

From Theory to Practice:  
The Quest to Radically Reconstruct  
Buffalo's Inner-City Neighborhoods



A Progress Report

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# The Executive Summary



## Introduction

The Inner City Transformation Project (ICTP) was launched in 2001 to develop a model of community development that can be applied to the radical reconstruction of distressed neighborhoods in metropolitan Buffalo and similar size cities in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The project is based on the assumption that distressed urban neighborhoods now represent the epicenter of racism and social class inequality in the United States and that the quest to dismantle racism must start with the radical reconstruction of these neighborhoods. The role of the Center for Urban Studies (CENTER) is to serve as a catalytic agent that can make things happen and that can generate social multipliers that triggers the involvement of other public and private entities in the development process, thereby creating synergies that would not otherwise exist. This task involves neighborhood planning, technical assistance, capacity building, policy formulation, and advocacy in working with communities to strengthen their social and civic structure.

The project is guided by five interrelated goals:

- Develop insight into the problem of inner city distress in metropolitan Buffalo.
- Engage in research to build a knowledge base that sheds light on neighborhood and community development issues.
- Implement neighborhood planning and community redevelopment projects in select neighborhoods. These projects will be designed to rebuild the physical neighborhood, to assist in institutional building, and to strengthen the social infrastructure.
- Provide technical assistance to community groups in select neighborhoods.
- Engage in community economic development projects, including those designed to strengthen the minority and women's business community.

The Inner City Transformation Project is primarily concerned with the development of neighborhoods on Buffalo's East Side, where the African American population is concentrated. This selection is based on the belief that solving the problem of neighborhood development in the African American community is key to resolving the urban crisis and building a great urban metropolis. Within this framework, the primary focus has been on the Fruit Belt neighborhood. However, because of the complexities of community development, the project team also undertook initiatives in other parts of the city and region. These short-term projects were designed to provide deeper understanding and insight into problem of community development so that work in the Fruit Belt would be enhanced.

The purpose of this report is to review the community development efforts being implemented in the Fruit Belt and other distressed neighborhoods in metropolitan Buffalo. The report will be divided into three parts. The first part will discuss the Fruit Belt Community Development Project, part two discusses projects in other neighborhoods, while part three is a conclusion that outlines the lessons learned.

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<sup>1</sup> The project was given a boost in the fall of 2001 when Rev. Robert Grimm gave the Center for Urban Studies a substantial gift to carryout its work.

## Part One: The Fruit Belt Community Development Project

The goal of the Fruit Belt Community Development Project is to work with residents and stakeholders to radically reconstruct the community by transforming its physical and social fabric and by linking Futures Academy,<sup>2</sup> a K-8<sup>th</sup> grade neighborhood school, to the community development effort. The role of the U.B. School of Architecture and Planning Center for Urban Studies is to assist residents and stakeholders in the neighborhood planning process, help develop social capital and institutional capacity, work with residents to identify and solve neighborhood development problems, and to advocate for the community. The Center for Urban Studies cannot transform the Fruit Belt, but it can work with residents and stakeholders so they can transform it.

### Neighborhood Planning and Community Development

In January 2001, The Fruit Belt Task Force asked the Center for Urban Studies to develop a strategic plan and action agenda to jumpstart the stalled community development effort. Residents hoped the CENTER would be able to formulate an approach to development that would reignite the quest to transform the neighborhood. The initiation of this planning process led to the launching of the Inner City Transformation Project and the start of a long-term relationship with the Fruit Belt. Over a period of two years, four plans were developed to guide the development of the Fruit Belt. An understanding of the plans formulated to guide community development in the Fruit Belt is essential to understanding the current state of planning and redevelopment in the community. A more detailed summary the four Fruit Belt plans, including the St. John proposal, follows.

#### **Plan One: The Turning Point: A Strategic Plan and Action Agenda for the Fruit Belt/Medical Corridor, March 27, 2001.**

On March 27, 2001, the CENTER released **The Turning Point: A Strategic Plan and Action Agenda for the Fruit Belt/Medical Corridor** (*The Turning Point Plan*). This plan was adopted unanimously by the Fruit Belt Task Force and informed all other planning efforts in the Fruit Belt, including the St. John's development plan.

#### **Plan Two: Fruit Belt Redevelopment Plan: Preliminary Study, November 2002**

The goal of this site plan was to visually represent the development ideas found in the *Turning Point Plan*. The bulk of the design work carried out in this project was completed as a studio project for graduate students in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University at Buffalo in the spring of 2002. Preliminary work on the project was carried out by a planning studio on vacant lot management, which was held in the fall of 2001. In that project, students studied the vacant lot maintenance problems in select neighborhoods and used those insights to help strategize about ways to improve the physical appearance of the Fruit Belt.

#### **Plan Three: Fruit Belt/Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus Tax Increment Finance District, January 2003.**

Tax increment financing (TIF) is a technique used to capture increases in property taxes caused by a redevelopment project to pay for the redevelopment of the locale. TIFs, then, literally allow a project to pay for its own development. It is based on the assumption that increased assessed valuation will accompany a successful restoration project and that the increased valuation can be used to pay for the redevelopment. The approach typically involves setting up a Tax Increment Finance District and establishing an Authority (which in this instance could be the Buffalo Urban

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<sup>2</sup> Futures Academy is a K-8<sup>th</sup> grade public school.

Renewal Agency) with the legal power to issue bonds, assemble land, repair streets, sidewalks, and curbs, and engage in a range of development activities. So, the key to the TIF, then, lies in the ability of the City to sell either general obligation or lease revenue bonds.

#### **Plan four: The St. John Baptist Church Fruit Belt Development Plan, Fall 2003**

The planning activities of the Center for Urban Studies informed the St. John Baptist Church housing development plan. For example, the marketing assumptions that justified the St. John plan were taken verbatim from the *Turning Point Plan*. Moreover, Phases One, Two, and Three of the St. John Plan are compatible with the site plans laid out in the CENTER's Fruit Belt Redevelopment Plan. At the same time, it should be stressed that the St. John plan went beyond those produced by the CENTER. St. John put together an implementation plan, which outlined their goal for the building of owner-occupied and rental housing for low to moderate-income families.

#### **Building the Fruit Belt Social Infrastructure**

A major goal of this project is to strengthen the Fruit Belt's social infrastructure by bolstering capacity, strengthening social capital, and linking Futures Academy to the community development movement. Efforts on this front consisted of assisting residents in developing the capacity to guide the community development process and creating a linkage between public school reform and community development.

#### **Building Organizational Capacity: The Governance Group/ the Fruit Belt Development Corporation**

When the Fruit Belt Community Development Project was launched there was no organization in the neighborhood with the capacity to lead a complex community development project. Moreover, although the community has a plethora of cultural, educational, and religious organizations, horizontal linkages do not exist among them, and outside of the Fruit Belt Task Force, there exists no structural framework to facilitate collaboration among the varied organizations and institutions in the community. So, two problems existed. First, there needed to be a group to provide oversight for the community development project and second, there needed to be a framework that could unite the entire community around the development effort. The CENTER recommended that the Fruit Belt Task Force undertake both tasks. Members of the task force, however, decided to develop another organization to carry out this mission. This group was referred to as the Governance Group.

Leadership quickly surfaced as a problem within the group. Residents were reluctant to head the new group and this created problems. The stakeholders felt residents should lead the Governance Group, and they did not want to assume that responsibility. By the time a resident agreed to assume leadership of the Governance Group, tensions had started to emerge between stakeholders and some residents over membership and the role of stakeholders in the organization. Eventually, the group lost complete sight of the larger questions and became hopelessly bogged down in narrow organizational questions.

Another problem was that the Governance Group ignored the immediate concerns of residents. While the goal of the Governance Group was to implement a large-scale community development project, most residents were concerned about day-to-day issues. The focus of the Governance Group remained on big picture issues and failed to make adequate connections between long and short-term goals. Long-range goals completely overshadowed the immediate concerns of residents.

In retrospect, the CENTER should have played a greater leadership role in the Governance Group. The CENTER treated the Governance Group like a client rather than a partner. Services

are provided to clients, and they must be able to articulate with clarity their needs. Partnerships between stakeholders and residents, on the other hand, are based on a mutuality of interests. Service providers and clients do not view themselves as being in the same boat, and their relationship tends to more distant and lacks passion. Partners, on the other hand, share a mutuality of interests and views believe their survival is based on cooperation and collaboration. In this scenario, stakeholder and residents *work together* as partners and in critical moments the stakeholder is not afraid to assert leadership.

### **Back to the Future: The Continuing Quest for a Community Drive Development Effort**

The demise of the governance group did not lead to the death of the dream of building a community development initiative led by residents and community-based stakeholders. Four events took place that breathed new life into this effort.

- 1. The Fruit Belt Task Force has again assumed leadership of the development effort.**
- 2. Council member Brian Davis has established a City Hall based steering committee to coordinate all development activities occurring in the Fruit Belt and to link those activities to government.**
- 3. The Fruit Belt Homeowners and Tenants Organization is emerging as the key grassroot organization in the Fruit Belt.**
- 4. The Erie County Community Action Organization has made Fruit Belt development a priority.**

### **Making Progress Down on the Ground: The Brush Up Buffalo Campaign and the Futures Academy Initiative**

During the past three years, the activities of the Center for Urban Studies has involved more than planning and working to build resident and community-based stakeholders community development initiatives. During this period, the CENTER was also engaged in other activities designed to develop and strengthen the Fruit Belt neighborhood.

#### **The Brush Up Buffalo Initiative**

A goal of the Fruit Belt initiative was to win some small victories, while focusing on the strategic objectives of the community development initiative. Toward this end, in the fall of 2001, Professor Henry Taylor met with Roseane Scibilia, board president of Brush Up Buffalo, to talk about the possibility of getting that organization to select the Fruit Belt community for their annual Brush Up Buffalo campaign. The board liked the idea put forward by Professor Taylor and adopted the Fruit Belt for its spring 2002 Campaign. A team consisting of neighborhood residents and staff from the CENTER worked with Brush Up Buffalo to implement this project.

On June 15, 2002 about 500 volunteers representing varied local companies, colleges, faith based institutions, government agencies, neighborhood groups and organizations descended on the Fruit Belt. In addition to having their homes painted, Dan Majeski Nursery and Garden Center of West Seneca planted flowers in each of the yards. As a result of this effort, seventeen houses in the Fruit Belt were painted and had flowers planted.

## **The Futures Academy Initiative**

The Futures Academy Initiative has been our most successful and sustained project in the Fruit Belt. The goal is to connect the Futures Academy to the effort to turn the Fruit Belt neighborhood into a great place to live, work, play, and raise a family. This is built on the theory that student achievement will be enhanced if children can be shown a connection between learning and the ability to transform the communities in which they live. The CENTER believes that one of the keys to improving academic output in public schools is to construct a learning environment that teaches children that education is important for both earning a living and for creating a world worth living in. Antiquated physical structures, overworked teachers, a stressful and difficult family situation, and a decaying and dangerous neighborhood environment hamper inner city public schools. Within this context, linking schools to the community development process and creating learning environments that will nurture and motivate students will be difficult. Several projects have been initiated to achieve this objective.

- **The Community Garden and Clean-A-Thon Project:** The Community Garden Project led to the transformation of a block of vacant lots fronting Futures into a passive garden, while the Clean-A-Thons have been used to show the students how they can take control of their environment.
- **The Sim City/Future City Project:** The Sim City/Future City project creates an opportunity for students to learn about urban development and deepen their understanding of the idea that neighborhoods and cities are “built environments.” The Future City contest is a national competition, which is in its second decade of existence. The competition is a program developed for seventh and eighth grade students to help them discover and foster interests in math, science and engineering. Using the Sim City software, gives students an opportunity to present their vision of a future city by constructing a model of the future city.

## **Part Two: Field Work in Other Neighborhoods: Technical Assistance and Building Collaborative Links**

The goal of this project is to develop a model of community development that can be applied to other communities across Buffalo, Western New York and in similar sized cities in other localities. While most work was centered in the Fruit Belt, it always been known that projects need to be carried out in other parts of the city to deepen our understanding of the complexities of community development.

- **The Jefferson Avenue Business Incubator**
- **The NFTA Allen Street Station Development Plan**
- **The Old First Ward Planning Initiative**
- **The Emslie Neighborhood Project**
- **The Masten District Planning Initiative**
- **The Depew Industrial Reuse and Neighborhood Planning Project**
- **Asset Building Coalition (ABC)**
- **Minority and Women Emerging Entrepreneurs Mentoring Program**

## Lessons Learned

The Inner City Transformation Project is only three years old. This is an extremely short time in the world of community development. Even so, much has been learned over this span of thirty-six months. The lessons outlined below are by no means exhaustive. However, they do indicate some of the most important lessons that have been learned over the past three years. The ICTP created an opportunity for the Center for Urban Studies to apply its approach to community development in a variety of neighborhoods. Although the primary focus of its activities was in the Fruit Belt, the CENTER still provided planning and technical assistance to neighborhoods outside the Fruit Belt. This combination of working both inside and outside the Fruit Belt has provided the CENTER with a knowledge base that will facilitate its future working inside the Fruit Belt neighborhood.

- **University-based community development activities must be carried out in partnership with a stable grass roots organization that can play a leading role in the quest to transform the neighborhood radically.**
- **Inner city neighborhoods are highly organized with numerous assets.**
- **Planning is an extremely important step that every community should take.**
- **Financing the development of inner city neighborhoods a huge obstacle that must be confronted**
- **Short and long term goals must be linked together.**
- **Conflict resolution, building collaborative links, and keeping the focus on programmatic issues is key to building a sustainable community development project.**
- **University based personnel working inside distressed neighborhoods must respect, admire, and trust the residents.**
- **The involvement of the university in community development will often trigger social multipliers.**
- **The issue of crime and safety must be addressed in the community development process.**
- **The physical redevelopment of neighborhoods must be connected to social and economic development.**
- **The city will not prioritize inner city development.**

## **The Next Phase of the Inner City Transformation Project**

**The Fruit Belt Community Development Project:** The Fruit Belt will continue to be the main focus of the Inner City Transformation Project. The work will center on four distinct projects:

- **The Community Outreach Partnership Center**
- **The United Front Program**
- **Futures Academy**
- **Building a partnership with the Homeowners and Tenants Association and the Fruit Belt Community Action Organization (CAO)**

**Neighborhood Planning and Technical Assistance:** Although the development focus will remain on the Fruit Belt, the CENTER will nevertheless continue to work closely with other neighborhoods on planning and technical assistance issues. In particular, efforts are already underway to strengthen its relationship with the city's planning department and help them with neighborhood planning and development issues.

- **Minority and Women Emerging Entrepreneurs Mentoring Program**
- **Masten Neighborhood Planning Project**

## **The Project Team 2001-2003**

A number of faculty, staff, and students at the Center for Urban Studies have participated in this project. In addition to the graduate assistants working on the project, more than sixty graduate and undergraduate students participated in the project.

### **The Team**

**Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.  
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Victoria Razak-Cole  
Chris Crawford  
Reggie Garner  
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Yashide Okuyama  
Kelly Patterson  
Samina Raja  
Robert Silverman**

**Project Director  
Budget Director  
Project Secretary  
Projects Manager (2001-2003)  
Futures Academy, Project Manager  
Planner (2002)  
Research/Planning  
Research (2001)  
Planner  
Economic Development  
Planner (2002-2003)  
Researcher (2001-2002)  
Research/Planner  
Research (2002)  
Research/Planner**

#### **Graduate Assistants**

**Shawna Armitage  
Chris Brown  
Chuck Colston  
Shanika Cowart  
Mehul Desai  
Eric Deline  
Brian Gatewood  
Greg Giles  
Evan Green  
Art Hall  
Shawntera Hardy  
Adrianna Johnson  
Rudri Joshi  
Saurabh Kaushal  
Chris Kay  
Gina Maramag  
Sean McDougald  
Joanna Rogalski  
Stephanie Simeon  
Kathy Toepfer  
Samuel Wong**

## **From Theory to Practice**

# **The Quest to Radically Reconstruct Buffalo's Inner City Neighborhoods**

## **A Progress Report**

**2001-2004**

### **Introduction**

The Inner City Transformation Project was launched in 2001 to develop a model of community development that can be applied to the radical reconstruction of distressed neighborhoods in metropolitan Buffalo and similar size cities in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The project is based on the assumption that distressed urban neighborhoods now represent the epicenter of racism and social class inequality in the United States and that the quest to dismantle racism must start with the radical reconstruction of these neighborhoods. The role of the Center for Urban Studies (CENTER) is to serve as a catalytic agent that can make things happen and that can generate social multipliers that triggers the involvement of other public and private entities in the development process, thereby creating synergies that would not otherwise exist. This task involves neighborhood planning, technical assistance, capacity building, policy formulation, and advocacy in working with communities to strengthen their social and civic structure.

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- Provide technical assistance to community groups in select neighborhoods.
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designed to provide a deeper understanding and insight into the challenges of community development so that work in the Fruit Belt would be enhanced.

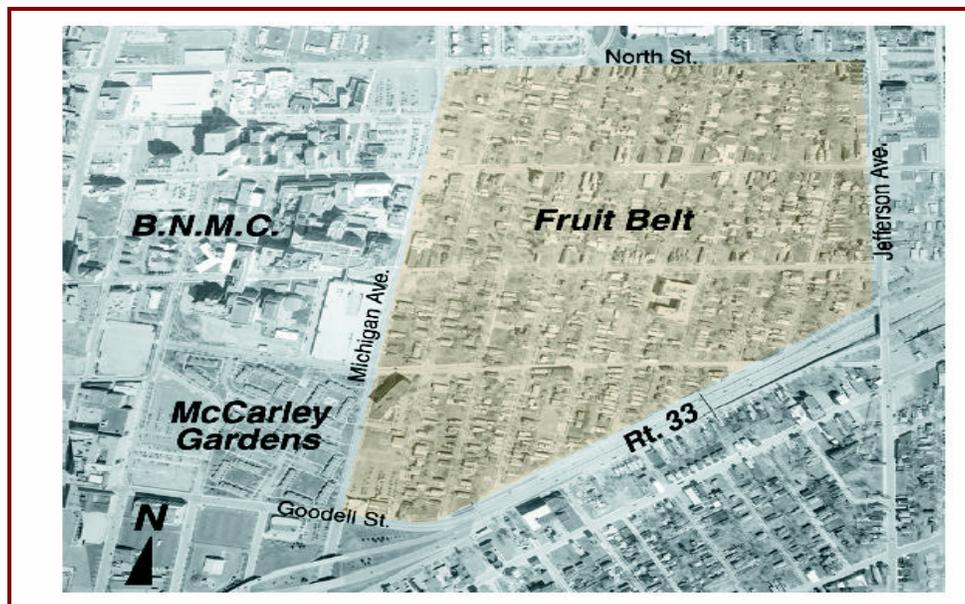
The purpose of this report is to review the community development efforts being implemented in the Fruit Belt and other distressed neighborhoods in metropolitan Buffalo. The report will be divided into three parts. The first part will discuss the Fruit Belt Community Development Project, part two discusses projects in other neighborhoods, and the part three is a conclusion that highlights the lessons learned.

## **Part One: The Fruit Belt Community Development Project**

The goal of the Fruit Belt Community Development Project is to work with residents and stakeholders to radically reconstruct the community by transforming its physical and social fabric and by linking Futures Academy,<sup>2</sup> a K-8<sup>th</sup> grade neighborhood school, to the community development effort. The role of the U.B. School of Architecture and Planning Center for Urban Studies is to assist residents and stakeholders in the neighborhood planning process, help develop social capital and institutional capacity, work with residents to identify and solve neighborhood development problems, and to advocate for the community. The Center for Urban Studies cannot transform the Fruit Belt, but it can work with residents and stakeholders so they can transform it.

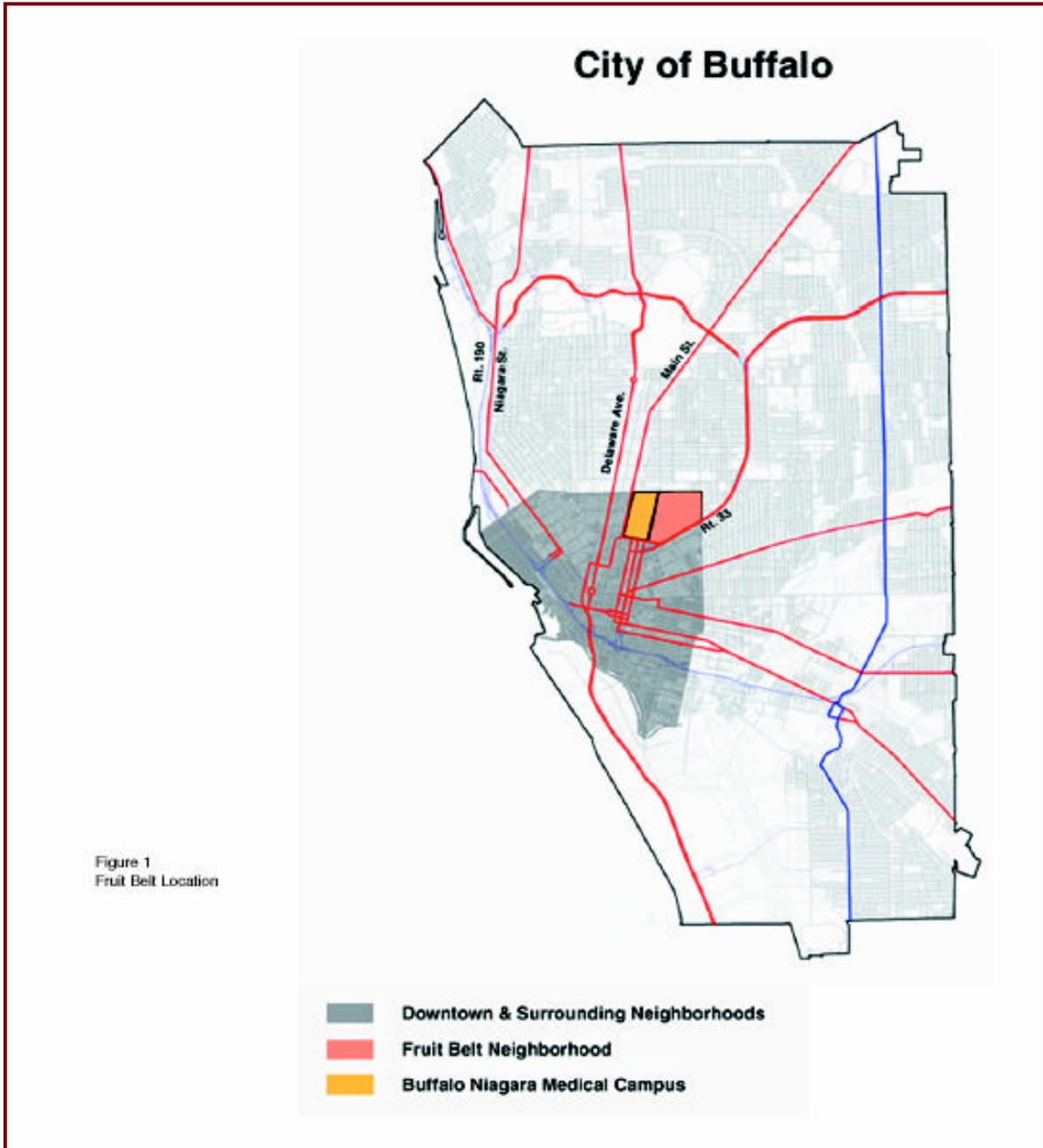
The Fruit Belt was selected as the primary target for a comprehensive community development project because of its favorable location and strong community infrastructure (Figures 1-3). A downtown Buffalo neighborhood, the Fruit Belt houses the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus, has a rich organizational infrastructure, a critical mass of concerned residents, and is anchored by a K-8<sup>th</sup> grade neighborhood school.

**Figure 1: Aerial View of the Fruit Belt**

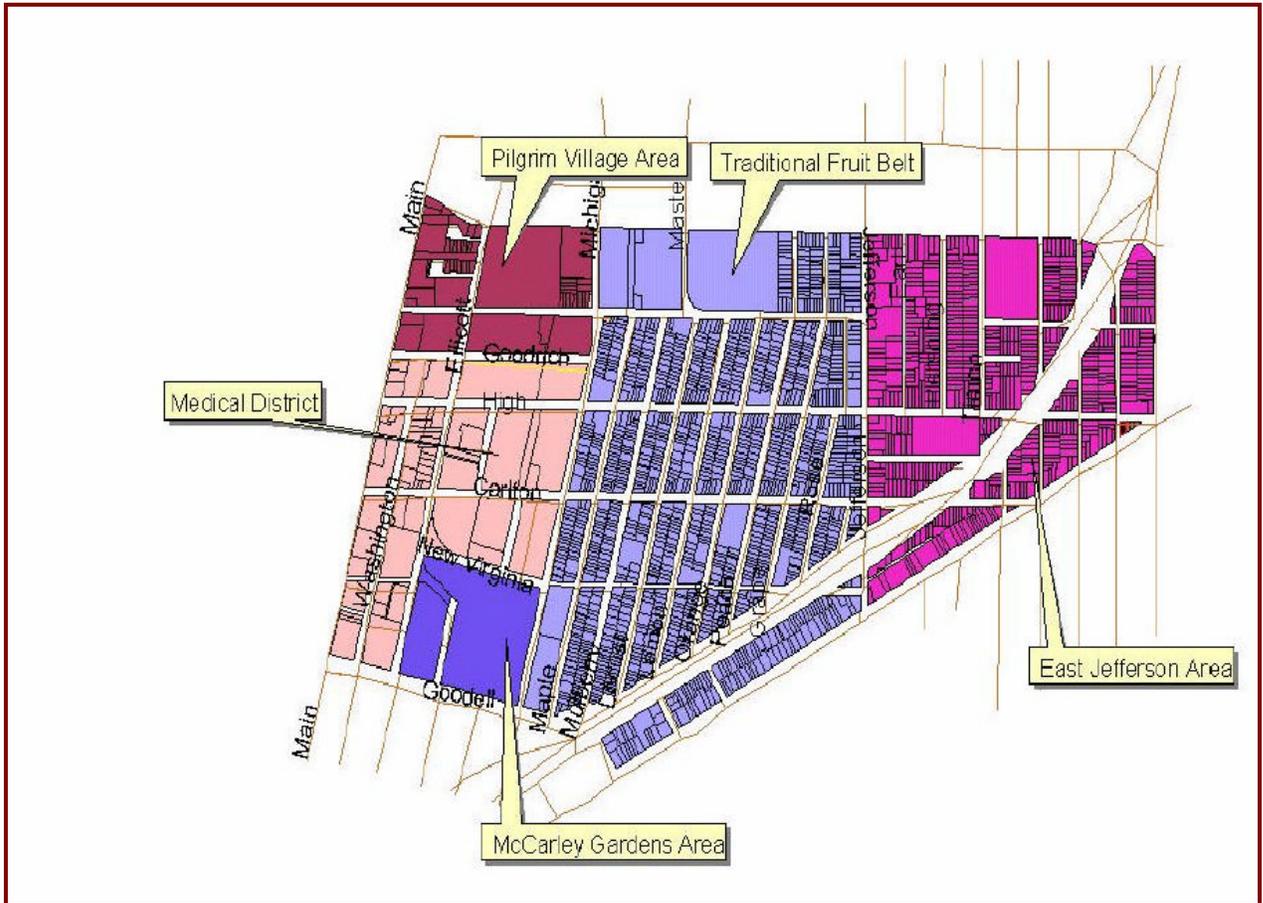


<sup>2</sup> Futures Academy is a K-8<sup>th</sup> grade public school.

Figure 2: The Fruit Belt Neighborhood in Context



**Figure 3: Map of the Fruitbelt/Medical Corridor**



## Historical Backdrop

Radically transforming inner city neighborhoods is a complex and difficult task that is made even more complicated by the existence of obstacles inside and outside of communities. The picture of a meeting of the Fruit Belt Homeowners and Tenants Association places the struggle to transform the Fruit Belt in perspective (Figure 4). The picture's caption reads *Redevelopment Was the Topic of Fruitbelt Home Owners & Tenants Meeting in 1974*. Thirty years later, residents are still trying to redevelop their community. Only through a protracted effort and the deep involvement of neighborhood residents, stakeholders, government, the private sector, and the university will the Fruit Belt be radically transformed. This does not suggest, however, that progress has not been made in the Fruit Belt. During the late seventies and eighties, much of the housing between North and Best was demolished to make way for the construction of Pilgrim's Village and Woodson's homes, two low-income residential complexes. Moreover, St. John Baptist Church played a major role in the development of the southwestern corner of the community in the Goodell area.

The most recent efforts to develop the Fruit Belt were initiated during the nineties and started with an initiative launched by Buffalo General Hospital.<sup>3</sup> The hospital conceived the Fruit Belt as part of its service community and wanted to unite with residents and stakeholders to revitalize the

<sup>3</sup> Blatner Associates, Inc., **Buffalo 2020: A Community Wellness Campaign** (Draft), N.D., p. 6.

locale.<sup>4</sup> However, because of changes in the regional health care industry and economic hard times, the redevelopment plan was scrapped. Later, in 1996, the City of Buffalo initiated a Fruit Belt redevelopment project that focused on new housing construction and some rehabilitation. About one million dollars was allocated to the project, and a task force formed to implement it. A number of new housing units were constructed, but after a few years, for unknown reasons, sales diminished and project slowed to a halt.

**Figure 4: The Fruit Belt Homeowners and Tenant Association in 1974**



## Neighborhood Planning and Community Development

In January 2001, The Fruit Belt Task Force asked the Center for Urban Studies to develop a strategic plan and action agenda to jumpstart the stalled community development effort. Residents hoped the CENTER would be able to formulate an approach to development that would reignite the quest to transform the neighborhood. The initiation of this planning process led

<sup>4</sup> Buffalo 2020, p. 7

to the launching of the Inner City Transformation Project and the start of a long-term relationship with the Fruit Belt.

In a city like Buffalo, neighborhood planning plays a key role in the community development process. It outlines the problems and challenges a community faces, chronicles its assets, and maps out a framework the community can use to guide the community development process. Despite its importance, very little neighborhood planning takes place in Buffalo. So, while there have been numerous efforts to develop the Fruit Belt, no comprehensive neighborhood plan had ever been formulated.

The efforts of the CENTER spawn a planning process that lasted for two years. The first plan was completed in the spring of 2001. It laid out a framework that guided the development of subsequent plans, including the one produced by St. John. After adopting **The Turning Point: A Strategic Plan and Action Agenda for the Fruit Belt/Medical Corridor** (the Turning Point Plan) in March 2001, the Fruit Belt Task Force and the City of Buffalo asked the CENTER to develop a detailed site plan for the neighborhood as well as a study to determine the feasibility of using tax increment financing to fund the development of the Fruit Belt.

During this period, St. John Church also developed a housing development plan, which was to be implemented in three phases. This housing strategy also included plans for the development of a Hospice. The St. John plan built on the earlier work of the CENTER and represented a strategy to operationalize the ideas outlined in the *Turning Point Plan*. However, the St. John plan called for the building of a traditional low to moderate-income black community instead of a cross-class multiracial neighborhood. St. John was not opposed to such a neighborhood, but felt it could tap the market required to make their project successful. They believed that a sustainable low-to-moderate income sustainable black neighborhood could be successfully built. While concerns existed over the St. John plan, all parties felt the involvement of St. John in the development of the Fruit Belt could trigger additional investments that would lead to the community's transformation. So, the CENTER and other groups supported their effort.

An understanding of the plans formulated to guide community development in the Fruit Belt is essential to understanding the current state of planning and redevelopment in the community. A more detailed summary the four Fruit Belt plans, including the St. John proposal, follows.

**Plan One: The Turning Point: A Strategic Plan and Action Agenda for the Fruit Belt/Medical Corridor, March 27, 2001.**

On March 27, 2001, the CENTER released **The Turning Point: A Strategic Plan and Action Agenda for the Fruit Belt/Medical Corridor** (*The Turning Point Plan*). This plan was adopted unanimously by the Fruit Belt Task Force and informed all other planning efforts in the Fruit Belt, including the St. John's development plan.

The turning point theory of neighborhood development formulated by Professors Henry L. Taylor, Jr. and Sam Cole undergirded this plan. This theory is based on the notion that fiscal investments in a neighborhood must rise above an indeterminant threshold before the radical transformation of that locale is triggered. If investments remain below this threshold, neighborhood conditions will not change substantially. A few cosmetic changes might occur, but overall neighborhood conditions will remain the same. The turning point theory is significant because it provides community developers with financial targets that must be hit before *real* changes occur in neighborhoods.

**The *Turning Point Plan* analyzed trends driving development of the Fruit Belt and presented a vision to guide that development process.** It then outlined a framework that could be used to guide the neighborhood rebuilding and community development process. Significantly, the plan addressed the challenge of financing physical development. Financing community development is the biggest obstacle facing the Fruit Belt and other inner city neighborhoods. The

*Turning Point Plan* addressed this issue and suggested that Tax Increment Financing be explored to determine its feasibility as a means of financing development of the Fruit Belt.

**The vision outlined in the Turning Point Plan called for turning the Fruit Belt into a cross-class multiracial community.** This vision is based on the principle of sustainability. Buffalo is a poor city in which more than half the African American population lives at or below the poverty line. Because of this, the East Side housing market, including the Fruit Belt, is very weak. The appreciation rate for housing is low and virtually all homeowners lose money when their homes are sold. In a market-based economy, the only way to bolster the housing market is to strengthen the population base by getting people from across the class and racial spectrum to move into the neighborhood. In a city like Buffalo, where so many blacks are poor, only by consciously creating neighborhoods that are cross-class and racially mixed can the long-term viability of the community be secured.

The following guidelines were formulated to guide the development process.

- 1. A built environment that supports a cross-class neighborhood should be constructed.** This means that a housing stock must be built that caters to a range of income groups, that the physical environment should be designed to encourage social interaction and that neighborhood images and symbols should be created that appeal to different classes and racial groups.
- 2. Extensive landscaping, streetscaping, and infrastructure development (streets, sidewalks, curbs, sewage, and water mains) should precede housing construction and rehabilitation.** The Fruit Belt has a forlorn and rundown appearance. Without changing this image, many potential homebuyers and higher income renters will not be attracted to the neighborhood.
- 3. The theme guiding the development of the Fruit Belt should be based on the area's rich history.** For example, the Fruit Belt neighborhood contains one of the largest concentration of homes, 100 years and older, in Buffalo. New houses should be designed so they are compatible with the existing structures and neighborhood design.
- 4. A comprehensive site plan should be developed to guide housing and residential development.**

The *Turning Point Plan* recommended the creation of a resident driven community development movement. The idea was to encourage the development of collaboration among residents, stakeholders, and developers that would drive community development in the Fruit Belt. The plan recommended a two-step process. At one level, a steering committee should be established to oversee the entire development process, while at another level, that same steering committee should raise the funds to hire a staff to carryout work on a day-to-day basis.

The most controversial aspect of the plan was to use tax increment financing (TIF) to fund the development activities in the Fruit Belt. Nowhere in Buffalo has a neighborhood been successfully redeveloped. Subdivisions, such as Main-LaSalle, have been developed, but nowhere has an entire community been successfully transformed. One reason is that the necessary funds are never available. So, rather than attempt to radically redevelop neighborhoods, the city builds a few new houses and makes other cosmetic changes. These changes make people feel good about their neighborhoods and make it appear that things are improving, but in the end, the changes that occur do not alter the conditions of life in that neighborhood nor do they create a lasting impact.

The goal of the Turning Point Plan was to devise a strategy capable of breaking this cycle. This is not easy. Buffalo, as a poor city, has only a few philanthropic organizations and limited public resources. Financing inner city development requires making it a top priority and investing

millions. This is not happening. Yet, scholars and policy makers shy away from discussing the topic.

The *Turning Point Plan* sought to address this problem by recommending that the city explore tax increment financing (TIF) to fund the Fruit Belt Project. The TIF would be used to cover the cost of housing rehabilitation, landscaping, streetscaping, and infrastructure. It would also be used to provide subsidies for low-income homebuyers. While emphasizing the TIF strategy, the *Turning Point Plan* also provided suggestions for other sources of financing. The Fruit Belt Task Force adopted the Tax Increment Finance Strategy and asked the Center for Urban Studies to pursue the issue with the City of Buffalo.

### **Plan Two: Fruit Belt Redevelopment Plan: Preliminary Study, November 2002**

The goal of this site plan was to visually represent the development ideas found in the *Turning Point Plan*. The bulk of the design work carried out in this project was completed as a studio project for graduate students in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University at Buffalo in the Spring of 2002. Preliminary work on the project was carried out by a planning studio on vacant lot management, which was held in the fall of 2001. In that project, students studied the vacant lot maintenance problems in select neighborhoods and used those insights to help strategize about ways to improve the physical appearance of the Fruit Belt.

The four main goals of the Redevelopment Plan were to encourage and facilitate the involvement of as many residents as possible in the development of a revitalization plan, to design an aesthetically pleasing environment that is compatible with the historic characteristics of the neighborhood and the ideals of the present Fruit Belt Community, to design a neighborhood that would accommodate a cross-class multi-cultural community in the Fruit Belt neighborhood in the future, and to design a multifunctional mixed-use neighborhood that will bring life and vitality back to the Fruit Belt.

During the spring of 2002, the design team engaged in extensive fieldwork. They took hundreds of digital photographs, which allowed the team to visually reproduce the entire community. A neighborhood asset-mapping project showed how important social institutions, including churches, social service agencies, and corners stores were spatially integrated into the community. To obtain insight into the needs, wants, and desires of neighborhood residents, meetings were held with the Fruit Belt Governance Board, the Friendly Fruit Belt Block Club Coalition, the Fruit Belt Task Force, and the Neighborhood Advisory Council of the Community Action Organization. Focus groups were also held with faith based institutions and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus population. These outreach activities culminated with the hosting of the community fair on May 4, 2002.

The design team focused on five key areas: Michigan Avenue, cross streets (in particular Carlton and High streets), residential streets, gathering places or major areas of neighborhood focus, and the southern edge of the community, which is bordered by Highway 33 and the Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers Road (BFNC).

Most significantly, the redevelopment plan created a visual image of what the Fruit Belt community could become. Residents are often able to generate memories of what the neighborhood used to look like during its golden era, and they know what it currently looks like, but they always have trouble visualizing what it might look like in the future. Through a series of before and after photographs and site designs, the plan created a powerful visual image of the Fruit Belt. At the same time, by calling the plan a *preliminary study*, it emphasize the notion that neighborhood plans are living documents that are continually enriched through the neighborhood planning and community building process (Figure 5)

**Figure 5: Neighborhood Context Map**



**Plan Three: Fruit Belt/Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus Tax Increment Finance District, January 2003.**

Tax increment financing (TIF) is a technique used to capture increases in property taxes caused by a redevelopment project to pay for the redevelopment of the locale. TIFs, then, literally allow a project to pay for its own development. It is based on the assumption that increased assessed valuation will accompany a successful restoration project and that the increased valuation can be used to pay for the redevelopment. The approach typically involves setting up a Tax Increment Finance District and establishing an Authority (which in this instance could be the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency) with the legal power to issue bonds, assemble land, repair streets, sidewalks, and curbs, and engage in a range of development activities. So, the key to the TIF, then, lies in the ability of the City to sell either general obligation or lease revenue bonds.

The idea of using the TIF to finance the physical development of the Fruit Belt found support in City Hall. The President of the Buffalo Enterprise Development Corporation, City Tax Assessor, the Common Council President, and black members of the Common Council were particularly excited about the prospects. The Commissioner of Strategic Planning and members of the City Planning Department were more cautious. The Commissioner of Strategic Planning, Joseph

Ryne, nevertheless called for the establishment of an ad hoc committee to determine the feasibility of the TIF. This committee met during the spring of 2001, and in May of that year, recommended that the Center for Urban Studies develop a detailed TIF proposal, which would allow them to determine its feasibility.

Council President James Pitts took the issue before the Common Council, and a formal process was set up to guide the development of a Tax Increment Finance Proposal for the City of Buffalo. The TIF proposal is a complex, mostly quantitative document that requires breaking down the physical redevelopment of a neighborhood into a series of sub-projects and then costing out each project. Then, it is necessary to project the tax increments and the time horizon needed to repay the bonds.

Developing the TIF proposal was an extremely time consuming process that involved studying the law, meeting with persons knowledgeable about the New York experience with TIFs, researching the tax assessment process in Buffalo and New York State, and studying the experiences of cities and states with the TIF. Developing the TIF proposal went through two stages. After much research and discussion, a draft TIF proposal was developed and circulated in City Hall. Meetings were then held with various administrative groups in City Hall, including the Director of Finance, the Commissioner of Strategic Planning and his staff, the Common Council President, and the Tax Assessor, to get their viewpoints.

After getting their criticisms, a second draft was developed. That draft was completed in January 2003. The Common Council then set up a committee to begin reviewing the TIF and determining how to move it through the appropriate legislative and administrative channels. Because of many changes in City Hall, this process has been extremely slow. However, in January 2004, a year after its submission to the Common Council, the City Tax Assessor said their office had approved the plan and suggested to Strategic Planning that it should be pursued as part of the strategy for financing the development of the Fruit Belt.

To our knowledge, the TIF report provides the most comprehensive cost assessment of neighborhood development in the city's history. The report indicated that the total private and public sector cost of revitalizing the Fruit Belt would be about \$75- \$80 million dollars with more than half the expense coming from the private sector. Most significant, the proposal cautioned the City about pursuing a development strategy that did not include housing rehabilitation along with new construction. Experience in Buffalo and elsewhere, including the Fruit Belt, have demonstrated that strategies involving new construction without a strong housing rehabilitation effort cannot be sustained. The rehabilitation strategy, however, was greatly complicated by the limited fiscal resources available for rehabilitation.

#### **Plan four: The St. John Baptist Church Fruit Belt Development Plan, Fall 2003**

The planning activities of the Center for Urban Studies informed the St. John Baptist Church housing development plan. For example, the marketing assumptions that justified the St. John plan were taken verbatim from the *Turning Point Plan*. Moreover, Phases one, two, and three of the St. John Plan are compatible with the site plans laid out in the CENTER's Fruit Belt Redevelopment Plan. At the same time, it should be stressed that the St. John plan went beyond those produced by the CENTER. St. John put together an implementation plan, which outlined their goal for the building of owner-occupied and rental housing for low to moderate-income families.

Consisting of three phases, the first phase targeted an area in the southwestern corner of the neighborhood, which was bounded by Michigan Avenue to the west, Carlton Street to the north, and Goodell and Locust Streets to the south and east. Phase one is designed to allow St. John to build outward from the Church, the Family Life Center, and McCarley Gardens. When implemented, the St. John plan will be a major boost to Fruit Belt redevelopment.

Because the St. John plan was developed in an insular fashion with no community input, tensions arose between St. John and some residents. Representing the interest of neighborhood residents, the Center for Urban Studies and the Fruit Belt Community Action Organization worked with St. John to resolve the differences. An agreement was reached to support Phase One of the St. John plan, and if no other developers showed interest in the Fruit Belt, the residents would be willing to support Phases Two and Three of the St. John plan. Because St. John's plan dealt only with new housing construction, the church suggested that other neighborhood entities should focus on developing a rehabilitation project. The Center for Urban Studies and the Community Action Organization agreed to work together to make this happen.

The CENTER had reservations about the St. John plan. It called for the development of an all-black low to moderate-income neighborhood, while the CENTER envisioned developing a cross-class, multi-cultural community. According to the 2000 census, many East Side neighborhoods are losing population because blacks are moving to other parts of the city and suburbs. As previously mentioned, the East Side housing market is weak and the CENTER does not believe these low to moderate neighborhoods will last beyond one generation of homeowners, without the same problems of decay reemerging. At the same time, a highly successful St. John project could trigger development in other parts of the neighborhood. Consequently, reservations notwithstanding, the CENTER threw its full support behind the St. John plan.

### **Conclusion**

The success of the planning activities cannot be overestimated. In the future, a community planning process will drive public and private investments in the physical, social, and economic development of neighborhoods. The process started with the Comprehensive City Planning initiative and the establishment of the Good Neighbors Planning Alliance. The flow of public and private resources into neighborhoods is going to be dictated by neighborhood plans approved by the Good Neighbors Planning Alliance. The Cold Springs neighborhood, which is the site of the Bethel AME neighborhood project, and the Fruit Belt and Masten districts are the only neighborhoods with fully developed plans. This places the Fruit Belt in an advantageous position.

St. John is already moving forward with Phase One of its project. Development of the hospice is underway and new housing construction might start by this spring. Developing and implementing a strategy to improve service delivery to the community, manage vacant lots, and developing an aggressive rehabilitation strategy will be an important part of this effort. *The bottom line here is that the planning phase of the Fruit Belt initiative was highly successful and places this neighborhood in prime position for being a target of continued development.*

### **Building the Fruit Belt Social Infrastructure**

A major goal of this project is to strengthen the Fruit Belt's social infrastructure by bolstering neighborhood capacity, strengthening social capital, and linking Futures Academy to the community development movement. Efforts on this front consisted of assisting residents in developing the capacity to guide the community development process and creating a linkage between public school reform and community development.

The Fruit Belt is a highly organized community with a strong faith based infrastructure. Yet, few collaborative links exist among these organizations, including the faith based institutions. Most organizations and faith based institutions work in isolation, pursue their own parochial interests, and have limited connections with residents. Consequently, encouraging horizontal linkages across organizations and creating stronger linkages between organizations and residents were goals of this project.

At the same time, the CENTER wanted to bolster the involvement of residents in the community development process. This is not an easy task. Many Fruit Belt residents have lost hope in the possibility of changing their neighborhoods. So, they will not attend meeting or participate in neighborhood improvement activities. Life is not easy for Fruit Belt residents. Free time is precious, and residents do not want to waste time going to meetings they view as fruitless. Increasing community participation will not happen quickly. It is going to be a slow, incremental process.

In this type of community setting, our experience suggests that for an extended period of time a handful of residents and stakeholders are going to be the engine that drives community development in the Fruit Belt. Community-based stakeholders, in particular, are going to be very important during this period of limited community participation. Even so, pursuit of the goal of resident leadership and greater community involvement is still an important goal. Why is this the case?

Inner city neighborhoods must be recreated from the inside out. The radical transformation of neighborhoods must include the redevelopment of the physical environment and a rebirth of the people living there. However, people will change only if they are involved in the process of rebuilding the places where they live. As they work to turn their communities into great places to live, work, recreate, and raise a family, they will be transformed in the process. They will become new people. Individual self-realization, interconnectedness with other neighborhood residents, and spiritual change will happen only if the residents are deeply immersed in the redevelopment process. Thus, if the reconstruction of the inner city is to be a truly empowering, liberating, and transformative experience, residents must participate and lead it. However, as mentioned earlier, this is not going to happen over night. It will take time generate the magnitude of community participation required for residents to drive the movement. In the meantime, those working in their behalf must struggle to consistently reflect their interest and avoid expert arrogance.

### **Building Organizational Capacity: The Governance Group/ the Fruit Belt Development Corporation**

The Fruit Belt neighborhood was not organized to carryout a resident driven community development initiative. There does not exist an organization in the neighborhood with the mission to engage in overseeing complex development projects, such as the one proposed in the *Turning Point Plan*. The Ellicott Community Development Agency's service area includes the Fruit Belt area. However, the development office is located on Williams Street in the Willert-Pratt neighborhood. The Willert-Pratt neighborhood was designated as an U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Home Ownership Zone in 1996. As a consequence, the Ellicott Development Agency has focused its energy in Willert-Park. Although it has the potential to play a major role in the Fruit Belt development, to date it has not assumed this responsibility.<sup>5</sup>

Although the community has a plethora of cultural, educational, and religious organizations, horizontal linkages do not exist among them, and outside of the Fruit Belt Task Force, there exist no structural framework to facilitate collaboration among the varied organizations and institutions in the community. The *Turning Point Plan* confronted this problem and recommended the establishment of a steering community to oversee the residential and commercial development of the Fruit Belt. "The group, the plan stated, "should have the responsibility and authority to guide all phases of the community development effort. The committee should be representative of the Fruit Belt neighborhood and consist of residents, community-based stakeholders, and stakeholders.

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<sup>5</sup> The history and capacity of the Fruit Belt neighborhood is detailed in the Report, Beverly McLean, *Study of Urban Neighborhoods and Community Capacity Building, Fruit Belt Neighborhood Capacity Study*, Center for Urban Studies, A report to the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, March 1, 2001.

The Fruit Belt Task Force represents the ideal body to assume this role. It was trusted by residents and was respected by stakeholders and City Hall. At the same time, the Fruit Belt Task Force was a loose body headed by the black developer James Anderson. At any rate, whatever entity that provided oversight for the Fruit Belt, needed to acquire the resources necessary to set up a development corporation and hire a full time staff consisting of three persons. This development corporation would report directly to the steering committee.

The Fruit Belt Task Force adopted this recommendation, but decided to form a steering committee independent of the Task Force. The idea was to form a "governance group" that would reach out to residents and stakeholders, while maintaining a strong relationship with the Fruit Belt Task Force. The governance group would not become "developers," but would work with others to bring developers into the community.

The Center for Urban Studies supported this idea. It hoped that such an organization might lead to more resident involvement in the community development effort. The governance group was organized during the summer of 2002. They held a series of retreats that focused on board training and this seemed to flower. Residents were excited and from thirty-to-forty people attended the weekly meetings. This group formed independent of the Center for Urban Studies, and we did not start working with them until August of 2002. By this time, the group seemed highly organized and up to the complex task that lay ahead. The first president was Mary Wilson, who was also the head of the Homeowners and Tenants Association and an employee of the Fruit Belt Community Action Organization.

Leadership quickly surfaced as a problem within the group. Ms. Wilson, for reasons that are still not clear, did not want to head the group and no other resident was willing to assume the mantle of leadership. It seemed that Ms. Wilson and other residents may have been intimidated by leading an effort as complicated as the Fruit Belt initiative. Meeting with City Hall officials, developers, bankers and others that showed interest in Fruit Belt Development may have seemed overwhelming. The reluctance of residents to assume leadership caused stakeholders to fill this void. This was not just a problem with the Governance Group; the developer James Anderson heads even the Fruit Belt Task Force. Outside the Friendly Fruit Belt Block Club, the key leaders in the neighborhood are heads of community-based organizations.

The lack of strong resident leadership created a dilemma. The stakeholders felt residents should lead the Governance Group, and they did not want to assume that responsibility. By the time a resident agreed to assume leadership of the Governance Group, tensions had started to emerge between stakeholders and some residents over membership and the role that stakeholders should play in the organization. Eventually, the group lost complete sight of the larger questions and became hopelessly bogged down in narrow organizational questions. For example, minor issues regarding the bylaws, mission, and membership dragged on for months, when they could have been easily resolved in a single afternoon.

Another problem was that the Governance Group ignored the immediate concerns of residents. While the goal of the Governance Group was to implement a large-scale community development project, most residents were concerned about day-to-day issues. Residents often talked about the problems of vacant lot management, trash and garbage scattered throughout the community, the illegal dumping of rubbish, overgrown trees, and poor service delivery from the City. The focus of the Governance Group remained on big picture issues and failed to make adequate connections between long and short-term goals. Long-range goals completely overshadowed the immediate concerns of residents. These problems were compounded by the continuous influx of new members. This led to a structural problem of bickering and continuously trying to "get everyone on the same page." About a year and half after their formation, the group had become moribund.

In retrospect, the CENTER should have played a greater leadership role in the Governance Group. The CENTER treated the Governance Group like a client rather than a partner. Services are provided to clients, and they must be able to articulate with clarity their needs. Partnerships between stakeholders and residents, on the other hand, are based on a mutuality of interests. Service providers and clients do not view themselves as being in the same boat, and their relationship tends to more distant and lacks passion. Partners, on the other hand, share a mutuality of interests and views and believe their survival is based on cooperation and collaboration. In this scenario, stakeholder and residents *work together* as partners and in critical moments the stakeholder is not afraid to assert leadership.

### **Back to the Future: The Continuing Quest for a Community Drive Development Effort**

The demise of the governance group did not lead to the death of the dream of building a community development initiative led by residents and community-based stakeholders. Four events took place that breathed new life into this effort.

- 1. The Fruit Belt Task Force has again assumed leadership of the development effort.** Various factions in the community, including St. John, respect this group. James Anderson provides capable leadership that has managed to make this a stable body capable of uniting various neighborhood factions. Currently, the Center for Urban Studies is working with that body to unite the community around a single development plan that will integrate the St. John housing plan with a housing rehabilitation and neighborhood services scheme, which is being devised by the Center for Urban Studies. When completed this spring, the plan will go forward to the City as the framework for guiding the development of the Fruit Belt Task Force.
- 2. Council member Brian Davis has established a City Hall based steering committee to coordinate all development activities occurring in the Fruit Belt and to link those activities to government.** The purpose is to facilitate development of the Fruit Belt and to create an institutional framework for resolving conflicts and for funneling resources into the community.
- 3. The Fruit Belt Homeowners and Tenants Organization is emerging as the key grassroot organization in the Fruit Belt.** This group has been in existence for many years and is the main link to homeowners and tenants in the Fruit Belt. It has the potential to become the driving force behind residential development in the Fruit Belt. They have their own organizational headquarters and are provided technical assistance by the Erie County Community Action Organization. The Center for Urban Studies is now working closely with this organization and will continue to provide it with technical assistance and support. The CENTER will be working closely with the Community Action Organization to provide the necessary support to help this organization emerge. It should be stressed, however, that this will be a long-term effort. The Homeowners and Tenants organization is too weak to drive community development in the Fruit Belt. However, if we are awarded the Community Outreach Partnership Grant the development process might be greatly accelerated.
- 4. The Erie County Community Action Organization has made Fruit Belt development a priority.** The CENTER is working closely with this group to provide a push forward in work on neighborhood development. For example, the CAO in partnership with the Homeowners and Tenants Organization has just completed a needs assessment of the community. This will help in the development of a combined approach to neighborhood rehabilitation and neighborhood service delivery that makes it possible to create linkages between short and long term community development goals in the Fruit Belt.

## **Conclusion**

The interplay of these four factors is constructing a new foundation upon which to launch renewed efforts to bring residents and stakeholders to the forefront in the development of the Fruit Belt. This is not to minimize the importance of the activities of St. John in the southwestern portion of the neighborhood or the activities of Pilgrim Baptist Church in the eastern part of the neighborhood, in the Jefferson Street area. The Center for Urban Studies supports these activities and believes they are critical to the successful development of the Fruit Belt. At the same time, the CENTER appreciates the importance of resident involvement in the radical transformation of this neighborhood. In the short term, the activities of these faith based institutions are going to be critical to the development of the Fruit Belt. In the long term, however, that development will only be sustained in residents are able to drive the process.

## **Making Progress Down on the Ground: The Brush Up Buffalo Campaign and the Futures Academy Initiative**

During the past three years, the activities of the Center for Urban Studies has involved more than planning and working to build resident and community-based stakeholders community development initiatives. During this period, the CENTER was also engaged in other activities designed to develop and strengthen the Fruit Belt neighborhood.

### **The Brush Up Buffalo Initiative**

A goal of the Fruit Belt initiative was to win some small victories, while focusing on the strategic objectives of the community development initiative. Toward this end, in the fall of 2001, Professor Henry Taylor met with Roseane Scibilia, board president of Brush Up Buffalo, to talk about the possibility of getting that organization to select the Fruit Belt community for their annual Brush Up Buffalo campaign. The board liked the idea put forward by Professor Taylor and adopted the Fruit Belt for its Spring 2002 Campaign. A team consisting of neighborhood residents and staff from the CENTER worked with Brush Up Buffalo to implement this project.

To qualify for painting and minor landscaping by Brush Up Buffalo, a house must be owner occupied, and the owners must agree to have their homes painted. Because of this, the selection process is extremely time consuming. The CENTER wanted to cluster the homes selected so the impact be greater. We identified and mapped the location of various owner occupied dwellings and after months of interface with Brush Up Buffalo, sixteen houses on Peach, Lemon, Rose, Locust, Maple, Grape, Mulberry and Orange Streets were selected.

On June 15, 2002 about 500 volunteers representing varied local companies, colleges, faith based institutions, government agencies, neighborhood groups and organizations descended on the Fruit Belt. In addition to having their homes painted, Dan Majeski Nursery and Garden Center of West Seneca planted flowers in each of the yards (Figures 6 includes 22 pictures of houses painted during Brush Up Buffalo).

**Figure 6: Houses Painted During Brush Up Buffalo**



**Homeowner: Lillian Morton, 268 Mulberry Street 883-9010**  
Teams: HOME Dave Wright 854-1140  
Belmont Jennifer Miller 884-7791  
First Preston Terry LaSalle



**Homeowner: John and Thelma Banks, 167 Mulberry 852-1887**  
Teams: Teen Challenge Rev. J. Swartzlander 855-6100  
Malcolm Pirnie Jim Releigh



**Homeowner: Kenneth Olden, 174 Mulberry 852-6899**  
Teams: Notre Dame Alum Jill Clayback 832-4139  
Common Council Dara Marciniak 851-4982



Homeowner: Leroy McDougle, 70



**Mulberry, 852-8060**  
Team: Mayor Masiello's Team  
Tom Gleed & Gretchen  
851-4841



**Homeowner: Frances Finley, 117 Maple, 845-6966**  
Team: DEC Team, Marty Doster 851-7220



**Homeowner: Frances Finley, 117 Maple, 845-6966**  
Team: DEC Team, Marty Doster 851-7220



**Homeowner: Samuel Easley, 36 Lemon,**  
Teams: American Axel Doug Chavers  
Fleet Bank Steve Sippel

**855-0143**  
**891-7373**  
**656-6104**



**Homeowner: Samuel Easley, 36 Lemon,**  
Teams: American Axel Doug Chavers  
Fleet Bank Steve Sippel

**855-0143**  
891-7373  
656-6104



**Homeowner: Donna Hunley, 54 Locust**  
Teams: Creditors Interchange  
Christine Nowak

**853-2606**

**614-7526**



**Homeowner: Mr. and Mrs. Clim Blair, 200 Locust, 883-0556**  
Teams: Newman Center at Buffalo State College  
John Kolaga 843-3809/884-7494





**Homeowner: Mr. and Mrs. James Moore, 73 Peach, 854-2796**  
Teams: TMP Technologie Jim Cervi 895-6100  
Enterprise Rent A Car 565-0002  
Brandy Miller 491-9451



**Homeowner: Gladys L. McLemore, 35 Peach**  
Teams: Bryant & Stratton Stacey Watson  
Buffalo Jaycees Ann Hackett  
Business First Tracey Drury

**856-9010**  
884-9120  
854-5822 E 239  
854-5822



**Homeowner: Esco and Eula Arrington, 58 Rose**

Teams: New Millennium Group Chris Dow

Phillips, Lytle Hitchcock Kathleen Lee

Blaine & Huber LLP

Minority Bar Association Craig Hannah

**856-4819**

843-3936

504-5724

851-4343



**Homeowner: Henry Smith, 35 Rose**  
Teams: Adelpia Cable  
Colleen Lynch

**847-1346**

**558-8253**



**Homeowner: Robert Cotton, 79 Grape**  
Teams: Rich Products Gail Arthurs  
BFNC John Senall

**856-4883**  
878-8497  
852-5065



**Homeowner: Charlotte and Frank Aughtry, 234 Orange**  
Teams: Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus  
Sheila Howard  
Matt Enstice

**886-6621**  
  
**843-7512**

By all accounts the Brush Up Buffalo campaign was very successful. Not only did it impact on the physical environment by improving the appearance of sixteen houses, but also it introduced a number of people and institutions to the Fruit Belt neighborhood. The residents were very appreciative and many of the volunteers, including those from the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, voiced their surprise that the Fruit Belt was a pleasant and safe community. Most important, the project demonstrated the importance of getting other people and institutions excited about the development of the Fruit Belt. In a limited resource region like metropolitan Buffalo, the only way that poor communities can garner the assistance and resources needed for development is to become a high priority on the regional development list. Projects such as Brush Up Buffalo are critical to making this happen.

## **The Futures Academy Initiative**

The Futures Academy Initiative has been our most successful and sustained project in the Fruit Belt. The goal is to connect the Futures Academy to the effort to turn the Fruit Belt neighborhood into a great place to live, work, play, and raise a family. This is built on the theory that student achievement will be enhanced if children can be shown a connection between learning and the ability to transform the communities in which they live. The CENTER believes that one of the keys to improving academic output in public schools is to construct a learning environment that teaches children that education is important for both earning a living and for creating a world worth living in. Antiquated physical structures, overworked teachers, a stressful and difficult family situation, and a decaying and dangerous neighborhood environment hamper inner city public schools. Within this context, linking schools to the community development process and creating learning environments that will nurture and motivate students will be difficult.

To achieve this goal, it will be necessary to build a trusting relationship with the principle and teachers and then get them involved in activities that promote the development of a *community oriented school*. Concurrently, it means developing educational activities that give students a deeper understanding of neighborhoods as built environments that can be altered and changed and that provide them with a sense of what it means to use their talents and skills to improve neighborhood conditions. At the same time, the poor academic backgrounds and limited cultural exposure of these children must be acknowledged and tutoring, mentoring, and enrichment activities must be developed to complement the activities of the teachers. Against this backdrop, the Center for Urban Studies developed an initiative at Futures Academy that initially centered on development of a community garden, tutoring, a Sim City Urban Simulation Project, and an annual Clean-A-Thon. The CENTER is linking efforts to those of the UB School of Social Work so that the full complement of programs will include our existing tutoring and community linkage activities combined with mentoring, after school and summer enrichment programs.

## **The Community Garden and Clean-A-Thon Project**

The community garden project was based on the simple idea that neighborhood context matters in the education of inner city children. It is difficult to make children believe that knowledge gives them the power to control their destiny and to turn their neighborhoods into great places when they live in communities that are dilapidated and rundown.

Back in 2001, vacant lots and an abandoned commercial structure fronted Futures Academy are vacant lots. This abandoned structure and unkept vacant lots also formed a symbol for the children that said, "You are a worthless person and no one cares about you. There is nothing you can do about your circumstance in life." The vacant lots and the abandoned building were the last things the children saw when they disappeared into Futures Academy and the first things they saw when left school at day's end. The vacant lots and abandoned building reminded them of their helplessness. It is hard to make children believe education makes a difference when their teachers and parents cannot even clean up the environment surrounding the school. For these

reasons, the CENTER believes that education and instruction must be linked to neighborhood redevelopment and place-making activities in distress neighborhoods.

The goal of the community garden project was to work with students at Futures to design and build a community garden. By transforming the unkept vacant lot and abandoned building across from Futures, the CENTER wanted to demonstrate to students and faculty at Futures Academy that it is possible to change the physical environment. Also, the CENTER wanted to show residents how landscaping and streetscaping can alter the appearance of the community. During the spring of 2002, students at Futures Academy, working with a team of graduate students in the Department of Planning under the supervision of Professor Richard Milgrom and Dr. Minoo Amini, designed the community garden (Figure 7 contains six photographs of students working on the community garden).

**Figure 7: Children Working on the Community Garden Project**



This phase of the project allowed the students to work on a number of academic skills, including math, writing, and public speaking as well as gaining insight into the planning and community development process. The project enabled them to see a connection between the work that could be carried out in the school and changes that could be made to happen in the community.

While the students worked on the park design, the CENTER worked with the city to gain control over the vacant lots fronting Futures Academy. Although the city owned the lots, getting the rights to turn them into a passive park was extremely complex.<sup>6</sup> It required interfacing with a number of different departments in city hall, getting formal approval from the city to develop the lots as a passive park, and then working with Futures and the Water Authority to develop a watering and maintenance plan for the park. Various options were explored for keeping the park watered, including building an underground sprinkling system. The various options proved too costly, and we finally settled on contracting with a local resident to maintain the park during the spring, summer, and fall.

The English Gardner, a landscaping company, was hired to develop the garden according to the design made by the students at Futures. This also proved to be an extremely difficult task. Site preparation was a huge problem. The city's demolition process is very poor. The companies hired to tear down buildings do not make the site construction ready. In many instances, debris is buried and the land is rarely leveled. Therefore, preparing the lot for something as simple as a passive garden proved to be time consuming and expensive. Nevertheless, the task was completed in the spring of 2002. A year after the students completed the design of the Fruit Belt community garden. The development of the community garden dramatically changed the frontage of the school (Figures 8-11). Recently, after determining that the rehabilitation of the building below was not feasible, we worked with the city to have the building torn down. This spring the community garden will be extended to the corner.

**Figure 8: The Vacant Lot and Abandoned Building Before the Community Garden**



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<sup>6</sup> Time does not permit a full elaboration of the problems encountered in getting the necessary approvals and paperwork signed by City Hall. It was an extremely difficult and time consuming process that took almost a year to complete. The experience has given us a sense of the difficulties involved in development in this city.

**Figure 9: The Vacant Lots After the Construction of the Community Garden**



**Figure 10: The Community Garden**



Figure 11: The Community Garden in Context



Other activities were developed to bolster ownership of the garden among the students and faculty members at Futures. In the spring of 2003, the art teacher at Futures had several of his students design trash containers for the community garden and a school wide essay contest was held to name the community garden (Figures 12-14).

**Figure 12: Students and Teachers Designing the Trash Containers**



**Figure 13: A Finished Product**



Figure 14: The Winning Essay Poster

building great places to live

Stephanie Mason  
 Essay  
 just left  
 8/10/03  
 302

I thought of 3 names for the park. I think the park should be called Future Gardens because I predicted how it would look like in the future. I thought it might look like a garden. Therefore I picked Future Gardens. I like the name Future Gardens. It has that perfect sound to it. I think it is a great name for the park across the street.

I thought of another name. The other name I thought of is Orange Grove. I think that is a good name because Orange Street is on one side of the park. I also think that is a good name as well.

I thought of one more name for the park across the street. The name I thought of is Peach Grove. I thought of Peach Grove because the other side street is Peach Street. Therefore I thought of Peach Grove. Peach Grove sounds like a friendly name for the people that live in this community.

In conclusion, I can't wait to see what we call it. I love these names I chose, but I don't care if I win. I just want to hear other great names and ideas.

Center For Urban Studies

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Clean - A - Thon  
Fall 2003

Sponsored by  
 The Fruit Belt Community  
 Futures Academy  
 UB & The Center For Urban Studies

The winning essay, which is printed on the poster, was the culmination of more than two years of work on the community garden. The contest allowed us to introduce writing into the community development process. The winning essay named the garden *Futures' Garden*.

*Over the past two years, Futures Garden has become a symbol of hope in the community. The challenge of maintaining and continually upgrading the garden has been met. This, in turn, has been translated into community pride. People do not drop trash or debris on the garden and the trash containers have been in place for almost one year. This is important because in many neighborhoods, the only way to keep trash containers from disappearing is to lock them to poles. In the case of Futures' Garden this has not been necessary. Moreover, the creation of the garden has truly transformed the area around Futures and bolstered the value of the new houses on the northern side of the street. The community garden project has been successful.*

To reinforce the connection between Futures and the surrounding community, in the spring 2002, the school held the first annual Clean-A-Thon(Figure 15). This created an opportunity for the students, teachers, neighborhood residents, and friends to come together to clean up the neighborhood. The event has been a huge success. At the end of each Clean-A-Thon is a picnic, prepared by residents, that celebrates the event and the unity between school and community that it breeds. Most important, the Clean-A-Thon provides a living example of the responsibility that the students, teachers, and residents have to making their community a better place.

**Figure 15: Poster Announcing Second Annual Clean-A-Thon**



This past year over a hundred seventh and eighth graders participated in the fall Clean-A-Thon. This spring, the Clean-A-Thon will be the biggest event yet. It will not only feature the annual clean up of the neighborhood, but also there will be a one-on-one basketball tournament for the students too young to participate in the cleaning. Also, for the first time, we will introduce the students to computer mapping as part of the planning process and will create opportunities for them to analyze the problem of littering in the community. By determine the places where most of the trash is concentrated, determining the location of that trash on property, and classifying and analyzing the places where the trash is dropped, the students will be able to determine the best way to stop blighting and keep the neighborhood clean. Also, during the spring, a sign with the name of the garden will be installed along with a community flag. Through these small steps, linkages are built between Futures and the surrounding community.

### **The Sim City/Future City Project**

The Sim City/Future City project creates an opportunity for students to learn about urban development and deepen their understanding of the idea that neighborhoods and cities are “built environments.” The Future City contest is a national competition, which is in its second decade of existence. The competition is a program developed for seventh and eighth grade students to help them discover and foster interests in math, science and engineering. Using the Sim City software gives students an opportunity to present their vision of a future city by constructing a model of the future city. The goals are to:

- Foster engineering skills, such as teamwork, communication and problem solving skills;
- Provide interaction among students, teachers, and engineer mentors;
- Inform the community about the multi-disciplines within the engineering profession;
- Inspire students to explore futuristic concepts and careers in engineering;
- Develop problem solving, research, math, science, computer, and presentation skills, along with learning the value of teamwork.

Most important, from our perspective, the competition creates an opportunity to teach students about the city building process by giving the opportunity to create their own city from scratch, converting a serene and untouched landscape into a thriving metropolis. It provides them with an opportunity to learn a new vocabulary and new concepts that give them a better understanding of the growth and development of urban society.

In the 2002, the students participated in the competition for the first time (Figure 16 shows five photographs of the students working on the Sim City Project). They placed ninth in the regional competition and won first prize, including \$100.00, for energy efficiency. This past year, the team did not place in the top five, but did win the Best Design Award. While we are extremely happy with the student’s performance, we believe they can do much better. The hope is to expand Sim City into a yearlong effort, which will provide the students with more time to plan and develop their city. Additionally, we hope to make the project part of the after school program that is being designed. This not only will give the students more time to work on the project, but it will keep Sim City from competing with other in-school activities. Perhaps the value of the program was best summarized in the words of one parent who said, “I have never seen my child so happy and motivated.”

## Sim City/Future City Competition 2003-2004

Figure 16: Team Leaders—Futures & UB



Figure 17: Futures Academy Teacher, Students and the The Future City Model



**Figure 18: Futures Academy Students Presenting at UB**



During the fall of 2003, steps were taken to work toward uniting our efforts at Futures with those of the UB School of Management. Dr. Jeannette Johnson runs a mentoring program in the school with about fifty professionals participating. We will work with her to augment this effort with an after school and summer enrichment programs. Those students, who are working with our existing tutorial program for math and science, will be linked to the mentoring program. These programs, combined with our community development programs, will give us a very strong relationship with Futures.

The initiative at Futures is unique because of its focus on linking inner city public school education to community development. In most places, public school reform and community development have traveled separate paths. In the Fruit Belt, we are attempting to connect those two efforts. Our work has already gained national attention. Professor Henry L. Taylor, Jr. has delivered papers on the work at Futures at the University of Pennsylvania and the University At Albany. This spring he will be presenting papers on the topic at the prestigious American Education Research Association conference in San Diego, California, and Dr. Taylor has been invited to deliver a lecture on the topic of linking public school reform to community development at a conference at The Ohio State University. Moreover, he has written a chapter, "Connecting Community Development and Urban Education Reform," in the forthcoming edited volume, **Urban Education With an Attitude: Linking Theory, Practice, and Community**, Lauri Johnson, Mary Finn and Rebecca Lewis, Editors. SUNY Press will publish the book, which will be out in the fall 2004.

## **Part Two: Field Work in Other Neighborhoods: Technical Assistance and Building Collaborative Links**

The goal of this project is to develop a model of community development that can be applied to other communities across Buffalo, Western New York and in similar size cities in other localities. While most work was centered in the Fruit Belt, it always been known that projects need to be carried out in other parts of the city to deepen our understanding of the complexities of community development.

### **The Jefferson Avenue Business Incubator**

In June 2002, Betsy Bergen, Projects Manager at the Center for Urban Studies, worked with Mike Clarke of the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC), Lauren Breen, ESQ. of the University at Buffalo Law School Community Economic Development Clinic, and Reverend Richard Stenhouse of Bethel Community Development Corporation (CDC) on a joint grant application to the Department of Commerce (DOC) to secure funds to initiate a business incubator on Jefferson Avenue to complement the Tops and spur economic development in the area. The role of Bergen and Breen was to provide technical assistance in the preparation of the grant. This effort led to the DOC awarding the group a \$125,000 grant to jumpstart the project.

DOC's objective in issuing the Request for Proposals was to foster collaboration between and among community based organizations (CBOs) and Faith Based Organizations (FBOs). The grant also required recipients to host a local roundtable discussion to gain greater insight into the activities taking place and to facilitate collaboration. Toward this end, a steering committee comprised of the grant applicants, St. John Baptist Church minister Michael Chapman, Avery Bates of the Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation, Karla Gadley of Fleet Bank, and Craig Rogers of Canisius College was formed. At the urgings of Rev. Stenhouse and Chapman, five ministers with churches along Jefferson Avenue were asked to work with the group.

Avery Bastes agreed to provide tenants for the incubator through the BEREC's Entrepreneurial/Marketing Assistance Program that provides business assistance to start ups. Students from the Center for Urban Studies and the Law School conducted surveys among residents to gain insights into the types of goods and services needed. These supportive efforts played an important role in making this project happen. Ironically, the business incubator recently opened on Jefferson Avenue in the eastern part of the Fruit Belt neighborhood, where Pilgrim Baptist Church is located.

### **The NFTA Allen Street Station Development Plan**

The Niagara Frontier Transit Authority sponsored a study to examine ways that the Allen Town and the Summer-Best Rail Stations could be improved and become engines of economic development. In particular, the NFTA wanted to turn the stations into user-friendly engines of neighborhood development. Both stations, especially Allen Town, are central to the development of the Fruit Belt neighborhood.

The NFTA contracted with Chan Krieger & Associates, the world renowned, Boston based, architectural and urban design firm, to conduct the study. Because of the involvement of the Center for Urban Studies in the development of the Fruit Belt, the NFTA insisted that it be part of the planning group. As members of the planning group, the CENTER convinced Chan Krieger to abandon the traditional planning approach of using citizen input to reflect and comment on draft projects that are almost completed, by placing citizen input at the front end of the process. This way, the ideas of residents could influence the entire planning and development process. To involve residents in the planning process, the CENTER held four focus groups: Allen Town, Fruit Belt, Medical Campus workers, and a wrap up sessions that included those who participated in all three neighborhood focus groups. Additionally, the CENTER conducted an intensive review of

the literature to determine ways that transit orientated development had impacted neighborhoods across the United States. In particular, the project team introduced the idea of Eco-Passes to the NFTA. The Eco-Pass system is designed to encourage use of mass transit over automobiles by allowing employers to purchase transit passes for all of their employees directly from the transit agency at greatly reduced rates. The NFTA particularly liked the Eco-Pass concept and plans to work with the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus to implement the idea.

### The Old First Ward Planning Initiative

The purpose of the Old First Ward project was to gain insight into the neighborhood planning and community development process by engaging in the planning process in a racially mixed neighborhood where deep divisions exist between the white working class residents and African Americans and Latinos. This is a very complex neighborhood, which is located in an old industrial part of the city and contains the Perry Projects, a public housing unit. Historically, deep antagonisms existed between the whites and people of color living in the neighborhood. The goal of the project was to determine if a planning process could be designed that could get input from the different racial groups, while simultaneously formulating a plan that could unite the community. At the same time, the project allowed the CENTER to develop deeper insight into the process of neighborhood planning in distressed inner city neighborhoods (Figures 18-22).

Figure 19: The Old First Ward: Study of Vacant and Occupied Land

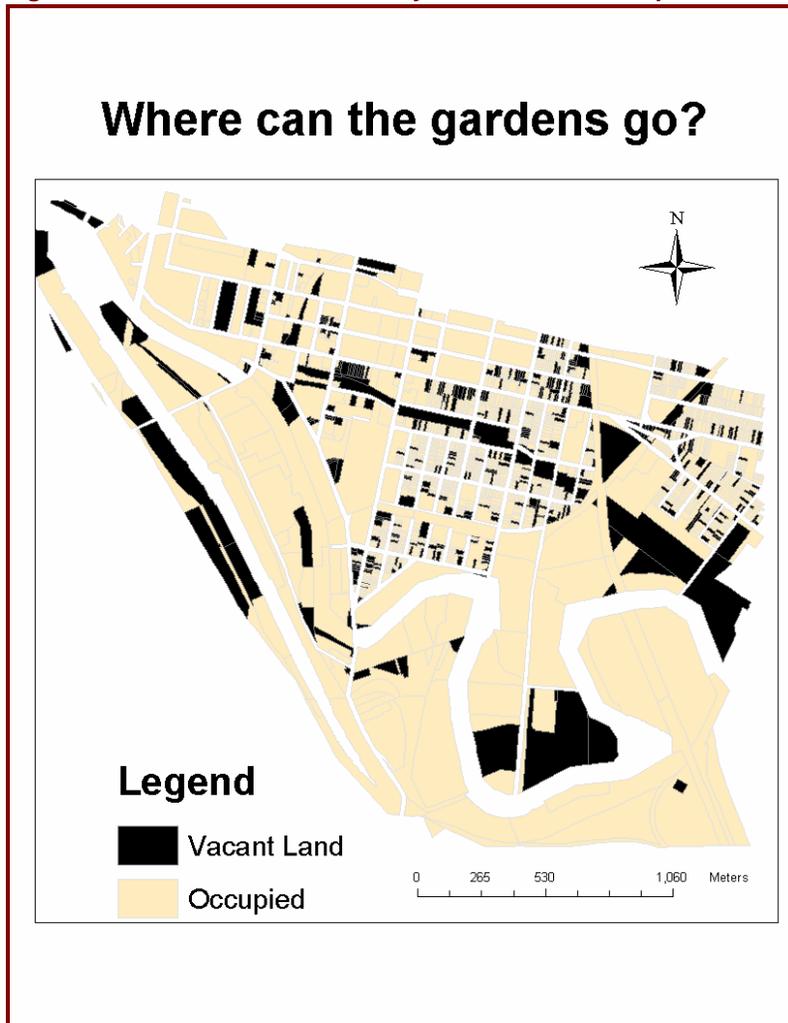


Figure 20: Educational Poster developed for the Community Fair

# Where do you live? housing

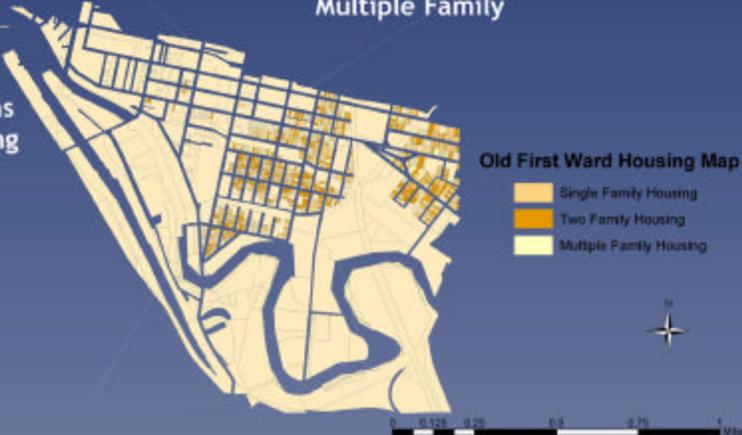


Single Family



Multiple Family

Do you feel that the existing housing conditions meet the minimum housing standards?



Old First Ward Housing Map

- Single Family Housing
- Two Family Housing
- Multiple Family Housing



Single Family



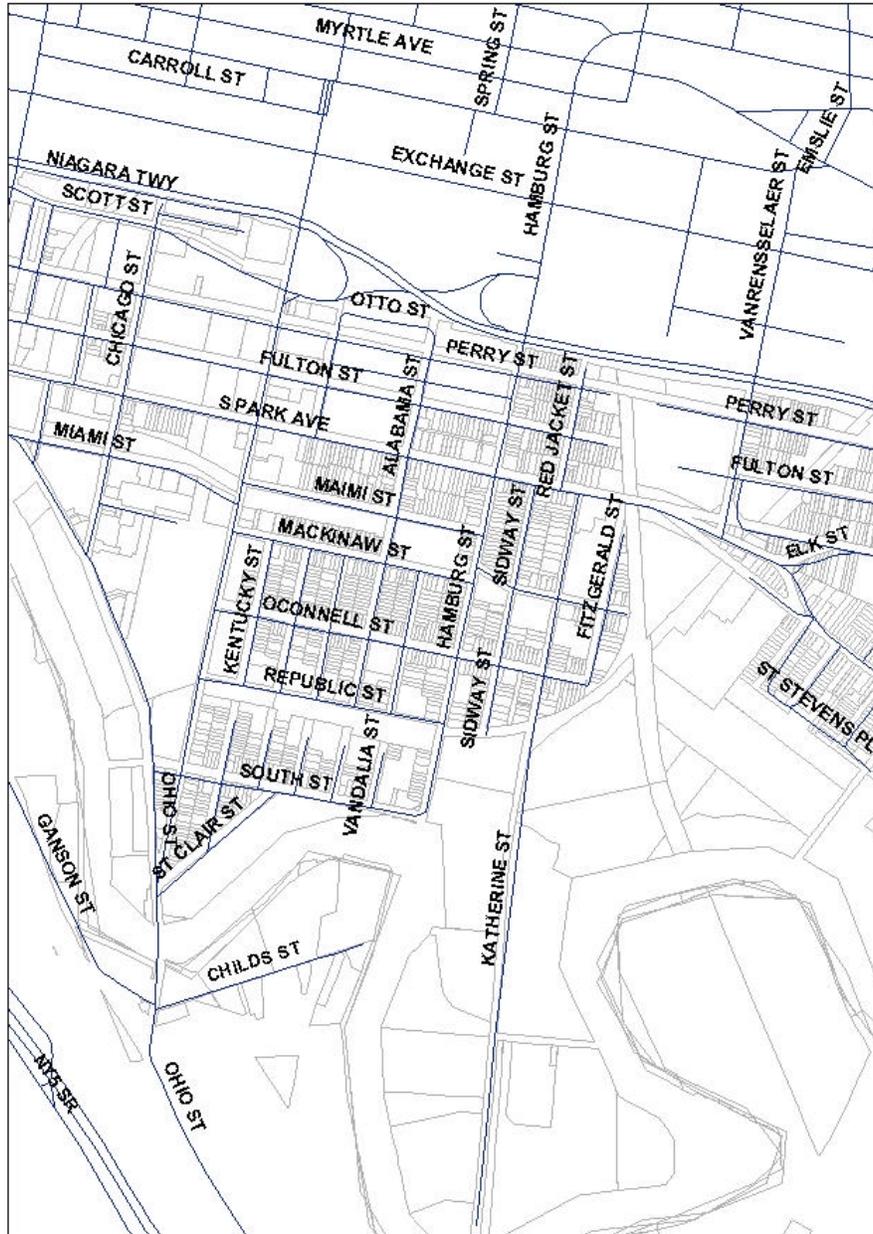
Two Family

## Old First Ward

UB University at Buffalo Planning Studio - Spring 2003  
Old First Ward Community Association



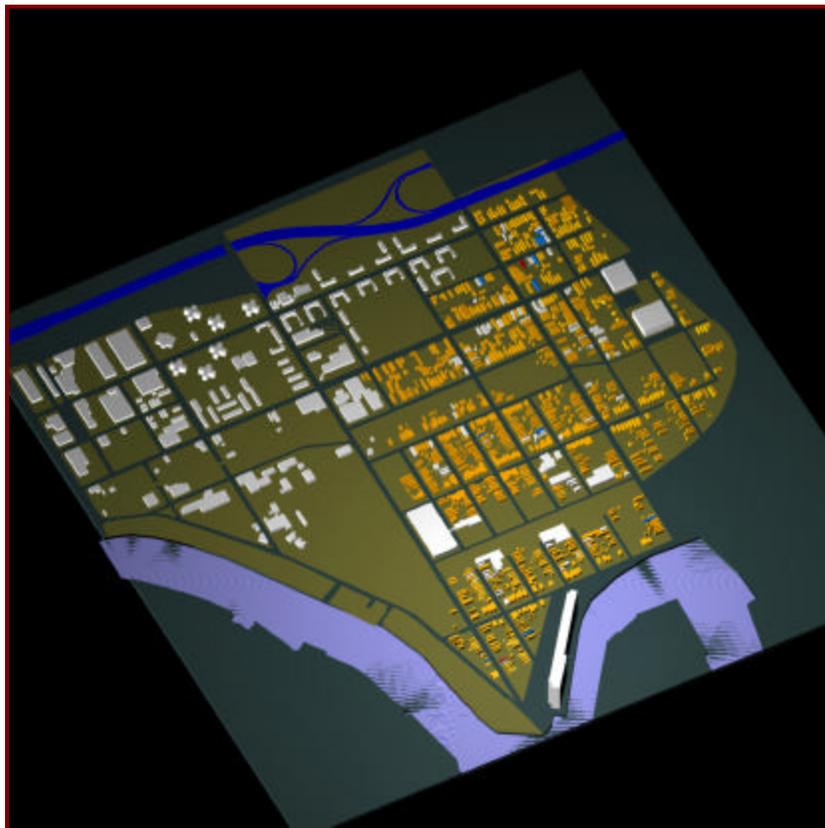
Figure 21: The Old First Ward



**Figure 22: Getting Community Input**



**Figure 23: Three Dimensional View of Neighborhood**



The project deepened the CENTER's understanding of the complexities of building cross-class, multiracial communities and of the importance of finding ways to bridge the cultural divide existing in racially mixed neighborhoods (Figure 23). While the plan was well received by both groups,

the people did not come together in its development. Rather, the project team had to penetrate the various racial enclaves in order to gain information. Nevertheless, it is felt that the final plan formulated ideas that could generate the collaborative activities necessary to bridge the racial divides. At the same time, the team came to appreciate even more how neighborhoods are divided along racial lines even when people belong to the same economic class.

**Figure 24: Black Planning Students Bridging the Racial Divide**



### **The Emslie Neighborhood Project**

The Emslie neighborhood represented a different type of challenge for the Center for Urban Studies. Located in the Ellicott District of Buffalo, this neighborhood was devastated on December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1983, when an explosion ripped it apart. The explosion happened on the corner of Grosvenor and North Division, in the southwest portion of the Emslie Neighborhood. The detonation came from within a four-story brick building that was surrounded by Old St. Paul's AMF Church and a number of residences.

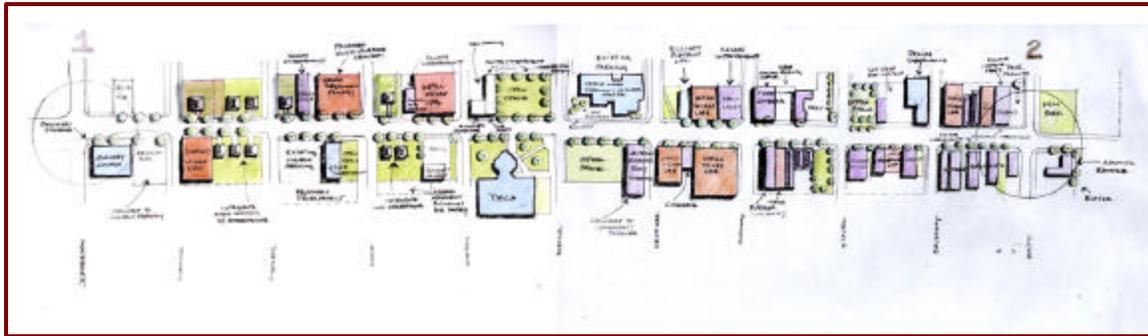
The explosion could be heard all the way to Elma, which is over 15 miles away. It was the result of a laborer's mistake in moving a nearly full 500 gallon drum filled with propane. The tank fell off a forklift and the building exploded when the gas reached a wood burning stove on the first floor.

The "Blast" left a giant physical and psychological scar on the east side, particularly the Emslie Neighborhood. In the explosion five firefighters were killed as well as two east side residents. Also over 37 homes and a number of businesses were either partially or completely destroyed. In the aftermath the owner of the building, Gerald Malachowski, was charged with negligent homicide for allowing an unskilled laborer to operate a forklift and move the tank. A lawsuit was also brought against the City of Buffalo. City building inspectors had been at the building a few weeks before the explosion and failed to cite the illegal tank. The city mandates that tanks be

licensed and it also forbids that 75 gallons or more of volatile storage, such as propane, be at any one location.

The goal of this project was to identify key problems holding back the neighborhood's development and then outline a strategy for addressing them. Like many East Side neighborhoods, Emslie is losing population, especially its middle-income residents. As these higher income residents move out, the neighborhood's economic base is weakened, leaving local businesses vulnerable.

**Figure 25: A Redeveloped Concept for William Street Section of Emslie**



## Concept drawing showing William Street

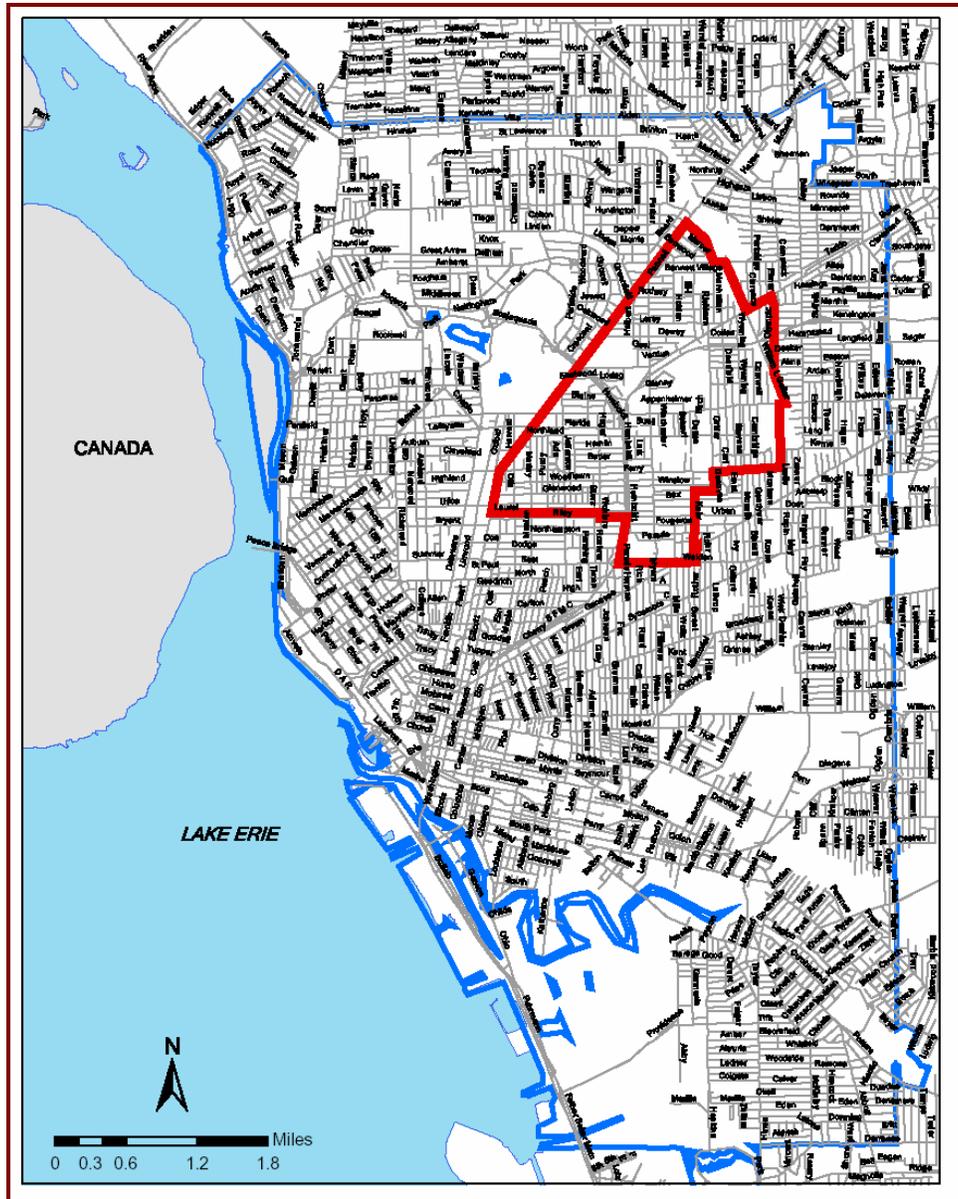
The neighborhood tends not to be visually pleasing. While there has been an effort to build new housing, this housing has not always been of a fine stock. It can be seen that some of this new housing is already beginning to fall into states of disrepair. Due to the lack of resources available, residents cannot make necessary repairs. Along with this new housing is the issue of the older housing units in the neighborhood. Some of these buildings are in such dilapidated states that they are not only eyesores, but they are unsafe for residents. Coupled with this is the issue of vacant lots and lack of visually appealing landscaping. Vacant lots comprise upwards of 40% of the land use in the neighborhood. These lots have come to be dumping grounds for trash that can cause problems with rats, as well as being displeasing to the eye. There are also many abandoned buildings within the confines of the community. These buildings have also become dumping grounds for garbage and graffiti. The lack of a clean and inviting landscape is a definite hindrance in any plan for community revitalization.

This project taught the CENTER several important lessons about neighborhood development. The first is the importance of making beautification a short-term strategy (Figure 25). Most inner city neighborhoods are visually unappealing and this greatly hampers development. Beautification campaigns are needed to restore confidence and pride in the neighborhood, while simultaneously making it appealing to potential investors.



The Masten District was of particular interest to the Center for Urban Studies because of its location, its strong economy, and the strength of its social infrastructure (Figure 26). Masten is literally situated in the center of Buffalo and has one of the highest concentrations of business and industry in the region. Yet, it has a high poverty and unemployment rate and its neighborhoods have been ignored by the city. If the complex of neighborhoods comprising Masten could be successfully revitalized, they would reverse the downward development trend in the city. Moreover, a planning project in Masten would not only provide the CENTER with insight into the problems holding the development of the district, but also it would give the CENTER even greater insight into the strategies required to transform Buffalo's inner city, as well as the big obstacles holding back this transformation process.

**Figure 27: The Location of Masten in Context**

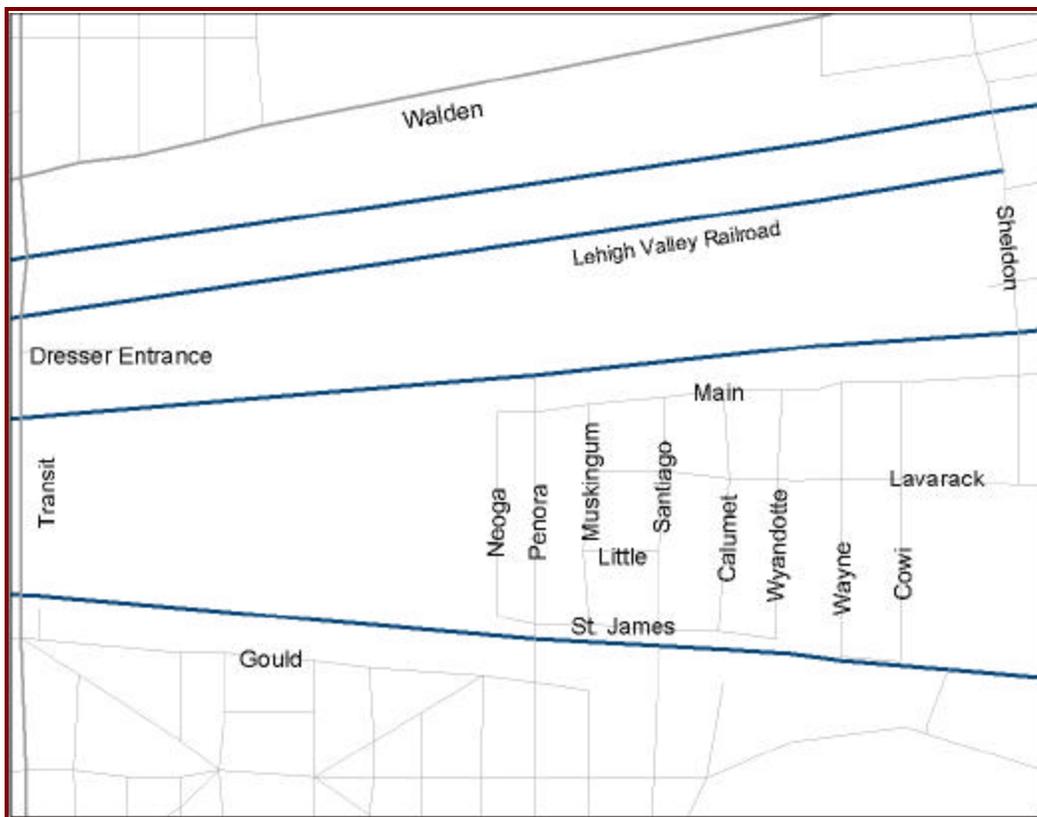


Lastly, because the Masten plan must be integrated into the city's Master Plan, work on this plan gave the CENTER an opportunity to gain insight into the city's planning process and its success in getting neighborhood residents involved.

### The Depew Industrial Reuse and Neighborhood Planning Project

The Center for Urban Studies took on the Depew project because it gave us the opportunity to gain insight into the process of developing a distressed suburban neighborhood (Figures 27-28). Also, working with neighborhood provided an opportunity to deepen our understanding of white working class culture. This is important for redeveloping Buffalo neighborhoods because the blacks are moving into most of the city's residential areas. This means that in the coming years building stable neighborhoods with a multiracial population will be critical to keeping the city viable.

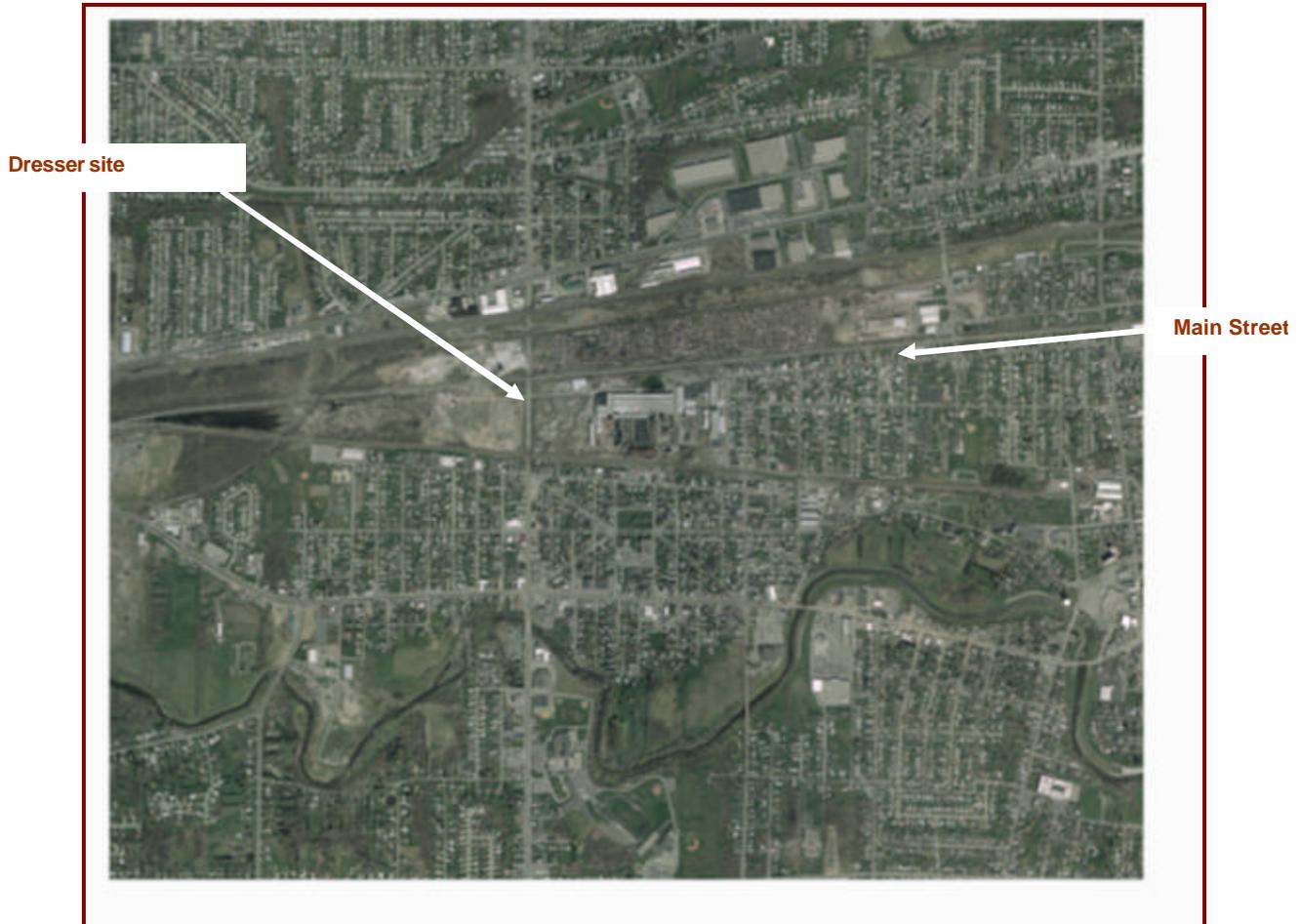
Figure 28: The Planning Neighborhood in Depew



The focal point of the planning area is Main Street, a neighborhood dominated by working class Germans and Polish. Main Street terminates at the entrance to the Dresser Plant. The goal of the project is to create a development strategy for the Main Street neighborhood that is compatible with the economic redevelopment of the Dresser Site. The importance of this project to inner city development is twofold. First, and most important, by planning a development strategy in a distressed neighborhood, with a working class population dominated by Germans and Polish, the planning team hoped to obtain greater knowledge of working class white culture and deeper insights into the complexities of building stable cross-class, multiracial neighborhoods. Second, the project demonstrates that inner city distress exists in the suburban region, which means that policy makers across the region should be concerned about distressed

neighborhoods. Third, by linking the economic redevelopment of the Dresser site to the redevelopment of the Main Street neighborhood, the project team hoped to greater understanding of the process of linking economic development to social development.

**Figure 28: Arial View of Dresser Site and Neighborhood**



### **Asset Building Coalition (ABC)**

To gain deeper insight into the financial problems Erie County Residents face, including those living in distressed neighborhood, Betsy Bergen worked with ABC, a coalition of governmental, financial, and faith based organizations seeking to increase economic opportunities for Western New Yorkers. ABC, in partnership with the IRS, provides financial literacy programs to low income individuals and has established about 80 volunteer income tax assistance centers so that low income residents (1) do not have to pay for tax preparation (2) receive the money owed from taxes, especially taking advantage of their eligibility for Earned Income Tax Credits, and (3) are encouraged to start savings. Bergen's role consisted primarily of distributing educational material to local employers and to their eligible employees.

### **Minority and Women Emerging Entrepreneurs Mentoring Program**

This highly innovative economic development program is a partnership among the UB School of Management Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership, the Office of Urban Initiatives, Inc., and the Center for Urban Studies. The goal of the program is to construct a pathway that enables minority and women entrepreneurs to move their companies to the next stage of development.

The program is based on matching emerging entrepreneurs with highly successful businessmen and women in the region. Also, each mentoring team has a successful minority entrepreneur on it. The mentors and their protégés meet four times a year. Other complementary activities are created to generate opportunities for the protégés to get to know each other and to interact more causally with the mentors. The basic idea behind the project is that the best-kept secrets to building a successful business are locked in the minds of the leading entrepreneurs. The mentoring program is designed to create opportunities for minority and women entrepreneurs to learn about those secrets. There are twelve minority and women entrepreneurs participating in the program, along with a mentoring team consisting of twenty-four entrepreneurs.

## **Conclusion: Lessons Learned**

The Inner City Transformation Project is only three years old. This is an extremely short time in the world of community development. Even so, much has been learned over this span of thirty-six months. The lessons outlined below are by no means exhaustive. However, they do indicate some of the most important lessons that have been learned over the past three years. The ICTP created an opportunity for the Center for Urban Studies to apply its approach to community development in a variety of neighborhoods. Although the primary focus of its activities was in the Fruit Belt, the CENTER still provided planning and technical assistance to neighborhoods outside the Fruit Belt. This combination of working both inside and outside the Fruit Belt has provided the CENTER with a knowledge base that will facilitate its future working inside the Fruit Belt neighborhood.

- **University-based community development activities must be carried out in partnership with a stable grass roots organization that can play a leading role in the quest to transform the neighborhood radically.** Most inner city neighborhoods are not organized to lead a complex community development effort. Even when neighborhoods have community development corporations, often those institutions are narrow in their scope and do not have the capacity to lead a complex community development effort. So, efforts must be made to develop the capacity of these organizations so they can fulfill this role. An important part of this task is working with this organization to expand its sphere of influence among residences, while simultaneously developing venues that can unite the entire community, residents and stakeholders alike, around a common agenda to transform the neighborhood.
- **Inner city neighborhoods are highly organized with numerous assets.** However, collaborative linkages do not exist among these organizations and institutions found in these neighborhoods. Most often, the economic and job producing institutions have weak attachments to the neighborhood. In this context, most groups have interests and agendas related to the advancement of their institutions, rather than the entire community. Visions and strategies for developing these neighborhoods are typically created in isolation from the residents. Most organizations and institutions view community participation as a process of getting people to agree to their vision of the neighborhood. In such a setting, it is necessary to create a neutral venue where groups, organizations, institutions, and individuals can work out their differences, find common ground, and map out a strategy for moving the entire community forward. In many instances, the lead organization and the place or ad hoc committee or task force that unites the community might be different. *In this setting, the lead organization might be just another interest group sitting around the table.* That should not become a problem. The idea is to create unity by finding common ground and developing a program of unified action.

- **Planning is an extremely important step that every community should take.** The planning process creates a common vision for the community and outlines specific tasks that must be completed before the locale can be transformed. Moreover, the plan provides the neighborhood with an agenda, which can be used to secure resources and build support. On this point, planning is a process and not an event. Plans are living documents and the community must be encouraged to continue to update and enrich plans so they can reflect new insights, lessons learned, and new circumstances.
- **Financing the development of inner city neighborhoods is a huge obstacle that must be confronted.** This is one of the biggest obstacles any neighborhood seeking to transform itself will face. Yet, policy makers, elected officials, and community activists rarely confront it. Funds are aggressively sought for individual projects. The problem is these projects are usually so narrowly conceived that even their successful implementation is not likely to change a neighborhood's downward trajectory. For example, in the Fruit Belt, St. John aggressively sought the additional funding needed to carry out its new housing project. While the city, stakeholders, and the private sector supported their activity, no one discussed where to get the money to rehabilitate existing housing units and to change radically the infrastructure, particularly streets and sidewalks. Everyone recognized the importance of these expenditures, but outside the CENTER no other group or organization addressed this question. This is a typical response. Consequently, residents are asked to think small when planning their neighborhood. Large-scale projects are considered unrealistic and impractical. Moreover, the city is primarily concerned about big economic development projects and middle class housing. It will not make big investments in distressed neighborhoods. The bottom line is that communities should think big in terms of transforming their neighborhoods and should develop a strategy for generating the necessary funds. But this will happen only when there exists a community-based organization strong enough to lead the effort.
- **Short and long term goals must be linked together.** Residents and community builders must see the big picture, but, at the same time, they must focus on short-term goals that are important to the residents. Often a disconnect exists between these two dimensions of the community development process. Residents and stakeholders will think about the big picture but lose sight of short-term goals, or they will focus on short-term issues but forget about the big picture. The idea is to think about the big picture, while simultaneously tackling critical short-term goals, which address the immediate issues concerning residents. Without demonstrating the capacity to successfully attack current issues, residents will not believe that the more complex and difficult long-term goals can be reached.
- **Conflict resolution, building collaborative links, and keeping the focus on programmatic issues is key to building a sustainable community development project.** Inner city neighborhoods are filled with organizations that possess varied interests and agendas. Moreover, residents are often at odds with stakeholders, and the residents themselves are divided along the lines of those who rent and own. In such a setting, conflicts are going to take place. Hence, it becomes extremely important to resolve conflicts as quickly as possible and not let them get the community development effort bogged down.
- **University based personnel working inside distressed neighborhoods must respect, admire, and trust the residents.** At all cost, they must avoid the *cult of the expert* and lose faith in the people they are working with. At the same time, they cannot romanticize the community and refuse to use their knowledge and insight to help push the development process forwards. In this sense, community residents and stakeholders are partners, not clients. Partners create a dialogue and work

together to achieve a common goal, while clients must make specific requests and are provided discrete services.

- **The involvement of the university in community development will often trigger social multipliers.** When one group becomes very active in a community, it causes others to become involved in activities that might not have been pursued if nothing else was going on in the neighborhood. The notion of social multipliers is often seen in many aspects of community development. For example, when one person starts to clean up their house and adjacent vacant lots, others are moved to action. The same principle operates when one organization, like the Center for Urban Studies, becomes active in the neighborhood.
- **The issue of crime and safety must be addressed in the community development process.** The bottom line is that neighborhoods will not be transformed unless the perception and reality of safety is realized. People, especially those with residential options, are not going to remain in neighborhoods they view as dangerous.
- **The physical redevelopment of neighborhoods must be connected to social and economic development.** Unless the residents of a community are changed along with the physical structure and ways are found to connect the neighborhoods job producing institutions to the neighborhood, the development effort will fail. If the physical environment is changed but not the people, then all the social problems that made the locale an undesirable place to live will persist.
- **The city will not prioritize inner city development.** They will say it is important, but they will not make the investment and policy decisions necessary to make this happen without pressure from residents. Consequently, political engagement must become part of the process of transforming inner city neighborhoods.

### **The Next Phase of the Inner City Transformation Project**

**The Fruit Belt Community Development Project:** The Fruit Belt will continue to be the main focus of the Inner City Transformation Project. The work will center on four distinct projects:

- **The Community Outreach Partnership Center:** The Center for Urban Studies will be applying for a HUD Community Outreach Partnership Center grant. This grant creates an opportunity to put forward a comprehensive program for continuing the involvement in the Fruit Belt, as well as providing planning and technical services to other Buffalo and Erie County neighborhoods. Even if the grant is not obtained, the proposal nevertheless outlines the approach the CENTER plans to take in this region, and the plan will be implemented even while the search for funding continues.
- **The United Front Program:** This effort is designed to unite all the major organizations and institutions in the Fruit Belt around a single development strategy and to get all key organizations and groups to attend regularly meetings of the Fruit Belt Task Force. For the past three months, Professor Henry Louis Taylor, Jr., director of the Center for Urban Studies, has been talking with heads of organizations and gathering material on their programmatic thrusts. The idea is to hold a unity day meeting and present a public program for community change anchored by Phase One of the St. John Housing Plan and a Housing Rehabilitation and Neighborhood Improvement Strategy. The program will also celebrate the activities of other organizations and will be submitted to Brian Davis, council member for the Ellicott

District, as a show of unity. This will also focus back on programmatic issues in the Fruit Belt.

The consensus among many stakeholders is that the Fruit Belt Task Force should be the neighborhood venue where issues of development are discussed and agreements reached and where conflicts are aired and resolved. The task force has played this role over the years and it should continue.

- **Futures Academy:** This initiative involves and unites the School of Social Work and the Center for Urban Studies around efforts to link the improved academic performance of students to efforts to transform the neighborhood. The long-term goal is to build a bridge to parents and to make neighborhood culture and school culture positive, mutually reinforcing elements in the lives of children. The key programs at Futures are:
  1. **The Clean-A-Thons (twice yearly).**
  2. **The Sim City Project**
  3. **The Futures Garden**
  4. **The Mentoring and Tutoring Program**
  5. **Summer Enrichment Program**
  6. **After-School Program**
- **Building a partnership with the Homeowners and Tenants Association and the Fruit Belt Community Action Organization (CAO):** The CENTER will work closely with these two organizations with the anticipation that the Homeowners and Tenants Association will become the lead group in the Fruit Belt. Currently, the CENTER is working on a Housing Rehabilitation Plan and Neighborhood Services Strategy that allows it to bolster the capacity of the Homeowners and Tenants organization. The CAO will play a major role in this effort and will assist in the implementation of this strategy once it is formulated.

**Neighborhood Planning and Technical Assistance:** Although the development focus will remain on the Fruit Belt, the CENTER will nevertheless continue to work closely with other neighborhoods on planning and technical assistance issues. In particular, efforts are already underway to strengthen its relationship with the city's planning department and help them with neighborhood planning and development issues.

- **Minority and Women Emerging Entrepreneurs Mentoring Program:** This program will be the CENTER's primary economic development activity. The goal of this program is to construct a pathway that enables minority and women entrepreneurs to move their companies to the next stage of development by creating opportunities for them to learn from highly successful entrepreneurs.
- **Masten Neighborhood Planning Project:** The CENTER will stay actively involved in the provision of technical assistance to the Masten District and will place particular emphasis on the redevelopment of the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. In this regard, it will build a partnership with the Buffalo Museum of Science. Preliminary talks have already been held with David E. Chesebrough, President and CEO of the museum. Dr. Chesebrough will be part of the team putting together the COPC application.