

The City of Niagara Falls

April 2002

Achieving Niagara Falls' **Future**

An assessment of Niagara Falls' waterfront planning



The Urban Design Project
School of Architecture and Planning
University at Buffalo, State University of New York

Foit-Albert Associates
Buffalo, New York

The Waterfront Regeneration Trust
Toronto, Ontario Canada





B Celebrating Niagara Falls' Heritage

★ The City of Niagara Falls Family Museum

Niagara Falls Discovery Center

- 2 Frederick Law Olmsted Interpretive Center
- 3 History of Civil Engineering exhibition
- 4 Niagara Gorge Discovery Center expansion and trailhead
- 5 Early Hydroelectric Power and Industrial Heritage Museum
- 6 Natural History Interpretive Center & Visitor Amenities Center

Other Heritage Interpretive Sites

- 7 Love Canal Education and Interpretive Center
- 8 Griffon Park interpretive materials
- 9 Buffalo Avenue industrial interpretation
- 10 Intake Park overlook and Ft. Schlosser interpretive venue
- 11 Adams Power Plant adaptive reuse
- 12 Reveal and interpret the Hydraulic Canal
- 13 Underground Railroad interpretive site
- 14 (Old) Customs House restoration and reuse
- 15 Niagara Arts and Cultural Center

C Upper River Projects

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1 "Riverview" upper river hike and bike trail | short term |
| 2 Naturalize Niagara River shoreline | |
| 3 Reconfigure Parkway to "boulevard" | long term |
| 4 Preserve Century Club access point | |
| 5 Connect City to Trail and Parkway at 53rd St. | |
| 6 Connect City to Trail and Parkway at Hyde Park Boulevard | |
| 7 Connect City to Trail and Parkway at Portage Road | |
| 8 Riverview Park birding area and overlook | |
| 9 Remove Parkway from Daly Boulevard to Main Street | |

D State Park/City Interface Projects

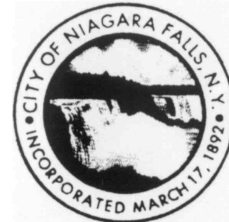
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|---|------------|
| 1 Create new pedestrian connections to the Niagara Reservation | short term |
| 2 Change Rainbow Boulevard North and South to two-way streets | |
| 3 Remove Parkway segment nearest the Niagara Reservation | |
| 4 Narrow Main Street segment | |
| 5 Repave Rainbow Boulevard South for "traffic calming" | |
| 6 Improve landscaping of West Mall | |
| 7 Modify Wintergarden for visual and pedestrian access | |
| 8 Improve landscaping and pedestrian connections at The Turtle | |
| 9 Remove parking and restore Olmsted's "Upper Grove" | long term |
| 10 Build new park building on Olmsted inspiration | |
| 11 Redesign/redevelop street level retail in buildings next to park | |
| 12 Redevelop buildings adjacent to park for higher quality | |
| 13 Continue linear park along Hydraulic Canal route | |

E Niagara River Gorge Projects

- 1 Gorge trails and trailhead improvements (low bank)
- 2 "GorgeView" Hike and Bike Trail (high bank)
- 3 Reconfigure Parkway
- 4 New Amtrak railroad station
- 5 Devil's Hole State Park naturalization and interpretation

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With
The City of Niagara Falls

April 2002

Courtesy/ Niagara Falls Public Library



Clifford Calverley, one of Niagara's many daredevils, 1893.



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The State University of New York

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School of Architecture and Planning

University at Buffalo, State University of New York

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*Earlier versions of this report used the terminology "Niagara Gorge Discovery Center." We now omit the word "gorge" for two reasons. Niagara Falls, and the Niagara Region more generally, have many more stories and sites to offer than are described by the word "gorge." Also, the New York State Office of Parks has renamed the Schoellkopf Geological Museum as the "Niagara Gorge Discover Center" and omitting the word "gorge" from this title can avoid possible confusion.

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Preface

There have been many plans for Niagara Falls and its waterfront. There will be more. But we don't need more plans before we can act. Nearly two decades of technical planning and public discussion have already laid a firm foundation for immediate action to achieve Niagara Falls' future. We already know what needs to be done first.

This study has taken the best ideas from nearly a dozen different plans, reports, studies and proposals for the Niagara Falls waterfront and crafted an aggressive strategy to help Niagara Falls assume its proper role in the economic resurgence of the region. The projects in the strategy are feasible, have citizen support and, taken together, will have transformative impact. They deserve to be developed and implemented.

The strategy that connects these projects is straightforward and powerful. It aims to achieve the development of economy, environment and community together, and is driven by three principles:

- First, reconnect Niagara Falls – its downtown and neighborhoods alike – with the Niagara River waterfront.
- Second, repair and improve both the urban and natural environments for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.
- Third, develop the means to tell the compelling stories of the city and region to build the visitor industry and create meaning for those who live here.

These principles provide a strategic framework that organizes these projects. The principles also offer a means to evaluate and prioritize all of the projects and proposals that may follow, and they will serve to guide continuing planning.

Two major projects already have a broad base of public and private support. One is to complete the installation of the waterfront trail system from city line to city line. The other is to mitigate the negative impact of the Robert Moses Parkway on waterfront access, urban environment, and city image. Completing the trail and mitigating the parkway will be important steps toward making visible the fact that Niagara Falls is a great place to live, work, and visit. Both of these projects are moving ahead.

We should also create a City of Niagara Falls Family Museum as the brightest star in an expanding constellation of heritage and cultural interpretive facilities and sites. The Family Museum would be the point of entry for all visitors, the hub of a system of attractions to be known collectively as the Niagara Discovery Center, and a point of orientation and embarkation for all of the heritage opportunities throughout the bi-national Niagara region.

This recommendation is rooted in past plans and responsive to powerful global trends in travel and education. More simply put, however, it is time to let the world discover the stories of this region, starting in the Park-City by the falls. There is no place better to tell the stories of the geology that formed the



The brink of the falls.



Predecessor to today's Rainbow Bridge, 1929.

The Urban Design Project / Jessica Jamroz

Courtesy Niagara Falls Public Library

cataract, the Iroquois Nation, the marriage of power and industry, great feats of civil engineering, Frederick Law Olmsted's vision for the Falls, City, and Park, and of the landscape and ecology that sets a context for all of our stories. There is no better place to begin than beside one of the world's best-known places.

The study team, working with City of Niagara Falls staff, has identified \$145 million in capital requirements for forty-six specific projects. Approximately \$11 million of that is devoted to projects that can be done right away – in the short term. Much of the remaining work can be further developed and implemented in the near term – the next few years – and all of these projects can and should be completed within a decade.

Making the strategy a success requires that we get to work and keep talking at the same time. Many different agencies have responsibility for the sites and projects crucial to achieving Niagara Falls' future and each must work out a way to move forward. At the same time, a continuing conversation is needed to develop a broader vision for what the City and region can become. We know this much already: the Falls, the gorge, and the Niagara waterfront are the City's greatest assets and should always remain at the center of plans for its economic revitalization.

This strategy does not include most of the investments, public and private, that must be made in hotels, restaurants, shopping facilities, entertainment venues, other visitor amenities, and public infrastructure if Niagara Falls is going to capture the full economic benefit of the growing tourism market. It does not include projects to be done under the auspices of USA Niagara. But it anticipates them and is meant to make these investments more attractive and more likely by regenerating the physical environment of the City's waterfront, reshaping its public image, and repositioning Niagara Falls, NY as the natural and cultural counterpoint to Niagara Falls, Ontario.

Private sector investors say they have been waiting for a signal that the public sector is ready to do its part to redevelop Niagara Falls. This waterfront strategy and development program sends that message loud and clear.

The project team was led by the Urban Design Project (UDP) in the School of Architecture and Planning at the University at Buffalo with the Waterfront Regeneration Trust (WRT) and Foit-Albert Associates (FAA). All members of the team were involved in a review of the planning documentation and in the identification of projects with City staff. The UDP and FAA teams developed the project descriptions with FAA taking primary responsibility for the Niagara Discovery Center and the UDP working on both the upper river and park/city interface descriptions. WRT worked on the overall project description and goal descriptions consistent with their earlier work on the "Citizen's Map of Niagara Falls" published in December of 1997.

Robert Shibley	The Urban Design Project
David Carter	Waterfront Regeneration Trust
Beverly Foit-Albert	Foit-Albert Associates

Achieving Niagara Falls' **Future**

Courtesy/ Niagara Falls Public Library



The cataract on a winter evening, 1954.

INTRODUCTION

In September 2000 the City of Niagara Falls contracted the Urban Design Project at the University at Buffalo's School of Architecture and Planning; Foit-Albert Associates, Architecture, Engineering and Surveying, PC; and the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, to undertake a three-part commission to:

- Assess waterfront planning done for the City over the previous seventeen years;
- Look to the future of the waterfront over the longer term; and
- Recommend a waterfront implementation program.

The City wants to take immediate advantage of existing waterfront plans to build momentum to seize the major development opportunities before this community as it enters the 21st century. The community has been asked to spell out its needs and desires many times, and many times the citizens have expressed their vision.

The people of Niagara Falls know that the water is the jewel of their city. They recognize that the river, the falls and the waterfront were the foundation on which the community was built, and will be the foundation for Niagara Falls' future. They want a city that protects, and enhances these assets – and one that is shaped by them. They want a city that achieves its prosperity by being true to its highest traditions and values, and they seek partners from outside the community to respect those best aspirations.

For a variety of reasons, few of the projects and proposals in existing waterfront plans have yet been implemented. Public resources have been lacking, intergovernmental agreement elusive, market linkages and demand missing, or a clear program of action absent. But now the situation has changed dramatically.

Niagara Falls has a civic administration determined to move the city forward. The State and the federal governments have both made new commitments to create the capacity for development, and to move forward with a clear and early program of action. The moment is ripe for Niagara Falls to realize its waterfront vision.

This strategy has been crafted to seize this opportunity. It is based on an assumption that the environmental regeneration of Niagara Falls must go hand in hand with its economic rebirth. These proposals for the development of natural and cultural heritage, environmental repair, and waterfront access are put forward with other emerging initiatives in mind. They are understood as interconnected and interdependent with the work of the USA Niagara Corp. in redeveloping downtown Niagara Falls, New York State Parks' plans for reinvestment in their assets, and the City's own comprehensive planning effort, soon to begin. All should move forward together in achieving Niagara Falls' future.

SUMMARY

Despite the passage of time, many of the individual elements in Niagara Falls waterfront plans produced over the past two decades remain desirable and feasible. We recommend implementation of four of these major plan elements based on their capacity to recapture public access to the waterfront and attract citizens and visitors. Niagara Falls should:

- Install a waterfront trail system (and associated amenities) to extend from one city line to the other and connect Niagara Falls to the region;
- Reconfigure the Robert Moses Parkway to reconnect downtown and neighborhoods to the waterfront access and improve environmental quality;

Courtesy/ Barbara Mcroom



The Maid of the Mist, about 1930.

- Implement a comprehensive waterfront naturalization program for upper river, park, and gorge; and,
- Plan for the future of Niagara Falls' "green structure."

There are precedents in these past plans, strong public support now, and strong justification in global market trends, for investments in waterfront improvements to help tell the community and the world the compelling stories of Niagara Falls and its region. Therefore:

- Develop a comprehensive celebration and interpretation of Niagara Falls' natural and cultural heritage --- featuring, and beginning with, a world class "City of Niagara Falls Family Museum."
- As initial steps, hold a "Heritage Fair," select natural and cultural heritage themes, and begin a program of research and interpretation to develop the means to tell Niagara's story.

Based on this analysis, and in recognition of the community's oft-expressed vision, we also recommend the adoption of five waterfront goals to guide the regeneration of Niagara Falls waterfront in the 21st century. We should:

- Achieve the most naturally beautiful, environmentally healthy, and publicly accessible waterfront possible for the citizens of Niagara Falls;
- Maintain power generation and existing industrial uses at appropriate locations along the waterfront;
- Celebrate and promote the unique natural and cultural heritage of Niagara Falls to enhance the waterfront as a tourist destination and to grow the economy.
- Improve the connection between downtown and the Niagara Reservation through high-quality urban and landscape design; and
- Make sure all actions serve the interests of the people of Niagara Falls as well as those of the region, the State, the nation, Canadian neighbors, and visitors from around the world.

In addition to the city-wide recommendations listed above, and the package of heritage development initiatives linked to the City of Niagara Falls Family Museum, there are also recommendations made in three discrete geographical areas of Niagara Falls:

- The upper river
- The downtown/Niagara Reservation interface, and
- The lower river and gorge



Courtesy Niagara Falls Public Library

The Hydraulic Canal was the backbone of early Niagara Falls industry, circa 1921.



The Urban Design Project

The Niagara River carved a great gorge through the escarpment.

In all, the program behind the strategy encompasses a total of 42 individual projects plus four citywide initiatives. Each of the projects is defined as either short term (i.e. possible to implement over the next two years) or longer term (i.e. possible to develop in more than two years).

The program includes many projects that were specified in plans from the past. It also integrates new concepts and ideas that were suggested by the spirit of previous plans or are demanded by the public now. Those in the latter category include the proposals for the City of Niagara Falls Family Museum and for achieving a well-designed interface between the State park and downtown.

The preliminary cost estimate for the 46 projects in the total waterfront development program is \$145 million over a period of ten years. This is the level of investment necessary to improve the waterfront to a point where Niagara Falls, NY is able to compete economically with its neighbor across the river.

The character and quality of investment we are recommending will reflect and build on the traditions, values and culture of the community. The result will be a waterfront that is unique, enhances the quality of life for citizens, generates confidence among private investors, and attracts tourists to spend significantly more time and money in the city.

Finally, the strategy encompasses a number of policy recommendations needed to make it all work. These recommendations are based on careful consideration of several factors. First, waterfront planning needs to be integrated with planning for the rest of Niagara Falls. This can be achieved through continuing planning, to which the City is committed.

Second, State and federal cooperation is vital; the waterfront development program cannot be achieved without it. Not only are State and federal financial and technical resources needed, State agencies, specifically the Department of Transportation (NYS-DOT), the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (NYS-OPRHP), and the New York Power Authority, (NYPA) own most of the waterfront lands, and their active agreement, support and participation are critical to the success of the program.

State agencies such as the Office of Parks have their own waterfront plans, so there is a need to integrate City and State waterfront planning. Given the congruence between the recommendations of this study and those of the "New Vision for State Parks" issued last year, such coordination should present no major obstacle. Federal needs and opportunities also may have a role to play in achieving the promise of Niagara Falls.

Third, existing land uses and ownership should be explored in detail and evaluated to identify opportunities for private investment. These investment opportunities should go beyond those outlined as "public/private" in the project descriptions and analysis charts of the report. They should establish the foundation for future discussions with the local and global business interests that will be making future investments in Niagara Falls.

Therefore, we recommend that the City act to:

- Reconcile and consolidate the waterfront plans of all relevant public agencies, and
- Negotiate a comprehensive agreement with the State and federal governments to fund the consolidated Niagara Falls Waterfront Plan.

The program outlined above and detailed below is a challenging one. It will require significant investments, both public and private, in basic infrastructure, visitor infrastructure, and the environment. It will demand great patience and continuity of vision. And it will need extraordinary cooperation and coordination among a wide array of participants. But it can be done. The reward will be the achievement of Niagara Falls' greatest possible future.

Courtesy/ Niagara Falls Public Library



Niagara Falls' gorge-side industrial district, circa 1895.



Direct waterfront access is fundamental to the strategy.

Niagara Falls **Waterfront** Recommended Projects

Bike and pedestrian trail system

A.1

Direct access by pedestrians to the Niagara River waterfront is the foundation of this strategy. Therefore, as soon as possible, implement existing plans for a pedestrian and bike way to run continuously along the entire length of the Niagara Falls waterfront. It is important to make sure that the path is well connected to adjacent neighborhoods and the city street pattern for easy local access.

Naturalize Niagara River shoreline and gorge

A.2

The waterfront should be natural and beautiful. Therefore, areas adjacent to the river, including the rim of the gorge, the Reservation, and the upper river stream bank, should be naturalized as much as possible through removal of paved surfaces and new plantings of trees and native plants. This will improve the environment and enhance the quality of views. It is acceptable to mow where needed for picnickers and other users, but the use of natural plants will cut maintenance costs and add to the enjoyment of users. Naturalizing the gorge rim will also help strengthen the buffer between city and fragile gorge ecosystems.

Reconfigure Robert Moses Parkway

A.3

The Robert Moses Parkway presents an almost continuous barrier between the city and its waterfront. So egregious has been the intrusion that the most important planning efforts of the last two decades have all suggested ways to mitigate the impact of the Parkway. These include the Niagara Falls Waterfront Master Plan by Sasaki Associates (1992), the Citizens Map of Niagara Falls by the Waterfront Regeneration Trust (1997), the Jerde Partnership development plan for Niagara Falls Redevelopment Corp. (1998), and the Main Street Plan by the City of Niagara Falls. (2001).

CITYWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

A range of treatment options should be considered to reduce the negative impact of the Parkway on the waterfront environment and as a barrier between city neighborhoods and the river, falls, and gorge. These should include elimination of lanes, removal of sections of the highway, reduction of speed limits, and introduction of at-grade intersections with the intent of reducing or eliminating automobile traffic and increasing pedestrian access.

The issue requires a great deal of additional technical work, design study, and public discussion. It will almost surely involve different approaches in different locations and contexts. But given the Parkway's limited value for transportation and its substantial conflicts with the goals of waterfront redevelopment in Niagara Falls, a systematic reconfiguration of the Parkway is an absolute requirement of this strategy.

Plan the Niagara Falls "Green Structure"

A.4

Within the borders of Niagara Falls there are hundreds of acres of old industrial lands, disused railway rights of way, New York Power Authority lands and other utility corridors, vacant lots, and otherwise unused urban land. In some ways, such lands are a burden, but they also offer a unique opportunity to expand and link the city's open space system in a way that better connects neighborhoods to the waterfront and repays the promise of the "City in the Park." These lands also extend beyond the Niagara Falls city line and thus hold out an opportunity to connect city "green structure" with the broader regional system of open space. The times to acquire, repair, and develop such lands for public uses may be long in the future. But the time is now right to survey, strategize, and plan for the recovery of these resources.



The Niagara Gorge is a sliver of wilderness.



Citizens celebrate closing the Parkway.



Railway rights of way and old industrial lands are a "green structure" resource.

Celebrating Niagara Falls' **Heritage**

CREATE A
WORLD CLASS
VISITOR
ATTRACTION

The City of Niagara Falls Family Museum

B.1

Niagara Falls needs a world class visitor attraction in a world class building to be the centerpiece of a system of natural and cultural heritage attractions. We recommend a City of Niagara Falls Family Museum.

It would be located in a prime location downtown near the edge of the Niagara Reservation. The Family Museum would be the first place that visitors go when they come to Niagara Falls. It would be the place where they see exhibits to help them understand the geography of the park, the history of the place, and to orient them to other attractions in the vicinity.

The museum would be designed and programmed to appeal to visitors of all ages and family situation, and to visitors from around the world. Its exhibits would be "cutting edge" – high-tech and high-touch with maximum use of interactive computers and video.

Like Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, the Family Museum building should be an attraction in itself.

Photo courtesy Charles A. Currie



The Family Museum would be the brightest star in a constellation of other museums and interpretive sites, including the "Niagara Discovery Center" (see below) and others throughout the city. The Family Museum would introduce visitors to the compelling stories of Niagara Falls and the region, and then direct them on to other sites where they can learn and experience more.

The City of Niagara Falls Family Museum should be in a building so wonderful that people come just to see it – the same way people flock to Bilbao, Spain to see Gehry's Guggenheim. The museum should also be located where it can best provide a point of reception and orientation for visitors. And it should stimulate active street life and help connect the city with the park.

DEVELOP A "NIAGARA DISCOVERY CENTER" INCLUDING:

Extending the stay of visitors – always a goal of tourism development – means expanding the array of sites and stories that can command their interest and curiosity. A major new investment in other educational and interpretive facilities in Niagara Falls is required. Toward that end, we propose creation of a series of interrelated and linked museums, exhibits, and attractions to be known collectively as the Niagara Discovery Center. They can celebrate and interpret the many stories Niagara Falls has to tell – the Olmsted legacy, the history of civil engineering and of hydroelectric power, of the natural history and geology of the falls and gorge. Significantly, these can be developed incrementally as market and financing allow, and take a range of forms from modest to elaborate.

Frederick Law Olmsted Interpretive Center

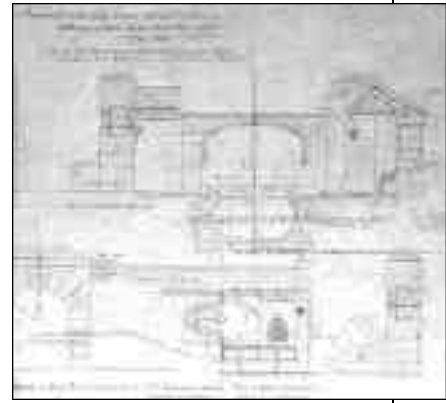
B.2

One of the primary stories to tell is about the Niagara Reservation itself and the inspiration of Frederick Law Olmsted that helped create it. We propose the renovation of either the current visitors center or the recently restored historic Horse Stable complex on Goat Island to accommodate a new Olmsted Interpretive Center. The center would explain how Olmsted's philosophy and designs influenced, not only our experience and understanding of Niagara, but also the development of landscapes throughout the nation. Olmsted understood that visitors to Niagara were motivated by a wish "to be astonished" as well as to enjoy the "pensive contemplation" of distinctive beauty. An exhibits area in the renovated facility would provide clear directional cues to the park, as well as interpretation of the Olmsted legacy. Placing the Olmsted exhibit in the Horse Stable will make it possible to consider other future uses for the current visitors center.

History of Civil Engineering exhibition

B.3

Niagara Falls has a rich history of civil engineering feats in the service of transportation, from early portages, to gorge railroads, and successive international bridge crossings. An interpretive exhibit beneath the Rainbow Bridge plaza could reveal this history for visitors at the same time it draws them from Prospect Point toward GorgeView Park. Signage, lighting,



Copyright Paul Rochelleau

The Olmsted legacy is a keystone attraction for visitors.



Courtesy Niagara Falls Public Library

There is a story to tell about Niagara Falls' bridges.



Folt-Albert Associates

The Schoellkopf Museum will be reborn.

pedestrian amenities, and exhibits would explain the history and encourage visitors to explore the variety of other educational and "discovery" opportunities along the Niagara River gorge such as the remnants of historic bridge crossings, or the site of the first railway in North America.

Niagara Gorge Discovery Center expansion and trailhead

B.4

The geological history of Niagara Falls is already interpreted through the facilities of the Schoellkopf Geological Museum. The richness of this story and the interest of the public, however, have suggested the need for the museum to be updated, expanded and revitalized. The New York State Office of Parks is preparing plans to expand and renovate the facility at its current location. The building, to be renamed the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center, has a magnificent view of the gorge, and has great potential to serve as a trailhead for explorations of the gorge itself.

Early Hydroelectric Power and Industrial Heritage Museum

B.5

The development of hydroelectric power in Niagara Falls is a story of world significance warranting a major investment in interpretive facilities and program. We propose creation of a new museum to be located on the concrete platform that was the roof of the discharge tunnels of the Schoellkopf hydroelectric power plant. The museum would provide space for exhibits on the early history of electric power; provide views of the gorge and the 200-foot-high stone wall that hides the water conduits of the plant; and offer new access to industrial heritage trails in the gorge by way of an elevator built into the original elevator shaft. The programming of the museum should be developed in a way that complements interpretive programs provided at the New York Power Authority Power Vista in Lewiston.

Natural History Interpretive and Visitor Amenity Center

B.6

Whirlpool State Park is a popular site for people who want to hike and experience nature in the gorge. There is a great opportunity to make these visits easier and more enjoyable and, at the same time, lessen the impact



Before hydroelectricity, Niagara Falls ran on mechanical water power.

visitors make on the natural setting itself. If we create a Natural History Interpretive and Visitor Amenity Center, adjacent to Whirlpool State Park on the DeVeaux campus, we can serve visitors better and soften our footprints in the gorge.

The location already offers visitors breathtaking vistas and physical access to gorge trails and fishing spots. A Visitor Amenity Center, outside of the natural gorge environment but nearby, would provide restrooms and concessions, tourist information and interactive destination planning.

A Natural History Interpretive Center, also located outside of the gorge, would tell the stories of the culture, environment and history of the Niagara eco-region. It would also teach visitors about rare plant and animal species – especially birds – found in the gorge.

The center would also serve as an additional trailhead or gateway for gorge hikers. Access to the gorge high-bank should be provided in the vicinity of the Whirlpool Bridge. Access into the gorge and the great rapids should also be considered, perhaps by elevators. The State Parks maintenance facility should be relocated away from the gorge rim.

DEVELOP OTHER HERITAGE INTERPRETATION SITES:

Opportunities for expanding the array of educational and interpretive sites extend well beyond those represented in the Family Museum and the Niagara Discovery Center. The stories of continental exploration, frontier conflict, the struggle for freedom, as well as the industrial heritage of Niagara Falls, all will find their audience and deserve to be told. As each of these is developed it should be connected to the larger system of heritage interpretation facilities through information, orientation and way-finding mechanisms.

Love Canal Education and Interpretation Center

B.7

Love Canal was a pivotal event in the history of the global environmental movement. It was the first federally declared "toxic waste disaster site," designated by President Carter in 1980. It was a tragic event in the lives of many individuals, but it also gave birth to a grassroots environmental movement that has had a tremendous impact on the world. Love Canal provided the catalyst for significant changes in the way the industry handles hazardous waste and initiated state and federal legislation resulting in more responsible management of these materials. It is an important story and needs to be told. The proposal for a Love Canal Education and Interpretation Center deserves public sector support to provide educational exhibits and programming on the role of Love Canal and Niagara Falls in the growth of the environmental movement.



The gorge remains a rich natural habitat.

The Urban Design Project/Lynda Schneekloth



Love Canal was a pivotal event in the growth of the environmental movement.

Love Canal 2000



LaSalle built his ship at the site of Griffon Park



The modern industrial heritage of Niagara Falls also deserves treatment.

Develop Griffon Park interpretive materials

B.8

In the late 17th century, the French explorer LaSalle built a ship, the Griffon, at a spot on the bank of the upper Niagara River. Today, the 20-acre park at the site, which was lost to the public during a decade of environmental remediation and litigation, is under redevelopment.

Planned work will restore access to the shore of the Little Niagara River, provide continuity for future trail extensions, ensure scenic vistas, and help meet local recreational needs. The site offers further potential for interpretation of early water-dependent industries, including shipbuilding, and the annals of explorers like LaSalle.

Industrial heritage interpretation – Buffalo Avenue route

B.9

Although, often understood as in conflict with the local aspiration for tourism development, the city's long and rich industrial heritage represents an important part of the story of Niagara Falls about which visitors may want to know more. From the earliest users of mechanical waterpower, to the growth of hydroelectric-powered manufacturers, and on to modern chemical making, the stories of Niagara Falls industry deserve to be researched, developed, and told.

One possibility would be to create a Buffalo Avenue industrial heritage route, which could be incorporated into a broader system of Niagara Falls heritage interpretation. New industries should be included along with older industries. Interpretation would be through kiosks and signage, supported by a map of a tour loop, with public tours of contemporary industry where possible.

Intake Park overlook and Fort Schlosser interpretive venue

B.10

The Upper River water intakes for hydroelectric power generation provide a natural point of entry – substantively as well as logistically – to the story of electric power. We recommend the further development of Intake Park to provide both recreational access to the river and expanded interpretive opportunities.

For those entering the city from the south, Intake Park would be a logical point at which to orient visitors to a "Power Route" linking several sites related to the hydro-power story specifically and to the heritage interpretation system overall. It would also be the appropriate site to tell the story of Fort Schlosser, which was captured during British incursions in the region during the War of 1812.

Located at the proposed intersection of the Robert Moses Parkway and Hyde Park Boulevard (see proposal C.6 below – "Connect City to Trail and Parkway at Hyde Park Boulevard") the park would also provide an additional point of access to the waterfront trail.

Adams Power Plant adaptive re-use

B.11

One of the earliest hydroelectric generation facilities in Niagara Falls was the Adams Power Plant along the upper Niagara River. It was featured in Lauren Belfer's historical novel, *City of Light*, as a symbol of the burgeoning hydroelectric industry at the beginning of the 20th century. It presents an extraordinary opportunity for reuse as an interpretive facility.

The State should move immediately to purchase the old Adams Power Plant, and State and City should negotiate with Niagara Mohawk to improve surrounding properties. The facility should be restored and included in a "Power Route" interpretive trail. This visitor route would link the Adams Power Plant with Intake Park (project B.10), RiverView Park (C.8), a "revealed" Hydraulic Canal (B.12), the Early Hydroelectric and Industrial Heritage Museum (B.5), and the Power Vista in Lewiston. Access to the Adams site could be from the Robert Moses Parkway and from a Portage Road extension (see project C.7).

Reveal and interpret the Hydraulic Canal

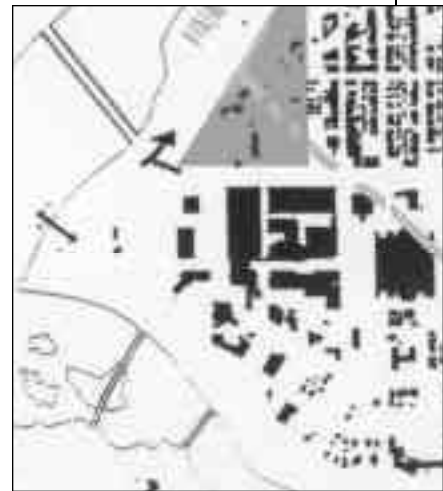
B.12

The Hydraulic Canal was a significant element in the history of Niagara Falls. It connected the upper river with the gorge across the city. It helped provide power to industry, facilitated transportation, and gave form to the city. It deserves to be interpreted and "revealed."

While any sort of thorough reconstruction is clearly infeasible, there are a variety of ways that it could be marked, remembered, or celebrated. Its distinctive diagonal transection of the city could be marked by open space and plantings; it could be remembered simply through interpretive signage; or a small section of the canal could be recreated to show what it might have been like. Such a remembrance also has potential to serve as an important cross-town pedestrian link. See project D.13.



Historic Fort Schlosser stood where the power intakes are today.



The Hydraulic Canal was the heart of early Niagara Falls industry.



The Adams Power Plant was a birthplace of hydroelectricity.



The road to freedom ran through Niagara Falls.

The Urban Design Project/Jessica Jannoz



The Old Customs House offers opportunities for reuse.

Clifton Brown Architecture/The Urban Design Project



The old Niagara Falls High School will be an art center.

Underground Railroad interpretive site

B.13

Before the U.S. Civil War, thousands of fugitive slaves, escaping from the South, came through the Niagara Frontier on their way to freedom in Canada. Like a number of locations along the Niagara River and on both sides of the international border, Niagara Falls has a rich history of involvement in what became known as "the Underground Railroad."

A local organization has expressed strong interest in developing the resources to tell this story. The Customs House at the Whirlpool Bridge is one possible location for such exhibits, and which could be part of a larger tour extending from Buffalo through Niagara Falls and on to St. Catharines.

(Old) Customs House restoration and reuse

B.14

One of Niagara Falls' lesser-known treasures is the former U.S. Customs House. The stone edifice at the Whirlpool Bridge is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was built in 1863 as the point of entry for Niagara Falls and is now vacant.

It presents obvious possibilities for renovation and reuse, including as a site for a new Amtrak railway station (see project E.4.), or as a place for interpretive exhibits perhaps on the Seaway Trail or Underground Railroad.

Niagara Arts and Cultural Center

B.15

The former Niagara Falls High School, built in 1924 and closed as a high school in 2000, is an important historic landmark and community asset. Located at the intersection of Pine Avenue and Portage Road, the building is minutes from the downtown tourist area and at the beginning of the city's "Little Italy" neighborhood. Its distinguished architecture, pleasant grounds, and gracious spaces make it an extraordinary resource for Niagara Falls.

Save Our Sites, Inc., a community-based grassroots organization in Niagara Falls, has mobilized to save the school and press for its regeneration as the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center. The anticipated program for the NACC includes performance, studio, and gallery space for visual and performing artists, as well as restaurants, shops, and other community uses.

The NACC offers an unusual opportunity, not only to provide for local arts and cultural activities, but to make a connection between the local Niagara Falls community and large numbers of international visitors to the Falls. The Niagara Arts and Cultural Center needs and deserves public support to save a valuable building and bring this program to fruition.



The bike and pedestrian trail will extend from city line to city line.

Upper River Recommended Projects

The upper Niagara River as it runs along the Niagara Falls waterfront is a broad and breathtaking expanse of water, its power veiled by an illusion of placidness. But the waterfront is sterile and cut off from city neighborhoods by industrial land and the Robert Moses Parkway.

The broad strategy for the upper river is to provide continuous access to the waterfront through completion of the pedestrian and bike trail; to improve the environment through plantings and naturalization; to mitigate the impact of the Parkway; and to expand the connections between the city and trails, recreational opportunities, interpretive sites, and the water itself.

Bike and pedestrian trail system

C.1

Implementation of the bike and pedestrian trail plan in the upper river area will involve construction of the trail from the Niagara Reservation to the east city line and beyond. A major trailhead is located at the Century Club site at the Grand Island Bridge and is addressed below. The entire trail would also connect the Reservation with the proposed RiverView Park, the Intake Promenade, the 53rd Street Docks, Griffon Park, other city neighborhood parks, elements of the Niagara Discovery Center, and beyond to Erie Canal and Erie County pedestrian facilities.

Naturalize Niagara River shoreline

C.2

The Upper River shoreline, as it exists today, is an artificial by-product of highway construction, without visual interest or natural function. Naturalization of the Upper River shoreline would improve the character of views and the quality of the waterfront environment through the introduction of native trees and plants.

Such plantings may be used to screen from view adjacent industrial facilities, but could also serve to highlight views of the Buffalo Avenue factories, as well as to frame views of the river.

SHORT
TERM



The Jade Partnership



The waterfront should be parkland not parkway.

The Urban Design Project/Jessica Jamroz



The Century Club site provides prime access to the waterfront.

These plantings would also improve habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife. Modification of the shoreline to provide current breaks and other "natural" features would improve fish habitat and increase sport fishing opportunities. Implementation of this element in the shorter term might involve participation by community groups or local youth organizations in volunteer planting projects.

LONG TERM

Reconfigure Parkway to "boulevard"

C.3

The Robert Moses Parkway should be reconfigured in boulevard-style from the Grand Island Bridge to Daly Boulevard in order to mitigate the negative impact of the highway on the waterfront environment, and to facilitate pedestrian access to the bike and pedestrian trail and to the river's edge.

Reconfiguration might include two or four lanes of traffic, separated by a planted median in either case, but would necessarily involve a reduction in speed limit, introduction of new intersections as noted below, with an option for the provision of roadside parking.

Preserve Century Club trailhead

C.4

The site of the former "Century Club" is a crucial location for the successful development and use of the waterfront pedestrian and bike trail and must be developed in a way consistent with preserving public waterfront access. The site is highly visible to northbound motorists on Interstate I-190 approaching the foot of the Grand Island Bridge. It should serve as gateway, announcement, and enticement to users of the trail.

This requirement is not necessarily in conflict with other proposals for the site, but any companion development should take into consideration the need to provide access to the trail and waterfront, services for cyclists, boaters, fishermen, pedestrians, and other users, and especially continuity for the trail itself and its operation and maintenance.

North Grand Island Bridge.



The Urban Design Project/Jessica Jamroz



Consideration should be given to replacing the RMP overpass, across Buffalo Avenue, with a city-style at-grade intersection to reduce parkway speeds, while increasing access to new land for park/recreationway development and safety.

Neighborhoods can connect to waterfront at several points along the upper river.

Connect City to Trail and Parkway at 53rd Street

C.5

Connect 53rd Street to the Robert Moses Parkway at a city-style at-grade intersection. This will create easy access to existing dock facilities from both the adjacent neighborhoods and the Parkway itself and create a new waterfront trailhead and fishing access point. At the same time, this will calm the flow of traffic on the reconfigured parkway.

Connect City to Trail and Parkway at Hyde Park Boulevard

C.6

Extend Hyde Park Boulevard to connect with the Robert Moses Parkway at a city-style at-grade intersection. This will provide access to the proposed Intake Park, discussed above, as well as create another new access point for the waterfront trail, and connect the trail to adjacent neighborhood streets. The intersection will also help slow traffic on the reduced parkway.

Connect City to Trail and Parkway at Portage Road

C.7

Extend (and turn) Portage Road to connect with the Robert Moses Parkway and waterfront trailhead at a new city-style at-grade intersection. This extension and intersection will provide new access between the trail and city neighborhoods and further calm traffic on the downgraded Parkway. It will also provide access for interpretive facilities at the Adams Plant (above) and to the proposed RiverView Park (below).



Conventional intersections can calm traffic on a new waterfront boulevard.



The upper river is an internationally recognized bird habitat.



Removing part of the Parkway can open up the downtown waterfront.

RiverView Park: birding area and overlook

C.8

One of the richest and most promising redevelopment sites on the upper river, ironically, is often referred to as the "spoils pile." The site is strategically located on the broad upper reach of the river, and it is large enough to accommodate an ambitious and varied program of recreation, education, historic interpretation, and visitor orientation.

This program should feature a proposal such as the Audubon Society/ Buffalo Ornithological Society's idea for The Bird Observatory, taking advantage of the Upper River's status as a world-class birding area. It can also accommodate historic interpretation of the Adams intake canal and "Old Stone Chimney" and interpretation of NYPA's working boat docks.

Recreational opportunities would be largely of a passive nature with facilities for picnicking and related activities. As a trailhead to the waterfront pedestrian and bikeway, it is a site capable of providing visitor orientation to the overall waterfront visitor experience.

The processes of vegetative succession have already gone a long way toward recreating the "spoils pile" as a natural area, an evolution that should be encouraged and maintained. Overall, this must be considered a high priority project. Necessary negotiations with the Power Authority, which owns the site, should be opened as soon as possible.

Remove Parkway from Daly Boulevard to Main Street

C.9

Given the reconfigured through-connections from the Robert Moses Parkway to Daly Boulevard and Rainbow Boulevard, it is possible to consider the outright removal of the Parkway from Daly Boulevard to Main Street.

This would allow for the conversion of the highway-style fly-over interchange at Daly Boulevard to an at-grade connection. More importantly, it will make land available for recreation, public access, green space, waterfront housing, small hotels, and bed and breakfast lodging.

This will further emphasize Daly Boulevard as a city gateway at the same time it ameliorates a major negative impact on the waterfront environment. Accomplishing this will require careful rationalizing of arrival routes, traveler orientation, and access to parking facilities.

State Park/ City Interface Recommended Projects

The Niagara Reservation is the most frequently visited state park in America, and well it deserves to be, for it provides access, not only to the great cataract, but also to the dramatic rapids and to other astounding views from Goat Island. But the distressed downtown area immediately adjacent is cut off from the park in many ways by traffic and an ill-designed urban environment.

The overall strategy for the interface between the Niagara Reservation and downtown Niagara Falls is to strengthen the connections between the two through landscaping, paving, and the redesign of both park and city elements, and to lay the foundations for expanded interpretive facilities and programming.

This strategy understands the physical and perceptual separation of the Niagara Reservation from the city center as a hindrance to the long-term development of economic activities in the downtown. We believe it is possible to bridge this divide by extending the park into the city, and by fostering a broader range of activities along the city-park edge.

SHORT TERM

Shorter-term projects have been selected for their likely immediate impact on the overall perception of the area, their low cost, and their feasibility, especially in terms of public control of sites and assets.

Create new pedestrian connections to the Niagara Reservation D.1

Recovery of the Niagara Reservation from commerce and industry was one of the great achievements of the 19th century. The 20th century, unfortunately, has seen the continuing isolation of the city from the park by highways and other infrastructure. The most immediate need in this area is to reestablish simple pedestrian connections from the city of Niagara Falls to the water's edge.

There are several opportunities for near term remedies. Several streets that run perpendicular to the Niagara River rapids could be opened for pedestrians and cyclists through to the park. Other direct connections can be made from downtown into the park nearer the brink of the falls. Generally, all streets downtown should be made more pedestrian friendly. Over the longer term, it is critical that more formal connections are established between downtown and the edge of the gorge downstream from the Rainbow Bridge.



The rapids should be a short walk from downtown.



Two way traffic will help calm Rainbow Boulevard.

The Urban Design Project/Jessica Iannoz

The Urban Design Project/Tamara Chenez/Marie Carone

The Urban Design Project/Tamara Chenev/Marie Carone



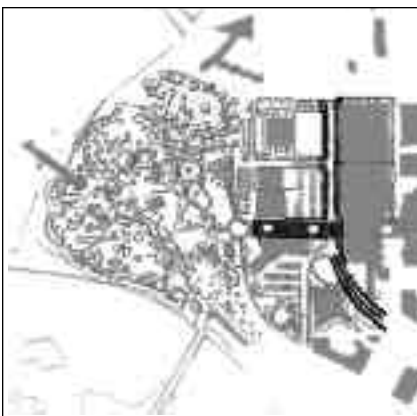
Vestigial section of parkway near downtown should be removed.

The Urban Design Project/Tamara Chenev/Marie Carone



A narrower Main Street will be more comfortable for pedestrians.

The Urban Design Project/Tamara Chenev/Marie Carone



Repave and replant the West Mall and Rainbow Boulevard.

Change Rainbow Boulevard North and South to two-way streets D.2

As a pair of multi-lane one-way thoroughfares, Rainbow Boulevards North and South create a wall of traffic between the park and the rest of downtown. To calm traffic, increase pedestrian safety, and to increase local access (as opposed to through traffic) both Rainbow Boulevard North and South should be converted to two-way traffic.

In the current configuration these streets threaten pedestrians with too-fast traffic and constrain the options of motorists at the same time. The result is a traffic pattern that tends to direct motorists through and out of the downtown. The shift to two-way traffic will mitigate all of these effects.

Remove Parkway section nearest the Niagara Reservation D.3

To bring the park farther into the city, and to encourage park visitors to patronize downtown businesses, the short section of Parkway that runs from the south end of the fragment of Main Street up to the bus loop near the State Park parking area should be removed. In place of the Parkway, create a pedestrian pathway wide enough to be used by emergency vehicles.

As a short-term measure, and to test the impact of this measure on traffic patterns, the Parkway could be left intact but altered using large planters to stop traffic and narrow the road for pedestrians.

Removal of this section of Parkway is likely to intensify and alter pedestrian traffic patterns from the city into the park. Design work should consider how best to connect pedestrian city paths and park paths, and more specifically, how to mitigate the possible barrier effect of the knoll at the park's edge.

Narrow Main Street fragment D.4

Like other sites in downtown Niagara Falls, The Turtle museum is somewhat isolated by the effects of heavy traffic. To increase space around The Turtle and make it easier to reach the building, the east end of the fragment of Main Street should be narrowed.

This will increase pedestrian comfort and help connect park and city, yet allow for continued diagonal parking on the south side of the hotel. This is also a measure that can be implemented in the short term using large planters.

Repave Rainbow Boulevard South for "traffic calming" D.5

Rainbow Boulevard South is forbidding to pedestrians in part because of the quality and design of paving materials. The expanse of blacktop says "cars come first; pedestrians beware." As a traffic-calming measure, and to increase pedestrian comfort, re-pave Rainbow Boulevard South with materials of distinctive color and/ or texture.



Landscaping on the West Mall should be improved.

This will announce to motorists the priority of persons on foot, and visually unify the area. The area re-paved should extend from Niagara Street to south of The Turtle, as well as down the Old Falls Street pedestrian mall, and between the mall and The Turtle.

Improve landscaping of West Mall

D.6

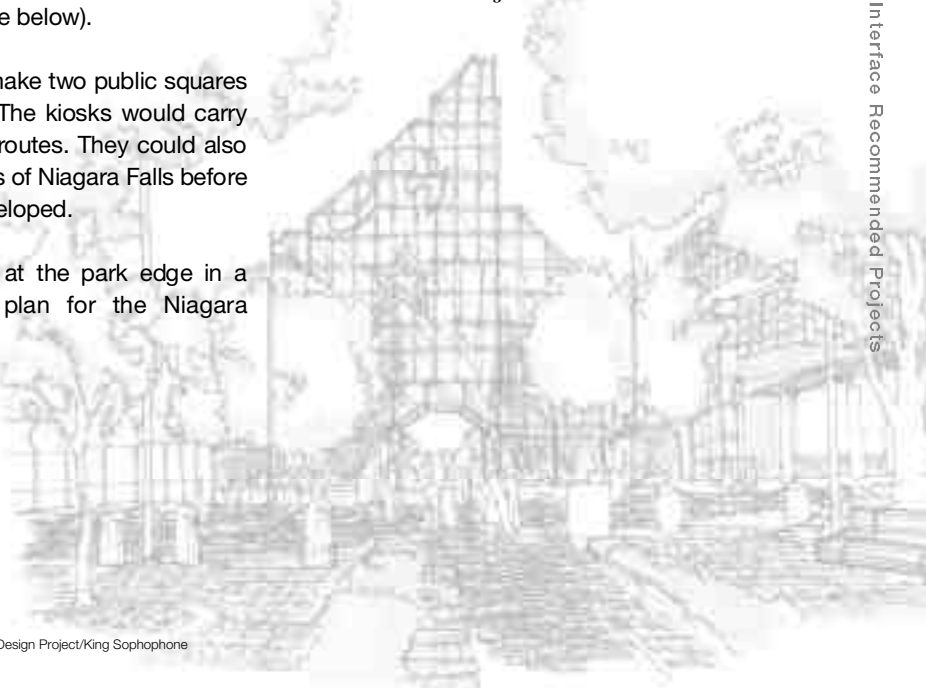
The West Mall provides a logical linkage between park and downtown but fails to meet its full potential. To further extend the park into the fabric of the city, and to provide a more formal entrance from the city into the park, re-landscape the pedestrian mall, beginning with work on the West Mall.

This would include replacing existing at-grade plantings (which restrict movement back and forth across the mall) with a more formal grid pattern of trees on pavement. The suggestion of a connection between the West Mall and the Wintergarden would be created by installation of a tree-planted median in Rainbow Boulevard South. This would calm traffic and increase pedestrian comfort and safety. It would also serve to funnel pedestrian traffic toward the western entrance of the Wintergarden (see below).

The West Mall tree pattern should be interrupted to make two public squares that would include seating and information kiosks. The kiosks would carry information about attractions, museums and tourist routes. They could also play an interim role in telling the many different stories of Niagara Falls before more elaborate interpretive infrastructure can be developed.

Finally, the redesigned West Mall would terminate at the park edge in a formal circle reminiscent of Olmsted's original plan for the Niagara Reservation.

The Wintergarden.





The Turtle is isolated by streets and parking.

Modify Wintergarden for visual and pedestrian access

D.7

As it exists now, the Wintergarden presents a physical and visual barrier between the park and elements of the downtown cityscape. To further connect the city and the park to each other, we suggest that the Wintergarden be opened up, at least during high tourist season when weather allows.

This might be accomplished by retrofitting lower level windows to open, as glass garage doors do in many commercial storefronts. When security needs or weather conditions require it, the doors could be closed. This would be a minimum treatment with more thorough approaches being possible. Improved programming of the Wintergarden, itself, would also improve the sense of access into and through the building.

Improve landscaping and pedestrian connections at The Turtle

D.8

Proposals to redevelop The Turtle as a major museum on Native American culture, possibly in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution, are worthy of support. Such efforts are more likely to succeed if the building can be better connected to adjacent pedestrian zones, the West Mall, and trails into the Niagara Reservation.

New paving patterns (discussed above) will contribute to achieving this goal. New plantings to help connect The Turtle back to the mall will help. So would creation of a more generous entrance facing Rainbow Mall South.

LONG TERM

Remove parking and restore Olmsted's "Upper Grove" D.9

The most important step in the restoration of Olmsted's original design for the park – and a crucial step in improving the environment of the park overall – would be to remove the existing parking lot and replace it with a replanted "Upper Grove."

This should be done, however, taking fully into consideration the importance of parking revenues for Office of Parks operations and of maintaining easy access to The Maid of the Mist. Negotiations toward an agreement between the Office of Parks and the City of Niagara Falls or others to share revenue for parking at a location outside of the park will be required.

This would allow most parking to be removed from the park, except for off-season parking, handicap-accessible spaces, operations and maintenance, and space for bus drop-off and people mover loading. A slight modification in the original design would allow the grove to be used as an amphitheater with a temporary stage such as the one used in Buffalo's Delaware Park for summer Shakespeare productions.

Build a new park building on the Olmsted inspiration D.10

If additional space for public amenities is required in the park, we strongly suggest a long, linear building to run along the northern edge of the Reservation. This would separate parkland from the Rainbow Bridge Plaza, creating a strong boundary to the park, and providing a barrier to noise and visual intrusions into the park.

This proposal is in the spirit of an original Olmsted idea for a building along the former Canal Street, also intended to shield the park from urban intrusions. In general, the park should be integrated with the city as much as possible, but not with the heavily trafficked bridge approach and inspections area.

Re-design/re-develop street level retail in buildings next to park D.11

As currently configured, many of the retail and commercial buildings adjacent to the park present a kind of impermeable wall to pedestrians and contribute to a hostile pedestrian environment. Where retail activities are already present, the City should work with building owners, particularly owners of the former Rainbow Center Mall, to redesign building facades and entrances to make these buildings more open, inviting, transparent and street-oriented. Where retail activities are absent, they should be encouraged, with a mix of goods and services pitched to existing and potential demand.



Moving parking out of the park can restore Olmsted's vision.



A new Olmsted building can complete the park's north edge.



New ground floor retail can bring the street alive.

The Urban Design Project/Maria Carone

Copyright Paul Rochelleau

The Urban Design Project/Jessica Jannoz

Redevelop buildings adjacent to park for higher quality**D.12**

Many of the buildings adjacent to the park (with the exception of the OxyChem building) are of low quality, image value, and intensity of use. The City should adopt a long-term strategy and policy to encourage property owners to redevelop these sites.

New structures should be of greater bulk-density (although not high-rise) and higher quality design and materials than those presently on those sites. With continued development of the local and visitor market, we assume that some of these projects will involve new and "higher and better" uses than currently exist. New urban design standards should be developed by the City to guide redevelopment.



The Urban Design Project/Maria Carone

Several sites along the park/city edge are ripe for redevelopment.

Continue linear park along Hydraulic Canal route

D.13

The recent development of a new linear park along Daly Boulevard has helped achieve the goal of bringing the park into the city. But the opportunity exists to extend the park and make a new cross-town connection between the upper river and the gorge rim trail going northbound. Starting from Main and Fourth Streets, and following generally the path of the old Hydraulic Canal (see project B.12), extend the linear park back to the Niagara Reservation.



The Jards Partnership

An artist's vision of ice on the Hydraulic Canal.



Folt-Albert Associates

*Trail along the gorge wall.*

Folt-Albert Associates

*The view is stunning from atop the gorge.*

Niagara River Gorge

Recommended Projects

The Niagara River gorge is one of the most spectacular landscapes anywhere. But, like other parts of the Niagara Falls waterfront, it is cut off from the city and its neighborhoods, and its value to residents and visitors alike is reduced. At the same time, it needs to be protected from those who do visit.

The overall strategy for the gorge area and lower river, like the other two regions of the strategy, is to improve connections between the city and the waterfront, to improve the overall physical environment of the gorge and gorge rim, to protect and restore gorge ecosystems for future generations, and to develop the means for telling the many compelling stories located there.

More specifically, the strategy is to eliminate the Robert Moses Parkway as a barrier between city and gorge, to improve pathways within the gorge, and to take advantage of the stories of hydroelectricity, civil engineering, industry, geology, natural history, and environment. In short, the strategy is to create a world-class linear park featuring the Niagara River gorge.

Gorge Trail System and Trailhead Improvements (low-bank)

E.1

The condition of existing trails in the Niagara River gorge varies widely, impacting the accessibility of the gorge environment and the safety of users. Where necessary, gorge trails should be repaired or rebuilt. Enjoyment of gorge trails and fishing platforms at the water's edge also depends on providing access and visitor services – each appropriate to the natural condition of the gorge – at trailheads along the way. These are discussed under other elements of this strategy.

"GorgeView" Hike & Bike Trail (high-bank)

E.2

Views from the top of the Niagara River gorge are spectacular in several directions and should be made more accessible to visitors and residents alike. A continuous system of hiking and biking trails along the gorge should be completed. Overlook facilities should be improved where appropriate. The end result should be a continuous open space system providing access from the city into and along the gorge.

Folt-Albert Associates



Reconfigure Parkway

E.3

The Robert Moses Parkway presents an especially difficult barrier between the gorge and the neighborhoods adjacent to it. The recent closure of the Parkway is an important step toward satisfying the public's expressed aspiration to be reconnected with its waterfront.

A longer-term solution to the issue requires a careful evaluation, not only of the provisional closure, but also a variety of possible alternatives. One of the most promising may be the most straightforward. North of the Rainbow Bridge, consider combining Whirlpool Street and the existing Parkway in a single boulevard configuration designed to allow the greatest park area. North of the city line, a redesign of the connection to Upper Mountain Road should be included in the evaluation.

It is crucial to remember that whatever option is adopted it allow connections between the gorge trailheads to and from adjoining neighborhoods via the GorgeView Hike & Bike Trail.

New Amtrak railroad station

E.4

Niagara Falls' current Amtrak passenger railroad station is a busy facility despite its isolation from the rest of the city (over 40,000 annual passengers). New facilities for rail passengers should be created in a location with proximity and visibility to Main Street and the waterfront tourist district, and in combination with appropriate tourist-related services. The proposed "Whirlpool Bridge" location will satisfy these goals while opening Niagara Falls to new cross-border markets that can dramatically increase ridership. The City's proposal will preserve the "Old Customs House," a significant historic resource, and create a new state-of-the-art, International Intermodal Transportation Facility to link rail, highway, and airline services with prime tourist and scenic areas. These will serve the city's transportation needs far into the 21st century.

Devil's Hole State Park naturalization and interpretation

E.5

Devil's Hole State Park is another popular site for visitors seeking access to the Niagara gorge, but significant modifications and improvements to the park and roadway infrastructure are needed to make the most of this resource. These should include a reduction in paving, reconfiguration of entrance conditions, and increase in natural areas.

Create an at-grade intersection on the Parkway there with Lewiston Road, to provide an enhanced entrance/gateway for the park itself, but more importantly to "calm" traffic as it enters the city. Remove the pedestrian walkover and replace it with an at-grade crosswalk. Consolidate the parking areas. Also, provide for interpretation of the historic "Devil's Hole Massacre."



The Parkway is now a barrier between city and waterfront.

Folt-Albert Associates



A new train station could serve tourists better.

The Urban Design Project/Jessica Jamroz



The gorge is a world apart.

Folt-Albert Associates

Niagara Falls Waterfront Strategy

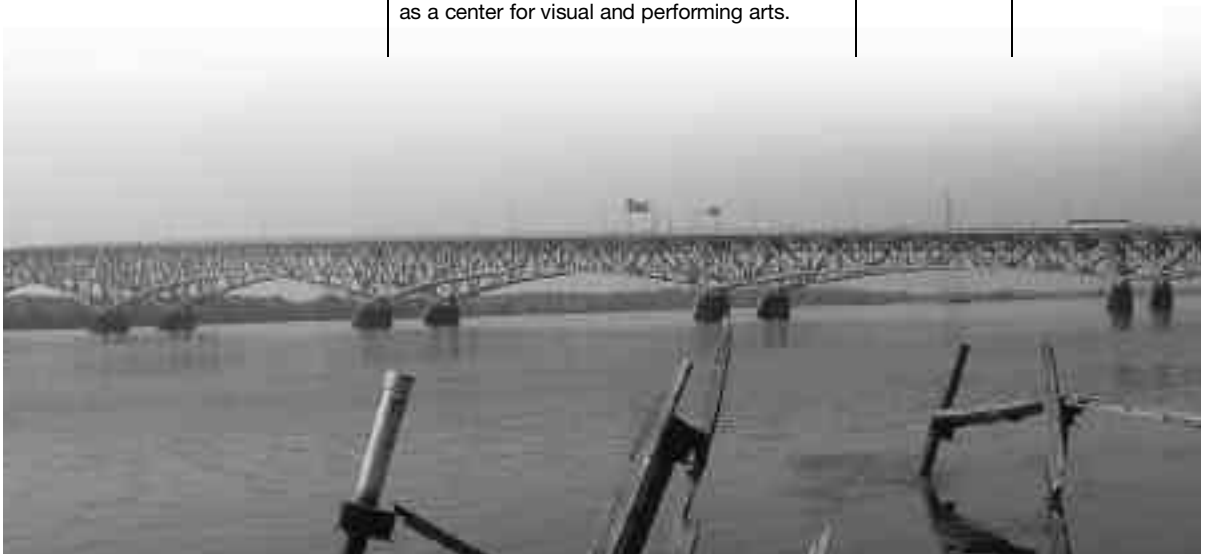
Table of Project Recommendations

Project name	Project description
A. CITY WIDE	
1. Complete waterfront bike and pedestrian trail	Provides for continuous pedestrian and bicycle access to the waterfront from Wheatfield town line, through downtown, and on to Lewiston, with frequent connections to and access from city neighborhoods.
2. Naturalize Niagara shoreline and gorge	Involves a range of plantings, depending on location, including trees and other vegetation to improve quality of environment and enhance scenic vistas.
3. Restructure Robert	Includes a range of treatments including lane and speed reduction, new perpendicular connections to city street grid, re-routing or removal.
4. Plan the Niagara Falls "Green Structure"	Survey, strategize, and plan for the recovery and use of old industrial lands, utility rights of way, old railroad rights of way, and other unused lands for future open space and recreational uses.

Project name	Project description	Control	Cost ¹
B. CELEBRATING NIAGARA FALLS' HERITAGE			
Create a World Class Visitor Attraction			
1. Create a City of Niagara Falls Family Museum	Develop facility to serve as point of entry and orientation to Niagara Gorge Discovery Center, as well as primary interpretive programs for city and park.	NYS/ Private	\$12,942,000 (b)
Develop a "Niagara Discovery Center"			
2. Frederick Law Olmsted Interpretive Center	Renovate either Visitors Center or use recently renovated historic Horse Stable complex on Goat Island to house interpretive programs celebrating the designs and philosophy of landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted.	NYSOPRHP	\$1,700,000 (b)
3. History of Civil Engineering exhibition	Install interpretive exhibits beneath the Rainbow Bridge celebrating bridge and transportation history. Provide lighting, signage, pathways.	NYSOPRHP/ Private	\$2,000,000 (b)
4. Niagara Gorge Discovery Center expansion and trailhead	Expand, update, and revitalize existing Schoellkopf museum structure, and provide for improved connections to gorge trail system.	NYSOPRHP/ Private	\$5,868,000 (b)
5. Early Hydroelectric Power and Industrial Heritage Museum	Construct new facility on roof of Schoellkopf plant discharge ports to house interpretive exhibits and access to views, trails. Install new elevator in existing shaft.	NYSOPRHP/ Private	\$12,250,000 (b)

¹Cost estimates for items with note (a) are rough estimates based on general concept. Estimates for (b) are detailed calculation of costs based on conceptual program. Estimates for items marked (d) are broad estimates of private sector investments in response to public policy. Estimates for (e) are extrapolated from previous estimates adjusted for inflation to 2005. A factor of 3% per year has been used for the years prior to 2000. For 2001 through 2005 the factor of 4% per year is used instead. Estimates marked (f) are working City of Niagara Falls estimates for projects under consideration. Estimates marked (g) are for detailed cost estimates based on formal planning studies.

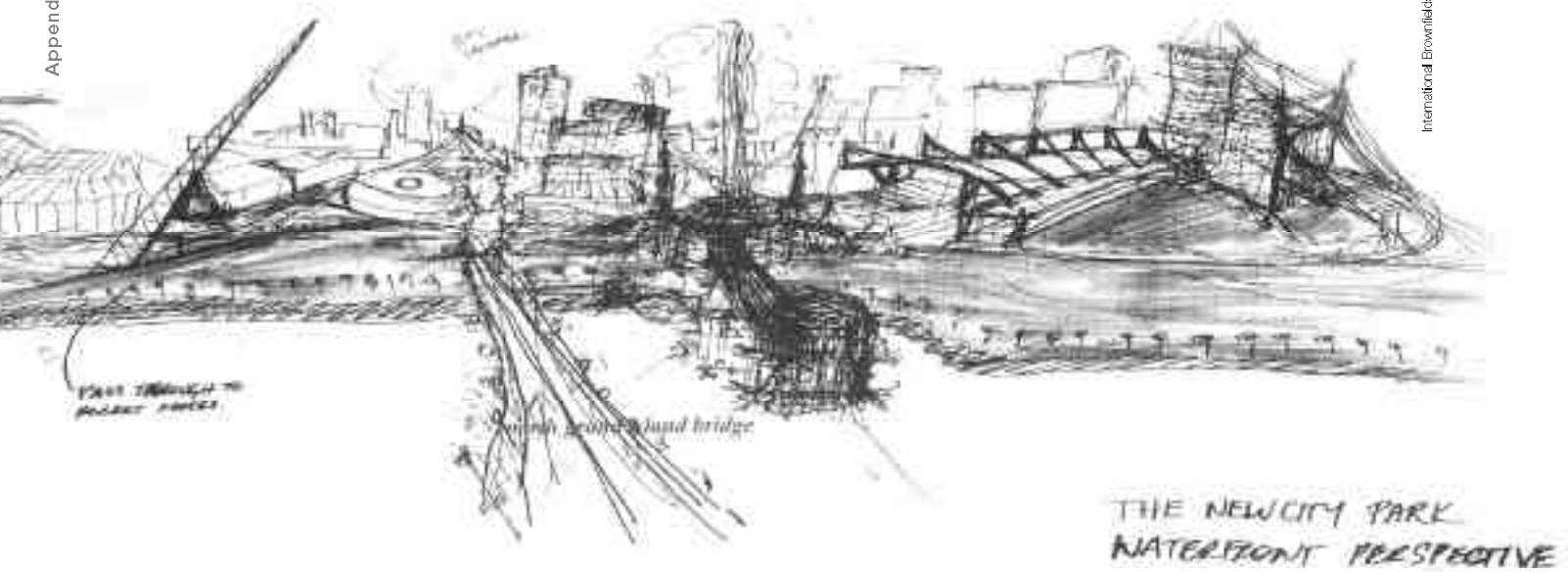
6. Natural History Interpretive Center and Visitor Amenity Center	Create facility to house interpretive exhibits on natural environment of Niagara Gorge, improve access to trails, and provide services to visitors.	NYSOPRHP/ Private	\$6,298,000 (b)
Develop other heritage interpretation sites			
7. Love Canal Education and Interpretation Center*	Development concept specifies 13,500 square foot museum facility with exhibits interpreting the story of the United States' most important toxic waste disaster and the movement that arose in response.	Private	\$6,285,000 (g)
8. Develop Griffon Park interpretive materials	Park redevelopment will include new play areas, picnic area, amphitheater, outdoor furniture, plantings, paving, etc. Cost estimate does not include anticipated expenditure on kiosks and signage to interpret historic events involving the explorer LaSalle and his ship, <i>The Griffon</i> .	City	\$425,500 (g)
9. Industrial heritage interpretation – Buffalo Avenue route	Incorporate Niagara Falls industrial heritage sites along Buffalo Avenue in overall heritage interpretation program.	City	\$150,000 (a)
10. Intake Park and Fort Schlosser interpretive venue	Create open space and interpretive programming for power intakes and site of historic Fort Schlosser, accessible by trail, Parkway, and perpendicular connection to Hyde Park Blvd.	NYPA	\$350,000 (a)
11. Adams Plant adaptive reuse	Purchase Adams Plant and site for preservation and reuse as part of "Power Route" historic interpretation. Cost does not include acquisition.	Private	\$2,000,000 (a)
12. Reveal and interpret the Hydraulic Canal	On state lands, mark, interpret and reveal the path of the former Hydraulic Canal to celebrate its role in power generation, transportation, and shaping urban form.	City/ NYSOPRHP	\$50,000 (a)
13. Underground Railroad interpretive site.	Establish site for interpretive exhibits on theme of Underground Railroad, perhaps in renovated U.S. Customs House.	City	\$150,000 (a)
14. Customs House restoration and reuse	Renovate National Register-listed structure for re-use as Amtrak Station (see E4), Underground Railroad interpretive exhibits (see B13 above) or other uses.	City	\$1,500,000 (f)
15. Niagara Arts & Cultural Center (NACC)	Renovate the former Niagara Falls High School building on Portage Road for use as a center for visual and performing arts.	SOS Inc./ Private	\$1,300,000 (g)



Project name	Project description	Control	Cost
C. UPPER RIVER			
Shorter term			
1. Upper River bike and pedestrian trail to east city line	Construct trail to connect the Reservation with the proposed Riverview and Intake Parks, 53rd Street docks, and Century Club trailhead, with possible extensions to Griffon Park and Erie County networks.	NYS DOT	\$2,542,709 (e)
2. Naturalize Niagara River shoreline	New trees and native plants to screen view of industrial facilities, but also to highlight views of the Buffalo Avenue plants, and frame views of the river. Short-term implementation might include community/ youth volunteer role.	NYPA	\$850,000 (a)
Longer term			
3. Reconfigure Parkway to "boulevard"	Reconfigure Parkway from Daly Blvd. to Grand Island Bridge as boulevard; allow on-street parking; reduce speed limit; replace interchanges with intersections.	NYSOPRHP	\$3,000,000 (a)
4. Preserve Century Club access point	Ensure that future development at this site allows for access to the trail, services for cyclists and pedestrians, and especially continuity for the trail itself.	City/ NYS	\$150,000 (a)
5. Connect City to trail and Parkway at 53rd Street	Connect 53rd Street to the Robert Moses Parkway at a city-style at-grade intersection to create access to existing dock facilities from adjacent neighborhoods and Parkway and create a new waterfront trailhead.	City/ NYPA	\$500,000 (a)
6. Connect City to trail and Parkway at Hyde Park Boulevard	Extend Hyde Park Boulevard to connect with the Robert Moses Parkway at a city-style at-grade intersection, provide access to Intake Park, create new waterfront trailhead, and connect to adjacent neighborhoods.	City/ NYPA	\$2,000,000 (a)
7. Connect City to Trail and Parkway at Portage Road	Extend (and turn) Portage Road to connect with Parkway and trail at new city-style at-grade intersection and provide access for interpretive facilities at the Adams Plant (above) and to the proposed Riverview Park (below).	NYPA	\$500,000 (a)
8. Riverview Park and Trail Head	Create a new park area on the "spoils pile," to provide birders with opportunities to view native and migrating species and visitors in general to overlook the river. This will mean allowing on-going process of vegetative succession to continue.	NYPA	[included in item C1] (e)
9. Remove Parkway from Daly Boulevard to Main Street	Remove all of the Robert Moses Parkway from Daly Boulevard Exit (Quay Street) to Main Street near the Falls and convert existing fly-over interchange to at-grade connection. This will make land available for recreation, open space or housing.	NYSOPRHP	\$3,500,000 (a)

Project name	Project description	Control	Cost
D. PARK/ CITY INTERFACE			
Short term projects			
1. Create at least three new pedestrian connections to the Niagara Reservation	Along the Niagara Rapids, near the brink of the Falls, and downstream from the Rainbow Bridge, create new pathways to connect neighborhoods and downtown to the waterfront.	NYSOPH	\$750,000 (e)
2. Change Rainbow Blvd. N & S to two-way streets.	Change one-way streets to two ways to reduce speeds, calm traffic, and improve pedestrian safety and comfort.	NYSOT	\$100,000 (a)
3. Remove Parkway section nearest the State Park	Eliminate two blocks of Robert Moses Parkway from Main Street to the Niagara Reservation entrance. For short term, close to traffic and use planters to narrow.	NYSOPRHP	\$1,000,000 (a)
4. Narrow Main Street fragment	Narrow the east end of the fragment of Main Street to increase pedestrian comfort, improve access to The Turtle, and allow diagonal parking on the south side of the hotel. Implement short term with planters.	City	\$75,000 (a)
5. Re-pave Rainbow Boulevard South for "traffic calming."	Re-pave Rainbow Boulevard South (From Niagara Street to south of The Turtle, down Old Falls Street pedestrian mall, and between the Mall and The Turtle) with materials of distinctive color and/or texture.	NYSOT/ City	\$500,000 (a)
6. Improve landscaping of West Mall	To better connect park and city, remove existing plantings and replace with formal grid of trees, leaving space for "public squares" with seating, informational kiosks and interpretive materials.	City	\$450,000 (a)
7. Modify Wintergarden for visual and pedestrian access	Redesign ground level windows – perhaps with garage-style doors or demountable panels – to allow pedestrians to see through and walk through building.	City	\$50,000 (a)
8. Improve landscaping and pedestrian connections at The Turtle	Provide new plantings, and a more generous southeast entrance, to improve connections between The Turtle and the Mall.	Private	\$450,000 (a)
Longer term projects			
9. Remove parking and restore Olmsted's "Upper Grove"	Given an agreement to share parking revenue with State Parks, relocate parking out of the Reservation and restore Olmsted's original design including the "Upper Grove."	NYSOPRHP	\$300,000 (a)
10. Build new park building on Olmsted inspiration	If needed, build new space for visitor amenities in a long, linear building to form barrier between park and bridge approach.	NYSOPRHP	\$2,500,000 (a)
11. Redesign/redevelop street level retail in buildings next to park	Work with adjacent building owners to make design of retail frontage more open, transparent, and inviting to pedestrians.	City/ Private	\$500,000 (a)
12. Redevelop buildings adjacent to park for higher quality	Adopt long-term strategy/policy to encourage property owners to redevelop sites at greater bulk-density and higher quality design and materials.	Private	\$50-100M (d)
13. Continue linear park along Hydraulic Canal route	On private lands, create design guidelines to extend the new linear park along Daly Boulevard west and north, generally along the route of the old Hydraulic Canal, to connect back to the Niagara Reservation north of the Rainbow Bridge.	City/ Private	\$250,000 (a)

Project name	Project description	Control	Cost
E. THE GORGE			
1. Gorge trail system and trailhead improvements	Repairs, reconstruction, or improvements to gorge trails and development of new trailhead facilities including vertical access.	NYSOPRHP/ NYPA	\$10,675,991 (e)
2. Gorge rim pathway	Construct a continuous bike and pedestrian pathway, improve or create overlook facilities, and create continuous open space amenity along the gorge rim.	NYSOPRHP/ NYPA	\$840,000 (e)
3. Reconfigure Parkway	Reconfigure Robert Moses Parkway to make connections to city street grid, and link to gorge rim trail. Consider short-term implementation through temporary closures.	NYSOPRHP/ NYPA	\$40,000,000 (e)
4. New Amtrak railroad station	Create new terminal facility at Whirlpool Bridge location to bring Amtrak services within more visible and convenient proximity of local tourism sites.	City	\$20,000,000 (f)
5. Devil's Hole State Park naturalization and interpretation	Create new intersection on Parkway at Lewiston Road and park entrance; remove pedestrian walkway; provide other park improvements.	NYSOPHR	[included in item 3] (e)
TOTAL	(not including private downtown redevelopment – item D12)		\$144,752,200



Analysis of Recent Plans for Niagara Falls

The Urban Design Project/Waterfront Regeneration Trust/Foit-Albert Associates

Date: 1988

Plan: Niagara Riverview Park and Trail

Auspices/consultant: Saratoga Associates for City of Niagara Falls

Key recommendations:

Phase I – bicycle/walking trail from Goat Island to LaSalle and the southern city line.
Phase II – activity node at NYPA “spoils” area. Includes berming, screening and planting along industrial sites. Estimated \$1.5 million in 1988.

Date: 1989

Plan: Niagara Gorge Hiking Trail

Auspices/consultant: Saratoga Associates for City of Niagara Falls and WNYEDC

Key recommendations:

Includes development of five “trail heads” and “loops” into the gorge between Prospect Point and Whirlpool Park (with existing connection to Devil’s Hole. Cost in 1989 was estimated at \$7.1 million with options for mechanical lifts at three sites adding \$11 million more. A very phaseable project.

Date: 1992

Plan: Niagara Waterfront Master Plan

Auspices/consultant: Sasaki Associates for City of Niagara Falls

Key recommendations:

Includes gorge trail system similar to proposed above; several alternatives for reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway as a “people mover” facility; alternatives included removing sections of parkway, linking parkway to city streets, slowing traffic, re-using for transit and pedestrian. Estimated cost in 1992, encompassing proposals made above, \$28 million.

Date: 1997

Plan: Citizen Visions for Niagara Falls

Auspices/consultant:

Waterfront Regeneration Trust for Niagara Falls Redevelopment Corp.

Key recommendations:

General recommendations include (1) reconnect city to waterfront, (2) develop “Niagara-in-the-park” concept, (3) improve downtown, (4) clean up environmental damage, (5) build tourism, and (6) move tourists and others better within the city.

Date: 1997

Plan: Griffon Park

Auspices/consultant: Peter J. Smith for City of Niagara Falls

Key recommendations:

(no document).



Date: 1998

Plan: A Developer Master Plan for Downtown Niagara Falls, New York

Auspices/consultant:

The Jerde Partnership for Niagara Falls Redevelopment Corporation

Key recommendations:

Expand the park experience (e.g. removal of sections of parkway and parking); repair the pedestrian fabric of downtown Niagara Falls (including streetscape standards, parking and people mover); create a new entertainment destination for the region (including gaming, retail, museums, etc.)

Date: n.d.

Plan: Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan

Auspices/consultant: City of Niagara Falls

Key recommendations:

Encompasses pedestrian-bike trail, gorge hiking trails, RMP revisions and other projects.

Date: 1999-2000

Plan: Quality Communities Demonstration Program

Auspices/consultant: City of Niagara Falls application to New York State

Key recommendations:

Would provide \$150,000 for planning greenway and larger "sustainable development strategy" and concept for "Niagara-in-the-Park system."

Date: current

Plan: Robert Moses Parkway removal

Auspices/consultant: Niagara Heritage Partnership

Key recommendations:

Citizen-led movement to remove more than five miles of Robert Moses Parkway and reconnect city to waterfront.

Date: future

Plan: Transportation and Community Systems Preservation Pilot (TCSP)

Auspices/consultant: Possibility for application to FHWA under TEA 21

Key recommendations:

Money available on a competitive basis to improve efficiency, reduce environmental impacts and future infrastructure needs, increase access to jobs, services and centers of trade, and to examine development patterns and identify strategies to shape private development and investment toward the broader goals.





Niagara Discovery Center

Expanding the experience of visitors and extending their stays in Niagara Falls requires a major new investment in educational and interpretive facilities in the City. Toward that end, we propose creation of a series of interrelated and linked museums, exhibits and attractions to be known as the Niagara Discovery Center.

Niagara Falls Family Museum

The point of entry and orientation to this system should be a City of Niagara Falls Family Museum to be located in a prime location at the downtown park-city edge. Exhibits within the Family Museum will help visitors begin to understand the geography of the park, the history of the place, and to orient them to other attractions in the vicinity. The museum should be designed and programmed to appeal to visitors of all ages and family status, as well as to visitors from around the world.

The Family Museum should introduce visitors to the many and various stories of Niagara Falls, its geography, culture, and history. But it should also let visitors know “what else is here.” A Family Museum should also be located and designed to mark a point of reception for visitors, stimulate active street life, and further connect the city with the park.

Frederick Law Olmsted Interpretive Center

One of the primary stories to tell is about the Niagara Reservation itself and the inspiration of Frederick Law Olmsted that helped create it. We propose the renovation of either the existing Visitor Center or the recently restored historic Horse Stable complex on Goat Island to accommodate a new Olmsted Interpretive Center. The center would explain how Olmsted’s philosophy and designs influenced, not only our experience and understanding of Niagara, but also the development of landscapes throughout the nation. Olmsted understood that visitors to Niagara were motivated by a wish “to be astonished” as well as to enjoy the “pensive contemplation” of distinctive beauty. In a renovated Visitor Center, the lower level exhibits area and theater would provide clear directional cues to the park, as well as interpretation of the Olmsted legacy.

PROJECT NARRATIVE AND PROGRAM SUMMARY

History of Civil Engineering exhibition

Niagara Falls has a rich history of civil engineering feats in the service of transportation, from early portages, to gorge railroads, and successive international bridge crossings. An interpretive exhibit beneath the abutment of the Rainbow Bridge could reveal this history for visitors at the same time it draws them from Prospect Point toward Gorgeview Park. Signage, lighting, pedestrian amenities, and exhibits would explain the history and encourage visitors to explore a variety of educational and discovery opportunities along the rim of The Gorge such as the remnants of historic bridge crossings.

Niagara Gorge Discovery Center and Trailhead

The geological history of Niagara Falls is already interpreted through the facilities of the Schoellkopf Geological Museum. The richness of this story and the interest of the public, however, suggest the need for the museum to be updated, expanded and revitalized. The current building has a magnificent view of the gorge and should be expanded at its current location. It also has great potential to serve as a trailhead for explorations of the gorge, itself. The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has recently announced such a proposal with the renovated and expanded museum to be renamed the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center.

Early Hydroelectric Power and Industrial Heritage Museum


The development of hydroelectric power in Niagara Falls is a story of world significance warranting a major investment in interpretive facilities and program. We propose creation of a new museum to be located on the concrete platform that was the roof of the discharge tunnels of the Schoellkopf hydroelectric power plant. The museum would provide space for exhibits on the early history of electric power; provide views of the gorge and the 200-foot-high stone wall which hides the water conduits of the plant; and offer new access to industrial heritage trails in the gorge by way of an elevator built into the original elevator shaft.

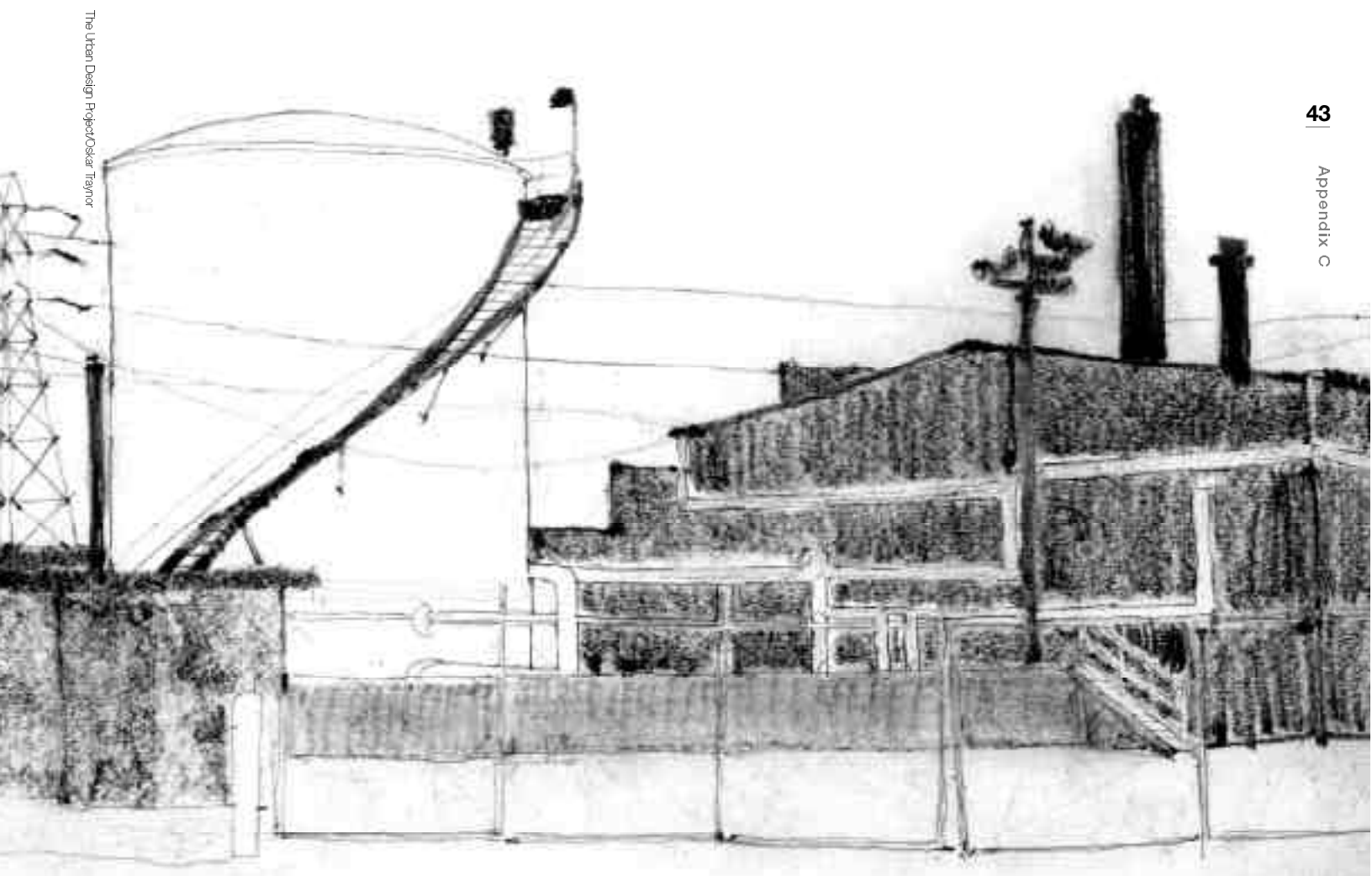
Natural History Interpretive Center and Visitor Amenity Center

Whirlpool and Devils Hole State Parks are both popular sites for visitors seeking nature and hiking experiences in the gorge. We suggest creation of a Natural History Interpretive and Visitor Amenity Center at Whirlpool State Park to facilitate and enhance these visits. The location already offers breathtaking vistas and provides physical access to gorge trails and fishing platforms. A visitor amenity center would provide restrooms and concessions, tourist information and interactive destination planning. A Natural History Interpretive Center would reveal for visitors cultural, environmental and historical aspects of the Niagara eco-region and offer information on the rare plant and animal species – especially birds – found in the gorge. The center would also serve as an additional trailhead for gorge hikers. Elevator access to the gorge at Whirlpool State Park should be provided.

Niagara Discover Center

Project Summary

	Project element	Estimated cost
	City of Niagara Falls Family Museum	\$12,942,000
	Frederick Law Olmsted Interpretive Center	\$1,700,000
	History of Civil Engineering exhibition	\$2,000,000
	Niagara Gorge Discovery Center and Trailhead	\$5,868,000
	Early Hydroelectric Power and Industrial Heritage Museum	\$12,250,000
	Natural History Interpretive Center and Visitor Amenity Center	\$6,298,000
	Directional Signage	\$150,000
	TOTAL	\$41,208,000



Niagara Discover Center

Program Summary

Description	Quantity	Unit Price	Total
Niagara Falls Family Museum			
New building	47,987 sf	\$215.00	\$10,317,205
Exhibits	15,000 sf	\$175.00	2,625,000
Total			\$12,942,000
Frederick Law Olmsted Interpretive Center			
Renovation of existing building	19,000 sf	\$50.00	\$950,000
Exhibits	5,000 sf	\$150.00	750,000
Total			\$1,700,000
History of Civil Engineering Exhibit			
New exterior exhibits, canopy, pavers	4,000 sf	\$125.00	\$500,000
Exhibits	3,000 sf	\$500.00	1,500,000
Total			\$2,000,000
Niagara Gorge Discovery Center and Trailhead			
Renovate existing building	4,019 sf	\$200.00	\$803,800
New building	13,881 sf	\$300.00	\$4,164,300
Exhibits	6,000 sf	\$150.00	900,000
Total			\$5,868,000
Early Hydroelectric Power & Industrial Heritage Museum			
New building	25,000 sf	\$300.00	\$7,650,000
Exhibits	10,000 sf	250.00	2,500,000
Passage from elevator	800 sf	500.00	400,000
Elevator 220-foot rise			250,000
Vestibules and corridor	800 sf	500.00	400,000
Performance/exhibit platform	14,000 sf	75.00	1,050,000
Total			\$12,250,000
Natural History Interpretive and Visitor Amenity Center			
New building	21,060 sf	\$250.00	\$5,265,000
Exhibits	5,900 sf	175.00	1,032,500
Total			\$6,298,000