

Boulevard Central District Action Plan



Town of Amherst, NY

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with

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Introduction

In January 2020, Dover, Kohl & Partners conducted a one-week design workshop in Amherst, meeting with the Town and district property owner stakeholders to test the potential for new development under the newly-adopted Mixed-Use Zoning Districts Code. Stakeholder meetings were held to discuss familiarity with the new districts and GEIS completed by the Town; familiarity with concepts of urbanism (walkability, mixed-use, density, mobility) that the Town is trying to foster through suburban retrofit; familiarity with the planned enhanced transitway (light rail or bus rapid transit) and with transit-oriented development opportunities. The DK&P team created illustrations showing how the area can transform with a new network of streets and public spaces, and renderings to show the potential for future development on key sites.

Key takeaways from the week of stakeholder meetings included:

- Current enhanced transit proposal includes a fenced corridor with gates at crossings for safety/speed/efficiency

Implementation of a light rail transit or bus rapid transit line will enhance access to the region and increase redevelopment opportunities in the Boulevard Central District area; but the design of the infrastructure itself could introduce some new barriers to circulation. In order to maintain speed and safety, the current NFTA proposal is for a fenced light rail corridor with gates at all vehicle/pedestrian crossings. This type of design is problematic within a walkable mixed-use environment, as envisioned for redevelopment of the Boulevard Mall site. Previous TOD studies for the Boulevard Mall site illustrate the possibility for the rail alignment to enter the site and proceed along a new main street; given the latest information about planned design, the recommendation in this document maintains the transit alignment on the Town's larger perimeter street corridors (Niagara Falls Boulevard and Maple Road) to reduce the number of conflicts with pedestrians and intrusion into the newly walkable urban realm.

- Property Owners: Some are interested in redevelopment, others aren't; inertia

Boulevard Central District property owners expressed differing opinions about the potential for new development in the district. Some were interested in the new code and potential for creating walkable mixed-use areas and intrigued by illustrations showing what was possible. Others were satisfied with the current conditions, or unconvinced that an extensive change in character of the suburban environment would occur in the area. It is likely that changes and redevelopment in the area will be on a phased, incremental basis.

- Questions raised about market potential and scale of redevelopment

Several stakeholders expressed potential for some sites (for example, the Boulevard Mall) to redevelop in a manner consistent with the new Mixed-Use Code; but doubt that the entire district would transform.

- Confidence & Implementation: built examples (+ developers experienced with walkable urbanism) needed

To address the above concerns, implementation could be aided by examples and "proof of concept". Developers experienced with walkable urbanism could be recruited to the area through marketing of the new Mixed-Use Code. Once quality built examples are on the ground, confidence in the feasibility and desirability of additional retrofits will grow.

This document describes the Urban Design and Transportation Vision illustrated for key sites and street corridors; and utilizes the information gathered at stakeholder meetings as well as previous plans and studies to summarize an action plan of steps to achieve the vision.

District Vision

VISION FOR BOULEVARD CENTRAL DISTRICT

The Town of Amherst has established and refined a vision for future development in the Boulevard Central District through recent planning efforts. The district today exhibits characteristics typical of suburban development found throughout New York and the United States. Commercial areas have been developed with primarily single-use office or retail uses, surrounded by surface parking lots. A sparse network of street thoroughfares (including Niagara Falls Boulevard, Maple Road, Sweet Home Road, Bailey Avenue, and Sheridan Drive) carry all of the area traffic; these streets have been designed with vehicle efficiency in mind, with multiple, wide vehicle travel lanes, and generally lacking in adequate facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. Safety concerns have come to the forefront due to recent vehicle/pedestrian accidents on Niagara Falls Boulevard; interim safety solutions such as improved crossings, lighting and signals, connecting missing sidewalks, and educational efforts are underway. There is also growing consensus around transforming the built environment through street redesign and retrofit of commercial areas, to better serve community needs and improve safety as well as economic outcomes.

Previous Town plans and studies sought input from technical experts and the Amherst community, and have defined a future vision for this area as a walkable, safe, mixed-use, connected, thriving community center. The illustrations and Implementation Action Plan in this document build upon these previous studies and established planning documents, seeking to:

- Implement the Town's *Comprehensive Plan* vision for land use and development which includes:
 - Diverse neighborhoods, ranging in character from traditional to suburban to rural
 - Pedestrian-friendly, interconnected, mixed-use development patterns
 - Revitalized older neighborhoods and commercial corridors
 - Open space integrated into the overall pattern of development
 - Development standards that promote objectives such as improved visual character, revitalization
- Capture future business development and economic growth potential projected to occur within the region along the I-290 corridor. (*2016 Town of Amherst Economic Study*)
- Build around the concept of transit-oriented development and expand mobility options through the NFTA's Metro Rail Expansion project, an enhanced transit extension to the north of University Station. (*Proposed Action by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority Metro Rail Expansion Project, nftametrorailexpansion.com*)
- Support the regional vision for strengthening and reinvesting in communities and improving mobility; this includes using new technologies and upgraded street features on multi-modal arterials such as Niagara Falls Boulevard. (*Moving Forward 2050: A Regional Transportation Plan for Buffalo Niagara*)
- Evaluate existing sites along commercial corridors with underutilized property, and outdated or otherwise obsolete commercial buildings to propose new, mixed-use, infill development. (*2019 Mixed-Use Zoning Districts adopted by Town of Amherst for infill and retrofit areas*)
- Leverage funding tools available through the Federal Opportunity Zone program, in addition to other available sources of funding. (*Amherst Industrial Development Agency, OpportunityZones.hud.gov*)

The conceptual plans and renderings demonstrate how the community vision could revitalize and transform the district's suburban commercial corridors into prosperous walkable town centers over time. The illustrative concepts aid in visualizing what vibrant, interconnected, and mixed-use environments could look like for existing and future residents; and the Implementation Actions describe necessary steps to get there.

VISUALIZING POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The Town of Amherst envisions the Boulevard Central District as a walkable, mixed-use, transit-oriented district, with its existing suburban commercial areas retrofitted incrementally over time. The new Mixed-Use Districts permit retrofit strategies appropriately tailored to corridors and centers. In addition, standards promote objectives such as improved visual character and predictability of built results. The Illustrative Plan and conceptual renderings that follow visualize future development and capture the essence of what the Boulevard Central District can become.

Illustrative Plan

The Illustrative Plan presents a hypothetical future view of the Boulevard Central District, showing how some sites in the area could redevelop according to the standards of the Mixed-Use Zoning Districts. A new, more connected street network framed by building frontages creates an environment with smaller, walkable blocks to provide interconnectivity among residents, businesses, and surrounding areas. Public open spaces such as parks and community gathering spaces are integrated into the overall pattern of development. Enhanced transit travels along tree-lined multimodal thoroughfares.

These illustrations are not meant to represent any prioritization of sites for redevelopment but rather have been created to demonstrate how some areas could redevelop while others remain unchanged, and to show the potential for future development to meet Town and community objectives for connectivity and vitality. Future development will be based on the decisions of individual property owners to utilize the potential for redevelopment.

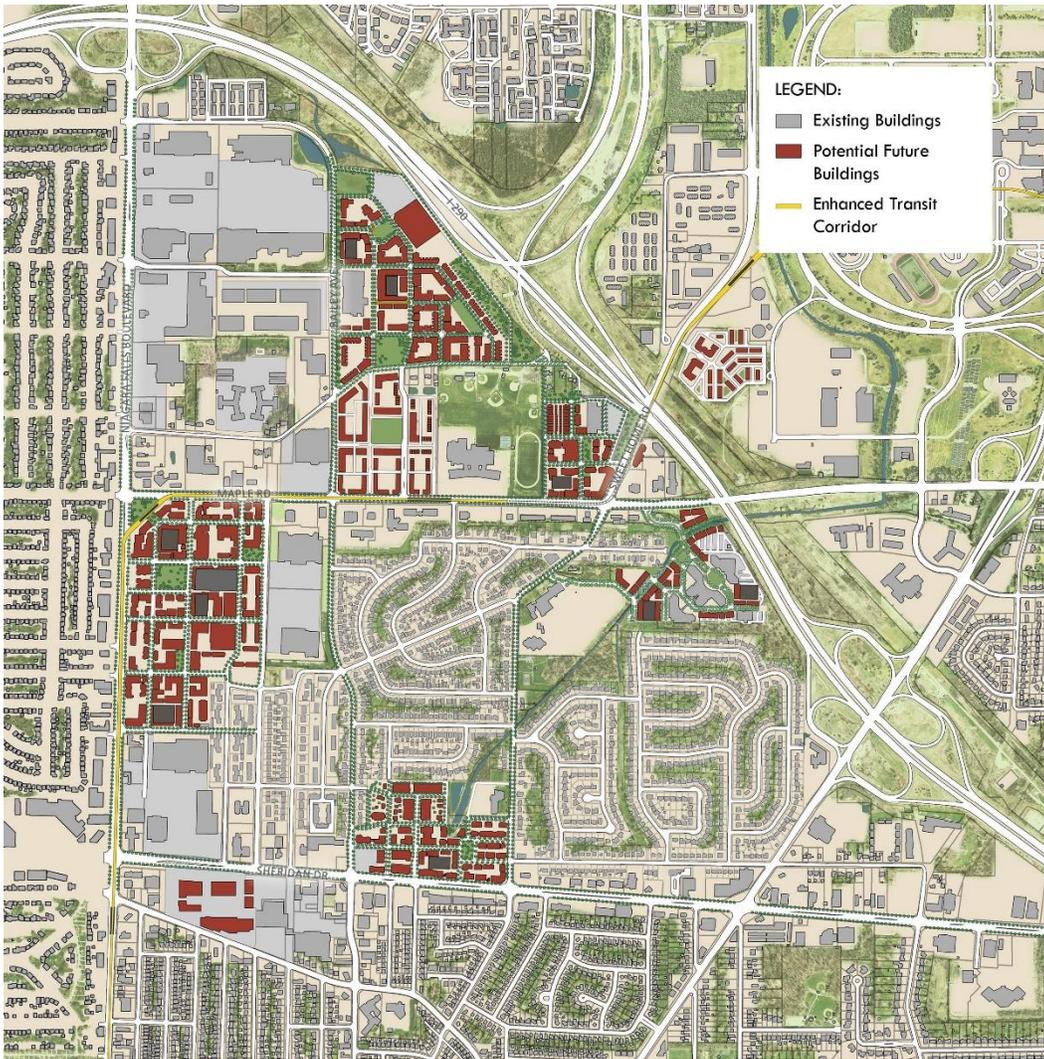
Street Network

A key characteristic of the existing built environment is a sparse street network that carries all vehicular traffic. The district's extra-large blocks and limited alternatives for circulation results in the need for extra-wide streets, and an auto-oriented street design that is counter to Town goals for pedestrian safety and connectivity of other modes (such as transit, bicycles and other micro-mobility devices). Introducing new street connections on future redevelopment sites, as shown on the Illustrative Plan, will provide more ways to circulate. This change, coupled with the redesign of existing streets as Complete Streets with enhanced transit and pedestrian / bike accommodations, will transform mobility in the district.

This change is not anticipated to happen quickly; it is much more likely to occur incrementally, over time. Initial phases of redevelopment on a few key sites can begin to introduce new ways to circulate in walkable mixed-use areas. Over time, the new network will become more complete, as parking lot drive aisles are converted to real streets with sidewalks and street trees, and as new mixed-use development replaces single-use commercial areas.

Each new redevelopment will result in new walkable tree-lined streets that connect residents with shops, workplaces, and other destinations. A complete transformation over a long-term horizon as shown in the final diagram (step 4) is possible, but it is more likely that some properties will redevelop while others remain as they are today, due to market forces or other limitations.

Figure 1: Illustrative Plan



Above: Illustrative Plan, potential future conditions; Below: Illustrative Plan, existing conditions

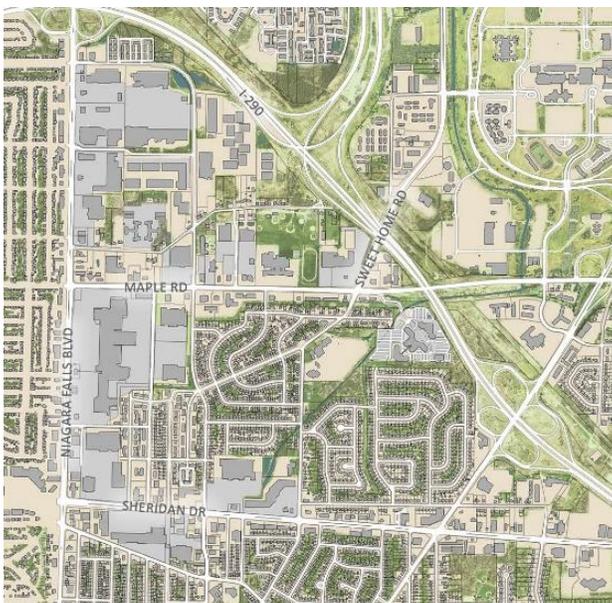


Figure 2: Street Network



Above: Illustrating potential for a new street grid to emerge over time, as properties choose to redevelop. Existing streets are shown in purple, with potential new streets in peach.

Sample Sites: Maple Ridge Center

Maple Ridge Center, located at the intersection of Sweet Home Road and Maple Road, is an example of a typical small-to-medium size commercial center in the district. This site is on the planned enhanced transit alignment, and within walking distance of a future station (planned for Maple Road, in front of Sweet Home Middle School). It is also located at a critical gateway to the Boulevard Central District, near the State University of New York at Buffalo (UB) north campus.

The new Mixed-Use Districts Code offers potential to re-imagine this site with a mix of uses in a small walkable urban center. New tree-lined streets can define five to six new development blocks; buildings line sidewalks, with parking located in mid-block lots or garages. Figure 3 shows the option to leave a portion of the existing commercial center in place (in this case, the AMC theater and its parking area) while redeveloping the remainder of the site with a mix of shops, offices and homes. A new public green space, central to the site, is framed by the fronts of new buildings.

Incremental Buildout

Existing on the site today is a small grocery, furniture store, AMC theater, restaurant outparcel, and a series of smaller shops in a suburban strip center format, set back from the road with parking areas in front. Redevelopment could happen incrementally, in a phased approach. The first phase could consist simply of a couple of new buildings near the Sweet Home / Maple Road intersection. The new buildings would be street-oriented, with facades that address the street and define the sidewalk. Ground floor shops could attract pedestrians walking from the nearby transit station; upper floors could be offices or apartments. In this initial stage, the remainder of the site (the shopping center and its parking) could remain intact. Some parking lot drive aisles could be lined with sidewalks and street trees, to connect the existing and new development (and set the stage for future infill).

Future development phases would replace parking areas and portions of the existing shopping center with new mixed-use buildings. Depending on the height, mix of uses and resulting parking demands, a mid-block parking structure could be included as part of a future phase.

Although there is flexibility in actual building design and how the site is ultimately redeveloped, the Mixed-Use Code includes requirements that directly guide and shape the form and appearance of future development to be similar to what has been illustrated. These requirements include maximum block size; build-to locations for buildings (specifying where the fronts of buildings shall be placed in relation to the street and sidewalk); lot frontage (how much of the front of the lot is occupied by buildings); building transparency (how much of the façade is doors and windows); and parking location (required to be behind a setback, which ensures buildings and not parking areas meet the pedestrian realm).

Figure 3: Maple Ridge Center



Above: Potential future redevelopment of Maple Ridge Center

Below: Existing conditions (image 1); Potential first step of development (image 2)



Sample Sites: Ridge Lea Site

Located east of Bailey Avenue, near the intersection of Bailey Avenue and Ridge Lea Road, the Ridge Lea site offers an opportunity for infill of a new complete mixed-use neighborhood.

Originally built as a UB satellite campus, this +/-40 acre site is currently home to the Amherst Commerce Park. Redevelopment according to the Mixed-Use Code would yield a complete network of blocks for future development sites and public open spaces. A portion of the site could be designated the neighborhood center, with a more intense mix of uses including shops, workplaces, homes, and entertainment destinations organized around a central community green. Other portions of the site could be more residential in nature, with apartments and townhouses fronting local neighborhood streets.

The new street network can be aligned to connect to surrounding streets and parking lot drive aisles and be sized to accommodate some existing buildings to remain (at least during preliminary phases of development). New neighborhood streets will be designed to accommodate all users. Some streets will be designated to have protected bikeways and on-street parking; there will be connected, tree-lined sidewalks and accessible crosswalks throughout.

The site is adjacent to I-290, which could be buffered by green areas and stormwater retention ponds; this buffer also is an opportunity for a large format retailer (and its parking) to be included in the neighborhood on land that is not suitable for other uses.

Figure 4a: Ridge Lea, Illustrative Site Plan



Figure 4b: Ridge Lea



Above: Ridge Lea, Mixed-Use Neighborhood Center. The center of the new neighborhood has the greatest mix of uses, including shops, workplaces, homes, and entertainment destinations — fronting walkable streets, surrounding a central community green.

Below: Ridge Lea neighborhood streets can include wide tree-lined sidewalks, protected bikeways, on-street parking, accessible crosswalks, and right-sized travel lanes to keep vehicular speeds low.



Sample Sites: Sheridan Center Site

The Sheridan Center and adjacent suburban retail could be retrofit over time into a walkable urban center. Located on Sheridan Drive, between Sweet Home Road and Bailey Avenue, the existing Sheridan Center and nearby commercial sites could be redeveloped as a diverse mix of uses, including shops, offices, apartments, townhomes, and entertainment destinations. Sheridan Center is a suburban strip shopping center, set back from the surrounding roads behind surface parking lots. Redevelopment could take place in phases, introducing a new mix of uses in buildings lining streets, and parking located in mid-block locations out of pedestrian view. As redevelopment transpires, an existing stream and natural area behind the shopping center could be improved with landscaping and walking trails and be fronted by streets and buildings rather than loading dock areas.

Over a long-term horizon, the new street network could be expanded to adjacent parcels. Sheridan Drive can be transformed to become a Complete Street that accommodates pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and auto drivers with wide sidewalks, street trees, and a protected bikeway.

Incremental Buildout

The redevelopment scenario shown is unlikely to be realized quickly; but it could be built incrementally, over time, as property owners decide to make improvements to their properties. A near-term step could replace a portion of the existing shopping center with a new street and green space. Existing outparcels along Sheridan, and a portion of the center and its surface parking, can remain in place.

Phasing should aim to include development along both sides of a new street within a single phase; even if only a small segment (one or two block lengths), the area can serve as “proof of concept” and demonstrate the potential for additional development.

Future development phases could replace outparcels and remaining portions of the existing shopping center with new mixed-use buildings. Eventually, this pattern of urban development could extend across adjacent parcels (such as those on the south side of the street) and include a transformation of Sheridan Drive itself. In the future, one travel lane in each direction can be repurposed for widened sidewalks, street trees, and a protected bikeway, to provide a better frontage for urban street-oriented buildings (see more details about street design, page 20).

Figure 5: Sheridan Center



Above: Potential future redevelopment of Sheridan Center

Below: Existing conditions (image 1); Potential first step of development (image 2)



Sample Sites: Boulevard Mall Site

The Boulevard Mall, located at the intersection of Niagara Falls Boulevard and Maple Road, presents an opportunity for transit-oriented development that can become the vital mixed-use hub of the Boulevard Central District. In many ways, the Boulevard Mall site is at the center of the Boulevard Central District. The site fronts Niagara Falls Boulevard at the location where an enhanced transit line will turn to the east (on Maple Road) to head to the UB campus. Opening in the 1960s, the Mall was the first indoor shopping center in the Buffalo area; its success led to the growth of the surrounding commercial areas in the district today.

In recent years, changing retail formats and consumer shopping habits have made large indoor malls similar to Boulevard Mall obsolete. Several anchor stores at the site are closed, and previous studies by the Town and NFTA explored potential for redevelopment of the site as a mixed-use urban center. The Mixed-Use Zoning Districts establish standards under which such a transformation could take place, setting rules for a network of pedestrian-oriented streets; building uses, height and placement; public open spaces; parking location; transparency of facades; and other standards that can deliver the walkable mixed-use environment desired. Building upon these earlier studies, the following images visualize what future development could look like and suggest a few key urban design approaches.

Incremental Buildout

The phased incremental redevelopment of the Boulevard Mall site will need coordination of actions among multiple property owners on the site, and consideration of the timing for portions of the Mall and its outparcels to be removed and replaced as well as and the timing implementation of enhanced transit on Niagara Falls Boulevard and Maple Road. Images presented in Figure 7 are one way this could occur.

A first step could leave much of the Mall intact, with new buildings constructed near perimeter roads. Early development phases should seek to include new buildings on both sides of a new road or public open space, whenever possible, to create a complete urban environment (however small) that demonstrates the look and feel of future development on the site.

Redevelopment of the Mall site is envisioned to have a complete mix of uses including shops, restaurants, offices, homes, and entertainment destinations. It will also include high quality public open spaces for the community gathering. Step 3 shows a central community green, framed by the fronts of new buildings. The green is located internal to the site where it can be surrounded by pedestrian-oriented streets and buildings with active facades. View corridors to Niagara Falls Boulevard, framed by new buildings, can draw pedestrians into the space. Existing Mall stores that remain can have narrow liner buildings added to their exterior, introducing facades with doors and windows to face new streets and public spaces.

Phased redevelopment is envisioned to continue across the site, with new streets and buildings replacing empty stores and parking lots. New parking will be located mid-block (behind buildings) in surface lots or strategically-located structures. Development will be coordinated with the implementation of the planned enhanced transit extension, which envisions a new station on or near the Boulevard Mall site. The transitway is anticipated to turn to the east across the Mall site prior to reaching the Niagara Falls Boulevard/Maple Road intersection. Turning just before the intersection produces an opportunity for a welcoming triangular open space at the intersection where the new station area can be located, framed by new development, with ample sidewalks leading into the new mixed-use center.

As part of the redevelopment, the Town desires to locate a community facility on a portion of the Mall site to better serve and support residents in this area of the Town. Another Town community facility could provide additional space to accommodate a variety of services beyond what the Town currently maintains/offers. An associated green space could be incorporated with the facility to provide space not only for various programs and activities but also to provide green space for the adjacent community.

Figure 6: Boulevard Mall



Above: Potential future redevelopment of Boulevard Mall
Bottom: View from Niagara Falls boulevard toward new central green



Figure 7: Boulevard Mall, potential change-over-time



Above: Existing conditions (image 1)

Below: Potential staging of development (image 3 and 4)



VISUALIZING POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE MOBILITY

Transit Access in the District

The vision for walkable, urban, mixed-use development in the Boulevard Central District is linked to enhanced transit plans. The district today is served by four Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) Metro bus routes; in the future, enhanced transit is planned to improve access and connectivity to the area and provide increased alternatives to driving.

The NFTA has evaluated various forms of enhanced transit to the University at Buffalo North Campus, and is currently planning an extension of its existing 6.4-mile light rail line, which currently operates from downtown Buffalo to University Station on the University at Buffalo South Campus. The extension's route, as planned, will extend through the Boulevard Central District along Niagara Falls Boulevard, turn on to Maple Road, continue to Sweet Home Road, proceed through the University at Buffalo's North Campus and finally continue along Audubon Parkway, terminating near the I-990.

As currently designed, the light rail extension will have three stop locations in the study area. From south to north, these stop locations are:

- At or near the intersection of Niagara Falls Boulevard and Eggert Road
- Mid-block on Niagara Falls Boulevard between Treadwell Road and Maple Road (near the Boulevard Mall)
- At or near the intersection of Maple Road and Hillcrest Drive (near Sweet Home Middle School)

As can be seen in Figure 8, these stop locations, as currently planned, will provide direct connections with Existing Bus Routes 34 and 35 inside the district. However, the stop locations will not provide direct connections with, or fall within a half-mile radius of, any other bus route inside of the study area. Further, the stop locations in their currently planned configuration leave much of the study area north of Maple Road outside of a half-mile radius of the enhanced transit stops, and the planned turn at the intersection of Maple Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard will require space for a wide turning radius if implemented as a light rail service with multiple cars.

Previous studies have evaluated options for the transit line to go through the adjacent property (the Boulevard Mall), to avoid the Niagara Falls Boulevard/Maple Road intersection, and create the needed turning radius. To maintain speed and safety, the current NFTA proposal is to fence the rail transit corridor and include gates at all vehicle/pedestrian crossings. Given this constraint, the transit alignment should continue on the Town's larger perimeter street corridors (Niagara Falls Boulevard and Maple Road) as far as possible to reduce intrusion into the newly walkable urban realm.

Due to these reasons it is recommended that:

- The Boulevard Mall stop be moved north to serve the area of the intersection of Niagara Falls Boulevard and Maple Road; and
- The route and stop location at this intersection be moved into the adjacent property (the Boulevard Mall), but only impacting the northwest corner. Turning before the intersection allows for the route to take an appropriate angle, reduces the transit line's impact on the operation of the intersection itself, as well as its impact on the walkable mixed-use development planned to replace the Mall. Placing the station near the Niagara Falls Boulevard / Maple Road intersection also places it within a short walk for Tonawanda residents.

The practice of cutting through the nearside plot adjacent to the intersection is not without precedent. An example of this exact design configuration in practice for a light rail line in Phoenix, Arizona use can be seen in Figure 9. In this case, the triangular plot of land created by the cut-through routing of the light-rail was converted into a park.

Figure 8: Existing & Planned Transit Service

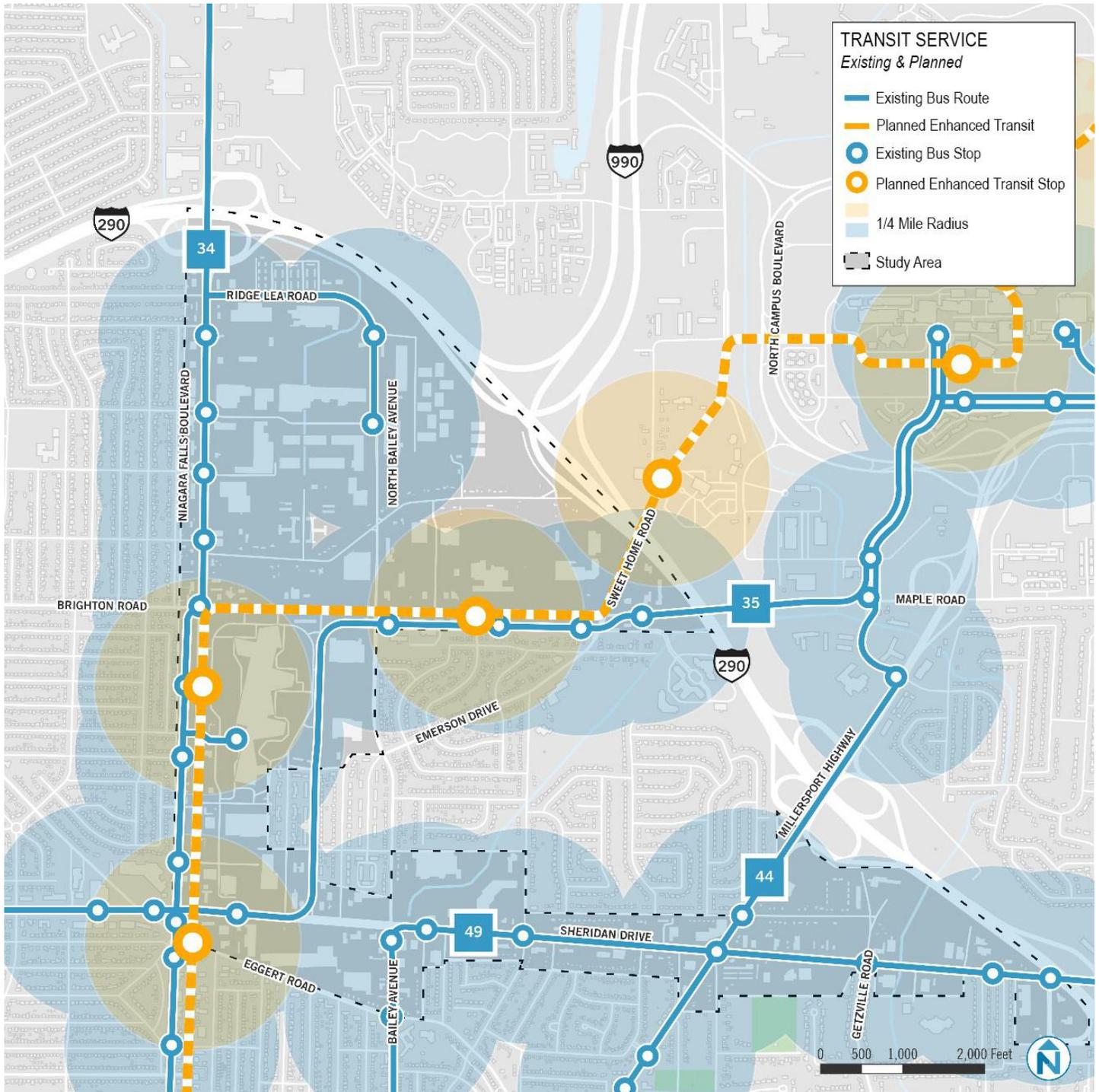


Figure 9: Enhanced Transit Stop Location and Turning Configuration near Boulevard Mall



Example Cut-Through Light Rail Turn in Phoenix, Arizona



Rendering of Recommended Transit Stop Location and Turning Configuration (at Boulevard Mall)

Street Design

A critical component of transforming the Boulevard Central District into an activity-rich, livable, transit-oriented area is implementing a grid of appropriately sized and designed blocks and streets. The design of streets should be guided by the overall vision for future land use and urban design; in this case, streets should be “Complete Streets” that support a safe environment and network connectivity for users of all modes (walking, biking, driving, and using transit). However, since each street has a finite amount of space, some streets may need to emphasize one or more modes over others by design, while still recognizing that all modes will occasionally make use of the street. This section presents a strategy for retrofitting existing streets, and for the design of new streets in the district.

Retrofitting Existing Streets

Auto-dominant existing streets will need to be redesigned to be more pedestrian, bike and transit-friendly, in order to increase safety for all users and accommodate the type of transit-oriented development envisioned by the Town. Niagara Falls Boulevard (south of Maple Road), Maple Road, and Sweet Home Road, are planned to be redesigned to accommodate enhanced transit. ***Analysis of traffic volumes reveals excess capacity on district streets¹; there are opportunities to reduce the number of travel lanes and reallocate the street space to other users (including transit, pedestrian and bike facilities). While traffic will increase in the future due to new developments, people will choose to travel using different modes other than the private vehicle if the street networks are designed as Complete Streets.***

Even with a reduction in travel lanes, some redesigned streets will need to extend beyond the existing public Right-of-Way (ROW) to fit the rail infrastructure and needed pedestrian and bike facilities at minimum widths prescribed by the Town code and national standards as well as best design practices. In some instances, portions of the street (such as sidewalk and planting areas) could fit within setbacks or easements on private property, and be implemented as properties redevelop. In other instances, acquisition of the full ROW width at the time of improvements may be preferred. Setbacks along existing streets must be coordinated with planned future conditions, so that near-term development building placement fits with the long-term vision for these streets.

Looking beyond the future transit corridor, other primary thoroughfares including Sheridan Drive and Niagara Falls Boulevard north of Maple Road can also be redesigned to fit the emerging walkable urban context of the district. The number of vehicle lanes can be reduced, with the space converted to pedestrian facilities (wider sidewalks and shade trees) and protected bikeways.

North Bailey Avenue may need a slightly different treatment, as it contains a variety of land uses, ranging from single family homes and offices to larger retail and industrial establishments. North of Maple Road, the nature of development and potential trip growth along this corridor could warrant lane expansion to adequately accommodate additional traffic volumes. The Town should seek to collaborate with local and regional transportation agencies to implement needed traffic improvements along the corridor and at key intersections. Along with accommodation of increased traffic volume, this roadway should also aim to become a Complete Street as discussed above, including amenities for all modes and users.

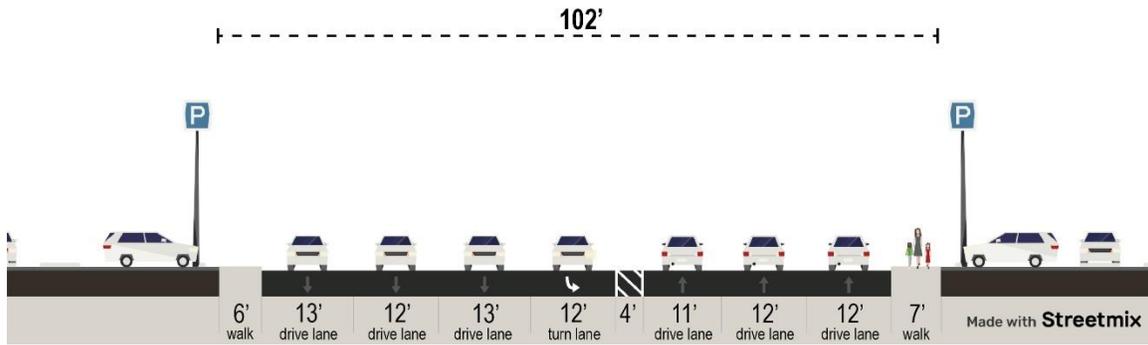
¹ Phase 1 Transportation Analysis Memorandum, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates

Existing and proposed cross sections for existing streets are on the pages that follow, as outlined below:

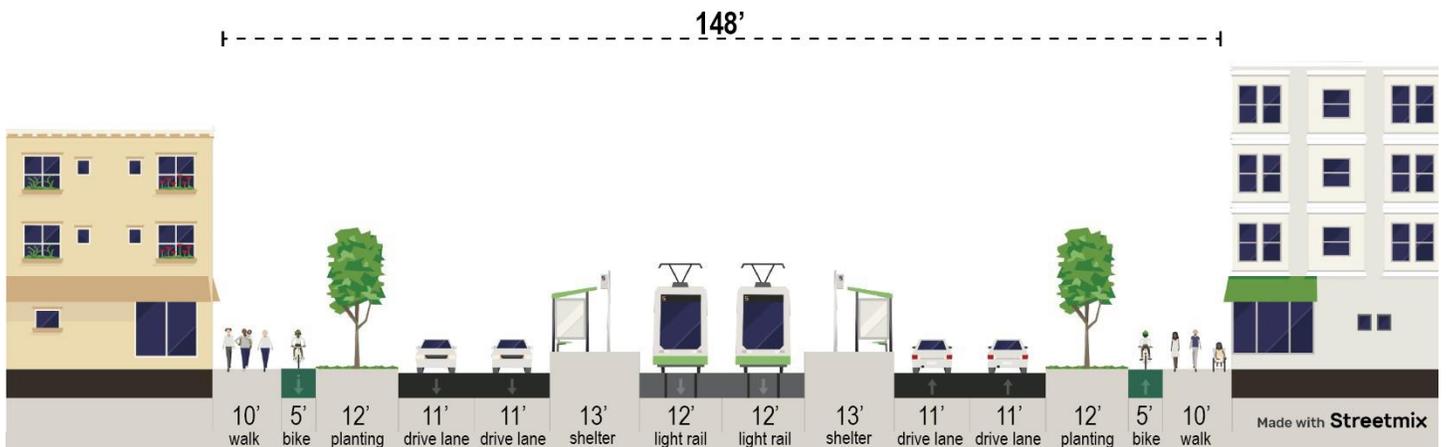
- Streets redesigned to reduce the number of travel lanes, add enhanced transit, and expand space for pedestrians and cyclists
 - Figure 10: Niagara Falls Boulevard (south of Maple Road)
 - Figure 11: Maple Road (between Niagara Falls Boulevard and Sweet Home Road)
 - Figure 12: Sweet Home Road (north of Maple Road)
- Streets redesigned to reduce number of travel lanes, and re-allocate street space to pedestrians and cyclists
 - Figure 13: Niagara Falls Boulevard (north of Maple Road)
 - Figure 14: Sheridan Drive (between Niagara Falls Boulevard and Sweet Home Road)
- Streets redesigned to accommodate additional traffic volumes and expand space for pedestrians and cyclists
 - Figure 15: Bailey Avenue (north of Maple Road)

Additional design options for the above streets, exploring alternatives in street design elements (such as varying width of transitway and its platforms), can be found in the Phase 1 Transportation Analysis Memorandum.

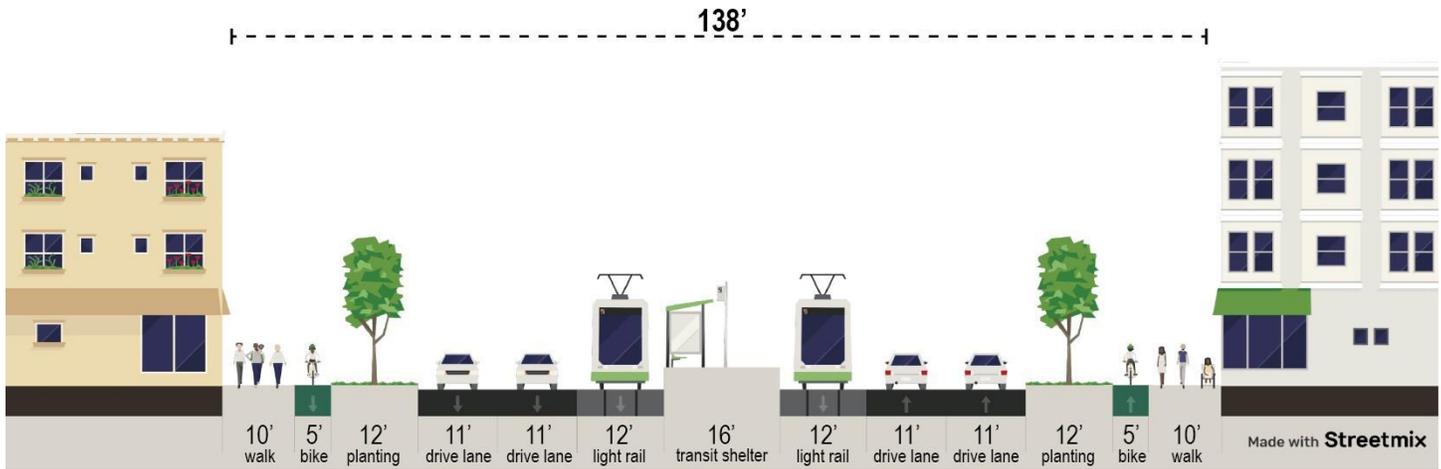
Figure 10: Niagara Falls Boulevard (south of Maple Road)



Existing conditions



Proposed conditions, option for light rail transit with side platforms (see dimensions for option 1a and 1b)



Proposed conditions, option for light rail transit with central platform

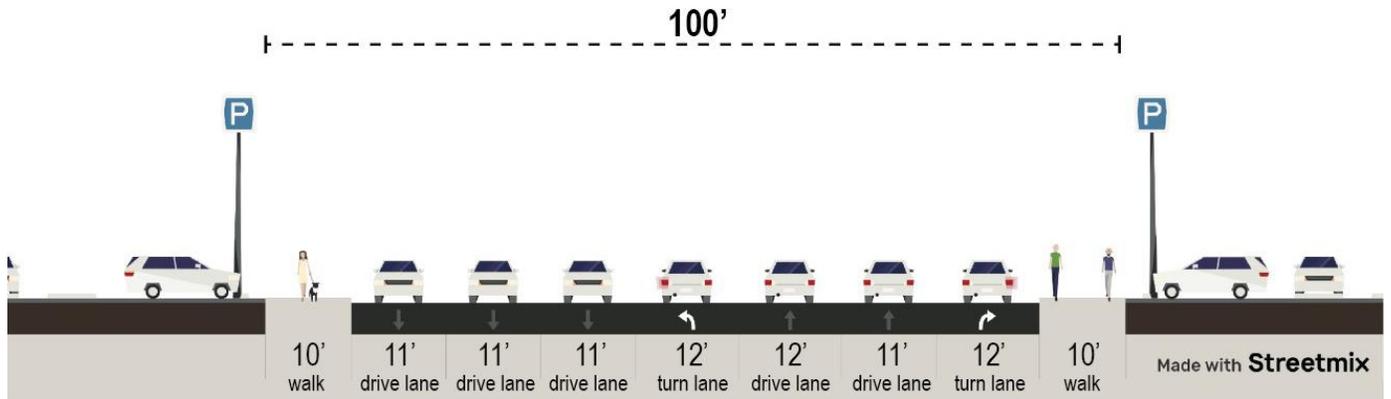
Niagara Falls Boulevard: South of Maple Road Intersection – Existing and Proposed Design Characteristics

Option	ROW Width	Light Rail Configuration	Dedicated Light Rail ROW (per direction)	Platform(s)	Driving Lanes Per Direction	Driving Lane Widths	Sidewalks	Street Trees / Planting Areas	Bicycle Facility
Existing	102'	None	None	None	3-4	11'-13'	6' (one side) 7' (one side)	None	None
1a	148'	Median	12'	13' dual platforms	2	11'	10' (both sides)	Trees in 12' planting strip (both sides)	5' protected bike lane (both sides)
1b	140'	Median	12'	9' dual platforms	2	11'	10' (both sides)	Trees in 12' planting strip (both sides)	5' protected bike lane (both sides)
2	138'	Inner lanes	12'	16' single platform	2	10'	10' (both sides)	Trees in 12' planting strip (both sides)	5' protected bike lane (both sides)

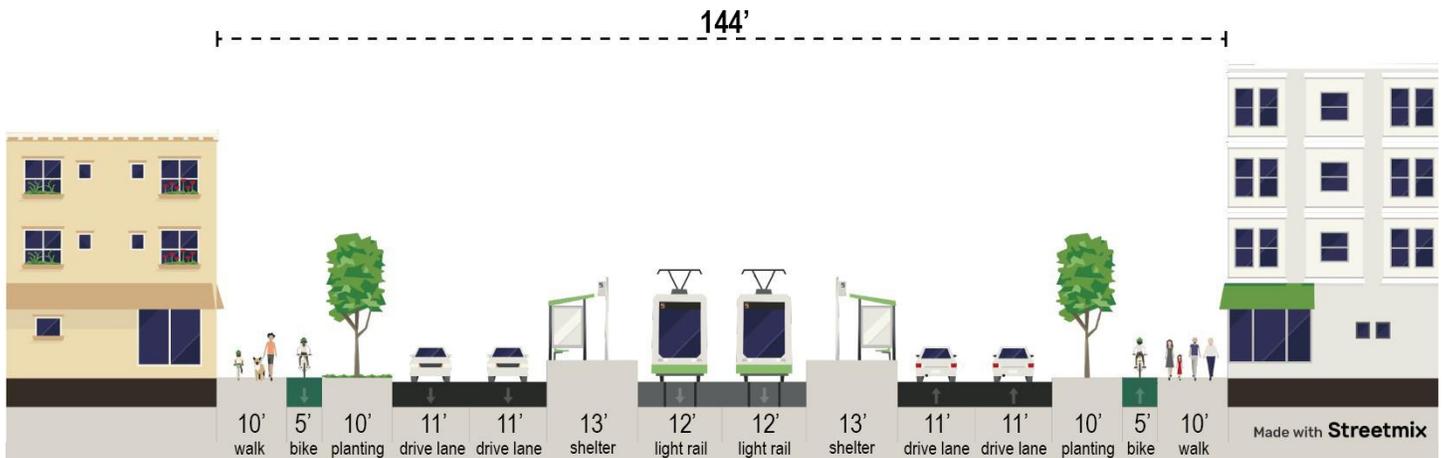
Notes:

- Pedestrian safety features:
 - Removing one travel lane in each direction reduces the total width at crossings
 - Right-sizing vehicle lanes (from up to 13' to 11') will slow travel speeds
 - The tree planting area separates pedestrians and cyclists from moving vehicles
- The design and configuration of the enhanced transit facility will impact the overall ROW needed. Several options show what the potential range for light rail could include:
 - Option 1a has the light rail in the median with 13' platforms on both sides (current NFTA standard)
 - Option 1b has the light rail in the median with 9' side platforms (dimension based on other precedents)
 - Option 2 has the light rail in the inner lanes, with one central 16' platform (resulting in the narrowest ROW)
- The 12' planting strip for street trees can accommodate snow storage

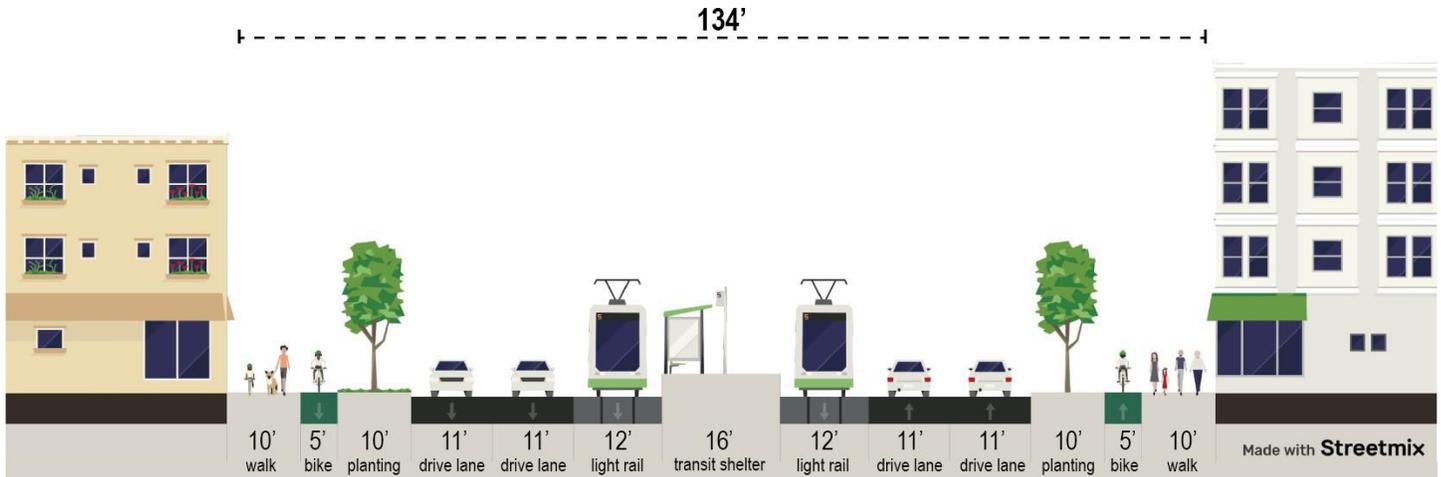
Figure 11: Maple Road (between Niagara Falls Boulevard and Sweet Home Road)



Existing conditions



Proposed conditions, option for transit with side platforms (see dimensions for option 1a and 1b)



Proposed conditions, option for transit with central platform (see dimensions for option 2)

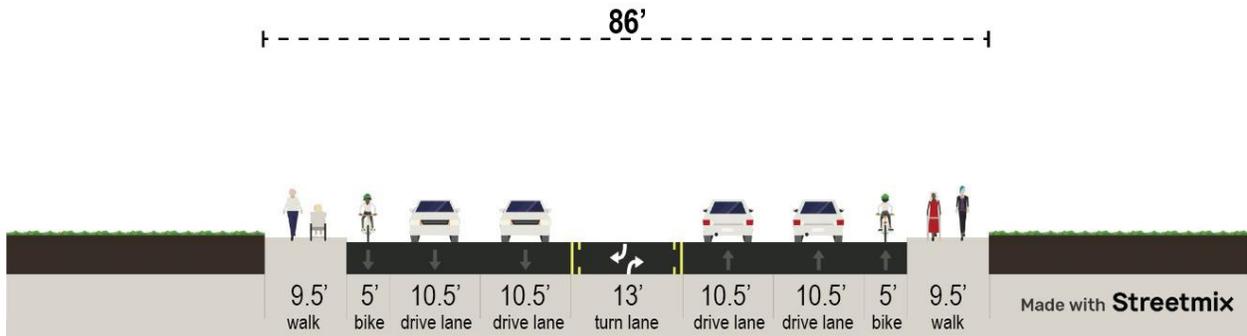
Maple Road Existing and Proposed Design Characteristics

Option	ROW Width	Light Rail Configuration	Dedicated Light Rail ROW (per direction)	Platform(s)	Driving Lanes Per Direction	Driving Lane Widths	Sidewalks	Street Trees / Planting Areas	Bicycle Facility
Existing	100'	None	None	None	2-3	11'-12'	10' (both sides)	None	None
1a	144'	Median, with side platforms	12'	13' side platforms	2	11'	10' (both sides)	Trees in 10' planting strip (both sides)	5' protected bike lane (both sides)
1b	136'	Median, with side platforms	12'	9' side platforms	2	11'	10' (both sides)	Trees in 10' planting strip (both sides)	5' protected bike lane (both sides)
2	134'	Inner lanes, with central platform	12'	16' central platform	2	11'	10' (both sides)	Trees in 10' planting strip (both sides)	5' protected bike lane (both sides)

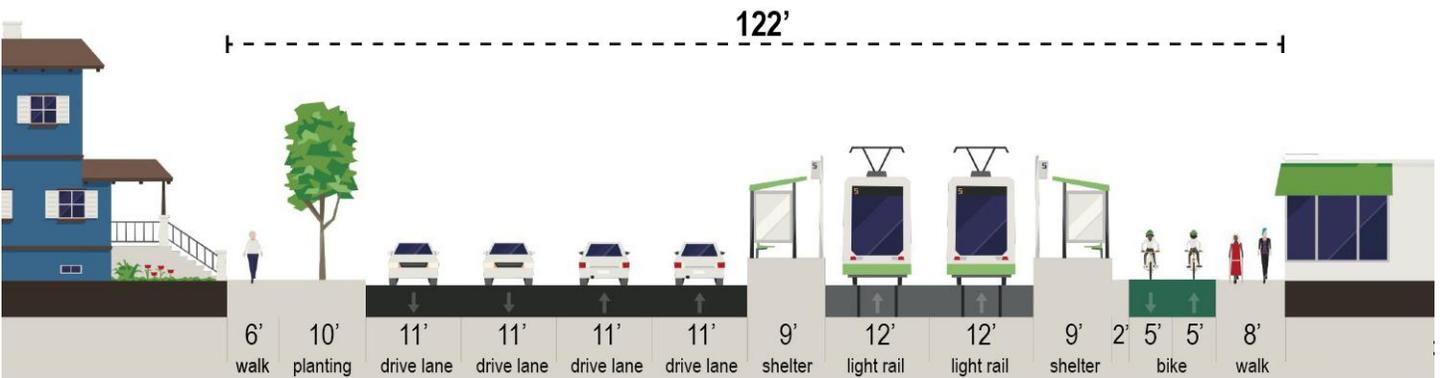
Notes:

- The design and configuration of the enhanced transit facility will impact the overall ROW needed. Several options show what the potential range for light rail could include:
 - Option 1a has the light rail in the median with 13' platforms on both sides (current NFTA standard)
 - Option 1b has the light rail in the median with 9' side platforms (dimension based on other precedents)
 - Option 2 has the light rail in the inner lanes, with one central 16' platform (resulting in the narrowest ROW)
- The 10' planting strip for street trees can accommodate snow storage

Figure 12: Sweet Home Road (north of Maple Road)



Existing conditions



Proposed conditions

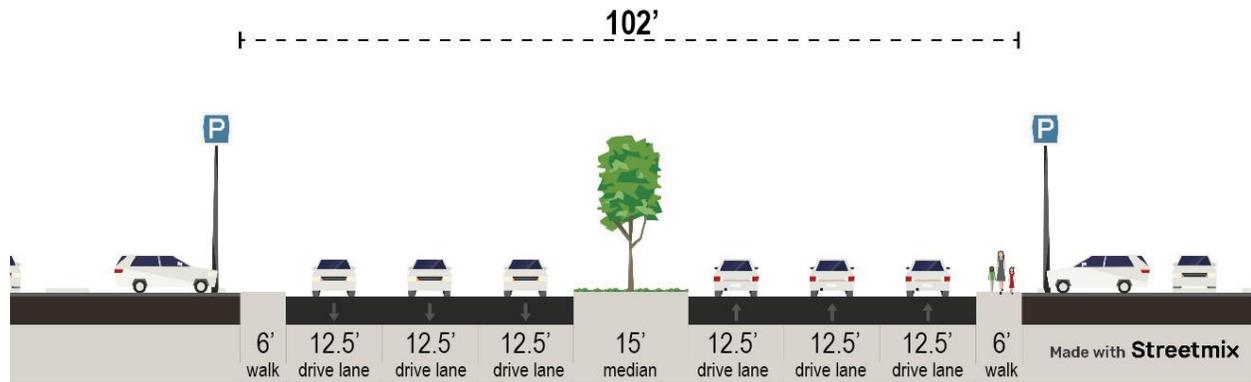
Sweet Home Road Existing and Proposed Design Characteristics

Option	ROW Width	Light Rail Configuration	Dedicated Light Rail ROW (per direction)	Platform(s)	Driving Lanes Per Direction	Driving Lane Widths	Sidewalks	Street Trees / Planting Areas	Bicycle Facility
Existing	86'	None	None	None	2	10.5'	9.5' (both sides)	None	5' bike lane
Proposed	122'	East side, with side platforms	12'	9' side platform	2	11'	6-8' (both sides)	Trees in 10' planting strip (one side)	10' 2-way protected bike lane (one side)

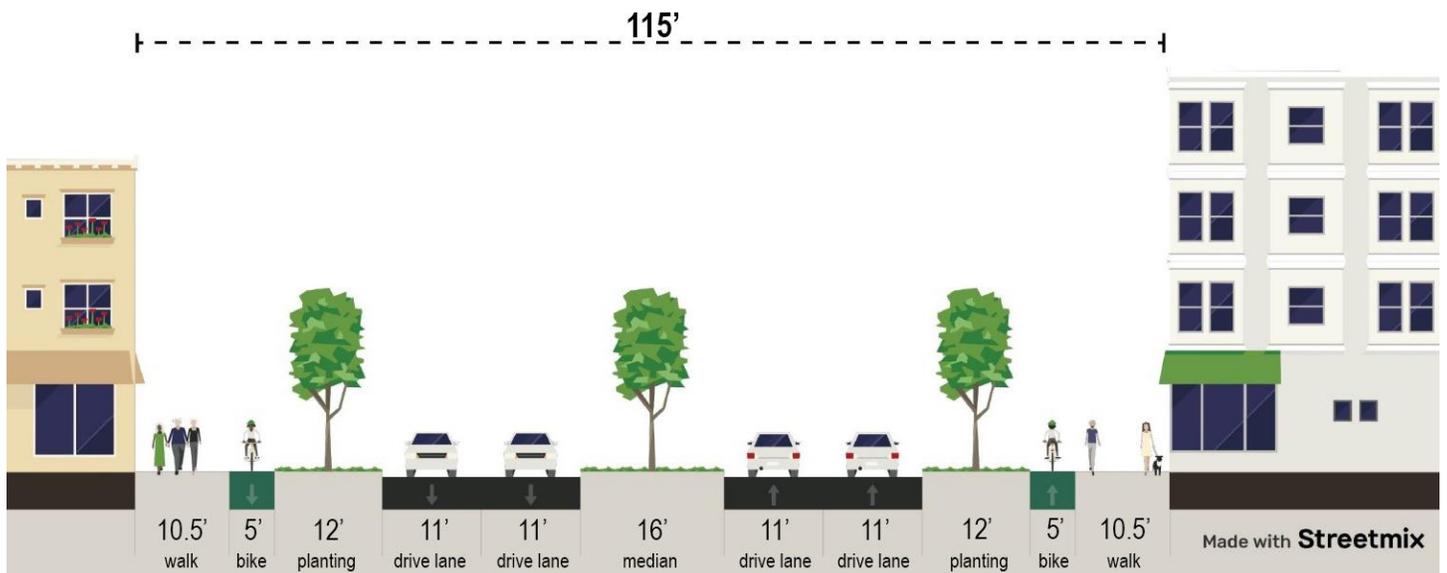
Notes:

- The existing conditions includes a center turn lane, removed in the proposed section.
- The design and configuration of the enhanced transit facility will impact the overall ROW needed; the dual light rail trackway could be reduced to 20' (10' in each direction).
- The 10' protected bike lane could be on either side of the street

Figure 13: Niagara Falls Boulevard (north of Maple Road)



Existing conditions



Proposed conditions

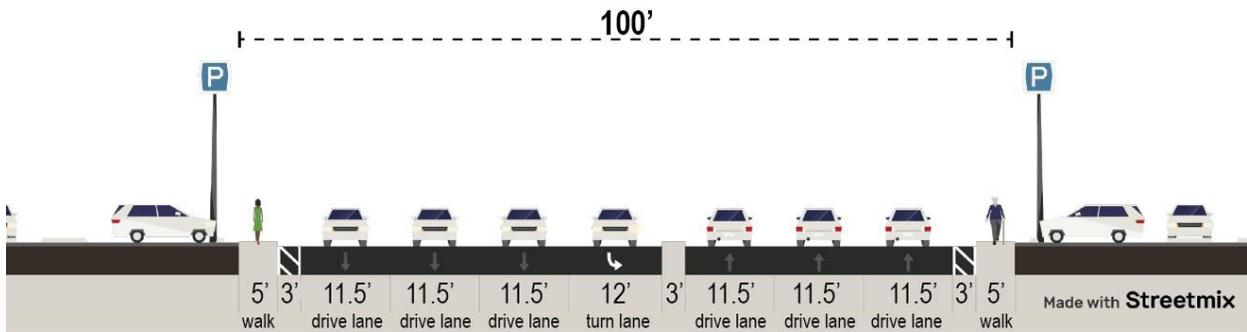
Niagara Falls Boulevard (north of Maple) Existing and Proposed Design Characteristics

Option	ROW Width	Driving Lanes Per Direction	Driving Lane Widths	Sidewalks	Street Trees / Planting Areas	Bicycle Facility	Additional Space
Existing	102'	3	12.5'	6' (both sides)	none	None	15' planted median
Proposed	115'	2	11'	10.5' (both sides)	Trees in 12' planting strip (both sides)	5' protected bike lane (both sides)	16' planted median

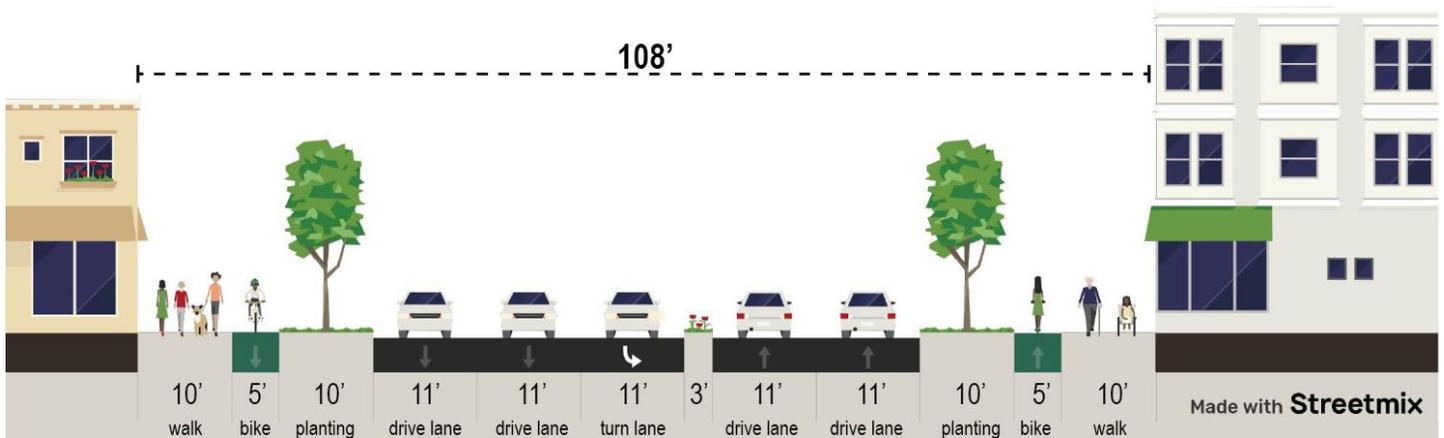
Notes:

- Pedestrian safety features:
 - Removing one travel lane in each direction reduces the total width at crossings
 - Right-sizing vehicle lanes (from up to 12.5' to 11') will slow travel speeds
 - The tree planting area separates pedestrians and cyclists from moving vehicles
- The 12' planting are for street trees and 16' central median can accommodate snow storage

Figure 14: Sheridan Drive (between Niagara Falls Boulevard and Sweet Home Road)



Existing conditions



Proposed conditions

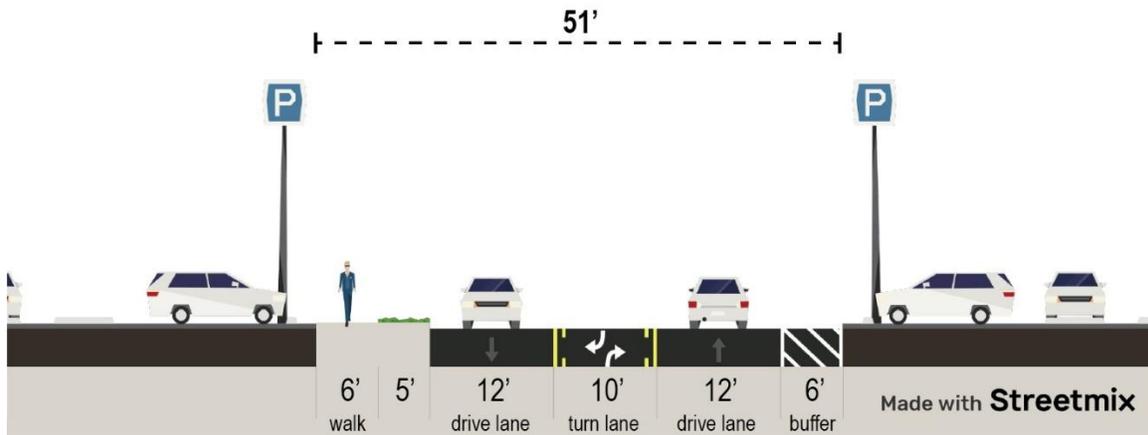
Sheridan Drive Existing and Proposed Design Characteristics

Option	ROW Width	Driving Lanes Per Direction	Driving Lane Widths	Sidewalks	Street Trees / Planting Areas	Bicycle Facility	Additional Space
Existing	100'	3	11.5 - 12'	5' (both sides)	None	None	12' center turn lane 3' median buffer 3' shoulder buffer (both sides)
Proposed	108'	2	11'	10' (both sides)	Trees in 10' planting strip (both sides)	5' protected bike lane (both sides)	11' center turn lane 3' planted median

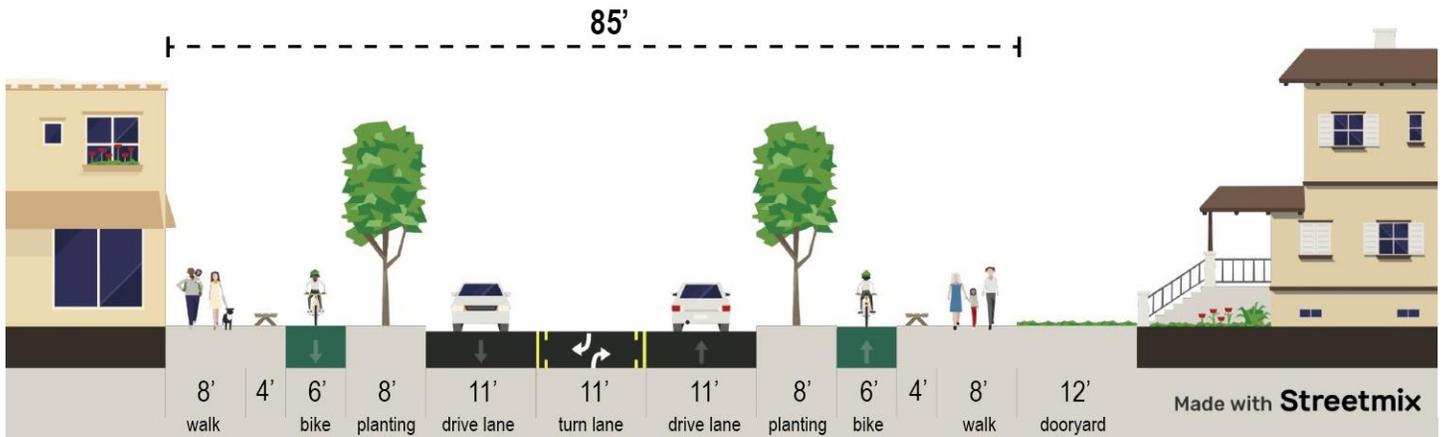
Notes:

- The 10' planting area for street trees can accommodate snow storage
- The planted median can be expanded to include trees where the center turn lane is not needed

Figure 15: Bailey Avenue (north of Maple Road)



Existing conditions



Proposed conditions

Bailey Avenue Existing and Proposed Design Characteristics

Option	ROW Width	Driving Lanes Per Direction	Driving Lane Widths	Sidewalks	Street Trees / Planting Areas	Bicycle Facility	Additional Space
Existing	51'	1	12'	6' (one side)	None	None	10' center turn lane 6' buffer (one side) 5' planting area (one side)
Proposed	85'	1	11'	8' (both sides)	Trees in 8' planting strip (both sides)	6' protected bike lane (both sides)	11' center turn lane 4' seating area (both sides)

Notes:

- The 8' planting area for street trees can accommodate snow storage
- The 12' planted dooryard area shown on one side of the street space is outside of the ROW
- The ROW could be expanded or reconfigured to accommodate additional traffic lanes as well

Design Standards for New Streets

The Mixed-Use Zoning Districts code serves as a framework for new street types in the district, to be implemented as parcels redevelop. Five types of Retrofit streets are proposed: Core Street, Core Half-Street, Local Street, Half-Local, and Alley/Drive Lane. These street types establish the street configuration and its street elements within the curb-to-curb width and link the curb and pedestrian zone to eight Retrofit frontages.

The Retrofit Frontages for new streets (Village/Walkable/Incremental Core, Residential, and Local) introduce specific dimensional standards including shared access drives, building setbacks, parking setbacks, streetscapes, story height, transparency and pedestrian access. For existing streets, the Code applies frontages based on the street's classification as designated in the Town's 2019 Comprehensive Plan Future Thoroughfare System Map Figure 9 (Collector, Minor and Major Arterials).

Street types may not be consistent for the whole of a corridor. Just as land use context changes – from low density residential neighborhoods to neighborhood business districts to areas of industry and production to the core downtown – so too do the street types change.

The Street Types presented on the following pages are a simplified version of the potential combinations of the street types and frontages mentioned above, and they account for both street functionality and adjacent land uses, as well as transportation mode focus. These street types are consistent with those prescribed in the Code, with the following variations:

- Travel lane dimensions: Travel lanes might need to be up to 12' if there is transit on it; and should only be 9' in Local residential streets. Turning lanes should not be wider than the travel lane (should be 10').
- Bike Facilities: There is more variation on the location and design of bike facilities, including a protected bike lane level with the sidewalk; variations of bike lanes / parking location to allow for parklet dining adjacent to the sidewalk in parking lanes; and sharrows on local streets.

Street types are defined below; Figure 16 shows how these types could be applied to the new street grid in the district.

Definition of Street Types

Street Types	Definition	Amherst NY Thoroughfare Plan	Amherst NY Zoning Code 2019
Urban Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Serve the dense, mixed-use core ▪ Accommodates heaviest pedestrian activity ▪ Incorporates bike/transit facilities as needed 	Local Collector	Village/Walkable Core Frontages
Medium Activity: Main Streets and Connectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spines through residential neighborhoods ▪ Collects vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians from residential streets and connect to High Activity streets 	Minor Arterials/ Collectors	Walkable Core Frontage
High Activity: Mixed Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regional connector carrying local and regional multimodal traffic ▪ Serves a variety of densities and land uses 	Major/Minor Arterials	Village/Walkable Core Frontages
High Activity: Parkway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regional connector carrying local and regional multimodal traffic ▪ Serves low-density residential areas, open spaces 	Major/Minor Arterials	Walkable/Incremental Core Frontages
Local Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides access to local residences ▪ Functions as shared spaces for vehicles, cyclists, and pedestrians 	Local Collector	Local or Residential Frontage

Figure 16: Street Types Applied to Conceptual Street Grid

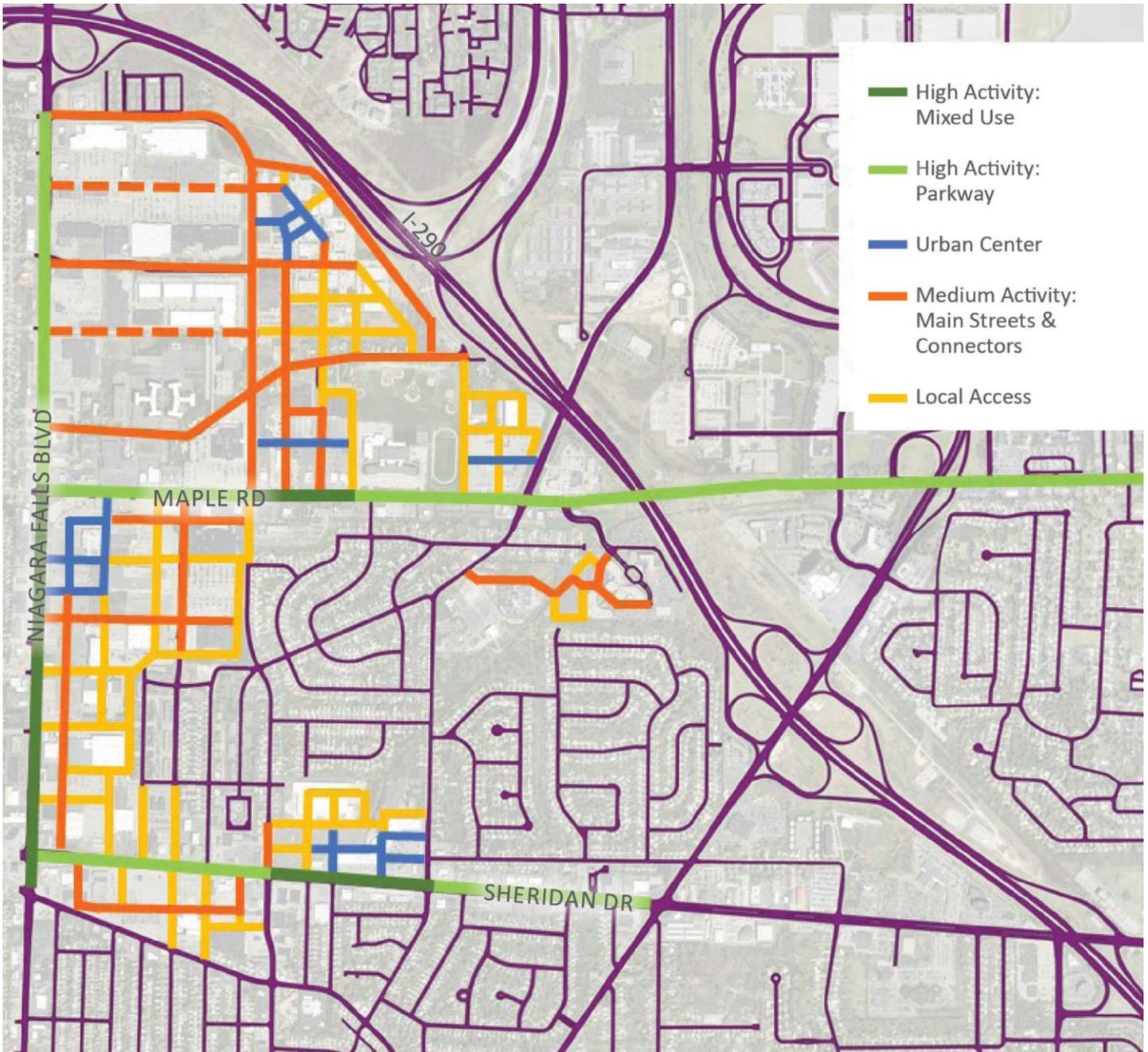


Figure 17: Example of Urban Center Street

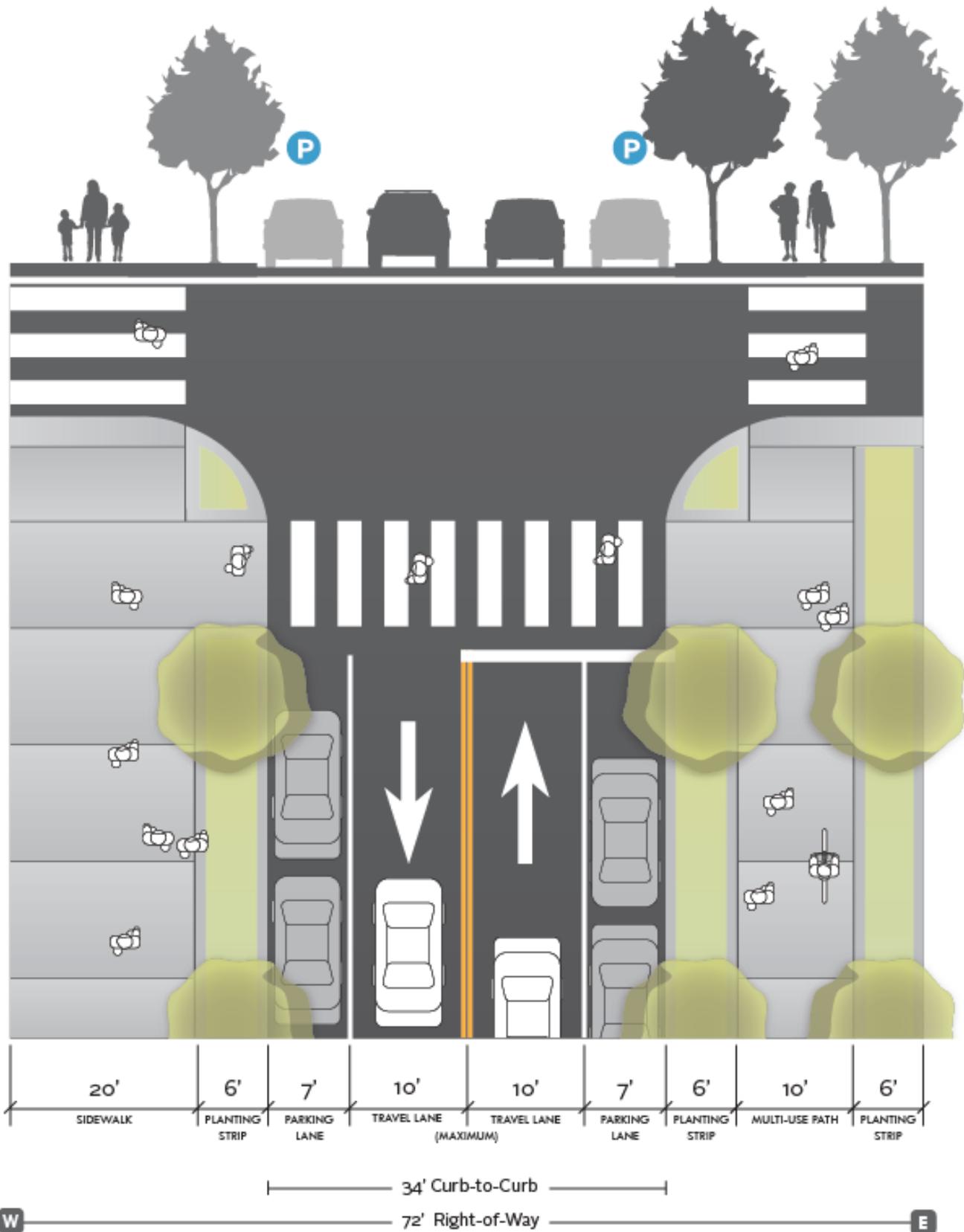


Figure 18: Example of Urban Center Street (with Bike Lane)

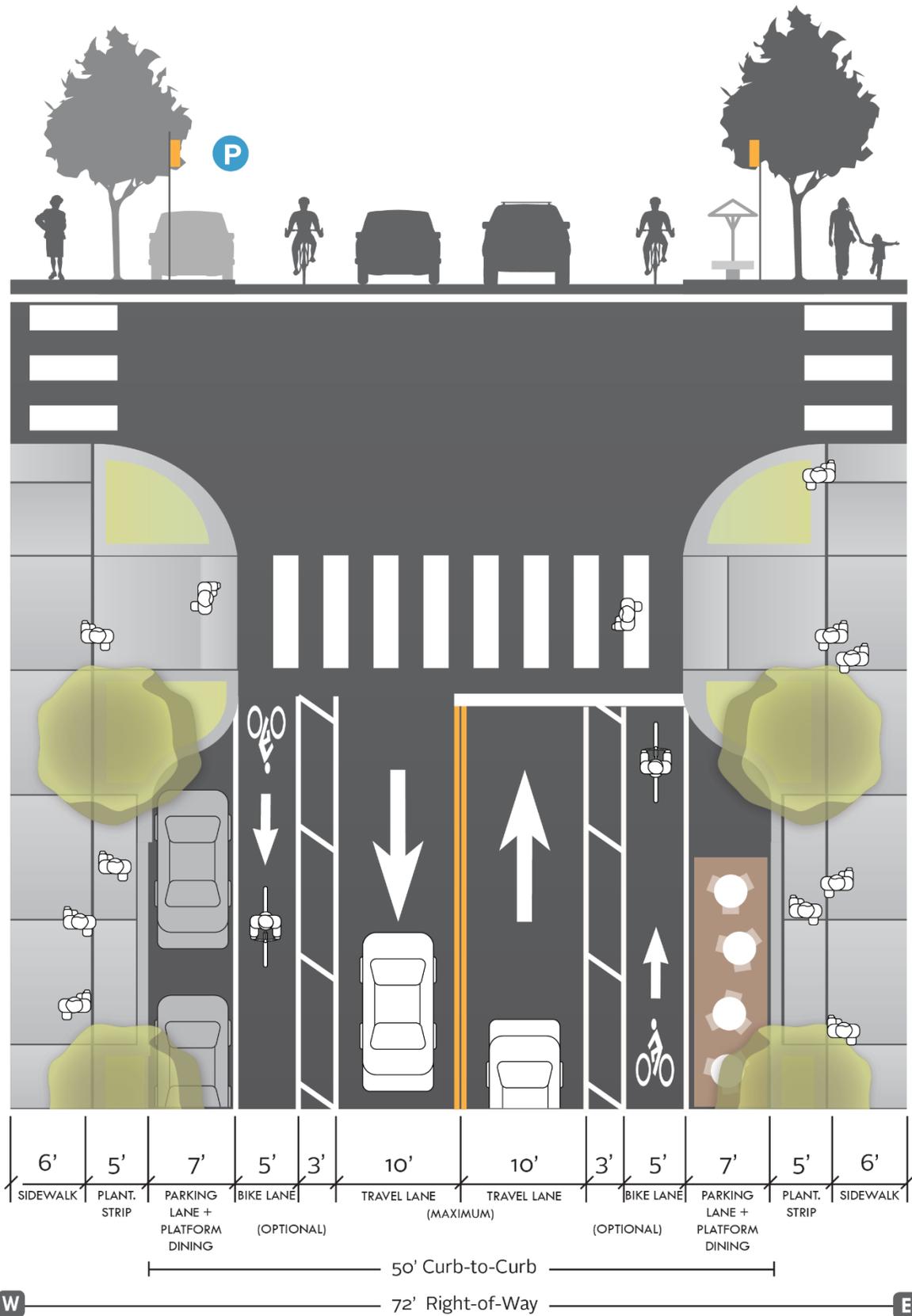


Figure 19: Example of Medium Activity: Main Streets and Connectors Street

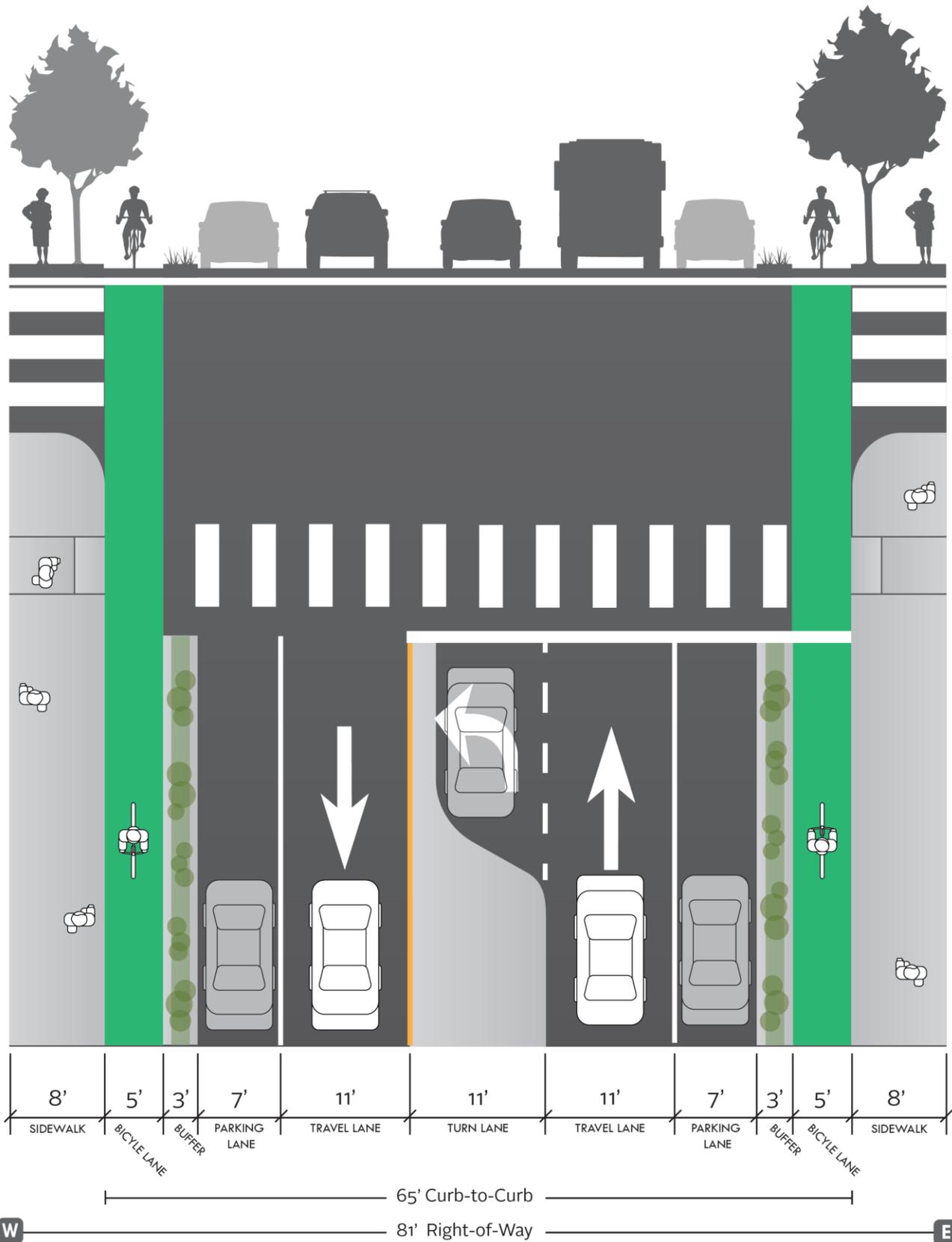


Figure 20: Example of Local Access Street

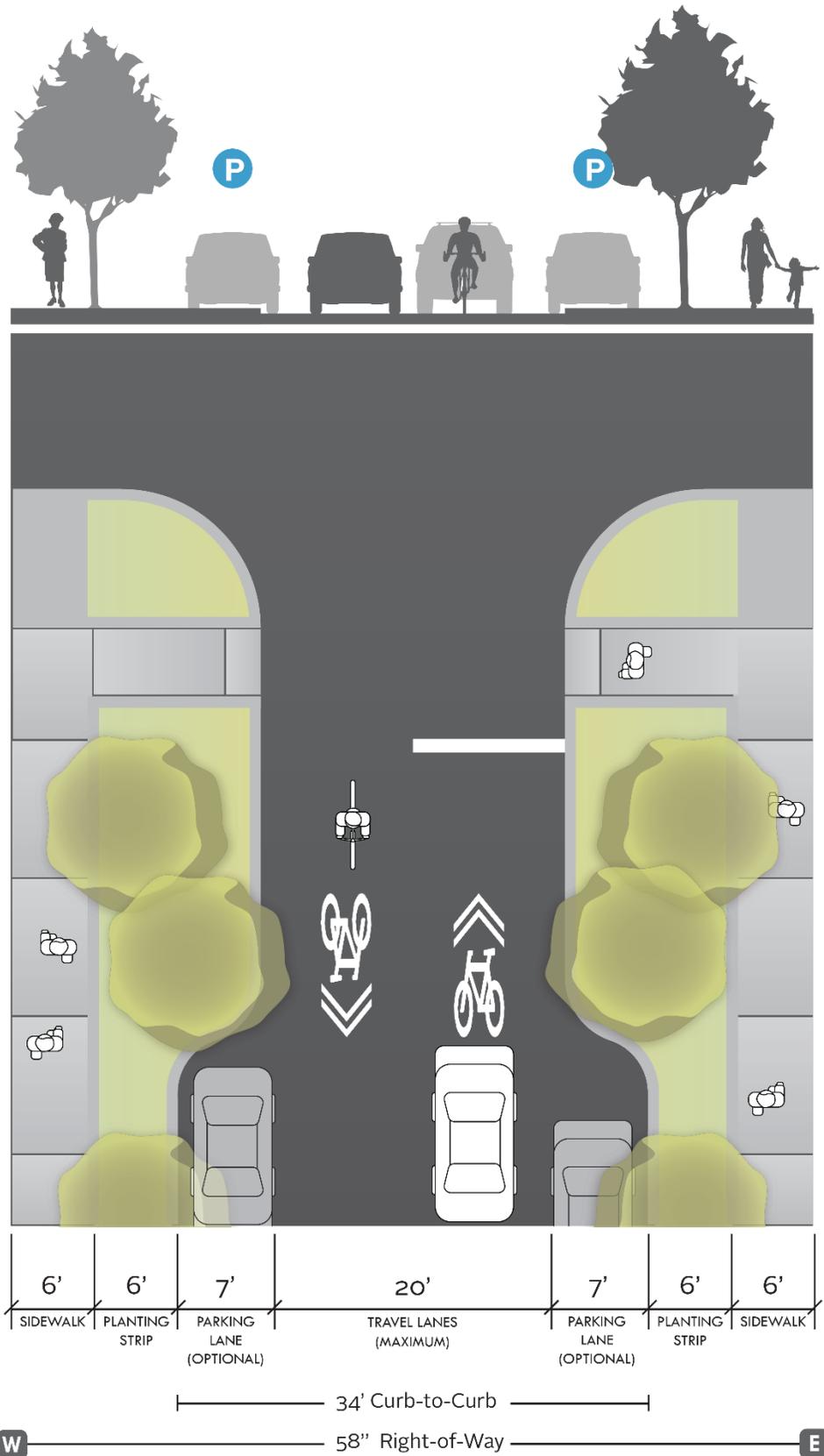


Figure 21: Example of High Activity: Mixed-Use Street

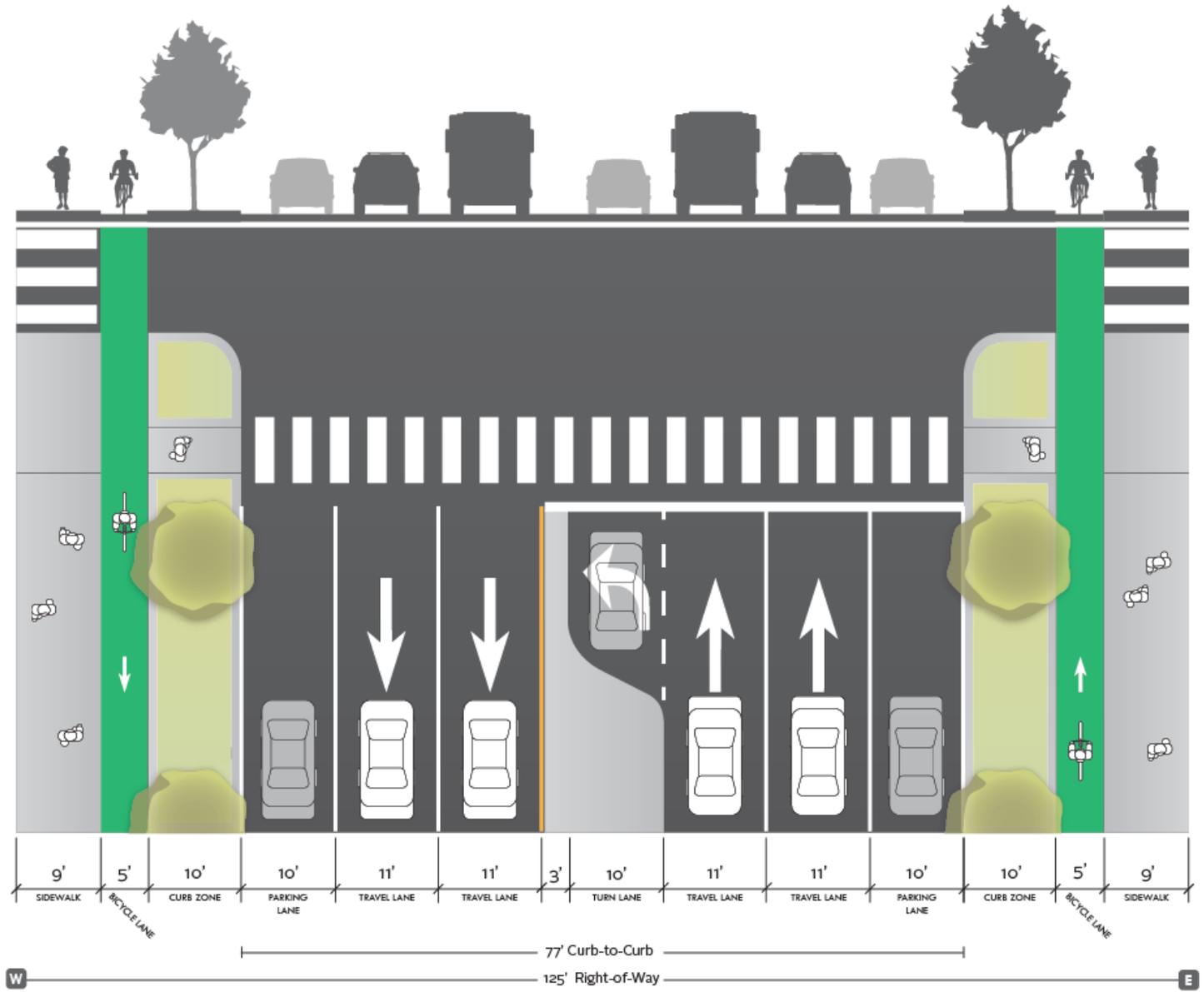
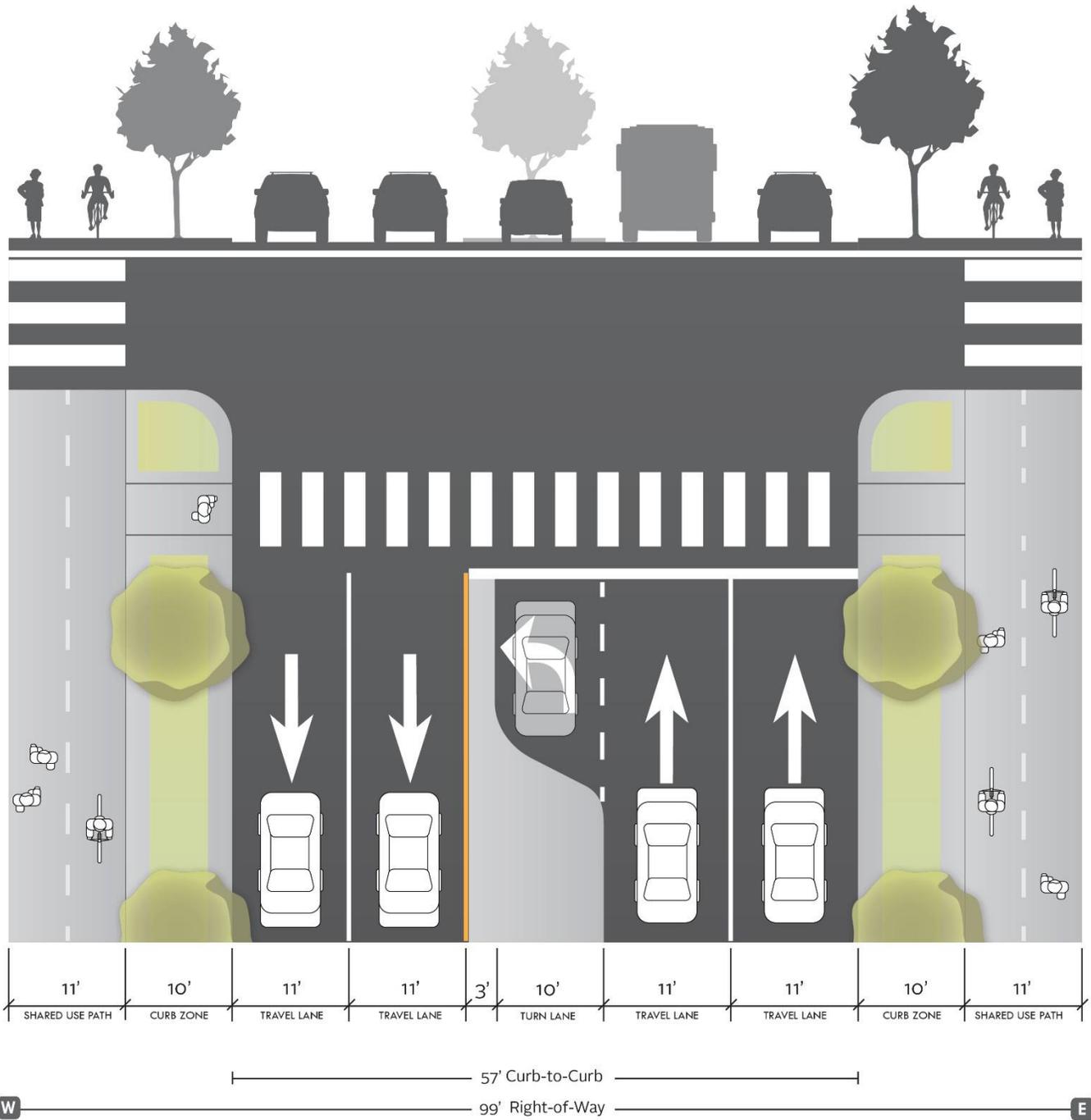


Figure 22: Example of High Activity: Parkway Street



The Bigger Picture: Moving Forward 2050

Moving Forward 2050: A Regional Transportation Plan for Buffalo Niagara was adopted as the regional transportation plan by the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) in May 2018. The plan envisions use of innovative technologies to improve the region's economy, communities, and environment, recognizing the role transportation infrastructure plays in providing opportunity, health and safety.

One of the key strategies of the plan is to transform major corridors into Smartly Enhanced Multi-modal Arterials (SEMAs). Major corridors in the region were designed to accommodate vehicular traffic but lack the basic elements that make alternative travel modes safe and efficient. Moving forward, SEMAs will incorporate upgraded street design features and emerging transportation services to efficiently utilize the full capacity of the corridor for the safe movement of people and goods. Recommendations include:

- *Share the Street*: Design the street right-of-way to allow for safe travel for all modes, including walking, biking and transit. Street design elements include vehicle lanes as well as dedicated bus/transit lanes, bike lanes, and a safe pedestrian environment with wide sidewalks, frequent crosswalks, and pedestrian-activated signals.
- *Mobility Hubs*: Mobility hubs will be located along SEMAs to connect travelers to a range of transportation options. Mobility hubs can include transit stops/shelters and convenient links to ride-sharing, circulators or buses, microtransit (shared vehicles that transport multiple commuters, which may be on-demand via a smartphone or on a set route), bike shares and other micro-mobility options; EV charging stations; and technology to improve the transit experience such as real-time information kiosks and wi-fi.
- *Improve Flow of People and Goods*: Coordinating signal timing, encouraging microtransit and utilizing new technology such as autonomous or connected vehicles (that can share information on hazards, alternative routes or available parking) can improve efficiency and avoid congestion.
- *Reactivate the Street*: New development and street design interventions that encourage walking and biking will enliven the street scene and increase mobility options. Flexible curb space should be included to facilitate pick-up/drop-off for rideshares, microtransit and autonomous vehicles as well as deliveries.

Niagara Falls Boulevard, a major north-south connector in the region, is a prime candidate to become a SEMA. Recommendations in this report (and other Town and regional plans) for dedicated transit and Complete Street design options that improve the safety and viability of pedestrian and bike networks are consistent with this goal. Stations along the enhanced transit corridor, including the stop proposed at the Boulevard Mall site, should be designed as a Mobility Hub. As described in the regional vision, the Mobility Hub can provide access to transit circulators/buses, bike share infrastructure, and other micro-mobility options (which could include autonomous shuttles, scooters, or other new technologies that emerge in the future) that provide convenient first- and last-mile connections.

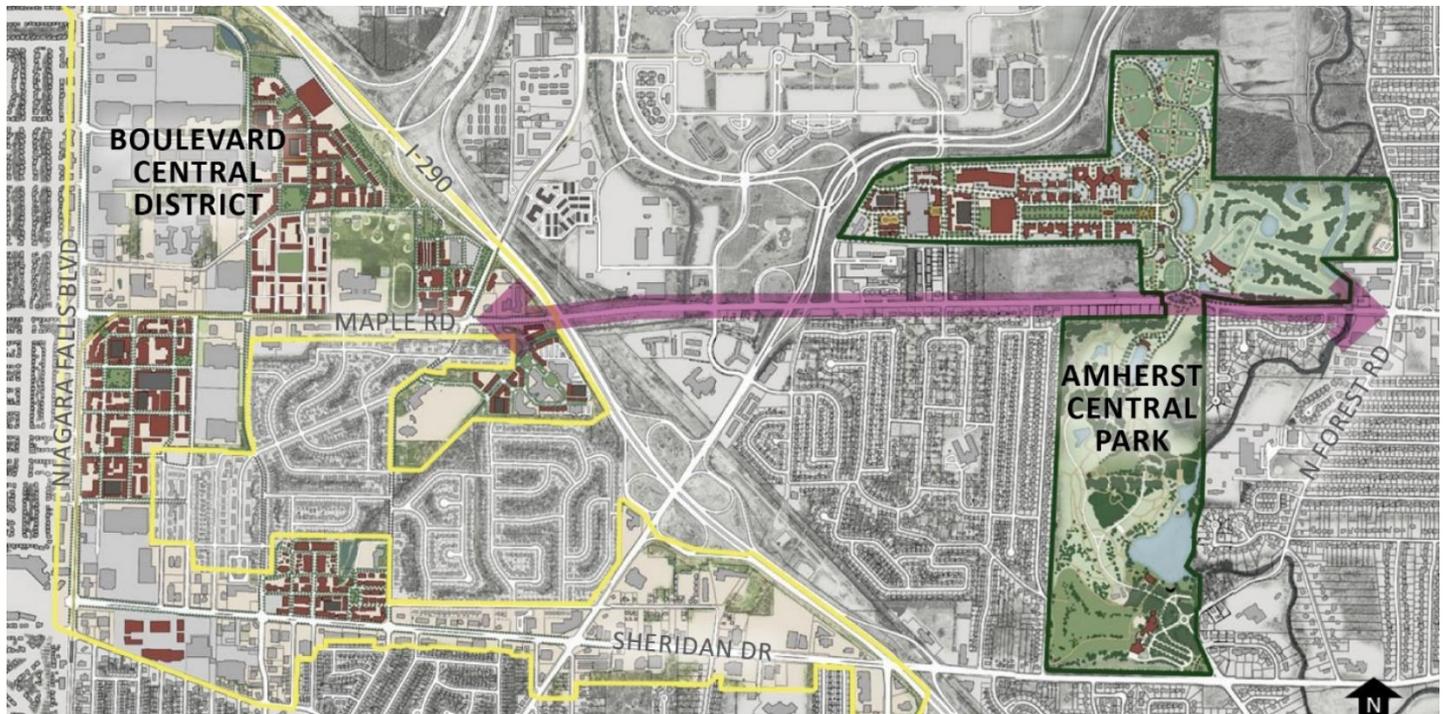
The design of streets throughout the district (particularly Urban Center streets) should incorporate flexible curb space zones as an alternative to the on-street parking shown in the sample street sections in strategic areas, to facilitate pick-up and drop-off for ride sharing and other alternative mobility modes, as well as access for e-commerce. In addition to providing space for increased mobility options, flexible curb space can be closed to vehicles at certain times of the day and used for special events/markets or pop-up vendors, enhancing the pedestrian experience and promoting increased activity in the district.

Connections to Amherst Central Park

The Town of Amherst is working with area property owners, stakeholders and the community to plan for Amherst Central Park, a world-class park and recreational center paired with mixed-use destinations on the sites of the former Westwood Country Club and Audubon Recreational Complex. Maple Road is an important connector between the new Central Park and the Boulevard Central District. Today, the 5-lane auto-oriented street is uncomfortable and unsafe to walk and bike. The existing design causes Maple Road to be a divider between the north and south sides of the Central Park site, and makes the park feel distant from the Boulevard District and enhanced transit on the western portion of Maple Road.

To capitalize on investments to transit and infrastructure, and implement the multi-modal, connected vision for this part of Town, the parkway design envisioned for Maple Road in the Boulevard Central District can extend to the east, past I-290 to the area of Amherst Central Park. A multi-modal design should be implemented on the segment of Maple Road without enhanced transit, between Sweet Home Road and Ellicott Creek (providing a better frontage to the park site, and connections to the Central Park facilities and Ellicott Creek trail) and it could be extended even further east if desired.

Figure 23: Maple Road, Parkway Connection to Amherst Central Park



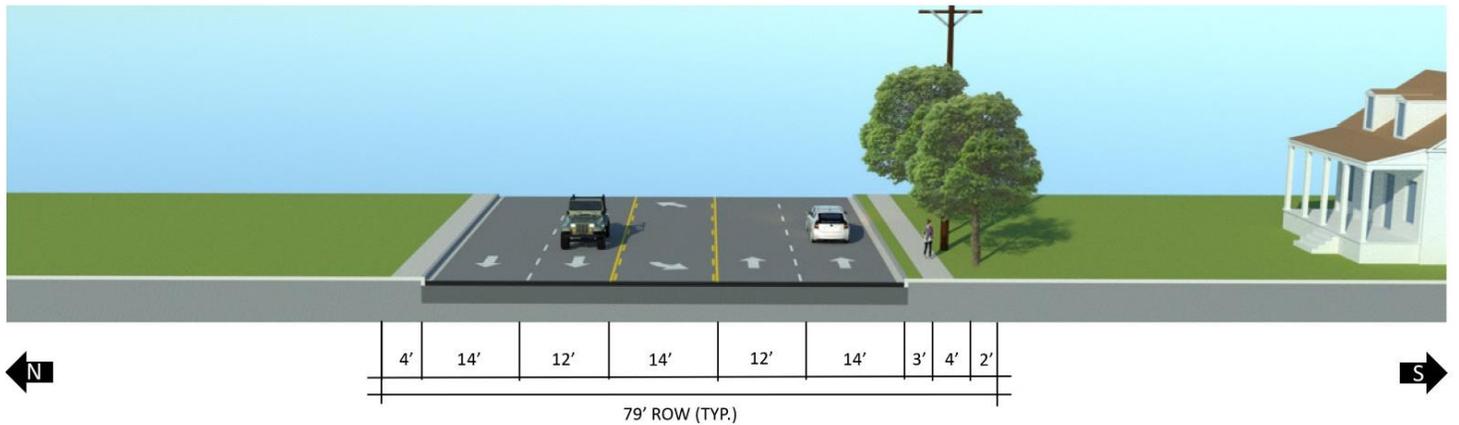
As part of planning for the Amherst Central Park area, preliminary street design concepts for Maple Road have been illustrated. The preliminary design proposes a “road diet” which repurposes vehicular lanes to provide a better balance with other mobility modes – in this case, removing one lane in each direction provides space within the right-of-way for a multi-use path on either side of the street, separated from moving vehicles by a planting area with regularly-spaced street trees. A center turn lane alternates with a planted median; the trees in the median and at the side of the road create a parkway environment and traffic-calming effect, creating a better environment for pedestrians and cyclists as well as an improved frontage for homes that front onto Maple Road near the Central Park area.

Improved crosswalks are needed along the corridor to make pedestrians feel comfortable. An elliptical roundabout is proposed where the north and south sides of the Park meet at Maple Road, to form a gateway that marks the entry to the Park and improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists crossing the street. The elliptical shape has a few advantages to a typical, circular roundabout:

- The elongated east-to-west shape makes the space feel like an extension of the park spaces on either side;
- There is a larger area for pedestrian refuge when crossing the street;
- The shape is reminiscent of the historic Olmsted park plan geometries that are a precedent for these park improvements;
- The ellipse is aligned with the predominant traffic flow moving east to west; and
- The enlarged space creates an opportunity for a flyway/continuous habitat for birds and pollinators.

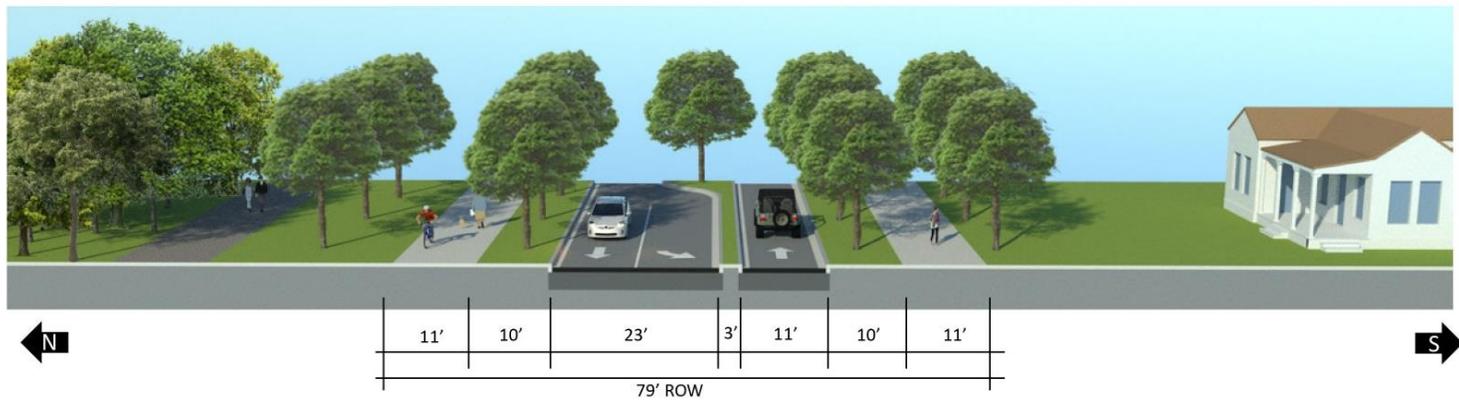
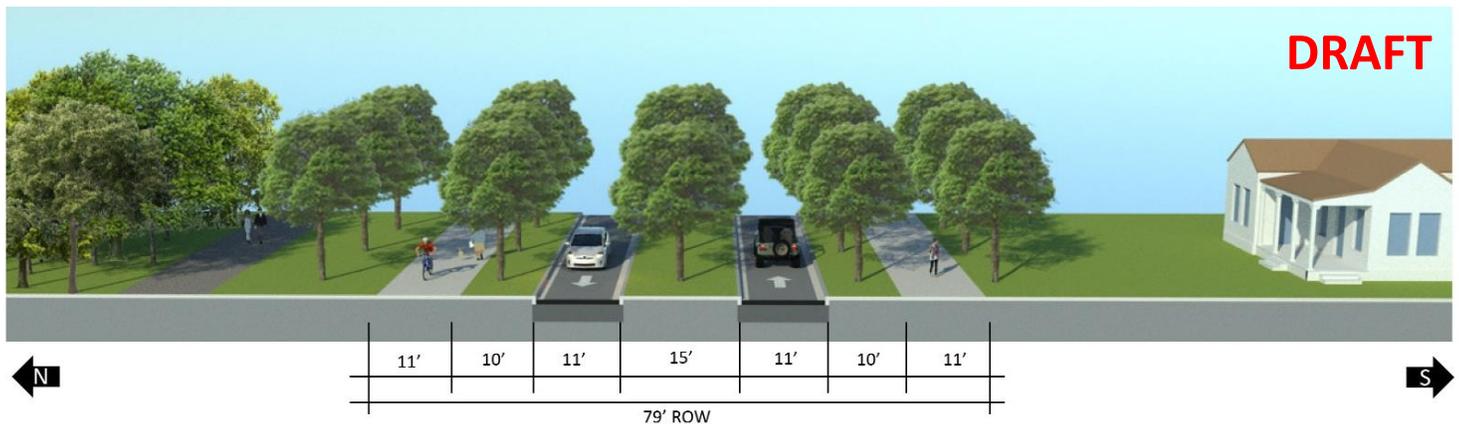
Preliminary design concepts for the Amherst Central Park area, including the draft illustrative plan shown in Figure 23, are being refined with input from the community. Further study of street design options to implement a Complete Streets approach with improved conditions for pedestrian and cyclists in this entire area is needed (including the potential road diet and intersection improvements shown in Figures 23 and 24). Next steps will include further analysis of existing traffic volumes and coordination with Erie County on the Maple Road redesign.

Figure 24: Preliminary Design Concepts for Maple Road



Above: Existing conditions on Maple Road near Amherst Central Park

Below: Potential future conditions on Maple Road at median (top) and where a center turn lane is needed (bottom). Street design changes aim to provide better balance between pedestrians, cyclists and autos by removing one vehicular lane in each direction and utilizing the space gained for a multi-use trail and street trees.



Bike/Trail/Greenway Network

Bicycle infrastructure within the study area today is limited. Sweet Home Road is the lone corridor in the district that features bicycle lanes, and there are no separated bicycling facilities. The street sections on the previous pages show how Complete Street improvements to new and existing roads can produce a more complete pedestrian and bike network in the district in the future.

The *2018 Recreation and Parks Master Plan* assessed parks and recreation levels of service (LOS) existing in the Town today, measuring areas within ¼ mile and ½ mile (easy walking and biking distance) of parks and recreation facilities. Eggertsville Community Park, located on Sweet Home Road south of Maple Rd, serves many of the district's residential neighborhoods. In addition, Sweet Home Middle School, with its complex of ballfields, track, and basketball courts, provides access to recreational facilities. Relevant findings of the parks LOS analysis include:

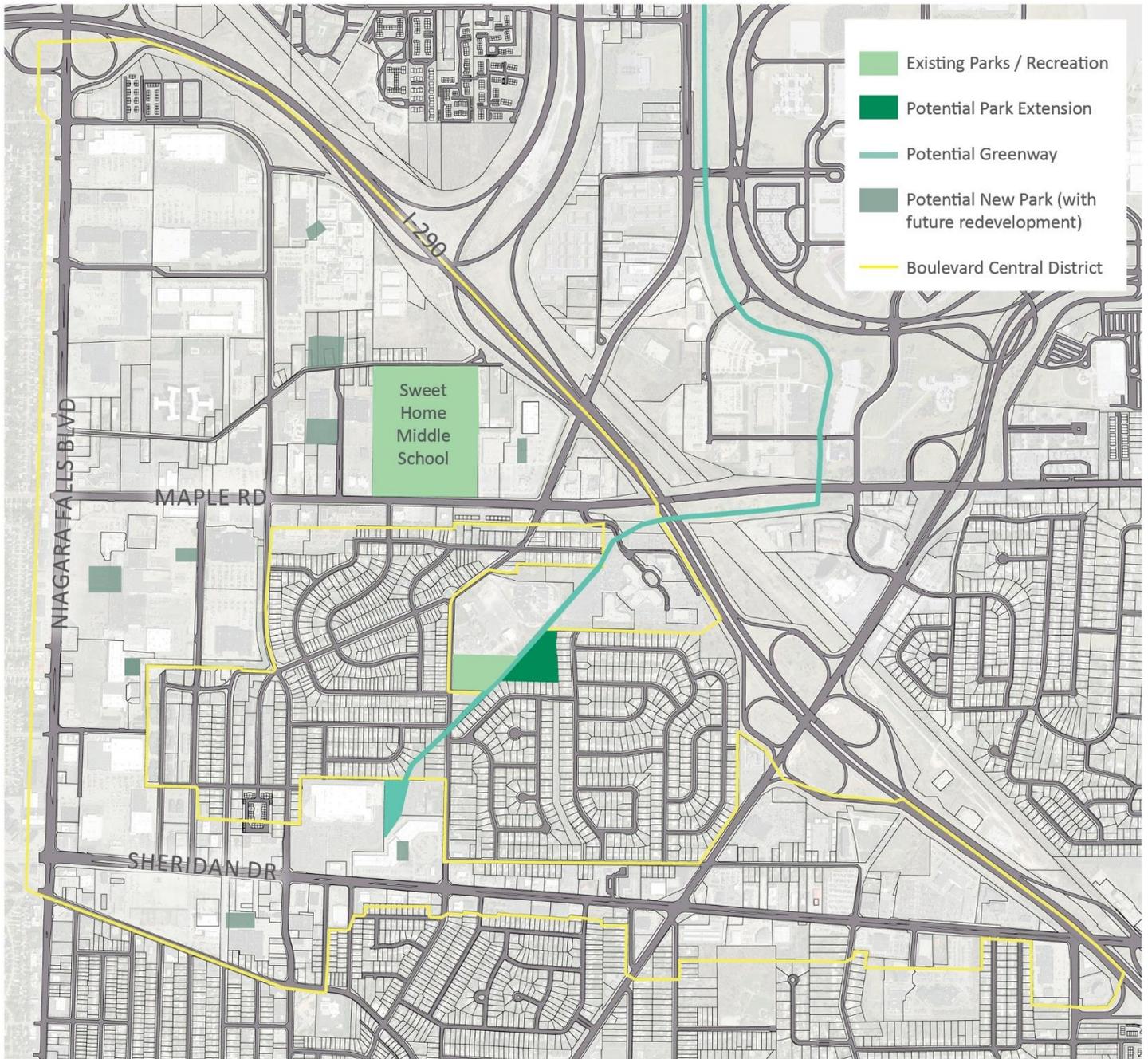
- Access to most athletic facilities and community parks is currently via automobile due to major pedestrian barriers (i.e. major road corridor, limited sidewalks, or lack of trail connectivity).
- Overall connectivity (by foot or bicycle) within and between parks is limited. The existing system of multi-use paths, sidewalks, and trails has potential to be expanded to provide better pedestrian and bicycle connections within the town.

The LOS analysis also reveals that portions of the district (primarily commercial areas) are underserved. With future redevelopment, additional parks, plazas, and open spaces will be included as part of new mixed-use areas to serve new residents who live in these areas near Niagara Falls Boulevard (a minimum 5 percent of the land area is required to be open space in most mixed-use districts by Code).

Improvements to streets and public spaces can be supplemented by off-road trails to create a complete bike/trail/greenway network. Town plans for trails and open space show a more complete system of trails (existing and proposed) near the university campus. There is potential to expand this pedestrian and bike network into the Boulevard Central District, through complete street improvements (including protected bikeways and multiuse paths on improved streets) as well as trails and greenways. Analysis of the district reveals additional greenway/park opportunities to explore (as shown in Figure 25):

- There is an existing drainage connection that leads from the south (near existing Walmart on Sheridan Drive), running adjacent to Eggertsville Community Park, and to the University area in the north. Portions of the stream have been placed underground in pipes today; portions appear to be in easements, while others segments are on privately-owned property. The Town could explore acquiring access to this natural corridor (through easement or acquisition), daylight the stream and add trails alongside it.
- There is a triangular parcel of land behind Eggertsville Community Park that contains one of the last contiguous natural/forested areas in the district. The area abuts the rear yard of existing residential homes and does not have auto access today; creating access would require crossing the stream/greenway discussed above. Considering these factors, the site is not as well-suited for development as nearby parcels; but could be an asset to the Town as an extension of Eggertsville Community Park. This area could be used for passive recreation/natural preserve, with trails connected to the greenway and existing park. The Town could pursue acquisition of this parcel as parks/preserve area.
- The addition of a green space to support a future community facility on the Boulevard Mall site allows for expanded services, programming, events and activities not only for new residents as part of the Mall redevelopment, but also serves the surrounding residents who currently lack close access to green space and community amenities.

Figure 25: Boulevard Central District Greenway/Park Opportunities



Implementation Actions

1) Implement Complete Street Design Concepts

The transformation of the district into a vibrant mixed-use center is reliant on transforming its auto-oriented streets into Complete Streets that consider the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, and transit users. The urgent need to improve safety for pedestrians on Niagara Falls Boulevard is a main concern for the Town, placing priority on interventions for the Boulevard. Implementing Complete Streets Design Concepts in the district will include:

- a) *Redesign Niagara Falls Boulevard with safety/mobility improvements* including: right-sizing vehicle lanes to slow vehicle speeds and create safer pedestrian crossings; reducing the number of vehicular lanes and reallocating street space to widened tree-lined sidewalks and protected bikeways (see Figure 13, proposed design north of Maple Road). South of Maple Road, coordinate with NFTA to expand the Right-of-Way to include the above pedestrian/bike safety improvements as well as enhanced transit (see Figure 10).
- b) In coordination with NFTA, *design and implement Complete Streets concepts on district streets along the proposed transit route* (Maple Road and Sweet Home Road), to include enhanced transit, widened tree-lined sidewalks, and protected bikeways (see Figures 11 and 12).
- c) *Redesign primary district thoroughfares to include similar safety/mobility improvements*. Prioritize arterials and collectors identified in the Town's Comprehensive Plan, which provide access across the district connecting many properties, such as Sheridan Drive (see Figure 14) and Bailey Avenue (see Figure 15).

2) Coordinate with NFTA on enhanced transit design and implementation

NFTA's proposal to extend enhanced transit through the district generates potential for the retrofitting of suburban commercial areas as transit-oriented development, and increased access to the region. As the NFTA continues planning, including the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and TOD Study, there are a few key design opportunities the Town can coordinate to maximize potential for the Boulevard Central District:

- a) *Design transit corridors as Complete Streets*. As described above, it is essential for district streets to be designed to safely accommodate all modes of mobility, including pedestrians and cyclists. The rights-of-way for Niagara Falls Boulevard, Maple Road, and Sweet Home Road will need to be expanded to accommodate enhanced transit facilities, as well as appropriately-sized sidewalks and bikeways separated from moving vehicles by planting areas with shade trees. The Town should coordinate with NFTA on the sizing and configuration/footprint of transit facilities to confirm the overall ROW needed and ensure that the ultimate street design accommodates all users.
- b) *Coordinate the design and placement of the new transit station near the Boulevard Mall site*. The Town will need to coordinate with NFTA and Boulevard Mall property owners on placement of a new enhanced transit station on or near the property. The site is an opportunity to integrate a station with new mixed-use redevelopment, at the location in the transitway alignment where space/turning radius to make a turn to the east (on Maple Road) is needed. Rather than running the enhanced transit through the new development, as shown in previous studies (which will introduce new conflicts with pedestrians and the transitway), Figure 9 shows how the station can be placed near the Niagara Falls Boulevard/Maple Road intersection, defining a new public space and creating an entry to the newly walkable Boulevard Mall site. Current planning for the enhanced transit as light rail envisions the corridor will be fenced to safely allow for desired speeds, with limited crossings for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles. This type of design reinforces the recommendation to keep the alignment on larger arterial roads that are better able to accommodate this type of infrastructure.

c) *Plan for Mobility Hubs at District Stations.* The Town should explore integrating Mobility Hubs that provide space for bike share facilities, bus/shuttle connections, microtransit (shared vehicles that transport multiple commuters in one vehicle, which may be on-demand via a smartphone or on a set route) and ride share access at new transit stations. Mobility Hubs extend the impact of the enhanced transit investment, providing alternatives for first- and last-mile connections and increasing the viability of using transit for more trips. This idea is consistent with the regional transportation vision, *Moving Forward 2050*, which aims to use technology and innovative design to support communities, economic development and workforce access. Today, most travel in the district is by automobile, which requires parking at each destination. Enhanced transit will directly impact properties within each stations' walk shed, providing more choice for mobility. Making it easier to utilize alternative modes will allow a larger area to benefit with reduced parking demands, greater access, and increased choice for residents, workers and visitors. Emerging technologies, such as autonomous microtransit vehicles and scooter-share companies have potential to further increase the options for future mobility. Planning for Mobility Hubs that accommodate existing and potential future alternative mobility modes works in conjunction with the transformation of district streets to included protected bikeways and widened sidewalks to encourage many options for travel.

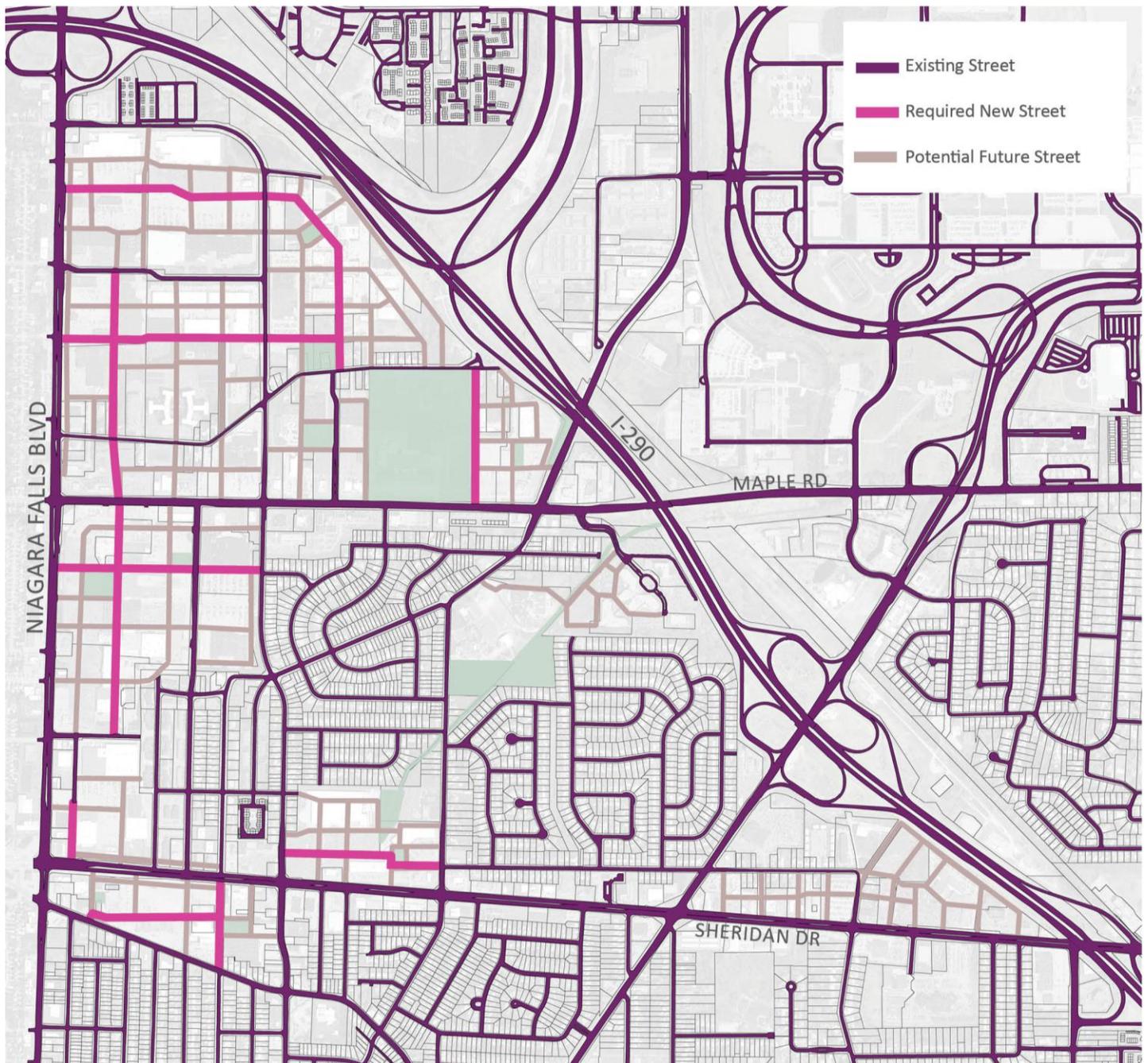
3) Continue to Update Regulations

The Town's Mixed-Use Districts Code allows properties to redevelop according to the vision for walkable, mixed-use development. Currently, the code is a floating code; property owners must apply to use its districts, frontages and walkable street designs.

The Town is currently undertaking an important first step, to rezone and apply the districts of the Mixed-Use Districts Code as mandatory zoning within the Boulevard Central District. This will ensure that future redevelopment matches the Town and community vision for the area. Redevelopment will have to meet standards for block size, with new streets that are defined by building frontages, and new open space areas provided. Testing of the code through this planning process reveals a few additional updates for the Town to consider:

a) *Draft and approve Street Regulating Plan to guide new street network.* The Mixed-Use Districts Code provides standards for new blocks, streets, and buildings (such as maximum block size, and requirements for a percentage of "core" streets that are the most walkable and urban in character). However, the ultimate site design is left to each property owner. In order to ensure that the new street grid provides needed alternatives for circulation (not relying on arterials and collectors for most trips), and produce more predictability in future site designs, the Town can consider drafting and adopting a Street Regulating Plan to accompany the code. This Regulating Plan would not need to include every street on the conceptual street grid included in this document, leaving many site design decisions to property owners; but it should identify, locate, and require those future street connections that are essential for circulation between properties. Figure 26 is a first draft of mapping the streets that could be required as part of future development in the district. Once adopted by the Town Board, the basic street alignment for these key connections will become a requirement for new development of these parcels under the code. Provisions for adjustments to required streets due to site-specific conditions should be included (for example, allowing a shift in the required street centerline by up to 50 feet to accommodate desired site design features; or adjusting the location of a required street due to environmental or utility constraints).

Figure 26: Sample Street Regulating Plan



- b) *Assess code requirements for Arterial and Collector frontages.* The new code permits walkable, mixed-use development as envisioned by the Town but it also allows some flexibility, particularly along existing arterials and collectors. The auto-oriented character of existing arterials and collectors makes it difficult to redevelop today with street-oriented buildings. The arterials and collector standards do not include build-to or lot frontage requirements, only setbacks, which allow for a variety of built conditions including buildings set back far from the street, and large gaps between buildings. The Core Half-Street Type allows for half of a new walkable street to be built, leaving large surface parking areas on one side of the new street to buffer arterials and collectors from new walkable mixed-use development. This is appropriate in the existing conditions; however, if the Town is undertaking Complete Streets design transformations of these corridors, the requirements for buildings to line the back edge of sidewalks on arterials and collectors should be revisited, and updated to be more similar to those for the walkable/village core areas.

In addition, arterial and collector frontage types require buildings to be setback 5' or 10' from the right-of-way line. This dimension must be updated and coordinated with Town planning for Complete Street improvements. In the near term, this setback dimension may need to be increased, so that new buildings are not placed within future planned right-of-way areas. To achieve the street designs depicted in this report, the Town may acquire property to expand right-of-way areas to include all of the street elements depicted; or portions of the sidewalk/planting areas could remain in easements on private property, to be built as properties redevelop. Either way, as street improvements are made, setbacks along those streets should be adjusted, to ensure that future buildings are placed at the back edge of the sidewalk.

- c) *Continue to make updates to the code to allow some variety and design innovation.* The process of illustrating implementation of the code on sample sites and producing street design options revealed some opportunities for code adjustments. Rather than permitting exceptions or variances for each site or circumstance, the Town can continue to evaluate and update the code on a regular basis to reflect new ideas and innovations. Examples could include introducing pedestrian-only streets as a permitted street type; permitting more variations in the design and location of bike facilities; further reducing on-site parking requirements; and allowing for encroachments to some dimensional standards (such as small footprint towers that exceed the height limit, and occupied space over colonnades that encroach into the setback area over the sidewalk).

4) Pursue Parks / Greenway / Public Space Improvements

The Town should pursue parks/greenway and public space improvements to support and supplement ongoing private investment. Ideas generated during this study include:

- a) *Create new greenway: daylight stream, add trails.* The design of sample sites revealed potential to transform an existing drainageway into a greenway with a multi-use trail that provides another way of moving through the district (see Figure 25). Portions of the greenway are already publicly owned; other portions are privately-owned and would require acquisition or easement. Upgrades can include daylighting segments of the stream that are in pipes underground; this new public greenway can be an asset to existing and future residents and connect mixed-use redevelopment sites to the university area and its network of existing and planned trails.
- b) *Acquire natural preserve area behind Eggertsville Community Park for park extension.* The identified property is one of the last remaining stands of natural/wooded area, adjacent to the potential new greenway and the existing park. It does not have vehicular access today and is also adjacent to the rear yards of existing single-family homes. The Town can explore acquisition of the parcel as an extension of the existing park, improve it with walking trails, and maintain as a natural preserve and buffer to residential neighborhoods.
- c) *Paint overpass to define gateway to University at Buffalo North Campus.* The Boulevard Central District provides a gateway to the SUNY Buffalo North Campus. Part of the Town's public space enhancements in the district can include painting the I-290 overpass on Sweet Home Road to mark entry and provide a formal gateway to the

University (see Figure 27). This relatively low-cost measure can make a striking visual impact. Options illustrated below include a simple logo/signage, as well as a more elaborate mural. The final design could be planned and implemented by student artists, with support from the Town.

Figure 27: University at Buffalo Gateway



Above: Concepts for painting the I-290 overpass at Sweet Home Road to create a gateway to the University

5) Encourage Desired Development

The planning work completed to date by the Town has aimed to proactively foster and cultivate new development according to the Town and community vision. This includes identifying and documenting the vision through the Comprehensive Plan; adopting and applying the new Mixed-Use Districts Code to allow and require the form of walkable, mixed-use development desired; and completing the Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) to study and identify environmental impacts and mitigation measures needed, removing that obligation from individual property owners and making it easier and more efficient for new development to occur. In addition, public improvements – to district streets, parks/greenways, and infrastructure, will begin to transform the character of the area and can inspire confidence in additional investment from area property owners. The Town can continue to work to implement the vision for the district and encourage desired development by:

- a) *Continue meetings with property owners:* The Town should continue its dialogue with area property owners, to explain the requirements and potential of the new Code, findings of the GEIS, and explore potential for infrastructure upgrades to assist implementation. The illustrations in this report can help to explain the possibilities and inspire future development.
- b) *Market the plan and code to experienced walkable community developers.* Undertaking vertical mixed-use development, as envisioned by the Mixed-Use Code, can be a complex undertaking. Built results are critical to inspire confidence in the potential for the types of transformations envisioned. Developers with experience with this type of development can help to get the first retrofits underway; once some built results are on the ground, it will be more likely for additional property owners to explore potential for redevelopment under the code.

6) Evaluate Mitigation Measures

The GEIS prepared by the Town studies and identifies environmental impacts (to land use, zoning, water, sewer, and transportation) and mitigation measures needed to address these impacts, based on a Projected Growth Redevelopment Scenario over a 20-year planning period. Mitigation measures include associated costs that will apply to private property owners that undertake redevelopment.

The transportation analysis includes a list of mitigation measures to accommodate the modeled traffic growth based on land use growth projections, primarily identifying additional lanes/turn lanes on key streets and intersections. The analysis does acknowledge that the wider streets and intersections these improvements would create may not be consistent with the vision for safe walking and biking, and that other options could be considered.

This type of analysis is conservative as it assumes that the auto-oriented travel patterns of today will continue through redevelopment. What is missing is the analysis of other potential future scenarios that could account for vehicle trip reduction as a result of the new street grid and street design, the new zoning and resulting walkable/bikeable neighborhood design, the supply of enhanced transit, or the implementation of other potential transportation demand management measures that have proven to be effective in similar context and that could be applied in the new office space, retail or residential areas (e.g. shuttles, protected bike lanes, carpool incentives, shared parking programs, etc.). Any combination would potentially reduce the vehicle trips to a level that some (or most) of the proposed mitigation measures are not required.

As a next step, the Town can refine this portion of the analysis, assuming a multimodal network and some other transportation programs that could be offered to make alternative modes more attractive than private vehicles to move around. Sample approaches for this type analysis are described below; any approach needs support from stakeholders (including the DOT and County) that the documentation is sufficient to demonstrate that the degree of road expansion is not needed.

One approach would be to re-do certain specific data points and recommendations in the GEIS to reflect the design work undertaken as part of this study. The revised GEIS data points should estimate the new vehicle trip and VMT generated by the future development, but considering potential vehicle trips and VMT reductions as a result of an increase on densities, diversity of development (mix of uses), transit accessibility and multimodal design of a development.

In order to recommend design of the future transportation networks, the analysis would compare the excess capacity of the existing networks with the travel demand needs of future horizons that would account for impacts on travel demand unrelated to the development (for example, other new developments in the area, or impacts on travel demand such as covid-19), as well as the impact of new development in the area. The timeframes for analysis can vary by the stage of improvements (such as implementation of enhanced transit, or amount of new development in the area). This type analysis would require expertise in travel demand modeling, and traffic and travel behavior analysis.

The travel demand needs would be initially estimated using vehicle trip generation rates and average travel distance by land use, and then vehicle trip reductions are applied. One resource for this type of analysis are reductions outlined in *Quantifying Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Measures* compiled by the California Air Pollution Control Officers Association (CAPCOA), which provides VMT reduction measures for various strategies. These strategies are not additive but rather complementary and synergistic. When additional measures are implemented, the marginal benefit of each new program diminishes because the baseline it is working from has already been reduced by prior strategies.

An alternative, cost effective and more general way to do this type of analysis would be to estimate order-of-magnitude changes in VMT and local traffic volumes based on urban design and density, multi-modal travel and TDM. This would make the generalized case to not invest in some or all roadway expansion in context of the development. This would be based on analysis of area-wide volumes in Amherst, analysis of volumes at peer suburban retrofit developments and walkable urbanism in suburban contexts, and a TDM program that produces the needed mitigations without road widening.

7) Pursue Infrastructure Upgrades

The Town can continue to pursue infrastructure improvements to make the district ready for anticipated development. Upgrades on the Town's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) list include:

- a) *West Side Interceptor Diversion Facility*: Construction of a diversion pump station and force main to alleviate surcharge in West Side Interceptor and accommodate future development. (2019)
- b) *Niagara Falls Boulevard Sanitary Sewer Rehabilitation and Replacement*: Phase 1 is reconstruction of Niagara Falls Blvd sanitary sewer from Maple Road to Ridge Lea Road. Phase 2 is relining of existing 8-inch sanitary sewer on Niagara Falls Blvd south of Maple and replacing sanitary along the south side of Maple from Niagara Falls Blvd to Alberta. (2020)
- c) *North Bailey Sanitary Sewer*: Construction of a 10 inch sanitary sewer along North Bailey Avenue from Meyer Road to Ridge Lea Road. (2021)
- d) *Water Line Replacements*: Replacement of 42,600 LF of 8 inch CIP waterline, 6,800LF of 12 inch CIP waterline and 2,500 LF of 16 inch CIP waterline to improve network pressures and flow. (2021)
- e) *Core Streets*: As part of future development under the Mixed-Use Districts, the Town will work with applicants to design and construct "Core Streets", some of which will be dedicated as Town rights-of-way.

Core Streets are intended to be the most pedestrian-friendly streets that extend through sites and connect to abutting streets and properties, creating a street grid. Street design requirements are included in the Code; a minimum percentage of streets must be designated as a Core Street in each development. It is anticipated that the Town may share a portion of Core Street costs with developers or may construct their own public Core Streets to support desired redevelopment. In addition to street design elements (paving, curb/gutter, bike lanes, sidewalks, crosswalks, street trees and curb zone furniture), costs can include utilities in the street such as sanitary sewer, waterlines, and stormwater infrastructure.

8) Pursue Funding Opportunities

The Town is looking for and pursuing available grants and funding mechanisms to implement the vision in the Boulevard Central District. These could include:

- a) *NYS Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) Grant*: The Town is pursuing a DRI grant from NYS to provide funding for new streets / streetscape improvements, and public spaces in the Boulevard Central District, centered around the Boulevard Mall site. The DRI program invests in neighborhoods across the state nominated by the state's Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) based on potential for transformation. Each community is awarded \$10 million to develop a strategic investment plan and implement key catalytic projects that advance the community's vision for revitalization.
- b) *NYSDOT Universal Multi-Modal Funds*: To mitigate the number of auto and pedestrian/bicyclist conflicts in the Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor, the Town is seeking multi-modal funding to reconstruct the corridor from Eggert Road to Ellicott Creek Road. Improvements can include reducing the number of travel lanes; implementing new access management strategies; increasing the availability of sidewalks and bicycle amenities; improving signage and signals; and construction of other pedestrian/bicycle-friendly elements.
- c) *Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) Grant*: These funds are made available to the State through the Federal Highway Administration and administered by NYDOT to support bicycle, pedestrian, and multi-modal improvements. The Town is pursuing TAP funding for bike facilities and other multimodal improvements on Niagara Falls Boulevard.
- d) *RAISE Grants*: The Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity, or RAISE Discretionary Grant program (previously known as the BUILD and TIGER programs), provides funding through the U.S. Department of Transportation for road, rail, transit and port projects that achieve national objectives and have significant local or regional impact. The Town and Erie County can pursue RAISE funding to implement multimodal improvements of Maple Road, a critical east-west corridor in the region. Improvements should emphasize a Complete Streets approach to balance the needs of cars, cyclists, pedestrians and transit riders, which will provide an enhanced/safer connection between the Boulevard Central District, Amherst Central Park, and points further east.
- e) *Tax Exemptions and PILOT Increment Financing for qualified applicants*: The Amherst IDA is working with the Town to assist with redevelopment of older commercial areas by encouraging quality infill redevelopment and providing assistance to property owners; programs include tax exemption and property tax abatement incentives.

Action Step Summary

Action / Description		Timeframe			Responsible Party / Implementing Partners	Potential Funding Sources
		Immediate	Mid Term (years 1 to 5)	Long Term (5+ years)		
Implement Complete Street Design Concepts						
1	Create design drawings for Niagara Falls Boulevard north of Maple Rd, with safety/mobility improvements such as widened sidewalks and a protected bike lane	X	X		Town of Amherst / NYDOT	State infrastructure grants, Town budget
2	Coordinate with NFTA to create design drawings for Niagara Falls Boulevard south of Maple Rd, with enhanced transit and safety/mobility improvements		X	X	Town of Amherst / NFTA & NYDOT	State infrastructure grants, Town budget
3	Implement Niagara Falls Boulevard improvements		X	X	Town of Amherst / NFTA & NYDOT	State infrastructure grants, Town budget
4	In coordination with NFTA, design and implement Complete Streets concepts on district streets along the proposed transit route (Maple Road and Sweet Home Road), to include enhanced transit tree-lined sidewalks, and protected bikeways		X	X	Town of Amherst / NFTA & NYDOT	State infrastructure grants, Town budget
5	Redesign primary district thoroughfares to include safety/mobility improvements (including Sheridan Drive and Bailey Avenue)		X	X	Town of Amherst / NYDOT	State infrastructure grants, Town budget
Coordinate with NFTA on Enhanced Transit Design and Implementation						
6	Design rail corridors as Complete Streets (see #2 and 4 above)		X	X	Town of Amherst / NFTA & NYDOT	State infrastructure grants, Town budget
7	Coordinate the design and placement of the new enhanced transit station near the Boulevard Mall site.	X	X		NFTA / Town of Amherst & property owner	Town budget
8	Plan for Mobility Hubs at District Stations, including the transit stop at Boulevard Mall		X	X	Town of Amherst / NFTA	Grants, Town budget
Continue to Update Regulations						
9	Apply the districts of the Mixed-Use Districts Code as mandatory zoning within the Boulevard Central District	X			Town of Amherst	Town budget
10	Draft and approve Street Regulating Plan to guide new street network	X	X		Town of Amherst	Town budget
11	Assess code requirements for Arterial and Collector frontages	X	X		Town of Amherst	Town budget
12	Continue to make updates to the code to allow some variety and design innovation.	X	X	X	Town of Amherst	Town budget

(continued – page 2 of 2)

Action / Description		Timeframe			Responsible Party / Implementing Partners	Potential Funding Sources
		Immediate	Mid Term (years 1 to 5)	Long Term (5+ years)		
Pursue Parks / Greenway / Public Space Improvements						
13	Create new greenway: daylight stream, add trails		X		Town of Amherst	Green infrastructure grants, Town budget
14	Acquire natural preserve area behind Eggertsville Community Park for park extension		X		Town of Amherst	Green infrastructure grants, Town budget
15	Paint overpass to define gateway to University at Buffalo North Campus.	X	X		Town of Amherst	Town budget
16	Utilize a portion of the Boulevard Mall site for community services, along with incorporation of an associated green space for events and activities.	X			Town of Amherst	Town budget
Encourage Desired Development						
17	Continue meetings with property owners	X	X	X	Town of Amherst / property owners	Town budget
18	Market the plan and code to experienced walkable community developers	X	X		Town of Amherst / Amherst IDA	Town budget
Evaluate Mitigation Measures						
19	Refine the GEIS transportation analysis, assuming a multimodal network and some other transportation programs that could be offered to make alternative modes more attractive than private vehicles to move around	X	X		Town of Amherst	Town budget
Pursue Infrastructure Upgrades						
20	Continue to pursue infrastructure improvements to make the district ready for anticipated development. This includes pursuing projects on the CIP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Side Interceptor Diversion Facility (2019) • Niagara Falls Boulevard Sanitary Sewer Rehabilitation and Replacement (2020) • North Bailey Sanitary Sewer (2021) • Water Line Replacements (2021) • Core Streets that support redevelopment 	X	X		Town of Amherst	Sanitary Sewer District, Water District; Mitigation Funds; Town budget
Pursue Funding Opportunities						
21	Pursue available grants and funding mechanisms to implement the vision in the Boulevard Central District	X	X		Town of Amherst / Amherst IDA	n/a