

# Buffalo Avenue Heritage District Revitalization Strategy

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Prepared for:



USA Niagara  
Development  
Corporation



City of  
Niagara Falls

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100 YEARS



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BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

USA Niagara Development Corporation (USAN) and the City of Niagara Falls (the “City”) are supporting a collaborative effort to develop a strategic action program for the revitalization of the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District. One of the oldest neighborhoods in the city, the District exhibits a unique sense of place that is enhanced by its substantial collection of historic buildings, and its distinctive location between the Niagara Falls State Park (and Niagara River Upper Rapids) and downtown Niagara Falls.

Despite these assets, many neighborhood buildings have been demolished or have fallen into disrepair through neglect or lack of financial resources. Despite these conditions, a renewed sense of optimism has begun to emerge for better capitalizing on this unique setting. While fledgling, this trend has been spurred by two key ongoing efforts—the recognition of the importance of Buffalo Avenue in the City’s new Comprehensive Plan and concrete efforts to reconfigure the Robert Moses Parkway south segment to reconnect the District to its historic relationship with the upper Niagara River.

To build upon these efforts, this *Buffalo Avenue Heritage District Revitalization Strategy* was initiated to identify specific actions that would help facilitate and foster investment in the District. Serving as the foundation to these actions are four project

memorandums that were prepared early in the planning process, and include the following:

- Inventory and Mapping;
- Conditions Assessment;
- Market Assessment; and
- Opportunities and Constraints.

The knowledge gained by gathering information for these memos, including maps, data, and stakeholder sentiment and perceptions, established a baseline



for understanding the fundamental issues facing the District, as well as its opportunities. Ultimately, through the process of preparing these memos, a vision for the District emerged, and the necessary actions to achieving this potential became clear.

Three distinct topic areas became the focus of this Revitalization Strategy, and were utilized as the organizing framework of this document. These topic areas include:

**DISTRICT CHARACTER AND AMBIENCE**—improving District appearance, preserving existing structures, and activating the District;

**STREETSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS**—enhancing the public realm, reinforcing the heritage theme, and increasing District access; and

**DEVELOPMENT PATTERN**—introducing new uses, improving investment climate, and respecting development context.

In the *Elements of the Vision* section of this document, suggested approaches to enhancing topic area components are explained. This in-depth discussion provides the reasoning and justification for the specific action items in the subsequent *Realizing the Vision* section. Comparatively short, this section touches on the challenges facing the topic areas, highlights key strategies to overcoming the challenges, and indicates expected

# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

outcomes of implemented strategies. Also included are 30 specific action items for each of the three topic areas—for a total of 90 recommendations—to revitalize the District. In general, the three most important actions for District revitalization are:

- Preserving and reinforcing the heritage of the District and its historical development pattern;
- Organizing neighborhood stakeholders to refine the vision and to participate in the revitalization process; and
- Improving the investment climate by enhancing the delivery of public services and creating targeted financial incentive programs.

In the end, the District can realize its potential as a safe, stable, 24/7 neighborhood by overcoming perceived constraints and building on its assets. The ideas and recommendations herein are intended to enhance the District's identity and well being by adding intrinsic historical and associative value that attracts reinvestment.

With rehabilitated and new structures providing home to a range of new uses and activities, the District would once again become a premiere waterfront neighborhood for residents, as well as an important added attraction in downtown Niagara Falls for visitors.





# INTRODUCTION

Buffalo Avenue is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the City of Niagara Falls. Generally bounded by Rainbow Boulevard, John B. Daly Boulevard, Old Main Street and the Niagara Falls State Park, the area is rich in history. There is a substantial collection of historic homes, some of which are listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The charm and walkability of the neighborhood is further enhanced by its unique location between the Niagara Falls State Park (the “Park”)—which is adjacent to the Upper Rapids of the Niagara River (the “River”)—and downtown Niagara Falls.

The *City of Niagara Falls Strategic Master Plan* identified Buffalo Avenue as a key revitalization opportunity for downtown Niagara Falls. The plan recommended establishing areas around Buffalo Avenue as a heritage district. To implement this concept, USA Niagara Development Corporation (“USAN”) and the City of Niagara Falls (the “City”) collaborated to develop this strategic action program for the purposes of formalizing and revitalizing the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District (the “District”). Recognizing the opportunities presented by the unique characteristics of this area, coupled with opportunities presented through current plans to reconfigure the Robert Moses Parkway to reconnect to its

historic riverfront, a key component of this Revitalization Strategy is the development and branding of a heritage-based theme that is envisioned as a primary tool for rejuvenating the District.

Specifically, the vision for the District reflects its unique location and heritage, and is based on the District as a:

- **“PARK” NEIGHBORHOOD**– the District should be considered an extension of the Park, and serve as a transitional connection to the downtown area;
- **HISTORIC RESOURCE**– remnants from the District’s significant industrialist era should be celebrated through strategic public and private investments;
- Setting for **UNIQUE DEVELOPMENT**– future development should reinforce the eclectic mix of quality historical structures, and spur a range of uses and activities;
- **DESTINATION**– improved physical and visual linkages should help promote the District as an additional node within the larger regional tourism network; and
- **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY**– the District should exhibit sustainable values and practices through the promotion of reuse/rehabilitation, where possible, green building technology and sound economic development.



# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

## WHY BUFFALO AVENUE? ITS HERITAGE

Heritage stems from identifiable, important resources and stories of broad interest that help foster a sense of continuity with the past. The heritage that survives time, including both physical artifacts and intangible attributes, serves as a way for people to identify with authentic parts of human history. Heritage is a resource, not immediately visible that needs to be uncovered, preserved, protected, and upheld. The interpretation of local heritage helps to form a unique identity and a strong sense of place by adding intrinsic historical and associative value.

Historical neighborhoods are important to the study of American history because they provide a concrete basis that can validate stories about how we once lived. Authentic places can also substantiate memories and draw people in, giving them a literal way of touching the past. For these reasons, a well-preserved District can attract visitors from vast places who seek knowledge about American life.

The District's distinctive history and geography boast natural and cultural heritage that could serve as a catalyst for enhancing the neighborhood's well-being. For this reason, it is important to convey neighborhood heritage in a way that helps to form an understanding of the historical significance and the changes that occurred in the District over time.

The District has been endowed with a dynamic history that begs to be shared amongst residents, property owners, local businesses and visitors. The richness of the District's heritage encompasses its development and settlement as a residential and industrial community. The neighborhood began to flourish during the late 1800s when the advent of cheap electrical power



Source: *In Niagara Falls Volume II*

spurred industrial growth throughout the City. During this time the neighborhood was one of the most prosperous areas of Niagara Falls.

Many leading families of large industries settled here, drawn by the dramatic views of the Niagara River. Because the District developed over a 100-year span, the mansions comprised a wide range of architectural styles of grand scale, form and vintage.

Henry Perky is of particular significance since he settled into his

stately home on Buffalo Avenue across the street from his Shredded Wheat factory. This unique relationship between residential and industrial land uses gave the neighborhood a remarkable identity, and is factored into this Revitalization Strategy.

With a slightly broader focus, other prominent people influenced the shape of areas adjacent to the District. For example, Frederick Law Olmsted, an influential American landscape architect, shared his passion for the area by designing the Nation's first state park, the Niagara Reservation.

These are two of the stories to be told: Buffalo Avenue is the venue. Because of its location and rich history, the District holds tremendous potential for historical interpretation and heritage programming.

The vision for the District aims to reconstruct the built form while preserving and drawing inspiration from the existing "urban fabric" - relationships among buildings, streets, and other built forms that define the landscape. The stewardship and interpretation of historic resources can make apparent the District's identity. Awareness of these elements is critical to the District's ability to command recognition and shape the perceptions of residents, visitors and investors.

## PURPOSE

With its prime location and rich history, the District holds tremendous and unique redevelopment potential in a way that differs from conventional tourist offerings downtown. In order to realize this potential, the District needs to overcome perceived constraints and build on a range of opportunities. Accordingly, this Revitalization Strategy focuses on making the most of opportunities to enhance the traditional urban fabric of the neighborhood and to improve its marketability as an attractive destination for residents and visitors.

Accordingly, a goal of this plan is to identify specific strategies and actions that promote a coherent, uniform, and pedestrian-friendly environment—one where heritage is celebrated and context-sensitive development occurs. This Revitalization Strategy is based on the following objectives:

- Recommending public infrastructure improvements to enhance the public realm and to spur private investment;

- Creating urban design guidelines to foster appropriate in-fill development and adaptive reuse of existing structures; and
- Recommending incentives to encourage development consistent with the City's proposed zoning ordinance.

This Revitalization Strategy is a significant first step to defining the future of the District. Having specific action items is essential for successfully achieving the goal of rejuvenating this neighborhood.

In view of that, all redevelopment proposals will be judged against the policies in this document. They will provide certainty for existing residents and new investors, and will speed up approval and construction of appropriate building types. In turn, they will discourage and quickly expose inappropriate ones. Collectively, these policies will be a powerful tool for attracting public and private investment and marketing the District.

*A key objective of this plan is to identify specific strategies and actions that promote a coherent, uniform, and pedestrian-friendly environment where heritage is celebrated and contextual sensitive development occurs.*

# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### Inviting

The District and its amenities are an asset that belongs to the entire region and beyond. All public and private spaces should be inviting and should contribute to the District's sense of place. The District should serve as a seamless, welcoming transition between the different downtown, State Park environments and the upper Niagara Riverfront. The District should be promoted as a tranquil destination, particularly for pedestrians.

Sharing the District's history and success should be executed in a way that attracts residents and invites visitors to the District.

A successful, inviting District is one that remains:

- Identifiable;
- Visually interesting;
- Alive year-round; and
- Family-oriented.



This Revitalization Strategy has been developed in accordance with principles that reflect goals and objectives. As such, the District should be described as:

### Attractive

Public and private investment should enhance, reinforce and create distinctive and memorable places within the District. Buildings and landscapes should be visually appealing to residents, visitors and potential investors.

Excellence in design of the neighborhood, individual buildings, transportation elements, public open space, and amenities should reflect sensitivity to massing, scale, and density. They should also take into consideration the relationships among buildings, open spaces, and the River. Designs should incorporate harmonious color, texture and material, in addition to complementary styles of architecture, hardscapes, landscapes, and signage.

Elements within the District should be:

- Cohesive;
- Well-maintained; and
- Clean.



### Historic

Opportunity to celebrate the local heritage should be encouraged wherever possible. A renewed celebration of District heritage should promote a strong connection to place.

Interpretive elements within the District should foster a sense of continuity with the past. New design should carefully consider the existing historic character and complement existing architectural style.

Eligibility for national and local historic recognition should be explored to preserve and protect the integrity of buildings that contribute to the historic character of the District.

The heritage of the District should be:

- Protected;
- Supported;
- Interpreted; and
- Celebrated.



# REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

## Connected

The District should serve as a junction to the many natural, cultural, and tourism assets within the downtown area, and link these resources together.

Nodes and connections should be serviced by varied transportation choices. Public transit as well as roads and trails should be safe and accessible by all, including the disabled, children and older adults.

There should be a human connection to the built environment and the upper Niagara Riverfront. District design elements should all reflect careful attention to pedestrian scale and focus on sensitive connections from the core of downtown to the District, and the District to the Riverfront.

Nodes and connections should be:

- Well-defined;
- Accessible;
- Safe;
- Well-lit; and
- Enjoyable.



## Diverse

Diversity should be promoted in every sense - varied landscapes, habitats, uses, programs, and experiences - to provide greater opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Fostering the creation of new uses and activities would contribute to the unique character of the District's distinct heritage.

Also, stewardship should be shared among individuals, organizations, business owners and public entities to achieve a healthy, vibrant and accessible District. A vested interest among stakeholders would improve maintenance and safety by having more "eyes on the street".

The neighborhood should be:

- Cared for;
- Safe;
- Useable; and
- Self-Supporting.



## Green

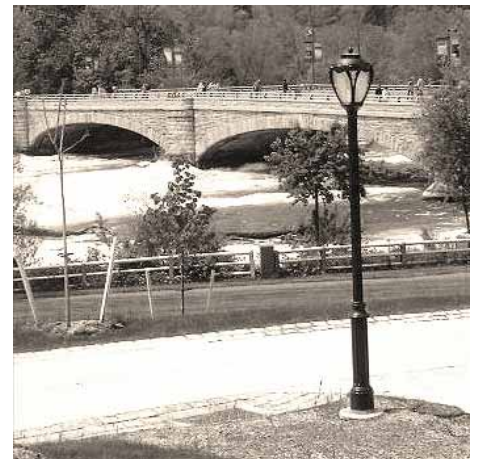
Natural features and topography should form a "green infrastructure" for the District that is supported by healthy trees, diverse landscapes, lush lawns, bountiful gardens, and inviting open spaces and parkland.

Landscaping and open spaces—in both public and private places—should enhance a visitor's experience within the District.

Existing vistas of the River and public parkland should be maintained and enhanced. Density and design of new structures should not create a visual barrier to the River or open spaces.

Natural features that enhance the experience of the District should be:

- Sustained;
- Inspiring;
- Functional; and
- Augmented.



## ISSUES FACING THE DISTRICT

Initial efforts to develop this Revitalization Strategy involved documenting existing physical conditions of the District and perceptions of residents, business people, and various agency officials on the potential roots of existing challenges and opportunities of the District. The following is a summary of various recurring issues that emerged from this documentation; these are presented in more detail in Appendices B, C, D, and E, which are included in Volume II of this document.

### EXISTING “PUBLIC REALM” INFRASTRUCTURE

**ROBERT MOSES PARKWAY SOUTH SEGMENT** There is arguably no infrastructure facility that more effects the District than the current alignment of the Robert Moses Parkway, which separates the District—both physically and in terms of perceptions—from its historic relationship to the Upper Niagara River. Completed in 1961, this four-lane expressway (since reconfigured to utilize only half of its highway lanes) is situated on an earthen embankment that fully cuts off access and views to the water from the District.

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, which owns the highway, is currently undertaking preliminary design to reconfigure the road to emulate the historic features of Olmsted’s design of the “Riverway”. While specific design features are currently being publicly vetted, the overall effect of such a

project would be to reconnect the District to the River.

**STREETSCAPE CONDITIONS IN THE DISTRICT** The features of the existing streetscape (e.g., curbs, sidewalks, lighting, crosswalks, etc.) exhibit deterioration that detracts from positive perceptions of the District. While some past efforts—such as installing period street lighting—have attempted to improve these conditions, overall the District lacks a sense of cleanliness and safety. In turn, opportunities to use streetscape elements to enhance continuity and sense of place as a neighborhood have not been undertaken.

**ALLEYS** While the District’s public alley system is considered an asset that could better permit parking and service access that have fewer visual impacts upon the street, the current condition and maintenance of these alleys is a problem. In some cases, overgrowth of vegetation and lack of light have created hidden areas that facilitate illicit activities such as dumping and crime.

### LAND USE & ZONING

**EXISTING ZONING CLASSIFICATIONS** The District’s primary zoning classifications are DCD: Downtown Commercial District (along Rainbow Boulevard) and NPD: Negotiated Planned Development – Residential (for the balance of the District) has caused confusion on what is actually permitted and intended to be encouraged in the District.

In particular, the NPD

classification—generally structured to permit multi-acre planned unit developments—does not match the existing character of small-lot, residential-scaled development in the District. While the City’s current planning policies speak to build upon this pattern of use of these structures and similar infill for housing, professional offices, B&B/inns, and heritage-inspired retail uses, the NPD zoning classification does not permit these types of development.

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VARIOUS TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT** In the last three decades a number of intrusions have occurred into the District’s primary development pattern. These have included the construction of mid- and high-rise structures such as the Parkway Condominiums, the Fallside Hotel, and the Holiday Inn. In turn, a number of surface parking lots have been constructed, both associated with these uses and public facilities.

These uses conflict in terms of scale, design, and associated street-level activity to the historic pattern/rhythm of development in the District. While relatively latent now, the District could experience development pressure in the future to allow for similar high-rise development which would further impair the character of the District.

**REAL ESTATE SPECULATION** Similar to other areas of downtown Niagara Falls, the District has been subject to of real estate speculation, often by out-of-town and international interests. These entities seek profit

by purchasing properties and holding them indefinitely in hopes that other developers or public agencies will need to acquire them at a premium to undertake projects.

In some cases, speculators will raze all existing structures to reduce their property tax liability during their holding period. This has resulted in large swaths of the District being vacant, creating “dead-spots” in the landscape that diminish perceptions of the District.

## BUILDING CONDITIONS

Of 75 properties surveyed in the District, most were found to be in “fair” condition, indicating that most of the exterior building features required moderate levels of repair, but if left unattended, could develop into major problems.

Most of the properties surveyed required extensive work in repairing “finishes” (painting, trim work, step repair, etc.) and rehabilitation of projections (porches, overhangs, etc.) and gutter/roof systems. Because of their visibility, these types of deficiencies tend to contribute more to negative perceptions by observers of the District.

## PERCEPTIONS OF DISTRICT

While there is a general sense of optimism regarding the long-term future of Niagara Falls, residents/business people in the District recognize that substantial improvements are required to realize a vision of improvement.

## PERMITTING & CODE ENFORCEMENT

Similar to many urban areas, the issue of building permits and approvals can be complicated as it relates to the District. Because business owners are usually novices to the process, City officials perceive that they often have difficulty fully understanding what needs to be done to getting get approvals for improvements/business start-ups. Conversely, business owners often portray the City as slow or less than responsive to small business needs; sometimes going out of their way to make it harder than it needs to be. Experience in many cities usually confirms that the true cause of such problems lies somewhere in the middle.

Regardless of the cause, improving the relationship and efficiency in the delivery of permit and code enforcement efforts—both in the District and Citywide—would likely prove to benefit revitalization.

## SOCIOECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

CHALLENGES TO MAINTAINING PROPERTIES. A number of socioeconomic trends have become evident that influence the ability to maintain properties in the District:

- The District has begun to become slightly more “renter” occupied than owner occupied; and
- The age characteristics of the District’s residency is become more predominated by older, fixed-income households.

Absent an influx of new residents,

these trends will tend to make it more financially challenging for properties to be maintained.

ACCESS TO EXISTING INCENTIVE/ ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS Most residents and business owners have a difficulty accessing City and USAN incentive programs for undertaking capital improvements to their properties. This is primarily because these programs are structured for more “Main-Street style” commercial assistance, and have minimum investment thresholds to participate (e.g., USAN grant programs require a minimum project of \$25,000 to be able to receive assistance). Investment capacity/needs are often more modest in the District, yet no less important to maintaining or starting a new business that will contribute to the economic setting downtown.

## COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Currently, there is no formal means for residents and business people in the Buffalo Avenue District to organize, however other groups (e.g., downtown business association, tourism groups, etc.) have geographic jurisdictions that often include the District. While another formal, incorporated community organization may not necessarily need to be established, other avenues of informal organization (block club, subcommittee of downtown association) could prove to help the District act and speak as one voice and be more effective in achieving their improvement objectives.

# THE VISION

Developing the envisioned physical form was an evolutionary process, as illustrated in the early drafts of the plan shown below. Yet, the overall vision for the District was clear: to preserve and enhance the historical built form along Buffalo Avenue and direct higher density development to Rainbow Boulevard.

Accordingly, this vision celebrates the District's distinctive heritage by calling for the preservation and adaptive reuse of the remaining traditional urban fabric which serves as a backdrop for historical references. Also, this vision provides substantial development and investment opportunities for economic expansion within the District.

While the street grid would be largely maintained in its current configuration, the proposed redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway would restore viewsheds to the River, thereby increasing development potential of the District. The Illustrative Site Plan on the following page depicts how the District could appear with new, contextually sensitive investment and development in this vision. Gray buildings indicate an existing structure to remain, orange buildings suggest new, infill construction. Clearly, this Revitalization Strategy calls for substantial new construction with some demolition to make way for new structures. However, the bulk of new construction would occur on land that is currently vacant.

Early conceptual District diagram



Refined District vision

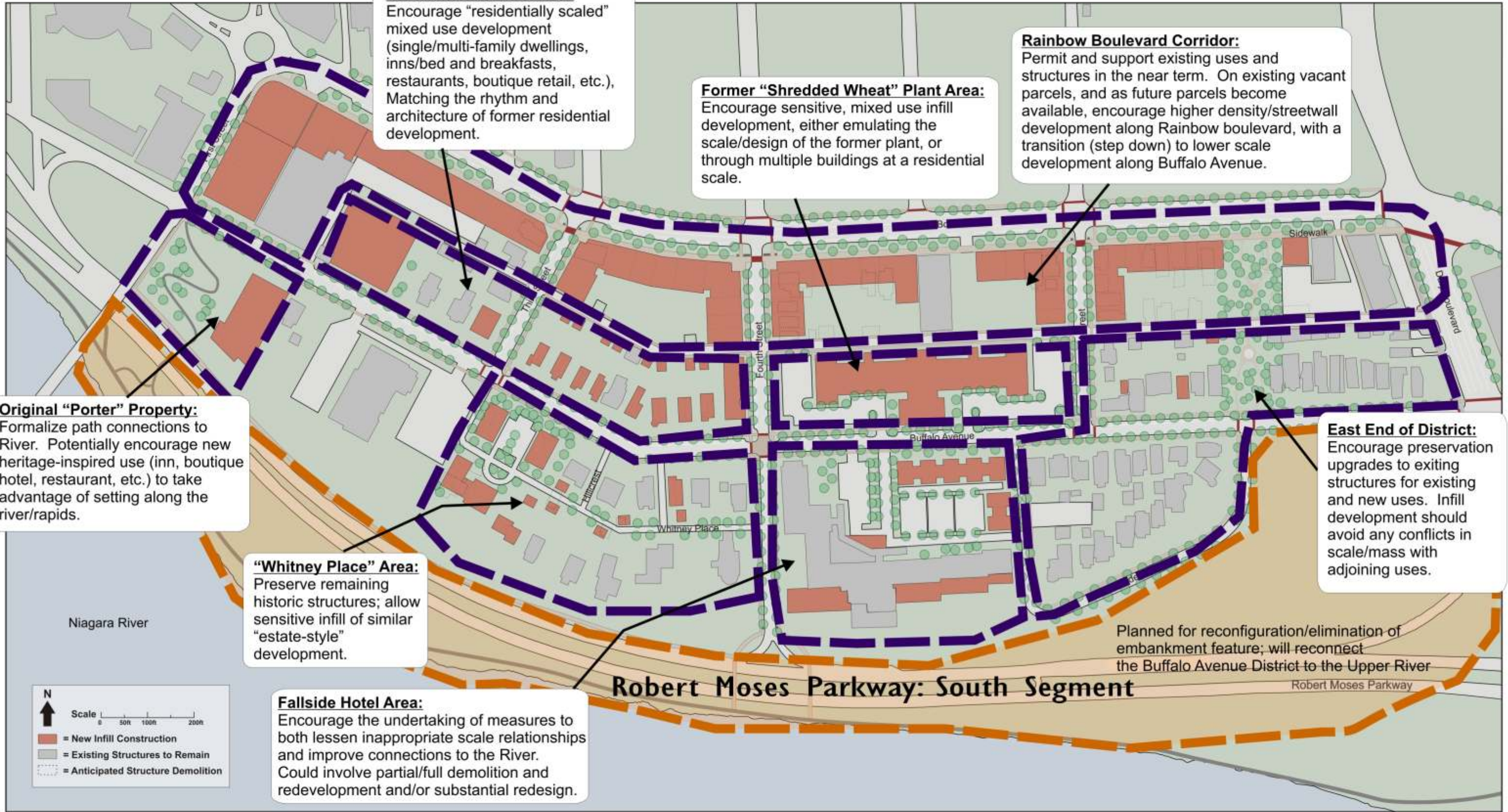


It is important to note that form and density of the orange structures are not the same throughout the District. Rainbow Boulevard is envisioned to house multi-story structures with high densities that would be more commercial-oriented than Buffalo Avenue. They would correspond to adjoining downtown developments by serving as a transition point. Buffalo Avenue would maintain and enhance its residential character with infill development of similar form and scale, that corresponds to existing structures, and preserves views to the River. In addition, there could be medium-sized developments (e.g. 3-story apartment buildings), that would be required to follow stringent design considerations to ensure they contribute positively to the District's character.

It is also important to state that this is a long-term vision, and that full build-out will depend on market conditions. Moreover, this is not a construction plan, but rather a graphic illustrating the principles of the vision. This vision is introduced early in the document to acquaint readers with the long-term vision, i.e. what we are working towards. The subsequent *Elements of the Vision* describes individual components of the plan that help achieve the vision, and includes the following subsections: *District Character and Ambience*, *Streetscape Characteristics*, and *Development Pattern*.



**20-Year Illustrative Diagram**



**Partially & Fully Vacant Parcels-  
Third and Fourth Streets:**  
Encourage “residentially scaled” mixed use development (single/multi-family dwellings, inns/bed and breakfasts, restaurants, boutique retail, etc.), Matching the rhythm and architecture of former residential development.

**Former “Shredded Wheat” Plant Area:**  
Encourage sensitive, mixed use infill development, either emulating the scale/design of the former plant, or through multiple buildings at a residential scale.

**Rainbow Boulevard Corridor:**  
Permit and support existing uses and structures in the near term. On existing vacant parcels, and as future parcels become available, encourage higher density/streetwall development along Rainbow boulevard, with a transition (step down) to lower scale development along Buffalo Avenue.

**Original “Porter” Property:**  
Formalize path connections to River. Potentially encourage new heritage-inspired use (inn, boutique hotel, restaurant, etc.) to take advantage of setting along the river/rapids.

**“Whitney Place” Area:**  
Preserve remaining historic structures; allow sensitive infill of similar “estate-style” development.

**East End of District:**  
Encourage preservation upgrades to exiting structures for existing and new uses. Infill development should avoid any conflicts in scale/mass with adjoining uses.

**Fallside Hotel Area:**  
Encourage the undertaking of measures to both lessen inappropriate scale relationships and improve connections to the River. Could involve partial/full demolition and redevelopment and/or substantial redesign.

**Robert Moses Parkway: South Segment**

Planned for reconfiguration/elimination of embankment feature; will reconnect the Buffalo Avenue District to the Upper River

N  
 Scale 0 50ft 100ft 200ft  
 = New Infill Construction  
 = Existing Structures to Remain  
 = Anticipated Structure Demolition

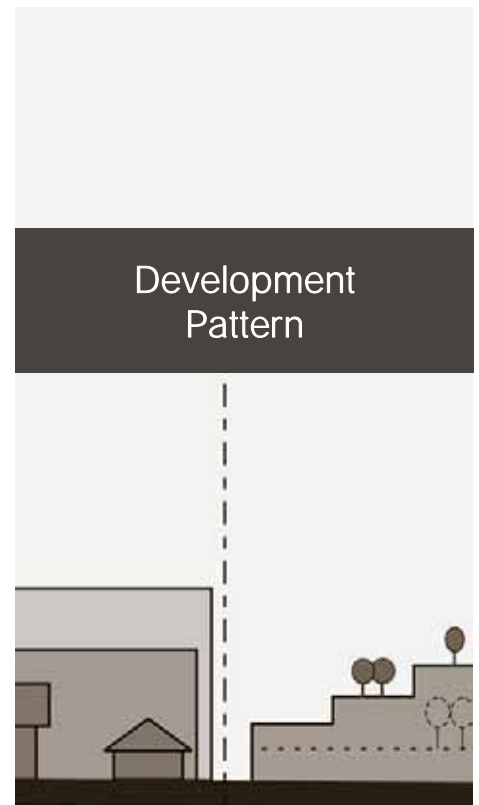
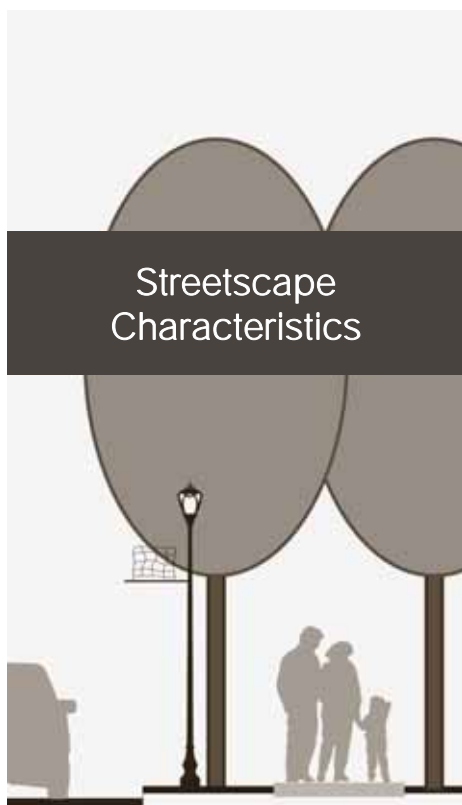
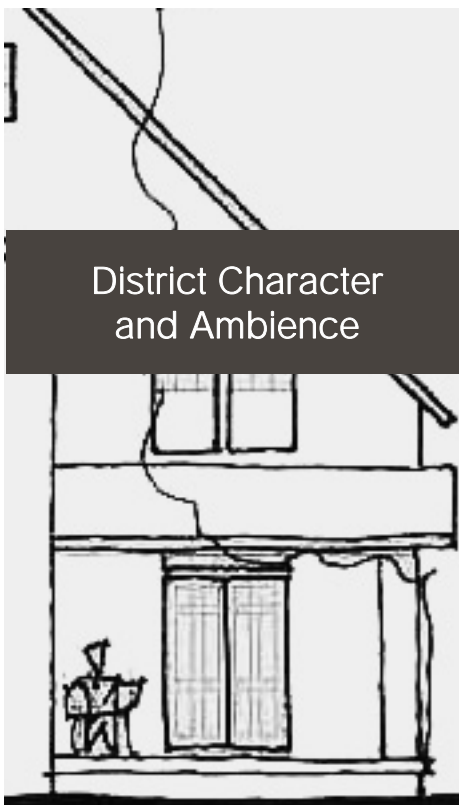
The long-term vision for the District is to preserve the historical built form of Buffalo Avenue and direct larger scaled development to Rainbow Boulevard.

# ELEMENTS OF THE VISION

In order to enhance District visibility, improve experiences within the neighborhood, and strengthen District identity, a combination of efforts must take place. Achieving the District vision requires addressing the following three major aspects of the District that reflect the vision's priorities in both form and function:

- Enhancing **District Character and Ambience** by improving District appearance, preserving existing structures, and activating the District;
- Improving **Streetscape Characteristics** by enhancing the public realm, reinforcing the heritage theme, and increasing District access; and
- Facilitating a desired **Development Pattern** by introducing new uses, improving investment climate, and respecting development context.

These *Elements of the Vision* form the foundation for revitalization of the District by providing the justification for specific recommendations that are listed in the subsequent *Realizing the Vision* section. Although these content areas are diverse, concurrent progress in each discipline is critical to future growth for the District.



## DISTRICT CHARACTER AND AMBIENCE

### District Theme

The heritage that survives from the past, often unique and intangible, offers great potential for cultural interpretation. A memorable cityscape is one that tells a story that holds meaning for residents and visitors alike. Therefore, creating a District with a rich environment that encourages physical memory and familiarity starts with a unique composition of architecture and a strong sense of place.

Accordingly, an identifiable theme has emerged for Buffalo Avenue. This theme is the underlying concept that gives character, shape and identity to the entire District, and is intended to tie disparate components into a comprehensive whole. The theme has evolved through the course of this study, and is comprised of an assortment of factors, including:

- Proximity to natural assets such as the Niagara River and Niagara Falls State Park;
- The specific period architectural style prevalent in the area (late 19th and early 20th centuries); and
- Important events/people associated with the District (e.g., Captains of Industry).

The District's proximity to the Niagara River and Niagara Falls State Park, as well as its strong relationship to the City's industrial heritage are significant contributing elements to the District theme. The community settled and developed by its founding families was from the outset intended to be an industrial city. The use of the river for power and for transportation of goods made this the ideal spot for manufacturing and trade. The mid-19th Century hydraulic canal and later hydroelectric power plants brought the dream of these early settlers to reality. The natural assets also provided panoramic views from Buffalo Avenue properties. Such a dramatic backdrop drew the attention of wealthy residents who established the District's unique residential settlement pattern of ornate architectural design and features.

The leading families of the young community—the Porters, the Whitneys, the Rankines and Henry Perky—who were making industry happen at the dawn of the 20th Century, all lived on Buffalo Avenue. While every American city at that time had a fine residential street like Buffalo Avenue (Buffalo's Delaware Avenue and Cleveland's Euclid Avenue are contemporary examples), only Buffalo Avenue had among its finest residences one of the largest



## REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

factories in the city: Henry Perky's Shredded Wheat Factory. That Henry Perky lived across the street from his factory was not unusual, however the fact that owners and managers of other factories chose to build fine mansions next to his factory is unusual. For this reason, Buffalo Avenue had, within an approximately six block stretch, an identity that was both high-end residential and industrial. The juxtaposition of stately residential and industrial uses created a unique fabric that is the foundation of the District's rich history.

The Shredded Wheat legacy and the former factory itself contribute to the heritage theme. The progressive factory was where the "ideal", "natural" food was produced, utilizing pure energies harnessed from a natural and renewable resource. Affectionately known as the "Palace of Light", the facility was at the time a model industrial work place, complete with rich architectural features, abundant natural light, and a climate-controlled working environment. Even management was "enlightened" and offered social welfare to its employees in time when typical working conditions at other facilities were unsanitary and unsafe. With its utopian ideals, the

Shredded Wheat legacy is an important component to the heritage theme.

The historic development of the riverfront and simultaneous development of industrialist's homes side-by-side with the Shredded Wheat Factory are unique to the City of Niagara Falls. Promoting this heritage theme will increase visibility of the District as an interesting and diverse place that provides opportunity to learn and celebrate a historic tale of American settlement. Recognizing heritage elements within the District and building on the remaining fabric from this era will add to the city's physical memory and increase the visible identity for the cityscape. By reinforcing this heritage through techniques and approaches suggested herein, the District can begin to effectively capitalize on its role as a walkable, quaint, and historic part of Niagara Falls. This theme will ultimately create a stronger presence for the District within the City of Niagara Falls, and attract a wider range of visitors.

*[District] theme is the underlying concept that gives character, shape and identity to the entire District, and is intended to tie disparate components into a comprehensive whole.*



Buffalo Ave. and Shredded Wheat Factory, Niagara Falls, N. Y.  
Source: [home.cogeco.ca](http://home.cogeco.ca)

### Heritage Tourism

Because experiencing authenticity and gaining knowledge have become top priorities for today's tourist, a dynamic travel experience often depends on unique places, structures and stories. According to the National Trust For Historic Preservation, "heritage tourism is traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories of people of the past." This type of touring has taken off as the fastest growing niche in the travel industry today.

Heritage seekers typically enjoy multi-faceted places that provide a range of things to do and are exciting and active year-round. Moreover, visitors are more likely to remember and return to a place filled with stimulating activity and interesting events. According to a study conducted by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, visitors will remember 10% of what they hear, 30% of what they read, 50% of what they see and 90% of what they do. It is therefore important to engage tourists in activities that link them to other attractions.

The District has the framework in place to capitalize on heritage tourism, and should be marketed as a destination

with a colorful past. To attract heritage tourists and beyond, the aforementioned District theme should be enhanced and refined to help visitors learn more about the city and the region through discovery of the District's historical past using the following approaches.

### CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

Cultural interpretation is an important part of recognizing heritage. In many ways, such interpretation provides an opportunity to educate people about important places and events, as we learn through cultural storytelling about our ancestors, hometowns and the places we visit. Therefore, interpretation is a key component to shaping the heritage-based District theme that would serve as a vital link to the District's colorful past.

Accordingly, the District's story needs to be developed and shared by all members of the neighborhood. For example, residents, neighbors, and family members should recall unique events and stories that highlight the heritage of the District, and which could be shared as part of cultural storytelling. Also, because business owners (more so than private citizens) interface with visitors, they should not only warmly welcome visitors and passersby to the neighborhood, but they should also play a pivotal role as custodians of the District's story who help provide visitors with a unique experience.

### DISTRICT BRANDING

Branding is the creation and development of an identity—the logo, images, slogans, ideas and other information connected to a product—that make the product recognizable and unique. With its distinctive history as an industrial and residential neighborhood, the neighborhood should be aptly branded to help residents and visitors relate to the District in a way that reinforces the sense of place that this Revitalization Strategy embodies. For the most effective branding, a memorable name and a ubiquitous slogan should be combined with an instantly recognizable and unique logo. Once established, the District's branding should be incorporated on walking tour maps, brochures, a District-related website, and even

*... the District theme should be  
enhanced and refined to help  
visitors learn more about the  
[District] ...*

District-related souvenirs and merchandise. In the end, District branding would be a very useful means of associating the District with Niagara Falls and highlighting and increasing the exposure of the local heritage.

## INTERPRETIVE ELEMENTS

Introducing interpretive elements would be a great way to reinforce the heritage theme envisioned for the District by communicating notable District history as well as by contributing to the District's unique sense of place. For example, interpretive panels, medallions, markers, and descriptive signage placed at historical locations would serve the dual purpose of bestowing a level of prestige on those properties as well as highlighting key components (e.g. sites, events, etc.) of the heritage theme. Additionally, wayfinding and gateway treatments would help to set the District apart from neighboring areas, and would be an effective means of subtly introducing visitors to an important part of the city.

Furthermore, all of the interpretive elements should comprise uniform style and color. The use of a cohesive design, when added to the park-like setting of the neighborhood, would strengthen the appeal of the District as a great place for touring. A more thorough discussion of interpretive elements with specific examples can be found under the *Streetscape Elements* heading on Page 30 of this document.

## TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE

Tourist infrastructure is comprised of features and activities that make visitors' experiences easier and more pleasurable, and can help convey a specific story. For example, sightseeing tours by foot, bicycle and/or Segway scooters are terrific tourist activities that could highlight the District's heritage. Establishing Buffalo Avenue as the starting/staging point for local tours would not only draw people to the neighborhood for this purpose, but also would increase foot traffic for nearby Bed and Breakfast (B&B) establishments, boutiques, shops, restaurants, and cafes, in turn acting as an economic driver for the District.

In addition, many travelers enjoy exploring on their own. A self-guided walking tour that utilizes cell phones would be a great way to educate visitors without requiring a tour guide. Walking tour maps typically contain information that complements historic medallions and interpretive panels. Tour participants would be able to explore the District at their leisure, making this type of tour ideal for spur-of-the-moment or off-season visits. Self-guided walking tour maps should be readily available to help orient guests to historic elements as well as nearby amenities. Additionally, these publications could serve as an excellent venue for advertisements for local businesses or future events.

Also, expanding the range of enterprises/services within the District would make the District more user-friendly. Establishments like restaurants, internet cafes, and boutiques/shops are desirable amenities for travelers, and would contribute to a pleasurable experience in the District. To help foster the formation of such enterprises, aspiring proprietors should be encouraged to attend assistance and educational programs to effectively develop their business plans and to market their businesses for maximum visibility and success. Moreover, business improvement seminars should be hosted for existing business operators to enhance their service delivery. As the District improves tourist infrastructure, amenities beneficial to tourists should be improved as well. For example, the City should explore extending the frequency of trolley trips to service the needs of an expanding tourist market. In addition, the City should explore implementing a Wi-Fi zone to increase the usability of public areas within the District.

In the end, measures to increase District tourism should focus on authenticity and quality, and should contribute to the heritage theme. Most importantly, the primary goal for all District stakeholders should be to create a dynamic setting and to provide superior products and services that create an experience for visitors that is both positive and memorable—an experience that is worthy of a recommendation to others.

# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

## Historic Designation

The District is a special place within Niagara Falls, and a primary goal of this Revitalization Strategy is to uncover and celebrate the District's unique heritage. While portions of the District's physical fabric have been lost, historic designation would serve to guard against further erosion. Moreover, historic designation would help to preserve the District's heritage infrastructure by providing avenues to protect, interpret, and enhance the neighborhood's history.

Specifically, historic designation would provide opportunity for cultural interpretation of the unique settlement pattern and enrichment of historic elements that help to define the character of the District. Conveying the history of the District and designating significant elements would provide a stronger sense of place for residents and visitors alike. This in turn would restore District identity and neighborhood pride by celebrating and recognizing the distinct history of the District.

There are several facets to historic designation that would offer benefits to the District. At both the National and State level, designation (district or individual listing) would introduce widespread distinction, financial incentives, and educational opportunity. In addition, local designation would protect the District from threats that could potentially compromise historic integrity of structures.

## NATIONAL REGISTER DESIGNATION

Pursuing National Register designation would add statewide and national distinction to the District. There are two areas within the District that potentially meet criteria for designation as National Register Historic Districts (see figure on next page). Within these potential districts, the National Register recognizes structures to be either 'contributing' or 'non-contributing' to the historic district, depending on the integrity and significance of the property. The New York State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) would determine which structures contribute to the historic district upon approval of the National Register District listing.

Placement on the National Register of Historic Places would open up eligibility to several federal, state, and private historic preservation fund sources to preserve and rehabilitate and interpret structures. These funds include tax credit programs and grants that would apply to contributing buildings within an established historic district, or to individually designated properties. The use of these funds could help to improve the aesthetic appearance and character of the District.

Upon designation, rehabilitation of properties that utilize State and Federal funding sources would be subject to The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and project review by SHPO. This process ensures proper methods and materials would be utilized in the rehabilitation of eligible and National Register listed properties. USAN and the City will explore making available technical resources as well as covering nomination costs to facilitate the application process and to encourage full participation among property owners.

## National Register District:

### Riverside Drive/600-700 Block of Buffalo Avenue

Riverside Drive and the north side of Buffalo Avenue between Sixth Street and Daly Boulevard contain a sufficient number of eligible properties in a contiguous streetscape to consider pursuing a National Register Historic District nomination. This nearly intact collection of turn-of-the-century homes bears a significant array of architectural styles. Moreover, many of these properties boast unique vistas of the River that remain a prominent feature of the District.

Twenty-three contributing properties and seven non-contributing properties in this two-block space make a strong case for National Register Historic District designation. Although one vacant area (mid-block) would not contribute to a potential historic district designation, if treated sensitively with appropriate landscaping or in-fill, this segment would not detract from the significance of the larger area.

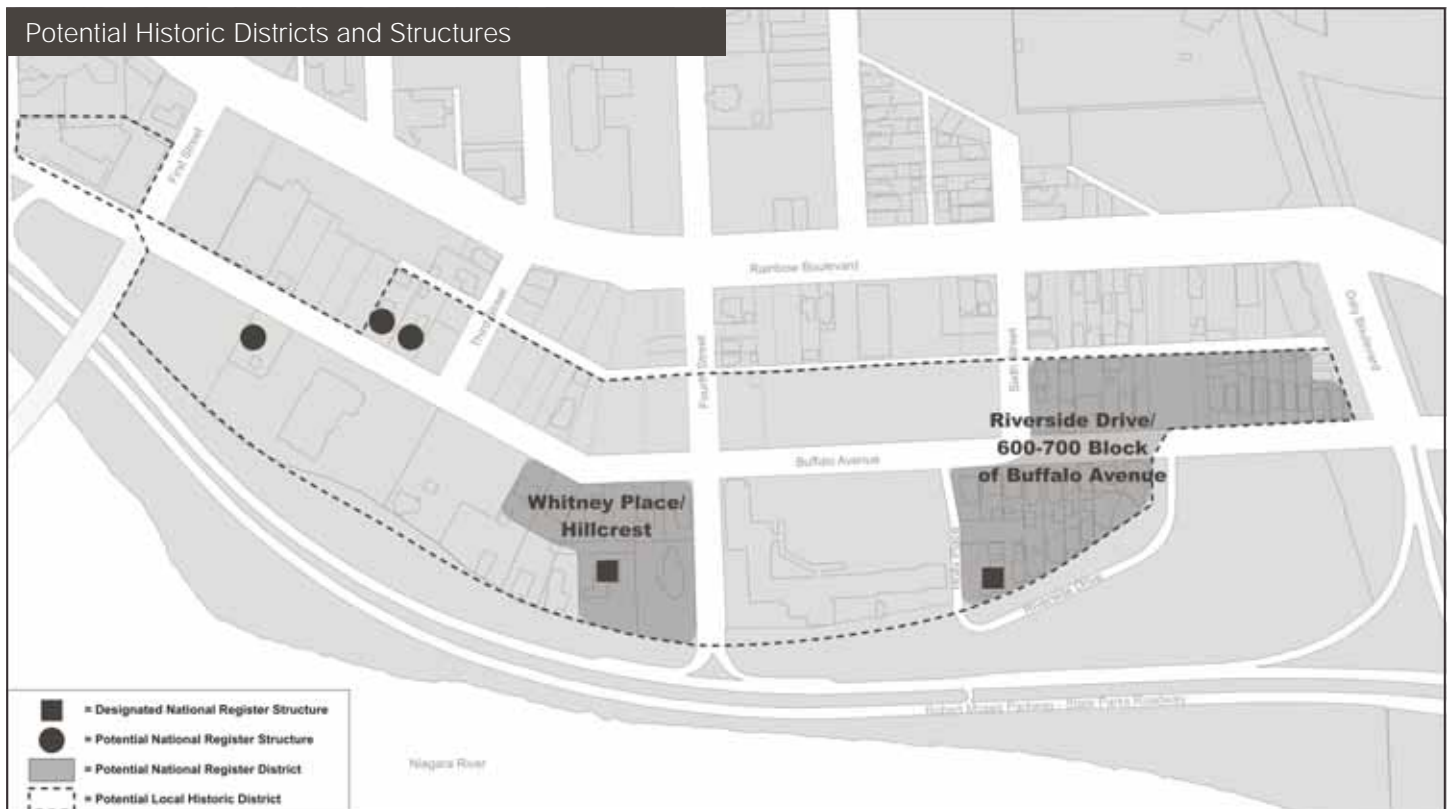
# REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

## National Register District: Whitney Place/Hillcrest

The properties contained within the western lot lines of 327 Buffalo Avenue and 2 Hillcrest Street to the west, Fourth Street to the east, Buffalo Avenue to the north and the State Park to the south have significant qualities in support of District nomination. Ten contributing residences in this potential district make up a nearly intact collection of historically significant buildings, both for their architecture and their relationship to the city's history. The remaining two non-contributing properties have additional historic significance for association with the people who owned them: the Porter and Whitney families.

The houses along the south line on the eastern edge are mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> Century while the others are early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, which demonstrate a social and cultural development over a period of nearly 70 years. While there is precedent throughout the city for residences built "in back" of others, there is an entirely different occurrence in this grouping, reflecting the development of the block, and the city itself, during that time period.

A strong case for National Register eligibility could be made not only for the individual properties that contain a high level of architectural integrity, but also for the grouping.





# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

As part of the Revitalization Strategy, the District should explore the aforementioned National Register District listings immediately. This would serve to introduce historic preservation to property owners, initiate protection against further loss of buildings in the neighborhood, and to spur improvements funded in part by federal tax incentives. Additionally, National Register Listing will help the District gain recognition, in turn quickly recovering the pride and confidence of current property owners and future investors.

## INDIVIDUAL NOMINATIONS

Although additional buildings within the District bear significance to local history and contribute to the overall fabric of the neighborhood, their associative value is potentially not strong enough for National Register Listing as individual properties. Despite this shortcoming, the history of these properties is important to the city and adds value to the local heritage that the Revitalization Strategy embodies. For example, substantial loss of historic structures on the north side of Buffalo Avenue between Third and Sixth Streets has isolated a few properties from properties east of Fourth Street that could be incorporated into a historic district. Protection of these isolated resources is important to reinforce the heritage theme.

In particular, 162 Buffalo Avenue, the Lavinia Porter Manse, was built for Augustus Porter's daughter, Lavinia. Porter had also provided homes on the block for two of his sons. The Lavinia Porter Manse may be the only extant property in the city directly associated with one of the recognized founders of the city. Additionally, 162 Buffalo Avenue had a 100-year period of significance as the manse for the First Presbyterian Church on Second Street (formerly Rainbow Boulevard North).

An outstanding example of a frame Italianate house stands at 154 Buffalo Avenue, virtually unaltered and with all of its intricate detailing in place.

The only other original property in this portion of the District, 125 Buffalo Avenue, has been altered significantly. However, this property is important to District heritage due to its association with a former resident, a mural painter well known in the city.

Once the National Register District Designations have been explored, measures should be taken to recognize those individual properties significant to the District heritage as Local Landmarks. By acknowledging individual Local Landmarks, particularly the Lavinia Porter Manse, the District can effectively recognize and protect properties that reside outside of the potential National Register Districts.



162 Buffalo Avenue



154 Buffalo Avenue



125 Buffalo Avenue

## LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION

As District property owners become more accustomed to the benefits of historic preservation through National Register Listing, a more stringent approach should be taken to further protect neighborhood character. While National Register designation offers vast recognition to property owners and opens up funding sources, it does not offer protection against negative impacts such as demolition or inappropriate alterations when no government resources are used. Local Historic District designation would be the next step in preserving District structures. A Local Historic District Designation would provide further recognition of the neighborhood's historically significant buildings, as well as increase visibility for the entire District. Furthermore, historic preservation at the local level could restore neighborhood pride by renewing interest in neighborhood heritage.

Designation of a neighborhood as a Local Historic District is a powerful tool that could be used to enrich historic character and appearance. Such designation allows an appointed local entity, such as the City Historic Preservation Commission, to approve historic district boundaries on the basis of local criteria and local procedures. Such entity would help to protect the District through adherence to design standards and by being a participant in the permitting process.

In an effort to tie disparate elements of the District into a cohesive whole, architectural design standards have been developed as part of this study for the District to work in conjunction with the Department of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. These qualitative standards have been tailored to the District's specific needs. They address various architectural elements, making certain that style and material of new buildings enhance the prevalent architectural styles found within the neighborhood. Designating a Local Historic District and seeking municipal approval of these design standards would ensure uniform application to all District properties—contributing; non-contributing; and vacant—by requiring a permit review process conducted by the

City Historic Preservation Commission.

Through this review process, local designation would help prevent unsympathetic "improvements" or alterations to non-contributing properties, which, while not historic, are nonetheless important components to the traditional development pattern of the District. Most importantly, a local designation would help protect significant properties from the threat of demolition by requiring a review and approval of demolition permits by the City Historic Preservation Commission.

Designation of a local historic district would support the heritage theme by encouraging property upkeep and cohesive aesthetics. The Local Historic District Designation, coupled with the District's architectural design standards would provide a guarantee that proper design and material are utilized on the character-defining exterior features of a property. These features wholly create the rich environment of urban form that encourages physical memory and develops a greater sense of relatedness, a connection to a sense of place that is integral to the vision for the District. In addition, Local Historic District Designation would ultimately create a stronger presence for the District within the city, and help to promote the neighborhood as a destination within the city and Western New York, attracting a wider range of visitors to witness and learn about the distinct heritage that the District embodies.

Despite the benefits to historic preservation, there are a few challenges for local historic district designation. Local preservation districts are sometimes perceived as restrictive resulting in financial burden to homeowners. While rigid design standards that require quality materials and delicate construction methods can be costly and cause project delays, such standards are intended to uphold excellence in design and strong historic character, and often increase property values because of high-quality work. As local district designation is explored, USAN will work with the City to overcome these perceived obstacles by educating local property owners of the benefits of district designation.

# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

## Authentic Materials

The momentum of high density development along the southern edge of Rainbow Boulevard is envisioned to continue, due in part to ongoing high density, casino-related development on the north side of Rainbow Boulevard. Also, proposed changes to the zoning code would separate the District into two zoning districts: an R4 Heritage Zone, which would reduce the permitted density along Buffalo Avenue, and D1-C Downtown Commercial, which would increase the potential value for parcels along Rainbow Boulevard. If the proposed zoning changes are adopted, smaller scaled structures would no longer exhibit the highest and best use of these sites, and would likely be demolished to make way for higher density development. Therefore, alternatives to demolition should be considered to preserve District heritage through retention of authentic building materials. Specifically, structure relocation and deconstruction methods could efficiently help preserve the historic character of the District by preventing further loss of historic elements.

### STRUCTURE RELOCATION

Structures that potentially would be demolished present the opportunity for relocation to sites within the District that better suit their use and character. For example, the few remaining low density structures along Rainbow Boulevard would be good candidates for relocation to Buffalo Avenue. There are currently several vacant parcels along Buffalo Avenue that could be infilled with these relocated buildings, and these structures would appropriately fit under its recently adopted R4 Heritage Zone.

### STRUCTURE DECONSTRUCTION

Deconstruction offers a new life for existing building materials that would otherwise be lost in the typical demolition process. By carefully dismantling a structure in reverse order from which it was built, many materials can be salvaged, particularly architecturally significant elements. Recycling character-defining exterior and interior elements from deconstructed buildings would be an effective means of utilizing local historic resources to reinforce the District's heritage theme.



*Structure relocation (above) and deconstruction (below) could be effective means of preserving authentic building materials that contribute to the District's heritage theme.*



## Neighborhood Group

A critical factor in advancing the District is stakeholder involvement. Individual property owners and residents are key to the revitalization of the District because they are at the forefront of the District. They are the agents of change. They are where real progress begins. For example, their investment in their property is an enhancement to neighboring properties and to the District as a whole. Even relatively small investments such as repainting a house, landscaping the front lawn, or simply placing flower pots on front steps augment the District's charm. Such organic investment is arguably more authentic than any improvements undertaken by public entities—whose projects would supplement District ambience, and not directly create it. By organizing as a group, local stakeholders can work as a team to improve the District.

Accordingly, the neighborhood should explore initiating a group that unites all District stakeholders—residents, business and land owners—to work towards the common goal of neighborhood revitalization. This group could operate informally, seek formal designation as a non-profit entity, or act as a component to the existing Downtown Niagara Falls Business Association.

Regardless, the overarching mission of this group should be to work with residents and businesses alike. Such a group should work to enhance the unique historical character of the neighborhood, and to foster an economically healthy District. The development of an active, walkable, clean and safe District would further help to create a sense of community and belonging amongst every resident, business, and visitor. The group should serve and protect the unique and historic value of the neighborhood by supporting the neighborhood's identity through creative programming and successful marketing.

Once established, the group should take on a leadership role within the District by promoting and organizing events that are enjoyable to locals, and which would also draw new visitors to the neighborhood. Programming should focus on promoting the District as a destination by offering a variety of year-round events, and publishing informative literature and

maps that highlight neighborhood features and orient visitors. The association should also develop relationships with local print, radio and television media to effectively market District opportunities and increase visibility.

Additionally, this entity should serve as a point of contact for identifying, prioritizing and communicating the needs of District residents, businesses and visitors. The group should work to build a healthy partnership with local government offices that can have a positive impact in the area. Furthermore, the group should identify a spokesperson to communicate with local government and other key players in the District's success.

In the end, the individual and collective passion and energy of local stakeholders will bring about the necessary changes to rejuvenate the neighborhood. More frankly, they bear the responsibility of doing so, for without any action from them, the best laid plans for the District will not realize their full potential. It is therefore in their keen interest to organize as a group, and to address the issues facing the District as a collective body.



## STREETSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS

The District's public domain currently contributes to its negative perception. District streets and sidewalks are not maintained and in some instances are unsafe and beyond repair. In addition, the streetscape is not optimally configured, as sidewalks are attached to the roadway. This reduces pedestrian perception of safety/comfort from vehicular traffic, and leaves no space for snow storage. Existing light standards are spaced too far apart leaving poorly lit areas of the sidewalk and street. Also, no clear definition of public and private space exists, as light standards, signs and utility poles are located on the outside of the sidewalk in what have become front lawns. Finally, the tree canopy has been greatly compromised from the loss of trees over the years, and many of the remaining trees are damaged. These conditions along with a lack of coherent design among streetscape elements contribute to the image of the District as worn and uninviting.

Implementing improvements to the streetscape would not only remedy these issues, but would also create a public realm supportive of private investment and reinforce the heritage theme. With design treatments that complement the District's historical structures, these improvements would help transform the District into a more charming place. Additionally, such improvements would build upon nearby infrastructure projects such as the Rainbow Boulevard and Robert Moses Parkway redesign projects.

### Circulation

A first step to improving the District's streetscape is to understand how people—vehicle drivers, bicyclists, and walkers—circulate in, out, and within the District. This is accomplished by identifying the popular destinations, places, and points of interest where people want to go. The next step is to enhance and augment the existing linkages to these nodes, and moreover to look for opportunities to create new connections.

For the Buffalo Avenue neighborhood, the nearby destinations are obvious: the downtown area including the Seneca Niagara Casino, and the River including the Park. The District is advantageously located between these primary origination and destination points, and therefore needs to serve the important role of

being a conduit to these two geographies. With this in mind, the District itself should become a comprehensive circulation network of streets, alleys, sidewalks, and paths to encourage movement through and within the District. As a result, the District would be more permeable, drawing more people to and through the District, thereby increasing opportunities for economic expansion of the District.

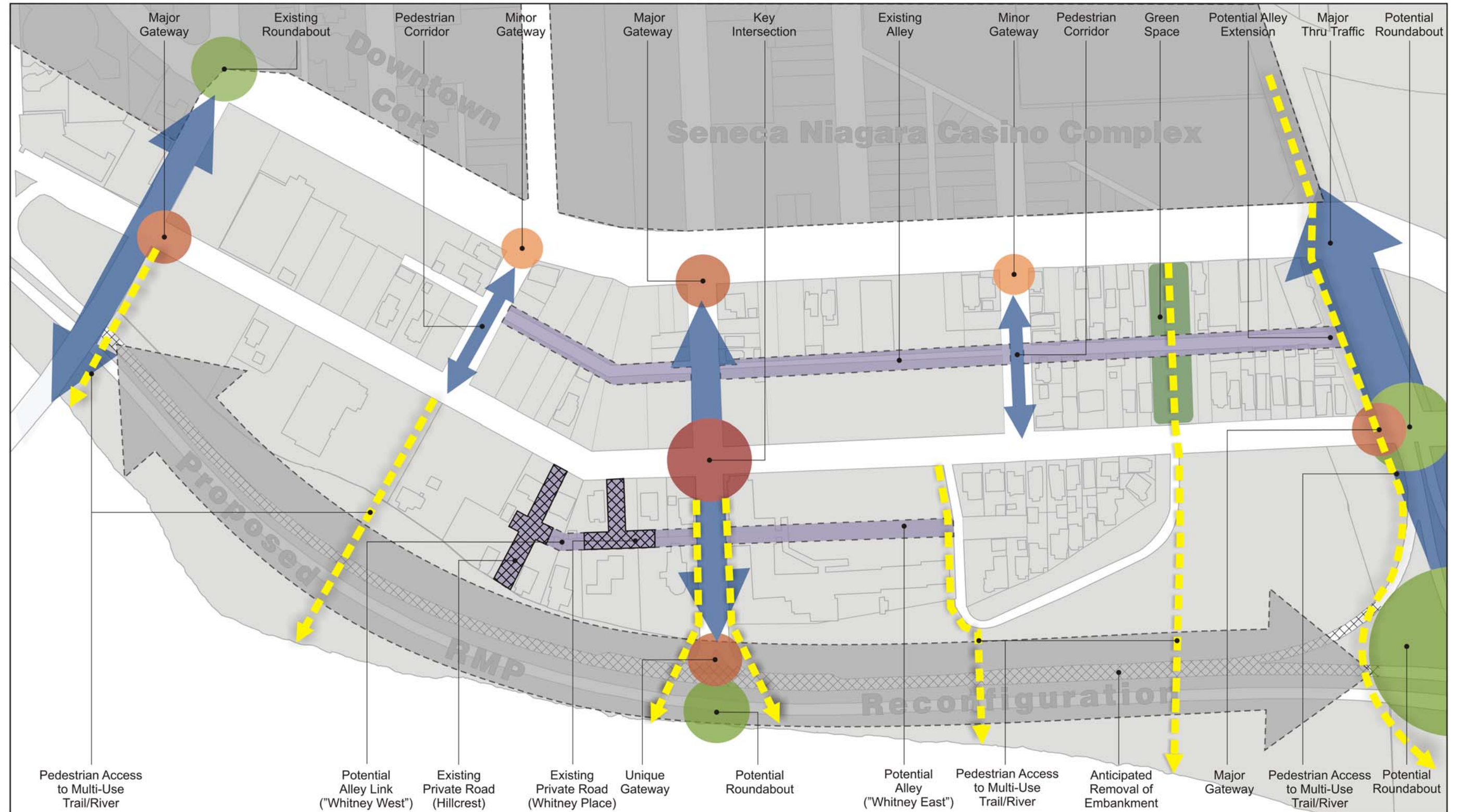
The Circulation Concepts graphic on the opposite page shows where potential circulation enhancements could occur, and how they collectively would improve access between the downtown area and the Park. In general, the concepts include a mix of enhancements to vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian connections as well as supplementary elements such as roundabouts and gateway treatments. The bulk of these concepts would be relatively small projects that address north-south connections. The notable exception is the Robert Moses Parkway reconfiguration, which will be a major project affecting east-west linkages.

Similar to the Illustrative Site Plan, the concepts in this graphic are long-term, and should be examined over time, as changes in ownership occur, as development plans evolve, and as the progression of projects alter the landscape of the District.



*An improved and expanded circulation network would draw people to the District.*

### Circulation Concepts



Increasing access between the downtown area and the River would create new viewsheds and points of interest for "explorers" of the District.

## PATHS/TRAILS

Pedestrian connections should be expanded, including formalizing existing paths and introducing new connections. Specifically, a worn path is evident along First Street between Buffalo Avenue and the Robert Moses Parkway that should be formalized into a safe, well-identified connection. Also, an extension from Third Street would be a new connection that would be more difficult to establish, as an easement would be required along either of two properties. Yet this is an intriguing connection considering Third Street is a primary pedestrian corridor all the way to the entertainment district. Moreover, considering the grade difference at this location, such connection would create a stunning new viewshed to the River from a meandering path down the embankment. Next, Fourth Street, south of Buffalo Avenue, needs sidewalks to complete the



*More paths would increase access to destinations, such as the River.*

connection to the Park. Considering the redevelopment potential at the site of the former Shredded Wheat Factory, a new connection along Holly Place would be a strategic link to the Park. In addition, a new connection toward the eastern end of the District along a portion of Riverside Drive would create a strong visual connection between Rainbow Boulevard and the River by extending the Park into the District through the creation of manicured green space on the vacant parcels between Buffalo Avenue and Rainbow Boulevard. Moreover, this connection could become a particularly significant link, as a high-rise hotel is expected to be constructed by the Seneca Gaming Corporation on the north side of Rainbow Boulevard. This structure would create a northern terminus of this viewshed, but could also draw hotel visitors into the Park via this direct connection. Finally, the connection along Daly Boulevard should be maintained, as it is the lone, existing, formalized link between the downtown area and the River.

## ROUNDBABOUTS

Roundabouts help with circulation by moving vehicular traffic efficiently without requiring vehicles to come to a complete stop. Roundabouts are also traffic calming features because drivers are forced to slow down as they navigate around the “obstacle” placed in the middle of the roadway. Designed with landscaping or art placed in their middle, roundabouts could also be dynamic amenities and

focal points that contribute to the District’s sense of place.

## GATEWAY TREATMENTS

Neighborhood monuments at key street intersections would help visitors navigate the downtown area and highlight entry into the neighborhood. Moreover, the presence of these strong and unique identifying features would help formalize the boundary of the neighborhood and establish a sense of arrival at the District.

Expansion of these circulation enhancements would create a more complete network system offering more opportunities to enter and traverse the neighborhood. This would not only make the neighborhood more accessible, but would also create new vistas and interesting spaces for residents and visitors to explore and to enjoy.



*Gateway treatments would identify the extents of the neighborhood and contribute to a sense of arrival at the District.*

# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

## ALLEY SYSTEM

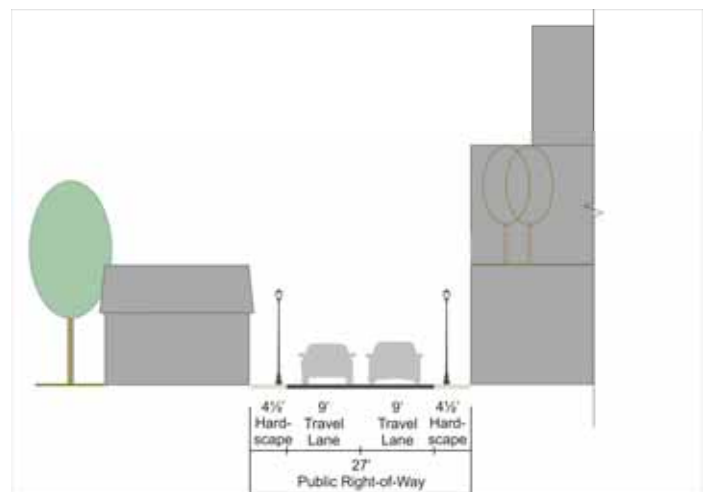
The alley located between Rainbow Boulevard and Buffalo Avenue is a key element of the urban design landscape. Although the alley is currently in poor condition, it serves an important function of providing rear access to properties that do not have driveways from Buffalo Avenue, and serving as a “hidden” location for refuse/garbage storage and collection. Preserving and enhancing this alley is important in order to improve District access and circulation, particularly for increased traffic resulting from anticipated high-density developments along Rainbow Boulevard.

However, the width of the alley is not continuous, as two of the three segments have a 27' width and the third, the middle segment, only a 13' width. Despite being aligned along the same centerline, the width reduction essentially diminishes the middle segment to one-way vehicular access. Ideally, all segments would have the same width, but it is recognized that acquiring 14' to match the 27' would likely be too costly. Consequently, acquiring a minimum of 7' feet would increase the roadway to 20', which would be sufficient to accommodate two-way traffic and help improve turning movements of larger vehicles (e.g. delivery or refuse trucks).



Moreover, the alley should be extended to connect directly to Daly Boulevard (it currently ends at W. Quay Street) to improve circulation by reducing circuitous movements. This would require at a minimum a break in the raised median along Daly Boulevard to allow for turning movements into and out of the alley. Alternatively, the raised median could be removed altogether and the turning lane on Daly Boulevard could be configured similar to the design along Rainbow Boulevard. Should the alley be directly connected with Daly Boulevard, the remnants of W. Quay Street become obsolete, and should be removed. North of the alley, the roadway could be converted to temporary parking for visitors arriving/departing from the existing hotel at the corner. South of the alley, the roadway should be converted into green space similar to E. Quay Street on the opposite side of Daly Boulevard. Such action would afford the two properties along W. Quay Street to have driveways (which neither property currently has) that connect directly to Daly Boulevard. In both cases, the opportunity to sell public R.O.W. to private parties is presented, and should be further explored for feasibility and practicality.

Finally, the alley should have additional lighting and should be repaved to improve safety and utility.





## PRIVATE ROADS

Hillcrest and Whitney Place are roads that provide limited access to a few properties within the southern portion of the District. The roads are constructed of brick pavers that evoke a desired ambiance that corresponds with the District theme. However, these roads are actually privately owned parcels of land, which in essence discourage public access to these parts of the District. Despite this ownership status, there are opportunities to add these roads to the circulation network and to open them to public access.

It is believed that these roads were created to provide access to property that was being sub-divided and sold off as the neighborhood's stately prominence declined. If not for the roads, certain parcels would have been landlocked. Consequently, ad hoc private access was created. Regardless, the system could be completed by connecting these roads to create an additional link in the circulation network, as shown in the previously introduced Circulation Concepts graphic. Paralleling Buffalo Avenue, this link would reinforce the District's historical street pattern, and would provide additional access to more properties. This is a particularly significant consideration. More mixed-use and commercial land uses are likely to occupy the District and would benefit from such improved

access. Moreover, a strengthened Whitney Place link on the west side of Fourth Street bolsters the future possibility of extending Whitney Place east across Fourth Street and through the Fallside site, as briefly described earlier.

In order for "Whitney West" to be realized, open dialogue would need to occur with owners of these parcels as well as neighboring property owners who likely benefit from having access via these roads. Such discussion should focus on the practicality of connecting these roads and the willingness of opening them to public access. While this type of infrastructure project could be left to the development community, the City should be prepared to play an active role in facilitating this network connection. Specifically, the City could foster the formation of easements necessary to provide greater access along these roads. Alternatively, the City should strongly consider acquiring the existing private roads and lands necessary to make this connection, and incorporate them into the public domain. This would provide a more secure ownership of the roadway that would consequently ensure public access to this area of the District and establish an entity (the City) responsible for and capable of maintaining its upkeep.



*Whitney Place evokes the character and charm that is sought for the entire District.*

**Street Configuration**

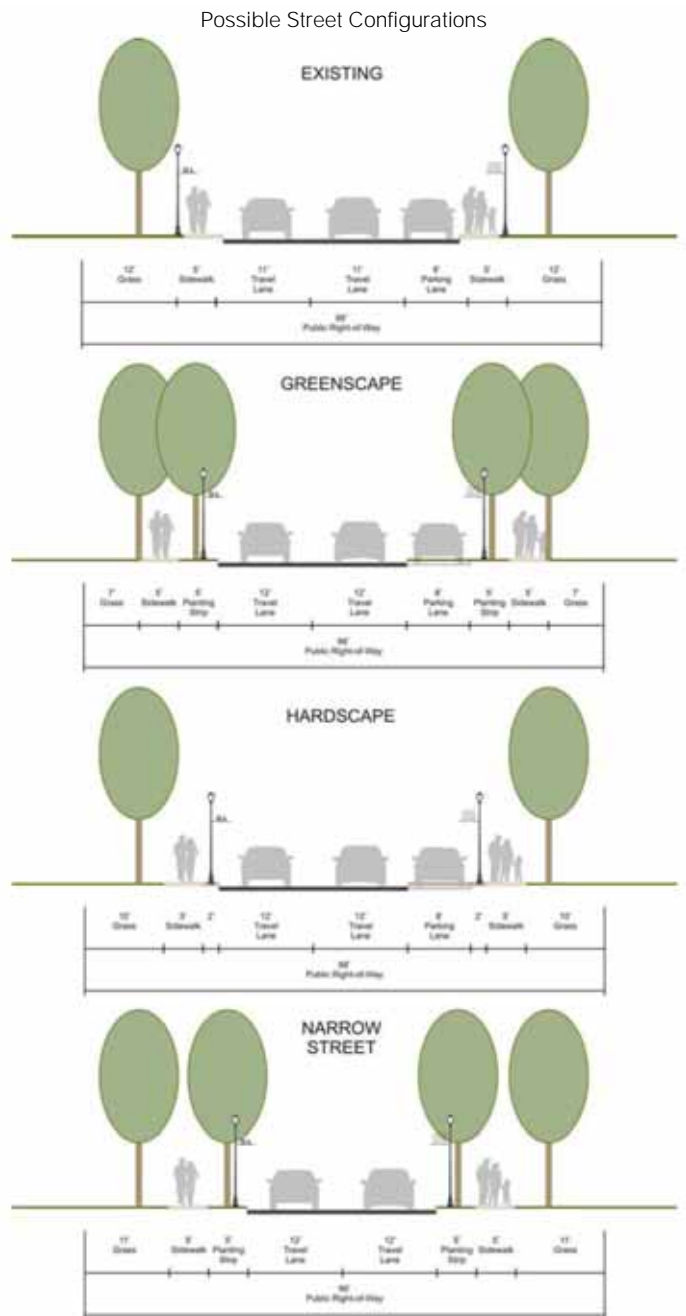
The configuration of a roadway system greatly influences the look and feel of its surroundings. Unfortunately, the existing roadway system of the District is not optimally configured. The primary concern with the District's **Existing** street configuration is the sidewalk attached to the roadway, as illustrated in the adjacent diagram. Such configuration precludes space for a tree lawn, which would serve as a buffer between the sidewalk and the street. This space would provide room for street lighting, street trees, signage and other streetscape elements near the curb as well as a storage area for snow.

To address this issue, three design concepts were developed that would improve the function and safety of the streetscape as well as enhance the overall setting of the District. Each of the following street configuration concepts would improve the District's roadway system, yet varying tradeoffs among the alternatives result from differing placement of specific streetscape elements.

The **Greenscape** concept would maximize pedestrian safety and comfort and enhance street aesthetics through creation of a distinct landscaping buffer that detaches the sidewalk from the roadway. The new tree lawn would provide dedicated space for trees, lighting (optimally placed between the sidewalk and roadway), signs and markers. The tree lawn would also provide ample space for snow storage. The two travel lanes and single parking lane would remain.

The **Hardscape** concept is the most utilitarian of the designs. In this concept, a narrow strip of hardscape material would provide minimal space to relocate light standards, signs and markers and for snow storage. New street trees would be planted on the residential side of the sidewalk as currently exists. The two travel lanes and single parking lane would remain.

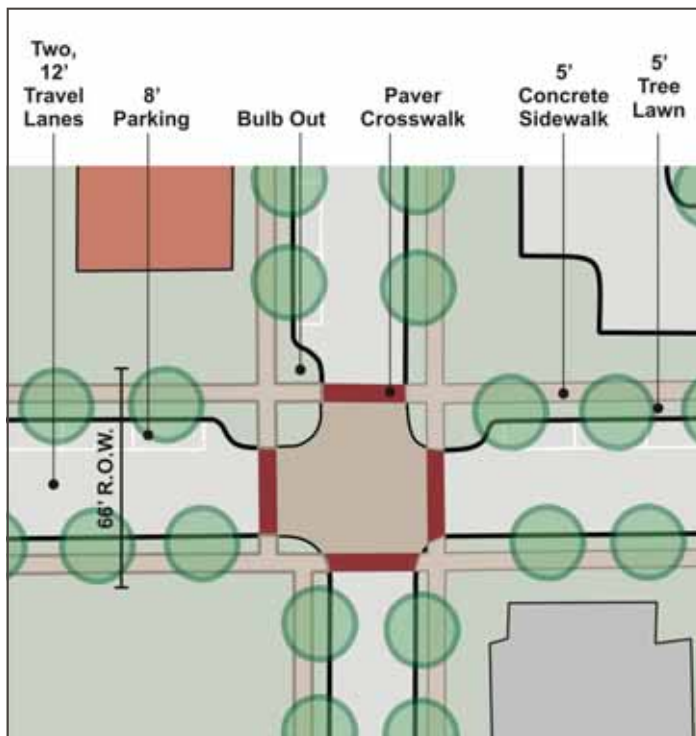
The **Narrow Street** concept is similar to the Greenscape concept, however, the tree lawn would be created from space currently dedicated to on-street parking. A double



## REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

row of trees would be possible in this design, which would clearly have residential aesthetic qualities. This design would include the two travel lanes, but would eliminate the single lane of on-street parking. The narrower paving and street canopy would likely slow travel speeds along the street.

While each concept offers a different approach to the configuration (i.e. width and placement of the specific components), designs that create more green space, such as the Greenscape and Narrow Street concepts, are preferred. However, as an alternative, a combination of configurations could be used—one for Buffalo Avenue and another for Third, Fourth, and Sixth Streets. The Greenscape or Narrow Street concepts are preferred for Fourth Street with the intent of enhancing the connection between the downtown area and the Park.



*Potential configuration of street components to improve District setting.*

It is important to note that all of these concepts could be constructed within the existing 66' right-of-way, which is a generous width considering the residential nature of the District. Street pavement utilizes 30' of the right-of-way, and is comprised of two, 11' travel lanes and one, 8' parking lane. However, for analytical purposes, travel lanes were expanded from current 11' to potential 12' widths to examine impacts of maximum widths to the overall streetscape. The existing 5' sidewalk width was maintained (not necessarily in its current location), as such width is a comfortable space for pedestrians.

In addition to these criteria, design treatments that strengthen the pedestrian-orientation of the neighborhood and reduce vehicular speeds should be utilized wherever possible. For example, the use of "bulbouts" would improve pedestrian safety by creating additional sidewalk area as a result of flaring out the curb line into the roadway. The result is three fold: 1) bulbouts reduce street crossing width for pedestrians, 2) bulbouts make pedestrians more visible in a crosswalk, and 3) bulbouts force drivers to slow down when they turn the corner, making the crosswalk safer and more comfortable for pedestrians.

In the end, the configuration of the street and the placement of its components are important aspects of the vision for the District because they are the venue for first impressions of the District. Great streets achieve a comfortable balance between the automobile, buildings, and the pedestrian, with the scales often tipped in favor of the pedestrian. Accordingly, the City can refine these concepts with input from the community before determining which design is the most practical for implementation. Still, in order to be most effective, the final design must improve the function of the public realm and uphold the ultimate goal of enhancing the pedestrian experience by incorporating thematic streetscape elements.

# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

## Streetscape Elements

A key objective of this Revitalization Strategy is to achieve a better physical and symbolic relationship between the core of the downtown area and the Park. As previously discussed, each of the street configuration concepts would improve the public domain by completing a functional, pedestrian-friendly streetscape design. Whatever design is implemented, the individual elements of that design will need to further contribute to and reinforce the heritage theme of the District. This would be accomplished by incorporating specific street furniture, decorative elements, and gateway treatments.

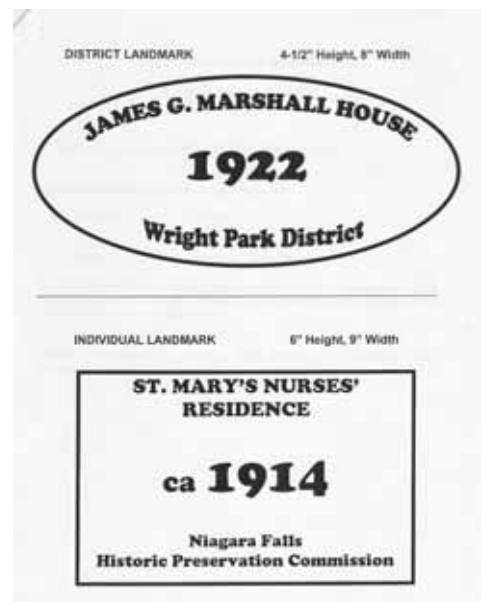
Street furnishings should relate to other site furnishings as well as building architecture. They must be carefully placed to be unobtrusive yet effective, and arranged with other streetscape elements into functional compositions (see below image). Specifically, benches expand opportunities for people to use the street, especially at key points of interest. However, given the residential nature of the District, placement of benches warrants careful consideration so as not to encroach on the private domain. Similarly, trash receptacles should be easily

accessible for pedestrians and trash collection. Lighting and lighting fixtures play a particularly important role in the character, function and security of a streetscape.

The existing pedestrian-scaled light standards with Central Park luminaires contribute to the unique character of the District, and therefore should be retained. Additionally, the low decorative light standards can accommodate street-level placement of signage, hanging flower baskets and other neighborhood-defining elements, such as thematic pole art, that would further enhance the District and reinforce its heritage theme.

Medallions and markers are other decorative elements that would contribute to the unique character and identity of the neighborhood as well as reflect the rich historical and cultural heritage of the District. These streetscape elements also help enliven the neighborhood's sense of place and contribute to a visually unified District.

One of the more dramatic design applications would be the installation of unique gateway treatments at entry points into the neighborhood. Composed of stone and



decorative metal, the monuments would provide a sense of identity for residents, and would further enhance the pedestrian quality of the neighborhood. As depicted below, major and minor monuments would form an entry hierarchy. Referring back to the conceptual circulation graphic, major monuments should be placed at both ends of Buffalo Avenue with one at Fourth Street and Rainbow Boulevard. Minor monuments should be placed at the Third and Sixth Streets entries from Rainbow Boulevard.

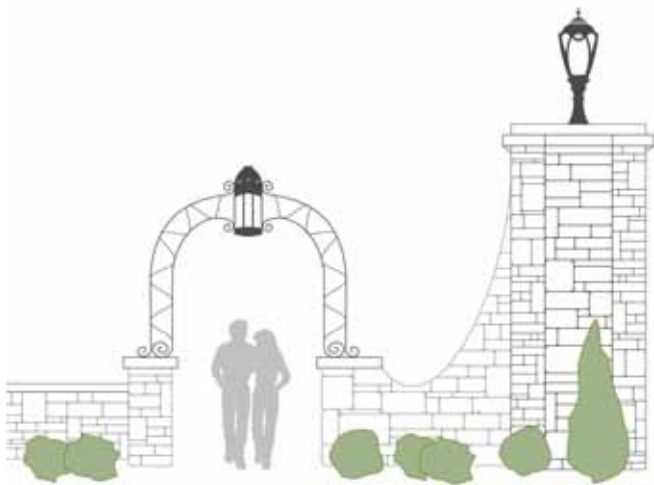
Collectively, unified design elements would supplement an improved streetscape configuration, and would subtly help define the District by contributing to the unique character of the District. In turn, the District would be more interesting and dynamic, and the pedestrian experience would be improved.

**Streetscape Design Recommendations**

Streetscape design standards have been prepared to direct future public infrastructure improvements. Specifically, the intent of the standards is to codify design elements for future infrastructure investments by public agencies, and for repair and maintenance activities undertaken by private utilities within the District's public rights-of-way. The design standards address such issues as construction materials, street trees, and light standards (among others), which collectively help to reinforce the underlying theme established for the District. A complete set of recommended standards is attached in Appendix I.



Minor Gateway Treatment



Major Gateway Treatment

*... the intent of the [design] recommendation is to codify design elements ...*

# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

## Streetscape Cost Estimates

The use of specific streetscape features inspired by the Olmsted design of the Park and outlined in the streetscape design standards would reinforce the character of the District. This section addresses the costs associated with such enhancements.

In general, the proposed street improvements would involve full depth reconstruction of each roadway segment. As part of this process, the roadbed and its foundation would be replaced. New granite curbing would be installed throughout the District. New sidewalks comprised of exposed aggregate concrete would be installed. Additional street lighting of the same style as the existing light fixtures would be installed more closely together: roughly 50 feet apart alternating sides of the street. This is approximately half the distance of the existing fixtures. Similarly, additional street trees would be installed, roughly 50 feet apart to enhance the neighborhood setting.

Because it is unlikely that full funding would be secured to address all public infrastructure improvements at one time, recommendations have been packaged into logical and achievable packages based on order-of-magnitude cost estimates for implementation by various State and local agencies.

STREETSCAPE COST ESTIMATES		
ROADWAY	SEGMENT	COST
Buffalo Avenue	First-Daly	\$3,900,000
Alley	Third-Daly	\$3,100,000
Riverside Drive	Including Holly Place	\$1,600,000
Fourth Street (south)	Buffalo-RMP	\$800,000
Fourth Street (north)	Rainbow-Buffalo	\$600,000
Sixth Street	Rainbow-Buffalo	\$600,000
Third Street	Rainbow-Buffalo	\$600,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$11,200,000</b>

See Appendix F for a complete breakdown of costs.

Specific cost estimates for the various recommended improvements were developed through the use of *NYSDOT Region 5 Pay Item Catalog* in conjunction with *FHWA Transport* estimating software. These sources provide information for similar project components, standard engineering procedures, material estimates, and best available knowledge. Each cost estimate includes a relatively generous design contingency (30%) to address unforeseen issues at this level of conceptual planning. They also include appropriate estimates for “soft costs” (20%) for design, legal, and construction administration services. The table below lists each roadway, the segment of that roadway, and the estimated cost of that segment. Full estimates setting the basis for these estimates are presented in Appendix F.

## Streetscape Phasing

Having cost estimates for specific street segments affords the opportunity to seek achievable funding amounts and to prioritize streetscape implementation. Priorities for implementation were determined through a combination of need for improvement, likely implementing/funding entity, relation to nearby recent improvements, and ability to reinforce heritage theme. The graphic on the opposite page illustrates the recommended sequencing of improvements to District street segments.

Third, Fourth (north) and Sixth Streets should be grouped together as one streetscape improvement project and implemented as a first priority. This is a logical priority since these streets and their components need immediate attention, and the collective cost for such a project (\$1.8 million) is modest. Moreover, improving these streets will tie directly into the redesign of Rainbow Boulevard and improve the District’s connection with the downtown area.

The second priority should be addressing Buffalo Avenue, even though it is currently in fairly good condition. The visual impact of an improvement project, complete with uniform streetscape elements, would help galvanize the heritage vision along this primary corridor through the District.

# REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

Despite its need for immediate physical improvement, the alley should be the third priority project because its location behind buildings would not convey the visual impact of the Buffalo Avenue project. However, this does not diminish the need for immediate removal of debris and regular cleaning of the alley to improve its general appearance.

Finally, Fourth Street (south) and Riverside Drive/Holly Place should be addressed once the redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway project, which is being led by NYSOPRHP, is complete. These streets are currently in acceptable condition and do not warrant immediate attention. They do lack streetscape components, such as sidewalks and adequate lighting, that should be addressed in an improvement project. Still, the

appropriate time to address these streets would be after viewsheds to the River are restored by the removal of the Robert Moses Parkway embankment.

This recommended sequencing is intended to return the greatest impact by addressing highly visible, often traveled streets that need immediate repairs. External factors, such as the timing of other, adjacent roadway projects, were also considered in this phasing. In the end, once all street segments have been improved, the District would be an enhanced, safe environment with uniform streetscape elements that reinforce the heritage theme and help define the character of the District.

Streetscape Costs and Phasing by Street Segment



### Potential Streetscape Funding Sources

Investments in transportation infrastructure, even small-scale investments, can make a big difference in the vitality and identity of a community. Streetscape improvements, transit-, pedestrian-, and bicycle-oriented developments, and related strategies can bring a new vibrancy to downtown areas, commercial cores and neighborhoods. These improvements enhance amenities and ambience, and making them places where people want to live and visit. Accordingly, this Revitalization Strategy has identified streetscape improvements as an important component to rejuvenating the District.

However, making the District more inviting with new pedestrian enhancements such as secure lighting, decorative benches, planters and paving, and lush trees and landscaping will cost a fair amount of money, as described in the preceding *Streetscape Cost Estimates* section. Fortunately, there are numerous funding sources currently available to help implement these important elements into the District's streetscape.

The list in the adjacent column identifies potential funding sources for infrastructure projects in the District. These sources and their respective programs range in what is available to and required of applicants. For example, there are generally two kinds of financial assistance to projects: planning/design grants for projects in their early stages of development, and capital grants to fund construction of projects with completed plans. Also, some funding sources require local entities to contribute monies to a portion (often 10%-20%) of total project costs, whereas other sources require local entities to front implementation costs and apply for reimbursement.

Despite their varying eligibility criteria and financial offerings, these funding sources could play an important role in realizing the vision for the District. Moreover, as District projects are conceived (such as those in the *Realizing the Vision* section of this document), USAN and the City should review the applicability of such projects against these and other established funding sources to help finance their implementation.

- City of Niagara Falls Capital Improvement Bond Funds
- City of Niagara Falls Community Development Block Grant Funds
- The 99-h Tribal State Compact Revenue Account Funds
- Niagara Power Project, FERC Project No. 2216, Comprehensive Relicensing Settlement Agreement Funds
  - License Articles
    - \* State Parks Greenway Fund
  - Non-License Measure/Contractual Commitments
    - \* Host Community Fund
    - \* Greenway Recreation/Tourism Fund Host Communities
- New York State Transportation Enhancement Program (TEP) Funds
- Federal and State Highway Program
- Proposed Federal Economic Stimulus Program Funds

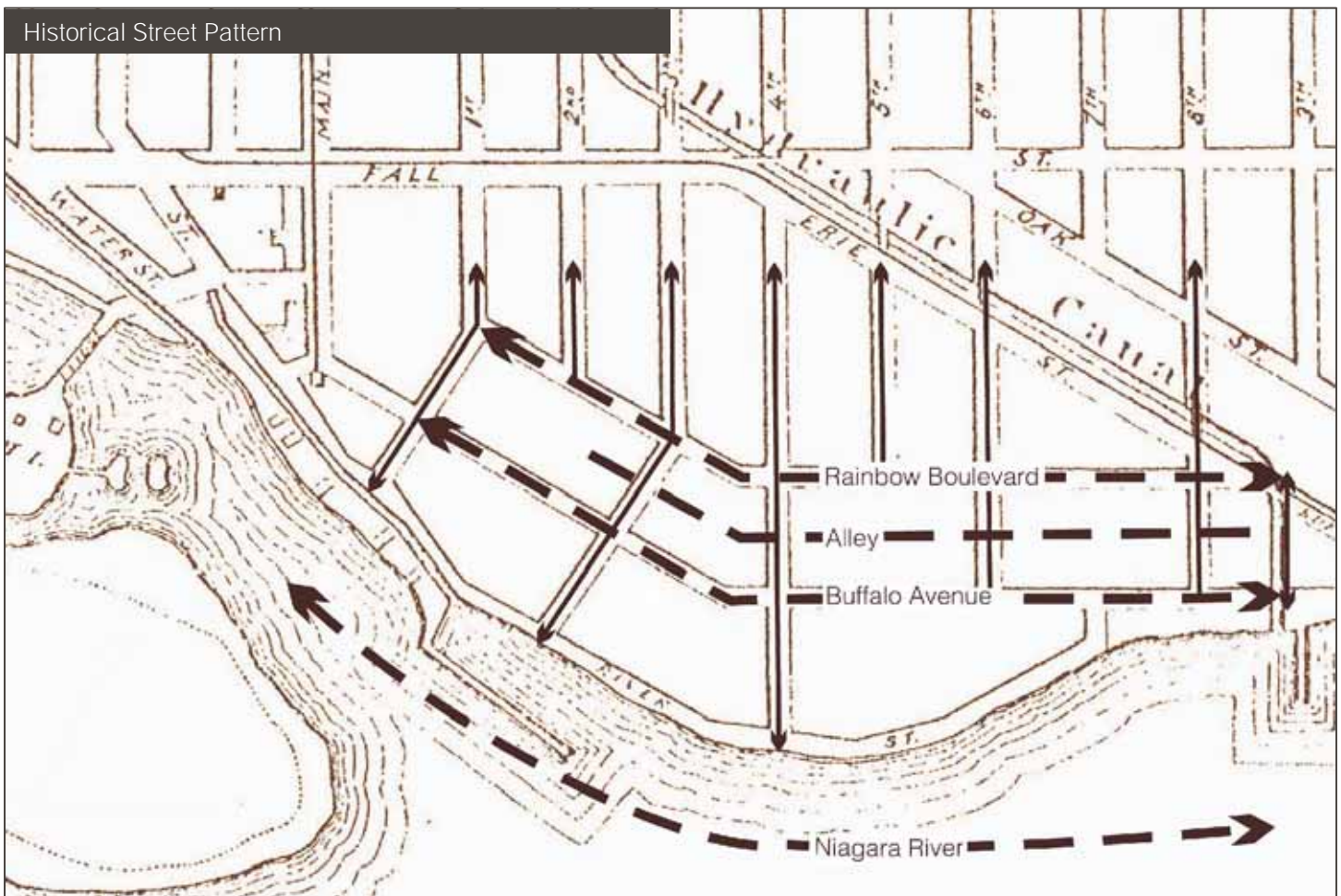




## DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

### Historic

The District's built form has been established by its historic relationship to the River. The street grid responds to this relationship, and its layout has formed the foundation for physical development within the District. As depicted in the below illustration, the east-west streets are layered in a roughly parallel manner from the Niagara River to Rainbow Boulevard. A slight bend in these roads corresponds with the shoreline of the River and further reinforces the pattern. Buffalo Avenue forms a horizontal spine through the middle. The north-south streets provide access between the downtown area and the District with limited access to the River. Fourth Street connects all three areas and bisects the District horizontally. Collectively, this roadway configuration is an important and unique organizing principle of the District, as it greatly influenced the use, form and scale of the District's development pattern.



# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

## RESIDENTIAL-SCALE

The District was historically a residential neighborhood distinguished by stately mansions of grand scale. Exhibiting rich architectural styles, the residences had prominent roof lines that varied in height, but generally conformed to 2½ to 3 stories, which established continuity along the streetscape. The generous spacing between homes, particularly at the western end of the neighborhood, allowed for lush landscapes and mature trees that added to the sophisticated appeal that drew many leading industrial families to settle in the District. The eastern end was more densely developed, but the structures maintained form and height continuity from the District's western end. This type of development was the predominant form within the District.

## MEDIUM-SCALE

Another of form of development that existed in the District is exemplified by the former Lockell Apartment Building. The size and scale of this structure, which once stood on the corner of Buffalo Avenue and Third Street, is an indication that larger development was historically acceptable within the District. Although a sizable structure, the three-story brick building did not dominate the District's landscape: it conformed to height continuity with neighboring residences. The structure was a good example of a corner building. It was positioned to both front and side lot lines and contributed to respective street edges. The design features of the building complemented and contributed to the District's rich architecture with strong cornice lines, appropriate floor elevations and generously articulated fenestrations.

## 400 BLOCK (NORTH SIDE)

The largest built form within the District was the Shredded Wheat Factory. Located on the north side of Buffalo Avenue's 400 Block, this impressive six-story structure stood prominently in the District, serving as a proud focal point for residents. Positioned along the alley, the site adorned Buffalo Avenue with abundant landscaping, and had an unobstructed view of the River. The structure was well articulated with varying setbacks, projections, and roof lines. Large window walls established uniform rhythm of windows and allowed daylight to illuminate interior spaces. The facility became a tourist destination known as the "Palace of Light". This ancestry provides a precedent for such type and scale of development at this particular site.



*Former residence at 170 Buffalo Avenue exhibiting traditional built form and rich architectural detail.*



*Picture of the former Lockell Building at the corner of Buffalo Avenue and 3rd Street.*



*Buffalo Ave. Hill Shredded Wheat Factory, Niagara Falls, N. Y.*

*Image of the former Shredded Wheat Factory along the north side of Buffalo Avenue's 400 Block.*

# REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

## Existing

In general, the built form of the District has eroded over the years, as streetscape elements have deteriorated and buildings have been demolished and often replaced with expansive surface parking lots.

The District's street pattern remains largely intact from its original configuration (refer to *Historical Street Pattern* graphic on page 36.) However, the Robert Moses Parkway, elevated on an embankment, forms a barrier between the District and the River. Also, removal of the hydraulic canal (now Daly Boulevard) has left W. Quay Street, which abutted the canal, as an underutilized road (East Quay Street has been grassed). Third, Fourth and Sixth Streets continue to provide access into and circulation through the District, however street elements are in poor condition. Similarly, the alley continues to provide rear access to properties, but it too has fallen into disrepair.

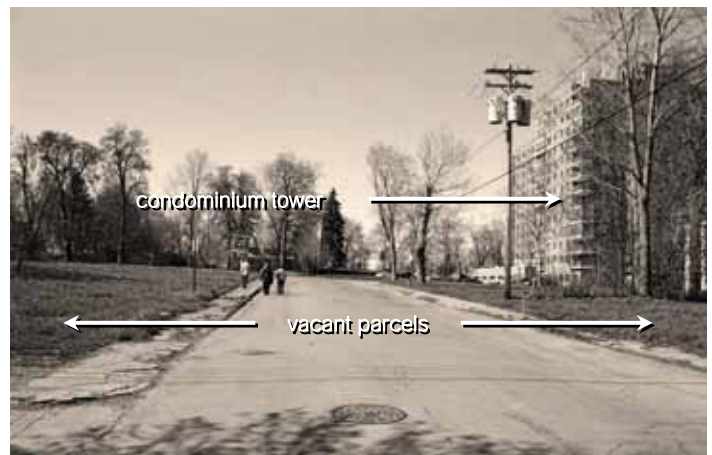
Unfortunately, several District buildings mirror the poor condition of public infrastructure. Even worse, many buildings have been demolished, creating substantial

voids in the urban fabric. Both the Lockeil Building and the Shredded Wheat Factory have been demolished. Their respective sites remain vacant, creating particularly large cavities in the central portion of the District. Such vacant land paired with the towering Seneca Niagara Casino development (just north of the District) creates an abrupt transition of built form between the downtown area and the Niagara River. This is compounded by the few remaining 2½ story structures that line Rainbow Boulevard which are small relative even to neighboring hotel structures. Conversely, the 13-story Parkway Condominium structure is disproportionately large compared to surrounding structures. Because of its location on the south side of Buffalo Avenue, the building blocks water views from downtown structures. The result is a haphazard and confusing built form that lacks cohesion and hierarchy.

However, a "step-down" framework, albeit loose, can be ascertained. For example, two pockets of original residential-scale development remain intact. These structures have varied projections and rooflines that contribute to the overall shape and appearance of the



*More dense development is supplanting less dense structures along Rainbow Boulevard, thereby altering the street's land uses and its character.*



*The Parkway Condominium structure towers over nearby vacant parcels.*

# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

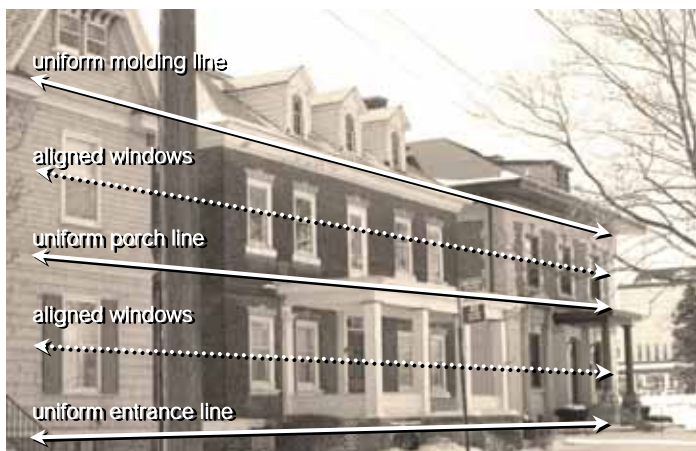
District. The wood, stucco, brick and stone structures comprised of various historic architectural styles add appeal that ties into the heritage theme for the District.

Although not in the core of the District, the apartment building that stood at 649 Rainbow Boulevard reflected the former Lockell Building with respect to mass, form, and articulation. In addition, vertically oriented hotels line Rainbow Boulevard, helping shape the skyline for the District. These structures range in height from five to seven stories. While the massing of these structures contributes to the stepped approach, hotels rely on large surface parking lots that create substantial voids in the street wall. Additionally, the buildings tend to lack quality articulation. For example, cornice lines are not pronounced, ground floors have minimal windows and lack permeability to draw pedestrians into interior spaces, and building materials are somewhat sterile.

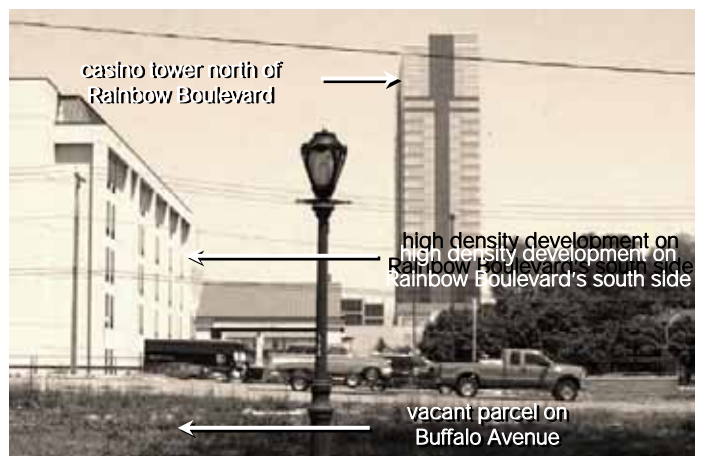
The largest form of development in the area is situated outside the District, but still influences the built form relationship within the District. The 26-story casino hotel, just north of Rainbow Boulevard, is currently the tallest

building in downtown Niagara Falls. From this apex, other structures in the downtown core reinforce the step down including the 20-story United Office Building, the 12-story Hotel Niagara Building, and the 8-story Jefferson Apartment Building. These structures, all located north of Rainbow Boulevard, clearly exhibit high density levels that overwhelm the preferred residential-scale development for the District. For this reason, the south side of Rainbow Boulevard, which is the northern limit of the District, is a critical edge of the District that helps soften the transition between the downtown area and the River.

The diversity of urban forms within and near the District can be attributed to the general decline of the city and sporadic redevelopment schemes. Such diversity has resulted in an array of conditions that necessitate careful consideration and in some instances unique treatment of site design and building mass to ensure that a cohesive built form is established. More specifically, existing vacant lots within the District present opportunities to construct appropriately scaled infill development that would reinforce the historic and ideal built form hierarchy.



*Contiguous historical structures along Buffalo Avenue that exhibit individual architectural style, but all adhere to basic design principles that unite the structures.*



*Stronger relationships among structures in and around the District would help reinforce Niagara Falls' built form hierarchy, a key urban design principle.*

## Future

The District still maintains an identifiable built form connected to its distinctive past. In order to protect and enhance this form, street infrastructure improvements and new structures should be comprised of appropriate scale and quality design to reinforce and complement the neighborhood character.

Although no major alterations to the street grid within the District are envisioned, the anticipated redesign of both Rainbow Boulevard and the Robert Moses Parkway would have significant positive impacts on the District's north and south borders. In addition, the potential for a more complete alley system could improve circulation through the District and access to particular properties.

While more completely addressed in the previous "Streetscape Characteristics" section, new investment in the neighborhood should begin with enhancements to public infrastructure, as such investment would result in a relatively quick makeover of the entire District and demonstrate a commitment to the neighborhood's revitalization. The improvements should promote a walkable street environment by taking into account the proximity of the Park and incorporating elements that help extend its tranquil setting into the District. Ultimately, improved streetscape elements (i.e., pavement, sidewalks, lighting, furniture and neighborhood monuments) should consist of appropriate scale, material,

and color that contribute to the District's shape as well as respect the built form of neighboring structures.

It is critically important to protect viewsheds to the Park and River utilizing appropriate urban form. Therefore, new infill development on the many vacant parcels must build upon the existing urban fabric by responding to neighboring building proportions and land uses. Specifically, massing and scale of future development should preserve views of the water and parkland from other District buildings. Enhancing the loosely established stepped-down built form from north to south would help to avoid development that towers over neighboring structures and consequently blocks southern viewsheds. Moreover, this stepped-down form softens the transition from large-scale buildings to the residential-scale community and minimizes negative impacts of shade and shadows. In the end, appropriate placement and height of infill development should maximize panoramic views (potentially from rooftop gardens/patios), and result in increased aesthetic and economic value for more District properties.

At the base of the stepped-down built form is residential-scale development. This is the preferred built form, and should make up the bulk of new development. Any new construction of this development type should respond to the proportions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century structures that are common in the

District. Accordingly, their design should reflect the original elements of the immediately adjacent residential buildings with respect to mass, material and articulation.

There are a few locations within the District where the assembly of parcels would allow for medium-scaled development. While this type of development is acceptable, it is not the preferred type, as only a couple instances have historically occurred in the District. Overuse of this type would potentially dominate or overwhelm the District's built form. In the few instances where such development could occur, careful consideration must be paid to the context and design of surrounding buildings. Moreover, the placement and height of medium-scale development should help to reinforce the stepped-down development pattern of the District.

The north side of Buffalo Avenue's 400 Block presents a unique development opportunity because it is currently a sizable vacant area in the core of the District, and it is the site of the former Shredded Wheat Factory. For these reasons, this site could be developed as a modern interpretation of the former factory and reestablish it as a focal point of the District. In order to celebrate the District's heritage appropriately, any construction of a structure similar to the former Shredded Wheat Factory must be expressive of the original structure's form, scale and design (see *Buffalo Avenue Architectural*

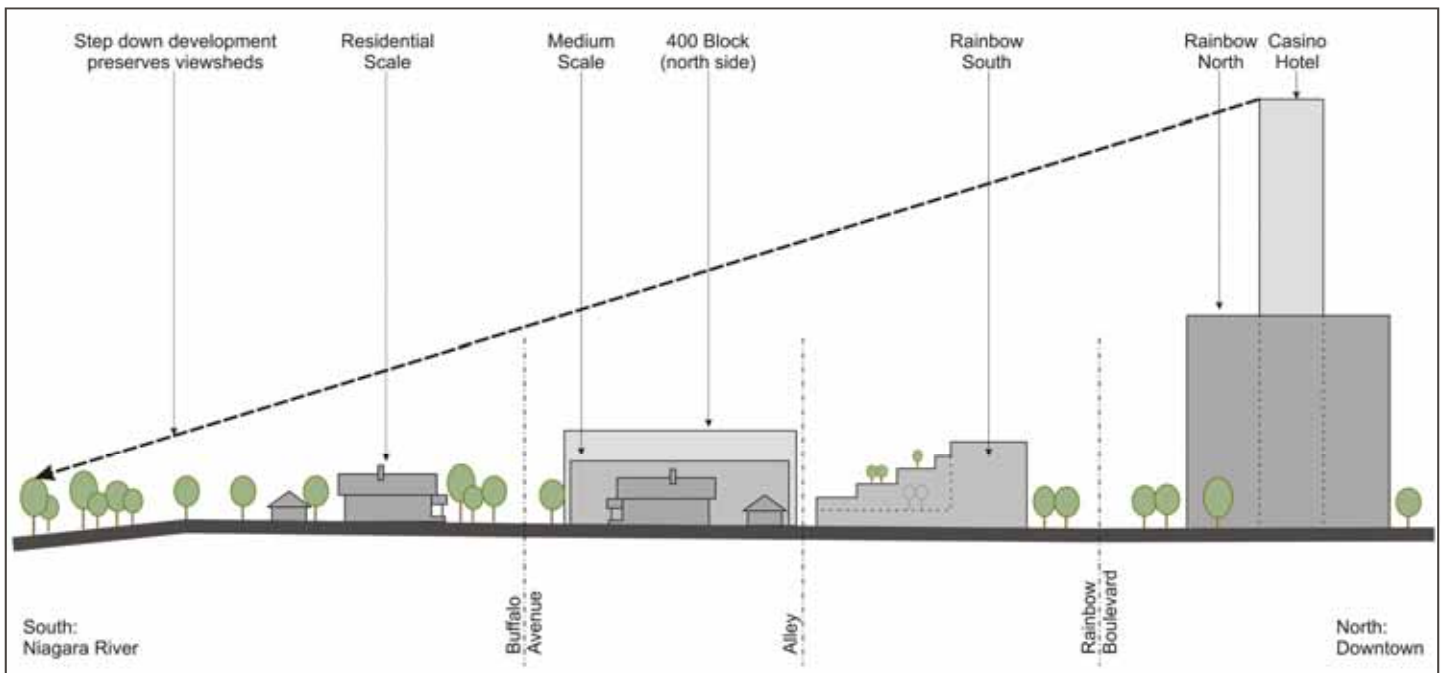
# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

*Design Standards* in Appendix J for specific design criteria). It is important to state that this site's unique history presents an *opportunity* to develop an interpretation of the original structure. However, this plan does not necessitate such a building be developed. In fact, such a structure would be an exception to the proposed zoning changes. Smaller scaled developments would be permitted and would also reinforce the District's historical built form and massing.

The last built form envisioned within the District is large-scale development along Rainbow Boulevard. With even larger

development to its north and less dense development to its south, the south side of Rainbow Boulevard is a key transition point to help reduce the strong vertical contrast between these two geographies. Development on Rainbow Boulevard's south side should continue to evolve from low rise to high rise development, i.e., the few remaining residential-scale structures should give way to more intensive uses. New development in its place should be five to seven stories in height, matching the existing hotels. However, new buildings should exhibit strong articulation and have active and viable uses at street level, and a better street presence, than the

existing hotels. The Hotel Niagara and Jefferson Apartment buildings are sound examples of good street presence. To further ease the step down and because of its key location, the individual structures along Rainbow Boulevard could be stepped down, particularly along the side streets (see illustration on page 44). Stepped-down structures would help soften the abrupt transition from large-scale development along the face of Rainbow Boulevard into the smaller scaled structures along Buffalo Avenue. Such design would also create opportunities for rooftop use and maximize southern exposure for views of the River.



Downtown Niagara Falls exhibits a "step-down" development pattern from the downtown area (right) to the river (left).

## Development Scenarios

A highly visible commitment by USAN and the City to providing quality, walkable public spaces (streets, sidewalks and open spaces) will signify a positive commitment to the District and to the investment community, and will help reinforce the heritage theme for the District. However, property owners may not understand fully how their projects would interlace with this emerging heritage theme or they could enhance the character of the District.

To help convey the dynamics of improving property within the District's historical context, the following five prototype development schemes were prepared. The prototypes serve three purposes: (1) to demonstrate how the District could appear in the future with new infill development (recall the orange buildings on the Illustrative Site Plan); (2) to illustrate the application of proposed design guidelines; and (3) to analyze financial feasibility of undertaking property improvements.

An illustration/photo depicting the mass and form of each prototype is included to help communicate and define the development scenarios. Also, a typical development budget was prepared for each scheme, and includes architectural/engineering fees, permit fees, construction costs, interest on construction financing, and any loss of rent during construction. These detailed estimates are included in the appendix of this document, but are briefly explained in a later section "Financial Analysis".

### SCENARIO 1A: EXISTING RESIDENTIAL REHAB

The existing neighborhood fabric is primarily comprised of 2½ to 3 story, residential structures, which have a commonality of mass and density such that they can be treated as a cohesive element in the District. Scenario 1A focuses on rehabilitating these structures as private residences in an effort to preserve the District's historical fabric and to retain these vital components of the District's heritage theme.

This domestic-sized development type with varied mass blocks, bays, porches, gables, dormers, and porte-cocheres should continue to be the predominant built form of the District.



### SCENARIO 1B: EXISTING RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE ADDITIONAL REHABILITATION (CONVERT TO BED & BREAKFAST)

Scenario 1B is similar to Scenario 1A in that it is also an existing structure to be rehabilitated. The difference between these two prototypes is that Scenario 1B would be an investment project that would generate revenue.

Specifically, Scenario 1B is an example of converting an existing residential structure to a Bed & Breakfast (B&B). This prototype would generate revenues to offset improvements, however, higher construction costs would result from additional improvements required by code to operate a B&B.

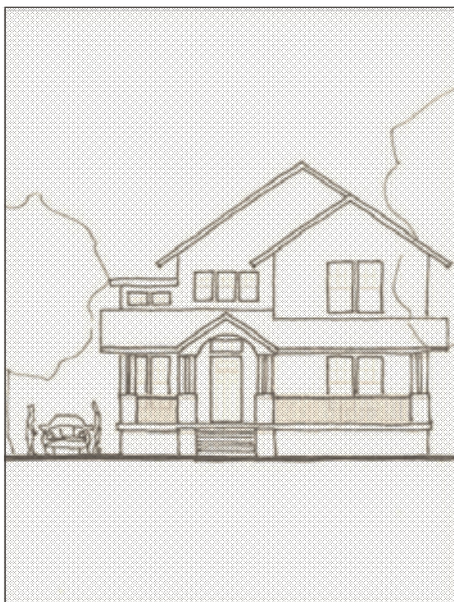


# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

## SCENARIO 2A: NEW RESIDENTIAL INFILL STRUCTURE

The existing neighborhood fabric would be supplemented by the contextually sensitive infill development of Scenario 2A. Inspired by former and existing stately homes, these new, single-family residences would reinforce the heritage theme by being constructed in a shape and form that respects the traditional fabric (late 19th and early 20th century) of the neighborhood.

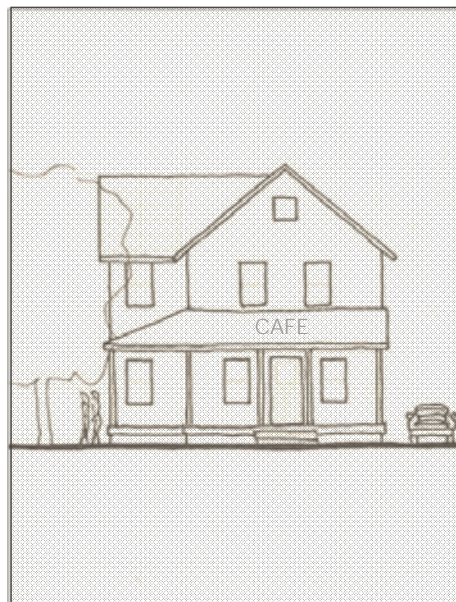
In addition, this prototype would address underutilized property by constructing new, residential developments on vacant land. Also, this scenario offers the development community an opportunity to construct modern residences in a premiere location of the city.



## SCENARIO 2B: NEW MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL/ COMMERCIAL INFILL STRUCTURE

Scenario 2B is similar to Scenario 2A in that the shape and form would be about the same. The difference between these two prototypes is that Scenario 2B would be an investment project that would generate revenue. Specifically, this development scenario is envisioned to house a commercial/retail operation on the first floor and two apartments on the upper floors.

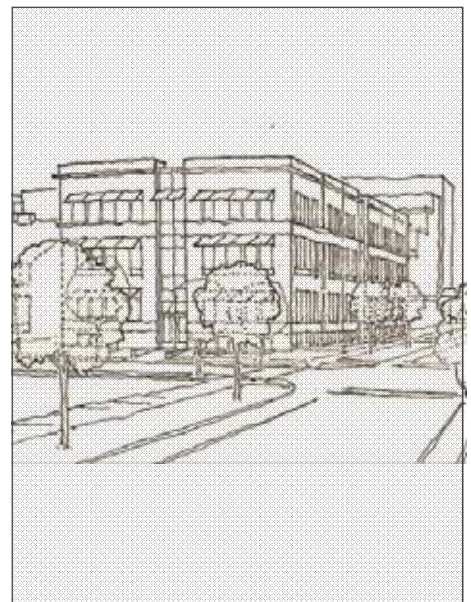
The shape and form of this development scenario meets the objective of reinforcing the traditional fabric sought in the design theme. Moreover, allowing a mix of uses broadens development options for an investor, and helps activate the District.



## SCENARIO 3: NEW MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL INFILL STRUCTURE

Envisioned as a low-rise apartment building, Scenario 3 is the largest of the development scenarios. Because of its relatively large size, there are only a few locations in the District where such form would appropriately fit into the urban fabric. Still, this prototype is an integral component for this Revitalization Strategy.

The concept of an apartment building in the District is within character of the desired heritage theme, as the Lockell Apartments once stood at the corner of Buffalo Avenue and 3rd Street. This apartment complex established historical precedent and provides a reference for design considerations of new structures. This is reflected in the design standards.



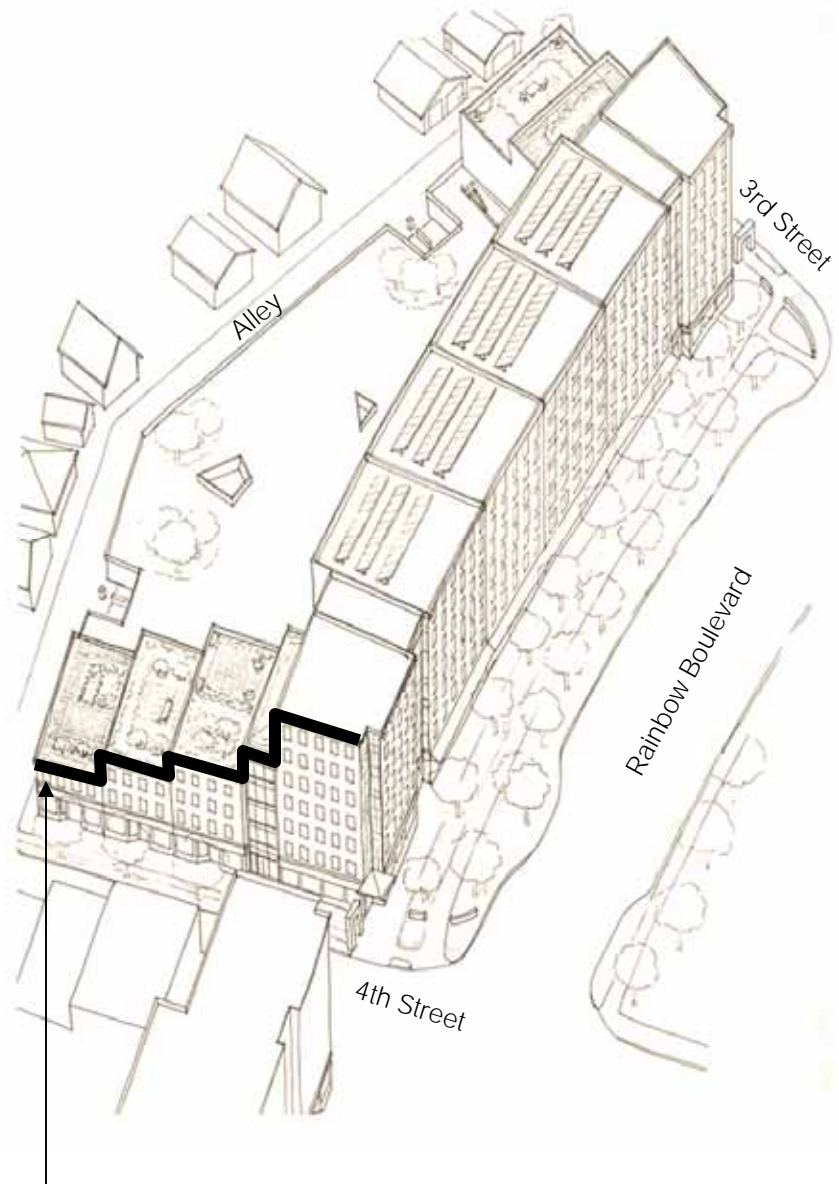


**Large-Scale Development—Rainbow Boulevard**

While the focus of this Revitalization Strategy is on reinforcing smaller-scaled development, large-scale development is likely, and even encouraged, to occur along Rainbow Boulevard. In fact, this area (between the alley and Rainbow Boulevard) is very important because it forms the significant northern edge of the District that interfaces with the downtown area. Also, the potential built form in this area is significant as it would help the transition between high-density, downtown development to low-density, neighborhood development that is south of the alley.

The adjacent illustration was prepared to convey relevant size and placement of development that would be allowed under the proposed “D1-C” zoning classification. The 80’ maximum building height along Rainbow Boulevard would help with the transition between downtown and the District. In addition, a design consideration for Rainbow Boulevard development should include step-downs along the side streets to further ease the built form transition.

It is important to note that this analysis of development along Rainbow Boulevard is focused on its scale and relation to the surrounding development pattern. Unlike the preceding scenarios, this development example is not financially analyzed as part of this study since existing programs address projects of this size.



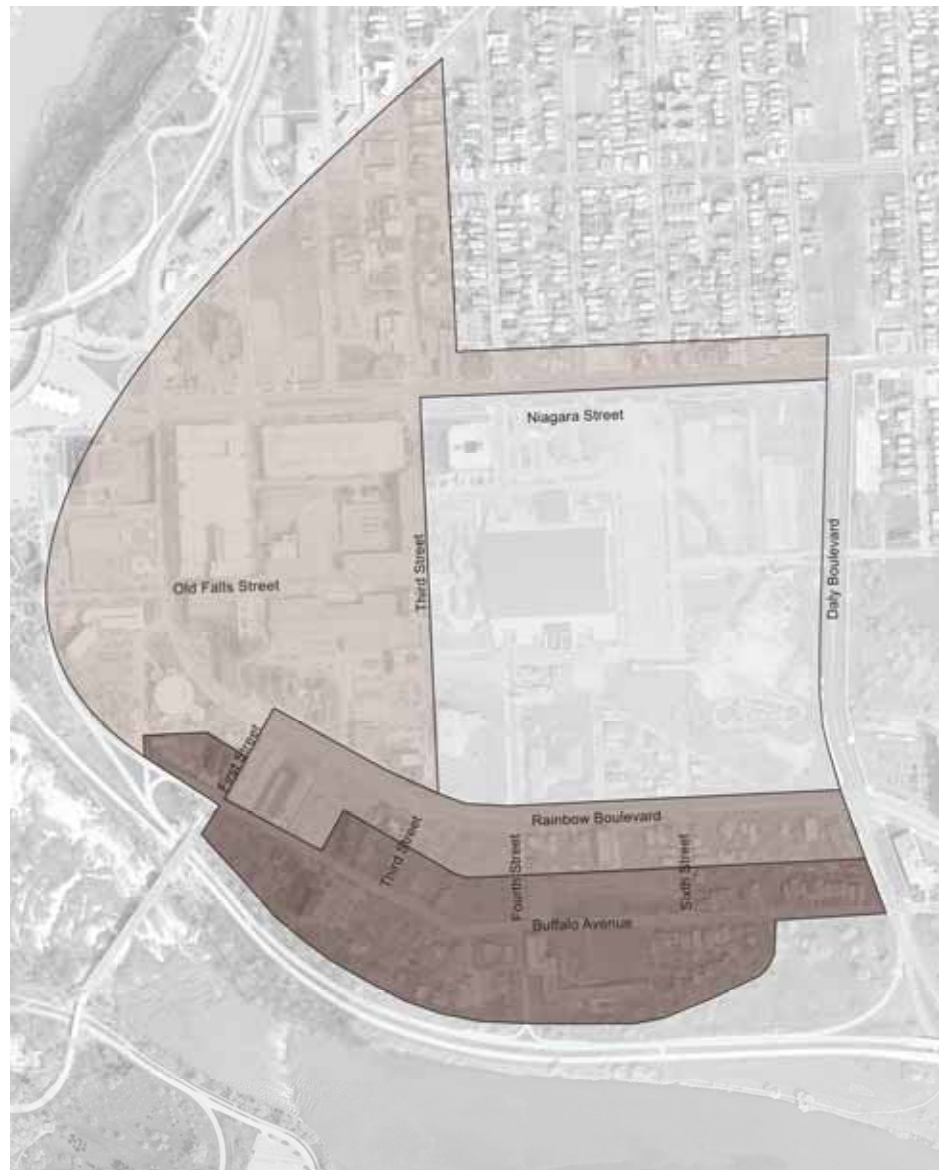
Step-down along side street

# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

## Architectural Design Standards

To help reinforce the heritage theme sought for the District, design standards that address architectural components of buildings were developed, and are included in Appendix J. Traditional design of former and existing historical District buildings, particularly with respect to massing, scale, materials, colors, and architectural features, served as a reference for the design standards. Adherence to the design criteria will help to protect the historical integrity of existing structures, and ensure quality construction of new structures that are compatible with existing District building fabric. Accordingly, the *Buffalo Avenue Architectural Design Standards* apply to both existing buildings and new, infill construction.

However, these design standards are not appropriate for the anticipated development along Rainbow Boulevard. For this reason, the program area for USAN's existing design standards should be expanded and applied to the south side of Rainbow Boulevard. The urban design principles of these standards more appropriately reflect the type of commercial development anticipated here than the *Buffalo Avenue Architectural Design Standards*. The adjacent figure depicts where the respective program areas would apply.



- Casino Compact Area
- Program Area of USAN Design Standards
- Potential Expansion of USAN Design Standards
- Program Area for Buffalo Avenue Design Standards

## Financial Analysis

Any investment decision, rehabilitation or new construction, involves an expenditure of dollars that adds value to a property. For most property owners, the decision to invest is only made when the value added at least equals the cost of the improvements. To gain a better understanding of the financial realities of such improvements, a key component of this Revitalization Strategy was to analyze the permitting, construction, and financing costs of each recommended development scenario and the assumed increase in property taxes resulting from property improvement.

The table titled *“Construction and Financing Assumptions”* on the next page summarizes the assumptions of development scenario attributes. The scenarios vary by construction type and size (square feet), and this lays the groundwork for the financial assumptions.

One of the first steps in the analysis was to prepare cost estimates for rehabilitation of existing structures as well as for construction of new buildings. In Scenarios 1A and 1B, which are existing structures that would be rehabilitated, the costs would include work necessary to bring the structure into code compliance. The remaining scenarios would be new construction projects, which are generally calculated on a square footage basis. It was assumed that the improvements would result in a higher property tax bill. Accordingly, an estimated after-improvement assessment value for each development scenario was prepared to provide a more complete understanding of the total costs to be carried by such projects.

Project financing for both property acquisition and improvements was assumed to involve 20% equity and 80% loan. Because Scenarios 1A, 1B and 2A would be eligible for a residential mortgage, a 30-year term was assumed at a 6.5% annual rate (compounded monthly). Scenarios 2B and 3 were considered commercial development, which conventional lending institutions would require a shorter term at a higher rate. A 10-year loan at 7.5% annual rate (compounded monthly) was assumed for these scenarios.

Using the prototypes and typical development budgets discussed above, 5-year cash flow analyses were prepared to illustrate the risk and expected return from an investment (summary cash flows [annual] are included in subsequent pages, and more detailed [monthly] are included in Appendix G). The cash flows were based on a simple “cash in, “cash out” model. It was assumed that no revenue was generated in Year 1, as a development was assumed to be under construction. Revenue commenced in Year 2 and was constant, i.e., no escalation, thereafter. Scenarios 1A and 2A are single-family units, and revenue assumptions do not apply. Expense items also are not typically considered for single-family developments, but were included to illustrate debt service and tax costs. For the remaining scenarios, expenses were determined from general knowledge of current market conditions, and were tailored to each scenario, as shown in the following pages. Real estate taxes were calculated assuming the increased property assessment value.

A typical property tax bill in Niagara Falls is comprised of school, city, county, and refuse taxes. However, the tax rate is different for homestead (residential) and non-homestead (all other). The below table titled *“2007 Tax Rates”* shows this difference between these two groups, and includes the specific rates (Year 2007) that were used as part of the cash flow analysis.

*For most property owners, the decision to invest is only made when the value added at least equals the cost of the improvements.*

# BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

## Construction and Financing Assumptions

	DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO				
	1A	1B	2A	2B	3
<b>CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE</b>					
Construction Type	Rehab	Rehab	New	New	New
Size (square feet)	4,000	4,000	3,000	4,000	36,000
<b>Improvement Costs</b>					
Construction	82,050	75,700	415,296	514,864	5,595,520
Design Fee (10%)	8,205	7,570	41,530	51,486	559,552
Permits	976	895	296	410	4,450
Total Estimated Costs (rounded)	92,000	177,000	458,000	567,000	6,200,000
Estimated Cost per Square Foot	23.00	44.25	152.67	141.75	172.22
<b>FINANCING ASSUMPTIONS</b>					
Financing Term (years)	30	30	30	10	10
Financing Rate (annual)	6.5%	6.5%	6.5%	7.5%	7.5%
Percent Financed	80%	80%	80%	80%	80%
<b>CASH FLOW ASSUMPTIONS</b>					
Real Estate Tax Rate	43.73	43.73	43.73	61.79	61.79
Revenue YR1	n/a	0	n/a	0	0
Revenue YR2 and beyond	n/a	43,200	n/a	72,000	583,200

In general, the scenarios exhibited a negative cash flow (i.e., expenses exceeded revenues). In fact, the analysis showed that the numbers were increasingly negative. This helps to explain why little rehabilitation or new construction has occurred in the District in recent years. To close this apparent financial gap, public intervention should be considered to improve development feasibility of each prototype. A preliminary look into targeted financial incentives that could serve as catalysts for spurring investment in the District is the focus of the next section. It is important to note that while several of the following financial incentives are recommended, *all* may not be universally applicable to *all* District properties (e.g., an incentive for a residential conversion to a B & B may differ substantially from that required for an infill mixed-use project). Yet, it is imperative for these programs to be clearly discernable and easy to understand in order to entice and maximize property owner participation.

2007 TAX RATES (dollars per \$1,000 assessed value)		
ENTITY	HOMESTEAD	NON-HOMESTEAD
School	18.44	20.35
City	16.62	32.77
County	8.57	8.57
Refuse	0.01	0.01
<b>Total</b>	<b>43.73</b>	<b>61.79</b>

## Targeted Financial Incentives

While the proposed development scenarios fit into the desired physical framework of the District, analyses of the cash flows showed the financials of such projects to be strained. For this reason, ways to improve project financials were explored. First, existing economic development programs were reviewed to determine whether their benefits applied to District properties (i.e., within their program boundary). Second, proposed incentive programs were conceived to fill gaps beyond the existing programs. Should the proposed programs be established, District property owners will have an impressive array of financing tools to help finance their construction projects. Of equal significance, some of the proposed incentives would have a limited lifespan, thereby creating a limited opportunity for property owners to take advantage of such programs. The result would be an immediate infusion of capital into improvements in the District.

The collective package of incentives is generous, particularly in the near term. This is intended to create buzz about the District and its investment opportunities. The goal is to have property owners take advantage of these incentives to stabilize and improve the District by both addressing the pressing needs of existing structures and building on vacant lots. As investment and construction start to occur within the District, more and more attention would be drawn to the area. In the end, the generous, short-term programs will have fulfilled their objective of “priming the pump” for additional development that would occur in a subsequent wave of investment.

## PROPOSED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

USAN and the City could explore funding a program that would provide term contracts to various consulting disciplines for the purpose of offering professional services to assist District property owners with technical issues at no cost. The consultants would be able to provide expertise on the construction process from start to finish. For example, consultants could provide design services and provide required construction drawings or specifications. They would help the property owners navigate the design review process and work with local planning board. They could also assist with the application process for historic designation. The consultants could serve as construction managers, review cost estimates (bids) from contractors and inspect completed work. Specifically, architects, landscape architects, and engineers are obvious professionals that should be considered for term contracts. In addition attorneys, real estate appraisers, and professionals providing environmental due diligence reviews should also be considered for term contracts. Collectively, the objective of utilizing such professionals would be to assist property owners with issues that they may not understand themselves.



PROPOSED PERMIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

While permit fees are often a smaller percentage of costs of an overall project, time lost in getting approvals to actually getting your approvals often delay a business from starting and go directly to the bottom line. Nevertheless, a review of current City building permit fee schedules as they would apply to the various development scenarios examined, show that permit fees are more expensive to rehabilitation scenarios—in both absolute and relative senses—than the new construction scenarios. This tends to suggest that permitting costs more for smaller investors and homeowners who tend not to be as versed in the construction process as seasoned developers. This is particularly a concern given that the need to preserve/upgrade existing structures is a key component for the District’s heritage theme and this Revitalization Strategy.

Thus, the City should undertake a comprehensive examination/review of its permitting and inspection fee schedules to ensure appropriate treatment between rehabilitation and new construction projects. Concurrently, USAN and the City should explore the possibility of undertaking an “ombudsman” or “ambassador” program. Several cities have successfully implemented such programs – where an ombudsman is assigned to a resident/small business owner to serve as a guide and advocate as they interact with various government agencies. Such individuals typically review and refer inquiries to agencies only after the resident or small business owner has worked to resolve the issues through the normal course of business. Such a program would come at limited cost to the City/USAN, insofar as staff informally works in this role in selected instances already.

*The goal is to have property owners take advantage of these incentives to stabilize and improve the District .*

PROPOSED EXTERIOR IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

This proposed program would provide a grant up to \$40,000 to property owners for exterior improvements to existing structures. This program would provide an infusion of capital to help stabilize and enhance some of the roughly 50 structures in the core of the District (south of the alley) exhibiting architectural richness that forms the basis of the heritage theme. Improvement projects that focus on building features visible from the street, particularly the front, would have preference, as the objective of this program would be to improve elements that contribute to the public realm of the District.

This program would create immediate impact in a few ways. First, this program would provide a grant to property owners. With potentially \$2 million of work sought (50 houses at \$40,000 a piece) but only \$1 million of grant money available, an incentive would be created to apply for a grant early in order to attain the money before the fund is exhausted. Second, this program would be available for only a limited period of time—five years—when any remaining monies would revert back to the City. Finally, few caveats, such as property size or value, income restrictions, or other complex formulas would be factored, thereby allowing broader participation in the program.

However, program participants would have to agree to some basic requirements. Most importantly, to prevent investors from “flipping” a property for a quick profit, participants would be required to own the property for five years following the project’s completion. Should the property be sold prior to the five year period, the grant would convert to a loan and would be repaid on a sliding scale. In addition, participation in this program would require adherence to USAN design standards, which provide basic design criteria intended to uphold architectural qualities. Also, any outstanding building code issues (e.g. lack of hand railing, raised concrete, etc.) would need to be addressed before completing non-code related projects (e.g. painting, landscaping, etc.). Finally, participants would need to be current on applicable taxes, fees, and mortgage payments.

## PROPOSED MICRO-GRANT PROGRAM

USAN will explore establishing a micro-grant program to provide rehabilitation assistance to existing property owners in the District. The primary objective of such a program would be to stabilize existing structures that help shape the unique form and character of the District. Eligible project activities would include various small-scale improvements and property enhancements that would contribute the District's physical setting. They include, but are not limited to:

- Correction of electrical, plumbing, and fire safety code violations;
- Restoration and/or replacement of exterior building features—roofs, porches, steps, clapboard/stucco, windows, etc.;
- Repair/installation of site improvements—decorative fencing, retaining walls, driveways, parking areas, etc.; and
- Incorporation of exterior visual/landscape amenities that add to the visitor and/or patron experience—landscaped courtyards, exterior sitting areas, gazebos, etc.

This program should provide a maximum grant of \$10,000, and should not require a minimum project cost to ensure even the simplest projects could be funded. A required 50% participation from the applicant would establish an owner's stake in the project. In the end, the culmination of many small-scaled projects would help improve the District as a whole, and begin to build momentum for additional future investment.

## PROPERTY TAX ABATEMENTS

After improvements are complete, a property's value is expected to increase, which is perceived to be positive. However, the property's assessed value on which property taxes are based also tends to increase resulting in a higher tax bill for the property owner. To help reduce the impact of a higher tax bill, existing tax abatement programs provide exemptions for certain capital improvements to real property (refer to *Incentive Programs* table in the following pages). These exemptions are in accordance with New York State Real Property Tax Law, and have been adopted by the City.

There are five existing tax abatement programs that could be applied to properties in the District. Each program is intended for a specific type of development, and can not be applied to multiple properties. Also, not all programs reduce all components to property taxes: some programs may apply to city taxes but not to school or county.

Various programs can help abate the remaining taxes, which effectively reduces the entire tax bill for a specified period of time. Each project, and related program offerings, are typically handled on an individual basis.

*The goal of spurring investment in the very near term should be realized by limiting the lifespan of proposed programs to a 5-year timeframe.*

### Impact of Incentive Programs

The existing and proposed targeted financial incentives collectively create an impressive package for property owners to utilize, and should result in reinvestment and new investment in the District. The various programs assisting property owners at multiple stages of the construction process should help facilitate rejuvenation of the District. Specifically, the proposed programs have been specifically tailored to fill financial gaps between already established programs. The combination of the existing with the new programs would clearly help investors from start to finish with their projects, either for building rehabilitation or for new construction. Moreover, with some of the proposed programs having a limited lifespan to take advantage of, the goal of spurring investment in the very near term should be realized.

### Addressing Vacant Parcels

There are a number of key parcels within the District that could prove to be major revitalization catalysts for the District. Many of these parcels are vacant and privately owned by only a few individuals. Not only have these parcels been inactive for several years, but their vacancies have adversely impacted the perception of the District. There is an opportunity for development of these key sites, but development could also be facilitated through the public sector: acquisition, solicitation of development proposals, and accepting bids. Accordingly, USAN and the City could start by working with existing property owners for the purposes of initiating economic development within the District. For example, USAN could coordinate with the City periodically to review the City's *in rem* and private mortgage foreclosure listings for properties in the District. Additionally, USAN could consider negotiating a purchase price with current owners of targeted properties.

As such, a site preparation/acquisition fund should be created to purchase property as it becomes available. Specifically, a program funded with \$200,000 annually for five years would create a pool of \$1 million from which monies could be drawn to acquire underutilized property. This amount of money would allow USAN or the City to

acquire numerous parcels, depending on their market values. To aid with the process, USAN and the City could consider soliciting the services of a real estate appraiser to determine more accurately the market value of property in the District. This information would also be useful for USAN to market to private investors.

Once public control of strategic parcels within the District is attained, USAN or the City would have the opportunity to help reinforce the character of the District both in the short- and long- term. As a temporary measure, acquired parcels could be used as a venue to host events. A permanent use would be achieved by soliciting development proposals from the private development community and selecting the proposal that best matches the specific design components identified in the Request for Proposals (RFP). In addition to a sound development plan and required financing, the RFP could also require the full build out of the plan within a specific timeframe to ensure timely implementation and completion of the project.



**Incentive Programs**

<b>TAX ABATEMENTS</b>								
<b>Program Title</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Construction Type</b>	<b>Minimum Construction Cost</b>	<b>Maximum Assessment Increase</b>	<b>Total Years</b>	<b>Applicable Tax</b>	<b>Incentive</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Section 421f : Exemptions for Capital Improvements to Residential Property	Residential (1-2 unit)	Rehab	\$3,000	\$80,000	8	City; County; School	Exemption to tax assessment increase: 100% year 1, 12.5% per year, years 2-8	
Section 421j: Capital Investment in Multiple Dwelling Buildings	Residential (multi-unit)	New; Rehab	\$15,000/unit	None	8	City	Exemption to tax assessment increase: 100% year 1, 12.5% per year, years 2-8	
Section 485a: Residential/Commercial Urban Exemption	Mixed-Use	Conversion	\$10,000	None	12	City; School	Exemption to tax assessment increase: 100% years 1-8; 20% per year, years 9-12	
Section 485b: Exemption for Commercial, Business or Industrial Property	Commercial, Business, Industrial	New; Rehab	\$10,000	\$50,000	10	City; County; School	Exemption to tax assessment increase: 50% year 1; 5% per year, years 2-10	
Section 485j: Resident Investment-New Construction	Residential	New	\$70,000	\$350,000	10	City	Exemption to tax assessment increase: 50% year 1; 5% per year, years 2-10	
<b>HISTORIC PRESERVATION TAX INCENTIVES</b>								
<b>Program Title/Source</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Construction Type</b>	<b>Minimum Construction Cost</b>	<b>Maximum Income Credit</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Type of Incentive</b>	<b>Incentive</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit Program for National Register Designated Commercial Buildings	Commercial	Rehab	Must be substantial rehab	No Cap	Credits received upon certified completion of project	Federal Income Tax Credit	20% of Approved Rehab Costs	National Register Designation; National Register or Tax Certified Historic District; Income Producing Structure. Substantial rehab is the greater of either \$5000 or the taxpayer's adjusted basis on the property. Work may be phased over several years.
NYS Commercial Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program for National Register Designated Commercial Buildings	Commercial	Rehab	None	\$100,000	Credits received upon certified completion of project	State Income Tax Credit	30% of the 20% Federal Credit value	National Register Designation; National Register or Tax Certified Historic District
NYS Historic Homeownership Rehabilitation Program for National or State Register Designated Owner-Occupied Residential Buildings	Residential	Rehab	\$5,000	\$25,000	Credits received upon certified completion of project	State Income Tax Credit	20% of Approved Rehab Costs	National or State Register Designation <i>and</i> Located in a Federally Recognized Distressed Census Tract; Owner-Occupied
NYS Real Property Tax Exemption for Historic Properties Program	Residential	Rehab	None	None	10 Years	Property Tax Abatement	5-year freeze on property taxes; 5-year incrementally phased increases thereafter	Local Landmark or Local Historic District designation
<b>HISTORIC PRESERVATION GRANTS</b>								
<b>Program Title/Source</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Construction Type</b>	<b>Minimum Request</b>	<b>Maximum Award</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Type Of Incentive</b>	<b>Incentive</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
The National Park Service, Save America's Treasures Program	Municipal, Tribal, Educational or 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Organizations	Preservation; Conservation	\$125,000* (minimum federal share)	\$700,000 (maximum federal share)	Varies	Grant	Matching Grant	National Landmark or National Register Listed; Awards must be matched
The NYS OPRHP Historic Preservation Program through the Environmental Protection Fund	Municipal; Non-Profit	Acquisition; Preservation; Restoration; Rehab; Protection; Reconstruction; Archeological Interpretation	None	Shall not exceed 50% of the approved project cost	Varies	Grant	Matching grant	State or National Register Listed <i>or</i> contribute to a National Register or Tax-Certified historic district prior to application

The Preserve NY Grant Program through Preservation League of NYS	Municipal, 501(c)(3) Non-Profit	Funding for historic district application to the National Register of Historic Places.	None	Usually \$15,000 maximum	Dependent on request	Grant	Matching grant not required, but advisable	
NYS Historic Preservation Office	Municipal, 501(c)(3) Non-Profit	Funding for historic district application to the National Register of Historic Places	None	Limited to available funding	Dependent on request	Grant	Matching grant not required, but advisable	Municipality eligible through the Certified Local Government Program.
Private Grantors Margaret Wendt; John R. Oishei	501(c)(3) Non-Profit	Preservation, Neighborhood empowerment	None	Limited to available funding	Dependent on request	Grant	Matching grant not required, but advisable	National Register Designation generally required.
<b>CITY OF NIAGARA FALLS PROGRAMS</b>								
<b>Program Title/Source</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Construction Type</b>	<b>Minimum Construction Cost</b>	<b>Minimum Assessment Increase</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Type of Incentive</b>	<b>Incentive</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
The Community Development Department Community Development Block Grant	Residential; Rental Property	Correction of Code Violations; Home Improvement	Varies with programs.	Limited to available funding	Dependent on request	Grant; Deferred Loan	Varies with programs.	Eligibility based on Federal HUD requirements; Limited to low- and moderate- income homeowners and tenants
The Community Development Department HOME Entitlement Grant Program	Residential	Rehab	Varies with programs.	Limited to available funding	Dependent on request	Grant	Varies with programs.	Limited to low- and moderate- income homeowners and tenants
The Economic Development Department; Programs that encourage tourism	Commercial	New; Rehab	None	None	Dependent on request	Varies with programs.	Varies with programs.	Promotion of Tourism in conjunction with other State and Local programs.
<b>USAN PROGRAMS</b>								
<b>Program Title/Source</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Construction Type</b>	<b>Minimum Request</b>	<b>Maximum Award</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Type of Incentive</b>	<b>Incentive</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> Street Entertainment District Grant Program (program to be extended to Rainbow Blvd)	Commercial	Business Development and Façade Projects	\$25,000	\$100,000	None	Grant	50% of eligible project costs	Must create or retain jobs; Must be consistent with local or regional comprehensive plan; Must comply with USAN 3 <sup>rd</sup> Street Design Standards
<b>PROPOSED PROGRAMS</b>								
<b>Program Title/Source</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Construction Type</b>	<b>Minimum Request</b>	<b>Maximum Award</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Type of Incentive</b>	<b>Incentive</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Technical Assistance Program	Residential; Commercial	New; Rehab	None	Varies with project	Program would expire after 5 years	Grant	Reimbursement of consultant fees upon successful completion of project	Property must be located within District boundaries; Owner must hold title for 5 Years; Project must comply with USAN Buffalo Avenue Design Standards
Permit Fee Program	Residential; Commercial	New; Rehab	None	Varies with project	Program would expire after 5 years	Grant	Reimbursement of building permit fees upon successful completion of project	Property must be located within District boundaries; Owner must hold title for 5 Years; Project must comply with USAN Buffalo Avenue Design Standards
Exterior Improvement Program	Residential; Mixed-Use	Rehab	None	\$40,000	Program would expire after 5 years	Grant	Reimbursement upon successful completion of project	Property must be located within District boundaries; Owner must hold title for 5 Years; Project must comply with USAN Buffalo Avenue Design Standards
Micro-Grant Program	Residential; Commercial	Rehab	None	\$10,000	Program would expire after 3 years	Matching Grant	50% matching grant of eligible project costs	Property must be located within District boundaries; Owner must hold title for 5 Years; Project must comply with USAN Buffalo Avenue Design Standards

# REALIZING THE VISION

To be successful, public and private entities must collectively implement strategic policies and programs that reinforce the heritage theme and support the overall vision for the District. A goal of the Revitalization Strategy is to show quick action and rebuild property owner confidence through image enhancing and theme reinforcing activities. This is a critical step in encouraging reinvestment by existing property owners, and in fostering an attractive market to new outside investment.

The following topic areas classify challenges and subsequent actions integral to District revitalization. Each topic area codifies specific strategies and actions that are further broken down into implementation phases. Immediate actions are items that can and should be commenced as soon as possible. Short-term actions are meant to be completed within one year. Both the Immediate and Short-term actions are low-cost tasks intended to accomplish the quick action necessary to rebuild confidence and spur redevelopment activity. Medium-term actions are intended to be implemented within one to three years. The long-term outlook is defined as three to five years, though some aspects of implementation may span up to ten years. While this time frame is long, it does not mean work can be postponed. Rather, it is imperative to begin planning and mobilizing for long-term initiatives that would continue revitalization momentum established by the successful implementation of earlier actions.



District Character  
And Ambience



Streetscape  
Characteristics



Development  
Pattern



## DISTRICT CHARACTER AND AMBIENCE

### Challenges

Current physical appearance of public and quasi-public spaces creates a perception of decline.

Many existing buildings are in need of routine maintenance to prevent deterioration of key building systems.

Few existing buildings exhibit high quality maintenance and upkeep.

The District has an underdeveloped character as a historic residential and industrial neighborhood.

The District lacks a distinct identity and sense of place.

Due to a lack of economic and social activity, the District is an unknown and underutilized area for downtown visitors.

### Key Strategies

#### Improve District appearance by:

- Organizing District stakeholders into a formal or informal group that is willing to be the “champion” of the neighborhood.
- Holding periodic clean up events to ensure the District is free of debris.
- Advocating for large public projects as well as small private improvements.

#### Preserve existing structures by:

- Initiating property maintenance and upgrades to enhance District character.
- Participating in incentive programs to offset/reduce improvement costs.
- Pursuing historic designations for preservation, heritage tourism, and financial purposes.

#### Activate the District by:

- Branding the District with a distinct identity and marketing the District to a larger audience.
- Sponsoring events and activities that engage residents and draw new people to the District.
- Soliciting niche proprietors who augment tourism infrastructure to locate in the District.

### Expected Outcomes

*Initiating and following through with the Key Strategies is expected to produce the following results:*

An improved overall appearance of the District would result from an established stewardship and pride for the District from its stakeholders. This altered impression of the District would help establish the District as a desirable marketplace.

Conserving the District’s historical fabric would maintain a key component of the heritage theme, and would retain the elements of the District that make it visually interesting.

By becoming an active and vibrant setting within the downtown area, the perception of safety would improve and additional activity would likely be spurred, as more and more visitors would be drawn to the District.



# REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

District Character and Ambience – Action Items	Term
Maintain vacant lots (cut grass/clear sidewalks of snow)	I
Remove debris and trash from alley, and maintain acceptable appearance	I
Facilitate formation of neighborhood group	I
Identify neighborhood “champion” to serve as a liaison to public entities	I
Encourage rehabilitation of existing structures to reinforce District theme	I
Sponsor periodic neighborhood clean up events	S
Host seminar highlighting positive aspects of historical preservation	S
Seek/engage public input to record unique stories about the District	S
Inform individual property owners on historical significance of their property	S
Assist nomination for National Register Districts	S
Publish pamphlet telling the story of the District	S
Create a unique branding for the District	S
Work with neighborhood group to develop marketing campaign	S
Host an inaugural event to celebrate District's rebirth	S
Publish map to improve visitor orientation of District and downtown area	S
Create newsletter to highlight recent/upcoming events and activities	S
Establish relationship with media to highlight District events	S
Host hospitality improvement seminars to improve service delivery	S
Assist owners with applicable federal and state preservation tax incentives/credits	M
Assist nomination of individual properties as local landmarks	M
Salvage materials from buildings to be demolished	M
Offer salvaged materials to District property owners to retain authentic materials	M
Develop walking tour program (e.g. cell phone tour) highlighting architectural styles and District heritage	M
Sponsor events and activities like a garden walk, a farmers market, a winter festival	M
Solicit proprietors to originate bike/Segway tours in the District	M
Solicit internet café proprietor	M
Work with the City to establish a Wi-Fi Zone	M
Pursue designation as a Local Historic Preservation District	L
Explore feasibility of relocating structures to preserve authentic materials	L
Explore feasibility of deconstructing structures to preserve authentic materials	L

I = Immediate; S= Short-Term (<1 year); M=Medium-Term (1-3 years); L= Long-term (3-10 years)

## STREETSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS

### Challenges

The public domain, including streets, sidewalks, lighting, and utilities, is generally in poor condition (beyond maintenance and repair).

Alleyways, in particular, are in very poor physical condition, are strewn with litter and are characterized by alleged illegal activity, resulting in a negative perception for this area of the District.

The current street configuration, with the sidewalk attached to the street, leaves no space for snow storage and impacts pedestrian sense of safety from passing vehicles.

Street furnishings lack coherent design treatments, i.e. materials, style, and color.

Many important connections between downtown, the Park and the River have been compromised over time.

### Key Strategies

#### Enhance public realm by:

- Examining parking management to identify shared parking opportunities.
- Examining street configuration for the purpose of improving the placement of streetscape elements.
- Implementing streetscape projects in a phased manner to first address areas in greatest need of improvement.

#### Reinforce heritage theme by:

- Introducing interpretive elements that help tell the story of the District.
- Employing cohesive elements that subtly help to define the District.
- Applying streetscape design recommendations that supplement the District's built form.

#### Increase District access by:

- Linking downtown and the River in a formalized, easy-to-navigate manner.
- Improving existing viewsheds in order to draw more visitors to the District.
- Establishing new connections that not only increase the number of entry points into the District, but also create new viewsheds.

### Expected Outcomes

*Initiating and following through with the Key Strategies is expected to produce the following results:*

Implementing the streetscape improvement projects would improve the physical conditions of the District, improve the function of the road and sidewalks (e.g. snow storage), and would improve the pedestrians' sense of safety.

The elements of the streetscape projects would contribute to creating a sense of place for the District and enhance the experiences of District residents and visitors.

Increased permeability of the District would create opportunities for strategic placement of gateway and way-finding elements that would improve navigation of the neighborhood and draw more "explorers" into the District.



# REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

Streetscape Characteristics – Action Items	Term
Clean/fix existing street furniture as temporary improvement	I
Use Buffalo Avenue Streetscape Design Recommendations to influence/shape future infrastructure projects	I
Undertake parking management study to maximize on-street parking availability/turn-over	S
Create planting strip along all streets	S
Reconstruct/relocate sidewalk within right-of-way	S
Introduce bulb outs	S
Introduce gateway elements at strategic entrances to the District	S
Place historic markers/medallions at significant sites	S
Initiate competition for light pole art design	S
Influence Rainbow Boulevard Project - integrate design elements with neighborhood	S
Acquire right-of-way for alley widening between 4th and 6th Sts.	S
Coordinate Robert Moses Parkway Project (south) design with Buffalo Avenue recommendations	S
Establish quasi-private, shared parking areas in strategic locations to preserve a developed street wall	M
Improve trolley and bus service to bring more people into the District	M
Establish a prominent gateway at 4th Street's intersection with Robert Moses Parkway	M
Implement streetscape improvement program along 3rd, 4th (north), 6th Streets	M
Implement streetscape improvement program along Buffalo Avenue	M
Introduce interpretive elements that reinforce heritage theme	M
Extend bike path across Buffalo Avenue to Rainbow Boulevard	M
Provide pedestrian connection from the District to the Niagara Riverwalk	M
Formalize pedestrian connection along 1st Street between Buffalo Ave and the Robert Moses Parkway	M
Participate in Robert Moses Parkway Project (south) scoping process	M
Emphasize as key focal point 4th Street-Buffalo Avenue intersection with additional design treatments	L
Implement streetscape improvement program along alleys	L
Implement streetscape improvement program along 4th Street (south)	L
Implement streetscape improvement program along Riverside Drive	L
Introduce pedestrian connection from 3rd Street to Robert Moses Parkway	L
Establish green connection between Buffalo Avenue and Rainbow Boulevard	L
Remove W. Quay Street; consider selling right-of-way to adjacent property owners	L

I = Immediate; S= Short-Term (<1 year); M=Medium-Term (1-3 years); L= Long-term (3-10 years)

## DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

### Challenges

A significant portion of District's urban fabric has been demolished leaving numerous parcels vacant.

Land speculation has kept many vacant parcels undeveloped.

The bulk of undeveloped properties are held by only a few owners.

Land assembly appears to be time-consuming and financially costly for potential developers.

Current land use controls do not address protection of the historic character of the District.

Market uncertainty has resulted from lack of predictability from zoning.

Improvement costs appear to exceed after-improvement-value of property.

The City's building permit and inspection process that has evolved over time can be intimidating to residents and business owners.

### Key Strategies

#### Introduce new uses by:

- Adopting proposed zoning not only to permit new uses in the District, but to also limit the size of new development.
- Highlighting investment opportunities to realtors, developers, and financiers by showcasing the vision for the District.
- Fostering relationship with neighboring Seneca Nation of Indians to partner with them in future development.

#### Improve investment climate by:

- Review and examine streamlining the City's inspection and permit services.
- Initiating technical assistance programs to ease the financial burden of building rehabilitation and new construction.
- Considering strategic acquisitions to facilitate context sensitive development.

#### Respect development context by:

- Encouraging infill development to supplement the District's historical fabric
- Stepping down development from downtown to the River to preserve viewsheds and to enhance property value.
- Following architectural design guidelines to ensure new development is properly sited and articulated .

### Expected Outcomes

*Initiating and following through with the Key Strategies is expected to produce the following results:*

Creating new investment opportunities by adopting zoning recommendations would foster a more fully functional destination that offers a broader range of goods and services. This would draw more residents to the neighborhood and extend the stay of visitors.

Improving the investment climate would help establish market certainty, which in turn would improve investor confidence and encourage (re)development in the District.

All new development would be designed in a manner that reinforces the heritage theme, and maintains the District's streetwall and rhythm. In addition, step-down development would preserve viewsheds for more to enjoy.





# REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

Development Pattern – Action Items	Term
Showcase Revitalization Strategy as vision for the District	I
Encourage the City to adopt Buffalo Avenue Architectural Design Standards	I
Apply existing USAN design standards to south side of Rainbow Boulevard	I
Support rezoning; creation of R4 Zone	I
Develop portfolio of development opportunities within the District	I
Highlight and encourage participation in existing incentive programs	I
Identify strategic, underutilized properties for targeted development	I
Encourage development that steps down to the River	I
Examine/test techniques to improve delivery of City permitting and inspection services	S
Reassess District properties to establish property value certainty	S
Host developer/realtor walking tour to showcase investment opportunities	S
Initiate proposed technical assistance program	S
Initiate proposed building permit fee program	S
Initiate proposed exterior improvement program	S
Initiate proposed micro-grant program	S
Initiate NYS Real Property Tax Exemption for Historic Properties Program	S
Pursue applicable Community Development Block Grant programs	S
Pursue NCIDA tax abatement, where applicable	S
Approach owners of strategic, underutilized properties; negotiate purchase	S
Review properties <i>in rem</i> for property acquisition	S
Consider designating the District an urban renewal area	S
Market sites for development that would contribute to established streetwall	M
Foster relationship with Seneca Nation of Indians as potential development partner	M
Follow up/work with new Fallside owner; review/influence building (re)design	M
Develop requirement of a performance bond for property maintenance	L
Assemble acquired properties into larger parcels for greater development opportunity	L
Prepare Request For Proposals (RFP) to solicit developers	L
Use precedent of Shredded Wheat Factory to allow higher density development	L
Explore opportunity for historical interpretation of former Shredded Wheat Factory	L

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BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

# CONCLUSION

The Buffalo Avenue Heritage District has tremendous potential as a premiere residential neighborhood and as a popular tourist destination. However, in order to reach this potential, certain obstacles need to be overcome. This document is a first step to realizing the District's full potential by identifying the specific obstacles facing the District as well as developing targeted recommendations to resolving these issues.

The 90 unique action items listed in the preceding section would facilitate and foster revitalization of the District. While these individual actions are small and incremental steps toward achieving the full vision for the District, there are three main recommendations that must remain in focus to progress revitalization of the neighborhood.

First, **the character and ambience of the District need to be preserved and enhanced.** A critical component of improving the District's charm are stakeholders—residents, property owners, and business owners—who need to organize and become a united group that would interface with the City. Such an organization should help to improve the overall appearance of the District, encourage preser-

vation of existing structures, and play a vital role in activating the District with events and activities.

Second, **streetscape improvement projects need to be implemented.** Enhancing the public realm would improve the appearance of the District and contribute to the heritage theme. Moreover, the enhancements would also be a substantial public investment in the District, that would in turn increase private investors' confidence in the District.

Third, **the existing development pattern within the District needs to be preserved with new development respecting this historical form.** In order to spur new investment in the District, appropriate steps need to be taken to improve the investment climate that make doing business in the District a pleasure, and not a burden.

The vision for the District is exciting, but it will not be attained without effort. The individual and collective actions by both the District's stakeholders and public entities will make this vision a reality. Therefore, the next step is for the community to embrace this Revitalization Strategy, and initiate and implement the recommended actions.

*The individual and collective actions by both  
the District's stakeholders and public entities  
will make this vision a reality.*

