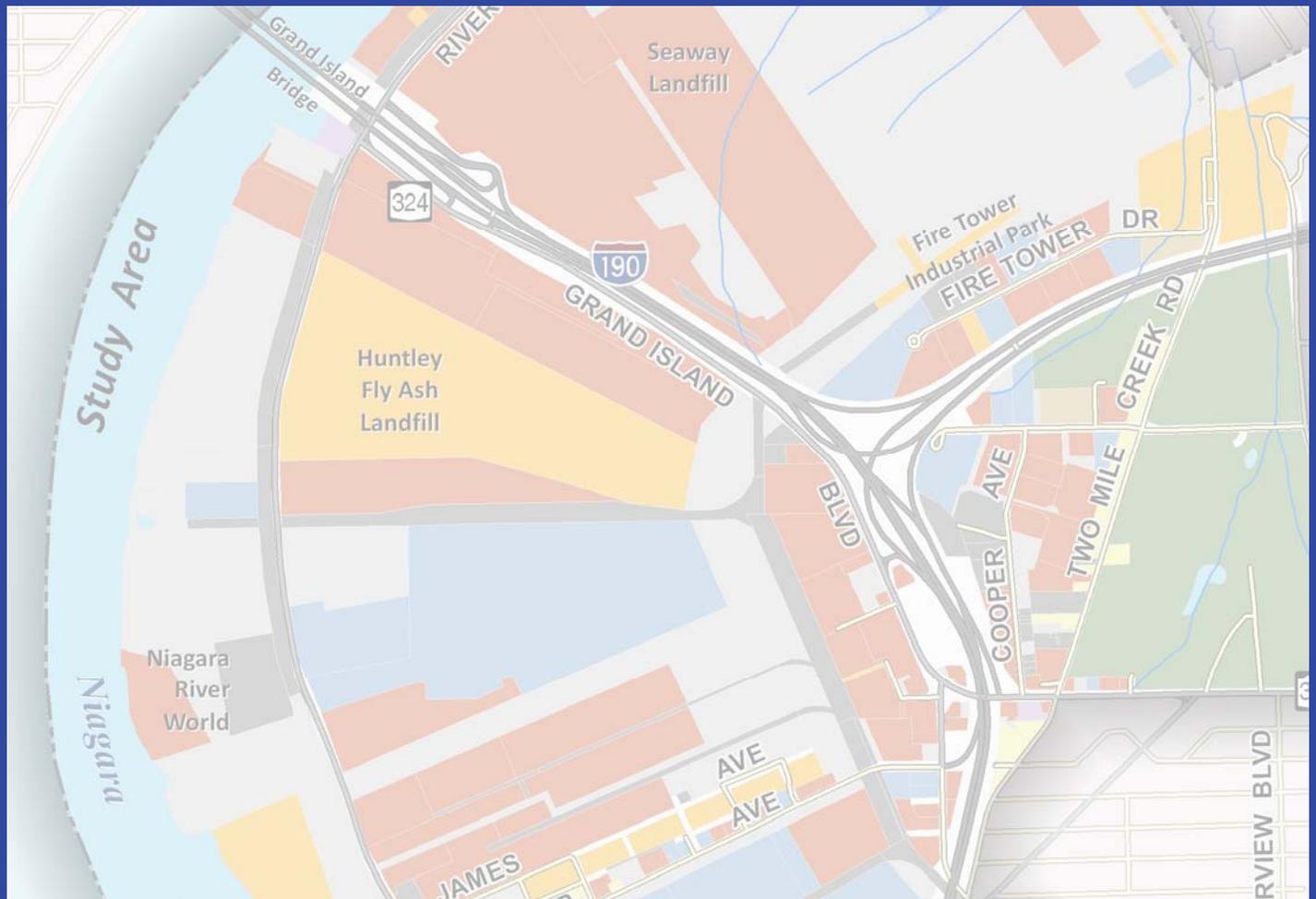


Chapter 6

Land Use Master Plan



Waterfront Land Use Plan
Town of Tonawanda

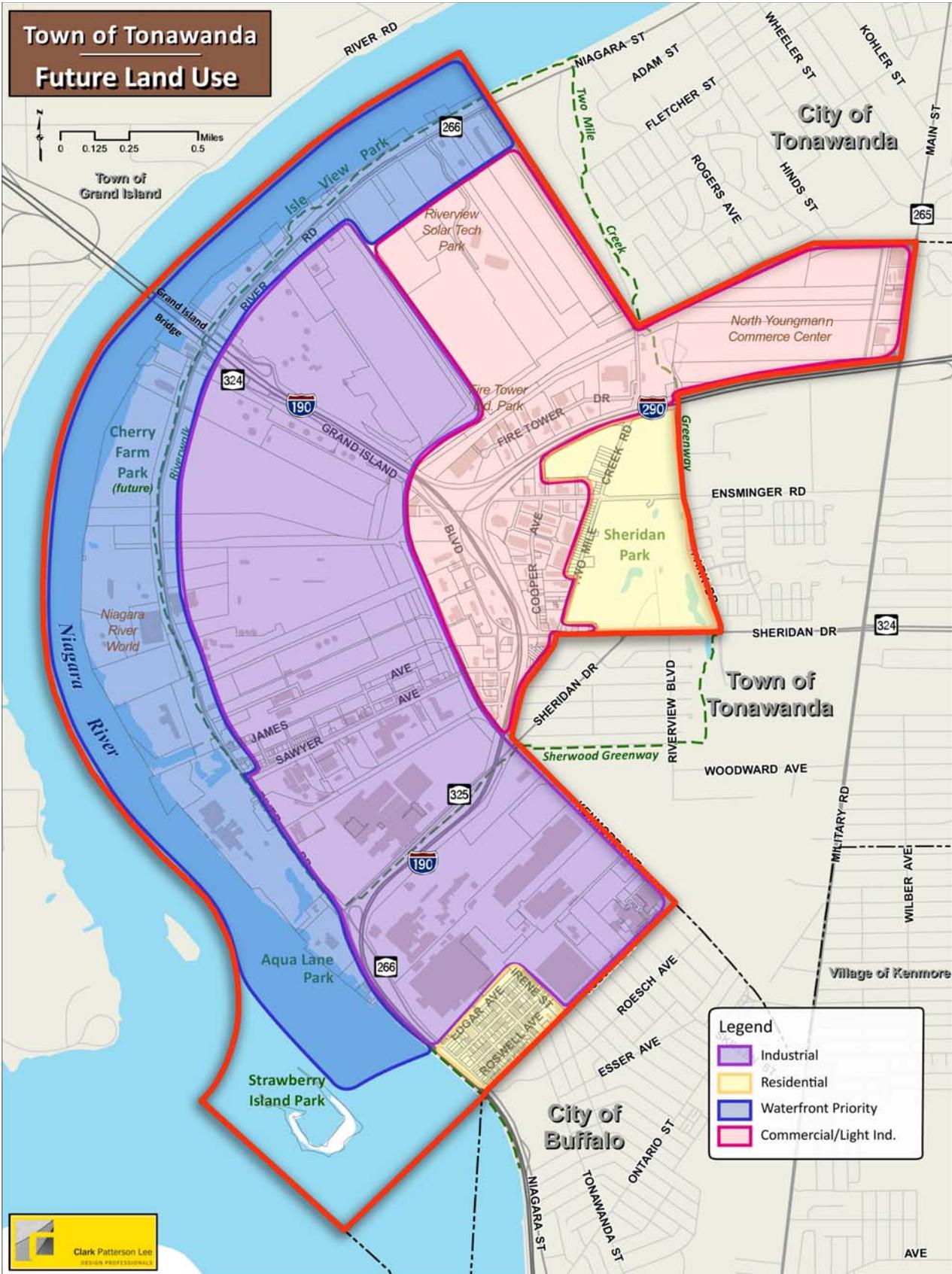


Figure 6-1: Future Land Use

Chapter 6: Land Use Master Plan

Land Use Master Plan

Future land use preferences are the physical representation of the community’s desire for its natural and built environments. While the factors that influence land use decisions can be complex, the underlying principles are fairly straight forward.

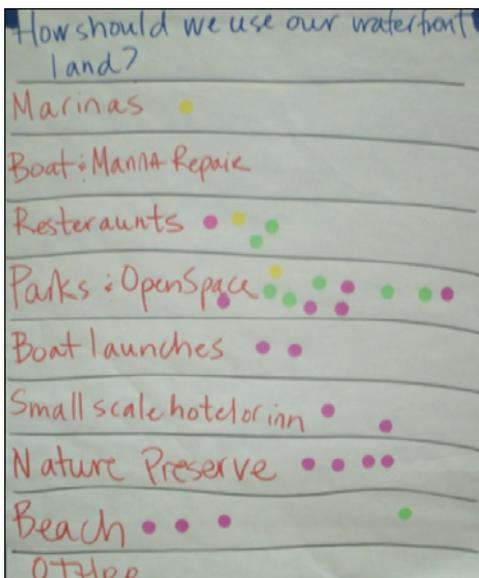
Well defined land use plans identify the highest and best use of the land in a given area based on a number of factors, including:

- Physical geography;
- Type, location and condition of natural features;
- Existing and proposed infrastructure;
- Projected demographics and economic factors;
- Development pressure and/or desire;
- The community’s overall vision; and
- Best practices in land use.

Any future development that occurs in the study area will likely take place on sites that have been previously used for other activities. It will be in the Town’s best interest to ensure that all projects in this area meet high-level standards. Projects that fail to achieve the Town’s expressed preferences and standards for this area will likely become a burden in the future.

The future land uses outlined in this chapter will provide guidance to future development decisions, inform the next Comprehensive Plan update, and provide a basis for immediate and future zoning code revisions. This chapter also offers basic guidelines for the way new developments should look and feel as well as how they relate to adjacent uses. The design recommendations were developed to improve Tonawanda’s overall image and economic prospects.

Given the profound influence this plan’s recommendations can have on the community’s waterfront area and beyond, it was important to ensure community support. The land



Prioritized brainstorming input from current study area residents gathered at a land use education session facilitated by Clean Air Coalition staff.

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use plan reflects community input received from this and previous planning efforts. The ideas and concepts developed in this process were reviewed by the public and refined based on comments and feedback received from a diverse range of stakeholders—from area residents to elected leaders.

Key Elements of Future Land Use Master Plan

The future land use map depicted on the previous page and further identified on the following pages features four distinctive land use types. The land uses were delineated based on proximity to the Niagara River, the mix of current and anticipated development types and evaluations about the highest and best uses of the corresponding parcels.

As the Town addresses zoning code revisions to this area, additional refinements may be needed to more specifically guide development types and/or provide guidance about design standards. Some general design standards and land use preferences have been included within each land use category for reference.

Waterfront Priority

General Intent

In Tonawanda's Waterfront Priority Area, the Town should encourage true water dependent uses and developments that maximize views of, and physical access to, the waterfront. Passive, public spaces should be available directly adjacent to the shoreline to the greatest extent feasible. New trail loops and linear connections to the Niagara Riverwalk should be created wherever possible to expand physical linkages and recreational opportunities through this area. Residential uses, whether stand alone or part of a mixed use development, should be limited in density and height to minimize blocking views of the water. Sustainable development practices and natural resource protection best practices should be implemented to preserve and improve water quality and natural habitats.

Considering Health Impacts

Future development within the study area will require careful consideration of impacts to human health. Air quality issues, soil contamination, waterborne diseases and invasive plant and animal species pose potential risks to human health. In addition, noise and light pollution from industry and highways can also have a negative effect on health. Although these issues are addressed indirectly through state and national environmental review regulations (SEQRA and NEPA), the direct examination of human health is not always fully considered in development and redevelopment projects.

Given the area's environmental history, the Town may want to take additional steps to ensure that any future development projects, especially those involving residential living, fully examine human health impacts and mitigate them to the greatest extent possible.

Health Impact Assessments (HIA) is an emerging process being used throughout the U.S. to consider human health in major policy decisions and large-scale projects. The process can take many forms, from rapid to comprehensive and the results are used to inform decision makers to improve health outcomes for impacted populations.

Compatible future land uses would include:

- Residential development (with public access)
- Mixed use development (higher density with waterfront commercial component such as the concept for Riverworld, Figure 7-2)
- Marinas
- Boat and marine repair facilities
- Restaurants
- Parks and open space (including boat launches)
- Small-scale retail
- Small inn or boutique hotel

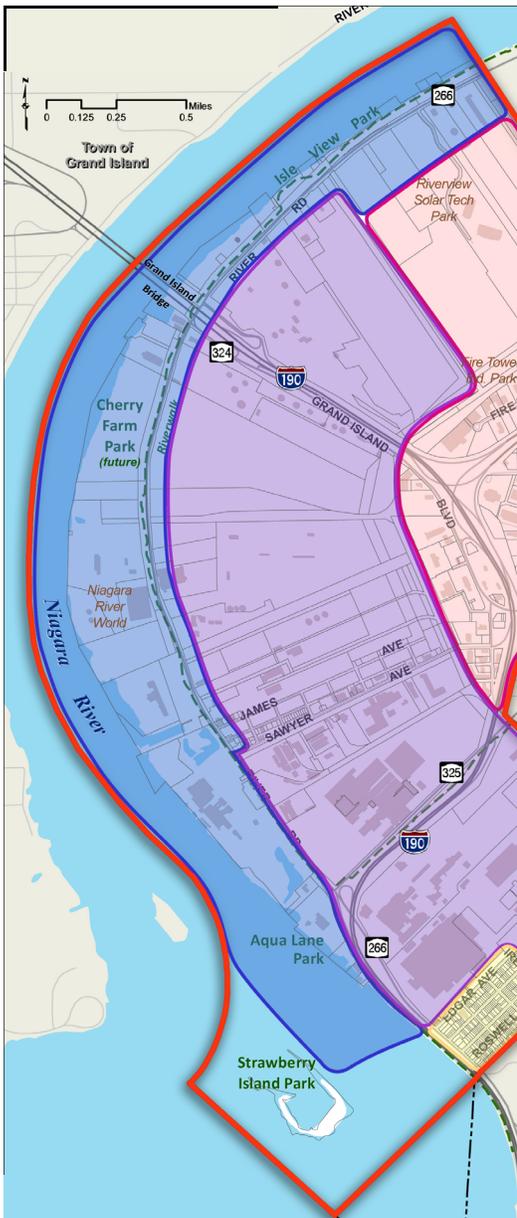
See Appendix G for example zoning district text.

Design Considerations

Inland development along River Road should be compatible in scale, style and use with future developments on the riverfront (west side) of the road. In the past, development along River Road did not fully consider its riverfront because this area was designated for industrial use. As the Town works to transform the character of the area and transition to mixed use environment, development and redevelopment along River Road will need to be compatible.

The community's desire for continuous access to its waterfront was clearly stated throughout the process. Tonawanda needs to promote consistent public access to the waterfront. Public access will be easier to provide and expand along the parcels that are publicly owned. To achieve access along parcels that are privately owned, the Town will need to use a range of potential tools, such as incentive zoning, riparian buffers, and/or public access easements. Determining the need for and utilizing one or a combination of the above tools should be assessed during the development review process.

Although the use of sustainable site design and building strategies is a growing priority for the community as a whole, this area of the Town requires the most stringent encouragement and enforcement. Chapter 7 contains an overview of the some of the sustainable design strategies that can be implemented to ensure future development protects natural resources for generations to come.



The Waterfront Priority boundary extends across the east side of River Road to ensure that upland development and redevelopment is compatible with its proximity to and views of the river.

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In a similar vein, strict protection of environmental resources will be critical for the entire study area and in this land use area in particular. The Town will need to carefully consider environmental and human health impacts of proposed development and redevelopment actions. Unfortunately, Tonawanda's industrial heritage has resulted in an legacy of environmental challenges the Town is still trying to overcome decades later. Tonawanda has expressed a clear intent to end that cycle. Therefore, the Town must take steps to ensure that future generations inherit better protected environmental conditions.

New structures adjacent to the river should be designed to maximize views to and from the river. This is best achieved through smaller building footprints and clustering multiple buildings to create open visual corridors to the river.

Often when communities think about residential and retail combined developments, they envision large towers or sprawling complexes. That scale of development wouldn't be well suited to Tonawanda. However, smaller-scaled mixed use development, similar to those pictured below, might be adaptable in these locations and other places within the waterfront priority land use boundary. The higher density residential units - whether rental or owner occupied - would appeal to both young professionals and empty nesters, which are two demographics the Town needs to better accommodate as it positions itself for the next two decades.



Examples of smaller-scaled mixed use redevelopment. Left: Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. Right: Seattle, Washington

Interstate 190 - Design & Noise Impacts

The presence of I-190 is a benefit economically for its high level of access, but it also brings constant noise and an expansive amount of pavement that can have a visual impact. Although the highway is depressed, reducing these impacts to the Old Town neighborhood compared to an at-grade highway, issues still remain. The limited amount of right-of-way and other potential highway restrictions limit what could be done, but some retrofits can be considered along Niagara Avenue include semi-transparent walls (short height) and strategic vegetation plantings (evergreens).



Current view of Niagara Ave at Riverdale; cars and trucks are still visible at eye level. © Google maps



Semi-transparent wall examples. © FHWA

Residential Area

General Intent

Although labeled as residential, this land use area consists of both existing residential and recreational uses, namely Sheridan Park. Within the study area, residential development in properly zoned areas should be limited to strategic areas, especially where it currently exists in established neighborhoods bordering the City of Buffalo and around Sheridan Park. In these areas, residential development will consist largely of single-family dwellings in the near future and remain so. However, well designed multi-family or mixed-use developments with neighborhood commercial uses may be appropriate, depending on location and context. Density, height, and aesthetics would be crucial to review for this type of development.

Appropriate future land uses would include:

- Single-family dwellings
- Mixed use residential and neighborhood commercial uses
- Multi-family dwellings
- Parks and recreational facilities
- Public facilities
- Schools and daycare

Design Considerations

Given the existing and anticipated land uses within the Residential Area, the Town does not expect significant changes in the overall land use pattern. The character of this area will not be altered drastically by future development and redevelopment. Future enhancements to streetscape and/or private property within the area should explore opportunities to improve landscaping and create visual buffers between residential and non-residential developments.

Higher density, mixed use residential redevelopment could be accommodated at key intersections within or immediately adjacent to the defined residential area boundary. For example, Sheridan Drive at the intersection

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of East Park Drive or Two Mile Creek Road could present redevelopment potential.

The Town needs to incorporate design standards to improve transitions among adjacent land uses. The area designated for residential in the future land use map demonstrates this opportunity well. Ensminger Road transitions from residential to parkland to commercial/industrial moving east to west. The change in scale and building type are somewhat abrupt, which could detract from residential properties' value and resale ability. However, if adjacent development is well buffered or designed to fit the context of the surrounding neighborhood, those transitions among uses are less likely to have a negative impact on the community.

The Town envisions that Sheridan Park and the golf course will continue for the near and long-term future, with strategic upgrades being made over time to further enhance the park for users. Additional trails, loops and connections should be incorporated into any new development to expand the current system, especially when adjacent to existing facilities. Sheridan Park is an amenity that many residents appreciate and may be an amenity that those living in condominiums, townhouses or other similar housing types would be interested in living in proximity to.

Commercial/Light Industrial



NOCO Pavilion in Sheridan Park overlooking the golf course.

General Intent

Building off the existing development patterns and recent development trends, the Commercial/Light Industrial Use area will be comprised largely of professional offices, light industrial and sustainable industry business enterprises. This area may also be suitable for a mix of uses including supportive commercial businesses to meet employees daily needs while in their workplace.

Appropriate future land uses would include:

- Professional offices
- Light industry
- Medical offices (e.g. doctors, dentists, etc.)
- Medical research and labs
- Bio-technology enterprises
- Call-centers
- Restaurants and small-scale retail (convenience stores, delicatessens, etc.)

Design Considerations

This area is intended to support a diverse range of business types and building styles, ranging from professional and medical offices to light industry and call centers. This kind of diversity requires consistent site design and building materials to create a unified sense of place. Compatible design elements help to create visual continuity and foster community character. The Town will need to ensure that redevelopment and new development within this area share consistent design principles.

Many of the parcels in this area have limited frontage and very long depth with minimal interior access. Resubdivision and land assembly should be encouraged to provide more conducive property dimensions for development. Facilities could range in footprints from around 30,000 SF for commercial uses to 200,000 SF for light industrial uses. The larger facilities would be better suited to the interior portions of the area or the Industrial land use area with smaller facilities along the edges to improve transitions to adjacent areas. Flexible space

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building designs should be encouraged to allow for easier adaptive re-use in the future. Larger building envelopes should be designed in a way that will allow spaces to be easily divided in the future. This approach can be used for both commercial or industrial spaces.

Access management strategies should be implemented as redevelopment occurs to encourage access into the interior portions of properties regardless of resubdivision or land assembly. Other access management strategies would include shared access driveways and shared parking to the greatest extent feasible. Other forms of connectivity should also be incorporated

Mixed Use Design Considerations



- A. In commercial mixed-use areas, non-traditional, eclectic signage may be appropriate.
- B. Landscaping should be utilized to provide visual relief in large parking areas.
- C. Variation in building scale and style can be accommodated.
- D. Simple building forms can be transformed by façade elements painted trim and planters.
- E. Landscaping, street trees, streetscaping and façade elements will improve larger buildings' sense of human scale.

into future development including sidewalks, multi-use paths and trails, bike lanes, park and rides, and bus stops. This enhanced connectivity will accommodate multiple forms of transportation (including pedestrian and bicycle access), encourage active transportation and provide opportunities for alternative transportation to and from work and access to area businesses by local employees. Currently, there is limited bus service available along River Road to this portion of the Town, but with an increase in development and potential ridership, a sufficient case can be made to extend bus lines to the area.

Industrial Development Area

General Intent

The area's industrial heritage and ongoing contributions to the local tax base and economy should be valued and strengthened in the future. Future development and redevelopment in these areas should capitalize on the industry-supportive infrastructure available, including rail lines and access to highways. In the future, the Town will continue to work with existing industries to improve their sustainability and decrease their potential negative impacts on environmental conditions and human health. New industrial development should be concentrated on emerging ecologically-friendly industries.

Appropriate future land uses would include:

- Manufacturing
- Warehousing
- Rail-related industries
- "Clean tech" and other alternative energy enterprises (e.g. solar, wind, hydroelectric, geothermal)
- Other "green" technology-based industries

Design Considerations

In the past, industrial uses were developed without much thought about appearance, context or impacts to adjacent areas. Consequently, industrial development created uninspired collections of pavement and structures with little to no green space, insufficient buffering at the edge of parcel boundaries and a lack of continuity between

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parcels. Tonawanda's waterfront area has several examples of this kind of development. Currently, vacated, underutilized or undesirable industrial properties lack a sense of place and do not help create a positive community identity for the Town; future industrial development should not repeat history. More recent industrial and commercial development efforts have better responded to the Town's desire for well-designed industrial development. That preference should be codified in future updates to the zoning and/or implemented through graphic-based design guidelines.

Larger industrial complexes should incorporate ample landscaped or hardscaped buffers and on-site amenities, such as water features and trails, to make future industrial developments attractive to potential investors, employees and nearby residents. When designed well, industrial campuses and development complexes can become a destination for non-employees.

The area designated for industrial uses has historically been the location of large industrial operations. Consequently, much of the land area within this future land use designation are comprised of very large parcels. The current parcel configuration presents opportunities for the Town to attract operations and facilities that require large parcels. This could provide a competitive advantage in attracting developers who do not want to be encumbered by complex land assembly transactions. However, if the demand for large parcels does not materialize for the Town, it may be beneficial to consider how these larger parcels could be easily resubdivided to create a series of smaller development sites. In most instances, this may require additional roads to provide interior circulation and provide connection points for future smaller lots.

There are several smaller facilities that present significant redevelopment opportunities because of their adaptive re-use potential. The Town should consider public infrastructure enhancements that will help promote these areas and parcels.

Several existing properties will continue to operate in



These photos of an industrial park in Monroe County, New York (located adjacent to the Erie Canal) demonstrate how industrial development can be landscaped, incorporate natural features (such as wetlands), and include amenities to make a more attractive site

their current capacity. In those cases, there may not be a regulatory trigger to implement the enhanced design elements needed to transform this area. The Town will need to work with property owners to encourage voluntary implementation of site improvements that promote the future land use plan.

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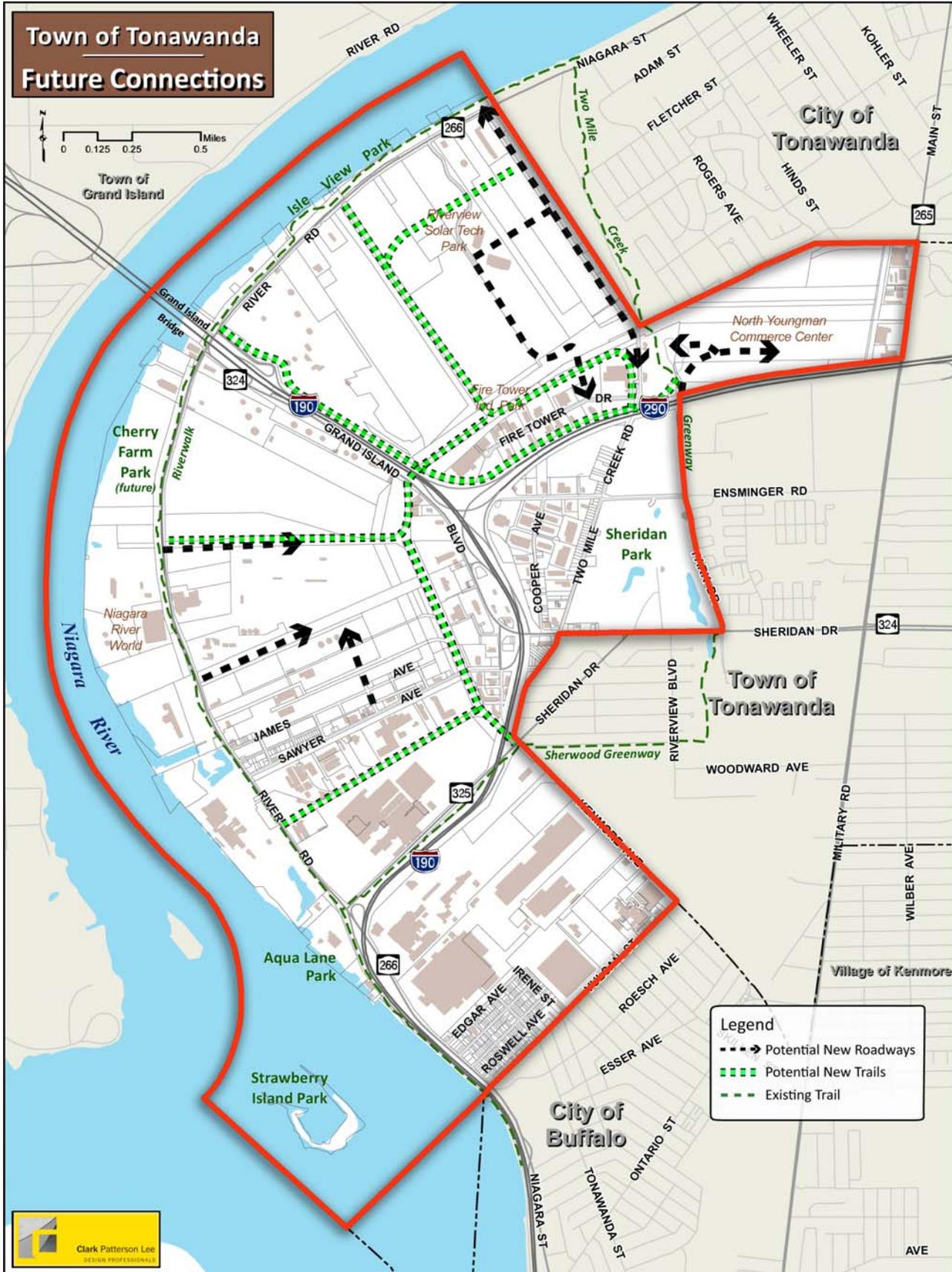


Figure 6-2: Future Access and Transportation Connections

Future Access and Transportation

Although not typically an element of a future land use plan, the unique nature of the study area provides an opportunity to include potential access and transportation improvements. The long, linear properties and high number of vacant lands can and should be resubdivided and/or assembled in configurations to encourage future development. Including an overall plan for transportation will help to facilitate multi-modal access opportunities and create better connections in the area.

The concept plans highlighted on the following pages highlight interior and arterial roadway connections as well as trail connections to existing trails in the Town. In addition, priority areas for streetscape improvements, which will help to change the visual quality of the study area, are included.

Future Connections

With any future redevelopment of the vacant or underutilized industrial parcels in the study area, enhancing connections and access will likely help to improve marketability and spur additional development. Internal roadway systems, similar to what has been occurring at the Riverview Solar Tech Park, brings development further into interior portions of the properties.

However, extending those internal roadways to other adjacent roadways further improves connections and helps to disperse traffic and thereby reduces volumes. In many instances, this would require the conversion of underutilized or abandoned rail spurs and sidings or grade crossings. This is especially evident on the north side of the study area between the Solar Tech Park and Fire Tower Drive. Other potential key locations for future roadway expansions are illustrated, although the broad nature of this planning effort does not specify their exact location or alignment. Further examination would be required and likely occur during subdivision or site plan review by the Town.

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What this map does not address is the potential for improved on-site circulation at existing parcels. As road networks expand, future redevelopment should utilize best practices in site design by creating on-site connections to multiple roadways when available. This approach minimizes congestion on arterials and collectors and provides alternative routing options to accommodate large freight trucks that will likely continue to serve area businesses and industry.

The plan does not preclude the continued use of existing on-site railroad systems. In fact, future redevelopment of key parcels may be bolstered by the availability of rail connections. The Town and its economic development partners will need to determine which underutilized rail connections should be maintained to facilitate appropriate, town-supported business development opportunities.

Several potential trail alignments are also highlighted on Figure 6-2, showing connections between existing trails and parks. With the presence of several regional and local trails, connections between them have been identified as an opportunity by the community. The trail alignments identified utilize vacant, underutilized, or abandoned corridors such as rail lines, utility access networks, and wide right-of-ways to facilitate these connections. In some cases, trails and rail could co-exist within the same right-of-way (i.e. Rails with Trails). As redevelopment of property in the study area occurs, trail connections should be included in plan review by the Town. Several east-west connections have been identified in Chapter 7 as being of higher potential or warranting further analysis to examine their potential.

Roadway Characteristics

In the process of transitioning the waterfront from one of predominantly industrial uses to a mix of commercial, industrial, recreational and some residential uses, visual improvements can make a huge psychological impact. The existing roadways in the study area present opportunities for improved aesthetic design and streetscaping. The map on the adjacent page identifies and prioritizes existing roadways that would have the greatest impact for visual improvements.



Figure 6-3: Roadway Characteristics

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The designations provide guidance about how the Town can invest in future streetscaping improvements and also indicate the extent of the enhancements.

Although the roadways were differentiated for the purpose of future capital investment planning, it is likely that certain streetscape enhancement elements would be similar across all three categories. For example, the Town should encourage right-of-way plantings (native shrubs and street trees), sustainable design practices and durable materials usage in every streetscape enhancement project, regardless of location.

Streetscape Priority 1 - These roads were designated as the highest priority for future enhancements because they are major connector routes, they play a prominent role in defining community identity and/or they are proximate to key destinations and attractions. These roadways would likely receive the most intensive streetscape enhancements.

Streetscape Priority 2 - These roads were designated because they provide secondary or cross access within the study area and may be the connection point for future road networks. Although these roads provide important linkages to the waterfront, their enhancement may not have as large an impact on enhancing community character or investment climate.

Streetscape Priority 3 - The roads in this category are local neighborhood streets that do not have high volumes or through traffic. They focus in these areas would be to maintain good conditions in the right-of-way (pavement and sidewalks) and provide additional landscaping and buffering where feasible.

In 2013, the Town received funding from the Niagara Greenway Commission to develop a feasibility study and preliminary design for several Priority 1 and 2 roadways as part of a multi-phased approach. This plan will examine and implement not only the recommendations within this plan, but also the circa 1990 detailed landscaping plans for River Road and Grand Island Blvd. that were developed and never realized.



Streetscaping examples that could be feasible along any number of the priority roadways identified include roadside trees, raised/landscaped medians, bus shelters, decorative street signs and gateways, and alternative pavement materials in strategic locations (i.e. intersections).

Design Studies

As part of the planning process, a series of design studies for the potential development within the Waterfront Land Use Plan study area were prepared. The purposes of these studies were to determine:

- What the mix of future uses could be that would initiate revitalization of the district and reposition environmentally-challenged sites;
- The massing and design of future development with enough detail that the dimensions could be considered as potential zoning district standards;
- What relationships could be crafted between land uses to integrate them into a district that creates destinations for multiple purposes;
- The required infrastructure for future development of the district; in particular, access and links between districts and distinguishing characteristics of the different road types.

The land use and design concepts were organized according to the recommendations of the draft master plan, public input, real estate market information and trends, and the options and limitations for different types of development as determined by the planning team. After these analyses, the plan was further refined and detailed to include:

- Landfill reuse strategies, which are dependent on the closure design;
- Building and site design guidelines based on the prototypical development with suggested buffers and setbacks;
- Guidelines for street styles that relate to the road classifications and adjacent land uses; and
- Guidelines and conceptual layouts for pathways and links.

Types of Studies

The design studies include a series of illustrations and descriptions. The full collection of study illustrations and conceptualizations are included in Appendix D. Examples are provided here to provide a glimpse of the recommendations derived through this planning effort.

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KEY PLAN



RAY 1



Figure 6-3: Key Plan for Design Studies

First are five rays for transects which start at Sheridan Park as the center point and radiate out to the Niagara River waterfront. Within these rays, land use areas are suggested with boundaries either by dimensional standards or by the location of existing or proposed infrastructure such as the interstate highways and new roads. These design studies include twelve different land use prototypes, ranging from passive open space to residential, commercial and industrial uses.

The second set of illustrations is used to further refine the proposed land use plan indicated in the rays. These are site plans of the prototypes with buildings, access, parking, and buffers that include the associated dimensions for the development prototype.

Third are prototypical sections for four styles of street and path systems that were created and designated for the existing and newly proposed accessways and links. These include design elements, which could be translated into standards and guidelines for pedestrian and bicycle pathways, local streets, collector streets, and local arterials.

The updated master plans for the significant open space areas - Cherry Farm Park, Sheridan Park, Riverfront Park, and the town's Aqua Lane Park - are included in Chapter 7's target area recommendations. These are updated with suggestions for facilities and activity areas that are designed based on Low Impact and Sustainable Design principles and standards.

Findings

The studies suggest ideas and directions for the Land Use Plan. Following are the key findings suggested by the use and spatial analyses.

Land Use

The Town could revise land use management plans to encourage redevelopment over the long-term. The Town should also make or encourage specific short-term land use choices that will influence broader change.

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Residential development could be an attractive option for the northern section of the district. However, residential use (e.g. townhouse type development) will only be a legitimate option if small in scale and if area-wide environmental issues are addressed.

Commercial uses, such as R&D office and flex spaces are desirable in many locations. They are also acceptable on the waterfront where the depth of the lots also allow inclusion of riverfront buffers and linked waterfront walkways.

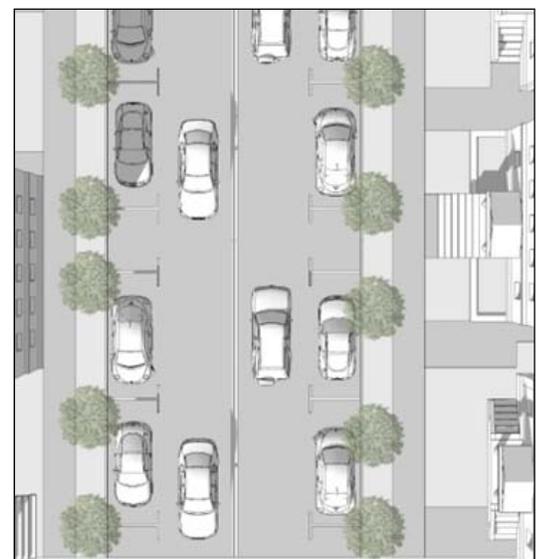
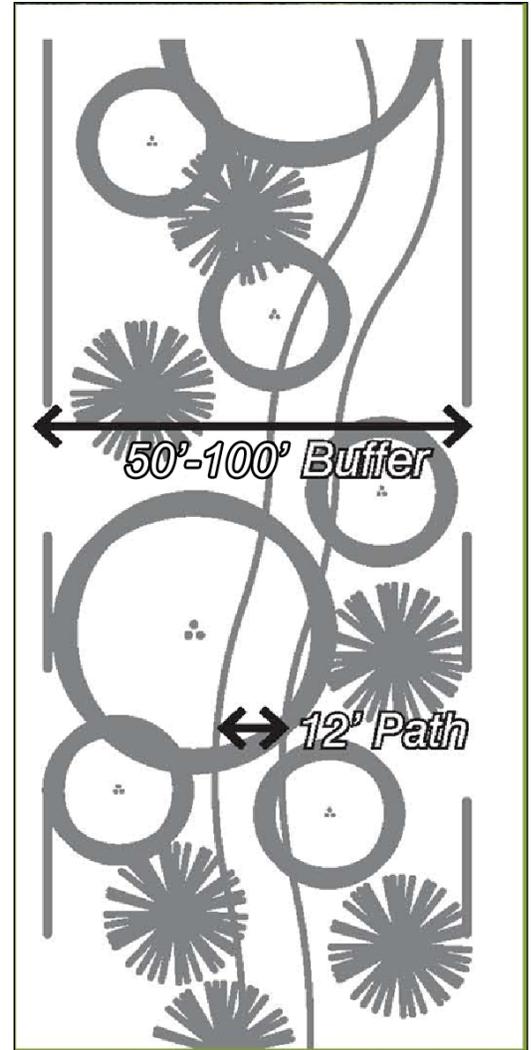
A commercial and institutional use such as a workforce training center could have substantial benefits by filling multiple local needs for development and training. Revenue-producing uses that have been successfully built in other locations should be considered for construction on the district landfills. These could include recreational uses and alternative energy production, but will be dependent on the final land fill closure design.

Design Standards

Low Impact Design and sustainable design elements should be included in all improvements. This will help brand the area as a district in transition from its past environmental problems.

The Town should implement greening and buffering strategies throughout the study area that include improvements to both public and private lands. This includes active and passive park spaces on the waterfront. Vegetative buffers should be a minimum of 30' for most uses except the largest buildings and corporate parks which should have a minimum buffer of 50'. Open space and riverfront buffers, which include pathways, should range from 50' to 100' where appropriate.

Zoning districts could be used for separation of less desirable uses from the public ways. When applied, residential districts on the waterfront or on River Road should have a minimum depth of 200' and commercial districts should have a minimum depth of 250'.



Illustrative graphics demonstrating land use preferences and design standards as part of the design studies.

Infrastructure

The Town will be in a position to re-brand the district as an area in transition through the utilization of infrastructure design themes that distinguish areas and link attractions and destinations.

A more intricate system of connections for vehicles and other modes of travel could separate industrial traffic and allow shared ways for the non-truck modes. This could include repurposing of the railroad rights of way for other modes of travel.

The Town should adopt different levels of right of way improvement designs to distinguish different areas of the district. These design standards should coincide with the desired future classification of the street; i.e. local, collector, arterial.

Parks and Open Space

Active recreation and programming of spaces on the riverfront will significantly improve public perception of the district. This requires creating public assembly areas for events, together with play fields on the public lands. In addition, considerations for inclusion of boating support facilities should be part of the designs.

Improvements to the parks should include demonstrations of the town's commitment to sustainable and low impact construction. Carefully chosen materials, pollution-controlling drainage systems, and designs that control impacts to the wetlands and waterways should be included in the designs. Examples are included in the conceptual drawings for the Cherry Farm and Aqua Lane parks.

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