RE-IMAGINING DOWNTOWN ROCHESTER Creation of an Equitable Urban Master Plan

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Creation of an Equitable Urban Master Plan

by

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“Re-imaging Downtown Rochester: Creation of an Equitable Urban Master Plan”

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ABSTRACT

Downtown Rochester, New York has seen a renewed interest in the past decade. However, most of that interest and reinvestment has occurred within the eastern half of the downtown area. The western half, which is roughly bordered by the Genesee River to the east and Interstate 490 and the Inner Loop to the west, has only been lightly touched by developers. Most new building projects tend to center around creating residential apartments, many of which have price points that may exclude many populations in Rochester. Additionally, street networks and connections tend to reinforce usage of private automobiles and dissuade the potential of walking, biking, taking public transit, or other methods of transportation. In western downtown, a lively streetscape at lunch time turns completely desolate by the close of business. Vacant office spaces are surrounded by asphalt parking lots. Through a design-based approach, this thesis looks to propose a balance of new development and reinvestment in order to create not only an active and vibrant downtown, but one that is socially equitable and considers Rochester’s populations as a whole. Background, history, and previous studies and plans of the area were researched. Community members and local organizations were consulted in order to address concerns and determine overall concepts to be proposed. These interactions shaped the project’s guiding principles and goals, which serve as a fundamental starting point for the concept. A completed master plan is proposed which aims to strike a balance of building uses and transportation options, stitch neighborhoods back together by reducing barriers, and improve walkability. By proposing new street designs, infill projects, and identifying building adaptations, this final design is a comprehensive concept that aims to create a successful and socially equitable urban plan for Rochester’s western half.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMITTEE APPROVAL</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. A Brief Overview of Downtown Rochester, New York</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Why Western Downtown?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. History of Western Downtown</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Urban Decline</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Sustainability in the Rochester Context</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Project Boundary &amp; Demographics</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. PREVIOUS PLANS &amp; STUDIES</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Center City Master Plan</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Rose Fellowship</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. We Shape Our City - A Community-Based Vision Plan for Downtown Rochester</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Local Waterfront Revitalization Program</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. ROC the Riverway</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Adjacent Planning Exercises</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Creating Connections - Susan B. Anthony Community Vision Plan</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Corn Hill Community Vision Plan</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. COMMUNITY INPUT AS THE DESIGN DRIVER</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Framework for Public Involvement in the Process</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Meetings &amp; Involvement of Area Stakeholders</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Summary of Guiding Principles</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Parking</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Beautification and Changing Perceptions</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Balance of New Spaces</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
iv. Connections and Boundaries 50
v. Walkability and the Pedestrian Experience 52

5. RE-IMAGING DOWNTOWN ROCHESTER: A PROPOSED MASTER PLAN 54

A. Overall Concepts 54
   i. Project Boundary 62
   ii. Parking Garage Design & Recommendations 63

B. FOCUS AREA ONE: The Inner Loop Northwest & Interstate 490 66
   i. The Inner Loop Northwest 66
   ii. Interstate 490 & Exit 14 74

C. FOCUS AREA TWO: Shifting West Main Street and West Broad Street 79
   i. Overall Changes 79
   ii. Thomas Wilson Boyde Jr. Park 86
   iii. The Remaining West Main Street & Broad Street 93
   iv. Zoning Considerations 95

D. FOCUS AREA THREE: Cascade District and The Hochstein Music School 96
   i. The Cascade District 96
   ii. The Hochstein School 102

E. FOCUS AREA FOUR: Frontier Field and Monroe Community College 108
   i. Monroe Community College 109
   ii. Frontier Field 110
   iii. Proposed Changes 111

F. FOCUS AREA FIVE: The Riverfront 117

5. CONCLUSION 126
6. LIST OF FIGURES 128
7. WORKS CITED 131
1. INTRODUCTION

A. A Brief Overview of Downtown Rochester, New York

The City of Rochester is located at the midpoint between Buffalo and Syracuse in Western New York State along the shores of Lake Ontario. It covers an area of roughly 36.44 square miles and has a 2010 population of 210,565.¹ The City of Rochester grew around power harnessed from the Genesee River, which runs through the city and roughly divides it in half. Several waterfalls exist within the city limits and fueled the original mills along the Genesee’s banks. Originally known as the “Flour City” for its plentiful flour mills, Rochester then became the “Flower City” and a botanical hotspot. Large companies such as the Eastman Kodak Company, Bausch & Lomb, and the Xerox Corporation were founded in Rochester and provided much of the employment in the area when they first rose to national and international acclaim.

The main area of downtown is situated around the Genesee River where these first mills were located. During the 1950s, the Inner Loop expressway was constructed encircling downtown to quickly transport people away from downtown in order to reduce congestion. This new circulation networked widened roads, encircled downtown, and created a physical barrier insulating the downtown core from the surrounding neighborhoods. The area within this boundary became known as the downtown area, with the Genesee River running through the heart of it.

B. Why Western Downtown?

This thesis comes at a time when Rochester is experiencing a rebirth in its downtown core. Private developers and companies are reinvesting in vacant land and underutilized buildings to rebuild and reshape downtown. Offices are being converted into high-end apartments and the number of residential units are on the rise. Abandoned buildings are being refurbished into Class A office space. Tired interiors are being refreshed with modern amenities and layouts. A typical business day in downtown Rochester’s East Main Street Corridor involves dodging a myriad of construction equipment and workers. However, West Main Street remains much quieter. Parking lots still cover much of the landscape and although a new post office and townhouses have been designed and constructed, investment is still lagging far behind the eastern section of the Center City. As revitalization starts to creep towards this west end and the many surface parking lots it contains, it is important to define the character of the area as determined by its stakeholders now so that developers can use it as a roadmap to ensure not only profits and economic health, but also community, civic rebirth and social equity.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. “2010 Demographic Profile: NY - Rochester City.”
When looking at the most recent plan for downtown development, Roc the Riverway, it is clear that western downtown is behind the curve on Rochester’s upswing. The image below shows the proposal for Roc the Riverway, announced in August of 2018.

![Image of ROC the Riverway plan](Image by City of Rochester)

Figure 1: Plan of ROC the Riverway showing “Recent/Ongoing River Corridor Investments.”

This image is particularly powerful. With north located to the right, this plan of the Genesee River shows the entire western half of downtown, the area encircled by the expressways, above the river in this image. The eastern side is located at the bottom of the image. If one were to look at the “Recent/Ongoing River Corridor Investments” indicated by the yellow asterisk, it can be seen that almost all of the current investment in downtown is on the eastern side of the river. The graphic of all of these asterisks clustered in one spot is striking. While this area of downtown is starting to become lively and more actively used and populated with restaurants and residential, the western half has been left behind. This is distressing once one remembers, or learns, that this western half was the original downtown of Rochester, and where the first streets of the Village of Rochesterville were laid out in the early 1800s. Many historic events happened in this area, and thus there are many historic buildings to go along with them. This also includes key sites and events in the women’s rights and the civil rights movements.

The purpose of this thesis is to propose a strategy for development and revitalization in the western half of downtown; a strategy that is designed with the public in mind and garners their input and support. The eastern half has seen an upswing in high-end residential housing. While this is a good type of investment to see in a downtown core that has been vacant for so many years, it is important to balance this type of housing with a variety of other income levels and types. A downtown core is not only the geographical center of the city, but the social heart as well. Downtown should be an area that is accessible and usable by all of the city’s residents and workforce. Development needs to be balanced. Therefore, the outcome of this thesis will be a new master
plan that takes aim at social equity issues and creates a sustainable community at the heart of Rochester. This can be defined as a community “in which diversity is tolerated and encouraged, where there is no sharp spatial separation or isolation of income and racial groups, where all individuals and groups have access to basic and essential services and facilities, and where residents have equality of opportunity.”

Therefore, this section of downtown will aim to create housing for all income levels and create a downtown that can be used by all ages, all families, and addresses the needs of those choosing to live in the urban environment as well as the visitors and commuters that travel downtown. The plan will recognize that pedestrian traffic and public transportation are important to the health and equity of the city, but that the private automobile is still the most prevailing method of transportation in Rochester and must be included as a factor in the development of any area in Rochester.

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2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. History of Western Downtown

To fully understand this area, it is important to first consider the history of this section of downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods. The very first building in all of Rochester was a grist and saw mill situated along the western edge of the Genesee River. Built in 1789, it was a part of a land purchase from local Native Americans, and struggled to operate in an area where there weren’t many residents at the time. A group of three men from Hagerstown, Maryland purchased the mill and the associated land, known as the 100 Acre Tract. These three men, Major Charles Carroll, Colonel William Fitzhugh, and Colonel Nathaniel Rochester, took the land and laid out the streets and lots, joined in with other new property owners, and created the Village of Rochesterville in 1817 with a population of 700. This area included only the section within the project boundary and the High Falls area. Travel across the river was difficult and so the eastern half of downtown, what is now dominated by new development and the towers of the 1960s era, was still untamed wilderness. As a new village, many of the firsts of Rochester took place in this part of the city. The first school was erected in 1813, the first newspaper in 1816, markets, train stations, street cars, courthouses, libraries and eventually universities. The village became a city in 1822, and annexed the development on the eastern side of the river shortly after in 1823. The small city grew rapidly and relied heavily on wheat products. At one point, Rochester had the largest wheat production in the entire United States. Within 23 years, the young municipality had grown from a village of 700 to a city of 20,000. Population continued to rise tremendously, tripling in size by 1860, and at it’s fastest, adding over 40,000 residents in a 10 year span during the 1880s.

While Rochester has had its industrial and manufacturing successes, civil liberty movements also were a source of pride for the “Young Lion of the West”, an affectionate nickname for Rochester. Rochester was a key stop on the Underground Railroad as many residents, who were then living within the project area, aided former slaves in achieving their freedom by traveling north or settling in Rochester. Colonel Rochester, one of the three men from Maryland and for which the city is named, was an emancipation-ist himself. On his travels north to secure the land, he brought his 10 slaves and freed them once reaching Dansville, New York. Frederick Douglass was Rochester’s most famed voice of the abolitionist movement and started his North Star publication in a church located in Corn Hill, before moving it to a building on West Main Street. Susan B. Anthony, one of the key figures of the women’s suffrage movement, resided in western Rochester, in a

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
neighborhood adjoining the project area. It is, or was, ingrained in Rochester’s history to be forward thinking and progressive in terms of these civil liberties.

B. Urban Decline

Like most cities situated along the ‘rust belt’ of the Great Lakes, Rochester has endured pains with regards to diminishing population and employment. Rochester’s population peaked at 332,488 in the 1950 census. At the time, that made Rochester the 23rd largest city in the United States and was strong in the realm of manufacturing. By 1970 however, Rochester’s city population had dropped almost 40,000, followed by a drop in another 50,000 in the following decade. Manufacturing giants such as Eastman Kodak Company, Bausch & Lomb, and Xerox, have dropped tens thousands of jobs within the last two decades with the potential for even more in the coming years. Despite this, Rochester has been able to shift its jobs from these large institutions to several small companies. The workers leaving the arms of the large companies use their talents and skills to start their own businesses or strengthen others. In the past 40 years, Rochester’s employment has risen almost 90,000 jobs, to 503,200 in 2012. That particular figure led all of New York State in job growth during that period. Educational institutions like the University of Rochester and Rochester Institute of Technology have picked up much of the slack in the workforce and have become the region’s largest employers. However, Rochester’s downtown core had continued to decline despite the region’s growth. Parking lots, vacant buildings, and tired facades are the norm within Rochester’s Inner Loop Expressway, an oval-shaped highway that encircles the central business district. In general, public perception of the city appears to continue to be negative and that the area is unsafe.

After World War II, suburbia and the rise of the personal automobile was changing American cities. As can be seen in nearly every American downtown, people began to leave the cramped and congested cities for their own plot of land on the periphery, abandoning public transit and streetcars for their new and affordable automobiles that could take them wherever they wanted to go. While a tremendous asset and invention, the American public soon began changing how cities were structured so that these new commuters could come to work and park their car. Interstate highways and parking lots soon began to slice through once dense urban fabrics. In Rochester, The New York State Department of Public Works proposed the 490 expressway that would cut through downtown to improve traffic efficiency. The Rochester Institute of Technology’s

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7 Lahman, Sean. “Rochester population falls out of top 100.”
9 Towler, Mary Anna. “The Big Rochester Myth about Downtown Crime.”
(RIT) campus was located in western downtown Rochester and was to be partially demolished in order to accommodate the new route. This would have effectively split the campus into two pieces between much of the housing in Corn Hill, and the original blocks of campus along Broad Street. With RIT’s enrollment doubling between 1950 and 1960, the campus was looking to expand or relocate. The City of Rochester pushed to move the proposed interstate further out of RIT’s land, but the State refused, citing engineering issues and added expenses. RIT soon secured financing for the move, and 490 went ahead as planned, razing 11 of the RIT buildings and severing several of the main connections to downtown from Corn Hill. This was a new physical barrier between the prominent African American community along Clarissa Street, where Frederick Douglass started, and downtown. With RIT’s move to the suburbs along with it’s entire student body and money with it, a vacuum of property and activity hit western downtown Rochester and Corn Hill, and lead to several properties that were formerly owned by the University to fall into disrepair and eventually to the wrecking ball. Although some properties were salvaged through low interest loans provided through urban renewal programs, much of the neighborhoods were cleared in the 1970s. Today, Corn Hill has bounced back into a historic and walkable urban neighborhood. However, that same renewed interest

11 Interview with Bonny Mayer. September 18, 2018.
never was able to carry over the barrier of 490 into western downtown. Therefore it has continued as the former center of Rochester, now marred by the pock marks of parking lots and the scars of elevated expressways. Even the infamous Rochester Subway had shut it’s doors when 490 opened, and sits empty and unused below Broad Street.

C. Sustainability in the Rochester Context

Sustainability has grown into an international focus area within the last several decades and is broken into three parts, environmental, economic, and social sustainability. As professions with a large role in the creation of the built environment, architects and planners have a necessary obligation to address sustainability when designing and considering choices and decisions on a project. According to the Brundtland Report for the World Commission on Environment and Development, Sustainable development can be defined as, “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”12 This broad scope can lead a designer in many paths. However, one of the many current issues at stake is the social issues of equity that exist within cities and urban contexts. As a part of the three main legs of sustainability, social issues can be some of the hardest to solve and some of the most difficult to quantify. They are the least understood of all aspects of sustainability and are fiercely intertwined with the economic and environmental health of communities.13 “A socially equitable distribution of environmental amenities or goods is important for sustainability and should therefore be a part of a community’s larger sustainability efforts.”14 Social sustainability needs to be given more weight in the discussion of new development and should be the underpinning concept for which the environment and economy are then considered. Cities across the world, especially within the United States, need to shift their focus from just economic or environmental sustainability goals to a broader goal of complete social equity. “Sustainability must incorporate a strong social component in order to be a viable paradigm and sustainable communities must be equally concerned with social and human sustainability as with ecological issues.”15 According to Timothy Beatley in his publication The Ecology of Place, “A sustainable community...is a just and equitable community,” and therefore “it must be open to all racial, cultural, age, and income groups and encourages social and cultural diversity.”16 The city can be the most effective entity in drafting up sustainability objectives as compared to the

14 Opp, Susan M. et al.
15 Saha, Devashree. 2009. “Empirical research on local government sustainability efforts in the USA”.
state and federal levels therefore needs to be the champion of the movement in their local region. Any proposed solutions need to be focused, whether they are city-wide or at the neighborhood scale. Most commonly, the parts of the city that are affected by limitations social equity are those with some of the lowest median incomes. This thesis will be primarily focused on this social aspect of sustainability. Specifically, equitable development will be examined and instituted as appropriate for Rochester’s context. How does one go about starting to address social issues through city planning and sustainable development?

D. Project Boundary & Demographics

The section of the city in which this thesis focuses is shown on the base map and is bounded by the Genesee River to the east, Broad Street, Interstate 490 and the Inner Loop’s path to the west, the Brown’s Square and Edgerton neighborhoods to the north, and the Corn Hill Neighborhood to the south. This effectively covers the western side of Rochester’s downtown. This boundary was determined though a combination of the City of Rochester’s definitions of the Center City, as well as perceived definitions of the urban core and where other neighborhoods connect. Originally, the Inner Loop Expressway was designed to encircle downtown completely and therefore defining the interior area as the downtown core, excluding High Falls and Frontier Field. This project includes these areas as part of western downtown. They can be strong amenities for any proposed design, and are already fairly popular destinations among local Rochester-area residents.

![Figure 3: Section showing existing Inner Loop & CSX Railway Line, looking east at State Street](Image by author)
Figure 5: Violent Crime Rate (2014)

Scale: none

NORTH
FIGURE 14:
MEDIAN GROSS RENT (2017)
SCALE: none

$0  $400  $800  $1,200  $1,600+
The table above shows demographic information for four different sections of the city, as well as the City of Rochester as a whole. The data was provided by the City of Rochester Neighborhood Data Map. The City provides additional information in an alternative application called “Building Blocks” that sources similar data from the 2017 American Community Survey. However, not all of the same categories are reported, therefore the 2014 data sets were selected as they were the most comprehensive. It should be noted that this data is older and may be less accurate of current trends. The areas within the project boundary are highlighted in yellow. They are Center City “West,” the area within the Inner Loop and to the west of the Genesee River, and the Edgerton census block, which includes High Falls and the Brown’s Square neighborhood north of the Inner Loop and extends up to Lyell Avenue. The project area currently cuts through the middle of the Edgerton statistical area, which extends north by three more blocks of residential land. This is why this section has higher
residential numbers. In reality, most of these units are to the north of the project boundary. The area within the boundary consists largely of former Kodak buildings, parking lots, and the High Falls area. Despite this, the information about Edgerton is still useful to see the make-up of the neighborhood immediately to the north of the project boundary. City Center “East” is the remaining section of downtown Rochester, across the Genesee River and within the Inner Loop. The Corn Hill section of demographics shows the remaining bordering neighborhood to the south and west, across Interstate 490.

This information from the City of Rochester’s Neighborhood Data Map (as well as the City of Rochester’s Building Blocks Application) was presented graphically, and can be found in Figure 5 through Figure 16, shown on the previous pages. This shows additional information to support the tabular data presented on the previous page and shows the information in clearly articulated census blocks. All information was provided by the City of Rochester and the American Community Survey. The original census blocks maps were provided by both the Neighborhood Data Maps and the Building Blocks Application. The only changes to these images was the formatting to fit the current base map. When looking at these images, two concepts are important to note: the change in household income between 2014 and 2017, suggesting that people from outside the neighborhood are moving to this section of the city, and the division between the Edgerton/Brown’s Square neighborhood and it’s neighbor across the Inner Loop, Center City “West.” This division between the two is often times extreme, more so than the other surrounding neighborhoods. Examples of this rapid change in data is for median area income and median assessed property value. This is in direct conflict with Timothy Beatley’s earlier quoted statement of a sustainable community having “no sharp spatial separation or isolation of income and racial groups.” Some of these data sets are very similar in numbers, such as population, rental percentage, and number of households. Data also supports the concept of boundaries and the perception of places. The Inner Loop Expressway and an elevated railroad exist side by side and pass through the City of Rochester along the northern edge of downtown. A section of this area can be seen in Figure 3. This has become a physical and psychological boundary for the citizens of Rochester. As can be seen in many of these images, one side of the Inner Loop/railroad is very different from the other. This applies to Interstate 490 as well, in comparison to the neighborhoods to the west and south of Center City “West,” although to a lesser degree. The boundaries of these census data blocks further support this as a boundary between neighborhoods. If boundaries were redrawn, it might result in a different or less severe visual change between neighborhoods. The fact remains that these expressways act as physical and mental boundaries for the people of Rochester, and so to further equalize neighborhoods and include anchors like High Falls, Kodak, and Frontier Field into the downtown core would
mean addressing the removal or reduction of these boundaries should be a priority.

It should be noted that data from the Center City “West,” the primary location for this project, may be somewhat skewed due to the Monroe County Jail. This operates in the southern section nearest Interstate 490 and Corn Hill, and currently holds a daily average of around 1,000 inmates. If these inmates are counted in the population numbers, then this means that there are only 126 true residents remaining in this area of the city, a severe drop off from every single neighborhood surrounding this area. If we adjust density to reflect this population count of 126, then the density changes from an impressive 5,118.2 residents per square mile, to down to mere 572.8. This is a dramatic shift, and reflects what may be the actual case of the neighborhood, which is largely quiet and unoccupied outside of business hours.

An initial look at the information provided by this table calls out the main discrepancy in median household income across the varying areas. The Center City “West” has a extreme low of $4,316 (2014), and is bounded by Center City “East,” which rises to $19,619. Although this number still isn’t a great median household income, it is almost 5 times that of the adjacent western half. Again, this data could be skewed from residents who are in the Monroe County Jail and receive no income. Additionally, the Open Door Mission provides shelters and services for the homeless that are in the area along West Main Street and West Broad Street. Although they may not be included in census data, the Open Door Mission operates at a maximum capacity of 70 beds. These people are largely unemployed and have little to no income, further reducing this average. If it is assumed that 1,000 of these residents are jail inmates and the remaining 126 are the only ones contributing to this average, then this 4,316 quickly becomes $38,570. Making this area above average for the City of Rochester. Although, this is only one interpretation of the data for this area. The 2017 numbers for household income hold fairly constant through all of the neighborhoods except for the Center City “West” which has risen sharply to $75,234. Since the adjacent neighborhoods remained similar and the time period is so short, it can be deduced that people from outside the...
neighborhood are moving into the area and affecting the survey values. This could be from the construction of the new townhomes along Plymouth Avenue, attracting people from the suburbs to an urban lifestyle.

The owner and rental occupied rate seems to be fairly level through the three most urban neighborhoods, evening out between the two in Corn Hill and the city averages. Rochester's overall renter to owner percentage seems in line with other American cities (Figure 18). The downtown areas typically have more renting populations compared to the more suburban feeling Corn Hill, but it will be an aspect to explore and attempt to get closer to the averages in Rochester and other cities.

One final conclusion that can be drawn from this statistical data is that there are fewer children living downtown than on the outlying neighborhoods. The two downtown areas report a much lower percentage of school-aged children than Edgerton or Corn Hill, which are both above the Rochester average. Something to investigate further would be the ability to include families and children in the creation of the new plan. While young professionals or empty nesters seem to be indicated as the predominant occupiers of these downtown areas (a topic to be revisited later), downtown should be made so that one does not feel the need to move out if starting a family, and that empty nesters or young professionals who have no children still find the area enjoyable as much as a family of five or six. How can this section draw people like the Corn Hill area does? How can the section of Edgerton, which has a higher population of children, get better connected to downtown through High Falls? Striking a better balance is a key tenet of this plan. It should also be noted that schools and the perceived quality of instruction may also have an impact on the amount of families choosing to live within city limits or in the surrounding towns. This is another issue that is a candidate for further research, but will not be explored in this thesis.
3. PREVIOUS PLANS & STUDIES

There have been numerous plans and studies conducted over the past decade which help inform the current state of the western section of downtown Rochester (Figure 20). However, not one plan addresses the area comprehensively as a whole. The Center City Master Plan does cover much of the project area, but can be argued that it does not specialize in western downtown and in fact focuses more on the eastern counterpart. This section will summarize the main plans that are currently at work in the region, and supplement with information from the older plans as necessary.

A. Center City Master Plan

The Center City Master Plan (CCMP) is a document that relates to Rochester’s downtown core and areas that are directly adjacent. The boundary is roughly along the Inner Loop Expressway and Interstate 490, which, together completely encircle downtown. At various points, the boundary shifts further outward to connect to other neighborhoods.
Most studies center around the neighborhoods, immediate downtown center, or the waterfront areas. Western downtown has only been comprehensively encompassed by the Center City Master Plan. Even in this plan, portions of western downtown are only lightly addressed. (Images by author)
This plan first came into being in 2003, after noting that downtown is clearly a different consideration than the city as a whole, and should be treated separately. While this is great, it can be seen through the last two iterations of the CCMP, that the western side of downtown is notably absent or only lightly mentioned. High Falls and the Cascade District are the only exceptions.

B. Rose Fellowship

Rochester was one of four cities selected to participate in The Rose Fellowship for the year 2016. The program is a yearlong period of engagement with each city, including a week long visitation event that allows selected cities to receive assistance on local planning and land use issues from the National League of Cities, the Urban Land Institute, and guests from other Fellowship cities. In, Rochester, the issues that were selected to be examined included activating and re-energizing key Downtown assets such as the Genesee Riverfront, Main Street, and the Broad Street Aqueduct. Participants, or Rose Fellows, visited from across the country to meet with community stakeholders and tour the downtown area in order to provide the city with suggestions during March of 2016. They compiled a list of observations and interviews with people on the street. Using these experiences, they created some objectives and goals for the river, Main Street, and Broad Street Aqueduct, and made a presentation to the City of Rochester. The findings of this study weren’t too surprising. Retail was a major consideration, as there is currently not enough to sustain any sort of street level activity outside of employees traveling from cars to offices. Additionally, the Genesee River has been underutilized and not seen as an asset for downtown. Buildings have turned their backs to the river, and fragmented any sort of park settings that have been created in-between. The Genesee Riverway Trail is not continuous through downtown.

In a discussion with Heidi Zimmer-Meyer, the President of the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation, she stated how people use the Riverway Trail for all sorts of activities, such as fishing, biking, walking or running, and in general, nearby residents are the primary users who benefit from such an asset. However, the blockages of the trail through downtown create a disjointed feel, and prevent the use of this asset to be carried upstream and into downtown, where it could benefit the local businesses and overall feeling of the neighborhoods. The most critical being where Main Street intersects the Genesee River. Currently, both sides of the trail are disjointed here, although the western side at least has a connection up to the Genesee Crossroads Garage. The Rose Fellowship pointed out how critical Main Street is to the downtown experience, and how it needs to be considered when determining a future plan for the river or the city. Historically as the center of

retail, the emphasis of Main Street has shifted in the eastern half of downtown. Recent development of the former location of Midtown, and the connection to the East End has begun to pull people off of Main Street, but yet still relate to it as a main source of traffic for automotive, pedestrian and transit. Therefore, this area has begun to change into a more cohesive picture of a future Rochester downtown. Housing is interspersed with office usage, retail, and restaurants. Although not complete by any stretch, this section is on the right track.

Looking to the western side of downtown, Main Street is held onto as the main thoroughfare and center of activity. Once you leave this area, “you can feel the energy drop,” says Zimmer-Meyer. Crossing over certain boundaries, parking lots grow, buildings disappear, and the feeling of an urban center disintegrates into the feeling of a suburban office park. Conveniently, the Rose Fellowships boundaries aligned with this “energy drop” and did not examine it as part of its study.

C. We Shape Our City - A Community-Based Vision Plan for Downtown Rochester

A charrette for downtown Rochester was held in 2007 and identified a number of key areas and goals to address. This plan, referred to as the DCVP (Downtown Community Vision Plan) is the most similar to this thesis in terms of detailed analysis and innovative solutions for the area. Therefore, the DCVP, now ten years old, should serve as a foundation point as several objectives or concepts raised by this plan have been implemented or attempted within the project area. The following guiding principles were created as a part of the planning process: 20

- ENHANCE the Pedestrian Experience
- CONNECT Distinctive Districts, Neighborhoods and Key Sites
- GREEN the Downtown
- FOCUS on Main Street
- DEVELOP the River as a Central Feature
- CREATE Mixed-use Neighborhoods
- CONSTRUCT Major and Minor Gateways
- IMPLEMENT a Strategic Planning Effort

The document goes into depth on each of these principles and states some key factors that future development should follow in order to work towards the vision plan. Some of these changes include the importance of the private automobile, ease of driving, and parking availability, while also understanding that the needs of the

pedestrian should come first and be promoted. Trees, plantings, and open park spaces should be added and be thoughtfully designed. Main Street is the geographic and commercial heart of Rochester and therefore should be built-out along its length with architecture of similar heights and details to create an enclosed urban corridor with a variety of occupancies to complement the surrounding neighborhoods. Overall, these are strong urban concepts and should be used as a starting point to build off with any proposed changes and designs.

The DCVP plan was divided into several focus areas, some of which directly relate to this thesis and are described below. The River North was the first section to be relevant to the new proposed thesis plan, and includes the area of High Falls and over to Frontier Field, largely coinciding with all of the area north of the CSX Railroad tracks within the project boundary. Charrette participants for this area noted the difficult or unappealing connections to High Falls as well as the lack of a grocery stores or other options for food in the immediate area. At the time that the DCVP plan was created, new residential units were under construction in High Falls, leading to less discussion on the need for more housing. Additional areas of concern for this section was the riverfront parcel directly south of the Inner Loop Expressway, noted above as Crossroads Village.

The Crossroads Village concept suggests mixed-use development with parking structures that can accommodate the reduced area surface lots. Additionally, the Inner Loop was pushed to an at-grade crossing in this section directly south of High Falls, leading to more connectivity. The last area of focus for this section
was immediately surrounding City Hall. A pocket park was suggested to replace a current surface parking lot at State Street and Church Street. Additionally, City Hall’s primary parking lot has been densified into a parking structure.

The DCVP continues on to go into depth on the entire Main Street corridor downtown and also provides some much needed focus on the West Main Street area that this project is looking at. A number of suggestions have been made with regards to possible uses and street realignments. Many problem areas that are noted in this report are the same ones that persist today. Issues such as connections, gateways, and alternative parking solutions had concepts presented in the DCVP but for one reason or another, have not yet materialized, most likely due to monetary investments.

![Figure 22: Proposed Main Street improvements.](Image by Community Design Center)

This thesis only focuses on the area shown to the left of the river in the image above, but as can be seen, a cluster or new development was shown, primarily corresponding to the location of surface parking lots. Also important is the main western gateway at Interstate 490 from the Susan B. Anthony Neighborhood. The Cascade District had a number of design interventions proposed, such as filling current surface lots with mixed-use residential and the redesigning of street networks to create a more defined urban village feel, as is believed to be most viable for this section of downtown. Adjacent to this district, and along Broad Street, was the idea to devote half of the roadway to a shallow canal bed, returning to its early roots and in order to create a unique draw to the neighborhood. The concept is compelling and possible, but not without serious investment in the infrastructure. A concept for this area should be explored independently of this thesis and consider this design
as well as some of the other concepts for the corridor.

The River South section of the plan addresses the area directly to the north of the Frederick Douglass / Susan B. Anthony Bridge and Corn Hill. This section discusses the need to infill the existing surface parking areas with development that supports the river frontage and can be bolstered by nearby amenities such as Corn Hill and Blue Cross Arena. This section also discusses the issues and possible solutions with the Civic Center Plaza that takes up several blocks over an underground parking structure. The problem of connectivity along the Genesee River corridor was also mentioned as a primary concern. Later addressed in the latest ROC the Riverway plan (RTR), it was identified early on that the Genesee River needed to be treated as an asset rather than taken for granted and used solely for industrial and utility purposes.
Overall, this plan created a good starting point for this thesis. The areas focused on were logical and clearly in need. Today, many of these areas still need attention and while some of these concepts may still be viable, this thesis aims to explore independently of this document to determine best uses, forms, and aesthetics that could lead to these areas being attractive and enjoyable spaces for the greater Rochester community. Additionally, the DCVP had the task of working with the entire downtown area. This thesis decreases the scope in order to provide further thought on these areas and provide additional areas for design intervention, leading to an ever increasingly specific planning solution.

D. Local Waterfront Revitalization Program

The Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) was originally drafted in 1990, amended in 2011, and most recently amended a second time in 2017. This latest amending had been underway before the Rose Fellowship began, as city officials recognized the importance of the Genesee and its current state of underutilization. However, it wasn’t until 2017 where it was finally completed. Labeled as a community-driven plan, it outlines a vision, set of policies, and a list of specific projects to enhance the areas waterways, such as the Erie Canal, Lake Ontario, and the Genesee River. Similarly to what was pointed out in the Rose Fellowship, gaps within the Genesee Riverway Trail stagnate pedestrian movement and need to be connected in order to create more accessibility to the downtown districts and Main Street. Development sites along the river need to be capitalized on to create entries and gateways into the area, and to start creating a critical momentum. It was after this study was complete that the community, developers, and the city decided that there needed to be a further effort to create images of what these connections and development activities could look like. According to city documents, “A bold, cohesive vision was missing that would maximize our potential to secure funding from other sources.” At this point, a new plan entitled “Roc the Riverway” (RTR) was born. It focused squarely on a six-mile stretch of the Genesee River than ran through the heart of downtown Rochester.

E. ROC the Riverway

In 2017, a group from the City of Rochester and Bergmann Associates, a Rochester-based architecture and engineering firm, convened to create a plan that built off of the previous Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan and defined the experience of the Genesee River downtown. The group was made up of urban designers,

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22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
planners, architects, and landscape architects. They worked to define tangible projects that would align with the guiding principles that were set earlier in the process. These projects included promoting health and vitality of the river and downtown, improving connectivity, re-orienting first floor uses, creating opportunities for artwork, and ensuring inclusive engagement. The six-mile stretch was divided into three regions. South River is the first, which is outside of the project boundary, and goes from the southern line of downtown south to the University of Rochester. Downtown is the centerpiece, and includes just the area within the Inner Loop Expressway. High Falls is the northern section and runs north of downtown for an additional mile. For this thesis, just the downtown and applicable sections of High Falls were examined, although the entire project was examined to ensure no conflicts were proposed.

Downtown’s key improvements were noted as increasing the connectivity along the river and redesigning or rethinking the connections across the river to reduce physical barriers. In the end, designers proposed 28 projects and projected the costs, provided digital renderings, and anticipated economic impacts for the area. In the beginning of 2018, they narrowed the scope down to a Phase I implementation. Governor Andrew Cuomo announced in February that New York State would contribute $50 million towards this implementation.

F. Adjacent Planning Exercises

Community-based planning exercises provided by the Community Design Center (CDC) allow for an in-depth look at two adjacent neighborhoods. These vision plans are not only vital to form the desired connections with the western downtown core, but also to tie to the neighborhoods and work together to achieve goals in order to promote the entire region more so than isolated blocks. Additionally, insights from residents participating in the planning process may shed light on difficult issues or creative solutions that arose from the projects.

i. Creating Connections - Susan B. Anthony Community Vision Plan

Completed in 2008, the Susan B. Anthony Community Vision Plan (SBACVP) takes a closer look at the neighborhood immediately to the west of western downtown, outside Interstate 490 and the downtown boundary. Strategies for this neighborhood were mainly about connections to the adjacent areas and mending the gaps in the fabric along major corridors. The area was once a large transportation hub, including two different canal beds (Erie and Genesee Valley Canals) and two different railroads (Baltimore & Ohio and

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
Western New York & Pennsylvania Railroads). All of these transit opportunities have left the area and ceased operations, and the land is left open and empty, specifically along West Main Street. This is the main connector to downtown Rochester, and this vast emptiness along the street is a hindrance to pedestrian traffic moving from the Susan B. Anthony neighborhood to downtown, and vice versa. Suggestions for this area include a number of landscaping and sculptural elements, traffic medians, and decorative fencing at the intersection of West Broad and West Main (Figure 25).

Further down main street, infill development on the sites of a gas station and small, single-story buildings will help enclose the corridor and promote a sense of safety as one travels across this gap into or out of downtown. This area has plenty of history to celebrate, not unlike the project area of this thesis. The SBACVP calls for promoting that history, and suggestions here include adapting former manufacturing buildings into new housing or community-supporting uses, and unearthing a former brick roadway along the old railroad right of way.\(^{26}\) Redevelopment of the Nick Tahou’s building, formerly a hotel followed by a large addition and adaptation into the former railroad offices, would be critical to getting sustained traffic on the street and framing the entrance to western downtown. The current time is right for the redevelopment and restoration of the building. Overall, the plan has been well received and several of the ideas have already been instituted into the physical environment, including some added signage and landscaping around the intersection of West Broad Street as well as a full reconstruction of the street to include a planted median. Redevelopment of a former industrial building into loft apartments with an affordable component has also taken place. The 1872 Cafe, now under new ownership, is another recent development that starts to infill vacant land and reconnects West Main and Troup Street with a pedestrian corridor along the side of the new building, as suggested in the plan. This thesis aims to have some of its pieces implemented, requiring thorough investigations as this group charrette has done.

\(^{26}\) Rochester Regional Community Design Center. *Creating Connections: Susan B. Anthony Neighborhood Community Vision Plan.*
ii. **Corn Hill Community Vision Plan**

Created in 2012, the Corn Hill Community Vision Plan (CHCVP) focused on the neighborhood immediately south to the western downtown core. The primary focus in becoming familiar with this document was to see common issues that might arise in the downtown area, one possibly being the noise generated from Interstate 490. Another reason for looking at this plan was to see the desired connections or improvements along the neighborhood edge, specifically those bounded by the center city. When it comes to these connections, most of the proposed actions were to not only increase the number of traffic sound barriers, specifically along Troup Street nearest Exchange, but to also visually improve the barriers that were there, be with plantings or artwork.27 Plymouth Avenue is the central gateway from center city into Corn Hill. as one crosses over Interstate 490 into the Corn Hill Area, it is immediately apparent that there is an aesthetic shift as the area transitions into a residential neighborhood. More trees are present, there is more grass, less surface parking, and many historical brick homes from Rochester’s early history. The CHCVP charrette resulted in a number of suggestions for the area, ranging from additional street lighting, to a new archway entry element to signify changes in neighborhood identity to passing automobiles. Traffic calming was also explored, as vehicles can easily speed through the wide boulevard of Plymouth from Exchange to West Main Street. One remedy was to add medians in order to reduce the street width in this section.28 This is interesting to note, as this roadway continues up and through the center city and into the northern section of residential neighborhoods past High Falls, although the width decreases dramatically when it reaches Frontier Field. This is due to the fact that Plymouth was at one time the Inner Loop Expressway, and needed to facilitate a larger amount of traffic daily. The pedestrian bridge across Interstate 490 was also discussed as needing a reboot. New wayfinding signage was the minimum that was proposed, while other ideas ranged up to the complete removal of the Boys Club Place and Washington Street adjacent to the expressway, and turning that area into dog parks, open area, adding more traffic sound barriers, and adding infill apartment housing. The most involved suggestion called for a removal if the off-ramp to Spring Street and downtown entirely and building a new pedestrian bridge to reconnect Washington Street back to Corn Hill.

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28 Ibid.
4. COMMUNITY INPUT AS THE DESIGN DRIVER

The City of Montreal, in Québec, Canada, has recently completed revitalization projects within its southwest neighborhoods. Employing sustainable development tactics such as the adaptive reuse of former industrial buildings and new residential infill, the projects included social engagement of the community. Residents of the area included many immigrants and working-class families with minimal income to spare. The worry of gentrification and displacement was extreme and neighborhood groups took opposition to the city and the developer’s plans to inject more housing into the area. It was later determined however, after the projects were complete, that new residents supplemented the existing rather than displacing, and prices in the area did not markedly increase as the new units were completed and former manufacturing facilities were converted.29 Displacement is a major factor in community revitalization. If not consulted, citizens can become enemies of the plans that are intended to help them or improve their neighborhood. In the case of Montreal, the stakeholders were not initially involved in the process and felt marginalized by the proposals, despite their outcome. This can only foster distrust in city government. How can this be avoided in Rochester?

Craigmillar, a borough of Edinburgh in Scotland, was a similar case to Montreal. A location of high poverty and low ownerships rates, there was a strong desire to revitalize the area. Craigmillar, contrasting with Montreal’s actions, was a case study of the idea of socially inclusive planning. Residents here also had concerns over gentrification and diverse uses with any proposed plan. Craigmillar’s current demographics were studied, and then residents were brought in as groups to assist in a community charrette to revitalize the borough. It was determined that socially inclusive planning is a viable and extremely helpful concept when creating master plans for neighborhood revitalization. “Jobs, employment, education, lifelong learning and economic development, seen by the community as adding up to a process of civic renewal” was the important take away from the community charrette.30 Mixed-use developments supporting not only residential facilities but also employment of those who live in the neighborhood led to a consensus between residents and city officials as a preferred development strategy.

The idea of involving the public in charrettes and discussions about the neighborhoods future is not a new concept. The Community Design Center in Rochester sponsors periodic neighborhood charrettes to generate resident involvement and new ideas for different areas of the city and Monroe County. Jonathan Logan, a longtime member of the Community Design Center in Rochester, and Joseph Schilling presented

30 Deakin, Mark. “The case for socially inclusive visioning in the community-based approach to sustainable urban regeneration.”
information that supports the idea of engaging the public in the design process through charrettes and community meetings. All residents and stakeholders deserve to have a say. Naysayers who criticize the plan soon become partial owners of it. Addressing their concerns brings them into the group. Soon, the community starts getting behind a plan and can help it succeed more than a plan designed in a city office and handed down to the people. “Public leaders in shrinking cities must embrace public participation as an important way to solve urban problems,” says Schilling.31 Community meetings in Rochester typically consist of a “presentation with some stale pizza and nothing ever happens” states artist activist Shawn Dunwoody. According to Dunwoody, quality community input involves “listening and being attentive” to the residents’ needs and desires.32 An example is High Falls Terrace Park in Rochester. Historically underutilized, a successful discussion between city officials, Dunwoody, and the residents and businesses nearby lead to the determination that by adding grills and additional seating to the park, more people would begin to use it, and it worked. People who visit Genesee Brewery come out to the park. People coming to get a scenic view of High Falls come to the park. Most importantly, the residents across the street now use the park. Any new major plan needs to have the community behind it as they are the ones ultimately affected by it. This thesis aims to generate that support and be attentive to the community’s needs.

Social interaction also plays an important role in our world today. Many people of contemporary society live in isolation. They get in their vehicles and travel to and from work or home and rarely have an opportunity to talk or engage in positive social interactions within the neighborhood.33 It has been proven that positive social interactions around one’s home can increase the feeling of safety and comfort in a neighborhood.34 If we can promote interaction and positivity, we can begin to rebuild and strengthen neighborhoods. What design choices can be made to promote these interactions? How can a community be spurred through planning and the enhancement to the public realm?

Proximity and the configuration of public and private spaces seem to have some of the great influences on social interaction. Furthermore, involving the residents in decisions of design as well as management strategies increase social interaction as well. This follows the guidelines of other researchers about stakeholder involvement in all aspects of design and management. Interaction forms community involvement and plans. These community plans can then feed up to the city government and property developers who wish to successfully revitalize neighborhoods or potential project sites, which in turn benefits not only the

31 Schilling, Joseph and Jonathan Logan. 2008. “Greening the Rust Belt.”
32 Interview with Shawn Dunwoody. March 17, 2019.
34 Ibid.
neighborhood, but the host city as well.

A. Framework for Public Involvement in the Process

Getting public involvement is no easy task, and this project proved to be no exception. As stated, the goal of involving the public in this section of the thesis is to define initial ideas and garner support for what this area of downtown and High Falls should look like and what it should include. This requires a good cross-section of the stakeholders and those involved within and surrounding the project area. Stakeholders are, in this case, any person who interacts with this area on a regular basis. This could be residents, downtown employees, business owners, government officials, building owners, property developers, and any additional people who may commute through or stop in the neighborhood. The network to find these people came through “snowballing,” or starting with a few contacts and growing with each subsequent contact until a representation of each of these groups have been met. The current list of people who have been active in this project can be found in the acknowledgments section at the beginning of this document but include residents, neighborhood association members, employees at local businesses, non-profits, academic institutions, real estate developers, members of the Landmark Society of Western New York, members of the Eco-District and Greentopia in High Falls, city employees, and members of the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation and Rochester Community Design Center. It should be noted that due to the limited time frame of this thesis, only a certain number of residents were able to be contacted and consulted. Further research on this topic should attempt to get more residents of the area over an extended period of time. That being said, this project spoke to many organizations who wish to see the neighborhood be revitalized and still has vital concepts and guidelines that can help any future development, regardless of it’s final shape.

B. Meetings & Involvement of Area Stakeholders

For this thesis, a series of interviews with neighborhood stakeholders were conducted in order to better understand viewpoint and opinions on the project area. Additionally, local development and design groups, such as the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation (RDDC), who has an interest in all new development projects within the downtown area, and the Community Design Center (CDC), an active local organization that assists with neighborhood planning and has created master plans for local communities in the past, were consulted during the interview process. These organization have a good track record with community involvement and are important voices to hear.
The meetings with these stakeholders took place over an extended time from April of 2018 until March 2019. As an iterative process, thoughts and feedback from these meetings were used to inform overall thematic concepts, building uses, neighborhood characteristics to build off of, things to avoid, and general opinions on Rochester's downtown area and future projects. Discussions also took place through the design process in order to garner initial feedback and assist with the strengthening of the design. These “in-progress” meetings were quite important, as it allowed stakeholders to give feedback and criticism on proposed changes. In many cases, it was easier to meet each person individually rather than attempt to coordinate one large group. Discussions with stakeholders included questions such as the following, but were not verbatim:

- What is your opinion on this section of downtown Rochester?
- How can this plan support you/your neighborhood/your business?
- What do you think is successful in this area? Unsuccessful?
- Where do you park?
- Where do you eat lunch?

These questions opened the conversations and usually led to more in depth discussions about the stakeholder’s particular interest in the area and his or her experience. While there was no set script for the discussions, it was important to hit the subjects surrounding the perception of the neighborhood and to get background about the stakeholder that might be important to consider when designing the plan. The information received was enlightening and important to the project’s ultimate design.

C. Summary of Guiding Principles

After speaking with these community stakeholders, it became abundantly clear that a few topics were repeated over and over again. These common threads became the guiding principles of the plan, and are the key items that need to be addressed according to the existing residents, employees, building owners and organizations. While these principles may be broad in nature, they encompass the full range of difficulties and opportunities with this project and adequately capture the needs of the neighborhood.

- Parking
- Beautification and Changing Perceptions
- Balance of New Spaces (retail, services, housing, offices)
- Connections and Boundaries
- Walkability and the Pedestrian Experience
Each of these main principles are further broken down and recommendations for goals and improvements are proposed. These goals helped to shape the proposed master plan and focus on equity, and should be used to shape future development and investment in the western half of downtown.

i. Parking

Space to park cars has proven to be one of the most important issues facing any new development activity in downtown Rochester. Nearly every person contacted as a part of this thesis discussed the topic, as it is nearly impossible to live in Rochester without the use of a private automobile. Concerns centered around the idea of there being “enough parking” in Rochester. Currently, 26.6% of all land area is dedicated to a parking use, ranging from surface lots to large municipal garages. Surface lots take up a majority of this percentage, and are the most inefficient way to store vehicles while not in use. However, they are the cheapest option for property owners and developers who are in need of space for tenants’ vehicles. Historically, this has been the go-to solution for private parking in Rochester. A nearby property would be acquired and any buildings on the parcel would be removed and the surface paved over and striped for cars. In some cases, paving was not necessary and the land exists as a gravel lot in the cityscape. These spaces are detrimental to the urban fabric of the city and lead to the division of the city and neighborhoods by swaths of asphalt. Additionally, cars require a large upfront cost that residents with lower incomes may not be able to afford. Therefore some of the space dedicated to be parking should be realigned for other transit uses. However, the value of a building today is tied to its parking. According to Jim and John Loftus, owners of many of the buildings and largely responsible for the creation of the Cascade District, if there is little or no dedicated parking for a building, or if a building would require the use of an adjacent parking lot owned by someone else, then the value diminishes very quickly. Therefore, the lots that are a detriment to the cityscape and to walkability also play a strong role in property values and redevelopment of older buildings. These impacts must be addressed for Rochester’s future.

Densify parking by using structures.

- Surface lots should be discouraged and prohibited whenever possible within the downtown core of Rochester. Existing lots smaller than a certain size

Figure 26: Stacked parking in Queens, NY. (Photo by author)
should be required to densify by stacking parking (Figure 26).

- Garages should be placed at strategic intersections, but ideally on the periphery of the downtown core if possible. This will allow Main Street and the adjacent streets to be used for ceremonial purposes without the disruption of garage traffic.

- Garages should be examined and designed for potential reuse as commercial or residential structures where appropriate. Further suggestions are outlined in the following section.

- Garages, whether privately or publicly owned, are to be required to be open at all times. At no time should a parking garage be closed to the general public that is in need of parking unless the lot is at capacity. This shared parking is critical to the belief that there is or is not enough parking in Rochester.

- Modernize infrastructure to allow several payment methods, such as by smart phone.

- Install easy to see signage indicating location of parking to passing drivers, as well as indications of open/filled spaces within the garage (Figure 28). This will allow drivers to easily find garages and an open space in order reduce some of the stress or barriers related to coming downtown.

Encourage on-street parking.

- On-street parking should be provided on as many streets as possible and encouraged whenever appropriate, and provides an added barrier between moving traffic and pedestrians. It also helps increase pedestrian safety by slowing speeds of traffic.

- Modernization of the current on-street parking payment system to allow for smart phone use. This will allow people to park for longer and pay for the appropriate times rather than rely on off-street parking for a time period longer than one to two hours, lessening the stress placed on these surface lots and garages.

- Open up parking times to allow for long-term parking on the street in designated areas. In more residential neighborhoods, this can reduce the need for off-street surface lots and should be
explored as a potential option. Permits are another viable way of parking and would not require the need of meters or smart phone payment for those who use the spaces frequently.

**Infill a majority of surface parking lots with new development.**

- Determine a feasible way to open up existing surface lots for redevelopment once parking has been densified.
- Depending on the location, some lots should be subdivided back into smaller lots for development. Many existing surface lots are a conglomeration of smaller parcels grouped together and have had the property lines redrawn.

**Encourage balance of public transportation.**

- Encourage and incentivize public transportation over private automobile by adding more bus lanes, routes, and bus stops.
- Further develop the bike lane network in Rochester and transition to separated bike lines in as many locations as possible. Street designs should follow the “8-80 rule” for design, meaning that the street should be friendly and safe for bicyclists ranging in age from eight years old to 80 years old, rather than just the young and able bodied, bold cyclist. This is extremely important in neighborhoods and the area directly adjacent where services are/should be placed.
- Continued exploration and support of light rail transportation opportunities to connect Rochester to the region and other local points of interest. Efforts should be made to examine routes extending outside the current CSX line as well. This would allow for people who do not own a car to travel to farther out destinations.
- Incorporate friendlier bus stops with seating and shelter. Heating would be a welcome improvement as well.

**ii. Beautification and Changing Perceptions**

Perceptions of the downtown core are still lagging behind reality. Some people tend to feel unsafe or refuse to travel to this area for fear of violent crime or an undesirable experience. While some people’s opinions may never change, beautification is an area that many residents, organizations, and property owners believed could help the most with the perceptions of the area. People often travel to the area to visit county and city offices, go to MCC, visit High Falls and the pedestrian bridge, go to Frontier Field for a Rochester Red Wings

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35 Moskowitz, Peter. *How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood.*
game, and much more. Beautification would be immediately visible to these visitors and help dissuade some of the negative perceptions surrounding this part of the downtown core. Furthermore, park spaces allow for social interactions between neighbors, dog walkers, various employees, and can allow for city sponsored events. These types of social interactions have been shown to increase job opportunities, as people tend to obtain employment by hearing of opportunities or getting recommendations from people they know, rather than simply by proximity.\(^{36}\) This is a potential added benefit of public space and is recommended as a topic for future research.

**Increased street lighting**

- Lighting should be increased in quantity as well as quality.
- Dark sky compliant fixtures should be used where applicable to reduce light pollution.

**Parking garages spaces should be designed with the public in mind.**

- Garages are, in many instances, the first and last thing people see when visiting downtown. Therefore, they need to reflect the pride and importance of the city. While current code stipulates that the exterior be designed so that it does not reflect the function of the garage, the interior is also very important to consider, and every effort should be made to enhance the interior within reason.
- Garages should be masked by other buildings whenever possible, either by activating the first two floors with rentable square footage, or by constructing liner buildings surrounding the garage or on main street facades. This further promotes walkability and contributes to the reduced need for automobiles.

**Enhance & green public spaces.**

- Small areas of open space should be encouraged in each neighborhood for the use of residents or other occupants of the area, and further encourage increased activity and interaction in the area.
- Larger open space should be planned to be used in a variety of ways, including wayfinding for those unfamiliar with the city, as well as event space.
- Plan park furniture for the young and old, as well as a wide range of abilities adn activities including items such as playgrounds, grill areas, seating, and the provision of shade.
- Promote varying levels of food options in public parks. Increase opportunities for food trucks as well as food carts in order to provide options at all price ranges.
- Trees should be planted along every street where space allows and implement a maintenance

\(^{36}\) Chapple, K. *Planning sustainable cities and regions: towards more equitable development.*
program. Trees should be logically selected for climactic conditions and experience of those on the street. Trees that shed, or drop things like acorns, should be discouraged as they can pose potential safety risk for those passing underneath and lead to a disorderly appearance.

- Redesign of existing green spaces to better serve the surrounding businesses or residents (ie: Genesee Crossroads Park).

iii. Balance of New Spaces

Downtown Rochester has always been the central business district and as such has seen office space increase steadily while few residential units have remained. It was not until 2000 when the first building (The Knowlton in the Cascade District) was converted into residential and interest began to grow. This section of downtown has seen less interest in residential conversions than on the eastern half of downtown. This leads to a bustling of activity midday during the week, but the area turns to a ghost town after the close of business or on weekends. This imbalance between residential and office and commercial uses leads to this large change in atmosphere as well as contributes to the lack of services and entertainment options in the area. Increasing housing in the western portion of downtown should be a priority. Some office spaces are known to be vacant, and could be good candidates for residential conversion. However, housing should be representative of Rochester as a whole and focus on equity in the target market, rather than targeting specific groups of consumers as much of the eastern half developments have done. The Downtown Housing Report, completed by the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation in 2016, noted that young professionals, downtown employees, and students represent the largest leasing interest in units downtown.37 These three groups currently have interest in this housing because they have the resources to support living in downtown as it currently exists (a well-paying job or supported by parents, a car to travel, and potentially close to work, school, or entertainment). In fact, those employed in the service industry are not listed as a group in this question for leasing interest on the Downtown Housing Report’s survey, indicating the disparity between desired tenants, affordability and Rochester’s actual makeup. Rochester’s central core needs to be a representative cross section of the ethnic, income and familial diversity that is reported across the entire city. Housing should be provided for the workers of the service or manufacturing industry, as well as for the elderly, and families with children. School age children make up only 3.82% of the population in western downtown, and 6.1% in eastern downtown, characteristic of developers catering to the young professional and student market. Edgerton has

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a school-age child percentage of 18.41%, much closer to the 17.7% citywide. It would benefit downtown to increase in amenities and the spaces that attract families, including public spaces and increased street safety. 

Affordability is also an important component to include in new housing. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, affordability is defined as paying less than 30 percent of one’s household income towards housing. While 24.4% of the housing downtown is currently marked as subsidized or affordable, this needs to be increased. Western downtown alone has a poverty rate of 68.62% (2014), and the neighborhood of Edgerton, which is partially included in the project area, as a poverty rate of 42.75% (2014). Therefore, the amount of affordable housing is inadequate and needs to be increased. Ownership within downtown is also out of proportion with the rest of the city. As of 2016, rental units currently made up 96.5% of all housing in downtown Rochester. As a whole, the City of Rochester’s rental market makes up 53% of all housing. In recent years, additional owner occupied housing has been created along Plymouth Avenue. These types of opportunities should be further encouraged.

Addition of new housing in western downtown Rochester.

- Vacant or underutilized office space should be converted to residential housing wherever possible.
- A wide variety of housing types, sizes, and price ranges need to be available in the central core of Rochester, allowing for a wide variety of lifestyles and families to benefit from the clustering of services and variety of (future) transportation options.
- Affordable housing needs to be increased in the downtown area to a suggested 40%, up from 24.4%.
- All housing that is affordable should also be fully accessible, or adaptable units at a minimum.
- Ownership opportunities are to be encouraged within the downtown area in order to better reflect the Rochester market. This can be accomplished with condominiums, additional townhouses, and single family homes. This variety should allow prices to be set at varying ranges and affordability should also be a component any ownership opportunity presented.
- Promote retail space on the first floor. With added residential should come the added need for services, retail, food and entertainment. Ground floors should be reserved for these uses and will aid in the activity along the street as well as pedestrian transportation. The local economy would benefit from the activity rather than requiring residents and office employees to travel to the fringes of the city for these options.

38 “Affordable Housing.” U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
• Further promote the concept of mixed-use buildings to create a well-balanced community, with office and residential located within the same building.

iv. Connections and Boundaries

Connections in western downtown should be improved to increase access to adjacent neighborhoods, districts, and improve navigation within the project area. While Interstate 490 represents a large obstacle that offers little flexibility, restructuring some key intersections, activating vacant space, removing the inner loop, and breaking down the physical barriers between neighborhoods will increase the perception of safety but help the neighborhood become friendlier for those who travel by car, bike, bus or by foot. It should be noted that the removal of the inner loop may not be feasible at this time, as city officials have stated that nothing can be done about some of the barriers it creates.40 However, if an alternative is not proposed, the condition will remain the same. This thesis provides one of these alternatives for future development.

Remove the Inner Loop Northwest.

• Lessen the barrier between Frontier Field, MCC, and High Falls and downtown Rochester.
• Increase land area for future development and offer at a variety of sizes and price ranges to encourage investment from a variety of sources, rather than only large developers with the necessary capital.
• Preserve an area for a future light rail transit option and promote alternative transportation.
• Examine additional neighborhood connections such as an extension to Mill Street, Oak Street, Front Street, and the Riverway Trail.
• It should be noted that there are citizens against the removal of the Inner Loop (discussed later). Therefore, it is critical that all community members’ voices are heard and weighed in the discussion about any potential removal.

Redesign the off-ramp from Interstate 490 to align to Plymouth Avenue.

• Shift major traffic to the main roads, rather than funneling into a small residential street.
• Improve safety along Washington Street and Spring Street to support pedestrians and residential units and encourage the creation of a new neighborhood with the addition of housing on surface lots.
• Provide an enhanced pedestrian bridge experience to Corn Hill, replacing the current bridge.

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40 Interview with Shawn Dunwoody. March 17, 2019.
This bridge should be a design feature that encourages use. Redesign of the landing space in Corn Hill should also take place to provide a welcoming environment for those going to/from the neighborhood.

- Examine the potential for a new roadway connecting the Susan B. Anthony neighborhood to the new Plymouth Avenue off-ramp (Utah Street).

**Reconnection to and enhancement of the Genesee River.**

- In conjunction with ROC the Riverway, promote developments that enhance the Genesee River corridor as a place of recreation and activity.
- Extension of the Riverway Trail to the Gorsline Building and examine possibilities of a platform that follows the gorge edge (see Focus Area Five: The Riverfront).
- Encourage clean up and redevelopment of the former Beebee Station site to include athletic fields, picnic space, housing, and some retail. An additional entry/exit should also be heavily examined to improve connectivity and prevent issues of safety or the feeling of isolation which could come from an unprogrammed and unpopulated open space with one exit, as the current ROC the Riverway plan suggests. An extension of Factory Street could be a potential solution.

**Support neighborhood activity and representation.**

- Lessen organizational requirements for neighborhood groups in order to allow for the inclusion and creation of several new groups within the project area to give local residents, building owners, and other stakeholders a stronger voice in the decisions that impact their neighborhoods. Invite these groups to the table when projects are proposed for the area. This directly focuses equity and allows all voices to be heard, not just those who can navigate the creation of legal entities to be included as neighborhood groups.
- Promote ownership of the neighborhoods and promote the idea of citizen involvement to assist in creating desirable neighborhoods.
- Explore possibility of creation of a new Center District to encompass downtown individually in the City Council, rather than connected to the adjacent districts. Downtown has it's own challenges and might be better represented separately in the city council. This includes the entire downtown area, not just the western section of this project. Fair representation is the ultimate goal and should be weighed when examining any redrawing of the boundaries.
v. Walkability and the Pedestrian Experience

The ability to walk from one place to another is the most basic form of human transportation. It does not require prior investment and can be completed outside of transit schedules and time frames. All too often, cities in North America are designed around the use of the automobile, rather than the people using the spaces. Additionally, downtown is an attractive option for those with disabilities and the aging. It can allow for greater independence and reduces dependency on an automobile as a primary method of transportation as many necessary services, employment, or entertainment is often within walking distance. As downtowns begin to grow in popularity once more, it is important that designing for the pedestrian experience becomes commonplace. Wayfinding, safety, accessibility and street level activity is important to facilitate walking in urban spaces. These aspects should permeate all aspects of the city and many of the previous goals and suggestions promote enhancing the pedestrian experience. The following goals build off of what has been previously stated in other sections of this paper.

Encourage pedestrian safety in all aspects of the city.

- All streets and intersections are to be designed with the pedestrian experience in mind.
- Parking garage entrances and exits should be geared towards the safety of the pedestrian at street level.
- Traffic calming tactics and enhanced pedestrian crossings are to be standard practice in as many areas as possible, specifically at the neighborhood level.

Create an attractive and engaging street experience.

- Combined with the aforementioned strategies in previous sections, improve street lighting with decorative fixtures, add additional street furniture and plantings, and more to create a rich pedestrian environment.
- Promote transparent first floor uses, specifically along Main Street and other main corridors.
- Encourage buildings to house a mix of uses and occupancies, further creating varied activity during all parts of the day and week. This will prevent the disparity between busy streetscapes during a weekday lunch hour but the same space being deserted on weekends.
- Building heights should aim to enhance the street level aesthetic by following the existing form-based code. Leeway should be granted to projects who demonstrate that the project is better for the pedestrian experience despite being outside of the desired height range.
- Enforce the zoning guidelines to ensure new development fits the aesthetic of the district in
which it is placed. While it may not be cut and dry, a concise examination of the street level activity and pedestrian experience should be the barometer for proposed developments. No longer should the city encourage any and all development.

**Use the Complete Streets model to design streets for varying abilities and ages.**

- Set a specified timeline for all streets within the project area to be redesigned and constructed following the Complete Streets policy adopted by the City of Rochester in 2011. Do not wait for private investment or the streets to deteriorate before taking isolated action.
- Keep traffic patterns simple when possible to assist those unfamiliar or with mental disabilities in understanding the flow (drivers as well as pedestrians).
- Traffic slowing techniques to reduce the danger of cars and increase time for above mentioned pedestrians and drivers to react to changes in flow or to pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Increase crossing times at intersections to benefit those in wheelchairs, are older, or who otherwise need longer times to cross streets.
- Create and enforce an equitable means of promoting sidewalk and ramp snow removal during the winter months. Educate local business owners and companies about keeping entrances accessible year-round.
- Use color paint to create signals for crosswalks, curbs, general wayfinding or other elements to help those with vision impairments.
- With a large deaf population in Rochester, increase the audio signal capabilities at crosswalks and extend outside of areas where deaf people might live to provide equal and safe access to all streets and areas.

*Figure 29: Sketch of proposed street sections using Complete Streets model.*

*(Image by author)*
5. RE-IMAGING DOWNTOWN ROCHESTER: A PROPOSED MASTER PLAN

A. Overall Concepts

The new plan for the western half of downtown Rochester is an attempt at creating equity in design, and displaying what those principles will look like in practice. Information from community members and organizations was gathered as much as possible and included into the proposals. When creating an equitable community, we need to think about many different aspects of life. What does it look like? How does it function? How do we move around and where are we going? One of the clearer points to start as a baseline, and perhaps the most crucial, is creating equity in movement around spaces. Walking is the fundamental mode of transportation. It does not rely on income, does not require any additional payments to use, and is an activity that promotes health. Private automobiles have typically reigned in center cities in North America and Rochester is no different. These vehicles offer more freedom in terms of distance and location. They require an upfront cost of purchase, leasing, or renting, but allow for a person to travel across the county, state, or country with ease. Carrying a lot of groceries, equipment, belongings, is much easier with an automobile, and affords people the possibility of saving money on other services, such as renting a truck or hiring a moving service for personal belongings. The automobile was so embraced by American culture that many buildings were demolished in order to create wider roads or expanses of paved land for parking. While this was happening, the ridership on public transport tended to decrease as more people purchased cars. Our city was redesigned for the car, it's movement, and parking. What happens if you do not own a car? You can move via your own two feet, by bicycle, or travel by bus. Generally, these methods have become more inconvenient in Rochester. Sidewalks or bike lines are not shoveled in winter and if they are, ramps for those with disabilities became the spots for the snow piles. Buses may not run at the times that are convenient, especially out to suburban shopping centers. Drivers are so accustomed to seeing only other vehicles on the street that they often do not see, or are not considerate to pedestrians and bicyclists, leading to an unsafe environment. This master plan looks at the ways people move around the city and attempts to create a more balanced approach to transportation that improves the safety of walking and bicycling, promotes bus travel, while still allowing the use of personal automobiles.

Another question that is looked at by this thesis is, where are we going? If there are a few great streets, bicycle lanes, bus lanes, and sidewalks, but they are rarely used as everyone needs to go out to Henrietta or Victor to purchase what they need, then what is the purpose? This leads to the need to cluster services and destinations closer to where people live. In the past, Rochester's downtown was the hub of many activities, but outside of that, one's own neighborhood tended to have what was needed for daily life. This concept should be
Figure 30: Proposed changes in percent of total area (square footage or acreage).
(Image by author)

Area Use

Figure 31: Two types of mixed use buildings proposed by this thesis.
(Image by author)
brought back in order for more equity to occur in our city. One should not have to drive through two towns for groceries or a box of nails. These services should be closer to one's residence, and serviced by multiple modes of transportation. For western downtown, that means examining how buildings (and parcels) are currently used and attempt to densify, redevelop, and reconnect the area to promote these smaller scale neighborhood systems.

Downtown was the central business district and commercial hotspot for several decades. However, it's becoming apparent now that the method of using downtown for sole purpose of office space has had a negative affect on the streetscape. If one travels to downtown during a lunch hour, specifically at Four Corners, the intersection of Main Street and Exchange Street, there would be plenty of activity and people moving from building to building. However, go to that same intersection at 8:00pm on a weekday, or nearly anytime on a weekend, and it can be seen just how empty that this area is in terms of housing and residential uses. This great urban intersection is devoid of any residential activity. This is typical of many spaces in downtown. While the eastern half has seen reinvestment and redevelopment with the addition of many residential units and buildings with facelifts, the western section has yet to catch on. This thesis proposes striking a better balance of the office space and residential units. As can be seen in the chart in Figure 30, this section of downtown has about 72% of all building square footage dedicated to an office or commercial use with a mere 11% of square footage dedicated to residential. The remaining square footage is split up between religious institutions, parks, utility buildings, retail, and vacant buildings. This project has proposed new buildings and suggested certain existing buildings to be repurposed to reconcile the differences between the amount of office space and the lack of residential housing downtown. By building out to the what is shown in this plan, the vacant office space can be repurposed and drop the percentage of square feet down to 54%, with residential growing to 32%. By proposing new and repurposing existing buildings into mixed-use buildings, this balance can be achieved. Two concepts are proposed for the downtown area. A traditional mixed use building is seen in Figure 31 and labeled type one, showing parking below grade, retail opportunities along the street level, and a single use for the rest of the building that can be either residential or commercial in nature. Many buildings downtown have this already, but should be used as the minimum standard for all buildings going forward to prevent the less active occupancies, such as office or residential lobby spaces, from encompassing the entire ground floor. The second concept, type two in Figure 31, again shows parking and retail using the bottom floors. However, the upper floors are split further to encompass both commercial and residential uses. This is taking the balance needed at the neighborhood level and scaling it down to the building level. This makes the ground level of the building very active, with people leaving for work, coming to work, coming home and going out at night. It will further
support the retail spaces on the first floor and not have to rely as much on the neighboring buildings to provide residential or commercial uses and added pedestrians.

Square footage space for manufacturing has increased in this master plan, despite still taking up 7% of the total space. With the added square footage of the new buildings, this added space seems negligible, but is important to add in. Some existing manufacturers located in the project area were given added space to expand, while additional manufacturing space was proposed. This will allow for those who work in manufacturing to live and work in downtown and benefit from the proximity, rather than by only providing the traditionally white collar jobs and housing which currently dominates the downtown market.

Additionally, Figure 30 shows the changes across other areas as well, including parking. Measured in acres of land use dedicated to parking uses, the total parking footprint has decreased while the amount of parking spaces have remained the same and even increased in some areas. This comes from the densification of spaces and the creations garages, underground parking beneath buildings, or stacked parking in existing surface lots. These are not new concepts. While parking garages may be expensive, with estimates at $19,700 per space, they are going to be necessary if downtown continues on the same track it has been, creating new buildings and existing buildings and housing more people who rely on transportation by private automobile. This plan has accounted for all existing surface parking lots and densified them into parking structures. A complete parking analysis was not completed and may show that, with some of the following concepts to reduce the need for automobiles, that there is an abundance of parking spaces. Therefore, parking garages may be eliminated. The amount of parking garages may not seem feasible, but gives a representation of what would be necessary if Rochester wished to densify without promoting other methods of transit. Another way to decrease the necessary parking supply is by providing improved transit opportunities. This thesis proposes a few concepts for reducing the need to use or own a car to move around. After increasing walkability and density, new grade separated bike lanes, bus only streets, and a potential passenger rail station have also been proposed to reduce the need for cars.

Affordability and ownership encompass much of the rest of the chart. The existing numbers were taken from the Downtown Housing Report completed in 2016 and are the most current numbers and represent the percentage of units across the entire downtown area, including the eastern section. Affordability in downtown came in at 24.4% of all units, with market rate taking up the remaining. While this thesis will not propose specific locations where all of the affordable housing should go, it suggests that these numbers should be altered

to reflect the current neighborhood conditions. As mentioned before in the table on page 8 of this document, the City of Rochester has a poverty rate of just over 30% as a whole with the specific areas of Center City “West” and Edgerton, the two reporting data groups in the project area, have poverty rates of 68.62% and 42.75% respectively (2014 data). Downtown should strive to better fill the need for the affordable housing that it is currently experiencing, and add more units so that the outcome results in approximately 40% affordability. Additionally, as mentioned in the project goals, affordable options for those who need accessibility must also be presented, as typically units that are fully accessible are priced as “luxury units” due to the amenities provided that are required for someone in a wheelchair, such as elevators, hardwood floors, washer dryer hookups, and covered parking. Affordability needs to permeate all ability levels and household types, as well as provide options for the young people who are just starting out, those just starting a family, and those who are older and no longer working, but wish to retain their independence. The table below takes the income reported in Figure 17 (as well as additional information available for 2017) and breaks it down further to provided numbers to illustrate what affordable housing should look like in Rochester.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting Area</th>
<th>Gross Annual Income</th>
<th>Monthly Income</th>
<th>Affordable Threshold (Per month)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Center City “West” (2014)</td>
<td>$4,316</td>
<td>$359.67</td>
<td>$107.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgerton</td>
<td>$23,258</td>
<td>$1,938.17</td>
<td>$581.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Rochester (Average)</td>
<td>$32,234</td>
<td>$2,686.17</td>
<td>$805.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center City “West” (2017)</td>
<td>$75,234</td>
<td>$6,269.50</td>
<td>$1,880.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center City “West” (Reported 2017 Avg.)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$1,133.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Wage 2019 ($11.10)</td>
<td>$23,088</td>
<td>$1,924.00</td>
<td>$577.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 33: Table illustrating affordability in Rochester’s context.
(By author)

The gross annual income comes from the reported median household income for the reporting area. Monthly income is then calculated by dividing by twelve. As defined earlier, affordability is defined as paying less than 30 percent of one’s household income towards housing. Therefore, the monthly number is taken at 30 percent, giving the benchmark for affordability. This can be for any housing type, whether a three bedroom apartment, or mortgage. The row of the table above labeled Center City “West” (2017) is taken from the City

42 Interview with Luticha Doucette, ADA Coordinator, City of Rochester. February 8, 2019.
43 “Affordable Housing.” U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
of Rochester’s Building Blocks Application, which pulls information from the 2017 American Community Survey. This illustrates the change in median income for the area for which affordability is then calculated. The following row of the table shows the average reported gross rent as of 2017. While below the “affordability cap” of the reported neighborhood income, it stands out as double the affordable rent for Edgerton, and well above the City of Rochester’s average. The final row shows an example of a single person working 40 hours a week at the current minimum wage in New York State and what his or her affordable threshold would be.

How much of the new residential needs to be affordable? Traditionally, downtown has approximately 966 residential units that are subsidized or affordable, making up 24.4% of the market.44 Currently, no units defined as subsidized or affordable exist in western downtown. In this thesis, nearly 3,600,000 square feet is proposed to be added to the residential stock through conversions and new construction. By raising affordable housing percentage to 40% as stated earlier, approximately 1,440,000 square feet of this new residential space would need to be affordable. These can take the form of many different size apartments, condominiums, houses, or any other housing type available.

Ownership is also important to cultivate and while Rochester may be on par with other cities in terms of rental rates in downtown cores (Figure 18), ownership should be encouraged so that the community has a stake in their neighborhood. A variety of options exist, including reasonably priced condominiums, to townhomes, to single family homes. Again, referring to the table on page 8, ownership rates across the City of Rochester are at 46.55% owned and 53.45% rented. This thesis pushes for the downtown area to reach 35% ownership and 65% rental, compared to the 14.4% ownership and 85.5% rental that is currently seen. Therefore, of that 3,600,000 square feet of new residential, 1,260,000 should be offered for purchase directly.

i. Project Boundary

The project boundary comes from the latest incarnation of the Center City Master Plan (Figure 34). The boundary for the initial Center City Master Plan from 2003 (Figure 19) was shown earlier in this document. This latest version shows that the boundary has changed and shrunk in size. Since this is the latest version, it is the starting boundary for this project. Some small deviations occur as necessary to complete changes that are in line with the community goals, such as an extension at Plymouth and Troup Street, or the extension out

![Diagram of Traditional Parking Garage Design](Image by author)

**Figure 35: Traditional parking garage design.**
*(Image by author)*
to Warehouse and Brown Street near Frontier Field. While this project does not address the area immediately across Interstate 490 from the Cascade District, it is an important connection to be developed to further connect the Susan B. Anthony neighborhood with the downtown core.

ii. Parking Garage Design & Recommendations

Parking garages are a large component of a city’s infrastructure and, for car users, is often the first and last place that users experiences in a city. How they look needs to be considered when planning out their locations and appearance. Functionality is also important to design. A typical configuration of a parking garage is shown in Figure 36:

![Figure 36: Parking garage recommendation. (Image by author)](Image by author)
garage is shown in Figure 35. This shows a structure with a ramping floor across the middle and tightly compacted floor levels. This increases the efficiency of parking by fitting more spaces into a building. However, what happens if the garage is no longer necessary, or parking demand has dropped so much that the land would be more valuable as something else? In this case, there’s little option but to continue to run the garage or demolish the structure and build an entirely new building.

Figure 36 shows an alternative for areas where parking might not always be in such high demand in the future. The garage is slimmed down to one aisle (may be more if the site allows) and a ramp is “clipped” onto the exterior of the building, allowing the floor plates to be level. Increasing the floor to floor heights allows for the garages to be repurposed later on, by providing enough roof for future mechanical equipment and fixtures while still having enough room for occupied space. While this is less efficient for parking, it allows the structure to remain the same throughout multiple uses compared to the sloping floor of the traditional design. The ramp can be removed as needed, by starting the repurposing at the top of the structure and working downward as parking demand is reduced or office or residential space demand increases. This allows the property owner to scale and react to market changes. While it is still a costly investment to build a garage of either type, an eye on the future is an important aspect to consider, and building viability can change an expensive structure that has gone dormant into a capital generating building once more.

While there are many garages proposed in this thesis, this is only one option to address parking. Ideally, a combination of improvements as seen in the guiding principles would help reduce car traffic, lead to a decreased need for parking spaces, and increase equity in transportation. While it is outside the scope of this project to investigate parking demand and supply, it should be noted that garages are not always used to their full capacity as seen in Figure 37 and Figure 38, taken at the same time during an event. This comparison shows that people are actively preferring the surface lot to the garage spaces. People also do not prefer to
park on the upper levels of garages if there is a surface lot nearby. Demand for parking here is driven by the nearby county and city offices which were both inactive during this event. Nevertheless, parking should still be examined and not only distributed evenly and priced correctly.
B. FOCUS AREA ONE: The Inner Loop Northwest & Interstate 490

i. The Inner Loop Northwest

The City of Rochester has a long history with the Inner Loop Expressway and its potential redevelopment. Designed and implemented in the early 1950s, the Inner Loop is a mostly elevated or sunken expressway that surrounds the downtown core of Rochester and has historically cut off downtown from the surrounding neighborhoods. As shown earlier in this thesis, the Inner Loop poses a physical and psychological barrier, isolating neighborhoods and poverty, and creating an uncomfortable walking experience. The sunken portion of the eastern half of this expressway was recently removed and filled in (Figure 40). New parcels are being redeveloped and the physical divide between downtown and the Park Avenue neighborhood is becoming a little bit less noticeable as buildings go up. The remaining section of the expressway, which runs along the northern edge of downtown, has yet to have a potential plan surface. The City of Rochester and Mayor Lovely Warren have stated the desire to move forward with this project, and as of July 2018, a study was to be underway to examine the potential options for removing the remaining section of the expressway.45 The image below was released by the City to illustrate a potential option for the removal of the well-traveled artery. However, as seems to be typical, the western portion of downtown is conveniently covered by the legend, and off

Figure 39: Image of Inner Loop North concept (Image by City of Rochester)

45 Sharp, Brian. “City Eyes $1M Study to Remove Remainder of the Inner Loop.”
The Inner Loop project is controversial among citizen-based groups and local organizations. While the project to remove the expressway appears to have enough support in City Hall to generate a realistic proposal and potentially materialize, it should be noted that the citizens concerned with the changes need to be addressed directly by the City. It has been demonstrated earlier in this thesis how the Inner Loop has created a divide within the project area, and isolates High Falls. However, it also provides efficient and quick transportation for those who live in the neighborhoods directly adjacent to the artery. Those along the northern section and along University Avenue, are worried of increased commute times and increased traffic on neighborhood streets.46 Despite these objections, the proposed plan by this thesis starts with an attempt to visualize what the project area may look like should the Inner Loop Expressway be removed, and use that to inform the remaining transportation network and potential parcels for redevelopment. This section of the removal will be referred to as Inner Loop Northwest.

Figure 44 shows, in greater detail, the adjustments made to the existing Inner Loop Expressway and the surrounding neighborhoods. Conversely to the other sections, this portion of the existing expressway is elevated above grade through this part of downtown with a solid-filled base and blank concrete walls. The proposed changes are in line with what has happened at Inner Loop East, and what is thought...

46 Interview with Suzanne Mayer, Center City Community Coalition. July 18, 2018.
to take place at Inner Loop North. The roadway will be lower to become an at-grade boulevard. Traffic numbers for this section of highway have not been disclosed, but it is apparent through observation that this area serves many more vehicles than the Inner Loop East project area had. Therefore, it is important to try to facilitate easy movement of automobiles while integrating the boulevard into the street network.

The street will combine sidewalks, on-street parking, and grade separated bike lanes similar to what was completed at the Inner Loop East site. Ramps to and from Interstate 490 will need to be modified accordingly to adjust for tighter curves, and steeper descents to the street level. This reconfiguration of ramps has the potential to open up additional real estate to the south. The Buckingham Commons building is currently on an island surrounded by the Inner Loop, Plymouth Avenue, and Allen Street (used as an exit from Interstate 490). By changing the ramps, the former Inner Loop becomes the main entry and exit to Interstate 490, and therefore negates the need for Allen Street to the south. Historic maps and imagery from the area provide insight into how the street network was laid out before the Inner Loop existed (Figure 42). Zooming into this section of downtown shows that Allen Street was not where it is presently located, but instead where the Inner Loop footprint is, directly to the north of the Buckingham Commons Building, or Pullman Building. By lowering the Inner Loop to street level, it can take the role of the historic Allen Street, in name and function.

Another principal change to the junction is the extension of Oak Street to the Inner Loop. By looking
at the same two images above, it can be seen that Oak Street formerly extended south under the railroad tracks to intersect with Allen Street. The same configuration could be completed by some careful realignments of ramps to 490 and coordination with the existing railroad overpass. There is enough space to fit Oak Street without modification of the bridge. This serves two purposes. One, it provides an easy route for people attending games at either Frontier Field or Capelli Sports Stadium (should the latter remain in existence). Secondly, it connects the Frontier Field and Platt Street neighborhood to Cascade District, which in this plan is aiming to become more residential. An alternative route to the stadium besides traveling on Plymouth Avenue or entering from further West on Platt Street makes the trek from western downtown to the ballpark a much quicker experience. The area of Frontier Field will be discussed further in another section.

Once the Inner Loop descends to street level and becomes Allen Street, it continues along the historic pathway until it intersects with State Street. The existing city blocks support this use, creating a more unique corridor than having the street aligned up against the railroad tracks. Furthermore, pushing the new Allen Street up against the buildings and parcels to its south allow for redevelopment opportunities up against the railway. If we refer back to the historic 1935 plat map (Figure 42), we can see that there used to be a transit station on Allen Street between Elizabeth St (Cascade Dr.) and Plymouth Avenue. Although there is no current rail transit options in Rochester, there was at one point. Speaking to equity, it is important that a variety of transit opportunities exist in a city center. A rail option in Rochester, although outside of the scope of this thesis to design or research, could prove to be a worthy investment in the future. Using the existing railroad right of ways, nearby suburban towns could be connected to the center of downtown with a transit stop located in this part of the city between Plymouth Avenue and State Street. Passengers could be dropped off within walking distance to Monroe Community College, Frontier Field, Rochester City Hall, Monroe County Office Building, the Federal Courthouse, and Blue Cross Arena, not to mention a myriad of other employers that currently reside in this section of the city. If there was ever a place to encourage public transit by rail, this location would prove to be the most effective. On the proposed plan, the new ‘City Hall Station’ is aligned with North Fitzhugh Street, opposite City Hall's parking lot. The parking lot would be densified into a parking structure, allowing for the creation of an urban park setting, a welcoming sight to those exiting the station. The parking structure would be four stories tall, matching the number of stories of the adjacent section of City Hall, and would be able to house over 250 parking spaces. The lot that currently exists has 108 parking spaces. Fitzhugh Street would be extended through a well-lit, large tunnel under the existing CSX railway, and connected into a new street where Kodak and MCC’s lots currently stand. Some surface parking will be
Figure 45: 3D view of proposed park behind City Hall, facing the Downtown United Presbyterian / Spiritus Christi Church and the new City Hall Station and Inner Loop redevelopment. (Image by author)
available directly adjacent to the station on this side of the tracks, with new mixed use buildings flanking each side along the major corridors. Space between the buildings on the southern side of the tracks could boast an elevated walking space at a similar elevation to the railroad, with retail square footage below at the street level. This space could also house office uses as well if the market demands it, but retail spaces will provide a more active use that can extend past typical office hours, and provide further activity and engagement along this new main corridor.

The tree lined boulevard crosses State Street and angles as it extends towards the river, here it returns to the Inner Loop’s original footprint in order to reuse the existing bridge over the Genesee River. New buildings can still wedge between the new Allen Street and the railroad.

A well documented concern with High Falls is it’s lack of connectivity to the surrounding areas. Annabelle Kleist, a resident in the area, states how High Falls is a spot she wishes she traveled to more, but the barrier of the Inner Loop and railroad bridge deters her and her husband from going there often. The couple frequents establishments on State Street, but despite only being a two minute walk from High Falls, rarely visit the neighborhood. This type of barrier is what is potentially holding High Falls back from taking off as a successful urban neighborhood. Currently the site of many offices and design groups, it has a character that has become an event venue, with photographers and recently engaged or married couples visiting to take photos with the old mill buildings and stone streets. The City of Rochester attempted to redevelop this area in the mid 1990s, leading to the relocation of several offices to the area, and the preservation of much of the history. However, the area still found itself with struggling to obtain enough traffic to keep restaurants and bars open. Rachel Walsh of Greentopia, provided the information that on any given workday there are 4,000-5,000 workers that are in High Falls but there are only 12 apartments in the neighborhood. Restaurants that currently exist tend to have hours that only cater to the workers of the area, open for lunches and close by 5pm. The area becomes much quieter on nights and weekends. In order to keep a restaurant going during typical hours (breakfast, lunch & dinner) in this area, it can be logically concluded that more people need to be in the area past closing of business, and that they need to be able to get there and know that the restaurant exists. Connections to the neighborhood need to be improved, and residential units should be added in or nearby. With the Inner Loop lowered to street level, there is now the opportunity to extend Mill Street further south to Andrews Street. This will create an intersection, and added visibility to High Falls. Currently, Mill Street terminates into an off-ramp of the inner loop, and faces one of the elevated concrete walls (Figure 46). With the proposed extension to Allen Street, any vehicle that travels on the Inner Loop would then see the Mill Street
entrance, rather than be whisked above it. The connection to Andrews Street will provide even more visibility to the street and not only physically connects High Falls to the center city, but can potentially increase the perception of it’s proximity to downtown as well. This connection, coupled with the decreased visual impact of an elevated concrete highway directly adjacent to an elevated railroad, should increase the friendliness of the transition from Center City to High Falls. This will therefore promote walking and biking across this divide, furthering the concept of transportation equity, and bringing High Falls back into downtown.

ii. Interstate 490 & Exit 14

Interstate 490 currently has one exit that services this section of downtown directly, outside of the Inner Loop junction previously described. Exit 14 is located at Spring Street and South Washington Street, the off-ramp is short and spits speeding traffic out onto a district street, rather than any main avenue. Road users can easily access Broad Street and Main Street or they can make an immediate right turn onto Spring Street to reach Plymouth Avenue. While it may seem convenient for drivers leaving the expressway, there are other aspects that leave this intersection dangerous. Drivers coming from the opposite direction on South Washington (south from Broad Street towards Spring Street) will stop at the intersection and only have the option of going left or right. However, the angle of the off-ramp and the presence of the pedestrian bridge ramp, roadway signage, and trees, make it
nearly impossible to see a car leaving the expressway at a high rate of speed (Figure 47). Since these drivers leaving 490 have no stop, then it is possible for them to maintain their higher speeds until they reach the traffic signal at Broad Street. Therefore, trying to make a left turn onto Spring Street is difficult to say the least. The adjacent buildings, one converted historic house structure that sits vacant, and one former RIT educational building adapted to suit office and apartments, have to bear the brunt of this speedy traffic. Residents of these apartments park across the street in the parking lot and will regularly cross Spring Street. Pedestrians have no safely designated crosswalk to use, and cannot see traffic that can come quickly around the corner, making this location very dangerous.

No other locations in the City of Rochester have this method or style of off-ramp. All other exits are stopped immediately by a traffic light or stop sign, and exit onto larger roadways. The on-ramp is located off of Plymouth Avenue, one block over. Here, drivers must turn right (west) in order to go east. The on-ramp loops around before joining 490 to cross the Genesee River. This is not an intuitive turn, but was more than likely instituted to speed traffic from the downtown area to the eastern suburbs (there is no on-ramp to go west). No left turns are required at this intersection and so traffic is unlikely to back up at rush hour. However, putting the on-ramp in this location required it to turn 180 degrees to head back East, consumed more surface area, and required that Troup Street be truncated and turned into a one-way street, that actually cannot be reached from other segments of Troup Street. This creates a confusing situation for residents and visitors to Corn Hill. “I see delivery drivers going back and forth on the street. Eventually after the third or fourth time I go out and help them get to the other side of Troup Street,” says Bonny Mayer of the Corn Hill Neighborhood Association. Furthermore, since this section of Troup Street is one way, it is marked with signs properly indicating that you cannot enter this street from Plymouth Avenue, and that it is one-way going east. The problem with this is that the on-ramp is directly next to it, over a small median. I myself have difficulty navigating this intersection. If I am coming from Corn Hill, I know that I need to turn left to get onto 490, but when approaching I see the one-way signs first, which is placed in the median. It appears to drivers as though the entire roadway, including the on-ramp, is one-way. It is only as you get closer that you realize that they cannot both be one-way.

In order to rectify these issues, efforts should be made to adjust 490 to discharge onto Plymouth Avenue and to realign the on-ramp to become more like the established standard here in Rochester. It would be safe to assume that Plymouth was selected as the original location of the off-ramp, but for one reason or another (traffic volume on Plymouth potentially) had to be moved one block over to South Washington. In the proposed plan, the on-ramp and off-ramp configuration has been tightened to create a much more familiar form to drivers.
in Rochester, which should be helpful to drivers coming to this area for the first time. Several other on and off-ramps are composed in this way. Ramps are close to the edges of the expressway and ramp up to the main cross street, and terminating in a traffic light with the option of turning left, right, or continue straight. This will not only allow discharging traffic onto main streets in order to avoid the smaller residential streets with lower speed limits, but assist drivers leaving the city find the proper turn for the on-ramp. This ramping style is very similar to other exits along 490 such as Culver Road, Monroe Avenue, Goodman Street, and Child and Ames Street. Goodman Street (Figure 48) takes the closest form of the ramp, as Utah Alley is to be extended adjacent to the expressway, similar to how Broadway interacts with Goodman Street.

This new configuration allows for traffic to easily turn right or left onto a main artery, rather than transverse a smaller neighborhood-like section of downtown. Utah Alley now becomes Utah Street as it continues as Broadway does. The difference here is that Utah Street is to be open to two-way traffic. This new street can carry traffic exiting 490 directly to a new junction with West Main Street and over to neighborhoods that are dependent on this exit. On the other side of 490, an off-ramp from the west now discharges onto Plymouth. Currently, travelers coming from the west needed to exit at the Inner Loop. There was no direct access to this section of downtown or Corn Hill. This new off-ramp allows for better access via automobile from western Rochester and the suburban towns on that side of the Monroe County. The entertainment venues and government offices necessitate facilitating the ease of access for visitors as well as the residents of the area. With this new on and off-ramp configuration, Troup Street can be reconnected as one singular roadway. Additional land is also freed up and has the potential to be more residential units adjacent to the popular Corn Hill Neighborhood. Here an apartment building and attached townhouses are shown, with parking located underground, partially working with the grading necessary to rise up to Plymouth Avenue.

According to the Corn Hill Community Vision Plan, completed in 2012 by the Community Design Center, connections with the surrounding community were identified as areas that needed improvement. Along with the proposed changes to the Plymouth-490 intersection, additional pedestrian friendly crossings should
be added, especially along Troup Street, in order to get automobiles passing through to slow down for the residential area. Additionally, added streetlights in this area and the re-planting of trees in the area reclaimed from the previous ramps should continue to help the transition feel more appropriate.

The reconfiguration would also allow the opportunity to make aesthetic improvements to the Plymouth Avenue bridge over 490. Similar concepts have been completed on the western side of the city, such as Saxton, Child, and Ames Streets. This should help tie into the more historic fabric of Corn Hill and make the area feel better to people who use the bridge as well as those who pass by on 490.

This proposed plan also changes the location of the current pedestrian bridge across 490 that used to link the former RIT campus buildings. With the addition of Utah Street, extending all the way to West Main Street, the current pedestrian bridge needs to be removed to ensure the right clearance can be achieved for passing cars. With the opportunity to completely relocate this connection, it was moved adjacent to Goldsmith Place, one of the many roads cut off when 490 was constructed. Currently, the connection serves a few people who walk or run across the bridge, but still seems to be underutilized and cannot overcome the barrier 490 presents to the neighborhoods on either side of the artery. The goal here was to begin to reconnect some of these former crossings, while improving the quality of space around them in order to bring these areas back to life. The current location of the new Utah Street is parking lots owned by the City of Rochester and a local bank. The area is difficult to activate due to 490’s angled route, Broad Street’s angle, and the way the street grids lay out. With Utah Alley here it allows for parcels to have another “front” to face, so that not everything needs to be oriented to Broad Street. The new corridor would aim to slow traffic by keeping narrow, with on-street parking on one side and a grade separated bike lanes on either side. A new boundary wall would be constructed along 490 to shield noise and some of the view from the new properties. A large parking garage is to be constructed to absorb the parking requirements of nearby businesses and city offices, as well as provide some additional spaces for visitors to the area. The new pedestrian bridge ramps up to cross Utah Street from Goldsmith Pl, and crosses 490 to discharge near it’s current termination by Paul Louis Arena.
enhancements here are to increase the on-street parking and add more spaces to Boys Club Place, as well as make the termination of the bridge a more formal park atmosphere. This requires realigning Goldsmith Place and Livingston Park to continue straight to Boys Club Pl, rather than turn to wrap the surface parking. The parking lot itself remains untouched, but the arena can now benefit from added parking across 490 on Utah Street and the new garage that is within a shorter walk, and ideally a more beautiful walk, despite needing to cross a large expressway. The design of the new bridge should be a feature of the area and almost a draw in and of itself. The Holmberg Bridge in Chattanooga, Tennessee is a good example (Figure 50). While it connects to a museum of art, the concept is similar. The bridge is a showpiece in itself and boasts a glass panel deck and steel cable railings to give a sleek profile. The glass panels may be replaced in the future for durability reasons47, but the bridge itself is still a strong design presence over a busy highway and links two neighborhoods together.

47 Walton, Judy. “Glass Coming Down, Steel Going up on Chattanooga’s Holmberg Bridge.”
C. FOCUS AREA TWO: Shifting West Main Street and West Broad Street

i. Overall Changes

West Main Street is the main thoroughfare through western downtown and undergoes a dramatic shift both aesthetically and in the level of activity as it moves through the project area. Four Corners, the area where State Street intersects with West Main Street, has the appearance of a large city block. Cars, buses, and people crowd the intersections on a business day. In fact, this section of Main Street has been used as a set in movies to imitate New York City in order to keep production costs lower. However, where the movie set terminated is exactly where West Main Street shifts from the lively big city atmosphere to the depressing and vacant core that surrounds the center city. George Traikos, owner of the Academy Building, the first school building in downtown and recently converted into apartments, said when he first looked at the area on a map, he thought the city looked like Dresden, Germany after World War II and appeared to be “bombed out” and empty. Specifically, the area of Plymouth Avenue and West Main Street and Broad Street. It is one of the main intersections of the city but has empty lots on three of the four corners. The only corner that is developed was done within the last five years. The remaining corners are surface parking lots that are privately owned and rented out on a monthly basis to car users who work in the nearby offices. While the space for parking might be necessary for now, the parking lots do not represent the highest and best use of space for these prominent corners. As recently as the mid-2000s, these lots were filled with buildings. The lot located on the eastern side of Plymouth used to be home to Hotel Rochester, a 10-story masonry building demolished in the early 2000s (Figure 52 and Figure 54). Across Plymouth, a myriad of smaller mixed-use buildings (Figure 51, Figure 53, and Figure 54) existed up until the last few decades. While underutilized at the time due to the decline of downtowns across the United States, these buildings allowed for a continuous Main Street experience from the successful Four Corners Area to the 490 overpass. Currently, these parcels make up a large gap in the urban fabric, and when they area not filled with automobiles, the gravel and rubble surface is detrimental in appearance to the neighborhood.

While in a group discussion with the leaders of Hochstein School of Music located on Plymouth

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48 Interview with George Traikos, October 30, 2018.
Avenue, city beautification came up as a potential way to change the perception of this part of town. “People think it’s unsafe. Your car is actually safer here than in Pittsford Plaza,” said one participant. While specific data relating to this claim was not found, the concept is important. Pittsford Plaza is a popular shopping destination out among the eastern suburbs, while nearly anything within the City of Rochester, especially downtown, is perceived to be highly dangerous and unsafe. The proposed changes to this area hope to combat this perception issue and create an enjoyable place where the old perception can be overwritten by new experiences.

West Broad Street runs from Lyell Avenue all the way to the Genesee River before turning into East Broad Street and continuing on for about another half mile. It enters the project area on the western most side and runs nearly parallel to West Main Street. This was the original bed of the Erie Canal. When the canal was re-routed around Rochester, the bed was drained and decked over to become the Rochester Subway, a rail system that traversed across the city and was underground as it passed through the downtown area. The subway ceased operations in 1956 and has been sitting vacant for much of the time since. Portions of the tunnels have been filled in or redeveloped. The original street grid in the project area was designed around that fact that West Broad Street was the Erie Canal, rather than a street.

West Main Street currently has four lanes of traffic with on-street parking in both directions. This provides for a right turn and bus lane as well as two uninterrupted lanes.
that travel the length of Main Street. West Broad Street has four to five lanes at any given section, along with on-street parking in both directions. Plymouth Avenue also has four to five lanes as it crosses West Broad and West Main. While there are many automobiles and parking lots, these roadways feel out of place and lead to an uneasy feeling when walking these stretches of sidewalk. This also has a large part to do with the lack of buildings along many of these street edges.

Figure 56 and Figure 57 show the proposed changes to West Main Street and West Broad Street. Streets are redesigned, and many buildings are either proposed to be built as infill projects, or to be renovated and converted to other uses. The primary changes to the street configurations include the introduction of the complete streets concept on every street and the shifting of the main traffic corridor to West Broad Street, with West Main Street becoming a bus only route. The two parallel streets are nearly redundant, giving and opportunity for one to become more pedestrian or transit friendly with reduced car traffic. Ultimately, West Main Street was chosen over West Broad Street due to the fact that much of the built urban fabric already exists. Ground floor spaces are largely transparent and optimal retail spaces while the need to infill on Main Street is far less than the need to infill along Broad Street. This change prioritizes walkability and public transportation and can help keep buses moving in times of heavy traffic. Automobiles can still cross Main Street at key intersections. Grade separated bike lane networks on each street are also proposed to contribute to a more equitable way of movement around the city. No longer should we need to rely on the automobile to go to the adjacent neighborhood. Bikes can be an efficient, healthy, and cost effective method of transportation. Additionally, intersections between side streets and Main Street (such as Washington Street or the various alleys) have been redesigned to slow automobiles to encourage safer behavior by drivers. Figure 55 shows a typical intersection between a side street and a main street in Copenhagen, Denmark. The sidewalk is elevated to create a speed bump that encourages drivers to go slow as they leave the neighborhood. Additionally, the side street is kept narrow with the curbs extending out at right angles towards the drive lane. This area is the ‘cap’ to the parking lanes down the neighborhood street, but also provides a space to plant trees and park bikes for those in using the neighboring buildings. This intersection effectively equalizes the different modes of transportation that would use this street and provides a safer atmosphere for all parties.
involved.

Moving to the western edge of Figure 56 it can be seen that a new traffic circle has been created in the intersection of Cascade Dr, West Main, West Broad, and the new Utah Street. Many cars travel through this intersection from Exit 14 at 490 in order to get to these western neighborhoods. Additionally, this traffic circle would split traffic heading to 490 or Corn Hill (those who have not split off at Ford Street already) and keep West Broad Street for downtown traffic. The creation of Utah Street and the traffic circle allows for more of a gateway approach to this section of downtown on the interior side of the 490 overpass. The opposite side still needs to be addressed. Whereas previous plans have called for a beautification of the 490 overpass, which is a good idea, this project proposes an alternative and more comprehensive overhaul of the area in order to generate the feeling of an urban square by harnessing the angles of the current buildings. This should still allow for easy traffic movement while providing more of an experience for the pedestrian and those who will observe this intersection daily from the neighboring buildings. While no traffic study was completed to determine a roundabout would be beneficial, the form of the buildings and roadways still help create the desired feeling of an urban square regardless of the final configuration of this intersection. The existing bank building and Rochester City School District (RCSD) lots have been removed and replaced with new structures that channel the same type of style as the Cascade District and neighboring buildings occupied by Passero Associates and Howard Hanna Real Estate. A large parking garage is also proposed to be placed here, in order to maintain the spaces needed for city employees. Retail can front this garage, represented by the dotted line along Broad Street. This conceals the parking from the street, but allows for these spaces to take advantage of the nearby amenity. Howard Hanna’s lots behind their buildings have been infilled with buildings and all parking removed. This space is invaluable to creating the new Main Street atmosphere in western downtown and developing it is imperative to reviving the area. Lost parking spaces can be regained by creating underground garages when constructing the new buildings or by obtaining spaces in the newly constructed garage across Broad Street. Three buildings are also re-purposed directly in vicinity. Currently they are underutilized by sitting completely vacant or were designed for office uses and have no tenant. Converting these to residential units will boost the amount of people living in the area and help support the creation or relocation of new retail and entertainment options in this area. An additional building has been suggested directly adjacent to one of the reuse projects. This could be tied in as an expansion of the current building and allow for additional apartment units above and a more expansive and useful retail space below, with space in the adjacent alleyway to spill out for seating or events as needed. This would help the pedestrian engagement along Main Street compared to the current use of
a small parking lot. The building on the corner, closest to the traffic circle, is to be renovated in order to become affordable housing.

The Open Door Mission is a non-profit organization that works to provide food and emergency housing to the homeless population of men, women, and children in Rochester. The organization has three locations, two of which are located within the project boundary. 156 North Plymouth houses the administrative offices, kitchen that prepares the meals, some transitional housing and shower and laundry facilities. The other location is at 210 West Main Street and is the primary shelter that has 50 beds but could house up to 70 people when necessary.\textsuperscript{49} The Open Door Mission has been serving the community for 65 years, and has been at the West Main Street location for over 20 years. The Open Door Mission has no plans to move their locations in western downtown, despite the fact that the City of Rochester has asked them to vacate the neighborhood. “We want to stay where the homeless populations is, or where they access resources” Anna Valeria-Iseman states.\textsuperscript{50} Their current building stock came from the previous owners who gifted the properties to the Mission, and includes the corner property adjacent to the proposed traffic circle (Figure 58). The Mission has stated that there is a need for housing for the working poor, a group of people who may no longer need the direct services of the Open Door Mission and are working, but are still struggling to make ends meet. Exploring options for the potential reuse of this building, the Mission has determined that they wish to create 18 one to two bedroom affordable units, and will ideally be developing the property themselves in order to keep costs down and maintain the units as “truly affordable,” as Veleria-Iseman states.\textsuperscript{51} The surrounding neighborhood of existing buildings and proposed buildings should build off of this new residential use and continue to add more units as well as the services, restaurants, and places of employment where these people have typically re-enter the workforce. Businesses that provide delivery drivers, work in the trades, food service, retail, and healthcare, are all places where current residents are employed.

Suggestions for the proposed buildings across the street include ground floor retail or service use with smaller residential units above to support young professionals or those getting started after high school or

\textsuperscript{49} Interview with Anna Valeria-Iseman, Executive Director of the Open Door Mission. January 11, 2019.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
college. Studio apartments can be a majority of the units, and rents should be kept at ranges acceptable to the 18-30 year old range for the immediate area. By infusing housing of varying income levels and sizes and reconfiguring the traffic routes, this area aims to become less dependent of the automobile and more equitable and balanced in terms of development.

ii. Thomas Wilson Boyde Jr. Park

Moving further east towards the Genesee River, the largest of the paved over lots currently used for parking has become a new feature downtown park. Originally thought to be filled with buildings to enclose West Main Street and the “energy dropping” Plymouth Avenue intersection, the switch to a park use has far more potential to the surrounding area than these buildings. This park has the opportunity to be a central meeting point for all gatherings, formal or informal events, historic tours, festive 5k runs, daily activities, lunch hours, family picnics or get togethers, dog playtime, or just a place to relax at all times of day. The City of Rochester and its neighborhoods have done a good job with programming throughout its parks, especially in urban settings. Concerts, holiday events, ice skating, theater acts or performances, art shows. This would give the western half of downtown a focal point for its own events. It will become a new anchor for the area and with it bring new investment in the surrounding buildings.

The name of the park should be tied closely to the history of the area. This is where downtown started, where education first began with former University of Rochester and RIT properties directly adjacent, and the location where Frederick Douglass printed his papers and near where Susan B. Anthony lived. Equality and education should be emphasized. Therefore, this project proposes the name of Thomas Wilson Boyde Jr. Park, but could be commonly referred to as Boyde Park. Thomas Boyde Jr. (Figure 59) was not only one of the first African American architects in the United States but also lived for much of his life here in Rochester. He worked on several notable buildings throughout his career spanning from the late 1920s through the 1960s, including design work on the very intricate Monroe Community Hospital as well as a prominent building along the Genesee, the Rundel Library. Boyde worked for local firm of Sigmund Firestone for many years before becoming one of the first African American architects to start and own his own firm. He was known for his

Figure 59: Photo of Thomas W. Boyde Jr. as a student at Syracuse University (Photo by Rochester Museum and Science Center)

52 Wilson, Ericka. “Rochester Roots: Meet the Architect Who Designed the Strathallan Hotel.”
RE-IMAGINING DOWNTOWN ROCHESTER

FIGURE 60: EXISTING WEST MAIN STREET - SECTION

FIGURE 61: PROPOSED WEST MAIN STREET - SECTION

FIGURE 62: SECTION THROUGH THOMAS W. BOYDE JR. PARK
professionalism and work ethic and shaped much of Rochester and its buildings post World War II. It would be fitting for a major urban park to pay tribute to a fine citizen who was a trailblazing professional and had created many other beautiful spaces during his career.

Directly to the west of the new park, on South Washington Street, is a beautiful building that deserves to be showcased. With the restoration of a historic cornice, the Washington Building would help frame the large open space of Boyde Park along with the new proposed buildings across Plymouth Avenue. These buildings, along with the existing offices, restaurant, and post office on West Main and the city school district offices on West Broad Street, are very important to help enclose Boyde Park to create a controlled but enjoyable space, similar to urban spaces throughout Europe or in larger American Cities. Bryant Park in New York City or Millenium Park in Chicago have the characteristics of a place where people can meet, take a lunch break, and escape from the bustle of downtown. While Boyde Park may not be at the scale of these great parks, it has the same opportunities. This park will create a visible hub of activity along two of the main thoroughfares through this section of downtown. Visible from these main corridors as well as further down the blocks, any activity here will not only seek to change perceptions of downtown from those passing by, but can also assist in navigation for those who are less familiar with the city. Boyde Park can become a central meeting spot for those coming to this part of downtown and will be a landmark for directions and helping orient oneself amidst the blocks of buildings. Events that are held at this location would increase the visibility of this section of Rochester while supporting the local storefronts or institutions. For example, Frontier Field or MCC are currently one of the only spaces where events such as 5k runs take place. It offers a convenient yet scenic area to start or end a race and has plenty of parking available. This new park would hope to compete with this venue and give another urban option for races or events of this nature.

Parking is the single-most frequently discussed topic that came up during the course of this thesis. While this project is not an in-depth parking study, it provides some solutions that could help Rochester. Thomas Wilson Boyde Jr. Park repurposes a surface parking lot that is typically filled during weekdays and empty on weekends. In order to provide spaces to those who use this lot currently, two options are presented. A large parking structure is constructed on the current surface lot of the RCSD, directly to the south of this park. This garage is large, at six stories including a rooftop level, but could house over 600 spaces of parking. This is much more than what the RCSD has provided on its surface lots. The minimum number to be included in a garage at this location should be 385 spaces, and is determined by counting the current spaces that will be removed by the proposed buildings, including the Howard Hanna Lot along West Main Street.
recommendations on the design of the parking garage should follow recommendations earlier in the document.

The second parking option is to capitalize on space below grade at the park site. As seen in Figure 62, this second option takes advantage of the below grade applications for parking. By taking the existing parking lot and dropping it below grade, the parking is hidden from view of the public, the space above is returned to the use of the city by the creation of the park, and this section of downtown will now have a focal point rather than forcing occupants to look at everyone’s cars on a vacant lot (Figure 63). The former Rochester Subway bed runs underneath West Broad Street for much of its length. Although partially filled in some locations, the area underneath the Broad Street and Plymouth Avenue intersection is open and spacious (Figure 64). Since it was determined that Broad Street would be better fit as a transit route rather than the shopping district, the roadway over the top is required to stay. The City of Rochester is currently exploring options to reuse the former subway for parking uses.53 This thesis proposes an alternative by reusing part of the subway bed to achieve ramping down to the subway grade, and then access the below grade space of the adjacent properties. This allows the structural arches of the original subway to be showcased, which could then lead to additional uses or concepts for the space to be generated. As seen in Figure 62, the entire site could be capitalized on in order to maximize the amount of parking spaces that can be supplied. The current layout can achieve approximately 130 spaces, including the spaces that are required for the stair, restroom, and rental pavilions. The change in grade can be achieved by the creation of a platform with stairs that can serve a multitude of different purposes, including table and chairs, a stage, public seating on the edge of the stairs, and could be structured so that food trucks and carts can be driven on top to provide

53 Sharp, Brian. “City Eyes Parking in Rochester’s Old Subway Tunnel.”
a location for western downtown office workers and residents to enjoy the movable restaurants that the eastern section has recently enjoyed at the Midtown block. Entrances to the garage can be through stairs that pop up above grade, and can be repeated in a similar spacing and fashion in order to create a design element that can house public restrooms and small spaces for rent. These spaces could be for any use, from small pop-up shops during events, to concessions or small cafés, coffee, or any number of uses that can change quickly and easily to adapt the space to stay relevant and interesting. This concept comes in part from Ofelia Plads in Copenhagen. Billed as “Copenhagen’s new square by the water,” Ofelia Plads is a new public waterfront cultural venue. Parking was created below the park area and the waterfront area was activated with the small café pavilions that can be rented out. “Kissing stairs” (Figure 65) front an open expanse of water where aquatic events could take place. The stairs are easy to sit on when tables and chairs are not available or necessary. While the square was under construction beginning in 2012, trials for what type of events this area could feasibly host were taking places starting in 2010, and was the result of a partnership between the Royal Danish Theatre and the real estate company Jeudan. The trial events included viewing World Cup soccer on a large screen, art festivals, concerts, ballets, Copenhagen Design Week, and more. A similar approach could be taken here in Rochester, with trial events being held when the parking lot is empty, followed by a trial closing of the lot, and eventually construction of the new park. Efforts should be make to make this a year round destination rather than only during the warmer months.

54 “Ofelia Plads.” Visit Copenhagen Website.
55 “From Transport Hub to Cultural Hotspot.” Ofelia Plads Website.
Figure 68: 3D sketch of proposed Thomas Wilson Boyde Jr. Park.  
(Image by author)
iii. The Remaining West Main Street & Broad Street

The remaining sections of West Main Street and Broad Street stretches from Plymouth Avenue to the Genesee River. This area is characterized by many professional offices and is home to the Monroe County Office Building and courthouse as well as many law firms. While this section has remained in a strong, dense urban form, these offices create an extremely noticeable vacancy when they are closed. Outside of typical business hours, this section of downtown is scarcely populated. Restaurants do not exist, and any cafés have closed by 3:00pm. Among the tall buildings are some spaces of “missing teeth,” where buildings have been demolished in order to create surface parking lots. This thesis aims to strengthen this area by proposing a series of renovation projects and garages to better densify the area and create more activity throughout the week.

Many adaptive reuse projects are proposed through these sections of West Main Street and Broad Street. Identified by the diagonal hatches in Figure 56, these buildings are either currently underway with renovations, in the planning phase, or have been identified through conversations with the public as potential target buildings for renovations. All of these buildings are office buildings or former manufacturing (newspaper printing). Some still have ground floor retail spaces available, but are typically underutilized. A boost to the residential population in these vacant office spaces will help distribute the population more evenly through these areas, and promote street life and activity that extends past the work day and into the night. This will then spur additional retail and entertainment possibilities to occupy ground floor, street level spaces. This is starting to become reality in the eastern section of downtown. Added residential units are slowly beginning to revive retail spaces and lead to additional renovation or construction projects.

With the City of Rochester focused on the redevelopment of the Riverfront, developing additional residential in this area should be a priority. However, many types of housing should be proposed, from units for purchase or rent, to spaces for higher and lower income occupants. Furthermore, housing for the elderly should also be planned. The suggestions for locations of new residential and the different types are to follow, and all buildings are to be of the Type 1 Mixed Use typology described earlier in this paper unless stated otherwise. However, it is outside the scope of this project to include the numeric breakdown of what rental levels should be at in terms of price point and ratio to the other income levels.

The building that currently houses Thompson Reuters, the Aqueduct Building (also known as the Lawyers Coop Building), will be vacant in the near future. It was announced in November that the offices will be closing and layoffs would be starting in the spring of 2019.56 This will open up a significant opportunity for

56 Thompson, Howard. “304 Employees Will Be Impacted by Thomson Reuters Layoffs in Rochester.”
additional housing directly adjacent to the Genesee River. Views from this building can see nearly all of downtown Rochester, the Rundel Library, the river, the adjacent Times Square Building, and all down the Broad Street Corridor. Parking already exists in the building’s courtyard, and could be complimented with the addition of parking off-site.

Within the same block are several office buildings that could lend themselves nicely for additional residential units. Liberty Plaza, 31 East Main Street, where Frederick Douglass published his paper, the North Star for several years, would be a good candidate for a residential conversion. Additionally, the building behind this, 11 Race Street and 12-16 Aqueduct Street would also be good additions to the housing stock. Both of these buildings are close to the Genesee River and directly adjacent to Aqueduct Park, a small urban park that is fairly well maintained. These buildings carry an extremely old-style urban feel, which many people desire when looking for contemporary residential options in downtown areas.

The stately Wilder Building, one of the first applications of structural steel in Rochester, would be another excellent addition to the residential portfolio. Of the four buildings at this main intersection, this building has the largest potential for a successful conversion. The upper floors also have striking views of the neighboring urban setting and the Genesee River. This building could also provide units for purchase as well as rent. Across the street is the Reynolds Arcade building which is home to a number of small scale retailers. Residential units above could also benefit from some of the views, but should be kept at affordable prices. At the intersection of Main Street and Irving Place is Union Trust Building, another structure that could be converted to residential units. This building has been stated to be in need of repair and
renovation by those interviewed and could be a good candidate for the lower-middle class residential units. These units do not need to be at affordable housing prices, but should be priced accordingly for the area median income.

iv. Zoning Considerations

The proposed buildings included in this section are to be designed in accordance with the City of Rochester Zoning Code and the applicable form-based zoning. The area of Main Street and Broad Street here fall under the Center City Main Street District (CCD-M). This thesis focused solely on the massing of the buildings (building height and ratios, number of stories, lot frontage) and did not consider other items such as fenestration, lighting, and other requirements. The requirements for the mass of proposed buildings are shown graphically in Figure 57. The dashed lines represent the minimum and maximum building sizes determined by the proposed footprints. The zoning calls for buildings to have a clearly defined base, midsection, and crown, as evidenced in many historic buildings that still stand. Alignment of horizontal elements is also a key feature of the zoning requirements. This traditional form will help Main Street maintain a cohesive look, but will still allow for some contemporary adaptations to these elements. Despite a few variances in terms of height, the buildings will fit in nicely with the character of Main Street and add cohesively to the new Broad Street experience. There is no need for a comprehensive reform for the zoning for this section of downtown. However, the City of Rochester needs to enforce these zoning requirements when building projects come in for various permitting. This zoning code is a strong asset for Rochester, and the popularity of downtown as a profit generating location for developers means the City has a chance to enforce these policies to keep downtown looking architecturally cohesive and pedestrian friendly and promote these equitable outcomes as much as possible.

![Figure 71 (left): Image depicting base, midsection, and crown.](image1)

![Figure 72 (right): Building height ratios.](image2)

(City of Rochester Zoning Code)
D. FOCUS AREA THREE: Cascade District and The Hochstein Music School

i. The Cascade District

The Cascade District was historically a manufacturing district of downtown and relied on the nearby Erie Canal (Broad Street today) to ship goods in and out. The area is characterized by large brick buildings built in the late 1800s and early 1900s that have been repurposed into a mix of office space and residential. This neighborhood, wedged between Interstate 490, the Inner Loop, Main Street and Plymouth Avenue, was one of the first areas to start to come back to life following much of the urban decline that took place in the 1970s and 1980s. The brothers Jim and John Loftus were a large part of this comeback and acquired their first building here in 1985. When the brothers, who started in the contracting business, bought their first property in the district, the area was still filled with photography studios. With the close proximity to Kodak, photographers set up shop in these old warehouse buildings and would be hosting shoots daily. This scene came to a very quick end according to the Loftus brothers, and left buildings vacant nearly immediately. Buildings were left in various sorts of disrepair, some had never been renovated since their construction. The brothers recalled one building they purchased for $15,000 having never had a roof replacement, and the current machine shop operating in the basement needed to tarp their equipment daily, as the five floors above had been leaking through and looked as though they were left untouched since the year 1910.57 Since then, the brothers have acquired most of the district and slowly renovated, moved, and demolished buildings to make the neighborhood what it is today. They have gone as far as to get grant money to redesign and rebuild the decayed streets in order to create a cohesive and comfortable atmosphere for tenants with brick pavers and trees. This has led to a solid identity and feel for the neighborhood. This thesis aims to

57 Interview with Jim and John Loftus, November 15, 2018.
PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CASCADE DISTRICT

EXISTING BUILDINGS
REPURPOSED BUILDINGS
PROPOSED BUILDINGS
PROPOSED PARKING STRUCTURES

0' 50' 100' 200' 300'

NORTH
build on and enhance this district by adding in buildings that mesh with the current fabric and still work to balance parking, office space, and residential uses.

With the removal of the Inner Loop, and Allen Street shifting north to the other side of the Buckingham Commons Building, the Cascade District has the unique opportunity to expand. Cascade Drive, North Washington Street and Scott Alley will now be extended to Allen Street’s new position alongside the railroad. As discussed in the section about the changes to the Inner Loop, this configuration is similar to how the streets were originally laid out in this section of downtown Rochester. An additionally alleyway is proposed and follows the general centerline of the current day Allen Street. This will provide some limited automobile access as well as an additional pedestrian link from the interior of Cascade to

Figure 76: Photograph of the end of Cascade Drive showing the existing tree canopy and clock. (Photo by author)

Figure 77: Sketch of the proposed extension to Cascade Dr, towards Allen St. and railway. (Image by author)
Plymouth Avenue. The current pedestrian connection to Church Street has been extended (Figure 78). Jim and John Loftus have fought for this connection over the years to ensure that the Cascade District is not shut off and enclosed from the rest of downtown. This linkage now continues through to North Washington Street, where it then narrows down into a smaller path and continues into the parking area between the existing buildings. While it may not extend fully to Cascade Drive as the parking is currently extremely valuable to the tenants and owners, the lots could be further redesigned and improved to create a more enjoyable experience than pavement directly up to the back of buildings.

The district is currently surrounded by surface parking lots in nearly every direction. These are supplied for the office employees and tenants in the remaining buildings. In order to remain relevant and rentable, parking needed to be supplied. As can be seen in the proposed plan (Figure 75), these lots have been removed and replaced with numerous buildings. A parking structure has been created fronting the new Allen Street and can house up to 529 automobiles with space for ground floor retail along Allen Street. The existing surface lots can hold 558 automobiles. The proposed parking garage could hold more if it continues to grow in height by adding additional levels, however, it is currently at five floors with rooftop parking to accommodate the 529 spaces, and adding more floors would push the structure too high with regards to the surrounding properties, resulting in an overbearing structure that would hurt the character of the neighborhood. The net loss of 29 spaces would therefore need to come from new surface lots or on street parking. The only new surface lots proposed are behind buildings on Cascade Drive that back up to Interstate 490, this, along with on-street parking along all of Cascade Dr, one side of North Washington, and along Allen Street, will hopefully assist with reducing the strain on any new garage. The Guiding Principles and Goals provide further recommendations for on-street parking. New buildings will have their own private parking on their site (underground or on first floor), or shared with other properties nearby.

Cascade Drive is characterized by the existing brick manufacturing buildings and should be supplemented with new buildings in a similar style. A small pedestrian pathway is to be in front of new
buildings (rowhouses) on the eastern side, with the remaining triangular shaped parcel becoming a small park for the area, fitted with the clock that currently exists towards the end of Cascade Drive (Figure 76), and fitted with benches, brick pavers, and additional trees that will aim to achieve the style of canopy that is currently developing at that location.

North Washington Street will become a nearly pure residential street with the addition of lower density housing at its center. Again, brick will be the primary material and six new buildings are proposed on the existing surface lots that will take the form and scale of single-family housing. The form should similar to that of the existing historic rowhouses next door (Figure 79 and Figure 80), and maintain close spacing to one another. Driveways are removed from the equation by providing vehicular access and parking along the back in alleyways, either in standalone garages or a covered bank of parking. Despite being a lower density structure, the buildings would house several units. The close proximity to each other will also create the necessary feel of the district. As can be seen in the 1984 photograph of the rowhouses on Washington Street when they were added to the National Register of Historic Places (Figure 79), buildings used to flank close to it’s sides and rear. Today, the rowhouse sits alone in a sea of parking lots (Figure 80). Formerly used as a boarding house and in extreme disrepair, the Loftus brothers acquired the property several years back, but received little interest on the property in its current state. The two brothers recently completed a renovation of the property to gear it towards a future use as a tavern and restaurant, hoping this will lead to its sale and use as a community establishment and downtown destination. It is the position of this thesis that a use as a restaurant would be a good fit, and help anchor the future neighborhood. It would provide a lively atmosphere in what could be a nice densified but quiet residential street in the heart of downtown. Channeling some of the aesthetics of Grove Place, another
downtown residential area with tightly spaced residential buildings (Figure 81), this street could be a new residential hot spot, close to many amenities and the new Thomas Boyde Jr. park and event space along Main Street.

An additional building is added at the former intersection of Allen Street and Plymouth, and will be of the same style as the buildings along Cascade Drive. Repurposed buildings along the Main Street side include the previously discussed Open Door Mission project as well as the conversion of a three story structure into retail with modest apartments above, with the potential for an addition and outside space. The final conversion suggested by this project is located on Industrial Street, adjacent to the Knowlton building and Passero Associates. This building has been converted into office space but currently has no tenant and is being underutilized as storage space. Converting this building to residential uses would add more momentum to the neighborhood and capitalize on a space that is in good shape. Clearly there has been no more additional demand for office space of this size.

ii. The Hochstein School

The Hochstein School was founded nearly 100 years ago as a community destination for music education and events of all kinds. The school strives to create a vibrant and inclusive community. Named after David Hochstein, a talented violinist who was killed in World War I, the school was started in 1920 to serve underprivileged children who were interested in music, something David Hochstein had desired to create. The school was originally located on Joseph Avenue, where Hochstein grew up, before relocating for the final time to its current site at the old Central Presbyterian Church.

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58 Interview with Jim and John Loftus, November 15, 2018.
The school provides musical instruction and event space, with a fluctuating tuition level that is based on income. Current enrollment is around 4,000 students, of which 1,300 have received this financial support to attend. Of these students, 1,200 are off-site for therapeutic arts. The ages of the students range from 6 months old to 90 years old, and includes young children, those with disabilities, and retired adults. Upwards of 120 part-time faculty and 15 staff members, about half of which area part-time, work at Hochstein on a regular basis. The performance hall is regularly rented out for events such as graduations, church services, music recitals, concerts, and other events. The school is open from 9:00am to 9:00pm, six to seven days a week. Nights and weekends are when the activity is the highest. For example, a typical Saturday includes 600-800 people arriving between the hours of 9:00am and noon. This, coupled with nightly events, such as RPO concerts, highlight the importance of traffic flow and support services.

The largest concern with running an educational venue is the movement of students and parents to and from with regards to safety, access, and ease. Many students carry instruments with them when they arrive and either require a place to park that provides a safe and convenient pathway for older generations, or a safer drop-off area for parents unloading children and other transient parking needs. In the past, parents have been hit by cars while crossing in crosswalks after dropping off their children. Currently, a 10-minute loading zone exists in front of the school. This space is rarely enforced by parking officials, and as the staff states, “is often parked in by contractors or people needing to quickly visit City Hall a couple blocks over.” Additionally, Hochstein buses in students from local YMCAs. The difficulty with these buses is that they have no location to safely pull off the main road, so when the doors are open and the lights are on, traffic is completely stopped in both directions on Plymouth Avenue.

Events such as 5ks, marathons, and parades that force street closures are also a big concern for Hochstein. With so many people arriving on Saturday mornings, when most events like 5k races are held, a road closure can nearly force the school to close, or provide for dangerous conditions for students and race participants as cars struggle to find ways to navigate. According to the staff, the school is only notified of these road closures the day prior. This, along with some other situations, makes Hochstein staff feel like the concerns of the school go ignored by the City.

Hochstein wishes to continue to be a community hub for education and inclusive experiences. Faculty and staff have noted the lack of activity along the streets, particularly in terms of retail and restaurant spaces.

60 Murphy, Justin. “Unplayed Sonatas: A Century after His Death David Hochstein’s Heroic Soul Still Inspires.”
61 Ibid.
62 Interview with Hochstein leaders, December 14, 2018.
63 Interview with Hochstein leaders, December 14, 2018.
Parents who drop their children off for an hour or two for instruction rarely have any place to go that is within walking distance, and so they must get in their car to leave the neighborhood in order to do anything. Getting the area active again, as well as changing the perception of western downtown has therefore become a priority for Hochstein. The school calls for a beautification of the entire area to help improve its image, and notes how the surface lots along West Main Street are a large detractor on weekends when they are mostly vacant. These comments above became the basis for the proposed design concept.

The most notable changes to the area surrounding Hochstein include the removal of the surface lots surrounding Hochstein. The Sister Cities Garage, located directly adjacent to the lots, houses 1,001 spaces and provides security for the parking of city and county employees. With a parking garage directly next door, it is inexcusable that the county provides a surface parking lot. This space should be filled in with better uses, especially since it is so close to City Hall, the center of the city government. By turning this lot into a pocket park and adding a residential building, the area would start to feel more cohesive and less like a forgotten patchwork of surface lots and the backs of buildings. The area is exclusively office space, and so either a conversion of existing buildings or the creation of new buildings, should focus on the residential aspect to bring more activity to the area outside of business hours. This should then encourage more retail or restaurant locations to open up, and coupled with the pocket park, should give parents of students in a class next door something to do without getting in their car. The added retail spaces here, coupled with the opportunities created in the nearby areas as other parts of the plan, aim to work towards Hochstein’s desire to see more small business in the city, and more specifically, minority-owned businesses as the downtown core redevelops. It was the goal of this thesis to provide spaces for these businesses, but an area of future research and exploration should be how policies can be adapted or instituted to help this area attract minority owned businesses and help them thrive.

The City has recognized that parking garages are a visual detractor in urban design and made it a requirement that garages blend into the surrounding buildings. The existing Sister Cities Garage is an example
of this. Rentable space along the ground floor is available as well, although it is nearly entirely vacant. The addition of residential and added foot traffic in the area might help these spaces get rented. The pocket park also enhances the pathway between Hochstein and the Sister Cities Garage, ideally promoting the use of this garage for those who are parking for longer periods of time. Although used nearly exclusively by city and county employees, the Sister Cities Garage, like other garages operated in all of downtown, needs to be analyzed specifically to determine the most efficient use of space.

Should it be determined that parking is still an issue in the area, this thesis provides for two additional options. One is constructing an additional garage along Church Street, crossing over Montgomery Alley. Approximately 200 cars can currently park in both lots fronting Church Street. The proposed parking structure is four stories, with rooftop parking and one level underground, and can hold approximately 310 automobiles. This not only provides additional parking as a worse-case scenario pending analysis of the Sister Cities Garage, but this new structure would to be built using the reusable design method, as detailed in an section. This allows the structure to be repurposed into retail and residential should parking demands change, or the adjacent garage become more efficient. Office use should be discouraged at this location. The ramp, located adjacent to the Frontier properties, could be removed as the garage is adapted. This space can then be infilled if necessary. A smaller building, of the Type 1 mixed-use typology, is to be constructed in a similar space that fronts Plymouth Avenue in order to maintain a continuous façade on the street. The second option, although highly unlikely and should not be encouraged, would be to construct the aforementioned new residential building in the same way. This would allow for even more parking to be provided without compromising the future ability to adjust the neighborhood towards it’s ultimate goal of providing a balance of residential and office space.

Like the main Thomas W. Boyde Jr. park nearby, this smaller neighborhood park has a paved section that is directly adjacent to the residential building. This could be for ground floor retail and allows for tables and chairs to be laid out should a restaurant lease the space. It also doubles as a small drive lane for food trucks or carts. Increasing in popularity over the last few years, food trucks offer a variety of food options in places where restaurants are scarce. Hochstein staff have stated that they wish they could enjoy these more, but find it difficult to walk over to their current base of operation, located on Elm Street and Clinton Avenue, and make it back to work in time. This space, along with the space at Boyde Park should provide adequate and easy spaces for the food trucks to park during peak lunch times, and be central enough so that employees within western downtown can enjoy their services. Like Boyde Park, this area should boast a variety of food options at varying price points when possible to equally cater to neighborhood residents and employees.
E. FOCUS AREA FOUR: Frontier Field and Monroe Community College

The fourth focus area looks to the north of the railroad tracks (Figure 85) and examines the space around Frontier Field, home of Rochester’s AAA baseball team the Red Wings, and Monroe Community College’s Downtown Campus (Figure 86). A variety of parking and new buildings are proposed with the goal of creating a destination for the ballpark and surrounding neighborhoods while also allowing for a realistic and efficient use when the ballpark is not active. As seen in the other focus areas, a mix of building uses are proposed connected by a network of redesigned streets allowing for facilitated and equitable movement through the city by multiple modes of transportation.

The area was the original home of Eastman Kodak Company, the film and camera producer that helped put Rochester on the map. Much of the land in this area is still owned by Kodak. The large parking lots, for instance, are owned by Kodak and are rented out to Monroe County, Monroe Community College, and various other employers who now lease or have purchased part of Kodak’s downtown campus. Monroe Community College purchased a section of the campus and parking lot in order to further their commitment to downtown. High Falls and the Genesee River is just to the right of the satellite image above and, as discussed before, has often felt disconnected from the rest of downtown due to these parking lots, railroad, and Inner Loop configuration. Frontier field remains a popular destination for baseball fans throughout the region and
hosts games and a variety of other events during the summer and throughout the year. Generally, people come to the field to watch a game and then leave. There is little infiltration of visitors into the surrounding neighborhoods, and as such there are few restaurants or activities close by. This thesis hopes to change that by taking the first step in creating a destination that can serve not only the visitors to the park but also the everyday employees and residents of the area.

i. Monroe Community College

Monroe Community College is no stranger to downtown. The college has its main campus in the nearby suburb of Brighton but establishing a downtown component has been a part of the school’s vision since 1991.64 Most recently, the campus was leasing space along East Main Street in the Sibley Building. The college was only planning that the space as a temporary location however, as plans developed to move into an adjacent space with the development of Renaissance Square. This planned redevelopment, which was to integrate a transit center, the new MCC campus, and performing arts center, could not generate the necessary funding and by 2009 the project had folded. MCC began looking for other spaces to purchase within downtown and eventually landed on part of Kodak’s downtown headquarters site. With Kodak Tower at the center, the company had expanded as it acquired properties in the neighborhood, eventually leading to an extremely dense block of manufacturing just north of Rochester’s central core. As automobiles grew in popularity, Kodak demolished some of it’s property and acquired more to provide surface parking for its employees, leading to the downtown form we have today. With Kodak’s falling from the ranks as one of Rochester’s top employers, the space they used to occupy became useful rental office and manufacturing space and now houses a variety of other companies.

MCC started demolition work on a section of the old Kodak buildings in 2014. Renovation work started in 2015, and by 2017 the doors were open to students. 250,000 square feet of space was updated to fit MCC’s needs while another 200,000 square feet was purchased directly adjacent ready for future expansion. Spread over seven floors, MCC has all the space they need (and all they anticipate to need) located under one

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64 Interview with Dr. Joel Frater, Dean of Monroe Community College’s Downtown Campus. December 7. 2018.
roof. Law and Criminal Justice, Human Services, and Education programs run out of this building. These programs are open to those at the Brighton campus, and a direct link via RTS is provided for all students in an attempt to reduce car usage.

MCC purchased part of the Kodak parking lot fronting Plymouth Avenue, directly across from Frontier Field (Figure 87). This allows for parking for all of their students and faculty, with an overflow lot located down Morrie Silver Way to the west. The downtown campus is primarily a commuter school and has no plans to add residence halls at the downtown location. Students who need housing are to be housed at Brighton’s campus. Dr. Joel Frater, Executive Dean of the downtown campus, stated how the college does not want to duplicate its efforts. From housing to academic departments, the campuses do not overlap. This helped inform whether or not the design of the neighborhood would or would not include academic components. Instead, the neighborhood focuses on the baseball stadium and connecting High Falls to Frontier Field.

ii. Frontier Field

Built in 1996, Frontier Field is the home of the Rochester Red Wings, one of the oldest professional teams in North America dating back to the late 1800s, and current AAA affiliate of the Minnesota Twins of Major League Baseball. AAA baseball played in Rochester and the surrounding cities like Syracuse and Buffalo is one professional level below the major leagues, and helps develop the talent of young players for the parent club. Naomi Silver, CEO of the Red Wings, said that attendance is on par with other AAA teams across the United States. The Red Wings average about 7,000 people per game during the season, which runs from April until September, with postseason play extending in September if the team does well. While the average is at 7,000, the actual attendance fluctuates between the cool spring weather games and the warmer summertime games. April usually brings crowds of only 3,000 with summer pulling in closer to 11,000. The records for attendance range in the mid 13,000s.65 During the season, the stadium plays host to a number of

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other events, such as concerts, charitable walks, 5k runs, sectional, little league, college or summer games, boy and girl scout sleepovers, and various other entertainment acts totaling at about 120 events per year. Frontier Field was also converted to host a hockey game once but it was determined that the stadium was not suited well for this conversion on a regular basis.

Ms. Silver outlined concerns that the organization has with any proposed plans for the neighborhood and added items that are important to the smooth operations of the stadium and bringing in crowds. Parking is always a concern for the stadium. Currently, the stadium is completely isolated by surface parking owned by Eastman Kodak Company (Figure 85). With the crowds ranging by several thousand, it is important to have enough parking so that people from across Monroe County and the Finger Lakes can attend games. As part of their lease, Monroe County is required to provide 2,085 parking spaces for the stadium.66 These spaces are located in the adjacent Kodak lots.

Overall, Silver expressed support in the plan and concept creating “more welcoming surroundings.” As such, densification of parking is supported by Silver but the feeling is that the garages must be accessible and extremely close to the stadium in order for people to feel as though it is convenient to park there and go to a game. Frontier Field attracts a strong older audience as well, and that needs to be considered when parking and routes are created. Shuttling traffic was another consideration that has been explored by the Red Wings but has not yielded positive results. Chiefly, Silver’s priorities with a plan for the area centered around parking quantity and access as well as safety and security for the audiences. People need to be able to park in a convenient spot and feel safe leaving their car and walking to and from the stadium at various times, while in a group or alone.

iii. **Proposed Changes**

The neighborhood that has been designed around Frontier Field and MCC (Figure 90) attempts to negotiate parking as well as create links to High Falls and the surrounding Brown’s Square neighborhood, promoting alternative transportation and building a neighborhood that can capitalize on the stadium’s location.
by becoming a destination for audiences. Frontier Field’s VIP Lot, a surface lot directly adjacent to the stadium has been densified into a traditional parking structure with a building wrapping the front facade as seen from the Morrie Silver Way. This building would ideally house an entertainment venue, with the potential for added staff offices or stadium operations related uses on the floors above. Across Morrie Silver way, there are a number of buildings ranging from one to four stories that house residential, retail, and restaurants. The scale of these buildings transition from a downtown feel and aesthetic down to the city neighborhood size as they move closer to Brown and Warehouse Street. A grocery store sits at Oak Street and Brown Street to serve the Brown’s Square neighborhood as well as those in the area for work during the day. Erie Street is extended through Oak Street and the existing parking lot (Figure 88), and Kent Street, originally removed with the creation of Frontier Field and parking lots, is reinstated. The artery transitions to a pedestrian only street lined with entertainment options as it approaches the stadium. Residential would be above all of these first or second floor entertainment and restaurant options. Bike parking is provided along the edge of the parking garage along the pedestrian street, prioritizing those who come to games via bike. The parking garages are of the multi-use typology, and have been broken up into blocks to facilitate a future conversions to other uses. Traditionally, a parking garage needing to house enough cars for this stadium would be one solid mass, with multiple sloped aisles. While efficient, this would leave to a large impassible block and further separate the neighborhood from the Kodak-owned offices. By breaking the garage up into smaller blocks, the connectivity remains. These is still less activity on the ground floor for these garages, but these blocks could be easily repurposed separate of the rest of the garage if and when the time comes. This results in a more adaptable neighborhood and one that can support future office or residential use, whichever is most important. A building wraps the main parking garage from view from Morrie Silver Way, which can be seen in Figure 90. Another building sits at the corner of MCC and Frontier Field, and offers a small open space directly across from one of the stadium entrances. This building offers a good view of the outfield and part of the infield, and could play host to rooftop entertainment options for game times, as well as dramatic views from offices or residential units.
Flipping to the other side of the stadium is a similar layout. The existing parking lot is broken back up into smaller blocks, reminiscent of the original street grid. A small park exists across Plymouth Avenue from another popular stadium entrance. Buildings on this block are mixed-use and range from four to six stories. A hotel sits on the corner of State Street and Platt Street. The shape of the building is designed to give a clear view from High Falls to a stadium entrance, and vice versa. This would ideally promote pedestrian movement between the field and High Falls. The park adjacent to the hotel would also provide an informal gathering and meeting space for fans before a game as well as provide MCC with an exterior area to use for various events if needed. Silver explained how many players reside at a local hotel along State Street and walk to the stadium. Some have stated that they would frequent bars and restaurants along this path if they existing, but largely these players only have underutilized historic buildings and parking lots to contend with. By developing this lot, they not only have many more options and a more comfortable experience walking to the ballpark, they have an added hotel venue located in the heart of the future “Baseball Entertainment District” in Rochester. The hotel could also serve anyone traveling with relations to MCC or the baseball operations from the parent club of the Minnesota Twins or other teams. It would also be a convenient tourist location with its central proximity to High Falls and a straight pedestrian path from the stadium all the way to the Genesee Brewery across the river (Figure 89).

The rest of the block houses another multi-use parking facility, as well as connections to the previously mentioned “City Hall Station” located on the main railroad line. Naomi Silver also mentioned how some guests to the stadium have complained that although they are parking in a parking lot directly next the stadium, if they are in the back corner (by the proposed transit station) they feel as though they are extremely far away. This would be an issue for anyone walking from that area, regardless of if it is a parking lot or not. A suggestion is for Frontier Field to create a new entrance plaza at the end of the now extended Commercial Street. This would provide a convenient and visible entrance for everyone coming off transit or out of the garage at this location. Additionally, it would provide an entrance for those walking from the newly developed downtown core to get into the stadium without having to walk all the way up to Platt Street. The location is currently mostly grass and would require little alteration to tie into the existing stadium sidewalks. Directly across Plymouth from this entrance is another building that could capitalize on the view over and between the stadium screens. Like Buckingham Commons across the railroad tracks, a rooftop patio could be added to this building. Seating could also be placed for on the roof of the MCC building for students with a clear view of the entire field. This could be an added draw to MCC and something that should be explored in further research and
design. With the creation additional seating venues on the top of buildings or the garages, this would begin to create a stadium-like atmosphere in the neighborhood surrounding the venue, similar to the neighborhood around Wrigley Field in Chicago.

Figure 91: Proposed Morrie Silver Way, section and plan view.
(Image by author)
F. FOCUS AREA FIVE: The Riverfront

The final focus area in this project addresses the Genesee River and proposed improvements along its length as it travels through downtown Rochester. ROC the Riverway was used as the starting point for this section of the plan. Changes were made to improve the RTR plan and address items like the removal of the Inner Loop, or extending the Riverway Trail through High Falls. The eastern side of the river is not addressed by this project. The following section will give an overview of the changes proposed.

Starting at the southern most end, closest to Corn Hill and Interstate 490 is a large existing surface lot, previously used by the city to host concerts or other events. Only the Casket Building, a building listed on the National Register of Historic Places, currently exists in this location. ROC the Riverway (RTR) proposed a new development for this site as seen in Figure 92. Independently, this project proposed a similar design that included more building rather than open space adjacent to Interstate 490 (Figure 93). This would be a continuation of the development to the south known as Corn Hill Landing, and would have a similar program with restaurants and ground floor activity. Additional buildings would screen the utility buildings along the river, creating a unique narrow street primarily for pedestrian and bike traffic as it travels through this part of downtown.

The Broad Street bridge is a unique structure also listed on the National Historic Register of Historic Places. RTR proposes to remove the top deck where automobiles cross in order to get down to the original aqueduct level. From there, the change in grade would be dealt with on the eastern side by Rundel Memorial Library. The removal of the current RGE substation and expansion of the Riverside Convention Center is also proposed.

Removing the deck of the Broad Street would expose the archways (or require them to be removed) which removes and integral part of the definition of the Broad Street Bridge. While these arches did not exist when the bridge was an aqueduct across the Genesee River, they were constructed when it was decked over and became the Rochester Subway. The area is currently a haven for graffiti artists to add artwork to the archway walls. The area acts as an informal gallery.
Figure 93: Proposed changes to the Downtown Riverfront
space, with the graffiti changing constantly, and a viewing platform conveniently located on the southern side of the bridge. Removing all of this for a watered aqueduct, while historically accurate, seems to be a poor use of space. This project proposes to keep the bridge deck for automobile traffic. Additionally, it is necessary to keep due to the reduced automobile traffic flow on Main Street. The deck would be partially cut out between Exchange Street and the River in order to ramp bike lanes and pedestrian access down to the new extended Riverway Trail, which will extend through the middle of the bridge, passing through the archways. There will be an intersection allowing all travelers going north or south on the trail to turn and get out onto Broad or Exchange. This may require additional studies to ensure feasibility, but it is warranted as this configuration connects pathways and preserves part of Rochester’s history. It also prevents the grade change at the Rundel Library site. Furthermore, removal of the existing RGE building located to the northeast of Broad Street should be reconsidered. This building once housed the mechanical equipment of the subway and has a historical industrial exterior of early Rochester and should be kept standing rather than bulldozed for an extension to a bland conference center. The building can be repurposed in a number of ways but it is imperative it remain standing, although it is outside of the project area and purely a suggestion.

Elevated trails proposed by RTR follow along the newly converted Aqueduct building along the river up and through to the Front Street and Inner Loop area, where another vacant lot sits (Figure 94). While the proposed development located at “River Front Reborn” is different, the principles are similar with a mix of residential and office uses, with buildings addressing the riverfront. The main concept proposed in this project is what will happen when the Inner Loop is removed and replaced with an at-grade boulevard (Figure 95). This is a critical connection to the feeling of isolation in High Falls. The proposed Riverway Trail crosses through enhanced pedestrian crossings and splits into two directions. One follows the river and under the existing railroad bridge to the Gorsline Building, where it then connects to the existing historic park located in the foundation of the far half of the building. The second route follows Brown’s Race under the railroad, connected into the parking lot entry for the Gorsline Building.

Figure 94: ROC the Riverway Downtown Plan, north. (Image by ROC the Riverway)
feasibility, but would allow for a straight path through downtown along the river for pedestrians and bicyclists, removing the need for a roundabout “trail” through downtown that is unused or known about.

Figure 98 shows changes to the “Beebee Flats” area of the RTR plan. This was the former location of the RGE West Station, or Beebee Power Plant. As a large industrial site, it may require cleanup before its reuse and redevelopment. It is characterized by a large drop off from High Falls and a natural basin at the base of a 93 foot waterfall north of downtown. As a geographic feature, the waterfall is a completely unique attraction that is unusual to see in a downtown in any city across the world. The area adjacent to it should be developed to showcase this waterfall. RTR shows it as a large park space with trails and parking for events. It is wonderful concept to have spacious parkland directly adjacent to the Genesee River, as that is something that downtown could capitalize on. However, having an open area, void of any activity outside of park users, and only one primary entry and exit (two more pedestrian connections are proposed), leads to a potential safety risk and further isolation of the area from the rest of High Falls.

The proposed plan included in this project (Figure 98) shows a more developed Beebee area, with buildings proposed in the area directly up against the cliff edge and steep grade change. An extension of Factory Street turns and slopes down to the base level before turning back to form the edge between the buildings built into the cliff edge and the proposed park land against the river (Figure 99). Some open unprogrammed space exists to be used for picnics, barbecues and events, ideally supporting the community and it’s new residents. Buildings
proposed can host a variety of uses as previously described for other districts. The buildings would face the park area, and could capitalize on the grade change by having multiple entrances and a mix of uses throughout the floors. The northern end, where the abandoned City of Rochester Incineration Plant exists, could be repurposed into added retail space or additional community spaces. A new pedestrian bridge connects over to the former East Station site, as shown on the RTR plan as well. The fields shown were designed off of the use of Cobb’s Hill park as a popular softball and baseball event space. These activities can bring large crowds of people into the area for fundraisers, games, and other events, and potentially add to the baseball infused feel of the neighborhood near the baseball stadium.
Figure 99: 3D sketch of proposed “Beebee Flats” area.
(Image by author)
Western downtown Rochester has been left behind from the rest of downtown. Most plans and studies completed to date have not been able to explore the intricacies of this section of downtown specifically. The Community Design Center has come closest to addressing this need by looking at downtown more cohesively. This portion of downtown differs starkly from the surrounding neighborhoods, from its lack of population, to income and rent prices. It is apparent that obvious boundaries encircle this area, primarily the Inner Loop Expressway. While it would be impractical at this stage to remove and reroute Interstate 490, the Inner Loop Expressway could be and should be a candidate for removal due to the isolating barrier it creates for those that live around it.

Downtowns across the United States are seeing a resurgence, but a resurgence coming at the hand of developers who are largely driven by profit rather than for the good of the community. With a few exceptions, Rochester appears to be similar. Eastern downtown has seen a surge in creation of rental units over the past decade. However, these units cater primarily to those with financial means. Rental prices are exceeding thousands of dollars for certain units. Surveys of residents in the area do not adequately capture the full range of professions, unfairly discounting service or trade workers as residents in the area, furthering the perception that only students or young professionals desire downtown living, instead of those who need to be close to public transportation or those with disabilities who wish to remain independent as much as possible.

This thesis has aimed to take a balanced and equitable community-driven approach to creating a master plan for an undeserved and under-voiced area that has the potential to be the physical embodiment of what Rochester has historically stood for, and needs to return to, as a place of equality and social justice. Community members such as residents, business owners, employees, and organizations were consulted about the neighborhood that they are in daily. These comments and ideas formed the guiding principles for this document, as well as helped inform and identify sub-goals that can help government officials, developers, and other entities with an eye on equality, work to enforce and recognize what needs to be done. Cities are oftentimes branding themselves in this new age of the downtown. The City of Rochester, who is rightfully proud of its heritage and residents such as Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony, should create it's brand around the idea of equality, using western downtown as its showcase of what the new urban United States should look like.

This thesis has attempted to create a master plan that addresses the concerns of the community and creates social equity through design. While some of the proposed options may not be ultimately feasible due
to unforeseen circumstances and the necessary funding, the guiding principles created by the community are increasingly important and adequately address the equitable principles necessary.

- Parking
- Beautification and Changing Perceptions
- Balance of New Spaces (retail, services, housing, offices)
- Connections and Boundaries
- Walkability and the Pedestrian Experience

These, in conjunction with the goals of each category, should be the baseline standards for future development in the area. Streets should be designed to the Complete Streets objectives and standards, and should promote multiple modes of transportation in order to reduce our community’s dependence on the automobile. By doing so, this reduces the need for parking. This plan demonstrates how much can be done by repurposing surface lots and densifying the existing number of parking spaces into structures. However, by reducing parking demand, the amount of parking structures may decrease, leading to a decrease in any necessary upfront investment, as well as the potential to reuse or convert garages in the methods discussed. Neighborhoods need to be designed for all ages and abilities. Tasks such as snow removal are paramount to this effort. Logical and safe connections to other sections of the city are necessary and reducing the barriers between neighborhoods, whether perceived or physical, will be important in order to encourage growth and investment in the area. The City of Rochester now has an opportunity to get it right with this section of downtown by creating unique, supportive, and equality driven urban neighborhoods representative of the city itself.
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1:</td>
<td>Plan of ROC the Riverway showing “Recent/Ongoing River Corridor Investments.”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2:</td>
<td>Satellite imagery of western downtown Rochester</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3:</td>
<td>Section showing existing Inner Loop &amp; CSX Railway Line, looking east at State Street</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4:</td>
<td>Project Boundary</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5:</td>
<td>Violent crime rate (2014)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6:</td>
<td>Population (2014)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7:</td>
<td>Number of households (2014)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8:</td>
<td>Renter occupied percent (2017)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9:</td>
<td>Owner occupied percent (2017)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10:</td>
<td>Median household income (2014)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11:</td>
<td>Median household income (2017)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12:</td>
<td>Percent receiving food stamps (2017)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13:</td>
<td>Median assessed value (2012)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14:</td>
<td>Median gross rent (2017)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15:</td>
<td>Unemployment rate (2017)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16:</td>
<td>Poverty rate (2014)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17:</td>
<td>Demographic Data of Selected Neighborhoods &amp; the City of Rochester.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 18:</td>
<td>Renter V. Owner Occupied Housing in Major Cities.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 19:</td>
<td>Center City Master Plan Boundaries (2003)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 20:</td>
<td>Maps of previous plans and studies.</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 21:</td>
<td>Plan of River North area from DCVP.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 22:</td>
<td>Proposed Main Street improvements.</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 23:</td>
<td>Proposed mixed-use development along the Genesee River adjacent to Interstate 490.</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 24:</td>
<td>Typical proposed Main Street Section</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 25:</td>
<td>West Main Street and West Broad Street Intersection</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 26:</td>
<td>Stacked parking in Queens, NY.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 27:</td>
<td>Existing Parking Facilities</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 28:</td>
<td>Parking space indicator in Copenhagen, DK.</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 29:</td>
<td>Sketch of proposed street sections using Complete Streets model.</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 30:</td>
<td>Proposed changes in percent of total area (square footage or acreage).</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 31:</td>
<td>Two types of mixed use buildings proposed by this thesis.</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 32:</td>
<td>Overall proposed plan</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 33:</td>
<td>Table illustrating affordability in Rochester’s context.</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 34:</td>
<td>Center City Master Plan Boundaries (2014)</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 35:</td>
<td>Traditional parking garage design.</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 36:</td>
<td>Parking garage recommendation.</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 37:</td>
<td>Surface lot, view from garage.</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 38:</td>
<td>Garage adjacent to surface parking.</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 39:</td>
<td>Image of Inner Loop North concept</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 40:</td>
<td>Photograph of newly constructed Inner Loop East conversion, South Union Street.</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 41:</td>
<td>Photograph of existing Inner Loop Northwest conditions.</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 42:</td>
<td>1935 plat map of Allen Street and Inner Loop.</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 43: Satellite imagery of Allen Street and Inner Loop.</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 44: Proposed changes to the Inner Loop Expressway</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 45: 3D view of proposed park behind City Hall, facing the Downtown United Presbyterian / Spiritus Christi Church and the new City Hall Station and Inner Loop redevelopment.</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 46: Photograph of the existing termination of Mill Street.</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 47: Photograph of existing Spring Street and Washington Street configuration.</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 48: Satellite image of Goodman Street and Interstate 490, with Broadway extending at top left.</td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 49: Sketch of residents’ ideas from the Corn Hill Community Vision Plan</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 50: Chattanooga’s Holmberg Bridge</td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 51: W. Main Street between Plymouth Ave &amp; Washington St.</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 52: Plymouth Ave looking towards W. Main Street in 1947.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 53: W. Main Street at Washington in 1997.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 54: W. Broad St, at Washington in 1997.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 55: Side street intersection with bike parking and raised crosswalk in Copenhagen, DK.</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 56: West Main &amp; Broad Street adjustments</td>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 57: West Main Street elevation - Looking South</td>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 58: Building to be converted to affordable housing for the Open Door Mission.</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 59: Photo of Thomas W. Boyde Jr. as a student at Syracuse University</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 60: Existing West Main Street - Section</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 61: Proposed West Main Street - Section</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 62: Section Through Thomas W. Boyde Jr. Park</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 63: Existing intersection of Plymouth and Main Street.</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 64: Existing subway bed at Plymouth and Broad Street.</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 65: Ofelia Plads in Copenhagen, the “kissing stairs.”</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 66: Ofelia Plads in Copenhagen</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 67: Ofelia Plads in Copenhagen</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 68: 3D sketch of proposed Thomas Wilson Boyde Jr. Park.</td>
<td>92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 70: Photograph of existing Wilder Building and adjacent properties.</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 69: Photograph of existing Aqueduct Building</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 71 (left): Image depicting base, midsection, and crown.</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 72 (right): Building height ratios.</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 73: Photograph of the Knowlton Building in 1995.</td>
<td>96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 74: Photograph of the Knowlton Building in 2007.</td>
<td>96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 75: Proposed Changes to the Cascade District</td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 77: Sketch of the proposed extension to Cascade Dr, towards Allen St. and railway.</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 76: Photograph of the end of Cascade Drive showing the existing tree canopy and clock.</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 78: Existing pedestrian connection through to Church Street.</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 79: Washington Street Rowhouses in 1984</td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 80: Washington Street Rowhouses in 2018</td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 81: Windsor Street in the Grove Place Neighborhood</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 82: Hochstein’s location at the former Central Presbyterian Church</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 83: Area Around Hochstein Music School</td>
<td>103</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 84: Existing surface parking along Church Street &amp; Fitzhugh</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Existing satellite imagery of the Frontier Field and Monroe Community College</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>MCC's downtown campus with Kodak Tower behind it. Parking is located to the left.</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Existing MCC parking lot, from Plymouth Avenue looking towards High Falls.</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>Existing termination of Erie Street at Oak Street.</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>Existing intersection of Platt St. and Plymouth Ave.</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Frontier Field &amp; Monroe Community College</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Proposed Morrie Silver Way, section and plan view.</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>ROC the Riverway Downtown Plan, south.</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Proposed changes to the Downtown Riverfront</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>ROC the Riverway Downtown Plan, north.</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Proposed changes to the Front Street Riverfront</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>ROC the Riverway Downtown Plan, Beebee Flats.</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>Panoramic photo of existing conditions at Beebee Flats</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>“Beebee Flats” - Genesee River</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>3D sketch of proposed “Beebee Flats” area.</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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