Niagara Falls, New York
East Falls Street Theatre District

The Urban Design Project
State University of New York at Buffalo
with
The City of Niagara Falls
Cover photo is a computer rendering of the East Falls Street Theatre District Proposal
Niagara Falls, New York
East Falls Street Theatre District

Planning and Urban Design Strategies for East Falls Street

The Urban Design Group

Robert G. Shibley, AIA, AICP
Project Director

Bill Clancy
Maurice Desjardins
Saloni Kumbkarni
Betsy Hauber
Brian Liona
Chris Lopez
Lita Semrau
Ed Smart

The City of Niagara Falls

Jacob A. Palillo
Mayor

Samuel M. Ferraro, Director
Department of Planning and Economic Development

John C. Drake, Director
Department of Community Development

The Urban Design Project, State University of New York at Buffalo

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Mayor Jacob A. Palillo has been the driving force behind the project. His sense of responsibility for defining a new destiny for the 100 plus acres of land east of the Niagara Falls Convention Center was the catalyst. His belief in the need to make a real downtown that respects the City, its residents, and the tourists has set a high standard for thinking about the potential for the area. Mayor Palillo’s images of the character that used to be Falls Street helped to set project expectations from the beginning.

While several critics at the University at Buffalo contributed a great deal, four in particular should be singled out. Professors Jean LaMarche, John Archea, Lynda Schneekloth, and Hiroaki Hata all provided comments at key stages during project development. Their criticism pushed the teams to avoid simple answers to complex questions, stressing that the reunification of the east and west side of downtown could not be achieved through any single design strategy. On the contrary, diverse strategies for redevelopment are required that respect history, current economics in the region, and the real diversity of both problems and opportunities on the sites.

Brian Liona did much of the photography for the publication and coordinated the development of final presentation drawings. In many ways Brian became the project coordinator in the final months of publication development. Thanks also goes to David Herzberg and Rachel Schneekloth for technical writing and proof reading assistance.

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PREFACE

The revitalization of downtowns in small sized cities (less than 100,000 people) represents one of the most difficult challenges in modern America. Many such cities have lost their affluent population to suburban flight, lost their industrial base, and lost much of the foundation upon which they initially developed. Yet, they are not so much dead as in transition. For Niagara Falls the transition dynamics need not be as difficult, as it has one of the world's wonders in the Falls, drawing both tourists and residents to the river edge.

The modern history of change in the downtown is marked by a number of actions originally designed to strengthen its tourist base and its attractiveness as a convention site. The result has been the gradual disinvestment in the historical downtown corridor (Falls Street starting from Portage Road on the east moving to the river on the west), in favor of more concentrated development west of the Convention Center focused on tourist development and entertainment.

The construction of the Robert Moses Parkway further hindered the full potential of downtown by routing traffic out of the former east Falls Street area into what is now the tourist area and the Rainbow Bridge to Niagara Falls, Ontario. Ironically, it is this same traffic to and from the Rainbow Bridge and the tourist area that can become the basis for the redevelopment of a downtown for the residents of the city.

The city has been land banking in the downtown area for several decades now. The area east of the Convention Center on Falls Street and on both sides of Quay Street is very much ready for development. With several proposals already put aside as economically unfeasible, a workable alternative will require patience, confidence, and the will to make downtown Niagara Falls a great place to live.

The power of the Falls will continue to bring the tourists. The tourists, in turn, will stay longer if there is a good place to "live well." A development policy that places city residents first is key to successful revitalization of downtown Niagara Falls.

Robert G. Shibley
July 1993
Figure 5. Site location diagram with primary boundary designated in black. The hatched area indicates the secondary boundary.
INTRODUCTION

This project is an attempt to provide specific suggestions for the rehabilitation of the East Falls Neighborhood in Niagara Falls, New York. The area's 100+ acres are over 80% vacant and mostly publicly owned, covering an area with mixed residential, commercial, and light industrial uses. These characteristics, in combination with the neighborhood's proximity to Niagara Falls and the Central Business District, make it a prime site for development. In fact, heavy traffic on the Robert Moses Parkway and entering the United States over the Rainbow Bridge has already increased investment pressure along Quay Street.

The primary site investigated is bounded by Buffalo Avenue on the south, Portage Road on the east, Niagara Street on the north, and Quay Street to the west. It is adjacent to the Niagara Falls Convention Center and surrounding residential neighborhoods, as well as a heavy industrial section to the far south. The focus of development will be Falls Street itself, the main corridor running east-west from the Convention Center to Portage Road.

A STUDIO APPROACH

The Urban Design Project has taken a studio approach to the process of planning the development of the neighborhood. This approach is specifically crafted to employ the site's history and demographics, its existing physical conditions (site analysis), and insights from precedent setting work done in other cities. Each of these topics were researched, discussed, evaluated, and continually checked against developing design strategies throughout the project.

Using this "studio" method, the project team has generated a tentative set of broad goals aimed at directing the development of east Falls Street in a manner that will insure the economic, social, and aesthetic success of the neighborhood. These goals are meant to open discussion on possible futures for the area, not to close them. Thus far, the planning effort has been shared between the City of Niagara Falls and the Urban Design Project. It is now time to further develop the discussion with a community of interested developers, citizens of the neighborhoods surrounding the site, and others with a stake in the future of the area. The tentative goals for the project which have emerged thus far include:

- linking the near east side neighborhoods to downtown through east Falls Street and the Convention Center, creating a real downtown for the citizens of the city;
- enhancing the area's attractiveness to both tourists and residents with an emphasis on the area's residents;
- enhancing the development potential of the site through infrastructure and amenities;
- creating a gateway to downtown Niagara Falls (including the East Falls development) from the Robert Moses Parkway and from the Rainbow Bridge up Niagara Street;

These goals are meant to open discussion on possible futures for the area, not to close them.
HISTORY

The roots of the East Falls Street Neighborhood stretch to the end of the 19th century, when breakthroughs in the generation and transmission of electricity spurred industrial development in the city of Niagara Falls. Its proximity to industrial zones prompted a significant influx of immigrants, especially industrial workers. The first and most prominent wave of immigrants were Italians, who helped dig the Hydraulic Canal near the Falls Street neighborhood.

The Italians were followed by a wave of Polish immigrants who, in 1901, founded the Holy Trinity Parish and Church. The stone church has since become a focal point of Falls Street. The neighborhood continued to attract a variety of immigrants, including Syrians, Armenians, and, after World War II, African-Americans. As each new ethnic group moved in, it tended to displace the previous community, causing a continual exodus from the increasingly diversified area.

The Falls Street of 1912 was the main business thoroughfare in the city. By 1913 the street had acquired one of the most expensive and elaborate supplemental illumination systems in the United States.
Although the neighborhood grew and was relatively prosperous during the first half of the 20th century, it has declined since mid-century. This is reflected in the housing trends: of the 1,024 housing units standing in 1970, over 90% were built before 1950, and, of those, 80% before 1940.

In the 1980s, the area was the proposed site for a major shopping center, the Manufacturer’s MegaMall. In the late 1970s and early 1980s a significant part of the site was razed as part of a slum and blight removal program, preparing the way for development proposals like the mall. With the election of Mayor Palillo, however, the MegaMall plan was further investigated, found to be economically unfeasible, and was terminated. The area’s continued deterioration has been reinforced by a variety of factors, including:

- a diminishing, aging, and less affluent population, contributing to a decreased tax base;
- a decline in tourism and the resulting revenue loss;
- the construction of the Robert Moses Parkway, permitting city-bound traffic to bypass the neighborhood entirely;
- the construction of the Niagara Falls Convention Center, which created a barrier between the neighborhood and downtown;
- suburban migration; and
- the abandonment and demolition of much of the area’s housing stock.

Attempts to address these problems have been stymied by the uncertainty of previous development projects like the MegaMall. Since the failure of that project, the city has been searching for a more appropriate development strategy for the area.

Figure 8. Looking east toward Holy Trinity Church on Falls Street as it appears today.
SITE ANALYSIS

The site analysis consists of a variety of examinations of the existing conditions of the East Falls Street Neighborhood. Based on the results of these analyses, the Urban Design Group made certain assumptions and judgements which supported and gave direction to their planning strategies. The studies include:

- image analysis (figure-ground studies, working sketches, photographs, and land use studies);
- traffic analysis (vehicular and pedestrian);
- statistical analysis (demographics); and
- retail analysis.

Image Analysis

An image analysis is a process used to examine certain key qualities of the neighborhood: paths, nodes, edges, landmarks, and districts. As part of the analysis, the project team examined corner conditions, spatial densities, land use, and the character of transitions from the neighborhood to surrounding areas.

In an effort to interpret the site conditions of the area, the Urban Design Group did a series of paintings representing the basic transportation routes surrounding the area as well as key nodes along Quay Street. The images also illustrate how the Convention Center and the Robert Moses Parkway create walls between the project site and the current downtown and tourist area.

Figure 9. Interpretive painting of transportation routes in the general area of the project.

Figure 10. An interpretive painting of the barriers created by the Robert Moses Parkway and the Convention Center as well as intersections along Quay Street.
Figure 11. Building and land use conditions of the primary site area depicts the relative density and location of residential, commercial, industrial, public, and vacant property.
Figure-ground drawings are studies of the spatial relationships between structures, both within the site and between the site and the surrounding areas. The drawing illustrates the sparse development of the area, especially in comparison to the mass of the Central Business District, the fine grain of the surrounding communities to the north and east, and the bulk of the heavy industry to the south. The transition between active downtown and the near-vacant Falls Street neighborhood is particularly harsh due to the parking lots around the Convention Center, and Quay Street’s large median which separates the Central Business District and east Falls Street. The jarring lack of a transition between the dense industrial zones along Buffalo Avenue and the vacant city-owned properties on the site also needs to be addressed.

Figure 13. Figure-ground analysis of the project site and immediate surrounds.

Figure 12. Permits issued for demolition far outnumber permits for new construction or renovation in the project site from 1985 to 1989. (Source: MegaMall Project Environmental Impact Statement)
East Falls Street is relatively dense starting at Portage Road, but two blocks west begins large expanses of vacant land stretching to Quay Street. The total site area has less than ten percent coverage by buildings, with the majority of them at the east end of the site. The modern Niagara County Social Services building represents one significant exception to the majority of older structures on the site.

Figure 14. The modern Niagara County Social Services building is the largest building on the west end of Falls Street.

Figure 15. The low density of the strip west of the Church illustrates the pattern of disinvestment in the area. The above drawing shows Falls Street from Portage Road on the right to Quay on the left.

Figure 16. The Convention Center marks the current western-most end of the Falls Street corridor with the suggestion of the tourist area of Niagara Falls, Ontario in the skyline.
Figure 17. Photographs recording conditions moving east on Rainbow Avenue toward Quay Street (upper left), moving west on Falls Street at the Portage Road intersection (upper right), and a street scene along Niagara Street near the Convention Center (right).
From the image analysis, the project team concluded that it would be necessary to achieve a smoother transition and connection between the East Falls Street Neighborhood and the surrounding communities through gradual infill and development. The study reveals the need to emphasize the visual connection down East Falls Street between the Portage edge and the Convention Center; the Quay axis as an entry to the city (define this entrance in an exciting way); and the procession created by industry along the Robert Moses Parkway.

The "Splash Park" adjacent to the Convention Center southwest of the Quay and Falls Street intersection can remain for its useful life but eventually the proposal images a higher and better use for the site.
The Urban Design Project
State University of New York at Buffalo

Traffic Analysis

A traffic analysis of existing pedestrian and vehicular patterns within the East Falls Street Neighborhood and in the large roadways leading into and out of the area helps to determine key points of entry into the site. Within the neighborhood, both pedestrian and vehicular traffic is light. Quay Street and Niagara Street are the two prominent arterials and handle the most traffic. On the outer boundaries there are traffic patterns and conditions that could be advantageous for both the East Falls Street Neighborhood and the City of Niagara Falls: for example, the entrance to the city via the Robert Moses Parkway already creates a gateway condition; this point of entrance should be announced properly.

Population Demographics

The statistical analysis compares population, household trends, and age statistics of the neighborhood to those of the entire city of Niagara Falls and Niagara County.

Over the past three decades, both Niagara County and the city of Niagara Falls have experienced a decline in population since reaching a peak in 1960. Between 1960 and 1970, Niagara County's population dropped by 2.7%; in the next decade, the population dropped by 3.5%. The city of Niagara Falls experienced an even more dramatic population decrease: it shrank by 16.3% between 1960 and 1970, 16.6% between 1970 and 1980, and another 13.3% between 1980 and 1990.

The population decrease within the city has had drastic effects on the East Falls Street Neighborhood: in the past 30 years, the population within the site has decreased from 1,263 to 675. This is mainly due to disinvestment in the area and the decline of the housing stock. The city currently offers a housing rehabilitation program for the area between east Falls Street and Niagara Street, as well as for other areas of the city. This program provides a way to begin strengthening the neighborhood and surrounding areas, and is much needed to support the commercial development the project team is proposing within the East Falls Street Neighborhood.

The population decline is also reflected in the household trends in Niagara County and in the city of Niagara Falls. Even though Niagara County lost population between 1970 and 1980, the number of households in the county grew by 11.7%, further illustrating the outmigration from the city to other areas of the county. The city recorded a 2.8% loss in its number of households.
during the same time period. Preliminary counts for 1990 released by the Bureau of Census suggest a continued decline in household numbers in the city.

As the population in Niagara Falls dropped over the past three decades, its composition has changed. The percentage of the population aged 65 and over has grown from 8% in 1960, to 14.7% in 1980, and was 19.1% in 1990. One potential housing application on the site that would add to the diversity of housing in the neighborhood would be the provision of senior housing to meet the growing demand.

A Comparison of City and County Population Changes 1900 - 1990
The statistical comparisons between the city and the county reinforce the need to repopulate the city and the East Falls Street Neighborhood in particular. The success of sustainable commercial development in the area depends on a strong residential base. The comparisons also suggest that the communities surrounding the neighborhood are aging but stable, and should be viewed as potential support for development.

Retail Analysis

An analysis of existing retail sites in the area helps to determine the viability of new commercial development. This type of analysis plots the locations of other successful commercial developments, such as the Summit Park Mall and the Niagara Factory Outlet Mall, in relation to the location of the East Falls Street Neighborhood. Knowing what services are already available in the area helps define the niche that new development should fill.

The retail analysis also provides existing retail market conditions in the region. Statistics provided by the Bureau of Census, based on 1982 and 1987 data show that Niagara County has kept its relative ranking of 18th in retail sales among all 62 counties statewide between 1982 and 1987. In 1982, sales were an estimated $854.2 million; in 1987, they were an estimated $1.18 billion.

Both Niagara County and the city of Niagara Falls have experienced a decline in the total number of retail establishments, but have nonetheless managed to post increased revenue. Food stores, eating and drinking establishments, automotive dealers, and gasoline stations have been at the forefront of the increase, posting the highest retail sales figures of 1987.

PRECEDENTS

After reviewing the site of the East Falls Street Neighborhood, the project team examined precedents of successful revitalizations of residential/retail areas that retained a pedestrian scale and reinforced downtown housing. From these precedents, including near-by Corning, New York, Niagara on the Lake, and the "Quality Hill" housing and commercial development in Kansas City, Missouri, and others, guidelines were produced related to form, function, economy, and planning.

Form

- Context (surroundings) is extremely important for a successful project;
- Variety is essential to the form of a project and determines the diversity of one’s experience in the area;
- Accessibility is essential to the form of the urban space;
- Construction must be sensitive to the existing structures;
- Scale and proportion are essential agents of design;

Function

- The area should have a balance of mixed uses;
- Public transportation should be easily accessible within the area;
- The area should be a real place for the real people who live there -- not just for tourists;

Economy

- The project should provide financial incentives for local entrepreneurs;
- A good catalyst project spurs further development;
Figure 20. Commercial retail outlets near the East Falls Street Theatre District.
The project should have low operation and maintenance costs;

- The area should have simple local management;

Planning
- There is a need for public and private collaboration in planning;

- Public participation and commitment is a must for the project to succeed;

- Development should be incremental and organic, with each new phase connected to and interdependent on the previous work.

PLANNING AND DESIGN STRATEGIES

The project team is proposing interdependent development throughout the East Falls Street Neighborhood. Building on the current efforts of the City of Niagara Falls in housing infill and rehabilitation programs, the team proposes marketing for new housing and infill in the area. The urban design and planning strategies proposed all build on the strengths of already existing neighborhoods.

In framing the planning and design strategies, the Urban Design Group explored a number of development approaches to density, lot parcel sizes, land use, and the potential for incremental development. From this exploration and the previous research, seven key development strategies emerged as follows:

1. Land Holding/Land Bank System. A large park-like space is proposed for the south of Falls Street, connecting it to the river front. It also moves into the north side with smaller parks, creating pauses in the streetscape. The "land bank" is seeded with wild flowers and a few trees, and is designed as a low maintenance wild area in the city that over a period of two or three years will become a significant amenity for "pioneer" developers.

2. The Convention Center and Downtown Connection. An alternative approach to routing vehicles and pedestrians around the Convention Center is proposed. Construction around the site is also proposed to help transform the Center from a dead-end of downtown to the center of downtown, linking east and west Falls Street.

3. Quay Street Retail Area and Entry Condition. The arrival off the Parkway and the Rainbow Bridge are points of entry and should be defined in a powerful way. A strong program of public art and sculpture at those points, combined with a defining structure on the entry corner, would accomplish this end and augment already strong retail possibilities on this corridor.

4. Niagara Street Residential/Retail Area. This proposal seeks to build on the strengths of the neighborhoods east of Portage Avenue and north of Niagara Street, aggressively marketing rehabilitation programs and providing first time home owner assistance as well as low to moderate income new home programs.

5. Portage Road/ Falls Street Entry. A modest "gateway" building at the corner of Portage Road and east Falls Street is proposed, announcing the neighborhood service retail on that end of the street opposite the Convention Center. The "corner store" image opposite the existing bank will help set the tone for further development in the area.
6. **Community Retail Service Area.** To support the residential neighborhoods to the north, east and west of Falls Street, community service retail is proposed in an exciting atmosphere helped by public art placements and the added amenity of brightly colored mosaic sidewalks made by residents and school children.

7. **Retail and Theatre District.** Closer to the Convention Center, this slightly upscale development on a theater theme will extend downtown to what used to be the neglected rear side of the Convention Center. Site programming on Falls Street from Portage to Quay is proposed to involve smaller more local services near Portage, moving to taller structures and higher densities in the Theatre District on both sides of Quay Street.
In General

The preliminary design investigations helped to raise issues which were then addressed in still more design work by the project team. Alternative figure-ground patterns, for example, contributed ultimately to the land bank strategy, which is proposed to connect the project area to both the Niagara River and to the downtown. An exploration of parcel size options and the possibility of either heavy commercial or light industrial land use south of Falls Street also contributed to the modest land bank/park proposal as one that can wait for some of the structural changes now at work in the region's economy.

The selection of specific land use strategies began with an exploration of the possibility of using the land south of Falls Street for heavy commercial or even light industry, buffering the retail and residential uses envisioned between Falls and Niagara Street to the north from the heavy industry along the Robert Moses Parkway. But the city and the surrounding region already has considerable land available for industrial park tenants elsewhere, and there is no perception that current demand will lead to any project development in this area in the near future. As a result, the project team is proposing a generous allocation of green space as both a buffer and amenity.

A key to all of the strategies in this document is the desirability of incremental development. The sites should be "finished" after each addition so early "pioneer" developers do not have to exist in an unsightly or raw site environment while waiting on other elements of the plan to give them needed amenities or infrastructure. For that reason, immediate landscape treatment and other vacant lot remediation is strongly recommended.
Figure 23. Parcel studies influenced the potential development strategies. In general larger parcels are proposed south of Falls Street with more residential scale development to the north.
Figure 24. The potential for incremental development is seen as key to the overall success of the area. The diagrams describe phases of development with the top one illustrating the Quay and Falls Street intersection and the Portage Road and Quay Street intersection as places to start. Later development (right) begins to show additional density along Falls Street, at the outer edges of Quay Street, and around the Convention Center.

Figure 25. One alternative land use strategy investigated by the project team involved using heavy commercial or light industrial uses south of Quay Street, buffering the area from the heavy industry near the Robert Moses Parkway. The model (right) illustrates how the massing might work if such a proposal were to be adopted.
Strategy 1. Land Bank/ Park

A large park-like space is proposed for the south of Falls Street, connecting it to the river front. It also moves into the north side with smaller parks, creating pauses in the streetscape and suggesting the park to the south. The "land bank" is seeded with wild flowers and a few trees which should be developed as a low maintenance wild area in the city. Over a period of two or three years the area will become a significant amenity for "pioneer" developers.

A significant part of the land bank/park system is the development of smaller, more...
open spaces on the north side of Falls Street. These smaller spaces provide key transitions along the street as its use changes from residential services near Portage Road, to more intense retailing, theater related entertainment, dining, and office uses further west. The large square mid-way between Portage Road and Quay Street becomes the public living room for the area. Essentially, places like the square, the larger park, neighborhood services, and the amenities of the new Theatre District in the area will all help convey that downtown is a good place to live.

Figure 27. The land bank/park system is intended to cross Falls Street at strategic locations, helping to link life on the street to the open space to the south.
A final characteristic of the land bank/park system is that it is a central part of a larger system of key focal points, paths, and gateway gestures which will contribute to the framing of a new image downtown.

Figure 18. Proposed key nodes and paths connecting amenities and entrances to the site area.
Strategy 2. The Convention Center and Downtown Connection

The goal in addressing the Convention Center in the strategies is to transform it from a dead-end of downtown to the center of town. The strategy involves new roads and pedestrian paths, new apartment and even single family home construction, and dense commercial development related to the proposed Quay and Falls Street Theatre District as well as to conventioneer and tourist interests.

Existing conditions surrounding the Convention Center reveal a number of vehicular dead ends and unfriendly pedestrian paths. There is clearly no reason to travel "around" the Center except by retreating to either Niagara Street or Rainbow Boulevard. A number of

Figure 29. Existing land uses surrounding the Convention Center.
investigations into how best to route traffic through the Center site led to the proposed creation of an inner loop consistent with the city's street grid but closer to the facility than Niagara Street and Rainbow Boulevard. This will increase access to the site and create new development parcels for construction consistent with the new character of downtown.

The large expanses of parking surrounding the Center pose another obstacle to creating a pleasant pedestrian environment. Current parking in the area, including the underutilized parking ramp just west of the Center, is more than sufficient to enable some of it to be given over to more pedestrian-oriented productive use.

Incremental change around the site of the Convention Center involves phased development that initially reconnects streets, allocates parking to the ramp and smaller lots on the site, and develops a second amphitheater/park. Initial mixed use commercial construction would start nearest the new theatre park and at the intersection of Quay and Falls Streets. Phase two development around the Convention Center would involve new infill construction completing the Falls Street axis, and infill on the reconnected streets. Multi-unit housing with commercial services on the ground floor are proposed, as well as support facilities for the Convention Center.
Figure 31. Phasing the development around the Convention Center: existing conditions (upper left), initial infrastructure improvements (upper right), and intermediate density (lower left and right).
Figure 32. Elevations around the new theatre park area of the Convention Center illustrate the scale and mixed-use character of the proposal.
Alternative building massing concepts illustrate how different densities can all be seen to be whole or complete while leaving the potential for still more development. No single development is the key to the success of the project, but each project must contribute. It would be a mistake to hinge the development on one single "anchor," rather than developing a more robust mixed-use strategy that would derive its strength from the diversity. This does not preclude anchor development, only dependence on it.

Figure 33. An interpretation of the Quay Street entrance to the site off of the Robert Moses Parkway and the build-up on the Falls Street corridor.

Figure 34. Two building mass alternatives illustrating medium and relatively high density development around the Convention Center.
Figure 35. Illustrated site plan of high density development around the Convention Center.
Figure 36. The building blocks in white east of the Convention Center represent a high density development option.
3. Quay Street Retail Area and Entry Condition

Much of the site potential of Falls Street is dependent upon its ability to draw traffic from off of the Robert Moses Parkway and the Rainbow Bridge. A strong gateway building related to the Nabisco grain elevator's prominence and the mass of the Convention Center at the intersection of Quay and Rainbow Boulevard is an important contribution to this potential. In addition, a program of public art within the site area and anticipating the area on approach from the Parkway will further complement the gateway dynamics.

Figure 37. The Nabisco grain elevator looking east across Quay Street.

Figure 38. An interpretation of the Quay Street view from the Parkway illustrating the relationship between the elevator, the Rainbow Boulevard/Quay Street intersection building site, and the mass of the Convention Center.
A building on the northwest corner of Quay Street and Rainbow Boulevard will need to address the low scale of development between Buffalo Avenue and Rainbow Boulevard and the larger mass of the grain elevator across Quay, as well as the proposed development along Quay to the north. The following schematic designs illustrate one of many alternative constructions that might provide a gateway dynamic and fulfill a mixed use housing/retail and theater program. The project builds connections to the Convention Center and provides a link with the land bank/park system and path.

Figure 39. A key building site in the construction of a gateway image based on site lines from the Parkway.

Figure 40. Theatre complex site plan on Quay at Rainbow Boulevard.
Figure 41. Conceptual designs of a gateway theatre complex floor plans (left), sections (top), and elevations (right).
The southeast corner of Quay Street and Niagara Street offers another opportunity for the site to announce itself to traffic, in this case from the Rainbow Bridge as well as from the Parkway. The site demands a much less monumental building than the Rainbow Boulevard interchange due to the scale of the immediate surrounds. One concept calls for a very simple corner building with a strong sculptural marker visible on both the north-south and the east-west directions. The sculptural treatment is consistent with the establishment of a tradition of street art throughout the new downtown area. Other expressions of markers are illustrated to suggest a range of possibilities.

Figure 42. Schematic of graphic markers which could signify entry into the new downtown, site location diagram of corner building, north elevation corner of Quay Street facing Niagara Street, floor plan of corner building.
4. Niagara Street Residential/Retail

A program of aggressive residential rehabilitation and new infill construction is proposed for the areas just north and south of Niagara Street from Portage to as far west as Fourth Street. The success of the east Falls Street project will be measured in its ability to make downtown a very desirable place to live. This will require efforts to attract a diverse population back to the city with a balanced program of incentives for the full range of incomes.

Ethnic and income diversity should be a theme for neighborhood housing development surrounding the downtown. Every effort should be made to avoid the gentrification of the area. A policy of one-for-one housing replacement should be initiated, for example, so that as the area becomes more attractive to middle and upper income populations, the existing population will be fully accommodated.

5. Portage Road/Falls Street Entry.

One of the important areas of entry to the site will be at the intersection of Portage Road and Falls Street. It is here that the site will announce itself as a residential retail service center supporting both the Polish community east of the Portage Road and the neighborhoods north of the site. A "corner store" grocery and deli is proposed to set the theme and scale for these first few blocks of modest development.

6. Community Retail Service Area.

Directly related to the modest gateway entry on the Portage Road side of the project is the service retail that would extend to the Holy Trinity Church site. Service retail stores like a cleaners, a video store, a barber shop, hairdressers, a drug store, a hardware outlet, photo shop, and other service retail are seen as the primary tenants building on the M & T bank at the corner of Portage Road and Falls Street. Complementing this transitional area would be a public art initiative extending the full length of Falls Street, relating the neighborhood service area to a theater district theme for the whole site.

It will be important to build community ownership of the area through direct participation in the detailed planning for the site, and in actually producing some of the art programs for the street. For example, a brightly colored sidewalk tile program could be initiated that would involve local school children in the fabrication of art tiles and in their actual placement in cooperation with construction contractors. Such a program relates directly to the pride of the community by making a new downtown and would, as a by-product of community pride, attract visitors to the Theatre District.

In addition to the art theme, the east end of Falls Street would also provide connections to the land bank/park system for the residents with mid-block entry points which would increase the retail value of the properties mid-block and add further life to the street.

Figure 43. The branch bank proudly holds one corner of the entry to Falls Street from Portage Road. A "corner store" is proposed to frame the opposite corner, setting the tone of retail and community service for this end of the development.
Figure 44. Concept sketch for a new corner store development opposite the bank at Falls and Portage (above) illustrates the scale of development for this end of the street. The opposite page illustrates the way such a facility would fit into the existing landscape, filling out the corner and complementing the church and the already residential character of this end of the street.
Niagara Falls, New York
East Falls Street Theatre District
A later stage of development illustrates increased infill development along Falls Street and a small vest pocket park as the first of several gestures relating developing north of Falls Street to the emerging land bank/park to the south. Still more infill development and a monumental greenway entrance to the land bank/park is illustrated on the opposite page along with a sketch of a possible sidewalk tile pattern. Street art like the tile pattern is envisioned as a main theme linking the more intense theatre district with its restaurants to the neighborhood service area.

Figure 45. Incremental figure-ground and neighborhood services on the first block of the new district.
Figure 46. Incremental figure-ground and greenway entrance structure.
7. Retail and Theatre District

The proposal is to make the entire district a theatre district, with a gradually changing emphasis from the more residential service quality of Portage Road to the new downtown centering on Quay Street. Approaching the Convention Center, height variations grow from two story residential scale to four or more stories approaching the Convention Center. Gradual development begins by giving initial emphasis to both ends of Falls Street, with later stages working on the infill between the retail services center and the downtown at the Quay and Falls Street intersection.
Parking throughout the area is behind the stores or parallel on Falls Street when there is a median strip. Diagonal parking should be considered if no median is provided to increase the density and street life.

Serious consideration should be given to restricting land uses in the district by deed constraints or zoning ordinance. The focus should be on uses consistent with neighborhood and family oriented commercial and entertainment facilities.

In this fashion, the district offers an alternative to the carnival atmosphere of Niagara Falls, Ontario and the louder night life west of the Convention Center.

Figure 48. Phase two involves an aggressive program of infill development along Quay and Falls Streets coupled with the maturation of new and renovation housing programs in the surrounding neighborhoods.
Figure 49. Phase III illustrates the full development of the Theatre District between Quay Street and Portage Road.
PHASE I

Initial development should lay in the basic infrastructure such as right of way improvements, curbs and gutters, lighting, signage, and some of the key streetscape amenities that will help set the tone for later development. The emphasis will be on development along Quay Street focused on the entertainment zone, and on the neighborhood service zone. Residential infill and rehabilitation should also begin immediately. Finally, work on the land bank/park should also begin immediately with wild flower and tree planting as well as path improvements for bikes and pedestrians.

PHASE II

Later, increased attention should be given to the entertainment zone extending both east and west from Quay Street, new infill should focus on downtown retail, there should be a continued emphasis on housing, and on the completion of neighborhood services near Portage Road.

PHASE III

The final phase of development involves a buildout which could look as dense as the cover illustration. It is important to recognize that, although the image is one of clusters of small buildings, the realities of commercial construction today suggest that there will be large parcels developed as single structures with shared services and multiple tenants. The illustrations depict small structures in order to emphasize the need to provide multiple tenants with individual identities and to stress that when there is a single large tenant, the building masses and facades should be developed in a manner that avoids large expanses of blank wall or monolithic structure.
Figure 51. Concept sketches of the city square on Falls Street, residential infill around the square, and an illustration of the application of simple design guidelines and parking accommodation on Falls Street (right).
Development guidelines should be simple, designed to help secure a sustainable commercial retail environment which also supports local residential character.

Buildings and blocks have clearly marked base, middle and top characteristics with no blank walls on the streetscape. Parking is provided off of Falls Street in lots to the rear of the buildings, as well as in parallel or diagonal on-street parking. The character of the streetscape is intended to recall the historic character of old Falls Street.
Figure 52 The rough study model illustrates the widening of Falls Street from Quay to the Holy Trinity Church enhancing the landmark termination of the Falls Street axis and the transition into the predominately neighborhood service retail between the church and Portage Road.

The study model photograph to the right illustrates the entrance onto Quay from the Robert Moses Parkway and the new landmark corner building on the northwest corner of Quay and Rainbow Boulevard.
The Urban Design Project at The University at Buffalo, School of Architecture and Planning works with community and governmental organizations throughout the Western New York region. The focus of the work is on issues of community development and urban revitalization. The project was initiated in September of 1990 in an effort to marshal some of the resources of the University in service of the community. In addition, the project is an intellectual exploration of architecture and planning. As such, it becomes a way to critically examine these professions. The Western New York region is one of our most important learning laboratories.