

# Regional Revitalization Partnership

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**A Baseline Report for Buffalo,  
Niagara Falls and Rochester**

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December 2023

## DECEMBER 2023

**RECOMMENDED CITATION:** University at Buffalo Regional Institute, State University of New York at Buffalo, School of Architecture and Planning. 2023. "Regional Revitalization Partnership: A Baseline Report for Buffalo, Niagara Falls and Rochester."

# Planning and Funding Revitalization Together:

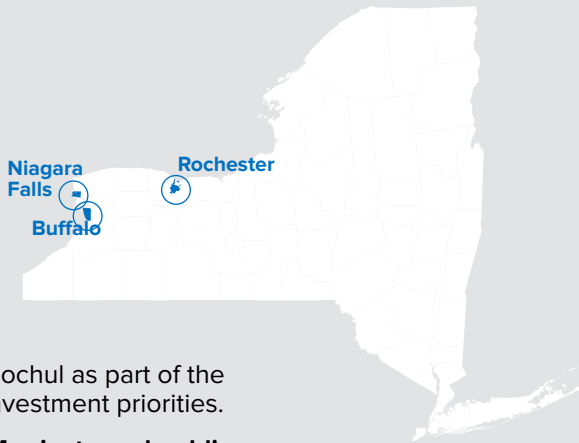
## A Cohesive Strategy Developed in 2021

### Co-Investing in Regional Community Wealth Building

RRP takes a holistic approach to economic development designed to strengthen the region's ecosystem and build community wealth through multiple paths.

A collaborative, community-driven, targeted economic development investment strategy will build community wealth and leverage public/private co-investments to maximize impact. These investments were announced on April 25, 2022 by Governor Kathy Hochul as part of the 2023 NYS budget. This book provides additional details about RRP investment priorities.

Developed through a collaborative effort in 2021, the **RRP** is a **\$300M private and public co-investment** in three interconnected geographic areas. Investment in these areas catalyzes economic growth for the entire region. Each area is at a different stage in its economic development, so the level of project detail provided herein varies.



**BUFFALO'S EAST SIDE** has an existing, ambitious community revitalization effort called East Side Avenues that provides capital and organizational support to transformational projects. This initiative will be built upon and scaled up.

**ROCHESTER** is a center for innovation and entrepreneurship with a rich history of invention and modernization. Investments will create places that attract and retain companies and talent.

**NIAGARA FALLS** is initiating a strategic economic development plan that builds on its unique assets. With millions of tourist dollars flowing each year, the plan will work to build and lengthen visitorship to increase tourism spending.

#### ABOUT THE REGIONAL REVITALIZATION PARTNERSHIP

RRP is a comprehensive community-driven economic development strategy developed in 2021 by a team at the University at Buffalo Regional Institute (UBRI), a research center of the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning. This strategy was made possible by the investment, leadership, and support of the Office of Governor Kathy Hochul, Empire State Development (ESD), Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation (RCWJF), ESL, KeyBank/First Niagara Foundation, Farash Foundation, M&T Bank, William & Sheila Konar Foundation, Monroe County, and the Cities of Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and Rochester.

#### COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING ECOSYSTEM

The RRP will focus investments on:

**WORKFORCE**  
investments to enhance residents' skills and increase access to good paying jobs for everyone

**PLACEMAKING**  
to regenerate commercial corridors and waterfronts, rebuild community anchors, and revitalize neighborhoods

**SMALL BUSINESS**  
with a focus on those owned by women and people of color

#### Economic Development Strategy built for the Community, by the Community

The RRP was designed through interactive and ongoing community and stakeholder input and engagement in the three target communities. Increased capacity and sustainability of **community-based organizations** ensures that programs directly engage with community members. Strong local intermediaries connect the dots while assessing, problem solving and ensuring resources are getting to the community.

#### COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING EMERGES THROUGH TARGETED INVESTMENT IN:

**NEW PATHS TO BUILD ECONOMIC PROSPERITY:**

Invest in building the small business ecosystem to ensure supplier diversity, entrepreneurial growth for MWBEs, and workforce development that connects people to good-paying jobs.

**BUILD CAPACITY AND SCALE UP SUCCESS:**

Strengthen core existing nonprofits through capacity-building programs, leverage recent investments, and enhance successful programs to build more community wealth.

**TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNITY ANCHORS AND HERITAGE AREAS:**

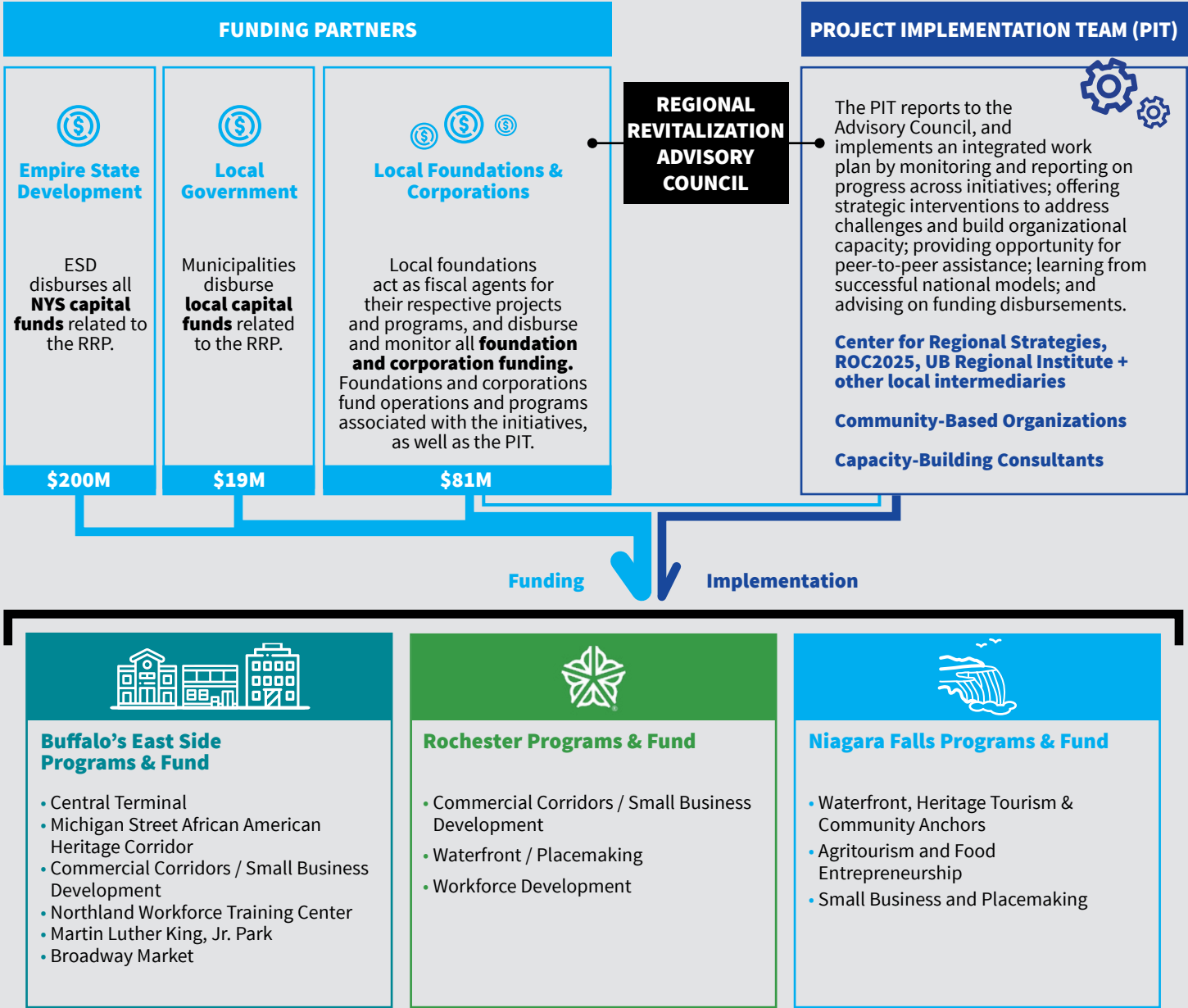
Invest in iconic, catalytic large-scale community anchors and unique historic assets/areas.

#### FOR THE COMMUNITY, BY THE COMMUNITY



GOVERNANCE,  
PARTNERS & FINANCE

A Project Implementation Team (PIT) provides leadership, implementation support and technical assistance for existing community-based organizations. Pooled funds and operations are overseen by a Regional Revitalization Advisory Council.



BUILDING  
PARTNERSHIP TO  
MAXIMIZE IMPACT

The RRP is a **unique partnership of private funders, public entities and community-based organizations**.

By **investing in a coordinated, collaborative, strategic way**, the RRP's impact will be maximized.

By **co-investing**, federal, state and local dollars will be aggregated and leveraged.

**Increased capacity and sustainability** of community-based organizations ensures that programs engage with and are led by community members.

This **holistic approach to economic development** is designed to strengthen the ecosystem and build community wealth through multiple paths.

**Strong local intermediaries connect the dots and help build and implement programs**, while assessing/reporting, problem-solving and ensuring resources are getting to the community.

Project Implementation Team (PIT)

2023 Big Picture Activities

Startup Activities

Established internal structures for leadership, administration, evaluation and communication. Formalized organizational infrastructure, governance, administrative and financial functions and staffing for new partners. Supported capacity building and new program design for new partners. Supported Rochester through its project planning process.

Measuring Progress

Established a framework for tracking progress and outcomes in the three investment communities. Created a baseline report with key indicators and conditions. Began building a dashboard for indicator updates.

Communications

Included quarterly progress reports, a comprehensive webpage, and a marketing plan for 2024.

2023 Summit

On December 6, stakeholders from the three communities convened at the Northland Workforce Training Center to share experiences, foster collaboration, and learn about best practices and shared opportunities.



# Tracking Progress Over Time

## About the Indicators

This report outlines a set of indicators that will be used to monitor and assess progress of RRP’s strategies to drive economic development and strengthen Buffalo, Niagara Falls and Rochester as anchors for inclusive long-term regional growth. The strategies and indicators were organized around three pillars: workforce, placemaking, and small business development. The indicators were selected based on their ability to measure progress towards goals in these three areas, as well as their relevance to the long-term economic health of these communities. These indicators will be regularly tracked and updated annually to facilitate continuous improvement and progress towards goals.

The 14 selected indicators include a mix of both project outcome measures and longer-term trends that matter. These indicators, while important to track, may be challenging to attribute to any single program or strategy since they are influenced by many external factors. These indicators were selected with the following design principles in mind, as documented by our partners at New Localism Associates:

The selected indicators:

- 1. Make progress visible:** The indicators are meant to give a simplified but actionable view of RRP’s progress over time.
- 2. Keep it simple:** The list of indicators is short to reduce redundancy and focus on the highest priority indicators that are readily understandable by wide audiences.
- 3. Build from what’s there:** Most indicators are based on data that is already being routinely collected and made available through public sources, reducing the burden of measurement through new survey instruments.
- 4. Focus on the portfolios, not individual investments:** The indicators focus on the overall RRP outcomes and portfolios of investments, rather than progress on individual investments and projects.
- 5. Focus on trends, not strict attribution:** The indicators track trends over time from baseline values rather than trying to attribute the impact of investments to specific outcomes, as outcomes are often affected by myriad factors.

3

FOCUS AREAS



WORKFORCE

Educational Attainment

Labor Force Participation

Access to Higher-Paying Jobs

Median Household Income

Economic Security

14

INDICATORS



PLACEMAKING

Population Growth

Business Sales Growth

Vacancy

Physical Transformation

Visitors Attendance and Spending

Community Engagement



SMALL BUSINESS

Entrepreneurs

Sole Proprietors

Small Business Growth

## Key Themes Across Investment Communities and Indicators

A few themes emerged from the collection and analysis of baseline data and indicators—an attempt to understand the investment geographies relative to benchmark communities and recent historical trends. These include:

**Rochester, Niagara Falls and Buffalo’s East Side are distinct communities with unique strengths and assets that can be leveraged** to support workforce development, small business development, and placemaking. For example, Rochester is a hub for entrepreneurship and innovation with a history of invention and a rate of entrepreneurship that significantly exceeds rates across the region, state and nation. Buffalo’s East Side offers a welcoming community for newcomers, with a young adult population that grew by double digits over the past 5 years, and a foreign-born population that more than doubled over that time. Niagara Falls is a major tourist destination with growing population diversity and business growth along commercial corridors.

**Despite their unique strengths, Rochester, Niagara Falls and Buffalo’s East Side face more pressing economic challenges than the rest of the region, state and nation.** Residents in Rochester, Niagara Falls and Buffalo hold no more than 32% of higher-paying jobs in their city, resulting in lower economic security of residents compared to the surrounding region. Educational attainment levels are also lower, with nearly half or more of residents with no training or education beyond high school. A disproportionate number of adults in these three communities are out of the labor force and face barriers to training and work. These challenges can make it difficult to attract and retain both businesses and residents.

**Revitalization efforts that have been underway on Buffalo’s East Side since 2019 are showing positive results, but more work is needed.** Indicator data for Buffalo’s East Side shows more new businesses and higher-paying jobs, population growth, higher median incomes, and fewer commercial and residential vacancies. But many small businesses and entrepreneurs still struggle to stay in business and educational attainment remains a pressing barrier to work and economic security. Revitalization doesn’t happen overnight. It requires a multi-year strategy and commitments from various stakeholders such as government, businesses, community-based organizations and philanthropy.

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# Buffalo's East Side

BASELINE CONDITIONS

## A Snapshot of Buffalo's East Side

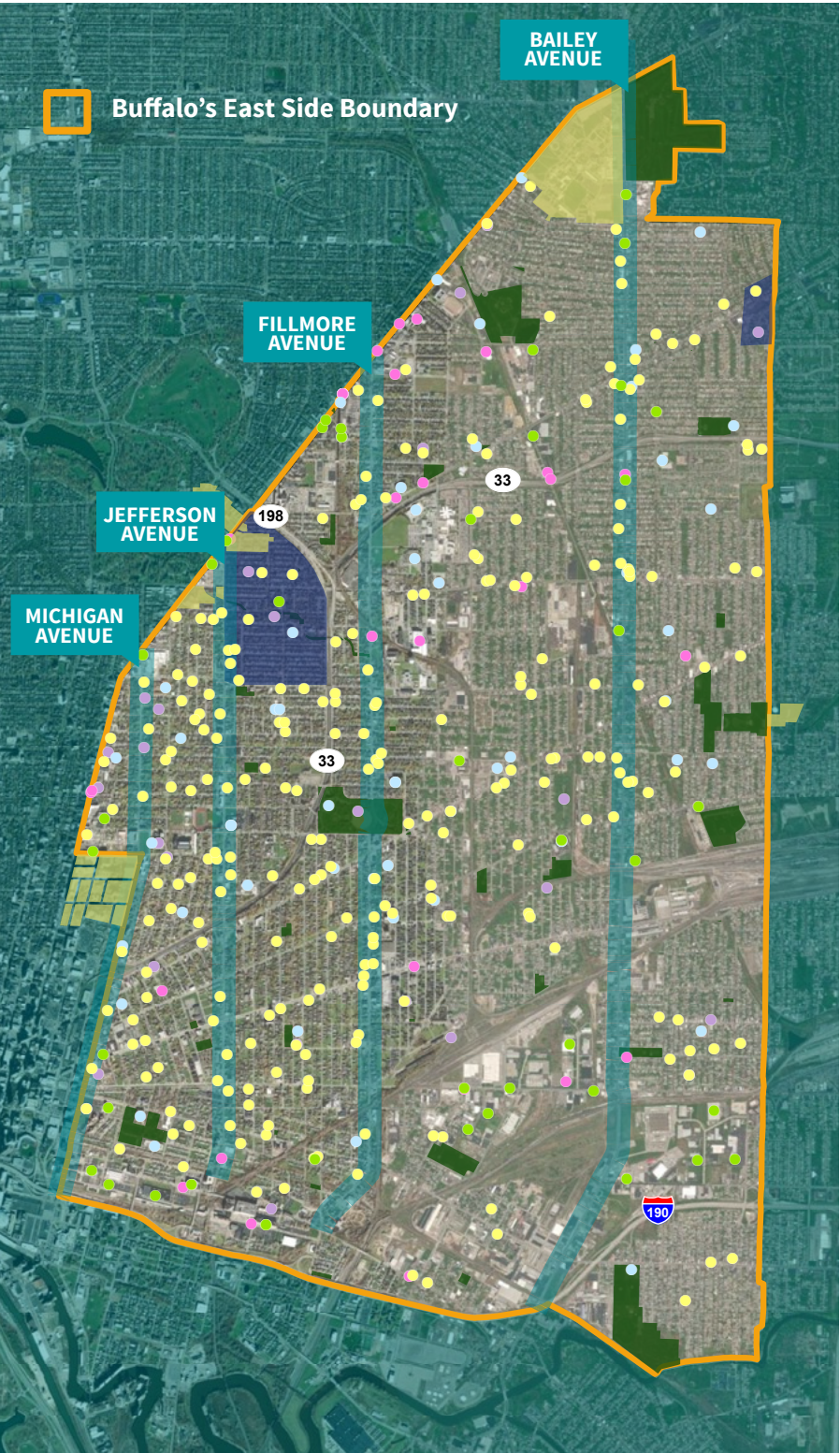


Buffalo's East Side is a predominately Black community comprising 17 square miles. It is situated adjacent to the city's Downtown Business District and bounded by the University at Buffalo to the north, the Town of Cheektowaga to the east, and Main Street along the western border.

The community has a diverse population of almost 115,000 individuals. Four north-south commercial corridors exist in the community along Michigan, Jefferson, Fillmore and Bailey Avenues.

Buffalo's East Side has a plethora of assets including 245 religious institutions, 52 parks, 33 workforce trainers, 39 major employers (with 100 or more employees), and 25 historical landmarks and places. Over recent years, the community has been at the center of significant major redevelopment and economic growth, particularly around the Northland Corridor, but a global pandemic and the mass violence incident at Tops Market on Jefferson Avenue compounded existing challenges. Revitalization will address decades of disinvestment and continuing challenges, including poverty, unemployment, vacancies and lagging small business growth.

- 2 Universities
- 39 Major Employers
- 33 Workforce Trainers
- 53 Schools
- 52 Parks and Open Spaces
- 2 Historic Districts
- 25 Historic Places
- 245 Religious Institutions
- 4 Commercial Corridors





BASELINE CONDITIONS

INDICATORS

**114,900+**  
residents live on  
the East Side.

*(40% of Buffalo's population)*

People of color account for

**4 out of 5**

residents on the  
East Side.

*Nearly 20% of all people of color  
across the nine-county WNY region live  
on the East Side.*

**63%** of the East Side  
residents ages 16-64 are  
in the labor force.

*(compared to 75% across the nine-county region)*

**43%**

of households on  
the East Side own  
the home they live  
in.

*This is 24 percentage  
points lower than the  
nine-county regional  
average.*

**Commercial and  
residential vacancy  
rates on the East  
Side declined since  
2018.**

*But there were still about  
770 vacant commercial  
addresses and 6,370 vacant  
residential addresses as of  
2023.*

**1,659** small businesses  
across the East Side employ  
13,600+ workers.

**48%** of residents ages 25-64 have a high  
school diploma at most, and could  
benefit from additional education  
and training.

**16.6%**  
growth in self-  
employment  
between 2018 and  
2023

*(This is more than double the 6.5% growth  
reported across the nine-county region.)*

**42%**

of households live on an  
income above 200% of  
the federal poverty level.

*(compared to 70% across the  
nine-county region)*

**33,246**

jobs on the East Side  
*(This is 24% of jobs across the city.)*

**18%** growth  
in young adults (25-34)  
over the past 5 years

*(This is more than triple the 5%  
growth across the nine-county WNY  
region.)*

**\$32,148** is the median household income.  
*This is nearly half of what it is across the nine-county  
region (\$61,950).*

**Only 6.5% of higher-  
paying jobs on the  
East Side are filled by  
residents.**

Big Picture Findings

**Buffalo's  
East Side is  
experiencing a  
transformation.**

A number of initiatives are underway in this community to strengthen anchor institutions, build capacity, revitalize commercial corridors, and connect residents with good-paying jobs. Many indicators are moving in the right direction with the data showing a growing population of young adults, reduced vacancies, higher levels of entrepreneurship, and more higher-paying jobs filled by residents. With this momentum, the outlook is moving in the right direction. Community-driven economic development initiatives such as East Side Avenues, which led to RRP, can catalyze more change. Continued investments in community-based assets will continue to transform the community into a vibrant and equitable place for business, residents and visitors.

**RRP is working to accelerate community-  
driven work on Buffalo's East Side through  
strategies and investments that boost small  
businesses, restore and revitalize iconic  
neighborhood assets, and expand training  
options for un/underemployed residents who  
need higher-paying jobs.**

INDICATORS

INDICATORS

WORKFORCE

RRP investments are striving to enhance residents' skills through expanded access to training and higher-paying jobs.



There are over 16,800 higher-paying jobs on Buffalo's East Side (with annual wages of \$40,000 or more). This represents less than a quarter of higher-paying jobs across Buffalo. Only 6.5% of higher-paying jobs on the East Side are held by East Side residents. While this marks a slight increase since 2015, there is still a need to connect residents to higher-paying jobs in the community, and increase the number of higher-paying jobs overall. This can boost the local economy and provide workers with an income that provides economic security.

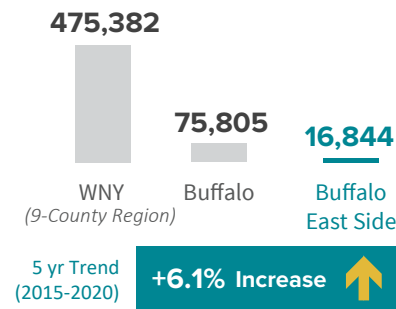
Being economically secure expands opportunity in almost every facet of life. Across the region, 70% of households are economically secure, or with incomes above 200% of the federal poverty level. On Buffalo's East Side only 42% of households are economically secure, meaning most live in or near poverty, and must often rely on social services to meet basic household needs. The median income on Buffalo's East Side is \$32,148—about half the regional median. Limited educational attainment and access to higher-paying jobs limits the income potential for many East Side residents.

Having some education beyond high school equips individuals for career success. On Buffalo's East Side just over half (52%) of adults have training beyond high school. If Buffalo's East Side looked like the region or state, at least 65% of adults would have some postsecondary training, with expanded job opportunities. The community has a number of assets to help advance residents' career prospects. This includes two colleges, and 33 workforce trainers, 20 of which are within a quarter mile of the four corridors, including the Northland Workforce Training Center.

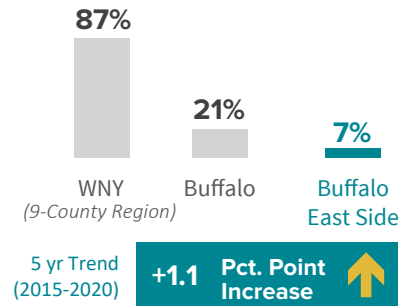
Overall 63% of all East Side residents are in the labor force—12 percentage points lower than the regional average. Labor force participation rates on Buffalo's East Side vary by race and ethnicity. Labor force participation rates for Black and Hispanic East Side residents are 64% as of 2021, up about two percentage points from 2016. Rates are highest for white individuals (65%) and lowest for Asian residents (53%)—three-quarters of whom are foreign born. Boosting labor force participation rate for all individuals on Buffalo's East Side will reduce these disparities and improve the community for residents and businesses.

Access to Higher-Paying Jobs

Number of higher-paying jobs (\$40,000 per year or more), 2020



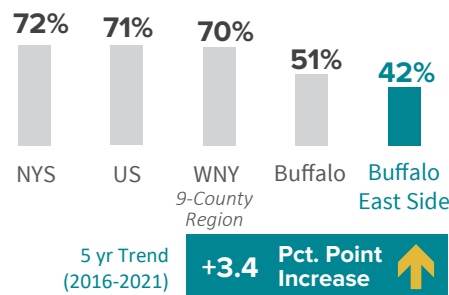
Percentage of higher-paying jobs in the geography held by residents, 2020



Source: OnTheMap

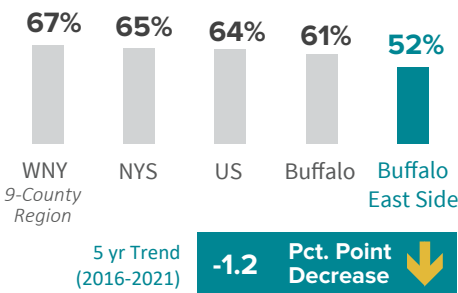
Economic Security

Percentage of households with incomes above 200% of the federal poverty level, 2021



Educational Attainment

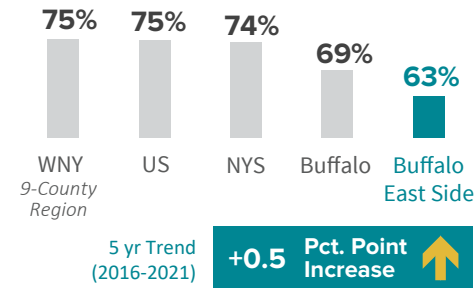
Percentage of adults ages 25-64 with some education or training beyond high school, 2021



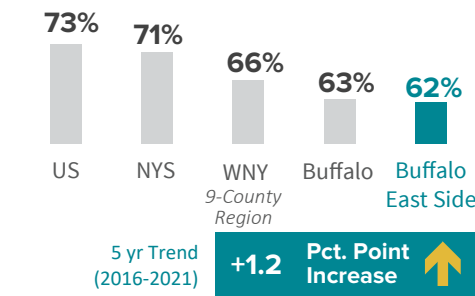
Source: American Community Survey

Labor Force Participation

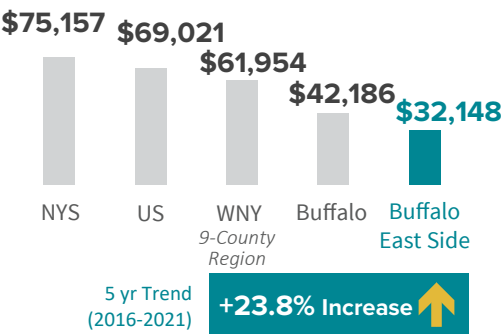
Percentage of ALL adults ages 16-64 who are in the labor force, 2021



Percentage of PEOPLE OF COLOR ages 16-64 who are in the labor force, 2021



Median Household Income, 2021





INDICATORS

INDICATORS

PLACEMAKING

RRP is building places aimed to attract and retain more residents, visitors and businesses through economic development approaches that rebuild anchors, revitalize neighborhoods and engage the community.



Population growth can add vibrancy to a community, attracting businesses and boosting economic growth. From 2016 to 2021, the population on Buffalo's East Side grew by 6%, outpacing trends across the region, state, and US.

Population growth on Buffalo's East Side is driven by a number of factors including an 18% increase in young adults (ages 25-34). The East Side is a growing community for diverse populations. The number of people of color in the community increased 7% from 2016 to 2021, slightly more than the city and state. The East Side is now home to nearly 20% of all people of color across the nine-county WNY region. Meanwhile, foreign born residents on Buffalo's East Side more than doubled from 2016 to 2021 (+102%), outpacing the city, region, state, and nation.

Business activity on Buffalo's East Side is also on the rise in recent years. Jobs at East Side businesses grew 6.3% between 2018 and 2023. Today, businesses on Buffalo's East Side employ more than 42,600 workers with thousands employed at establishments along Bailey and Jefferson Avenues, and hundreds more at businesses along Fillmore and Michigan Avenues.

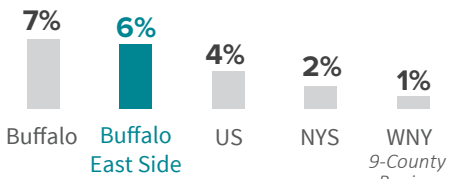
As Buffalo's East Side is growing as a place to live and work, vacancy is on the decline. From 2018 to 2023, commercial vacancy rates fell 5.5 percentage points, while residential vacancy rates declined by 1.4 percentage points. But vacancy rates remain high compared to the city, region, and state. Across the East Side, there are 1,605 acres of vacant land and 1,103 abandoned buildings, based on city code enforcement violations data. This includes 138 acres of vacant land and 58 vacant buildings along the four corridors. This points to extensive opportunities to rehabilitate, restore, and redevelop vacant parcels and buildings.

The East Side has significant assets to leverage for placemaking, which can boost economic growth. This includes two historic districts and 26 registered historic sites—14 of which are within a quarter mile of the four commercial corridors. Key regional assets line the four corridors, including Veteran's Hospital, Colored Musicians Club, Buffalo Museum of Science, Clinton Bailey Farmer's Market, and MLK Park, to name a few.

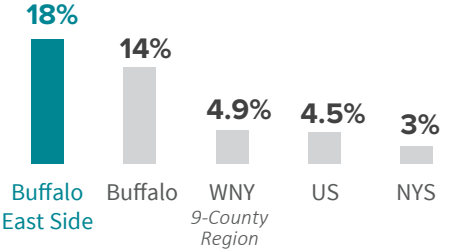
Source: American Community Survey

Population Growth

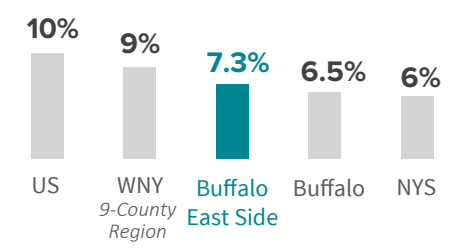
Percentage change in TOTAL population, 2016-2021



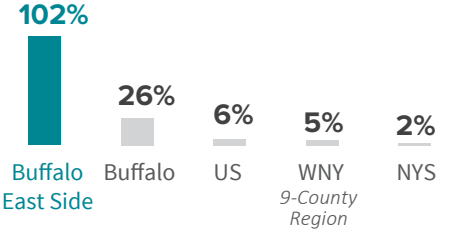
Percentage change in YOUNG ADULTS (25-34), 2016-2021



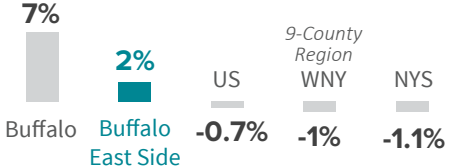
Percentage change in PEOPLE OF COLOR, 2016-2021



Percentage change in FOREIGN BORN, 2016-2021

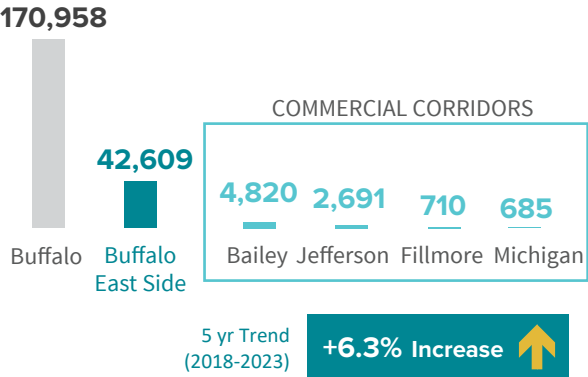


Percentage change in WHITE population, 2016-2021

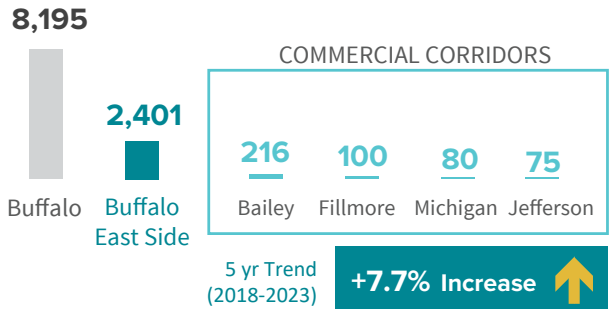


Business Growth

Employment at All Employer Locations, 2023



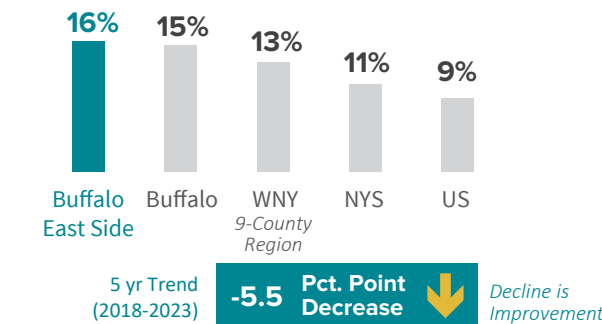
All Employer Locations, 2023



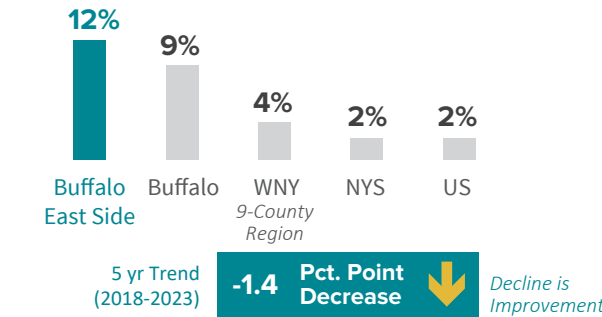
Source: Data Axle

Vacancies

Commercial Vacancy Rate, 2023



Residential Vacancy Rate, 2023



Source: USPS Vacancy Data

Physical Transformation

Indicator will be reported in 2024

Visitor Attendance and Spending

Indicator will be reported in 2024

Community Engagement

Indicator will be reported in 2024

INDICATORS

INDICATORS

SMALL BUSINESS

RRP is fostering firm and job creation across the region through small business capacity building resources focused on building up commercial corridors and supporting businesses owned by women and people of color.



Businesses of all ages and sizes drive economic growth. More than 2,400 businesses on Buffalo's East Side employ over 42,600 workers—an average of 18 workers per business. Nearly 20% of these workers are employed at businesses along Jefferson and Bailey Avenues.

Small businesses with under 50 employees are the backbone of the East Side economy, making up about 70% of all businesses in the community. Nearly half of East Side businesses are a microbusiness with no more than five employees. This includes 185 sole proprietors.

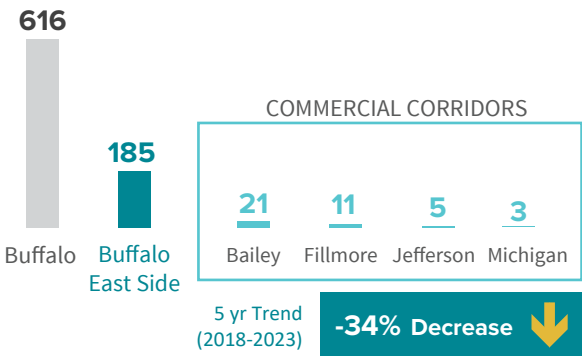
Business activity in the community is on the rise. Since 2018, more than 100 new businesses opened on the East Side, while the total number of businesses increased nearly 8%.

Small businesses and microbusinesses grew at a slower rate, suggesting that they were not as resilient during the pandemic and may be slower to recover. COVID-19-related shutdowns made it difficult for business owners to stay profitable and less likely for entrepreneurs to start a business. Sole proprietors were hit particularly hard by COVID-19 and recent economic changes. The number of sole proprietors across Buffalo's East Side declined 34% since 2018.

Today, less than 2% of individuals across Buffalo's East Side are self-employed, a rate that lags city, regional, statewide and national trends. Stronger supports for entrepreneurs could help reverse this trend, including business planning services, capacity building resources, affordable coworking spaces, transportation services, and more. The community has a variety of business support organizations that are coordinating support services for new and small businesses to help spur business ownership.

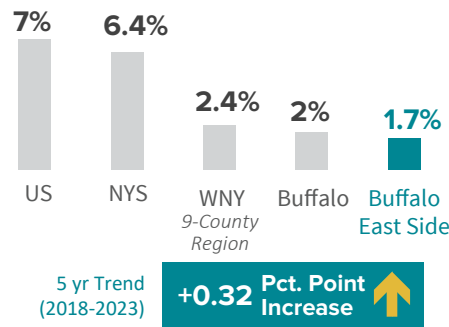
Sole Proprietorship

Sole Proprietors, 2023



Source: Data Axle

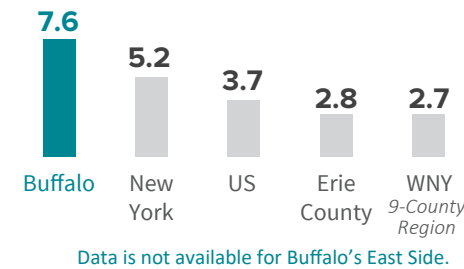
Self Employment as Percentage of Total Employed, 2023



Source: Lightcast

Entrepreneurship

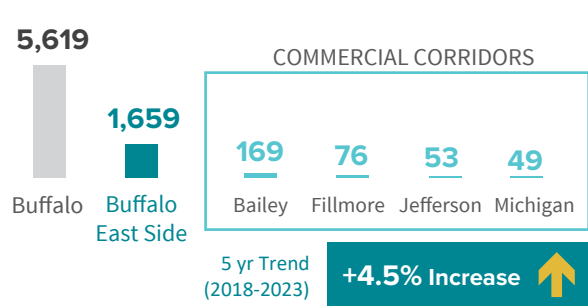
Entrepreneurs per 10,000 people, 2023



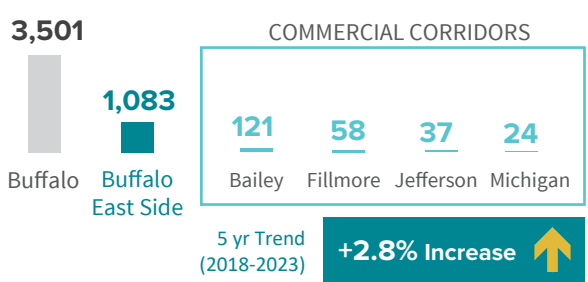
Source: Lightcast

Small Business Growth

Small Businesses (Under 50 Employees), 2023



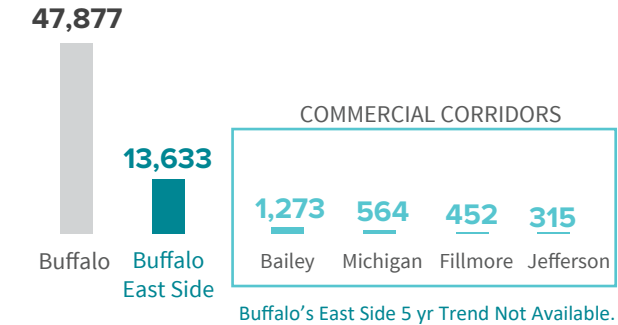
Microbusinesses (Under 5 Employees), 2023



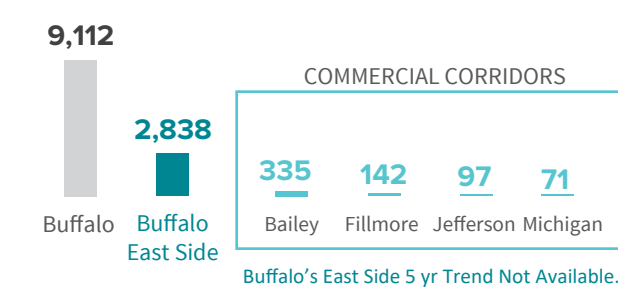
New Businesses (Up to 5 years old), 2023



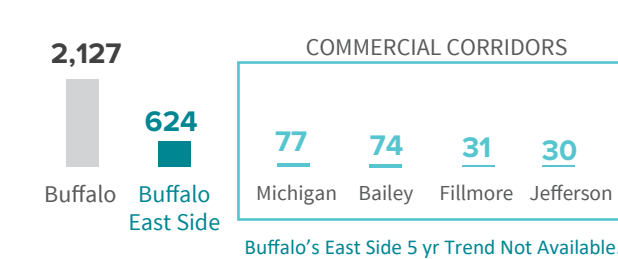
Employment at Small Businesses (Under 50 Employees), 2023



Employment at Microbusinesses (Under 5 Employees), 2023



Employment at New Businesses (Up to 5 years), 2023



Source: Data Axle



PROJECTS

# Buffalo's East Side Investments

Through East Side Avenues and initial follow-on funding from RRP, 89 East Side buildings were awarded capital improvement funds since 2019.

RRP is an outgrowth of East Side Avenues—a \$73M community-driven public/private partnership that provided capital and organizational supports to transformational projects in targeted areas along four East Side commercial corridors since 2019. A combined \$180 million RRP investment on the East Side will scale up ESA's foundational public and philanthropic investments—driven by the community—that support small business improvements, redevelop key mixed-use properties, promote historic preservation, reinvigorate fundamental East Side anchors, and build capacity for nonprofit partners to implement this critical work.

Through East Side Avenues and initial follow-on funding from RRP, 89 East Side buildings\* were awarded capital improvement funds. Buildings include Neighborhood Anchors like Central Terminal, MLK Park and Broadway Market as well as buildings that were awarded capital improvement grants through three grant programs—East Side Commercial Districts Program, Commercial Building Stabilization Fund, and Community-Based Real Estate Development Training Program Fund. The number of projects will increase as future rounds of grant funding through RRP are completed.

Note: Buildings are Neighborhood Anchors or are included in the Direct Project Assistance program, East Side Commercial Districts Program, Commercial Building Stabilization Fund, and/or Community-Based Real Estate Development Training Program Fund. The total number of buildings is subject to change after initial project scoping is complete. Capital improvement funds include pre-development.



East Side Avenues and RRP Investment Locations (2019-2023)

PROJECTS



## Broadway Market

*Re-establish the Broadway Market as a viable and vibrant public food entrepreneur hub and attractive regional destination.*

Following the recommendation in the Broadway Market’s new business plan that the Broadway Market should be managed by an independent nonprofit to ensure long-term sustainability and success, Broadway Market Management Inc. (BMMI) assumed its 501(c)(3) incorporation from BURA Inc. a nonprofit local development agency that was registered with the New York Department of State (DOS). Formal action was taken to register a name change with DOS; restructure the board, issue bylaws, appoint board leadership, and take other NYS-required actions to re-purpose the entity as the framework for a Market management entity. The BMMI Board of Directors currently has seven directors who meet monthly and several preliminary committees were formed.

BMMI has been working for six months with an organizational development and technical support consultant to formalize its governance, organizational infrastructure, administrative, legal and financial functions; as well as preparing the organization to hire and successfully support a full-time staff starting with two key leadership positions. This will ensure that BMMI operations, including policies and procedures, are efficient and effective in

managing the day-to-day elements of BMMI.

Following RFP processes, ESD hired a business support services consultant to operationalize specific action items from the concepts/programs outlined in the business plan, and an A&E consultant to undertake space programming, design development, construction documents and construction oversight for a phased program of capital improvements to transform the Market. To build excitement around the Broadway Market redevelopment plan, the team developed a display for the community room that illustrates the vision and timeline. The display was unveiled during the busy Easter season in 2023 at the Market.

The Market was awarded \$2.5M under the Broadway-Fillmore Downtown Revitalization Program. This funding will be administered by ESD and added/coordinated with funds already programmed for capital improvements to the Market, growing the total for capital improvements to approximately \$40M.



## Small Business Growth Initiative

*Develop a dedicated and coordinated suite of services and programs to strengthen the small business ecosystem and ensure small businesses have the tools to prosper and grow.*

The Small Business Growth Initiative is a three-year comprehensive initiative that creates a dedicated support network for small businesses located on Buffalo’s East Side and beyond. It is led by two trusted community-based nonprofit business and entrepreneur service organizations—**The Exchange at Beverly Gray** (The Exchange) and **The Foundry**. The initiative is designed to strengthen the small business ecosystem and is centered on aligning critical resources while making them easily accessible/navigable for small businesses. It will serve as a one-stop program customized to fit business owners’ specific needs; will focus on supporting small business growth and developing future

entrepreneurs; and will help build generational wealth along with the regional economy. Data-driven and guided by authentic conversations with principals and stakeholders, UBRI assisted The Exchange and The Foundry with initial planning for a suite of seven unique programs that specifically address the community’s identified needs.

PROJECTS

PROJECTS

East Side Commercial Districts Program



*Create a building renovation program to generate wealth for small business owners, combat vacancies and revitalize commercial corridors.*

The East Side Commercial Districts program, modeled after the New York Main Street program, provides matching capital grants to building owners through local program administrators (LPAs). East Side Commercial Districts provides funding for building renovations in four investment areas through three community-based nonprofit LPAs—Jefferson Avenue Commercial District (**Citizens’ Alliance**, in partnership with the **Black Chamber of Commerce of WNY**), MLK Park Business District and Broadway Fillmore (**Broadway Fillmore Neighborhood Housing Services**), and Kensington Bailey (**Heart of the City Neighborhoods, Inc.**).

Capacity building funds allow the LPAs to dedicate staff members to conduct outreach, select projects, administer capital grant funds, and monitor construction. Capacity building funds are also helping the LPAs implement their unique strategic action plans to strengthen board governance, organizational development, marketing and fundraising with consultant support.

To address challenges such as scoping and cost estimating, as well as a need for greater quality control and prioritization of building and overall district needs, the program was revamped in 2022 by raising capital fund limits to \$100,000, offering a greater degree of architecture and engineering (A&E) technical assistance to create stronger and more uniform cost estimating and planning, and streamlining administrative processes. LPAs were able to deliver a new round of capital funding under these new parameters by hiring A&E consultants, implementing new policy changes and promoting and communicating these opportunities. It is anticipated that through two rounds a total of 36 buildings will be renovated with awards totaling approximately \$3.9M.



Commercial Building Stabilization Fund

*Support East Side building owners and maintain neighborhood character by stabilizing at-risk historic buildings for future use.*

Administered by **Preservation Buffalo Niagara** (PBN), the Commercial Building Stabilization Fund provides a dedicated funding source to support stabilization of at-risk historic buildings in targeted investment areas. To address challenges such as rising construction costs, bidding responses and emergency interventions, the program was revamped in 2022 by raising capital fund limits to \$150,000 and offering more technical assistance from an A&E consultant at no additional cost to the property owner. PBN delivered two new rounds of capital funding this year under these new parameters—implementing new policy changes and promoting and communicating these opportunities. Through three funding rounds, a total of 24 buildings will be stabilized through 27 projects with awards totaling approximately \$3.5M. Five projects are complete to date.

Capacity building funds allow PBN to dedicate staff members to the program and conduct outreach, select projects, administer capital grant funds, and monitor construction. Assisted with a leadership search by strategic planning consultants, PBN announced their new Executive Director, Bernice Radle, in March 2023. PBN completed its three-year strategic plan and addressed multiple recommendations, including a holistic evaluation of the organization’s programs to ensure they are aligned with PBN’s focus and values. PBN also implemented a number of recommendations with support from consultants in the areas of human resources, communications, organization development, fundraising, and succession planning.

Community-Based Real Estate Development Training (CBREDT)



*Train building owners in commercial real estate development to ensure buildings are redeveloped for and by East Side residents.*

In 2023, 19 students completed the tuition-free, non-credit bearing, adult education program that provides an in-depth overview of the commercial real estate development process. For the first time, the class was held in-person, hosted at Northland Workforce Training Center. UBRI was responsible for all elements of the class—from the participant selection process, to classroom instruction, to communicating with students, to organizing special events, as well as next steps after graduation.

Nine graduates from the past three past cohorts are being supported by the restructured CBREDT Program Fund (a capital grant program dedicated to CBREDT graduates and their real estate projects). University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning (SAP) provides technical assistance and recommends courses of action with regard to development activities and funding to CBREDT program graduates. Broadway Fillmore Neighborhood Housing Services (BFNHS) acts as LPA—working with ESD and in coordination with SAP to administer Pre-Development and Small Project Funds.

After gathering feedback from past participants and key stakeholders, we began planning for and communicating about an expanded and enhanced CBREDT program in 2024. The program will feature a free online course with interactive learning modules along with three optional in-person experiential sessions. This course will be made available to all who register, but will have a continued focus on reaching East Side residents and stakeholders. The new format will allow us to serve more people and will hopefully result in more completed East Side commercial development projects. Each year, five to ten graduates of the course, who own an East Side property with appropriate commercial or mixed-use zoning, will be invited to participate in a structured, hands-on pre-development intensive that consists of bi-weekly applied learning workshops on relevant topics.



Northland Workforce Training Center (NWTC)

*Advance NWTC’s mission to prioritize training and employment for under- and unemployed residents and communities of color to address hiring needs of advanced manufacturing employers and grow WNY’s clean energy resources.*

Opened in 2018, the 100,000 square foot facility serves as an anchor asset for the Northland Corridor. It has provided 932 individuals with an opportunity to overcome personal and societal barriers by facilitating training for in-demand careers in the advanced manufacturing and energy sectors that offer family-sustainable wages. The graduation rate (of 576 eligible students) is 60.9%—almost three times the national average for community colleges (22% in three years). NWTC’s high retention and graduation rate is attributed to intensive wraparound services and a continual coaching model for up to three years after graduation. Due to meaningful partnerships with advanced manufacturing and clean energy employers, NWTC’s current in-industry placement rate for employment is 82.5% (not including the

83 spring 2023 graduates). In 2023 over 120 students met with 42 local manufacturers. The average starting salary for a NWTC graduate is \$40,560. These placements have a combined economic impact of more than \$12M dollars in wages added back into the local economy. NWTC welcomed 160 new students and 127 returning students for the fall 2023 semester. Minority representation amongst the student population was 60.2% and 8.4% female. For the first time since opening, NWTC welcomed a full cohort of Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machining students.



PROJECTS

Martin Luther King, Jr. Park (MLK Park)



*Restore the historic MLK Park greenhouses and ensure educational and workforce development opportunities in horticulture and park management.*

Ongoing capital improvements to MLK Park ensure this historically significant community anchor remains an accessible, safe, and relevant asset for the community. The **Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy**, which stewards Buffalo's Olmsted Park System under a maintenance and management agreement with the City, is leading work on making improvements to MLK Park as identified through community engagement as part of its five-year planning process. Previously, the Conservancy completed an assessment of MLK Park's historic greenhouses, which produce 10,000 annuals and hundreds of other plants for all of the Buffalo Olmsted parks and circles, and began designing improvements. The design stage is now complete

and the Conservancy is bidding/contracting the initial phase of construction for structural repairs that will ultimately add new heating and cooling systems, and make electrical and plumbing improvements to fully restore the greenhouses. Looking ahead the Conservancy will complete construction to refurbish greenhouses and ensure the space will house educational and workforce development opportunities in horticulture and park management. Support for the Conservancy will train and employ residents to work at MLK Park and throughout the Olmsted Park System.



Central Terminal

*Increase community access by transforming the iconic Central Terminal into a year-round, neighborhood, city and regional venue.*

With the infusion of NYS funds to support planning and capital improvements guided by their 2021 community-informed Master Plan, and support from East Side Avenues and RRP for capacity building and full-time operational staff, Central Terminal Restoration Corporation (CTRC) continues to live up to its mission statement: to develop the Buffalo Central Terminal—a majestic historic landmark—as a lasting cultural and economic hub for the community.

Capacity building funds provide CTRC with a full-time executive director and other paid staff and link the Board and staff to organizational consultants. CTRC is implementing their updated 3-year Strategic Framework which focuses on governance, strategic planning, fundraising, marketing, neighborhood connections and involvement, community-oriented programming, equitable development and care of the buildings and grounds. CTRC also assessed and addressed long-term issues such as operations and maintenance, event operations and property management.

CTRC is advancing necessary predevelopment and design work in preparation for Phase 2 of construction—a \$13M to \$16M project that will address the highest priority safety and stabilization issues. Phase 2 started his year with the

conditions assessment of the Main Terminal building and garage followed by a design phase with construction documents to be issued in late 2023 and early 2024; bidding and construction will take place starting in 2024 and will continue through 2025.

It is anticipated that Central Terminal will reopen for public use on a limited basis in 2025 with the start of a Civic Commons consisting of the Concourse, the Great Lawn and the former parking deck.

CTRC and the City of Buffalo will select a private development partner who will take the rehabilitation and reuse of Central Terminal to the next level. CTRC and the City of Buffalo partnered on a joint, two-step solicitation process for the 12.5 acres owned by the CTRC and 16-acres currently owned by the City of Buffalo, releasing a Request for Expression of Interest (RFEI) in July 2022 followed by a Request for Proposals (RFP) in March 2023. The selected developer will leverage existing public and philanthropic support to bring significant private investment to transform nearly 30 acres of the larger 61-acre historic site. Selection of the development partner will be completed by the end of the year.

PROJECTS

Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor



*Build a unified international tourism destination around Michigan Street's unique assets.*

This project supports the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor Commission's (The Commission) efforts to create a multifaceted tourist destination focused on the historic assets between William and Broadway (Michigan Street Baptist Church, Nash House Museum, Colored Musicians Club, and WUFO Black Radio History Collective).

The Commission continues to build capacity for the Corridor and individual anchors through funding for a full-time executive director and other paid staff, and linking the Board, staff and anchors to organizational consultants who are assisting with continued organizational development, marketing/communications and fundraising. Planning is ongoing to maximize and leverage RCWJF's pledge of \$100,000 annually to the Commission and anchor institutions.

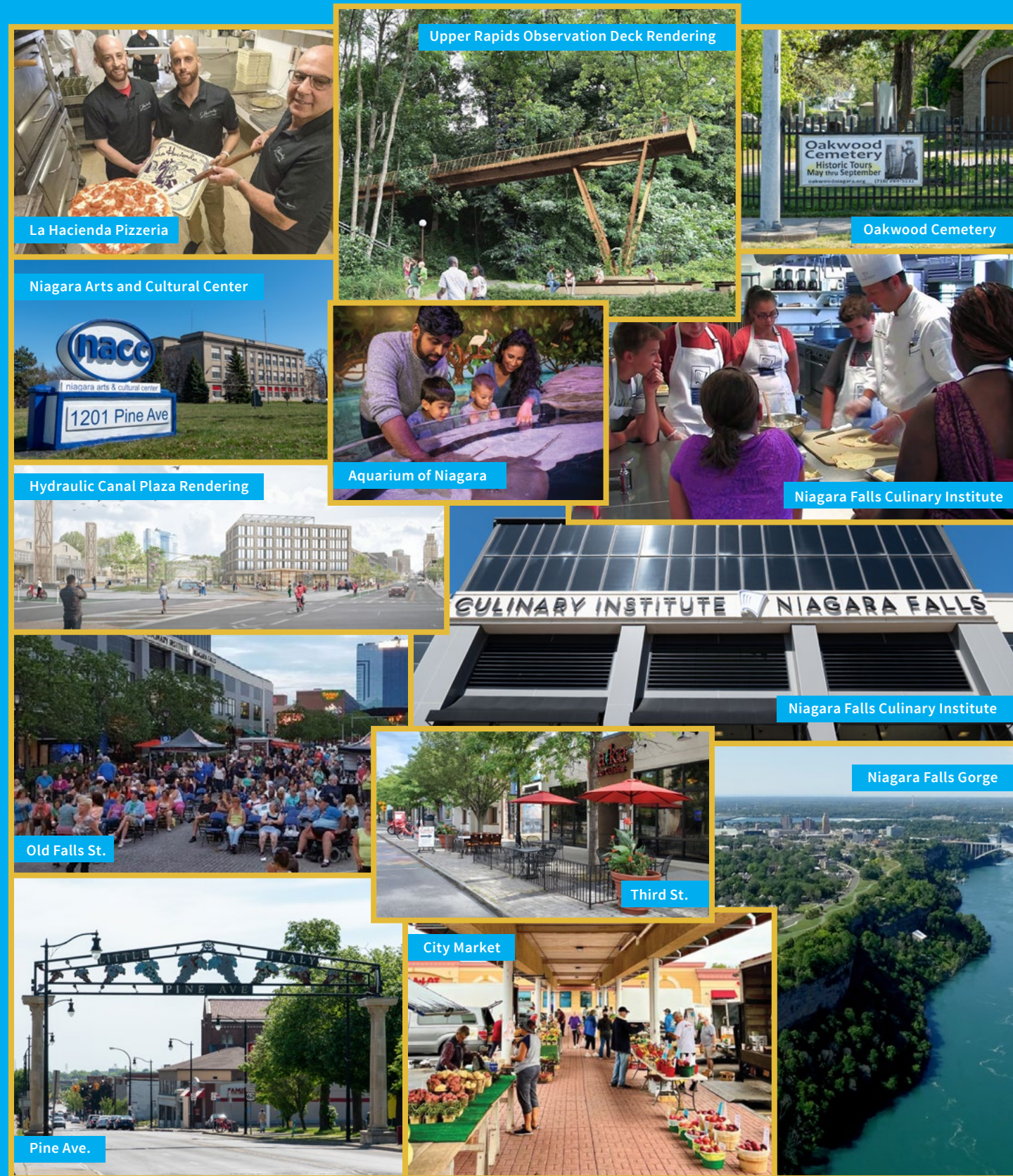
The Commission held the official ribbon cutting and press event for the new headquarters and visitor hub at 136 Broadway. Michigan Street Baptist Church completed Phase I stabilization, and is in the process of final design/bidding for Phase 2—a \$2.2M project to expand facilities. Concurrent to these significant capital improvement projects, the Commission is developing a real estate plan for the corridor, and economic development strategies for each anchor. This will prioritize capital improvement projects, including the new headquarters and visitors' hub, and associated programming in line with the Corridor's strategic action plan. Pre-development and design work for the first phase of capital improvement projects will follow.

The Commission built partnerships with community-based organizations to increase their in-person events, activities and tours throughout the year. Examples of these activities include A Soulful Christmas, Black and Women's History Month events, and Mrs. Frances Nash Farmers Market. This garnered tremendous local press coverage. The Commission is also beginning to be recognized nationally by hosting the NYS Commission of African American History and serving as host for the opening of the International Black Summit, which welcomed 200 attendees from around the world.





# Niagara Falls



## BASELINE CONDITIONS

## A Snapshot of Niagara Falls

Situated on the United States-Canada border about 20 miles north of Buffalo, Niagara Falls is renowned for its waterfall, waterfront, and natural splendor. In addition to the falls, the city boasts 53 parks and open spaces and two historic districts.

Niagara Falls is the largest city in Niagara County, offering urban destinations for food, shopping, and entertainment for local residents and visitors. The city's workforce is supported by one college campus, 16 schools, and 10 workforce trainers that help to equip residents with the skills that local employers seek, including 29 major employers.

More than 13,000 are employed in neighborhoods near four strategically located commercial corridors—Main Street (from Ferry Ave. to Portage Rd.), Niagara Street (from 3rd St. to John Daly Blvd.), Portage Road (from Main St. to Pine Ave.), and Pine Avenue (from Hyde Park to 3rd St.). These four corridors are the focus of many of the RRP investment strategies. Revitalization of these corridors will create economic drivers for Niagara Falls and critical pathways needed to connect downtown, North Main Street, and the waterfront. Because the corridors are mostly commercial, demographic analysis looked at residents living nearby. The Niagara Falls Corridor Neighborhoods are census tracts within a half-mile of the four corridors. The data analysis in the pages that follow uses this geographic definition to better understand what is happening in and around the commercial corridors and how catalytic investments affect this surrounding area.

- 1 University
- 29 Major Employers
- 10 Workforce Trainers
- 16 Schools
- 53 Parks and Open Spaces
- 2 Historic Districts
- 21 Historic Places
- 82 Religious Institutions
- 4 Commercial Corridors





BASELINE CONDITIONS

48,700+

residents live in  
Niagara Falls.

*This number represents a 0.8% decline between 2016 and 2021.*

Nearly

17,000

people of color  
live in Niagara Falls.

*This demographic grew 8% between 2016 and 2021, while the population of white individuals declined 5%.*

67%

of working-age adults in  
Corridor Neighborhoods are  
in the labor force.

*(compared to 75% across the nine-county region)*

48%

of households  
in Corridor  
Neighborhoods own  
their home.

*This is 10 percentage points lower than across the entire city of Niagara Falls and 19 percentage points lower than the nine-county regional average.*

More than one out  
of four commercial  
addresses are  
vacant in Corridor  
Neighborhoods.

*This is more than double the commercial vacancy rate across the nine-county WNY region.*

574

small businesses  
across Corridor Neighborhoods employ  
4,078+ workers.

*Small businesses account for 66% of all employer locations in the community.*

51%

of residents ages 25-64 in Corridor  
Neighborhoods have a high school  
diploma at most, and would benefit  
from additional training.

The rate of  
entrepreneurship in  
Niagara Falls is

3 per 10,000

*This is slightly higher than across Niagara County and the nine-county region.*

48%

of households in Corridor  
Neighborhoods live on an  
income above 200% of the  
federal poverty level.

*(compared to 70% across the nine-county region)*

13,044

jobs across Corridor  
Neighborhoods

*(This is 68% of jobs across the city.)*

14% growth  
in older residents age  
65+ over the past 5 years

*Meanwhile, the number of young adults ages 18-24 in the city declined by 17%.*

5,138 jobs in Corridor  
Neighborhoods pay more than

\$40,000 per year.

*Less than 40% of all jobs in this area are higher paying, and residents fill only 13% of higher-paying jobs.*

\$34,243

is the median household  
income in Corridor  
Neighborhoods.

*This is about \$27,700 less than the median across the nine-county region (\$61,950).*

INDICATORS

Big Picture Findings

Niagara Falls is  
positioned for a  
more prosperous  
and vibrant future.

Niagara Falls faces a number of challenges, but strategies are underway to support small business growth, expand opportunities for entrepreneurship, rebuild community anchors, and build on the city's unique assets to support tourism and its economic impact. With these measures, Niagara Falls can reinvent itself as a dynamic and growing destination to live, work, visit and do business.

RRP's strategic investments in Niagara Falls are empowering local businesses, revitalizing iconic resources and neighborhoods and expanding training opportunities for residents seeking higher-paying jobs.

INDICATORS

INDICATORS

WORKFORCE

**RRP strategies are powering workforce development in Niagara Falls by growing neighborhood-serving businesses and jobs along commercial corridors, strengthening pipelines for entrepreneurs, and investing in community anchors that will attract visitors, support spending and create jobs.**



Workforce initiatives in the region will expand access to higher-paying jobs through programs that align workforce and industry needs. Across Niagara Falls, there are more than 6,000 higher-paying jobs offering wages of \$40,000 per year or more. Only a third of these positions are held by residents while most are filled by individuals who live outside the city. Residents living near commercial corridors fill only 13% of higher-paying jobs in the area.

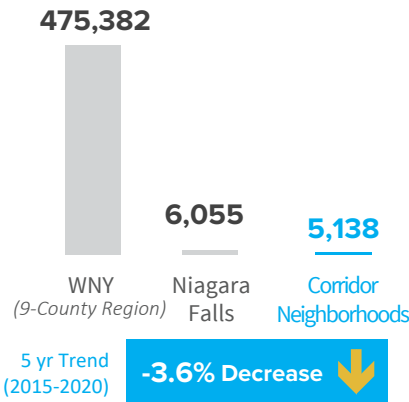
Limited access to higher-paying jobs leaves many Niagara Falls residents living in or near poverty. Just 56% of households in the city and 48% of households near the four corridors have an income above 200% of the federal poverty line. This creates disparities for residents in Niagara Falls compared to the region overall where 70% live on incomes that provide economic security. This limits opportunities for home ownership, transportation, and small business development, while increasing reliance on public assistance.

The median annual income for households near the Niagara Falls corridors is \$34,234, or about \$30,000 less than the region overall. With limited educational attainment and persistent barriers to work, many adults in Niagara Falls remain in lower-paying jobs or out of the labor force. Less than half (49%) of adults ages 25 to 64 living near the four corridors have some training or education beyond high school, compared to 67% of those across the region. Niagara Falls has a variety of organizations to help provide education or training as a stepping stone to work and higher-paying careers. Across the city, there are 16 schools and ten workforce trainers, six of which are near the four corridors, including the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute.

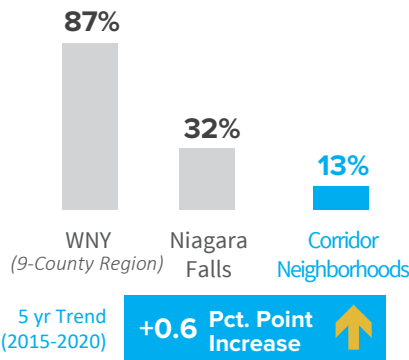
Additional training that meets the needs of hiring employers could bring more residents back into the workforce. As of 2021, only 67% of residents living in areas around Pine, Portage, Niagara and Main are working or looking for a job. While this represents a 5 percentage point improvement from 2016, labor force participation near the corridors lags the region, state and nation. Disparities by race, ethnicity, and nativity contribute. By fostering a more inclusive and skilled workforce, RRP strategies can drive labor force participation and economic growth, while creating a more prosperous community. Workforce initiatives could leverage investments in placemaking and entrepreneurship around strategic sectors such as tourism and food.

Access to Higher-Paying Jobs

Number of higher-paying jobs (\$40,000 per year or more), 2020



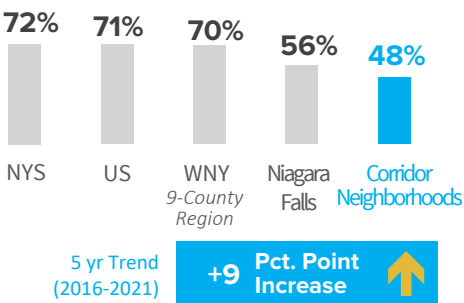
Percentage of higher-paying jobs in the geography held by residents, 2020



Source: OnTheMap

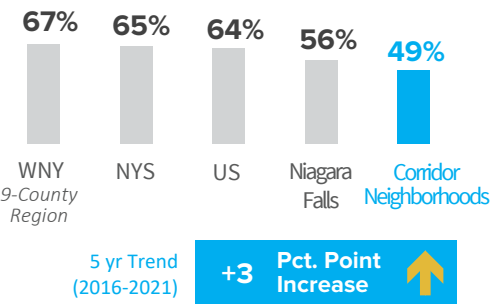
Economic Security

Percentage of households with income above 200% of the federal poverty level, 2021



Educational Attainment

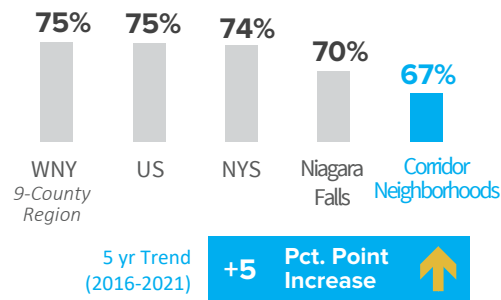
Percentage of adults ages 25-64 with some education or training beyond high school, 2021



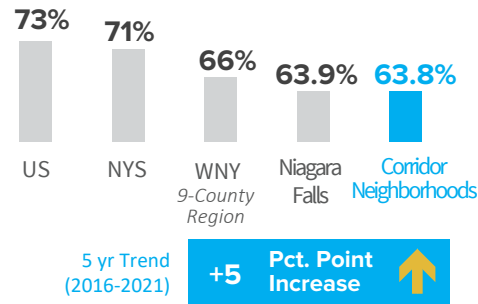
Source: American Community Survey

Labor Force Participation

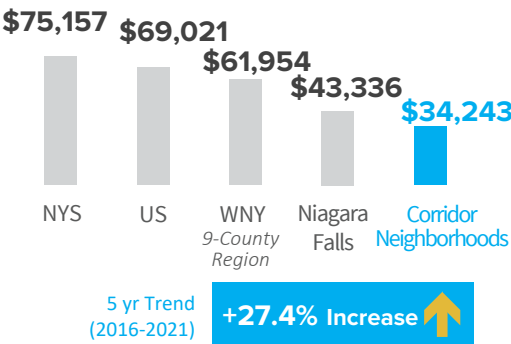
Percentage of ALL adults ages 16-64 who are in the labor force, 2021



Percentage of PEOPLE OF COLOR ages 16-64 who are in the labor force, 2021



Median Household Income, 2021





INDICATORS

INDICATORS

PLACEMAKING

Placemaking efforts in Niagara Falls will fund building renovations, expand mixed-use opportunities in commercial corridors, and create stronger connections between tourism anchors and neighborhoods.



Population growth can add to the vibrancy and diversity of a community, attracting visitors, businesses and jobs and boosting economic growth. While the population of Niagara Falls experienced a slight 1% decline over the past 5 years, Corridor Neighborhoods reported 2% population growth, mirroring statewide trends, but falling slightly behind the US.

Diversity is driving Niagara Falls population trends. From 2016 to 2021, the population of color increased 8%, while the white population declined 2% in Corridor Neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the foreign-born population declined 22% both across the city and in areas near the corridors.

The young adult population (ages 25 to 34) grew 2% from 2016 to 2021 in Corridor Neighborhoods, lagging the region, state and nation. Meanwhile, the population ages 18 to 24 in the area declined by 21%. Growing higher-paying jobs, promoting job opportunities, and aligning workforce with economic development can help curb these trends. Ten major employers are within a quarter mile of the four corridors, including Niagara Falls Memorial Hospital, Seneca Niagara Casino, city government, hotels, and restaurants.

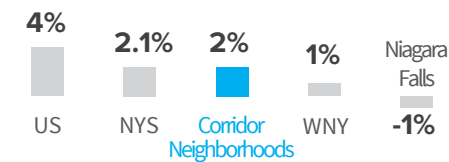
While Niagara Falls' population grew in recent years, employment declined 4% since 2018. This suggests a widening gap between residents and economic opportunities. Strategies that create vibrant urban areas can attract residents and businesses, and Niagara Falls has a number of strategic placemaking assets concentrated along the four corridors. This includes Oakwood Cemetery, the Niagara Falls City Market, and the Niagara Arts & Cultural Center (NACC). Fifteen of the city's 21 registered historic places are within a quarter mile of the four corridors.

While Niagara Falls works to strengthen the city as a place to live, work and visit, vacancy rates are on the rise. Across Niagara Falls, one in four commercial spaces is vacant. This is more pronounced near commercial corridors, where the commercial vacancy rate climbed to 28% in 2023—a 5 percentage point increase over the past 5 years, and more than double the regional and state benchmarks.

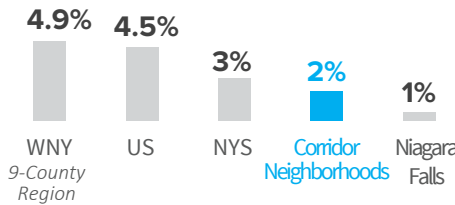
Residential vacancy along Niagara Falls commercial corridors is 20%, a 3 percent increase from 5 years ago. In addition to vacant building spaces, there are over two square miles of vacant land in Niagara Falls, including 12 acres along the four corridors. This points to opportunities for mixed-use renovation and revitalization projects such as the Niagara Falls Small Business Property Improvement Program.

Population Growth

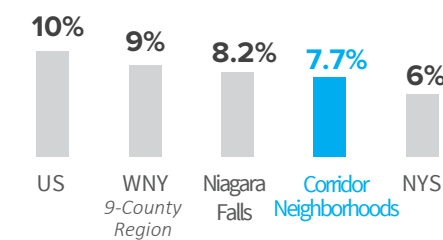
Percentage change in TOTAL population, 2016-2021



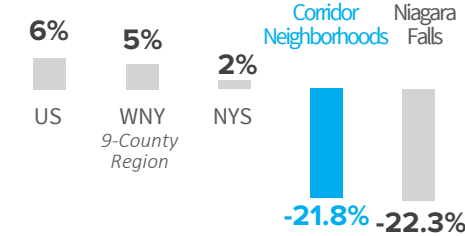
Percentage change in YOUNG ADULTS (25-34), 2016-2021



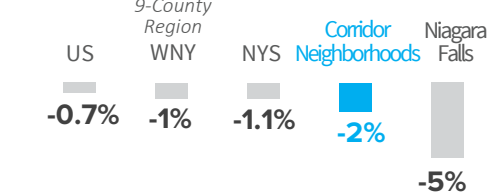
Percentage change in PEOPLE OF COLOR, 2016-2021



Percentage change in FOREIGN BORN, 2016-2021

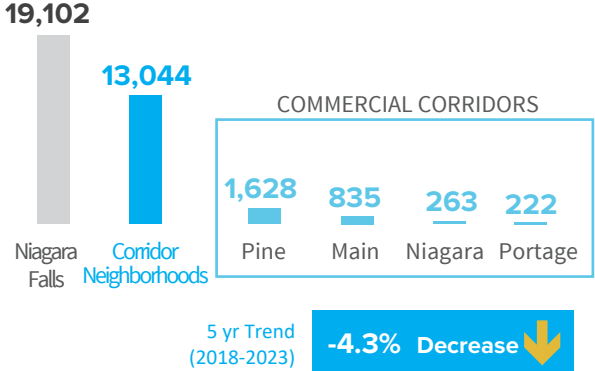


Percentage change in WHITE population, 2016-2021

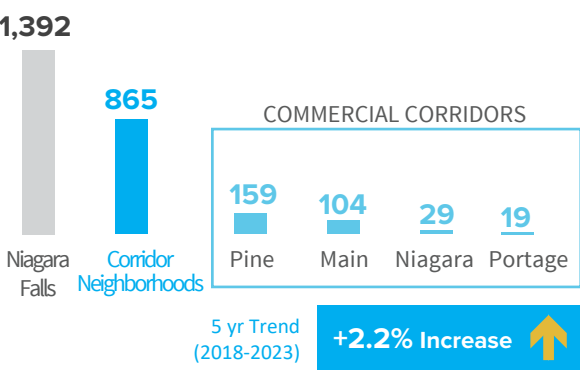


Business Growth

Employment at All Employer Locations, 2023



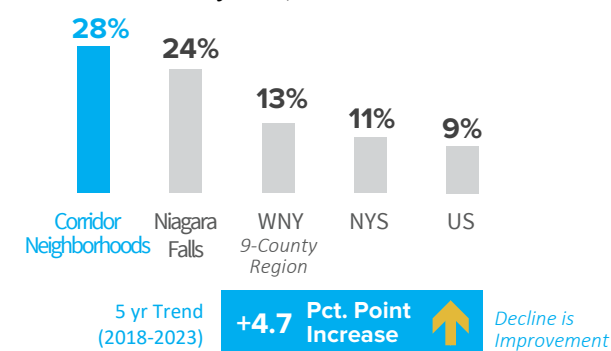
All Employer Locations, 2023



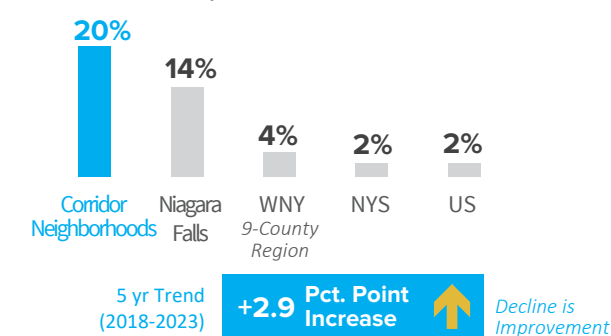
Source: Data Axle

Vacancies

Commercial Vacancy Rate, 2023



Residential Vacancy Rate, 2023



Physical Transformation

Indicator will be reported in 2024

Visitor Attendance and Spending

Indicator will be reported in 2024

Community Engagement

Indicator will be reported in 2024

INDICATORS

INDICATORS

SMALL BUSINESS

RRP is fostering firm and job creation along commercial corridors in Niagara Falls’ urban core through small business capacity building resources focused on building up commercial corridors and supporting businesses owned by women and people of color.



Businesses in Niagara Falls employ more than 19,100 workers at 1,392 locations across the city. The typical business location has 14 employees. The majority of employers and workers can be found downtown, and near the neighborhood corridors of Pine, Main, Niagara and Portage. There are 45 new businesses across the city, 26 of which are in neighborhoods around the four corridors.

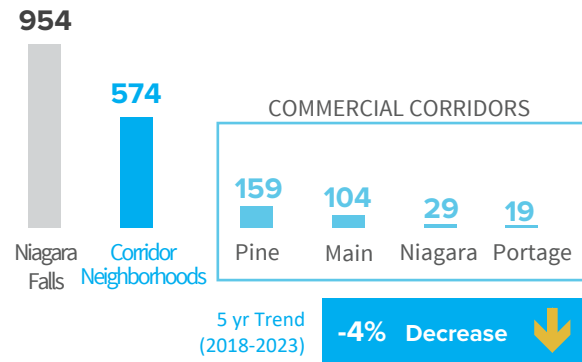
Most (70%) of businesses in Niagara Falls are small businesses with under 50 employees. Nearly 600 small businesses are located in commercial corridors, with the highest numbers being along Pine and Main. Microbusinesses with under 5 employees make up a big part of Niagara Falls’ economy, with 661 firms, most along commercial corridors. This includes 137 sole proprietors.

Small businesses were not as resilient during the pandemic and may be recovering more slowly. While the data shows growth in overall businesses and employment in and around commercial corridors in Niagara Falls, microbusinesses and sole proprietors declined since 2018. New business activity is up substantially—increasing 160% over the last 5 years—but this activity is limited along the four corridors, signaling barriers to business startup.

Less than 2% of individuals across Niagara Falls and in areas near the four corridors are self-employed, a rate that trails regional, statewide, and national trends. Strategies that create a stronger ecosystem for entrepreneurs, particularly food entrepreneurs, will foster business startups, job creation and economic development, while leveraging regional and industry strengths, such as arts, tourism, agriculture, and the rich food culture of Niagara Falls.

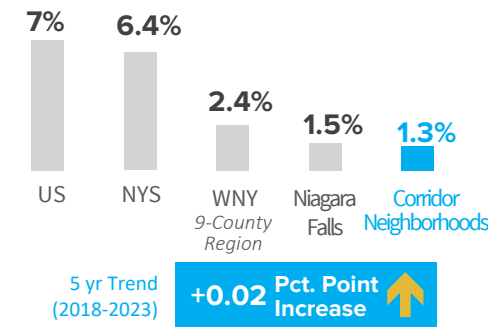
Sole Proprietorship

Sole Proprietors, 2023



Source: Data Axle

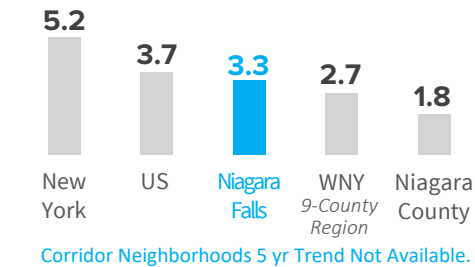
Self Employment as Percentage of Total Employed, 2023



Source: Lightcast

Entrepreneurship

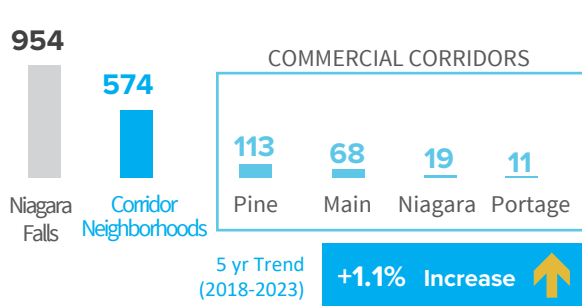
Entrepreneurs per 10,000 people, 2023



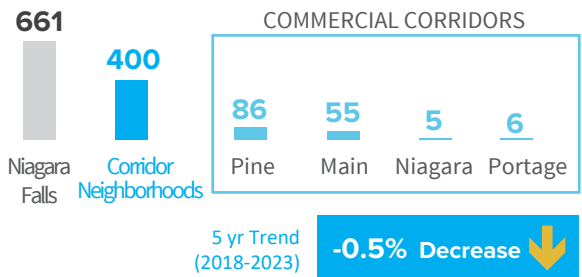
Source: Lightcast

Small Business Growth

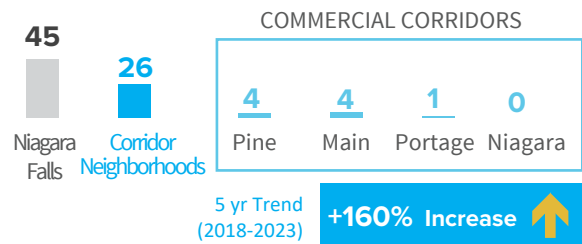
Small Businesses (Under 50 Employees), 2023



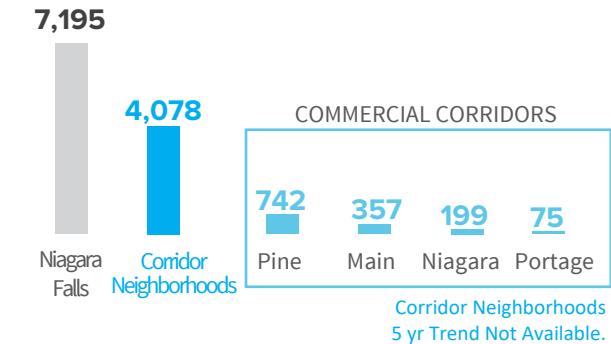
Microbusinesses (Under 5 Employees), 2023



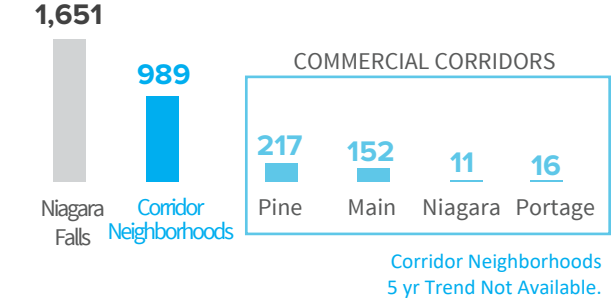
New Businesses (Up to 5 years old), 2023



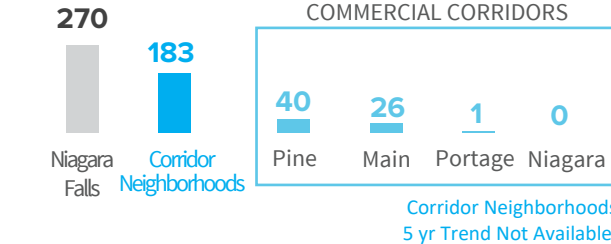
Employment at Small Businesses (Under 50 Employees), 2023



Employment at Microbusinesses (Under 5 Employees), 2023



Employment at New Businesses (Up to 5 years), 2023



Source: Data Axle



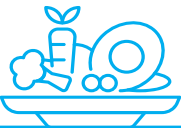
PROJECTS

# Niagara Falls Investments

A \$40M investment through RRP is building an ecosystem in Niagara Falls centered on three key projects that promote agritourism and food entrepreneurship, small businesses along revitalized commercial corridors, and enhanced waterfront heritage tourism and community anchors. This strategic approach, which capitalizes on the city's unique strengths, rich history, natural assets and built environment, will transform it into a more vibrant destination for visitors, entrepreneurs, and residents.



## Agritourism & Food Entrepreneurship



*Foster a pipeline for food entrepreneurship—with City Market as a key anchor—that capitalizes on the rich food culture of the city, regional agricultural strengths and food-based tourism opportunities.*

By creating stronger connections between existing food entrepreneurs and the region's food producers and processors, and investing in capital improvements and supports for small businesses, Niagara Falls has the opportunity to create an authentic, premier food destination. As a first step, The City of Niagara Falls re-acquired/ extinguished the private sector lease for development/ operations of the entire **Niagara Falls City Market** area, allowing for the future unencumbered redevelopment of the Market—an important anchor for this initiative. Following an RFP process in collaboration with the City of Niagara Falls and ESD [led by its subsidiary USA Niagara Development Corporation (USAN)], a consultant was selected for business planning and conceptual design services associated with the redevelopment of the Niagara Falls City Market.

In the coming months, the project partners will select a consultant team to study and report on the current agricultural landscape in Niagara County, and work with the current ecosystem of government entities, businesses and organizations to facilitate consensus-building among stakeholders that will lead to better connections and coordination between the agriculture and hospitality industries. This is a first step of a longer-term goal to undergo a strategic planning process that purposefully connects the tourism sector with the agriculture sector, and addresses capital, programmatic and organizational needs for the ecosystem. USAN is in extended discussions with Field & Fork, a preferred local program administrator (LPA), to become a partner with USAN on this Agritourism scoping process.

PROJECTS

## Niagara Falls Small Business Property Improvement Program (NFSBPIP)

*Fund building renovations to expand neighborhood-serving businesses and increase mixed-use opportunities in commercial districts.*

Two organizations were chosen as LPAs for the NFSBPIP, which provides matching capital project grant funds of up to \$100,000 to commercial and mixed-use building owners in four targeted investment corridors with the goal to expand neighborhood-serving businesses including retail, restaurants, and other services, and to increase mixed-use opportunities along the corridors. NFC Development Corporation (NFC)—a 501(c)4 not-for-profit of the City of Niagara Falls—serves as the LPA for three of the four districts (Pine Avenue, Main Street, and Portage Road). USAN will partner with NFC through a memorandum of understanding and administer the NFSBPIP in their downtown development district. Application guidelines and administrative procedures were developed by the LPAs earlier in the year in anticipation of program launch.

Following an RFP process, NFC selected a Program Administration Consultant for NFSBPIP for three years. The Consultant will assist with updating/expanding existing urban design standards for use in all districts; and will provide program support for the three NFC districts including grant administration, marketing, evaluating and

selecting activities to be supported by the NFSBPIP. The grant program opened on a rolling basis to applications in fall 2023. The program was marketed using the stakeholders list developed through the initial community engagement process. Outreach to promote the program and solicit interest in grant funding from small businesses in all four commercial districts included a kick-off meeting, door-to-door canvassing, outreach to elected officials, and media release distribution. Looking ahead, the LPAs will finalize and announce the first group of projects to be funded. With assistance from the consultant, LPAs will work with building owners to develop work scopes, undergo bid solicitations, and begin construction while continuing engagement with business owners.

## Waterfront, Heritage Tourism & Community Anchors

*Launch a comprehensive heritage placemaking initiative that invests in the waterfront and historic community anchors to tell the unique story of Niagara Falls—to locals and visitors.*

USAN, Niagara Falls National Heritage Area (NFNHA), and community anchors are simultaneously initiating a series of capital improvements to community anchors and capacity building initiatives that contribute to Niagara Falls' sense of place and connect residents and visitors to the city's rich history. When fully implemented, this comprehensive heritage placemaking initiative will offer opportunity for entrepreneurship, enhance the city's cultural offerings, create stronger neighborhood connections, and expand the possibilities for community programming.

Schematic design work is underway followed by finalizing construction bid documents for waterfront sites at **305 Buffalo Avenue** to build a scenic overlook of the upper Niagara River, and for the **Hydraulic Canal Site** which will interpret the historic significance of the former canal in downtown Niagara Falls as it related to the city's first hydroelectric power generation. **Oakwood Cemetery** finalized a scope and will begin A&E procurements for historic restoration and public access projects at three historic structures including new roofs, stone repointing, and other structural repairs to stabilize and restore the 1877

chapel, the 1913 Green & Wicks mausoleum, and the 1922 stone office. **Niagara Arts and Cultural Center (NACC)** finalized scope and will begin A&E procurements for historic rehabilitation of its 1000-seat theater located in the center of the historic building that serves as a key anchor on Pine Avenue. 2023 also saw the start of a community design process to interpret the significant Underground Railroad history of the site of the former **Cataract House Hotel** along the upper rapids of the Niagara River at the entrance to Niagara Falls State Park. **Niagara Falls Public Library** with History Associates, Inc. (HAI) began finalizing a scope to complete the final phase of a comprehensive inventory, rehousing and digitization project for the Local History Collection which provides important source material for cultural heritage tourism and placemaking work being undertaken in the city. NFNHA also initiated a search for two full-time equivalent positions for capacity building to help implement RRP and other projects. Next steps are to finalize scope, funding and project details for the **Portage Interpretation** project with NFNHA.





# Rochester

Rochester

BASELINE CONDITIONS

## A Snapshot of Rochester

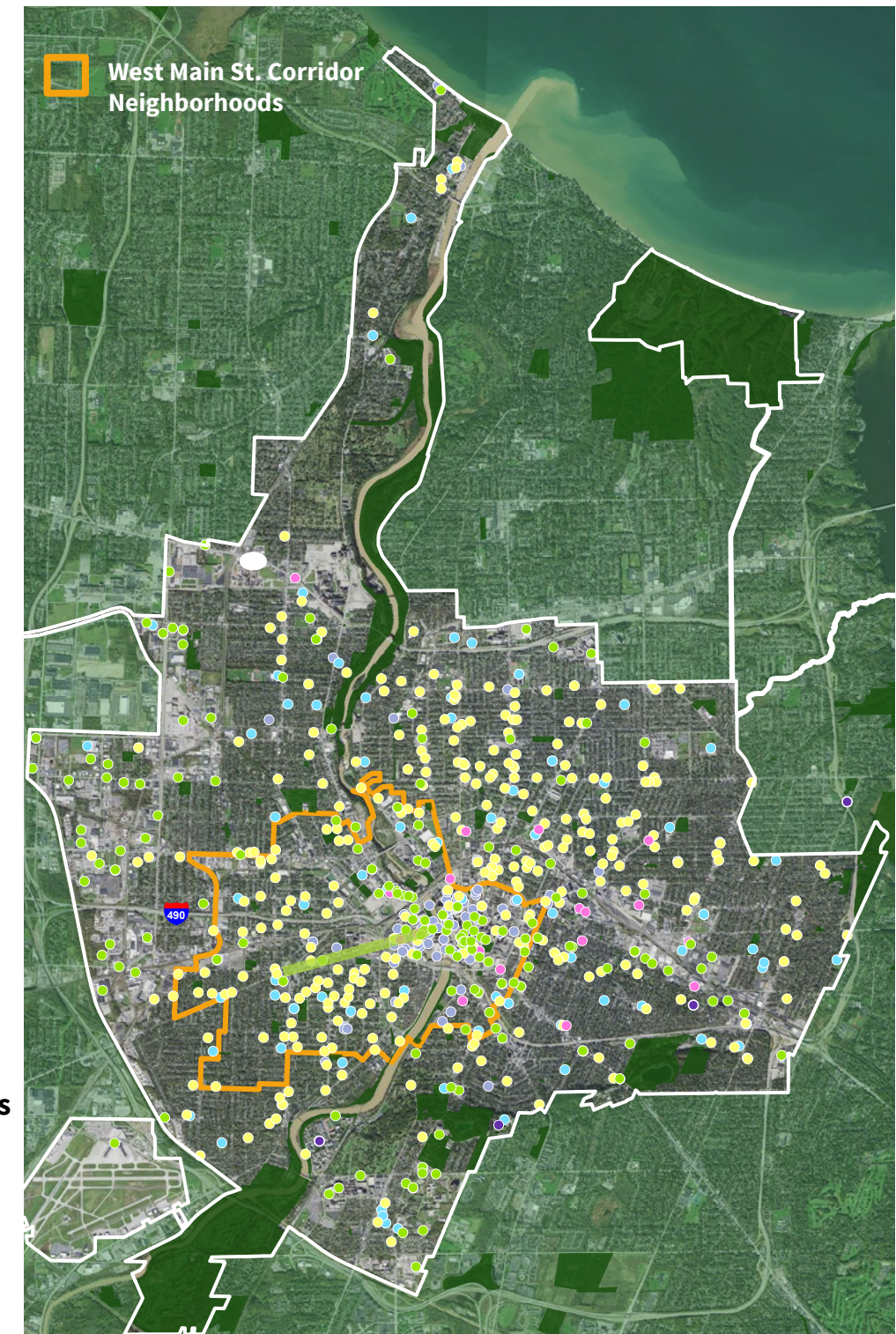
Rochester has key resources to drive economic development, revitalization, and create thriving neighborhoods.

With 170 major employers and a high rate of entrepreneurship, the city is a major center of innovation and business creation. It also has a vast education and training ecosystem with 3 universities, 83 schools and 33 workforce trainers.

Rochester has key assets that add to neighborhood character and quality of life, including many parks, historic sites, and community organizations.

West Main Street Corridor Neighborhoods are census tracts within a half-mile of West Main St., including the Genesee Riverway. This area, which has some of the city's highest poverty rates, but also significant opportunities for business improvements and anchor redevelopment, is a focus of RRP strategies for commercial corridor investments. The data analysis in this report uses this geography to better understand how catalytic investments affect communities near West Main St.

- **3 Universities**
- **170 Major Employers**
- **33 Workforce Trainers**
- **83 Schools**
- **122 Parks and Open Spaces**
- **13 Historic Districts**
- **25 Historic Places**
- **301 Religious Institutions**
- **West Main St. Corridor**





BASELINE CONDITIONS

BASELINE CONDITIONS

211,100

residents live in Rochester

(Nearly 20% live in West Main St. Neighborhoods.)

132,700+

people of color live in Rochester

People of color account for about 70% of residents in West Main St. Neighborhoods.

65%

of the population in West Main St. Neighborhoods are in the labor force.

(compared to 75% across the nine-county region)

26%

of households in West Main St. Neighborhoods own their home.

And only 22% of rental units in West Main St. Neighborhoods are affordable to lower-income households.

There are

690

vacant commercial addresses and

2,102

vacant residential addresses in West Main St. Neighborhoods.

1,928

small businesses in West Main St. neighborhoods employ 15,200+ workers.

Small businesses account for 70% of all employer locations in West Main St. neighborhoods.

46%

of residents ages 25-64 in West Main St. Neighborhoods have a high school diploma at most, and would benefit from additional training.

The rate of entrepreneurship in Rochester is

11 per 10,000

This is more than triple the rate of 3 per 10,000 across the nine-county region.

42%

of households in West Main St. Neighborhoods live on an income above 200% of the federal poverty level.

(compared to 70% across the nine-county region)

54,596

jobs in West Main St. Neighborhoods

(This is about a third of all jobs in Rochester.)

20% growth in residents ages 65+ over the past 5 years in Rochester.

By comparison, the population of young adults 18-24 declined 10%.

\$31,294

is the median household income in West Main St. Neighborhoods

This is nearly half of what it is across the nine-county region (\$61,954).

2.7% of higher-paying jobs in the West Main St. Neighborhoods are filled by residents.

Of the nearly 28,000 jobs in the West Main St. Neighborhoods paying \$40,000/year or more.

Big Picture Findings

Rochester is on the cusp of a renaissance...

...with strategies in place that will boost economic activity through entrepreneurship, supports for new and small businesses, anchor development, targeted investments, and by connecting residents to good-paying jobs in the community. The city is leveraging strengths such as the high rate of entrepreneurship and the availability of trainers and good-paying jobs to address challenges and reposition itself as a vibrant place to live, work and visit.

RRP's strategic investments in Rochester are leveraging regional assets and accelerating efforts to fuel economic development through workforce training, small business development and places where people want to live, work and visit.

NOTE: As RRP initiatives expand and evolve across the city of Rochester, the geographic definition of corridor neighborhoods used to track indicators may change in future RRP reports.

INDICATORS

INDICATORS

WORKFORCE

**RRP will support workforce projects in Rochester that address the needs of residents, providing training and reskilling for higher-paying employment.**



Rochester residents face workforce barriers to higher-paying jobs. While over half of jobs in the city pay more than \$40,000 per year, city residents only hold 16% of these higher-paying jobs. The number of higher-paying jobs grew 7% from 2015 to 2020, this is slower than the region overall (10%), suggesting a need to support higher-paying job growth and strengthen the workforce initiatives that expand access to higher-paying jobs by filling workforce gaps and meeting industry needs.

Access to higher-paying jobs expands opportunity for home ownership, reliable transportation and small business development, while reducing reliance on public assistance programs. The majority of Rochester residents live in or near poverty, including those near the corridor. Although poverty rates exceed regional, state and national averages, there has been marked improvement since 2016.

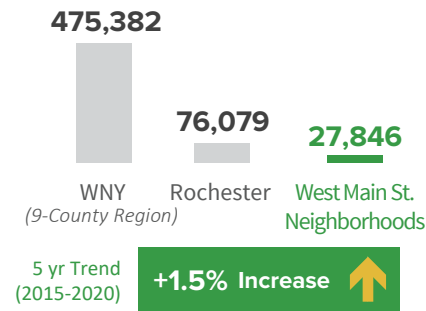
The median income for households in Rochester is \$40,083, or about \$35,000 less than the regional median. Although median incomes in the city increased by 27% from 2016 to 2021, limited educational attainment and other barriers to work keep many in lower-paying jobs, or out of the labor force altogether. This situation is pronounced in areas near the West Main St. corridor.

Postsecondary training and education is essential to higher-paying careers. Only 58% of adults ages 25 to 64 in Rochester have some training or education beyond high school, compared to 67% across the region. The city has three colleges and 33 workforce trainers with programs to expand employment options for residents and help fill a variety of in-demand jobs for local businesses. There are 170 major employers with a hundred or more jobs in the City, including seventeen within a quarter mile of West Main Street.

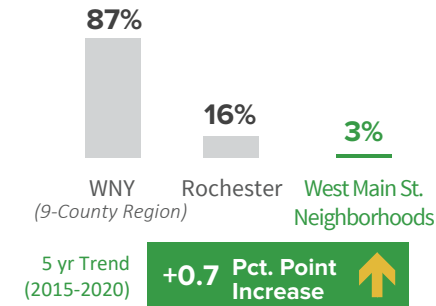
Labor force participation in the city improved slightly from 2016 to 2021, (0.7 percentage points) but more needs to be done to bring people back into the workforce, especially people of color. Currently, only 70% of adults age 16 to 64 in Rochester—lower than the region (75%). The labor force participation rate for people of color is even lower (65%), highlighting the importance of inclusive workforce development strategies.

Access to Higher-Paying Jobs

Number of higher-paying jobs (\$40,000 per year or more), 2020



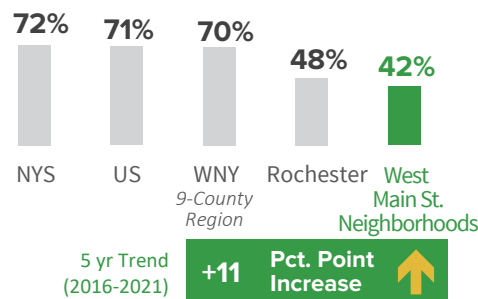
Percentage of higher-paying jobs in the geography held by residents, 2020



Source: OnTheMap

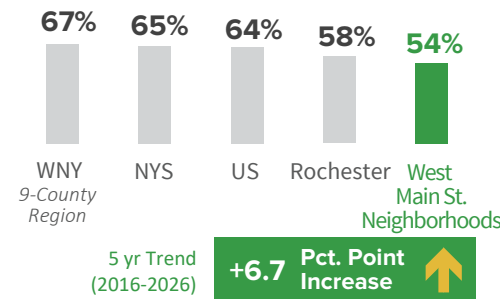
Economic Security

Percentage of households with income above 200% of the federal poverty level, 2021



Educational Attainment

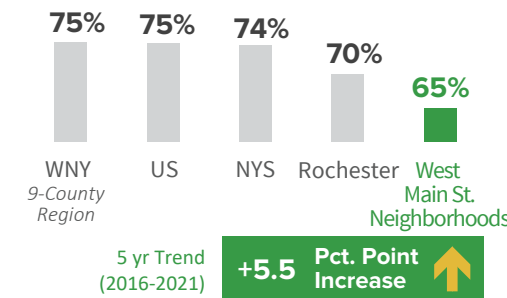
Percentage of adults ages 25-64 with some education or training beyond high school, 2021



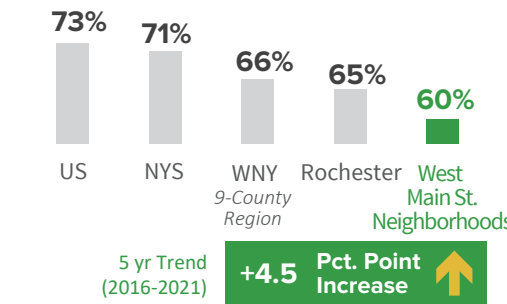
Source: American Community Survey

Labor Force Participation

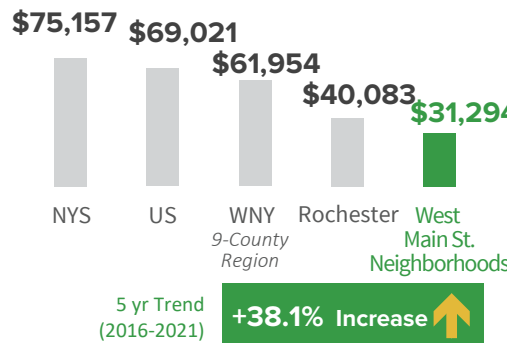
Percentage of ALL adults ages 16-64 who are in the labor force, 2021



Percentage of PEOPLE OF COLOR ages 16-64 who are in the labor force, 2021



Median Household Income, 2021





INDICATORS

INDICATORS

PLACEMAKING

Rochester’s placemaking projects will focus on the needs in and around West Main Street and the nearby Genesee Riverway, revitalizing the community in ways that will attract and retain more residents, visitors and businesses through approaches that invest in anchors, restore historic neighborhoods, leverage assets and engage the community.



Population growth can make communities more diverse and vibrant, attracting visitors, businesses, workers, and boosting economic growth. The population around the West Main St. corridor grew by 3.6% from 2016 to 2021, outpacing the city (0.4%), as well as the region, state, and nation.

Demographic changes contributed to population growth near West Main St. From 2016 to 2021, the number of young adults ages 25-34 grew 13%, more than the city (7%) and the region (5%) overall. The white population around West Main St. also grew significantly from 2016 to 2021 (28%), more than any other benchmark community.

While racial and ethnic diversity is increasing across the US, state, and region, it is relatively stagnant in Rochester. In areas around West Main St., the number of people of color and foreign-born residents declined by 4% and 11%, respectively. Strategies to attract the region’s increasingly diverse population to the city and its West Main St. corridor could help boost population and economic growth.

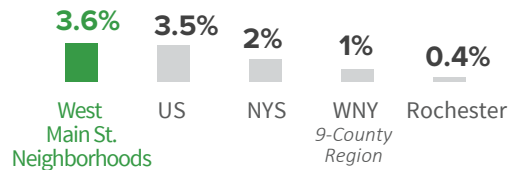
Population growth can spur business activity. Employment along West Main St. grew 3.8% since 2018, and commercial and residential vacancy rates are declining. These trends suggest the corridor is becoming more attractive to residents and businesses. However, vacancy rates remain relatively high. One out of five commercial locations and one out of 10 residential units are vacant. On West Main St. itself, there are four vacant structures and 18 vacant parcels covering 4.2 acres. This underscores the continued importance of placemaking strategies, including renovation and reuse of existing buildings and infill development.

Rochester’s West Main St. corridor has significant placemaking assets that can help spur population and economic growth citywide. Within a quarter mile of the corridor, there are seven parks, three historic districts, and 29 historic sites, including the Susan B. Anthony house. Placemaking initiatives that strategically leverage these and other assets can expand the tax base, raise property values, and increase economic activity.

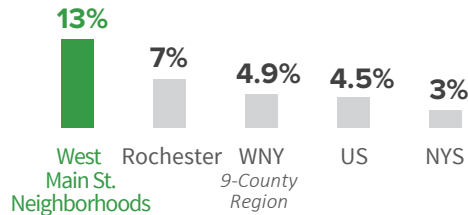
NOTE: As RRP initiatives expand and evolve across the city of Rochester, the geographic definition of corridor neighborhoods used to track indicators may change in future RRP reports.

Population Growth

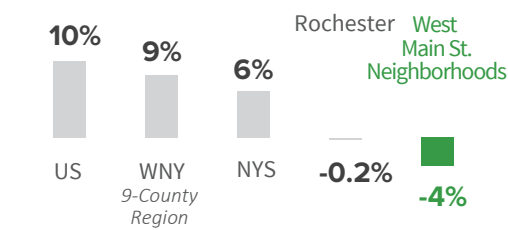
Percentage change in TOTAL population, 2016-2021



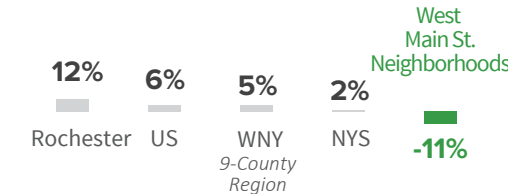
Percentage change in YOUNG ADULTS (25-34), 2016-2021



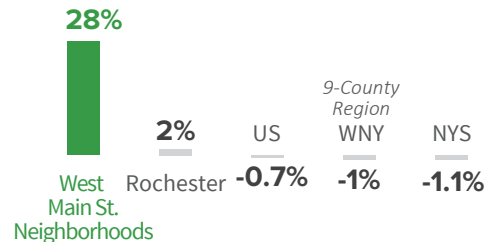
Percentage change in PEOPLE OF COLOR, 2016-2021



Percentage change in FOREIGN BORN, 2016-2021

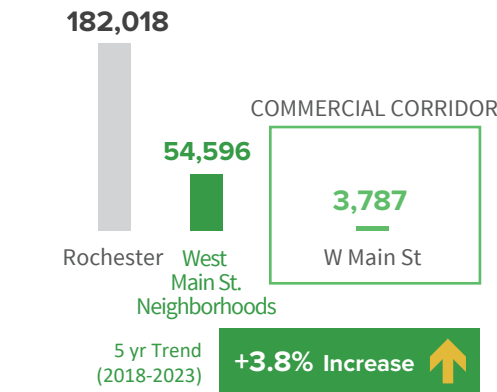


Percentage change in WHITE population, 2016-2021

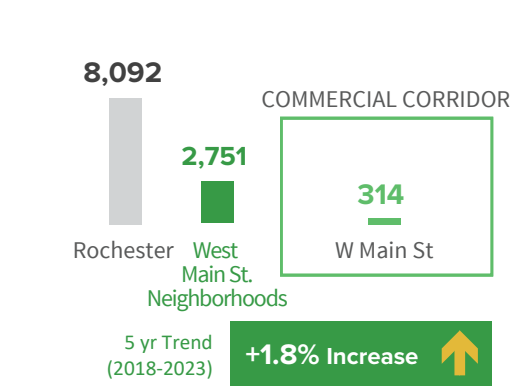


Business Growth

Employment at All Employer Locations, 2023



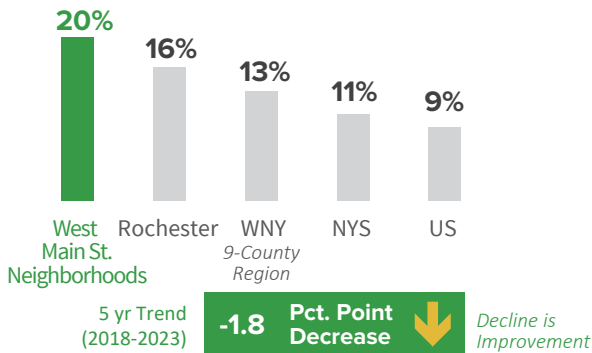
All Employer Locations, 2023



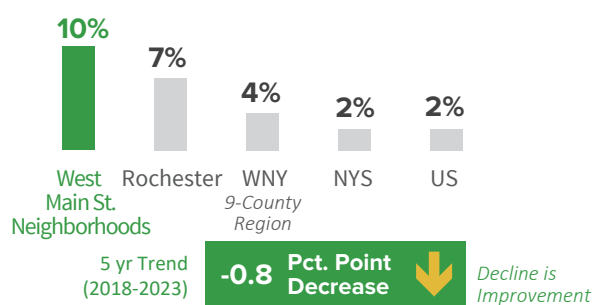
Source: Data Axle

Vacancies

Commercial Vacancy Rate, 2023



Residential Vacancy Rate, 2023



Physical Transformation

Indicator will be reported in 2024

Visitor Attendance and Spending

Indicator will be reported in 2024

Community Engagement

Indicator will be reported in 2024

INDICATORS

INDICATORS

SMALL BUSINESS

Several corridor projects in Rochester will foster business growth and job creation in and around West Main St. in downtown Rochester.



There are more than 8,000 businesses in Rochester, employing more than 182,000 workers. Over 2,700 businesses operate in the neighborhoods around the West Main St. corridor, and more than 300 are on West Main St. itself.

Small businesses are particularly essential to Rochester's economy, making up 70% of all businesses across the city and on the West Main St. corridor. The typical small firm has eight workers.

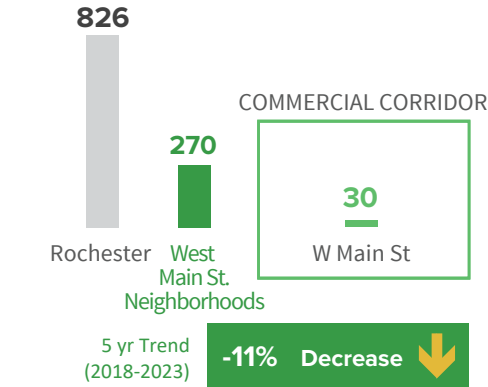
Small businesses were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as they struggled to withstand shutdowns, social distancing guidelines and economic hardship. The number of small businesses in and around West Main St. declined 3% over the last five years, exceeding the 1.8% decline in business of all sizes. Microbusinesses and sole proprietors on the West Main St. corridor were hit particularly hard, declining 4.8% and 11% respectively from 2018 to 2023.

Yet with a number of new businesses opening up in recent years, particularly around West Main St., the corridor is a growing community and a good place to start a business. The West Main St. corridor neighborhoods have 90 more new businesses than it did 5 years ago—a 143% increase. Nine of these new businesses are on West Main St., indicating an opportunity to attract more businesses while combating potential barriers, such as space availability or cost.

Rochester's strong history of innovation and currently high rate of entrepreneurship is a strength that RRP strategies can leverage to expand the pipeline of new businesses and support their growth. With 11 entrepreneurs per 10,000 people, the rate of entrepreneurship in Rochester is more than triple the rate across the region (3 per 10,000). The city has key organizations that can help spur entrepreneurship, including three colleges, and a number of business support organizations which are working to coordinate and strengthen services to support new and small businesses.

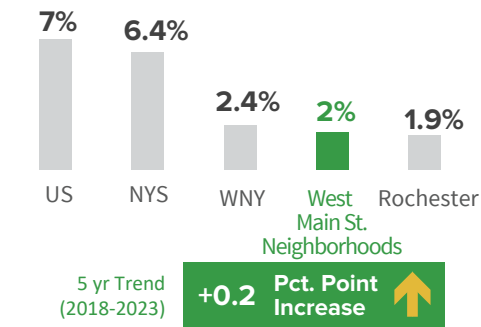
Sole Proprietorship

Sole Proprietors, 2023



Source: Data Axle

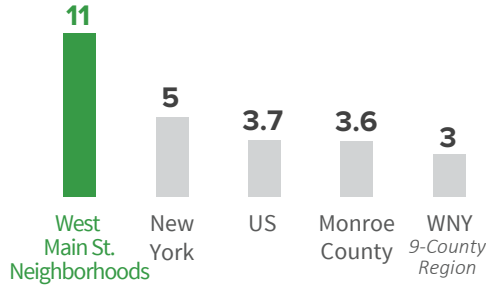
Self Employment as Percentage of Total Employed, 2023



Source: Lightcast

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurs per 10,000 people, 2023

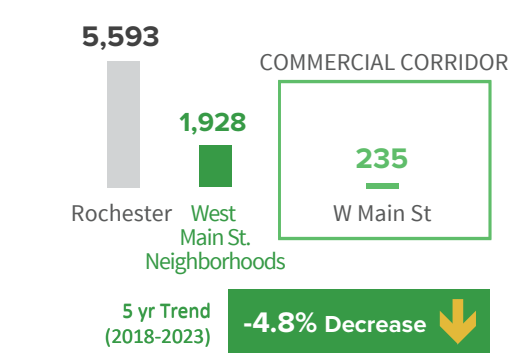


Data is not available for W. Main St. Neighborhoods.

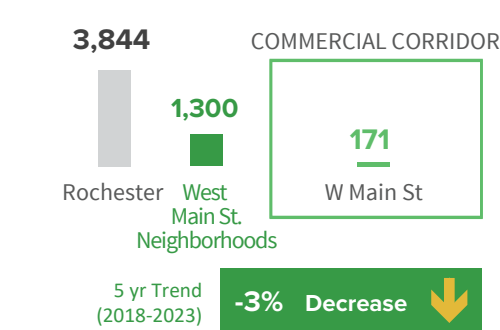
Source: Lightcast

Small Business Growth

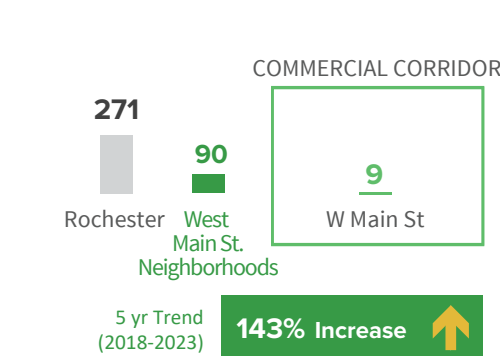
Small Businesses (Under 50 Employees), 2023



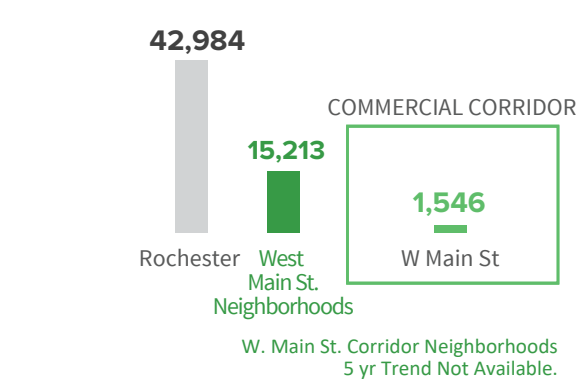
Microbusinesses (Under 5 Employees), 2023



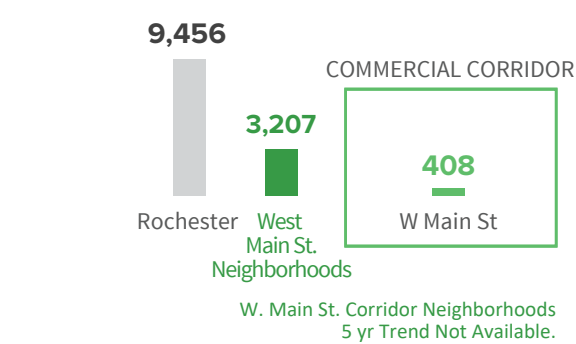
New Businesses (Up to 5 years old), 2023



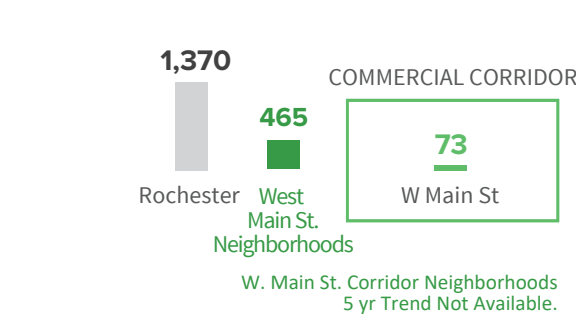
Employment at Small Businesses (Under 50 Employees), 2023



Employment at Microbusinesses (Under 5 Employees), 2023



Employment at New Businesses (Up to 5 years), 2023



Source: Data Axle



# Rochester Investments

## Rochester Planning

*Revitalize Rochester through investments in placemaking, entrepreneurship and workforce development.*

ROC2025 and their Advisory Committee, in partnership with Highland Planning and New Localism Associates and UBRI, completed baseline research for the RRP project selection process including best practices, stakeholder interviews, commercial corridor analysis, and a preliminary project list based on past planning efforts. This research helped create the initiative’s goals, geographic guidance, project selection criteria, project approval process, community engagement plan and indicators for evaluation. The partners engaged in extensive community outreach activities to inform the public about Rochester Forward and to solicit project ideas.

Phase 1 call-for-proposals yielded 47 community-based submissions with a total request of \$153.8M. The partners conducted an initial review of all proposals for alignment with RRP goals and selection criteria, and conducted due diligence activities. For viable submissions, a small committee of representatives from the consultant team, ROC2025, ESD, the City of Rochester, UBRI and RCWJF conducted 24 listening sessions from April-June.

Currently, the Phase 1 recommended project portfolio spans 14 small business/commercial corridor, workforce and placemaking projects with an aggregate RRP commitment of \$50.2M, leveraging an additional \$19.3M in funding already committed by RRP funders to these projects. This project portfolio is still in development. Based on needs in and around West Main St., there is advanced consideration of a proposed Corridor Management Program that will build capacity for a West Main St. LPA, develop a West Main St. corridor neighborhood plan with design guidelines, and invest in properties across the West Main St. corridor.

The team is working to refine Phase 1 project budgets and prepare them for applications to individual funders. Looking ahead, the team will provide technical support to Phase 1 projects as needed, working with project stakeholders to disperse Phase 1 funds as approved, and also continue due diligence for Phase 2 proposals.

# Lessons Learned

**Scaling up programs and geographies is no small feat.**

In many ways, the RRP is one of the biggest economic development initiatives undertaken in the region. We need to be cognizant that the three geographies have their own specific set of portfolio priorities—building on unique place-based strengths and addressing local challenges—and understand that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach. At the same time there are opportunities to learn and grow from each other’s work, and to experiment across geographies.

**Learning from other experiments in collaborative models is very valuable.**

Starting from scratch with such an ambitious plan can feel daunting. Luckily, we had a running start. East Side Avenues—the government/philanthropic partnership launched on Buffalo’s East Side in 2019—served as a key model to learn from as we worked as a team to develop this new public/private partnership. The discipline of tracking our lessons over the first several years of East Side Avenues implementation, and setting up the mechanisms to find the right cadence of communication and engagement has been a tremendous tool to help us build the scaled-up model of RRP. We are taking those foundational building blocks and using them to make informed decisions in RRP geographies, and are using lessons learned in program development to shorten the learning curve when it is helpful.

**Setting up baseline information, determining how to evaluate progress and deciding how best to communicate that information has been critical in year 1.**

The complexity of such a large-scale initiative with dozens of community-based implementation partners, multiple geographies, and a mix of capital projects, programs and capacity building requires a network of consistent, clear, ongoing tracking and communication to understand and to reflect on the impact of the RRP.

**We are getting to next level planning and capacity building consulting to plan for transformational capital projects.**

We are helping organizations evaluate their needs and facilitate efficiencies within this process and among organizations. Organizations are identifying their most pressing needs and how and when they can be addressed; undertaking processes to address staffing needs or to find the right consultants to assist them with these needs; and entering into contracts so the real work can begin. With the assistance of consultants, major planning and organizational development efforts are beginning at the Broadway Market in Buffalo and City Market in Niagara Falls. The Niagara Falls Small Business Property Improvement Program launched and community anchors are moving into design phases. These are critical next steps and essential building blocks to realize major construction projects and large-scale program implementation for full realization of the RRP vision.

**Mapping the flow of funds across projects will continue to be a priority.**

With so many projects in different stages and with different needs, timing funding flow with our various funding partners is critical. We are mapping out funding needs for our project partners based on their stages of planning and implementation.

# Data Sources and Notes

**NOTE: Corridor neighborhoods used to measure indicators are defined by census tracts:**

**East Side of Buffalo:** Includes all census tracts within a half mile of the corridors: Bailey, Fillmore, Jefferson, and Michigan Avenues. This covers all areas in the City that lie east of Main Street and north of the Buffalo River.

**Rochester Corridor Neighborhoods:** Tracts within half mile of the West Main Street Corridor.

**Niagara Falls Corridor Neighborhoods:** Tracts within a half mile of the corridors: Pine Avenue, Portage Road, Main Street, and Niagara Street.

The indicators and the geographic definitions of corridor neighborhoods may change in future RRP reports due to changes in data availability and RRP programs.

## Asset Maps (pages 11, 27, 39)

**Universities, Parks and Open Spaces, and Religious Institutions:** County Tax Parcel Data, 2022. (Erie, Niagara, and Monroe County). Selected by property class codes.

**Major Employers:** DataAxle, ReferenceUSA Business Database, 2023. Major employers are business locations with 100 or more employees.

**Schools:** NYS Department of Education, 2023;

**Historic District and Places:** US Department of interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 2023.

**Workforce Trainers:** Various sources including NYS Department of Labor, Eligible Training Providers List, 2023; Mobile Safety Net, Numbers in Need, 2019; and WNY 211, 2023.

## Baseline Conditions (pages 12, 28, 40)

**Vacancies:** US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Aggregated US Postal Service (USPS) Administrative Data on Address Vacancies, March 2023.

**Self-employment:** Lightcast, Occupational Data, 2023.

**Total jobs and higher-paying jobs held by residents:** US Census, Longitudinal Employment-Household Dynamics (LEHD), Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), OnTheMap application, 2020.

**Entrepreneurship:** Lightcast, Profile Analytics, June 2023.

**Small businesses:** DataAxle, ReferenceUSA Business Database, June 2023. Small businesses are business locations with under 50 employees.

**All other indicators:** US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2021.

## Workforce Indicators (pages 14-15, 30-31, 42-43)

**Access to higher-paying jobs:** US Census, Longitudinal Employment-Household Dynamics (LEHD), Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), OnTheMap application, 2015 and 2020.

**Economic security, Educational attainment, Labor force participation, and Median household income:** US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2021.

## Placemaking Indicators (pages 16-17, 32-33, 44-45)

**Population growth:** US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2021.

**Business growth:** DataAxle, ReferenceUSA Business Database, June 2023.

**Vacancies:** US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Aggregated US Postal Service (USPS) Administrative Data on Address Vacancies, March 2023.

**Vacant structures:** City of Buffalo, Code Violations, retrieved September, 2023 from <https://data.buffalony.gov/Quality-of-Life/Code-Violations/> Includes active code violations for abandoned properties; City of Rochester, Code Enforcement Vacant Structures, retrieved September, 2023 from <https://data.cityofrochester.gov/datasets/4a1128efa23d40499e063f01a4724a3a/explore>

**Vacant land:** County Tax Parcel Data, 2022. (Erie, Niagara, and Monroe County). Selected by property class codes.

## Small Business Indicators (pages 18-19, 34-35, 46-47)

**Sole Proprietorship:** DataAxle, ReferenceUSA Business Database, June 2023. Sole proprietors are business establishments with one employee, excluding physicians, lawyers, and social workers who are listed individually but are affiliated with larger firms.

**Entrepreneurship:** Lightcast, Profile Analytics, June 2023. Based on self-identified entrepreneurs in online LinkedIn worker profiles. Includes any individual who identifies their job title as an entrepreneur or innovation professional. This information is not available by census tract; the smallest geography available is a municipality.

**Small Business Growth:** DataAxle, ReferenceUSA Business Database, June 2023. Small businesses are business locations with under 50 employees. Microbusinesses have under 5 employees. New businesses are locations that were started 2018 or later.

# Thanks to our generous funders

The Regional Revitalization Partnership would not be possible without the very generous support of these funders. Their grantmaking enabled us to develop community-driven collaborative strategies and projects that address pressing regional challenges and opportunities in unprecedented ways. We value their time, resources and commitment to this important initiative. Thank you for helping to build a brighter future for our region!

- City of Buffalo
- City of Niagara Falls
- City of Rochester and Monroe County
- Empire State Development
- ESL
- Farash Foundation
- KeyBank/First Niagara Foundation
- M&T Bank
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## Introduction