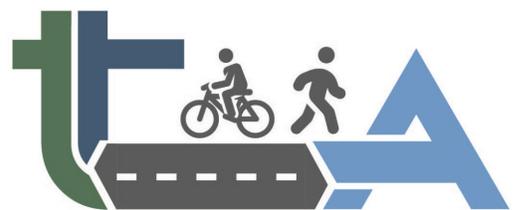


ACROSS THE BOULEVARD

WILLOW RIDGE-PARKVIEW ACTION PLAN

MAY 18, 2023



ACROSS THE BOULEVARD
Connecting Willow Ridge and Parkview

This project is proudly supported in a joint effort by the Town of Amherst and the Town of Tonawanda.



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1 INTRODUCTION

In 2021 the Towns of Amherst and Tonawanda came together to enact a Project Charter for planning within the Willow Ridge and Parkview neighborhoods. With the shared goal of wanting to better serve the neighborhoods and the immediate need to improve safety along Niagara Falls Boulevard, the Willow Ridge – Parkview Action Plan is an opportunity to establish and enhance connections within the area and provide a framework for both near and long-term improvements.

The Willow Ridge – Parkview (WRPV) Action Plan is a working document that captures the community’s vision for the future of the area. Through thoughtful input from neighbors, property owners, local government, and state officials, the WRPV Action Plan is a comprehensive planning document that provides a framework to guide future development and public improvements and sets forth policy strategies and implementation steps to achieve successful results.

While addressing opportunities and challenges, the Plan includes strategies to improve connectivity, pedestrian safety, recreation, building form and appearance, as well as market analysis and transportation recommendations to realize project goals. The study area extends along Niagara Falls Boulevard from Interstate 290 to the Erie County line, and includes the Parkview and Willow Ridge neighborhoods, as well as Ellicott Creek Park (as shown in Figure 1.2).

The Action Plan describes the community’s vision for the area and outlines strategies to achieve the goals of the Project Charter:

- » **Land Use & Zoning** – Create a joint land use vision and complementary zoning and design provisions for future land use and development. Determine the future vision for scale and design of buildings.
- » **Economic Revitalization & Redevelopment** – Identify key sites to be upgraded or redeveloped. Explore potential forms of redevelopment for vacant buildings and underutilized sites.
- » **Traffic & Transportation** – Create a unified street identity with an enhanced streetscape and improved pedestrian safety. Employ the use of new transportation technologies along with inclusion of alternative modes of public transportation to produce less emissions and traffic congestion. Formulate a land use and access management plan for the corridor.
- » **Community Amenities & Services** – Expand and enhance safe and convenient connections to nearby destinations and amenities. Improve existing park and recreational facilities.

“The Towns will employ the Action Plan to update Comprehensive Plan policies, create new goals and objectives, and utilize implementation strategies to create a more vibrant, connected and safe inter-municipal community.”

– Project Charter Mission Statement



THE NEED FOR A PLAN

Niagara Falls Boulevard (US Route 62) is at the center of many recent and ongoing regional and municipal plans. As a New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) roadway, the corridor is an important regional connector as well as a local thoroughfare. While focused on moving vehicles, years of growth in an auto-oriented development pattern has left the Willow Ridge and Parkview neighborhoods on either side of the boulevard (although the two neighborhoods are in different towns, they have the same school district) with a road that physically divides the community and is dangerous to traverse as a pedestrian or cyclist. Recent pedestrian fatalities has brought the roadway to the forefront, necessitating better safety for users.

Recognizing growing concerns and immediate need for change, the Towns have been working together to analyze the problems and identify potential solutions to improve safety along Niagara Falls Boulevard. In 2018 the Towns completed a Pedestrian Road Safety Audit. Understanding that the road is under the jurisdiction of New York State (NYSDOT) to operate and maintain, the Towns are responsible for streetscape elements (sidewalks, landscape, lighting, and safe crossings) and designating land use and zoning. Initial conclusions of the study found that pedestrians have to walk too far to get to an intersection with signals and crosswalks and then have to wait too long to cross the corridor. When signals allow pedestrian crossings, the study found that the signals did not allow adequate time for pedestrians to safely cross the 5+ lane roadway.

In 2019 the NYSDOT performed a Pedestrian Safety Corridor Evaluation and formulated a Pedestrian Safety Action Plan (PSAP). The study documents existing conditions, such as posted speed limits and average annual daily traffic volumes, as well as takes a closer look at when pedestrian crashes occur. The PSAP for Niagara Falls Boulevard identifies a number of potential street improvements, such as lighting, signage, improved pedestrian signals, as well as potential changes to, or studies regarding, street design (for example, reducing the number of travel lanes or reducing actual width of travel lanes so as to narrow the crossing width at key intersections). Recently installed street lights along both sides of the boulevard are an example of the Towns

working together to implement recommendations from the PSAP and improve conditions along the corridor.

In 2020, the Town of Amherst completed an Action Plan for the Boulevard Central District, located immediately south of I-290 and the WRPV study area. The Action Plan provides steps for the primarily-commercial area to become a more mixed-use and transit-oriented area over time. Recommendations include street design upgrades for Niagara Falls Boulevard from Sheridan Drive to I-290 that improve safety and walkability, which could be extended into this study area.

The WRPV Action Plan takes the analysis and recommendations from these studies, coupled with urban design, land planning, community input, and stakeholder review, to create a safer Niagara Falls Boulevard surrounded by complete and connected neighborhoods.

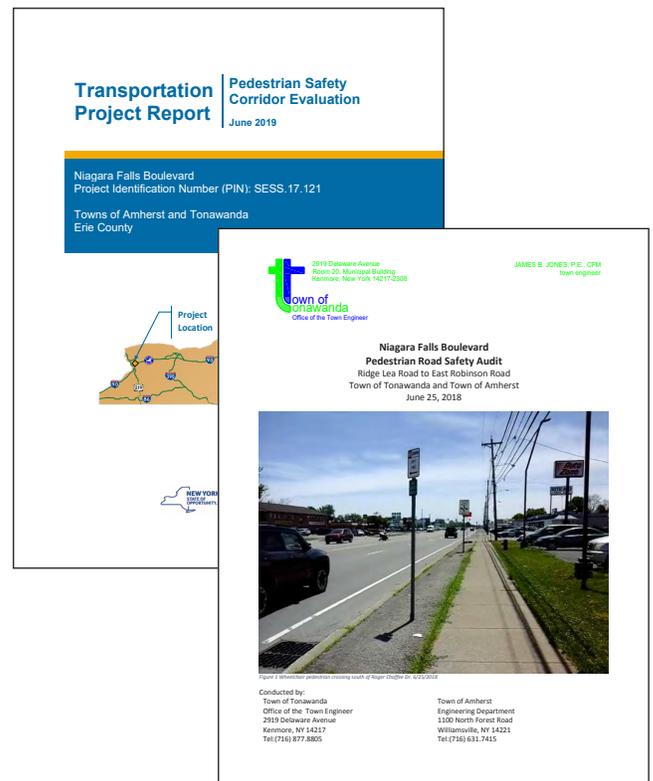
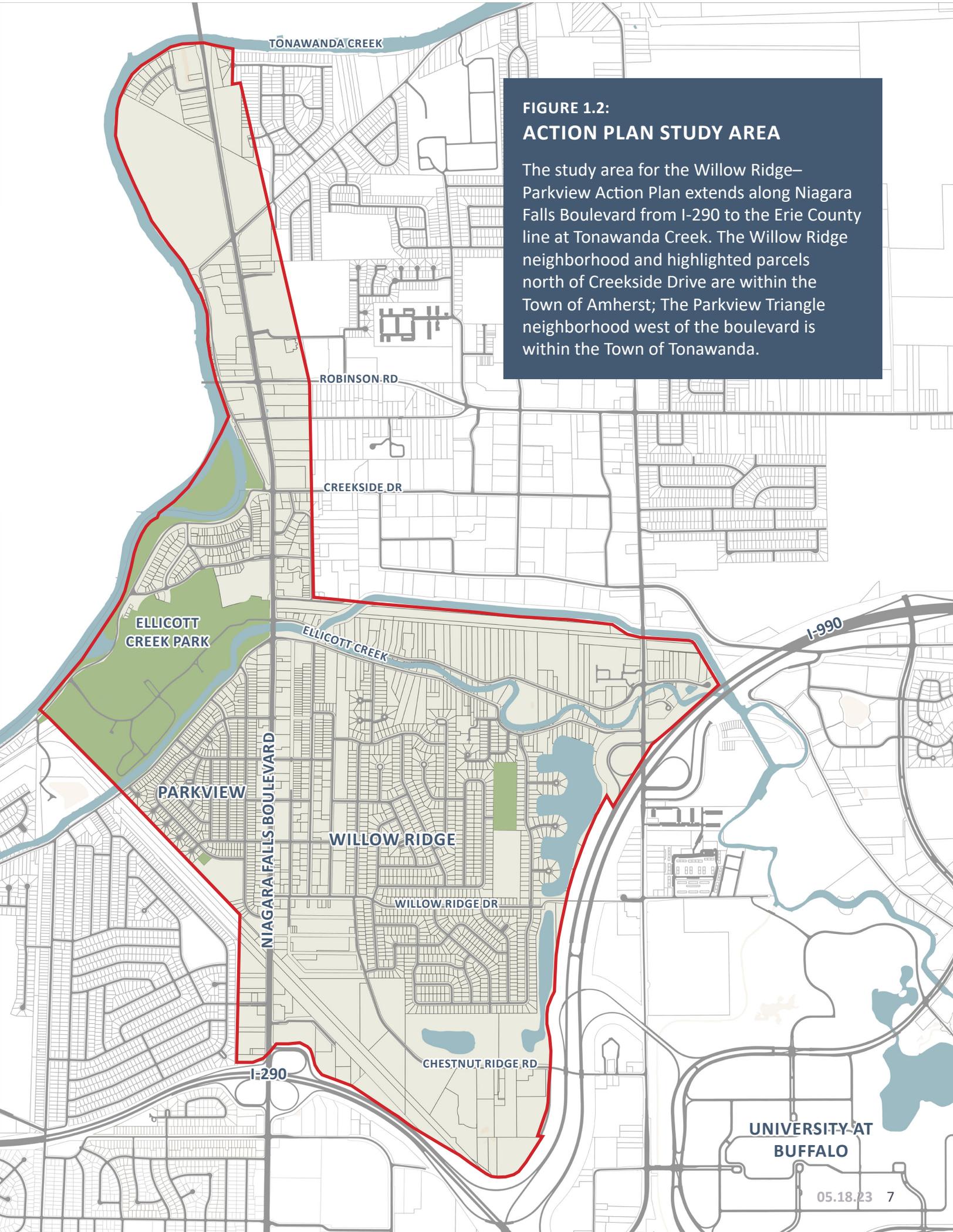


Figure 1.1: Recent studies and initiatives by the Towns and NYSDOT to improve safety along the boulevard



**FIGURE 1.2:
ACTION PLAN STUDY AREA**

The study area for the Willow Ridge–Parkview Action Plan extends along Niagara Falls Boulevard from I-290 to the Erie County line at Tonawanda Creek. The Willow Ridge neighborhood and highlighted parcels north of Creekside Drive are within the Town of Amherst; The Parkview Triangle neighborhood west of the boulevard is within the Town of Tonawanda.

2. PLANNING PROCESS

The Willow Ridge – Parkview (WRPV) Action Plan is the result of extensive community engagement and detailed analysis and planning. The Action Plan represents the coming together of the Towns of Amherst and Tonawanda to proactively plan for a safer Niagara Falls Boulevard and improved connections between and within the Willow Ridge and Parkview neighborhoods. The planning process began with a thorough review of previous plans and studies and included a week-long community design charrette in April 2022.

SITE VISIT & ANALYSIS

In March 2022 members of the planning team convened in Amherst to document existing conditions, better understand town concerns, and examine conflicts with the built environment. The team documented conditions in the neighborhoods and along Niagara Falls Boulevard by walking and driving the area, taking photos, marking on maps, and measuring urban design elements. The team noted conditions of sidewalks, crosswalks, and the overall experience of driving and walking along the boulevard. At the Ellicott Creek bridge, the team examined the limited ability to safely walk across the bridge, primarily as a result of fast-moving vehicles and narrow sidewalks, and considered potential trail connections to better connect to Ellicott Creek Park and the creek.

The team toured the Willow Ridge neighborhood, noting the tree-lined streets, the elementary school and park, the apartment areas to the south, connections across the Interstate 990 (I-990) to the University at Buffalo North Campus, and Ellicott Creek to the north. In the Parkview Triangle area, the team looked at how commercial uses on the boulevard transition to neighborhood homes, and where connections to Ellicott Creek Park were located. The team toured the area north of the creek, where the scale of commercial development is a bit larger, and drove along Old Niagara Falls Boulevard noting the bike trail, Tonawanda Creek water view, and potential for a mix of land uses to connect to and enhance the creek.



Figure 2.1: Site visit walking tour

In addition to on-site analysis, the team met with a wide range of stakeholders, each with experience, expertise, and connections to the area. From state officials to local leaders to neighborhood organizations, the initial meetings during the site visit helped to shape the course and findings of the overall project.

PROJECT WEBSITE

The Towns launched a project website, www.connectingwrpv.com, to provide continual access to information and community input. Background information, ways to get involved, upcoming events, and interactive surveys have been shared through the website. Results from the April 2022 charrette and the draft Action Plan report were also made available for review online.

The image shows two overlapping screenshots from the project website. The top screenshot is the main landing page, featuring a dark green header with navigation links: Home, About, Project Resources, Get Involved, and Charrette Newsfeed. The main content area has a blue background with the title 'ACROSS THE BOULEVARD: WILLOW RIDGE-PARKVIEW ACTION PLAN' and a 'PROJECT PURPOSE' section. The bottom screenshot is a survey titled '4. Improved Crossing of Ellicott Creek Road' with a 3D rendering of a 'THISTLE AVE INTERSECTION'. The rendering shows a 'Multi-use Path', 'Raised Median', 'Formalized On-street Parking', and 'Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacon'. A 'DRAFT' watermark is visible. Below the rendering is a survey question: 'What do you think of this idea for improving the crossing of Ellicott Creek Road to the park?' with three radio button options: 'I like it', 'I don't like it', and 'Not sure'. A text input field for 'What do you like or not like about the idea?' is also present, with a character count of 1000.

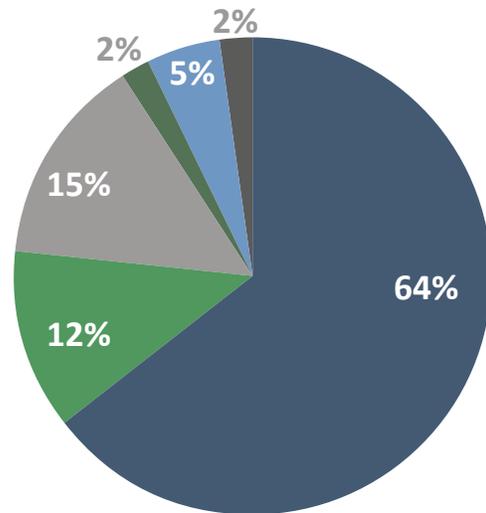
Figure 2.2: Sample pages from the project website, www.connectingwrpv.com

COMMUNITY KICK-OFF

A Community Kick-off meeting for the public and stakeholders was held via Zoom on the evening of March 15, 2022. The meeting provided participants an opportunity to learn more about the upcoming planning process, meet the planning team, and share their goals and priorities for Willow Ridge, Parkview, and Niagara Falls Boulevard.

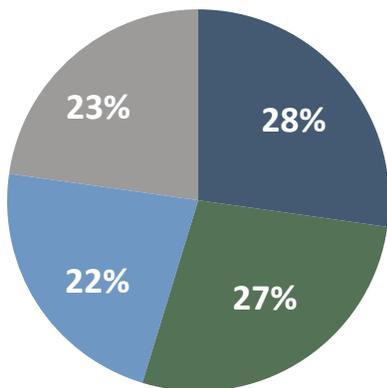
The graphics on these pages show the polling results from the Community Kick-off meeting.

1 What is your primary interest / top priority to be included in the Action Plan?



- Redesign Niagara Falls Boulevard
- Improve neighborhood / regional parks
- Connect Trails Network
- Economic development / expand commercial businesses
- Enhance neighborhood design
- More housing choices

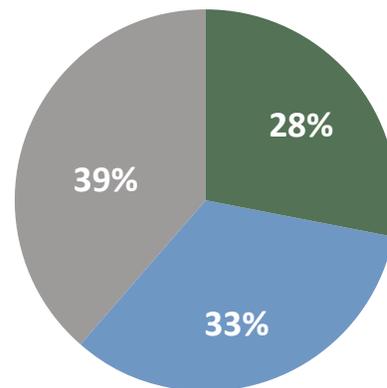
2 How often do you walk in the study area?



● Daily

● Weekly

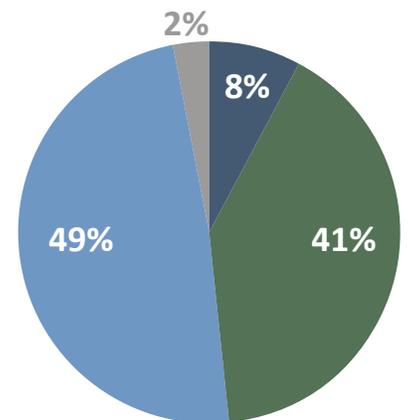
3 How often do you bike in the study area?



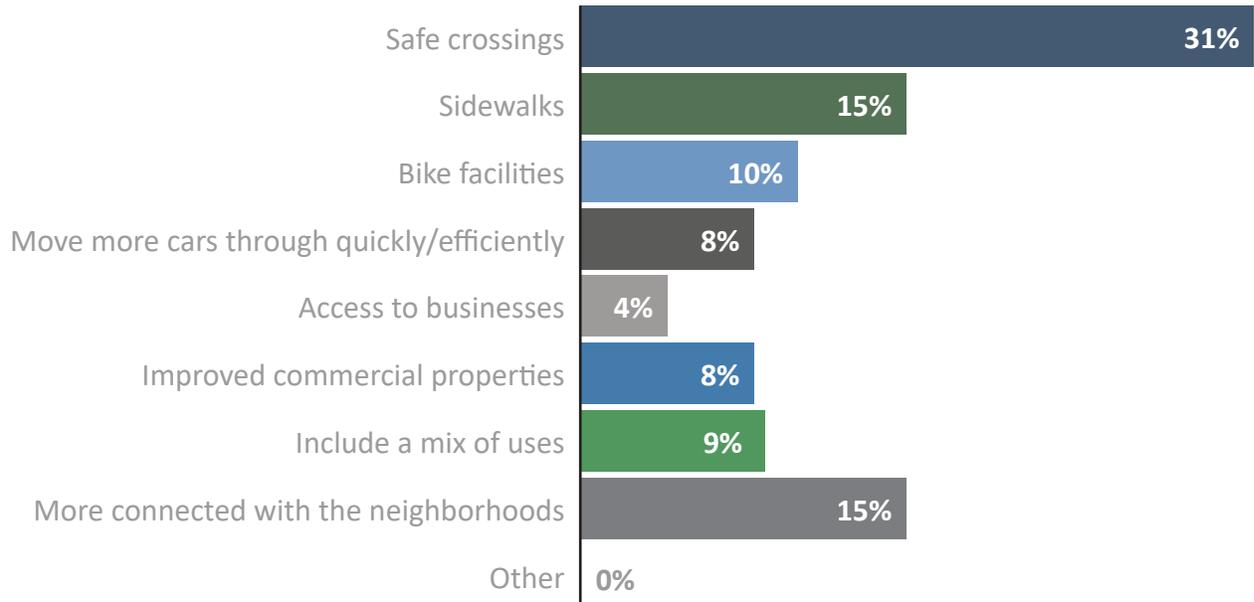
● Special Events

● Never

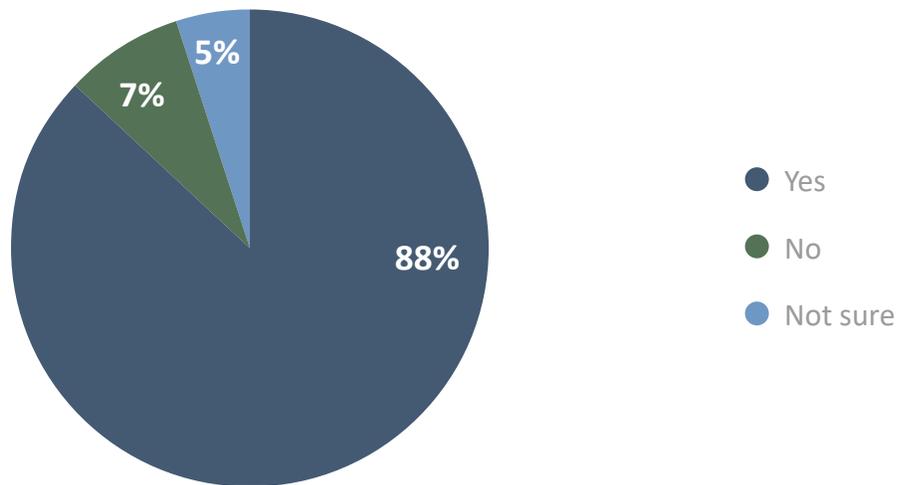
4 How often do you go to a park in the study area?



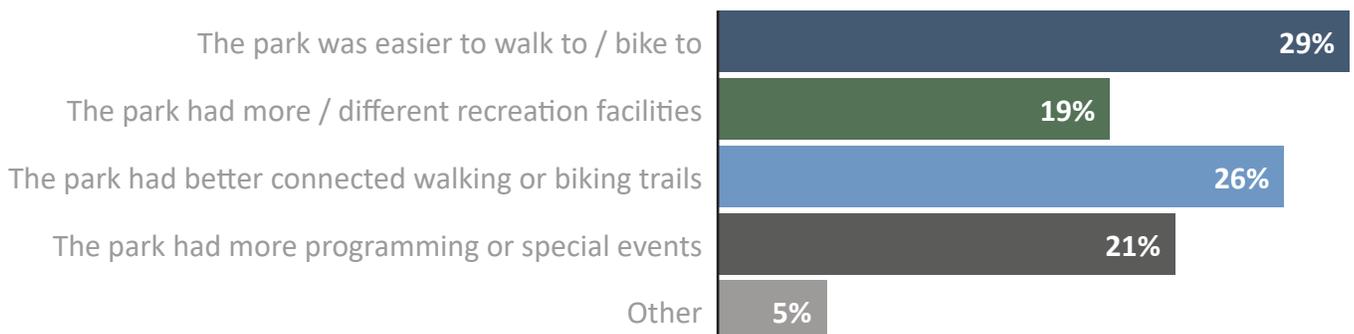
5 What is most important about the future design of Niagara Falls Boulevard? Choose up to 3 responses.



6 Would you walk or bike frequently if there was safer / improved on-street accommodations (wider sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, etc.)?



7 Would you go to a park in the study area more often if:



THE CHARRETTE

The charrette for the Willow Ridge – Parkview Action Plan took place April 2 – 7, 2022. During this time, the planning team set up a design studio in the neighborhood at Dexter Terrace Elementary School and hosted a series of interactive workshops, meetings, and planning sessions. By working on-site, the Plan was created in real time, in public, and with continuous opportunities to share and gather community input.

From neighborhood improvements to transportation connections and economic development strategies, the team worked to sketch ideas, research scenarios, and demonstrate what is possible over time by having a plan in place. Opportunities for in-person feedback as well as virtual engagement was tailored to best gather input and build consensus essential to the plan’s success.

HANDS-ON DESIGN SESSION (APRIL 2)

On Saturday morning the planning team kicked off the charrette week by holding a hands-on design session at Sweet Home High School. Following a brief introductory presentation, participants gathered around base maps to discuss their ideas for the future of the study area. At the end of the session, one person from each table gave a short presentation of their group’s “big ideas” for the future of the area, which included:

- **Bike Paths:** consistent bike paths, create loops, improve safety, include bike crossings
- **Niagara Falls Boulevard:** pedestrian amenities, redesign the boulevard, update vacant and outdated parcels
- **Connectivity:** better network of sidewalks, pathways, bike paths and waterways
- **Village Nodes:** create gateways, beautification, small shops & restaurants; in short-term focus areas can lead long-term to walkable village areas
- **Access to Parks:** improve crossings into parks, trail connections
- **Amenities:** events, programs, food trucks

What is a CHARRETTE?

A charrette is a multi-day public engagement process designed to collect input and establish a community vision. The process is highly collaborative, where members of the planning team are able to directly interact with the community in a variety of meeting formats and events to identify priorities and test ideas.



Figure 2.3: The Hands-on Design Session



COMMUNITY BUS TOUR (APRIL 3)

On Sunday afternoon, the planning team went on a bus tour of the study area with interested community participants. The group observed the existing conditions of the built environment together and discussed potential future conditions -- how pedestrian and bike connections and safety could be improved, what future development could look like, and how the area could become more complete. The discussion and feedback added to the input from the Saturday in-person hands-on session and increased the team's understanding of the community vision for the area.



Figure 2.4: The Community Bus Tour

VIRTUAL HANDS-ON DESIGN SESSION (APRIL 4)

On Monday, April 4th, a virtual Hands-on Design Session was held by Zoom. During this meeting participants met with members of the planning team and spoke about their vision for the area, asked questions, and marked ideas in Google Maps. Participants worked in small virtual break-out rooms to participate in a hands-on design exercise (similar to the in-person exercise on Saturday). It was interesting to hear common themes that also emerged in earlier charrette meetings, as well as to learn new details and perspectives.



Figure 2.5: The Virtual Hands-on Design Session

Big Ideas – Virtual Hands-on Session

Breakout Room 1:

1. Improve the Thistle Bridge crosswalk and make Ellicott Creek Road safer for all. Improve connections to the park. Reduce speeds on Ellicott Creek Road and other residential connector roads.
2. Improve safety along Niagara Falls Boulevard, especially between Ellicott Creek and the Home Depot. Add additional crossings.
3. Create a better built environment to attract locally owned businesses that are attractive to residents and visitors. (see Kenmore, Williamsville)

Breakout Room 2:

1. Neighborhood connectivity with regional trails/path networks
2. Ellicott Creek Park Improvements
3. Improve safety on Boulevard

DESIGN STUDIO (APRIL 4 - 6)

During the week the planning team worked at the temporary design studio at Dexter Terrace Elementary School drawing and testing ideas for street designs, trail improvements, and potential development in the study area. The doors were open for community members to drop in throughout the day and see the draft work underway.

A number of small group meetings were held to review ideas in progress, including with representatives from:

- » **University at Buffalo**
- » **Ken-Ton Chamber of Commerce / Amherst Industrial Development Agency (AIDA)**
- » **Parks and Trails Stakeholders:** Towns, Erie County, Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC), GObike Buffalo, and Niagara River Greenway Commission
- » **Transportation Agencies:** Towns, Erie County, New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) and GBNRTC
- » **Corridor Business Owners**
- » **Community Groups:** Willow Ridge Civic Association, Parkview Triangle

Daily project updates, meeting presentations, and surveys to gather additional feedback were posted to the project website, connectingwrpv.com.

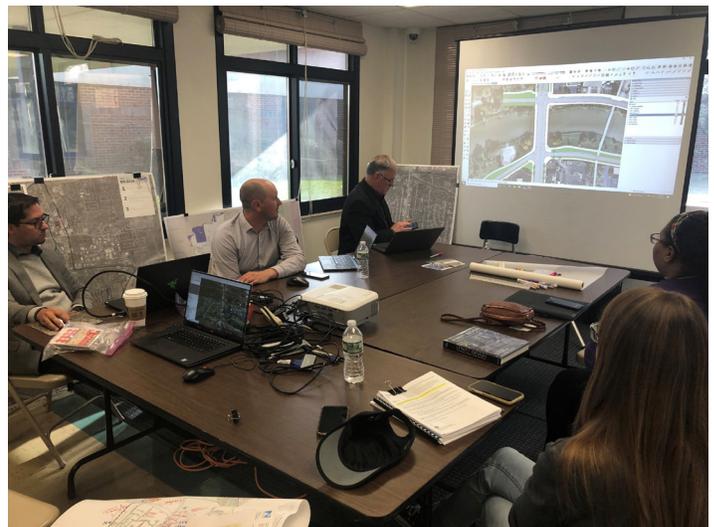


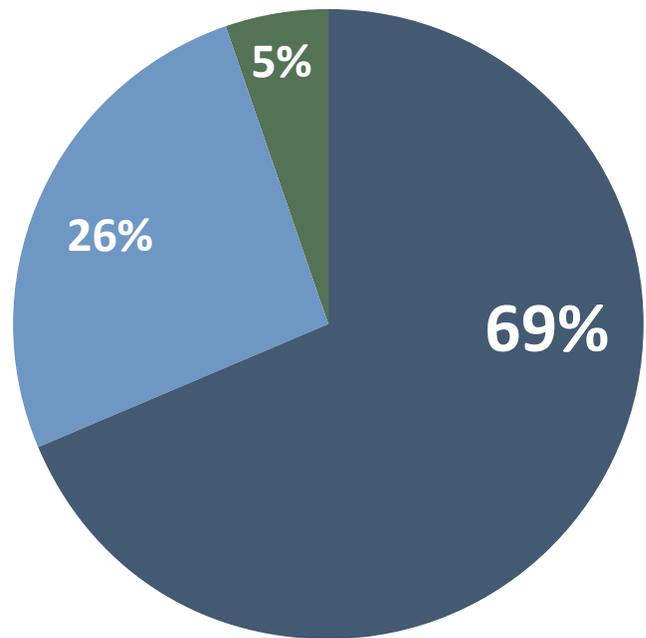
Figure 2.6: The on-site design studio

WORK-IN-PROGRESS PRESENTATION (APRIL 7)

On Thursday, April 7 a “Work-in-Progress” presentation was held via Zoom. The planning team presented the draft ideas from throughout the week and asked for feedback. With a focus on improved safety and better connections, the drawings, diagrams, and draft plans helped to illustrate and capture the community’s vision for the area. When asked if the Action Plan was on the right track, 94% of participants responded yes or probably yes.

Input from polling at the Work-in-Progress Presentation is shown on these pages, as well as throughout the report where ideas are summarized.

Based on what you heard tonight, is the Action Plan on the right track?



- Yes
- Probably yes
- Maybe – need more information
- No

Which ideas discussed tonight were most exciting to you?

“Mixed use with smaller setbacks ... Narrower lanes, lower speed limit, downgrading the traffic flow ... Brewery rooftop patio ... Something like Pittsfield ... Puppy park development ... Connecting bike trails – pedestrian bridge over the creek and build up around the water ... Tree-lined Boulevard with wider sidewalks making it safer for pedestrians ... Connection at Ellicott Creek and NFB with new bridge a green space ... NF Blvd walkable destinations ... Safe crosswalk at Thistle and Ellicott Creek Road ... Additional bike paths ... The Home Depot site redevelopment ... Puppy park upgrades ... Updated Blvd / Ellicott Creek intersection ... That the municipalities are doing this JOINTLY ... Park entrance ... Bike and trail connections and infill development ... Safety on Niagara Falls Blvd ... Trail and bike connections ... Adding bike lanes along the Blvd with traffic calming ... Thistle Ave”

3. A PLAN FOR ACTION

The Plan for Willow Ridge and Parkview is centered on a series of action steps and is the culmination of public input, listening, and learning from current conditions and future possibilities. The ideas and actions are synthesized in recommendations to the Towns of Amherst and Tonawanda. The “Plan for Action” is a summary of strategies and policy reform to implement the Plan and represent the collective review and analysis of urban design techniques, transportation analysis, and market data so as to make sure ideas are feasible and workable solutions for the future of the area. A summary of actions are included in this section; details of each action are included in subsequent sections. An implementation section is included to organize actions and steps into near and long-term timeframes and to detail further funding, policy, and strategies.





Learn more about this idea for improving safety on Niagara Falls Boulevard, page 32 (Figure 4.10)

MAKE IT SAFE

Wide travel lanes, plentiful curb cuts, buildings set in the center of expansive parking lots, high speed vehicle travel, and reduced opportunities for safe crossings all define the character and reality of Niagara Falls Boulevard today. The physical elements that define the boulevard all contribute to a mindset and actuality of a road where people drive too fast, collisions are common, and pedestrian safety is at constant risk.

The culture and climate of life along the busy roadway has become one where unsightly and unsafe aspects have become tolerated. Oversized lane widths, wide corner turning radii, and lack of pedestrian amenities (including street trees) induce auto dominance and lack of consideration for other modes of safe travel.

Recent studies and analyses on both the state and local level exemplify the acknowledged need to improve all aspects of safety along Niagara Falls Boulevard. Whether in a car, crossing the street on foot, or traveling by bike or transit, a more balanced, safer opportunity exists for the future of the corridor. The time is now to put the tools, policies, and Plan in place to properly grow and transform the boulevard into a corridor that is both beautiful and safe – a great address reflective of the proud towns of Amherst and Tonawanda.

MAKE IT SAFE Action Steps

- 1 Adopt a Joint Resolution: Safety is the Highest Priority for the Boulevard**
- 2 Improve Signal Spacing: Add Signals at Additional Intersections**
- 3 Rethink Speed Management: Balance Design Speed with Posted Speed**
- 4 Reconfigure Niagara Falls Boulevard into a Multi-Modal Corridor**
- 5 Access Management: Consolidate Driveways, Add Medians**

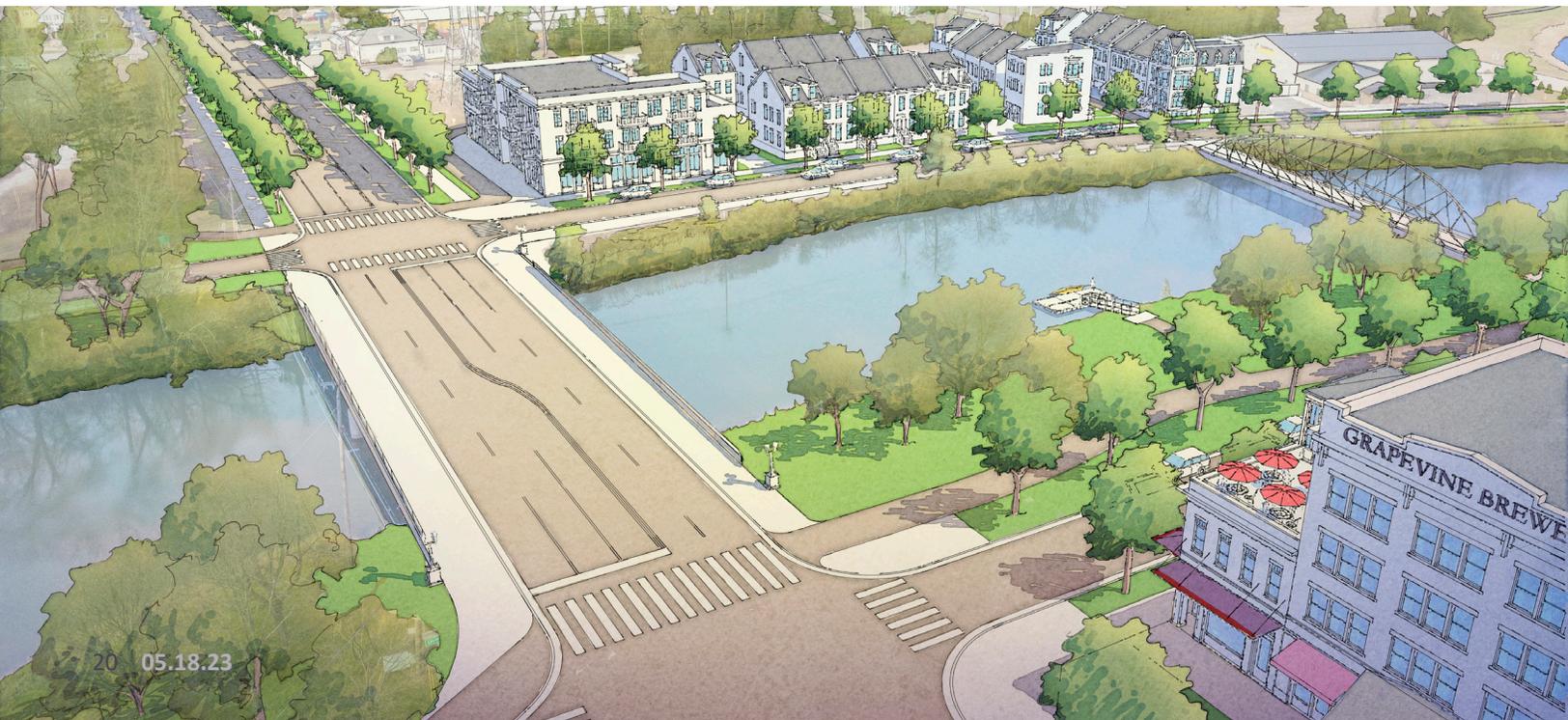
CONNECT

The Willow Ridge and Parkview neighborhoods are bisected by Niagara Falls Boulevard. With a priority to improve safety and transform the corridor from an auto-dominated thoroughfare to a safe and balanced multi-modal corridor, opportunities exist now and in the future to foster better connections. From improved crossings to multi-use paths to changing the mindset on parking, the ability to connect is a centerpiece in creating a network of mobility.

CONNECT Action Steps

- 1 **Emphasize Placemaking and Walkable Connections Rather than Parking**
- 2 **Establish a Network of Trails**
- 3 **Retrofit Streets to Expand Pedestrian + Bike Infrastructure**
- 4 **Capitalize on the Creek and Trail as a Great Address**
- 5 **Improve Connections to Ellicott Creek Park**

Learn more about this idea for connecting the trail network near Ellicott Creek Bridge, page 48 (Figure 5.10)





Learn more about this idea for activating underutilized parking areas, page 68 (Figure 6.12)

REFRESH

To create a complete, safe, and vibrant corridor, reinvestment, refurbishment, and rebuilding will be necessary to re-energize Niagara Falls Boulevard as a great address. Public improvements, such as safety modifications and streetscape enhancements, are essential to catapulting a resurgence in private investment. The market is strong if you look beyond single-use commercial development and look towards a mix of uses and range of building types. To reap the benefits of public improvements and civic investment, there is the need to remove impediments that are currently limiting the potential of the private market.

REFRESH Action Steps

- 1 **Actively Support Investment and Remove Impediments**
- 2 **Adopt Mixed-Use Ordinances Along Niagara Falls Boulevard**
- 3 **Identify Market Opportunities and Attract Investors**

4 MAKE IT SAFE

The time is now, the need is unavoidable; a safer Niagara Falls Boulevard is imperative for the citizens of Amherst and Tonawanda. Through design and leadership, the corridor can be transformed to accommodate all modes of travel and promotes a safer built environment through physical changes and policy actions.

1. ADOPT A JOINT RESOLUTION: Safety is the Highest Priority for the Boulevard

Similar to when the towns came together to establish the Project Charter for the Willow Ridge – Parkview Action Plan, the leadership of Amherst and Tonawanda should pursue and pass a joint resolution that states that safety is the highest priority for Niagara Falls Boulevard. Safety is a higher priority over speed. Safety is a higher priority over vehicle capacity and vehicle miles traveled (VMT). This does not mean the ability to move cars efficiently is no longer considered; but rather that Niagara Falls Boulevard should be a more complete street that is safe for all modes of travel (walking, biking, driving, transit). Future improvements should strive to balance the needs and desires for movement and commerce with the essential need to travel the corridor safely.

A joint resolution focused on safety would set the stage and change the conversation in discussions with local and state leaders from an auto-oriented thoroughfare to a street that is designed and properly engineered to naturally demand safe actions and travel habits, while at the same time serving as a beautiful example of lasting civic infrastructure.

From incremental interventions to dramatic reconstruction, changes to Niagara Falls Boulevard will be shepherded through citizen action, adopted policy, and an approved plan. Understanding that change does not happen overnight, yet recognizing that change is imminent to save and protect lives, there are incremental adjustments that can be made in the near term with regular maintenance (such as resurfacing and restriping) that can demonstrate what could be without major disruption or budget stress. Ideas have been synthesized into key steps that work independently yet collectively have the most impact for improving safety along the boulevard.

MAKE IT SAFE Action Steps

- 1 Adopt a Joint Resolution: Safety is the Highest Priority for the Boulevard
- 2 Improve Signal Spacing: Add Signals at Additional Intersections
- 3 Rethink Speed Management: Balance Design Speed with Posted Speed
- 4 Reconfigure Niagara Falls Boulevard into a Multi-Modal Corridor
- 5 Access Management: Consolidate Medians and Driveways



Figure 4.1: Existing conditions on Niagara Falls Boulevard

FOCUS ON THE BOULEVARD

Niagara Falls Boulevard (Route 62) is part of the US Highway system. It is a regional corridor (and I-290 connector) that is auto-oriented with large parking areas, drive-thru businesses and frequent driveways. Businesses along the boulevard often have parking in the front, due in part to the setbacks and minimum parking required by the current zoning regulations. With large parking lots and limited pedestrian connectivity, it is difficult to walk to multiple destinations.

Sidewalks along the boulevard are five feet wide and are frequently interrupted by driveways for businesses. In the winter, sidewalks are often blocked by snow storage. There are no bike facilities on the boulevard today.

Intersections with signals and crosswalks are sparse along Niagara Falls Boulevard. South of Ellicott Creek, there are only three with over a half mile between them. During the charrette the planning team heard complaints of pedestrians or bicyclists crossing the boulevard between signals, and that walk times are not long enough for pedestrians to cross where there are signals, creating a dangerous situation.

Vehicle speed is a concern, particularly at off-peak hours when there is no traffic congestion. Curb cuts to access each parcel, and a continuous center turn lane, creates multiple conflict points and hinders safety.

The Action Steps in this chapter aim to correct these deficiencies, addressing intersection spacing, speed and access management, and safe use of the boulevard by all modes (particularly walking, biking and transit).

4: Make it Safe

2. IMPROVE SIGNAL SPACING:

Add Signals at Additional Intersections

A major reason for poor pedestrian safety along the boulevard comes from large gaps between crossings. Signals that are spaced too far apart do two things: 1) they generate speeding between signals in hopes that motorists avoid long wait times at red lights, and 2) they create long stretches of space between designated crossings, leading people to cross between them. On-site analysis, day to day observations, and recent studies highlight limited crossing opportunities and in general, an insufficient number of signals along this stretch of the boulevard.

Between I-290 and Ellicott Creek, there are seven signalized intersections along Niagara Falls Boulevard. With a $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile between many signals, the current conditions promote an auto-dominated environment of fast-moving vehicles and increased hazards for those walking or biking. The addition of signalized intersections can provide for additional crossings while not being detrimental to vehicular travel or travel times. Four additional crossings between the Home Depot traffic signal and Forbes Avenue would greatly improve crossing opportunities along Niagara Falls Boulevard. Some of the new signals could be High Intensity Activated Crosswalks (HAWK); these only change to red when someone has pushed the button, and remain green if the signal has

not been activated. HAWK signals have been recently implemented in the region in the Village of Williamsville and on Sheridan Drive in Tonawanda.

Pedestrian walk times at signals are not adequate to safely cross Niagara Falls Boulevard; walk times at crossings should be increased to ensure pedestrians can cross before lights turn green, reducing conflicts.

Adding signals can be done without noticeably impacting travel times. Signal cycle lengths are currently rather long. With more signals drivers may need to stop more but they will not have to wait as long. By adding signals, cycle length can be reduced and new signalized intersections would provide for increased connections along and across the boulevard.

The Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) has a smart mobility program that uses technology to make more and better connected mobility options. Signalized intersection spacing could be further enhanced by Niagara Falls Boulevard becoming a GBNRTC Smartly Enhanced Multi-Modal Arterial (SEMA). This would offer opportunities to enhance technologies within the segment extending from the I-290 ramp signal to North Ellicott Creek Road. In doing so, signals would

Figure 4.2, below: HAWK signal on Main Street in Williamsville, NY

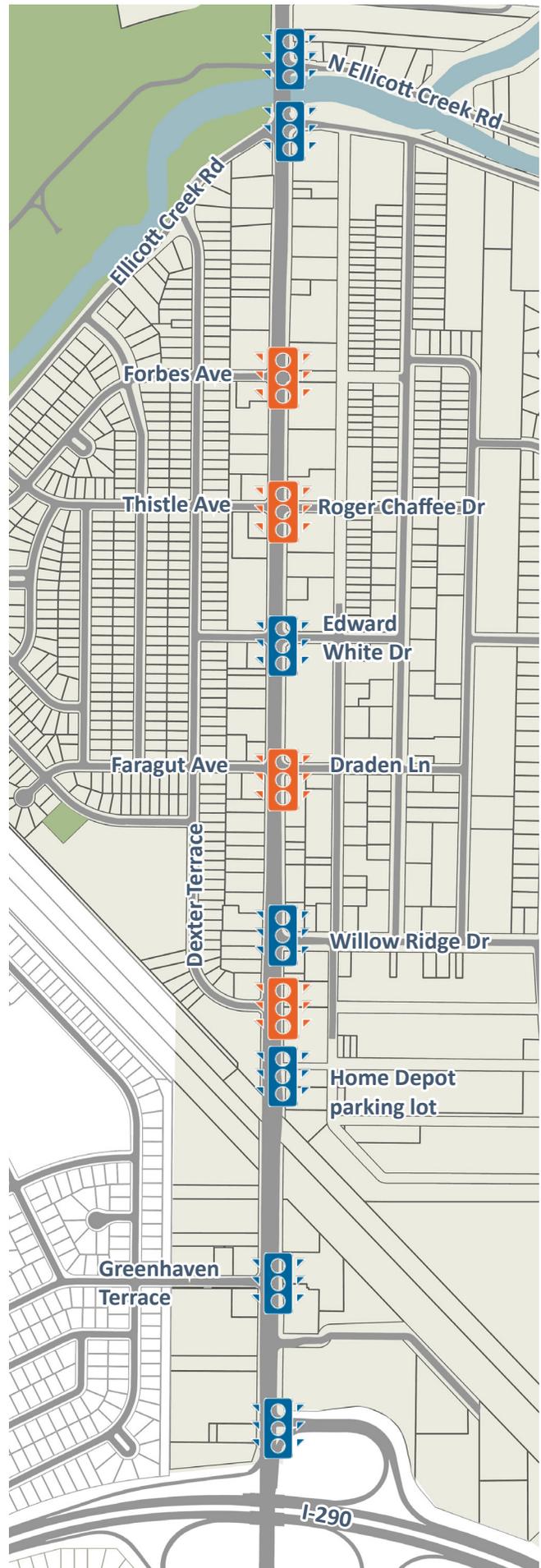


be coordinated and timed based on a set vehicle speed for drivers that maintain a consistent speed below the posted speed limit to have a more efficient trip through the study area while also traveling at a speed that is safer for all street users. Setting coordinated signal timing for a speed of 30 mph, the minimum allowable for NYSDOT’s functional classification designated as a ‘Principal Urban Arterial Other,’ would also support the goal of speed management to improve safety (Action Step 3). Coordinated traffic signal systems are among the NYSDOT’s supported methods of traffic calming to achieve speed reductions for arterials like Niagara Falls Boulevard.



Figure 4.3, right: Existing signals and recommended additional signal locations on Niagara Falls Boulevard between I-290 and Ellicott Creek. Proposed signal locations should include new high visibility crosswalks; some locations may be pedestrian-activated HAWK signals.

The addition of new signals will be subject to feasibility review/analysis by the NYSDOT. If the analysis demonstrates that full signals are not warranted, HAWK signals should be explored as an alternative. Warrants for determining the applicability of HAWK signals include potential future demand for pedestrian crossings at locations where no high quality marked crossing currently exists.



4: Make it Safe

POSTED SPEED / DESIGN SPEED / TARGET SPEED

POSTED SPEED: Speed drivers see on the sign

DESIGN SPEED: How fast drivers feel they should be going, based on the design of the roadway and street elements

TARGET SPEED: How fast traffic engineers want drivers to go

THE EFFECT OF VEHICLE SPEED ON PEDESTRIAN FATALITIES



5% chance of pedestrian fatality



45% chance of pedestrian fatality



85% chance of pedestrian fatality

3. RETHINK SPEED MANAGEMENT: Balance Design Speed with Posted Speed

Vehicle speed is a detriment to safety along the boulevard. Speeding at off-peak hours when there is not a lot of traffic congestion is particularly detrimental to all modes of travel. Pedestrians are the most vulnerable street users. With limited pedestrian resources and common speeding, drivers' peripheral vision is constrained when going faster. The faster vehicles are traveling, the greater risk of pedestrian fatality when collisions occur.

The posted speed limit along Niagara Falls Boulevard was recently reduced from 45mph to 40mph as part of the NYSDOT Pedestrian Safety Action Plan. While the posted speed was lowered, no other modifications were made to the travel lanes or right-of-way to alert drivers to instinctively slow down. In order to see the effects of a lower posted speed, interventions to change or lower the design speed of the roadway need to be made. To achieve the results of slower, safer travel speeds along the boulevard, the size of travel lanes should be reduced and street trees added to foster a sense of visual enclosure.

Figure 4.4: The effect of vehicle speed on pedestrian fatalities. Source: *Killing Speed and Saving Lives*, UK Dept. of Transportation, London, England. See also Limpert, Rudolph: *Motor Vehicle Accident Reconstruction and Cause Analysis*, Fourth Edition, Charlottesville VA, The Michie Company, 1994, p 663.

4. RECONFIGURE NIAGARA FALLS BOULEVARD INTO A MULTI-MODAL CORRIDOR

A variety of lane configurations with through lanes and dedicated turn lanes at key intersections define vehicular travel conditions along Niagara Falls Boulevard. Varying rights-of-way or widths determine the number of lanes and limited space is left for the pedestrian realm. There is potential to reconfigure the street design, and enhance transit opportunities and conditions, to provide a better balance for all modes of travel.

Rethink Street Design

The most constrained section of the Niagara Falls Boulevard is 86' wide near Thistle Avenue. There are five lanes of travel (with lane widths averaging 12 feet), a small shoulder, and an 8' sidewalk. Between the shoulder and sidewalk there is sometimes a grass strip but a paved area is more common. The area between the shoulder and sidewalk serves snow storage/removal needs in winter. Street trees are few and far between and newly installed street lights illuminate the boulevard.

There is an opportunity to repurpose the 86' right-of-way to accommodate the same number of travel lanes but to successfully change the character of the place from one that is dominated by cars to one that invites walking and biking. With safety designated by the Towns as the highest priority, the repurposed space would have the excessively-wide travel lane widths corrected to standard (narrower) widths, a landscaped area to buffer the sidewalk from the street, and a wider sidewalk at 10' wide to safely accommodate walking or biking.

Further south near I-290, where the boulevard expands to seven lanes, there is a much wider and significant amount of right-of-way but street connections continue to focus on vehicle travel and do little to foster pedestrian safety. Sidewalks are narrow and commonly interrupted by frequent curb cuts and driveways. A strategy for this section of the boulevard should be to reduce the number of travel lanes from seven to five. By reducing the number of travel lanes, the right-of-way can be utilized to provide more opportunities to walking or between destinations and overall better pedestrian infrastructure.



Figure 4.5: Example of tactical urbanism using paint and other low cost materials to demonstrate modifications in street design that supports and encourages a more walkable environment.

A double row of trees would produce shade and better protect pedestrians from vehicles, while continuing to provide a location for snow removal. A shared path would be wide and safely encourage walking and biking.

Short-term interventions in the form of lane restriping can be tested as part of a low-cost pilot study. The distance between the curb would remain the same but travel lanes would be reduced in number and/or right-sized. The space between the curb and travel lanes would provide a wider shoulder. Adjusting travel lanes and restriping would allow for a preview of how the right-of-way can be re-used and re-vamped to provide a safer experience for vehicles and pedestrians. Other “tactical urbanism” demonstration projects could be undertaken to test ideas for neighborhood streets as well.

4: Make it Safe

NIAGARA FALLS BOULEVARD, North of Willow Ridge Drive

Currently Niagara Falls Boulevard north of Willow Ridge Drive has five, 12 foot lanes and 5 foot sidewalks. The sidewalk is often interrupted by driveways for businesses, creating uncomfortable walking conditions. There are no bike lanes, so bikes must either share a lane with vehicles or ride on the 5 foot sidewalk with pedestrians. A 3 foot shoulder is where snow storage occurs, but often snow overflows to the sidewalk as well.

The proposed changes (Figure 4.6) maintain the number of lanes but repurpose some portion of the right-of-way to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. Lane widths are narrowed to 11 feet, with a 10 foot turning lane, to allow for wider sidewalks and landscape strips. The sidewalks are expanded to 10 feet, becoming a shared-use path that can accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists. Landscape strips with shade trees serve as a buffer between vehicles and the shared-use path.

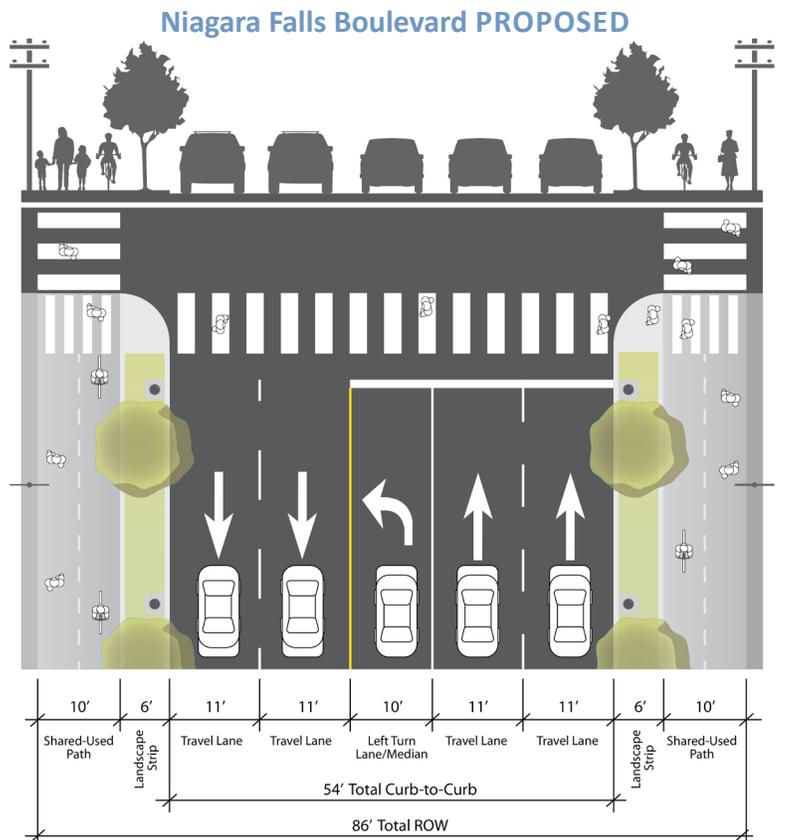
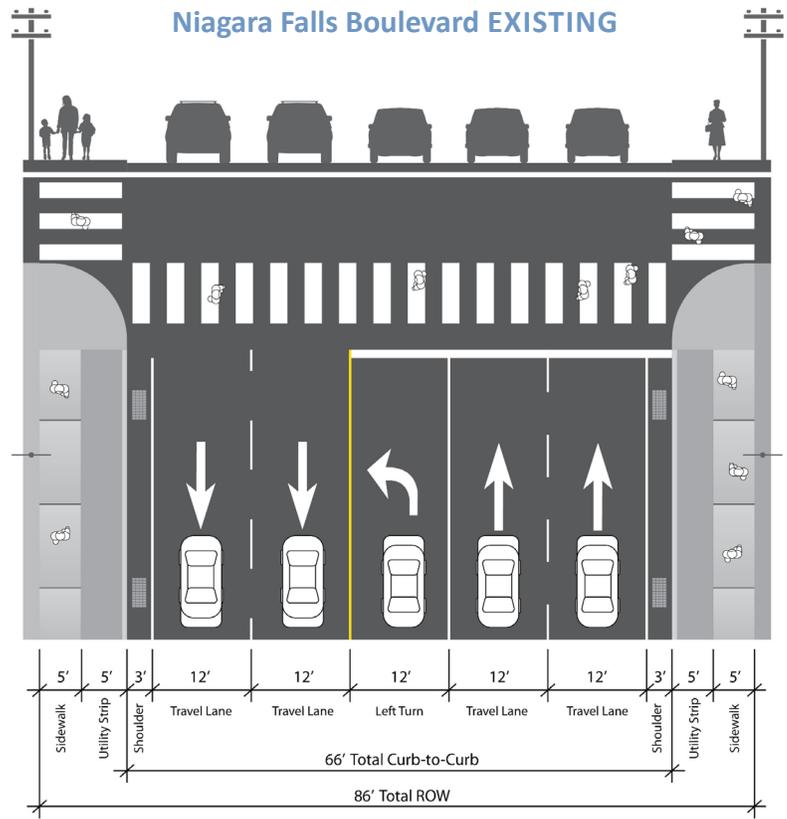
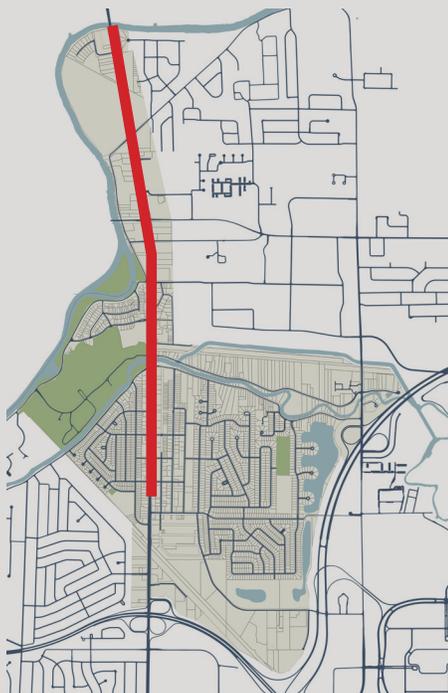
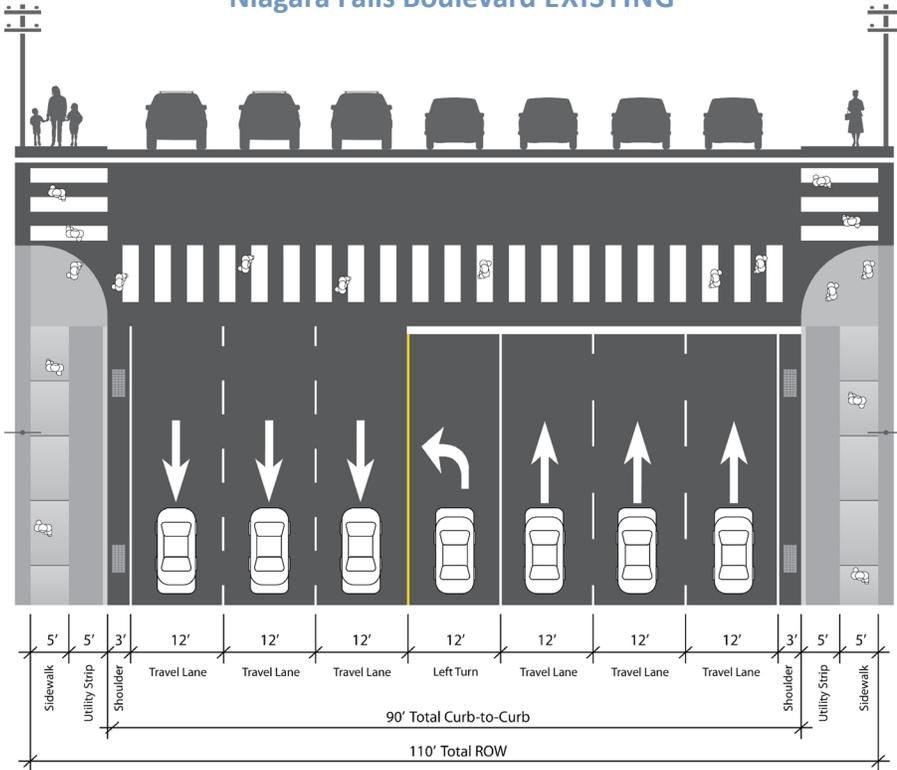


FIGURE 4.6:
NIAGARA FALLS BLVD (NORTH OF WILLOW RIDGE DR)

Niagara Falls Boulevard EXISTING



Niagara Falls Boulevard PROPOSED

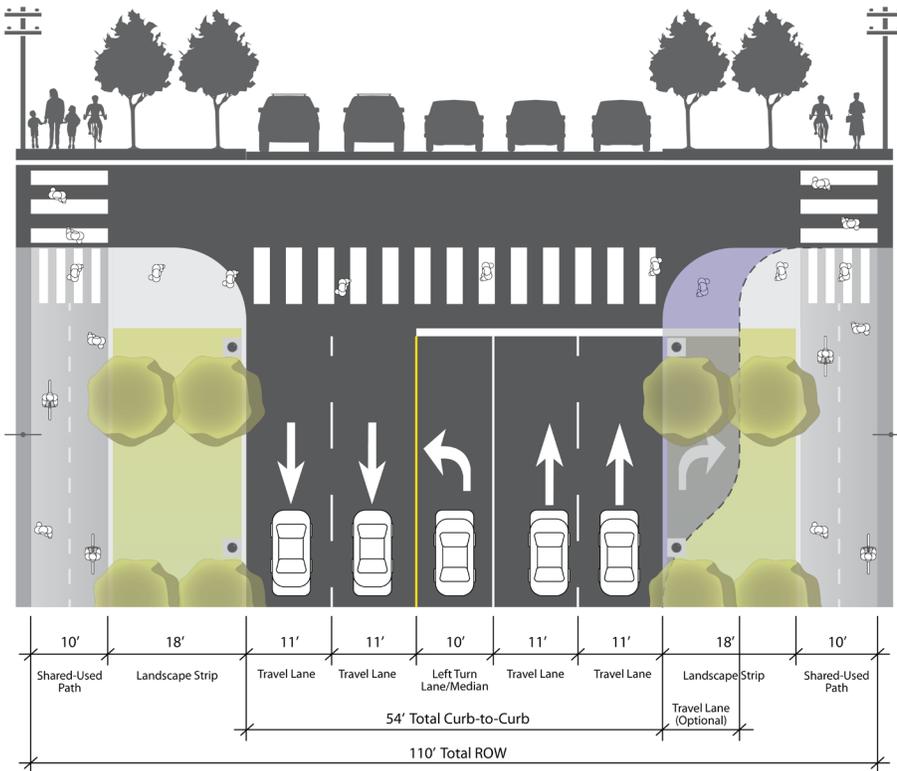


FIGURE 4.7:
NIAGARA FALLS BLVD (SOUTH OF WILLOW RIDGE DR)

NIAGARA FALLS BOULEVARD, South of Willow Ridge Drive

South of Willow Ridge Drive, Niagara Falls Boulevard is seven lanes. The right-of-way widens to 110 feet while the sidewalk remains at 5 feet. Space for pedestrians and bicyclists continues to be limited while the space for vehicle lanes expands.

Matching the roadway to the north, the number of vehicular lanes is recommended to be reduced to five (Figure 4.7). With this change the 10 foot shared-use path can continue, and a larger landscaping strip can be constructed with space for two rows of trees and snow storage in the winter. These updates will create a cohesive street design along the entire boulevard.

Right turn pockets can be added at intersections where high turning demand may warrant the need for additional capacity. These turn pockets will also help sustain through movement capacity along the corridor.



BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

The proposed design changes to Niagara Falls Boulevard seek to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists as well as safety for all users while maintaining the existing right-of-way width. Preliminary transportation analysis was undertaken as part of the planning study to explore the feasibility of the proposed design interventions; key findings are described below. Implementation of these ideas will require coordination with NYSDOT, and may include additional data collection/analysis and review/approval of proposed design exceptions.

Lane Widths

Figures 4.6 and 4.7 illustrate proposed future street sections for Niagara Falls Boulevard, which include a re-sizing of the travel lanes to 11 feet in order to accommodate improved pedestrian and bike infrastructure. This design change is significant, as it provides the space needed for a shared-use path and street trees to fit within the existing right-of-way. Without this adjustment, it would be difficult to significantly improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists without property acquisition to widen the right-of-way – which could be costly, technically challenging due to constraints, and not desired by property owners who have already seen their property reduced by previous road widening. The recommended standard through travel lane width of 11' matches the configuration in the approved Boulevard Central District Action Plan (2020), which also calls for 11' travel lanes on Niagara Falls Boulevard. Furthermore, precedent for this lane width applied in a recently completed street configuration change is Main Street (NYS Route 5) in Williamsville, where four 11' travel lanes exist adjacent to on-street parking.

According to NYSDOT¹, lane widths on principal urban arterials are permitted to be 10' for corridors that contain little to no truck traffic (less than 2%) and 11' in all other cases. Latest data available from NYSDOT shows a truck vehicle percentage of 3% along Niagara Falls Boulevard through the study area, which would require 11' travel lanes.

¹ NYSDOT Highway Design Manual, Revision 96. Chapter 2 Design Criteria. Exhibit 2-4. Page 2-46

With respect to special vehicle access, as an 'access highway' in the Official Description of Designated Qualifying and Access Highways in New York State², minimum travel lane widths of 10' are required along Niagara Falls Boulevard (US 62)³. The proposed section for Niagara Falls Boulevard maintains 11' through travel lanes, which exceeds this threshold.

The minimum widths for left and right turning lanes is 10' for turning lanes with less than 2% truck traffic, and 11' for those with greater than 2% truck traffic. As most left turn lanes through the study corridor are into neighborhoods, turning truck traffic is expected to be minimal and 10' lanes are recommended, however further data collection may be required to confirm these assumptions.

Travel Lanes and Volume

A four-lane roadway on Niagara Falls Boulevard between I-290 and Willow Ridge Drive maintains consistency with the Boulevard Central District Action Plan (2020)⁴, which recommends the Boulevard to be four-lanes with 11-foot drive lanes, a landscaped buffer and median north of Maple Road.

An investigation of historical volumes on Niagara Falls Boulevard in the study area show a slight decrease in traffic over various data points in the past 10 years through 2019. Data from 2020 was available for some segments and is included in this chart, however the impacts from COVID should be considered in reviewing this data. Data from 2021/2022 was not available at the time of this report.

The segment with the highest daily average traffic is between the I-290 ramps and Willow Ridge Drive, where the roadway is six lanes. The vision of this segment as a four-lane configuration should take into consideration the historic decline in daily traffic, and data beyond 2020 should be obtained and reviewed as part of future

² <https://www.dot.ny.gov/divisions/operating/oom/transportation-systems/repository/Truck%20Book%202020.pdf>

³ NYSDOT Highway Design Manual, Revision 96. Chapter 2 Design Criteria. 2.5.3.2. Page 2-24.

⁴ https://www.amherst.ny.us/pdf/planning/bcd/210726_final_bcd_action_plan.pdf

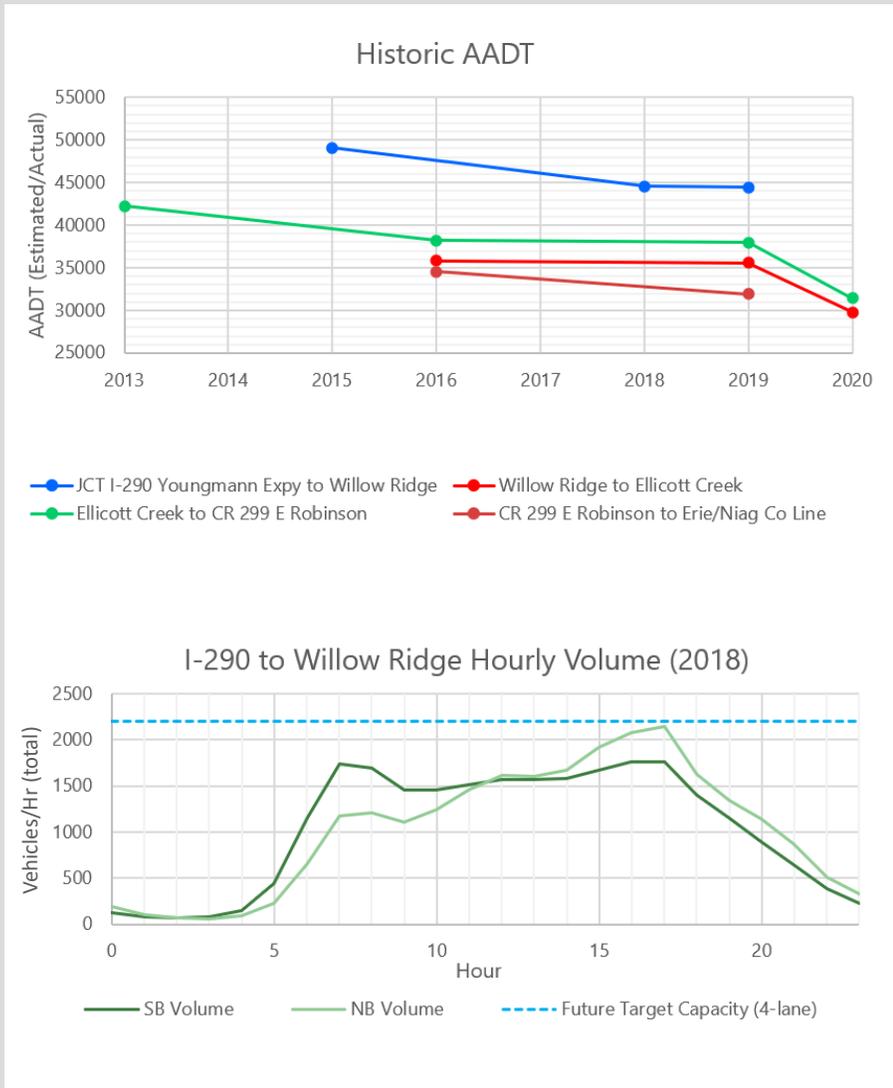


Figure 4.8: Annual average daily traffic (AADT) on Niagara Falls Boulevard from I-290 to the County Line; and hourly traffic volumes from I-290 to Willow Ridge Drive.

feasibility studies to determine any detailed lane configuration changes south of Willow Ridge Drive. If needed, additional right and/or left turn pockets at key intersections, such as interstate ramps or access points into major commercial developments can be accommodated with the available right-of-way.

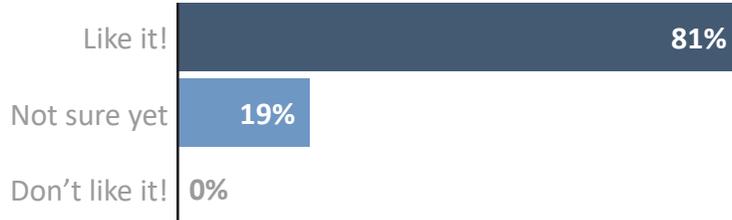
Examining vehicular travel along the Boulevard at hourly intervals in the most traveled segment between the I-290 ramps and Willow Ridge Drive shows a clear dominant peak direction - southbound in the AM peak, and northbound in the PM peak. The highest volumes measured are northbound in the evening hours, where volumes exceed 2,000 vehicles per hour for two hours per day on weekdays, reaching a high of approximately 2,150 vehicles per hour⁵. Southbound hourly volumes do not exceed 1,800 vehicles per hour during any weekday hours.

While further detailed traffic analysis will be necessary for implementation, using up-to-date volumes to determine the appropriate signal phasing and turn lane needs for this segment, 2018 data shows that a target and ideal lane capacity of 1,100 vehicles per hour per lane would accommodate existing traffic volumes. With a base free flow capacity of 1,900 vehicles per hour per lane, this target lane capacity should be achievable due to the lack of other major street crossings between I-290 ramps and Willow Ridge Drive. Priority phasing and signal coordination along Niagara Falls Boulevard should be assumed in any future analysis efforts.

⁵ NYSDOT Traffic Viewer. Data from 2018. <https://gisportalny.dot.ny.gov/portalny/apps/webappviewer/index>.

RECONFIGURE NIAGARA FALLS BOULEVARD

What do you think of the ideas for redesigning Niagara Falls Boulevard? (responses at charrette presentation)



BIG IDEAS

Expand the sidewalk: The sidewalk would increase from 5 feet to 10 feet, to be used as a multi-use (walk and bike) facility.

Add street trees: Trees in planting strips will calm traffic, provide snow storage area, and create a buffer for pedestrians.

Create more crossing opportunities: Improved pedestrian crossings will create connections between neighborhoods.

ECONOMIC INSIGHT

Underutilized land is the raw material for visionary developers. There is a supply of land ready for change.

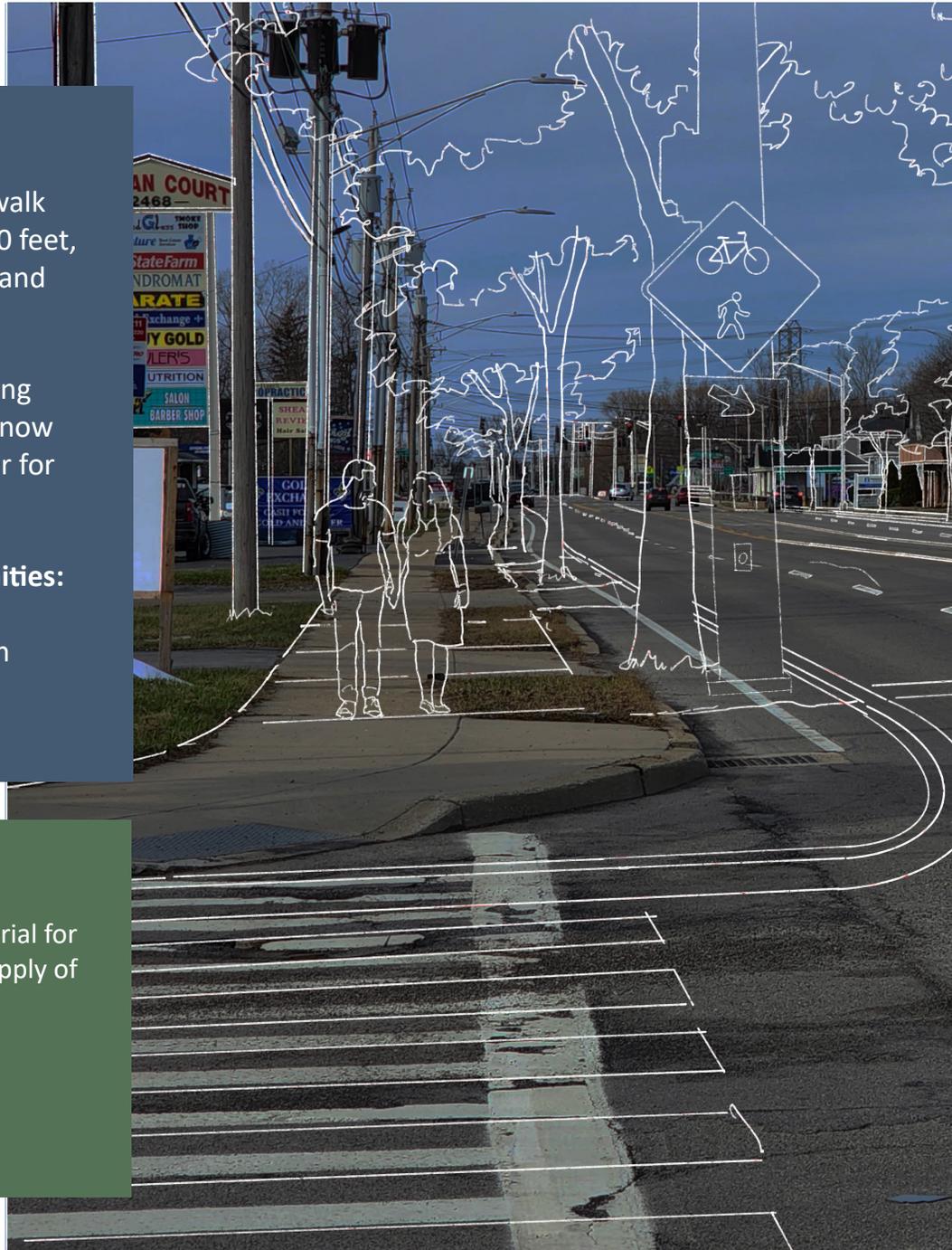


Figure 4.9, right: Existing Conditions

Figure 4.10, below: Redesigning Niagara Falls Boulevard to be safer for pedestrians by narrowing the vehicle lane widths, increasing safe crossing opportunities, enhancing sidewalks and adding street trees.



4: Make it Safe

Enhance Transit Opportunities and Conditions

The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) operates bus Route 34 on Niagara Falls Boulevard from Robinson Road to the south limits of the study area, continuing to the University at Buffalo South Campus Light Rail station. Bus stops are generally placed nearside of almost every intersection, leading to typical spacing of 0.1 mile, or about 500 feet, between Home Depot and Ellicott Creek, with longer spacing north and south.

This relatively close spacing is appropriate for the current condition of the boulevard, as longer spacing would require bus customers to walk along the arterial, where current poor walking conditions are documented herein. This is especially true during dark, snowy winter conditions.

In siting the bus stops, NFTA has clearly avoided placing bus stops that overlap with curb cuts and driveways. However, there are several bus stops that, under current street design, unavoidably occupy curb cuts. This is a problem for customers with disabilities using the bus' ramp, and creates a higher step in and out for all riders. The bus stop location can also cause pedestrian-vehicle conflicts when the bus blocks the visibility of alighting pedestrians for drivers waiting to use the curb cut.

At the following stops curb cuts affect both the front and rear doors of a stopped bus:

- Roger Chafee Drive n/b
- Willow Ridge Drive n/b
- Thistle Avenue s/b
- Faragut Avenue s/b

At the following stops, curb cuts affect the rear door of the bus:

- Forbes Avenue s/b
- Willow Ridge Drive s/b

These locations should be prioritized for consolidation of curb cuts in order to provide a continuous curb at bus stops for better pedestrian access.

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As walking conditions on the boulevard improve, the NFTA can consider consolidating bus stops. This involves removing a stop and adjusting the location of stops either side of that stop to reduce walking distance or improving walking conditions. A spacing of 0.15-0.20 miles will provide faster bus service, and maintain easy pedestrian access. The planning team used available data to identify very lightly used bus stops which can be consolidated; although redevelopment of the boulevard will change the relative usage of bus stops, requiring ongoing reassessment.

Under current ridership, bus stops that can be **considered for consolidation** are:

- Vinson Avenue/Edward White Drive n/b and s/b (in context of improved walking conditions)
- North Ellicott Creek Road n/b and s/b (in context of new pedestrian crossing of Ellicott Creek)

Most bus stops currently on the boulevard lack key amenities, such as shelters, pedestrian scale lighting (with timers), a larger paved boarding pad and schedule information. Shelters with benches (on private property, with agreements) are appropriate at stops with significant counts of boarding (not alighting) passengers; heating (with timers) should be considered at the heaviest boarding locations in recognition of the climate.

Under current ridership, bus stops that should be **considered for improved amenities** are:

- Greenhaven Terrace
- Home Depot
- Willow Ridge Drive
- Faragut Avenue - Draden Lane
- Robinson Road

While redesign of the boulevard will likely remove the space between the edge stripe and the curb, where this space exists, the curb should be bumped out to meet the edge stripe of the outer moving lane, so the bus driver does not have to pull right in order to stop.

These recommendations are summarized on Figure 4.11.



Figure 4.11, left: Potential improvements and modifications to bus stops and transit facilities along Niagara Falls Boulevard.

-  Improved Amenities Needed
-  Prioritize Curb Cut Consolidation
-  Potential Bus Stop Consolidation
-  Current Bus Stops

5. ACCESS MANAGEMENT: Consolidate Driveways, Add Medians

Many locations along the boulevard have a continuous center double left turn lane, creating a driving culture of speed and fast turning maneuvers. The double turn lane is dangerous for pedestrians trying to cross the boulevard, and creates numerous conflict points for turning vehicles. If the boulevard is to become safer for all modes of travel, access management is critical. In coordination with NYSDOT, the Towns should initiate planning for a joint Land Use and Access Management Plan; this plan will establish a coordinated policy to consolidate curb cuts as part of future redevelopment and introduce medians at targeted locations.

Access management is defined by the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration as the proactive management of vehicular access points to land parcels adjacent to roadways. Wide turn lanes, frequent driveways and curb cuts, and unsignalized cross streets are common conditions associated with poor access management.

As redevelopment along the boulevard occurs in both the short and long-term, there is opportunity to improve access management. Both Towns should review and update their land development regulations to encourage and/or require a reduction in curb cuts. For example, applying the Town of Amherst’s Mixed-Use Corridor Districts in the corridor would introduce standards that limit curb cuts and require access between parcels (see section 6 of this report for more information).

In addition, medians should be considered at target locations to limit the number of left turn lane conflicts (see Figure 4.13). The utility/powerline easement area south of the Home Depot driveway is a candidate for a median that could include a gateway treatment, such as signage and landscaping. Additional sporadic locations for smaller medians in between longer segments free of driveways, or where duplicate driveways can be converted to a right turn out only configuration, are also candidates for medians. Areas where conditions would support a median include the segment between Vinson Avenue/Edward White Drive and Forbes Avenue, as well as segments north of Ellicott Creek Road where parcel driveways are spaced at longer intervals.



Figure 4.13: Frequent curb cuts and the continuous center turn lane creates numerous conflict points for all roadway users (pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles).

NYSDOT’s Highway Design Manual (Chapter 5) states that medians are desirable for streets with four or more traffic lanes. The primary functions of medians are to provide the following:

- Pedestrian safety when used and functionally designed as a refuge area
- Storage space for left-turning vehicles
- Separation of opposing traffic streams
- Access control to/from minor access drives and intersection
- Traffic calming

The Manual (Section 5.9.10) recommends that raised median openings with left-turn lanes should be provided only at major cross streets and to serve large traffic generators or emergency vehicles. Pedestrian and bicycle travel patterns are to be considered. The manual also recommends avoiding median openings (if medians exist) on divided highways for left turns to and from residential or commercial driveways.

The State’s policies align with the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) support for corridor access management as one of their 28 proven safety countermeasures⁶. The FHWA’s Highway Safety Manual concludes that a 25-31% reduction in injury and fatal crashes along urban/suburban arterials can be achieved with controlling entry and exit points along a roadway.

⁶ *Making Our Roads Safer: One Countermeasure at a Time*. Federal Highway Administration. FHWA-SA-21-071. October 2021. Page 15. https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/pdf/FHWA-SA-21-071_PSC%20Booklet.pdf



Figure 4.13, left: Potential median locations along Niagara Falls Boulevard.

- Potential Existing Median Opportunities
- Median Opportunity with further driveway consolidation/property coordination

5. CONNECT

From schools, libraries, parks, and community centers to higher education facilities, Amherst and Tonawanda have incredible community resources. Opportunities to gather and connect as a community exist, yet many centers of activity remain isolated or difficult to get to if not traveling by car. Through careful consideration and community desire to have more options to move around the neighborhoods and region, across Niagara Falls Boulevard and beyond, it is important to emphasize and strengthen connections.

Driving along the corridor will continue to be an important mode of mobility, but the priority is shifting to an emphasis on safety and a multi-modal approach. For vehicular travel, there is a focus on a connected network of streets to allow for shorter trips to reduce demand on regional roadways. For other modes of travel, like walking or biking, it is important to plan and properly implement appropriate infrastructure to foster connections beyond automobile travel.

CONNECT Action Steps

- 1 Emphasize Placemaking and Walkable Connections Rather than Parking**
- 2 Establish a Network of Trails**
- 3 Retrofit Streets to Expand Pedestrian + Bike Infrastructure**
- 4 Capitalize on the Creek and Trail as a Great Address**
- 5 Improve Connections to Ellicott Creek Park**

1. EMPHASIZE PLACEMAKING AND WALKABLE CONNECTIONS RATHER THAN PARKING

Current conditions along Niagara Falls Boulevard foster an environment of driving with plentiful parking at the ready, with a separation of land uses that forces one to drive to multiple destinations rather than parking once or walking to daily needs. Zoning and land development regulations have centered on land use and minimum parking requirements. In doing so, modern day Niagara Falls Boulevard exemplifies a “form follows parking” built environment. In order to break the culture of driving and parking, the rules need to change to emphasize placemaking and walkable connections rather than expansive parking lots. The reality of many people walking, biking, or using transit is slim in the existing built conditions; but if properties along the corridor are planned, designed, and developed as a collective center with shared parking, better options to move around will naturally occur.

2. ESTABLISH A NETWORK OF TRAILS

The existing local and regional trail network that abuts the neighborhoods of Willow Ridge and Parkview is a unique community asset that should be expanded, promoted and enhanced. A range of types of trails and connections can build off current infrastructure to strengthen a local and regional trail network. By planning for a future network of trails, the Town can create loops for recreation while simultaneously creating a framework that better connects the neighborhoods. By expanding the network of trails, the Towns of Amherst and Tonawanda can capitalize on this incredible community asset and become a place where no matter where you live you can walk out your door and reach a trail network.

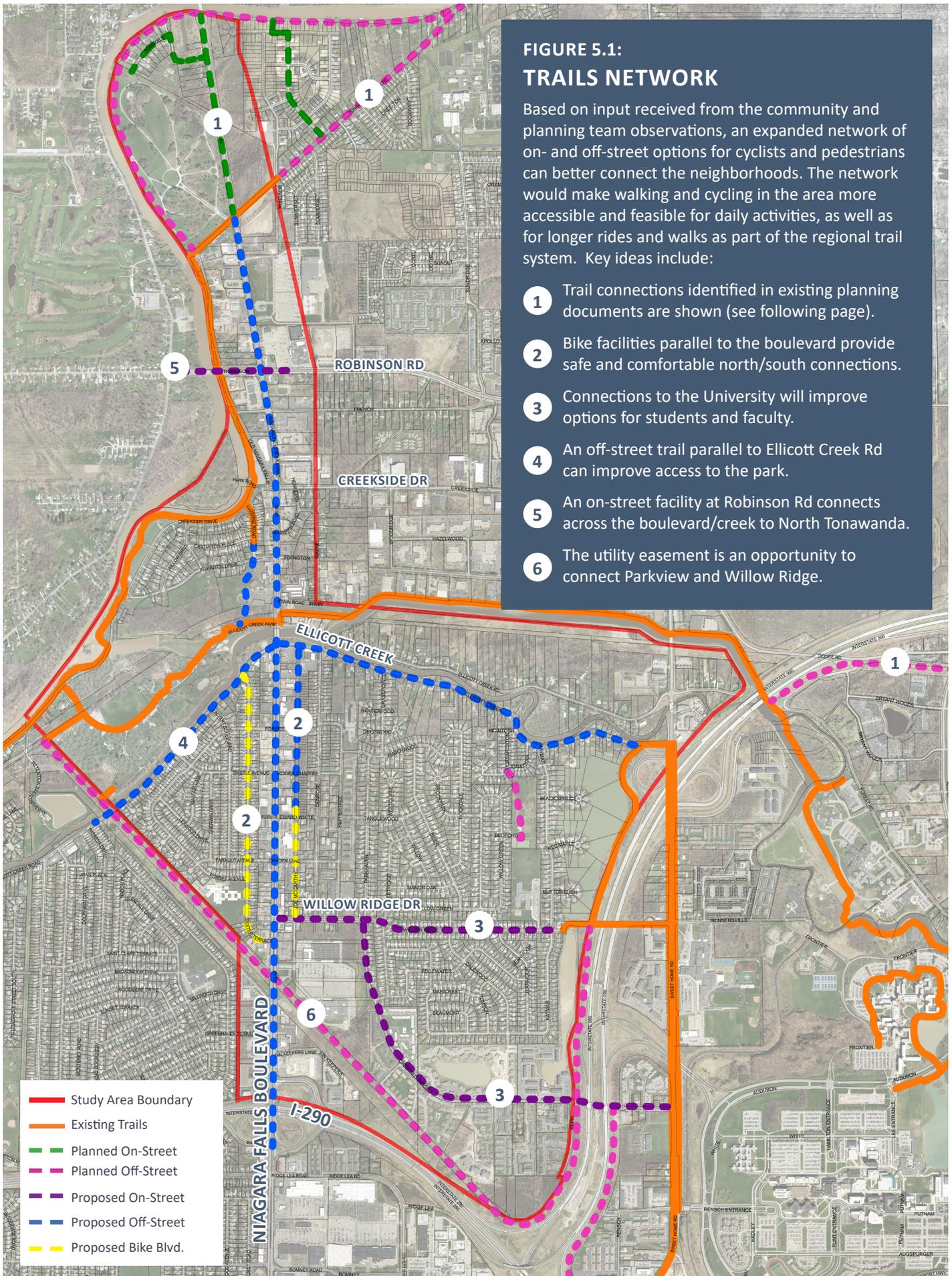
The Trails Network map on Figure 5.1 details the strategy for trail connections in the study area:

- **Planned On-Street and Planned Off-Street:** These are trail connections that have been identified in existing

FIGURE 5.1: TRAILS NETWORK

Based on input received from the community and planning team observations, an expanded network of on- and off-street options for cyclists and pedestrians can better connect the neighborhoods. The network would make walking and cycling in the area more accessible and feasible for daily activities, as well as for longer rides and walks as part of the regional trail system. Key ideas include:

- 1 Trail connections identified in existing planning documents are shown (see following page).
- 2 Bike facilities parallel to the boulevard provide safe and comfortable north/south connections.
- 3 Connections to the University will improve options for students and faculty.
- 4 An off-street trail parallel to Ellicott Creek Rd can improve access to the park.
- 5 An on-street facility at Robinson Rd connects across the boulevard/creek to North Tonawanda.
- 6 The utility easement is an opportunity to connect Parkview and Willow Ridge.

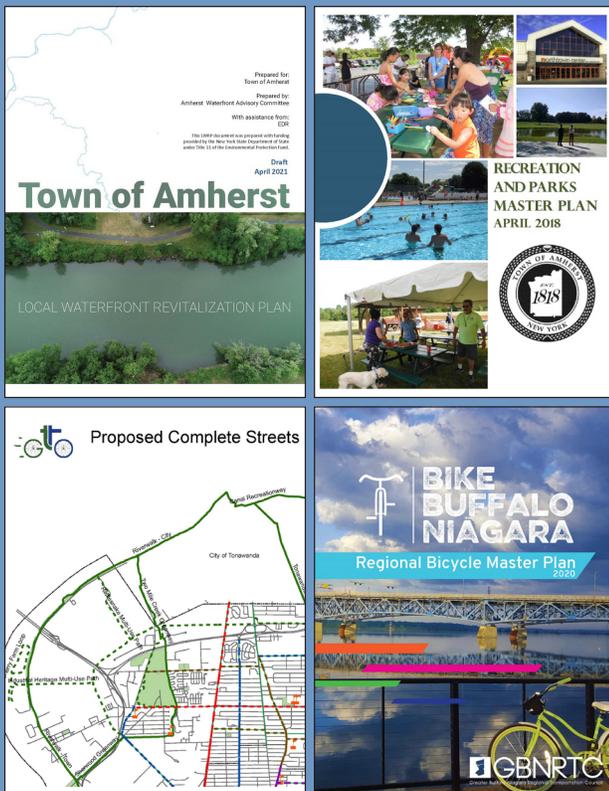


5: Connect

TRAILS PLANNING IN AMHERST & TONAWANDA

There has been a lot of great trails planning for this area completed to date; the goal for this plan will be to build upon what is already underway. Key documents and plans that have informed the proposed trails network include:

- *The Town of Amherst Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP)* addresses the Ellicott and Tonawanda Creek areas in Amherst; projects include connection of the Empire State Trail, street improvements for Old Niagara Falls Boulevard, and connecting the Ellicott Creek Trailway across Niagara Falls Boulevard.
- *The Town of Amherst Recreation and Parks Master Plan* completed in 2018 identifies existing and potential trail connections, including a new multiuse trail in the utility easement south of Willow Ridge.
- *The Town of Tonawanda Proposed Complete Streets Network* includes a path in the utility easement south of the Parkview Triangle neighborhood.
- The Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) recently released a regional bike plan that coordinates existing and planned on- and off-road trails in the region, which includes a recommended bike facility on the boulevard north of Ellicott Creek.



Town planning documents, such as the Lehigh Valley Trail (in the utility easement south of Willow Ridge) and the Empire State Trail (at the northern end of the study area).

- **Proposed On-Street:** These are recommended on-street bike connections to link to existing and planned trail connections, to make a more complete network. An example is the proposed bike lane for Willow Ridge Drive that will provide a better connection to the pedestrian/bike bridge across I-990.
- **Proposed Off-Street:** These are recommended trail connections that are separated from moving vehicles, which could include a pedestrian/bike trail or a protected bikeway / multi-use trail within the right-of-way. Examples are the proposed trail in the “paper street” area of Joe McCarthy Drive, the multi-use trail on the north side of Ellicott Creek Road, and the proposed shared-use path on both sides of Niagara Falls Boulevard.
- **Proposed Bike Boulevard:** Bike boulevards are streets with low traffic volumes and speeds giving bikes priority, designated with bike markings and signage. For local neighborhood streets that have slower motorized traffic bike boulevards are an optimal choice.

Street sections detailing recommendations are included throughout the remaining actions in this “Connect” section of the plan report.

3. RETROFIT STREETS TO EXPAND PEDESTRIAN + BIKE INFRASTRUCTURE

The trail network in Tonawanda and Amherst is extensive and it is expanding to connect to regional networks. Trails will be on-street and off-street facilities so any level of cyclist will have a trail they feel comfortable on. An example of these connections includes connecting the University at Buffalo’s North campus to the Parkview and Willow Ridge neighborhoods, where many students live. This network would allow residents of the towns to live in close proximity to bike facilities and have multiple transportation options.

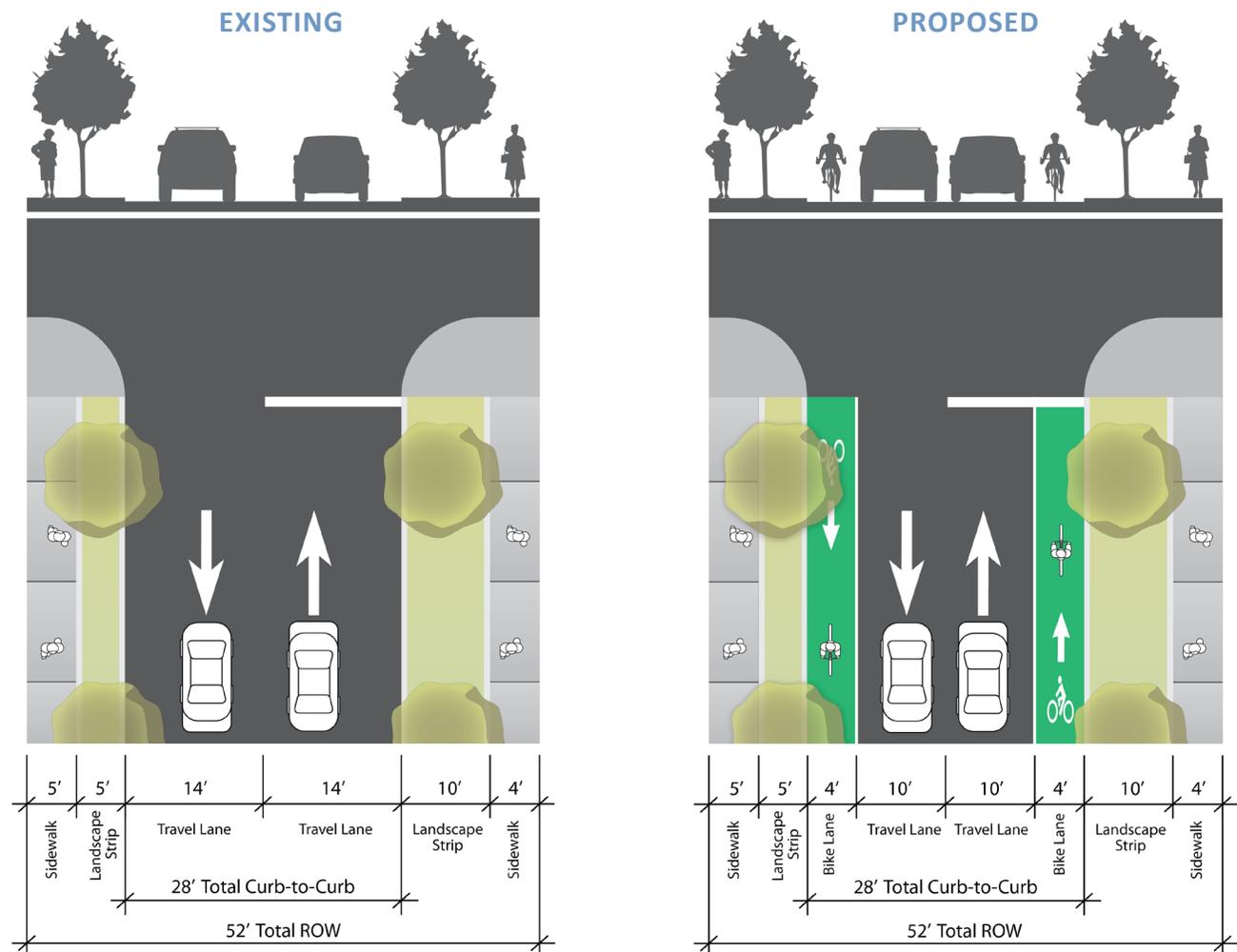
The following pages describe recommended improvements to expand pedestrian and bike infrastructure on Chestnut Ridge Road, Willow Ridge Drive and Joe McCarthy Drive.

CHESTNUT RIDGE ROAD

Chestnut Ridge loops around the southern edge of the Willow Ridge neighborhood and provides an important connection between the boulevard and Sweet Home Road. Current conditions are that of a street that is designed to foster speeds too high for a neighborhood street. To improve safe travel and connections and general traffic calming, the roadway should be re-striped to include a curbside bike lane. By narrowing travel lanes to be a more appropriate size for a residential neighborhood, the street can be repurposed as a safe, vital connection for all modes of travel. Chestnut Ridge Road has a similar right-of-way dimension to Willow Ridge Drive and a similar protected bike configuration could be implemented along Chestnut Ridge if the roadway is reconstructed (see example street section for reconstruction of Willow Ridge Road Figure 5.3).



FIGURE 5.2: CHESTNUT RIDGE ROAD



WILLOW RIDGE DRIVE

Willow Ridge Drive is a key street connecting Niagara Falls Boulevard with the Willow Ridge neighborhood and the University at Buffalo. Currently there are no bike facilities along Willow Ridge Drive. At the end of the street there is a pedestrian / bike trail and bridge across I-990 that leads to the university and connects to the regional trail network. Willow Ridge Elementary School and an entrance to Willow Ridge Park is also located off of this street. Residents traveling to any of these sites by bike must ride in the car travel lanes; improvements to Willow Ridge Drive, that include an improved bike facility, will increase safety and comfort for those biking to the park, elementary school and university. Creating connections and safe bike facilities encourages ridership.

East of Chestnut Ridge Road, informal on-street parking is allowed on the north side of the street and provides

a benefit to residents. In this area, restriping should be done to continue to allow parking on the north side, and add shared lane markings for bicyclists to show this is a route to the trail.

West of Chestnut Ridge Road (to Niagara Falls Boulevard), a designated bike facility should be added. This can be done initially by restriping, without changing the curb to curb dimensions. The travel lane widths can be reduced from 14 feet to 10 feet; markings for bike lanes can be put in and the center yellow lines can be taken out. The narrowed travel lanes and removal of the center lines are traffic calming measures aimed to improve safety and slow driving speeds.

If this segment of Willow Ridge Drive is reconstructed, protected bike lanes in both directions can be provided,

FIGURE 5.3: WILLOW RIDGE DRIVE

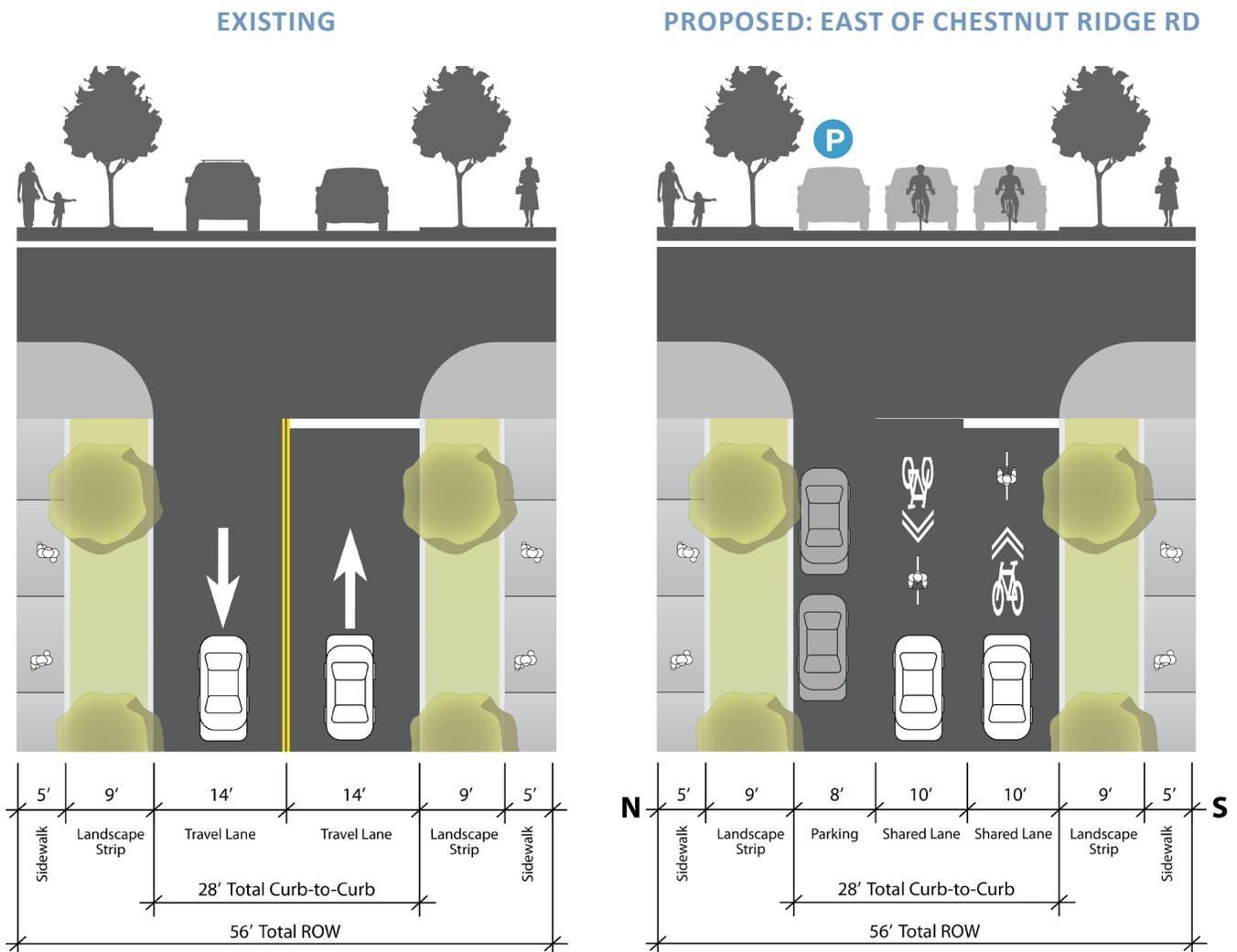
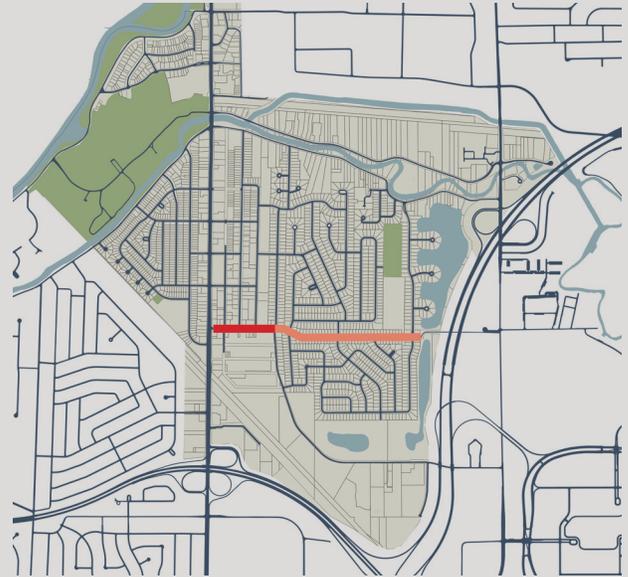




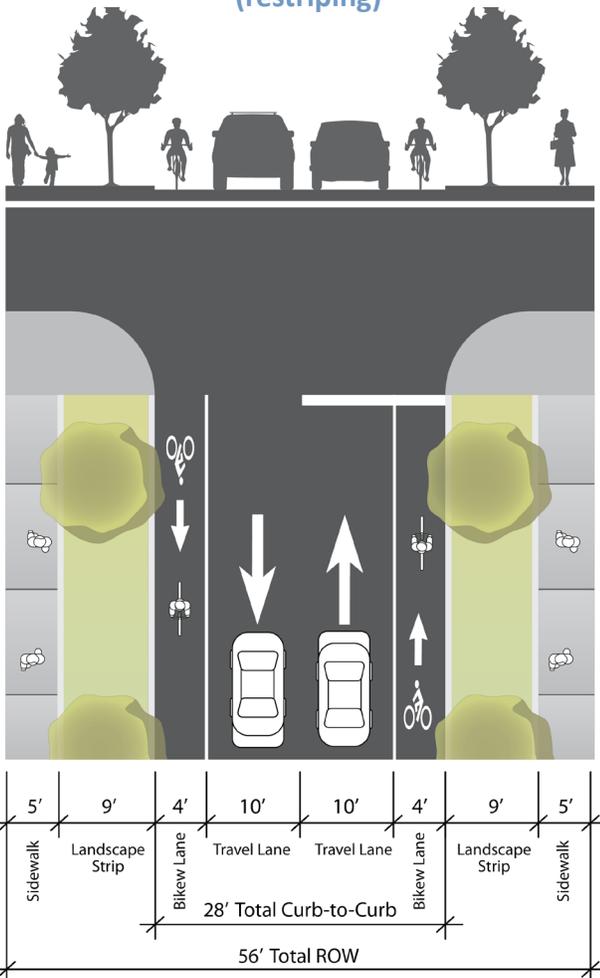
Figure 5.4: Willow Ridge Drive, Existing Conditions

to increase the safety of riders and encourage ridership. Travel lane size would be reduced and the bike lanes protected behind the planting strip.

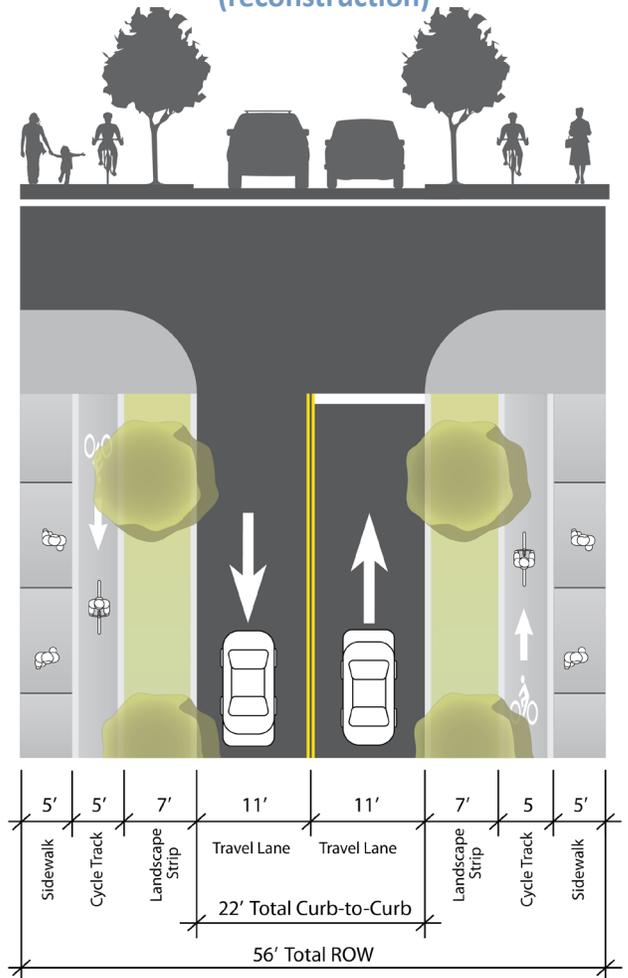


West of Chestnut Ridge Rd
East of Chestnut Ridge Rd

PROPOSED: WEST OF CHESTNUT RIDGE RD (restriping)



PROPOSED: WEST OF CHESTNUT RIDGE RD (reconstruction)



5: Connect

JOE MCCARTHY DRIVE

Joe McCarthy Drive, east of Niagara Falls Boulevard, is a parallel street that is a viable option for safe cycling. This low-volume, tree-lined neighborhood street is residential in character and features a single lane of travel in each direction and on-street parking.

With minor interventions, like adding bike stencils to the pavement, signage, and wayfinding, Joe McCarthy Drive can be transformed into a safe thoroughfare that openly welcomes both cyclists and vehicles, all within the existing right-of-way.

Where Joe McCarthy Drive ends there is a “paper street” (a right-of-way that was designated but the street never constructed) that could provide an extension north to South Ellicott Creek Road. There is adequate right-of-way to create a trail connection to the creek. The extension could be designated for cyclists and trail users and would serve as a complete alternative to travel along Niagara Falls Boulevard. The extension would connect to the creek and local/regional trail network; and the shared-use path for walking and biking (not a full service roadway) would have conservation easements on both sides to create a protected network of green and buffer to adjacent properties. As shown on Figure 5.5, the easement could be wider on the east side, to provide a wider buffer adjacent to existing single-family homes.

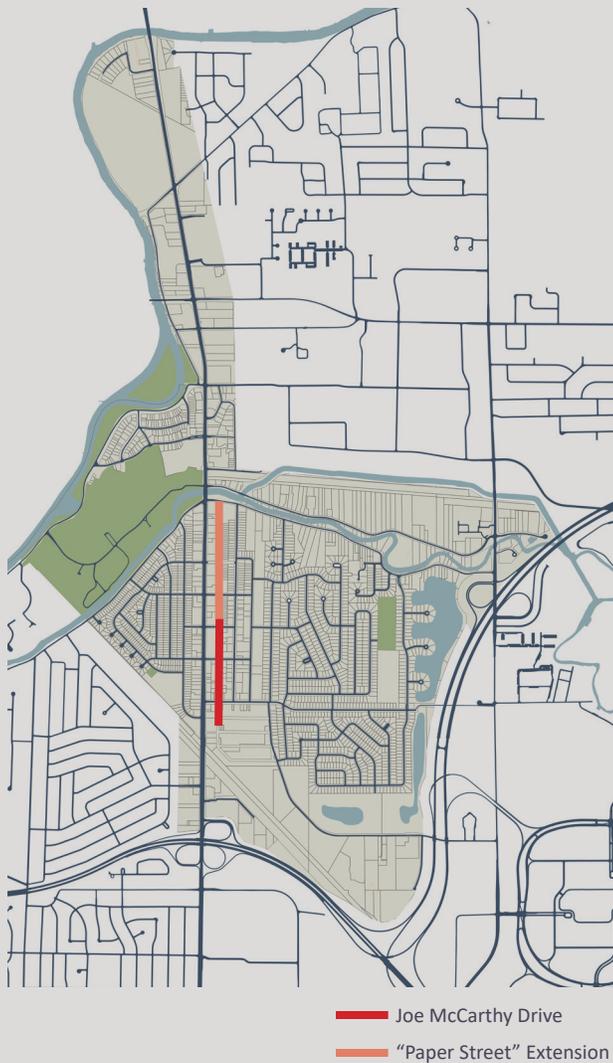


FIGURE 5.5: JOE MCCARTHY DRIVE

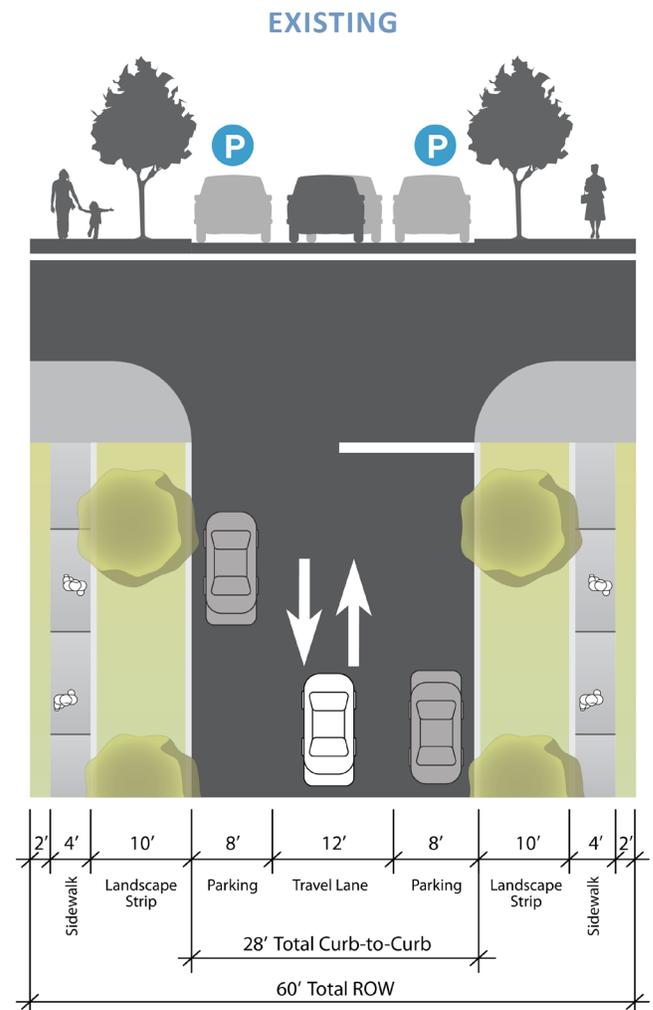
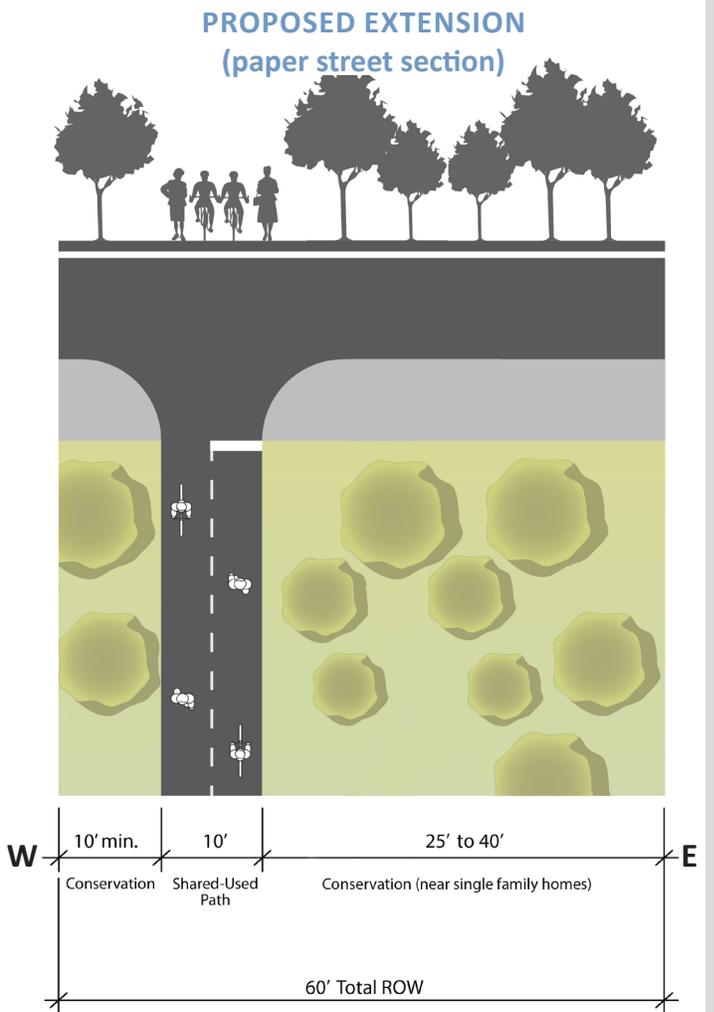
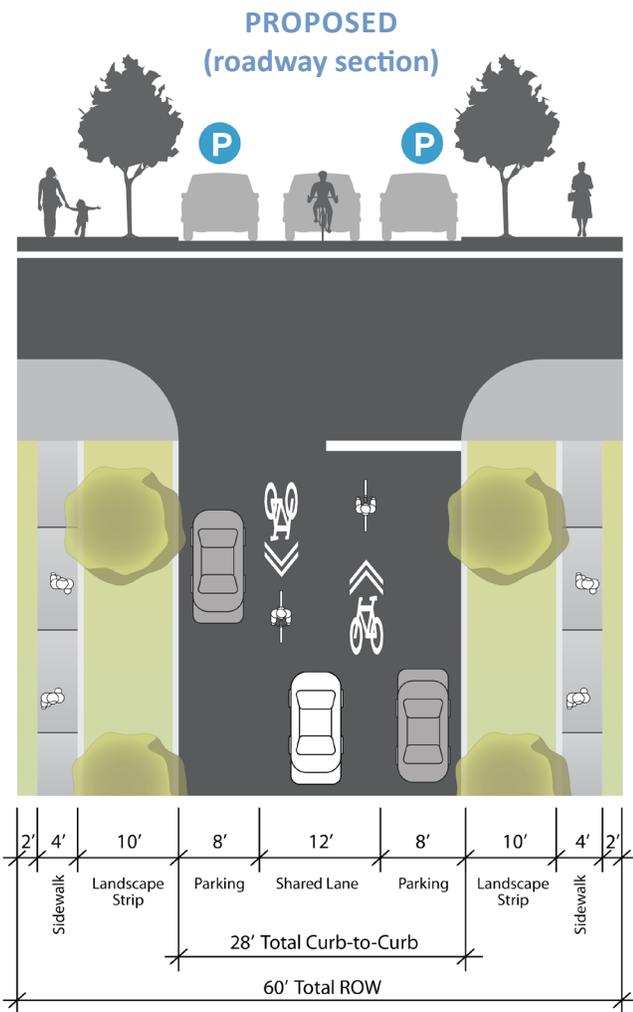




Figure 5.6: Joe McCarthy Drive, Existing Conditions





SEASONAL
USE PATH
NOT
MAINTAINED
NOV 15
TO
APR 15



Figure 5.7, above: Ellicott Creek and Ellicott Creek Bridge, Existing Conditions

Figure 5.8, left: Entrance to Ellicott Creek Park north of the Ellicott Creek Bridge.

4. CAPITALIZE ON THE CREEK AND TRAIL AS A GREAT ADDRESS

Ellicott Creek Park is home to 165 acres of parkland, trails, and recreational amenities. The park lies between Tonawanda Creek and Ellicott Creek and was among the first parks developed by Erie County. Established in 1926, many of the park’s facilities and landscapes that residents and visitors treasure today are the result of improvements led by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s. The park is a local and regional destination and an important component of civic and green infrastructure for the Willow Ridge and Parkview neighborhoods and beyond. Many trails lead to the park and the intersection of Ellicott Creek Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard is a key area where a variety of trails converge yet it is difficult to make a safe connection across the boulevard to the park.

Ellicott Creek Bridge is consumed by travel lanes leaving limited right-of-way for properly sized sidewalks and unsafe conditions for pedestrians. On the south side of the creek, where South Ellicott Creek Road intersects the boulevard at the base of the bridge, crossing is difficult and connections are disrupted by the current configuration of the boulevard.

Figures 5.10 through 5.13 illustrate opportunities to improve safe crossings, expand the trail network, and make a great address along the creek.

STREET TREES

The Action Plan proposes to incorporate trees on Niagara Falls Boulevard in order to beautify and improve the corridor environment. The inclusion of street trees within the state right-of-way is essential to designing a safe and connected street; among other benefits, trees buffer pedestrians from moving vehicle, provide traffic calming, and improve property values.

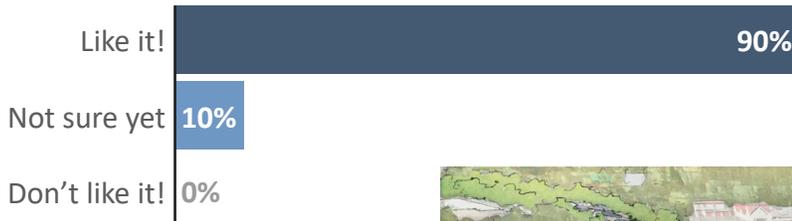
The state’s Highway Design Manual, Chapter 25 promotes and encourages landscaping (including trees) as a traffic calming treatment on roadways between 35 and 50 mph (Category III facilities). Design guidance describes how the NYSDOT will embrace trees if planned properly¹: *“With proper planning, trees can supply a multitude of benefits to travelers, communities, wildlife and the environment. Our goal is to incorporate trees that will aid in the efficiency of our roads and beautify and improve the quality of life where they are planted.”* Design considerations should include adherence to NYSDOT guidance on species selection, clear zones, and mature heights in order to minimize maintenance costs over time.

¹ <https://www.dot.ny.gov/divisions/engineering/environmental-analysis/landscape/trees>

CAPITALIZE ON THE CREEK AND TRAILS

What do you think of this idea for connecting the trail system at Niagara Falls Blvd and Ellicott Creek?

(responses at charrette presentation)



BIG IDEAS

Safer intersections: Lane widths will be right-sized to slow traffic and shorten crossings.

Improved connections: Wider sidewalks and new on- and off-street trails can connect pedestrians and cyclists on both sides of the creek.

Pedestrian Bridge: A pedestrian bridge can further connect the Ellicott Creek Trailway with a new trail on the south side of the creek.

Trail-oriented development: New housing and commercial activities can benefit from their proximity to the trail network.

ECONOMIC INSIGHT

Ellicott Creek Park and Trail are huge assets! The National Association of Realtors found that trails are a top amenity sought by homebuyers, and walkable/bikable neighborhoods (with places to go and ways to get there on foot or by bike) are preferred.

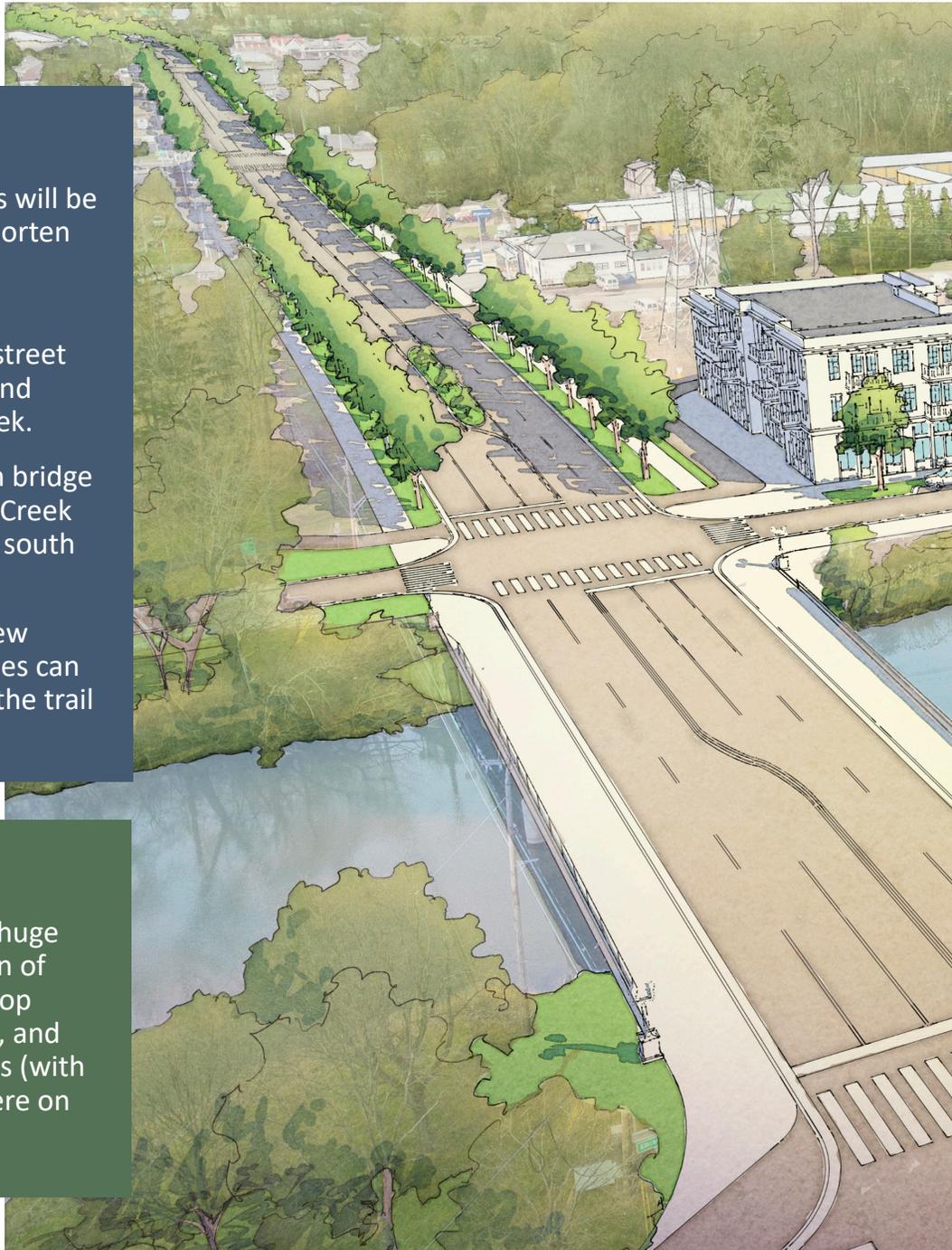


Figure 5.9, right: Existing Conditions

Figure 5.10, below: To better connect the north and south sides of Ellicott Creek, the Ellicott Creek Bridge is reworked with narrower travel lanes and wider sidewalks. A new bike and pedestrian bridge is added to provide designated trail access across the creek, connecting to the larger regional trail network. Trail-oriented buildings, to include housing and a mix of uses, can front the waterway and highlight access to trails.

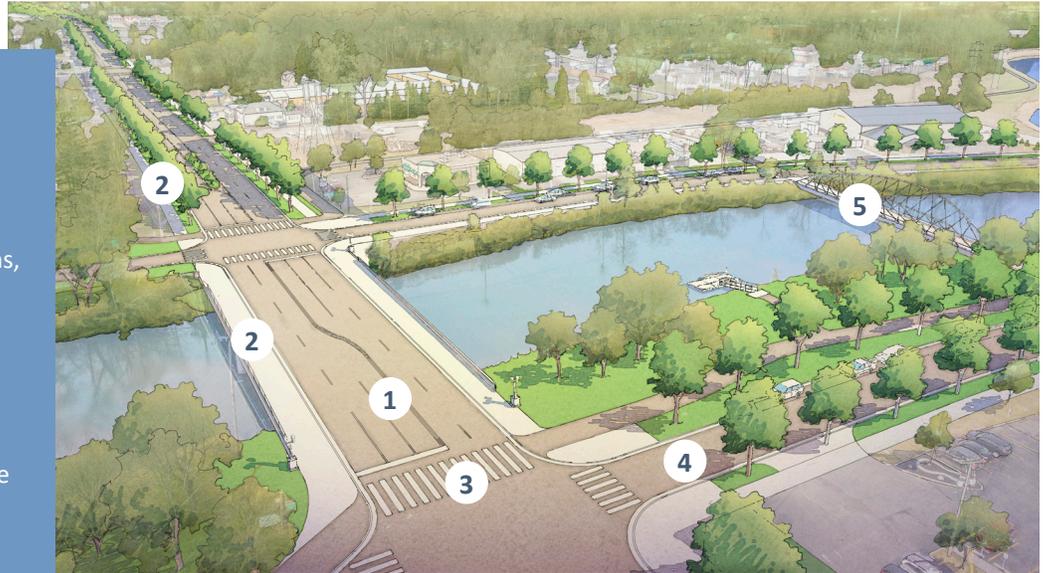


5: Connect

**FIGURE 5.11:
POTENTIAL PUBLIC
IMPROVEMENTS**

Public improvements can bring greater safety for all (pedestrians, cyclists and motorists); in the area of the Ellicott Creek Bridge recommendations include:

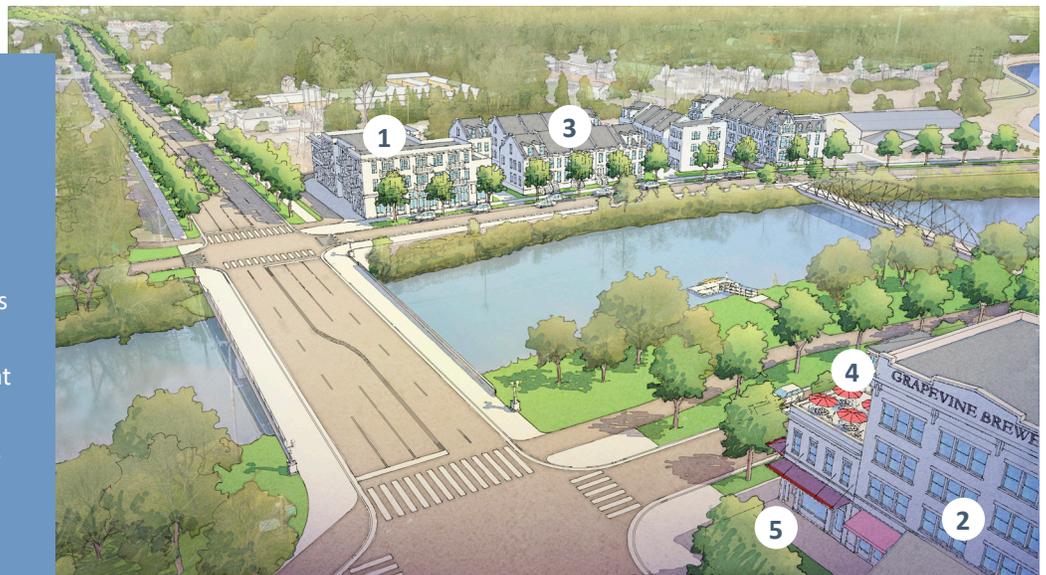
- 1 Right-sized travel lanes
- 2 Wider sidewalks; beyond the bridge, street trees line the boulevard
- 3 Improved crossings and safer intersections
- 4 Ellicott Creek Rd as a tree-lined, walkable street
- 5 New pedestrian and bike bridge



**FIGURE 5.12:
POTENTIAL PRIVATE
INVESTMENT**

Public improvements can be a catalyst for change; potential private investment shown in this illustration:

- 1 Trail-oriented development
- 2 New mixed-use building faces the boulevard at this prominent corner
- 3 New housing overlooking Ellicott Creek
- 4 Rooftop dining with views of the park and water
- 5 Public space for outdoor dining and events



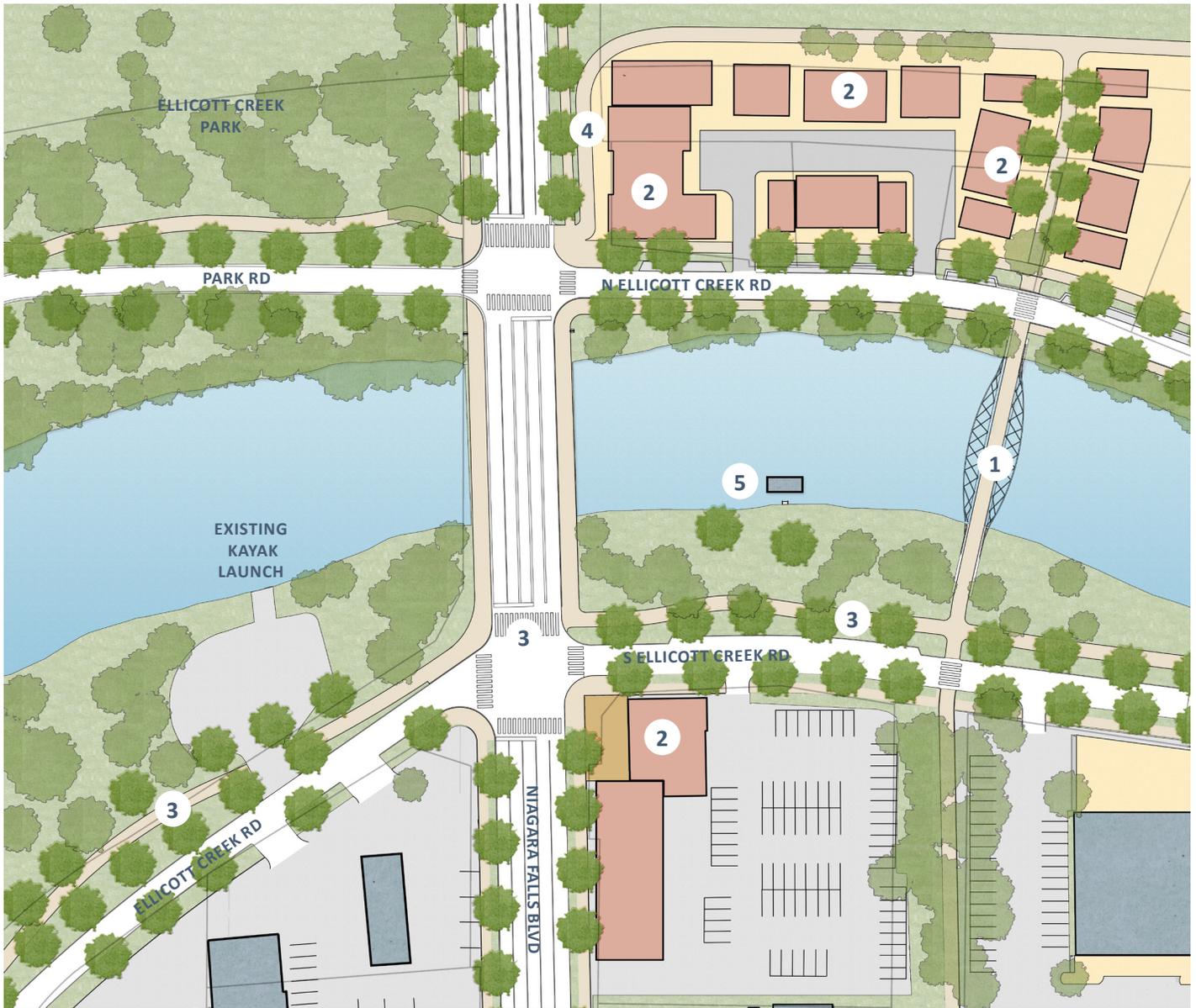


FIGURE 5.13:
ELLICOTT CREEK BRIDGE AREA

Ellicott Creek Bridge is a critical location, connecting the north and the south sections of the boulevard and key segments of the trail network. Ellicott Creek Park has an entrance on the northwest side of the creek, and the existing Ellicott Creek Trailway is located to the northeast. Proposed changes to the Ellicott Creek Bridge area include improved crossings, widened sidewalks, and trail connection improvements.

Understanding opportunities to modify the bridge are limited and a complete bridge reconstruction is not slated in the near future, the Town of Amherst should also consider a pedestrian/bike bridge east of the vehicular bridge. Similar to recently constructed JJ Audubon Parkway Bridge near the University at Buffalo, the proposed pedestrian bridge would provide a safe crossing of the creek and better connect the neighborhoods both north and south of the creek.

By embracing the creek frontage the Town will unlock

redevelopment opportunities that capitalize on real estate with untapped potential. Key ideas shown in this illustrative plan include:

- 1 A new pedestrian/bike bridge is aligned with the trail extension of Joe McCarthy Dr; it could alternatively be located closer to the existing bridge.
- 2 New buildings face streets or trails, with parking located to the rear.
- 3 A new off-street trail on Ellicott Creek Rd connects to entrances to the park, to widened sidewalks on the bridge, to the new pedestrian / bike bridge, and to an improved high visibility crosswalk across the boulevard.
- 4 Pedestrians/cyclists on the existing Ellicott Creek trailway easily connect across the boulevard and to neighborhoods to the south.
- 5 As identified in the Town's draft LWRP, an additional kayak launch here will increase connectivity / access to the water.

5: Connect

5. IMPROVE CONNECTIONS TO ELLICOTT CREEK PARK

Ellicott Creek Road is an important neighborhood connector, especially as it relates to access to Ellicott Creek Park in Tonawanda. Whether arriving by car or on foot, the current conditions of Ellicott Creek Road are that of a fairly wide thoroughfare with a missed opportunity to easily connect residents and visitors to the park. A wide shoulder and intermittent curb lead to parking at random and the lack of a trail along the creek limits access and further connections. Concerns regarding fast moving cars and difficult crossings to the park are all too common.

If the road was re-imagined as an inviting entrance parallel to the park and was designed to embrace the character of a neighborhood street, the impact on placemaking and accessibility would be significant. Right-sizing the roadway with narrow travel lanes, curbs to define clear parking opportunities, and a new path along the creek will formalize connections (and crossing locations) and strengthen access to the park.

Thistle Avenue Crossing

Near the intersection of Thistle Avenue and Ellicott Creek Road is a crossway and entrance to Ellicott Creek Park. This intersection is frequently used by the Parkview Triangle community to access the park. Reducing the Ellicott Creek Road lane widths, adding curbs and formalizing on-street parking locations as described above will slow traffic. For the crossing, a Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacon (RRFB) should be added. While not signalized like a HAWK signal, RRFBs are highly effective as they provide a push button activation for flashing lights when crossing is needed. Such flashing crossings are especially effective at night to direct driver’s attention to designated crossings. To further safety efforts and to alert drivers that this is an active crossing, a small median island can be installed to make drivers more aware and to provide traffic calming and refuge for people crossing the street.



Figure 5.14: An RRFB signal and small median island are proposed to create a safer crossing of Ellicott Creek Road at Thistle Avenue.

What do you think of this idea for improving the crossing of Ellicott Creek Road to the park?

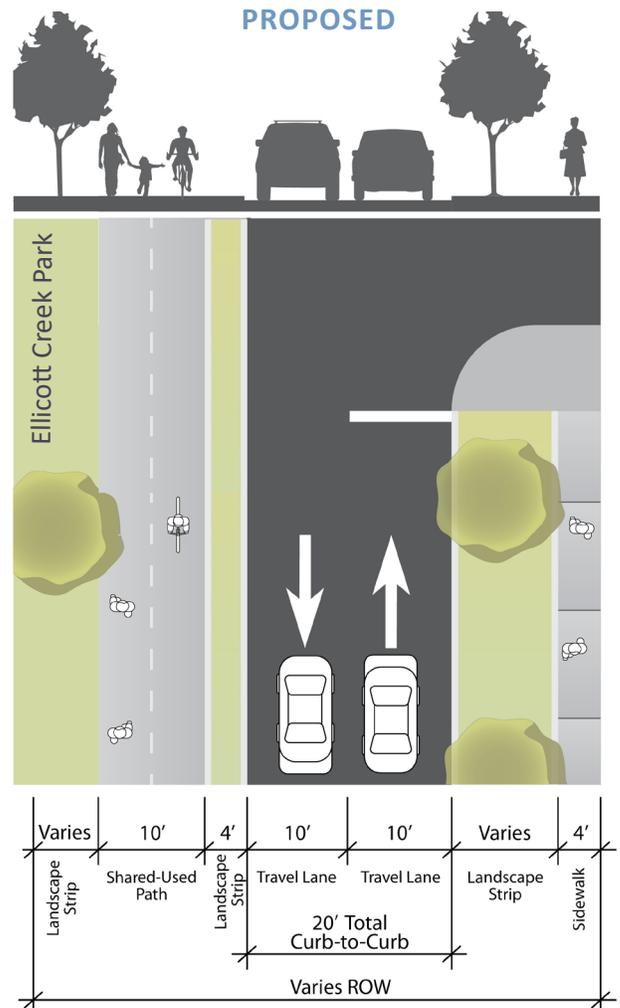
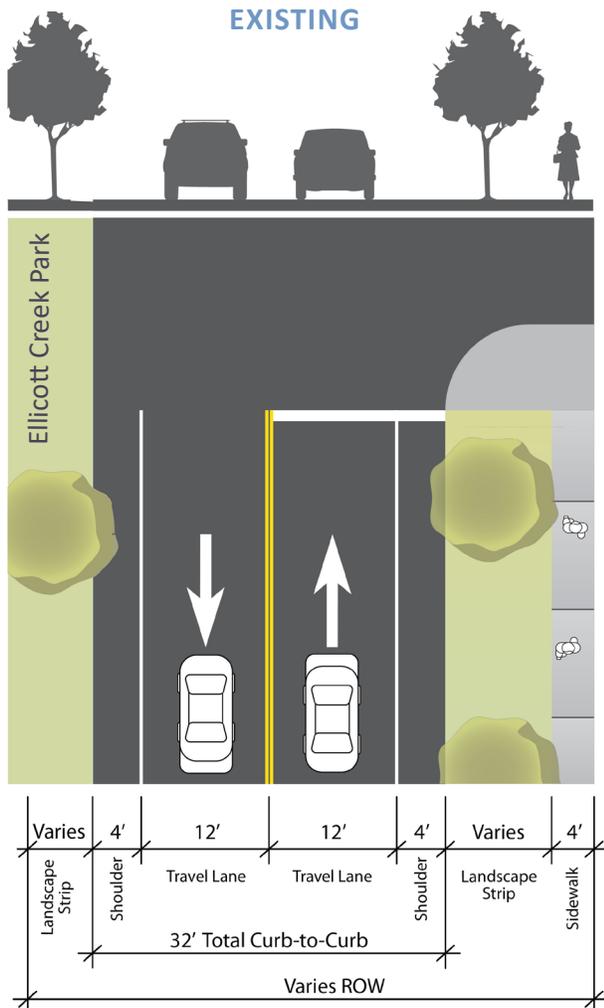
(responses at charrette presentation)





Figure 5.16: Ellicott Creek Road near Thistle Avenue, Existing Conditions

FIGURE 5.15: ELLICOTT CREEK ROAD



6. REFRESH

As with many commercial corridors across the country, and with an ever-changing retail environment, many buildings along Niagara Falls Boulevard are nearing the end of their usable lifespan. Originally constructed in the great age of the automobile and motoring, Niagara Falls Boulevard is home to a building stock ranging from low-slung, one-story 1950s and 1960s buildings, to 1980s and 1990s commercial and office buildings surrounded by parking, to modern-day big box retail and service commercial buildings. The economic livelihood along the corridor is limited by an outdated single-use pattern of development. Many properties are underutilized or are becoming obsolete; the rules and regulations need to change so that as redevelopment occurs the residents of Amherst and Tonawanda get the place they want it to be and property owners can make the numbers work to support new development.

1. ACTIVELY SUPPORT INVESTMENT AND REMOVE IMPEDIMENTS

Actively supporting investment and removing impediments to street-oriented, mixed-use development will send a clear message to property owners and investors that this corridor is ready to accommodate growth (as defined by the community in this plan) in the form of new buildings, businesses, and housing types.

REFRESH Action Steps

- 1 Actively Support Investment and Remove Impediments
- 2 Adopt Mixed-Use Ordinances Along Niagara Falls Boulevard
- 3 Identify Market Opportunities and Attract Investors

The physical environment found along the boulevard is a major impediment to change; it is difficult to imagine a walkable/bikable mixed-use place can emerge when the existing public realm is centered on driving. The public improvements described in the previous sections will increase safety and improve connections; they can also inspire confidence in a new future for the corridor. New mixed-use buildings (including housing) along the corridor will become more desirable when there are wide sidewalks, street trees, and easy/comfortable connections to parks, waterways, and trails.

Another potential impediment is the Towns' land use regulations and policy documents. This joint plan is an important first step in defining a common vision for future development. Next, the Towns should each amend their Comprehensive Plans, Zoning Ordinances, and other policy documents to be consistent with this plan and ensure that investors and property owners are able to move forward unhindered with improvements and future development that fits the vision. Town policies should not only allow, but proactively prescribe the details of the physical environment that the community would like to see; updates to zoning can be particularly impactful (as described in Action Step 2).

The Towns can also work to support investment by making property owners and investors aware of available resources for improvements. For example, Erie County has a façade improvement program funded through the CARES Act; other grants, including Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), may be available as well. The Amherst Industrial Development Agency (AIDA) can work with property owners to establish PIFs (PILOT Increment Financing) to help fund infrastructure costs associated with redevelopment. The Towns' Economic Development offices should prioritize the identification of additional funding sources or programs to support and promote private improvement actions, attract small businesses that can serve the local communities, and expand economic development opportunities reflective of the community's vision for the corridor.



Figure 6.1: Existing parcels/buildings that face the boulevard.

ENERGIZING THE BOULEVARD

The Parkview and Willow Ridge neighborhoods are stable communities with a strong housing stock and open space amenities. In stark contrast, the boulevard, which could be a central core and prime gathering space, has many outdated, underutilized, and vacant properties. The community vision for this area is to have a vibrant mix of uses and destinations in walking or biking distance to homes.

The Holiday Inn Express (top left) is an example of new investment; a protracted rezoning process included dissent from neighbors about each iteration of the building and site design and yet few are satisfied by the ultimate outcome. Many other parcels along the

corridor sit vacant and are ready for new investment or development. This chapter describes steps the Towns and community can take to shape infill development that better meets community expectations and market realities.

2. ADOPT MIXED-USE ORDINANCES ALONG NIAGARA FALLS BOULEVARD

Updating the Towns’ zoning regulations is a great opportunity to support investment. Existing setbacks, lot coverage, separation of uses, and minimum parking requirements promote more of the same auto-oriented style of development that lines the corridor today, and makes the use of the land inefficient. The planning team’s analysis found that in many cases the net developable footprint under current regulations was less than the existing development footprint. This suggests that even existing development may not be permitted under current zoning classifications, and new development is difficult.

With the application of mixed-use zoning, places often find great benefit from right-sized parking and building placement that addresses the street and creates a cohesive street space. Both Amherst and Tonawanda have been hard at work to advance planning efforts and be forward thinking with regards to zoning reform.

The Town of Amherst’s recently adopted Mixed-Use Districts enables the type of pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use environment envisioned by this plan. The Town should map the floating Mixed-Use Districts to facilitate property owners use of the standards (see further detail, at right).

In the Town of Tonawanda, the recent development of the Holiday Inn Express revealed shortfalls in the existing zoning, with deep setbacks and parking in the front, and the building pushed to the middle of the lot (closer to neighboring homes). The Town is in the process of updating its zoning ordinance; a recent draft describes a Mixed Use General Commercial zone for the boulevard. This plan (including the sample site studies later in this section) provide an opportunity to study and refine the details of the proposed setbacks, building form and parking requirements of that zone to ensure the new standards are in alignment with the community vision as the Town moves forward to adoption. Using the development forms illustrated and community feedback in this plan as a guide, the Towns should work together to align their zoning standards for building form (height, setbacks, appearance) and parking (location, access, and minimum requirements) to produce a more cohesive built environment along the boulevard.

APPLYING THE MIXED-USE DISTRICTS

In 2019, the Town of Amherst adopted the Mixed-Use Districts in Chapter 203 of the zoning code, using a form-based zoning approach to shape redevelopment of commercial and mixed-use centers throughout the Town.

The code includes “Retrofit Districts”, intended for parcels of land that are designated commercial and mixed-use activity centers along major corridors in the Town’s 2019 Comprehensive Plan. The intent of the code is to improve safety and experience for all users. The Retrofit Districts have standards that shape the form (placement, massing, and appearance) of new buildings, and require a new network of walkable, pedestrian-oriented streets to connect the community to newly-developed or redeveloped sites.



Figure 6.2: Amherst’s Mixed Use Districts

Corridor Districts

Chapter 203 includes a range of Corridor Retrofit Districts: Shallow Corridor 3 (SC-3), intended for parcels less than 200' deep and allowing buildings 1 to 3 stories in height; and Deep Corridor districts, intended for parcels 200' deep or greater. Deep Corridor 3 (DC-3) allows buildings up to 3 stories in height, and Deep Corridor 5 (DC-5) allows buildings up to 5 stories in height. The standards for these districts allow and/or require many of the elements illustrated in this plan, including: street-oriented buildings with transparent façades (doors and windows facing the street); reduced curb cuts; parking setback from streets and placed behind buildings; reduced minimum parking requirements; new street connections creating walkable block sizes; and landscaped transition areas adjacent to residential districts. A mix of these districts could be appropriate along the corridor; when mapping to specific parcels, the Town should consider proximity to neighboring uses, the existing and planned future zoning across the street (including in Tonawanda), and where landmark building sites – and greater height – are most appropriate.

Center Districts

Chapter 203 also includes Center Retrofit Districts, which shape new walkable mixed-use places. The Center districts are appropriate for larger sites, requiring a network of new streets and minimum percentage of usable open space. Maximum block sizes and street design standards that specify the dimensions of pedestrian amenities and bike facilities ensure streets are highly walkable and bikable. Similar to the Corridor districts, the Center districts proactively require street-oriented buildings with parking to the rear. The Home Depot / Asian Food Market site described later in this section is an example of site that could be mapped as a Center 5 District, to guide the type of redevelopment shown in plan sketches.

Process for Implementation

The Retrofit Districts are currently not mapped as part of the overall Town zoning map, but are eligible to be used in the plan study area along Niagara Falls Boulevard. Property owners would need to request a rezoning to use the standards in place of the existing General Business and Motor Service District commercial zoning currently designated along the boulevard. This process could take

considerable time and expense, and deter use of these new districts. There are a few options that the Town could pursue to map the districts in the study area, to make it easier for property owners to use the District classifications and more effectively implement the vision of this plan.

A first option, the Town could initiate rezoning of parcels to one of the Retrofit Districts to replace the existing zone. As part of the Boulevard Central District Plan (located south of I-290) the Town has started this process. This approach yields the greatest predictability of what future redevelopment of the area will look like.

A second option, the Mixed-Use Districts could be adopted as a parallel code (in addition to the existing zoning). In this approach, the existing zoning would remain in effect, and the Town would map and allow use of the Retrofit Districts on specific parcels as part of a coordinated action. Property owners would then have the choice to redevelop under the existing conventional zoning or the new Mixed-Use District assigned to their parcel. This approach is often faster to implement, as the Town is simply adding more options for property owners rather than changing the zoning. Future development projects must abide by one set of regulations or the other (picking/choosing from the standards of the two codes should not be permitted). This approach works best if there are strong incentives in place for property owners to choose the new code (such as, reduced minimum parking requirements or greater development potential). If property owners along the corridor redevelop under both codes simultaneously, the predictability and cohesiveness of future development is greatly diminished. Codes that begin in a parallel implementation can become mandatory over time (replacing the underlying zoning) as property owners and the community become more comfortable and familiar with the new standards. Examples of parallel and mandatory form-based codes can be found at www.formbasedcodes.org/codes.

3. IDENTIFY MARKET OPPORTUNITIES AND ATTRACT INVESTORS

Recognizing the need to refresh and restore economic prosperity along the aging corridor, market research and data were analyzed to test assumptions and realities of market demand and need. Several opportunities exist to reshape and revitalize the area.

Make Better Use of Underutilized Land

An integral opportunity to support redevelopment is the robust supply of underutilized land. Most of the existing building stock is dated and becoming obsolete. For lease or sale signs are common and where buildings once stood, lots remain vacant and undisturbed. The corridor is filled with opportunity and ready for things to happen, if regulations, rules, and conditions can be revised to reflect the type of development desired.

Based on 2022 Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data provided by the Towns, only 15% of property in the study area is covered by buildings, mostly with single stories. Analysis suggests that a 30% building coverage would still allow for parking and 3 stories of development. In 51% of the area, the land is of more value than any structure (if any) on it. While this is an unfortunate circumstance for the residents, tax collectors and owners, it is an opportunity for developers. There is a ready supply of land available and feasible for development.

Target and Promote a Mix of Uses, Including a Wide Variety of Housing Types

As opportunities are identified it is important to understand what may be currently limiting development. The market analysis looked at services within a 5 and 10 minute drive time to assess market opportunity. The data shows that the businesses and destinations along the corridor attract retail sales from farther away, and that the area and local population are well served in most categories, with regional retail drawn to facilities south of the freeway. This makes it difficult to justify much in the way of new retail services.

Anticipated rent is another constraint to new development. Existing (lower) rents for aging commercial space on the corridor do not support new construction. The boulevard has not demonstrated a strong demand for commercial uses that will support new construction, so speculative (“build-to-suit” for a specific tenant or owner/occupier) development is not taking place.

In the future, new commercial services should not be expected to fill the entire corridor, but rather specific areas or intersections can be targeted for a cluster of new retail experiences. To stimulate demand, small amounts of quality retail (including restaurants) should be concentrated at neighborhood nodes or centers.

Understanding that a changing market is not solely dependent on retail, new housing types should be promoted and encouraged as a key component in a successful mix of uses along the boulevard and in the neighborhoods.

Erie County’s population is growing at a healthy rate of 0.7% annually. The study area benefits from existing desirable neighborhoods and proximity to the University at Buffalo, generating demand for housing for both employees and students. When this data is applied to the study area, the possibility exists for the corridor to capture demand for 30 to 50 new residential units a year. While this is not a major increase in housing need, it is enough for any of the projects or sample sites described to find a sufficient market to leverage feasibility.

Capitalize on Amenities

New development should capitalize on existing amenities, and in this case, both sides of Ellicott Creek. Ellicott Creek Park and connecting trails are a vital asset; data (including a recent National Association of Realtors survey) shows that people are willing to pay more, and live in smaller spaces or lots, if they live close to a park. These amenities can be leveraged to achieve rents that support new development.

There is space and opportunity along Ellicott Creek to take advantage of the frontage along the waterway, expanding housing opportunities and civic connections to the water. The Towns of Amherst and Tonawanda should lean into access to the waterfront and turn this incredible amenity into one that supports businesses and encourages economic revitalization. Until momentum builds and the character of the corridor shifts, infill development on larger lots can create their own special places with walkable urban design and new public spaces to attract residents and retail services.

RETAIL GAP

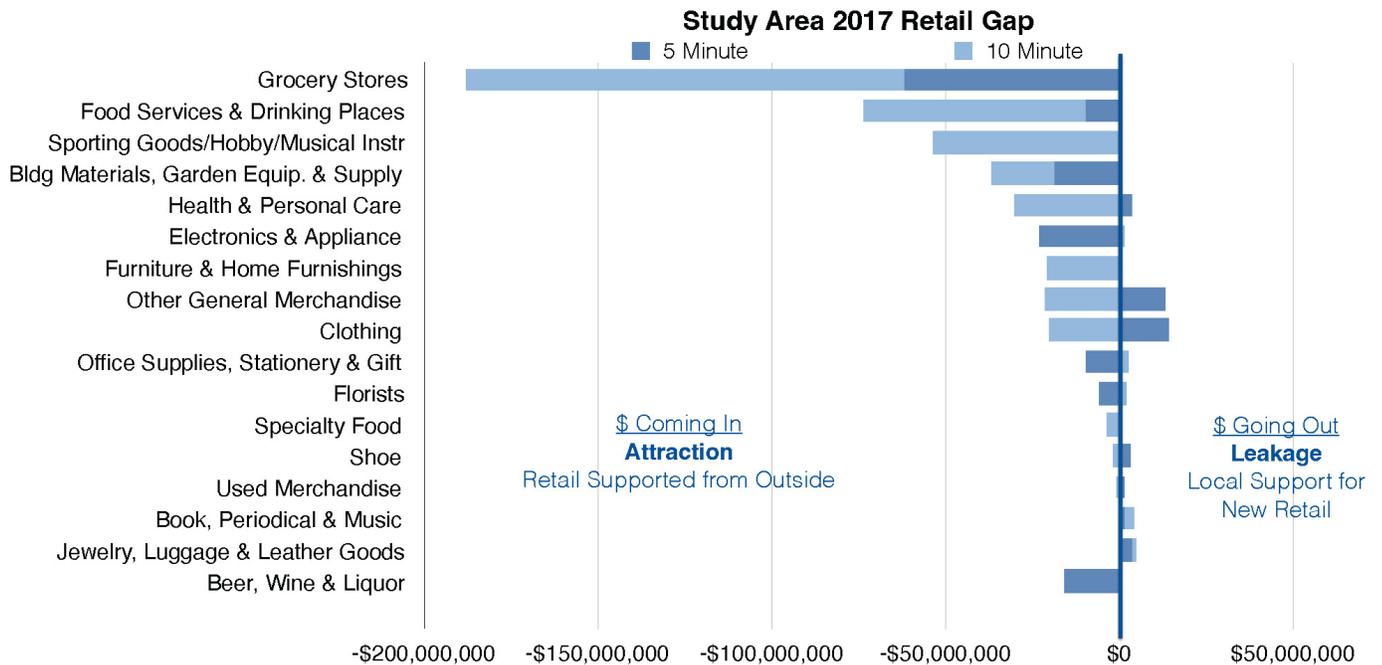


Figure 6.3: A “Retail Gap” analysis compares the household purchasing and retail sales in an area, providing a supply/demand analysis. Within the area, the number of households and their income help estimate spending power by retail category to determine local demand. Local supply is estimated in sales at retailers by category. The difference between the two numbers is “retail gap” (Spending minus Sales). So if the supply exactly meets the local demand, the retail gap would be zero. If the retail stores actually sell more than the local area can support (left side / negative numbers on the chart) the area is “attracting” spending from outside the area. If the opposite is true, and the local population demand more services than are offered in the area (right side / positive numbers on the chart) there is “leakage” where the residents leave the area to purchase goods elsewhere. When there is a strong household population with unmet demand, there is the opportunity to capture that spending locally with new retail services located more conveniently than wherever they would otherwise need to travel.

The data suggests that in most categories, the area and local population are well-served, with businesses along the corridor attracting sales from within the study area and farther away. Retail targeted to unique experiences not found today (such as shops clustered in walkable neighborhood centers) could fill an unmet need.

Attract Investors

Redevelopment and re-investment in properties along the corridor should reflect the vision of the community and proudly embody local values. By setting the rules in place to allow right-sized development and adopting the plan which outlines the vision for the area, the Towns can attract investors that want to be partners in making the place better.

Economic development activities should promote the vision described in this plan, and cultivate developers who believe in this vision and love this area and the Towns. Development can be exploitive when conducted by outsiders; or it can be reflective of local values. No one will invest in your town like someone who is doing it for their own family and community.



MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

New housing in the study area should not be limited to detached single-family homes or large apartment complexes. The neighborhood vision supports a range of “Missing Middle” types. The term Missing Middle was conceived by Daniel Parolek of Opticos Design in 2010 to define a range of housing types compatible in scale with single-family homes that help meet the growing demand for walkable living and that are often lacking in today’s neighborhoods. Missing Middle housing increases affordability while also considering neighborhood design and infrastructure needs. There are existing duplexes in the study area that fit comfortably with single family homes; by further increasing housing diversity, the neighborhood can accommodate households with a greater range of ages, incomes, and needs.

The following characteristics excerpted from missingmiddlehousing.com, explain the appeal:

- **Small-Footprint Buildings:** Small- to medium-sized footprints, similar to single-family homes, allows a range of Missing Middle types to be blended into a neighborhood.
- **Lower Perceived Density:** Due to the small footprint and the fact that they are usually mixed within the neighborhood, the perceived density of these building types is usually quite low.
- **Walkable Context:** Buyers and renters of these housing types are often trading square footage for proximity to services and amenities.
- **Marketable:** Because of the increasing demand from baby boomers and millennials, and shifting household demographics, the market is demanding more vibrant, sustainable, walkable places to live. Missing Middle housing types respond directly to this demand.

FIGURE 6.4: CREEKSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER

Currently, large parking lots and auto-oriented street intersections take up most of this site at the entrance to the Ellicott Creek dog park. This area could become a place that people want to spend more time in, a destination for the neighborhood rather than nondescript “in-between” space. Key ideas include:

- 1 Old Niagara Falls Boulevard is realigned to follow the water, creating a regularly-shaped parcel.
- 2 The entrance to the Bark Park is formalized.
- 3 A new public green space can be used for community gatherings.
- 4 On-street parking on Old Niagara Falls Boulevard and Creekside Drive (including angled parking near the entrance) provides Bark Park parking.
- 5 Mixed-use buildings front the new public space; some businesses could be oriented to dog-friendly uses.
- 6 A variety of housing types, including attached townhouse and apartments over shops are possible; parking for residents is to the rear of buildings.



SAMPLE SITES

To demonstrate possibilities for infill development and redevelopment with implementation of the “refresh” action step, three sites of varying size and conditions were analyzed to showcase “what if” scenarios. The urban design approaches for these sample study sites could be applied to parcels throughout the corridor.

Reconfigure Old Niagara Falls Boulevard, Creating a Creekside Neighborhood Center

By capitalizing on waterfront opportunities and trail connections, an area that could become a centerpiece of neighborhood activity is the land adjacent to the Ellicott Island Bark Park. Fondly called “Puppy Island” by residents, the location is west of Niagara Falls Boulevard and is where the two towns converge. Old Niagara Falls Boulevard bisects the land forming an elongated “v” shape and a surface parking lot provides parking and access to the Bark Park and trail head. Access to Puppy Island is along a pedestrian bridge that spans the creek.

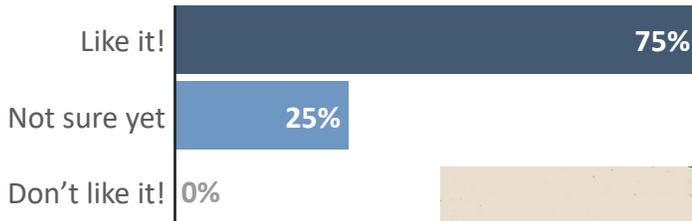


Figure 6.5: Existing Conditions, Old Niagara Falls Boulevard at Creekside Drive, and the parking lot and entrance to the Bark Park.

CREATE A CREEKSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER

What do you think of this idea for reconfiguring parking lots into a neighborhood center?

(responses at charrette presentation)



BIG IDEAS

Neighborhood Public Space: A new green can formalize the entrance to the Bark Park and provide a place for gathering; angled on-street parking serves the park.

Reroute Old Niagara Falls Boulevard: The street is re-aligned in this area to follow the creek and create a regular-shaped development parcel.

Improved Frontages: The fronts of buildings, rather than rear loading docks, face the creek and public spaces.

A Mix of Uses: New development can include shops/businesses as well as residences.

ECONOMIC INSIGHT

The creek is a tremendous natural amenity that can be leveraged to attract new mixed-use development, including residences with water views.

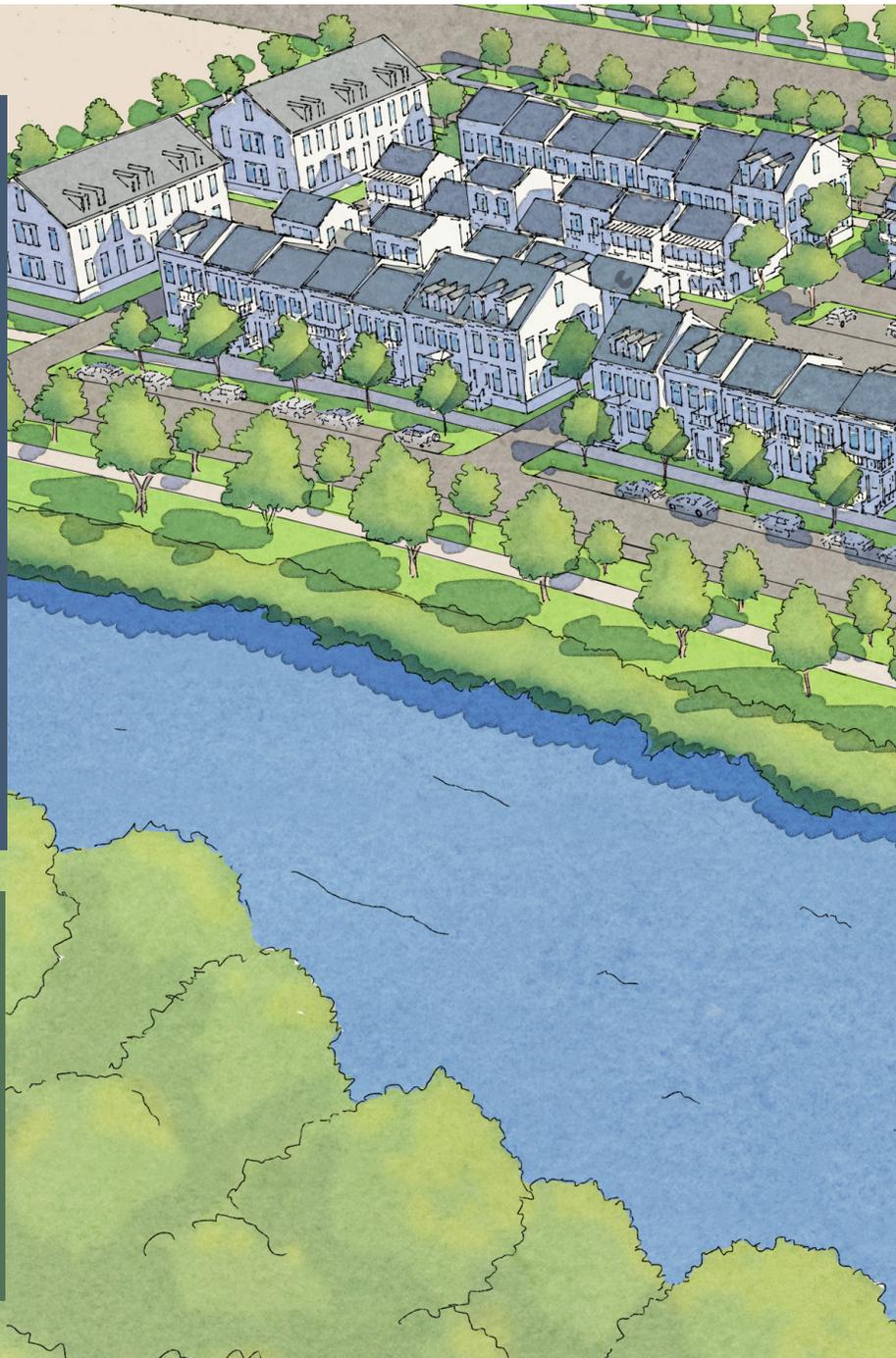


Figure 6.6, right: Existing Conditions

Figure 6.7, below: At Creekside and Old Niagara Falls Boulevard, the entrance to the Bark Park is reconfigured to create a neighborhood gathering space and expanded opportunities to live close to the park. The street network is optimized to create a great public space and to reclaim lost land that has resulted in narrow parcels along the roadways. Old Niagara Falls Boulevard is realigned to create a notable address along the creek and an enhanced entrance to Ellicott Creek Park.



6: Refresh

The Creekside Neighborhood Center location, illustrated in Figure 6.4, is a prime example of how all three plan actions can come together to create a valuable and active mixed-use, civic space. The street network can be optimized to take advantage of improved connections and safer crossings to the park. By reconfiguring the street placement, the entrance to the Bark Park can feel more like arriving in a great public space and less like just another forgettable asphalt parking lot. Parking availability would remain the same, all within a safe and comfortable walking distance to Puppy Island.

Designated on-street parking along a realigned Old Niagara Falls Boulevard and Creekside Drive would continue to provide easy access to the park while creating an in-town experience that compliments the park experience at Puppy Island. In time, this already popular location can be organized more efficiently and form a complete space where there is actually the ability to increase parking supply, but organized in a more village-oriented way as opposed to a surface parking lot.

Lost space at the intersection of Creekside Drive and Old Niagara Falls Boulevard would be reclaimed and optimized with the new street configuration, allowing opportunities for infill development or redevelopment of parcels. Capitalizing on the park and creek as a great address, value is added in this new creekside village space that could include housing overlooking the park, additional green space, parking for residents and visitors, and new business potential (for example, a dog-friendly coffee shop or brew pub).

A NEW PARADIGM

Along the Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor there is a similar land development pattern characterized by large parking lots, sparse trees, buildings far from the street, few people and many cars. This common pattern blurs together as one travels the corridor, and it can be difficult to know where you are without a map.

This can present a challenge to a community that is seeking to differentiate itself and attract reinvestment. It's inherent in human nature to identify with a place, a home, a community; when sense of place is lost, community cohesion suffers.

Reduce Neighborhood Impact by Building Closer to the Street

At the Tucket Inn Motel site (2436 Niagara Falls Boulevard, adjacent to the recently built hotel) on the Tonawanda side of the boulevard, the boarded-up property is an example of a site ripe for redevelopment. The next generation of infill development should demonstrate what is possible when mixed-use regulations, focused on form rather than just outdated zoning practices, are applied. The scenario illustrated for the Tucket Inn site shows a multi-story, mixed-use building placed close to the boulevard. Envisioned with ground floor storefront space with commercial or loft housing above, the building would become a proud address that fronts the boulevard and faces a new street space with wide sidewalks and street trees. Because the building would be placed closer to the street, the site configuration would accommodate adequate parking behind the building yet would still leave ample space for a substantial green buffer between the Parkview neighborhood and the corridor.

While properties may seem shallow on the Tonawanda side of the boulevard, they average 200 feet deep. With new zoning applied, the parcels can be optimized to front the boulevard with street-oriented architecture and still include a green buffer, parking, and elements to screen parking (like garden walls, hedges, or small amounts of architecture) to properly transition to established neighborhoods. Development does not need to be large but should provide services to the neighborhood and address the corridor correctly.

In order to create a destination and a place where people feel comfortable spending time, the form of development needs to change. Placing new buildings close to wider sidewalks with parking lots to the rear of the building, and taking on the public improvements described in previous chapters (adding street trees, widening sidewalks, reducing the travel lane widths, connecting trails) will dramatically change the relationship between the community and the Boulevard.

The sample site studies demonstrate how new development, in a mixed-use and street-oriented format, can shape memorable public spaces and contribute to the missing sense of place.

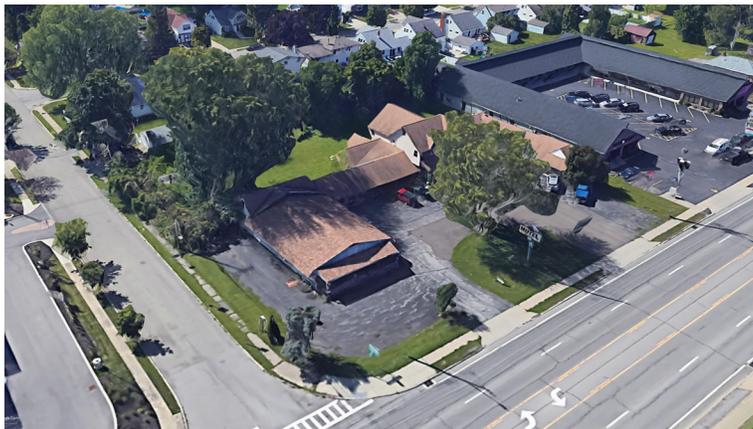


Figure 6.8, top: On the Tonawanda side of the boulevard the lot sizes are relatively narrow and are just over 200 feet deep. With minimal setbacks, buildings could be placed at the front of the lot with parking located in the rear. By placing new buildings closer to the boulevard, it would allow more options to create a buffer between development along the boulevard and housing in the Parkview neighborhood.

Figure 6.9, below: Existing Conditions, Tucket Inn site.

BIG IDEAS

Small/Zero Setbacks: With a change in regulations (and a more pedestrian-friendly street design), buildings could be pulled forward on lots allowing for larger buffers in the back.

Mixed-use Development: New zoning should allow for residential and live/work buildings on the boulevard.

Reduced Parking Requirements: Eliminating or reducing the minimum parking requirement makes infill development more feasible.

ECONOMIC INSIGHT

Lining the corridor with new commercial uses is unlikely. This proposal suggests a small amount of retail that could complement the Holiday Inn next door, and the Creekside node at the end of the block. Residential units would be feasible on upper floors.

Activate Underutilized Parking: Rethinking the Use of Land at the Home Depot / Asian Food Market

On the southern end of the boulevard, north of I-290 and south of Dexter Terrace, is a signalized intersection that marks the entrance to the Home Depot and Asian Food Market (located in the old Walmart building). Community members and Town staff identified this site as an opportunity for future improvements. The big box retail spaces are located on a large parcel of land consumed by an expansive parking lot. As big box retailing continues to change, as online shopping, home delivery, and order fulfillment needs increase, the vast parking supply could become available for other things. A neighborhood center in a village-like setting can occupy this lost space while not disturbing but rather better connecting and serving the Willow Ridge neighborhood.

Approximately 30 acres, the site is vastly underutilized. It is adjacent to the Willow Ridge neighborhood, within close walking and biking distance of apartments popular with University at Buffalo students. Yet, a fence and landscape berm separate the site from its neighbors. Additionally, given the Town and community's desire to implement the Lehigh Valley Trail in the adjacent utility easement, there is an opportunity to transform this large swath of underutilized real estate into a special place capitalizing on connections with the neighborhood and the regional trail.

Over time, the buildings can be re-used and parking can be re-purposed. In the near term (in the next 1 to 5 years) the focus should be on providing a pedestrian connection to the neighborhood and activating a public gathering space in a portion of the existing parking lots where there could be outdoor dining, markets, and food trucks. A trail could allow residents to visit the market without getting in their car and on the boulevard. By activating the space, there is a reason to come together in a social space, not just in an in-and-out retail consumer space. Inexpensive elements like picnic tables, lanterns, string lights, and mobile food trucks can quickly illustrate the viability and community interest in making an informal pop-up plaza in the parking lot.



Figure 6.10, above: The Home Depot / Asian Food Market site, Existing Conditions

In the longer term, as big box shopping trends continue to evolve, land currently used for Home Depot parking could one day be home to more housing opportunities. This location, with access to Niagara Falls Boulevard and improved connections to the Willow Ridge neighborhood and trail network, would be the perfect choice for filling in missing middle housing. By providing a range of housing sizes and types, like rowhouses, duplexes, and small apartment buildings, the area can provide a broader range of housing choice currently absent in the established neighborhoods.

The long-term build-out of the site could include a network of streets reminiscent of the tree-lined streets of the Buffalo region, vibrant public spaces, and neighborhood greens reflective of the proud character of Amherst and Tonawanda. The Mixed-Use Districts in the zoning code could be used to shape new development, prescribing the details for street-oriented buildings and walkable streets (see page 57). The possibilities for redevelopment are vast and the timeframe is long, but by planning now for the future place that you want, you can be ready to fill in and reclaim this vital space.



FIGURE 6.11:
HOME DEPOT / ASIAN MARKET SITE

Potential reuse and development of the Home Depot / Asian Market site could happen over a long-term horizon, in phases.

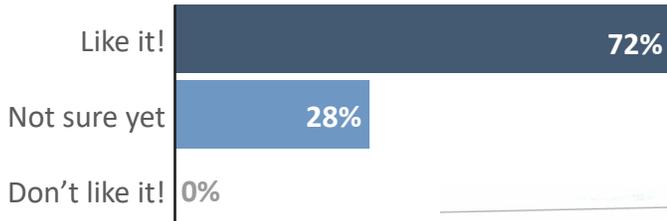
The first phase could include a pedestrian connection, façade renovations, and an outdoor market with food trucks, vendor stalls, and other light imprint and low cost incubator opportunities (see next page). The above illustrative plan shows an interim phase, where a portion of the parking area is being used for new development, while the remainder (near the boulevard) remains as surface parking. Key ideas include:

- 1 A pedestrian connection between the market and the neighborhood should be one of the first improvements on the site.
- 2 A pedestrian connection to the future Lehigh Valley Trail in the adjacent utility easement should be included.
- 3 Future development could include a mix of uses and a range of housing types, including attached townhomes or apartments over shops. A priority is placed on walkable form, with buildings defining streets and public spaces, to establish a unique sense of place.
- 4 Public green spaces for community gatherings should be included as part of the design of the site. (Public spaces such as these are required under the Mixed Use Districts code, which can be used to shape future development).
- 5 A full street connection (vehicular) could be included with future reuse of the site; this should be planned with input from the Willow Ridge neighborhood.
- 6 Existing parking lot drive aisles can be formalized into street connections with sidewalks and street trees; additional connectivity should be explored, such as a connection to Joe McCarthy Drive to the north.

ACTIVATE UNDERUTILIZED PARKING

What do you think of this idea for utilizing the parking lot at Asian Food Market / Home Depot area for additional uses?

(responses at charrette presentation)



BIG IDEAS

Neighborhood Public Space: A portion of the Asian Food Market parking lot is used as a public plaza, with seating areas / gathering space defined by food trucks and temporary vendors.

Walkable / Bikeable Access: Providing pedestrian and bike access to the Willow Ridge neighborhood via a new trail connection will draw more people to the plaza.

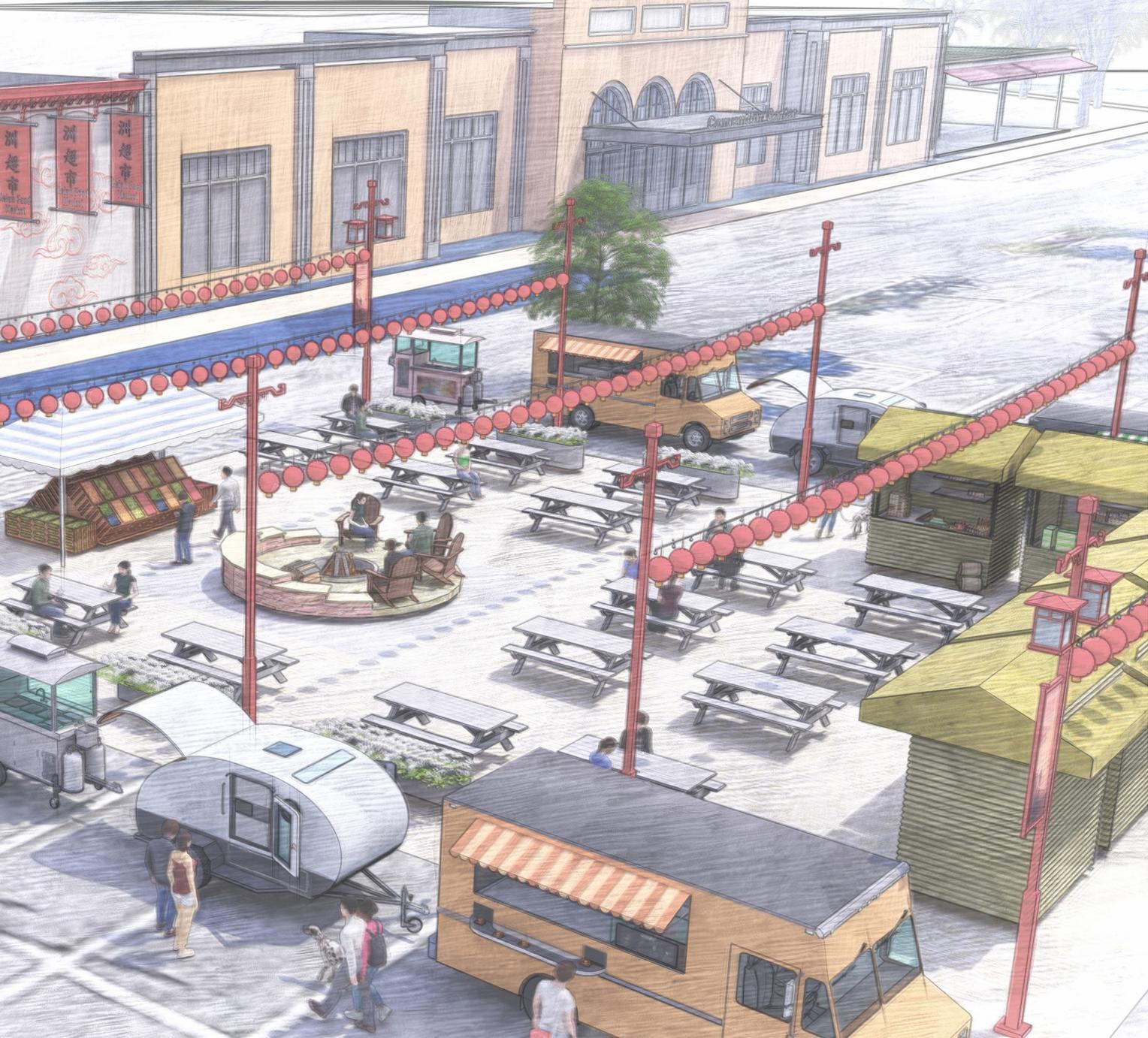
Building Reuse: More of the former Walmart can be used for new businesses and an outdoor market.

ECONOMIC INSIGHT

The pop-up plaza could be an incubator for local small businesses, providing inexpensive space with high visibility.



Figure 6.12, below: The Asian Food Market could expand and include food trucks and a public gathering space in the existing parking lot. This would be an early phase of any potential future reuse of the site, as it has a relatively low cost and little impact on the existing parking lot configuration. The food trucks could be removeable while there may also be food stalls or vendor space that could be more permanent.



POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE OVER TIME



Figure 6.13: Initial Steps

Illustrations on these pages show one way future improvements and development could be phased at the Home Depot / Asian Food Market site. Initial steps include creating pedestrian / bike connections to the surrounding neighborhood and trails. An outdoor market and destination for people is established in the parking lot. The current Asian Food Market building could be renovated to have more businesses in vacant space.



Figure 6.14: Incremental Development

Townhomes could be added closest to the Willow Ridge neighborhood, oriented to face a new tree-lined boulevard and public green space.



Figure 6.15: A Neighborhood Center

Over time, larger buildings may be added, including new businesses and a variety of housing options. Buildings are oriented to face new streets or public spaces, making it easy to walk or bike; a neighborhood center is formed. The potential mix of uses for this site is vast; suggestions during the charrette include new residences, neighborhood-serving businesses, and a conference center / event hall. A portion of the site closest to Niagara Falls Boulevard remains as surface parking.



Figure 6.16: A Mixed-use Village

In the long-term future, the existing large box buildings could be redeveloped, or may no longer require large surface parking areas (for example, if there was a change from retail to warehousing uses). In this scenario, more of the site could become an extension of the neighborhood.

POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS

G Kellogg & Co conducted a Potential Development Analysis based on Town of Amherst and Erie County GIS and Tax Assessor data.

Footprints and Lot Coverage

In examining building footprints and lot coverage, only 15% of lot area is covered by buildings. This area does not appear to be highly landscaped and most of that net (85%) is parking. That would be a parking ratio of about 12 spaces per thousand square feet of use at single story construction. Only 13% of the area has a lot coverage over 25%, and 7% of land is in lots that have no building footprint at all. That totals 18 acres of vacant lots, not including vacant buildings. 80% of the land in the area has lot coverage of less than 25%. For comparison, earlier analysis found it feasible to sufficiently build a 3 story building with 32% lot coverage, 41% parking and 27% landscaping. The footprints and lot coverage suggest the land in the study area is largely underutilized.

Building to Land Value

Next, G Kellogg & Co examined Building to Land Value. This analysis compares the assessed value of property to the assessed value of the land. A high ratio means the building is worth more; a value below 1 means the land is worth more than the building and a value of 0 means the lot is vacant or the building is of no value. 51% of the study area has a building to land ratio of less than 1; the land is assessed more than the structure. Currently, 8% of land is valued as vacant. Building to land value roughly correlates to lot coverage, as more building footprint usually means more building value. Increased building to land values also correlate with higher collected taxes per acre for the Towns. Under-developed land is not only an eyesore to the community and a missed opportunity for the owner, it is also lost tax revenue to the Town.

The 40% of land with building values that exceed land values are estimated to pay 60% of taxes in the study area.

Exclusion of Properties

In conducting the next phase of analysis, several properties were excluded. These properties were either recently developed, under construction or deemed unlikely to significantly change. The Wegmans property was excluded because of the extent to which it skews analysis. At almost 18% of the entire study area, this one

site has a net lot area (lot less footprint) of 43 developable acres. Since this site is deemed unlikely to redevelop in a substantial way, it was removed from analysis.

Potential Development Analysis

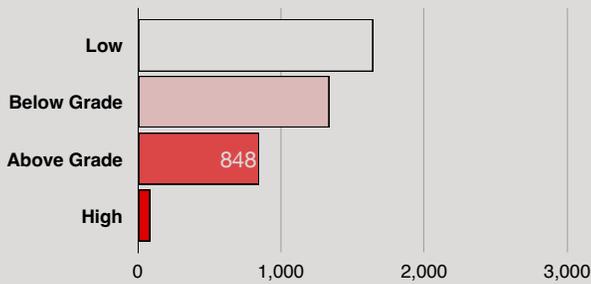
The analysis simulated development on all parcels under existing zoning and under the Mixed-Use Districts Deep Corridor (DC-3/DC-5) zoning to understand the feasibility and impact of development. The analysis assumed development of 1 floor of commercial / retail with two floors of small apartments above; most similar to the “Tucket Inn” site pro forma analysis and the “Creekside Neighborhood Center” proposed development. This kept construction at a minimum cost and insured higher parking ratios per square foot with smaller units. Variables included parking ratios, setbacks, construction costs and the assessed full market value of properties.

Under existing zoning, 45% of land produces a “low” return and another 32% produces a “below grade” return, indicating that 77% of land is infeasible for redevelopment under current zoning. Under the existing General Business / Commercial (GB/C) zoning 21% is projected to be “above grade” while only 2% is “highly” developable. Interestingly, the net developable footprint in many cases was actually lower than the existing footprint. That means even the existing buildings might not be permitted under the current code, and new development may be impossible in some cases. Under the rules of the Deep Corridor districts, 46% of land is projected “above grade” for investment and 7% is “high”. Using these updated rules shifts 30% of land from below investment grade to potentially feasible development. This could unlock 63 acres of land with 1.5 million square feet of development in the study area.

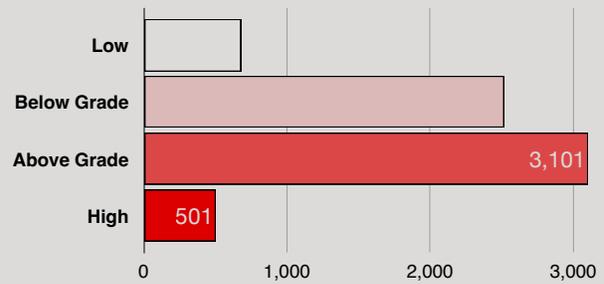
Projected Impacts

Under the existing by-right zoning, 85 units and 84,000 square feet of development should be highly feasible; an additional 840 units and 280,000 square feet should be possible. Under Deep Corridor zoning an additional (net) 400 units and 360,000 square feet of development should be highly feasible and a net 2,200 units and 1.2 million square feet should be possible. The impact of tax revenue would be \$480,000 annually for the highly feasible properties up to \$2.4 million for properties above investment grade. The current, under-utilized Study Area is estimated to produce \$4,000 per acre in tax revenues.

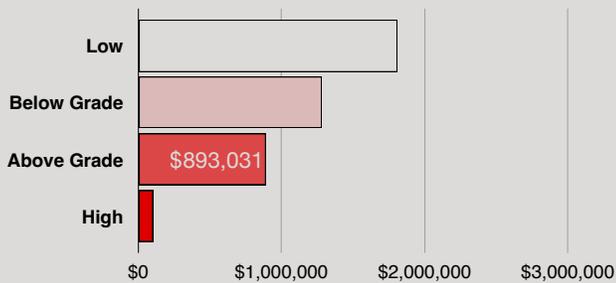
GB/C New Residential Units



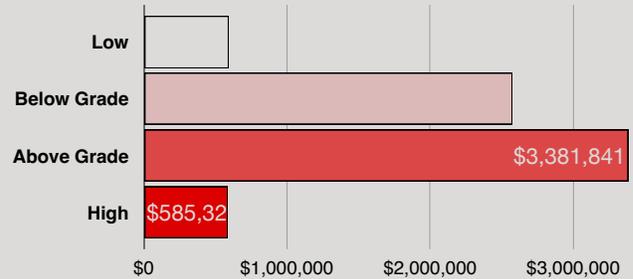
Deep Corridor New Residential Units



GB/C Net New Town Tax Revenue



Deep Corridor Net New Town Tax Revenue



Development under existing zoning is projected to produce \$24,000 per acre. Development under the proposed scenario is projected to produce \$38,000 per acre, a 58% increase from existing zoning.

Conclusions

Based on analysis of building footprints, lot coverage and building to land values, land in the Study Area is under-utilized. Under-utilized land both under-performs for owners and is disadvantageous for tax revenues. Implementing Deep Corridor zoning and the proposed development scenario could “unlock” significant value for owners by allowing more efficient use of land, making 30% of property more feasible to develop. The 63 acres of under-performing land feasible for development would support up to 1.5 million square feet of development. Even a modest amount of potential development would generate net new taxes and increase the tax collected per acre. Just the most highly feasible parcels would generate a net \$480,000 in Town revenues. Proposed development is modeled to generate 58% more revenue per acre than development under existing regulations and 9 times the existing, under-utilized property development.



Figure 6.17, above: The Potential Development analysis assumed one floor of commercial/retail with two floors of apartments above, similar to what was illustrated for the sample sites.

7. IMPLEMENTATION

The Implementation matrix describes public improvements and recommended Town policies and programs that can implement the Willow Ridge-Parkview Action Plan. These recommendations span both the Town of Amherst and Town of Tonawanda, covering both sides of Niagara Falls Boulevard and surrounding neighborhoods.

Actions are organized by report section: Make it Safe; Connect; and Refresh. The anticipated timeline is defined as Immediate (years 1 to 2); Mid-Term (years 3 to 5), and Long-Term (6+ years). However, many factors will influence implementation, including cost, available funding, and ease of implementation. The Towns should proceed simultaneously with large-scale improvements (that are more complicated and costly; but also will have greater impact) as well as “low-hanging fruit” that are easier to achieve. The plan will need to be flexible to adjust to changing conditions and new opportunities; some mid-term actions may become feasible in the near-term, and similarly some near-term actions may need more time than anticipated.

Following plan adoption, representatives from both Towns should meet on a yearly basis to review progress, and identify goals and actions to be pursued in the next year. Community feedback on the Action Steps, which can help to inform implementation decisions, is summarized starting on page 80.



ACROSS THE BOULEVARD WILLOW RIDGE-PARKVIEW ACTION PLAN

MAY 18, 2023



Action #	Description	Timeframe			Responsible Party / Partners	Potential Funding Source	Page #
		Immediate	Mid-term	Long-term			
Make it Safe							
S-1	Adopt a Joint Resolution: Safety is the Highest Priority for the Boulevard						22
S-1.1	Draft and adopt a joint resolution between the two towns to solidify priority on safety over speed, serving to inform all actions at local, county, and state levels.	X			Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda	Town Budget	
S-2	Improve Signal Spacing: Add Signals at Additional Intersections						24
S-2.1	Coordinate with NYSDOT on intersection signal recommendations for Forbes Avenue, Thistle Avenue, Faragut Avenue, and Dexter Terrace; conduct traffic signal warrants evaluation for new signal types (HAWK or full vehicular signal); ensure pedestrian demand warrants for HAWK signals include additional induced pedestrian demand from installing the new crossing; implement new signals according to study results.	X	X		Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, NYSDOT	State grants, Town Budget	
S-2.2	Continue implementation of Pedestrian Safety Action Plan (PSAP) recommendations by partnering with NYSDOT to develop an access management policy for the corridor (see also step S-5); implementing leading pedestrian intervals at all signal-controlled intersections; and constructing a new signal near the Classics V Banquet facility at the Niagara Falls Boulevard / Forbes Avenue intersection (see also step S-2.1).	X			Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, NYSDOT	State funding	
S-2.3	Submit a letter of interest to Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) Smart Corridor for Niagara Falls Boulevard to be considered for Smartly Enhanced Multimodal Arterial (SEMA), Smart Corridor pilot program; update signal timing with new technology.	X	X		Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, GBNRTC	Town Budget, grants	
S-3	Rethink Speed Management: Balance Design Speed with Posted Speed						26
S-3.1	Re-design Niagara Falls Boulevard to lower the design speed to increase safety (narrow travel lanes, add street trees) and reflect posted speed of 40mph. (See also step S-4)		X	X	Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, NYSDOT	State grants, Town Budget	
S-3.2	Partner with NYSDOT to synchronize and update signals along Niagara Falls Boulevard to new technology (such as Miovision) to better regulate and monitor traffic flow and safety.	X	X		Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, NYSDOT	State grants, Town Budget	

7: Implementation

Action #	Description	Timeframe			Responsible Party / Partners	Potential Funding Source	Page #
		Immediate	Mid-term	Long-term			
S-4	Reconfigure Niagara Falls Boulevard into a Multi-Modal Corridor						27
S-4.1	Test proposed vehicle lane design changes on Niagara Falls Boulevard with paint/restriping as part of NYSDOT scheduled milling and resurfacing maintenance (projected to occur in 2025).	X			Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, NYSDOT	State grants, Town Budget	
S-4.2	Pursue design and engineering plans/studies for the reconstruction of Niagara Falls Boulevard according to Plan recommendations (right-size vehicle lanes, add multi-use trail, street trees, crosswalks, transit shelters).	X	X		Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, NYSDOT, NFTA, GBNRTC	State grants, Town Budget	
S-4.3	Submit multi-modal corridor improvements for Niagara Falls Boulevard to GBNRTC as a candidate project to be considered for Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) funding to be considered for future phases of TIP funding, or candidacy as a Smart and Enhanced Multimodal Corridors (SEMA).	X	X		Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda	State grant	
S-4.4	Implement Niagara Falls Boulevard street design improvements.		X	X	Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, NYSDOT, NFTA, GBNRTC	Federal and State grants, Town Budget	
S-4.5	Utilize best practices in snow removal / ice treatment and planting area maintenance to limit salt/chemical deposits and encourage healthy landscape and street tree growth. Planted areas should maintain excellent lateral drainage by supporting percolation under the adjacent sidewalk, for example by providing a gravel base under the sidewalk or installation of a Silva Cell system.	X	X	X	Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, NYSDOT	Town budget, State funding	
S-5	Access Management: Consolidate Medians and Driveways						36
S-5.1	Initiate planning for a joint Land Use and Access Management Plan; this plan will establish a coordinated policy to consolidate curb cuts with redevelopment and introduce medians at targeted locations as part of the boulevard street design changes. (See also step S-4)	X	X		Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, NYSDOT	Town Budget	

Action #	Description	Timeframe			Responsible Party / Partners	Potential Funding Source	Page #
		Immediate	Mid-term	Long-term			
Connect							
C-1	Emphasize Placemaking and Walkable Connections Rather than Parking						38
C-1.1	Update Town land use regulations and policy documents to be consistent with the Project Charter and vision in the WRPV Action Plan. (See also step R-1, R-2)	X			Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda	Town Budget	
C-2	Establish a Network of Trails						38
C-2.1	Update the Town of Amherst's policy documents, including the Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan and Recreation and Parks Master Plan, and the Town of Tonawanda Complete Streets Network to include recommended on- and off-street trail connections (see Trails Network map, page 39).	X			Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda	Town Budget	
C-2.2	Pursue grants / funding opportunities and implement components of the trails network.	X	X		Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, Erie County, GBNRTC	Town Budget, grants, LWRP	
C-3	Retrofit Streets to Expand Pedestrian + Bike Infrastructure						40
C-3.1	Pursue design and engineering plans/studies (such as necessary scoping, traffic impact analysis, and designate funding resources) for recommended neighborhood street improvements to improve pedestrian and bike connections (Chestnut Ridge Road, Willow Ridge Drive and Joe McCarthy Drive).	X	X		Town of Amherst	Town budget, grants	
C-3.2	Implement bike improvements on Joe McCarthy Drive and Dexter Terrace to provide a parallel bikeway to the Boulevard.	X	X		Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda	Town budget, grants	
C-3.3	Implement pedestrian and bike improvements on Chestnut Ridge Road and Willow Ridge Drive to better connect to the University at Buffalo.	X	X		Town of Amherst, University at Buffalo	Town budget, grants	
C-3.4	Utilize best practices in snow removal / ice treatment and planting area maintenance along neighborhood streets to limit salt/chemical deposits and encourage healthy landscape and street tree growth.	X	X	X	Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda	Town budget	

7: Implementation

Action #	Description	Timeframe			Responsible Party / Partners	Potential Funding Source	Page #
		Immediate	Mid-term	Long-term			
C-4	Capitalize on the Creek and Trail as a Great Address						47
C-4.1	Update Town land use regulations and policy documents (such as the Comprehensive Plan, Zoning, Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan and Recreation and Parks Master Plan) to be consistent with the vision for trail-oriented development along Ellicott Creek. (See also step C-2, R-1, R-2)	X			Town of Amherst	Town budget	
C-4.2	Pursue design and engineering plans/studies for recommended improvements to Ellicott Creek Bridge. (See also step S-4)	X	X		Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, NYSDOT, GBNRTC	Town Budget, grants, LWRP	
C-4.3	Pursue trail connection upgrades near Ellicott Creek bridge, including a new pedestrian/bike bridge, connected trails, and kayak launch. (See also step C-2)	X	X		Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, NYSDOT, GBNRTC	Town Budget, grants, LWRP	
C-5	Improve Connections to Ellicott Creek Park						52
C-5.1	Redesign the intersection of Thistle Avenue and Ellicott Creek Road to include a re-aligned high visibility crosswalk, Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacon (RRFB), and small median island.	X			Town of Tonawanda	Town budget, grants	
C-5.2	Pursue design and engineering plans/studies for recommended neighborhood pedestrian and bike improvements (Ellicott Creek Road).	X	X		Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda	Town budget, grants	
C-5.3	Implement improvements to Ellicott Creek Road to include a shared-use path on the north side of the road, right-sized vehicle lanes, and clearly-defined parking opportunities.		X	X	Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda	Town budget, grants	
Refresh							
R-1	Actively Support Investment and Remove Impediments						54
R-1.1	Update Town land use regulations and policy documents (such as the Comprehensive Plan, Zoning, and Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan) to be consistent with the vision in the WRPV Action Plan. (See also step C-1, R-2)	X			Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda	Town Budget	

Action #	Description	Timeframe			Responsible Party / Partners	Potential Funding Source	Page #
		Immediate	Mid-term	Long-term			
R-1.2	Work to support investment by making property owners and investors aware of available resources for improvements. This may include researching and maintaining a list of available grants or funding mechanisms, pursuing grants, and conducting outreach to property owners.	X	X	X	Town Economic Development offices	Town Budget	
R-1.3	Work with property owners to establish PIF (Payment in Lieu of Taxes/PILOT Increment Financing) to capture increased incremental property taxable revenues to help fund infrastructure costs associated with redevelopment consistent with the vision in the Action Plan.	X	X		Amherst Industrial Development Agency (AIDA), Town of Tonawanda	Town Budget	
R-2	Adopt Mixed-use Ordinances Along Niagara Falls Boulevard						56
R-2.1	In the Town of Amherst, map and allow use of Retrofit Districts – Shallow Corridor 3 (SC-3); Deep Corridor 3 or 5 (DC-3 or DC-5), or Center 5 District (CTR-5) – by right for commercial properties along Niagara Falls Boulevard. This may be done as a parallel code or to replace the existing zoning.	X			Town of Amherst	Town Budget	
R-2.2	In the Town of Tonawanda, refine the draft Mixed Use General Commercial zoning district for the Boulevard to be consistent with the Action Plan (address setbacks, building form and minimum parking requirements); adopt new zoning.	X			Town of Tonawanda	Town Budget	
R-3	Identify Market Opportunities and Attract Investors						58
R-3.1	Promote the Action Plan to attract and encourage development along the corridor according to the community vision.	X	X	X	Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda, Chamber of Commerce	Town Budget	
R-3.2	Update zoning and policy documents to ensure new development can make better use of underutilized land and capitalize on market opportunities: allow mixed-use nodes along the boulevard; allow for greater lot coverage, small or zero foot setbacks, and remove or reduce minimum parking requirements in mixed-use nodes; allow and encourage a range of Missing Middle housing types (see page 60). (See also step R-2)	X			Town of Amherst, Town of Tonawanda	Town Budget	

ACTION STEP FEEDBACK AND PRIORITIZATION

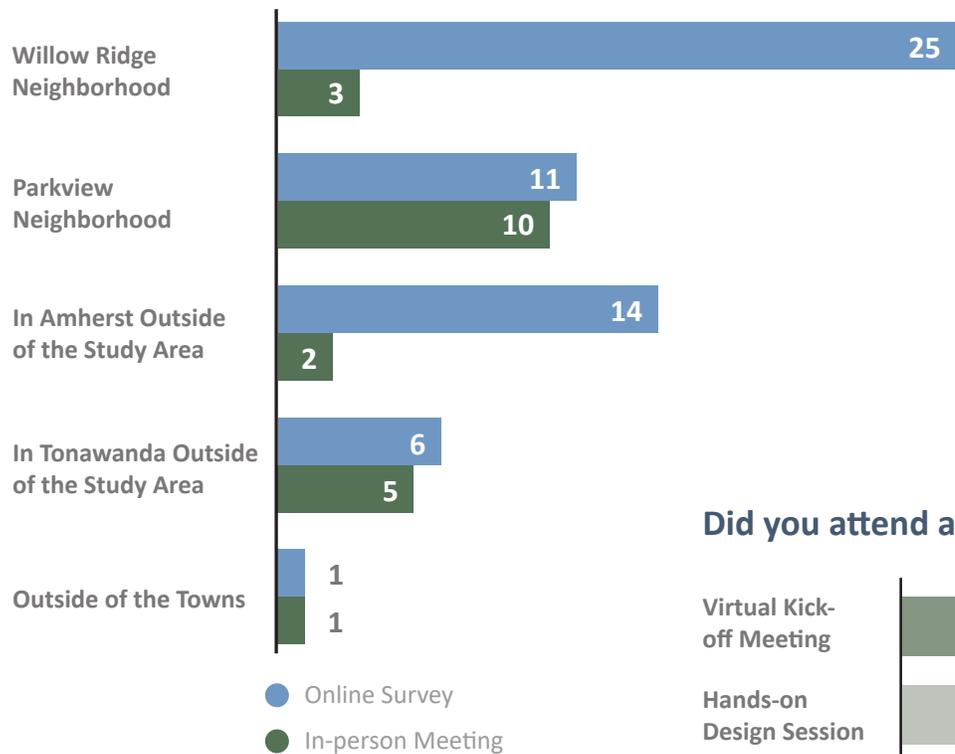
Following the release of the Community Review Draft of the Action Plan in October 2022, the Town posted a public input survey at connectingwrpv.com; the survey was open from October 24, 2022 to December 31, 2022. On March 8, 2023, an in-person meeting was held at Sweet Home Middle School to review the draft report and online survey input. Polling and feedback forms at this review session gathered additional input on the proposed Action Steps. The following pages summarize this feedback, which the Towns can use to help prioritize actions as implementation moves forward.

In this section, charts in shades of **blue** reflect feedback from the online survey, and those in shades of **green** reflect feedback from the in-person community meeting.

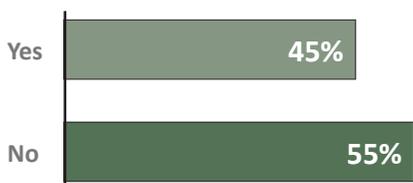
Below: There were 57 participants in the online survey, and 22 participants in the in-person polling. Of respondents at the in-person meeting, 45% had also done the online survey; and 57% had participated in at least one other previous plan meeting or event.

Right (next page): Although all of the Action Steps are important, the CONNECT actions ranked as the highest priority overall of participants in the online survey. “Adopt a Joint Resolution” / “Reconfigure Niagara Falls Boulevard” (MAKE IT SAFE), and “Adopt Mixed-use Ordinances” (REFRESH) also each had at least 20 people rank them in their top five.

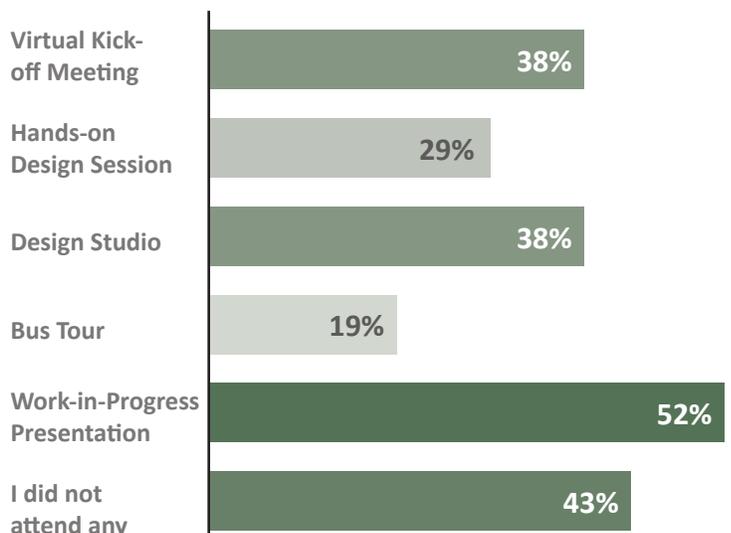
Where do you live?



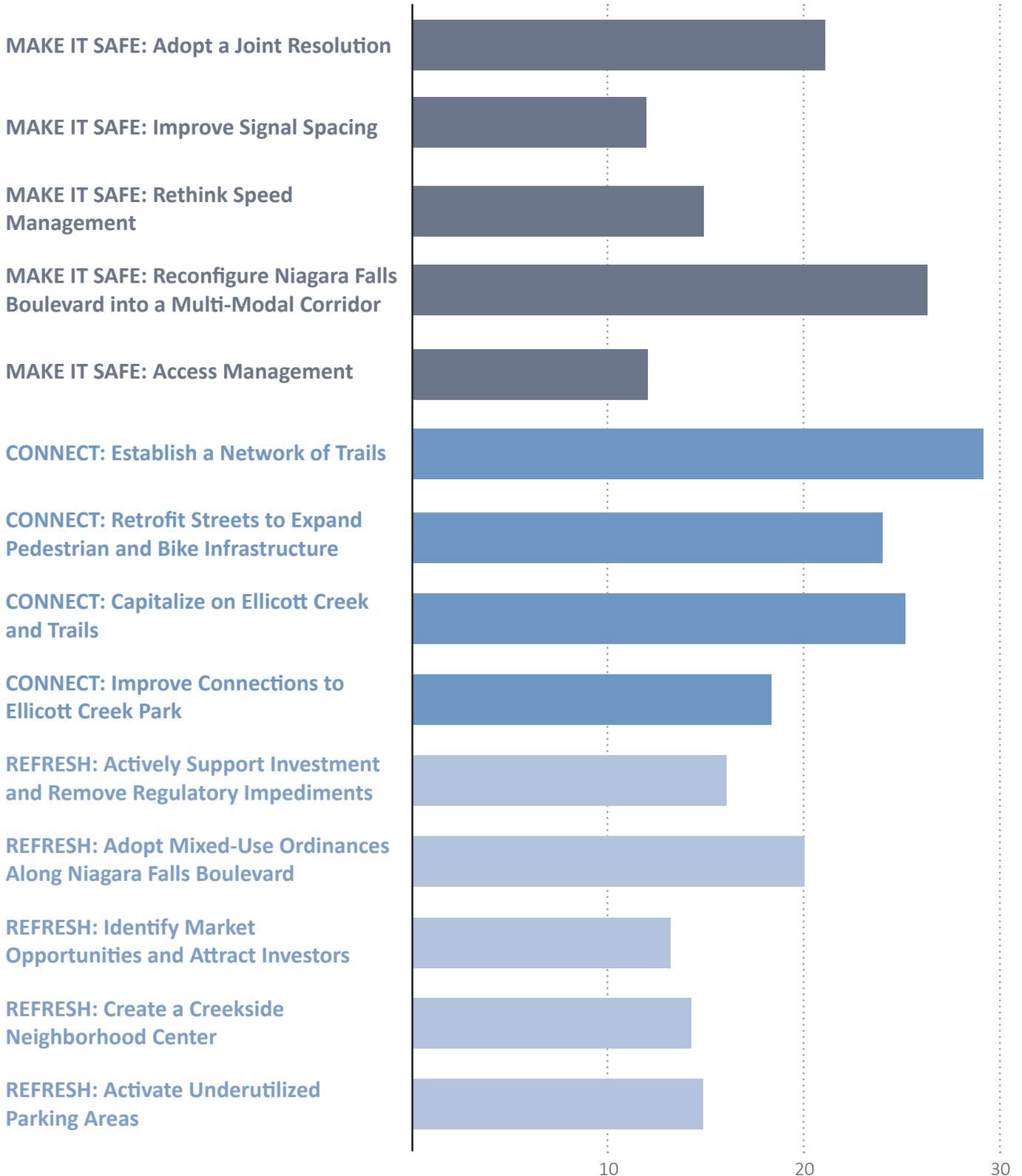
Did you complete the Online Survey?



Did you attend any Charrette Events?



Overall, what are the top five actions that should be of highest priority?



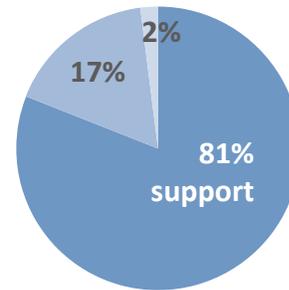
MAKE IT SAFE

The MAKE IT SAFE Action Steps focus on creating a safer environment for all modes of travel on Niagara Falls Boulevard – walking, biking, driving, and using transit. The steps include policy actions as well as recommended changes to the physical environment.

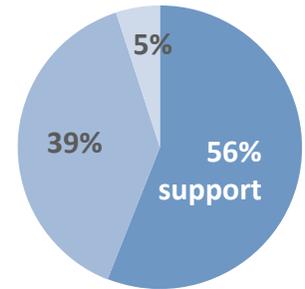
Feedback from the survey generally demonstrated support for these actions. “Reconfigure the Boulevard into a Multi-modal Corridor” ranked as the highest priority overall in both the online and in-person polling. Although changes to the boulevard street design will be one of the more complicated and higher budget action steps to fully realize, the feedback recognizes the importance of taking steps to make changes that safely accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users.

Of the proposed steps, “Improve Signal Spacing” received the lowest level of support. Comments submitted with the polling cited concerns about potential traffic delays with additional signals. The plan recommends new signals could be HAWK (pedestrian-activated) or full signals which could be synced with nearby signals to minimize impact on overall travel time for motorists. Further analysis of the proposed signals will need to be done with NYSDOT as part of implementation; impacts on corridor travel time will be part of that evaluation.

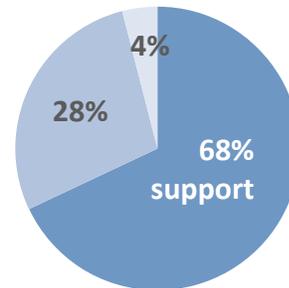
Do you support the MAKE IT SAFE Action Steps ?



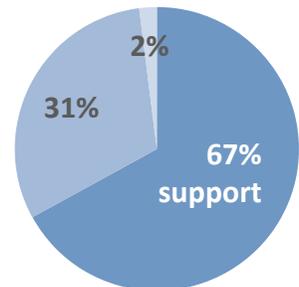
Adopt a Joint Resolution



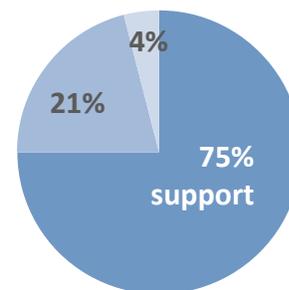
Improve Signal Spacing



Rethink Speed Management



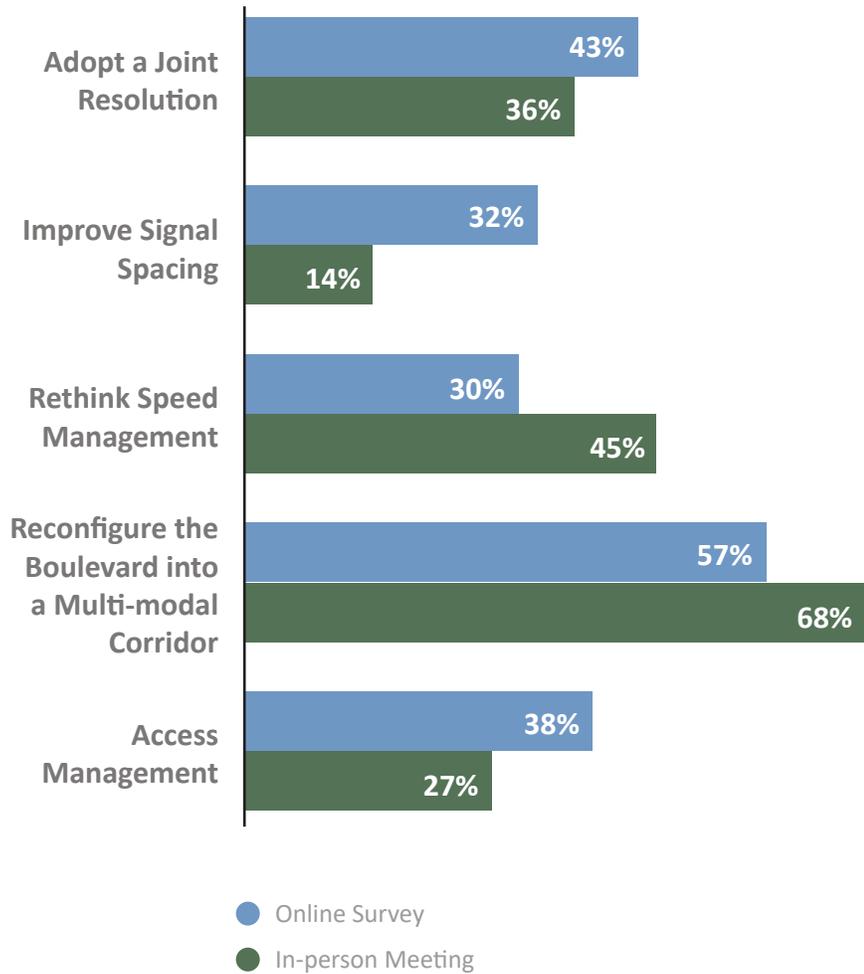
Reconfigure the Boulevard into a Multi-modal Corridor



Access Management

- Support
- Don't Support
- No Opinion

Please select the top two MAKE IT SAFE Action Steps you feel should be of highest priority to the Towns:



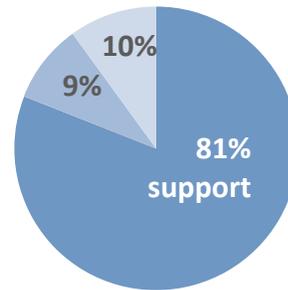
CONNECT

Today, Niagara Falls Boulevard forms a barrier between neighborhoods; the CONNECT Action Steps aim to better link residents across the boulevard and to surrounding parks and destinations through a network of trails and improved neighborhood street designs.

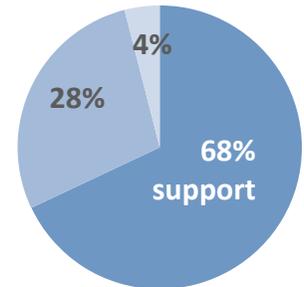
The CONNECT Action Steps received the highest levels of support from survey participants, with prioritization split among each. “Capitalizing on Ellicott Creek and Trails” had the greatest combined support in both the online survey and in-person meeting. This step includes public improvements such as widening sidewalks on the existing bridge, new trail connections near the creek and park, and a new pedestrian bridge over Ellicott Creek; as well as potential private investment stimulated by code and policy changes that shape trail-oriented development to overlook the creek.

The online survey asked respondents to rank potential trail connections in order of importance. Implementing the trail connections that are identified in existing planning documents (the Amherst Recreation and Parks Master Plan and Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan, Tonawanda Complete Streets plan, and GBNRTC Regional Bicycle Master Plan) and a new off-street trail parallel to Ellicott Creek Road to access the park were ranked the highest.

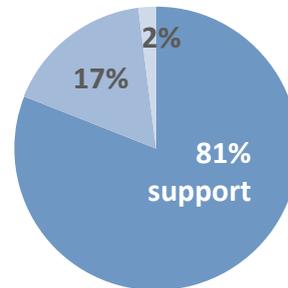
Do you support the CONNECT Action Steps?



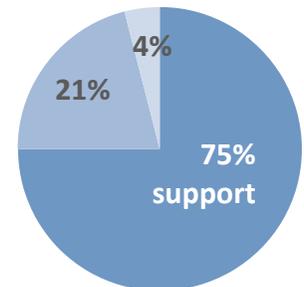
Establish a Network of Trails



Retrofit Streets to Expand Pedestrian & Bike Infrastructure



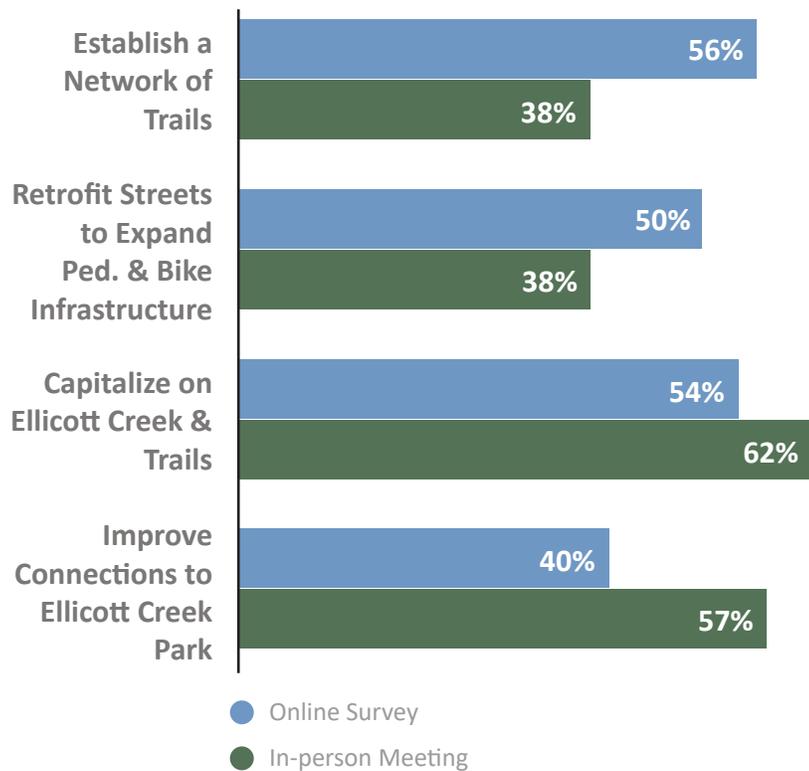
Capitalize on Ellicott Creek & Trails



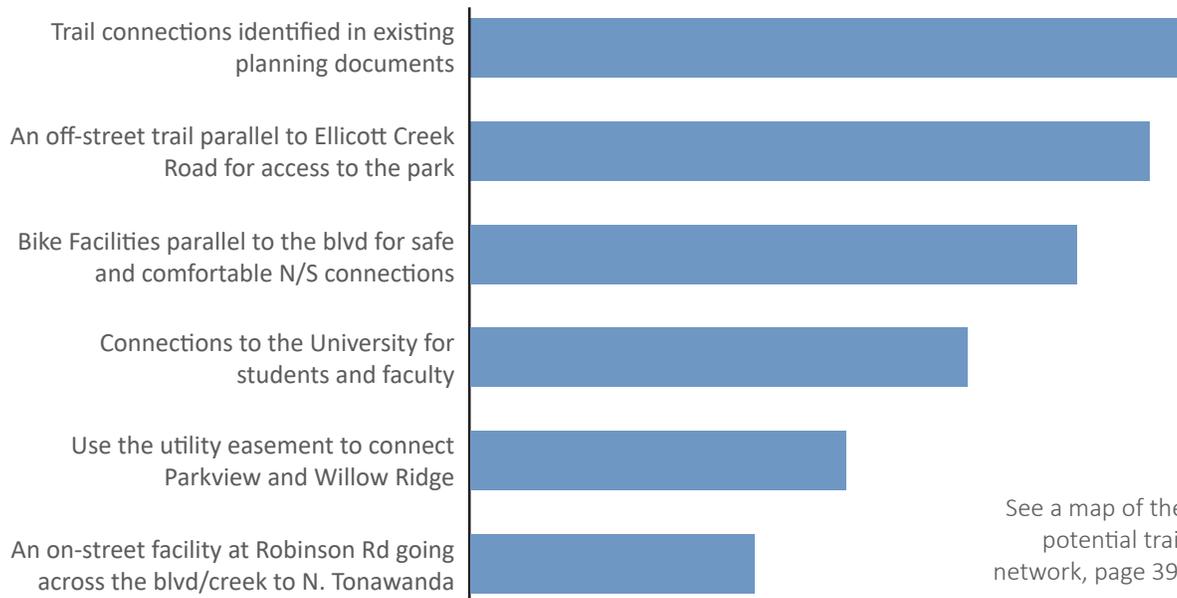
Improve Connections to Ellicott Creek Park

- Support
- Don't Support
- No Opinion

Please select the top two CONNECT Action Steps you feel should be of highest priority to the Towns:



Please rank the following trail connections in order of importance to you:



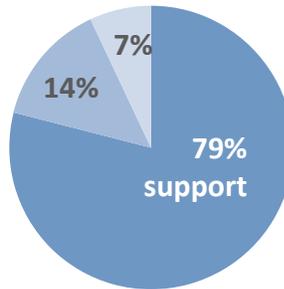
See a map of the potential trail network, page 39.

REFRESH

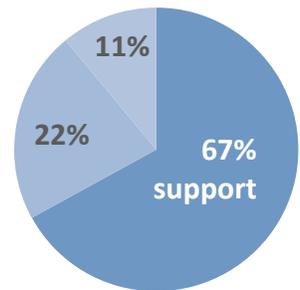
To create a more complete and vibrant corridor, reinvestment and rebuilding of vacant or underutilized properties along the boulevard is needed. The REFRESH Action Steps seek to encourage investment by making it easier for new development that fits the community vision. The steps include changes to Town zoning codes and policy documents, creating incentives and removing development barriers, and marketing the plan and available resources.

“Adopt Mixed-Use Ordinances Along Niagara Falls Boulevard” was identified as the highest priority for survey respondents; all of the actions generally had high levels of support. The online survey also gathered feedback about plan concepts that illustrated development potential on sample sites (Create a Creekside Neighborhood Center and Activating Underutilized Parking at the Home Depot / Asian Market Site); both ideas received positive feedback from participants.

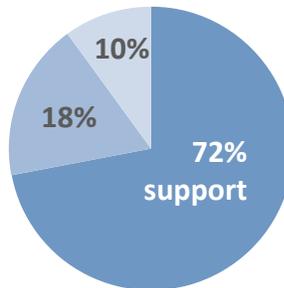
Do you support the REFRESH Action Steps?



Actively Support Investment & Remove Impediments



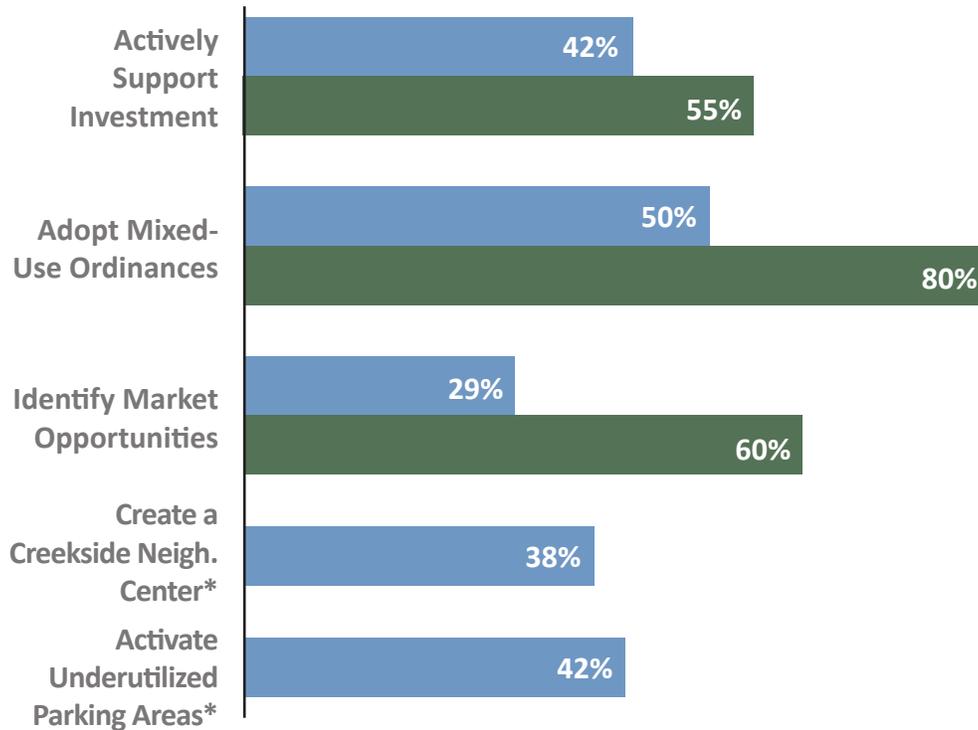
Adopt Mixed-Use Ordinances along the Boulevard



Identify Market Opportunities & Attract Investors

- Support
- Don't Support
- No Opinion

Please select the top two REFRESH Action Steps you feel should be of highest priority to the Towns:



● Online Survey
● In-person Meeting

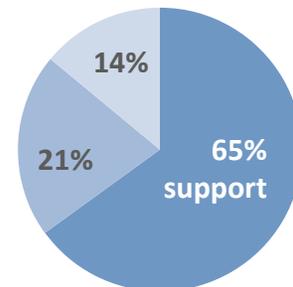
* Two additional choices about the “sample site” plan concepts were included in the online survey.

Do you support these plan concepts?



Create a Creekside Neighborhood Center

See more information about this idea pages 61-64.



Activate Underutilized Parking Areas

See more information about this idea pages 66-69.

