

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Urban Land Institute Advisory Services Panel Report**



AN ADVISORY SERVICES PANEL REPORT

# Rochester New York



Urban Land  
Institute

# Rochester New York

**Strategies for Re-Creating the Urban Core**

June 10–15, 2005  
An Advisory Services Panel Report

ULI—the Urban Land Institute  
1025 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W.  
Suite 500 West  
Washington, D.C. 20007-5201

# About ULI—the Urban Land Institute

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**U**LI—the Urban Land Institute is a non-profit research and education organization that promotes responsible leadership in the use of land in order to enhance the total environment.

The Institute maintains a membership representing a broad spectrum of interests and sponsors a wide variety of educational programs and forums to encourage an open exchange of ideas and sharing of experience. ULI initiates research that anticipates emerging land use trends and issues and proposes creative solutions based on that research; provides advisory services; and publishes a wide variety of materials to disseminate information on land use and development.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 28,000 members and associates from 80 countries, representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines. Professionals rep-

resented include developers, builders, property owners, investors, architects, public officials, planners, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, academics, students, and librarians. ULI relies heavily on the experience of its members. It is through member involvement and information resources that ULI has been able to set standards of excellence in development practice. The Institute has long been recognized as one of America's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

This Advisory Services panel report is intended to further the objectives of the Institute and to make authoritative information generally available to those seeking knowledge in the field of urban land use.

Richard M. Rosan  
*President*

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# About ULI Advisory Services

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The goal of ULI's Advisory Services Program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 400 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfields redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's Advisory Services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI panel teams are interdisciplinary and typically include several developers, a landscape architect, a planner, a market analyst, a finance expert, and others with the niche expertise needed to address a given project. ULI teams provide a holistic look at development problems. Each panel is chaired by a respected ULI member with previous panel experience.

The agenda for a five-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing day composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; a day of hour-long interviews of typically 50 to 75 key community representatives; and two days of formulating recommendations. Many long nights of discussion precede the panel's conclusions. On the final day on site, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. A written report is prepared and published.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, partic-

ipants in ULI's five-day panel assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues and to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academicians, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this Advisory Services panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

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In particular, the panel would like to thank our sponsors, the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation, especially President Heidi Zimmer-Meyer, Chairman Dave Beinetti, Sean Phelan, and Karen Hite. Members of the city and county government have aided this project in several ways, including Rochester Mayor William A. Johnson, Jr., Rochester City Council President Lois Geiss, Rochester Planning Director Larry Stid, Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks, and Monroe County Legislature President Wayne Zyra.

The panel members appreciate the gracious hospitality that was offered to them by members of the community. They extend special thanks to the

more than 120 people interviewed during the week.

This effort would not have been possible without sponsors whose financial contribution brought the panel to Rochester. Supporting sponsors include Bausch & Lomb; Buckingham Properties; Christa Construction; the city of Rochester; Conifer Realty; Costanza Enterprises; Home Leasing, Inc.; Jasco Tools, Inc.; JPMorgan Chase; LeCesse Construction; LeChase Construction Services; Monroe County; Pembroke Companies; Pike Company; RG&E; Rochester Democrat & Chronicle; Rochester Downtown Development Corporation; SWBR Architects/Engineers; and Wilmorite, Inc.

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# Foreword

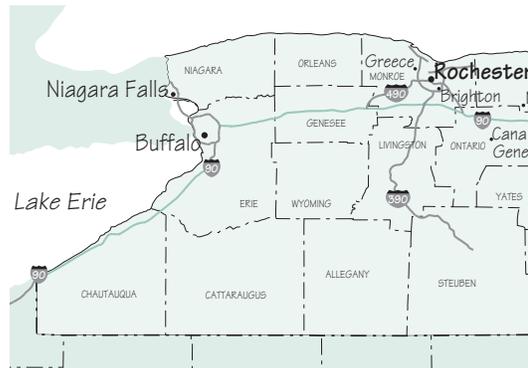
Like countless other urban areas in America, Rochester has experienced most of the negative effects of suburbanization. The most dramatic effect has been disinvestment in the downtown core. As one of the nation's earliest centers of manufacturing, trade, and technology, Rochester has historically been one of the nation's key focal points of innovation and creativity. Unfortunately, as has been seen in many other Rust-belt cities, the urban core's heritage is rarely an insurance policy against the physical, economic, and social forces of suburbanization. Housing and jobs move to less expensive, less congested areas surrounding the core. They take with them retail spending, dining dollars, and even more jobs. Businesses leave the core. Storefronts go dark. Private investment declines and disappears. Public spending on infrastructure declines and the physical environment decays, as governments at all levels spend a greater share of their resources on low-density suburban infrastructure. Urban cores become uncomfortable places to spend time, with few familiar faces and even fewer things to do. The very vibrancy and diversity that formed the foundation for the core's regional strength and engine for growth have moved elsewhere.

In order to reverse this trend—across the country as well as in Rochester—projects such as sports stadiums, performance halls, cultural facilities, and casinos have often been promised and, in many cases, executed as the needed catalyst to revive a failing inner city. As part of a visionary master plan, large projects can help produce the desired results. Although these mega-projects can have a positive effect, by themselves they have not proven able to re-create the energy of a lively, successful city.

The good news is that many proven solutions and experiences exist to draw upon for downtown cores seeking to re-create themselves. Downtown Rochester's revival is, in fact, more of a re-creation than



Location map, above.  
Regional map, left.



Distinctive architecture is found throughout downtown Rochester.



Several residential projects have already been built or proposed in downtown Rochester.

it is revitalization. Although many elements in a reawakening downtown will seem familiar—government, cultural, entertainment, and even residential uses—many of these same elements will look very different from in the past.

Generally, the jobs in large corporate headquarters are disappearing, but they have been replaced by a growing service sector economy, which is often dominated by smaller, more nimble entrepreneurial firms and initiatives. Nationwide, manufacturing jobs have been downsized or taken off shore. Indeed, Rochester is fortunate to retain a sizable number of jobs with companies such as Bausch & Lomb, Kodak, and Xerox. These jobs are valued, but no longer the stable, lifelong careers they once offered. Although the city should continue to embrace the traditional economic base, the time has come for downtown Rochester to secure its share of new small business opportunities.

People are already moving back to downtown Rochester. These urban pioneers have a younger

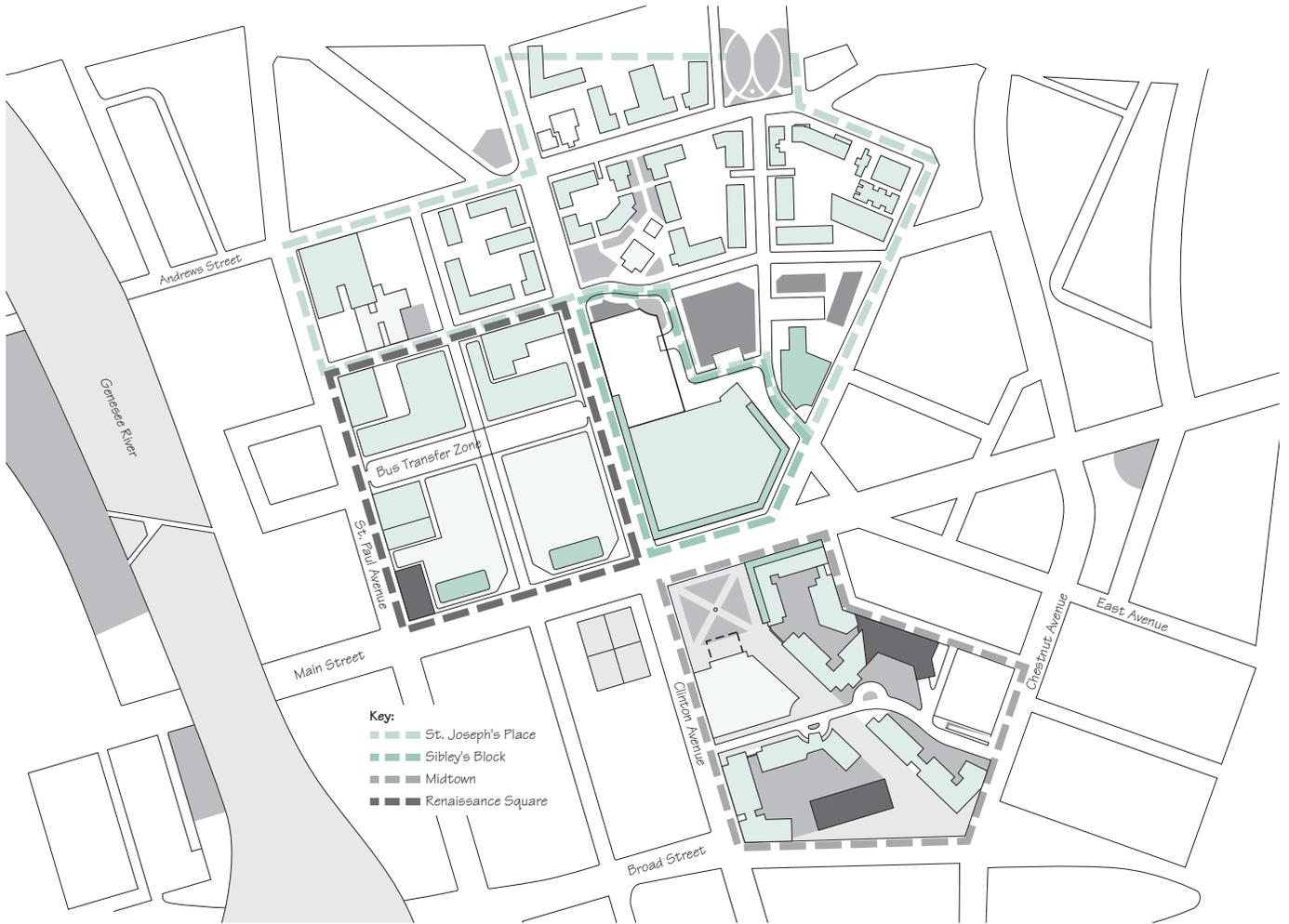
face, and an older one as well—groups of people who make lifestyle choices for the excitement and activity of the urban core. Entertainment, culture, and education are also increasingly diverse in downtown. Symphonies resound side by side with cutting-edge nightclub music. Museums lie across from the latest coffeehouse and cyber café. The coffeehouse doubles as a gathering spot, school library, and dining venue. Historic buildings, long abandoned and ignored by the market as functionally obsolete, are high on investors' and developers' target list for conversion to new uses as housing, retail, dining, entertainment, and cultural locations.

The new wave of activity downtown also attracts a very diverse population of visitors and residents to the urban core. Where business and government were the heart and soul of urban cores in the past, the diversity of people and the level of activity now make the urban cores the attractive places that they are becoming—not only for people to live, work, and play, but also for the public and private sectors to make very significant investments.

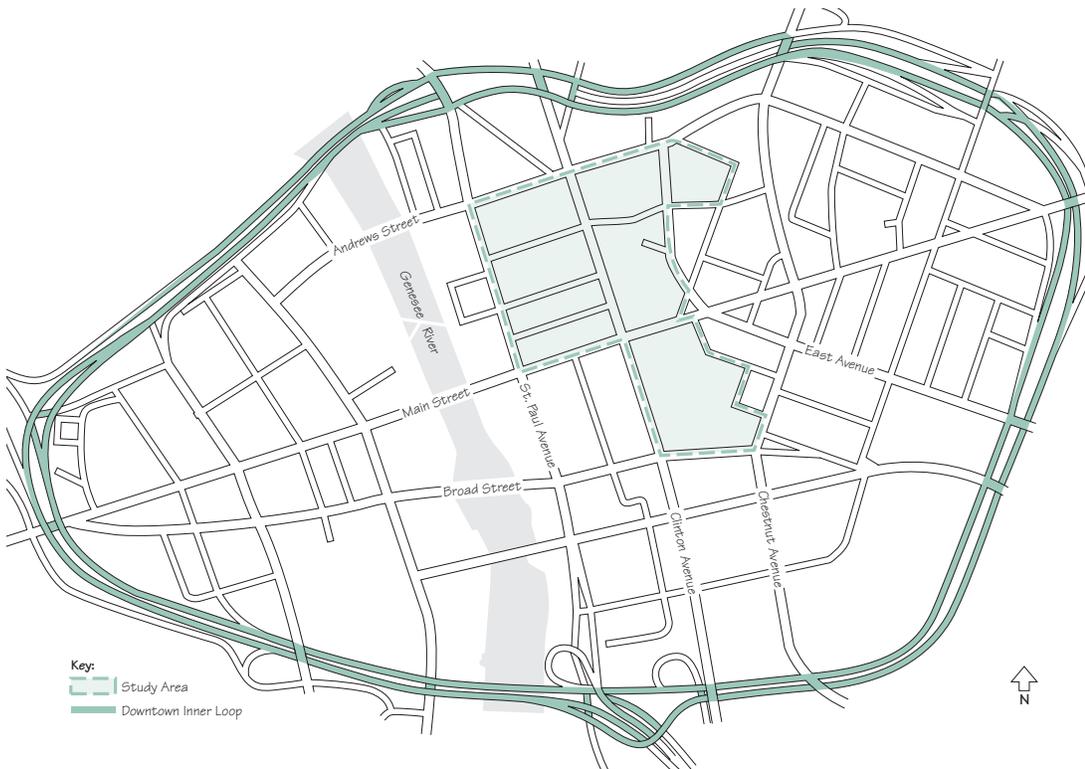
The panel acknowledges the tremendous effort the Rochester community has made in focusing its energy and attention on the needs of its downtown area. One only need look at the East End corridor, the St. Paul Quarter, or the High Falls entertainment district to see the level of commitment the city has accorded to a re-created downtown. The panel found much evidence that Rochester has focused its attention and efforts on and successfully attracted some key elements necessary for urban core re-creation. That success not only is a major building block for the re-creation of downtown Rochester but also has helped cement Rochester's position as the regional center for this portion of upstate New York. In this respect, Rochester is ahead of many other cities, which are just now identifying those critical elements and trying to figure out how to start their emergence.

### The Panel's Assignment

The ULI Advisory Services panel was charged with two separate tasks. The first task focused on identifying future uses of four superblocks at the center of downtown. At the heart of the urban



Top: The panel's study area is broken down into four distinct sites. Left: The panel focused on an area that is not part of the downtown revitalization.



core lies the area around the intersection of Main Street and Clinton Avenue. Whereas Rochester has seen substantial development interest downtown, vibrancy has bypassed this area. These blocks hold the former Sibley's department store, the Midtown Mall, and two large blocks surrounding St. Joseph's Church. These blocks are the literal hole in the doughnut for a rejuvenated downtown. Adjacent to the study area parcels is the planned Renaissance Square—a multipurpose transit station, performing arts center, and educational facility. Attracting new development interest in these parcels is made more difficult by the current reality of the economy in upstate New York, which has little to no population growth paired with little to no job growth.

Successful reuse of the four principal study blocks cannot take place without a systemic change in downtown. Therefore, the second task involved crafting a revitalization strategy for all of downtown Rochester—identified as the area inside the Rochester inner loop highway. This second task

begins with crafting a vision for downtown and progresses with a series of action plans to achieve that vision.

The panel's assignment is influenced by a planned project adjacent to the study area known as Renaissance Square. Slated for the northwest corner of Main Street and Clinton Avenue, the project will be a multiuse facility comprising upward of 1 million square feet of performing arts, community college, and transit station space. Renaissance Square will replace a superblock of underperforming or vacant office buildings, storefronts, and a parking garage. At an estimated cost of \$230 million, it represents a substantial investment by the city, state, and federal governments that will be closely monitored and highly publicized. The panel believes the project is a valuable stimulus to downtown redevelopment but makes several recommendations about the design and function of Renaissance Square in this report.

# Overview and Summary of Recommendations

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This section briefly outlines the panel's vision and recommendations for the study area and downtown Rochester as a whole. The topics covered here are discussed in greater detail later in the report.

## Downtown Vision

The panel has a bold vision for downtown Rochester that builds upon the successful resurgence the area is already experiencing. The panel believes that Rochester should build upon its existing strengths of housing and office space. The panel developed three overarching strategies for downtown Rochester. The first is to re-create downtown as a neighborhood. The panel feels that a strong latent demand exists for housing throughout downtown. Rochester has already seen the beginnings of a residential renaissance downtown. Continuing this trend will bring more people downtown and help support other industries in the urban core, particularly retail and dining venues. Furthermore, Rochester's large inventory of architecturally significant, historic buildings is ideal for residential retrofit. The panel also believes that new downtown residents will re-energize its streets. Bringing pedestrians back to downtown will help sustain new retail in the urban core and eliminate the perception of danger.

The second strategy is to re-create downtown as a center of commerce. The panel proposes selectively demolishing obsolete office buildings, retaining Class A office tenants, recruiting neighborhood retail, and fostering the growth of specialty shopping and nightlife establishments. Rochester should continue to embrace its existing large office and industrial employers but should recognize the increasing importance of small, entrepreneurial firms.

The third strategy is to promote downtown as a center of arts and culture. This goal is accomplished

by connecting the district between the Genesee River and the Eastman School of Music along Main Street with cultural and arts uses. Existing cultural sites anchor this cultural corridor at both ends. This cultural axis should have art galleries, artisan supply stores, performing arts venues, public performance space, and year-round festivals.

## Sibley Building

The panel believes that the Sibley Building is an architectural gem that has very high potential for redevelopment as loft-style housing. The floor plates, atriums, large windows, and unique brickwork all lend themselves to residential conversion. The Sibley Building could accommodate several hundred residential units, depending on the size and floor plans decided upon. Because of the building's sheer size and the nascent but evolving market for downtown housing, retrofit should be accomplished in phases. The first phase should include converting the building's first floor to retail use. Residential conversion can be accomplished floor by floor as market absorption dictates. The panel believes that the tower should be converted to housing first, followed by the department store space. Existing uses in the Sibley Building, including higher education and office space, should be relocated to more appropriate buildings elsewhere in downtown.

## Midtown

The panel believes that the Midtown Mall and most of the associated office space has come to the end of its functional life. The unsightly complex contributes to a glut of office space that can be eliminated. Therefore, the panel recommends that most of the Midtown Plaza be demolished, except for the underground parking garage and the Euclid Building. The Midtown Office Tower should be stripped to its structural components and a decision should be made in two or three years whether



The panel tours the study area during its visit to Rochester.

to reskin it for Class A office use. The rest of the Midtown site should become a mixed-use center that includes a public plaza/park, a medium-sized performing arts theater, and residential-over-retail buildings. A new street will segment the block and restore the natural street grid. The panel estimates 350 to 450 units of housing could be built on the Midtown blocks.

### St. Joseph's Place

The facade of St. Joseph's Church should be retained as a community symbol. The panel believes that St. Joseph's Place, located on several blocks north of the Sibley Building, is ideal for a mid-rise urban village. The panel recommends the city assemble the various parcels of land in this block and select a developer to build four- to five-story apartments and condominiums. Approximately 550 to 650 units of housing, built at 15–40 dwelling units per acre, could be realized in St. Joseph's Place. The panel also feels that some limited retail, including a grocery store, is warranted on these blocks.

### Implementation

The panel recognizes that its proposed vision for downtown will require agency leadership and funding. To help consolidate the process, the panel

proposes the establishment of two public/private partnerships to lead downtown redevelopment. The first, known as the Rochester Center City Authority (RCCA), will take the lead role in assembling land, attracting new development, and securing funding. The second public/private partnership will alter the current role of the existing Rochester Downtown Development Corporation (RDDC), recasting it in a traditional Business Improvement District (BID) role. The downtown BID will be responsible for marketing, special events programming, and a new safe-streets initiative.

The panel feels that numerous financing and incentive tools are at Rochester's disposal for redevelopment efforts. The panel recommends that the Rochester Center City Authority establish a tax increment financing (TIF) district that encompasses the entire downtown but focuses its financial resources on the three study areas already described. Numerous other programs are available to pay for, or otherwise make downtown a more attractive location for, development. These ancillary local, state, and federal programs can be applied to specific projects as warranted by circumstances.

The panel also recommends a renewed commitment to pedestrianism in downtown through infrastructure changes, downtown programming, and a safe-streets initiative. Pedestrians should be returned to the street by removing unnecessary sections of the skyway system, moving retail outdoors to street level, and reducing noise and pollution. Furthermore, the panel suggests a comprehensive study be undertaken to analyze how parking and bus transit can be altered to further the city's redevelopment goals.

# Market Overview

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This section provides an overview of employment, population, and income trends within the broad market area. An overview of forecasted real estate, economic, and population trends is an important determinant in the re-creation of downtown. The panel feels that Rochester has certain superior underlying conditions for downtown development. These factors should be capitalized upon to re-create the urban core.

The panel feels that downtown Rochester should be reimagined and reborn as the cultural, educational, and entertainment heart of the region. In order to do so, a range of creative, high-tech, and entrepreneurial people need to have great reasons for wanting to live and work downtown, and everyone else needs to have equally strong reasons for wanting to visit there.

Downtown Rochester is well positioned to attract the “creative class.” The creative class is composed of knowledge-producing workers who can choose where to live and work, on a global as well as a local basis. A city needs to be rich in lifestyle amenities as well as interesting work opportunities to attract and retain this group that has come to be symbolic of success in downtown reinvention.

Because Rochester has a large stock of historic buildings and a wide offering of cultural and entertainment venues, it has every opportunity to continue to enlarge and benefit from this entrepreneurial group. As is well documented, job growth in the United States now comes primarily from entrepreneurs and small companies, not corporate America, so cities need to be attractive to the creative class as a linchpin in their long-term economic development efforts.

## Employment Trends

Rochester has historically been a world leader in image technology. Although the city continues to be a major market for imagery, the metropolitan

area has experienced a dramatic shift from a manufacturing-based economy to one providing research and services. Manufacturing jobs have declined since 1990 by an annual average of 3,250 in the Rochester Metropolitan Statistical Area. However, total employment increased by more than 1,000 jobs per year, showing that the regional economy is shifting away from manufacturing. According to the New York Bureau of Labor Statistics, growth has been especially strong in the education, health, and professional services industries. The addition of nearly 45,000 jobs in those sectors has more than compensated for the restructuring of Bausch & Lomb, Eastman Kodak, Valeo, ViaHealth, and Xerox that, during the past 15 years, has resulted in the loss of more than 41,200 jobs. In 2005, Monroe County’s unemployment rate is 5 percent compared with 6.8 percent in the state.

Firms such as Lifetime Healthcare, Paychex, and Unity Health System have grown in recent years. Institutions such as the University of Rochester, Rochester Institute of Technology, and Monroe Community College have supplied highly trained employees and provided collaborative research in support of the region’s new economy.

During the past 30 years the quality of business locations and availability of greenfields—open land at the periphery—have resulted in suburban competition for businesses. Jobs have been dispersed around the region as the urban core’s share of the total has declined in recent years. Suburban business park locations will continue to provide stiff competition for central area sites because of their free parking, landscaping, and housing that has traditionally appealed to middle- and high-level workers.

From 1990 to 2004, metropolitan Rochester’s population increased by a relatively stagnant rate of 3.7 percent, or 39,600 people. Over two-thirds of this growth occurred in Monroe County. At the

same time, the city of Rochester was losing nearly 18,000 people. Clearly, suburban Monroe County—and not Rochester itself—attracted most of the residential development during this 14-year period.

Beyond attracting the lion's share of residential development, outlying areas of the region attract wealthier individuals. Rochester's median average annual household income was more than \$37,400 in 2003, nearly one-third lower than the regionwide income of \$49,800.

## Office

Ten Class A office buildings inside the inner loop beltway contain 2.35 million net leasable square feet. Their cumulative estimated occupancy rate was 90 percent in 2004. Average annual absorption of these buildings has been nearly 70,000 square feet, part of it attributable to transfers from nearby less-competitive buildings. Class A space is characterized by relatively new construction, high-quality common areas, on-site security, and quality building materials. Lower-class office space comprises 4.76 million square feet of space, 48 percent of the total inventory. Class B and C office space had a 33 percent vacancy rate. Existing Class B and C buildings are largely obsolete because of modern technological requirements, such as telecommunication and power systems. Generally, these buildings occupy sites better suited to other uses. The panel recognizes that upgrading to Class A office may be a viable use for older office buildings.

Midtown Plaza, which lies within the panel's study area, includes five office buildings (Euclid, McCurdy, Tower, Seneca, and B. Forman) totaling more than 753,000 square feet. They are considered Class B because they are more than 30 years old, do not have contemporary infrastructure, and generally offer fewer amenities than Class A buildings. Their poor condition and often obsolete floor plates indicate they have outlived their usefulness as office space.

Across Main Street to the north of Midtown Plaza is Sibley Center, a 977,000-square-foot office and classroom building that formerly was a regional retail emporium. Its occupancy is expected to reach a low of 12 percent by 2009 when Monroe Community College relocates to the planned Re-

naissance Square. Sibley Center will then become a candidate for conversion to other uses.

As the inventory of obsolete and nontraditional office buildings (those having all or any of unconventional floor plates, poor layout, low rents, or off-center locations) is reduced; some Class A buildings deteriorate; and demand for good-quality buildings continues, the need for a new building will develop. The newest Class A building in the downtown inventory, Bausch & Lomb, is already 10 years old. The panel feels that increasing downtown housing will support office growth to provide professional services and to accommodate those employees choosing a short commute. The panel estimates growth will develop slowly at 30,000 to 40,000 square feet per year to 2010 and accelerate to 60,000 to 80,000 square feet annually from then to 2015. Nearly all of this growth will be for Class A space. However, at the present time an oversupply of office space exists in downtown, particularly in lower-class buildings.

## Retail

The second-most-prevalent cliché in real estate, "Retail follows rooftops," is very applicable to Rochester. Shops, restaurants, and cafés, along with entertainment and sports venues, are much more viable when an expanding, involved community of residents is nearby. As more retail establishments come online, more residents are attracted. The panel feels that Rochester should strive for an upward cycle of residential and retail growth.

Experience across the country and in the Rochester area proves the negative effect of large suburban retail malls on downtown department stores and on other retailers. The 1962 construction of Midtown Plaza was partially a defensive mechanism to keep department stores downtown in the face of suburban competition. The three large Rochester-area suburban malls are Greece Ridge, The Marketplace, and Eastview. Their anchors are Bon-Ton, Sears, JCPenney, Kaufmann's, Galyan's, Lord & Taylor, and Target, none of which are present in downtown Rochester.

Although downtown has more than 100,000 square feet of occupied retail space, over 200,000 square

feet of vacant former street-level retail space is still available. Much of the active inventory is accessed from Main Street, but it is hidden from the street. This obstacle is especially the case in Midtown Plaza, which requires a walk of about 200 feet to reach the center of the retail court. Few pedestrian wayfinding signs help potential customers locate their retail destinations. Main Street should once again become the center city's principal shopping street. To become a bustling retail area, Main Street needs more retail square footage that opens directly onto sidewalks.

Several examples of successful retail districts exist within downtown. Within walking distance of the study area are the neighborhood entertainment retail centers of East End and High Falls. Primarily attracting younger patrons, these districts feature restaurants, nightclubs, and bars. The East End is convenient to the Eastman School of Music while High Falls is convenient to Eastman Kodak headquarters and the Frontier Field baseball stadium.

Demolition of Midtown Plaza would require relocation of its nearly 50 retailers that serve nearby residents, employees, and visitors. Existing retailers have made a commitment to downtown and play an important role in delivering needed goods to downtown residents. Rehabilitated retail space should be made available at street level to accommodate the transfer of existing Midtown Plaza retail tenants in a timely fashion. They will be able to continue serving customers in street-level space while potentially increasing their revenues.

Continued construction of downtown housing units will be the primary driver of retail sales growth during the next several years. Accompanying this residential growth should be the addition of retailers not already present in the inventory. They may include a specialized grocery store, electronics stores, jewelers, home furnishings stores, ethnic restaurants, a part-time farmers market, and professional services.

The panel estimates that growth of residential-, employee-, and visitor-based retail sales will not only increase productivity of existing retailers but also increase demand for an additional 90,000 to 110,000 square feet by 2015. Timing of the supply



Coffee shops and restaurants are common in the East End neighborhood, but are rare in the rest of downtown.



The Midtown Mall is home to a declining number of retailers.

of this space should keep pace with growth of the customer base.

## Hospitality

Rochester is the second-leading convention city in the state. Its 250,000-square-foot Riverside Convention Center is conveniently located on Main Street, overlooking the Genesee River. The facility has 100,000 square feet of flat floor exhibit space and hosts 385,000 people per year at 420 events, an impressively high rate of use.

Because of this demand, expansion of the convention center is being considered to the south toward East Broad Street. Roughly 100,000 to 110,000 square feet of new space would be allocated to administrative support, exhibit, and ballroom functions. This expansion would accommodate larger and more frequent functions after 2008.

Three major hotels located within three blocks of the Convention Center provide approximately



The Rochester Convention Center and several hotels are located near the Genesee River.

1,150 rooms, meeting space, food service, and recreation facilities. The Clarion Riverside, Crowne Plaza, and Hyatt Regency host mostly corporate visitors and various small meetings with about one-sixth of their business devoted to leisure visitors. Because these properties were built from 13 to 37 years ago, the quality of their physical plants varies and periodic updating is required. Hyatt renovations are programmed this year. The Clarion Riverside and Crown Plaza hotels should be evaluated to ensure they retain their competitive edge to maintain Rochester's advantageous convention market.

## Education

Four institutions of higher learning are represented in the downtown area. The main campus of the Eastman School of Music is located there. It is a world-famous 900-student institution with programs ranging from children's introductory music classes to doctoral degrees. In addition to classrooms and faculty offices, the campus includes the Eastman Theatre, Sibley Music Library, and student housing.

Although the 14,000-student Monroe Community College (MCC) main campus is located in the southern suburbs of Rochester, a 1,700-student branch is located in the Sibley Building. MCC will become an integral part of Renaissance Square upon its completion, occupying 212,000 square feet of classrooms and offices. Adjacent to Renaissance Square, potential exists for a 400-bed student residence facility to be constructed. Furthermore, a hospitality training program and a small student-run restaurant are planned for the new campus.

The State University of New York (SUNY) at Brockport has two small facilities downtown, east of the river: a Brockport branch and a Rochester skills and employment center. Four blocks west of the river is the Hochstein School of Music. None of these institutions has announced expansion plans.

Institutions of higher learning in downtown can act as strong catalysts for economic development. Student-oriented housing should be in demand near these campuses. Retail establishments that cater to younger people will find the area desirable.

## Residential

As the demographics of America change, housing preferences change as well. The percentage of households with one or more children living in the same home with both of their natural parents is continuing to decline. Many nontraditional households, such as divorced parents, gay and lesbian singles or couples, students, and empty nesters are all candidates to move into nontraditional, non-single-family homes in urban areas.

Appropriate housing for this growing proportion of households includes rental and ownership mid-rise and high-rise apartments and condominiums,

lofts, live/work spaces, and attached townhomes. The depth of the for-sale market has not been tested in Rochester, but most likely a range of for-sale product at a variety of price points would prove a good complement to a similar range of rental multifamily housing. Creating home ownership, whether loft or luxury condominium, new or rehabilitated, is an important element for creating long-term stability in the area.

Throughout the country, the return to downtowns and the areas around them is fueled by three distinct, yet compatible, demographics. The largest group is composed of young professionals, both singles and couples without children or with preschool-age children. A second group, growing in number and significant in terms of financial strength, is called empty nesters. These people are approaching retirement and their children are now grown and living away from home, thus giving them the opportunity to downsize or change their lifestyle to a lower-maintenance, “lock and leave” product such as a townhouse, condominium, or apartment. The third is an amorphous group tied together by their lack of children. Members of this group include young singles, gay singles and couples, and divorced or childless adults.

All three groups appreciate cultural offerings, fine cuisine, and entertainment nightlife. They have also responded to living and workspaces with lofty ceilings, large windows, wooden floors, and visible piping—all attributes of historic structures converted from former office and industrial buildings. To its great benefit, Rochester has a multitude of wonderful historic buildings, and the results of initial renovations of these properties have been both visually stunning and commercially successful.

Particularly important in Rochester, because of the presence of several college-level institutions in and around downtown, is the potential for student housing. Although not as financially capable as the young professionals or empty nesters, college students add a colorful and important component to a re-created downtown. Particular rental properties are designed for this demographic, and the panel sees an opportunity for the gradual development of several hundred units of student housing in the downtown area.



The Sibley Building is home to post-secondary education venues like Monroe Community College and SUNY Brockport.

A 2005 housing survey by the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation reveals that of 2,181 rental units located downtown, 60 percent are market rate. Of the market-rate units, 60 percent are one- or two-bedroom units. The market-rate inventory has a low 5 percent vacancy rate and includes 161 loft-style units.

Since 2000, only 69 rental and 9 owner units have been built. So much unmet demand has been identified that 177 rental and 37 owner units are under construction. Another 96 rental and 20 owner units are proposed. If downtown can maintain or enhance the housing trend, the demand for household-based retail and professional services will increase in turn.

Downtown's goal should be new construction and rehabilitation of 5,000 to 7,000 mixed-income rental and owner units. Their absorption will increase the 24-hour vibrancy of downtown while substantially increasing the neighborhood's attractiveness to retailers.

# Development Strategies

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Successful downtowns share certain characteristics that make them exceptionally user-friendly. These characteristics differentiate downtown from the suburbs, making downtown an attractive place to live, work, and play. The panel suggests that all of Rochester's redevelopment efforts should enhance the following characteristics:

- **Meaning.** Successful downtowns express and communicate the ideals and values of the residents of their cities. They generate loyalty, civic pride, and enjoyment. They motivate, encourage, and inspire residents to believe in their city, and by extension, in themselves.
- **Walkability.** Good downtowns invite walking between destinations, or merely strolling for pleasure. In such downtowns, pedestrians take precedence over vehicles at intersections. Street trees and awnings provide shade and shelter from the elements. Prominent signage allows easy wayfinding. Short blocks and continuous, occupied storefronts offer visual entertainment and interest.
- **Diversity.** Successful downtowns contain variety and diversity of building types, scales, uses, architectural styles, restaurants, and housing choices. They make the most of their historic structures, adapting them to new uses as needs change. Diversity also includes a variety of human groups. The integration of ethnic backgrounds, races, income levels, and ages helps make the downtown experience different from that of the dull, homogenous suburbs.
- **Greenery.** An attractive downtown features abundant street trees, planters, and colorful flowers along its sidewalks. It offers both parks and landscaped plazas of various sizes that invite pedestrians to rest, read, and linger, and serve as relief from and counterpoint to the street and sidewalk paving. It features large centrally located celebration spaces for community gathering, festivals, concerts, art shows, and other events that bring residents together to interact with each other in common purpose.
- **Vitality.** Good downtowns are busy downtowns. People crowd the sidewalks, cars flow, and signs of life are evident from the beginning of the workday until the early hours of the morning. The streets and sidewalks are the center of civic and public life, where people serendipitously meet to do business or just to chat. A good downtown has plenty of nightlife for all people in diverse restaurants and nightclubs.
- **Uniqueness.** Good downtowns offer a variety of pleasant experiences that can be found in no other place. They celebrate the unique physical and cultural characteristics of their inhabitants, expressed in art and architecture, as well as in unique shops, galleries, arts and cultural venues, and restaurants. Civic buildings and public gathering places require important sites to reinforce community identity and the culture of democracy. They deserve distinctive form, because their role is different from that of other buildings and places that constitute the fabric of the city. The development and redevelopment of a good downtown respects historical patterns, precedents, and boundaries, including street, building, and open space patterns and scale. Successful downtowns adapt with time, accommodating new demands for space and the nature of society.
- **Safety.** The success of downtowns depends in large measure on how safe and secure residents, visitors, and daytime workers perceive themselves to be. The design of streets and buildings must reinforce safe environments, but not at the expense of accessibility and openness. For example, obtrusive safety features like fences, gates, and physical barriers should be avoided.

## Significant Strengths

The greater Rochester region has numerous strengths, including a highly educated workforce and a firm foundation in innovative technologies. Downtown Rochester is no different. The panel observed several major advantages for the urban core—strengths that many cities of similar size would love to claim for their downtown. The city and its citizens need to recognize these strengths in order to build upon them in re-creating downtown Rochester as it enters the 21st century. Some of the strengths observed include the following:

- A substantial base of daytime employment still exists downtown. Substantial numbers of downtown workers could be attracted to live downtown or spend off-work hours there.
- Several housing developments are under construction in and around downtown. The demographic characteristics of the target buyers are similar to those reflected in national trends—indicating favorable demographic trends in the Rochester market.
- Downtown has ample parking resources.
- Strong sales prices and absorption have been reported for recent condominium development in downtown, although of a limited scale.
- The downtown area is home to numerous well regarded and popular arts and cultural institutions, including the Eastman School of Music and Theatre, the GeVa Theater, and the Strong Museum. These venues attract visitors locally and regionally.
- Downtown has little traffic congestion.
- Several entertainment districts have established themselves over the past decade and draw many patrons to downtown. Districts such as the East End, High Falls, and the St. Paul Quarter demonstrate that the right amenities will attract activity and development interest.
- Downtown Rochester has a rich collection of beautiful late 19th- and early 20th-century architecture that is not only a noble heritage, but also a very valuable real estate asset.



- Downtown has wide sidewalks for pedestrian use.

Downtown Rochester has plentiful garage and surface parking.

## Significant Challenges

Challenges are apparent to the panel as well. Rochester is far from alone in dealing with the loss of vitality in its downtown. Much of the panel's advice is rooted in the successful strategies that other cities have employed as well as the strategies that have failed. The forces that have drained downtowns of their commerce and life—suburbanization, building obsolescence, well-intentioned but misguided planning—are not unique to Rochester. By building upon Rochester's strengths, these challenges can be overcome. With the appropriate public sector support and private sector investment, these challenges can be re-created into real estate development opportunities. Some of the challenges observed by the panel include the following:

- Downtown Rochester has a weak office market with high vacancy rates—particularly in Class B buildings—that continues to deteriorate, creating near- and mid-term excess capacity, holding down rents, and reducing asset valuations.
- Most older downtowns were developed for regional retail uses but no longer can function as such. The resulting vacant and underused space also fails to serve the needs of downtown employees and residents.



Rochester has a large stock of architecturally significant buildings.

- The Midtown Mall design turns its back on the street, sapping vital activity from Main Street.
- Retail that has survived downtown is generally characterized as low end. This type of retail is not attractive to the potential new residents of downtown or prospective office users. However, the panel notes the importance of these retailers to current downtown residents and advocates the relocation of most existing retail uses elsewhere in downtown.

- Many vacant or underused buildings throughout downtown contribute to the image of decline.
- The street patterns are difficult to navigate, especially for visitors not familiar with downtown.
- Buses dominate Main Street at certain hours of the day, creating an unpleasant atmosphere and blocking visibility of first-floor retail.
- The pervasive perception of unsafe streets in downtown inhibits suburban residents from patronizing downtown businesses and institutions.

### Vacant Historic Commercial Buildings

Throughout downtown Rochester, the panel observed many attractive, historic structures. Sadly, several of these former commercial buildings lie vacant or underused. Some of these buildings could be renovated for office use, but others should be converted to residential use. Commercial buildings with especially fine architecture and high ceiling heights that can accommodate true lofts are ideal candidates for residential conversion. Buildings with larger floor plates could accommodate first-floor retail use. To the extent that the market can bear, residential conversions should be condominiums, which will provide a strong ownership foundation for the new community and maximize real estate tax revenue for the city.

### Office

As previously noted, the office market downtown is weak, with high vacancies—particularly among Class B properties—and little new demand. The excess capacity in the downtown market is a drag on rents and occupancy in all downtown office buildings. To shore up the office market, excess capacity must be reduced. This reduction can be achieved with two methods: demolition and conversion. The panel recommends the following:

- As previously noted, the Midtown property should be demolished, eliminating most of its office space, with the exception of the Midtown Tower (pending a market study in two years) and the Euclid Building.

- The numerous historic commercial buildings throughout downtown should be converted to residential use, such as the Sibley Building. This strategy reduces the supply of office space while increasing the number of residents.

The redevelopment plan for the Midtown blocks should incorporate the Euclid Building site. The building should be retained because it is relatively new, because an access tunnel to underground loading docks runs underneath, and because a substantial renovation investment was recently made by the building's major tenant.

## Retail

Retail space must be reoriented to face the street, bringing better visibility to the businesses and more life to the streetscape. This strategy will be accomplished primarily through the demolition of the indoor Midtown Mall and the relocation of the majority of its tenants to other street-facing locations along Main Street and Clinton Avenue. Some of these tenants could be relocated to the retail space on the first floor of the Sibley Building or other adjacent locations. The ultimate location of the Midtown Mall retail tenants will depend upon retailer preferences, rental rates, and landlord merchandising plans. Retail space is proposed for the following locations:

- The first floor of the Sibley block is ideal for retail use. First-floor space should be reconfigured to create a variety of retail spaces along Main Street and Clinton Avenue.
- The new public space on the Midtown block should be wrapped with retail. These shops will face Main Street across the public space.
- Where appropriate, develop first-floor, neighborhood-serving retail in converted residential buildings.
- Sufficient space should be programmed to accommodate restaurant uses that will support the performing arts venues.
- The city should reserve sufficient space for a small grocery store and pharmacy.



## Arts and Culture

Eastern Main Street between the river and the inner loop should be branded as the art and cultural district of Rochester. Rather than aggregate all of the arts and culture venues in one area, these uses should be stretched along Main Street, creating a reason for pedestrians to walk along Main Street. Restaurant development should be encouraged along Main Street to support the arts venues and to contribute to the activity on the street. Some specific strategies are as follows:

Top: Marginal retail establishments line downtown streets. Above: The East End of downtown has multiple cultural and artistic venues.

- Develop a 2,800-seat Broadway venue and a smaller 300- to 500-seat venue at Renaissance Square at Main Street and Clinton Avenue.
- A concert hall/theater with approximately 1,000 seats should be part of the Midtown redevelopment.
- Program a future arts venue on the parcel owned by the Cultural District Corporation on the northeast corner of Main and Chestnut streets.
- Reconnect Main Street to Broad Street through the Midtown block, making a connection to the Strong Museum.

### Re-Creation Strategy

The panel believes that downtown Rochester contains many of the elements that can allow it to reach its full potential as a successful and vital center city. However, the panel finds that to meet the challenges the city faces in the new century, Rochester must foster and strengthen those elements. In fact, Rochester must decide to focus its efforts to re-create itself as one of America's best small cities. The panel believes that downtown Rochester can re-create itself through three major strategies, which are outlined here.

#### Strategy One: Re-Create Downtown as a Neighborhood

Downtown Rochester should take full advantage of every opportunity both to construct new housing and to convert existing vacant or underused buildings to a variety of residential product types and price levels. If downtown Rochester increases the number of downtown residents, numerous benefits will follow. Retail uses will be attracted to the larger customer base. More people means more street activity and vitality. Streets containing buildings populated by residents on upper floors are inherently safer because of the presence of "eyes on the street."

Increasing the presence and visibility of additional community-oriented police officers on foot, on horseback, or on bicycles often increases real and perceived safety more than any other factor. However, downtown may take other steps, such as requiring that the design of every new or conversion project include defensible space principles. Defen-

sible space—also known as crime prevention through environmental design—builds safety measures into the urban form. See-through windows, appropriate lighting, and open space lead to greater visibility and safety.

#### Strategy Two: Re-Create Downtown as a Center of Commerce

Downtown Rochester must work to retain its existing office population and to attract new tenants to downtown by offering amenities such as the following:

- Inexpensive, convenient parking;
- A variety of restaurants;
- A safe, congenial, convenient, and entertaining atmosphere;
- Public parks, squares, and plazas that encourage interaction.

The panel recommends the selective demolition of older, obsolete buildings that are not viable candidates for conversion to new uses. Coupled with conversion of eligible buildings to residential uses, such demolition will substantially reduce excess office capacity to manageable levels. This action will foster higher rents and also stimulate more demand for Class A space.

Changing tastes and living patterns demand that downtown Rochester re-create its retail identity from regional center to a mix of street-level, sidewalk-oriented convenience and daily needs retail and service businesses such as a grocery, pharmacy, and dry cleaners. Restaurants, nightclubs, and unique shops that can be found in no other location in the region will enhance downtown's livability and attract visitors. Although such street-level retail space should be planned into each new and adaptive reuse project, Rochesterians must be patient and understand that it will fill over time as the population grows.

#### Strategy Three: Promote Downtown as a Center of Arts and Culture

Downtown Rochester retains a substantial number of artistic, cultural, and educational venues. The city should build upon these existing strengths by:

- Establishing the Downtown Arts District along Main Street between the Eastman School of Music and the river;
- Aggressively promoting the existing arts institutions and their events, tying them together with downtown promotional events such as street music festivals;
- Adding additional performing and visual arts venues in the Downtown Arts District, including a new performing arts complex at the intersection of Main Street and Clinton Avenue;
- Recruiting small galleries, art supplies stores, and other arts-related retail uses to locate on Main Street or in the Downtown Arts District.

## Study Area Redevelopment

This section describes the panel's vision for new uses for the four sites located within the study area. The process of redevelopment is complex and should be coordinated by a dedicated public agency, which is discussed in the Implementation section of this report.

### Midtown

The panel recommends that most of the Midtown block, with the exception of the Midtown Tower and the Euclid Building, be demolished and replaced with a mixed-use urban village. The Midtown Tower presents the most difficult challenge on this site. This office building is almost completely vacant, has substantial asbestos contamination, and is approaching the end of its useful life because of obsolete floor plates and poor telecommunications hookups. Currently, little demand exists for Class B office space, and very costly redevelopment would be required to upgrade the Midtown Tower to a Class A building. Current Class A rents do not justify this level of investment. Furthermore, the abatement and demolition costs for the Midtown Tower are very high and are not justified by current or anticipated land costs. The panel believes that the decision to demolish a building of this volume and replace it with a much lower-density structure should not be made on the basis of information currently available to the panel and to the city. As the city recreates downtown, new market forces could very



The Midtown office tower is mostly vacant but presents substantial problems with demolition.

possibly surface. The bold redevelopment being recommended by the panel might spark demand for Class A office space in two to five years.

Therefore, the panel recommends a plan of asbestos remediation, followed by an extensive market study to determine whether the tower should be reused or demolished. Whether the Midtown Tower is eventually torn down or reused, abating the asbestos, stripping the skin of the building, and removing obsolete building systems will have to take place.

The panel recommends that after the Midtown blocks are acquired, the tasks of asbestos abatement and skin removal begin immediately, because they will be required for any redevelopment strategies for the tower. Acquisition of the site, including financing, will take at least two years, and the abatement and exterior skin demolition will likely take nine months or more. Three years from now, the best use of the tower could be much clearer. The Class A office market could rebound or demand for high-rise housing may be evident. If the market for reuse of the building skeleton is not evident in three years, the rest of the building should be torn down. This procedure will cost



Above: The Sibley Building's atriums help make it suitable for residential conversion. Right: The first floor of the Sibley Building has excellent street-level amenities.



roughly the same as immediate demolition but allows for flexibility in future use.

The Midtown block will accommodate a variety of land uses after redevelopment. At the corner of Main Street and Clinton Avenue, a large park or plaza should be constructed. This park could be used for outdoor performances, festivals, and other community gatherings. The panel also endorses a 1,000-seat concert hall on the site. Establishing a mid-sized performance hall would help free up space in Renaissance Square as well as spread out foot and vehicular traffic. The rest of

the site should be developed as a mid-rise urban village, with residential uses above retail. Retail should wrap the park/plaza area and be visible from Main Street or Clinton Avenue. Midtown's underground 1,800-space parking garage should be retained. It is a valuable resource for future land uses on the site.

After demolition, a significant portion of the Midtown site is recommended for mixed use with a strong component of residential. Other uses to be mixed with housing on the Midtown site are public open space, a medium-sized performing arts venue, and new street-level retail. This mixed-use approach could also be described as creating an "urban village." Four- to five-story structures, some with first-floor retail, will appeal to young professionals as well as empty nesters who want to take advantage of the myriad performing arts venues within easy walking distance, but who prefer a more conventional floor plan than will be offered at the Sibley Building. Some of the units above the retail will look out over the public park. The units on the south side of the site will be clustered around courtyards, providing privacy and quiet amid the urban bustle. The site could accommodate approximately 350 to 450 units, with a mix of rental and condominium ownership at a variety of price points.

### Sibley Building

The Sibley Building provides an outstanding opportunity to develop a critical mass of loft housing in the center of downtown. Loft units have proven to be a high-demand product throughout the northeast and are particularly popular among the 25- to 40-year-old demographic that has shown a preference for downtown living in Rochester and throughout the country. Although loft and other apartment units in converted commercial buildings are relatively new products downtown, their sales and leasing have been brisk, proving market acceptance of the product. The lack of a sufficient sales history makes it impossible to accurately project ultimate demand for this product, but the experience of other cities portends well for the conversion of historic commercial buildings with high ceilings, exposed brick, and a stripped-down industrial look. The residents attracted to this type of housing have a lifestyle that will sup-

port renewed vigor downtown because they are likely to patronize entertainment and arts venues.

The conversion of the Sibley Building to residences should begin with the tower portion of the building. The tower configuration lends itself to a residential conversion with its double-loaded corridors and appropriate depth from the exterior window wall to the corridor wall. The high ceilings, expansive windows, and historic look of the building should be strong selling points. The conversion of this building will support other recent residential developments nearby by creating a residential feeling along the north side of Main Street east of Clinton Avenue. This redevelopment will be the largest residential project yet within downtown and, if successful, will prove the market, encouraging other developers.

When the tower portion is near completion, the department store floor plates above the first floor should be converted to residential as well. This conversion is technically more challenging because of the floor configuration, but the panel projects a stronger housing market downtown by 2009. If economic conditions remain favorable, the market will bear the higher development costs that are inherent in the residential conversion of the department store floors. The panel is aware of the successful conversion of department stores in other cities—such as the Atrium in Baltimore (a former Hecht's) that used an atrium similar to the one in the Sibley Building. The atrium enabled double-loaded corridors with some units facing inward onto the atrium and others facing out toward the street.

The first floor of the Sibley Building should be converted to first-floor retail with residential loft units on all the floors above. Both the tower and the old department store sections of the Sibley Building should become loft-style residential. The ground floor of should be converted to retail.

At the present time, the Sibley Building is owned and operated by a private sector entity that is exploring other reuse options, including a casino. The panel believes that the city must entice and engage this property owner with viable alternatives. Those alternatives could include financial incentives for rehabilitation, voluntary sale to a city

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## Casino

The panel is aware that a casino complex has been proposed for the Sibley and Midtown sites. In the experience of the panel, with rare exception, casinos detract from, rather than add life to a downtown. Under current New York state law, only a Native American-owned casino would be allowed in downtown Rochester, which would require transferring the proposed casino site into tribal ownership, effectively creating a sovereign nation at the heart of downtown.

By intention, casinos are one-stop destinations, aiming to capture as much consumer spending from each patron as possible. They are deliberately designed to capture and hold customers, providing every amenity with the intent of making it unnecessary for a customer to leave the building at any time. As a result, customers typically do not interact with the surrounding city or engage in commerce with any other merchants. In fact, casinos may have a detrimental effect on the existing surrounding businesses. In the case of Rochester, a casino would undoubtedly attempt to counterprogram concerts and other events that would negatively affect the new performing arts center.

Architecturally, successful casinos turn inward, presenting blank walls to the street. Internally, casinos have a very controlled circulation pattern that seeks to keep patrons inside. Pedestrians needed for a vibrant retail street instead stay indoors. Casinos can also create substantial vehicular traffic congestion and can act as a magnet for other undesirable activities.

From a financial perspective, the panel believes that, in an era when cities and states all over the country are experiencing shrinking resources and increasing budget struggles, Rochester can ill afford to permanently remove such prime, large parcels of land from the property-tax rolls. Furthermore, experience shows that no guarantee exists that casino revenues will be shared with the local community or government. For this and other reasons, the panel agrees with the community's commitment not to give up sovereign ownership of some of the most important real estate in Rochester.

The panel believes that a casino would be an inappropriate use for the most important intersection of downtown Rochester and would be antithetical to the goals of re-creating downtown as a vibrant, active center of commerce, a public meeting place, a thriving neighborhood, and a center for arts and culture. ♦

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redevelopment authority, or a taking by the city—a measure of last resort.

## Renaissance Square

The panel feels that the planned Renaissance Square is a valuable component for downtown redevelopment. However, the panel envisions several changes to the planned structure that will help further the city's redevelopment goals. First, the panel endorses the planned 2,800-seat Broadway theater venue at the corner of Main Street and Clinton Avenue. Furthermore, the addition of a college center on the block is also desirable. The college center could include programs from SUNY Brockport in addition to the planned space for

Monroe Community College. Because of the large physical size of the block, the panel suggests installing a midblock road named Stone Street. The original Stone Street was demolished in the 1960s. The panel also endorses the idea of building a new transit center at Renaissance Square, although the transfer station should be above ground.

### St. Joseph's Place

St. Joseph's Place comprises three blocks north of the Sibley Building and Renaissance Square. The major landmark on these blocks is the remains of St. Joseph's Church, which was largely destroyed in a fire some years ago. The panel envisions a large urban village, with rental units, condominiums, some retail, and green space. Any redevelopment effort will require demolishing most of the buildings and surface parking lots on these blocks. However, the panel feels that St. Joseph's vestibule should be retained as a park and neighborhood icon. This area may also have strong potential for student housing.

The panel recommends reconfiguring the blocks north of Renaissance Square and the Sibley Building and south of Andrews Street. A more straightforward street grid will provide a new urbanist framework for medium-density development of attached housing and neighborhood retail. These two-, three-, and four-story townhouse-like struc-

tures will help provide additional needed housing downtown. With townhomes instead of mid-rise buildings, the neighborhood will transition smoothly toward Grove Place. This market-rate housing could be a mix of rental and condominium, with certain buildings targeted to students. The site could accommodate 550 to 650 units.

### Housing

As stated earlier in this report, the re-creation of downtown is critically dependent upon accelerating the development of new housing. The study area presents a number of opportunities for housing development. The panel believes that housing must be at the center of any redevelopment scenario in downtown Rochester.

City financial support should be targeted to ensure a mixed-income community within neighborhoods or specific development projects. This aim can be accomplished by income restriction or new construction targeted to lower-income consumers such as students. The resulting diversity promotes strong, sustainable communities. Long-term sustainability and diversity are attractive to buyers and renters who prefer an urban lifestyle.

# Planning and Design

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**T**he Interstate-490/inner loop beltway generally defines downtown Rochester. The Genesee River bisects the urban core. Previous development has generally turned its back to, or altogether ignored, the river. Development during the 1960s and 1970s further isolated people with internal shopping malls, lack of public spaces and parks, and the skyway system, all of which act to keep people off the streets, diffuse the density of pedestrians and shoppers, and generally add to a sense of isolation. Recent efforts such as the East End and St. Paul Quarter—although successful—are scattered and lack cohesion. Main Street, the central axis of the core, has lost its retail focus and been reduced to nothing more than a place to pass through or loiter.

There is good news, however. Rochester has a strong architectural and historic building stock—particularly of late-19th- and early-20th-century buildings—that provides the bones for future rebuilding. Work in the East End, St. Paul Quarter, and other areas shows positive and successful growth patterns in housing and retail development. Work by the community on the Rochester 2010 Center City Master Plan and design guidelines demonstrates a strong desire to create a vibrant and inviting urban center, and recent city/county collaboration shows recognition that a strong Rochester is critical to the future of the region.

## City Crossroads

Within the study area, three very large development sites dominate the landscape: the Sibley Building, Midtown Plaza, and the Renaissance Square block. These sites currently present large blank building walls along Main Street, with little retail activity and no visual interest to pedestrians. Heavy use of Main Street as the central transfer point for the regional bus routes creates a further “iron curtain” of buses at certain times,

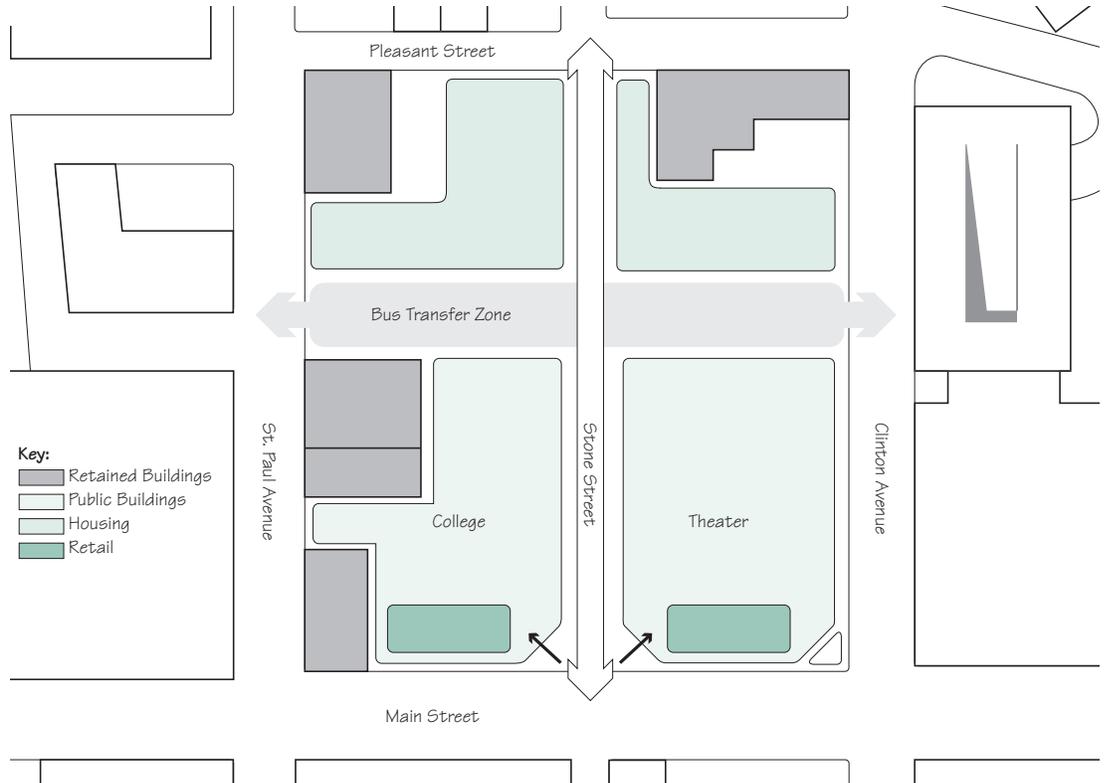
barring pedestrian and even visual access along Main Street. These conditions present a lack of pedestrian scale and comfort, making this area of Main Street uninviting and unattractive. The lack of sufficient public spaces further undermines Main Street’s ability to act as downtown’s civic and ceremonial boulevard. A confusing street grid, especially north of Main Street, the maze of skywalks, and potentially unnecessary one-way traffic flows make navigating the area difficult for visitors and suburbanites coming into downtown.

The study area has some substantial architectural and design strengths. The Sibley Building has strong architectural character, and the large floor plates are very valuable to today’s retail and residential developers. Both the tower portion and the shorter department store floor plates work well for residential and retail layouts. Ample parking—including 1,800 spaces underground—and loading facilities further increase the versatility and value of the building. Main Street runs directly through the heart of both the study area and the downtown generally, and the Midtown block is positioned at the crossroads of many of the area’s key streets. Together, Main Street and the Midtown block provide organizing elements for citywide development efforts.

## Reclaiming the Public Domain

With the Renaissance Center anchoring the west end of the study area, reclamation of Main Street and the Midtown block are the next important steps. Main Street must reintroduce itself as the primary civic street for the city. Upgrades to the street in accordance with the Center City Master Plan should be done from the river to the Eastman School of Music to identify this role. Part of this upgrade should reintroduce on-street parking along Main Street and the adjacent cross streets, with free parking after 5 p.m. and low short-term rates during business hours to make parking con-

The Renaissance Square site should break up the superblock with an above-ground bus transfer area and an extension of Stone Street.



venient and encourage its use. Main Street then starts to become the central organizing element, beginning to connect isolated district developments into a coherent whole.

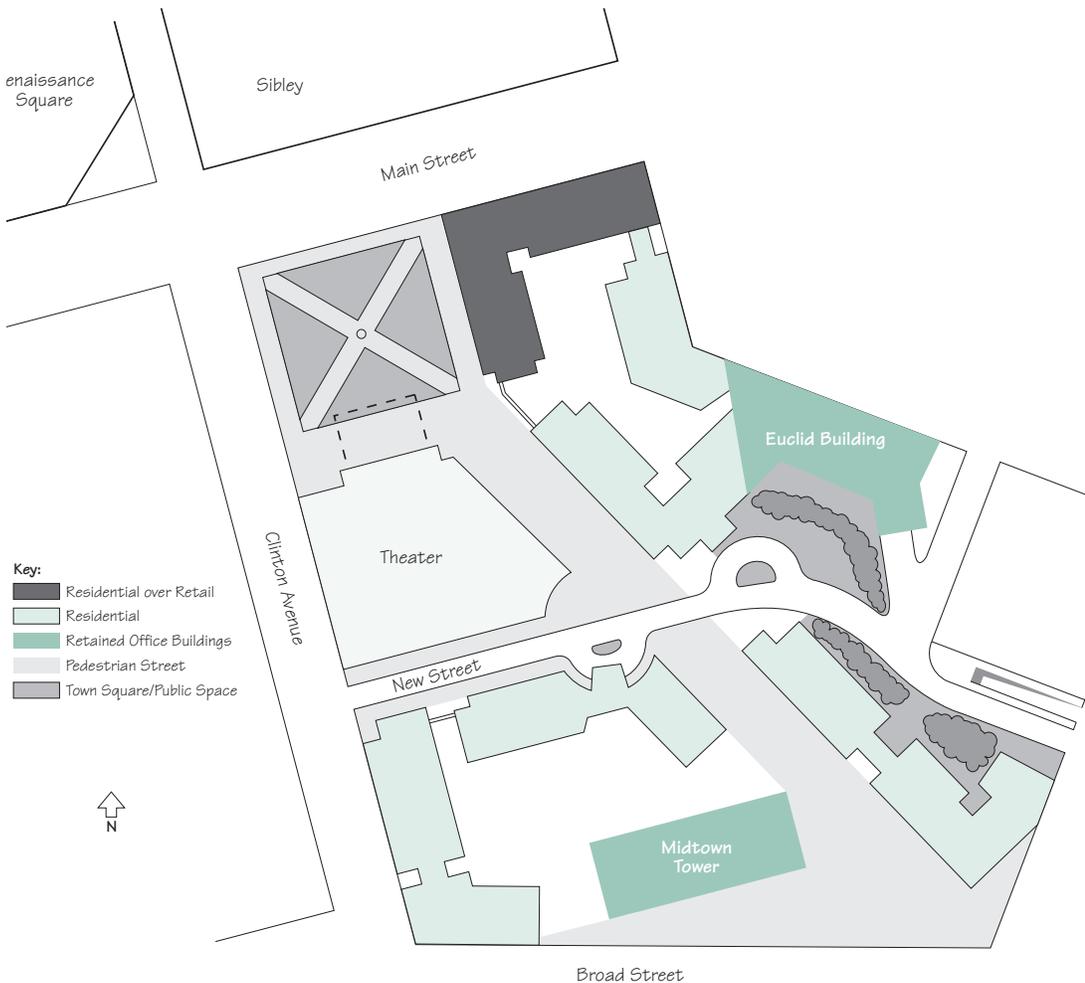
The Midtown block becomes central in adding to the numerous cultural amenities in the downtown. A second 1,000-person theater can be added to this block as well as public space for the city's outdoor living room. In short, the Midtown block can become central to all of the public and quasi-public amenities in the immediate region.

### Renaissance Square Opportunity

The Renaissance Square project is in the early design stages and provides a number of positive additions to the urban environment. It adds another cultural destination to a downtown that already contains a wide variety of cultural venues, including the Eastman Theatre, Strong Museum, Frontier Field, and the Blue Cross Arena. The project also establishes on Main Street a major campus for Monroe Community College, expanding and strengthening an ongoing commitment to education as a core function of the downtown.

The panel recommends several design elements for consideration as Renaissance Square proceeds, including the following:

- Seek an at-grade (or street-level) solution for the bus transfer center. It could provide a continuous storefront on both Clinton Avenue and St. Paul Street, keeping people on the streets where they generate activity and engage in commerce. An at-grade transfer center would also avoid creating a very expensive underground space that will be viewed as unfriendly, unsafe, and undesirable, while retaining the flexibility to respond to future transit developments more easily and cost-effectively.
- Reintroduce Stone Street on the north-south axis of the project in order to break down the mass and scale of this block, particularly along Main Street. Breaking up the block will improve pedestrians' sense of security and well-being. It will also ensure that future development is built on a pedestrian scale.



The panel's vision for the Midtown site includes public space, a theater, and residential uses.

- Rethink the one-way couplets of Clinton Avenue and St. Paul Street/South Avenue in order to create better bus-turning movements, reduce pedestrian/bus conflicts around Renaissance Square, and simplify overall traffic flow. Although the level of service at the intersections may be decreased somewhat, the panel does not believe the traffic volumes warrant one-way conditions.
- Resist the placement of internal food-service functions in the college program, unless they are incorporated into the Main Street frontage.
- Have separate performing arts and college entrances front on Main Street, with the performing arts component and its primary entrance placed on the corner of Main and Clinton.

### Midtown Plaza Opportunity

Midtown Plaza has outlived its useful life. This centerpiece of Rochester's 1960s' revitalization efforts now needs to move aside to facilitate a new urban re-creation. The panel proposes that the Midtown site should support Rochester's cultural

amenities. To meet this requirement, the panel proposes the demolition of the Midtown Plaza, as well as the B. Forman, McCurdy, and Seneca buildings. In their place, the panel recommends the creation of a signature civic space and a mixed-use development, both to front on Main Street. This park should be similar in character and pedestrian orientation to Courthouse Square in Akron, Ohio, or Bryant Park in New York City, and be designed to build on Rochester's historic ties as the Flower City. The park will provide a new town square—a public space for meeting and



An important underground service tunnel complicates the demolition and redevelopment of Midtown Plaza.

talking, relaxing and people watching, seeing a new piece of public art, or catching an outdoor performance.

Across Clinton Street on the open portion of the Chase site, the panel proposes development of a Winter Garden to provide year-round public space for the community. This space would be programmed for similar functions as the outdoor site across the street. The panel would also like the Clock of Nations from Midtown Plaza refurbished and relocated here as a link to Rochester's past.

Breaking down the Midtown block with smaller-scale streets and pedestrian ways is also important. A new street should be carved from Clinton Avenue to East Avenue. Combined with adequate sidewalks, this configuration supports mixed-use development of retail and housing as well as a 1,000-seat theater space. The panel recommends keeping the underground parking garage and service tunnel operational, although maintenance and modifications will be required to accommodate this new development.

The panel recommends that the Euclid Building be retained, with some modifications to make it a freestanding building. Furthermore, the Midtown Tower should be abated of environmental hazards and prepared for reskinning or eventual demolition. The final disposition of this building will be determined based on how the markets for residen-

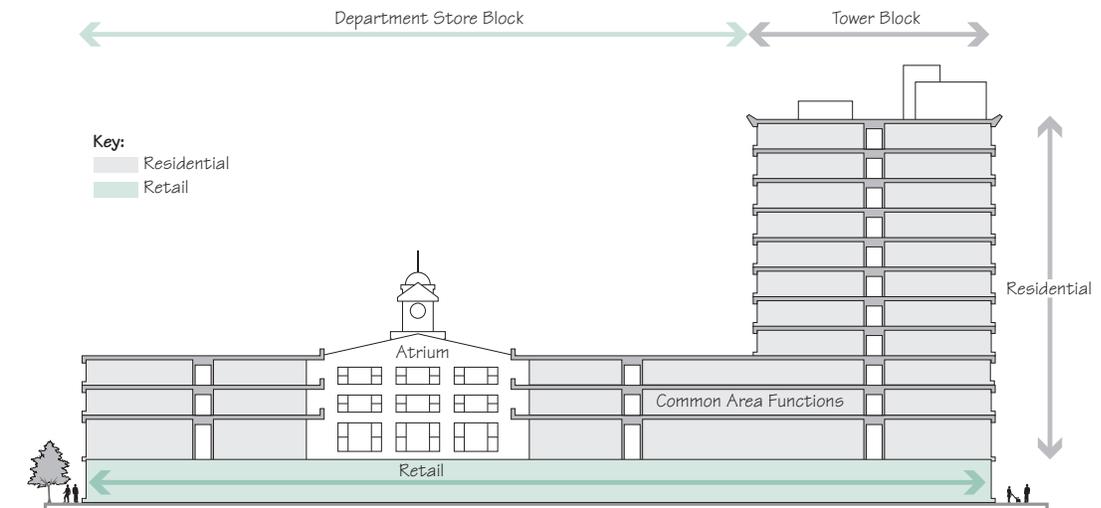
tial and office space in the city evolve, with either additional rehabilitation for reuse as office or residential/hotel, or full demolition an option. If the building is demolished, additional mixed-income housing could infill the site.

Last, a link through the Midtown block should be developed to reach out toward the Strong Museum and Manhattan Park, to initiate a connection between this valuable regional resource and the arts and cultural events of Main Street.

### Sibley Opportunity

The Sibley Building is a major piece of Rochester's history. This glorious structure must be retained and given new purpose. Because the panel believes housing will drive downtown Rochester's re-creation and the Sibley Building represents an excellent physical opportunity for residential conversion, the panel proposes that this building be adapted to a mixed housing/retail use, with retail on the entire ground floor and residential units developed above.

The first-floor retail space might be used to accommodate relocation of some current Midtown Plaza tenants onto the street. It could also provide spaces for food and entertainment shops to support the performing arts center patrons, for tenants new to the downtown market, and to incubate new local retail enterprises that could then migrate into the larger retail marketplace.



The Sibley Building should include first-floor retail with residential uses on the floors above.



## St. Joseph's Place

The area north of the Sibley Building and Renaissance Square should be developed as an urban village. The panel recommends that this development be primarily residential townhouses and attached housing products with a density of 15 to 40 dwelling units per acre. It should include a grocery store and associated neighborhood retail uses as appropriate and possible.

This project should incorporate and preserve the historic St. Joseph's Church vestibule and steeple as a community icon. The Warner Building lends itself well to a conversion to incubator space with live/work units because of its high ceilings and large windows. A neighborhood park will also be needed within the district, and possibly an elementary school in the future. Reorganization and simplification of the local street grids should be studied to improve circulation and reduce or eliminate odd and orphan parcels, allowing additional housing units to be created.

## Other Opportunities within the Inner Loop

Several general downtown issues need to be addressed. The design guidelines developed as part of the Center City Master Plan provide an excellent starting point for creating the kind of urban environment envisioned by the panel. These guidelines should be reviewed in light of the panel's recommendations to ensure that they will adequately address mixed housing products and street retail.

Public art is an important element of any urban environment. In a city building its future around arts, education, and cultural activities, public art is a key component. Building a program around visual as well as performing arts would increase the excitement of the public realm, activate the retail areas, and tie into the region's rich history. Large-scale photographic murals, sculpture, and environmental art pieces could all enliven the core of the city.

St. Joseph's Place is an ideal site for a mid-rise urban village.

# Implementation

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The panel has articulated a clear vision for the study area and downtown as a whole. Realizing this vision is the next step in the process. The panel feels a number of issues need to be addressed if successful development is to progress. Rochester needs to create and empower two agencies to direct the re-creation process. One agency will be responsible for coordinating the land acquisition, government programs, and subsidies for redevelopment. The second agency will be responsible for a series of enhancements to the public realm that will help further redevelopment goals and raise quality of life downtown. The second agency will also assume responsibility for marketing and promotion of downtown.

## Downtown Development Corporation

Rochester is fortunate to have business and non-profit leaders who have taken a strong interest in the economic situation of downtown. Rochester is equally fortunate to have public sector leaders motivated to change the state of affairs. Partnerships that bridge both sectors are critical to the re-creation effort, but currently no single entity is in a position to lead this complex process. The panel believes that the city and county must jointly initiate formation of a new single-purpose development authority that combines the strength and purview of both the public and private sectors. This proposed entity, dubbed the Rochester Center City Authority, will partner with the private sector to facilitate the re-creation of downtown. The authority will also be responsible for purchasing the land and preparing and packaging it for development. Its activities would, at first, focus on the redevelopment of Midtown Plaza, the Sibley Building, St. Joseph's Place, and Renaissance Square, if needed.

As a quasi-governmental agency, the authority should be chartered by the city of Rochester and Monroe County. Special approval may be required

from the state of New York. The board of the authority should have members appointed by the city and county, but a majority should be drawn from the private sector. The agency would possess government powers delegated to it. The authority should be specifically enabled to

- Buy, or condemn where necessary, to assemble land parcels for redevelopment;
- Solicit proposals and award development rights;
- Grant payment in lieu of taxes and other tax incentives;
- Provide management oversight of TIF districts;
- Make low-interest development loans;
- Build and operate city-owned parking as a parking authority;
- Impose impact fees;
- Act as developer of last resort.

The panel recognizes that the decision to create the RCCA can be politically difficult. It requires elected officials to give some of their powers over to a board of appointed officials. However, use of the authority vehicle minimizes many of the political roadblocks in the redevelopment process by putting more power in the hands of private sector leaders—the same leaders upon whom the community must rely to take the financial risks necessary to achieve redevelopment. Several cities around the country, including Memphis, Tennessee; Norfolk, Virginia; and Washington, D.C., have experienced excellent results from similar public/private agencies.

## Business Improvement District

The Rochester Downtown Development Corporation has played and continues to serve a valuable role in the economic revitalization of downtown

Rochester. It has provided a reliable platform for downtown stakeholders to come together and advocate for the center city. In that way, the RDDC currently functions as more of a Business Improvement District than it does a development corporation. The panel believes that the RDDC should adopt a different name and assume even more roles typical of a BID. These new roles include the following:

- Cooperate with the RCCA and facilitate retail relocation from Midtown Plaza;
- Create and manage new festivals and coordinate existing festivals;
- Market events and opportunities;
- Implement safe-streets initiatives;
- Perform business and cultural ombudsman functions.

## Financing

Many of the panel's recommendations require a significant amount of public and private money. The private development community is easily dissuaded from pursuing center-city projects because of lack of experience, insufficient financial returns, complicated land acquisition, and other issues. Public sector assistance can ameliorate or eliminate these hurdles. The panel believes that the private sector will invest in downtown when the public sector streamlines the development process and contributes funding to ensure reasonable returns. As downtown becomes more successful—and developers gain experience—the necessity of public financing will likely diminish.

Public financing for projects can come from a variety of sources. Direct cash subsidy is only one source. In fact, cash subsidy is one of the rarest forms of development subsidy. Low-cost loans, tax incentives, and acquisition assistance are far more common. The Rochester Center City Authority will need to assemble a package of assistance tools for prospective developers of large projects.

## Local Programs

The most readily available programs for the city of Rochester come from local governments. How-



The Renaissance Square project is planned for this block at the corner of Main Street and Clinton Avenue. Tax increment financing could help pay for redevelopment.

ever, the total dollar value may be somewhat limited because of fiscal constraints on local governments. The panel has reviewed the programs available in the city of Rochester and Monroe County and believes the following programs are consistent with executing the strategies recommended by the panel.

**Tax Increment Financing.** Tax increment financing is a very powerful financing tool provided under New York state law that allows bonds to be issued and repaid with the increase in property tax revenue. A local body, such as a redevelopment authority or a municipality, creates TIF districts. Bonds are issued to pay for needed land acquisition, demolition, new construction, and public infrastructure. These improvements cause an increase in property tax receipts from property within the district. The city captures a portion of the higher tax (the “tax increment”), which goes to repay the TIF bonds.

A TIF district is one of the most powerful tools for effecting redevelopment. Funds realized from the bond sale could be used to acquire land, demolish buildings, or construct new structures on the Renaissance Square, Sibley, Midtown, or St. Joseph's sites. Because the acquisition, selective demolition, and reuse of the study area properties will cause a substantial increase in property value, the panel recommends creating a TIF district encompassing the entire inner loop to benefit the redevelopment of all the sites discussed in this report.

**Conversion Urban Exemption Program.** A Conversion Urban Exemption (CUE) program assists developers in converting vacant office space to residential housing units and commercial uses. It



St. Joseph's Place sits north and east of the namesake historic church. Public involvement will be required to assemble and acquire the diverse parcels composing the St. Joseph's site.

forgives 100 percent of the property taxes attributed to improvements to the structure for the first 8 years. The amount of exempted property tax decreases during the 9th through 12th years.

A CUE program can be authorized by the city of Rochester. It would be a valuable program for the retrofit of the Sibley Building from office space to residential units. However, the city should analyze any potential effect on the area's TIF district before proceeding with a CUE tax exemption.

**Dedicated Fees or Taxes.** Dedicated user fees could support a redevelopment agency and its programs. The panel recommends imposition of a small fee on any or all of the following: performing arts tickets, convention center use, downtown hotels, downtown alcoholic beverages. Evening parking fees could also be earmarked for certain projects. Fees on tickets could help cover the operating cost of the performing arts center component of Renaissance Square.

A user fee is best justified for building and operating Renaissance Square and other performing arts venues. Because a ticket surcharge would be a user fee paid by patrons of the performing arts, it should be politically viable. Taxes or fees on alcohol, hotels, or the convention center could be earmarked for other projects.

**Eminent Domain/Condemnation.** The power of eminent domain is authorized by the U.S. Constitution; it allows local governments to take private property for public benefit, including for economic development purposes. The U.S. Supreme Court issued an opinion in June 2005 clearing the use of eminent domain for economic development purposes. Eminent domain is a valuable tool during negotiations to purchase property from the private sector, particularly from holdout owners. It is generally regarded as a method of last resort for land acquisition. Use of eminent domain is controversial, litigious, and often politically unpopular.

In the panel's opinion, the redevelopment of Midtown Plaza and the Sibley Building will result in substantial public benefit by creating new housing opportunities, jobs, and public facilities. Thus, eminent domain could be used for land acquisition if absolutely necessary. With the numerous parcels and owners in St. Joseph's Place, eminent domain could also be a tool to assemble land at that site.

**Industrial Revenue Bonds.** Authorized through Monroe County, Industrial Revenue Bonds can be used by private developers to raise capital. Similar in structure to commercial or industrial securities, the bonds require repayment from the developer. However, the bonds have favorable terms because they carry tax-exempt status.

These bonds could be used by developers to perform work on any of the properties discussed in this report. The redevelopment agency must work to inform developers of this program and give them assistance in applying.

### State Programs

The state of New York has additional fiscal programs that the panel believes are applicable to downtown Rochester's re-creation. However, accessing these funds can be difficult and time consuming. Increasingly, local leaders will need to present a unified front on redevelopment policy in order to secure state funding.

**Incentive Tax Credit Program.** The Incentive Tax Credit (ITC) program offers a 20 percent tax credit to property owners who undertake the certified major rehabilitation of an income-producing property. Owners can choose to reduce their tax li-

ability or can sell the tax credits to produce equity for the project. Projects require state approval and certification.

The ITC program should be taken advantage of when rehabilitating the Sibley property, because the building requires major rehabilitation and will produce residential rental income. This program's ability to raise upfront capital will make it attractive to developers.

**Empire Zone Incentives.** The state legislature needs to ensure that the target area lies within an Empire Zone. Flexible zone boundaries were created during the last legislative session, so any areas of downtown not currently holding Empire Zone status can be included without a lengthy legislative approval. Rochester may consider reducing the number and size of Empire Zones city-wide, to ensure that the downtown Empire Zone has maximum competitive advantage over outlying areas. Among other tools, the three following important incentives exist for businesses occupying space in an Empire Zone:

- Certified employers can receive a tax credit for creating new jobs within an Empire Zone.
- Property tax abatements reduce the taxable value of owned buildings within an Empire Zone.
- Up to 8 percent of sales taxes paid on building materials can be refunded to the purchaser or developer.

**Urban Renewal Districts.** These districts are authorized by the state legislature but initiated and administered by the city of Rochester. After approval by the state, the city stimulates the redevelopment of the district by tying together a group of parcels into a district for the purpose of resale on the private market. Typically, this process begins with the acquisition of parcels, followed by demolition, developer selection, and negotiation of a resale agreement. Parcels may be resold below market value. Furthermore, the assembly and resale process may proceed even if a taking by eminent domain is being litigated in court.

This program is particularly valuable to assemble the parcels in St. Joseph's Place. That area contains many parcels with multiple owners and could be assembled and repackaged to a developer at low cost. The panel suggests that the redevelopment agency use a different name for the district, given the negative connotations of "urban renewal" programs in past decades.

**NYSERDA Incentives.** The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority program provides cash incentives for new construction of multifamily dwellings of five units or more. These resources are available for all project phases from predevelopment through startup of operations. Nonprofit organizations, private developers, municipalities, redevelopment agencies, and BIDs are eligible.

These funds would be of particular use for the construction of new housing at Midtown Plaza. However, the panel understands that competition for funding from this program is fairly intense.

### Federal Programs

The federal government has several programs that are applicable for downtown redevelopment in Rochester. As with state programs, local consensus and aggressive pursuit are important in securing funds and incentive approvals. The panel notes the following programs for their potential use in downtown Rochester's re-creation efforts.

**Section 108 Loan Guarantees.** The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guarantees notes issued by units of local government to finance economic revitalization and development activities. The bonds issued are backed by the promise of future Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) money from HUD. Funds can be used for a wide variety of projects, including expansion of businesses and acquisition of land.

Section 108 loans can raise upfront capital and have broad uses. However, they require dedicating future CDBG funds to current projects, thus reducing monies available in the future. Section 108 loans could be used for acquisition, demolition, or construction on any of the sites discussed in this report. The panel endorses the idea of using

Section 108 loans but urges caution because of the future implications of giving up CDBG funds.

**American Heritage Rivers Initiative.** This U.S. Department of Transportation program supports local communities' efforts to revitalize and maintain riverfront areas. Local communities can apply for assistance through their state and metropolitan planning organizations. Eligible projects include those that would improve economic or environmental viability of riverfront neighborhoods. Given the proximity of these sites to the Genesee River, Rochester could make an application to this program.

This small program does not directly apply to the downtown-focused vision and strategies articulated by the panel. However, if any redevelopment plan included waterfront parks, trails, or stormwater upgrades, the city could be eligible for funds under this program.

**LEED-Certified Tax Credits.** A Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-certified building meets a series of certification tests for environmental friendliness and sustainability. Developers whose projects qualify for LEED certification can apply tax credits toward their total profit on the project. Unlike historic or affordable housing tax credits, LEED tax credits cannot be sold to raise equity.

LEED tax credits could be explored for construction of new housing and facilities at Renaissance Square. The panel strongly encourages the city to set goals of "green" building. The Rochester Center City Authority should make developers aware of this program and provide application assistance.

**HUD Renewal Communities Program.** Rochester was identified in 2002 as one of 40 Renewal Communities by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Until 2012, this powerful program provides up to \$12 million per year in tax breaks and other incentives for business development. The panel understands that the program is not being fully used by the city. The program is applicable only to projects that include (or are entirely) commercial or industrial components. However, mixed-use projects with 20 percent of in-

come produced from commercial space qualify for this program. The program provides for rapid depreciation of the property (thus reducing or eliminating taxes), a capital gains tax exclusion, and corporate income tax credit for jobs created by businesses.

Several pieces of the panel's vision include mixed-use components, including the urban village on the current Midtown site, the Sibley Building, and portions of St. Joseph's Place. Incentives from the Renewal Communities program could also be applied to the retrofit of the Midtown Tower after abatement and stripping are complete. Developers who would reskin and outfit the bones of the tower for Class A office space would welcome such incentives. The city and its redevelopment agencies must make potential developers aware of this program and target the incentives to the core of downtown.

**Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives.** Administered by the Department of the Interior's National Park Service, federal historic preservation tax incentives offer two programs to make the rehabilitation of historic structures more feasible and attractive. The first program offers 20 percent tax credits for rehabilitation of any building listed on the National Register of Historic Places or lying within a designated historic district. The rehabilitation plan must be approved by the state historic preservation office and subsequently certified by the U.S. Department of the Interior. To capture the full tax credit, the owner must operate the rehabilitated building for five years.

The second program offers a 10 percent tax credit for rehabilitation of any building built before 1936. This tax credit is available for buildings that are not listed on the historic register. Both tax credits are powerful tools for downtown Rochester's recreation. The RCCA should assist developers in applying for these tax credits.

## Quality-of-Life Issues

The panel believes that "quality of life" and public perception issues must be addressed as soon as possible. Downtown Rochester must become a dynamic, interesting, and, above all, pleasurable

place to be. Enhancing quality of life will make downtown an attractive place for new housing units and office relocation.

### Public Safety

The panel has heard repeatedly that crime is an issue in downtown. Yet, statistically, violent crime in downtown is minimal. The panel believes that the perception of crime is almost as important as the reality of crime. Therefore, the panel recommends that panhandling, vagrancy, and other threatening behaviors be removed from the downtown as a whole, not just shifted from one neighborhood to another. Appropriate social service agencies—both public and private—should be brought in to help solve this problem.

The police department and social service agencies may require additional resources to accomplish this goal. However, the panel believes that adequate, engaged, highly visible, and helpful police should be considered part of the city's infrastructure. The preferred method of policing in the downtown is on horseback, on bicycle, or on foot, which gives police the ability to interact with the people on the street. Car patrols separate the police from the community and are less effective in areas of high pedestrianism.

The panel heard concerns about racial and generational conflicts—real or perceived. The panel believes that programs to bridge these gaps are key to a vibrant, comfortable downtown. Partners in this effort may be found in the church and educational communities. Festivals and civic events that attract families across the racial and ethnic spectrum are particularly useful.

### Cultural Downtown

The panel believes that the city needs to market itself to its own residents. A campaign to “take a vacation in your hometown” sponsored by the local media and widely advertised would expand the support base for future development, enlighten people to what is in their own backyard, and generate home-grown excitement about Rochester. Regular contact with existing residents and businesses will ensure that the city retains its residential and commercial base while undertaking efforts to attract more residents and businesses.



### Community Vision

The city is experiencing the beginnings of a residential renaissance, largely led by young people moving into the city. The panel strongly believes that young people and empty nesters are prime candidates for a significant residential resurgence. In an effort to retain these new “downtowners,” the city should listen carefully to their wants and needs and anticipate their future needs. These people have a choice about where they live. They have chosen downtown.

The panel was impressed with the performance-based zoning ordinance and regulations. However, the panel believes that codes and ordinances should be critically reviewed to ensure that they are conducive to the desired uses and contribute to the life of the street as well as to the visual quality of the environment. The codes are designed to produce development that has superb architecture, but they do little to encourage desirable uses. The city may want to explore adding additional components to the code to stimulate job-producing businesses that engage the street.

Urban form can also be a unifying influence. “Green infrastructure” in the form of parks, linear parks, public plazas, and playgrounds creates opportunities for people of different ages, races, and economic means to come together. An organized green network also presents physical fitness opportunities. The “healthy communities” movement seeks to facilitate physical activity through urban design. Linked open spaces, lively streets, and

This preserved advertising mural reminds Rochesterians of the rich history of downtown.

mixed-use development discourage auto dependence, thus encouraging walkable communities, and the best part is—people may not even realize that they are exercising!

## The Public Realm

The city has direct control over the public realm. Several alterations to the public realm can play an important role in making downtown an attractive, special place to be. Making the public realm more attractive can create a marked shift in the behavior and preferences of downtown visitors and residents.

### Parking

The panel encourages the city to undertake a study of parking pricing to ensure that the city's parking policies are supporting its downtown redevelopment goals through efficient pricing. The panel has heard complaints from a variety of sources about the parking situation in downtown. However, observations and analysis of Rochester's parking supply suggest the city has ample parking for the existing uses downtown. The panel feels that visitors to downtown have an unreasonable expectation for their parking experience while visiting the city center, particularly with respect to proximity to the destination and the cost of parking. Parking consumes massive amounts of valuable space. The city must recoup its expenses for constructing parking garages and therefore must charge for parking. One of the traits of suburban areas is the prevalence of free parking directly adjacent to the traveler's destination. An urban downtown cannot be expected to provide the same type of parking as the suburbs. If the city is vibrant and provides a unique experience, the comparison is meaningless. Indeed, a downtown with free surface parking lots would cease to function as the urban core because land uses would be so separated. The panel does not recommend constructing additional parking facilities at this time but encourages the retention of the rather extensive garage network.

The downtown parking supply can easily accommodate the demand created by the panel's proposed development scenario. New or rehabilitated housing will likely provide dedicated parking

spaces in addition to the facilities already located downtown. Other recommendations increase parking demand during evening hours—during times when existing facilities sit nearly vacant.

One of downtown Rochester's strengths is the prevalence of garage parking facilities. Nine city-owned garages and four private facilities provide 12,899 spaces within the inner loop. Surface parking lots accommodate several thousand more cars. Daily parking rates range from \$1.50 for a surface space to \$6.35 for a garage space.

### Pedestrianism

The panel notes a strong resistance to walking at street level in downtown Rochester. Walking several blocks is an inevitable trait of center city life. Rochester's downtown needs more street activity, a universal trait of successful downtowns. People must be encouraged to park once and walk to their destination. Future downtown residents must enjoy walking from home to their destination. The panel believes that as safety concerns are alleviated, street-level retail returns, and more residents arrive, Rochesterians will become more and more comfortable with returning to downtown streets.

The panel has heard several references to inclement winter weather in Rochester impeding downtown's pedestrians. Rochester's winters can be harsh, but Rochester's mild summers provide some of the finest weather in the country for outdoor activity. The panel believes that if downtown provides rewarding destinations and amenities, people will bundle up and walk downtown during all seasons of the year.

Wayfinding systems need to be updated and clarified to make navigation through center city more obvious. Part of visitors' comfort level is determined by how well they feel they can get around in a strange or unfamiliar place. The general sense of comfort and security will be improved by simplifying pedestrian and vehicular wayfinding systems. As an example, improved signage for parking structures could significantly increase visitors' ability to find alternate parking sites.

Downtown Rochester has an extensive network of skyways and pedestrian bridges. Unfortunately,

the skyway system is confusing to use, removes people from the street, and is inaccessible during off-peak hours. The panel believes that the skyway system detracts from the vitality of downtown. Therefore, the panel recommends putting more people on street level by demolishing most of the skyway system. Rochester could use more covered walkways and building awnings to shield pedestrians from winter weather.

### Bus Transit

The Rochester-Genesee Regional Transit System operates 40 bus routes throughout the greater Rochester region. Most of these routes operate on a pulse system—where low-frequency buses stop at the central transfer point near the corner of Main Street and Clinton Avenue, allowing riders to transfer lines. The bus transfer point will be moved to the Renaissance Square site in the coming years. The current system causes substantial problems for the downtown core.

The mass discharge of patrons presents both a hardship and an opportunity for the city. Ample foot traffic could create opportunities for transit riders to patronize downtown retail establishments. At the same time, the sheer number of people can overwhelm a small space. The panel endorses the idea of a new transfer station at Renaissance Square. However, the panel feels that the transfer station should not be placed underground, as early plans have called for. Instead, the transfer point should be located at grade to allow patrons to engage the street.

Because of synchronized schedules, many buses arrive and depart at the same time from the transfer point. This system creates a parade of noisy, distracting buses moving and waiting along Main Street. The panel suggests altering the routing of buses to use other thoroughfares, reducing the number of buses that travel along Main Street. The panel also suggests exploring altering the bus system schedule to lessen the convergence of buses at the same location at the same time.

Buses waiting for transfer passengers create a noisy eyesore along important streets targeted for redevelopment. These buses will be moved to side streets after Renaissance Square is complete, which will largely alleviate the situation. In the



Because the Skyway system removes people from the street, the panel recommends it be largely dismantled.



A wall of buses lines Main Street several times during the day.

meantime, the panel suggests a phased replacement of the old diesel buses with clean-burning and quieter compressed natural gas buses.

### Festivals and Decoration

The panel believes that festivals should not be relegated to the few months of nice weather. Festivals large and small should be brought to the heart of downtown. The plaza at Main Street and Clinton Avenue should be programmed as often as

possible. The rich resource of the Eastman School of Music should be tapped. The Rochester Public Market should have a downtown satellite location once a week. Noontime street activity will bring the office workers to the street. The street needs to be supplemented with food and other vendors to create a festive atmosphere.

Holiday festivities and programming are equally important. Many Rochesterians expressed fond memories of being downtown for the holidays. The city and businesses should join together to have a

winter/holiday festival. In the old days of downtown retail, the purpose of such a festival was to get people into the stores. Now the purpose is to get people into the downtown—eventually the purpose will be to get the people into the stores again. Holiday decorations extend beyond the winter holidays. Programming and decorations for other national holidays can create a festive, vibrant feel in downtown all year long.

# Conclusion

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**P**eople and activity are the key to re-creating downtown Rochester. Whether to visit or live, people are coming to downtown Rochester because of what is already there—a strong base of entertainment, cultural, and educational offerings and impressive historic architecture. They are looking for excitement, activity, and people to interact with. The panel hopes the city can build on its already strong base to create additional attractive places and neighborhoods for people to live in.

The bold moves needed to re-create downtown Rochester require a coordinated effort from the public and private sectors. The public and the private sectors must work together to execute important action plan items to achieve the community's vision for downtown Rochester. The entire community must work together to execute important action plan items to achieve the community's vision for downtown. Bold does not mean foolish, nor does it mean achieving consensus. Leaders in the community must listen to a diverse set of stakeholders and formulate action items that are in the best interest of the community. Routine moves are also important. The day-to-day nuts and bolts of effective, responsive city management is what will bring everything together. The panel hopes that the formation of a public/private redevelopment agency and a full-service BID will help solidify leadership in Rochester.

In March 2005, the Brookings Institution released a study titled "Turning around Downtown: Twelve

Steps to Revitalization." One of the key points that Brookings made was that people have been reattracted to urban core areas in growing numbers because those areas retain something that their suburban counterparts can never have—"walkable urbanity." The study makes the point that people will walk the streets if and because "they have an interesting and safe streetscape and people to watch along the way—a mix of sights and sounds that can make a pedestrian forget that he is unintentionally getting enjoyable exercise. Depending on the time of day, the day of the week, or the season of the year, the experience of walking downtown will be entirely different, even if you are traveling along a well-trod path." The study goes on to point out that this activity and variety beget even more activity and variety—an upward spiral that is very much self-perpetuating.

The panel believes that the key to downtown redevelopment is to set the upward spiral in motion. People and business want a unique, cultural destination to call their own. The foundation is already in place. The opportunities are there. Public and private leadership are willing and capable of taking on the challenge. The panel has laid out a vision and pointed the path to success. Now is the time for local leadership to commit to the vision and achieve the goal of re-creating downtown Rochester.

## About the Panel

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### Alex J. Rose

*Panel Chair  
El Segundo, California*

Alex J. Rose serves as director of development for Continental Development Corporation in El Segundo, California. He is responsible for managing all development and construction activities for the suburban office/research and development (R&D) park developer, whose holdings cover 3.5 million square feet in Southern California's South Bay market and in the city of San Francisco. Rose oversees acquisitions and new project development; planning and execution of all tenant improvement, core and shell renovation, and new construction work; major facilities maintenance and upgrades; project budgeting and cost controls; internal project management; and architect, engineer, and contractor management.

Over the past nine years, Rose has overseen the development and acquisition of nearly 1 million square feet of Class A office space, as well as the physical transformation of more than 1 million square feet of single-tenant R&D facilities into multitenant office space, restaurants, retail, and entertainment uses. Before assuming the development and construction responsibilities, Rose served as director of property management. He also has extensive experience in title insurance and is a licensed California attorney, with experience in general civil and bankruptcy litigation practices.

Rose received his MBA from the University of Southern California (USC), his JD from Southwestern University School of Law, and his BA in political science from UCLA. He is a trustee of the Urban Land Institute, chair of ULI's Commercial and Retail Development Council, a vice chair of ULI's national Program and District Council Committees, and a member of ULI's Los Angeles District Council Executive Committee. Rose has

chaired and served on numerous ULI Advisory Services panel assignments focusing on downtown and transit corridor redevelopment and revitalization and office development issues and has participated in several ULI office sector workshops.

Rose has been a member of numerous other community, industry, legal, UCLA, and USC affiliated groups, including the Los Angeles Conservancy; Leadership Manhattan Beach; and the Steering Committee of New Schools Better Neighborhoods, a broad-based private and public citizen's advisory board that is researching and developing standards and methodologies for the development of more than 100 new community-asset public schools in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

### Ray Brown

*Memphis, Tennessee*

Ray Brown offers architectural and urban design services as a consultant to Memphis, Tennessee, architectural firms for individual projects. As needed, he provides creativity, skills, experience, knowledge, and ideas in fields of specific expertise, such as architectural and urban design, project direction, and project development. He seeks projects that have the potential to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged residents by transforming at-risk urban neighborhoods into more livable communities.

Brown directed the design and construction of AutoZone Park in Memphis, America's finest minor league baseball park, and a crown jewel in Memphis's downtown renaissance. As vice president for development of the Memphis Center City Commission, Brown set the framework for the downtown urban design plan, facilitated new development, recruited new businesses, and administered design standards.

For 26 years, Raymond Brown Architect specialized in providing municipal and private clients with architectural and urban design projects, focused on downtown redevelopment and planning. Brown taught architectural design at the University of Cincinnati and was downtown planner for the city of Dayton, Ohio.

He is a member of the Memphis Habitat for Humanity “Green Hat” construction committee. Brown holds a BS in architecture from the University of Cincinnati.

### Allen K. Folks

*Sacramento, California*

Allen K. Folks, a licensed landscape architect and planner, directs the design studio at EDAW, Inc., in San Francisco. He has prepared master plans and directed the implementation of a wide range of projects in the western United States and internationally. His waterfront planning experience includes large mixed-use projects in several Bay Area cities and the resolution of issues related to the California Environmental Quality Act. Folks also was very active in the design and preparation of several key waterfront military base reuse plans, including those for Mare Island Naval Shipyard and Alameda Naval Air Station.

Folks’ current responsibilities include the preparation of specific plans for new developments in the cities of Napa and Half Moon Bay, California; a specific plan that addresses urban infill in the city of Walnut Creek, California; design of Microsoft’s new South Campus in the city of Mount View, California; and the master plan for a new development in Cairo, Egypt.

### Donna Lewis

*Trenton, New Jersey*

Donna Lewis is the planning director for Mercer County, New Jersey’s capital county. She has served Mercer County for 16 years. The Planning Division is responsible for growth management and redevelopment, open space and farmland preservation, and transportation planning. Mercer County is a leader in applying cutting-edge trans-

portation concepts, most notably through the creation of a Transportation Development District and through development of an Access Management Plan. A strong redevelopment effort is focused both on the city of Trenton and the first-generation suburbs.

Lewis serves on the Transportation Research Board Access Management Committee, the Central Jersey Transportation Forum Steering Committee, and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission.

Lewis holds bachelor’s degrees in political science and English from the College of New Jersey and a master’s of city and regional planning from Rutgers University. She is a New Jersey–licensed Professional Planner and a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners. She is an adjunct professor at the College of New Jersey.

### Christopher B. LoPiano

*Washington, D.C.*

Christopher LoPiano is senior vice president, community development banking, for the Bank of America Community Development Corporation (CDC) Mid-Atlantic Region. In this capacity, he is responsible for Bank of America CDC development efforts in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. He also manages the Bank of America CDC office in Washington, D.C.

Before joining Bank of America in January 1994, LoPiano served as deputy director of the Marshall Heights Community Development Corporation, a nationally recognized community development corporation in Washington, D.C., that focuses primarily on rental and for-sale affordable housing and retail and industrial development.

LoPiano serves on the District of Columbia Local Advisory Committee of LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation). He serves on the board and is past president of the Neighborhood Design Center, based in Baltimore. Working with design professionals who donate their time, this group provides free design services to neighborhood and nonprofit organizations in Maryland.

## Zane Segal

*Houston, Texas*

Zane Segal is a project director, marketing consultant, and real estate broker with Zane Segal Projects, Inc. Specializing in mixed-use, residential, retail, historic, hospitality, urban, and resort properties, Segal has 27 years of experience in real estate venture management, development, construction, brokerage, and marketing on a range of property types, including land, lofts, townhomes, custom homes, low- and mid-rise condominiums, hotels, retail centers, office buildings, subdivisions, and sports facilities, as well as mixed-use projects incorporating several property types.

He received a BS from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and an MFA from the University of Southern California, and has studied graduate-level architecture at the University of Houston.

Segal is vice chair for advisory services of the Urban Land Institute's Houston District Council, is previous vice chair for membership, has served on six ULI Advisory Services panels across the country, and has chaired ULI Houston's first two Technical Advisory Program panels. He is a member of a city of Houston Planning Commission committee studying urbanization of the suburbs, is on an advisory committee overseeing a regional visioning project, and serves on the boards of the Citizens Environmental Coalition and Blueprint Houston.

Previous community activities include becoming the first president of the Houston Association for Film & Television, founding executive director of the Museum District Business Alliance, member of the Regional Planning Committee of the Greater Houston Partnership, presenter on urban design to Imagine Houston, and president of Sparacino Company Dancers.

Segal has often spoken, written for publication, and been quoted by the media concerning real estate, development, urban design, and the arts. He is an avid traveler, photographer, writer, and runner.

## Edward Shriver, Jr., AIA

*Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

Ed Shriver has been planning and managing architectural and strategic planning projects for corporate, developer, and institutional clients throughout the United States for more than 25 years. He believes planning is an effort to see opportunities in problems, to collect the facts and understand the issues facing an organization, in order to create not just solutions but value.

Shriver's work has focused on developing and implementing corporate and development strategies through architecture and urban design. Recent development projects include retail and urban mixed-use developments such as Kravco's Fifth and Forbes project and Continental Real Estates North Shore District, both in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Millcraft Industries Crossroads project in downtown Washington, Pennsylvania, all of which involved integrating retail, entertainment, and public markets/public spaces with housing or office functions or both. His corporate work includes strategic facilities planning for both corporate offices and critical infrastructure facilities such as distribution centers and data centers. His principal areas of interest are in strategic facilities planning and retail-oriented mixed-use developments.

Shriver has worked for major corporate and development clients such as May Department Stores Company, Continental Real Estate, Millcraft Industries, Kravco Company, Integra/National City Bank, IBM Transarc Labs, and Weirton Steel Corporation. He has also worked for numerous institutional clients such as Carnegie-Mellon University, the University of Pittsburgh, and the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission.

Shriver received his BA in architecture from Carnegie-Mellon University.

## David C. Slater

*Reston, Virginia*

David C. Slater has been with Hammer, Siler, George Associates since 1972. He has been responsible for a range of economic development,

development management, housing program, and real estate market studies. Prior to 1972 he worked for the Knoxville, Tennessee; Atlanta, Georgia; and Baltimore, Maryland metropolitan planning agencies as well as the American Planning Association. He taught real estate economics at the University of Virginia Graduate School from 1981 to 2002.

Slater has presented papers at more than 30 conferences of the American Planning Association, National Association of Installation Developers, American Society for Public Administration, Maryland Association of Counties, and Interna-

tional Economic Development Council. He is the author of the “green book” on management of local planning published by the International City/County Management Association.

Slater holds a master’s of regional planning degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a BS in city planning from Michigan State University, and an AS in pre-engineering from St. Clair County (Michigan) Community College.