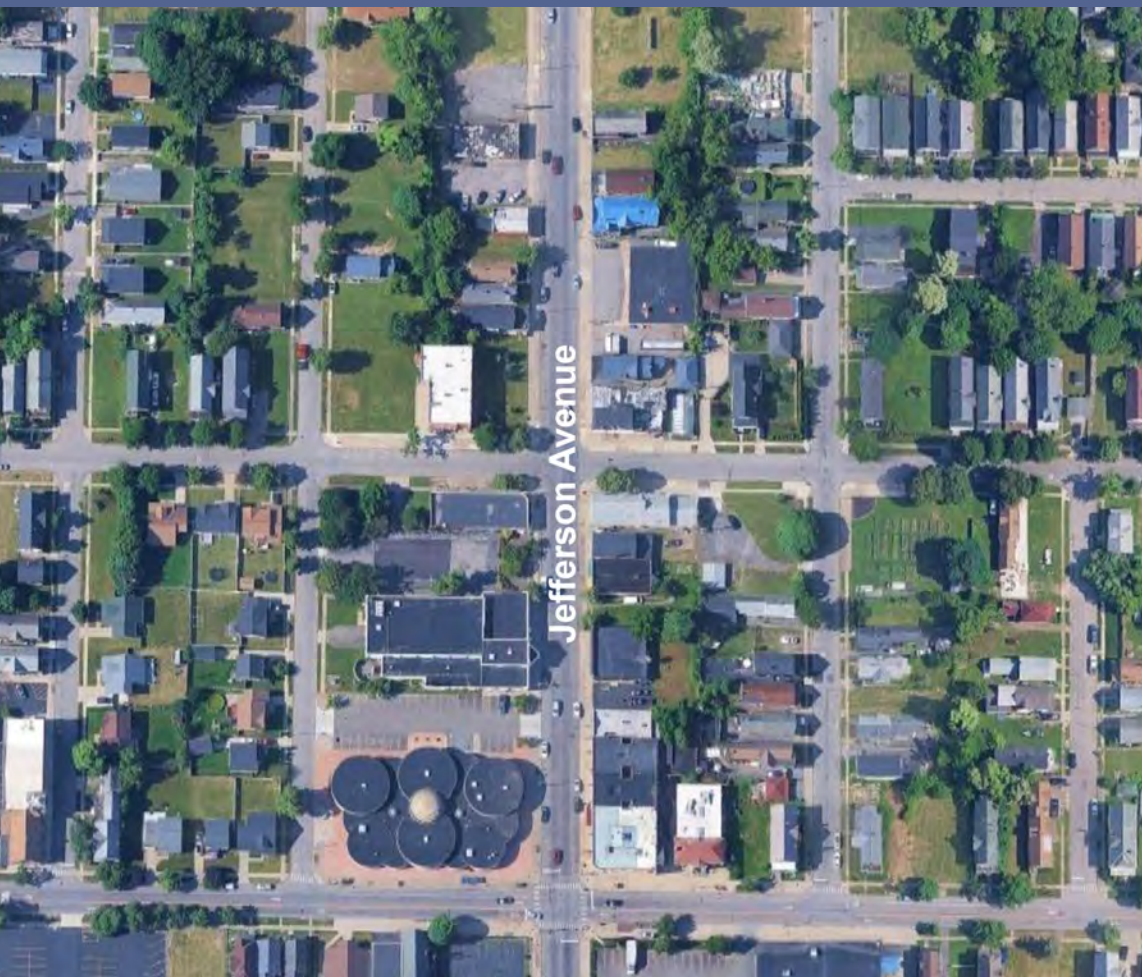


Buffalo New York

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

November 17–22, 2024



COVER: Overhead view of the Jefferson Avenue Corridor. (Google Maps)

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Buffalo New York

Jefferson Avenue Corridor Revitalization

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

November 17–22, 2024



Urban Land Institute
2001 L Street, NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036-4948
uli.org



ULI New York
1230 6th Avenue
Squad 1622
New York, NY 10020
newyork.uli.org

About the Urban Land Institute

THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 48,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 84 countries.

The extraordinary impact that ULI makes on land use decision-making is based on its members sharing expertise on a variety of factors affecting the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns.

Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of convenings each year that reinforce ULI's position as a global authority on land use and real estate. Each year, thousands of events, both virtual and in person, are held in cities around the world.

Drawing on the work of its members, the Institute recognizes and shares best practices in urban design and development for the benefit of communities around the globe.

More information is available at uli.org. Follow ULI on [X \(formerly known as Twitter\)](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#).

About ULI New York

The ULI New York district council brings together real estate professionals, civic leaders, and the New York community for educational programs, initiatives affecting the region, and networking events, all in the pursuit of advancing responsible and equitable land use throughout the region. With over 2,900 members across the state, ULI New York furthers ULI's mission by locally delivering on the Institute's best practices in leadership development and by facilitating New York-based community service and enhancement of land use policy and practice. ULI serves the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines—from architects to developers, CEOs to analysts, builders, property owners, investors, public officials, and everyone in between. Using this interdisciplinary approach, ULI examines land use issues, impartially reports findings, and convenes forums to find solutions.

About ULI Advisory Services

THE GOAL OF THE ULI 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 700 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, brownfield 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 are screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda of an Advisory Services panel is tailored to meet a sponsor's needs. ULI members are briefed by the sponsor, engage with stakeholders through in-depth interviews, deliberate on their recommendations, and make a final presentation of those recommendations. A report is prepared as a final deliverable.

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, academics, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

ULI Program Staff

Kelsey Steffen

Executive Director, Advisory Services

Lauren McKim Callaghan

Senior Director, Advisory Services

Barbra Gustis

Director, Advisory Services and Key Leaders

Victoria Oestreich

Director, Advisory Services

Libby Riker

Senior Editor

Jonathan Fishlock, Creative Circle

Production Designer

Melissa Goodwin, Creative Circle

Traffic Manager



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ULI also thanks the more than 150 stakeholders who shared their experiences, perspectives, and insights with the panel.

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About the Panel

ULI Panel and Project Staff

Panel Chair

Tyrone Rachal

President

Urban Key Capital Partners

Atlanta, Georgia

Panel

Dionne Baux

Chief Programs Officer

Main Street America

Chicago, Illinois

Dr. Lorin R. Carter

Founder and Chief Executive Officer

C-Suite Equity Consulting

Dallas, Texas

Justin Chapman

Senior Development Executive

The Integral Group

Atlanta, Georgia

Caressa J. Davis

Director of Community Partnerships

St. Louis Development Corporation

St. Louis, Missouri

Juanita Hardy

Managing Principal

Tiger Management Consulting Group

Silver Spring, Maryland

Sherry Okun-Rudnak

Principal

BAE Urban Economics

Atlanta, Georgia

Mark Sherfy

Development Group Director, Vice President

BHC

Kansas City, Kansas

Tierra Barnes (Local Design Expert)

Interior Designer

Wendel

Buffalo, New York

ULI Project Staff

Lauren McKim Callaghan

Senior Director, Advisory Services

Barbra Gustis

Director, Advisory Services and Key Leaders

Felix Ciampa

Executive Director, ULI New York

Chris Karakul

Senior Manager, ULI New York

Carolyn Whelan

Senior Manager, ULI New York



Introduction and Key Recommendations

“JEFFERSON AVENUE WAS THE CENTER OF WHAT’S HAPPENING IN OUR COMMUNITY. . . . It had barber shops, clothing stores, gas stations, auto repair shops, grocery stores, mom-and-pop stores. . . . It was thriving,” said Reverend Mark Blue, president of the Buffalo Branch of the NAACP, during an interview with *Urban Land*. Over the past several decades, the corridor has experienced decline and disinvestment. Interested in a community-driven approach to revitalization, a group of local stakeholders approached ULI to help identify a framework for action to revitalize the Jefferson Avenue Corridor.

In this section:

- An overview of the Jefferson Avenue Corridor and its history of prosperity and decline
- Current conditions including economic hardship and no population growth
- The panel assignment and process
- The five social determinants of health
- The panel’s key recommendations for actions stakeholders can take for the revitalization of the Jefferson Avenue Corridor

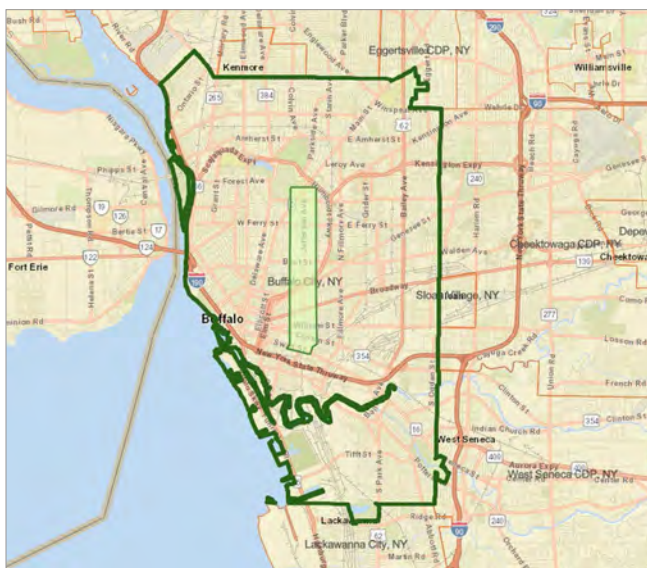
The Jefferson Avenue Corridor

Jefferson Avenue is located on the East Side of Buffalo, New York. This major north/south thoroughfare runs across most of the major radial streets that fan out from downtown. For the Advisory Services panel, the study area included approximately 3.3 miles of Jefferson Avenue from Myrtle Avenue to Main Street and approximately one-quarter mile to the east and west on either side of the corridor.

A Brief History

The following are excerpts from the history of Jefferson Avenue provided to the panel as part of briefing materials prepared by WindsorTurner for this effort.

Jefferson Avenue originally served as a key transportation route to connect different parts of the city and facilitate the movement of people and goods. The street played a significant role in the development of the East Side of Buffalo by linking residential areas with commercial and



WINDSOR TURNER

Jefferson Avenue is a major north/south corridor on the East Side of Buffalo. City boundaries are shown in dark green. The study area, in light green, includes approximately one-quarter mile to the east and west of Jefferson Avenue.



WINDSOR TURNER

The study area includes portions of several census tracts along its 3.3-mile distance.

industrial zones. Over time, Jefferson Avenue evolved into a major corridor, reflecting the growth and changes in the city's layout and infrastructure. Today, Jefferson Avenue is an important commercial business corridor connecting neighborhood assets such as Masten Park and Johnnie B. Wiley Sports Pavilion, the Frank E. Merriweather Jr. Library, and the nearby Forest Lawn Cemetery. Jefferson Avenue has long been home to a diverse community, contributing to the cultural richness of the East Side. Jefferson Avenue's role as a major thoroughfare, combined with its historical and economic importance, makes it a key component of Buffalo's urban landscape.

Jefferson Avenue is a significant example of the urban development that occurred in Buffalo during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Its transformation from a residential street to a major commercial and transportation corridor reflects broader trends in the city's growth and expansion. Early developments along Jefferson Avenue played a significant role in shaping the character and growth of the East Side of the city. Since the industrialization of Buffalo, Black residents have had a higher propensity to live on the East Side, and today approximately 72 percent of the population within the Jefferson Avenue Corridor study area identify as Black Alone based on U.S. Census data.

Jefferson Avenue has witnessed significant economic shifts, including periods of prosperity and decline. The development and expansion of highway systems in the 1950s to the 1970s had a considerable impact on Jefferson Avenue. Interstate 90 (I-90) had wide-ranging impacts citywide. As with many communities at the time, highway construction altered commute patterns, encouraging many families to relocate outside the urban core, provided they had access to credit and capital for a new home. Prior to the 1968 Fair Housing Act, there were extremely limited home loan products available to people of color. Nationally, between 1932 and 1964, only 2 percent of the \$120 billion of federally subsidized housing went to people of color. In known patterns of redlining, impacts of these highway systems were disparate, allowing primarily white families to access suburban communities, and extracting resources and wealth, leaving behind those without credit and capital. This was both a concentrator of poverty and a limiting factor in housing choices to people of color. Furthermore, the installation of the Kensington Expressway created a disruptive dissection across the city, resulting in a massive barrier through neighborhood areas formerly united.

On July 25, 1967, race riots took place on Jefferson Avenue in Buffalo. These riots were part of a larger sequence of race-related protests that took place across the United States during the 1960s, driven by tensions related to racial inequality and civil rights. The riots resulted in extensive property damage, including the destruction of businesses and homes. Many storefronts were looted and several buildings were set on fire. This destruction led to economic hardship for many local businesses and residents. Rebuilding efforts took time and resources, which affected the community's overall economic stability.

Finally, in a larger context, Buffalo lost more than 50 percent of its population over the past 60 years. These population losses were related to substantial losses of jobs in the manufacturing sector. Impacts were far-reaching through the region. These negative economic conditions and unfair investment practices have resulted not only in the wealth gap, but in some of the starkest racially segregated health outcomes in the country over the last few decades.

Jefferson Avenue Today

In recent decades, the theaters, Black-owned businesses, and homes in and around this once-thriving Black business district and mixed-use urban neighborhood have suffered a severe decline in business investment and a rise in the poverty levels of its residents. Based on data gathered by WindsorTurner, Jefferson Avenue has not experienced population growth since 2010, consistent with trends at the city and county level. Households in the neighborhoods immediately surrounding Jefferson Avenue have a median household income based on 2024 data (\$37,005) that is below that of the city (\$48,179) overall.

On May 14, 2022, this tight-knit community of legacy African American families suffered an unspeakable tragedy when a man opened fire at the Tops Friendly Markets store located on Jefferson Avenue, killing 10 people and injuring three others. As the entire city of Buffalo grapples with the aftermath of this tragedy, a look into the past to recall the resiliency of Buffalo's East Side community is now more critical than ever.

Panel Assignment

Reflecting on the resiliency of Buffalo's East Side community and the thriving Jefferson Avenue Corridor of the past, the NAACP in partnership with the Buffalo Urban League, with the support of the City of Buffalo, the Local Organizing Committee (LOC), community stakeholders, and the ULI Western New

York regional satellite district council, asked ULI to convene an Advisory Services panel to offer community-driven recommendations for a framework to revitalize Jefferson Avenue. Specifically, the panel was asked to address the following questions.

- What do the future real estate market and economics look like for the Jefferson Avenue Corridor? What might the future build-out potential look like?
- Is the existing infrastructure (streets, water, sewer, electric, internet, and gas) adequate to handle potential future development? Where should key infrastructure improvements be targeted to best support future development?
- What are the other obstacles potentially preventing successful revitalization of the corridor?
- What goods and services are needed to help make the corridor a thriving business district like it once was?
- What tools, strategies, and funding sources can be employed to strengthen the adjoining neighborhoods to support commercial development along Jefferson Avenue?
- What are examples from peer cities of potential catalytic public or private projects or strategic action steps that can spur future development and make that development a success?
- What tools or antidisplacement strategies are available to encourage or ensure diverse, equitable, and inclusive development, and ensure opportunities for current residents? How can the corridor develop to maintain its rich history of Black heritage?
- Are public investments needed for the corridor's-built environment, such as plazas, parks, or streetscape improvements?
- What type of organization, if any, is needed to promote, guide, and monitor future development in the corridor?

Advisory Services Panel Process

The ULI Advisory Services panel met over five days. Using a process honed over 75 years, an Advisory Services panel has three key parts: listening and learning, panel deliberation, and presentation of expert recommendations. The listening and learning portion of this panel included a full day of on-the-ground experiences: a briefing by the sponsor team, a site

tour, and a meet-and-greet event in which the panel heard from residents and other stakeholders to learn their perspectives on the issues at hand. The panel then conducted small-group interviews with stakeholders representing a broad cross-section of interests and perspectives. Using information gathered during these activities, and briefing materials provided by the sponsor team, the Advisory Services panel team spent two days developing and drafting recommendations and producing a presentation. This presentation was made on the last day of the Advisory Services panel. Although time was limited, the panelists made every effort to incorporate what they learned and what they heard. The recommendations in this report reflect this effort and what the panel knew at the time.

Social Determinants of Health

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Healthy People 2030 initiative identifies the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. These conditions fall within five social determinants of health: economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context.

The panel used these five categories to conceptualize the interconnectivity of the recommendations within this report to comprehensively approach the revitalization of the Jefferson Avenue Corridor. These five determinants also play a key role in the discussion of community infrastructure within this report.



The social determinants of health helped the panel conceptualize the interconnectivity of its recommendations.

Key Recommendations

This report includes a comprehensive set of recommendations on actions that stakeholders can take to build and further expand the foundation for the revitalization of the Jefferson Avenue Corridor. Below are highlights of the recommendations found within this report.

A Strategic Approach: Connectivity, Leadership, and Communication

- Build upon the notable City investments, connecting their impact in a cohesive way and communicating this impact to the community and other stakeholders. Strategically communicate progress to the community and stakeholders.
- Ensure coordination between and among local community-based organizations and collaboration with public, private, and philanthropic partners.
- Approach revitalization with the principles of equitable development at the forefront.
- Prioritize the social, cultural, and economic aspects of investments in Jefferson Avenue, along with the needs of residents, to empower the community to participate in the revitalization of the corridor.

Socioeconomic and Market Analysis

- Conduct a housing stock analysis to further understand the current housing market and provide additional data that can pinpoint more precisely the number of housing units available and habitable around the corridor.

Corridor Development

- Use Buffalo's Unified Zoning and Land Use Code and infrastructure project phasing to guide development along the corridor and focus on using a combination of low-, medium-, and high-density housing in residential areas to accommodate a range of income levels.
- Prepare an antidisplacement strategy before development creates pressure that accelerates displacement and the potential for gentrification. Consider tools such as tax exemption programs and community benefit packages, when appropriate, that target wealth creation for residents in exchange for incentives in larger-scale projects.
- Develop nodes within the corridor and complement each node with thematic drivers that build on the area's rich history, culture, and institutions.

- Consider the creation of a new land trust to cohesively manage the use of vacant parcels along the corridor.
- Adopt a long-term mixed-income strategy to address housing needs.
- Cultivate relationships between developers and the community. Open communication and collaborative planning will make it easier to manage expectations and build trust.
- Provide clear instructions and resources for navigating the City's development application process.

Community Infrastructure

The panel framed community infrastructure recommendations around the social determinants of health: economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context. Highlights from recommendations in each area follow.

- Share wealth retention strategies so equity is passed down from generation to generation.
- Introduce children to diverse careers early and highlight local success stories and business innovation.
- Use a susu model and group economics to reduce dependency on outside sources for financial investment, resiliency, and growth.
- Take steps to address the low educational attainment rate that limits employment options.
- Address the challenge of accessing reliable, high-speed internet within the study area.
- Create a network of health care providers that service the entire district.
- Increase awareness of and address the negative health impact of years of manufacturing and industrial uses near residential properties along Jefferson Avenue.
- Increase park space dispersed throughout the neighborhood, activate pocket parks in vacant lots, and increase access to healthy food options.
- Celebrate the strong sense of community along the corridor.
- Build deeper trust between City Hall and community members by creating a Neighborhood Communications Plan and streamlining city processes.
- Navigate new changing cultural dynamics among current and legacy residents, immigrants, and those migrating from other parts of the state.

Physical Infrastructure

- Take a pause to think corridor-wide and provide spaces in the right-of-way for future placemaking elements. Consider making provisions for future broadband and possible public-access greenspace locations.
- Take steps to identify resources and programs to increase internet access.
- Conduct a corridor and neighborhood placemaking study and formalize a plan for Jefferson Avenue and its historic neighborhoods.
- After the Jefferson Avenue streetscape improvements are complete, local stakeholders should start talking about where to invest next, taking the opportunity to plan bigger and develop a shared vision.
- "Turn the corner." Consider future improvements to key east/west connections to facilitate the development of key activity nodes along the corridor.

Economic Development: Workforce Development

- Cultivate relationships with key local stakeholders—such as businesses, education systems, and community organizations—and establish working groups to focus on trades, technology, and entrepreneurship pathways.
- Start working with local businesses and community organizations to introduce industry-specific workforce training programs, modeled after successful initiatives.
- Launch a pilot youth employment and mentorship program, drawing inspiration from existing models that use apprenticeships, internships, and community-led development projects.
- Work with industry partners, educational institutions, and workforce development agencies to establish comprehensive career pathways in the trades, health care, technology, and other growing sectors.

- Create a long-term plan for sustaining and expanding programs, including securing funding and building partnerships.

Economic Development: Small-Business Support

- Create a functioning, effective small-business ecosystem focused on entrepreneurs of color and address barriers including a lack of access to capital and financial resources, insufficient business networks and mentorship, and a lack of essential business skills or education.
- Invest in pop-ups, incubators, and accelerators to foster innovation and further connect small businesses with support services.
- Identify an organizational model to move revitalization efforts forward. The panel recommends considering a community quarterback, the Main Street model, or a combination of both.

Economic Development: Business Retention, Expansion, and Attraction

- Develop and implement a marketing strategy that focuses on rebranding the Jefferson Avenue Corridor and ultimately leads to ongoing marketing and engagement efforts that continue to enhance the corridor's brand and reach target audiences.
- Create short-term incentives focused on business retention, expansion, and attraction and test their effectiveness using a pilot program. Expand existing and evaluate new incentive programs for businesses along Jefferson Avenue. Consider scaling programming after the initial pilot phase and include plans to develop incentives to attract larger businesses or anchor institutions over the long term.
- Use retail-attraction strategies to bring a variety of businesses to Jefferson Avenue and foster entrepreneurship by developing incubator or accelerator programs.

Cultural Placemaking

- Implement an upgraded streetscape plan that includes strategic placement for historical markers, murals, and public art along pedestrian and bicycle routes.
- Install temporary pop-ups on vacant lots for art exhibitions, music and entertainment venues, festivals, farmer markets, flea markets, and more.
- Consider converting some of the City-owned vacant lots into parks and work with a team of artists and landscape designers and architects to design public art that invites locals and visitors to the corridor.
- Pursue activities to increase art and culture along the corridor, including a historical walking tour and a Jefferson Avenue Mural Art Initiative. Expand and add ongoing activities such as musical entertainment and return the Juneteenth celebration to Jefferson Avenue.
- Connect the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor and Jefferson Avenue to tell a comprehensive, robust story about the rich African American history and culture of Buffalo.
- Recruit a chief cultural officer to work with major community and public sector leaders to integrate art and cultural elements into key planning and implementation projects.



JAVIL CREWS

A Strategic Approach: Connectivity, Leadership, and Communication

THROUGHOUT THE PANEL WEEK, A FEW OVERARCHING THEMES EMERGED. The panel noticed the need for strategic connectivity, strategic leadership, strategic communication, and placing equitable development principles front and center in revitalization efforts for the Jefferson Avenue Corridor.

In this section:

- Recommendations for using strategic connectivity to communicate progress to the community and stakeholders, and develop a holistic, coordinated approach
- Recommendations for implementing strategic, collaborative leadership with a focus on equitable development
- Recommendations for including neighborhood stakeholders, the public sector, and the private sector in strategic communication that will lead to more equitable outcomes

Strategic Connectivity

The theme of connectivity emerged in several ways during the panel: physical connectivity, connecting to culture and history, and connecting resources. In addition, the panel particularly noted the opportunity to better connect the notable investment the City has made in Jefferson Avenue with the impact of those investments as well as where investments build upon or

connect with one another. The panel heard from stakeholders that the perception is that investment by the City in the Jefferson Avenue Corridor has either gone unnoticed or has occurred in a piecemeal fashion. In fact, more than \$300 million has been invested in a wide range of projects in and around the corridor.

Key City Investments: Jefferson Avenue Corridor

Investment Type	Investment Amount (\$)
Infrastructure	
Jefferson Avenue Streetscape Improvements (full length)	32,500,000
Middle Main Street	50,000,000
Johnnie B. Wiley Sports Pavilion/Masten Park	22,000,000
Housing	
Laurel Street, five affordable units	1,400,000
Legacy Cities Infill Project	3,000,000
Gateway Village – 1035 Jefferson Avenue (HOME grant)	2,000,000
Frederick Douglass – 210 Jefferson Avenue	948,000
Health and Wellness Center – 1507 Jefferson Avenue (HOME/ARPA funds)	1,850,000
Small Business	
The Exchange at Beverly Gray	500,000 annually
Community Anchors	
Frank E. Merriweather Library	803,000
Buffalo Urban League Headquarters	1,000,000
African American Culture Center	1,000,000
Apollo Media Center	850,000
5/14 “Seeing Us” Memorial	1,100,000
Other Investments	
Martin Luther King Jr. Park Casino: building only (2015–present)	2,100,000
Martin Luther King Jr. Park: all other improvements (2006–2021)	8,000,000
Kingsley Park: basketball courts and perimeter (2024)	375,000
Trinidad Park master plan (ongoing)	550,000
Scajaquada Trail (2025–2026)	2,900,000
Main Utica Square Apartments (HOME grant)	1,100,000
Bellamy Commons Black Achievers’ Museum	150,000
Urban Forestry grant	(On hold) 8,000,000

Source: City of Buffalo

- Infrastructure ●
- Housing ●
- Small Business ●
- Community Anchors ●
- Other Investments ●



A visualization of key investments the City has or plans to make within the Jefferson Avenue study area.

The panel believes it is important to build upon these notable City investments, connecting their impact in a cohesive way and communicating this impact to the community and other stakeholders. While the City investment is significant, the panel believes that it is necessary to leverage the impact of these investments and do the following:

- Strategically communicate progress to the community and stakeholders.
- Develop a holistic approach and demonstrate a coordinated effort, something that has gone unnoticed by the community and stakeholders.

The perceived lack of communication about City projects and investments has led to mistrust and confusion by the community and has further siloed grassroots efforts due to the lack of knowledge by end users.

Strategic Leadership

Any major redevelopment effort requires strategic leadership to accomplish positive results. Top-down planning efforts often miss the mark from a community perspective. Therefore, the panel emphasizes that leadership must be collaborative with all oars rowing in the same direction and with consistent communication up and down the planning process. This increases the importance of coordination between and among local community-based organizations and collaboration with public, private, and philanthropic partners. As noted in ULI's *Successful Public/Private Partnerships: From Principles to Practice*, efforts such as the revitalization of Jefferson Avenue will take more than a public/private partnership between the City and private sector developers. This effort will require five “sectors”—nonprofit, philanthropic, the people, the public sector, and the private sector to work together in partnership for success.

Equitable Development

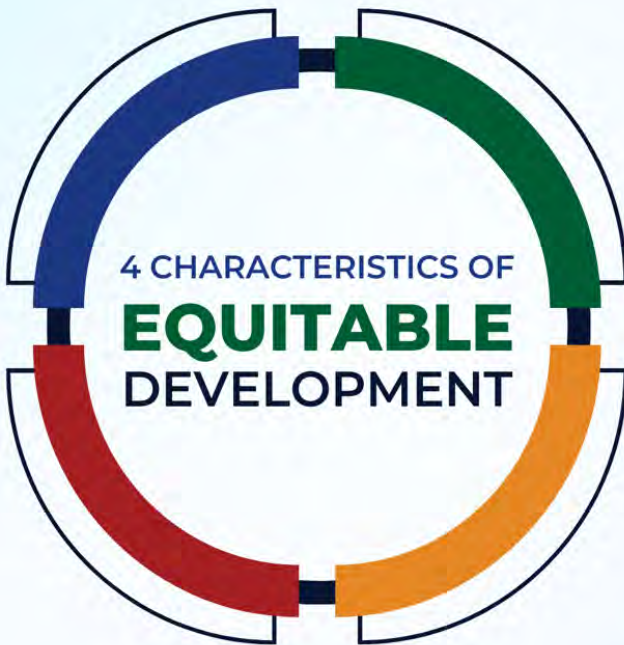
As a part of the strategic leadership necessary for the revitalization of Jefferson Avenue, the panel recommends that community and city leaders approach revitalization with the principles of equitable development at the forefront. Equitable development provides a framework and a way to communicate the overarching goal of the community—to create a place



Public/private partnerships for Jefferson Avenue revitalization will need to include five sectors, not just public and private sectors, for success.

that honors history and legacy residents and their sacrifice, presence, and investment. The framework provides a place for those who want to return and contribute their assets (social, environmental, or economic) back into the community, and those who want to join and create a new way forward together.

Equitable development is a holistic, community-focused investment approach that seeks to further the overall well-being of communities. Key elements of equitable development include prioritizing the needs of existing residents; addressing historical disinvestment and race-based disparities before, during, and after development; emphasizing equitable benefits distribution for current, new, and returning residents; and addressing social determinants of health. These determinants will be discussed in greater detail within this report. The panel also emphasizes the need to develop housing in the neighborhoods along the Jefferson Avenue Corridor that will accommodate a variety of income levels, ensuring that the area remains accessible to all, from low-income families to higher-income individuals. This broad approach to housing will also help prevent the displacement of vulnerable residents while fostering a diverse, inclusive community.



WHAT IS EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT?

Equitable Development is a holistic, community-focused investment approach that seeks to further the overall well-being of communities.

WHO DOES IT PRIORITIZE?

Equitable Development intentionally prioritizes the needs of existing residents, especially people of color.

WHAT DOES IT ADDRESS?

It works to address historic disinvestment and race-based disparities before, during, and after development, including how social determinants of health are experienced by current residents.

WHAT DOES IT EMPHASIZE?

Equitable Development emphasizes equitable benefits distribution between current, new, and returning residents of the area.

DR. LORIN R. CARTER, C-SUITE EQUITY CONSULTING

The panel recommends using the principles of equitable development for revitalization efforts along Jefferson Avenue.

Strategic Communication

By prioritizing the social, cultural, and economic aspects of investments in Jefferson Avenue, along with the needs of residents, the community will be empowered to participate in the revitalization of the corridor. Focusing on these priorities will also lead to more effective communication and trust. The panel firmly believes that increased communication will lead to superior outcomes and improve neighborhood vitality and overall quality of life in a more equitable way.

There are various methods to improve the effectiveness of communication for different stakeholder groups including community, government, nonprofit, philanthropic, and private sector (investor) groups highlighted above. Public/private partnerships, including the above expanded definition, will be required to maximize the capacity to leverage opportunities throughout the study area. Several examples of strategic communication are described below.

Neighborhood Stakeholders

- Create neighborhood-led communication committees to act as liaisons between the community and external stakeholders.
- Develop inclusive communication materials to ensure accessibility.

Public Sector

- Establish a unified communication strategy across city, county, and state agencies.
- Leverage digital platforms and in-person outreach for greater inclusivity.

Private Sector/Investors

- Build trust by incorporating community voices into development decisions.
- Promote transparency about project timelines, opportunities, and outcomes.

[Appendix C](#) provides additional information on the panel's findings and recommendations on strategic communications. The appendix presents tactical ideas for strategic communication to help regain trust among stakeholder groups. A key element includes identifying a central body or bodies to manage the coordination and implementation of a communication strategy.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Socioeconomic and Market Analysis

SUCCESSFUL REVITALIZATION EFFORTS ALONG JEFFERSON AVENUE REQUIRE UNDERSTANDING the potential for future real estate market conditions and demand along the corridor. To do this, the panel did a high-level analysis of community demographic, economic, and real estate market trends and their relationship to potential development and investment attraction along the Jefferson Avenue Corridor.

In this section:

- Key demographic and economic factors that impact the present and future of the Jefferson Avenue Corridor
- The housing market conditions that affect the Jefferson Avenue commercial corridor's revitalization
- Retail market conditions and the demand for goods and services

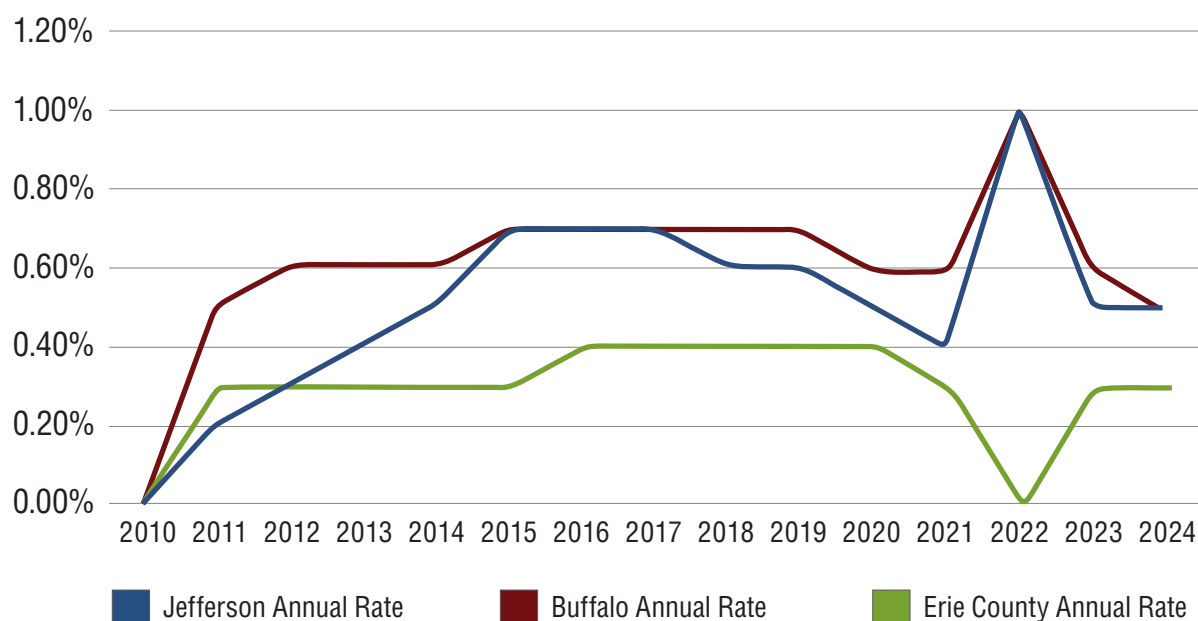
Socioeconomic Data

Based primarily on information provided to the panel from the briefing materials produced by WindsorTurner for the sponsor team, the following is a summary of key demographic and economic factors that impact the present and future of Jefferson Avenue.

Population and Households

Based on 2024 data from Esri, approximately 16,704 persons in 7,069 households call within one-half mile of the corridor home. Jefferson Avenue's population has not changed more than 1 percent since 2010, which is consistent with the City of Buffalo.

Jefferson and Peer Geographies Population Growth



WINDSOR TURNER, ESRI

A 1 percent population increase for both the city and corridor does not translate into demand for new housing units to fill in vacant parcels on the adjoining streets. Attracting investment will require capturing demand from other parts of the city. In addition, although programming and events such as Friday Night Live can attract nonresidents to the community to eat and shop, these alone cannot support local retailers over the long term. Retail requires “rooftops” or households that spend their incomes consistently in the neighborhood to support the types of retail found in self-sufficient communities, including a variety of eat-in and take-out dining options, grocery stores, dry cleaners and laundromats, apparel stores, barbers and salons, hardware and home goods stores, and other retail establishments that the existing community wants to attract.

Household Income

Developers and investors, whether within or outside the community, look at household income levels to determine the types of housing that the area can support, as well as the types and amounts of retail. Higher household incomes indicate higher disposable income to be spent in neighborhood shops and restaurants, which indicate that retail proprietors will be able to pay rent to the commercial building owners. Having a mixed-income community that includes households in all income strata can show developers that there are households that can support new retail and commercial space and attract the types of retail and commercial uses that benefit the existing community.

The corridor currently has a median household income of \$37,005, which is lower than both the city (\$48,179) and Erie County (\$71,829) based on 2024 data from Esri provided by the sponsor team. The overall lower median household income of the corridor is one reason why attracting development has been difficult from a purely economic perspective.

Housing Affordability

At \$37,000 per year, the median household can afford to pay up to \$925 per month for rent and utilities without spending more than 30 percent of its gross income on housing. According to smartasset.com, a first-time home buyer using a federally backed Federal Housing Administration or Veterans Administration mortgage can afford a home price of up to \$150,000 with a 5 percent downpayment. The panel does note that changes to downpayment and interest rate assumptions will impact affordable purchase price.

Housing Market Conditions

While Jefferson Avenue is a commercial corridor that is home to businesses and community spaces, the neighborhoods immediately surrounding this thoroughfare are an important aspect of the corridor's revitalization and increased vibrancy. Understanding the housing market in these neighborhoods is essential.

Home Prices

According to Redfin, a realty website, home prices in the census tracts touching the corridor range in value from under \$10,000 for a vacant lot to \$40,000 for a home in need of a complete renovation and remediation, to over \$200,000 for a renovated housing unit. This means the median household in the corridor *should* be able to afford a home based on the above cursory analysis of affordability. However, it is the panel's belief that the median household likely *cannot* afford to purchase a home for \$40,000 and spend another \$150,000 or more on needed remediation and renovation. Likewise, the average homeowner may not have the knowledge to choose a trusted contractor to undertake this work, especially with a labor shortage in this area. It is also the panel's observation that home prices are starting to exceed the median household income affordability of \$150,000.

Housing Unit Rents

Rents in the census tracts touching the corridor range from \$340 to \$981 based on data from CoStar, with the majority falling within what the median income household could afford without paying more than 30 percent of their household income on rent and utilities. Some of the more expensive units may be unaffordable when accounting for utility costs. Conditions for these units are unknown. However, the panel heard anecdotally that as home values increase, landlords are taking advantage of this perceived demand by raising rents and/or deferring maintenance.

Vacancy Rate

According to American Community Survey five-year sample data from 2022, there are 8,761 units within one-half mile of the corridor, 21 percent of which are vacant. Of the 1,877 vacant units, only 310 units are available for sale or lease. This represents an effective vacancy rate of 3.5 percent, which is indicative of a tight housing market. The area's tight housing market means that while there may be enough physical units on the corridor to support households and household growth, there are not enough available units. A lack of *available* units and a low effective vacancy rate shows that there will be gentrification and displacement pressures on the near horizon.

The panel recommends that a housing stock analysis be conducted to further understand the current housing market in the study area. Specifically, this analysis will provide additional data that highlights the condition of units available, the number of code violations, and other housing condition data that can pinpoint more precisely the number of housing units available and habitable around the corridor.

Cost to Build

Interviews with multiple housing developers, real estate brokers, and community lenders active in the corridor resulted in an estimated cost of approximately \$400,000 to build a new single-family unit. As median home prices in the area are well below this amount (topping out at \$250,000 per Redfin.com), new development will require a subsidy of at least \$150,000 to attract a new developer.

A desktop review of new multifamily projects developed around Buffalo provided the following information. According to information cited in the September 18, 2020, article from WKBK on The Grid and a January 31, 2022, article from *Buffalo Rising* on Michigan Place, construction costs range from \$160,000 per multifamily unit at The Grid on Main at Summer (an adaptive use project), to \$363,000 per unit at Michigan Place. The average cost to build a multifamily housing unit is approximately \$236,000 per unit. Spreading fixed development costs across multiple units allows multifamily housing units to be built for nearly half the cost of a new single-family home. While subsidies are still likely required and will need to be determined based on a full analysis not calculated in this report, they are anticipated to be lower for multifamily development than the subsidies needed for a single-family unit. Thus, the panel believes multifamily projects could be a good option to meet the current demand within the tightening housing market.

Retail Market Conditions

According to CoStar, retail rents have remained constant over the past year. Vacancy rates are below 1 percent; if a business wants to rent space on the corridor, the options that are currently available are very limited. Although the panel's visual inspection of the corridor indicates that there are many buildings that are vacant, only a small number of these are in rent-ready condition. The lack of available options for rent within the current market indicates that there is pent-up demand for retail along the Jefferson Avenue Corridor. However, rents are not likely to support the cost of construction or rehabilitation. As with housing, subsidies will be needed in the short term and medium term to develop new retail spaces.

Jefferson Avenue Corridor Retail Market Conditions			
Retail Market Indicators	Third Quarter 2024	Third Quarter 2023	Year over Year Change
Number of buildings	101	101	0
Inventory (square feet)	673,277	673,277	0
Vacant square feet	6,175	75,173	-68,998
Vacancy rate	0.9%	11.2%	-10.3%
Annual rent per square foot	\$14.52	\$14.52	\$0 .00

Source: CoStar, 2024

Low vacancy rates in both the housing and retail markets indicate that the Jefferson Avenue Corridor will likely see some pressure on prices and rents due to the limited number of units available to buy or rent. However, the panel believes it will be some time before those rents and prices are high enough to attract new development and investment without subsidies. Implementing the recommendations in this report around corridor improvements will exacerbate and accelerate those pressures without policy interventions focused on equitable development and protections for legacy residents and businesses. Therefore, the panel recommends a full market study that evaluates residential and commercial markets in depth, including identifying demographic and economic trends that inform demand to provide a clearer picture of supportable housing by unit type and retail space.

Demand for Goods and Services

There is a clear gap in the availability of retail goods and services within the Jefferson Avenue Corridor study area. Understanding demand for goods and services will be crucial for guiding the types of businesses to target. For example, the sponsor provided briefing book estimates that over the next 10 years, the corridor could support millions of dollars in retail sales across a variety of sectors.

Many of these retail sectors represent neighborhood-serving retail uses. Neighborhood retail uses represent purchases made often, and in locations close to home. These include pharmacies, drug stores, and grocery stores as well as services like parcel shipping, laundry, printing, bakeries, florists, barber shops and salons, restaurants, and other goods and services needed on a day-to-day basis.

Many of these goods and services are already present along the corridor and exist in small local businesses, such as Golden Cup Coffee, The Ink Spot, and Nanny's Nook. Chain retailers Tops and Family Dollar provide access to much-needed grocery and household goods, while M&T Bank provides access to banking services.

In addition to the community services that nonprofits provide, housing, municipal services, and transportation, essential goods and services necessary for a self-sustaining community include the following and reflect the types of retail the panel believes will continue to be in demand as revitalization continues:

- Food,
- Clothing,
- Pharmacies,
- Health care,
- Banking,
- Legal services, and
- Repair and maintenance

Estimated Retail Growth by Sector	
Category	Projected Growth (\$)
Food (overall)	4,526,379
Food (at home)	3,004,038
Food (away from home)	1,522,341
Entertainment and recreation (overall)	1,508,532
TV/audio/video	558,317
Pets	355,928
Apparel and services (overall)	1,017,758
Women's apparel	359,497
Housekeeping supplies	365,191
Furniture	394,282

Demand for several retail sectors is estimated to grow along the Jefferson Avenue corridor over the next 10 years.



Corridor Development

JEFFERSON AVENUE FACES SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES as it works toward revitalizing the corridor to its historic vibrancy. However, it is the panel's observation that there is a growing interest in the area by existing residents and those new to the corridor who want to reconnect to the community in the wake of the 5/14 tragedy (the Tops Friendly Markets shooting) and are eager to contribute to the efforts fueling Jefferson Avenue's growth.

In this section:

- A high-level review of the residential and commercial markets and existing conditions and gaps that might impact development of the corridor
- Essential considerations needed to lay the foundation for revitalization and future development
- Comprehensive, transparent, and actionable elements for a strategy to guide development of vacant lots and underused spaces while addressing the needs of residents, businesses, and potential developers alike

Existing Conditions and Gaps

To better understand the potential corridor development opportunities that might harness some of the growing interest in revitalization, the panel first did a high-level review of the residential and commercial markets as outlined within this report and reviewed existing conditions and gaps that might affect development of the corridor in particular.

Vacant Lots

The panel learned that the City owns a substantial number of vacant lots within the study area. The panel also heard that acquiring publicly owned vacant parcels from the City can be an onerous process. It is also the panel's understanding that a streamlined mechanism does not exist for the City to offer land at a reduced price that could help keep these properties in local hands and potentially subsidize development, especially for smaller developers with ties to the community.

It is also the panel's understanding that, in some cases, private vacant lot owners hold onto their properties, which can contribute to the lack of development activity within neighborhoods surrounding Jefferson Avenue. In addition, the panel observed that the housing units that do remain in the neighborhoods surrounding Jefferson Avenue often suffer from poor maintenance or deferred repairs. The cost of construction can make it infeasible to rebuild or renovate existing housing units, especially given that home values in the study area fail to match or exceed the expenses involved to do so.

Affordability

As highlighted in the residential market discussion for Jefferson Avenue within this report, current market pressures and existing conditions are impacting the affordability of housing on Jefferson Avenue. It is the panel's understanding that public concerns regarding displacement and gentrification are relevant throughout the East Side of Buffalo. As Jefferson Avenue evolves, equitable growth will be paramount. Nonetheless, it is the panel's observation that the ownership of land and homes is a core value for many in the community and this can serve as a foundation for future stability as the area redevelops.

Corridor Project Feasibility and Funding

While it is the panel's belief that the community is generally supportive of new development, bringing those plans to fruition is much harder. The high cost of construction relative to rents observed by the panel will make it difficult to render projects feasible without significant subsidy. Thus, public/private partnerships are required to catalyze meaningful action. It is also the panel's observation that the city has a shortage of Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), which can provide crucial funding for housing and commercial development projects. In addition, the panel identified that access to capital is a notable hurdle, hearing from local stakeholders that the process for securing funds is slow, opaque, and poorly communicated to those who might benefit most from these opportunities.

Infrastructure

Sections of this report identify some of the improvements to physical and community infrastructure needed to support equitable development along the corridor. The panel believes that improvements to local schools, utilities, and basic infrastructure such as streetscapes and green space will enhance the livability of the corridor for the existing community. These public investments also show developers that the City is committed to improving the corridor, which provides a tangible

benefit to developers and investors interested in helping to revitalize the corridor. In addition, it is the panel's observation that the lack of reliable transportation impedes efforts to attract a denser population that could create the critical mass needed to support business and retail vibrancy on Jefferson Avenue.

Foundations for Corridor Revitalization

Based upon stakeholder interviews and experience in other markets throughout the country, the panel identified a few essential considerations that are needed to lay the foundation for revitalization and future development along the Jefferson Avenue Corridor.

Connective Planning and Leadership

To ensure a thriving, sustainable future, a comprehensive, transparent, and community-led approach is needed for revitalization efforts that balances the needs of both legacy residents and businesses while fostering new growth. The panel noted that transparency must include how information is shared and distributed between community and municipal stakeholders and that it is implemented in a way that fosters trust to create truly actionable plans.

The panel recommends that any future work conducted along the corridor should use current and previous planning efforts in the study area to reinforce key priorities already identified by community stakeholders for action and execution. In addition, as discussed further in this report, appointing a dedicated organization or entity to act as the "community quarterback" is an essential step to the revitalization. Typical responsibilities of this entity are outlined elsewhere in the report. The panel also recommends that this entity consider taking on the following responsibilities: building consensus among stakeholders, prioritizing projects, identifying project owners, holding those entities accountable, connecting stakeholders with resources, and keeping the community informed about progress and outcomes.

The panel also recommends that key development nodes complement each other to encourage people to live, work, and play along the entire corridor, rather than compete. One valuable resource to build upon is the 2007 Jefferson Avenue Business Plan, which outlines a vision for the corridor, a document the panel believes can still be helpful in revitalization efforts today. The plan designates different nodes along the corridor, positioning the center as a commercial hub. It envisions mixed-use residential and commercial areas south from Kingsley Street to Dodge Street, and north from Glenwood Avenue to Perry Street. While the plan may need updating to reflect

current conditions based on when it was originally produced, its framework offers a strong foundation on which to build, with its implementation items ripe for revisiting and expansion.

Connecting with the Resources

Developers and contractors within the Jefferson Avenue community will have ample opportunity to participate in projects of varying scale as the corridor revitalizes. To execute on any plans, stakeholders need exposure and access to the multitude of existing grant or subsidy programs at the city, county, and state level. This means that communication between local actors and the institutions that allocate resources needs to be open and transparent to avoid missed opportunities to spur action, build execution experience, and create wealth.

Opportunities and Implementation

To ensure the sustainable development of the community and its neighborhoods, a comprehensive, transparent, and actionable development strategy must be implemented. This plan will guide the development of vacant lots and underused spaces while addressing the needs of residents, businesses, and potential developers alike. The panel recommends the following elements are included in a development strategy for the corridor's revitalization.

Take Strategic Steps with Land Use

Use Buffalo's Unified Zoning and Land Use Code in conjunction with infrastructure project phasing to guide development. The panel offers the following examples:

- In residential areas, the panel recommends a combination of low- (single-family/townhouse), medium-, and high-density housing within the context of an urban area will accommodate people at various income levels, ensuring the community remains inclusive and diverse. For example, converting carriage houses to residential units can be a way to densify neighborhoods with housing types that are naturally affordable, and also offer income-generation opportunities for landowners.
- Align corridor development phasing with infrastructure work, especially for larger projects. The panel recommends identifying which uses are appropriate for each node and considering whether timing is viable from a needs and resources perspective. When possible, "Tear the street up once."
- Zoning along Jefferson Avenue primarily consists of N-3 (Urban Mixed Use) and Employment categories. Although these categories allow a range of uses by right, some uses such as live entertainment, open-air markets, schools, and lodges/clubs require a special-use permit. The panel recommends reviewing the permitting process for a range of uses that increase the vitality of the corridor.

Auburn Pointe: Revitalization Is a Marathon, Not a Race

Auburn Pointe is a transit-oriented development project located in the historic Sweet Auburn neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia. Building upon previous catalytic Hope VI mixed-income housing partnerships, The Integral Group joined forces with The Atlanta Housing Authority to revitalize public housing at Grady Homes. The initial master planning, land transactions, and site demolition took place between 2004 and 2008, followed by the development of over 600 units of mixed-income and senior units in five phases between 2008 and 2014. Master planning and further land acquisition activity began in 2016 for the subsequent development of 700 additional market-rate and workforce units along with neighborhood retail. Market downturns delayed final land acquisition and predevelopment activity until 2024, and subsequent deliveries of additional housing units are targeted for 2026–2029.



Auburn Pointe in 2002 (top) and 2023 (bottom).

- The panel recommends the inclusion of pocket parks and open space along the corridor, as these uses are compatible with Urban Neighborhood zones in Buffalo's form-based code.

Create a Comprehensive Antidisplacement Strategy

Preparing an antidisplacement strategy before gentrification and displacement pressures begin accelerating will be critical to ensuring that a revitalized Jefferson Avenue benefits the whole community. Specifically, the panel recommends taking a creative approach to combatting displacement, including the following actions related to development along the corridor.

- Use existing tax-exemption programs such as the STAR tax exemption for seniors and veterans as part of an antidisplacement strategy. These programs can reduce the financial pressures on legacy residents, helping them stay in the community.
- Work to allocate City-owned land to private landowners for affordable and attainable development, considering projects that target 60–80 percent area median income (AMI) for ownership options. This will create a path to homeownership for middle-income families while supporting affordable housing options.
- Consider community benefit packages that target wealth creation for residents in exchange for incentives in larger scale projects. For example, include margin within rent payment structure to allow for savings opportunities or rent-to-own model.

Make the Jefferson Avenue Corridor a “Cool” Destination

Develop nodes within the corridor that complement each node with thematic drivers building on the area's rich history, culture, and institutions. The goal is to create spaces that serve both the local community and attract visitors to spend time and money in the area. Additional cultural placemaking strategies are discussed within this report. Key elements to achieve this include the following:

- **Vacant Lot Activation:** Implement temporary uses such as food trucks, urban agriculture, pop-up retail, events, and arts and culture initiatives in vacant lots along the corridor. These temporary uses will help activate these spaces and create a lively, engaging atmosphere in the neighborhood. For more information, see the [Urban Agriculture Toolkit](#).

- **Cleanliness and Safety:** Prioritize cleanliness and public safety, which will help build community trust and attract visitors.
- **“Art from the Start”:** Embed creative arts within the design strategies for projects at all scales to amplify neighborhood and citywide voices and talent that highlight Jefferson Avenue authentically.
- **Beautification and Branding:** Establish a strong marketing and branding strategy to highlight the area's unique identity.
- **Open Space:** Include green, accessible open spaces for community gatherings and recreation.

Leverage Existing Subsidies and Funding Opportunities

Identify and use both new and existing subsidies that could support development and existing building rehabilitation. Create a living database that functions as a community resource. Potential sources of funding could include the following:

- **Legacy Cities:** Ensure residents and developers are aware of and using all funding and grant sources available in the *Legacy Cities of Practice* report 2024. These include funding for
 - Repairs and deferred maintenance
 - Energy and resilience upgrades
 - Multifamily building energy management
 - Financial and home buyer education
 - Eviction relief
- **Brownfield Zones:** Explore incentives for executing Phase 1 environmental assessments as a precursor to identifying brownfield sites along Jefferson Avenue. If applicable, consider applying for a Brownfield Opportunity Area designation to facilitate funding and reimbursement sources for contaminated sites.
- **New York State Housing Pilot Program:** It is the panel's understanding that Senator Sean Ryan of the New York State legislature secured \$80 million to create two pilot housing programs to address Buffalo's housing challenges that could positively impact Jefferson Avenue neighborhoods. The panel recommends that Jefferson Avenue corridor stakeholders explore this funding source and, when appropriate, work together to advocate for participating in one or both pilot housing programs. The panel's understanding of the two programs is as follows:

- An allotment of \$40 million was awarded to New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) to construct affordable one- and two-family homes in Buffalo, Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, and Binghamton. The funding will cover construction costs and subsidize the sale of the new homes to low- to moderate-income New Yorkers across Upstate New York.
- An additional \$40 million will be used to create a pilot program that will allow small landlords throughout Upstate New York to apply for grants to help them make major improvements to their rental properties. In exchange for the grants, the landlords will be required to rent the rehabilitated units at an affordable rate determined by HCR for 10 years.
- **Leasing Strategies:** Use low-cost ground leases to activate parcels and unlock value in the short term and medium term. Explore creative lease structures between landlords and tenants to align interests and ensure longer-term viability (percent rent).
- **Social Impact Capital:** Increase awareness of and explore capital sources aligned with community impact.

Examples of Social Impact Capital Sources

- **Washington Housing Initiative** (Washington, D.C.) provides lower cost of capital for projects to preserve affordable multifamily homes.
- **Turner Impact Capital** raises funding for preservation and new development targeted for affordable and workforce housing in key markets.
- **Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing Impact Fund** purchases existing units to preserve affordability.

Adopt a Long-Term Mixed-Income Strategy

Consider a mixed-income development strategy that allows for a sustainable, diverse Jefferson Avenue Corridor and surrounding neighborhoods. By ensuring housing options for a range of income levels, developments will impact the community by deconcentrating poverty and promoting long-term stability.

In conjunction with these efforts, the panel recommends incorporating workforce housing and missing middle housing into the overall development approach to provide pathways to self-sufficiency, home ownership, wealth building, and wealth retention. The following steps are recommended to support this approach.

- Increase AMI from 30–60 percent to give residents a place to grow.
- Add missing middle housing options to attract historic residents back and give local professionals a place to purchase inside district boundaries.
- Add citywide, resident-focused communication that shares available support to support first-time homebuyers (such as downpayment assistance programs and homebuyer workshops).
- Provide guidance on how to maintain or upgrade existing properties such as existing governmental programs, phased improvements and schedules for regular maintenance, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency–led programs for remediation.

Explore the Role of Land Trusts

Connect with existing organizations such as the Fruit Belt Community Land Trust or consider the creation of a new land trust to cohesively manage the use of vacant parcels along the corridor. The panel acknowledges that land trusts can have restrictions on owners that may limit wealth creation, but a land trust can also ensure that land is held in perpetuity for community benefit, helping to ensure land is developed for specific, community-driven purposes.

Phasing: Identify Both Incremental (Short-term) or Large-Scale (Long-term) Strategies

Decide when to focus on smaller, incremental development and rehabilitation projects for more immediate impact versus larger, more ambitious developments. Both approaches can help revitalize Jefferson Avenue. However, opportunities for large projects can present execution challenges due to land assembly, increased costs, and more complex capital stacks required. Smaller infill projects can establish visible and psychological momentum and provide a stabilizing force to attract development to the corridor over the medium term and long term.

Cultivate Relationships between Developers and the Community

Fostering ongoing relationships between developers and the community is crucial for ensuring that development aligns with local needs. Open communication and collaborative planning from the beginning will make it easier to manage expectations and build trust. The panel recommends using developers and contractors that can help build capacity within the community through apprenticeships and other programs that can provide career opportunities for community members.

Communicate and Streamline the City's Entitlement Process

Provide clear instructions for navigating the City's development application process. Create content for the City's website and distribute materials at local workforce development centers that show the steps for submitting planning applications. Outline essentials such as back-up documentation, phone numbers for different departments that issue required permits, and a timeline for the process. These efforts will help new developers or individuals who want to build new units for themselves more easily navigate the process. The panel also recommends that the City consider an even more proactive strategy for residential development that moves affordable housing project applications to the "front of the line," and provide "concierge" services to applicants to assist with navigating the process.

Concierge Services

In Los Angeles, when a developer submits an application to build affordable housing, their application moves to the top of the pile for processing, as well as utility permitting and building inspection. The planner who accepts the application is assigned to the developer and assists in making appointments with the necessary departments in an expedient manner to shorten the predevelopment process. This concierge service saves the developer time, providing a great incentive to development.

Use Resources from the Urban Land Institute

Leverage resources and tools from ULI, such as UrbanPlan, which familiarizes local youth, adults, public officials, and community groups with the complexities of the planning and development process. Raising awareness about urban planning and development processes helps to ensure that everyone in the community has a voice and feels invested in the future of the neighborhood.

By following these strategies, the City, local leaders, and stakeholders can lay the foundation for a thriving, inclusive, and sustainable corridor that benefits both current residents and future generations. By activating vacant lots, leveraging available subsidies, improving infrastructure, and fostering collaboration, the community will have the tools to manage growth and avoid displacement, while creating a vibrant space for all.



SHUTTERSTOCK, DINABERLIN

Community Infrastructure

JEFFERSON AVENUE WAS A SELF-SUSTAINING DISTRICT

that provided diverse, consistent, and quality access to a variety of community supports integral to overall health and well-being of its residents and physical infrastructure. However, over the past half-century, the Jefferson Avenue Corridor has experienced significant change including the loss of many of those community supports. Like other cities in the Rust Belt, Buffalo, specifically the Jefferson Avenue Corridor, is at an important inflection point—one that will determine the direction of both public and private investment moving forward. This is why it is important to understand and assess how the community can use this moment to position itself for long-term growth and success.

In this section:

- A discussion of the elements of the five social determinants of health (economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context)
- Existing conditions and gaps observed by the panel for each element
- Opportunity and implementation recommendations offered by the panel

The panel used the HHS five social determinants of health as a holistic framework and the essential building blocks for the community's infrastructure. This section focuses on the elements of these five social determinants of health (economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context) not focused on in greater detail elsewhere

in the report. For each element, existing conditions and gaps observed by the panel are highlighted, followed by the opportunity and implementation recommendations offered by the panel.

Economic Stability

Goal: To help people earn steady incomes that allow them to meet their health needs

Existing Conditions and Gaps

Economic stability is impacted by several factors. Within the Jefferson Avenue Corridor, gentrification and displacement pressures are constantly increasing, and while the economic vitality of the corridor and overall opportunities have decreased, existing residents demonstrate a commitment to stay. The panel observed that existing businesses are facing challenges to stay open, but they continue to innovate in business model and practices to remain open and grow. The panel also observed that there are limited pathways to earning higher incomes and homeownership, and the current children in households in the study area have limited examples of stable, living-wage employment.

During the panel week, the ULI team highlighted the following gaps to economic stability:

- Smaller businesses do not have the capacity to hire a large portion of the neighborhood or comfortably afford additional office space to grow.
- Available opportunities do not necessarily match the skillsets of nearby residents, or residents must travel to find available jobs that match their skillsets.
- Programming to increase economic stability is one to three steps ahead of where many residents can meaningfully participate, particularly in the areas of the arts and entrepreneurship.

Opportunities and Implementation

Incorporate a comprehensive antidisplacement and gentrification strategy immediately. The panel recommends using a range of tools to affect the pressures that revitalization may place on current residents and businesses.

- Community land trusts can be used to maintain affordability of housing within the neighborhoods surrounding Jefferson Avenue and to create affordable commercial options that provide opportunities for micro (fewer than 10 employees) and small businesses to rent space.
- Prioritize land bank lots for existing residents.
- Implement or increase awareness of property tax exemptions, such as those for seniors, veterans, those with disabilities.

- Incorporate overlay districts and design guidelines to include a range of housing types that are already approved to simplify and speed up the development process.
- Diversify the existing housing stock to include two to four units (i.e., duplexes, triplexes) to address rental market demands and increase options for homeownership and a broader range of price points.
- Use gradients or buffers in land use planning along the corridor and surrounding neighborhoods to create gradual changes between uses and temper the impact of new development on property values in the short term.
- Streamline the development approvals process for individuals looking to build then occupy their home.
- Consider deed restrictions on land or properties that use municipal, regional, or state dollars to build affordable housing.

Share wealth retention strategies so equity is passed down from generation to generation. The panel recommends offering programs and services to help residents with estate planning (wills, estates, and trusts), as well as preserving art and valuable handmade items owned by residents for generations to come.

Use group economics to reduce dependency on outside sources for financial investment, resiliency, and growth. The panel recommends that local businesses seek opportunities for investment via crowdfunding as well as engage in group economic development via the susu model, a form of savings-and-loan and collective investment club. Other options might include credit unions and cooperatives (co-ops).

Highlight local success stories and business innovation. The panel recommends pursuing extensive and collaborative media campaigns that incorporate radio, television, print, social, web, and in-person activations to highlight the business success along Jefferson Avenue now and throughout its revitalization. An application-based awards ceremony could also be created for innovation and small business and administered by an organization such as the Jefferson Avenue Business Association.

Introduce children to diverse careers early. The panel recommends introducing a range of career pathways such as skilled trades, blue collar, white collar, and entrepreneurship at an early age. This effort could be supported through mentorship and positive peer groups and through a network

that incorporates existing programs including those that work with local schools designed to improve youth outcomes, such as Say Yes Buffalo.

Use the susu model. A susu is an informal, rotating savings club often used by communities of color. It represents the power of collective economics and allows communities to serve as their own bank. A financial susu can also be used to provide funding for local opportunities for those businesses and organizations that may face challenges with traditional lending models or those without access to additional resources like CDFIs. The panel recommends that the susu model be expanded and also serve as a social gathering point to build awareness of opportunities, programs, and share knowledge—a social susu.

Education Access and Quality

Goal: To increase educational opportunities and help children and adolescents do well in school

Existing Conditions and Gaps

During the panel week, the ULI team learned that many adult residents do not obtain a high school diploma or GED, college degree, or certification, which can limit financial mobility, stability, and resilience. The panel also learned that the blue-collar community is struggling to transition to service and technical industries. At the same time, it observed that there are successful nonprofit programs preparing youth for college and supporting academic success from infancy to college. The tour of Jefferson Avenue also demonstrated to the panel the proximity of the corridor to several diverse university campuses and their local thought leaders on gentrification, displacement, and community development.

While a high number of the youth programs are available to cater to diverse interests, it is the panel's observation that there is limited knowledge within the community of all existing youth resources and programs. The panel also heard that there are issues with accessing reliable and high-speed internet and a low level of involvement of youth and young adults in civic activities.

Opportunities and Implementation

Increase youth and young adult interest in civic activities/engagement. The panel recommends establishing a Youth Success Network that incorporates existing programs designed to improve outcomes through career exposure, mentorship, and positive peer groups from infancy to college. The local library may also be able to provide interactive options to learn about civics. The panel also recommends collaborating with local

influencers to show youth and young adults how their interest and engagement can be used to impact their neighborhood—examples include Funk Fest, 30 Changemakers Awards, and Say Yes Buffalo.

Address the low educational attainment rate that limits employment options. The panel recommends that community leaders and stakeholders work with educators and students to overcome obstacles to high school graduation and higher education. Concurrently, the panel recommends taking steps to increase awareness of available educational and vocational options outside of school for students. Another strategy the panel recommends is to develop a support network for students at high risk of not graduating from high school.

Address the challenge of accessing reliable, high-speed internet within the study area. From the perspective of physical infrastructure, the panel noted that internet access is essential to today's way of life, but reliable high-speed internet access is a challenge for residents along the Jefferson Avenue Corridor. The panel recommends identifying the resources to continue and expand the hotspot program within the Buffalo School District and identifying a corporate partner to support expansion of access to broadband.

Health Care Access and Quality

Goal: To increase access to comprehensive, high-quality health care services

Existing Conditions and Gaps

It is the panel's understanding that no medical services are currently available within the study area, but the panel heard that in past decades "any medical service you needed was available" and given by providers and business owners that were reflective of the neighborhood, including dentists, pediatricians, and primary care physicians. Fortunately, the panel understands that a new medical center/clinic is planned for the areas and will be opened where the FIGMAS (Finally I Got Myself a Store) was located for years. In addition, the new Erie County Medical Center medical campus has expanded its capacity. However, the overall limited access to health care services across the spectrum of health needs remains a challenge for area residents.

Opportunities and Implementation

Create a network of health care providers that service the entire district. The panel recommends that an existing building be repurposed to create a shared medical office space incubator and medical pop-ups are coordinated that cater to residents without reliable transportation.

Support the creation of medical clinics and increase awareness of their use for routine medical visits for community members.

Leverage proximity to medical centers and allied health professionals and medical programs. These institutions present opportunities for job training and long-term provider recruitment within the study area.

Increase awareness of and address the negative health impact of years of manufacturing and industrial uses near residential uses along Jefferson Avenue. The panel recommends hosting clinics that speak directly to the impact of industrial uses within a community and that the City consider zoning and plans that more gradually transition from industrial to residential uses in this area moving forward.

Neighborhood and Built Environment

Goal: To create neighborhoods and environments that promote health and safety

Existing Conditions and Gaps

A formerly fully integrated corridor, the panel observed that Jefferson Avenue is currently fragmented and lacks connection and synergy between the various districts. The panel observed a loss of visually and physically distinct cultural zones, as well as public investment with impactful but disconnected projects. The high incidence of vacant land and abandoned structures also presents a challenge to the neighborhoods and built environment as well as the need for additional park space (large and small) dispersed throughout the study area. The panel also noted the need for basic infrastructure improvements to streets and sidewalks, to encourage social interaction, shopping, and activity along the corridor as well as more options for alternative modes of transportation. During the panel week, the ULI team also identified the need for a variety of prepared and fresh healthy food options and a need for additional tree canopy, green infrastructure, and landscaping.

Opportunities and Implementation

The panel offers the following recommendations to promote health and safety within the Jefferson Avenue Corridor neighborhoods.

Add green space. The panel recommends increased park space dispersed throughout the neighborhood and activating pocket parks in vacant lots for small-scale urban gardening, farmers markets, makers markets, and events.

Address physical infrastructure and environmental issues.

The panel recommends investing in improvements to streets and sidewalks, which will make commuting to work easier and potentially increase social interactions and foot traffic for businesses. Streetscape improvements, including increasing the tree canopy, can be paired with broader planning efforts that create a sense of identity with physically distinct cultural zones along the corridor. Placemaking strategies, as discussed further in this report, can also be used to create a sense of visual identity. At the same time, the panel recommends incorporating a common utility trench in the right-of-way for broadband providers as part of future street infrastructure projects to support educational, social, and economic connectivity.

More broadly, the panel recommends engaging in strategic planning efforts that connect public and private investment to create catalytic projects along the corridor and pursue federal funding to support historic corridor upgrades. The panel also believes it is important to pursue remediation of former industrial sites that also need to be complete before, and as, new development takes place along Jefferson Avenue.

Increase access to healthy food options. Provide a variety of options for healthy foods, not only through fresh grocery options, but also with prepared foods and restaurants. Pop-ups or incubators are two ways to increase healthy food options within the corridor and provide entrepreneurs with proof of concept for potential growth.

Social and Community Context

Goal: To increase social and community support

Existing Conditions and Gaps

Even over the few days of the panel week, the panel observed the strong sense of community among residents, businesses along the entire length of the corridor, and through the presence of legacy and multigenerational families. However, the panel also observed that trust has eroded between the community and the entities that have engaged with and invested in the corridor due to what has been described as overpromising and underdelivering. It is the panel's understanding that there has been increasing racial tensions among immigrants, migrants from other parts of the state, and the existing Black community. In addition, the community has been impacted by decades of institutional and systemic racism—generating environmental, social, and economic trauma. The panel heard that there has been a loss of knowledge within the community and there is no current structure in place to pass it down. The panel also hears that there are notable silos within the community based

on quadrants and districts along Jefferson Avenue. Finally, the community is still reeling from the events and impact of the shooting that occurred on May 14, 2022.

Opportunities and Implementation

To increase social and community support within the Jefferson Avenue Corridor, the panel recommends the following actions.

Celebrate the strong sense of community along the corridor.

To do so, the panel recommends expanding multigenerational mentorship programs to build entrepreneurship capacity and civic engagement.

Build deeper trust between City Hall and community

members. The panel recommends creating a Neighborhood Communication Plan to create consistent communication and to streamline City processes for individuals to take advantage of development and programmatic opportunities.

Navigate new changing cultural dynamics. The panel recommends introducing cultural sensitivity and healing circles to ease racial tensions between immigrants, those migrating from other parts of the state, and the existing, legacy Black community. In addition, the panel recommends acknowledging that the 5/14 incident highlighted the impact of decades of institutional and systemic racism, but that collaborations—such as the 5/14 Memorial “Seeing Us” by Jin Young Song and Douglas Alligood—can spark the beginning of environmental, social, and economic change.



SHUTTERSTOCK - WINDCOLORS

Physical Infrastructure

OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH STREETS, ROADS, SIDEWALKS, AND UTILITIES, PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE IS ESSENTIAL for resident quality of life and doing business along a commercial corridor such as Jefferson Avenue. The panel conducted a high-level review of existing conditions along the corridor, including capital improvement projects planned by the City, and considered what other improvements might support development and revitalization along the corridor.

In this section:

- A high-level review of existing conditions, including capital improvement projects planned by the City, and gaps along the corridor
- Short-, medium-, and long-term opportunities to consider for physical infrastructure improvements

Existing Conditions and Gaps

Interviews and informal conversations with stakeholders provided the panel with insight into the current conditions and challenges associated with Jefferson Avenue. Streetscape

and street improvements were mentioned, as well as safety for persons on all modes of transportation and a need to cohesively connect the corridor through branding that reflects the community's history.

What the Panel Heard

A summary of the stakeholder feedback on physical infrastructure:

- More trees, planters, and benches
- Activate some existing greenspace, even if temporary
- Pedestrian and bicycle improvements
- Traffic moving too fast, slow it down
- Better street and sidewalk maintenance
- Increased lane and crosswalk striping is needed
- Increased sidewalk lighting is needed
- Consistent branding and art that reflects the community history (placemaking)
- Make it safer for cars, people, and bicycles
- Better bus shelters
- When the street improves, adjoining properties will follow suit

Upcoming Streetscape Projects on Jefferson Avenue

The panel also learned about three City-led projects, with funding, that are currently under design or in the initial concept phase that will begin to address the issues and themes highlighted by stakeholders. The following is a high-level summary of each project, and the panel recommends that the City take steps to provide additional information and status on each project to area residents on a regular basis.

Streetscape Improvements Phase 1

Project Area: Jefferson Avenue from Best Street to Main Street

Street Phase: In design, construction scheduled for 2025

This project is the first of two phases of Jefferson Avenue Streetscape Improvements with a construction budget of \$25 million between them. It will include road and crosswalk restriping, pedestrian safety upgrades, bump-outs, potential green infrastructure, street trees and site furniture, bicycle accommodations, new street lightning, new signage, and public art.



The planned Jefferson Avenue Streetscape Improvements Phase 1 area, highlighted in red.

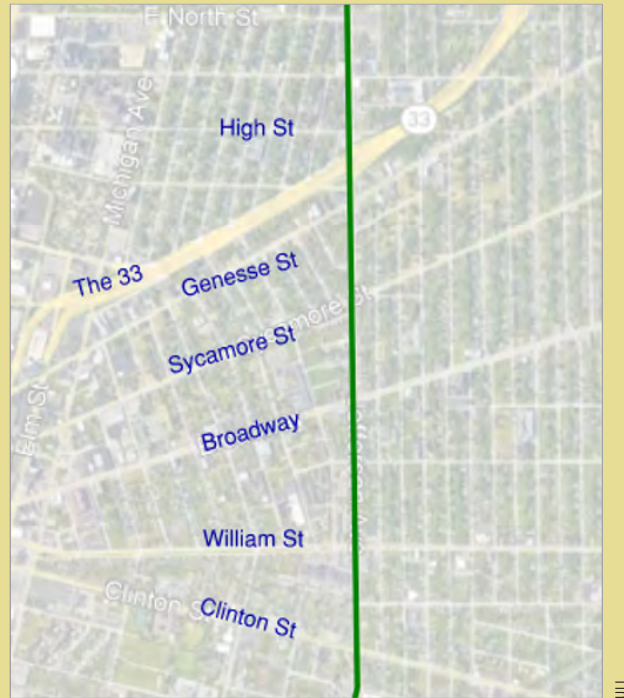
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Streetscape Improvements Phase 2

Project Area: Jefferson Avenue from Swan Street to Best Street

Phase: In design, construction scheduled for 2026–2029

This project is the second of two phases funded with the remainder of the \$25 million. It will be a continuation of Phase 1.



The Phase 2 area for the project, highlighted in green.

East Delavan Sewer Project

Project Area: East Delavan and Spillman Place

Phase: Currently not in design, construction tentatively scheduled for 2027

This funded project is rebuilding and replacing the sewer system along East Delavan Avenue and Spillman Place. The project will likely consist of a 1.5-million-gallon underground holding tank with associated improvements. The project will include environmental projection

measures, reduce water pollution into Scajaquada Creek, reduce opportunities for sewer water system back-ups, provide an opportunity for landscaping improvements, and provide some new water and sewer infrastructure.

In addition to the three streetscape projects highlighted in this report, the panel also noted the following existing conditions and gaps in physical infrastructure along Jefferson Avenue.

- **Kensington Expressway Project:** Although it was not the focus of the panel's efforts, the team did learn that the Kensington Expressway Project—which would include the construction of a tunnel to put a portion of the expressway from Dodge Street to Sidney Street underground, create a tree-lined median on top of the tunnel, and add approximately 11 acres of public greenspace—is on hold.
- **The State New York All Electric Building Act:** The panel believes this act, effective January 1, 2025, will be a game changer for the region. The act requires that all newly constructed buildings use electricity, not natural gas. More locally, it is the panel's understanding that future capacity is available if Jefferson Avenue demands continue at a reasonable pace.
- **Water and Sewer Services:** It is the panel's understanding that the existing utilities along Jefferson Avenue are “okay” and can support reasonable growth along the corridor. However, the panel notes that existing water main and lateral services are planned to be largely left in place with the streetscape improvement projects. It is the panel's understanding that the existing sewer main was also investigated and found to be in satisfactory condition, so they are not being replaced with the upcoming streetscape projects.
- **Pavement Improvements:** The panel believes it is important to note that the two Jefferson Avenue Streetscape Improvement projects are not street reconstructions. It is the panel's understanding that the plan is to mill the three- to four-inch asphalt surface to return to the underlying older concrete surface. Any deep uncovered concerns would be repaired and a geogrid fabric installed over the surface for reinforcement and stabilization prior to resurfacing with new asphalt. The panel notes that this is an accepted and widely used street rehabilitation strategy but does not have the same life cycle as a reconstructed street.
- **Internet Accessibility:** The panel reviewed the [Federal Communications Commission \(FCC\) National Broadband Map](#) for up-to-date information on existing internet providers, their technology, and download/upload speeds. The corridor is predominantly served by Spectrum via cable, offering download speeds of 1,000 Mbps and

upload speeds of 35 Mbps. Given the current service availability, the panel believes that the corridor may not meet the underserved designation. However, with upload speeds at 35 Mbps, schools, businesses, and incubator spaces could consider engaging with service providers to negotiate faster upload speeds during future system upgrades.

At the northern end of the corridor, from Canisius University south to Northland Avenue, Greenlight Networks provides fiber-optic service with download/upload speeds of 5,000 Mbps. In the Larkinville District, the FCC map indicates fiber-to-the-premises service (not cable) provided by Spectrum, is delivering speeds similar to those found along the corridor.

However, while the infrastructure does exist for internet access, this does not address the cost of service. The panel heard that accessing reliable, fast internet service remains an issue within the community.

- **Unified Placemaking Plan:** Discussed in more detail within the [Cultural Placemaking](#) section, a unified placemaking plan does not currently exist for the corridor. Phase 1 of the Jefferson Avenue Streetscape Improvements project has a placemaking and art component that could lead in developing a unified plan for the rest of the corridor, but this effort may not be currently evaluated through that lens.

Opportunities and Implementation

Jefferson Avenue in its heyday once had infrastructure, placemaking, and catalyst developments. The three currently funded infrastructure projects can lead the way to a new vibrancy for Jefferson Avenue when combined with the other recommendations included within this report. The panel identified several opportunities to consider for physical infrastructure improvements along Jefferson Avenue. The panel recognizes that many of these have substantial construction costs not currently budgeted, but the panel believes they are all items worthy of further consideration and planning.

Short-term Recommendations

Take a pause and review Phase 1 of the Jefferson Avenue Streetscape Improvements project. The panel recommends thinking corridor-wide about providing spaces in the right-of-way for future placemaking elements such as overhead monumentation, neighborhood markers, and historical

markers, and strongly recommends considering more funding for public art on Jefferson Avenue.

The panel also recommends taking time to consider making provisions for future broadband, such as placing fiber conduit in with the streetscape improvements. It is the panel's understanding that the established policy is that service laterals for utilities from the right-of-way to the property owner have always been the responsibility of the property owner. The panel recommends incorporating additional communication regarding property owner responsibilities into current and future communications around utility projects and infrastructure plans.

The panel also recommends taking time during this review period to identify permanent or temporary greenspace for public use in this early phase of revitalization so that it can be incorporated into current and future projects and plans.

Take steps to identify resources and programs to increase internet access. The panel recommends identifying the resources to continue and expand the hotspot program within the Buffalo School District and identifying a corporate partner to support the expansion of access to broadband as discussed in the [Community Infrastructure](#) section of this report. The panel also recommends exploring programs such as [Verizon Forward](#). This program provides low-cost internet plans for qualified households. Additional discounts for New York residents through the New York Affordable Broadband Act may apply.

Medium-term Recommendations

Conduct a corridor and neighborhood placemaking study and formalize a plan for Jefferson Avenue and its historic neighborhoods. The panel recommends establishing a plan that promotes the history of Jefferson Avenue, its neighborhoods, and its people. This effort can both guide future placemaking efforts and elevate placemaking priorities to be considered for future funding sources. Key recommended elements for the plan include the following:

- Overall continuity of placemaking efforts throughout the entire Jefferson Avenue Corridor;
- Right-of-way or easement space reserved for placemaking markers;
- Coordinated culture, history, and art elements;

- Locations for overhead banners along the corridor like those on Michigan Avenue;
- Locations of historical significance identified for walking tour signage;
- Historic neighborhood boundaries identified for monumentation;
- Locations for possible pocket parks identified and perhaps reinforced by short-term efforts to promote greenspace for public use along the corridor; and
- Concepts for seasonal and permanent street light banner signs.

Long-term Recommendations

Plan bigger and share a vision. After the Jefferson Avenue streetscape improvements are complete, local stakeholders should start talking about where to invest next. Consider the future need for sewer and water main improvements over the long term.

“Turn the corner.” Consider future improvements to key east/west connections. It is currently understood by the panel that \$25 million has been identified for two phases of Jefferson Avenue Streetscape Improvements. This funding is for Phase 1: Best Street to Main Street, and Phase 2: Swan Street to Best Street.

The panel recommends that consideration be given to potential future phases for east/west connections to bring more people to Jefferson Avenue as it revitalizes. This effort could be done concurrently or separately from the recommended corridor/neighborhood placemaking study. The panel does acknowledge that any final long-term vision will require additional planning, community engagement, public communication, project cost-estimating, and funding.

Specifically, the panel recommends additional phases that could build upon the Jefferson Avenue improvements at key east/west nodes along the corridor as private investments increases. Communication of a visionary phasing plan will also promote further development interest, especially after the community sees completion of the initial phases of the Jefferson Avenue improvements.

Phase 3A: Utica Street from Verplank Street to Hauf Street.

As the intersection of Jefferson and Utica develops, this represents a continuation of that node for two blocks to the east and west.

Phase 3B: Best Street from Peach Street to Pershing Street.

As the intersection of Jefferson and Best develops, this represents a continuation of that node for two blocks to the east and west.

Phase 4: High Street from the medical center to Jefferson Avenue.

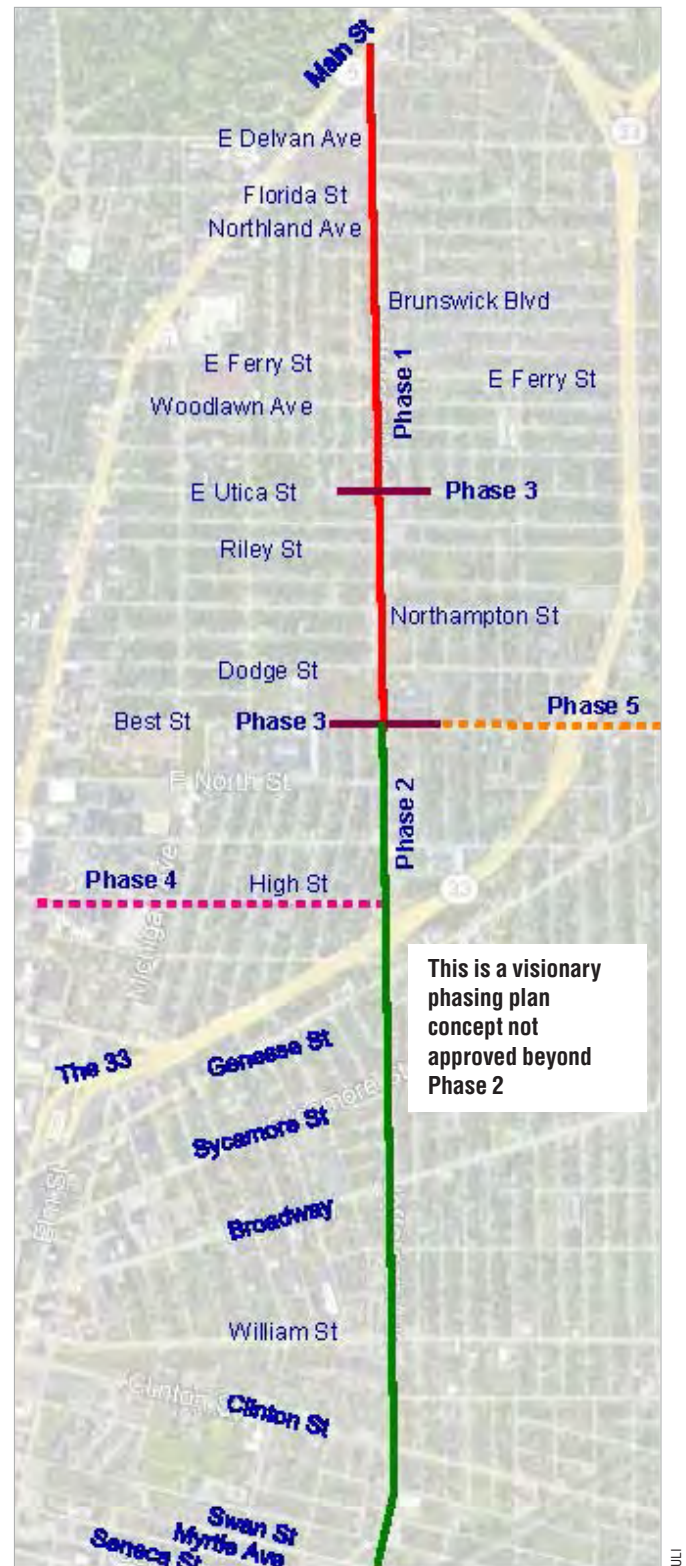
As development occurs at Jefferson Avenue and High Street, this project could connect the medical campus to Jefferson Avenue, encouraging employees to frequent the existing and new retail establishments and restaurants on Jefferson Avenue.

Phase 5: Best Street from Jefferson to Martin Luther King Jr. Park.

The panel recommends correcting a longstanding wrong in at least one location through infrastructure improvements with a bridge and sidewalk improvements. This could provide a much stronger and safer pedestrian and bicycle connection between the long-separated neighborhoods.

Jefferson Avenue Infrastructure Funded and Visionary Infrastructure Investments

Funded Phases	Year
Phase 1: Jefferson Avenue from Best Street to Main Street	2025
Phase 2: Jefferson Avenue from Swan Street to Best Street	2027 (Tentative)
Visionary Ideas	Year
Phase 3A: Utica Street east/west	To be determined
Phase 3B: Best Street east/west	To be determined
Phase 4: Connection to the medical center along High Street	To be determined
Phase 5: Best Street from Jefferson Avenue to Martin Luther King Jr. Park	To be determined



Visionary phasing plan concept developed by the panel to illustrate potential, future infrastructure improvements.



SHUTTERSTOCK, DRAZEN ZIGIC

Economic Development: Workforce Development

A THRIVING CORRIDOR REQUIRES A SKILLED AND ACCESSIBLE WORKFORCE that meets the needs of employers while creating opportunities for residents to achieve economic mobility. Workforce development explores strategies to connect residents with training and employment opportunities, aligning skills with the demands of the local economy.

In this section:

- Critical workforce development challenges and opportunities
- Existing conditions that show where workforce development efforts can focus on industries with strong job growth potential while addressing the systemic barriers that contribute to higher unemployment rates in the corridor
- Skill and training gaps that hinder workforce participation
- Opportunities to expand training access, create career pathways, and leverage community partnerships
- Recommendations for phased implementation of workforce development plans

Community members, business owners, and other stakeholders highlighted several critical workforce development challenges and opportunities in conversations with the panel. There is a pressing need to expand access to training and apprenticeship programs in the trades, helping residents gain the skills necessary for high-demand jobs while addressing local workforce gaps. Additionally, stakeholders have stressed the importance of “workforce training for tomorrow”—programs that prepare workers for emerging industries and technologies while fostering adaptability in an ever-changing economy.

Educational pipelines also emerged as a focal point, with feedback calling for stronger pipelines to connect elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education systems. Community members stressed the need to introduce students early to career pathways and opportunities to build awareness and readiness.

The panel also heard that access remains a significant barrier to workforce development. Many residents expressed difficulty in navigating existing programs, while employers struggle to find qualified candidates due to gaps in outreach and program visibility. There is also strong support for increasing mentorship opportunities—both formal and informal—to guide job seekers in personal and professional growth. Stakeholders also pointed to the need for greater industry awareness and education on the broader workforce ecosystem. By demystifying industries and their terminology, the community can foster stronger connections among job seekers, employers, and workforce programs.

It is the panel's observation that these insights underscore the community's commitment to creating a workforce development strategy that not only addresses current gaps but also builds a foundation for sustainable economic growth and opportunity.

Existing Market Conditions

The Jefferson Avenue Corridor reflects broader employment trends on Buffalo's East Side, where unemployment rates provided by WindsorTurner for the Jefferson Avenue Corridor (13.4 percent) are consistently higher than those observed in the City of Buffalo (8.4 percent) and Erie County (5.7 percent). While this underscores systemic challenges, it also points to opportunities for strategic workforce development. The employment landscape along the corridor is heavily concentrated in a few sectors, with health care and social assistance representing the largest share (19.6 percent), followed by educational services (11.4 percent) and accommodation and food services (9.3 percent).

These primary industries highlight the importance of the health care and education sectors in providing jobs along the corridor, though employment opportunities in these fields are not yet sufficient to address the area's high unemployment rates. Moreover, the accommodation and food services sector, though smaller, underscores the corridor's potential for growth in hospitality and retail-related industries.

Looking forward, several sectors show significant growth potential along Jefferson Avenue. The construction industry offers opportunities to meet both local workforce needs and broader economic development objectives, particularly as infrastructure improvements and redevelopment initiatives move forward. The technology sector also emerges as a key area for growth, representing an opportunity to align workforce training with high-demand, high-growth jobs. Additionally, health care, already a major employer, holds continued promise as the demand for services grows and innovations in care create new career pathways.

Understanding these trends allows local stakeholders to focus workforce development efforts on industries with strong job growth potential while addressing the systemic barriers that contribute to higher unemployment rates in the corridor. By doing so, Jefferson Avenue can become a hub of opportunity, aligning its workforce with the region's economic strengths and future possibilities.

Existing Gaps

The Jefferson Avenue Corridor faces several critical obstacles that hinder workforce participation and limit the economic potential of its residents as observed by the panel. These barriers can be grouped into key themes that impact residents' ability to secure and sustain employment.

Skills and Training Gaps

There is a noticeable lack of job training programs aligned with the needs of industries essential to Jefferson Avenue's revitalization, including retail, hospitality, creative arts, and technology. It is the panel's understanding that while some programs exist, they often do not address the full spectrum of skills needed in both technical and “soft” areas like communication and conflict resolution. In addition, it is the panel's understanding that many residents are unable to access industry-specific training or develop the necessary skills to thrive in growing sectors, which directly impacts local businesses and economic growth.

Access and Awareness Barriers

It is the panel's understanding that many residents lack reliable internet, devices, and digital literacy, making it difficult for them to search for jobs, access training programs, or participate in remote work opportunities. In addition, existing workforce development programs often go underused due to a lack of awareness, perceived barriers to entry, or mistrust in institutions. This prevents community members from benefiting from available resources. Also, it is the panel's understanding that residents are often unaware of career paths and industries such as health care, technology, and construction, which have significant growth potential. This limits their ability to pursue opportunities in emerging sectors.

Systemic and Structural Barriers

Longstanding racial and economic disparities have created challenges in educational attainment, access to networks, and career mobility. Addressing these inequities requires focused, equity-driven solutions. In addition, a lack of youth-focused programs including apprenticeships, internships, and mentorships limits young people's ability to gain hands-on experience and successfully enter the workforce.

Local Network and Job Market Navigation Challenges

It is the panel's understanding that transplants or returning residents often struggle to establish professional connections within the local job market due to a lack of a local network, making it difficult to access job opportunities and gain credibility. In addition, new residents may not understand local industry expectations or job market dynamics, hindering their ability to navigate the job search process and secure relevant opportunities. Many residents may lack guidance on where to look for jobs or how to target industries based on their skills and experience, leading to missed opportunities.

Opportunities

The Jefferson Avenue Corridor presents a unique opportunity for transformative workforce development strategies aimed at bridging the gap between residents and the growing economic opportunities in the region. By focusing on expanding training access, creating career pathways, and leveraging community partnerships, the community can build a robust and inclusive workforce ready to participate in the revitalization of Jefferson Avenue.

Expand access to and awareness of government-sponsored/funded workforce training programs in partnership with local businesses. Expanding access to government-funded workforce programs is a crucial step in equipping Jefferson Avenue residents with the skills needed for emerging job sectors. Key programs, such as those managed by the Buffalo Employment & Training Center (Buffalo Division for Employment and Training), Northland Workforce Training Center (NWTC), Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) workforce programs, provide valuable resources that can be integrated into the Jefferson Avenue Corridor's workforce strategy.

Create career pathways focused on trades, technology, and entrepreneurship. Strengthening career pathways for local residents, especially in trades, technology, and entrepreneurship (such as the programming offered at The Exchange at Beverly Gray), will be vital for boosting local talent pipelines and fostering economic self-sufficiency. The following are examples of successful programs that can be adapted to the Jefferson Avenue Corridor:

- **Yea I Built That (Hands-On Construction Showcase):** This initiative showcases the potential of the construction trade to inspire and engage residents in hands-on learning experiences. By creating similar programs in the Jefferson Avenue Corridor, residents can gain valuable exposure to the construction industry, acquire skills, and potentially transition into construction careers. A focus on hands-on experience will allow residents to directly connect with the trade while also building a sense of community and ownership in the revitalization process.
- **Dream Builders for Equity:** This program provides a model for addressing the vacant home epidemic while simultaneously creating workforce development opportunities for minority youth. By engaging local youth in large-scale, community-led development projects, residents not only contribute to the physical revitalization of their neighborhoods but also gain valuable skills and ownership. Replicating a similar program along Jefferson Avenue would help youth from underserved communities build careers in the construction industry, all while creating lasting positive change in the area. Importantly, Dream Builders for Equity ensures that efforts don't displace current residents, creating a sustainable and inclusive growth model.

Examples of Government-Sponsored/Funded Workforce Training Programs

- **WIOA Workforce Programs:** The WIOA provides funding for a wide range of workforce development programs, including specific initiatives for vulnerable populations. Programs such as Job Corps, YouthBuild, Reentry Employment Opportunities, and others address the needs of underrepresented groups. By incorporating these programs into the Jefferson Avenue Corridor workforce strategy, there can be tailored support for youth, returning citizens, and other underserved populations, providing them with job training, career coaching, and the skills necessary to thrive in today's workforce.
- **Buffalo Employment & Training Center (Buffalo Division for Employment and Training):** This center offers a variety of services aimed at improving workforce outcomes in the region, including career planning, skills training (such as GED and ESL), job search assistance, and job placement. It also collaborates with local businesses, particularly those involved in city economic development projects, to meet workforce needs and offer specialized services.
- **Northland Workforce Training Center:** NWTC focuses on training individuals for careers in advanced manufacturing and energy. It provides certifications, job placement, and financial aid counseling, aiming to address growing employment opportunities in high-skill industries. The center plays a critical role in upskilling Buffalo's workforce, especially in sectors that are expected to grow in the coming years.
- **Chicago Women in Trades and the Hispanic American Construction Industry Association (HACIA):** Both organizations focus on expanding workforce opportunities in the construction and trade industries for women and minority communities. These models, along with partnerships from local organizations, could significantly enhance opportunities for women and minorities in the Jefferson Avenue Corridor. Programs focused on training, apprenticeship, and mentorship can create a more diverse workforce in the trades and tech industries, empowering marginalized communities to secure high-paying, sustainable jobs.
- **Chicago Dawson Technical Institute:** This technical training institution offers a robust curriculum for those pursuing careers in various trades. Integrating programs like this into the Jefferson Avenue Corridor would provide residents with access to the specialized training needed to succeed in rapidly growing fields such as construction and technology.



SHUTTERSTOCK, GROUND PICTURE

Partner with current community organizations to address access barriers. Buffalo is home to a wealth of local community organizations that can be leveraged to help overcome barriers that prevent residents from fully participating in the workforce. Collaborating with these organizations, such as those outlined below, will ensure a more inclusive approach to workforce development and help to connect the community with valuable resources.

- **Nonprofits:** Organizations such as the Buffalo Urban League and others have a strong track record of advocating for economic and workforce development in underserved communities. By partnering with such organizations, Jefferson Avenue revitalization champions can tap into an established network of programs and resources that directly address the needs of residents, such as job-readiness workshops, mentorship, and access to job listings.
- **Educational Institutions:** Institutions such as Buffalo State College can serve as critical partners in creating pathways for higher education, certifications, and training programs that align with workforce needs. In addition to providing academic support, educational institutions can work with local businesses to create tailored curriculum and internships that align with emerging sectors in Jefferson Avenue.
- **Grassroots Organizations:** Organizations such as the North East Basketball Club can play an important role in creating mentorship and career development programs for youth and young adults. By using trusted community spaces such as local recreation centers, the club and other grassroots organizations could partner with workforce development programs to create internship opportunities, training, and career exploration activities for local youth.

By expanding access to workforce training, focusing on career pathways in high-demand sectors, and partnering with community organizations, Jefferson Avenue can develop a sustainable, inclusive workforce that is prepared to meet the demands of a growing and revitalizing region. These strategies not only provide opportunities for residents but also strengthen the local economy by ensuring that businesses have access to the skilled workforce they need to thrive.

Phased Implementation

The panel recommends the following phased actions to increase the economic vitality of the Jefferson Avenue Corridor by focusing on workforce development.

Short Term

Create community engagement and partnerships. The panel recommends that efforts are made to immediately begin cultivating relationships with key local stakeholders—such as businesses, education systems, and community organizations—while exploring models from cities like St. Louis Agency on Training and Employment (SLATE) and Chicago (Women in Trades, HACIA) to understand best practices and refine the workforce development strategy for

Jefferson Avenue. Establish working groups to focus on trades, technology, and entrepreneurship pathways.

Build a framework to replicate successful models. Start working with local businesses and community organizations to introduce industry-specific workforce training programs, modeled after successful initiatives such as Dream Builders for Equity, Yea I Built That, and others. These initiatives will focus on creating career pathways in the trades, technology, and entrepreneurship, especially aimed at strengthening minority talent pipelines.

Medium Term

Create youth engagement and mentorship programs. Launch a pilot youth employment and mentorship program, drawing inspiration from existing models that use apprenticeships, internships, and community-led development projects to prepare youth for career success. Partner with local contractors and industry leaders to provide hands-on experience and exposure to high-demand industries.

Explore integration of government-funded workforce programs. Begin assessing how to bring workforce development programs such as WIOA and to recreate models such as SLATE into Buffalo's local ecosystem. This involves determining whether the City should take the lead in managing these programs, whether a new entity should be created to oversee their implementation, or if there is an opportunity to partner with existing organizations to integrate these programs.

Long Term

Create industry-specific career pathways. Work with industry partners, educational institutions, and workforce development agencies to establish comprehensive career pathways in the trades, health care, technology, and other growing sectors. Tailor these pathways to meet local workforce needs and ensure they address the broader gaps identified in Jefferson Avenue's workforce ecosystem.

Build a sustainable workforce economic development framework. Create a long-term plan for sustaining and expanding these programs, including securing funding for workforce development initiatives, building partnerships with universities or training centers, and exploring opportunities to incorporate digital literacy into the training process to meet the needs of an increasingly tech-driven economy. Consider developing an apprenticeship program linked to redevelopment projects that can be incentivized to attract large-scale economic development opportunities from business attraction to real estate development.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Economic Development: Small-Business Support

THE BACKBONE OF ANY VIBRANT COMMUNITY IS ITS SMALL-BUSINESS ECOSYSTEM. The panel emphasizes small-business ecosystem-building in this report as a pathway to fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic resilience. By supporting existing businesses and creating an environment conducive to new ventures, Jefferson Avenue can become a hub of cultural and commercial activity.

In this section:

- The importance of small-business ecosystem-building in fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic resilience
- Existing small business programs, incentives, and support designed to support locally owned businesses
- Panel recommendations for increasing small-business support and developing an inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem

Existing Conditions and Gaps

Through stakeholder interviews, the panel learned about various small business programs, incentives, and support backed by the City of Buffalo and New York State. These efforts are designed to support locally owned businesses, with a particular focus on projects that provide economic benefits to individuals living and working within the community. The panel would like to applaud and highlight these efforts.

East Side Avenues: Administered by the Empire State Development Corporation, this initiative supports locally owned

business with a focus on projects that provide economic benefits to people working and living in the community. The organization focuses on five capacity-building programs that support small business through investments in community anchors and infrastructure.

The Buffalo Small Business Assistance Grant Program:

This program is designed to help small and minority business owners in the City of Buffalo recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and develop plans for future resilience. Eligible small

businesses with 50 or fewer full-time equivalent employees can apply for grants of up to \$25,000. In addition, businesses will receive customized technical assistance. The program is administered by Grow America, with support from the Buffalo Urban League and The Exchange at Beverly Gray, which assist business owners with technical guidance and application support.

Buffalo Business Forward: Buffalo Business Forward is a webpage on the City of Buffalo's official site that serves as a central resource hub and communication tool for the local business community. The page provides updates on business assistance opportunities, available resources, and guidance for entrepreneurs.

East Side Avenues Initiatives

East Side Commercial Districts: An expanded building renovation program. The program targets four key investment areas and aims to improve the business climate, combat vacant properties, and contribute to the revitalization of commercial corridors. There have been two funding rounds, providing financial support for 36 building renovations across four districts.

Community-Based Real Estate Development

Training: This program offers training to East Side residents and building owners in commercial real estate development, aiming to build local capacity for real estate investment and ownership. Four cohorts have occurred, with 36 graduates.

Commercial Building Stabilization Fund: This fund provides dedicated financial resources for stabilizing at-risk historic buildings in targeted investment areas. Funding has been provided for 20 building stabilizations totaling \$3,000,000.

Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor:

This initiative aims to create a cooperative operating and business model for capital improvements, turning Michigan Street into a unified tourist destination that highlights the area's unique assets.

Central Terminal: Efforts are underway to restore one of Buffalo's most iconic buildings to serve as a year-round, regional venue, contributing to the revitalization of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood.

Additional information about East Side Avenues can be found at <http://eastsideavenues.org>.

What the Panel Learned

During the panel week, the ULI team learned that there are already efforts underway at the grassroots level to support small businesses and revitalize the Jefferson Avenue Corridor. The panel acknowledges these hyper-local, trusted organizations and individuals helping support small business along Jefferson Avenue—the Greater Jefferson Avenue Business Association, the Buffalo Urban League, The Exchange at Beverly Gray, the NAACP, and the organizer and founder of Funkfest and Friday Night LIVE, Marnetta Malcolm. This list is not exhaustive, but the panel wishes to highlight that efforts to support small business and revitalization of the corridor exist today and can be leveraged for future growth and revitalization.

However, the panel's conversations with stakeholders revealed a disconnect for some business owners on how to access available resources. The panel also observed a lack of trust among some groups regarding the effectiveness of these initiatives in supporting locally owned, Black-owned businesses.

Moreover, the panel identified a significant gap in the support available to micro-entrepreneurs, defined as businesses with fewer than five employees, which are often overlooked in the broader landscape of small business support. These businesses face unique challenges, such as limited access to capital, technical assistance, and business development services.

Micro-entrepreneurs are an essential part of Buffalo's economy, and tailored support for them can potentially provide a substantial boost to their growth and sustainability. Expanding capacity-building resources, offering smaller-scale grants, and improving outreach to this group could create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Buffalo's smallest businesses. This is particularly true for existing and future small and micro-businesses along Jefferson Avenue, a once-thriving corridor for Black-owned businesses. The panel believes that it is critical to understand the existing challenges facing Black-owned businesses and work to address them.

Create a Functioning, Effective Small-Business Ecosystem Focused on Entrepreneurs of Color

Small businesses and entrepreneurial enterprises have long played a critical role in shaping the fabric of our communities. They drive local economies, provide unique consumer experiences, and catalyze innovation. Over the past decade, this sector has expanded, and its influence on neighborhood commercial districts across the country has grown significantly. Two key factors are converging, fueling the ongoing transition and increasing importance of entrepreneurship in community revitalization efforts:

- An increase in the percentage of the workforce employed by small businesses, and
- A shift in the demographic makeup of small business owners.

Although small-business ownership is on the rise, there are systemic disparities in business ownership. In New York State, particularly among Black and Hispanic business owners, the underrepresentation of these groups in business ownership is stark. Data provided by New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli in *Economic and Policy New York State Business Owners*, March 2024, shows that New York State lags behind the national average when it comes to the percentage of Hispanic-owned firms—5.9 percent in New York compared to 7.1 percent nationally. Moreover, both groups are significantly underrepresented relative to their share of the state's population (19.5 percent for Hispanics and 14.2 percent for Black individuals in New York) and the national population (18.8 percent for Hispanics and 12.1 percent for Black individuals).

When examining the rates of Black business ownership specifically, the gap becomes even more apparent. Only 3.4 percent of business owners in New York are Black, despite representing 14.2 percent of the state's population. Nationally, Black business ownership stands at just 2.8 percent of owners compared to 12.1 percent of the population.

Barriers to Business Ownership

Research has identified several key barriers that contribute to the low rates of business ownership, especially among women and people of color. These barriers include the following:

- **Lack of access to capital and financial resources,**
- **Insufficient business networks and mentorship, and**
- **A lack of essential business skills or education.**

According to Goldman Sachs's *10,000 Small Businesses* survey, Black business owners express a clear need for stronger connections to capital resources to both start and grow their businesses. They also highlight the importance of access to talent and mentorship. This mirrors the findings of the *2021 National Survey of Military Affiliated Entrepreneurs*, where 49 percent of veteran entrepreneurs identified lack of start-up capital as a major obstacle to achieving their business goals.

In addition to financial constraints, persistent discrimination remains a significant issue. The Goldman Sachs survey found that Black business owners are three times more likely to have their bank funding applications rejected compared to white business owners. Furthermore, for business owners with household incomes under \$75,000, fewer than one-third of Black owners received bank funding, compared to nearly two-thirds of white owners.

Gender bias is another key factor contributing to disparities in business ownership. The *2019 HSBC Global Private Banking Survey* revealed that 58 percent of American women entrepreneurs were concerned about gender bias when seeking financial capital, and 46 percent reported experiencing gender bias

Continued on next page

during the pitch process. These gender-based challenges compound the difficulties women face in securing the resources needed to start and scale their businesses.

Financial Disparities among Small Business Owners

In addition to challenges in securing start-up capital, minority-owned small businesses also face financial difficulties related to cash flow. Studies show that Hispanic and Black small-business owners often have less liquid capital on hand compared to their white (non-Hispanic) or Asian counterparts. This cash gap is critical because it directly impacts the ability of a business to sustain operations. For example:

- Over **70 percent of white-owned businesses** have at least 14 days' worth of cash reserves to cover operating costs.
- Nearly **98 percent of Asian-owned businesses** can rely on 14 or more days of cash reserves.
- In contrast, only **5.3 percent of Black-owned businesses** and **10.5 percent of Hispanic-owned businesses** can rely on the same financial buffer.

These disparities highlight the [significant financial instability](#) faced by many minority-owned businesses, making them more vulnerable to economic shocks, including the disruptions caused by the pandemic.

The challenges faced by minority and women entrepreneurs are deeply rooted and multifaceted, ranging from financial barriers to systemic discrimination. To address these gaps, there must be a concerted effort to increase access to capital, mentorship, and business networks for these entrepreneurs. In addition, policies that support equitable access to resources and address the unique needs of underrepresented business owners will be critical in fostering a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Opportunities and Implementation

The panel recommends the following approaches to increasing small-business support and developing an inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem.

By most definitions, entrepreneurial ecosystems refer to the strategic alignment of a variety of public and private efforts—including government policies, funding and finance, human capital, and regulatory frameworks—to provide necessary financial, social, and human capital to foster entrepreneurship in innovative and creative ways. Frequently overlooked in these definitions is the value of place and the physical environment as central factors in creating and growing successful enterprises. By emphasizing the creation and support of great places and spaces for people to live and work, commercial districts can attract new businesses and new ideas, thus contributing directly to the development of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.



An inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem is essential for small business success.

Invest in pop-ups, incubators, and accelerators along Jefferson Avenue to support the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. The panel recommends adding spaces that foster innovation and can further connect small businesses with support services. Locally, the panel notes that The Exchange at Beverly Gray Center, The Foundry, and the Buffalo Urban League are offering programs and services to support the local entrepreneurs. The panel recommends looking to peer cities for inspiration to identify models that can complement these existing resources.

- **Northside Economic Empowerment Center (NEEC) – St. Louis, Missouri:** Run by the St. Louis Development Corporation, the NEEC centralizes programs and services, such as capacity building and workforce development, for local businesses and residents. Services are offered in-person and online. Examples include technical assistance for certification, licensing, and marketing; access to capital; and small-business and resident networks.
- **Russel Innovation Center for Entrepreneurs (RICE) – Atlanta, Georgia:** RICE provides a range of programs and services for Black entrepreneurs and small-business owners including networking, education, mentoring, and capital resources. The facility includes a business generator, innovation lab, and museum. “. . . RICE invests in Black entrepreneurs, strengthens businesses, and creates community.”
- **Mercado del Pueblo – Chicago, Illinois:** Mercado del Pueblo is a small-business incubator and pop-up market focused on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) small-business owners in Humboldt Park. The organization offers small-business services such as financial advising, market research, marketing assistance, and licensing/permitting support for entrepreneurs and artisans.
- **Berwyn Shops – Berwyn, Illinois:** Berwyn Shops is a retail incubator to support entrepreneurs, artisans, and makers. Twelve, small cottage-style retail shops are open May–December. Shop vendors are selected each year by a jury of community volunteers.

Key Definitions

Pop-up: A short-term physical space used to showcase products or services, often with a marketing focus, which can be used by businesses at any stage

Accelerator: A structured program with a set timeframe that provides intensive mentorship, funding, and networking opportunities to help startups scale quickly

Incubator: A supportive environment for very early-stage businesses to develop their ideas, often with access to office space, mentorship, and basic business services

Identify and implement an organizational model for guiding revitalization, supported by local champions. Given how essential a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem is for Jefferson Avenue, and the many stakeholder groups invested in the future of the corridor, the panelists recommend identifying an organizational model that will help to move revitalization efforts forward. The panel recommends the following models for Jefferson Avenue.

A Community Quarterback

A community quarterback is a local organization that guides and supports a community's revitalization efforts. It's an approach that is used by [Purpose Built Communities](#) to strengthen neighborhoods. Community quarterbacks are responsible for the following:

- **Assembling resources:** Gathering resources and information to support the community's goals
- **Setting strategy:** Aligning partners and resources to create a strategy that reflects the community's vision
- **Tracking progress:** Monitoring the community's progress toward its goals and adjusting strategy as needed
- **Holding people accountable:** Ensuring that everyone is held accountable for their actions

The community quarterback approach is a flexible strategy that helps strengthen struggling communities. Community quarterbacks are deeply invested in the community and its people and are focused on achieving the goals that the community has identified.

The Main Street Model

Since the introduction of the Main Street model more than 40 years ago, close to 2,000 U.S. communities have used it to revitalize their downtown or neighborhood commercial districts.

The Main Street model combines activities in four intersecting areas:

- Design and physical improvements to enhance the district's attractiveness
- Promotion and marketing to strengthen the district's image and attract more customers
- Economic vitality to identify the district's economic potential, build on existing assets, and attract new business and capital
- Organizational development to create a strong volunteer-driven organization that engages all major concerned parties in planning and executing commercial district revitalization

The Main Street approach focuses on local initiatives that build on community assets, involve government/private-sector partnerships, and create change incrementally. A guiding principle of Main Street programs is that small improvements can have big consequences. Most Main Street programs operate as independent 501(c)(3) corporations with a small staff and a volunteer board drawn from local businesses, property owners, nonprofit organizations, and government.

Volunteers set program goals, design activities, and assist staff with implementation. The responsibility for designating local organizations as Main Street programs usually falls to the city, county, and state governments, which provide training and technical assistance.

Programs raise operating funds for the local Main Street or revitalization organization through city or state funding, philanthropic support, and in-kind contributions, and fundraising projects. The Main Street model offers a comprehensive revitalization approach that transcends commercial real estate development and small-business assistance.

The aim is to build both local capacity and community support, create an appealing environment, and attract the pedestrian activity necessary for a vital commercial district. Main Street practitioners have access to a well-established network of resources for information, training, and technical assistance.



One collective impact model for corridor revitalization is the Main Street model.



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Economic Development: Business Retention, Expansion, and Attraction

BUSINESS RETENTION, EXPANSION, AND ATTRACTION

(BREA) is a cornerstone of sustainable economic development. Proactively engaging with businesses to address their needs, encourage growth, and attract new investment will ensure that Jefferson Avenue remains competitive and positioned for long-term success.

In this section:

- The desire for and challenges to corridor self-sufficiency and sustainability
- A collaborative strategy to promote business retention, expansion, and attraction, including incentive programs
- The importance of marketing and branding to position the Jefferson Avenue Corridor as an entrepreneurial destination

Residents and business owners alike expressed in conversations with the panel a strong desire to restore Jefferson Avenue to a place where they do not need to leave the community to meet essential needs. Many recall a time when the neighborhood was self-sufficient, with a variety of businesses that supported daily life. The panel observed a shared vision to revive and expand local businesses to meet those needs again, making Jefferson Avenue a thriving hub where residents can shop, dine, and access services close to home.

However, the panel learned that business owners face significant challenges in retaining talent and sustaining their operations. Many struggle to attract and keep skilled employees due to limited growth opportunities and a sense of disconnection from the broader community. This disconnection, combined with a lack of community engagement, leads to lower employee motivation and retention. In addition, the absence of a steady, reliable customer base makes it difficult for businesses to generate the necessary foot traffic and revenue. The limited customer pool is exacerbated by a lack of diverse businesses in the area, leaving many businesses unable to thrive.

The panel observed a clear need for a more diverse mix of businesses—ranging from restaurants to retail, entertainment, and professional services—that would meet the needs of the community while attracting visitors from outside the area. A vibrant, varied business ecosystem would drive local economic activity and create a dynamic environment that draws both customers and talent, helping businesses to survive and grow, while fostering a stronger sense of community pride and ownership.

Existing Conditions and Gaps

The current market conditions along Jefferson Avenue reflect several pressing challenges, particularly concerning the decline in Black-owned businesses and underused commercial spaces. Historically, Black-owned businesses have played a significant role in local economies. However, according to Pew Research Center, recent trends indicate a decline in their numbers, especially in the wake of economic disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, Black-owned businesses represented only 3 percent of all U.S. firms, and while they saw growth in gross revenue from 2017 to 2021, they still made up a disproportionately small share of total business activity.

In Buffalo's Jefferson Avenue Corridor, this trend is evident, with a noticeable decline in Black-owned businesses and underused commercial spaces, which once served as vibrant hubs for these businesses. This is compounded by a shrinking local customer base, which further limits the viability of remaining businesses. The lack of foot traffic, combined with limited resources for business expansion, particularly for Black entrepreneurs, exacerbates these challenges.

Moreover, without a diverse mix of businesses that can attract a wider customer base, the commercial vitality of the area continues to suffer. This highlights the critical need for revitalization strategies that focus on attracting new businesses, supporting the growth of existing ones, and addressing systemic barriers that disproportionately affect Black entrepreneurs, such as limited access to capital and higher loan-denial rates.

One of the primary challenges faced by businesses, particularly Black-owned enterprises, is a lack of access to capital. Studies indicate that Black entrepreneurs are significantly less likely to receive funding compared to their white counterparts, and when they do, they often receive smaller loan amounts with higher interest rates. This is compounded by a lack of education on how to access available funding resources. Many business owners are unaware of or unable to navigate the

variety of financial support options, including grants, loans, and government programs designed to help small businesses. To address this, there is a clear need for a dedicated small-business liaison within the community—someone who is familiar with the resources available, can provide guidance on securing capital, and direct business owners to the appropriate funding channels. This resource would help bridge the gap and increase the flow of financial support to local businesses, empowering them to grow and thrive.

In addition, the infrastructure in the Jefferson Avenue Corridor does not adequately support the modern needs of businesses. As discussed further in this report, issues such as access to reliable internet and outdated streetscapes hinder business operations and discourage potential entrepreneurs from starting or expanding their ventures.

Opportunities and Implementation

Create a collaborative BREA strategy. The panel recommends that a collaborative BREA strategy is created for the Jefferson Avenue Corridor. The various economic development agencies, utility companies, and workforce development organizations that service the Buffalo metropolitan area should establish a strategic working group, dedicated to attracting business to the Jefferson Avenue Corridor. This strategy would bring together critical stakeholders to create a coordinated effort that supports the sustainable growth of businesses and strengthens community development along Jefferson Avenue.

The central objective of this recommended collaboration is to connect businesses in the Jefferson Avenue Corridor with the appropriate resources and opportunities. It is the panel's belief that establishing strong relationships among government officials, economic development entities, utility companies, and workforce organizations ensures that business owners and entrepreneurs are aware of who to contact for assistance with their business needs, including expansion, talent acquisition, and navigating local regulations. To do this, the panel recommends that the coalition focus on the following actions.

- Foster stronger communication between industry and government to ensure businesses understand available programs and incentives, reducing the disconnect that can prevent growth.
- Provide planned engagement with regional companies, through both virtual and in-person visits, to cultivate further investment in Jefferson Avenue, thus driving job creation and business expansion.

- Support businesses in resolving community-specific challenges, whether related to workforce availability, local infrastructure needs, or community engagement.
- Leverage knowledge of local industries, supply chains, and customer relationships to identify new investment opportunities and promote a thriving local economy.

In addition, the BREA strategy will intentionally focus on equity and inclusion. This means including businesses from economically disadvantaged areas, particularly those owned by women, minorities, and immigrants, and addressing barriers these groups face in accessing resources and opportunities. By ensuring inclusivity in the BREA strategy, the Jefferson Avenue Corridor can build a more diverse and resilient business environment that serves the entire community.

Through this collaborative approach, the community and key stakeholders can create an environment where businesses thrive, residents benefit from local job opportunities, and Jefferson Avenue becomes a vibrant hub of economic activity.

Implement a new business attraction effort. This effort must be grounded in a deep understanding of the community's needs, as well as tailored strategies and incentives designed to drive sustainable and relevant economic growth.

Understand Community Needs and Desires

The first step in attracting new businesses is to conduct thorough community engagement to identify the specific needs and desires of Jefferson Avenue's residents. This includes gathering data on what kinds of businesses would meet local demand, whether it is retail stores, restaurants, service-based industries, or creative spaces. Resident surveys, focus groups,

Possible Core Coalition Members for Business Retention, Expansion, and Attraction

Although not exhaustive, the panel recommends working to engage the following organizations to form the core of this coalition.

Economic Development Agencies

- **Buffalo Urban Development Corporation:** Provides real estate services and development opportunities, particularly in underutilized areas
- **Buffalo Niagara Enterprise:** Focuses on attracting new businesses and assisting with retention and expansion, leveraging Buffalo's competitive advantages
- **Erie County Industrial Development Agency:** Plays a critical role in offering tax incentives, financing, and infrastructure development to stimulate economic growth and investment
- **New York State Empire State Development:** Works at the state level to provide incentives and support for business development, expansion, and infrastructure improvement across New York

Utility Companies

- **National Grid:** Provides essential energy services, playing a pivotal role in supporting business growth through energy infrastructure upgrades and incentives for businesses in energy-efficient operations

- **Buffalo Sewer Authority:** Supports local businesses by providing access to water and sewer infrastructure, with potential opportunities for businesses to access sustainability-related incentives
- **New York Power Authority:** Offers energy services, including renewable energy options, and could provide businesses with opportunities for cost-saving measures and green energy initiatives

Workforce Development Agencies

- **Buffalo Employment & Training Center:** Provides job training and career placement services to improve workforce readiness in Buffalo, particularly for those in marginalized communities
- **Northland Workforce Training Center:** Specializes in advanced manufacturing training and provides workers with the skills needed for high-demand jobs
- **Workforce Investment Board:** Facilitates workforce development initiatives and helps businesses connect with skilled workers through job readiness and training programs

and community meetings are essential to ensuring the new businesses introduced will complement the neighborhood's unique character and fill gaps in the current market offering. By having a clear sense of the community's preferences, economic development efforts can be more strategic and impactful.

Leverage Retail Attraction Strategies, Consultants, and Conferences

In addition to understanding local needs, attracting businesses also requires specialized retail attraction strategies. Partnering with retail consultants can be beneficial in identifying the types of businesses that are most likely to succeed in the area based on factors such as foot traffic, demographics, and consumer behavior. These consultants can guide the development of targeted marketing efforts and support the recruitment of potential tenants.

Attending industry conferences that focus on urban development and retail attraction can also provide valuable insights and connections. For example, events such as the International Council of Shopping Centers conferences bring together developers, retailers, and urban planners to discuss emerging trends, best practices, and potential opportunities in urban retail growth. These conferences offer platforms to network with companies interested in expanding to new markets and can help to position Jefferson Avenue as an attractive location for investment.

Create attraction incentives. A powerful tool in attracting new businesses is the development of tailored retail attraction incentives. One example is the St. Louis Downtown Incentives Program, which offers a range of financial incentives to encourage businesses to open or expand in the city's downtown area. The program includes several components:

- **Sales Tax Incentives:** Offers sales tax rebates for new or expanding retail businesses within the designated area
- **Property Tax Abatement:** Provides property tax incentives to developers and businesses that contribute to the revitalization of the area
- **Customized Grant Programs:** Provides grants for tenants to help with property improvements, such as signage, building renovations, and storefront enhancements

These incentives have been successful in stimulating investment and bringing new retail establishments to underserved areas in St. Louis. Adopting a similar model for Jefferson Avenue would make the corridor more attractive to potential businesses, offering them the financial support they

need to mitigate initial startup costs. Tailored incentives for the Jefferson Avenue Corridor could include targeted grants for storefront improvements, tax incentives for businesses that hire locally, and subsidies for businesses that serve community needs.

By aligning incentives with both community priorities and market demands, this approach can attract businesses that are not only economically viable but also support local growth, meet the needs of the residents, and contribute to the neighborhood's vibrancy.

Develop a program to incentivize business attraction and expansion that prioritizes equitable and inclusive support.

To revitalize the Jefferson Avenue Corridor, it is essential to create an incentive program that prioritizes equity and inclusion, ensuring that business attraction and expansion reflect the needs and aspirations of the local community. This program must focus on reducing barriers for smaller, community-based, or minority-owned developers and businesses that have historically lacked access to such resources.

Facilitate an Accessible Incentive Process

Streamlining the incentive process is critical to supporting equitable development. A simplified and expedient process reduces administrative burdens and costs for smaller businesses and developers, allowing them to focus resources on creating vibrant and sustainable ventures. For Jefferson Avenue, this means ensuring that the incentive system is transparent, user-friendly, and designed to meet the unique needs of businesses seeking to invest in this historic corridor.

Expand the Pool of Recipients

A truly equitable program will actively expand the pool of incentive recipients by including those who may not have previously had the capacity or knowledge to apply for support. This involves targeted outreach to minority- and women-owned businesses, immigrant entrepreneurs, and small-scale community developers, ensuring they are aware of available opportunities and equipped with the tools to navigate the application process. Capacity-building initiatives, such as training on how to apply for incentives or providing technical assistance, can be instrumental in leveling the playing field.

Leverage Technology for Transparency and Accessibility

To foster inclusivity and trust, an online platform can be developed to centralize access to information about incentives, track project data, and map out the development pipeline. Such a platform could provide the following:

- A step-by-step guide to available incentives and how to apply
- A transparent view of ongoing and planned projects along Jefferson Avenue to encourage collaboration and accountability
- Metrics and data on incentive recipients to assess the program's equity and impact

Demonstrate Possibility

Focused public and private investments along Jefferson Avenue would serve as a demonstration area, showcasing how targeted efforts can transform a commercial corridor. Incentives should align with community priorities, such as creating businesses that meet local needs, hire residents, and contribute to the cultural and economic vitality of the area.

Prioritize Local Impact

To achieve equitable growth, the program should include specific incentives for businesses that

- Hire local residents, especially from historically underserved neighborhoods
- Provide goods and services that fulfill the needs of the Jefferson Avenue community
- Engage in community partnerships or initiatives that promote shared prosperity

Make Jefferson Avenue an entrepreneurial destination.

To solidify the corridor's reputation, consider creating or enhancing initiatives that cater specifically to entrepreneurs, such as the following:

- **Business incubators and accelerators** offering workspace, mentorship, and funding connections tailored to small and minority-owned businesses
- **Investor matching programs** to connect businesses and developers with venture capital, private equity, and grant opportunities



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- **Destination events**, such as festivals, expos, or market days, that draw foot traffic and showcase the area's economic and cultural vibrancy

Promote Jefferson Avenue Corridor as a destination for entrepreneurs and investors through a marketing and rebranding strategy. To transform Jefferson Avenue into a thriving hub of economic activity, it is critical to establish a comprehensive marketing and rebranding strategy that positions the corridor as a premier destination for entrepreneurs, investors, and business owners. This effort should include targeted outreach, strategic partnerships, and an emphasis on the unique opportunities and cultural vibrancy of the Jefferson Avenue community.

Create a Marketing and Rebranding Strategy

A marketing strategy should highlight Jefferson Avenue's potential as a place for growth, innovation, and community impact. Key elements of this strategy might include the following:

- **Rebranding Jefferson Avenue** as a corridor of opportunity, emphasizing its cultural and historical significance, emerging development potential, and the support structures available to businesses
- **Storytelling campaigns** featuring local business owners, community members, and success stories to showcase the area's appeal and resilience
- **Targeted advertising** through regional and national economic development platforms to attract entrepreneurs, investors, and developers
- **Social media and digital marketing**, leveraging platforms including Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook, to create a vibrant and modern image of the corridor as a place to live, work, and invest

Highlight the Corridor's Unique Value Proposition

Marketing efforts should focus on Jefferson Avenue's distinct value propositions:

- **Cultural Heritage:** Celebrate its role as a center for Black culture and entrepreneurship in Buffalo.
- **Economic Opportunity:** Emphasize incentives, workforce development programs, and available resources that make investing along the corridor financially viable and impactful.
- **Community Connection:** Illustrate the corridor's commitment to equitable growth, fostering a narrative of shared prosperity and inclusion.

Build Partnerships with Tourism and Economic Development Entities

Collaboration with Buffalo's tourism board and regional economic development organizations is essential. These partnerships can help amplify the corridor's message and integrate Jefferson Avenue into broader campaigns aimed at attracting visitors, investors, and new residents. Opportunities for collaboration might include the following:

- Featuring Jefferson Avenue businesses and attractions in tourism guides and campaigns
- Hosting investor and entrepreneur tours or events showcasing available properties and resources along the corridor
- Participating in regional conferences and trade shows to highlight investment opportunities

Phased Implementation

The panel recommends the following phased actions for implementation.

Short Term

Engage stakeholders.

- Host initial meetings with key economic development agencies, utility providers, workforce organizations, and the tourism board to begin forming a coalition focused on the Jefferson Avenue Corridor.
- Identify a lead entity or facilitator to coordinate communication and strategy development among these stakeholders.

Develop a marketing framework.

- Launch a Jefferson Avenue Corridor rebranding effort by collecting stories, visuals, and data that illustrate the corridor's potential as a destination for business and investment.
- Establish a social media presence and begin crafting campaigns to highlight the corridor's cultural and economic opportunities.

Create short-term incentives.

- Develop a pilot incentive program for new or expanding businesses to locate along Jefferson Avenue.
- Partner with local organizations to offer small business workshops focused on accessing available funding and resources.

Medium Term

Implement a collaborative strategy.

- Formalize a collaborative BREA strategy among the economic development agencies, workforce organizations, and other stakeholders.
- Launch a platform or resource center to make information on incentives, funding, and workforce support easily accessible to business owners.

Launch a marketing campaign.

- Roll out a targeted marketing campaign to attract entrepreneurs, investors, and developers, featuring Jefferson Avenue as a hub for innovation and community-driven growth.
- Organize promotional events such as tours, open houses, and community business expos to showcase available properties and business opportunities.

Pilot workforce development partnerships.

- Partner with workforce organizations to create tailored training and apprenticeship programs to support local businesses along the corridor.
- Begin promoting the corridor's workforce-ready talent pool to attract new businesses and investors.

Long Term

Expand and evaluate incentive programs.

- Scale the incentive program, incorporating feedback from the pilot phase to ensure accessibility and equity.
- Develop long-term incentives to attract larger businesses or anchor institutions that align with community needs.

Attract and cultivate diverse businesses.

- Use retail attraction strategies, such as consultants and retail-focused conferences, to bring a variety of businesses to Jefferson Avenue that meet community demands.
- Foster entrepreneurship by developing incubator or accelerator programs tailored to the needs of minority and community-based businesses.

Sustain marketing and engagement.

- Continue enhancing Jefferson Avenue Corridor's brand through consistent storytelling, partnerships with the tourism board, and integration into citywide economic development initiatives.
- Maintain regular engagement with business owners and residents to ensure alignment with evolving community needs and goals.



Cultural Placemaking

SEVERAL IMPORTANT CULTURAL JEWELS RESIDE WITHIN THE JEFFERSON AVENUE CORRIDOR, as discovered through conversations with stakeholders and materials reviewed by the panel. Places such as the Black Achievers Museum, Apollo Theater, the new Buffalo Urban League building, and the Gateway Art Center are important to preserving and celebrating arts and culture along the corridor now and in the future. The panel believes that cultural placemaking and elevating arts and culture play a critical role in the revitalization of the corridor.

In this section:

- An analysis of the existing and potential roles that art plays within the Jefferson Avenue Corridor
- Panel recommendations to preserve and celebrate arts and culture along the corridor now and in the future
- Successful case studies to serve as models

Existing Conditions and Gaps

Interviews and conversations with stakeholders provided the panel with a better understanding of the existing and potential roles that art plays within the community. Below is a summary of what the panel heard.

- The community is still in a state of shock and trying to recover from the events of 5/14. Some community members believe that art can help to heal the community.
- There is a sense that “The creatives are on fire. There are murals everywhere. The arts will play a key role in the development of our community going forward.”

- African Americans represent a healthy share of Buffalo’s population, approaching 40 percent. Along Jefferson Avenue, there could be inviting spaces for people to visit, creative shops, for example, selling artwork, rugs, clothing, and jewelry. This could create a new personality for the district, attracting people who want to interact with the place. As one stakeholder put it, “there is a need to create a culture zone.”

Examples of Successful Art and Culture Initiatives

Although not exhaustive, the panel recommends working to engage the following organizations to form the core of this coalition.

Art and culture have proven to be both components of a healthy, thriving place and strategies to achieve it. Both art and culture can have an impact on key components for a thriving place, including food, health, housing, transportation, education, environment, and economy. Therefore, the panel recommends weaving art and culture into many components of the Jefferson Avenue community. The panel offers the following examples that have proven beneficial in other communities.

Economy: [Bethlehem SteelStacks](#) is the adaptive use of a former steel manufacturing plant transformed into a sprawling art and entertainment center. SteelStacks annually has over 1,000 concerts and eight different festivals, and in 2023, delivered an economic impact of nearly \$123 million and welcomed nearly 1.6 million visitors (1,578,298).



Bethlehem SteelStacks in Pennsylvania.

Environment: [The ReefLine](#) is a Miami Beach underwater sculpture park. The sculpture is made of material that promotes growth of coral, which has been dying due to rising sea water temperatures.

Housing: [Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling](#), housed in an affordable housing complex in Harlem, New York, attracts diverse audiences and connects people in meaningful ways.



Confluence Park in San Antonio, Texas.

Environment: [Confluence Park](#) in San Antonio, Texas, was designed by an artist and architect. Its pavilions double as cover during heat or inclement weather days and an environmental feature that channels water to a reservoir below the park's surface, resulting in recycling that serves most of the park's water needs.

Transportation: [Charlotte Rail Trail](#) in Charlotte, North Carolina, is a former emergency path along light rail transformed into a public bike and walking path that connects six neighborhoods and attracts locals and visitors. It has been proven an economic engine for the community, as businesses turn their storefronts from the street to the trail.

Transportation: [The Brickline Greenway](#) is a massive \$250 million project that will transform St. Louis by connecting communities in all directions via a 20-mile (32 km) walkable, bikeable path that meanders through as many as 17 neighborhoods. The Brickline is expected to promote healthy living, enhance access to transit options, and spur economic development.

Health: A [memorial](#), featured along the [Brickline](#), will demonstrate how art can help to heal a community. The memorial, designed by a local artist, will honor a once-thriving African American community, Mill Creek Valley, devastated by a thoroughway that displaced 20K Black residents during "Urban Renewal" that swept the country in the 1950s. The memorial consists of a series of cathedral-like sculptures, symbolic of the homes and businesses that stood in Mill Creek Valley during its over 200-year history.

- There are creatives in the neighborhood who are capturing stories about African Americans, working with emerging artists, and generating revenue for established and emerging visual artists and recording artists. Some are actively engaged, serving on boards that support art and culture.
- “Jefferson Avenue can be a walking museum.” The panel heard that there was interest in making art educational and using it to tell the story of Jefferson Avenue.

During the panel week, the ULI team also learned of a recently implemented “1 Percent for Public Arts” program, which is a start to funding arts and culture activities, but the panel believes that it does not go far enough for Jefferson Avenue and more funding is needed. Ultimately, the panel believes that the Jefferson Avenue vision for art and culture includes public art but is more expansive than that—it is an element on the essential components of a healthy, thriving place. These components include housing, environment, schools and education, and the economy and the panel recommends incorporating arts and culture into each.

Opportunities and Implementation

The panel recommends leveraging arts and culture in a variety of ways to support the revitalization of Jefferson Avenue. The arts and cultural placemaking can be used to raise awareness and celebrate the rich history and culture of Jefferson Avenue. The panel also believes there is an opportunity to leverage the arts to drive economic development efforts along Jefferson Avenue and help heal the community and support the process of building and restoring trust.

There are many ways that art and culture can be leveraged to promote social, economic, and environmental benefits in the Jefferson Avenue community. The panel recommends the following opportunities for the corridor in both the short term and long term.

Develop a Jefferson Avenue historical walking tour, with a potential tie into an audio tour element or supporting podcast series.

Implement and upgraded a streetscape plan that includes strategic placement for historical markers, murals, and public art along pedestrian and bicycle routes.

Install temporary pop-ups on vacant lots along Jefferson Avenue for art exhibitions, music and entertainment venues, festivals, farmers markets, flea markets, and more.

Expand access to parks and public spaces. There are currently three parks in the study area, with Masten Park being the largest.

- Consider converting City-owned vacant lots into parks.
- Adhere to the “15-minute walk to a park” guideline.
- Work with an artist and a team of landscape designers and architects to design public art, lighting, and other features that invite locals and visitors into the corridor.

Implement a Jefferson Avenue Mural Art Initiative. The panel recommends the following elements:

- Developing a walking tour of Jefferson Avenue’s murals.
- Consider lobbying to have Jefferson Avenue murals added to Brian Hayden’s feature “Explore Our City of Murals,” a list of murals on the Visit Buffalo Niagara website.
- Create new murals along Jefferson Avenue. Explore an approach such as the [Interactive Media Mural and Oral History Project](#) through the Miami Museum of Contemporary Art of the African Diaspora. Murals include QR codes that link to oral histories and other interactive features.

Add and expand upon on-going programming. Examples include the following:

- Return the Juneteenth celebration to Jefferson Avenue.
- Cultivate regular musical entertainment, potentially funded by the [Levitt Foundation](#), that focuses on music and strengthening the social fabric of communities.
- Establish new festivals that celebrate Jefferson Avenue.

Encourage cross-neighborhood collaboration, connecting the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor and Jefferson Avenue to tell a comprehensive, robust story about the rich African American history and culture of Buffalo. Examples of the connectivity might be through signage, as discussion points on the historical walking tour of Jefferson Avenue, and through collaborative event programming.

Recruit a chief cultural officer, who will focus on working with major community and public sector leaders to integrate art and culture elements into key planning and implementation projects. The panel recommends that this role also select the projects to implement such as those listed above.

Neighborhood Gateways:

Provide wayfinding and acknowledgment to all the neighborhoods contributing to the Jefferson Corridor.

Playspaces:

Engage all ages by providing outdoor playspaces for the youth.

Impromptu Event Spaces:

Engage vacant spaces with impromptu gatherings engaging the arts (e.g., pavilions).

Historic Walking Tours:

Recognize historic properties (e.g., the Apollo Theater) and encourage movement throughout the corridor via tours.

Local Influential Banners:

Advertise local business associations.



TERRA BARNES WENDEL

Wall and “Magic Carpet” Murals:

Celebrate and engage local artists to beautify the corridor.

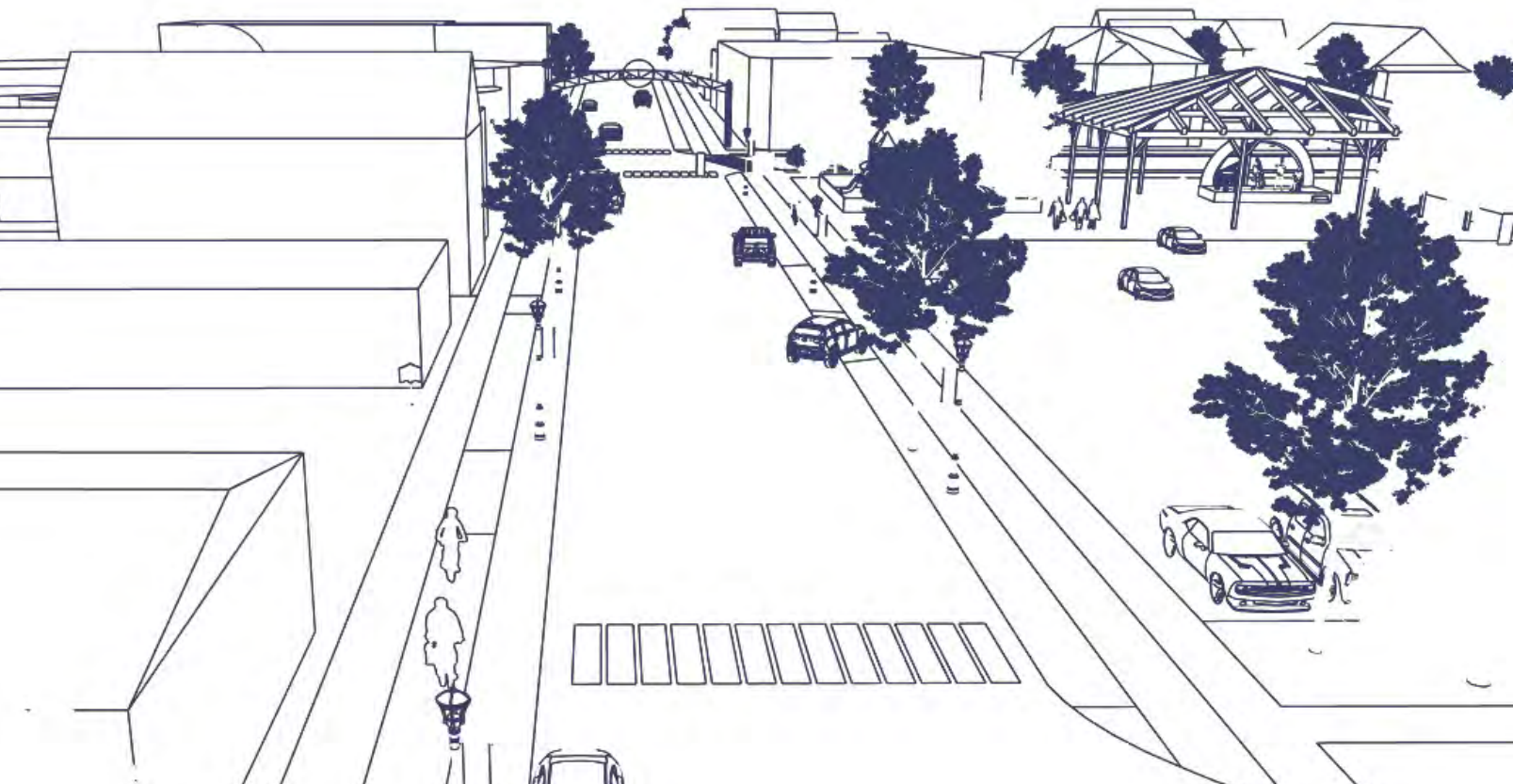
Illustration depicting examples of some of the cultural placemaking strategies the panel recommends for the Jefferson Avenue Corridor.

Essential elements for success for each project undertaken include developing a project scope, partners, and plan, and securing project funding. The panel recommends considering the following sources for potential funding for these projects:

- Local, regional, state, and federal arts organizations
 - Buffalo Arts Commission
 - Mid Atlantic Arts (MAA)
 - New York States Art Council – NYSAC
 - National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)
- Other local, state and federal programs such as the Buffalo Historic Preservation
- Local and national foundations
- Private sector entities

Implement a neighborhood watch program. Since there are deep concerns about crime in certain sections of the study area, safety would need to be addressed to fully implement an art and culture plan. The panel recommends considering block clubs to implement a neighborhood watch program.

Develop a comprehensive marketing strategy and plan, aimed at rebranding Jefferson Avenue. Details on a potential approach are outlined within this report and in the Appendix.



GOOGLE MAPS

Conclusion

THE IMPORTANCE OF JEFFERSON AVENUE AND ITS HISTORY AS A CENTER FOR BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES AND AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURE IN BUFFALO was clearly articulated in conversations with stakeholders, and this resonated with the panel. In addition, as the corridor evolves, differing points of view may emerge from historic and new residents.

The panel encourages the community, stakeholder organizations, and the City to use this vibrant history as an inspiration to collaboratively pursue revitalization of Jefferson Avenue. It will be essential to implement a shared vision for the revitalization of the corridor and prioritize equitable development, strategic connectivity, and strategic communication approaches throughout the process.

Revitalization will take time, but the first step is to identify a leadership team to drive community development and ensure the shared, long-term vision for the Jefferson Avenue Corridor remains top of mind throughout the journey.

Appendix A: Implementation Guide

Below is a high-level summary of the recommendations from each section. For details on each recommendation and additional background on existing conditions and gaps, please refer to the appropriate section of the report.

A Strategic Approach: Connectivity, Leadership, and Communication

Build upon the notable City investments, connecting their impact in a cohesive way and communicating this impact to the community and other stakeholders.

- Strategically communicate progress to the community and stakeholders.
- Develop a holistic approach and demonstrate a coordinated effort, something that has gone unnoticed by the community and stakeholders.

Ensure coordination between and among local community-based organizations and collaboration with public, private, and philanthropic partners.

- Revitalization of Jefferson Avenue will take more than a public/private partnership between the City and private sector developers. This effort will require five sectors—nonprofit, philanthropic, the people, the public sector, and the private sector—to work together in partnership for success.

Approach revitalization with the principles of equitable development at the forefront.

- Equitable development provides a framework and way to communicate the overarching goal of the community to create a community that honors history and legacy residents and their sacrifice, presence, and investment. It is a holistic, community-focused investment approach that seeks to further the overall well-being of communities.

Prioritize the social, cultural and economic aspects of investments in Jefferson Avenue, along with the needs of residents, to empower the community to participate in the revitalization of the corridor.

- Improve the effectiveness of communication for different stakeholder groups including community, government, nonprofit, philanthropic, and investor groups.

Neighborhood Stakeholders

- Create neighborhood-led communication committees to act as liaisons between the community and external stakeholders.
- Develop inclusive and communication materials to ensure accessibility.

Public Sector

- Establish a unified communication strategy across city, county, and state agencies.
- Leverage digital platforms and in-person outreach for greater inclusivity.

Private Sector/Investors

- Build trust by incorporating community voices into development decisions.
- Promote transparency about project timelines, opportunities, and outcomes.

Socioeconomic and Market Analysis

Conduct a housing stock analysis to further understand the current housing market.

- This analysis will provide additional data that highlights the condition of units available, the number of code violations, and other housing condition data that can pinpoint more precisely the number of housing units available and habitable around the corridor.

Corridor Development

Use Buffalo's Unified Zoning and Land Use Code and infrastructure project phasing to guide development.

- In residential areas, using a combination of low-, medium-, and high-density housing will accommodate people at various income levels, ensuring the community remains inclusive and diverse.
- Align corridor development phasing with infrastructure work, especially for larger projects. When possible, “tear the street up once.”
- Review the permitting process for a range of uses that increase the vitality of the corridor.
- Include pocket parks and open space along the corridor.

Create a comprehensive antidisplacement strategy.

- Prepare an antidisplacement strategy before gentrification and displacement pressures begin accelerating. Elements to consider include existing tax exemption programs, allocation of City-owned land to private landowners for affordable and attainable development, and community benefit packages that target wealth creation for residents in exchange for incentives in larger scale projects.

Make the Jefferson Avenue Corridor a “cool” destination.

- Develop nodes within the corridor and complement each node with thematic drivers that build on the area’s rich history, culture, and institutions. The goal is to create spaces that serve both the local community and attract visitors to spend time and money in the area.

Leverage existing subsidies and funding opportunities.

- Identify and use both new and existing subsidies that could support development and existing building rehabilitation. Create a living database that functions as a community resource.

Adopt a long-term mixed-income strategy.

- Ensure housing options for a range of income levels so developments will help to deconcentrate poverty and promote long-term stability. The panel recommends incorporating workforce housing and missing middle housing into the overall development approach.

Explore the role of land trusts.

- Connect with existing organizations such as the Fruit Belt Community Land Trust or consider the creation of a new land trust to cohesively manage the use of vacant parcels along the corridor.

Phasing: Identify both incremental (short-term) or large-scale (long-term) strategies.

- Decide when to focus on smaller, incremental development projects for more immediate impact versus larger, more ambitious developments.

Cultivate relationships between developers and the community.

- Open communication and collaborative planning will make it easier to manage expectations and build trust.

Communicate and streamline the City’s entitlement process.

- Provide clear instructions for navigating the City’s development application process. Create content for the City’s website and distribute materials at local workforce development centers that shows the steps for submitting planning applications and outlines essential documentation, phone numbers, and a timeline for the process.

Use resources from the Urban Land Institute (ULI).

- Leverage resources and tools from ULI, such as UrbanPlan, to raise awareness about urban planning and development processes.

Community Infrastructure

Economic Stability

- Incorporate a comprehensive antidisplacement and gentrification strategy immediately.
- Share wealth retention strategies so equity is passed down from generation to generation.
- Use group economics to reduce dependency on outside sources for financial investment, resiliency, and growth.
- Highlight local success stories and business innovation.
- Introduce children to diverse careers early.
- Use a social and financial susu model.

Education Access and Quality

- Increase youth and young adult interest in civic activities/engagement.
- Address the low educational attainment rate that limits employment options.
- Address the challenge of accessing reliable, high-speed internet within the study area.

Health Care Access and Quality

- Create a network of health care providers that service the entire district.
- Support the creation of medical clinics and increase awareness of their use for routine medical visits for community members.
- Leverage proximity to medical centers and allied health professionals and medical programs.
- Increase awareness of and address the negative health impact of years of manufacturing and industrial uses near residential uses along Jefferson Avenue.

Neighborhood and Built Environment

- Increase park space dispersed throughout the neighborhood and activate pocket parks in vacant lots.
- Address physical infrastructure and environmental issues.
- Increase access to healthy food options.

Social and Community Context

- Celebrate the strong sense of community along the corridor.
- Build deeper trust between City Hall and community members.
- Navigate new changing cultural dynamics among current and legacy residents, immigrants, and those migrating from other parts of the state.

Physical Infrastructure

Take a pause and review Phase 1 of the Jefferson Avenue Streetscape Improvements project.

- The panel recommends thinking corridor-wide to provide spaces in the right-of-way for future placemaking elements, consider making provisions for future broadband, and possible public-access greenspace locations.

Take steps to identify resources and programs to increase internet access.

- Identify the resources to continue and expand the hotspot program within the Buffalo School District and engage a corporate partner to support the expansion of access to broadband. Explore programs such as [Verizon Forward](#).

Conduct a corridor and neighborhood placemaking study and formalize a plan for Jefferson Avenue and its historic neighborhoods.

- The panel recommends establishing a plan that promotes the history of Jefferson Avenue, its neighborhoods, and people. This effort can both guide future placemaking efforts and elevate placemaking priorities to be considered for future funding sources.

Plan bigger and share a vision.

- After the Jefferson Avenue streetscape improvements are complete, local stakeholders should start talking about where to invest next. Consider the future need for sewer and water main improvements over the long-term.

“Turn the corner.” Consider future improvements to key east/west connections.

- Key intersections to consider include:
 - Phase 3A: Utica Street from Verplank Street to Hauf Street
 - Phase 3B: Best Street from Peach Street to Pershing Street
 - Phase 4: High Street from the medical center to Jefferson Avenue
 - Phase 5: Best Street from Jefferson to Martin Luther King Jr. Park

Economic Development: Workforce Development

Create community engagement and partnerships.

- Cultivate relationships with key local stakeholders—such as businesses, education systems, and community organizations and establish working groups to focus on trades, technology, and entrepreneurship pathways.

Build a framework to replicate successful models.

- Start working with local businesses and community organizations to introduce industry-specific workforce training programs, modeled after successful initiatives like Dream Builders for Equity, Yea I Built That, and others.

Create youth engagement and mentorship programs.

- Launch a pilot youth employment and mentorship program, drawing inspiration from existing models that use apprenticeships, internships, and community-led development projects.

Explore integration of government-funded workforce programs.

- Begin assessing how to bring workforce development programs such as WIOA and recreating models such as SLATE into Buffalo's local ecosystem.

Create industry-specific career pathways.

- Work with industry partners, educational institutions, and workforce development agencies to establish comprehensive career pathways in the trades, health care, technology, and other growing sectors.

Build a sustainable workforce economic development framework.

- Create a long-term plan for sustaining and expanding these programs, including securing funding for workforce development initiatives, building partnerships with universities or training centers, and exploring opportunities to incorporate digital literacy into the training process.

Economic Development: Small-Business Support

Create a functioning, effective small business ecosystem focused on entrepreneurs of color.

- Address barriers that contribute to the low rates of business ownership, especially among women and people of color. These barriers include a lack of access to capital and financial resources, insufficient business networks and mentorship, and a lack of essential business skills or education.

Invest in pop-ups, incubators, and accelerators.

- Add spaces that foster innovation and can further connect small businesses with support services.

Identify and implement an organizational model for guiding revitalization.

- The panel recommends identifying an organizational model to move revitalization efforts forward. The panel recommends considering a community quarterback or the Main Street model, or a combination of both.

Economic Development: Business Retention, Expansion, and Attraction

Engage stakeholders.

- Host initial meetings with key economic development stakeholders.
- Identify a lead entity or facilitator to coordinate communication and strategy development.

Develop a marketing framework.

- Launch a Jefferson Avenue Corridor rebranding effort.
- Establish a social media presence.

Create short-term incentives.

- Develop a pilot incentive program for new or expanding businesses.
- Partner with local organizations to offer workshops on accessing available funding and resources.

Implement a collaborative strategy.

- Launch a platform or resource center to make information easily accessible to business owners.

Launch a marketing campaign.

- Roll out targeted marketing.
- Organize promotional events.

Pilot workforce development partnerships.

- Partner with workforce organizations to create tailored training and apprenticeship programs.
- Begin promoting the corridor's workforce-ready talent pool.

Expand and evaluate incentive programs.

- Scale the incentive program, incorporating feedback from the pilot phase.
- Develop long-term incentives to attract larger businesses or anchor institutions.

Attract and cultivate diverse businesses.

- Use retail attraction strategies to bring a variety of businesses to Jefferson Avenue.
- Foster entrepreneurship by developing incubator or accelerator programs.

Sustain marketing and engagement.

- Continue enhancing Jefferson Avenue Corridor's brand.
- Maintain regular engagement with business owners and residents.

Cultural Placemaking

Develop a Jefferson Avenue historical walking tour.

- Combine a walking tour with existing or created interactive tie-ins such as an audio tour element or supporting podcast series.

Implement an upgraded streetscape plan.

- The plan should include strategic placement for historical markers, murals, and public art along pedestrian and bicycle routes.

Install temporary pop-ups on vacant lots along Jefferson Avenue.

- Use this space for art exhibitions, music and entertainment venues, festivals, farmers markets, flea markets, and more.

Expand access to parks and public spaces.

- Consider converting City-owned vacant lots into parks and work with a team of artists and landscape designers and architects to design public art that invites locals and visitors to the corridor.

Implement a Jefferson Avenue Mural Art Initiative.

- Take inspiration from interactive mural exhibits in other communities and seek opportunities to elevate awareness of the murals along Jefferson Avenue.

Add and expand upon ongoing programming.

- Return the Juneteenth celebration to Jefferson Avenue and pursue regular programming such as music entertainment and new festivals.

Encourage cross-neighborhood collaboration.

- Connect the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor and Jefferson Avenue to tell a comprehensive, robust story about the rich African American history and culture of Buffalo.

Recruit a chief cultural officer.

- This role will focus on working with major community and public sector leaders to integrate art and culture elements into key planning and implementation projects.

Implement a neighborhood watch program.

- Given there are deep concerns about crime in certain sections of the study area, safety would need to be addressed to fully implement an art and culture plan.

Develop a comprehensive marketing strategy and plan.

- Focus the strategy and plan on rebranding Jefferson Avenue.

Appendix B: Marketing Strategy

Jefferson Avenue: Where Culture, Community, and Commerce Thrive

Introduction

The following is a guide to the key elements and an outline for a marketing strategy for the Jefferson Avenue Corridor.

The purpose of the marketing strategy is to reposition Jefferson Avenue as a thriving cultural and retail district that honors its historical African American roots, leverages its proximity to key institutions, and becomes a central location for community convening and healing.

The panel offers the following vision statement to guide the marketing strategy:

Blending history, culture, and commerce, Jefferson Avenue will re-emerge as a dynamic social and economic corridor and shine as a central gathering space for Buffalo that empowers and connects the community while preserving its rich heritage.

Marketing Narrative – Jefferson Avenue

The following are elements that the panel believes Jefferson Avenue should emphasize to form the foundation of its compelling story (narrative) for marketing materials and messaging.

The Legacy of Jefferson Avenue

- Highlight the historical significance of Jefferson Avenue as a cornerstone of African American culture and commerce in Buffalo.
- Share stories of past successes—thriving Black-owned businesses, cultural landmarks, and community resilience.

A Central Location with Endless Opportunity

- Emphasize Jefferson Avenue's geographic advantage in Buffalo's city center, making it accessible and positioned for growth.
- Highlight proximity to anchor and educational institutions as a key driver of foot traffic, youthful energy, and intellectual resources.

A Space for Convening and Healing

- Position Jefferson Avenue as a space for collective healing following recent tragedies, fostering unity and cultural celebration.
- Highlight plans for inclusive public spaces including parks, plazas, and community hubs where all residents feel welcome.

Culture, Retail, and Modernity

- Showcase Jefferson Avenue's potential as a destination for retail, dining, and entertainment that blends historical charm with modern amenities.
- Promote diverse offerings including African American heritage events, niche boutiques, restaurants, and cultural festivals.

Target Audience

Understanding who the target market is for marketing efforts is essential to developing a successful strategy. The following describes the target audience that panel recommends prioritizing.

Local Residents

- Build pride in the corridor's cultural heritage and create a sense of ownership.
- Highlight local businesses, community events, and opportunities for involvement.

Visitors from the Region

- Attract tourists and regional visitors seeking authentic cultural experiences.
- Position Jefferson Avenue as a must-visit destination for history, arts, and cuisine.

University Students and Employees

- Encourage students and employees to see Jefferson Avenue as an extension of campus life for dining, shopping, and cultural engagement.

Investors and Business Owners

- Promote the corridor as a business-friendly environment with opportunities for growth.
- Highlight incentives for minority-owned businesses and partnerships with the community.

Marketing Strategy

A marketing strategy includes four essential elements, outlined below: brand identity and storytelling, strategic partnerships, content and campaigns, and measuring success. Ultimately, marketing efforts for Jefferson Avenue should 1) reaffirm the corridor's unique identity as a beacon of African American culture, economic opportunity, and community pride and 2) serve as a call to action encouraging stakeholders to get involved and support the vision for a brighter future on Jefferson Avenue.

Brand Identity and Storytelling

Brand Elements

- Develop a logo, tagline, and visual identity reflecting Jefferson Avenue's cultural richness and modern vision. Example tagline: "Jefferson Avenue: The Heartbeat of Buffalo's Culture and Commerce."
- Use colors and visuals tied to African American heritage and urban vibrancy.

Storytelling Initiatives

- Launch a multimedia campaign featuring personal stories from residents, business owners, and community leaders.
- Highlight milestones in Jefferson Avenue's history and future plans for development.

Marketing Channels

Digital Marketing

- **Website:** Create a central hub featuring events, business directories, and historical highlights.
- **Social Media:** Use platforms including Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok to share engaging content (e.g., business spotlights, cultural moments, live events).
- **Email Campaigns:** Produce regular newsletters to keep residents and stakeholders informed.

Traditional Media

- Produce local radio and TV commercials focusing on the corridor's history and upcoming events.
- Form partnerships with local newspapers and magazines for feature stories.

On-the-Ground Engagement

- Create murals and public art installations celebrating the community's heritage.
- Host regular community events including farmers markets, street fairs, and cultural festivals.

Strategic Partnerships

University Collaborations

- Partner with nearby universities for internships, research projects, and events.
- Create a "student discount program" to encourage spending at local businesses.

Community Organizations

- Work with cultural organizations, such as the NAACP Buffalo Branch, to co-host events and initiatives.
- Collaborate with local nonprofits such as Say Yes on youth programs and workforce development.

Private Sector Engagement

- Attract anchor tenants including restaurants, cafes, and co-working spaces that align with the district's vision.
- Highlight opportunities for minority-owned business grants and tax incentives.

Content and Campaigns

Signature Events

- Further amplify annual events celebrating African American culture in Buffalo such as Juneteenth.
- Host a monthly event featuring local vendors, live performances, and community discussions.

Content Themes

- **“Then and Now”**: Highlight Jefferson Avenue’s evolution through before-and-after imagery and stories.
- **“Faces of Jefferson”**: Share profiles of local entrepreneurs, artists, and residents.

Promotional Campaigns

- Run campaigns focused on shopping local, such as “Shop Jefferson” during holiday seasons.
- Develop itineraries for visitors (e.g., “Spend a Day on Jefferson Avenue.”)

Measuring Success

Key Metrics

- Measure increased foot traffic and sales for local businesses.
- Track growth in event attendance and community participation.
- Evaluate positive sentiment and awareness through surveys and social media engagement.

Feedback Loops

- Create avenues for ongoing feedback from residents, businesses, and visitors to refine the strategy.

Appendix C: Strategic Communication

Stakeholder and community feedback from the panel week illustrated to the ULI team that strategic communication is an important element of the revitalization of Jefferson Avenue. Feedback from stakeholders is summarized below.

Neighborhood Stakeholders

- Business owners and residents feel disconnected from government and development decisions.
- There is a lack of awareness about available resources, events, and initiatives.
- There are concerns about transparency and equitable inclusion in decision-making processes.
- There is a desire for regular, clear, and accessible communication channels.

Public Sector

- Challenges exist in efficiently disseminating information to diverse community groups.
- There is a need for better alignment among local, state, and federal efforts.

Private Sector/Investors

- Investors express uncertainty about community priorities and expectations for engagement.
- There is a need for clear pathways to participate in equitable, inclusive development.

Existing Conditions and Gaps

During conversations, neighborhood stakeholders discussed limited access to digital tools and platforms in some areas, which create information gaps. It is the panel's understanding that there is a strong desire for two-way communication where feedback is sought and valued. The panel also observed that anchor institutions, such as local universities, can serve as hubs for information dissemination.

From the public sector and government official perspective, it is the panel's observation that existing communication channels such as public meetings and newsletters often miss key groups. The panel also learned that coordination across multiple levels of government remains inconsistent.

The private sector/investors, the panels understands, have limited understanding of the cultural and historical importance of the corridor and there is minimal accountability and experience with meaningful community engagement practices in development.

The panel also observed several gaps in communications efforts for the Jefferson Avenue Corridor:

- A lack of centralized communication infrastructure connecting all stakeholder groups
- Insufficient trust among neighborhood stakeholders, government officials, and private sector/investors
- Limited use of culturally relevant and accessible communication methods
- Absence of a formalized process for community engagement in development projects

Opportunities

The panel believes the following opportunities exist for strategic communication across neighborhood stakeholders, the public sector, and the private sector/investors.

Neighborhood Stakeholders

- Create neighborhood-led communication committees to act as liaisons between the community and external stakeholders.
- Develop inclusive and multilingual communication materials to ensure accessibility.

Public Sector

- Establish a unified communication strategy across city, county, and state agencies.
- Leverage digital platforms and in-person outreach for greater inclusivity.

Private Sector/Investors

- Build trust by incorporating community voices into development decisions.
- Promote transparency about project timelines, opportunities, and outcomes.

Phased Implementation

The panel recommends the following implementation actions in the short, medium, and long term for each key stakeholder group. Most immediately, the panel emphasizes the need to

identify a central body or bodies to manage the coordination and implementation communication strategy.

Stakeholder Group	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
Neighborhood Stakeholders	Launch a digital community bulletin and SMS alert system for residents and businesses.	Establish resource hubs at anchor institutions for centralized access to information.	Empower neighborhood leaders with training and tools to sustain communication efforts.
	Host listening sessions to identify specific communication preferences and needs.	Create a community advisory board to review and provide input on proposed projects.	Celebrate progress through community events and milestones to maintain momentum.
Public Sector	Develop a shared calendar of events and updates for dissemination to all stakeholders.	Implement a multiplatform communication strategy (e.g., social media, print, local radio).	Evaluate and adjust communication strategies based on community feedback and outcomes.
	Issue public commitments to transparent communication and regular updates.	Facilitate workshops on understanding local government processes and decision-making.	Establish formal accountability mechanisms for stakeholder communication.
Private Sector/ Investors	Conduct introductory meetings with community groups to build relationships and gather input.	Provide training on community engagement best practices.	Fund long-term initiatives that promote cultural preservation and economic growth.
	Share initial development plans and incorporate public feedback.	Collaborate with government and community leaders on equitable development guidelines.	Showcase successful projects as models for inclusive development.

About the Panel

Tyrone Rachal

Panel Chair
Atlanta, Georgia

Tyrone Rachal is president of Urban Key Capital Partners, a mission-driven, specialty finance advisory services platform with expertise in providing a range of financial services to highly impactful real estate development projects in distressed communities and development authorities. He is also a principal of Red Rock Global and president of Red Rock Global Capital Partners where he has specific responsibility for directing all financial advisory services and private placement activity. Prior to forming Urban Key Capital Partners and rejoining Red Rock Global, Rachal was managing director of redevelopment at Invest Atlanta. He had specific responsibility for managing, marketing, and overseeing the City of Atlanta's tax allocation district program and served as director for commercial, retail, and mixed-use projects applying for tax increment finance funding.

Rachal also created and had the responsibility of directing Invest Atlanta's controlling entity interest as president of Atlanta Emerging Markets Inc., a New Markets Tax Credit program Certified Community Development Entity and multiround allocatee (\$353 million). He joined Invest Atlanta from Red Rock Global, an Atlanta-based real estate advisory services and commercial brokerage company he co-founded in 2001. Prior to that, Rachal served with the Private Equity Group of Merrill Lynch & Co. in New York where he had the responsibility of advising financial sponsors in the private placement of over \$7 billion of limited partnership interests to institutional investors. He also served within the mergers and acquisitions group at Merrill Lynch & Co. in New York where he provided advisory assistance to Fortune 500 companies and financial sponsors in over \$5 billion of both acquisitions and divestitures.

Rachal is a graduate of Dartmouth College with degrees in economics and government, as well as the University of Chicago Law School and Booth School of Business, where he received his juris doctor and master of business administration degrees, respectively. He currently serves as district council chair of ULI Atlanta, past chair of the Public/Private Partnership Council of ULI, Global Governing Trustee of ULI, and an active participant in the Atlanta district council's Inaugural Center for Leadership. Rachal is the 2022 distinguished award recipient

of the ULI Advisory Services Robert M. O'Donnell Award, the highest achievement award that serves as an ongoing remembrance of Bob O'Donnell, a stalwart contributor to the success of ULI. It acknowledges the time, effort, and commitment that a particular ULI member has given to the Advisory Services program and that has enhanced the importance of Advisory Services as an outreach program of ULI.

Rachal proudly serves on the boards of directors of Southface Institute, CaringWorks, Sadie G. Mays Health and Rehabilitation Center, Health 1st Foundation, and Ebenezer Baptist Church. He has also chaired the boards of directors of the Development Authority of DeKalb County (Decide DeKalb), the DeKalb Private Hospital Authority, and the Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly Authority. In addition, Rachal is a graduate of the 2012 Class of Leadership Atlanta, the 2013 Class of Leadership Georgia, and the 2013 Atlanta Regional Commission Leadership Institute.

Dionne Baux

Chicago, Illinois

As chief programs officer, Dionne Baux focuses on building capacity for coordinator programs and local programs across the Main Street Network. Her division works to strengthen existing coordinating programs and launch and grow new coordinating programs that support Main Street America's expanding national network. She also works with the field services staff to provide technical assistance, training, and resources to local Main Street programs.

Baux has more than 20 years of project management experience, specializing in the revitalization of commercial districts and urban economic development. In addition to supporting opportunities for capacity building, she has vast experience working with community stakeholders, identifying and implementing initiatives in partnership with community-based groups and governmental and philanthropic institutions. Baux worked as a senior program officer for Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Chicago prior to joining Main Street America in 2016. While there, she created and administered the award-winning Business District Leadership program as

well as the award-winning Smart Communities demonstration. She also managed economic development initiatives for the Chicago office. Before joining LISC Chicago, Baux worked as a financial planning analyst for the Department of Community Development of the City of Chicago, where she led the administration of the Rehabilitation Grant Programs for Eligible Chicago Residents and Small Business Owners as well as the Tax Increment Finance Interest Subsidy Program for Developers.

Baux has a bachelor's in communications from the University of Illinois at Chicago and a master's in public administration from Roosevelt University. Baux serves on the board of the Small Business Anti-Displacement Network, a group of professionals dedicated to avoiding the displacement of small businesses in gentrifying areas. To offer the research team strategic guidance, Baux also served as a member of the advisory board for the Center of Technology in Government's "Enabling Smart, Inclusive, and Connected Communities: The Role of Public Libraries" research project at the University of Albany in New York. Additionally, she has participated in ULI Advisory Service panels across the nation.

In her hometown, Baux participates on the advisory board of Equiticity. She also participates in the Economic Development Committee of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

Dr. Lorin R. Carter

Dallas, Texas

Dr. Lorin R. Carter, Esq., M.S., E.I., serves as the visionary founder and CEO of C-Suite Equity Consulting LLC, with a background spanning civil engineering, law, higher education, public policy, and urban planning. Carter has nearly two decades of expertise in innovative solutions that foster thriving communities and empower individuals. Her visionary leadership ensures innovation meets impact, drives positive change, and champions equity.

Carter's leadership has left an indelible mark, securing a groundbreaking \$6 million equitable development client investment from the JPMorgan Chase Foundation, a transformative financial infusion, coupled with community-driven programming, that is generating lasting impact, uplifting neighborhoods, and positively impacting residents and businesses. A cornerstone of Carter's portfolio is the Southern Gateway Deck Park equitable development plan that leverages

over \$80 million in infrastructure investment for social, environmental, and economic good. This initiative earned the prestigious Dunnigan Engagement Award for its commitment to innovation, strategy, and research. Carter's influence extends nationally through engagements such as conducting a community needs and strength assessment for the Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas, keynoting on housing issues in Washington, and co-authoring ULI guidance on infusing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles into real estate development. As a sought-after speaker, trainer, and thought leader, she shares her insights through national news outlets such as The Grio, Thrive Global, Blavity, Take the Lead, and Visible and as a 2020 Dallas Public Voices Fellow through the OpEd Project, amplifying her impact on a wider stage. Her commitment to sustainable community development is further demonstrated as a vice chair of the Farmers Market Reinvestment Zone of Dallas. This leadership, innovation, and over \$17 million of direct impact is propelling C-Suite Equity Consulting to maintain its base of nonprofit organizations and expand its services offerings to corporations and governmental institutions.

Justin Chapman

Atlanta, Georgia

Justin Chapman is a senior development executive for The Integral Group, where he is responsible for the full range of development activities within the company's portfolio of mixed-use projects in the Atlanta, Georgia, region. He holds a BA in fine art from Ithaca College, a master's in urban planning from Georgia Tech, and an MDES in real estate from the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Since 2008, he has engaged in the planning and implementation of over 1.6 million square feet of built projects across multiple asset types nationally. Chapman is passionate about the role planning development can play as a positive change agent for cities and institutions, believing that quality design should be accessible and central in shaping life experiences across socioeconomic levels. Chapman is currently a member of ULI's Public/Private Partnership Product Council and Harvard Real Estate Alumni Board, and is also a lecturer in the master in real estate program at Harvard Graduate School of Design. He is a member emeritus of the AIA Board of Directors, AIA Finance Committee, and Harvard GSD Alumni Council. As a creative, Chapman has been engaged in electronic music production for over 25 years and has toured the world extensively sharing his music. Chapman currently resides in Atlanta with his wife Randi and son Brook.

Caressa J. Davis

St. Louis, Missouri

Caressa J. Davis, director of community partnerships at the St. Louis Development Corporation, brings over a decade of experience in nonprofit, philanthropy, and community development. Her career has been dedicated to forging impactful collaborations between various communities, positioning her as a key facilitator in driving both economic and social progress in St. Louis. As the founder of The Curated Connection, Davis has developed platforms for community engagement and professional networking, with a focus on connecting diverse young professionals to opportunities for meaningful collaboration. Throughout her career, Davis has excelled in building strategic partnerships that unite businesses, nonprofits, and civic organizations with the goal of revitalizing urban spaces and enhancing the region's cultural and economic vitality. Her work with prominent institutions, from arts to education, showcases her capacity to lead initiatives that foster strong public/private partnerships.

Davis's role at SLDC and her expertise in community engagement, urban revitalization, and cross-sector collaborations make her a strong advocate for the development of projects that not only stimulate growth but also address the needs of underserved communities. Her work exemplifies her commitment to leveraging partnerships for long-term, sustainable impact across St. Louis.

Juanita Hardy

Silver Spring, Maryland

Juanita Hardy has a passion for fostering healthy, thriving, and equitable places to live, work, learn, and play through her work with individuals and businesses. She founded Tiger Management Consulting Group LLC, an executive coaching and business consulting services firm, following a 31-year career with IBM. Hardy has over 45 years of business experience, including a decade in the real estate industry, and over 35 years in the arts as a nonprofit leader, trustee, and patron of the arts.

Since 2016, Hardy has served as Senior Visiting Fellow for Creative Placemaking for ULI, providing research and guidance to real estate professionals on leveraging creative placemaking, or art and culture in tandem with great design, to grow project value and enhance social and economic benefits for project stakeholders. Hardy has also served as an Equity Advisor to ULI on its DEI initiatives.

Tiger Management's client portfolio comprises for-profit and nonprofit organizations, including Right Management, a global human capital development firm, where she serves, since 2006, as an executive coach for senior business professionals in large enterprises across multiple industries. Hardy was the executive director of CulturalDC (2013–2015), a Washington, D.C., nonprofit that provides space for artists and creative placemaking services for real estate developers. Hardy held leadership positions with IBM, helping to transform businesses of IBM Fortune 500 clients spanning IBM's software development, systems engineering, and management consulting lines of business, until her retirement in 2005.

Hardy was recognized as a Minority Business Leader by the *Washington Business Journal* in 2010 and an art advocate and collector by The Phillips Collection in 2022. She is an accomplished writer and public speaker. Her articles and essays have appeared in magazines and journals in the United States and abroad, including [seven articles on creative placemaking](#) for *Urban Land* magazine (2016–2024), two ULI publications ([2020](#) and [2022](#)), and a [2023 essay](#) for volume 3 of *The Place Economy* published by Hoyne Communications based in Australia.

Sherry Okun-Rudnak

Atlanta, Georgia

Sherry Okun-Rudnak oversees projects across BAE Urban Economics's six offices. She specializes in providing practical real estate development advisory services, economic development support, market studies, financial feasibility analyses, and economic impacts analyses to BAE's clients.

Okun-Rudnak is assisting LA Metro in negotiating joint development projects along the LAX/Crenshaw line. As part of this assignment, she is evaluating projects to enhance feasibility and ground lease payments and prepared a term sheet for use on affordable housing projects. She is also assisting the City of Los Angeles with developing a plan to activate and bring new development to the Civic Center area of Downtown Los Angeles.

Okun-Rudnak also leads BAE's assignments supporting various Livable Centers Initiative plans around the Metro Atlanta Area. She provided market support to the cities of Woodstock, Villa Rica, Tyrone, and Winder to project demand for a variety of land uses. She also prepared pro forma models to test developer feasibility for new development on catalyst sites and provided best practices for implementation of catalyst site development.

Okun-Rudnak is an adjunct instructor for the University of Southern California's Sol Price School of Policy Studies and a member of ULI's Urban Revitalization Product Council. She earned her designation as a U.S. Green Building Council LEED Accredited Professional in 2007.

Mark Sherfy

Kansas City, Kansas

Mark Sherfy is the development group director and vice president at BHC, a civil engineering and surveying firm headquartered in Overland Park, Kansas. He previously served as the public works group leader at BHC. Sherfy is a licensed professional engineer in nine states, bringing over 30 years of experience in public works and private land development.

Before joining BHC, Sherfy dedicated more than a decade to the City of Shawnee, Kansas (population 69,000), where he held key leadership roles, including city traffic engineer, transportation manager, and deputy director of public works. His project portfolio spans a wide range, from local neighborhood traffic calming initiatives and 2-million-plus square feet of office and mixed-use developments to multi-million-dollar federal infrastructure projects.

Sherfy is known among his colleagues as an enthusiastic and engaged leader who consistently pursues win-win solutions. Clients value his technical expertise, customer service, integrity, and innovative approach.

Sherfy earned a bachelor of science degree from Iowa State University, graduating with honors. He is an active member of several professional organizations, including the Institute of Transportation Engineers, the American Public Works Association, the International Council of Shopping Centers, the American Council of Engineering Companies, and the Kansas City Area Healthcare Engineers.



Urban Land Institute
2001 L Street, NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036-4948
uli.org



ULI New York
1230 6th Avenue
Squad 1622
New York, NY 10020
newyork.uli.org