

# Morningside and Westside in Pittsfield, MA: A Historical Perspective



*View of Pittsfield from Division Hill. Photo by Nate Orluk (2021)*

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## The Team



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## **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.”

## **Introduction**

### *Purpose of Report*

The Morningside and Westside in Pittsfield, MA: A Historical Perspective project is an observational study that describes how specific demographics, health outcomes, and housing indicators have changed over a three-decade period in the Morningside and Westside neighborhoods in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. The client for this project was Allison Egan, a senior planner on the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and a member of Pittsfield Grey to Green Committee. Pittsfield Grey to Green advocates for an inclusive community process that centers the experiences of the Morningside and Westside neighborhoods and champions for health equity through environmental planning.

### *Timeline*

The project was divided into two tasks. The client was interested in the development of a report that gave a high-level summary of how the landscapes of the Morningside and Westside neighborhoods have changed over the last few decades, particularly related to resident demographics and housing. Our first step was to identify the best (available) indicators for capturing neighborhood change over time. Examples of potential indicators are household income,

home ownership, cost of rent, quantity of vacant buildings, investments by public/private entities, and so on. Through an examination of case studies of neighborhood change combined with historical research regarding Pittsfield's neighborhood development, we identified five indicators that we deemed the most useful for understanding such change. The historical research regarding Pittsfield was insightful in our selection of indicators to capture and demonstrate certain trends we had discovered in our research. We submitted a summary report to Allison Egan on November 2, 2021, with our findings and recommendation for stage two of the project.

During stage two, we applied our selected indicators to Pittsfield's Morningside and Westside neighborhoods. During this stage, we worked closely with Allison Egan and other Berkshire Regional Planning staff, representatives from the City of Pittsfield, neighborhood residents, and representatives from community organizations on collecting data, conducting interviews, and gathering general context for change over time in the neighborhoods. Our application of these indicators was verbally summarized to Allison Egan in late November. As a team, we remained in continuous, weekly contact regarding any updates, questions, or concerns throughout the project.

## **Contextual Background**

### *Pittsfield History*

Pittsfield officially became a town in 1761, following its generational tenure as a land of the Mohicans. A classic New England mill town, Pittsfield found itself in the same position as many other towns in the latter half of the 19th century — without a primary source of jobs and income. But the economy and economic prosperity of many residents was improved by the timely entrance of General Electric, a manufacturing giant, in 1903. By the 1920s, GE dominated

employment in Pittsfield. By the 1940s, GE had reached its peak, with 13,000 of Pittsfield's 50,000 residents employed throughout its 300+ acre campus along the Housatonic River.



*View of Pittsfield from Division Hill. Photo by Nate Orluk (2021)*

As Bob Cudmore, who worked at the local WBEC radio, remembers, "My wife, who was alive at the time, had told me once that when she was at a social gathering, other women would come up to her and say, 'Well, what does your husband do at GE?' And she said, 'Well, he doesn't work at GE.' And she said they had a look in their face like, 'Well, you poor dear.'"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Meghna Chakrabarti and Jamie Bologna, "GE Left Behind A Complex Legacy in Pittsfield," *Radio Boston*, WBUR, June 29, 2016, <https://www.wbur.org/radioboston/2016/06/29/ge-and-pittsfield>.  
<https://www.wbur.org/radioboston/2016/06/29/ge-and-pittsfield>

GE was more than just a manufacturing plant — it was Pittsfield’s heart and soul. It was the crux of the town’s economy, social life, and a point of pride for residents and employees who saw themselves as an integral part of American industrial ingenuity.

In Cudmore’s words, "GE did a lot in Pittsfield. Number one, it did pay its workers well. And it also was much involved in community activities, some go so far as calling it welfare capitalism. I mean, GE in Pittsfield was the first place organizations like the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the anti-poverty agencies, who needed money for “good works,” they'd be the people you'd approach, because they'd be the ones who would be most likely to support you.”<sup>2</sup>

And as the factory grew and brought in more and more workers, new neighborhoods began to materialize. One of these became known as the Morningside area, and is one of our primary focuses in this report.

Unfortunately, it could not last forever, and Pittsfield met the same downfall as many other factory towns throughout the country. Factories moved around the world to cut costs, and local production plummeted. Then, in 1979, the federal government banned PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), which GE used to make its transformers, declaring them a probable human carcinogen. For Pittsfield, this was the beginning of the end of the GE era.

By the early 1980s, the plant employed only 7,000 workers, already a 5,000 job decrease from just 30 years before. And in 1987, the GE transformers division closed its doors forever, opting to move its corporate headquarters to Boston. Pittsfield was devastated, losing thousands of jobs, a significant chunk of its tax base, and its reputation as a hotspot for American innovation.

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<sup>2</sup> Meghna Chakrabarti and Jamie Bologna, “GE Left Behind A Complex Legacy in Pittsfield,” *Radio Boston*, WBUR, June 29, 2016, <https://www.wbur.org/radioboston/2016/06/29/ge-and-pittsfield>.  
<https://www.wbur.org/radioboston/2016/06/29/ge-and-pittsfield>

Since then, the city has also done everything it can to recover from the damage of GE chemicals. The EPA estimates that GE was responsible for between 100,000 and 600,000 pounds of PCBs dumped into the Housatonic River.<sup>3</sup> To recover, the state, GE, and the EPA came to an agreement in 1999; GE financed \$613 million, 13 year cleanup. This has been largely completed, with hundreds of thousands of cubic yards of contaminated soil having been dug up and removed since.<sup>4</sup> Currently, GE and communities south of Pittsfield are working to come to an agreement to clean up the PCB contamination downstream in the Housatonic River.

Searching for a new identity, Pittsfield has tried to move on from this age of single company reliance. Now, two companies lead employment numbers: Berkshire Medical Center and General Dynamics. Berkshire Medical Center employs about 3,500 employees, and General Dynamics, an aerospace and defense contractor, is home to almost 2,000 more.

Even more important to both identity and job availability, the City of Pittsfield has embraced a new “creative economy.” The city has worked with business partners, residents, community organizations, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to obtain grant funds and create and/or promote programs to revitalize Pittsfield as a whole. There is now a plethora of theatres, galleries, pop-up stores, coffee shops, and artist run projects. Existing institutions like the Berkshire Museum, Beacon Cinema, and Barrington Stage Company have been bolstered by things like the creation of the Tyler Street Business District, the reopening of the historic Colonial Theatre, the Berkshire Theatre Festival, and the Lichtenstein Center for the Arts.

So, despite a radical change in industry, Pittsfield has largely adjusted for the twenty-first century and been successful in attracting new families and new businesses into the community.

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<sup>3</sup> EPA, “GE/Housatonic River Site Update”. Boston, MA: EPA, 2011, <https://semspub.epa.gov/work/01/477424.pdf> (Accessed December 7, 2021)

<sup>4</sup> EPA, “Cleaning up the Housatonic”. 2021. <https://www.epa.gov/ge-housatonic/cleaning-housatonic#WhatProgress>



Some residents, however, particularly in the Morningside and Westside neighborhoods, are continuing to experience ongoing economic crises and poverty.

### *Site Description*

#### Morningside

The Morningside neighborhood is home to the Morningside Community School and former General Electric campus. Morningside's boundaries are Springside Avenue to the North, East Street to the South, Silver Lake/Fourth Street/Kellogg



*Pittsfield Common. Photo by Nate Orluk (2021)*

Street/Woodlawn/Benedict Street to the East, and North Street to the West. Morningside shares its eastern boundary with Silver Lake, which is approximately 26 acres large and drains into the Housatonic River. Morningside is also home to the Pittsfield Common on First Street. The Pittsfield Common features pavilions, basketball courts, a new play structure, and additional lighting posts. The Pittsfield Common was recently revitalized by the city in early 2010s to raise the grade to increase safety and visibility and replace playground equipment. The Pittsfield Common used to be home to the Pittsfield Skate Park, which now resides next to Pittsfield High School on East Street. Morningside is captured by the US Census tracts 9001 and 9002.



Map 1: Morningside neighborhood, showing boundaries

## Westside

The Westside neighborhood is home to the new Westside Riverway Park, a performing arts center with a boat launch from the Housatonic River on Dewey Avenue spearheaded by the City of Pittsfield and their community partners. It is also home to additional traditional parks with basketball courts and play structures. There are also



Westside Riverway Park. Photo by Nate Orluk (2021)

several community gardens. One is run by the Christian Center and another by the Westside Legends and their sister organization, Growing Legends, a community group focused on revitalizing the neighborhood through community events and advocating for community needs.

Westside boundaries are 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.

Westside is captured by the US Census tract 9006.



Map 2: Westside Neighborhood, showing the neighborhood's boundaries



Robbins Avenue Community Garden in the Westside Neighborhood. Photo by Nate Orluk (2021)

## Literature Review

### *Neighborhood Change Over Time*

The main indicators analyzed in this review were economic changes at the level of the U.S. Census tract over time. Such indicators are home ownership, household income, land use/zoning, and vacant lots. According to academic scholar Laura Smith from Macalester College, neighborhood change over time is best shown by changes in housing affordability, land use change, commercial character, socioeconomic status, and social character. To capture the first half of these themes, Smith argues for an analysis of market values per U.S. Census tract, rents costs, land use, and vacancy rates. To address the latter half, key data sources are median incomes by U.S. census, employment rate, and ESRI data (unique consumer-segments of US neighborhoods).

Academic scholar Karen Chapple adds to Smith's scholarship in her report, "Mapping Susceptibility (2009)," on the behalf of the Center for Community Innovation that examines the California Bay Area's neighborhood change in the 1990s. Like Smith's scholarship, the report stresses the importance of tracking housing variables as it relates to neighborhood change. Four housing indicators that indicate susceptibility are the number of multi-unit buildings (with three or more units), the number of renter-occupied housing, the number of public housing units, and the median gross rent. The first three indicators have a positive relationship to neighborhood change. The last indicator, median gross income, generally has a negative relationship to neighborhood change. The report also provides greater insight into understanding markers of displacement; to track the rate of displacement, individuals could analyze the incidence of pre-foreclosure notices and the share of neighborhood income that comes from newcomers to the area.

Throughout our initial review, there are few studies connecting the effects of neighborhood change with public health. There are mixed results depending on the direction of the relationship, but most studies agree that there is a relationship between the two. One study by Jana A. Hirsch and her fellow peers, Heidi E. Grunwald, Keisha L. Miles, and Yvonne L. Michael, “Development of an instrument to measure perceived gentrification for health research (2021),” attempts to measure and analyze the relationship between the perception of change and residents' health through the development of a survey. The study calls their survey “Perceptions About Change in Environment and Residents” (PACER) Survey and asks questions regarding affordability, amenities and business, the physical environment, and social/cultural dynamics. The survey opens by asking residents to think about changes in their neighborhood and answer the following questions based on the degree of change. In the original survey, there were 27 variables. Of those 27 variables, 20 were included in the final version of PACER. These variables related to new investment, housing construction, neighborhood dynamics, the degree of perceived change, and affordability. These variables were statistically coded and analyzed based on their means. As the study stresses, the wording of the survey as well as the temporal scale must be adjusted to match the local contexts of the area under study.

Another study released by the Institute of Medicine Committee (1997), “Measurement Tools for a Community Health Improvement Process,” highlights the significance of constructing a community health profile and the potential indicators to create such a profile. The development of a community health profile allows public officials to identify issues of the community related to specific health issues. The study divided possible indicators into six categories: sociodemographic characteristics, health status, health risk factors, health care resource consumption, functional status, and quality of life. In addition to this categorization, the study

provides a description of the type of information/question this indicator can be used to address as well as potential data sources. For example, the indicator of children in poverty falls under the sociodemographic category and can ask questions regarding prosperity, social environment, health, and function. Data for child poverty can be found within the Census. This study was extremely helpful in determining how to capture certain trends within the neighborhoods as indicator variables as well as locating their data sources.

From this literature review regarding neighborhood change, we were informed about the importance of certain economic and housing indicators such as median household income and percentage of homeowners to renters as well as the importance of tract level data for our study. Through our review of neighborhood health, we selected indicators from the construction of community health profiles such as unemployment rate and family poverty. Our literature review guided our final selection of indicators as we were reassured of the indicators' importance and ability to capture neighborhood capture.

### *Pittsfield Research*



*An abandoned home in Westside. Photo by Nate Orluk (2021)*

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), in collaboration with the City of Pittsfield, assessed the quality of buildings and major open spaces in Downtown Pittsfield in their 2005 *Slums and Blight Report*. The report defined their boundaries of inspection from the “West and East Housatonic Streets on the south to the Housatonic Railroad line traversing North Street on the north and

from Center Street on the west to Wendell Avenue and First Street on the east.”<sup>5</sup> About 30% of the buildings were commercial types and 45% were residential use.

Out of the 356 buildings surveyed, 63% were rated in either “poor” or “fair” condition. These findings exceed the standard 25% of fair to poor building conditions set by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development. In regard to our study, the report found that 84.3% of residential buildings surveyed were in either “fair” or “poor” condition. In conclusion, the report determined that the inspected area of Downtown Pittsfield is a blighted area as defined by Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 121, Sections A and B.

In 2006, the Morningside Initiative Steering Committee and the Pittsfield Department of Community Department created the “Morningside Neighborhood Action Plan” as a guide for the neighborhood with a 2017 update. Based on 2013 Census estimates, Morningside trails behind the rest of the City of Pittsfield in owner occupancy rates, household income, poverty rate, and median home value. In 2013, about 25% of Morningside residents lived below the poverty line compared to 10% average citywide. The plan outlines a range of small, medium, and large proposed projects. A few examples of the projects range from the small project of the establishment of an active crime watch to a medium project of the improvement of lighting near Morningside school to a big project of housing development. At time of writing, there has not been an additional update on the project or the progress of the few outlined projects.

In 2009, the City of Pittsfield and the Department of Community Development commissioned the “Housing Needs Analysis & Development Recommendations: Westside and Morningside Neighborhoods.” The report is an extensive review into the demographics of both neighborhoods in relation to the rest of Pittsfield, given their proximity to Downtown Pittsfield.

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<sup>5</sup> Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and the City of Pittsfield, *Pittsfield Slum and Blight Report*, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, 2005, n.p.

The main takeaway from the report is there is a large number of unoccupied and distressed housing units. The report recommends a few policy needs, physical housing needs, and focus areas for the city. The first policy need is the reduction of distressed residential units, defined as properties in foreclosure, abandoned, or vacant, by continued code enforcement, acquiring, and demolishing those units that do not approve, rehabilitating housing units that serve market needs, and encouraging development on vacant property. The physical housing needs are the rehabilitation/new construction of homes that appeal to younger residents, retirees, and empty nesters, larger code compliant bedroom rental units, and infrastructure improvements. The report identifies two focus areas. In the Westside, the report recommends focusing on the area encompassed by Linden Street to the north, Columbus to the south, Dewey on both sides to the east, and John Street to the west. In Morningside, the focus area is bordered by Orchard to the north, Railroad to the south, First Street to the east, and Second Street to the West.

In March 2015, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission released another report, “City of Pittsfield-West Side Neighborhood Land Use & Zoning Analysis,” regarding land use and zoning of the Westside neighborhood. The purpose of the report was to determine whether the existing zoning was compatible with the type of commercial uses appropriate for the neighborhood. The Westside neighborhood is divided into 180.4 acres of land. Out of those 180.4 acres of land, about 64% is residential use. Within residential use, 29% is high density residential and 35% is multi-family residential. There is about 10% of the acreage zoned for commercial use. In addition, there are about 50 vacant lots and vacant buildings in the designated area. A majority of these vacant lots and buildings were intended for residential use as opposed to commercial use. Given the majority of residential uses and zoning, the report concludes that this neighborhood does not host a vibrant mix of commercial and residential uses. The majority zone, High Density Multi-



family Residential (R-M) District, only allows for residential uses with limited commercial uses. General Business (B-G) District holds potential for the development of neighborhood appropriate commercial, but its existing area is too small to create the vibrant neighborhood the Commission seeks. The report concludes with three recommendations: 1) amend the R-M district to allow neighborhood appropriate uses such as eating establishments and retail sales and services, 2) expand the General Business (B-G) district in the study area, and 3) re-zone portions of the study areas as Neighborhood Business (B-N).

There are a few reports regarding a neighborhood plan for Westside as well as community input, conducted by various nonprofit organizations in partnership with Pittsfield. In 2015, the West Side Neighborhood Initiative Steering Committee released a draft of the Westside Action Plan, located on the City of Pittsfield's website. The guiding vision of the neighborhood is "Enriching the West Side: Safe, Clean, Healthy and Strong: It takes all of us!" The top three areas of focus were a cleaner and safer West Side, parks and recreation, and youth engagement. A cleaner and safer West Side included tasks like identifying vacant lots/buildings, neighborhood clean-up, neighborhood watch, and better street lighting. A few tasks for parks and recreation were the clear communication of the Riverway Park, the development of a nature trail, and maintaining playgrounds/parks. For youth engagement, a committee working session in January 2015 advocated for the exploration of a sports league, literacy program, gardening, or STEM program.

The Neighborhood Revitalization Team at Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity conducted a community survey in Westside in 2016. This survey, also known as the Westside Neighborhood Success Measures Database System Survey, found that overall, residents were satisfied with living in Westside and 65% would continue to remain in the neighborhood. The top three things residents liked best of the neighborhood were the housing, neighbors, and access to

amenities, yet they still longed for additional business such as ice cream shops, markets, and activities for the youth. The top three things residents liked least about the neighborhood were safety, activities/recreation, and neighbors. Based on these results, additional research must be conducted to understand and disentangle the survey finding that neighbors are listed in the most liked and least liked categories. Residents stated their top perceived issues were drug activity, poorly maintained streets and sidewalks, traffic, trash/litter, abandoned homes, and poorly maintained public spaces. The survey concludes with priority recommendations for drug activity, physical infrastructure, and increased programming for the youth and families.

Berkshire Habitat for Humanity conducted an additional survey, Westside Neighborhood Survey in 2019. The survey found that residents felt either somewhat or not at all that their opinions mattered to other residents and organizations in the neighborhood. About 48% of residents stated that the neighborhood's impact on their emotional and physical health was either very positive or somewhat positive, and 71% of residents also stated that they felt a sense of community. Trash and litter were noticeable findings within the survey with 37% of residents having trash on their property and 42% of the block face having a lot of litter.

Former Williams College students, in collaboration with the City of Pittsfield, completed a 2016 report, "Pittsfield TDI Data Collection and Analysis,"<sup>6</sup> regarding the conditions of land parcels in the Tyler Street Transformative Development Initiative. The students assessed land parcels based on the Community Development Block Grant' category ratings. The report found that out of the 417 buildings, 70.7% were rated as "good" in condition with only 1.2% rated as "poor" in condition. In regard to land use, 354 of out 454 land parcels were designated as

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<sup>6</sup> Refer to this source for statistics in this paragraph: Silje Christoffersen, Gemma Holt, Ross Hoffman, and Angel Ortiz. *Pittsfield TDI Data Collection and Analysis*. Williams College. 2016. <https://ces.williams.edu/files/2014/08/Pittsfield-final.docx>

residential use. Out of the remaining 100 parcels, 37 were vacant land. Only about 34 or 7.5% of total land parcels were designated for commercial use. The report concludes that since only 13.2% of the buildings surveyed were rated as either “fair” or “poor,” the Tyler Street District is not blighted and serves as a fruitful location for redevelopment.

In 2017, MassDevelopment, in coalition with private organizations, collaborated and released the “The Tyler Street Transformative Development Initiative.” The Tyler Street District encompasses Tyler Street between Woodlawn Avenue to the east, First Street to the west, and roughly 0.25 miles to the North and the South of Tyler Street. The main purpose of the report was to direct the City’s approach to “improve the quality of life for residents; expand the local economy and attract new investments to the neighborhood.”<sup>7</sup> The land use of Tyler Street District reflects some of the industrial legacy of General Electric campus, as there is high pedestrian connectivity and majority residential land use (65%) within the district. The report highlights that there is about 26.5% of “General Business” zoning within the Tyler District, but the current “General Business” zoning promotes suburban strip development rather than pedestrian oriented development. The report also held a series of focus groups, community input meetings, and interviews. The most common challenges of these investigations were the perception of the neighborhood (as it relates to crime), land-lord accountability, job opportunities, and lack of a community center. Several residents expressed the desire for art-focused development, community center, youth engagement, and streetscape improvements. In its conclusion, the report lists a few recommendations moving forward: develop commercial and mixed use design policies specific to Tyler District, encourage

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<sup>7</sup> MassDevelopment, *The Tyler Street Transformation Development Initiative*, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, 2017. [https://www.massdevelopment.com/assets/what-we-offer/TDI/TDI\\_Districts/Pittsfield/Tyler\\_Street\\_TDI\\_Planning\\_Study.pdf](https://www.massdevelopment.com/assets/what-we-offer/TDI/TDI_Districts/Pittsfield/Tyler_Street_TDI_Planning_Study.pdf), 5.

investment, create an inventory of vacant and blighted properties, increase homeownership, and explore a rental stabilization program.

From our literature review of Pittsfield related reports, we familiarized ourselves with the past and current discourses regarding the Morningside and Westside neighborhoods. From the prevalence of reports focused on the Tyler Street District, we knew this district would have some influence in our findings regarding the future trajectory of Morningside. From the reports focused on Westside, we understood Westside as a mostly residential neighborhood with its main areas of concerns being youth engagement and an absence of commercial character. This literature review informed our indicator selection process and data collection as it provided unique insights into these Pittsfield's neighborhoods.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this report is to capture neighborhood change over approximately a three-decade period. Seeing as we are not native to Pittsfield and are in fact almost total newcomers to the city, we first made it our priority to acquaint ourselves with the city and its history. We did this by beginning to familiarize ourselves with current and relevant Pittsfield-specific news — such as the *Berkshire Eagle* and *iBerkshires* — as well as reading through historical accounts of the city. We then conducted an extensive literature review, as seen in the *Literature Review* section of this report, including both large-scale neighborhood change work as well as a plethora of pre-existing Pittsfield-specific studies. These ranged from how to measure neighborhood change to the specific zoning of the Westside neighborhood and its effects on business. To supplement our secondary research, we also spoke to representatives from both neighborhoods, the City, and a non-profit working in Pittsfield. Those insights are in the *Interviews* section of this report.

From this primary and secondary research, we focused the scope of the report on four central themes. These four themes were: 1) business flight/food insecurity 2) demographics and housing 3) public investment and 3) crime/drug use. Our initial speculation for indicators included police crime statistics, hospitalizations, self-reported health surveys, land use/zoning, homeownership rates, and market value per tract before we conducted a robust data exploration and extraction process.

At this stage of the project, we examined possible data sources, including the U.S. Census, the American Community Survey, Berkshire Benchmarks, CityStat (through the Pittsfield Police Department), and the Department of Mental Health Services. We also speculated on the possibility of the distribution of a survey to collect residents' perceptions of neighborhood change and the current defining characteristics of the neighborhood.

After exploring these data, it became apparent that effective data collection would be difficult, particularly in the realms of some of the themes we wanted to explore. Given the report's focus on the Morningside and the Westside neighborhoods, data availability at the appropriate [neighborhood] scale was difficult to locate. Hence, throughout the latter half of the project, the themes explored were refined to correspond with the availability of data. The refined themes became socioeconomics, demographics of residents, housing (value, conditions, and type of occupants), and present neighborhood issues.

Data collected from the US Census and the American Community Survey captures the first two themes, presenting a historical perspective of neighborhood change at the U.S. Census tract level. These indicators are the following: Percentage of Vacant Housing Units, Rental Vacancy Rates, Percentage of Owner Occupied Units, Percentage of Renter Occupied, Median Household Income, Percentage of High School Graduates, Year Structure Built, Length Homeowner Has

Lived in this House, Median Age, Median House Value, Unemployment Rate, and Percentage of Families Below Poverty Line.

The last theme, current neighborhood issues, was captured through an observational approach, gathering together the insights of the interviews we had conducted, as well as our exploration of current events in the area. We were forced to eliminate the possibility of a survey as an instrument of measurement as a function of time constraints, worries about non-representational online response rates, and the Covid-19 safety concerns involved with a paper survey campaign.

We began extracting data from the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey, using both the current U.S. Census Bureau website and the National Historical Geographic Information System (NHGIS) website. Datasets from 2000 to 2019 were extracted from the current U.S. Census Bureau website. Datasets prior to 2000 were extracted from the NHGIS website. Using the current U.S. Census Bureau website, we were able to extract data for our chosen indicators at the tract level for the entire city of Pittsfield, as well as pull data pertaining to the entire surrounding area of Berkshire County for comparison. Data extraction from the NHGIS website at the tract level produces data points for all US Census tracts. Therefore, we filtered the data by county and removed all entries that were unrelated to Berkshire County.

Once all of the data for our indicators was extracted, we proceeded to select and reorganize all data pertinent to this project, creating a database from which we could begin to draw conclusions. The process of creating this database was generally unchanging, and consisted of extracting the relevant data from the Census and ACS reports and orienting it in the proper sections of our created database. There were, however, a few exceptions to this methodology, which we detail below.

**Rest of Pittsfield Averages:** For each neighborhood (tract) specific dataset that we collected, we included a “rest of Pittsfield” average for the purpose of comparison. These averages were created through finding a mean of all non-Morningside and non-Westside census tracts. This means that these numbers are not entirely proportional, as they do not reflect the populations of each of these tracts but instead give each individual tract equal influence on the value of the average. They still, however, provide functional, useful insight into the general values found in the rest of the area.

**Inflation Adjusted Household Income:** The Census is immensely useful for acquiring household incomes, but it does not adjust for inflation. Thus, this had to be done manually. This was done through the use of CPI (Consumer Price Index) values acquired from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>8</sup> Seeing as we are looking at Berkshire County, CPI values for New England were employed. Upon the gathering of the necessary CPI data, we used the standard formula for calculating inflation adjusted value:  $CPI_{Current} / CPI_{Past} * Value_{Past}$ . Seeing as our most recent data is from 2019, this is the year income was adjusted to, rather than adjusting all of our data to the current year, 2021.

**Median Age:** For the years 2000, 2010, and 2019, the U.S. Census (or in the case of 2019 the ACS), provided median age. However, for the year 1990, the data provided only a series of age values (e.g., 1-2 years old), along with the number of occurrences of this value. So, median age had to be calculated manually by calculating the sum of all occurrences, locating the midpoint, and then seeing where in the list of occurrences this midpoint fell. This does not influence the integrity of these values, and they remain at least as accurate as the median ages provided automatically for the other three years.

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<sup>8</sup> “Bureau of Labor Statistics.” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Accessed November 29, 2021. <https://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet>

**Racial Composition:** The race numbers provided in this report are all accurate, but you will notice that the 1990 numbers lack some of the categories provided in the next three checkpoints. Specifically, these are 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.

## Findings

### *Interviews*

#### Morningside: Long-Term Resident



*A now abandoned bakery & deli in Morningside. Photo by Nate Orluk (2021)*

On October 21, 2021, we conducted a walk and talk tour of the Morningside neighborhood with a long term resident (name withheld). The resident expressed great concern about food insecurity within the neighborhood. During a mass business exodus between 1980s-1990s, several local grocery stores and fresh meat markets left the neighborhood.

This left Morningside residents with few to no food source options within walking distance. The resident stated the need for food security, which is magnified by the activity of food pantries operated by the local churches. Almost all the churches in the area operate food pantries and witness high participation from the neighborhood residents. One of the few options is the newly constructed Cumberland Farms in the area for their access to food. The resident stated that children



were lacking nutritious food, as pizza, hot dogs, and typical convenience snacks were far cheaper than a pack of crackers and tuna at Cumberland.

The Cumberland Farms was noted as a site of active drug use and sex work. The resident said that in her thirty year residence, the older population left the neighborhood, either selling their homes or renting their property at low rates as a younger, more diverse population moved in. She said that as this new population moved into the neighborhood, crime and drug use became commonplace. This normalization of crime has physically and mentally affected the resident. She



*Cumberland Farms on 1st St. Photo by Nate Orluk (2021)*

said that she was unaware of the constant stress she was under until she left the neighborhood. She said that it felt like she could finally relax again. Through the nature of resident's occupation, she also expressed concerns about youth engagement. As an individual who works

with at-risk youth, predominantly in Morningside and Westside, there also seemed to be very few accessible options for these youth. Within close proximity to Morningside, the resident highlighted the Boys and Girls Club and YMCA but discussed the inaccessible nature of those spaces for the children in the neighborhood. In order to access the programs provided by the Boys and Girls Club, there is a \$20 membership fee. Then, to register for a sport such as swim or basketball, there is an additional registration fee of \$50. While the organization offers economic assistance for qualifying families, this is another step likely to keep many children away from this community. As such, the resident praised the work and programs offered by these private institutions but argued that the institutions and the City must be aware of such inaccessibility. For these private institutions, the

City must think about whether Morningside residents can afford these services and if they have a means of transportation when it is required.

The resident echoed a desire of community and connectivity within a neighborhood that seems in transition. With the influx of new renters and older residents having left, the neighborhood feels like it has a finite time stamp for residents' stays. The resident advocated for increased job opportunities and investment into physical infrastructure. They talked about the importance of bringing employment, which would allow residents work towards a manageable career with benefits. Most of the housing stock was visibly older and in need of repair, and sidewalks were broken or uneven, hindering the connectivity and walkability of Morningside.

#### Westside: Westside Legends

On October 29, 2021, we conducted a walk and talk tour of the Westside neighborhood with Westside Legends representatives Tony Jackson and Marvin Purry. The Westside Legends is a community-focused group that aims to rebuild and reconnect community life in the Westside neighborhood. Both Tony and Marvin stated that Westside Legends began as a Facebook group page where they began building community by centering around their childhood heroes, the athletes that emerged from the neighborhood. The Westside Legends soon transformed their scope into an all-encompassing campaign to raise neighborhood pride and love for all community members by uplifting their voices and advocating for solutions towards the neighborhood's most pressing problems.

Two of the most central issues raised by the Westside Legends were the lack of business and youth engagement within the neighborhood. Throughout the walk, the Westside Legends pointed out the lack of variety or convenience stores. They recalled when they were kids, there were about two to three variety stores that sold anything from candy to lunch meat to beer within

walking distance. Now, the neighborhood lacks these small businesses, or any other commerce related to food. Acknowledging that there were a few restaurants on the periphery or just outside the neighborhood that have recently opened, the Westside Legends still echo the demands for a more vibrant mixed use community.

The Westside Legends talked in greater depth about the need for more youth engagement.



*Christian Center. Photo by Nate Orluk (2021)*

While acknowledging services available in downtown Pittsfield such as the Boys and Girls Club and YMCA, the Westside Legends advocate for the desire to create a community center in the neighborhood for kids and all residents. When the Legends

were kids, the Christian Center on Robbins Ave served as the hub for community engagement and opportunity between the early 1970s to mid-1980s. Run by Tony's dad, the Christian Center provided food, clothes, jobs, and entertainment to young kids. In the basement of the Center, there were ping pong tables, a pool table, and a pinball machine. The Center would take vans of kids to Boston or New York City. Whenever residents needed help or a favor like cutting their grass, the kids would be sent as a way to engage with their neighbors and provide them with an opportunity to make a bit of money. The Westside Legends miss this sense of community. They highlight the prevalence of parks and green space within the neighborhood but echo the sentiment of a desire for something different. A park is a great location to foster community, but the Westside Legends

seek a community center like the Christian Center: a location with robust programming and intentional engagement.

In one of our last stops in the tour, we viewed the Westside Legends' most recent community demonstration garden. This garden is still in progress as the Westside Legends, with



*Westside Legends' nascent community garden. Photo by Nate Orluk (2021)*

support from the Habitat for Humanity and Gray to Green, attempt to locate funding to follow through on the intended uses for the garden. They shared a powerful story about the creation and vision for the garden. The land the garden

rests on used to be a vacant lot.

Tony's mother began maintaining the vacant lot as it was near their old family home. After maintaining the lot for a while, Tony's mother asked the City of Pittsfield if they had an intention or interest in the lot, as she was interested in acquiring it. The City decided to sell her the vacant lot for \$1, under the sole condition that she maintained it for one year (at an additional charge of \$1). After one year and maintenance, Tony's mother received the lot for a total cost of \$2. The Westside Legends' vision for the garden is to serve as a locus for community engagement instead of individually working the garden and taking the produce; the Legends envision opportunities for educational programming and events within the space. These programs and events will remain tentative until funding is secured.

Dubois Thomas (Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity Representative)

On November 4, 2021, we spoke with Dubois Thomas, a representative from Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity. He advocated for a focus on sustainable development and felt that while the concerns expressed by Morningside and Westside residents are reasonable and understandable, the narrative of General Electric's departure from Pittsfield is an incorrect framing of the issue. While General Electric's departure could have induced business flight, the representative identified the issue in a more general view: that the City of Pittsfield's decision decades ago to root their economic and community development onto a fleeting industry giant was the core issue. But the City is not unique in this decision — this was a story of several mill town's historical development and trajectory. Moving forward, the City of Pittsfield must develop and incentivize economic and community development with its longevity in mind as well as the diversity of development to avoid dependence on a single industry.

CJ Hoss (City Planner) & Jim McGrath (Director of Parks & Recreation)

On November 18, 2021, we conducted an interview with the City of Pittsfield Planner CJ Hoss and the Director of Parks and Recreation Jim McGrath. Throughout the interview, Hoss and McGrath expressed the City's willingness to continue investing within the Morningside and Westside neighborhoods. They brought up previously expressed concerns from some community members about the possibility of gentrification. McGrath and Hoss reaffirmed that all city projects and investments were planned and intended for the benefit of all residents. City officials were interested in demonstrating as well as accentuating the beauties and benefits in living in Pittsfield and emphasized that increases to home values in development areas, increases of businesses participating in Pittsfield's economy, were mutually beneficial to all residents.

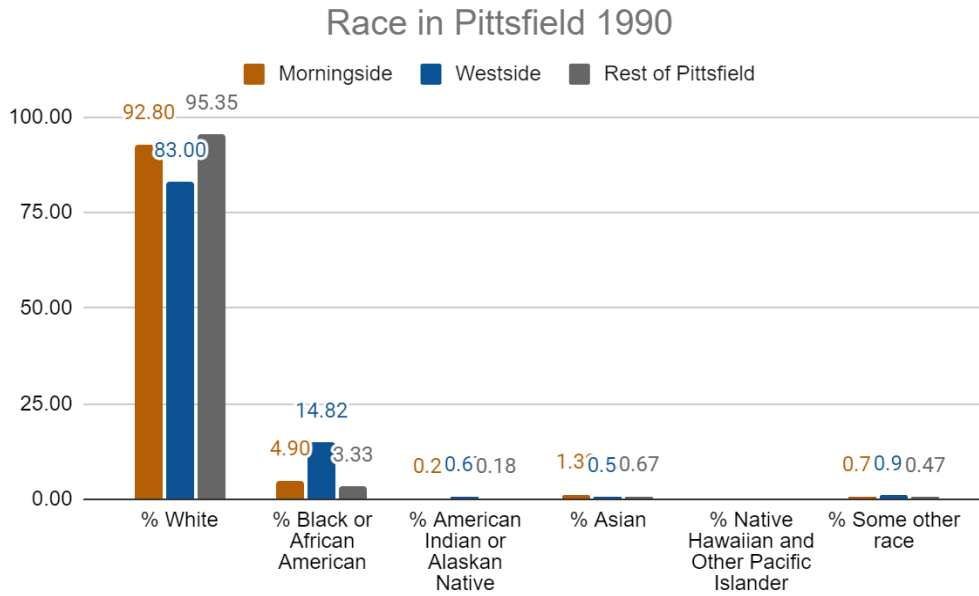
Both Hoss and McGrath discussed the extremely different landscapes and histories of the two neighborhoods, Morningside and Westside, and how this knowledge of their difference must inform their approach moving forward. This is discussed further in our *Conclusions*.

While thinking about these neighborhoods in separate spheres, Hoss and McGrath highlighted their older housing stock. There were discussions of affordable housing and determining the definition of affordable. According to city officials, Morningside and Westside hold Pittsfield's share for relatively inexpensive housing in terms of rent, but these housing units are also significantly dated. There are very few affordable housing units in these neighborhoods that have been proscribed in their deeds or laws regarding rent control in units. Moving forward, city officials will prioritize the development of safe and affordable housing throughout Pittsfield.

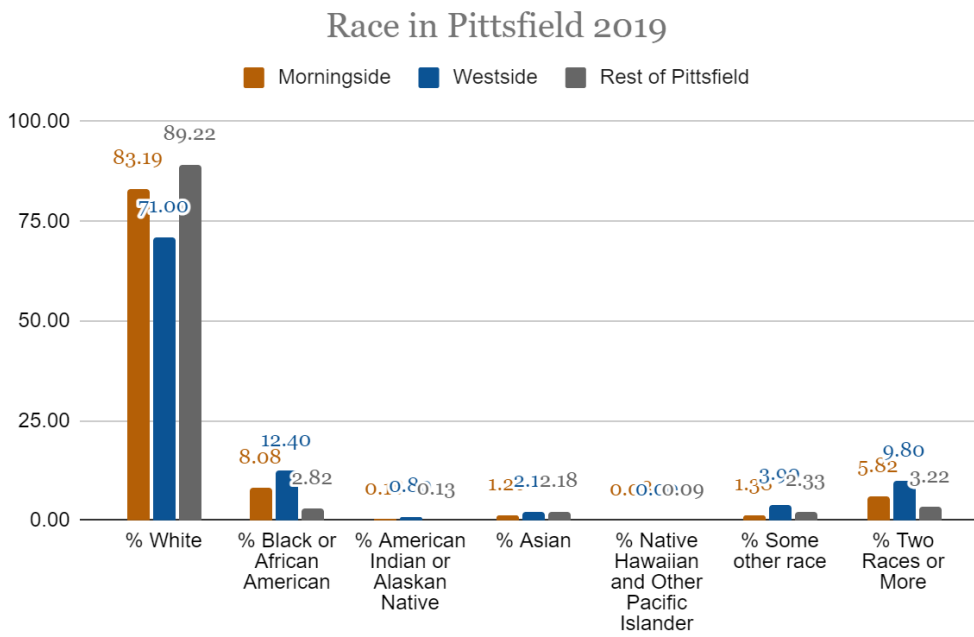
With regard to youth engagement within the two neighborhoods, McGrath discussed the programming oriented toward the youth in Pittsfield. He highlighted the Boys and Girls Club, Girls Inc, and the YMCA and the crucial role these organizations played in engaging with students after school. He shared the story of his own son attending the programs of the Boys and Girls Club and how not only had this organization provided sports for the neighborhood residents, but also provided dinner. In addition, he highlighted the robust after-school programming conducted by the local schools in the area. McGrath stated that with all these programs, the parks within the city try not to duplicate the programs but create programs that supplement the already existing opportunities for kids. Despite these opportunities, McGrath and Hoss also recognize an issue of awareness and family obligations that might prevent kids from accessing these spaces. While the City has conducted several awareness campaigns via flyers about these programs, Hoss and McGrath state that there sometimes seems to be a communication gap between neighborhood residents and city officials. They also recognized that some of the children had prior family

obligations such as watching their younger siblings that prevent them from attending these after school programs. Thinking about ways to engage these youth and continue to make those spaces accessible will remain a priority for the City of Pittsfield as well.

### Data Results

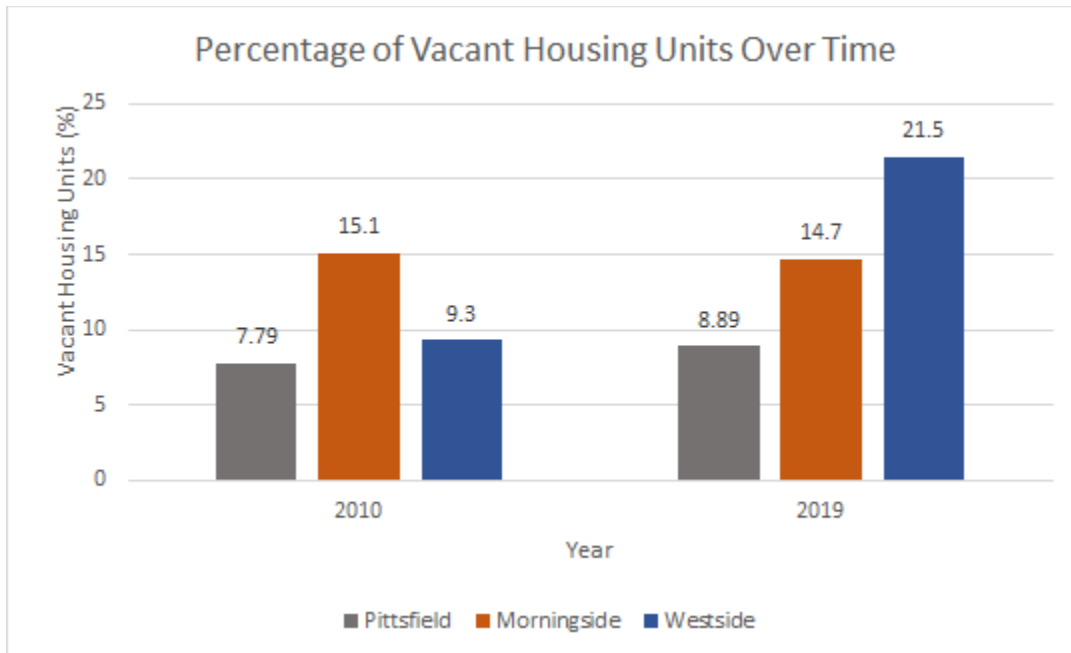


Source: 1990 U.S. Census Bureau



Source: 2019 American Community Survey

To help provide a better understanding of these neighborhoods, we begin with some basic demographics. Here, we can see the racial makeup of the rest of Pittsfield in comparison to the Morningside and Westside neighborhoods. As you can see, the rest of Pittsfield is significantly whiter than these neighborhoods and has seen a smaller decrease (~6%) in the white population than Morningside (~10%) and Westside (~12%) since 1990. Westside is the most diverse neighborhood, with the highest percentage of Black or African American citizens, as well as almost every other minority category. In 2019, the only exception was the percentage of Asian people, which is marginally higher (.06%) in the rest of Pittsfield. But essentially, while they are both still predominantly white, these two neighborhoods have significantly higher diversity than other neighborhoods in the area.

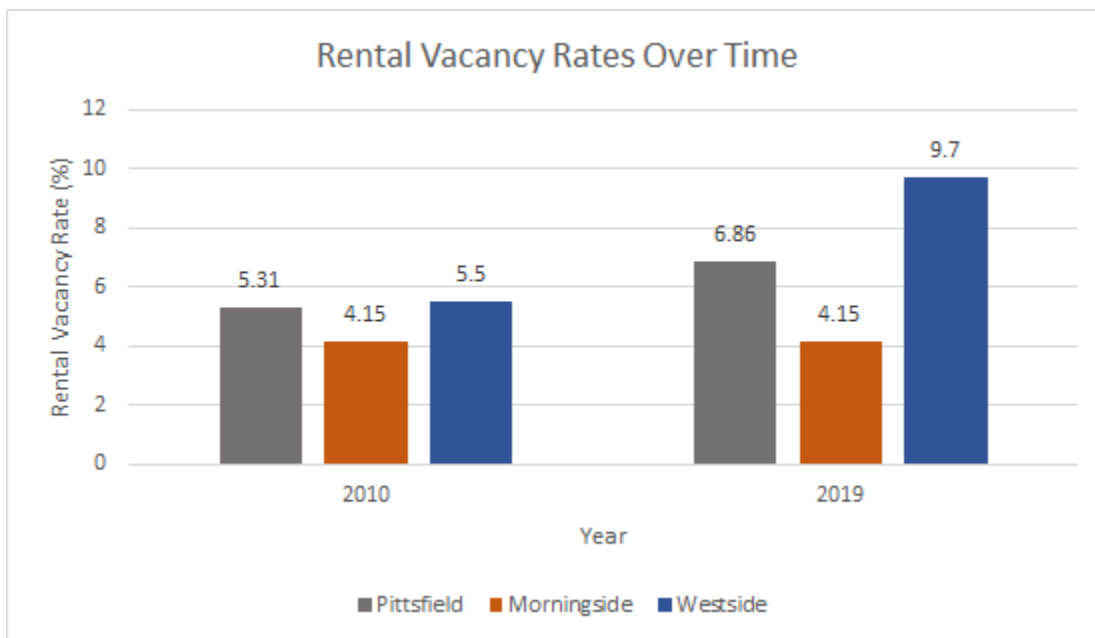


Source: 2010-2019 American Community Survey

The “Percentage of Vacant Housing Units Over Time” presents a representation of vacant housing units in the Pittsfield locale. This is one indicator of both demand for housing as well as desirability of existing housing; higher demand means less vacancies, with the exception that low desirability can cause a potential homeowner to look elsewhere even if demand is high or it means



increasing budget. When put in context, these numbers present a serious vacancy issue in the Westside neighborhood. A healthy vacancy rate is something in the 7-8% range, while anything above 12% is considered high, and once the 20% threshold is reached, it is considered hyper-vacancy.<sup>9</sup> By these standards, we can see that the rest of Pittsfield is within a healthy range, and while it has increased incrementally, this can be written off as minor fluctuation. The Morningside neighborhood has higher than ideal vacancy rates, but 15% does not present an enormous issue. Westside, however, is where this number is most telling. The vacancy rate has skyrocketed from a relatively healthy 9.3% in 2010 to a rate of 21.5% in 2019, pushing it all the way into the category of hyper-vacancy. This can have serious implications for the neighborhood, as it reduces home values and provides a home for crime. As a 1993 study tells us, blocks with vacant properties are twice as likely to experience crime as those without.<sup>10</sup>

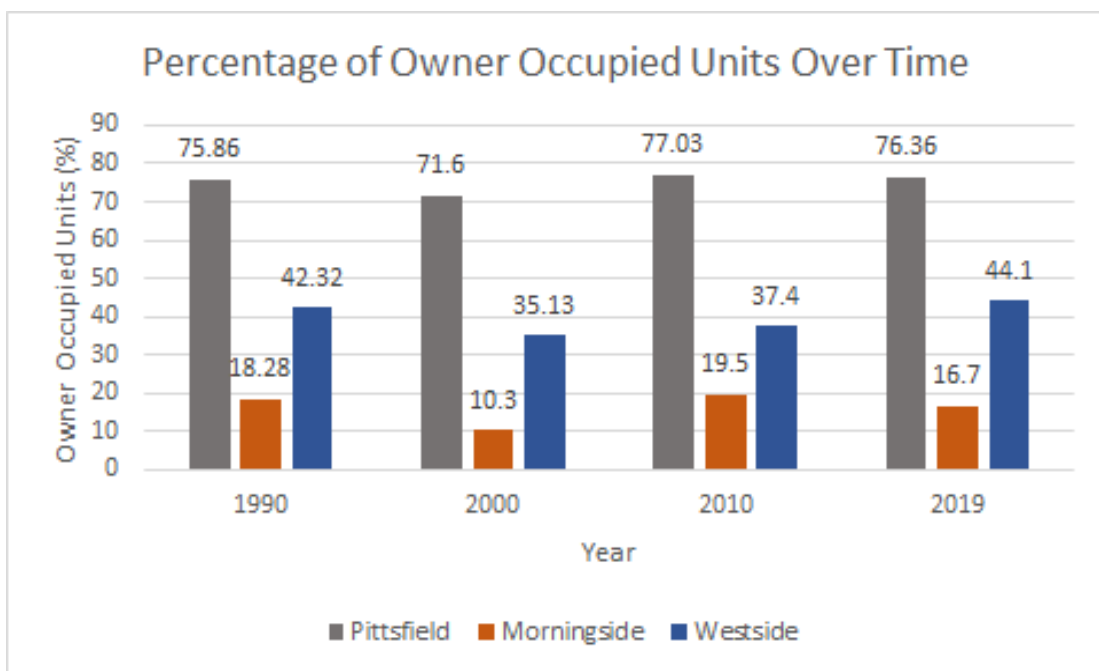


Source: 2010-2019 American Community Survey

<sup>9</sup> Richard Florida, "The Disturbing Rise of Housing Vacancy in US Cities," Bloomberg CityLab, Bloomberg, July 27, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-07-27/the-disturbing-rise-of-housing-vacancy-in-u-s-cities>.

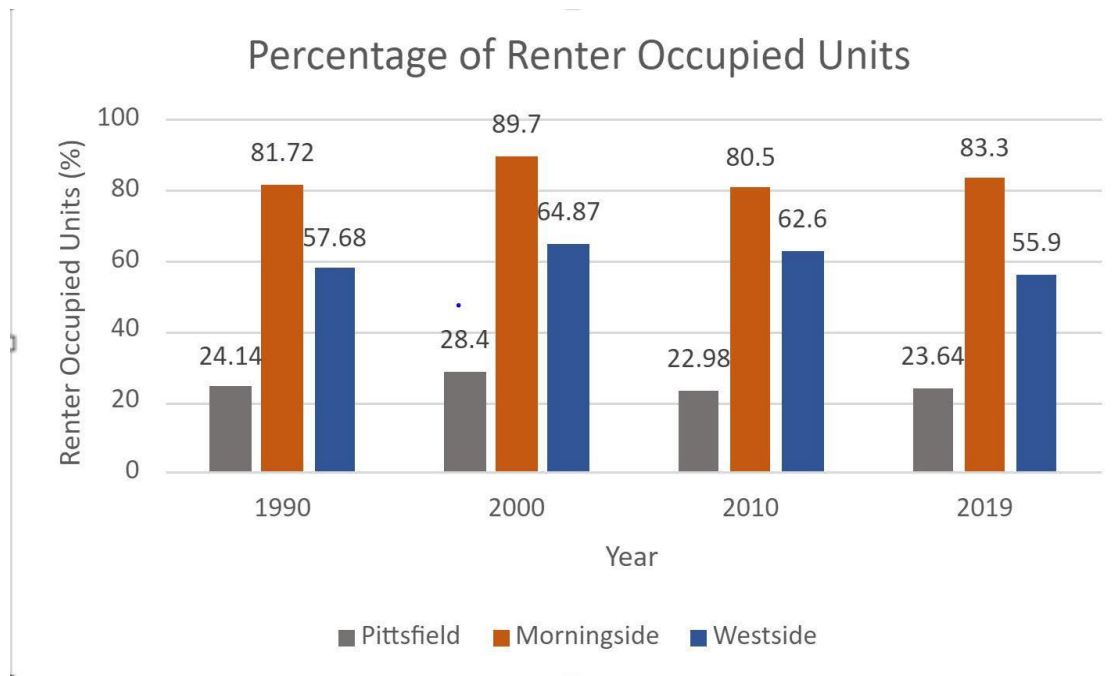
<sup>10</sup> William Spelman, "Abandoned Buildings: Magnets for Crime?" *Journal of Criminal Justice* 21, no. 5 (1993): 481-95. [http://www.antonioacasella.eu/nume/Spelman\\_1993.pdf](http://www.antonioacasella.eu/nume/Spelman_1993.pdf)

“Rental Vacancy Rates Over Time” is an illustration of rental vacancy rates over time in the two neighborhoods as well as the rest of Pittsfield. The national rental vacancy rate typically resides in the 5-8% range, but Pittsfield spent much of its time in the 2000s between 9% and 11%.<sup>11</sup> A rate lower than this would indicate a housing shortage, as there would be too much demand for the housing supply. A rate higher indicates a lack of demand for housing, and therefore more vacant rentals. In this graph, we see a slight increase of 1.55% in the rest of Pittsfield, but it remains in a healthy range. Morningside remains rather low, indicating a plentitude of rental demand in the area. Westside is again where we see an issue, as it goes from a healthy vacancy rate in 2010 to one of concern in 2019, when the value almost doubles. This shows that demand for housing in the Westside neighborhood is decreasing, another troubling sign.



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

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Rental Vacancy Rate in the United States [RRVRUSQ156N], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/RRVRUSQ156N>, December 8, 2021.



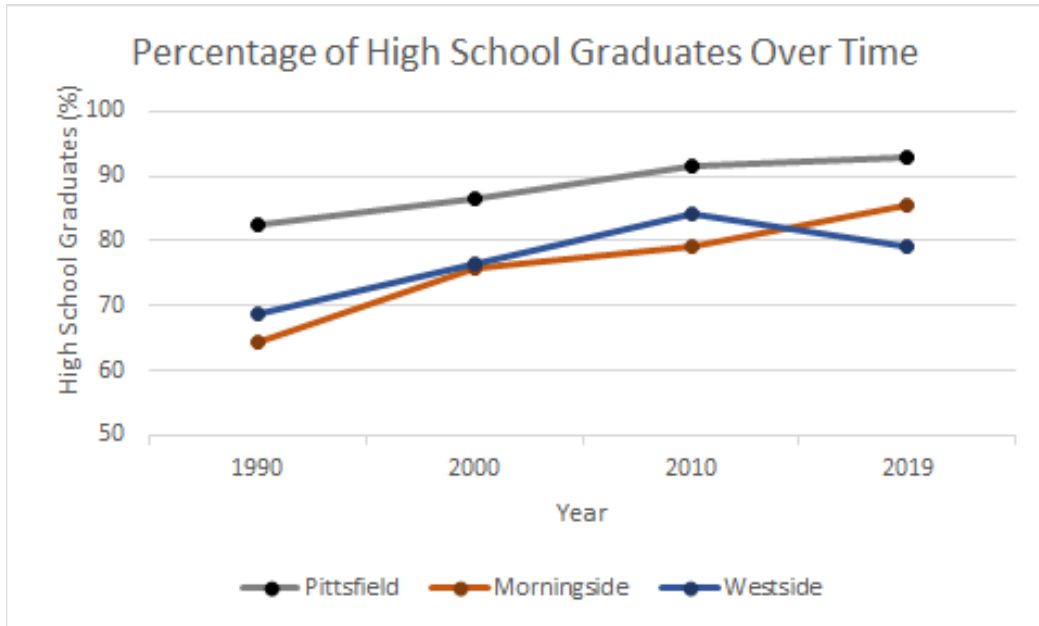
Source: 1990-2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

Here we see the percentage of renter occupied units in conversation with the percentage of owner occupied units — its inverse. This number takes only occupied units into account, not those that are vacant. Nationally, 65% of occupied housing units are owner-occupied, with the remaining 35% occupied by renters.<sup>12</sup> Homes occupied by owners are typically in better condition, and therefore fewer less health hazards.<sup>13</sup> Unsurprisingly, rates of ownership are significantly higher in the rest of Pittsfield compared to the two focus neighborhoods, likely as a function of higher income. While there have been consistent fluctuations, none of the three categories have seen a consistent trend, and there has been very little overall change in the last three decades. Morningside has consistently had the highest percentage of renter occupied units, potentially indicating lower incomes but also showing a possible transitional neighborhood, as people would rather rent than make a long-term purchase. Based on available data, we cannot draw concrete conclusions from

<sup>12</sup> “Quarterly Residential Vacancies and Homeownership,” United States Census Bureau, US Department of Commerce, November 2, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/files/currenthvspress.pdf>.

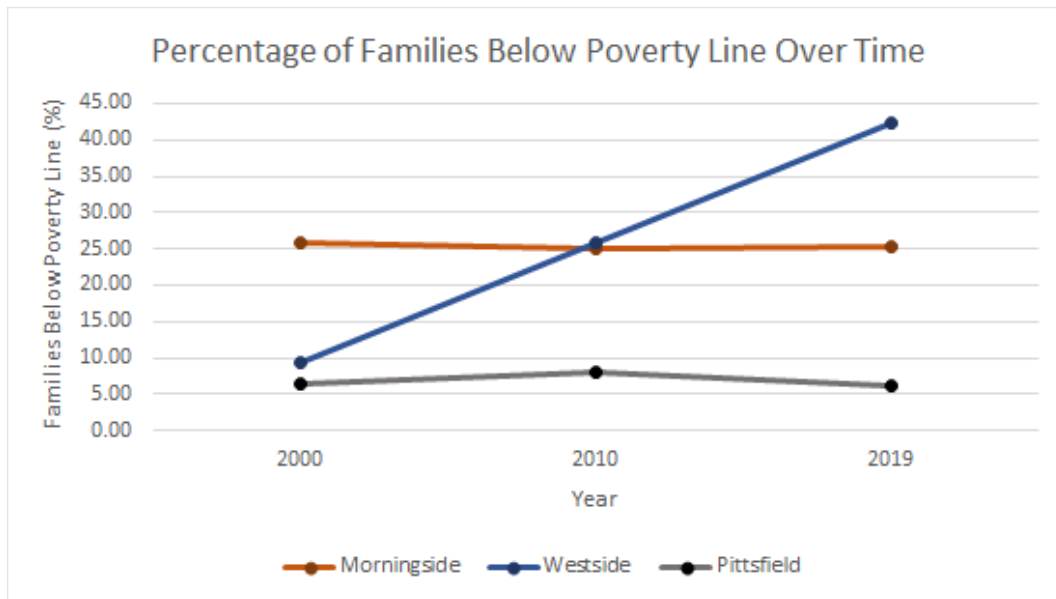
<sup>13</sup> Habitat for Humanity. “The Health Benefits of Homeownership.” Habitat for Humanity. Accessed November 29, 2021. <http://www.rchfh.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Healthy-Homes.pdf>.

this dataset. However, based on anecdotal evidence and other trends in the neighborhoods, we consider lower incomes to be a primary factor for these findings.



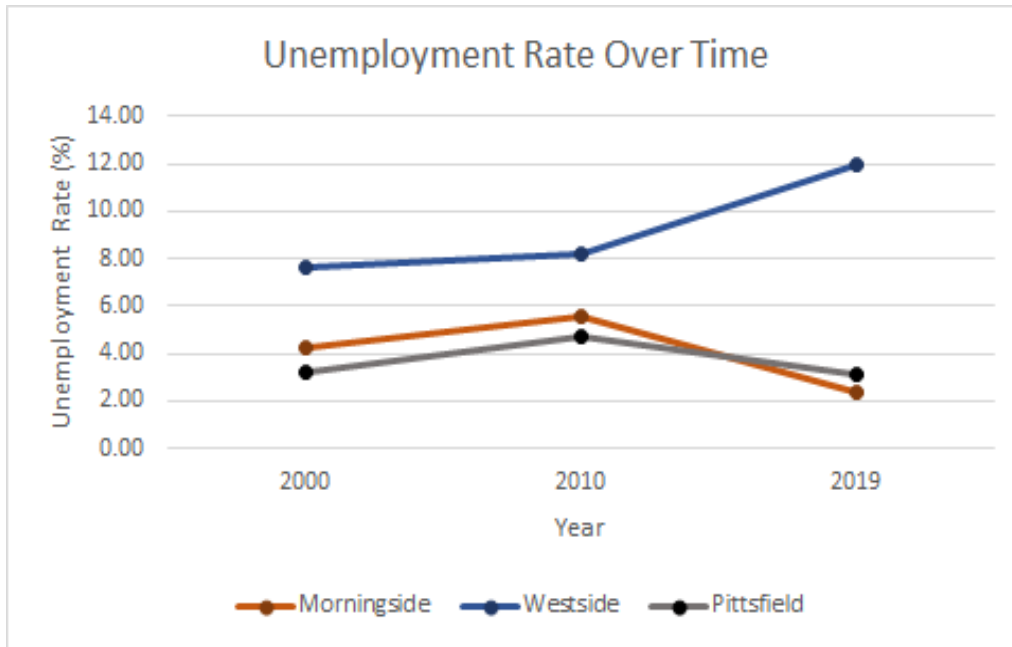
Source: 1990-2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

The “Percentage of High School Graduates Over Time” graph shows the percentage of high school graduates from 1990 to 2019 in Morningside, Westside, and the rest of Pittsfield. Overall, the rest of Pittsfield consistently has a higher percentage of high school graduates than Morningside and Westside with an upward trajectory. In 1990, Morningside had a slightly lower percentage of high school graduates, 64.48%, than Westside. In 1990, 68.68% of Westside’s population were high school graduates. In 2000, both Morningside and Westside had similar percentages, a difference of 0.65%. In 2010, Westside experienced a relatively significant increase in high school graduates while Morningside remained within the 70% range. Between 2010 and 2019, Westside experienced a decline in the percentage of high school graduates while Morningside experienced an increase, surpassing Westside. Looking ahead, Westside shows a declining trajectory regarding the percentage of high school graduates, while Morningside has an upwards trend and is actually closing the gap between itself and the rest of Pittsfield.



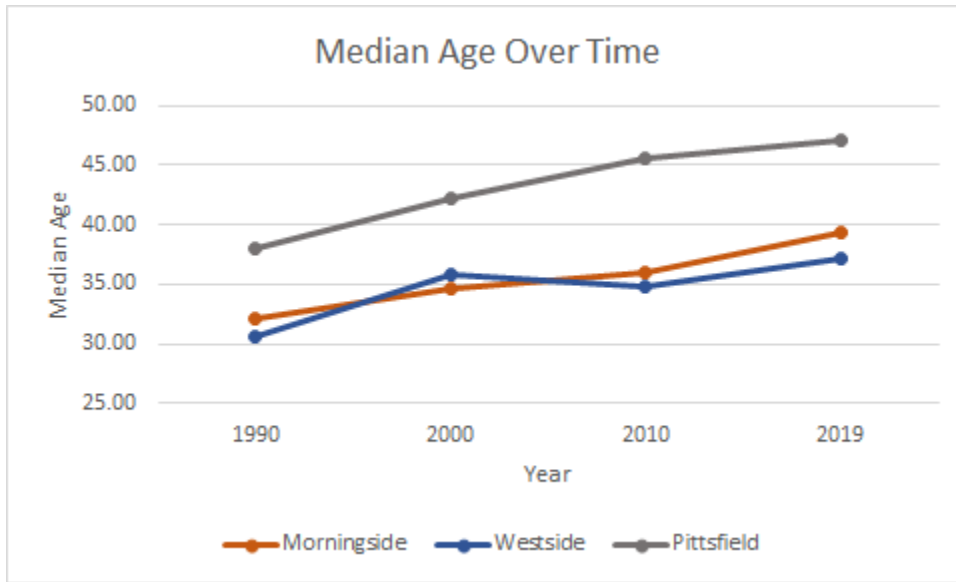
Source: 2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

The “Percentage of Families Below Poverty Line Over Time” graph above shows the percentage of families below the poverty line from 2000 to 2019 in Morningside, Westside, and the rest of Pittsfield. The percentage of families below the poverty line, along with unemployment rate, highlight the socioeconomic status of these three locations over time. The rest of Pittsfield has stayed fairly consistent throughout the years, with the percentage of families below poverty line between 5% to 10%. Morningside has also remained consistent throughout 2000 to 2019, remaining slightly below and slightly above 25%. The most striking observation is the extreme upwards trend in the Westside neighborhood. In 2000, Westside’s percentage of families below the poverty line was fairly close to the rest of Pittsfield, a difference of 3%. But after 2000, the percentage of families below the poverty line sharply increased the years afterwards in Westside. In 2019, about 42.2% of families were below the poverty line in Westside. This is a difference of approximately 17% compared to Morningside and approximately 36% compared to the rest of Pittsfield.



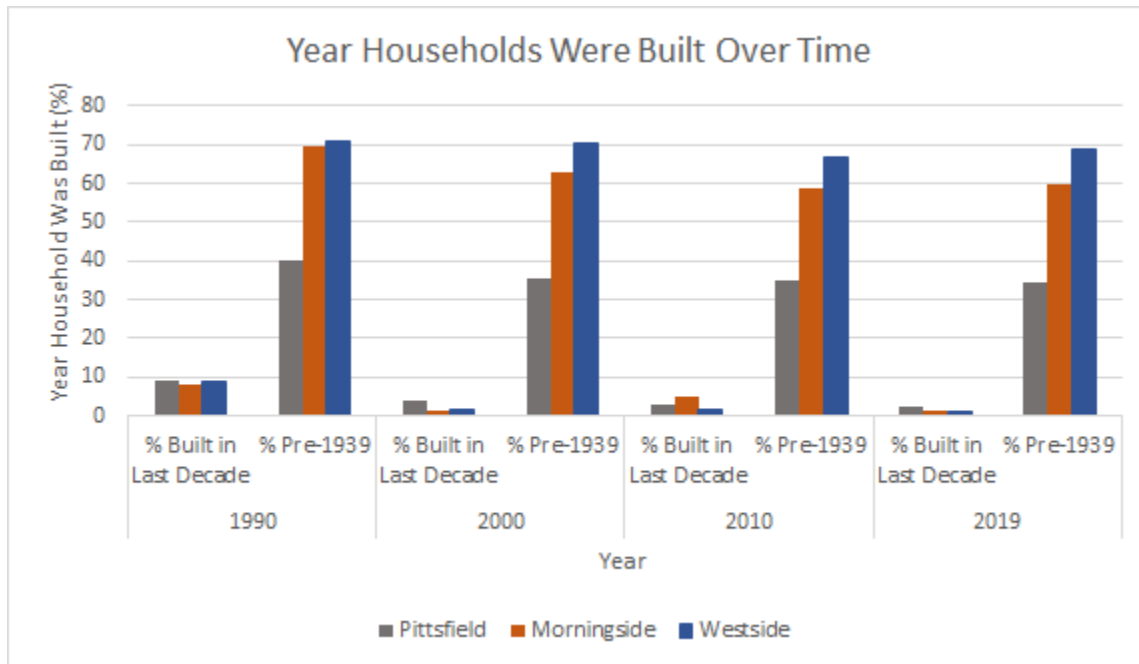
Source: 2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

The “Unemployment Rate Over Time” graph shows the unemployment rate from 2000 to 2019 in Morningside, Westside, and the rest of Pittsfield. Unemployment rate provides insight into job availability and a picture of the workforce in these three locations. The rest of Pittsfield has maintained a fairly low unemployment rate throughout the years with a minor increase in 2010. For the rest of Pittsfield, the unemployment rate has remained between 3% to 4%. Morningside has remained fairly close behind, mimicking the unemployment rate trend seen for the rest of Pittsfield. In 2000, the unemployment rate for Morningside was 4.25%, a difference of approximately 1% compared to the rest of Pittsfield in 2000. Morningside also experienced a slight increase in unemployment in 2010 like the rest of Pittsfield, but between 2010 to 2019, the unemployment rate dropped about 3%, ranking lower than the unemployment rate for the rest of Pittsfield in 2019. Westside has consistently demonstrated a higher unemployment rate than Morningside and the rest of Pittsfield. In 2019, the unemployment rate for Westside was 12%, a difference of approximately 10% compared to Morningside and approximately 9% compared to the rest of Pittsfield.



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

The “Median Age Over Time” graph above shows the median age from 1990 to 2019 in Morningside, Westside, and the rest of Pittsfield. This indicator provides a robust understanding of the age of these three locations as well as their current trajectories. The median age for the rest of Pittsfield is older than the median age for both Morningside and Westside throughout the years. From 1990 to 2019, the rest of Pittsfield displayed an aging population, with the median age going from approximately 38 in 1990 to approximately 47 in 2019. Morningside and Westside are fairly similar, with Westside being slightly younger in 2019. In 1990, the median age for Morningside was approximately 32, a slight difference of about 1.51% compared to Westside, whose median age in 1990 was approximately 31. In 2019, the median age for Westside was approximately 37 while in Morningside, it was about 39. Overall, both Morningside and Westside combined have experienced an average difference of approximately 8 years from 1990 to 2019 when compared to the rest of Pittsfield in median age.



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

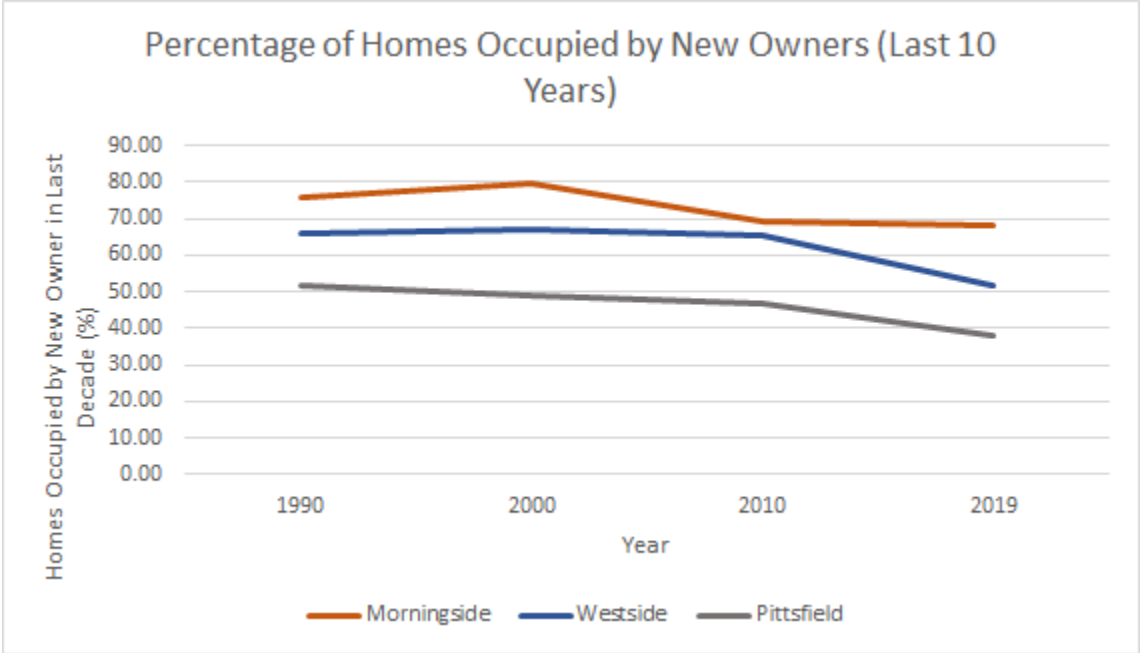
“Year Households Were Built Over Time” shows the percentage of years households were built from 1990 to 2019 in Morningside, Westside, and the rest of Pittsfield. For each year, there are two categories – the percentage of households built in the last decade and the percentage of households built pre-1939. Overall, Pittsfield’s housing stock, including Morningside and Westside, is old, but Morningside and Westside have a higher share of the older housing stock than the rest of Pittsfield. About 69% of households in Morningside were built pre-1939 in 1990, and this number stays fairly constant throughout the years. About 70% of the households in Westside were built pre-1939. Compared to the rest of Pittsfield, both Morningside and Westside contain between 30% to 36% more of the older housing stock in Pittsfield. For the rest of Pittsfield, the percentage of households built pre-1939 remain between 34% and 40% throughout the years. The decrease in older housing stock in more recent years can possibly be attributed to its demolition or current vacancy.



In 1990, there seemed to be a few housing developments in the last decade, but overall, the entire city of Pittsfield has not seen a significant amount of new housing developments in quite a



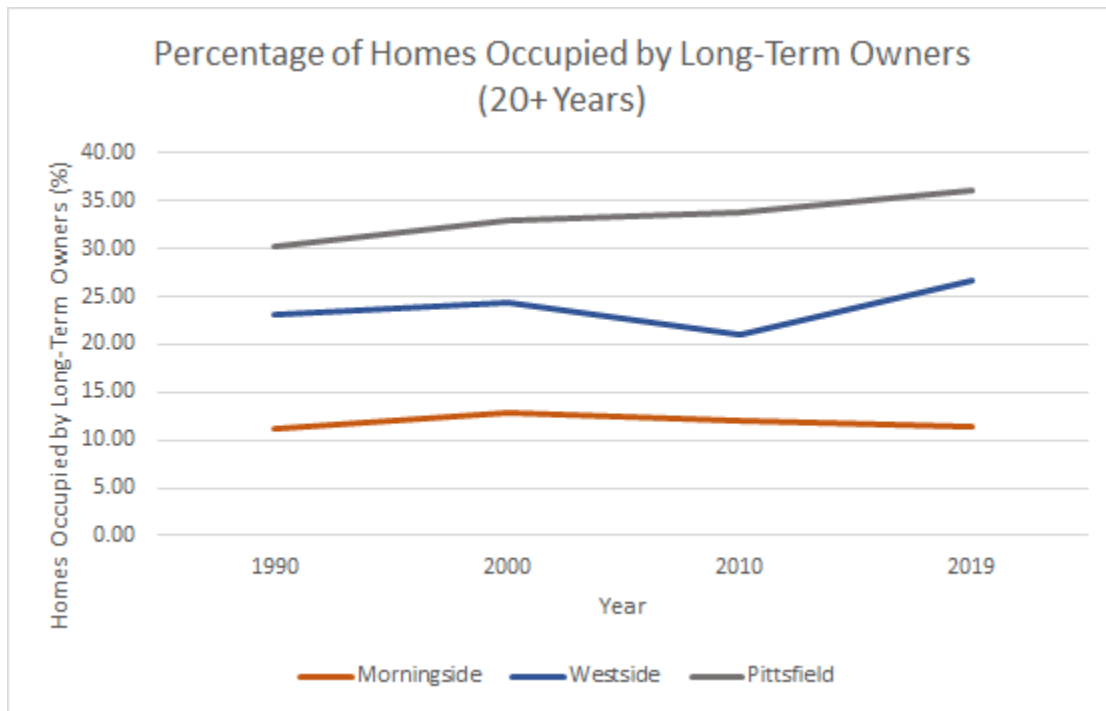
few years. In 1990, the percentage of households built in the last decade in Morningside and Westside were approximately 8%, compared to the 9% for the rest of Pittsfield. In 2000, the percentage of households built in the last decade was approximately 4% compared to both Morningside’s and Westside’s 1.5% for the same category. In 2010, Morningside had a slightly greater increase in the percentage of households built in the last decade compared to Westside and the rest of Pittsfield; the percentage for Morningside was approximately 5% compared to Westside’s roughly 2% and the rest of Pittsfield’s roughly 3% in the same category.



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

“Percentage of Homes Occupied by New Owners (Last 10 Years)” allows us to see what percentage of homeowners are new to the neighborhood. This gives us some insight as to how desirable a neighborhood it is to move into, but is also muddled with factors such as availability of housing, affordability, and so on. This explains why the rest of Pittsfield numbers are lower than those of the two neighborhoods that are undoubtedly less desirable in their current states. Thus, the changes are a more valuable number than the overall percentage. Using this metric, we

can see Westside and the rest of Pittsfield dropping from 2010 to 2019, with Westside’s dropping by a full 13.8% compared to Pittsfield’s 8.7%. Morningside, on the other hand, sees a dip from 2000 to 2010 but has leveled out since then. So, Westside is seeing the largest decrease in desirability, at least according to this one metric.

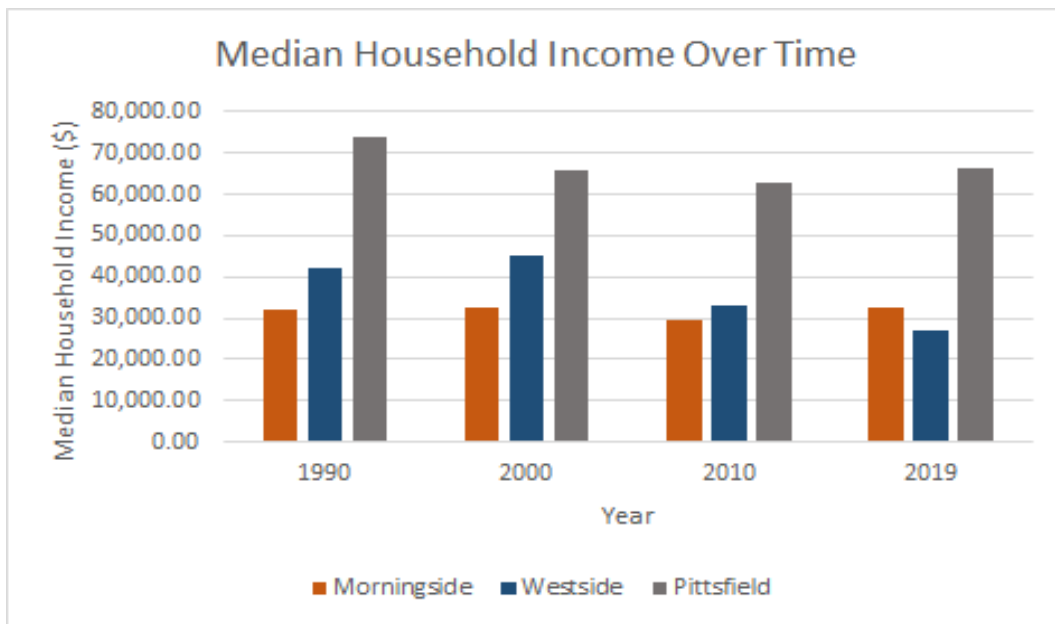


Source: 1990-2000 US Census Bureau & 2010-2019 American Community Survey

The “Percentage of Homes Occupied by Long-Term Owners (20+ Years)” gives us the ability to look at long-term house owners in Pittsfield. This gives us some idea of how desirable a neighborhood is and the sense of community in that neighborhood. It also, however, indicates the difficulty of scaling the socioeconomic ladder and moving into a more desirable house at some point in time. In fact, lower-earning and less educated owners are more likely to remain in their homes longer.<sup>14</sup> Finally, it is a measure of how transitional a neighborhood is, or if it is more of a

<sup>14</sup> “Average Length of Homeownership,” iPropertyManagement, iPropertyManagement.com, November 12, 2021, <https://ipropertymanagement.com/research/average-length-of-homeownership>.

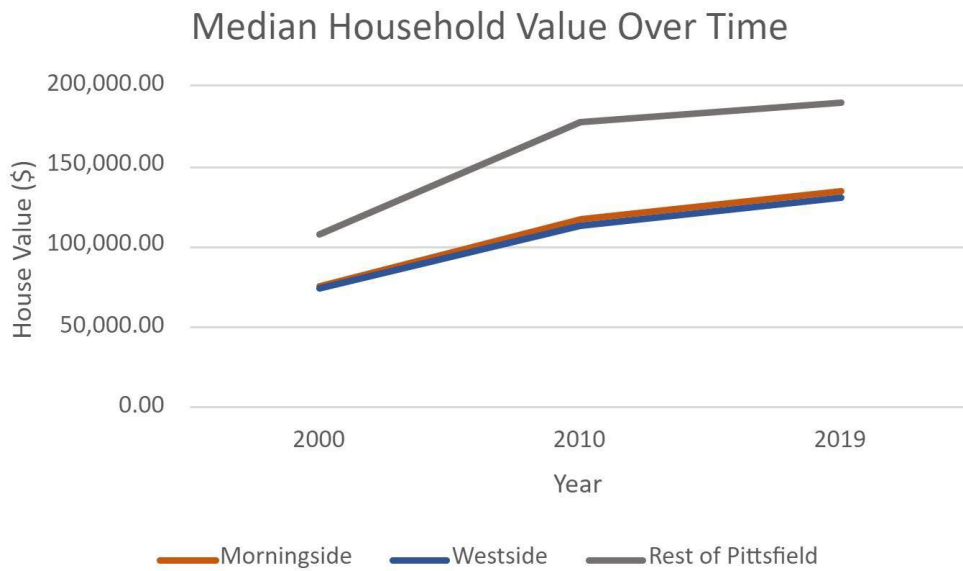
permanent home. Morningside has a low rate of long-term ownership, possibly indicating both that it is a neighborhood people do not desire to remain in but also showing that the neighborhood has enough economic mobility for people to move elsewhere if desired. For the overall Pittsfield number, its higher rate can be explained through the existence of historic, highly desirable neighborhoods where those amongst the higher classes in Pittsfield have no reason to leave. In the Westside neighborhood, we see numbers in the middle relative to the other two. This is likely explained by the existence of an older generation with fond memories of Westside and a strong desire to return it to the neighborhood they remember — such as our interviewees Tony and Marvin (who have moved out of the neighborhood but know many residents like them still there).



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

The “Median Household Income Over Time” above shows the median household income, adjusted for inflation, from 1990 to 2019 in Morningside, Westside, and the rest of Pittsfield. Overall, the rest of Pittsfield has consistently held a higher median household income than Morningside and Westside throughout the years. The Morningside and Westside neighborhoods represent approximately 40%-50% of the rest of Pittsfield’s median household

income from 1990 to 2019. From 1990 to 2010, Westside had a higher median household income than Morningside. In 2019, Morningside surpassed Westside in median household income by about \$5,484. From 1990 to 2000, median household income for both Morningside and Westside were on the rise, but from 2000 to 2010, there was an overall decrease in median household income for both neighborhoods as well as the rest of Pittsfield.



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

Here, the “Median Household Value Over Time” shows the median household value over the course of the last two decades. This number is not adjusted for inflation, so it should not be taken as a comparable representation of home values, but the change in reference to one another can still be used to draw conclusions. As shown, the Morningside neighborhood has seen marginally greater increases in housing value. This is especially pronounced in Census tract 9002 — the area immediately surrounding the Tyler Street Development area — where average household value was \$146,100 in 2019. Another promising sign comes in reference to the rest of Pittsfield numbers. While value increase in the rest of Pittsfield greatly outpaced these two neighborhoods from 2000 to 2010, Morningside and Westside have seen slightly faster increases

than everywhere else in the decade since then. While this is not pronounced enough to be a major consideration, it is nonetheless promising.

From our data results, the key takeaways are that Morningside and Westside trail behind the rest of Pittsfield in most major economic metrics, but Morningside seems to have an upwards trajectory, while this is not evident for Westside. For vacant housing units, Westside jumped from 9.3% to 21.5% from 2010 to 2019, far surpassing the healthy vacancy rate of 7-8%. The Westside neighborhood has seen increasing trends in their unemployment rates and percentage of families below the poverty line over the last 20 years. Morningside surpassed Westside in median household income from 2010 to 2019 and is projected to significantly minimize the gap of high school graduates between Morningside and the rest of Pittsfield. Nevertheless, both Morningside and Westside trail in median household income and older housing stock than the rest of Pittsfield.

## **Conclusions**

In this section, we present some general assertions as to the current state of the Morningside and Westside neighborhoods. These are supported by both the observational and statistical research presented throughout this report and accompanied by recommendations for future studies. An additional aim of this concluding section is to provide a reflection on this report's limitations to provide a robust understanding of the depth, strength, and limits of these findings.

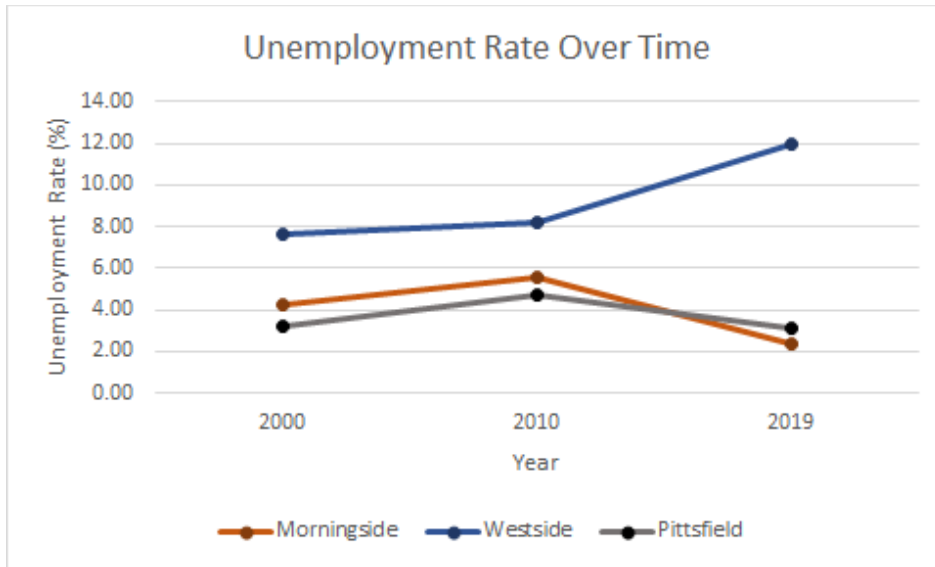
One of the most significant concepts that this report elucidates is the varying differences between the Morningside and Westside neighborhoods. The two are typically considered together as though part of the same area, but the differences are real and quantifiable. As such, despite the similar socioeconomic profiles of these neighborhoods, city officials should consider decoupling the neighborhoods in their discussions of community revitalization approaches.

Morningside was home to the General Electric campus and now offers promising hope for revitalization with the investment and redevelopment of the Tyler District. This is explained by both recent city investments and a longer existing trend within our statistical data. Specifically, the existence of major commercial parcels in Morningside as well as the city's recent investments in the Tyler Business District have facilitated additional opportunities within the Morningside neighborhood.

Westside has predominantly been a residential neighborhood without zoning for significant business or large industry. Its proximity to downtown Pittsfield could provide a new approach to its revitalization by thinking on a larger scale than a neighborhood level. But as of now, Westside's primarily residential zoning lacks this commercial appeal. In the following pages, we lay out some of the primary reasons why recommendations, priorities, and focus areas in these neighborhoods should be treated differently.

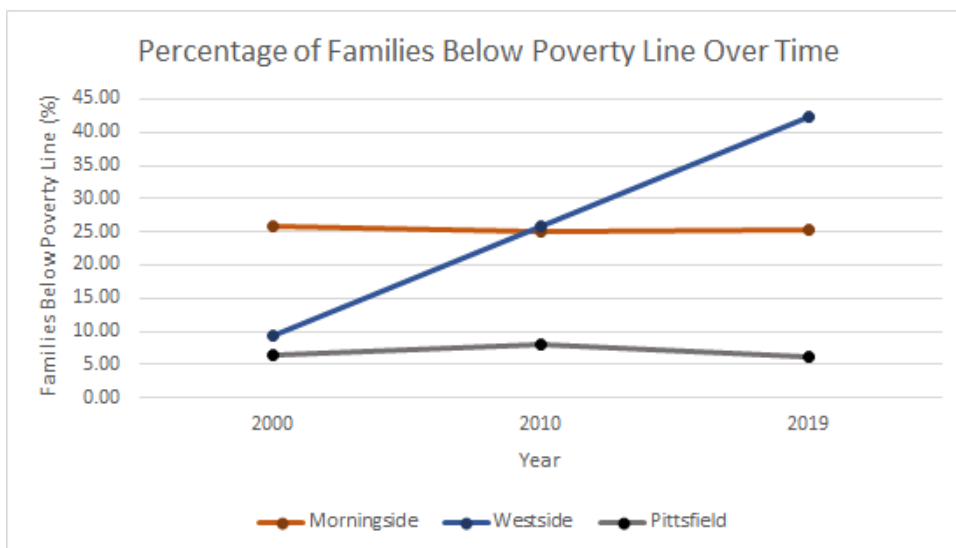
Most importantly, the neighborhoods seem to be in extremely different stages at this point. We see this throughout the statistical data (dating to 2019). As inflation-adjusted income has remained generally constant in the Morningside neighborhood, Westside has seen major decline. Immediately, it seems like the situation in Westside is worsening, and there is more evidence to this effect.

Unemployment rates in Morningside track with those of Pittsfield in the last decade, seeing a major decline. In fact, the unemployment rate in the Morningside neighborhood was lower in 2019 than that of the rest of Pittsfield. In Westside, however, that number has jumped more than 4% over the course of the same period.



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

This has led to increased poverty, as we can see that while Morningside has marginally decreased its rates of poverty, Westside’s doubled from 2000-2010, and then again from 2010-2019. While the economic trajectory of Morningside is stabilizing, Westside is deteriorating at a rapid pace.



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

The final most telling number about the situation in Westside is the prevalence of vacancies, both in homes and rentals. As discussed in the *Findings* section, the last decade has pushed the neighborhood into a state of hyper-vacancy. This has a destructive impact on local housing value and indicates a lack of housing assistance and desirability. If there is one housing number in this report that should jump off the page, it is this one.

This does not mean Westside is without its strengths. As illustrated in our *Findings*, fewer people are moving into Westside and the number of people remaining in the same house for decades remains almost the same. This is all statistical evidence for the possibility of greater neighborhood cohesion — at least compared to Morningside. This is in line with our learnings from our interview process. We found that the Westside neighborhood seems to be more generational, and therefore fosters a greater sense of community, than the more transitional Morningside neighborhood. This is apparent by the long standing existence of community groups like the Westside Legends and the West Side Neighborhood Initiative. Such groups and the City of Pittsfield are interested in tapping into this community strength by bolstering its youth engagement programming and community events to highlight the benefits of living in Westside.

But despite this strong and growing sense of community, the Westside neighborhood does need economic assistance. Unlike Morningside, Westside is not home to any significant commercial zone to promote commerce within the neighborhood. The Westside neighborhood and the City of Pittsfield must develop a new action plan to revitalize the neighborhood, drawing on its low-priced housing and strong community.

While Morningside displays an upward trajectory, it also has its own host of struggles. Relative to the rest of Pittsfield, Morningside also trails behind in most major metrics. However, as shown, it should not have the same focal point as Westside, as it faces a unique array of issues.



One crucial area of focus for Morningside should be the lack of neighborhood cohesion. Unlike the Westside neighborhood, Morningside is not home to any long standing community groups. This is likely a function of the lack of community gathering spots or awareness of pre-existing ones within the



*Pittsfield Common. Photo by Nate Orluk (2021)*

neighborhood. In Westside, block parties are common and serve as a way for the community to become better united with one another. It seems like Morningside would benefit from similar social gatherings. Moving forward, the City may want to conduct more intentional outreach advertising the community events that exist in the Commons and Springside Park to Morningside residents.

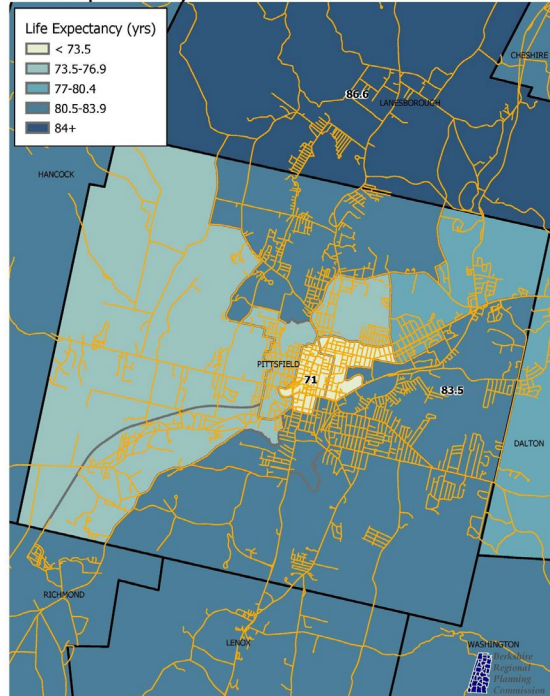
While one of the biggest aims of this report is to highlight the differences between these two neighborhoods, there are a variety of issues that both neighborhoods currently face. One such issue is public health. The life expectancy in the Morningside neighborhood (72.05) is almost 11.5 years less than that of residents in the Southeast neighborhoods (which go as high as 83.5). For Westside, that number is just 2 years less, at 9.5 years less than the Southeast.<sup>15</sup>

While this was not the primary focus of our report, we have still gleaned some knowledge as to possible roots of this unnerving discrepancy. To some extent, this phenomenon is explained by the correlation between lower income and life expectancy, as the nationwide mean for life expectancy difference between those in the top income quartile and those in the bottom income

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<sup>15</sup> “Life Expectancy at Birth for U.S. States and Census Tracts, 2010-2015 (Interactive Map).” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 9, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data-visualization/life-expectancy/index.html>.

## Life Expectancy



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

quartile is 7 years.<sup>16</sup> This is clearly an issue in and of itself, but the Morningside and Westside neighborhoods face significantly worse projections than others in their income bracket.

One possible factor could be that both these areas, as well as the rest of Pittsfield, is considered a food desert. Residents from these two neighborhoods as well as the rest of Pittsfield recognize this issue, as residents ranked it as their highest priority resident assistance project for

Pittsfield's given ARPA (American Rescue Plan

Act) funding. 49% ranked it as their top or second

choice, 39% as their third to fifth, and just 11% placed it lower.<sup>17</sup> But for wealthier neighborhoods, especially in Southeast Pittsfield, people can afford and have the means to travel to higher quality markets and stores for their groceries. This is not the reality for many Morningside and Westside residents — making this concern so urgent. Food sources are scarce in both neighborhoods and much scarcer than they were just a few decades ago. Morningside is beginning to address this to some extent, thanks to actions such as the Tyler District Initiative project, but grocery store

<sup>16</sup> Raj Chetty, et al., "The Association Between Income and Life Expectancy in the United States, 2001-2014," *JAMA* vol. 315,16 (2016): 1750-66. doi:10.1001/jama.2016.4226

<sup>17</sup> Meg Britton-Mehlisch, "Pittsfield Residents Got to Chime in on a Survey on Spending Coronavirus Relief Money. Here Are the Highlights.," *The Berkshire Eagle*. New England Newspapers, Inc, September 27, 2021, [https://www.berkshireeagle.com/news/central\\_berkshires/arpa-survey-results-breakdown/article\\_537b1496-1664-11ec-b18f-f792668cf58a.html](https://www.berkshireeagle.com/news/central_berkshires/arpa-survey-results-breakdown/article_537b1496-1664-11ec-b18f-f792668cf58a.html).

inaccessibility remains an issue. Without access to affordable, healthy food, residents turn to cheap, unhealthy food sources like Cumberland Farms. This was discussed at length in an interview (detailed in the *Interviews* section) with a long term resident. While subpar access to healthy food options is found in lower income neighborhoods around the country and the world, it is nonetheless extremely prominent in both of these neighborhoods.<sup>18</sup>



*Outside Cumberland Farms. Photo by Nate Orluk (2021)*

There are also persistent drug problems, as there are across the rest of Berkshire County. The opioid epidemic hit Pittsfield hard as anywhere. Opioid use is more prevalent in lower income neighborhoods across the country, so while we do not have tract level drug statistics, we would anticipate rates of opioid use are high in these two neighborhoods.<sup>19</sup> We would recommend a further investigation of how to decrease drug use and increase overall quality of life in these neighborhoods.

Finally, PCB contamination could be having an impact in the health composition of the two neighborhoods. This is especially supported by the fact that life expectancy in the Morningside neighborhood — the immediate locale of the G.E. plant — is lower than that in Westside, despite Morningside’s apparent better conditions. While our investigation was limited in scope and time, a further investigation into ongoing PCBs related health concerns and action plans to address health disparities is warranted for future studies.

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<sup>18</sup> Angela Hilmers et al. “Neighborhood disparities in access to healthy foods and their effects on environmental justice,” *American Journal of Public Health* vol. 102,9 (2012): 1644-54. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2012.300865

<sup>19</sup> “Today’s Heroin Epidemic Infographics,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July 7, 2015, <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/heroin/infographic.html>.

Throughout this section, we have argued for the decoupling of these two neighborhoods in regard to future action plans as well as provided suggestions for future areas of research. These future areas of research have been weaved into our discussion of the commonalities between these neighborhoods. To reiterate, future studies for both neighborhoods should focus on five areas: public health, housing stock, drug use, food insecurity, and economic revitalization. Public health as it relates to environmental factors of the lasting effects of General Electric's pollution as well as older housing conditions. In regard to housing stock, there must be a comprehensive examination of the existing housing conditions in these neighborhoods as well as future explorations on how to revitalize its conditions and create true affordable housing. For drug use, there can be additional awareness campaigns of existing programs to combat drug use. Additional investigations are also warranted to highlight the availability of different food sources in both these neighborhoods as well as strategize ways to increase access to affordable, healthy food options like community gardens. Finally, there must be further studies strategizing ways to incentivize business investment within these neighborhoods, especially in the Westside neighborhood. A potential avenue of exploration could be an examination of the relationship between median household income and the types of industry residents hold employment within to provide greater insight into how best to economically assist the neighborhoods.

In addition, our research process has also highlighted gaps within data collection that would provide crucial insight into the issues facing these two neighborhoods. When evaluating on a neighborhood level, data availability at the appropriate scale becomes increasingly difficult. 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/awareness campaigns 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 infeasible 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.

Finally, as a team, we want to conclude our report with an acknowledgement of our report's limitations, as well as our own as researchers. Our investigation was conducted over the course of one academic semester (roughly two to three months) and as students with additional coursework; thus, our report was limited in depth given our time constraints. We also recognize that we are both outsiders to Pittsfield and serve as outside researchers; thus, we have worked tremendously hard to familiarize ourselves not only with Morningside and Westside but with the entirety of Pittsfield. With that being said, our report does not aim to present solutions but summarize existing reports as well as investigate statistical data regarding these two neighborhoods to present a comprehensive historical assessment of the Morningside and Westside neighborhoods.

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