

CHAPTER 2: WHY BLACK ROCK NOW?

The previous chapter provided a number of reasons, from a planning perspective, that Historic Black Rock is important: it was built first, it has assets of regional significance, several recent developments have highlighted its growing fragility, its geographic placement makes it strategic, it has an active block club, and it is on the move. This last point — the fact that Historic Black Rock is on the move — is worth expanding upon as we full address the question, “Why Black Rock Now?”

In selecting a first community to initiate planning activities among many worthy ones in Black Rock-Riverside, it was advantageous to be able to identify and leverage existing programs and projects, first so that planning recommendations can be integrated into a wider whole, but also so that these recommendations could be fed by the progress of additional efforts, which can create the momentum needed for successful implementation. In planning, an important, real-world dynamic is always present, involving the community, funding partners, government, and it is simply this: Everyone wants to see resources committed be successfully and effectively implemented. The presence of existing programs and projects makes solving that equation successfully easier.

Among the notable existing programs or projects in or near Historic Black Rock are:

Buffalo Weed & Seed Black Rock-Riverside, through U.S. Department of Justice = \$100,000 (status: application pending) This is a U.S. Dept. of Justice grant program to fund increased law enforcement and community policing to “weed out” criminal activity, and then support community programs to “seed” community revitalization. It does its work thorough partnerships involving multiple agencies and local residents. It is coordinated through the City of Buffalo Office of Citizen Services.



Tonawanda Street Corridor Brownfields Opportunity Area Program = \$425,000 (status: grant pending) The NYS Brownfield Opportunity Areas Program, made possible by the Superfund/

REDEVELOPMENT

7 brownfield projects OK'd for state funding

Seven brownfield cleanup projects in Erie, Niagara, Chautauqua and Wyoming counties have received a state designation, bringing them more than \$1.3 million funding.

The sites, tapped as Brownfield Opportunity Areas, are among 50 statewide named in the latest round of awards.

The City of Buffalo and Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper will receive \$472,500 for the second phase of cleanup in the Buffalo River corridor. The city will also receive \$382,500 for the second phase of work in the Tonawanda Street corridor.

The City of Lackawanna will receive \$202,500 for a project in its 2nd Ward, while the Town of Tonawanda is getting \$60,480 for the first phase in a River Road project.

In Niagara County, the City of North Tonawanda will be receiving \$175,000 for the second phase of a Tonawanda Island cleanup.

Elsewhere, the City of Jamestown has been awarded \$53,093 for work on the Chadakoin riverfront, while the Village of Perry will receive \$21,159 for the first phase of a project on Washington Boulevard.

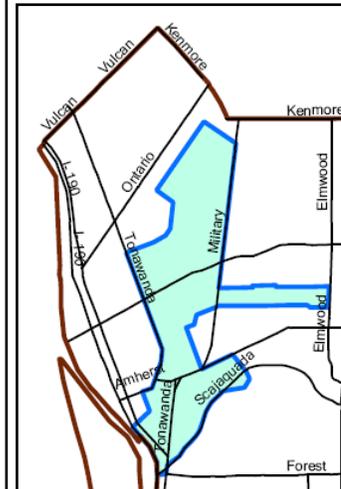


Figure 11: “7 Brownfield Projects OK'd for State Funding”, Buffalo News, March 9, 2008, C-3.

Figure 12: Boundary of the proposed Tonawanda Street Corridor Brownfield Opportunity Area.

Brownfield law in October 2003, provides municipalities and community based organizations with assistance, at up to 90 percent of the eligible project costs, to complete revitalization plans and implementation strategies for areas or communities affected by the presence of brownfield sites and to do site assessments for strategic brownfield sites. Step 2 Activities (i.e. planning and analysis leading to recommendations involving strategic properties) will be undertaken with this grant. 514 acres in the Tonawanda Street Rail Corridor and Chandler Street area are the focus, and much of this area comprises the eastern border of Historic Black Rock.

Historic Sites, Including War of 1812 Historic Black Rock has more pre-Civil War buildings than any other area of its size in Buffalo. Among these are the Samuel Howell House at 189 Dearborn (1830) and the Jacob Smith House at 73 Amherst Street (1835). Also, it has significant late 1800s-early 1900s structures like the North Buffalo Building at 1920 Niagara Street (1873), St. John's United Church of Christ at 85 Amherst Street (1890), and former St. Francis Xavier Church (now the Buffalo Religious Arts Center) at 151 East Street (1911). Further, the Black Rock-Riverside GNPA Historic Restoration Committee is discovering the local War of 1812 legacy in Historic Black Rock, identifying sites and participating in the Erie

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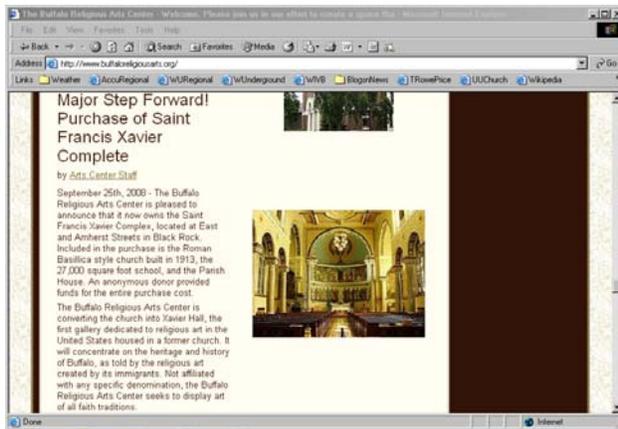


Figure 13: Excerpts from the web site of the Buffalo Religious Arts Center announcing purchase of St. Francis Xavier properties in September, 2008.



Figure 14: The new Buffalo Religious Arts Center at 157 East Street in Historic Black Rock (formerly St. Francis Xavier Church)

County War of 1812 Planning Group led by local historian and neighborhood advocate Chris Brown. As part of this group's work, it is meeting with the Binational Tourism Alliance and the 1812 Bicentennial Legacy Council to coordinate local efforts with city-wide and international ones. Significant War of 1812 events in the Historic Black Rock area include:

- October, 1812 Capture of the Brigs Detroit and Caledonia,
- December, 1812 British Landing for the Burning of Black Rock and Buffalo,
- May, 1813 Site of the Naval Ship Yard of Commodore Perry, and
- August, 1814 Battle of Scajaquada Creek.

The area has historic significance for other times as well.

Purchase of the Closed St. Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Church by the New Buffalo Religious Arts Center. This new museum/information

center is an outstanding example of adaptive reuse of a historic church building, while at the same time providing a valuable public service, by creating a home for artifacts and art from closed houses of worship throughout Western New York.

Black Rock-Riverside NHS - Various Programs

Black Rock-Riverside NHS is a full-service neighborhood housing agency serving the area and its headquarters are located nearby at 203 Military Rd. In addition to providing housing programs in Historic Black Rock that are also offered throughout the rest of its service area, the agency is involved in several initiatives with a special geographic emphasis that includes Historic Black Rock. These include Judge Nowak's Black Rock Vacancy Initiative, the 2008 Block by Block AHC Program (One-half of the \$100K budget is for five houses on Dearborn), and a CHDO project at 77 East St. The agency also maintains a contractors list (licensed, insured contractors) and offers other referral services, which are important as homeowners endeavor to maintain their historic homes.

North West Buffalo Community Center - Various Programs

North West Buffalo Community Center is a comprehensive community center serving the area, located nearby at 155 Lawn Ave. For more information, visit: <http://www.nwbccinc.org/>

Significant Parks Improvements at Squaw Island Park and Tow Path Park, and Proposed Improvements at the Ontario Street Boat Launch and Cornelius Creek Park

Squaw Island Park has been created by converting a 60-acre municipal landfill with an innovative closure concept approved by the NYSDEC and the heavy use of new plant massing and wildflower mixtures. It is linked to the Riverwalk. Phase I and Entrance Improvements are completed. Phase II is contingent on funding. Total project cost: \$12.6 million.

Tow Path Park is located along the Niagara River at the foot of Hertel Avenue. It is linked to the Riverwalk and has been absorbed by the County Park system. Phase I improvements included basic re-grading, seeding, walkway amenities and park furniture. Phase I is complete. Phase II involves incorporating into the park an interpretative historic sign, improved access/egress via Hertel Ave, improved fencing/landscaping adjacent to Rich Marina, some new picnic tables, lighting, and new plantings throughout the park. Phase II is about 90% complete. Total project cost: \$826,000.

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Squaw Island Park



Project Summary:

Squaw Island Park is located at the north end of Squaw Island, between the Niagara River and the Black Rock Locks.

The Park is being created by converting a 60-acre municipal landfill with an innovative closure concept approved by the NYSDEC and the heavy use of new plant massing and wildflower mixtures. The southern portion of the site will be used for a combination of passive and active recreation. The northern portion of the site will be used for more passive recreational uses, such as hiking and fishing. The Park is linked to the regional shoreline trail system through the Riverwalk.



CITY OF BUFFALO
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
PARKS AND STREETS

Project Budget / Cost:

Costs:

Site closure and remediation	\$7 million
Park Improvements	\$4.5 million
Entrance Improvements	\$100,000
TOTAL:	\$12.6 million

Project Contact: Steven Stepniak, Com.

Status / Schedule of Project:

Closure/remediation	Completed
Phase I Park Improvements:	Completed
Entrance Improvements:	Completed
Phase II Park Improvements:	Contingent on funding

Figure 15: Slides regarding improvements at Squaw Island Park from the Buffalo Urban Development Corporation "Buffalo Waterfront Projects: Project Summary and Update", October, 2007.



Figures 16-17: Excerpts from the presentation for the Black Rock Canal Park proposal, which would combine the Ontario Street Boat Launch with adjacent Cornelius Creek and bring added facilities and recreational amenities to the area.

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The Ontario Street Boat Launch and Cornelius Creek Park (see Figures 16-17) are the subject of an award-winning conceptual vision which specifies specific improvements to these properties that will lead to their transformation into “Black Rock Canal Park,” featuring new and expanded facilities and recreational amenities.

facilities and provide an opportunity for sporting events at the school with spectators drawn from miles around, including football games featuring the Riverside Frontiers, who in 2008 had a 10-1 record and won the 105th Harvard Cup football championship at All High Stadium.

Completion of the Scajaquada Pathway Phase III Linkage to International Railroad Bridge/ Army Corps of Engineers

Completion of three critical gaps along the pathway from Delaware Park to the Riverwalk at the Niagara River have been achieved, including a segment west of Niagara Street from Forest Avenue to the International Railroad Bridge/Army Corps of Engineers parking lot and I-190 pedestrian bridge. Total overall project cost: \$1.7 million.

Renovation of Riverside High School Located near the northern border of Historic Black Rock, the renovation of Riverside High School is an over \$30 million Joint Schools Construction Board project with completion slated for April, 2010.

Renovation of the school will occur in two phases, and will include construction of a new Pavilion Addition and Synthetic Football Field. These exciting, new features will vastly improve the recreational

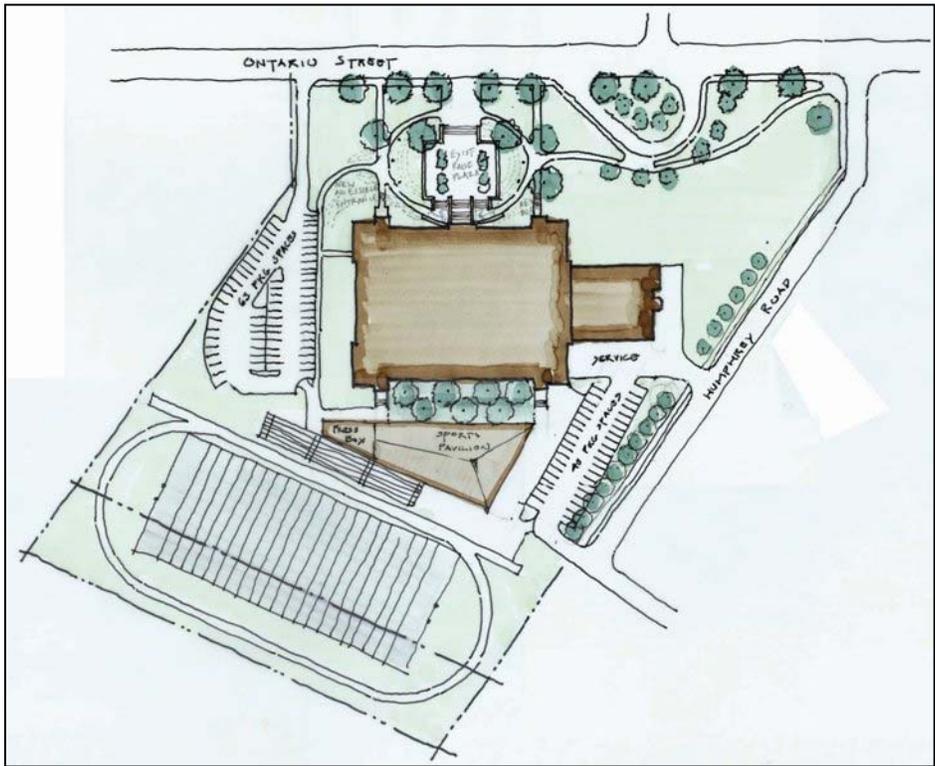


Figure 18: Riverside High School proposed site plan.