

Eggertsville Action Plan



Prepared for:
The Town of Amherst



Prepared by:



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Introduction

... Eggertsville's development pattern/character that today is being emulated by developers across the country

The Eggertsville community is a very special place within the Town of Amherst. It has a unique character and density found locally in only a few older suburban communities. Eggertsville is one of the oldest parts of the Town of Amherst due to its proximity to the historic regional center – the City of Buffalo. Earlier in the century, the outward growth of traditional urban neighborhoods, which for the Town of Amherst began in both Eggertsville and Snyder, established a development pattern/character that today is being emulated in new communities across the country. Eggertsville's special attributes have created a community fabric worth preserving and enhancing.

The Eggertsville community is located in the southwest corner of the Town of Amherst, adjacent to the City of Buffalo and Town of Tonawanda. The Eggertsville study area is bounded: to the west by Niagara Falls Boulevard, that also serves as the boundary of the Town of Tonawanda; to the south by Kenmore Avenue and Main Street, serving as the City of Buffalo line; to the east generally by Getzville Road; and to the north by Sheridan Drive *(See Maps 1 and 2)*.

The Plan focuses on commercial corridors and nodes.

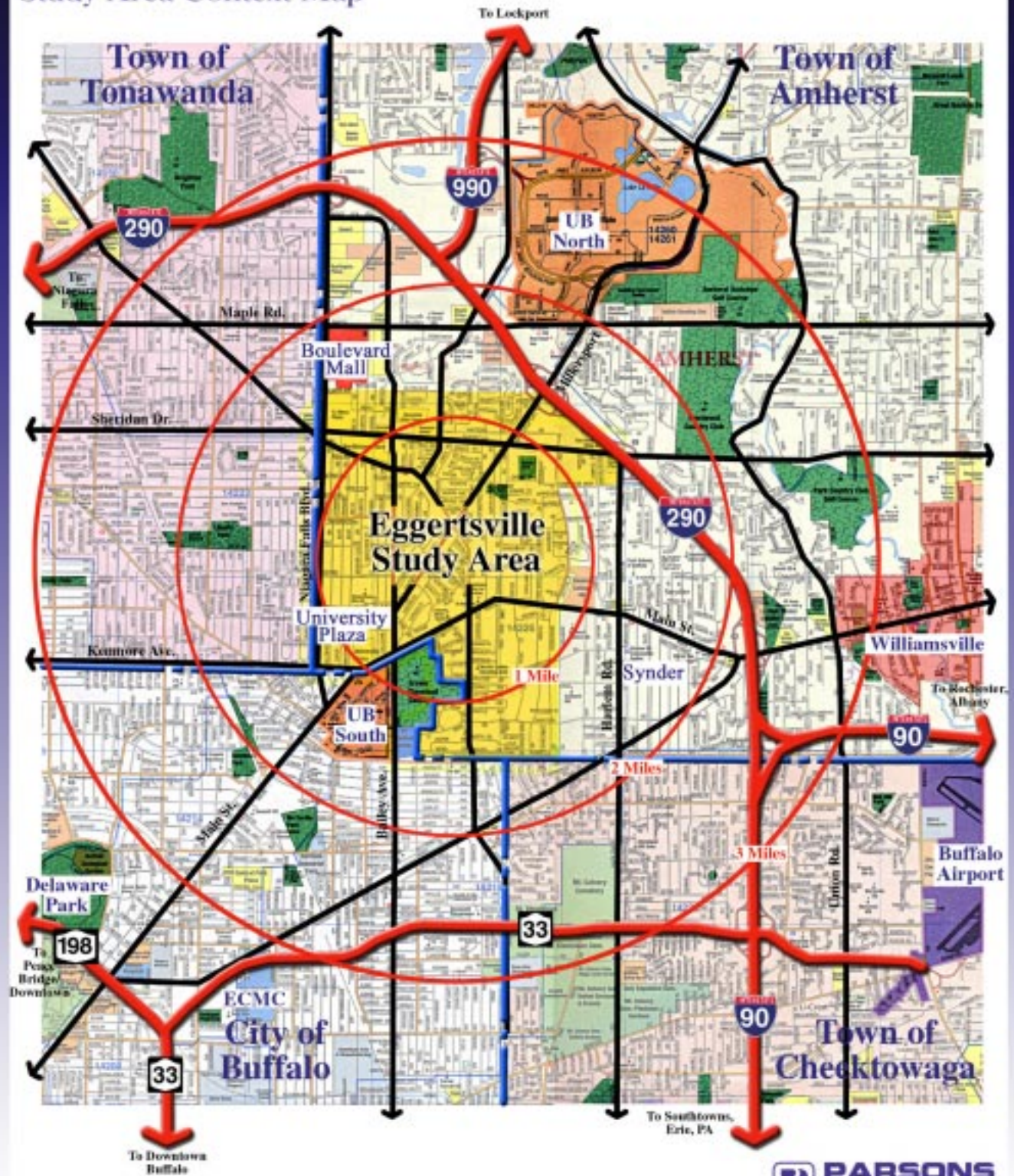
The Action Plan focuses on the **commercial corridors**, which include Main Street / Kenmore Avenue, Niagara Falls Boulevard, Eggert Road, Bailey Avenue, and Sheridan Drive. Each corridor has its own unique character. The plan also highlights **commercial nodes**, which include the Main Street - Eggert Road Intersection and the Six Corners area *(including Millersport Highway / Grover Cleveland highway)* *(See Map 2)*. Additional minor nodes are included within the discussions for commercial corridors.

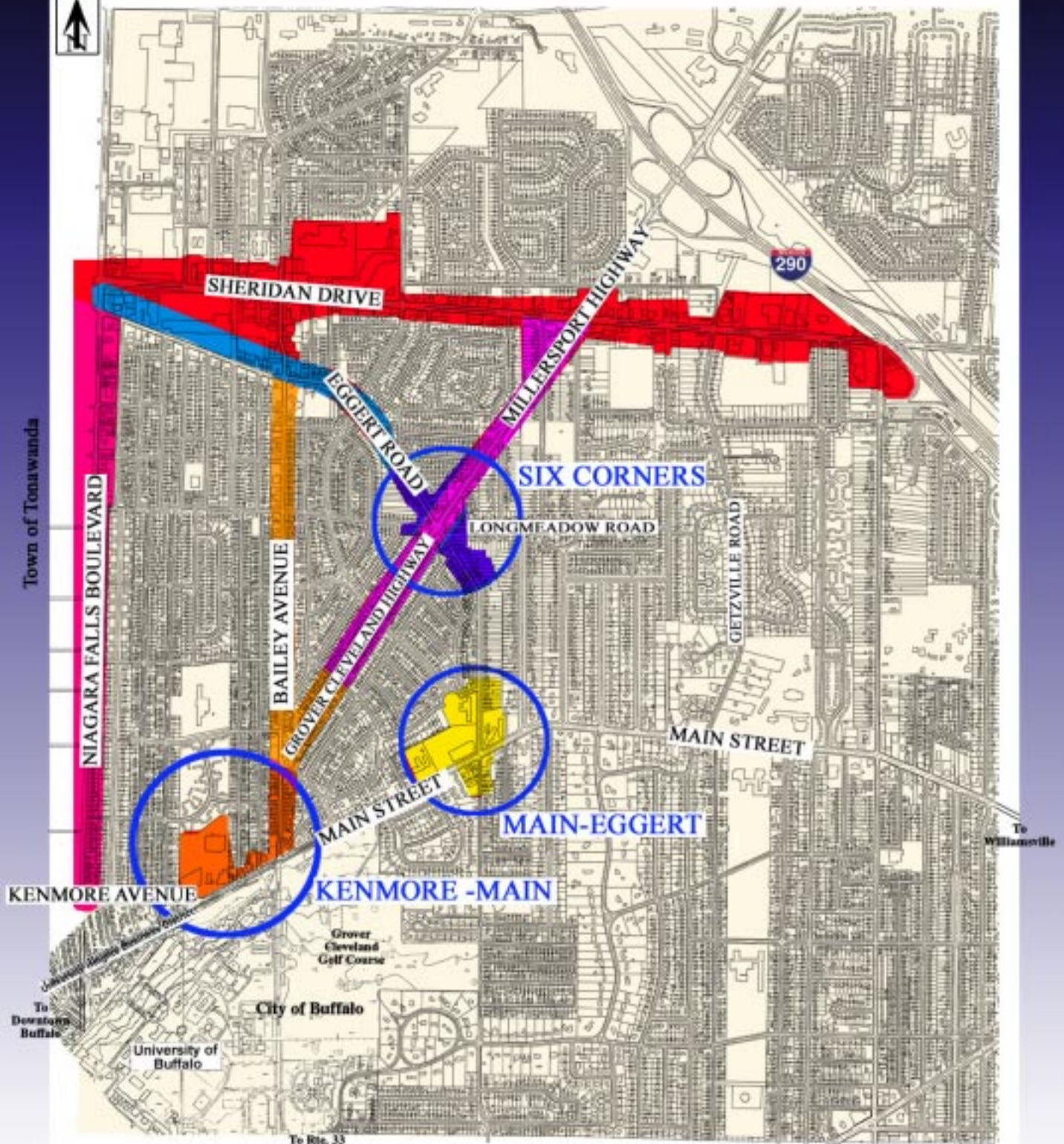
Short-term Actions will be targeted for 1-5 year implementation.

The Amherst Town Board is preparing this plan in order to identify short-term actions (one to five years) to revitalize commercial areas within Eggertsville. Specifically, the plan identifies barriers to redevelopment created by the Town Code and recommends amendments that eliminate those barriers. The plan also identifies capital projects that support redevelopment of Eggertsville's commercial corridors. Finally, the plan will identify financing options, where appropriate, that will enable business to invest in the rehabilitation or reuse of commercial areas.



Study Area Context Map





Commercial Strategy Areas

Important Corridors and Nodes



This planning process was set up to be ambitious in both timing and its short-term actions for the Town to implement. The plan is a strategic action plan, and informs future Town policies in its upcoming comprehensive plan. This intent dictated the methodology and process utilized during the course of this study, including the following:

***Developer/Stakeholders
Comments –***

- *“Improve ability to develop “hard-to-develop properties.”*
- *“Make development opportunities more attractive . . .”*
- *“Continue to streamline the planning process to encourage development”*
- *“Explore alternative developments to retail. . . “*
- *“Identify actions Town can undertake to reduce development costs.”*
- *“Neighborhood opposition to projects is so difficult to overcome that developers look to less intensely developed areas to avoid opposition.”*
- *“Marketing initiatives would make Eggertsville more attractive to developers.”*

- *Stakeholders meeting to initiate the project, including developers, town officials and community representatives.*
- *General market analysis of the Eggertsville area, prepared by Economic Research Associates (ERA)*
- *Telephone interviews with area developers, property owners and brokers, conducted by ERA .*
- *Research techniques used in comparable suburban communities.*
- *Inventory of study area, including a “windshield” survey, collection of available plans and projects in community area, and Town GIS, data base resources.*
- *Presentation and discussion of Key Findings with Town Board and various Town departments.*
- *Presentation of Key Findings to Eggertsville Community Association.*
- *Preparation of Draft Final Plan for review by Town officials and area stakeholders.*
- *Presentation of Draft Final Plan to general public in open house format.*

The Action Plan is presented in sections for ease of review and understanding. The plan introduces Eggertsville through a general overview of the area, and proceeds into specific recommendations and actions for various commercial corridors and nodes. The content for the action plan is as follows:

- **Study Goals / Objectives**
- **Area Highlights / Overview of Existing Conditions**
- **General Area Recommendations as they apply to Eggertsville**
- **Descriptions of Specific Commercial Corridors and Nodes**
- **Key Findings for each area**
- **Specific Short-Term Actions for each area**



Study Goals / Objectives

Study goals were established through a series of meetings with Town officials, area stakeholders, and area residents. Based on these discussions, the Town Planning Department has established the following goals for the study.

Identify barriers for redevelopment.

- ◆ **Identify uses the Eggertsville commercial corridors can support given the context of the surrounding neighborhoods and market realities.**
- ◆ **Reinforce or in some cases create a sense of place.**

Strategies for achieving these goals shall focus on:

- ❖ **Eminating barriers to redevelopment presented in zoning code**
- ❖ **Identifying capital projects the Town can undertake to encourage / support development.**
- ❖ **Identifying Actions the Town or other public entities can undertake as partners in the redevelopment process.**
- ❖ **Establishing guidelines enhancing the quality of development.**
- ❖ **Establish design guidelines making public spaces, i.e. street right-of-ways, public parks and squares, etc., more attractive, safe, and green.**

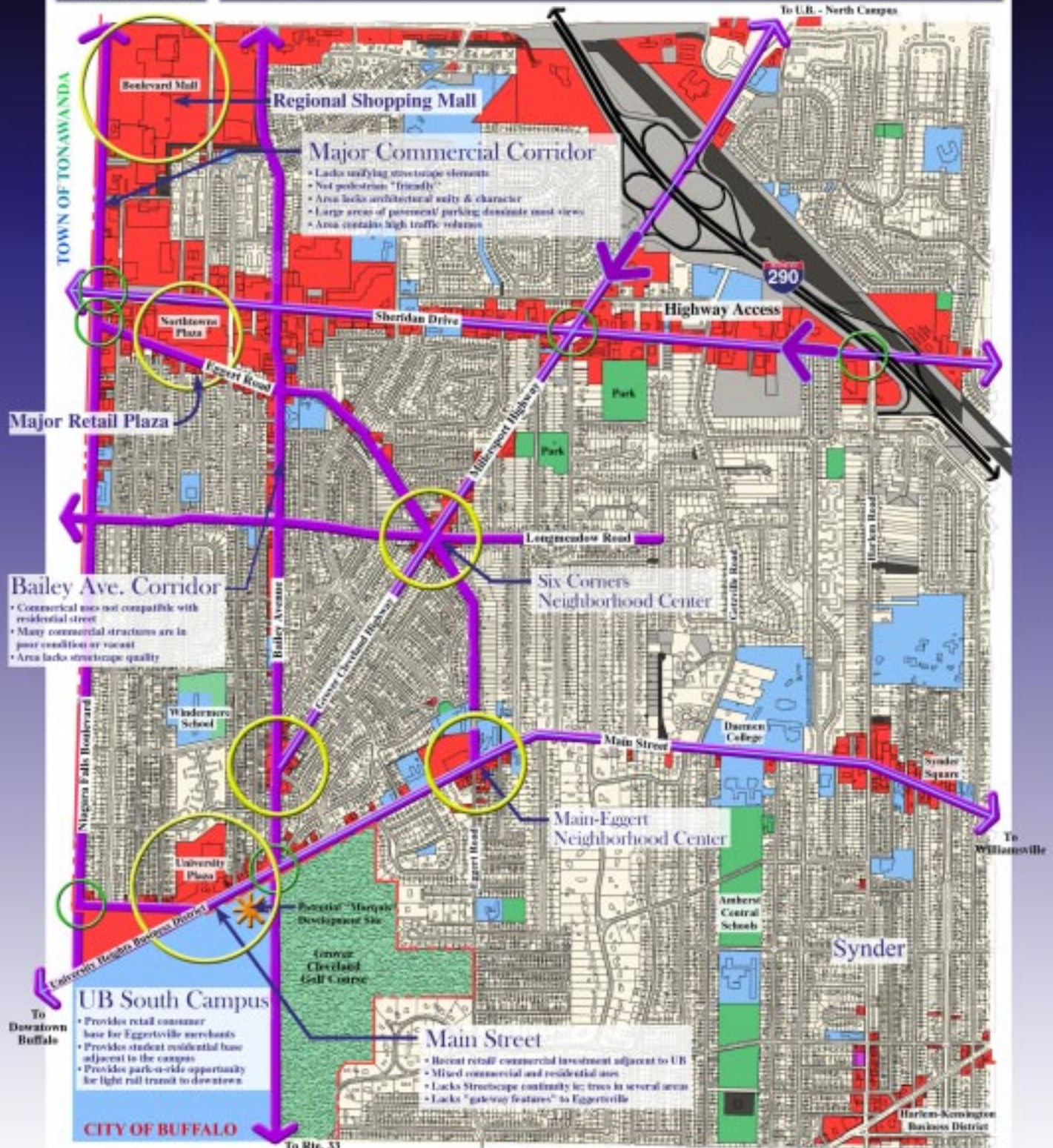
Zoning changes to encourage new, quality development opportunities.

These goals are to be achieved through a series of action steps within a short-term action plan.

Area Highlights / Overview of Existing Conditions:

The Eggertsville community is unique to most other parts of Amherst and the region as a whole. Its strategic location links the urban neighborhoods of the City of Buffalo with the newer suburban areas of the Town of Amherst. An analysis of the Eggertsville community revealed a number of strengths that should be built upon (*See Map 3*). It also identified some of the challenges confronting the Town and community as we look towards the future. The following findings provide a general overview of existing conditions within the overall Eggertsville community.

Eggertsville's many strengths should be built upon.



Site Analysis Map

LEGEND

- Commercial Areas
- Community Facilities
- Park/Open Spaces
- Potential Gateway Feature

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ERA - Economic Research Associates



GENERAL FINDINGS

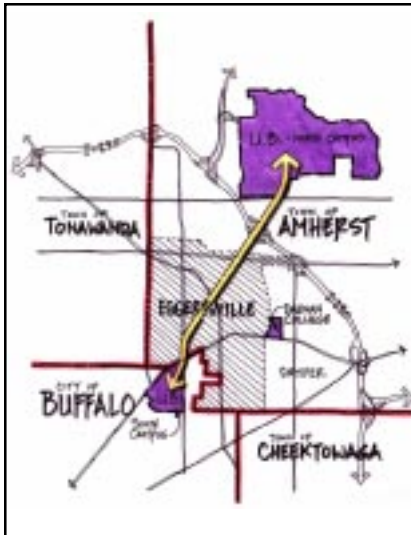
Housing

Eggertsville has a diverse mix of housing types, ages and values.

- **Eclectic mix of housing types** – The Eggertsville community boasts an eclectic mix of housing types, from some of the largest, most exclusive single-family estates to modest single-family homes to multi-family housing, including duplexes and apartment complexes.
- **Diverse housing stock** – A diverse housing stock provides opportunity for a healthy mix of household incomes within the community as well as serving an equally broad housing market that ranges from first-time buyers to the established family to “empty nesters.”
- **High quality housing** – The housing stock ranges in age from 1920’s to the post-war building boom of the 1950’s & 1960’s. A small amount of new residential construction has infilled the neighborhoods over the past two decades.
- **Stable real estate values** - Real estate values in Eggertsville have followed regional trends. The weak regional economy and continued new housing construction in outlying areas have impacted real estate prices in older established communities. Fortunately, neighborhood pride and housing quality have allowed residential values in Eggertsville to remain stable, relative to the rest of the region.

University-related community

- **Adjacency to University** - The Eggertsville community grew up near the University at Buffalo’s city, or South Campus.
- **Situated between two campuses** - With the construction of the North Campus (Amherst), the Eggertsville community found itself uniquely situated between the North and South campuses of the State University of New York and its Flagship University.
- **Support base for commercial areas** - For years, the University of Buffalo provided a good base of support for commercial establishments along Main Street, Kenmore Avenue, and Bailey Avenue. Decisions over the last decade to relocate University of Buffalo undergraduate studies programs and housing to the North Campus have tested the viability of some of these older commercial areas.



Eggertsville is uniquely situated between two campuses.

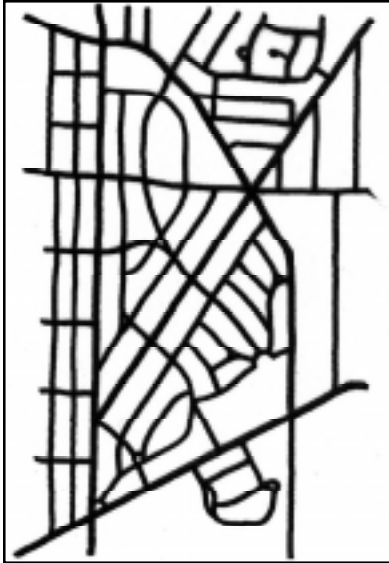
- **Roadway linkage through community** - Grover Cleveland Highway and Millersport Highway are the direct connection between the two campuses.
- Recent investment in and near University Plaza has been a positive impact on this corner of Eggertsville.

Cultural diversity

- **Proximity to urban center and university** - Eggertsville's proximity to both the City of Buffalo and the University has given it a rich blend of people from many different international backgrounds.

"Walkable" Neighborhood

- **Traditional street pattern and neighborhood design** - Eggertsville was originally designed using a more traditional street pattern often used by the City Planners of the late 1800's and early 1900's. This included a system of narrow, winding neighborhood streets lined with trees and sidewalks. The density of housing and pattern of streets was attractive for homebuyers looking for a close-knit-neighborhood fostering the social interaction, which is lacking in many newer communities over the last 20 years (*See Map 4*).

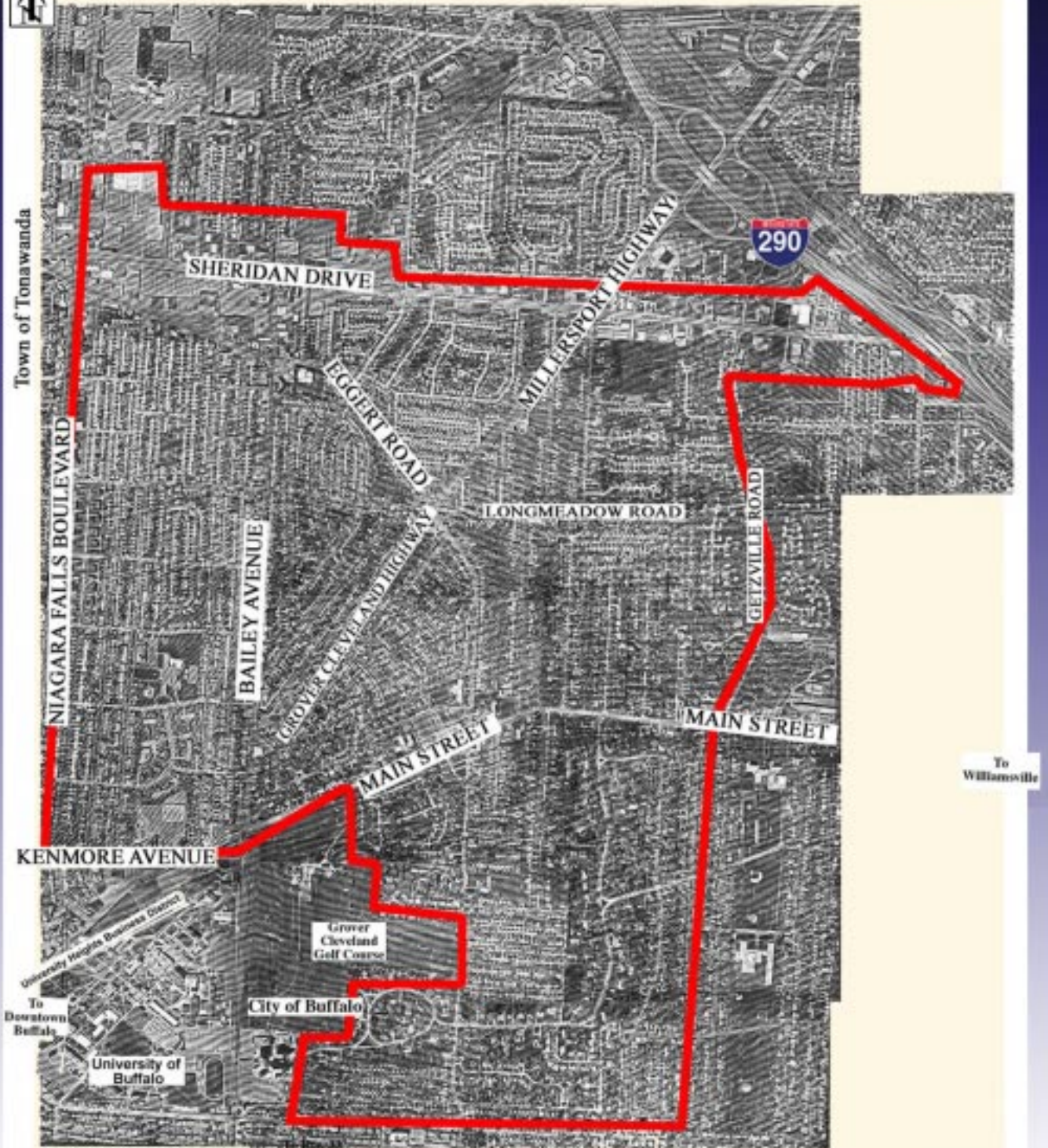


Map highlighting the traditional walkable street pattern of Eggertsville.

Area Roadways

- **Variety of street types** - The Eggertsville community has a mix or variety of street types. These range from cul-de-sacs to narrow neighborhood streets to 4 and 6-lane arterials.
- **Changing roadway character** - The character of the major streets has changed over the years in response to suburban growth and sprawl, and trends in modern roadway engineering. What were local commercial streets or tree-lined boulevards have become primary commuter routes carrying high volumes of traffic to and from outlying areas. This is largely due to "state highway guidelines that are imposed over some area streets that provide design geometrics for another 5-10 mph above the posted speed limits, as well as for providing roadways that are 'forgiving' to incautious drivers." (*Street Designs for Healthy Neighborhoods, Dan Burden, 1/99*)
- **Major commercial corridors** - The Eggertsville community, which was once at the fringe of the region's development,

The character of the major streets has changed over the years.



Aerial View of Eggertsville



State Highway Standards are not generally “neighborhood friendly.”



NFTA map highlighting bus routes through the Eggertsville area.

has now seen its major roads widened encouraging higher travel speeds, removal of on-street parking, intersections geometry modifications, streets deforestation, all in an effort to provide for the “safe, efficient movement of traffic.” This is evident along Eggertsville’s commercial corridors (i.e., Niagara Falls Boulevard, Main Street, Sheridan Drive, Grover Cleveland Highway, Millersport Highway, and soon to happen along Bailey Avenue).

- **Multi-modes of transportation** - Given Eggertsville’s original layout as a pedestrian-friendly, walkable community, future plans for the major commercial corridors in Eggertsville need to refocus on multi-modes of transportation and away from being strictly automobile dependent.

Access / Public Transportation

- **Accessible to area amenities** - Eggertsville’s commercial corridors are serviced by public transportation (MetroBus) providing access to shopping, professional services and area activities/attractions (i.e., Northtown Plaza, University Plaza, Boulevard Mall).
- **Close Proximity to Metro Rail** - The community is within a very short distance to the existing Light Rail / Metro Rapid Transit which connect University of Buffalo’s South Campus to downtown Buffalo.
- **Easy access to area highways** - While Eggertsville’s transportation system provides easy access from within, the community is also easily accessed from all parts of the region via the I-290 at Millersport Highway, and Niagara Falls Boulevard, the I-90/290 at Main Street, and the NY33 (Kensington Expressway) at Bailey Avenue and Eggert Road.
- **Neighborhood bicycle route** - A bicycle route is provided through the neighborhood connecting the two university campuses.

Area Open Space / Parks

- **Variety of open spaces** - Open space can be found throughout Eggertsville in the form of tree-lined streets, parks, school properties and a major golf course on the southern edge of the community.
- **Neighborhood parks and school grounds** - Garnett and Dellwood Parks offer outdoor ballfields, basketball, and



recreation, while many residents utilize the facilities at Windermere School, nearby Amherst Central Middle and High Schools, Cantalician Center, and Temple Sinai.

- **Lack of community recreation space** - There is concern within the Eggertsville community that structured indoor recreational opportunities (i.e. community center/facility) are lacking.

Commercial Uses

- **Viability of older commercial areas** - University Plaza, located at Main Street and Kenmore Avenue in Eggertsville, was one of the first suburban shopping experiences in the region. Over time, as population and regional income shifted outwards, so did the centers of retail and office activities. University Plaza was succeeded by Northtown Plaza, which has since been overshadowed by the likes of the Galleria and Boulevard Malls, Boulevard Consumer and Delaware Consumer Squares, and even today's powerful "e:commerce" internet shopping network. What was once the focus of regional dollars, is now facing increased competition and is struggling to maintain its viability as a community center.
- **Excess retail space** - Based on a market analysis (**See Appendix A**), the amount of existing retail space in Eggertsville far exceeds the amount of space it will be able to support in the future - - almost two times as much.
- **"Old" commercial structures** - Much of Eggertsville's commercial space is "old" by industry guidelines. Older structures generally do not have the interior space flexibility offered by newer structures, including "open" floor plans, taller ceiling heights, and larger overall floor areas. Over 80% of the space in Eggertsville is over 20 years old. These factors make it increasingly difficult to retain existing or attract certain types of new commercial uses.
- **Regional consumer market** - On the positive side, the new area "super centers" (i.e., Boulevard Mall) and new power centers (i.e., Boulevard Consumer Square), will draw from larger, more distant markets attracting new shoppers into the area. This creates a market opportunity for new types of retail and commercial use development within Eggertsville. To capture these markets, developers will have to think beyond the standard retail model typical to the area. National trends

Centers of retail and office activities have shifted outwards with population and regional income.

Much of the commercial space is "old" by industry standards.

Eggertsville's retail types and sizes vary by corridor.

Requirements for some new developments tends to be “out of scale” with surroundings.

have shown that real estate projects offering a unique “experience and setting” tend to capture more interest and appeal to more of today’s discriminating consumers.

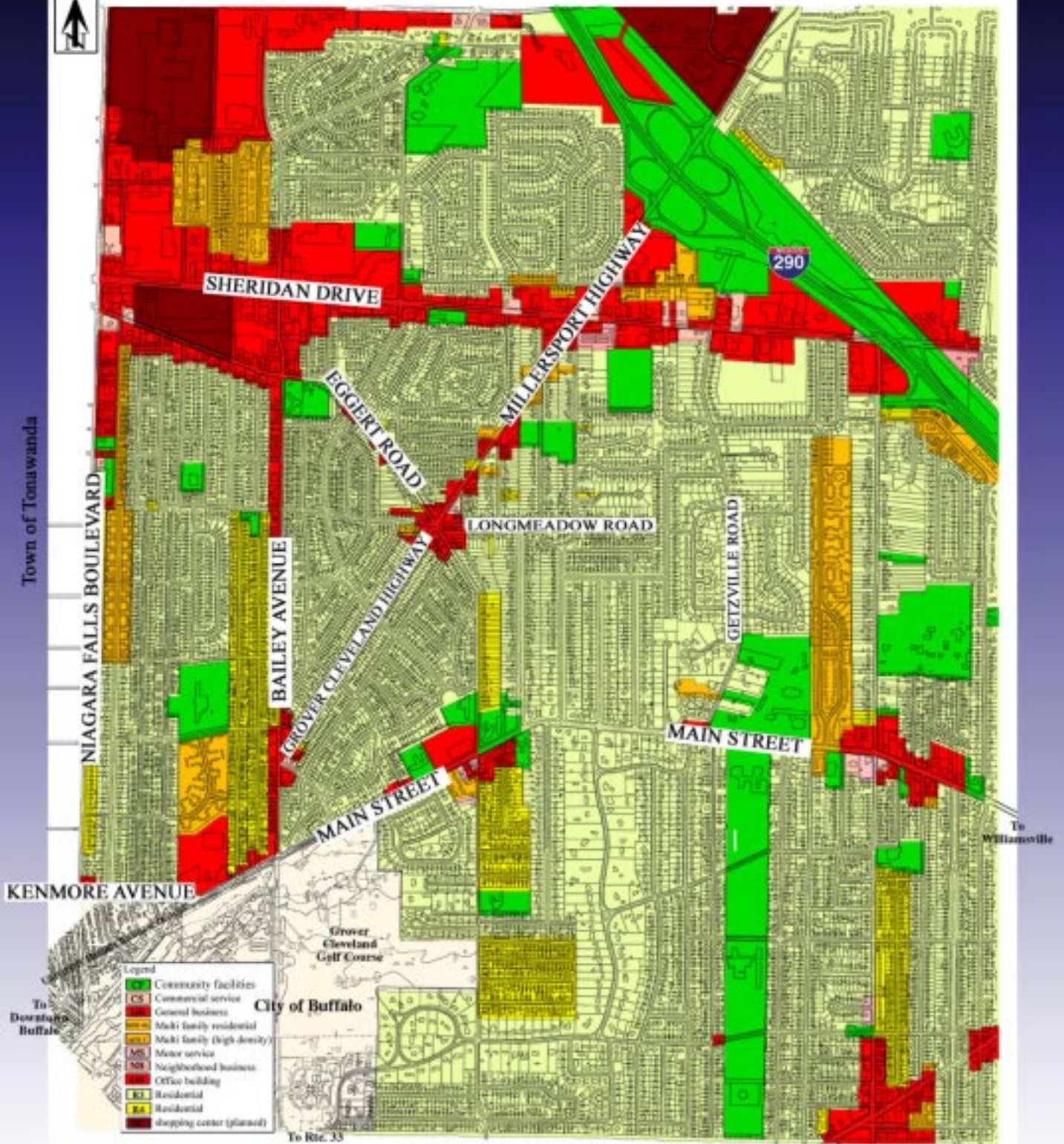
- **Variety of commercial space** - Within Eggertsville, the types and sizes of retail vary by corridor. While Main/Eggert and the Six Corners offer more neighborhood convenience and specialty services, Northtown Plaza, Sheridan Drive and University Plaza are more in the style of suburban “strip-malls” or “big box” developments. This includes developments with larger floor plates, larger parking lots and tends to “bridge many markets under a single roof.” Today’s “big boxes” represent national chain pharmacy superstores to mega-home improvement centers. The very nature and scale of these project types, parcel size, building footprint, required parking and traffic generated tend to be “out of scale” with communities such as Eggertsville. Buildings are often designed as “disposable architecture,” often lacking in high quality detailing and character, as well as having only a 10-20 year life expectancy. This development philosophy allows for properties to be “recycled” easily as retail trends change.

Zoning

The Town’s zoning ordinance is currently “one size fits all.”

- **“One-size-fits-all” zoning** - The Town of Amherst’s Zoning Ordinance is presently designed as a “one size fits all” system, dating back to 1976 (*See Map 5*). The existing Zoning Code applies guidelines typical to newer suburban communities, yet fails to recognize the special qualities that make an older community such as Eggertsville special. It imposes guidelines suitable for the newer areas of Williamsville and East Amherst to older neighborhoods like Eggertsville and Snyder. It treats Bailey Avenue and Eggert Road the same as Transit Road and Upper Niagara Falls Boulevard. It treats the “Boulevard Consumer Square” the same as “Six Corners.” In many cases the zoning code creates very few opportunities for newer “mixed-use” developments, central to the health and vibrancy of most neighborhoods.
- **Rezoning and variances** - Due to the “one size fits all” zoning, developers over the years have sought rezonings and variances to better fit their projects to irregular parcel sizes and building configurations within the Eggertsville community. This is particularly evident at the “Six Corners” area where six (6) zoning classifications co-exist at one intersection.

The current zoning code treats the “Boulevard Consumer Square” the same as “Six Corners”.



Zoning

0 1/8 1/4 3/8 1/2 MILE



Developers often find it difficult to make their projects “fit” within established neighborhoods.

- **Difficulties for “infill” development** - Infill development is particularly difficult in Eggertsville due to the inconsistencies between the existing zoning codes and the existing character of the surrounding community. Developers find it difficult to make their projects “fit” and often shy away from community conflicts. These developers gravitate towards the northern and eastern parts of town where larger parcels and less potential community conflicts exist. It also becomes less costly for developers to build in the newer parts of town, rather than expending more energies and resources trying to force a project into an older, more established neighborhood.

Land Uses

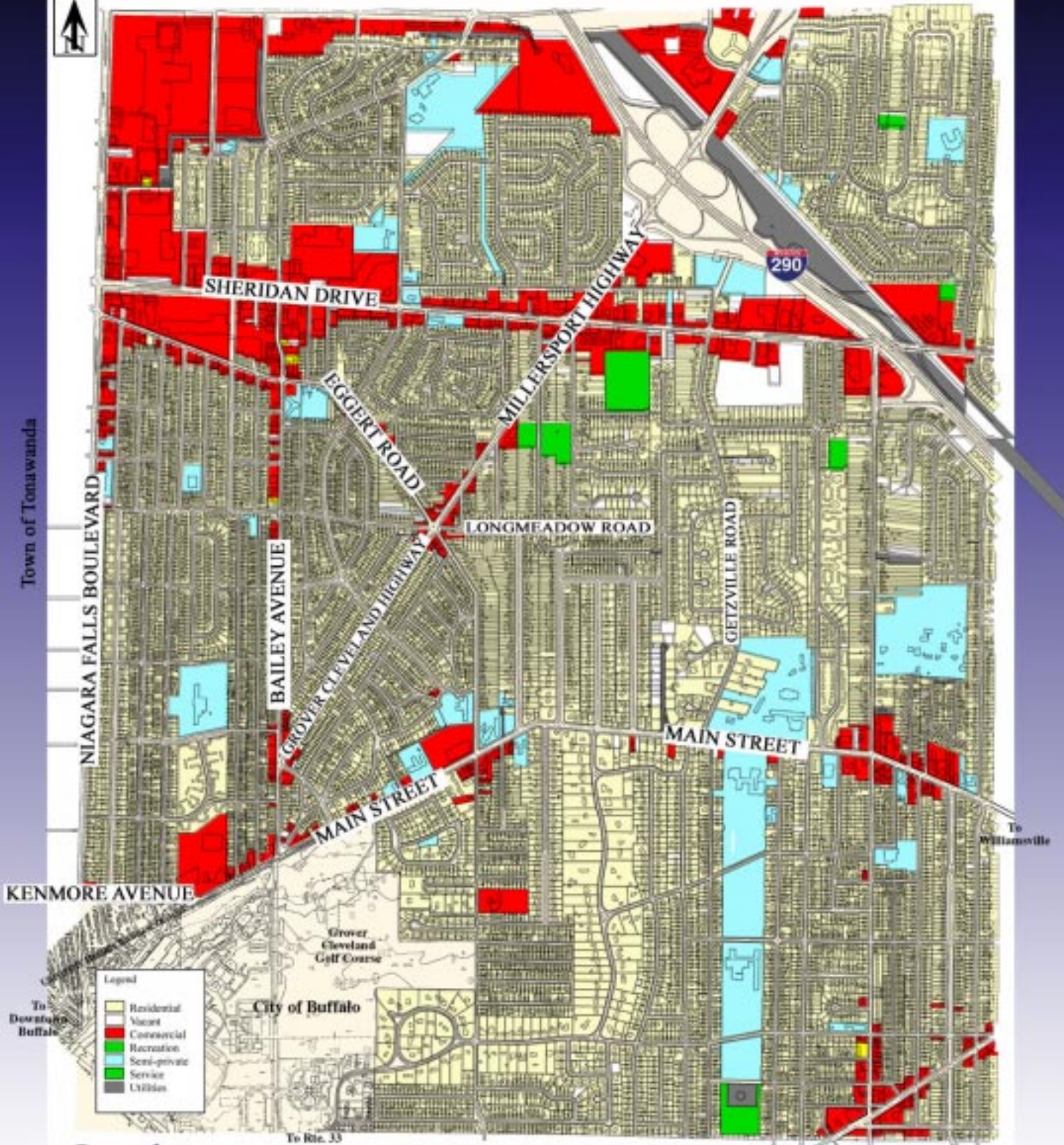
- **Large diversity of land uses** - A “windshield” survey of the commercial corridors found a large diversity of land uses (*See Map 6*). Some areas such as Grover Cleveland Highway tend to be mostly single-use on both sides of the street, while other corridors such as parts of Niagara Falls Boulevard and Bailey Avenue have less compatible uses from parcel to parcel. For example, the Amherst side of Niagara Falls Boulevard is residential while the Tonawanda side is largely commercial.
- **Need for reinvestment in older structures** - Many of Eggertsville’s older commercial structures house second or third generation of uses, adding to the need for occasional reinvestment to keep these structures competitive in the area marketplace. In some cases, it does not make economic sense to prolong the life of some buildings. The idea of demolition and redevelopment becomes more economically attractive if land can be acquired inexpensively.

In some cases . . . the idea of demolition and redevelopment becomes more economically attractive.

Vacant Parcels and Building

- **Aging structures and modern retailing** - Vacancies have become more and more evident within Eggertsville over the last few years. This is largely due to aging structures and the demands of modern retailing, which cannot always be accommodated in those structures.
- **Regional trends and competition** - Given the sluggish regional economy, numerous other commercial areas throughout Western New York have also suffered from similar vacancy problems. However, it is important to note that

Numerous other commercial areas through WNY have suffered from vacancy problems.



Landuse



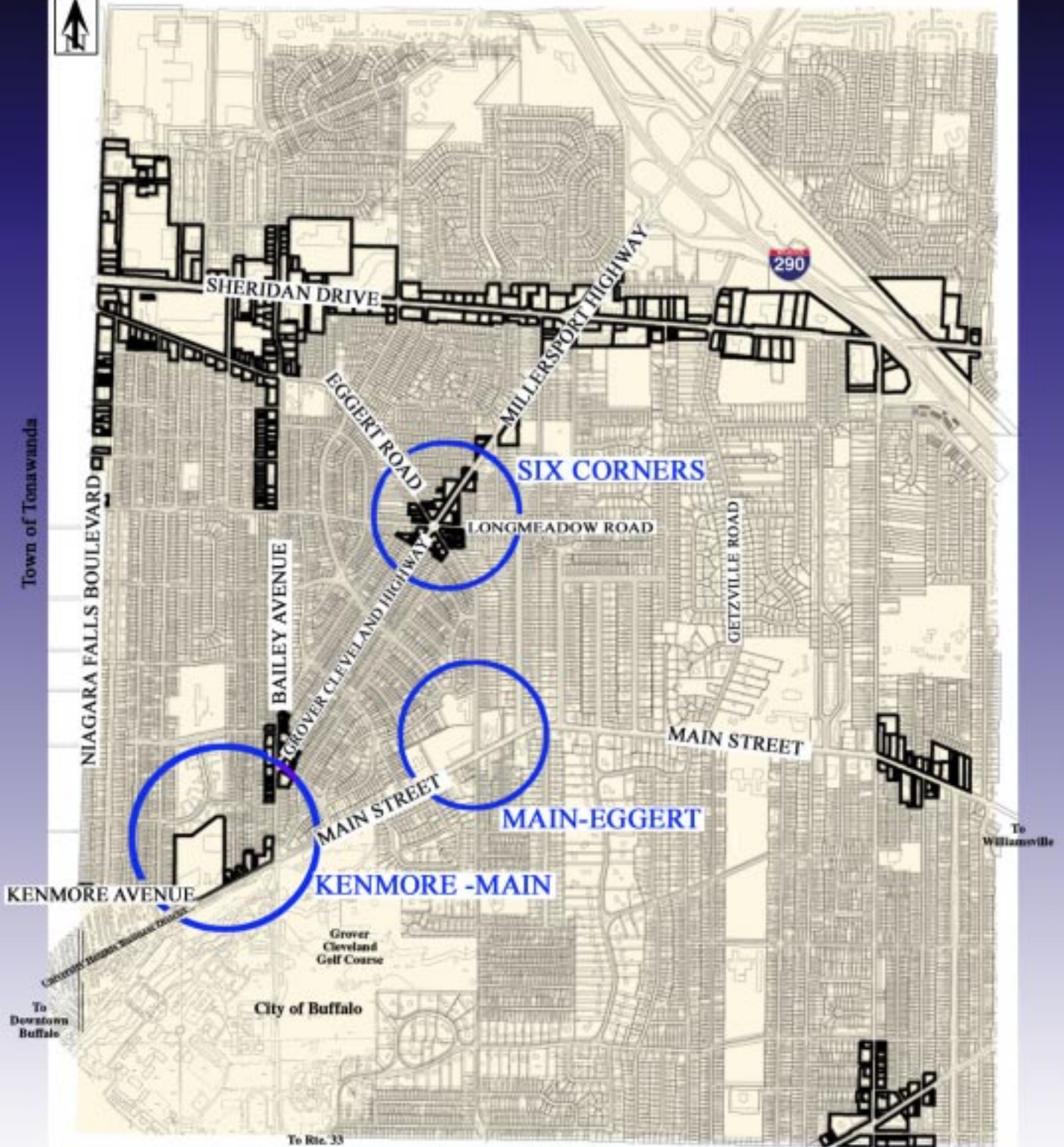
vacancies are also typical in many stronger commercial areas, as fierce competition forces many retailers to constantly update their formats or risk going out of business. The difference becomes evident when stronger commercial areas “turn over” properties much quicker to new tenants and uses.

Town Permit Process

- A review of the permit process found the system works well to balance public and private needs. The process is not onerous to developers, and the turn around review time is very reasonable.

Development Incentives

Due to the demands, size and scale of many typical newer retail developments, developers tend to “shy away” from established neighborhoods due to potential opposition from surrounding residents. In an effort to attract new investment to Eggertsville’s commercial corridors, the Town has targeted this community for inclusion within the 485-B program (*See Map 7*). This is an incentive program set up to encourage commercial investment through a graduated tax-abatement system. While the concept behind the 485-B program is appropriate to encourage investment in Eggertsville, it tends to be more applicable to “big-box” developments or new construction projects. The experienced developer knows and uses the program to his or her benefit. Discussions with local economic development officials indicate that the minimum investment required to qualify for the 485-B program is often greater than the average small business enterprise can afford under most developments or it is difficult to raise the assessed value of existing properties by more than \$10,000, the minimum amount required to qualify for the program.



485-B Areas



Overall Strategies

Without question, Eggertsville remains a relatively stable and desirable place for residents and businesses alike. As the early warning signs of commercial deterioration begin to appear, the Town of Amherst has decided to take action to preserve one of its finest and most historic neighborhoods. Since the Town will soon be undertaking a comprehensive planning process for the entire town, Amherst clearly believes that Eggertsville's needs are more immediate and require recommendations that are attainable in the very short term.

With this short-term focus in mind, the following four development principles and strategic recommendations to the Town of Amherst regarding overall strategies for Eggertsville must be adopted:

- 1. Ensure a stable base of homeowners.** Research by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has linked high rates of resident homeownership with strong neighborhoods. Strong neighborhoods generally include and support commercial centers and nodes that provide necessary services and uses. Though Eggertsville does currently possess a high level of homeownership, it is important to reinforce this community strength.
- 2. Do not rely on zoning and design alone.** While attractive buildings and commercial districts can influence the locational decisions of businesses, economics is unfortunately the usual deciding factor. Adopt zoning code revisions that are tailored to specific neighborhoods and commercial corridors that create new development opportunities that "fit" within the community.
- 3. Coordinate the resources of local business.** Commercial areas in Eggertsville along Sheridan Drive and at University Plaza, which are owned by a few key developers and national tenants tend to be more successful. In more fragmented commercial areas like Six Corners properties and businesses alike depend upon the efforts of individual entrepreneurs. In areas like these, a lack of coordination among various players can lead to physical deterioration and parking and access problems, among other issues. If these individuals are

encouraged to band together, perhaps as a local business organization, mutual concerns can be addressed with mutually beneficial solutions.

- 4. Provide the community with information on available incentive programs.** To date, the Town of Amherst's 485-B tax abatement program, which can be used for any project that adds more than \$25,000 to a property's value, has mainly been used by larger development companies to construct new commercial buildings. Furthermore, the Town has already established Eggertsville as a targeted 485-B district. The fact that few small-scale and/or rehab projects have used this tax abatement is largely due to a lack of publicity and a minimum threshold investment that is difficult for most small businesses to achieve. If local entrepreneurs are to take advantage of available economic incentives, Amherst must do more than raise awareness. The Town should publish a guidebook and create outreach programs for neighborhood redevelopment incentives and have neighborhood or business organizations be responsible for its distribution.
- 5. Provide incentives to enhance development of the business elements within the target area.** Collectively, these incentives need to be as attractive or more attractive than the incentives provided to developers and entrepreneurs that would normally develop vacant parcels in the more undeveloped portions of the Town of Amherst or other outlying communities.

These five guiding principles must be kept in mind as individual strategies are developed for the smaller nodes within Eggertsville.

General Recommendations with Town Wide Application

Action 1

Town Planning Department and Town Law Department prepare a new "Neighborhood Business" zoning classification for application in older, traditional neighborhood business districts. General elements of this proposed zoning classification are described in [Appendix B](#). Proposed additions to and modifications of the Town's Zoning ordinance should be

addressed on a larger scale as part of the Town's comprehensive plan process. Proposed changes to area zoning must fully consider the impact of such changes on the tax base of the Town and school district.

Cost: Not Applicable

Action 2

Town Board and Amherst Industrial Development Agency define in a Memorandum of Understanding their respective roles and responsibilities (e.g., marketing, ombudsman, financing) in assisting business districts in Eggertsville and Town-wide.

Cost: Not Applicable

Action 3

The Town Board support the efforts of the Amherst Chamber of Commerce in organizing business district associations.

This may involve reassigning staff or hiring new staff for this function. This staff person would initially be responsible for helping districts structure and organize business associations. The staff person would subsequently market available resources (e.g., 485-B Program), cold call businesses to determine needs, if any, maintain a database of commercial properties, owners, available space, lease rates, and serve as a technical resource to the association boards. Any business efforts should be done in close coordination with the established Eggertsville Community Organization.

The Town Planning Department Geographic Information System (GIS) would be an essential tool to this staff person's work.

Cost: \$44,000± (salary plus fringes) for a new staff position

Action 4

The Town Board and Amherst Chamber of Commerce jointly prepare a marketing package clearly articulating the benefits, requirements and procedures needed to participate in the town's 485-B program and any other potential funding programs. One such program to explore would be a "Jumbo" Bond program, offering a single large bond that could provide assistance for many individual projects, large and small,

throughout the commercial corridors of Eggertsville. Typically Jumbo Bonds are restricted to the improvement of public properties.

Cost: Not Applicable

Action 5

The Town Engineering Department hires a consultant to evaluate the possibility of implementing “safe street” or “traffic calming” techniques on Grover Cleveland Highway, Eggert Road and Bailey Avenue to restore residential character and atmosphere. Cost effective experiments such as adding on-street parking to Grover Cleveland Highway should be explored. The addition of on-street parking would also reduce the needs for “front lawn” parking typical to this stretch of roadway.

Consultant Study: \$5,000 - \$10,000 (area wide)

Restriping/signage: \$20,000 - \$25,000 (Grover Cleveland Only)

Action 6

Town Board adopts a targeted tax property abatement program as an incentive for neighborhood commercial property owners to add landscape elements to properties. The amount of the abatement could be equal to half the value of the improvements amortized over a five-year period. To qualify for the incentive, property owners would have to meet minimum guidelines established by the Town subject to review and approval by the Town Planning Director.

Cost: Not Applicable

Action 7

Town Board and Amherst Industrial Development Agency approach major lending institutions to create a revolving loan fund for targeted commercial nodes. The loan fund would be available for property improvements and business start-ups. The Amherst Industrial Development Agency would administer the loan fund. The Amherst IDA currently has Community Development Block Grant Funds available for potential seed money for such a revolving loan program.

Cost: Not Applicable

Action 8

The Town Board staffs the Town Building Department to support its new “Comprehensive Property Maintenance Code.”

Cost: \$40,000± (salary plus fringes) for a new staff position.

Action 9

The Town develops an urban forestry management plan for Eggertsville including a planting program for inclusion in the Town capital budget. This plan will prioritize areas of Eggertsville for reforestation and street trees.

Consultant Cost: \$15,000 - \$20,000

Action 10

The Town takes advantage of area roadway reconstruction projects to maintain the existing character of its streets. The appropriate agencies responsible for reconstruction projects should take community character and “quality of life” issues into consideration as design criteria.

Cost: Not Applicable

Action 11

The Town explores creative agreements permitting maintenance of trees on private properties.

Cost: Not Applicable

Action 12

The Town explores creative arrangements that reduce the need for off-street parking towards parking requirements, shared parking facilities and strategically placed municipal lots.

Cost: Not Applicable - (possibly combine effort with consultant study listed under Action 5.)

Action 13

The Town explores incentive zoning possibilities under the Town-Wide Comprehensive Plan.

Cost: Not Applicable