

Appendix X. Gateway Master Plan Changes Planned for Utica's Gateway Historic Canal District

With \$2.5 million in funding through Governor George Pataki's Empire Opportunity Fund and the recent announcement of an \$11.5 million HOPE VI award by Congressman Sherwood Boehlert, the City of Utica is preparing for sweeping changes throughout the nearly 120-acre section of the City known as the Gateway Historic Canal District.

Bounded by the CSX tracks to the north and Columbia Street to the south, Genesee Street on the east and NYS Route 8/12 on the west, a number of important public destination points lie within or adjacent to the Gateway District, including the Utica Memorial Auditorium, Hotel Utica and the Utica Marsh. Furthermore, key multimodal transportation routes like the NYS Thruway, NYS Routes 8/12, the Erie Canal, Oriskany Boulevard and the CSX rail lines support District businesses including PJ Green and Tartan Textiles. With the Empire Opportunity Funds, the City of Utica intends to implement the recently completed master plan for the District that will capitalize on the various assets like transportation to create an environment that will foster private development.

Initiated by Mayor Timothy Julian, a steering committee comprised of private business owners and local, regional and State government representatives including EDGE and Empire State Development guided Peter J. Smith and Co., Inc. of Buffalo in the development of the plan. The primary goal of the plan was to determine the public investments necessary to spur private development. Characterized by predominantly vacant parcels served by mature infrastructure, the planning process began with a complete inventory of the assets and properties in and around the District. With this inventory, combined with an economic analysis of local and regional conditions, focus group meetings and public outreach meetings, a plan for the District was developed.



[BSC Business Plan Note: This Gateway scene depicts how planners envisioned Burchard Lane looking, the small building at left is the BSC Kiln House.]

The plan recommends mixed use development throughout the District with industrial uses largely concentrated north of Oriskany Boulevard to take advantage of the proximity to the rail lines and highways. To encourage mixed use development, the plan calls for improvements that will facilitate pedestrian traffic throughout the District. Additional changes are proposed to vehicular traffic routes through the District that are compatible with pedestrian movements and provide improved access and visibility in support of economic development. Streetscape improvements along these new and improved corridors, combined with zoning regulations based on design guidelines rather than restrictions on use, will further improve the live and work environment of the District in the future.

With the award of \$2.5 million in Empire Opportunity Funds from Governor Pataki, the City of Utica is currently in the process of designing the improvements that will be made throughout the District to begin implementation of the plan. Three projects are planned for construction this year that will provide visible, high-impact change and will leverage funds from other sources.

In partnership with the New York State Department of Transportation, the City of Utica will fund design changes to Oriskany Boulevard that will improve pedestrian access along this corridor as it cuts through the Gateway District. Constructed in the same location where the Erie Canal once coursed, Oriskany Boulevard historically divided the Gateway District. With a narrowing of the pavement width and increasing the landscaped median, visitors to the Auditorium will have easier access to the expanded parking facilities and stores and restaurants in the central business district to the south.

As the entranceway to the Gateway District and the City's Central Business District, Lower Genesee Street will receive streetscape improvements to enhance the historic architecture of the buildings. In addition, a small alley that runs behind these buildings, Burchard Lane, will be improved to enhance pedestrian traffic, in turn making the adjacent buildings more attractive to pedestrian-related businesses like restaurants and small cafes. The streetscape improvements will be designed to evoke the Canal-era atmosphere that existed when many of the buildings were originally constructed.

Finally, parking in portions of the Gateway District has been an issue for a number of years, an issue that can impact business expansion/location. With the design improvements to Oriskany Boulevard and the elimination of on-street parking through that corridor, parking will become a greater issue, particularly within the public safety complex that includes the Police Department and City Courts buildings. To address the issue, a number of buildings will be demolished in the block adjacent to the Police Department to provide surface parking. In fact, implementation of this phase of improvements has already begun – Utica Plumbing Supply broke ground in March on construction of a new facility on Whitesboro Street, thereby vacating the inefficient and antiquated existing facility in the Gateway District. Pedestrian improvements such as lighting and decorative pavers will be incorporated in the design of the parking that will link the parking to Hanna Park and the Memorial Auditorium.

Just as the construction of the Erie and Chenango Canals through this area spurred expansive growth in the City of Utica almost two hundred years ago, it is the hope that the implementation of the Gateway Historic Canal District master plan will spur public and private redevelopment.

