

December Stakeholder Meeting Summary

December 15, 6:30pm – 8:30pm
D'Youville College, Madonna Hall



This Meeting

This initial meeting served as an official launch to Niagara Street Now. Stakeholders actively involved in efforts along Niagara and its nearby communities were invited to learn about the project scope, meet the project team contracted to oversee the design work, and offer early thoughts on the project.

Niagara Street Now

The City of Buffalo's Department of Public Works and the Buffalo Sewer Authority are leading an effort to transform Niagara Street. This streetscape project seeks to enhance accessibility, safety, and corridor vibrancy for all – residents, visitors, and businesses. Niagara Street Now will cover Niagara Street from Porter Avenue up to Ontario Street.

Meeting Overview

Welcomes, Introductions and Project Overview

Michael Finn, City Engineer from the Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets (DPW), kicked off the meeting, welcomed the stakeholders, and introduced the project team from DPW. Julie Barrett O'Neill, General Counsel for the Buffalo Sewer Authority (BSA) followed with remarks on the BSA's role in the project and the important role green infrastructure will play in the project. Phillip Galbo, the project lead for the Watts Consultant Team, closed out the introductions by speaking about the team it has assembled to implement this project for the City of Buffalo.

Community Engagement Process and Planning Principles

Bart Roberts of the UB Regional Institute discussed the overall engagement process and presented a series of planning principles culled from an analysis of existing plans. Stakeholders gave feedback using electronic polling devices and offered comments on each of the six principles.

Great Streets: Imagining Possibilities

Chris Reed of Stoss delivered a presentation on great streets from around the world and close to home; various types of "complete streets"; and examples of the forms and types of green infrastructure that can complement public spaces and streetscapes.

A Conversation with our Stakeholders

Bob Shibley of the UB School of Architecture and Planning closed out the meeting by facilitating a discussion with attendees about the material presented, as well as further thoughts on the project.

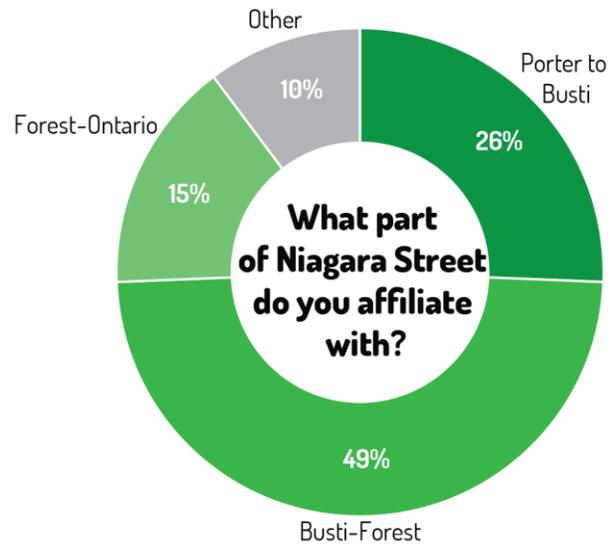
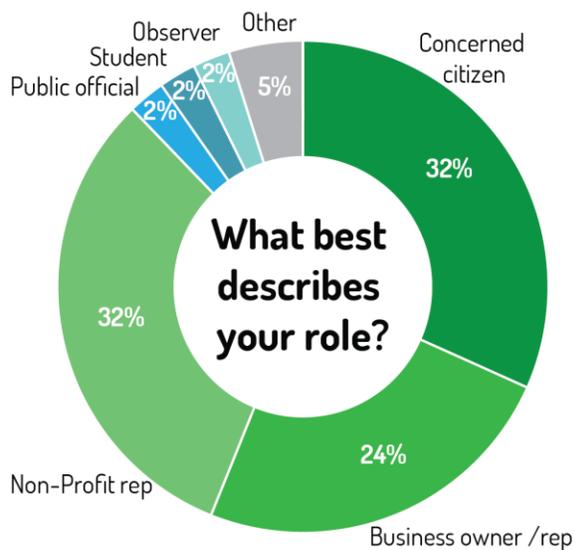
Who Participated?

49 in attendance

Representatives from 27 different organizations

Bruce Ader, *Neighbor*; Seth Amman, *Vision Niagara*; Tim Ashton, *Project Slumlord*; Nathan Attard, *Buffalo State, Center for Health and Social Research*; Justin Booth, *GObike Buffalo*; Sue Boyle, *WNY United*
 William Breeser, *Vision Niagara*; Tom Chestnut, *Buffalo Arts Commission*; Andrew Czuba, *Sugar City*; Cornelia Dohse-Peck, *Will Peck Construction/Art Studio Dohse-Peck*; Andres Garcia, *Hispanic Heritage Council*; Maggie Gibbons, *BRRAlliance Inc*; Elizabeth Giles, *Citizens for Regional Transit*; Norman Glenister, *Cottage St. Block Club*; Andy Goldstein, *Fargo Estate*; Nick Gordon, *Sugar City*; Sage Green, *PUSH member*; Deborah Grine, *Days Park Block Club*; Peter Grine, *Days Park Block Club*; Michael Herbold, *Neighbor*; Sara Jablonski, *Neighbor*; Anthony James, *Vision Niagara*; Giles Kavanagh, *Vision Niagara*; Joe Kedron, *BRRAlliance Inc*; Mary Ann Kedron, *BRRAlliance Inc*; Matthew Kenny, *Neighbor*; Renata Kraft, *Vision Niagara, Buff Niag Riverkeeper*; Craig Labadie, *Buffalo Alternative Therapies*; JohnMichael Mulderig, *GBNRTC*; Sean Mulligan, *Niagara District Council Office*; Angelo Natale, *Natale Builders*; Will Peck, *Will Peck Construction/Art Studio Dohse-Peck*; Vito Picone, *McGuire Development*; Bernice Radle, *Buffalove Development*; Howard R. Rich, *Rich Products*; Broady Richardson, *Project Slumlord*; Michael Rizzo, *Vison Niagara/ Sports City Pizza Pub*; Barbara Rowe, *Vision Niagara*; Austin Sanders, *Niagara Street Design Committee*; Atley Sanders, *Neighbor*; Joseph Snodgrass, *D'Youville College*; Peter Sowiski, *Vision Niagara*; David Stewart, *D'Youville College*; Evelyn Vossler, *BRRGNPA, BRRAlliance, Inc.*; Jeff Ware, *Resurgence Brewing Company*; Erin Ware, *Resurgence Brewing Company*; Amy Weymouth, *GBNRTC*; Dionne Williamson, *Visit Buffalo Niagara*; Michael J Wysochanski, *Adam Sokol Architecture Practice*.

Participants were asked to identify the role they represent as stakeholders in this process, as well as what part of Niagara Street they affiliate with most closely. Below is a breakdown of how they responded.



Feedback and Discussion from Stakeholders



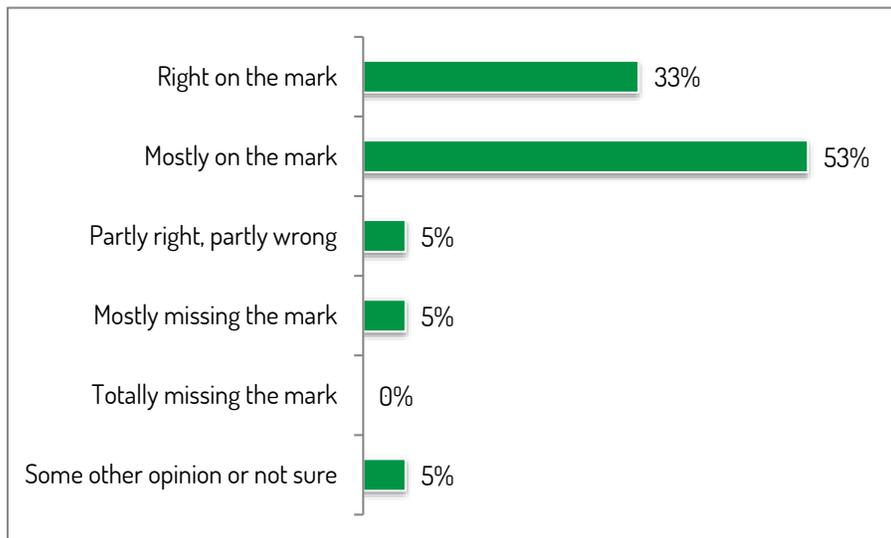
The audience was presented a series of “planning principles” culled from an analysis of 33 plans that mentioned specific community values and expressions about Niagara Street. Spanning the last decade and more, documents reviewed and summarized included neighborhood-based plans, citywide plans, environmental plans, waterfront plans, transportation plans, and regional plans.

The six statements, along with supporting information about each were presented to the audience. To gauge whether or not each statement reflects the group’s priorities and values for the street, each participant was provided an electronic device that allowed her/him to evaluate the six statements.

This is what the Stakeholders told us:



Become a distinct and inviting gateway into the city – Buffalo’s “Front Door” for residents and visitors.

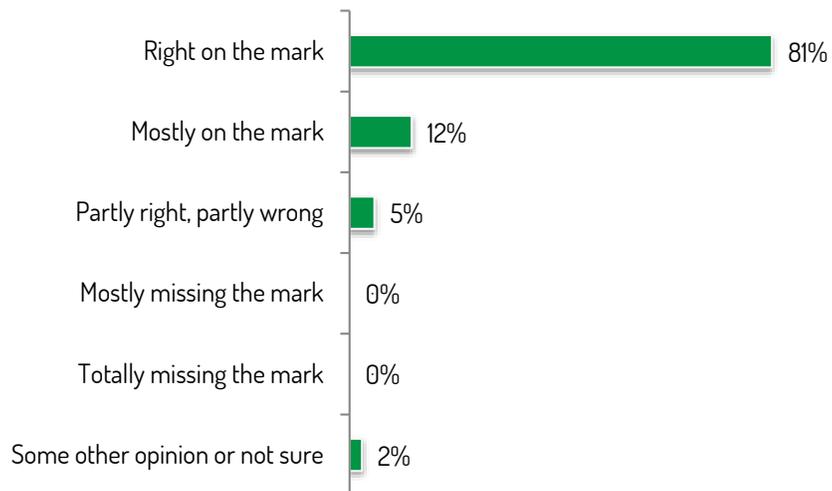


Discussion/Feedback from Audience:

- Functions as a way out of the city, as well as a way in
- Funnels people out of neighborhoods to downtown, Canada and elsewhere
- Canalside is more of the “Front Door”, may not be the best role for Niagara St.
- *Citizens for Regional Transit* has recommended that Buffalo can become the “World’s Greatest Waterfront”, of which Niagara Street would be a critical part
- Concerned about adding more trucks on the road, need to limit air pollution and noise of traffic which are currently a significant problem
- Not just a gateway for trucks and cars, can eventually become a multimodal gateway



Embrace the waterfront – build connections with the Niagara River and preserve it for future generations.

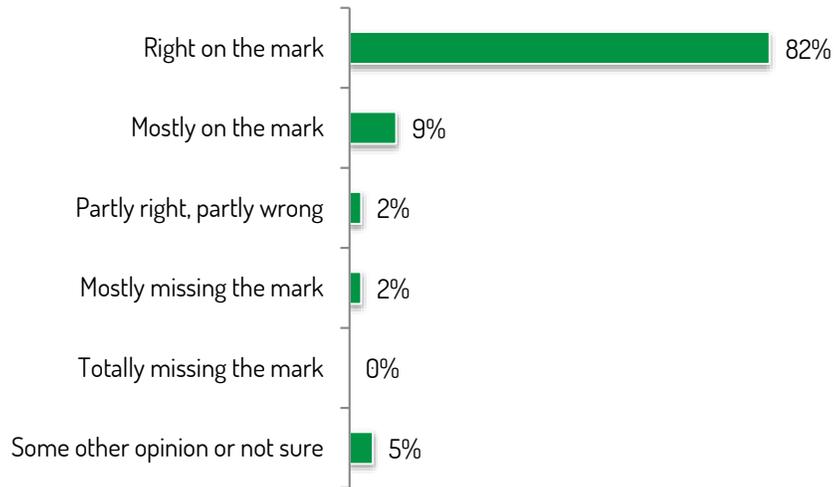


Discussion/Feedback from Audience:

- Focus on the intersection of Scajaquada Creek and Niagara Street
- A waterfront landmark with the most potential on the corridor that is unfortunately now buried under concrete
- Should be the strongest area on the corridor
- In need of traffic calming measures
- This is a great concept, but the sewage plant makes the environment undesirable
- Perhaps changing the schedule of the wastewater treatment plant or other measures would prevent odors and noise during daytime hours when visitors would want to spend time enjoying the environment
- Need to find balance – embracing the waterfront to a certain extent may end up over-developing the site, and could make it too “touristy”



**Celebrate
history and
heritage
while
promoting
local arts
and culture.**

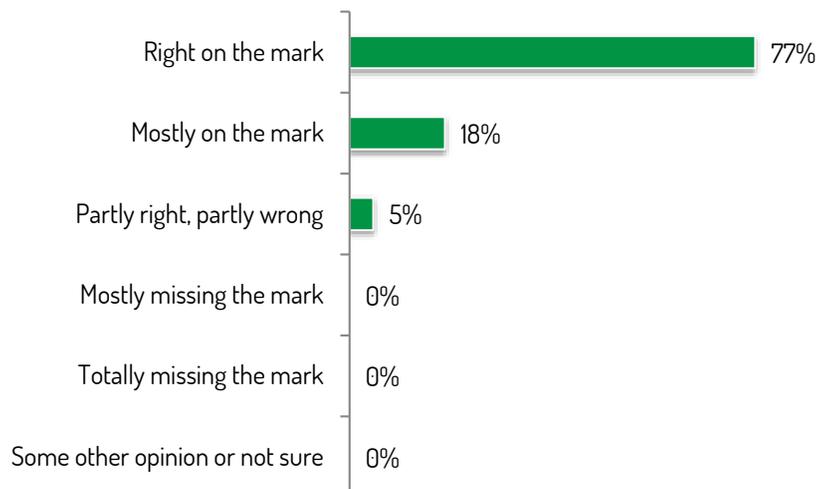


Discussion/Feedback from Audience:

- This is important, but delicate
- So many histories to tell, need to be comprehensive and sure that none are neglected
- The stakeholder group gathered here is not entirely representative of the community, so expanded outreach is needed
- Also need to integrate the culture of current residents of the corridor so they are not neglected or displaced



**Anchor a
vibrant,
walkable and
safe community
that serves
residents,
visitors, and
local businesses.**

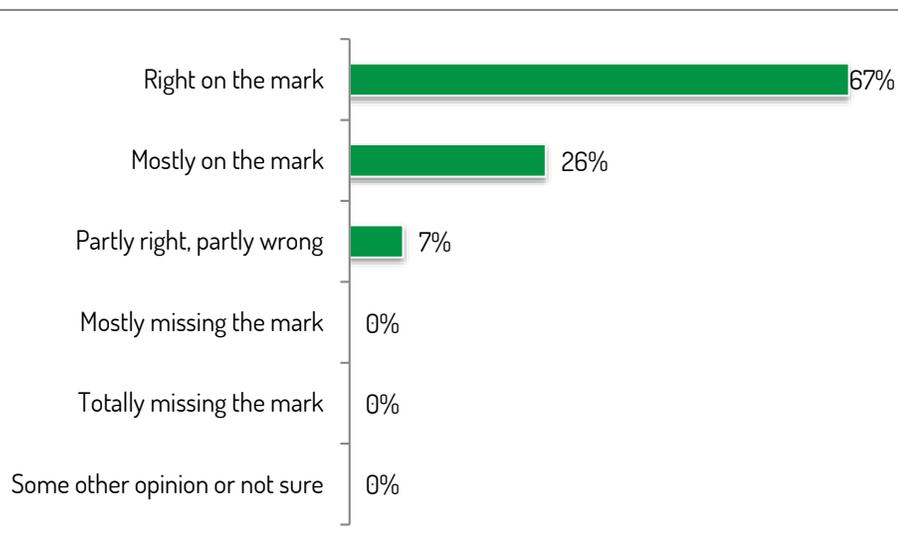


Discussion/Feedback from Audience:

- There may be a conflict between walkability and the fact that the street serves as a main “artery” of the city
- But if people actually drove the speed limit (30 mph) this would not be a problem
- It is a long segment and cannot all be walkable, so it’s important to focus on key nodes that can be made more walkable
- Drivers have their way with the road on weekends and early mornings – the car racing needs to stop
- Street redesign, will help, but greater enforcement is still needed
- Reducing the number of lanes would help curb reckless driving



Promote sustainability by reinforcing the natural environment, adding greenspace and curbing energy use.

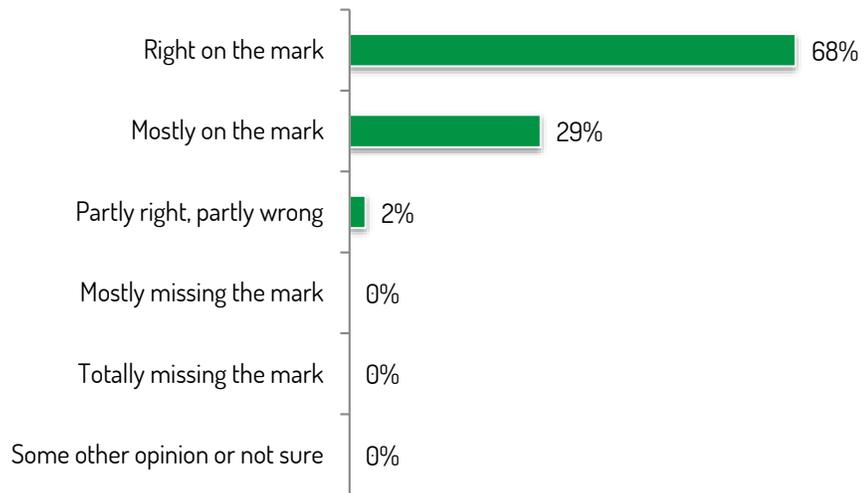


Discussion/Feedback from Audience:

- Redevelop brownfields as parks and open space, not new buildings
- High asthma rates on west side need to be considered
- Reducing air pollution needs to be more of a focus



Provide transportation choice – work safely and efficiently for pedestrians, cyclists, buses and trucks.



Discussion/Feedback from Audience:

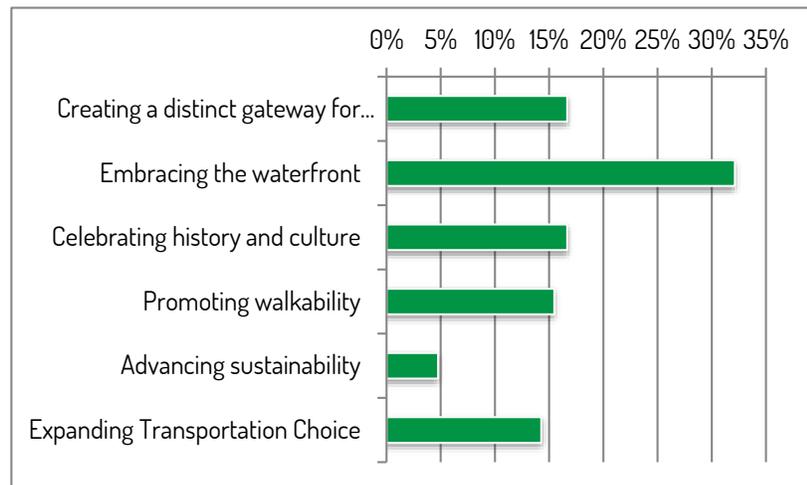
- Also needs to function for cars
- Leave open the opportunity to connect the street to adjacent railways (former belt line) in the future
- Pollution is the biggest problem in the neighborhood
- Trucks are killing the neighborhood
- But trucks are also what makes the local businesses function, so need to evaluate alternative access routes to find the right balance between the transportation needs of pedestrians and major businesses.

Prioritizing the Principles...

Following discussion of each of the six principles, participants were invited to select the two principles they believe are most important. Below is a summary of the answers and comments of the discussion that followed..

This is what the Stakeholders told us:

Which of the themes are most important?



Other Thoughts and Comments

Stakeholders participated in an open discussion with the project team following the presentation of “Great Streets: Imagining Possibilities.” Below is a summary of those comments.

Discussion/Feedback from Audience:

- Need to provide a clearer scope of what Niagara St. is defined as
 - o Include the railroad, water and I-190, which is what the neighborhood sees
- Right now, Western New York generally views Niagara River from the thruway
- Use water as a design element that comes into and out of the neighborhood
- Use water and light together – Toronto passive waterways are good example
- Hopefully we can narrow the street to improve walkability and connections
- Hudson St. pedestrian bridge is important –waterfront of LaSalle Park is disconnected at present – this would be a huge way to reconnect people to water
- Focus on east-west connections, increase crossings to waterfront
 - o Right now, it’s only possible at the foot of Ferry street (Robert Rich Way)
 - o Explore opportunities along rail lines
- Numerous War of 1812 sites should be promoted, not neglected
- Maybe we can take advantage of how wide the street is by adding a dedicated bus lane to provide rapid transit service
 - o A large number of residents do not own a car
- Niagara street is now the “dreariest” street in the city
 - o Using paint could help, but this may not be financially feasible or sustainable
- As we make decisions, need to think about affordability, sustainability, and the climate

- Sustainability is still a priority, just not a strong, specific action-oriented word.
- Sustainability is an integral part of all the themes that were presented
- Focus on building upon infrastructure that we already have, like the Olmsted Parks
- Apply “High road economic development”
 - o by hiring local workers for road economic development
 - o do not displace residents
 - o Green job training for local residents
 - o Julie Barrett O’Neil: The BSA is so proud to be committed to this – already have partnered in innovative ways to do inclusive job training and employ a workforce that’s more representative of local neighborhoods.
 - o Julie Barrett O’Neil: The BSA is also working with local groups to document how the hiring is impacting the local workforce to see how much more we all benefit by hiring those in greater need
- Use streetscape design to enhance both the function and look of the street
 - o Look beyond streetscape and also improve businesses, etc...
- Tourists of Buffalo and Niagara Falls most often visit both destinations
 - o Visitors without cars must go up and down Niagara Street (via bus route) which makes it even more important to make Niagara St. beautiful
- War of 1812 history is important, but so is the area’s significant history in regards to immigration. Plus, the West Side is still a gateway for immigrants – need to affirm cultural, immigrant history as well as military history.
- The north side of Unity Island is a hidden gem, and risking – make it safer and more accessible
- Designers, professionals and decision makers should feel emboldened to “choose beauty over “niceness”. Some other destinations which have strived to become “World class” end up being too eclectic and miss their goal by trying to please everyone who provides input
- Put a fund (either private, public or both) in place to do renovations and new builds along Niagara Street that abide by set urban design standards
- Think about what will be there 100 years from now - sustainability
- Treat cars as 2nd or 3rd class citizens – do not concede parking (“the bane of good cities”)
- Certain spots on the street provide great views when the thruway is blocked from view. Even if views are not grand streetscape work could open up the world for a lot of people.
- Many cyclists ask how to get from Buffalo to Niagara Falls – recreational tourism is a huge asset for city and state, and needs to be considered as a key aspiration of this project.
- Need to improve wayfinding and signage, especially for bicyclists
- It’s better to plan things that are not maintenance intensive
 - o Amenities and features that will work throughout all four seasons
- Remember safety – for guests, visitors, residents, workers and business clients that spreads beyond the Niagara Street corridor
- Challenge the design team to think a little differently from beginning to end of corridor
- Bring people to the center of the street, where cultural destinations and assets exist