

Public Meeting #1 Summary

2021 River Rock Connections Project

City of Buffalo, New York

Overview

The City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning and consultant team held a public meeting on September 22, 2021, virtually via WebEx videoconferencing platform. The purpose of this public meeting was to introduce the community to the project and its priorities, and to share next steps of the planning process including the upcoming walking tours through the study area and the focus group meeting on September 29, 2021.

The public meeting was open to anyone that wished to join from the public. The meeting was advertised on the City of Buffalo website on the project webpage, and through a press release and update from Mayor Brown. In addition, the meeting was advertised through local media outlets WIVB, WGRZ, WBFO, Spectrum News, and the neighborhood newspaper the River Rock Times. Representatives from Spectrum News, WBFO and WGRZ were also present on the virtual meeting.

In total, 20 participants joined the online public meeting. The attendees heard a brief presentation and then were active in a question-and-answer session, where City Staff and the consultant team could directly address concerns from the public and clarify information. There was also staff on hand to facilitate the meeting and to take notes.

Meeting Presentation Summary

The meeting presentation consisted of an introduction of City staff, as well as the consultant team that has partnered with the Office of Strategic Planning for the project. Hailey Whitney, the assigned City planner to the Black Rock and Riverside neighborhoods, and Mike Godfrey of Fisher Associates led the presentation. The Stakeholder Advisory Group member list was also shared.

Following introductions, the presentation acknowledged previous plans and work in the neighborhoods. This included the:

- Good Neighbors Planning Alliance Neighborhood Plan (2007),
- Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (2014), and
- Tonawanda Street Corridor Brownfield Opportunity Area (2016).

In addition to the brief summaries of the previous planning work in the neighborhoods, the presentation also shared information on current City initiatives happening in the neighborhoods. These initiatives include the:

- Niagara Street Reconstruction,
- Schaffer Village Master Plan,
- City of Buffalo Parks Master Plan,
- Region Central Project, and
- Scajaquada Creek Restoration.

The context of this previous and current work will be guiding the River Rock Connections project and was presented as such.

Goals and priorities of the project ultimately were shared with the community, as well as more specific elements of the timeline and scope of work. The three main goals of the project are:

- 1) increased waterfront public access,
- 2) complete streets, and
- 3) potential rails-and-trails opportunity.

These goals will result in a deliverable expected in January of 2022 of a Connectivity Plan with Preliminary Waterfront Design. The plan elements were shared during the presentation with the public and include documents that will outline the planning process, research and findings, design and infrastructure recommendations for the three main priority areas, a high-level cost estimation, and a list of next steps to be taken to achieve the plan.

To conclude the presentation, information on the project webpage was shared, as well as direct contact information to the neighborhood planner, Hailey Whitney. A list of upcoming engagements, including times and locations was also shared.

Summary of Meeting Attendee Input/Feedback

The attendees were active in conversations following the presentation.

Much of the input and feedback was received through a question and answer session led by City Staff and the consultant team, as well as in the chat box during the live virtual meeting.

Participant Questions:

Q: How does this project tie into wellness and overall health of the community?

A: As the plan will prioritize waterfront access and multi-use trails, community wellness will be incorporated as important aspects of those priorities.

Q: Is this project going to take into account the City of Buffalo Bicycle Master Plan?

A: The project will be considering previous planning work that has taken place in the neighborhood including city-wide plans such as the Bicycle Master Plan.

Q: Will the project boundary include the space at Tonawanda and Amherst Streets, behind Tops Plaza?

A: The River Rock project does not include this area as it is part of the Region Central project. The Region Central project has an interactive map on their website for the community to leave comments (www.gbnrtc.org/regioncentral). Please use this website for your comments on this area.

Q: How is this project coordinating with the Region Central Project?

A: The timelines will be very similar in terms of recommendations. The focus of the Region Central project is more specific to the Scajaquada roadway and surrounding streets, whereas the River Rock project is more focused on neighborhood access to and from the Niagara River waterfront.

Q: How does this tie into the Grant Street project?

A: The Grant Street project is outside of the River Rock study area and is not directly focused on neighborhood connectivity to the Niagara River waterfront. We will be looking at furthering connections to Grant Street, those neighborhoods, and building off their project.

Q: What is the coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers and the Shoreline Trail?

A: We will be coordinating and looking into the wayfinding and bridge concerns that have been raised. It is noted that the Army Corps. owns and maintains a bridge over I-190 that is used by their employees. Recent improvements on Niagara Street and Hertel Avenue provide an alternative route for the Shoreline Trail when the Army Corps. bridge is closed.

Observations & Comments:

- Participants noted they are supportive of the project.
- Demolition and potential redevelopment of 308 Crowley is a high point of interest for community.
- There is a desire for the plan to take into consideration historic Cornelius Creek and its relation to the neighborhood.
- There are multiple rail lines and residents are unsure of active or inactive lines, but they remain curious and interested about the ideas of potential reuse.
- There is uncertainty regarding usage of Unity Island and the green space nearby. A plan for the future of that park is desired, in addition to better access.
- The project will be fulfilling a goal of the Olmsted Master Plan which identified a need for a larger waterfront access discussion.

Project Contact Information

Project Website:

www.buffalony.gov/1403/River-Rock-Connections

Project Contact:

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