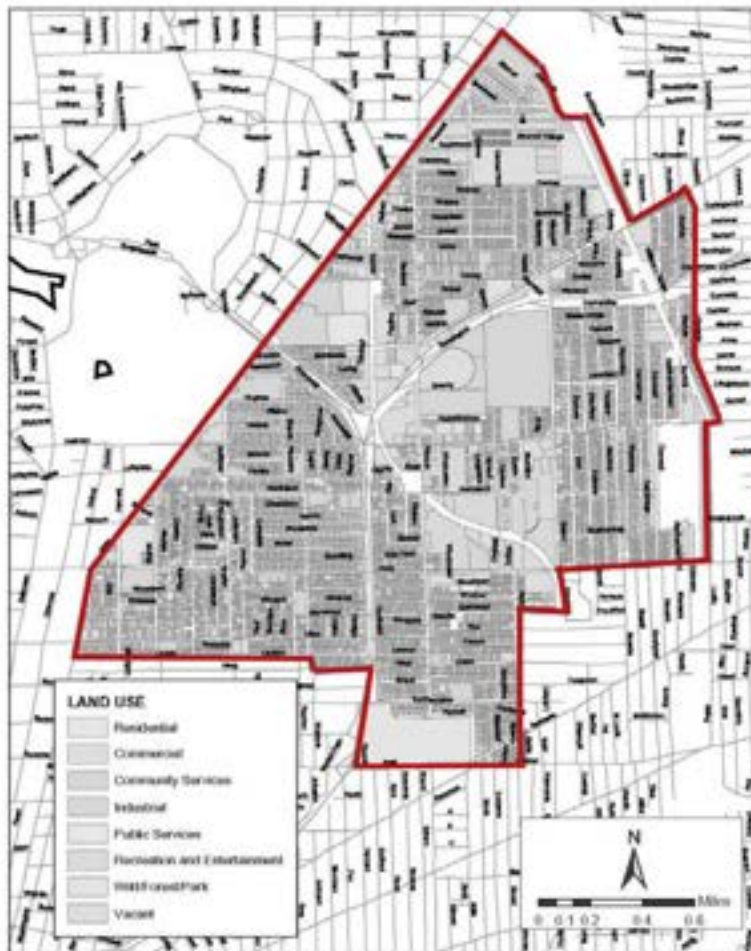


# The Masten District Neighborhood Plan



The Office of Urban Initiatives  
UB Center for Urban Studies  
Antoine Thompson, Masten District Council Member



THE UB CENTER FOR URBAN STUDIES AND THE OFFICE OF URBAN INITIATIVES  
ANTOINE THOMPSON, MASTEN DISTRICT COUNCIL MEMBER

# The Masten District Neighborhood Plan

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A Strategy for Redeveloping the District and Transforming it  
into a Great Place to Live, Work, Play and Raise a Family

A Project Sponsored by the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency and the Office of Urban Initiatives, Inc.

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## Executive Summary

**T**he Masten District Neighborhood Plan (Plan) is a strategy for redeveloping the district and transforming it into a great place to live, work, play, and raise a family. The Plan focuses on land-use issues, community economic development as well as housing and neighborhood development. Although primarily concerned with physical development, the plan nevertheless assumes that successful redevelopment is dependent upon creating employment opportunities, developing great schools, bolstering social service delivery systems, increasing the perception and reality of safety, and solving urgent social problems. While the Plan does not directly address these issues, it is nevertheless rooted in the idea that transformation of the physical environment will create a neighborhood setting that enhances social development and encourages public and private investments. The Plan is part of the Comprehensive Planning process initiated by the City and its findings and recommendations will be integrated into that document.

The Plan is divided into three parts. Part One introduces the Plan by outlining the approach used in its development and by analyzing the challenges that must be met to transform the Masten District into one of the top residential areas in western New York. Part Two details the Plan. In this section is found the district wide redevelopment strategy and the individual plans for each neighborhood. The recommendations are contained in Part Three.

### **The Site**

Situated in the center of Buffalo, the Humboldt/Scajaquada and the Kensington expressways divide the Masten District into eastern, western, and northern quadrants and connect the district to every section of the metro. The district is built on an axis of seven commercial thoroughfares: Main, East Delavan, East Ferry, Kensington, Jefferson, Fillmore, and Grider. It is composed of six neighborhoods: Fillmore-Leroy, Cold Springs, Delavan-Grider, Hamlin Park, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Trinidad Park. These six neighborhoods are contained wholly within census tracts 32.01, 33.01, 34, 35, 39.02, 39.01, 52.02, 40.02, and partially within census tracts 36, 52.01, 42, and 45. Each Masten neighborhood has a distinct persona that is

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based on that community's historical experience, architecture and urban design, assets, values, image, and identity. Merged together, these collective neighborhood characteristics form the district's unique personality.

The Masten District has "good" housing stock, although many of its housing units are in need of major rehabilitation. Most important, the district still has a strong asset base. It is a major regional employment center and contains some of the most important businesses and employers in western New York, including, American Axel, Tri-Main Center, Canisius College, Sisters Hospital, and Erie County Medical Center. Concurrently, some of the great regional cultural assets are found in the district, including Bethel A.M.E. Church, Mt. Olive Baptist Church, Paul Roberson Theatre and African American Cultural Center, Buffalo Museum of Science, Martin Luther King, Jr. Olmsted Park, the Challenger, the Apollo Theatre, the Hamlin Park historic district, and Mattie's and GiGis, the region's two premier soul food restaurants. Moreover, Fillmore and Jefferson Avenues' commercial corridors are two of the most important thoroughfares in the region. Collectively, these assets make the Masten District one of the most important locales in western New York.

### **The Conceptual Framework**

The Plan is based on five guiding principles.

1. Citizen participation.
2. A sound housing stock dominated by units that are attractive, in good repair, and with strong "curb" appeal is key to creating a strong housing market, developing a healthy community, retaining existing residents and attracting new ones.
3. The belief that commercial thoroughfares are windows through which neighborhood life and culture are viewed.
4. Neighborhood improvement and enhanced service delivery are keys to restoring resident confidence in the community's future.
5. The Turning Point Theory of Neighborhood Change is the conceptual and theoretical foundation upon which development plans should be based.

### **The Vision**

The Masten District is envisioned as one of western New York's great neighborhoods and the region's Black Cultural Center.

### **The Goal**

The goal is to fashion a strategic framework that enables the Masten District to become one of the top neighborhoods in the city and county.

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## **The Slogan**

The slogan of the Masten District is “Masten: A Community on the Move.”

## **The Housing Market Development Scenario**

The Plan rejects the existing development scenario in the Masten District and instead uses a housing market approach to development that links improvements in housing and neighborhood conditions to cultural and economic development. This scenario is based on the belief that strengthening the housing market in the Masten District is central to transforming the district into a top residential area.

Most homebuyers are reluctant to purchase a house in a neighborhood where property values are weak. In such a setting, houses might lose value over time and the owners might experience trouble selling the house, even at a reduced price. This means neighborhood redevelopment must be driven by a conscious strategy to strengthen the housing market.

## **Statement of the Problem: The Developmental Challenge**

1. Population loss.
2. The housing market in the Masten District is very weak.
3. The Masten District is a cross-class community with a high proportion of low-income residents.
4. The worst housing neighborhood conditions are often found along the commercial corridors, which are the community's primary image-makers.
5. Crime and the perception of safety is an issue.

## **Methodology**

1. The Center for Urban Studies is committed to engaging residents and stakeholders in all phases of the planning process.
  2. U.S. Census data was used to compile various datasets to study housing, demographics, and economic issues in the Masten District.
  3. Digital Photography and Windshield Surveys were used to study housing and neighborhood conditions.
  4. A number of previously completed reports and studies on Buffalo and the Masten District were also consulted.
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## Recommendations

### Priorities

1. The establishment of a neighborhood superfund, administered by the United Way, the community foundation, or a similar organization, should be explored.
2. The development of employer-assisted housing programs in all neighborhoods with major employers should be explored.
3. The City should bring together the banking community and work to develop a set of unique mortgage packages and incentives designed to stimulate residential development in select Masten neighborhoods.
4. Redevelopment of the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood is crucial to the successful revitalization of the Masten District.
5. The redevelopment of Fillmore Avenue must be considered as part of the redevelopment of Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood.
6. Redevelopment of East Delavan Commercial Corridor, Jefferson Avenue Commercial Corridor, and the Fillmore Avenue Commercial Corridor, including the Martin Luther King, Jr. Commercial District will jump start the redevelopment of the neighborhoods surrounding them.
7. Development of an Artist Colony in the Tri-Main area and the redevelopment of Fillmore Avenue from Main Street to the Expressway, will completely transform this part of Masten.
8. The Glenny Projects should be landscaped and turned into a passive park until they can be commercially developed.
9. A strategy should be developed for strengthening the district population by encouraging young college graduates and other upwardly mobile groups, from across the racial spectrum, to settle in the Masten District.

### District Wide Recommendations

The Masten District is composed of six neighborhoods—Hamlin Park, Delavan-Grider, Fillmore-Leroy, Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, Cold Springs, and Trinidad. What follows are general recommendations that apply to all district neighborhoods:

- Establish a neighborhood *superfund* (1) to finance improvements on the properties of residents who are not able to afford them (2) to develop and maintain public spaces, and (3) to fund the maintenance of abandoned properties.
  - Develop a strategy for housing renovation that includes in-fill construction that uses the guidelines on housing design review established by the Lower West Side Neighborhood Stabilization Demonstration Project.
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- Establish a vacant lot and brown field management program to maintain and beautify vacant lots and abandoned buildings.
- Establish a tracking system to identify unkempt vacant land, abandoned houses and buildings, and other problem properties.
- Establish a program to provide residents, potential residents, and small property investors with the resources to upgrade and modernize their homes and buildings.
- Develop building codes to set minimum standards for exteriors of houses and buildings, including sidewalks, curbs, and lawns.
- Target neighborhood investments based on carefully established priorities in order to maximize impact.
- Transform the neighborhoods in the Masten District by using a block-by-block strategy development strategy.

## Neighborhood Recommendations

### The Fillmore-Leroy Neighborhood

- Establish *five planning areas* in the Fillmore-Leroy neighborhood to facilitate planning and development.
  - Establish a Neighborhood Renaissance Zone (NRZ) to stimulate revitalization of Fillmore-Leroy.
  - Urge banks to establish a mortgage program in the NRZ to encourage the purchase of homes in Fillmore-Leroy.
  - Establish a housing rehabilitation and modernization program that provides loans and grants to all property owners regardless of income, to spawn the physical improvement of the neighborhood.
  - Establish a home equity assistance program in the NRZ to stimulate the purchase of homes in the neighborhood.
  - Establish a *crime bubble* in priority development areas in the NRZ to ensure safety in those places.
  - Establish a team of residents to participate in a District neighborhood problem identification program where problem properties are identified, mapped and upgraded.
  - Develop the Tri-Main area into an artist colony to attract artists, musicians, writers, and others who wish to live in such a creative environment.
  - Develop Fillmore Avenue, from Main to the Kensington Expressway to provide goods and services for local residents and to provide shops, restaurants, and activities that cater to tourists and workers in the area.
-

- Landscape and beautify the Glenny Projects until they are developed.

### **The Delavan-Grider Neighborhood**

1. Redevelop the East Delavan commercial corridor from Chelsea to the American Axel Plant.
2. Redevelop Grider and East Ferry to create a positive image of the neighborhood.
3. Urge the City of Buffalo to regularly maintain the William L. Gaiter Parkway.
4. Establish a team of residents to participate in a district neighborhood program where problem properties are mapped, identified and improved.
5. Establish a rehabilitation/modernization and infill-housing program in the area south of Scajaquada.
6. Formulate a plan to redevelop the commercial and residential area west of Grider.
7. Develop a program for vacant lot and brownfield management for the industrial/commercial area west of Grider to make the area attractive and visually appealing.
8. Work with large companies and institutions for an employer-assisted housing program within the neighborhood.
9. Establish an education program to make renters become more responsible tenants who are invested in the neighborhood.
10. Establish a marketing campaign to promote Delavan-Grider as a great place to live, work, and raise a family.
11. Work with the other Masten neighborhoods to develop a building code that establishes minimum exterior standards for houses and buildings, including sidewalks, curbs, and lawns.

### **The Hamlin Park Neighborhood**

- Establish a team of residents to participate in a district program where problem properties in the neighborhood are identified and mapped.
  - Work with the other Masten neighborhoods to develop a building code that establishes minimum standards for the exterior of houses and buildings, including sidewalks, curbs, and lawns.
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- Urge area banks to form a collaboration with Canisius College to increase homeownership in Hamlin Park for graduates and staff of the College.
- Establish low-interest home improvement and rehabilitation loan programs for all property owners, regardless of income level.
- Target major thoroughfares in Hamlin Park for landscaping and streetscaping in order to turn them into attractive corridors that produce a positive image for Hamlin Park:
- Establish a marketing campaign to promote Hamlin Park as a great place to live, work, and raise a family.
- Establish a housing rehabilitation, modernization and infill program in the area, south of East Ferry.
- Construct new housing units on vacant lots on Jefferson near Hamlin and Brunswick.
- Establish an education program to make renters become more responsible tenants who are invested in the neighborhood.

#### **Trinidad Park Neighborhood**

- Landscape and beautify Kensington from Pauline to Humboldt to change the neighborhood image.
  - Create a grand entrance to the neighborhood at Trinidad Street.
  - Establish a team of residents who will participate in a district program where neighborhood problem properties are identified, mapped and improved.
  - Work with other Masten neighborhoods to develop a building code that establishes minimum standards of exteriors of houses and buildings, including sidewalks, curbs, and lawns.
  - Establish an employer-assisted housing program with Sisters Hospital and Niagara-Mohawk.
  - Establish an education program for renters to become better tenants who feel invested in the neighborhood.
  - Landscape and transform the area surrounding the community garden into a passive park.
-

- Demolish the vacant structures on Gillette and integrate the lot into the passive park.

### **The Martin Luther King, Jr. Park Neighborhood**

- Establish a Neighborhood Renaissance Zone (NRZ) to stimulate revitalization of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park community.
  - Urge banks to establish a neighborhood renaissance mortgage program in the NRZ to encourage the purchase of homes in Fillmore-Leroy.
  - Establish a housing rehabilitation and modernization program with loans and grants to all property owners in the NRZ, regardless of income, to spawn the physical improvement of the neighborhood.
  - Establish a home equity assistance program in the NRZ to guarantee equity and to stimulate the purchase of homes in the neighborhood.
  - Establish a crime bubble in priority development areas in the NRZ to ensure safety in those places.
  - Establish a team of residents to participate in a district program where problem properties are identified, mapped, and redeveloped.
  - Redevelop the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor to create a positive neighborhood image.
  - Paint the Kensington Expressway railings that front houses located along the Humboldt Parkway.
  - Landscape and beautify the industrial lands that front the houses on Woodlawn.
  - Establish an aggressive rehabilitation/modernization and infill-housing program in the area south of Northampton to redevelop the area adjacent to MLK Park.
  - Establish a marketing campaign to promote the MLK neighborhood to immigrants and young upwardly mobile blacks, Latinos, and whites.
-

## **Major Thoroughfares**

- To landscape and streetscape thoroughfares in order to radically reconstruct them.
  - To establish building codes requiring high standards for upkeep of establishments along the thoroughfares, including signage, the exterior of structures, sidewalks, and curbs.
  - To enact legislation that allows the Mayor's Impact Team to make necessary improvements on properties that do not respond to citations and to be able to bill the owners for the cost of improvement. Grants will be given to those who cannot afford the improvements.
  - To urge the City to establish a district-based Enforcement Team composed of trained volunteers that will monitor the upkeep of thoroughfares and will identify violators.
  - To urge the City's Office of Strategic Planning (OSP) to commission an architectural firm to develop a landscaping plan for each thoroughfare and to cost out the landscaping project. The OSP should also outline a plan to fund this project
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# Introduction

## *Masten District: A Community on the Move*

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THE MASTEN  
DISTRICT  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
PLAN  
IS A STRATEGY  
FOR  
REDEVELOPING  
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**T**he Masten District Neighborhood Plan is a strategy for redeveloping the district and transforming it into a great place to live, work, play, and raise a family. The Plan focuses on land-use issues, community economic development, and housing and neighborhood development. Although primarily concerned about physical development, the plan nevertheless assumes that successful redevelopment is dependent on creating employment opportunities, developing great schools, bolstering social service delivery, increasing the perception and reality of safety, and solving urgent social problems. While the Plan does not directly address these issues, it is nevertheless rooted in the idea that transformation of the physical environment will create a neighborhood setting that enhances social development and encourages public and private investments.

The Plan is part of the City of Buffalo's comprehensive planning efforts. Common Council member Antoine Thompson decided to have a separate planning initiative in the Masten District because the district had been broken up and placed in three separate planning areas by the city's planning initiative. Such a process made it difficult for Thompson to determine the district's needs and priorities. At the same time, Thompson realized that to implement the Plan it needed to be linked to the city's comprehensive planning effort. Therefore, the development of the Plan did not take place in isolation. Rather, it was formulated in collaboration with the Good Neighbors Planning Alliance. Moreover, the city will integrate the Plan into the city's comprehensive plan.



The Plan is divided into three parts. Part One introduces the Plan by outlining the approach used in its development and by analyzing the challenge that must be met to transform the Masten District into one of the top residential areas in western New York. Part Two details the Plan. In this section is found the district wide redevelopment strategy and the individual plans for each neighborhood. The recommendations are contained in Part Three.

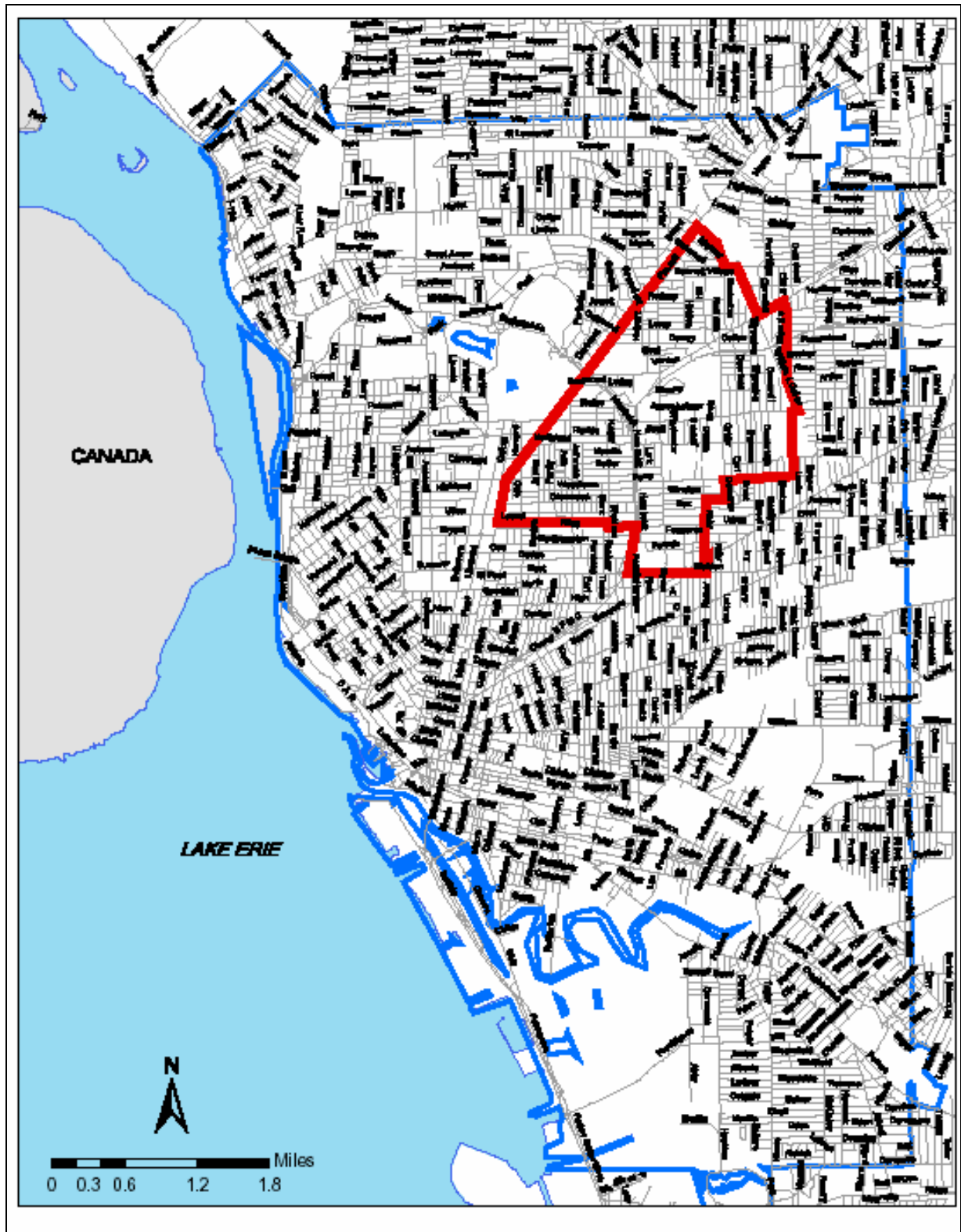
## **1.1 Site and Situation**

### **1.1.1 The Site**

Situated in the center of Buffalo (Map 1), the Humbolt/Scajaquada and the Kensington expressways divide the Masten District into eastern, western, and northern quadrants and connect the district to every section of the metro. The district is built on an axis of seven commercial thoroughfares: Main, East Delavan, East Ferry, Kensington, Jefferson, Fillmore, and Grider. It is composed of six neighborhoods: Fillmore-Leroy, Cold Springs, Delavan-Grider, Hamlin Park, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Trinidad Park. These six neighborhoods are contained wholly within census tracts 32.01, 33.01, 34, 35, 39.02, 39.01, 52.02, 40.02, and partially within census tracts 36, 52.01, 42, and 45. Each Masten neighborhood has a distinct persona that is based on that community's historical experience, architecture and urban design, assets, values, image, and identity. Merged together, these collective neighborhood characteristics form the district's personality.

The Masten District is a city councilmatic district with political boundaries that are constantly changing. Although this complicates making a comparative analysis of Masten over time difficult, by holding the present boundaries constant, it is possible to obtain insight into the historical development of Masten. In making reference to the historical development of the Masten District, contemporary names [Fillmore-Leroy, Cold Springs, Delavan-Grider, Hamlin Park, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Trinidad Park] were used to deepen understanding of how the community's historical legacy influences contemporary planning and development in the community.

Figure 1: Masten District within the Context of Buffalo



Source: UB Center for Urban Studies, 2003. Prepared by Jin-Kyu Jung

### 1.1.2 The Situation

The neighborhoods comprising the Masten District were developed during the period between 1885 and 1915. The houses were built primarily for higher-income white workers. Most structures were large, roomy two-story doubles, which made it possible for the owner to live in one apartment and rent out the other. By acquiring rental income, homeownership became feasible for a larger number of workers. During this period, in most industrial cities, to move higher income workers into the homeownership class, these two-story doubles were constructed.

The community's urban design was influenced the garden city movement. The Masten neighborhood environment was filled with trees, green space, and fresh air, despite the heavy concentration of industrial lands and railroads in the Delavan-Grider and Fillmore-Leroy neighborhoods. Beginning in 1869, Frederick Law Olmsted designed a park system for the City of Buffalo, which included the construction of Delaware and Martin Luther King, Jr. Park (originally called Parade Park) and the beautiful Humboldt Parkway to connect the two areas.

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, primarily U.S. born whites, Germans, Polish, Canadians, Italians, Russians, along with a handful of African Americans, populated the district. In 1930, prior to the World War II influx of African Americans, about 94,610 people lived in the Masten District. Although a variety of U.S. born whites and white immigrants dominated the region, the locale was segregated along ethnic lines, with some ethnics more concentrated in some parts of the district than in other. For example, U.S. born whites dominated Cold Springs and the neighborhoods north of East Delavan. Germans, the second most populous group in Masten, on the other hand, were scattered throughout the district, with the heaviest concentration in the area now called the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. A small Italian population was concentrated in Delavan-Grider neighborhood, in the area south of East Delavan. They lived in a community clustered around the industries in that locale. The small Polish population was even distributed throughout the district, while the small number of African Americans was clustered in Cold Springs.

In the thirty years between 1940 and the 1970, the African American population in Buffalo exploded. During that time the number of African American living in the city increased from 17,694 to 94,329, an increase of 76,635. As blacks moved into Buffalo, whites moved out. During that same period, the number of whites living in the city fell from 557,618 to 364,367, a decrease 193,251. Most significant, in this thirty-year period, suburban population growth outstripped central city population growth. By 1970, when the World War II migration of blacks to Buffalo ended, the population of the city was 462,768 and the suburbs were 650,723. For the first time, suburbanites outnumber central city dwellers in metro Buffalo.

Many of the whites leaving the central city lived in the Masten District. As they left, an increasing number of African Americans moved into the homes being vacated. For example, in 1950, there was only two-census tract (Cold Springs and Hamlin Park) in which 400 or more blacks lived. Twenty-years later, in 1970, African Americans lived in every Masten neighborhood. Although some good housing was found in the district, the majority of the units were declining. Years of neglect caused by the "Great Depression" and the restriction on building materials during World War II had negatively impacted the housing stock. In 1983, UB Professor Alfred Price reported, "The overall problem of housing deterioration in the Masten District is very serious." According to Price, more than half (55.9%) of the housing structures were rated "substandard" or "deteriorated."

Price called for the development and implementation of a major housing redevelopment project in the Masten District. Unless this is done, Price suggests that the problem will worsen, becoming increasingly difficult to

solve with the passage of time. Within this context, Price noted that “two concentrations of relatively well-maintained housing in Hamlin Park and around Martin Luther King, Jr. Park,” represented strength on which to build.

The city ignored the recommendations of Professor Price. Instead of establishing a housing redevelopment project that emphasized housing rehabilitation and in-fill housing construction, the city did nothing. Housing units were allowed to deteriorate and then they were demolished. Masten became a major site of housing demolition between 1965 and 1995.

Today, the Masten District still retains a “good” housing stock, albeit many housing units are in need of major rehabilitation. Most important, the district still has a strong asset base. It is a major regional employment center, which contains some of the most important businesses and employers in western New York, including, American Axel, Tri-Main Center, Canisius College, Sisters Hospital, and Erie County Medical Center. Concurrently, some of the great regional cultural assets are found in the district, including Bethel A.M.E. Church, Mt. Olive Baptist Church, Paul Roberson Theatre and African American Cultural Center, Buffalo Science Museum, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Olmsted Park, the Challenger, the Apollo Theatre, the Hamlin Park historic district, and Mattie’s and GiGis, the region’s two premier soul food restaurants. Moreover, Fillmore and Jefferson Avenues commercial corridor are two of the most important thoroughfares in the region. Collectively, these assets make the Masten District one of the most important locales in western New York.

### 1.2.1 The Conceptual Framework

The Plan locates the Masten District within the context of the City of Buffalo and the County of Erie. The district is linked to the city and county by a series of complex, interactive social, economic, political, and cultural linkages. As a result, what happens in the Masten District affects the city and county, and what happens in the city and county affects the Masten District. Therefore, programs and activities that bolster the quality of life in Masten will not only benefit local residents, but also the city and county as well.

The Plan is based on five guiding principles.

1. **Citizen Participation.** Residents and stakeholders must be involved in every phase of the neighborhood planning process.
2. **A sound housing stock** dominated by units that are attractive, in good repair, and with strong “curb” appeal is key to creating a strong housing market, developing a healthy community, and maintaining existing residents and attracting new ones. The development of a sound housing stock in built-up urban neighborhoods involves formulating a strategy that makes possible the rehabilitation of both rental and owner-occupied units, as well as new construction that fits into the neighborhood’s existing architectural and urban design.
3. **Commercial thoroughfares** are windows the through which neighborhood life and culture are viewed. If the thoroughfares are dilapidated and rundown, passersby will believe that the surrounding neighborhoods are also dilapidated and rundown. On the other hand, if the thoroughfares are attractive and vibrant, passersby will believe the surrounding neighborhoods are attractive and vibrant as well.
4. **Neighborhood improvement and enhanced service delivery** are keys to restoring resident confidence in the community’s future. Improved garbage and trash pick-up, tree trimming, vacant lot management, neighborhood clean-up campaigns, and similar activities bolster confidence in the community and spawns a belief that change can be made.

5. The Turning Point Theory of Neighborhood Change is the conceptual and theoretical foundation upon which development plans should be based. This viewpoint stresses that neighborhood change is characterized by the dynamic interplay between tipping points and turning points. When declining neighborhoods pass the tipping point threshold, the downward trajectory is greatly accelerated, making it difficult, if not impossible, to reverse the downward thrust. On the flip side, when neighborhoods on an upward trajectory pass the turning point threshold, the upward trajectory is greatly accelerated. This means that a *minimalist approach* to development will not push community development beyond the turning point threshold. Modest investments such as street repair, scattered site development, and limited housing rehabilitation might improve things somewhat, but they will not alter fundamentally the conditions of life in the neighborhood. Moreover, Incrementalism will work only if the sum of “small projects” is large enough to push investments beyond the turning point threshold. Otherwise, “small projects” will only create the *illusion* of motion.

### 1.2.2 The Vision

The vision is that Masten District will be one of western New York’s great neighborhoods and the region’s Black Cultural Center. Anchored by five thriving commercial corridors, an Olmsted Park, elegant houses and neighborhoods, exciting cultural, health, and educational institutions, and a strong economy, Masten will be a great place to live, raise a family, work, play, and visit.

### 1.2.3. The Goal

The goal is to fashion a strategic framework that enables the Masten District to become one of the top neighborhoods in the city and county. The Masten District is a major regional employment and cultural center has neighborhoods with charm and character. This combined with its favorable location and easy access to major thoroughfares places it in a very favorable position for continued economic and residential development. The goal of the plan, then, is to fashion a strategy that will transform the community’s vision into a reality.

### 1.2.4 The Slogan

The slogan of the Masten District is “Masten: A Community on the Move.” This phrase captures hope and optimism of residents and stakeholders and reflects their belief that the district can be transformed.

### 1.2.5 The Housing Market Development Scenario

- More than one way exists to develop a neighborhood. A variety of development scenarios can be used to guide the rebuilding of any locality. A community can always follow the existing developmental scenario, or it can choose another. The Masten District is no exception. The Plan rejects the existing development scenario in the Masten District and instead uses a housing market approach to development that links improvements in housing and neighborhood condition to cultural and economic development. This scenario is based on the belief that strengthening the housing market in the Masten District is central to transforming the district into top residential areas.
- This rationale is based on the reality that housing and neighborhoods in the United States are commodities. In this setting, homeownership anchors the residential environment. When a person buys a home, they are making an economic investment, and they want a return on it.

Consequently, people want to purchase a home in a community where housing prices are appreciating and where they can expect to sell their home for more than the original purchase price. Optimism drives this process. If the homeowner or potential buyer feels a community is “hot” or on an upward trajectory, they will invest in the area. Moreover, owners of rental properties will also keep their units attractive and in good repair. Market considerations drives investments in housing and neighborhoods in the United States and the redevelopment of the Masten District must operate within this framework.

- Most homebuyers are reluctant to purchase a house in a neighborhood where property values are weak. In such a setting, houses might lose value over time and the owners might experience trouble selling the house, even at a reduced price. This means neighborhood redevelopment must be driven by a conscious strategy to strengthen the housing market.

### **1.2.6 Statement of the Problem: the Developmental Challenge**

#### **1.2.6.1 Population Loss**

The Masten District is a predominantly African American community situated in the heart of the city. Although the district has numerous assets and a strong regional economic and cultural base, it still faces formidable developmental challenges. Understanding and meeting these developmental challenges is crucial to realizing the Plan’s vision and goal. The identification and analysis of these developmental challenges were based on an extensive examination of the 1990 and 2000 census data, review of the literature on community development and fieldwork, including a windshield survey, walk-thru of every street in the Masten District, insights gained from the focus group meetings, and informal discussions with residents.

The Masten District is losing population. Between 1990 and 2000, the population in the Masten District, a predominantly African American community, dropped from 36,019 to 31,142, a decrease of 13.54 percent.<sup>1</sup> During the same period, the population of Buffalo decreased by 10.8%. What is significant is that population loss in the Masten District took place at a time when the city’s black population was growing. During the nineties, the black population increased from about 100,000 to 108,000. Black population growth was not concentrated. Rather, most sections of the city experienced some growth in its black population. Thus, the black population in Masten fell while it was increasing in many other parts of the city.

The neighborhoods comprising the historic core of Black Buffalo also lost population during the nineties. The historic core consists of those census tracts with a black population threshold of 400 residents in 1970. To gain insight into the loss of population in the black historic core, an analysis was made of (1) those census tracts with a declining black population and (2) those census tracts a growing black population.

Twenty-nine census tracts lost black population or the population remained unchanged. The total population in these tracts was 73,454.

The black population increased in sixty-one census tracts. The total population of those tracts was 219,194.

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<sup>1</sup> These figures are based on the new boundaries for the Masten District.

### 1.2.6.2 Differences between Tracts Losing and Gaining Black Population

- Those tracts where the black population declined or stayed the same (hereafter called black tracts or BT) were 65% black, while those tracts gaining population (black growth tracts or BGT) was 25% black.
- The median income in BT tracts was \$19,373 and \$25,739 in BGT.
- In BT 36% of the population had incomes below the poverty level, while 24% had incomes below the poverty level in BGT.
- The median value of housing units in BT was \$41,638 and \$64,331 in BGT. The rates of home ownership were about the same in both areas.
- The median rent was \$319 in BT and \$432 in BGT.
- The vacancy rate in BT was 21% and 14% in BGT.
- Between 1990 and 2000, BT lost 3943 housing units, while BGT lost 2572 housing units. During the decade, BT lost 35% more housing units than BGT

This analysis suggests that people were leaving the Masten District and other black tracts in search of better housing and neighborhood conditions. They were also leaving a part of the city that was predominantly black for one that was predominantly white. The Black Tracts were 65% African American while the Black Growth Tracts were 66% white.

This demographic shift could have an unsettling impact on census tracts where the black population is increasing. Neighborhood Preference Theory suggests that when the proportion of blacks and/or low-income groups reaches a certain percentage, whites will move out. This has been the Buffalo experience. Historically, as African Americans moved into census tracts, whites have moved out. Thus, city neighborhoods have followed a pattern of segregation, integration, and resegregation.<sup>2</sup> Unless a way is found to break this cycle, the proportion of Erie County whites living in Buffalo could drop to 10% by 2000. Between 1990 and 2000, the proportion of Erie County whites living in Buffalo fell from about 25% to 20%. If the City continues to lose its white population, efforts at economic recovery and rejuvenation will be greatly threatened.

### 1.2.6.3 The Housing Market

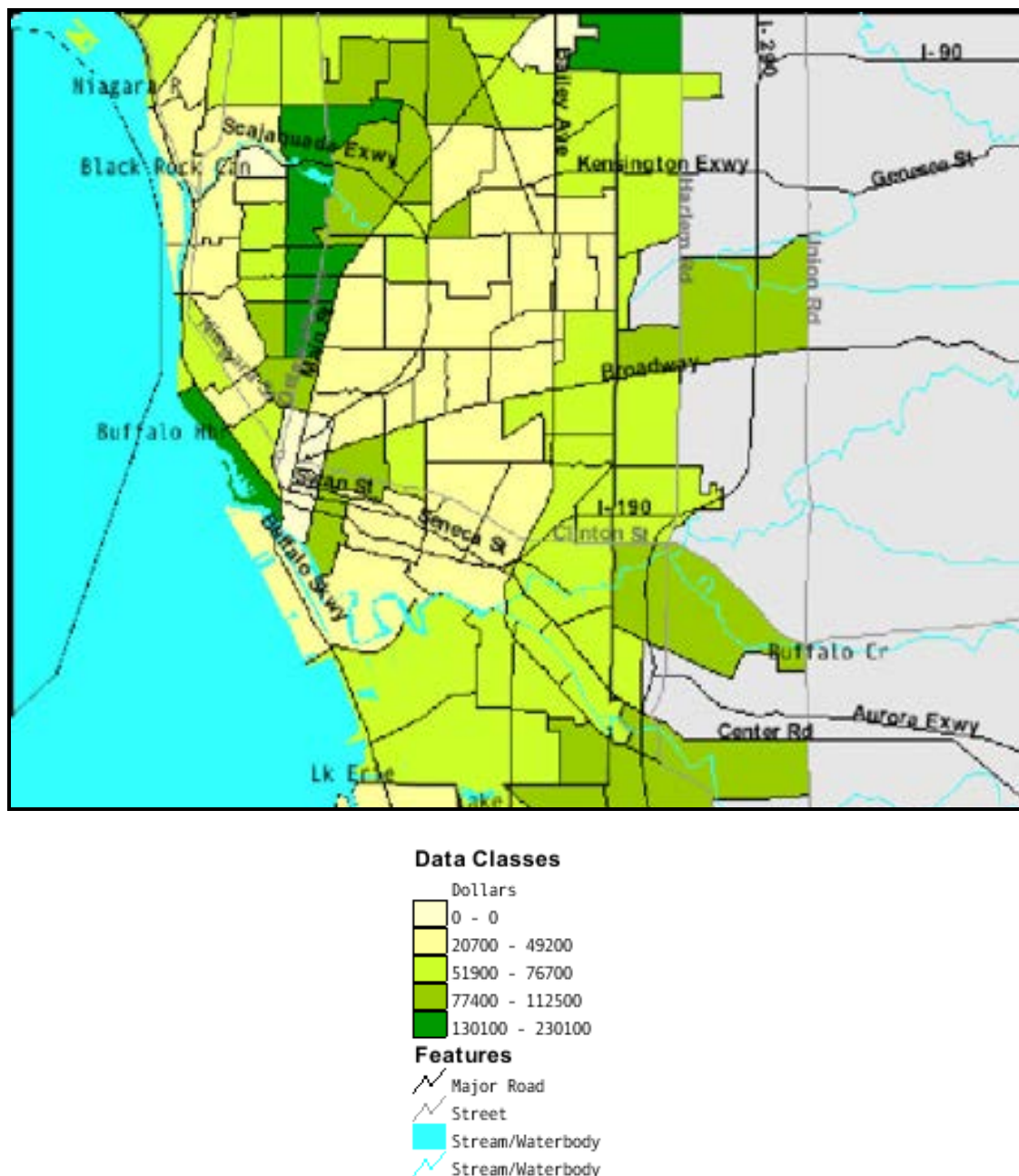
The housing market in the Masten District is very weak (Figure 3). The value of housing in every neighborhood in Masten is below the citywide median housing value of \$59,300. The Map below provides a graphic portrait of the drag on housing values caused by the East Side's weak housing market. In the Masten District, the median value of housing is \$43,485, which is a whopping \$16,000 less than the median value of housing in Buffalo. The significant difference in the value of housing in the Masten District and in other neighborhoods reflects the weakness of the housing market. High vacancy rates are another symptom of a weak housing market. The vacancy rate in Masten is 19% percent, while in the Martin Luther King, Jr. and Cold Springs neighborhoods; the vacancy rates are 25% and 26% respectively.

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Louis Taylor, Jr., **African Americans and the Rise of Buffalo's Post-Industrial City, 1940 to Present** (Buffalo: Buffalo Urban League, 1990): 112-152.



Figure 3: Housing Values In Buffalo



**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder, Summary File 3 (STF 3), Thematic Maps, 2000. The East Side is on the eastern side of Main Street.

The Masten District cannot be stabilized and redeveloped without strengthening its housing market. This is formidable challenge because the district has an aging housing stock in need of rehabilitation and modernization. While good housing units are found in every neighborhood, dilapidated, vacant, and boarded-up housing units are also found in every community. In many neighborhoods, including Fillmore-Leroy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cold Springs, these bad housing units are omnipresent and spawn depressed housing values. At the same time, in



neighborhoods like Hamlin Park and Trinidad Park, where the housing units are in good shape, problem dwelling units can still be found on most streets. When poor sidewalks and streets and unkept vacant lots are added to the mix, the situation becomes even more serious.

The Masten District housing market is further weakened by a low-rate of home ownership. Only 43% of housing units in Masten are owner occupied compared to 65% of the housing units citywide. Of even greater concern is the age structure of the home owners. About 54% of the housing units in Masten are owned by people sixty years of age and older. If the housing market remains weak, in ten to fifteen years, when many of the current owners die, many of these owner-occupied units might become abandoned because no one will purchase them. If this happens, Masten will face an unprecedented housing crisis. At the same time, only 20% of the owners fall within the 25 to 44-age cohort. Therefore, developing homeownership among this group is central to strengthening the ownership structure in the Masten District.

#### **1.2.6.4 Population Composition**

The Masten District is a cross-class community with a high proportion of low-income residents. Although Moderate and middle-income groups dominate the Masten 54%),<sup>3</sup> there are a significant number of low-income residents (46%) living in the area. Only in Trinidad Park did less than 40% of the population have low-incomes, and even here 36% of the residents fell into that category.

In neighborhoods with large numbers of low-income residents, special efforts must be made to help property owners, including landlords, maintain their properties. Unless this happens, bad housing will bring down property values. The problem is that low-income groups—owners, renters, and landlords—cannot afford to maintain or keep up the outside appearance of their properties. The result is the number of bad housing units multiply, which eventually leads to a decline in property values. The bottom line is unless owner-occupied and rental units are well maintained, property values will drop.

Maintaining housing units in cross-class neighborhoods is not just a problem affecting the Masten District. Rather, it is a difficulty confronting every neighborhood in the city. To gain insight into the issue, the socioeconomic structure of Buffalo's 53 neighborhoods was determined. In 43 of Buffalo's 55 neighborhoods (78%), at least 30% of the population fell into the low cohort.

The cross-class neighborhood is not an ideal but a reality in this city. Thus, unless a strategy is formulated to maintain property in these types of neighborhoods, the quest to revitalize Buffalo will fail. Within this context, redevelopment of the Masten District can lead to the creation of a model for stabilizing, redeveloping, and sustaining cross-class neighborhoods with significant numbers of low-income residents.

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<sup>3</sup> In the plan, the income range for low-income groups was \$19,999 & lower; moderate (\$20,000 - \$34,999); Lower middle (\$35,000 - \$59,000); Middle (\$60,000 - \$99,000), and Upper-Middle (\$100,000 & higher).

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### 1.2.6.5 Commercial Corridors

THE  
MASTEN  
DISTRICT  
IS BUILT  
AROUND  
THE AXIS  
OF SIX  
COMMERCIAL  
THOROUGHFARES:  
JEFFERSON,  
FILLMORE,  
EAST DELAVAN,  
GRIDER,  
KENSINGTON,  
AND EAST FERRY.

The Masten District is built around the axis of six commercial thoroughfares: Jefferson, Fillmore, East Delavan, Grider, Kensington, and East Ferry. These thoroughfares are the windows through which people see everyday life and culture in the surrounding neighborhoods. If the thoroughfares are in excellent condition, people believe the surrounding neighborhoods are in excellent condition. If, on the other hand, the thoroughfares are dilapidated and rundown, people will believe the surrounding neighborhoods are dilapidated and rundown.

In the Masten District, the worst neighborhood conditions are often found along the commercial corridors. These Dilapidated and rundown commercial thoroughfares hurt the district in three interrelated ways:

1. They depress property in the surrounding neighborhoods by making it appear that area is declining. This discourages investments in the surrounding neighborhoods, including home improvements and home buying.
2. The dilapidated and rundown nature of the corridors also discourages investments along the commercial corridor.
3. Poorly developed commercial corridors lower the standard of living in the Masten District. In Masten Neighborhoods, many residents rely on public transportation. Because many convenient goods and services are not sold at the neighborhood level, residents must travel great distances to get them. A focus group participant once said, "Dr. Taylor, bags babies and buses don't mix". She was talking about the difficulty of making the journey to shop on public transportation. When inner city residents cannot purchase high quality goods and services in their neighborhoods, they are forced to travel long distances to obtain them. These journeys make life unnecessarily difficult.

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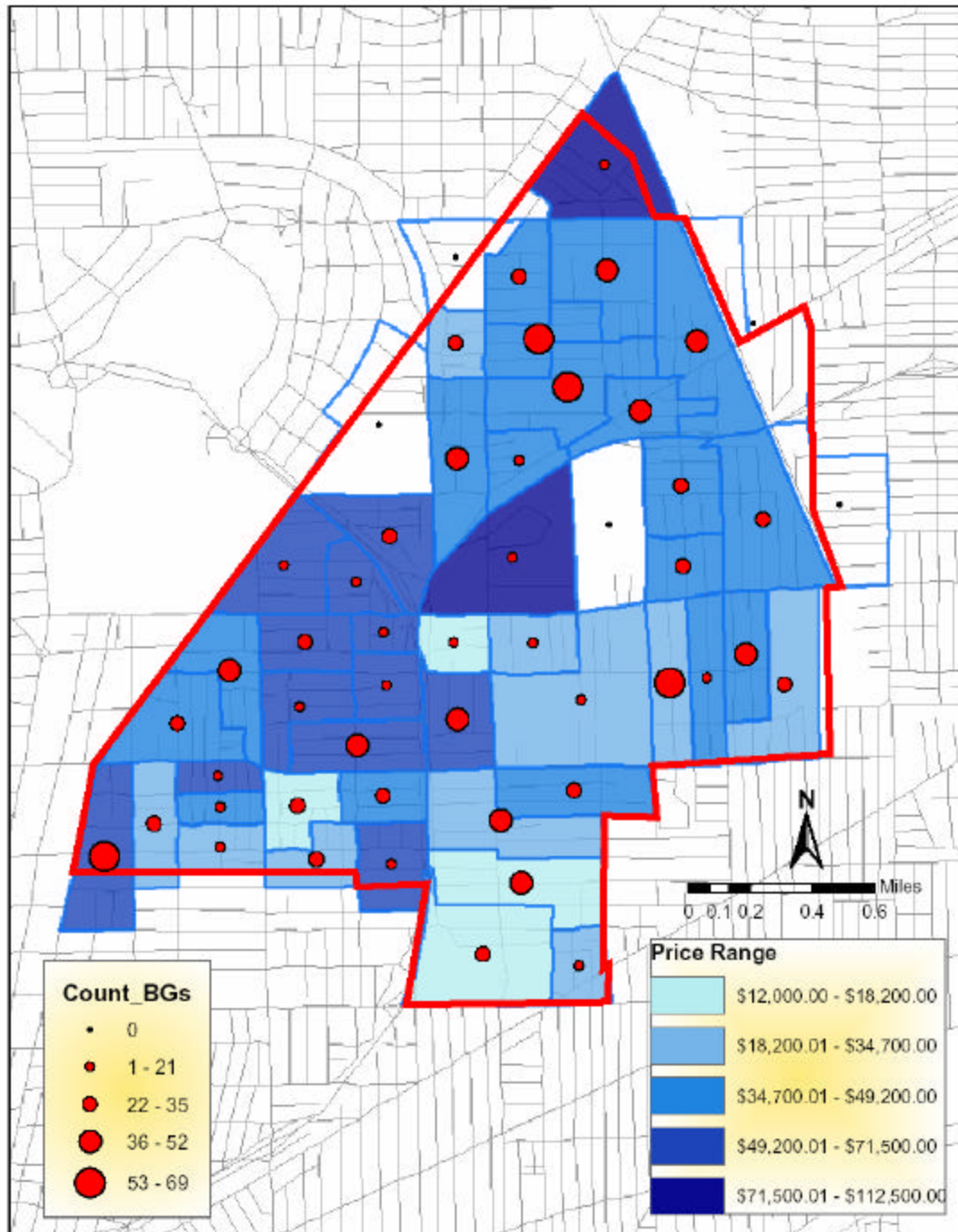
IN THE  
MASTEN DISTRICT,  
THE WORST  
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CONDITIONS  
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FOUND  
ALONG  
THE  
COMMERCIAL  
CORRIDORS.

#### **1.2.6.6 Crime and Community Development in Masten**

To gain insight into the crime issue in the Masten District, crime data from 1996 to 2001 were analyzed. The 2001 data show that the lowest crime rates were found in the two neighborhoods with the highest housing values, while the highest crime rates took place in those neighborhoods with the lowest housing values. Although the data is far from conclusive, it nevertheless suggests that improving neighborhood conditions and increasing housing values can reduce the crime rate.

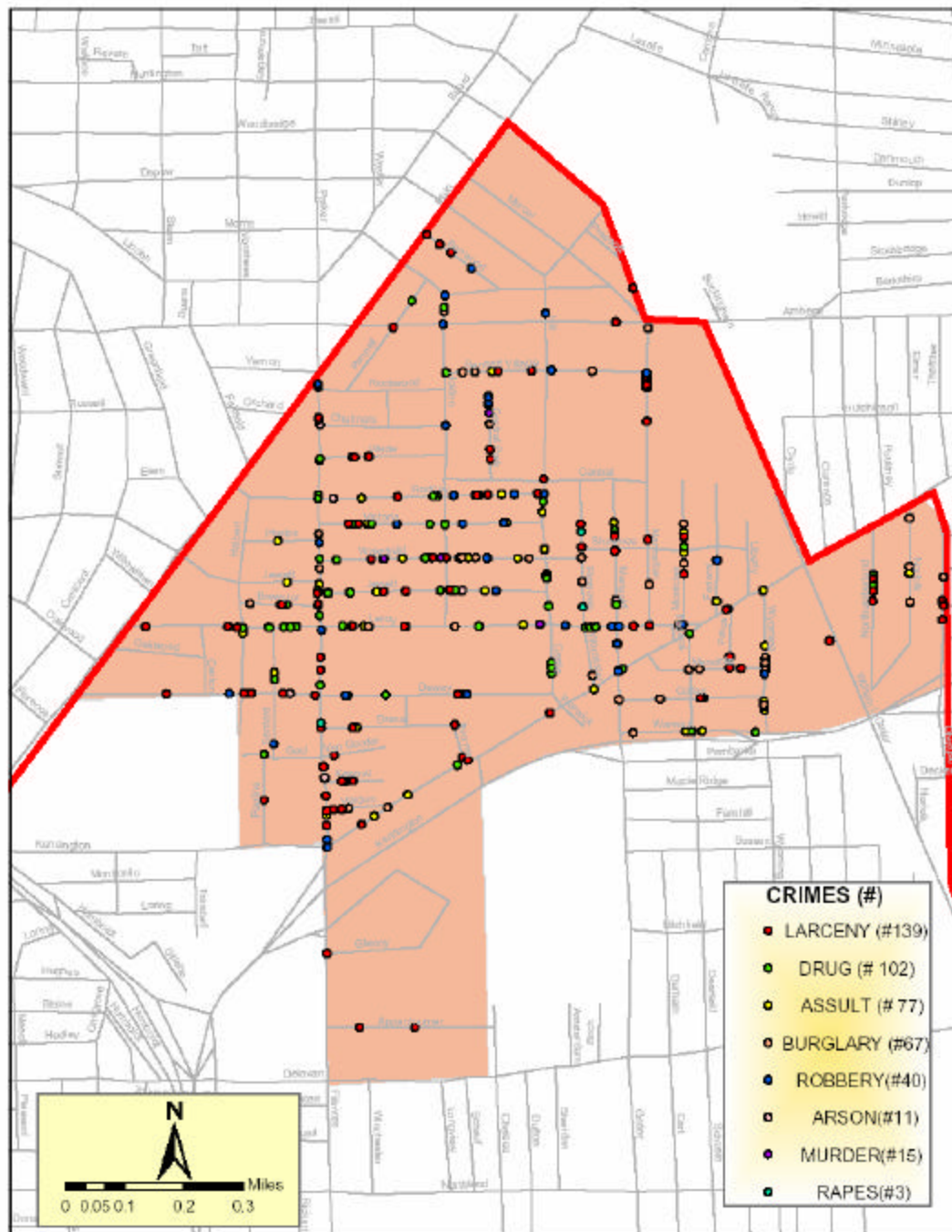
Larceny, burglary, and drugs are the major sources of reported crime in the Masten District. Violent crimes such as robbery, murder, and rape occurred with much less frequency, although assault was a problem in all neighborhoods. Fillmore-LeRoy had the most significant crime problems. All categories of crime were high in this neighborhood, and sixty percent of the 25 murders that took place in Masten in 2001 occurred in this neighborhood. Most of this criminal activity seemed to be concentrated in the area between Rodney and Leroy, where the worst housing and neighborhood conditions are found. On the flipside, Trinidad Park had the lowest rate of crime in Masten.

Figure 4: Crime and Housing Values in Masten



**Source:** Reported Crimes, 1996- 2011 Federal Bureau of investigation Crime Reports. U.B. Regional Policing Center, Allen Hall, South Campus, University at Buffalo.

Figure 2: Reported Crime in the Fillmore-Leroy Neighborhood



**Source:** Reported Crimes, 1996- 2011 Federal Bureau of investigation Crime Reports. U.B. Regional Policing Center, Allen Hall, South Campus, University at Buffalo.

## 1.3 Methodology

### 1.3.1 Primary Data

1.3.1.1 Citizen Participation: The Center for Urban Studies is committed to engaging residents and stakeholders in all phases of the planning process. A variety of mechanisms were used to increase the level of participation in the Masten District Neighborhood Plan. A Citizens Planning Committee was established that consisted of representatives from each of the six neighborhoods comprising the district. The planning team, headed by Professor Henry Louis Taylor, Jr., director of the Center for Urban Studies, met monthly with the team and provided them with detailed reports. The Committee reacted to the reports, offering both criticism and suggestions for future work. In these deliberations, the Committee had the power to approve or veto all actions, including recommendations for the final report.

**Figure 3: A Meeting of the Community Planning Team**



**Staff Photo:** Center for Urban Studies, Fall 2003

To gain additional input from residents, Angela Jones held focus groups with residents on April 5 and May 3, 2003 at Second Temple Baptist Church. About thirty residents and stakeholders, representing all six neighborhoods, attended these sessions. The meetings were organized around three questions:

1. What are the needs of the community?
2. What are the wants of the community?
3. What are the desires and dreams of the community?

When the session started, participants met as a group to discuss districtwide issues, and then break-out sessions were with members from each neighborhood.



In the group sessions, the responses of participants were recorded on large sheets of paper and then posted on the walls. In the break-out sessions, a recorder kept an account of issues. After the break-out sessions, the group reassembled to report their findings.

At the monthly Masten Stakeholders Breakfast, Angela Jones also facilitated a focus group session with residents and stakeholders. This focus group consisted primarily of getting residents to discuss their ideas about redeveloping the district, while a member of the planning team kept a record of the various ideas and suggestions. Additionally, Professor Henry L Taylor made regular reports at the Stakeholders Breakfast.

During the summer of 2003, a preliminary draft of the neighborhood plan was developed. A series of large panels were developed that outlined key elements of the developmental problem facing the neighborhood, recommendations, and visuals that depicted different aspects of proposed Plan. This material was presented at a community-planning fair on August 31, 2003 at Martin Luther King, Jr. Park. The planning posters were displayed in a tent, which was visited by more than 200 people. A questionnaire was developed, which listed the districtwide and neighborhood recommendations and allowed people to vote on them. Additionally, the questionnaire provided space where additional developmental ideas could be recorded.

Throughout the fall of 2003 and during the winter and spring of 2004, Professor Taylor met with representatives of four of the six neighborhoods in the Masten District. At these meetings, the preliminary plan was presented and discussed. Following the meeting, the questionnaires were distributed and a time scheduled to pick them up.

**Figure 4: The 2003 Community Fair (top and lower left) and Press Conference Announcing Community Slogan (bottom Right)**



**Staff Photo: Center for Urban Studies, 2003**

In September 2004, the final recommendations were presented at the second community planning fair, which will be held in Martin Luther King, Jr. Park. The format used in the 2003 community planning fair was repeated.

1.3.1.2 U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, 2000 Summary Tape File (STF 3), [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov). Claritas, U.S. Census Data on Western New York, CD-Rom, Version 2.06. From the census bureau and the Claritas data, which is based on census data, various datasets were compiled to study housing, demographics, and economic issues in the Masten District. The Claritas dataset is available at the UB Center for Urban Studies.

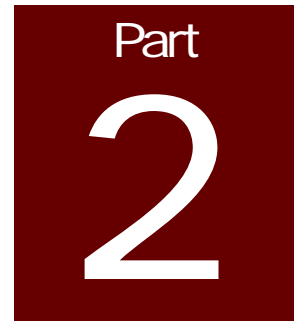
1.3.1.3 Digital Photography and Windshield Surveys: Hundreds of digital photographs were taken of the Masten District. These photographs were displayed in a variety of ways to provide insight into housing and neighborhood conditions in Masten. Also, using Photoshop, simulations were of before and after scenarios for different parts of the districts. Windshield surveys were conducted on over 90% of the streets in the Masten District. These surveys focused on the external condition of housing units and on sidewalk and street conditions. Also, the extent of illegal dumping, dilapidation, and blighting were noted. A 1-4 rating system (1= Good and 5= worst) was used to describe housing, vacant lot, streets, and sidewalks and level of blight. Because of the limited time, no effort was made to record this data for each dwelling and street (Appendix). Rather, the survey was used to obtain a general impression of conditions inside these neighborhoods and to acquire a clearer sense of the magnitude of the neighborhood distress problem. The digital photographs are electronically contained at the Center for Urban Studies database (S-Drive/Center Projects/ Masten 2003 Neighborhood Plan).

### 1.3.2 Secondary Sources

- 1.3.2.1 Alfred Price, Project Director, *Masten Community Renewal Project*, Volume 111: Summary of Findings—A Statistical Profile of the Community, The City of Buffalo, January 1984.
- 1.3.2.2 Arch/U.P. 537—Housing Systems, Ypsilanti Vacant Structures Term Project: Downtown Ypsilanti, University of Michigan, N.D.
- 1.3.2.3 B. Arnold & Associates, *Jefferson Avenue Small Business Development Study* (Buffalo: Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency, December 1997).
- 1.3.2.4 Center for Urban Studies, *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Cultural District and Cultural Corridor: A Strategic Plan and Action Agenda for the Masten District*, Buffalo Urban Renewal Authority, May 1, 2001.
- 1.3.2.5 Denver, Colorado, *Blueprint Denver: An Integrated Land Use and Transportation Plan*, March 2002.
- 1.3.2.6 Emergency Relief Bureau, *Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority Report, Part 11, Slum Area Determination Survey, 1934*, Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority.
- 1.3.2.7 Michelle D. Hare, *Gap Between Planning and Implementation: Analysis of Past Planning Projects in the Masten District, 1990-1998*, Thesis, Center for Urban Studies, School of Architecture and Planning, 1999.
- 1.3.2.8 City of Buffalo, Masten District Neighborhood Summit, October 1, 1996.
- 1.3.2.9 City of Buffalo, Division of Planning, *Masten Planning Community*, N.D.
- 1.3.3 Byron Brown (Masten District Council Member), *Ongoing Projects*, N.D.



- 1.3.3.1** Division of Planning, *East Delavan Community Master Plan: Phase 1, Needs Assessment*, City of Buffalo, January 1996.
- 1.3.3.2** Dennison Associates, Inc., *Housing Study*, City of Buffalo, August 20, 2001.
- 1.3.3.3** Dennison Associates, Inc., *Revitalization of the Richmond Avenue Neighborhood: A Report to the City of Buffalo*, May 2, 2000.
- 1.3.3.4** Hamilton Houston Lownie Architects PC, *Downtown Buffalo Strategic Plan*, City of Buffalo, Department of Community Development, September 1999.
- 1.3.3.5** Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, *Bridgeport: Inner City Business Strategy Initiative, Creating Jobs, Income, and Wealth for Inner City Residents*, April 2000.
- 1.3.3.6** Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, *ICIC City Advisory Practice, Proposal, Upstate New York Inner City Competitive Project*, June 2001.
- 1.3.3.7** Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, *City Advisory Practice: Smart Thinking for Inner Cities: Project Overview, New York State Inner City Competitiveness Project*, April 2000.
- 1.3.3.8** Price Waterhouse, *Proposal to Conduct a Study on Housing Preservation*, City of Buffalo, Common Council, February 8, 1993.
- 1.3.3.9** *Queen City in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Buffalo's Comprehensive Plan, Draft*, June 26, 2003.
- 1.3.4** Uzochukwu E. Ihenko, *Constructive Approaches with Contradictory Results: Community Development and the Dynamics of Housing Demolition in the City of Buffalo, New York, 1960-1997*, dissertation, March 10, 2003.



# The Neighborhood Plan

## 2.0 The Districtwide Context

The neighborhood planning process looks at the Masten District both as a single community and as a locale divided into six neighborhoods. The Plan uses a market approach to development, which views neighborhoods as housing markets that must compete successfully with other neighborhoods to prosper. If the housing market is strong, the neighborhood will thrive because it will attract residents and investors. If the housing market is weak, the neighborhood will decline because it will lose residents and investors.

The goal therefore is to identify those critical neighborhood problems, which if addressed, will make Masten a competitive housing market among Western New York neighborhoods. Most people obtain housing in the private market, and they are desirous of obtaining a return on their house investment.<sup>4</sup> They want to invest in a neighborhood housing market where values appreciate over time, and a handsome profit is made when the unit is sold. The strength of a housing market is affected by many factors, including the bundle of available services, school quality, neighborhood conditions, and the perception of safety and security. While recognizing the importance of these issues, the Plan is nevertheless focused on *physical improvements*.<sup>5</sup> The main idea is use the physical transformation of Masten District to trigger other developmental activities, including school renovation, increased employment, and the like.

The class and neighborhood structure of a community also affects its housing market. The trend toward race and class residential segregation is still very strong in the United States.<sup>6</sup> The Plan does not view this tendency as fixed and immutable because it did not develop fully until after the rise of home ownership in the 1940s and 1950s. Community development policy triggered this trend toward race and class segregation.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Allen Hays, **The Federal Government and Urban Housing: Ideology and Change in Public Policy** (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995): 57.

<sup>5</sup> Hays, **The Federal Government**, 35

<sup>6</sup> Hays, **The Federal Government**, p. 57.

Therefore, community development policy can also reverse it.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the Plan understands that race and class segregation is a retrogressive force in the development of Masten, so it looks for creative ways to reverse it.

This portion of the Plan is divided into three parts. The first part looks at the people of the Masten District, while the part two examines major thoroughfares and the physical development of the district. Part three consists of an analysis of the five of the six neighborhoods comprising the Masten District. Cold Springs is not included in this section of the report because Bethel AME church has developed a separate plan for that community.

## 2.1 The People of Masten

The strength of any housing market is dictated by the characteristics of the residents living in it. The Masten District is no different. This segment of the Plan looks at the people distributed across the Masten's six neighborhoods. This analysis provides an aggregate portrait of the district, and only tangentially concerned about similarities and differences among the various neighborhoods.

### 2.1.1 Population

The Masten District is a cross-class community comprised largely of African Americans. About 88% of the 31,143 residents are black; while whites comprise 9.29% and other racial groups comprise 3.17% of the population (Figure 5). This population is distributed across six neighborhoods: Hamlin Park, Delavan-Grider, Fillmore-Leroy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cold Springs, and Trinidad Park. Hamlin Park (9,195) is the largest neighborhood, while Trinidad Park (551) is the smallest. The Masten District is losing population. Between 1990 and 2000, the district population fell from 36,019 to 31,142, a decrease of 13.54 percent.<sup>8</sup> Although the population of Buffalo decreased by 10.8% in this period, the city's African American population jumped from 100,579 to 108,951, an increase of 8.23% (Figure 6). Thus, the Masten District is losing its black population during a period in which the City's black population is increasing.

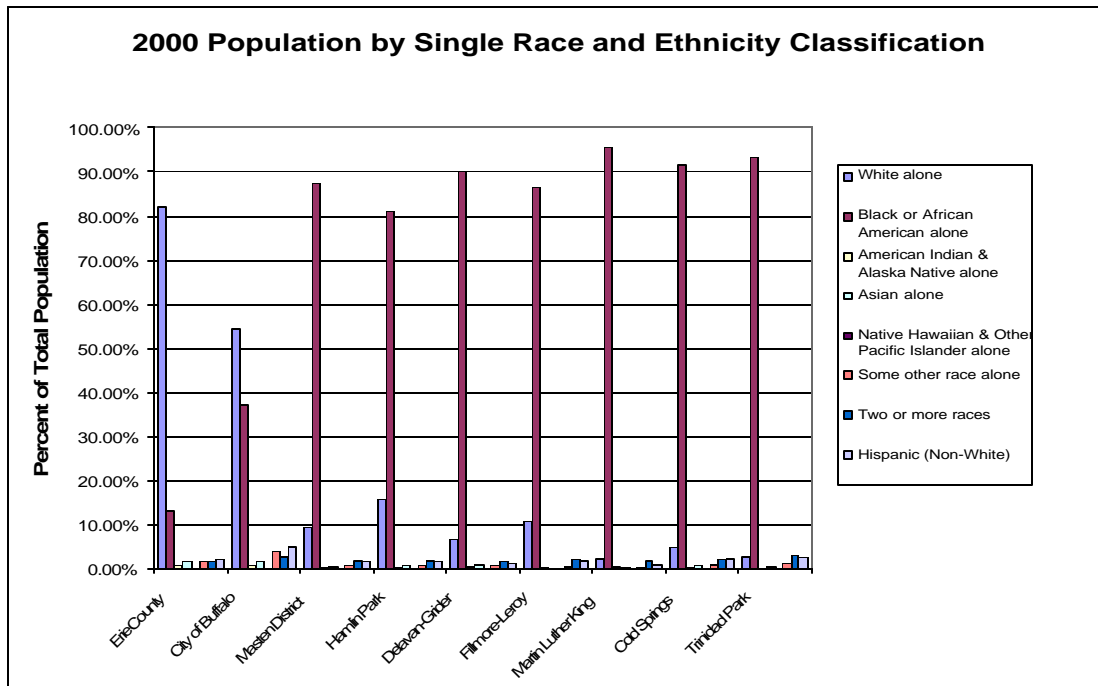
Every neighborhood in Masten lost population during the nineties. Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood sustained the greatest population loss (-25%), while the Hamlin Park neighborhood lost the fewest residents (8.23%). Canisius College is located in the neighborhood, and increases in Hamlin Park's white population (10.3%) offset a 14% decline in the black population. Surprisingly, Trinidad Park lost 24% of its population. Housing and neighborhood conditions, comparatively speaking, are good in this neighborhood. So, the significant loss of population should be a matter of great concern.

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Louis Taylor, Jr., *Creating the Metropolis in Black and White: Black Suburbanization and the Planning Movement in Cincinnati, 1900-1950*, in Henry Louis Taylor, Jr. and Walter Hill, Eds., **Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis: African Americans in the Industrial City, 1900-1950** (New York and London: Garland Publishers, 2002, pp. 51-71.

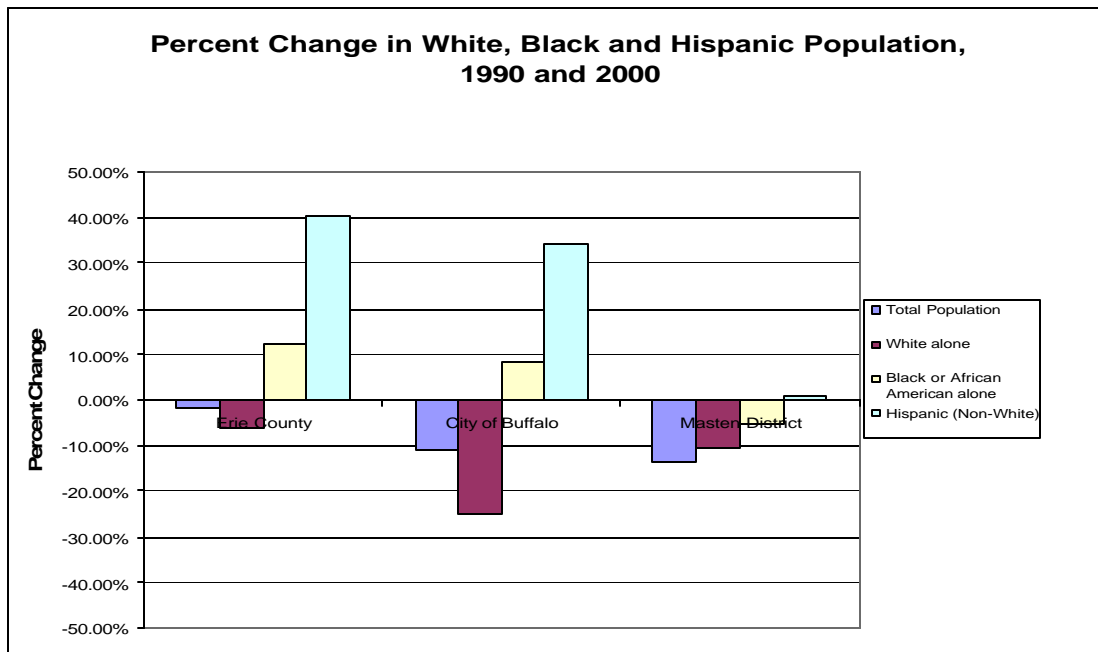
<sup>8</sup> These figures are based on the new boundaries for the Masten District.

Figure 5: The Population of Masten by Race



Source: U.S. Census, 2000

Figure 6: Percent Change in White, Black, and Hispanic Population During the Nineties



Source: U.S. Census, 2000

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THE  
MASTEN  
DISTRICT  
HAS  
A HIGH  
PROPORTION  
OF  
DEPENDENT  
RESIDENTS,  
WHO NEED  
TO BE  
SUPPORTED BY  
PARENTS  
OR  
RELATIVES OR  
WHO  
ARE IN OR NEAR  
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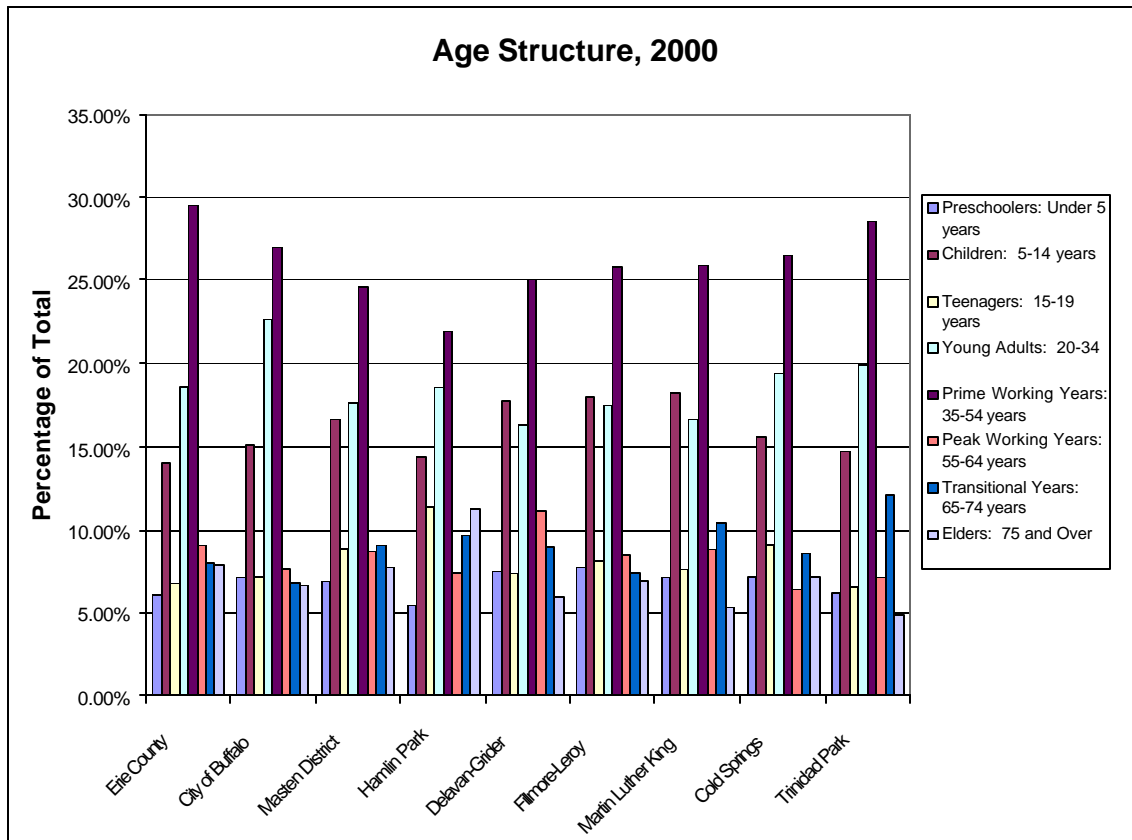
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### 2.1.2 The Age Structure

The median age of Masten District residents is 35 years, which is slightly higher than the median age of Buffalo City residents and slightly lower than Erie County residents. Yet, the age structure of the community is complex. For example, preschoolers (under 5 years), young adults (20-30 years) and adults in their prime working years (35-54 years) are underrepresented in the Masten District (figure 7). At the same time, children (5-14 years), teen-agers (15-19 years), and elders (65 years and over) are over represented. Put another way, compared to Buffalo City and Erie County, the Masten District has a high proportion of *dependent residents*, who need to be supported by parents or relatives or who are in or near retirement. Simultaneously, those groups that are economically upwardly mobile (young adults) and those in their prime earning years (35-54) are underrepresented in the district.

### 2.1.3 Education

The Masten population has a high level of educational achievement. The proportion of Masten residents (30.16%) with high school diplomas is higher than the proportion of Buffalo City (29.11%) and Erie County (29.87%) with high school degrees. Moreover, the proportion of Masten residents (22.17%) with *some college, but no degree* is higher than the proportion of Buffalo City (19.55%) and Erie County (19.02%) residents. However, the proportion of Buffalo City and Erie County residents with associate and college degrees is much higher than in the Masten District. For example, in 2000 only 10.82 Masten residents had college degrees, while 18.29% and 24.52 Buffalo City and Erie County residents had graduate from college (figure 8).

**Figure 7: Age Structure of the Masten Population 2000**

Source: U.S. Census 2000

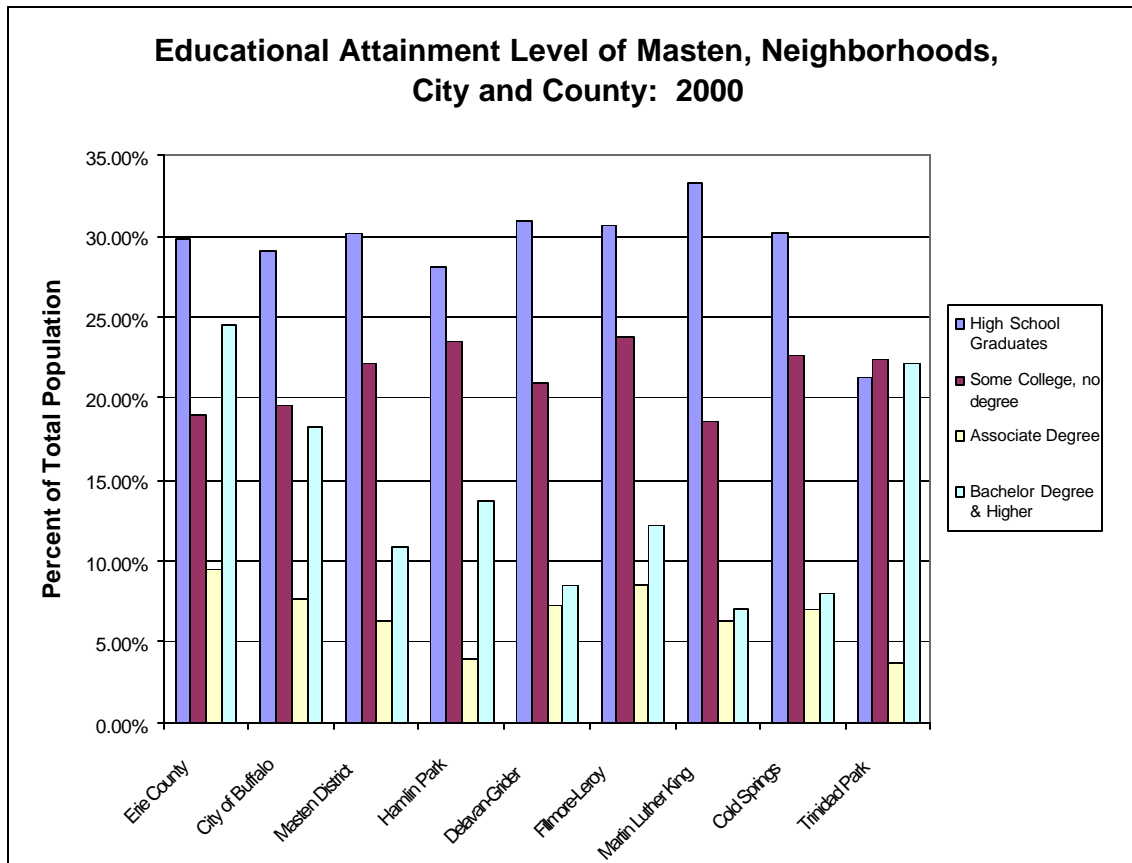
#### 2.1.4 Occupation

Masten District residents are under represented in the higher paying occupational categories. For example, only 23.5% of residents hold jobs in the Management, Professional, and Related Occupations category, compared to 29.18% and 34.73% of city and county workers, respectively. Also, Masten workers (4.08%) are under represented in the Construction, Extraction, and Maintenance industries. In this category, 5.48% and 6.82% of city and county workers are found, respectively. At the same time, a significantly higher proportion of Masten workers (28.5%) hold jobs in the Service industries than city (21.08%) and county (15.61%) workers.

#### 2.1.5 Socioeconomic Profile

Given the educational and occupational differentials between Masten and city and county residents, it should not be surprising that the socioeconomic profile of the community reflects high levels of distress. The unemployment rate among Masten residents is 10%, which is higher than both the city (7%) and county (5%) rates, while the labor force participation rate (LFPR) is significant lower in Masten (51%) than in the city (58%) and county (62%). The LFPR differential between Masten and the city and county is important. Between 1990 and 2000, the LFPR increased slightly in the city and county, while it fell by 3.27% points in the Masten District. This suggests that a growing number of workers in Masten might be losing confidence in their ability to find decent jobs. So, they are dropping out of the labor force.

Figure 8: Educational Attainment in the Masten District 2000

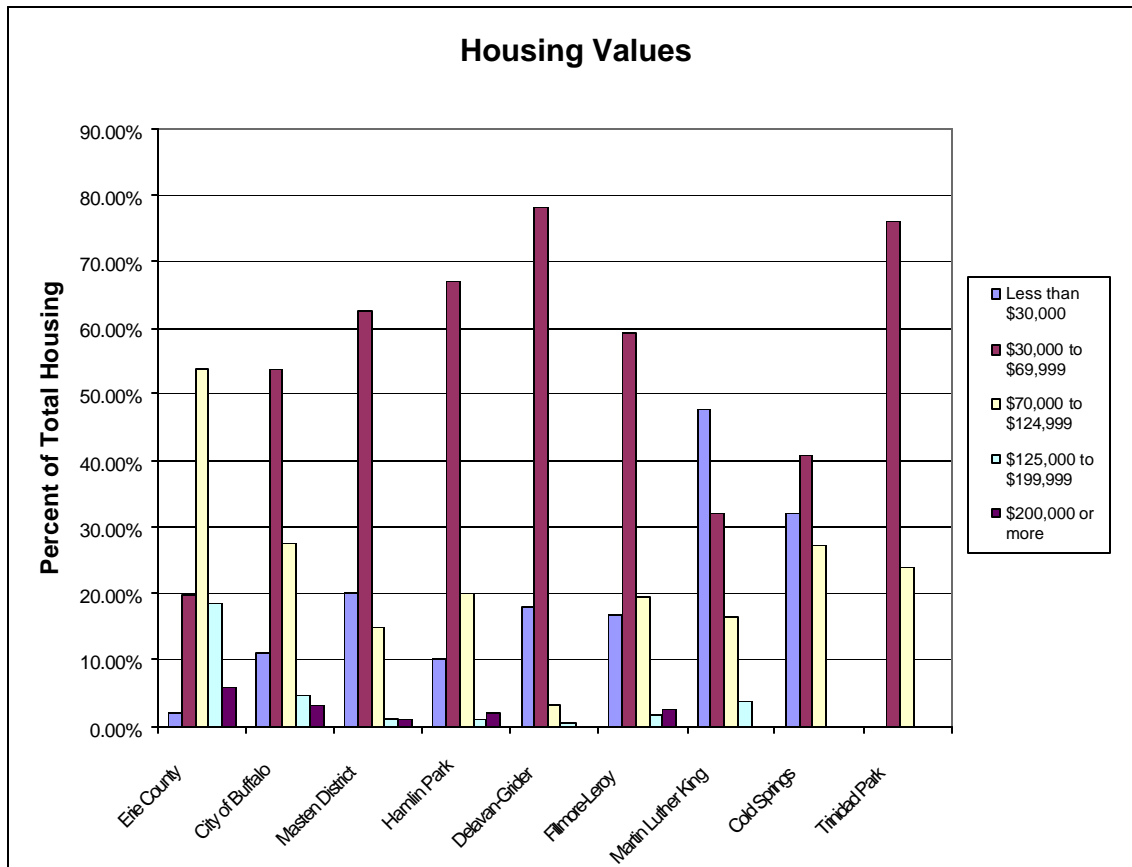


Source: U.S. Census 2000

The high poverty rate (30%) in Masten combined with high unemployment and low labor force participation rate to paint a picture of socioeconomic distress in the community. Yet, at the same time, the cross-class character of the district mitigates the economic distress. Although the district's median income is only \$22,536, about 54% of the population falls into the moderate to upper income category. Approximately 24% of the households are moderate-income (\$20,000-34,999), 17% are lower middle-class (\$35,000-59,999), 10% are middle-class (\$60,000-99,999), and 3% are upper-middle class (\$100,000 and over).

The challenge facing the Masten District is that 46% of the households have low-incomes (\$19,999 or less). This challenge is reflected in several ways. First, a high proportion of families in the Masten District (34%) are headed by women, while married couples head only 23%. In contrast, married couples head 47% of the households in Erie County, while women head only 13% of households. Second, housing values in the Masten District are among the lowest in Erie County (figure 9). This problem of inexpensive housing is compounded by the age structure of owner-occupied housing units. In the city and county, the majority of homeowners fall within the 25-54-age cohort, while in the Masten District, the majority of homeowners fall within the 65-84 age cohort. Only in Cold Springs does the age structure of homeownership reflect the city and county age structure.

Figure 9: Housing Values in the Masten District 2000



Source: U.S. Census 2000

## 2.2 The Physical Development of the Masten District and Major Thoroughfares

The Masten District is built around a skeletal frame that consists of seven major thoroughfares—Main Street, Fillmore Avenue, East Ferry, East Delavan, Grider, Jefferson Street, and Kensington—and Route 33 and the Humboldt Parkway (Figure 13). These thoroughfares are fundamental to residential development in the Masten District because they are the windows through which people view neighborhood life and culture. If the thoroughfares are vibrant and attractive places, visitors will believe the surrounding neighborhoods are also vibrant and attractive. If, on the other hand, the major thoroughfares are foreboding, dilapidated and rundown, people will believe the surrounding neighborhoods are also foreboding, dilapidated, and rundown.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, major thoroughfares are the neighborhood image-makers in the Masten District. Consequently, foreboding, dilapidated and rundown thoroughfares will lower property value in the surrounding neighborhoods.

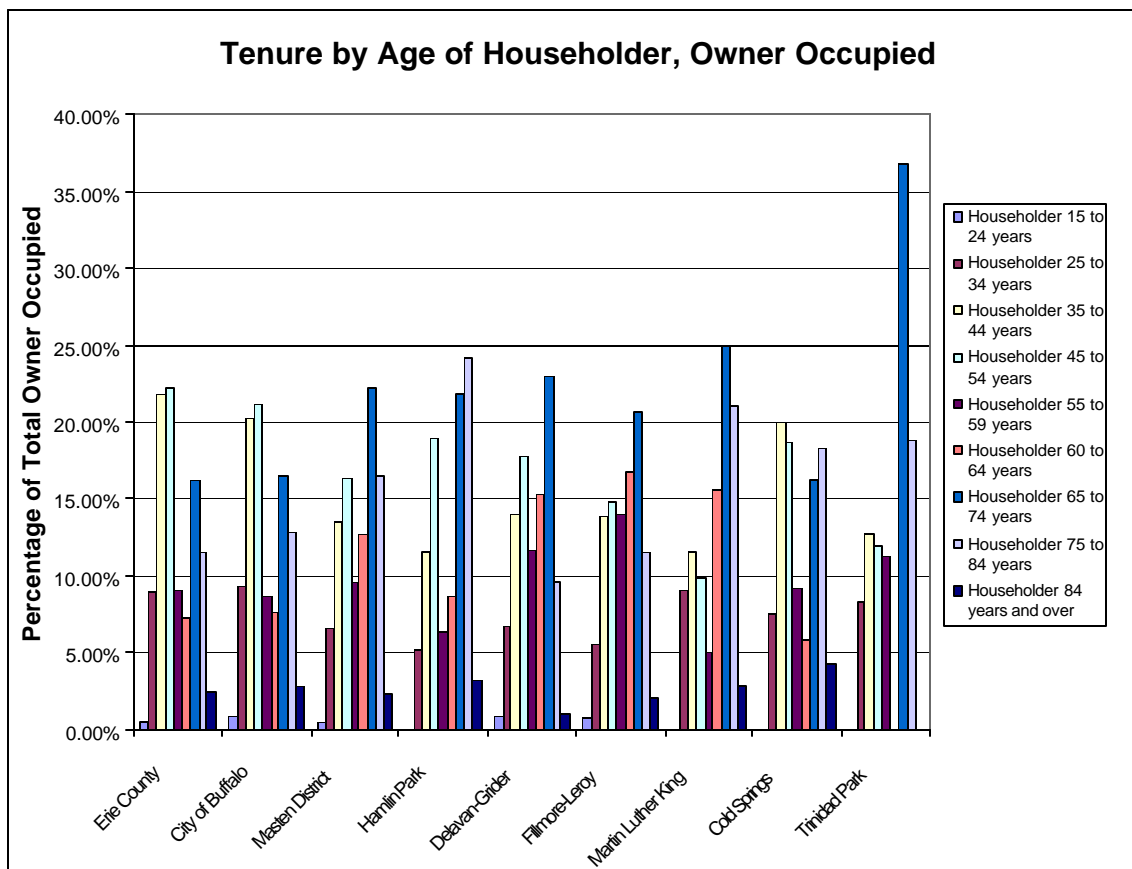
The problem is that the worst housing and neighborhood conditions are found on the major thoroughfares and that the condition of the Route 33 and the Humboldt Park has a blighting effect on the surrounding neighborhoods. Poor sidewalks, trash and rubbish, boarded-up buildings, unkept vacant lots characterize the thoroughfares. Collectively, these conditions give the thoroughfares a foreboding and dilapidated appearance.

<sup>9</sup> Rae, *The Federal Government and Urban Housing*, p. 35.



East Delavan, between Grider and the American Axel plant, provides a classic example of the negative impact that poorly maintained thoroughfares can have on neighborhood development. The neighborhoods surrounding the commercial corridor between Grider and the American Axel plant are in good condition (figure 12). The median income in the Delavan-Grider neighborhood is \$23,988, which is slightly higher than the median household income for the Masten District, but lower than the citywide median income of \$24,536 annually. Many of the homes are well kept, but housing values in the neighborhood are depressed. For example, most of the houses in the Delavan Grider neighborhood fall into the two price ranges: \$30,000 or less and between \$30,000 to 69,999. Very few houses in the neighborhood fall into the price range between \$125,000 and \$200,000, and there are no houses in Delavan-Grider that cost \$200,000 or more dollars. Given the neighborhood's strong employment base and good housing, the value of its house stock should be higher. Therefore, it is believed that the deplorable condition of the commercial corridor is primarily responsible for depressing housing costs (figure 12).

Figure 10: Tenure by Age of Householder



**Figure 11: East Delavan Commercial Corridor**



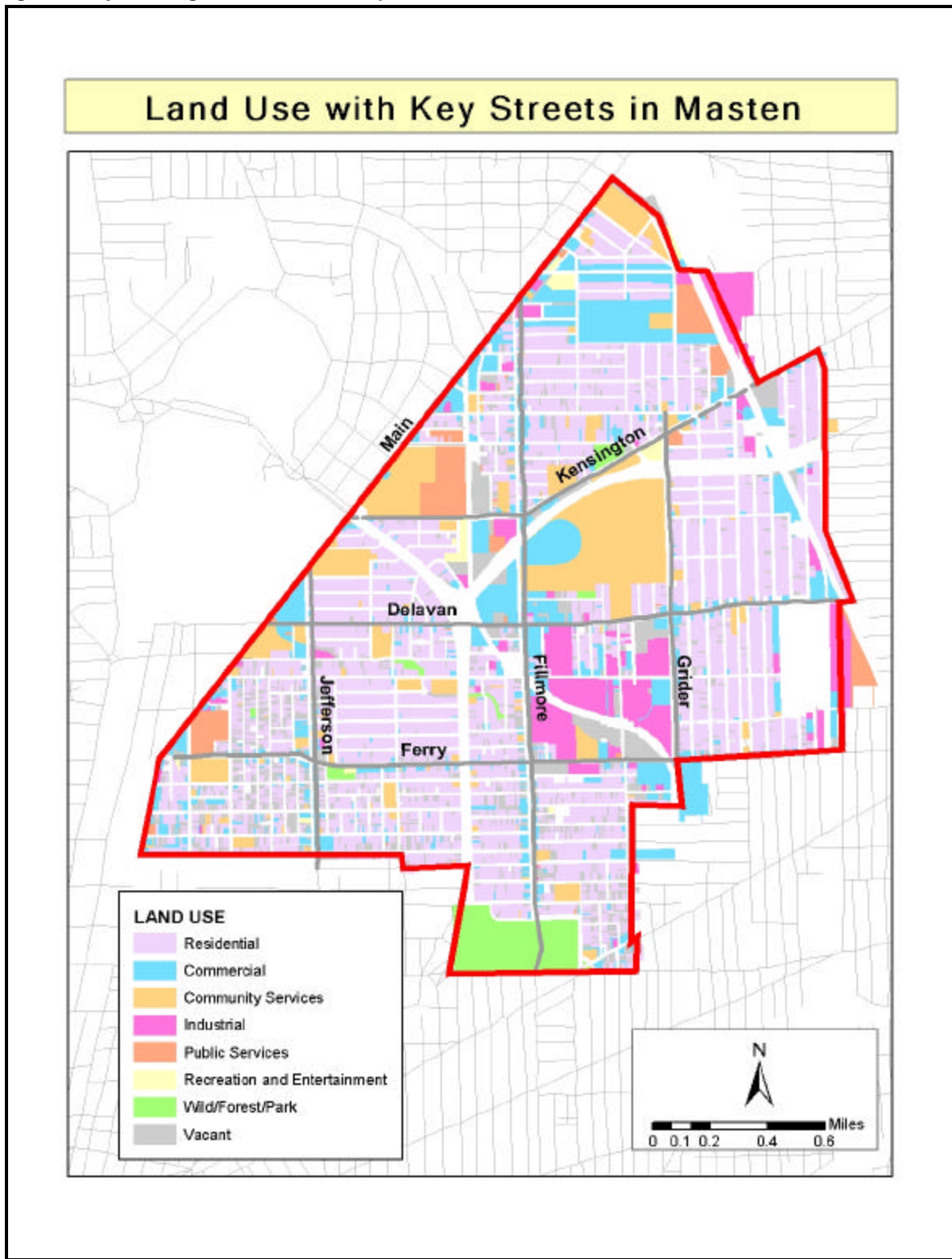
**Source:** Center for Urban Studies Staff Photo

**Figure 12: Housing Units in Delavan-Grider Neighborhood**



**Source:** Center for Urban Studies Staff Photo

Figure 13: Major Thoroughfares Form the Developmental Framework in Masten



Source: U.S. Census 2000; Map by Jin Ku Jung

The Fillmore Avenue thoroughfare, between East Ferry and Martin Luther King, Jr. Park provides another example of the negative impact that poorly maintained thoroughfares can have on neighborhood development. This segment of Fillmore Avenue is called the Martin Luther King, Jr. Commercial District and is the spine that holds together the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. The commercial district not only serves as a *commons* for the community, but also it provides residents with needed goods and services. The problem is that many of the buildings in the district are in bad condition, it contains many unkept vacant lots, and the streets and sidewalks are littered with debris. The rundown appearance of the commercial district is a major obstacle to the redevelopment of the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. For example, the housing values in the MLK neighborhood are the lowest in the Masten District. About 48% of the housing units in the neighborhood cost \$30,000 or less. Given the architectural significance of the housing stock and the neighborhood amenities, the MLK neighborhood should be a prime target of revitalization. However, this cannot happen without the redevelopment of the commercial district.

### 2.2.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

The redevelopment of the major thoroughfares in the Masten District should be a top priority. These thoroughfares are not only the district's image-makers, but also they each contain commercial districts that provide vital services to many residents who are dependent on public transportation.

1. Establish a Masten District Major Thoroughfare Committee. The purpose of this committee is to develop a strategic plan for implementing the recommendations major thoroughfare revitalization. Resources should be obtained to hire a project manager to implement the strategic plan. Key businesses and big institutions on the thoroughfares should be organized and asked to provide the resources necessary to hire a manager and equip an office.
2. Business Improvement Districts should be established on Jefferson Avenue, between East Delavan and Best Street, Fillmore Avenue between East Ferry and Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, and on Delavan between Grider and Gaiter Parkway.
3. Develop and implement a maintenance plan for vacant lots and public spaces along the thoroughfares. The goal is to transform the vacant lots into green spaces and to dot the area with public art so that the thoroughfares become attractive places.

4. Create vibrant urban streetscapes that enhance the culture and uniqueness of each of the thoroughfares and the neighborhoods through which they pass. The effort should employ greenery, historical street lamps, decorative trash containers, public art, decorative benches, lively colored houses and buildings, public art, and banners should be employed to create a vibrant urban streetscape.
5. Develop and implement a street cleaning and blight removal program for the major thoroughfares.
6. Repair streets, sidewalks and curbs, and provide better street lighting.
7. Develop a plan for rehabilitating existing structures, including houses, building new structures along the thoroughfare. In those places where it is not feasible to rehabilitate or build new structure, well-maintained public spaces should be developed.
8. Establish focal points along the thoroughfare for high prioritized development: For example the area between East Ferry and Parade, along Fillmore Avenue, should be a top development zone, as well as Jefferson Avenue, between East Delavan and Best Street. The point is that these focal points should be identified and their comprehensive development prioritized.



## The Neighborhoods

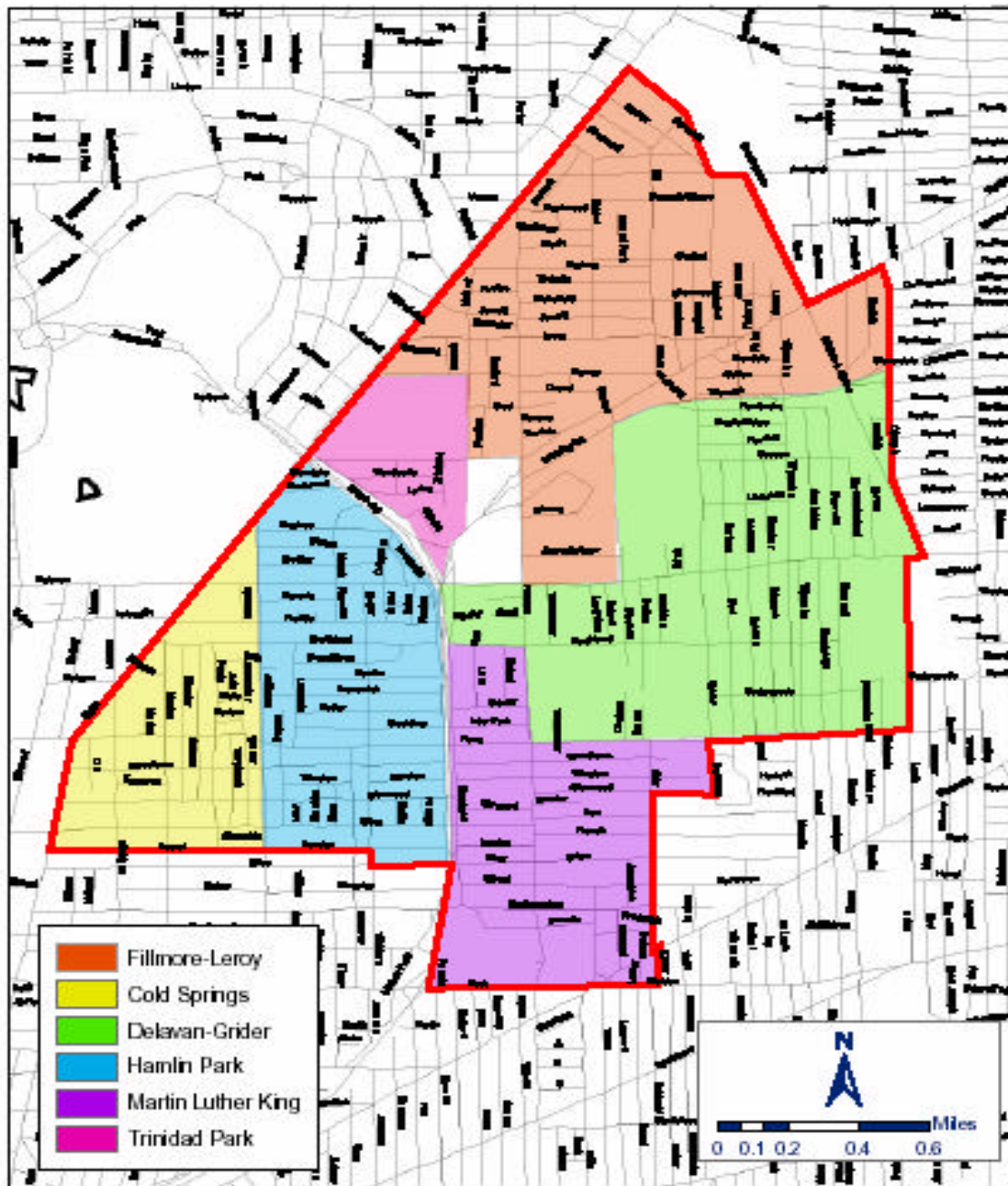
The following neighborhood plans and profiles featured in this section are:

- Fillmore Leroy Neighborhood
- Hamlin Park
- Delavan Grider
- Trinidad Park
- MLK Park



## Fillmore Leroy Neighborhood

Map 1: The Masten District Neighborhood



Source: Center for Urban Studies; Map by Jin Kyu Jung

# Fillmore - Leroy Neighborhood

■ Fillmore-Leroy Needs to be Radically Reconstructed



Leroy Avenue



Tri-Main Area



Brewster Street



Richlawn Ave.

## Masten Neighborhood Master Plan

*"A Community on the Move"*



The Office of Urban Initiatives  
and  
The Urban Center for Urban Studies  
Department of Urban and Regional Planning  
School of Architecture and Planning

Poster no.

1/2



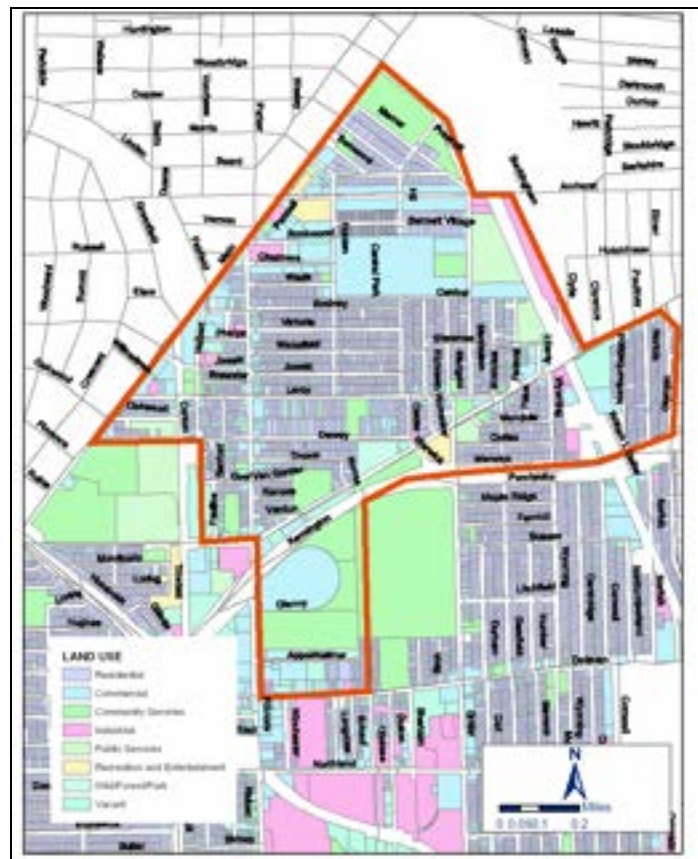
## Site and Situation

The Fillmore-Leroy neighborhood is situated in the northern part of the Masten District, adjacent to the University District. The neighborhood is bounded by Main Street on the west, Huntington, Manhattan and the Erie and Lackawanna Railroad lines on the east, and the Kensington Expressway and East Delavan on the south (Map 1).

The neighborhood's western boundary runs along Main Street, which makes it an important image-maker for both the Masten District and the City. Fillmore-Leroy is strategically located. Main Street provides easy access to most locations in the City and easy access to Route 33 links it to the rest of the region. Moreover, the neighborhood is only a short distance from the Darwin Martin House, a major tourist attraction.

A cluster of economic retail and commercial activity is situated at the intersection of Main and Fillmore. Anchoring this node is the Tri-Main Center and the Buffalo Community Saving Bank. Another significant cluster of economic activity is found in the William L. Gaiter light industrial park and surrounding area, which is located in the eastern corner of the neighborhood. Although currently undeveloped, the Fillmore Avenue commercial thoroughfare and the Central Park Plaza are potentially important centers of retail activity. Additionally, the redevelopment of the abandoned Glenny public housing project could be a big economic boost to the neighborhood.

**Map 2: The Fillmore-Leroy Neighborhood**



### **The People of Fillmore-Leroy**

Fillmore-Leroy is third largest neighborhood in the Masten District. During the nineties its population dropped from 7,951 to 7,042, a change of about 11%. The population is about 87% black, 10% white, with a scattering of other colored population groups. Females (56%) outnumber males (44%) in the neighborhood, and women head 36% of the households, with 24% of these being mothers with children under 18 years. Married couples account for 30% of the households, with 11% being households with children under 18 years of age. About 34% of the population are 19 years and younger, while 51% are in their working years, between 20 and 64 years, with 26% of the population in their prime working years, between 35 and 54 years. The neighborhood, then, is characterized by a large number of children and youth, and a number of residents in their prime working years.

Fillmore-Leroy is a cross-class neighborhood with a median household income of \$23,093. Significantly, 44% of its residents have incomes below \$20,000 a year. So, although moderate to upper middle-income residents are the dominant income group in the neighborhood, a significant number of low-income residents live there as well. Many of the neighborhood residents are living on the economic margin. About 30% live in poverty, the unemployment rate is about 7%, and the labor force participation rate is 52%, which is below the citywide rate of 58%.

Comparatively speaking, the residents have a moderate level of educational achievement. For example, about 31% are high school graduates, 24% have some college, but no degree, and 9% have associate degrees. All these figures are above citywide percentages, and the proportion of Fillmore-Leroy residents with high school and some college, but no degree, are even higher than countywide proportions. Moreover, about 12% of the residents have college degrees. Yet, this educational achievement has not been translated into higher paying jobs. This is reflected in the neighborhood's occupational structure. Fillmore-Leroy residents are over represented in service and sales and office occupation, production, transportation & maintenance occupations, and under represented in management, professional and related occupations and construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations.

### **Housing and Neighborhood Conditions**

Fillmore-Leroy is a large, complex neighborhood, where conditions vary greatly from one part of the neighborhood to another. Therefore, for neighborhood planning and community development purposes, it is reasonable to divide the neighborhood into smaller planning units. The goal was to facilitate planning by creating five sub-units with similar housing and neighborhood conditions (Map 2).

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PLANNING  
AREA  
ONE:  
THE TRI-MAIN  
CENTER LOCALE

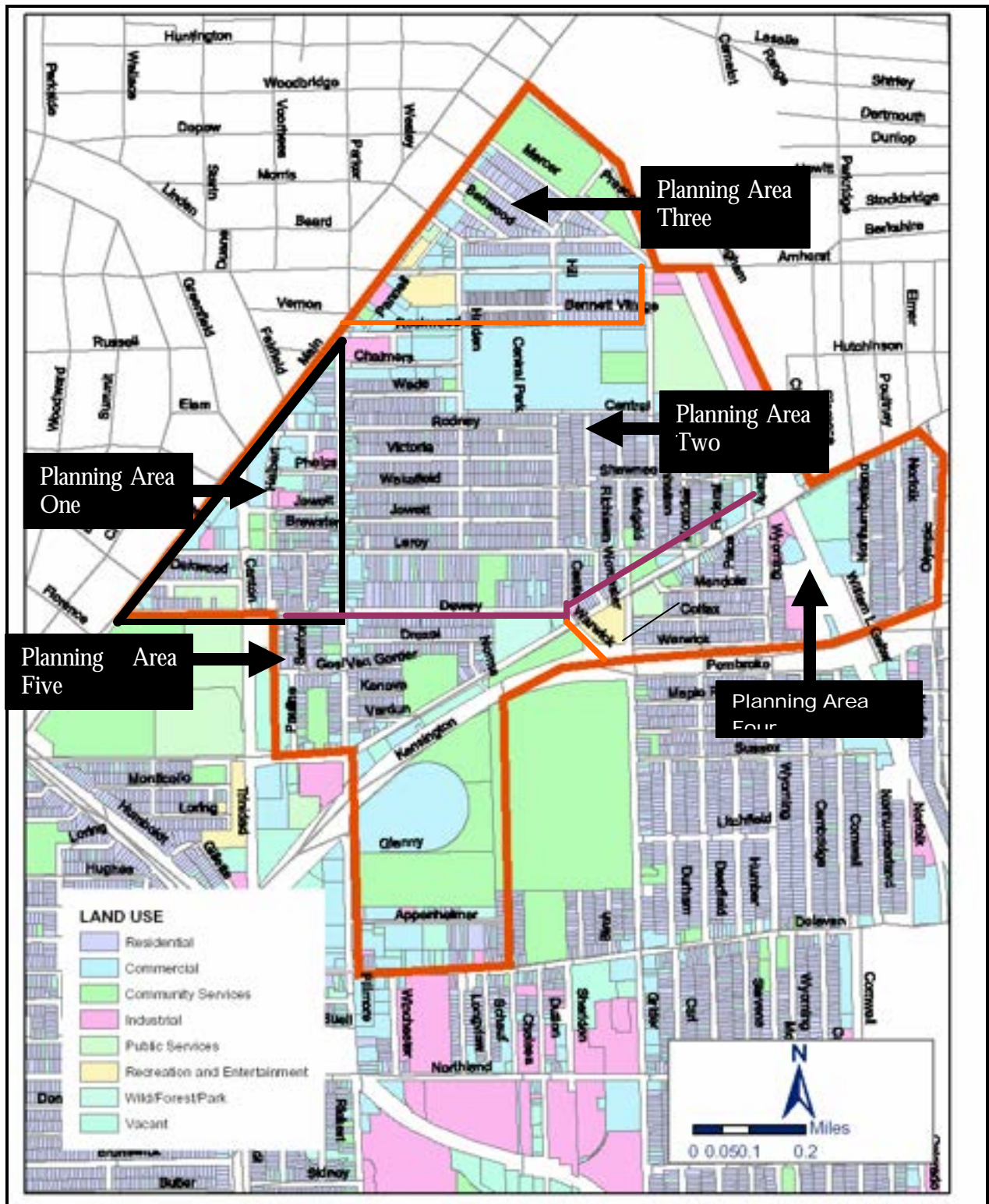
**Planning Area One: The Tri-Main Center Locale**

Anchored by the Tri-Main Center, Planning Area One is a triangular shaped locality, situated along the western border of Fillmore-Leroy. Main Street is the neighborhood's western border; Fillmore Avenue is the eastern border, while Dewey Street forms the southern border. This is a small, self-contained area. Main, Fillmore, and Dewey combine to form *hard boundaries* that build a virtual wall that isolates the planning area.

Planning Area One is the site of extensive economic activity. The Tri-Main Center, itself, is one of the most innovative mixed used facilities in the United States. Its presence has triggered significant development along the neighborhood's Main Street boundary (Photo 1). The intersection at Main and Fillmore Avenue is becoming an energetic commercial node. The Community Savings Bank recently opened, Linwood Baptist Church is situated in a new building, and Canisius College has renovated a building at the corner of Main and Leroy. Within the interior of Planning Area One, there are several small commercial operations, such as UC Coating, Koch Metal Spinning Company, and Phoenix Frontier, those are intermixed with the residential community.

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Map 3: The Fillmore-Leroy Neighborhood





**Photo 1: The Intersection at Fillmore and Main**



The problem is this economic activity has not stimulated residential development. Today, much of the housing stock is deteriorating, many others have been demolished, and vacancy is a problem (Photo 2).

**Photo 2: Housing Conditions in Planning Area One**



At one housing extreme are the conditions found on Brewster Street (Photo 3). A number of units have been demolished and others are in need of major repair. The street looks abandoned, but it is not. About seventeen families, including a number of households with children live there.

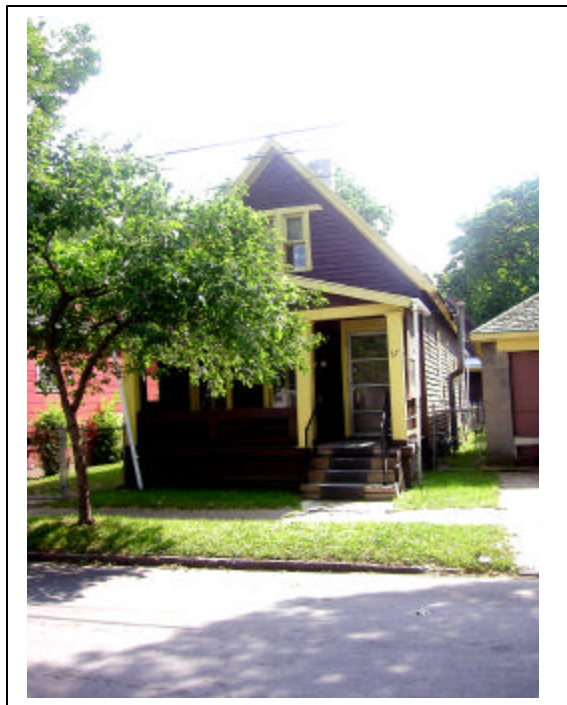
While conditions are not as bad on other streets, dilapidation is still omnipresent. Yet, in spite of the large stock of decaying and abandoned housing units, the planning area should be the prime target for a major rebuilding and revitalization effort. Many of the housing units are small, single-family houses, which should not be too costly to renovate. This locale is a great site for a redevelopment project that combines rehabilitation of existing units with the construction of in-fill housing. Concurrently, the urban design was inspired by the Garden City movement, which provides the neighborhood a delightful setting.

Planning Area One is near the Darwin Martin House (DMH), which is located on Jewett Parkway. After renovation, which should be completed in a year or two, local leaders believe the DMH will become a major regional tourist attraction. Concurrently, the Tri-Main Center rents work space to artists. The planning area could be redeveloped as an *artist colony*, where housing units are constructed with space for work and for selling their paintings. The colony would be marketed not only to artists, but also to musicians, writers, and others desirous of living in a community with other creative people. Such a colony would benefit from the development of the DMH. When tourists visit the Martin house, an artist colony nearby would give them another venue to visit before leaving the area. Artists could sell their products from their home, and the Fillmore Avenue commercial thoroughfare from Main Street to Leroy could be developed to cater to both the tourist trade and workers and visitors to the Tri-Main Center.

Photo 3: Brewster Street



Photo 4: Typical Single Family Unit in Planning Area One



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PLANNING  
AREA  
TWO:  
ANCHORED BY THE  
CENTRAL PARK  
PLAZA

**Planning area two is anchored by the Central Park Plaza.**

The area is bounded by Fillmore Avenue to the east, railroad lines to the west, and Dewey and Kensington Avenue to the south and Central Park Plaza to the north. Housing and neighborhood conditions in this planning area are also poor. The locale is dominated by large, two-family homes with are intermixed with single-family units. While a number of good houses are found in the locale, deteriorating housing units are omnipresent. Indeed, not a single street can be found that does not have problem properties on it. While some of the housing units in the area are candidates for demolition, many others could be saved through rehabilitation and modernization. The identification, rehabilitation and modernization of trouble properties are essentially to the rejuvenation of this community.

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**Photo 5: Housing Conditions in the Planning Area Two**







Planning area three is primarily a residential enclave. There are few commercial and retail establishments in this area, with the exception of those businesses situated along Main Street. Housing in the locale is characterized by row houses, single-family units, and by the Amherst Garden Apartments, a large multi-building, rental unit. Housing and neighborhood conditions are excellent. The Bennett Village row houses could be one of the most beautiful residential streets in Buffalo. At the same time, Bennett Village is a potential trouble area that should be carefully monitored. The City should work closely with the property owners to provide assistance and incentive for them to maintain conditions in the community. For example, graffiti was painted on a neighborhood wall, and it remains there today.

Photo 6: Bennett Village Street



Photo 7: Graffiti on Wall in Bennett Village





The Amherst Garden apartments, located on Amherst Street, are a well maintained apartment complex. Yet, at the same time, it must be carefully monitored to ensure that its exterior and lawn are kept in good condition. To the north of the Amherst Garden apartments is an outstanding middle-class enclave. This is the only exclusively middle-class enclave in Masten. Although conditions in this area are excellent, it should also be regularly monitored so that troubled properties can be quickly identified and efforts to solve the problem initiated. For example, although housing on Depew is very good, there are at least two trouble properties on the street.

**Photo 7: Housing in the Morris Mercer Area**



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PLANNING  
AREA  
FOUR  
AND  
FIVE: THE WILLIAM  
L. GAITER AND  
GLENNY PROJECTS  
AREAS  
PLAZA

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**Planning area four and five are comprised a residential enclave bounded by Kensington Avenue to the north and Route 33 to the south.** Grider Street forms the western boundary and Olympic the eastern border. The William L. Gaiter Parkway divides the residential area. Housing conditions in both sections of the planning areas are good, although both are also plagued with problem properties. Planning area five is comprised of the area situated just south of Dewey. It is comprised of a small residential enclave and the Glenn Projects. Housing in this area is mixed with some units well maintained and others in need of exterior improvement.

**Photo 9: The Glenly Projects**

Location is a problem with both these planning areas. They are small residential enclaves, which are not anchored by important assets. The complex of loans and grants available in other parts of Fillmore-Leroy should also be available to these residents. At the same time, their future development is dependent on the successful redevelopment of planning areas one and two. The implementation of successful projects in these areas will trigger a multiplier effect that will stimulate the redevelopment of planning areas four and five.

### **Recommendation**

A serious housing crisis exists in the Fillmore-Leroy neighborhood. If immediate steps are not taken to stabilize and improve housing and neighborhood conditions in this community, it might well pass the tipping point threshold by the end of this decade. If this happens, the revitalization of the district will be difficult, if not impossible. At the same time, because of its strategic location, the neighborhood is well positioned for a major recovery, if action is taken now. The neighborhood is sandwiched between the Erie County Medical Center Campus on the south and the Tri-Main Center and the Central Park Plaza to the north. If the residential enclave in the shadow of Tri-Main is redeveloped and if the Central Park Plaza is revitalized, the trilogy of economic activity could stimulate redevelopment throughout the neighborhood. Four major problems must be solved to end the housing crisis and turn Fillmore-Leroy into a vibrant neighborhood. The first is to identify resources that will enable homeowners and small property investors to improve the exterior and interiors of their homes, rental properties, and buildings. Second, resources must be identified that will allow property owners to maintain their properties once they have been improved. Third, the City must initiate a vigorous program to maintain all public spaces, including parks and playgrounds. Fourth, the private sector must become a major player in the revitalization and rebuilding effort.

A Neighborhood Renaissance Zone should be established in Fillmore-Leroy. Although the entire neighborhood would be designated as a renaissance zone, only planning areas one and two would be targeted for the full complex of programs associated with the zone. If the program is successful it will be extended to all parts of the district.

The Neighborhood Renaissance Zone will be a demonstration project designed to determine the types and mixtures of programs and activities that are required to halt the downward trajectory of neighborhoods and push their development back toward the turning point threshold, where neighborhood development is accelerated when passed.

A rehabilitation and modernization program will be established that provides loans and grants to all property owners, including homeowners and small property investors.

A Neighborhood Renaissance Mortgage should be established by the banking community, which is modeled after the Location Efficient Mortgages that have been established in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Chicago. The idea will be to provide flexible mortgages that enable buyers to fold the rehabilitation and modernization cost of properties into a single mortgage. The key to making such a mortgage work is that the income of the buyer, not an artificial price established by neighborhood price comparables, dictates the size of the mortgage package. These mortgages would be characterized by low-down payments, flexible criteria for qualification, and easy approval. The target population would be residents currently living in Fillmore-Leroy, immigrants, recent college graduate, and people that work in the neighborhood, but live elsewhere. Other innovative program established in the neighborhood would be rent-to-own programs and sweat equity programs. Buyers with the capabilities of renovating their own homes would be sold repossessed or city owned properties. Though a grant program financed through community development block grants, the buyer would be given the materials necessary to rehabilitate and modernize the property.

Home Equity Assistance Program is the third major Renaissance Zone program. The basic idea behind the program is by registering and paying a one-time fee, a homeowner is guaranteed that the value of the member's property will not fall below the fair market value established at the time he or she registers for the program. The person must stay in the program for a minimum of five years and keep the property at the minimum standard established by homeowners, renters, and property investors in the area. If the members decide to sell their home after the five-year period and cannot sell it at the guaranteed prices, the program will make up 100% of the difference between the guaranteed value and the actual selling price.

A Crime Bubble should be established in planning areas one and two. As part of the Neighborhood Renaissance Zone, a zero-tolerance for all crime will be established in the zone. This will be a demonstration project to determine the mixture of policing, neighborhood watch programs, computerized mapping, and community policing that involves paid citizen patrols that are needed to bolster significantly the perception and reality of safety in a neighborhood. If the program proves successful, then it will be extended to other areas of Fillmore-Leroy.

Establish a Neighborhood Problem Identification Program. A program should be established in Hamlin Park that identifies all problem properties and potential blighting conditions. Once these properties have been identified, a remediation plan should be developed to bring these property or conditions up to standards. If the owner does not comply, the City's Impact Team should correct the problem and bill the owner.

A revitalization plan is currently being developed for the Central Park Plaza. This effort should be supported and it should be integrated into the overall strategy to redevelop planning areas one and two.

Planning area one should be redeveloped as an artist colony. A unique redevelopment team consisting of representatives from the major companies in the area, existing residents, FLARE, representatives from the artist community, the president of Forever Elmwood, the Office of Strategic Planning and the Masten should be convened to guide the redevelopment effort. The redevelopment of the Fillmore Avenue thoroughfare from Main Street to the Kensington Expressway should be considered part of this redevelopment effort. The redevelopment should not only concentrate on the provision of convenience goods for neighborhood residents, but also a series of shops and stores that take advantage of the tourist traffic and visitors to the area.

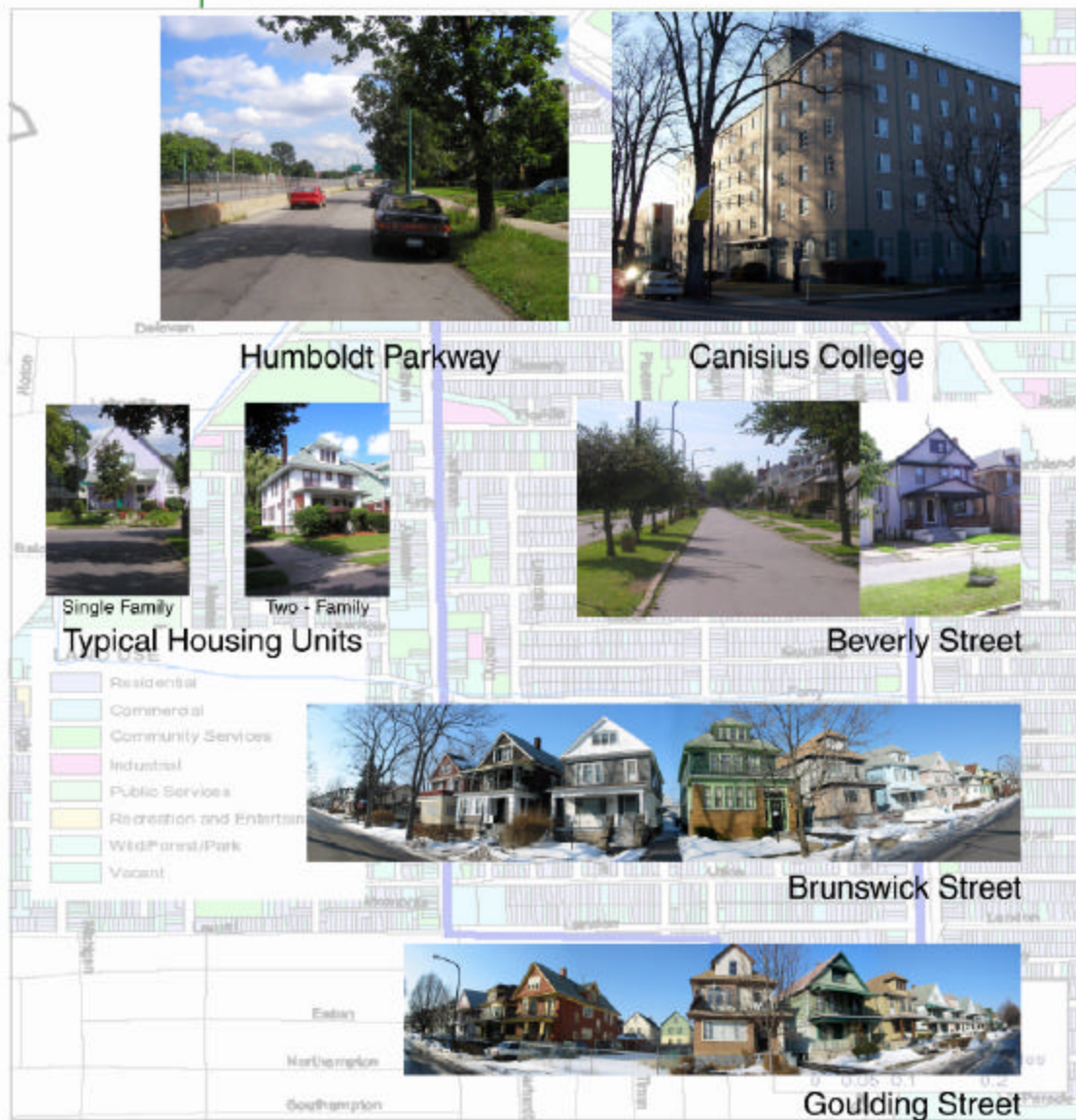
The Glenny Projects should be landscaped and turned into a passive garden until it is redeveloped. The fence should be removed, the grass cut, perennials planted. Decorative window covers should replace the plywood covers, and benches placed on the grounds.



## Hamlin Park Neighborhood

# Hamlin Park

■ Buffalo's Only Predominantly Black Historic District



**Masten Neighborhood Master Plan**  
"A Community on the Move"



The Office of Urban Initiatives  
and  
The UB Center for Urban Studies  
Department of Urban and Regional Planning  
School of Architecture and Planning

Poster no.  
**1/1**

## The Site and Situation

Hamlin Park is the only predominantly black neighborhood in western New York with a historic district designation. It is located in the southwestern quadrant of the Masten District. Hamlin Park is composed of two sub areas: the historic district and a second sub area, which is a smaller locale situated at the southern end of the neighborhood, between East Ferry and Landon and Riley (Map 1).

Prior to 1950, Hamlin Park was one of the finest neighborhoods in Buffalo. The neighborhood was anchored by a beautiful tree-lined boulevard that connected Omsted's Delaware Park to Parade Park (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Park). Then, during the 1960s, Route 33 replaced the Humboldt Boulevard median, property values declined and in less than a decade the community went from about 90% white to 90% black.

**Photo 1: The Humboldt Parkway before Construction of the Kensington Expressway**



**Photo 2: The Humboldt Parkway Today**



The neighborhood is divided into two sections: the historical district and a sub area located between East Ferry and Landon Street (Map 1). According to the Buffalo Preservation Board, the boundaries of the Hamlin Park Historic District extend along “Jefferson Avenue from East Ferry Street to Main Street on the western edge, with a section of Main Street from Jefferson to Humboldt Parkway on the Northwest, the curve of Humboldt Parkway extending from Main Street to East Ferry Street on the northeast, and East Ferry from Humboldt Parkway to Jefferson Avenue on the south border.” The second Hamlin Park sub area, which lies outside the historic district, extends from East Ferry to Landon.

Hamlin Park is home to Canisius College, Blue Cross/Blue Shield and the Niagara Lutheran Home. In addition to these three assets, the community is centrally located. It is easily accessible to Route 33, I-90, and the Buffalo Niagara Airport. Buffalo State College, the University of Buffalo, and downtown are only a few minutes away, and two subway stations service the neighborhood.

### **The People of Hamlin Park**

Hamlin Park sustained less population loss than other neighborhoods in the Masten District. Between 1990 and 2000, the population fell from 10,020 to 9,195, a decline of about 8%. Hamlin Park benefits from the presence of Canisius College. About 16% of the neighborhood’s population is white, mostly students at Canisius. During the nineties there was a slight increase in the white population, while the African American population dropped by 1,187 residents, a decline of about 14%. About 48 of the residents fall within the 20-64-age cohort. So, a little less than half the population are in their working years, including 22% in their prime working years.

About 45 percent of the housing units in Hamlin Park are owner-occupied and the median value of housing is \$51,858. Hamlin Park, like all neighborhoods in the Masten District, is a cross-class neighborhood where groups from across the income spectrum are well represented. About 57% of the residents have incomes that fall into the moderate to upper middle-income cohort. Yet, there is a critical mass of residents with low-incomes. The poverty rate in Masten is 28.5%, slightly above the citywide rate of 26.6 percent. Special efforts must be made to ensure that the both the exteriors and interiors of the dwelling units housing these residents are well maintained.

Hamlin Park has percentage of homeowners that are sixty years and older, with a substantial number of these owners being sixty-five and older. This means that a number of housing units will be changing ownership over the next ten to fifteen years. Depending on the condition of these dwelling units and the strength of the neighborhood’s housing market, this could be a potential problem. This should be an area of concern, especially considering the high vacancy rate of 16.5% in Hamlin Park. This is slightly above the citywide vacancy rate and almost doubles the countywide rate of 8.4%.

### **Housing and Neighborhood Conditions**

Hamlin Park, as previously mentioned, is divided into two sub areas: the Historic District and a smaller community situated between East Ferry and Landon and Riley. In some respects, even within the Historic District, conditions vary between the neighborhood situated to the north of East Delavan and that portion of the neighborhoods sandwiched between East Delavan and East Ferry. In this sense, from a planning and development perspective, the Hamlin Park neighborhood is divided into three sub areas: the Historic District 1 (north of East Delavan), Historic District 2 (between East Delavan and East Ferry), and Southern District (between East Ferry and Landon and Riley).



### Map: The Hamlin Park Neighborhood





### The Historic District 1

Housing and neighborhood conditions in the historic district are good, especially in the area to the north of East Delavan. In this area, housing is primarily composed of single and two family units. The neighborhood is relatively free of trash, rubbish and other blighting elements and there are only a handful of deteriorating houses. At the same time, there are a few problem properties scattered throughout the community, and conditions on East Delavan, and on the side streets near East Delavan, need improved maintenance.

Prior to the construction of the Kensington Expressway, the tree lined Humboldt Parkway ran though the Hamlin Park neighborhood. The railing now lining the Kensington Expressway is unpleasant and detracts from the overall beauty of the housing along the Humboldt Avenue border of Hamlin Park. Moreover, conditions along East Delavan also detract from the neighborhood. Housing in this area is not was well maintained and there are a few buildings that are poor maintained. Similar conditions are found along East Ferry and Jefferson Avenue. These major thoroughfares are image-makers for the Hamlin Park neighborhood, and their rundown appearance paints a negative portrait of the entire community.

Photo 2: Typical Single Family

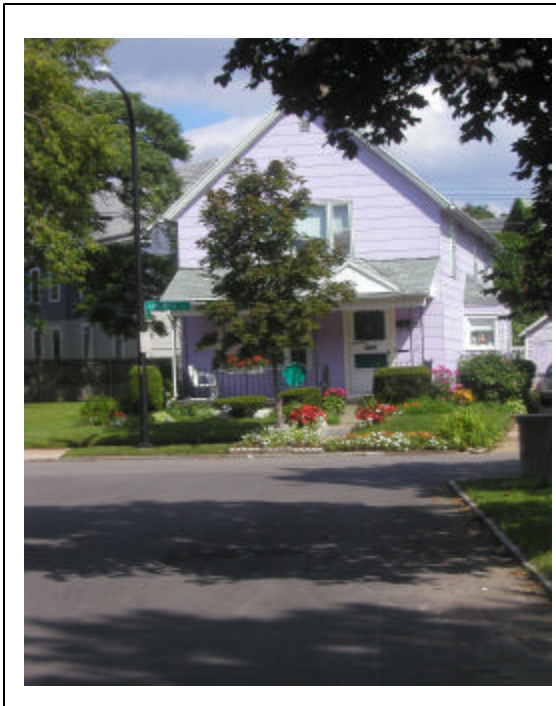


Photo 3: Typical Two Family Unit



Housing and neighborhood conditions in the historic district, between East Delavan and East Ferry are not as good as those found north of East Delavan. The number of housing units in need of external improvements, including landscaping, is much greater. Also, there is a larger number of deteriorating housing units in this area. Yet, the urban design in this section of the historic district is wonderful. Beverly Street has great potential. A beautiful Highgate is situated at the entrance. The street is divided with a tree-lined island and terminates at the base of the Niagara Lutheran Home. The island needs better landscaping and maintenance, the gate at the Jefferson Street entrance needs repair, and many of the houses could benefit from an exterior spruce up. Overall, while many of the houses in this section of the historic district are well maintained, problem properties are omnipresent and represent a potential threat to the community.

**Photo 6: Housing on Beverly Street**



**Photo 7: Housing on Florida Street**



### Sub Area Two: East Ferry to Landon

This section of the Hamlin Park is outside the historic district. Here, housing and neighborhood conditions are poor. The units are older and there is a large stock of deteriorating housings, many of which can and should be rehabilitated, while others need to be demolished. In this section of Hamlin Park there is an opportunity to develop a mixture of rehabilitated and newly constructed infill housing.

#### Recommendations:

The Hamlin Park neighborhood is the only predominantly African American community in western New York with a historic district designation. If the community is spruced up, it could become a major tourist attraction. Moreover, because of the presence of Canisius College, if conditions are improved throughout the neighborhood, Hamlin Park could take greater advance of this major asset. *An aggressive program of reinforcement and revitalization should be initiated in Hamlin Park.*

1. Establish a Neighborhood Problem Identification Program. A program should be established in Hamlin Park that identifies all problem properties and potential blighting conditions. Once these properties have been identified, a remediation plan should be developed to bring these property or conditions up to standards. If the owner does not comply, the City's Impact Team should correct the problem and bill the owner.
2. Develop a building code that establishes minimum exterior conditions for houses and buildings, including condition of sidewalks, curbs, and lawn maintenance. A neighborhood wide coalition of block clubs leaders should work with the council member to formulate the code. Once the code becomes law, a program should be established that enables block club members to work closely with the City to identify houses, building, and properties that are out of code. Property owners will be cited and given a specified period to make the changes. If the changes are not made within the time period, the Impact Team will make the changes and bill the owner. Property owners unable to make the improvements will be given deferred bills, which must be paid when the unit is sold.
3. Canisius College and area banks should form a collaboration to increase homeownership in Hamlin Park. This program would involve developing a collaboration with Hamlin Park block clubs to identify housing units that might be attractive to faculty and staff members at the college. The college would aggressively market these units to their faculty and staff members and the banks would make available mortgage packages allowing the purchaser to fold the cost of rehabilitation into the mortgage.
4. A low-interest home improvement and rehabilitation loan programs should be established. The loans would be available to all property owners, regardless of income level.
5. Jefferson Street, from Main to Landon, East Delavan, from Jefferson to the Kensington Expressway, and East Ferry, from Jefferson to the Kensington Expressway should be the target of a major beautification program. A program to improve significantly the exterior of houses and buildings on these main thoroughfares should be the top priority. Additionally, streetscaping should be carried out to complement the area.

## Delavan-Grider Neighborhood

# Delavan - Grider

■ Land of Businesses, Industries, and Health Care Institutions



Grider Avenue



Cambridge Park



Problem Area: ...  
Mixed housing and industrial  
uses between Northland and  
SCMC

Industrial Land Uses between Northland and East Delavan



Single-Family



Two-Family

Typical Housing Units - Cornwall Street

Masten Neighborhood Master Plan

"A Community on the Move"



The Office of Urban Initiatives  
and  
The Urban Center for Urban Studies  
Department of Urban and Regional Planning  
School of Architecture and Planning

Poster no.

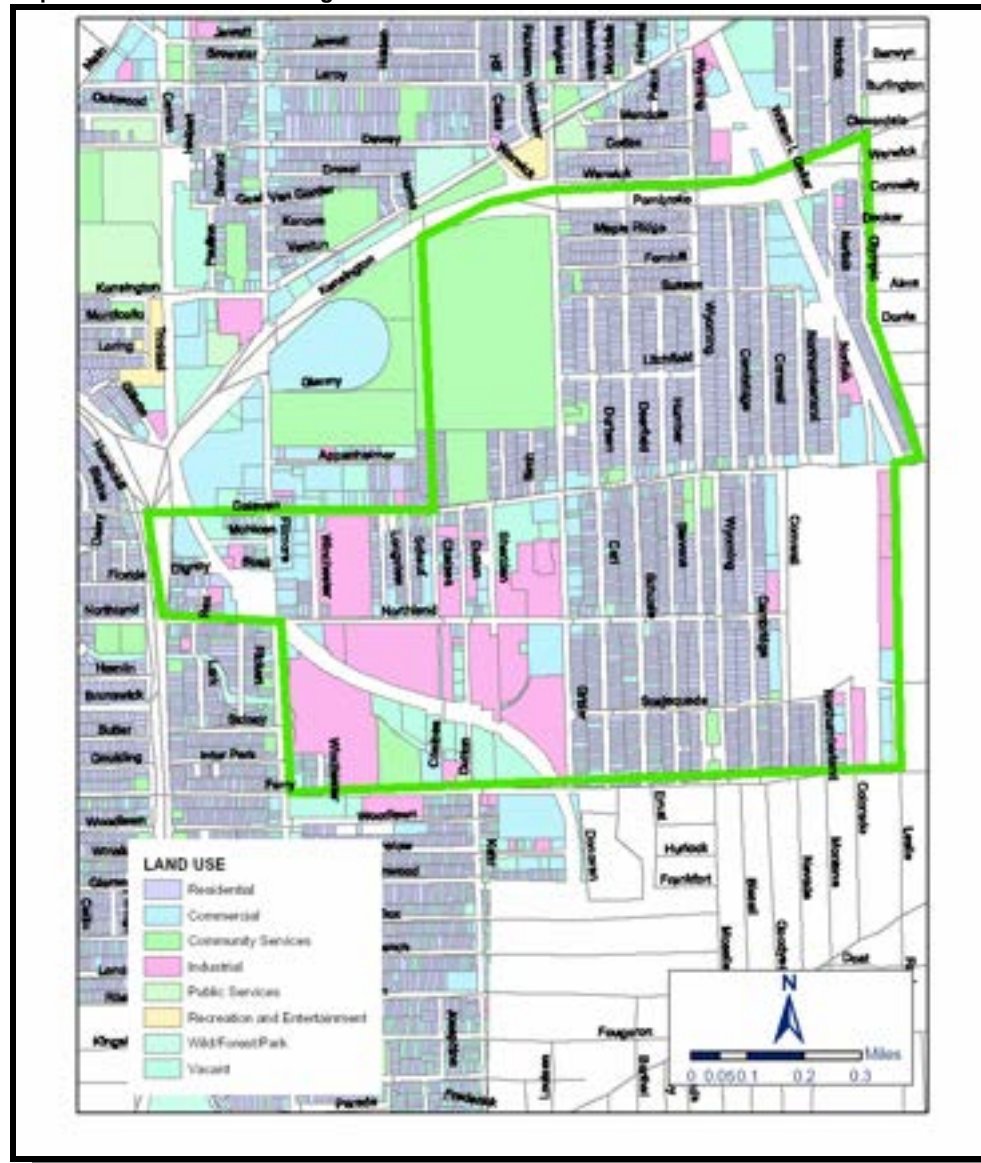
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## The Site and Situation

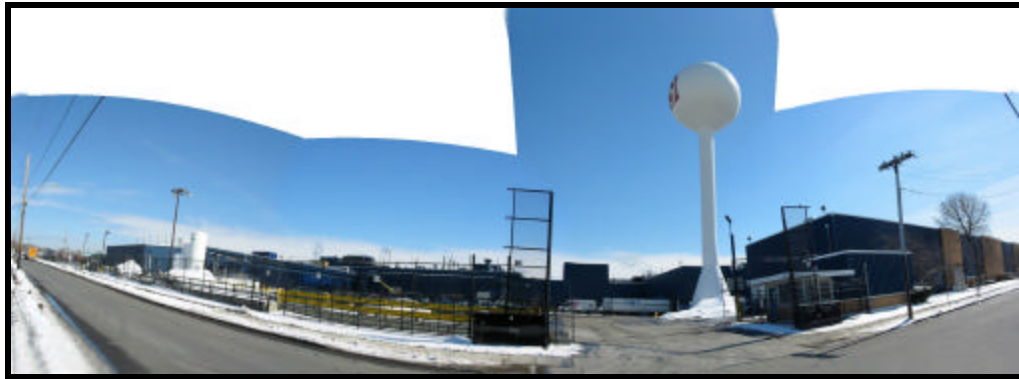
The Delavan-Grider neighborhood is strategically located. Situated near Route 33, it can be easily reached from either Grider or the William L. Gaiter Parkway. This linkage makes it possible to reach easily all sections of Erie County. This access has made the neighborhood the most commercial and industrialized neighborhood in Buffalo. Erie County Medical Center, American Axel, and a number of smaller businesses and enterprises are located in Delavan-Grider.

Map 1: The Delavan-Grider Neighborhood



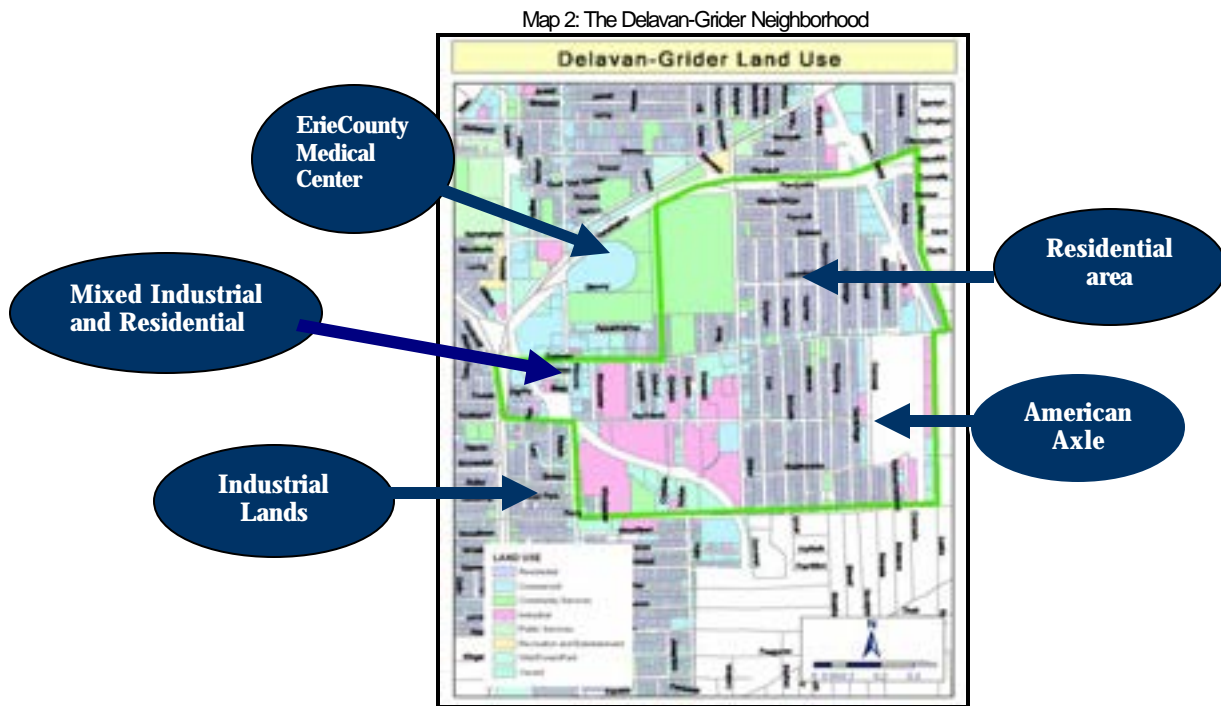
The neighborhood's land use structure is complex. Grider divides the neighborhood into western and eastern sectors. To the west of Grider, industrial and community service land use dominates. Almost no housing is found in the industrial area bounded by Fillmore Avenue, Grider, Northland, and East Ferry. Between Fillmore and Grider and Northland and East Delavan, industrial land use is intermixed with residential land use, while most of the northwest segment of the neighborhood is dominated by the Erie County Medical Center Campus. In the eastern half of the neighborhood, residential land use dominates, although American Axle and other industrial uses are found in the area.

**Figure 3 : A Side View of American Axle**



**Figure 4: The Erie County Medical Center Campus**





### The People of Delavan Grider

Delavan-Grider is a largely African American. During the nineties its population fell from 8,065 to 7,104, a decline of about 12 percent or about 961 residents. The neighborhood has residents from across the life cycle. The median age of the population is 36 years. About 33 percent of the residents are children and teenagers, and 52% are in their working years between 20 and 64 years. Of this group, about 25% are in the prime working years between 35 and 54 years. The remaining 15% of the residents are elders.

About 35 percent of the households are headed by females, and married couples, with and without children, comprise about 25% of the households, and 34 percent are non-family households. Male householders represent about four percent of the households in Delavan-Grider. Like all neighborhoods in Masten, Delavan-Grider is a cross-class community, where all income groups live. The median household income is \$23,988, which is slightly lower than the citywide median of \$24,536, and the poverty rate is 25%. About 54% of the population have income within the moderate to upper-middle income cohort. Within this context, the moderate (\$20,000 – \$34,999) and lower-middle (\$35,000 - \$59,000) income comprises 39% of all households. Middle (\$60,000 - \$99,999) and upper-middle (\$100,000 +) comprises 15% of the households. Significantly, 46% of the households have incomes that are \$19,000 and less. Even so, with an aggregate household income of \$93,459,100, Delavan-Grider is the second most prosperous neighborhood in the Masten District. The unemployment rate is 6% and the labor force participation rate is 46%. Overall, the Delavan-Grider neighborhood is one of the most stable in Masten.

### Housing and Neighborhood Conditions

Major thoroughfares are the windows through which people view neighborhood life and culture. If the thoroughfare is dilapidated and rundown, people will assume the surrounding neighborhoods are also

dilapidated and rundown. On the flip side, if the thoroughfares are attractive, lively and energetic, people will assume the surrounding neighborhoods are also attractive, lively and energetic. Major thoroughfares, then, are the image-maker of neighborhoods and undergird the neighborhood housing market and influences property values.

Nowhere is this thesis truer than in the Delavan-Grider neighborhood. East Delavan, Grider Street, and East Ferry are the image-makers for the Delavan-Grider neighborhood. The problem is the most dilapidated and rundown streets in the neighborhood are these three major thoroughfares. Transforming this commercial corridor is critical to the revitalization of the neighborhood.



Photo 1: East Delavan Looking East From Grider

Photo 2: The East Delavan Commercial Corridor



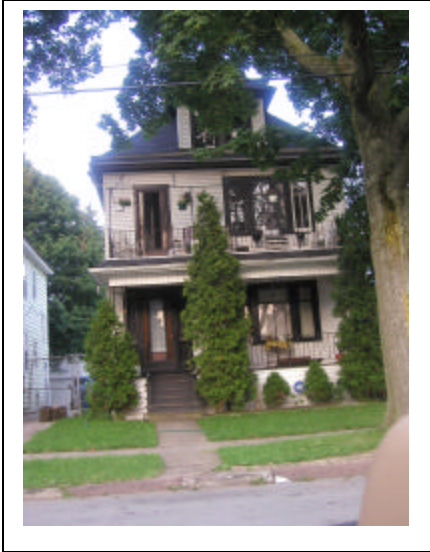


Generally speaking, housing is well maintained in the Delavan-Grider neighborhood, and there are few signs of deterioration. On some streets, such as Wyoming and Cambridge, the conditions are really good, housing and lawns are well maintained. Few signs of rubbish, trash, abandoned and deteriorating housing or other blighting elements are found in most parts of the neighborhood. Single and two-family units dominate the housing stock, and small, single-family units are the most prevalent type of housing in the southern half of the neighborhood. Housing in the southern part of Delavan-Grider tend to be smaller than in the northern half of the neighborhood.

While housing and neighborhood conditions are good, some problems do exist. The worst housing and neighborhood conditions are found along the main thoroughfares. A number of houses needing exterior improvements are found on Grider. Housing units on Grider, between East Ferry and Delavan, are fronted by industrial land use. Lacking landscaping and streetscaping, housing along this thoroughfare have an unpleasant view, which ultimately devalues their property and will make the sustainability of these areas difficult.

Housing and neighborhood conditions between Scajaquada and East Ferry are not as good as in other parts of the community. Conditions are particularly poor on Northumberland, where the many of the houses are deteriorating or have been demolished. While houses and neighborhood conditions are better maintained on the other streets, there are more problem houses in this neighborhood than in other sections of Delavan-Grider. The sub area in the western part of the neighborhood faces a different set of issues. Housing between Northland and East Delavan are intermingled with industrial land uses, and the long-term sustainability of this area is questionable. Several of the factories appear to be empty and the unkept nature of the parking lots helps to create an unappealing landscape and greatly detract from the residential area. Unless these circumstances are corrected, the viability of the residential area is questionable.

**Photo 3: Typical Housing Units in the Delavan-Grider Neighborhood**



**Photo 4: Housing in the Delavan-Grider Neighborhood**



**Photo 5: Grider Looking South toward East Ferry**



**Photo 6: Grider Looking North toward East Delavan**



## Recommendations

- The East Delavan Commercial Corridor, from Chelsea to the American Axel Plant should be redeveloped. This commercial thoroughfare is the major image-maker for the Delavan-Grider neighborhood and transforming the appearance of this area is central to the development of the Delavan-Grider neighborhood. A strong untapped market for retail exists in the neighborhood, which is the second most prosperous in Masten. Additionally, sandwiched between the Erie County Medical Campus and American Axel, the East Delavan Commercial Corridor has the ability to capture a larger market share of the potential spending from the 9,015 daytime workers in the area. For additional information, see the section on commercial corridor development.
- The redevelopment of Grider should be approached in two ways. First, ECMC has landscaped much of the western side of Grider between Kensington and East Delavan. The remainder of the street, on both the western and eastern sides, is dominated by housing in need exterior treatment, including landscaping. A neighborhood wide coalition of block club leaders and representatives from the private sector should work with the City to ensure that all the exteriors of all properties fronting Grider are brought up to a minimum standard. If the

changes are not made within a specified time, the Mayor's Impact Team should make the changes and bill the owner. Property owners unable to pay for the improvements should be given deferred bills, which must be paid when the property is sold.

- The aforementioned strategy should be applied to East Ferry. The recommendation is to force property owners with the ability to upgrade and maintain their properties to do so. For those who cannot, deferred billing is one way to get the improvements done. A pool of funds derived from the Community Development Block Grant program or HOME dollars could be used to provide upfront capital for the project.
- The William L. Gaiter Parkway should be regularly maintained by the City of Buffalo. This thoroughfare is also a neighborhood image-maker. Maintenance of the thoroughfare is inconsistent. Keeping it well manicured should be one of the City's highest priorities.
- A Neighborhood Problem Identification Program should be established that identifies all problem properties and potential blighting conditions. Once these properties have been identified, a remediation plan should be developed to bring these property or conditions up to standards. If the owner does not comply, the City's Impact Team should correct the problem and bill the owner.
- A major redevelopment should be launched in the sub area to the south of Scajaquada. Outside housing along the major thoroughfare, this area needs the most help. Rehabilitation and home improvement loans and grants should be made available to the property owners in this area. In particular, Northumberland should be the site of significant rebuilding effort that includes a mixture of demolition, rehabilitation, and new construction. A small Latino community lives south of Scajaquada and efforts should be made to attract more Hispanics into this locale. Improved housing throughout the area, especially Northumberland could encourage other Latinos to settle in the locale.
- A decision needs to be made about the future of residential settlements that are intermingled with the industrial lands. Minimally, this entire area needs to be landscaped and made visually appealing. A feasibility study needs to be done about the future of this entire region and a strategic plan developed. The Office of Strategic Planning should finance this study.

## Trinidad Park Neighborhood

# Trinidad Park

## Buffalo's Best Kept Secret

Fillmore-Leroy

Cold Springs

Delavan-Grider

Hamlin Park

Martin Luther

Trinidad Park

Masten Neighborhood Master Plan

"A Community on the Move"

4

The Office of Urban Initiatives  
and  
The U.S. Center for Urban Studies  
Department of Urban and Regional Planning  
School of Architecture and Planning

Poster no.  
5/1

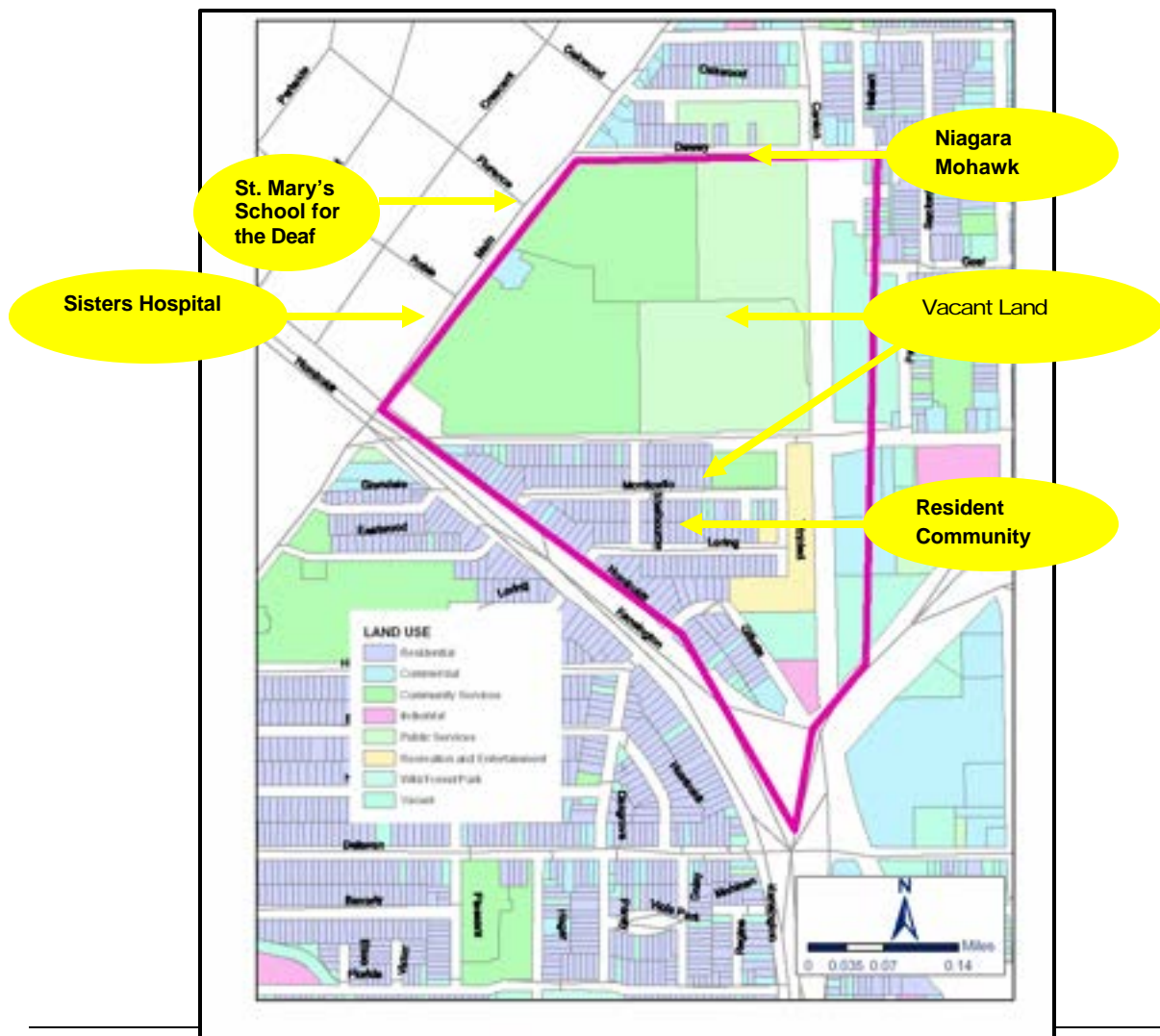


## The Site and Situation

Trinidad Park is a small, self-contained neighborhood located along the western border of the Masten District (Map 1). This self-containment gives the neighborhood a sense of intimacy and security. Dewey Street borders the community on north, Main Street on the west, the Kensington Expressway on the south, and Halbert Street on the east. Trinidad Park was part of the Hamlin Park neighborhood before the expressway severed it.

The community is divided into two distinct sectors. The northern sector is site of the Sisters Hospital medical campus, Niagara-Mohawk Utility Company, and the St. Mary's School for the Deaf (Photo 1 and Map 1). In both sectors, there is an abundance of vacant land, which is suitable for economic development. Railroad tracks separate the vacant land from the community (Photo 2). The neighborhood is located near Route 33 and the Scajaquada and Kensington Expressways, which links it to every section of the Western New York region. The concentration of wealth producing industries in the northern sector, combined with the neighborhood's access to major regional transportation routes, and significant tracts of vacant land suitable for development, makes Trinidad Park a job rich community with growth potential (Photos 1 and 2).

Map: The Trinidad Park Neighborhood





**Photo 5: Sisters Hospital**



**Photo 6: Railroads separating the vacant lands in the northern sector of Trinidad Park**



### **The People of Trinidad Park**

Trinidad Park is the smallest neighborhood in the Masten District. During the 1990s, its population dropped from 719 to 551, a decline of 23 percent. This is perplexing. Comparatively speaking, this is one of the strongest neighborhoods in the Masten District. About 93% of the population is African American, and the balance between females (57%) and males (43%) is similar to that found in other Masten neighborhoods.

The age structure differs from that of other Masten neighborhoods. Only about 27% of the population is 19 years and younger, with most of them in the 5 to 14 year cohort. At the same time, about 56 percent of the population are in their working years, with 48 percent of these residents in the 20 to 54 year age cohort. Thus, there are a significant number of residents that are in the upwardly mobile stage of the life cycle. At the same time, about 12 percent of the residents are in that 65-74 year age cohort, which is the highest proportion in the Masten District. Unlike other Masten neighborhoods, married couples (52%) dominate the household structure, with most (42%) having no children under 18 years. Meanwhile, females head only about 12% of the households. About 36% of the households are non-family households, with 26% of these units having children less than 18 years.

Moderate to upper-income groups dominates the neighborhood. About 37% of the residents have incomes that are \$35,000 and higher. This seems to reflect the educational level of the residents. About 22% of residents have college degrees. This is almost double the District wide rate and higher than the citywide rate (18%). About 36% of the population have incomes less than \$20,000 yearly. While this is a significant number, it is still much lower than the percent of low-income groups found in other Masten neighborhoods. Trinidad Park has the highest median household income in the Masten District (\$26,708), the lowest poverty rate (13%), and the second highest labor force participation rate (60%). The unemployment rate is up (9%), but overall, comparatively speaking, this is a prosperous

neighborhood. When the low crime rate, high homeownership rate (55%), and median value of housing (\$54,500)<sup>10</sup> is added to the equation, the staggering population decline is puzzling.

### Housing and Neighborhood Conditions

The residential neighborhood is located in the southern sector. Trinidad Park is a compact neighborhood, with the eastern border set aside for parks and recreation (Photo 3). The amount of land available for park and recreational space could be greatly expanded if vacant land adjacent to the park on Gillett was transformed into a passive park and garden. Currently, this area contains three boarded-up multiple family units and a small abandoned factory (Photo 4). The three multiple family units could be demolished, the abandoned factory extensively landscaped, and the entire site and the site made part of an expanded park, recreational area, and passive garden.

Photo 3: Recreational Space in Trinidad Park



Photo 8: Vacant Multifamily Units



<sup>10</sup> This is the highest in the Masten District.

There are about 287 housing units in Trinidad Park, with only about 43 or 14% of these units being vacant. Trinidad Park has the second highest rate of homeownership in the Masten District. Of the neighborhood's 244 occupied housing units, 133 or 54.51% are owner-occupied. While the neighborhood has high rate of homeownership, about 56% (N= 74) of those owners are 65 years or older. On the flipside of the age structure, only 21% of the homeowners are 44 years and under. About 69% of the housing units in Trinidad Park were constructed in 1940 or earlier, and the median value of those nits in Trinidad Park is about \$54,000. The housing is dominated by large one-family and two-family structures (Photos 5-7).

Photo 5: Large Single-Family



Photo 6: Small Single-Family



Photo 7: Two-Family



The Trinidad Park housing stock is attractive and housing conditions are good in the neighborhood. A windshield survey of the community suggests that most of housing units are in good condition, especially the single-family units. Some problem properties do exist in the community, however. A number of two-family units, especially on Kensington and Monticello, appeared to need paint and repair. Bringing up these problem properties should be a very high priority. Small neighborhoods, such as Trinidad Park, must arrest *creeping housing decay* while it is in the early stages of development. People thinking about buying in a neighborhood generally will ride through the community. If potential buyers believe housing decay is on the ascent, they will purchase in a different neighborhood.

Neighborhood conditions are very good in Trinidad Park (Photo 8). The streets are clean and the community is free of trash and rubbish, although two abandoned cars were seen during the windshield survey. Even so, there were no signs of rubbish or graffiti. The park seemed to be in good condition and the basketball nets were up (Photo 9). This is always a good sign. When neighborhoods have youth problems, typically they get manifested on the basketball court. As a result, the hoop and net are often taken down.

Photo 8: Typical Housing and Neighborhood Conditions



The Kensington Avenue, which separates the residential area from the northern commercial side of the neighborhood, detracts from the overall beauty of the neighborhood. Indeed, this thoroughfare projects a negative image of the neighborhood. Signage is also a problem for the neighborhood. It is not clear where the main entrance to the community is located and getting through the area is like traveling through a maze. This is both a strength and weakness. The enclave character of the neighborhood contributes to its safety and security, while the isolation probably creates problems attracting residents. This combined with the age of the housing units might explain why it is losing population.

Yet, this small neighborhood has a very strong asset base. Not only does it have a highly educated population, but the location of the Sisters Hospital Medical Campus, Niagara-Mohawk Utilities Company, and St. Mary School for the Deaf provides the community with a set of potentially important community building partners. Moreover, the large tracts of vacant land provide the community with an opportunity for additional economic development.

### Recommendations

1. Landscape and beautify Kensington from Pauline to Humboldt to change the neighborhood image.
2. Create a grand entrance to the neighborhood at Trinidad Street.
3. Establish a team of residents who will participate in a District program where neighborhood problem properties are identified, mapped and improved.
4. Work with other Masten neighborhoods to develop a building code that establishes minimum standards of exteriors of houses and buildings, including sidewalks, curbs, and lawns.
5. Establish employer-assisted housing program with Sisters Hospital and Niagara-Mohawk.
6. Establish an education program for renters to become better tenants who feel invested in the neighborhood.
7. Landscape and transform the area surrounding the community garden into a passive park.
8. Demolish the vacant structures on Gillette and integrate the lot into a passive park.



## Martin Luther King Jr. Neighborhood

# Martin Luther King Jr.

## ■ Reaching For the Turning Point

Housing and Neighborhood Conditions

<h3>Masten Neighborhood Master Plan</h3> <p><i>"A Community on the Move"</i></p>		Poster no. <b>4/1</b>
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### Site and Situation

The Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) neighborhood is situated in southern border of the Masten neighborhood. The neighborhood's western boundary extends along Route 33 and the Humboldt Parkway. Best Street and Walden form the southern boarder, while East Ferry and Northland form the northern border. Donovan and Klefer represent the eastern boundary.

The focal point of the MLK neighborhood is the Martin Luther King, Jr. Olmsted Park. It is the neighborhood's most important asset and shapes its character. MLK is divided into western and eastern neighborhoods, which are connected by the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor. Collectively, Fillmore Avenue and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park form framework to guide the community building process. MLK is strategically located. Proximity to Route 33 provides a connecting link to all parts of the metropolitan region. Moreover, the neighborhood is close to several important employment centers: downtown Buffalo, Canisius College, Sisters Hospital, Erie County Medical Center, and American Axel.

Map: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Neighborhood



### The People of Martin Luther King, Jr. Neighborhood

The Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood is in deep trouble. No other neighborhood in the Masten District is more threatened. This is problematic because Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood is the



cultural center of Black Buffalo. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Park is the most sacred social space in the African American community. It is the site of the Juneteenth Celebration of slavery's end. It is the favored site for family, school, and organizational reunions. Indeed, most celebrations in the African American community center on Martin Luther King, Jr. Park. The Buffalo Museum of Science has become the town center for the African American community. Whenever there is a need to discuss issues that are important to the African American community, the meetings are always held at the Buffalo Science Museum. Many people make a yearly pilgrimage to the statue of Martin Luther King, Jr. in MLK Park.

Even so, conditions in the neighborhood have reached crisis proportions. During the 1990s, the population in MLK dropped from 5,827 to 4,368, a decline of 25%. The population loss in MLK was greater than in any other neighborhood in the Masten District. About 96% of the residents of MLK are African Americans, the highest proportion of blacks living in any Masten neighborhood.

The neighborhood has a large number of children and youth (34%) and residents in their working years (51%). At the same time, it has large percentage of elders (16%). So, residents at the two extremes of the lifecycle are well represented in this neighborhood. On this point, MLK has the highest proportion (18.2%) of children (5-14) and the highest proportion (10.4%) residents in the 65-74-age cohort. Indeed, MLK has a median age of 25 years, making it the youngest neighborhood in the Masten District. So, in this community you have a big concentration of youth and elders.

Females and non-family households dominate the household structure, and most children live in these types of households. 69% of all households in MLK fall into this category, and 52 percent of these households are with children under 18 years. Married couples head only 26% of the households, and only 9% of these households have children under 18 years. Among Masten neighborhoods, the MLK neighborhood has the highest proportion of low-income groups. Fifty-four percent of the population have incomes below \$20,000 a year, the median household income is only \$18,000 annually, and 37% of the population lives at or below the poverty level. Unemployment is at 9% and the labor force participation rate (47%) is the second lowest in Masten. In all of the socioeconomic indices, the MLK neighborhood ranks near the bottom.

### **Housing and Neighborhood Conditions**

The MLK neighborhood, for planning and community development purposes can be divided into three sub neighborhood units. The neighborhood to the west and east of Fillmore Avenue comprise two neighborhood sub units, while the area south of Northampton, surrounding the MLK Park represents a third neighborhood sub unit.

Housing is one of the most significant assets in the MLK neighborhood. The preservation, rehabilitation, and modernization of housing are critical to the radical transformation of this neighborhood. While some good housing units are found in the MLK neighborhood, most of the housing units are in poor or marginal condition. While some very good housing units are found in the neighborhood, poor housing is omnipresent, and *every street* in the neighborhood has bad housing units interspersed with good units. Such conditions undermine neighborhood optimism and depress housing values.

Nonetheless, the neighborhood has important assets and should become a developmental priority. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, one of Buffalo's Olmsted Parks, anchors the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. The housing stock, while declining, nevertheless is architecturally similar to the units that are so popular on the West Side. These beautiful homes represent an asset, which could become attractive to upwardly mobile citizens, immigrants, and newcomers to the City.

The housing stock in the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood has been neglected and now shows the visible signs of decline. The median year that houses were built in the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood was 1940, with only 110 of the 2,468 housing units in the neighborhood being built in 1960 or later. Most of the new housing units in the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood appear to be concentrated on Woodlawn, on the eastern side of Fillmore Avenue.

**Figure 9: New Housing Units on Woodlawn [located on the eastern side of Fillmore Avenue]**



Most of the housing stock, however, is older units built in 1950 or earlier. A big problem is that about 60% of these houses are renter occupied, and these renter occupied units are dispersed among owner-occupied units. Poor maintenance among most of the housing units in the neighborhood has caused prices to be greatly depressed. The median value of houses in the MLK area is \$26,000. Within this context, most of the owners are long-residents. For example, the median year of occupancy for owner-occupied dwellings is 1971, while the median year of occupancy for renter units is 1995.

The structural nature of this problem lies in the age structure of homeowners in MLK. Forty percent of the units (728) found in the Masten neighborhood are owner occupied. A whopping 62% are owned by residents 60 years and older. The 45 –59 age cohort owns Sixteen percent. Only 22 percent of the units are owned by residents 44 years and younger. Two problems flow from this analysis. The first is that most of these owners probably do not have the discretionary income to maintain their properties. This means that keeping these houses in good repair with appealing facades and residential sites will be challenging. Given the depressed nature of the housing market in this local, resale of the units will be very problematic. Third, unless a successful intervention strategy is formulated, the outmigration will persist.

At the same time, most of the housing units in this neighborhood are large structures that will be expensive to rehabilitate. Yet, this is a built up area with large numbers of vacant lots only on a few streets: Roeder, Box, and on the streets south of Urban. The housing stock is the type of early 20<sup>th</sup> century structures that have been so popular on the West Side. Martin Luther King, Jr. Park and the Fillmore Avenue Commercial District anchor this neighborhood.

**Photo 10: Three Family Home**



**Photo 11: Two Family House**



**Figure 12: One story single-family unit**

### Recommendations

Revitalization in the MLK neighborhood should occur in phases. The first phase should focus on the redevelopment of neighborhoods around the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park. In this phase, the entire neighborhood from Northland to the park will be redeveloped, along with the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor (which will be discussed in detail in the next section). This approach will allow the redevelopment to extend from the neighborhood's major asset, and it will reimage the community. As part of this phase, Woodlawn will be extensively landscaped and streetscaped. Most of the housing on this street has been built within the last ten years and extensive landscaping is the only requirement for improving this part of the neighborhood. After completing phase one, the western part of the neighborhood should be redeveloped, and then the remainder of the neighborhood.

1. Establish a Neighborhood Renaissance Zone (NRZ) to stimulate revitalization of Martin Luther King, Jr. Park community.
2. Urge banks to establish a neighborhood renaissance mortgage program in the NRZ to encourage the purchase of homes in Fillmore-Leroy.
3. Establish a housing rehabilitation and modernization program with loans and grants to all property owners in the NRZ, regardless of income, to spawn the physical improvement of the neighborhood.
4. Establish a home equity assistance program in the NRZ to guarantee equity and to stimulate the purchase of homes in the neighborhood.

5. Establish a *crime bubble* in priority development areas in the NRZ to ensure safety in those places.
6. Establish a team of residents to participate in a District program where problem properties are identified, mapped, and redeveloped.
7. Redevelop the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor to create a positive neighborhood image.
8. Paint the Kensington Expressway railings that front houses located along the Humboldt Parkway.
9. Landscape and beautify the industrial lands that front the houses on Woodlawn.



## Recommendations

The recommendations outlined in this plan are sensitive to the City's economic plight. They are based on the idea of building a partnership among block clubs, neighborhood residents, elected officials, the City administration, the banking community, and businesses and public institutions operating in the Masten District.

Significantly, the recommendations suggest that the Erie County Industrial Development Agency (ECIDA) and the Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation (BERC) must become actively involved in the redevelopment scheme. Redevelopment of the major thoroughfares and commercial corridors are crucial to reimagining the Masten District and restoring its competitive advantage in the regional housing market. The State Department of Transportation must be involved in the effort and ECIDA and BERC must take the lead in the restoration of commercial corridors.

The recommendations also have a legislative dimension. A series of neighborhood development laws should be enacted. The first step in this process should be a thorough evaluation of existing laws and the housing code enforcement process. Then, on the basis of this evaluation, the neighborhood development legislation framework should be strengthened. Moreover, it is necessary to find creative ways to increase the revenue stream in district. A study should be financed that is designed to determine the best way to find funding to support the development and maintenance of public space and to assist in the stabilization of neighborhoods with high percentages of low-income residents living in them. The use of special taxing district for neighborhoods, which are similar to BID, should be explored.

The rehabilitation and modernization of existing housing units and commercial buildings is instrumental to the revitalization of the Masten District. Massive rehabilitation must be the engine that drives the redevelopment process. Some infill housing will be needed, but only the renovation and modernization of existing housing units will change the community's character. The problem is that traditional methods of rehabilitating housing units are too restrictive to work in Masten. There are various market segments in any community that need addressing: homeowners, low-income homeowners and those on restricted income, such as elders; small property investors, especially those with limited resources, and the like. This is a very complex problem.



One important strategy is for the banking community to develop a set of mortgage designed to stimulate development in particular neighborhoods. Attracting new population groups to the Masten District is fundamental to its revitalization. Immigrants, and recent white, black, and Latino college graduates and upwardly mobile professionals should be encouraged to settle in select neighborhoods. A program should be established in select neighborhoods that make buying literally cheaper than renting for the targeted population groups. In locales like the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood, upscale but affordable apartments should be constructed above commercial shops. This not only would increase density along the commercial corridor, but also it would create a unique living experience for upwardly mobile whites, blacks, Asians, and Latinos.

The City should work with the banking community on the development of such packages and to develop a set of special incentives for targeted communities. In such targeted communities, services should be bolstered and a crime bubble placed over the community. The *crime bubble* concept refers to the creation of a special program designed to make the select neighborhoods very safe. Community policing is operationalized, all homes are equipped with burglar alarms, patrol cars canvass the area regularly, and “paid” civilian foot patrols report suspicious activity to the police. Lastly, the City should finance a study of housing rehabilitation that will provide the District with strategies and guidelines for carrying out this massive undertaking.

### Priorities

- Establish a neighborhood *superfund* to finance improvements on properties of those who are not able to afford it, to develop and maintain public spaces, and to fund the management of abandoned properties.
- Develop a strategy for housing renovation that includes in-fill construction that uses the guidelines on housing design review established by the Lower West Side Neighborhood Stabilization Demonstration Project.
- Establish a vacant lot and brown field management program to maintain and keep vacant lots and abandoned buildings.
- Establish a tracking system to identify unkempt vacant land, abandoned houses and buildings and other problem properties.
- Establish a program to provide residents, potential residents, and small property investors with the resources to upgrade and modernize their homes and buildings.
- Develop building codes The establishment of a neighborhood superfund, administered by United Way, the community foundation, or a similar organization, should be explored. Such an approach would facilitate fund raising, grant writing, and other activities designed to generate the additional resources needed for redevelopment.
- Develop Employee assisted housing programs in all neighborhoods with major employers. Aggressive neighborhood development activities should take place in every place where there is an employee assisted housing program.
- The City should bring together the banking community and work with them to develop a set of unique mortgage packages and incentives designed to stimulate residential development in select Masten neighborhoods. In particular, low-interest loans should be made available for home improvement [repairs, modernization, and rehabilitation] in targeted neighborhoods.

- Redevelopment of the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood is crucial to the successful redevelopment of the Masten District. Named in honor of one America's greatest heroes, this neighborhood is the cultural center of Black Buffalo and is a symbol of the *state of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream* in Buffalo. Already, significant resources have been poured into Martin Luther King, Jr. Park and the Buffalo Museum of Science. This effort should now be extended to the neighborhood. The idea is to create a *MLK Dream Neighborhood Initiative*. Special incentives should be developed for settling in the neighborhood and the goal will be to create it as cross-class, multi-racial community, where King's dream of an integrated, harmonious society can be seen. Outreach should be made to the immigrant community and recent college graduates as cornerstones of the new housing market.
- The Redevelopment of Fillmore Avenue should be considered part of the transformation of Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood.
- Redevelopment of East Delavan Commercial Corridor, Jefferson Avenue Commercial Corridor, and the Fillmore Avenue Commercial Corridor, including the Martin Luther King, Jr. Commercial District will jump start the development of the neighborhoods surrounding them. These are key thoroughfares and commercial corridors. Their development is central to the transformation of the Masten District. Business Improvement Districts should be established in each of these areas.
- Development of an Artist Colony in the Tri-Main area and the redevelopment of Fillmore Avenue from Main Street to the Expressway will completely transform this part of Masten. This effort should be viewed as part of the creation of the Artist Colony. The owners of Tri-Main are interested in this type of project and the Main Street section of the area is already thriving. This represents an opportunity to push development from Main Street up Fillmore Avenue. This development combined with efforts to redevelop the Central Park Plaza could stimulate the redevelopment of the entire Fillmore-Leroy neighborhood. The development of an Artist Colony could become a complimentary tourist venue for the Darwin Martin House. Within this context, this portion of Fillmore Avenue should be redeveloped to compliment the Artist Colony and to attract visitors to the area.
- The Glenny Projects should be landscaped and turned into a passive park until commercially developed. The plywood window covers should be replaced with decorative ones, and benches placed on the grounds.
- A Strategy should be developed for strengthening the district population by encouraging young college graduates and other upwardly mobile groups, from across the racial spectrum, to settle in the Masten District.

### District wide Recommendations

**Potential:** Neighborhoods are housing markets that must compete successfully with other neighborhoods to survive. If the housing market is strong, the neighborhood will thrive because it will attract residents and investors. If the housing market is weak, the neighborhood ceases to be a good place to live, work, and raise a family. It will start to decline, lose population and will not be able to attract residents and investors. The Masten District has a weak housing market but it also has a housing stock and urban design that could compete successfully with any community in Erie County.

**Goal:** To convert the Masten District into a housing market that competes successfully with other neighborhoods in Buffalo and Erie County. The District is in the grips of a severe housing crisis. While there are many good housing units, much of the housing stock has deteriorated. The strategy is to launch

an aggressive, highly coordinated campaign that will improve the neighborhood conditions dramatically and renovate existing housing stock significantly.

The Masten District is composed of six neighborhoods—Hamlin Park, Delavan-Grider, Fillmore-Leroy, Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, Cold Springs, and Trinidad. These are general recommendations that apply to all district neighborhoods.

- Establish a set minimum standard for exteriors of houses and buildings, including sidewalks, curbs, and lawns.
- Target investments based on carefully established priorities in order to maximize impact.
- Transform the neighborhood by developing block-by-block.

### The Fillmore-Leroy Neighborhood

**Potential:** Anchoring the community is a vibrant commercial frontage along its Main Street border and the Tri-Main Center, one of the most exciting mixed-usage facilities in the world. It has a charming housing stock similar to the one found in the popular Elmwood community. The neighborhood's proximity to Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin Darwin House combined with the presence of the Tri-Main Center makes the neighborhood a potential tourist venue. Fillmore-Leroy is a neighborhood with great potential.

**Goal:** The goal is to launch an aggressive and innovative program to revitalize and modernize Fillmore-Leroy so that it becomes a great place to live, work, visit, and raise a family. A serious housing crisis exists in Fillmore-Leroy. Unless immediate steps are taken to improve housing and neighborhood conditions, the process of decline will greatly accelerate. If this happens, by 2025, housing and neighborhood conditions will be so bad that the revitalization of the neighborhood will be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible.

- Establish *five planning areas* in the Fillmore-Leroy neighborhood to facilitate planning and development.
- Establish a neighborhood renaissance zone (NRZ) to stimulate revitalization of Fillmore-Leroy.
- Urge banks to establish a Mortgage Program in the NRZ to encourage the purchase of homes in Fillmore-Leroy.
- Establish a housing rehabilitation and modernization program that provides loans and grants to all property owners regardless of income, to spawn the physical improvement of the neighborhood.
- Establish a home equity assistance program in the NRZ to stimulate the purchase of homes in the neighborhood.
- Establish a *crime bubble* in priority development areas in the NRZ to ensure safety in those places.
- Establish a team of residents to participate in a District neighborhood problem identification program where problem properties are identified, mapped and upgraded.

- Develop the Tri-Main area into an artist colony to attract artists, musicians, writers, and others who wish to live in such a creative environment.
- Develop Fillmore Avenue, from Main to the Kensington Expressway to provide goods and services for local residents and to provide shops, restaurants, and activities that cater to tourist and workers in the area.
- Landscape and beautify the Glenney Projects until it is developed.

### The Delavan-Grider Neighborhood

**Potential:** The Delavan-Grider neighborhood is a residential neighborhood where there is one of the largest concentrations of businesses and industries in western New York. By a wide margin, it has the largest daytime population in Masten. Many houses in Delavan-Grider are smaller than in other Masten neighborhoods, which mean the community has great potential as a starter neighborhood for young families. If economic development can be linked to residential development, this neighborhood could become one of the most prosperous in Erie County.

**Goal:** To reconstruct the most deteriorated and rundown streets in the Delavan-Grider neighborhood, its major thoroughfares—East Delavan, Grider, and East Ferry. These corridors represent a major barrier to the neighborhood's development.

- Redevelop the East Delavan commercial corridor from Chelsea to the American Axel Plant.
- Redevelop Grider and East Ferry to create a positive image of the neighborhood.
- Urge the City of Buffalo to regularly maintain the William L. Gaiter Parkway.
- Establish a team of residents to participate in a District neighborhood program where problem properties are mapped, identified and improved.
- Establish a rehabilitation/modernization and infill-housing program in the area south of Scajaquada.
- Formulate a plan to redevelop the commercial and residential area west of Grider.
- Develop a program for vacant lot and brownfield management for the industrial/commercial area west of Grider to make the area attractive and visually appealing.
- Work with large companies and institutions for an employer-assisted housing program within the neighborhood.
- Establish an education program to make renters become more responsible tenants who are invested in the neighborhood.
- Establish a marketing campaign to promote Delavan-Grider as a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

- Work with the other Masten Neighborhoods to develop a building code that establishes minimum exterior standards for houses and buildings, including sidewalks, curbs, and lawns.

### The Hamlin Park Neighborhood

**Potential:** Hamlin Park is the only predominately African American community in Western New York with a historical district-designation and has the potential to become a major tourist attraction. This, combined with its proximity to Canisius College, makes Hamlin Park a neighborhood with great potential.

**Goal:** Make Hamlin Park a tourist attraction. Reinforce the potentials of the community and revitalize the remaining portions of the neighborhood to make Hamlin Park one of the most attractive and competitive neighborhoods in Buffalo and Erie County.

- Establish a team of residents to participate in a District program where problem properties in the neighborhood are identified and mapped.
- Work with the other Masten neighborhoods to develop a building code that establishes minimum standards for the exterior of houses and buildings, including sidewalks, curbs, and lawns.
- Urge area banks to form collaboration with Canisius College to increase homeownership in Hamlin Park for graduates and staff of the College.
- Establish low-interest home improvement and rehabilitation loan programs for all property owners, regardless of income level.
- Target major thoroughfares in Hamlin Park for landscaping and streetscaping in order to turn them into attractive corridors that produce a positive image for Hamlin Park :
- Establish a marketing campaign to promote Hamlin Park as a great place to live, work, and raise a family.
- Establish a housing rehabilitation, modernization and infill program in the area, south of East Ferry.
- Construct new housing units on vacant lots on Jefferson near Hamlin and Brunswick.
- Establish an education program to make renters become more responsible tenants who are invested in the neighborhood.

### Trinidad Park Neighborhood

**Potential:** Trinidad Park is one of Buffalo's best-kept secrets. It is a unique, self-contained community with well-maintained housing and excellent neighborhood conditions. It is home to Sisters Hospital, Niagara-Mohawk, and St. Mary's School for the Deaf. The neighborhood has significant tracts of vacant land, isolated from the residential area, which could be used for industrial or commercial development. Trinidad Park is a good residential area with great economic development potential.

**Goal:** The goal is to reinforce the neighborhood and to promote it as a great place to live and raise a family. The Trinidad Park neighborhood is an attractive one with well-maintained houses, well-kept recreational areas, and clean streets. Yet, the neighborhood is not competing with other neighborhoods in the City and region. During the 1990s Trinidad Park lost 23 per cent of its population. Even so, it still retains the lowest vacancy rate in Masten.

- Landscape and beautify Kensington from Pauline to Humboldt to change the neighborhood image.
- Create a grand entrance to the neighborhood at Trinidad Street.
- Establish a team of residents who will participate in a District program where neighborhood problem properties are identified, mapped and improved.
- Work with other Masten neighborhoods to develop a building code that establishes minimum standards of exteriors of houses and buildings, including sidewalks, curbs, and lawns.
- Establish employer-assisted housing program with Sisters Hospital and Niagara-Mohawk.
- Establish an education program for renters to become better tenants who feel invested in the neighborhood.
- Landscape and transform the area surrounding the community garden into a passive park.
- Demolish the vacant structures on Gillette and integrated the lot into the passive park.

### The Martin Luther King, Jr. Park Neighborhood

**Potential:** The Martin Luther King, Jr. Park is one of the most important neighborhoods Buffalo. Named in honor of one of this country's great leaders and anchored by an Olmsted Park and the region's Natural Science Museum, the Martin Luther, King, Jr. neighborhood is a regional asset.

**Goal:** The goal is to radically transform the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park (MLK) neighborhood and make it as one of the most important assets of metropolitan Buffalo. A serious housing crisis exists in the MLK



neighborhood. Although good housing units are found in the community, including a number of new homes on Woodlawn, nevertheless, much of the housing stock is deteriorating. During the 1990s, MLK lost 25 percent of its residents. Many of the homeowners in MLK are aging, its housing is the cheapest in Masten, and 64 percent of the homes are owned by people sixty years of age or older. Having a dilapidated, rundown neighborhood named in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. is unacceptable.

- Establish a neighborhood renaissance zone (NRZ) to stimulate revitalization of Martin Luther King, Jr. Park community.
- Urge banks to establish a neighborhood renaissance mortgage program in the NRZ to encourage the purchase of homes in Fillmore-Leroy.
- Establish a housing rehabilitation and modernization program with loans and grants to all property owners in the NRZ, regardless of income, to spawn the physical improvement of the neighborhood.
- Establish a home equity assistance program in the NRZ to guarantee equity and to stimulate the purchase of homes in the neighborhood.
- Establish a crime bubble in priority development areas in the NRZ to ensure safety in those places.
- Establish a team of residents to participate in a District program where problem properties are identified, mapped, and redeveloped.
- Redevelop the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor to create a positive neighborhood image.
- Paint the Kensington Expressway railings that front houses located along the Humboldt Parkway.
- Landscape and beautify the industrial lands that front the houses on Woodlawn.
- Establish an aggressive rehabilitation/modernization and infill-housing program in the area south of Northampton to redevelop the area adjacent to MLK Park.
- Establish a marketing campaign to promote the MLK neighborhood to immigrants and young upwardly mobile blacks, Latinos, and whites.

## Major Thoroughfares

**Potential:** Major thoroughfares are the windows through which people see neighborhoods. If the thoroughfares are shabby, dilapidated, rundown, and foreboding, then people will believe the neighborhoods surrounding the thoroughfares are also dilapidated and rundown. Beautiful thoroughfares increase the value and marketability of nearby neighborhoods.

**Goal:** Major thoroughfares in the Masten District are the most dilapidated and rundown streets in the community. The goal is to transform these thoroughfares into attractive and energetic arteries that produce positive images of the neighborhood that surround them.

The Masten District has seven thoroughfares that function as image-makers for the community: Jefferson, Fillmore, East Delavan, Kensington, Humboldt, and Grider.

- To landscape and streetscape thoroughfares in order to radically reconstruct them.
- To establish building codes requiring high standards for upkeep of establishments along the thoroughfares, including signage, exterior of structures, sidewalks, and curbs.
- To enact legislation that allows the Mayor's Impact Team to make necessary improvements on properties that do not respond to citations and to be able to bill the owners for the cost of improvement. Grants will be given to those who cannot afford the improvements.
- To urge the City to establish a district-based Enforcement Team composed of trained volunteers that will monitor the upkeep of thoroughfares and name violators.
- To urge the City's Office of Strategic Planning (OSP) to commission an architectural firm to develop a landscaping plan for each thoroughfare and to cost out the landscaping project. The OSP should also outline a plan for paying for this project

