

# Introduction

The waterfront region in the Town of Tonawanda is in a period of transition. The area has a strong industrial heritage, but it is increasingly focused on waterfront recreational and scenic purposes. The Riverwalk, Isle View Park, Niawanda Park, Veteran's Park, Fireman's Park, Aqua Lane Park, the Town Boat Launch and the Two-Mile Creek Greenway are some of the recreational assets in or near the Town's waterfront region. These amenities have increased public access and open space in the region, and are helping to change the character of the area. Former environmental concerns have largely been addressed.

The area is ready for redevelopment in a new context—one that recognizes the importance of industrial and commercial uses, but that also increasingly accommodates recreational use, public access to the waterfront and the aesthetic potential of the area.

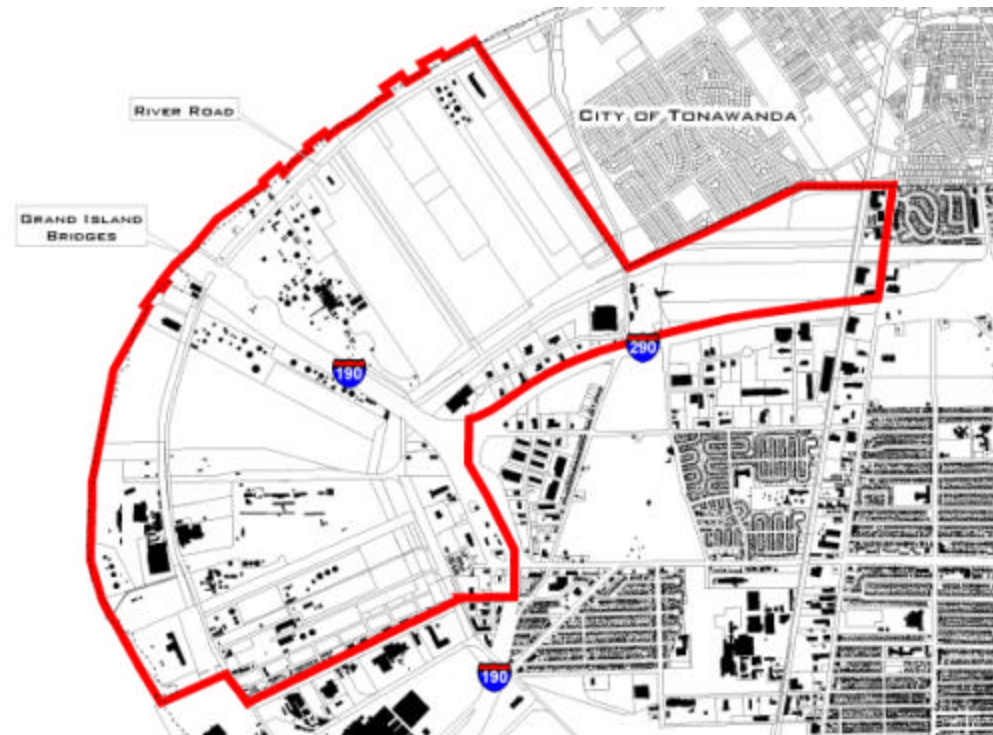
A number of factors affect potential land uses in the waterfront area in Tonawanda. There are physical characteristics (land use, infrastructure), market considerations (development trends, demand), and environmental issues (floodplains, wetlands, and environmental concerns) that influence the area. These comprise the opportunities and constraints that determine what is feasible. In addition, there are certain objectives that the community wishes to accomplish in this area, and any actions should also be consistent with the policies of the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program adopted by the Town. These objectives have been used to evaluate the alternatives in order to select the preferred land use plan for the waterfront region.

This report summarizes the results of the land use investigation of this area of Tonawanda. The effort entailed a review of past studies, an update and analysis of existing conditions in the area, an analysis of economic trends, and confirmation of the goals of the waterfront area in the Town of Tonawanda. The report results in a Land Use Plan for the area. The map on the following page summarizes this plan in a visual form.

The primary purpose of the Land Use Plan is to provide guidance for zoning issues pertaining to the waterfront area. The next step in the process is to draft new zoning regulations for the Town which conform to the concepts presented in this Land Use Plan, and to amend the Town's Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan to ensure consistency. With appropriate zoning and land use controls in place, the Town will be able to guide development in the waterfront area in a manner that will serve to implement this new vision for the Tonawanda waterfront.

## Study Area

The study area for this project incorporates all lands in the Town of Tonawanda bounded by the Niagara River on the west, the City of Tonawanda on the north, and Sawyer Road on the south. The I-190 and I-290 Expressways and Military Road form the eastern boundary of the study area. Within this study area, the analysis focuses primarily on those areas in the waterfront region that have been zoned W-1, W-2, W-R or WID.



## Existing Conditions

### ▪ *Existing Land Use*

The existing land uses in the area establish the image and the tone. While it is possible to change future land uses, the influences of existing uses must be acknowledged and addressed in order for any change to be successfully implemented.

#### **Study Area:**

Within the study area, land uses can be categorized into two areas. Each area is defined by distinct land use characteristics, and are the following:

1. Northern Sector (area north of the I-190/Grand Island Bridge):

This area is characterized by a mix of vacant lands, small industrial uses and larger, fixed uses, such as the Seaway landfill, the Town wastewater treatment plant and the United Petroleum tank farm. There are also some newer light industrial uses at the eastern end of this area (Fire Tower Industrial Park.) Many of the lands in this northern sector of the waterfront are available for development and redevelopment. This area has the greatest potential for establishing a new image, with uses benefiting from ties to the waterfront and enhanced public access. Proper planning of this area can result in land uses that complement the assets of this region (waterfront views, parks, Riverwalk, City of Tonawanda shopping districts, major transportation corridors, including Interstate access) and fit within the constraints of the area (adjoining uses, accessibility).

2. Central Sector (area between the Grand Island Bridges and Sawyer Road):

This area consists of established industrial uses, but is a transitional area where change is beginning to occur. Current proposals being implemented in this area include the redevelopment of the Cherry Farm parcel into a regional State Park, subdivision and redevelopment of the NOCO property for additional light industrial use, and clean-up and redevelopment of the River World and Tonawanda Coke sites. The area is a mixture of heavy industrial uses, light industrial, commercial, public uses and a small residential area. As with any transitional area, careful planning is extremely important to properly balance the assets and constraints associated with the area. Change is much more challenging in this section due to the mixture of uses and the established characters of the sub-areas.

- ***Existing Land Use (cont.)***

**Adjacent Areas:**

The areas directly south and due east of the study area each also have distinct characteristics. These areas are important to understand because they have a potential influence on land uses within the study area:

1. Southern Sector (area south of Sawyer Road to the City of Buffalo border):

This area is south of the study area for this project. It is dominated by large industrial uses: Dunlop, Dupont, GM, FMC and the Huntley Power Station. The overall character of this area is established and unlikely to see any major changes in the foreseeable future. Although industrial in nature, this area includes several important waterfront assets, including Aqua Lane Park, the Town boat launch facility, a marina, and the continuation of the Riverwalk. Amenities include public access (the Riverwalk), excellent views, fishing and boating opportunities. Particularly along Aqua Lane, these assets merit continued protection and expansion as opportunities arise.

2. The area east of I-190 and south of I-290 to Sheridan Park:

The three areas discussed above (Northern, Central and Southern) form a crescent around this fourth area, which contains a mix of uses, including Sheridan Park, and industrial, commercial, and residential uses. This area provides a transitional area between the waterfront region and the residential neighborhoods of Tonawanda. In general, land use patterns coordinate between this area and adjacent areas (i.e. industrial uses adjacent to industrial uses). Impacts of transportation and types of usages in this fourth area are important factors in deciding the direction of the waterfront study area.

- ***Existing Land Use (cont.)***

## Summary of Major Land Use Issues

- The waterfront is an important asset, not only to the general public, but also to property owners. It has the potential to add value to any development or redevelopment in the area. Important views, public access, trails and recreational amenities can help change the image of the area, and promote higher quality development along the river.
- The area is predominately industrial in nature, particularly south of the Grand Island Bridges, and plans must take these existing adjacent uses into consideration.
- There are large tracts of undeveloped land in the waterfront area. These lands are large enough to establish a new image for any new development that occurs.
- Isle View Park and the Riverwalk help establish a positive image, and create excellent public access to the waterfront, as do Niawanda and Veteran's Parks in the City of Tonawanda. The Riverwalk extends from the City of Tonawanda through the study area, and south to the City of Buffalo. The Two Mile Creek Greenway, a trail along Two Mile Creek, is another recreational asset just north of the project area, and there are plans to extend this pathway south of Sheridan Park through the Praxair property and along Sheridan Drive to River Road. With the future development of Cherry Farm, there will be a significant amount of public greenspace along the waterfront.
- Certain land uses, such as the Seaway landfill, United Petroleum's tank farm and Tonawanda Coke are unlikely to be converted to other uses in the near term. Redevelopment may occur at some point in the future, but for practical purposes, land use plans should design around these uses. (For long term planning, it may be possible to develop a reuse plan for the landfill focusing on recreational and/or parkland type uses.)
- The former Seaway landfill can serve as a visual buffer between any new development occurring on the vacant property to its north and the more industrial uses to the south. The open lands at the northern end of the corridor can be more easily associated with adjacent parklands and trails because the landfill blocks negative views to the south.
- Scattered small industrial users, such as truck terminals, remain along the River Road corridor, particularly south of the Grand Island bridges. Some of these are vacant, while others are active uses. For those users which cannot be induced to relocate to more appropriate areas, more effective screening and higher design standards should be encouraged to help improve the visual character of the area.

## Land Uses: Northern Sector (North of the Grand Island Bridges)



Two Mile Creek Road at  
Fire Tower Industrial Park



River Road looking South



River Road looking North



Isle View Park

## Land Uses: Central Sector (South of the Grand Island Bridges)



Industrial Uses



Huntley Power Station



Industrial Uses

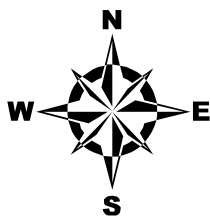


Sawyer-Kaufman Area

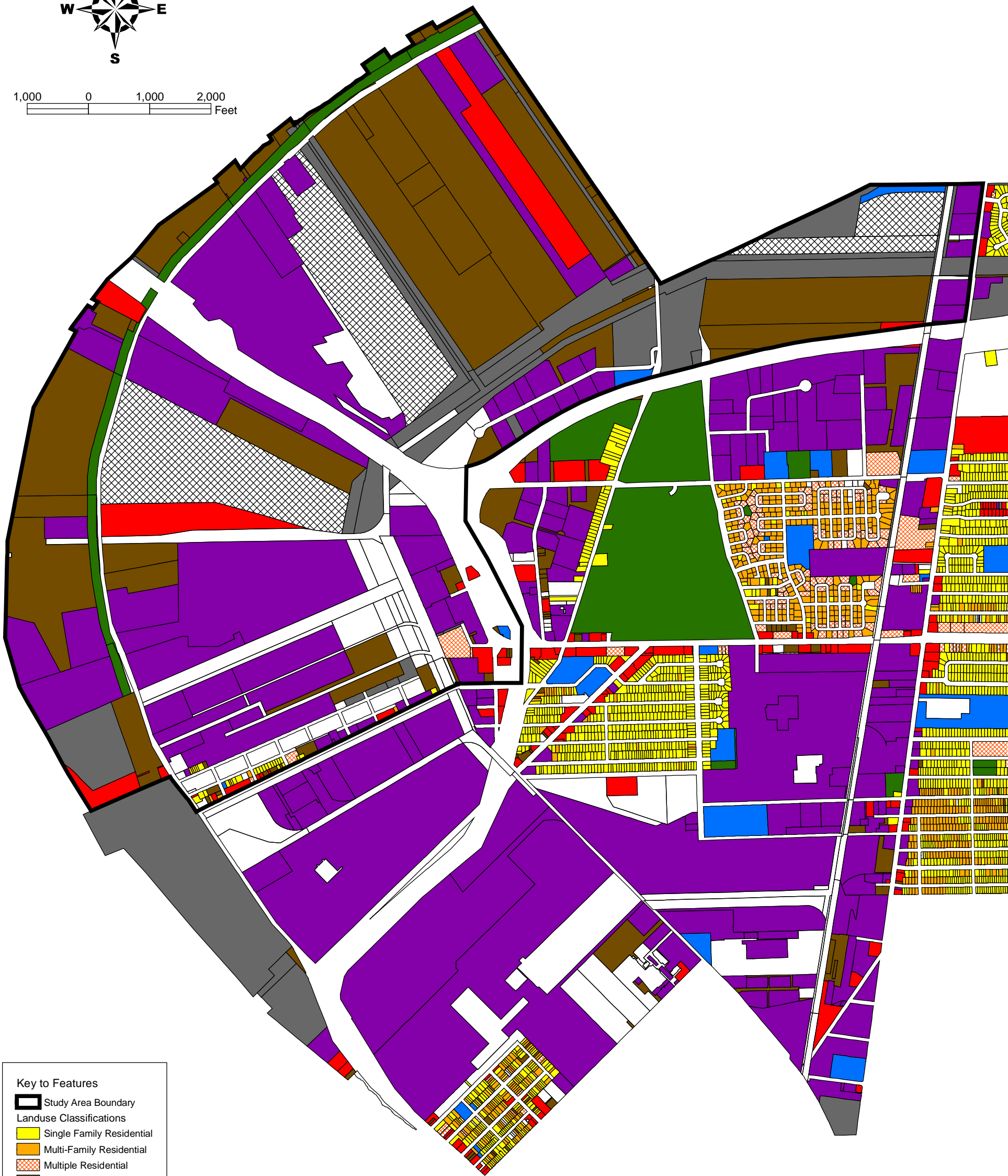
- ***Infrastructure and Circulation***

# Tonawanda Waterfront Zoning Update

## Existing Landuse



1,000 0 1,000 2,000 Feet



### Key to Features

Study Area Boundary

### Landuse Classifications

Single Family Residential

Multi-Family Residential

Multiple Residential

Vacant

Commercial

Industrial

Parks

Government/Public

Utilities/Infrastructure

Landfill/Dump

Missing Data

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2. ANY DECISION MADE OR ACTION TAKEN OR NOT TAKEN BY THE READER IN RELIANCE UPON ANY INFORMATION OR DATA FURNISHED HEREUNDER

DATA SOURCES: TOWN OF TONAWANDA

In general, the study area has adequate infrastructure (utilities, such as water, sewer, electric, natural gas) along the perimeters of available land, with sufficient capacity for most development that would occur. Electric lines, in particular, are of a high capacity. However, service within parcels is not always available. Many of the parcels are extremely large, and utility lines and roadways need to be extended into the interior of the parcels to effectively open up land for development. The Isle View and the North Youngmann Commerce Park sites would benefit the most from extension of roadways and utilities into the sites.

There are excellent overall transportation linkages to the area, which is adjacent to I-190 and I-290 and served by a number of exits and entrances. There are also active rail lines serving the area, with access primarily at the rear of the properties. River Road is the major roadway through the northern sector. Traffic counts on River Road are estimated at 11,800 vehicles (AADT) per day north of the bridges. Access through to River Road and the Interstate system is awkward for some of the uses and parcels that do not have frontage on River Road, and roadway access to particular parcels could be improved. Access to inland parcels is provided by private drives.

South of the Grand Island Bridges, the major roadway connectors are River Road and Grand Island Boulevard, which connect south of the bridge. Average annual daily traffic on River Road in this section is 8,700 vehicles per day. Sawyer Avenue is the only road that cuts through the central sector of the study area (connecting River Road to Grand Island Boulevard). Two small streets (James and Kaufman) provide access from River Road to the Sawyer-Kaufman area, which is a mixed-use area with large and small businesses, industries and residential housing.

With respect to roadway capacities, the area has been studied extensively, with a 1996 traffic study that examined the traffic impacts of different development scenarios in this region of the Town. The 1996 study determined many of the roadways have adequate capacity, with levels of service of A and B, although it recommended a number of transportation improvements, some of which have been implemented. Future needs, particularly connectors into the sites, coupled with expected traffic generation from development, will result in the need for additional transportation improvements in the area.

- The need for interior roadway access is critical. It is important to establish a roadway system to open up the interior lands in a manner consistent with the goals for the region. Otherwise, any development that occurs is likely to focus primarily on road frontage development, with interior access, if any, provided only by private drives. This will undercut efforts to establish a new image with higher quality development in the area, and undermine the development potential of the interior lands. While this need is most important in the northern sector, available lands south of the Grand Island Bridges also lack effective access.

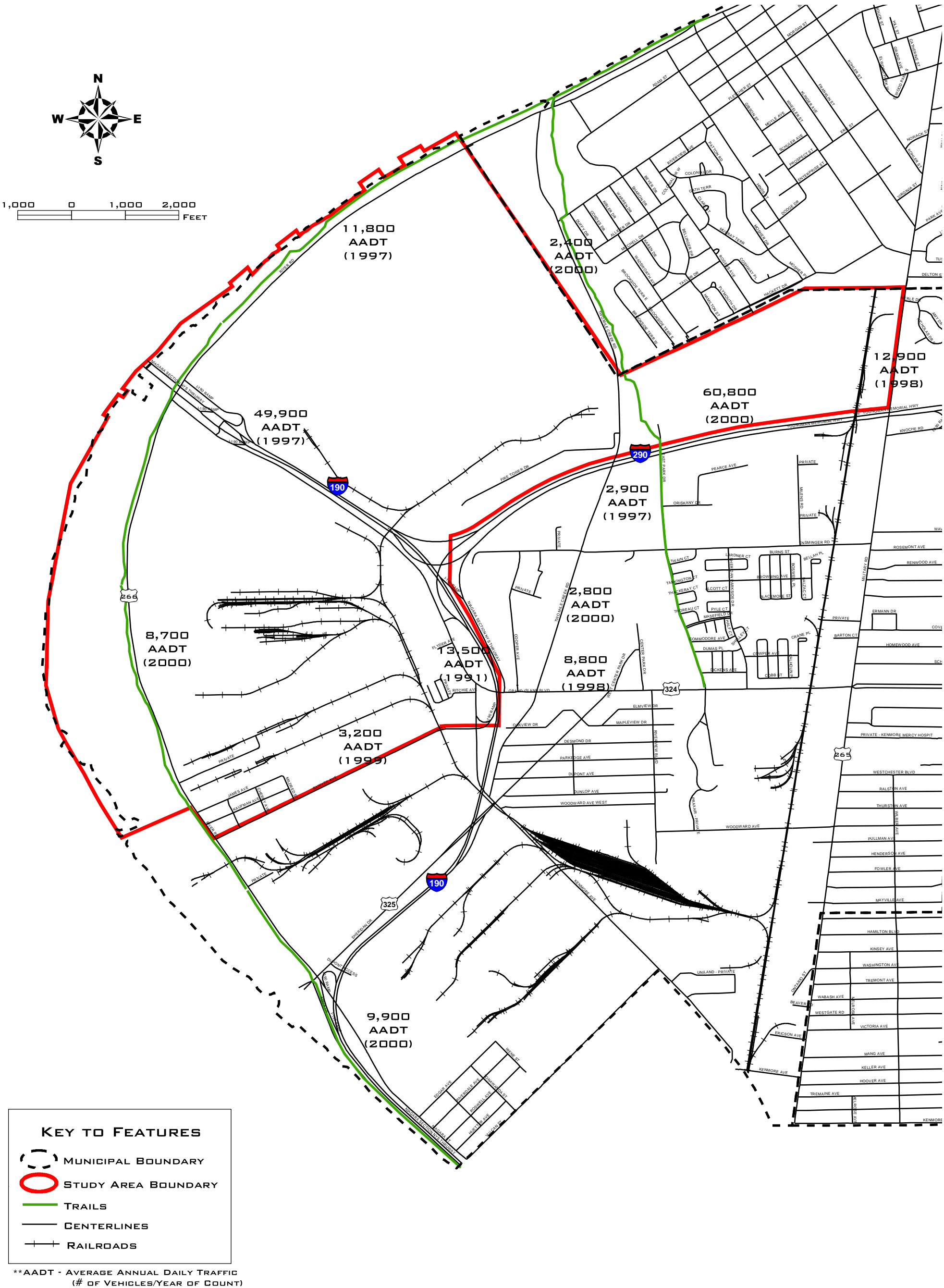
#### ▪ ***Infrastructure and Circulation (continued)***

- Proper placement of roadways will also facilitate the extension of utilities, since additional utilities can be provided along the right-of-way.

- A new roadway in the northern part of the waterfront region could also serve to alleviate pressure on Two Mile Creek Road. Currently, traffic from the Fire Tower Industrial Park and other industrial uses in this area must travel a circuitous route south past a residential area along Two Mile Creek Road to gain access to major roadways or the interstate system. Truck traffic is legally restricted from traveling north on Two Mile Creek Road through the City of Tonawanda. A new roadway connecting the Fire Tower Industrial Park area with River Road would provide a more direct, appropriate route for commercial traffic.
- Other recommendations of the 1996 traffic study should be implemented as the area develops, to ensure continued good transportation access throughout the waterfront region.

# TONAWANDA WATERFRONT ZONING UPDATE

## EXISTING TRANSPORTATION



## ▪ ***Development Trends/Market Indicators***

Past studies and discussions with economic development specialists have identified sufficient market demand to support light industrial and office uses along the waterfront corridor in the Town of Tonawanda. For example, a recent site selection report to Buffalo-Niagara Enterprise identified the Isle View and North Youngmann Commerce Park sites as potentially attractive to their target niches of warehousing/distribution and medical device manufacturing. Isle View was also seen as suitable for research and development. Experience at other locations in Tonawanda, such as Fire Tower Industrial Park and the Interstate Commerce Center, has also been quite positive. Most existing industrial park facilities in the Town of Tonawanda are at or near capacity, and there have been continued inquiries at the Town of Tonawanda Development Corporation, suggesting positive market demand.

Regionally, occupancy rates have been climbing. In Amherst, Class A office space is estimated to have an occupancy rate of 92%. A recent Amherst IDA survey indicates demand for around 494,000 square feet of new office/light industrial space over the next two years from existing local businesses alone. The Town of Tonawanda is located within close proximity to the same markets and labor force as the Town of Amherst, and it is reasonable to expect that it could capture some of that demand. Competitive advantages of the Town of Tonawanda include:

- Land prices in Tonawanda are significantly lower than in Amherst.
- Development could be eligible for the Empire Zone incentives, further lowering development costs. The Town has a designated Empire Zone, which includes the Isle View site. Any parcel within the study area is eligible to be included within the Empire Zone, and zone boundaries can be amended to extend Zone benefits to a proposed development.
- The area has excellent transportation access to the interstate system. Many sites also have rail access. The availability and capacity of existing utilities is also excellent.
- The study area is characterized by many amenities, such as the waterfront, trails, and parks, which could add value to proposed development.

Given economic trends in the region, the following market niches offer the greatest potential for the Tonawanda area:

- Office: There is currently no office park-style development within the Town of Tonawanda, representing a gap in the available product. Office development should meet modern demand characteristics, consisting of one- or two-story buildings in a campus setting with ample parking and a high level of amenities, such as telecommunications services, bike/hike trails and extensive landscaping. Research and development is another potential niche.
- Light industrial: demand in the region has been steady through the past few years, and vacancy rates are very low.
- Medium sized parcels for new business development and expansion for local companies (parcels one to twenty acres in size): inquiries at the Town of Tonawanda Development Corporation suggest there is a need to accommodate the expansion needs of local companies.
- Small parcels available for purchase, rather than lease, for small, local entrepreneurs.

## ▪ ***Environmental***

Environmental conditions affect the type of development that is appropriate for a particular area. In the case of the Town of Tonawanda waterfront, there are few major environmental impediments to development at most locations.

- **Floodplains:**

A large proportion of the land on the waterfront side of River Road is within the 100-year floodplain, particularly north of the Grand Island Bridges, where nearly all waterfront lands are affected (river side of River Road). While this does not preclude development, all buildings and structures within the floodplain must be built to conform to the Town's floodplain regulations.

- **Wetlands:**

There are about 8 acres of wetlands along the shore immediately north of the Grand Island Bridges, 18 acres on the Cherry Farm site, and some additional wetlands on the rear of the Tonawanda Coke parcel. The Cherry Farm wetlands have been incorporated into designs for the site as a positive feature along the proposed nature trail system, and the parcel north of the Bridge is identified for parkland. There are no identified wetlands that would present a barrier to development plans on parcels with near-term development potential.

- **Soils:**

Portions of the area have been previously developed, and consist of soils categorized as urban lands. In areas of vacant land, much of the soils are Churchville-Remson soils, which tend to be clay-like and poorly draining. There are some areas where hydric soils are found, particularly along Two Mile and Rattlesnake Creeks. A concentration of hydric soils is also located at the rear of the Tonawanda Coke parcel, as well as some adjacent areas. There are significant areas in the North Youngmann Commerce Park and the Isle View site where there is the potential for hydric inclusions. These do not preclude development on these lands, but it does sometimes warrant additional investigation, and building and roadway design will need to address the issue of potential seasonal wetness.

- **Creeks:**

Two Mile Creek cuts across a narrow portion of the study area, through the North Youngmann Commerce Park parcel. Its tributary, Rattlesnake Creek, traverses the Isle View site, which is the largest area of vacant land in Tonawanda's waterfront area. Neither stream presents barriers to development. The Two Mile Creek Greenway increases public access to the waterfront and provides an amenity to the area. Rattlesnake Creek has the potential to be incorporated into site design as a positive feature.

- ***Environmental (continued)***

- **Woodlands:**

There are some wooded areas in the vacant area at the northern end of the waterfront region and also on vacant property along the riverfront. Wherever feasible, site design should attempt to retain mature trees and incorporate them into the development. They help buffer adjacent uses, and add character and amenity to the development.

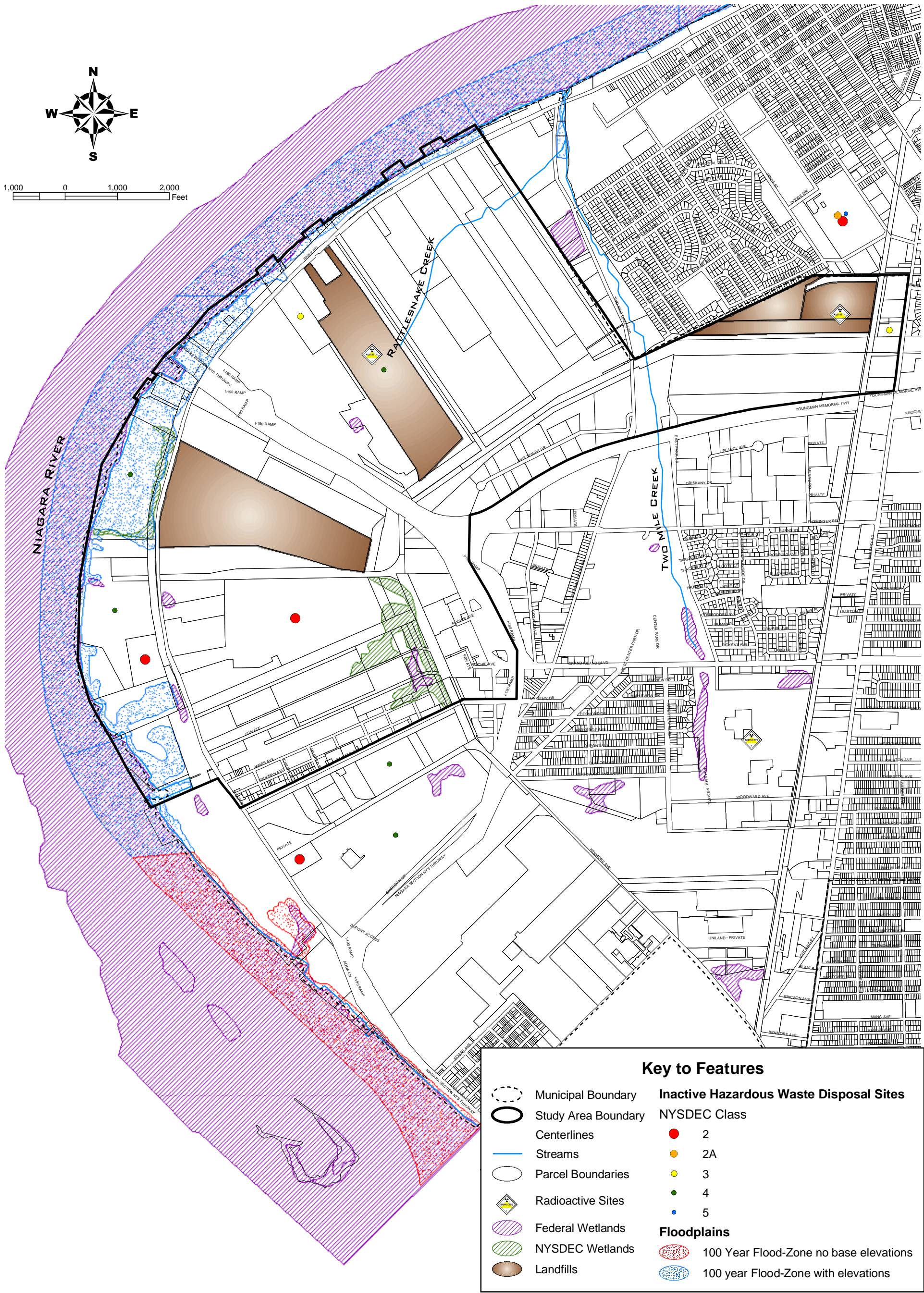
- **Hazardous wastes:**

With the exception of two sites, all the environmental concerns in the area have either been remediated (cleaned up) or contained to small localized locations (lagoons). Two sites within the study area (Tonawanda Coke and Niagara River World) are still classified as DEC Class 2 Hazardous Waste sites under the Superfund initiative, indicating continued contamination. A significant portion of the Niagara River World site (where Envirotek had operations) is in the process of being remediated, with completion of the feasibility study due in 2002. New York State plans to begin cleaning up the remainder of the site in 2002. Cleanups are also continuing at the Tonawanda Coke site.

All areas with potential radioactive residue are being cleared under the jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers. Remediation is completed at the two Ashland sites, which have been cleared to levels that exceed required standards. Soil excavations to remove all radioactive residue from the Rattlesnake Creek area are scheduled to be completed in the Fall of 2002. Some residue is present at the Seaway landfill, but levels are very low and confined to the immediate area. There are small isolated spots of radioactive residue in the Town of Tonawanda landfill, and in the North Youngmann Commerce Park. All are minor and easily addressed. The Army Corps of Engineers expects remediation at these sites to be complete by 2003.

# Tonawanda Waterfront Zoning Update

## Environmental Features



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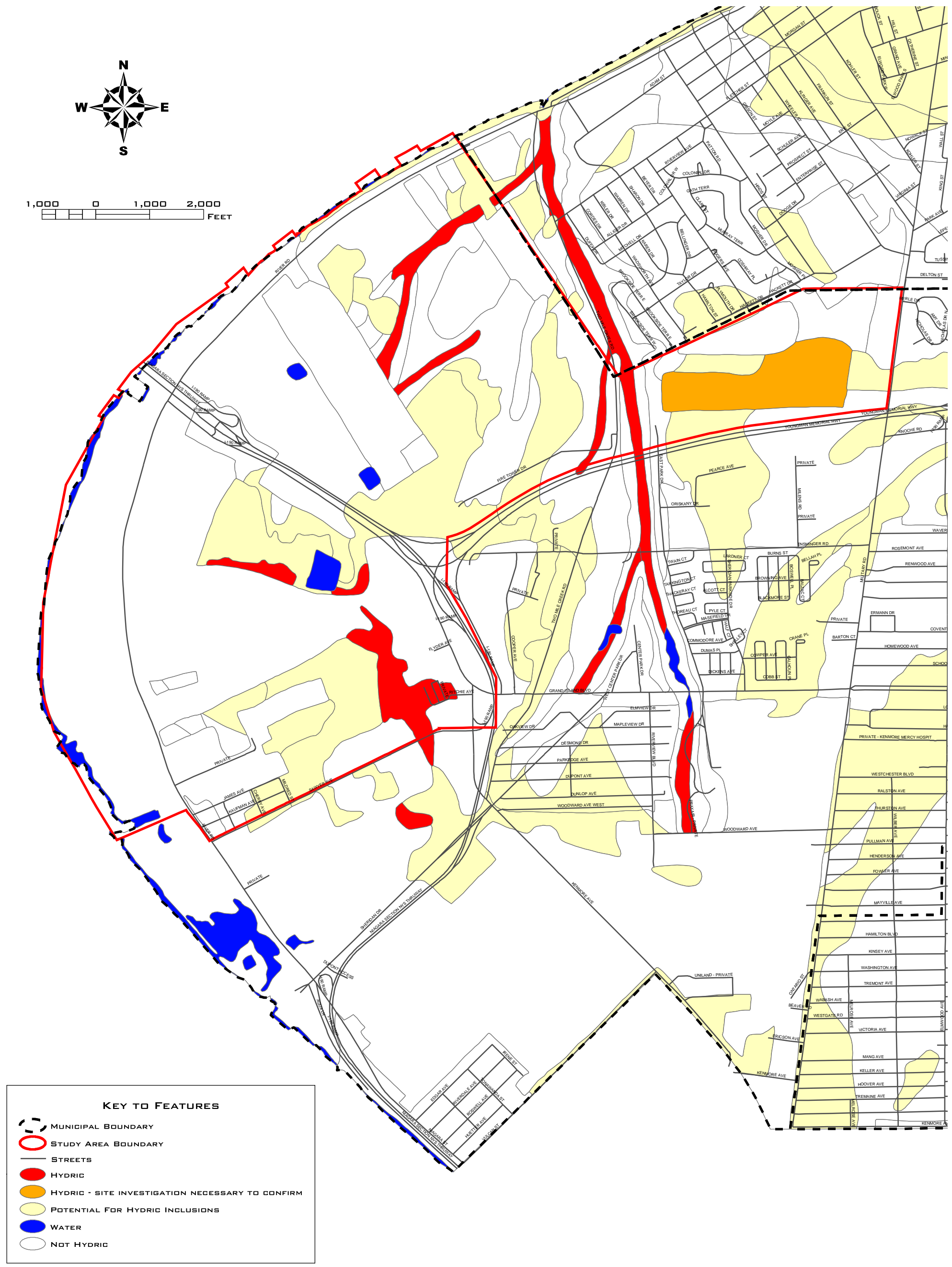
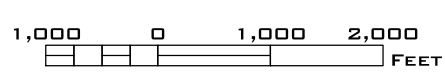
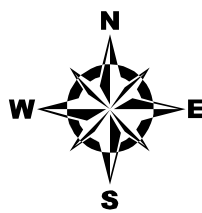
1. ANY ERRORS, OMISSIONS, OR INACCURACIES IN THE INFORMATION PROVIDED REGARDLESS OF HOW CAUSED WITH THE EXCEPTION OF STUDY AREA BOUNDARY, STREAMS, RADIOACTIVE SITES, FEDERAL WETLANDS, NYSDEC WETLANDS, LANDFILLS, INACTIVE HAZARDOUS WASTE SITES, AND FLOODPLAINS; OR

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DATA SOURCES: TOWN OF TONAWANDA, CUGIR, ERIE COUNTY DEP, NYSDEC

# TONAWANDA WATERFRONT ZONING UPDATE

## HYDRIC SOILS



### KEY TO FEATURES

- MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY
- STUDY AREA BOUNDARY
- STREETS
- HYDRIC
- HYDRIC - SITE INVESTIGATION NECESSARY TO CONFIRM
- POTENTIAL FOR HYDRIC INCLUSIONS
- WATER
- NOT HYDRIC

### ▪ ***Summary of Existing Conditions***

The analysis of existing conditions forms the general opportunities and constraints facing the waterfront district in the Town of Tonawanda. There are many areas that offer excellent opportunities for development or new land uses, although there are other areas where development or redevelopment is unlikely to occur in the near future due to constraints associated with environmental issues or existing land uses.

- Wetlands are not a significant issue, although there are some areas where hydric or potentially hydric soils will require considerations in building and site designs.
- Access and infrastructure extensions into larger parcels will be necessary to support new development in some areas, and it is important that these extensions be carefully planned in order to maximize development potential.
- Efforts should be made to prevent individual parcels from developing along the road frontage, particularly in the Isle View area where multiple ownership makes coordinated efforts more difficult. Such development patterns would make the efficient development of the large interior section problematic.
- While the area has faced hazardous waste issues, clean-ups have progressed to where only two sites remain affected: Tonawanda Coke and Niagara River World.
- Derelict properties should be cleaned-up to the extent feasible, to improve the visual image of the River Road corridor.

## Key Goals for the Waterfront

Proposed land uses must reflect the community's ideals and preferences. Building upon previous studies and Steering Committee input, a number of key goals for the waterfront zone in Tonawanda have been developed. In general, they fall into two categories: economic development and quality of life, although certain objectives support both categories.

### ***Economic Development-related Goals:***

- Support and facilitate appropriate economic development and redevelopment, particularly in the designated Empire Zone, with the intent of increasing job opportunities in the region.
- Provide clear standards and guidance for the type, size and style of development that should be encouraged.
- Provide a regulatory process which is user-friendly and which delivers decisions in a prompt and rational manner.
- Provide appropriate transportation linkages to facilitate access to the State Highway system, and alleviate and prevent congestion on local roadways.
- Provide for the possibility of a range of non-residential development types to facilitate business development and business retention in Tonawanda.
- Plan for the redevelopment of potential brownfield sites within the study area.

### ***Quality of Life-related Goals***

- Take advantage of the assets and amenities in the waterfront corridor to add value to development and promote a higher quality of life.
- Continue to promote and encourage a high level of public access, both visual and physical, to the waterfront for the general public.
- Maintain high design standards along River Road.
- Provide zoning and design standards which take advantage of the view of and proximity to the Niagara River.
- Provide design standards that assure buildings and sites that are accessible, attractive, compatible and consistent with the character of the waterfront region.
- Protect environmentally sensitive features, such as the Niagara River and area wetlands, from environmental degradation through appropriate design and performance standards.
- Enhance public access in the waterfront area with a system of integrated trails and connections.

## Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP)

Plans for the waterfront region must also be consistent with goals and objectives of the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. At the most general level, this means that uses within the designated waterfront revitalization area, particularly on the shoreline, should be water-dependent or water-enhanced. The Town of Tonawanda LWRP calls for giving water-dependent uses priority for location immediately adjacent to the shoreline. Appropriate water-dependent uses that are specifically mentioned include marinas, yacht clubs, boat launch facilities, commercial and excursion boat facilities, parkland, trails, fishing docks and piers, and water-dependent industrial activities, such as water-intakes and industrial dockage. Categories of uses considered appropriate water-dependent uses include those requiring utilization of resources found in coastal waters (e.g. fishing); recreational activities; flood and erosion protection structures; boat-related facilities; scientific or educational activities which require access to coastal waters; and support facilities for these uses (parking, parks, snack bar, short-term storage, etc.). Upland parcels may have water-enhanced and non-water-dependent uses, such as light industrial, restaurants, offices, nature and interpretive centers, and lodging. Parcels on River Road with Niagara River frontage are not restricted to water-dependent uses, provided that they incorporate public access to the shoreline, or incorporate water-dependent uses as part of a mixed-use development.

The LWRP policies recommend that actions within the waterfront district should meet the following guidelines:

1. New development should "enhance existing and anticipated uses"—in other words, design should be sensitive to and provide for the potential needs of desired future uses,
2. It should serve as a "catalyst" to private investment,
3. Any action should improve the area, or at a minimum not cause further deterioration,
4. It should give consideration to scale, architectural style, density and intensity—to be compatible with desired future uses,
5. It should enhance the economic base of the community,
6. It should improve views, or at least not degrade them,
7. It should increase the potential for multiple uses, and
8. It should be compatible with existing or future planned uses in the area.

Any proposed uses should be considerate of public access, and provide for public use to the maximum degree feasible. Trails, scenic views, new parklands and other means of increasing opportunities for public access should be encouraged, including the redevelopment of Cherry Farm as a park.

The scenic resources of the area are an important resource which merits greater restoration and protection in land use plans. In particular, it is important to preserve scenic vistas in any redevelopment plans. It is also recommend that greater efforts be made to upgrade the appearance of River Road. The LWRP provides for specific standards in this regard. In addition, any proposed uses should be sensitive to other categories of LWRP policies, including their impacts on fish and wildlife, flooding or erosion, historic and scenic resources, and water and air quality.

## Land Use Plan

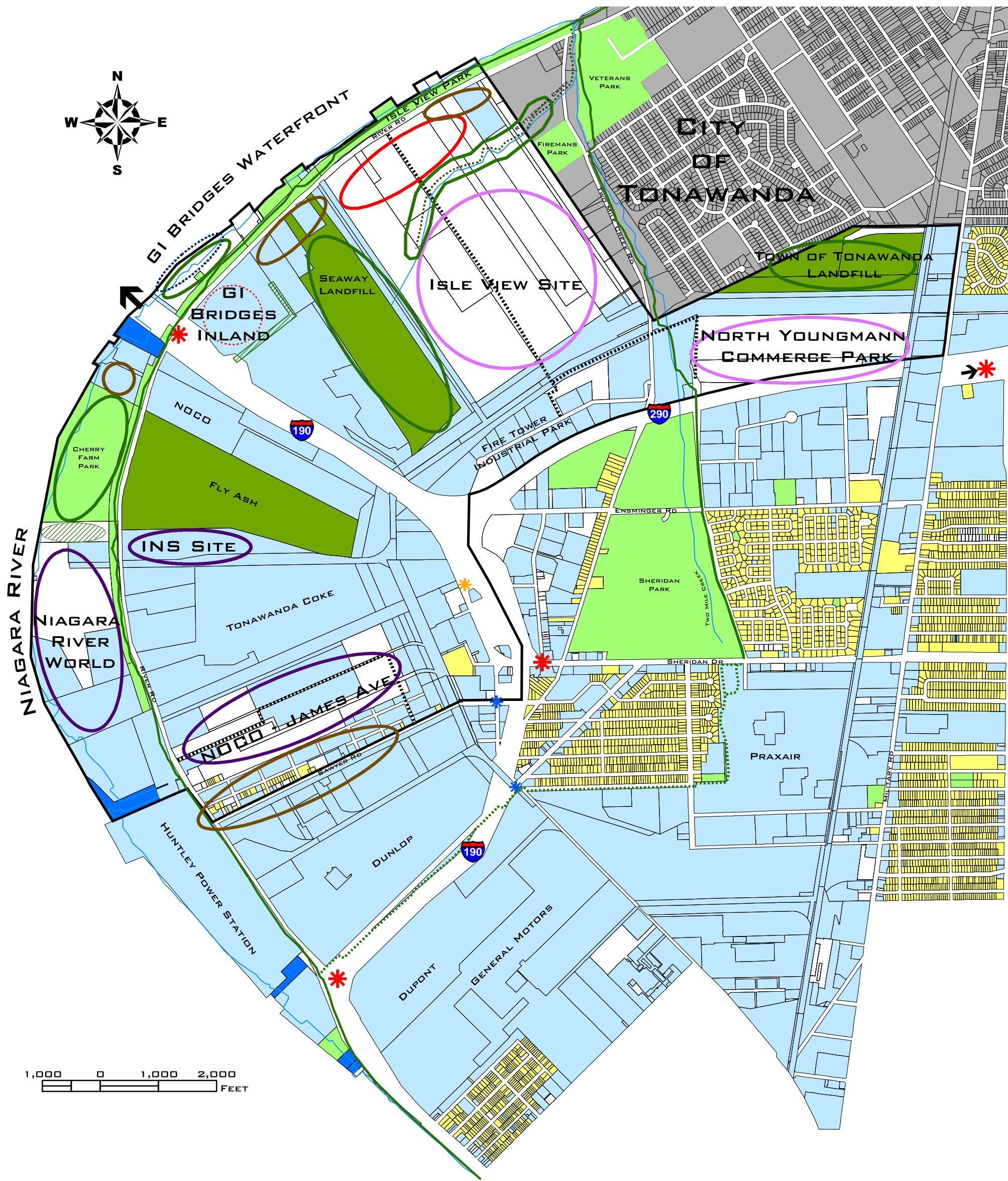
The Land Use Plan for the waterfront area has been developed by the consultant and the Waterfront Zoning Steering Committee based on an analysis of the existing conditions, development trends, market indicators and environmental factors discussed in previous sections of this report. The Land Use Plan depicts the preferred land use patterns for properties within the study area, and summarizes key actions to be taken. The Land Use Plan Map, which shows this plan visually, can be found at the beginning of the report. The map is also helpful in identifying the location of specific sites. This section of the report describes the Land Use Plan for the Tonawanda waterfront area. It focuses primarily on seven specific sites, or subareas, within the waterfront area where there is significant development or redevelopment potential in the near term, although other areas within the waterfront area are also discussed. This Land Use Plan is intended primarily to guide the Town in developing appropriate zoning controls for the waterfront, although it also provides direction for other future land use planning issues within the waterfront area.

For each subarea, a brief summary of the site's characteristics is provided, identifying the parcel and any special features that may affect development. The summary also includes a synopsis of existing and adjacent land uses, and the type of access available to the site. Specific assets pertaining to the site are detailed, as are issues that may need to be addressed for successful development or redevelopment of the site. The discussion of each site concludes with a summary of planned actions, outlining the type of use that is preferred on that site and specific actions required to implement the plan effectively.

There are some areas within the waterfront district in Tonawanda where existing land uses will remain in place. Into this category fall such diverse land uses as Isle View Park, the Seaway landfill, the Huntley Power Station, Tonawanda Coke and the Town's wastewater treatment plant. It is assumed that these existing uses will not change significantly in the foreseeable future. In the case of the Town landfill, the Town plans to close the site in accordance with State requirements, so that the site may be used for recreational purposes in the future. There are also some currently active uses that it is desirable to relocate away from the waterfront. These include primarily smaller users, such as the concrete plant and truck terminals. While recognizing that these are longer-term actions, alternative land uses are specified for these in the section entitled "Transition Areas". Following the discussion of the specific sites, the final section provides additional comments that apply more generally to the study area.

# TONAWANDA WATERFRONT ZONING UPDATE

## LAND USE PLAN



KEY TO FEATURES		
	STUDY AREA BOUNDARY	
	STREAMS	
	NEW ROADWAYS	
	EXISTING TRAIL	
	PROPOSED TRAIL	
	INTERSTATE ACCESS	
	FULL ACCESS	
	ENTER ONLY	
	EXIT ONLY	
	GRAND ISLAND BRIDGES	
	LANDUSE	
	COMMERCIAL, INDUSTRIAL, UTILITY, & PUBLIC	
	LANDFILL/DUMP	
	MARINA/BOAT LAUNCH	
	PARKS/OPEN SPACE	
	RESIDENTIAL	
	VACANT	



## ISLE VIEW SITE

- *Isle View Site*

**Site Characteristics:** Excellent potential for development. On the west, the site fronts on River Road, overlooking the Niagara River. It is bounded on the north by the City of Tonawanda, on the South by the Seaway landfill, and on the east by the Town-owned rail line, affording the site potential rail access. The site is generally flat, with some wooded areas. The property is essentially vacant, with no past uses that suggest any environmental issues. Rattlesnake Creek bisects the site, running approximately parallel to River Road. The total site is approximately 210 acres in size.

**Land Use:** River Road to Rattlesnake Creek: a campus-like high quality landscaped development of office, incubator and/or light industrial/office establishments  
Remainder of property: light industrial, warehousing, flex-space

**Adjacent Land Uses:** Mix of uses, including parks, recreational land and some industrial uses. Inactive and environmentally closed landfill borders southern edge of property. Property is sufficiently large that it will be possible to establish its own identity independent of adjoining uses.

**Access:** Less than one- mile from Interstate system

**Assets:**

- Property sits on a prominent bluff, offering excellent views of Niagara River and high visibility from River Road.
- Adjacent Isle View Park offers recreational opportunities, public access to the river, and open space.
- Additional site amenities include wooded areas, Rattlesnake Creek and access to a regional trail system, via the Riverwalk and Two Mile Creek Greenway. Just north of the site, the Two Mile Creek Greenway, Niawanda and Veteran's Parks in the City of Tonawanda, and an established concentration of retail services, particularly restaurants in the City of Tonawanda provide additional amenities.
- Site is generally level and rectangular.
- All utilities (water, sewer, natural gas, electric) available to the site with ample capacity.
- Town-owned rail line runs along rear of site, offering potential rail access.
- Empire Zone incentives.
- Seaway landfill to the south offers a physical and visual buffer from more industrial uses to the south. Additional benefits would result if the landfill were more extensively landscaped, creating a more parklike setting, or if low intensity recreational use were allowed on the landfill site in the future.
- National site selectors in the BNE study noted that its "remote location" (i.e. relative isolation from adjoining uses) was an advantage in attempting to appeal to users such as research and development that are very image conscious.

**Issues:**

- Need to establish a new image for area, distinct from heavier industrial uses to the south.
- Utilities need to be extended into the site—currently available only along perimeter.
- Additional roadway access into the site will be necessary to maximize development potential.
- Improved access to the site from River Road is also required.

- Multiple ownership complicates development process—land uses favor treatment as one consolidated parcel.
- Small level of radioactivity is being remediated, with completion scheduled for 2002.

#### **Planned Actions:**

##### **River Road:**

- Establish the River Road portion of the site (from River Road to Rattlesnake Creek) as a high quality campus-style development offering a mix of offices and light industrial uses. Research and development (R & D) uses would also be appropriate.
- Incorporate a high level of amenities, including on-site improvements, such as landscaping, open space, and trail features, as well as ties to area assets.
- Some limited flex-space could be allowed, with careful restrictions regarding amount, location and style. If the character of the area is seen as warehousing, it will undermine efforts to attract office or R & D uses.
- Establish strong visual linkages and a close association between the new development and adjacent parklands and trails to add value and appeal to the development. Any proposed site design should enable direct pedestrian access to adjacent assets, such as the Riverwalk and Isle View Park.
- Rattlesnake Creek is the natural separation between this area and the "interior" of the property. The Land Use Plan incorporates the creek into site design as an additional amenity, with trails and creekside open space features that add value and help provide drainage for the site. The trail along the creek will tie into the Two Mile Creek Greenway and the Riverwalk and other trail systems. This adds value to the development, facilitates trail use by employees and visitors, and increases public access to the waterfront along the creeks.
- The Land Use Plan differentiates this area of the waterfront from more industrially-oriented areas. To contribute to the success of any planned development, site design will need to establish a separate identity for this area, distinct from past images of heavy industry. It is important to maintain high design standards.
- The Land Use Plan shows new roadway access to this site (the exact location of the roadway will be determined by future studies) providing access to adjacent properties. Private and public investment or assistance in constructing the roadway will facilitate establishing appropriately located access roads with utility extensions provided along the right-of-way.
- Public investment in the clean-up of neglected properties, and increased landscaping and screening where feasible will facilitate the establishment of a new image for the area.
- Improved access to River Road will require either a traffic signal or a turn lane.

##### **Interior:**

- This portion of the site, extending from Rattlesnake Creek inland toward the Fire Tower Industrial Park, is identified as an area for light industrial, warehousing and flex-type space.
- The Land Use Plan shows access brought in off River Road, affording the development easy access to the Interstate system.

- The size and configuration of the site allows flexibility in terms of users, and the site could accommodate a number of moderate sized firms, or fewer larger ones, as market demand requires. The entire parcel is extremely large, and can easily accommodate over a million square feet of development, even with areas, such as Rattlesnake Creek, preserved as open space.
- The Land Use Plan shows the access roadway through the center of the site. The exact location of the roadway will need to be determined in the site planning process, but the intent is to provide a major "spine" road serving development for adjacent parcels and connecting through to Fire Tower Industrial Park and Two Mile Creek Road. This roadway, to be built as a public-private partnership, will be capable of handling commercial truck traffic, with utility service trunks to be provided in the right-of-way. The presence of the spine road will facilitate establishing private access drives, or "rib roads" from individual private businesses on back parcel properties.



## NORTH YOUNGMANN COMMERCE PARK

- *North Youngmann Commerce Park*

**Site Characteristics:** Extends from Two Mile Creek to rail corridor parallel to Military Road at far eastern boundary of the waterfront region. The site is generally flat, and consists of approximately 80 acres. It is bounded on the north by electric transmission lines, and on the south by the Youngmann Expressway (I-290).

**Land Use:** Light Industrial, warehousing, flex space.

**Adjacent Land Uses:** primarily light industrial in nature, including the Town's wastewater treatment plant and light industrial uses to the south. The Tonawanda Town landfill is located directly north of the site. Future plans are to develop recreational uses on the inactive landfill, providing a greenspace buffer for the site to the north.

**Access:** within a mile of the Interstate, the Youngmann Expressway (I-290) forms its southern boundary. Access is possible either along East Park Drive or Two Mile Creek Road, although neither provides direct access to the Interstate (through truck traffic is prohibited on Two Mile Creek north of the site). An active rail line runs along the eastern end of the site, blocking access to Military Road. Installation of a grade level rail crossing was denied by Conrail, and an elevated crossing presents space problems and would be very costly. Access to River Road through the Isle View site would provide easy Interstate connections.

**Assets:**

- Excellent visibility from the Youngmann Expressway
- Low property cost (Town-owned)
- Site is generally level and rectangular
- All utilities (water, sewer, natural gas, electric) available to the site
- Adjacent to Two Mile Creek Greenway trail, providing access to the regional park system
- Adjacent to Fire Tower Industrial Park
- Adjacent to Town landfill, which is planned to be redeveloped for recreational uses.
- Empire Zone incentives

**Issues:**

- Small level of radioactivity is being remediated, with completion scheduled for 2003
- Improved access to interstate is desirable

**Planned Actions:**

- Extend East Park Drive into site as a truck pick-up and delivery zone.

- Extend roadway into site from Two Mile Creek Road. The Land Use Plan shows a roadway connection through the Isle View site, connecting with Fire Tower Industrial Park and linking to Two Mile Creek Road. This new roadway would provide interstate access from the North Youngmann Commerce Park via River Road.
- Ensure high design standards to maximize value of visibility from the Youngmann Expressway.
- Property is suitable for use as one large parcel, or subdivided into smaller development sites.
- If the property is subdivided, layout should be flexible enough to accommodate users of various sizes, with parcels ranging in size from approximately one to as large as 20 acres.
- Site plan should accommodate access through North Youngmann Commerce Park to future recreational uses on the Town landfill site to the north.



## GRAND ISLAND BRIDGES- WATERFRONT

### ▪ ***Grand Island Bridges Vicinity—Waterfront Parcel:***

**Site Characteristics:** The area immediately north of the Grand Island Bridges on the west side of River Road is a vacant, generally wooded site consisting of approximately 10 acres. To the north of this area is a wharf facility for United Petroleum which is in active use by the company. No change of use for the wharf is proposed. North of the wharf is an additional vacant parcel which adjoins Isle View Park. Environmental issues (floodplains, wetlands) limit amount of development site could accommodate.

**Land Uses:** Riverfront Park, with possible park-related, water-dependent ancillary uses (visitor center, retail).

**Adjacent Land Uses:** Expressway and bridges, industrial, open space.

**Access:** Immediately adjacent to interstate. The Riverwalk runs adjacent to site along River Road for the entire length of the site.

#### **Assets:**

- Waterfront location—excellent views and access to the River
- Attractive, wooded site
- Excellent access to the interstate system

#### **Issues:**

- Currently in private ownership (United Petroleum).
- Environmental clean-up of a small oil spill on the parcel adjacent to the bridges is required, although clean-up plans have been prepared. Environmental condition of site north of the wharf is unknown.
- Wetlands and floodplains present on site could be incorporated into park design, but may affect ancillary development on site.
- Some active water-dependent industrial uses (dockage for oil tankers) need to be taken into consideration.

#### **Planned Actions:**

- A park in this location fills in a gap in the ribbon of greenspace along the River from Niawanda in the City of Tonawanda to the proposed Cherry Farm Park to the south.
- The presence of additional parkland increases public access to the waterfront, and further helps change the image of the riverfront corridor. Tying into the Erie County Riverwalk (and eventually the Erie Canalway), this series of parks along the Niagara River will be a regional asset.
- Some ancillary park-related commercial development is possible (visitor center, interpretive center, convenience retail, restaurant, possibly lodging). The United Petroleum dockage facility, although infrequently used, will remain an active use at the center of the site, and any development on the site must take this into consideration.
- Much of this parcel is located in the floodplain, and there are areas of wetlands, so development must be limited.
- Any development that occurs on this parcel should be water-dependent or water-enhanced uses and provide for public access.



## GRAND ISLAND BRIDGES- INLAND

- *Grand Island Bridges Vicinity—Inland Parcel:*

**Site Characteristics:** The area immediately north of the Grand Island Bridges on the east side of River Road, consisting of approximately 25 acres. This parcel is the frontage of the United Petroleum site, located south of its loading station. It is generally flat and unoccupied.

**Land Uses:** Highway-related Commercial

**Adjacent Land Uses:** Expressway and bridge ramps, industrial, open space

**Access:** Immediately adjacent to interstate

**Assets:**

- Across River Road from the proposed park site; Good views of the River
- Excellent visibility from I-190 and access to the interstate system
- Large number of truck terminals in area with no competing services available
- High traffic counts in area (River Road and I-190)

**Issues:**

- Land east of the parcel (rear of parcel) is used for gasoline and oil storage facility, which is currently accessed via driveway at loading station on River Road. Any new development must maintain access to the rear of the parcel, and share site with existing use.
- Tank truck loading station at northwest corner of site and tanks to the east—most probably will require screening.
- I-190 and toll booths exert a strong presence (noise, etc.).

**Planned Actions:**

- Given visibility and access from the interstate, the Land Use Plan identifies this area for uses relying on drive-by traffic for part of their market. Examples include a truck depot or a fast food style restaurant. Lodging, restaurant, convenience retail type uses could also be accommodated.
- A buffer separates the parcel visually from the tanks at the rear of this parcel and the loading station at the northern end. The nature and extent of buffering required will depend upon the actual use (truck plaza would require less buffer than hotel use).
- High design standards should be enforced along River Road to the extent feasible to help change the tone of the area, and support higher-value development.
- Site should not be totally truck and automobile-oriented, but should also accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Access across River Road should be provided to link this parcel to the waterfront parcel, enabling the development to serve visitors to the Riverwalk or the park, and facilitating public access.





## NIAGARA RIVER WORLD

## ▪ **Niagara River World (Roblin Steel)**

**Site Characteristics:** The site consists of approximately 62 acres with frontage on both River Road and the Niagara River. Redevelopment of the site is complicated by presence of infrastructure and foundations from former uses.

**Land Use:** Mixed-use, primarily industrial, with water-related industrial development on the riverfront

**Adjacent Land Uses:** Primarily industrial and some recreational (Riverwalk, proposed Cherry Farm park)

**Access:** Excellent connections to the interstate system (two entrance/exits within a mile). On-site dockage with direct access to Niagara River freighters.

### **Assets:**

- Riverfront docking facilities
- All utilities available on site with excess capacity
- Adjoining land uses are industrial

### **Issues:**

- Environmental clean-up is continuing
- Existing site infrastructure from former use as steel plant (e.g. foundations, structures) presents a constraint
- Nearby Cherry Farm Park

### **Planned Actions:**

- The current owner has redevelopment plans as a mixed-use facility, primarily industrial in nature
- The waterfront side of the property is identified for water-dependent commercial/industrial use as wharf/dock space.
- Rezoning would facilitate redevelopment
- The Tonawanda Coke property immediately south of the River World site is also primarily vacant. It could be incorporated into River World plans, or could support similar independent industrial development, as long as any proposed development maintains access to the water intake facility for Tonawanda Coke.
- Uses should be compatible with adjacent Cherry Farm Park, or have adequate screening to protect the park site from any negative impacts.



## INS SITE

- *INS Site*

**Site Characteristics:** Approximately 30 acres, zoned GI (General Industrial). Rail line runs adjacent to parcel, offering excellent rail access.

**Land Use:** General industrial

**Adjacent Land Uses:** Mix of vacant and industrial, with operating Fly Ash landfill directly to the north, and Tonawanda Coke to the south

**Access:** Interstate access is excellent

**Assets:**

- Adjoining uses industrial in character
- Excellent access

**Issues:**

- Land is not vacant, but occupied by active uses. These would have to be cleared before redevelopment is possible
- Prior uses were relatively heavy industrial in nature (junkyard) and suggest possible environmental concerns

**Planned Actions:**

- Ideally, the current uses should be relocated to a less visible location, opening up this site fronting River Road for uses that are not as "heavy" in nature and that take better advantage of railroad access.
- Given adjacent areas, the area is targeted for redevelopment as industrial uses. New design standards will improve the visual image of the site.



## NOCO – (JAMES AVENUE)

▪ ***NOCO Property (off James Avenue)***

**Site Characteristics:** Approximately 22 acres located off James Avenue, plus 20 acres off Private Road

**Land Use:** Small scale general industrial and commercial uses

**Adjacent Land Uses:** Mix of vacant and industrial, with a small residential area along the southern end of site

**Access:** Interstate access is excellent, with a number of alternative entrances to the interstate system

**Assets:**

- Adjoining area consists primarily of similar small-scale industrial uses
- Excellent access
- All utilities are available

**Issues:**

- Additional infrastructure, particularly roadways, to the sites would facilitate development.

**Planned Actions:**

- NOCO is planning on subdividing this property into a number of smaller industrial parcels for sale to small users. This concept is consistent with the zoning and with existing adjacent land uses, particularly along Sawyer Road.
- The area is targeted for small industrial and commercial businesses, such as tool and die makers and similar industrial-services operations.
- Additional access to the site is shown on the Land Use Plan to help support redevelopment efforts.

## **Additional Comments:**

### **Future Park/Open Space:**

The Land Use Plan presumes that the Cherry Farm site will be redeveloped as a regional State Park. This will represent an important addition to the available publicly-owned parkland in the waterfront region. Adjacent sites must be designed to be compatible with this important public park use. The Land Use Plan indicates a buffer between the Cherry Farm site and more industrial uses to the south.

The Seaway landfill is closed. The Town of Tonawanda landfill is in the process of closure. The Town of Tonawanda has plans to redevelop the Town landfill site for recreational uses, such as ball fields, which will be an asset to the area. In the long-term, it may be feasible to reuse the Seaway landfill site for low-intensity recreational use, such as walking trails and open space. In the short term, the Seaway site should be landscaped to be attractive to neighboring properties. As these sites transition to recreational or open space uses, this will help further redefine the image of the area away from its more industrial past, and reinforce its evolution into a more recreational-oriented area. It will also further increase public access, and provide additional open space amenities in the area. As an added benefit, the establishment of open space on the former landfills will make these areas more attractive neighbors for planned adjacent uses.

### **"Transition Areas:"**

There are several areas that are denoted on the land use plan as "transition areas." There are active and viable businesses or uses in these locations which should not be disrupted, but which are not ideally located. Over time, as opportunities are presented, it should be a policy to encourage these uses to relocate and be replaced with more compatible uses.

- River Road near Tonawanda City border: transition to commercial, office or light industrial. Aesthetics and image should be emphasized to help support higher-end office development on adjacent Isle View site. Uses more closely related to waterfront location are given priority.
- River Road south of Isle View site and north of Grand Island Bridges, including frontage of Seaway landfill: transition to light industrial or commercial. The property across River Road is identified for park and water-enhanced commercial use, and the landfill property is open space, with possible passive recreational use in the future. Heavy industrial uses should be discouraged in this area. At a minimum, high aesthetic standards should be required. This is particularly important if image-conscious uses, such as lodging, occur on either the United Petroleum parcel to the south or the waterfront park site.
- A. Duie Pyle Trucking company: this use is not water-dependent or water-related, and should preferably not be located on the waterfront side of River Road. As a viable business and an important component of Tonawanda's economy, the company should not be displaced. However, if it becomes feasible at some point in the future, relocation should be supported. Location on the inland side of River Road would be acceptable.

- As a long-term policy, existing non-compatible uses in the waterfront area (truck terminals, scrap yards, oil/gasoline storage) should be encouraged to relocate to inland parcels south of the Grand Island bridges, to an area that is more consistently industrial in character.
- Residential properties along Sawyer Road: We do not recommend displacement of these households, but as properties become available for sale, market forces may result in these properties transitioning to non-residential use.

## River Road

To successfully change the image of the area, it is very important that any new development be carefully implemented. Techniques such as adequate buffers, high design standards and careful site planning should be utilized to ensure a high quality of development.

For all properties located along River Road, measures to help improve the visual image of the area are needed. This is true for small, individual uses as well as more large-scale projects. Aesthetics and streetscape issues help set the tone for the area, and at present, there are a number of examples where improvements could be made. Such improvements are actually more easily implemented around redevelopment and new projects. A challenge will be to improve aesthetics for existing, active uses. Detailed site-specific landscape plans were made for all River Road frontages south of the bridges in 1991. These plans can serve as a basis for consideration for other properties along river Road.

There are situations along River Road where clean-ups, grading and reseeding would have an immediate beneficial impact on the visual image of the area. To the extent feasible, current owners (including the NYS Thruway Authority) should be encouraged to invest in improvements and landscaping.

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