

# S.O.S. Utica, NY | Sin City Again?

## Happy for \$300M, new hospital, but not the location!

Utica is beautiful and unique. It has been overlooked for so long as another small rust belt city that has been all but abandoned. Now, times have changed as America enters a phase when urban cores are recognized as unique and special places. These downtowns have been shaped by generations, back when the main sources of transportation were by foot or by horse. They have been designed piece by piece to attract foot traffic, to withstand time and to be repurposed with each new owner that comes along with a creative vision. These strong people breathe new life into a previously unused space.



America has realized that these downtowns have purpose, and people are eager to be a part of this American renaissance. Much of our infrastructure from the day of the canal still exists and is ripe for repurposing. Once they are dozed, they cannot be replaced. So many opportunities for local entrepreneurs could be lost.

The two main areas of activity in Utica, Genesee St. and Varick St., can help guide the restoration of existing storefronts and yield small-scale mixed use development in the near future. The streets that connect these two busy centers are set up perfectly for a connective corridor of vibrancy and development that can strengthen Utica's core downtown. These streets are threatened by plans to put a mega-hospital in the area, which would be a true disaster for Utica's comeback, when the project could be built so effortlessly on the property already owned by MVHS, where St. Luke's is located. A mega-hospital on the Columbia-Lafayette blocks would create a large roadblock for pedestrians and motorists from accessing the city. Instead of a grand box of a hospital, imagine what can be done with the existing infrastructure already in the area.

If Utica needs any new development, it doesn't need large scale state funded projects. Look out for phrases like "opportunity of a lifetime" and "must move forward." You will hear these words from investors, trying to convince the public that these projects cannot fail. In reality, many of these projects are over bloated, unstable and serve private interests far more than the interests of the community.

Moving forward, Utica can capitalize on its resources by taking any efforts to preserve its unique and profitable infrastructure. Regulations need to be dropped and zoning needs to be relaxed to make it easier for local investors can come in and repurpose existing buildings. The public should be allowed to explore creative, temporary ways to give purpose to unused space, encouraging greenery, art and traffic-calming techniques.

City lots for sale should be smaller and sold individually so small mixed-use can be developed over time, building up instead of out. Parking minimums should be eliminated for efficient use of land resources because empty parking lots do not generate revenue. This goes for all city centers in CNY, not just Utica. They say Rome wasn't built in a day. So true. Neither was OUR Rome or our Utica. Putting all our trust in civic leaders with their shiny, grand projects will only leave us more in debt with all our problems still intact. The only way to restore Utica is to enable the citizens who care enough to put in the effort to make it more resilient. Have you been downtown lately? It's already happening. **By Daniel Parsnow**