

A large, stylized white graphic of a book spine is centered on a solid blue background. The spine is composed of several horizontal bands of varying thickness, with the top and bottom bands being the widest. The spine curves slightly to the right. The text is printed in a bold, black, sans-serif font, centered over the spine.

**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
**FOR**  
**CITY OF NIAGARA FALLS, USA**  
**2009**



# **CITY OF NIAGARA FALLS, NEW YORK**

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## **FOREWORD**

The original version of this document was completed in August 2004 by Urban Strategies Inc. for the City of Niagara Falls and originally entitled the Niagara Falls Strategic Master Plan (the "2004 Strategic Master Plan"). After its completion, it was determined that the 2004 Plan should serve as the basis for updating the City's 1994 Comprehensive Plan. The 2004 Strategic Master Plan thus became the 'draft Comprehensive Plan' and has since served as the de facto primary policy framework for planning and development in the City. Since 2004, the municipal intent and strategic recommendations reflected in the 2004 Plan have been expressed simultaneously through the City's proposed adoption of comprehensive planning policies and comprehensive zoning changes. Also during this time, the "big move" strategic initiatives and recommendations have been further investigated, expanded upon, analyzed, and refined. The result of this further evolution of the 2004 Strategic Master Plan is this Comprehensive Plan, a richer, more detailed, and more relevant interpretation.

In most aspects, this Comprehensive Plan document is comparable to the 2004 Strategic Master Plan and owes an enormous debt to Urban Strategies, Inc. and the many individuals who came together to make that award-winning plan possible, all of whom should continue to be regarded as the chief authors of this plan (see "Acknowledgements" page). The main difference between the earlier version of the document and this, the final 2008 version, is Section 7, "General Citywide Strategies." Since completion of the 2004 Strategic Master Plan, it was determined that the citywide policy discussion therein should be broadened (greater scope) and expanded upon (greater depth) in order to ensure a continuity of the strategic vision throughout each planning area of the city and across functional responsibility. The expanded discussion reflects input received from elected and appointed officials, academics, developers, economic and legal consultants, and the general public in close consultation with city staff. Additional changes to the original document include: revisions to Section 1.2, "The Planning Process," to reflect the additional public workshop conducted as part of the effort to expand the citywide policies; refining the details of key initiatives; zoning code update process; provision of a conceptual planning areas map (Appendix B) and; a brief overview of previously completed plans and studies that have been consulted in the development of this plan (Appendix A). Accordingly, this 2008 Comprehensive Plan document is a continuation and culmination of significant planning activities undertaken both before, during, and subsequent to development of the 2004 Strategic Master Plan.

This Comprehensive Plan is the blueprint for our future, engendering the principles and guidelines that will influence our city's development in the coming years. This is not an ordinance; it is not a code book. It is a plan, intended to encourage thoughtful urban design and city building reflective of the community's vision and leading to a city that we can all embrace and enjoy.



## **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 and commercial 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 are 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) is providing 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 and Rainbow Boulevards has demonstrated the positive impact that carefully chosen and executed capital projects can bring to the city.

Niagara Falls did not fare well in the post-industrial era, but the 21<sup>st</sup> century will see different global economic and social forces that may serve to fundamentally change the prospects of the City looking out over the next twenty years. Niagara Falls for all its current cosmetic faults still has great bones. Niagara Falls still possesses 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 Comprehensive 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 intent is to enhance the quality of life for Niagara Falls residents living here today, residents that will come to live here in the future, as well as, enticing tourists to come, stay longer, and visit again and again.

## 1.1 The Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

This document sets out a comprehensive foundation for revitalizing the City of Niagara Falls, and the long-term renewal of the regional economy. It is also strategic 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 Comprehensive Plan creates 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, specific renewal programs, actions, and projects that focus on strengthening the 'Core City.' This Plan intends to 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. The goal is 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 renewal and 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 Falls (Reservation) State Park, 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 East Falls Street URA Redevelopment Area,<sup>1</sup> —east of John B. Daly Boulevard.

While a number of planning studies<sup>2</sup> 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 Comprehensive Plan strives to achieve. It represents *the City's program for renewal*. It is informed by many elements contained or outlined in previous studies, but further refines and updates those ideas. It also identifies a new set of critical programs and priority projects intended to kick-start reinvestment and city building in many areas necessary to create a diverse, healthy, and successful community. The Comprehensive Plan places equal emphasis on the development of educational and cultural resources and amenities, as it does on 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Previously known as "Lands Subject to Development Agreement"

<sup>2</sup> A summary of these documents is provided in Appendix A.

The Comprehensive 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, Comprehensive Plan Strategies, Priority Initiatives for the Core City, and General Citywide Policies**, identifies specific recommendations for programs, strategies and initiatives to halt the city's decline and begin the process of revitalization in the Core. The citywide policies presented here establish a broad framework for the revitalization of the City's overall urban environment and are organized into nine policy areas.

**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 Comprehensive Plan.

As the City's strategic plan for renewal and revitalization, this Comprehensive Plan purposefully targets those municipal actions and capital expenditures that are likely to bring about multi-faceted urban renewal, and best attract and support private and public sector involvement and reinvestment, to start, continue, and compound the process of renewal and revitalization.

This document has been prepared to guide amendments to the City of Niagara Falls Urban Renewal Plan and Zoning Ordinance. Together, these amendments will establish a comprehensive and cohesive framework to guide and enable revitalization and city building, as envisioned herein.

## **Planning Areas**

One result from the public outreach effort conducted in connection with this plan was the identification of planning areas for the purposes of focusing future planning efforts within the City. Specifically, these planning areas are: (a) The Core City Planning Area (including parts of Center City)<sup>3</sup>; (b) The DeVeaux-Highland Planning Area (c) The Hyde Park Planning Area (including parts of Center City and the Buffalo Avenue Industrial Corridor)<sup>4</sup>; (d) The LaSalle Planning Area. These planning areas are highly conceptual in nature and represent only general divisions of the City along geographic lines. A bubble map is contained in Appendix B.

With the exception of the Core City Strategies in Section 4, the citywide policies set forth in Section 7 of this Comprehensive Plan do not necessarily correspond to a specific planning area, but rather are pertinent to and shall apply generally across all planning areas in the city. The intent therefore is for future planning efforts to further the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan by developing the general policies with greater detail, with more specific goals and strategies that respond to the unique characteristics and circumstances of each specific planning sub-area, unit of analysis, neighborhood, or district.

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<sup>3</sup> Center City includes the Core City and areas west of Hyde Park Boulevard

<sup>4</sup> Buffalo Avenue Industrial Corridor includes the "south-end" of Center City, the upper river waterfront, and industrial lands adjacent Hyde Park Blvd.

## **1.2 The Planning Process**

The 2004 Strategic Master Plan and this Comprehensive Plan were developed in a process that was open to the public and informed by many interactions with business leaders, community leaders, residents, and agencies, representing a wide cross-section of the city's constituency. Therefore, this Comprehensive 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 2004 Strategic Master Plan and this Comprehensive Plan represents an intensive effort on the part of consultants, residents, stakeholders, and City officials and staff over a period of several years beginning with a series of stakeholder interviews with representatives from area business associations, institutions, government and agencies, arts organizations, visitor attractions and residents' groups, as well as landowners and developers. These consultant interviews provided an opportunity for one-on-one neutral discussions about specific challenges and opportunities while undertaking an analysis of the city's physical structure and synthesis of existing background studies and related documents.

The key components of the 2004 Strategic Master Plan and this Comprehensive Plan were largely developed during 2003-04. During this period, open working meetings with the Niagara Falls Planning Board were held twice a month, and a focused stakeholder workshop was held in October 2003 to review, gather feedback, and confirm the strategies proposed. The 2004 Strategic Master Plan was then finalized in August 2004. Subsequently it was determined that the essence of the original Master Plan should evolve and be incorporated into a Comprehensive Plan for the city and that the citywide policy section of the document be expanded to broaden the scope of the plan and to provide more detailed and comprehensive policies for the whole city. This re-drafting was undertaken concurrently with an updating of the city's Zoning Ordinances by the Planning Board and planning staff, assisted by Behan Planning Associates. This process included an additional public workshop held in May, 2005, followed by a series of public forums held by the Niagara Falls Planning Board almost monthly in 2006, during which various zoning proposals and their possible environmental impacts were considered. In 2007, the Planning Board made its initial recommendation to City Council for full consideration and adoption of the proposed Comprehensive Plan, the proposed Zoning Amendments, and accompanying DGEIS<sup>5</sup> pursuant to the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act ("SEQRA"). In 2008, after an expanded legal review was also undertaken, the Planning Board again recommended full consideration and adoption of the proposed Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Amendments by City Council.

In adopting this Comprehensive Plan, City Council will express its intent to set the official municipal policy framework for future decisions, to provide direction and vision as to how the City will develop, and to initiate a process of renewal designed to implement the recommendations contained herein. Additionally, the Urban Renewal Plan and Zoning Ordinance must be made consistent with this Plan.

Citizen input played an integral role in developing the goals, objectives, and recommendations in this Plan, and citizen input shall play an integral role in developing consensus on future development decisions as well. As such, it is the intent of City Council upon adoption, to require the Planning Board to undertake periodic review of the Plan, and

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<sup>5</sup> Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement



to provide for citizen input and consultation on a regular basis during the life of this plan. To that end, under General City Law, Sec. 28-a (11), the Planning Board and the Administration shall provide for the conduct of a thorough review of the Comprehensive Plan at intervals practical and prudent, but in no instance less than once every three years.

## **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 Comprehensive Plan presents an overview of the contemporary context by:

- Outlining key challenges and opportunities the Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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, and poor investment decisions, 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.



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

## **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 region's<sup>6</sup> manufacturing sector fell from 170,000 to 90,000, a decline of 53%<sup>7</sup>.

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. However, there is a huge built-in locational value here which can revive new production, but additional manufacturing production without high-tech, value adding employment, and without more competitive residential markets can never produce the same level of economic impact it did in the 1950's.

***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, including emerging "green" technology and research; 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 averages<sup>8</sup> – 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.

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<sup>6</sup> Defined as the Buffalo-Niagara MSA

<sup>7</sup> Strategic Projections Inc. (2001) *Economic Trends in Niagara Falls and the State of New York, Draft Report*

<sup>8</sup> United States Census Bureau

***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***
- ***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 1990s<sup>9</sup>. 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***

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

- ***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***



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

### **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.

***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) pre-World War II multifamily dwellings of two, three or four units; 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%<sup>10</sup>. 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 replacement. Due to the oversupply of this 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 renewal and 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, due to a cascading series of problems following industrial decline that have affected the employment base and by extension real estate value and property-tax rates. 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, and business development interests, and unattractive to financial and lending institutions necessary to support these interests. It is this fundamental economic shift and the lack of a consistent economic strategy or investment in tourism that have created the current weak market conditions.

In addition, while tourism is increasingly seen as an important new economic driver for the city, the current visitation numbers indicate a profound inability to capture a significant portion of an otherwise strong market. The dearth of new or upgraded lodging or attractions also presents a weak market case. These factors, 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 the necessary growth, which then supports growth in other commercial and residential sectors.

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<sup>10</sup> City of Niagara Falls

Yet, the unrealized opportunity is for additional and upscale lodging development and for expanding the existing 'tourism program' and recreational offerings. It is the city's latent ability to expand its offerings with new attractions, quality lodgings, 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, which has the greatest potential to yield positive economic growth for Niagara Falls and encourage new growth in other sectors.



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

***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.

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 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, including Transportation funds, should be directed toward the identification of priority remediation areas, in the Core City, along the riverfront and entrances to the city, for redevelopment. In the short term, improvements aimed at reducing the visual impact of prominent brownfield sites, consolidation of industrial uses, re-use were appropriate, as well as, developing industrial heritage sites should be the most viable 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 Comprehensive 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 East Falls Street Redevelopment Area each have particular opportunities and drivers which must be carefully timed and 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 corridor<sup>11</sup>. 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%<sup>12</sup>. 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-***

<sup>11</sup> Niagara Bi-National Region Economic Roundtable. <http://www.niagarabinational.com/>

<sup>12</sup> 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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

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 Comprehensive 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%<sup>13</sup>. Current visitation numbers indicate approximately 6 million tourists visit the city annually, not including Casino patrons<sup>9</sup>, 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.

<sup>13</sup> United States Census Bureau

<sup>9</sup> 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 Comprehensive 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. Steps should be taken to elevate the education system within the city to the best in the region such as an inner city magnet school or by offering specialized programs in math, science and the arts. Other educational opportunities should also be pursued to bring programs of higher learning to the city. Providing these opportunities for the residents of Niagara Falls and the involvement of partnership agencies and affiliations with area colleges and universities will make the school system a change agent, and 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 retraining programs linked to the local economy;***

- ***A safe, accessible school system with magnet or specialized programs linked to industry and 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 frequent 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.



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

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.

***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. It will also require Niagara Falls and the Bi-National Region to advance a "smart transportation" system. One which intergrates ground transportation and specifically transit with airport and downtown hubs.***

## **PART II: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN STRATEGIES**

### **1. THE COMPREHENSIVE 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 Comprehensive 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 the elimination of blight and the diversification of residential housing types
- Increasing the residential population in the Core City generally and in downtown specifically
- Support for high-quality educational programs
- Interpreting cultural resources, promoting heritage tourism, and historic preservation
- Creating new green structures, pedestrian friendly streets and streetscapes, and new parks and greenways
- Creating distinct places, precincts, or character areas to support visitation of local places and businesses
- Refining the city/park interface along the city's waterfront to 're-image' the city as *'the city in the park'*
- Developing new tourism infrastructure, attractions, and tourism marketing programs with the emphasis on authenticity.

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 should be integrated into the local land use regulations as fully as possible.

The Comprehensive 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 key opportunities specific to the City. It provides an action-oriented

framework to achieve positive change. The Comprehensive Plan is comprised of the following key components:

- **Eight Principles for City Renewal** that outline the theory and approach underlying the Comprehensive 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 summarize 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.
- **Citywide Policies**, which aim to revitalize significant components of the urban system, and are meant to build upon and complement the Core City Strategies. They address land use, historic resources, the built environment, environmental and open space resources, transportation, economic development and tourism, housing, brownfield/greyfield development and waterfront development. The Citywide Policies stress the importance these systems have in the renewal of the city and identify broad recommendations aimed at general improvement throughout the city and as such serve to guide future district and project planning.

It is fundamentally important to recognize and underscore 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. Each action not only encourages further positive change, but also itself becomes a reinforcing element with an additive affect to subsequent actions.

## **2. TOWARD A NEW DIRECTION FOR THE FUTURE**

This 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 Comprehensive 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 more densely populated urbane place; where industrial activity, while important, can no longer be seen as the city’s primary or lone economic engine; and that the City needs to lead renewal efforts and invest in itself before others will do the same.

The Comprehensive Plan embodies 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 clusters, transportation infrastructure, and locational incentives.

#### **2. Develop the waterfront: recreation, adjacencies, and cultural potential — “The Big Move.”**

The Niagara River waterfront is the city’s defining feature and premier asset. The Niagara River Greenway should encompass all public areas and these areas should be reconfigured into world-class park or public space. This collection of redefined assets should support an array of year round activities, cultural programming, events, high-quality tourism and educational destinations. This is the wise long-term investment. The frayed urban edge on the riverfront must also be reclaimed and encouraged to evolve into the city’s open front door and its premier address. Current confusion between ‘fronts, backs and sides’ of buildings that form ‘the built edge’ must be clarified through design guidelines, land use controls and Greenway build-out. 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 while adding value and tax-base.

### **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 neighborhood districts, 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 that reinforces and supports 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 (east of downtown, adjacent to the Buffalo Avenue Industrial Corridor, and in LaSalle). These "connections" should be, at every opportunity, 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 not only advance the purposes and intent of developing the Niagara River Greenway<sup>14</sup> and the Niagara National Heritage Area,<sup>15</sup> but 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 City's riverfront 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 may be low and many neighborhoods are under-occupied and in need of repair. Other areas are truly blighted, making them unattractive for reinvestment. Targeted public realm improvements; local heritage preservation incentives; improvements to community facilities and to the quality of the school system; the removal of blight and the retirement of derelict housing will strengthen some neighborhoods and serve to increase options to create demand for new residential options in the city.

Alternative housing forms catering to a variety of income levels and housing market sectors, such as young professionals, single adults and empty nesters, can bring more households to support retail and business expansion within the Core City. Higher density and alternative

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<sup>14</sup> Niagara River Greenway Commission, Wendel Duscherer, et al., *Niagara River Greenway Plan*, Adopted 2007.

<sup>15</sup> National Parks Service, *Niagara National Heritage Area Study*. Niagara National Heritage Area signed into law as part of the Consolidated Natural Resources Act, May 8, 2008.



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, the same way it was in the past, as a much more dense and compact city, with an identifiable core surrounded by thriving neighborhoods and commercial precincts that are attractive to and supported by residents and 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, for instance, an expanded Aquarium of Niagara, a new outdoor performance and festival area, the Gorge Discovery Center, Niagara Experience Center, in addition to beautifully landscaped parkland new tourist facilities and other high-quality educational and tourism amenities and attractions. The intent should be to create attractive pedestrian-oriented places complementary to the natural and cultural resource along the Gorge and in so doing re-define the City/Park edge and interface. 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,’*** perhaps between Prospect Street and Rainbow Boulevard. The City should influence the development of an attractive

activity node, venue for cultural and entertainment programming, and visitor orientation, while weaving the Niagara Reservation and the Falls Street Promenade into a more successful pedestrian mall and coherent open space feature.

- ***Create a downtown entertainment center/theater***, perhaps on Niagara or Third Street. This street/center should be designed to encourage street related uses, provide business development assistance targeting entertainment uses, and provide architectural design guidance to improve the quality of the public realm, while reinforcing connections to other nearby 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 Comprehensive 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 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 the goal of 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 Plan cannot precisely predict how these forces will play out. Rather, the Plan highlights those efforts that should be undertaken to promote renewal. In some instances however, there are trade-offs required to move the city forward. The Comprehensive 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 and focusing them as necessary for progress.

### **3. CORE CITY VISION**

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

It is 2030 and the city has dramatically changed through the successful implementation of many development projects and programs initiated through guidance of the Comprehensive Plan. The social and economic circumstances of Niagara Falls and its residents have been considerably improved following a targeted and coordinated 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 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 adjacent John B. Daly Boulevard (North); 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 new 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 an 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, along traditional commercial corridors, 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 of New York. By coordinating the establishment of the Niagara River National Heritage Area, the creation of a NYS Niagara River Greenway and URR Heritage Area, 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 Niagara Experience Center. The upper river riverfront is evolving into 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, with the NF State Park and downtown extending eastward.

The reconfiguration of the Parkway creates an environmentally sensitive, pedestrian-friendly, and value-added riverfront 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 visitors with many new reasons to visit and residents new reasons to live in the downtown and along the riverfront.

The redevelopment of the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District properties fronting the NF State Park, marked by boutique hotels, specialty shops, and high-quality residential developments, has reintegrated the park and the city, encouraging visitors to spread out and 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.

The establishment of the city's *International Railway Station/Intermodal Transportation Center* (IRS-ITC) at the Old Customhouse has similarly encouraged growth of the tourism industry. The IRS-ITC has become 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 along Niagara Street. An intense mix of residential and retail, office, and residential developments has created a vibrant medium to high-density 'main street' providing some of the best living, shopping, and entertainment experiences within the region. They have also created a strong activity spine linking East Falls Street, Memorial Park, and the casino precincts 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, in conjunction with the development of a high-quality pedestrian environment and the release of targeted Request for Qualifications (RFQ's) (to take advantage of employment growth downtown) have brought in new residential and mixed use developments transforming the street.

With a collection of nightclubs, entertainment and restaurant offerings, Third Street has also 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, while also linking the gorge waterfront to downtown. 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 surrounding neighborhoods and better meeting 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 for traffic movement.

The introduction of new employment together with a broad 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 center city and the development of new educational opportunities have expanded interest in all of the new residential opportunities being built. 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/Center City to other areas of Niagara Falls. Additionally, the infrastructure and surplus land that were 'banked' have become the focus of continuing reinvestment in the City.

Known for being a cool, green, and clean city, 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 City has become a more desirable place live, to work and to visit. Residents and visitors alike enjoy a network of community open spaces and parks, including trails and pathways. Overall, it has become an attractive urban setting with a strong economy, the focus of a region with a bright future.

*The Core City Vision is graphically represented 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. In short, they represent the actions necessary to guide the revitalization of the Core City and achieve leverage for expansion of the City's vision to more of the city 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 would have a particularly powerful influence on the revitalization of Niagara Falls, and must be accomplished in order for the greater transformation to occur. These initiatives were identified as the most critical to the future of the city and were not only brought up repeatedly throughout the Master Plan consultation process and in previous precedent planning studies and documents dating back decades in some instances (see Appendix A), but were also re-enforced by stakeholder input during development of this Comprehensive Plan. In addition to the Big Moves, the Comprehensive Plan has identified seven Precinct Strategies, which outline recommendations specific to definable character areas within the Core City. These strategies build upon the perceived development potential and unique economic role of each area, 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 conceptualized 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 Customhouse and North-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] Park Place Heritage District
- 4.2.7 Buffalo Avenue Heritage District
- 4.2.8 Casino Precinct
- 4.2.9 East Falls Street Redevelopment Area

Combined or multiple actions undertaken within a given area of the Core City can have significant synergistic impact. The Core City Strategies and their recommendations are specifically designed and 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, which encourage 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 zoning and ordinances. (Additional strategies developed and deployed in the future for other planning areas in the city should likewise follow the same strategic thrust of this Plan: building off of the strength in the core; nesting, and overlapping activities and initiatives.)

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.

Recommendations can be categorized into five broad 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 associated 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 herein 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.

## **4.1 The Big Moves**

### **4.1.1 Reconnect the City to its Waterfront**

#### ***Description***

With the exception of a small area fronting the Niagara Reservation and LaSalle, the City of Niagara Falls is completely cut off from its waterfront, the Niagara River, and the Gorge by the Robert Moses Parkway. Despite being conceived and built when additional expressways were planned for expanding physical capacity and mobility, the Parkway too was configured as a high-speed limited-access transportation facility not a true “park-way.” Actual transportation needs prove the planning for greater expressway capacity within the City as erroneous. An error that has left the city to cope with a grossly over-scaled expressway that is only marginally justifiable from a transportation perspective, particularly when more viable options exist, and that occupies extremely valuable riverfront lands representing 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 physical presence but also by the absence of local connections between the city and the riverfront.

These conditions have prevented the development of what otherwise could be a strong relationship for the city, its local tourism and its business development. Residents and pedestrians are physically separated from the city’s most valuable public land, and visitors to (or through) the riverfront lands 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 redevelopment opportunities and existing local businesses, which keeps waterfront property values lower than otherwise, 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 and yield considerable benefits to the city.

#### ***Project Strategy***

The strategy for reconnecting the city to its waterfront involves reconfiguration and redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway to purposely open the waterfront districts for reconnection into the urban fabric of the city and create a calm, narrower, more pedestrian friendly and humanly scaled ‘riverfront drive’ (see Figure 9). The new roadway, whatever its called, would be appropriately scaled to existing and emerging transportation needs, and be fully connected to the network of local streets, which are adjacent to but currently disconnected from the existing parkway. This represents a return to the traditional, urban, interconnected, street network as the preferred transportation solution. More importantly, it implies new purposes for the Parkway and requires it to evolve, leaving the efficient movement of cars to the traditional hierarchy of arterials and collectors away from the riverfront. The reconfigured Parkway or ‘riverfront drive’ must accommodate more than just one goal. It must support accessibility by people and cars, and it must support non-transportation goals, including recreation and ecological enhancement. It must support a “world-class park;” it must create beautiful public realm streetscapes 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, and; it must create a renewed setting to stimulate economic development and reinvestment along the riverfront corridor.



Across North America, there has been a fundamental shift in transportation thinking and planning over the previous decades. The sole focus on transportation function 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, systems approach which can accomplish many goals simultaneously. Indeed, many North American cities have already or are currently 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 urban fabric, which has often resulted adjacent to expressway corridors. These cities are successfully recreating and extending their original multi-modal network based system, and finding opportunities for community building and economic development from reclaimed 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 will more 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 of the Parkway, its re-purposing, and even its elimination in some sections, land can be reclaimed and conveyed back to productive use. The riverfront would certainly gain parkland, a functioning ‘greenway,’ and a heritage corridor, but it would also yield new development opportunities capable of stimulating economic growth and reinvestment within the city on lands adjacent to a reconfigured Parkway. In particular, opportunities to dramatically change the riverfront and improve economic performance are possible through the removal and reconfiguration of the segments north of Main Street along the Gorge; removal and reconfiguration of the segments within the downtown and Buffalo Avenue Heritage Districts.

The following will briefly describe the recommended alignment and basic design parameters of specific sections of the reconfigured Parkway/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 City will explore all options for removal and/or reconfiguration. Access and pocket parking would be integrated within the park nodes. Reconfiguration would emphasize reconnection and naturalization, with excess land returned to parkland. Reconfiguration north of the city line should also be studied with the similar goals of accessibility and infrastructure rationalization. Pedestrian connections north of Findlay Drive should be explored at the re-design / planning stages. The Findlay connection could be configured as a true gateway to signal entry into the Core City.

- **From Findlay Drive to Cedar Avenue**, within the Customhouse and North 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 would remain as described above. However, the alignment should be rationalized and consolidated largely within the existing Whirlpool Street right-of-way to create a new alignment. During the scoping phase a ‘mid-point’ alignment should also be considered in order to create new opportunities for residential development and to re-image this critical entryway to the city while adding significant new parkland along the riverfront corridor. Many new street connections within this design segment would reconnect the city to the riverfront, and a high caliber of streetscape and public realm design would define the parkland resource and create an appropriate setting for high value residential development between the open space resource and Main Street.
- **From Cedar Avenue to Niagara Street**, the existing Parkway would be abandoned and returned entirely to productive use as part of a Cultural District (see Section 4.1.2). A new ‘riverfront drive’ would be aligned at the Cedar Avenue connection to Third Street, then southwest along Main Street to Rainbow Boulevard (or First St.). This alignment would define the full extent of the Cultural District to the West and would 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 perhaps 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/‘riverfront drive’ should also be designated 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. The Parkway/‘riverfront drive’ should be a fully connected network-based system, with many alternate route possibilities.
- **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’ would continue as part of the integrated and connected street network. Within this area, multiple routes are available to disperse traffic and provide flexibility of use through the high tourist season. The Parkway configuration outside of the Park must re-enforce its role as an important interface between the City and the Park. The Parkway configuration inside the Park would need to evolve to serve the ‘Olmsted park’ restoration. The connection between the Park and the City at Daly Boulevard is crucial. The existing Parkway interchange at Daly Boulevard would be eliminated while the restoration of park land would be expanded as much as possible.
- Within the Falls Precinct many new street connections are proposed to include both sides of Old Falls Street and/or a new “Festival Square” (see section 4.1.3), including streetscape extensions between the Riverfront and the Buffalo Avenue Heritage

District. These new connections would create an integrated street network linking the Park's "riverside drive" to Buffalo Avenue and Rainbow Boulevard, 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. A high quality streetscape, comprised of a double row of street trees, special landscape features, special paving, in-street paving and unified streetscape furnishings, or similar, would link The downtown roadway segment to the Cultural District segment. Similar high-quality streetscape improvements should be extended to Rainbow Boulevard and Buffalo Avenue. This portion of the new 'riverfront drive' should also be a designated Pedestrian Priority Zone (see Falls Precinct Section 4.1.3) where pedestrian and non-vehicular forms of movement are given priority over the automobile. The use of special streetscape treatments, special paving or cobbles, highly articulated pedestrian crossings and signage would signify this the Pedestrian Priority Zone to uses.

- The re-configuration of the parkway and its integration into the urban grid would allow the removal of the ramps from John B. Daly Boulevard south of Buffalo Avenue and the possible introduction of a new traffic calming roundabout at an intersection with Buffalo Avenue will function as a transition and 'gateway' to downtown, East Falls, and the Casino. Entry into the Core City should be marked by a fundamental change in the character of the of the city, or at least in the character of the street.
- **From John B. Daly Boulevard to LaSalle Expressway**, as with the Gorge View segments, the parkway should be decommissioned as a major arterial and ultimately reconfigured into a two-lane park road with views of the river, and a generous landscape buffer on the north side when feasible to do so. Pocket greenway nodes dispersed along the riverfront zone would permit access to the open space resource for pedestrians and vehicles as appropriate. Enhanced connections between the waterfront and the city would be established where they are lacking and/or reinforced where they currently exist. In particular, this would occur near Portage Road, Hyde Park Blvd., First Street, Daly Boulevard, 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, the Grand Island Bridge, at the time of its eventual replacement, and at LaSalle Waterfront Park (former Century Club site). This longer-term recommendation should be realized through the extension of LaSalle Expressway westward, as an at-grade facility, that eventually aligns with Buffalo Avenue at Hyde Park Boulevard, thereby enabling fast alternate north/south routes to Lewiston. More importantly, creating significant economic value along an enhanced east/west downtown route, while also enabling the creation of ecological and recreational value along the waterfront.

The redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway would be a 'Big Move' for the city; it would 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 would enhance the experience of visiting and living beside an internationally celebrated Niagara River, 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 would not amount to the exchange of one Parkway for another or the creation a 'Robert Moses Parkway Lite'. Rather, this would represent a fundamental shift to a traditional network-based transportation solution which can bring people and development activity to the waterfront; provide flexibility in terms of choice of routes and use (daily, weekly and seasonally); and consolidate a vast amount of riverfront 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 together with coordinated enhancements to other arterials and collectors throughout the city would encourage visitors to use and explore these and other local streets and increase patronage of local businesses. The physical design and streetscape setting created through the new 'riverfront drive' would 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 [Northern Gateway]**

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 Parkway corridor. Among other things, 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 function as an integrated pedestrian and vehicular park-road 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 would be strengthened and many new street extensions would reconnect people and business to the riverfront corridor. The safety and comfort of pedestrians moving between the waterfront and the city would be a primary consideration in the new design.

While an integrated land use and transportation improvement project would 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 the varied and complex components of any transportation improvement project. Similarly, the ultimate phased reconstruction of Parkway segments may not adhere exactly to the roadway segments described below.

### **1. Northern Municipal boundary to Findlay Crescent**

Design parameters outlined above would guide the integration of an expanded park node with new road segments within the existing and planned context of the area and local street connections.

### **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 of the roadway. Where the new alignment of the ‘riverfront drive’ is located at a ‘mid’ point between the present location of the Robert Moses Parkway right-of-way and the Whirlpool Street right-of-way, residential development opportunities should be created. In addition, relocation of the OPR&HP maintenance garage would 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 would 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 adjacent precincts. 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’ would 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 would 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 riverfront drive, Buffalo Avenue, the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District and Rainbow Boulevard would allow greater flexibility with regard to street closures, while still delivering people and service vehicles in support of the mixed-use development envisioned for this important heritage and tourism area.

Any highway network alteration should be preceded by a market assessment to determine the effect on development potential within the area.

#### **5. John B. Daly Boulevard to LaSalle Expressway**

Design parameters outlined above as well as those resulting from later more focused Buffalo Avenue Industrial Corridor “Brownfield Opportunity Area” planning efforts would guide the integration of this new Parkway segment within the existing and planned for 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 / Gorge View 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 would 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 would include the expanded or rebuilt Niagara Aquarium adjacent to the new Niagara Gorge Discovery Center located in the State park. This may also be an ideal location for the proposed Niagara Experience Center. A state-of-the-art, outdoor, performance and concert venue with regularly scheduled events should be included to take advantage of this unique location and 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 could be used to demonstrate best practices in stormwater management, building upon the eco-tourism potential of the Niagara River corridor. The Gorge View section of



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

the Niagara River Greenway Trail would link attractions in and out of the district.

The combination of the setting and attractions within the Cultural District would establish a regionally significant destination that would complement and further expand the Niagara Falls (Reservation) State Park. The District must exhibit a quality of design and landscape excellence, at least commensurable to 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 would 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 would create long-term value by providing a high-quality context for significant reinvestment, infill and new developments at the downtown edge.

The redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway as a riverfront drive located on the existing Third Street and Main Street would make available a large area of land that would be incorporated into the overall open space framework of the Cultural District. Additional lands should be assembled along the west side of Main Street between Third Street and Cedar Avenue. The collection of heritage holdings found there should be preserved, interpreted, and integrated into the overall offering of outdoor performance areas, retail, and restaurant amenities within the District.

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 agreements premised on the potential for mutual benefit to all parties. Among other things, 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
- Implement marketing and maintenance programs.

### ***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, NYS-Parks, NYS-ESD and USA Niagara Development Corp., the Aquarium of Niagara, and the NYS-DOT. The National Park Service would become 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 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 would be comprised of the following components:

- 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. Among other things, the Cultural District Development Plan should:

- 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 would 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/or 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&HP, 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 would be determined by the partnership.

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

The new roadway should take on an urban character with urban-style development at its interface with the Cultural District, with sidewalks extending to the curb on both sides of the street and continuous parallel parking permitted. A double row of street trees would distinguish the precinct, with the new Parkway designated as a Pedestrian Priority Zone (see Section 4.1.3) characterized by pedestrian crossings, high quality development and special streetscape treatments that prioritize pedestrian and non-vehicular forms of movement. The redesigned new Park roadway should perform as an integrated pedestrian and vehicular boulevard.

### **4.1.3 Initiate Public Realm and Catalyst Projects in The Falls Precinct**

#### ***Description***

Bounded by Main Street, Prospect Street, Buffalo Avenue, Daly Boulevard, Rainbow Boulevard and Third Street, the Falls Precinct was developed primarily during the 1960s and 1970s urban renewal period with major convention, entertainment, and shopping attractions intended to revitalize Niagara Falls as a tourist center. The precinct in 2004 includes a number of hotels, the former Occidental Chemical and Carborundum Office Buildings, the Old Falls Street pedestrian mall, and many of the tourist-oriented businesses located east of Prospect Street and south of Niagara Street, including the Rainbow Mall, the Wintergarden, Conference Center of Niagara Falls and the former Native American ‘Turtle’ Museum.

This precinct however, 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 one of the most valuable assets, not only in the City, but the surrounding region as well. Rainbow Mall is vacant and a portion of the parking ramp is closed off. The outside of the building presents blank concrete walls to visitors, with few street-related activities. Purchased from the City of Niagara Falls by private-sector interests, the Wintergarden’s future reuse has become an issue.

There is a strong realization that enhancement of this area is vital, and several initiatives have already been put in place to begin to improve it. USA Niagara, with the City, 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; reconstruction of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Rainbow Blvd., and the Old Falls Street [east] pedestrian promenade; conversion of the United Office Building into a high-quality residential building, and hotel upgrades.

#### ***Project Strategy***

Building on the positive work of USA Niagara and its private sector partners, the Comprehensive 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 would 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 will 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 visitor information and orientation center, combined with the creation of a programmed 'festival square' at or near 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 potential catalyst for additional private sector investment. Improvements to key pedestrian axis and connections in between the Casino Precinct and the Falls, including new street connections, streetscaping and the creation of a Pedestrian Priority Zone, will reimagine the precinct and reinforce it as an attractive and vibrant pedestrian place. The interface to the State park should 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, provided there is an appropriate transition from key pedestrian scale heritage areas and other public spaces adjacent to the 'Parks,' and provided there is an allowance for sunlight to activate these vital places throughout the year.

### ***Key Recommendations***

#### **1. Pursue a joint venture partnership program involving the City, the Cordish Group [lessee] and the State 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 Mall site is a condominium property owned by the City and leased to the Cordish Group. to the east of the Rainbow Center a City-owned parking ramp has been leveled and 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 underperforming, 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 serious reconsideration and redevelopment. Through a joint development agreement potentially involving density bonusing, a remarkable new development on this important site could certainly 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 'Ramp I' site to the east represents an excellent opportunity to establish a joint venture partnership agreement. Other

such partnerships between the City, State, and other appropriate developer/builders for creating signature mixed use projects situated in the Falls Precinct or near the proposed new Falls Street Festival Square (described below) should create the attractive and vibrant anchors needed to balance the Seneca Casino's growing offerings.

Any 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 or combination of additional uses proposed for Rainbow Center 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 would 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 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 is sorely needed and could be accommodated anywhere downtown but preferably near the western terminus of Old Falls Street. An added benefit here is bringing more of the park into the city and creating a high value setting for continued reinvestment and development at the city/park interface



A new 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.

While conceptual, any public square for Niagara Falls should be designed to create a high-quality public gathering place and point of orientation for people visiting the falls, and other attractions. A 'Festival Square' would provide 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 would complement existing attractions such as, the balloon ride and the Hard Rock Café, which should remain as primary tourism attractions (although not necessarily within their current locations).

A square should 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, should also 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. The renovated former Occidental property, together with sensitive renovations to the Comfort Inn Hotel and the redevelopment of the Rainbow Center and parking ramp site, represent catalyst opportunities to reimage downtown Niagara Falls.

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 roadway connections. Initiating and marketing a national/international design competition would 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 pre-design 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 Old Falls Street 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 Old Falls Street Promenade are recommended. Public realm improvements along this linkage would 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 former 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 would 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 activity and special events. It should be opened throughout the winter to support commercial and retail uses planned in conjunction with the conference center.



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.

### **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 Old Falls Street Promenade improvements and the potential partnership program to achieve the redevelopment of the Rainbow Center and former 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 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 Comprehensive 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, requiring active 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 protection of world-class views and ultimately to the optimization of those views for the maximum number of development parcels downtown should be a central objective for controlling built form. As such, the creation of design guidelines should be adopted as part of the amendments to the City of Niagara Falls Zoning Ordinance. In addition, a 3-dimensional physical model could 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 on Niagara Street: 'Days Inn' and adjacent sites**

Project type: Management and Partnership

Project priority: 0-5 years

The Falls Precinct between Niagara and Main Streets is strategically located at the center of many significant redevelopment initiatives outlined in this Plan. For instance, the Days Inn site 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, 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 should be considered a premier redevelopment opportunity. As such, it must be carefully considered and nurtured to secure a signature development project for the city.

The parcels that include former Hydraulic Canal land should be projected 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), that would provide a strong pedestrian linkage from the retail activity on Niagara Street to the entertainment and educational attractions of the Cultural District. The land here is ideal for a 'signature building' – a building intended to be seen from all directions and 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 as well as all other downtown property owners, aimed at securing the redevelopment of their site similar to what has been 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 and 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 NW corner of Third and Niagara Streets would be redesigned as a park and landscape focal point providing a gathering and meeting space for passive recreation interpretation and a venue for programming events. Design guidelines would 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. This former Hydraulic Canal diagonal also provides an important opportunity for heritage interpretation. Such a 'Canal-Walk' will provide a further high-quality pedestrian connection between NYS Gorge-View Parks, the Cultural District and the rest of downtown.

## **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, would create a new pedestrian promenade along Prospect Street to support private sector development efforts along this premier waterfront/urban interface zone. This new setting would 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 other public realm improvements achieved through the design competition for a public festival square and extend these to the northern edge of the Niagara Falls [Reservation] State Park, adjacent to a 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 State Park 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 would take precedence over vehicular movement in this area. Roadway design considerations 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. 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 couplet 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.

These and other similar “transportation” improvements are outlined in ‘Downtown Niagara Falls Multi-Modal Access Program,’ By USA Niagara Development Corp., for Niagara Falls, which identified the enhancement of multi-modal access (i.e., pedestrian, bicycle, transit, vehicular) as a key strategic component to fostering economic development downtown. In particular, this will involve actions to create a more walk-able and bike-able urban setting for new development and redevelopment activities.

Consistent with several past planning efforts for revitalizing downtown, the Multi-Modal Access Program documented that a number of major urban renewal/highway projects stretching from the 1950s to the late 1970s, while improving higher-speed vehicle access, had impeded the ability to foster a lively, urbane street setting. Understanding this context, the Program led to the development of a series of projects to:

- Progressively and sensitively re-introduce street elements/characteristics in downtown Niagara Falls to facilitate more user-friendly pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access, while still maintaining acceptable levels of service for vehicles;
- Identify and advance context opportunities to better connect Niagara Falls State Park and waterfront areas to downtown Niagara Falls;
- Introduce urban design elements to the downtown streetscape to enhance the pedestrian experience and safety and to visually relate to features in Niagara Falls State Park;

- Simplify and calm traffic flows on routes serving downtown sites by providing multiple route choices and intuitive wayfinding for residents and tourists; and
- Suggest preliminary components of an overall City program of parking management to better address current and projected demand associated with future development opportunities and to better fit into the urban setting of downtown.

## **4.1.4 Transform the Niagara Street Precinct**

### ***Description***

The Niagara Street Precinct extends east from Third Street to John B. Daly Boulevard. Ultimately, a similar strategy would extend eastward toward Portage Road. Parking lots, blighted residential, vacant sites, and underutilized and derelict buildings characterize this portion of Niagara Street. Recent changes in the precinct include the establishment of the Seneca Gaming Corporate Offices in the former Niagara Office Building, and the construction of Seneca Niagara Casino parking ramps on the south side of Niagara Street.

### ***Project Strategy***

The Comprehensive 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 broad redevelopment goals on the north side of Niagara Street to take full advantage of the Seneca Niagara Casino adjacency. The City should encourage traditional cross-street retail shopping between north south streets. On the north side of the street, commercial lot depth and development density must be sufficient to allow for structured-parking solutions. This area along the north side of Niagara Street should be encouraged for renewal opportunities. In this corridor, the City should encourage consolidation of parcels along the street and there offer for redevelopment and housing renewal. Associated design guidelines would ensure appropriate built form and contribution to the creation of a vibrant mixed-use street. 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 would 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 neighborhoods will be important. A combination of commercial uses at grade and office and residential uses above would 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 a key to stabilizing the adjacent residential area to the north, attracting new residential investment, 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 mid-to-high-rise urban retail and residential environment on the Niagara Street Corridor, 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 mixed-use, 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 mixed-use 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 a full range of transportation options from parallel parking to furniture, access to and from the Casino District. The incorporation of parking structures as well as new streetscaping into the redesign would 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 would ensure the street is well used by residents and provide additional opportunities for visitors. These study elements must be carefully assessed in conjunction with a housing component, as well as a retail and merchandizing 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.

## **4.1.5 Create a New Neighborhood in the Daly Boulevard Precinct**

### ***Description***

The extension of John B. Daly Boulevard 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 Comprehensive 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 would eventually 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 would 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 would ameliorate the current back-lotting situation along the street.

The development of the properties fronting the extension would 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 supply. Live/work units and professional offices close to established commercial corridors, Niagara Street and Pine Avenue, would also contribute to increasing the vitality of the Core City. The extension of Daly Boulevard and the subsequent development of the properties along it would increase the value of adjacent residential properties and help to encourage reinvestment and renewal within the surrounding Memorial Park neighborhood. While a substantial amount of housing would be provided over time, the development should scale itself to avoid overwhelming the market. This would dramatically change 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 will be reasonably 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 would be extended north to connect with Pine Avenue as described above. Increased building setbacks from the edge of the right-of-way would allow for a generous landscape area on either side of the street extension that would 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 by Empire State Development, 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 emphasis 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 or issue a Request for Proposals to select an appropriate developer/builder to undertake phased implementation of renewal projects. 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] Park Place 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 would 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 Comprehensive 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 would bring new residents to the heart of the city, and a public/private partnership is spearheading the proposed reuse of the Old Customhouse 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 would 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 Comprehensive Plan supports designating portions of the [Wright Park] Park Place 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 would retain their unique residential character and would 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 would 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 would reinforce the distinct character and amenity of these districts. A high degree of design excellence should be promoted through urban and heritage design guidelines to ensure that 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] Park Place) 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 was completed in 2004. The City should continue its commitment to complete more phases of 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] Park Place and Buffalo Avenue as Heritage Districts**

Project type: Partnership and Management

Project priority: 0-5 years

The City of Niagara Falls should designate the Park Place [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] Park Place 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: 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 Park Place and Buffalo Avenue Heritage Districts. Improvements to the public realm would 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] Park Place 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 Comprehensive 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 15.

The gradual release of land for new housing would 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 would stabilize decline in neighborhoods that continue to accommodate housing, thereby raising the residential housing market to a more regionally competitive price point. This would 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 would 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



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.

should only be released through a Request for Qualifications process that sets out clear design standards and programmatic requirements for development, potential development 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 Comprehensive 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 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 Customhouse and North-Main Loft Precinct

#### *Description*

The Customhouse 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 Customhouse and North-Main Loft Precinct should be positioned and supported as a primary mixed-use main street offering authentic areas of historic fabric, community, neighborhood 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, would 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 Customhouse 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 16).

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 would 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, would 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 would 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, would 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 would 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 Customhouse 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 Comprehensive Plan recommends the following actions and initiatives to support the revitalization of this precinct area:

### ***Key Recommendations***

#### **1. Support the Reuse of the Customhouse 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 Customhouse 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 would 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) would be incorporated into the IRS-ITC. The Customhouse is a signature building and an excellent gateway into the city for those arriving by rail or from the north.

## **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 Customhouse and North-Main Loft Precinct, the undertaking of the redesign of the Robert Moses Parkway would 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 would 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 would 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 would 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), would provide an enhanced setting for further neighborhood renewal and investment.

## **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 Comprehensive 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 would 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 would 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 16). 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 would 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 would 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 would 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 11<sup>th</sup> Street together with targeted neighborhood rehabilitation, code enforcement and the clearance of slum and blight conditions between Main and 11<sup>th</sup> would 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, Niagara Street, and Main Street. It also includes the “Memorial Park neighborhood.” 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 Comprehensive 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 to better serve the local and tourism markets and integrating medium to high density residential in mixed-use projects that can be competitive within the larger regional market. A secondary study might look at the re-introduction of streetcars within the core city to connect the north-end with the south-end and facilitate ‘Transit Orientated Neighborhood Development’ schemes. While it is not imperative that these studies 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 core city generally and the precinct specifically. Figure 16 shows the context of this precinct among its immediate surroundings.



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.

### ***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

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.

#### **2. Undertake a focused study of the Memorial Park Neighborhood, in Partnership with Key Private Sector Stakeholders**

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

The study should:

- Develop a vision and strategy for the revitalization and growth of the neighborhood surrounding the Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center (NFMMC) and the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center (NACC).
- Address identified points of concern
- Provide recommendations for restoring the fabric and vibrancy of the neighborhoods surrounding these two major institutions.

## 4.2.4 Pine Avenue Precinct

### *Description*

The Pine Avenue Precinct reaches west to east from Main Street to Hyde Park Boulevard. This precinct overlaps and 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



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.



very positive addition to the Pine Avenue Precinct. A 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 Comprehensive 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 17.

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 would 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 would 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 would encourage residential reinvestment and the creation of a safe and healthy community context surrounding this important regional amenity. They would also help identify the center as a special place in the Core City. Streetscape, roadway and lighting improvements would improve the neighborhood setting of the existing facility and support a planned expansion of it on the block bound by Memorial Parkway, Ferry Street, 10<sup>th</sup> 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 north south 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 should be undergoing redevelopment with restaurant and nightclub uses that are in keeping with the precinct's entertainment-oriented image. Public assistance programs will also need to be developed to support business development in the precinct.

In addition, to the USA Niagara public realm and streetscaping strategy that seeks to strengthen the pedestrian quality of the street and encourage reinvestment in properties on Third Street, more Streetscaping improvements would need to be extended as storefronts fill and the precinct needs to expand onto Main Street and connecting with Cultural District improvements.

### ***Project Strategy***

The Comprehensive 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. Figure 17 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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] Park Place Heritage District

### *Description*

Focused on the intersection of Main Street and Pine Avenue, the [Wright Park] Park Place 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 16.

### *Project Strategy*

The Comprehensive 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 would retain its predominant residential use, enjoying a new relationship to the waterfront achieved through the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway. The district would 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



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

located in this district. Pine Avenue would continue to function as a residential street west of Main Street, while streetscape improvements would 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).

### **1. Designate Park Place [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] Park Place 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, would create a new pedestrian-friendly interface between the waterfront and the [Wright Park] Park Place Heritage District by establishing a high-quality public boulevard utilizing existing streets from Cedar Avenue including Third Street to Lower Main Street.

This section of the 'riverfront drive', fronting the [Wright Park] Park Place Heritage District and the Cultural District, would 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 would 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 would 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] Park Place**

Project type: Management, Design and Installation

Project priority: 5-15 years

Perhaps Veteran's Park could be re-named to better reflect history, and possibly expanded to include the property on the northwest corner of the Pine Avenue/Main Street intersection, which currently contains automobile services. High-quality heritage-themed landscaping and streetscaping would strengthen the space as a civic focal point and as a catalyst for revitalization. It would 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 the Park and may be augmented by additional high-quality public art in keeping with its historic character. Interpretation of the site should be incorporated into the park, with reference made to the historic resources located there. Such as the original Schoellkopf homestead site.

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

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.

Any 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, or any important Heritage District. The guidelines will reflect the importance of the heritage designation and ensure the character of the precinct is protected.

**6. Enhance Post Office Square**

Project type: Design and Design Guidelines and Installation  
Project priority: in conjunction with [Wright Park] Park Place expansion

Enhanced and/or expanded public space should be provided at or near the intersection of Walnut Avenue and Main Street to provide a forecourt to the US “Main” Post Office building. The intent is to establish a public open space capable of making the intersection more recognizable as an important node in the transportation network, and to complement an expanded Veteran’s Park to the northwest with high-quality landscaping reinforcing it as a public place. It would 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 (Niagara Falls [Reservation] State Park), John B. Daly Boulevard, Rainbow Boulevard, Sixth Street and Buffalo Avenue, or the alleys between them. 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' and inter-connection with the State Park. This District is shown in Figure 17.

### ***Project Strategy***

The Comprehensive 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 scale and character of heritage structures (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, would 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 would support renewal and reinvestment. The redesign of the Parkway would provide for appropriately scaled pedestrian and vehicular access to the riverfront open space. New street and pedestrian connections would 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 to ensure new buildings fit with the character of existing built form.

A transit and visitor orientation element located at or near the intersection of Buffalo Avenue, John B. Daly Boulevard or Rainbow Boulevard (see Section 5) would strengthen the importance of the precinct as a key point of entry into the city and be an important complement to future tourism development north and east of the district.

Intensification of the precinct over the long-term with additional tourist accommodations in the form of appropriately-scaled bed and breakfasts and boutique hotels, as well as new residential developments, would 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 structures, either at grade or in structured parking facilities. Opportunities to locate shared parking structures immediately adjacent 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

In the district and/or adjacent on Buffalo Avenue, John B. Daly Boulevard or Rainbow Boulevard is where a major visitor orientation center incorporating parking, transit facilities and year round visitor information services should be considered (see Section 5). Visitor orientation at or adjacent to the district, particularly closer to John B. Daly Boulevard could establish a control point for access to all major wayfinding routes and attractions within Niagara Falls. Introduction of such a center should take place in conjunction with long-term parking facilities; or in combination with other cultural or recreational facilities, and; the establishment/expansion of a visitor shuttle service with stops at major attractions and tourist amenities (see Section 5 and Figure 18).

### **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 would 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 streetscape finishing. It should be designed as a two-lane riverfront drive compatible with Olmsted's original design intent, including new tree plantings and sidewalks on both sides of the parkway and reinforcing the route as a place for pedestrians and fully integrated into the waterfront area.

The alignment of the new redesigned Parkway would link Prospect or Main Street and the more formalized Park entrance near Daly Boulevard. This alignment is consistent with the role of the roadway as an important public interface between the City and the Park designed to ensure that the City and its buildings are situated to present a 'front' to the redesigned parkway and the State Park. The redesigned parkway may continue to Daly Boulevard or it may connect to Buffalo Avenue via the existing Riverside Drive or new 'round-about.' The impacts to business associated with the potential disconnection at Daly Boulevard should be examined through a market impact assessment.

In addition, proposed new street connections would permit temporary street closures along portions of the new redesigned parkway to accommodate programmed events and festivals, while ensuring access and servicing needed to support local business and visitation. This portion of the new redesigned parkway or 'riverfront drive' would 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 create the Pedestrian Priority Zone as part of the land uses.

The re-configuration of the Parkway and its integration into the urban grid will allow the immediate removal of the ramps from John B. Daly Boulevard south of Buffalo Avenue and will allow the continued change of the Parkway as an expressway and arterial to a simple park-way and riverfront drive. A new traffic calming round-about or circle at, or near the Buffalo Avenue intersection would function as an entry to the downtown and transition to park and open space precincts. This new transportation feature would create a strong positive impression for visitors and encourage redevelopment of the many parcels currently found along Rainbow Boulevard and re-generation of the many vacant parcels along 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 would 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 historic structures and that the character of the precinct is protected.

## **4.2.8 [Seneca Niagara] Casino Precinct**

### ***Description***

The Casino Precinct encompasses lands subject to the State of New York-Seneca Nation Casino Compact. The precinct is approximately 50 acres and is bounded by Third Street on the west, Niagara Street on the north, J.B. Daly Boulevard on the east and Rainbow Boulevard on the south. It contains the casino resort operated by Seneca Gaming Corporation (SGC) was established by the Seneca Nation of Indians in August 2002 for the purpose of developing, constructing, leasing, operating, managing, maintaining, promoting and financing all of the Nation's gaming facilities within the precinct. Seneca Niagara Casino opened its doors on December 31, 2002 and opened a luxury hotel, the 26-story Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel, on December 30, 2005, with future expansions planned. St. Mary's RC Church is the only non-Seneca property within the precinct.

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. In addition, 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 Comprehensive Plan, including the design competition for and creation of a "Festival Square," improvements to the Old 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 would 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 coordinate 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. Ultimately, the built form of the Casino Precinct should as it develops become more integrated with the surrounding urban fabric.

#### **4.2.9 East Falls Street Redevelopment Area<sup>16</sup>**

##### ***Description***

The City of Niagara Falls and the Niagara Falls Urban Renewal Agency adopted a conceptual plan for East Falls Redevelopment Area. This plan is contained in the 1991 Urban Renewal Plan, which establishes URA land controls specific to high volume retail/tourism uses or uses complementary thereto. The “action area” is bounded by Niagara Street, Portage Road, Buffalo Avenue and John B. Daly Boulevard. The intent of the URA Plan was to acquire and “bank” properties within this area and to enter into a partnership for the purpose of significant redevelopment. 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 Falls and Casino Precincts together. Developers were and still are expected to make proposals for redevelopment subject to review and approval of a developer’s agreement and schedule by the NF-URA and the City of Niagara Falls.

##### ***Project Strategy***

The City of Niagara Falls should work very closely with prospective developers to ensure that East Falls Redevelopment Area 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 Comprehensive Plan has recommended a number of focused initiatives within the existing downtown, the Falls Precinct, the Cultural District and other Core City areas adjacent to the riverfront. It will be important to ensure that development propositions in the East Falls Redevelopment Area 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 East Falls Redevelopment Area is located within the Core City, it is located at some distance from the existing major assets, including the State Park, the Falls Precinct, the riverfront, the future Cultural District, and the new conference center. The East Falls Redevelopment Area will need to find its development niche in relation to the Casino Precinct that lies between it and the Falls. 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 immediately adjacent to the State park and/or existing areas of tourism and other activity centers (i.e. the Falls and Cultural Districts, Buffalo Avenue and Niagara Streets Precincts), development in East Falls Redevelopment Area 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,

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<sup>16</sup> Referred to previously in the 2004 *NF Strategic Master Plan* as “Lands Subject to Development Agreement”

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, large-scale residential development in the East Falls Redevelopment Area will likely have a detrimental effect on the ability to encourage needed housing renewal elsewhere in the Core City. At best, this would significantly delay private sector reinvestment in existing housing stock, thereby undermining other projects and programs intended to promote neighborhood renewal in the Core.

As with the Seneca Nation and the development of the compact lands, it is in the best interests of both developer 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 the City and its residents. Once development proposals come forward, 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.

The municipality also 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 east of John B. Daly Boulevard that could be redeveloped over time as market conditions permit. There should be a flexible development framework that is well connected to existing urban fabric and that can accommodate a mix of uses similar to those found elsewhere within the downtown commercial districts. 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 the value of the East Falls Area.

The City should require the preparation and implementation of urban design guidelines for all developments within the East Falls Redevelopment Area 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 higher standard of construction engineering, architecture 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 Aquarium of Niagara, and the Seneca Niagara 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 and performance of the State Park system, especially the reconfiguration 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 well 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 Comprehensive 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 proposed 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 corridors and park 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. This 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 other of amenities and attractions.

## **Arrival and Orientation**

In the short-term, visitors to the city would be directed into the city along the new riverfront drive (see Figure 18). As the quality and image of the western and southern edges of the Casino Precinct, Niagara Street, Rainbow Boulevard and Buffalo Avenue improves over time, visitors will be encouraged to use these routes to access other city districts as well. Improving traditional arterials and collector routes will offer greater commercial opportunities over time. Arrival routes should focus on creating opportunities to support the city's economic growth and prosperity. Over time the Robert Moses Parkway would be re-configured as a Pedestrian Priority Zone. In the short term, it would be the redesigned parkway, between John B. Daly Boulevard and Fourth Street, that would intermittently be closed to vehicular traffic to support special events, festivals or seasonal celebrations along the riverfront.

### **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 NYS-DOT, OPR&HP, USA Niagara Development Corporation, 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 Customhouse area, Rainbow Bridge, Pine Avenue, Main Street, the riverfront drive/John B. Daly Boulevard/Buffalo Avenue area. Well-marked visitor orientation centers at or close from these primary points of entry into 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 18 indicates suggested locations for a series of visitor orientation centers that offer easy access and a direct route into the Core City – the Old US Customhouse, Falls Street Plaza and the intersection of Buffalo Avenue and John B. Daly Boulevard. Visitor 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 Old Falls Street Promenade and vicinity 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 historic US Customhouse. The redevelopment of the (Old) Customhouse as a transit center is an important opportunity to create a critical mass of tourist amenities serving both train passengers and automobile traffic. Just as important, this important piece of infrastructure will add to the amenities of an expanding riverfront district while bolstering the commercial activity on North Main Street. New parking facilities, a visitor orientation element, and a visitor shuttle system connecting to the Casino District and downtown will bring additional functionality for all users.
- 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, or near the intersection of these streets. A relatively large site situated at the primary entryway into the core city and a visitor center 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 18 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 always add to the public 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 18) would provide new routes into the city and 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. Multimodal improvements in the Core are critical, but so are new improvements between modal connections—in particular, at the airport and at the railway station.

## **1. Pedestrian Priority Zones**

The Comprehensive Plan identifies a series of Pedestrian Priority Zones and connections (see Figure 18) 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, would 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 and city wide over time, connecting key points of interest, attractions and multiple local venues while providing an efficient alternative method of transportation alleviating automobile congestion and parking demands in the Core City. The shuttle system would connect tourists arriving at visitor information and orientation centers to amenities found in the Core City, to major attractions, and to transit stops and stations (see Figure 18). The shuttle system is an important tool for encouraging tourists to extend their visit by introducing them to areas of the city they were unaware 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 Comprehensive 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 19 and 20).

### **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 Comprehensive 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 would 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 would 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 Comprehensive 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 would 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 Comprehensive Plan, in conjunction with partnership agreements and the city’s capital budget process.

## **7. GENERAL CITYWIDE POLICIES**

The citywide policies presented in this section establish a broad framework for the revitalization of key components of the City's urban environment. Specifically, the citywide strategies have been organized into the following nine policy areas:

1. Land Use;
2. Historic Resources;
3. Built Environment;
4. Environmental and Open Space Resources;
5. Transportation;
6. Economic Development and Tourism Development;
7. Housing;
8. Brownfield/Greyfield Development; and
9. Waterfront Development.

Each of the above 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 Policies, 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.

### ***How to Use***

The general citywide policies contained in this section should be consulted regularly for the broadest level of citywide policy guidance, particularly in the absence of any plan or study pertaining to a particular issue or area. The policies should also be used as a guide and catalyst for additional studies and area- and/or issue-specific plans, which should be considered as amendments to the Comprehensive Plan.

At the same time, the citywide strategies serve as a guide for developing future plans, and even the most detailed policy or strategy from an issue- or area-specific plan should be able to trace its origin back to a general policy in this section of the Comprehensive Plan. Therefore, there should be no conflict between the citywide policies in this section and more detailed area- or issue-specific plans that may ensue; the policies and strategies of the latter simply address a given issue or area in a more detailed manner than the former.

### ***Consistency***

It is neither possible nor desirable for a citywide policy document, such as the Comprehensive Plan, to anticipate every potential circumstance or development scenario that may arise. By its very nature, the Comprehensive Plan will simultaneously contain numerous competing and/or overlapping policies. General citywide policies must be considered and weighed according to the particular situation at hand. While adopted policies and actions should be adhered to and followed, common sense will dictate their application in particular situations.

As already mentioned, area- or issue-specific plans can be undertaken to provide additional clarity and certainty, when needed. Such plans should derive from and be consistent with one or more of the general citywide policies in this section of the Comprehensive Plan, but will address specific needs and circumstances of a particular area or issue in more detail. The policies and strategies set forth in an adopted area- or issue-specific plan should be viewed as a refinement of the broader policies contained in this document. In the event of a perceived conflict, the policy or action recommended in an adopted area- and/or issue-specific plan should take precedence over its more generalized counterpart in the Comprehensive Plan.

### ***Citywide Policies***

Preceding each policy area is a general policy statement. The general policy statement is a broad statement of the City's approach to addressing and solidifying the policy area. The main policy areas are: land use, historic resources, the built environment, environmental and open space resources, transportation, economic development and tourism, housing, brownfield/greyfield development, and waterfront development.

Within each policy area, specific goals have been identified, and where applicable, action items for each goal are given. As stated earlier, these should be reassessed and revised time to time to ensure their compatibility and relevance to the City's vision for its future as it evolves over time.

## **7.1 POLICY AREA 1 LAND USE**

### **General Policy Statement:**

*It is the City's policy to ensure that the City's vision for development is supported by appropriate land use policies and regulations, and that the City pursue a fine-grained, mixed use approach to land use that respects the existing character of healthy, stable neighborhoods, while allowing the City to grow and revitalize. In order to achieve this, the City sets the following policies:*

- Policy 7.1.1** Conserve and strengthen existing residential neighborhoods (see Figure 21).
- Action 1** *Promote development that rehabilitates existing housing stock within city neighborhoods.*
- Policy 7.1.2** Encourage a pattern for new development that incorporates a mix of uses at a variety of densities.
- Policy 7.1.3** Pursue a “fine grained” approach to land use that allows uses to mix and benefit from one another.
- Policy 7.1.4** Strengthen the Core City by encouraging higher density development that encompasses a mix of uses that supplies services to residents, especially to adjacent neighborhoods, as well as to tourists.
- Policy 7.1.5** Encourage development that supports an accessible waterfront from waterfront adjacent districts which offer a mix of uses and connections to other land use districts – such as nearby neighborhoods, parks, greenways or trails, etc.
- Policy 7.1.6** Maintain and enhance natural areas and open space while also providing connections and which may promote alternative forms of transportation.
- Policy 7.1.7** Encourage commercial and light industrial uses only where most appropriate.
- Policy 7.1.8** Encourage and support alternative or interim land uses and creative site planning solutions in vacant and/or underutilized industrial areas that support the City's overall renewal vision and strategy.
- Policy 7.1.9** Retain public sector functions, uses, and institutions in centralized locations.
- Action 1** *Coordinate with the operators of public uses (i.e., school board, United States Postal Service, library system, municipal government) to rethink relocation and decentralization plans.*

- Policy 7.1.10** Coordinate the City’s land use vision with its transportation policies and projects to encourage and support the connection between development and transportation for both resident and tourist populations.
- Policy 7.1.11** Employ land use policy to solve and prevent transportation related issues, such as traffic congestion and land use related issues, such as parking.
- Policy 7.1.12** Undertake and adopt future area- and/or issue-specific plans, as needed.

**7.2 POLICY AREA 2 HISTORIC RESOURCES**

**General Policy Statement:**

*It is the City’s policy to protect, enhance, and capitalize on the City’s unique historical, cultural, natural, and architectural heritage resources and structures. In order to achieve this, the City sets the following policies:*

- Policy 7.2.1** Identify and protect the City’s cultural, natural, and historic resources and structures.

- Action 1** Establish districts that protect historic and architecturally significant resources, such as heritage, preservation and historic overlay districts.*

- Action 2** Evaluate the City’s policy on demolitions.*

- Action 3** Expand the role of the Niagara Falls Historic Preservation Commission to include advisory review of development in heritage districts.*

- Policy 7.2.2** Identify, conserve and replicate successful, historic elements of design in existing neighborhoods, including both new development and reinvestment in existing structures and infrastructure:

- Action 1** Establish heritage districts.*

- Action 2** Revise and fine tune City’s zoning and land use regulations to permit and encourage desirable historic development patterns.*

- Policy 7.2.3** Encourage the adaptive reuse of historic structures.

*Examples: Carolyn’s House; the conversion of the Old Customhouse to a train station; the conversion of the Pine Avenue High school to the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center (NACC).*

**Action 1** *Identify and create levels of flexibility for land use, zoning and building code requirements, where appropriate, to encourage reuse of heritage resources and structures.*

**Action 2** *Encourage the rehabilitation and restoration of historic resources and structures.*

**Policy 7.2.4** Celebrate and interpret the City's many historic, cultural, and archeological heritage resources.

**Action 1** *Make historic districts and heritage areas distinct by providing them with unified design themes that set them apart from the rest of the City.*

**Action 2** *Coordinate with local historic preservation and landmark organizations to organize historic oriented educational and entertainment events.*

**Action 3** *Create public awareness of the City's many historic, cultural, and archeological resources and structures through education and public events.*

### **7.3 POLICY AREA 3 BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

#### **General Policy Statement:**

*It is the City's policy to foster a built environment that respects the City's historic architecture and design while allowing for new development and growth that possesses a high level of architectural integrity, fosters a pedestrian-friendly environment, and respects the City's important natural, scenic, and open space resources. In order to achieve this, the City sets the following policies:*

**Policy 7.3.1** Maintain and replicate the City's scale and urban form where appropriate, while creating opportunities for increased densities elsewhere.

**Action 1** *Utilize floor to area ratio (FAR) to ensure proper density and promote flexibility in design.*

**Action 2** *Devise design guidelines for specific neighborhoods that outline the massing and scale requirements for development, as well as identifying specific design and architectural elements for each such neighborhood.*

**Policy 7.3.2** Enhance the City's streetscape and important gateways to and from neighborhoods.



**Action 1** *Develop conceptual guidelines to define gateways using signs, plantings, architectural landmarks and other design features.*

**Policy 7.3.3** Enhance the pedestrian environment and experience through design and amenities that support pedestrian movements, for both the able and disabled population.

**Action 1** *Develop and incorporate pedestrian oriented design guidelines into the construction of new buildings, roads and other City infrastructure and projects.*

**Action 2** *Discourage and/or prohibit surface parking lots in the Core City.*

**Action 3** *Incorporate retail and other uses into the exteriors of public parking structures.*

**Policy 7.3.4** Protect the City's scenic views and encourage development that complements the City's natural resources and its desired community character.

**Action 1** *Develop design guidelines for high-rise architecture that is complementary to existing scenic resources*

**Policy 7.3.5** Mitigate the negative impacts of vacant and abandoned properties.

**Action 1** *Encourage programs that support façade and window improvements that mitigate the negative impacts of transitional and/or vacant storefronts.*

**Action 2** *Encourage interim landscaped areas on vacant sites as temporary uses to enhance the image of the area.*

**Action 3** *Develop the capacity to properly create and manage landscapes.*

**Policy 7.3.6** Focus City funds for infrastructure repairs and maintenance to areas identified as necessary to support the City's renewal and revitalization efforts and to better align service delivery and maintenance of the City's infrastructure with actual needs until new growth requires renewed expansion and investment.

**Policy 7.3.7** Limit height and density along the waterfront in order to protect and maintain the natural context and experience of the river setting while maximizing the availability of scenic views.

## 7.4 POLICY AREA 4 ENVIRONMENTAL AND OPEN SPACE RESOURCES

### **General Policy Statement:**

*It is the City's policy to preserve, conserve, and recognize the environmental and natural resources of the City in a manner that contributes to the City's overall quality of life, enhances public health, and fosters appropriate development. In order to achieve this, the City will (see also Figure 22):*

**Policy 7.4.1** Limit the potential for cumulative and secondary impact of development and other activities on water, air, and land quality and quantity.

**Action 1** *Ensure that proposed development or redevelopment is subject to development review that seeks to protect important environmental areas or resources.*

**Action 2** *Devise a citywide tree program for the protection, replacement, and maintenance of city trees.*

**Action 3** *At a minimum, ensure that the City's thresholds and standards for evaluating impacts to natural resources are consistent with those set forth by the federal, county, and state agencies with jurisdiction over such resources.*

**Policy 7.4.2** Provide connections and public access, where appropriate, between development and natural areas, parks, and recreation areas within the City, as well as to regional connections of these resources outside of the City.

**Action 1** *Devise an open space and recreation plan that outlines the City's goals for specific open spaces and recreational areas and looks to provide connections between these resources.*

**Action 2** *Improve Gill Creek as a ecological connection*

Gill Creek should be strengthened as an important environmental resource and 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 perhaps 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.

- Policy 7.4.3** Ensure that there is an adequate supply of permanently protected natural areas, open space, and recreation resources.
- Action 1** *Evaluate and consider the adoption of a development impact fee that is dedicated to the acquisition of open space and recreational resources.*
- Policy 7.4.4** Protect and enhance the city’s waterfront from degradation and damage associated with new development.
- Policy 7.4.5** Guide development into the Core City to protect the city’s natural resources and to provide an efficient level and cost of services to residents.
- Policy 7.4.6** Preserve important viewsheds and corridors with scenic views.
- Action 1** *Continue to map and identify scenic views from specific highpoints within the city as well as along corridors and then prioritize these for protection.*
- Action 2** *Create scenic overlay districts within the city’s zoning to address the protection of scenic views and corridors.*
- Policy 7.4.7** Protect, maintain, and enhance the city’s open space resources, parks, and natural environment.
- Action 1** *Devise a citywide tree ordinance for the protection, replacement, and maintenance of city trees.*
- Action 2** *Implement the strategies for open space connections as outlined in the Comprehensive Plan.*
- Action 3** *Identify opportunities for the use of natural open space areas for passive recreation uses.*
- Action 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 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.

More Comprehensive greenway planning is needed to include the parks assets at the northern end of the gorge - Hole/Whirlpool State Park, Earl Bridges Art Park.

**Action 5** *Develop a Citywide Parks Plan*

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.

**Policy 7.4.8** Acknowledge and enhance the city's primary open space network and resources as valuable new public infrastructure.

**Action 1** *Develop a Citywide Parks Plan*

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 recreational 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.

**Policy 7.4.9** 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:

- Action 1** *Lead and actively support efforts to designate the Niagara River corridor a National Heritage Area*
- Action 2** *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*
- Action 3** *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*
- Action 4** *Participate in the identification funding mechanisms and partnerships for the Heritage Area*
- Action 5** *As soon as possible, 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*

**Policy 7.4.10** 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.

## **7.5 POLICY AREA 5 TRANSPORTATION**

### **General Policy Statement:**

*It is the City's policy to encourage and provide a citywide transportation system that facilitates connections between multiple modes of transportation; is safe, efficient, affordable, user friendly and accessible to residents, tourists, and others; and that provides a viable alternative to the use of the private automobile, and encourages walking and bicycling which in turn decreases the need for large parking facilities. In order to achieve this, the City sets the following policies (see also Figure 23):*

- Policy 7.5.1** Offer choices between multiple modes of transportation so that residents and tourists can choose to travel and move about and through the City in many different ways.

*Examples: Mode choice includes walking, bicycling, taking a bus, taxi, train, tram, rickshaw or any other transportation mode.*

**Policy 7.5.2** Coordinate land use and transportation policies.

**Action 1** *Develop land use regulations that include provision for multiple modes of transportation in consideration of site plan review.*

**Action 2** *Ensure that transportation considerations are built into the site plan review process.*

**Action 3** *Focus higher density and mixed-use development in transit accessible locations.*

**Action 4** *Coordinate with federal, state, county, and local transportation entities/departments to implement the City's land use, development and transportation policies.*

**Policy 7.5.3** Favor and nurture pedestrian environments over automobile environments, if required at all, and utilize design standards to camouflage parking through design and landscaping.

**Action 1** *Emphasize a pedestrian and bicyclist friendly and oriented urban built form over parking.*

**Action 2** *Emphasize the destination (i.e., Core City, shopping and entertainment districts, heritage areas) over the parking facilities that serve the destination.*

**Action 3** *Place parking to the rear or sides of buildings within the Core City and historic areas.*

**Action 4** *Establish landscaping and screening requirements for parking facilities.*

**Action 5** *Reduce and/or eliminate off-street parking requirements and/or establish maximums in mixed-use, higher density areas.*

**Action 6** *Incorporate pedestrian friendly, streetscape enhancing elements (such as retail, landscaping, windows, etc.) into the design of parking facilities.*

**Policy 7.5.4** Encourage walking and bicycling as viable alternate modes of transportation.

**Action 1** *Coordinate with GBNRTC's bicycle and pedestrian program for technical support in devising a citywide bicycle and pedestrian plan.*

**Action 2** *Incorporate new or enhance existing bicycle and pedestrian pathways and amenities in new development or in redevelopment projects.*

**Action 3** *Utilize traffic calming measures to create a safe pedestrian and bicyclist environment.*

**Policy 7.5.5** Promote transit supportive development.

**Action 1** *Encourage a development pattern that incorporates a mix of uses at a variety of densities, which in turn limits the need and demand for parking and unnecessary automobile trips, while supporting the use of public transportation.*

**Policy 7.5.6** Ensure that the public transit system is designed to be a system of “choice” rather than a system of “last resort.”

**Action 1** *Make the transit system easy to use for both discretionary riders and those that depend upon it.*

**Action 2** *Provide information such as route maps, schedules, and route number information/signage at every step of the transit experience: on the Internet, at the transit stop, and en route.*

**Policy 7.5.7** Reduce opportunities for transportation conflicts, both within and between modes.

**Action 1** *Reduce excessive curb cuts.*

**Action 2** *Encourage and/or require shared parking facilities with cross access easements between commercial properties.*

**Action 3** *Incorporate design elements into transportation projects that establish boundaries and hierarchies for the various modes (i.e., colored and textured pavers to indicate a crosswalk, striped bicycle lanes, signage for transit stops, etc.)*

**Policy 7.5.8** Employ alternative approaches to traffic and congestion management than traditional limited access, highway approaches.

**Action 1** *Encourage new road development that completes the street grid and connects the City’s neighborhoods together and also reduces traffic congestion by dispersing automobile traffic over a large, integrated network.*

**Action 2** *Discourage cul-de-sacs in new development by requiring that all roads connect to the existing street grid or will provide such a connection in the future as development occurs.*



**Policy 7.5.9** Balance the needs of multiple modes of transportation to move both “through” the City and “within” the City.

**Action 1** *Evaluate where transportation corridors and infrastructure creates barriers to human interaction, and find ways to remove or mitigate such barriers.*

**Action 2** *Discourage one-way traffic patterns for major streets in the Core City.*

**Policy 7.5.10 Mitigate the Negative Impacts of Past Transportation Choices**

**Action 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. Conceptual redesign of the parkway has been explored in several planning studies and is discussed again in Section 4.1.1.

**Action 2** *Redesign LaSalle Expressway*

The State of New York DOT is scheduled to undertake reconstruction of the LaSalle Expressway. The City should examine all options for its redesign and re-integration, including an at-grade configuration at both the west and east end termini. The City of Niagara Falls should actively participate in this study to advocate for a roadway of not more than four lanes (two lanes in either direction). An at-grade terminus design, which connects to local streets at either end will better integrate the north/south and east/west expressways into the urban street network. Additionally, the Expressway right-of-way offers sufficient land to integrate the Niagara River Greenway Trail (the city’s recreational trail) alongside the roadway from the I-190 to Griffon Park and the eastern city boundary where it would link with a Wheatfield segment of the trail.

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

## **7.6 POLICY AREA 6 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM**

### **General Policy Statement:**

*It is the City's policy to ensure that the City's economy is comprised of and supported by a diverse mixture of businesses and that the City's land use, zoning and development policies are supportive of economic growth, including the development and expansion of the tourism industry, cultural resources and the health care sector. In order to achieve this, the City sets the following policies:*

**Policy 7.6.1** Work actively to retain existing businesses and jobs and to promote and strengthen a mixed economy.

**Actions 1** *Collaborate with the private, not-for-profit, and government sectors to support existing businesses, attract future development, and conduct joint marketing.*

**Action 2** *Work with neighboring communities, regional agencies, and state government to promote land use and development policies that support the City's role as a regional tourist, travel, and economic area for Western New York.*

**Action 3** *Redefine the City as a more complex and diverse regional center.*

**Action 4** *Diversify the economy and move beyond historical reliance on heavy industry.*

**Action 5** *Expand 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.*

**Action 6** *Establish partnerships between educational institutions in the region, industry organizations and business development agencies as a means of providing on-going training and professional development programs for existing employees.*

**Policy 7.6.2** Promote and support locally owned and controlled small businesses.

**Policy 7.6.3** Coordinate the City's land use and zoning policies with the City's economic development vision.

**Policy 7.6.4** Pursue and support programs, institutions and activities aimed at the promotion and development of retraining programs, facilities and satellite facilities within key growth sectors.

**Policy 7.6.5** Retain and attract a broader population to Niagara Falls, including young families and young adults.

**Action 1** *Develop and market the Core City and special neighborhood districts, such as Little Italy, as unique, high value and attractive places to developers, residents and visitors.*

**Action 2** *Provide tax or incentive programs to jumpstart positive change in the City.*

**Action 3** *Re-configuring suburban style offerings and amenities currently found in the Core City to support a high-quality urban identity.*

**Action 4** *Focus 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.*

**Policy 7.6.6** Encourage incremental, holistic and broad based approaches to improving the City's quality of life that pay off in the long term, rather than focusing on large scale, "silver bullet" projects.

**Policy 7.6.7** Acknowledge the importance and uniqueness of the City's traditional commercial and retail corridors and activity areas, such as Main Street, Pine Avenue, Niagara Street and Third Street, and support these corridors.

**Policy 7.6.8** Coordinate activities and development ventures with the Seneca Nation to maximize mutual economic benefit and ensure every project fully contributes to positive change within the city without precluding future opportunities.

**Action 1** *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.*

**Action 2** *Work together to develop a joint Master Plan for the compact lands and immediately surrounding areas to facilitate and coordinate the long-term objectives of both the City and the Nation.*

**Policy 7.6.9** Coordinate activities and development ventures with the Seneca Nation to maximize mutual economic benefit and ensure every project fully contributes to positive change within the city without precluding future opportunities.

**Action 1** *Provide visitor information centers and enhances tourist amenities and other services.*

**Action 2** *Providing an intuitive and, user-friendly transit system.*

**Action 3** *Encouraging visitors to explore the City on foot.*

**Action 4** *Preserve, protect, and connect the City's open space assets and environmental resources that are the foundation of the tourist economy – especially between the City and its waterfront.*

**Policy 7.6.10** Use historic preservation as an economic development tool.

**Action 1** *Encourage 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.*

**Action 2** *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.*

**Action 3** *Incorporate the City's historic resources into the tourism marketing approach.*

**Policy 7.6.11** Support the development of high quality education at all levels.

**Action 1** *Establish partnerships to support development and advancement of educational streams*

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

**Action 3** *Establish new educational opportunities for science or the arts.*

**Action 4** *Encourage the location of satellite campuses for institutions of higher learning within the City.*

**Action 5** *Address the education and community needs within the City to begin to attract residents back to the City and provide a support base for business and economic development.*

## **7.7 POLICY AREA 7 HOUSING**

### **General Policy Statement:**

*It is the City's policy to provide access to housing that is safe, decent, and affordable for all residents of the City and to have neighborhoods that are a source of community pride. In order to achieve this, the City will:*

**Policy 7.7.1** Encourage a diverse and healthy housing stock and housing market.

**Action 1** *Create and enforce site plan review and residential development guidelines for different types of residential development in neighborhoods that will encourage new and infill development that is high quality and that creates housing in a character similar to that desired by the neighborhood.*

**Action 2** *Rehabilitate existing housing stock and create infill development that provides a mix of densities in appropriate locations.*

**Action 3** *Identify and assemble properties for future residential development and ensure that interim planning and development decisions support future housing in such locations.*

**Action 4** *Support and implement programs that will assist in upgrading the existing housing stock to ensure that residents are not living in substandard housing.*

**Policy 7.7.2** Support the development of additional housing opportunities within the City, with concentrations of higher density development in the

Core City portion of downtown and around the activity centers of surrounding neighborhoods.

**Action 1** *Develop zoning code language for the Core City that allows for increases in density for development, including housing options for City residents.*

**Policy 7.7.3** Encourage a mix of housing options to meet the different needs of households, such as the elderly, households with children, people with disabilities, and low-income households.

**Policy 7.7.4** Halt and reverse the decline in the residential housing market.

**Action 1** *Strictly and rigorously enforce housing code violations and fast track prosecution of violators.*

**Action 2** *Expand and fast track blight clearance initiatives.*

**Action 3** *Reduce the oversupply of derelict housing units to stabilize the market at more normative and regionally competitive values.*

**Action 4** *Conserve vacant, historic housing stock that can be renovated in the future, as an alternative to demolition.*

**Policy 7.7.5** Capitalize on the City's supply of affordable, "under-valued," historic housing.

**Action 1** *Market housing stock to potential owner-occupants in the region and beyond.*

**Policy 7.7.6** Broaden existing programs into a more a comprehensive set of neighborhood and housing renewal programs, such as:

- a) Residential property maintenance programs, such as façade improvement programs, intended to encourage investment in private residential properties;
- b) Residential tax incentive programs aimed at encouraging new residents to purchase and invest in Core City or target residential properties;
- c) Employer assisted housing programs offering financial (i.e. mortgage) support to employees residing in Niagara Falls or those looking to move into the City, and/or;
- d) 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 a "municipal reserve," or land-bank.

- Policy 7.7.7** Promote, support and/or undertake residential development and/or conversion projects to increase the population within the Core City  
**Action 1** *Promote home ownership programs for all buyers in the market*

## **7.8 POLICY AREA 8 BROWNFIELD/GREYFIELD REDEVELOPMENT**

### **Policy Statement:**

*It is the City's policy to encourage the reuse and revitalization of vacant and/or underutilized industrial properties through the re-establishment of industrial uses, or the conversion of such properties to new uses that further the City's land use and development vision. In order to achieve this, the City sets the following policies:*

- Policy 7.8.1** Pursue existing federally funded brownfield remediation programs.
- Policy 7.8.2** Identify priority remediation areas, particularly along the riverfront and along entrances to the City, for remediation and redevelopment programs.
- Policy 7.8.3** Implement short term, improvements to reduce the visual impact of prominent brownfield sites.
- Policy 7.8.4** Improve the visual appearance of the edges of industrial areas adjacent to residential areas.
- Policy 7.8.5** Evaluate potential for alternative uses in industrial areas, such as residential, retail and office.
- Policy 7.8.6** Develop an aggressive targeted marketing program that matches available industrial properties and structures with potential users.

## **7.9 POLICY AREA 9 WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT**

### **Policy Statement:**

*After decades of technical planning and public discussion, Niagara Falls is on a firm foundation for immediate action. City projects put forth in our award-winning Achieving Niagara Falls' Future: Waterfront Agenda are feasible, have citizen support and, taken together, will have transformative impact for the City of Niagara Falls. The strategy that connects our waterfront projects is driven by three base principles:*

- *First, re-connect Niagara Falls – its downtown and neighborhoods alike – with the Niagara River waterfront.*
- *Second, repair and improve both, the natural environments for greater ecological function and benefit, as well as the urban environments for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.*
- *Third, develop the means to tell the compelling stories of the city and region to build the visitor industry and create meaning for those who live here.*

*It is the City's policy therefore, to reconnect the City to its waterfront and to protect and enhance the City's waterfront resources. In order to achieve this, the City sets the following policies, which are consistent with all relevant New York State Coastal Management policies as written in the City's draft Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP):*

**Policy 7.9.1** Develop the Niagara waterfront, the Falls, Gorge and River, as a great public space of international significance.

**Action 1** *Lead in the development of the Niagara River Greenway*

**Action 2** *Lead in the development of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area*

**Policy 7.9.2** Encourage waterfront development that supports an active, urban waterfront by offering a mix of uses, public access, and connections to other land uses – such as nearby neighborhoods, greenways, trails, etc.

**Action 1** *Restore, revitalize, and redevelop deteriorated and underutilized waterfront areas.*

**Action 2** *Facilitate the siting of water-dependent and water-enhanced uses on or adjacent to coastal waters, and give priority over non-water-related uses along the river shore.*

**Action 3** *Protect, maintain, and increase the level and types of access to public water-related recreation resources and facilities.*

**Action 4** *Encourage the location of development in areas where public services and facilities essential to such development are adequate.*



**Action 5** *Create a bicycle and pedestrian trail system along the waterfront that provides intuitive access to and from the City proper.*

**Policy 7.9.3** Protect, enhance or restore the unique qualities and characteristics of the Niagara River —as the fundamental building block and encourage development that only complements this resource.

**Action 1** *Protect and restore Significant coastal and wildlife habitats whenever feasible.*

**Action 2** *Protect, restore, or enhance scenic views and vistas, which contribute to the overall scenic quality of the coastal area.*

**Action 3** *Minimize the damage to natural resources from development activities, particularly the introduction of hazardous waste and other pollutants.*

**Action 4** *Conserve and protect agricultural lands in the State's coastal area.*

**Policy 7.9.4** Create a Heritage Corridor Framework to develop, interpret, link and promote a wide range of natural, historical, cultural, architectural and other attractions as a regional destination to extend visitation in the Niagara Region.

**Policy 7.9.5** Activities or development in the coastal area will be undertaken so as to minimize damage to natural resources, property from flooding, and erosion by protecting natural protective features

**Policy 7.9.6** Develop attractive and understandable modes of access along the entire waterfront that establish clear links between destinations.

**Action 1** *Protect, maintain, and increase the level and types of access to (public, water-related) recreation resources and facilities.*

**Policy 7.9.7** Mining, excavation or dredging in coastal waters shall not significantly interfere with the natural coastal processes.

**Policy 7.9.8** Best management practices will be used to ensure the control of storm-water run-off and combined sewer overflows.

**Action 1** *Non-point discharge of excess nutrients, organics, and eroded soils will be minimized*

**Policy 7.9.10** Protect, enhance and restore structures districts, areas or sites that are of significance in the history, architecture, archaeology or culture of the City.

**Action 1** *Protect, enhance, and restore structures, districts, areas, or sites that are of significance in the history, architecture, archaeology or culture of the State, the City of Niagara Falls, or the nation.*

**Policy 7.9.11** Decisions to the siting and construction of major energy facilities in the waterfront area will be based on public energy needs, compatibility of such facilities with the environment, and the facility's need for a shorefront location.

**Policy 7.9.12** Safeguard the vital economic, social, and environmental interests of the State and of its citizens, proposed major actions in the coastal area must give full consideration to those interests, and to the safeguards which the State has established to protect valuable coastal resource areas.

## **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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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.
- **Comprehensive Plan Literature:** A brochure or larger poster outlining the key themes and primary goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan, as well as key renewal projects, strategies, programs and initiatives will be very useful in promoting increased awareness and knowledge concerning the Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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.



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

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.

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 Comprehensive Plan is an aggressive one; however, this end goal must first be defined in order to initiate the appropriate 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 Comprehensive Plan, leadership is required at all levels, beginning with the City Council and the City administration, 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 Comprehensive 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. And, while some tough decisions must be made along the way, 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 Comprehensive 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 East Falls Street Redevelopment Area.
- Revise current zoning, as appropriate, to reflect the heights recommended in the Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 and timely for financial contributions to enhance the public realm as well. However, it is the Core City that will likely leverage citywide renewal.
- Establish policies that require all capital works projects to conform to the Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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 Comprehensive 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.

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# **APPENDIX A**

PRECEDENT  
PLANNING STUDIES  
AND DOCUMENTS

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In preparing the Comprehensive Plan many planning studies and reports can be considered as “guiding” or “contributing,” particularly those documents, in whole or in part, which offer continuing relevance, consistent themes or principles, and have maintained general support within the general public and as such are part of the evolution in vision and strategic planning reflected herein. While the Niagara Falls City’s Comprehensive Plan and the Strategic Master Plan that preceded it take a more comprehensive approach, others plans have addressed specific issues, neighborhoods, precincts, or areas. The precedent studies listed below provide context for this plan and insight into the intent of the municipality and its residents in the preparation (and adoption) of this Comprehensive Plan, its policies, its priorities, and its recommendations.

These studies are:

- Niagara Waterfront Master Plan (Sasaki Associates: 1992)
  - Niagara’s Future: A Citizens’ Vision for Niagara Falls and Region (Waterfront Regeneration trust: 1997)
  - A Developer Master Plan for Downtown Niagara Falls (Jerde Partnership: 1998)
  - The City of Niagara Falls’ Main Street Business District Revitalization Plan (Parsons: 1998)
  - Highland Area Redevelopment Plan (City of Niagara Falls: 1999)
  - Main Street Business District Revitalization Study (City of Niagara Falls: 2001)
  - Rethinking the Niagara Frontier: A Report on the Continuing Binational Forum (The Urban Design Project: 2001)
  - USA Niagara Development Strategy: A Blueprint for Revitalization of Downtown Niagara Falls (Hunter Associates: 2002)
  - Achieving Niagara Falls’ Future – An Assessment of Niagara Falls’ Waterfront Planning (Urban Design Project: 2002)
  - Strategic Transportation Directions (GBNRTC: 2003)
  - Niagara Falls Strategic Master Plan (Urban Strategies: 2004)
  - City of Niagara Falls Local Waterfront Revitalization Program Draft (CNF: 2004)
  - USA Niagara Development Corporation Multi-Modal Access Program (PB America: 2005)
  - Niagara Falls International Train Station and Intermodal Transportation Center Project [Design Report] (Wendel-Duchscherer: 2006, 2008)
  - Niagara River Greenway Plan (Wendel-Duchscherer: 2006)
  - Niagara River Greenway Vision and Project Proposals (CNF: 2006) [*Achieving Niagara Falls’ Future* — update]
  - Revisioning Brownfields: A Regional Strategic Approach (Saratoga Associates: 2007)
  - Niagara Falls Strategic Transportation Plan — Draft Final Report (Wendel-Duchscherer: 2008)
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## **APPENDIX B**

FIGURES & GENERAL  
PLANNING AREAS MAP

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## Figures and Map Table

FIGURE #	TITLE
1	Study Area: City of Niagara Falls and Core City Boundaries
2	Existing Conditions and Primary Land Uses
3	Existing Core City Structure
4	Bi-national Region
5	Core City Vision Plan: A 20-Year Look Forward
6	Core City Vision: Some Big Moves are needed to unlock the tremendous potential of the future
7	Core City Vision: Priority Initiatives within the Core City
8	Core City Vision: Urban Structure
9	The Big Moves: Reconnecting the City to its Waterfront
10	The Big Moves: Reconnecting the City to its Waterfront – Proposed Image and Character in the Customhouse and North-Main Loft Precinct
11	The Big Moves: Cultural District
12	The Big Moves: Proposed Image and Character in the Cultural District
13	The Big Moves: The Falls Precinct
14	The Big Moves: Niagara Street Precinct and Daly Boulevard Extension
15	The Big Moves: The release of consolidated land banked areas for new housing and commercial parking can support existing commercial corridors, such as Third Street
16	Precinct Strategies: Customhouse and North-Main Loft Precinct, Main Street Revitalization, Middle Main Street Precinct, Wright Park Heritage District and Portage Precinct
17	Precinct Strategies: Pine Avenue Precinct, Third Street Precinct and Buffalo Avenue Heritage District
18	Tourism: Arrival and Orientation
19	Priority Initiatives within the Core City: Short-term Projects for Implementation (first 5 years)
20	Priority Initiatives within the Core City: Long-term Projects for Implementation (5 to 15 years)
21	General Citywide Strategies: Existing Housing Conditions
22	General Citywide Strategies: Proposed Open Space System
23	General Citywide Strategies: Proposed Transportation System
--	Planning Areas Bubble Map

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

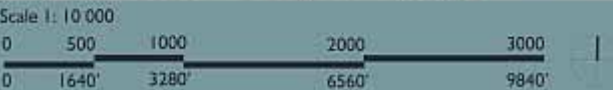


Figure 2. Existing Conditions and Primary Land Uses

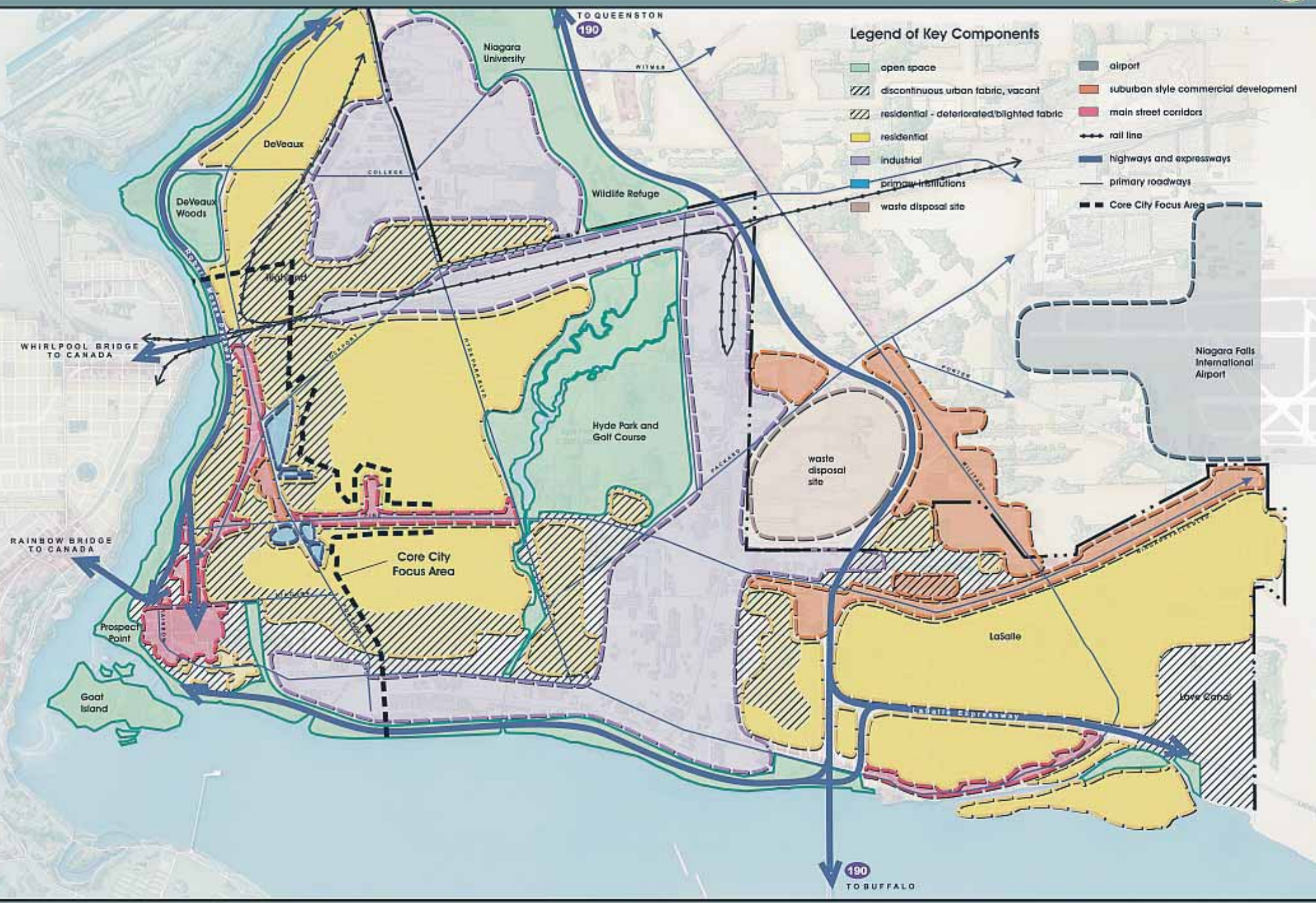


Figure 3. Existing Core City Structure

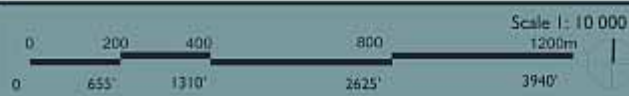
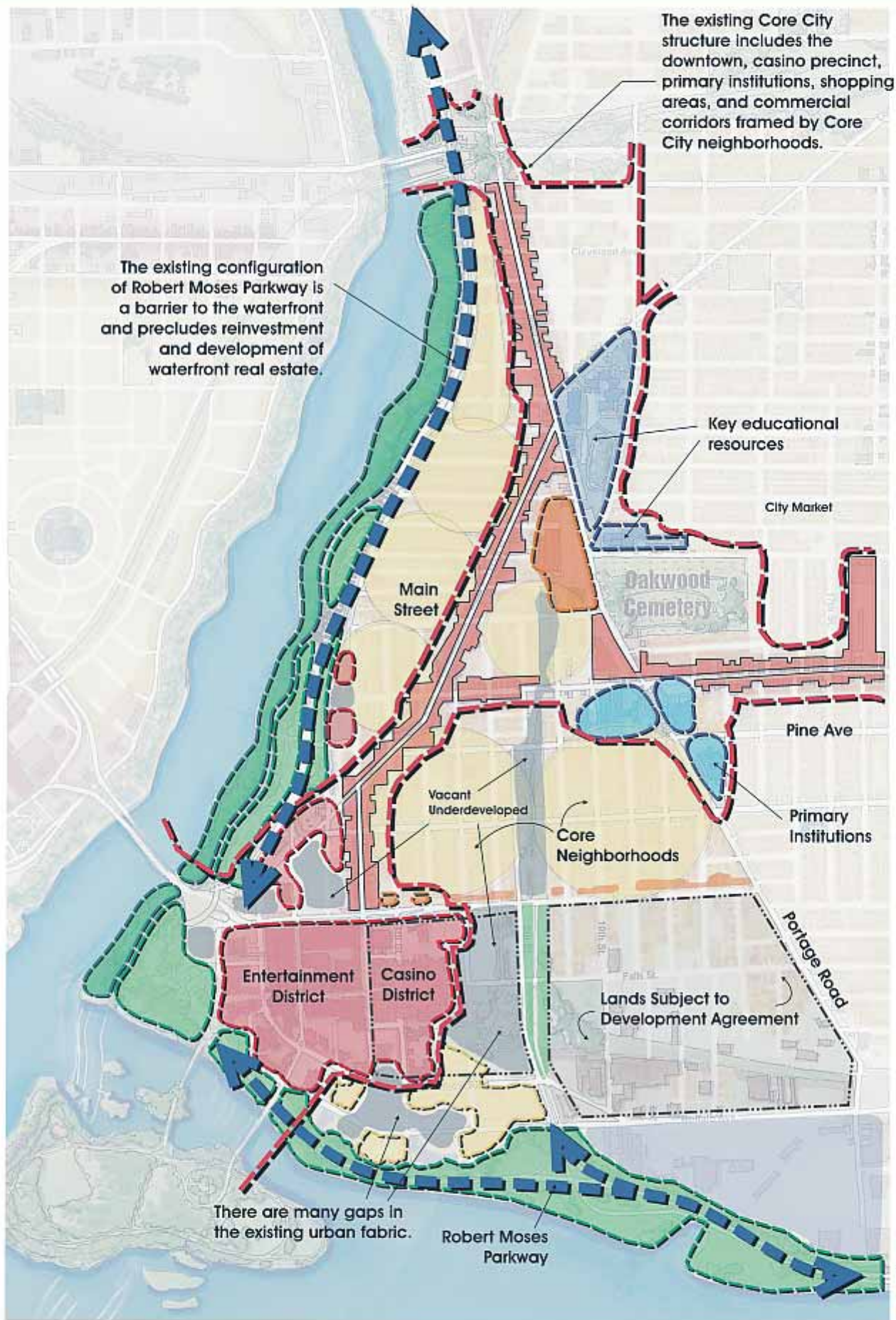
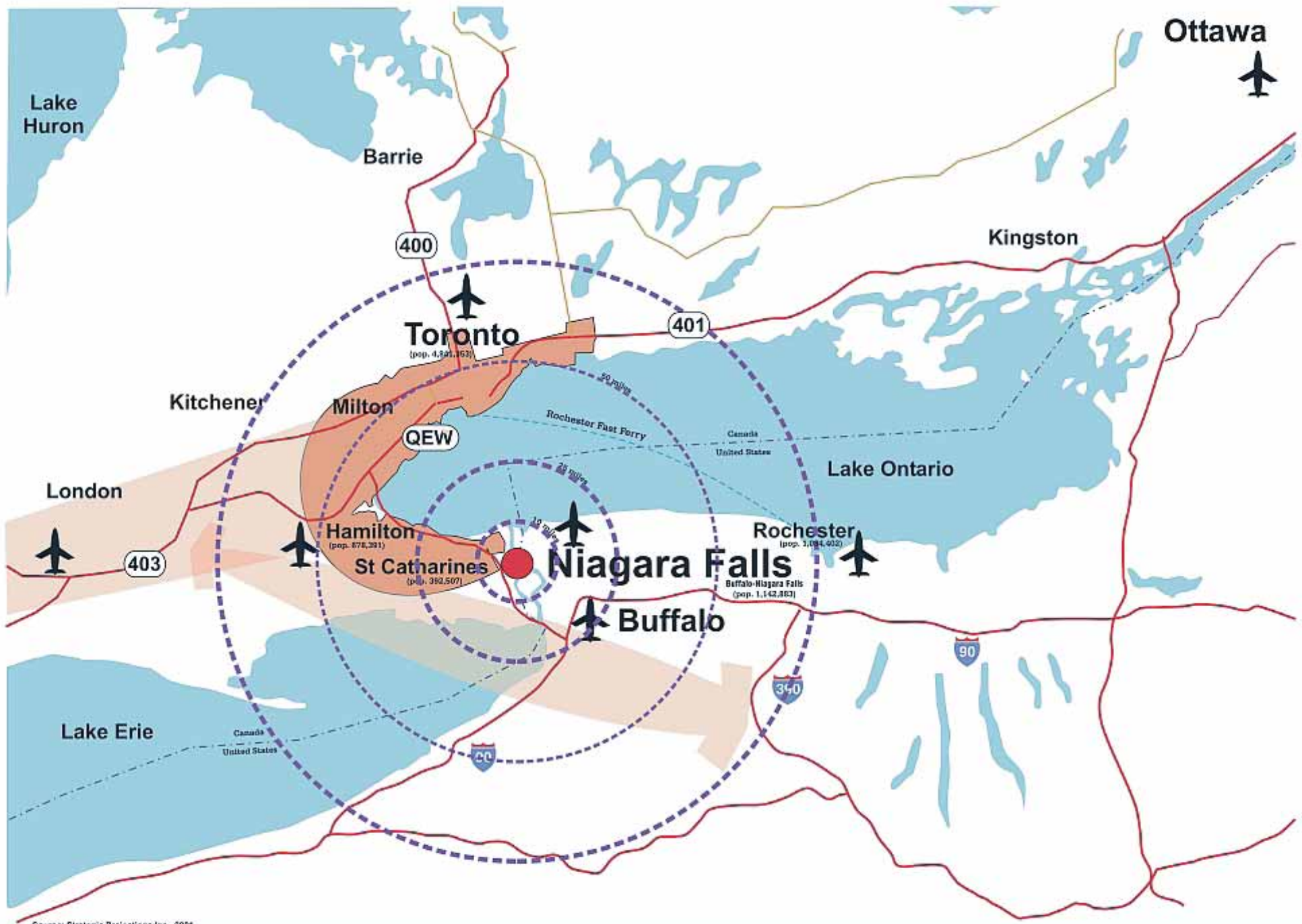
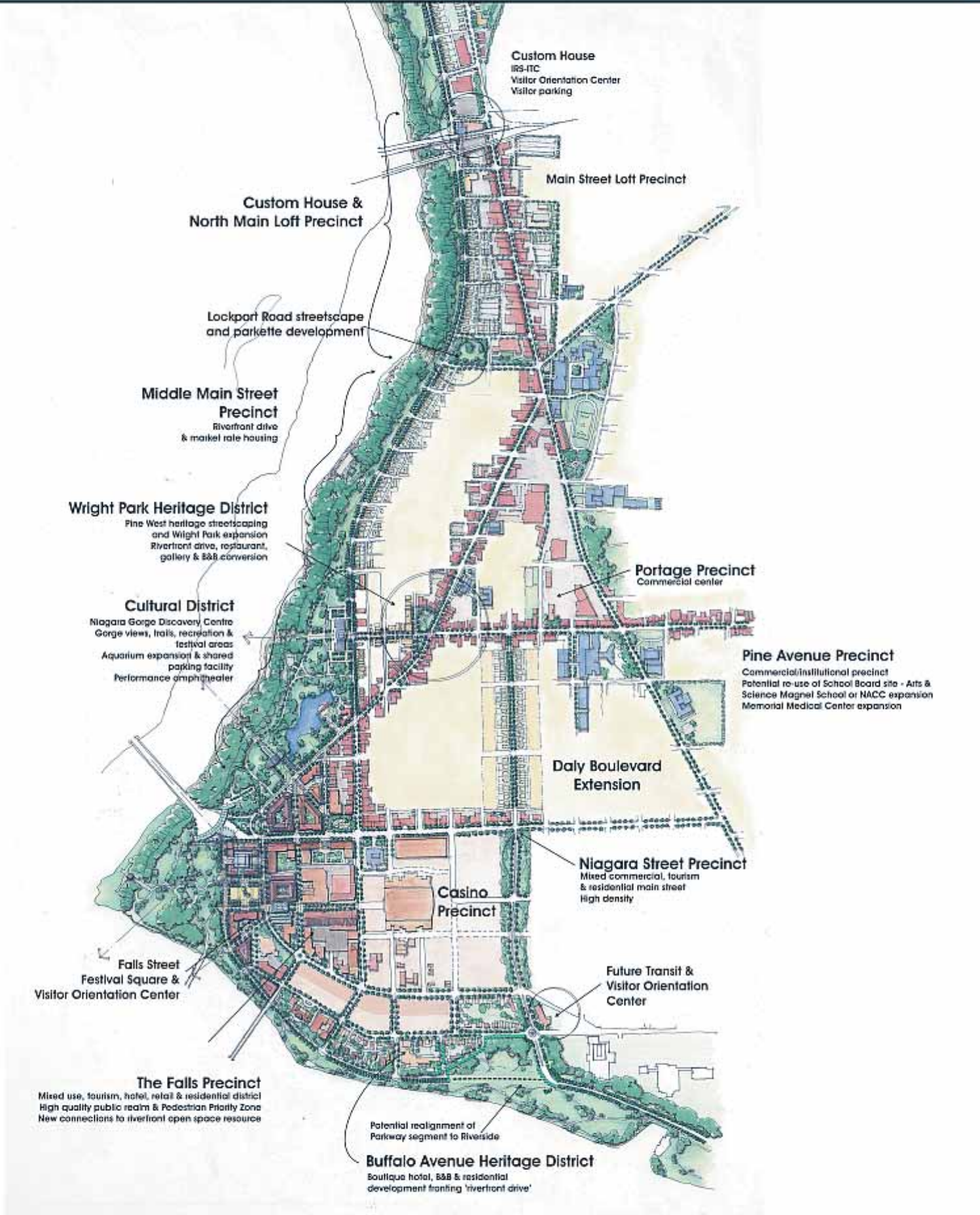


Figure 4. Bi-national Region



Source: Strategic Projections Inc., 2001

**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



The reconfiguration of the Parkway, the creation of the Cultural District, neighborhood renewal, and a focus on strengthening existing assets throughout the Core City and Falls Precinct areas will enable the City to unlock its future economic, social and cultural potential, and firmly attach the downtown to its waterfront.

Strengthen existing Commercial Corridor

Downtown and mixed use areas have a significant role to play in the City's growing tourism economy. Improving connections between tourism, business and waterfront areas will increase visitation to local establishments and stimulate greater economic growth.

Reconfigure Robert Moses Parkway

Main Street

The Cultural District

The new Daly neighborhood will be a catalyst for neighborhood renewal.

Pine Ave

Niagara Street has tremendous potential as a mixed use main street.

Portage Rd

Casino District

Lands Subject to Development Agreement

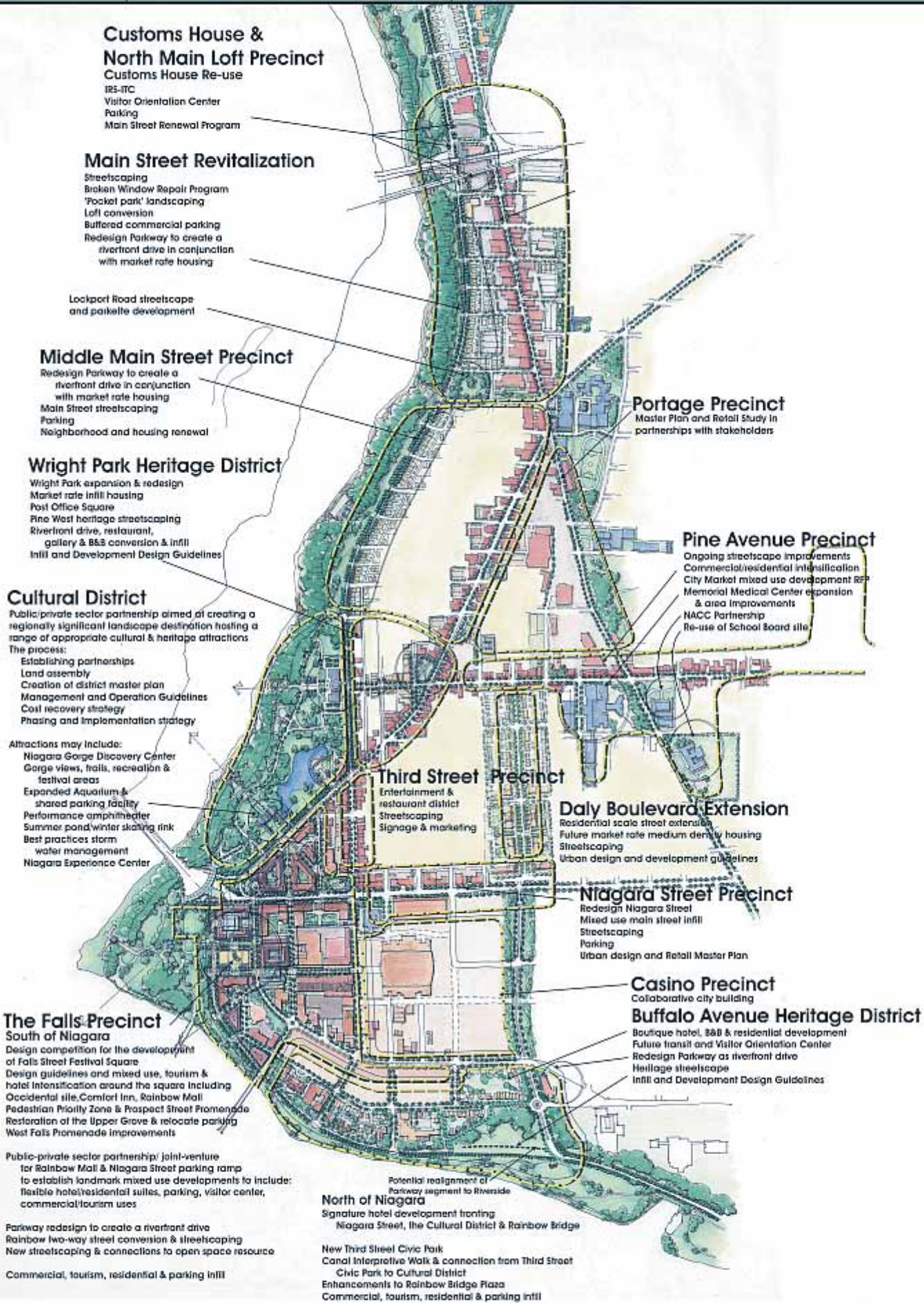
Many targeted initiatives are needed in the Falls Precinct to support tourism development.

Potential realignment of Parkway segment to Riverside



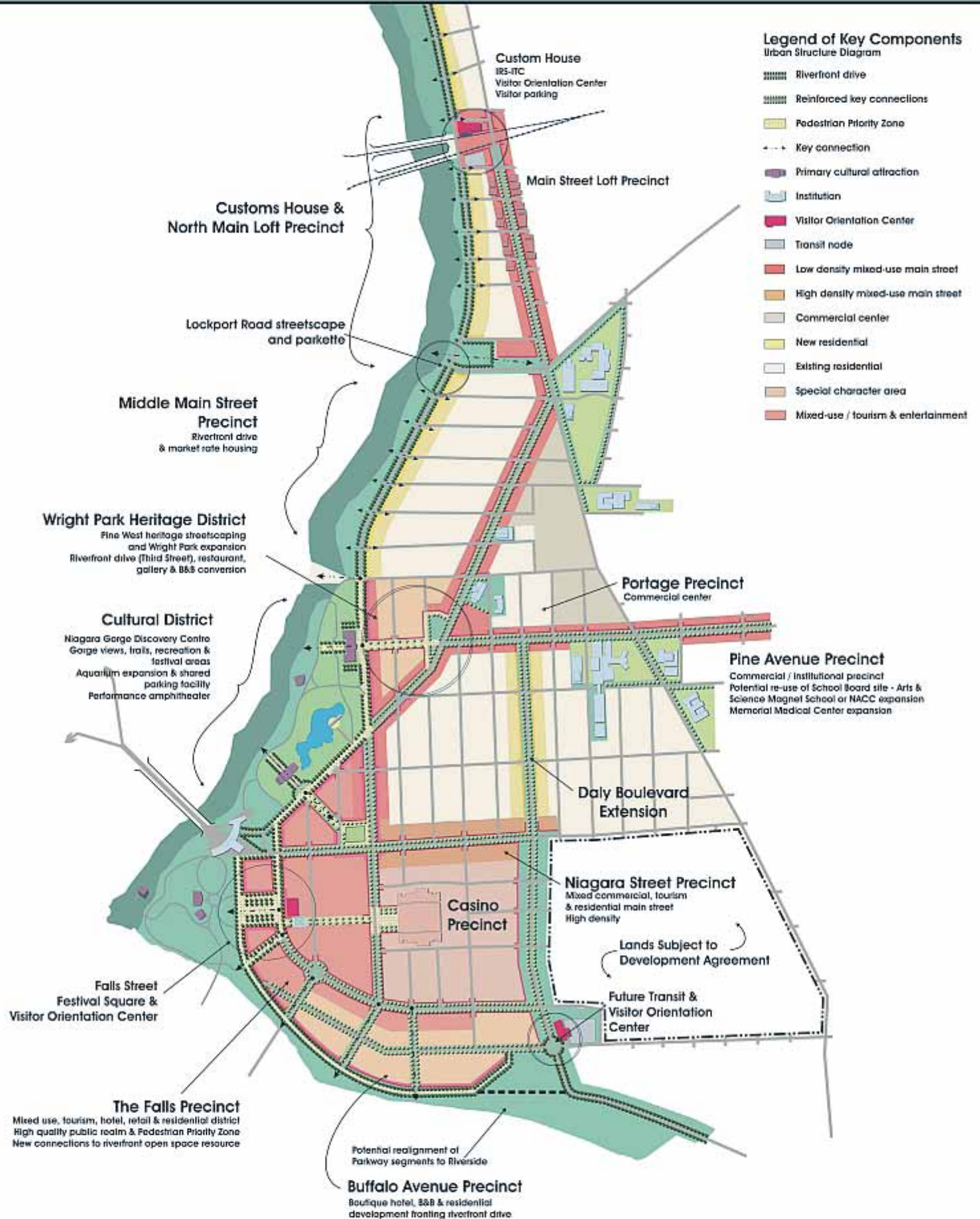
**Figure 7. Core City Vision:**

Priority Initiatives within the Core City

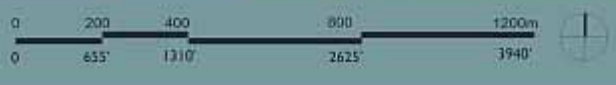
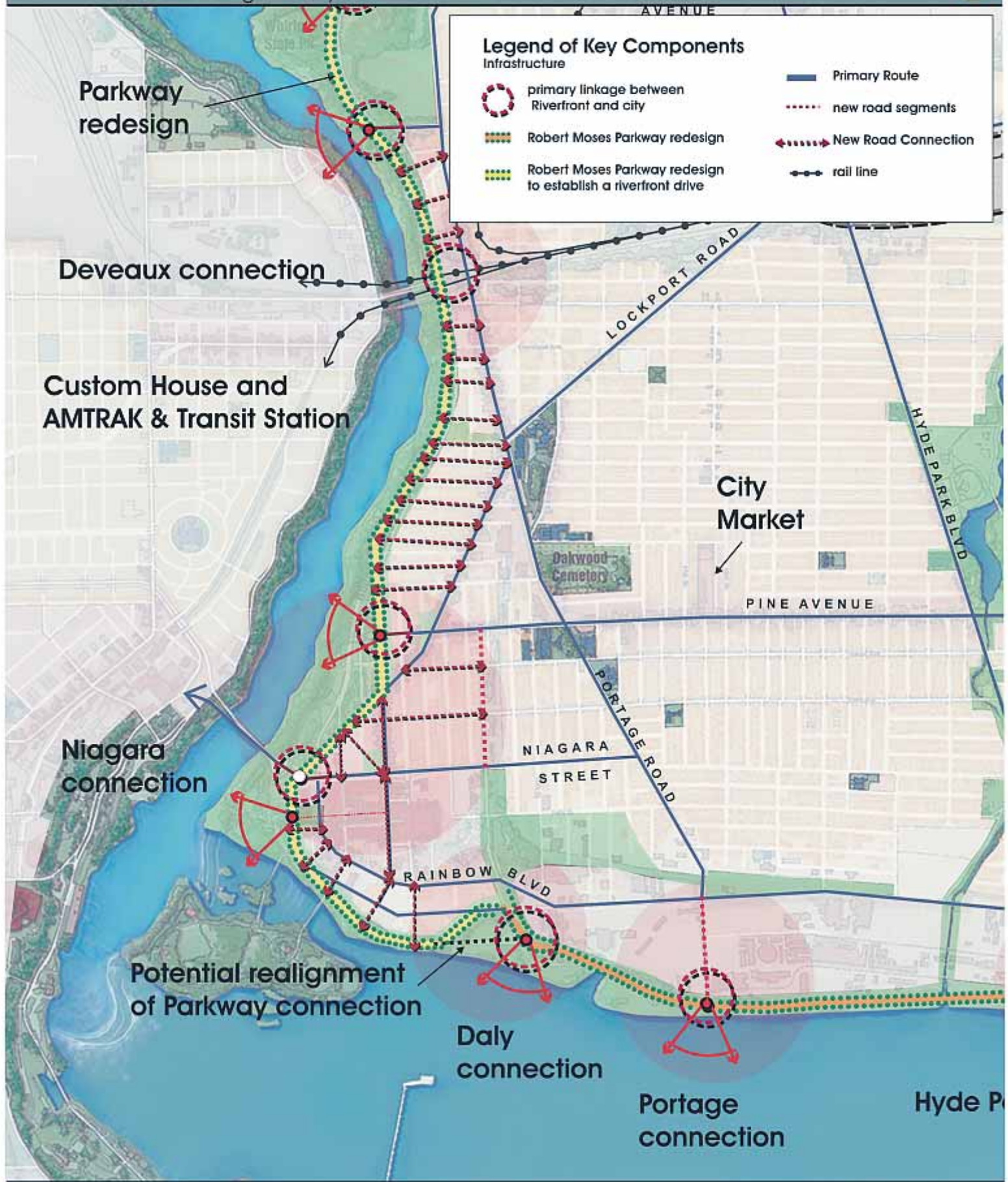




**Figure 8. Core City Vision:  
Urban Structure**



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





**Figure 10. Core City: The Big Moves - Reconnecting the City to its Waterfront**  
 Proposed image and character in the Customs House & North Main Loft Precinct



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



## Cultural District

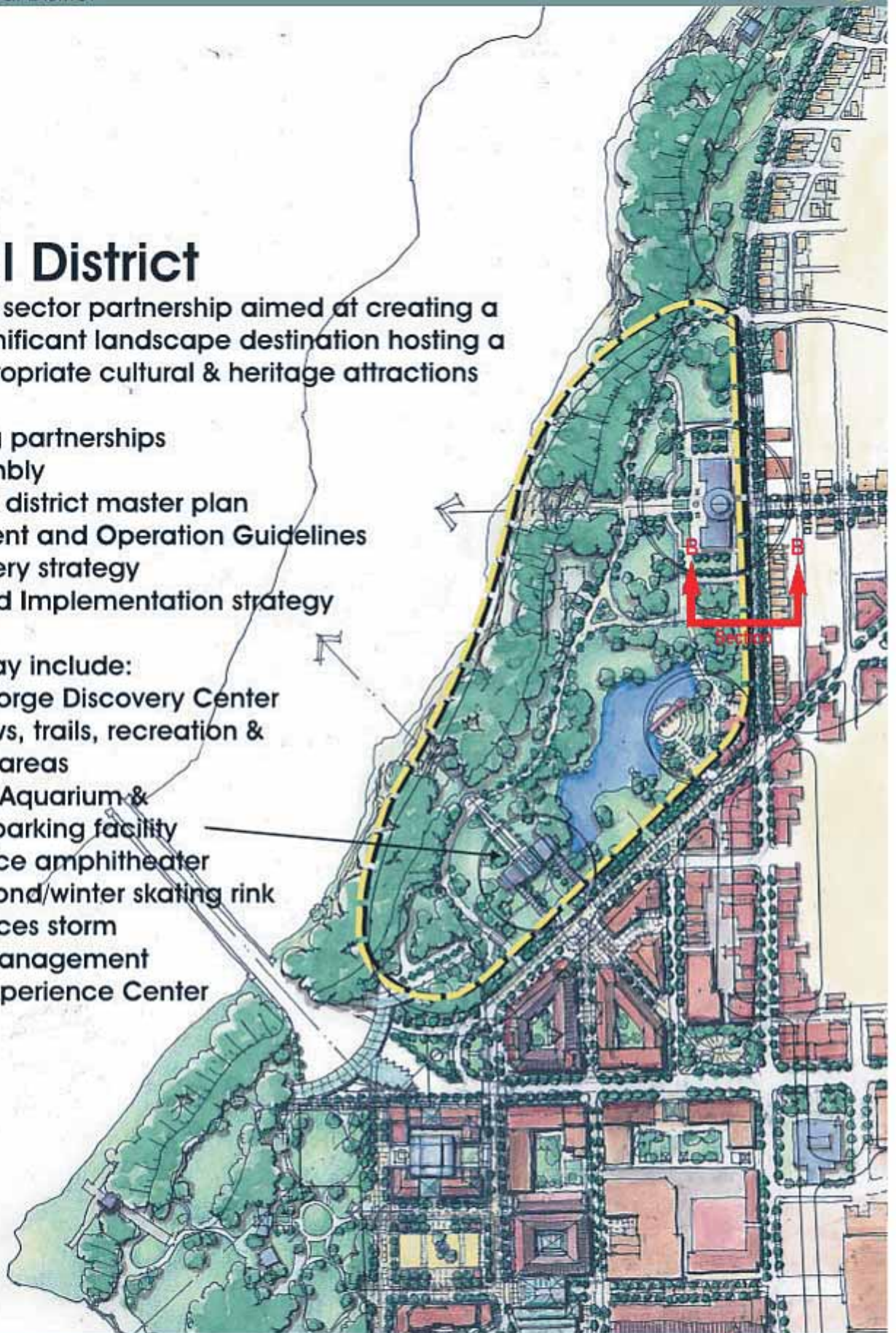
Public/private sector partnership aimed at creating a regionally significant landscape destination hosting a range of appropriate cultural & heritage attractions

The process:

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

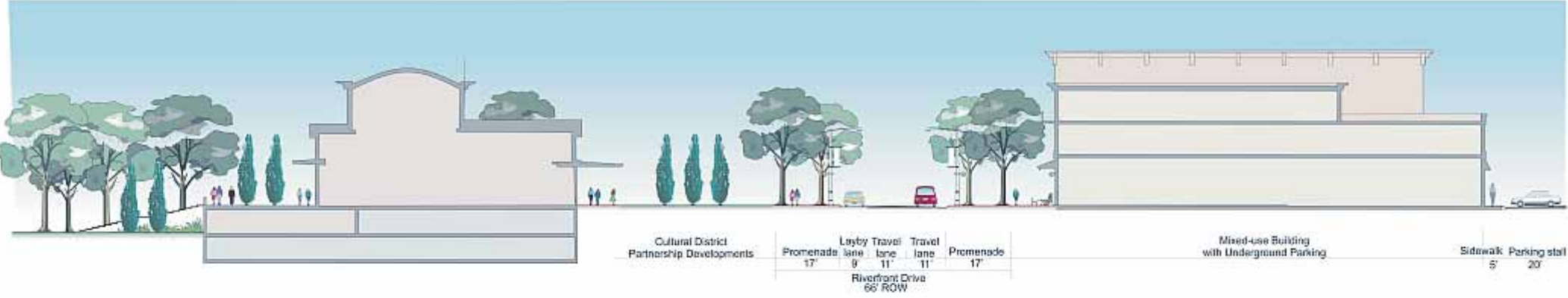
Attractions may include:

- 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



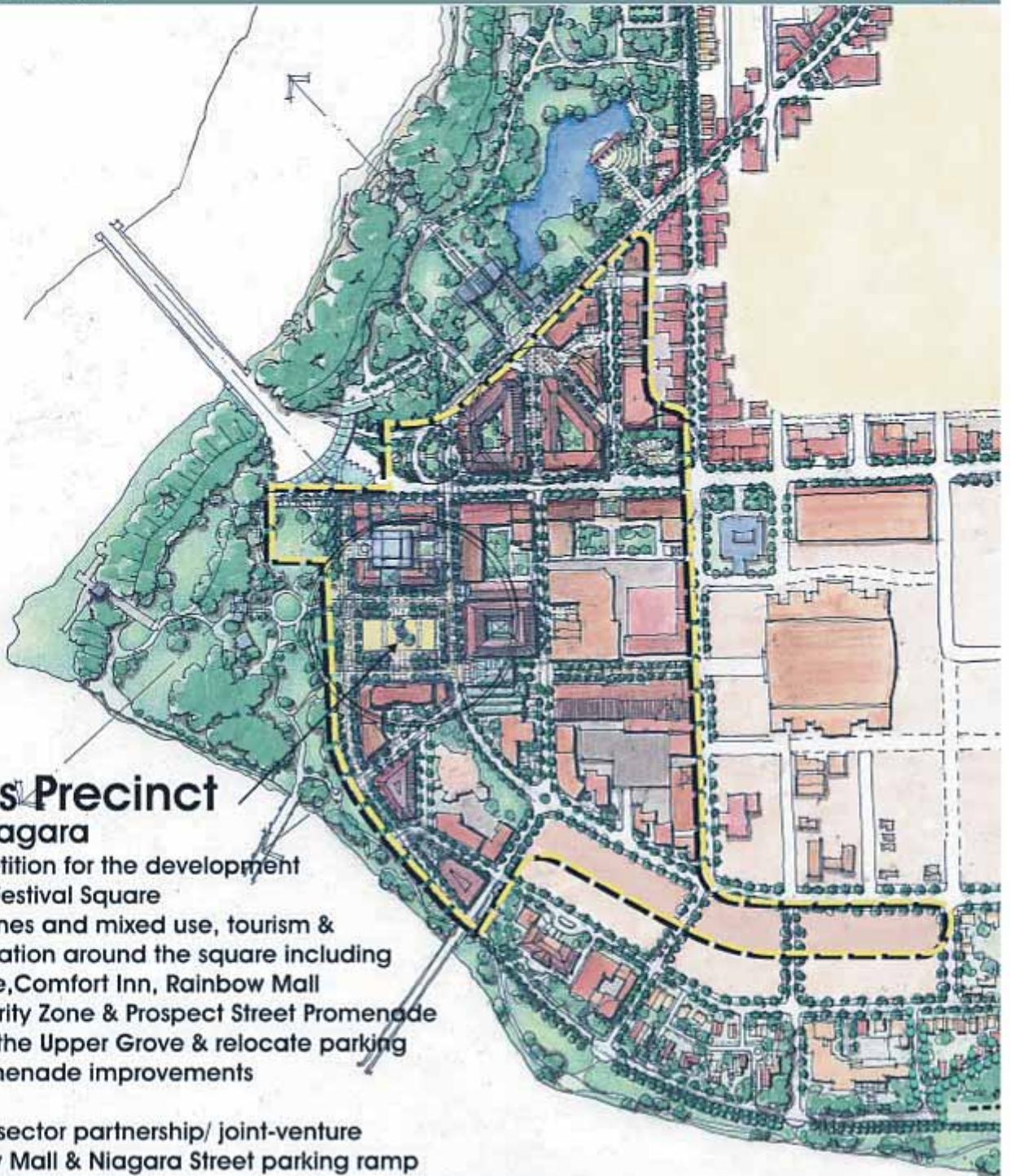


The creation of a lake demonstrating state-of-the-art storm water management techniques could provide a remarkable setting for many destinations in the Cultural District.



Section A: Proposed section through riverfront drive at Aquarium of Niagara expansion

**Figure 13. Core City: The Big Moves**  
The Fall Precinct



## **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

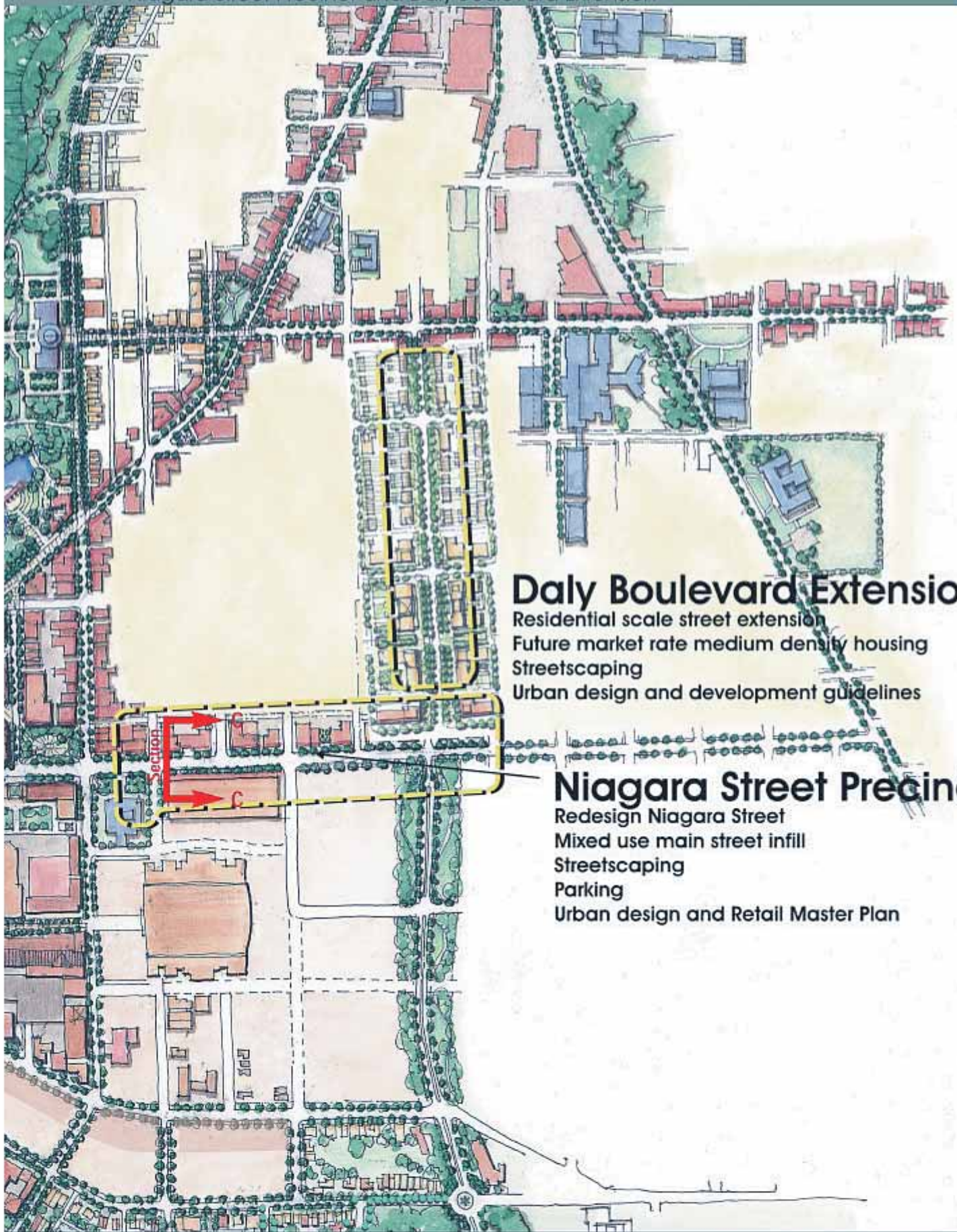
Public-private sector partnership/ joint-venture for Rainbow Mall & Niagara Street parking ramp to establish landmark mixed use developments to include: flexible hotel/residential suites, parking, visitor center, commercial/tourism uses

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

Figure 14. Core City: The Big Moves

Niagara Street Precinct and Daly Boulevard Extension



### Daly Boulevard Extension

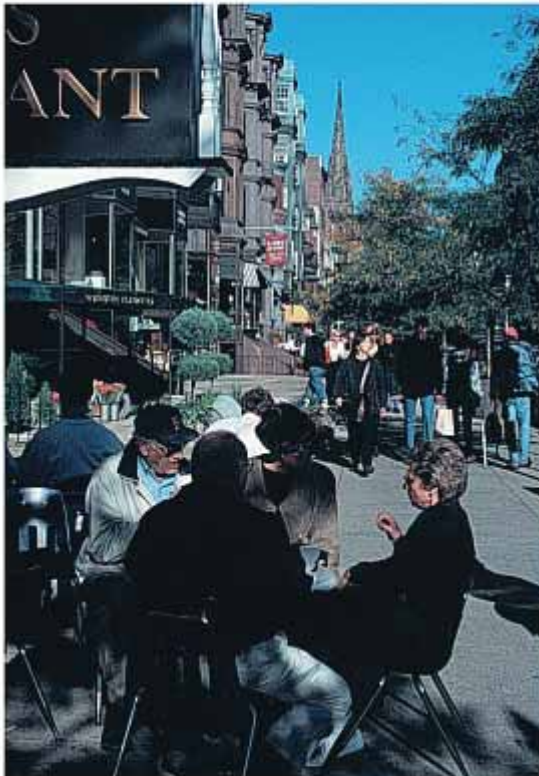
- Residential scale street extension
- Future market rate medium density housing
- Streetscaping
- Urban design and development guidelines

### Niagara Street Precinct

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



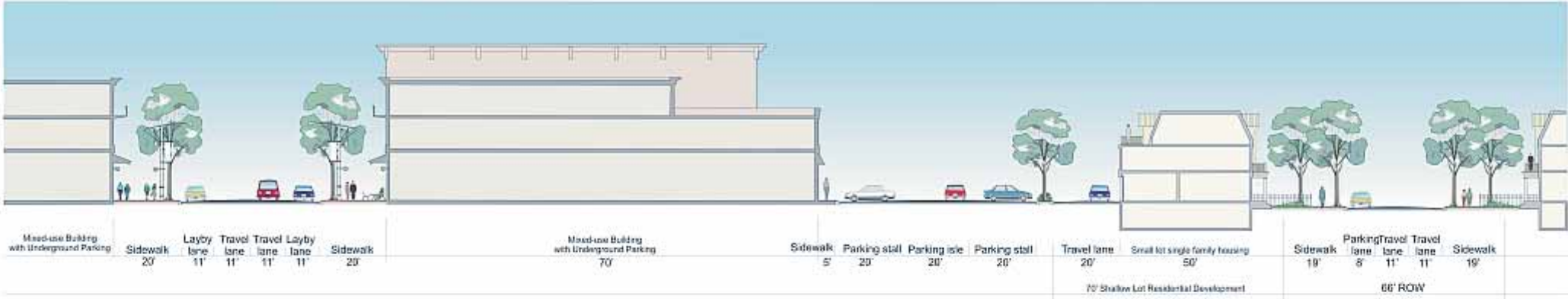
Figure 15 . Core City: The Big Moves - The release of consolidated 'Land Banked' areas for new housing and commercial parking can support existing commercial corridors, such as Third Street



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



**Figure 16. Core City: Precinct Strategies**

Customs House & North Main Loft Precinct, Main Street Revitalization  
Middle Main Street Precinct, Wright Park Heritage District and Portage Precinct

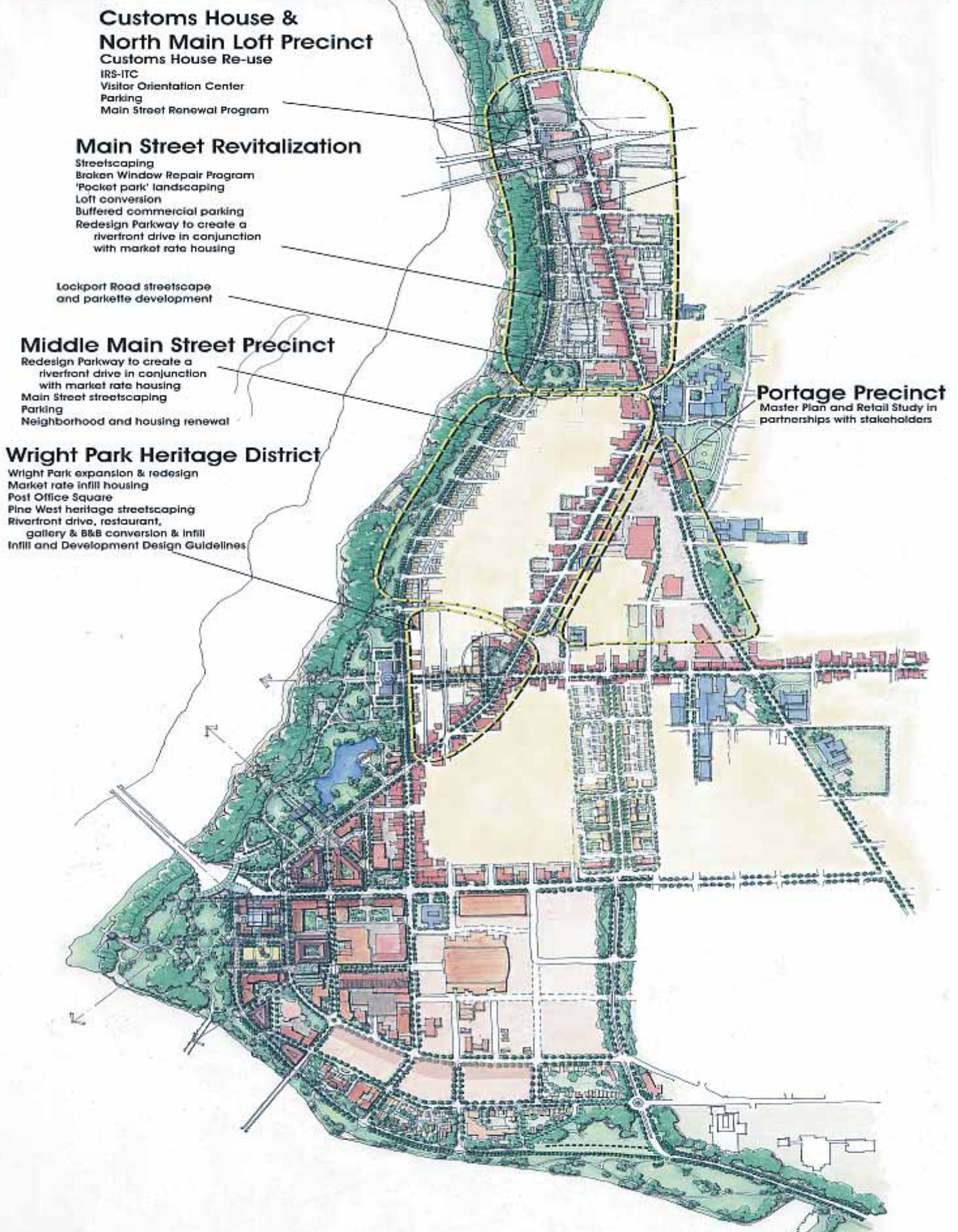
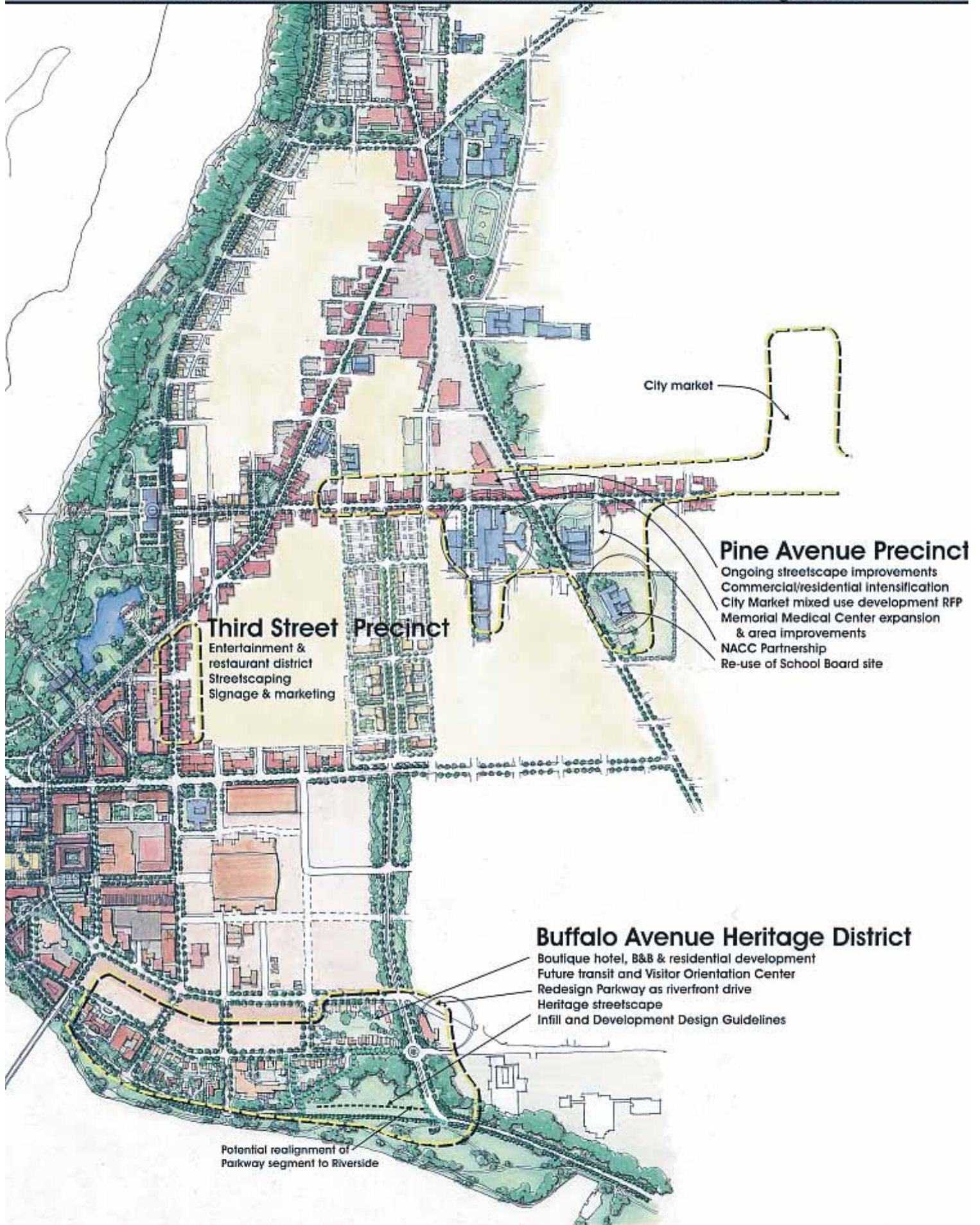
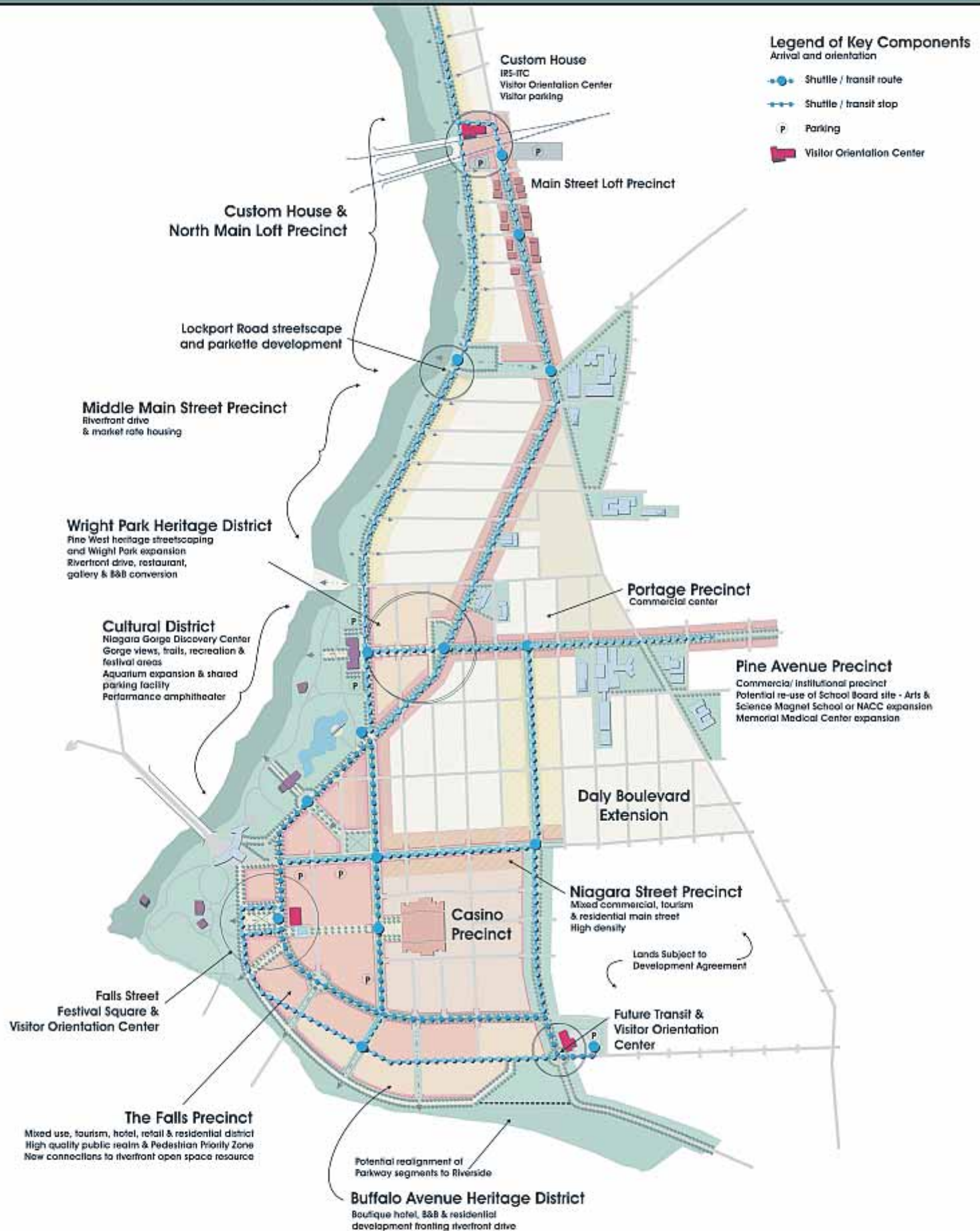


Figure 17. Core City: Precinct Strategies

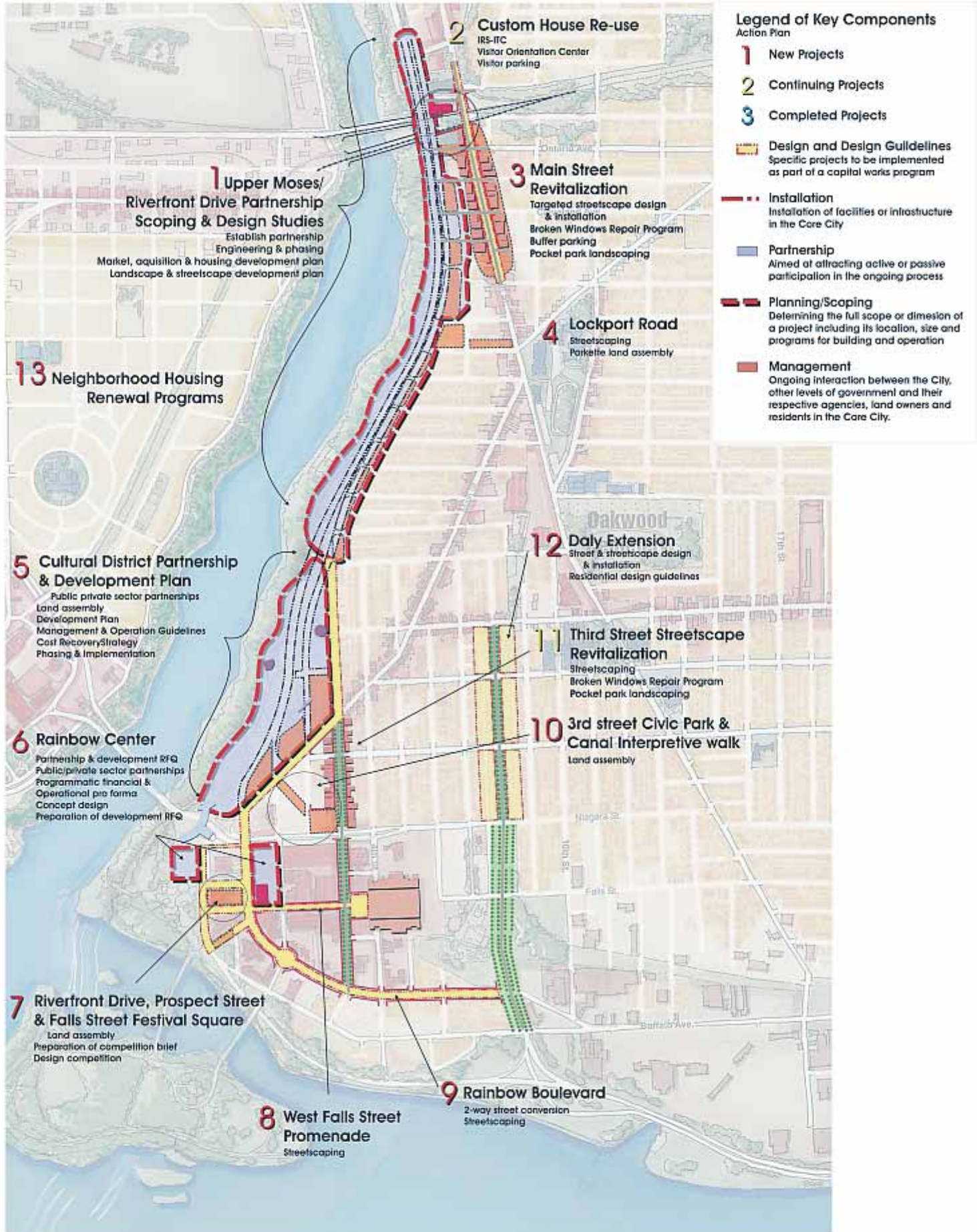
Pine Avenue Precinct, Third Street Precinct and Buffalo Avenue Heritage District





**Figure 19. Priority Initiatives within the Core City**

Short-term Projects for Implementation (first 5 years)



**Figure 20. Priority Initiatives within the Core City**

Long-term Projects for Implementation (5 to 15 years)





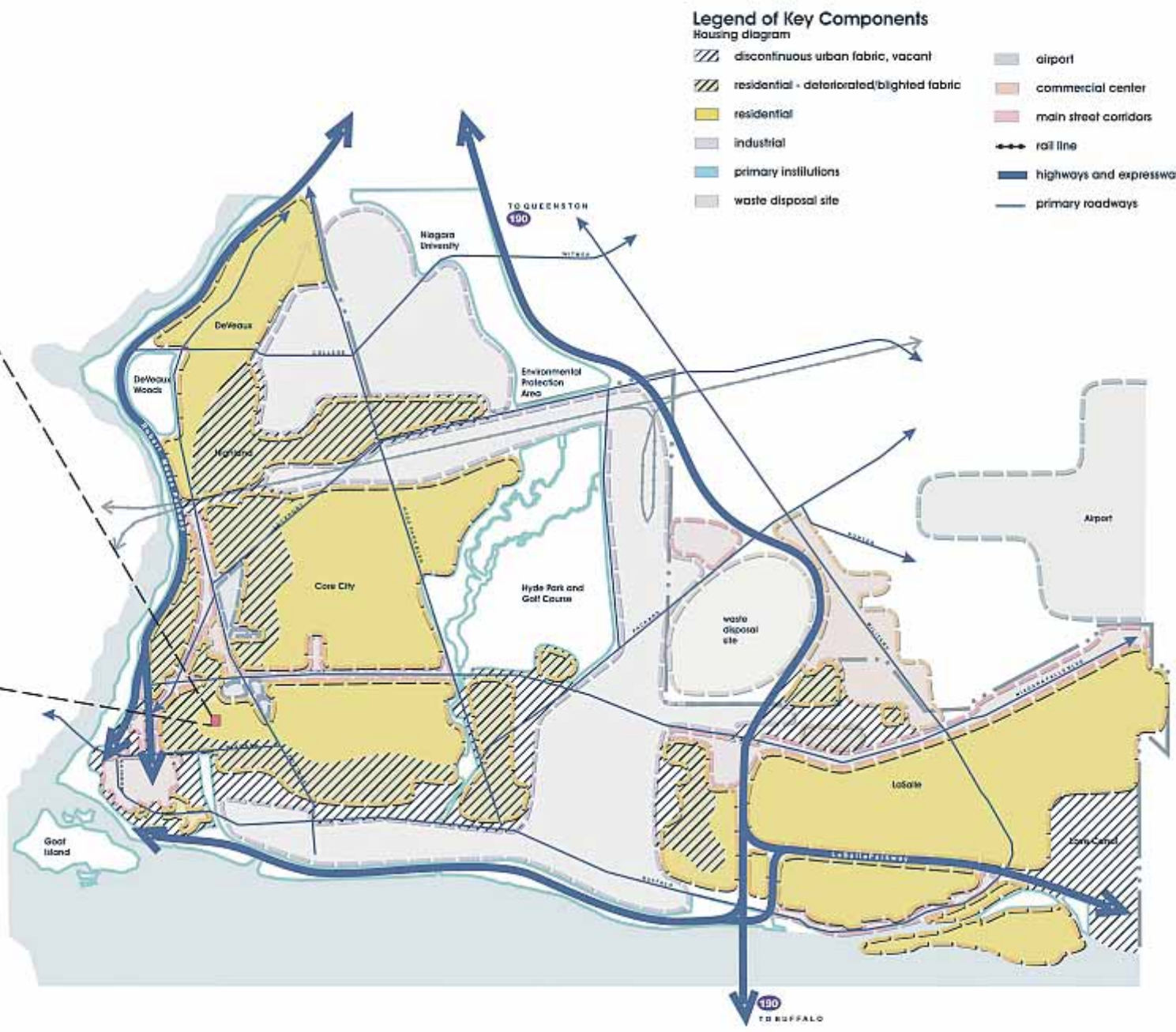
Figure 21. General Citywide Strategies:  
Existing Housing Conditions



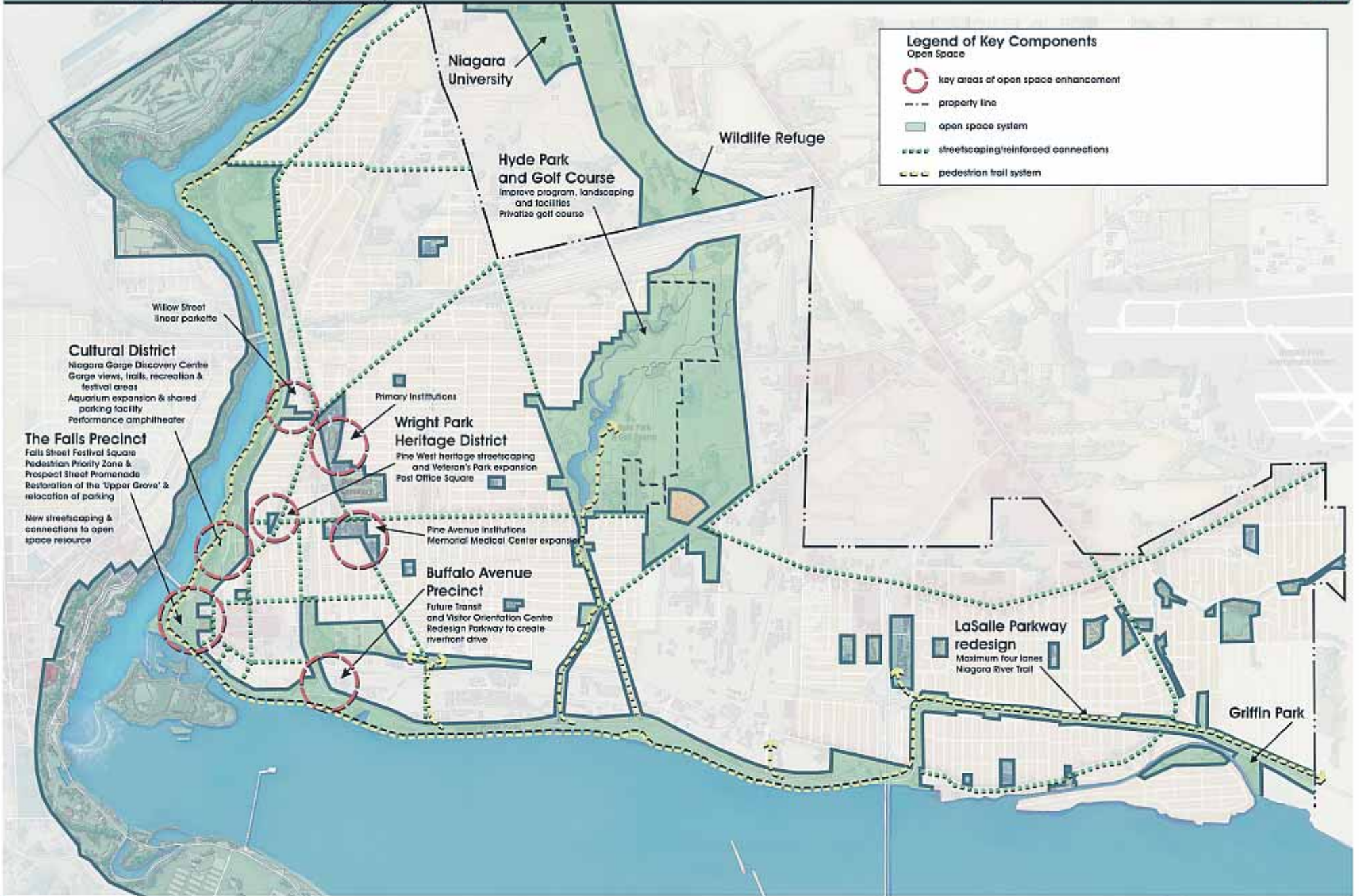
Targeted acquisition



Release land for open space and new residential development



**Figure 22. General Citywide Strategies:  
Proposed Open Space System**



**Legend of Key Components**  
Open Space

- key areas of open space enhancement
- property line
- open space system
- streetscaping/reinforced connections
- pedestrian trail system



**Figure 23. General Citywide Strategies:  
Proposed Transportation System**



**Legend of Key Components**

**Infrastructure**

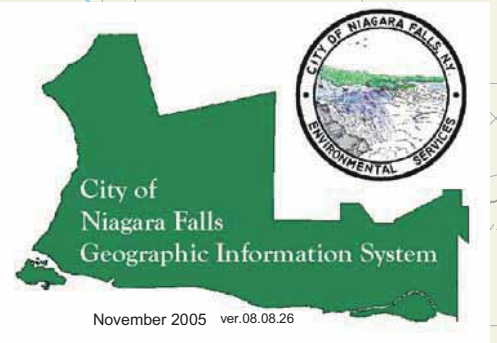
- primary linkage between Riverfront and city
- property line
- Robert Moses Parkway redesign
- Robert Moses Parkway redesign to establish a riverfront drive
- Lasalle Expressway redesign
- Niagara Falls International Airport
- highways and expressways
- primary roadways
- new road segments
- Improved connections
- rail line
- rail corridor







# City of Niagara Falls, New York Planning Areas Bubble Map



To: Queenston /  
Lewiston  
Bridge

**DeVeaux/Highland  
Planning Area**

Canada

Whirlpool  
Bridge

**Hyde Park  
Planning Area**

Niagara Falls  
International Airport

**Core City  
Planning Area**



**LaSalle Planning Area**



Robert Moses Parkway

Grand Island  
Bridge

LaSalle Expressway

Disclaimer: Digital files are based on data from various sources. The City of Niagara Falls, N.Y. assumes no responsibility or legal liability for the accuracy, completeness, reliability, timeliness, or usefulness of any information presented.

