

CITY OF NIAGARA FALLS Strategic Master Plan

Setting the Stage for Renewal Master Plan Strategies

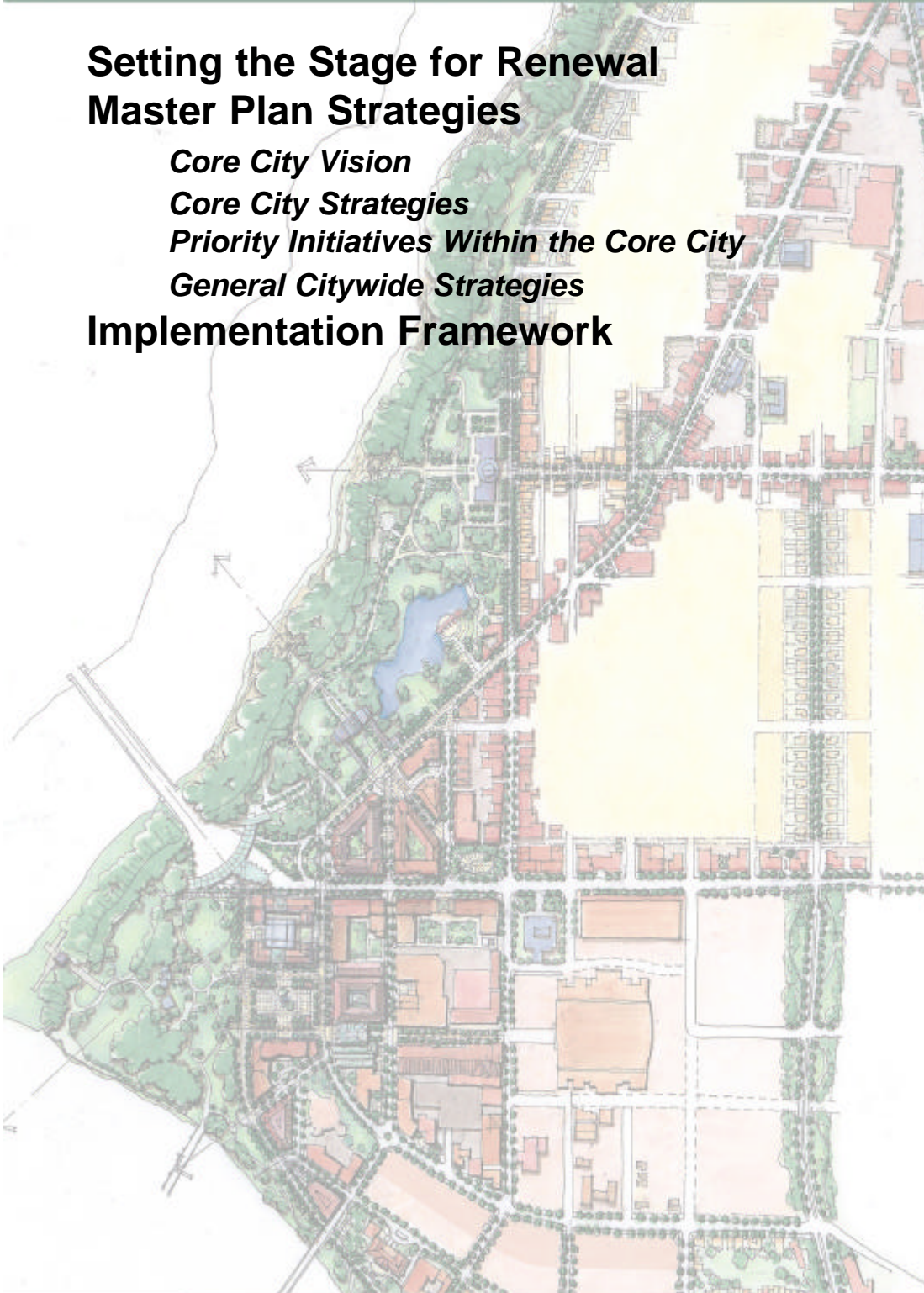
Core City Vision

Core City Strategies

Priority Initiatives Within the Core City

General Citywide Strategies

Implementation Framework



Prepared By Urban Strategies Inc.
For City of Niagara Falls
Final Report August 2004



URBAN STRATEGIES INC.

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PART I: SETTING THE STAGE FOR RENEWAL

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past four decades, the City of Niagara Falls has suffered from economic and industrial decline, and serious employment and population loss. As well, a number of misguided renewal initiatives that removed residential stock in the heart of the city have fragmented the downtown core and the communities that traditionally supported it. Today, many urban neighborhoods are in decay, large areas of the city's industrial corridors have been abandoned, and many residents, community and business leaders have lost their sense of pride in their city. In fact, many former residents have chosen to move out of Niagara Falls. Many visitors are disappointed and clearly unimpressed by the quality of the urban environment and the tourism offering that is not what they would expect adjacent to a world-class natural heritage destination such as the Falls. Tourists prefer to visit Niagara Falls, Ontario than remain in Niagara Falls, New York for more than a couple of hours.



The physical quality of the city is a deterrent to tourists.

While these conditions have taken their toll, the future need not be that of continued decline. A number of recent positive initiatives have renewed interest in the city, including the establishment of USA Niagara and the introduction of the Seneca Nation's Casino in the heart of Niagara Falls. The re-licensing agreement with the New York Power Authority (NYPA) will likely provide the municipality with new sources of revenue, which should be used for carefully considered 'catalyst' projects. The recent streetscape improvement program along John B. Daly Boulevard has demonstrated the positive impact that carefully chosen and executed capital projects can bring to the city.

Niagara Falls has a number of existing assets and key opportunities that can be positioned and leveraged to improve the overall social and economic circumstance of the city; support and strengthen new and emerging economic, employment and cultural sectors; and achieve, over time, the renewal of the city as an attractive and desirable place to live, work, invest, visit and play. The Strategic Master Plan places a strong emphasis on the quality of the urban experience for both visitors and residents. By supporting improvements to the whole community – main streets, parks, heritage neighborhoods and local business establishments – the plan aims to enhance the quality of life for Niagara Falls residents, as well as enticing tourists to stay longer and visit again.

1.1 The Purpose of the Strategic Master Plan

This document sets out a Strategic Master Plan as the basis for revitalizing the City of Niagara Falls, and the long-term renewal of the regional economy. It is a strategic plan in that it assesses current challenges and opportunities, as well as opportunities that may present themselves if encouraged through short-term actions aimed at longer-term gain.

This Master Plan draws a framework capable of directing positive change over the long term. It identifies a set of planning principles to guide decision-making, and recommends general strategies and specific renewal programs and action projects that focus on strengthening the 'Core City. The Strategic Master Plan will help focus public and private sector initiatives, reinvestment and partnerships toward broad-based social and economic change that will benefit the entire community. It establishes a clear vision and an action strategy that leverages key economic, natural, social, historical and cultural drivers to reposition Niagara Falls as a more economically and culturally diverse, attractive and vibrant regional center, possessing a distinct role within both the Erie/Niagara and the Bi-national Regions.

For the purposes of this document, the Core City is defined as the area loosely bounded by Portage Road, Whirlpool Bridge and the Niagara River (see Figure 1). The Core City is targeted because it has the greatest potential with regard to tourism development, residential and commercial intensification, the provision and growth of regional services and amenities, including education, and the creation of a more rich and diverse cultural and public realm. It also contains unique assets not found within other parts of the city that must be strengthened and leveraged to bring about growth and renewal to the whole city. These include the Falls and the Niagara Reservation, the Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center, the Seneca Nation's casino, City Hall, and others. The Core City also includes the downtown and the lands east of John B. Daly Boulevard that are subject to the Development Agreement between the City of Niagara Falls and Niagara Falls Redevelopment Corporation.

While a great number of planning studies addressing various areas of the city – the waterfront, Pine Avenue, the Highland Area, Main Street and the primary tourist precinct – have taken place, none of these documents approach Niagara Falls as a complex or whole city. Nor do they balance competing interests to establish a comprehensive vision for broadly based positive gain. This is what the Strategic Master Plan does. It represents *the City's* program for renewal. It is informed by many elements contained or outlined in previous studies, as well as new ideas and programs. It identifies a set of critical programs and priority projects to kick start reinvestment and city building in many areas necessary to create a diverse, healthy and successful community. The Master Plan places equal emphasis on the development of educational and cultural resources and amenities, as it does the stabilization and renewal of inner city residential neighborhoods, tourism and employment development, and the support and strengthening of regional economic sectors – all integral and essential components of a competitive and healthy urban city.

The Strategic Master Plan is presented in three parts:

Part I, Setting the Stage for Renewal, sets the context for the study by outlining the contemporary challenges and opportunities Niagara Falls is presented with, as well as major economic drivers to be leveraged in moving forward with the city's renewal.

Part II, Master Plan Strategies and Priority Initiatives for the Core City, identifies specific recommendations for programs, strategies and initiatives to halt the city's decline and begin the process of revitalization.

Part III, Implementation Framework, outlines an implementation framework that includes key policy changes and recommendations for institutional strengthening necessary to achieve the vision contained in the Master Plan.

As the City's Strategic Plan for renewal and revitalization, the Plan targets municipal actions and capital expenditures which can bring multi-faceted urban renewal, and which can best attract and support private and public sector involvement and reinvestment, to continue the process of renewal and revitalization of the city.

This document has been prepared in such a way as to allow it to be easily translated into amendments to the City of Niagara Falls Comprehensive Plan, Urban Renewal Plan and Zoning. The amendments will establish a comprehensive and cohesive framework to guide and enable revitalization and city building, as envisioned by the Strategic Master Plan.



Niagara Falls Strategic Master Plan

Figure 1. Study Area: City of Niagara Falls and Core City Boundaries



Scale 1: 10,000



August 2004

URBAN STRATEGIES INC.

1.2 The Planning Process

The Strategic Master Plan was informed by many interactions with business leaders, community leaders, residents and agencies, representing a wide cross-section of the city's constituency. The Master Plan responds to the diverse needs of this constituency, and outlines actions and strategies to overcome specific challenges and capture opportunities to proactively direct positive change.

The preparation of the Strategic Master Plan represents an intensive effort on the part of both the consultant team and the City of Niagara Falls. The project began in the spring of 2003 with a Community Open House to announce the Strategic Master Plan initiative and the preparation of amendments to the City of Niagara Falls Comprehensive Plan, Urban Renewal Plan and Zoning.

The consultant team undertook a series of stakeholder interviews with representatives from area business associations, institutions, government and government agencies, arts organizations, visitor attractions and residents' groups, as well as landowners and developers. The interviews provided an opportunity for one-on-one discussions about specific challenges and opportunities. At the same time, the consultant team undertook an analysis of the city's existing physical structure and a complete review of existing background studies and documents.



The planning process included a stakeholder workshop that brought together a variety of community, business, housing and arts and cultural interests to review emerging Strategic Master Plan directions.

The key components of the Strategic Master Plan were developed during the summer and fall of 2003. During this period, working meetings with the Planning Board were held twice a month and a focused stakeholder workshop was held in October to review, gather feedback, and confirm the strategies proposed. The draft Strategic Master Plan was finalized through the first six months of 2004 with the City administration giving its approval in March. It is anticipated that the Plan will be presented to the public in the fall of 2004.

To implement many of the Strategic Master Plan recommendations, the City must incorporate these recommendations into a series of official amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, the Urban Renewal Plan and the Zoning Ordinance, which will likely follow public comment and environmental review throughout the fall, with adoption as soon as possible thereafter.

2. SETTING THE STAGE FOR CHANGE: UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND ECONOMIC DRIVERS

All urban places undergo a continuous process of change, evolution, growth and decline. Successful communities are able to understand and mediate their unique challenges and build on opportunities to improve their overall circumstances, quality of life, economic vitality and livability. To be successful, positive change must be based on a realistic understanding of contemporary challenges, opportunities and economic drivers that must be addressed and/or leveraged to improve the city's quality of life and potential for the future.



The steady decline of heavy industry has resulted in economic and social dislocation.

This section of the Strategic Master Plan presents an overview of the contemporary context by:

- Outlining key challenges and opportunities the Master Plan will need to address
- Outlining a direction or recommended course of action forming the basis for planning principles, specific renewal programs and strategies outlined in Part II of the Strategic Master Plan

2.1 Understanding Contemporary Challenges

The following is a brief discussion of the challenges the city currently faces. Many of these challenges represent impacts of 40 years of industrial and manufacturing decline that have adversely affected the city, its growth and economy. The impacts of this decline reinforce the need for creative diversification of the city's employment and economic bases to sustain a vibrant residential population.

The Decline of Industry and Manufacturing

Over the past 40 years, both the region and the city have experienced significant changes, resulting from the steady decline of the city's industrial and manufacturing base. In the 20 years between 1970 and 1990 alone, total employment in the



Personnel reductions and the closure of large-scale industrial operations have led to unemployment levels that exceed state and national averages.

region's¹ manufacturing sector fell from 170,000 to 90,000, a decline of 53%².

The loss of industrial jobs has had numerous widespread impacts that are outlined below. As in many industry-based cities in North America, expansion of this sector in the future is not likely due to global shifts in the manufacturing economy.

Public and private sector initiatives aimed at generating and strengthening new employment growth sectors must be supported and encouraged by the municipality to stabilize and ultimately expand the economic and residential bases of Niagara Falls. Key growth sectors include tourism and hospitality generally, and heritage and nature-based tourism, specifically; professional services; regional health services; arts, culture and entertainment; and regional and bi-national transport of goods and services.

High Unemployment

For decades, Niagara Falls has relied almost solely on one employment sector – heavy industry – with very little in the way of economic or employment diversification. The transformation of local, regional and national economies has resulted in reductions and consolidations that have minimized the presence of corporate head offices in the city. In addition, major government offices have not located in the city, and tourism has only very recently been considered an important sector for future economic growth. As a result, the eggs have been in one basket and Niagara Falls has become ‘a single resource town’. Personnel reductions and the out-right closure of large-scale industrial operations by major employers have consequently had a debilitating effect on the city. High unemployment, averaging 10.5% in the 1990s – almost twice the state and national averages³ – continues.

The capital-intensive nature of chemical and other heavy industries in Niagara Falls has made it next to impossible for former employees to start their own companies. Consequently, closures have not led to new businesses or related spin-off activity. Furthermore, Niagara Falls’ industrial base has not traditionally been engaged in research and development – an important component for continued economic growth and business development. The rare introduction of new industrial operations has not been of sufficient scale to replace lost jobs. Manufacturing closures have instead resulted in a large number of workers competing for the few remaining jobs or leaving the region altogether for new opportunities elsewhere.

Programs, institutions and activities aimed at the promotion and development of retraining programs, facilities and satellite facilities within key growth sectors should be actively supported by the municipality to:

- ***Stabilize and retain the city’s workforce and population base***
- ***Support economic diversification***
- ***Reduce unemployment***

¹ Defined as the Buffalo-Niagara MSA

² Strategic Projections Inc. (2001) *Economic Trends in Niagara Falls and the State of New York, Draft Report*

³ United States Census Bureau

- ***Better equip potential employees to participate and contribute in the service and knowledge-based economy***

A Declining and Aging Population

Diminishing economic opportunities, high unemployment associated with steady industrial decline and new employment opportunities occurring within the region have caused many residents to relocate elsewhere. The city, built to support a population of just over 100,000 at its post-war peak, accommodates a current population of close to 50,000. Not surprisingly, the majority of those who have left Niagara Falls have been young adults and families with young children. The number of family households in the city fell by 13% in the 1990s⁴. This decline in population has impacted neighborhoods, diminished the strong sense of community once found here and resulted in inner city school closures and reduced community support services and facilities. The ultimate result is inner city neighborhoods that are less desirable to existing and potential new residents.

The decline of the young adult population is not only detrimental to stabilizing the population, but in particular to the emergence of an entrepreneurial culture in Niagara Falls. A young adult demographic typically promotes and supports a willingness to venture in new directions, exhibits a willingness to take informed risks, and supports cultural development and renewal. In the absence of strong representation by these younger age cohorts, the city's cultural and entrepreneurial potential will not be fully realized and its available workforce will continue to be reduced, leaving employers with fewer options for new employees. The presence of an educated and available workforce is a significant factor, which cannot be over-emphasized in attracting new employers to locate their operations in the city.

While the population of Niagara Falls is declining, it is also aging. A growing elderly population will place increased demands on health care services and already stretched social agencies over time. The burden of these demands will intensify if the city's tax base continues to fall due to a declining population, high unemployment, an absence of new development, and a lack of growth in key industry sectors.

To retain and attract a broader population to Niagara Falls, including young families and young adults, the municipality must pursue a range of activities and programs aimed at improving the overall quality of life experienced in the city. These initiatives should:

- ***Improve the condition of residential housing stock and neighborhoods, and the range of housing types***
- ***Support high-quality, specialized inner city educational opportunities***
- ***Improve the physical and visual quality of the urban environment and experience***
- ***Support specialized retail/commercial development and business opportunities***
- ***Provide for arts, cultural and entertainment development***
- ***Promote employment opportunities within key industry growth sectors***
- ***Improve community, health care and recreational amenities and services***

⁴ Ibid.

Competitive Suburban Growth and the Decline of the Core City

While the suburban communities surrounding Niagara Falls have experienced the impacts of decline in the region as a whole, they have fared somewhat better than the city itself. Seen by many as attractive, safe and affordable alternatives to living in Niagara Falls, many surrounding municipalities have experienced both population and employment growth. New housing developments and commercial activities are concentrated in these areas. A prime example is the array of new format retail developments found along Military Road. These developments, along with new regional shopping centers, are marketed on convenience and the presence of national retailers. With their selection of shops and easy access from major regional transportation routes, commercial offerings in nearby suburban areas have pulled consumers away from the city's traditional shopping streets, namely Main Street and Pine Avenue, and refocused much of the retail activity outside of the core.



Suburban style growth has had a significant and negative impact on the city's commercial corridors.

The municipality should address the imbalance between suburban growth and the decline of the Core City through targeted policies and actions focused on making the Core City a unique, high value and attractive place to developers, residents and visitors. Initiatives should focus on enhancing quality of life, as well as:

- *Providing tax or incentive programs to kick start positive change in the city*
- *Re-configuring suburban style offerings and amenities currently found in the Core City to urban development typologies that support a high-quality urban identity*
- *Offering and marketing unique elements and amenities not available in suburban locations, such as:*
 - *Walkable arts, entertainment, cultural and shopping precincts; niche boutique and specialty retail areas;*
 - *Heritage district preservation and interpretation;*
 - *High-quality education and resources;*
 - *Regional services;*
 - *Convention and healthcare services;*
 - *A high-quality of design excellence in the built and natural environments; and*
 - *Greater employment and economic opportunities.*
- *Creating and marketing a distinct and high-quality urban identity and shopping experience*

The Residential Market, Neighborhoods and Housing

The growth of Niagara Falls and its neighborhoods occurred largely in response to the city's pre-war economic and industrial expansion. As a result, many working class neighborhoods developed quickly and were located immediately adjacent to existing or former industrial areas and the infrastructure serving them, such as train tracks. While this provided quick access to employment areas, many neighborhoods were not sufficiently buffered from heavy industry or became surrounded by industrial uses over time and isolated from neighboring residential areas. This situation



The decline of the housing market and residential neighborhoods must be halted by protecting stable residential areas and...

continues today; few of these neighborhoods enjoy connections to the river, as industry and/or transportation routes occupy this land base. Figure 2 shows the existing conditions and primary land uses in the city. The destructive impact of Urban Renewal initiatives of the 1960s and 70s further fragmented neighborhoods.

These difficult physical relationships, combined with de-industrialization, loss of population, suburban flight, and the decline in the overall economic circumstance of Niagara Falls have resulted in systemic deterioration of many neighborhoods, making the city unattractive to many home-builders and homebuyers. As a result of these conditions, Niagara Falls has a tremendous oversupply of lower-density housing, including pre-World War II multifamily dwellings of two, three or four units or more; houses built two to a lot; and stately single-family homes converted into multiple units.

Oversupply of this older residential stock and a continuing decrease in family size, together with population out-migration have meant that the overall housing market is low. Resale values in the Core City are extremely weak, where one would typically expect to find the most desirable and upscale housing, given proximity to the core and the extent of original or heritage housing stock.



... introducing programs for renewal and repair.

The city's vacancy rate has increased in recent years to 13%, while the rates for the county and state have fallen to 8%⁵. Within the current oversupplied market, there is no incentive for the repair and upgrading of rental units and many homes are abandoned and in significant need of repair, updating or

⁵ City of Niagara Falls

replacement. Due to the oversupply of obsolete older housing, and the built-out nature of most parts of the city, construction of new market-rate housing units has been non-existent.

Today, the healthiest neighborhoods are those located furthest to the east, north of the Core City, and away from major industrial areas. The areas in greatest state of decline are generally found in the Core City or immediately adjacent to the city's primary industrial areas. School closures and reduced community support facilities resulting from population decline and the lack of medium and high-density housing alternatives offer very limited choice for those wishing to live in the city. The widespread dilapidation of under-occupied neighborhoods is clearly noticeable and speaks of a city in dire need of change.

The municipality will need to pursue a residential renewal and reinvestment strategy comprised of a number of ongoing programs to:

- ***Stop and reverse the decline in the residential housing market***
- ***Reduce the oversupply of derelict housing units to stabilize the market at more normative and regionally competitive values***
- ***Address the education and community needs within stable neighborhoods to begin to attract residents back to the city and provide a support base for business and economic development***
- ***Position new housing alternatives to support and reinforce existing and anticipated commercial and tourism developments***

Weak Market Conditions

The market in Niagara Falls is weak, as a cascading series of problems following industrial decline have affected the commercial, retail, office and tourism sectors. Erosion in the quality of life; loss of population; physical deterioration of neighborhoods and community support facilities; infrastructure in obvious need of repair; and unattractive built form and vacant parcels in the tourism precinct make the city unattractive to residential, business and development interests, as well as to financial and lending institutions necessary to support these interests.

In addition, while tourism is increasingly seen as an important new economic driver for the city, the current visitation numbers do not indicate a strong market for additional hotel or lodging developments based on the existing tourism program and recreational offering. This, coupled with the existing poor quality appearance and physical condition of tourist areas in Niagara Falls, must be addressed to advance the tourism industry and provide necessary growth to support the commercial, retail, office and residential sectors.

The city's ability to expand its tourism offering with new attractions, good quality restaurants, boutique shopping, entertainment, family and educational destinations and other amenities, and, at the same time, improve the visual or physical quality of the urban environment, has the greatest potential to yield positive economic growth for Niagara Falls and encourage new growth in other sectors.

The municipality must establish a clear vision for the Core City tourism sector. Its programs and activities must reflect a demonstrated commitment to positive change,

whereby the City of Niagara Falls leads critical catalyst initiatives that can induce private sector investment and renewal of the city.

Excess Infrastructure

Niagara Falls is a city built to accommodate a population of approximately 100,000 people, and its land base includes a significant amount of employment/commercial land intended for large industrial operations. With the continuing decline of both its residential and industrial bases, the city is now ‘oversized’, with an excess of infrastructure and developed land in relation to actual use and municipal tax return. Despite the reduced tax base due to population and business losses, the municipality continues to be responsible for maintaining and repairing the same amount of infrastructure once necessary to support the city of 100,000. Clearly, the City of Niagara Falls’ ability to maintain this infrastructure, provide continued support for community facilities, and/or develop new programs intended to halt and reverse decline, is severely challenged.



The city's infrastructure is crumbling as a result of a steadily declining tax base.

A number of difficult decisions are necessary to determine where infrastructure investment, maintenance and improvements will have the greatest positive impact, in order to pursue programs and strategies necessary to begin the city's renewal and support critical economic sectors. It may become necessary to defer maintenance, and even provisionally retire infrastructure in underused areas of the city until the market once again calls for growth and resources become available for projects that are not currently a priority. Immediate and ongoing investment in priority areas of the city will allow Niagara Falls to tap new sources of revenue, attract more residents and provide momentum for revitalization of the entire city.

The municipality must focus its expenditures on projects that will encourage the desired and necessary private sector reinvestment and enhance the quality of life and quality of experience offered to residents and visitors. New infrastructure projects should enhance the livability of existing urban areas, rather than expanding into new areas, while strengthening the city's role as an important international crossing and tourism destination.

Brownfields

The City and its industry were founded on the locational advantage offered by the Falls and the Niagara River (see Figure 2). With the decline of industrial activity, the city is left with a large collection of contaminated sites that cannot be remediated easily or quickly. The majority of these sites sit vacant and/or abandoned with neglected buildings dotting the landscape. These conditions further depress real estate values, prevent public access, and often preclude reuse. Many residential neighborhoods adjacent to these areas have been negatively affected by their proximity to abandoned sites, which has contributed to neighborhood disinvestment and decline. Clean-up costs, perceived regulatory inflexibility, and issues of liability and responsibility often hinder remediation efforts.

Across North America, many cities are actively engaged in remediating and redeveloping brownfield sites, to re-establish connections to previously industrialized waterfronts and initiate a new era of economic development and growth focused on transforming these areas into vibrant, mixed use waterfront communities. In Niagara Falls, many industrial uses will continue to be located within existing industrial corridors; however, over the long term, the City should pursue existing federally funded brownfield remediation programs to begin to prepare priority sites for future use, particularly those adjacent to the city's waterfront. These areas represent the next era of city building in Niagara Falls and municipal resources should be directed toward the identification of priority remediation areas, in the Core City, along the riverfront and along entrances to the city, for remediation and redevelopment programs. In the short term, improvements aimed at reducing the visual impact of prominent brownfield sites, consolidation of industrial uses, and appropriate reuse of suitable buildings and industrial heritage sites will be the most immediate and noticeable investment in brownfield sites.

The municipality should anticipate brownfield redevelopment over the long-term and identify sites located within or adjacent to the Core City and/or the waterfront for preliminary scoping and feasibility analysis.

A Propensity to Look Outward for Solutions

The continued decline of Niagara Falls, the lack of a clear vision forward and few indications of positive municipal-led change have left the community with a sense that the challenges are insurmountable and that citizens themselves cannot influence positive change. The signs of decline – broken windows, littered streets and decrepit buildings – convey an underlying message that the community has become used to decline and that this is the normative condition. Compounding this is a propensity to look outward for ‘the one big project’ that will turn Niagara Falls around as opposed to focused community action aimed at incremental change for long-term positive benefit. The history of failed mega-projects in the city's core has left many residents cynical about the future and the municipality's ability to direct and negotiate success. Despite these conditions, there are people who recall the city's success and who are searching for new directions that have the potential to bring the city back to the same levels of growth and achievement Niagara Falls once knew.

The municipality must support and utilize the Strategic Master Plan as a shared community vision for the future success of Niagara Falls. It must clearly demonstrate a commitment to broad-based community change through the ongoing pursuit of strategies, projects and partnerships to bring long-term incremental renewal to the city.

2.2 Opportunities and Key Economic Drivers

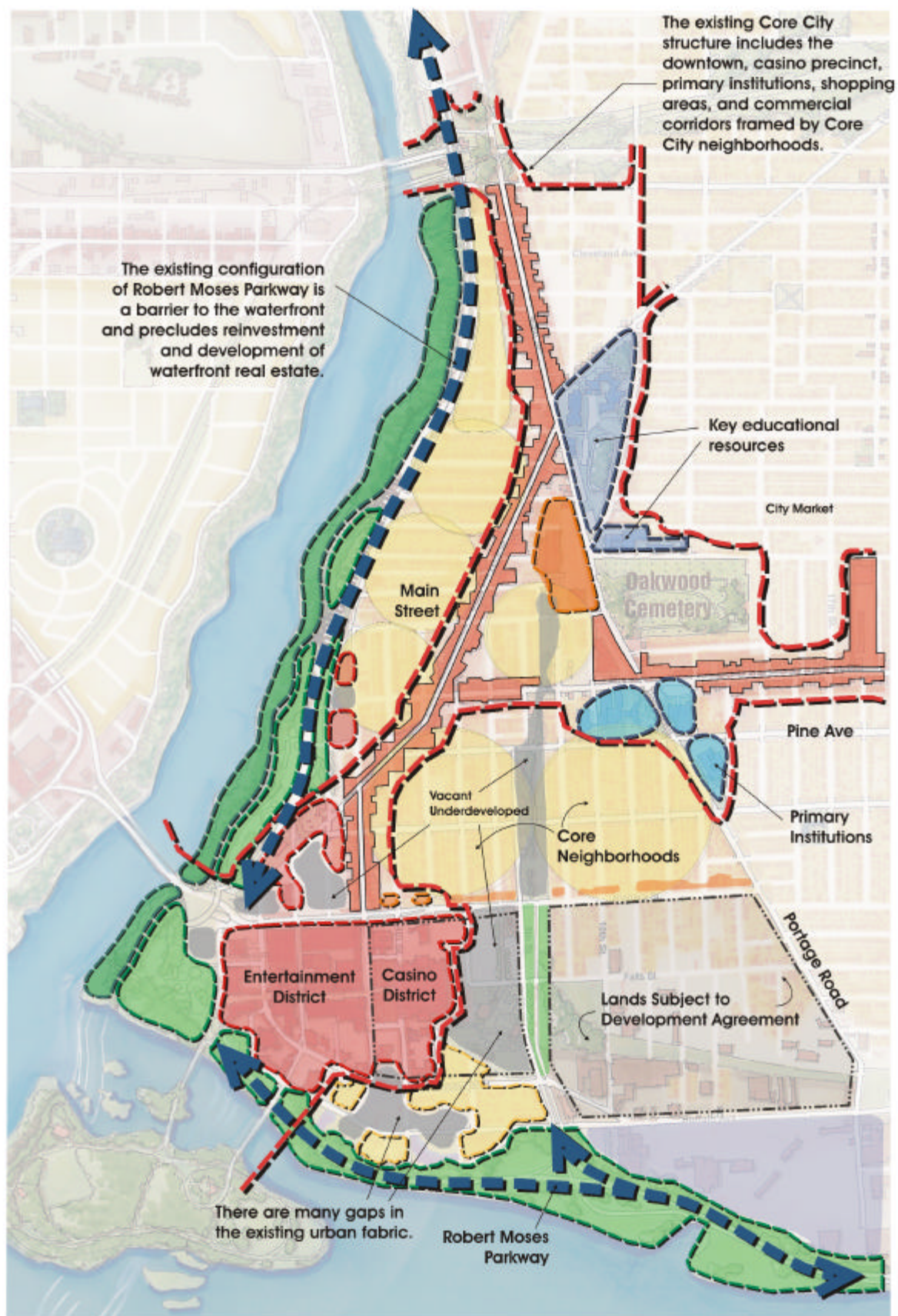
The challenges described above are great, and will require a shift in thinking, actions and priorities to effectively deal with many difficult aspects of long-term urban decline. At the same time, there are a number of key drivers and opportunities that have tremendous potential to contribute positively to the future of the city. These need to be carefully nurtured and leveraged to bring economic, social and cultural benefit to Niagara Falls.

It is time to redefine the city as a more complex and diverse ‘regional center’, and to explore opportunities and actions that can encourage diversification of the economic base. A diverse economy that capitalizes on local assets will better position Niagara Falls to realize new growth and development, and make it a better place to live, open a business or engage in cultural and recreational activities.

The existing Core City contains the Downtown, Casino Precinct, primary institutions, shopping areas and commercial corridors, framed by Core City neighborhoods. Figure 3 provides an overview of the existing downtown structure. The diagram clearly shows that the Robert Moses Parkway presents a barrier to the city’s primary waterfront. The removal of this barrier will enable the city to capitalize on the economic and social benefits of waterfront redevelopment. The many gaps in the existing urban fabric as shown in Figure 3 present new development opportunities which can better connect neighborhoods to each other, while permitting new public realm, housing and open space opportunities. The core neighborhoods, the city’s commercial nodes and corridors, primary institutions, key educational and cultural resources, Casino Precinct and lands subject to development agreement each have particular opportunities and drivers which must be carefully leveraged to bring about the renewal of the city.

The following opportunities and drivers in particular have significant potential to improve the quality of life within Niagara Falls:

- Niagara Falls: A Bi-National Regional City with Tremendous Potential for Cross-Border Commerce and Collaboration
- Public-Private Partnerships
- Tourism
- Arts and Culture
- Regional Health Care
- Education
- Nodes and Corridors
- Heritage Communities and Neighborhoods
- Niagara International Airport



Opportunities

Niagara Falls: A Bi-National Regional City with Tremendous Potential for Cross-Border Commerce and Collaboration

Niagara Falls is part of the Bi-national Region, extending from the Genesee River area in New York to Oakville, Ontario (see Figure 4). This region is the third-largest consumer marketplace in North America and the continent's second busiest trade corridor⁶. The

population of the Bi-national Region is expected to reach approximately 12.7 million by 2031, an increase of 37%. The Canadian population is estimated to grow by 47.6%⁷. While Western New York is not expected to experience this level of growth (4.6% in comparison), Niagara Falls is uniquely positioned geographically to benefit from growth in Canada and to capture economic, social and cultural benefits arising from the movement of people, goods and services across the United States/Canada border. Critical to positioning this locational advantage is the development of high-quality amenities, attractions and services that can attract people within the bi-national region, recognizing the importance of cross-border commerce and collaboration. Through cross-border collaboration between agencies the City can better position its unique natural and economic assets and benefit from its bi-national geographic circumstance.



Niagara Falls is uniquely positioned within the Bi-national Region. It must leverage its assets to promote more cross-border tourism and shopping.

Niagara Falls also has an important role to play in the success of the Erie/Niagara Region. The Erie/Niagara Framework Plan, a joint initiative involving Erie and Niagara Counties, emphasizes the need for an urban-centered strategy for revitalization, and that regional success will depend upon the health of Buffalo and Niagara Falls. These cities require unique yet complementary roles, given market and financial prospects in the Western New York area. While Buffalo has an established history as the business/financial center, Niagara Falls should pursue a role as the region's tourism/recreational center by building on the wealth of historic, cultural and natural assets in the area and complementing these with new high-quality, authentic urban places and experiences, as well as culture and education-based attractions. Niagara Falls, New York can distinguish itself from Niagara Falls, Ontario by offering an authentic and compelling urban and natural experience showcasing Core City assets, heritage, and cultural and education amenities.

The City must explore tourism, retail, conference/conventioning, and other business and physical improvements within the city as a critical opportunity to attract and capture increased commerce within the Bi-national trade Region. To this end, the City's natural, cultural and economic assets must be leveraged to increase cross-

⁶ Niagara Bi-National Region Economic Roundtable. <http://www.niagarabination.com/>

⁷ Strategic Projections Inc., 2001

border collaboration, commerce and business development, and reposition Niagara Falls to take full advantage of the unique and important role it can play within Erie-Niagara and the Bi-national region.

Establishing New Partnerships and Identifying New Resources

Municipalities cannot achieve success alone or in isolation. The Strategic Master Plan recommends some projects that are too large for the city to implement alone. However, the City must undertake these projects if it is to thrive. This situation underscores the need to strengthen public-private partnerships that will help the City achieve its goals. Across North America, many municipalities are actively engaged in public/private partnerships involving various levels of government and their agencies, non-profit organizations and private interests, to achieve significant change and collective benefit. The preparation of this Strategic Master Plan is a very timely initiative for the city; it is occurring at a time when the State and Federal governments, as well as the private sector, have indicated a growing interest in the success of Niagara Falls and in achieving this success together.

The State of New York established USA Niagara in 2001 to support and promote economic development initiatives in Niagara Falls, and both are intent on leveraging private investment and encouraging growth and renewal of the tourism industry. USA Niagara is currently involved in a number of significant projects. These include bringing high-quality urban residential opportunities to the downtown through the conversion of the United Office Building to residential uses, the redevelopment of the Falls Street Faire to establish the city's new conference/convention center, and most recently, the Third Street streetscape proposal. The agency is also supporting local efforts to establish the Niagara Experience Center, aimed at enhancing the city's tourism offering with a high-quality educational and heritage attraction.



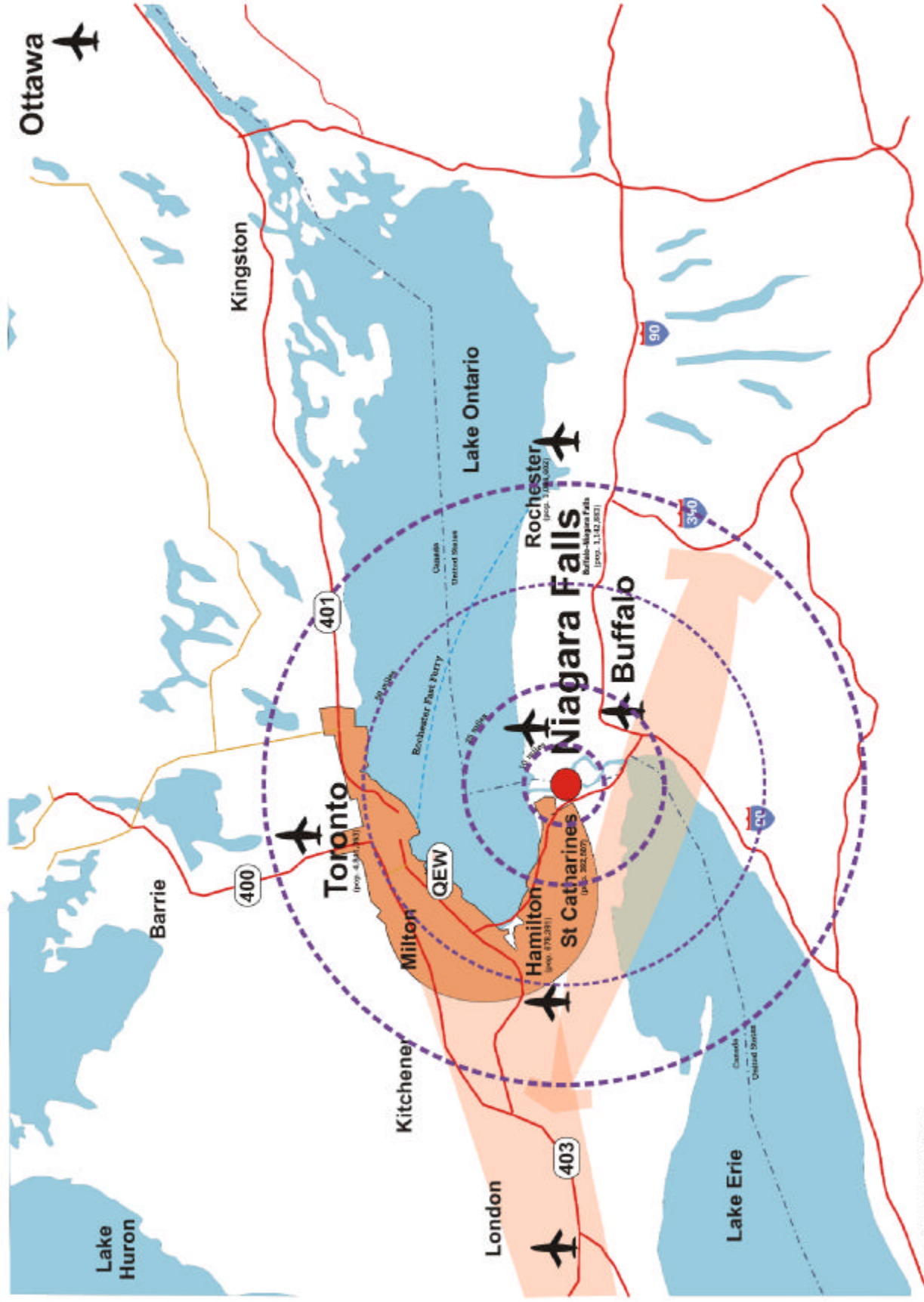
USA Niagara is leading efforts to improve and revitalize Old Falls Street as a key pedestrian connection and gathering place. The Strategic Master Plan must build on key current initiatives.

The New York State-Seneca Nation Gaming Compact has resulted in a 55-acre Casino Precinct in the heart of Niagara Falls and a portion of the casino's revenue will be allocated to the city for new projects and initiatives. In addition, the re-licensing of the NYPA Niagara Project in 2007 can be expected to have important and significant financial benefits for the community. These partnerships all demonstrate the positive potential of working together toward a set of common goals. Partnerships also represent the way to renewal and revitalization of the city.

The National Park Service is currently studying the designation of a National Heritage Area along the Niagara River, which would bring additional, exciting partnership opportunities, as well as projects and financial support to achieve significant change along the city's riverfront. While this study is not yet complete and the designation has yet to be determined and confirmed, minimum funding of up to \$1 million per year for 10 years may be available

Figure 4. Bi-national Region

Niagara Falls Strategic Master Plan



Source: Strategic Projections Inc., 2001

through such designation. This funding could be used to improve the public landscape of the corridor, establish heritage interpretation programs and new tourism infrastructure, establish a regional parks agency capable of coordinating state, local and federal investment in managing the area, and/or undertake other economic development initiatives in Niagara Falls. The Heritage Area would be administered by a partnership or management agency, potentially involving the City of Niagara Falls and Niagara County; State Parks and the Department of Transportation (DOT); Empire State Development Corporation; and others. These partners would contribute to and benefit from working collaboratively to strengthen the Niagara River corridor as an internationally recognized natural, cultural and historical resource. Clearly, the benefits to Niagara Falls as a major stakeholder in such a partnership arrangement could be enormous.

Whether or not the designation comes to fruition, the City of Niagara Falls should actively pursue a partnership agreement along its waterfront to not only achieve, but also maintain over the long-term, the needed physical improvements along this most important and potentially high value urban interface. Such an arrangement is critical to promoting municipal interests in creating a landscape setting, which can increase visitation to the city, accommodate the introduction of high-quality cultural/educational venues and stimulate private sector reinvestment along the riverfront. Niagara Falls is in an exceptional position geographically, located next to an internationally celebrated natural feature, among a high concentration of heritage features, and within the Bi-national Region. The City should take full advantage of the opportunity for bi-national connections and initiatives, particularly by fostering collaboration between park agencies and shared management of heritage assets on both sides of the border.

Other types of partnership opportunities can include joint development proposals whereby the municipality leverages private capital by leasing land under public ownership to the private sector. Niagara Falls has engaged in arrangements like these in the past; however, a lack of attention to a flexible program of use, physical relationships, and design excellence has meant that the municipality and the community have gained little from these initiatives. Partnerships must be carefully conceived, with clear roles, responsibilities and expectations, to ensure they ultimately benefit the community of Niagara Falls. With these partnerships in place, a great deal can be achieved through carefully researched and scoped projects receiving professional market and design review.

The Strategic Master Plan defines the City's priorities for reinvestment and identifies projects and initiatives that will have the greatest potential to mediate current challenges and encourage or catalyze desired private sector reinvestment and/or spin-off projects. Many of these projects are partnership projects intended to achieve long-term physical, economic, and cultural gain within Niagara Falls. Most of them involve initial feasibility and scoping studies necessary to outline the full parameters of a project prior to phased implementation. Projects, initiatives and partnerships should be undertaken as short or long-term initiatives as funding becomes available through the NYPA relicensing agreement, partnership agreements and other sources.

Key Economic Drivers

In order to better weather cyclical changes in the economy and provide greater opportunities for the city's residents and employees, Niagara Falls needs to diversify its economy and move beyond its historical reliance on heavy industry. This will require a new way of thinking about the city, what it is, what it offers and what elements can be leveraged, strengthened or grown to achieve a greater measure of economic diversity and improved quality of life.

While every effort should be made to protect existing industrial activity, Niagara Falls can no longer afford to rely on a single sector in a rapidly changing global economy. New opportunities will be found by focusing attention on resources that define the city as a unique place, support workforce development and reinforce Niagara Falls as a great place to live, raise a family and work.

The Falls and the adjacent tourism precinct, the airport, the Memorial Medical Center, the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center, post-secondary institutions, commercial spines and main streets and Core City heritage communities represent key drivers and resources that can be leveraged to strengthen the social, economic and cultural fabric of Niagara Falls. These Core City assets must be strengthened, supported and nurtured to maximize not only their individual potential, but the synergies and linkages between them as well, by building intelligently and carefully upon each.

Tourism

With its unique combination of assets and attractions, Niagara Falls can become the fulcrum for tourism in Western New York, focusing and strengthening the regional tourism base. As the focus for tourism in Niagara Falls, the historic downtown core must be improved to meet its potential and anchor the city's economy. A more strategic approach to development and positioning of attractions is needed to give Niagara Falls a strong and genuine identity within the region, as a beautiful place to visit as well as a vibrant place to live.

Tourism is the most important and immediate growth sector for Niagara Falls.

While manufacturing jobs declined in Niagara County between 1977 and 1992, those related to the tourism industry specific to accommodations and lodging grew by approximately 38%⁸. Current visitation numbers indicate approximately 6 million tourists visit the city annually, not including Casino patrons⁹, whereas approximately 12 million visit Niagara Falls,



The Falls and the Olmsted Park system are primary assets which are disconnected from the Core City by the Robert Moses Parkway.

⁸ United States Census Bureau

⁹ City of Niagara Falls Office of Planning

Canada. Although Canada benefits significantly from its ability to offer direct views of the Falls, there are other reasons for the significant difference in visitation numbers between the two cities. Niagara Falls, USA offers very little in the way of high-quality tourist amenities and services, including hotels and restaurants, and a limited range of quality attractions, particularly those of interest to families. As well, and perhaps most importantly, the city's tourism infrastructure is underdeveloped. The 'arrival experience' and poor urban environment, with many vacant sites, dilapidated buildings and weeds growing in asphalt surfaces, discourages exploration of the city. The transportation system is not intuitive and there is little assistance for first-time visitors attempting to orientate themselves to the city. There are few linkages, physical, visual, or programmatic, between existing attractions that might encourage visitors to see other sights and stay longer in the city. Figure 3 shows the barrier between the city and the waterfront that is created by the current configuration of the Robert Moses Parkway, as well as other opportunities to improve the Core City.

Proposals for the redesign of Robert Moses Parkway and development of the Niagara Experience Center are important first steps in strengthening Niagara Falls as a more inviting city and addressing arrival, orientation and transportation issues. Importantly, both of these initiatives build on the city's premier assets – the riverfront, the Falls, and the Olmsted Park system that frames the riverfront and plays host to residents and visitors. These natural features are truly unique in the world. They represent unparalleled assets that hold tremendous potential for enhancement, city building and renewal by focusing programs and initiatives aimed at strengthening the urban and natural interface, defining a new image for the city and creating a vibrant place to visit, live, work and invest. The Falls, the broader open space resource, and the urban interface that contains and defines these resources are all central to the renewal of Niagara Falls. A focused program that creates high-quality places and experiences leveraging the value of the Falls – the reason visitors come to the city – and their surroundings, represents the opportunity and catalyst for positive change.

This is no easy task; however, given the city's remarkable assets and potential, the Strategic Master Plan presents many recommendations and initiatives, outlined in Section 5 (Enhancing the Tourism Experience: Arrival and Orientation), aimed at simultaneously improving the city and advancing tourism. These recommendations focus on developing a more appealing and sophisticated tourism program by improving the range of quality educational and cultural tourism attractions, and premiere lodgings and services, within a significantly improved physical and urban setting. This will attract and promote new employment

opportunities, making Niagara Falls a more attractive place to live or grow a business, elevating the quality of life, pride and opportunity offered by the city. By placing a strong emphasis on the quality of the total urban experience, this strategy supports tourism within the local community, including all of its assets – main streets, parks, heritage neighborhoods



The tourism offering must mature to meet the requirements of an increasingly sophisticated market.

and local business establishments – and not only traditional tourism attractions, enhancing the quality of life of residents. This will enable local residents, employees and businesses to participate in both the development and benefits of making Niagara Falls the reason for a ‘return visit’.

Strategies and investments aimed at both enhancing the tourism offering and infrastructure are necessary to ignite and fuel continued reinvestment and renewal of the entire city.

Arts and Cultural Development

Cities with thriving arts and cultural communities are able to harness the talent and creative energy of the arts sector to create a rich, diverse, and exciting community with many positive ripple effects felt throughout the broader economy. Niagara Falls has indicated a strong support for the city’s arts community with the recent establishment of the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center (NACC).

The center currently provides space to approximately 70 artists engaged in the visual arts, and accommodates an art gallery, gift shop and two theatres. The NACC has provided an important boost to artists in the city and the region by providing support and a venue for creative and entrepreneurial pursuits within the local marketplace. Through creative planning, the center can mature to become a vital part of the local tourism offering that highlights local and regional arts, culture and traditions. This is an important consideration within an increasingly sophisticated tourism marketplace, where high-quality authentic products are essential to the development of niche and boutique market sectors necessary to draw new visitors, encourage longer stays, and diversify the tourism experience. Arts and cultural amenities and programming can become the basis for major festivals, events, and markets having a year-round, multi-seasonal draw and providing significant benefits to the local economy. Quebec City’s Winter Carnival, Toronto’s Jazz Festival, and Rochester’s Genesee River Fair are all cultural events with important social, cultural and economic benefits to their respective local communities and hospitality industries. Development of a strong arts and cultural program is also important to the city’s ability to attract young families, empty nesters, professionals and young adults looking for residential locations offering a more upscale range of cultural, educational and quality of life choices.



The NACC must be supported as a cornerstone of what can become a vibrant arts and cultural sector with an important role in tourism development.

Over time, investments in arts and culture, associated programming, venue and retail development within the Core City, providing an outlet for the celebration of local culture, will help to support the diversification of the tourism and economic base and promote the development of a culturally unique and rich environment attractive to both residents and visitors.

Regional Healthcare

A city's ability to meet the health care needs of its residents is fundamental to future economic development and growth. Few people will choose to live in a place that does not offer adequate medical facilities and trained personnel to meet their health needs. In Niagara Falls, the demographic shift toward aging populations is exaggerated by the out-migration of younger members of the population. While this situation has obvious economic and social disadvantages, it also presents strong opportunities for future growth in the health care sector, such as seniors' housing and extended care facilities.

The positive impacts of health facilities as economic drivers are even greater when they are aligned with teaching facilities associated with a reputable medical school and/or research and development centers involved in leading-edge work. This combination of education, care and research opportunities has the added benefit of supporting long-term residency, which is particularly important to the renewal of Niagara Falls.

The Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center is currently the city's only hospital and one of four in Niagara County. The center offers a full range of inpatient and outpatient services and an array of wellness and support programs between its downtown campus and three satellite facilities – the Summit Healthplex, the Hamilton B. Mizer Primary Care Center and the Schoellkopf Health Center. Partnerships with the Child Advocacy Center of Niagara and the Outreach for Wellness in Niagara (OWN) programs are important elements of the hospital's community programs. The Center maintains close ties with the Niagara Community College nursing program and the University of Buffalo's Roswell Cancer Institute. It is increasing its focus on women's health and has initiated a multi-million dollar upgrade and expansion of its downtown emergency department and a major new heart care center. The heart center will accommodate innovative cardiac diagnostic technology, a principal component of the Memorial Medical Center's comprehensive cardiac care program.

The Medical Center is an important regional asset and economic driver, bringing technology, experienced professionals, and patients to Niagara Falls and supporting economic and health care development. The need for a range of high-quality healthcare services will become increasingly important with overall demographic change and aging, presenting significant opportunities for regional facilities such as the Medical Center in the near future. The expansion of this facility is an important step in advancing the Medical Center as a regionally significant cardiac center and an important step in supporting the diversification of the city's economic base.

Maintaining, supporting and promoting regionally significant health care services, teaching and research facilities within the Core City is critical to maintaining a healthy population and supporting economic, employment and residential renewal in Niagara Falls.

Education

Educational institutions are another premier regional asset. They are a source of new ideas and theories and new employees for the labor force. They also offer opportunities for community partnerships and support growth in many areas from culture to business.

Niagara Falls is fortunate to have two post-secondary institutions in the area – Niagara University, a private liberal arts university located in the Town of Lewiston, and Niagara Community College, a locally sponsored college under the State University of New York in Sanborn. Both maintain active roles in the community, provide a range of outreach and continuing education programs, and offer co-operative education options for students enrolled in their programs.

Neither Niagara University nor Niagara Community College maintains research and technology transfer programs. Such programs often bring benefit to their host cities through the commercialization of research undertaken by faculty and students providing support and opportunities for local business, often technology-oriented industries. Niagara University and Niagara Community College are, however, important elements within the city's 'economic toolbox'. They are critical to the development and on-going education of the city's workforce, providing programs that are relevant to the specifics of the local economy. For example, the university's College of Hospitality and Tourism is closely linked to the Niagara Falls tourism industry. Over time, the City should work with these institutions to establish programs that will prepare students for employment in a diversity of expanding sectors.

Critical to the desired renewal and reinvestment of the Core City and its neighborhoods is the quality of the public and the private school systems. These institutions steward the education of the city's youth and function as hubs for community activities, gatherings and cultural events to provide a strong focus for neighborhood and civic life. Indeed, many parents and families will not invest in a return to the city and will in fact leave the city if the school system is not perceived as safe, or if it does not offer the high standard of quality education necessary to prepare children for adult life and/or post secondary education.

School closures and the location of secondary or high school facilities outside of the Core City have had a negative impact on Core City neighborhoods, community life and reinvestment. Issues of quality and access to education must be addressed to achieve renewal in the city and encourage potential residents to call Niagara Falls home. Inner city magnet schools offering specialized programs in math, science and the arts should be ardently pursued to elevate the education system within the city to the best in the region. Providing these opportunities for the residents of Niagara Falls and the involvement of partnership agencies and affiliations with area colleges and universities can make the school system a primary catalyst for residential and neighborhood renewal.

High-quality educational programs are fundamental to renewal, reinvestment and strengthening the quality of life that Niagara Falls can offer. The city must diversify and strengthen its employment skill base, attracting people, professionals and businesses back to Niagara Falls. The following educational programs should be supported or actively pursued by the municipality in partnership with other institutions, agencies and levels of government:

- ***Continuing education and professional retraining programs that are linked to the local economy;***

- *A safe, accessible school system with magnet or specialized programs linked to cultural resources;*
- *The visual and performing arts;*
- *High-quality recreational facilities;*
- *Niagara University; and*
- *Niagara Community College.*

Commercial Nodes and Corridors

Niagara Falls developed along native portage routes, namely Main Street and Pine Avenue, which linked the original villages that now form the city. While not an original portage route, Third Street has evolved as an important corridor focused on restaurant and entertainment uses. As the most direct entryway into the Core City from Niagara Falls, Ontario, Niagara Street presents a straightforward opportunity to capture cross-border commerce. Although portions of Main, Pine, Niagara and Third are struggling, these corridors contain some of the healthiest urban fabric and best heritage structures in the Core City and represent the places that the local citizenry frequents on a daily basis to conduct business, shop, meet friends and family, and socialize and enjoy civic life.

Traditional commercial corridors present a network of commercial activity, attractive destinations, and compelling places that can draw people into the city and encourage them to stay. In Niagara Falls, this network must be seen as a key economic driver that can be strengthened to support tourism development to local places while strengthening the overall local economy.

Many businesses along the Main Street, Pine Avenue, Niagara Street and Third Street corridors and other areas of downtown have been in operation for generations and are well-established local gathering places. Communities throughout North America have realized the potential of these corridors and places, and are investing in them as authentic places that offer a glimpse of historical development and an understanding of local culture and everyday city life. Niagara Falls' commercial nodes and corridors are assets that must be built upon, to improve the overall economic performance and quality of life found within the City. Linking existing commercial corridors firmly to tourism development and elevating the role of these corridors as primary linkages between local attractions and major tourism destinations, will enable these corridors to play a key role in the renewal of the city. Strategies and initiatives that can help elevate and reinforce these corridors as primary linkages between tourism precincts include streetscape improvement programs, unique retail and niche marketing campaigns and other economic and development programs.



Pine Avenue is a healthy commercial corridor linking neighborhoods and people to the city's waterfront.

Main Street, Pine Avenue, Niagara Street and Third Street and other similar traditional commercial strips can be important elements within Niagara Falls' developing tourism offering. By attracting new investment and new residents, these streets in particular can become vital urban corridors benefiting from year-round resident and visitor patronage. These corridors present opportunities to link together the City's attractions, including the downtown, the riverfront and the open spaces that frame these resources, creating a network for further revitalization, building around the riverfront corridor and the downtown. These are the most appropriate places to implement economic development programs, streetscape improvements and targeted retail and niche marketing campaigns.

Heritage Communities and Neighborhoods

Niagara Falls has extensive built heritage resources, neighborhoods and precincts that architecturally and culturally convey the evolution of the city, its people and values. These resources are often not present in suburban locations. Many North American cities are strategically engaged in enhancing and promoting heritage resources, precincts and character areas as a means of increasing tourism visitation and marketing a unique image for their traditional city centers. The Core City contains some of the most interesting and unique built heritage in Niagara Falls. Areas such as the western end of Pine Avenue, old Buffalo Avenue and Main Street north of Lockport Road are just three examples of areas that should be preserved and enhanced through neighborhood renewal strategies aimed at making these places attractive to both residents and visitors.

Blight removal and new housing opportunities that complement the existing single and multi-family fabric, including loft and condominium conversions of commercial properties, should be encouraged as part of a reuse strategy, along with new retail and commercial activities to support an increasing residential population. Heritage districts and unique character areas provide a solid basis for return visits to the city, and the most successful cities are those where tourists seek out the places where residents themselves spend their time. Improvements to the edges of these districts, sensitive infill, heritage streetscape development and public realm improvements will begin to redefine these areas as special places that are attractive to visitors, residents and private sector investment.

Renewal and protection of the city's primary heritage resources and areas will require specific programs designed to promote:

- *Historic designation of special heritage areas in order to protect and preserve them over the long term*
- *Relaxed zoning and building code requirements to encourage reuse of heritage structures*
- *Streetscape and public realm improvements*
- *Appropriate design and infill guidelines allowing desired flexibility and interest within the built environment*

Niagara Falls International Airport

Major regional and international transportation facilities such as the Niagara Falls International Airport are important facilities that can serve multiple purposes. The airport currently accommodates a variety of military and private uses, including the United States Air Force, National Guard and Army Reserve. With the third longest runway in the State of New York, the airport can accommodate large aircraft that others cannot, making it ideal for military uses and long-haul international flights. A flight simulator used in the training of airline employees will be located at the airport in the near future.

Over the long term, there may be an opportunity to enhance the functions of the Niagara Falls International Airport to include a stronger emphasis on long haul and international passenger flights, balanced with continuing cargo operations. The ability of the Niagara Falls Transportation Authority (NFTA) to secure major international flight agreements will depend on the city's success in redefining itself as an exciting and attractive tourism destination with strong links to the cities and attractions of the larger Bi-national Region, including Niagara-on-the-Lake, Rochester and the Finger Lakes, Buffalo, Hamilton and Toronto. Multi-modal transportation links, particularly rail links between the airport and major center will, in the long-term, provide even more connections. Expansion of the airport's functions will need to be explored in the context of the operations of the Buffalo-Niagara International Airport to ensure the two facilities do not directly compete with one another. Increasing the capacity of the cargo handling functions at the Niagara Falls International Airport in the short term will not compete with or duplicate passenger handling infrastructure at the Buffalo-Niagara International Airport.

Realizing the full potential of the airport and drawing the number of tourists necessary to expand passenger functions and services to compete successfully with other major airports in the region will require Niagara Falls to evolve and mature as a quality tourism destination with the types of uses, attractions and lodgings that international visitors would expect.

PART II: MASTER PLAN STRATEGIES

1. THE STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN

The City of Niagara Falls recognizes that the contemporary challenges and opportunities facing the city are complex, often interrelated and cannot be addressed overnight or by a single project or program. Therefore, a sustained strategy of focused, incremental and targeted efforts, programs and strategies is needed across the community to create a more attractive quality of life and improve the economic circumstances of the city and its residents. Clearly, these strategies will need to focus largely within the Core City, mediate contemporary challenges, and build strategically on key opportunities for economic growth. The Strategic Master Plan focuses and builds on the following important themes to bring about positive change and growth to the city:

- Identifying market opportunities
- Prioritizing catalyst projects in the core city to initiate revitalization and build investor confidence
- Diversifying the economic base
- Reducing excess infrastructure
- Neighborhood revitalization through diversification of residential housing types
- Increasing the residential population downtown
- Providing new high-quality educational programs in the core city
- Interpreting cultural resources and promoting heritage preservation
- Creating new green structures, pedestrian friendly streetscapes, two-way streets, and new parks and greenways
- Create distinct places and character areas to support visitation of local places and establishments
- Refining the city/park interface along the city's waterfront to 're-image' the city as *'the city in the park'*
- Develop new tourism infrastructure, attractions and tourism marketing programs

As the steward of the city's economic and physical development, the City of Niagara Falls recognizes the need to lead renewal efforts and establish new partnership programs to ensure the interests of the city and its residents are pursued and that the benefits of revitalization extend to the entire WNY community. The urban design, land use and built form recommendations underlying the Core City Strategies are intended for integration into the Niagara Falls Comprehensive Plan and its land use regulations.

The Strategic Master Plan presented in this document represents a new way of thinking about the city and its future. It is a comprehensive guide for renewal in the City that focuses on key challenges and opportunities specific to the City and results in an action-oriented framework to achieve positive change. The Strategic Master Plan is comprised of the following key components:

- **Eight Principles for City Renewal** that outline the theory and approach underlying the strategic plan. These principles can be directly incorporated into the City’s planning policies to guide decision-making.
- **The Core City Vision and Core City Strategies**, which present a detailed vision of how the Core City should develop over the next several decades, identifying key projects, initiatives and programs to achieve the vision and kick-start and direct reinvestment. The Core City Strategies are organized as follows: the Big Moves, which are fundamental to the future success of the city; followed by Precinct Strategies, which establish recommendations to enhance the role various areas within the Core City can play in bringing about the renewal of the city. For the purposes of this document, both the *Big Moves* and *Precinct Strategies* make recommendations relative to specific ‘areas of character’ within the Core City.
- **Priority Initiatives Within the Core City**, which summarizes the key initiatives that the City should undertake in two stages over the next 15 years to bring about and encourage renewal and private sector reinvestment.
- **The seven General Citywide Strategies** are aimed at revitalization of significant components of the urban system, building upon and complementing the Core City Strategies. They address housing, the open space network, heritage resources and transportation, industrial land, communication and marketing, and education. The Citywide Strategies stress the importance these systems have in the renewal of the city and identify broad recommendations aimed at general improvement throughout Niagara Falls.

It is fundamentally important to recognize that the targeted Core City Strategies and General Citywide Strategies provide a consistent and comprehensive approach in guiding broad-based renewal in Niagara Falls. These initiatives are “nested,” logically building upon one another to solve not just one problem, but address many complex issues simultaneously. Every action not only encourages further positive change, but also itself becomes a reinforcing element to subsequent actions.

2. TOWARD A NEW DIRECTION FOR THE FUTURE

The Strategic Master Plan is different from previous studies in that it focuses on repairing and rebuilding the city, its streets, open spaces, neighborhoods and community spirit, rather than relying on general goals or the “silver-bullet” projects of the past.

As a comprehensive framework for change, the Strategic Master Plan will guide the evolution of the city to achieve a balanced range of opportunities for living, working, investing and recreating, which offer residents a high quality of life and visitors a unique and vibrant urban experience. Fundamental to the transformation of Niagara Falls will be the acceptance by the community and its leaders that the municipality’s resources and operations need to be aligned to strategic, focused activities, and toward a smaller and more compact population; that industrial activity, while important, can no longer be seen as the city’s primary economic engine; and that the City needs to lead renewal efforts and invest in itself before others will do the same.

The Strategic Master Plan is based on the following principles which should be used to guide development, investment and decision-making toward long-term renewal and city building.

2.1 Principles for City Renewal

1. Build on core assets

Niagara Falls must build and capitalize on its existing assets and leverage these to initiate social, economic and cultural renewal. These include the city’s role in the regional economy as the tourism destination; the Niagara River and its vast riverfront setting including the Falls and the Gorge; regional health care facilities and other institutions, including the Memorial Medical Center, Niagara Arts and Cultural Center, Niagara University and Niagara Community College; the city’s collection of heritage buildings, neighborhoods and traditional commercial districts; and existing industrial activities.

2. Develop the riverfront, its recreational, development and cultural potential - “The Big Move.”

The riverfront is the city’s defining feature and premier asset. Expanding and positioning this asset to support an array of year round activities, cultural programming, events, high-quality tourism and educational destinations would be a wise long-term investment. The frayed urban edge on the riverfront must evolve to become the city’s open front door and its premier address. Current confusion between ‘fronts, backs and sides’ of buildings that form ‘the edge’ must be clarified through design guidelines and new land use controls. The land along this city/park interface has the potential to become the most highly valued real estate in Niagara Falls. Districts adjacent to re-defined riverfront will offer a visually interesting, attractive urban/park environment showcasing high-quality built form, beautiful pedestrian streetscapes and a vibrant range of urban uses and amenities that will entice residents and visitors to explore and enjoy the city.

3. Create green streetscape connections that link the riverfront amenities to the city, its neighborhoods and main streets.

Major tourism destinations such as the riverfront and its attractions, including the Niagara Aquarium and the Niagara Reservation, should be better connected to the city, local places and established main streets, to promote visitation of local establishments and cultural destinations. These attractions should be linked to other regional and local parks and public spaces to create a continuous green framework to support community-based tourism. Greening public spaces and improving the public environment will extend the value of the riverfront's edge into larger areas of the Core City.

Many new connections are needed within the downtown and along the eastern neighborhoods, connections that should be introduced through the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway. Strengthening these linkages depends on rethinking local streets as attractive pedestrian-oriented tree-lined places that accommodate people and activity, not just cars.

A well-designed network comprised of the riverfront, streets, parks, squares and other open spaces will play a key role in enhancing the city's image and its quality of life, while creating an attractive setting for high-quality private sector reinvestment. A network of green public spaces and improved public environments will extend the value of the riverfront's edge into larger areas of the Core City.

4. Prioritize residential development: revitalize neighborhoods and make living in the Core City attractive.

Revitalizing and increasing the residential population in the Core City is key to the creation of a vibrant urban center. The traditional downtown must evolve to become not just a place for visitors, but an authentic urban core where people live, work, shop and recreate, and where the ability to walk or bike to work or to cultural, retail, recreational and entertainment amenities is considered a quality of life advantage.

From a market perspective, current demand for existing housing is low and many neighborhoods are under-occupied and in need of repair, making them unattractive for reinvestment. Targeted public realm improvements; local heritage preservation incentives; improvements to community facilities and the quality of the school system; and the removal and retirement of derelict housing will strengthen these neighborhoods and serve to stabilize and increase demand for residential options in the inner city.

Alternative housing forms catering to a variety of income levels and household compositions, such as young professionals, single adults and empty nesters, can bring more people to the area who will support retail and business expansion within the Core City. Higher density and alternative housing should be carefully located in the core, including the existing tourism area, to support renewal of the core and build the critical mass necessary to create and support a vibrant city center and tourist area.

5. Plan to become a more compact, attractive and manageable city.

By stabilizing and revitalizing neighborhoods, retiring derelict housing and industrial uses, holding land in reserve, developing interim land uses, and increasing the amount of green

space within the city, it is possible for Niagara Falls to become a more attractive and manageable city that is better able to meet the needs of its current residents and effectively plan for future growth. Niagara Falls will be most successful in the future as it was in the past, as a much denser, more compact city, with an identifiable core surrounded by thriving neighborhoods and commercial precincts that are attractive to and supported by residents, as well as visitors.

6. Commit to sustained small-scale incremental change, design excellence, and authentic place making.

The desire for immediate change often encourages people to look for big, ‘one-off’ project solutions. These rarely deliver what they promise and can overshadow a diversity of smaller scaled projects throughout the city that can fuel many fires of renewal and revitalization. The reuse of historic buildings, streetscape improvements and infilling of small vacant parcels are examples of small-scale actions that can greatly contribute to revitalization efforts. Attention to design quality and place making that complement the city’s unique character and built form, heritage fabric and pattern of urban development will create attractive, inspiring places for people and activity, to encourage continued reinvestment and renewal in Niagara Falls.

7. Carefully target ‘catalyst projects’ to ignite renewal efforts and encourage private sector interest and reinvestment.

While a sustained program of incremental change is necessary for renewal, a few carefully selected larger projects can result in dramatic changes in the short term and signal an area’s rejuvenation, furthering interest by the private sector. These projects should complement their existing context and contribute to place making by including residential components as often as possible, and not obscuring traditional urban patterns and uses. For example:

- ***Create a Cultural District*** by incorporating both State and City waterfront open space resources including an expanded Aquarium of Niagara, a new outdoor performance and festival area, the Gorge Discovery Center, Niagara Experience Center, beautifully landscaped parkland and tourist facilities and other high-quality educational and tourism attractions. This would create attractive pedestrian-oriented places complementary to the natural and cultural resource along the Gorge and re-define the City. An expanded park setting and re-configured roadway connections will not only greatly enhance the potential of all secondary attractions along the lower river corridor, but also provide many new opportunities for private-sector investment in the corridor.
- ***Create a downtown Festival Square*** between Prospect Street and Rainbow Boulevard. The City should influence the development of an attractive venue for cultural programming, visitor orientation and hotel and residential development, while weaving the Niagara Reservation and the Falls Street Promenade into a more successful and coherent pedestrian space and open space gesture.
- ***Create a downtown entertainment/theater center*** on Niagara Street. This center should be designed to incorporate street related uses and provide an attractive street façade to improve the quality of the public realm and reinforce connections to other attractions.

8. Build strategic partnerships and promote a common agenda to undertake ‘catalyst’ projects.

The active and ongoing participation of all those with a stake in the future of Niagara Falls must be sought and encouraged to achieve renewal and the City must work to ensure benefits are shared with the entire community. Achieving the many projects and initiatives recommended in the Strategic Master Plan will require the City to pursue a number of partnerships with the public, private and non-profit sectors. Partnerships represent a new way to plan, achieve, prioritize and implement city-building initiatives while strengthening support for renewal within the community and helping to overcome the history of isolated decision-making and self-contained, stand-alone projects.

2.2 A Comprehensive Roadmap for Positive Change

The Core City Vision, Core City Strategies, Summary of Priority Initiatives, and Citywide Strategies that follow build on the Principles of City Renewal presented above, and provide a comprehensive roadmap for the renewal and revitalization of Niagara Falls. Together, they outline recommendations for ongoing programs and strategies, as well as targeted actions aimed at encouraging broad-based social, economic and cultural prosperity within the city.

The recommendations presented in the Core City Vision and Core City Strategies provide a blueprint for the renewal of the Core City. These recommendations identify a series of targeted actions aimed at reversing decline and capturing new economic, social and cultural opportunities in the Core City.

The Strategic Master Plan places great emphasis on a sustained program of focused actions within the Core City to kick start redevelopment and reinvestment where it will have the greatest positive impact, while simultaneously improving the City’s position within the region. Recommendations for the Core City build on existing assets and new opportunities to strengthen the city over the next 20 years. Actions necessary to achieve change are outlined in the Summary of Priority Initiatives. Many initiatives are interrelated and purposely nested to address complex and multifaceted problems, and thus must be pursued consistently and holistically to achieve broad-based renewal.

The revitalization of the city will occur through a combination of public and private sector initiatives and investment decisions guided by market factors and public policy. The Strategic Master Plan cannot precisely predict how these forces will play out. Rather, the Strategic Master Plan highlights those efforts that should be undertaken to promote renewal. It also illustrates how specific actions can positively change and influence the city socially, economically and culturally. In some instances however, there are trade-offs required to move the city forward. The Strategic Master Plan provides new ways of thinking about the city and its renewal. It also establishes a basis for public dialogue about the choices we face as a community going forward, such as committing resources necessary for progress.

3. CORE CITY VISION

Imagine the future. Imagine the city you want your children to inherit...

It is 2025 and the city has dramatically changed through the successful implementation of many development projects and programs initiated through the Strategic Master Plan. The social and economic circumstances of Niagara Falls and its residents have been considerably improved following a targeted program of improvements and investments by the municipality, and the successful execution of seven ‘Big Moves’ – the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway; extensive public realm investments in the Falls Precinct; the heart of the city; the establishment of the Cultural District; the repositioning of Niagara Street as a high-value mixed use retail shopping area; the creation of a new neighborhood along John B. Daly Boulevard; and the introduction of a series of innovative heritage preservation and neighborhood housing renewal programs. A thriving residential population, new office and employment uses, and retail and commercial activity define the heart of Niagara Falls and present a rich range of opportunities for living, working and leisure activities in the Core City.

New cultural and educational amenities including the Aquarium expansion, the Niagara Experience Center and the city’s new Cultural District with its annual program of concert performances and cultural festivals bring many new visitors to the city to enjoy the rich offering of urban, natural and cultural heritage experiences along the waterfront and in downtown areas.

The focus of tourism development has been to develop the riverfront corridor and the urban interface extending from the city’s northern boundary, along the Gorge, past the Falls and along the Upper Niagara River to the city’s eastern boundary. Yet, the implementation of any planned waterfront development can only occur in partnership with the State. Coordinating the establishment of the Niagara River National Heritage Area, the creation of a NYS Lake-to-Lake Greenway, the creation of a ‘Gorge view’ Cultural District, the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway, and other proposed waterfront projects, the city can create a riverfront corridor equal to, if not surpassing, the quality and diversity offered by the Niagara Parks Commission in Canada. The Cultural District will contain a collection of high-quality family-oriented and educational attractions within a beautiful landscape setting. These attractions include the expanded Aquarium, Niagara Gorge Discovery Center or other cultural interpretations, an outdoor performance/concert venue, and perhaps the recently funded Niagara Experience Center. The Cultural District setting is itself an incentive for high-quality development and private sector investment along the urban edge presenting a dramatic new image of the city to the world – the city within a park.

The reconfiguration of the Parkway creates an environmentally sensitive, pedestrian-friendly, and value-added riverfront drive linking destinations all along the waterfront. In the city, many new street connections have firmly reconnected the city and its population to its waterfront. A new setting has been established for public life and pride, as well as, new reinvestment in retail and shopping, bed and breakfast establishments, hotels and convention facilities, galleries, restaurants and cafes focused in the heart of the city. These

new developments have boosted the city's tourism sector and provided residents with many new reasons to visit and live in the downtown area.

The redevelopment of the properties fronting the State park with boutique hotels, specialty shops, and high-quality residential developments has reintegrated the interface between the park and the city, encouraging visitors to spend many more hours exploring the City. A new public focus at the interface of the park was established with the introduction of Falls Street Festival Square. Located across from the main park entrance on Prospect Street, the square is an active public space that provides a place to rest and take part in the many festivals and performances that can be found here.

The area east of the Goat Island Bridge has been re-imaged through a series of new bed and breakfasts, new mixed-use, and boutique hotel development along Buffalo Avenue and Rainbow Boulevard. Sensitive infill developments complement the historic character of this precinct, reinforcing it as a special part of the city, adjacent to the State Park; it is one of Niagara Falls' key heritage districts. At the intersection of John B. Daly Boulevard, a new visitor orientation center is anticipated to provide tourism related information to visitors as they enter the primary tourist area. The center offers parking and transit facilities, encouraging visitors to leave their cars and explore the city by foot or by the shuttle service, which links the various attractions and amenities found at Niagara Falls.

The establishment of the city's *International Railway Station/Intermodal Transportation Center* (IRS-ITC) at the Old Custom House has similarly encouraged growth of the tourism industry. The IRS-ITC is an important point of entry and orientation, and a stop for the visitor shuttle operated under a City/State partnership operating between the center, various State park facilities, other tourist attractions and amenities located in the Core City. The Center also acts as a multi-modal hub linking the cities of the Bi-national Region by Via Rail and Amtrak as well as shuttle connection via Ontario's "People Mover" and "Metro Rail" to the airport.

Significant changes have also occurred on Niagara Street. Mixed use retail, office and residential developments have created a vibrant medium density 'main street' providing some of the best shopping and entertainment experiences within the region. They have also created a strong activity spine linking the casino precinct to the waterfront and cultural district. New hotels, movie theaters and specialized shopping, balancing local independent retailers with major national chains, anchor the street and present residents and visitors with sophisticated, high-quality urban amenities able to successfully compete with the offering across the bridge in Canada. This combination of elements has served to ensure activity at all times of the day. The recent narrowing of Niagara Street, in conjunction with the development of a high-quality pedestrian environment and the release of targeted Request for Qualification (RFQ) developments aimed at attracting the best mixed use and retail development talent have brought about the transformation of the street.

With a collection of nightclubs, entertainment and restaurant offerings, Third Street has become a destination in its own right. Multi-level establishments with outdoor terraces and patios, infill projects and unique lighting and streetscape treatments have established Third Street as a cutting edge regional draw – a place which supports business luncheons and meetings as well as fashionable clubs and dancing establishments for the younger generation.

Figure 5. Core City Vision
A 20-Year Look Forward

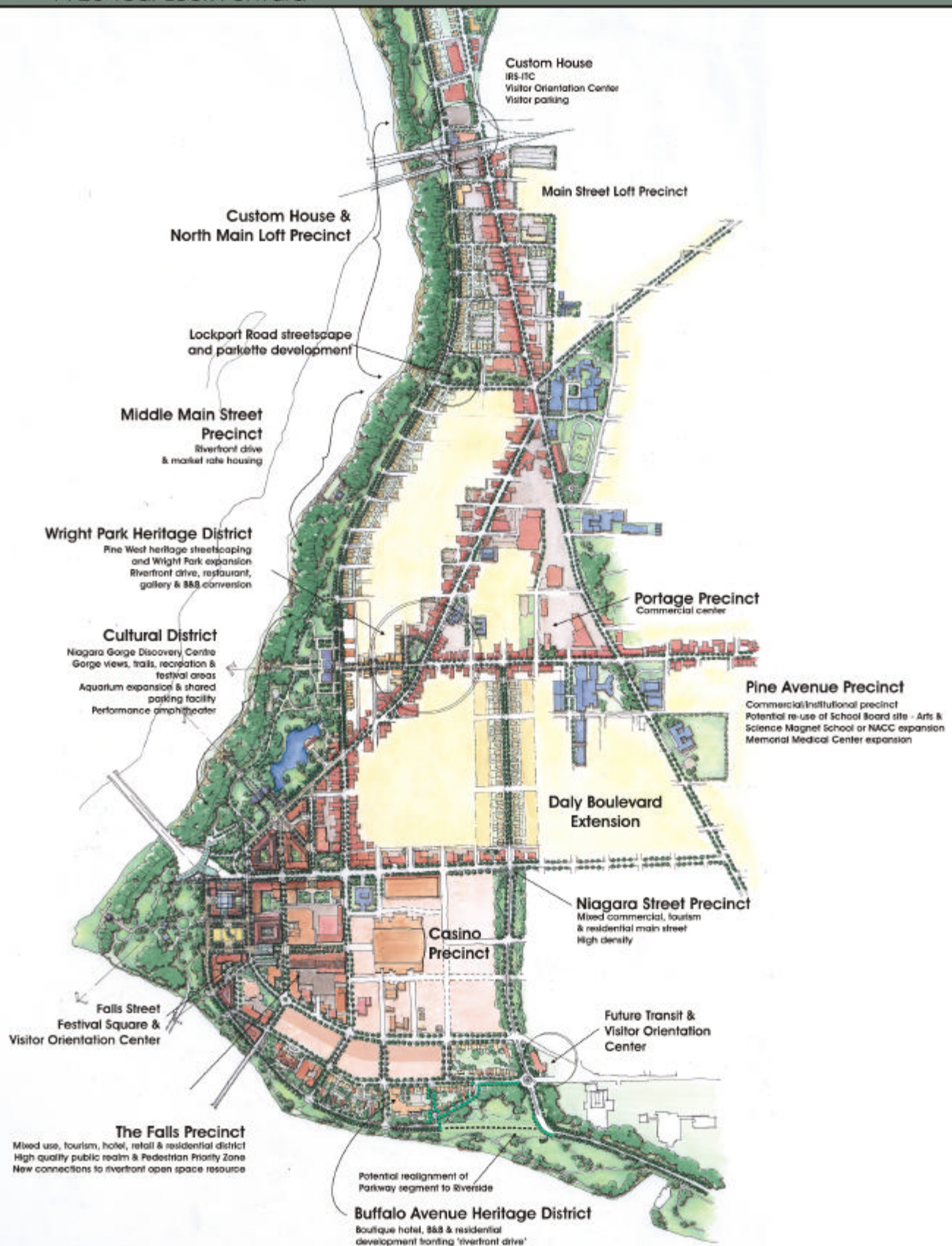


Figure 6. Core City Vision:



Some Big Moves are needed to unlock the tremendous potential for the future



Likewise, Pine Avenue and Main Street have also enjoyed new prosperity due to streetscape improvements and appropriate infill development aimed at capturing a unique sense of place for these important corridors, while strengthening their ability to support resident and visitor needs. Other parts of the city have benefited from more modest public infrastructure investments. The extension of John B. Daly Boulevard from Niagara Street north to Pine Avenue has provided an important new focus for residential development, while easing traffic congestion and better connecting local streets to provide a more logical pattern of movement.

The introduction of a range of new housing opportunities has helped to broaden the city's demographic, attracting new families, seniors and young professionals back to Niagara Falls. The municipality's heritage preservation policies have preserved the Core City's unique characteristics while permitting new innovative loft developments along North Main Street, apartment conversions and new low- and medium-density housing along the waterfront and throughout the city. The rehabilitation of neighborhoods in the Core City and the development of a new magnet school have expanded interest in all of the new residential opportunities being built in the core. A diverse offering of residential options allows residents to remain in the city throughout their lives to take part in its strong and dynamic offering. As the population has grown and the local economy has flourished, the City and the private sector have turned their attention and their resources from the Core City to other areas of Niagara Falls. Additionally, the infrastructure and surplus land that were 'banked' decades ago are now the focus of continuing reinvestment in the City.

Known for its beautiful tree-lined streets, welcoming people-places, collection of civic squares and parks, active street life, regional health and educational services and strong cultural offerings, the Core City has become a wonderful place live, to work and to visit. Residents and visitors alike enjoy a network of community open spaces and parks, including pathways and trails. Niagara Falls has become a beautiful place to visit, a healthy place to live, and a focus for the region. It has become an attractive urban setting, with a strong economy, and a bright future.

The Core City Vision is summarized graphically in Figure 5. Figure 6 compares the existing and proposed downtown structure, to illustrate how the Big Moves can unlock the city's tremendous potential for the future.

4. CORE CITY STRATEGIES

The Core City Strategies represent a sustained program of focused, incremental and targeted efforts and programs aimed at seizing and building upon opportunities within the Core City to create a more attractive quality of life and economic circumstance within Niagara Falls. In short, they represent the actions necessary to guide the revitalization of the Core City and achieve the vision over the next several decades.

The Core City Strategies are divided into two sections – The Big Moves and Core City Precinct Strategies. The seven Big Moves are Core City Strategies that will have a particularly powerful influence on the revitalization of Niagara Falls, and must be accomplished in order for the transformation of the city to occur. These initiatives were identified as the most critical to the future of the city and were brought up repeatedly throughout the consultation process, analysis of precedent documents and further analysis done in drafting the Strategic Master Plan. In addition to the Big Moves, the Strategic Master Plan has identified seven Precinct Strategies, which outline recommendations specific to definable character areas within the Core City building upon the perceived development potential and unique economic role, while supporting the identity and character of each. Each of the Big Moves and Core City Precinct Strategies are shown in Figure 7: Priority Initiatives. In addition, Figure 8: Urban Structure shows the proposed urban re-structuring of these ‘precinct areas’ within the Core City.

The Core City Strategies are comprised of:

4.1 The Big Moves

- 4.1.1 Reconnect the City to its Waterfront
- 4.1.2 Create the Cultural District
- 4.1.3 Initiate Public Realm and Catalyst Projects in the Falls Precinct
- 4.1.4 Transform the Niagara Street Precinct
- 4.1.5 Create a New Neighborhood in the Daly Boulevard Precinct
- 4.1.6 Preserve the Heritage of the Core City
- 4.1.7 Housing Renewal

4.2 Core City Precinct Strategies

- 4.2.1 Customs House and Main Loft Precinct
- 4.2.2 Middle Main Street Precinct
- 4.2.3 Portage Precinct
- 4.2.4 Pine Avenue Precinct
- 4.2.5 Third Street Precinct
- 4.2.6 Wright Park Heritage District
- 4.2.7 Buffalo Avenue Heritage District
- 4.2.8 Casino Precinct
- 4.2.9 Lands Subject to Development Agreement

Combined or multiple activities within a given area of the Core City can have significant synergistic impact. The Core City Strategies and their recommendations are intended to be a set of ‘nested’ and overlapping initiatives that address complex issues and problems in a

comprehensive way, by capitalizing on the synergies and connections between them. As a result, pockets of renewal can be created, encouraging reinvestment throughout the Core City. The urban design, land use and built form recommendations underlying the Core City Strategies are to be integrated into the City's Comprehensive Plan.

The Core City Strategies represent a range of initiatives or project types to guide change in the Core City. Many of the strategies are strictly physical improvement projects, while others involve additional program or policy recommendations to ensure implementation. Most will require new and innovative partnerships between the municipality, community organizations, other levels of government, and the business sector. All will require leadership.

Project recommendations have been categorized into five broad project types or activities described below. In many cases, a project falls into more than one category.

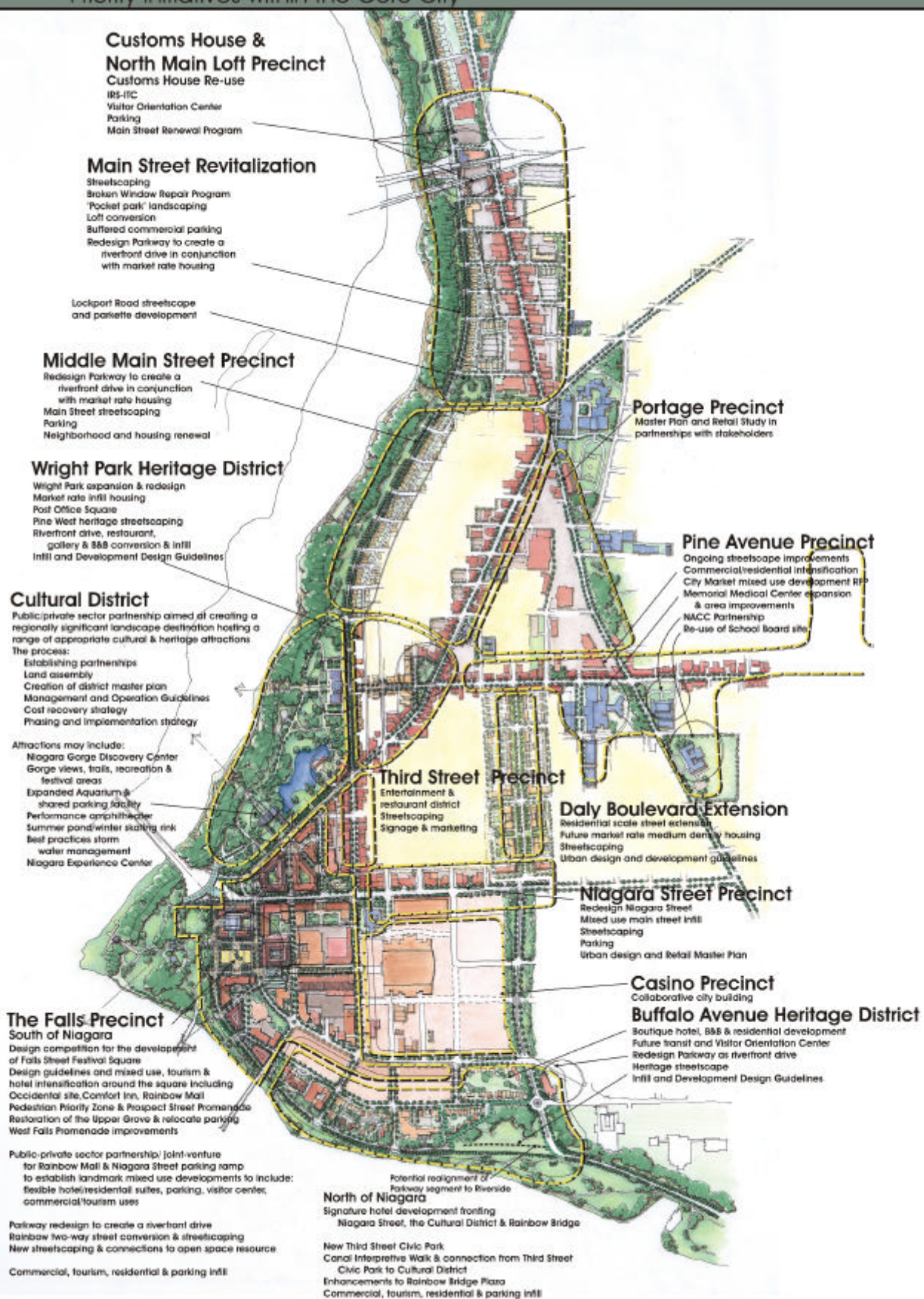
- **Design /Design Guidelines** – Creating specific projects with the intention that they be implemented through an ongoing capital works program or by the private sector, according to established municipal design criteria
- **Installation** – Construction of facilities or infrastructure in the Core City.
- **Partnership** – Attracting active or passive participation in the ongoing process of economic development in Niagara Falls.
- **Planning/Scoping** – Determining the full scope or dimension of a project including its programming, location, size, financing and operation.
- **Management** – Ongoing interaction between the municipality, other levels of government and their respective agencies, businesses and residents.

The following presents an overview of the Core City Strategies relative to their current and long-term potential, followed by specific strategies or recommendations intended to guide or support the renewal and development of each precinct area. Initiatives and recommendations are prioritized according to immediate term (0 to 5 years) or longer-term (5 to 15 years) implementation.

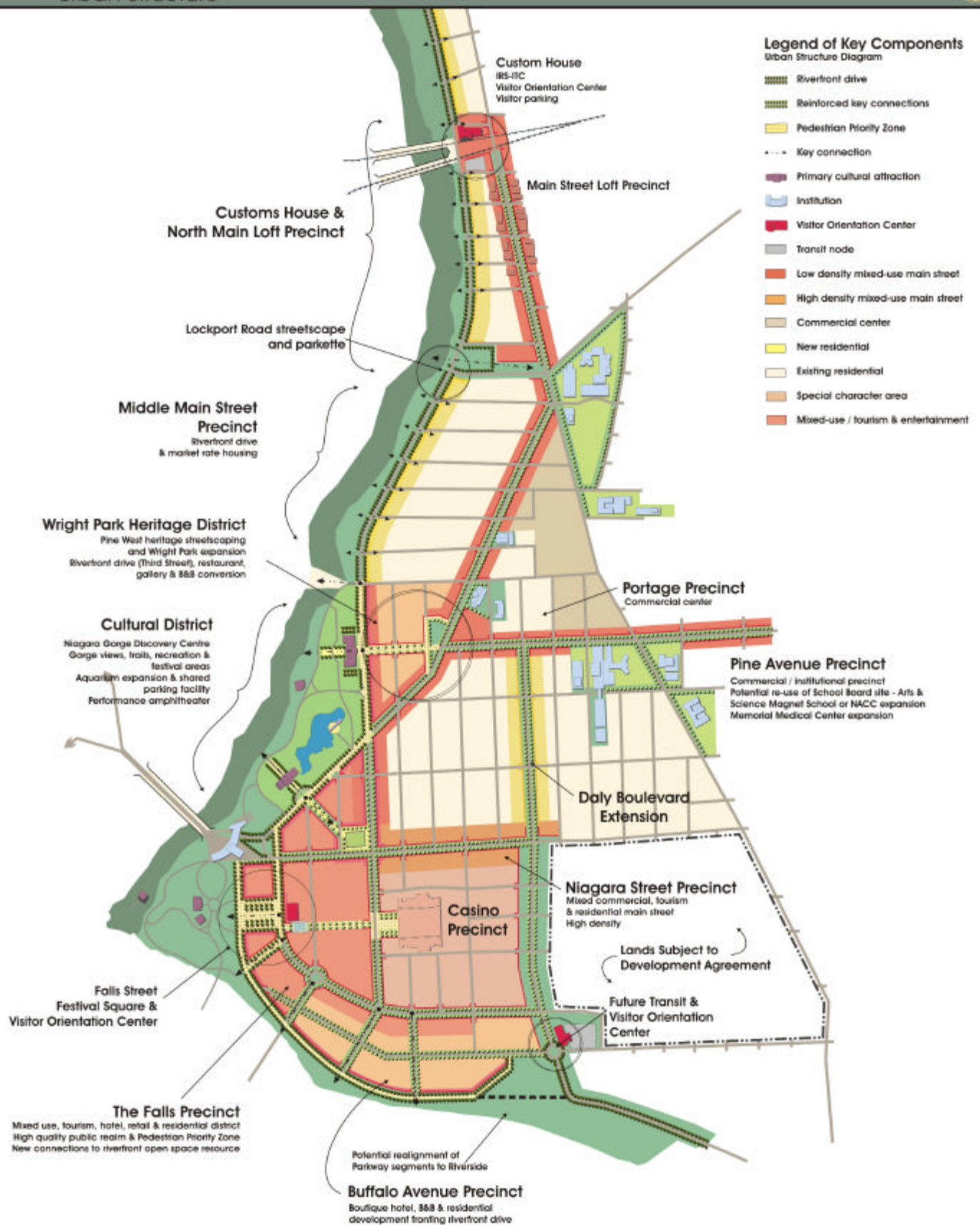
The Core City Strategies are organized to provide:

- A general description of the precinct or focus area, its current state and its importance
- A project strategy outlining the approach or rationale for renewal initiatives or programs
- Recommendations of specific initiatives for the precinct.

Figure 7. Core City Vision:
Priority Initiatives within the Core City



**Figure 8. Core City Vision:
Urban Structure**



4.1 The Big Moves

4.1.1 Reconnect the City to its Waterfront

Description

With the exception of small area fronting the Niagara Reservation, the City of Niagara Falls is completely cut off from its waterfront, the Niagara River and the Gorge by the Robert Moses Parkway. Configured with multiple lanes in each direction and a central dividing median, the Parkway is set within an expressway- width right-of-way and is grossly over-scaled in relation to the current and anticipated transportation and capacity needs of the City. It occupies extremely valuable riverfront lands not justifiable from a transportation perspective and represents a significant barrier to safe, easy access to the riverfront corridor. Occupying virtually the entire length of the city's interface with its riverfront, the parkway presents a barrier not only by its width, but also by the absence of east/west local street connections between the city and the riverfront.

These conditions have prevented the development of what otherwise could be strong relationship between the city, local businesses and waterfront tourism. Residents and pedestrians are physically separated from the city's most valuable public land, and visitors to the riverfront are not drawn to the city's other attractions and amenities because logical street connections are missing. The Parkway has isolated people and vehicular traffic in a pattern that denies access to existing local businesses, has largely held waterfront property values down, and has precluded needed economic development and investment along the length of the city's most valuable real estate asset - the waterfront. Clearly this is a situation that could be greatly improved, to considerable benefit.

Project Strategy

The strategy for reconnecting the city to its waterfront involves reconfiguration and redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway to create a calm, narrower, more pedestrian friendly and humanly scaled 'Riverfront Drive' (see Figure 9). It will be appropriate to existing and future transportation capacity needs, and fully connected to the network of city streets, which are adjacent to but currently disconnected from the existing parkway. This represents a traditional, urban, connected street network based solution. And it requires the parkway to evolve and perform not just a single role, the efficient movement of cars, but multiple roles to meet a variety of new goals. The reconfigured parkway or 'Riverfront Drive' must accommodate not just one, but all forms of movement, including people, cars, cyclists and bladders; it must create a beautiful public realm and streetscape to define an attractive interface between the city and its riverfront; it must re-establish pedestrian and street connections between the city and the riverfront asset; and it must create a renewed setting to stimulate economic development and reinvestment along the riverfront corridor. The reconfiguration of the parkway is the first step in unlocking and activating vast areas of prime riverfront lands and repositioning these to meaningfully participate in the future tourism based economy of the city.

Across North America, there has been a fundamental shift in transportation thinking and planning over the last decade. The sole focus on transportation at the exclusion of other equally important components of a healthy city, has given way toward a more balanced,

integrated land use and development-supportive, network-based or systems approach which can accomplish many goals. Indeed, many North American cities are currently engaged in dismantling and reconfiguring their expressways built in the 1960s and 70s to reconnect their waterfronts to urban cores, reclaim and develop extensive land areas sterilized by transportation corridors, and repair frayed and blighted fabric, which has often resulted along expressway corridors. These cities are engaged in recreating and extending their original network based system, and finding opportunities for community building and economic development through lands reclaimed from the expressways. Boston, MA, San Francisco, CA, Rochester, NY, New York, NY and Toronto, Canada are among the many cities engaged in re-planning their expressway corridors to create healthy, prosperous and productive urban areas, which can fully contribute to the growth and vitality of the city.

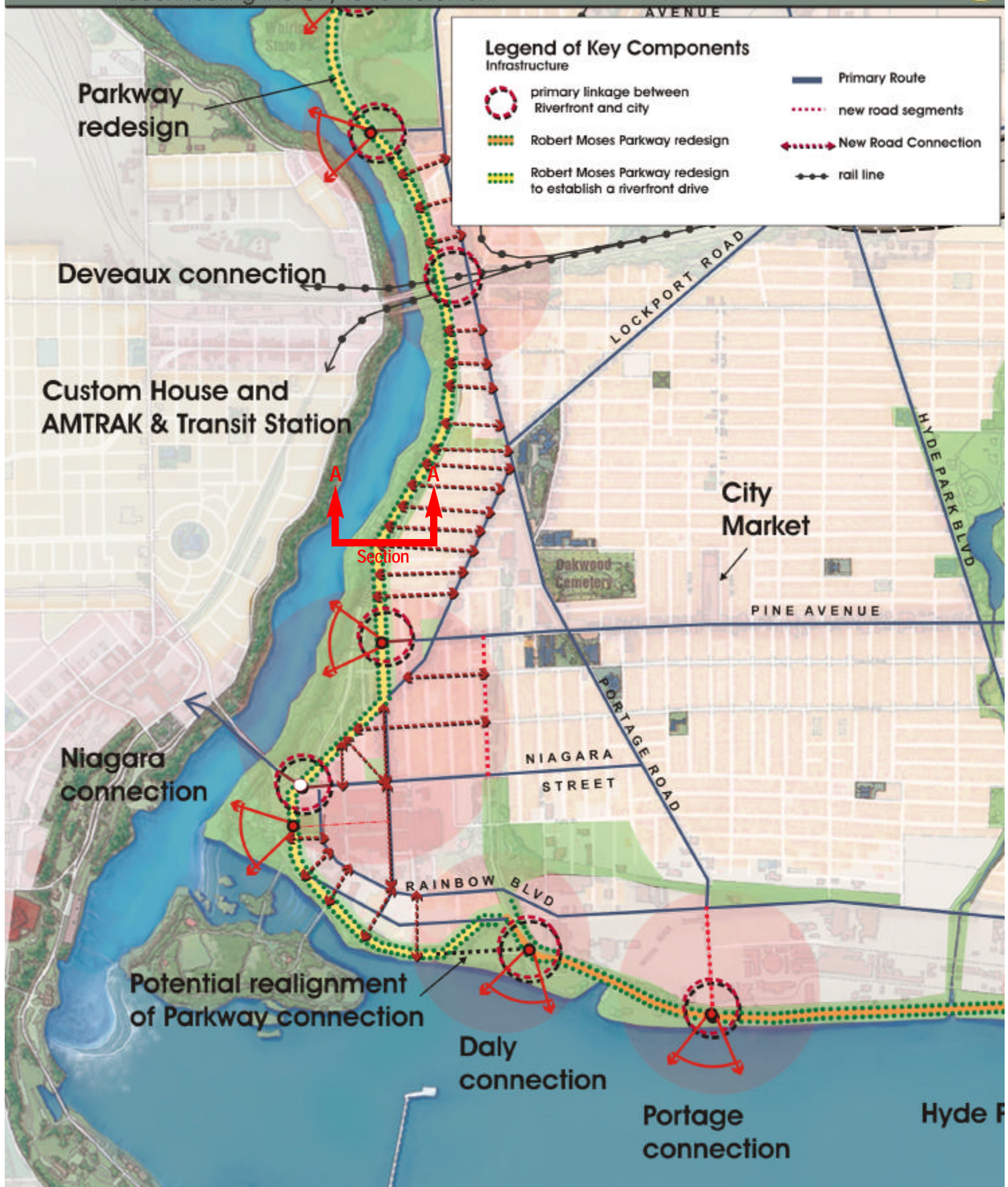
Within the City of Niagara Falls, the reconfiguration and reuse of the Robert Moses Parkway has tremendous potential to create new opportunities for economic development and community building.

Through the reconfiguration and downsizing of some sections of the Parkway, land can be reclaimed and conveyed back to productive use as riverfront parkland, as well as yield new urban development parcels to stimulate economic growth and reinvestment on the city side of the reconfigured route. In particular, opportunities to dramatically change the riverfront are possible through the reconfiguration of the segments from the north municipal boundary to Cedar Avenue, and southeast of Prospect Street; the complete removal of other segments realigning the roadway to existing streets, such as the Whirlpool to Third Street to lower Main Street linkage; and through the adoption of a flexible network-based system involving primary tourism streets such as Rainbow Blvd., Buffalo Avenue, a narrow, urban 'Riverfront Drive' together with the introduction of many new cross street connections to fully link the city to its waterfront and tourism potential.

The following will briefly describe the recommended alignment and basic design parameters of specific sections of the reconfigured 'Riverside Drive' to best integrate this new urban street within the existing and planned context. Additional recommendations specific to the reconfigured parkway segments below are presented in key recommendations, which follow.

- **From the Northern Municipal boundary to Findlay Circle**, the parkway will be narrowed to accommodate one travel lane in each direction with an alternating passing lane where appropriate. Pocket parking can be integrated along or within the park. The drive will generally follow its current alignment with excess lands restored to parkland. A new street connection to College Street should be made and the potential for additional connections north of College Street should be explored at the design and planning stage. The Findlay Crescent connection can be configured as a round-a-bout to signal entry into the Core City.
- **From Findlay Circle to Cedar Avenue**, within the Customs House and Main Loft Precinct (see Section 4.2.1 and Figure 10) and the Middle Main Street Precinct (see Section 4.2.2), the functional design of the parkway will remain as described above. However, the alignment should rationalize and consolidate the existing parkway right-of-way and the Whirlpool Street right of way to create a new 'mid-point'

Figure 9. Core City: The Big Moves
Reconnecting the City to its Waterfront

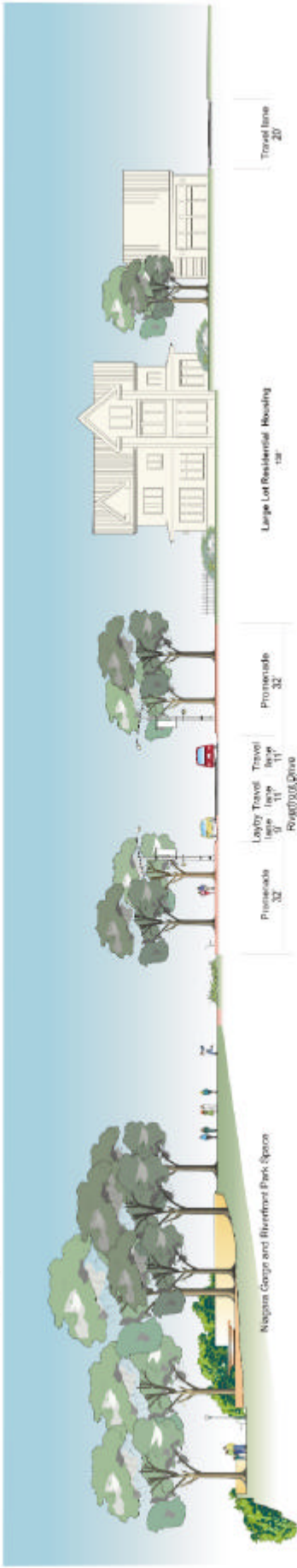




The character of the Robert Moses Parkway in the Customs House and North Main Loft Precinct will be that of a drive through a park.



New residential development along the riverfront drive will need to have a strong presence.



Section A: Proposed section through riverfront drive north

alignment, creating opportunities for residential development on the east side of the Parkway to re-image this critical entryway to the city, and add new parkland along the riverfront corridor. Many new street connections within this design segment will reconnect the city to the riverfront, and a high caliber of streetscape and public realm design will define the parkland resource and create an appropriate setting for high value residential development fronting the open space resource.

- **From Cedar Avenue to Niagara Street**, the existing parkway will be abandoned and returned entirely to productive use as part of the Cultural District (see Section 4.1.2). The ‘Riverfront Drive’ will be aligned at the Cedar Avenue connection to Third Street and lower Main Street, then southwest along Main Street to Rainbow Boulevard and Niagara Street. This alignment will define the full extent of the Cultural District to the West and will reposition important local streets as part of the ‘Riverfront Drive’ making the urban fabric and properties to the east prime riverfront locations. The streetscape in this segment should take on a much more urban character with a double row of tree plantings on both sides of the park, generous sidewalks on both sides of the street and continuous parallel parking permitted on the eastern side of the street only. This portion of the Parkway will also be designated as a Pedestrian Priority Zone (as described for the Falls Precinct in Section 4.1.3) with many pedestrian crossings and a very high quality of streetscape treatment, which may include in-street unit pavers or cobbles to signify the importance of this new mixed use and tourism area and prioritize pedestrian and non-vehicular forms of movement over vehicular movements. As this is a fully connected network-based system, with many alternate route possibilities, ‘Riverfront Drive’ may be temporarily closed to support special programming and events occurring within the Cultural District.
- **From Niagara Street to Daly Boulevard**, passing through the Falls Precinct (see Section 4.1.3) and Buffalo Avenue Heritage District (see Section 4.2.7), the most urban and intensively used area of the city, the new ‘Riverfront Drive’ will become part of an integrated and connected street network. Within this area, multiple routes will disperse traffic and provide flexibility of use through the potential for temporary street closures for special events or street fairs, or potentially during the high tourist season. The alignment of the new ‘Riverfront Drive’ will conform to Prospect Street and follow the existing parkway alignment, narrowed to one travel lane in each direction with parallel parking on the city side of the street. This alignment is consistent with the role of the roadway as an important public interface between the City and the Park designed to will ensure that the City and its buildings are situated to present a ‘front’ to ‘Riverfront Drive’ and the State Park. The drive may continue to Daly Boulevard or it may connect to Buffalo Avenue via the existing Riverside Drive. The impacts to business associated with the potential disconnection at Daly Boulevard should be examined through a market impact assessment.
- Within the Falls Precinct, many new street connections are proposed to include both sides of the new Falls Street Festival Square (see section 4.1.3), the extension of Third Street to the Riverfront and others. These new connections will create an integrated street network linking ‘Riverside Drive’ to Rainbow Boulevard and

Buffalo Avenue, to reinforce connections from the primary tourism attraction, the falls and state park, back to these important city streets to better support local business and drive reinvestment. These connections also will permit temporary street closures along portions of the new 'Riverside Drive' to accommodate programmed events and festivals, while ensuring access and servicing needed to support local business and visitation. A high quality streetscape, comprised of a double row of street trees, special landscape features, special paving, in-street paving and unified streetscape furnishings, will link this roadway segment to the segment above defining the Cultural District. Similar streetscape improvements should be extended to Rainbow Boulevard and Buffalo Avenue, and to new street connections to define a clear and distinct image for the entire tourism area. This portion of the new 'River Front Drive' will also be designated a Pedestrian Priority Zone (see Falls Precinct Section 4.1.3) with pedestrian and non-vehicular forms of movement given priority over the automobile. The use of special streetscape treatments, special paving or cobbles, highly articulated pedestrian crossings and signage will signify this the Pedestrian Priority Zone to uses.

- The configuration of 'Riverfront Drive' and its integration into the urban grid will allow the removal of the ramps from John B. Daly Boulevard south of Buffalo Avenue. A new traffic calming circle at the Buffalo Avenue intersection will function as a transition and entry to the Casino, downtown and tourism precincts, announcing a fundamental change in the character of the city as visitors arrive to the Core City.
- **From John B. Daly Boulevard to LaSalle Expressway**, the parkway will be narrowed and reconfigured as either a two-lane roadway with the potential for an alternating third lane for passing where appropriate, or a 4-lane roadway, with 2 traffic lanes in either direction. The center median will be removed, views of the river to the south will be revealed, and a generous landscape buffer on the north side will screen the Buffalo Avenue corridor from view. Pocket parking lots dispersed along the river frontage will permit access to the open space resource. Connections between the waterfront and the city will be reinforced at the foot of Portage Road, Hyde Park Blvd., Third Street and the Grand Island Bridge, through its redesign.

The redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway is a 'Big Move' for the city; it will unlock the potential of land values and encourage waterfront development and reinvestment, which have been held back for a long time. The reconnection of the city to the waterfront will enhance the experience of visiting and living beside an internationally celebrated natural feature, and bring about many benefits to the City, economically, recreationally and in terms of tourism development.

The functional alignment and design parameters of individual roadway segments outlined above do not amount to the exchange of one Parkway for another or the creation a 'Robert Moses Parkway Lite'. Rather, this represents a traditional network-based solution which can bring people and development activity to the waterfront; it provides flexibility in terms of choice of routes and use, daily, weekly and seasonally; and it clearly defines and consolidates a vast amount of riverfront parkland to create an open space resource remarkable in itself,

yet capable of generating many new economic and business opportunities to strengthen Niagara Falls as a world-class tourist destination. The new Whirlpool and Main Street alignment will encourage visitors to use and explore these and other local streets, promoting increased patronage of local businesses and greater exploration of other areas of the city. The physical design and streetscape setting created through the new 'Riverfront Drive' will reinforce the City as a riverfront community and reposition forgotten and deteriorating properties currently trapped along the parkway's edges as prime waterfront properties appropriate for reinvestment and renewal.

Key Recommendations

1. Undertake an Integrated land use and transportation improvement project to redesign and reconfigure the Robert Moses Parkway

Project type: Partnership, Planning/Scoping, Design and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

In partnership with DOT and OPR&HP, the municipality should undertake an integrated land use and transportation improvement project to fully determine transportation network function, scope, design, role and economic potential associated with the redesign of the parkway and establish a phasing and implementation schedule to accomplish incremental installation.

This project should examine the incorporation of new street connections and new development along the east side of the Parkway, as well as opportunities for park expansion through reduction of the overall right of way of the Parkway as well as reuse of existing rights of way, which parallel the expressway. Study components will need to address:

- Urban design—establishing guidelines for new and infill development;
- Urban streetscape and park landscape planning;
- A full market assessment to evaluate development and intensification potential for residential, retail, hotel and other uses;
- Transportation engineering—design, phasing, project development, phasing and implementation; and
- Land acquisition and construction timing.

The design character of the reconfigured parkway is very important and the ultimate reconfiguration should reflect the character of a beautifully landscaped 'Riverfront Drive', which, through special streetscaping and landscape treatments, can function as an integrated pedestrian and vehicular boulevard within the Core City. Design speeds must be appropriate for an inner city route situated against a valuable public natural resource and its planned cultural, educational tourism enhancements. The character and configuration of the drive will vary somewhat along its length to respond to the character and use of various precinct areas, and to accommodate flexible use and temporary street closures within existing and proposed primary tourism precincts – the Falls precinct and the Cultural District. Views between the city and the riverfront corridor will be strengthened and many new street extensions will reconnect people and business to the riverfront corridor. The safety and

comfort of pedestrians moving between the waterfront and the city will be a primary consideration in the new design.

While the integrated land use and transportation improvement project will ultimately define the character and physical configuration of the reconfigured parkway, the design parameters associated with specific roadway segments identified above and additional recommendations presented below should be utilized to guide a comprehensive approach to complex components of the improvement project. These areas coincide with other ‘precinct areas’ and recommendations within this document. The ultimate phased reconstruction of the Parkway may not adhere to the roadway segments described below.

1. Northern Municipal boundary to Findlay Crescent

Design parameters outlined above will guide the integration of this new urban street segment within the existing and planned context.

2. Findlay Crescent to Cedar Avenue

Surplus right-of-way lands not required for transportation uses should be utilized for parkland expansion to the west and the development of high-quality housing to the east, creating an enhanced urban entryway to the city. The new alignment of the ‘Riverfront Drive’ will be located at a ‘mid’ point between the present location of the Robert Moses Parkway right-of-way and the Whirlpool Street right-of-way, creating development opportunities along both sides of the new drive. In addition, relocation of the OPR&HP maintenance garage will open new development opportunities for the State of New York. New housing development created through surplus transportation lands are appropriate for high-end, regionally significant housing that will not only broaden the housing offering in Niagara Falls but also provide an incentive for the renewal and upgrading of existing residential and commercial properties in the precinct. Additional lands acquired by the municipality through the proposed Land Bank, described below in section 4.1.7, Housing Renewal, may augment lands allocated for the future housing development.

Upon completion of the integrated land use and transportation project, the municipality should endeavor to assemble future development lands as recommended and issue a Request for Qualifications to secure an appropriate developer/builder to undertake housing development in a comprehensive manner consistent with market findings. Given their status as landowners, the State and municipality should establish a partnership agreement with the selected developer to ensure that housing development is consistent with the goal of reimagining this important interface to Niagara Falls adjacent to its primary asset – the waterfront.

3. Cedar Avenue to Niagara Street

The alignment of the reconfigured ‘Riverfront Drive’ will make a large parcel of land available for the creation of the Cultural District. This segment of the integrated land use and transportation study should be undertaken concurrently with the Cultural District Development Plan (see Section 4.1.2), as these two initiatives are closely linked and the reconfiguration of the Parkway, its urban design and streetscape treatment will have a substantial impact on stimulating a catalytic private sector response within the District.

Additional details about the redesign and reconfiguration of the Parkway are presented in the recommendations for the Cultural District, described in Section 4.1.2.

4. Niagara Street to John B. Daly Boulevard

Within this design segment, the reconfigured parkway and many new street connections between the new River Front Drive, Buffalo Avenue, the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District and Rainbow Boulevard will allow greater flexibility with regard to street closures, while still delivering people and service vehicles in support of the commercial and retail development envisioned for this important heritage and tourism area.

The potential disconnection of the 'River Front Drive' at Daly Boulevard, utilizing existing Riverside Drive to Buffalo Avenue, should be undertaken following a market assessment to determine the effect this would have on development potential within the area.

5. John B. Daly Boulevard to LaSalle Expressway

Design parameters outlined above will guide the integration of this new urban street segment within the existing and planned context.

4.1.2 Create the Cultural District

Description

The Cultural District encompasses the area bounded by Cedar Street, Third Street, Main Street and the Niagara River. This area currently contains a portion of the Robert Moses Parkway, the Niagara Aquarium site, the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center and underutilized properties along Main and Third Streets.

Project Strategy

The municipality should establish a new Cultural District through the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway and the rationalization and clear distinction of urban edge uses from parkland uses, as defined by significant streetscape enhancements to Third Street and Main Street (see Figures 11 and 12). This district is envisioned as a remarkable destination landscape set on the plateau above the Niagara Gorge that will contain a range of high-quality, family-oriented educational and cultural venues and attractions that will dramatically strengthen the tourism offering of the Core City while complementing the State Park lands along the Gorge.



The Cultural District will be a destination of regional significance, offering a range of active and passive spaces and new high quality educational and tourism developments.

A destination in its own right, the District will act as the ‘container’ for a collection of attractions celebrating the unique industrial, cultural, natural and geological history of Niagara Falls and the region, as well as offer other tourism-related developments. The collection will include the expanded or rebuilt Niagara Aquarium adjacent to the new Niagara Gorge Discovery Center located in the State park. This is also an ideal location for the future Niagara Experience Center. A state-of-the-art, outdoor performance and concert venue with regularly scheduled events will take advantage of this unique location and quality landscape setting and add a valuable cultural draw to augment other Niagara Falls attractions. A pavilion-style hotel, fronting on all sides so as to be seen ‘in the round’, could provide a focus for retail, restaurants and other tourism offerings within the Cultural District. A man-made lake or other water feature at the heart of the district can be used to demonstrate best practices in stormwater management, building upon the eco-tourism potential of the Niagara River corridor. The Niagara River Trail will link attractions within the district and beyond.



The Cultural District will be the ideal setting and location for demonstration projects related to environmental management.

The combination of the setting and attractions within the Cultural District will establish a regionally significant destination that will complement the Niagara Reservation. The District will exhibit a quality of design and landscape excellence of the caliber found along the Niagara Parkway in Canada. The Cultural District should be established immediately adjacent to the urban fabric to the east of the redesigned Parkway. This particular location will allow the city to re-engage and re-connect with the Niagara River by closely linking the riverfront to Pine Avenue, and Third, Niagara and Main Streets, while providing new economic advantage to the local community. The Cultural District will create long-term value by providing a high-quality context for significant reinvestment, infill and new developments along the urban edge.

The redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway as a new two-lane riverfront drive located on the existing Third Street and Main Street will make available a large area of land that will be incorporated into the overall open space framework of the Cultural District. The collection of heritage holdings found to the west of the intersection of Whirlpool and Main should be preserved and retrofitted to integrate with the outdoor performance areas, offering retail, café and restaurant amenities within the District. Additional lands will be assembled along the west side of Main Street between Third Street and Cedar Avenue.

The establishment of the Cultural District is a substantial undertaking that should begin immediately. Designation of the Cultural District offers the opportunity for the City of Niagara Falls, State Parks, the State Department of Transportation and the Niagara Aquarium to enter into a formal partnership agreement premised on the potential for mutual benefit to all parties. Establishment of the Cultural District will require co-operation to:

- Designate the land made available through the redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway as part of the Cultural District;
- Acquire privately-held lands that are within the district;
- Undertake the Cultural District Program and Development Plan;
- Establish guidelines for the operation and management of the district;
- Prepare a cost recovery strategy;
- Develop a shared-use parking strategy and facilities; and
- Establish a marketing and maintenance program.

Key Recommendations

1. Undertake the Cultural District Partnership and Development Plan and assemble the land comprising the Cultural District

Project type: Partnership, Planning/Scoping and Management

Project priority: 0-5 years

Establish the partnership arrangement necessary to undertake the Cultural District as a destination attraction within Niagara Falls. The partnership must necessarily include the City of Niagara Falls, State Parks, the Aquarium of Niagara and the State DOT. The National Park Service will also be an important partner with the establishment of the National Heritage Area along the Niagara River corridor.

The partnership should issue a Request for Qualifications and a Request for Proposals to select an appropriate team of consultants to undertake a development plan. An integrated



Cultural District

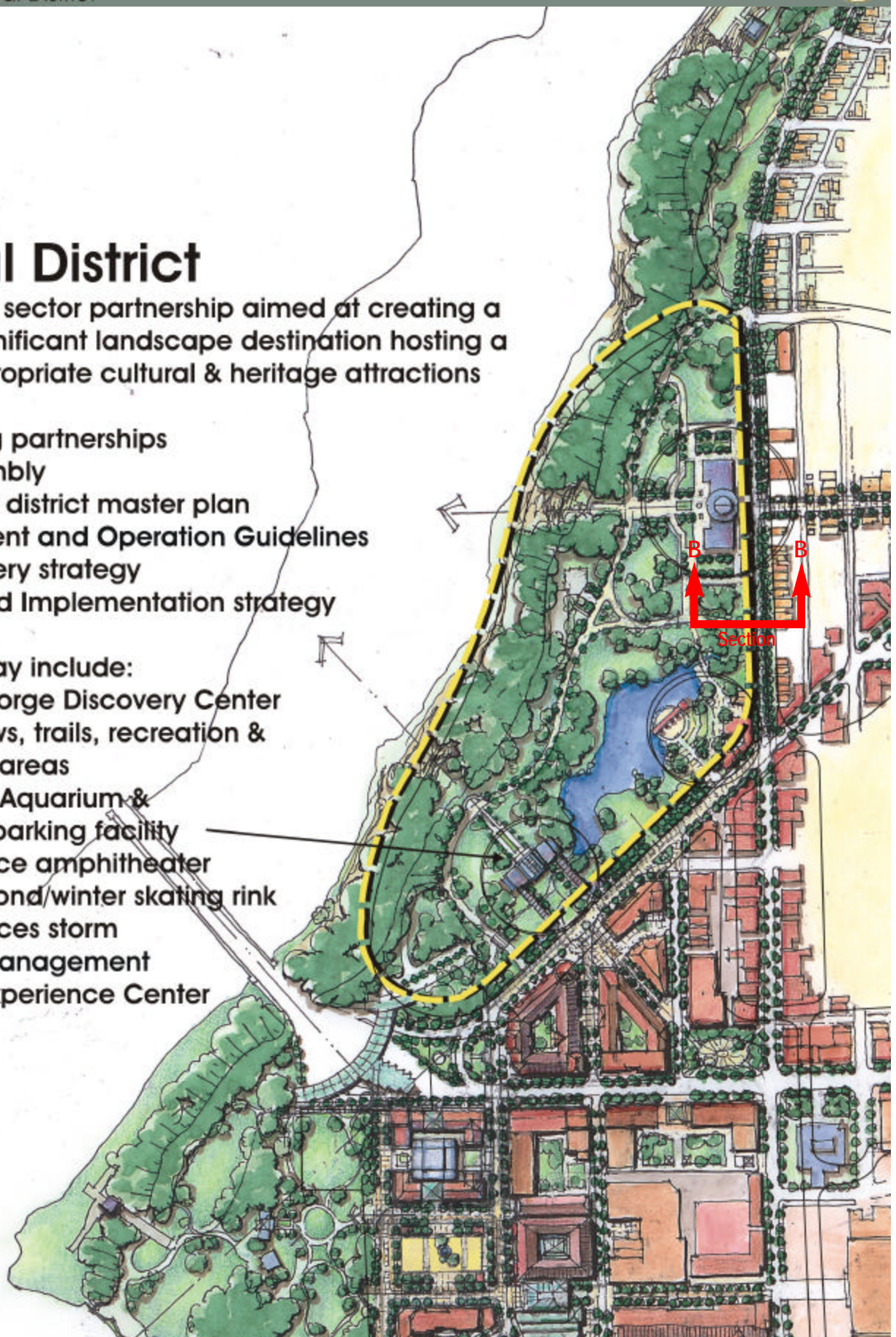
Public/private sector partnership aimed at creating a regionally significant landscape destination hosting a range of appropriate cultural & heritage attractions

The process:

- Establishing partnerships
- Land assembly
- Creation of district master plan
- Management and Operation Guidelines
- Cost recovery strategy
- Phasing and Implementation strategy

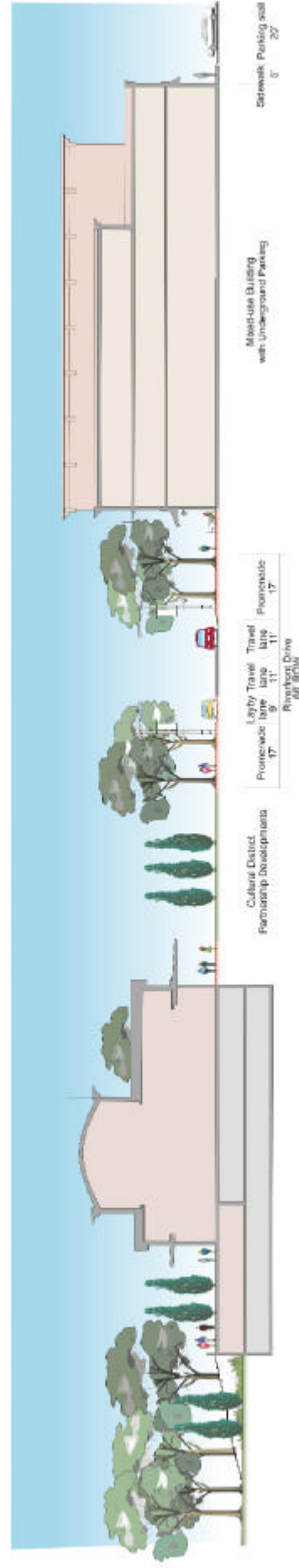
Attractions may include:

- Niagara Gorge Discovery Center
- Gorge views, trails, recreation & festival areas
- Expanded Aquarium & shared parking facility
- Performance amphitheater
- Summer pond/winter skating rink
- Best practices storm water management
- Niagara Experience Center





Proposed image and character in the Cultural District



planning approach is necessary to prepare and complete the Cultural District Development Plan and should involve urban design, transportation, open space and recreational planning, retail and cultural planning, and financial and operational feasibility. The final plan will be comprised of the following:

- Master Plan
- Management and Operations Guidelines
- Cost Recovery Strategy
- Phasing and Implementation strategy

The Cultural District Development Plan is essential to ensure development of the district capitalizes on the setting without threatening the landscape. Specific programs must be financially grounded and designed to complement one another to establish a valuable year-round activity and tourism focus. The Cultural District Development Plan will:

- Identify sites appropriate for development;
- Address roadway, servicing and emergency access to each development site;
- Include a comprehensive scoping of all new facilities and their programs to be located in the district;
- Identify visitation and economic impacts to the city;
- Recommend urban design criteria to be used in evaluating building and facility designs; and
- Include a parking strategy that addresses shared parking facilities, including underground parking.

2. Establish a Partnership Program to support and guide expansion of the Aquarium of Niagara

Project type: Partnership and Planning/Scoping

Project priority: 0-5 years

The Aquarium of Niagara is a significant asset to the city and an important existing component within the future Cultural District. The municipality should establish a partnership agreement with the aquarium to ensure that future development or expansion is consistent with the goals and objectives for the Cultural District, to facilitate shared parking strategies or joint use parking development and to expedite the planning and approvals process. Renovations to the existing aquarium structure to create a landmark building that highlights the facility's remarkable park setting and its role as a terminus for Pine Avenue will contribute to the sense of place within the precinct. Shared underground or carefully designed structured parking made to appear as a building within the landscape and undertaken as a joint venture should address long-term parking projections associated with the needs of the municipality, the State, the aquarium and the Niagara Falls Experience Center. A small amount of surface parking may be carefully integrated into the site in a manner that respects the natural environment surrounding it and is not visible from the public street.

3. Undertake an integrated land use and transportation improvement project to redesign and reconfigure the Robert Moses Parkway

Project type: Partnership, Planning/Scoping, Design and Design Guidelines and Installation
Project priority: 0-5 years

As recommended in the Big Move Section 4.1.1, Reconnect the City to its Waterfront, an integrated land use and transportation project should be carried out by the municipality to address the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway, in partnership with OPR&HA, NYPA and DOT. The redesign of this segment of the Parkway must be integrated with the Cultural District Development Plan. These two studies should occur concurrently or may be completely integrated as one development Master Plan. Phasing of the project will be determined by the partnership.

The redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway will provide a new edge to the urban fabric of Niagara Falls between Niagara Street and Cedar Avenue. The new riverfront drive will travel south along what is currently Third Street, with the new Cultural District to the west and the boutiques and restaurants of the Wright Park Heritage District to the east, then along Main Street, between the Cultural District and the Falls Precinct. The redesign will provide a high-value setting for new boutique hotels, restaurants and galleries, residential developments and other appropriate reinvestment projects

The new two-lane roadway will take on an urban character along the interface of the Cultural District, with sidewalks extending to the curb on both sides of the street and continuous parallel parking permitted on the eastern city side of the street only. A double row of street trees will distinguish the precinct, and this portion of the Parkway will be designated as a Pedestrian Priority Zone (see Section 4.1.3) with many pedestrian crossings, a very high quality of streetscape development and special streetscape treatments to prioritize pedestrian and non-vehicular forms of movement. The redesigned roadway should perform as an integrated pedestrian and vehicular boulevard with the potential for temporary street closures to accommodate special events, fairs, concerts and other activities within the Cultural District.

4.1.3 Initiate Public Realm and Catalyst Projects in The Falls Precinct

Description

Bounded by Main Street, Prospect Street, Buffalo Avenue, Sixth Street, Rainbow Boulevard and Third Street, the Falls Precinct was developed primarily during the 1960s and 1970s urban renewal period with major entertainment and shopping attractions intended to revitalize Niagara Falls as a tourist center. The precinct includes a number of hotels, the Occidental Chemical Building, the Old Falls Street pedestrian mall, and many of the tourist-oriented developments located east of Prospect Street and south of Niagara Street, including the Rainbow Mall, the Wintergarden, Niagara Falls Conference Center and the Turtle.

This precinct is characterized by underdeveloped sites, unattractive concrete parking structures and low-quality tourism offerings adjacent to the Niagara Reservation, an area which should instead be upheld as the most valuable asset not only in the City but the surrounding region as well. Rainbow Mall is vacant and a portion of the parking ramp included in it is closed off. The outside of the building presents blank concrete walls to visitors, with few street-related activities. Purchased recently from the City of Niagara Falls by private sector interests for reuse, the Wintergarden essentially functions as an indoor pedestrian arcade.

There is a realization that enhancement of this area is vital, and several initiatives have already been put in place to begin to improve it. USA Niagara has initiated major change in this precinct with the renovation of Falls Street Faire to accommodate a new 116,000 square foot conference center with restaurant and café uses fronting onto the Falls Street pedestrian promenade. Plans are currently underway to convert the United Office Building into a high-quality residential building.

Project Strategy

Building on the positive work of USA Niagara and their private sector partners, the Strategic Master Plan identifies key public realm improvements and critical catalyst projects aimed at enhancing this precinct as a vibrant urban mixed-use and tourism destination next to the Falls. High-quality visitor amenities; exceptional place making; residential development; urban infill and significant improvements to the public realm will transform the precinct into an attractive, highly desirable and pedestrian-friendly place for a range of activities. Figure 13 summarizes the range of initiatives that are recommended for the Falls Precinct. Emphasis must be placed on quality of place if the tourism development is to reach its full potential and successfully attract and keep residents and visitors in Niagara Falls.

Parks, squares and streets make up the public realm and comprise the places people use every day. They are a defining feature of any urban place. Collectively, they provide the main places for public gatherings and the locations where civic life occurs. The quality and image of the components of the public realm strongly influence how people perceive the city and the values of those who reside there. Visitors often interpret the condition of these public places to be an indication of how citizens feel about their city and their willingness or desire to receive, host and welcome newcomers. Extending and improving the public realm can have tremendous economic impacts by increasing property values, attracting new investment to particular shopping precincts, and encouraging people to walk, shop and take in and enjoy the city. Public investment in well-designed, high-quality open spaces and

streetscapes is one of the best ways to create people-friendly settings that have the added benefit of signaling positive change and encouraging private sector reinvestment that matches or even exceeds the quality of the public realm, thereby enhancing the area further.

There are several underutilized parcels and properties in the precinct that offer significant potential for redevelopment. The City must work with the State and developers in pursuing strategic renewal projects or joint ventures. The potential redevelopment of the Rainbow Mall and City-owned parking ramp above is an opportunity which should be pursued between the City and the Cordish Group to better realize the true potential of this strategically located site. Reconsidering this aging complex as a mixed retail, hotel and residential complex with a new visitor information and orientation center, combined with the creation of a programmed festival square at the interface to the State park (see Recommendation 2 below), will provide a strong new activity node at the center of the downtown and a catalyst for additional private sector investment. Improvements to key pedestrian connections, including the linkage between the Conference Center, Casino Precinct and the Falls, new street connections, streetscaping and the creation of a Pedestrian Priority Zone along portions of Prospect Street and Rainbow Boulevard will reimagine the precinct and reinforce it as an attractive pedestrian place. The interface to the State park will be enhanced with high-quality complementary developments that capitalize on their adjacency and proximity to the park. The falls precinct is appropriate for tall ‘downtown’ buildings which transition appropriately to key pedestrian destinations including parks and squares and allow sun to activate these vital places throughout the year.

Key Recommendations

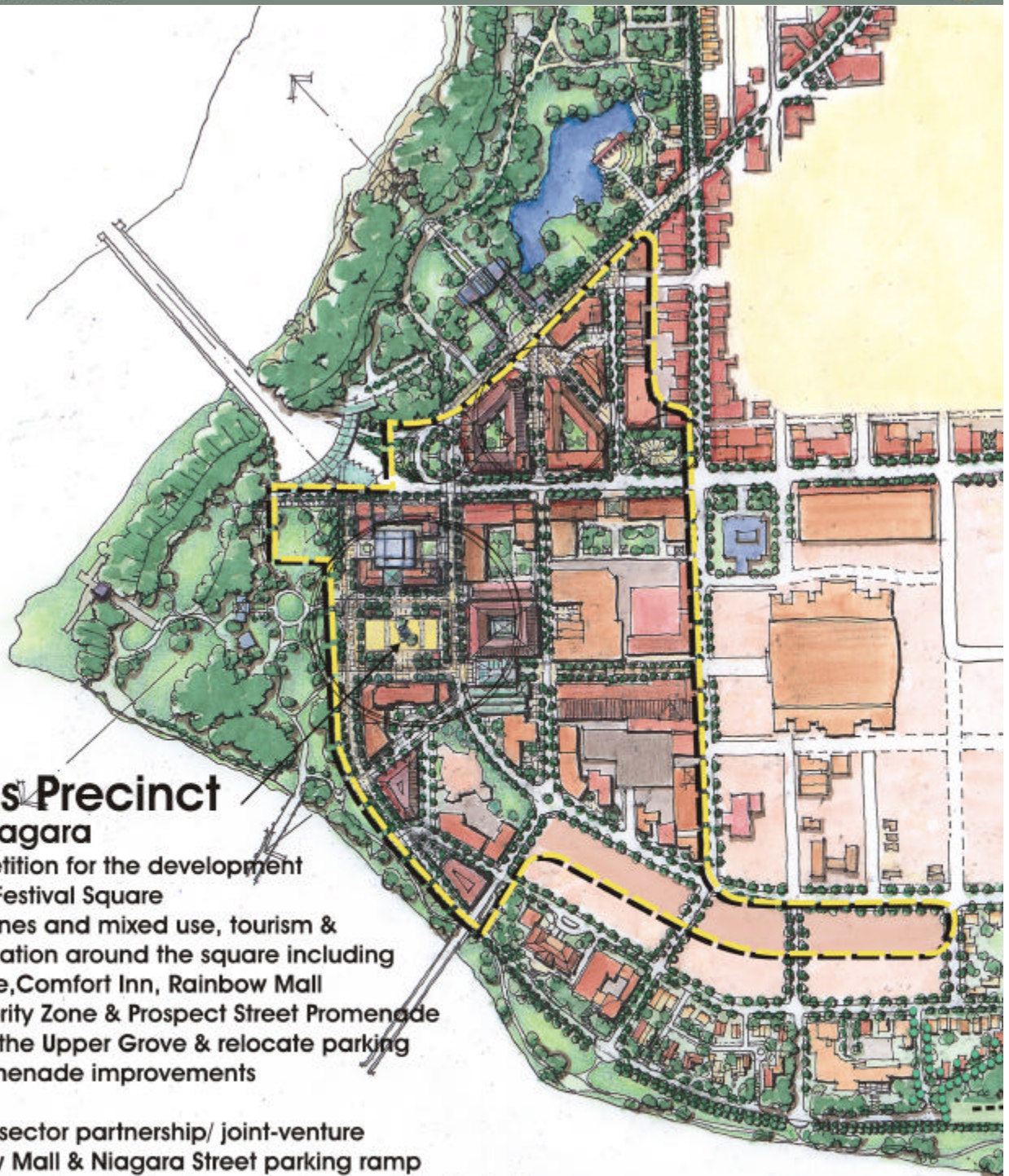
1. Pursue a joint venture partnership program involving the City, the Cordish Group and State Parks for the redevelopment of the Rainbow Center and the Niagara Parking Ramp, and the restoration of the Upper Grove

Project type: Partnership, Planning/Scoping, Design, Management and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

The Rainbow Center site, a condominium property held by the City and the Cordish Group, and the City-owned parking ramp to the east of the center should be replaced with high-quality mixed-use development combining retail, residential, office, hotel and other tourist-related uses and parking. The Rainbow Center is currently fairing poorly, particularly in terms of viable retail leasing. In addition, the physical deterioration of the municipally operated parking ramp above the Rainbow Center Mall and the overall appearance of the complex make this site worthy of reconsideration and redevelopment. Through a joint development agreement potentially involving density bonusing, a remarkable new development on this important site could reimagine the area and significantly benefit the city and its tourism industry. Appropriate redevelopment would also serve to demonstrate the physical and economic value of high-quality development projects within the Core City and encourage similar responses from the development industry.

The redevelopment of the Rainbow Center site and the City-owned parking ramp to the east represents an excellent opportunity to establish a joint venture partnership agreement between the City, State Parks, the Cordish Group and an appropriate developer/ builder to create a signature mixed use complex situated on the new Falls Street Festival Square



The Falls Precinct South of Niagara

Design competition for the development of Falls Street Festival Square
Design guidelines and mixed use, tourism & hotel intensification around the square including Occidental site, Comfort Inn, Rainbow Mall
Pedestrian Priority Zone & Prospect Street Promenade
Restoration of the Upper Grove & relocate parking
West Falls Promenade improvements

Public-private sector partnership/ joint-venture for Rainbow Mall & Niagara Street parking ramp to establish landmark mixed use developments to include: flexible hotel/residential suites, parking, visitor center, commercial/tourism uses

Parkway redesign to create a riverfront drive
Rainbow two-way street conversion & streetscaping
New streetscaping & connections to open space resource

Commercial, tourism, residential & parking infill

(described below). The complex should create an attractive and vibrant point of arrival and act as a gateway to the Falls.

The partnership should establish a development program and financial *pro forma* for the sites involving significant revenue generating uses, such as a boutique hotel; residential condominium units; grade-related and specialty retail, such as high-

quality food shops or restaurants; and parking. The development program should also consider the creation of a new Visitor

Orientation Center (see Section 5) as a ground floor use adjacent to the new Falls Street Festival Square at the city/park interface. This is an ideal location for the center, which will provide information concerning the Niagara Reservation, the Falls, and other attractions in the city and region. The development program or combination of additional uses proposed for this site must attract people to the area at all times of the day and night throughout all seasons of the year. The design quality of these redevelopment projects will establish the tone and standard for subsequent reinvestment and redevelopment in the precinct and must be of the highest quality to exact similar results from private sector projects.

The partnering of State Parks and the City in the provision of parking on these sites and others in the core would provide a joint revenue source that may permit the restoration of the Upper Grove to its former quality to the benefit of the City and the State while also improving the visitor experience. A landscape improvement program aimed at restoration of the Upper Grove should be established through the partnership agreement. It may be implemented over time and in successive phases as the partnership's parking revenues increase.

2. Undertake the Falls Street Festival Square Design Competition

Project type: Planning/Scoping, Management, Design and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

An expanded and redesigned public plaza at the western terminus of Old Falls Street fronting onto Prospect Street will extend and bring the park into the city and create a high value setting for continued reinvestment and development at the city/park interface within



High quality mixed-use development fronting onto the new Festival Square will ensure a greater level of activity, vibrancy and commerce at the interface of the park and the city.



The new Falls Street Festival Square will provide an attractive setting for new development and offer a range of programmed events throughout the year, from buskers in the summer to skating in the winter.

the most intensively used tourism area in the city.

Falls Street Festival Square should be designed to create a high-quality public place and point of orientation for people visiting the falls, the city, and other attractions. The square will provide a focus for public and civic life as a flexible gathering space that can accommodate a variety of programmed activities throughout the year, including buskers; festivals; concerts; special market and retail events; art events; readings and theatre events; events related to food, such as ‘A Taste of Niagara Falls’; a variety of well designed, leasable retail kiosks; and winter ice skating. These activities will complement the existing balloon ride and the Hard Rock Café, which should remain in the area as primary tourism attractions, although not necessarily within their current locations.

The square could take on a number of configurations that would meet the objectives of ensuring it is of a sufficient size to accommodate a range of activities throughout the year, is easily accessible, and maintains a visually and physically open linkage between the Niagara Reservation and Rainbow Boulevard.

The square will be a catalyst for private mixed-use, hotel and tourism intensification on adjacent sites and must be designed to a very high quality of design excellence to realize desired reinvestment. New development encouraged through its creation should establish a strong urban built form edge to the public square. Active uses at grade, such as cafés, restaurants and high-quality retail offerings, will help to animate the indoor/outdoor interface. The potential relocation of the existing Hard Rock Café to one of the new developments around the edges of the square represents an opportunity to retain the popular destination, while reconfiguring the use within a more attractive complex designed to encourage increased retail and boutique shopping activity within the district.

All roads surrounding the square should be designed in conjunction with the design of the square and consist of narrow or non-traditional right-of-ways. They should appear as part of the square, exhibiting the same special paving and high-quality streetscape elements to create a cohesive public realm for a range of activities. The southern road segment should align with the West Falls Promenade to extend this promontory directly to the Niagara Reservation. The northern segment should be situated to create a new development parcel in front of the Occidental office building. The creation of the Occidental development parcel, together with sensitive renovations to the Comfort Inn Hotel and the potential Partnership Program to achieve the redevelopment of the Rainbow Center and parking ramp, represent catalyst opportunities to reimagine the three built form sides of the square to create a truly memorable place.

Prospect Street, including the new north and south road segments, as well as the Rainbow Boulevard frontage should be designated as a Pedestrian Priority Zone. Some or all of these streets may be closed to vehicular traffic at certain times of the year and/or certain times of the day to permit special events and easy access to the Niagara Reservation during peak tourist season. At other times of the day and year, vehicular access will be an essential requirement in order to ensure access for elderly and physically challenged persons, and to meet the servicing requirements of retail and commercial uses in the area.

A national/international design competition is recommended to select a highly qualified and talented design team to undertake the design and installation of Falls Street Festival Square and its adjacent roadways. Initiating and marketing a national/international design competition will signify the City's commitment to change within the core and serve to build media and public interest in the project. The built work of significant national or international designers can also bring people to the city for the express purpose of considering the finished installation. The City should establish a planning and pre-design program for the square and issue a competitive two stage RFQ/RFP process to select the design team. Stage one should involve a juried short list of approximately four or five qualified design teams having previous national or international experience in the design of successful urban squares. Stage two should consist of a two-week design competition, commencing with a site tour and a planning and predesign program briefing to short-listed candidates and concluding with a public presentation of all preliminary schemes and the announcement by the jury of the winning design team. Participating teams should be awarded an honorarium for taking part in the competition.

3. Undertake the West Falls Promenade improvements

Project type: Design and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

To build on the success and momentum of the design competition for Falls Street Festival Square and to strengthen the primary linkage between the square, the Niagara Reservation and the Casino Precinct (see Section 4.2.6), significant streetscape improvements to the western portion of the West Falls Promenade are recommended. Public realm improvements along this linkage will reinforce this connection as an important and distinct civic spine within the downtown and complement the new conference center, and retail and restaurant uses located in the Falls Street Faire building. Streetscape improvements should include upgraded landscaping, lighting, paving, streetscape furnishings and public art to create a more welcoming and interesting environment. The design component of this project should involve an examination of the feasibility of permitting one-way vehicular traffic along the corridor to Third Street. This will encourage retail and commercial businesses to locate along the frontage of the conference center and adjacent buildings, creating a lively shopping and dining experience year round. The one-way street could be closed during certain times of the day and/or year to accommodate peak tourist season



Public realm improvements along the West Falls Promenade will complement recent investments by USA Niagara and create a stronger linkage connecting the Casino and the Festival Square to the Niagara Reservation.

activity and special events. It should be opened throughout the winter to support commercial and retail uses planned in conjunction with the conference center.

4. Establish design guidelines for key intensification sites within the Falls Precinct to include: the Occidental Site, the Comfort Inn Hotel framing Festival Square, the Days Inn Hotel Site and other significant and highly visible sites

Project type: Design Guidelines and Management

Project priority: 0-5 years

The creation of Festival Square, the West Falls Promenade improvements and the potential partnership program to achieve the redevelopment of the Rainbow Center and parking ramp are major steps in the creation of a new physical and economic climate, led by the public sector, with the intention of encouraging private sector interest in the intensification of the Occidental Site, the Comfort Inn Hotel site and other sites within the area. To guide the redevelopment and intensification of these and other highly visible and important sites, and to ensure that future redevelopment is consistent with municipal goals and significant municipal expenditures and investments in the area, the Strategic Master Plan recommends the creation of built form development guidelines for these and other sites within the Falls Precinct, to clearly direct the form and nature of private sector initiatives. Development guidelines should explore such elements as built form height and massing, permitted ground floor uses, building and entry articulation, through connections, the location of parking and service access, roof and cornice treatments, podium and building base configurations. The creation of design guidelines should be adopted as part of the amendments to the City of Niagara Falls Comprehensive Plan and Zoning By-law. A 3-dimensional physical model should be created as part of this project to illustrate the recommendations contained in the guidelines and to provide a marketing tool for prospective development interests within the precinct.

5. Promote and encourage the intensification and redevelopment of the Days Inn Site on Niagara Street

Project type: Management and Partnership

Project priority: 0-5 years

The Days Inn site is strategically located at the epicenter of many significant redevelopment initiatives outlined in the Strategic Master Plan. It is within immediate proximity of important municipally led projects, including the creation of the Falls Street Festival Square, the potential redevelopment of the Rainbow Center and the parking ramp, the creation of the new Cultural District and the Urban Design, Streetscape Improvement Plan and Retail Master Plan for Niagara Street presented in Precinct Strategies later in this document. Due to its size, adjacency to many proposed initiatives and its visual prominence upon arriving in Niagara Falls via the Rainbow Bridge, this site is considered a premier redevelopment opportunity. As such, it must be carefully considered and nurtured to secure a signature development project for the city.

This site is very appropriate for a 4-star hotel development with state-of-the-art convention and meeting facilities of the highest caliber of design, with multiple primary frontages, including Main, Niagara and Second Streets, and the proposed Third Street Civic Park and

Canal Interpretive Walk (described below) providing a strong pedestrian linkage from the retail activity on Niagara Street to the entertainment and educational attractions of the Cultural District. It is ideal for a pavilion style building – a building intended to be seen ‘in the round’ (i.e. from all directions) that exhibits a consistent quality of built form on all sides. Parking for this site should not be visible from any public street and should be constructed underground or in parking structures designed to appear as part of the building fabric.

The City should undertake discussions with the current owner of the Days Inn site, aimed at securing the redevelopment of the site as outlined above. The City should consider tax incentives, density bonusing, potential partnership agreements, TIF programs and other strategies to encourage redevelopment. In addition, the City with the current owners may wish to approach high-quality hotel operators within North America to assess various partnership opportunities covering the site. Density bonusing beyond that permitted through rezoning should be considered as a development incentive, contingent upon a commitment to design excellence on the part of the prospective development proponent. The 3-dimensional model undertaken in concert with the preparation of design guidelines for key sites could be used as part of the promotional materials for these discussions.

6. Establish the Third Street Civic Park and Canal Interpretive Walk

Project type: Management, Design, Design Guidelines and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

The existing open space at the intersection of Third and Niagara Streets will be redesigned as a park and landscape focal point providing a gathering and meeting space for passive recreation and a venue for programmed events. Design guidelines will be required for the buildings and development opportunities surrounding the park to ensure that future developments appropriately frame and contain the park and support its emergence as a special place in the heart of the city. The park’s location at Third and Niagara Streets represents a significant crossroads, linking the activity to the north along Main and Third Street to the Falls and Casino Precincts. The diagonal Canal Interpretive Walk will provide a further high-quality pedestrian connection to the Cultural District.

7. Undertake Prospect Street streetscape improvements and designate Prospect Street a Pedestrian Priority Zone

Project type: Design and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

The street frontage along the Niagara Reservation should be designed to the highest quality of streetscape and public realm design to create an attractive and pedestrian-friendly interface between the city and the Park. Reinforcing this edge with significant street tree plantings, special pedestrian scale lighting, wide sidewalks on both sides of the street articulated with special paving and improved pedestrian crossing areas with in-street paving, will create a new pedestrian promenade along Prospect Street to support private sector development efforts along the this premier waterfront/urban interface zone. This new setting will support the emergence of Falls Street Festival Square area as a premier boutique hotel and shopping precinct in Niagara Falls and encourage greater visitor movement between the park and the city and exploration of the city’s many other attractions.

The streetscape improvement program should complement public realm improvements achieved through the design competition for the Falls Street Festival Square and extend these to the northern edge of the Niagara Reservation, adjacent to the restored Upper Grove, and south to the intersection of First Street and the vehicular bridge to Goats Island. The improvement program should seek to strengthen gateway entrances to the Niagara Reservation at public street intersection to enhance movement and visitor orientation between the park and city.

With the Pedestrian Priority Zone designation in effect, pedestrian movement will take precedence over vehicular movement in this area. The roadway design should include a narrow pavement width capable of accommodating one-way movement with parallel parking on the city side of the street, or two-way movement with no parallel parking. Given the many new street connections proposed between Rainbow Boulevard and Prospect Street to better connect the city and the park, vehicular traffic could be re-routed to accommodate street closures on portions of Prospect Street at certain times of the year, or for special events, to give priority to pedestrian activity and movement. Vehicular access along Prospect Street, particularly during winter months and the off-peak tourist season, is essential to attracting the high-quality retail and commercial development envisioned for this area.

8. Convert Rainbow Boulevard to two-way movements, and undertake a streetscape improvement program.

Project type: Design, Management and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

A new streetscape improvement program and the conversion of Rainbow Boulevard from a one-way to a two-way movement system will support the development of new mixed-use developments fronting the street. The reintroduction of two-way traffic is essential for improving movement and connections within the Core City and creating a more pedestrian-friendly environment with slower moving traffic. For pedestrians, two-way streets are easier to cross as opposing traffic encourages cars to travel at more moderate speeds. Two-way streets also provide important functional advantages for drivers, including a greater choice of alternate routes, ease of lane movement for left and right turns, more moderate speeds, improved way finding and a more flexible street system less confusing to navigate. The streetscape improvement program should emphasize numerous pedestrian crossings, street tree planting, pedestrian and overhead lighting, streetscape furnishings and special planting and paving treatment zones.

4.1.4 Transform the Niagara Street Precinct

Description

The Niagara Street Precinct extends east from Third Street to John B. Daly Boulevard. Parking lots, vacant sites and underutilized and derelict buildings characterize this portion of Niagara Street. Recent changes in the precinct include the opening of the Niagara Aerospace Museum in the Niagara Office Building, and the construction of the Seneca Nation's parking ramp on the southeast corner of Fourth and Niagara Streets.

Project Strategy

The Strategic Master Plan supports the development of the Niagara Street Precinct as a vibrant, mixed use commercial and residential 'main street' with regionally significant retail uses, to attract residents and visitors throughout the year. In one of the most significant places within the city, the municipality should carefully consider the redesign of Niagara Street to create a narrower street cross section without the central median, to support the creation of an active pedestrian environment that can encourage traditional cross-street retail shopping (see Figures 14 and 15). This would provide new 'development opportunities' associated with the reclamation of any right-of-way lands, which should be consolidated on the south side of the street and offered for redevelopment. Associated design guidelines would ensure appropriate built form and contribution to the creation of a vibrant mixed-use street. On the north side of the street, commercial lot depth and development density must be sufficient to allow for structure parking solutions with minimal impacts to adjacent residential uses. Improvements to Niagara Street should extend west beyond Third Street as well, into the Falls Precinct.

A mix of uses, including retail and commercial, office and upper-story residential uses will encourage activity at all times of the day. Along with the Falls Precinct, this is a precinct in which tall downtown buildings are appropriate, with opportunities for signature developments at key locations. Appropriate transitions in building height and massing at the interface with residential neighbourhoods will be important. A combination of commercial uses at grade and office and residential uses above will redefine the image of the street as an active and interesting place and create new opportunities for a more diverse range of housing options in the Core City that can also support local business growth.

While the current market may limit the amount of viable at-grade commercial activity, a retail study is recommended to establish a retail merchandizing mix that can attract regional patronage, as well as other synergistic specialty stores within a comprehensive redevelopment program. The retail study should examine local and national retail uses such as Crate and Barrel, the Cheesecake factory, Ann Taylor, William and Sonoma and others. Parking may be situated underground or in structures integrated within the overall design of each block and accessed via the side street or rear lot lane adjacent to residential uses. Increased activity and amenity within the Niagara Street corridor is key to stabilizing the adjacent residential area to the north and to creating an active and vibrant visitor experience that is sufficiently urban and compelling to encourage repeat visits. The introduction of high-quality urban parkettes or squares with better maintenance will lend distinction to this area and ensure a positive impression for those arriving in Niagara Falls via the Rainbow Bridge or John B. Daly Boulevard. A program for public realm improvements and ongoing maintenance needs to be followed.

Key Recommendations

1. Undertake an Urban Design and Streetscape Improvement Plan and a Retail Master Plan for Niagara Street

Project type: Design, Design Guidelines, Partnership, Installation and Management

Project priority: 5-15 years

An integrated Master Plan Study is necessary to plan and understand the potential and feasibility of a compact midrise urban retail and residential environment on the Niagara Street corridor that can be a spine effectively linking the Casino Precinct (see Section 4.2.6), the Falls Precinct (see Section 4.1.3), the Cultural District (see Section 4.1.2) and the riverfront. The goal is to create a new high value urban entertainment and shopping precinct. This study must include expertise in urban design, retail and merchandizing, transportation and streetscape design, market and economic analysis and development financing to fully address the complexities involved in this type of urban redevelopment.



The presence of nationally recognized retailing as well as local businesses will strengthen Niagara Street as a distinct shopping precinct within the city and region.

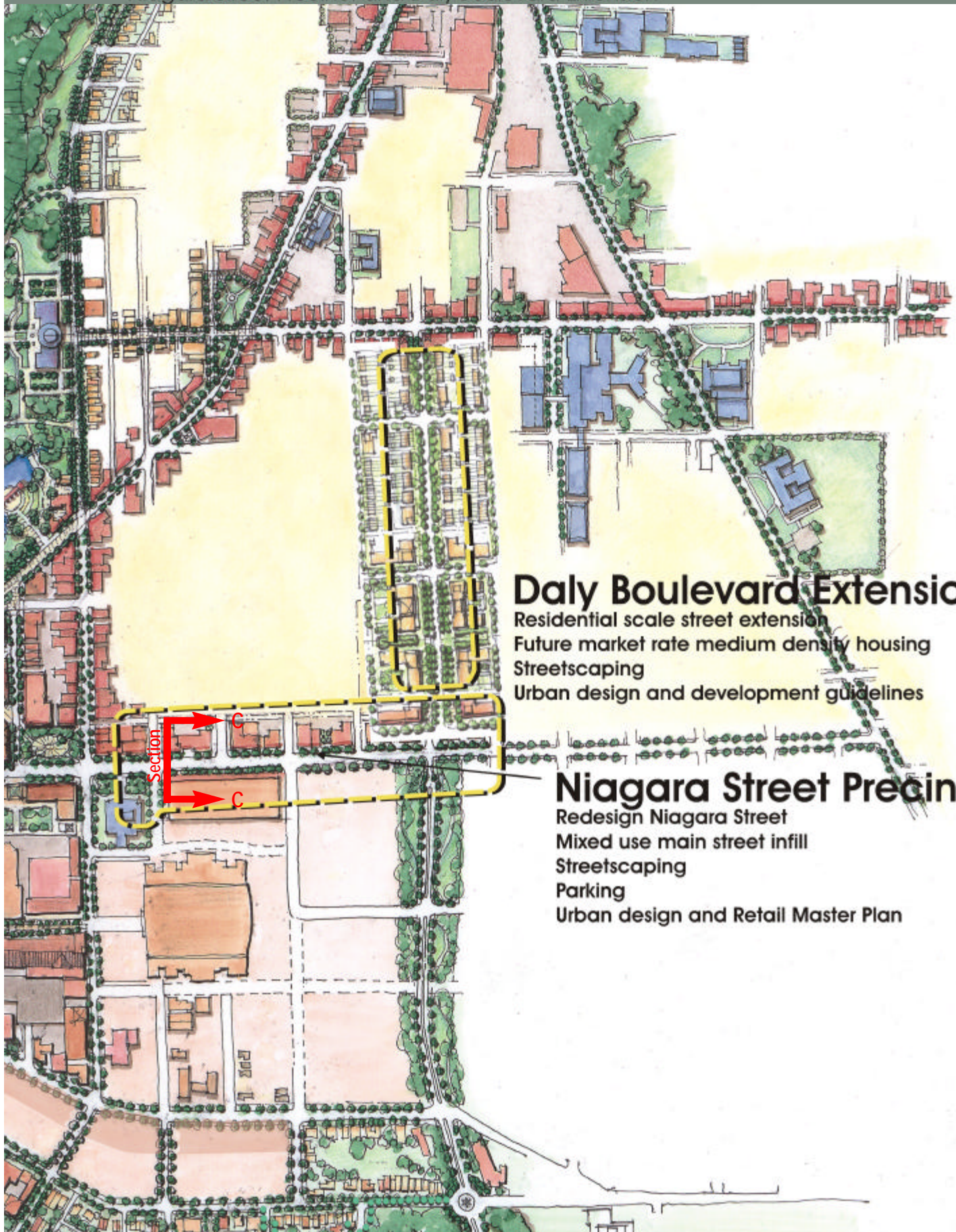
The study should examine reducing the width of Niagara Street to four lanes, with parallel parking on both sides of the street from Rainbow Boulevard to Daly Boulevard. By reducing the distance from building face to building face, this configuration will better position the street to function as a main street and will create a tighter zone for commercial and pedestrian activity. Additionally, the reduction can be single sided, creating new development opportunities in front of the Casino Precinct parking garage, which may be suitable for a combination of retail and residential development better linking the casino to Niagara Street. The incorporation of new streetscaping into the redesign will provide a strong identity for the precinct and provide simple wayfinding to major attractions for local visitors.

Special uses such as theatres and lifestyle fitness centers will ensure the street is well used by locals and provide additional opportunities for visitors. These elements must be carefully assessed in conjunction with the retail and merchandizing study component. The study should seek to identify areas for future municipally owned parking structures and include a parking strategy that can accommodate the planned redevelopment of the precinct and co-exist with neighborhood uses to the north.

The study must also involve preparation of design and development guidelines to inform property assembly and provide recommendations concerning partnership development opportunities in order to provide a clear template that can guide development along the street. The study may conclude with the formulation of a Request for Proposals to secure a development partnership to undertake the phased implementation of the Niagara Street urban entertainment, shopping and residential precinct.



Niagara Street Precinct and Daly Boulevard Extension



Daly Boulevard Extension

Residential scale street extension
Future market rate medium density housing
Streetscaping
Urban design and development guidelines

Niagara Street Precinct

Redesign Niagara Street
Mixed use main street infill
Streetscaping
Parking
Urban design and Retail Master Plan

4.1.5 Create a New Neighborhood in the Daly Boulevard Precinct

Description

The John B. Daly Boulevard Precinct extends from the existing Daly Boulevard terminus at Niagara Street north to Pine Avenue. It encompasses the right-of-way of the planned boulevard extension and the blocks of land located between the extension and Seventh and Ninth Streets.

Project Strategy

The Strategic Master Plan supports the Daly Boulevard extension as the first phase of a larger redevelopment program to create a new appropriately scaled residential neighborhood. The extension of Daly Boulevard from Niagara Street to Pine Avenue should be comprised of two travel lanes with parking on both sides of the street without a center median (see Figure 14 in Section 4.1.4). The extension of John B. Daly Boulevard will provide an important local and visitor link to the Pine Avenue commercial precinct and should function as a local street appropriate for new medium density residential development.

The extension of the roadway offers the opportunity to normalize the block to the west of the extension and create new frontage on it. At a depth of just 80 feet, the block to the west of the roadway is 60% of the width of typical city blocks found in the area. By assembling the properties on the west side of Eighth Street and combining them with the Seventh Street block, a typical block will be created that will be divided down the middle by a laneway. This will result in a standard lot depth fronting onto both Seventh Street and the extension of John B. Daly Boulevard and create new frontage on both streets that can be redeveloped with high-quality residential uses. By adding a new row of buildings, this reconfiguration will ameliorate the current back-lotting situation along the street.

The development of the properties fronting the extension will provide important opportunities to attract new residents to the Core City by offering new medium-density housing, such as townhouses or small apartment or condominiums, not yet available in the current market. Live/work units and professional offices close to established commercial corridors, Niagara Street and Pine Avenue, will also contribute to increasing the vitality on this new street. The extension of Daly Boulevard and the subsequent development of the properties along it will increase the value of adjacent residential properties and help to encourage reinvestment and renewal within the surrounding neighborhoods to stabilize the housing market. While a substantial amount of housing will be provided, the development is small enough in scale to avoid overwhelming the market, while dramatically changing the character of the precinct. Projects like this one can provide a focus for developing neighborhood renewal programs, in conjunction with other amenities needed by residents, to attract people back to the Core City. In this neighborhood, new housing is close to institutional blocks, including a hospital, school and the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center.

Key Recommendations

1. Implement the extension of John B. Daly Boulevard north to Pine Avenue as a local street appropriate for new medium density residential development

Project type: Design and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

John B. Daly Boulevard will be extended north to connect with Pine Avenue as described above. Increased building setbacks from the edge of the right-of-way will allow for a generous landscape area on either side of the street extension that will continue the open space and visual connection that currently exists to the south with the existing roadway segment. To make the street attractive to live on, it should be designed appropriately as a residential neighborhood street; if it is too wide or busy potential buyers will be less likely to choose to live in that location.

2. Prepare urban design and development guidelines for the John B. Daly Boulevard extension and issue a Request for Proposals to undertake the phased implementation of new residential developments

Project type: Design, Design Guidelines and Management

Project priority: 0-5 years

The reconfiguration and normalization of the block pattern adjacent to the Daly Boulevard extension and the subsequent creation of a new residential neighborhood within the heart of the city represents a significant opportunity for the municipality to take the lead in diversifying and strengthening the housing market. This process may involve targeted land acquisition to facilitate comprehensive redevelopment either by the municipality or on behalf of the private sector, or through a partnership involving both.

The creation of urban design and development guidelines is critical to ensuring design excellence is achieved throughout the area to bolster the residential market and emphasize positive change within the Core City. The guidelines should examine building placement and configuration, height and scale relationships, corner block treatments, entry ways and development typologies that can be mixed along the length of the street to add interest and variety to the built environment. The guidelines should also explore residential and live/work uses in the form of professional offices and the relationships between these uses. Development should generally be low to medium-density in townhouse or low-rise apartment form. Apartments should front both Daly Boulevard and the adjacent numbered streets to ensure an appropriate relationship with both street edges.



Townhouses and low-rise apartment buildings with generous front yard landscaping will support the creation of a unique character along the John B. Daly extension.



Upon completion of the design guidelines, the municipality may enter into a joint development agreement with landowners and issue a Request for Proposals to select an appropriate developer/builder to undertake phased implementation of the project. The Request for Proposals should be issued upon the completion of a residential market study that establishes a proven market and the rate of take up or rate of supply for recommended development types.

4.1.6 Preserve the Heritage of the Core City

Description

Established neighborhoods are usually the most desirable to live in, in any Core City and typically exhibit the most architecturally interesting housing. Through neglect and changing economic realities, several of the city's Core City neighborhoods with significant heritage value have fallen into disrepair and are not fulfilling their potential. In addition, many heritage resources were removed from the landscape altogether in the 1960s and 70s as a result of urban renewal programs.

Niagara Falls contains a wealth of heritage resources, particularly in the Wright Park District and Buffalo Avenue District of the Core City. Both of these areas contain a number of architecturally important buildings on large lots with mature trees and comprise areas of relatively intact heritage fabric and resources. They both present enormous potential for future tourism development, as well as residential renewal and intensification, given their heritage characteristics and locations within the Core City. Both precincts also have the advantage of being positioned along the waterfront and will benefit significantly from the expansion of open space and the creation of new connections to the waterfront resulting from the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway and implementation of many Strategic Master Plan initiatives.

Throughout the Core City, the recognition, preservation, and enhancement of the unique and rich value of heritage structures can contribute to the revitalization of the urban environment for residents and tourists. The conversion of the old Niagara Falls High School into the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center by a group of dedicated volunteers is an important project to be celebrated and supported. The redevelopment and conversion of the United Office Building will bring new residents to the heart of the city, and a public/private partnership is spearheading the proposed reuse of the Old Customs House as the city's new intermodal transit center. All of these projects can act as demonstration projects for the adaptive reuse of important heritage assets and will undoubtedly stimulate renewal activities in their immediate and adjacent areas. City Hall, the United Office Building, the Niagara Hotel, and the bed and breakfast neighborhood in the Rainbow Boulevard/Buffalo Avenue area are some of the best-known historic features in the Core City. Main Street north of Lockport Road also contains heritage architecture that should be preserved and enhanced.

Project Strategy

The Strategic Master Plan supports designating portions of the Wright Park District (see Section 4.2.6) and the Buffalo Avenue District (see Section 4.2.7) as unique Heritage Districts under the appropriate state and/or federal statutes, with special roles in Niagara Falls' overall tourism offering. Both districts will retain their unique residential character and will benefit from the designation and other initiatives preserving and enhancing their value as important historic and character areas within the city. Additionally, the reconfiguration of the Parkway, and the creation of new street and pedestrian connections and new development along the Parkway linking these areas to the waterfront will provide an incentive for reinvestment in these districts. The addition of heritage themed streetscaping and appropriate small-scale tourism oriented uses, including bed and breakfast

accommodations, restaurants, galleries and other amenities will reinforce the distinct character and amenity of these districts. A high degree of design excellence should be promoted through urban and heritage design guidelines that will ensure new buildings fit with the character of existing built form. Specific recommendations for both of these heritage areas are presented later in this document, in Sections 4.2.6 (Wright Park) and 4.2.7 (Buffalo Avenue).

The City is undertaking a phased Historic Preservation Resource Survey to establish a historical context for the city and to more precisely identify all of the historic resources. The project involves a detailed building-by-building analysis of the historic/architectural/cultural resources of the study area. The City will use the results of the survey to formulate general heritage strategies and to specifically address the need for protection and/or the opportunity for redevelopment and reuse on a site-by-site basis. This first phase of this study is expected to be completed in 2004. The City should continue its commitment to complete the resource survey as soon as possible.

The following key recommendations for heritage preservation in the Core City should extend throughout Niagara Falls, to protect the city's historical assets (see Section 7.3).

Key Recommendations

1. Designate Wright Park and Buffalo Avenue as Heritage Districts

Project type: Partnership and Management

Project priority: 0-5 years

The City of Niagara Falls should designate the Wright Park and Buffalo Avenue areas as Heritage Districts under the appropriate State of New York legislation, in order to protect their historic character and support compatible development within these districts.

2. Protect heritage buildings and districts

Project type: Partnership and Management

Project priority: 0-5 years

The City of Niagara Falls should continue to protect its remaining historic structures and districts throughout the City by collaborating with building owners to designate heritage buildings for preservation under the appropriate State of New York legislation and with the approval of the City.

3. Develop design and infill guidelines for the Wright Park and Buffalo Avenue Heritage Districts

Project type: Design Guidelines

Project priority: 5-15 years

Infill and development design guidelines will reflect the importance of the heritage designation and ensure the character of the districts is protected. The guidelines should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Uses appropriate to these distinct mixed/residential districts
- Building envelopes

- Development typologies for sites fronting the new riverfront drive
- The location of parking
- Building setbacks
- Building heights
- Cornice lines
- Roof treatment
- Articulation of building entries, and other elements to ensure the character of the district is preserved.

4. Undertake heritage themed streetscape developments, and park, plaza and open space enhancements to strengthen the character of the Heritage Districts

Project type: Design and Installation

Project priority: 5-15 years

Public realm improvements that are compatible with and reinforce the identity of heritage districts should be undertaken in the Wright Park and Buffalo Avenue Heritage Districts. Improvements to the public realm will reinforce the heritage character of these districts and support a heritage district designation, encourage residential renewal and reinvestment, and set the stage for high-quality infill developments consistent with the low-scale, traditional character of the districts. Further details on this recommendation are described under Section 4.2.6, Wright Park Heritage District.

4.1.7 Housing Renewal

Description

Decades of population decline, suburban flight, and a decrease in family size have resulted in an oversupply of housing in the City. Within the oversupplied market, there is no incentive for the repair and upgrading of rental units and many homes are abandoned and in significant need of repair, updating or replacement. In addition to the state of housing itself, population decline has resulted in a reduction of community support facilities while school closures have further diminished the desirability of living in the Core City. Neighborhoods in the greatest state of physical and social decline are generally found in the Core City or immediately adjacent to the city's primary industrial areas. Along with the deterioration of housing and neighborhood amenities, difficult physical relationships associated with neighborhoods in close proximity to industrial areas have made the city unattractive to many homebuyers.

Project Strategies

In order to address the complex and varied housing and neighborhood conditions in the Core City, the Strategic Master Plan recommends a multi-faceted and comprehensive approach to neighborhood renewal. This approach is premised on the fact that Niagara Falls must initiate targeted housing and neighborhood renewal programs where they can be most successful. At the same time, use of the city's extensive land base must be reconfigured to a more compact and efficient form that more appropriately reflects the city's reduced population by putting areas that are not being used or maintained in a reserve or land bank for use or redevelopment at some time in the future. This will ensure the City's limited resources are maximized and population growth and the provision of services can be focused to neighborhood areas that can once again become healthy and stable. It is in these areas where housing rehabilitation and home ownership programs can most successfully encourage neighborhood renewal.

Healthy neighborhoods offering high-quality amenities and a range of housing options are fundamental to the creation of a vibrant city that is competitively positioned to attract and retain a broad mix of residents. A focus on broad-based neighborhood renewal targeted first to the Core City and second to the whole city forms the basis for restoring a wider sense of pride in the city by strengthening communities. To this end, on-going attention and effort is necessary not only to address neighborhood decline, but also to ensure existing healthy neighborhoods remain so.

The private, public and non-profit sectors and the community need to be involved and participate in redefining the city's neighborhoods and improving living conditions and the quality of life for residents. New private sector-led developments throughout the Core City will broaden the range of housing options to provide choice for residents at differing stages of life and with differing cultural, educational or quality of life needs. To support residential growth within the Core City, a strong emphasis must be placed on the urban elements associated with quality of life choices. These include a strong arts community, high-quality schools, active institutions, an abundance of recreational and leisure amenities, a diverse network of parks and open spaces and proximity to employment, retail and entertainment opportunities within an easily walkable and compact setting.

Unoccupied, deteriorating, derelict housing units and neighborhoods that have resulted from dramatic population loss, including infrastructure that is not currently or expected to be utilized, should be acquired, identified as future growth opportunities and held within a land reserve or Land Bank. By doing so, the municipality can strategically direct its resources to priority areas for improvement and focus its physical structure into a more compact urban form that allows for more efficient delivery of services. Reserve lands held within a Land Bank should be released to support specific renewal efforts, or to meet proven market demand or population growth in the future. The opportunity to consolidate Land Banked commercial areas may create opportunities for new housing on non-traditional short depth lots, while integrating commercial parking behind those lots to meet multiple needs, as shown in Figure 16.

The gradual release of land for new housing will ensure that the market is not overwhelmed by an oversupply of housing, which would otherwise continue to reduce overall property values and cause further negative impact to the renewal of neighborhoods and existing housing stock. By reducing the oversupply of housing units and the costs associated with the delivery and maintenance of existing infrastructure and services, the Land Bank approach will stabilize decline in neighborhoods that continue to accommodate housing, thereby raising the residential housing market to a more regionally competitive price point. This will serve to encourage growth, renewal and improved service delivery to neighborhoods that can be revitalized, improving quality and desirability of housing in Niagara Falls overall.

Lands within the Land Bank must be appropriately maintained or used in an interim fashion in order to avoid adding to the problem of physical decay. In the inner city, vacant land can be utilized in a number of ways, including interim active playground resources or neighborhood parkettes. Adjacent to industrial corridors, vacant lands may be planted to create a passive green open space corridor to protect and buffer stable residential uses from industrial uses. Over time, interim open space corridors may be developed to link important open space resources and destinations within the city.

In addition to the retirement and banking of residential land, the City should establish a comprehensive set of housing and neighborhood renewal programs, focused on the Core City, to address neighborhood decline and improve the quality of residential stock. Programs that improve housing and neighborhoods by encouraging private owners to maintain their property or invest in homes within the Core City, or those that offer financial support to assist employees to move to or stay in Niagara Falls should be considered. Programs to support the Land Bank, by facilitating the City's identification and acquisition of land should be established. To attract and retain residents within the Core City neighborhoods, the City must secure resources to improve community amenities and services, including open spaces, schools and community centers. Housing and neighborhood renewal programs should be undertaken in partnership with other levels of government and local agencies.

Over time, as the recommendations for housing renewal are implemented in the Core City, improving neighborhoods and attracting more residents and investment to the City, new opportunities and demand for the renewal of residential neighborhoods will spread throughout Niagara Falls. The citywide expansion of the housing renewal Big Move is described in Section 7.1.

Key Recommendations

1. Establish the Niagara Falls Land Bank

Project type: Partnership and Management

Project priority: 0-5 years

The City should establish the Niagara Falls Land Bank as the mechanism for assembling parcels, holding and releasing land for development by the public and/or private sectors. The municipality should identify properties that are vacant, in tax arrears or deemed unsafe or code deficient. If after a sufficient period of time and sufficient notice properties have not been upgraded, they should be considered for acquisition. The City will then maintain, manage, and market these lands through the Land Bank. Assembly of contiguous properties will allow for the creation of larger parcels that can be comprehensively developed when market conditions improve.

Properties held in the Land Bank will remain as open space until a market for their development is clearly established. The City should work with the community to explore and foster opportunities for interim public use of the properties for such activities as community gardens, publicly accessible open space, and children's play areas. These interim uses may become permanent, should the community and the City of Niagara Falls determine this is the best use of the land. However, the bulk of the properties held in the Land Bank should be disposed of when market conditions can guarantee a significant return on the land to offset the loss of tax revenues incurred by the municipality while the land was held in the bank, and to facilitate development agreements for larger tracts of land in accordance with programmatic or design criteria established by the municipality.

The release of properties for development will be at the discretion of the management agency established to oversee Land Bank acquisitions and dispositions, such as the Urban Renewal Agency. Large properties with significant development potential within the Core City should only be released through a Request for Qualifications process that sets out clear design standards and programmatic requirements for development, potential development



The orange areas represent the concept of targeted acquisition of code deficient and derelict units negatively impacting the overall neighborhood.



Over time, as the market improves, land can be released for new residential development or kept as open space, forming valuable neighborhood amenities.

partnership responsibilities in the case of a public/public private sector partnership and a formal review and evaluation process to select the winning proponent.

2. Establish a comprehensive set of neighborhood and housing renewal programs

Project type: Partnership and Management

Project priority: 0-5 years

The range of neighborhood and housing conditions in Niagara Falls requires a comprehensive set of renewal programs aimed at improving the physical quality and character of residential areas, as well increasing the range of housing types offered, particularly in the Core City. In concert with the State and Federal Governments, as well as local housing and community groups, the City of Niagara Falls must work to ensure sufficient resources are put in place to address the extent of decline that has taken place and support new forms of residential development. In particular, the City will need to devote a significant portion of the money received from the Seneca Nation Casino to a multi-year housing initiative comprised of, but not limited to, the following:

- Residential property maintenance programs, such as façade improvement programs, intended to encourage investment in private residential properties
- Residential tax incentive programs aimed at encouraging new residents to purchase and invest in Core City residential properties
- Employer assisted housing programs offering financial (i.e. mortgage) support to employees residing in Niagara Falls or those looking to move into the city
- Property acquisition strategies that will address mechanisms for the City of Niagara Falls to begin acquiring land that is vacant, in tax arrears or deemed unsafe or code deficient that will be held in the Land Bank
- Fast tracking of housing code violations and blight clearance

As a key imperative to initiating renewal in the heart of Niagara Falls, both existing and new programs should focus on the Core City in the immediate-term. The following criteria should be considered to help target areas for housing renewal programs:

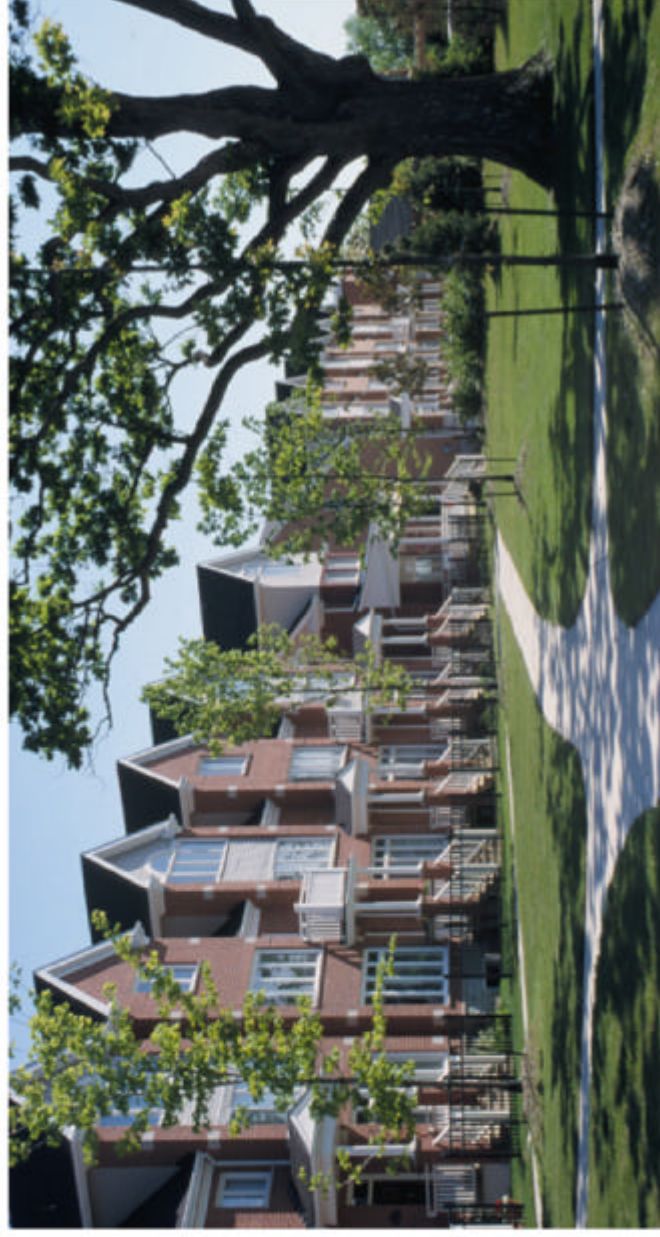
- Areas that are relatively stable and the physical form of neighborhoods is intact, without significant voids or a prevalence of vacant parcels resulting from extensive demolition
- Areas located in close proximity to other targeted reinvestment initiatives recommended in the Strategic Master Plan, including the Robert Moses Parkway redesign (see Section 4.1.1) and redevelopment and the revitalization of key corridors and nodes.
- Areas amongst the oldest residential neighborhoods within the city that possess value as original heritage resources and/or character areas with unique built form attributes

Using the information collected through the Department of Community Development's 2004 Housing Conditions Study, combined with the existing database maintained by the City Assessor's Office, the City should develop a detailed system for identifying and tracking properties with regard to tax arrears, code violations, safety and fire code violations, et cetera. The City of Niagara Falls can use this information to develop renewal and retirement

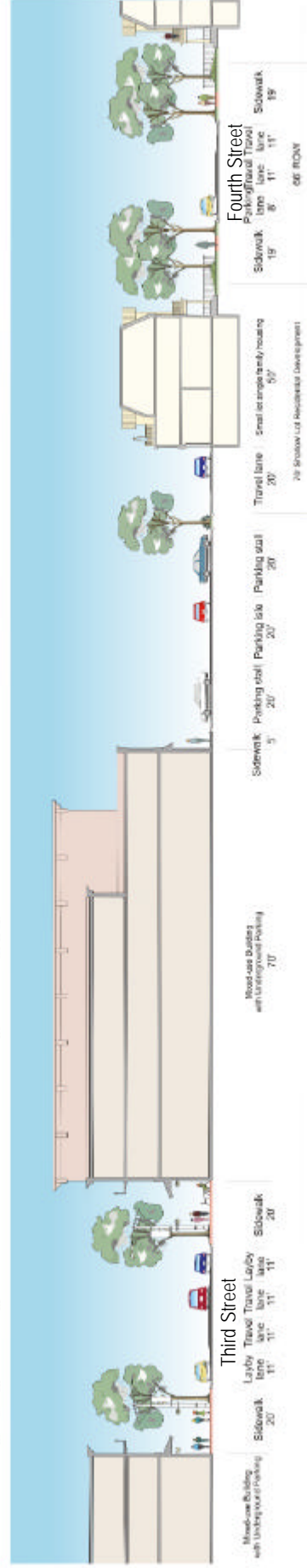
areas for new housing and commercial parking can support existing commercial corridors, such as Third Street



Housing must be supplemented by community amenities and high quality streetscapes.



By consolidating properties acquired through the Land Bank, new housing in a greater variety of forms can be developed, to meet the diverse needs of the city's population. The gradual release of land in response to market demand is important, to ensure the market is not overwhelmed by an oversupply.



Section D: Commercial uses and parking on Main Street adjacent to neighborhoods

programs specific to the neighborhoods. In addition, the City should establish management and operational guidelines to direct Land Bank acquisitions and dispositions associated with housing renewal and retirement programs.

3. Improve community amenities and services

Project type: Design, Design Guidelines, Partnership and Management

Project priority: 5-15 years

The City of Niagara Falls, in partnership with community agencies and the School Board, must secure the resources necessary to provide high-quality neighborhood amenities and services. In order to retain existing residents and attract new residents, Niagara Falls must maintain safe and inviting open spaces, high-quality schools, community centers and programs. Specific recommendations concerning improvement of these amenities and services are made throughout the document and in the Citywide Strategies, Education (Section 7.7) and Open Space (Section 7.2).

4. Promote, support and/or undertake residential development and/or conversion projects to increase the population within the Core City

Project type: Design, Design Guidelines, Partnership and Management

Project priority: 5-15 years

The City of Niagara Falls must take a leadership role in implementing and investing in housing renewal programs in the Core City and encourage others to do the same, by building confidence and momentum in the reversal of the decline of the city's residential neighborhoods and making the Core City neighborhood more attractive to current and potential residents. New residential projects, including higher-density developments, must be supported by a market study to justify need while not resulting in an oversupply in the market and ensuing market decline or instability.

4.2 Core City Precinct Strategies

4.2.1 Customs House and North Main Loft Precinct

Description

The Customs House and North Main Loft Precinct includes the area extending north along Main Street from Lockport Road to Findlay Crescent and from the western side of Robert Moses Parkway to the eastern side of Main Street. Although this precinct is struggling at present, it holds significant potential for renewal due to its authentic and historic building fabric, opportunities for commercial and residential infill, and its proximity to the riverfront corridor, the downtown, and key institutions.

Project Strategy

The Customs House and North Main Loft Precinct should be positioned and supported as a primary mixed-use main street offering authentic areas of historic fabric, community, neighbourhood and visitor amenities and visitor orientation. This precinct has significant potential for new investment supporting a broad range of uses, including tourist services, neighborhood commercial uses and new residential development. The existing heritage architecture on Main Street offers immediate opportunities for restoration and reuse, particularly for loft-style residential development, and lends the district a distinct character, which should be enhanced through carefully considered new developments. Additionally, the precinct's reconnection with the waterfront through the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway, and associated park enhancements, will create a very special main street district in the northern portion of the city. As such, this area should provide a civic, amenity and commercial focus serving adjacent neighborhoods, including Highland, Deveaux, Center City and the Niagara University community.

Short-term initiatives, including the development of the Old Customs House as the Niagara Falls International Railway Station/Intermodal Transportation Center (IRS-ITC) at the Whirlpool Rapids International Bridge, represent immediate opportunity to reinforce this precinct as an important arrival node in Niagara Falls and a major point of activity (see Figure 17).

Current and continued residential loft conversions, and the adaptive reuse of existing heritage building stock with new retail and service uses attractive to both the local population and university students will help to restore this portion of Main Street as a healthy commercial corridor. To support and fuel this type of positive reinvestment, a streetscape improvement program should be initiated throughout this precinct, generally consistent with the recommendations of the Main Street Revitalization Study (2002). Streetscape improvements along North Main Street, including tree planting and



The conversion and reuse of historic buildings will reinforce North Main Street as a special place.

landscaping, will enhance the pedestrian environment and the appearance of the street and encourage private sector redevelopment efforts. Investments in the public realm should be coordinated with private investment where possible to minimize disruptions to local businesses and maximize the use of public and private resources. Private sector reuse and conversion of existing buildings for lofts and apartments will provide new opportunities for housing, reinforcing the street as a viable place to live, work, shop and recreate – an alternative to the automobile-oriented suburbs and the separation between the places where these daily activities take place.

Parking situated internally on Main Street blocks with generous landscape buffers, as a transition to residential uses, will ensure an adequate supply of parking without disrupting the existing urban fabric.

Attracting new residential populations through restoration and reuse opportunities afforded through the future reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway is very important to stabilizing the commercial components of the upper Main Street precinct. The redevelopment quality and character of new and infill developments fronting the Parkway corridor will establish the first impression for visitors of Niagara Falls, and it is critical to execute residential development fronting the Riverfront corridor to a high standard of design excellence. These development projects should be scoped and planned in conjunction with integrated land use and transportation improvement project for the redesign of the Parkway (see Section 4.1.1).

The evolution and enhancement of the Customs House and North Main Loft Precinct should be supported through code enforcement, to remove blighted properties and create land for consolidated redevelopment; through ongoing heritage and main street preservation programs, to maintain the character and local heritage of the main street in an authentic urban manner; and by targeted commercial and housing renewal programs.

The Strategic Master Plan recommends the following actions and initiatives to support the revitalization of this precinct area:

Key Recommendations

1. Support the Reuse of the Customs House as the IRS-ITC and Visitor Orientation Center

Project type: Planning/Scoping, Management and Installation

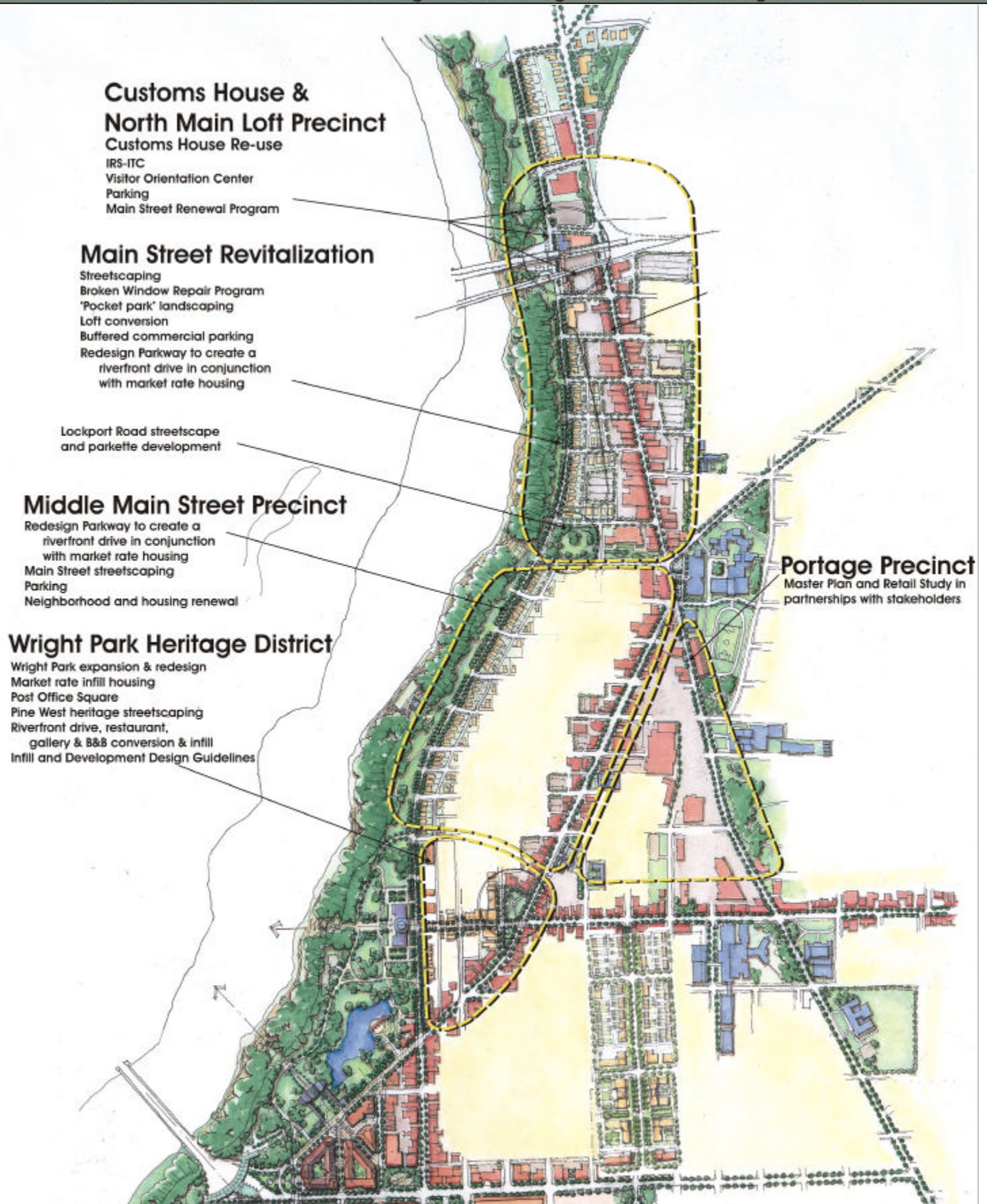
Project priority: 0-5 years

The renovation and reuse of the Customs House as part of the city's IRS-ITC project represents a significant catalyst project in the long-term renewal of the north Main Street area. The 27,500 sq ft center will be a multi-modal transportation facility linking Amtrak, automobile, bus, trolley, bicycle and pedestrian transportation to prime tourist sites in the Core City. In addition to facilities for rail passengers, border security operations and general commercial activity, a Visitor Orientation Center (see Section 5) will be incorporated into the IRS-ITC. The Customs House is a signature building and an excellent gateway into the city for those arriving by rail or from the north.



Customs House & North Main Loft Precinct, Main Street Revitalization

Middle Main Street Precinct, Wright Park Heritage District and Portage Precinct



2. Develop and Promote Main Street Renewal Programs

Project type: Planning/Scoping, Design and Design Guidelines and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

To support the development and transformation of Main Street into a vibrant and safe pedestrian-friendly, community-oriented main street, these programs will include:

- **Continuation of Façade Improvement Programs and the addition of a ‘Broken Windows’ Grant Repair Program** along Main Street. The municipality should continue and consider expanding the Façade Program, and should establish a grant program to assist property owners to improve the image of the street and its sense of activity through replacement of boarded up windows with new windows and protective open grills.
- **Development and implementation of a Streetscape Improvement program** to enhance the image of the street, emphasize its heritage attributes and characteristics, mediate the presence of surface parking lots, improve pedestrian crossings and street lighting and support continued private sector reinvestment
- **Development of landscaped pocket parks** on vacant sites as interim uses to enhance the image and protect against speculation. Some of these parks may become permanent uses that provide amenity-rich, public gathering spaces that are otherwise lacking.
- **Expansion of Business Assistance Programs utilizing Community Development Block Grants and other government sources of community and economic development funding that assist businesses to locate in the area**
- **Development of governmental and institutional facilities on Main Street, particularly satellite retraining and educational facilities,** through ongoing discussions with existing educational institutions

3. Establish Development and Infill Design Guidelines for the Precinct

Project type: Planning/Scoping, Design and Design Guidelines and Management

Project priority: 0-5 years

To ensure that the overall heritage character of the area is retained and to allow intensification with minimal impacts to existing uses and residential neighborhoods, the municipality should initiate a study to generate development and infill design guidelines for the area. Development and design guidelines should promote the successful integration of new construction with existing heritage fabric, a pedestrian-oriented street environment with vibrant public spaces, and strong linkages between the riverfront corridor and the heritage main street frontage. Streetscaping and landscaping should screen parking and other functional elements while encouraging additional private sector developments.

4. Undertake an integrated land use and transportation improvement project to redesign and reconfigure the Robert Moses Parkway

Project type: Partnership, Planning/Scoping, Design and Design Guidelines and Installation
Project priority: 0-5 years

As recommended in the Big Move Section 4.1.1, Reconnect the City to its Waterfront, an integrated land use and transportation improvement project should be led by the City to address the remaking of the Robert Moses Parkway, in partnership with OPR&HP, NYPA and DOT. The phasing strategy of the reconfiguration of the Parkway will be determined by the partnership.

Within the Customs House and North Main Loft Precinct, the undertaking of the redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway will result in the creation of many new street connections linking the Precinct to the riverfront and new opportunities for appropriate development within the park, along the city/park interface, and adjacent to the park.

5. Establish Willow Avenue as a key and transportation and green structure link

Project type: Management, Planning, Design and Installation
Project priority: 0-5 years

Willow Avenue should be strengthened as a primary connection between the new riverfront drive and other major arterials to provide a strong setting for new residential development and a focus for community and neighborhood activities. Properties located on the north side of the street will be assembled to form a new parkette that will extend east to the waterfront to bring parkland into the city and improve the open space connections. The park's design and features will complement streetscape improvements along the roadway. Willow Avenue should be renamed Lockport Road to emphasize its importance as a key east/west link between the riverfront corridor and the city.

Likewise, reconstruction of Lockport Road east of Main Street will reinforce its role as a major connection to the Core City precincts. Streetscape improvements and landscaping to buffer existing vacant and in-use industrial areas from the roadway (see Section 7.5), will provide an enhanced setting for further neighborhood renewal and investment.

Figure 18. Core City: Precinct Strategies



Pine Avenue Precinct, Third Street Precinct and Buffalo Avenue Heritage District



4.2.2 Middle Main Street Precinct

Description

The Middle Main Street Precinct is located between Lockport Road and Pine Avenue. Within this precinct are a number of professional and governmental offices and public institutions, including the Earl W. Bridges Public Library, the Trott Access Center, the Niagara County Court Building, the Carnegie Building and City Hall, many of which are designated historic buildings. The precinct also includes the residential area located between Main Street and the Niagara River Gorge.

Project Strategy

This portion of Main Street currently functions well as the focus for public/government activities and professional services. The Strategic Master Plan seeks to reinforce and strengthen this area through projects and initiatives aimed at improving the physical setting of the precinct as a healthy neighborhood, business precinct and government/institutional area. Further concentration of public services will generate business opportunities for services that support this sector and help to activate the street. Improvements to the public realm and attention to public transit and cross-town arterial connections will make this precinct more attractive to businesses and professional office and service uses seeking to locate in the area. Intensification through infill development and mixed commercial/residential uses consistent with the character and scale of existing development, with increases in density, should be encouraged to enhance urban vitality and improve the service draw of the area (see Figure 17). Neighborhood renewal and home ownership programs, such as those outlined in Section 4.1.7, open to both existing residents and new residents should be pursued to improve housing conditions within the area and to strengthen the resident base.

Key Recommendations

1. Establish a Streetscape Improvement Program for Main Street

Project type: Design and Design Guidelines and Installation

Project priority: 5 – 15years

Improved streetscaping along the length of Main Street from Lockport Road to Pine Avenue will help to identify this area as a unique business location and reinforce its role as an important north/south connection through Niagara Falls. These improvements should be coordinated with streetscape improvements to the north and south, reflecting a comprehensive image for the street, while highlighting unique character areas along its length. Streetscape improvements should significantly improve the amenity and quality of the built pedestrian environment and can be undertaken as part of a phased capital works program and/or coordinated with significant redevelopment projects along the street. Future parking should be situated internal to the block. Large surface parking lots fronting Main Street should be discouraged. Generous planted buffers should be required at the interface of surface parking and residential uses to minimize negative impacts on existing urban fabric.

2. Undertake an integrated land use and transportation improvement project to redesign and reconfigure the Robert Moses Parkway

Project type: Partnership, Planning/Scoping, Design and Design Guidelines and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

As recommended in the Big Move Section 4.1.1, Reconnect the City to its Waterfront, an integrated land use and transportation improvements project should be carried out by the municipality to address the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway, in partnership with OPR&HP, USA Niagara and DOT.

Within the Middle Main Street Precinct, the undertaking of the redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway will result in the creation of many new street connections linking the Precinct to the riverfront and new opportunities for appropriate development within the park, along the city/park interface, and adjacent to the park.

3. Undertake a Parking Supply and Management Strategy for North Main Street

Project type: Planning/Scoping

Project priority: 5-15 years

The municipality should undertake a parking supply and management strategy to explore:

- Approaches to buffering parking from residential uses in the North Main Street area
- Opportunities for shared use parking facilities in locations that will not negatively impact adjacent residential areas

4. Implement Neighborhood and Housing Renewal Programs

Project type: Planning/Scoping and Management

Project priority: 0-5 years

The existing neighborhood between Niagara River and Main Street will be a priority area for the housing rehabilitation and neighborhood revitalization programs outlined in Section 4.1.7. The development of high value, regionally significant housing fronting the new riverfront drive will be closely tied to renewal efforts in the existing neighborhood farther east of Main Street. The combination of these initiatives will serve to stabilize and improve the quality of neighborhood areas for existing residents while attracting a broader range of residents to the Core City. General streetscape improvements along 11th Street together with targeted neighborhood rehabilitation, code enforcement and the clearance of slum and blight conditions between Main and 11th will not only visually improve conditions but also reinforce public investments in the area.

4.2.3 Portage Precinct

Description

The Portage Precinct encompasses the area bound by Portage Road, Pine Avenue and Main Street. It includes a mix of low and high-density residential and general commercial uses, as well as neighborhood retail uses, and includes the Tops Plaza and related parking. This precinct is currently functioning well with a mix of community and convenience commercial/retail uses that meet the needs of local residents who would otherwise be required to frequent retail uses on Military Road.

Project Strategy

While this precinct currently provides a focus for shopping and commercial activities in the heart of the city and is linked to other commercial and retail uses along the Pine Avenue corridor, it is suburban in its development pattern and would better benefit the city by providing a more urban commercial experience integrating residential developments and other amenities that would strengthen this node as a focus for daily community life. Competition within the North American retail marketplace has led to the redevelopment of many suburban-style commercial complexes, resulting in more traditional town center or main street experiences emphasizing the quality of the built and pedestrian realms.

The Strategic Master Plan recommends that this area be the subject of a combined Master Plan and retail study to examine opportunities to support the Portage Precinct as a unique mixed-use town center. The study should examine ways of improving and elevating the retail mix and integrating new uses to better serve the local and tourism markets to better compete within the larger regional market. While it is not imperative that the study be undertaken immediately, the municipality should encourage development proposals while ensuring its ability to proactively respond to them in a way that supports the long-term intensification of the precinct. Figure 17 shows the context of this precinct among its immediate surroundings.

Key Recommendation

1. **Undertake the Portage Precinct Master Plan and Retail Study, in Partnership with Key Private Sector Stakeholders**

Project type: Planning/Scoping, Design, Partnership and Management

Project priority: 0-5 years



Suburban retail developments throughout North America are being transformed into pedestrian-oriented commercial nodes. This type of shopping experience would be appropriate in the Core City and for the Portage Precinct.

The study should:

- Address the physical configuration, urban design and visual quality of the node
- Identify strategies and development typologies that will result in the intensification of the precinct as a multipurpose urban mixed-use shopping and residential town center
- Specify and secure a merchandizing mix that includes both national and local retail components to improve the local and regional draw of the area
- Create a streetscape improvement plan that enhances the street edges and in particular, addresses circulation, ensures pedestrian access is adequate and enhances the visual appearance of the precinct by screening surface parking on main streets such as Main, Pine and Portage.

4.2.4 Pine Avenue Precinct

Description

The Pine Avenue Precinct reaches from Main Street east to Hyde Park Boulevard. This precinct includes the Pine Avenue commercial corridor and the institutional node found at the intersection of Portage Road and Pine Avenue. Pine Avenue is a vibrant commercial street providing a focus for local shopping activity and business development, with a mix of retail and convenience shopping, including the City Market. East toward Hyde Park Boulevard, automobile-related uses predominate. The institutional node at the intersection of Pine Avenue and Portage Road that includes the Memorial Medical Center, the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center (NACC) and the now vacant School Board site south of Walnut Avenue play an important role in bringing people to this area and vitality to the street.

The precinct is one of the city's healthiest areas. It has a strong and established identity as the heart of the Italian community. Ongoing efforts by the business community to strengthen this image and enhance the pedestrian atmosphere of the street are guided in part by the Pine Avenue Business Precinct Urban Design Plan. The guidelines contained in the plan, while providing strong and useful direction concerning building location, orientation and entry articulation, are overly prescriptive and stringent with regard to architectural design details and do not accommodate the level of variation within the built environment necessary for the creation of interesting urban places. As a result, the guidelines will need to be interpreted with a great degree of flexibility to encourage desired levels of re-investment.

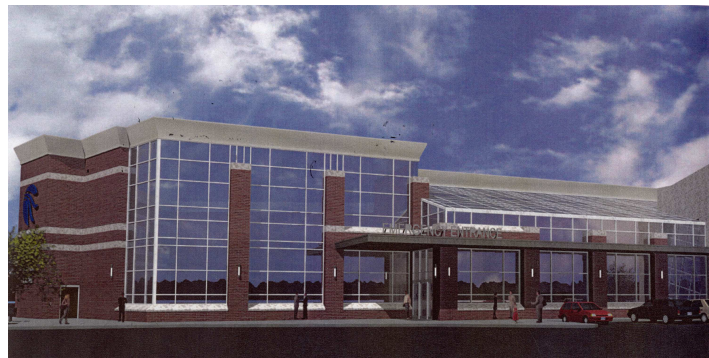
The recent conversion of the old Niagara Falls High School to accommodate the NACC is a very positive addition to the Pine Avenue Precinct. A



A greater emphasis on upper-storey residential uses will add new vitality to Pine Avenue.



Pine Avenue will be a destination for both residents and visitors.



The high quality of the Memorial Medical Center expansion should be met with an appropriate municipal response including high quality streetscape improvements, to encourage residential reinvestment and renewal around this important regional amenity.

growing arts community in the heart of the city has a strong role to play in shaping the character and identity of the precinct and in creating new destinations for tourists and residents in the Core City. The location of the center is ideal, with Pine Avenue providing a direct physical link to the Cultural District at the western terminus of the street. The Cultural District would be an appropriate location for showcasing the works of NACC artisans, both visual and performance related arts. The planned expansion of the Memorial Medical Center will bring new attention and activity to this area as an important regional health care facility. The center is seeking to enhance its existing cardiac and women's health programs to take a leading role in medical care within Niagara County.

Project Strategy

The Strategic Master Plan seeks to reinforce this precinct as a significant regional and community focus within the City of Niagara Falls. Investments in the public realm and existing buildings will create the setting for new mixed-use developments along Pine Avenue that will strengthen commercial uses and provide new housing opportunities to support retail activities. The recommendations for the Pine Avenue Precinct are summarized in Figure 18.

The expansion of the Memorial Medical Center and the reuse of the School Board site will also bring new people, visitors and activity to add vitality to the Core City. With the presence of the NACC and the medical center, the municipality should focus community development and renewal resources in the surrounding neighborhoods as part of a comprehensive strategy for improving the precinct. This will improve the condition of existing housing stock and the visual and physical amenities provided within the public realm, streetscapes, parks and open spaces. The open spaces located in the precinct will be preserved and enhanced to ensure the precinct can provide high-quality, well-maintained community amenities.

Intensification, infill development or the redevelopment of vacant sites should be encouraged and the city should consider a tax incentive program for projects that include residential units above ground floor commercial uses.

Existing automotive uses to the east of 20th Street disrupt the traditional retail and pedestrian shopping experience, and are inconsistent with future residential intensification. New zoning provision should prohibit automobile uses and expansions of existing ones. These sites are well suited for future residential intensification and should be rezoned mixed-use residential to a typical four-storey height.

Key Recommendations

1. Implement the Pine Avenue Streetscaping Initiative and Façade Improvement Program

Project type: Design and Design Guidelines and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

The existing streetscape initiative along Pine Avenue should continue and be implemented over the short term and augmented with simple, elegant entryway treatments that announce arrival at Pine Avenue at Portage Road, Main Street and Hyde Park Boulevard without becoming overbearing or cliché. An improved streetscape maintenance program and tree

replacement schedule is necessary to protect the investments made in the public realm. Improvements to the public realm will support business development and intensification of the street over time and reinforce the corridor as one of the primary main streets in Niagara Falls. The existing façade improvement program should be expanded, as recommended in the Pine Avenue Business Precinct Urban Design Plan.

2. Undertake a City Market Mixed Use Development RFP

Project type: Management and Planning/Scoping

Project priority: 5-15 years

The municipality has initiated an urban design study to understand how the City Market can better function as an important commercial designation within the Core City. The municipality should now issue a Request for Proposals, seeking an appropriate design and development team to explore the market as a flexible community and commercial space; attract new businesses, retail and new residential development, while better integrating the site within its context; and address transportation and parking issues. The RFP should emphasize the following goals:

- Scenarios for land use and development intensification
- Improvements to the public realm
- Permanent and flexible retail uses and their configuration
- Built form relationships to adjacent neighborhood edges

The development team should be selected based on qualifications, the completion of similar urban redevelopment projects, the criteria listed above, financing and a proposed partnership/leasing arrangement with the City. The selection process may be a two-staged process, which would allow more detailed proposals to be generated by a short list of qualified proponents identified through a Request for Qualifications, who would be invited to respond to the Request for Proposals.

3. Improve the physical setting of the Memorial Medical Center to support its planned expansion

Project type: Design and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

Streetscape improvements around the Memorial Medical Center will encourage residential reinvestment and the creation of a safe and healthy community context surrounding this important regional amenity. They will also help identify the center as a special place in the Core City. Streetscape, roadway and lighting improvements will improve the neighborhood setting of the existing facility and support a planned expansion of it on the block bound by Memorial Parkway, Ferry Street, 10th Street and Walnut Avenue to the south of the center's existing site. The installation of the new features should be planned and undertaken as part of an ongoing capital improvement program that benefits neighbors and the NACC. These two uses would mutually benefit from a broader public improvement program.

4. Develop a reuse strategy for the Portage Road School Board site

Project type: Partnership and Planning/Scoping

Project priority: 0 -5 years

The municipality should collaborate with the Niagara Falls School Board to develop a reuse strategy for the School Board property bound by Walnut Avenue, Portage Road, Ferry Avenue and 14th Street. New uses identified for the property should reinforce it as a key site in the Core City and take advantage of its proximity to the NACC, the Memorial Medical Center and Pine Avenue; accessibility from major roadways; generous open space; and its potential to act as a focal point for civic and neighborhood use. The reuse of this site should complement the expansion of the Memorial Medical Center and the establishment of the NACC to provide a clear indication that the area is undergoing positive change. Partnerships and/or discussions with these institutions should be undertaken to develop the reuse strategy.

4.2.5 Third Street Precinct

Description

The Third Street Precinct extends from Pine Avenue to Niagara Street. Third Street has experienced a significant degree of decline as a result of changing economic and demographic conditions. While the urban fabric remains largely intact, the majority of the buildings require significant upgrading. A number of sites have recently gained the attention of the private sector and are undergoing redevelopment with restaurant and nightclub uses that are in keeping with the precinct's entertainment-oriented image.

In addition, USA Niagara has announced a public realm and streetscaping strategy that seeks to strengthen the pedestrian quality of the street and encourage reinvestment in properties on Third Street.

Project Strategy

The Strategic Master Plan supports the streetscape improvement program proposed by USA Niagara that includes wider sidewalks, the provision of new street furniture, entryway elements, upgraded materials and improved building facades, as a mechanism to support existing and future private sector business development. New landscape and street tree plantings should be provided as well. Construction of the new streetscape is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2005. Figure 18 shows the recommendations for the Third Street Precinct.

Key Recommendation

1. Implement Third Street Streetscape Improvements

Project type: Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

The Strategic Master Plan supports the implementation of the streetscape improvement program to renew Third Street as an active pedestrian street attractive to both visitors and residents and to reinforce its role as a major north/south downtown cross street.

The Strategic Master Plan also recommends:

- Promoting the City's façade improvement programs in the area
- Instituting a Broken Windows Repair Program
- Introducing well landscaped pocket parks on strategically located vacant sites
- Landscape buffering of parking adjacent to residential areas
- Measures to prevent surface parking from encroaching into neighborhoods
- The development of a shared parking strategy involving business operators, property owners and appropriate municipal departments

4.2.6 Wright Park Heritage District

Description

Focused on the intersection of Main Street and Pine Avenue, the Wright Park Heritage District is bound by Main Street, Third Street and Pine Avenue. At the intersection of two Core City commercial corridors, this area currently lacks both a coherent identity and connections to the riverfront park system. The district contains a number of architecturally important buildings, including the Post Office Building, the church at the intersection of Main Street and Pine Avenue and the historic building fabric along the western portion of Pine Avenue.

This area is uniquely positioned along the waterfront and will benefit significantly from expanded waterfront open space resulting from the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway and from the establishment of the Cultural District (see Section 4.1.2). As such, it presents enormous potential for future tourism development, as well as residential renewal and intensification given the heritage characteristics and location of the district within the heart of the Core City. The recommendations for this District are shown in Figure 17.

Project Strategy

The Strategic Master Plan recommends the designation of this district as a unique heritage district with a special role in the overall tourism offering, as recommended in Section 4.1.6. The area will retain its predominant residential use, enjoying a new relationship to the waterfront achieved through the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway. The district will benefit from small-scale tourism oriented uses, including boutique hotels, restaurants, galleries and other amenities to be encouraged on Third Street, and from heritage themed streetscaping focused on the portion of Pine Avenue located in this district. Pine Avenue will continue to function as a residential street west of Main Street, while streetscape improvements will elevate its importance as a key link to the Cultural District and the commercial districts to the east. New bed and breakfast uses will be encouraged in the district and the enhancement of existing open spaces will define this as a special mixed residential district. Urban design and heritage design guidelines will be required to ensure a high degree of design excellence and that new buildings fit with the character of existing built form (Section 4.1.6).



New development in the Wright Park Heritage District will complement the historic character of the precinct.

1. Designate Wright Park as a Heritage District, as outlined in Section 4.1.6

Project type: Partnership and Management

Project priority: 0-5 years

As recommended in Section 4.1.6, the City should designate the Wright Park area as a Heritage District in order to protect and enhance its historic character.

2. Undertake an Integrated land use and transportation improvement project to redesign and reconfigure the Robert Moses Parkway

Project type: Partnership, Planning/Scoping, Design and Design Guidelines and Installation
Project priority: 0-5 years

The redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway, as outlined in Section 4.1.1, Reconnect the City to its Waterfront, will create a new pedestrian-friendly interface between the waterfront and the Wright Park Heritage District by establishing a high-quality public boulevard utilizing existing streets from Cedar Avenue including Third Street to Lower Mainstreet.

This section of the 'Riverfront Drive', fronting the Wright Park Heritage District and the Cultural District, will take on an urban character, with sidewalks extending to the curb on both sides of the street and continuous parallel parking permitted on the eastern city side of the street only. A double row of street trees will distinguish this important urban interface and the proposed Cultural District to the east, and create an appropriate setting to encourage new boutique hotel, bed and breakfast development and other small-scale commercial and restaurant developments on Third Street.

This portion of the Parkway will also be designated as a Pedestrian Priority Zone (see Section 4.1.3) with many pedestrian crossings and a very high quality of streetscape treatment, which may include in-street unit pavers or cobbles to signify the importance of this new mixed use and tourism area and prioritize pedestrian and non-vehicular forms of movement over vehicular movements. As the reconfiguration of the parkway represents fully connected network-based system, with many alternate route possibilities, 'Riverfront Drive' may be temporarily closed to support special programming and events occurring within the Cultural District.

3. Expand and Improve Veteran's Park as Wright Park

Project type: Management, Design and Installation
Project priority: 5-15 years

Veteran's Park, re-named as Wright Park, will be expanded to include the property on the northwest corner of the Pine Avenue/Main Street intersection, which currently contains a vacant gas station. High-quality heritage-themed landscaping and streetscaping will strengthen the space as a civic focal point and as a catalyst for revitalization. It will also create an attractive linkage to the Cultural District, lined with some of the highest quality housing stock in the Core City. The memorials situated on the existing site will remain integral elements in Wright Park and may be augmented by additional high-quality public art in keeping with its existing character. Interpretation of the site as the original Schoellkopf homestead should be incorporated into the park, with reference made to the stonewall remnants located there.

4. Undertake a Heritage Themed Streetscape Master Plan and Improvement Program for Pine Avenue West and the streets surrounding Wright Park

Project type: Design and Installation
Project priority: 5-15 years

As outlined in Section 4.1.6, Heritage Preservation, improvements to the public realm will reinforce the heritage character of this precinct and support a heritage district designation, encourage residential renewal and reinvestment and set the stage for high-quality infill developments reinforcing the low-scale, traditional character of the precinct.

The master plan program should focus on place-making within the study area and examine special streetscape treatments, heritage or themed lighting, seating and places of gathering, landscaping, street tree planting and appropriate fencing to establish a cohesive image for the district.

5. Develop Infill and Development Design Guidelines

Project type: Design Guidelines

Project priority: 5-15 years

As recommended in Section 4.1.6, infill and development design guidelines should be developed to guide infill and plan projects in this important Heritage District. The guidelines will reflect the importance of the heritage designation and ensure the character of the precinct is protected.

6. Establish Post Office Square

Project type: Design and Design Guidelines and Installation

Project priority: in conjunction with Wright Park expansion

A new public open space at the intersection of Walnut Avenue and Main Street will provide a forecourt to the Post Office building. Known as Post Office Square, the space will complement the expanded Veteran's Park to the northwest with high-quality landscaping reinforcing it as a public place. It will also protect views of the historic Post Office building from the south.

4.2.7 Buffalo Avenue Heritage District

Description

The Buffalo Avenue Heritage District is bound by the access point to the Goat Island Bridge, Niagara River open space corridor, John B. Daly Boulevard, Rainbow Boulevard, Sixth Street and Buffalo Avenue. This area of the Core City is defined by the collection of large, historic homes located within it. Situated on generous lots with mature trees, the majority of the homes have been converted into bed and breakfast establishments or professional offices. While some homes have been restored and are in excellent condition, others are in very poor condition and in need of investment and repair. Additional tourist accommodations, a condominium development and smaller residential buildings can also be found in the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District.

The combination of architecturally important buildings and waterfront location uniquely positions the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District for further tourism development, as well as residential renewal once the reconfiguration of Robert Moses Parkway has created a new 'front' to the district. This District is shown in Figure 18.

Project Strategy

The Strategic Master Plan recommends designating portions of this precinct as a unique heritage district with a special role in Niagara Falls' overall tourism offering as described in Section 4.1.6. The area will retain its predominant residential character (see Section 4.1.7), enjoying a new relationship to the waterfront achieved through the reconfiguration of the Parkway. The addition of new and complementary uses, such as boutique hotels and bed and breakfast accommodations, will take advantage of the precinct's easy access from the Falls District and major routes into Niagara Falls from the south. Heritage themed streetscaping (see Section 4.1.6) is appropriate for the district and will support renewal and reinvestment. The redesign of the Parkway will provide for appropriately scaled pedestrian and vehicular access to the riverfront open space. New street and pedestrian connections will better link this portion of the city to the park. A high degree of design excellence should be promoted through urban and heritage design guidelines that will ensure new buildings fit with the character of existing built form.

A transit and visitor orientation center located at the intersection of Quay Street, Buffalo Avenue, John B. Daly Boulevard and Rainbow Avenue (see Section 5) will strengthen the importance of the precinct as a key point of entry into the city and will be an important complement to future tourism development.

Intensification of the precinct over the long-term with additional tourist accommodations in the form of bed and breakfasts and boutique hotels, as well as new residential developments, will help to strengthen the area and encourage investment in existing buildings. Parking associated with non-residential uses should be located off public streets and behind buildings, either at grade or in structured parking facilities. Opportunities to locate a shared parking structure immediately adjacent to the redesigned Parkway in the embankment grade change should be explored by the City of Niagara Falls as a strategy for meeting parking requirements in the area.

1. Designate the Buffalo Avenue area as a Heritage District

Project type: Partnership and Management

Project priority: 0-5 years

As outlined in Section 4.1.6, Heritage Preservation, the Buffalo Avenue area should be designated a Heritage District in order to protect and enhance the historic character of its buildings and streets.

2. Establish a Visitor Orientation Center

Project type: Planning/Scoping, Management, Design and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

The intersection of Buffalo Avenue, John B. Daly Boulevard and Rainbow Avenue is an ideal location for a major visitor orientation center incorporating parking, transit facilities and year round visitor information services (see Section 5). A center at this location provides easy access to all major roadways and attractions within Niagara Falls. Introduction of the center should take place in conjunction with long-term parking facilities and the establishment of a visitor shuttle service with stops at major attractions and tourist amenities (see Section 5 and Figure 20).

3. Undertake an Integrated land use and transportation improvement project to redesign and reconfigure the Robert Moses Parkway

Project type: Partnership, Planning/Scoping, Design and Design Guidelines and Installation

Project priority: 0-5 years

The redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway will establish a new urban interface between the city and its waterfront. The segment of the Parkway located between First Street and the intersection of John B. Daly Boulevard and Buffalo Avenue should act as an extension of the improved Prospect Street (see Section 4.1.3 above), with a very high level of urban streetscape finishing. It should be designed as a two-lane riverfront drive with parallel parking located on the city side of the boulevard. Landscaping, including a double row of street tree plantings, and sidewalks on both sides of the Parkway will reinforce the route as a place for pedestrians and better integrate the redesigned roadway into the waterfront area.

The alignment of the new 'Riverfront Drive' will conform to Prospect Street and follow the existing parkway alignment. This alignment is consistent with the role of the roadway as an important public interface between the City and the Park designed to will ensure that the City and its buildings are situated to present a 'front' to 'Riverfront Drive' and the State Park. The drive may continue to Daly Boulevard or it may connect to Buffalo Avenue via the existing Riverside Drive. The impacts to business associated with the potential disconnection at Daly Boulevard should be examined through a market impact assessment.

Proposed new street connections will permit temporary street closures along portions of the new 'Riverside Drive' to accommodate programmed events and festivals, while ensuring access and servicing needed to support local business and visitation. This portion of the new 'River Front Drive' will also be designated a Pedestrian Priority Zone (see Falls Precinct Section 4.1.3) with pedestrian and non-vehicular forms of movement given priority over the automobile. The use of special streetscape treatments, special paving or cobbles, highly

articulated pedestrian crossings and signage will signify this the Pedestrian Priority Zone to uses.

The configuration of 'Riverfront Drive' and its integration into the urban grid will allow the removal of the ramps from John B. Daly Boulevard south of Buffalo Avenue. A new traffic calming circle at the Buffalo Avenue intersection will function as a transition and entry to the Casino, downtown and tourism precincts, and create a strong positive first impression for visitors and encourage redevelopment of the many vacant parcels currently found along Rainbow Boulevard and Buffalo Avenue.

4. Undertake a Heritage Streetscaping Plan and Improvement Program for Buffalo Avenue

Project type: Design and Installation

Project priority: 5-15 years

As recommended in Section 4.1.6, Heritage Preservation, improvements to the public realm will reinforce the heritage character of this precinct and support a heritage district designation, encourage residential renewal and reinvestment and set the stage for high-quality infill developments reinforcing the low-scale, traditional character of the precinct.

The master plan program should focus on place-making within the study area and examine special streetscape treatments, heritage or themed lighting, seating and places of gathering, landscaping, street tree planting and appropriate fencing to establish a cohesive image for the district.

5. Develop Infill and Development Design Guidelines

Project type: Design Guidelines

Project priority: 5-15 years

As described in Section 4.1.6, infill and development design guidelines should be developed to guide infill and plan projects in this important Heritage District. The guidelines will reflect the importance of the heritage designation and ensure the character of the precinct is protected.

4.2.8 Casino Precinct

Description

The Casino Precinct encompasses lands subject to the State of New York-Seneca Nation Casino Compact. The precinct contains the casino operated by the nation, a recently completed parking ramp fronting Niagara Street, the structure of the closed Splash Park water park, residential housing, the Ramada and Holiday Inns, the Niagara Office Building and St. Mary's Church.

The compact between the State of New York and the Seneca Nation permits the operation of a casino on the designated lands for up to 14 years. However, the nation retains ownership of properties acquired under the terms of the agreement. The compact lands are Seneca Nation sovereign territory, which means they can be developed as the Nation desires, without municipal review, approval or public disclosure.

Project Strategy

It is in the best interest of the Seneca Nation and the City of Niagara Falls to communicate and collaborate on a regular basis with regards to the development of the compact lands, as well as development beyond the compact lands in the Core City initiated by the municipality. The many municipal-led projects in the Core City recommended by the Strategic Master Plan, including the design competition for and creation of Falls Street Festival Square, improvements to the West Falls Street Promenade leading to the main entry to the casino, the Urban Design and Retail Master Plan for Niagara Street, will have a significant and positive impact on the Seneca Nation and casino visitation over time.

Changes in the urban fabric can be expected to have a significant and positive impact on the ability of the city and the casino to attract a broader tourism demographic; how visitors arrive at the casino; and what they see and do prior to and after visiting the casino. These changes will also impact whether or not they choose to stay in the city for an extended period and make the casino just one of many stops within the Core City.

By working together, the City and the Seneca Nation can co-ordinate activities and development ventures to maximize mutual economic benefit and ensure every project fully contributes to positive change within the Core City without precluding future opportunities. To this end, the City and the Nation should meet regularly to discuss long-term objectives, especially as these relate to transportation infrastructure as well as proposed new developments. Ultimately, the City and the Nation may wish to undertake the preparation of a joint Master Plan for the compact lands and immediately surrounding areas to facilitate and co-ordinate the long-term objectives of both parties. Careful consideration of all the opportunities within the framework of a long-term, incremental development Master Plan will yield benefits, partnership opportunities and cost savings to both parties.

In the short-term, the Casino Precinct can play an important role in the efforts to improve the image and visitor experience of Niagara Falls and the Core City. Greening undeveloped land as an interim use will enhance the visual and physical quality of the precinct. This is an inexpensive proposition that could be undertaken jointly by the Seneca Nation and the City, promoting a collaborative relationship. Figure 19 shows how the built form of the Casino Precinct could possibly develop and become integrated with the urban fabric.



Casino Precinct
Collaborative city building

Potential realignment of
Parkway connection

Lands subject to
Development
Agreement

4.2.9 Lands Subject to Development Agreement

Description

The City of Niagara Falls and the Niagara Falls Urban Renewal Agency have entered into a development agreement with the Niagara Falls Redevelopment, LLC (NFR) for the lands bound by Niagara Street, Portage Road, Buffalo Avenue and John B. Daly Boulevard, as well as other interests. The agreement gives NFR the right to acquire properties within this area and to develop them as set out in the agreement. At approximately 120 acres of public and private property in addition to public rights of way, the extent of these lands represents an area slightly larger in size than the area bound by Niagara Street, John B. Daly Boulevard, Robert Moses Parkway and Prospect Street. While NFR is permitted to develop any uses the agency wishes on the lands it acquires, development proposals are subject to review and approval by the City of Niagara Falls. Development of the lands is subject to a schedule set out in the agreement and will take place over a number of years.

Project Strategy

The City of Niagara Falls should work very closely with NFR to ensure that the lands subject to the development agreement ultimately develop as an extension and expansion of the downtown with a similar mix of employment, residential, office, commercial and tourism uses to strengthen the overall economic position of the city. Clearly, the Strategic Master Plan has recommended a number of focused initiatives within the existing downtown, the Falls Street Precinct, the Cultural District and other Core City areas adjacent to the riverfront. It will be important to ensure that development propositions on development agreement lands do not weaken, detract or compete with redevelopment initiatives planned within the western portion of the Core City, and do not have adverse impacts on the overall market by exceeding demand and thereby precluding redevelopment and reinvestment elsewhere in the Core City.

While the lands subject to the agreement are located within the Core City, they are located at some distance from the existing major assets, including the State park, the Falls Precinct, the riverfront, the future Cultural District, the casino and the new conference center. In light of the need to align the City's resources to its current size and population, and the existing condition of the short-term market, redevelopment initiatives focused outside the area immediately adjacent to the State park and/or beyond existing areas of tourism and other activity centers (i.e. the Falls and Cultural Districts, Buffalo Avenue and Niagara Streets Precincts) must be clearly justified by a market study fully assessing economic impacts associated with the proposed development. This will ensure that proposed initiatives will not pull investment, activity and interest away from existing critical tourism areas and redevelopment initiatives in the downtown. In this way, proposed development within the subject land can be weighted against the potential to create the required critical mass of activity around proposed catalyst projects in the downtown, intended to strengthen growth in tourism, commercial and residential developments. In addition, significant residential development on the development agreement lands will likely have a detrimental effect on the ability to encourage needed housing renewal in the Core City. At best, this would significantly delay private sector reinvestment in existing housing stock, thereby undermining many projects and programs in the Core City intended to promote neighborhood renewal.

As with the Seneca Nation and the development of the compact lands, it is in the best interests of both NFR and the City of Niagara Falls to communicate and collaborate in the development of the lands east of John B. Daly Boulevard to ensure maximum return to NFR, the City and residents of Niagara Falls. Once development proposals are available for review by the City, they should be evaluated against the municipality's own development priorities and against a comprehensive market assessment to determine implications to existing business, tourism and residential precincts in the Core City.

As well, the municipality has an interest in ensuring that a flexible development framework is created for the lands that can logically connect the area to the existing street network, preserve important heritage and architectural resources, create valuable public open space, and permit phased development over time. In the short-term, the municipality should encourage the creation of a flexible use development framework that demonstrates the attributes outlined above, and has the ability to create a valuable open space resource to the east of John B. Daly Boulevard that could be built upon over time as market conditions permit. Figure 19 illustrates a flexible development framework that is well connected to existing urban fabric and that can accommodate a mix of uses similar to those found within the downtown. Initial investment in the open space resource would build and add value to adjacent development blocks, which could be released incrementally over time for redevelopment in response to economic and market growth. The image of the city and the John B. Daly Boulevard entranceway would be significantly improved through this type of approach, creating a more positive first impression of Niagara Falls.

The City should require the preparation and implementation of urban design guidelines for all developments within the subject lands as well as a full market study for each development phase. Guidelines would be a useful mechanism for ensuring that urban and not suburban building typologies are pursued and for promoting a high standard of built form and public realm design.

5. ENHANCING THE TOURISM EXPERIENCE: ARRIVAL AND ORIENTATION

The tourism potential of Niagara Falls represents the primary opportunity for diversifying and expanding the local and regional economic base. Capturing and leveraging the tourism potential to enhance the overall tourism experience is critical to the city's future success and the re-definition of the city's visual and physical image. The city boasts a wealth of tourism resources today – the premier attraction of the Falls themselves, the State Park system, the recently completed Niagara Gorge Discovery Center, the Niagara Aquarium and the Seneca Nation Casino to name but a few. The Core City Strategies and the 'Big Moves' are intended to reposition and leverage existing strengths and assets by establishing a series of recommendations, programs and initiatives, which knit together and build intelligently on existing resources, adding value through new amenities, special features, high-quality tourism attractions, and cultural and educational developments that can be undertaken over time as part of a comprehensive program for renewal of the city. Creating the Cultural District and improving the quality of the State Park system, including the redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway, and improving the urban interface to the park along the riverfront are key steps in enhancing Niagara Falls as a destination worthy of extended and multiple visits.

In order to fully realize the tourism potential of Niagara Falls, a strategy aimed at fundamentally changing the visitor experience is necessary. Tourists to Niagara Falls should be immediately captivated, not only by the Falls, but also by the landscape and the city, its buildings and the amenities that surrounds them. Niagara Falls should become known for offering a real or 'authentic' urban experience showcasing local places of character, remarkable streetscapes, high-quality parks and open spaces, and excellent building fabric creating an attractive physical setting for an array of high-quality, family-oriented educational attractions. The Core City must evolve to become a memorable and enjoyable place for both visitors and residents. Visitors should be able to move between the city and the riverfront with maximum ease and the location of tourist-related services and amenities, such as parking, visitor centers, hotels and restaurants should be intuitive, easy to find, and integrated into a welcoming visitor experience.

While the Core City Strategies are focused on targeted initiatives designed to strengthen the tourism sector and other sectors critical to the health, prosperity and vitality of the city, this section of the Strategic Master Plan deals with improving the visitor experience. Specifically, by organizing and choreographing the arrival sequence to create a strong first impression, it encourages visitors to explore both the extensive park system along the Niagara River and the city itself. Clearly, the development of an organized arrival sequence will take time, and it will not be one of the first projects to be implemented within Niagara Falls. Rather, it will involve a number of initiatives undertaken in a logical sequence and coordinated with other recommendations contained within this document to add up to significant change and an appropriate arrival, wayfinding and orientation program.

Perhaps most significant to this process is the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway, which enables the connection of the city to its riverfront and the redevelopment and intensification of this high-value urban edge with a mix of active and attractive uses creating a new image for the city – the city in the park. This project is essential to achieving an

arrival sequence that can captivate those who travel along it, and encourage them to want to explore all the city has to offer. Additional strategies are also needed to address the orientation and movement of visitors once they are in the city itself. Today, visitors to Niagara Falls arrive to find themselves in a sea of signs directing them to a multitude of locations, without a straightforward means of making their way through the city to a series of key destinations. The Strategic Master Plan sets out a series of recommendations below that are intended to secure a positive tourist experience over time and help encourage visitors to remain in Niagara Falls for extended periods exploring the City's riverfront and the park system, its shopping and restaurant amenities, and its wealth of other amenities and attractions.

Arrival and Orientation

In the short-term, visitors to the city will be directed into the city along the new riverfront drive (see Figure 20). As the quality and image of the western and southern edges of the Casino Precinct, Niagara Street, Rainbow Boulevard and Buffalo Avenue improves, visitors will be encouraged to use these primary routes to access the city as well. These routes offer commercial and retail uses, and over time, the primary arrival routes should focus on shopping and business streets to support the city's economic growth and prosperity. The Robert Moses Parkway west of the John B Daly intersection will, over time, become a Pedestrian Priority Zone. Portions of the roadway between John B. Daly Boulevard and Holly Place will potentially be closed to vehicular traffic to support special events, festivals or seasonal celebrations along the riverfront or within the Falls Street Precinct. In the short term, however, the reconfigured Parkway will be the most attractive street to visitors and offers a much better image or snapshot of the city in comparison to the discontinuous fabric on Rainbow Boulevard or Buffalo Avenue when approaching from the east.

1. Wayfinding Strategy

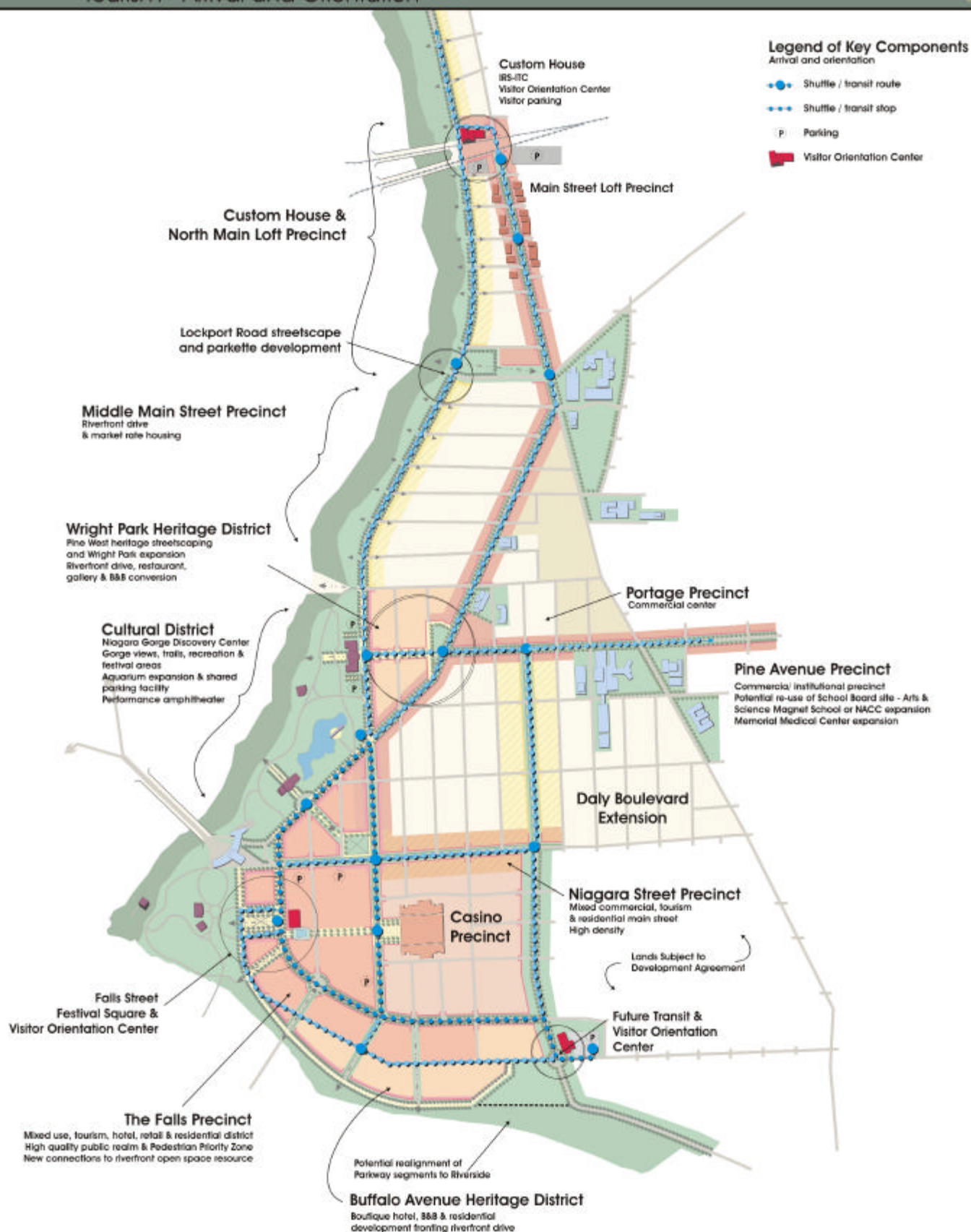
A comprehensive wayfinding strategy should be undertaken for the city focusing on with the Core City and the primary entrance routes into Niagara Falls as the key areas of focus. The City of Niagara Falls must work with other agencies, including State DOT and Parks and the Niagara Bridge Commission, to establish consistent signage policies that provide clear standards for approval, design, size and location. Authorization should be required to post signs.

2. Visitor Orientation Centers

Visitors to Niagara Falls arrive at the Core City at a number of points – Whirlpool Bridge/ Old Customs House area, Rainbow Bridge and the riverfront drive/John B. Daly Boulevard/ Buffalo Avenue area. Well-marked visitor orientation centers at or close to these primary points of entry to the Core City are necessary to guide visitors into the city and to help them plan their stay. The centers should provide travel information, visitor orientation and reservation services.

Figure 20 indicates preferred locations for a series of visitor orientation centers that offer easy access and a direct route into the Core City – the Old Customs House, Falls Street Plaza and the intersection of Buffalo Avenue and John B. Daly Boulevard. Visitor Orientation

Figure 20. Core City:
Tourism - Arrival and Orientation



Centers need to be phased in and coordinated with other initiatives as tourist activity increases. For example, the Visitor Orientation center shown just to the East of Falls Street Festival Square should be achieved through the redevelopment of the Rainbow Center Mall and the municipal parking structure above. Additionally, parking should be close to or available at each visitor center location. Over time, each center will be serviced by a visitor shuttle system linking people to hotels, attractions, shopping, restaurants and additional parking in the Core City (see below).

- The Falls Street Plaza area is an ideal location for a visitor orientation center given its central location at the interface of the park and the city, and its proximity to existing parking facilities. Establishment of this center should be undertaken immediately in either a temporary or permanent configuration to provide a source of an attraction that can market all Niagara Falls has to offer and offer additional information services to visitors. The Opportunity to integrate this facility into the redevelopment of the Wintergarden as a short-term, temporary or possibly permanent initiative should be explored with the building's owners. Ideally, a permanent facility should be included as part of the redevelopment of the Rainbow Center property.
- An orientation center is a natural fit for the new IRS-ITC located at the Customs House. The redevelopment of the Customs House as a transit center is an important opportunity to create a critical mass of tourist amenities serving both train passengers and automobile traffic on the new riverfront drive. New parking facilities and connections to the Core City via a visitor shuttle system will add to the services offered by the visitor orientation center.
- Over the long term, and with the development of a stronger tourism market and improvements to the quality and image of the area immediately east of John B. Daly Boulevard, tourists should be encouraged to consider Rainbow Boulevard, Buffalo Avenue and John B. Daly Boulevard as routes into the Core City. When this happens, a major visitor orientation center incorporating parking and possibly other tourism uses should be established at the intersection of these streets. This is a relatively large site situated at the primary entryway into the core city and a visitor center at this location can be expected to capture a great deal of traffic, provide orientation services, and through the development of the visitor shuttle system, alleviate traffic congestion in the core while delivering people to many destinations within the city.

3. Parking

Virtually all visitors to Niagara Falls are travelling by automobile or tour bus, making the provision of parking facilities a critical element within the overall tourism strategy. Figure 20 identifies a number of strategic sites throughout the Core City that would achieve the following parking objectives:

- Provide easy access to major attractions and amenities
- Encourage visitors to explore the city on foot or via the visitor shuttle system (see below)
- Preserve and protect the open space assets and environmental resources that are the foundation of the tourist economy
- Tie parking into the overall movement network within the Core City

Partnership arrangements and joint ventures involving various public and private sector parties can help to reduce the cost and risk involved in providing parking, and provide predictable revenue streams to each party. Each partner is assigned responsibility for construction, operations and maintenance as appropriate, based on the experience and expertise required to ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources and maximum gain to both the provider and the user. The municipality should explore partnership and joint venture arrangements with public sector agencies and the private sector to add to the parking resource in the core city. All major development projects within the core are a potential source of additional parking supply and the city should work with development proponents to overbuild and add to the parking resource.

4. Rainbow Bridge Plaza Improvements

Landscape improvements to the existing Rainbow Bridge Plaza and the immediate area will provide a high-quality public area that balances security requirements with opportunities for public spaces. Rainbow Bridge is a key entry point into the city and a major entry point into Western New York. Its character and quality should reflect its importance as a primary point of entry. Signage directing travelers to the bridge or into the city must be clear and straightforward to ensure the quick and efficient movement of vehicles away from the bridge and to prevent unnecessary queuing on city streets by those crossing over Rainbow Bridge to Canada.

Connections

The Strategic Master Plan seeks to encourage visitors to explore the Core City without requiring the use of automobiles. Tourism development is primarily focused within this area and the Strategic Master Plan builds upon existing attractions in the core to create a critical mass of amenities and destinations. Initiatives described in the Core City Strategies emphasize the creation of a human-scale, walkable Core City known for its high-quality pedestrian realm. A number of new street connections (see Figure 20) will provide new routes into the city and will better link the city and the riverfront, providing easy access between the park, the water and the many services, attractions and amenities located in the core.

1. Pedestrian Priority Zones

The Strategic Master Plan identifies a series of Pedestrian Priority Zones and connections (see Figure 20) that are intended to enhance pedestrian use and provide flexible public spaces, plazas and streets that can be closed to vehicular traffic at certain times of the year or for special purposes to accommodate special events such as festivals and street parties. This level of flexibility is necessary to provide year-round support for the retail uses that front many of the streets and public area in the Pedestrian Priority Zones. Designated Pedestrian Priority Zones, which also function as streets, will be active in the warm months and during the tourist season, and during special events. During colder months and the off-season, vehicles will need to be permitted on these streets to ensure customers can access businesses, and that business can remain viable and emergency servicing and delivery is maintained. Pedestrian priority streets must be subject to high-quality streetscape design to ensure they

are safe, comfortable and can flexibly accommodate special purpose events, as well as transportation functions.

2. Visitor Shuttle System

A visitor shuttle system should be phased in and routed through the Core City over time to connect key points of interest, attractions and local venues while providing an efficient alternative method of transportation alleviating automobile congestion and parking demands in the Core City. The shuttle system will connect tourists arriving at visitor information and orientation centers to amenities found in the Core City, to major attractions, and to bus stops and stations (see Figure 20). The shuttle system is an important tool for encouraging tourists to extend their visit by introducing them to areas of the city they were not aware of or had not considered visiting and providing information about these sites and places to encourage visitation and extended stays within the city.

6. PRIORITY INITIATIVES WITHIN THE CORE CITY

The Strategic Master Plan sets out an exciting and aggressive vision for the Core City. Significant commitment and diligence over many years will be required to achieve this vision. The Summary of Priority Initiatives describes the sequence of steps to be undertaken to implement the strategies over time. The Action Plan is divided into two timeframes – short-term (1 to 5 years) and long-term (5 to 15 years) (see Figures 21 and 22).

6.1 The Short-term Projects for Implementation (0 to 5 Years)

The first 0 to 5 years of implementation will primarily involve ‘getting organized’. During this time, the City and its partners will initiate and complete the studies necessary to achieve two of the most exciting elements of the Strategic Master Plan – the redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway and the establishment of the Cultural District – and undertake a number of other important priority projects. These have tremendous potential to be ‘early successes’ as projects that can be completed in the short-term, such as the Falls Street Festival Square, Third Street streetscape improvements and the John B. Daly Boulevard extension. Successfully implemented, these projects will bring attention to the renewal efforts and help to create momentum and commitment for further change within the community by catalyzing private sector action and leveraging coordinated public sector investment. These early initiatives will also establish an environment of confidence, set a ‘quality benchmark’ for future developments and attract interest in the city as a place to live, work, play and invest. Planning, coordination and preliminary studies focusing on specific longer-term projects will also be undertaken in the short term. The municipality will determine final implementation schedule of all project recommendations presented through the Strategic Master Plan, in conjunction with partnership agreements and the city’s capital budget process.

6.2 The Long-term Projects for Implementation (5 to 15 Years)

Following the first 5 years of implementation, the City and its partners will be prepared to begin construction of a number of projects that were previously in the planning and scoping phase. These include the Cultural District and the redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway and the redevelopment of properties along it. Many of the land assemblies necessary in the first 5 years will have also taken place, enabling the City to also begin construction of new public spaces and tourism infrastructure, such as the Lockport Road parkette and Third Street Civic Park and Canal Interpretive Walk. The municipality will determine final implementation schedule of all project recommendations presented through the Strategic Master Plan, in conjunction with partnership agreements and the city’s capital budget process.



Short-term Projects for Implementation (first 5 years)





7. GENERAL CITYWIDE STRATEGIES

The Citywide Strategies presented in this section establish a broad framework for the revitalization of key components of the City's urban environment such as housing, transportation, the open space system and heritage resources – all of which are important components of a healthy urban city. While the Core City Strategies identify targeted initiatives specific to a site or precinct context (see Section 4), the general Citywide Strategies, building on the Core City Strategies, outline recommendations for major components of the city as a whole. As such, they represent ongoing or continuous programs that must be established, managed and monitored over time and will require financial and personnel resources.

The Citywide Strategies are intended to complement the Core City Strategies by:

- Promoting the citywide renewal of neighborhoods that can be revitalized by retiring derelict, code deficient and dangerous housing to reduce the oversupply of housing units and stabilize the residential market to make living in the city more attractive to existing and potential residents
- Enhancing the city's primary open space network and resources as valuable new public infrastructure
- Encouraging the restoration and reuse of valuable heritage resources throughout Niagara Falls, including buildings, parks and squares to preserve these important cultural and character features and the value they add to the city and adjacent properties
- Mediating the negative impacts of industrial activities and work to return underutilized industrial land to active use over time
- Provisionally delaying repairs to excess infrastructure currently maintained by the City of Niagara Falls to better align service delivery and the maintenance of infrastructure with actual capacity requirements until new growth requires renewed expansion

7.1 Neighborhoods

Healthy neighborhoods that are well maintained, with housing in good repair, a range of housing options, and amenities to support the needs of a residential population will make the city more attractive to current and prospective residents. Over time, as Core City neighborhoods are improved through the recommendations presented in this report, attracting more residents and investment to the City, the Strategic Master Plan anticipates that new opportunities and demand for the renewal of residential neighborhoods will spread throughout Niagara Falls. The Citywide Strategies for neighborhoods will follow the same multifaceted approach used in the Core City, to address the complexity of the state of housing and neighborhoods in the city.

The repopulation of neighborhoods will play a large part in preventing and reversing the effects of neglect as houses regain owners and residents regain pride in their city. An emphasis on urban amenities associated with quality of life, including high-quality schools, recreational and leisure amenities, parks and open spaces, active institutions and the arts is needed to support a growing residential population. A comprehensive set of housing and neighborhood renewal programs that offer financial support or otherwise encourage private homeowners to move to Niagara Falls, and purchase and maintain properties in the City should be implemented.

The creation of the Land Bank as introduced in Section 4.1.7 for the Core City should be carried out on a citywide basis. By identifying and targeting code-deficient or abandoned properties that are beyond repair by their owners, and setting them aside for future development, with an interim open space use, the City can direct its limited resources to areas where its programs can most successfully encourage neighborhood renewal. Figure 23 shows the general condition of housing in the city. Properties that are underused and neglected should be identified, and if the improvements required by the building code enforcement have not been completed after a sufficient period of time, the lands should be acquired and held within the Land Bank, to be released in the future for specific renewal efforts or to meet proven market demand.

Housing and neighborhood renewal programs should be undertaken in partnership with other levels of government and local agencies and in consultation with the community. The private sector must be encouraged to provide a range of housing options for residents at differing stages of life and with diverse cultural, educational or quality of life needs. The gradual release of land for new housing will ensure that the market is not overwhelmed by an oversupply, which would otherwise continue to reduce overall property values and cause continued negative impacts to the renewal of the city's neighborhoods.

The following recommendations, described in Section 4.1.7, should be carried out throughout the city, in addition to significant housing renewal focused in the Core City.

Key Recommendations

1. Establish the Niagara Falls Land Bank

The Niagara Falls Land Bank will act as the mechanism for assembling parcels, holding and releasing land for development by the public and/or private sectors. The municipality will

Figure 23. General Citywide Strategies:
Existing Housing Conditions

Niagara Falls Strategic Master Plan



- Legend of Key Components**
- Housing diagrams**
- discontinuous urban fabric, vacant
 - residential - deteriorated/damaged fabric
 - residential
 - industrial
 - primary institutions
 - waste disposal site
- Other components**
- airport
 - commercial center
 - main street corridors
 - rail line
 - highways and expressways
 - primary roadways

Release land for open space and new residential development

Scale 1: 10 000



August 2004



URBAN STRATEGIES INC.

acquire land that is vacant, in tax arrears or deemed unsafe or code deficient and maintain, manage and market these lands through the Land Bank.

2. Establish a comprehensive set of neighborhood and housing renewal programs

In concert with the State and Federal Governments, as well as local housing and community groups, the City of Niagara Falls must work to ensure sufficient resources are put in place to address the extent of decline that has taken place and support new forms of residential development. A comprehensive, multifaceted, multi-year housing initiative should include:

- Residential property maintenance programs;
- Residential tax incentive programs;
- Employer assisted housing programs; and
- Property acquisition strategies.

3. Improve community amenities and services

The City of Niagara Falls, in partnership with community agencies and the School Board, must secure the resources necessary to provide high-quality neighborhood amenities and services. In order to retain existing residents and attract new residents, Niagara Falls must maintain safe and inviting open spaces, high-quality schools, community centers and programs.

4. Promote, support and/or undertake residential development, intensification and/or conversion projects to increase residential population

The City of Niagara Falls must take a leadership role in implementing and investing in housing renewal programs in the City. The Core City housing renewal strategies will help build confidence and momentum in the reversal of the decline of the city's residential neighborhoods and making attractive to current and potential residents.

7.2 Open Space Network

The role of the open space network is particularly important in Niagara Falls. The Falls and the city itself are situated next to a remarkable open space resource that, if enhanced, can create many new opportunities for private sector investment in the areas of tourism, retail activity, eco-tourism and cultural heritage development.

What is needed is a comprehensive strategy to enhance and reimage existing public open space resources while adding carefully to them to create a setting that can function as a destination in its own right and stimulate private sector development and neighborhood renewal to the long-term benefit of the city and its population.

The recommended open space initiatives recognize that improvements to the public realm will play a vital role in the renewal and revitalization of Niagara Falls, and in many cases, will serve as catalysts for private sector redevelopment efforts. Building on and complementing the Core City Strategies that aim to reconnect the city to its riverfront and coordinate public realm and catalyst projects in the Falls Precinct, the Citywide Strategies for open space seek to improve and expand the existing open space network in Niagara Falls. They outline how the City can proactively take part in discussions regarding the National Heritage Area designation by setting out how the City can participate and contribute to the success of such an initiative. Improvements to existing components of the network are necessary to harness private sector redevelopment and enhance the quality, image and attractiveness of Niagara Falls and its neighborhoods. Figure 24 summarizes the recommendations for the citywide open space system.

Key Recommendations

1. Support and advocate for the National Heritage Area Designation

The potential designation of the Niagara River corridor as a recognized National Heritage Area is an excellent opportunity to begin the process of establishing the partnerships and resources necessary to maximize the potential of both the corridor and its urban edge that defines and contributes to the animation of the resource. To effectively participate in this initiative, the City of Niagara Falls will need to:

- Lead and actively support efforts to designate the Niagara River corridor a National Heritage Area
- Establish partnerships with State Parks and Department of Transportation, the Niagara Aquarium, Ontario and Erie County tourism interests and others with a stake in the Heritage Area and future of the river corridor
- Lead the establishment of a management entity, that includes representatives from the Federal and State Governments, the City and Niagara County, to oversee the National Heritage Area
- Participate in the identification funding mechanisms and partnerships for the Heritage Area
- Immediately undertake a scoping study for preparation of a Heritage Area Master Development Plan, Management and Operations Guidelines and a Cost Recovery Strategy with other partner stakeholders

Figure 24. General Citywide Strategies:

Proposed Open Space System

Niagara Falls Strategic Master Plan



2. Establish agreements with State Parks and a management entity to implement the City Waterfront Programs and develop a Natural Heritage Area Master Plan and Programming Strategy

In partnership with State Parks, a management entity should be established for the heritage area to implement the City Waterfront Programs plan and establish a Natural Heritage Area Master Plan and Programming Strategy to protect, enhance and maximize the value of this tremendous open space asset for the city, its residents and visitors and the state. The implementation strategy will involve creating a federal Heritage Area Plan designation to establish shared jurisdiction, developing a partnership with the State and collaboration between the two entities working in equal partnership to implement the plan for the riverfront. The City of Niagara Falls and State Parks should collaborate in the Master Plan and programming strategy to guide the evolution of the asset and offer a rich range of experiences throughout the year.

The Master Plan should:

- Identify landscape, programmatic and physical improvements necessary to establish a series of linked destinations within the corridor creating a sequence of places, landscapes educational, recreational and interpretive opportunities equal in quality to lands maintained by the Niagara Parks Commission in Canada
- Identify opportunities for natural and cultural heritage interpretation
- Identify design parameters for the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway to establish a new riverfront drive capable of successfully integrating and reconnecting Niagara Falls to its riverfront
- Include a landscape improvement plan along the corridor
- Identify areas along the riverfront that would benefit from buffering to minimize the impacts of adjacent uses, such as the industrial corridor along Buffalo Avenue

The strategy should incorporate four programmatic areas – history, culture, education and environmental awareness – to ensure that there is always something new and different to see and experience as a means of encouraging return visits to the riverfront.

3. Develop an interim open space strategy for banked land

Land that is held in the Niagara Falls Land Bank (Section 4.1.7) should function as part of the city's open space system as an interim use. Banked land can be provided for use as children's play areas, allotment gardens or other community uses until redevelopment is feasible. Adjacent to industrial uses, open space buffers and corridors linking communities, natural heritage features and important destinations could be created as permanent features over time to the benefit of the entire community. The City of Niagara Falls should, whenever possible, acquire and bank vacant and/or abandoned land located adjacent to existing open spaces and parks to facilitate future expansion of these resources should the need arise. Alternatively, the City could acquire open space easements along these corridors. Open space land held in the Land Bank should not be designated 'park' in order to retain the ability to develop these properties in the future.⁹

⁹ Land designated *park* is subject to a State of New York process to redesignate it for the purposes of development.

4. Undertake a DeVeaux Woods State Park Master Plan Study in partnership with State Parks

DeVeaux Woods is a remarkable asset to both the city and the State. It should be the subject of a Master Plan Study, undertaken in partnership with State Parks, to explore potential uses, economic feasibility and a broad range of partnership scenarios benefiting the municipality and the state agency. Areas of examination should include environmental and natural sciences education and research, an ecology park, interpretive and public outreach programs, conference and convention facilities, State Park program headquarters and others. The City of Niagara Falls should work closely with State Parks to ensure that future development/use proposals take advantage of the many positive features of the site and its location along the river corridor, result in a high quality of design and are not disruptive to the adjacent residential uses.

A Master Plan is needed to include the parks assets at the northern end of the gorge - Hole/Whirlpool State Park, Earl Bridges Art Park. While these parks are located in the City, they are also state assets that should be comprehensively planned.

5. Develop a Landscape and Programmatic Enhancement Plan for Hyde Park

The City of Niagara Falls should complete a landscape and programmatic enhancement plan for Hyde Park that provides for phased improvements to the park aimed at accommodating a greater range of activities and increased community use to strengthen this amenity as a major community asset. As the primary citywide community open space in Niagara Falls, Hyde Park should be well maintained with attractive landscaping, while ensuring the safety and comfort of park users. Opportunities and facilities for indoor and outdoor recreational, community and arts programming should be examined through the enhancement plan process.

6. Establish a leasing agreement for the management of the Hyde Park Golf Course

The City of Niagara Falls currently subsidizes the operations of the Hyde Park Golf Course. Transferal of responsibility for the management of the course through an appropriate leasing arrangement will allow the City to focus its resources on critical community amenities, while improved maintenance and operation of the course and its facilities will make it attractive to a broader market, including tourists.

7. Improve Gill Creek as a connection

Gill Creek should be strengthened as an important physical connection between Hyde Park and the Upper Niagara River. The creek is one of only two water-based links from the river into the city and could be better integrated within the city's open space network with new plantings and a natural environment emphasizing its ecological functions. A walking and cycling route between Hyde Park and the river should be developed and could be located adjacent to the creek. New, designed open space connections can be created by extending Hyde Park to Gill Creek and extending the power conduit ROWs linking Hyde Park and Gill Creek to the waterfront.

8. Undertake park, plaza, streetscape and open space enhancements within the Core City as identified within the Core City Vision and Core City Strategies.

7.3 Heritage Resources

Cities across North America are successfully strengthening and marketing their heritage resources, traditional neighborhoods and core areas to attract visitors and expand tourism development. Many of the design characteristics of heritage buildings and districts, such as their strong street presence and pedestrian orientation, are highly compatible with contemporary urban design theory aimed at the creation of vibrant and successful urban places.

A number of high-profile redevelopment and reuse projects are generating interest in the city's historic assets and demonstrate the value of fostering stewardship of heritage resources. The buildings and landscapes that have been preserved from the past have an important role to play in any renewal strategy. The layering of different architectural periods and styles contributes to the richness of the urban environment, adding to the sense of place and communicating the unique image and evolution of the city. Restoration of valuable heritage buildings, parks and squares adds value to surrounding properties and the city as a whole. Reinvestment in heritage resources can be a strong catalyst for the restoration and/or redevelopment of adjacent buildings and properties and even entire neighborhoods.

As heritage resources are located throughout the City of Niagara Falls, the Citywide Strategy for heritage resources will build on the extensive heritage preservation strategy recommended for the Core City. The following recommendations should be extended throughout Niagara Falls, in addition to being undertaken in the Core City.

Key Recommendations

1. Protect heritage buildings and districts

The City of Niagara Falls should continue to protect the remaining historic urban fabric by partnering with building owners to designate heritage buildings and districts under the appropriate State of New York legislation and with the approval of the City.

2. Establish design and infill guidelines for heritage districts to ensure that future development is in keeping with the character, image and identity of these important districts.

Infill and development design guidelines to establish appropriate uses, building envelopes, typologies, setbacks, heights, parking locations and architectural details that reflect the city's heritage and ensure the character of the districts is protected.

3. Undertake heritage themed streetscape developments, and park, plaza, and open space enhancements to strengthen the character of unique heritage districts and areas throughout the City.

Public realm improvements that are compatible with and reinforce the identity of heritage districts should be undertaken. Improvements to the public realm will reinforce the heritage character of heritage districts and support a heritage district designation, encourage residential renewal and reinvestment, and set the stage for high-quality infill developments consistent with the traditional character of the districts.

7.4 Transportation System

The transportation system in Niagara Falls was originally built for a city twice the current size of Niagara Falls. This extensive infrastructure is becoming a substantial burden in terms of maintenance and operation costs. In addition, there are many instances where particular components of the system have negatively impacted the urban fabric or communities surrounding them, dividing the city where divisions are not necessary or desirable. The provision of new infrastructure should successfully address the functional need to move people, cars, bikes and transit while creating desirable places and addresses for new employment and residential developments. A failure to acknowledge the complex and multifunctional role of public streets and to favor of transportation solutions for reasons of expediency will represent lost opportunities to capture and catalyze appropriate redevelopment needed within Niagara Falls. The following recommendations for the transportation system are aimed at reducing excess infrastructure and reconnecting parts of the city to one another and to the riverfront corridor (see Figure 25).

Key Recommendations

1. Undertake an Integrated land use and transportation improvement project to redesign and reconfigure the Robert Moses Parkway

The reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway is a key initiative that will have widespread economic, social and cultural benefits throughout the city, with impacts to land use and development potential along the proposed routes. Details of the Parkway's redesign are described in Section 4.1.1.

2. Redesign LaSalle Expressway

The State of New York DOT is scheduled to undertake a study of the LaSalle Expressway to examine options for its redesign and downsizing, which could include an at-grade configuration. The City of Niagara Falls will actively participate in this study to advocate for an at-grade roadway of not more than four lanes (two lanes in either direction) in order to eliminate a major physical barrier that currently divides the community in two. An at-grade design and the provision of a number of connections to local streets will better integrate the roadway and its right-of-way into the urban fabric, provide linkages to the residential areas to the north and south and allowing for surplus lands from the reconfigured roadway to be turned over to open space that functions as part of the city's larger open space network. The right-of-way will offer sufficient land to integrate the Niagara River Trail (the city's recreational trail) alongside the roadway from the I-190 to Griffon Park and the eastern city boundary where it will meet the Wheatfield segment of the trail. Additional surplus land made available through the redesign should be turned over to the municipality and held in the Land Bank until there is a proven market for residential or mixed-use developments in the LaSalle area.

3. Redesign the Grand Island Bridge interchange

The complexity and possible over-capacity of the Grand Island Bridges and the interchange at Buffalo Avenue should be studied and addressed in any future redesign/reconstruction of the bridges and the LaSalle Expressway. Reduction of the access ramps and the development of more urban street connections should be sought in any redesign/reconstruction. This will open up land that can be integrated with the open space resource along the reconfigured Parkway or new riverfront drive. The potential benefits of

Figure 25. General Citywide Strategies:

Proposed Transportation System

Niagara Falls Strategic Master Plan



extending the LaSalle Expressway west of Hyde Park, with full interstate connections should be examined through an appropriate transportation study.

7.5 Industrial Corridors

The majority of the industrial land base within the City of Niagara Falls is located within the city's three corridors, located along Buffalo Avenue¹⁰, Highland Avenue and Hyde Park Boulevard. Much of this land is underutilized and/or abandoned and categorized as brownfields. It is reasonable to assume that decades of industrial use have left many of the sites suitable only for continued heavy industrial activities unless remediation is undertaken.

The Strategic Master Plan general strategies for the city's industrial corridors are premised on a long-term perspective that recognizes sustained commitment, effort and diligence will be required in order to return this land to active uses that will provide the most benefit to the city and the community. Given the likely extent of contamination of these lands, reuse for non-industrial activities is not expected in the short to medium-term. Additionally, focusing attention on the remediation and redevelopment of these lands other than over the long-term will reduce attention, capital expenditures and revitalization activity within the Core City, which is critical to supporting existing and emerging social, economic and cultural opportunities in the immediate future.

The Strategic Master Plan recommends positioning these lands for long-term renewal by undertaking the studies necessary to understand the type and extent of contamination, long-term priority remediation areas, the types of remediation techniques or solutions which are available, possible adaptive reuse of abandoned buildings given knowledge concerning site contaminants and feasible potential uses and associated order of magnitude cost estimates for priority site clean up.

With these studies complete, the City should embark on a program aimed at reducing the impact industrial uses have had on the image residents, investors and visitors have of Niagara Falls. A new City-sponsored program to provide extensive landscape buffers along the edge of industrial sites undertaken in partnership with private landowners will help not only to screen these sites from view, but to also create interim and long-term regeneration areas where nature is allowed. The City should also encourage the demolition of abandoned buildings that are not of architectural significance. The results of the program will serve to visually and physically reduce the impacts of industry on adjacent land uses, particularly residential neighborhoods and the riverfront, and assist in the process of creating a new more attractive image for Niagara Falls.

Key Recommendations

1. Establish an abandoned buildings demolition program

An incentive program should be put in place that will encourage and assist owners of industrial sites to remove vacant industrial structures that do not have significant value for reuse or heritage value. The presence of abandoned industrial buildings is not only a reminder of past industrial successes, but hinder efforts to move forward and reimage Niagara Falls as a different kind of city. The City will work in partnership with landowners to transition these properties to more productive uses or implement a property edge

¹⁰ The future of the Buffalo Avenue corridor will be the subject of a more detailed study as part of the Regional Brownfields Waterfront Plan to be undertaken by the Brownfields Waterfront Showcase Coalition.

landscaping/greening strategy and long-term maintenance strategy until market conditions improve.

2. Improve edge conditions

The perimeter of all industrial corridors and active and abandoned industrial sites located adjacent to residential neighborhoods and important connections into Niagara Falls must be heavily planted and regularly maintained to provide a generous green buffer. This can be as simple as an annual commitment by the City of Niagara Falls to plant trees in designated buffer strips that over time will have the desired effect of screening these sites from view.

The municipality should actively solicit the partnership and assistance of industrial landowners in this endeavor through contributions to the acquisition, planting and maintenance of landscape materials. The City should establish and publicize tree and landscape planting events involving the general public, local schools and other educational and community institutions. This effort may also be extended to the greening of surplus lands held within the Land Bank to contribute to the growth of the city's open space network over time. Landscape improvements along the Buffalo Avenue corridor should be undertaken as an immediate priority, as this interface is critical to redefining a primary entry corridor conveying an important first impression and image of the city.

7.6 Communications and Marketing

To ensure the success of Niagara Falls as a major tourism destination, a concerted effort is necessary to promote both the city and the region as exciting and interesting destinations that require multi-day visits to fully visit and experience. To this end, a partnership of agencies, governments and private sector tourism operators should sponsor a tourism marketing strategy to promote growth of tourism visitation.

Key Recommendations

1. Prepare a Niagara Tourism Marketing Strategy

The City of Niagara Falls, in partnership with State Parks, the Niagara Falls Tourism and Convention Corporation, the private sector, Niagara County and other regional agencies and municipalities, should undertake a preparation of a marketing strategy to promote themes and packages of existing attractions, and prepare a strategy to develop new tourism infrastructure. Preparation of the strategy should:

- Include an inventory of existing product offerings
- Determine strengths and weaknesses in relation to competitors
- Promote public investment in opportunities for expanding tourism-related uses and infrastructure

At minimum, the strategy should include:

- Preparation of literature, such as a series of brochures outlining the cultural, environmental and industrial history of Niagara Falls and the region, specific attractions and amenities, the Niagara River Trail and other recreational opportunities. All those involved in marketing Niagara Falls should use the literature.
- A World Wide Web site that will enable communication both nationally and internationally. Internet users should be able acquire information related to the city, the State Park, tourist accommodations and amenities and upcoming events. It will also serve to broaden knowledge of the city and region through active links to other relevant web sites. The site should contain high-quality images and contact information and should be updated regularly to provide accurate information.
- A print ad campaign promoting the city and the region nationally and internationally

7.7 Education

Education is a fundamental component of any revitalization strategy and a key ingredient to sustaining healthy communities. A multi-faceted approach to education and knowledge development premised on lifelong learning is needed in Niagara Falls to address the educational and knowledge requirements of all citizens, regardless of age or background.

Niagara Falls has a wealth of resources that can be utilized to implement a broad-based approach to education and knowledge development. Niagara University, through its Center for Community and Continuing Education and the Niagara Community College, with both its Sanborn Campus and its office at the Trott ACCESS Center, are actively involved in meeting the educational needs of the Niagara Falls community. The establishment of the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center is an excellent resource for arts and performance education. Additionally, local business organizations and associations, such as the Niagara USA Chamber, are ideal as sponsors of workshops and one-day training sessions for small businesses seeking to improve their performance, especially in an increasingly sophisticated tourism market. Existing educational institutions and agencies should be encouraged to meet regularly to discuss the range of programs they offer, program development, opportunities for shared satellite facilities and joint programs, and to explore possibilities for offering additional regional-based educational services in the Core City. The partnerships envisioned here will involve school boards, institutions and other levels of government.

A Focus on Educational Streams

Youth Education – High-quality schools, both public and private, are critical to retaining and attracting residents. Few parents will compromise their children’s education by choosing to reside in a neighborhood or city with schools that cannot meet their needs or that may compromise the future of their children; however, cities with declining tax bases and shrinking populations – cities such as Niagara Falls – cannot, over time, support the educational infrastructure they have or the students that remain. Cycles of school closures and diminishing quality of education are often the result. As well, schools must be located within neighborhoods to ensure they are easily accessible and to provide a focus for community life, gathering places and recreational amenities.

Retraining – The wrenching effects of sustained industrial change in Niagara Falls has meant that some residents have found themselves not only without employment, but also without the skills necessary for new types of work. Meeting the retraining needs of citizens locally is critical to retaining the existing Niagara Falls population and to maintaining an available workforce for new businesses.

Continuing Education – Continued training and educational development is also critical for those engaged in gainful employment. Lifelong learning should be a constant theme in efforts to expand education programs. The tourism industry, for example, is an important source of jobs in Niagara Falls today and can be expected to employ even larger numbers of people in the future. As the face of the city, and often the first point of contact for visitors, it is absolutely critical that those working in the industry have excellent customer service and hospitality skills that are continually improved and expanded upon. The promotion of

lifelong learning throughout the community will help to change the culture of failure that has arisen as the fortunes of the industrial city have fallen.

Key Recommendations

1. Establish partnerships to support development and advancement of educational streams

a) Career forums

The City of Niagara Falls Department of Community Development, in partnership with the School Board, Niagara University and Niagara Community College, should approach professional organizations in the region to participate in a series of annual forums that will introduce public and private school students to new career options and potential internship opportunities. As promoters of their particular industry or sector, the mandates of these organizations often have an educational component that is ideally suited to an initiative like this. While the program of the forums would initially target students in the upper grades, they can be expanded over time to include younger students as well as the general public.

b) Employee training

Partnerships between educational institutions in the region, industry organizations and business development agencies can be a means of providing on-going training and professional development programs for existing employees. With the continuing shift to a service and tourism-based economy, a partnership between the Hotel/Motel Association, the Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation and Niagara University's College of Hospitality and Tourism should be pursued to provide training for the employees of hotels, restaurants, visitor information centers and other service and tourism-related services and amenities in Niagara Falls.

c) Retraining programs

Partnerships between educational institutions in the region, industry organizations and business development agencies can also be used to provide retraining programs for those who are unemployed. Niagara Community College has an active role to play in providing such services to the community at present. These services should be augmented by technical and trade schools with programs linked to the local and regional economies.



Changing economic realities require the City and its residents to adapt. By helping its residents learn new skills the City can help them stay and grow with Niagara Falls.



Specialized educational programs will draw families and young people to the Core City, and enrich the City's cultural offerings.

2. Create partnerships to assess the feasibility of new regionally significant educational facilities, consolidate services and improve efficiencies.

a) Arts and science magnet school

An arts and science magnet school in the Core City will help to strengthen the value of the Core City within the region and reinforce it as a place for families and children to encourage residential reinvestment and renewal. A feasibility study involving the public and Catholic School Boards, the City of Niagara Falls and other potential partners will be necessary to determine the school's program and an appropriate site. While there are a number of sites in the Core City that would be appropriate for a magnet school, the School Board site located on the block bounded by Walnut Avenue, Portage Road, Ferry Avenue and 14th Street is one. This site would be ideal, given its reuse potential, its significant open space setting and central location. The synergies between the adjacent Niagara Arts and Cultural Center and the proposed school would be very attractive to many people, particularly young families with children. Improved landscaping and reconfigured parking would be required to upgrade the space for use by the school and the community and provide a context for neighborhood revitalization.

b) Core City satellite campuses

Opportunities to establish satellite campuses in the Core City should be explored. These can be as simple as an educational institution leasing a small amount of commercial space in a building to offer continuing education courses or as substantial as locating the infrastructure of an entire program, new or existing, in the Core City. Centrally located satellite campuses offering a full program or specific courses aimed at adults with 'day jobs' are an excellent way of encouraging activity in the central city outside of standard business hours. Central sites are attractive to students because they are usually accessible via public transit. The municipality should engage Niagara University, Niagara Community College and others in ongoing discussions concerning potential benefits to the community, its residents and workforce, and the institution, in the development of Core City satellite campuses.

PART III IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The following implementation strategies are intended to help guide the City toward realizing the new vision for Niagara Falls and the incremental pursuit of projects, programs and initiatives outlined in by the Strategic Master Plan. Implementation strategies include policy recommendations, procedural changes and streamlining, and other tools and mechanisms which not only allow for, but also encourage and support, ‘on the ground’, practical implementation of the recommendations contained in this Plan. The staff, policy and procedural framework outlined in this section of the document is necessary to undertake the strategic investments to unlock the short and long-term potential of the city, and they must be put in place.

1. BUILDING SUPPORT FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

1.1 Establish On-going Education and Awareness Program

The renewal and revitalization of the Niagara Falls will have important implications to the economic, social, cultural and physical fabric of the city. Creating and providing a high level of quality information about the Strategic Master Plan, renewal efforts and the ongoing implementation of projects, initiatives and programs will be a very important part of building and promoting ongoing support necessary to drive implementation, and continued positive change and reinvestment in the City.

The preparation of the Strategic Master Plan involved multiple consultation events with a variety of stakeholders who remain actively involved in the planning process. The City must continue to work with this constituency, with local agencies, business and resident groups, institutions and others in the community and establish an ongoing dialogue about the future of Niagara Falls and the next steps the City intends to take to initiate and fuel the process of renewal. This will not only provide certainty amongst the citizenry that the municipality is pursuing projects and initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life for all its residents and businesses, but it will also help to create support to galvanize resources necessary to achieve some of the Big Moves contained in the City's Strategic Master Plan, such as the creation of the Cultural District. The community must be kept apprised of the City's ongoing renewal efforts and consulted when major changes to the Master Plan are contemplated.

To assist in this effort, and to build support for positive change, the City will require a clear and inspiring communication, education and awareness program. This program should be developed as part of a broader public relations strategy initiated through the Mayor's office and designed to promote a broad understanding of the meaning, scope and importance of the Strategic Master Plan as a proactive approach toward renewal and to directing the city's future growth, and as a vehicle for the creation of new economic opportunities. In this sense, the Strategic Master Plan is a vehicle through which to preserve and enhance significant natural, cultural and historical resources and to carefully add to these resources new amenities that can broaden opportunities for economic growth while improving the quality of life within the city. A communication strategy designed to promote these

concepts can build significant support for implementing elements of the Strategic Master Plan, and help to re-establish a sense of pride and ownership in the community.

The Communication, Education and Awareness program should promote a broad understanding of the importance of the Strategic Master Plan initiative as it relates to the daily lives of Niagara Falls' residents and business owners. This program should include:

- **Creation of a web site** providing regularly updated information on the status of Strategic Master Plan initiatives and providing active links to other well-used municipal or tourism sites in the City. The site should provide information on upcoming events, specific development projects and contain high-quality images of improvement projects and initiatives. The site should also provide contact information for businesses or developers contemplating business or projects in Niagara Falls.
- **Strategic Master Plan Literature:** A brochure or larger poster outlining the key themes and primary goals and objectives of the Strategic Master Plan, as well as key renewal projects, strategies, programs and initiatives will be very useful in promoting increased awareness and knowledge concerning the Strategic Plan Initiative to residents, visitors and businesses and can also be very useful as a marketing tool to prospective investors and developers. These Brochures should be issued to all school age children within the city of Niagara Falls.
- **News Releases:** Regular news releases intended to provide an update as to the status of strategic Master Plan Initiatives, or announce major new redevelopment initiatives or partnerships should become an ongoing component of the communication strategy.
- **Recognition of Partnerships:** The City should establish a formal method of acknowledging and recognizing Partners whose active or passive participation is a cooperative part of the City renewal process. A general recognition of partners should occur at all events sponsored by the Mayor. Plaques or site markers should be considered to acknowledge private and institutionally operated partners.

1.2 Celebrate Major Initiatives and Achievements

Successful renewal initiatives involve a high degree of community engagement, commitment and focused activity designed to restore a sense of community pride and ownership in the city. This requires a belief that residents can make a difference. Discouraged by decades of decline and the signs of decay around them, the residents of Niagara Falls need a reason to feel positive about their city again. There are a number of strategies that can be employed to begin to restore a renewed sense of pride and confidence in the city.

Celebrating successes by publicly recognizing the achievements of the City, community and the private sector will enhance residents' sense that positive things are happening in the city, increasing their sense of pride and confidence in leadership. Festivals, opening day events and public announcements will ensure citizens are kept apprised of renewal efforts and that they have an important role in participating in and sustaining the momentum of positive change.

Events such as naming competitions for new public parks and squares are an excellent and simple way to both bring attention to a project and involve the community.

Celebrating public sector projects, which are often funded through taxes, will help to emphasize the City's involvement, leadership and commitment to renewal activities.



Festivals are an excellent way to celebrate achievements, inaugurate new projects, attract tourists and create a sense of pride in the city.

New planning and development initiatives, studies and projects must involve the community beyond the public consultation requirements of New York State planning law. By providing the community with the opportunity to participate in open houses, workshops and charettes, residents will remain informed of what is taking place in the city and why these initiatives are important to the future success of the city. Enhancing community pride will only be possible if residents truly believe that their thoughts, ideas and opinions matter. Public sessions should be recorded and a summary of findings and thoughts should be provided to all those who take part.

Public lectures and presentations related to major redevelopment projects, such as presentations by architects or designers associated with major design competitions, are increasingly used by cities undergoing renewal as public forums in which to share information and highlight exciting and innovative projects and thinking. These are an excellent way to 'get the word out' about a project and galvanize community support and interest. Presentations by short-listed competitors can be followed by additional sessions whereby residents are updated on the project's progress.

1.3 Strong Leadership is Required

The vision outlined in the Strategic Master Plan is an aggressive one; however, this end goal must first be defined in order to initiate the steps by which it can be achieved. To this end, the plan presents the Core City Action Plan and the implementation framework. To achieve the vision and undertake the initiatives contained in the Master Plan, leadership is required at all levels, beginning with the City's administration and senior staff, to stay the course, despite obstacles, and realize the vision. Responsibility for championing and leading change rests with City's leaders who need to not only communicate the objectives and goals of the Strategic Plan, but also ensure it is implemented as envisioned. The City must be proactive about directing its own future and it must communicate its interests and maximize opportunities for partnerships when they are appropriate. Some tough decisions must be made; however, there is much to gain over the long-term.

2. POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND TOOLS

Current constraints to the development of Niagara Falls will need to be addressed by changing public policies, procedures and tools, while employing existing tools and/or creating new ones to initiate or encourage new development and sustain positive change over the long-term.

2.1 Policy Changes

Existing City policies regarding land use, property maintenance and parking will need to be reviewed, changed, as necessary, and complemented with new policies to support the implementation of the Strategic Master Plan. In particular, the City should:

- Strengthen existing land use policies in the City of Niagara Falls Comprehensive Plan to focus new development in the Core City and along existing nodes and corridors. The City should actively encourage other levels of government to adjust their policies to achieve the same goals and support Niagara Falls in its efforts.
- Introduce policies that promote a diversity of housing types in the Core City, helping to create a better balance of low, medium and high-density residential opportunities as well as greater choice and diversity for a broader range of household incomes.
- Revise current zoning policies to allow for a mix of residential and commercial uses in the Core City, particularly along its commercial nodes and corridors, and within the downtown area and lands subject to development agreement
- Revise current zoning, as appropriate, to reflect the heights recommended in the Strategic Master Plan
- Introduce policies that prohibit the development of new industrial and manufacturing facilities, which are stand alone, single use entities in the Core City
- Establish a Design District Overlay for the Core City that builds on the distinct urban pattern of development found within this area. The urban design guidelines recommended in the Strategic Master Plan should be consolidated and added to in order to create a complete, precinct-based policy overlay that applies to the entire Core City. Additional detailed urban design guidelines for the Core City that reflect the precincts and places described in the Strategic Master Plan and the built form articulated through the zoning should be prepared. The guidelines should describe built form and ground floor relationships, building heights, setbacks, transitions between areas of differing uses and/or densities, special use sites, public open spaces, plazas, streets, etc. A 3-dimensional physical model would help the City to better understand height relationships within the Core City and between the Core City and other areas, key views and relationships with the riverfront open space.

- Introduce land use and urban design policies that address the provision of parking in the Core City. These policies should restrict the development of surface parking lots and parking structures on key sites in the Core City and address the physical relationship of parking facilities to public places and residential areas. Comprehensive Plan and Zoning amendments adopted in order to implement the Strategic Master Plan should identify existing surface parking lots as legal non-conforming uses, which are permitted to expand only if the expansion is minor in nature and does not result in a net increase in surface parking on the subject site.
- Introduce demolition control policies that require an approved alternative use and building permit prior to receipt of demolition approval
- Introduce policies, including height restrictions, to protect key view corridors to the Niagara River
- Establish policies that require public realm improvements or financial contributions to public realm improvements for new developments in The Falls Precinct and the Cultural District at minimum. Other precincts may also be considered appropriate for financial contributions to enhance of the public realm, including Niagara Street, Lands Subject to Development Agreement, The Buffalo Avenue Heritage District, and the Wright Avenue Heritage District.
- Establish policies that require all capital works projects to conform to the Strategic Master Plan

2.2 Procedural Changes

- Establish a single point of contact and facilitator for development proponents. This may involve retaining the services of an experienced consultant team with the necessary experience to facilitate the development projects identified in the Strategic Master Plan and others.
- Establish a development and design review process for all public sector projects, major private sector projects over 10,000 square feet and all infrastructure projects. A development and design review process can augment the City's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning to address the more qualitative aspects of design and heritage preservation, while the Design District Overlay will do much to ensure the development of high-quality buildings, parks, parking structures and streets. The City of Niagara Falls should establish a process of architectural and urban design peer review involving the American Institute of Architects and the American Society of Landscape Architects.
- Work with banks and other funding agencies to encourage them to revise lending practices in order to make funds available for both large and small projects. City representatives should meet with lending institutions to inform them of the Strategic Master Plan and the short-term initiatives that will have a positive impact on the commercial and residential markets and the ability of lenders to assist private owners in improving and acquiring properties.

2.3 Tools

A variety of implementation tools are available that can be used to implement the Strategic Master Plan. These are outlined below.

- Continue to apply for Federal and State programs, including housing and neighborhood renewal programs and transportation and infrastructure programs
- Explore creative approaches and incentives to encouraging new development
- Explore approaches to density bonusing in the Core City that could provide for the retention of heritage buildings and groups of heritage buildings/heritage streetscapes; provision of at-grade open space; and retention of existing open space areas adjacent to existing development.

3. INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

Implementation of the Strategic Master Plan requires the City of Niagara Falls to strengthen its own capacity to lead, initiate and sustain renewal. A fundamental change in culture is necessary to ensure the long-term renewal of Niagara Falls remains at the top of the agenda and to indicate to the community that revitalization is the top priority.

- Formalize the internal review process for planning and development applications by establishing a dedicated, multi-disciplinary staff team of ‘point persons’ responsible for coordinating the review of all applications by relevant City departments, including Community Development, Urban Design (see below) and Engineering and for facilitating the approvals process. Departments should report to a single team member responsible for compiling comprehensive reports summarizing staff recommendations. Reports will be forwarded to City Council and the Planning Board for consideration. The same staff team should also be responsible for coordinating public works, capital projects and infrastructure improvements schedules with development applications when possible and appropriate.
- Establish the Office of City Renewal with the mandate to implement the Strategic Master Plan. The office will be staffed with a dedicated team of employees who report directly to the City’s elected representatives and work closely with Community Development, Economic Development or Economic Development Consultants retained to advise the City, other City departments, as well as agencies such as USA Niagara. To highlight the importance of the Office of City Renewal, a Commissioner or Director of City Renewal position should be established and filled. The successful candidate should bring extensive experience in planning and urban design for large urban projects. At minimum, the Office of City Renewal should:
 - Oversee the development and design review process for major redevelopment projects
 - Draft and release Requests for Proposals
 - Oversee the Niagara Falls Land Bank
 - Administer the City’s housing and neighborhood renewal programs
- Strengthen the City’s planning resources by:
 - Establishing a Department of Urban Design
 - Securing permanent funding for a full-time grant writer. Federal, State and other funding agencies will remain important sources of financial assistance for the City for the near future. Access to the resources they offer frequently entails an extensive and detailed application process. A professional grant writer responsible for tracking funding opportunities can ensure that the City does not miss an opportunity to apply for additional funding.
 - Secure permanent and sufficient funding to undertake the level of code enforcement necessary to implement the Strategic Master Plan

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