



HIGHLAND COMMUNITY BROWNFIELD OPPORTUNITY AREA

NOMINATION DOCUMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FINAL NOVEMBER 21, 2012

Prepared for:



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INC.

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THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITY

BROWNFIELD OPPORTUNITY AREA GRANT PROGRAM

Through the Highland Community Area Brownfield Opportunity Area Program (BOA), the City of Niagara Falls is planning for economic diversification, community building and long-term renewal for the BOA area.

The BOA program provides the resources necessary to plan for the revitalization of brownfield sites and vacant and underutilized properties. The BOA program is unique in that it provides an opportunity for the community and the City to work together to learn and capitalize on core strengths, mitigate environmental and market challenges and to capture local and regional industries to transform the BOA study area into a focus for economic growth and community renewal. The Program also enables the community, the City, and its partners to realize a vision for brownfield redevelopment, to prepare implementation strategies for restoration of environmental quality, and to bring dormant areas back into productive use.

THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITY AREA BOA NOMINATION DOCUMENT

This Nomination Document is the product of the Step 2 Brownfield Opportunity Area Program for the Highland Community Area. Through the BOA Program and the development of this document, the City of Niagara Falls, along with the Highland Community Revitalization Committee (HCRC), have embarked on a journey to transform approximately 560 acres - of which approximately 380 acres are potential brownfields - into a prosperous, economically diverse, socially strong, high quality, safe destination for new employment, residential and community uses.

The Nomination Document provides an in-depth description and analysis of the Highland Community Brownfield Opportunity Area. Included is an economic and market trends analysis of existing conditions, a description of current physical, social and environmental conditions, the community vision and supporting Master Plan that responds to analysis, and a series of recommendations to advance redevelopment of strategic sites to revitalize the study area.

The BOA Plan was prepared in accordance with the guidelines established by the New York State Department of State and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, whom acted as joint-agency leads for the project, overseeing and providing guidance to the City of Niagara Falls, the Highland Community Revitalization Committee, and their appointed study team.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITY

The City and the Region

Home to 1.17 million people, the Buffalo Niagara Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is the second largest Metropolitan Area in the State. With a population of 55,500, the City of Niagara Falls is the second largest center within in the Buffalo-Niagara MSA.

The bi-national location of the region generates exceptional opportunities for international trade and distribution across the US-Canada Border. The region is also well positioned to capitalize on proximity to national and international markets, sitting within 500 miles of 55% of the US population, and 62% of

Canada's population, for locally produced goods and services. Niagara Falls is part of North America's fifth largest market (and second busiest trading corridor), supported by 22 million people and generating \$530 billion in economic activity.

Although the City and the region have faced economic challenges over the last decades, there are strengths that can be capitalized on to help shape the future. Buffalo-Niagara's geography places it in the center of a key international market giving the region's businesses a logistical advantage while providing convenient access to a host of professionals with expertise in international business.

Business, Financial, and Professional Services & Activities are growing at the County and Niagara-Buffalo MSA level. Locally within the City of Niagara Falls, these specific regional growth sectors are under-represented, providing expansion area opportunities.

Manufacturing is a critical sector for the Region and the County, with current employment concentrated in the more traditional sector of Manufacturing as well as Trade & Transportation. At the local level, manufacturing is even more important for Niagara Falls, where advanced manufacturing is beginning to take hold, and represents a significantly greater share of employment.

Other growth areas are in culture, tourism, and service sector, plus higher value uses, such as health care, that are creating new opportunities at both the local and regional level. Today the City is the center for tourism in the region. Home to one of the world's most famous natural wonders – Niagara Falls – the City is known around the world and attracts approximately 8 million visitors annually.

The Highland Community Area

Formerly considered one of the most important industrial zones in Niagara Falls, the Highland Community Area BOA is located in the north-west portion of the City. The triangular area is positioned between the City line to the east, a rail corridor, and the established neighborhood of DeVeaux to the west and a rail corridor to the south. The study area is also home to almost 2,700 residents, mainly clustered within the southern portion of the BOA.

A consequence of Highland's industrial legacy, about half of the study area's 560 acres are considered 'brownfield' sites. Within the Highland community, there are a number of challenges that need to revitalization efforts, including:

Isolation: The community is separated from other City neighborhoods by rail lines along its southern and western edge. A highway (Route 61/Hyde Park Blvd) is a virtual barrier along its eastern boundary.

Image: A high level of vacant land, along with existing heavy industry, sets a challenging environment for redevelopment. The area's strong industrial legacy also continues to stigmatize the Highland community. In addition, the proximity of industrial to residential use detracts from the quality of the neighborhood.

Environmental Uncertainty: Across the study area, only a small number of sites have a fully understood environmental history. For most of the sites, environmental conditions are uncertain.

Land Ownership: Ownership is complex and fragmented, with very few large parcels under single ownership. In addition, many parcels are irregularly shaped and difficult to segment or subdivide. This presents challenges for large-scale redevelopment.

Land Use Conflict: The close proximity of residential to industrial areas creates challenges for potential new uses. The scale of industrial lands overwhelms the residential community creating a difficult relationship.

Social Issues: The Highland community has high levels of poverty, an aging population, low levels of educational attainment, limited growth in household income, low home values, real and perceived crime and the loss of one-quarter of the area's population between 1990 and 2007.

Although Highland faces many challenging conditions, the community remains vibrant and active with a strong sense of community pride and determination to usher in a positive future. In addition to the community strength, the following local opportunities offer significant potential to improve the quality of life within the Highland BOA:

- Strong regional and international linkages.
- A gateway location when entering Niagara Falls from the north.
- Well served by infrastructure with opportunities for growth.
- Access to major open spaces and natural resources.
- Valuable, high profile road frontages.
- New housing developments and improved open spaces.
- Several existing and new local business, particularly on the south end of Highland Avenue.
- Numerous churches make Highland a focus for faith in the City.
- Access to State and Federal funding programs to stimulate investment.
- Thriving community support centers, such as Block Clubs, the Doris Jones Family Resource Center, St Mary's Health Clinic, Niagara Falls Weed & Seed, Highland Community Redevelopment Committee and religious institutions.

THE HIGHLAND BOA STUDY AREA

The Consultation & Public Participation Process

A highly collaborative approach was undertaken for this project. Stakeholders and community members were involved in the development of the Nomination Document, including the City, HCRC, local businesses, landowners, universities and colleges, arts and cultural interests, Police & Fire Depts, health providers, faith leaders, community interest groups and individual residents.

The process employed numerous outreach methods to ensure robust public and private engagement throughout the course of preparing the Nomination Document. Methods included:

- Five facilitated public open house events
- Four Steering Committee meetings were held before the group was amalgamated into the wider public open house forums.
- Targeted interviews & small group sessions with fifty key stakeholders.
- An educational six-week Brownfield Mini-Course, where thirty-eight resident participants learned about brownfield and community redevelopment within the context of the program goals and objectives.
- Community leaders meetings to promote the project and to increase local participation.
- Utilization of local community recruits to provide 'on-the-ground' contacts for residents and other stakeholders interested in finding out more information on the project.

- Establishment of a local Project Information Center at the Doris Jones' Attain Lab as a one-stop information shop for the Nomination Study and regarding brownfield redevelopment.
- Creating a Community & Stakeholder Contact List to keep the community and other stakeholders up to date on consultation events and the progress of the study.
- Circulating project flyers door-to-door and via mail to stakeholders that live outside the community.
- Establishing and maintaining an interactive and dedicated project website.

THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITY VISION, PRIORITIES & PRINCIPLES

The Community Vision Statement:

Out of brownfields will emerge a better quality of life for residents, greater economic opportunities for businesses and a more positive image for the community as a whole. Highland will be transformed into a stable, attractive and prosperous neighborhood with a strong community base, diverse economy and a high quality of life.

Principles

A series of six principles were established in partnership with the local community and the Steering Committee:

1. *Build a healthy Highland Community from the ground up – fully understand environmental, economic and social issues affecting the community.*
2. *Diversify and expand Highland's economic base, while supporting existing viable businesses and industries to create new opportunities for businesses of all scales.*
3. *Strengthen and diversify the skill sets of residents and workers to allow them to access new opportunities.*
4. *Transform negative perceptions of the area and generate a positive image for Highland through targeted place making efforts.*
5. *Reinvigorate Highland as a place where people can work, shop, play, learn and live seven days a week.*
6. *Success cannot occur in isolation: Embed Highland more deeply within the City of Niagara Falls to capture mutually beneficial opportunities.*

LAND BASE ANALYSIS: EXISTING CONDITIONS

To produce a viable long-term plan for any community, it is important to examine the physical, market, and policy environments that influence the area. Below are key conclusions drawn from the land base analysis:

The BOA project is approximately 560 acres and includes 1082 parcels. The area is characterized as follows:

Brownfields:

- Historically, the Highland Community BOA has contained one of Niagara Falls' largest and most established industrial districts. Today, land uses within the BOA remain dominated by industrial uses (manufacturing and processing), underutilized commercial (e.g. storage and parking), and vacant sites.

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- Throughout the BOA study area, there is little to no environmental information known about a large number of sites (133 acres / 284 parcels with “No Site Characterization”).
- Due to the limited number of sites with characterization, an evaluation of the level and extent of contamination throughout the entire BOA is not possible.

Vacant, Abandoned, & Underutilized Sites:

- The Highland BOA Study Area currently supports approximately 280 acres of ‘vacant, abandoned or underutilized sites’. These underutilized sites present significant opportunities for redevelopment.

Land Ownership:

- Out of the 1082 parcels contained within the area, approximately 58% are under private ownership (318 acres) held by nine different interests, while the remaining 21% is held in public ownership (117 acres). An additional 21% of the land is committed to roads/right-of-ways.
- Public/private partner participation will be crucial in the development and implementation of catalyst projects within the BOA.

Parks & Open Space:

- The Highland BOA area benefits from a large central recreational space (D’Amelio Park), containing play fields and a children’s play area (with swimming pool, baseball diamond and basketball courts). Almost 10 acres of formal park space, plus informal open space, is located across the BOA area.
- D’Amelio Park is the only formally designated municipal park in the Highland BOA. Immediately north of the park is a large recreation field owned by the Niagara Falls Housing Authority that is used by the community as an extension of D’Amelio Park. However, this area will be reduced through the HOPE VI/Center Court redevelopment.

Historic or Archeologically Significant Areas:

- There are no designated Historic Districts or properties within the Highland BOA area. The historic US Custom House is adjacent to the southwest corner of the Highland BOA area.

Natural Resources:

- Natural resources and environmental features within the BOA are limited.
- No detailed soil survey exists; the entire BOA is classified as Urban Land.
- The area is underlain by glacial till deposits with variable texture consisting of clay or silt-clay.
- Uppermost bedrock formation beneath the BOA consists of upper Silurian Period dolostone, limestone, and local bioherms from the Lockport Group. Depth ranges from 4.5 to 23.5 feet.
- Soils and bedrock conditions are conducive to development.

Transportation Systems:

- A well developed regional transportation network exists in close proximity to the Highland Community which includes interstate highways, four international bridges, two international airports, a regional bus network, and passenger and freight railroad service.

- Capacity exists across network to support redevelopment.
- Higher traffic volumes along Hyde Park Boulevard may support additional commercial development.
- Primary roads are in good condition and the road network will support any additional traffic that will arise because of redevelopment.
- There are only four poorly marked, low visibility, primary entryways to Highland.
- Awkward intersections, plus railroad bridges and underpasses, decrease connectivity to the rest of City hampering entrance to the Highland Community.
- Opportunities exist to increase connectivity by enhancing gateways into the Highland Community, opening up the center of the BOA with new roads, and modifying intersections.

Utilities:

- Adequate public utilities for power, public water supply and sanitary sewer are available across the BOA study area; (capacity to be further examined depending on future use needs) .
- Low cost / subsidized hydroelectric power may be available as an incentive for development.
- Excess capacity exists in gas, water, sewer, and electricity.

ECONOMIC ANALYSIS: OPPORTUNITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Residential Potential:

- Population loss has led to an oversupply of housing and low market values.
- High home values are not supported in the Highland BOA due to presence of heavy industry, environmental contamination concerns, and dilapidated housing stock in some locations.
- There is little to no new market-rate housing being built in the wider city because the cost of new production is typically greater than current market prices.
- Until market values increase across the city, the likelihood of developing private market rate housing in the Highland BOA is limited. The immediate opportunity is for subsidized housing.
- Continued public investment in housing renewal, coupled with code enforcement, will improve the Highland neighborhood's high vacancy rates, encourage homeowners and landlords to reinvest in their properties, and stabilize neighborhood conditions to support new investment.

Retail Potential:

- Niagara Falls' northern neighborhoods are underserved by retailers and that existing unmet potential could support new retail development, particularly value-oriented stores.
- The Highland neighborhood lacks any significant retail presence.
- Data indicates that there is over \$27 million in unmet convenience-goods expenditure potential, though rents are unlikely to support the cost of new construction without subsidies.
- Nearly \$6 million in unmet expenditure potential at restaurants, bars, and taverns.
- Over \$300 million in comparison-goods retail expenditure potential.

Office Potential:

- CoStar Group's Economics Research Associates estimates that there will be demand for 400,000 to 500,000 square feet of office space in Niagara County between 2007 and 2015, with more than half coming from the health and social assistance industry.

- Within Highland, the potential exists for new build-to-suit office space.
- The best opportunity for office development is to associate any new build with either existing or emerging manufacturing uses or research and development use.
- Over the next five to ten years the Highland Community BOA could support an office park that accommodates build-to-suit office buildings between 40,000 and 250,000 square feet.

Industrial/Flex Market Potential:

- Emerging sectors hold promise for new industrial development projects. The recent reopening of the Globe Metallurgical plant for the production of metallurgical and solar-grade silicon may encourage an end-user manufacturer to locate within the BOA.
- Analysis of regional economic trends, future opportunities, and the competitive positioning of the BOA within this regional context, indicate that firms related to alternative energy and the green technologies overwhelmingly drive new opportunities for economic growth.
- Based on local demand and the provision of existing industrial/flex spaces, over the next five to ten years the Highland Community BOA could support an additional provision of light industrial / advanced manufacturing uses.
- This manufacturing expansion could be accommodated through on site intensification of existing industries (specific build-to-suit developments that complement industrial operations), through the creation a new technology & business park, or a combination of both.

BROWNFIELDS AND STRATEGIC SITES

A key aspect of the BOA planning process is identification of strategic sites for which successful redevelopment will help catalyze revitalization of the entire study area. To begin to evaluate a property's potential to act as that catalyst for revitalization, all underutilized and brownfield sites within a study area must be identified and inventoried. The following sections describe the methods used during this study for identifying properties as underutilized and brownfield sites.

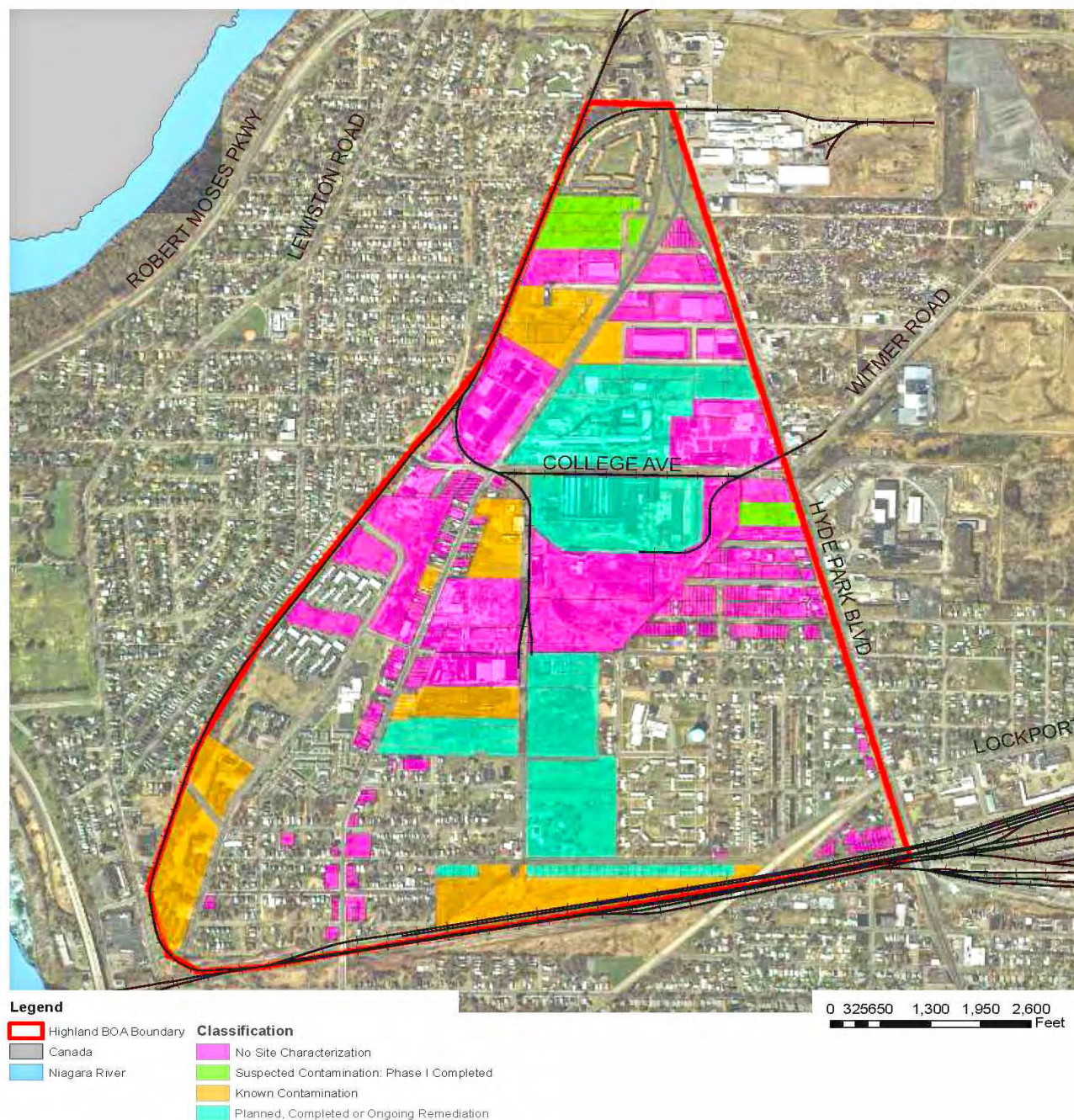
The Highland BOA Study Area currently has 565 parcels, covering 282 acres of 'Vacant, Abandoned or Underutilized sites'. The Vacant, Abandoned, or Underutilized Sites were selected using the City's property class codes in the existing GIS database as well as field reconnaissance. These underutilized sites present significant opportunities for redevelopment and are comprised of:

- Vacant Sites: 481 parcels, 154 acres
- Abandoned Sites: 24 parcels, 47 acres
- Underutilized Sites: 60 parcels, 81 acres

Brownfields: Key Findings

While the Highland BOA already contains employment uses, with brownfield redevelopment, the area has great potential to become a major economic driver and to contribute to the City of Niagara Fall's economic development plan.

This figure presents brownfield sites across the BOA study area.



Unfortunately, throughout the BOA study area, there is little to no environmental information known about a large number of sites, totaling 133 acres. Due to the limited number of sites with characterization, an evaluation of the level and extent of contamination throughout the entire BOA is not possible and significant additional work is required to fully understand the environmental condition of much of the BOA study area. For those sites where environmental conditions are known, levels of contamination are generally low.

Where contaminants have been identified the following general conclusions may be drawn:

- Contaminants identified on site are limited to those commonly found in most urban environments.

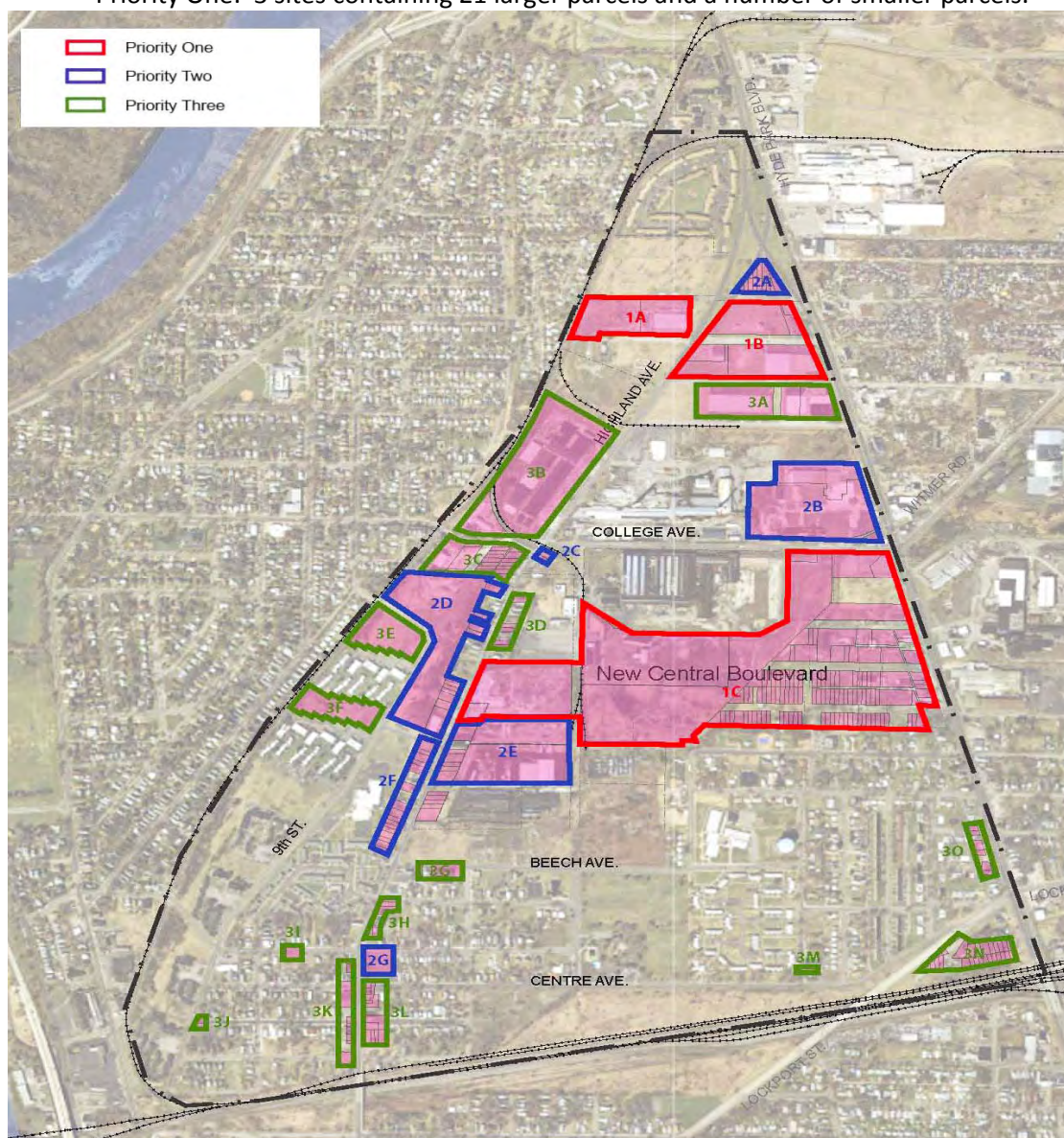
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- Identified contaminants typically do not move, so off-site migration is not expected.
- Contamination of ground water sources is not a major concern.
- For metals and SVOCs, remediation often consists of covering the site with a clean soil cover, asphalt, concrete, or a new building to remove the exposure pathways.

Priority Strategic Sites

Of the numerous brownfield, abandoned and vacant sites identified during the inventory and analysis phase, approximately 60 acres of land has been identified as ‘priority strategic sites’ requiring more immediate attention. Early environmental assessment and remediation of Priority One sites is necessary to deliver the ambitions presented in the BOA Master Plan. Priority One Strategic Sites are catalytic sites, and have the ability to deliver significant economic and social benefit to the Highland Community as well as to the wider City.

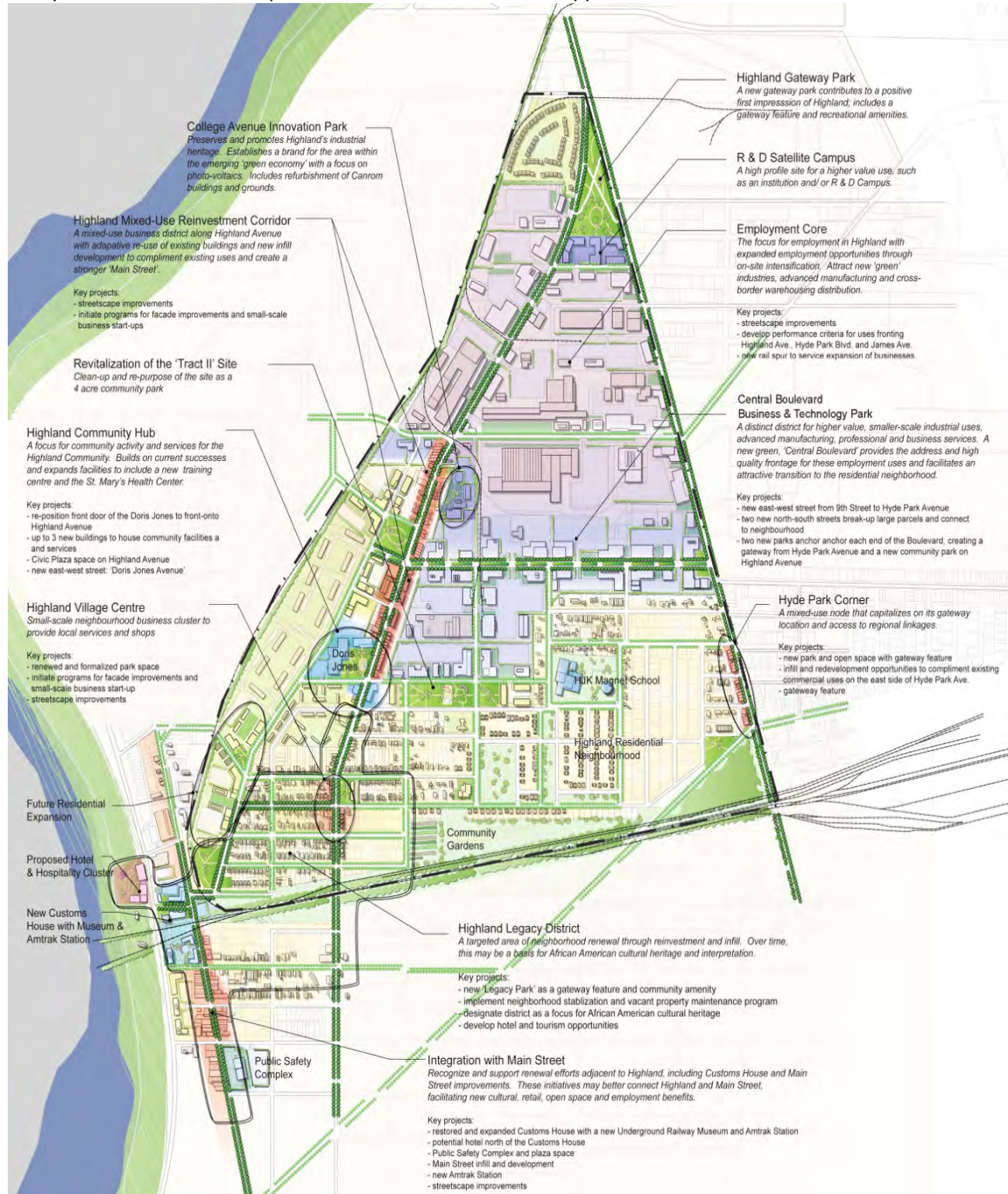
- Priority One: 3 sites containing 21 larger parcels and a number of smaller parcels.



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REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES: THE HIGHLAND BOA MASTER PLAN

The BOA Master Plan identifies opportunities and methods to attract a range of new employment uses to the area. Market forces will determine the specific size and form of such uses and opportunities. The City's ability to foster the redevelopment it desires and is able to support will be crucial.



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The long-term economic success of the BOA will depend upon a variety of redevelopment strategies that leverage near-term opportunities while positioning the BOA for sustainable growth. The Master Plan allows Highland to act as an important employment center in Niagara Falls, nurturing and retaining existing industries, while also creating the conditions necessary to attract other complementary employment uses to the area, such as industrial services, professional services, research & development, back office and clean industrial/ advanced manufacturing.

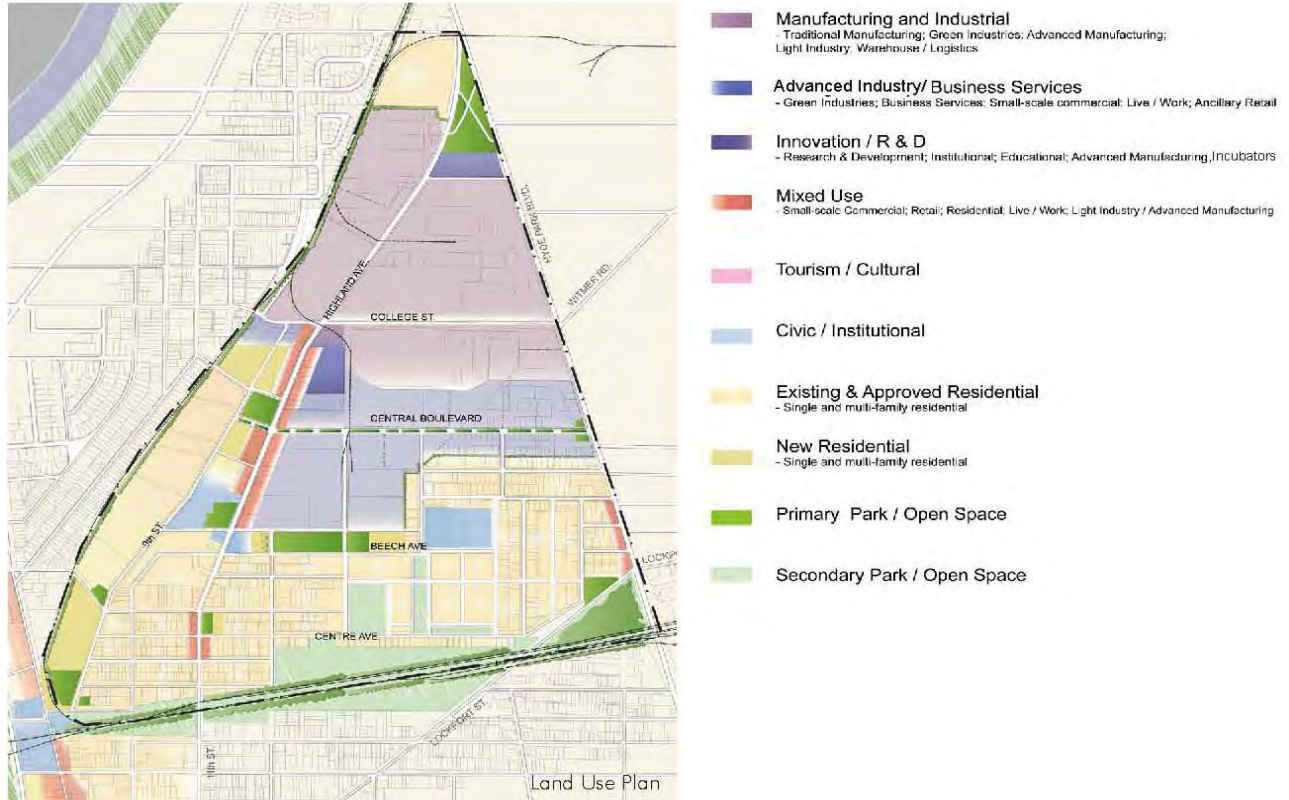
For the Highland Area to contribute to the economic growth of the city and region, the Master Plan recommends that appropriate growth industries, particularly emerging green industries, R & D and advanced manufacturing sectors, be targeted as a priority. Long-term successes will be strengthened by early efforts to co-locate and strategically phase uses to achieve the greatest land use synergies and create an identifiable brand for the Highland BOA.

To bring about sustainable social change, the existing community needs to be revitalized and strengthened. The Master Plan aims to build a healthy residential neighborhood by stabilizing the housing stock through a targeted residential program of infill and site specific rehabilitation. In the near term, publicly supported housing renewal should continue along with on-going support for community-based services, including training, health care, education, employment, retail, and cultural activities. To address the previous lack of provision of parks and open space within the BOA, a number of new parks and open space areas are proposed.

An important objective of the Master Plan is to create a more holistic Highland, where the separation of employment and residential uses is less defined and more integrated than today. The Master Plan works to mitigate the division between the two districts (employment and residential) through the introduction of a transition zone able to accommodate a mix of uses and building typologies. This new zone, identified as the Central Boulevard Technology & Business Park, provides a more gradual transition from large-scale industrial uses to the smaller scale residential neighborhood. Clean industry, advanced manufacturing, and business services are located on either side of the new Central Boulevard, creating an address for higher-value employment use within the BOA.

The Master Plan proposes a diversity of higher value uses that can capture economic and community benefits and bring greater long-term economic resiliency to the Highland BOA.

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It is important to note that the Master Plan presented in this section is illustrative and intended to demonstrate the future opportunity for Highland based on economic and environmental research undertaken and community aspirations articulated during the process of crafting the Step 2 BOA Nomination Document.

MASTER PLAN DISTRICTS

The Highland BOA can be divided into five District Areas, each with a logical collection of land parcels and a unique development emphasis. Although the districts are distinct in character, the land uses proposed are complementary and compatibility between adjacent uses has been carefully considered. Districts include:

1. Highland Green Industrial Park: Protecting and improving Highland's existing employment base.
2. Central Boulevard Technology & Business Park: A clean industry, innovation and business service District
3. Highland Revitalization Corridor: A mixed-use destination and commercial spine
4. The Highland Neighborhood: Protecting & strengthening the existing residential neighborhood



5. Main Street / Customhouse North: connecting Highland to the downtown

Niagara Falls Green & Renewable Energy Park

The Master Plan transforms Highland's existing employment core into a more strongly branded Green Industrial Park. The intention for this area is to attract new 'green' industries, advanced manufacturing and additional cross-border uses. Within an enhanced setting, existing employment uses will be encouraged to intensify on-site, particularly in high profile locations along Hyde Park Boulevard, Highland Avenue and the new Central Boulevard.

Central Boulevard Technology & Business Park

Located south of College Avenue, the most important new employment area in the BOA is the proposed Central Boulevard Technology & Business Park. This 80-acre district provides accommodation for higher value, smaller-scale advanced manufacturing (focused on green technologies), R & D, light industrial and business services. The types of employment uses for the Central Boulevard Technology & Business Park will create a new market for Niagara Falls and help to diversify the city's employment base.

Highland Revitalization Corridor

The Highland Revitalization Corridor is a mixed-use commercial spine where existing buildings will be renewed and adaptively re-used for a variety of commercial/ business uses. Current vacant parcels will be filled with appropriate mixed-use commercial or multi-family residential developments. Infill development will fully repair the street edge and ultimately create a strengthened business destination for Highland. Consistent with the market findings, there is potential for a mid-sized food store (15,000 to 35,000 square foot) to be located in the Highland Community.

Centrally located on Highland Avenue, a cluster of new and expanded facilities – including an new St. Mary's Health Center, an expanded Doris Jones Center and a proposed multi-function Education & Training Center – will continue to provide the Highland community with a range of support services and create a strong anchor for further community development. Central to the community facilities cluster, a public plaza is proposed to front directly onto Highland Avenue and link with the Doris Jones Family Resource Center and the proposed St. Mary's Health Center expansion.

The Highland Neighborhood

The Master Plan respects the existing residential neighborhood and seeks opportunities for renewal and infill, enhancing open spaces and improving street connections. Existing residential housing will be able to be stabilized through targeted repair (a mix of in-fill and site specific rehabilitation). This can be facilitated through housing improvement grants, streetscape and public realm improvements.

Main Street / Customhouse North

Although outside the Highland BOA boundary, redevelopment of North Main Street, restoration of the Historic Custom House, the Underground Railway Museum and the Amtrak Station relocation are important opportunities that the Highland community can benefit from. The Master Plan recognizes and supports these important renewal efforts adjacent to the study area and realizes the benefits they can bring to the area as a whole. For example, once completed, the Amtrak Station relocation to the Customhouse will potentially bring over 50,000 people annually to Highland's front door, creating new commercial and tourism opportunities for the local area.

To help draw economic benefits from the regeneration of the wider Main Street area into Highland, the Master Plan proposes some key projects that focus on strengthening connections to Main Street and the downtown/waterfront area. A gateway art project is proposed at the Depot rail underpass as well as public realm improvements and a new green open space, Legacy Park, to create a better first impression of the Highland community when arriving from Main Street. The Plan also proposes a feasibility study for a hotel on the parcel north of the Customhouse.

ACTIONS: PHASED DELIVERY OF MASTER PLAN

Both the Nomination Document and the Master Plan are ambitious and propose substantial investment and intervention across the Highland BOA over the next 20 years. Initiatives are positioned in the manner that would most likely occur based on available market data. Partnership agreements and financial considerations will determine the final implementation schedule of all project recommendations.

The tables below present the suggested phasing of the initiatives across the BOA. Actions eligible as part of Step 3 of the BOA process have been identified in 'The First 5 Years' table; it is presumed that Step 3 will be complete by Years 5 and beyond.

DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES: FIRST 5 YEARS	Eligible for BOA Step 3
1. Update Zoning to allow for development of new uses	✓
2. Construction of Business & Technology Park and Industrial/Energy Park Infrastructure	
Continue remediation of priority sites	
Begin process of site acquisition for development of Business Park and expansion of Industrial / Energy Park	partial
Continue environmental review and undertake Phase 1 / Phase 2 Environmental Assessments for parcels with no site characterization	✓
Site Assembly: Undertake partnerships / land assembly to facilitate development of Central Boulevard	✓
Undertake detailed utility audit (energy, water, sewer)	✓
Design, funding and construction of Central Boulevard	partial
Design and begin construction of incubator building in Business Park.	partial
3. Construction of two parks anchoring either end of Central Boulevard	
Due to no site characterization, undertake Phase 1 / Phase 2 Environmental Assessment s	✓
Site Assembly: Undertake partnerships / land assembly to facilitate park development	✓
Design, funding and construction of two anchor parks	partial
4. Marketing and Branding of Highland Employment Areas	✓
Prepare Branding & Marketing Plan for Prestige Business Park	✓
Prepare Marketing Strategy to attract Green Industries	✓
Build partnerships with delivery agencies and sector leaders.	✓
5. Develop performance criteria for uses fronting high profile roads	✓
6. Establish business start-up, rehabilitation and support grants for local business	

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7. Tract II / Power City / Doris Jones Cluster	✓
Clean up of Tract II and Power City Warehouse sites	
Develop Beech Avenue Park	partial
Undertake feasibility study for Business/Office & Job Training Center fronting Highland Ave	✓
Undertake detailed design study for development of Doris Jones Plaza (including EA)	✓
8. Formalization of existing open spaces as parks	
Formal designation of Community Gardens	✓
Formalize existing Highland Village Park, including Phase 1 / Phase 2 Environmental Assessment due to no site characterization	✓
9. Targeted Neighborhood Repair	
Streetscape improvements along Highland Avenue	partial
Initiate Highland façade improvement program	partial
Undertake preliminary engineering for neighborhood road infrastructure	✓
Establish grant structure for housing ownership / rehabilitation	✓
Develop a Vacant Properties Management Program as part of city-wide initiative	✓
Prepare in-fill guidelines for neighborhood (residential), and Highland Avenue (commercial)	✓

Actions in the earlier years focus on creating the setting for new employment uses and enhancing Highland's image. Improving the image of the Highland area is important for building confidence and sending a constructive message that the area is in positive transition. Catalytic projects identified in the early stage have the capacity of delivering significant spin-off benefit to the BOA. Public investment is targeted towards completion of the physical infrastructure necessary for development of the Technology & Business Park.

The second phase focuses on creating a stable residential and business destination for Highland. In this second phase, residential, commercial, and retail development in mixed-use buildings will commence along Highland Avenue, Hyde Park Avenue, the Technology & Business Park, and the Green Industrial Park.

DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES: BEYOND 5 YEARS
1. Expand Innovation / R&D Clusters
Refurbishment of buildings & grounds of Canrom . Potentially include new incubator building nearby.
Phase 1 Assessment of build-to-suit complex (north of James Avenue) due to no site characterization
Establish partnerships to complete build-to-suit complex
2. Expansion of Technology & Business Park
Construct new street connections south to neighborhood from Business Park in conjunction with new development
Undertake Phase 1 Environmental Assessments, as required
3. Branding & Image
Undertake signage & landscape improvements at entry points: Hyde Park Corner, Depot & DeVeaux
Undertake streetscape improvements along College Avenue and Hyde Park Avenue
Undertake streetscape improvements along 9th Street, west of Centre Avenue and Main Street
4. Create additional Community Parks
Development of "Highland Gateway Park" including Phase 1 EA due to no site characterization
Development of "Legacy Park", in conjunction with future residential development
Establish relocation program for homes in SE corner of Highland community area (to be naturalized)
Phase 1 Assessment of SE corner site (to be naturalized) due to no site characterization

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Undertake enhancement / naturalization of SE corner site
Development of “Highland Park”, including EA, remediation, design & construction.
Acquisition required for parcels along Highland Ave.
5. Doris Jones Cluster
Execute findings from feasibility study for Business/Office & Job Training Center fronting Highland.
Execute findings from detailed design study for construction of Doris Jones Plaza
6. Ongoing Neighborhood Repair
Initiate construction on multi-use facility fronting Highland Avenue.
Prepare in-fill guidelines for neighborhood (residential), and Highland Avenue (commercial)
Establish grant structure for housing ownership / rehabilitation
Initiate a Vacant Properties Management Program
Undertake streetscape improvements between Highland Avenue and Main Street
Market & develop site for food retailer, including market study, identify site, market site, and EA
Phase 1 Assessment, remediation and construction of residential sites adjacent to Highland Park.
Construction of 9th Street connection to Highland Ave.
7. Build Tourism and Cultural Opportunities
Support locally based tourism and culture initiatives as they come forward within the community
BEYOND BOA BOUNDARY
1. Support for Main Street
Undertake feasibility study for hospitality / tourism cluster at Customs House
Continue to promote business development, mixed use infill and streetscape improvements
Strengthen connections between Main Street and Highland through improved public transit services.

NEXT STEPS

The following recommendations will serve as the basis for the detailed Implementation Strategy, to be developed during Step 3 of the Brownfield Opportunity Area Program.

1. Leveraging the BOA Opportunity
2. Establish Supporting Delivery and Regulatory Framework
3. Strengthen Community Benefit
4. Position Highland for Economic Development Opportunities

1. LEVERAGING THE BOA OPPORTUNITY

Apply for Step 3 of the BOA Program

Step 3 will focus on strategic planning to achieve successful redevelopment of the area, particularly of priority strategic sites. Although the Highland BOA Master Plan proposes a series of initiatives, preliminary phasing and a list of strategic sites, the actual implementation details will occur in Step 3. Additional funding to conduct site assessments will be available through Step 3 and should be used to evaluate the environmental conditions of strategic sites and to determine the remedial effort necessary.

Work with Highland Land Owners to Commence Site Assessments & Remediation

The City will need to initiate discussions with private landowners to encourage assessment and remediation of privately owned sites as part of Step 3. This is particularly true for those identified as Priority Strategic Sites.

Pursue Funding Opportunities

While the BOA program will provide financial assistance to undertake pre-development activities and assessment of strategic sites, funding for the remediation of these sites and actual redevelopment, will need to be sought from other sources.

Complete State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA)

One outcome of the BOA study is the adoption of a comprehensive land use plan for the redevelopment of an area with a high concentration of brownfield sites. The outcomes from Step 2 and Step 3 projects of the BOA Program, the Nomination Study and the Implementation Strategy, meet the requirements for a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) of SEQRA. The GEIS prepared under the BOA Program has many benefits, and can help foster development of properties within the Study Area. Development that occurs within the overall conceptual plans for the area and is under thresholds evaluated in the GEIS, can proceed without undergoing a lengthy SEQR process, and are considered shovel-ready with respect to SEQR. This presents a significant savings for developers, in terms of both time and money.

2. ESTABLISH SUPPORTING DELIVERY & REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Endorse the Master Plan

Before significant change can take place in Highland, the preliminary step will be for the City of Niagara Falls to endorse the community vision and BOA Master Plan presented through formal or informal adoption.

Update Land Use & Zoning

The zoning may need to be revised so that it corresponds with the actual and anticipated land uses, including proposed park and open spaces, employment uses, and the re-positioning of vacant and underutilized sites.

Identify Suitable Delivery Mechanism

The implementation of a long-term plan will require a highly collaborative approach for managing the future of Highland. An organizational structure will need to be created that is capable of facilitating and delivering the Highland Community BOA Master Plan Implementation strategy.

Use the Master Plan to Guide Decision-Making

The Highland Community Area BOA Master Plan provides clear direction for decisions about land use, growth, and investment priorities. The Master Plan should be used as the core framework to guide change.

Be Flexible

To help facilitate diversity of land uses and better attract the growth sectors identified above, future land use planning must be sufficiently flexible to accommodate as many opportunities as possible, yet still provide certainty about what the community can expect in the future.

3. STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY BENEFIT

Prioritize Projects & Spending

While the full redevelopment of the Highland area will occur over decades, focusing resources to specific areas and actions will make the best use of initial investments. Early projects will need to leverage public money and set the standard for remediation and redevelopment. The early priority projects should not only benefit the existing Highland community but also act as magnets for private sector interest, such as the installation of infrastructure to allow private lands to be developed or improvements to the public realm to create an attractive setting for new residential and commercial development.

Create and Promote 'Green Economy' Job Training Opportunities

Support for the recently formed Niagara Greenspace Consortium (NGC), whose goal is to create and deliver workforce development programs for high value tech employment needs, can provide training programs creating a locally-based qualified workforce for future industries envisioned as part of the proposed Niagara Falls Green & Renewable Energy Park.

Continue Efforts to Revitalize and Strengthen the Existing Community:

- Establish business start-up, rehabilitation and support grants for local business.
- Initiate Highland façade improvement program.
- Prepare In-fill Guidelines for neighborhood area, including Highland Avenue.
- Set aside land for community services based on economic trends, including retail, health care, job training centers, and cultural attractions, as identified in the Master Plan.
- Continue to support publicly funded housing renewal.
- Formalization of existing community open spaces as City Parks.
- Develop a Vacant Properties Management Plan as part of citywide initiative.

4. POSITION HIGHLAND FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Promote the BOA Nomination Document, Community Vision, and Master Plan

The Master Plan needs to be promoted not just within Niagara Falls, but also at the County, Buffalo-Niagara Region and the State level. Promoting the Master Plan will not only support the ambitions of the City and the community, but also help to formalize partnership opportunities with interested external partners.

Pursue Identified Market Opportunities

The City should work with the County, the Region, and the State to create a 'green technology' market niche and build on the identified market opportunities, including:

Industrial:

Over the next five to ten years the Highland Community BOA can support additional light industrial and advanced manufacturing uses. This manufacturing expansion can be accomplished through on site intensification of existing industries and/or through the creation of a new Technology & Business Park.

Office:

Over the next five to ten years the Highland Community BOA can support new build-to-suit office buildings between 40,000 and 250,000 square feet. The best opportunity for office development is to closely associate any new build with manufacturing uses or research and development use.

Retail:

The Highland Community BOA can support a neighborhood shopping center of up to 80,000 square feet. Much of this space would be for a new food store. Although demand is present, it is unlikely that the cost of rent could support the cost of new construction without subsidies. Therefore, a partnership between the retailer and a public agency is necessary. The issue of retail implementation for Highland should be examined further as part of Step 3 via a retail consultant.

Residential:

Until market values increase across the city, the likelihood of developing private market housing in the Highland BOA is limited. Efforts to introduce in-fill subsidized housing should be explored. In addition, the City should work to expand or improve a grant system for housing renovation.

Agree on a Strategy for Land Assembly

Many of the proposed initiatives will require land assembly if they are to be realized. The City and its partners should agree on a strategy to undertake land assembly on required sites. Discussions with landowners may also be required early-on.

Undertake Studies to Inspire Investment:

- Undertake preliminary engineering work, including a utility audit, to facilitate new uses with a priority focus on the Technology & Business Park.
- Undertake Feasibility Study for the proposed Business/Office & Job Training Center.
- Prepare a Branding & Marketing Plan for the Technology & Business Park.

Actively Promote Economic Advantages Specific to the City and the BOA:

- Proximity to large population centers in Northern US & Canada.
- Large parcels of land available for redevelopment.
- Existing toolbox of incentives available to development partners, including: low-cost power and environmental remediation credits; tax credits; and renewable, clean energy, and energy efficient product manufacturing incentive programs.
- Well-known, established industrial brands/firms.
- An emerging hub of green technology.
- A strong infrastructure and transportation/utility rights of way.
- Ongoing neighborhood revitalization efforts.
- Low cost of living.

Build Partnerships to Expand Markets

The City needs to work with the community, County and Region to create a market niche and build a new brand that focuses on alternative energy and green technology. The area's industrial legacy is an economic strength. Current operations such as Globe and SantaRosa may be leveraged to attract complementary uses.

The City should also continue to build a strong partnership with members of the recently formed Niagara Greenspace Consortium (NGC). The NGC is a not-for-profit, tax-exempt corporation founded with a mission to restore environmentally compromised properties adjacent to the Niagara River and its watersheds. (In conjunction with the City of Niagara Falls, The NGC recently submitted a funding request to NYPA for the development of the Niagara Falls Green & Renewable Energy Park. In total, almost \$13.7million of NYPA funding has been sought for remediation, construction of supporting infrastructure, management and marketing of the park and locally based job training.

Utilize Publically Controlled Lands as Revitalization Catalyst

Coordination between the multiple entities is an important consideration as partners move forward in the development and implementation of catalyst projects. Having key sites under public control that will be critical to the implementation of the Community Vision and Master Plan.

Highland Community Brownfield Opportunity Area Grant Program
Step 2 Nomination Document: Executive Summary

