The Queen City **Hub**

A Regional Action Plan for **Downtown Buffalo**

Volume 1 – Overview

The Context for Decision Making

Anthony M. Masiello, MAYOR
WWW.CITY-BUFFALO.COM

November 2003

Working Together...Making It Work!

Downtown Buffalo 2002!

Dedication

To people everywhere who love Buffalo, NY and continue to make it an even better place to live life well.

Program Sponsors: Funding for the Downtown Buffalo 2002! program and *The Queen City Hub: Regional Action Plan for Downtown Buffalo* was provided by four foundations and the City of Buffalo and supported by substantial in-kind services from the University at Buffalo, School of Architecture and Planning's Urban Design Project and Buffalo Place Inc.

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Buffalo is both "the city of no illusions" and the Queen City of the Great Lakes. ***The Queen City Hub Regional Action Plan*** *accepts the tension between these two assertions as it strives to achieve its practical ideals.*

PREFACE

The Queen City Hub: A Regional Action Plan for Downtown Buffalo is the product of continuing concerted civic effort on the part of Buffalonians to improve the center of their city. The effort was led by the Office of Strategic Planning in the City of Buffalo, the planning staff at Buffalo Place Inc., and faculty and staff of the Urban Design Project in the School of Architecture and Planning at the University at Buffalo. The plan has drawn upon the considerable technical expertise of eighteen public and private sector partners and incorporates the analysis of more than fifty technical studies and plans they and others produced over the past decade. During the past three years, the priorities expressed in the plan have been developed and reviewed in full public view. Televised public summits, multiple Downtown Buffalo 2002! newsletters, a web site (**www.downtownbuffalo2002.org**), frequent press reports, stakeholder focus groups, two cycles of survey research on priorities (1999-2002), over fifty public presentations, and detailed professional reviews were some of what was employed to shape the vision and implementation program and keep everyone informed about its evolution.

The Queen City Hub is part of a broader emerging framework of planning that encompasses Downtown Buffalo's inner ring of neighborhoods, the whole City of Buffalo, and the region. It is a significant component of *Queen City in the 21st Century: Buffalo's Comprehensive Plan*.

Volume I – *Overview,* *The Context for Decision Making* is for general distribution and provides a specific context for decisions about Downtown development. It presents the vision and key priorities for implementation related to both strategic investment areas and priority neighborhood development sites. It also makes the case that we are not starting from scratch but rather have a substantial history of strategic investments on which to build. *The Context for Decision Making* outlines the physical plan components needed to link priorities to Buffalo's historic Joseph Ellicott radial plan, Frederick Law Olmsted's Park and Parkway System, and our Waterfront. In addition, it frames the basic activity program and key principles that will be applied to achieve the vision.

Volume II – The Work Plan provides the full text of the vision and implementation program. It provides a detailed work plan intended to reinforce the implementation process with the needed tools (zoning, design guides, management practices), additional planning, and analysis (more detailed work on the activity program Downtown as well as the principles employed in developing the activity areas). The work plan establishes a flexible framework for the multiparty collaborations that will be required to implement the vision. This document is intended for citizen and professional planners, architects, public officials, developers, finance institutions, community based organizations and others who seek a more detailed involvement in implementation.

The Queen City **Hub:**

A Regional Action Plan for **Downtown Buffalo**

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Appendix “A New Story About Downtown Buffalo”

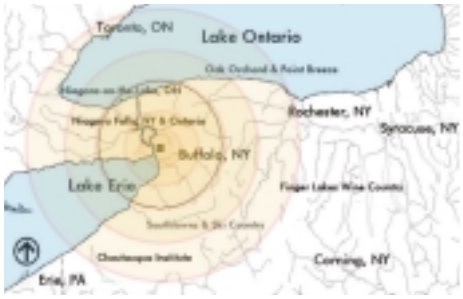
Downtown Buffalo is the hub of the Queen City of the Great Lakes and our bi-national region. (Source: *Queen City of the Great Lakes* by Wm. De Leftwich Dodge, 1932)

Downtown Buffalo's Farmer's Market is part of what it takes to make Downtown the neighborhood of neighborhoods for the Queen City. (Source: Buffalo Place Inc.)

1. THE VISION

At the first commencement of the Buffalo Medical Faculty in 1847, university chancellor Millard Fillmore called Buffalo the "Queen City of the Great Lakes." It was not an idle phrase. For Fillmore it meant that the influence of the city, and the university that it nurtured, extended to the surrounding countryside and eight other states. *The Queen City Hub: A Regional Action Plan for Downtown Buffalo*, in concert with the City of Buffalo's Comprehensive Plan, builds on that vision and takes it forward.

The Queen City Hub envisions Downtown as a place where citizens of the city and the surrounding region live, work and play. *The Queen City Hub* sees a stronger urban core as a regional center for culture and entertainment, heritage, education, health care and life sciences research, and commerce. It understands that Downtown's role as the Western New York center for government, finance, banking, and legal services makes it part of the backbone of the regional economy. The vision presents Downtown as the diverse neighborhood of neighborhoods for the whole region and it celebrates Buffalo as a historic waterfront city in the bi-national Niagara region.



Map at right: Buffalo is in the center of a bi-national region that is growing at the rate of 110,000 people a year. *The Queen City Hub: A Regional Action Plan for Downtown Buffalo* is intended to position the city and region to participate in this growth. (Source: The Urban Design Project, *Queen City Centre*, proposal for Buffalo Place Inc., 2000)

The most basic elements of the vision are already in place – embedded in Joseph Ellicott's 1804 radial plan for the city and reinforced by Frederick Law Olmsted's park and parkway system. Taken together, these historic plans link all the neighborhoods to Downtown and both the neighborhoods and Downtown to the waterfront. The Queen City was, according to Olmsted,

Frederick Law Olmsted and collaborators laid out six destination parks for Buffalo and linked them to each other, Downtown, and the water through a system of parkways.
(Source: The Urban Design Project for *Queen City in the 21st Century: Buffalo's Comprehensive Plan*, GIS data from the City of Buffalo, Office of Strategic Planning, Data Analysis Section)

"…the best planned city in America." It needs no new grand physical vision, only respect for the one that helped make it great, along with a commitment to build on the strategic investments already made Downtown, a dedication to the development of a new regional economy, and creative responses to our contemporary problems.

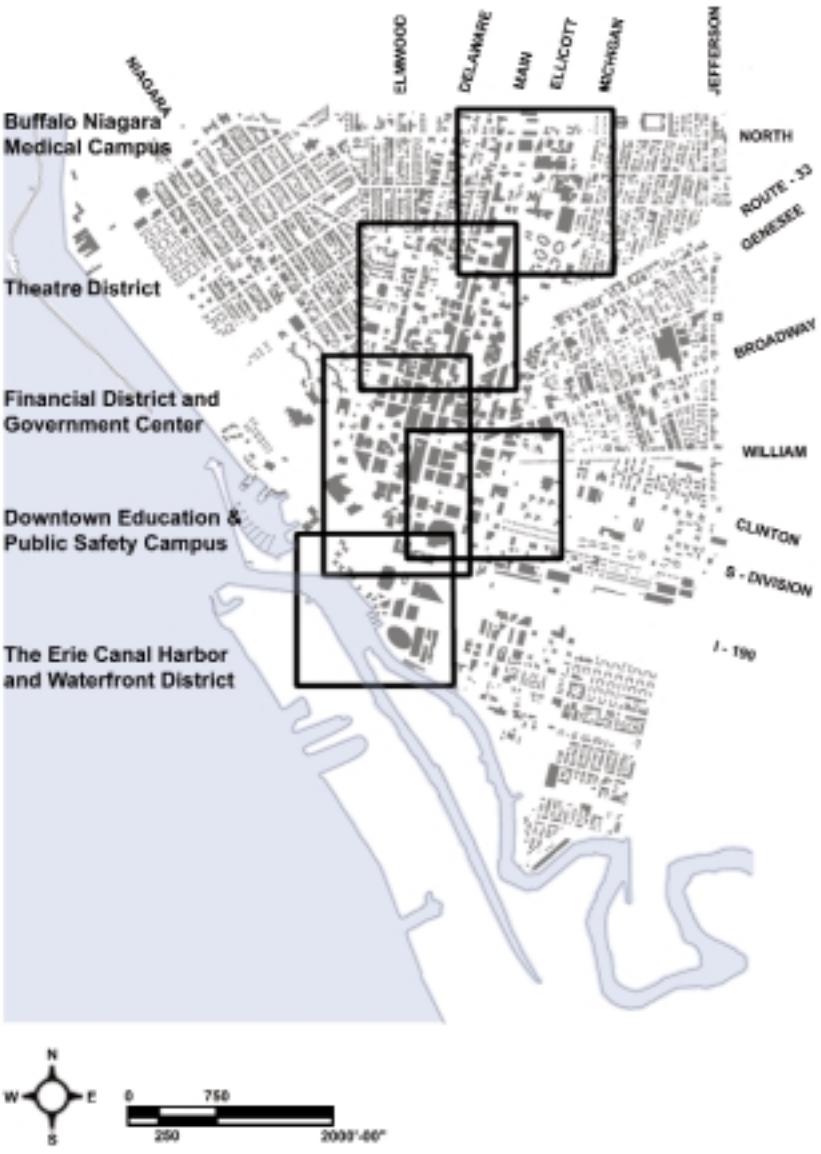
Joseph Ellicott laid out the City of Buffalo in 1804 as a radial city, linking its center to surrounding neighborhoods and to the water. (Source: Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society)

This vision for Downtown starts with the basics. It is a place that is clean, safe, pedestrian friendly, and beautiful. It is accessible, appealing, and "green." It is a place where important economic sectors are encouraged to grow and thrive in "strategic investment areas." Yet, it forms a coherent whole, knit together by its own emerging residential districts, and connected with adjacent neighborhoods and the waterfront by celebratory gateways, Ellicott's "great streets," and Olmsted's park and parkway system. The Downtown of this vision is a place of life, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, twelve months a year. In short, it is a place where residents and visitors alike live their lives well.

2. ACHIEVING THE VISION

The obstacles to achieving the vision are serious. The city has been losing population at a rapid rate for decades while the employment base of Downtown has remained relatively static. The business community identifies a long list of disincentives to retention, expansion, and recruitment of new economic activity Downtown including taxes, energy costs, parking, access, some obsolete building stock, an overall weak market, and declining property values. The fragmentation of economic development services, the unpredictability of the development environment, and continuing difficulties in permitting only make the situation more daunting.

The vision can be achieved, however, with a concerted effort that builds on progress we have already made, organizes commitment to practical improvements, and commands continuing accountability to the plan. Achieving the vision will need a few bold moves, but mostly it will require incremental capital investments that build on current assets. It will also require discrete policy initiatives and administrative reforms that develop institutional capacity. This will include developing a strong planning and design capacity in City Hall, and creating clear and enforceable design guidelines that demand the best urban environment possible.



The regional action plan for Downtown requires a focus on five strategic investment areas, leveraging past investments. The focus areas are creating the necessary critical mass and density in the Downtown core and help connect the Downtown to the surrounding neighborhoods. (Source: The Urban Design Project)

(THE QUEEN CITY HUB: A REGIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR DOWNTOWN BUFFALO IS)

"…an extraordinary piece of work that dramatically improves the context for Downtown planning and implementation."

John Sheffer, Director,
Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth
University at Buffalo,
State University of New York

Queen City in the 21st Century: Buffalo's Comprehensive Plan, incorporates *The Queen City Hub* and also describes ways to fix the basics and get full leverage from our strengths and past investments throughout the city. It also connects to a larger and still developing regional and economic planning framework without which neither Downtown nor the city will achieve their full potential.

Strategic Investment Areas

The vision for Downtown focuses attention and continued investment on five specific areas: the Waterfront and related Erie Canal Harbor developments, the Financial District and Government Center, the Theatre District, a new Downtown Education and Public Safety Campus, and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC). Work in each part of Downtown will provide benefits for the whole of Downtown and the inner ring of neighborhoods. Attention to the strategic investment areas also helps establish or reinforce related mixed-use residential communities and supportive retail activity.

The geography of the strategic investment areas builds on a series of investments, each building on the last. The work of the 1980s and 1990s created Fountain Plaza and reinvested in property a full block north on Main in the Theatre District and four blocks west on Chippewa Street as a reinvigorated core of Downtown. The work already slated for the decade of 2000 invests further north in the 700 and 800 blocks of Main and even more aggressively in the BNMC, taking Downtown reinvestment all the way to North Street.

From Fountain Plaza, moving south along Main Street, we can also already see new investments in commercial and some residential uses on the west side of the street and in the Electric District. This area has projects in play linking Lafayette Square to the developments to the north. Work on the Downtown Education and Public Safety Campus and on the Waterfront should improve the climate for investment in the

areas between them, especially with infrastructure improvements on Church Street connecting the Adam's Mark Hotel and Conference Center to Downtown along what should become one of Buffalo's "great streets." These investments will also reinforce the attractiveness of development options in the traditional retail core of the City surrounding Lafayette Square.

Alternative conceptions of the Erie Canal Harbor Commercial Slip. Future work will involve still more integration of the heritage of the western gateway to the Erie Canal and the Central Wharf with transportation, sports, retail, housing, and other commercial, cultural, and entertainment venues. (Source: Empire State Development Corporation, Flynn Battaglia, Architects PC; Mathews Nielsen Landscape Architects, PC; John Miller Associates, Inc; Chermayeff & Geismer, Inc.)

The Erie Canal Harbor and Related Waterfront Developments will lay the foundation for a build-out of the cultural, maritime, residential, commercial, retail, sports and entertainment venues planned for the waterfront from Michigan Avenue to the Erie Basin Marina. Public investments in the Erie Canal Harbor, the HSBC Arena, a new intermodal transportation facility, parking capacity, and related infrastructure should leverage at least $100 million in additional private sector investment in the Memorial Auditorium and adjacent development parcels, and create a minimum of two thousand additional jobs. Heritage interpretation of the western gateway of the Erie Canal will complement other visitor attractions Downtown and add to the city's draw as a tourism destination.

A New Downtown Education and Public Safety Campus anchored by Erie Community College, the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, and a proposed new Public Safety Campus will support Downtown's role as a regional center and add to Downtown employment and patronage. It will be a catalyst for connecting new neighborhood developments on the southeast side of Downtown to the Downtown core. An estimated $30 million of public investment in the Education and Public Safety Campus should leverage as much as $50 million of private sector investment to create hundreds of new jobs to serve the larger student market for housing, retail, and services.

Erie Community College in Downtown Buffalo serves as the core of a new focus area devoted to creating a Downtown Education and Public Safety Campus. (Source: The Urban Design Project)

Buffalo's City Hall forms the centerpiece of the "Government Center and Financial District." (Source: The Urban Design Project)

The Financial District and Government Center will continue to anchor the employment and tax base for Downtown, provide markets for emerging retail and service venues, and be the favored site for regional special events such as *Thursday at the Square*, the summer free concert series produced by Buffalo Place Inc. New public investments like the planned new Federal Court and the recently completed Family Court are also adding jobs to the core. A carefully rationalized system of parking and transit options and aggressive tenant retention programs will help assure we retain the existing base of office employees Downtown. A strategy to convert suitable class B and C office and light industrial buildings to residential use, or upgrade to class A status, will reduce vacancy rates and add twenty-four hour life to the central business district.

Shea's Performing Arts Center is part of Buffalo's Downtown Theatre District, the success of which has been the result of two decades of development effort. During that time, the vast majority of the Main Street block from Chippewa to Tupper has seen substantial reinvestment. (Source: Buffalo Place Inc.)

The Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus is home to over 7,000 employees and expects to add an additional 3,000 in the coming years as we invest another $250,000,000 in life science research and development facilities. (Source: *Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus Master Plan*, Chan Krieger & Associates)

The Theatre District will continue to be the major regional venue for live theatre and mutually reinforce the entertainment district emerging on Chippewa, Pearl and Franklin Streets. After many investments over the last twenty-five years, the core of the Theatre District on Main Street is largely built out. Continued investments on Pearl, Franklin, Delaware, and Elmwood north of Chippewa should focus on reducing the large percentage of surface parking lots in favor of mixed-use commercial and residential development with parking integral to the new structures.

The Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus and life sciences facilities, including the new Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics and the Hauptman-Woodward Research Center will significantly reinforce the Fruit Belt and Home Ownership Zone neighborhoods even as it strengthens Main Street, Allentown, and Downtown. Well over $250 million were invested in campus facilities over the past decade. A like amount will be invested in the near term for research and development facilities, and may yield as many as three thousand new well-paying jobs in the area.

Putting It All Together

Focusing attention on strategic investment areas does not mean treating them as self-contained districts or urban islands. It means using new residential districts and attendant retail development to knit them together; connecting them along "great streets" on the Ellicott radials and grid; announcing them with celebratory gateways; and envisioning them as part of a greater Downtown that extends beyond the historical bounds of the CBD.

The Sidway Office Building at Main and Goodell is now being renovated as an apartment building.
(Source: The Urban Design Project)

A Residential Base. The plan requires diverse pedestrian-oriented residential communities throughout Downtown. Housing Downtown will serve a growing market for city living, bring life to the streets, support retail development, make connections to adjacent neighborhoods, and help create the continuous urban fabric that Downtown needs.

The plan identifies a series of four focus areas for mixed-use housing development that utilizes the existing stock of buildings wherever possible. These include the 600-800 blocks of Main Street and throughout the Theatre District; on Genesee Street east of Main; the 500 Block of Main Street and "Electric District" to the immediate east; and at the foot of Main Street in the Cobblestone District extending east along Perry Street.

In the Central Business District, more than seven hundred new units are now under construction or in final phases of financing and design. Rents for units range from $600/month to well over $1,300/month. All of these units are in residential focus areas called for in the plan. They involve an estimated investment of well over $90 million including land, public improvements, soft costs, and construction. Some of the sites in play involve an important mix of affordable and middle income rents and future sites will require still more attention to adding additional affordable housing to meet the demand of the current Downtown workforce.

Adjacent to the Genesee Street block to the north on Ellicott Street is the Ellicott Lofts project with 34 loft spaces and 5,500 square feet of commercial use under construction. Another 60 living units are planned in phases over the next few years.
(Source: The Urban Design Project)

This section of Genesee Street between Ellicott and Elm is one of the few largely intact blocks of turn of the century buildings, that should be preserved and developed for mixed-use residential and commercial uses.
(Source: *Downtown Buffalo Strategic Plan*, Hamilton, Houston and Lownie, Architects, PC, 1999)

Supportive Retail. The residential focus areas are important, in part, because they reinforce the market for retail services in Downtown. Plan reviewers and participants in the Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team visit of the American Institute of Architects said we should not squander the potential impact of the still modest market for Downtown housing by dispersing it. When we combine the demand for shopping by Downtown workers and visitors with the market potential of residents who live Downtown or in adjacent inner-ring neighborhoods, the aggregate approaches what is necessary to support a more competitive array of retail goods and services.

Priority will be given to four new neighborhoods Downtown, adding to the strength of existing residential units and the inner ring of neighborhoods. This will create a strong residential life, contribute to the market for service retail, and increase the sense of safety and security with life on the street twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. (Source: The Urban Design Project)

NEIGHBORHOODS

The 600-800 Block of Main Street

Genesee Street

The 500 Block of Main St. & the Electric Dist.

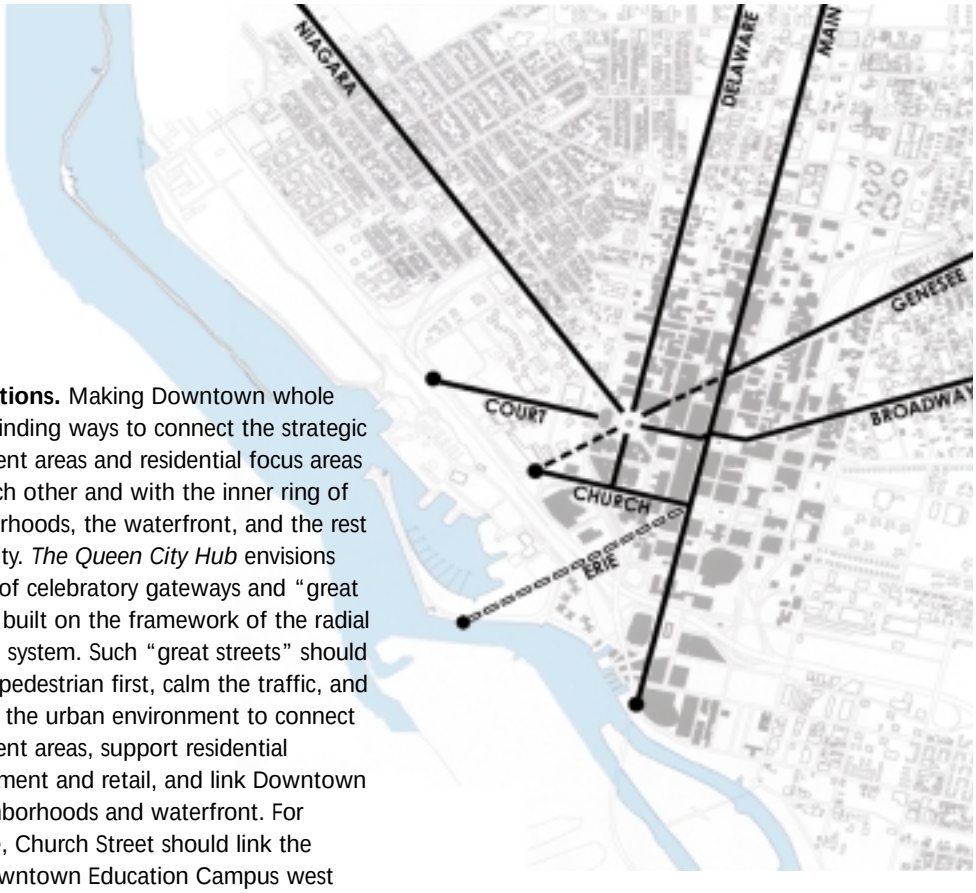
Cobblestone District & Perry Street

854, 856, 858 & 864 Main Street	2–30 residential rental units, office & retail
Century Center I	161 studio and two bedroom loft units
Sidway Building	67 residential units 1st floor retail
Spaulding Building	19 units
Schmidt – Vernor	30 units
Ansonia	53 units
Saturn Building	10 units
Tent City	12–20 residential condominium units
Graystone	26 units
Watkins Building	6 two bedroom units
Market Arcade	10 two bedroom units
City Center	41 condominium units
Ellicott Lofts	Phase I–34 loft rental units / 5,500 sf. office Phases II & III – 60 loft rental units
Genesee Village	30 units
Grevers Florist	1–2 residential units
Belesario	29 luxury market rate units / 30,360 sf. office
496 Main Street	2 retail (1st floor) 6 rental units (fls 2–4)
Holling Press	Up to 82 units (residential/condo)
Cobblestone District	77 residential units (condo/townhouse) commercial restaurant, fitness center, retail, and entertainment)
Elk Terminal	52 rental loft units

PROPOSED EXISITING

Estimated Number of New Units = 784
Estimated Cost for New proposals = $70,560,000.00
assuming average unit cost of $90,000.00

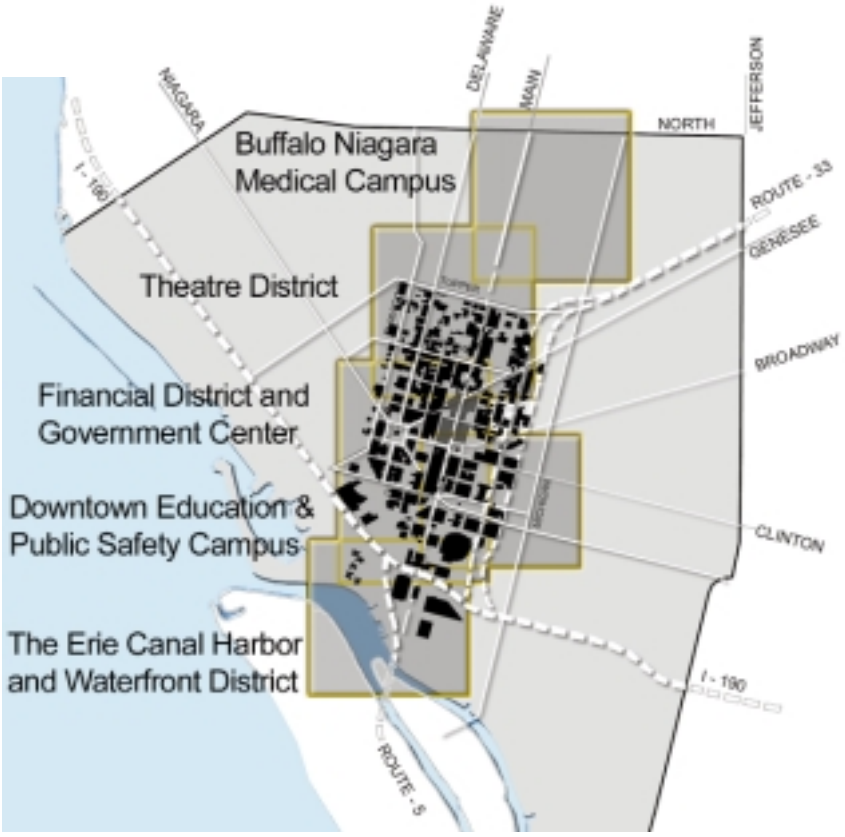
A sketch illustrating what a Genesee Street vista would be like if the street were cleared of construction and reopened to traffic. (Source: Vision for Buffalo)



Connections. Making Downtown whole means finding ways to connect the strategic investment areas and residential focus areas with each other and with the inner ring of neighborhoods, the waterfront, and the rest of the city. *The Queen City Hub* envisions a series of celebratory gateways and "great streets" built on the framework of the radial and grid system. Such "great streets" should put the pedestrian first, calm the traffic, and improve the urban environment to connect investment areas, support residential development and retail, and link Downtown to neighborhoods and waterfront. For example, Church Street should link the new Downtown Education Campus west to Genesee and from there to the water.

Top right: Great streets are an essential part of the establishment of great Downtowns. Selecting a few key streets for special treatment will reinforce the Ellicott radial and grid street plan as well as connections to both the Olmsted destination parks and the waterfronts. (Source: The Urban Design Project)

Church Street should be a great pedestrian street linking the historic old U.S. Post Office to the Ellicott Square Building, M&T Bank Building, St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral and Cathedral Park, Guaranty Building, and ultimately the Adam's Mark Hotel and Erie Basin Marina. (Source: The Urban Design Project)

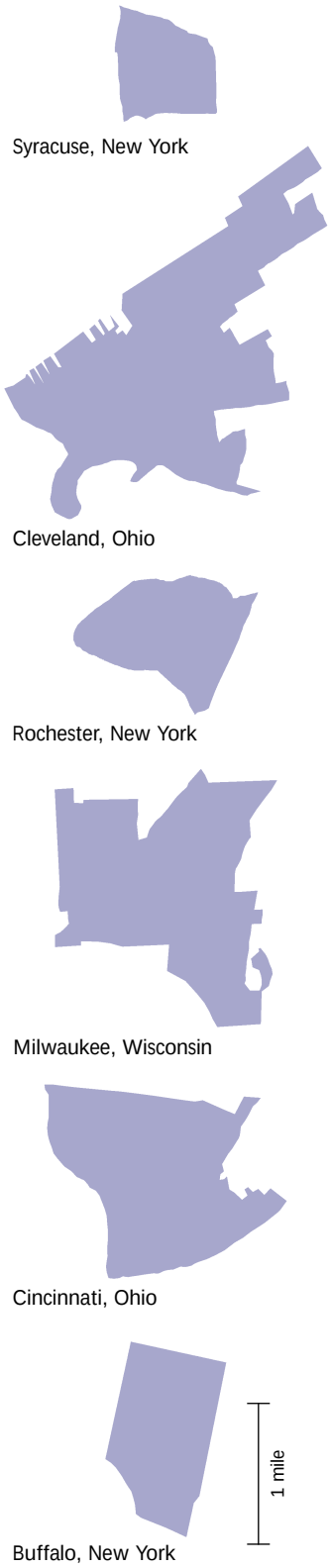


It is critical to focus on the Strategic Investment Areas (dark grey) representing an area slightly larger than the traditional Central Business District (black figure ground). At the same time, we must concentrate on the connections between Downtown and its abutting neighborhoods (light grey), respecting their interdependence. (Source: The Urban Design Project)

Between 1832 and 1854, the City of Buffalo grew from 4.5 sq miles to its present area of 42 square miles while the area of the central business district remained essentially the same. (Source: Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society)

A Greater Downtown. An important part of the vision for Downtown involves seeing it more broadly than we do now. Our CBD is relatively small compared to several peer cities. If we can imagine a Downtown that encompasses a relatively modest 4.5 square miles – an area bounded by Porter Avenue and North Street on the north, Jefferson Avenue to the east, and water on the south and west – we can see more clearly our assets, opportunities, and challenges, and act accordingly. One important aid to this imagination of Downtown would be a system of gateways and great streets that celebrate connections among Downtown points of entry, the city and the region.

The geography of *The Queen City Hub* honors the traditional boundary of the central business district while suggesting a larger conception of Downtown, involving about ten per cent of the total area of today's city. But this area accounts for forty percent of the business activity and tax base of the city with well over sixty thousand people employed. The central business district plus the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus account for more than 55,000 of these employees.



Buffalo's central business district is relatively small compared to several peer cities. (Source: The Urban Design Project)

HIGH AND MEDIUM TRAFFIC GATEWAYS

Entrances to the Downtown core should be given special urban design attention, celebrating arrival with well-considered signage, banners, landscape treatment, street furniture, and high quality architecture. (Source: The Urban Design Project)

This greater Downtown brings the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus fully into the family of Downtown employment centers. It includes more than 15,000 additional residents in the Downtown market base. Investments along Michigan Avenue, for example, will add value to the Downtown and abutting neighborhoods. Hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in the inner ring of neighborhoods in the greater Downtown are leveraged by investments in the strategic areas and all are supported with "great streets" and gateways.

The Capital Program

The capital program to implement the plan is already in motion and will continue through 2025. It is investing in the construction of a broad array of small and intermediate sized projects and a few large ones. Small businesses will complete the majority of work as they help build new neighborhoods and create opportunities to do business Downtown. The public sector will provide infrastructure support and continuing incentives for critical developments in the Strategic Investment Areas.

Work on the capital program builds on the work of public and private sector partners between 2000 and 2003, as well as significant investments made Downtown since the 1980s. The program outline in Part Two of *The Queen City Hub* identifies immediate and urgent requirements for work over the next six months, and longer-term work through 2010, and in some cases continuing though 2025.

Based on the pace of public and private sector development in the first three years of this decade, the 2000s are projected to see more than twice the level of investment that occurred during the 1990s. Such concrete action is heartening precisely because it adheres to the strategic vision of the *Queen City Hub* plan. Over the period 1990 through the implementation of programmed investments in 2003, about twenty-five percent of Downtown available for investment will have experienced it, most of it in the strategic investment areas identified in this plan.

Other Major Proposals

A number of large-scale proposals for sites located Downtown, or with relevance for Downtown, have been discussed in the course of plan development and reviewed over the past three years. These are large budget, long term, and in some cases, very controversial proposals that represent

The darker color indicates sites of significant investment in the decade of the 1990s together with investment already in progress or under very serious consideration in the decade of 2000. (Source: The Urban Design Project, 2003, *Investment Profiles Downtown Buffalo 2002!*)

alternative ideas for the future of Downtown. They command public discussion and, done well, one or more of them could add significant value to Downtown. None, however, are essential to achieving the vision of *The Queen City Hub*. That will only occur through the sustained implementation of the capital program and related work scheduled in the plan.

Casino Gambling. The Seneca Nation of Indians has an agreement that allows them to develop casino gambling facilities in Downtown Buffalo. Opinion is divided on whether such a development would be good for Downtown specifically or Buffalo as a whole. In any event, plan reviewers believe a range of key issues need to be addressed and potential social and economic impacts carefully assessed before moving forward. We especially need to know whether a casino would provide net employment and revenue growth for the city, as well as what negative social impacts are likely to occur and how to minimize them.

Some reviewers of *The Queen City Hub* say that if a casino is developed it should respond to the following performance criteria:

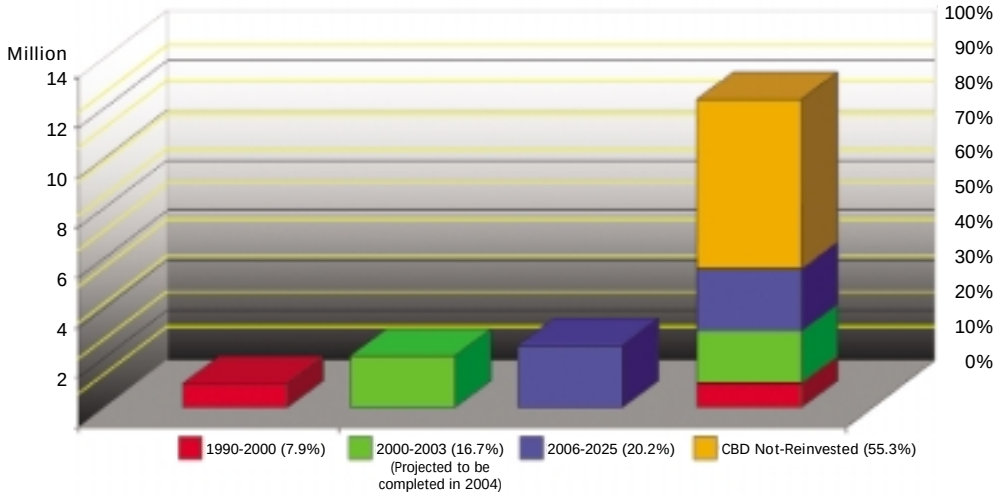
1. Locate in Downtown Buffalo in order to take advantage of existing infrastructure, to reuse the stock of existing buildings, and create synergies with other visitor attractions.

2. Integrate with the City – physically through the careful design of entries and connections, programmatically through business arrangements – to make sure the economic benefits are widely shared locally.

3. Target tourists, not residents, to make sure the casino attracts outside revenues, avoids exploiting local players, and complements efforts to build convention and tourism business.

4. Ensure revenue accrues to local government rather than the State – to pay for new infrastructure and services, to invest in Downtown redevelopment, to support tourism development and marketing, and to help provide for the general needs of the city and county.

Areas Receiving Investment as a Percentage of Total Buildable Land
(Building Cover, Surface Parking and Parking Garages in CBD)



Between 1990 and 2000, the public and private sector invested in about 8% of the surface area available for development in the central business district. In the decade of 2000, investment is projected to reach well over 16%. Essentially we are already seeing more than twice the capital development activity experienced in the preceding decade in strategic investment areas.
(Source: The Urban Design Project, (2003) *Patterns of Investment – Downtown Buffalo 2002!*)

Convention Center. Planning for a new 400,000 square foot convention center with a 125,000 square foot main exhibit hall is now on hold due to uncertainty in the convention and meetings market, shifting public investment priorities, and community controversy over the necessity of a new facility. While the long-term need for investment in larger and more up-to-date convention space is clear to many, it is less certain where a new facility should go, how large it should be, or how it will impact other goals of this plan.

A key issue in location and design of any new convention facility is how a building with a very large footprint can be permeable to the public realm, add life to city streets, and provide economic benefits to nearby businesses. Sites near the Theatre District and Chippewa Street have been discussed at length. A site next to HSBC Arena has been offered as an alternative. Expansion of the current convention center, recently renovated, remains an option. Estimated costs for a new facility exceed $120 million and could go higher depending on the cost of hotel accommodations in the package.

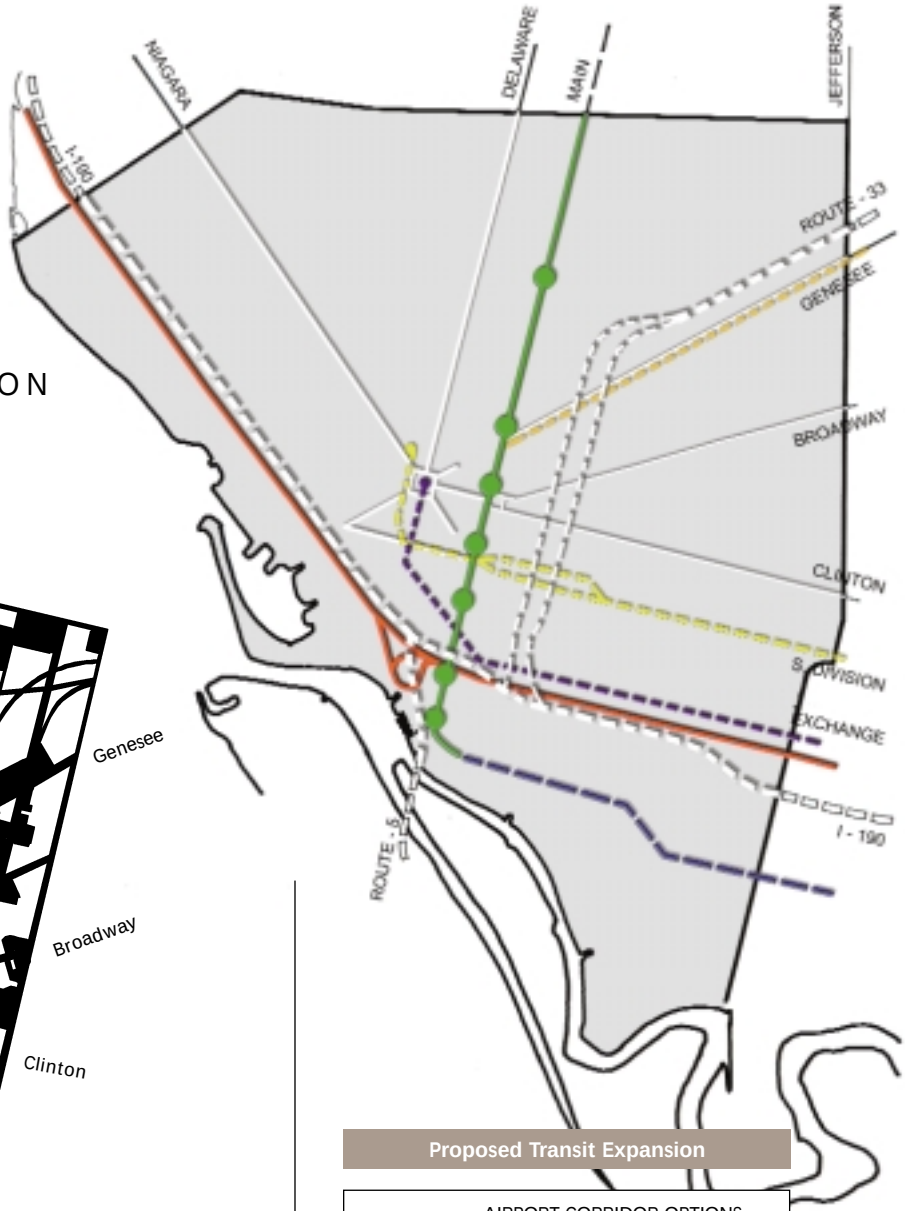
The Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council calls for Metro Rail Extensions to the airport as well as the Tonawandas as part of its 2025 plan for the region. (Source: Buffalo Place Inc.)

Light Rail Expansion. Citizens and professional planners reviewing drafts of this plan have strongly endorsed proposals to extend the Metro Rail system. Among the possibilities studied by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) are links to the south towns, the Buffalo Niagara International Airport, the University at Buffalo Amherst Campus, and the Tonawandas. *The 2025 Long Range Plan* of the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council calls for Metro Rail extensions to the airport as well as the Tonawandas. The 2025 plan is incorporated by reference in the City of Buffalo's comprehensive plan.

An expanded rail system could reinforce the strategic position of Downtown in the region and reverse a trend of declining transit ridership. However, serious issues confront proposals for rail system expansion. Federal funding for such projects is competitive. Significant local matching funds are required. New rail capacity may worsen structural operating deficits of the system. No dedicated source of funding for transit operations now exists. Residents in some suburban communities have expressed opposition to construction. Costs for the NFTA "preferred alternative" Airport route via Exchange Street are estimated at $456 million. An additional proposal offered by plan reviewers would extend the current transit line south and east, linking large parking lots currently served by a vehicle shuttle service to the employment centers on Main Street.

DOWNTOWN TRANSPORTATION

Off street parking accounts for 28% of the surface area of the Central Business District while buildings account for 27%. While there is a shortage of parking in some parts of the CBD there is an excess in others. The plan calls for a comprehensive access plan to address parking efficiencies, transit options, and multi-modal movement throughout the greater Downtown. (Source: The Urban Design Project)



Proposed Transit Expansion

AIRPORT CORRIDOR OPTIONS
Option 1 – Genesee Street
Option 2 – South Division Street
PREFERRED AIRPORT CORRIDOR
Exchange Street
EXISTING INTER CITY RAIL
SOUTH TOWNS CORRIDOR
EXISTING MAIN STREET LINE
Amherst/Tonawanda Corridor

The *Queen City Hub* plan calls for a more disciplined and integrated multimodal approach to transit that relates all modes of transportation and access in one comprehensive system. (Source: The Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council 2025 Transportation Plan – graphic modified by The Urban Design Project)

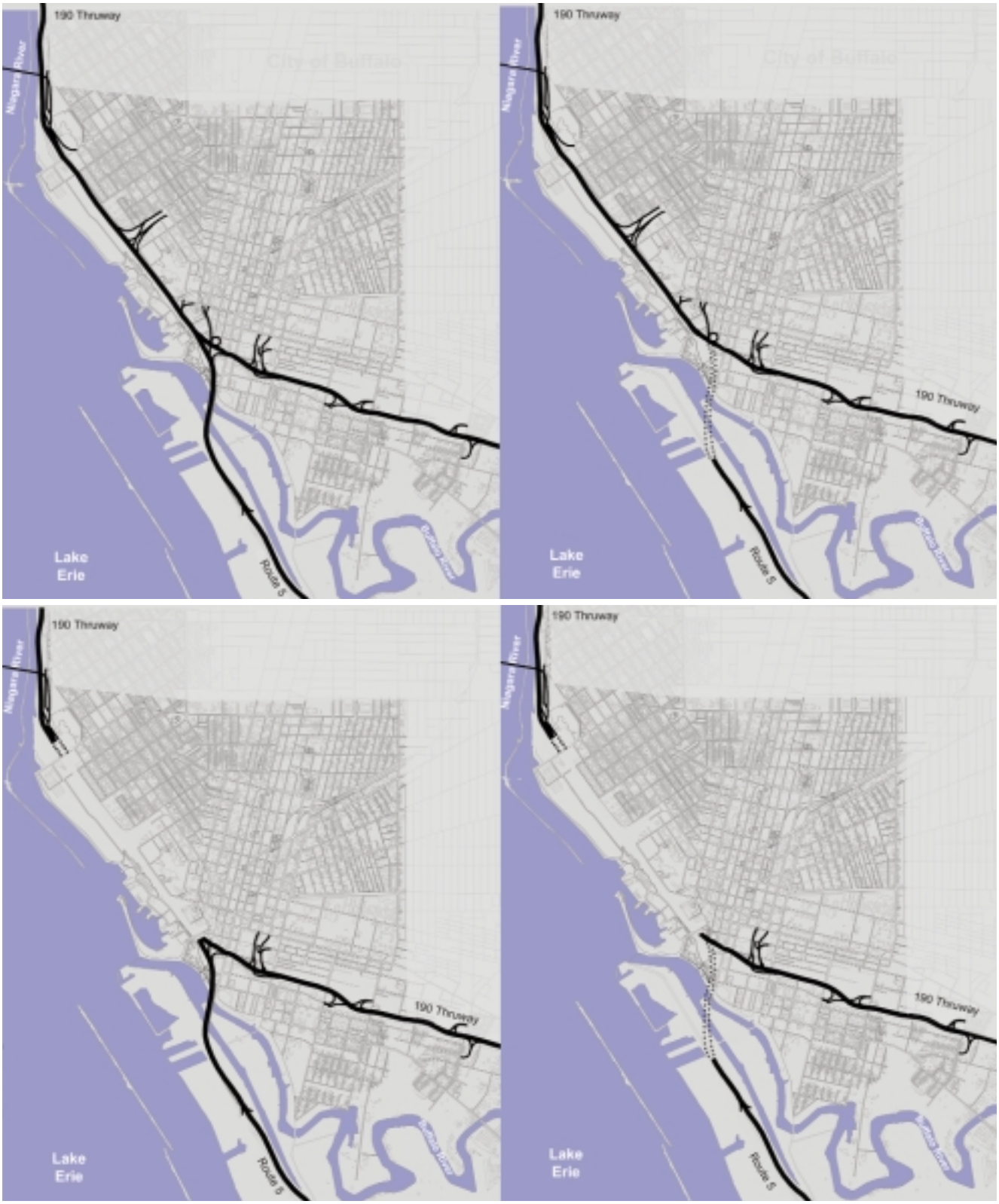
"Reclaiming Genesee Street" sketch assumes an initial casino site in a renovated Statler Hotel with supporting parking to the north. The sketch further envisions a Genesee Street that is reopened through the Hyatt Regency Hotel and existing convention center as well as through the parking garage on the southeast corner of Niagara Square, taking Genesee all the way to the water. (Source: Vision for Buffalo)

Genesee Street Restoration. Re-opening the Genesee Street radial would correct some of the acknowledged mistakes of the past. This would mean demolishing the atrium section of the Hyatt Regency Buffalo, part of the Buffalo Convention Center, and the Charles R. Turner parking garage next to Buffalo City Court. Doing so would restore one of Downtown's primary connections between the City and waterfront. Additional work to make Genesee Street a "great street" could be done from Martin Luther King, Jr. Park on the east all the way to the water on the west. Estimated costs for all phases including land acquisition, demolition, infill improvements, and terminus at the water range from $600 million to $1 billion.

The diagrams above indicate that access to the waterfront is actually plentiful. They are also poorly signed and the waterfront sites are poorly prepared for visitors. Well in advance of more ambitious proposals, we can work to improve access and further develop key waterfront destinations. (Source: The Urban Design Project)

Niagara Thruway (I-190) Cut and Cover. It has also been proposed to "cut and cover" portions of the Niagara Thruway (I-190) to reconnect Downtown to the waterfront. An alternative to this proposal would rebuild the Thruway as a low-speed parkway with multiple intersections and pedestrian crossings. Impacts on commercial truck traffic, Amtrak rail service, and overall highway capacity would need to be considered. A third option would include a combination of cut and cover and at grade boulevard. Estimated costs range from $700 million to $1.2 billion depending on how and where the deck is constructed.

Skyway (NY Rte. 5) Removal. A similar proposal calls for the removal of the Buffalo Skyway with new access to Downtown from the south provided by a tunnel or one or more lower-level bridges. Assembly Member Brian Higgins, primary proponent of the proposal, argues that the anticipated maintenance and reinvestment costs in the current infrastructure, frequent closings of the Skyway, and numerous accidents on the bridge, make a strong case for some kind of replacement. "Increased access to the waterfront in general," Higgins says, "would be worth the money." The cost would depend on the alternative chosen to carry traffic currently handled by the Skyway. Developers exploring options on the waterfront adjacent to and under the skyway, however, have not described the skyway as a serious impediment to investing.



Proposals to remove the Rte. 5 skyway and/or cut and cover the I-190 require careful consideration. Upper left is existing I-190/Rte. 5 Skyway. Upper right shows the Skyway removed. Lower left shows I-190 cut and cover and lower right shows both I-190 cut and cover and Rte. 5 Skyway removal. (Source: The Urban Design Project)

Erie Basin Marina Build-Out. Another recent proposal involves completion of the Erie Basin Marina/Waterfront Village area, including an extension of the Buffalo River esplanade from the Inner Harbor to the marina, realignment of Erie Street to the north of its current path, construction of a hotel on the riverside development parcel this creates, and development of a new waterfront campus of mixed use office, retail, entertainment, and housing facilities. Such proposals are directly connected to the strategic investment areas for Downtown and could play an important role in reclaiming still more of our waterfront. It is critical to do such work in a way that fully connects this part of the waterfront back into the Downtown. Costs have not been estimated.

Downtown Cogeneration. The Western New York AFL-CIO recently proposed development of a Downtown energy cogeneration system to provide district heating and electricity using biomass as a fuel. The proposal is presented as a way to reduce the cost of doing business Downtown and produce energy in an environmentally sound way. Costs for a cogeneration system are not available but would likely be borne by ratepayers with an expectation of net savings over the current costs of energy.

Setting Priorities

Downtown and the city would benefit from implementing one or more of these proposals. *The Queen City Hub: A Regional Action Plan for Downtown*, however, will not be defeated if these listed projects are not the first ones we accomplish. We can only defeat this plan if we focus on "big ideas" at the expense of ongoing incremental investment in projects to create jobs, bring residents, generate activity, provide entertainment, improve the urban environment, enhance access, protect heritage, and make Downtown sustainable.

Indeed, the possibility of realizing the best of these proposals depends on our success in growing the Downtown economy and the larger regional economy so that it can justify and support the massive investments that fulfillment of these big ideas will require. Even then, the costs are so great that we will have to choose among them, and wisely.

The practical idealism of the *Queen City Hub* plan requires us to sustain a double focus. We need to concentrate on those programs and capital projects that enjoy a clear consensus and can deliver significant returns for economy and quality of life now. Simultaneously, we need to keep in mind the possibilities for achieving the bigger and bolder elements of the vision. The larger ideas should not be allowed to distract us from on-going work in the near-term, nor should short-term actions be allowed to foreclose possibilities for realizing the larger ideas in the future.

The plan also requires that we practice a kind of flexible discipline. We must always be ready to do what it takes to retain existing businesses and take advantage of new opportunities. At the same time, we cannot afford to follow a policy of "anything goes." We need to stick to the plan and focus our attention on building out the strategic investment areas, supporting key Downtown activities, fostering growth in emerging economic sectors, following stated development principles, and investing in deliberate increments to expand the Downtown economy and improve its environment.

"If we can't imagine it, if we can't strive for it, we can't achieve it… We at Erie County are committed to working with the City and the region to achieve this shared vision for Downtown Buffalo."

Joel Giambra
Erie County Executive
In his vision speech to the Downtown Buffalo Summit
April, 2002

MAYOR ANTHONY M. MASIELLO ON VISION

"If the idea of "vision" is going to mean anything for making a better Downtown for Buffalo, it has to meet at least four criteria:

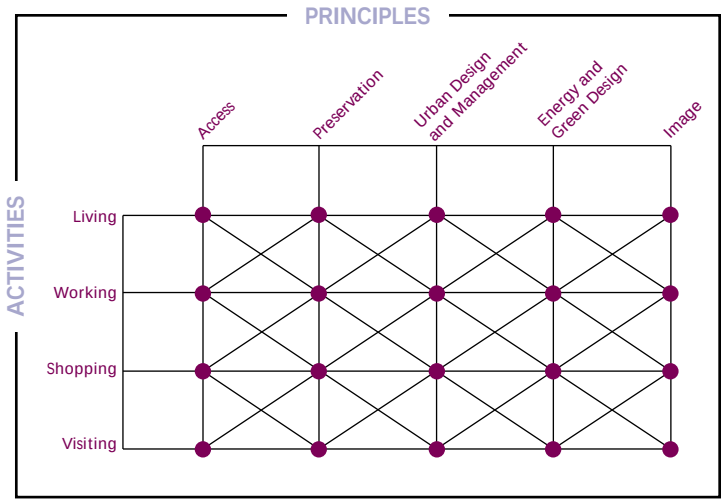
It has to be grounded in reality. It has to understand our current assets accurately. It has to see our possibilities clearly. It has to be rooted in real performance, getting things done. Private sector leadership is critical to the success of such grounding.

A real vision has to reach for the future. It has to aspire to a future that is different from and better than the present. It is not good enough for a vision to see more of the same. It has to imagine that things can really change in significant ways.

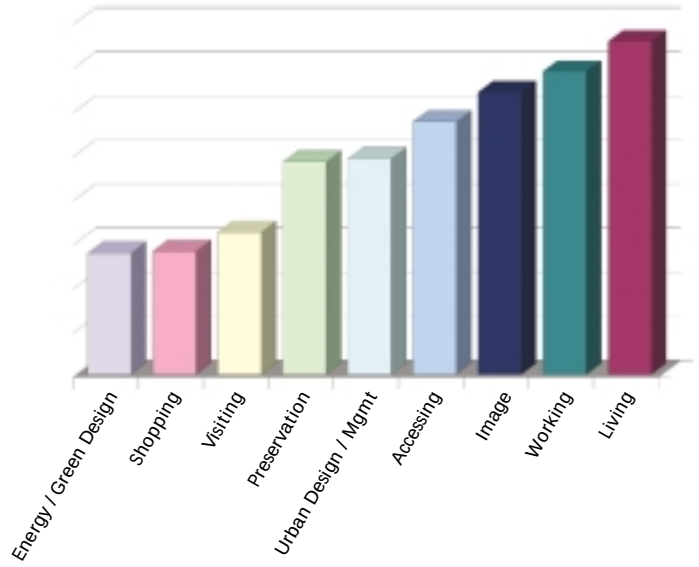
It has to be shared. It can't be only one person's vision – not even the Mayor's – nor can it be the vision of only one group or organization or interest. That means it comes out of conversations conducted at the Downtown Summits and issue forums that have come before. It's also the product of collaborative work across institutions like the Downtown 2002! program and the R/UDAT (Regional Urban Design Assistance Team) visit we held in 2001. If a vision is developed with a diverse base of participants and shared broadly enough, not only will everyone know it and understand it, most everyone will get behind it, too.

Finally, a vision has to have public leadership. That means it has to be more than shared broadly and out there for everyone to see. It has to be carried by City government with full support from County, State and Federal partners. It's partly that City government has some of the tools needed to make things happen when the market won't. It's partly that City government holds the power to regulate building and land use. But more than anything else, making a public vision requires the democratic mechanisms of City government to determine that the vision is the people's vision.

The Queen City Hub: Regional Action Plan for Downtown Buffalo defines a consensus vision that belongs to all of us even as it provides an ability to make tough choices and a reason to say no when that is what must be said. It delineates priorities. It delivers a physical vision inspired by Joseph Ellicott's 1804 radial plan for the city, Frederick Law Olmsted's park and parkway system, and our waterfront history. Finally, It provides a programmatic vision of an inclusive regional city hub where citizens and visitors live, work and play in a beautiful urban environment. Consensus on this vision does not mean every one agrees to all the details, but it does mean that we have worked it out sufficiently to take decisive action. We all deserve the realization of this vision of *The Queen City Hub*."



All of the activities Downtown should be developed in accordance with the principles outlined in the work plan. All of the principles have implications for the development and accommodation of activities. Many of work products in the plan require codification, enforcement, and adjustments to policy. Some will require changes in the way we organize to deliver economic development and basic quality of life services to Downtown. (Source: www.downtownbuffalo2002.org)



A web-based and paper-based survey on the April, 2002 draft of *The Queen City Hub* plan identified strong (80%) respondent support for the vision description and a substantial emphasis on Waterfront and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus as opportunities for strategic investment. The survey also ranked the key elements of the work plan with the top priority development agenda continuing to be "Living Downtown." (Source: Downtown Buffalo 2002!)

3. ORGANIZING TO IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

The Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning will be the lead agency to deliver the vision of *The Queen City Hub*. The implementation campaign will build on the work of the Downtown Buffalo 2002! program that produced this plan. New work related to the plan will begin following its publication with an expanded set of constituent partners to support the aggressive management of the detailed work plan. An implementation council will continue to sharpen the vision and action plan for Downtown as it moves priority projects forward and creates new policy. The revised implementation campaign will employ governmental reforms and targeted incentive programs, increased private and not-for-profit sector collaboration and shared risk taking, and continued public accountability.

The work plan for the implementation campaign in Volume II of *The Queen City Hub* focuses on specific measurable actions in each of nine theme areas, four of which focus on developing the primary functions or activities in Downtown and five others that codify the principles we should follow to promote the primary functions. In all cases, the work tasks are identified according to who needs to participate to make the action successful. Goals for the work program behind each activity and principle are briefly summarized below. The plan associated with each goal area addresses the context of the topic, its current status, key strategies, and action items in the short, intermediate, and long term.

The Spaulding Building, with 19 units of housing on the 700 block, was an early pioneer in rental housing Downtown and is soon to be joined by the nearby Sidway building project and several others in the 700 and 800 blocks of Main Street. (Source: The Urban Design Project)

Activity Downtown: Live, Work and Play

Living Downtown means that Downtown is a demand area for residence. People living Downtown make it active twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. Mixed-use residential neighborhoods with a full complement of service retail and a full range of units, affordable to luxury, should be the glue that holds together our Medical Campus, Theatre District, Government and Financial Centers, Education Campus, and Waterfront.

The work plan goal and key activities are designed to deliver new diverse Downtown neighborhoods and strengthen the existing surrounding neighborhoods. The strategies identified include: expanding the geography of Downtown while retaining traditional definitions for the Central Business District; focusing on target areas that create high quality design and a critical mass of residential density, connecting strategic investment areas; standardizing incentives to "level the playing field" for all developers; and, delivering incentives only until the market can deliver the needed product without help.

Working Downtown means office and other commercial space is high quality, in demand, and supports sustained job growth to maintain Downtown as the regional center, not only for government, but for finance, insurance, real estate, law, life sciences, and business incubation.

The work plan goal and key activities are to develop a collaborative and consistent approach to business development and retention in Downtown. The goal includes measuring progress using quantifiable factors such as the size of workforce, occupancy rates, corporate expansion potentials and longevity rates, and the availability of product by type.
The strategies include:

1. Consolidate and improve delivery of services and information for potential business locations Downtown;

2. Clarify the demand for and availability of light industrial space within the Western New York region, especially in the smaller floor plate range. Downtown has a surplus of light industrial buildings that can easily be converted to new light industrial space as well as for loft housing;

3. Assure that the *Buffalo's Comprehensive Plan* land use strategies for business development are consistent with the realities of contemporary land use demands and define the importance of Downtown locations. All of the city and regional planning efforts need to take better advantage of the positive attributes of Downtown building stock;

4. Market Downtown as the regional incubator for office and light industry and demonstrate its competitive advantages;

Buffalo has historically been the hub of retail activity in the region. While regional retail capacity may be in its long-term future, *The Queen City Hub* plan is focused on meeting the greater Downtown demand for $300 million of buying power per year. (Source: The Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society)

5. Reduce the vacancy rate in existing class B and C office buildings by redeveloping strategically located structures for use as residences and work to relocate existing tenants in better locations and facilities;

6. Assemble land for campus settings east of the Downtown Education and Public Safety Campus as well as north and east of the Erie Canal Harbor and Waterfront District to facilitate accommodating demands for future development;

7. Formalize retention, relocation, and expansion support for those who wish to do business Downtown, making the process clear, equitable, and consistent with developing a more diverse and robust Downtown business economy.

Shopping Downtown means residents, workers, and visitors can buy a regionally competitive range of goods – days, nights, and weekends. Retail adds excitement to the street, amenities for tenants, and economic value to building stock because ground floor shops are thriving.

The work plan goal for shopping Downtown is to meet the demand of retail consumers in the workforce, new residential communities, the underserved inner ring of adjacent neighborhoods, and that of visitors of all kinds to Downtown. Some estimates place this combined unmet demand at close to $300 million of buying power a year. The strategies include: concentrate on existing unmet demand; seek opportunities to support retailing through incubators and entrepreneurial training; and coordinate agency support for retail recruitment and retention.

Visiting Downtown means Downtown is "one destination with many attractions" offering something for people of all ethnicities, incomes, interests, and lifestyles. It is user friendly for new and repeat visitors and hotels, restaurants, and entertainment and cultural venues are thriving.

The work plan goals are to understand the needs of visitors to Downtown, enhance their experience, and to encourage increased visits and economic spin-off. Doing this will require us to establish new ways to bring visitors to Downtown as we enhance the experience of existing visitors. Strategies for Visiting Downtown include an aggressive program to: diversify the venues to assure a quality visitor experience for everyone; coordinate venues, events, and marketing to maximize impact; and to establish the signage and interpretation materials that make opportunities to visit Downtown clear and compelling.

A new office building under construction at the corner of Main and Chippewa. (Source: City View Properties Inc.)

Downtown Buffalo is the special event capital of the region, attracting over 2.2 million visitors annually. More than seven million a year visit Downtown for sports, festivals, theatre, libraries, conventions, religious services, and special events. (Source: "First Night" photo courtesy of Buffalo Place Inc.)

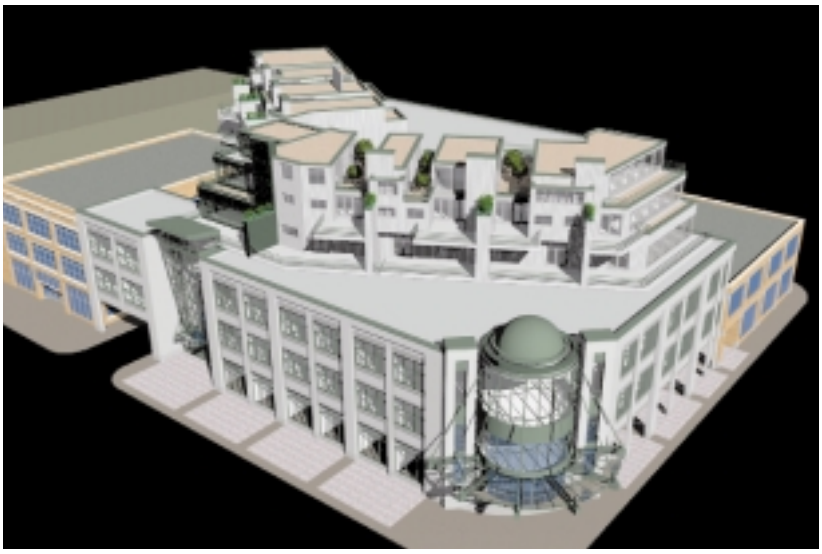
Principles: Policies for a Great Downtown

Accessing Downtown means it's easy for everyone to drive and park, ride the train or bus, cycle, and especially walk in order for everyone to take advantage of everything Downtown has to offer. It also means Downtown is connected again to the waterfront on the south and west.

The work plan goal for access Downtown is to create a balanced and well integrated access and transportation system supporting all of the activity programs Downtown. Strategies include coordinating the numerous agencies with jurisdiction over Downtown streets, parking, transit and other access functions; developing a collaborative and comprehensive management system with all of the access service providers; building on work in progress on coordinating the availability of parking with high demand areas without the proliferation of surface parking lots; encouraging the use of innovative transit solutions, and encouraging the use of bicycles to move people while also accommodating the automobile. A project likely to have a significant impact on all of the Downtown activity programs is the Main Street multi-modal access and revitalization project through which vehicular traffic will share the train way with Metro Rail.

Urban Design and Management means good urban design is understood not just as aesthetics, but all the things that make Downtown livable, walkable, and profitable. Downtown's success is measured against urban qualities, not suburban standards.

The work plan goal is to institutionalize the requirement to make every act of infrastructure and new development in the Downtown contribute to the quality of the public realm and its maintenance. The strategies involve: changing what have been the "backs of buildings" on Washington and Pearl Streets into fronts; using key streets like Genesee and Church Street as well as south Main Street to emphasize the Downtown relationship to water; creating an Urban Design Action Plan that addresses the standards for a quality public realm, identifying priority areas, greening Downtown, and establishing joint funding opportunities; working on the street infrastructure to insure that needed sidewalk, crosswalk, and basic infrastructure standards are fully accommodated; and connecting the Downtown to the neighborhoods through a system of "great streets" based on the key elements of Joseph Ellicott's radial and grid street pattern and Olmsted's incorporation of the pattern in his park and parkway system design.



A new mixed use entertainment, office, parking, and housing complex was proposed for the corner of Main and Tupper. The mix of uses links the activity of the Theatre District to the south with the new life envisioned for the 700 and 800 blocks of Main Street. The site helps further link the entertainment district to the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. The project incorporates a parking garage. (Source: Avalon Development, Inc.)

Basic maintenance on all aspects of the public realm is a critical component of the proposed urban design action plan in *The Queen City Hub*. (Source: Buffalo Place Inc.)

Preservation means that preserving historic buildings, spaces and districts is understood as a crucial part of sustainable economic development. Preservation, demolition, and new construction are balanced and respectful of our history and our urban fabric according to clear policies and procedures fairly enforced.

The work plan goals are to: 1) establish a practical and powerful system for protecting and rehabilitating historic structures, districts and related neighborhoods, and 2) to develop an appreciation of historic preservation as a tool in Buffalo's economic and cultural development. The strategies include: engaging the full complement of community based organizations, developers, foundations, financial institutions, and governmental agencies in the preservation enterprise; doing the necessary inventory and analysis work to establish priorities, doing emergency stabilizations; and, developing policies to assure the vitality of our historic resources and surrounding communities.

The Michigan Street Baptist Church forms the core of a proposed new preservation district in the greater Downtown. The proposal unites the underground railroad site with the Jesse Nash House, The Colored Musician's Club, and multiple additional opportunities for historical interpretation. (Source: The Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society)

Energy and Green Design means increased use of energy efficiency and green design strategies reduces the cost of energy in Downtown Buffalo, the ecology and green infrastructure of Downtown is sustainable, and the quality of life is improved through better environmental practices.

The work plan goals are: 1) to increase awareness and encourage the utilization of the best available energy efficient and environmental practices, and 2) to emphasize the substantial economic and environmental advantages of employing green design practices, with a primary focus on reducing operating costs and improving amenities to increase the demand for space. The strategies include educational programming and new policies that relate energy and environment concerns with the infrastructure and administration of economic development.

Image means that workers, residents, visitors and the press can all say "I love Downtown!" as a clean, safe, and friendly place to live, work, and play for people of all kinds.

The work plan goal is to create an image of Downtown consistent with the vision of the *Queen City Hub* plan. Downtown Buffalo should be understood to be a clean, safe, friendly place where it is great to live, work and play. The strategies include coordinating marketing activities for Downtown, celebrating current success and promoting realistic potential. The strategies also include education programming for media, community based organizations, and businesses on Downtown's role in the region and in the city.

4. DECADES OF PROGRESS

The Queen City Hub builds on decades of investment Downtown. We are not starting from scratch. We are standing on the foundations provided by people who also had a clear vision and good ideas about how to create a great Downtown. The work to be undertaken now would not have been possible without all the work that came before.

In the 1970s… the Erie Basin Marina was carved out of abandoned docklands on the Buffalo waterfront. The roof was raised on major league hockey at The Memorial Auditorium. A County Legislator led the charge to save the old U.S. Post Office and Sen. Daniel P. Moynihan helped preserve Louis Sullivan's renowned Guaranty Building. Shea's Buffalo was saved from the wrecking ball. The idea of a Theatre District Downtown was born. Construction began on the Metro Rail and transit mall. Out of town investment in the Hilton Hotel at the Waterfront (now the Adam's Mark Hotel) invigorated the Downtown investment climate.

In the 1980s… a new Downtown neighborhood was created in Waterfront Village. A beautiful baseball stadium was erected at Washington and Swan. Lafayette Square was restored to its 19th century grandeur. The Genesee Building was transformed into the Hyatt Regency Buffalo. Fountain Plaza was created as the centerpiece of a new financial district with headquarters for two major Buffalo based banks. The Theatre District began to grow with Theatre Place and new cinemas. The Ansonia Center and City Centre brought apartment living to Downtown. The first new single-family homes were built in Willert Park and Georgia Prospect.

Erie Basin Marina was an early accomplishment in the reconnection of Buffalo to its waterfront. (Source: City of Buffalo)

Lafayette Square was little more than a traffic circle in the 1970s and 80s. Now it serves as a great public outdoor room in the center of Downtown, housing such events as the summer concert series *Thursday at the Square* produced by Buffalo Place Inc. (Source: Buffalo Place Inc.)

In the 1990s… Key Center completed the work on Fountain Plaza. A new entertainment district on Chippewa Street sprung to life. The Flickinger Athletic Center brought new activity to its corner of Downtown. A new hockey arena was constructed at the foot of Main Street. Two new hotels opened in Downtown and another in what is now called the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. New public buildings – for the FBI and the U.S. Attorney – were constructed Downtown. Lafayette Square was made beautiful again as a large public outdoor room.

Roswell Park Cancer Institute
(Source: Robert Kirkham/*The Buffalo News*)

In the 2000s… A new office building in the Theatre District was constructed. A beautiful new Erie County Family Court building was completed. Developers in the 700 and 800 blocks of Main Street searched for opportunities to meet the growing demand for new housing Downtown. Planning proceeded for the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus even as Roswell Park completed its ambitious new building – soon to be followed by construction of the Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics and other life sciences facilities. Planning and construction for a Downtown Education and Public Safety Campus moved ahead. Construction commenced on the Erie Canal Harbor project. Plans to return cars to Main Street were completed.

5. A REGIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PLANNING AND ACTION

The Queen City Hub: A Regional Action Plan for Downtown Buffalo is part of a much larger framework for planning and action that extends from detailed planning at the neighborhood and district scale to broader planning efforts at the citywide and regional scale. Some of this work is near completion, some is in progress, and still other elements of the work have just begun. All of it, however, is devoted to building a new economy, incorporating growth management principles, reinforcing existing business and economic life, and improving the quality of life for citizens of Buffalo and the entire Niagara region.

Achieving these goals means facing up to two contradictory trends. The first is that Buffalo, as part of the "Golden Horseshoe" that extends from Rochester to Hamilton, Toronto, and beyond is located in the fourth largest and second fastest growing urban region in North America, adding 110,000 people each year. At the same time, Buffalo and its immediate region have been shrinking. Buffalo lost 10.8 percent of its population in the 1990s, while Erie and Niagara County lost 1.9 percent, and 0.4 percent of their population, respectively. In short, during more than three decades of decline, Buffalo and its region have failed to participate in the powerful economic growth surrounding it. The emerging planning framework, from top to bottom, is designed to turn long term decline to future stability and, in the longer term, smart growth consistent with our position in the bi-national mega-region.

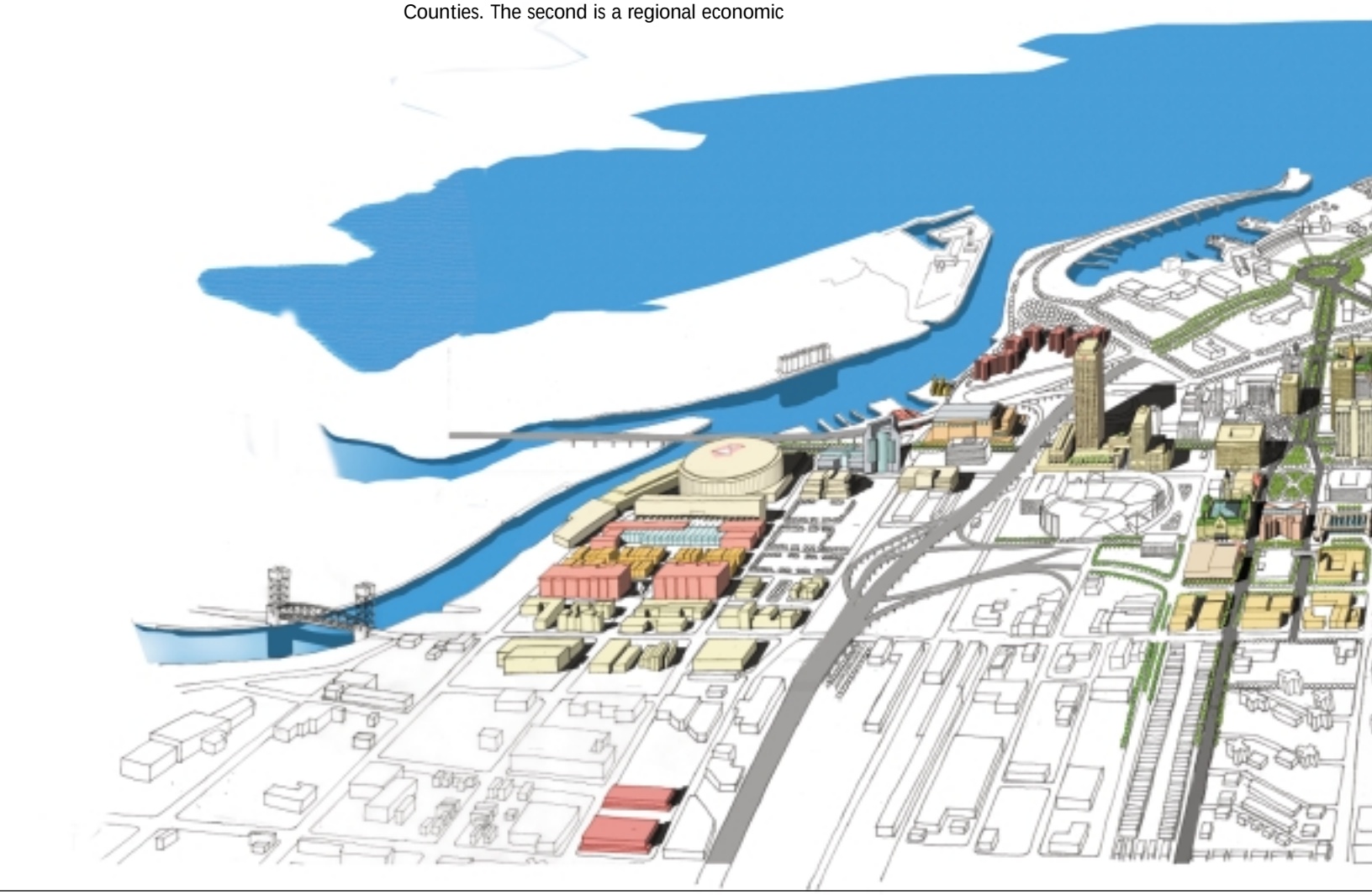
Queen City in the 21st Century: Buffalo's Comprehensive Plan is a physical land use plan providing a strategic framework to guide both public and private investment in the city for the period 2003 to 2025. Like *The Queen City Hub: A Regional Action Plan for Downtown*, *Buffalo's Comprehensive Plan* emphasizes fixing the basics of city service and infrastructure and building on our considerable assets as a city. Like the Downtown plan it calls for using the Ellicott radial plan, the Olmsted park and parkway system, and the waters of the Buffalo River, Lake Erie and the Niagara River as a way to help organize the image of the city. It focuses development in strategic investment areas related to the key public school reconstruction projects, neighborhood retail districts, and key sites available for light industrial and commercial development. The plan is directly connected to the capital and operating budget for the City.

Downtown and the inner ring of neighborhoods. (Source: The Urban Design Project)

Related Planning and Action at the Regional Scale. Planning and action on economic development and land use at the regional scale will be required to address the problems of Downtown and the City of Buffalo, as well as the two county region. In May of 2002, *The Buffalo Niagara Economic Development Agencies Performance Audit*, commissioned by the Buffalo Niagara Enterprise, produced recommendations for improving the region's economic development services system, some of which are already being implemented.

Three more such efforts will produce results by 2004. The first is the Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth, commissioned jointly by Erie and Niagara Counties. The second is a regional economic development plan commissioned by the Erie County Industrial Development Agency. The third is an effort sponsored by the Oishei Foundation to develop a regional plan for cultural tourism. All three of these efforts promise an integrated regional approach to positioning the economy of Western New York and, as such, the economy of Downtown Buffalo, for growth in the decades ahead.

The collective work and the shared vision of thousands of Buffalonians is ready to pay off in another period of progress. *The Queen City Hub: A Regional Action Plan for Downtown Buffalo* has set some new goals,



reaffirmed some old ones, and framed a clear strategy for continuing action. It understands the importance of always building on our assets and taking advantage of the efforts of decades past. It builds on the inherited framework for greatness found in our radial city plan, reinforced by our historic Olmsted parks and parkways, and drawn back to our historic relationship to the water.

This vision and strategy for Downtown is framed by broader regional visions and strategies and coordinated with other local plans to achieve the maximum possible impact. The formula itself is simple: focus our investments on strategic activity areas and new Downtown neighborhoods; follow key principles for making a great Downtown; concentrate our investments in promising economic sectors; and always work to improve the urban environment for the benefit of the people who use it.

The approach to this work is also simple. We must always work for practical achievements today, no matter how modest. Yet we can never lose sight of the bigger vision and the broader horizon. Perhaps most of all, we must work together, solving problems, building the organizational capacity to take action, and holding one another accountable to the plan. With all of these things, there is no doubt that Downtown Buffalo is poised for greatness.

Perspective sketch of several development proposals consistent with *The Queen City Hub* vision. (Source: The Urban Design Project)

THE HISTORY OF THE PLAN

The Queen City Hub: A Regional Action Plan for Downtown Buffalo is the product of nearly a decade of continuing and conscientious visioning, action, and accountability. The process began on October 22, 1994, when more than 300 people gathered in the new studios of WNED-TV to outline their vision of the future for Downtown Buffalo. Citizens focused on topics of living, working, meeting, feeling safe, shopping, learning, accessing, and having fun in Downtown. That public conversation laid the groundwork for the evolving community consensus about the vision and priorities for Downtown and for action over the ensuing decade.

After that day, there were five more summits over eight years to refine the vision, set priorities, and review progress on implementation. A second summit held in March 1996 focused on the details of housing and security, as well as on a critique of the vision work up until then. A third summit, held that same fall, refined the vision and focused on more details of Downtown improvement. These community discussions, augmented by focus groups, interviews, public hearings, and plan reviews by experts all helped to forge a consensus on the current plan and continued action Downtown.

Achieving the vision, however, required a clear and disciplined public approach to plan implementation. On September 14, 1999 Mayor Anthony M. Masiello unveiled a consolidated Strategic Plan for Downtown Buffalo. Emphasizing the theme of Downtown as a good place to work, live and play, the plan presented a tentative vision of the future and offered a preliminary action plan to achieve that vision. Close on the heels of the release of the Downtown Strategic Plan, the Mayor also announced a new initiative to get the plan done.

Downtown Buffalo 2002! was a working partnership of the City of Buffalo, Buffalo Place Inc., and the Urban Design Project of the School of Architecture and Planning, University at Buffalo. They were charged with the task of reviewing the plan, seeking public priorities for immediate action, shepherding those priority projects to completion and preparing *The Queen City Hub.* These partners managed an Implementation Council representing 18 public and private implementing agencies working together to solve problems and hold one another accountable. Of the fifteen priority projects in the Downtown Buffalo 2002! implementation portfolio, twelve are done, and two more are headed toward completion in the next few years. One has been overtaken by events.

The Downtown plan implementation process continues to combine collaborative problem solving and accountability with broad public communication and consultation. Two more televised citywide summits were held, one in December of 1999 to seek consensus and establish priorities for the 1999 draft Strategic Plan and another in April 2002 seeking final public comment on the revised *Queen City Hub*. More than 7,000 Downtown citizens received regular newsletters. The public reads progress reports in the local press. And 57 presentations of the plan and work in progress were made to community and business groups. The project web site at **www.downtownbuffalo2002.org** continues to be active and commentary on its contents is brisk.

The implementation process will continue under the guidance of the Director of the City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning. A powerful constituency with strong habits of collaboration and accountability remains to help carry the process forward with established approaches to plan implementation that have been tested and proven successful.

Robert G. Shibley, AIA, AICP
Director, Downtown Buffalo 2002!

PLANNING AT THE CITY SCALE

***Queen City in the 21st Century: Buffalo's Comprehensive Plan*, incorporates by reference the work of *The Queen City Hub: A Regional Action Plan for Downtown Buffalo* and other strategic planning initiatives. A few key initiatives are:**

The Joint Schools Construction Board. The City and State are investing one billion dollars over the next decade for a comprehensive overhaul of City school buildings. This effort and the work by the Board of Education to improve the quality and efficiency of school programs both promise to significantly improve the quality of the education system in Buffalo for all its citizens.

Olmsted Parks and Parkway System Restoration and Management Plan. The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy has taken on an ambitious twenty-year park and parkway restoration and management program beginning with the creation of a master plan fashioned after New York City's Central Park Conservancy restoration and management program. The effort is predicated on collaboration with the City of Buffalo and Erie County and depends on the Conservancy's capital campaign to raise much of the money needed to implement the plan.

The Waterfront Corridor Initiative and the Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan. The Waterfront Corridor Initiative is not a planning exercise. Rather, it is a plan review and implementation campaign designed to resurrect the good ideas and hard work of twenty years of planning on Buffalo's waterfront and translate them into action – now. The Initiative is underway and an analysis of Buffalo's waterfront planning legacy is near completion. Next steps involve the myriad waterfront stakeholders, public agencies, and general public, who will review and prioritize viable projects for Buffalo's waterfront. When that's done, priority projects will be turned over to those agencies – public and private – that have the ability to get those things done. An Implementation Council made up of the leadership of those agencies will meet regularly to solve problems, hold each other accountable, and turn plans into reality.

The initiative is supported by a grant to the City of Buffalo from the Federal Highway Administration with a primary goal of identifying key transportation infrastructure initiatives that will support economic and community development, transportation safety and efficiency, and waterfront access. The Waterfront Corridor Initiative (WCI) will be concluded in 2004. All of the WCI work will be subject to the principles of the Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP) to be concluded by the City of Buffalo in 2003. That plan outlines the key principles and constraints on waterfront development that will assure environmentally sound development.

THE PLANNING FRAMEWORK AT A REGIONAL SCALE

Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth. This effort is a broad two-county collaboration to examine existing conditions, regional trends, and inter-municipal and multi-county precedents for action. It is defining principles and best practices for smarter growth and developing a consensus among regional leaders for future action. Finally, the work includes creating a toolkit and detailed action plan that will, "…provide policy, regulatory, investment and governance recommendations as well as timelines, responsibilities, resource requirements, and progress indices for both region-wide and area-specific projects and initiatives." The work is scheduled to conclude in 2003.

Erie-Niagara Economic Development Strategy. The economic strategy will propose a series of planning and development activities for the two-county region for implementation with the Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth. Part of this effort will address the recommendations of the two-county Economic Development Working Group to develop four themes: (1) the *current picture*, (2) a *vision* for economic development, (3) a regional economic development *strategy*, and (4) creation of a seamless *"one-stop shop"* from the perspective of the consumer of economic development services. The plan will include recommendations for structural reforms, industry targets for development, and ongoing research and monitoring.

Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative. The Cultural Tourism Committee of the John R. Oishei Foundation has commissioned a comprehensive plan for cultural tourism development. The plan will produce an inventory of tourism assets and opportunities, a market analysis of current and potential cultural tourists, regional priorities for development, and implementation mechanisms. The work involves substantial data collection based on the premise that "you can't manage what you can't measure." The data work includes establishing a set of performance indicators that can measure progress on the plan, evaluate marketing and product-development strategies, and assess the economic impact of arts, culture, and cultural tourism.

Buffalo-Niagara Economic Development Agencies Performance Audit. The audit determined that the Buffalo Niagara region must transform its fragmented economic development services delivery system or face continued difficulty in attracting and retaining business. In an eight-county region of 1.6 million people, six major economic development organizations and five smaller ones offer more than 40 separate financial assistance or tax incentive packages, each with its own application and approval process. The audit found problems at all scales of service delivery and in program coordination between agencies. Recommendations to rationalize the system are already being implemented, including the reorganization of services provided by the Buffalo Niagara Enterprise, the Erie County Industrial Development Agency, the Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation, and the Office of Strategic Planning in the City of Buffalo. Other promising steps are anticipated in the coordination of the audit with the Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth and the Erie-Niagara Economic Development Plan efforts.

REFERENCES

The technical foundation for *The Queen City Hub* is partially built upon over fifty reports produced in the normal course of due diligence on Downtown development over the past decade. The full list of references is provided in Volume II of the plan. *The Queen City Hub* specifically owes a great deal to the predecessor plan produced by Hamilton Houston Lownie Architects PC, Wallace Roberts & Todd, and Hammer Siler George Associates (1999) for the City of Buffalo. That plan is available on the web at www.downtownbuffalo2002.org and has helped guide action over the past three years, demonstrating significant progress on most of the 18 projects it identifies as important to the achievement of that plan's goals. Further debt is owed the initial draft of *The Queen City Hub* Plan first published in April of 2002. The draft served as the basis for an additional year of review, implementation and refinement leading up to publication of *The Queen City Hub*.

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Downtown Buffalo 2002!

The Implementation Council for Downtown Buffalo 2002! Benderson Development Company ★ Buffalo Common Council ★ Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation ★ Buffalo Niagara Enterprise ★ Buffalo Place Inc ★ City of Buffalo, Board Of Parking ★ City of Buffalo, Administration/Finance ★ City of Buffalo, Office of the Mayor ★ City of Buffalo, Public Works ★ City of Buffalo, Office of Strategic Planning ★ Ellicott Development Co. ★ Empire State Development, WNY Region ★ Erie County Department of Environment & Planning ★ Erie County Legislature ★ Erie County, Office of the Executive ★ Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council ★ Heart of the City Inc. ★ M & T Bank ★ Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, Board of Commissioners ★ Signature Management Group

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Focus Group Participants. Sixty-five people worked with the Downtown Buffalo 2002! team in the initial framing of the work plan associated with both the activities and principles of *The Queen City Hub*. Their participation in focus group meetings and plan review helped to solidify the final planning framework.

Summit Participants, Draft Plan Reviewers, and Survey Respondents. Additional assistance on the project came in a variety of forms. Hundreds of participants in the Buffalo Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team visit of 2001 focused on housing, and hundreds more attended two Downtown Buffalo 2002! Summits in December of 1999 and April of 2002. And still hundreds more responded to requests for professional, citizen, and agency review.

A detailed list of all the participants in plan development is published in Vol. II and is posted on the **www.downtownbuffalo2002.org** web site.

The U.S. General Services Administration proposal for a new Federal court house is an illustration of their commitment to high quality architecture and to building out the Government District around Niagara Square in a manner consistent with the vision of *The Queen City Hub*. This view illustrates the vista to the McKinley Monument from Niagara Street.
(Source: U.S. General Services Administration; Kohn Pederson Fox Associates, Architects and Planners)

“Beauty is universal… everybody needs it and there’s never any excuse for anyone, certainly in government, to ever build anything that doesn’t add to the beauty of a city.”

Joseph E. Riley,
Mayor, Charleston, SC
in a speech to the Buffalo Renaissance Foundation
November, 2001

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