

TOP STORY

Lackawanna no longer lacking opportunity

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A win for Lackawanna

Lackawanna will be reaping the employment and tax benefits from Erie County's newfound attention to redeveloping the **Bethlehem Steel site on the city's western end**. But that vast swath of formerly polluted brownfield is not the only part of town that the city is focusing on.

With businesses and developers taking a fresh look at what's happening in the city just south of Buffalo, it is catalyzing **Lackawanna's own economic development efforts** in other areas, particularly involving six city-owned properties that now lie vacant but ripe for reuse within Lackawanna's downtown and neighborhoods.

One-third of the city's available land is former industrial land, and all but one of the six target properties are located in the city's **Brownfield Opportunity Area and Opportunity Zones**, making them even more attractive for redevelopment.

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And that fits into **Mayor Annette Iafallo's** vision since she took office two years ago – to fill in and revitalize neighborhoods, bolster the tax revenues and create better connections to neighboring cultural and recreational destinations, like the Our Lady of Victory Basilica, South Park, the Botanical Gardens and the Seaway Trail.

"It increases our tax base," Iafallo said. "It's jobs for our residents, and it helps restore the vibrancy to our city."



Looking down South Park Avenue toward Our Lady of Victory Basilica at 767 Ridge Road in Lackawanna. The copper dome is 165 feet in height, and at the time of the basilica's completion in 1926 it was second largest next to the U.S. Capitol. The dome was replaced in 2002.

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Flexlume Sign Co. already bought a 4-acre vacant parcel on **Albright Court** – formerly a low-income housing complex – for a new \$2 million office and manufacturing facility, where it will relocate 20 employees from Buffalo by year-end. **Empire Building Diagnostics**, a local demolition and remediation firm, is moving its 70-person operation from Depew to a 73,000-square-foot building that it bought at 400 Ingham Ave.

The city is looking for proposals to redevelop the **1.3-acre property at 539 Ridge Road** – formerly St. Barbara's Catholic Church. It is also hoping for a mixed-use project with a grocery on **2.5 acres at 264 Ridge**, which used to be the site of Friendship House community center until that was demolished 20 years ago.



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The larger property was later subdivided, with nonprofit **Community Services for Every1** using part of the land to **construct its \$8.5 million affordable housing community** called **Ridgeway Commons**, featuring 32 one- and two-bedroom apartments – including some designated for those with intellectual or physical disabilities. That project was completed in 2018, **but the remaining land is still available.**

The city has also received inquiries for warehousing or light manufacturing space for a **6.5-acre L-shaped parcel at 1 Alliance Drive**, adjacent to Empire Diagnostics and on the other side of Dona Street. Indeed, Empire is one of the firms that expressed interest.

Additionally, there's a **2.5-acre open parcel on Wilmuth Avenue**, also designated for light manufacturing or warehouse use. And officials are hoping for townhomes or apartments to be built at **100 Dona, on the 2.2-acre site** of the former Lincoln Annex High School that Friendship House later used for administrative offices until it was torn down 25 years ago and taken over by the city.

"We're focusing on these areas here. We're open to any ideas," Iafallo said. "I want to see it happen."

The city also wants to create a new recreational splash pad on the west end of the Franklin Playground near Center Street, and a new pocket park at South Park Avenue and Ridge Road, expected to be open by June. And it hopes to see redevelopment of several privately owned but highly visible properties, including a former Sunoco gas station at **1361 Abbott Road**, as well as vacant lots at **1271** and **2048 Abbott**, and a **corner building at 2719 South Park**.

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