
Niagara Falls Core City Urban Renewal Area

Strategic Plan for the Downtown Gateway Area



November 2011

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Introduction

The Niagara Falls Core City Urban Renewal Plan was approved by the City of Niagara Falls on September 28, 2009. The Core City Urban Renewal Plan, which was initiated by the Niagara Falls Urban Renewal Agency (NFURA), re-established the City's mechanism for carrying out urban renewal activities after the expiration of previous urban renewal plans and the adoption of a new municipal comprehensive plan, as well as the continuing physical decline of lands within the urban renewal areas.

With urban renewal mechanisms in place, the City of Niagara Falls, through its NFURA, called for this study to determine the actions necessary to further the development goals and objectives contained in the City's Comprehensive Plan for the Core City. The resulting Strategic Plan identifies specific actions that need to be taken in a subarea within the Niagara Falls Core City Urban Renewal Area, hereafter referred to as the "Downtown Gateway Area." The Downtown Gateway Area is bounded by Niagara Street on the south; the alley between 3rd Street and 4th Street on the west; Main Street on the northwest corner; Pine Avenue on the north; and 10th Street on the east. Approximately 20 blocks in size, the Downtown Gateway Area comprises an area, also known as the Daly Precinct and the Memorial Park Neighborhood, that is largely residential in nature, with the Pine Avenue and Main Street business district to the north, and Niagara Street and the Downtown Commercial District to the south, which includes the Seneca Niagara Casino-Hotel complex on the south side of Niagara Street.¹

Stakeholder Consultation

This Strategic Plan is intended to present a well-grounded, realistic, and achievable set of activities and initiatives that the City/NFURA can take to promote and guide development in the Downtown Gateway Area (or other areas in the Core City). To that end, the City/NFURA hosted a two-day design charrette on December 14 and 15, 2010, at the Conference Center of Niagara Falls. Twenty people attended the design charrette (in addition to City staff and consultants) and they represented community stakeholders, the development community, and the banking industry.

The attendees discussed what could help contribute to revitalization efforts, especially to stimulate redevelopment activities along Niagara Street and maximize development potential along the John B. Daly Boulevard Extension. In addition, information was gathered on what would be needed to encourage desirable development to move forward. (See "Design Charrette Summary" in Appendix I.)

Several points of consensus were reached during the charrette that have an important bearing on downtown economic redevelopment efforts. All of these will need to be addressed for progress to be achieved:

1. Redevelopment (solicitation) efforts within the study area should focus first on Niagara Street between 10th Street and the alley between 3rd and 4th Streets. A future focus area is the intersection of John B. Daly Boulevard and Pine Avenue.

¹ Figure 4 in Appendix II shows the location of the Core City Urban Renewal Area and the Downtown Gateway subarea.

2. The design of the John B. Daly Boulevard Extension described in the March 2010 Design Report/Draft Environmental Assessment is not consistent with the redevelopment goals for the area. To ensure that the roadway construction is consistent with re-development goals, the Extension should be redesigned and fully integrated with the adjacent neighborhood to allow for feasible parcel redevelopment adjacent to the roadway, comfortable and safe pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, and appropriate intersection design at cross streets.
3. There was, and is, an on-going lack of awareness of the City's recent redevelopment activities, including completed and ongoing projects, studies, plans, and economic redevelopment grant programs.

Barriers to Redevelopment and Private Investment

The City of Niagara Falls was founded on and sits adjacent to a world-famous waterfall that draws an estimated eight million visitors a year. Yet, the vacant parcels of land and empty, run-down buildings prevalent in the Downtown Gateway Area are evidence of a dramatically insufficient level of private investment, which reflects a lack of confidence in the market by outside investors and developers. The City is currently attempting to re-build its downtown core and build up its tourist infrastructure, and can only do so with new infusions of capital investment from the private sector. Another important component for private development to occur is support of the community-at-large. Based on input from attendees at the two-day design charrette, the following were identified as barriers to private development in the downtown core:

1. *Perceived lack of current comprehensive planning:* the private development community has the impression that redevelopment and investment in Niagara Falls has been pursued by organizations (whether private, public, or semi-private) on an individual basis without macro-level planning and cooperation among major stakeholders. The perception is of a transitory or "scattershot" approach to redevelopment.
2. *Lack of a central and vibrant downtown "place" or focal point for City residents and visitors:* While specific sites within or near downtown attract tourists, there is little to entice visitors to explore the area beyond the Falls and the Seneca Niagara Casino. In addition, unanimated streetscapes can generate a perception that downtown Niagara Falls is unsafe, which further discourages people from exploring or lingering in the area.
3. *Lack of economic opportunity:* Low incomes among residents of Niagara Falls (40% below the national average, with median annual income approx. \$30,000), together with a declining population are significant hurdles to attracting private investment. Exacerbating the overall population decline is the loss of younger households and high percentage of elderly households.

While item number three in the above list is outside the scope of this Strategic Plan, the City must continue to address the lack of economic opportunities for Niagara Falls residents if it hopes to attract an escalating level of private investment. Moreover, tangible movement to remove barriers one and two will contribute to economic growth and create economic opportunity. The strategic actions in the sections that follow are suggested to attract development and investment interest among private developers in the region and allow the City to focus financial and personnel resources on actions that

promote economic redevelopment and private investment in the near term, while reinforcing its current and previous economic development efforts.

Strategic Actions

To address the reasons that private development community is unwilling to risk investment in the area, the City will need to take different simultaneous approaches:

1. Refine concepts to implement the vision: With the Urban Renewal Plan and revised zoning already in place, the City has created a vision for the larger Core City Urban Renewal Area. It must continue to refine the concepts for the Core City generally and in the Downtown Gateway Area specifically. The City should first develop a series of specific and feasible projects that are well-planned and immediately actionable. Foremost among these is redesigning the John B. Daly Boulevard Extension.
2. Mobilize and coordinate stakeholders: The City must demonstrate its willingness and ability to mobilize and coordinate disparate stakeholders and investors. This is best accomplished by a long-term commitment of resources to that end. The NFURA has no full-time staff. State Legislators have simultaneously proposed expanding and shutting the Empire State Development Corporation subsidiary here. The actions of the City and the State need to clearly communicate their commitment of resources toward their stated revitalization goals. By doing so, the City/NFURA will be able to promote confidence on the part of the development community that it is worth the risk to invest for the long-term in Niagara Falls.
3. Support and solicit development proposals. As a means of engaging the private sector in redevelopment efforts, the City should begin the solicitation process for development concepts in the Downtown Gateway Area. Based on the concepts developed in the December 2010 charrette, and the prominence and visibility of Niagara Street, the City should focus on Niagara Street. The City should begin with a developer prequalification process, reaching out specifically to regional and national small developers that have worked in similarly challenged redevelopment areas.

The development process is about more than just soliciting qualifications and responses from the development community. The City/NFURA must also be proactive about convincing the development community that Niagara Falls is a good place to invest. “Walking-the-walk” is critical, but if no one else knows positive steps are being taken or the message is disjointed, then the value of those actions are diminished or lost, and the development community will not be convinced that investment is worth the enormous risk. Therefore, the City must be more deliberate and consistent in its message and delivery to show that it is creating predictability and certainty, and that it has the resources to support redevelopment.

The remainder of this section provides more detail on each of the three strategies, including actions to undertake for each strategy. The Strategic Actions will require dedicated staff to be successful. The City/NFURA should address staffing needs to ensure successful implementation of the actions.

Strategy 1: Refine and Implement the Vision for the Downtown Gateway Area

Background: To build on the City's recent redevelopment activities and to ensure that future private development further creates momentum in downtown, the City/NFURA solicited input during the two-day design charrette on specific concepts for redevelopment projects. The effort focused on Niagara Street and the extension of John B. Daly Boulevard, two corridors with high visitor traffic and therefore the greatest opportunity for economic redevelopment. (These efforts built on concepts discussed as part of previous master planning exercises.²)

The information gathered during the design charrette was used to develop several new concepts which were presented to the attendees on the afternoon of the second day and further refined to reflect community priorities, as well as development and fiscal realities. Ideally, these refined concepts would become a nucleus for private investment among area developers that leads to a ripple effect of new development spreading out from a newly revitalized Downtown Gateway Area.

To bring reality to the vision for the Downtown Gateway Area, the City/NFURA should undertake the strategies and actions listed below.

Action 1.1: Redesign the John B. Daly Boulevard Extension

The City should direct its roadway design consultant to begin *immediately* on a re-design of the John B. Daly Boulevard Extension that more accurately reflects community priorities.

The City must act quickly to redesign the John B. Daly Boulevard Extension: funding for construction must be obligated by September 2012 or it will be forfeited *and* funding spent to-date on design will have to be repaid.

John B. Daly Boulevard currently terminates at Niagara Street, but the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) plan to extend the roadway three blocks north to the Pine Avenue business district will not serve to encourage development on adjacent blocks, will significantly raise the cost of maintenance to the City, and will likely serve to further erode conditions in the adjacent Memorial Park Neighborhood. The design of the John B. Daly Boulevard Extension described in NYSDOT's March 2010 Design Report/Draft Environmental Assessment is not consistent with the redevelopment goals for the area as described in both the Memorial Park Neighborhood Revitalization Plan (2005) and the City Comprehensive Plan (2009).

Based on stakeholder input from the charrette, there was a consensus that John B. Daly Boulevard should be extended but as a more urbane, lower-speed street. The Extension should be consistent with redevelopment goals, and therefore, the Extension should be more integrated with the neighborhood district. Further, the design should allow for feasibility of practical parcel redevelopment adjacent to the roadway, as well as comfortable and safe pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, and appropriate intersection design at cross streets. The goals for a lower-speed, integrated Extension are to:

² Two prior planning studies: Toward Implementing the Strategic Master Plan at Daly Boulevard by Urban Strategies, Inc. 2006; and The CNF Comprehensive Plan, 2009.

- Create a neighborhood center and public space that can be connective and multi-functional
- Create a gathering place for residents that visitors will also find interesting and safe
- Provide for new residential opportunities, such as townhouses and condominiums
- Allow greater accessibility that can support mixed uses

NYSDOT has a policy of context-sensitive solutions, which means that the agency's projects "recognize community goals, and are designed, built and maintained to be sustainable while minimizing disruption to the community and the environment." In other words, NYSDOT will defer to local community preference over the character of the Extension that should be built.

Action 1.2: Refine and Implement the Niagara Street Concept

The City/NFURA – working together with resident stakeholders and invited economic development professionals – developed attractive concepts for Niagara Street. Because they were developed quickly during a two-day charrette, the concepts are at a sketch level of detail. To bring the concepts to life, the City/NFURA should engage an urban designer and/or landscape architect to refine the concepts with more detailed visualization and renderings. To ensure that future development proposals are consistent with any refined concept and/or City/NFURA performance requirements, concepts should be included in the RFP that NFURA and/or the City will release when economic conditions are favorable.

Niagara Street is a busy state road carrying very high traffic volumes, especially during the tourism season. As a result, the Street is the City's most prominent land and redevelopment should ensure high design standards. The street is currently built to convey high volumes of automobiles but property blight along its length does not provide for an inviting pedestrian realm.

The presence of the Seneca Casino on the south side of Niagara Street provides both an opportunity and some complications. The Casino attracts a large number of visitors, providing a built-in target audience for any redevelopment on the north side of the street. It also brings workers to the downtown area at all times of day and night.³ However, the Casino is internally focused, meaning it has limited design connection to the downtown at large. The Casino's size and scale, and especially the design of the parking garage that fronts Niagara Street, create an uninteresting walking environment along the south side of Niagara Street.

To address the limitations that currently prevent Niagara Street from being an inviting gateway to downtown, the City/NFURA Charrette developed two concepts. The two potential concepts are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Both concepts would provide a mix of uses along Niagara Street, and would provide a safe and inviting pedestrian environment. Each of the alternatives has a different design scheme. The goals of both concepts were to:

- Create an interesting and unique (street-level) experience
- Create an inviting and safe pedestrian environment with a "cozy" feel
- Ensure high design standards and a prominent design theme

³ Seneca Niagara Casino employment is just under 3000. Build out of the Seneca Casino is estimated to double employment to nearly 6000. Expansion plans are on hold.

- Provide some degree of developer control given uncertainty over the ultimate nature or pace of development at the Seneca Niagara Casino
- Include a mix of uses for both visitors and residents
- Link to the Niagara Waterfront
- Create a chain of public green spaces/parks from the waterfront district inland

The *Park Concept* (Figure 1) provides a mix of retail, office, and residential uses centered on a public plaza. The plaza is intended to host events year-round, such as farmers markets and concerts in the spring and summer, and an ice rink in the winter. The mix of development enveloping the plaza would make it feel secure by providing a reason for people to be there at all times of the day and keeping “eyes on the street.”

The *Promenade Concept* (Figure 2) provides a mix of retail, office, and residential uses along a linear pedestrian street or promenade. The narrow pedestrian street creates an intimate, cozy feeling to encourage people to shop and linger. The buildings bordering Niagara Street would have double frontages in order not to present blank walls on either side. Promenade Concept may give a higher degree of confidence to the private development community because they could control the design of both sides of the pedestrian corridor.

Both concepts assume enhanced streetscaping along Niagara Street to create a safer and more inviting pedestrian realm. Calming traffic will encourage people to stroll along Niagara Street and more importantly to visit both the north and south side of the street. Making the streetscape on Niagara Street a safe inviting walking environment, likewise helps to encourage retail and mixed uses to locate there. Providing safe and distinctive street crossings is a key part of the streetscaping solution.

Knowing that the City/NFURA favor a development typology for the Niagara Street corridor will frame expectations and provide a level of predictability to developers regarding community receptivity of a potential redevelopment proposal. This should increase investor willingness to spend additional time and effort to develop their proposals. Additionally, creating a compelling picture of how Niagara Street could look in the future should help motivate the community to engage with the City/NFURA’s economic redevelopment efforts. Development solicitation actions are discussed in Strategy 3.

Figure 1



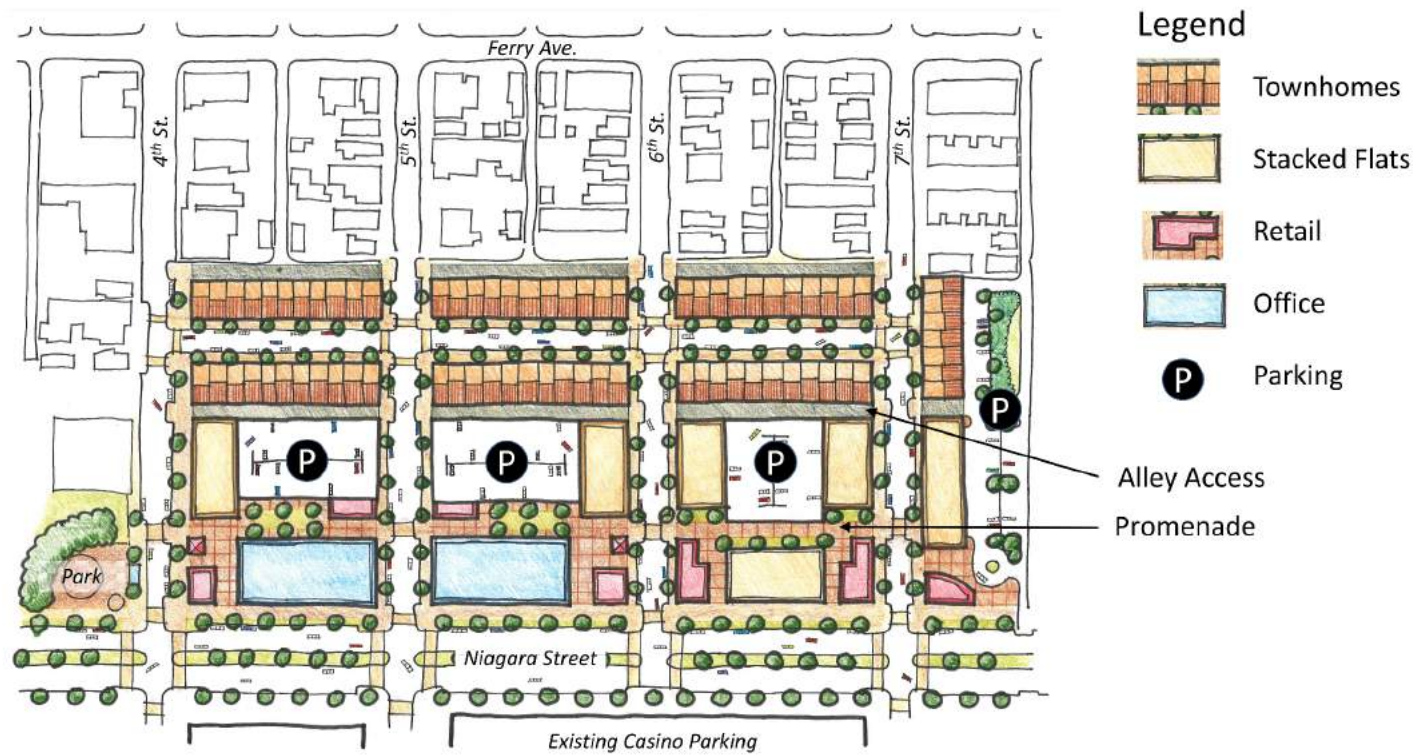
Niagara Street Frontage – Park Concept

Parsons Brinckerhoff

February 23, 2011



Figure 2



Niagara Street Frontage - Promenade Concept

Parsons Brinckerhoff

February 23, 2011



Action 1.3: Refine and Implement the John B. Daly Boulevard Extension Concept

Another product of the December design charrette was a more appropriate alternative concept for the future John B. Daly Boulevard Extension. As with the Niagara Street concept, the John B. Daly Boulevard Extension concept is at a sketch level of detail and needs to be refined. The City/NFURA should engage an urban designer and/or landscape architect to refine the John B. Daly Boulevard Extension concept with more detailed visualization and renderings. Showing how a revised John B. Daly Boulevard Extension would look with development adjacent would ensure that a revised design for the Extension meets community goals and that the goal of feasible parcel development is achievable within the context of a redesigned Daly Blvd.

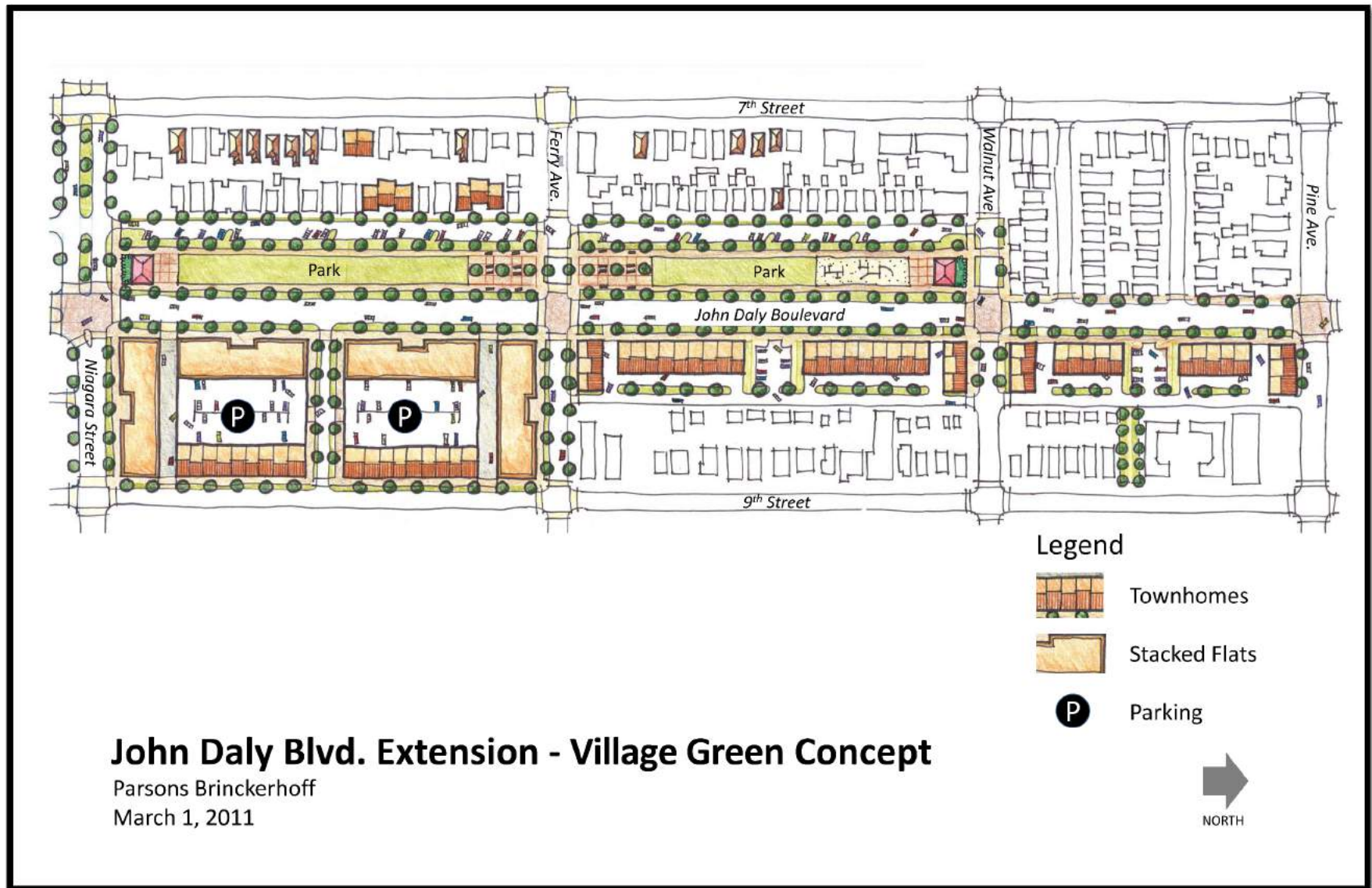
Based on input and feedback gathered during the charrette, a more attractive “Village Green” concept emerged (see Figure 3) for the area that would extend John B. Daly Boulevard as a lower-speed street that better integrates with the surrounding neighborhood and results in future parcel layout that will encourage the type of redevelopment under consideration. The goals of a concept for a lower- speed, integrated Extension are to:

- Create a neighborhood center and multi-purpose public space
- Create a gathering place for residents that visitors will also find interesting
- Provide new residential opportunities, such as townhouses and condominiums
- Allow a mix of uses

This “Village Green” concept would make it more amenable to in-fill mixed-use development on the corners of Pine Avenue and Niagara Street. The Village Green concept would also encourage the development of residential and live-work options in the blocks between them. John B. Daly Boulevard must be extended as a slower-speed, multimodal city street rather than as a high-speed arterial. The objective should be to slow traffic so as to provide a comfortable pedestrian and biking environment that can encourage pedestrians to use the corridor, or better yet to linger, rather than to avoid the corridor. Angled parking alongside the linear park would provide a buffer and slow traffic. A linear park would extend north/south between Niagara Street and Ferry Avenue, and would act as a public green with space for both permanent activities (like a skate park or ice rink) and/or the occasional programmed community event, such as holiday celebrations, festivals, or farmers markets.

The “Village Green” concept assumes high-quality public space, including streetscaping along the Extension.

Figure 3



Strategy 2: Mobilize and Coordinate Redevelopment Efforts

Background: To further demonstrate its commitment to redevelopment and that it is in control of economic redevelopment efforts, the City must mobilize and coordinate efforts at redevelopment among key stakeholders and investors. Cooperation and financial commitment among major stakeholders would reflect a comprehensive approach to economic development in Niagara Falls.

Action 2.1: Create a Downtown Area Working Group

The City/NFURA should more regularly convene a targeted group of stakeholders, possibly forming a Downtown Area Working Group tasked to be a conduit between the municipal agencies, the development community, and the local business community. This Working Group could also serve as a sounding board during project development. Creating this Working Group could give the NFURA a role in leading implementation of the City's vision, ensuring that the vision will be followed by action in areas in adjacent Core City areas that are not necessarily in the Falls Precinct. The Downtown Area Working Group would be convened with representation from the following:

- NFURA (Lead)
- Downtown Business Association (to focus on issues on the south side of the Downtown Gateway Area)
- Pine Avenue Business Group (to focus on the north side of the Downtown Gateway Area)
- Niagara Falls Planning Board
- The City Administration, particularly the Planning And Economic Development Department
- USA Niagara Economic Development Corporation
- Interested property owners
- Private investors, especially those with a regional perspective
- Seneca Nation, and/or Seneca Gaming Corporation

However, with the City/NFURA spearheading and managing a new Working Group creates an administrative burden of redevelopment efforts by the City's agencies. Since NFURA has no dedicated staff, City agency personnel, who are integral to managing such a Working Group, would need to commit to active participation. This kind of commitment would likely go a long way in giving the private sector confidence that the city is in control of the development destiny of Niagara Falls, and like USA Niagara Development Corporation, it is actively pursuing the Plan's vision with dedicated staff and resources. A Working Group with private involvement (depending on its makeup) could be very helpful to the city in understanding the particular issues that have stymied development and in avoiding situations in which the City offers inappropriate incentives for the development contemplated.

The Working Group should initially focus specifically on the 'Downtown Gateway Area,' and, with the City/NFURA, pursue specific actions that would methodically increase the pace of economic redevelopment efforts in this area. An early initiative for the Working Group to consider is driving the development solicitation process for projects in the Downtown Gateway Area.

Involving the Downtown Area Working Group with other stakeholder/investor groups in a coordinated effort would further demonstrate the City's leadership and commitment to economic renewal. Another goal for the Working Group to consider leading on is creating an education and job training plan of action that will lead to increasing income levels among Niagara Falls residents. The education and training programs could be targeted to specific industries that the City would attract such as cultural tourism, hospitality, back office, logistics, or green-manufacturing.

Action 2.2: Encourage Coordinated Investment

The success of any economic redevelopment actions in the Core City or in the Downtown Gateway Area specifically will rest on a long-term commitment to projects and strong backing from the private sector. The City/NFURA should encourage coordination among investors for larger investment projects. The City/NFURA-coordinated group of investors might be developed for the purpose of soliciting equity contributions among stakeholder organizations and other state and federal sources and leveraging it by bonding the initial investment into a significant economic development fund.

One type of coordinated investment fund that has been used in other areas of the country (such as Cleveland, Detroit, Cincinnati, the San Francisco Bay Area, Pittsburgh, and Appalachian Kentucky) is the Corporate Civic Investment Fund.⁴ There are different models of Corporate Civic Investment Funds, but all have the common goal of channeling private resources directly to community development initiatives. In many areas, Funds were developed as a result of ongoing, long-term economic revitalization efforts. These private funds often measure investment success based on a "double bottom-line" of market return and community benefits (such as job creation).

Fund structures vary. They can be for-profit or non-profit, and are sometimes affiliated with a non-governmental parent organization whose mission is economic redevelopment. Some coordinated investment funds are part of a family of funds, with each member of the family focusing on different initiatives. The fund's mission and charter drive the types of projects and programs that the fund will invest in. Sources of capital can include banks, private corporations, foundations, individuals, or even government funding (if the Fund qualifies). Depending on how the fund is set up and/or the types of projects it invests in, investors may qualify for tax credits. Funds have a dedicated board and staff to identify and manage investment projects and monitor fund performance over time.

A Corporate Civic Investment Fund for Niagara Falls could be used for a variety of purposes such as:

- Infrastructure development, such as structured parking facilities, park/green space, recreational facilities
- Workforce training
- Subsidizing retail merchants for a period of time

⁴ Hosier, Amy. "Corporate Civic Investment Funds: New Models for Community Development Finance?" March 2003. Retrieved August 3, 2011 from: http://www.federalreserve.gov/communityaffairs/national/CA_Conf_SusCommDev/pdf/hosieramy.pdf

- Programs and Activities planning to activate the envisioned public spaces (e.g., farmer's market, concerts, outdoor movies, children's activities, arts and cultural activities)
- Gap financing (i.e. low interest loans) for a private development, along with other loan types

Such coordinated investment could be encouraged through solicitation in a RFQ/RFP stage of the redevelopment process. Ideally, a coordinated group of investors would include local and regional investors, including local corporations and foundations, along with potential national investors. The City/NFURA should encourage interested parties to support and strengthen the Downtown and Pine Avenue Business Groups.

The City/NFURA's role in promoting a Corporate Civic Investment Fund should include continued identification of potential projects and programs that could tangibly address economic revitalization; research on Fund types and structure; and outreach to potential investors.

Action 2.3: Partner with the Seneca Nation

The Seneca Nation is more than a neighboring stakeholder; they are a potential partner with intrinsic interest in the success of downtown initiatives and potential resources to implement solutions. The City/NFURA should actively partner with the Seneca Nation in coordinating investment and development downtown, such as workforce housing options in the downtown area for Casino workers, the need for coordinated development efforts, use of design standards and guidelines for a cohesive and integrated downtown, cross promotion, among many other potential opportunities.

Action 2.4: Engage Regularly with the Private Sector

The private sector can be a source of information and investment that works with the city. To promote cooperation between NFURA and the private sector development community, the City/NFURA should engage more regularly with the private development community, in the form of one-on-one meetings, group briefing sessions on City/NFURA development activities, design charrettes, etc., to achieve the following:

- Bring in professionals and practitioners to learn best practices from other areas
- Identify opportunities
- Work as a sounding board for ideas and building consensus around proposed actions

As a key part of this engagement, the City/NFURA should reach out to developers with experience in redevelopment of blighted areas of former industrial cities, such as those involved with the revitalization of Pittsburgh and the Cleveland waterfront. These developers will be familiar with the issues associated with redevelopment of blighted areas and ways of working through them.

Strategy 3: Support and Solicit Development

Background: Niagara Falls has been diligent in creating a foundation for sustainable revitalization of the Downtown Gateway Area. Clarity in policy and selecting the most appropriate solicitation process that best meets the needs of the City/NFURA will ensure the foundation will be built upon successfully. As a means of engaging the private sector in redevelopment efforts, the City should begin the solicitation

process for development concepts in the Downtown Gateway Area. Due to its methodological process to date and desire to create a new brand for the Downtown Gateway Area and sustainable revitalization efforts, a developer prequalification process for drawing developer interest is recommended.

However, the development solicitation process is just one part of what should be ongoing, cohesive efforts that show that the City/NFURA is focused and serious about revitalization. In addition to soliciting development proposals, several policies to support the solicitation process are recommended. The City/NFURA should signal certainty to the development and lender community by publicizing its ongoing redevelopment activities, and by repositioning/rebranding the Downtown Gateway Area through a partnership of the City and private sector business. In addition, the City/NFURA should consider the staffing resources needed for long-term redevelopment efforts.

Action 3.1: Conduct a Developer Prequalification Process

The City should begin with a developer prequalification process, reaching out specifically to regional and national small developers that have worked in similarly challenged redevelopment areas, such as Pittsburgh and Cleveland. In response to a Request for Qualifications (RFQ), developers would submit a qualifications package to the URA to be short-listed for future RFPs. They would likely need to update financial data to their packages on an annual basis.

A developer pre-qualification process allows the City/NFURA to be more directly in control of selecting a specific site based on its own developed criteria for catalyst success. The criteria may include city policies in addition to market conditions, financing availability for specific uses, etc. This process also works well for selecting one developer to redevelop multiple properties within the URA boundary. Developers may want to form teams or consortia to prequalify for the redevelopment work. This could allow local developers who specialize in different types of development to team and offer a full suite of development services to the City/NFURA.

The pre-qualification process provides the greatest flexibility for the City/NFURA to prequalify developers for a wide breadth of markets and development typologies in the prequalification phase. The pre-qual process also indicates certainty and commitment to the development community if RFPs are released on an on-going basis.

A draft RFP has been prepared and can be issued when economic conditions become more favorable to redevelopment actions. When the RFP is released, it would focus on the specific proposed parcel/s within the boundary in regards to uses, financing, and site design and architecture. Based on the concepts developed in the December 2010 charrette, and the prominence and visibility of Niagara Street, the RFP focuses on redevelopment solicitations for Niagara Street parcels.

Action 3.2: Publicize City Redevelopment Activities

The City/NFURA should develop a coordinated public relations campaign to publicize its recent and ongoing activities in support of its redevelopment efforts. The campaign should be focused on reaching the development and investment community broadly, but be accessible to all members of the community.

The perception among stakeholders at the two-day design charrette was that the City/NFURA is not leading its own redevelopment or that it reacts too slowly to potential development opportunities. In reality, the City and USA Niagara are working together in a very coordinated and effective way and have undertaken targeted initiatives in the core downtown area that do demonstrate the City's commitment to creating a strong, well-designed downtown that can and will attract residents and visitors as well as investment. These initiatives include projects in the Core City, a set of policy changes meant to further spur economic redevelopment, and various assistance programs.

Signaling to the development and lender communities that the City/NFURA is interested in and proactive about attracting development to Downtown is one of the most important components to revitalization efforts; it indicates some predictability and certainty in an otherwise uncertain market. Clearly, the City/NFURA needs to do a better job of publicizing these recent ongoing and successful efforts by getting the word out in a more sophisticated and consistent fashion, and to a broader audience. To that end, the City/NFURA should develop a coordinated public relations campaign.

At a minimum, the City should issue press releases and update its website to reflect the latest status of projects as well as particular milestones reached. More proactive means of publicity include road shows to regional development and lender communities; virtual road show videos; quarterly "downtown investment breakfasts" with the Mayor; and special events, such as hosting an annual forum of the Urban Land Institute on "Creating Value in Downtown" or hosting Regional Roundtables with local and regional developers and Chambers.

Projects and planning initiatives that should be part of an on-going, active outreach effort to publicize City redevelopment activities are included in Appendix II.

Action 3.3: Engage in a Repositioning/Rebranding Effort

To signal to the development and lender communities that "things are changing" in the Downtown Gateway Area, and that the City has a vision for the future, the City/NFURA should conduct a repositioning and branding exercise for the area. A repositioning and branding exercise should be conducted in several phases. An initial repositioning strategy and branding concept should be completed by the City/NFURA or local business partnership (such as the Downtown Area Working Group). Once a developer is selected, a second, more thorough, repositioning and branding exercise should relate to the specific project, but also apply to the entire Downtown Gateway Area that highlights revitalization efforts and existing amenities and conveniences.

Action 3.4: Evaluate Staffing Resources Needed

The City/NFURA need to consider what staffing resources they will need to carry out a long term redevelopment effort. Some of the resources needed include:

- Coordination of the RFQ/RFP can be addressed by a staff member. A selection committee, perhaps comprising the Downtown Area Working Group, will need to be assembled and managed;
- An executive staff member will be needed to negotiate the terms of the deal;

- Negotiation support from planning and finance staff to run program development, and sources and uses scenarios;
- Staff to manipulate pro formas;
- Contracted or in-house legal support and a financial advisor in drafting an agreement; and
- And once an agreement is executed, management and maintenance of the bonds, or developer reimbursement packages will be needed.

Fees can be structured in the agreement to self-fund the resources needed to see a redevelopment project through the life of its financing, potentially 30 years.

Conclusion

The Niagara Falls Urban Renewal Agency, the City of Niagara Falls, and their partner agencies have invested time and money to develop a vision for the Core City Urban Renewal Area. This Strategic Plan defines a set of realistic, feasible, immediate actions that the City can undertake to continue economic redevelopment activities and encourage private investment in downtown that fall under three strategies:

- Strategy 1: Refine and Implement the Vision for the Downtown Gateway Area
 - Action 1.1: Redesign the John B. Daly Boulevard Extension
 - Action 1.2: Refine and Implement the Niagara Street Concept
 - Action 1.3: Refine and Implement the John B. Daly Boulevard Extension Concept
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 - Action 3.2: Publicize City Redevelopment Activities
 - Action 3.3: Engage in a Repositioning/Rebranding Effort
 - Action 3.4: Evaluate Staffing Resources Needed

By refining and implementing the concepts for the Core City and Downtown Gateway Area (Strategy 1), mobilizing the larger community to ensure implementation happens (Strategy 2), and building investor confidence and soliciting development proposals (Strategy 3), the City can build momentum for ongoing actions while moving to ‘fast forward’ other economic renewal strategies throughout the Core City.

APPENDIX I:
Design Charrette Summary



Waterfront Village Center
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Notes

Design Charrette for Daly Boulevard extension and Niagara Street

Notes

Date: December 14-15, 2010
Location: The Conference Center of Niagara Falls

Attendees:
See list at end

Purpose:
This design charrette was held to solicit input from community leaders, developers, and financiers to help contribute to revitalization efforts in the core city urban renewal area, and specifically to identify concepts that would stimulate economic development along Niagara Street and maximize development potential of the Daly Boulevard extension.

Overview:
The intent of the two-day design charrette was to solicit information from several different groups about how development around the extension and along Niagara Street should look and feel and how the Daly Boulevard extension should proceed. In addition, information on what would be needed to encourage desirable development to move forward was also gathered.

The information gathered during the design charrette was used to develop several concepts for development which were presented to the attendees on the afternoon of the second day. Based on the feedback, two concepts will be refined for inclusion in a Draft Action Plan and Draft Request for Proposals to be developed in early 2011.

Outcomes:
Several points of consensus were reached during the charrette that have an important bearing on the Draft Urban Renewal Action Plan content and approach:

1. Redevelopment efforts within the study area should focus on Niagara Street, the intersection of John B. Daly Boulevard and Niagara Street, and a future intersection of John B. Daly Boulevard and Pine Avenue.
2. The design of the John B. Daly Boulevard Extension described in the March 2010 Design Report/Draft Environmental Assessment is not consistent with the redevelopment goals for the area. To be consistent with redevelopment goals, the Extension should be integrated with the neighborhood to allow for feasibility of parcel redevelopment adjacent to the roadway, comfortable and safe pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, and appropriate intersection design at cross streets.
3. The Action Plan should describe the City's existing redevelopment efforts, including completed projects, ongoing projects, and ongoing plans, and include information on the City's ability to work with redevelopment efforts proposed by the development community.



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Summary of Charrette:

Tom DeSantis provided background about recent studies and City actions that were setting the stage for development, as follows:

- ▶ NYSDOT's John B. Daly Boulevard Extension Design Report (Summer 2009)
 - Recommended a two-lane boulevard between Niagara Street and Pine Avenue
 - Design criteria emphasize vehicle throughput
 - Recommended 40 mph design speed
 - Little attention paid to land adjacent to extension
- ▶ City of Niagara Falls updated zoning ordinance (April 2009)
 - Makes land use controls consistent with vision Designated Core City area as Urban Renewal area
 - Commercial zoning in Core City
 - Established Design District (includes Niagara street)
- ▶ City of Niagara Fall's Core City Urban Renewal Plan (September 2009)
 - Replaced expired urban renewal plans
 - Established new legal framework for action and plan consistency

After the presentation of background information, attendees were asked for their input on how the Daly Boulevard extension should proceed, and about development around the extension and along Niagara Street.

Summary of input:

The following area items of consensus on development in the area:

- ▶ Strengths of the Area
 - The Falls
 - Good historic character
 - Fine-grained street layout & walkability
 - 3rd Street - Pine Avenue – Memorial Park
 - Colleges, Hospital
 - Cultural & arts groups (NACC)
- ▶ Why Development Isn't Happening:
 - Perception of safety
 - Nothing for younger generation to do here (jobs and entertainment)
 - Concern over lack of demand
 - Cost of constructing housing is more than buyers are willing to pay
- ▶ What Should Development Look Like
 - Daly Boulevard, if extended at all, should be integrated into neighborhood rather than simply be a connector between Niagara Street and Pine Avenue.
 - Village/cozy feel
 - Boutique-style shopping
 - Places for both locals and tourists
 - Variety of updated housing options
- ▶ What would help facilitate development?



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- Comprehensive vision from the City
- Safer feel to area (resulting from foot patrol, police sub-station, etc.)
- Increased opportunities for younger generation, such as vocational training
- Eighth Street provides a large redevelopment opportunity
- Proactivity from the City when opportunity is there

Detailed discussion items

The following table shows all of the feedback received and from whom the feedback came.

	Community Leaders	Development Community	Finance Community
Strengths			
Walkability	●		
Transit access	●		
Hospital	●		
Colleges	●		
Memorial Park architecture/character	●		
Main Street	●		
3 rd Street	●		
Pine Avenue	●		
Important properties: Women's shelter, Board of Education, Post Office, Older homes along Main Street	●		
Impediments to development			
Safety issues/ perception of safety issues/aesthetics	●	●	●
Negativity	●		
Absentee landlords/ speculators	●		
Lack of jobs for young people	●		
Need to take city out of the process			●
Costs to build housing are greater than market for rent or sale will bear			●
What should development look like?			
<i>Elements common to both locations</i>			
Concern over ongoing maintenance planning/responsibility/funding	●		
Village/boutique/unique feel/small scale/quaint/cozy	●	●	●
Strong community	●		
Good housing values	●		
Technology incubator	●		
Movie theaters	●		
Grocery store	●		
Open/green space/pocket parks	●		
Local history/culture/museums	●		
No bars/taverns	●		
Ignore Niagara/Daly and focus downtown			●



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	Community Leaders	Development Community	Finance Community
Need <i>new</i> residential opportunities		●	
Mixed uses can't be supported – separate tourism/commercial and residential			●
Consider interim steps that are small scale, but change the aesthetics/perception of safety			●
Need to bring more people into the area/region (i.e., immigration)			
<i>Daly Extension</i>			
Should be a gateway to City		●	
No need for extension		●	●
Quality streetscape	●		
Houses (not garages) fronting on new road	●		
Two-family/single-family homes	●		
Connect housing east-to-west	●		
Townhouses			●
Connect with Ferry & Walnut	●		
30 mph speed/pedestrian friendly	●	●	
Integrate with neighborhood, rather than dividing it in half	●		
Use property that backs up to the Daly Extension	●		
Concentrate development on corners first/build near Pine/Niagara first	●	●	●
Catalyst site: Niagara Street near Daly			●
<i>Niagara Street</i>			
Desired uses			
Entertainment/performing arts	●		
Offices for Canadian businesses	●		
New, affordable housing	●		
Boutiques/small shops	●		
Boutique hotels	●		
Live/work units	●		
Consider parking	●		
Slow traffic down/narrow the road	●		●
Ongoing maintenance planning/responsibility/funding	●		
Ice-skating rink	●		
Consider programs to create incentives for long-term living through rehab	●		
Vocational courses (home rehab and other)	●		
Catalyst site: Niagara Street near 3 rd		●	



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	Community Leaders	Development Community	Finance Community
In order for development to happen...			
More aggressive city involvement	●	●	
Demonstration of market demand		●	
Public subsidy/financing		●	
Commercial tenants		●	
Scale and mix of parking must be flexible		●	
Clear, comprehensive vision from city		●	●



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Presentation of concepts:

Based on the information gathered from Community Leaders, the Development Community, and the Finance Community, the Steering Committee and consultant team developed several concepts for presentation to the attendees. The concepts are as follows:

Niagara Street:

Concept 1: Linear development

Concept 2: Small Village Green

Concept 3: Pedestrian Street/"Paseo"

Daly Boulevard Extension:

Concept 1: Village Green

Concept 2: Parkway

Sketches and images that were presented to the attendees to illustrate the concepts are included in this summary, following the summary of feedback.

Feedback on concepts

Niagara Street

Feedback on Niagara Street concepts focused on two issues: the street as a place and the ability to create a place since the Seneca do not have to abide by development and quality guidelines. With regard to creating a place on Niagara Street, the group discussed the need to ensure that people can cross Niagara Street easily between the Casino and whatever sort of development occurs on the north side of the street. Thus, enhanced pedestrian crossings were thought to be needed. Several suggestions to address pedestrian crossings were using different types of paving/pavers in the street, creating pedestrian refuge spaces, or using roundabouts.

Regarding development guidelines, attendees mentioned that Niagara Street is the City's most prominent land, and design controls should insist on design quality and a prominent design theme. This should be discussed with the Seneca and agreed-upon guidelines should be established so that developers will be able to develop the north blocks with certainty. As it stands now, more structured parking garages could be located along Niagara Street, producing out-of-scale issues and an un-inspiring design character along Niagara Street.

All Niagara Street concepts were generally well-received, but discussion focused most favorably on the Pedestrian Street/Paseo concept.

- The Pedestrian Street/Paseo best created the "cozy" feel that was one of the evaluation criteria.
- The Pedestrian Street/Paseo best created a safe space for people to walk.
- Compared with the concepts that fronted on Niagara Street, the Pedestrian Street/Paseo was more attractive to the development community because it would allow them to control design of both sides of the pedestrian corridor. Development that fronts on Niagara Street was thought to be riskier because development controls do not extend to the south side of Niagara Street, i.e., on Seneca Land.



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- The Development Community noted that up-front master planning of such a concept would be very expensive and might create the need to allow multiple developers to work together on a single package.
- Alternatively, developers might prefer to work on the north side of the pedestrian street first (i.e., on the 'back' of the lot) and then finish the other side (the 'front' of the lot) after some success could be gauged. A phased development approach could incorporate both the small "Village Green" concept and the Paseo/Pedestrian Street. The "Village Green" would be developed first and then filled in on the south side of the lot to create the pedestrian corridor.
- The need to accommodate existing business was also discussed.

Daly Boulevard Extension:

Feedback was universally positive on the extension of Daly Boulevard as a lower-speed street that integrates with the surrounding neighborhood. Attendees hope that people will stop and look around as they drive along Daly Boulevard, rather than simply passing through.

Attendees liked the ideas of townhouses and/or apartments fronting on green space. Although both concepts for Daly Boulevard were generally well-received, there was a preference for the "Village Green" concept:

- The "Village Green" concept would allow the creation of a flexible new public space to hold special events to attract a larger audience or smaller events for locals (such as a farmers market). It would more successfully draw people in from the surrounding area.
- Residential development fronting on a Village Green would create passive security that would give a safer feel to the area.

Members of the Development Community felt that four stories of development would be needed (two stories of townhouses, and two stories of apartments above) but that the need for elevators would have to be considered in fleshing out a concept in more detail. They also appreciated the City's flexibility on parking standards in the area, and felt that market-driven parking would make more sense than minimum parking requirements. They felt that residential development will have to lead the development phasing, given lack of demand for retail under the current conditions.

Other feedback on development was as follows:

- Consider materials to use in developing plazas, etc., in open spaces given that ground freezes and thaws
- Ensure that a maintenance plan for open space is included in any development plan
- Consider design standards that are clear but have some flexibility in order to ensure that new development integrates well with existing development.

The "Village Green" concept will be more fully developed for inclusion in later materials.

Development Process

Members of the Development Community provided the following feedback to guide development of future Request(s) for Proposals (RFPs):

- Issue multiple RFPs for different projects/project areas rather than a single RFP for the entire core area



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- Allow flexibility in terms of lot size
- Allow flexibility in terms of developing one block or multiple blocks
- City should include information on sources of public financing or support that are applicable and be clear in conveying the message that the City could be a partner in applying for those programs
- City must convey a clear message on the overall vision for Downtown Niagara Falls, and how the particular project in question is part of that overall vision
- Include information on recent development success stories, such as Third Street redevelopment or the Conference Center/Old Falls Street streetscape enhancements
- Include information on USA Niagara and its role, given that it is such a unique entity

The City would need solid proposals before moving forward on land assembly.

Next steps:

The consultant team will refine the Daly Boulevard “Village Green” concept and the Niagara Street “Small Village Green” and “Pedestrian Street/Paseo” concepts.

A Draft Action Plan and Draft Request for Proposals will be the next work products and will incorporate information gathered during the design charrette.



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Attendees:

Name	Organization	Tuesday morning	Tuesday afternoon	Wednesday wrap-up
Steering Committee				
Tom DeSantis	City of Niagara Falls, Planning	●	●	●
Joe Collura	City of Niagara Falls, Economic Development		●	●
Paul Tronolone	USA Niagara	●		●
Holly Ortman	USA Niagara	●		●
Community				
Rick Smith	Niagara Falls Planning Board	●		●
John Ambrose Cooper	Memorial Park Neighborhood Block Club			●
Linda Gibbons	Memorial Park Neighborhood Block Club	●		
Ruth Cooper	Memorial Park Neighborhood Block Club	●		
Kathie Kudela	NACC	●		●
Louis Townsend	NACC	●		
Ron Anderluh	Niagara Street Business Association	●		
Ann Marie Tucker	Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center	●		
Rick Znew	NF Urban Renewal Board	●		
Janet Markarian	NF Urban Renewal Board	●		●
Development				
Shawn Webber	Jefferson Apartments	●		●
Skip Cerio	The CRS Companies	●		●
Mark Blackburn	Seneca Gaming Corp	●		●
John Cleary	Eastern Hospitality	●		
Carl Montante, Jr.	Uniland Development	●		
Denise M. Juron-Borgese	Ciminelli Real Estate	●		
Finance				
Sheldon Berlow	Pyramid Brokerage		●	
Ralph Aversa	Key Bank		●	
Gary Coscia	Largo Real Estate Advisors		●	
Stephen Hunt	Hunt Commercial Real Estate		●	

Steering Committee

Tom DeSantis, City of Niagara Falls

Paul Tronolone, USA Niagara Development Corporation

Consultant team:

Marsha Kaiser, PB PlaceMaking

Tom Hester, PB PlaceMaking

Shannon Yadsco, PB PlaceMaking

Mark Tytko, Parsons Brinckerhoff

Amy Ford-Wagner, Parsons Brinckerhoff

City of Niagara Falls Action Plan for City Core

Design Charrette
December 14–15, 2010
Presentation

What's Been Done

- ▶ **John B. Daly Boulevard Extension Design Report (Summer 2009)**
 - Recommended a two-lane boulevard between Niagara Street and Pine Avenue
 - Little attention paid to land adjacent to extension
- ▶ **Updated zoning ordinance (April 2009)**
 - Makes land use controls consistent with vision Designated Core City area as Urban Renewal area
 - Commercial zoning in Core City
 - Established Design District (includes Niagara street)
- ▶ **Niagara Falls Core City Urban Renewal Plan (September 2009)**
 - Replaced expired urban renewal plans
 - Established new legal framework for action and plan consistency

Design Charrette

What We Heard


► Strengths of the Area

- The Falls
- Good historic character
- Fine-grained street layout & walkability
- 3rd Street – Pine Avenue – Memorial Park
- Colleges, Hospital
- Cultural & arts groups (NACC)

► Why Development Isn't Happening:

- Perception of safety
- Nothing for younger generation to do here (jobs and entertainment)
- Concern over lack of demand
- Cost of constructing housing is more than buyers are willing to pay

What We Heard

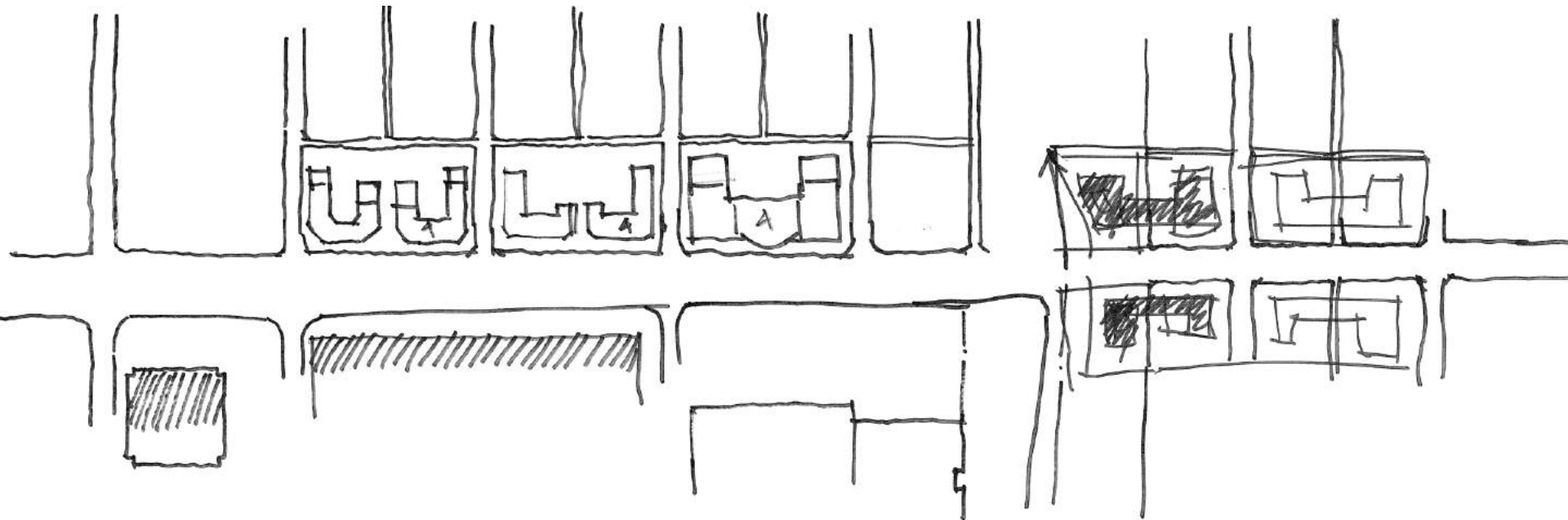
- ▶ What Should Development Look Like
 - Village/cozy feel
 - Boutique-style shopping
 - Places for both locals and tourists
 - Variety of updated housing options
 - ▶ What would help facilitate development?
 - Comprehensive vision from the City
 - Safer feel to area (resulting from foot patrol, police sub-station, etc.)
 - Increased opportunities for younger generation, such as vocational training
 - Eighth Street provides a large redevelopment opportunity
 - Proactivity from the City when opportunity is there
- 

Concepts

Niagara Street

Linear Development

- ▶ Mix of uses (retail/office/residential) along Niagara Street from 3rd Street to Daly Boulevard
- ▶ Streetscaping important to create an inviting walking environment
- ▶ Treatments on south side of Niagara could make casino parking garage more pleasant



Linear Development

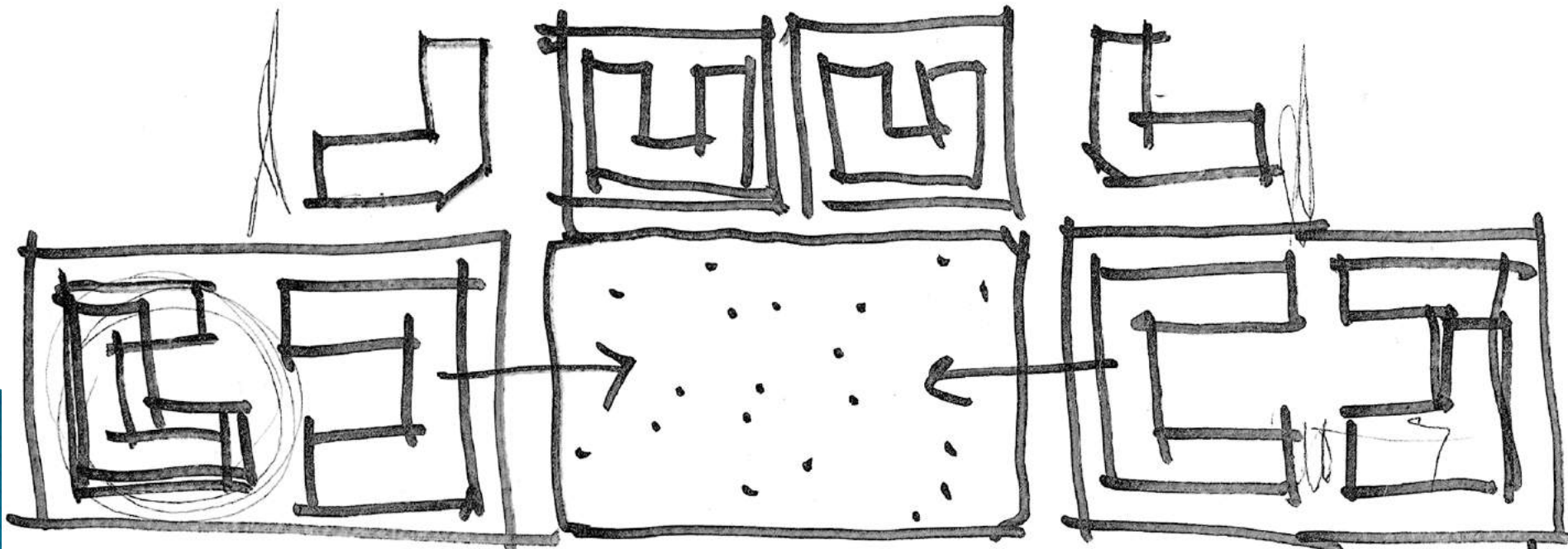


These images are from different locations and give an idea of how linear mixed-use development and streetscaping on Niagara Street could look.



Small Village Green

- ▶ Mix of uses (retail/office/residential) centered on a public plaza
- ▶ Plaza could host events year round
 - Farmers market in spring/summer
 - Ice rink in winter
- ▶ Development around plaza makes it feel secure by keeping “eyes on the street”



Small Village Green



One Boulder Plaza, Boulder, Colorado – Summer and winter

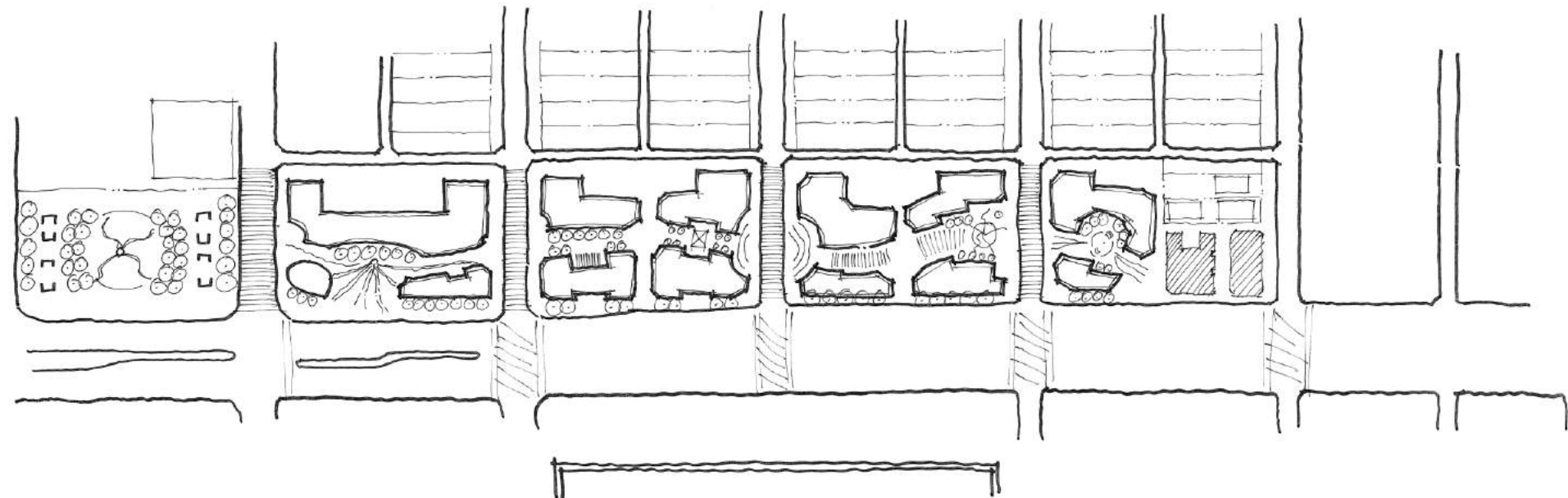
These images give an idea of how development around a plaza on Niagara Street could look.



Giddings Plaza, Chicago, Illinois

Pedestrian Street

- ▶ Mix of uses (retail/office/residential) surround a pedestrian street (or “paseo”)
- ▶ Narrow pedestrian street creates an intimate feel where people like to shop and linger
- ▶ Buildings bordering Niagara Street would have double frontages in order not to present blank walls



Pedestrian Street



Iowa City Pedestrian Mall, Iowa



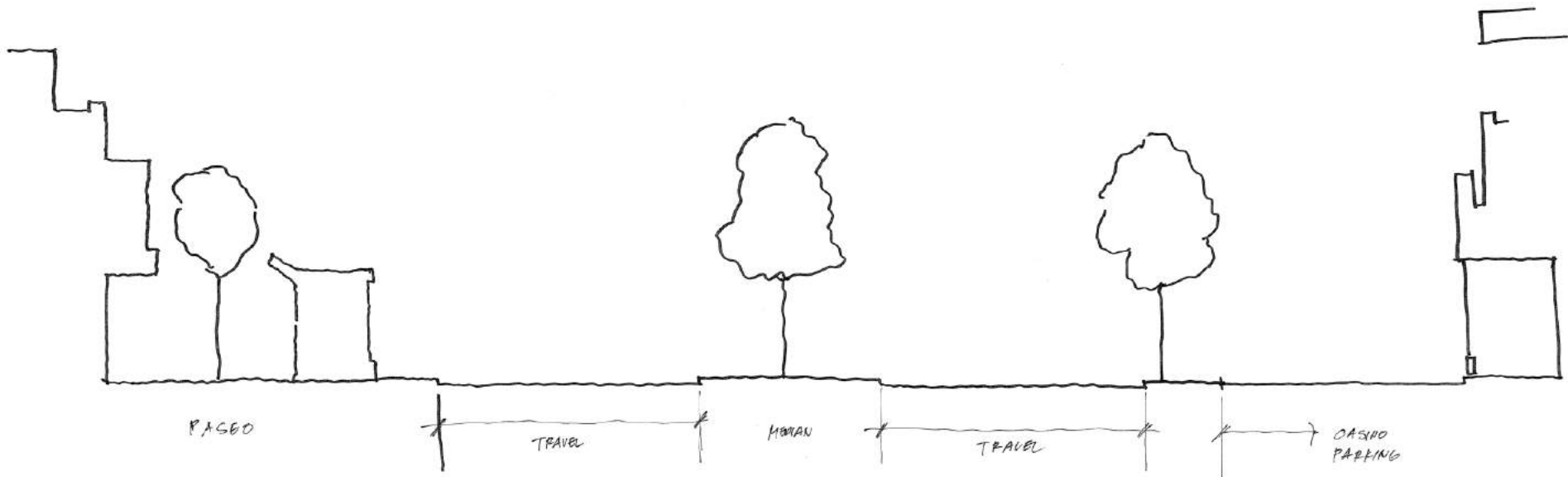
Pearl Street Mall, Boulder, Colorado

These images give an idea of how a pedestrian street could look.



Sparks Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Niagara Street cross-section with Paseo

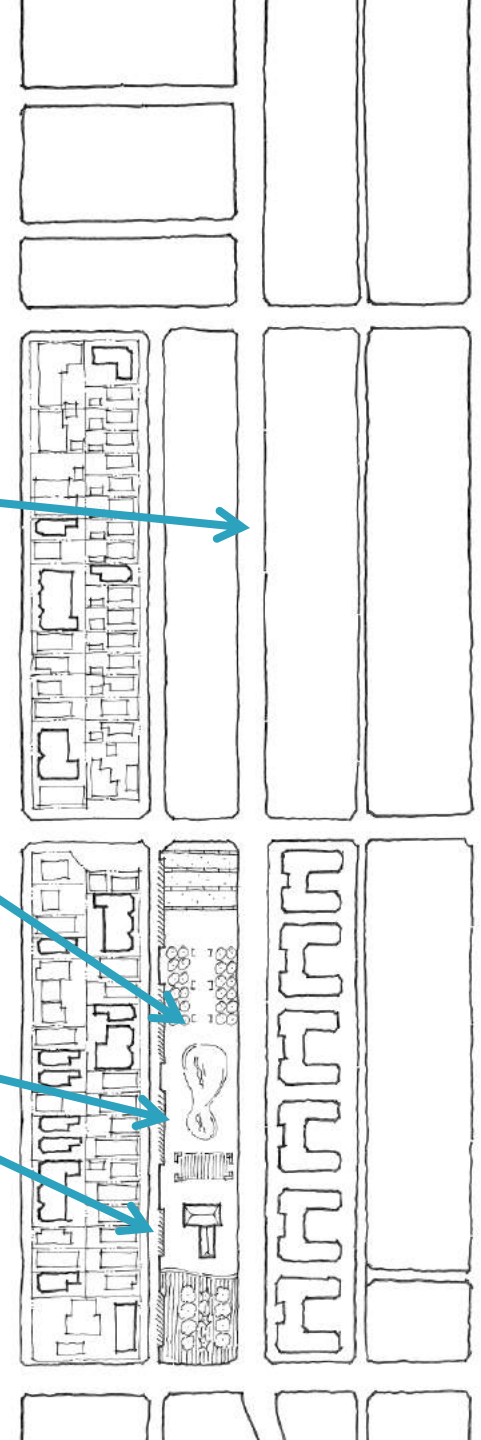


Concepts

John B. Daly Boulevard Extension

Village Green

- ▶ Daly Blvd extended, but as a slower-speed, multimodal boulevard rather than high-speed thoroughfare to slow traffic and encourage people to stop rather than simply pass through
- ▶ Linear park acts a village green with space for both permanent activities (like a skate park/ice rink) and programmed events, such as holiday celebrations, farmers market, etc.
- ▶ Angled parking alongside linear park provides a buffer and slows traffic
- ▶ Mixed-use development fronts on Daly Blvd



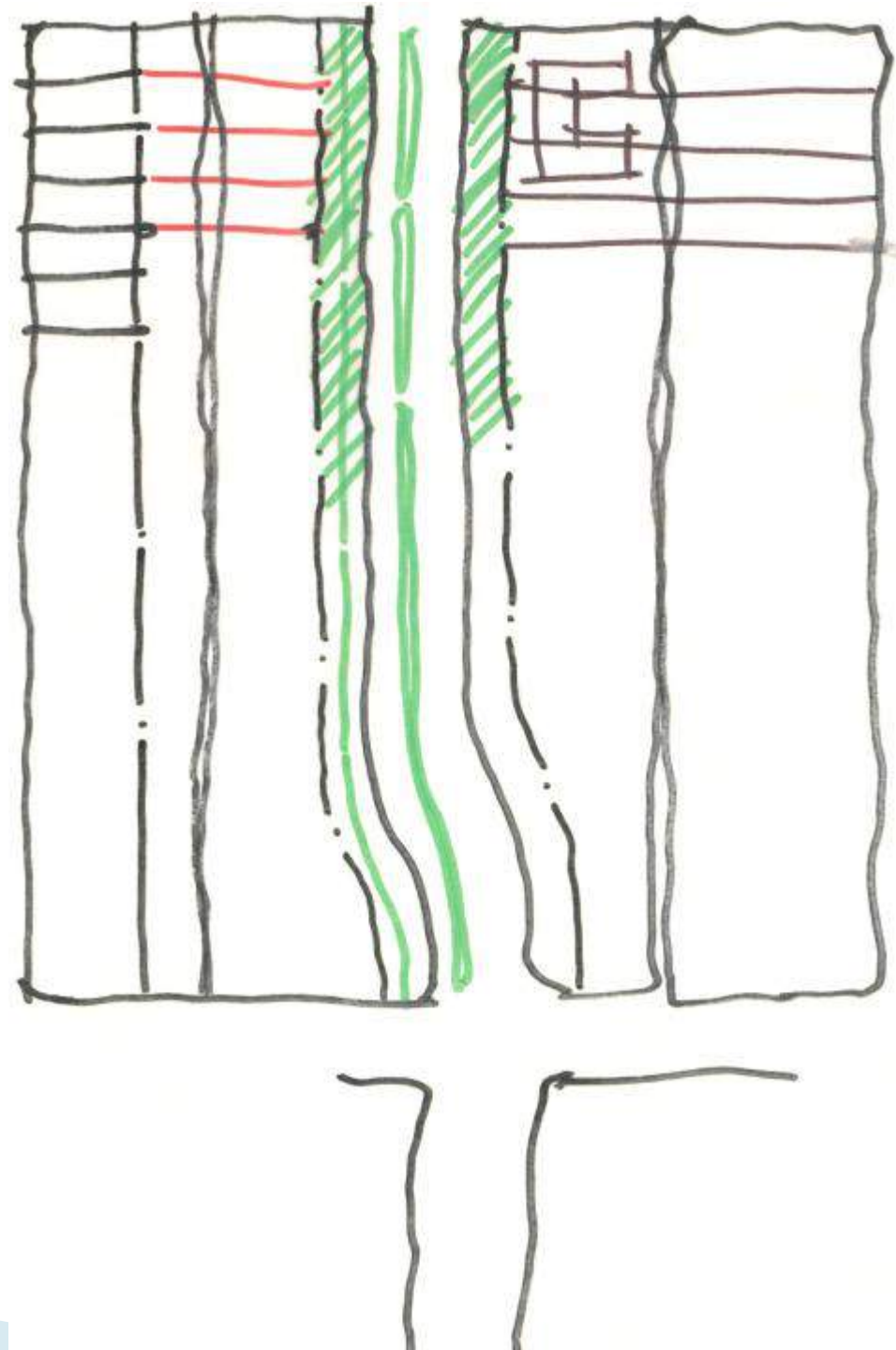
The Village Green

These images from Bidwell Parkway in Buffalo give an idea of how a Daly Blvd Village Green could look and function.



Parkway

- ▶ Daly Blvd extended as grand multimodal boulevard with landscaped median to slow traffic
- ▶ Wide green strips on either side of boulevard act as narrow linear public spaces
- ▶ Townhouses would front on Daly Blvd



The Parkway



These images are from different locations and give an idea of how a Daly Blvd Parkway concept could look.

What Do You Think?

Next Steps

What Comes Next

- ▶ Refine concepts
- ▶ Develop Action Plan
- ▶ Develop Request for Proposals to issue to development community

APPENDIX II:
Recent City Planning Activities

Projects

Recent public initiatives to revitalize downtown Niagara Falls through urban design and catalyst projects include:

- *Old Falls Street Re-opening*: In May 2009, Old Falls Street, the main connection between Niagara Falls State Park and Seneca Niagara Casino, reopened after being closed for over three decades. The reopening followed a three-year, \$12 million revitalization effort that included streetscape improvements such as historic streetlamps and pedestrian-friendly street furniture, removal of the old Wintergarden building, and full landscaping renovation. Old Falls Street now hosts public events and creates an inviting way for visitors to the falls to be enticed into downtown Niagara Falls.



Old Falls Street and Conference Center (courtesy USA Niagara)

- *Red Coach Inn expansion project*: \$900,000 expansion project to historic inn that added 12 new luxury guest rooms to the inn which has been an institution on Buffalo Avenue since 1923. The project was supported, in part, with grant funds from the state and the city.
- *Third Street Entertainment District*: This project, complete in October 2005, comprised a \$3.7 million comprehensive streetscape and road reconstruction initiative, including replacement of water mains, widened sidewalks, landscaping and street trees, special branding/district identity markers, new lighting, and street furniture.



Third Street Entertainment District

- *Conference Center Niagara Falls*: The Conference Center opened in June 2004 and features event spaces, meeting rooms, and a grand ballroom, for a variety of events.
- *Crowne Plaza Hotel Investment Project*: USA Niagara provided reimbursement funding for Interior and exterior capital improvements to assist in revitalizing the 400-room hotel
- *The Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel* opened in March 2006, with 600 hotel rooms and several types of gaming. The casino/hotel employs about 3,000 people.
- *Niagara Falls Culinary Institute*: This project will renovate a portion of the former Rainbow Center



Crowne Plaza

Mall to turn it into a Culinary Institute under Niagara County Community College's culinary arts, hospitality management and tourism/event management programs. The Institute is scheduled to open in Fall 2012 and will include a student-operated restaurant and pastry/deli facilities, a college bookstore, and a "Niagara Wine Trail" shop.

- *Robert Moses Parkway North and South Reconfiguration*: The goal of reconfiguring Robert Moses Parkway is to re-connect downtown Niagara Falls to the upper Niagara River by removing the elevated embankment and replacing it with a traffic circle at the John B. Daly Boulevard entrance into the city. Doing so will open up views of the river and improve pedestrian access to the waterfront.
- *Niagara Experience Center*: This project – currently under development – will be designed to use technology to allow visitors to experience Niagara Falls virtually, and allow them to get closer than they are able to in real life
- Just outside the Downtown Gateway Area is a project to relocate *Niagara Falls Train Station*. This \$44 million project calls for turning an 1863 U.S. Customs House at the base of the Whirlpool
- International Bridge into a new train station that will house Amtrak, border inspection facilities, and an Underground Railroad interpretive center.
- *Downtown Parking Management Plan*: The City is currently studying parking in downtown to understand visitor travel patterns and parking needs and to develop a plan for managing these needs. The study kicked off in June 2011.

Combined, these projects show how the City is gradually rebuilding the tourist infrastructure of the city, both to bring visitors into the City and entice them to explore beyond the Falls while they are there. These projects are shown in Figure 4.

Policies

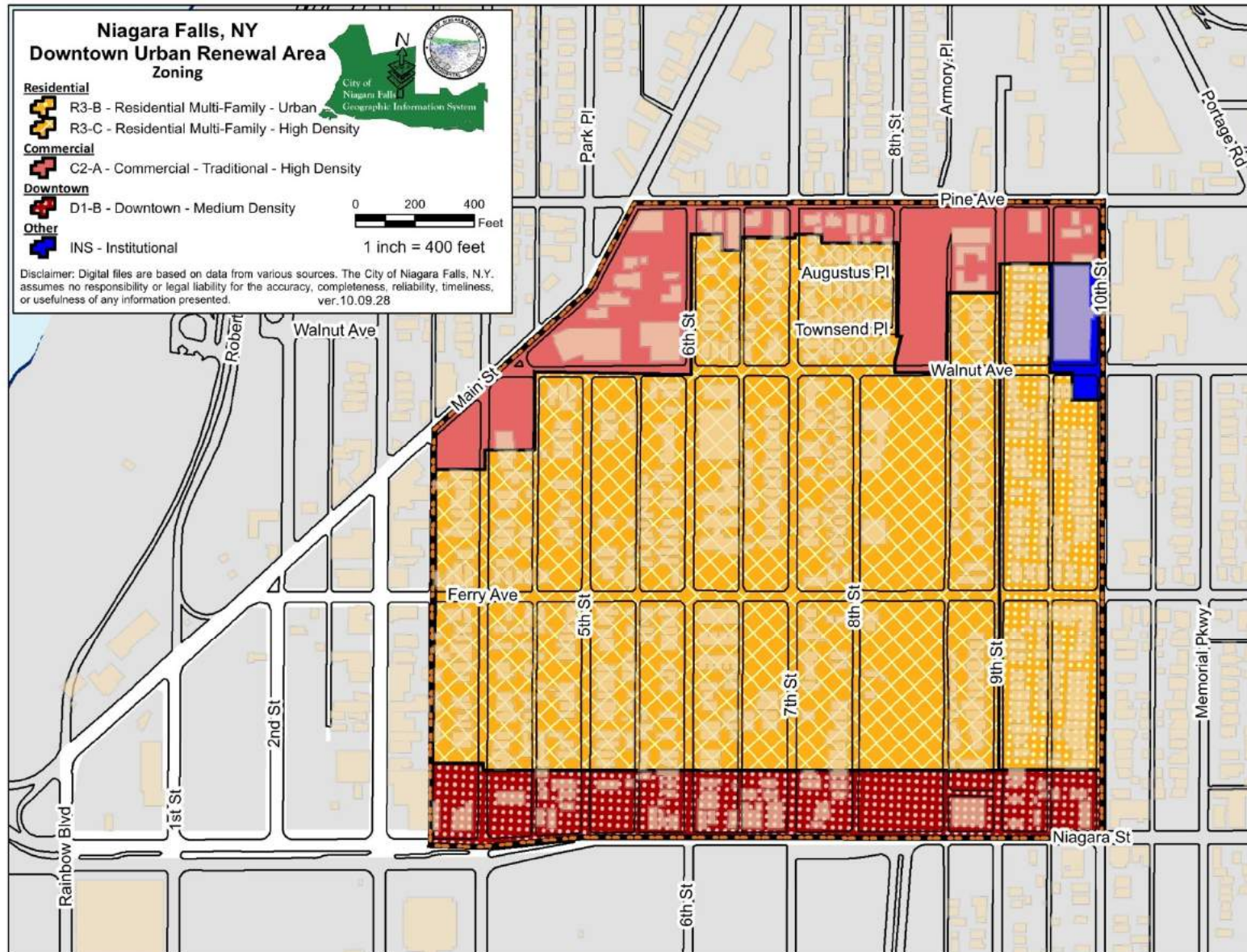
In addition to these specific projects, the City has updated several policy documents to lay the groundwork for further development. The Core City Urban Renewal Plan, adopted in September 2009, re-established the City's mechanism for carrying out urban renewal activities and broadened the designated urban renewal area to more effectively address urban blight and deterioration. The updated Plan removes inconsistencies that previously existed between City planning documents and gives the City greater flexibility in implementing redevelopment and reinvestment strategies.

Also in September 2009, the City updated the zoning for the Urban Renewal Area, including the downtown sub-area, allowing for a mix of uses in the area and creating a Design District overlay. The zoning changes allow for a mix of uses as-of-right and provide guidance on standards that development must follow. The Design District Design Guidelines address scale and context; building layout and placement on the site; streetscape elements; promotions of amenities for a high-quality public realm; circulation and connectivity; and parking. Zoning in the Downtown Gateway Area is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 4: Recent and ongoing planning projects in Niagara Falls



Figure 5: Zoning in Downtown Gateway Urban Renewal Area



Financial Resources or Programs to Support Development

Typically available public incentive programs

Note. Multiple public agencies at every level of government offer business incentives to encourage investments capable of driving business growth and job creation. The incentives are available individually, or bundled as part of a comprehensive program. Generally, all government incentive programs are aimed at helping companies to grow and expand by investing in those promising economic activities that will retain jobs or create new jobs in the most promising sectors of the regional and local economy. While the public sector programs below are the most typically available, it is not expected to be exhaustive. And, while economic incentives can be flexible to meet emerging opportunities, they must always be considered with regards to the anticipated community development benefit.

City of Niagara Falls programs:

Direct loan program – low interest loan that can be used for capital improvements, machinery & equipment and necessary project costs i.e. Soft costs; legal, accounting, architectural, etc.

Minority & Women Business Enterprise loan – up to \$25,000 in funds to be used for capital improvements, machinery & Equipment, inventory, working capital and necessary project soft costs.

Micro-enterprise Assistance – assistance can be in the form of a loan to a maximum of \$25,000 or a fifty percent (50%) matching grant up to \$10,000 that can be used for capital improvements, machinery & equipment, inventory, working capital and any necessary project soft costs.

Green Initiative – this is available in the form of a low interest loan up to a maximum of \$25,000 and a grant in the form of a twenty percent (20%) reduction in the loan amount. The grant is available upon demonstrated evidence of energy savings of 10% or greater based on past history. The funds can be used for the acquisition and installation of energy efficient equipment and products intrinsic to the building. The can include heating/air-conditioning equipment, lighting, weatherization, etc.

Commercial Façade Rebate Program– This program reimburses the owner for fifty percent (50%) of the projects costs up to \$10,000 for the rehabilitation of building facades.

Commercial Loan Subsidy program – This provides an incentive for property owners and lease tenants to rehabilitate their commercial buildings. The subsidy will be in an amount equal to the result of a theoretical reduction in the interest rate of the commercial bank loan by five (5) percentage points. This is a rebate at project completion.

Real Property Tax Abatement (485-B) – The amount of exemption is for 10 years in which the first year is fifty percent (50%) of the increase in assessed value attributed to the eligible improvements then it decreases by 5% in each of the remaining 9 years.

Note: Other possible grant funding may be available on a project-by-project basis in targeted areas.

Niagara County programs:

Niagara Economic Development Fund – the fund can provide up to 30% of \$250,000 of the eligible project cost, whichever is less. Maximum amount of public funding in the project cannot exceed 50%.

Revolving Loan Fund – Niagara County Industrial Development agency can make direct loans up to \$250,000 available together with other public and private financing. Bank financing must be associated with the project.

New York State programs:

USA Niagara Grant program – this is an incentive program to create jobs and encourage new investment within their defined boundaries. Grant amounts vary depending upon the proposed project value.

Empire State Development Corporation – this is a lead economic development agency and assists investors, business owners, etc. by providing financial and other forms of assistance. The level of the assistance is on project-by-project basis.

NYS Regional Development council – This council has the ability to access multi millions of dollars from New York state for qualifying projects. Each project is evaluated on its own merits by the council.

Federal (US) programs:

Small Business Administration SBA (504) Direct loan program – The SBA can provide direct funds for up to forty percent (40%) of the eligible project costs to a maximum of \$1,300,000.