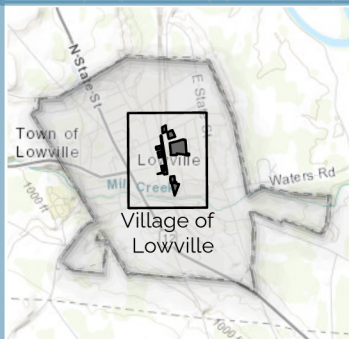
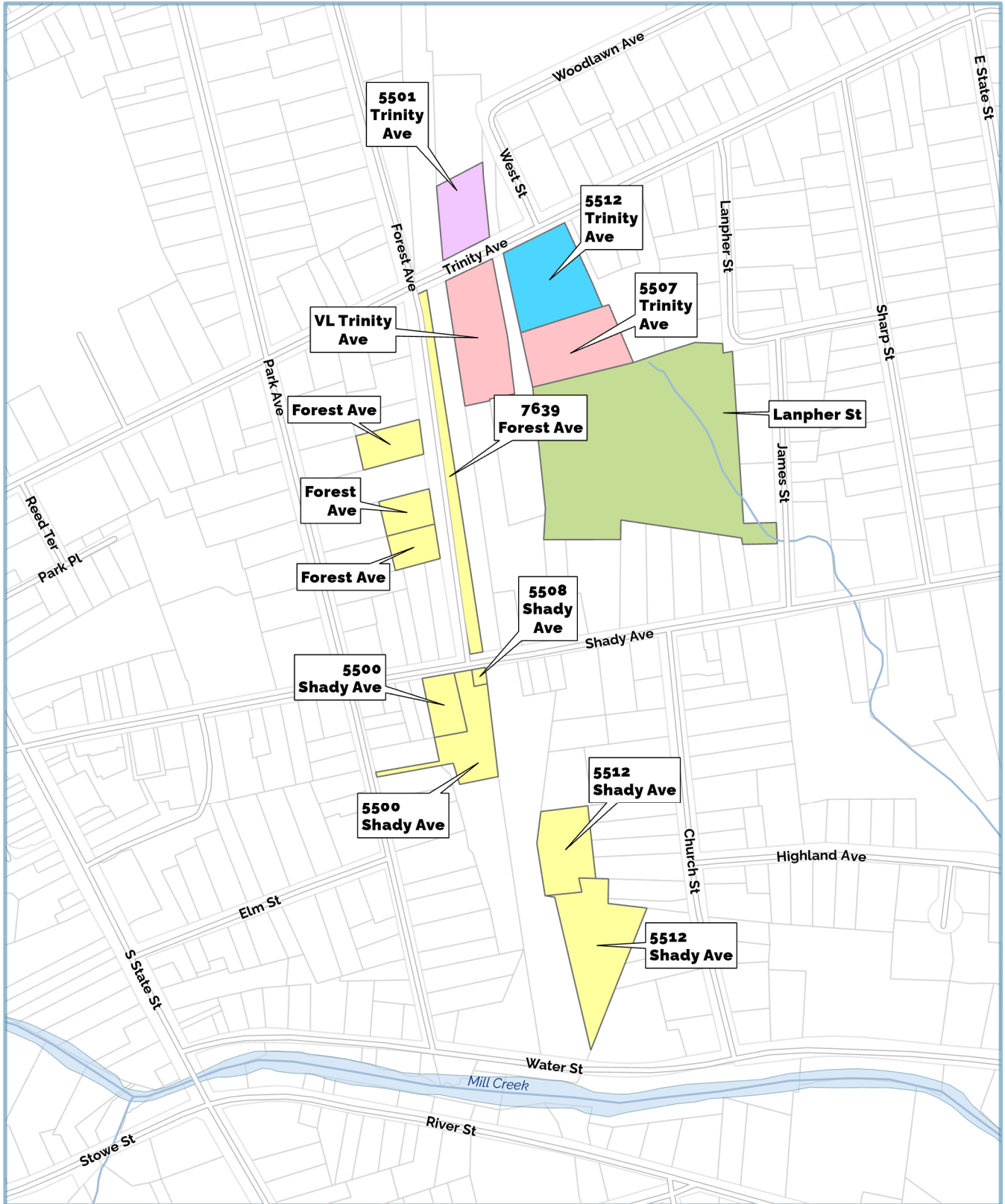


Village of Lowville

# Three Trees Neighborhood Visioning



**SEPTEMBER 20, 2023**  
**PROJECT NO. 2232600**



Selected Parcels in Three Trees Neighborhood

- County of Lewis Industrial Development
- Lowville Farmers Co-Op
- VPJ Properties
- Double Play Sports
- Lowville Food Pantry
- Parcel Boundary

## Selected Parcels in Three Trees Neighborhood





## Introduction and Local Context

From its earliest days, the Village of Lowville has been closely tied to its rail systems. Established routes such as the Black River Canal in 1851, the Rome, Watertown, and Ogdensburg Railroad in 1867, and the Lowville and Beaver River Railroad in 1906 were once the lifelines that connected Lowville to distant markets in Rome, Syracuse, and beyond. These railways were not just for freight; they also ushered in tourists captivated by Lowville's scenic vistas and cultural richness. The Adirondack Scenic Railroad, for instance, which operated until 2019, made Lowville a must-visit stop along its route from Saranac Lake to Utica. The influence of the railways even extends to museums like the Railway Historical Society of Northern New York and emerging enterprises like Railstar Corp, which aims to reinvigorate the local rail experience.

However, as highways and air travel revolutionized logistics and personal transportation, these vital rail arteries faced decline and, in some cases, obsolescence. Yet, rail-to-trail projects across the Northeast have proven how these old routes can be repurposed into dynamic public spaces, thereby sustaining the environment, local economies, and community well-being. New York's High Line, Massachusetts' Minuteman Bikeway, Pennsylvania's Heritage Rail Trail County Park, and Vermont's Island Line Rail Trail stand as success stories of how transformational this concept can be.

### Local Initiatives

In alignment with this larger vision, Lewis County has proactively considered rail-to-trail opportunities for its obsolete railway corridors. Since 2007, local interest has been growing in converting these former rail lines into multi-use trails. Recognizing the potential, the county has worked to secure 31 miles of rail corridors, covering stretches between Lowville to Croghan and Lowville to Carthage. Additionally, this project includes eight miles through Lowville and a half-mile in Lyons Falls. Lewis County embarked on a Master Rail Trail Plan initiative in contract with Alta Planning in Fall 2023.

The county's vision for these rail corridors is multifaceted. Primarily, the transformation into recreational trails aims to offer residents and tourists alike alternative transportation routes that are both functional and scenic. But it goes beyond mere trails; it's about fostering a lifestyle change that emphasizes public health and community well-being. These trails could become local attractions that boost tourism, creating spillover benefits for businesses, particularly in the growing arts, entertainment, and food services sectors.

### The "Three Trees" Neighborhood

Over the past decade, the Three Trees Neighborhood—encompassing most of Forest Ave, Trinity between Park Ave and James Street, and Shady Avenues—has weathered significant economic challenges and urban decay. While the decline of the railway system and the rise of over-the-road distribution have impacted its industrial and commercial sectors, the Village of Lowville sees these challenges as opportunities. Armed with a vision and a commitment to strategic planning, the Village aims to transform these decaying structures and empty plots into a vibrant downtown area that attracts both residents and visitors.



A **visioning questionnaire** conducted in July 2023 revealed that most residents of the neighborhood value the neighborhood's small-town atmosphere and village services. This feedback sets the stage for more detailed planning elements, including potential uses for vacant lots and the benefits of adopting NC-2 zoning for community revitalization.

In the survey, residents have expressed concerns over the number of blighted properties. While residents liked the Village infrastructure amenities, residents would like to see better code enforcement and maintenance of properties and additional resources for rehabilitating existing housing stock. Survey results also indicated the desire from residents to have improved streetscapes with clearly delineated curbing, landscaping, and lighting, as a vast majority of survey respondents wanted increased walkability. Through this visioning process and with state grants and local initiatives, the neighborhood has the potential to transform into a dynamic community space that honors Lowville's rich history while embracing a prosperous future.

The core streets of Trinity, Shady, and Forest Avenues have the potential to serve as transformational spaces that drive the area's economic and social resurgence. The recent acquisition of the nearby railroad by Lewis County offers a unique revitalization opportunity. These streets straddle the once-vital railway line and could benefit from rail-to-trail initiatives that stimulate tourism, public health, and general well-being, giving new life to long-neglected rail corridors.

The Village envisions transforming this area into a vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive community that honors Lowville's unique historical and cultural fabric. Through redevelopment and public engagement, the Village can optimize underutilized spaces, revitalize existing structures, and improve public amenities, fostering an environment conducive to economic growth and social well-being. This transformation will serve as a model for sustainable community development and position the Village favorably for future Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) applications and other grant opportunities.





## Market Considerations: Economic Development

For various reasons, NACIS (North American Industry Classification System) data is instrumental in economic planning and policymaking. It enables standardized industry benchmarking for local and national comparisons, informing targeted economic development and resource allocation. By identifying thriving and struggling sectors, policymakers can better guide strategic planning, attract investment, and develop the workforce in line with industry needs. Additionally, NACIS data aids in formulating and assessing policies, facilitating necessary adjustments for maximum impact. It also provides opportunities for cross-sector analysis, enabling integrated development strategies. Ultimately, leveraging NACIS data offers a comprehensive analytical framework to guide more effective and informed decision-making in community and economic development.

NAICS	Description	2018 Jobs	2028 Jobs	2018 - 2028 Change	2018 - 2028 % Change
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	23	66	43	189%
42	Wholesale Trade	48	118	70	144%
61	Educational Services	40	75	35	87%
72	Accommodation and Food Services	244	375	131	54%
23	Construction	52	76	24	47%
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	75	107	32	43%
48	Transportation and Warehousing	25	35	9	38%
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	54	71	17	31%
90	Government	289	370	81	28%
44	Retail Trade	487	590	103	21%
31	Manufacturing	717	812	94	13%
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	211	233	22	10%
56	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	15	16	1	7%
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	33	35	2	5%
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	346	302	(44)	(13%)
52	Finance and Insurance	50	42	(7)	(15%)
51	Information	32	27	(5)	(16%)
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	15	11	(4)	(29%)
22	Utilities	29	15	(14)	(49%)
		<b>2,792</b>	<b>3,441</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>23%</b>

### Leveraging Growth Sectors:

- Wholesale Trade and Transportation and Warehousing:** Given the significant growth in these sectors, focusing on developing logistics hubs or specialized trading zones can be beneficial. This can also create linkages with the booming construction industry for infrastructure development.



- **Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation:** Encourage the formation of a cultural or arts district to attract tourists and locals alike. This could synergize well with "Accommodation and Food Services," providing a more comprehensive experience for visitors.
- **Accommodation and Food Services:** Capitalize on this by potentially setting up food and hospitality training centers to maintain a qualified workforce, enhancing the sector's competitive advantage.
- **Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services:** Developing tech parks or innovation hubs can provide the infrastructure and environment to foster growth in this sector.
- **Government:** Given the stable growth in government services, aim to develop a civic center or government plaza that could also offer mixed-use spaces for other sectors.

#### Revitalizing Declining and Stable Sectors:

- **Utilities and Mining:** Given the decline in these traditional industries, explore transitioning these into more sustainable alternatives.
- **Health Care and Social Assistance:** Despite the decline, this remains a crucial sector. Look into specialized healthcare clusters focusing on eldercare or telemedicine, significantly since the general population in the area is shrinking but aging.
- **Real Estate and Administrative Services:** Given their stability, these sectors could offer supportive roles, providing essential services to growing and emerging clusters.

#### Cross-sector Synergies:

- The rise in "**Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation**" could potentially tie in with "**Accommodation and Food Services**," creating a more dynamic hospitality and tourism cluster.
- The "**Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services**" sector could offer high-value, specialized services to "**Wholesale Trade**" and "**Construction**," perhaps in the form of consulting or planning, thereby adding value to those already growing sectors.
- Given that "**Government**" is also a growth sector, there could be room for public-private partnerships that facilitate these clusters, perhaps through tax incentives or by easing zoning regulations to help these industries grow in a focused way.

By targeting these sectors based on current trends, Lowville can craft an economic strategy that builds on existing strengths and ensures sustainable and comprehensive development.



## Market Considerations: Housing

*Leveraging the capabilities of "Envision Tomorrow," an advanced suite of planning tools, is a way to shape public policy and urban development strategies more effectively. This software solution offers a range of analytical methods, enabling planners and policymakers to assess the long-term impacts of different development scenarios and policy options.*

The data indicates several trends and projections that affect future housing developments in Lowville, NY. The data indicates several important trends that will shape its housing market and development plans for the future.

There is a projected decrease in population from 3,592 people in 2021 to 3,153 by 2040, which could imply less demand for new housing. However, **the number of households is expected to slightly increase**, from 1,513 in 2021 to 1,564 by 2040. This discrepancy could be due to smaller household sizes, likely tied to the trend of an aging population. **By 2040, the data predicts more residents will be 65 or older**, while younger populations (both <25 and 25-44 age groups) will decline.

This shift toward an older demographic suggests that there may be **increased demand for housing types that cater to seniors**, such as assisted living facilities, low-maintenance condos, or age-restricted communities. Given the aging trend, housing with accessibility features may also be in higher demand.

The vacancy rate is relatively stable at 7%, but it is worth noting that vacancy rates for owned and rented units differ significantly (2% and 6%, respectively). This could imply that the rental market may have more flexibility in accommodating demographic changes.

Regarding tenure, a slight shift is expected: the percentage of homeowners is predicted to decrease from 66% to 64%, **while the renter population is expected to rise from 34% to 36%**. Coupled with the income and age data, this suggests that younger people in Lowville are more likely to rent, particularly in lower income brackets. At the same time, older individuals are more likely to own their homes, especially if they have higher incomes.

The presence of an underpayment adjustment implies that there could be housing affordability issues, particularly among certain income brackets. This points toward a need for more affordable housing options, especially if the younger population is already struggling with housing costs.

In summary, Lowville's housing development should consider focusing on age-appropriate accommodations for a growing older population, potentially smaller housing units to cater to smaller households, and affordable housing options to address income disparities and underpayment issues.

### Recommendations for Future Housing Developments:



- **Senior Housing:** Given the aging population, developers should consider investing in senior-friendly housing options.
- **Affordable Rentals:** With a projected increase in renters, especially among the younger population, affordable rental housing could be a smart investment.
- **Quality Homes for Ownership:** Though ownership rates are predicted to decline slightly, there will still be a market for quality homes, especially among older and higher-income individuals.
- **Flexible Housing:** Given the shifts in demographics, flexible housing options that can be easily converted from rental to owner-occupied (or vice versa) might be advantageous.

By aligning future housing projects with these trends, developers can make more informed decisions that cater to the changing needs of Lowville.



## Specific Recommendations

The following parcels could become a cornerstone in revitalizing this micro-neighborhood, especially given their adjacency to the future Rail Trail. Given the current market trends and the specific community visions for these properties, there is a strong case for each development to proceed, assuming community engagement and further studies confirm their viability.

All of these development parcels fall within the boundaries of the Village of Lowville's Neighborhood Commercial 2 District (NC-2). This zoning designation permits small-scale commercial activities meant to serve the immediate needs of nearby residential communities. The NC-2 zoning guidelines stipulate a minimum lot size of 10,000 square feet and a maximum building height of 35 feet to maintain existing neighborhoods' character and aesthetic quality.

The benefits of developing within the NC-2 district are multiple. First, the district could become a localized service hub offering a range of amenities, such as retail outlets, eateries, and banking facilities, making life more convenient for residents and reducing the necessity for long-distance commuting. This convenience factor also contributes to environmental sustainability by minimizing car usage, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions and noise and air pollution levels.

Additionally, this localized economic boost could significantly increase the demand for commercial spaces, subsequently raising tax revenues and creating job opportunities for the local population. In line with community aesthetics, the district's zoning guidelines—such as constraints on lot size and building height—have been designed to ensure that new commercial establishments coexist harmoniously with residential properties, mitigating potential downsides like light pollution, loss of privacy, or visual discordance.



## Lowville Farmer's Co-Op – 7639 Forest Ave, 5500 Shady Ave



**Current Zoning:** Neighborhood Commercial-2

**Current property information:** These properties are the locations of the Lowville Farmer's Co-Op, Inc.. This cooperative offers various products and services to farmers and consumers in Lowville and surrounding areas. The co-op has three different departments: the feed and crop center, the hardware, clothing, and footwear department, and the building supplies department. The Lowville Farmer's Co-op is looking to relocate, which is the reason for the re-use analysis for this property. The properties have a combined area of 4.3 acres and a combined building size of 18,800 square feet.

- 7639 Forest Ave: This building is the Feed and Crop Center of the Lowville Farmer's Co-Op, which offers animal feed, seeds, fertilizer, animal health, and more. According to the Lewis County Real Property Tax Service, the building has an assessed value of \$250,000 and a market value of \$500,000.





- 5500 Shady Ave: This building is the Hardware, Clothing, and Footwear Department of the Lowville Farmer's Co-Op, which offers pet food, bird seed, paint, plumbing, fasteners, lawn and garden supplies, clothing, boots, shoes, and more. According to the Lewis County Real Property Tax Service, the building has an assessed value of \$200,000 and a market value of \$400,000.

**Recommended changes:** These buildings present a unique opportunity to address some of the housing concerns and trends identified by Envision Tomorrow. These properties are well-suited for mixed-use redevelopment with a combined area of 4.3 acres and an 18,800-square-foot building footprint. The recommendation to convert the upper floors into residential units while maintaining boutique commercial spaces on the ground floor aligns well with Envision Tomorrow's data, indicating a future demand for more diverse housing options, especially for older residents and smaller households.

The existing zoning laws for these areas already permit mixed-use developments, provided the residential units are situated above ground-level commercial spaces. Keeping the zero-lot-line building frontage and adhering to the max height of 35 feet in the zoning law will invigorate the street front and enhance the area's walkability. This would create a vertical mixed-use development that provides housing and contributes to economic vitality, possibly appealing to younger professionals and seniors looking to downsize. The presence of commercial spaces on the ground floor can also offer employment opportunities, further enhancing the appeal of this proposed development.

Securing the necessary zoning permits and ensuring compliance with New York State's Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code is crucial to moving forward with this plan. If executed well, this development could become a blueprint for adapting existing commercial and industrial spaces to meet evolving housing needs while energizing the local economy.





## Lowville Food Pantry - 5502 Trinity Ave



**Current Zoning:** Neighborhood Commercial-2

**Current property information:** This property is owned by the Lowville Food Pantry, a nonprofit organization that provides food, personal care items, household items, and clothing to individuals and families in need in Lewis County. The Food Pantry is not using this specific building; it is a vacant structure on a property owned by the Food Pantry. Their operations are in a smaller building to the rear of the parcel. The food pantry building has an assessed value of \$75,000 and a market value of \$150,000.

**Recommended changes:** The vision is to repurpose the space into a commercial area for vendors, akin to an indoor farmer's market and craft space. The focus would be on using the side entrance for better flow. The design would honor the area's agricultural roots. Given the community's preference for an agricultural theme, the project would be received well. However, traffic flow and parking would need to be addressed, especially given the commercial nature of the venture. The zoning code allows for various commercial uses in the commercial district, including retail stores, restaurants, and indoor markets. Therefore, the revised plan would be compatible with the zoning code.



However, as mentioned above, any change of use or occupancy would require a zoning permit. Any alteration or enlargement of an existing building would need to comply with the New York State Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code.

The zoning code also has some design standards for buildings in the commercial district, such as minimum setbacks, maximum lot coverage, minimum parking spaces, and minimum landscaping. The project must adhere to these standards or seek a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Additionally, the zoning code requires that any commercial use generating more than 100 vehicle trips daily submit a traffic impact study to the Planning Board for review and approval. The project must determine if it meets this threshold and provide the necessary information.





## Lowville Food Pantry – 5502 Trinity Ave 1.1-acre vacant adjacent parcel (east of property)



**Current Zoning:** Neighborhood Commercial-2

**Current property information:** This property is the location of the Lowville Food Pantry, a nonprofit organization that provides food, personal care items, household items, and clothing to individuals and families in need in Lewis County. Adjacent to the Food Pantry (to the east) is a 1.1-acre vacant parcel owned by the same entity. The vacant parcel has an assessed value of \$6,000 and a market value of \$10,000.

**Recommended changes:** This parcel could be converted into a community garden. The rail spur between this building and the food pantry would be acquired and converted into a community-focused public space. Landscaping, lighting, and curbing would be incorporated.





## 5512 Trinity Ave



**Current Zoning:** Neighborhood Commercial-2

**Current property information:** VPJ Properties, Inc., a New York domestic business corporation founded in 1986, owns this property. The property features a brick building with four bedrooms and two bathrooms, situated on a lot size of 0.57 acres and a building area of 2,046 square feet. Built in 1890, it was most recently sold in 2023 for \$180,000.

**Recommended changes:** The plan would involve converting the existing structure into residential apartments while developing a community garden on the adjacent lot.





## 5501 Trinity Ave – former Skewed Brewing



**Current Zoning:** Neighborhood Commercial-2

**Current property information:** This property was formerly a brewpub and restaurant called Skewed Brewing, which closed in 2019. It is now owned by the Lewis County Industrial Development Agency (LCIDA), which purchased it in 2020 for \$1.2 million. The property has a total area of 3.5 acres and a building size of 14,000 square feet.

**Recommended changes:** The LCIDA plans to use the property as a business incubator and accelerator, offering office space, conference rooms, and commercial kitchen facilities to local entrepreneurs and startups. This property could be a hub for fostering growth in key sectors identified through NACIS data. For example, commercial kitchen facilities could be invaluable in training and nurturing startups in the "Accommodation and Food Services" sector. The office spaces and conference rooms could support businesses in "Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services," thereby adding value to already thriving sectors like "Wholesale Trade" and "Construction." Given the property's versatility, it could also host a specialized healthcare cluster focusing on eldercare or telemedicine, catering to the area's aging population. Furthermore, the availability of such a space could be a crucial element in public-private partnerships, potentially



attracting governmental support or tax incentives. By aligning LCIDA's incubator and accelerator facility with the growth sectors identified through NACIS data, Lowville can more effectively concentrate its resources to build on existing strengths and opportunities, fostering sustainable and comprehensive economic development.





## 5507 Trinity Ave



**Current Zoning:** Residential

**Current property information:** This is a vacant site, as the structure was demolished in the summer of 2023. The property has a total area of 0.17 acres and a building size of 1,344 square feet.

**Recommended changes:** Once the building is demolished and the site is cleared, a mixed-use building that combines residential and commercial uses, such as apartments and offices, apartments and a cafe or a bookstore, would be ideal. This would align with the Village's plan to create a vibrant downtown district that attracts the next generation of residents and visitors. A mixed-use building would also provide more housing options and economic opportunities in the area and enhance the walkability and livability of the downtown.

The design of the building should respect the historic character and architectural style of the surrounding buildings while incorporating modern features and amenities. The building should also comply with the commercial district's zoning code and design standards or seek a variance or a special use permit if necessary.





## Double Play Sports Community Center - 6.9-acre vacant parcel on Lanpher Street



**Current Zoning:** Neighborhood Commercial-2

**Current property information:** This is a vacant parcel on Lanpher Street that Double Play Sports Community Center, Inc. owns. This nonprofit organization operates a sports and recreation facility in Lowville. The vacant parcel has an assessed value of \$15,000 and a market value of \$25,000.

**Recommended changes:** The currently vacant lot in the area presents a unique opportunity for enriching community life through various recreational avenues. One promising option is transforming the space into a dedicated dog park, which would offer a safe and social environment for pets and their owners. Alternatively, the property could be developed into a multi-use area that incorporates a community garden, a children's playground, and an outdoor fitness area. This would diversify recreational opportunities and cater to residents of all ages.



## Proposed Renderings

- **Forest Ave Higher Density Residential Development**
- **Trinity Ave Public Market**
- **Trinity Ave Community Garden**





**VIEW FROM FOREST AVE**

VILLAGE OF LOWVILLE, NY





**VIEW WEST DOWN TRINITY AVE - PUBLIC MARKET**

VILLAGE OF LOWVILLE, NY





**VIEW WEST DOWN TRINITY AVE - COMMUNITY GARDEN**

VILLAGE OF LOWVILLE, NY





**VIEW OF PUBLIC MARKET AND FOREST AVE DEVELOPMENT**

VILLAGE OF LOWVILLE, NY