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# BUFFALO TURNING THE CORNER



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# **BUFFALO TURNING THE CORNER**

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Once the study neighborhoods were selected, a Community Advisory Committee was assembled to create interactive links between the research team and the community and to assist in the recruitment of residents and stakeholders to participate in the focus groups. The members of this committee were Ruth Bryant, Ellicott; Barbara Singletary, Ellicott; Catherine Watkins, Ellicott; Gail V. Wells, Ellicott; Denise Barr, Fruit Belt; Ben Cashaw, Fruit Belt; Zaid B. Islam, Fruit Belt; Dejjia Jones, Fruit Belt; India Watson, Fruit Belt; Brooke Densing, Lower West Side; Edwin Jackson, Lower West Side; and Jack Norton, Lower West Side. Finally, we thank the fifty-two community members who were asked to review and comment on the final draft of this report.

## ABOUT THE CENTER

The Center for Urban Studies is a research, neighborhood planning, and community development institute which focuses on the transformation of vulnerable, underdeveloped, and marginalized neighborhoods into communities of opportunity. We seek to achieve this goal by redeveloping community within the broader context of turning the urban metropolis into a *just city*.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Overview

The *Buffalo Turning the Corner Project* is part of a national project administered by the Urban Institute. Launched in January 2016, the National Turning the Corner Project pilots a research model that monitors neighborhood change, drives informed government action and supports displacement prevention and inclusive revitalization. The project is an initiative of the Urban Institute's National Neighborhood Indicator Partnership and has five partners implementing it at a local level: Buffalo, Detroit, Milwaukee, Phoenix, and the Twin Cities.

*Buffalo Turning the Corner* aims to understand how local housing and development policies and practices drive neighborhood change, especially in neighborhoods at-risk of becoming unaffordable to low-income groups. The objectives are (1) to identify those factors producing undesirable neighborhood change; (2) develop a strategy for recognizing the most at-risk neighborhoods; and (3) design an approach to monitoring vulnerable communities and preventing unwanted changes from occurring in them. An assumption informing the study is that unwelcome change is happening in some Buffalo neighborhoods, and that insights gained from their examination can guide the development of a monitoring system and community toolkit to mitigate and prevent such adverse changes.

In this study, undesirable change is neighborhood-scaled changes that (a) threaten to displace low-income residents; (b) threaten the sustainability of businesses, stores, institutions and facilities that provide for the needs, wants, and desires of low-income residents; (c) make the community unfriendly to families and children; and (d) make high demand neighborhoods inaccessible to low-income groups living outside them.

The *Buffalo Turning the Corner Project* builds on the 2017 City's *Buffalo Housing Opportunity Strategy* (czb LLC 2017). The Housing Opportunity Strategy proposed a market-centric approach to residential development that links public investments to private investments by focusing on neighborhoods where market demand is growing. *Turning the Corner Project* builds on this report by understanding how institutional expansion and neighborhood upgrading can lead to the displacement of low-income residents in soft and low housing market demand

localities. *Turning the Corner* also recommends a set of policy tools that can prevent or mitigate unwanted neighborhood change and the dislodgement of low-income residents.

This report examines the unwanted change in neighborhoods with weak housing market demand, but where residents still confront the dangers of residential displacement. In this context, the study centers central city dynamics, although it recognizes the importance of the racial disparities between city and suburbs. An examination of such inequality, however, is beyond the scope of this study. Likewise, many Buffalo neighborhoods face huge issues with poor rental housing, absentee landlord, abandonment, unkempt vacant lots, and unhealthy conditions. An examination of these problems and what to do about them is also beyond the scope of this study.

*Buffalo Turning the Corner* privileges those neighborhoods where the housing market is recovering, even if demand in those communities are still weak. The study's recommendations are intended to provide a framework to guide the creation of more inclusive, diverse, and equitable communities in soft and low demand housing markets, as well as in neighborhoods where market demand is strong. The report consists of six sections. The first part includes an introduction, while the second part explains the process used to identify the three study neighborhoods and details the methodology. The third part analyzes the three study neighborhood, while sections four and five discuss strategies for monitoring neighborhood change and mitigating and preventing undesirable change. The final section presents conclusions and recommendations.

## **Methodology**

The methodology for the Buffalo TTC project involved three phases. The first phase consisted of using a community participation model to select the three study neighborhoods. The second phase entailed a detailed analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected from the three study communities. The third phase involved gathering feedback on the results from community participants. Data were drawn from several primary and secondary sources during each stage of the analysis, including the US Census, the City of Buffalo, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, other state and federal agencies, commercial databases, windshield surveys, and focus groups with residents and other stakeholders. Data triangulation made it possible to gain a holistic view of trends at each stage of the analysis.

## **The Study Neighborhoods**

This section of the report examines the scope of neighborhood transition and residential displacement in the three study areas. We examine four dimensions of life in each study neighborhood: *general neighborhood trends, population and housing characteristics at the census block group level, the subsidized housing population, and neighborhood quality of life and amenities.*

### ***Lower West Side Neighborhood***

The Lower West Side neighborhood consists of eight census block groups located in parts of three census tracts (69.02 BG2, 69.02 BG4, 71.01 BG1, 71.02 BG2, 71.01 BG3, 71.01 BG4, 71.02 BG2, and 71.02 BG3). It is situated west of downtown Buffalo and southeast of a major anchor institution, D'Youville College. In 2016, the Lower West Side was the most ethnically and racially diverse of the three study neighborhoods. It has a sizeable Latinx population (50%) which consist mostly of Puerto Ricans. The community has a sizable white population (36%) and a smaller number of blacks (14%). Renters make up 74% of the neighborhood's households, and housing cost is a burden to many families. For example, in all the block groups, median gross rents were at or above 30 % of household income.

Between 2010 and 2016 the neighborhood population dropped by slightly more than 13%. The decreases are most dramatic among African-Americans, where their numbers fell by slightly more than 77% during the period. The neighborhood lost housing as well as people. During these six years, the Lower West Side lost about 14% of its housing stock, with 50% of the lost units being vacant ones. Concurrently, the median value of owner-occupied housing rose by slightly more than 90% in the period, while median rents increased by just under 16%.

Investments in the neighborhood grew during the twelve years between 2004 and 2016. These investments consist of increases in the annual unit housing sales prices, the issuance of permits for asbestos removal and demolitions, and housing improvements. There are permitting activities between 2005 and 2010 related to asbestos removal and demolitions. Property owners did this work to prepare sites in the neighborhood for revitalization. The pattern of tax foreclosures in the community suggests that it also contributed to an acceleration of neighborhood change and residential displacement.

Neighborhood upgrading is taking place in the Lower West Side, and distinct clustering of demolition, investment, and intervention by private parties, institutional actors, and local government are driving this transitional process. These improvements in the living environment are disproportionately impacting people of color and other low-income residents. Dislocation of low-income groups and people of color is threatening the community's racial and cultural diversity.

The two block groups in 71.02 BG 2 and 71.02 BG 3 deserve special mention. These two block groups are close to downtown and situated in a high demand market area. This part of the neighborhood has a predominantly white population. Most of the residents have a high school education, some college, and a higher than average income. Renters in these two block groups have housing cost burdens. Overall, across the Lower West Side, increases in building permits for eliminating asbestos and knocking down dilapidated structures appears to be a prelude to residential upgrading.

The presence of site-base subsidized units, and landlords who accept housing choice vouchers (HCV), protected the poorest residents from the adverse effects of increases in housing costs triggered by neighborhood revitalization. Lastly, in focus groups, residents and stakeholders said the lack of adequate services for youth, low-income families and other at-risk populations (e.g., quality schools, options to age-in-place, access to health care, and employment opportunities) also contributed to their outmigration.

### ***The Ellicott Neighborhood***

The Ellicott neighborhood consists of three census block groups located in one census tract (14.02 BG1, 14.02 BG2, and 14.02 BG4). It is situated east of downtown Buffalo and south of Broadway. Between 2010 and 2016, the Ellicott population declined by slightly more than 28%. The neighborhood's African-American population declined by slightly more than 33% during the period. In contrast, white and Hispanic residents grew by a little more than 507% and 144% respectively, with their growth occurring mostly in BG4.

Renters (85%) dominate this neighborhood, and most families are housing cost burdened. In all but one block group (14.02 BG4), median gross rents were at or above 30% of household income. Families that pay 30% or more of their income on housing are considered housing cost burdened. Thus, the neighborhood's rising housing cost is a source of concern. Between 2010 and



2016, the median value of owner-occupied housing rose by more than 7%, while US census data show that median rents grew by just over 11%. So, the population is declining, while rents and housing prices are increasing.

In the block groups where rents and housing prices are the highest, there is a distinct pattern of demolitions and institutional investments preceding increases in rents and housing values. A growing worry among residents is that their community will become unaffordable and lose its identity as a black community. At the same time, the significant clustering of site-based subsidized units, and landlords who accept HCV in these neighborhoods suggest that many low-income residents will remain. Even so, the community proximity to downtown and the growth of its white and Latinx population are causes of concern.

Lastly, in focus groups, residents and stakeholders discussed the lack of facilities that serve youth, low-income families, and other at-risk populations. One renter said, “Our children don't see no future; that's why they don't stay here.” Other focus group participants echoed this sentiment. By itself, affordable housing does not check all of the boxes that constitute a high quality of life in a neighborhood. There is a need for additional supportive services for youth, seniors, and other at-risk groups for a community to be family friendly and sustainable.

### ***The Fruit Belt Neighborhood***

The Fruit Belt neighborhood consists of four census block groups located in one census tract (31 BG1, 31 BG2, 31 BG3, and 31 BG4). It is situated north of downtown Buffalo and east of Main Street. The neighborhood is also home to the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC), a world-class medical complex known for its clinical care, research, and education. The BNMC is located in census block group BG4, and it is the driver of neighborhood development in the Fruit Belt. Consequently, discussions of institutional “encroachment” by the BNMC are privileged in all focus group discussions.

The Fruit Belt is 86% black, but their numbers are dropping. In 1970, for example, about 9,000 blacks lived in the Fruit Belt, but today, less than 2,500 African-Americans reside there. The number of whites living in the Fruit Belt remains small (12%), but their numbers are increasing. Overall, the Fruit Belt population declined by slightly more than 15% between 2010 and 2016, with the decrease being highest among African-Americans.

Renters dominate this community, and they make up 55% of the households. These are mostly low-income tenants that are housing cost burdened. In all but one of the neighborhood block groups (31 BG4), median gross rents were at or above 30 % of household income. Although low-income renters dominate the Fruit Belt, dislocation nevertheless endangers them. In the six years between 2010 and 2016, the number of renter-occupied units fell by over 35%. On the flipside, the homeowner group is stable, and in some census blocks, it is growing.

The continued growth and development of the BNMC are spawning increases in property value across the Fruit Belt. For example, the median value of owner-occupied housing rose by slightly more than 93% between 2010 and 2016, while median rents increased by almost 40%. The highest rents are in the census tract BG 4, the location of the BNMC, and the community's only site-based subsidized housing units.

Growth and development of the BNMC are stimulating residential upgrading in the Fruit Belt. For example, between 2009 and 2016, permitting for asbestos removal and demolitions and housing improvements in the block groups east of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus suggest conditions are on the upswing. Concurrently, field visits to the Fruit Belt indicate that such upgrading is still in its nascent stage. On the negative side, the same area is experiencing many in-rem tax foreclosures. It thus appears that that in-rem tax foreclosures are accompanying neighborhood improvements in the Fruit Belt. Neighborhood improvements are occurring in the Fruit Belt, although it is moving at a slow and uneven pace throughout the community.

Destroying dilapidated structures, removing asbestos from older homes and other structures, while simultaneously foreclosing on in-rem properties is fueling these improvements in the Fruit Belt. At the same time, the population is declining at an alarming rate, and those being forced out are among the community's poorest residents. Thus, while the Fruit Belt will likely remain a predominantly black enclave, it's class composition appears to be altering. On the positive side, the existence of site-base subsidized units, and landlords who accept HCVs will protect some low-income residents from dislocation. However, even the high cost of neighborhood housing endanger these subsidized units. The temptation for property owners will be to convert these subsidized units to more profitable housing types. For example, the failed efforts of St. Johns Church to sell McCarley Gardens, a low-income housing complex to the University at Buffalo illustrates this threat.

## **Monitoring Neighborhood Change: Neighborhood Indicators**

The *Buffalo Turning the Corner* initiative recommends building an early warning system to monitor undesirable neighborhood changes in areas where housing dislocation threatens low-income groups. Displacement is problematic in locales where the residential transition is causing market demand to increase. The slow, incremental growth of community transition sometimes masks the dislocation danger. For this reason, cities should develop an early warning system to detect unwanted changes while they are still nascent.

The neighborhoods in this study are in soft and low housing market demand areas, which are near high market demand communities, downtown, or anchor institutions. Although similar, the displacement danger operates differently in each study neighborhood. The variety of dislocation dangers reinforces the need for localities to have early warning systems to detect unwanted change.

### ***A Neighborhood Early Warning Monitoring System***

Neighborhood monitoring consists of four interactive stages. The first stage consists of identifying communities where increased market demand is putting low-income residents at-risk of dislodgement. The second stage is when the establishment of a surveillance system takes place in localities, where the danger of displacement is the greatest. In the third step, the areas where dislocation might be happening are studied. In the final stage, if the dislocation threat-level warrants it, the City or neighborhood groups implement mitigation plans or strategies to reverse dislodgement. The early warning system uses four levels.

1. The first level identifies communities with low-income populations, which are susceptible to dislocation, such as blacks and Latinx.
2. The second level determines if demographic shifts are taking place, which is consistent with neighborhood upgrading and renewal.
3. The extent to which rents, housing prices, and property values are increasing in a neighborhood represents the third level.
4. In the final analytical level, a fine-grained analysis occurs in census tracts with high scores (roughly in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile).

## Mitigating and Preventing Undesirable Neighborhood Change and Displacement: The Community Tool Kit

*The Buffalo Turning the Corner* initiative aims to construct guidelines, which the City government, practitioners, and community activists can use to develop equitable, diverse, and inclusive neighborhoods. Buffalo is on the rise, but it is still experiencing slow economic growth and intense competition from the suburbs for the population. In this situation, the temptation to minimize or ignore issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion in residential development is high among City officials. The City must resist the temptation to allow land developers, and market dynamics to drive neighborhood development (Florida, 2017). The community toolkit contains policy options that can prevent or mitigate unwanted neighborhood change. Because market conditions are different in each residential area where the housing displacement danger exists, the toolkit policy options will vary based on the particularities in each locality.

The strategy for *high demand markets* includes the use of tools such as (1) inclusionary zoning; (2) the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority (BMHA) establishing *exception payment standards* for housing choice vouchers (HCV); (3) deed restrictions; (4) increasing subsidized housing in these locales; (5) adopting below-market-rate housing ordinances to ensure that housing opportunities are available for low-income populations in high market demand neighborhoods; (6) revision of existing housing foreclosure policy to provide more protection for low-income owners and; (7) the adoption of “Just Cause” eviction ordinances to protect tenants from evictions for improper evictions.

The strategy for *moderate demand markets* includes (1) establishing community land trusts; (2) inclusionary zoning; (3) BMHA setting exception payment standards for HCV; (4) deed restrictions; (5) increasing the number of subsidized housing in these locales and; (6) the adoption of below market rate housing ordinances. The strategy for *soft and low demand markets* includes considering the use of tools such as, (1) deed restrictions; (2) establishing community land trusts; (3) the adoption of below market rate housing ordinances; (4) the use of New York State Housing Trust Fund resources; (5) the formation of limited equity cooperatives and other forms of cooperative housing; (6) the review of existing housing foreclosure policy and; (7) the adoption of “Just Cause” eviction ordinances.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The *Buffalo Turning the Corner Project* is part of a national project administered by the Urban Institute. Launched in January 2016, the *National Turning the Corner Project* pilots a research model that monitors neighborhood change. *Buffalo Turning the Corner* aims to understand how a City's approach to housing and neighborhood development drives the neighborhood change process, especially areas threatened by gentrification and displacement. The objectives are to (1) to identify the causes of undesirable neighborhood change; (2) devise a strategy for identifying the most at-risk neighborhoods and; (3) design a method of monitoring vulnerable communities and preventing unwanted changes from taking place in them.

The intent is to provide a framework to guide cities in sustainable, equitable, and inclusive development of housing and neighborhoods. The project identified three areas to learn how residential upgrading triggers gentrification and displacement: the Lower West Side, Ellicott, and the Fruit Belt. The study's findings led to the following conclusions.

1. Undesirable neighborhood change consists of the displacement of low-income residents, or cultural and commercial changes occurring in communities that make them “unfriendly” to youth, families, or individuals with special needs, or a combination of both. Housing market dynamics drive these unwelcomed neighborhood changes. The City of Buffalo *facilitates* market-based development but does not lead it. In this setting, the actions of developers and property-owners fuel neighborhood upgrading and community development, with the city implementing policies that aid their activities.
2. Neighborhood change is a complex process that unfolds differently within and across neighborhoods. Unwanted neighborhood change, for example, operated differently in each of the study neighborhoods. In the Lower West Side, a more traditional type of gentrification and displacement took place. In this community, as higher income whites entered the area, increases in housing prices and rents started to dislodge blacks, Latinx, and other low-income groups from the neighborhood.

In Ellicott, the pattern was similar but took place only in one census block group. In that block group closest to downtown, a traditional model of gentrification is starting to occur. Higher income whites, along with Latinx, are moving into a predominantly black enclave, precipitating the outmigration of lower income blacks. The distinction is that the block group is turning into a racially mixed residential pocket, with a social class structure that is becoming less diverse. In both the Lower West Side and Ellicott, the catalyzation of market forces because of proximity to downtown is bringing about neighborhood change.

In the Fruit Belt, another category of gentrification and displacement is underway. In this neighborhood, the growth and development of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus are

generating market dynamics, which are causing property values to rise. Land speculation is so rampant in this neighborhood that the Buffalo Common Council imposed a ban on development until the forging of a more holistic plan of community revitalization. Regardless, market forces are still causing housing prices and rentals to rise, which is forcing out many of the lowest income residents. Meanwhile, outside investors own most of the land and property in the community. When the City completely lifts its ban, the Fruit Belt might be overwhelmed by a tidal wave of market-based development.

3. A housing displacement danger exists in those Buffalo neighborhoods where market demand is growing. This problem is worsening, and policy-makers, practitioners, and community activists must pursue aggressive actions to stop it. Otherwise, the dislodgement of low-income blacks and Latinx will persist. Institutional expansion and residential upgrading endanger the three study neighborhoods. In these communities, displacement threatens those residents even though housing demand is weak. The reason those neighborhoods are clustered in the shadow of downtown Buffalo, where institutional expansion, commercial development, and residential upgrading produce market dynamics that make low-income residents susceptible to dislocation (City of Buffalo, 2003: 11).
4. A combination of private investment and government action are spurring neighborhood upgrading. A cluster of demolition, institutional investment, and intervention by the local government are what facilitates residential improvement. These resultant neighborhood changes generate increases in housing costs that adversely affect blacks, Latinx, and low-income residents more than upwardly mobile whites.
5. The issuance of permits, particularly for asbestos removal and demolitions, in areas where market demand is growing is a forerunner to neighborhood upgrading ignited by property owners. Moreover, steady investments in housing improvement and housing transactions are associated with an increased market demand that spurs increases in housing prices and rents.
6. The process of undesirable neighborhood change occurs unevenly in neighborhoods, and it proceeds in a slow, incremental manner, which is often difficult to detect in its early stages of development. For example, in the Ellicott neighborhood, residential upgrading clusters mostly in census block three, while the pattern is complexly different in the Fruit Belt. In that community, the dynamic growth and development of the BNMC (BG4) are triggering neighborhoods upgrades mostly in adjacent census blocks. However, because of their proximity to the medical campus, all census tracts are experiencing increases in property value and land speculation.
7. Neighborhoods close to anchor institutions, such as D'Youville College and Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, are susceptible to residential displacement. A combination of institutional expansion and residential upgrading will trigger increases in rents, property values, and housing prices, which, in turn, will make low-income residents increasingly susceptible to residential displacement.

8. Low-income renters of color are the group most at-risk of displacement in neighborhoods where market demand is increasing and where housing is becoming unaffordable. Most low-income households are burdened by housing costs, with many paying more than 50% of their income on a place to live. Consequently, the slightest increases in rent can push them out of a community. The exception, of course, is those low-income residents residing in site-based Section 8 housing units and those receiving subsidized rent through HCV. The presence of site-based subsidized housing and landlords who accept housing choice vouchers protect these low-income residents from displacement in neighborhoods undergoing residential upgrading or a combination of institutional expansion and neighborhood transition.
9. The decline in stores, shops, and facilities that serve low-income youth and families and other at-risk populations make neighborhoods “unfriendly” for low-income families and individuals. New development tends to cater to the service demands of a more transient population consisting of a college-age cohort, professionals and members of the creative class, young adults without children, and empty nesters. The presence of these new residents alters the traditional neighborhood character of areas in transition, making them less family friendly.
10. A unique set of community development problems exist in the Fruit Belt neighborhood. This community has experienced tremendous population loss. In 1970, more than 9,000 African-Americans lived in the area. Today less than 2000 blacks reside in the neighborhood. Many rental properties have been eliminated, excluding large site-based subsidized properties located in BG4. Homeowners now dominate the locale. The cluster of in-rem tax foreclosures is a contributor to the outmigration, along with the demolition of hundreds of housing units. In the Fruit Belt, unlike other neighborhoods in the study, displacement is driven by institutional expansion.
11. Crime in the three study neighborhoods occurs mostly on commercial corridors rather than in residential areas. The stigmatization of these locales as dangerous and crime-ridden enclaves is not valid.

## **Recommendations**

1. The City should develop an early warning neighborhood monitoring system. Initially, the system should monitor only those neighborhoods where the threat of displacement is high. The monitoring system must have the capacity to study those areas where dislocations and unwanted changes are occurring. After identifying such sites, a rectification plan should be initiated to mitigate the adverse changes. At a later date, the City should expand the monitoring system to include all Buffalo neighborhoods. This expansion will involve the establishment of indicators to measure the unwanted change in undeveloped and marginalized communities.

2. The City should identify a local organization or university to design and operate the monitoring system. The institution or organization overseeing the monitoring system should have the capacity to conduct studies of those locales where unwanted neighborhood changes are taking place.
3. The City of Buffalo should take a more proactive role in guiding neighborhood development and center the formulation of policies aiming to create inclusive, diverse, and equitable communities. These progressive policies will require formulating intentional strategies to control neighborhood housing market dynamics
4. *Turning the Corner Project* is a study of the neighborhoods that are threatened by gentrification and displacement. Many Buffalo neighborhoods are underdeveloped, and the marginalized communities need revitalizing. The city should prioritize formulating regeneration strategies to improve residential conditions in those neighborhoods.

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**Table 3.1.4:** 2012-2017 Lower West Side Population in Subsidized Housing

**Table 3.1.5:** 2012-2017 Lower West Side Characteristics of Subsidized Housing Units

**Table 3.2.1:** Estimated Change in Fair Market Rents for the Ellicott Neighborhood

**Table 3.2.2:** 2010-2016 Population Characteristics for the Ellicott Neighborhood

**Table 3.2.3:** 2010-2016 Housing Characteristics for the Ellicott Neighborhood

**Table 3.2.4:** 2012-2017 Ellicott Neighborhood Population in Subsidized Housing

**Table 3.2.5:** 2012-2017 Ellicott Neighborhood Characteristics of Subsidized Housing Units

**Table 3.3.1:** Estimated Change in Fair Market Rents for the Fruit Belt

**Table 3.3.2:** 2010-2016 Population Characteristics for the Fruit Belt

**Table 3.3.3:** 2010-2016 Housing Characteristics for the Fruit Belt

**Table 3.3.4:** 2012-2017 Fruit Belt Population in Subsidized Housing

**Table 3.3.5:** 2012-2017 Fruit Belt Characteristics of Subsidized Housing Units

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Building vibrant, healthy communities anchored by quality, affordable housing is central to making Buffalo a more prosperous and sustainable city. Neighborhoods and housing are interactive places that influence the life chances and socioeconomic outcomes of individuals and families (Sampson, Morenoff, Gannon-Rowley, 2002; Sampson, 2012; UB Regional Institute, 2014). Providing low-income residents, especially African-Americans and Latinx, access to healthy and nurturing communities is essential to building cities imbued with racial and social justice. This premise anchors the *Buffalo Turning the Corner Initiative*.

*Turning the Corner* is part of a national project administered by the Urban Institute. Launched in January 2016, the *National Turning the Corner Project* pilots a research model that monitors neighborhood change, drives informed government action, supports displacement prevention, and supports inclusive neighborhood recreation and regeneration. The project is an initiative of the Urban Institute's National Neighborhood Indicator Partnership, and it has five partners implementing it in their localities: Buffalo, Detroit, Milwaukee, Phoenix, and the Twin Cities. The aim is to develop an understanding of neighborhood dynamics within the context of recovering housing markets, especially in neighborhoods at-risk of becoming unaffordable. The ultimate goal is to provide a framework to guide cities in sustainable, equitable, and inclusive neighborhood development. The Kresge Foundation funds the national project, and the Wilson Foundations sponsors the local Buffalo initiative.

*Buffalo Turning the Corner Project* recognizes the problem of unequal neighborhood development between the central city and suburbs. But grappling with this issue is beyond the scope of this study. Likewise, the research team is aware of the challenges facing the City's underdeveloped communities, but again, the *Turning the Corner* does not address this problem. The study does build on the City's 2017 *Buffalo Housing Opportunity Strategy* (czb LLC 2017). The Housing Opportunity Strategy centers a market-centric approach to residential development, based on a partnership between local government and land and property developers. *Turning the Corner* builds on this foundation by identifying the forces that push low-income residents out of residential communities that are on the upswing and then outlines a strategy that keeps this from happening.

*Buffalo Turning the Corner* seeks to understand how local policies and practices shape neighborhood development, especially in locales at-risk of becoming unaffordable. The Project then constructs a system of monitoring unwanted change in such neighborhoods and develops a community toolkit to mitigate and prevent adverse changes. The objectives are to (1) identify those factors producing unwelcome neighborhood change; (2) develop a strategy for recognizing the most at-risk locales and; (3) design an approach to monitor communities that are upgrading and prevent undesirable changes from occurring in them. In this study, unwanted neighborhood change (a) threaten to displace low-income residents; (b) endanger the survival of shops, stores, and institutions that serve the needs, wants, and desires of low-income residents; (c) make the community unfriendly to families and children and; (d) make neighborhoods with strong market demand inaccessible to low-income groups.

*Turning the Corner* also aims to grasp the dynamics of neighborhood change in shrinking, peripheral legacy cities located in shrinking regions. The contextualization of this study in the post-2008 mortgage crisis makes it possible to understand how ripples from that crisis continue to affect housing market dynamics (Silverman, 2018). Buffalo is an ideal city for this type of study. It is a transnational municipality and the second largest urban center in New York State. Situated in Erie County, on the Canadian border, after decades of decline, the population of Buffalo and Erie County appears to be stabilizing. According to the U.S. Census, Buffalo's population dipped between 2010 and 2016 from 261,310 to 258,989, while Erie County's population increased slightly from 919,040 to 922,129. Buffalo is a majority-minority city, with whites comprising 45%, blacks 37%, and Latinx 11% of the city residents, but less than a third of the county's population resides in the core.

In this setting, for Buffalo to grow its population, the city must lure suburbanites to the urban core. This battle to get white suburbanites to move to the urban core, especially millennials and retirees, informs Buffalo's city-building strategy. Buffalo is a city dominated by low-income residents, so it needs to attract higher-income groups to remain fiscally solvent. For example, in 2016, the city's median household income was \$33,119, but for whites, it was \$43,000, for blacks it was \$25,000, and for Latinx, it was \$21,000. Concurrently, the 2016 poverty rate for blacks was 38% and a staggering 48% for Latinx, and 20% for whites. Buffalo is a majority-minority city, but significant socioeconomic disparities exist among whites, blacks, and Latinx.

The income disparities between whites and people of color produce stark differences in the type of neighborhoods in which they reside. Income disparities, then, represent a huge challenge to building inclusive, racially, and economically diverse communities. Not only this, but these same racially-based income disparities will continually reinforce the existing patterns of neighborhood inequality. The reason is that private investments concentrate on localities, where housing market demand is growing (czb LLC, 2017). The highest demand neighborhoods are the ones where whites are most likely to reside.

This report opens with the *Executive Summary* and then is followed by six sections. The first section is the *Introduction*. Section 2 is *Methodology*; this section describes the methods and principals used in the study and explains the process used to identify the three study neighborhoods. The core of the *Turning the Corner* study is in section three, *Study Neighborhoods*. It analyzes the three study neighborhood, the Lower West Side, Ellicott, and the Fruit Belt, while sections four, *Monitoring Neighborhood Change*, and five, *Mitigating and Preventing Undesirable Neighborhood Change*, outline a strategy for monitoring, allaying, and preventing undesirable neighborhood change. The final section, *Conclusions, Recommendations, and Lessons Learned*, of the reports on the study's outcomes and identifies strategies for the City in the development of planning sustainable, equitable, and inclusive neighborhoods.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The methodology for the Buffalo TTC project involved three phases. The first phase applied a community participation model for the selection of the study neighborhoods. The second phase entailed a detailed analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected for the three study areas. The third phase involved feedback on results from community participants. Data were drawn from several primary and secondary sources during each stage of the analysis, including the US Census, the City of Buffalo, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, other state and federal agencies, commercial databases, windshield surveys, and focus groups with residents and other stakeholders.

The triangulation of data took place during each stage of the analysis to gain a more holistic view of trends. Through triangulation, we compare similar variables and measures across data sources to address concerns about margins of error and other idiosyncrasies associated with the collection of specific data. The triangulation of data in the analysis improved our confidence and

reliability in the findings since we did not rely on a single data source to generate recommendations. A description of each phase of the methodology is in the following section.

### **Selection of the Study Neighborhoods**

The first phase of the study uses a participatory model to select the three study neighborhoods. The research team assembled a Neighborhood Review Panel to select the study neighborhoods. The panel consisted of thirteen city-wide stakeholders from local government, the nonprofit development community, and higher education. This diverse group of men and women included African Americans, Latinx, and whites, and had representatives from the disabilities community, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the Greater Buffalo Community Foundation, the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency, the Community Action Organization of Erie County, community-based organizations, higher education, community activists, the private sector, and residents.

The panel met three times to select the *Turning the Corner* study neighborhoods. In the first meeting, the group discussed data, methods, and the final selection process. Next, after completion of preliminary data collection and analysis, the review panel met to discuss the initial findings in the study neighborhood selection process. In the third and final meeting, during the summer of 2017, the review panel selected the neighborhoods for the *Turning the Corner Study*.

The Neighborhood Review Panel made its selection based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data. The quantitative analysis examined demographic and housing trends between 2000 and 2015. This analysis took place at the census tract and block group levels. The quantitative analysis used a modification of the Lisa Bates Methodology to identify neighborhoods at-risk of gentrification and displacement (2013). The variables in that analysis concentrate on three dimensions of neighborhood change: a neighborhood's vulnerability to housing displacement; the identification of demographic changes at the census tract that are consistent with gentrification and; increases in property values and rents.

Weighted indexes were constructed for the three dimensions of neighborhood change for all census tracts in the city of Buffalo. High scores (in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile) in census tracts triggered a more fine-grained analysis at the block group level, which included an examination of the quantitative data as well as the collection of qualitative data. A ground-truthing assessment involves using windshield surveys to study actual conditions in communities at-risk of

gentrification and displacement. The review panel identified the Lower West Side, the Fruit Belt, and the Ellicott neighborhoods as communities at-risk of gentrification and displacement (Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1:** Buffalo Turning the Corner Study Neighborhoods

### **Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of the Neighborhoods**

After selecting the three study neighborhoods, a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) consisting of sixteen members was assembled to advise the research team during the research process. The Community Advisory Committee, selected from a slate of candidates the Neighborhood Review Panel recommended consists of representatives from each of the study neighborhoods: Fruit Belt (N=6), Ellicott (N=4), and the Lower West Side (N=5). The Community Advisory Committee consists of a mixture of renters, homeowners, and representatives from community-based organizations. The CAC assisted in identifying participants for the focus group and gave feedback on the quantitative and qualitative research findings. The Community Advisory Committee will also play a role in the dissemination of the study and informing others about its policy and program implications.

The analysis of the study neighborhoods has quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative analysis builds on earlier research, which informed the selection of the three study neighborhoods. This fine-grained analysis represents a deep dive into a broader range of quantitative data, including census data, other governmental data sources measuring dimensions of housing and neighborhood conditions, characteristics of subsidized housing, records of property sales and improvement, tax foreclosures, crime statistics, tree density, and infrastructure investments. The census data came from the American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates, based on annual surveys in the US. Census Bureau conducts. The Census maintains a minimum of 90% confidence for all ACS data released. Documentation of the methodology for data collection is found at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>. These data were analyzed using statistical and spatial techniques and mapped with geographic information system (GIS) software. Map classifications are based on the analysis of the data distributions for the year that data were available and designed to show the neighborhood change over the years (Table 2.1).

A pairing took place between quantitative and qualitative data obtained from a series of focus group sessions. The focus groups followed the methodology described by Silverman (2014) and Silverman and Patterson (2014). A total of nine focus groups were held in the three study neighborhoods. They included a separate focus group of renters, homeowners, and stakeholders for each community. A convening of the focus groups took place during the fall of 2017, with each focus group session lasting approximately one and a half to two hours. Data from the focus groups is transcribed verbatim and coded collaboratively by members of the research team using ATLAS.ti software. The focus groups were a critical component of the analysis since they helped to contextualize how residents and other stakeholders' perceived trends identified in the quantitative analysis. Standpoint Theory informs the study of focus group data. This theoretical perspective amplifies the voices of groups traditionally excluded from the planning and policy processes (Adler & Jermier 2005; Anderson 2017). By incorporating the viewpoints of residents and other stakeholders into the study, we can achieve a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the range of impacts that urban revitalization has on the quality of life in the study neighborhoods.

Table 2.1 summarizes the data used in the quantitative analysis, and Table 2.2 summarizes the characteristics of the focus group participants. After completion of the data analysis, the final stage in the research process involved the collection of feedback on results from members of the



Neighborhood Review Panel and the Community Advisory Committee. A draft report sent to all panel and CAC members provided them with the opportunity to give feedback on the final draft of the study.

**Table 2.1:** Variable definitions

Variable	Definition	Source	Year
<b>Violent crime density</b>	Number of violent crime per census block	City of Buffalo	2009-2017
<b>Property crime density</b>	Number of property crime per census block	City of Buffalo	2009-2017
<b>Unit housing sales price</b>	Interpolated annual unit housing sales price (per sq. foot)	MLS data provided by the City of Buffalo	2004-2016
<b>Subsidized housing unit</b>	Subsidized housing by types	City of Buffalo, HUD	Until 2016
<b>Infrastructure investment</b>	Investment on facilities, parks, and streets and from HOME, CDBG, and HOZO program	City of Buffalo	2006-2016
<b>Demolition density</b>	Density of annual building permits issued for demolition	City of Buffalo	2004-2016
<b>Asbestos removal density</b>	Density of annual building permits issued for removing asbestos	City of Buffalo	2004-2014
<b>Housing improvements density</b>	Density of annual building permits issued for housing improvements	City of Buffalo	2004-2016
<b>Demolished properties density</b>	Density of demolished properties	City of Buffalo	2000-2016
<b>Tax foreclosure density</b>	Density of annual tax foreclosure properties	City of Buffalo	2009-2016
<b>Tree density</b>	Density of trees planted and maintained by the City	City of Buffalo	2017

**Table 2.2:** Characteristics of Focus Group Participants (N=58)

Variable	Value
<b>Average Focus Group Size</b>	6.4
<b>Percent Homeowners</b>	34.5
<b>Percent Renters</b>	29.3
<b>Percent Stakeholders</b>	36.2
<b>Percent Male</b>	38
<b>Percent Female</b>	62
<b>Percent Age 18-35</b>	8

<b>Percent Age 36-64</b>	32
<b>Percent Age 65 and Over</b>	60
<b>Percent White</b>	22.5
<b>Percent Black</b>	63.3
<b>Percent Latino</b>	10.2
<b>Percent Other</b>	4

### 3. THE STUDY NEIGHBORHOODS

This section of the Buffalo TTC report examines the scope of neighborhood transition and residential displacement in three neighborhoods: the Lower West Side neighborhood, the Ellicott neighborhood, and the Fruit Belt neighborhood. The study focused on four dimensions of urban life: *general neighborhood trends, population and housing characteristics at the census block group level, the subsidized housing population, and amenities and quality of life issues.*

#### 3.1 Lower West Side Neighborhood

##### *General Neighborhood Trends on the Lower West Side*

The Lower West Side neighborhood consists of eight census block groups found in parts of three census tracts (69.02 BG2, 69.02 BG4, 71.01 BG1, 71.01 BG2, 71.01 BG3, 71.01 BG4, 71.02 BG 2 and 71.02 BG3), as shown in Figure 3.1.1. The community is situated west of downtown Buffalo and southeast of a major anchor institution, D’Youville College. In 2016, the Lower West Side was the most racially and ethnically diverse of the three study neighborhoods. It has a sizeable Latinx population (50%), which consists of mostly Puerto Ricans, along with a significant number of whites (50%), and a smaller black population (14%).

Renters dominate this community and comprise 74% of its households. The renter-class consists mostly of low-income groups. For example, the median gross rents were at or above 30% of household income in all neighborhood block groups. HUD defines cost burdened families as those who pay more than 30% of their incomes on housing, which affects their ability to afford necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care. Although demographic and housing conditions vary by census block group, these statistics suggest that the Lower West Side has a substantial population that is vulnerable to housing displacement.



**Figure 3.1.1:** The Lower West Side Neighborhood

Between 2010 and 2016 the population in the neighborhood fell by slightly more than 11%, with the most significant decline among African-Americans, where their numbers dropped by slightly more than 77%. At the same time, the educational attainment of residents increased. The number of adults with less than high school education fell by slightly more than 38%, while those with a high

school diploma and some college increased by more than 26% and, those with a college degree grew by more than 4%. Concurrently, median household incomes rose by almost 3%. Increases in the educational and income levels of the community moved in tandem with housing upgrades. The community lost about 14% of its housing stock between 2010 and 2016, with much of that decline (50%) occurring among vacant units that were not for sale. At the same time, the number of owner-occupied units grew by nearly 4%, with rental units dropping at the same proportion.

Residential upgrading triggered increases in housing costs. The median value of owner-occupied housing rose by slightly more than 90% between 2010 and 2016, while US census data show that median rents rose by almost 16%. A more detailed data was available for estimates of fair market rents in the area for 2018 (see Table 3.1.1). This data showed that approximations for fair market rents rose the most for larger units in the community.

**Table 3.1.1:** Estimated Change in Fair Market Rents for the Lower West Side

<i>Zip Code 14201 - Lower West Side</i>	<i>0 Bedroom</i>	<i>1 Bedroom</i>	<i>2 Bedroom</i>	<i>3 Bedroom</i>	<i>4 Bedroom</i>
<i>Small Area Fair Market Rent 2018</i>	\$590	\$600	\$730	\$930	\$1,070
<i>Percent Change 2011-2018</i>	5.36	7.14	8.96	12.05	16.3

**Source:** HUD Small Area Fair Market Rent Database

The general neighborhood trends suggest that the population and number of housing units are shrinking while housing prices and rents are increasing. The census block group analysis provides a detailed view of the change taking place. The discussion examines population and housing characteristics in greater detail, followed by an examination of changes in the subsidized housing population. Lastly, the section discusses issues of neighborhood amenities and quality of life.

### ***Lower West Side Population and Housing Characteristics at the Block Group Level***

Table 3.1.2 summarizes the population characteristics for the Lower West Side neighborhood, while Table 3.1.3 summarizes housing characteristics. The Lower West Side's population dropped between 2010 and 2016, but that decline varied at the block group level. The patterns of decline moved in tandem with residential upgrading in the three census block groups adjacent to D'Youville College (69.02 BG2 69.02 BG4, and 71.01 BG1). The African-American and Latinx populations in this cluster of block groups dropped markedly, as educational attainment and median household income rose in the area.

Housing dynamics reinforce the notion that the Lower West Side is a community in transition. The housing stock is shrinking because a significant number of vacant, not for rent or sell units, are being knocked down. Concurrently, there are slight increases in owner-occupied units and a minor reduction in renter-occupied housing. Simultaneously, housing prices increased substantially in these three block groups, especially in 71.01BG1, while they had some of the highest rentals in the Lower West Side. The housing cost burden for renters is also noticeably higher in these three block groups, with a median gross rent of 50% in two of the three block groups. In one focus group, homeowners attributed increases in housing cost to the need for more student housing at D'Youville College. Another homeowner complained that "D'Youville was buying up properties and tearing down perfectly decent houses" to construct parking lots, while another said:

*"Rents have gotten so high, and the proximity to D'Youville, you can end up with like a dorm next door. Because they can split up the rent and it becomes reasonable if you've got four people."*

Like other areas where anchor institutions are expanding, proximity to D'Youville College has increased demand and costs for housing. This type of encroachment was changing the make-up of the community and impacting the quality of neighborhood life. One focus group participant

reflected on how her neighborhood's makeup has shifted from an "all families" place to a more diverse locality consisting of college students and families. The quietness of the old community is disappearing, as college students invade the area, hold weekend parties, and create nuisances. The focus group participant described this encounter with a college student leaving a party next door to her:

*"I came from a Halloween party myself. But I'm like, 'Oh my God.' I pull in front and he's like, 'Are you my Uber?' I'm like 'No - I live here! Have a good night.'"*



A different pattern emerged in the three block groups bisected by Niagara Street, which is the commercial spine of the Lower West Side (71.01 BG2, 71.01 BG3, and 71.01 BG4). This area had the most extensive population decline in the community, except for BG3, where the residents grew by over 46%. These three census block groups also had the highest concentration of residents of color in the Lower West Side. Even so, the area had a net loss in dwelling units, but housing costs were still rising, and renters were cost-burdened. One renter and focus group participant made this comment after visiting a newly constructed apartment building in the neighborhood:

*“One bedroom, the least that you can pay for it is \$986 a month. \$1500 for one, one big bedroom. But the studio was \$986 - the one bedroom was \$1,500. I said, “How can this neighborhood afford that kind of rent.” They are bringing people from the suburbs to move into these homes because people are working, and people don't have that high income. They will never live in \$1,500 a month. So people couldn't make it - they all used to chip in and make it work for them. And this is what's happening in Buffalo. Rents are going too high. They think of New York City, and we're not New York City.”*

**Table 3.1.2:** 2010-2016 Population Characteristics for the Lower West Side

	Tract 69.02 BG2	Tract 69.02 BG4	Tract 71.01 BG1	Tract 71.01 BG2	Tract 71.01 BG3	Tract 71.01 BG4	Tract 71.02 BG2	Tract 71.02 BG3	LOWER WEST SIDE TOTAL
<b>Total Population 2016</b>	896	874	637	759	1,442	738	664	578	6,588
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-13.76	-8.1	-27.94	-44.64	46.25	-27.36	6.07	-2.53	-11.76
<b>Race 2016</b>									
<i>White 2016</i>	524	579	349	269	468	374	410	327	3,300
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-26.92	11.56	-12.53	-38.86	34.1	2.75	-5.96	8.64	-6.82
<i>African American 2016</i>	94	149	80	219	120	164	89	19	934
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-47.19	18.25	21.21	-65.78	79.1	-67.33	18.67	-88.82	-77.1
<b>Hispanic Ethnicity 2016</b>									
<i>Hispanic/Latino 2016</i>	357	141	270	455	1,036	477	219	328	3,283
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	51.27	-62.6	-59.03	-18.31	83.04	16.63	-14.45	10.81	-2.18
<b>Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Over</b>									
<i>Less than High School 2016</i>	174	143	84	293	248	41	43	55	1,081
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-15.94	-38.89	-39.13	-29.06	-27.7	-75.74	16.22	-73.04	-38.05
<i>High School Graduate and Some College</i>	289	273	280	186	439	341	159	281	2,248
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	22.46	5	40	20	30.27	73.98	-36.9	95.14	26.29
<i>Bachelor's Degree or More</i>	178	192	113	17	100	45	230	78	953
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-51.23	n/a	242.42	-85.95	49.25	n/a	11.11	-35.54	4.27
<b>Median Household Income 2016 (In 2016 Inflation Adjusted Dollars)</b>	\$48,594	\$14,802	\$33,611	\$9,123	\$35,040	n/a	\$24,926	\$36,964	\$20,155
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	62.52	-43.25	97.63	-10.48	6.74	n/a	-15.99	32.63	2.95

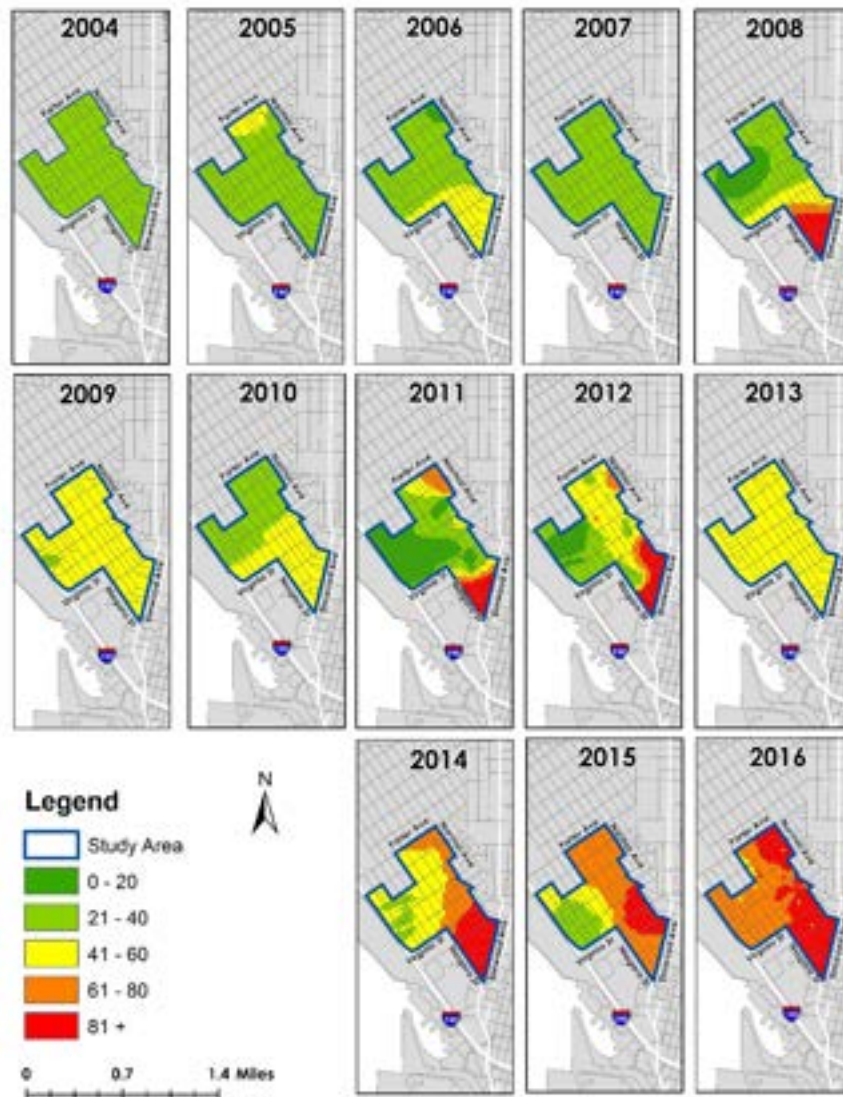
**Source:** 2016 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

**Table 3.1.3:** 2010-2016 Housing Characteristics for the Lower West Side

	<i>Tract 69.02 BG2</i>	<i>Tract 69.02 BG4</i>	<i>Tract 71.01 BG1</i>	<i>Tract 71.01 BG2</i>	<i>Tract 71.01 BG3</i>	<i>Tract 71.01 BG4</i>	<i>Tract 71.02 BG2</i>	<i>Tract 71.02 BG3</i>	<i>LOWER WEST SIDE TOTAL</i>
<b>Housing Units 2016</b>	430	530	359	515	587	392	508	290	3611
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-26.37	44.02	-31.09	-26.53	-24.36	11.36	-1.93	-20.77	-13.74
<b>Vacant Housing Units 2016</b>	73	75	97	51	46	47	59	39	487
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-51.01	0	-40.12	-31.08	-84.97	-11.32	-51.24	-22	-50.81
<b>Occupied Housing Units 2016</b>	357	455	262	464	541	345	449	251	3124
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-17.93	55.29	-27.02	-26	15.11	15.38	13.1	-20.57	-2.25
<b>Owner Occupied 2016</b>	160	101	73	21	180	20	143	124	822
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-26.61	94.23	65.91	-77.42	11.80	-20.00	116.67	-6.77	3.79
<b>Renter Occupied 2016</b>	197	354	189	443	361	325	306	127	2,302
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-9.22	46.89	-40.00	-17.04	16.83	18.61	-7.55	-30.60	-4.24
<b>Median Value Owner-Occupied Units 2016</b>	\$116,700	\$81,900	\$287,100	n/a	\$96,300	n/a	\$202,800	\$59,800	\$108,987
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	4.76	87.41	514.78	n/a	75.09	n/a	45.48	-6.71	90.65
<b>Median Gross Rent 2016</b>	\$708	\$810	\$648	\$289	\$601	\$653	\$628	\$725	\$614
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	37.21	-4.14	2.37	-5.56	17.15	49.77	13.56	26.09	15.85
<b>Median Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income in The Past 12 Months 2016 (Dollars)</b>	50.00	50.00	30.80	38.40	34.20	30.00	33.40	50.00	37.50
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	26.60	11.10	-19.20	8.00	-2.90	-4.70	4.30	0.00	2.00
<b>Median Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income 2016</b>	17.00	20.20	22.50	n/a	16.10	10.00	18.10	20.90	n/a
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	2.10	3.30	-27.50	-17.50	-4.60	10.00	0.60	-15.30	n/a

**Source:** 2016 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

Another unique area consists of the two census block groups nearest to downtown Buffalo (71.02 BG2 and 71.02 BG3). This locality has a more stable population and whites dominate it. Most of these residents have a high school education and some college, as well as median household income slightly higher than the citywide median. Although this area lost housing units from 2006 to 2016, the data show that housing costs were still rising and renters were experiencing increased cost-burdens (Figure 3.1.2).



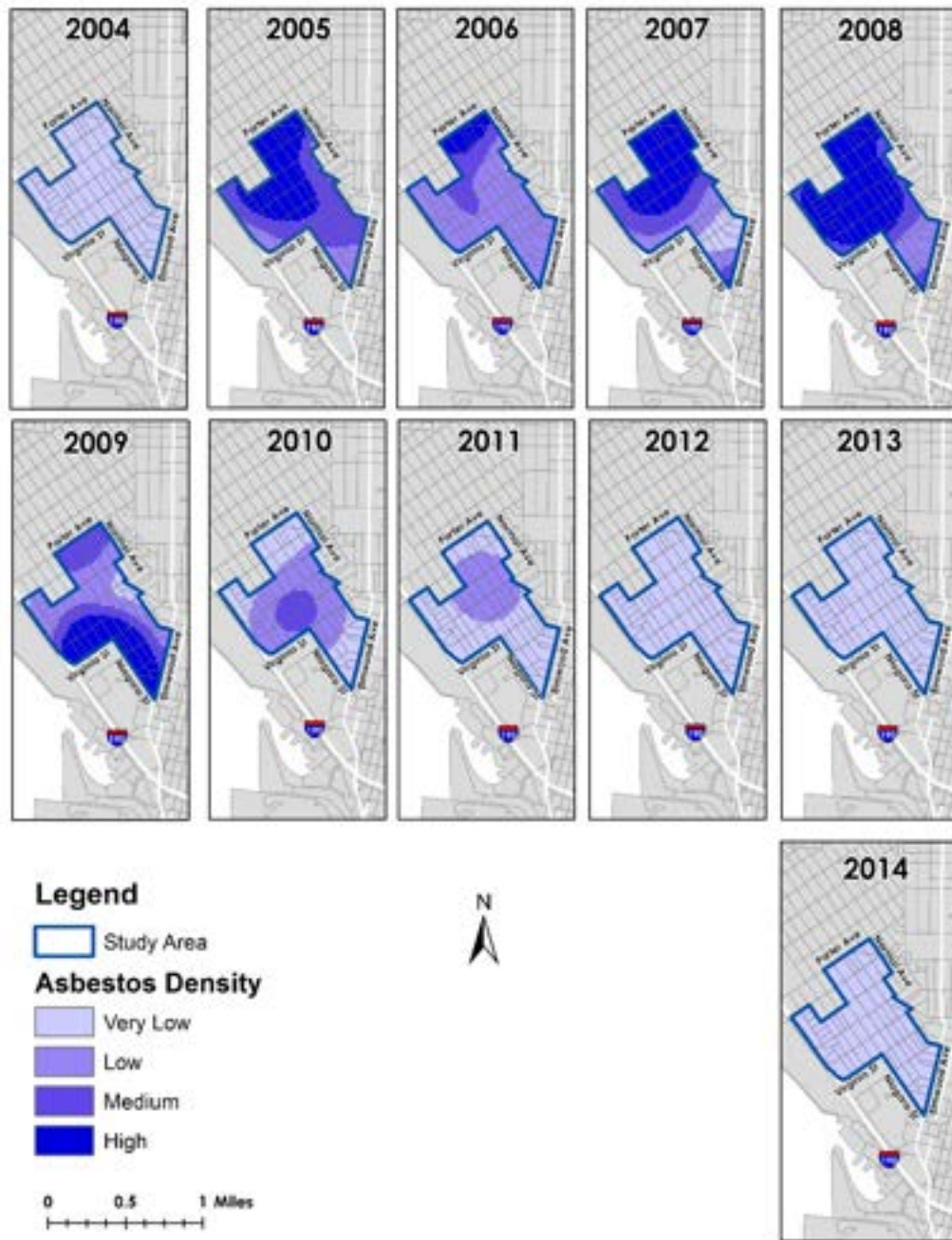
**Figure 3.1.2:** Annual Unit Housing Sales Prices (per sq. foot): 2004-2016  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

Figure 3.1.2 shows the annual housing sale prices per sq. foot from 2004 to 2016. The sales data was collected at the address level citywide and interpolated for application to properties in the

study neighborhoods. The maps show that unit sale prices increased over the years, especially in the area closest to downtown.

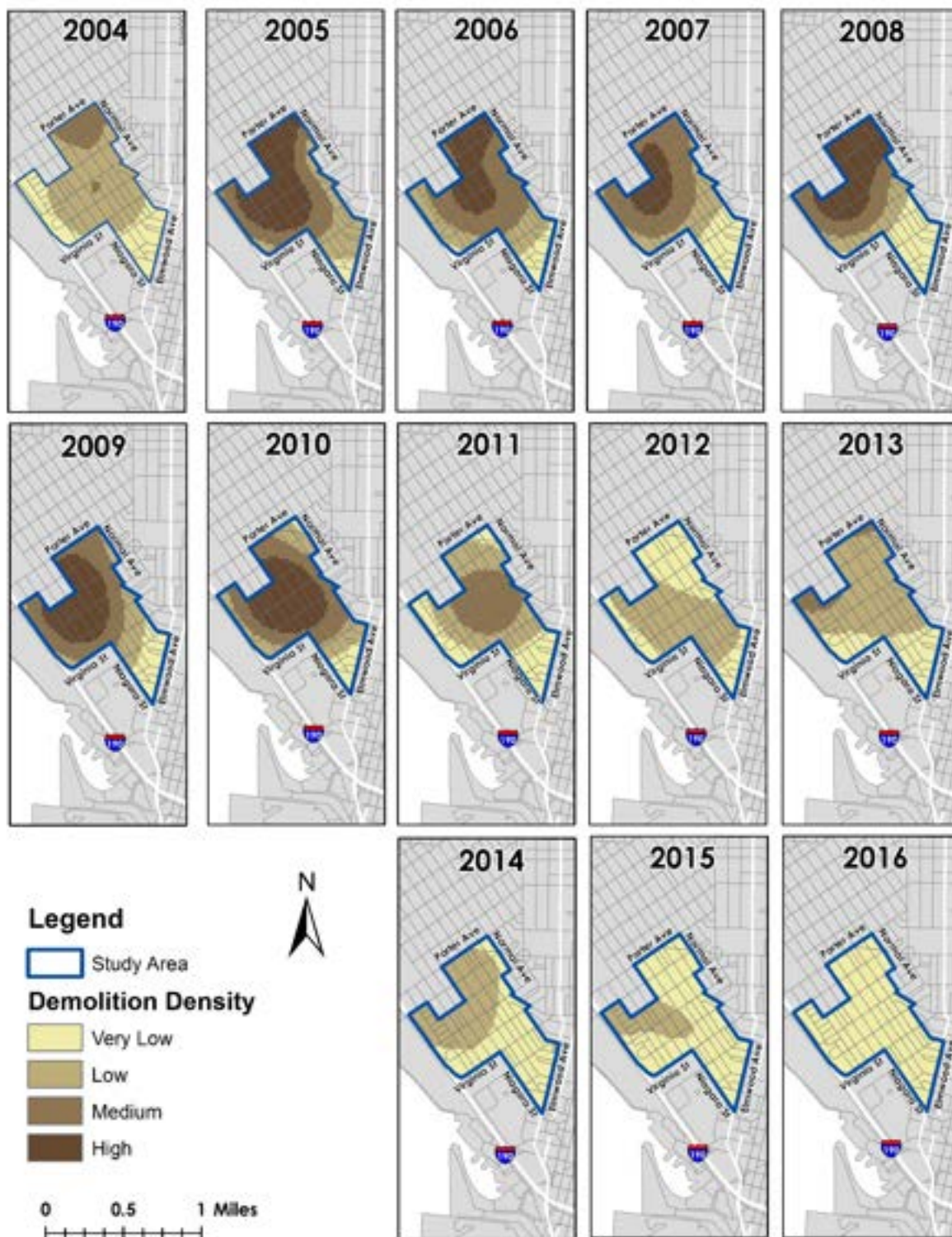
The examination of permits, tax-foreclosed properties, and demolitions show how public sector activities intersect with the private sector and individual actions to spur neighborhood improvements. Figures 3.1.3, 3.1.4 and 3.1.5 show the interplay among the issuance of permits issued for removing asbestos, demolition, and housing improvements between 2004 and 2016, and demonstrate that these permitting activities catalyze neighborhood improvements. Property owners typically initiate these actions as an initial step to upgrading their property.

The issuance of permits for asbestos removal spiked from 2005 and 2009, while permits for demolition spiked from 2005 to 2010 (Figures 3.1.3, and 3.1.4). The demolition permits embraced a range of activities, such as interior demolition of structures, the removal of fencing and other exterior improvements to properties, as well as the removal of entire structures. Property owners initiate most of the permits for demolition. On other occasions, the City demolished properties to remove blight, respond to fire emergencies or to remove derelict structures. Random demolition that occurs in response to community complaints is one type of action by the city government. A different kind of action occurs when demolitions are proactive ones intended to facilitate neighborhood upgrading.



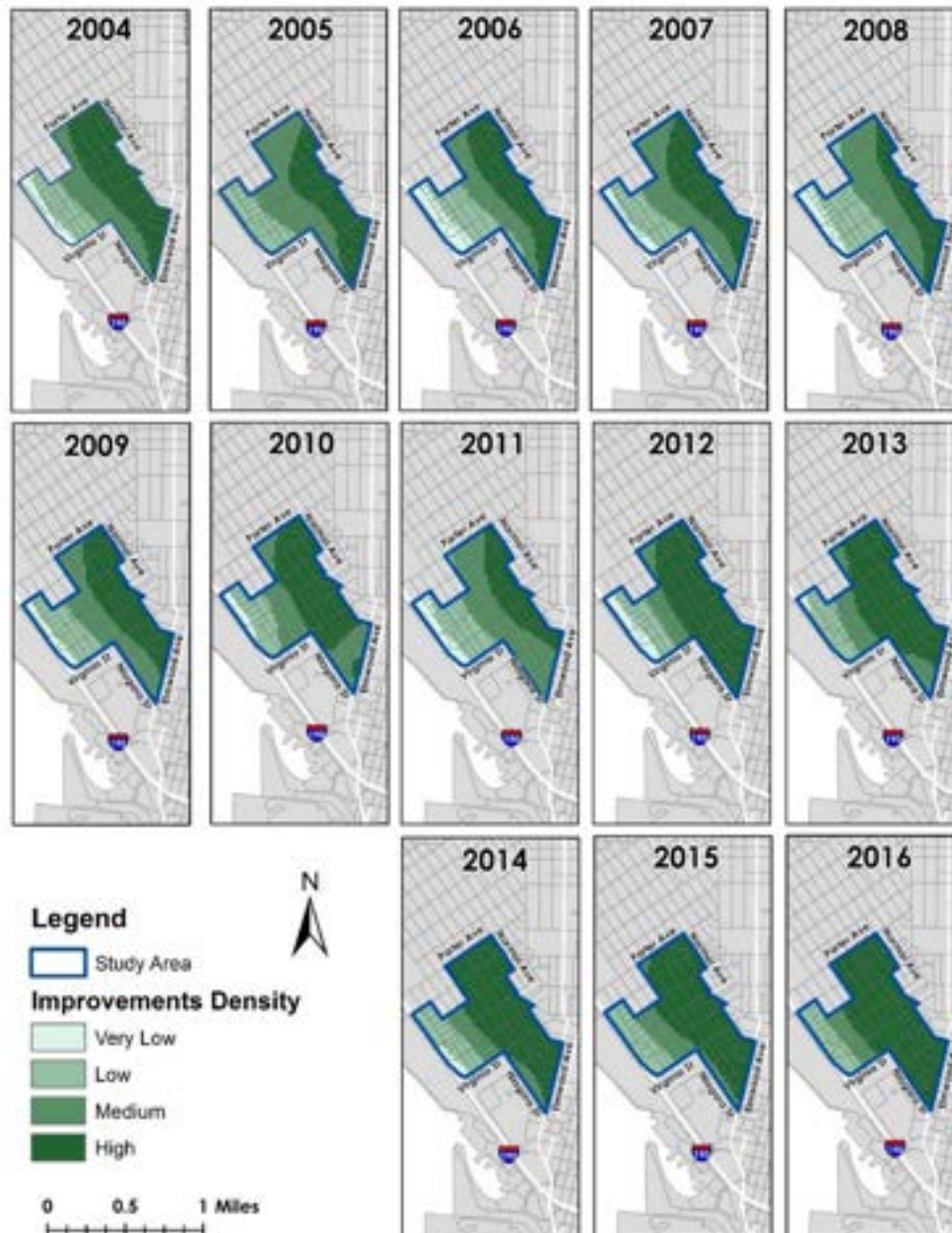
**Figure 3.1.3:** Density of Annual Building Permits Issued (Asbestos): 2004-2014  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning





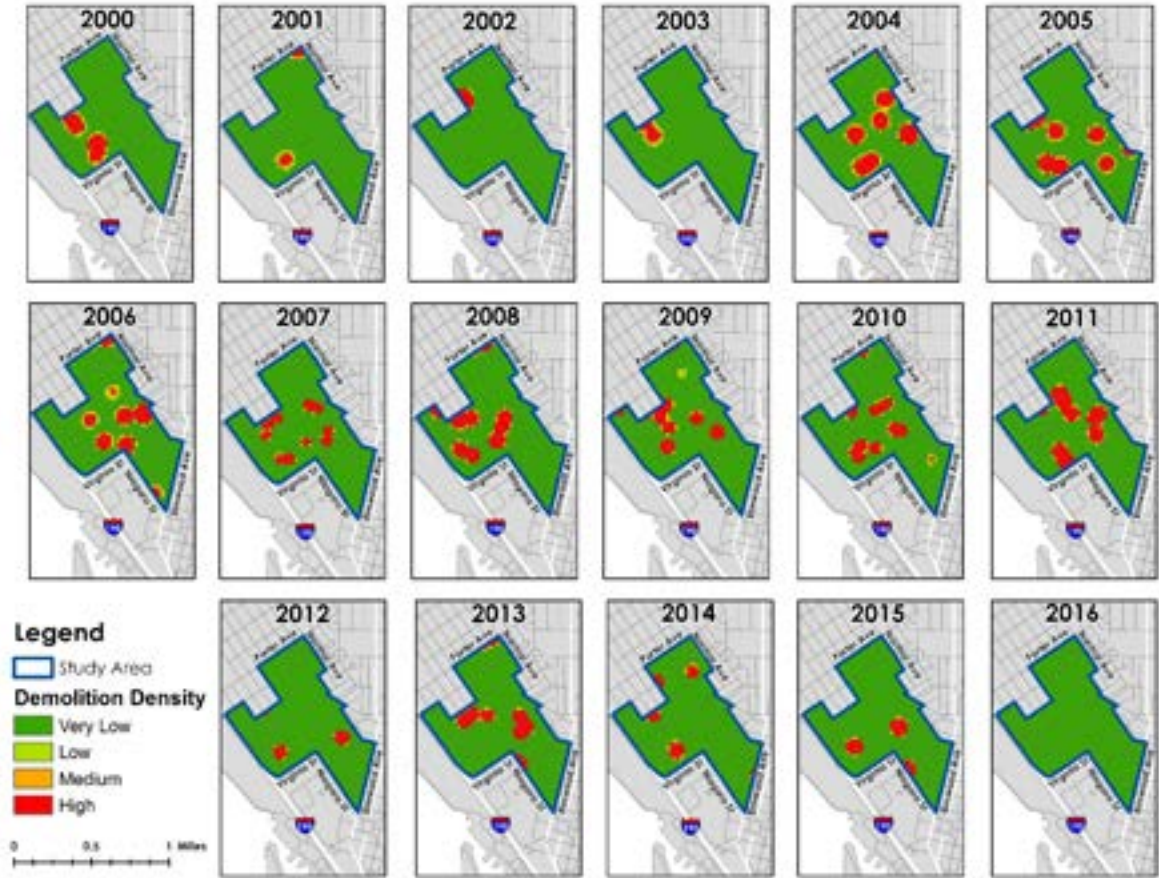
**Figure 3.1.4:** Density of Annual Building Permits Issued (Demolition): 2004-2014  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

Figure 3.1.5 reflects the next stage of the residential upgrading process. It shows that investments steadily grew in the Lower West Side and accelerated after 2011. In essence, the abatement of asbestos and other environmental hazards, along with the removal of obsolete and blighted structures, catalyzed increases in housing improvements. The pattern of Lower West Side demolitions reinforces this conclusion (Figure 3.1.6).



**Figure 3.1.5:** Density of Annual Building Permits Issued (Housing Improvements): 2004-2014  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning



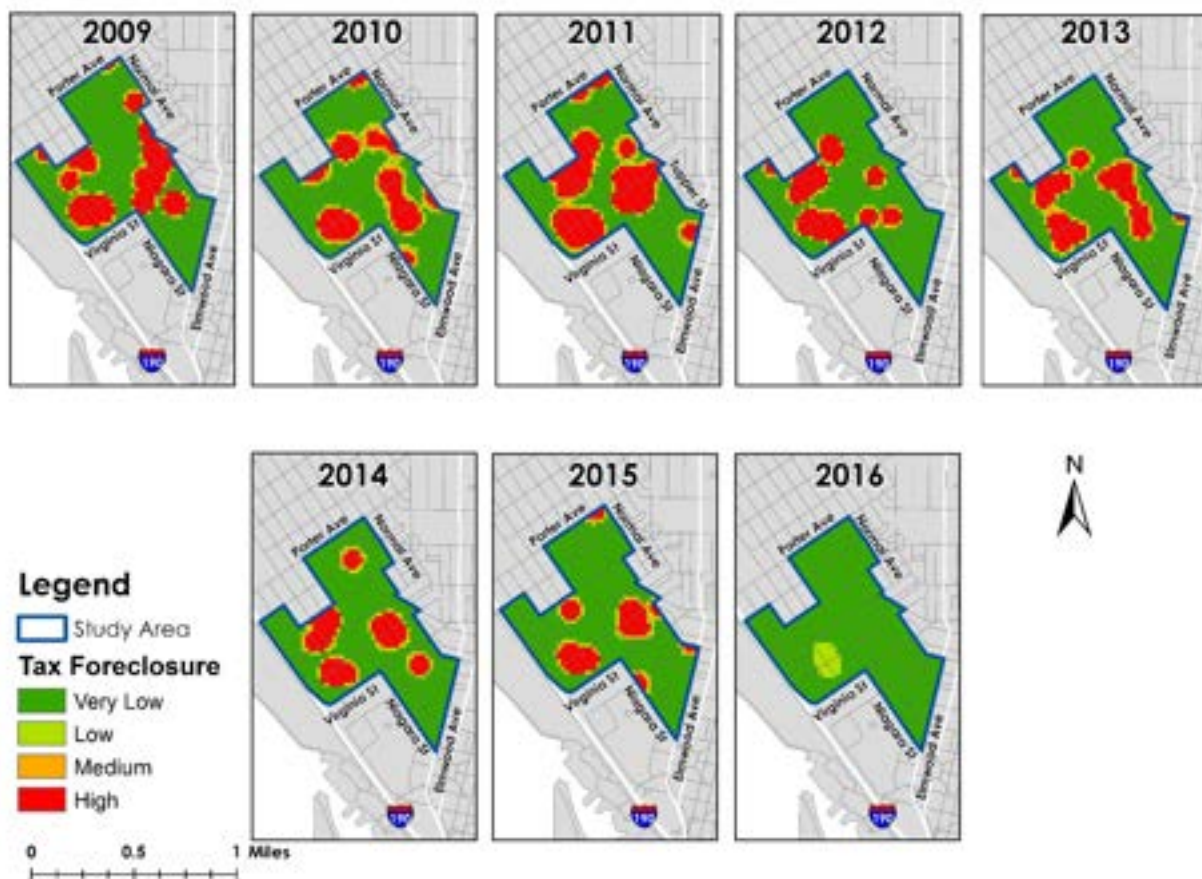


**Figure 3.1.6:** Density of Demolished Properties: 2000-2016

**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

Figure 3.1.6 shows the density of demolished properties in the Lower West Side neighborhood from 2000 to 2016. This data is for the complete removal of structures from the Lower West Side, and it shows how the complete removal of structures creates shovel ready sites for redevelopment. What stands out is the area where blacks and Latinx are clustered is also the locale most impacted by the demolitions.





**Figure 3.1.7:** Density of Annual Tax Foreclosure Properties: 2009-2016  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

Figure 3.1.7 reveals the role played by tax foreclosures in the neighborhood change process and shows the density of tax-foreclosed properties in the Lower West Side. The City of Buffalo places these properties on the annual auction to recover delinquent taxes and fees. Figure 3.1.7 shows a clustering of tax foreclosures between 2009 and 2015 in the three block groups bisected by Niagara Street. The intensity of tax foreclosure activity illustrates an interactive process that changes property ownership from one individual to another while simultaneously pushing low-income homeowners out of the community. On the flip side, the data suggests that demolitions and the removal of asbestos and other environmental hazards are a prelude to housing improvements and residential upgrading. Even so, the process of neighborhood transformation is a slow and often undetectable process. The following comment, made by a renter and focus group participant, exemplifies the incremental dimension of neighborhood change:

*“You can see there's pockets that are being developed a little bit more than others and they are sort of squeezing in. [In] some of the areas on the West Side, West Avenue,*

*and Prospect Avenue, the prices of the houses are rising. So that's one of my main concerns, there is gentrification in the area. You can taste it. It's happening. And like a lot of things, it happens at a slow pace where you don't recognize it right away until it's too late. So I think that's one of the biggest things. That's my biggest concern, among others. You are starting to see this movement of the ethnic groups that have been here being moved out to other areas of the city. Normally the outer ring of Buffalo and Cheektowaga, the further East Side. The West Side is becoming popular."*

Figure 3.1.11 maps the location of different types of public sector investments in neighborhood infrastructure between 2006 and 2016. Most of these public investments came from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The spending was most intense in those parts of the Lower West Side where demolitions were taking place. The expenditure of HOME investment partnership funds took place in a few locations near the site of CDBG investments. Pennsylvania Street, Hudson Street, and Busti Avenue received street resurfacing, while the two parks on the neighborhood's fringe in Tract 69.02, Block Group 4, and Tract 71.01, Block Group 4, received public funding.



**Figure 3.1.11:** Public Sector Investments in Neighborhood Infrastructure: 2006-2016

**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

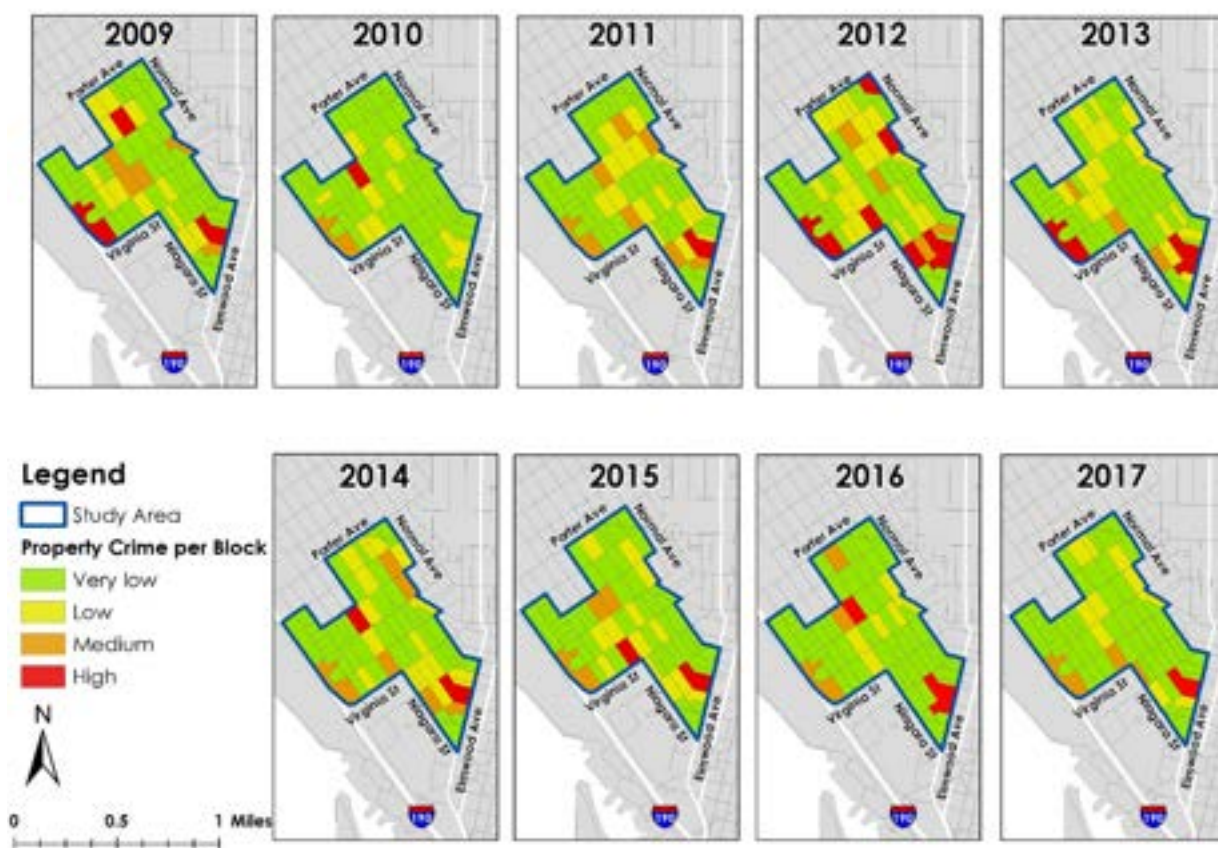
In the focus groups, Lower West Side residents and stakeholders said people were attracted to the area because of its racial and ethnic diversity and the density of its cultural institutions, ethnic restaurants, and the opportunity to live in a locale with a mixture of races and social classes. However, focus group participants said that recent changes in the community, along with increases in housing costs were threatening diversity and inclusivity. One long-term renter said:

*“We're creating segregated neighborhoods again. Like when we first came here. When my people came here. The Lower West Side was Italian. South Buffalo was Irish. The East Side was German. It's almost like that's happening now. We talk about Grant Street, the pocket of people from East Africa, Nigeria and Burma, they've got their neighborhood now and it's becoming segregated. And you have parts of the West Side that is segregated with Hispanics. And then you have a big language barrier for communication. Now you also have the single white people moving in and married couples. So once that happens and there's only two things that make people move. First is jobs, second is education. So when somebody comes into a neighborhood, and they are new and they are freshly married and everything is good and they are happy because there is a lot of action in the city. A lot of places to go, a lot of places to have fun. [They have] children and the education system isn't what they hoped it would be. The education system that we have actually forces people that come in before they have kids, now to seek education elsewhere. Whether it's private school or back to the suburbs. We've created segregated neighborhoods.”*

Housing unaffordability is reducing the mixture of races and social classes in the Lower West Side. Perceptions of less access to supportive services like child care, quality schools, and amenities are making the community “unfriendly” to families and youth. One stakeholder, for instance, said neighborhood changes were dislocating seniors, young couples with children, as well as Latinx.

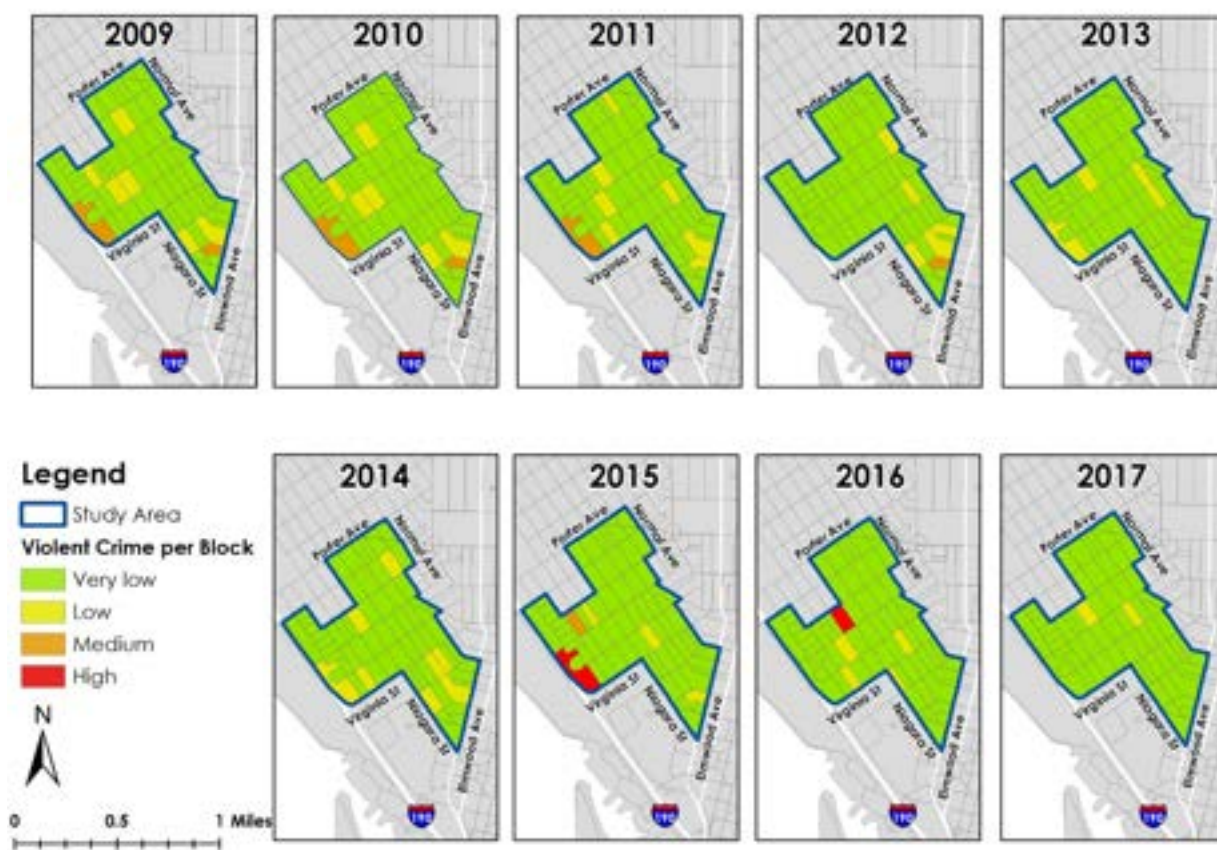
An analysis of the crime data provides an assessment of safety and security in the Lower West Side between 2009 and 2017. Commercial areas are the site of the highest volumes of property crime. For example, crime was clustered on the blocks closest to the Niagara Street retail corridor and downtown Buffalo. Across the Lower West Side, the number of property crimes dropped over the past ten years, with the possible exception of those streets near downtown (Figures 3.1.12 and 3.1.13).





**Figure 3.1.12:** Property Crime Density in the Lower West Side Neighborhood: 2009-2017  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

Figure 3.1.13 shows the annual reported violent crimes per block between 2009 and 2017. Overall, violent crime remains low in most of the Lower West Side neighborhood. The block located on the southwest corner of Tract 71.01, Block Group 2, however, consistently had a higher violent crime rate than other parts of the community. BG 2 is one of the lowest income areas in the Lower West Side.



**Figure 3.1.13:** Violent Crime Density in the Lower West Side Neighborhood: 2009-2017

**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

During the focus groups, residents and stakeholders described the neighborhood as a safe place to reside. Some focus group participants said that crime peaked several years earlier, and spoke of problems with gangs, drug addicts, and related crime in the past tense. One homeowner said the neighborhood had “random crimes here and there,” but overall the area was safe. Another homeowner said:

*“I do want to touch on the safety issue. There was the drug dealing and there was crime. But I want to say, I walk to and from every day, rain, shine, dark, snow, light. And we always have our doors wide open. It might not be the smartest thing in the world. So I’ve always felt safe. I guess we were broken into a couple of times, but I feel pretty safe.”*

Other focus group participants said the community had a greater police presence and that some officers even lived in the community. Their presence, some residents believed, deterred

crime. For example, one homeowner described the impact of having three police officers living in his neighborhood.

*“When somebody sees a person out mowing the lawn with a pistol hanging out of their back pocket, they say ‘holy shit.’ There were these bikers that came over to my house on their Harley Davidsons like, “what kind of neighborhood is this? A guy across the street is carrying a gun mowing the lawn.” And I said, “oh it’s not that bad guys.” But I mean we’ve got a very interesting, diverse neighborhood. I really enjoy it.”*

### *The Subsidized Housing Population on the Lower West Side*

Examining changes in the composition of subsidized houses will deepen understanding of the neighborhood change process. Figure 3.1.8 maps the location of four types of subsidized Lower West Side housing: site-based Section 8 properties, public housing, low-income housing tax credit properties, and other subsidized units. This figure shows a clustering of these subsidized units in the three block groups bisected by Niagara Street.



**Figure 3.1.8:** The location of Subsidized Housing in 2017  
**Source:** HUD Picture of Subsidized Housing Database



Table 3.1.4 summarizes data for the Lower West Side population in subsidized housing between 2012 and 2017. This data includes characteristics of subsidized households in site-based properties as well as renters who hold portable HCV. A clear picture of the subsidized population emerges from this data. The fewest subsidized units are in the census tract (69.02) near D'Youville College. The residents in these units are predominantly Hispanic women without children, as well as several elderly residents, with 58% of these households headed by a person sixty-two years or older. With a median household income of \$11,445, these tenants are low-income residents and have the lowest labor force participation rates. Table 3.1.5 also shows that the majority of subsidized housing units in this census tract were 0-1 bedrooms. Given the absence of site-based subsidized units in this census tract, it is likely that the majority of this population are renters in the HCV program.

**Table 3.1.4:** 2012-2017 Lower West Side Population in Subsidized Housing

	<i>Census Tract 69.02</i>	<i>Census Tract 71.01</i>	<i>Census Tract 71.02</i>
<b><i>Subsidized Units 2017</i></b>	195	665	512
<i>Percent change 2012-17</i>	6	82	1247
<b><i>Total Residents in Subsidized Units 2017</i></b>	296	1386	1101
<i>Percent change 2012-17</i>	28	99	710
<b><i>Percent of the Population Black 2017</i></b>	13	27	39
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-14	-13	-1
<b><i>Percent of the Population Hispanic 2017</i></b>	60	66	51
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	13	3	-10
<b><i>Percent of Households Female Headed</i></b>	49	73	71
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-8	-1	-10
<b><i>Percent of Households Female Headed with Children</i></b>	15	38	39
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	5	0	18
<b><i>Percent of Households with a Person with a Disability</i></b>	27	17	22
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	5	0	-21
<b><i>Percent of Households Headed by a Person 62 yrs or More</i></b>	58	29	19
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-4	1	-1
<b><i>Household Income 2017</i></b>	\$11,445	\$14,160	\$12,867
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	4	11	8
<b><i>Percent of Households where Wages are Major Source of Income 2017</i></b>	12	29	29
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	5	2	21
<b><i>Percent of Households where Welfare is Major Source of Income 2017</i></b>	8	11	10
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	4	3	5

**Source:** 2012 and 2017 HUD Picture of Subsidized Housing Database

In contrast, the subsidized population in the census tract (71.01) bisected by Niagara Street had the most significant number of subsidized units and residents. The inventory of subsidized units and the number of residents grew considerably in this tract between 2011 and 2017. The residents of these units were predominantly black (27%) and Hispanic (66%) and living in female-headed households (73%). However, just over one-third of the household are female-headed with children. The elderly subsidized population in this census tract is small, with 29% being headed by a person sixty-two years or older. In a relative sense, this was also the least impoverished subsidized population in the neighborhood, with a median household income of \$14,160 and higher levels of labor force participation. Table 3.1.5 also shows that there were more subsidized housing units in this census tract with two or more bedrooms.

**Table 3.1.5:** 2012-2017 Lower West Side Characteristics of Subsidized Housing Units

	<i>Census Tract 69.02</i>	<i>Census Tract 71.01</i>	<i>Census Tract 71.02</i>
<b><i>Subsidized Units 2017</i></b>	195	665	512
<i>Percent change 2012-17</i>	6	82	1247
<b><i>Total Residents in Subsidized Units 2017</i></b>	296	1386	1101
<i>Percent change 2012-17</i>	28	99	710
<b><i>Percent of Units 0-1 Bedroom 2017</i></b>	66	35	34
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-3	-1	13
<b><i>Percent of Units 2 Bedroom 2017</i></b>	17	30	30
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	2	1	-7
<b><i>Percent of Units 3 or More Bedroom 2017</i></b>	17	35	37
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	2	1	13

**Source:** 2012 and 2017 HUD Picture of Subsidized Housing Database

Finally, the subsidized population in the census tract (71.02) closest to downtown Buffalo had its unique attributes. Between 2011 and 2017 subsidized housing expanded rapidly in this area. The residents of these units are predominantly black (39%) and Hispanic (51%) and living in female-headed households (71%). Like census tract 71.01, just over one-third of the household in this census tract are female-headed with children. The subsidized population in this census tract is the least likely to be elderly, with 19% being headed by a person sixty-two years or older. This



is also an impoverished subsidized population, with a median household income of \$12,867 despite relatively high levels of labor force participation. Table 3.1.5 also shows that there are more subsidized housing units in this census tract with two or more bedrooms, although there had been a noticeable decline (119%) in three or more bedroom units between 2011 and 2017.

Together, these data reflect the role that subsidized housing plays in stemming residential displacement in the Lower West Side neighborhood. The presence of site-based subsidized units and landlords who accept HCVs has helped to cushion the poorest residents in the community from the negative impacts of neighborhood upgrading and concomitant increases in housing costs. Because these residents also consist of a spectrum of people of color, seniors, and disabled members of the community, it is crucial to sustain and expand subsidized units to curb future displacement. However, preserving affordable housing in the Lower West Side is only part of the challenge for policymakers. In focus groups, the residents and stakeholders also said the lack of services that target low-income families and other at-risk populations (e.g., quality schools, options to age-in-place, access to health care, and employment opportunities) also contributed to outmigration. For instance, one homeowner made this comment about factors pushing seniors out of the neighborhood:

*“We are missing long-term care. So when you have people, it's going to be a woman's issue because when they can't take care of their house and they need to move somewhere, they don't want to go to Williamsville, but they often have to go to Williamsville. There aren't patio homes, there just aren't those options that are affordable. So that's super, super, super important. And health care to me is a big question mark because what you saw happening was there were doctors in the city and they moved to the suburbs, Williamsville, Orchard Park. And that was a problem for consumers because they had no way to get there. And now, whether the medical campus will change that, I'm not entirely positive. Because I'm not sure that's what's going to happen. But there has to be access to medical care.”*

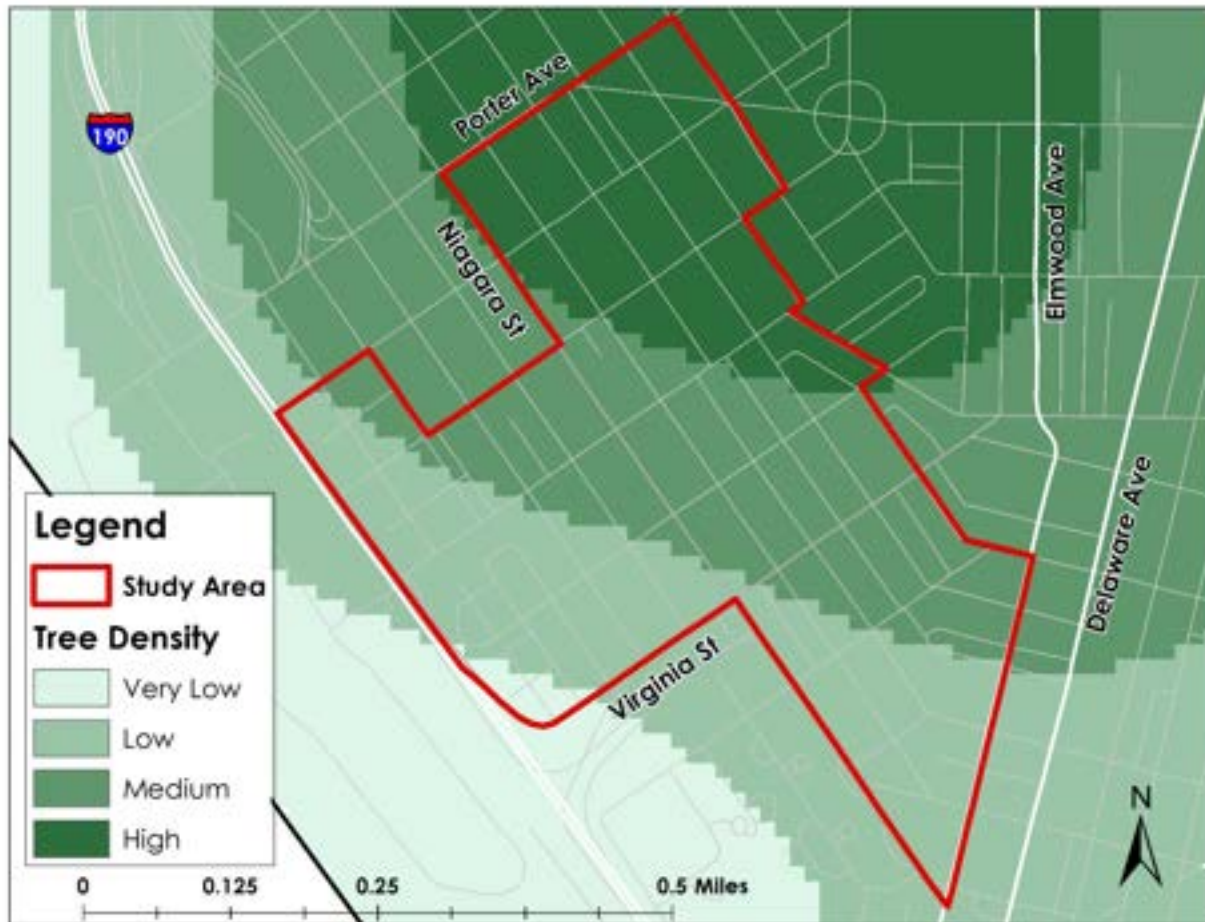
#### *Neighborhood Quality of Life and Amenities on the Lower West Side*

In addition to population and housing characteristics, the collection of data on the quality of life and amenities gave insight into the changing character of the Lower West Side. Figure 3.1.9 identifies land use characteristics that affect neighborhood conditions. The mapping shows that Niagara Street is the center of commercial activity, while parks, schools, and other educational amenities situate on the neighborhood's fringe. Figure 3.1.10 adds context to this observation. It shows that the density of different types of landscaping amenities, such as trees planted and maintained by the City along streets and thoroughfares, is also concentrated on the fringe of the

neighborhood. The absence of these amenities suggests that the remediation of airborne pollution is problematic in the area, particularly in parts of the community where minority and low-income residents live.



**Figure 3.1.9:** Land Use Characteristics in the Lower West Side Neighborhood



**Figure 3.1.10:** Tree Density along Public Streets in the Lower West Side Neighborhood  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

### 3.2 Ellicott Neighborhood

#### *General Neighborhood Trends in the Ellicott Neighborhood*

The Ellicott neighborhood consists of three census block groups located in one census tract, 14.02 BG1, 14.02 BG2, and 14.02 BG4 (Figure 1). The community is situated east of downtown Buffalo and south of Broadway. Ellicott is a predominantly African-American neighborhood. In 2016, 89% of the neighborhood's residents were black. Between 2010 and 2016, however, the black population fell by slightly more than 33%. During this same period, the number of whites (5%) grew, although the growth rate was only trickling.

The renter-class community dominates the Ellicott neighborhood and they comprise 85% of the households in the locale. The renter-class is a low-income group that mostly resides in BG



1-2, where the median gross rents were at or above 30% of household income. Thus, many of the renters in this area are cost-burdened. Although income variation exists in Ellicott, many residents are vulnerable to housing displacement.



**Figure 3.2.1:** The Ellicott Neighborhood

In the six years between 2010 and 2016, the Ellicott populations fell by slightly more than 28%, with the most significant loss occurring in BG 4, which is the closest to downtown and has the fewest number of subsidized housing units. Blacks lost population, while the white and Latinx populations grew by slightly more than 507% and 144% respectively, with most of these increases occurring in BG 4. The *sudden influx* of whites and Latinx into Ellicott suggests the changes in the makeup of the neighborhood is in the early stages.

Educational attainment paints a disturbing but subtle picture of changes in the social-class make-up of Ellicott. For example, adult residents with less than a high school education declined by slightly more than 26%, and those with a high school diploma and some college declined by

more than 30%. Concurrently, residents with a college degree grew by more than 55%, while median household incomes fell by 8% and remained relatively low, at \$18,969 in the neighborhood. This portrait of increases in college-educated residents accompanied by falling median household incomes seems contradictory. Typically, increases in college-educated residents trigger increments in median-housing income. This conflicting picture in Ellicott appears to result from the *masking* of gains in educational attainment and incomes in BG 4 by the concentration of lower income groups in BG 1-2.

Housing conditions mirror Ellicott's slowly changing social class composition. Ellicott lost less than 3% of its housing stock between 2010 and 2016, which is barely noticeable in a community with abundant vacant lots. Even so, it is suggestive that the number of owner-occupied units dropped by over 50%. The decline of owner-occupied units compared to the stability of rental units suggest that renters will continue to dominate Ellicott. Within this context, between 2010 and 2016, the neighborhood experienced an increase in housing costs. The median value of owner-occupied housing rose by more than 7% while US census data indicate that median rents increased by just over 11%. More detailed data were available for estimates of fair market rents in the neighborhood in 2018 (see Table 3.2.1). These data showed that approximations for fair market rents rose the most for larger units in the area.

**Table 3.2.1:** Estimated Change in Fair Market Rents for the Ellicott Neighborhood

<i>Zip Code 14204 Ellicott</i>	<i>0 Bedroom</i>	<i>1 Bedroom</i>	<i>2 Bedroom</i>	<i>3 Bedroom</i>	<i>4 Bedroom</i>
<i>Small Area Fair Market Rent 2018</i>	\$590	\$600	\$730	\$930	\$1,070
<i>Percent Change 2011-2018</i>	7.27	9.09	10.61	13.41	18.89

**Source:** HUD Small Area Fair Market Rent Database

The general neighborhood trends suggest that the size of the population and number of housing units are shrinking while housing prices are increasing. However, an analysis at the block group level provides a more in-depth and insightful view of where neighborhood change occurs. The following section presents an examination of neighborhood block groups. This discussion investigates the population and housing characteristics and examines changes in the subsidized housing population, and then explores the issues of neighborhood quality of life and amenities.

### *Ellicott Population and Housing Characteristics at the Block Group Level*

The pattern of population change varies at the block group level. Population change in BG 4, for example, differs significantly from changes in BG 1-2 and appears driven by that BG's proximity to downtown Buffalo. This block group lost over 55% of its residents between 2010 and 2016, but experienced increases in its white and Latinx populations. These two groups now comprise 33% of the people living in BG 4. These changes represent a shift in social class, as well as a significant racial shift. For example, during the 2010 to 2016 period, the median household incomes grew by slightly more than 54%, while the median household income rose to \$41,691. In BG 4, low-income residents are in danger of displacement.

The changes occurring in BG 1 differ significantly from those happening in BG 4. This block group has the largest population in Ellicott, and it is still growing. And it is also becoming more impoverished. Between 2010 and 2016, the median household income dropped 25%. There are whites and Latinx living in this block group. BG 2 is more diverse and impoverished than BG 1. There are a handful of whites and Latinxes residing in the block group, and the median household income of \$10,270 is the lowest in Ellicott.

**Table 3.2.2:** 2010-2016 Population Characteristics for the Ellicott Neighborhood

	<i>Tract 14.02 BG1</i>	<i>Tract 14.02 BG2</i>	<i>Tract 14.02 BG4</i>	<i>ELLICOTT TOTAL</i>
<b>Total Population 2016</b>	839	387	418	1644
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	21.24	-42.15	-55.81	-28.74
<b>Race 2016</b>				
<i>White 2016</i>	0	27	58	85
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	0.00	0.00	314.29	507.14
<i>African American 2016</i>	839	360	262	1461
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	22.66	-42.40	-70.56	-33.56
<b>Hispanic Ethnicity 2016</b>				
<i>Hispanic/Latino 2016</i>	0	27	78	105
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-100.00	-22.86	n/a	144.19
<b>Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Over</b>				
<i>Less than High School 2016</i>	244	52	61	357
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	11.42	26.83	-72.77	-26.24
<i>High School Graduate and Some College</i>	339	266	326	931
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-19.76	-48.50	-26.38	-30.29
<i>Bachelor's Degree or more</i>	86	37	61	184
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	n/a	-38.33	5.17	55.93
<b>Median Household Income 2016 (In 2016 Inflation Adjusted Dollars)</b>	\$19,273	\$10,270	\$41,691	\$18,969
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-25.51	-5.89	52.01	-8.00

**Source:** 2016 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

The housing characteristics at the block group level mirrors the population composition, and they show that the BG 4 neighborhood enclave is changing. A significant decline in housing units took place in this block group, while BG 1-2 had increases in the number of housing units. BG-4 lost significant numbers of owner- and rental-occupied units (Table 3.2.3). On the flipside, BG1 also lost a substantial number of owner-occupied units but saw a notable increase in rental units. BG 2 also saw a jump in renter-occupied units, but there are no homeowners in this block group.

The number of owner-occupied units and median housing values declined in the neighborhood as a whole, but the changes in BG4 are nonetheless particularly troublesome. Residential improvements in this block group are triggering racial and social class changes. Thus, even though the block group lost a substantial number of owner- and renter-occupied housing units, the median value of owner-occupied units still rose by over 15%, and rents increased by just under 64%. At the same time, these residents are not cost-burdened. A different story is unfolding in BG 1-2. Median housing values did not increase, and rental cost-burden is a problem.

Unkept vacant lots plague the Ellicott community, and demolitions worsen the problem. A homeowner, who participated in the focus group, described the issue this way.

*“There a lot of vacant lots. When a house goes down, they just leave the lot there. And it's bad enough within the past five years that you've brought that up down there on Broadway, straight off of Pratt. I don't know who this person is that lives there or owns the property or lot, but they've turned it into what they call a green space. What it is, is a rodent trap — rodent house. Because now we have woodchucks over here, we have skunks, and they're coming into our yards. They're coming from their property with all that mess. It doesn't even look good. It looks terrible. You can't miss it! It's a big green bush. A big green jungle, and what it is, is home to rodents now. Not so much rats, but the rodent family: woodchucks, skunks, rabbits. And they're in our backyards now, tearing up our plants, they're digging up under our patios, and they're everywhere.”*

**Table 3.2.3:** 2010-2016 Housing Characteristics for the Ellicott Neighborhood

	Tract 14.02 BG1	Tract 14.02 BG2	Tract 14.02 BG4	ELLICOTT TOTAL
<b>Housing Units 2016</b>	538	422	408	1368
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	14.23	8.76	-24.02	-2.01
<b>Vacant Housing Units 2016</b>	51	156	127	334
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	112.50	n/a	0.79	122.67
<b>Occupied Housing Units 2016</b>	487	266	281	1,034
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	8.95	-31.44	-31.63	-17.01
<b>Owner Occupied 2016</b>	41	0	122	163
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-63.39	-100.00	-41.35	-50.30
<b>Renter Occupied 2016</b>	446	266	159	871
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	33.13	-30.00	-21.67	-5.12
<b>Median Value Owner-Occupied Units 2016</b>	\$85,800	n/a	\$108,700	\$103,075
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-17.58	n/a	15.52	7.75
<b>Median Gross Rent 2016</b>	\$397	\$283	\$476	\$392
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-23.36	-9.03	64.71	11.36
<b>Median Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income in The Past 12 Months 2016 (Dollars)</b>	31.40	31.60	13.30	30.50
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	0.80	5.10	-23.00	1.00
<b>Median Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income 2016</b>	17.50	n/a	19.40	36.90
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-9.70	n/a	0.50	-9.20

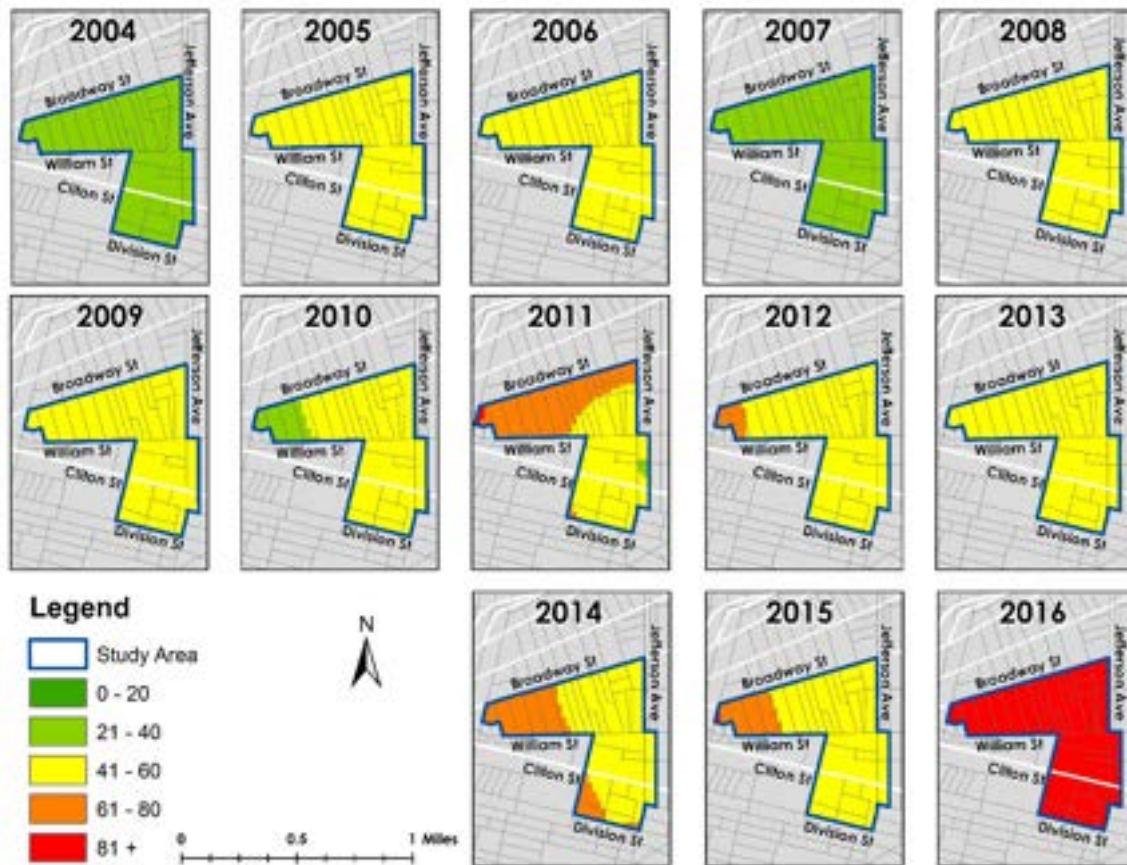
**Source:** 2016 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

A different pattern emerged in 14.02 BG1 and 14.02 BG2 on the south side of Williams Street. These two blocks are composed of African-American residents who are high school graduates with some college. However, residents with more than a high school education were declining in numbers between 2010 and 2016, and they also had the lowest median household incomes. In contrast to 14.02 BG4 where renters made up 57% of the population, renters made up 95% of the population in these two block groups.

Two different stories are emerging in Ellicott. Market forces are transforming BG 4 into a middle-income area, and this is pushing low-income blacks out. Meanwhile, BG 1-2 are low-income black localities and will likely remain that way. Even so, the transitions occurring in BG 4 are generating fears of displacement in BG 1-2. A renter participating in the focus talked about this issue.

*“They're going to have what is supposed to be a four or five-story building. And they're supposed to start breaking ground this spring. Everything they are building around, everything they want to do, and then you say ‘we're not trying to raise everybody's rent.’ But anything you do to improve anything, or anywhere, there's going to be an increase. And nobody can tell me there's not. There's going to be an increase. That increase is going to push a lot of black people out of the neighborhood. If the rent gets to the point that we cannot afford it. That's my opinion.”*





**Figure 3.2.2:** Annual Unit Housing Sales Prices (per sq. foot): 2004-2016

**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

The annual housing sales data were collected at the address level and interpolated for application to the properties in the study neighborhoods. The maps show increases in unit sales prices in Ellicott over that over the years, especially in 14.02 BF4. These increases in housing prices and rents raised concerns about displacement and the long term sustainability of Ellicott as a black community (Figure 3.2.2.). One stakeholder said:

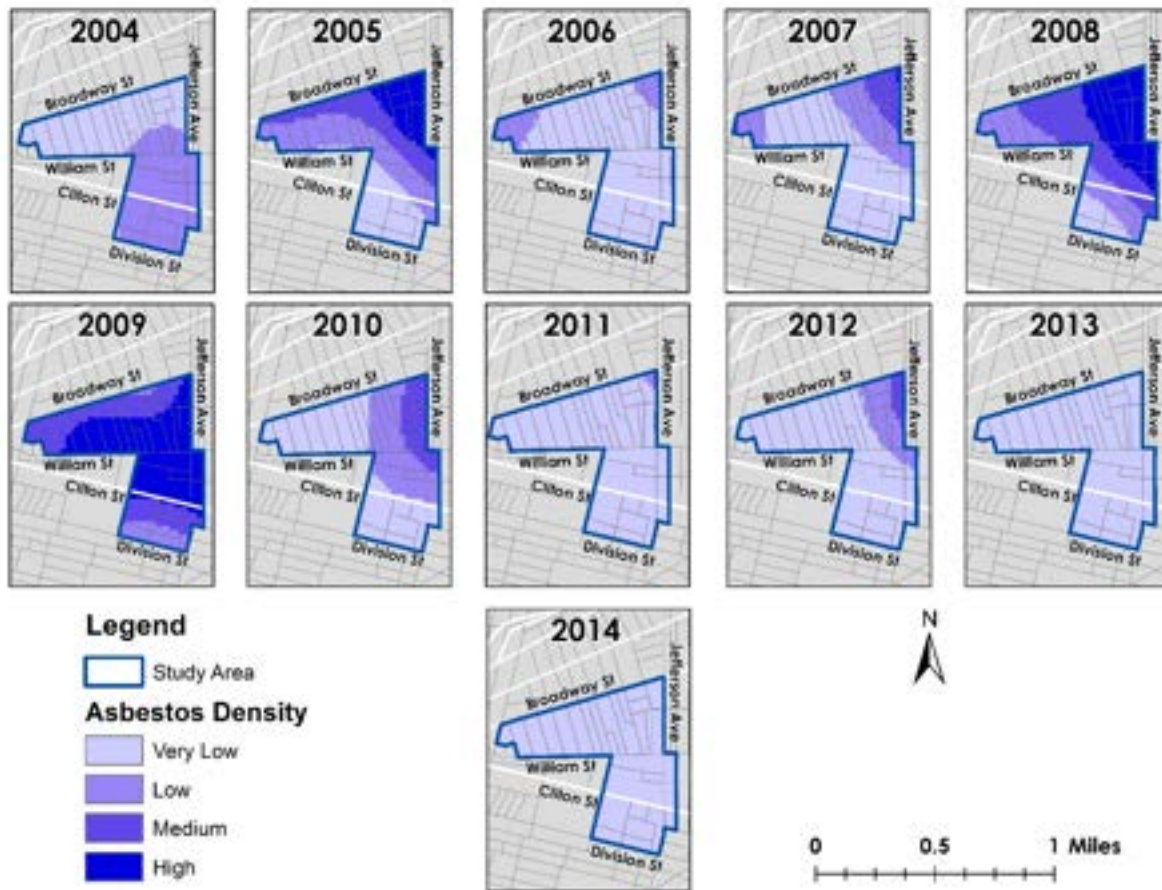
*“What I’ve seen is kids are getting priced out of apartments. They can’t even afford to get a house in Buffalo. They are going to Amherst, Cheektowaga, and Tonawanda. And here we have an opportunity for them, they’re not scared to move in the East Side of Buffalo, but they got to give them something to move in to.”*

Increasing housing costs and upgrades in the neighborhood are forcing out low-income residents and young families. The examination of other data sets will deepen understandings of these residential development dynamics. These data used in this analysis include permits for

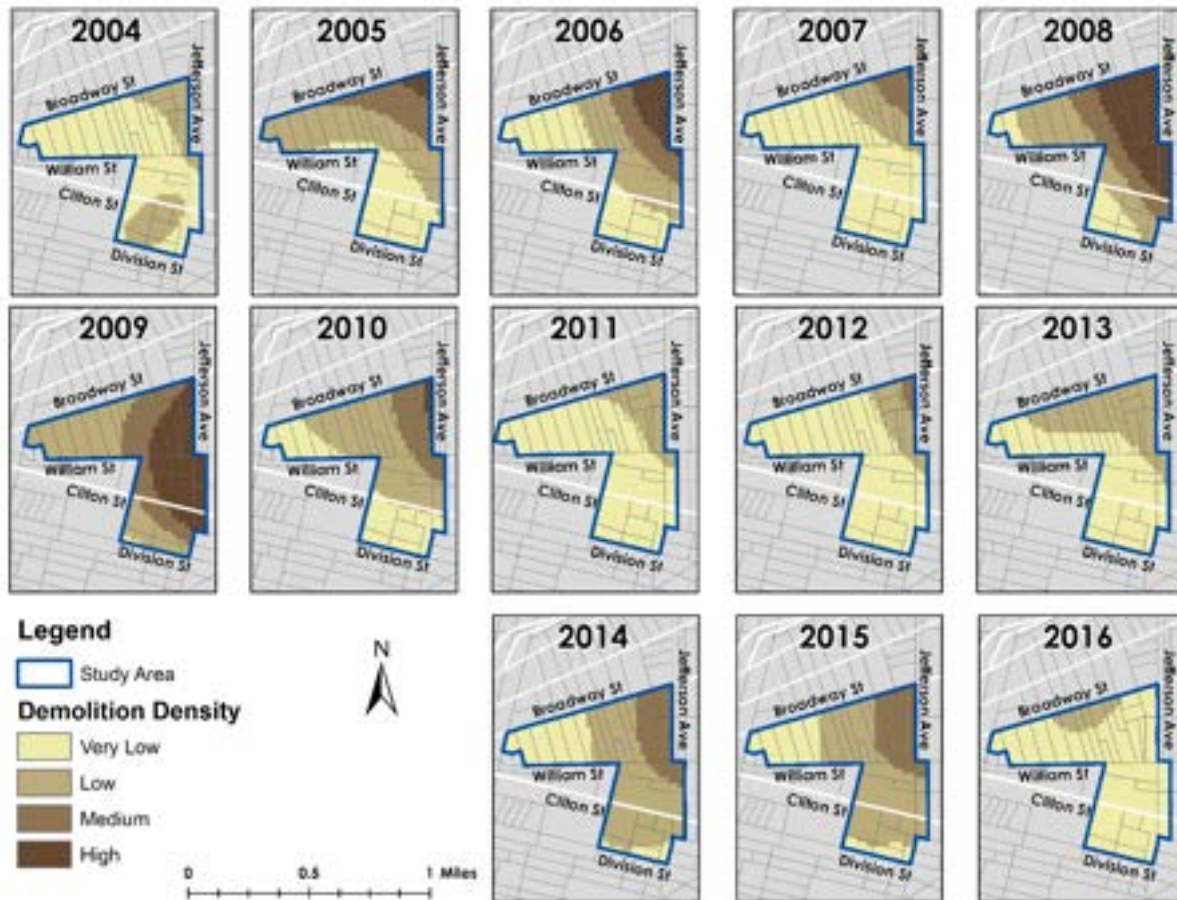
removing asbestos, demolitions, and housing improvements, along with data on tax-foreclosed properties, and demolitions from 2004 to 2016.

The issuance of permits, particularly for asbestos removal and demolition, are precursors to neighborhood upgrading, and typically the owners initiate them as the first step in making improvements on their properties. These activities represent strategic investments designed to bolster the revitalization of communities. For example, Figure 3.2.3 shows that the number of permits issued for asbestos removal spiked in 2005 and then again between 2008 and 2009. These permitting activities set the stage for future investment in the housing stock.

Similarly, Figure 3.2.4 shows that permits for demolition spiked between 2005 and 2010, and again from 2014 to 2015. These permits encompass a range of activities such as interior demolition in structures; the removal of fencing and other exterior improvements to properties, as well as the removal of entire structures. A variety of circumstances trigger these demolitions, including blight removal in response to emergencies and community complaints by homeowners. Even so, when these permitting activities overlap and improvement on properties follow, they are conceived as precursors to residential upgrading.

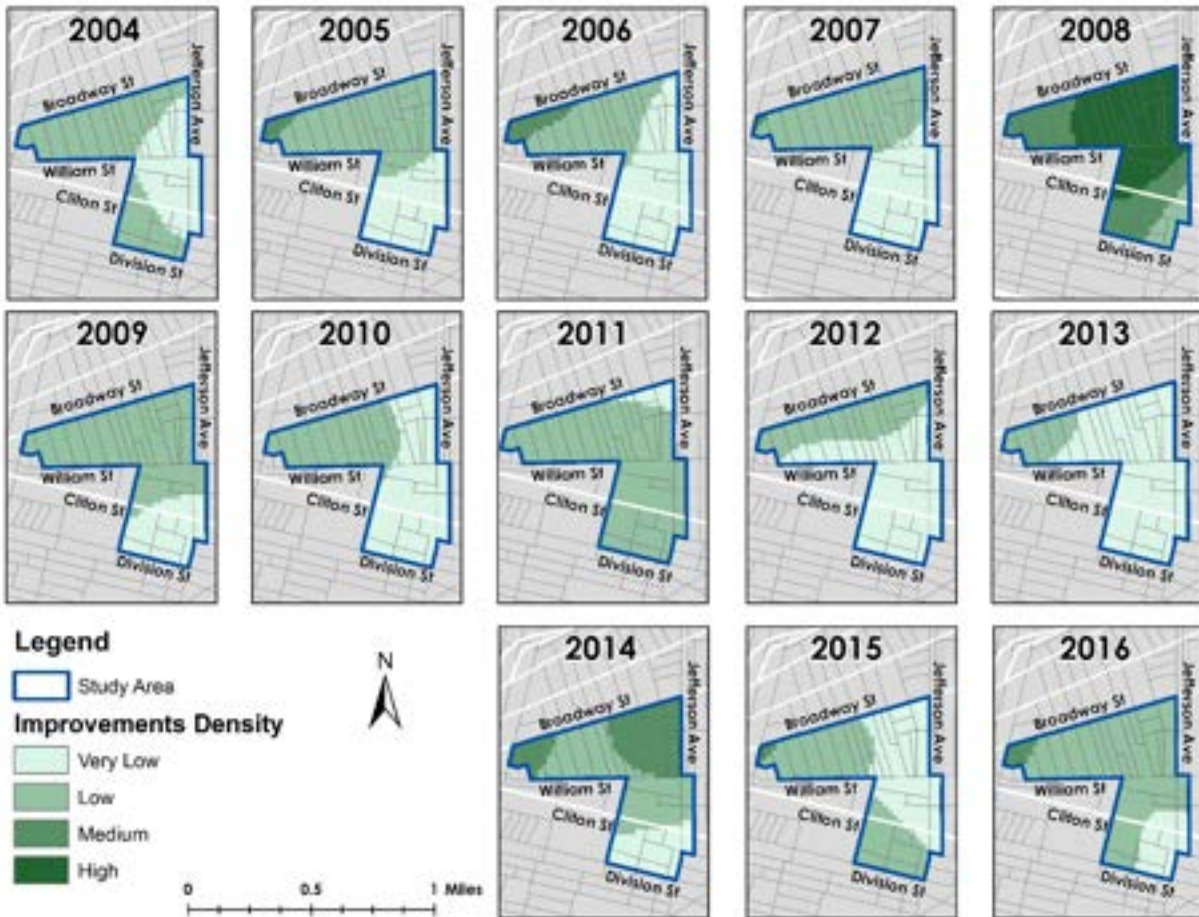


**Figure 3.2.3:** Density of Annual Building Permits Issued (Asbestos): 2004-2014  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning



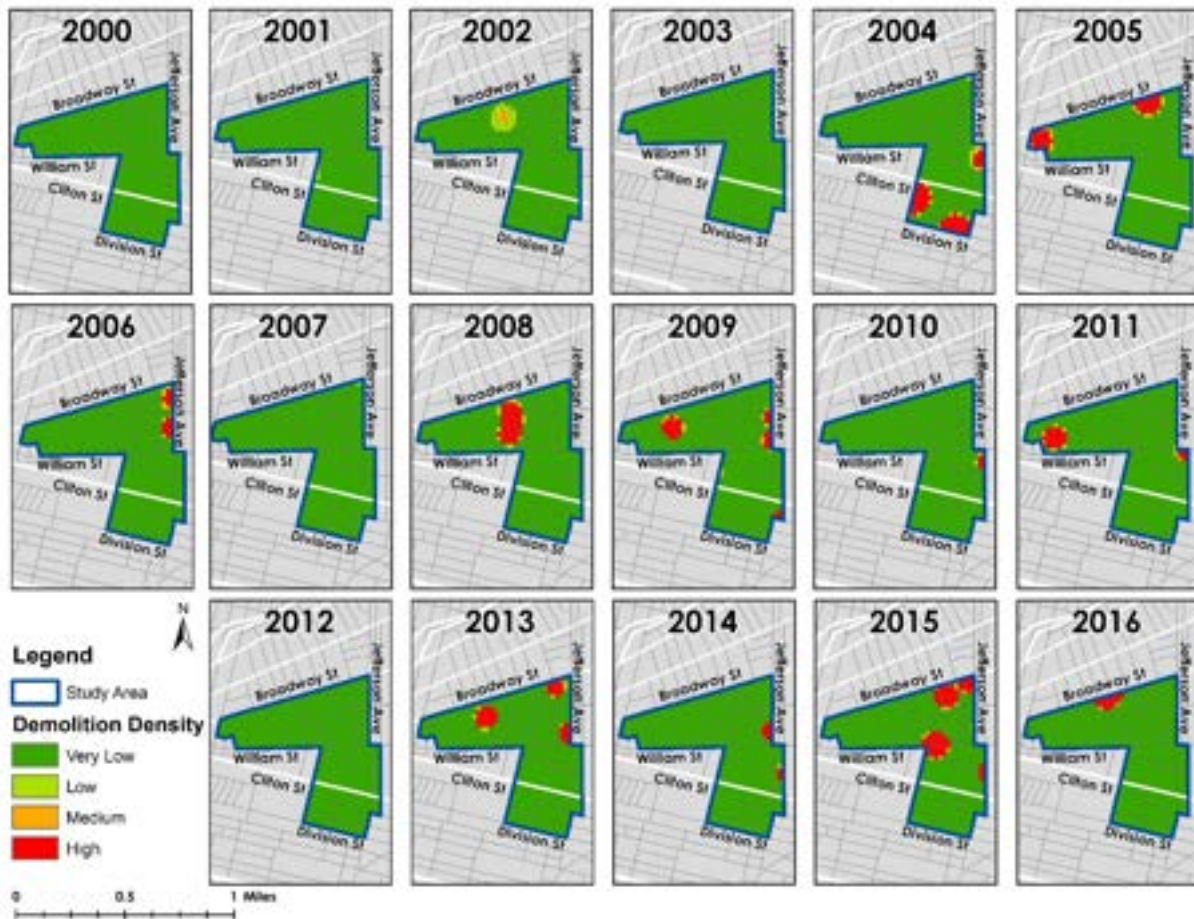
**Figure 3.2.4:** Density of Annual Building Permits Issued (Demolition): 2004-2014  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning





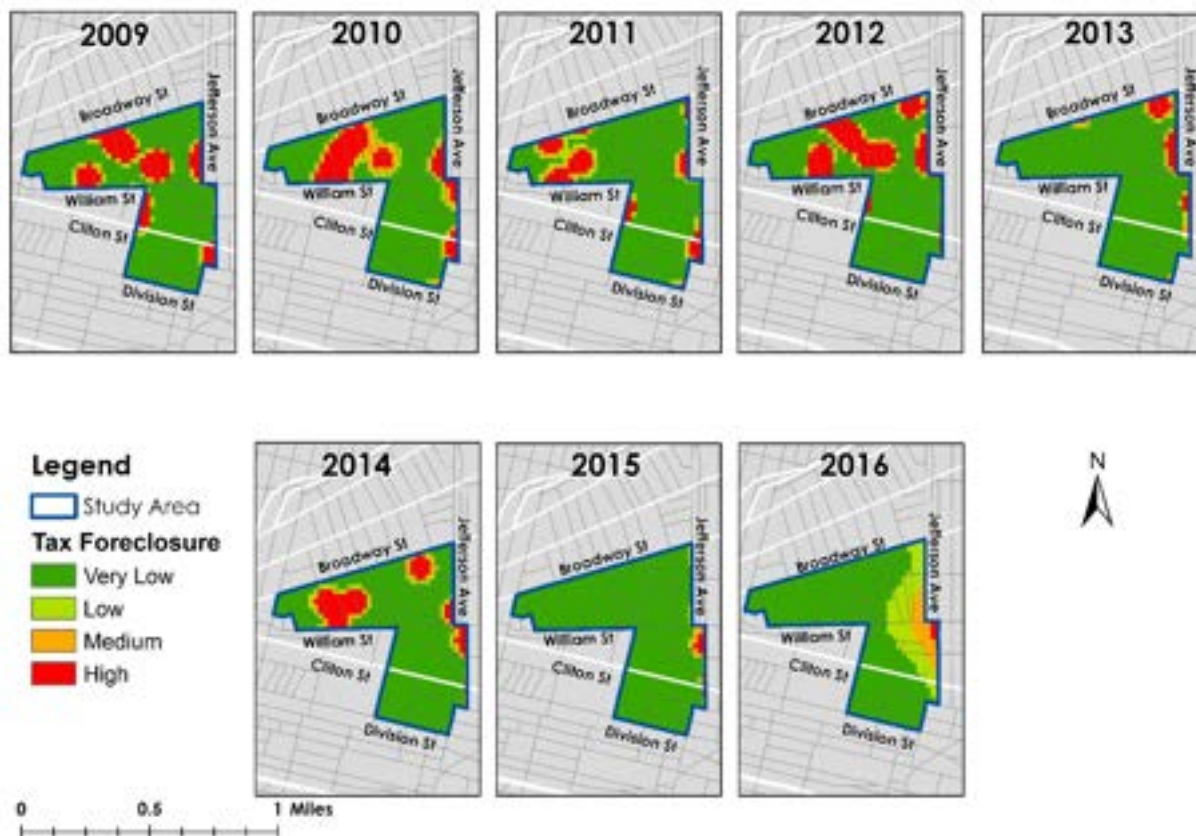
**Figure 3.3.5:** Density of Annual Building Permits Issued (Housing Improvements): 2004-2014  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

Figure 3.2.5 reflects the next stage in the residential upgrading process. It shows that steady investments in housing improvements took place between 2000 and 2016. These investments in home improvement were most intense from 2008 to 2014. The abatement of asbestos and other environmental hazards, along with the removal of obsolete and blighted structures, preceded this improvement. Data on the density of demolished properties in Ellicott support this thesis (Figure 3.2.6).



**Figure 3.2.6:** Density of Demolished Properties: 2000-2016  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

Unlike the data presented in Figure 3.2.4, which shows where permits for a variety of demolition projects were issued, these data illustrate the complete removal of structures from the neighborhood housing inventory. The mapping indicates that BG4 was the primary site of demolitions from 2000 to 2016.



**Figure 3.2.7:** Density of Annual Tax Foreclosure Properties: 2009-2016  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

The maps on the density of tax-foreclosed properties deepen understanding of the role played by this public policy in transforming neighborhoods. Strategic public investments catalyze change in Ellicott's BG4, and such investments are the triggers of residential upgrading. BG4 is now the most prosperous locale in the Ellicott neighborhood. For these reasons, the experiences in BG4 demonstrate how strategic public sector interventions precede neighborhood transformation. In Ellicott's BG4, the removal of asbestos and other environmental hazards along with the complete elimination of dilapidated structures paved the way for that block group to become an evolving middle-income place, with an ever-increasing white and Latinx population.

Public actions that spawn demolitions, the removal of environmental hazards, and aggressive tax foreclosures represent one side of the public sector investment strategy, while spending on Buffalo Homeownership Zone program, Community Development Block Grants, and parks programs represent the other. Almost all of these public investments are in BG4, the neighborhood's emerging middle-class enclave (Figure 3.2.11).



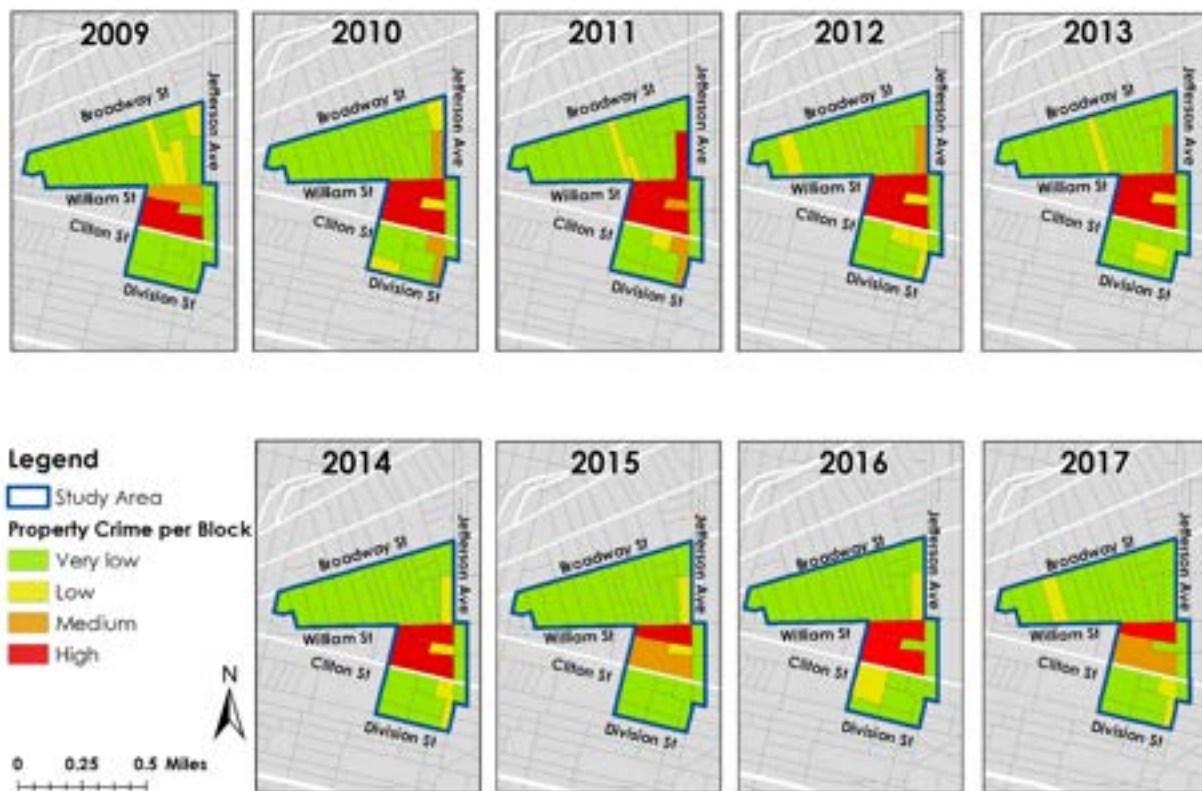


**Figure 3.2.11:** Public Sector Investments in Neighborhood Infrastructure: 2006-2016

**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

The crime data reinforce the hypothesis that targeted public investments are driving the transformation of BG4 into a middle-class enclave. The crime portrait is intriguing. Although BG4 is the most prosperous section of the Ellicott neighborhood, it has the lowest crime rate between 2009 and 2017 (Figure 3.2.12). Within this framework, crime clusters along the commercial corridors and into the Town Gardens section of BG2, with other parts of the community having lower levels of property crimes.



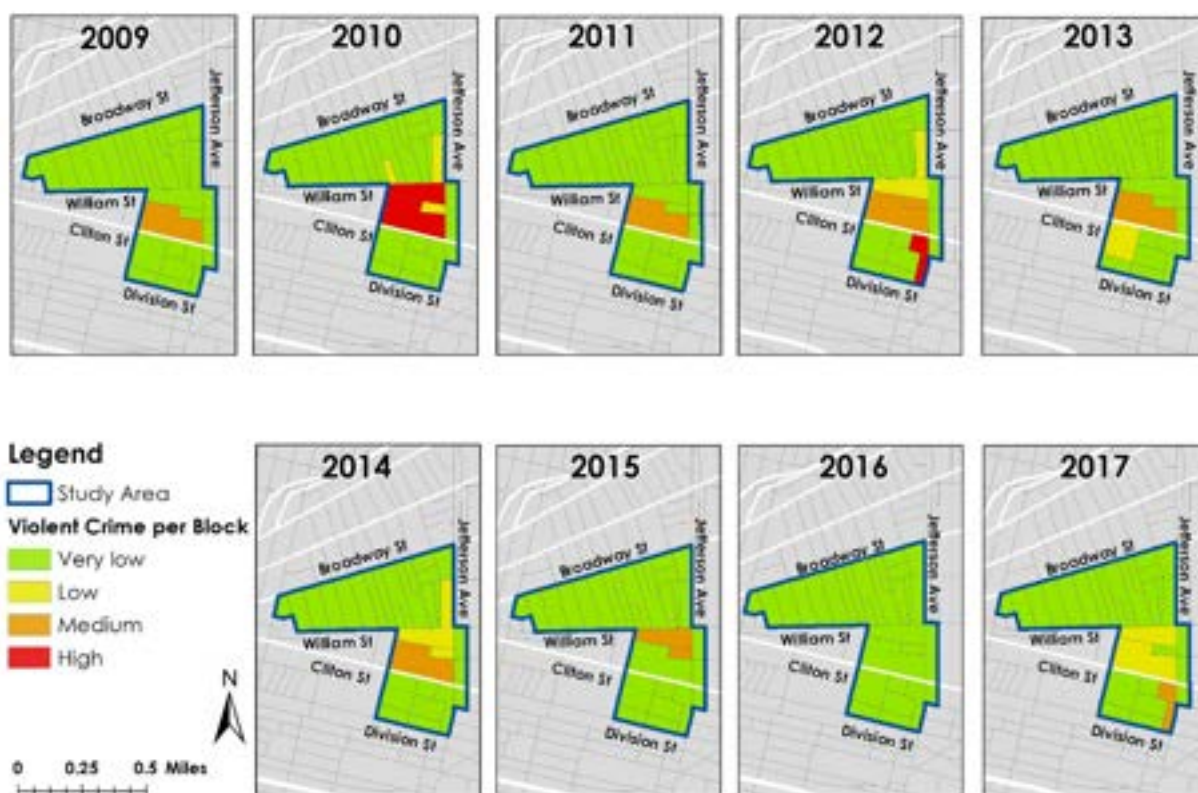


**Figure 3.2.12:** Property Crime Density in the Ellicott Neighborhood: 2009-2017

**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

Figure 3.2.13 shows annual reported violent crime per block between 2009 and 2017. Overall, violent crime followed a similar pattern to property crimes. They remained very low in 14.02 BG4 and high in commercial areas. Like other neighborhoods examined in this study, residents did not view crime as problematic, despite these areas being stigmatized as crime-ridden in the media. Several focus group participants characterized the neighborhood as safe.

*“It’s one of the lowest crime areas in the city. At nighttime it’s quiet. It’s like being in the suburbs. You can walk. It’s a safe area. There’s still things that need to be done. They need to finish it, but right now it’s probably one of the most desirable places in the city of Buffalo.”*



**Figure 3.2.13:** Violent Crime Density in the Ellicott Neighborhood: 2009-2017

**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

### *The Subsidized Housing Population in the Ellicott Neighborhood*

Ellicott is a community of contrasts, and it highly subsidized renter populations headlines this diversity story. There are four types of subsidized housing in Ellicott: (1) public housing; (2) Section 8 properties; (3) low-income housing tax credits and; (4) other subsidized units. These units cluster in the easternmost section of Ellicott (Figure 3.2.8)



**Figure 3.2.8:** The location of Subsidized Housing in 2017

**Source:** HUD Picture of Subsidized Housing Database

African-American women (77%) dominate the residents living in subsidized housing units and women with children head about one-third of the households. Just under one-quarter are disabled and just over one-third are elderly. These are very low-income residents with a median household income of \$11,995. Moreover, only 21% of the population is in the labor force, while 11% are welfare dependent (Table 3.3.4). A significant number of subsidized residents live alone, as reflected in the large number of one bedroom apartments (Table 3.2.5). One of the most important findings is that subsidized housing does not buffer residents from rising housing costs completely. For example, one focus participant living in subsidized housing said.

*“Once it was gas and maintenance. So they cut the maintenance guy because the maintenance guy wasn't doing his job. Now it's gas and water. Where did the water come from? Now you just put an underground system in there for the water, I don't know what you call it, and then all of a sudden we got a water bill.”*



Other renters said they expect ancillary costs associated with their housing, like utilities and general maintenance, to continue rising. Concern over increasing utility costs also made the residents worry about the quality of maintenance. They feared that landlords and the BMHA might cut back on maintenance to compensate for increases in the cost of housing. They also worry that the encroachment of market-rate housing in their neighborhood will cause their rents to rise, making them less affordable.

**Table 3.3.4:** 2012-2017 Ellicott Neighborhood Population in Subsidized Housing

	<i>Census Tract 14.02</i>
<i>Subsidized Units 2017</i>	1118
<i>Percent change 2012-17</i>	12
<i>Total Residents in Subsidized Units 2017</i>	1652
<i>Percent change 2012-17</i>	-1
<i>Percent of the Population Black 2017</i>	77
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-20
<i>Percent of the Population Hispanic 2017</i>	17
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-20
<i>Percent of Households Female Headed</i>	74
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	1
<i>Percent of Households Female Headed with Children</i>	30
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-1
<i>Percent of Households with a Person with a Disability</i>	22
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	0
<i>Percent of Households Headed by a Person 62yrs or More</i>	37
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	7
<i>Percent of the Population Below Poverty 2017</i>	32
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-13
<i>Household Income 2017</i>	\$11,995
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	6
<i>Percent of Households where Wages are Major Source of Income 2017</i>	21
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-8
<i>Percent of Households where Welfare is Major Source of Income 2017</i>	11
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	4

**Source:** 2012 and 2017 HUD Picture of Subsidized Housing Database

**Table 3.2.5:** 2012-2017 Ellicott Neighborhood Characteristics of Subsidized Housing Units

<i>Census Tract 14.02</i>	
<b><i>Subsidized Units 2017</i></b>	1118
<i>Percent change 2012-17</i>	12
<b><i>Total Residents in Subsidized Units 2017</i></b>	1652
<i>Percent change 2012-17</i>	-1
<b><i>Percent of Units 0-1 Bedroom 2017</i></b>	48
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	7
<b><i>Percent of Units 2 Bedroom 2017</i></b>	20
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-18
<b><i>Percent of Units 3 or More Bedroom 2017</i></b>	32
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	11

**Source:** 2012 and 2017 HUD Picture of Subsidized Housing Database

These data collectively reveal the role that subsidized housing plays in stemming residential displacement in the Ellicott neighborhood. The presence of site-based subsidized units and landlords who accept HCVs protect the poorest residents from the displacement danger. Still, concerns about the sustainability of affordable rental property loom in residents' minds. Because these residents are also composed of a spectrum of blacks, Latinx, seniors, and disabled residents, it is essential to sustain and expand subsidized units to curb future displacement.

#### *Neighborhood Quality of Life and Amenities in the Ellicott neighborhood*

The data on neighborhood quality of life and amenities provides a broader view of the residential experience in the Ellicott neighborhood. The easternmost section of the community is the site of much of Ellicott's commercial activity (Figure 3.2.9). Willert Park, situated in the northwestern corner of BG4, is the only park in Ellicott. Although Ellicott does not have a public school, Bennett Park Montessori School is adjacent to the neighborhood, as well as the J.F.K. Recreational Center (3.2.9).



**Figure 3.2.9:** Land Use Characteristics in the Ellicott Neighborhood

The mapping shows that landscaping amenities, such as trees planted and maintained by the City along streets and thoroughfares, was moderately high in Ellicott (3.2.9). Ground truthing, or windshield surveys do not support this viewpoint. The neighborhood’s green cover does not sufficiently protect residents from airborne pollutions and other negative externalities. The lack of tree coverage is problematic because of extensive automobile traffic in the community.

Additionally, the City does not sufficiently invest in the maintenance and upkeep of the recreational center that serves Ellicott. A renter made this statement at a focus group session:

*“I turned 68 last months. I was born here. I don't know, it just seems like, to me, being born here, it just seems like it's just the same problem over and over again. And like the JFK Center - now that was there when I was a kid. It seemed like everybody else has had their community center done over, but they ain't touched the JFK Center. My grandchildren came here from Virginia, and we had to stand in line to get the two at once on the swing. And like I said, you don't give these*

*children in this area no center, you don't give them nothing to look up to. That's a problem too.”*

This renter went on to say, “Our children don't see no future; that's why they don't stay here.” Other focus group participants echoed this sentiment. By itself, affordable housing does not check all of the boxes that constitute a high quality of life in a neighborhood. There is a need for additional supportive services for youth, seniors, and other at-risk groups, for a neighborhood to be family friendly and sustainable.



**Figure 3.2.10:** Tree Density along Public Streets in Ellicott Neighborhood  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

### **3.3 Fruit Belt Neighborhood**

#### *General Neighborhood Trends in the Fruit Belt*

The Fruit Belt presents a model of how institutional expansion and development spawns residential upgrading and the displacement danger. The Fruit Belt neighborhood consists of four census block groups (31 BG1, 31 BG2, 31 BG3, and 31 BG4) located in one census tract (Figure 1). It is situated north of downtown Buffalo and east of Main Street. The Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC) forms its western boundary (31 BG4). The BNMC is a vital anchor institution that drives the neighborhood transformation process. Discussions of every day and culture in the Fruit Belt are not possible without accounting for the residential dynamics generated by BNMC's "encroachment."

The Fruit Belt is a predominantly African-American (86%) neighborhood, and since the establishment of the Medical Corridor in 1973, the community population has steadily declined. In 1970 over 9,000 blacks lived in the Fruit Belt, and in 2016 less than 2000 resided there. Within this contextual setting, between 2010 and 2016, the African-American population fell by slightly more than 10%. The black population is declining, but the white population (12%) is growing, albeit at a very slow rate. The renter-class (55%) dominates the Fruit Belt, but this social group is rapidly declining. The rental class is living on the economic edge; median gross rents were at or above 30% of household income in much of the neighborhood. A significant number of renters are thus cost-burdened; the housing displacement threat endangers them.





**Figure 3.3.1:** The Fruit Belt Neighborhood

Between 2010 and 2016 the total population declined by slightly more than 15%. Most residents leaving the Fruit Belt are low-income groups, and the neighborhood's social class structure seems to be changing. Between 2010 and 2016 residents with less than a high school education declined by slightly more than 10%, while those with a high school diploma and some college fell by more than 20%. At the same time, those residents with a college degree grew by more than 108%, and median household incomes rose by just over 53%. Even so, the Fruit Belt median household income remained relatively low at \$25,392. The citywide median household income is \$34,268, and for African Americans \$25,509. The Fruit Belt, thus, remains a low-income neighborhood despite trend lines suggesting that its social class structure is gradually changing.

The housing profile reinforces this picture of a community in transition. The loss of over 35% of rental housing units from the Fruit Belt housing stock is troubling and suggests the dislodgement of the renting-class. On the flip side, homeowners appear to be benefitting from market dynamics catalyzed by BNMC development dynamics. For example, homeownership

remained stable from 2010 to 2016 while increasing in some block groups. Most significantly, the median value of owner-occupied housing rose by slightly more than 93% between 2010 and 2016.

Increases in the value of houses are beneficial for homeowners, but increases in rents harm tenants, especially when they are already cost-burdened. Between 2010 and 2016, the nearly 40% increases in median rents explain somewhat why population declined in the Fruit Belt. The data on fair market rents in the Fruit Belt, understandably, show that estimates for fair market rents rose the most for larger units in the community (Table 3.31). Overall, the data show that fair market rents were the highest in the block groups in the vicinity of the BNMC (zip code 14203).

**Table 3.3.1:** Estimated Change in Fair Market Rents for the Fruit Belt

<i>Zip Code 14203 - Fruit Belt West of Michigan Street</i>	<i>0 Bedroom</i>	<i>1 Bedroom</i>	<i>2 Bedroom</i>	<i>3 Bedroom</i>	<i>4 Bedroom</i>
<i>Small Area Fair Market Rent 2018</i>	\$800	\$830	\$1,000	\$1,260	\$1,460
<i>Percent Change 2011-2018</i>	31.15	36.07	36.99	40.00	46.00
<i>Zip Code 14204 - Fruit Belt East of Michigan Street</i>	<i>0 Bedroom</i>	<i>1 Bedroom</i>	<i>2 Bedroom</i>	<i>3 Bedroom</i>	<i>4 Bedroom</i>
<i>Small Area Fair Market Rent 2018</i>	\$590	\$600	\$730	\$930	\$1,070
<i>Percent Change 2011-2018</i>	7.27	9.09	10.61	13.41	18.89

**Source:** HUD Small Area Fair Market Rent Database

The general neighborhood trends suggest that the size of the population and number of housing units are shrinking while housing prices and rents are increasing. A block group level analysis presents a more detailed and microscopic assessment of these neighborhood changes.

#### *Fruit Belt Population and Housing Characteristics at the Block Group Level*

The Fruit Belt is a community in flux, and the population dynamics in block groups 31 BG4 and BG3 reflects this fluidity. The population is declining in the BNMC area (BG4), while the adjacent BG3 is experiencing an influx of new residents. Because of its proximity to the BNMC, the block group is emerging as the prime Fruit Belt locality. Much of this growth is attributable to the addition of 300 units in the High Pointe nursing-care facility and a smaller number of affordable rental properties built in the area by the St. John Community Development Corporation.

By 2016, 50% of Fruit Belt residents lived in this block group (31 BG3), including most of the white residents. The increased proportion of residents in these two BG illustrate the changing race and social class character of this locality. At the same time, the median income is relatively low in both blocks. This suggests that the expansion of the BNMC is causing a shift in the

population of these two block groups, with the immediate area surrounding the BNMC experiencing population losses and the adjacent area experiencing growth. Within this framework, BG2 and BG3 are the most prosperous enclaves in the Fruit Belt with a median household income of \$38,458 (Table 3.3.2). Educational attainment is higher in BG3, where a significant number of residents are high school graduates with some college and college graduates. Thus, the sizable number of low-income block group residents lower the median household income, BG3 is still the prime residential location in the Fruit Belt.

**Table 3.3.2:** 2010-2016 Population Characteristics for the Fruit Belt

	<i>Tract 31 BG1</i>	<i>Tract 31 BG2</i>	<i>Tract 31 BG3</i>	<i>Tract 31 BG4</i>	<i>FRUIT BELT TOTAL</i>
<b>Total Population 2016</b>	577	271	1146	302	2296
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-31.06	-42.58	20.89	-34.91	-15.62
<b>Race 2016</b>					
<i>White 2016</i>	10	10	215	36	271
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-83.05	0.00	10.26	-82.78	-42.71
<i>African American 2016</i>	567	253	911	198	1929
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-19.92	-43.90	24.28	-22.35	-10.15
<b>Hispanic Ethnicity 2016</b>					
<i>Hispanic/Latino 2016</i>	0	20	20	53	93
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-100.00	-4.76	n/a	n/a	111.36
<b>Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Over</b>					
<i>Less than High School 2016</i>	36	65	220	68	389
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-67.57	32.65	18.92	-24.44	-10.57
<i>High School Graduate and Some College</i>	242	164	442	135	983
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-27.54	-21.53	-10.71	-33.82	-20.85
<i>Bachelor's Degree or More</i>	88	12	133	25	258
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	700.00	-50.00	84.72	47.06	108.06
<b>Median Household Income 2016 (In 2016 Inflation Adjusted Dollars)</b>	\$38,571	\$38,458	\$25,431	\$9,583	\$25,392
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	137.36	51.31	16.62	-3.21	53.02

**Source:** 2016 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

The housing characteristics in the Fruit Belt affirms BG3 as the community's prime residential enclave (Table 3.3.3). Proximity to the medical campus is central to its desirability. While residential development exists in BG4, BMHA expansion is recreating this enclave for medical students, hospital workers, and other staff-level hospital employees, and this transformation is significantly reducing residential space. Consequently, between 2010 and 2016, the BNMC lost 43% of its housing units. Meanwhile, residential development is on the upswing in BG3, where the area experienced a 10% increase in its housing units.

Moreover, the median value of housing (\$20,000) in these block groups was significantly higher than any other area in the Fruit Belt, an increase of 173% over six years. Homeownership in the block group did decline by about 18%, which probably resulted from the City's aggressive tax-foreclosure policies. This issue will be discussed later in this section. Housing values rose across the Fruit Belt, which benefitted all homeowners in the community.

Renters and homeowners have different experiences in the Fruit Belt. The rental units declined in three of the four Fruit Belt block groups, and across the community, there was a 35% decline in rental units. The trend is that rental units are declining, while owner-occupied units are increasing. The decline of low-income rental units bodes well for homeowners but not for renters. Low-income workers dominate the Fruit Belt renter class. The cost-burden of renters reflects this reality. In all but BG 4, a significant number of residents are cost-burdened, and in BG1, 50% of the population is housing cost-burdened (Table 3.3.3).

**Table 3.3.3:** 2010-2016 Housing Characteristics for the Fruit Belt

	<i>Tract 31 BG1</i>	<i>Tract 31 BG2</i>	<i>Tract 31 BG3</i>	<i>Tract 31 BG4</i>	<i>FRUIT BELT TOTAL</i>
<b>Housing Units 2016</b>	414	221	545	153	1333
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	1.97	-36.68	10.32	-42.70	-12.07
<b>Vacant Housing Units 2016</b>	194	80	195	10	479
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	56.45	-27.93	16.77	n/a	19.15
<b>Occupied Housing Units 2016</b>	220	141	350	143	854
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-21.99	-40.76	7.03	-46.44	-23.34
<b>Owner Occupied 2016</b>	153	108	124	0	385
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	41.67	8.00	-18.42	-100.00	-0.52
<b>Renter Occupied 2016</b>	67	33	226	143	469
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-61.49	-76.09	29.14	-40.42	-35.49
<b>Median Value Owner-Occupied Units 2016</b>	\$58,600	\$81,800	\$119,800	n/a	\$81,805
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	6.55	59.14	173.52	n/a	93.25
<b>Median Gross Rent 2016</b>	\$845	\$692	\$742	\$369	\$684
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	45.96	46.30	31.10	2.50	39.88
<b>Median Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income in The Past 12 Months 2016 (Dollars)</b>	50.00	32.50	33.20	23.30	32.10
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	0.00	17.90	-15.70	-13.20	-13.00
<b>Median Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income 2016</b>	12.10	12.10	18.10	n/a	13.90
<i>Percent Change 2010-2016</i>	-37.90	-26.00	-0.20	n/a	-10.50

**Source:** 2016 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

In 31 BG3 and 31 BG4, the transformation of the Fruit Belt is most visible. One homeowner described the impact of the BNMC expansion this way:

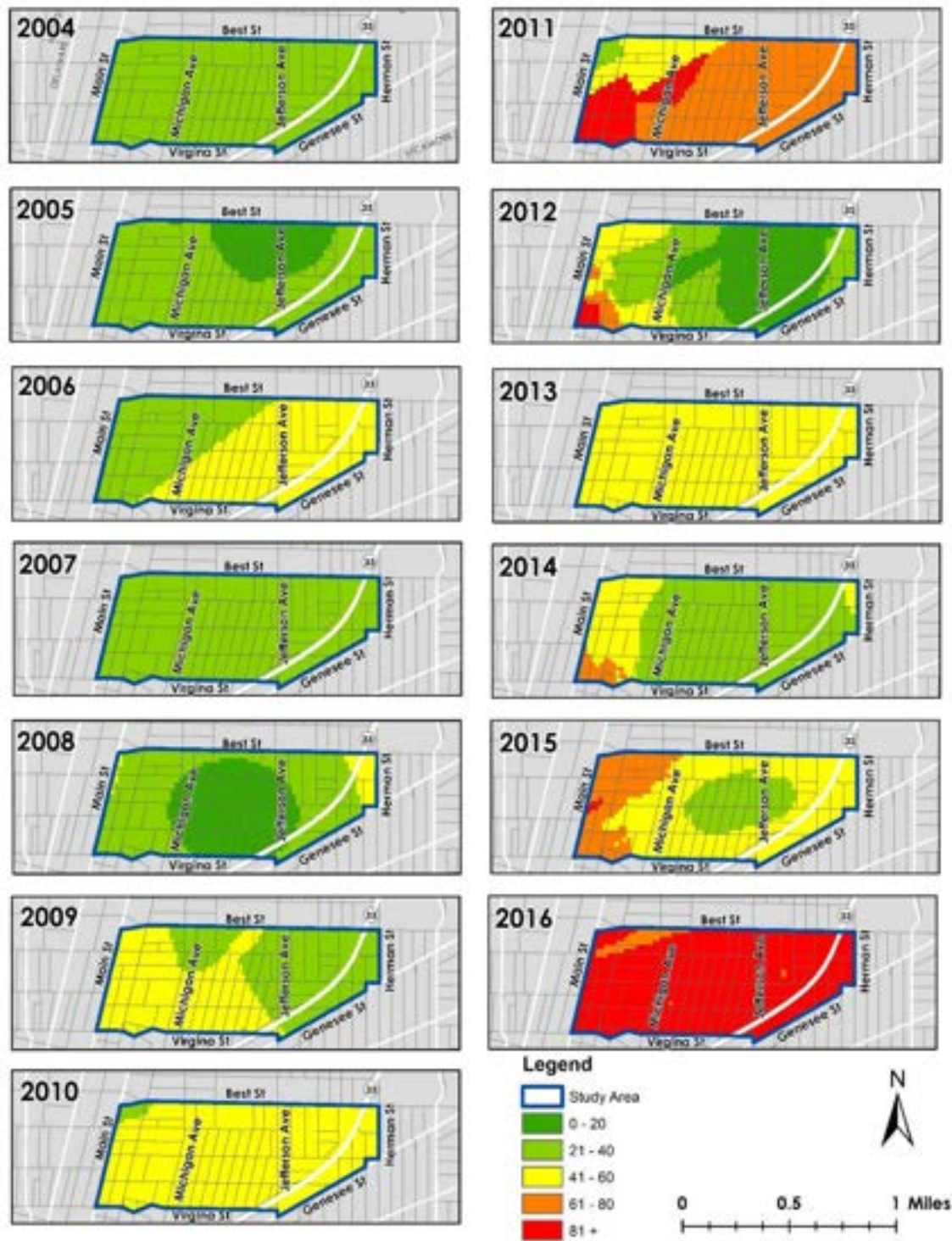
*“If you had come three or four years ago, you might not even recognize the place. My daughter moved away and she was gone for about that time and when she*

*came back she was totally shocked. The whole skyline with the medical corridor, the work that they are doing on the streets, even the new houses that are being put up by the Saint John's Corporation, all of the new livable apartments. So what used to be an older, run-down community is coming back to life because of our location. This is the best time, probably in history, to live in the Fruit Belt. The prices of the property have skyrocketed, along with the rents. Which is good and bad because it's going to up the ante for whoever lives here to try to keep up with the pace of what's going on. But overall, if you can keep up with what some of us are calling gentrification, which is happening in the Fruit Belt, it is going to definitely pay off."*

Other residents discussed their perceptions of BNMC encroachment similarly. One renter said real estate speculation and development have “crossed over Michigan Avenue and is over here in the Fruit Belt now, and once it's coming, it's like an avalanche, and you'll see it keep coming.” An analysis of the data on housing prices will give greater insight into this *avalanche that keeps coming*.

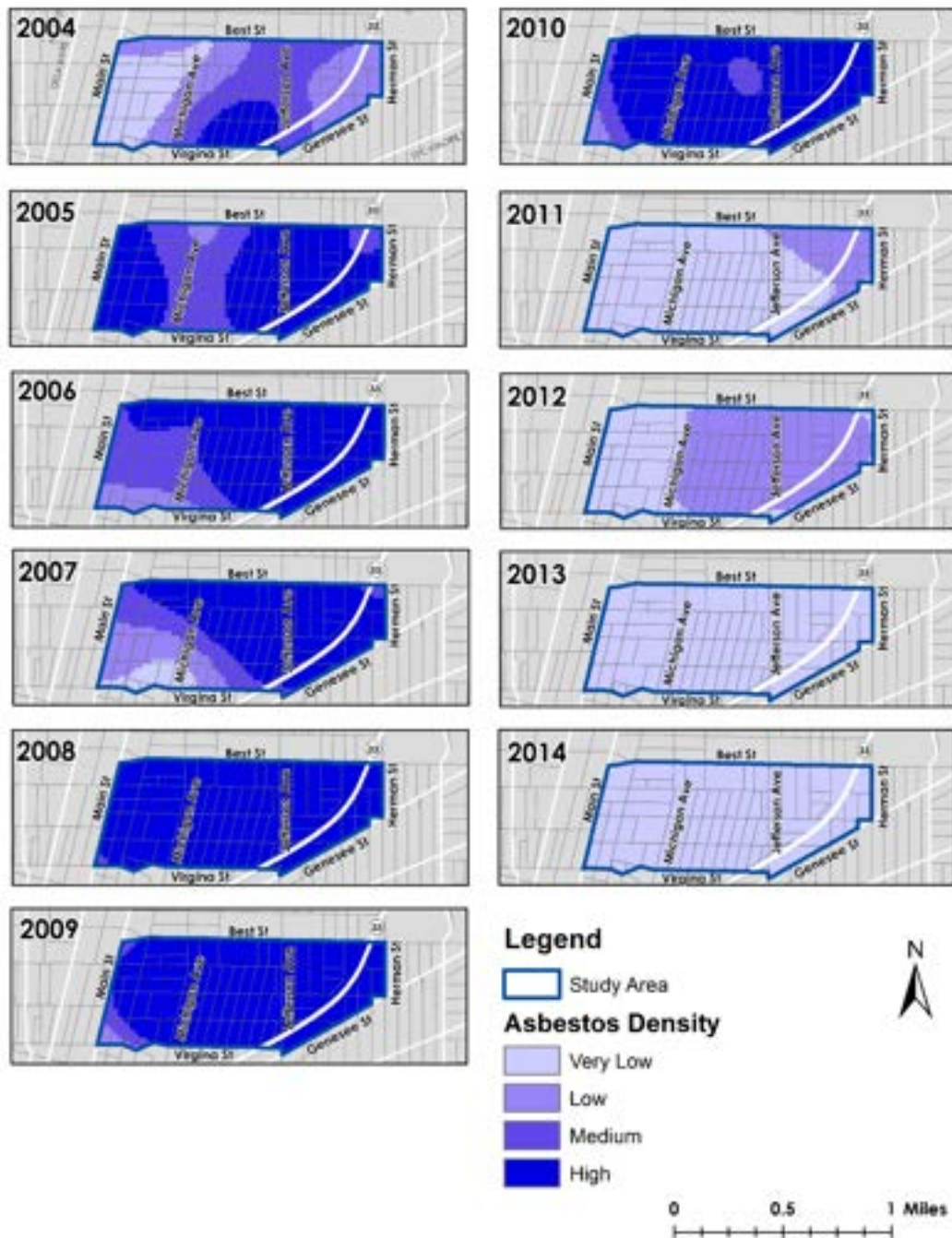
Figure 3.3.2 shows the annual housing sale prices per sq. foot in the Fruit Belt Neighborhood from 2004 to 2016. The data show that housing unit sale prices are rising, but the increments are probably due to optimism spawned by the remarkable development of the BNMC, rather than housing demand. According to the *Buffalo Housing Opportunity Strategy*, the Fruit Belt is a low demand neighborhood. Still, there is more to this story than the growth of the BNMC producing increasing housing values. The data on permits for asbestos removal, demolitions, housing improvements, and tax-foreclosed properties provide insight into the public sector's role in catalyzing neighborhood transformation.

In the Fruit Belt, the issuance of permits for asbestos removal and demolition, regardless of the reasons for having the work done, are considered forerunners to institutional development and residential upgrading *if* followed by building construction, renovations of property or housing improvements. The number of permits issued for asbestos removal spiked between 2005 and 2010, setting the stage for future investment in institutional development in BG4 and in the housing stock in neighborhoods east of Michigan Avenue (Figure 3.3.3).



**Figure 3.3.2:** Annual Unit Housing Sales Prices (per sq. foot): 2004-2016  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning



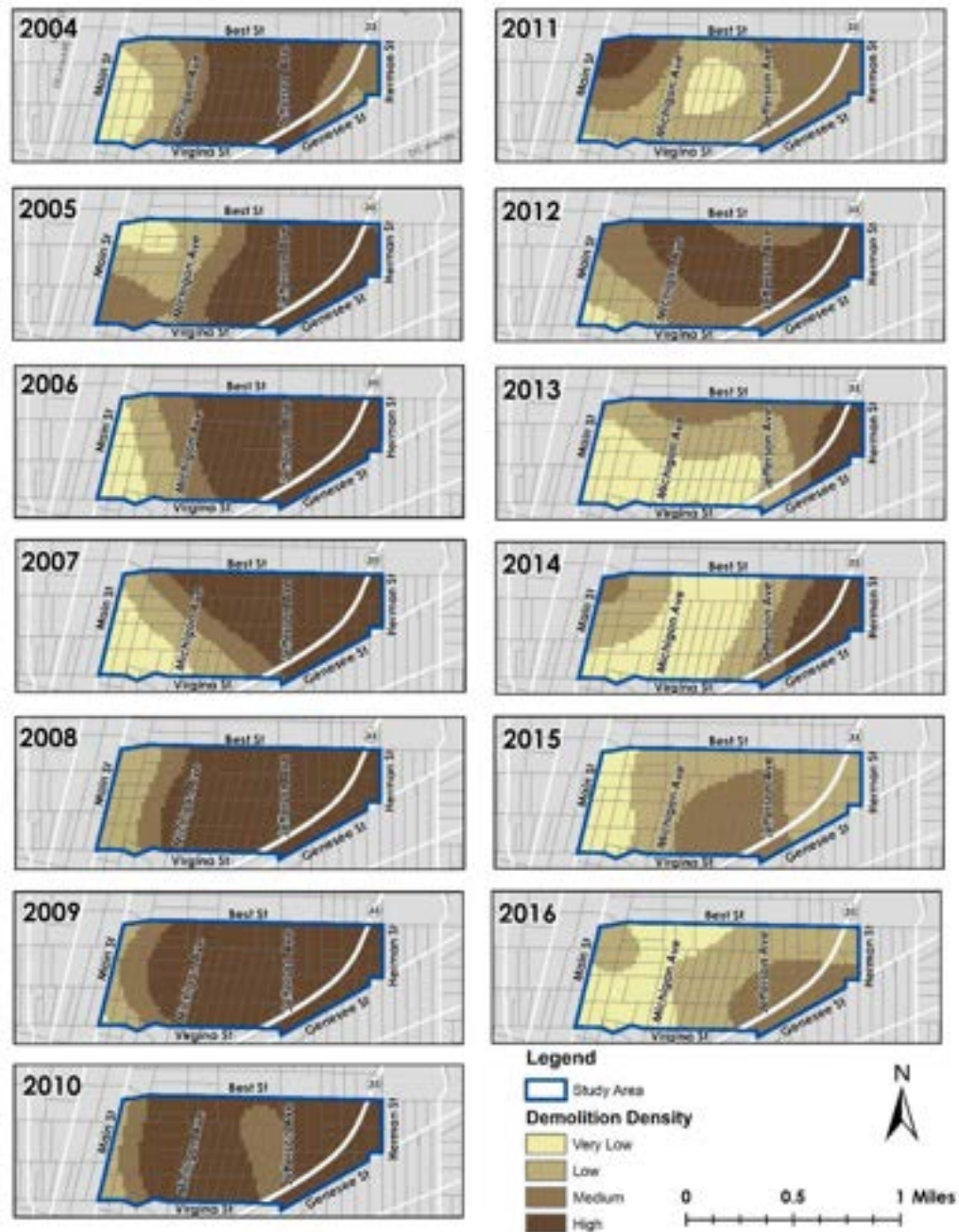


**Figure 3.3.3:** Density of Annual Building Permits Issued (Asbestos): 2004-2014  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

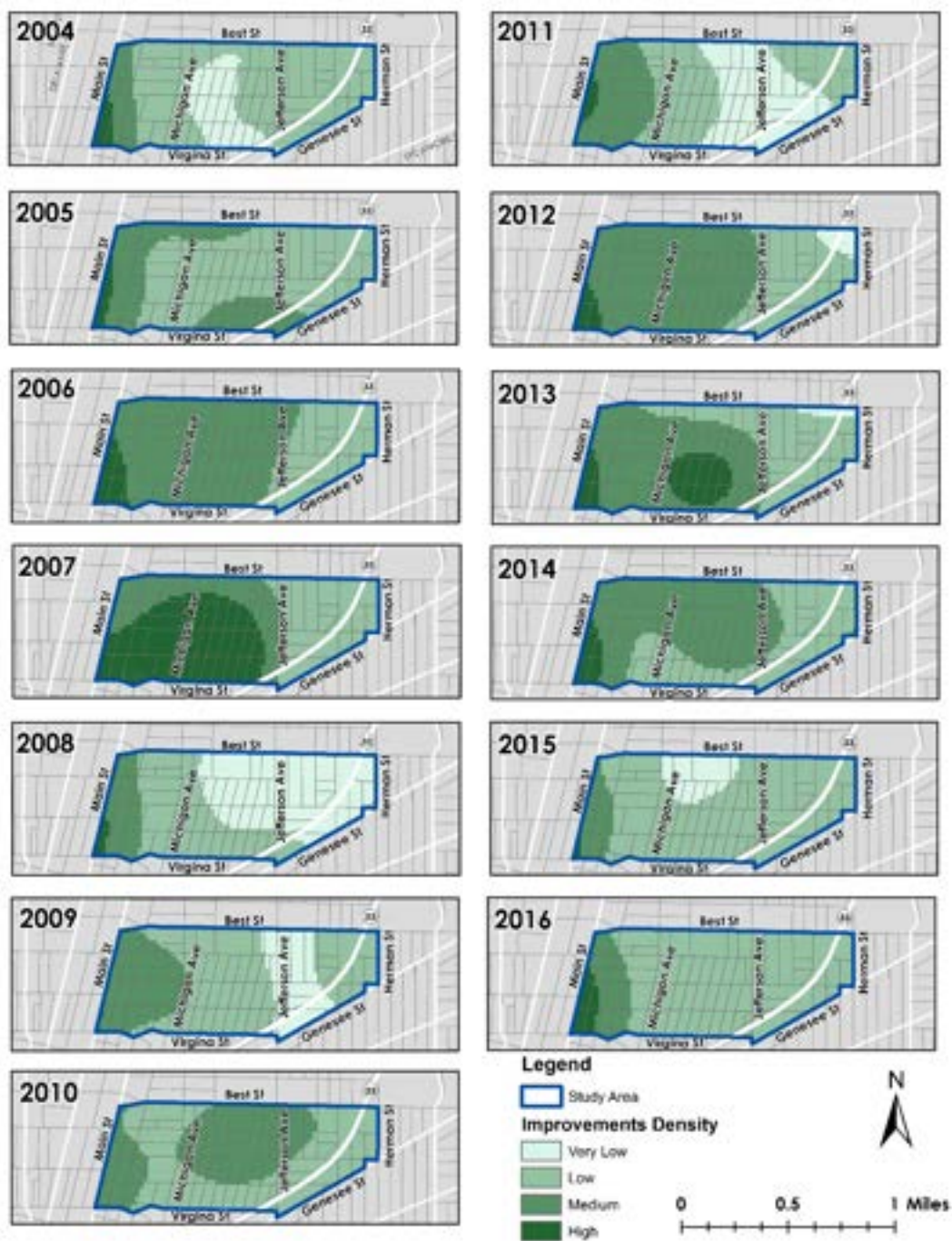
Similarly, Figure 3.3.4 shows that the number of permits for demolition spiked from 2004 to 2012, with a significant amount of demolitions taking place in the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus and the adjunct BG3, as well as across the Fruit Belt. Combined, permitting activities between 2004 and 2012 related to asbestos removal and demolition, particularly those initiated by



property owners, reflect work to prepare sites for redevelopment, both in the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus and in the Fruit Belt residential sections.



**Figure 3.3.4:** Density of Annual Building Permits Issued (Demolition): 2004-2016  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

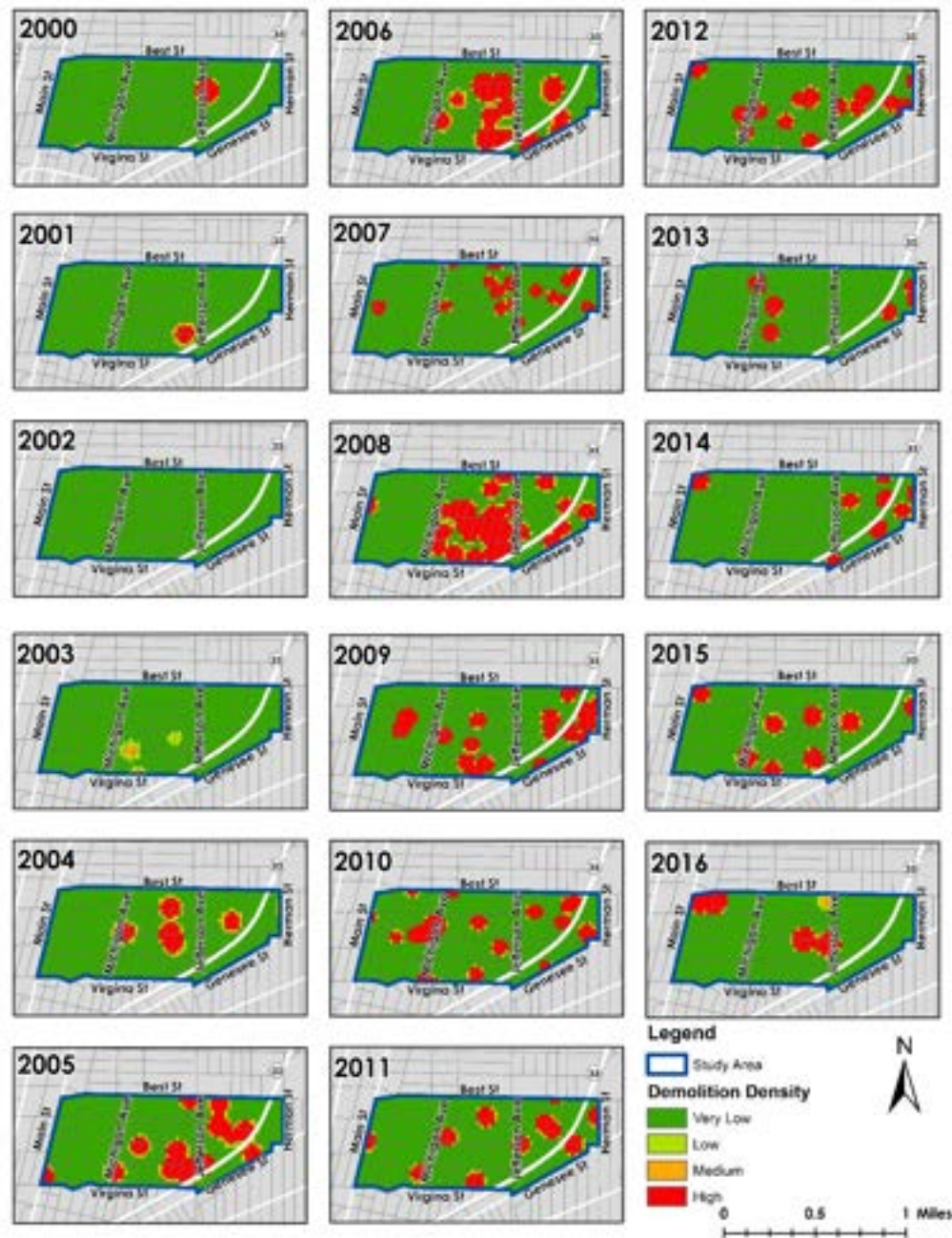


**Figure 3.3.5:** Density of Annual Building Permits Issued (Housing Improvements): 2004-2016  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

Figure 3.3.5 demonstrates that investments in housing improvements are most intense following the removal of obsolete and dilapidated structures, along with environmental hazards,



such as asbestos. This conclusion is reinforced by the data displayed in Figure 3.3.6, which illustrates the density of demolished properties in the community.



**Figure 3.3.6:** Density of Demolished Properties: 2000-2016

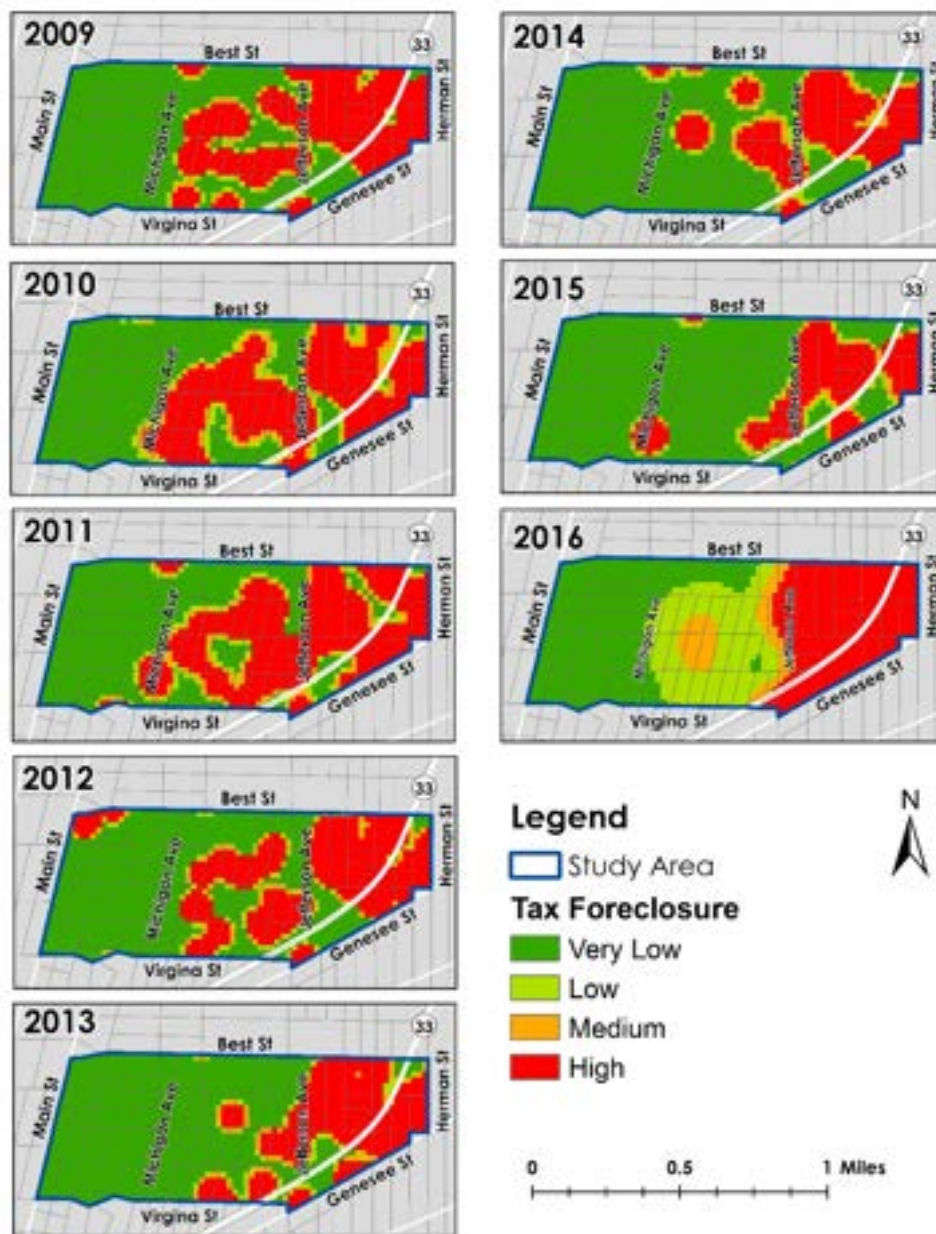
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

Figure 3.3.6 shows the density of demolished properties in the Fruit Belt neighborhood from 2000 to 2016. Unlike the data presented in Figure 3.3.4, which shows where permits for a

variety of demolition projects were issued, these data represent the complete removal of clusters of structures from the neighborhood. This set of maps provides a more focused view of places in the community where shovel ready properties exist for the possible construction of new buildings, houses, and apartment complexes.

The Fruit Belt saw an increase in demolition density in 2004. In the following years, there were high-density demolition areas clustered in different parts of the community. What stands out in these maps is that the three-block groups east of the BNMC were the most impacted by demolition. The BNMC block group contains a clustering of health care and education institutions, and sizable site-based subsidized housing developments. There are relatively few properties available for development or at risk of demolition in this area. Consequently, as BNMC expansion accelerated, development pressures and concerns about encroachment, demolitions, and displacement became heightened in areas east of the medical campus.

Figure 3.3.7 shows the role of tax-foreclosures in the neighborhood change process. The City seizes these properties for back taxes and fees and then auctions them off to recover the taxes. The seizure and re-sell of delinquent properties is a method of shifting property ownership from low-income homeowners to investors or higher income groups. An assessment of these tax-foreclosures indicates that block groups east of the BNMC were hurt the most by tax foreclosures. As tax foreclosures process unfolded from 2009 to 2016, it gradually moved eastward, gobbling up delinquent properties along the way. The City's aggressive foreclosure policy contributes to the reduction of homeownership in the Fruitbelt and is a causal factor in the displacement of low-income residents.



**Figure 3.3.7:** Density of Annual Tax Foreclosure Properties: 2009-2016  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

The residents say that homeowners are also experiencing greater scrutiny by City code enforcers. One renter said the City’s code enforcement and tax foreclosure processes caused many homeowners to lose their properties:

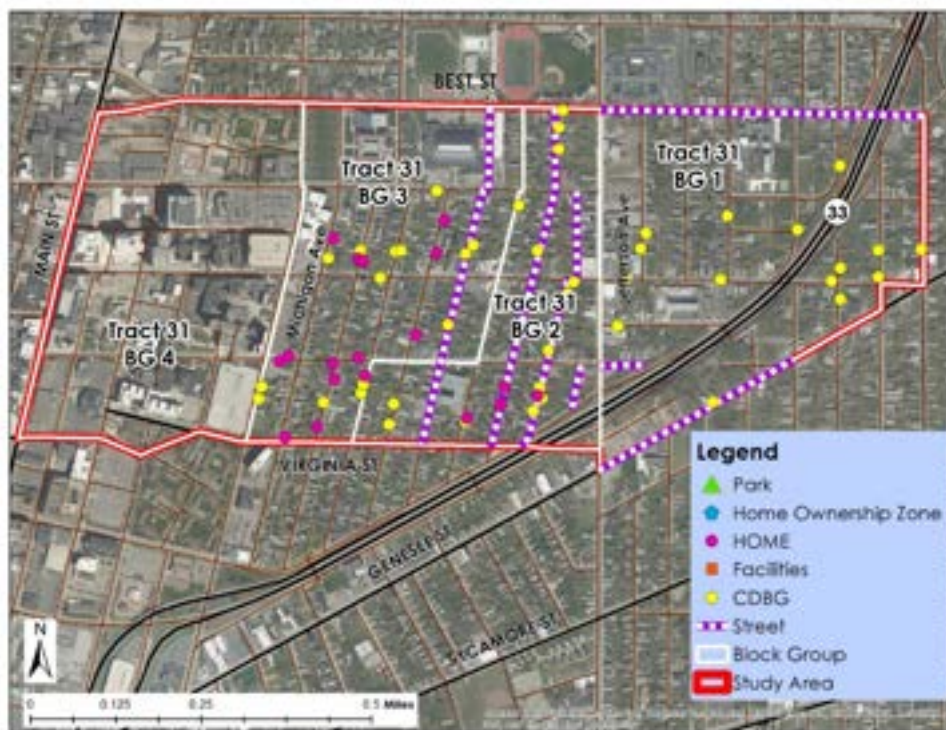
*“I spoke with a lot of people in the city who left the Fruit Belt. They were forced out because of inspections and the taxes. The City was coming hard on them for the violations they had in place about the roofs, the eaves, the porches, the stairs, the sidewalks. And there was a number of people that were saying they couldn't*



*keep up with the fines and pay the taxes at the same time and were forced out of their residences and abandoned the houses, which the City now possesses.”*

A stakeholder put it this way, “It just seems like since the medical campus, it seems the people are being robbed of their homesteads.” Some residents believe the City’s foreclosure policy is contributing to a reduction in homeownership and the outmigration of lower-income residents. The City’s uses a twofold investment strategy in the Fruitbelt. At one level, it uses a combination of asbestos removal, demolitions, and tax-foreclosures to spur development, while at another level invests Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and HOME funds in the community.

The HOME funds are grants to the local government designed to increase homeownership and affordable housing opportunities for low to very low-income residents and may include rental assistance, housing rehabilitation, site improvements, demolition, and other activities. The CBDG funds are flexible dollars that can be expended on many things, including to repair sidewalks and perform demolitions. BG3 was the site of much of the HOME and CBDG spending, which contributed to the residential upgrading in this section of the Fruit Belt. HOME expenditures were mostly concentrated in BG3, while the Community Development Block Grants funds are scattered throughout block groups east of Michigan Avenue.

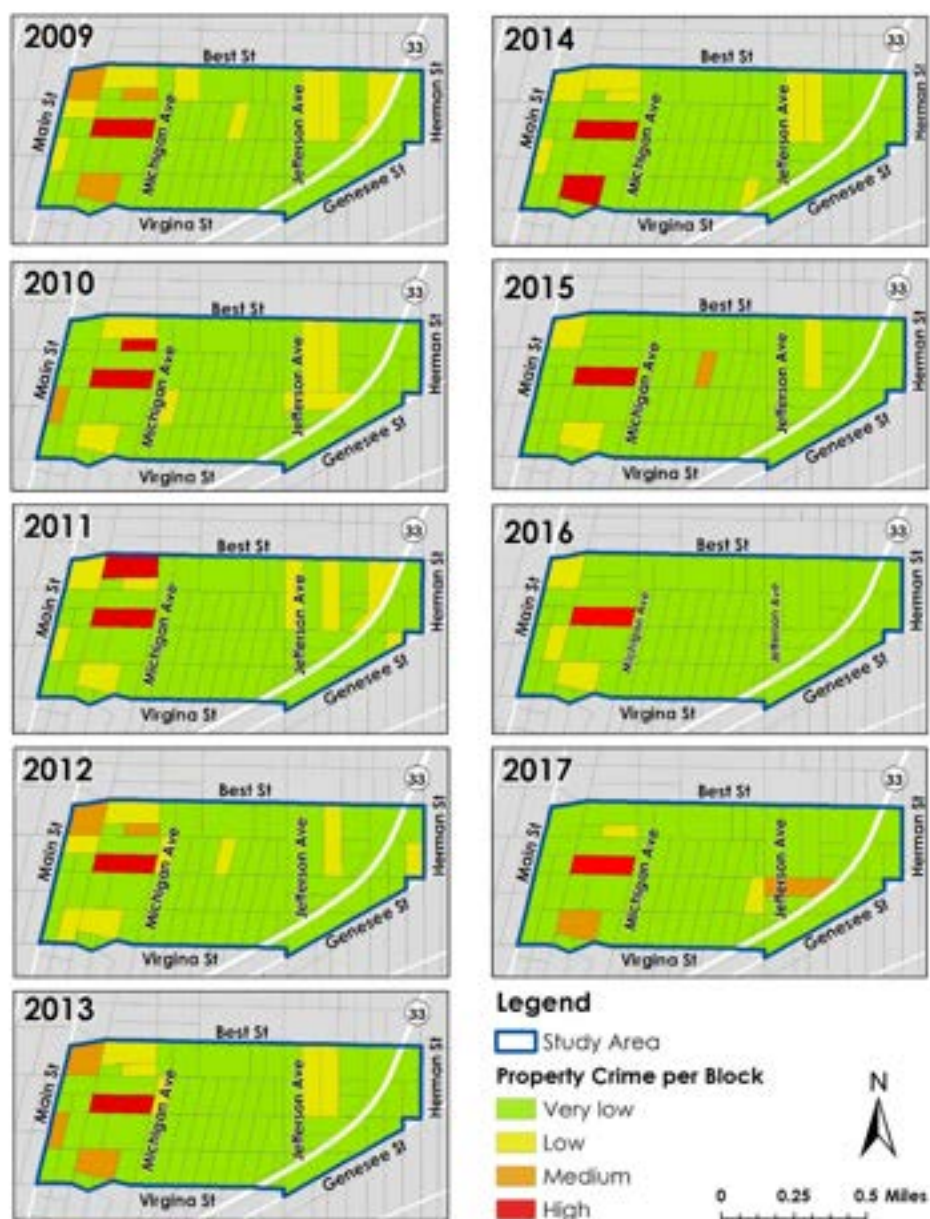


**Figure 3.3.11:** Public Sector Investments in Neighborhood Infrastructure: 2006-2016

**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

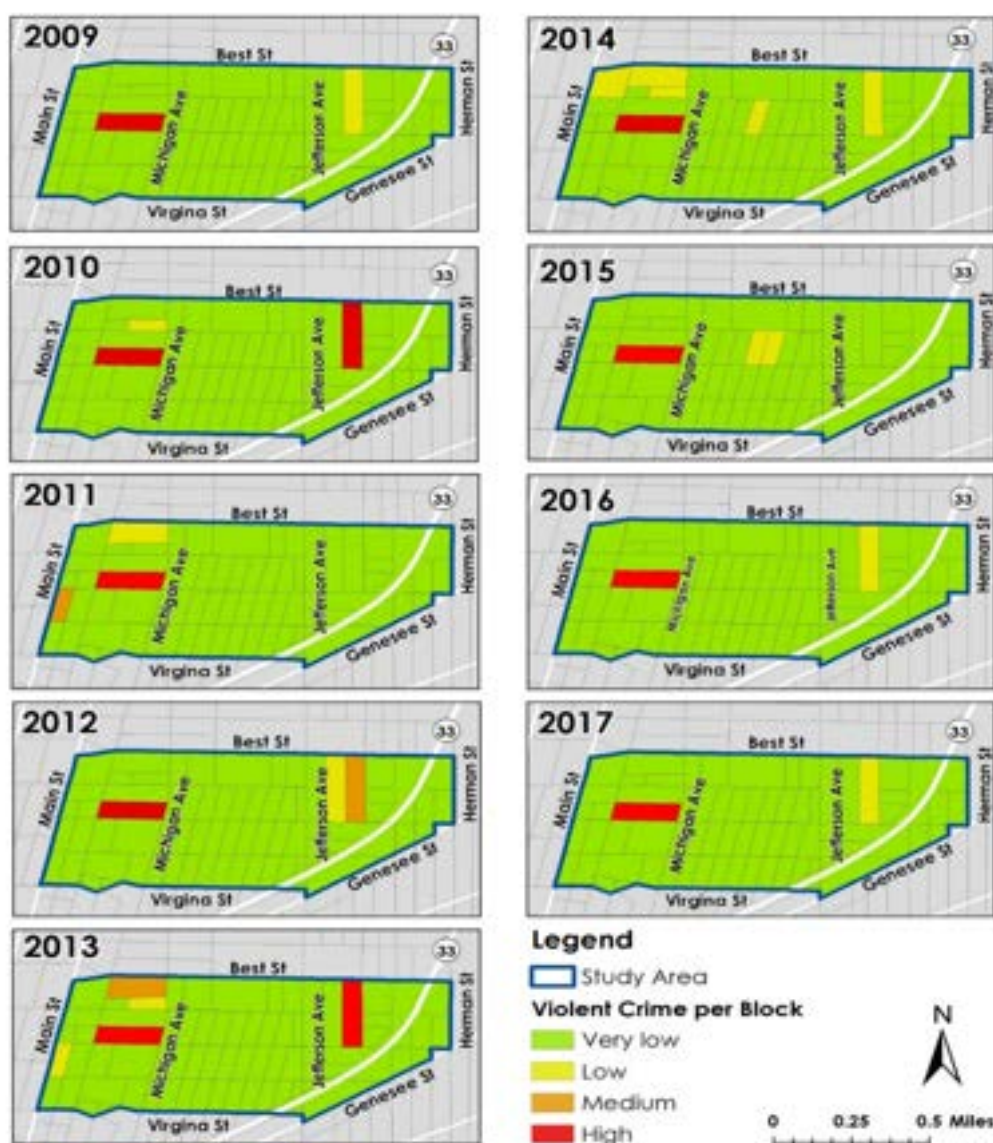


The Fruit Belt crime profile is intriguing. Although property crime is not problematic, it nevertheless mostly clusters in the vicinity of the BNMC and the Jefferson Street commercial corridor. Very little property crime occurs in BG3 and BG2, especially in those sections south of High Street, in the prime residential areas. Overall, the number of property crime remained low in the neighborhood over the past ten years (Figure 3.3.13).



**Figure 3.3.12:** Property Crime Density in the Fruit Belt Neighborhood: 2009-2017  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

The violent and property crimes portraits mirrored each other from 2009 and 2017, with both clustering in the medical campus vicinity and the Jefferson Avenue commercial corridor. The High Street block in the BNMC area always has a high level (over ten crimes in the block) of violent crime. East of Jefferson Avenue, between High and Best streets, two other blocks have consistently high rates of violent crime over the years; but little violent crime occurs in the residential sections of the Fruit Belt. Overall, violent crime remained very low in the Fruit Belt neighborhood during the past ten years.



**Figure 3.3.13:** Violent Crime Density in the Fruit Belt Neighborhood: 2009-2017

**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

The crime rate in the Fruit Belt is low, but the neighborhood nevertheless suffers from the stigma of being a dangerous, high crime area. One homeowner said the stigma was a legacy of from the past.

*“There's still that stigma that I think was attached to it years ago when we mentioned the gangs. Because when we first moved in, that's what my kids heard when they were going to school. “You live in the Fruit Belt?!” This gang and that gang. I haven't had any issues; my children never had any issues. So, you know. Sometimes it's who you are and what you are involved in as opposed to the community as a whole. A few bad apples can ruin it for the bunch. So I think that's what has happened in this area. So you gotta get away from that stigma.”*

Residents also quickly point out that outsiders are the ones committing neighborhood crimes, including those urban outlaws seeking to victimize the medical campus community. One homeowner explained her suspicions that “unfamiliar” people might be stealing packages from residents’ front porches during the day:

*“I've been here twenty-four years and I've never had a problem. I've raised my children here. I love my home, and I've left numerous items out on my front lawn. I never had an issue, never had a problem with anybody taking or stealing, until recently this year. A FedEx package was taken off of my front porch, which was very surprising to me. So I kind of thought it was the FedEx person, I'm not going to lie. I've been here twenty-four years, and that's never happened to me before. I found out a couple of other neighborhoods had issues with that as well. Packages that were taken off their front porch. This was done actually within the span of two hours. The package got delivered at twelve o'clock, I came home on my lunch hour at two, gone. So what I've been noticing recently is that there's other, how should I say, unfamiliar people in the neighborhood.”*

An increase in a police presence in the neighborhood created a new problem. Historically, residents say the Fruit Belt was under-policed. Growth and development of the BNMC changed that reality. Many residents today say the Fruit Belt might even be over-policed in some locales. One renter said, “Because the Fruit Belt is under the eye of billion-dollar corporations and developers, they want to make sure that they see a good product there, so it's policed more than other neighborhoods to make sure crime is down.” Sometimes this “increased” policing leads to harassment rather than protection.

*“We're finding out that police are coming around at nighttime, after eleven o'clock, my son is on the porch in front of my house. And they're asking him if he has ID. ... Who sits outside of their house and has their ID sitting in their pocket, unless they're going somewhere? You know what I'm saying? This is not just our neighborhood, though, that's what I'm saying. This is something that's*

*happening around the city. ...On my porch. And this is happening around the city. So I have no problem with patrols, but what I do have a problem with is when they decide that they're going to come around and they're going to harass our kids. I have a problem with that."*

Although police misconduct and harassment of blacks is part of the historic fabric of most American cities, residents perceived that police-community relations changed in response to changing demographics. In their view, the Fruit Belt is becoming a contested space. One stakeholder made this observation about perceived demographic changes:

*"I've worked in the Fruit Belt for thirteen years, and the past three years specifically, I have noticed a vast change in the demographic profile of the Fruit Belt. Not only in homeownership, in who owns the properties, but also in who is living there. On my drive to work every morning, I come off of the 33 on Jefferson and turn to come up to Carlton. I find it interesting that now you have a neighborhood which, ya' know, back in the day wasn't necessarily safe to walk on the street as freely as it is now. I see white women in the morning with their coffee and their puppies, walking their dogs, which is something you didn't see over here before."*

Along the same lines, a renter noted, "What I see is white people not being afraid to come into a black neighborhood." Similarly, a homeowner remarked that "It's wonderful for me to see somebody that's not black walk up the street and not be afraid." The perception is that the Fruit Belt is becoming more racially diverse and less socially segregated. One homeowner said:

*"The neighborhood is somewhat opening up to the city in terms of people moving in. Prior to that, it was family based. You know, we knew everyone, everyone that basically moved into the area was a member of the family. There was a lot of those clusters, and now there are people who are here that are from other parts of the city, and other parts of the country, and the world. So it is very diverse - or becoming very diverse."*

These demographic changes are more perceptual than real. A small number of whites do live in the Fruit Belt, but this is still a mostly black community, but its social class structure is changing because of the dislodgement of low-income residents. Even so, the Fruit Belt could lose its racial identity. Outside investors own most of the land and property in the Fruit Belt and when the City lifts the moratorium on development completely, a flurry of market-rate residential development could quickly turn the Fruitbelt into a predominantly white locale. In this regard, one homeowner said:

*"There's power in a name. I didn't realize that until this Green Code thing came up. All of the dreams and the aspirations we had for this community won't even*



*matter unless we can lay hold of the claim that we exist again. That the “Fruit Belt” is here. When you look on maps, you don't see it anymore; it's considered the “Medical Corridor,” “The Medical Park,” or whatever. They have erased us with a big eraser off of the city map. And if we don't exist, you can't fix anything that don't exist. So the primary thing is if we establish ourselves. That yes we are here, and we want to remain on the map as a community and give us a chance to be heard. Then we can build to all of the other things we want: community centers and better schools and whatever. But first, they have to accept us and respect us as a living community.”*

### *The Subsidized Housing Population in the Fruit Belt*

Market dynamics are threatening the Fruit Belt’s lowest income population and this centers our understanding of how neighborhood transition threatens the subsidized housing population. Figure 3.3.8 maps the location of subsidized housing in the Fruit Belt neighborhood. The available data for the Fruit Belt shows only two site-based Section 8 properties and they are both situated in BG4 site of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus.



**Figure 3.3.8:** The location of Subsidized Housing in 2017

**Source:** HUD Picture of Subsidized Housing Database

Four hundred and forty-six residents are living in subsidized units in the Fruit Belt and 84% of them are African-American. Women head 65% of the subsidized households and 33% of these are women with children. Additionally, about one-third of the subsidized population is disabled and one-third are elderly (Table 3.3.4). The subsidized housing group is a very low-income population with a median household income of only \$11,212. At the same time, 18% of the population was in the labor force and 4% were welfare dependent.

**Table 3.3.4:** 2012-2017 Fruit Belt Population in Subsidized Housing

	<i>Census Tract 31</i>
<i>Subsidized Units 2017</i>	292
<i>Percent change 2012-17</i>	9
<i>Total Residents in Subsidized Units 2017</i>	446
<i>Percent change 2012-17</i>	-6
<i>Percent of the Population Black 2017</i>	84
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-5
<i>Percent of the Population Hispanic 2017</i>	6
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	4
<i>Percent of Households Female Headed</i>	65
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-5
<i>Percent of Households Female Headed with Children</i>	33
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-3
<i>Percent of Households with a Person with a Disability</i>	30
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	3
<i>Percent of Households Headed by a Person 62yrs or More</i>	29
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	7
<i>Household Income 2017</i>	\$11,218
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	6
<i>Percent of Households where Wages are Major Source of Income 2017</i>	18
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-1
<i>Percent of Households where Welfare is Major Source of Income 2017</i>	4
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-4

**Source:** 2012 and 2017 HUD Picture of Subsidized Housing Database



Table 3.3.5 also shows that the majority of subsidized housing units in this census tract were 0-1 bedrooms, suggesting that many residents of subsidized units live alone or with large families. Thirty-two of the units contain three or more bedrooms. These subsidized units play a role in stemming residential dislocation in the Fruit Belt, but market forces are threatening them. St. John's Church, for example, attempted to sell their low-income apartments, the McCarley Gardens, while McGuire Development Company is trying to launch a \$200 million project to transform Pilgrim's Village, a low-income housing settlement, into a mixed-income and mixed-use development. These actions demonstrate the precarious nature of subsidized housing in communities where market forces drive neighborhood development.

**Table 3.3.5:** 2012-2017 Fruit Belt Characteristics of Subsidized Housing Units

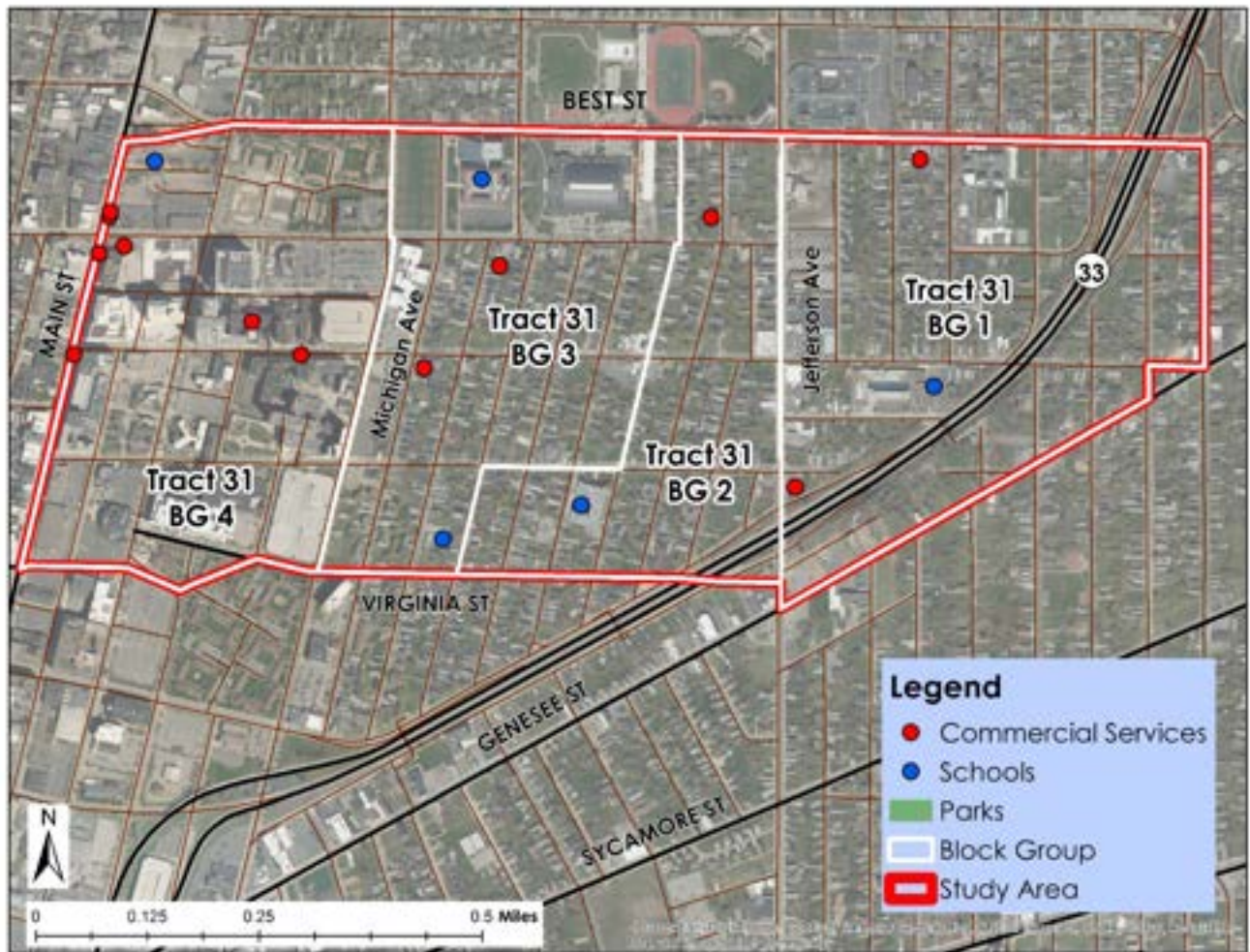
	<i>Census Tract 31</i>
<b><i>Subsidized Units 2017</i></b>	292
<i>Percent change 2012-17</i>	9
<b><i>Total Residents in Subsidized Units 2017</i></b>	446
<i>Percent change 2012-17</i>	-6
<b><i>Percent of Units 0-1 Bedroom 2017</i></b>	48
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	4
<b><i>Percent of Units 2 Bedroom 2017</i></b>	20
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	-7
<b><i>Percent of Units 3 or More Bedroom 2017</i></b>	32
<i>Percent change 2012-2017</i>	4

**Source:** 2012 and 2017 HUD Picture of Subsidized Housing Database

### *Neighborhood Quality of Life and Amenities in the Fruit Belt*

The Fruit Belt has a weak commercial and retail structure that serves the community. A limited amount of neighborhood-based commercial activity occurs on Jefferson Avenue. Also, commercial activities exist on Main Streets, but those shops and stores serve BNMC employees and Allentown residents. The Fruit Belt has several public schools and other educational amenities dispersed throughout the area, but it lacks parks and recreational space that typically complement communities. Masten Park, on Best Street, just north of the neighborhood, is the closest park. Although the park is nearby, in focus groups, homeowners and renters complained that children

have to traverse a major corridor to gain access to the nearest community center and that this was particularly problematic during the winter months and inclement weather.



**Figure 3.3.9:** Land Use Characteristics in the Fruit Belt Neighborhood

The tree coverage in the Fruit Belt is substantial, but the green cover is still insufficient. Route 33 bisects the community, and thousands of cars travel on that road daily, and hundreds of more people visit the medical campus. Thus, given the traffic density, the community needs significant green coverage to protect residents against airborne pollution and other negative externalities.



**Figure 3.3.10:** Tree Density along Public Streets in Fruit Belt Neighborhood  
**Source:** City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning

#### 4. MONITORING NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE: NEIGHBORHOOD INDICATORS

The *Buffalo Turning the Corner Project* aims to understand how the city-building process is affecting housing and neighborhood development. The objectives are to (1) identify those factors producing undesirable neighborhood change and residential displacement; (2) develop a strategy for recognizing the most at-risk neighborhoods and; (3) design an approach to monitor vulnerable communities and prevent undesirable changes from occurring within them. A goal of the *Buffalo Turning the Corner Project* is to use insights derived from this study to develop a system to monitor undesirable neighborhood change across Buffalo City.

In this study, undesirable change is neighborhood-scaled changes that (a) threaten to displace low-income residents; (b) threaten the sustainability of shops, stores, institutions and

services that provide for the needs, wants, and desires of low-income residents; (c) make the community unfriendly to family and children and; (d) that make high market demand neighborhoods inaccessible to low-income groups. The *Turning Point Project* thus seeks to construct a strategic framework to guide the development of equitable, inclusive, and diverse residential areas. This section of the *Buffalo Turning Point* report outlines a proposed neighborhood monitoring system that practitioners, residents, and government officials can use to mitigate and prevent neighborhood upgrades from displacing and becoming uninviting to lower-income families and individuals.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the threat of displacement increases in areas where market demand is growing. These unwelcome changes are often subtle during the nascent stages of development. Population decline, the removal of derelict housing units, and other public investments typically precede neighborhood upgrading. As neighborhood improvements intensify, and housing values and rents rise, the displacement threat level for low-income groups increases. The renters, homeowners, and other stakeholders, who participated in the focus groups, perceived neighborhood change as an indiscernible, incremental process that is often fueled by real estate speculation and institutional investments. The gradual, progressive rise of the displacement threat is why urban centers need an *early warning monitoring system* to detect unwanted changes in their early stages.

### **A Neighborhood Early Warning Monitoring System**

Undesirable neighborhood change occurs differently in every residential area, but its pattern of development is easily recognized (Rose, 2002). This predictability makes possible the establishment of a monitoring system to detect an unwanted change. The monitoring system will use a set of indicators to identify adverse changes, which are consistent with gentrification and displacement (Phillips, 2003, p. 2). Such a warning system allows policymakers, practitioners, and community activists to identify undesirable trends and attack them before they become difficult to mitigate or reverse (Galster, Quercia, Cortes, 2003).

Neighborhood monitoring is a three-fold process. The first step identifies neighborhoods where the growing displacement threat is endangering low-income residents. The second step is to place under surveillance, the places where the danger of dislodgement is growing. In the last

step is to study the communities where the displacement level ranges from moderate to high to determine if the development of a mitigation strategy is necessary.

### Identifying the Most Vulnerable Neighborhoods

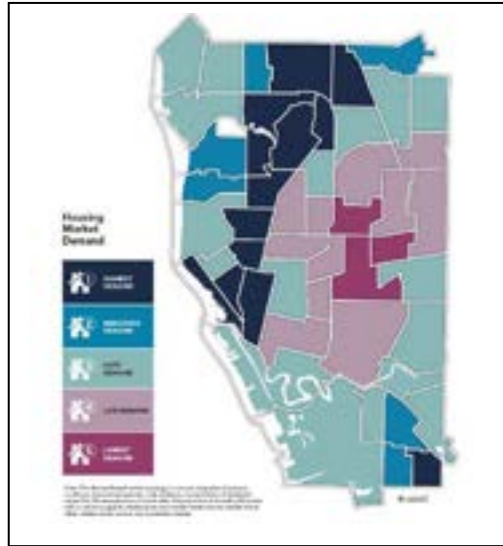
There are dozens of neighborhoods in Buffalo, but not all of them are susceptible to dislodgement. The identification of such sites requires using (1) GIS data of annual housing transaction unit prices per sq. foot from 2004 to 2016; (2) permits issued for improvements from 2004 to 2016; (3) 2016 map of the exterior field survey of 70,500 residential properties and; (4) a map of the Buffalo Housing Market Demand Areas (Figure 4.1).

GIS data show housing transactions and improvement permits activities taking place in high demand communities, which are located in downtown Buffalo and the West Side residential corridor. The area represents a district where investments in residential development are high. GIS data on housing conditions in downtown and the West Side corridor are classified as excellent and good, which reinforces this view that these are emerging high-end residential areas (Figure 4.1). Moreover, the high and moderate demand market areas overlap the localities where private investments are the most intense. Downtown and the West Side corridor, then, are the sites where one finds Buffalo's highest demand neighborhoods (Figure 4.2).



**Figure 4.1:** Housing Transactions, Permits for improvement and Housing Conditions  
**Source:** UB Center for Urban Studies





**Figure 4.2:** Buffalo Housing Market Demand

**Source:** czb LLC, 2017

Downtown is the strategic center of public and private investments in Buffalo. City leaders intend to turn the place into a magnet that draws knowledge workers to the city. The City strategic downtown investment strategy endangers low-income residents living in neighborhoods within the City’s strategic downtown investment zone, including the Fruit Belt and Ellicott. At the same time, downtown also serves as the anchor for the West Side residential corridor (Figure 4.1, 4.2). Main Street is Buffalo’s primary thoroughfare, and the extension of the City’s light rail system along Main Street adds value to the West Side residential corridor.

The light rail system connects the residents to prime employment centers in the city, including the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus, downtown Buffalo, along with essential anchor institutions, including the University at Buffalo South Campus and Medical School, Canisius College, and Sisters Hospital. Moreover, studies show that the value of residential properties increases with proximity to the rail stations in Buffalo (Hess, 2006). The value added to real estate by proximity rail lines will place low-income residents, living close to Main Street, in danger of dislodgement. The reason is that investors and speculators will purchase and hold these properties for anticipated future developments.

### **Residential Areas where the Displacement Danger Exists**

Downtown neighborhoods and communities in the West Side corridor are the areas where low-income groups are the most vulnerable to residential displacement. We refer to this residential



district as *the zone of greatest vulnerability to residential displacement* (Figure 4.3). Increases in rents and housing prices in the *zone*, combined with its transformation into a chic, hipster district will threaten low-income groups with dislocation, although the dislodgement process will vary within and across the zone. Without intervention, many low-income residents in these increasingly upscale neighborhoods will be forced to move to the East Side, or inner-ring suburbs, such as Cheektowaga and Lackawanna, or leave the Erie County altogether.



**Figure 4.3:** Zone of Greatest Vulnerability to Housing Displacement  
**Source:** UB Center for Urban Studies

The goal is to keep the *zone* neighborhoods from becoming exclusive communities, which are unfriendly to families, children, and those with special needs. In these communities, housing must be kept affordable to low-income groups to prevent them from becoming exclusive places. Most low-income households are housing cost burdened, and slight increases in rent can force them out of a community. Therefore, this area should be under constant surveillance; *trouble spots* should be identified, and be carefully studied; then a plan to mitigate the unwanted change should be implemented.

## **Neighborhood Monitoring and Indicators**

Buffalo needs an early warning system to monitor unwanted neighborhood change in the communities where the *displacement-threat level* is growing. The monitoring of census tract changes should occur in all downtown neighborhoods and those residential areas scattered across the West Side corridor. In the monitoring system, a comparison takes place between the census tract level and citywide census data. The reference point for the monitoring system should be 2000, and the American Community Survey used for gathering census data between the decennial census. This time frame is sensitive enough to pick-up changes that are trending at the census tract level.

The neighborhoods where displacement-threat levels are rising should be studied to determine if the threat endangers low-income residents. Ground-truthing or windshield surveys should compliment detailed studies of neighborhood changes. These more in-depth studies will involve quantitative and qualitative analysis. If warranted, the city should formulate strategies to mitigate or reverse the undesirable change.

The early warning indicators will examine three dimensions of community change: (1) vulnerability to housing displacement; (2) demographic change and; (3) appreciation in property values. These indexes will be weighted, and census tracts with high scores (80<sup>th</sup> percentile) will be subject to a more in-depth study.

### **1. Population Vulnerable to housing displacement**

- percent black
- percent Hispanic ethnicity
- percent less than a college education
- percent below poverty
- percent renter
- percent of gross rent as income
- percent vacant

### **2. Undergoing demographic change consistent with gentrification [*newcomers*]**

- percent population change
- percent change white
- percent change with a college degree or higher
- percent change in median household income
- percent change in homeowners

### **3. Appreciation in housing values and rents [*housing dynamics*]**

- Change in the ratio of the track: city median housing values

- Change in the median housing values
- Change in the ratio of the tract: city rents
- Change in the median rents

### **Analysis of Neighborhoods at High-Risk of Housing Displacement**

For those neighborhoods where the risk of housing displacement is very high, a fine-grained analysis is necessary to determine if displacement is taking place or if the threat of housing displacement is significant enough to warrant the development and implementation of a mitigation strategy. This analysis should occur at both the census tract and block level, and it should include demographic analysis, along with the study of data on asbestos removal, demolitions, and other public investments. Such data can be used to detect early stages of neighborhood revitalization. Additionally, windshield surveys or ground truthing will take place to determine if signs of gentrification or dislocations are visible. Focus group sessions with renters, homeowners, and stakeholders will provide a resident perspective on changes taking place in the community. If warranted, the development of a plan to mitigate unwanted changes, which includes strategies to prevent dislocation and cultural shifts, will conclude the study.

### **An Implementation Strategy**

The design and implementation monitoring system require collaboration between the City, neighborhood-based organizations, and an independent institution, such as a university research center. The institution will administer the monitoring system. The lead institution and City will integrate the neighborhood monitoring system with the Open Buffalo Data platform. Using data from the neighborhood monitoring system, community planners from the City, in partnership with the lead institution will work with residents to develop neighborhood interventions and other policies to address undesirable change.

## **5. MITIGATING AND PREVENTING UNDESIRABLE NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE AND DISPLACEMENT: THE COMMUNITY TOOLKIT**

*The Buffalo Turning the Corner* initiative aims to construct guidelines to prevent the displacement of low-income residents in neighborhoods experiencing residential upgrading. The community toolkit outlined in this report gives policymakers, practitioners, community activists, and residents a set of tools to create communities that are inclusive, diverse, and family-friendly.

The specific challenges facing communities will depend on the unique housing and neighborhood conditions found in them. Housing market demand, then, will determine how best to use the community toolkit.

### **Preventing and Mitigating Undesirable Change**

The community toolkit outlines a set of policy measures to complement Buffalo's market-centric approach to residential development. This method offers policies designed to mitigate market dynamics and prevent or minimize residential displacement. The *Turning the Corner* community toolkit operates under the assumption that market dynamics drive the dislocation of low-income residents in neighborhoods when market demand is on the upswing. Therefore, the key to building sustainable communities, which are inclusive and diverse, is to control market dynamics. The community toolkit is a guide, not a blueprint. The specific policy initiatives outlined in the toolkit should be part of a larger strategy to improve neighborhoods, regardless of the market dynamics taking place in the residential area.

### **The Plan**

The community toolkit approach assumes that low-income residents in the downtown area and the West Side corridor are the most susceptible to displacement. Concurrently, moderate, soft, and low- market demand residential areas near this high market demand district are also threatened (Figure 5.1). For example, the three study neighborhoods in this report -- the Lower West Side, Ellicott, and the Fruit Belt -- are soft and low-demand neighborhoods situated in the shadow of downtown Buffalo. The dislocation threat endangers all three communities. The displacement threat also jeopardizes low-income residents in West Side neighborhoods and East Side communities located along Main Street. The challenges facing low-income residents in these neighborhoods vary based on market dynamics in those residential areas. Thus, different policies are needed for high-, moderate-, soft-, and low-demand residential areas and the specific mixture of strategies will vary based on the conditions found in the locale.



**Figure 5.1:** Market Demand in Zone of Vulnerability to Housing Displacement  
**Source:** czb LLC, 2017

- ***Highest Demand Market Zone Communities.***

1. **Inclusionary zoning is a policy tool for high demand communities where the danger of displacement and cultural change are very high.** In high demand areas, the city should require that 10% to 30% of rental units in all new apartments be set aside for low-income residents. The inclusionary zoning strategy should target groups earning between 60% and 20% of AMI. This approach ensures that the lowest income groups can live in the new housing units.
2. **Developers can create these affordable units on the same site or at other locations within the *high demand market zone*.** The intent is to bolster social class, racial, cultural, and income diversity in high demand zones (Partnership for Public Good, 2017). Policymakers should create a variety of packages to incentivize inclusionary zoning, such as options for developers to make contributions to tax-exempt nonprofit housing organizations engaged in off-site affordable housing development.
3. **The Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority should set exception payment standards for Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) at 110% of the Small Area Fair Market Rents (SAFMRs) in high demand zip codes.** Increases in the value of housing choice vouchers will make it possible for residents with HCV to acquire housing in neighborhoods where rentals are increasing. By voluntarily basing the

exception payment standards on 110% of small area fair market rents in these zip codes, the BMHA only has to notify HUD of this policy. No additional approvals are required. This policy shift would broaden the housing choices available to renters with the lowest incomes.

4. **The City should use deed restrictions, also called restrictive covenants, to determine the future use of the vacant (unbuilt) lots and abandoned structures.** For example, a deed restriction could specify that any apartment built on this vacant land must set-aside 60% of the rental units for non-student renters with incomes between 60% and 20% of the AMI. The City should work with housing practitioners and neighborhood activists to identify parcels on which to place deed restrictions. Deed restrictions are particularly useful in residential areas that do not have community land trusts.
5. **Subsidized housing should locate in the zone of greatest vulnerability to decrease the threat of housing displacement.** This study demonstrates that the presence of site-based subsidized units and landlords who accept HCVs protects the lowest income residents from dislodgments caused by increases in rents. Site-based Section 8 properties and low-income housing tax credit properties should be located and for the highest demand neighborhoods.
6. **The City should establish a Below Market Rate Housing Ordinance (BMR) to charge housing impact fees on commercial spaces, including hotel and apartment development, to use for the preservation, rehabilitation, and development of housing units affordable to low-income groups.** The city should model its legislation after the City of Palo Alto, California BMR (Rose, 2002).
7. **The City of Buffalo should revise its housing foreclosure policy in neighborhoods where the displacement threat is high.** The City should make every effort to retain low-income homeowners in areas where residents are in danger of displacement. In the Fruit Belt, for example, extensive tax foreclosure activity is forcing some homeowners to leave the neighborhood. As a stakeholder put it, *“It just seems like, since the medical campus, it seems the people are being robbed of their homes...”*.
8. **“Just Cause” Eviction Ordinances requires the City to develop and implement ordinances to protect low-income residents in all residential rental properties from unfair evictions.** The Just Cause Eviction ordinance forces a landlord to have a “just cause” for evicting a tenant. The law will not stop evictions, but it will give tenants another layer of protection (Phillips, Flores, Henderson, 2014).
9. **“Right of First Refusal” Ordinance** ensures that any resident displaced because of a “no-fault” eviction will receive just compensation and comprehensive relocation assistance (Choi, 2009; Rodriguez-Dod, 2013; Phillips, Flores, Henderson, 2014). This type of policy should be part of a rent stabilization ordinance established by the Common Council.



- ***Moderate Demand Market Zones***

1. **Inclusionary zoning is a useful policy tool in moderate demand neighborhoods.**
2. **BMHA should set exception payment standards for Housing Choice Vouchers at 110% of the Small Area Fair Market Rents (SAFMRs) in moderate demand zip codes.**
3. **Deed restrictions are essential tools in these communities.**
4. **Community Land Trusts (CLT) are essential complements to deed restrictions in moderate demand market communities.** The CLT demonstrate the power of communal ownership as a complement to market-centric residential development. The CLT strategy is the most promising method of controlling market dynamics in neighborhoods. A community land trust (CLT) is a private, nonprofit corporation that acquires and retains ownership over plots of land, while often selling the housing on it. The CLT usually places deed restrictions on these structures. Significantly, the CLT gives residents control over the development of neighborhood communal lands. While the CLT uses land ownership to ensure the existence of high-quality, affordable housing for low- to moderate-income households, it can also pursue other usages that will enhance the quality of neighborhood life for long-standing residents.
5. **Below Market Rate Housing Ordinance (BMR) funds** should be considered for the preservation, rehabilitation, and development of affordable housing units for moderate to low-income households in the moderate demand residential areas.

- ***Soft Demand Market Zones.*** In these communities, the displacement danger is at a nascent stage, but their proximity to high demand neighborhoods threatens them.

1. **Deed restrictions**
2. **Community Land Trusts**
3. **Below Market Rate Housing Ordinance (BMR) strategies.**
4. **The City should use the New York State Housing Trust Fund (HTF) dollars** to incentivize the building of affordable housing units in soft/low market demand neighborhoods. The NYS Housing Trust Fund is a public benefit corporation that seeks to expand the supply of affordable housing opportunities for people of low income. The HTF provides funding to rehabilitate or convert the vacant, distressed, or underutilized residential or non-residential property for occupancy by low-income homesteaders, tenants, coop owners, or condominium owners (New York State HTF, 2018).

Buffalo should explore the possibility of establishing a housing trust fund in Erie County. Such an HTF would direct revenue streams to housing and neighborhood

development initiatives aimed at equitable and sustainable development. San Francisco, for example, channels fees allocated for housing from commercial development into a housing trust fund, along with federal HOME and Community Development Block Grant money and state and city revenues. These funds are targeted to support households that earn thirty to fifty percent of the AMI (Rose, Reimagine, ND)

5. **Limited Equity Cooperatives (LECs) and other forms of cooperative housing are ideal for soft demand neighborhoods.** The goal of limited equity cooperatives is to reduce the cost of homeownership and the housing cost burden. For example, owners could form brigades responsible for lawn maintenance and minor repairs. There are different types of cooperative housing with each one having its own set of rules and regulations. Coops preserve affordability for low- to moderate income groups by restricting resale value and establishing income limits for members (Ortiz, April 2017). This strategy is best suited for apartment buildings or multiple units clustered together in a campus setting.
6. **“Just Cause” Eviction Ordinances.**
7. **“Right of First Refusal” ordinance.**

To operationalize these mitigation and prevention strategies, the City should identify several housing organizations with the capacity to manage housing development projects in various neighborhoods. Having a lead organization to guide revitalization is vital because preventing displacement will require both the rehabilitation and the construction of new units.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The *Buffalo Turning the Corner Project* is part of a national project administered by the Urban Institute. Launched in January 2016, the *National Turning the Corner Project* pilots a research model that monitors neighborhood change. *Buffalo Turning the Corner* aims to understand how a City’s approach to housing and neighborhood development drives the neighborhood change process, especially areas threatened by gentrification and displacement. The objectives are to (1) identify the causes of undesirable neighborhood change; (2) devise a strategy for identifying the most at-risk neighborhoods and; (3) design a method of monitoring vulnerable communities and preventing unwanted changes from taking place in them.

The intent is to provide a framework to guide cities in sustainable, equitable, and inclusive development of housing and neighborhoods. The project identified three neighborhoods that helped us to understand the residential upgrading triggers for gentrification and displacement: the

Lower West Side, Ellicott, and the Fruit Belt. The study's findings led to the following conclusions.

1. Undesirable neighborhood change consists of the displacement of low-income residents, and cultural and commercial changes that occur in communities to make them unfriendly to youth, families, or individuals with special needs. Housing market dynamics drive these unwelcomed neighborhood changes. The City of Buffalo *facilitates* market-based development but does not lead it. In this setting, the actions of developers and property-owners fuel neighborhood upgrading and community development, with the city implementing policies that aid their activities.
2. Neighborhood change is a complex process that unfolds differently within and across neighborhoods. Unwanted neighborhood change, for example, operated differently in each of the study neighborhoods. In the Lower West Side, a more traditional type of gentrification and displacement took place. In this community, as higher income whites entered the area, increases in housing prices and rents starting to dislodge blacks, Latinx, and other low-income groups from the neighborhood.

In Ellicott, the pattern was similar but took place only in one census block group. In the block group closest to downtown, a traditional model of gentrification is starting to occur. Higher income whites, along with Latinx, are moving into a predominantly black enclave, precipitating the outmigration of lower income blacks. The distinction is the block group is turning into a racially mixed residential pocket, with a social class structure that is becoming less diverse. Because of their proximity to downtown, both the Lower West Side and Ellicott, the catalyzation of market forces are bringing about neighborhood change.

In the Fruit Belt, another category of gentrification and displacement is underway. In this neighborhood, the growth and development of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus are generating market dynamics which are causing property values to rise. Land speculation is so rampant in this neighborhood that the Buffalo Common Council imposed a ban on development until the forging of a more holistic plan of community revitalization can be initiated. Regardless, market forces are still causing housing prices and rentals to rise, which is forcing out many of the lowest income residents. Meanwhile, outside investors own most of the land and property in the community. When the City completely lifts its ban, the Fruit Belt might be overwhelmed by a tidal wave of market-based development.

3. A housing displacement danger exists in those Buffalo neighborhoods where market demand is growing. This problem is worsening, and policy-makers, practitioners, and community activists must pursue aggressive actions to stop it. Otherwise, the dislodgement of low-income blacks and Latinx will persist. Institutional expansion and residential upgrading endanger the three study neighborhoods. In these communities, displacement threatens them even though housing demand is weak. This is because they are clustered in the shadow of downtown Buffalo where institutional expansion, commercial development,

and residential upgrading produce market dynamics that make low-income residents susceptible to dislocation (City of Buffalo, 2003: 11).

4. A combination of private investment and government action are spurring neighborhood upgrading. A cluster of demolition, institutional investment, and intervention by the local government are what facilitates residential improvement. These resultant neighborhood changes generate increases in housing costs that adversely affect blacks, Latinx, and low-income residents more than upwardly mobile whites.
5. The issuance of permits, particularly for asbestos removal and demolitions, in areas where market demand is growing, is a forerunner to neighborhood upgrading ignited by property owners. Moreover, steady investments in housing improvement and housing transactions are associated with an increased market demand that spurs increases in housing prices and rents.
6. The process of undesirable neighborhood change occurs unevenly in neighborhoods, and it proceeds in a slow, incremental manner which is often difficult to detect in its early stages of development. For example, in the Ellicott neighborhood, residential upgrading clusters mostly in census block three while the pattern is complexly different in the Fruit Belt. In that community, the dynamic growth and development of the BNMC (BG4) are triggering neighborhood upgrades mostly in adjacent census blocks. However, because of their proximity to the medical campus, all census tracts are experiencing increases in property value and land speculation.
7. Neighborhoods close to anchor institutions, such as D'Youville College and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, are susceptible to residential displacement. A combination of institutional expansion and residential upgrading will trigger increases in rents, property values, and housing prices. This, in turn, will make low-income residents increasingly susceptible to residential displacement.
8. Low-income renters of color are the group most at-risk of displacement in neighborhoods where market demand is increasing and where housing is becoming unaffordable. Most low-income households are burdened by housing costs with residents many paying more than 50% of their income on a place to live. Consequently, the slightest increases in rent can push them out of a community. The exception, of course, is those low-income residents residing in site-based Section 8 housing units and those receiving subsidized rent through HCV. The presence of site-based subsidized housing and landlords who accept housing choice vouchers protect these low-income residents from displacement in neighborhoods undergoing residential upgrading or a combination of institutional expansion and neighborhood transition.
9. The decline in stores, shops, and facilities that serve low-income youth and families and other at-risk populations make neighborhoods unfriendly for low-income families and individuals. New development tends to cater to the service demands of a more transient population consisting of a college-age cohort, professionals, members of the creative class, young adults without children, and empty nesters. The presence of these new residents

alters the traditional neighborhood character of areas in transition, making them less family friendly.

10. A unique set of community development problems exist in the Fruit Belt neighborhood. This community has experienced tremendous population loss. In 1970, more than 9,000 African-Americans lived in the area. Today less than 2000 blacks reside in the neighborhood. Many rental properties have been eliminated, excluding large site-based subsidized properties located in BG4. Homeowners now dominate the locale. The cluster of in-rem tax foreclosures is a contributor to the outmigration along with the demolition of hundreds of housing units. In the Fruit Belt, unlike other neighborhoods in the study, displacement is driven by institutional expansion.
11. Crime in the three study neighborhoods occurs mostly on commercial corridors rather than in residential areas. The stigmatization of these locales as dangerous and crime-ridden enclaves is not valid.

## **Recommendations**

1. The City should develop an early warning neighborhood monitoring system. Initially, the system should monitor only those neighborhoods where the threat of displacement is high. The monitoring system must have the capacity to study those areas where dislocations and unwanted changes are occurring. After identifying such sites, a rectification plan should be initiated to mitigate the adverse changes. At a later date, the City should expand the monitoring system to include all Buffalo neighborhoods. This expansion will involve the establishment of indicators to measure the unwanted change in undeveloped and marginalized communities.
2. The City should identify a local organization or university to design and operate the monitoring system. The institution or organization overseeing the monitoring system should have the capacity to conduct studies of those locales where unwanted neighborhood changes are taking place.
3. The City of Buffalo should take a more proactive role in guiding neighborhood development and center the formulation of policies that aim to create inclusive, diverse, and equitable communities. These progressive policies will require formulating intentional strategies to control neighborhood housing market dynamics
4. *Turning the Corner Project* is a study of neighborhoods that are threatened by gentrification and displacement. Many Buffalo neighborhoods that need re-vitalizing are underdeveloped and home to marginalized communities. The city should prioritize formulating regeneration strategies to improve their residential conditions.



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