

# Focus Group #2 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 focus group meeting on November 10, 2021, at Riverside Academy, 51 Ontario St. within the study area. The purpose of the second focus group meeting was to provide the community with an opportunity to share input on the progressing plan and for the project team to share next steps of the planning process.

The focus group meeting was open to anyone from the public. The meeting notice was posted on the City of Buffalo website and a flyer was distributed to the project's stakeholder advisory group and to other identified stakeholders in the community. The meeting flyer was translated into Spanish, Burmese, Arabic, and Mandarin. These translated flyers were also shared and distributed within the community.

In total, 12 members of the community participated in the meeting. Meeting participants were actively engaged in the discussions and provided valuable insight and input. City staff and the consultant team were on hand to facilitate.

The meeting was conducted in an open-house format with a display of a series of inventory highlight posters as well as these engagement activities:

- Collaging activity
- Mapping connections activity
- A visual preference survey elements featuring images on posters relating to the connection these for the project: waterfront, neighborhood and community connections. A poster of viaduct preferences was included because the viaducts came through so clearly as a community issue and concern in the walking tours

### Inventory Boards

Several poster size boards were available for meeting participants to review at the beginning of the meeting. Content on these boards included project overview information and maps from the inventory phase of the project including waterfront access, waterfront views, waterfront park connections, boating access, natural resources, historic resources, roadway classification, roadway ownership, number of travel lanes, estimated daily vehicles, estimated daily trucks, volume-to-capacity, bike facilities, transit facilities, parks, playgrounds, trails, land use, zoning, rail property, rail bridges, and publicly owned land.

## Collaging Activity

Creating collages using the simple tools of images clipped from magazines, glue sticks and construction paper is a powerful visioning tool. Very often it is easier to articulate emotions and emotional responses in images rather than words and the act of searching through magazines for the perfect image becomes a meditative exercise, allowing meeting participants the ability to articulate a fully formed vision of the preferred future for the River Rock study area. Participants created collages that expressed their visions for River Rock. Each participant presented their collage and common themes futures were developed. The themes that emerged were:

- Places
- Connections and Trails
- Nature
- Water
- Feel

The collage connections to these themes are summarized below.

### Places

- *7-11 and vacant lot- possible butterfly and nature garden*
- *Enliven the sidewalk w/ parklettes, awnings and seating*
- *Austin and Amherst underpass brighten to be "gateway"*
- *Area to sit*
- *Take a break on bike ride*
- *Spot for coffee*
- *Support area to reach potential*
- *Monuments to commemorate Vets and history*
- *Encourage people to linger*

### Connections and Trails

- *Bridges for pedestrians and cemetery to waterfront over 190*
- *Bike trails with nature*

### Nature

- *Vegetation incorporated into streets/streetscapes*
- *Nature and flowers, perennials*
- *Very green*
- *Nature back*
- *Natural materials*
- *"Soft" organic even if have edge*

### Water

- *Extending land out to water*
- *Kayak docking*
- *Activity along water- not just through movement*
- *Innovative materials for "feature" on waterfront*
- *Waterfront (2 mentions)*
- *Play based waterfront*
- *Daylight creek*
- *Water based activities*

## Feel

- *Boardwalk feel*
- *Active*
- *Sculptural*
- *Interactive right to the Shoreline trail*
- *Multi-generational*
- *Consider repurpose*

## Mapping Connections Activity

Maps of the study area asked participants to respond to the question, “How do you make connections? Draw your routes on the map!” Participants drew their routes on the maps, including the rail trail corridor, off-road paths and on-street connections. Participants also added comments directly on the map and on sticky notes. A scan of these maps is provided at the end of this document. A summary of common routes and ideas are provided below.

- Multi-use trails utilizing former railroad land including the north-south corridor from the International Bridge to Kenmore Ave, and the east-west corridor from Niagara street to approximately Hertel Avenue
- Multi-use trail connections to Unity Island
- Multi-use trail connections to Scajaquada Creek utilizing land east of Tonawanda Street and south of Amherst Street
- Multi-use trail connections to the “Dearborn Triangle”
- Multi-use trail connections east of the study area via railroad property adjacent to Chandler Street and Hinman Avenue
- Connecting to and highlighting the Ware of 1812 area
- Greater access to the shoreline along the Black Rock Harbor
- Utilizing Black Rock Harbor Drive and around/through 2207 Niagara Street (shopping plaza) as a means to connect to the multi-use trail suggested for the former railroad property.
- Utilizing Esser Avenue and Evelyn Street as a potential route to connect Riverside Park with the suggested multi-use trail for the former railroad property.
- Providing multiple access points to the potential multi-use trail suggested for the former railroad property
- Improve safety and lighting for underpasses
- Olmsted Riverside Park overlook and waterfront access.

## Precedent Poster Activity

Participants were given a series of images under the themes of streets, underpasses/bridges, trails, and waterfront. Using these images for inspiration, they were asked to indicate which elements they would like to see in their community. They voted for their favorites by placing a sticky dot on the photo. A scan of the poster boards is provided at the end of this document. Their votes and comments are shown for each category below.

### Streets

Crosswalk with artistic treatment – one comment:

- *Crosswalks are amazing, a must*

Crosswalk with raised median island – two sticky dots and four comments:

- *Pedestrian island 6 ft = safety, aesthetics, opportunity for greening, and traffic calming*
- *Near schools would be great*
- *Raised crosswalks – speed tables*
- *Residents always note that crossings are too wide. Medians would help.*

Signage – one sticky dot and one comment:

- *Signage is very important/ visibility*

General comment:

- *Protected crosswalks; 2. Bump-outs; 3. Roundabout (ie at Amherst at Military! At Amherst at Tonawanda!); 4. Chicanes*

### Underpasses/bridges

A tunnel that has been daylight – one sticky dot and one comment:

- *Austin St. viaduct- more light, barrier between motor vehicles and bikes/pedestrians!*

Overpass lighting- three sticky dots and two comments:

- *Lighting and art showcase beauty, attractiveness and a sense of safety.*
- *Artistic colored lighting LED*

Tunnel with backlit artistic metal panels – two sticky dots and one comment:

- *Lighting is very important, I would love to see all bridges lit up.*

Underpass with bike lane – one sticky dot and one comment:

- *This is NOT a bike lane, it is a death trap.*

Underpass with mural – one sticky dot and four comments:

- *Murals at Austin and Tonawanda viaducts*
- *I love murals, with proper upkeep.*
- *Murals on bike path walls*
- *How do we make sure murals are well maintained?*

### Trails

Multiuse paved trail with person walking dog, cyclists, runner – no sticky dots or comments

Trailhead signage – three sticky dots and four comments:

- *Could be nice on Unity Island*
- *We'll need wayfinding!*
- *History about parks and trails is always good.*
- *We need areas where nature predominates! "A walk in the woods" in the city!*
- *Family biking on a trail- one sticky dot and one comment*
- *Rail to Trail could be more naturalized- less developed*

Sculpture along trail- one sticky dot and one comment

- *Industrial art theme*

### Waterfront

General comments:

- *I love all!*
- *We want everything on this poster!*
- *Views of the water- like Acqua*

Outdoor amphitheater – three sticky dots and two comments:

- *Placemaking- unstructured places to gather*
- *Features facing the waterfront (upwind from canal) to breathe fresh air*

Fishing area – one comment:

- *Fishing is very important to the residents in this area. Safety first.*

Naturalized shoreline: no sticky dots or comments

Beach area – one comment:

- *I would love to see this in Riverside*

Pier area – one comment:

- *I can see this behind the McDonalds*

## Project Contact Information

Project Website:

[www.buffalony.gov/1403/River-Rock-Connections](http://www.buffalony.gov/1403/River-Rock-Connections)

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