A New Downtown Neighborhood in Buffalo

The Urban Design Project
School of Architecture and Planning
State University of New York at Buffalo

and

Buffalo Place Inc.
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PREFACE

Housing for Buffalo’s downtown fundamentally is about the quality of life in our region. The density and diversity of downtown housing is a measure of our health as a community and our commitment to providing meaningful choices to our citizens. Downtown housing also is about the sense of security and pride we take in the city and the region. Any blighted neighborhood diminishes our city. A blighted downtown is no exception. The current lack of housing downtown helps to insure the continued outward migration of population to the suburbs and further erosion of the city’s tax base. Ultimately, the city could lose its ability to deliver any meaningful service to residents anywhere within the city.

It is a truism in urban design that as office occupancy and housing go, so goes retailing. We know from sister cities across the United States and Canada that when they develop a good and diverse downtown housing base, they also increase office occupancy and increase downtown’s retail market share. All this, then, increases the ability of the city to invest in its neighborhoods with improved services driven by an improved tax base.

Downtown can become the neighborhood of neighborhoods, improving the diversity of lifestyle choices, the ability of the city to care for itself, and improving the quality of life for everyone in the region.

Downtown Buffalo needs more housing. More people living downtown will mean more people patronizing downtown stores, restaurants, theaters and festivals. More people living in what are now empty areas just north, east and west of downtown’s Theatre District will re-link downtown with Buffalo’s strong neighborhoods. The expansion of Allentown, the Lower West Side and the East Side into downtown will make both the neighborhoods and downtown stronger.

People want more housing downtown. Downtown housing symposiums pack lecture halls. Developers show a keen interest. More importantly, the few housing developments that have been done downtown fill up with residents, and they report to us that they like living downtown.

We hope that our partnership with the Urban Design Project will provide a framework for discussing downtown housing and be a springboard for future development.

Richard T. Reinhard
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A New Downtown Neighborhood in Buffalo

To be a great place to work and shop, Downtown Buffalo also must become a great place to live. Over the past 30 years, Buffalo has persevered in its efforts to redevelop downtown into a self-sustaining, regional economic center. It has had much success in selected aspects of this endeavor, notably in the construction of new "Class A" office space, a light-rail transit mall, a new baseball stadium, new and refurbished public plazas, and a new entertainment district on Main Street.

Other aspects of the anticipated downtown renaissance have not been as quick to progress. Notably, retail and residential development have lagged significantly behind. The exploration documented in these pages lays out the issues that Buffalo will need to consider to attract more people to live in its downtown core.

Today there is strong consensus among community leaders on the need for more housing downtown. Having more people living downtown will bring more life to the streets and sidewalks, support more stores and restaurants, improve the city's tax base and provide a committed group of advocates for downtown's interests. All in all, more housing will significantly enhance efforts to make downtown a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week destination.

Downtown housing is a quality of life issue. It is about our sense of place and sense of pride in our city.

Phil Fairbanks

Figure 1. Charles Burchfield's paintings of 1920 Buffalo (left and above) illustrate the character that used to be the Downtown neighborhood.
The Urban Design Project and Buffalo Place Inc. propose a new downtown neighborhood. Our work involved reviewing downtown Buffalo’s history, comparing Buffalo to other cities, interviewing stakeholders in downtown housing, analyzing demographics and market conditions, and exploring alternative planning and design proposals. Our resulting strategy envisions rehabilitating and converting old buildings and infilling with new buildings, reconnecting the urban fabric where it has been lost to surface parking and vacant lots.

Existing economic, social, physical, and demographic conditions of the center city area all combine to suggest that a plan for downtown housing should embrace five basic goals.

1. Focus. Buffalo should focus downtown housing in an area that links strong inner-city neighborhoods to downtown and to each other. Concentrating on an area bounded by Goodell/Edward on the north to Huron on the south, from Michigan on the east to Elmwood on the west will reconnect downtown to the rest of the city and link downtown residents to existing neighborhood services. The Theatre District, the Chippewa corridor, the Huron/Genesee corridor, and the Main-Goodell/Edward intersection merit special attention.

2. Diversity. Buffalo should develop downtown housing that encourages economic, racial, and social diversity, in order to properly reflect downtown’s role as the center and focus of the real diversity of the region.

3. Increments. Buffalo should develop increments of downtown housing. Developing 100 units of market-rate housing and 100 units of low-income or specialty housing is a reasonable goal.

4. Environment. Buffalo should improve the pedestrian environment in and around downtown, with enhanced lighting, street trees and furniture, better cleanliness and more police foot patrols, further establishing the image of downtown as a safe and enjoyable place to be.

5. Organization. Buffalo should organize a downtown housing development corporation to help create a downtown neighborhood by advocating for it and seeking reliable sources of both public and private investment.

There is the possibility of continuous pedestrian traffic between the CBD and the 120,000 people who live within a two mile radius of the city core.

Laurence K. Rahim

History

It is fair to say that Americans always have had an uneasy relationship with their cities. Cities have been unfairly accused of harboring every vice and sin imaginable. They also are, however, the economic, social, and cultural engines that drive any society.

The urban environment rather than suburbia brings out the creative genius in its people.

Robert Benia

New immigrants also were arriving in Buffalo. African-Americans had been moving in from the South since at least 1920, and Puerto Ricans had established themselves on the City’s Lower West Side since World War II. At the same time, the federal government was encouraging the suburban exodus by offering low-interest loans to home buyers, and by instituting the federal Interstate Highway Act of 1954. This caused massive highway construction and allowed people to live further from their place of employment.

Meanwhile, urban renewal programs, intended to revitalize the cities, served merely to further destabilize and depopulate troubled neighborhoods. Eventually, businesses and retailers recognized that metropolitan areas were becoming too decentralized to be served by a single downtown location. Retail and service businesses followed the affluent middle class to the suburbs to serve this growing market, while simultaneously disinvesting in central city locations.

The condition we now find ourselves in, a less than vigorous downtown, is the product of a long-term problem, which we will not solve overnight. If history has taught us anything, it is that retail and service industries follow their market. If we expect downtown to become more commercially viable in the future we must make a long-term commitment to rebuilding a population base in downtown.
Figure 2. Downtown Buffalo was once connected by a system of trolley lines that tended to follow the radii of Joseph Ellicott’s master plan of the city.

Figure 3. A comparison between the Theatre District of 1915 and that of 1991 reveals that virtually all of the residential-scale buildings have been removed. The earlier downtown boasted a full spectrum of entertainment, commercial services, and housing.
Figure 4. Ongoing migration of Buffalo residents has occurred over several decades.

Figure 5. All housing is not gone from Downtown. Johnson Park housing, for example, is within a few blocks of Main Street.

Figure 6. New housing on Michigan Avenue further illustrates interest in housing near downtown.
Other Cities

Buffalo is not the first city to attempt to revitalize its central city. There are many examples of attempts in other places, several of which have been successful. As part of a search for examples of such successes, the Urban Design Project reviewed studies, including the archives of the Rudy Brumer Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment (a case file of more than 250 examples of urban excellence). We initially reviewed 31 projects, looking closely at such issues as location, development mix, activity level and type of construction. Based on this initial review we selected four of the projects, examining in detail their adjacency to the downtown, mixed-use development, 24-hour life, infill as well as new construction development, neighborhood linkages, parking options, and housing in the "upper level" of the developments.

These precedents included: the development of Downtown Portland, Oregon over the past two decades; the Northside Economic Development Program in Pittsburgh; Chinatown Revitalization Program in Honolulu; and the Quality Hill project in Kansas City. A brief summary of each project is provided with a diagram of the place and a sketch to illustrate the character and relative density of the developments.

An analysis of each precedent further reveals a set of common characteristics of program success, predicated on the inclusion of a significant investment of resources for housing development. In Portland, for example, housing development was hindered by the existence of quality neighborhoods within easy commuting distance of downtown. Still, the city of 450,000 people recognized it as an important priority, and eventually was successful in attracting housing development into the downtown core. Portland's comprehensive master plan also targeted other important components such as ground floor retail in all new development, maintenance of a healthy mix of activities and uses, and a focus on mass-transit improvements to eliminate the need for redundant parking, increase the density of downtown, and improve air quality.

The result, now 23 years after the 1972 plan, is a downtown that has moved from a 4% share of the regional retail market to more than 30%. It is a downtown with as much life over the weekend as during the week, and as much life after 5 p.m. as at noon.

In another example Honolulu, Kansas City, Missouri; and Pittsburgh, housing was a key ingredient to development. In most cases, development efforts were characterized by employing a mix of investment groups, through some kind of "umbrella" facilitator organization; for example, neighborhood housing services, a formal housing plan, financial incentives, implementation policies, public design review, transit improvements, and design guidelines. Buffalo's history, current circumstances, and precedents from other revitalization efforts all suggest that success in downtown will require a comprehensive effort.
**GOALS**

1. **Focus**

   Downtown residents want to feel that they are living in a neighborhood of their own. Having enough housing units in one area is a critical part of creating a sense of neighborhood.

   Downtown Buffalo is too large to allow dispersed development throughout the entire center city. For the short term the city needs to focus on a smaller area for housing development which will allow the city to quickly establish neighborhood experiences for early pioneers. Focusing on the right area will allow the city to build on the strengths of surrounding neighborhoods.

   Buffalo should focus on developing downtown housing in an area bounded by Goodell/Edward on the north to Huron on the south, from Michigan on the east to Elmwood on the west. Meriting special attention are the Theatre District, the Chippewa corridor to the west, the Huron Genesee corridor to the east and the Main Goodell/Edward intersection at the north.
The Urban Design Project
State University of New York at Buffalo

Concentrating on developing housing in the defined area will take advantage of the part of the downtown building stock most friendly to residents. Major housing projects -- City Centre, Ansonia Center and the Spaulding Building -- already have been developed in this area. The Urban Design Project has identified more than 25 additional properties especially amenable to housing development. (The Downtown Buffalo Housing Source Book, identifying each property's location, description, current use, condition, lot size, building size, assessed value, current status, owner and current zoning, is available at Buffalo Place Inc.) Developing housing in the defined area also will draw downtown closer to strong, adjacent neighborhoods, and will help diffuse Buffalo's linear downtown, reinforced by the transit mall, which serves as a barrier to neighborhoods east and west.

Finally, focusing on developing housing in the defined area will help link downtown residents to services, such as food stores, dry cleaning and automobile repair. Neighborhoods adjacent to downtown already have a large number of these services, so, if downtown were more visibly connected to these neighborhoods, potential downtown residents would view these service businesses as being located within a comfortable walk or short drive. This would help improve downtown's image as a neighborhood and would alleviate the need for the city to subsidize the development of redundant services.

Connecting the new downtown neighborhood to the east and west can best be accomplished through developing Chippewa and Genesee streets as a single, connected residential corridor. Connecting to the north can best be accomplished by developing the Main/Goodell/Edward intersections.

The downtown neighborhood will be abutted on the south by the downtown retail and commercial district. When taken as a whole, with additional development internal to the Theatre District, these linkages can help create the critical mass and identity for a single downtown neighborhood.

Additional housing undoubtedly will be developed to the southeast of the downtown retail and commercial district -- in the Old First Ward and Valley -- and to the southwest - Waterfront Village. These areas, however, are more detached from downtown and will need to be supported by their own neighborhood infrastructure.

Figure 1. Residential development in downtown needs to build on strengths of nearby neighborhoods, particularly the Lower West Side, Allentown, the Hospital District, and the East Side.

Figure 2. The Chippewa, Genesee, Huron Streets corridor should be developed as a major link between Buffalo's Downtown and Lower West Side and East Side neighborhoods.
The Chippewa Street Reach West

The Elmwood-Chippewa intersection represents a major transition between a small but well-preserved neighborhood called the West Village and downtown. The sense of continuity currently is lost here due to the presence of two unattractive surface parking lots. These vacant tracts give rise to the impression of approaching downtown from the "back door." A development at this critical node with an emphasis on housing, coupled with a general improvement in the condition of Chippewa Street (improved sidewalks, trees, police foot patrols, etc.) would help to encourage foot traffic and enhance the residential potential for the area.

Further east but before Main Street, the Root Building on Chippewa, 210 Delaware and space above the newly restored Calumet present two of several residential opportunities for the Theatre District neighborhood. In addition to the rehabilitation of existing buildings, infill construction should be considered to complete the corner conditions on the corridor.

The Main and Edward Reach North

The main entrance to downtown from the north on Main Street is now a vacant lot, at the southwest corner of Main/Edward and Goodell. It presents a bad first image and hinders a useful connection of downtown to the Allentown neighborhood. The Urban Design Project has concluded several studies of potential development on this site to include its potential for senior citizen housing subsidized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In feasibility studies conducted by Professor Rashid Mohsini with Brian Cook, Mark O'Grady, and Matthew Reikin, nine different development options were explored looking at different possibilities for HUD and private-sector participation in the project. The study concluded that private development actually had the best chance for an early return on equity investment.

The results of a feasibility analysis, looking at all three schemes considering cost of construction and 20 years of operation, are as follows:

- Scheme 1 (all HUD-financed) shows that all three sizes would go into debt. Size three, the largest, would incur the least debt, at $126,696 over the 20 years of operations.
- Scheme 2 (all privately financed) holding rents between $400 and $500/month for one-bedroom apartments and $700-$850/month for two-bedroom units actually shows a 3 percent return on equity in the first year of operation for the middle-density scheme using $500 and $850/month rents.
- Scheme 3 (mixed HUD and privately financed) requires residential and commercial portions to be evaluated apart from the HUD portion. The HUD portion, remaining at 43 units for all three sizes, is unfeasible, incurring a $565,000 debt over 20 years of operation. The combined private development also shows a negative return on equity.
## Vernor-Teck Site Development

### Feasibility Analysis

<table>
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<tr>
<th>SCHEME 1</th>
<th>SCHEME 2</th>
<th>SCHEME 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All HUD 202 Residential Development</td>
<td>All Private Residential and Commercial Development</td>
<td>Mixed HUD 202 and Private Residential and Commercial Development (requires separate parcels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>96 Units</strong></td>
<td><strong>First level commercial retail</strong></td>
<td><strong>First level commercial retail</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>75 units above</strong></td>
<td><strong>36 units above 1st floor would be private development</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>48 HUD units</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>125 Units</strong></td>
<td><strong>First two levels commercial retail/office</strong></td>
<td><strong>First level commercial retail</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>64 units above 2nd floor</strong></td>
<td><strong>54 units above 1st floor would be private development</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>48 HUD units</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>48 units by HUD</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>142 Units (requires HUD waiver of 125 unit limit)</strong></td>
<td><strong>First two levels commercial retail</strong></td>
<td><strong>First level commercial retail</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>104 units above 2nd floor</strong></td>
<td><strong>66 units</strong></td>
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Figure 17. An analysis of three schemes explored for the Vernor-Teck site at Main and Edward Streets. This analysis favors private development of the site for housing and mixed use retail and office.

Directly adjacent to the Vernor-Teck site is the Sidway Building, a high-profile, terra-cotta and brick structure, which also has the power to further enhance the reach across Goodell and Edward streets to the Allentown neighborhood. The Sidway Building is an example of a rather large class "B" office building, which over time may be suited to conversion to housing. It has a large lightwell at the south of the building, which means all units could have abundant light and air. The building also has the critical mass necessary for a significant number of units in a high-profile development.

Figure 18. The Spaulding building has apartments above the first floor, providing pioneer residential space in the 700 Block of Main Street. Other residential development near the site indicates that there is a beginning nucleus of residents in the Theatre District around which to build a neighborhood. City Centre on Main Street also will build on the residential base, with new tenants preparing to move into the project at the intersection of Main and Chippewa streets.
Alan Makalinao has proposed a mixed-use (residential/office/retail) schematic design illustrating the use of the Main and Edward streets site as a gateway into downtown. The scheme employs an arcade and a commercial ground floor and a mix of office and residential space above the ground floor in a 10-story structure. The scheme further illustrates the potential to build mid-density "garden apartments" within the Theatre District to the west, adjacent to the Cyclorama Building. The resulting density in residential units would help provide the critical mass of residents needed to reinforce pioneer tenants in the nearby City Centre, Ansonia Center and Spaulding Building residences.

The Huron/Genesee Reach East

This site has the potential to serve as a gateway to vehicular traffic entering downtown from both the Kensington Expressway, and vehicular and pedestrian traffic from the Lower East Side via Genesee Street. It is especially important as a means for establishing linkages between downtown and a disenfranchised and troubled East Side. Considerable work has already been done on the Genesee Village buildings, but developers have been unable to complete redevelopment up to this point. Inclusion of a residential component in the project may serve to strengthen their viability, humanize the streetscape in that area, and improve the connection of downtown to the Lower East Side.

Figure 19. Alan Makalinao’s mixed-use proposal for the site bounded by Main, Edward, and Pearl streets, on the northern edge of downtown.

Figure 20. Spatial and image studies of the Genesee-Chippewa corridor reaching to the East Side of the city. The diagonal street is Genesee, which meets Huron Street at Roosevelt Plaza on Main Street.
Figure 21. Surface conditions and current land use studies of the Genesee-Chippewa corridor reaching to the East Side of the city.

Figure 22. Ash and Spruce Street site plan illustrates some of the potential housing sites on the Genesee corridor reaching east.
The Theatre District

The area bounded by Goodell/Edwards on the north, Chippewa on the south, Washington on the east and Elmwood on the west offers the best single opportunity for creating a new residential neighborhood in the downtown area. Its scale, its adjacency to pre-existing neighborhoods, its focus on entertainment, and its abundance of older structures with rehabilitation possibilities all converge to offer a natural fit for a focused investment in housing development. A large number of vacant sites and buildings offer a wide range of possibilities for residential construction.

Figure 23. Given Howard's Genesee Street radial landscape plan and vest pocket park illustration. In the long term, a safe, clean neighborhood should be supported by substantial public amenities such as parks like this one, proposed for the 100 block on Genesee Street.

Figure 24. Vacant sites and buildings in the Theatre District as of December of 1992. Since this study, the church on Delaware and Tupper streets has been acquired by a new congregation.
Figure 25. A figure ground analysis of the structures in the Theatre District reveals vacant land in the area. It also reveals the residential fabric from the Lower West Side approaching Delaware Avenue below Tupper.

Figure 26. Current land uses in the Theatre District.

Figure 27. The sketch elevations on both sides of Delaware, Franklin and Pearl streets in the Theatre District demonstrate the number of holes in the street fabric.
A recommended change in the infrastructure of the Theatre District is to extend Johnson Park two blocks east across Delaware Avenue. A connecting street between Delaware Avenue and Main Street in the long block between Chippewa and Tupper could be an effective extension of the scale and ambiance of Johnson Park, a residential street, and would provide another connection between the West Village and the Theatre District. The idea of a crosstown street has been promoted since at least 1923, and the concept for a residential extension of Johnson Park was called for in the Regional Center Update Plan of 1985. In the January 3, 1923, edition of the Truth newspaper published in Buffalo, a headline read "Conditions Demand Street Between Tupper-Chippewa." The article states, "The long block between Tupper and Chippewa on Main, Pearl, Franklin, and Delaware is a great and vital public inconvenience, as well as being a detriment to the advancement of property values." This long block was also the target of the Regional Center Update, where it was identified as the Franklin Residential Neighborhood.

Figure 28. The Franklin Residential Neighborhood as envisioned by the 1985 Regional Center Update for downtown.

Figure 29. Before-and-after isometric and sketch studies of another alternative to the Johnson Park extension developed by Larry Lippold in the Urban Design Project.
2. Diversity

Buffalo traditionally has been known as a city of neighborhoods. Each enclave has had its own character depending on the racial and ethnic groups that settled there. Each neighborhood has had a local business district to serve the basic needs of its residents. For larger shopping trips or a Saturday night "on-the-town," downtown beckoned. It offered a wider range of goods and services than any one neighborhood business district and served as the focus for the entire city.

Thus, within each neighborhood, there existed relative homogeneity of culture or class, but all neighborhoods together as one city represented a diversity of cultures, and downtown was the crossroads wherein all people could co-exist. In more recent times, as populations have shifted and the automobile has become more prevalent, suburban shopping areas have flourished and downtown’s prominence has waned. City residents are now just as likely to look outward as inward.

For all of their successes, however, suburbs cannot offer all of the advantages downtown can. The suburban shopping mall, unlike downtown, is a private enterprise. It is free to include or exclude people at its discretion. It is not a crossroads or a public space. It primarily is an enterprise devoted to selling, so it cannot offer the wide range of opportunities that a healthy downtown can offer. Furthermore, these suburban places are most easily accessible by car. Public transportation, while it exists, is infrequent compared to within the center city. This exclusion limits both shopping and employment opportunities that these suburban centers offer.

In establishing downtown as a neighborhood, we should be sure to offer a living experience fundamentally different from that of the suburbs. We should work, not just to provide housing, but to reconnect downtown to the neighborhoods around it, and make it a neighborhood of inclusion rather than exclusion.

As part of this strategy, a diversity of housing types should be actively encouraged in downtown. The City of Boston has had tremendous success in encouraging diversity by a formula they call "one-third, one-third, one-third". This means that within any private housing development receiving public assistance one-third of the units are reserved for low-income tenants (below 60% of median regional income), one-third are reserved for moderate-income (60%-80% of regional median income), and one-third are offered at "market-rate" prices (whatever the market will bear). In order to assist in providing funding for such projects, the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) was established by the State Legislature as a public benefit agency to offer low-interest loans to developers willing to develop housing which can satisfy their standards for a "public benefit." Other sources of financing include private debt and equity, and "low-income housing tax credits," which can be sold to investors as a tax shelter. Through these programs, MHFA has assisted in financing 50,000 new or rehabilitated units statewide over the last 20 years.
Deciding what kind of diversity is desired or appropriate is a complex issue. Racial or socioeconomic quotas feel coercive. "Anything goes" feels too prone to the gentrification that eventually makes the downtown neighborhood just another exclusive domain of the wealthy. Some guidelines on the types of mixes may be desirable.

Banking institutions have got to get involved here. . . we can't keep relying on city juice.

James Anderson

One measure of diversity is the income stratification currently experienced in the region. A guideline for the range of housing based on the demographics of the area would mean that 20-35% of the housing built downtown should be low-income, 25-45% should be moderate-income, and 25-40% should be high-income housing. Serious consideration should be given to the development of the higher income market early in the development of the neighborhood creating the demand for services and amenities.

Another measure of diversity is a full range of density types as well as supplemental housing programs. A well considered housing plan will enable a spread of medium-to-high density-housing options in downtown as well as a full range of special housing programs such as:

- Quality single-room-occupancy housing could take place downtown, providing transitional housing or studio apartments.
- Subsidized housing to encourage a more vibrant and visible art community.
- Habitats for Humanity rehabilitation projects and new construction help lower income families obtain home ownership.
- Student housing supporting students from the University at Buffalo, Canisius College, and Buffalo State College, all of which are an easy transit ride away from the downtown core.

Downtown is everybody's neighborhood. In designing housing for downtown Buffalo, we should work to reconnect the area to the rest of the community, and develop housing that serves a wide variety of social classes, family sizes, age groups, and lifestyles.

3. Increments

Due to the relative lack of housing opportunities downtown today, logic dictates a slow and methodical approach to developing housing. Based on interviews with experts in the local housing market, a yearly goal of 100 units of new "market rate" housing would seem to be a reasonable start. To this should be added an additional 100 units of specialty housing to include housing for seniors, students, low to moderate income tenants, single-room-occupancy units, etc.

The resulting goal of 200 units per year would eventually lead to a critical mass of new residents after several years of persistent development. This critical mass would have the potential to improve downtown's desirability as a neighborhood through an improved sense of security and an enhanced level of services, which would then lead to progressively larger numbers of new housing starts down the road.

![Graph showing income distribution by households as of 1989.](image1.png)

![Graph showing projected density after five years of developing approximately 200 units of housing per year in the Theatre District.](image2.png)
The Urban Design Project
State University of New York at Buffalo

Figure 33. Projected density after 15 years of developing approximately 200 units of housing per year in the Theatre District.

Figure 34. Projected density after 25 years of developing approximately 200 units of housing per year in the Theatre District.

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Figure 35. Projected housing density after 25 years of developing approximately 200 units of housing per year in the Theatre District.
4. Environment

In order to begin to make people think of downtown as a desirable neighborhood in which to live, we must begin by improving the physical attractiveness of the downtown area, and enhancing its image as a safe place. The pedestrian environment of downtown should be improved by repairing sidewalks, planting street trees, improving street lighting and illuminating building facades, remediating blank walls with graphics, light fixtures, planters, etc., and developing vest-pocket parks.

This activity should be focused primarily in areas off of Main Street in order to bring their condition up to the level of "the Buffalo Place transit mall." Downtown's security image should also be enhanced through an active block-club and police foot patrols.

The City should consider focusing its early efforts in one "model block" location. This strategy has the potential to demonstrate its planning strategy through one "shining example" of a typical downtown neighborhood streetscape. This model could then be used as a guide for further development. One such block could be the Johnson Park extension proposed earlier. Another could be Chippewa Street from Elmwood Avenue to Main Street. Both emphasize the central location of the Theatre District, reinforcing connections to the Lower West Side and Allentown.

5. Organization

Because downtown currently has few residences, the constituency of neighborhood voters in favor of downtown housing is small. Downtown has no block clubs, no neighborhood housing services corporations, no community-based organizations to militate in favor of more housing or more amenities conducive to housing. Nevertheless, the quiet consensus acknowledging the logic of more downtown housing appears to be strong.

Interested parties should form a not-for-profit corporation, charged with taking the lead in developing downtown housing. The composition of a non-profit organization should represent a broad cross-section of interests. Toward that end, a "blue-ribbon" panel should be convened to decide on the group's composition and powers. Such a panel could include representatives of:

- City of Buffalo
- Buffalo Place Inc.
- Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority
- Theatre District Association
- Greater Buffalo Partnership
- Women for Downtown
- Lower West Side community
- Allentown community
- Lower East Side community
- Business leaders
- Hospital officials

The nature of developing downtown housing is that pioneering efforts will most often require financial assistance to make them work. Existing housing programs, government contribution toward writing down the cost of land, low-interest loans from private lending institutions, volunteer labor and "sweat equity" all will have to be exploited if downtown housing is to be successful.

City department and neighborhood groups currently use a number of federal, state and city subsidy programs to develop housing in Buffalo's neighborhoods. Many programs also should be used, or modified so they can be used, downtown.

The City and the housing development corporation should access the following government programs to develop housing:

Federal
- Section 8 Rental Assistance Programs
- Community Development Block Grant
- Section 108 loan guarantee programs
- Section 202 Director Loans for Housing for Elderly and Handicapped Persons
- Public Housing Demolition/Disposition Regulations
- HOPE for Homeownership of Multi-Family Units Program
- HOPE for Homeownership of Single-Family Homes Program
- Low-Income Housing Tax Credits

State
- Low Income Housing Trust Fund
- Turnkey/Enhanced Housing Trust Fund
- Special needs Housing Program
- Urban Initiatives Program
- Shared Housing Development Program
- Low Income Housing Credit Program
- Rental Rehabilitation Program

City
- BURA Downtown Residential Development Program
- BEIDC 50/40 Loan Program
- BEIDC Small Business Loan Program
- Historic Preservation/Adaptive Reuse Agreements
- BNRC Commercial Facade Renovation Program
- 500 Block Commercial Revitalization Program
- Commercial Revitalization Program - Chippewa Street

Figure 36. A model neighborhood block would provide an aggressive program of street tree, planter, street light, building lighting, and other installations.

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Next Steps

The housing development corporation formed through the deliberations of the blue-ribbon committee should follow up on the recommendations made in this report by developing a comprehensive master plan, done by a planning consultant with expertise in developing urban housing opportunities. The master plan will help to lend credence to the effort, and will allow for a more objective and broad view of the situation.

In addition to reviewing housing subsidy programs, the master plan should review existing downtown zoning laws. Current DO and RR zones in downtown should be re-evaluated to determine whether they have been encouraging or hindering housing development. The so-called "sunset clause" on the RR zone is due to expire in 1997. It may be possible that developers and land speculators are holding potential rehabilitation properties in anticipation of a reversion to commercial zoning.

This report, and the work that came before it, are cautious first steps in the planning process. The recommendations are the culmination of a full year of study on the problem from both a practical and an academic viewpoint. This work should serve as both a tentative guide for action and as a catalyst for further discussion as Buffalo continues to work to develop its downtown as a place to work, shop, visit, and live.

A new neighborhood downtown will take patience and aggressive action by the citizens of Buffalo who love their city. The process of focusing development, providing for diversity, developing in modest increments, improving the image of the city, and organizing to accomplish it all represent an opening of possibilities. The most important next step is to start, allowing differences of opinion along the way to enrich the focus and diversity we seek rather than hinder it.