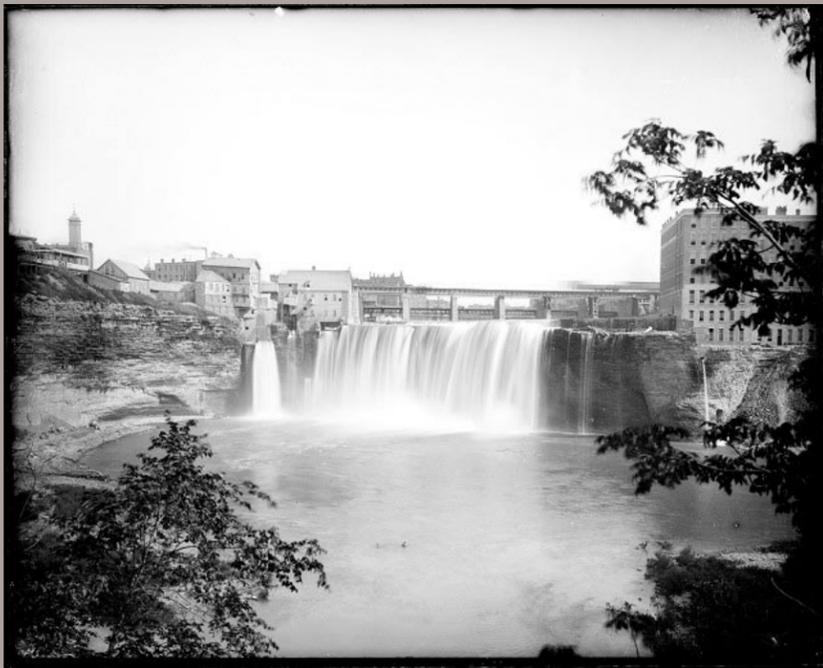Erie Canal.
Source: Rochester Public Library Local History Division

Historic High Falls.
Source: Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center

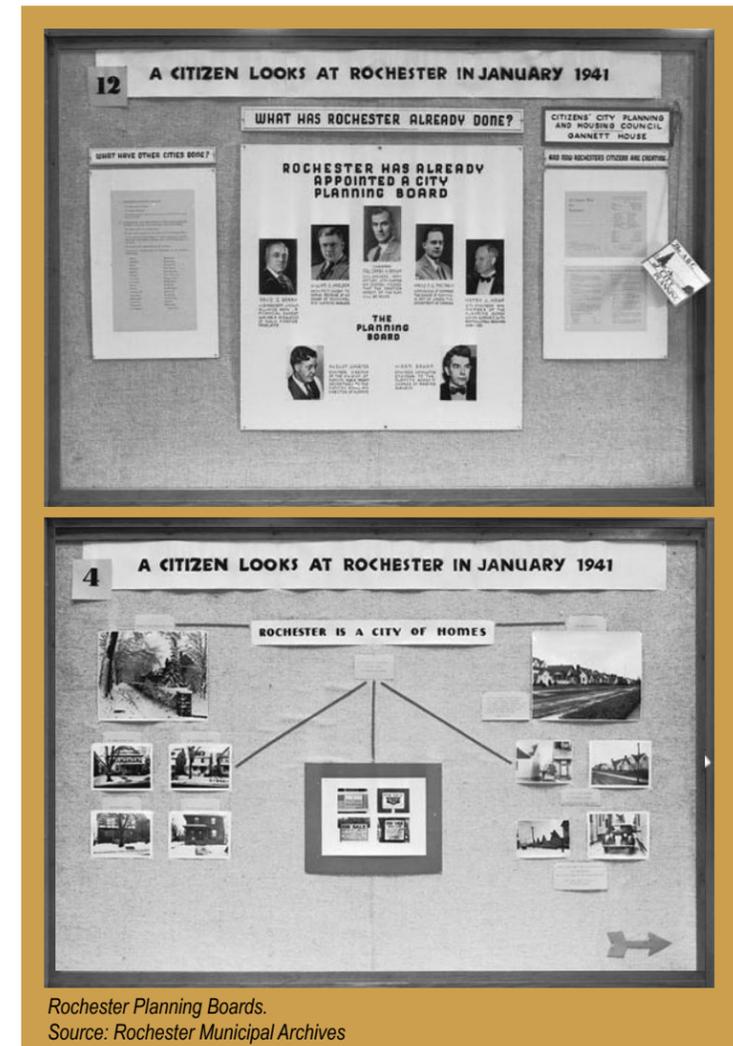Main Street, 1910.
Source: Rochester City Hall Photo Lab

Historic Main Street.
Source: Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center

Historic urban texture.
Source: Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center

LIVING IN ROCHESTER

Rochester grew from a milling town into a thriving industrial center. In that change emerged a collection of close knit communities that identified strongly with local industry and their proximity to unique features such as the Genesee River, Lake Ontario and the Erie Canal. During the mid-20th Century, Rochester reached its peak population of almost 330,000 people. Although population loss primarily through "white flight" and increasing poverty rates started to manifest themselves in the 1940s and 1950s, City leadership remained confident in Rochester and actively planned for its future.

Rochester Planning Boards.
Source: Rochester Municipal Archives

Urban renewal ushered in a new era of change and confidence resulting in an aggressive 1964 Master Plan that sought to solidify Rochester's population and economic base. Although some projects moved forward after that plan, Rochester followed national trends and experienced significant disinvestment and population loss. Today, the historic pattern of Rochester's growth and development is still visible and valued despite the larger negative trends impacting the City.

Rochester Neighborhoods
1   Charlotte
2   Maplewood
3   Lyell-Otis
4   Edgerton
5   U.N.I.T.
6   P.O.D.
7   J.O.S.A.N.A.
8   Brown Square
9   Susan B. Anthony
10 B.E.S.T.
11 19th Ward
12 Mayor's Heights
13 Cornhill
14 Genesee-Jefferson
15 Plymouth-Exchange
16 14621
17 Northland-Lyceum
18 Upper Falls
19 North Marketview Heights
20 South Marketview Heights
21 Homestead Heights
22 Beechwood
23 Culver-Winton
24 Browncroft
25 Atlantic-University
26 East Ave
27 Park Ave
28 Pearl-Meigs-Monroe
29 South Wedge
30 Ellwanger-Barry
31 Swillburg
32 Upper Monroe
33 Cobbs Hill
34 Highland
35 Strong
36 Central Business District

Designated District

Figure 25. Preservation Districts. Source: City of Rochester

Homes adjacent to the City's historic industrial structures.

Designated Preservation District at South and Gregory in the South Wedge.

To recognize and further imprint the historic character of the City upon future generations, a number of Preservation Districts have been established. These are focused within and around downtown including Grove Street, Brown's Race at High Falls, Susan B. Anthony and Corn Hill. In addition, a small preservation district has been established at South and Gregory in the South Wedge. The largest districts encompass East Avenue from the inner loop to N. Winton Road and the entire north edge of Highland Park – the Mount Hope District. Beach Avenue along the lakefront in Charlotte is also a designated Preservation District within the City.

Figure 26. Major Streets and Rail Corridors. Source: Observation

One of the most unique aspects of Rochester's physical environment is grounded in its radial street network. Since Rochester began as a milling and trading center, all major transportation routes and development radiated from the center. Rochester's expansion only further reinforced the routes of old township roads and county highways that connected downtown to the hinterland. The result is a street pattern that heavily emphasizes a handful of major roads, most of which have unique vistas of downtown and other amenities or institutions.

Superimposed on this street network are vestiges of previous eras of development from the Erie Canal through to today's transportation infrastructure. Rail corridors, active and inactive, as well as the introduction of I-490 and the inner loop created additional physical boundaries within the City.
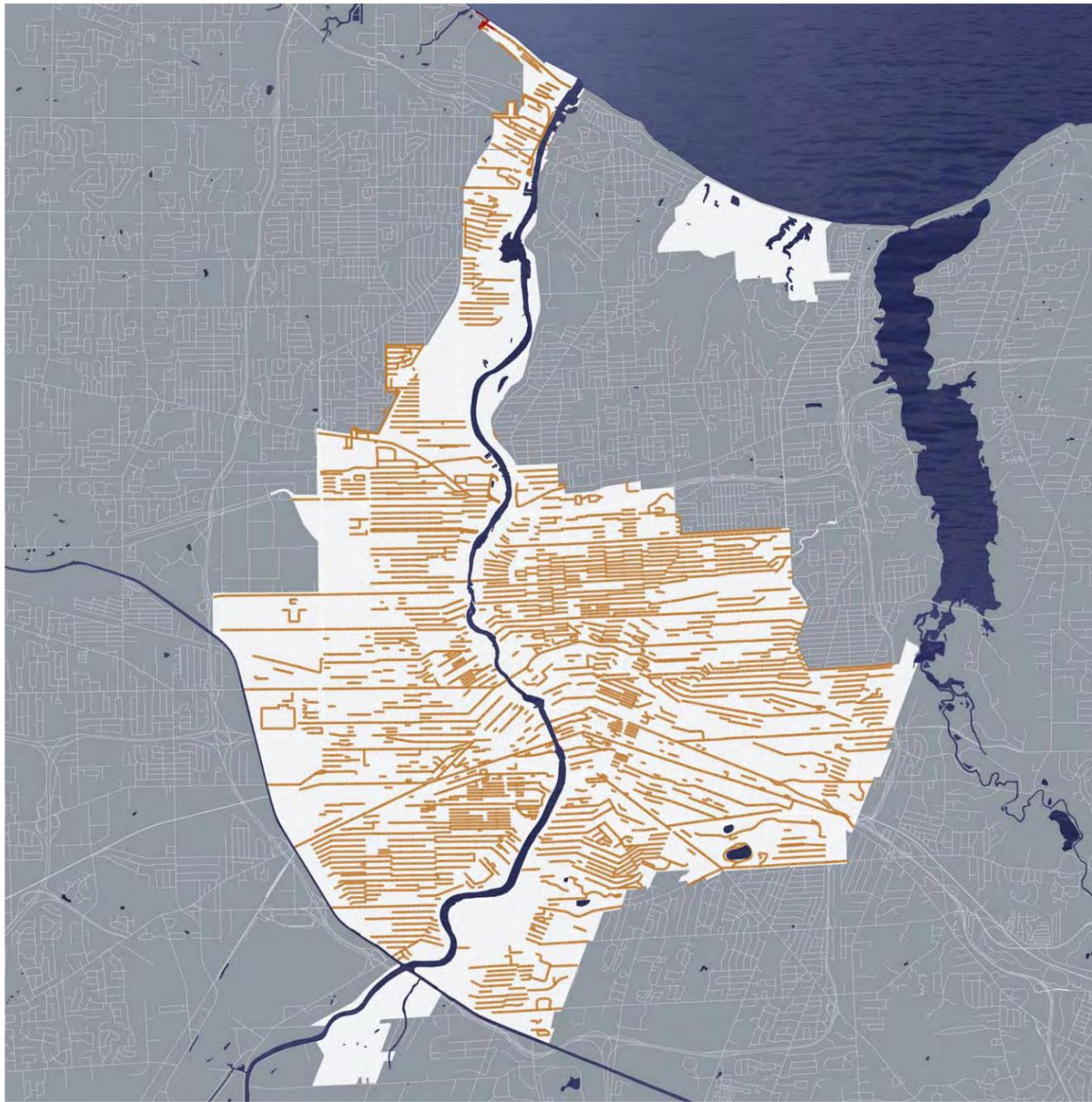
Figure 27a. East-West Street Network. Source: Observation

Figure 27b. North-South Street Network. Source: Observation

The overall result is a relatively disconnected city fabric compared to cities that developed within a grid or more rationalized radial street pattern. In reviewing separately the east-west and north-south streets, the importance of the City's main radial streets becomes readily apparent. Connectivity from one neighborhood to another, or from different neighborhoods to downtown, is squarely focused upon a limited number of major streets. Clinton Avenue, Chili Avenue, Lyell Avenue, Main Street, East Avenue, Monroe Avenue, Mt. Hope Avenue, and Lake Avenue, to name a few, represent the locations where the major perceptions and experiences about the City are formed by visitors and commuters. These corridors are the gateways to the City's neighborhoods.
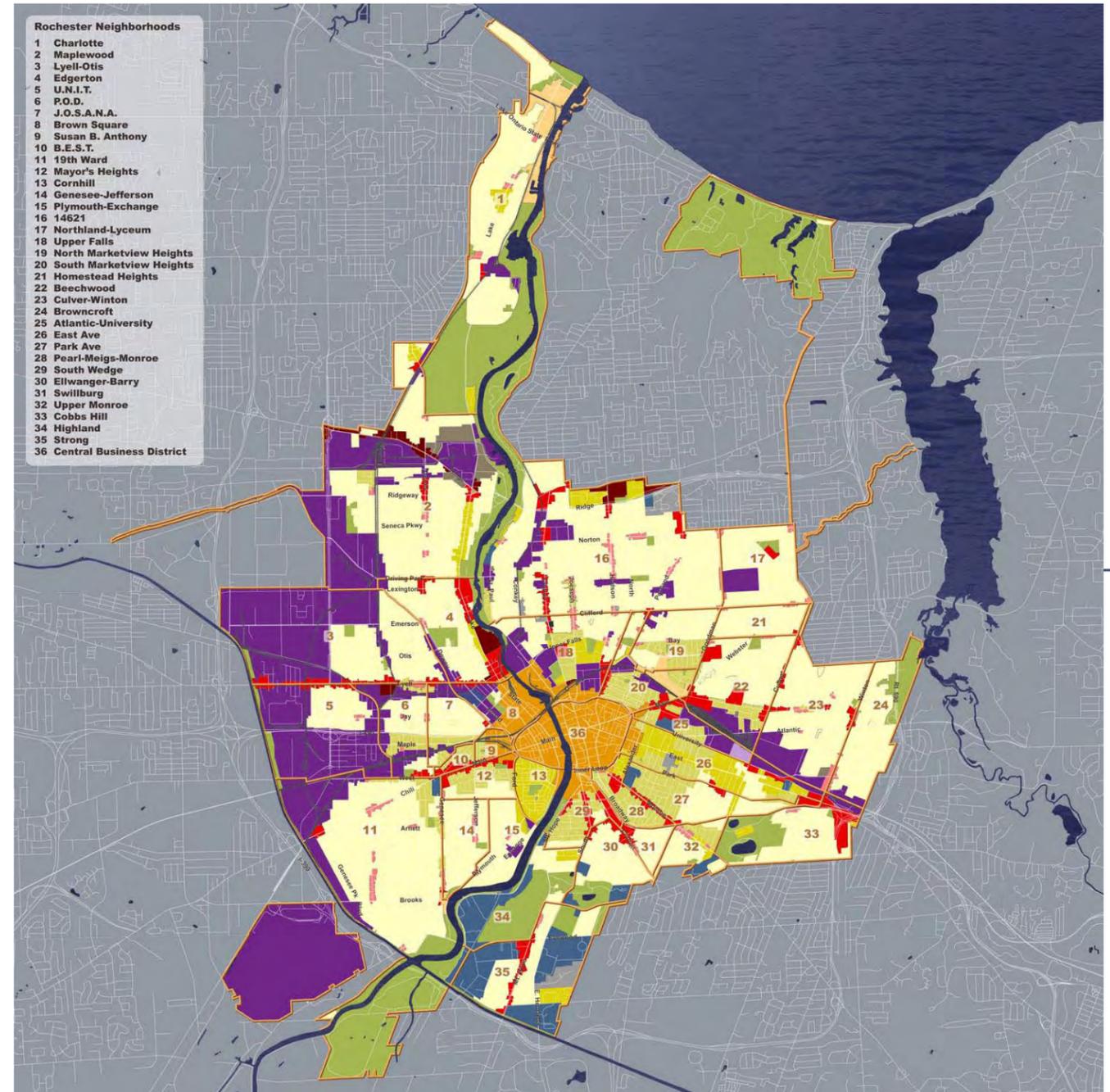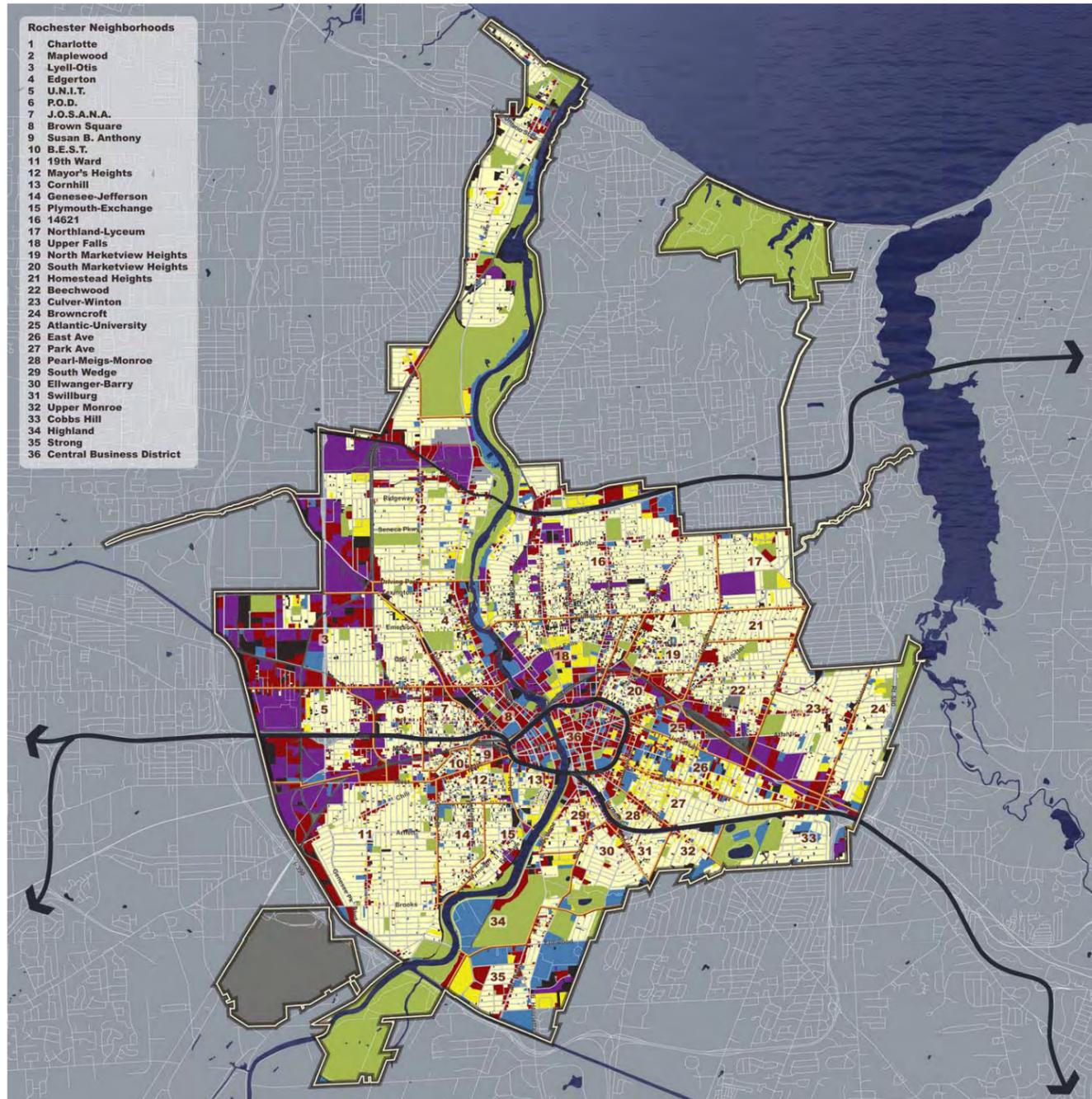
Figure 28a. Land Use. Source: City of Rochester

Figure 28b. Zoning. Source: City of Rochester

Legend:
- Residential: low/medium density
- Residential: high density
- Commercial / Office
- Industrial
- Public / Semi-Public Facilities
- Parks & Cemeteries
- Major Transportation
- Vacant Land

Land Use

Unlike many cities, Rochester's existing land use and zoning maps are closely aligned. This is due to the foresight of City leadership that updated the City's zoning code and use designations.

While much of the City is comprised of residential uses, strong concentrations of industrial activity are found along the City's western edge, along Ridge Road (Kodak) and stretching across town along the rail corridors. Similarly, commercial concentrations exist along the City's main streets extending from the inner loop. An issue that has emerged from both of these uses is the increasing vacancy impacting surrounding neighborhoods. Industrial properties as well as many spurs of formerly active rail lines

Legend

- Center City District
- Brooks Landing
- Public Market Village
- Harbortown Village District
- R1: Low-Density Residential
- R-2: Medium Density Residential
- R-3: High Density Residential
- C-1: Neighborhood Center
- C-2: Community Center
- C-3: Regional Destination Center
- M-1: Industrial District
- Manufacturing-Industrial Planned Development
- Erie Canal
- Open Space
- Planned Development
- Urban Renewal District
- Transitional Parking District
- Institutional Planned Development

- Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA)

Rochester Neighborhoods

1 Charlotte
2 Maplewood
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8 Brown Square
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25 Atlantic-University
26 East Ave
27 Park Ave
28 Pearl-Meigs-Monroe
29 South Wedge
30 Ellwanger-Barry
31 Swillburg
32 Upper Monroe
33 Cobbs Hill
34 Highland
35 Strong
36 Central Business District

Figure 29. Brownfield Opportunity Areas. Source: City of Rochester

Top - Bottom: Formerly contaminated site in downtown Rochester, Vacant commercial properties - large and small scale.

sit vacant and negatively affect the value of surrounding properties. In many cases, these active and vacant industrial properties are designated brownfields, which greatly complicates the ability to transform these properties into new uses due to increases in the cost of redevelopment, legal issues, or indemnification. The City recognizes the added challenges that brownfield sites pose to reinvestment and has successfully accessed available State monies for brownfield remediation planning to establish Brownfield Opportunity Areas (BOAs). Brownfields within Rochester's designated BOAs are eligible for additional remediation funding.
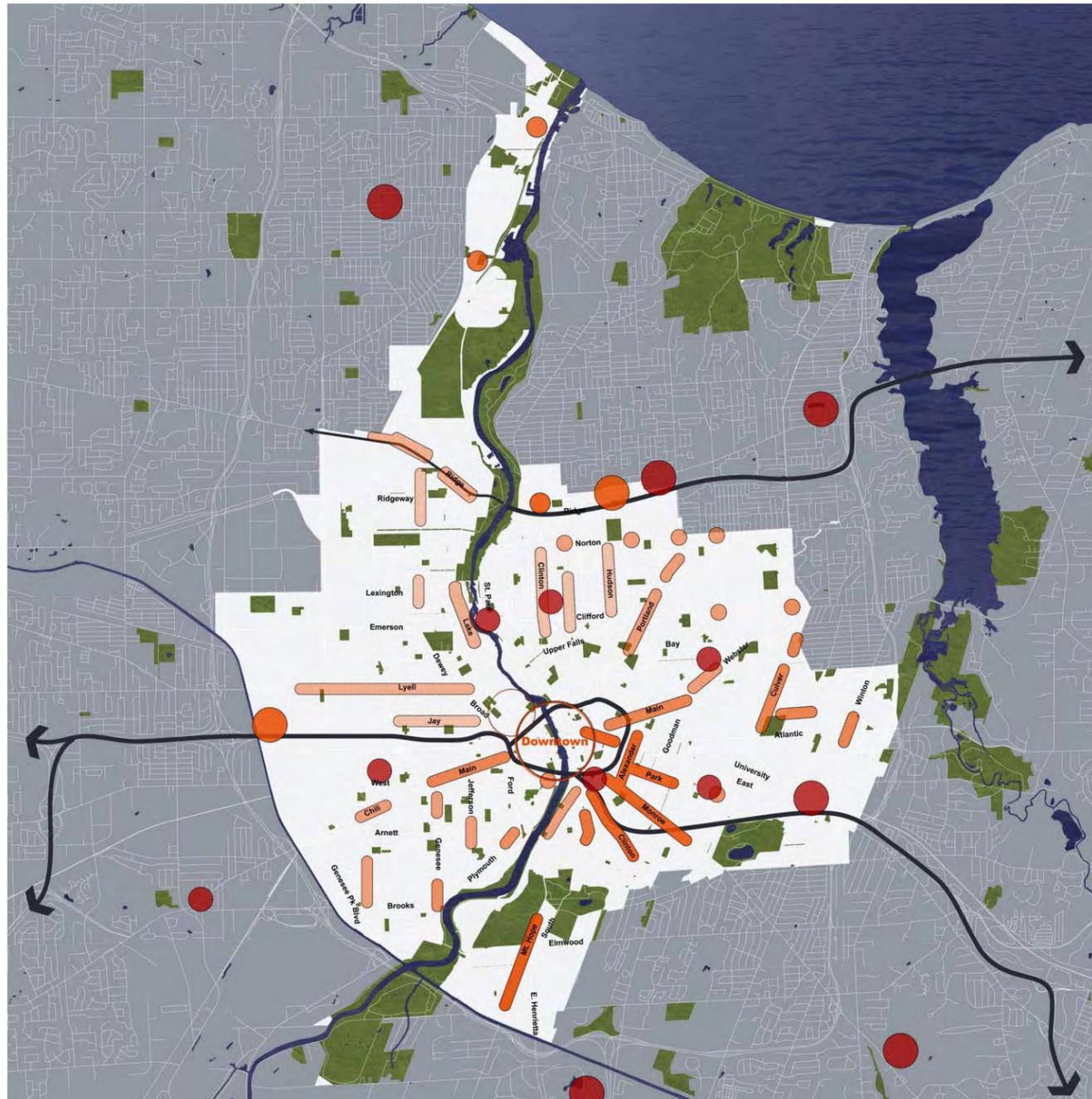
Figure 30. Primary commercial areas. Source: Observation

Figure 31. Fragmentation of residential fabric. Source: City of Rochester land use data

Commercial Uses

Concentration of commercial services

Supermarket

Similarly, the commercial streets exhibit far less activity and variety in retail than previous decades. With changing patterns of shopping and a growing number of shopping centers built in the suburbs, the City's traditional commercial streets are struggling to compete. There are now only seven supermarkets in the entire City. Traditional commercial streets like Dewey Avenue, Clinton Avenue, and Lyell Avenue

have deteriorated significantly, the result of which has been increased crime, increased vacancies and a continually eroding base of services. The impacts have also been felt beyond the corridors themselves, with a concentration of housing vacancies adjacent to many of the City's historically commercial streets. Due to their negative influence on surrounding communities, this issue has become a serious concern for neighborhood organizations. Recently, a number of "charrettes" were undertaken with assistance from the Rochester Regional Community Design Center to develop revitalization strategies for commercial streets.
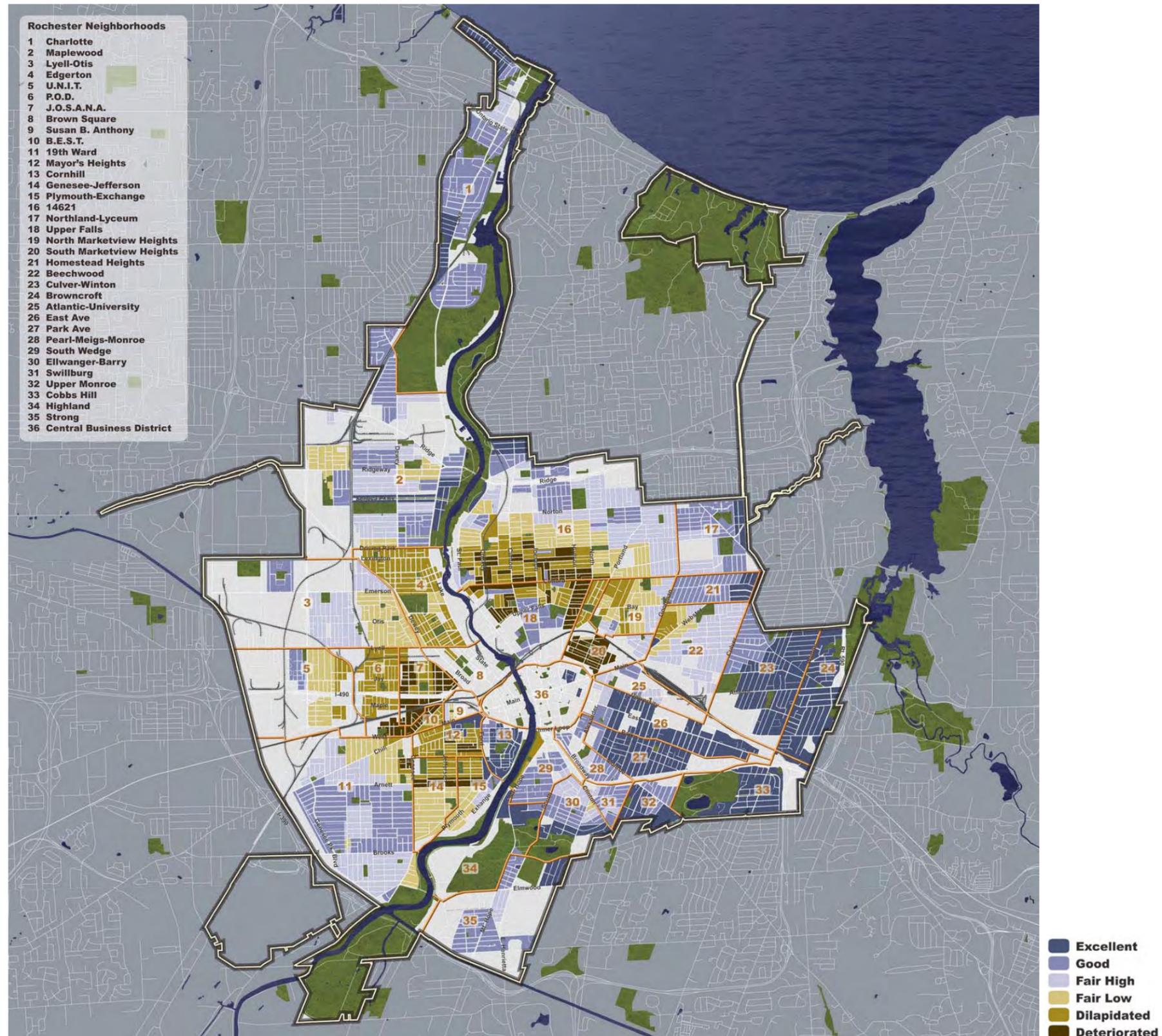
Rochester Neighborhoods

1 Charlotte
2 Maplewood
3 Lyell-Otis
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5 U.N.I.T.
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36 Central Business District

The map at the far left indicates where concentrations of existing commercial services exist based upon a physical survey. One of the healthiest areas of the City – the Southeast – also contains the strongest commercial corridors in terms of the number and variety of existing stores.

Residential Areas

The majority of land uses in Rochester are residential - 83 percent - and evenly distributed across the City. These neighborhoods appear, in many cases, as islands separated from adjoining neighborhoods by major streets, rail lines, highways, large public uses such as cemeteries and the aforementioned concentrations of active and former industrial / commercial areas. The strong divisions between neighborhoods create considerable challenges in terms of extending a potential market from one neighborhood to another. In other cities that experience this issue a significant amount of public investment is usually required to begin to dissolve some of the boundaries in the form of new economic and commercial development, streetscape, or open spaces.

The residential fabric of the City varies greatly in terms of its physical appearance and image. Every block in the City was surveyed to determine a general condition rating. The condition survey does not account for the specific quality of each property, but rather assigns a qualitative value for each block based upon the number of vacancies; the general condition of the majority of each block's homes taking into account minor physical issues such as peeling paint and major problems such as crumbling foundations or settling; and the quality of the streetscape including the condition of sidewalks and street trees. What was found was a concentration of "deteriorated" blocks both north of downtown in Upper Falls, South Marketview Heights and 14621 and west along I-490 in J.O.S.A.N.A., B.E.S.T. and Susan B. Anthony. Although "deteriorated" and "dilapidated" blocks characterized much of these areas, there were also blocks in close proximity in "fair" or even "good" condition. The best conditions were found in the East Avenue, Park Avenue, Browncroft, Cobbs Hill, Charlotte, Corn Hill, Upper Monroe, and Culver-Winton neighborhoods.
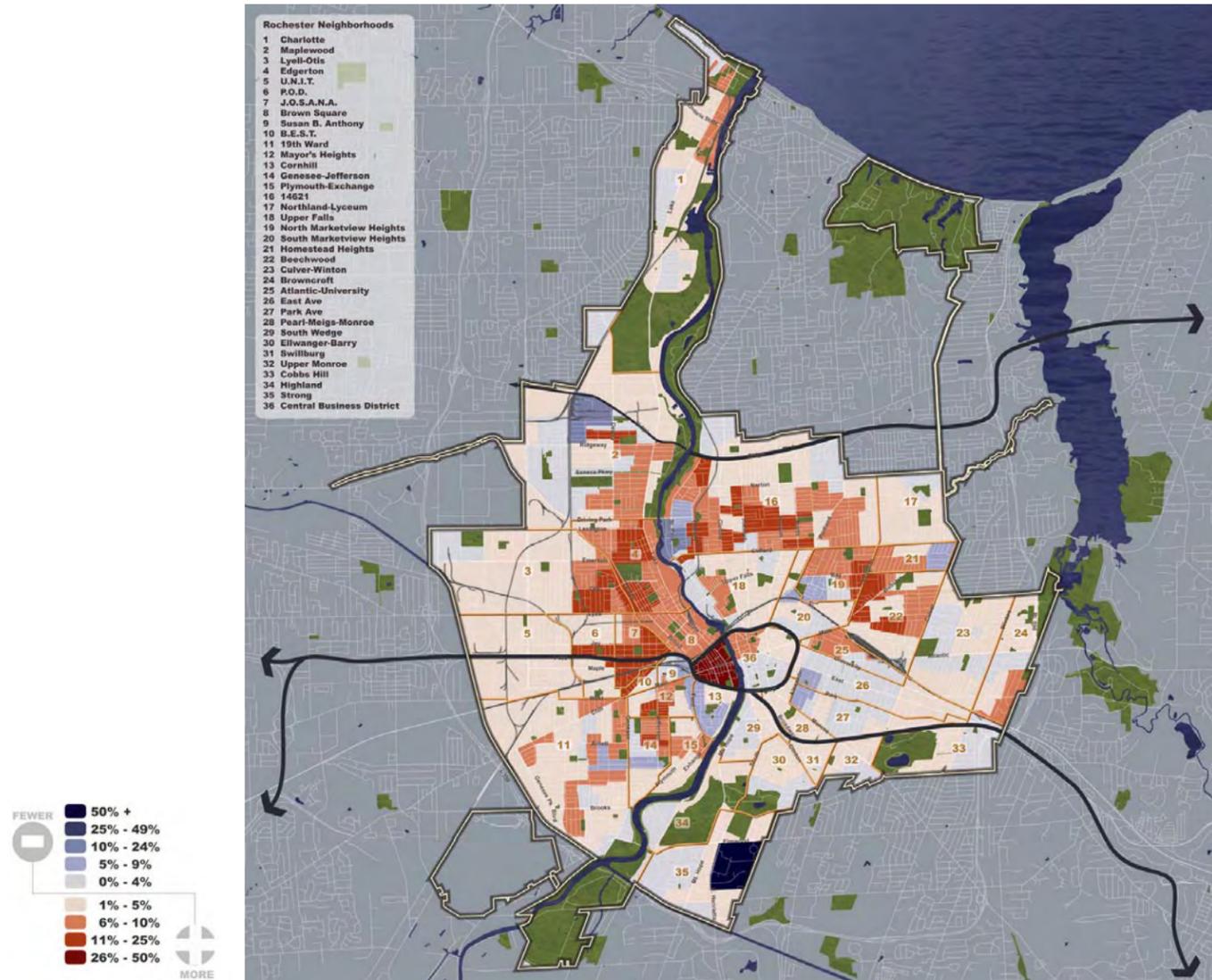
Legend:
- Excellent
- Good
- Fair High
- Fair Low
- Dilapidated
- Deteriorated

Figure 32. Qualitative Block Condition. Source: Observation

Figure 33. Percent Change in Housing Units Vacant, 1990-2000. Source: U.S. Census, 1990 and 2000

Figure 34. Percent of Housing Units Vacant, 2000. Source: U.S. Census, 2000

Vacancy

Almost every neighborhood is faced with residential vacancies, which have been rising overall in the City. In the 1990s, the vacancy rate in Rochester surged from 7.5 percent to 10.8 percent. This amounted to 3,243 new vacant units. Portions of Upper Falls, Edgerton and Lyell-Otis saw the biggest increases in vacancy at 22 percent, 20 percent and 19 percent respectively. Conversely, the vacancy rates in Corn Hill, portions of Maplewood and the western most section of 14621 along the River all decreased in the 90s. The highest percentage change in the number of housing units vacant is located in the Strong neighborhood due to the closing of a psychiatric facility.

The result is an increasingly polarized City in terms of the physical health of neighborhoods. Charlotte, Strong, Cobbs Hill, Browncroft and Northland-Lyceum remain stable with vacancy rates below three percent in 2000 according to the Census. On the other hand, Beechwood, 14621, Brown Square, Edgerton and J.O.S.A.N.A. have vacancy rates between 20 percent and 30 percent.
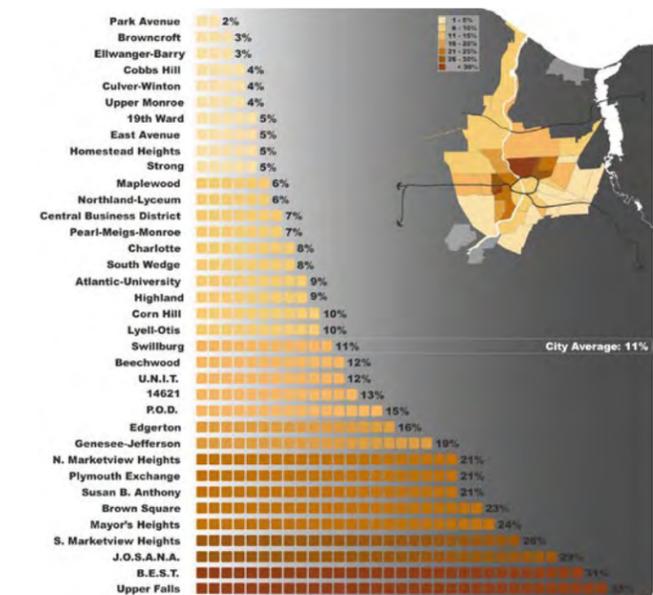
Multiple forms of vacancy.

Rochester Neighborhoods

1 Charlotte
2 Maplewood
3 Lyell-Otis
4 Edgerton
5 U.N.I.T.
6 P.O.D.
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31 Swillburg
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34 Highland
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36 Central Business District

Vacant Land
Vacant Building

Figure 35. Vacancy by Parcel, 2006. Source: City of Rochester

Figure 36. Percent of Parcels Vacant by Neighborhood, 2006.
Source: City of Rochester

City GIS data was used both to map 2006 vacancy by parcel and to aggregate vacancy by neighborhood. The map of vacancy by parcel shows a scattered pattern of vacant buildings and land, with concentrations of vacancy existing in the northern portion of Upper Falls and southern portion of 14621 as well as in the Edgerton, J.O.S.A.N.A., Mayor's Heights, Genesee-Jefferson, and Plymouth Exchange neighborhoods.

The total vacancy calculated for each neighborhood includes all parcels of vacant land plus all parcels that host a vacant building. The diagram at the far right ranks neighborhoods on a percent of total parcels vacant. (An analysis of vacancy by total acreage is presented on page 57 of this Study.) The City average for percent of parcels vacant is 11 percent, represented by the Swillburg neighborhood. The lowest rate of vacancy by parcels was found in Park Avenue, Browncroft, and Ellwanger-Barry.

J.O.S.A.N.A., South Marketview Heights, B.E.S.T. and Upper Falls have the highest vacancy rates in terms of percentage of parcels vacant, with between one quarter and one third of all parcels occupied by vacant land or a vacant building. Worth noting, however, is the fact that despite Upper Falls' relatively large size, a substantial portion of the neighborhood is composed of large parcels, which are, for the most part, not vacant. Therefore, the two neighborhoods with the highest percentage of parcels vacant, B.E.S.T. and Upper Falls, both have relatively few parcels, which skews their statistics slightly higher than reality. Nonetheless, the high numbers of small and scattered vacancies throughout the City bring significant challenges in terms of neighborhood revitalization efforts, with few opportunities to amass large numbers of vacant properties that, if developed, could bring about a visible and significant change.

Public Ownership

In response to growing vacancies and deteriorating properties, the City has taken ownership of a lot of properties for multiple purposes. In sum, the City owns 3,376 parcels, or 869 acres, not including public uses in perpetuity such as schools, parks and libraries. In addition to City-owned land, the Rochester Housing Authority owns 388 parcels, or 127.9 acres.

The City contains 66,638 parcels and 16,458 acres, not including the airport, Genesee Valley Park, streets, and water bodies. RHA owns less than one percent (.005) of the total parcels and less than one percent of the land (.007). The City owns (in residential, commercial, and vacant land only) five percent of the total parcels and 5.3 percent of the total acreage. How the City maintains and subsequently makes this land available for different uses will have a large impact on the future of many neighborhoods.

Rochester Neighborhoods
1 Charlotte
2 Maplewood
3 Lyell-Otis
4 Edgerton
5 U.N.I.T.
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25 Atlantic-University
26 East Ave
27 Park Ave
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29 South Wedge
30 Ellwanger-Barry
31 Swillburg
32 Upper Monroe
33 Cobbs Hill
34 Highland
35 Strong
36 Central Business District

City-Owned Land
RHA-Owned Land

Figure 37. City and RHA Ownership. Source: City of Rochester

Rochester Neighborhoods

1 Charlotte
2 Maplewood
3 Lyell-Otis
4 Edgerton
5 U.N.I.T.
6 P.O.D.
7 J.O.S.A.N.A.
8 Brown Square
9 Susan B. Anthony
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36 Central Business District

Minor Violation(s)

Major / Structural Violation(s)

Figure 38. Code Violations, 2006. Source: City of Rochester

Code Violations

One of the major quality of life concerns for many neighborhoods is the number and distribution of code violations. Through the City's NET program, code enforcement data for a selection of specific violation types was collected for 2006. The map of 2006 code violations indicates the location of properties cited with one or more "minor" violations as well as at least one "major" or "structural" violation.

For the purpose of this Study, "minor" violations include the following citation categories:

o   Nuisance;
o   Trash and Debris;
o   Deteriorated Paint (a new category established in July 2006 in response to the Lead Ordinance);
o   Unlicensed Vehicle; and
o   Tall Grass and Weeds.

The City of Rochester's NET Bureau aided in the definition of "major" or "structural" violations. Properties with a "major" or "structural" violation include:

o   those with 10 or more "serious" citations, which suggest structural deficiencies that require further investigation. "Serious" citations might include falling porches or slight leaning, among other observable issues; and
o   those with at least one "hazardous or unsafe conditions" citation, which often prompts follow up by the City regarding potential demolition of the dangerous structure.

Almost every neighborhood is faced with code violation issues. Infractions that result in "minor" citations impact the quality of life as well as the perceptions and values of other properties located in close proximity. "Major" or "structural" violations threaten both an area's image and morale as well as public safety, property values, and the ability of nearby property owners to obtain homeowner insurance. The greatest concentrations of both types of violations are found in 14621, Beechwood, Edgerton, J.O.S.A.N.A., P.O.D., U.N.I.T., Genesee-Jefferson and Plymouth Exchange. While not as extreme in terms of numbers of violations, the majority of blocks in both Maplewood and Charlotte contain at least one violation. The southeast exhibits the fewest numbers of violations with only the Pearl-Meigs-Monroe neighborhood containing a real concentration of violations centered mostly around Monroe Avenue.

Of the 7,142 "minor" violations city-wide in 2006, over a third were "tall grass and weeds" citations (38 percent). The majority of properties - 77 percent - had only one violation. The distribution of violations by type reflects the overall pattern of all infractions with a concentration in neighborhoods to the north and west of the downtown. This is particularly true of "deteriorated paint," "nuisance," and "trash and debris." "Tall grass and weeds" and "unlicensed vehicles" were the primary violations cited in the southeast and northwest neighborhoods. In 2006, there were 1,612 "major" or "structural" violations city-wide the distribution of which mirrors the concentrations of minor violations.

Crime

Crime is a factor that impacts all City neighborhoods. Similar to national trends, the violent crime rate in the City dropped in the late 90s only to increase throughout the past five years. What has remained constant is that the City outpaces the County in violent crime rates. From 2000-2005, there were 14,176 violent crimes recorded in Monroe County. Of those crimes, 11,057, or 78 percent, occurred within Rochester. Property crime data indicates a more even balance in total numbers, with Rochester experiencing 53 percent of the total in Monroe County. When accounting for the population difference, however, per capita rates are much higher in the City.

To truly understand the impact of crime, both violent and property, on the City's neighborhoods, crime data from the City was collected, geo-coded and mapped for 2006. The data, focused on only major crimes including murder, rape, burglary, arson, motor vehicle theft, robbery and aggravated assaults, was used to help generate the Neighborhood Classifications described in the Neighborhoods by the Numbers chapter of this Study.

The general pattern of crimes, most notably robberies, aggravated assaults, burglaries and motor vehicle thefts, can be traced along, or near, many of the City's commercial corridors. This fact only reinforces the importance of revitalizing these streets in concert with other initiatives including housing investment.

Other crimes follow the vacancy patterns of the City's neighborhoods. As homes are vacated and left to deteriorate, these structures become targets for illegal activity and arson. The subsequent impact is on adjacent homeowners who often have significant difficulties in obtaining homeowner insurance and on the larger community where physical blight reinforces the very activities that undermine the social stability of the neighborhood. One component of creating safe communities is to pay close attention to the physical environment that often enables criminal behavior.

To address crime, Rochester, like many cities, has established links to community organizations to coordinate crime prevention activities. Neighborhood watch can be an important means of addressing crime as well as building capacity at the grass roots level. Data from the NET Bureau identified a number of active neighborhood watch areas in Rochester. The preponderance of active neighborhood watch blocks are located in Maplewood, the 19th Ward, Plymouth Exchange and South Wedge neighborhoods. Two areas, 14621 and Beechwood / Culver-Winton, were identified as being almost completely covered with neighborhood watch activities. It was also indicated through NET that 10 different neighborhood groups in Sector 3 are working on crime prevention strategies.

Rochester Neighborhoods

1. Charlotte
2. Maplewood
3. Lyell-Otis
4. Edgerton
5. U.N.I.T.
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31. Swillburg
32. Upper Monroe
33. Cobbs Hill
34. Highland
35. Strong
36. Central Business District

Neighborhood Watch by NET Areas
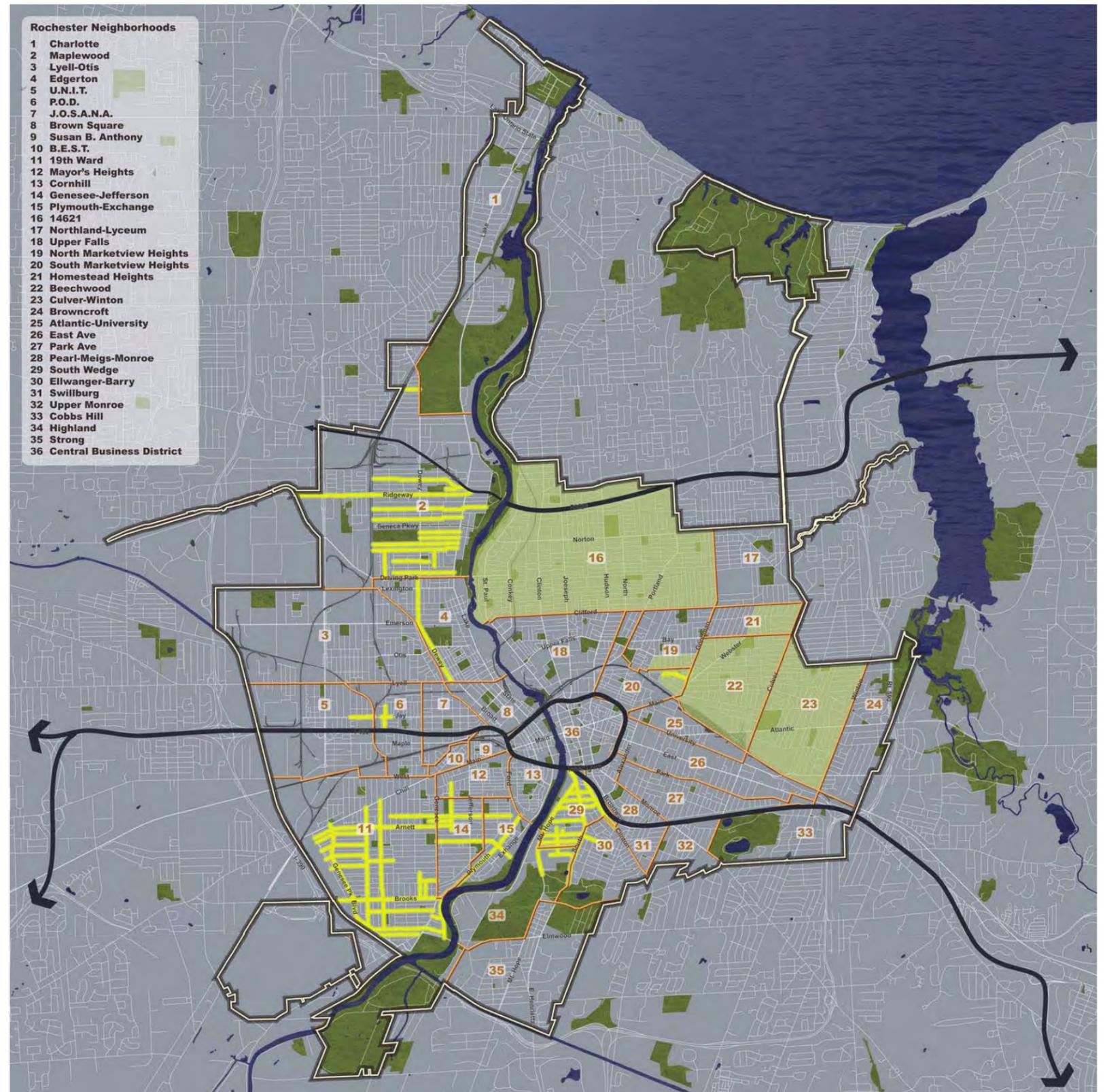- Streets Patrolled
- Neighborhood-Wide Service

Figure 39. Existing Neighborhood Watch Blocks. Source: City of Rochester