



# Reflecting Back. Looking Ahead.



Center for  
Regional  
Strategies



University at Buffalo  
Regional Institute  
School of Architecture and Planning



EAST SIDE  
AVENUES

2019 - 2024

**FIVE YEARS OF  
EAST SIDE AVENUES**

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**Through Empire State Development (ESD), New York State dedicated \$65 million to the revitalization of Buffalo's East Side** and is making capital investments along four commercial corridors. Through \$8.4 million in private and philanthropic funds, East Side Avenues provides capacity building and organizational support to complement these capital investments.

The Project Implementation Team (PIT), led by the Center for Regional Strategies in partnership with UB Regional Institute and supported by a team of consultants, ensures that appropriate resources are in place for community leaders; assists with strategic planning, program design, organizational capacity building and problem solving; leads the team on technical assistance for community-based organizations; and reports on progress while lifting up the voices of the community.



The Center for Regional Strategies (CRS) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that focuses on planning, developing and implementing economic growth strategies to build sustainable community wealth, especially in underserved areas. CRS's income-building strategies focus on the core foundational principles of placemaking, workforce and small business development and nonprofit capacity building.

East Side Avenues is led by the Center for Regional Strategies in partnership with UB Regional Institute.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2023 - 2024:

**\$65 million in capital + \$8.4 million in programs and capacity building.**

## REFLECTING BACK

### Five Years of East Side Avenues...

...**represented** a unique moment in time to build collaboration and spark transformational change on Buffalo's East Side.

...was **informed** by the community.

...was **based** on organizational capacity building to effect change driven by the community.

...**involved** a dedicated intermediary.

...had an **ongoing and** continuous feedback loop from the program stakeholders to inform program development.

...**invested** in storytelling as the most compelling way to communicate impact.

**A combined \$180 million through Regional Revitalization Partnership (RRP) in capital and programmatic investments.**

## LOOKING AHEAD

### East Side Avenues Programs...

...will **continue** into the future through the RRP.

...will **scale up, evolve and change.**

...will continue to be **supported.**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Five Years of Lessons Learned...



Primary role of an intermediary is **problem-solving.**

**Economic change** takes years, not months.

**Capacity building comes in all shapes and sizes**, but shouldn't stretch an organization past its mission.

**Placemaking and visible change are critical** in economic development, but construction is a challenge.

**Collaborative funding** works best when you buy into a portfolio together.

The cadre of the willing is the **momentum builder needed in collaboration.**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Capacity Building Programs Major Accomplishments Over Five Years

#### MICHIGAN STREET AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE CORRIDOR



Capacity building funds helped formalize the Commission's organizational infrastructure and administrative functions and hire an executive director and other staff. Additional consultants assisted with marketing/communications, fundraising, succession planning, and board development. The Commission completed a strategic action planning and economic development strategy process and increased programming. A new headquarters and visitor hub was established at 136 Broadway. Concurrent to addressing some of the anchors' immediate capital needs, the Commission developed a real estate plan for the corridor, and economic development strategies for each anchor.



#### NEW HEADQUARTERS AND VISITOR HUB



**136 BROADWAY**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Capacity Building Programs Major Accomplishments Over Five Years

#### CENTRAL TERMINAL



Capacity building funds provide the Central Terminal Restoration Corporation (CTRC) with a full-time executive director and other paid staff and link the Board and staff to organizational consultants to assist with governance, strategic planning, fundraising, marketing, neighborhood connections and involvement, community-oriented programming, equitable development and care of the buildings and grounds. Phase 1 NYS-supported design and construction focused on sizeable asbestos remediation and extensive roof repairs. CTRC chose a real estate development team and is advancing necessary pre-development and design work in preparation for Phase 2 of construction.



PREPARATION  
**FOR PHASE 2**  
CONSTRUCTION



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Capacity Building Programs Major Accomplishments Over Five Years

#### COMMERCIAL BUILDING STABILIZATION FUND



Through three funding rounds, 20 buildings will be stabilized with awards totaling approximately \$3M. Capacity building funds allowed the Local Program Administrator's staff to conduct outreach, select projects, administer capital grant funds, and monitor construction. Additional consultants assisted with strategic planning, board development, human resources, marketing and fundraising.



Strategic Planning →

Board Development →

Human Resources →

Marketing & Fundraising →

20 BUILDINGS =

**\$3M**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Capacity Building Programs Major Accomplishments Over Five Years

### EAST SIDE COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS



Through two funding rounds, 36 buildings in all four districts will be renovated with awards totaling approximately \$3M. Capacity building funds helped our nonprofit partners hire staff to administer the program and implement their unique strategic action plans to strengthen board governance, organizational development, marketing and fundraising with consultant support.



**2 FUNDING  
ROUNDS**



**36 BUILDINGS  
COMPLETED**



**4 DISTRICTS  
TARGETED**



**\$3 MILLION  
AWARDED**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Capacity Building Programs Major Accomplishments Over Five Years

#### COMMUNITY-BASED REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT TRAINING



Through four cohorts, 69 graduates completed the 20-week intensive commercial real estate development training program. Graduates who own East Side buildings were given technical assistance by program staff and 13 graduates are being supported by the CBREDT Program Fund to redevelop their buildings. A new, expanded and enhanced online CBREDT program launched in June 2024.

**FOUR** COHORTS  
**69** GRADUATES  
**COMPLETED**  
20-WEEK TRAINING





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## CAPITAL INVESTMENTS

SINCE 2019, 89 EAST SIDE BUILDINGS WERE AWARDED CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT FUNDS FROM EMPIRE STATE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE EAST SIDE CORRIDOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUND.

Capital improvement funding can include support for pre-development activities. Buildings invested in are neighborhood anchors or buildings supported as part of 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 shown here is subject to change after initial project scoping is complete.



89 BUILDING  
PROJECTS

TOTAL AREA OF BUILDINGS SUPPORTED =

OVER 2,440,000 SQ.  
FT.\*

\$9.9 MILLION

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC AND PRIVATE  
INVESTMENT LEVERAGED

1,200,000+

PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH:

- ▶ **EARNED MEDIA:** *Buffalo News, Buffalo Rising, WBEN, WIVB, WKBW, Spectrum News*
- ▶ **PAID MEDIA:** *Criterion and Challenger newspapers*
- ▶ **DIGITAL AND OTHER MEDIA:**
  - CRS and East Side Avenues eNews
  - Community partner eblasts, website postings & outreach
  - East Side Avenues website updates
  - 8 storytelling videos
  - In-person presentations

14,130 VISITORS AT CENTRAL  
TERMINAL AND MSAAHC

▶ 3,100 more than last year

\*The total number of buildings is over five years and subject to change after initial project scoping is complete. Capital improvement funds include pre-development. 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.

Notes: Data was self-reported from the five East Side Avenues capacity building programs through a survey completed in July 2024. The reporting period was September 2023 through August 2024 unless otherwise noted.

## QUALITATIVE IMPACTS OF CAPACITY BUILDING

“We completed a succession plan with the Board of Directors and completely overhauled our operations with standard operating procedures for every facet of our business. This allowed us to cut down on inefficiencies, increase stronger partnerships, maximize staffing professional development and improve upon program delivery.”

“We hired consulting firms to help increase our marketing and outreach capacity—creating a new brand and materials for outreach, and making our website ADA compliant which puts us ahead of the curve. Additional consultants assisted with better application intake. We increased the number of families we serve by 30% and visits to our website and social media engagement by 40%. More prepared clients increased by 80%.”

**STEPHANIE SIMEON**, HEART OF THE CITY NEIGHBORHOODS, INC.

“ESA funding is vital to the services we offer community members on the East Side of Buffalo. The community sees us as a committed partner that helps advocate for the community and gets results.”

**CORNELIUS JOHNSON**, BLACK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

“The hiring of a full-time Chief Financial Officer will be instrumental in facilitating \$24 million in Phase 2 capital projects approved by New York State. This will be key in continuing the momentum of transforming the Heritage Corridor into an international destination.”

“We have seen an increase in requests from private and public organizations for presentations, tours, or access to our historic sites; an influx of people coming to the Corridor from outside our region who are looking for an experience; and increased interest in younger professionals wishing to join or participate on a pertinent committee or short-term activity.”

**TERRY ALFORD**, MICHIGAN STREET AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE CORRIDOR COMMISSION

“We have hope and confidence in our new future because of ESA/RRP. The funding will continue to be critically important as we create a Buffalo Central Terminal that is a lasting cultural and economic hub.”

“The ESA/RRP funded initiatives are the most meaningful work happening in Buffalo. Hands down, absolutely life changing for all of us.”

**MONICA PELLEGRINO FAIX**, BUFFALO CENTRAL TERMINAL

“East Side Avenues has provided funding for two staff members, allowed us to upgrade/maintain our website, and connected us to commercial building owners and developers. It has fostered collaborations that will be important going forward.”

“We are starting to see improvements to other buildings in the commercial districts. The East Side Commercial Districts program has the potential to change the perception of the East Side for people who don’t live here.”

**STEPHEN KARNATH**, BROADWAY FILLMORE NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING SERVICES

\*Information was compiled through a survey completed in July 2024.

# Building an **EFFECTIVE ECOSYSTEM** to Maximize East Side Revitalization

It All Started with  
**\$65 Million in  
Capital  
Investments** from  
New York State



Private Foundations and  
Banks Provided **\$8+ Million  
for Capacity Building**



**Listening to the  
Community**  
Initial and Ongoing  
Engagement and Community  
Outreach Informs  
Program Development



Formed **Project  
Implementation  
Team**, Led by UBRI



**Comprehensive  
Communications Strategy  
and Storytelling Effort** Create  
Awareness of Programs and  
Lift Up Voices of the East Side

## 5 Capacity-Building Programs Built

Capital for new  
programs, matched  
by more than \$8  
million from local  
foundations and  
corporations,  
strengthens the  
work of local  
nonprofit  
organizations.  
These programs  
support small  
business  
improvements,  
historic  
preservation, real  
estate development  
training, and  
fundamental  
East Side anchors.



**COMMERCIAL BUILDING  
STABILIZATION FUND**



**COMMUNITY-BASED  
REAL ESTATE  
DEVELOPMENT TRAINING**

**MICHIGAN STREET  
AFRICAN AMERICAN  
HERITAGE CORRIDOR**



**EAST SIDE COMMERCIAL  
DISTRICTS**



**CENTRAL TERMINAL**

**MICHIGAN**

**JEFFERSON**

**FILLMORE**

**BAILEY**



## Investments in Anchors and Infrastructure

Targeted capital funding ensures  
community anchors remain accessible  
and active core assets, improves key  
mixed-use properties to spur private  
investment, and enhances the  
streetscape along the corridors.



**INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT  
AND ENHANCE INVESTMENTS**

Areas of infrastructure  
investments



**MLK PARK DISTRICT**



**BUFFALO  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
STABILIZATION  
FUND**



**DIRECT  
PROJECT  
ASSISTANCE**



**COMMUNITY SOLAR ARRAY  
AT NORTHLAND**



**BROADWAY  
MARKET**







# Reflecting Back.

## FIVE YEARS OF EAST SIDE AVENUES...

### **...represented a unique moment in time to build collaboration and spark transformational change on Buffalo's East Side.**

New York State dedicated \$65 million to the revitalization of Buffalo's East Side through transformational capital investments in nine targeted areas along four East Side Commercial Corridors. Understanding the tremendous opportunity to leverage and complement New York State's \$65 million investment (East Side Corridor Economic Development Fund), private and philanthropic organizations created a pooled \$8.4 million East Side Collaborative Fund to support operations, programs, capacity building, and community infrastructure associated with five of the State's capital initiatives. East Side Avenues brings together these public and private funders, community nonprofits, anchor institutions, consultants and the City to plan and coordinate revitalization activities aimed at improving economic conditions on Buffalo's East Side. Fourteen foundations and corporations joined this endeavor to complement the state's investment and committed to an unprecedented five years of funding to organizational capacity building.

### **...was informed by the community.**

Initial and ongoing community engagement was one of the most important elements in the creation of East Side Avenues. It wasn't a traditional grant program with a formal application process. It needed to be more flexible and more experimental, to fund the best community-driven projects. Community members—individuals, businesses, community groups, and nonprofits—were engaged through a series of one-on-one conversations and listening sessions. This created a much deeper understanding of the challenges of economic development, and what programs could be created to have the greatest impact, while building trust with the community. When funding decisions were made, broad partnerships were created with trusted community partners with strong neighborhood ties to implement the capital projects and programs that community members said were priorities.

### **...was based on organizational capacity building to effect change driven by the community.**

Building organizational capacity for trusted community partners has four important elements. It supports a multi-year funding commitment, so organizations are focusing on implementation rather than fundraising for programs. It provides operating support—most importantly salaries for staff members—for brand new organizations or existing organizations that are understaffed or run primarily with volunteers. It uses evaluation to assess an organization's starting point and ongoing needs. Finally, it provides technical assistance to address deficiencies and to scale up.

### **...involved a dedicated intermediary.**

The East Side Avenues Project Implementation Team (PIT), led by the Center for Regional Strategies (CRS) in collaboration with the University at Buffalo Regional Institute (UBRI), and supported by a team of consultants, ensures that appropriate supports such as infrastructure, staff, and funding are in place for community leaders; assists with strategic planning, program design, and problem solving; leads the team on technical assistance for community-based organizations; and reports on progress while lifting up the voices of the community.

From the beginning, administrative processes were developed with the Fund's fiscal agent (Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo). Reporting and program evaluation parameters and processes were established with all partners. The East Side Avenues Advisory Council, made up of funders, met quarterly to review quarterly progress reports and financials. Communication processes were developed to maximize efficiency and ensure consistent engagement among partners and community organizations. Fundraising efforts continued and additional funders were secured.

# Reflecting Back.

## FIVE YEARS OF EAST SIDE AVENUES...

### **...had an ongoing continuous feedback loop from the program stakeholders to inform program development.**

The PIT reflected on where East Side Avenues was succeeding, identified challenges, listened to community partners and made thoughtful program improvements to expand our reach and strengthen program outcomes. We took a hard, honest look at what was working and what needed work. We had the best intentions entering into program development and full implementation mode, but we needed to reflect on where challenges emerged and how we could best support community constituencies.

We developed relationships where feedback could be reflective and honest. We built trust with our partners so that when we are assessing programs and progress, evaluation can be more productive and changes can be more meaningful. Based on feedback from our nonprofit partners, participants in the various programs, local banks and other lenders, and business and building owners receiving grants, we learned that effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact our ability to move construction projects. Rising costs, limited contractors, and struggling small businesses are all unexpected barriers to faster progress. We learned that a grant program alone isn't the solution to many challenges such as securing bank financing and completing pre-development activities. We learned that projects can be complicated and expensive, and it's very likely that a scope will change—both in breadth and cost—causing difficulties for owners. We recommended policy changes and revamped programs to bridge the gap between program expectations and realities that had come to light.

### **...invested in storytelling as the most compelling way to communicate impact.**

First-person voice was elevated from day one. Engagement with people who directly benefit from investments provides the best insight into understanding the impact being made. Our storytelling program includes videos with community members, written interviews, and dynamic photography. The extensive multi-media series shares the stories of over 56 individuals. We built viewership and drove traffic to the East Side Avenues website. We implemented outreach programs to the media and our partners to create awareness of the stories and East Side Avenue's programs and progress. As we build the library of stories annually, it becomes an archive of the East Side Avenues initiative, and most importantly, lifts up the voices of people who live, work and are collectively moving the East Side forward.



# Looking Ahead.

## FIVE YEARS OF EAST SIDE AVENUES...

### **...will continue into the future through the Regional Revitalization Partnership.**

The Regional Revitalization Partnership (RRP) is a multi-year \$300M collaborative initiative developed in collaboration with New York State Governor Kathy Hochul and Empire State Development (ESD) and is supported by ESL, Evans Bank, Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation, Five Star Bank, KeyBank/First Niagara Foundation, William & Sheila Konar Foundation, M&T Bank, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, and partners in the cities of Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and Rochester. Building upon and accelerating collaborative, community-driven work that is already underway, this public/private initiative co-invests in three interconnected communities in Western New York (Buffalo's East Side and the cities of Niagara Falls and Rochester) to create a comprehensive community-driven economic development vision to strengthen the regional economy and build pathways to individual wealth.

RRP is an outgrowth of East Side Avenues. A combined \$180 million RRP investment on the East Side scales up East Side Avenues' 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.

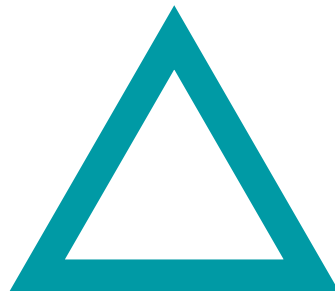
### **...will scale up, evolve and change.**

The ESA Project Implementation Team began assessing program mechanics and outcomes and thinking about what the transition to RRP funding will look like for East Side Avenues' programs. We are determining how programs might change, transition or scale-up and how they will be integrated into the larger RRP infrastructure. We are looking at the growth and evolution of program partners—determining if we need to add new community-based partners in some areas or grow existing partnerships in others. We are exploring how to best build organizational infrastructure and capacity for East Side partners to implement new RRP-associated projects and programs.

### **...will continue to be supported.**

CRS and other local intermediaries supported by a team of capacity-building consultants “connect the dots” for RRP through effective governance—both across nonprofit partners and across the three geographies to maximize impact. They provide overall coordination, collaboration, communications and project management to ensure a strong cohesive coalition; and assist in building the capacity of nonprofit partners.

An increased level of capacity building for community-based nonprofits to scale up and take on large-scale new projects is imperative. We will build upon five years of foundational work and use lessons learned to increase the capacity of our existing partners to expand their projects through actions such as adding the technical expertise of additional consultants and expanded staff. This will require close evaluation and monitoring across programs to ensure nonprofits have the support they need and are not growing too quickly or losing focus outside of their core missions.





CAPACITY  
BUILDING PROGRAMS



# MICHIGAN STREET AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE CORRIDOR

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

## WHY THIS PROJECT

East Side Avenues supported 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 St. and Broadway (Michigan Street Baptist Church, Nash House Museum, Colored Musicians Club, and WUFO Black Radio History Collective). The objective was to create a cooperative operating business model and coordinate capital improvements to build a unified tourist destination that will tell the story of Buffalo's contribution to African American history while attracting new visitors to the region.



MICHIGAN STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

NASH HOUSE MUSEUM

COLORED MUSICIANS CLUB

WUFO BLACK RADIO HISTORY COLLECTIVE



## WHAT HAPPENED OVER FIVE YEARS

Capacity building funds helped strengthen the Commission by formalizing its organizational infrastructure and administrative functions and hiring its first executive director and other staff including a Chief Financial Officer. The Commission embarked on a strategic action planning and economic development strategy process, rooted in community engagement. The plans formalize a cooperative operating model, prioritize future capital investments, and outline strategies for bolstering the economic vitality of the targeted area. The Commission continued to leverage capacity building funding to strengthen foundational elements of the organization, especially governance, marketing/communications, fundraising, succession planning, and board development for the Commission and anchors. Planning is ongoing to maximize and leverage support from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation Arts and Culture Initiative which commits \$100,000 annually to the Commission and anchor institutions. The Commission built partnerships with community-based organizations to increase their in-person events, activities, tours and public art throughout the year. Examples of these activities include A Soulful Christmas, Black and Women's History Month events, Mrs. Frances Nash Farmers Market and street pole banner installations. This garnered tremendous local press coverage.

In 2023, the Commission held the official ribbon cutting and press event for the new headquarters and visitor hub at 136 Broadway. The Colored Musicians Club (CMC) completed elevator installation and is working on exterior expansion. Michigan Street Baptist Church began its second phase of interior capital improvements—installing flooring, wall treatments, and new early-1900 period pews. WUFO Radio's Black Radio History Collective is working with the City to renovate 509 Michigan St., as well as constructing a sister build-out.

While addressing some of these immediate capital needs, the Commission developed a real estate plan for the corridor, and economic development strategies for each anchor. Pre-development and design work started at 136 Broadway. A consultant developed a museum and exhibit collection process for the anchors and implementation is underway.



## WHAT DOES THE NEXT FIVE YEARS LOOK LIKE THROUGH RRP?

- ➔ Implementation efforts in the coming years align with the Commission's goal to create a heritage destination that is a walking, living museum that encompasses and acknowledges the deep roots of African Americans in our region's history. These efforts include Phase II capital improvement projects for the anchors and Corridor, property acquisitions, placemaking and wayfinding, business pop-ups, incubators, and cultural events and historical interpretive programming activities; while also increasing the operational sustainability of the Commission and anchors.

## TERRY ALFORD

Over the past five years, the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor experienced tremendous growth. Three of the corridor's cultural anchors—Michigan Street Baptist Church, the Colored Musicians Club, and the Nash House Museum—completed their phase-one capital improvement projects, with phase two planned for 2025. The Commission also established its headquarters and visitor center.

While these milestones are impressive, it's the community's praise that brings Terry the greatest pride. With more work on the horizon, the vision of making the corridor a historical and cultural destination is becoming clearer.

Beyond capital improvements, the Commission is collaborating with the Erie Canal Bicentennial Commission and the Smithsonian on several initiatives to illuminate the corridor's rich history and bright future.

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▶ View this story at [eastsideavenues.org/stories](https://eastsideavenues.org/stories)





## CENTRAL TERMINAL

—

Increase community access by transforming the iconic Central Terminal into a year-round, neighborhood, city and regional mixed-use facility and economic hub.

### WHY THIS PROJECT

The Broadway Fillmore neighborhood is largely defined by its proximity to the iconic Buffalo Central Terminal, an Art Deco masterpiece that closed to rail traffic in 1979 and has been the focus of a community driven restoration movement. This project aims to restore the Central Terminal, pursue development that benefits the community, and better connect it to the Broadway Fillmore business district to attract private investment and visitors to the area.



### WHAT HAPPENED OVER FIVE YEARS

The previously all-volunteer-run Central Terminal Restoration Corporation (CTRC) made tremendous strides in stabilizing the facility and bringing attention to the landmark's importance. Guided by their 2021 community-informed Master Plan, and with support from East Side Avenues for capacity building and full-time leadership and operational staff, CTRC is living 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. With assistance from capacity building 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. With the assistance of an event management consultant, numerous community-based art, music, and health activities are presented on the grounds of Central Terminal year-round.

Phase 1 NYS-supported design and construction focused on sizeable asbestos remediation and extensive roof repairs. CTRC is advancing necessary pre-development and design work with an A&E consultant in preparation for Phase 2 of construction—a \$13M to \$16M project that will address the highest priority safety and stabilization issues, reopen the Passenger Concourse for public access on a limited basis, and expand use of the Plaza and the Lawn. CTRC also completed a Historic Structures Report and limited Cultural Landscape Report with a team of historic preservation architects and consultants; and selected

Environmental Consulting Service to assist in the preliminary work to assess and potentially enter the Brownfield Cleanup Program.

Following an extensive procurement process, CTRC chose a real estate development team. Leveraging existing public and philanthropic support, the team will bring significant private investment to transform the nearly 30-acre development project, including the rehabilitation of four historic structures.

### WHAT DOES THE NEXT FIVE YEARS LOOK LIKE THROUGH RRP?

➡ CTRC will continue to successfully implement their Master Plan as the guide for Central Terminal's future development and reuse opportunities with a groundswell of community support. Phase 2 construction recently commenced and includes: roof repairs to stop water infiltration; masonry repairs at the top of the Tower to eliminate fall hazards; returning the plaza to original loading capacity; securing interior Guastavino tiles; installing bathrooms; and addressing exits. It is anticipated that Central Terminal will reopen for public use on a limited basis in 2025 with a Civic Commons consisting of the Concourse, Great Lawn and former parking deck. In addition to capital improvements, CTRC will work toward long-term sustainability by diversifying revenue streams and will continue to create active connections with and involvement of residents from the Broadway Fillmore neighborhood and East Side community through outreach and programming.





## JAMES MORRELL

As a youngster, James Morrell would ride his bike down Paderewski Drive, captivated by the grandeur of the Central Terminal. Today, as Chair of the Central Terminal Restoration Corporation (CTRC), James is at the forefront of preserving this historic landmark for future generations.

After years of diligent work, James is thrilled that the Terminal's Phase I stabilization is complete. Stabilization and readiness will continue and work will focus on development and executing the master plan. James credits East Side Avenues for the capacity building and board development that have enabled the CTRC to reach this pivotal moment.

While much of the work completed so far at the Central Terminal has been foundational, the community is starting to see glimpses of what's to come. The initiation of summer events on the Great Lawn previews the vibrant activity that will make the Central Terminal an exciting hub of activity on Buffalo's East Side.

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▶ View this story at [eastsideavenues.org/stories](https://eastsideavenues.org/stories)



## EAST SIDE COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

—

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

### WHY THIS PROJECT

Small businesses anchor neighborhoods with locally driven economic activity. They create jobs and upward mobility while helping build and maintain a positive, unique neighborhood identity. East Side businesses were more vulnerable to market downturns and disruptions, often lack access to capital, and were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. With commercial districts relying on fewer businesses, communities are challenged to develop vibrancy and density of activity, which is critical to the reversal of urban decline.



Our community engagement revealed a need to expand neighborhood-serving businesses such as retailers and restaurants and increase mixed-use opportunities along commercial corridors.

We also heard about the importance of maintaining the historic character of the buildings and re-establishing traditional, walkable community business districts. We learned that buildings along the corridors have a broad range of needs—from exterior façade renovations and interior improvements to systems improvements and code compliance upgrades. These vary greatly in scale and cost. A focused effort on building renovations could help improve the business climate, combat vacancies, and contribute to the overall revitalization of the corridors.

## EAST SIDE COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

### WHAT HAPPENED OVER FIVE YEARS

Launched in 2019, 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). The East Side Commercial Districts program 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.

As the program developed, we created a continuous feedback loop with key stakeholders and made revisions to the program to maximize impact. To address challenges such as scoping and cost estimating, as well as a need for additional quality control and prioritization of building and overall district needs, the program was revamped in 2022 by raising capital fund limits, offering a greater degree of A&E technical assistance to create stronger cost estimating and planning, and streamlining administrative processes. We held a contractor “match-making” event with more than 80 participants in collaboration with ESD, UB School of Architecture and Planning, the Small Business Development Center at Buffalo State University and The Construction Exchange and created a real-time project posting page on our website in order to better connect contractors with East Side bidding opportunities.

LPAs were able to deliver a new round of capital funding under these new parameters. It is anticipated that through two rounds a total of 36 buildings will be renovated with awards totaling nearly \$3M.



### WHAT DOES THE NEXT FIVE YEARS LOOK LIKE THROUGH RRP?

- ➔ In 2025, RRP will launch the East Side Building Fund. The East Side Building Fund will take a streamlined and holistic approach to capital funding. By taking a look at the overall needs of a particular building and funding needs through one source, we can move money into the community more quickly, and cut down on confusion and eligibility for multiple funding sources. The intent, goals and geographic focus of the East Side Commercial Districts program will be preserved and rolled into the new East Side Building Fund.



## SYDNEY BROWN

Sydney Brown advocated for Buffalo's East Side for over 15 years. She played a key role in the community input that shaped East Side Avenues and continues her work as the Economic Development Director for Citizens Alliance.

Citizens Alliance, in partnership with the Black Chamber of Commerce of Western New York, serves as the local program administrator for the East Side Commercial Districts program for Jefferson Avenue. Sydney collaborates with business owners to complete exterior and façade improvements. Where others see windows or signage, she sees a broader impact—helping businesses thrive and strengthening the community.

Over the past five years, Sydney witnessed progress firsthand, but she knows more work remains. Her message is clear: “Be the change that you’re looking for. There’s no need to wait for others.”

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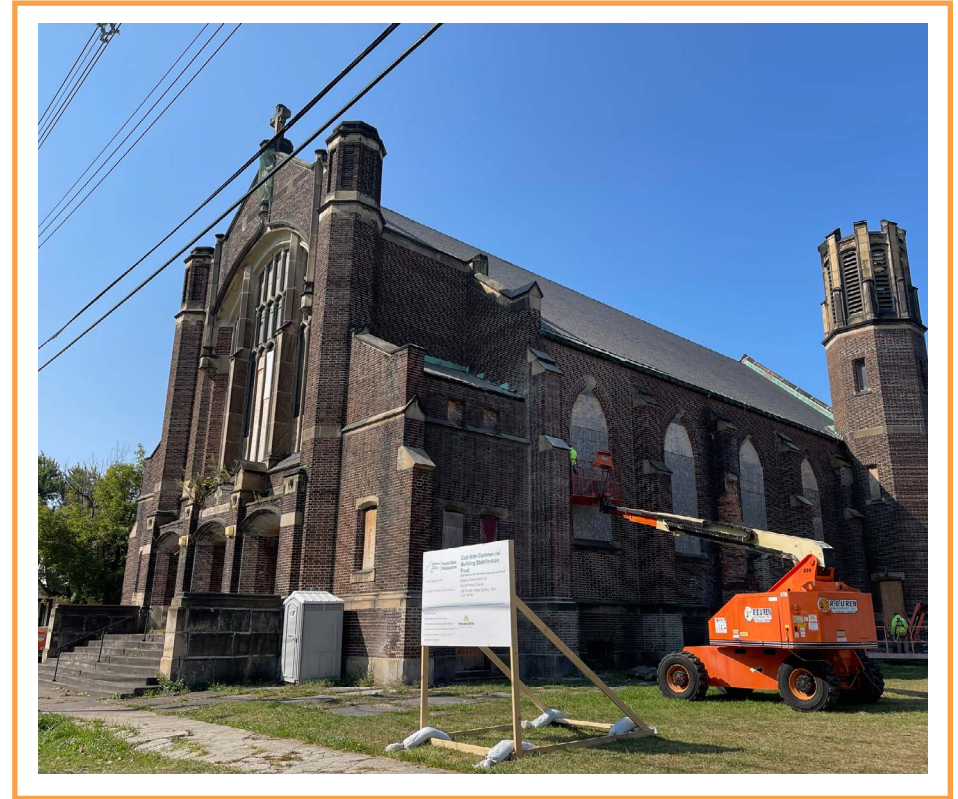
## COMMERCIAL BUILDING STABILIZATION FUND

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

### WHY THIS PROJECT

Historic preservation is an important element of the region's economic development strategy. Western New York's unique history, beauty, and sense of place are retained through architecture, landscapes, and urban design. We learned that more than any other area of the city, the East Side has historic buildings in danger of demolition. In many instances, the owner is willing to work on building redevelopment, but lacks funding to stabilize the property or the ability to self-develop. The community wants to see stabilization of historic buildings along the corridors to ensure that historic assets are saved, and neighborhood fabric and character is preserved—both essential to a thriving commercial district.





## COMMERCIAL BUILDING STABILIZATION FUND

### WHAT HAPPENED OVER FIVE YEARS

Launched in 2019 and 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. Capacity building funds allow PBN to dedicate staff members to the program and conduct outreach, select projects, administer capital grant funds, and monitor construction. 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, organizational development, fundraising, and succession planning. PBN underwent a leadership transition during this timeframe.

As the program developed, we created a continuous feedback loop with key stakeholders and made revisions to the program to maximize impact. To address challenges such as rising construction costs, bidding responses and emergency interventions, the program was revamped in 2022 by raising capital fund limits and offering more technical assistance from A&E consultants at no additional cost to the property owner. PBN delivered two new rounds of capital funding in 2022-2023 under these new parameters—implementing new policy changes and promoting and communicating these opportunities. Through three funding rounds, a total of 20 buildings will be stabilized with awards totaling approximately \$3M.



### WHAT DOES THE NEXT FIVE YEARS LOOK LIKE THROUGH RRP?

- ➡ In 2025, RRP will launch the East Side Building Fund. The East Side Building Fund will take a streamlined and holistic approach to capital funding. By taking a look at the overall needs of a particular building and funding needs through one source, we can move money into the community more quickly, and cut down on confusion and eligibility for multiple funding sources. The intent and goals of the Commercial Building Stabilization Fund will be preserved and prioritized into the new East Side Building Fund.

## COMMUNITY-BASED REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

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

### WHY THIS PROJECT

There is tremendous entrepreneurial spirit on the East Side—from small business owners to artists, urban farmers, preservationists, budding commercial developers, and nonprofit leaders. These entrepreneurs have deep roots in the community and want to grow and develop their East Side properties. Many see real estate development opportunities and are passionate about how their buildings could house small business enterprises, but need assistance to successfully plan and implement a commercial real estate development project.

### PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

Through 4 cohorts, **69 graduates** completed the program.



## WHAT HAPPENED OVER FIVE YEARS

In 2019, we launched the Community-Based Real Estate Development Training program (CBREDT) to train East Side building owners and community members to undertake commercial or mixed-use projects. This ensures that revitalization is driven by the community, and buildings don't fall into the hands of absentee landlords or land speculators or sit unused. The first of its kind in the region, CBREDT is a tuition-free, non-credit bearing, adult education program. The approximately 20-week intensive program provided an overview of the commercial real estate development process, including predevelopment, construction, property management, and financing a project from private and public sources. Weekly classroom instruction was provided by a wide range of experienced real estate development professionals and included lectures and hands-on activities. Participants were linked with a mentor based on individual needs and interests. Students worked toward a final project to present to a panel of jurors. The course culminated with a graduation ceremony. Through 4 cohorts, 69 graduates completed the program.

Students who own buildings and successfully complete the program are invited to apply for ESD capital grants through the CBREDT Program Fund. 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. ESD administers larger grants and two graduates have received ESD Incentive Proposals for over \$450,000. Thirteen graduates are being supported by the CBREDT Program Fund to date.

## WHAT DOES THE NEXT FIVE YEARS LOOK LIKE THROUGH RRP?

➡ After gathering feedback from past participants and key stakeholders, a new expanded and enhanced CBREDT program launched in June 2024. After months of program planning, content and module development, filming, website development, editing and beta testing, the new program features two key components: (1) CBREDT 101: a free online course with interactive learning modules along with three optional in-person experiential sessions. The course is available to all who register, but will have a continued focus on reaching East Side residents. And, (2) Pre-Development Coaching Program: each year, five to ten graduates of the course, who own a commercial or mixed-use East Side property, will be invited to participate in structured, hands-on pre-development coaching with SAP that consists of 15 applied learning workshops on relevant topics. The first cohort of five students began in September 2024. As with past cohorts of the class, we developed and executed a robust marketing communications strategy to reach the intended audience. We will continue to assess the success of the online program and coaching, and plan for 2025.

Looking ahead, funding for projects on the East Side initiated by graduates of the CBREDT program will be given preference for funding through the new East Side Building Fund.



A close-up portrait of Rosaura Romero, a woman with long dark hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a blue top and a gold chain necklace. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with greenery.

## ROSAURA ROMERO

Rosaura Romero serves as the community program manager for East Side Avenues, focusing on the Community-Based Real Estate Development Training program (CBREDT). This initiative empowers community members to develop their own neighborhoods.

Over the past five years, the program evolved from a cohort-based model to include online, asynchronous learning. CBREDT also offers technical assistance to graduates, helping them apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios and navigate development challenges. This support includes opportunities for pre-development funding, ensuring projects move forward.

In her role, Rosaura is constantly inspired. “Working with emerging developers, the main thing that always sticks out to me is how resilient they are,” she says.



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## OTHER EAST SIDE CORRIDOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUND INVESTMENTS



### DIRECT PROJECT ASSISTANCE



Mixed-use and anchor projects along the targeted commercial corridors received direct project assistance to facilitate business growth and job creation.

### *COMPLETE*

- Expansion at MANDELLA MARKET
- TORN SPACE THEATER Restoration
- BLACK ACHIEVERS MUSEUM Exhibits
- 1021 BROADWAY (Mosaic 659 Foundation)  
commercial spaces including Three Stories Coffee
- NASH LOFTS at Michigan & Broadway Restoration

### *UNDER CONSTRUCTION*

- BUFFALO BREWING COMPANY/SCHREIBER BREWERY  
initial phase of work complete

### *PLANNING/DESIGN*

- VARSITY THEATRE Stabilization
- 1351-1377 FILLMORE AVENUE Rehabilitation
- APOLLO THEATER MEDIA CENTER  
upgrade of production equipment to support community  
training programs

## OTHER EAST SIDE CORRIDOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUND INVESTMENTS

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Additional targeted capital funding set the stage for success—now and into the future.



### CITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Selected City of Buffalo Streetscape projects (to serve as a required non-Federal match) in areas of commercial corridor programs.

### BUFFALO NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION FUND

This multi-pronged housing initiative works to increase homeownership, prevent foreclosure, and target zombie properties on the East Side.

A photograph of a Black man in profile, wearing a dark suit, a blue and white checkered shirt, and a blue patterned tie. He is also wearing clear safety glasses with green temples. He is looking out of a window, and the reflection of his face is visible on the glass. In the foreground, there is a large, stylized pink logo consisting of two triangles pointing towards each other, with a vertical bar in the middle. The background is a bright, out-of-focus view of a city street.

## REGIONAL REVITALIZATION PARTNERSHIP (RRP)

Targeted capital funding for MLK Park, Northland Workforce Training Center, Broadway Market and The Exchange at Beverly Gray set the stage for growth. In this next phase, RRP capital and capacity building will scale up initial investments to transform these anchors into catalysts for economic change.



## REGIONAL REVITALIZATION PARTNERSHIP (RRP)

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### MLK PARK

Capital improvements to Martin Luther King, Jr. Park and the Buffalo Museum of Science ensure these historically significant community anchors remain accessible, safe, and relevant assets for the community. The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy is leading work on making improvements to MLK Park as identified through community engagement in its five-year planning process. The Conservancy completed an assessment of the park's historic greenhouses, which produce annuals and plants for all the parks and circles in the Olmsted system and create maintenance and horticulture jobs. Design is complete, as well as bidding and contracting for 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.



## MLK PARK

The City of Buffalo implemented interim “road diet” measures, lighting and sidewalk improvements along Fillmore Avenue. Further infrastructure and amenity upgrades to MLK Park will help meld portions of the park on either side of this busy corridor, as well as lighting, sidewalk, and historic pathway reconstruction. This will increase accessibility within the park and facilitate park programming, as well as improve connectivity between the park and the adjacent business district. The Conservancy completed the design and installation of lighting improvements within the park.

Construction is underway on restoring the Buffalo Museum of Science’s original north entrance and façade—the original main entrance—to fully remediate deterioration that barred it from public use for several decades. This will involve restoration of the museum’s monumental grand steps, limestone façade, public plaza, and associated sidewalks and curbing. When completed, the restored outdoor space will provide a destination for passive recreation and pedestrian gathering for museum guests and support community programming. The facility is also undergoing security and ADA-accessibility improvements.



### WHAT DOES THE NEXT FIVE YEARS LOOK LIKE THROUGH RRP?

- ➔ 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.



A close-up portrait of Catie Stephenson, a woman with short blonde hair and blue eyes, smiling. She is wearing a white button-down shirt. The background is slightly blurred, showing green foliage.

## CATIE STEPHENSON

Nestled within the historic Martin Luther King, Jr. Park in Buffalo lies a lush and historic greenhouse that Catie Stephenson and the team from the Olmsted Park Conservancy are working to restore and reopen to public use.

Although the greenhouse is fully operational, it has been closed to visitors for decades. Each year, in partnership with the City of Buffalo, Conservancy staff grow thousands of plants to beautify Buffalo's parks. The MLK Park greenhouse is undergoing a full restoration, including new glass panels, windows, structural repairs, and the addition of a high-tech community meeting space.

Catie is eager to see this historic structure once again serve the neighborhood. "We're really excited to bring this building back to its original glory," she says.



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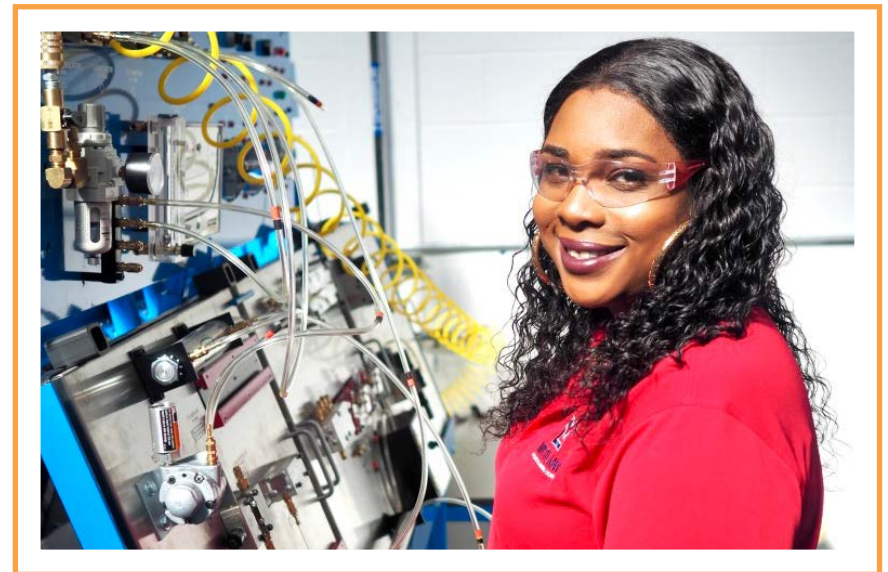
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## REGIONAL REVITALIZATION PARTNERSHIP (RRP)

### NORTHLAND WORKFORCE TRAINING CENTER

Northland Workforce Training Center (NWTC) is an industry-driven, public-private partnership between employers, educational institutions, community and faith-based organizations and state and local government focused on closing the skills gap of the local labor pool and creating economic on-ramps to training, co-ops, internships, apprenticeships, and permanent employment for Western New Yorkers seeking high-paying advanced manufacturing and energy careers.



NWTC offers a state-of-the-art training center designed to increase the number and quality of local candidates prepared for energy and advanced manufacturing careers. NWTC provides for-credit, certificate and degree programs as core offerings through educational partners, Alfred State College and SUNY Erie Community College, incorporating evidence-based placement strategies with an emphasis on permanent employment with family sustaining wages and benefits.

East Side Corridor Economic Development Fund will create a new Community Solar Array at Northland to power the campus and surrounding neighborhood to benefit residents while attracting new tenants and facilitating hands-on training in the renewable energy sector. The components will include rooftop solar at the Northland Central building (683 Northland Avenue); upgrading the BUDC-owned substation on the campus to allow distribution of generated power; and other upgrades aimed at future expansion that will accommodate other types of power generation, as well as battery storage to ensure continuation of service via the microgrid during power outages. Buffalo Urban Development Corporation (BUDC) completed a microgrid planning effort to determine initial components of the system and a financing package. The project was awarded a U.S. Economic Development Administration Build Back Better grant to finance all components of the microgrid system, as well as restoration of two additional campus buildings. All components are currently in final design.



## WHAT DOES THE NEXT FIVE YEARS LOOK LIKE THROUGH RRP?

➡ Outcomes during the last five years are exemplary. With the benefit of intensive wraparound support embedded with highly technical training, ongoing retention and job-placement services, a very high percentage of enrolled students complete their programming and are successfully placed into employment. Outcomes not only exceed internal targets but are well above community college and other comparable national program benchmarks. Related key success metrics include 73% of those enrolled continue into the second year/semester. 62% of those enrolled completed their full course work (double the national average and almost triple the rate of the local community college). 82% of those graduated are hired. In the Spring 2024 semester, minority representation amongst the student population was 59.0%—a 4.5% increase from the Fall 2023 semester.

After building a consistently solid and strong foundation of early success, NWTC is poised to strengthen operations to further optimize results and outcomes for all constituents, scale programming for even greater impact and increase engagement with East Side residents—further positioning NWTC as an anchor institution within the Northland Corridor. NWTC will launch The Clean Energy Technology Training Center to include a Clean Energy Technologies Lab, an HVAC program focusing on heat pump technology, a short-term CNC micro-credentialed program, and improved industrial wiring training capabilities.





## STEPHEN TUCKER

Stephen Tucker has dedicated his career to workforce development. Since moving to Buffalo in 2017, he has led the Northland Workforce Training Center—strategically located on Buffalo’s East Side—to close the skills gap and provide pathways for upward mobility.

Under Stephen’s leadership, Northland partnered with SUNY Erie Community College and Alfred State to offer high-demand training programs. Since opening in 2018, the center has enrolled over 1,000 students with a 60% completion rate—double the national average. Graduates secure jobs averaging over \$45,000/year, contributing to a \$42 million economic impact.

Stephen often hears from graduates who express gratitude for the opportunity to support their families. Looking ahead, he’s excited about the new WNY Manufacturing and Tech Workforce Coalition, which promises to accelerate the growth of high-tech jobs in Buffalo.

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# REGIONAL REVITALIZATION PARTNERSHIP (RRP)

## BROADWAY MARKET

In 2021, as a first step in re-establishing the Market as a viable and vibrant public shopping hub and attractive regional destination, the Broadway Market completed a comprehensive planning process to develop Business and Marketing plans and Concept Design Services.

Following the recommendations that the Broadway Market should be managed by an independent nonprofit to ensure long-term sustainability and success, Broadway Market Management Inc. (BMMI) assumed 501(c)(3) incorporation. Formal action was taken to register a name change, structure 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.



## BROADWAY MARKET

In 2023, BMMI worked 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. A business support services consultant is operationalizing specific action items from the concepts/ programs outlined in the business plan.

An A&E consultant is undertaking space programming, design development, construction documents and construction oversight for a phased program of capital improvements to transform the Market. Legal counsel is solidifying BMMI's lease with the City of Buffalo, and will consult on governance and compliance issues. BMMI also retained financial management and bookkeeping services to meet the current needs of the organization.



## WHAT DOES THE NEXT FIVE YEARS LOOK LIKE THROUGH RRP?

➡ The Market will transition from City of Buffalo management to BMMI which will become a robust, well-resourced nonprofit operator rebuilding a sense of place and connecting deeply with surrounding and adjacent communities. It will undergo significant transformational capital improvements to address structural and programming needs and elevate the user experience for customers, vendors, and visitors. It will add to the existing vendor community and complement their offerings to make Broadway Market a widely attractive cultural and culinary destination. And, it will create an innovative series of events and programming to attract and rebuild a local, regional, and international customer base to showcase what is great and what is unique about the regional food entrepreneurs, Buffalo, Broadway Fillmore, and publicly-owned markets.



A photograph of Peter Cammarata, a man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a dark blue button-down shirt. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a workshop or factory setting with various tools and equipment visible. A teal-colored overlay covers the left side of the image, containing text and a logo.

## PETER CAMMARATA

The Broadway Market holds a special place in Peter Cammarata's heart. He fondly recalls his mother's stories about visiting the market as a teenager. Peter's professional journey spanned retail and economic development, including managing the very market he grew up hearing about.

Now, as president of Broadway Market Management Incorporated, the nonprofit organization taking over day-to-day operations from the City of Buffalo, Peter is steering the market into a new era. This shift in management structure will enable more staffing and fundraising efforts to support the market's growth.

The market is currently in the design phase for renovations to update the interior and exterior while preserving its historical charm. Peter is confident it can once again be a multi-generational destination. He looks forward to soon sharing this iconic landmark with his grandson.



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## REGIONAL REVITALIZATION PARTNERSHIP (RRP)

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### SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT/THE EXCHANGE AT BEVERLY GRAY



East Side Corridor Economic Development Funds assisted with capital improvements to The Exchange at Beverly Gray (The Exchange) including furniture and equipment purchases. The Exchange is an Entrepreneur Service Organization (ESO) that serves underrepresented entrepreneurial communities in Buffalo. The goal of The Exchange is to provide entrepreneurs and business owners with the tools to start, launch and grow their businesses, while serving as a business development and growth conduit. By providing strategic startup resources at their earliest point— business education, entrepreneur coaching and mentorship, access to support services, and potential funding—The Exchange is able to help business owners and entrepreneurs remove barriers that impede starting businesses.

The Exchange also provides coworking space for entrepreneurs and business owners who need a safe place to convene, exchange ideas, discuss issues, and celebrate triumphs directly in the community in which they live.

### WHAT DOES THE NEXT FIVE YEARS LOOK LIKE THROUGH RRP?

➡ The Small Business Growth Initiative (SBGI) is a three-year comprehensive effort that creates a dedicated support network for small businesses located on Buffalo's East Side and beyond. To implement the SBGI, The Exchange is partnering with The Foundry—another East Side community-based nonprofit business and entrepreneur service organization.

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, the partners are planning for and implementing a suite of seven unique programs that streamline services and specifically address the community's identified needs including capacity building, business and product development, access to financing, access to technical expertise, connections to commercial real estate, and pipeline building to support the next generation of entrepreneurs.

In February 2024, The Foundry and The Exchange unveiled their partnership and officially announced the Small Business Growth Initiative at an event hosted at The Exchange at Beverly Gray. The partners are enhancing operational infrastructure, streamlining processes, and hiring new team members to support small businesses. With consultant assistance, they are developing a comprehensive marketing program to amplify outreach, and the first marketing accelerator—REACH EAST. They are finalizing initial technical expertise partners to assist with legal, finance, loans, credit counseling, tax, web design and accounting, and will continue to identify partners for this targeted support. They are establishing curriculum focused on product development for the new Product Lab and overhauling incubator services to provide more tailored assistance. They are assessing the local youth entrepreneurship landscape, gathering feedback, and enhancing curriculum design for an improved Youth Entrepreneurship Program.



*Photo credit: Aille Design*

A close-up portrait of Megan McNally, a woman with wavy brown hair, smiling slightly. The image is partially covered by a teal overlay on the left side, which contains text. A red play button icon is visible in the lower right area of the teal overlay.

## MEGAN MCNALLY

For over a decade, Megan McNally and The Foundry have been a steadfast presence on Buffalo's East Side. The makerspace offers a wide range of programming, from business incubation to product development support to youth entrepreneurship.

Thanks to Regional Revitalization Partnership funding, The Foundry joined forces with The Exchange at Beverly Gray—led by serial entrepreneur Derrick Parson—to launch the Small Business Growth Initiative. The first collaboration was REACH EAST, a marketing accelerator program specifically for East Side businesses. The inaugural cohort participated in workshops led by local marketing professionals, and business owners secured seed grants to bring their new plans to life.

Megan is eager to explore innovative ways to break down barriers for entrepreneurs, continuing her mission to empower the next generation of East Side business leaders.

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# Five Years of Lessons Learned

East Side Avenues is a unique and unprecedented collaborative model that illustrates that effecting economic change for underserved communities cannot be limited to a series of public infrastructure investments and real estate projects by outside developers. Planning must be driven by solid data and community voices. There must be an unprecedented level of public and private collaboration and co-investment that directly invests in the community's vision, and is targeted, coordinated, and large enough to drive real, transformational change. The investments should create vibrant commercial corridors and neighborhoods of opportunity; strengthen historical, cultural, and natural assets; and connect people with family-sustaining jobs. Investments must be made in human capital to equip residents, businesses, and property owners with the tools they need to invest in their own assets, start or expand businesses, and grow wealth with the idea of bolstering resident leadership while generating economic income for the people in the community. The East Side Avenues model also reinforces the role for intermediaries in ecosystem building.

In the past five years, East Side Avenues was presented with challenges we couldn't have imagined. Decades of disinvestment on the East Side revealed barriers that caused delays in timelines or cost more than initially budgeted. A global pandemic and the mass violence incident at Tops Market on Jefferson Avenue compounded existing challenges. Local, community-based organizations and anchor institutions that provided essential services were stretched to their limits. Construction schedules were challenged by labor shortages and delays, supply chain delays, increased material costs, and a challenging bidding environment. The growth potential of minority and women-owned small businesses was greatly impacted. We learned that progress comes in many forms. Despite such challenging times, East Side Avenues, through the tireless hard work and dedication of a resilient community, made tremendous strides.

## We learned many lessons that will inform the next five years of investment:

### Primary role of an intermediary is problem-solving

Our job is to give everyone the tools they need to succeed. With so many projects in different stages, we help partners identify their most pressing needs, and how and when these needs can be addressed. Even with a well-mapped plan, we learned to expect the unexpected. With many factors beyond our control, there are moments of triage and problem-solving for unexpected needs—no matter how great the plan is. It is just as important to prepare for the best-case scenario, as it is to be ready to adapt to unexpected challenges.

### Economic change takes years, not months.

Economic change is about patience and determination. There are many strategies to get there, but the only way to improve the economy is to improve people's ability to increase household income. Even with a driving sense of urgency, moving the needle takes years. Studying the data (quantitative and qualitative) is important, but analysis paralysis can be real. The best way to learn is to experiment and to learn from what worked and what didn't. You can learn, tweak and reevaluate, but economic drivers are what they are.



# Five Years of Lessons Learned

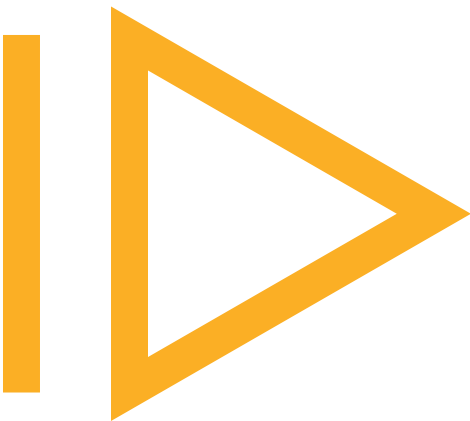
## Capacity building comes in all shapes and sizes, but shouldn't stretch an organization past its mission.

The type of help that nonprofit partners need has a broad range—from roll-up-your-sleeves problem solving, to making connections with other expertise, to presenting our stories together. With help from the PIT, organizations identified pressing needs and how and when they should be addressed. Then, partners, consultants and community members rallied around these organizations to provide fundraising assistance, board development, HR training, financial training, communications support, diversity training, marketing, A&E support, master planning ability and legal assistance. These things together illustrate progress that may not be visible, but aggregated together is setting the stage for the biggest capital investments the East Side has seen in recent history and building sustainability for years to come.

We also learned that capacity building can cause growing pains for an organization. It is best to understand what drives the organization and what they excel at, and build capacity around that; rather than stretching an organization past its mission and expertise. Organizational leadership, at both the staff and board level, is critically important. Regardless of the mission, leadership can make all the difference in successfully implementing programs and projects.

## Placemaking and visible change are critical in economic development, but construction is a challenge.

Bricks and mortar in placemaking is critical for transformation and visible change. But leading construction projects of varying size and scale successfully can be a huge challenge. Repairs to buildings in distressed neighborhoods with aging building stock tend to be expensive, have multiple needs and often unanticipated costs. There can be tension between enhancing façades to improve the look and feel of a neighborhood, versus stabilization and code compliance efforts which are important but don't necessarily provide immediate aesthetic improvement. There must be the right balance of team members with strong skills—from financial management and administrative support, to construction management and architectural and engineering expertise—that understand that every project has different needs and challenges. There should also be strategies to find good contractors in a difficult market. Streamlining processes can move money to the community more quickly.





# Five Years of Lessons Learned

## **Collaborative funding works best when you buy into a portfolio together.**

No one can solve it alone. Funders buying into a built unified vision is the most efficient way to run a collaborative initiative with many moving parts. Not only is it most efficient from a management perspective, but aggregating is often the only way to get to scale and to ensure resources are consistent and dependable. From an outcomes perspective, the interconnection of investments, programs, organizations and people with common goals demonstrates a powerful aggregate to maximize impact.

## **The cadre of the willing is the momentum builder needed in collaboration.**

The broad partnership that makes up East Side Avenues is fundamental to its effectiveness and success. But having so many partners makes things complex. No one pleases everyone all of the time. Gaining consensus can be a difficult process and decision-making can take longer and elicit challenges. Diversity of opinion and criticism is fair; but negativity without alternative recommendations isn't. In the end, it's most important to rally around people and projects for the greater good. Those that don't want to find solutions or are overly focused on their own benefit can crush the momentum and spirit needed to push forward.



# The Path Forward is Even Bigger

Announced in 2022, the Regional Revitalization Partnership (RRP), is an outgrowth of East Side Avenues. A combined \$180 million RRP investment on the East Side scales up East Side Avenues' 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.

East Side Avenues initial investment of \$73.4M set the stage for the \$180M now dedicated to Buffalo's East Side under RRP.

## COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

*East Side Building Fund, Community-Based Real Estate Development Training Program, Small Business Growth Initiative*

**\$15 MILLION**

## NORTHLAND WORKFORCE TRAINING CENTER

**\$21 MILLION**

## MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. PARK

**\$6 MILLION**

## BROADWAY MARKET

**\$37 MILLION**

## CENTRAL TERMINAL

**\$61 MILLION**

## MICHIGAN STREET AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE CORRIDOR

**\$30 MILLION**

## INTERMEDIARY & CAPACITY BUILDING

**\$10 MILLION**



## **THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS FUNDERS**

Multi-year grantmaking has enabled East Side Avenues to respond to and overcome challenges. We cannot thank these funders enough for giving us the time, resources, and support needed to build and improve our programs over time. Thank you for your trust and long-term commitment!



**BANK OF AMERICA**

**CANNON HEYMAN & WEISS, LLP**

**COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR GREATER BUFFALO**

**THE CRAVENS FOUNDATION**

**EMPIRE STATE DEVELOPMENT**

**EVANS BANK**

**FIVE STAR BANK**

**THE JOHN R. OISHEI FOUNDATION**

**KEY BANK/FIRST NIAGARA FOUNDATION**

**M&T BANK**

**THE MARGARET L. WENDT FOUNDATION**

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Paths to prosperity through commercial,  
historic and human investment.



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**CENTER FOR REGIONAL  
STRATEGIES**

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