



Morningside & Westside in Pittsfield, MA: A Historical Perspective

Nate Orluk
&
Clarissa Dominguez

Land Acknowledgement



"It is with gratitude and humility that we acknowledge that we are working and gathering on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican people, who are the indigenous peoples of this land. Despite tremendous hardship in being forced from here, today their community resides in Wisconsin, and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We pay honor and respect to their ancestors past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all."

PROJECT GOALS

Overview

- Develop a report that describes how specific demographics, health outcomes, and housing indicators have changed over a 3 decade period of time in the Morningside and Westside.

Stage 1

- Assess which indicators are necessary to assess neighborhood change over time
- Gain an understanding of the neighborhoods and region
- Select 4-5 indicators

Stage 2

- Apply those indicators to Morningside and Westside
- Condense findings to report & presentation format

Allison Egan

- Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
- Weekly Check -Ins at 1pm

Data Collection

U.S. Census and American Community Survey data collected through the Census Bureau and National Historical Geographic Information System. The following is a list of values that required additional work / refinement.

Rest of Pittsfield Averages:

- Created mean using the non-Morningside / Westside tracts
- Not proportional to different tracts' population differences

Racial Composition:

- You may notice that the 1990 numbers lack the “Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander” and multi-racial categories.
- The latter is instead lumped in with a single race, and the former joins the “Some other race” category.

Inflation Adjusted Household Income:

- Census does not account for inflation
- Used New England CPI values from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to provide adjusted numbers (adjusting to 2019)

Median Age:

- Census provided for 2000, 2010, & 2019
- Calculated manually for 1990, but does not impact integrity of values

Literature Review: Neighborhood Change



View of Pittsfield from Division Hill

- Laura Smith (Macalester College) & Karen Chapple (Center for Community Innovation)
 - Noticeable changes in housing affordability, land use change, commercial character, socioeconomic status, and social character
 - Prevalence of multi-unit buildings, the number of renter-occupied housing, and number of public housing units, as well as changes in median gross rent
- Neighborhood Health
 - PACER: Perceptions About Change in Environment and Residents Survey
 - Construction of community health profile (sociodemographics, health status, health risk factors, and quality of life)

A Brief History of Pittsfield

- A classic mill town, Pittsfield found itself in trouble in the latter half of the 20th century
- But, G.E.'s entrance in 1903 and the accompanying jobs brought it bustling back
- During its tenure, G.E. was essential to the city's economics, culture, and more
- In 1987, it came to an end, as G.E.'s transformers division closed permanently
- The city's dependence on G.E. was exposed, and a new identity and economy was needed
- While the population has greatly declined, the economy has also made a recovery, partly due to the rise of the "creative economy"

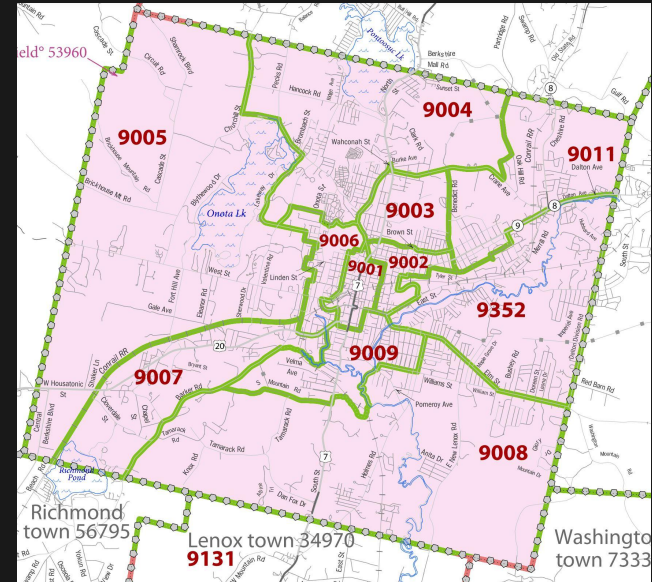


Pittsfield in the middle of the 20th century
Source: 1962 Pittsfield Comprehensive Master Plan

Map of Morningside



Census Tract Map of Pittsfield





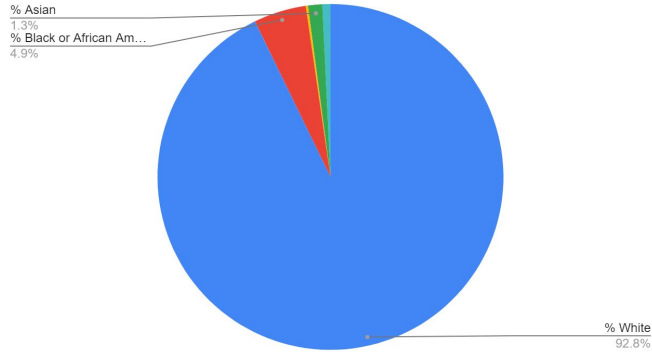
The General Electric plant in the 1940s
Source: The Berkshire County Historical Society, Pittsfield, MA

Morningside Site Description

- Boundaries: Springside Avenue to the North, East Street to the South, Silver Lake/Fourth Street/Kellogg Street/Woodlawn/Benedict Street to the East, and North Street to the West
- Home to former General Electric campus and Pittsfield Common
- Captured by Census tracts 9001 & 9002

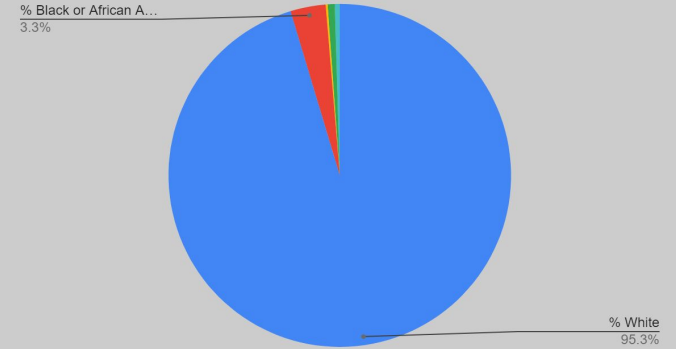
Racial Makeup for Morningside vs the Rest of Pittsfield

Race in Morningside Neighborhood 1990



Source: 1990 US Census Bureau

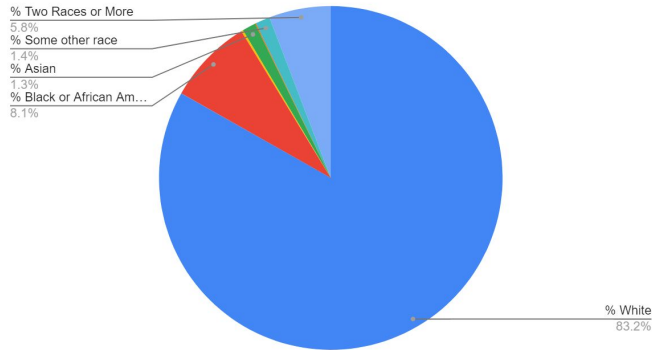
Race in Rest of Pittsfield 1990



Source: 1990 US Census Bureau

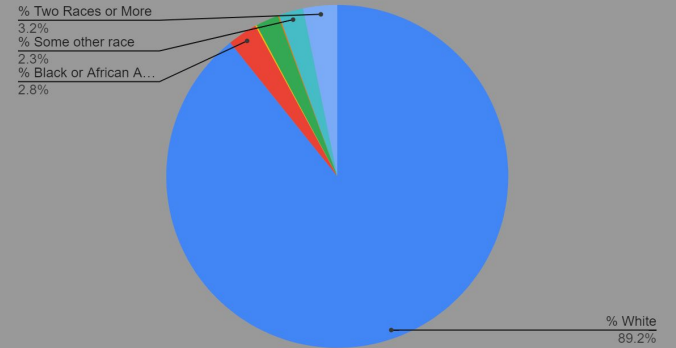
- % White
- % Black or African American
- % American Indian or Alaskan Native
- % Asian
- % Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
- % Some other race
- % Two Races or More

Race in Morningside Neighborhood 2019



Source: 2019 American Community Survey

Race in Rest of Pittsfield 2019



Source: 2019 American Community Survey

Map of Westside

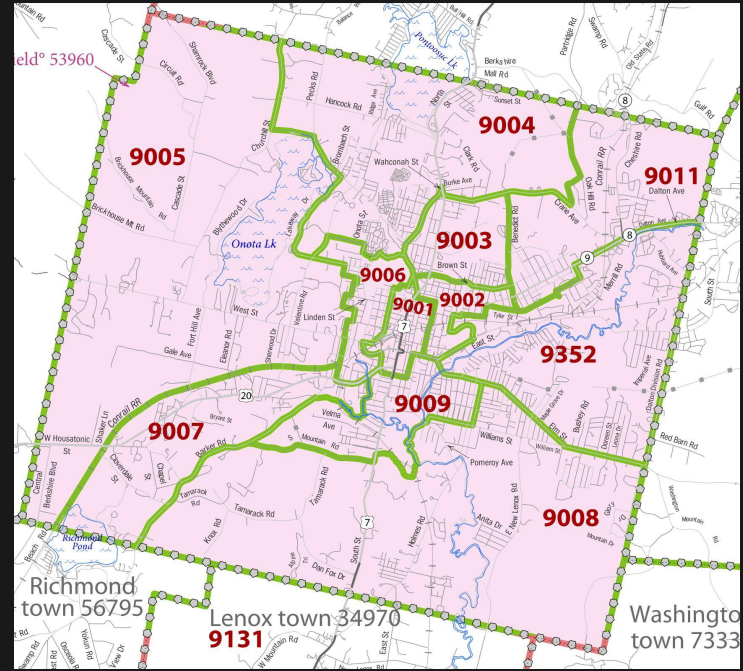


Pittsfield Westside Zoning Analysis
Pittsfield West Side Neighborhood

Legend

- WestSideBoundary
- RoadInventory

Census Tract Map of Pittsfield



Richmond town 56795
Lenox town 34970
Washington town 7333

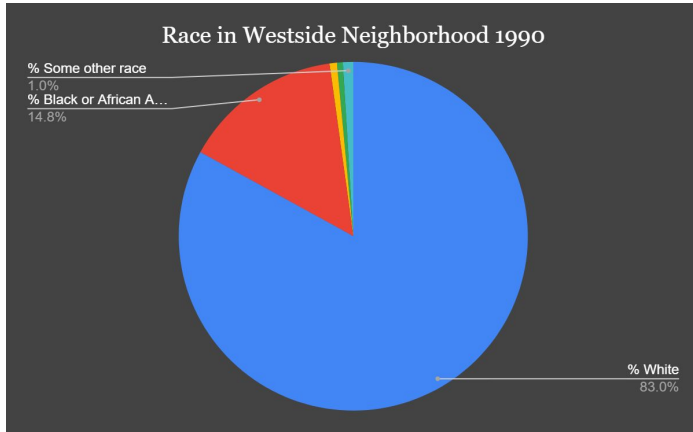


Westside's Riverway Park, opened in July 2021

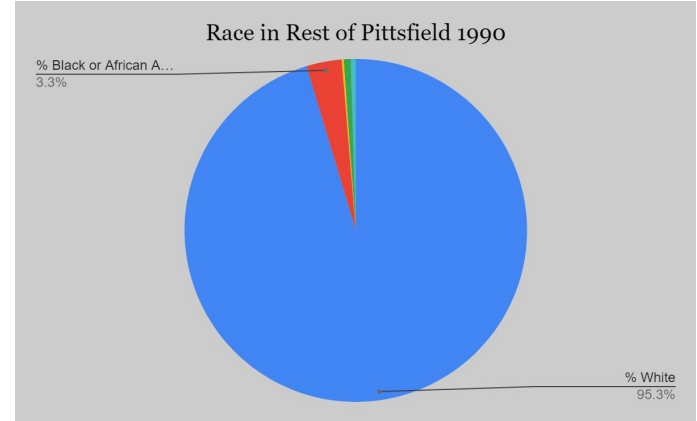
Westside Site Description

- Boundaries: Parts of Park Street/Beech Street/Turner Avenue to the North, College Drive and West Street to the South, North Street to the East, and Onota Street on the West
- Home to several community gardens & multiple parks including the new Westside Riverway Park
- Captured by Census tract 9006

Racial Makeup for Westside vs the Rest of Pittsfield

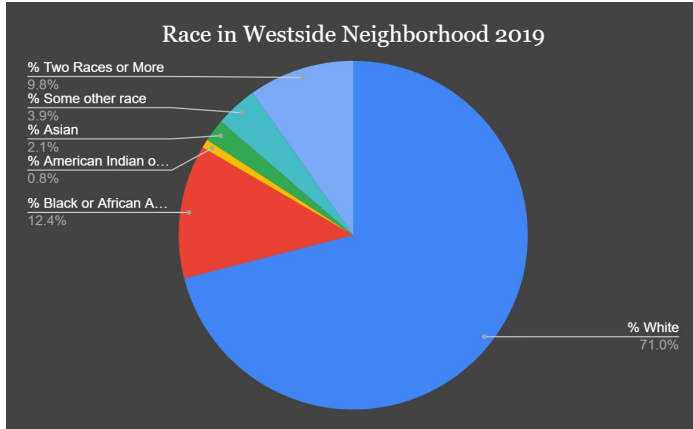


Source: 1990 US Census Bureau

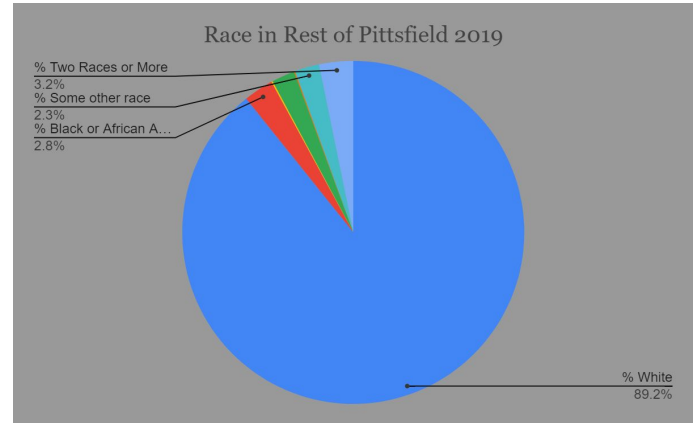


Source: 1990 US Census Bureau

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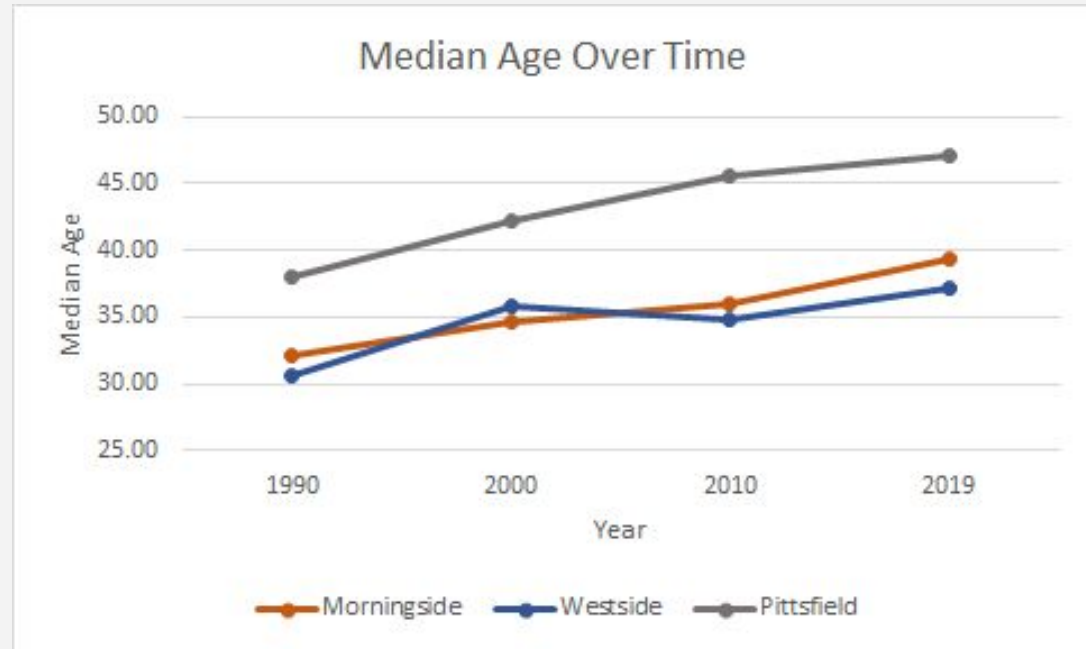


Source: 2019 American Community Survey



Source: 2019 American Community Survey

A Comparison of Median Age



Source: 1990-2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

Literature Review: Pittsfield Specific

- Housing Needs Analysis & Development Recommendations (2009)
 - Large number of unoccupied and distressed housing units
 - Identifies target areas
- Westside Neighborhood Land Use & Zoning Analysis (2015)
 - 64% residential land use (split between high density and multi-family)
 - Expand general business section and amend certain sections to allow for eating and retail services
- Pittsfield TDI Data Collection and Analysis (2016)
 - 70.7% in Good condition with only 1.2% as Poor condition
 - TDI not a blighted area
- The Tyler Street Transformative Development Initiative (2017)
 - Encourage investments in Tyler District and promote pedestrian oriented development



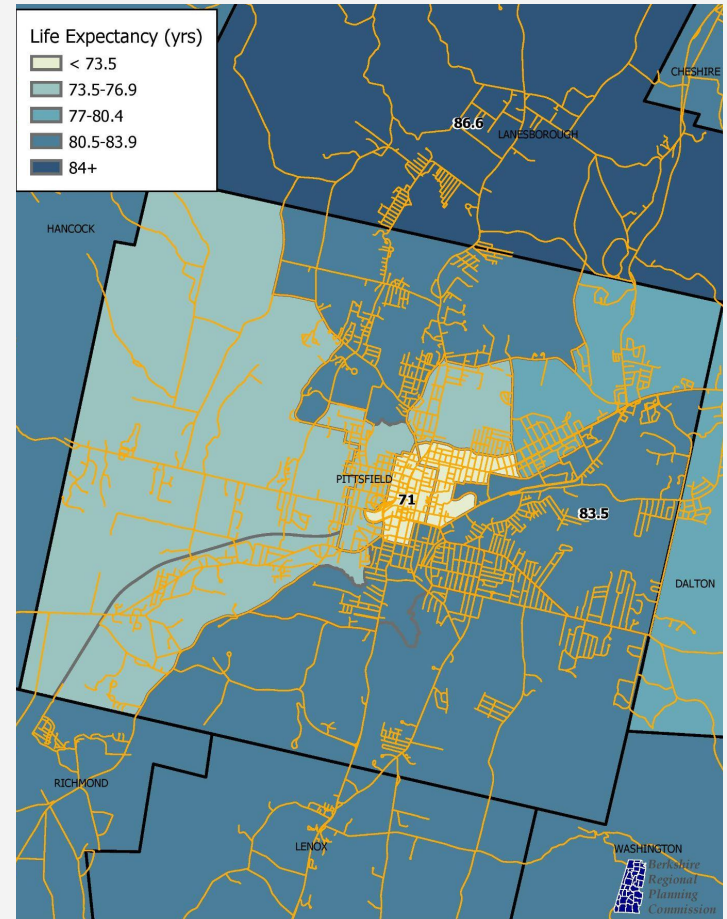
Street juncture in the Westside neighborhood

Interviews

- **Long Term Morningside Resident**
 - October 21, 2021
 - Walk and Talk Tour of Morningside
- **Tony Jackson & Marvin Purry**
 - October 29, 2021
 - Westside Residents & Members of the Westside Legends
 - Walk and Talk Tour of Westside
- **Dubois Thomas**
 - November 4, 2021
 - Habitat for Humanity Representative
- **CJ Hoss & Jim McGrath**
 - November 18, 2021
 - City Planner & Director of Parks and Recreations

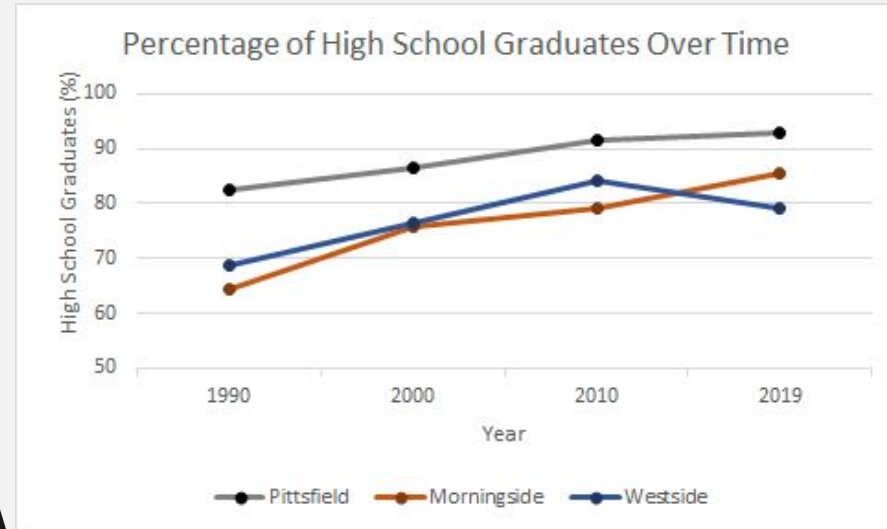
Life Expectancy

- Morningside's life expectancy is 71 and Westside's is 74, 12.5 and 9.5 years lower than other neighborhoods in Pittsfield, which go as high as 83.5
- National average for life expectancy difference between those in the top income quartile and those in the bottom is 7 years
- Thus, the gap in Pittsfield is significantly higher



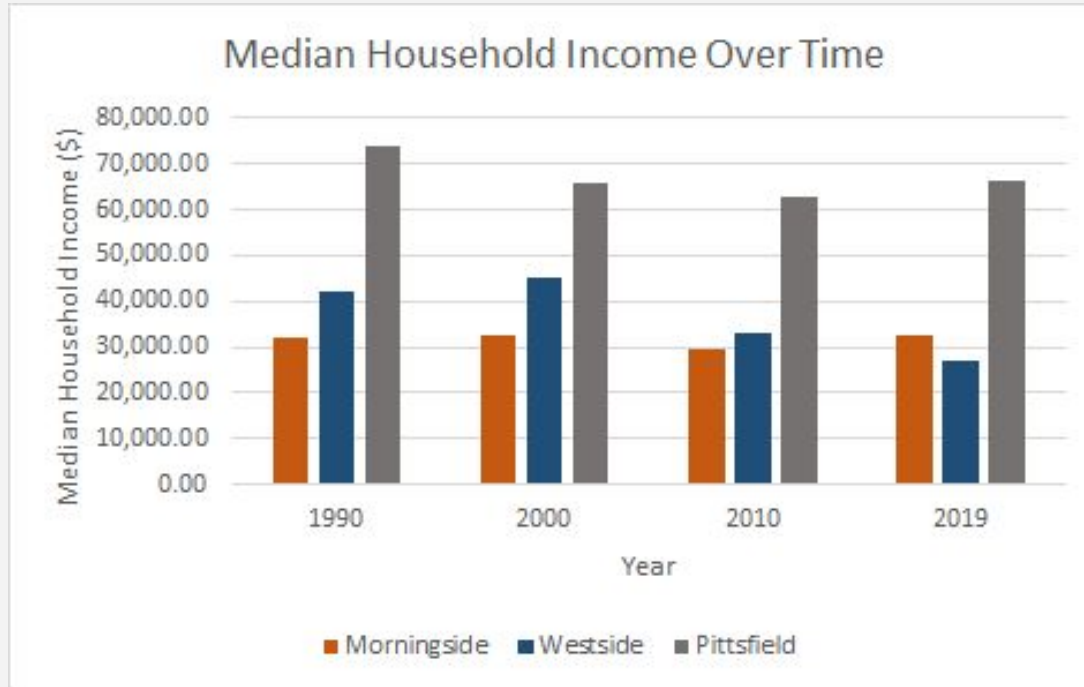
Source: CDC Life Expectancy at Birth for U.S. States and Census Tracts, 2010-2015. Map created by Mark Maloy.

High School Graduates



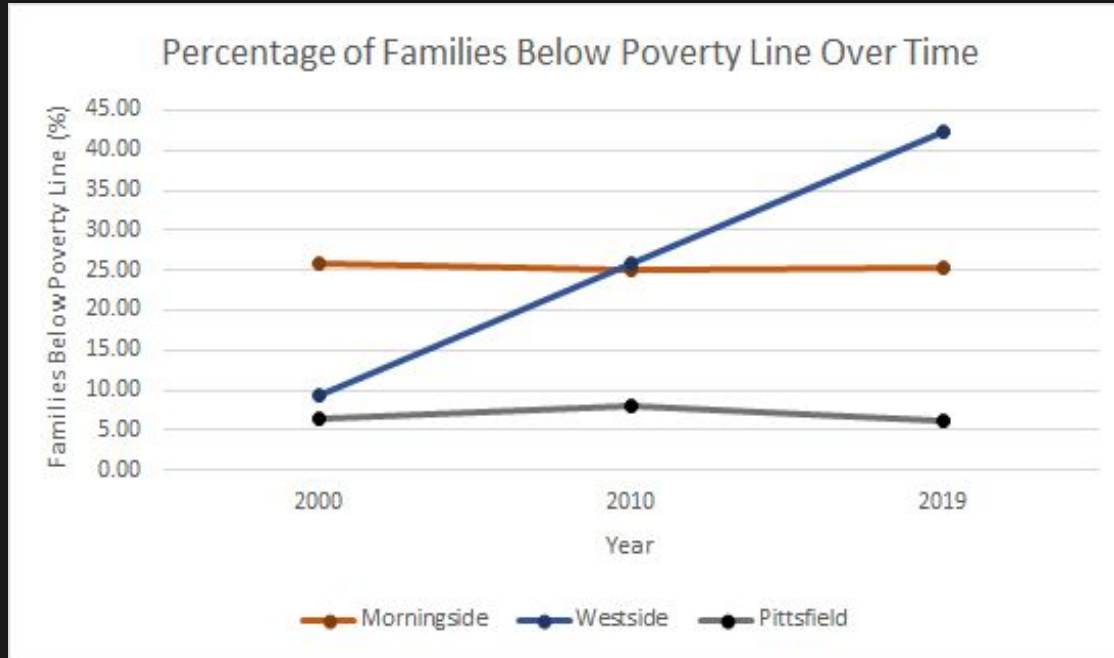
Source: 1990-2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

Median Household Income



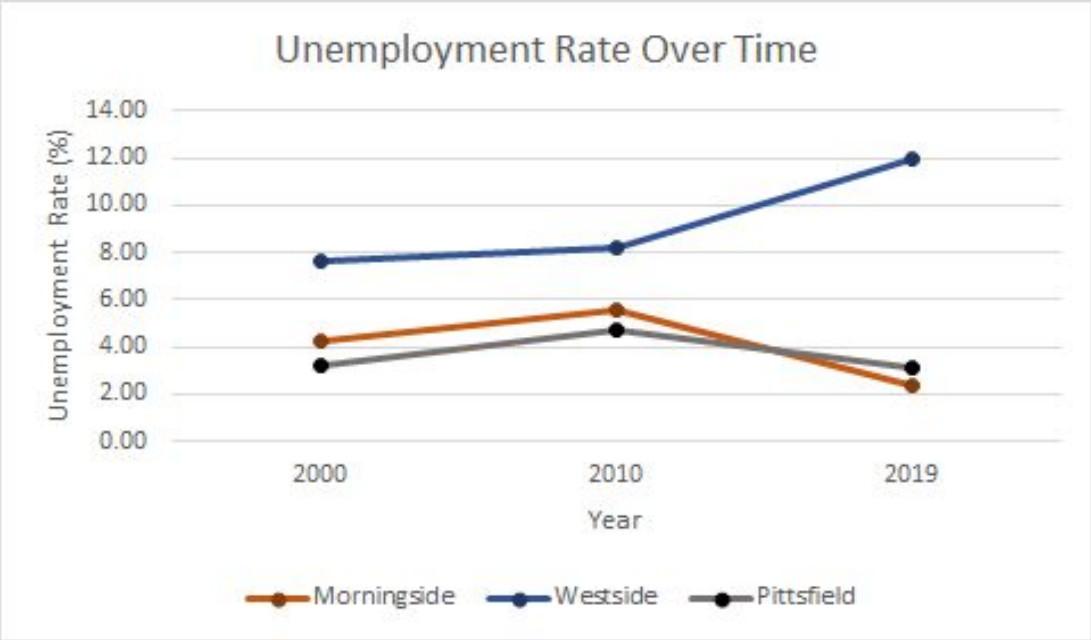
Source: 1990-2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

Family Poverty



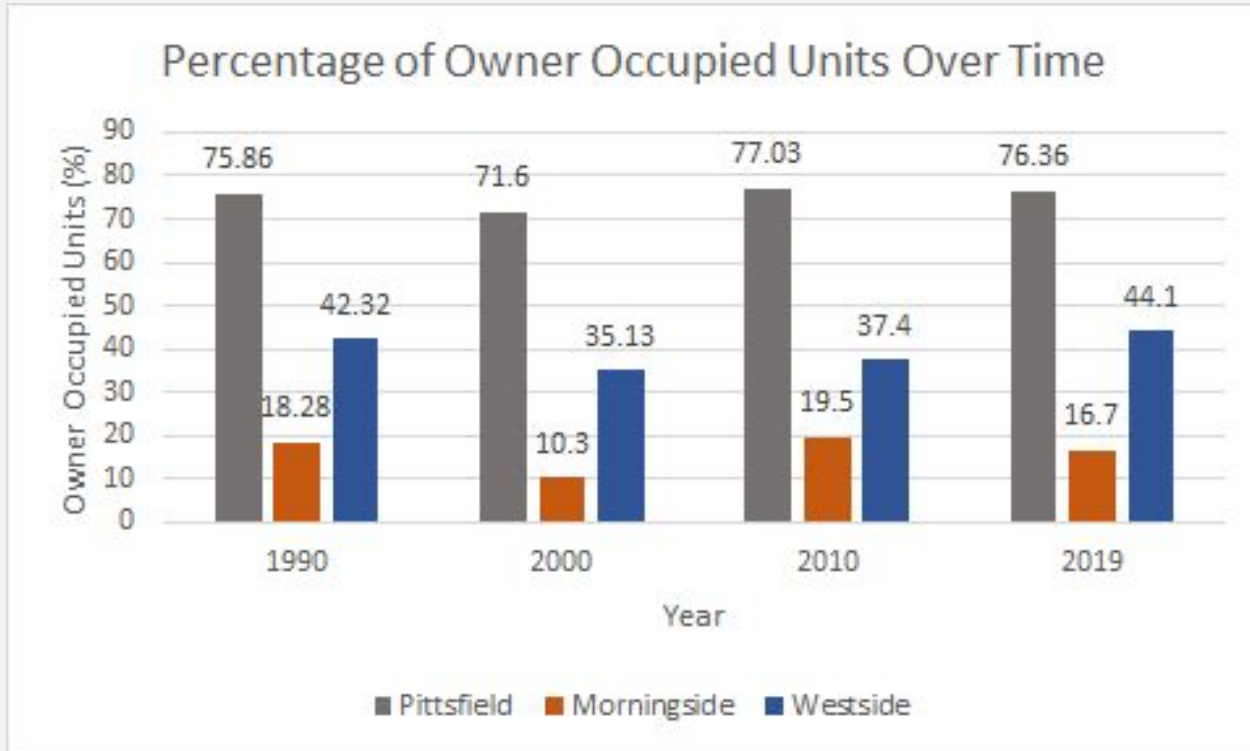
Source: 2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

Unemployment Rate



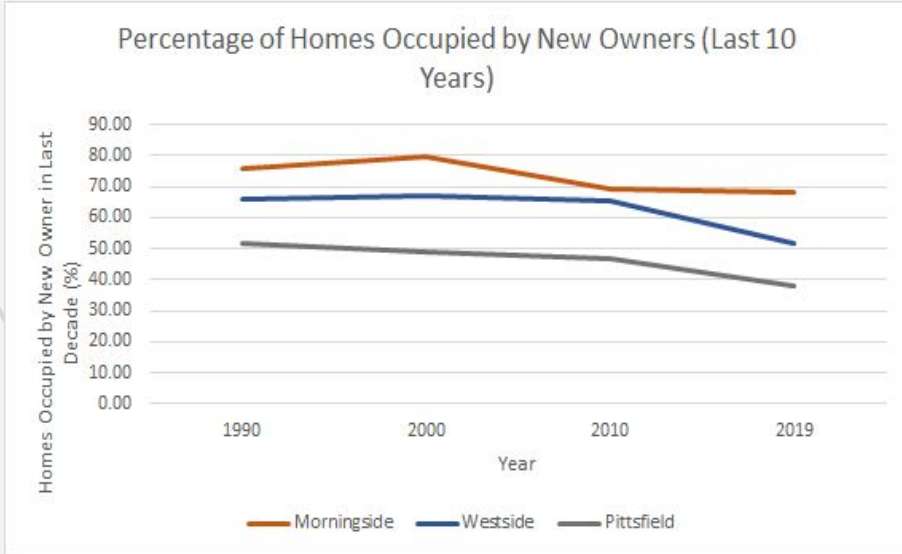
Source: 2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

Percentage of Renter vs Homeowners

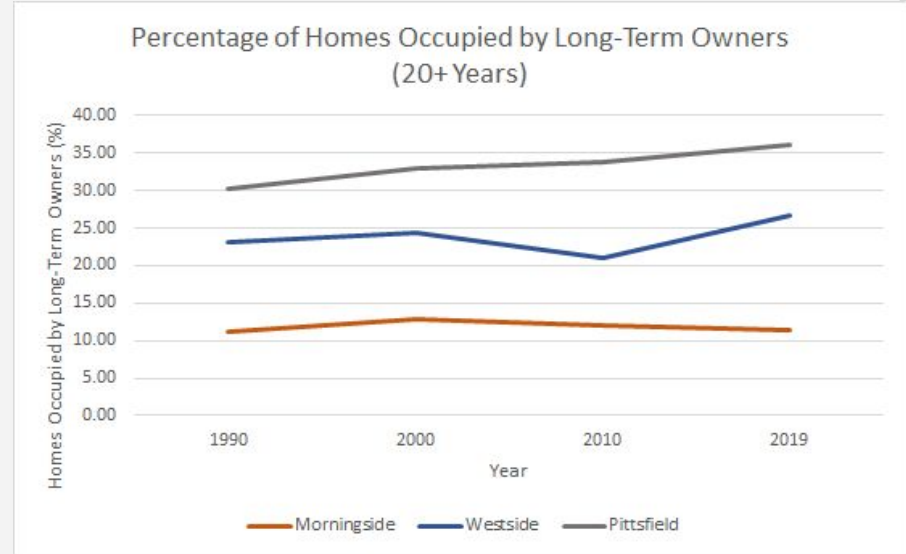


Source: 1990-2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

Neighborhood Transition



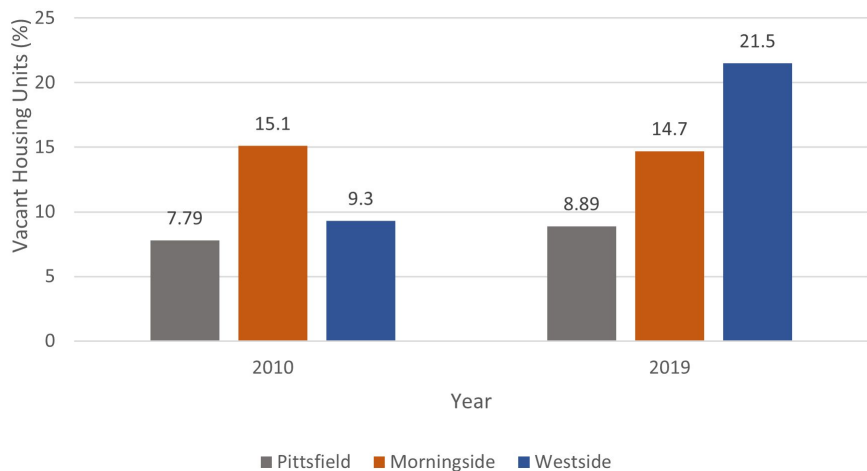
Source: 1990-2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey



Source: 1990-2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

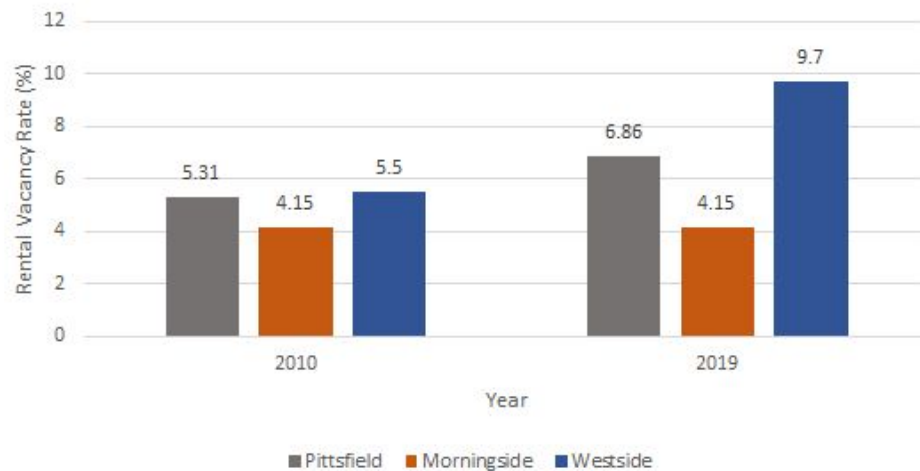
Vacancies

Percentage of Vacant Housing Units Over Time



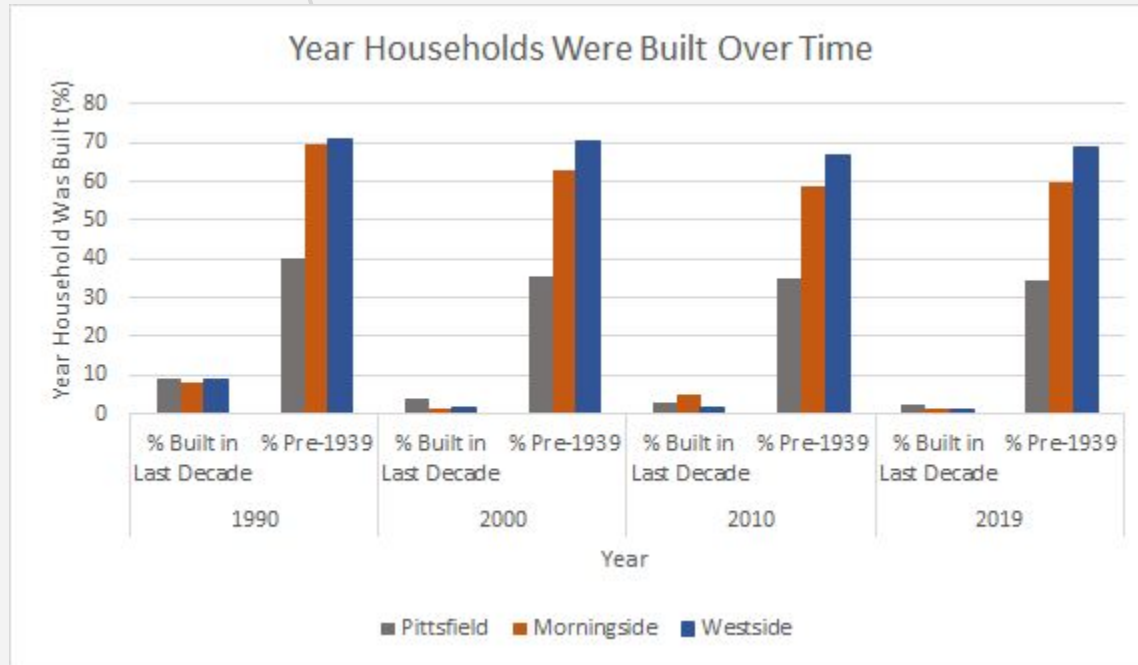
Source: 2010-2019 American Community Survey

Rental Vacancy Rates Over Time



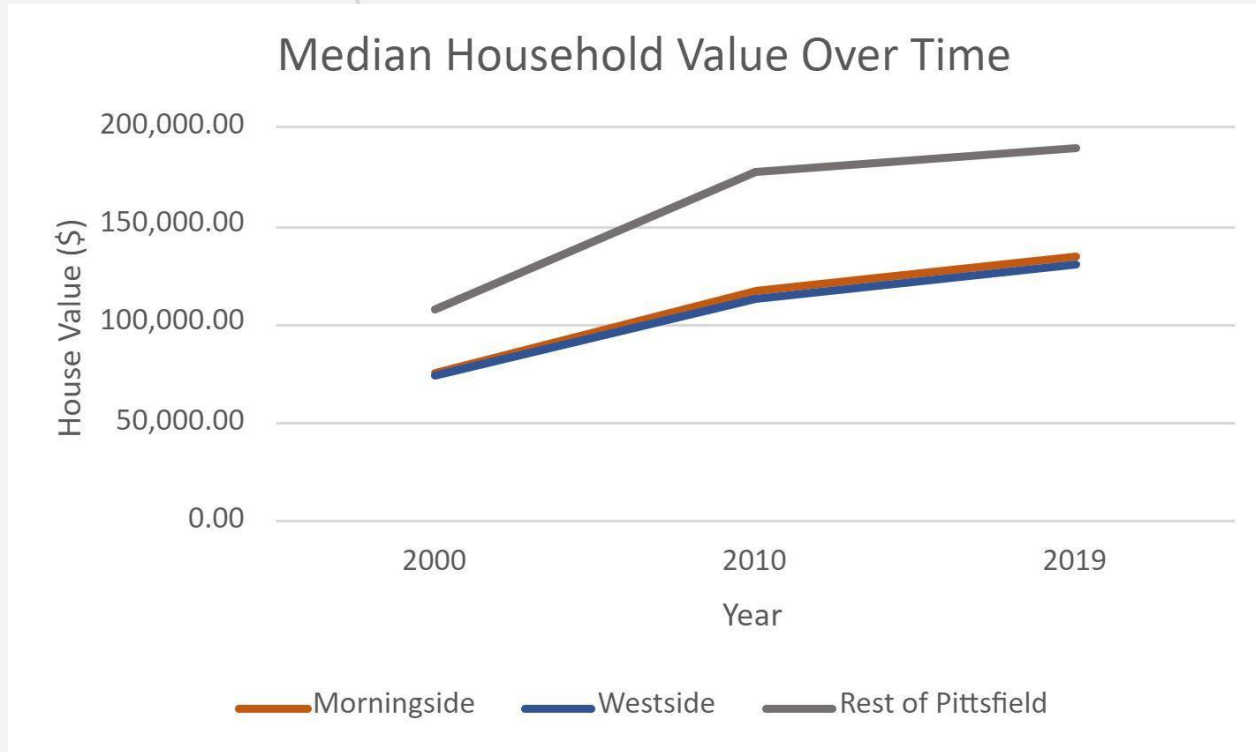
Source: 2010-2019 American Community Survey

Housing Stock Age



Source: 1990-2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

Median Household Value



Source: 2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

Conclusions

- **City must separate Morningside and Westside in their consideration of solutions**
- There is a strong tendency to put Morningside and Westside in the same breath, implying that there is a sort of one-size-fits-all “solution”
- But while both of these neighborhoods have been problematized--they should instead be recognized as two structurally unique areas with largely different strengths and weaknesses



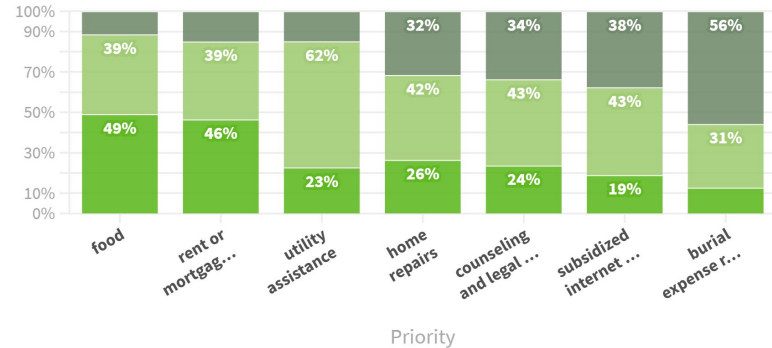
The beginning of a new community garden in the Westside

Shared Issues

- Both neighborhoods still have an overabundance of old housing stock, low home-ownership rates, and diminished incomes relative to the rest of Pittsfield
- Both of these areas are food deserts as a function of a deficit of walkable supermarkets
 - With less access to transportation than the rest of Pittsfield, it is a more pressing issue.
 - This is particularly prevalent in the Morningside, where there is a severe shortage of supermarkets, resulting in the local Cumberland Farms rising as a top source of food
 - This need was verbalized in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) survey filled out by Pittsfield residents

Which types of resident assistance projects should be prioritized for ARPA dollars?

Respondents were asked to rank their priorities for American Rescue Plan spending from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important)



Summary of ARPA survey, graph created by The Berkshire Eagle



Cumberland Farms located in the Morningside

Analysis of the Westside

- The Westside neighborhood is a stunning historic neighborhood with an abundance of green space and an encouraging core of community spirit.
 - But while this green space is valuable, it is seeing very little use as Westside residents have more pressing concerns, and many do not feel safe
 - 39% feel safe in parks and playgrounds, and 33% do not feel safe. (Westside Neighborhood Success Measures Database System Survey (2016))
- But, as incomes fall, the neighborhood reaches hyper-vacancy with poverty rates and unemployment rates climbing, making revitalization of the Westside neighborhood increasingly difficult
 - As the most diverse neighborhood in Pittsfield, structural racism, a national concern, must be considered as a factor
- Business is rare in the Westside, and even rarer than it once was. Tony and Marvin were able to cite a plethora of now closed businesses, many of these being food sources and almost all locally owned
- Westside needs a new action plan — a way to bring money (and therefore residents) into the neighborhood



Robbins Avenue Community Garden in the Westside Neighborhood



An abandoned home in the Westside

Westside Zoning Map

Source: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. *West Side Neighborhood Land Use & Zoning Analysis*. Pittsfield, Massachusetts, 2015.

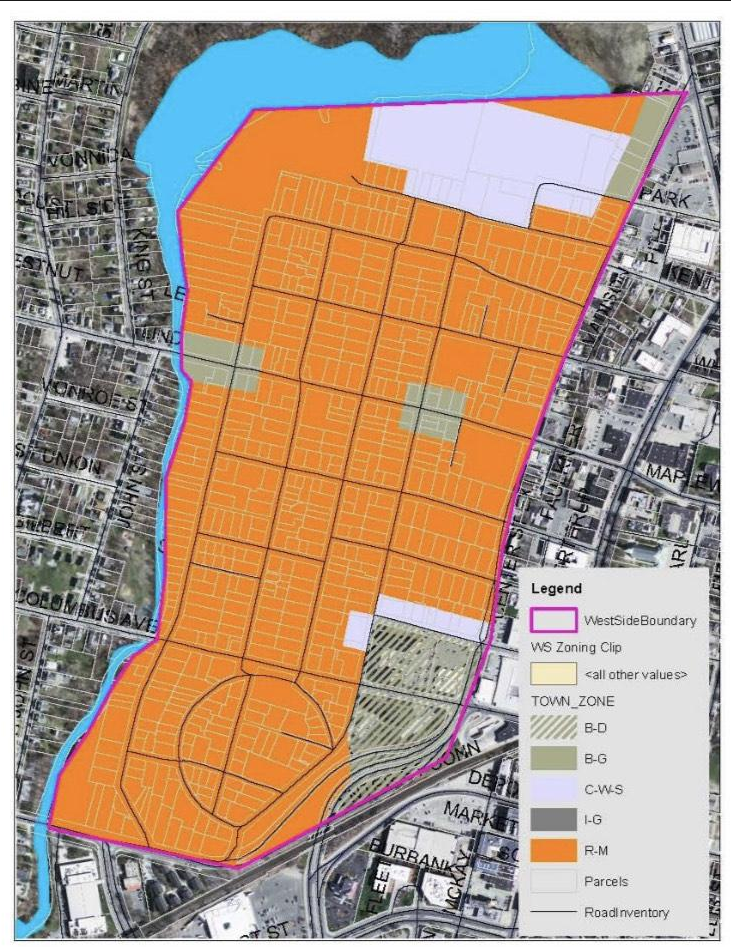


Figure 5. Existing Zoning in Study Area

- **B-D:** Downtown Business District (Green Stripes)
- **B-G:** General Business District (Gray Green)
- **C-W-S:** Commercial Warehouse District (Light Purple)
- **R-M:** High Density Multifamily Residential District (Orange)

Morningside Analysis

- From an economic standpoint, the Morningside has largely been trending positively (unemployment rate, education rate, etc), or at least remaining constant (income, poverty rate, etc)
- We believe this is largely due to investments into Morningside's TDI, which have and will continue to have increasing returns in the neighborhood
- Still, while Morningside's economy is trending upwards, it is lacking Westside's sense of community and plethora of green space
 - Existing playgrounds are found in locations like behind the old jail (now Sheriff's office) and cramped into urban areas
 - This detracts from its desirability, and keeps it in the realm of transitional neighborhood
- The Morningside also, as discussed earlier, has a shockingly low life expectancy — trailing 12.5 years behind the rest of Pittsfield.
 - This could be a function of lack of nutritional, affordable food, residual pollution from G.E.'s PCB contamination in the area, or something else entirely



A playground in the Morningside neighborhood

Recommendations

Moving Forward

- We recommend additional studies to promote awareness of youth engagement programming, investigate public health concerns, determine the root cause(s) for the life expectancy discrepancy, strategize ways to combat food insecurity and promote economic revitalization
- Our recommendations for additional data collection by the City are the following: a comprehensive list of vacant or blighted buildings (residential or commercial), youth engagement programming and its rates of usage, digitalization of business certificates to track private investment, and a record of public investments.
- We recognize that some of our recommendations may be not be feasible given current time constraints, labor power, and fiscal commitments. Our intention through our process is to highlight possible recommendations if these constraints are lessened or removed and allow for additional data collection.



A now abandoned bakery & deli in Morningside



Adam St in Morningside

Special Thanks To:

- Allison Egan, for providing the initial project and her incredible support and assistance throughout the project
- Professor Sarah Gardner, for her continued time and effort assisting this process
- Tony Jackson and Marvin Purry, for sharing their immense knowledge and experience of the Westside neighborhood
- C.J. Hoss and Jim McGrath, for their willingness to help and provide the narrative from the city's point of view
- Mark Maloy, for his invaluable help with the identification and retrieval of data
- Dubois Thomas, for his insight regarding the city and the root of the presented issues
- Our anonymous Morningside resident, for their perspective as a resident and their help acquainting us with the area



Tucker Park in the Westside

Thank you for your time and attention!

Any questions?

If you would like to view the full
report, it will be available at the
following link:

<https://ces.williams.edu/environmental-planning-papers/>