development and blight planning, having worked in several Western Pennsylvania Communities.



Unlike many communities that undertake blight planning, Monessen began the blight planning process with strong public participation and existing data. The City of Monessen has a legislative framework to address blight that is described in more detail on Page 15. The approach to the blight plan was to build on this framework. The process used to develop this Comprehensive Blight Plan is detailed in the publication, *We Can Do This: A Five-Step, Fast Track Blight Plan*, written by Chris Gulotta and published by the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania in 2016.

The five steps in the process of developing a Blight Plan include:



This plan is organized around these five steps, beginning with a review of the consensus building process.

Step 1: Gain Consensus for Developing a Blight Plan

Community consensus for addressing blight emerged from the comprehensive planning process. Blight was one of three priorities that emerged from Monessen’s comprehensive planning process. Residents noted that blight has an impact on the entire Monessen community. Specific impacts noted were public safety as well as negative impacts on property values and tax revenue.

Monessen’s successful comprehensive planning process and subsequent technical assistance grant from DCED brought additional capacity to address blight. Mayor Ron Mozer’s administration has made blight a priority, and his work has supported both existing efforts such as the Blighted Property Review Board and new efforts to strengthen the City’s capacity. This Comprehensive Blight Plan builds upon the existing foundation and provides a road map for moving forward.

Step 2: Assess Nature & Extent of Blight

Understanding the nature and extent of blight is a critical first step in designing data driven strategies tailored to conditions in Monessen. Key questions that need to be answered include: 1) What are the historical and current population and economic conditions?; 2) Do the data show recent trends?; 3) How extensive is the blight is it concentrated blight concentrated in specific geographic areas? The answer to these questions allows the community to evaluate which tools and strategies are appropriate given Monessen’s existing conditions and its goals.

Population and economic trends impact local real estate markets. In Monessen, like many of the region’s communities along the Monongahela River, developed alongside heavy industry. As these industries consolidated and restructured after World War II, the economic base they supported shrank considerably. This had impacts that rippled through Monessen’s population, economy, and housing stock.

Population and Economic Data

Monessen’s population peaked in 1930, with an increasing rate of population loss occurring after 1960. Since 2010, Monessen’s population has declined by nearly 12%, a rate of loss that is more than three times that of Westmoreland County’s.

Figure I: Monessen Population Data

Item	City of Monessen	Westmoreland County	Pennsylvania
2010 Population	7,720	365,169	12,702,379
2021 Population	6,811	353,057	12,964,056
% Change 2010 - 2021	(11.8%)	(3.3%)	2.1%

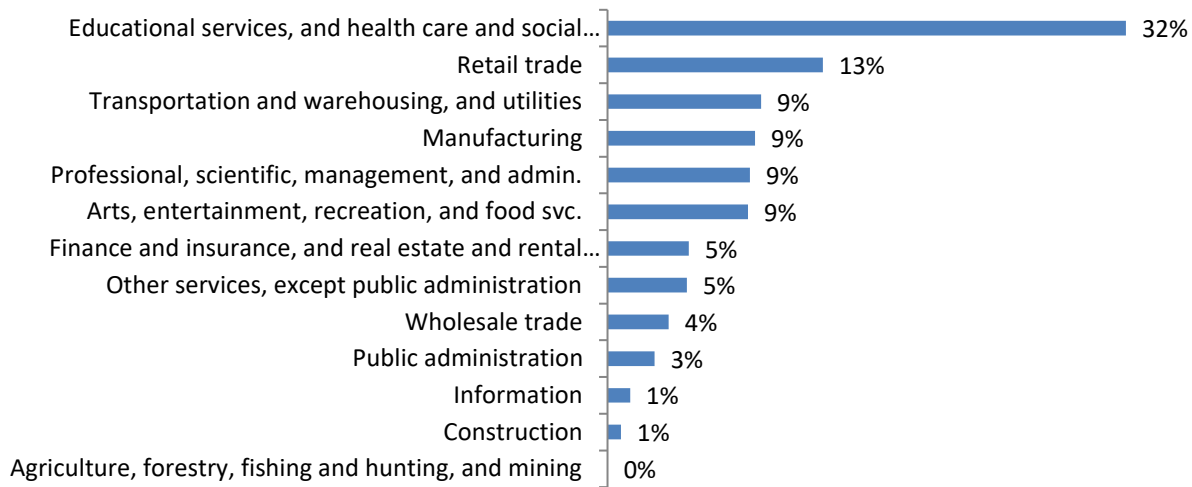
Source: 2020 Census and 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles

Not only is Monessen’s population shrinking, but it is also aging. The median age in Monessen is 47.3,

which is considerably higher than the state-wide average of 40.9. In addition, almost 1/3 of Monessen’s population is age 62 or higher.

Accompanying Monessen’s population loss is a shift in local employment once dominated by heavy industry and manufacturing to one that is more service based. Employment data show that most jobs held by Monessen residents are now in the service, retail, and transportation industries.

Figure II: Monessen Employment by Sector



Source: American Community Survey

A significant percentage of Monessen’s working population is employed in retail and service industry positions that tend to have lower pay. The median household income in Monessen is \$45,658, significantly less than the county and statewide medians. Monessen also has a higher household poverty rate than does Westmoreland County as a whole.

Figure III: Monessen Income and Poverty

Item	City of Monessen	Westmoreland County	Pennsylvania
Median Household Income	\$45,658	\$64,708	\$63,627
Poverty Rate	16.5%	9.3%	12.1%

Source: 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles

This economic data are reflected in community conversations around the importance of connecting residents with education and/or training opportunities that can provide pathways to higher earnings.

Housing Data

Figure IV: Monessen Housing Vacancy Data

Item	City of Monessen	Westmoreland County	Pennsylvania
Total Housing Units	3,919	167,776	5,742,828
Total Occupied Units	3,175	152,833	5,210,598
Vacant Units	744	14,943	532,230
Vacancy Rate	19.0%	8.9%	9.3%

Source: 2020 Census

Monessen’s median housing value is only 41% of the median housing value in Pennsylvania and less than half of the median housing value in Westmoreland County. With low housing values, the cost of restoring blighted properties may be more than the value of the house, discouraging investment in blighted properties. Monessen has a comparable homeownership rate to Westmoreland County, which is higher than the state-wide figure. This is particularly interesting given that the median household income in Monessen is significantly less than that for the County and the State. This relatively high homeownership rate in Monessen indicates a high percentage of the population has strong ties to the community, and a vested economic interest in its recovery.

Figure V: Monessen Housing Tenure & Value

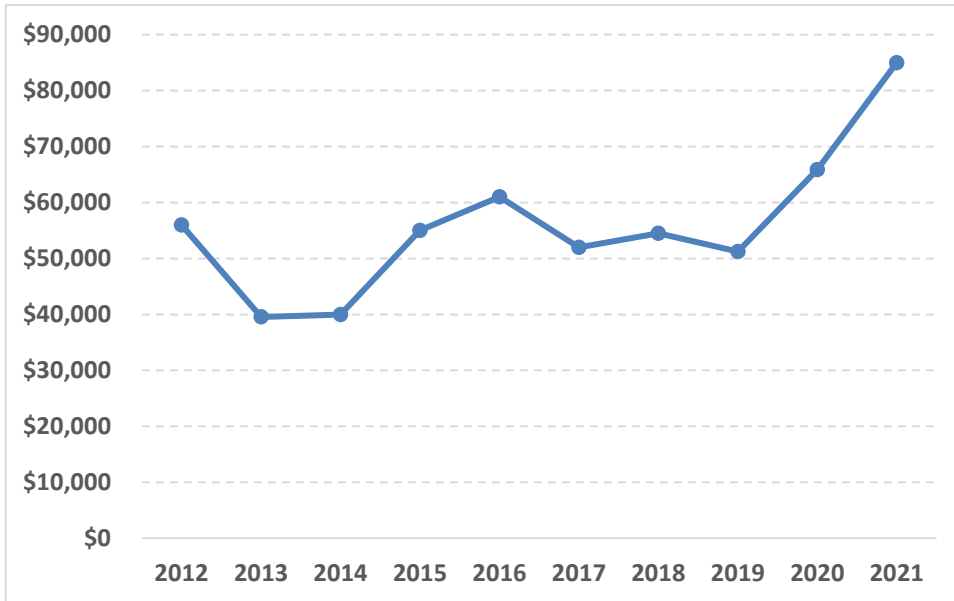
Item	City of Monessen	Westmoreland County	Pennsylvania
Owner Occupied %	76.6%	77.6%	69.0%
Median Value of Owner-Occupied Housing	\$76,900	\$157,200	\$187,500

Source: 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles

It was noted by participants in this planning process that the cost of renting a property in Monessen often exceeds a mortgage payment for a comparably sized property. This suggests that with the assistance of homeownership and credit counseling, interested households can start on the path towards homeownership.

To better understand trends in Monessen’s housing market, sales data were purchased through RealSTATs. The data appear below in Figure VI.

Figure VI: Monessen Median Sale Price of Single-Family Homes



This data is also included in tabular form below in Figure VII.

Figure VII: Housing Data: Sale of Single-Family Homes in Monessen

Year	Median Sales Price	High Price	# of Sales	% Sales > \$100K	Total Sales Volume
2012	\$56,000	\$159,900	96	12.5%	\$5,504,750
2013	\$39,550	\$135,000	90	10.0%	\$4,523,587
2014	\$40,000	\$160,000	97	10.3%	\$4,988,170
2015	\$55,000	\$176,000	101	12.9%	\$5,752,880
2016	\$61,000	\$283,750	107	17.8%	\$7,114,970
2017	\$52,000	\$185,000	113	18.6%	\$6,655,097
2018	\$54,500	\$173,000	114	11.4%	\$6,698,238
2019	\$51,250	\$168,900	130	20.8%	\$7,963,073
2020	\$65,900	\$225,000	143	25.2%	\$9,940,401
2021	\$85,000	\$220,000	177	39.0%	\$14,489,094

For the years between 2012 and 2019, median sale price of a single-family home did not exhibit a consistent upward or downward trend and fluctuated between a low of \$39,550 and a high of \$56,000. From 2019 to 2021 the median sale price for an arms-length sale increased from \$51,250 to \$85,000 – an increase of 42%. This is a relatively short-time period, which overlaps with the COVID-19 pandemic, so additional years of data will be necessary to evaluate whether this upward movement in sales prices continues. What the recent sales data show in Monessen is consistent with a pattern that emerged during the pandemic—home prices increased as supply was limited, and buyers were more active in communities that previously had not seen as much interest from buyers. Monessen saw a 40% increase in home sales in 2021 compared with 2019—the last full year before the COVID-19 pandemic began in the United States.

Not only is the median sale price of single-family housing in Monessen increasing, but more homes are also selling at the upper end of the sale price range. In 2018, only 13 homes sold for \$100,000 or more compared with 69 in 2021. As shown in Figure VIII, Sheriff’s Sales now account for a relatively smaller portion of total sales than at any point in the previous 10 years except for 2020 when Sheriff’s Sales were curtailed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A higher percentage of Sheriff’s Sales are associated with housing markets that are distressed, and the decline in the percentage of Sheriff’s Sales is data that supports the improving trajectory of Monessen’s housing market.

Figure VIII: Housing Data: Sheriff’s Sales of Single-Family Homes

Year	# of Sheriff’s Sales	Sheriff’s Sale as % of Total Sales	Total Sales Volume
2012	26	21.3%	\$130,919
2013	20	18.2%	\$32,336
2014	19	16.4%	\$41,023
2015	73	42.0%	\$91,355
2016	16	13.0%	\$54,151
2017	35	23.6%	\$69,249
2018	22	16.2%	\$67,558
2019	23	15.0%	\$103,999
2020	10	6.5%	\$53,904
2021	23	11.5%	\$363,106

Source: RealStats

Monessen’s population increased in the early 20th century alongside the development of industry. The population peaked in 1930 and began declining more rapidly in 1960. Over 75% of Monessen’s housing stock was built before 1960, which means that most Monessen’s homes are at least sixty years old and given their age, they may have significant maintenance costs and often lack the amenities that current homebuyers expect.

Figure IX: Monessen Age of Housing Stock

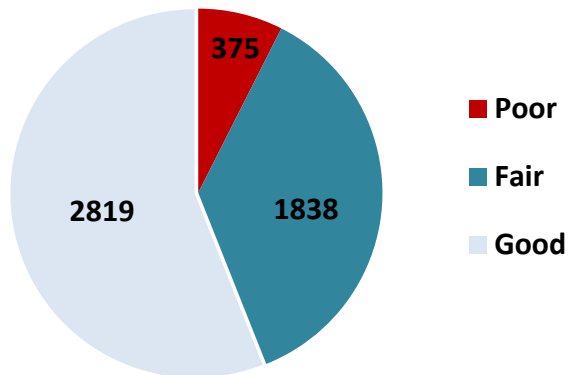
Year Built	Number	Percent
Built 2010 or later	42	1.0%
Built 2000 to 2009	16	0.4%
Built 1990 to 1999	22	0.5%
Built 1980 to 1989	48	1.1%
Built 1970 to 1979	409	9.6%
Built 1960 to 1969	453	10.6%
Built 1950 to 1959	1482	34.6%
Built 1940 to 1949	635	14.8%
Built 1939 or earlier	1,174	27.4%
Total	4,281	100.0%

Source: 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles

Location & Extent of Blight

As part of Monessen’s Comprehensive Planning process, existing conditions data was collected in 2019 and updated in 2021 by the Westmoreland County Department of Planning and Development in partnership with the City of Monessen, Mackin Engineering, and MGR consulting. The existing conditions assessment found that 7.5% of the properties were in poor condition. Another 36.5% of the properties were in fair condition, and many of these are candidates for some type of intervention such as access to home repair resources. Data and mapping from the assessment are available [here](#).

Figure X: Monessen Property Condition

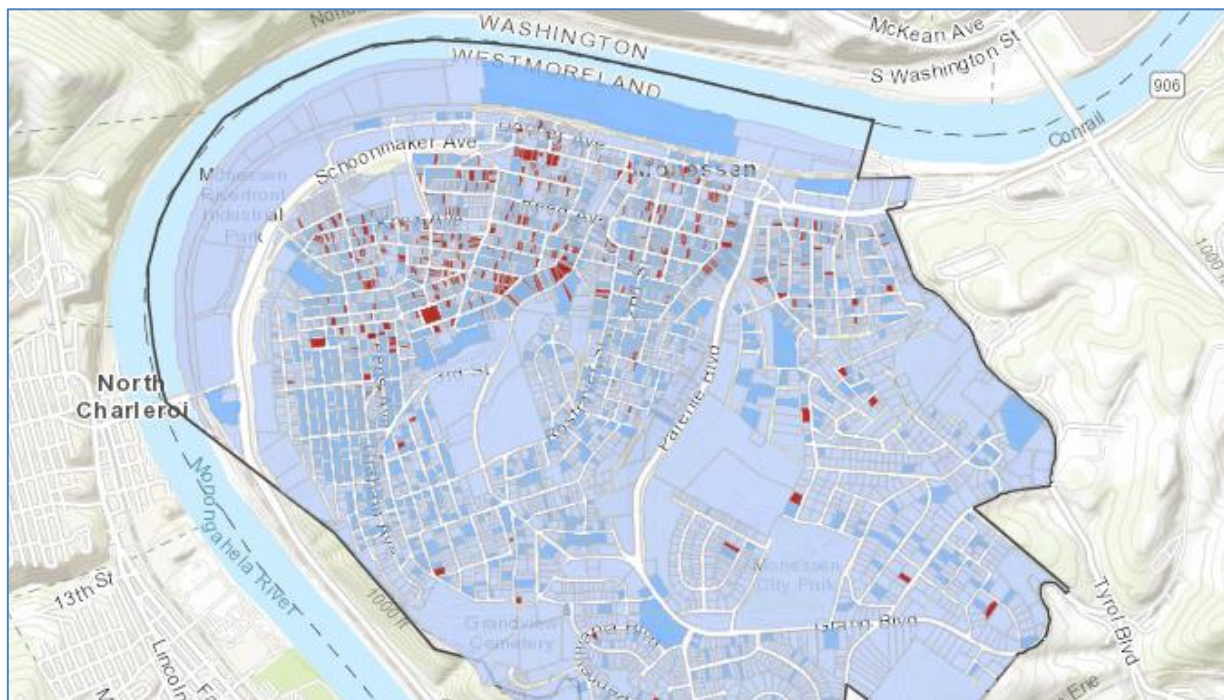


Source: Monessen Comprehensive Plan and Update

Monessen’s Downtown runs along Donner Avenue which runs parallel to the rail lines and the Monongahela. The residential area adjacent to Downtown is built on the hillsides. This area contains some of the oldest homes in the community. As you reach the top of the hill, the homes are relatively newer, with many of them being built in the 1950’s on slightly larger lots.

Monessen’s blight is concentrated in the Downtown area and in the adjacent residential neighborhoods highlighted by the properties shown in red in Figure XI below.

Figure XI: Blight Inventory Mapping Project Map



Source: Monessen Comprehensive Plan and Update

Analysis

Several themes emerge from the data and have implications on prioritizing effective blight strategies in Monessen:

- 1) Continued Population Loss and Aging of the Remaining Population Create Challenges that Extend to the Local Housing Market – These challenges are not unique to Monessen--Westmoreland County has one of the oldest populations in Pennsylvania. The County has prioritized workforce and other initiatives to help retain a younger population base. This is important for Monessen as well, as a shrinking population reduces demand for housing. An aging population, the majority of which are homeowners, means that many of these households may be aging out of their homes in the next several years. Addressing the turnover of these homes and generating housing demand from a younger population is essential to creating a stronger housing market.
- 2) A Significant Number of Homeowners Have Limited Resources with Which to Maintain Their Homes – Monessen’s homeownership rate is higher than Pennsylvania’s statewide average and nearly the same as Westmoreland County’s. Monessen’s median income is significantly below both benchmarks. The result is that many of Monessen’s homeowners may struggle to maintain an older housing stock. Without resources, home maintenance is deferred, and the home may be at risk of becoming blighted. Supporting existing homeowners will help prevent blight in Monessen.
- 3) While Median Home Sale Prices Have Risen Significantly in the Previous Two Years, They Are Still Relatively Affordable – The median sale price in Monessen is slightly more than \$80,000, which is not quite double the City’s median income. A home in Monessen could be purchased with a resulting mortgage payment often less than the rental expense for a comparable property. This creates a pathway to homeownership that many communities do not have based upon having significantly higher median sales prices. Connecting interested renters to credit counseling and HUD certified homeownership training can create a pipeline of prospective homebuyers. This is particularly important in Monessen as a significant percentage of the existing housing stock is likely to turn over based on the age of the existing home owning population.

Municipal Efforts to Address Blight

As a result of the comprehensive planning efforts, the City of Monessen built upon its existing legislative framework by adopting several programs. These programs are highlighted in Figure XII below.

Figure XII. Summary of Blight Efforts in Monessen

Item	Date Enacted	Key Points
Municipal Code & Ordinance Compliance Act	9/15/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires that a purchaser of a property with code violations bring it into compliance within 12 months or demolish it.
Blighted Property Review Board	10/13/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Power to certify property as blighted Advise the City in matters related to reinvestment and rehabilitation of blighted property. Board members include representation from City Council, Executive Branch, Redevelopment Authority, Planning Commission, and citizens.
Property Tax Forgiveness Program	Updated 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial program forgave previous delinquent City real estate taxes to new purchasers that signed a Development Agreement to invest at least 3x forgiven tax amount in the property. Program was updated in 2022 to improve accountability of purchasers.
Vacant Property Registration Ordinance	2/19/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies to properties that have been vacant 30 or more days in a year. Fees: Registration \$65 and Inspection \$130. Fines from violations go into a Blight Fund. Requirement to maintain and secure property. Waiver for properties being actively marketed.
Tenant & Occupancy Registration Ordinance	5/11/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registration is required annually along with a fee ranging from \$25 - \$250 depending on location of property manager. Property subject to random inspections Insurance required at 150% of replacement cost.

Item	Date Enacted	Key Points
Member of Westmoreland County Land Bank	2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westmoreland County Land Bank is regarded as one of the leaders in Land Banking in Pennsylvania. • Has the ability to bundle and expedite quiet title actions. • Managing the County’s Demolition Program as described below.
Nehemiah of Monessen Community Development Corp.	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effort led by local clergy • Holistic focus includes not only redevelopment but making connections with workforce development and social service agencies to provide services to residents.

Step 3: Convene a Blight Task Force

Since Monessen has an active Blighted Property Review Board, this board provided oversight to the Blight Planning process. The Board consists of residents and business owners, and the City Manager and Mayor attend their meetings as well. Blighted Property Review Board meetings are advertised and open to the public. In addition to the Blighted Property Review Board, input was sought from other organizations and elected bodies including the Nehemiah of Monessen Community Development Corporation.

First Meeting

The first blight planning public meeting was hosted by the Blighted Property Review Board on December 19, 2022 at Monessen’s City Hall. In addition to members of the Board, several community members attended along with Corey Block, a planner with Westmoreland County’s Planning and Economic Development Department. The meeting included review of data on existing conditions, as well as the legislative frame work for addressing blight. Participants were asked to prioritize blight strategies for Monessen, and these initial priorities were reviewed and subsequent meetings.

Second Meeting & Presentation to City Council

The second meeting involved receiving feedback from the Nehemiah of Monessen Community Development Corporation at its meeting on January 20, 2023. This organization was formed in 2022 and is led by local clergy and stakeholders with a focus on expanding Monessen’s capacity to implement community development activities. The group is modeled after a successful initiative in New York City, and has the support of Monessen’s elected leadership. A presentation of the draft Blight Plan to Monessen’s City Council was made on February 23, 2023.

Monessen Economic Development Summit

Monessen Mayor Ron Mozer coordinated an Economic Development Summit which was held at Monessen High School on January 20, 2023. This event featured presentation and panel discussions by representatives from Monessen's state legislator's offices as well as by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and DCED. Blight was part of the discussion, as blight consultant Tom Hardy was on a panel discussion with Westmoreland County Land Bank Executive Director, Brian Lawrence, along with representatives of the Westmoreland County Commissioners.

The Monessen Economic Development Summit was attended by approximately 50 residents, business owners, and other stakeholders. All the presentations and panel discussions included an opportunity for participants to ask questions and make comments. Feedback from participants included a desire to re-activate vacant lots, particularly as side yards for adjacent property owners. Other issues raised included concerns about potential increases in real estate tax assessments as new construction occurs.

Priority Blight Strategies

Five priority strategies emerged from the blight planning process. These have been organized into three categories: Prevention, Remediation, and Redevelopment. Collectively these strategies provide a comprehensive approach that begins with preventing additional blight and goes all the way through returning properties to productive use.

A discussion of the priority strategies follows:

- 1) Expand Code Enforcement — Critical to blight prevention is a consistent and proactive approach to code enforcement. With a proactive approach, non-code compliant conditions can be documented early in the process before they become more severe. If necessary, citations are issued and followed up on. The goal is compliance by the current owner. In circumstances where the property is owner-occupied, and the owner is financially unable to maintain the property, referrals may be made to programs and agencies that may be able to assist (such as the united way). If the property is vacant, and the owner unreachable or non-responsive to multiple citations, initiating a parallel process to determine eligibility for the Westmoreland County Land Bank to purchase it through a Tax Sale should be explored.

Proactive and consistent code enforcement often improves voluntary compliance from property owners. Other communities have found that as the word gets out and property owners observe more proactive and consistent enforcement, they address property issues to avoid citation that they previously did not expect the municipality to issue. This helps to raise overall code compliance. The other thing that proactive and consistent code enforcement does is it shortens the timeline for intervention on properties where the owner is non-responsive to citations. Shortening this timeline for intervention improves the chance of addressing the problem before a property becomes blighted and is a candidate for demolition.

Specific work items will include receiving training on and adopting the most recent version of the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC). The most recent version, published in 2021, is

based on current best practices. Using digital tools, such as the codePRO system, is another item that will improve both efficiency and communication. This system is part of the database utilized by the Westmoreland County Land Bank and can streamline the process of identifying properties eligible for Land Bank acquisition.

- 2) Prioritize and Demolish Unsafe Structures — Monessen is part of Westmoreland County's Demolition and Rehabilitation Program which is managed by the Westmoreland County Land Bank. The County has committed \$10.4M to this program, funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which will fund demolitions in 10 eligible census tracts in Westmoreland County. Monessen has two of these census tracts.

Monessen has access to the codePRO database and has used this to update property information and identify priority projects for the Land Bank. Westmoreland County has a publicly available dashboard that shows the status of current and potential projects under this program. As of this writing, there are 305 potential demolition projects in Monessen and 5 have been completed and another 12 have been bid. Current information is available at bit.ly/arpadashboard.

- 3) Connect Households with Small Mortgage Lending and Other Home Repair Resources — Monessen's demographics indicate that a significant percentage of the homeownership population is of moderate income. Much of this population is also elderly and lacking the income or the savings to complete costly home repair projects. In some cases, these households may also struggle to keep up with regular maintenance. Proactively working to connect these households with resources for home repair work is an essential part of the strategy to prevent more homes in Monessen from becoming blighted.

There are several programs currently available at both the state and local level. The Pennsylvania Homeowner Assistance Fund is administered by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) and provides funds for eligible homeowners that have fallen behind on their mortgage or property tax payments. The Whole-Home Repairs program authorized by the Pennsylvania legislature in 2022 will provide counties with resources to address home habitability and weatherization. Wading through the requirements of individual programs is often challenging for homeowners, and having a person or an organization that can serve as a resource to make these connections and ensure proper follow through is essential.

- 4) Support Capacity Building at Nehemiah of Monessen Community Development Corporation — Communities that have successfully address blight in Pennsylvania demonstrate the importance of strong community leadership and capacity. Monessen's City leadership and clergy came together in 2022 to hold meetings that led to the formation of the Nehemiah of Monessen Community Development Corporation (NMCDC). The organization is a faith-based community development organization with a mission of "assisting the underprivileged with services to enhance our community and transform the fabric of the city, one family, one business at a time."

Through its leadership, the NMCDC reaches a significant portion of Monessen's population. Building capacity within the organization will help to coordinate and advance the blight work. While the support of the City administration is both necessary and critical, a local non-profit partner can access additional resources. NMDC, as it expands its capacity, can coordinate key components of the blight strategy by connecting homeowners with resources to help maintain

their homes. With the scale of demolition that is planned, residents have expressed concern over rising costs and potential displacement. This work of the NMDC is critically important, as it will address these quality-of-life issues and be responsive to resident concerns.

- 5) Partner with Qualified Developers on Rehabilitation and New Construction — Partnerships are key to Monessen’s revitalization. These are particularly important to achieving the desired scale in home rehabilitation and new construction in the community. Light to moderate rehabilitation work is well suited for private developers that have this experience and capacity. More significant renovations and new construction in Monessen will require subsidies to cover a cost of construction that will exceed the market value of the completed home. Non-profit housing developers have experience financing projects by combining a variety of grants and private sources.

The Westmoreland County Land Bank provides a resource to clear titles on tax delinquent properties and sell them to qualified housing developers. The Land Bank has a process by which interested parties can submit proposals for Land Bank owned properties. These proposals must include proof of a viable redevelopment plan including the financing to complete the work. Monessen can work closely with the Land Bank to build relationships with qualified developers and refer them to available properties through the Land Bank.

Initial conversations have occurred with potential housing development partners. Level Equity Building is a non-profit that is renovating properties in the community of McKees Rocks which has similar market conditions. Matt Uram, who has developed senior housing in Washington County has also expressed interest in doing work in Monessen. The Mon Valley Initiative, a regional community development corporation has previously done housing work in downtown Monessen. Advancing these potential partnerships will begin in the implementation of this plan, with next steps outlined in the Work Plan.

Step 4: Engage Municipal Officials

Monessen is well ahead of many other municipalities in terms of engaging municipal officials around blight. Strong partnerships have emerged since the completion of the Comprehensive Plan. Monessen has engaged with elected leadership and the appropriate agencies at the state and federal levels. This was evident in the Monessen Economic Summit this past January that not only provided an opportunity for residents to learn about different programs and resources—the event also provided an opportunity for leaders to hear questions and concerns directly from community members.

Monessen was recently awarded a technical assistance grant from HUD. The scope of the grant will complement the blight work identified in this plan. In addition, elected leaders in Monessen are working to build connections with regional foundations and other community development corporations to learn from their experiences. As part of this process, a delegation from Monessen was recently hosted by Carnegie Mellon’s Remaking Cities Initiative and heard from practitioners involved with redevelopment efforts in Pittsburgh and other neighborhoods and communities in the Pittsburgh region.

Step 5: Identify Priority Action Steps and Implement!

This Comprehensive Blight Strategy provides a first step to aggressively addressing blighted and at-risk properties in Monessen. The strategies prioritized in this plan must be implemented to make an impact. An Action Plan has been drafted as a road map for the implementation process. The draft Action Plan is an appendix to this document and includes:

- Tasks necessary to implement each priority strategy
- Time frame for completing the tasks
- Lead organizations
- Resources needed
- Measurements of success

The Action Plan is designed to be a living document and one that is updated frequently. Tasks may be added or modified based on circumstances. The timelines will help monitor progress and maintain accountability throughout the process.

The Blighted Property Review Board meets monthly and can assess progress, address implementation issues, and update the plan as needed.

For more information about this Comprehensive Blight Plan and its implementation, please contact:

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Appendix A: Action Plan

City of Monessen Blight Strategy: Action Plan

Strategy & Tasks	Lead Organization / Individuals	Completion Date	Resources Required	Measurements Of Success	Notes
Strategy 1. Expand Code Enforcement					
Task A. Training on Most Current Version of the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC – 2021)	Palo Alto Partners (Tom Hardy)	7/30/23	City staff resources Existing TA contract w/ Housing Alliance	Completed training	See Note #1
Task B. Adopt 2021 version of IPMC	City staff & solicitor	8/30/23	City staff resources	Adopted City Council Resolution	See Note #1
Task C. Review status of implementation of existing blight ordinances	Palo Alto Partners (Tom Hardy)	8/30/23	Existing TA contract w/ Housing Alliance	Summary memo on status	See Note #2
Task D. Utilize CodePRO for tracking violations.	Palo Alto Partners (Tom Hardy) and City Staff	9/30/23	City staff resources. Existing TA contract w/ Housing Alliance	Updated CodePRO database	See Notes #3
Task E. Add code enforcement staff hours.	Mayor Ron Mozer and Acting City Manager Michael Korposh.	12/31/23	City staff resources	Documentation of increased hours	See Note #4

Notes:

- 1) Best practice encourages use of the most current IPMC. Training of code enforcement should happen prior to, or parallel with, adoption.
- 2) Monessen has several blight laws as summarized in the Blight Plan. This task will take a closer look at implementation status.
- 3) Electronic recordkeeping of code enforcement is best practice. CodePRO is a tool utilized by the Land Bank that the City has access to.
- 4) Additional code enforcement hours is a goal, subject to City’s budget situation. Evaluate how additional fees could offset some of the costs.

City of Monessen Blight Strategy: Action Plan Continued

Tasks	Lead Organization / Individuals	Completion Date	Resources Required	Measurements Of Success	Notes
Strategy 2. Prioritize & Demolish Unsafe Structures					
Task A. Continued participation in Westmoreland County’s Demolition Rehab Program.	Mayor Ron Mozer and Acting City Manager Michael Korposh.	Ongoing	Existing City staff resources	Target of average of 15 property demolitions each quarter	See Note #1
Task B. Prioritize eligible Downtown Properties for Rehab under Westmoreland County’s Demolition Rehab Program.	Palo Alto Partners / Housing Alliance (Tom Hardy) and Mayor Ron Mozer & BPRB*	8/30/23	Existing TA contract w/ Housing Alliance & existing City staff resources	List of prioritized properties	See Note #2
Task C. Complete quarterly property survey updates and provide updated blight records through CodePRO	Palo Alto Partners / Housing Alliance (Tom Hardy) and Mayor Ron Mozer & BPRB	Quarterly	Existing TA contract w/ Housing Alliance & existing City staff resources	Updated CodePRO data	See Note #3

Notes: *BPRB is Monessen’s Blighted Property Review Board

- 1) Program is currently underway and progress is noted a dashboard is here. City staff will communicate regularly with Land Bank staff.
- 2) Some funds under this program have been earmarked towards stabilization and rehab, and communities that clearly identify priority structures and prepare a feasible redevelopment plan will be best positioned to receive this funding.
- 3) Certain areas where there have been the most changes from previous survey should be identified and resurveyed. This should happen quarterly and the updated blight records can be conveyed to the County through CodePRO.

City of Monessen Blight Strategy: Action Plan Continued

Tasks	Lead Organization / Individuals	Completion Date	Resources Required	Measurements Of Success	Notes
Strategy 3. Connect Households with Small Mortgage Lending and other Home Repair Resources					
Task A. Prepare a summary of existing programs with contact information.	Palo Alto Partners / Housing Alliance (Tom Hardy)	6/30/23	Existing TA contract w/ Housing Alliance	Summary document	See Note #1
Task B. Distribute information on existing programs through multiple channels.	City Staff / Nehemiah of Monessen CDC	7/15/23	Existing City staff resources	Summary of distribution	See Note #2
Task C. Identify a coordinator that can assist residents with applications.	City Staff / Nehemiah of Monessen CDC	7/15/23	TBD	Identification of coordinator	See Note #3

Notes:

- 1) This is timely, as there are some new programs such as the Whole Homes Programs that are anticipated to be in high demand.
- 2) Anticipated to include a variety of social media as well as through local churches, non-profits and employers.
- 3) Process of households applying for assistance often breaks down at point of assembling required information for application. Having a resource to assist households as they apply should help raise the success rate. Nehemiah of Monessen CDC is a logical place for this work to be based.

City of Monessen Blight Strategy: Action Plan Continued

Tasks	Lead Organization / Individuals	Completion Date	Resources Required	Measurements Of Success	Notes
Strategy 4. Support Capacity Building in Nehemiah of Monessen Community Development Corporation					
Task A. Secure 501-c-3 status.	Nehemiah of Monessen CDC	6/30/2023	Existing staff time	501-C-3 determination letter	See Note #1
Task B. Apply for Neighborhood Assistance Program	Nehemiah of Monessen CDC	3/30/2024	Existing staff time and tax credit partner	Completed application	See Note #2
Task C. Partner with other non-profits that provide credit and homeownership counseling	Board w/ Assistance from City Staff	6/30/2023	Staff time	Documentation of partnership efforts	See Note #3

Notes:

- 1) Application is currently pending. Necessary for fundraising.
- 2) Provides funding for a non-profit comprehensive community development program. Need to find a corporate partner willing to invest cash for Pennsylvania tax credits.
- 3) Important opportunity to provide interested residents a pathway to homeownership. Timely given data showing rising pricing and increased investor activity converting formerly owner-occupied homes to rentals.

City of Monessen Blight Strategy: Action Plan Continued

Tasks	Lead Organization / Individuals	Completion Date	Resources Required	Measurements Of Success	Notes
Strategy 4. Support Capacity Building in Nehemiah of Monessen Community Development Corporation					
Task D. Take lead on coordinating housing assistance programs for existing homeowners.	Nehemiah of Monessen CDC	ongoing	Existing staff time	Successful homeowner applications	See Note #4
Task E. Coordinate with City to Create and implement a plan for vacant lots.	Nehemiah of Monessen CDC / City Staff / Housing Alliance / Palo Alto Partners (Tom Hardy)	9/30/2023	Existing staff time and tax credit partner	Completed plan	See Note #5

Notes:

- 4) Given strong networks of Board Members, this is a logical place for this activity to reside.
- 5) Critical activity that will set the stage for the disposition of vacant property and potential partnerships with qualified non-profit and private developers. Review work and recommendations from CMU student project.

City of Monessen Blight Strategy: Action Plan Continued

Tasks	Lead Organization / Individuals	Completion Date	Resources Required	Measurements Of Success	Notes
Strategy 5. Partner with Qualified Developers on Rehab and New Construction					
Task A. Complete HUD Technical Assistance Program.	Mayor Ron Mozer and Acting City Administrator Mike Korposh	12/31/23	Existing TA contract w/ HUD	Completed contract with next steps outlined	See Note #1
Task B. Develop process for soliciting and prequalifying potential development partners.	Nehemiah of Monessen CDC / City Staff / Housing Alliance / Palo Alto Partners (Tom Hardy)	7/31/23	Existing TA contract w/ Housing Alliance	Written policy and procedure	See Note #2
Task C. Work with Westmoreland County Land Bank on properties it owns to refer interested parties to make applications.	Palo Alto Partners (Tom Hardy)	Ongoing	Existing staff resources	Documentation of referrals	See Note #3

Notes:

- 1) City has existing Technical Assistance with HUD.
- 2) Development partners are key to adding capacity to help implement the plan by providing expertise around housing development.
- 3) For properties that Monessen is not working on as part of larger land assemblies/redevelopment projects, individuals may make applications to the Land Bank for property they wish to purchase.