BUFFALO'S RACE FOR PLACE

Ellicott Street

2021 PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

BUDC
Buffalo Urban Development Corporation
Hon. Mayor Byron W. Brown, Chairman

Mayor Byron W. Brown, Chairman

wendel

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

BUDC
Buffalo Urban Development Corporation
Hon. Mayor Byron W. Brown, Chairman

To Our Citizens, Employers, Institutions and Stakeholders:

Since 2006, we have worked together to accomplish something truly remarkable for Buffalo. Collectively, we have again arrived on a national stage, recognized for the rebirth of our great City.

Old buildings have been given new life, new projects are reinvigorating our neighborhoods, employers are opening up new locations in the City, and we have built thousands of new affordable and market rate housing units. But it is not simply headlines. For the first time since 1950, the City of Buffalo's population has increased as we added more than 17,000 new residents and outpaced many of our peers across New York State and throughout the Great Lakes region.

But our work isn't done and its time to take that success to the next level. Its not enough to simply offer new jobs, of which we have plenty, we must offer a world-class place to live. Over the next several years, and with your partnership, we will lead a series of landmark improvements to Downtown Buffalo's living environment, public realm, amenities and attractions that will make it one of America's great urban neighborhoods. The transformation of the Ellicott Corridor will be the new home for thousands of residents, professionals, innovators and companies that will lead our next generation of rebirth.

I look forward to working in partnership with you to further the momentum of our incredible city.

Sincerely,

Hon. Byron W. Brown
Chairman

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

BUFFALO'S RACE FOR PLACE

Friends,

During the past 15 years, Downtown Buffalo has experienced a transformation.

Yes, there have been investments in new infrastructure such as Cars Sharing Main Street, Canalside, and the Entertainment District. Many of our beautiful, historic buildings have been given new life. Hundreds of new apartments have been developed at various price points, welcoming more than 2,000 new residents downtown who can now rent or own some of the most beautiful new units in the region. Major private sector projects and economic drivers like the M&T Tech Hub, the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, Harbor Center, and the development of the Michigan Avenue Heritage Corridor are changing the landscape of the core of our City.

This change in downtown has been a tremendous source of pride for Buffalo.

But perhaps more important than any of those projects or investments is the way that we have come together. These transformations have been developed upon incredible partnerships between our public leadership, private employers, community groups, local investment, and citizens, among many others. It's time to continue building our partnerships as downtown is ready to take further steps to create a strong sense of place for our community to enjoy. We are in a 'Race for Place' to create a vibrant and lively destination that is inclusive attracts talent and exudes the kind of livability that the world's greatest cities have.

Join us as we look to weave together our many successes and work together to enhance the character, vibrancy, and connections between places that we love. This streetscape strategy helps to provide a road map to help us connect not only buildings, but our community in a way that builds on our strengths, adds to Buffalo's historic character and supports and reflects our diverse residents and businesses.

Sincerely,

Brandye Merriweather, President

Buffalo Urban Development Corporation

STREETSCAPE

The backbone of the corridor is the Ellicott streetscape. A downtown urban thoroughfare, Ellicott Street's future is the spine of a mixed-use, walkable neighborhood corridor. The street is the critical public space between buildings. The streetscape is where people connect, dining rooms expand, entertainment spills out and visitors experience the urban character of downtown Buffalo.

MOBILITY

Ellicott Street will be a standard-bearer for mobility in downtown Buffalo. The streetscape is simply designed to accommodate the needs of residents, employers and visitors in the 2020s. Mobility hubs, rideshare curb space, safe access for bicycles & pedestrians and planning of autonomous vehicles are elements of this plan. Innovative mobility will drive downtown as a desirable place to invest, live and visit.

INFILL

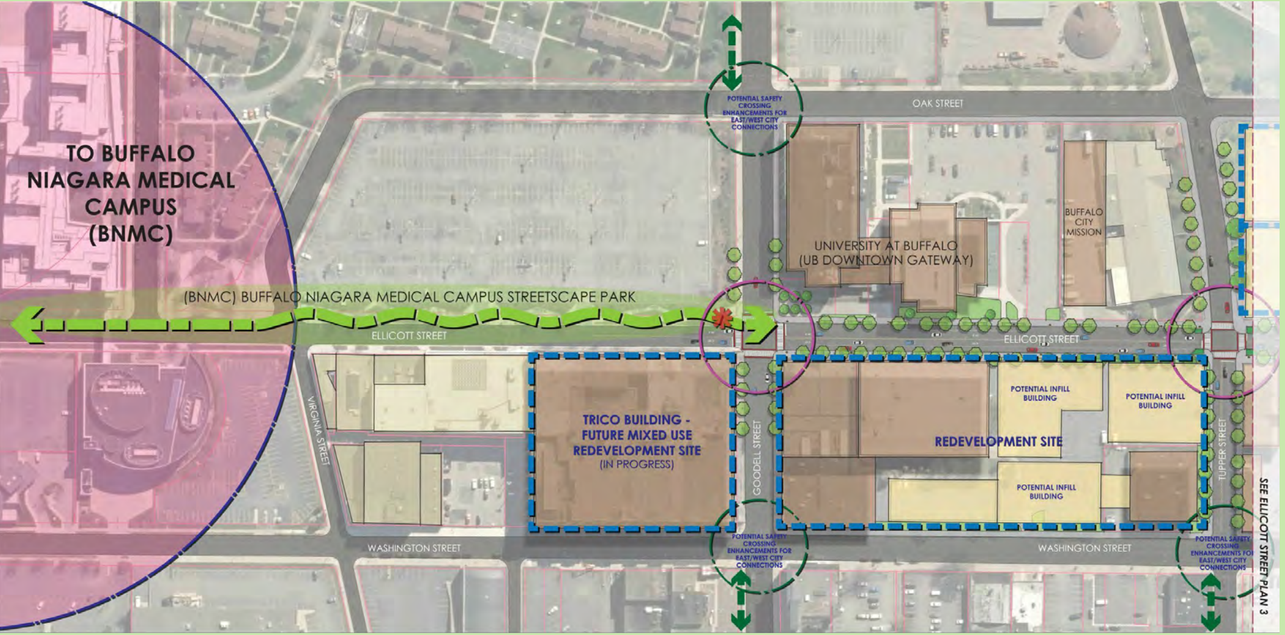
The existing building stock composes a beautiful urban fabric lining Ellicott Street, however there are gaps. In conjunction with a public realm investment, the vision for Ellicott Street is to fill these gaps with infill development appropriate for the scale and use of a compact and vibrant urban neighborhood.

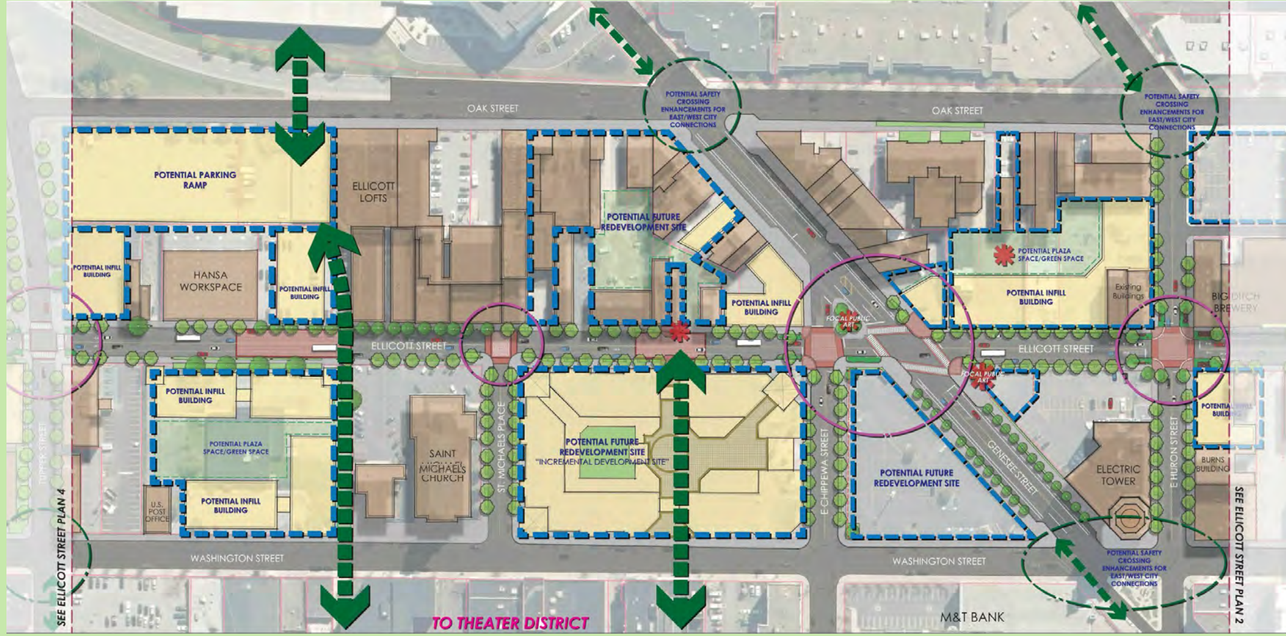
ENVISION ELLICOTT STREET

Buffalo is at a crossroads. Over the past 15 years, the City Buffalo has experienced a renaissance. Downtown is an epicenter for regional events, has seen thousands of new apartments come online as residents have chosen an urban lifestyle and there is a renewed interest from businesses looking to grow their presence in our local economy. Meanwhile, there has been significant public and private investments in major economic development initiatives such as the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC), Canalside and the Michigan Street Heritage Corridor and the Cars Sharing Main Street project. Separately, each of these have been catalytic iniatives for Buffalo's rebirth.

The next step is to curate 'complete urban spaces' that provide the vibrant city environment of living, work, entertainment and amenities. The public realm will be inviting for people and functional spaces for the lives and businesses that populate downtown while infilling the gaps in a quality urban fabric. We will look towards the future of connectivity and mobility to build a downtown that serves the 21st century.

Ellicott Street is emerging as the cornerstone for a downtown live, work and play neighborhood. The existing street has a collection of historic urban buildings, unique restaurants and a growing residential population. It is a direct link threading the BNMC, the Central Business District, the M&T Tech Hub and Buffalo's waterfront. The vision for is to grow a dense residential population seeking a vibrant, mixed-use living environment. Ellicott Street will be a desirable lifestyle option and having housing options for residents at various price points and income levels. It will be a place for those seeking a downtown location where they don't need a car and can live, work and play all within a few blocks.





The Streetscape Improvement Plan

The vision for the Ellicott streetscape design is rooted in simplicity:

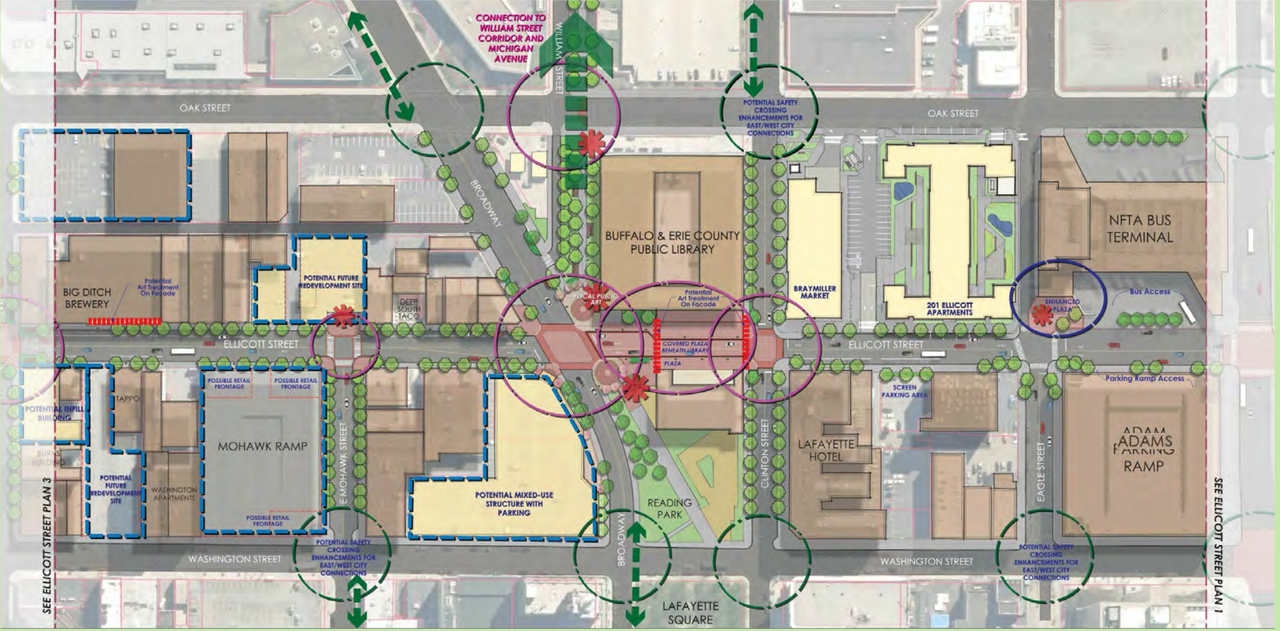
> Creation of a walkable, urban landscape that is a beautiful, safe and dynamic public realm for the residents, restaurants, employers and visitors that come here. The functional design is purposely segregated into components that can be implemented individually or collectively.

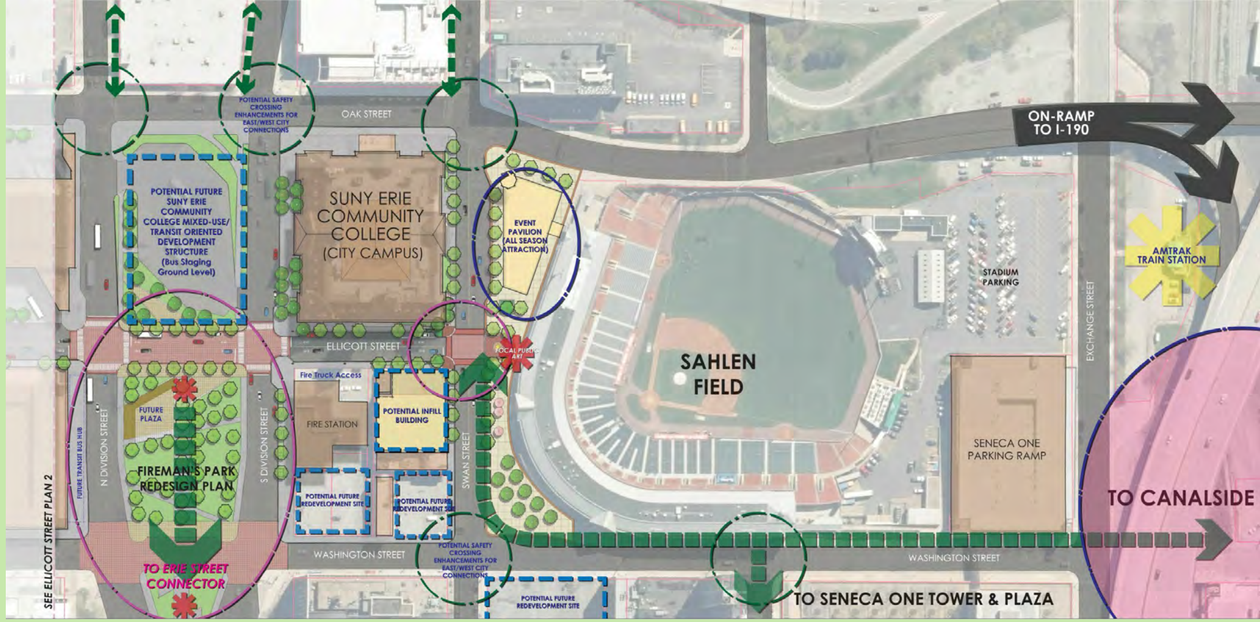
This approach will allow the infrastructure improvements to respond to the changing market and adjacent development activity. It will also speed up the time-to-market for improvements.

The project begins on the north at Goodell Street, directly linking to the existing BNMC Streetscape Park on previously constructed on Ellicott Street. The improvements will establish a more walkable link directly from the heart of the Medical Campus and Innovation Center into the Ellicott Street downtown neighborhood. Modest improvements are recommended at both Goodell and Tupper Streets, introducing bump-outs and enhanced crosswalks, while the intervening block needs to be replanted with trees where they had previously been removed.

Extending further south, the blocks between Tupper Street and West Huron Street are critical and a significant focus for new improvements. The area is ripe with assets to build upon for neighborhood development. The existing historic building stock has stimulated some of downtown's earliest mixed use and residential addaptive reuse projects such as the Ellicott Lofts, Genesee Gateway and the Electric Tower. Significant additional opportunity is present within the Flower District and the former Simon Electric buildings for both adaptive reuse and infill development. The M&T Bank parking lots represent one of Downtown most significant future new-construction opportunities.

The Streetscape plan is designed to support the block's evolution into a true mixed-use neighborhood with more intense investments at key intersections of St. Michaels, E. Chippewa and W. Huron Streets. These designs include bump-outs, and tabled crosswalks with material/color changes for the entire intersection space. Additionally, two mid-block crosswalks are proposed between E. Tupper and E. Chippewa Streets to shorten walking distances and provide more of a neighborhood feel to the area. This plan also proposes enhanced crosswalks and material/color changes for the entire intersection space.





Further South, from W. Huron to N. Division Streets is where the Ellicott Corridor engages with the core of downtown Buffalo. Three critical sites will drive the future success of this area: The redevelopment of the Mohawk Parking Ramp, the Buffalo and Erie County Central Library and 201 Ellicott Street. 201 Ellicott Street is a major new investment into the affordable housing downtown and living amenities with its new grocery store. This project will drive new foot traffic and vitality to other areas of Ellicott Street. Conversely, the Erie County Central Library represents a barrier to walkability downtown. The visual separation of dark environment created by the overpass makes the location feel unwelcoming to pedestrians and visitors.

Strengthening Connections to the East

The plan also leverages improvements to better integrate East Side neighborhoods to our growing downtown. Adjacent to the library is the pedestrian-challenged intersection of Broadway, Ellicott and William Streets. This area is recommended for the most significant intervention in the district. William Street, between Oak Street and Ellicott Street is designed to be closed or reduced and reconfigured to a one-way access for the south side of the filling station property. This allows for a simpler configuration of the intersection and a reduction in crossing lengths, while establishing a green pedestrian linkage, east to the Michigan

Street Heritage Corridor. The reconfiguration is complemented by streetscape enhancements to the intersection and extending under the library to Clinton Street providing tabled crossings with bump-outs and material/color changes to the infrastructure. Additionally, public art improvements involving lights and projections are recommended for the library overpass to create a more interesting and inviting environment.

The City of Buffalo is in the process of evaluating proposals for the redevelopment of the Mohawk Ramp. This site is a critical gap in the quality of the urban fabric. New development should appropriately address Ellicott Street with an active first floor and enhanced pedestrian infrastructure.

The southern end of the district builds upon previous projects. The plan incorporates the existing design for improvements to Shelton Square and Fireman's Park, enhancing walkability and establishing a direct link from this location to the waterfront via Erie Street.

Additional intersection improvements are recommended for Swan Street, which sees significant foot traffic from the ECC Campus and Sahlen Field. It is also recommended that the Buffalo Bisons relocate their events from beyond the right field wall to a new pavillion on the Swan Street plaza, adding interest and activation to the streetscape, potentially year-round.

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STRATEGY & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The team at Wendel met with a broad and inclusive cross-section of stakeholders in developing this strategy. This included residents, community groups, major employers, developers and landowners along the Ellicott Street Corridor. Each has a unique understanding and experience of the corridor and downtown Buffalo, broadly. Importantly, they each have a unique vested interest in its ongoing revitalization. We sought to gather their feedback on Ellicott's future potential as a downtown neighborhood and the elements to make it successful.

The following strategy recommendations have been developed based upon input from stakeholders.

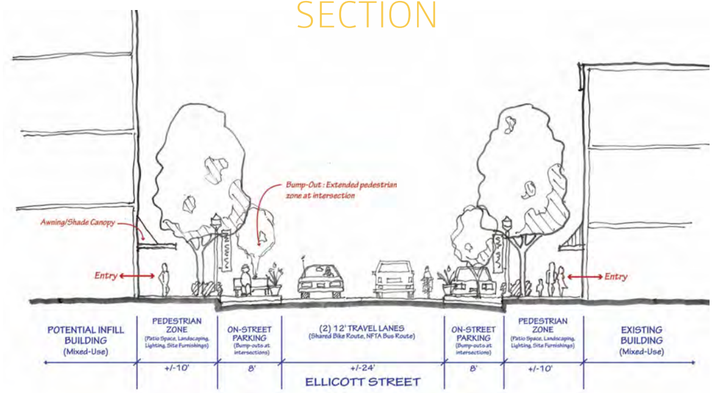
Simple, Urban Streetscape Design

The Ellicott streetscape should be rooted in a simplistic design that implements best practices in urban design that supports walkability, mobility and functions as a quality central spine of the public realm. The streetscape needs to be effective and attainable from a financial, construction and ongoing maintenance standpoint.

The adjacent section diagram illustrates the design for Ellicott Street, leveraging the 60` right of way. Fundamentally, the street will remain two-way, with one lane in each direction, parking on each side and 10' sidewalks fronting the building. The travel lanes will be shared spaces for multi-mobility, including bicycles, buses and cars. The parking lanes should accommodate temporary patio expansions. At intersections, bump outs would extend the 8' width of the parking lane to shorten crossing distances.

Generally maintaining street dimensions, curb locations and existing crowning will mitigate cost implications that serve as a potential barrier for the project.

ELLICOTT STREETSCAPE SECTION



Promoting Safety & Walkability

Among the chief concerns from stakeholders was safety and walkability along the entirety of the corridor. Most noted that the conditions of the present infrastructure, especially sidewalks and intersections are deteriorating. It is recommended that areas of disrepair be of a heightened priority, including bringing sidewalks, crosswalks and pedestrian ramps into ADA compliance.

At intersections, crosswalks lack pedestrian signage or signalization. In particular, the intersection of Broadway, Ellicott and William Streets has been identified as a significant safety concern. The crosswalk on the east side of Ellicott measures more than 90 feet and crosses two streets, while on the west side the cross is more than 60 feet. Further, the confluence of three different roads is confusing with irregular signal patterns and uncertainty or when it will be safe to cross or how long pedestrians are allotted to cross.

Throughout the corridor, intersections require improvements, including enhanced cross-street markings, shorter crossing lengths and improved pedestrian signalization with countdown timers. Where feasible, bump-outs should be constructed to provide better connectivity and ADA access. At the Ellicott, Broadway, William intersection, the city should consider a reconfiguration that can produce safety and comfort measures not achievable through incremental means.

Incremental Improvements

Throughout our stakeholder interviews, concern has been expressed for the scale and cost of improving the entire corridor. Participants noted the long timeframes and opportunity costs for streetscape upgrades such as on Main Street, Allen Street and Chippewa Street. It was strongly encouraged that the improvements to Ellicott Street be simple and cost effective. Very little desire was expressed for more lavish improvements that would add costs, time and complicate the streetscape.

General support was expressed for a simple, urban street design with modest, walkable improvements. The point was also made that the entire street should not have to be completed at once. Rather, an incremental approach where one intersection and/or block can be completed at a time is desirable, following the previous model of improvements at Genesee Street adjacent to the Electric Tower. Smaller projects offer the opportunity for achievable public-private partnerships where landowners and corporations can participate with the City to make key improvements.

Focusing Investment

Consistent with the original strategy of selecting Ellicott Street for further planning, the importance of focusing investment within downtown was echoed amongst stakeholders. There is a general recognition of the limited resources that are available, such funding should be allocated where it can have the greatest impact.

Most expressed that the majority of funding should be put towards a few key areas/intersections. These include the previously noted intersection with William Street and Broadway, the corner of E. Huron Street and building off of previous investment in Genesee Street.

Leverage Key Public Properties

Several significant public properties are present along Ellicott Street, these include the Mohawk Ramp parking structure, the Buffalo and Erie County Central Library and Sahlen Field. Multiple stakeholders noted the importance of leveraging these assets to improve development conditions along the corridor.

Prior to the release of this report, the City of Buffalo has issued an Request For Proposals for the redevelopment of the Mohawk Ramp, which would serve as a lynchpin for the redevelopment of the entire corridor. Strategic investments in the other properties are seen as opportunities to add interest and potentially activity along the public realm. It is noted that the Library underpass is unsightly and does not promote safety and security in the district. As a result, the district is disconnected along Ellicott. Improvements here are necessary to improve the image, safety and connectivity within the district.

Transitioning Major Real Estate

There are several properties along the corridor that present voids in the urban fabric. These are large parking lot sites, vacant buildings and unprogrammed public spaces. Understanding that full redevelopment will take time, participants suggested considering transitional uses or programming. This may include pop-up retail, festival/venue programming, public art installations or modest improvements to the landscape and street frontage to upgrade some of the gaps in the streetscape.

Stimulate Infill Development

BUDC offers a gap financing tool for building renovation projects through the Buffalo Building Reuse Loan Program. Many of Downtown's historic properties have now been redeveloped through this and other tools such as the Historic Tax Credits. It is recommended that the loan program be revised to enhance support for new infill construction projects to stimulate the repair of the urban fabric.

Funding Long-Term Maintenance & Expanding the B.I.D.
Universally, participants noted significant concerns about the long-term conditions and maintenance of any improvement to the district. Any project must have a dedicated resource or source of funding to maintain the streetscape.

Downtown Partners, including BUDC, the City of Buffalo and Buffalo Place, should collaborate to consider all options related to funding ongoing care for improvements and leveraging existing maintenance resources downtown. This should include expansion of the existing Buffalo Place Business Improvement District (B.I.D.). This would allow Buffalo Place to leverage the corridor's redevelopment, expand their own resources and serve a greater downtown footprint.

Incorporate Public Art
Most participants expressed the value of incorporating public art into the district as a means to develop a more recognizable brand and affordably improve underutilized spaces and structures. Many pointed to the success of murals that have been implemented throughout downtown in bringing life and color to otherwise blank canvasses. There is a great amount of interest from landowners in partnering with arts organizations and grant programs to incorporate public art into their properties.

Leveraging the Strategy

This document is intended to function as a playbook for the revitalization of the Ellicott Street Corridor and can be used as a guide for other streetscapes in the City as well. Moving forward, the Buffalo Urban Development Corporation is the leader, but not the sole owner of this strategy. BUDC should seek partnerships with public, private and non-profit stakeholders to develop buy-in to the common vision and investment in Ellicott Street as a major economic and quality of life initiative for downtown Buffalo. A collective effort can lead to a holistically improved urban neighborhood.

BUFFALO URBAN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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