

## Introduction

*Safe & Clean Niagara* is a study designed to assess the reality and perception of safety of the tourist district in Niagara Falls, New York. This initiative is based on several similar efforts that have been performed around the world to address safety questions, largely by The United Nations Human Settlements Program, known as UN-Habitat. In a UN-Habitat safety audit, the users of the space are considered experts on the safety of the area where they live, work, and move around.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, this study treats the tourist district workforce and residents as experts in the question of safety of the tourist district in Niagara Falls. While many safety audits involve only women, this one was designed to include both women and men in the sample. In turn, while many of the safety audits performed through UN-Habitat are often grassroots endeavors, this study was organized by USA Niagara Development Corporation (USAN), a subsidiary of Empire State Development Corporation, the New York State Economic Development agency in collaboration with the City of Niagara Falls. USAN is solely dedicated to the support and promotion of economic development initiatives in Niagara Falls by leveraging private investment and encouraging growth and renewal of the tourism industry in the City of Niagara Falls.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of “safety” that is being studied through *Safe & Clean Niagara* was defined as a feeling of personal security. Do people feel safe walking and moving around in the tourist district of Niagara Falls? If so, what is it that makes them feel secure and if not, what is making people feel uncomfortable or vulnerable? Traffic safety and other health and safety issues were not addressed in this study. In addition to gaining an understanding of the perceptions that people have of the tourist district, efforts were made to understand the reality of safety in the tourist district. Data from the Niagara Falls Police Department and street level assessments examining the physical environment were used to understand the reality of safety. This was compared to the perceptions that came to light through the focus groups (see Image 1).



**IMAGE 1:** Children playing in the fountains on the corner of Old Falls Street and 1st Street.

**1]** See, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2008, this reference will be made throughout this document, in particular see sections 1.0 and 3.1-3.3.

**2]** See, USA Niagara Development Corporation, 2011, view this website to learn more about USA Niagara projects, press releases, RFPs/RFQs & related links.

In any downtown and in any tourist district, the perception of safety can be as relevant as the reality of safety in that place.<sup>3</sup> The goal of this study was not to disprove the perceptions, but rather to understand what is perception (and what shapes those perceptions), what is reality, and what is both. The second part of the study involves creating implementable action items to address all of these issues, with the goal of fostering a safe and hospitable tourist district, in both perception and reality.

The study area includes the tourist district of Niagara Falls, New York, including the area occupied by the Seneca Niagara Casino, focusing on five specific areas of concentration. These include the City Parking Ramp (also known as the Rainbow Centre Mall Parking Ramp); Old Falls Street & the State Park Entrance; Third Street Business District; Buffalo Avenue Heritage District and the Aquarium of Niagara. The study does not include the Niagara Falls State Park; only the entrance to the State Park was considered in the study as a gateway to the City (see Figure 1 on page 3). These particular areas of concentration were selected as they are areas of commerce within the tourist district of Niagara Falls and USAN is interested in assessing the perceptions of safety in these areas as one measure to facilitate overall revitalization efforts.

In order to assess the perception and reality of safety in the Niagara Falls tourist district and in each of the areas of concentration, three exercises were conducted. These included focus group sessions with area residents, employees, community leaders and City government officials; a street-level assessment of each of the areas of concentration; and lastly the study of 2008-2010 Niagara Falls crime statistical data of the entire study area and each area of concentration provided by the Niagara Falls Police Department (NFPD). Each of these methods are discussed in detail in the next section, Methodology.

After conducting each of the above exercises and gaining a better understanding of the real and perceived issues of safety in the study area, data and findings were analyzed and a series of action items were created to address the safety issues through policy and infrastructure recommendations. This information is in the Findings & Analysis and Recommendations sections.

Readers of this study must be mindful that the comments of each section are subjective due to the nature of the audit and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the State of New York, Empire State Development, USA Niagara Development Corporation, or members of its staff. This document is intended only to describe issues/perceptions in selected areas of the tourist district of Niagara Falls, New York and is not intended or proscribed to be indicative and/or applicable in other communities or locations.

<sup>3</sup>] See, Milder, 1987, pages 16-19.



**FIGURE 1:** Map showing the boundaries of the *Safe & Clean Niagara* study. The boundaries spread right to left from the John B. Daily Boulevard (between Buffalo Avenue and Niagara Street), across Niagara Street, up Third Street to the Aquarium of Niagara and around the parameter of the Niagara Falls State Park and Buffalo Avenue Heritage District.

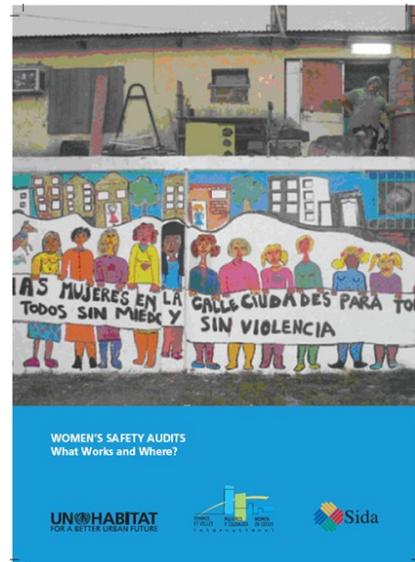
## Methodology

The “UN-HABITAT Women’s Safety Audit: What Works and Where?” research was used as a guide to formulate the methodology of this study. This is a document that discusses the methodologies used in a number of different safety audits conducted by UN-HABITAT. The intention of the document is to educate those wishing to conduct a safety audit on what techniques have worked in the past and what pitfalls and challenges may be encountered, and how to avoid them (see Image 2). In UN-HABITAT safety audits, the methodology is changed for each audit to adapt to the place being studied.<sup>4</sup>

Elements of existing UN-HABITAT studies were used to design methodology of *Safe & Clean Niagara*. One of the strongest elements of that methodology is the concept of “user as expert”.<sup>5</sup> This is the idea that those using, living and working in the space have the best knowledge of the safety of that space.

While the UN-HABITAT studies use primarily a resident population as experts in focus group sessions, in this study mostly an employee population was utilized. The employee base of the study area was the best focus group audience because a tourist district was analyzed that has both local residents and a tourist population. Employees have an understanding of the place year round and also know, to some degree, the perception of tourists as many work in the tourism industry. The real strength of focus groups is in the voice of the local participants who contribute, give first-hand accounts of their experiences, as well as recommendations on how spaces can become safer for the entire community.<sup>6</sup>

In a number of ways, this study slightly departed from the typical UN-HABITAT methodologies. Many UN-HABITAT studies involve focus group sessions in which participants walk through areas of concentration and document safety concerns. The *Safe & Clean Niagara* focus groups were conducted beginning in the winter in Niagara Falls, NY. It was not feasible to conduct walking focus groups as snow covered the study area and made it difficult to analyze and walk through the physical space (see images 3 & 4 on page 5). Therefore, in order to conduct focus group sessions, the research team used pictures presented in a Power Point presentation to jog participant’s memories of the specific areas of study bring analyzed. This also allowed for



**IMAGE 2:** The UN-HABITAT “Women’s Safety Audit: What Works and Where?” document was a tool used to formulate the methodology of the *Safe & Clean Niagara* study.

4-6] See, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2008

the study of a larger area, since it did not need to be covered on foot by the participants.

Another departure from the UN-Habitat format was the participation of both men and women in the focus group process. UN-HABITAT studies were originally designed as women's safety audits to address the situations where women were targets of violence. Initially this study was going to do the same task, but in the course of researching the potential methodologies for this study, it became apparent that to address the safety of all people in the Niagara Falls tourist district (which was the goal), the focus groups would have to involve a broad sample of people, including men. As such, both women and men were active participants in this effort.

Three different sources of information were used for the creation of this report, as follows:

- Focus groups of tourism district residents, employees of City businesses, City employees, and other people interested in the safety of Niagara Falls;
- City of Niagara Falls Police Department crime data; and
- Street level assessments of the physical condition of the study area.

Each of these three information sources will be detailed individually in this section.



**IMAGES 3 & 4:** These winter images from the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District show how the inclement weather December through March prevented the research team from conducting effective walking focus group sessions. Instead, indoor focus group sessions were held.

## Focus Group Sessions

Eight focus group sessions were held, totaling 73 participants. The survey (see Appendix A to view the full survey) was designed to assess the perceptions of safety held by those people who are frequently in the area. Participants were guided through the survey by USAN representatives who served as focus group leaders while an accompanying Powerpoint presentation showed images corresponding to the locations they were being asked to consider (see Appendix B to view the *Safe & Clean Niagara* Focus Group Powerpoint presentation). Questions for the focus group questionnaire were derived from UN-HABITAT studies as well as other safety audits researched for this project.<sup>7</sup>

For the most part, groups consisted of between 5 and 12 participants, although one group numbered 17 participants. Focus group participants were promised that their contact information would remain confidential and that organizers would in no way specifically link their identity to any resulting reports. The survey was broken down into 3 parts: two exercises to flesh out perceptions and a conclusion session to sum up and ask participants to examine the overall context.

For Exercise 1 of the survey, in which participants were asked to consider their perceptions of the safety of the study area as a whole, participants were shown the geographic boundary that they were being asked to consider and filled out the corresponding survey forms. (see Figure 1 on page 3 for a map of the boundaries of the study). Questions in this section included asking participants to explain how they felt moving around the study area both alone and with others at all times of day; which areas felt more and less safe; in terms of safety if they recommended others visit the tourist district; and what items they decide to carry or leave behind. There was no discussion during this portion of the survey. Exercise 1 partially served as a warm-up exercise to get participants accustomed to the focus group exercise and help them begin thinking about how they feel moving around the study area, preparing them for the analysis to come in Exercise 2 of the survey.

Exercise 2 was the portion of the study dedicated to determining the perceptions of safety in five specific areas of concentration in the tourist district: the City Parking Ramp; Old Falls Street & the Niagara Falls State Park Entrance; Buffalo Avenue Heritage District; Third Street Business District; and the Aquarium of Niagara. For each area, focus group leaders introduced the geography with a map, gave a general description of the boundaries, showed 6-8 images of the area, and asked participants to fill out one corresponding survey page. After

participants had finished filling out the page of an area of concentration, they were invited to engage in a brief discussion (about 4-5 minutes) of their perceptions of safety in that area. At that point, participants were also welcome to add information to their surveys if they so desired. Questions for each area of concentration were the same and included asking participants to rank how familiar they are with each area; how safe they believe each area to be; how comfortable they feel recommending other people visit each area in terms of safety and what factors affect this; and how the area could change to make the experience there more positive.

At the end of Exercise 2 participants were asked to fill out a section asking them to suggest other areas that the authors of the study might have missed that should be focused on in terms of either positive or negative safety concerns. Finally, in the conclusion section of the survey, participants were asked to write down which study area they believed to need the most immediate attention in terms of safety.

The results of focus group participant surveys were entered into a spreadsheet database that was organized by exercise, area of concentration and question number. After all data were imputed into Excel the contact information of each participant was placed in a separate document and alphabetized so as not to link any participant to a specific survey, to protect the participants' privacy.

Specifically for Exercise 2, familiarity of each area of concentration was established as a necessary factor to adequately gauge the perception of that area's safety. Therefore, the results of participants who ranked the familiarity of an area of concentration with a 1, meaning "not familiar," were not included in the analysis. The analysis of the perception of the tourist district from the focus group data was later compared with NFPD crime statistics and street-level assessment data.

## Niagara Falls Police Department

The second source of information used for this study was data provided by the City of Niagara Falls Police Department (NFPD). The NFPD keeps detailed records of calls received, crimes committed, and complaints made as well as the specific location where these occurred. They were able to specify the geography of the *Safe & Clean Niagara* study area and create a report of all data available for that area in 2008-2010. The data include all areas within the 5 areas of concentration as well as every area that falls in between, but still within the study boundary (See Figure 1 on page 3).

To analyze the data provided by the NFPD, some crimes were removed from the analysis, including arguments, arrests, assisting another agency, domestic, and others. Please see Appendix C for the list of crimes that were removed from the analysis. The crimes that were included in the analysis were the ones that typically have the greatest impact of feelings of safety and that the NFPD believed to be most relevant to this study. The crimes included for analysis are: assault, assault with weapon, criminal mischief, disorderly conduct, harassment, indecent exposure, larceny, narcotics, open bottle, rape, reckless endangerment, robbery, sexual abuse, stolen vehicle, and theft of services.

It is important to note that the police data only includes crimes that are reported, and not those that may go unreported.

## Street Level Assessments

The third source of information utilized was a street-level mapping exercise of each area of concentration. A questionnaire was derived from the Women's Community Safety Audit Guide, prepared by Women's Initiatives for Safer Environments out of Ottawa, Canada.<sup>8</sup> This questionnaire was used to assess the physical elements of each of the areas of concentration. The questions were taken from other safety audits and included the assessment of each area including: overall impression, lighting, signage, sightlines, isolation, movement predictors, maintenance and overall design. For the City Parking Ramp, the stairwells and other specific parking garage elements were analyzed as well (see APPENDIX D to view the street level assessment questionnaire). Areas were visited during the day and after dark to assess the quality of lighting as well as the maintenance of lighting facilities. Efforts were made to limit this portion of the audit to the physical elements of the built environment, and not to bring into consideration the people, weather, and other factors that could affect the feeling of safety in the environment. These factors were taken into consideration through the focus group process.

<sup>8</sup>] See, Women's Initiatives for Safer Environments, 2005 especially the Appendices

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are the result of compiling data from the focus group session discussions and surveys, police department statistical data, interviews with police department representatives and research on other safety audits. In preparing audit materials and researching safety audits conducted around the world UN-Habitat, Women's Initiatives for Safer Environments,<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization<sup>9</sup> and CPTED documents<sup>10</sup> were assessed.

Not all of these recommendations should or even can be implemented concurrently, but all are options for addressing concerns raised in the *Safe & Clean Niagara* process that could enhance the feeling of safety in the tourist district of Niagara Falls. The recommendations may be implemented in immediate to long term projects depending on the parties involved, costs, time and resources required.

While cleanliness may not seem to have a direct relationship with safety, in fact the perceptions of safety are very much based on a feeling that the area is well-maintained and clean, according to focus group participants. Many of the following recommendations will bring up cleanliness and maintenance as ways to improve safety in the tourist district of Niagara Falls.

The study also recommends implementing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPDET) practices as one means to improve safety. CPTED regulations are standard practices in designing built environments that improve safety. The main concepts involve utilizing surveillance, access control, territorial reinforcement and space management to enhance community safety. Surveillance encourages the use of mixed development to decrease loitering problems and increase passive surveillance; people watching out for one another. Entrances and exits of buildings should be secured using appropriate locking systems, technology and passive surveillance for superior access control. The natural and built landscape as well as built form can help define and separate residential, public and private areas to deter intruders, thus enhancing territorial reinforcement. Lastly, space management involves implementing and enforcing proper maintenance and cleanliness standards to ensure areas are perceived as safe. These techniques have been developed into bigger picture ideas of how safety audits can fit into long-term crime prevention plans.<sup>11</sup>

The following are recommendations that apply across the entire study area. Following are recommendations specific to the five areas of concentration (see Figure 14 on page 30 for survey participant conclusions on which areas of study believed to need the most immediate attention).

## General Recommendations Across the Area of Study

The following recommendations pertain to each of the five areas of concentration and throughout the tourist district (see Figure 1 on page 3 for a map of the area of study & Figure 3 on page 13 for a map of the areas of concentration).

### Lighting:

- Incorporate exterior lighting requirements into the USAN Buffalo Avenue Grant Program and City of Niagara Falls sponsored grant and loan program to ensure that those receiving funding from the state assist in increasing street and sidewalk light levels.
- According to standard CPTED guidelines, lighting should allow users to identify faces 15 meters (~45 feet) away, and the illumination of the light should reach the light of the next beam and should not produce a glare or dark shadows.<sup>12</sup>

### Security:

- In accordance with standard CPTED guidelines, where appropriate, avoid blind spots in pathways, stairwells, alcoves, entranceways and areas with parked cars by placing mirrors and other protection measures where necessary to allow users to see ahead and around corners.<sup>13</sup> This can be applied/encouraged through development agreements and/or grant requirements.

### Code Enforcement:

- To improve the appearance of the tourist district as a whole and to make it clear that the area is well-maintained and clean, it is important for the City to enforce existing building codes. This may help address the feeling of discomfort was felt by focus group participants partially due to a lack of proper maintenance and general cleanliness issues.

### Reporting Protocol:

- Establish the means to and inform individuals on how and where to report lighting, maintenance, security and emergency issues.
- Ensure the speedy repair of damaged or vandalized property, as recommended in CPTED guidelines.<sup>14</sup>

### Signage:

- Ensure signage is consistent and up to date throughout the study area by removing old signage and replacing inaccurate or deteriorating signs.

**12-14]** See, Former Sunbeam Site, 2008, especially pages 7-11 and Appendix A.

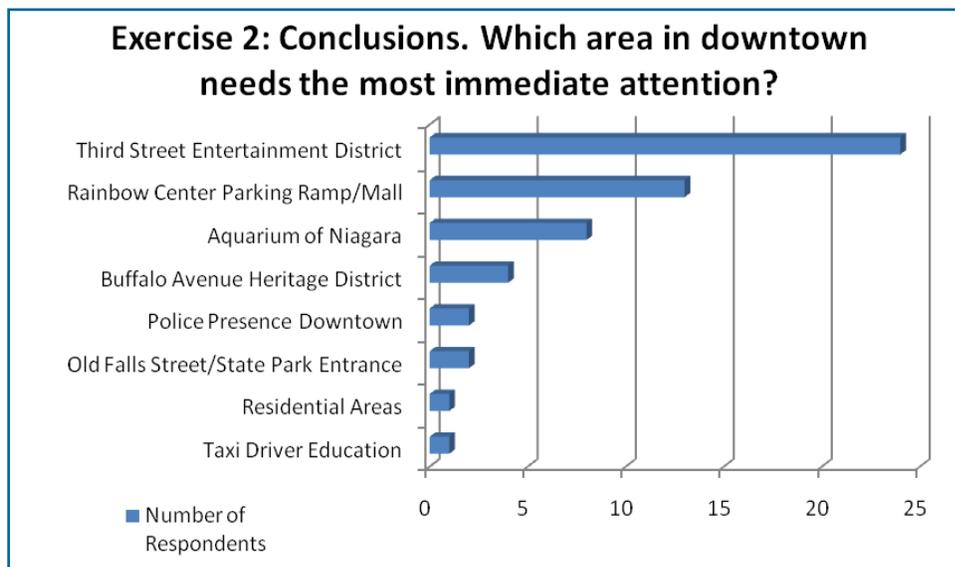
- All buildings must be properly identified and labeled with a street number visible from the road.
- All signage should be visible, easy to read and easy to understand (CPTED).<sup>15</sup>

Feet on the Street:

- Give people a sense of security by putting more people out on the streets. One way to do this is through a group of volunteer rangers or ambassadors organized by many communities through the federal AmeriCorps program. This endeavor would encourage a greater feeling of safety in the tourist district as it would build a presence of people in the tourist district who would serve dual roles of providing security (by being liaisons to local police) and information to visitors to the tourist district. These escorts/greeters would most likely be composed of a group of high school or college students who would be paid for their service or receive school credit. Such a program could possibly complement the City’s volunteer greeters program.

Traveler Precautions:

- The NFPD also discussed how tourists are vulnerable in the tourist district when they do not exercise standard precautions for securing their vehicles and personal belongings. If tourists were more mindful of travel safety and understood the importance of stowing the belongings in their vehicles out of sight and inside of a locked vehicle many break-ins may be prevented. A city-wide campaign to use common sense could be implemented using signage, brochures and other marketing materials.



**FIGURE 14:** Conclusions of Focus Group Survey participants on which areas downtown need the most immediate attention.

<sup>15]</sup> See Former Sunbeam Site, 2008, Appendix A.

### City Parking Ramp Recommendations:

The following recommendations cover the areas inside and outside of the City Parking Ramp, including the faces of the building on Rainbow Boulevard, Niagara Street and First Street. (The face of the Ramp on Old Falls Street is covered in the Old Falls Street & State Park Entrance section.) According to focus group survey results, the top six factors participants stated most greatly affected their perception of safety were lighting, (lack of) people, security, cleanliness/maintenance, law enforcement and season. Each of these factors was stated by over 30% of participants as being leading indicators of feelings of insecurity at the Ramp (see Figure 15). As of December 2011, the project team in charge of City Parking Ramp rehabilitation believes the Ramp will be open by summer 2012, and it is estimated that the NCCC Culinary Institute should open to students by fall or winter of 2012 . Below are recommendations to enhance the feeling of safety inside and around the exterior of the City Parking Ramp. These recommendations, if not immediately implemented, can take place over time as the NCCC Culinary program grows and City Parking Ramp usage increases:

Lighting:

- Reflective or Light Surfaces: Make the floors, ceiling and walls reflective surfaces to increase the brightness and bounce luminosity through the interior of the Ramp.
- Exterior Lighting: Additional lighting on the exterior would make the Ramp appear more welcoming and safer after dark.
- The exterior lighting should be placed high enough or protected to be vandal resistant (CPTED).<sup>16</sup>

What factors affect how safe you feel at the City Parking Ramp?		
Factor	# of participants	% who wrote this is a factor*
lighting	30	50%
people	26	43%
security	24	40%
cleanliness/maintenance	22	37%
law enforcement	19	32%
season	18	30%
time of day	11	18%
dislikes parking ramps	7	12%
body	3	5%
event	3	5%
location	3	5%
affordable	2	3%
ratio of men to women	1	2%
* Participants were permitted to indicate more than one factor affecting their perception; percentages add to over 100%		

FIGURE 15: City Parking Ramp Focus Group recommendations ranked from highest to lowest priority.

<sup>16</sup> See Former Sunbeam Site, 2008, Appendix A.

Security Plan:

- A plan should be put in place to set the guidelines for the presence of security personnel during the day and evenings and for the installation, monitoring and ongoing maintenance of security cameras and call boxes.
- The installation of call boxes throughout the Ramp would provide users a telephone with a direct line to Ramp security to report problems or ask for information. The call boxes should be used to enhance the presence of existing police and security officers, not replace them.
- In addition to security, the presence of the NFPD around and within the Ramp would further ensure users feel at ease both parking their vehicle within the Ramp and moving by foot around and within the facility.
- Signage should indicate that the NFPD and Ramp security have a presence and should indicate how users can access help.

Openness/Transparency:

- Incorporate an open style or transparent materials to allow users to see into the spaces they are about to enter and make interior activities visible from the street level. This is especially crucial with Ramp entranceways and stairways (CPTED).<sup>17</sup>
- The security office doors and windows should also be transparent
- Locate car services and taxi ranks near or within the Ramp to maximize surveillance.



**IMAGE 15:** An elevator inside of the City Parking Ramp. The lack of cleanliness can give the impression that the elevator is not safe to use.

Elevator Condition (see Image 15):

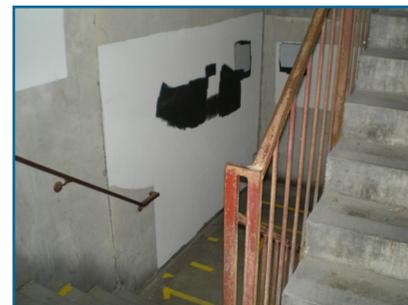
- While the elevator is presently in working order it needs to be kept clean. Cleanliness and maintenance are interrelated and a clean elevator will assure users that it is well maintained, in proper working order, and safe to use.
- The elevator appearance should also be enhanced, including fixing broken ceiling and floor tiles, fresh paint and minimizing creaks and other noise to give users the feeling that the space is not only safe, but cared for.

Signage Update (see Images 16 & 17 on page 33):

- Have “you are here” signage at the stairwell entrances and exits so those frequenting the Ramp understand where they are or will be when they exit the facility.
- Update “your car is here” signage, with a different color in addition to a floor number for each level to help users navigate through the Ramp to find their vehicles.
- Ensure that signage is clear to drivers and pedestrians directing them to stairs, elevators and exits.
- Use signage to advise users to lock their cars and place valuables out of sight. This should be done in a way that does not stigmatize the location (i.e. “Any time you travel, please use common sense and do not leave valuables in your car.”)



**IMAGE 16 and 17:** These images further demonstrate how the City Parking Ramp is in need of updated signage.



**IMAGE 18:** Deteriorated conditions in one of the Ramp stairwells.

Stairwell Updates (see Image 18):

- Add additional lighting to the stairwells or examine the potential for incorporating openings for natural light if possible.
- Paint the stairwells a light color with reflective paint to further brighten up the space, paint the stairwell handles and other trimming within the Ramp a neutral color; the red paint color presently detailing the Ramp makes the space feel more alarming, isolated, and unsafe than it actually is.
- Paint the surface with anti-graffiti paint or reduce wall visibility using vegetation to discourage graffiti.

Façade:

- Updating the exterior façade would make the building feel more up to date and welcoming. This facelift would help to erase the negative stigmas associated with the Ramp.

Consistency:

- If the Ramp appears to be open, more people will use it; the hours of operation should be consistent and visibly posted throughout and outside of the Ramp and personnel should always be present and visible.

Posters/Ads:

- Advertisements of upcoming events and local attractions throughout the Ramp would liven up the space and help make it more current, frequented and cared for. For this to be effective, the signage must be timely.

Name:

- The City Parking Ramp #2, more commonly called the Rainbow Centre Parking Ramp should be renamed after renovations are complete to reinforce that the Ramp has a new image. This will further help to erase negative and unsafe perceptions.

### Old Falls Street & State Park Entrance Recommendations:

This area includes Prospect Street between Comfort Inn the Pointe and the Hard Rock Café, and Old Falls Street from the State Park Entrance to the Seneca Niagara Casino Complex. Focus group survey results concluded that the top safety concerns in this area include season, people and lighting. Each of these factors was mentioned by at least 17% of participants (see Figure 16). Below are suggestions to enhance the perception of safety across Old Falls Street & State Park Entrance:

#### More People on the Street:

- **Extend Season:** Make efforts to extend the tourist season and draw visitors down Old Falls Street and into the City (see Image 19).
- **Marketing:** Improve marketing to attract more people to Old Falls Street during events and downtimes; additional people around will help the street feel populated and thus more comfortable. Additional efforts may include encouraging cross-marketing throughout Western New York and Southern Ontario, maintaining up-to-date and easily accessible event calendars and advertising around the area in places like the City Parking Ramp, billboards along the I-190 and local universities.

What factors affect how safe participants feel on Old Falls Street and the State Park Entrance?		
Factor	# of participants	% who wrote this is a factor*
season	27	38%
not a lot of people around	24	33%
lighting	12	17%
activity	9	13%
law enforcement	8	11%
time of day	8	11%
cleanliness/maintenance	8	11%
location	6	8%
open	5	7%
attractive	4	6%
events	3	4%
accessible	1	1%
ratio of men to women	1	1%
weather	1	1%
day of week	1	1%
sense of community	1	1%

\* Participants were permitted to indicate more than one factor affecting their perception; percentages add to over 100%

**FIGURE 16:** Old Falls Street & State Park Entrance recommendations ranked from highest to lowest priority



**IMAGE 19:** Events like the 2011 Niagara Holiday Market, an outdoor European-style market featuring specialty vendors, attract additional visitors to the area and bring new life to Old Falls Street.

Photo Credit:  
Chuck Alaimo  
Photography

### Mixed-Use Development:

- Following standard CPTED guidelines, develop mixed-use properties on both sides of Old Falls Street to provide more street life and use the increase of residents and visitors to increase passive surveillance.<sup>18</sup>

### Cleanliness/Maintenance (see Image 20 ):

- According to standard CPTED guidelines, a well-kept place helps to attract more people, therefore reducing the opportunity of crimes to occur because of increased passive surveillance.<sup>19</sup> While Old Falls Street is presently new and attractive, the street must continue to be properly cleaned and maintained to ensure that the infrastructure remains well-kept and does not have to be replaced unnecessarily because of neglect.



**IMAGE 20:** The street must continue to be properly cleaned and maintained to remain an attractive and safe place.

### Lighting:

- Use shop window and exterior building lighting and signage to improve street lighting levels.
- Have year-round lighting in the trees to increase street lighting levels. This will simultaneously enhance the ambiance and encourage more people to use the space. These lighting efforts may also assist in guiding more visitors from the State Park entrance, up Old Falls Street and to the 3rd Street Business District.



**IMAGE 21:** An example of an emergency call phone.

### Security:

- Install call boxes and emergency telephones to provide information and a sense of security both when there is great activity and when the street is more desolate (see Image 21). The call boxes should be used to enhance the presence of existing police and security officers, not replace them.
- Encourage communication between the NFPD and event organizers in the tourist district about the nature of the events occurring and the likely need for a security and law enforcement presence.

### Buffalo Avenue Heritage District Recommendations:

This district encompasses the residential area on Buffalo Avenue extending from John B. Daly Boulevard to First Street as well as side streets, including Riverside Drive and Holly Place. Focus group participants believed time of day, lighting, cleanliness/maintenance and season to be the greatest factors influencing safety in the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District. Over 30% of participants believed each of these four factors to be an issue affecting their perception of safety here (see Figure 17). The following are recommendations to enhance the feelings of safety people have when traveling in the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District:

Lighting (see Image 22):

- Increasing the number of street lights is necessary. The existing luminaires emit enough light, however there are simply not enough fixtures to adequately illuminate the street and sidewalks.
- Explore installing dual lights that provide both low-level pedestrian and high-level vehicular light or a combination of low and high level individual lights.
- Encourage business owners and residents to keep exterior lights on after dark.

What factors affect how safe participants feel in the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District?		
Factor	# of participants	% who wrote this is a factor*
time of day	22	37%
lighting	21	36%
cleanliness/maintenance	19	32%
season	18	31%
location	7	12%
sidewalks	6	10%
law enforcement	5	8%
road maintenance	4	7%
people	2	3%
security	2	3%
snow	2	3%
trees	2	3%
crime	1	2%
day of week	1	2%

\* Participants were permitted to indicate more than one factor affecting their perception; percentages add to over 100%

FIGURE 17: Buffalo Avenue Heritage District recommendations, ranked from highest to lowest priority.



IMAGE 22: A broken light pole on Buffalo Avenue.

Code Enforcement:

- Established codes for property cleanliness and maintenance must be strictly enforced to ensure all homeowners stay on top of and are responsible for the upkeep of their properties; these include but are not limited to enforcing codes on shoveling sidewalks and lawn mowing.



**IMAGE 23:** Historic homes on Riverside Drive in the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District

Sidewalk Design:

- Moving the sidewalks away from the street would help pedestrians feel safer as they would walk further away from vehicular traffic and it would also assist with snow removal in the winter. If the sidewalks were moved further away from the street this would allow snow plows to remove snow from the streets without covering the sidewalks. While this is a potential long term solution, in the mean time code enforcement should be used to mandate residents keep their sidewalks clear of snow.

Cleanliness & Maintenance in the Public Domain:

- Cleanliness and beautification efforts will help to increase the presence of individuals in this area and allow people to feel safer while moving throughout the neighborhood.
- Residents and businesses along Buffalo Avenue should work with the Niagara Beautification Committee to maintain the attractiveness of the street (see Image 23).

### Third Street Business District Recommendations:

This district includes the area of Third Street between Niagara Street and Main Street, and the business establishments in this corridor, including their front and rear entrances and the alleyways that run in the adjacent streets (the alleyway between 3rd and 4th Streets and the alley between 2nd and 3rd Streets). In the Third Street Business District, season, time of day, people, law enforcement presence and restaurants are the top factors focus group participants believed to influence their perception of safety. 16% or more of participants believed these factors to be issues impacting their perception of safety (see Figure 18). Below are recommendations to improve the feeling of safety in the Third Street Business District:

**Security:**

- Install call boxes and/or emergency telephones to provide information and a sense of security both when there is great activity and when the street is more desolate. The call boxes should be used to enhance the presence of existing police and security officers, not replace them.

**Law Enforcement:**

- Visitors and local residents will feel more comfortable visiting business establishments in this corridor after dark with an enhanced police presence.
- More bike patrols, foot patrols and, if necessary, private security are recommended to further increase the feeling of security in the tourist district, especially on Third Street.

What factors affect how safe participants feel in the Third Street Business District?		
Factor	# of participants	% who wrote this is a factor*
season	23	37%
time of day	23	37%
people	21	33%
law enforcement	14	22%
restaurants	12	19%
vacant buildings	10	16%
day of week	9	14%
lighting	8	13%
location	7	11%
activity	6	10%
bars	4	6%
ratio of men to women	3	5%
cleanliness/maintenance	2	3%
alleys	1	2%
entrance	1	2%
gangs	1	2%
news	1	2%
purpose of visit	1	2%

\* Participants were permitted to indicate more than one factor affecting their perception; percentages add to over 100%

**FIGURE 18:** Third Street Business District recommendations, ranked from highest to lowest priority.

Satellite Station (see Image 24):

- Focus group participants believed this area of concentration to be in most need of improvements. To enhance feelings of safety it is strongly recommended to place a police substation in a highly visible area in the tourist district of Niagara Falls near the Third Street Business District.
- Police presence on Third Street would be easier to facilitate with the existence of a satellite station on Third Street.
- A satellite station will help to address the time-of-day issues in this area evident as many survey participants stated they do not wish to frequent this area after dark.
- It will help to deter inappropriate and indecent activities which are often accompanied by the rowdy crowds of bar visitors that frequent this area on evenings and weekends.
- The doors and windows of the substation should be transparent to allow observation of the streetscape.
- It would serve as a point of reference to anyone in need of directions, basic information on local attractions and first aid in addition to emergency assistance.



**IMAGE 24:** An example of a satellite police Location on Staten Island in New York City

Lighting:

- Use shop windows and exterior building lighting and signage to improve the street lighting levels.
- Year round lighting in the trees to increase street lighting levels which will simultaneously enhance the ambiance and make the space more attractive.

### Aquarium of Niagara Recommendations:

The Aquarium of Niagara includes the entranceway to the Aquarium and outward into the Aquarium parking lot, the homes across the street and the pedestrian bridge leading to the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center. Focus group participants believed the top factors influencing safety in this area of concentration were season, time of day, location, lighting, people and homes across the street. Each of the above areas was mentioned by 18% or more of participants in focus group *Safe & Clean Niagara* surveys (see Figure 19).

The following are recommendations to enhance the perception of safety near and around the Aquarium of Niagara:

**Maintenance:**

- Careful consideration should be given by the staff of the Aquarium to maintenance of the lights on the property and other amenities that impact safety.
- Landscaping in the parking lot, including tall trees and low bushes, can help the Aquarium feel like a more attractive and cared for space and enhance the perception of safety. Tall bushes that could conceal a person should be avoided.

What factors affect how safe participants feel at the Aquarium of Niagara?		
Factor	# of participants	% who wrote this is a factor*
season	26	39%
time of day	26	39%
location	18	27%
lighting	16	24%
people	15	23%
houses across street	12	18%
law enforcement	7	11%
cleanliness/maintenance	7	11%
car break-ins	4	6%
security	3	5%
entrance from third street	3	5%
access	1	2%
entrance on Whirlpool St.	1	2%
first impression	1	2%
ratio of men to women	1	2%
signage	1	2%

\* Participants were permitted to indicate more than one factor affecting their perception; percentages add to over 100%

FIGURE 19: Aquarium of Niagara recommendations,



IMAGE 25: The addition of lighting and landscaping within the Aquarium parking lot would supplement exterior lighting and add to the space feeling better maintained, cared for and safe.

Lighting (see Image 25 on page 41):

- Additional lighting within the parking lot would help to supplement exterior parking lot lighting and further increase the parking lot lighting.
- Landscaping the parking lot by adding islands of plantings would create more opportunities to brighten up the parking lot with the insertion of pedestrian and vehicular lights adjacent to foliage in the interior of the lot.
- The pedestrian bridge adjacent to the Aquarium that leads to the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center is dark and should be more adequately lit.



**IMAGE 26:** The Aquarium of Niagara's main entrance on Whirlpool Avenue.

Security:

- Security cameras directed into the parking lot would further deter thieves and unsuitable activities.
- A parking attendant and/or security guard could monitor the parking lot and prevent thieves from being tempted to break into parked vehicles.
- Appropriate signage indicating that there are security patrols and/or cameras may deter criminals.

Entrance (see Image 26):

- The main entrance of the Aquarium and the front entrance to the building are on Whirlpool Street, however this road is closed to vehicular traffic. In order to reduce confusion of travelers relying on their GPS to navigate to the Aquarium, the mailing address could be changed to 3rd Street.

Signage:

- Signage should be made clear and coordinated and should be of appropriate scale. Also, the Aquarium's hours of operation should be visibly posted.

Homes Across the Street (see Images 27-29):

- Law enforcement should increase monitoring of the homes across the street from the Aquarium to deter suspicious activities.
- Property owners should be encouraged by the City to take more pride in their establishments and practice regular maintenance and cleaning to give the appearance that their property is cared for.
- The City should more strictly enforce established building codes thus forcing absentee landlords to pay fines for not properly maintaining their properties.



**IMAGES 27-29:** The homes across the street from the Aquarium are often sites of suspicious activities and they lack regular maintenance and upkeep. The homes do not present a safe feeling to Aquarium guests who park just across the street.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Survey

Appendix B: Focus Group Powerpoint Presentation

Appendix C: Niagara Falls Police Department Data

Appendix D: Street Level Assessment Questionnaire

Appendix E: Additional Questions for the City Parking Ramp

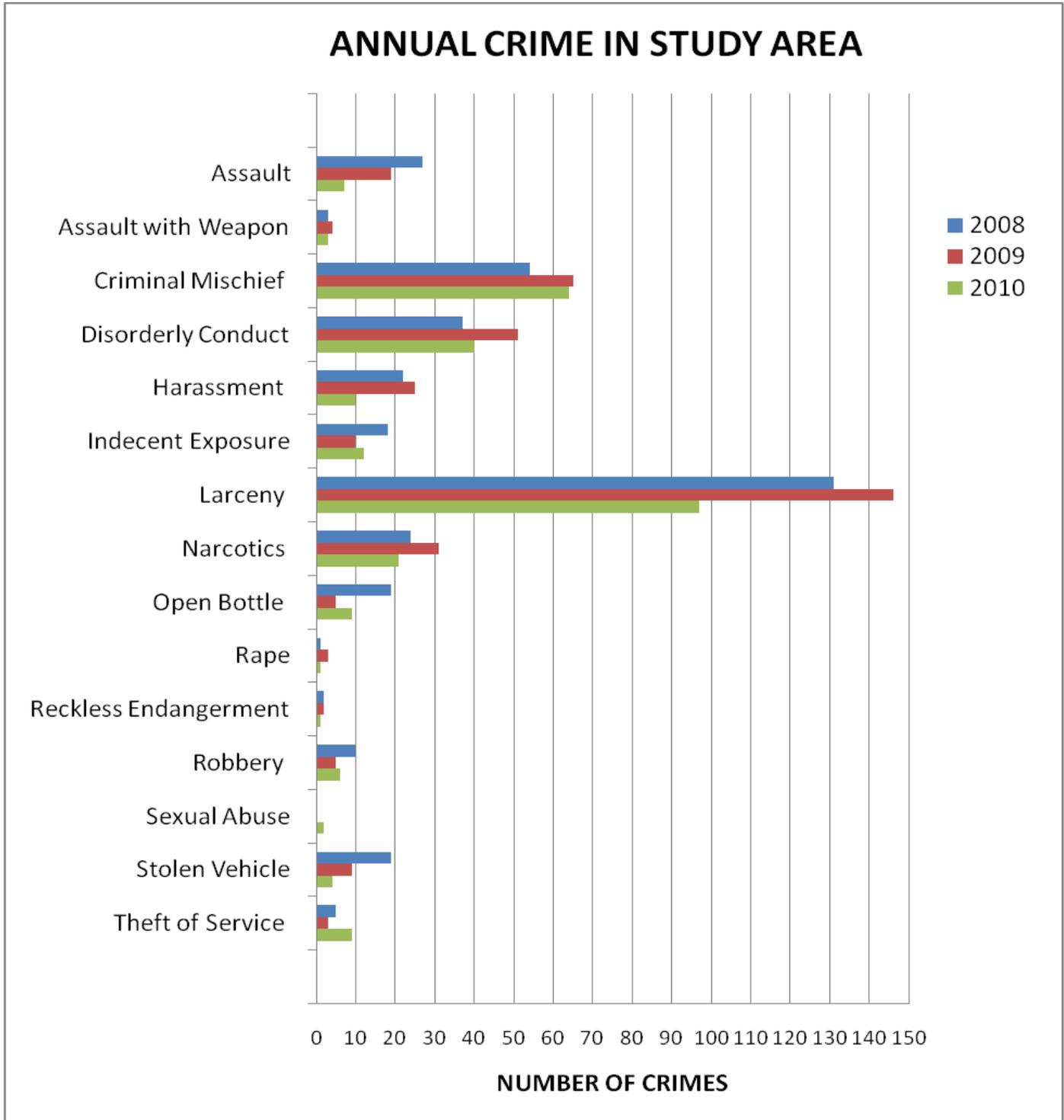
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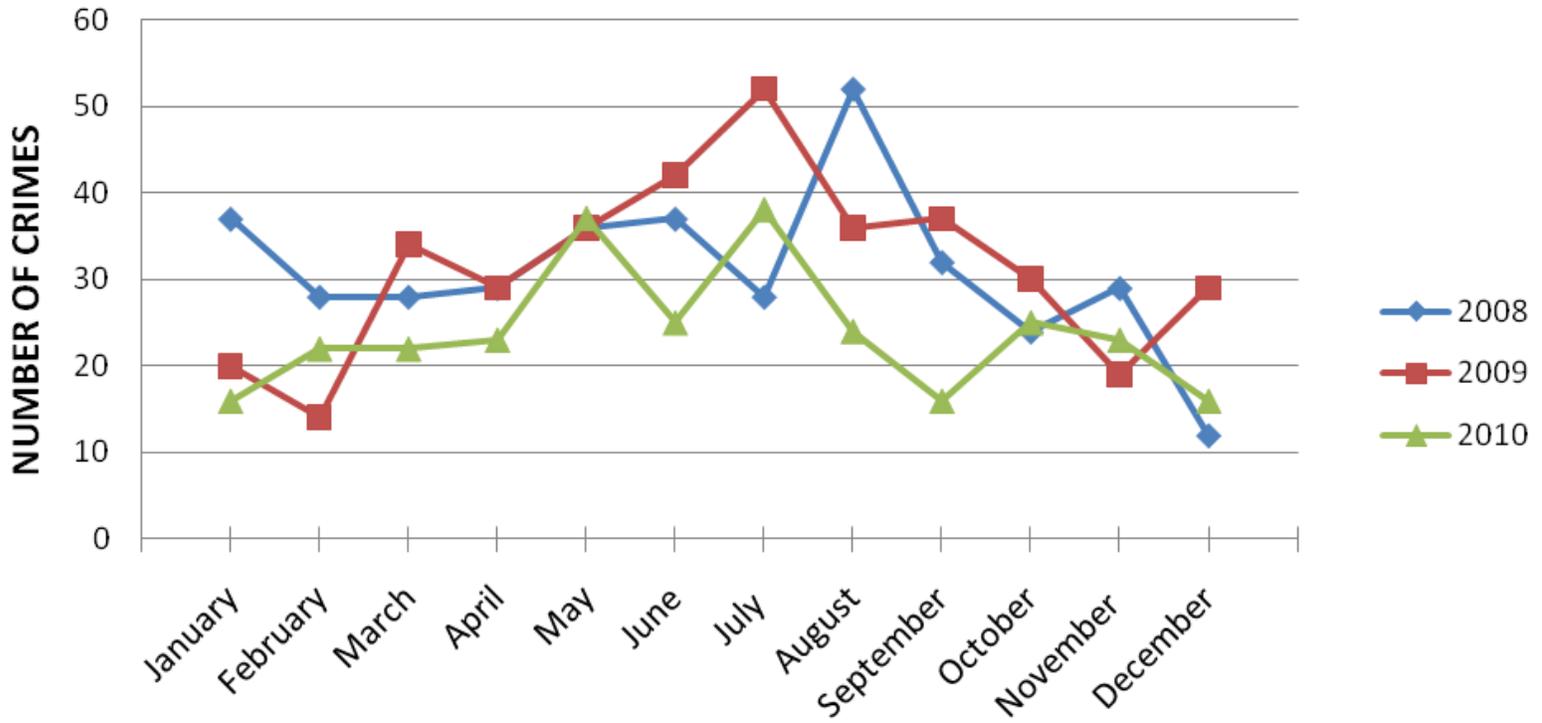
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Retrieved from WISE IFSE: [http://www.femmesetvilles.org/pdf-general/WISE\\_new%20safety%20audit%20guide.pdf](http://www.femmesetvilles.org/pdf-general/WISE_new%20safety%20audit%20guide.pdf)

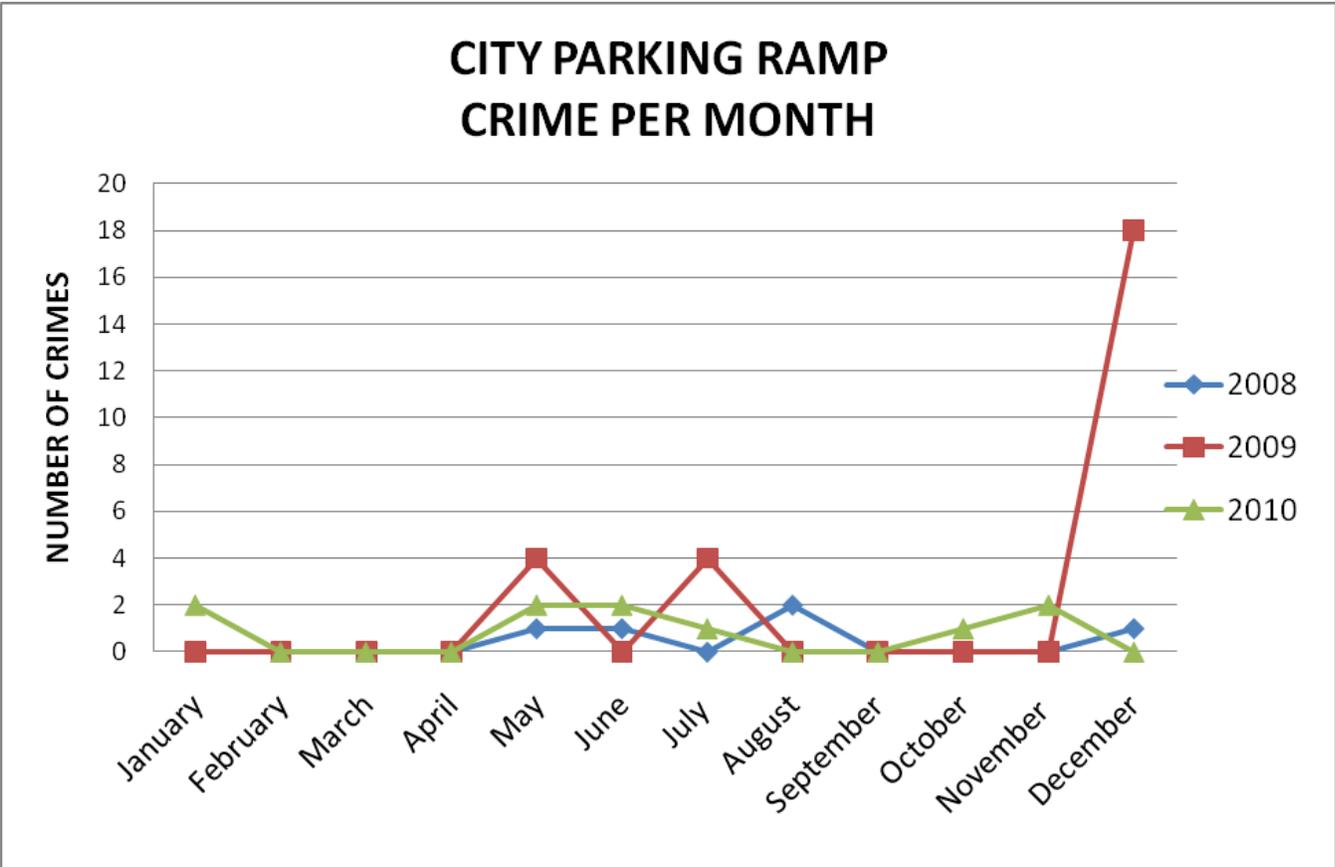
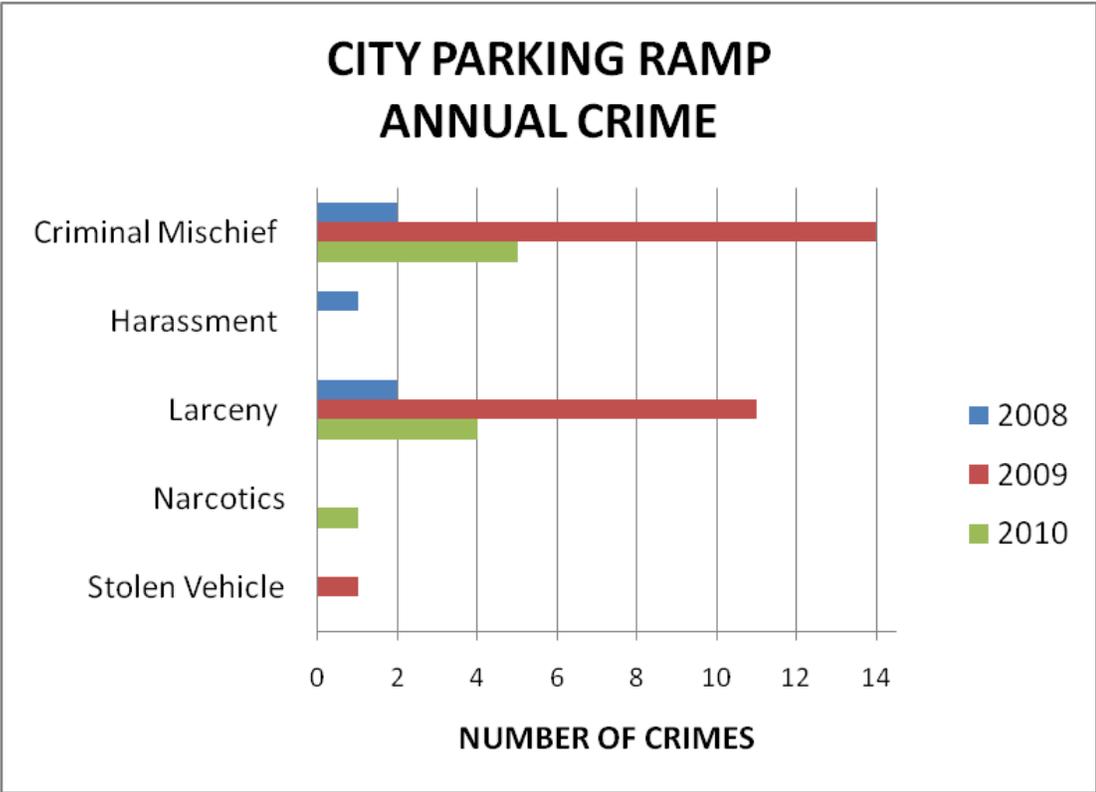
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# APPENDIX C: NIAGARA FALLS POLICE DEPARTMENT DATA

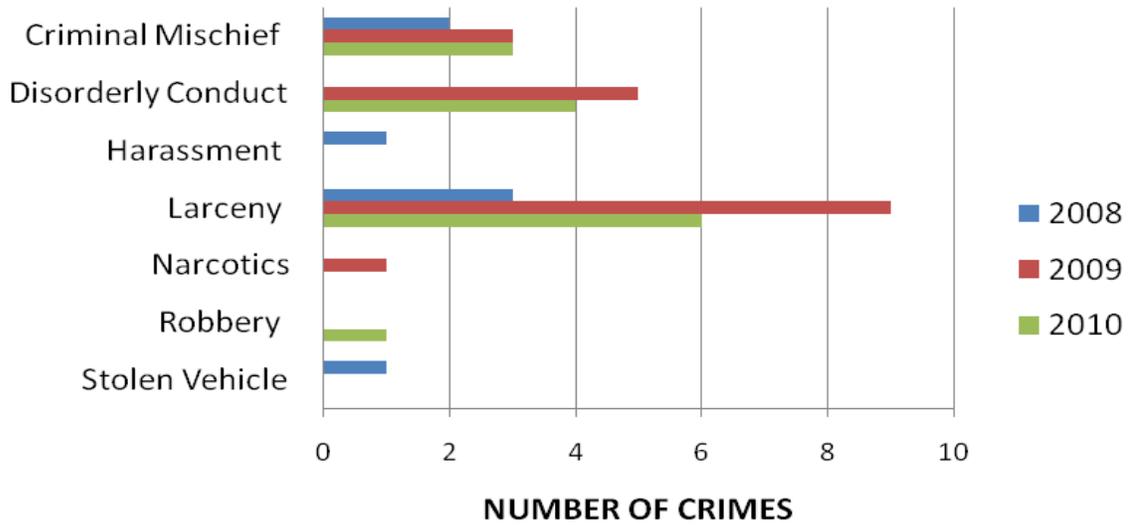


## STUDY AREA CRIME PER MONTH

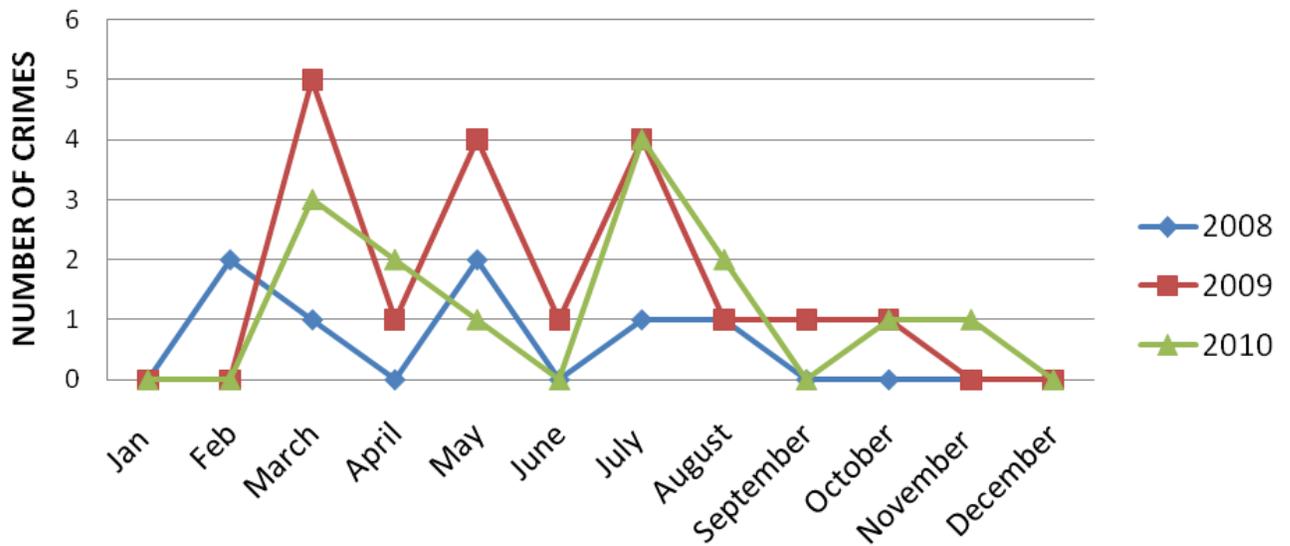




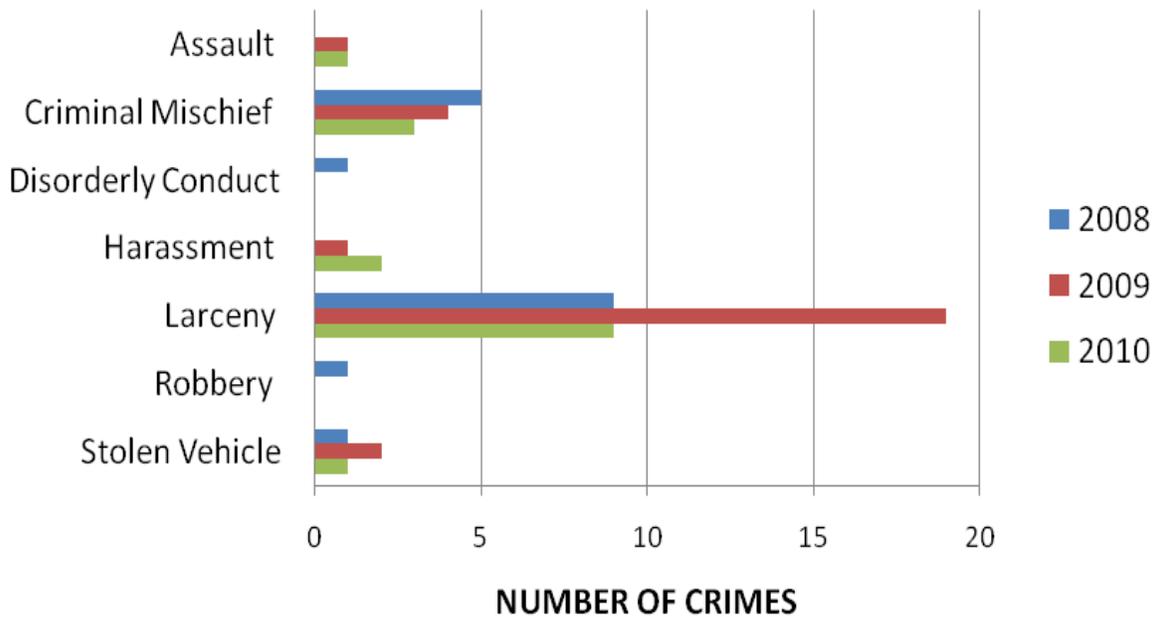
## OLD FALLS STREET & STATE PARK ENTRANCE ANNUAL CRIMES



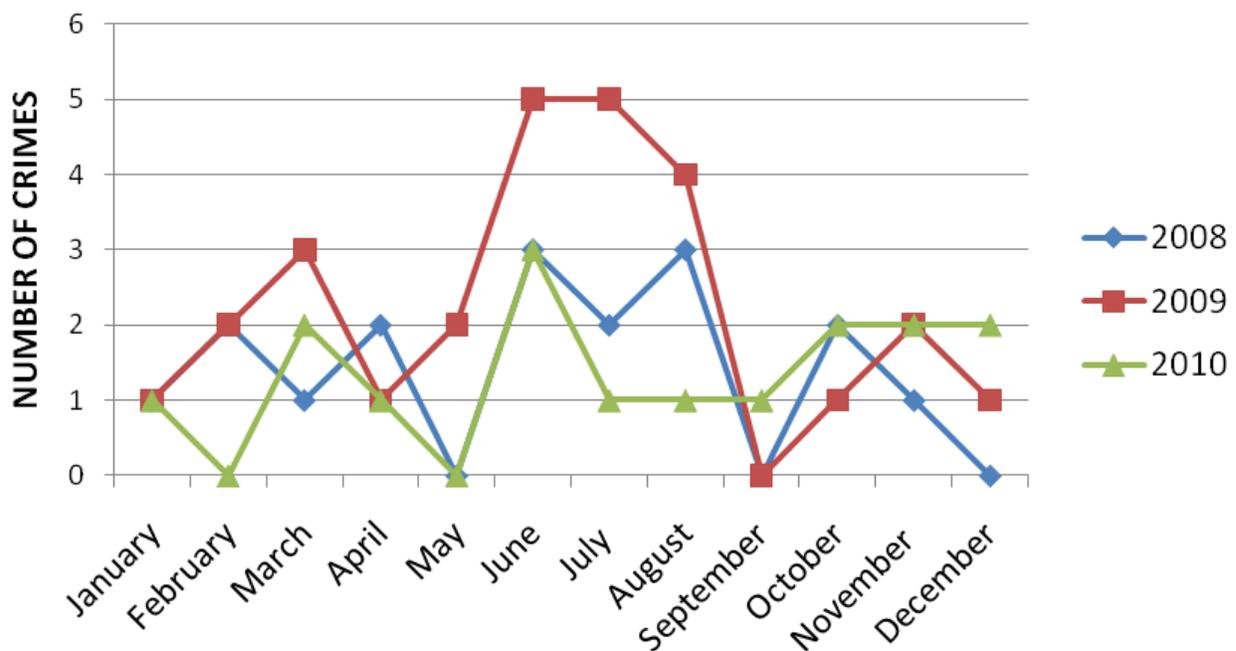
## OLD FALLS STREET & STATE PARK ENTRANCE CRIMES PER MONTH



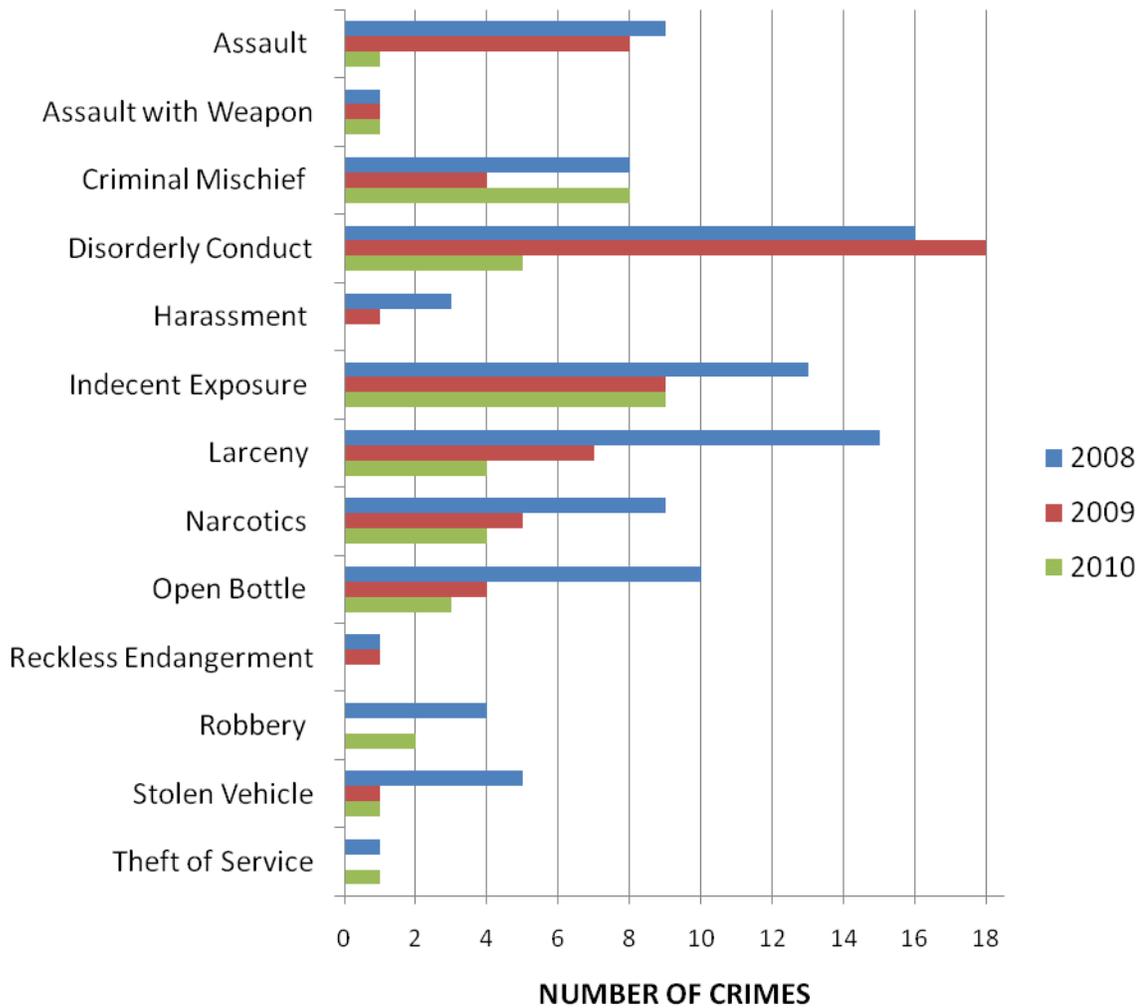
## BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT ANNUAL CRIME



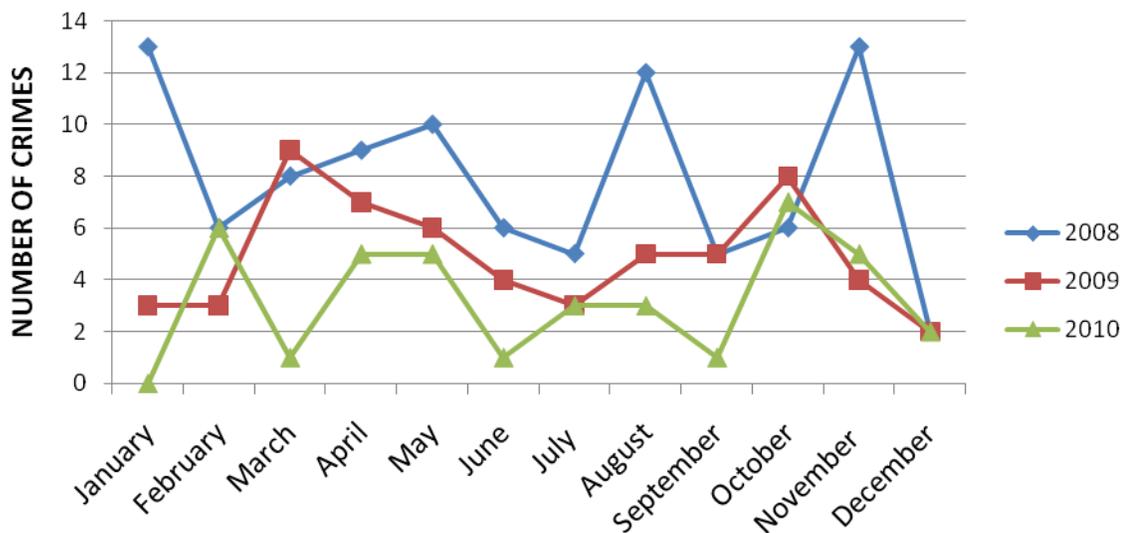
## BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT CRIME PER MONTH



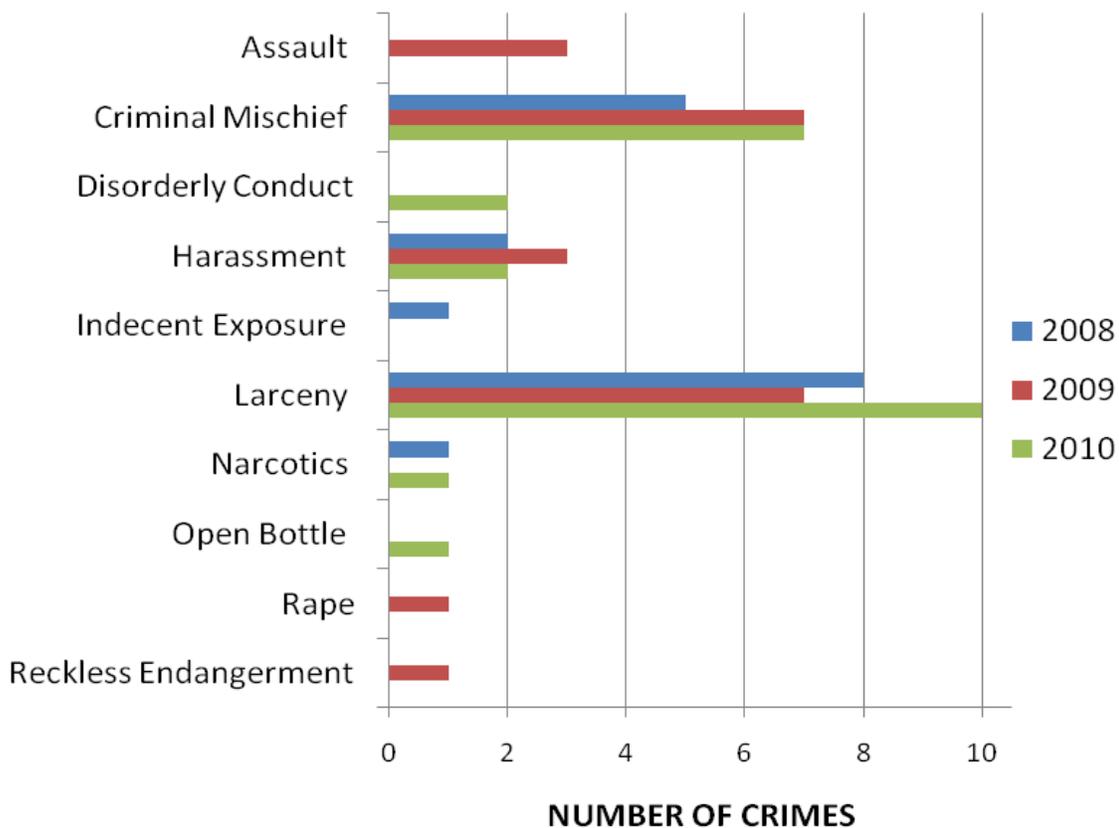
## THIRD STREET BUSINESS DISTRICT ANNUAL CRIME



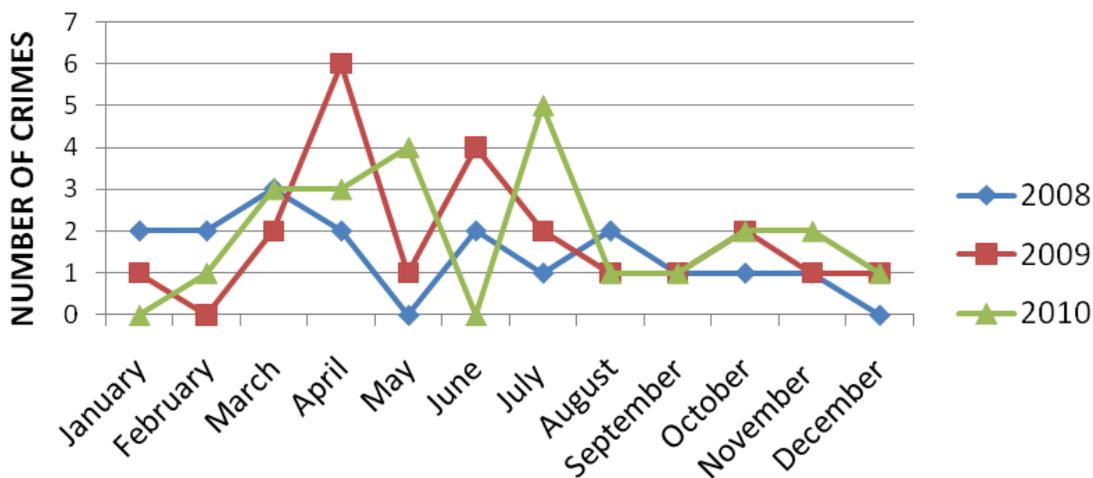
## THIRD STREET BUSINESS DISTRICT CRIME PER MONTH



## AQUARIUM OF NIAGARA ANNUAL CRIME



## AQUARIUM OF NIAGARA CRIME PER MONTH



**Crimes NOT Included in Safe & Clean Niagara Study:\***

accident- hit & run	investigation
alarm-burglary	loitering
animal loose	lost property
animal-other	mental
argument	missing person
arrest	out with a party
assist other agency	premise check
burglary alarm	prisoner pick up
check the welfare	prostitution
dog bite	shoplifter
domestic	subject with gun
driving while intoxicated	suicide
expired subject	suspicious person
fall on city property	tow truck needed
fireworks	traffic hazard
forgery	traffic stop
found property	trespass
fraud	unknown problem
illegal parking	unwanted persons

\*The following reported crimes were not included in the analysis of crime as NFPD and the Safe & Clean Niagara research team did not believe these actions assumed visitors to the area would be directly targeted.

# APPENDIX D: STREET LEVEL ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

## 1. General Information

Location:

Date:

## 2. Overall Impression

How would you generally rate the location? (circle one)

very safe      fairly safe      not safe      scary

First impression:

---

---

---

---

## 3. Lighting

First impression of lighting:

very good              good              satisfactory              poor

very poor              too dark              too bright

What proportion of lights is out?

---

Is the lighting obscured by trees or bushes or other obstructions?    Yes                      No

How well does the lighting illuminate pedestrian walkways and sidewalks?

very well              well              satisfactorily              poorly              very poorly

How clearly does the lighting illuminate doorways, directional signs or maps?

Very well              well              satisfactorily              poorly              very poorly

What is positive about this locations lighting?

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---

---

How would you generally rate the lighting scheme?

very safe                      fairly safe                      not safe                      scary

Main problems, recommendations & corrective measures

---

---

---

---

#### 4. Signage

First impression of signage:

very good                      good                      satisfactory                      poor                      very poor

Are there directional signs or maps nearby which can help you identify where you are?

Yes                      No

Are there signs which show you where to get emergency assistance?

Yes                      No

Is the lettering on the signs easy to read and large enough?

Yes                      No

Do the signs have a symbol attached?

Yes                      No

If you weren't familiar with the place, would it be easy to find your way around?

Yes                      No

What is positive about this locations signage?

---

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---

How would you generally rate the signage scheme?

very safe                      fairly safe                      not safe                      scary

Main problems, recommendations & corrective measures

---

---

---

---



Could you ask for help if you feel unsafe?

Yes

No

If yes, who could you ask? (police officer, 24 hour shop, bar, restaurant, transportation employees, other) Please specify.

---

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---

What is positive about this location regarding isolation-ear distance?

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---

---

What is your overall impression regarding isolation-ear distance?

very safe

fairly safe

not safe

scary

Main problems, recommendations & corrective measures

---

---

---

---

### 8. Movement Predictors (a predictable or unchangeable route or path)

Are there corners, alcoves, or bushes where someone could hide and wait for you?

Yes

No

Are there corners, alcoves, or bushes where someone could bring you to isolate you?

Yes

No

Are there small, confined areas where I would be hidden from view?

Yes

No

If yes, they include:

Between garbage bins

unlocked equipment or utility shed

construction site

Alleyway

doorway

isolated bus stop

isolated parking lot

other

Are there areas which should be barricaded, enclosed, locked and which are not currently (abandoned/unfinished building, vacant lot, parking lots, abandoned houses, building entrances, etc.)? Please specify.

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What is positive about the locations movement predictors?

What is your overall impression regarding movement predictors?

very safe                      fairly safe                      not safe                      scary

Main problems, recommendations & corrective measures

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---

---

## 9. Maintenance

What is the surrounding or nearby land used for? (Circle all that apply)

offices                      restaurants/bars                      stores                      park  
residential houses& streets                      busy traffic                      parking lots                      river bank  
heavily treed/wooded area                      don't know                      other

Does the place feel cared for?                      Yes                      No

Does the place feel abandoned?                      Yes                      No

If yes, why?

---

---

---

First impression about the surrounding's maintenance:

very good                      good                      satisfactory                      poor                      very poor

Is there litter lying around?                      Yes                      No

Are there any domestic animals in the area?                      Yes                      No

Is this area dirty due to the animals?                      Yes                      No

Are there graffiti on the walls? Yes No

In your opinion are there racist or sexist slogans/signs/images on the walls?  
Yes No

Are there signs of vandalism? Yes No

Are there any broken items? Yes No

Do you know to whom maintenance concerns should be reported?  
Yes No

What is the condition of amenities in the area (benches, garbage cans, tree lights, sidewalks, light poles, etc.)?

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---

What is positive about the location?

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---

What is your overall impression regarding maintenance?

Very safe          fairly safe          not safe          scary

### 10. Overall Design

In your opinion, is this a user-friendly place? Yes No

Why or why not?

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---

Are there benches strategically placed for rest stops? Yes No

Are there curb cuts at crosswalks and corners? Yes No

Would other materials, tones, textures or colors improve your sense of safety?

Yes                  No

If yes, which ones?

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---

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---

---

If I were not familiar with the place would it be easy to find my way around?

Yes                  No



# APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP SURVEY

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## SAFE & CLEAN NIAGARA

Thank you for taking the time to participate in Safe & Clean Niagara. By participating in this study you can play a vital role in helping us understand the safety issues in Downtown Niagara Falls. This information will be our basis for how to create a safe and successful downtown.

Please note that your contact information will remain confidential and will only be used by USA Niagara Development Corporation for the purpose of asking follow-up questions. We will not connect you to the data in this study. In all resulting reports your identity will be kept confidential.

- A. NAME: \_\_\_\_\_
- B. AGE: \_\_\_\_\_ SEX: M F
- C. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT: \_\_\_\_\_
- D. RESIDENT of TOWN/CITY: \_\_\_\_\_
- E. RACE/ETHNICITY (OPTIONAL): \_\_\_\_\_
- F. PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_
- G. E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_
- H. The best way to reach you is by: PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_
- I. What time of day would you prefer to be contacted?  
MORNING \_\_\_\_\_ AFTERNOON \_\_\_\_\_ EVENING \_\_\_\_\_

# I. EXERCISE #1

Please take the time to look at the map of downtown Niagara Falls.  
Think about how safe or unsafe you feel *throughout downtown*.

1. How would you generally rate the safety of downtown? (Please circle)

Very Safe                      Fairly Safe                      Not Safe                      Scary

2. List 3 or more words that explain how you feel downtown:

---

---

---

3. On average, how safe do you feel when you visit downtown?

Unsafe		Fairly Safe		Very Secure
1	2	3	4	5

3b. Please explain:

---

---

---

3c. How safe do you feel when:

	Unsafe		Fairly Safe		Very Secure
--	--------	--	-------------	--	-------------

1. On foot?	1	2	3	4	5
2. By car?	1	2	3	4	5
3. By bus/taxi?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Alone, on foot, during the day?	1	2	3	4	5
5. Alone, on foot, in the evening (after dark)?	1	2	3	4	5

4. Which places within downtown feel more safe to you?

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5. Which places feel less safe to you?

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6. Would you recommend friends/family/acquaintances visit downtown? YES NO  
Why, or why not?

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7. In your interaction with tourists, do you warn them about safety issues in Downtown Niagara Falls? If so, what do you say?

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---

8. Are there areas you tell people to stay away from? If so, which ones?

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9. Do you feel comfortable walking around downtown Niagara Falls alone? Why, or why not?

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---

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10. Are there additional things you bring with you to be prepared when traveling within downtown (cell phone, map, etc.)?

---

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---

11. Are there certain things that you do not carry or wear when traveling within downtown Niagara Falls?

---

---

---

## II. EXERCISE #2

Please use the maps and pictures in the front of the room to answer the following questions about *specific areas downtown*

### A. RAINBOW CENTRE PARKING RAMP

1. Overall, how familiar are you with the Rainbow Centre Parking Ramp? (please circle)

Not Familiar		Fairly Familiar		Very Familiar
1	2	3	4	5

2. List 3 or more words to describe how you feel at the Rainbow Centre Parking Ramp:

---

---

---

3. In terms of safety, do you feel comfortable recommending that **other people** park in the ramp? Why, or why not?

---

---

---

4. What factors affect this? (season, number of people, time of day, law enforcement presence, location on street, day of the week, ratio of men to women, etc.)

---

---

---

5. How could this area change to make the experience more positive for you?

---

---

---

6. Overall, how safe do you feel the Rainbow Centre Parking Ramp is? (Please circle)

Dangerous	Unsafe	Fairly Safe	Safe	Secure
1	2	3	4	5



### C. BUFFALO AVENUE HERITAGE DISTRICT

1. Overall, how familiar are you with the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District? (Please circle)

Not Familiar		Fairly Familiar		Very Familiar
1	2	3	4	5

2. List 3 or more words to describe how you feel in the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District:

---

---

---

3. In terms of safety, do you feel comfortable recommending that **other people** visit the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District? Why, or why not?

---

---

---

4. What factors affect this? (season, number of people, time of day, law enforcement presence, location on street, day of the week, ratio of men to women, etc.)

---

---

---

5. How could this area change to make the experience more positive for you?

---

---

---

6. Overall, how safe do you feel the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District is? (Please circle)

Dangerous	Unsafe	Fairly Safe	Safe	Secure
1	2	3	4	5

## D. THIRD STREET ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT

1. Overall, how familiar are you with the Third Street Entertainment District? (Please circle)

Not Familiar		Fairly Familiar		Very Familiar
1	2	3	4	5

2. List 3 or more words to describe how you feel on Third Street:

---

---

---

3. In terms of safety, do you feel comfortable recommending that **other people** visit Third Street? Why, or why not?

---

---

---

4. What factors affect this? (season, number of people, time of day, law enforcement presence, location on street, day of the week, ratio of men to women, etc.)

---

---

---

5. How could this area change to make the experience more positive for you?

---

---

---

6. Overall, how safe do you feel the Third Street Entertainment District is? (Please circle)

Dangerous	Unsafe	Fairly Safe	Safe	Secure
1	2	3	4	5

## E. AQUARIUM OF NIAGARA

1. Overall, how familiar are you with the Aquarium of Niagara? (Please circle)

Not Familiar		Fairly Familiar		Very Familiar
1	2	3	4	5

2. List 3 or more words to describe how you feel at the Aquarium of Niagara:

---

---

---

3. In terms of safety, do you feel comfortable recommending that **other people** visit the Aquarium? Why, or why not?

---

---

---

4. What factors affect this? (season, number of people, time of day, law enforcement presence, location on property, day of the week, ratio of men to women, etc.)

---

---

---

5. How could this area change to make the experience more positive for you?

---

---

---

6. Overall, how safe do you feel the Aquarium of Niagara is? (Please circle)

Dangerous	Unsafe	Fairly Safe	Safe	Secure
1	2	3	4	5

## F. OTHER AREAS

This is a place for you to share other areas of downtown that we have left out. Please feel free to tell us where you feel safety is a concern and/or a place where things feel particularly safe.

A. What is another area downtown that you would like to bring to our attention?

---

---

---

1. What factors affect you feeling this way? (season, number of people, time of day, law enforcement presence, location on property, day of the week, ratio of men to women, etc.)

---

---

---

2. How could this area change to make the experience more positive for you?

---

---

---

B. What is another area downtown that you would like to bring to our attention?

---

---

---

1. What factors affect you feeling this way? (season, number of people, time of day, law enforcement presence, location on property, day of the week, ratio of men to women, etc.)

---

---

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2. How could this area change to make the experience more positive for you?

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### III. CONCLUSIONS

1. In your opinion, what areas of downtown require the most immediate attention concerning safety? Please be specific.

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2. Do you know of someone who may be a good candidate to get involved in this safety audit? If so, can you please provide us with their contact information:

Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

## **SAFE & CLEAN NIAGARA**

We sincerely thank you for taking the time to participate in the Downtown Safety Audit. The information collected will be our basis for how to create a safe and successful downtown. Your contact information will remain confidential and will only be used by USA Niagara Development Corporation for the purpose of asking follow-up questions. We will not connect you to the data in this study. In all resulting reports your identity will be kept confidential.

If you have any further ideas/concerns or know of anyone who would benefit from participating in Safe & Clean Niagara please contact:  
Holly Ortman at 716-284-2556 or by email at [hortman@empire.state.ny.us](mailto:hortman@empire.state.ny.us)

# SAFE & CLEAN NIAGARA

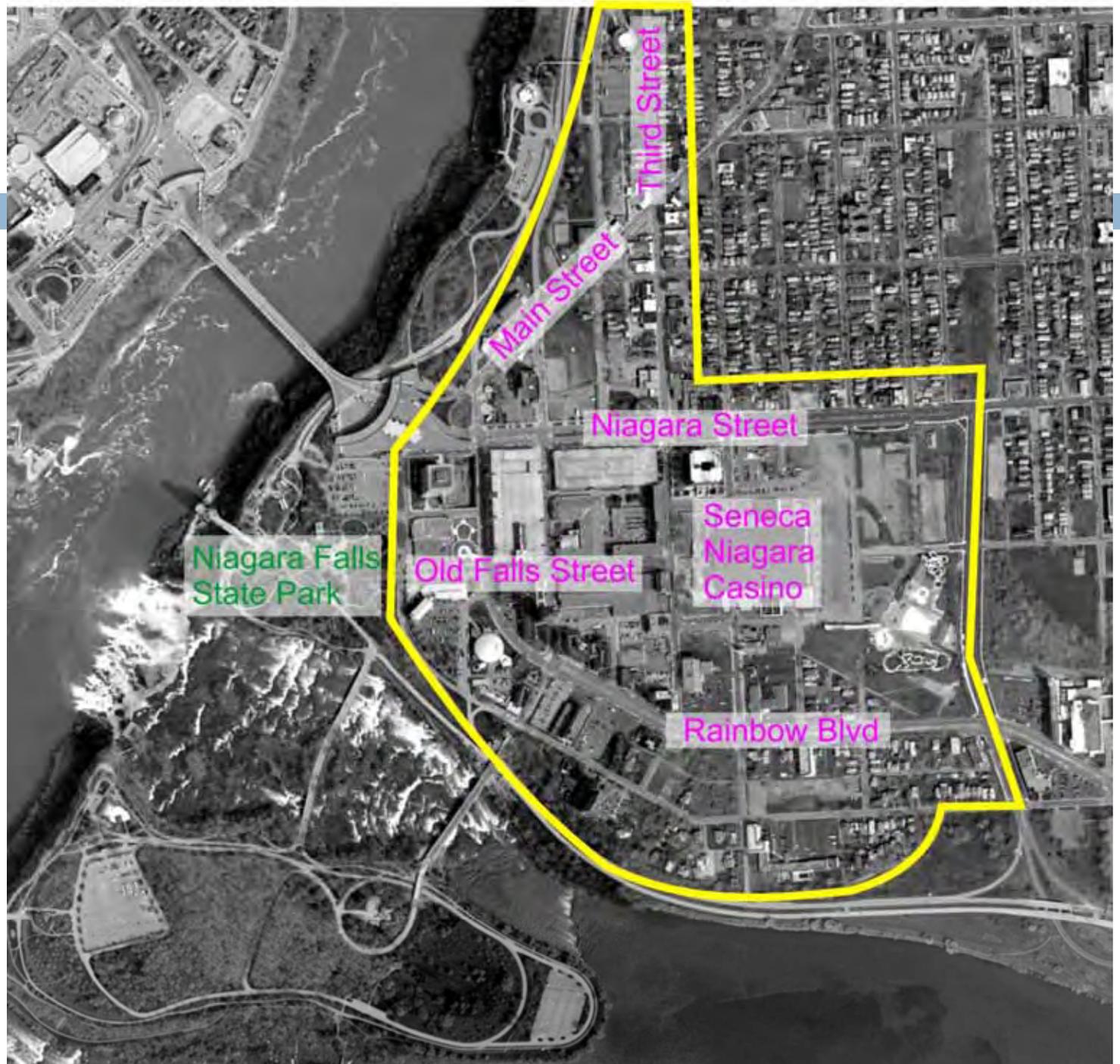
Downtown Safety Audit – Niagara Falls, NY

# Exercise 1: Downtown Safety



- Please think about your perceptions of safety in downtown Niagara Falls.
- Then fill out the questions related to Exercise 1 in your handout
- This is about *your perceptions*. Please fill it out as honestly as you can.

Downtown  
Niagara  
Falls



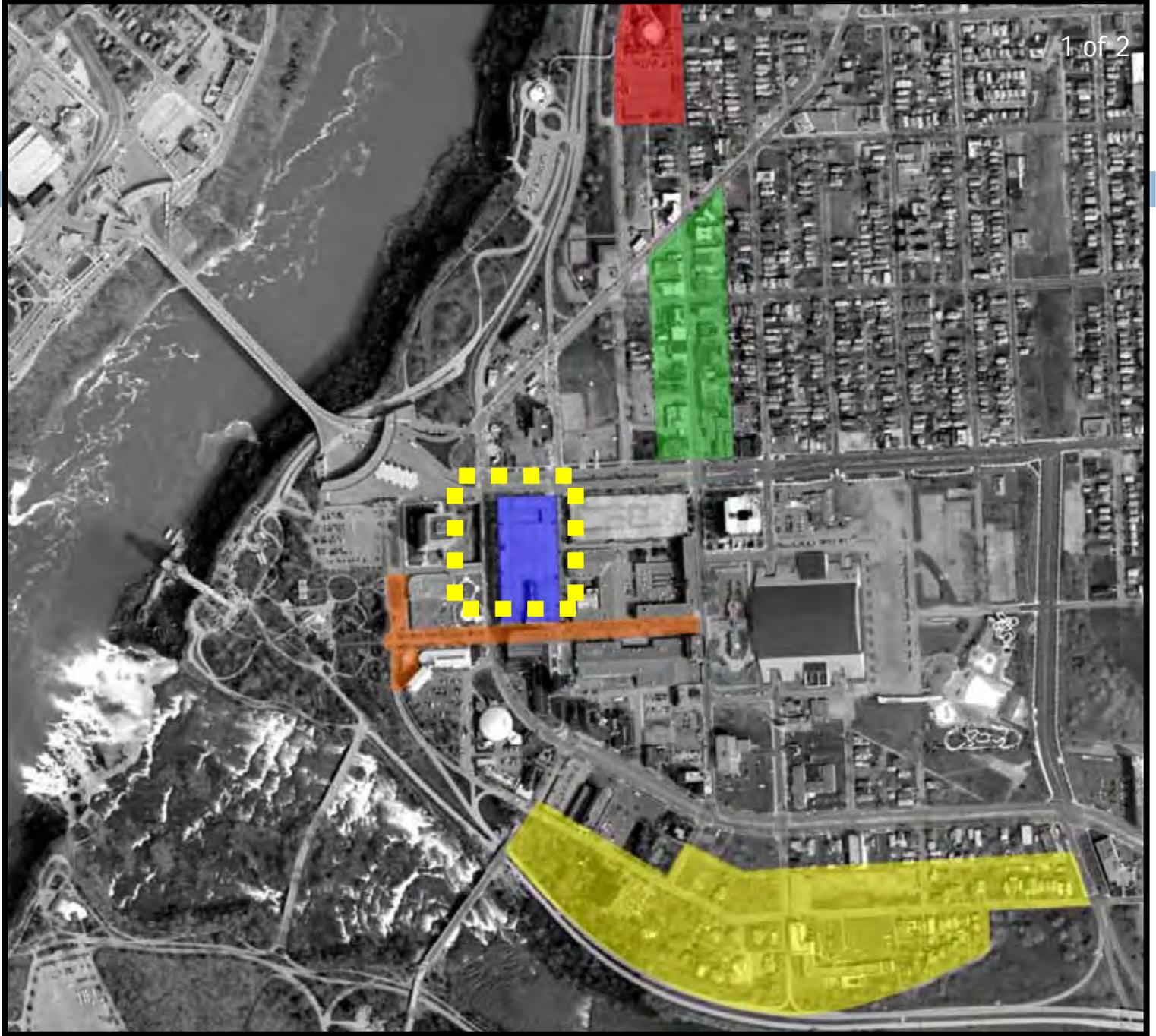
# Exercise 2: Specific Downtown Areas



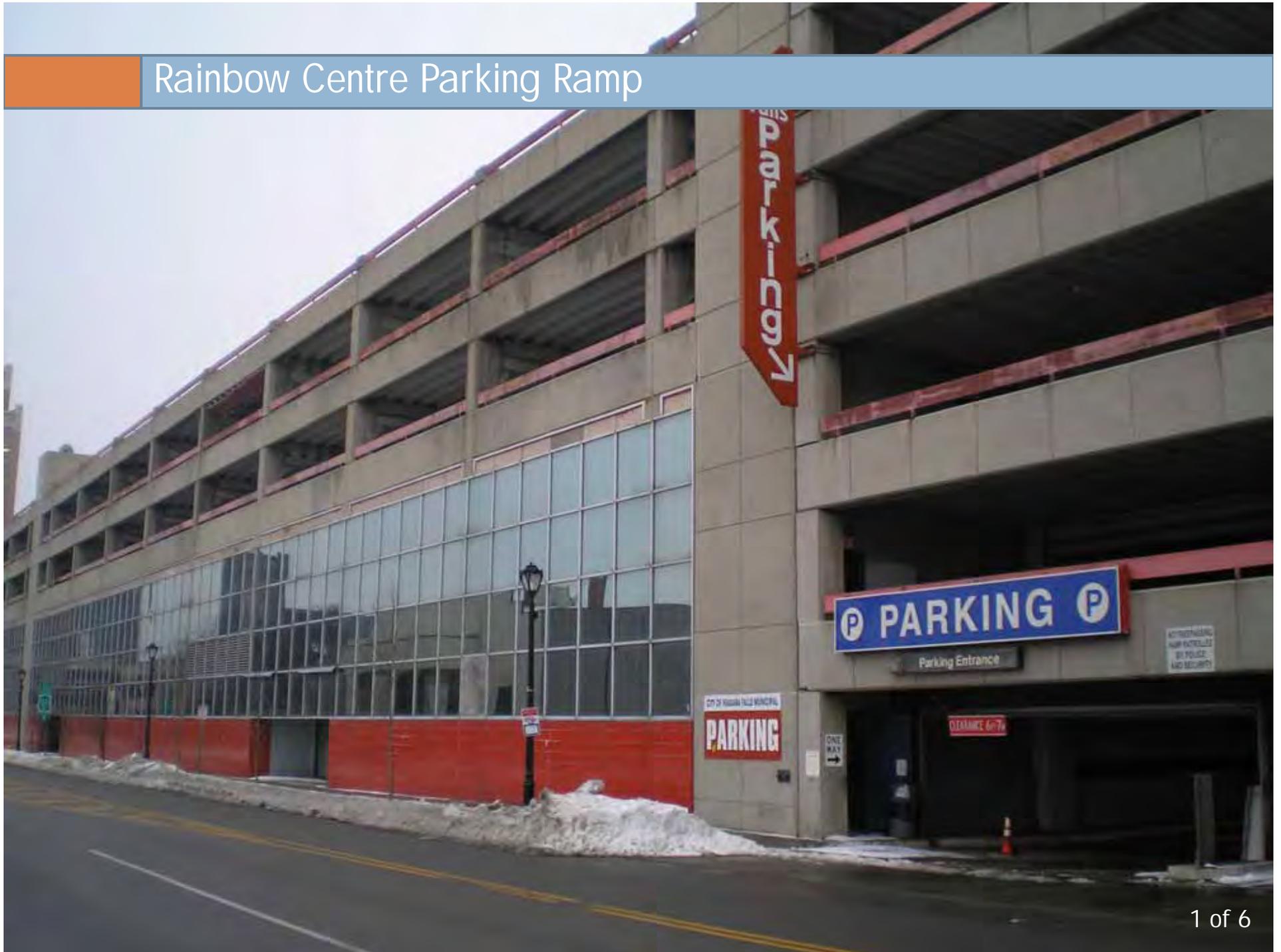
- Next we are going to look at pictures related to specific areas of downtown
- Again, this is about **your** perceptions of the areas
- Please be as honest and thorough as you can



# Rainbow Centre Parking Ramp



# Rainbow Centre Parking Ramp





# Rainbow Centre Parking Ramp



## Rainbow Centre Parking Ramp



## Rainbow Centre Parking Ramp

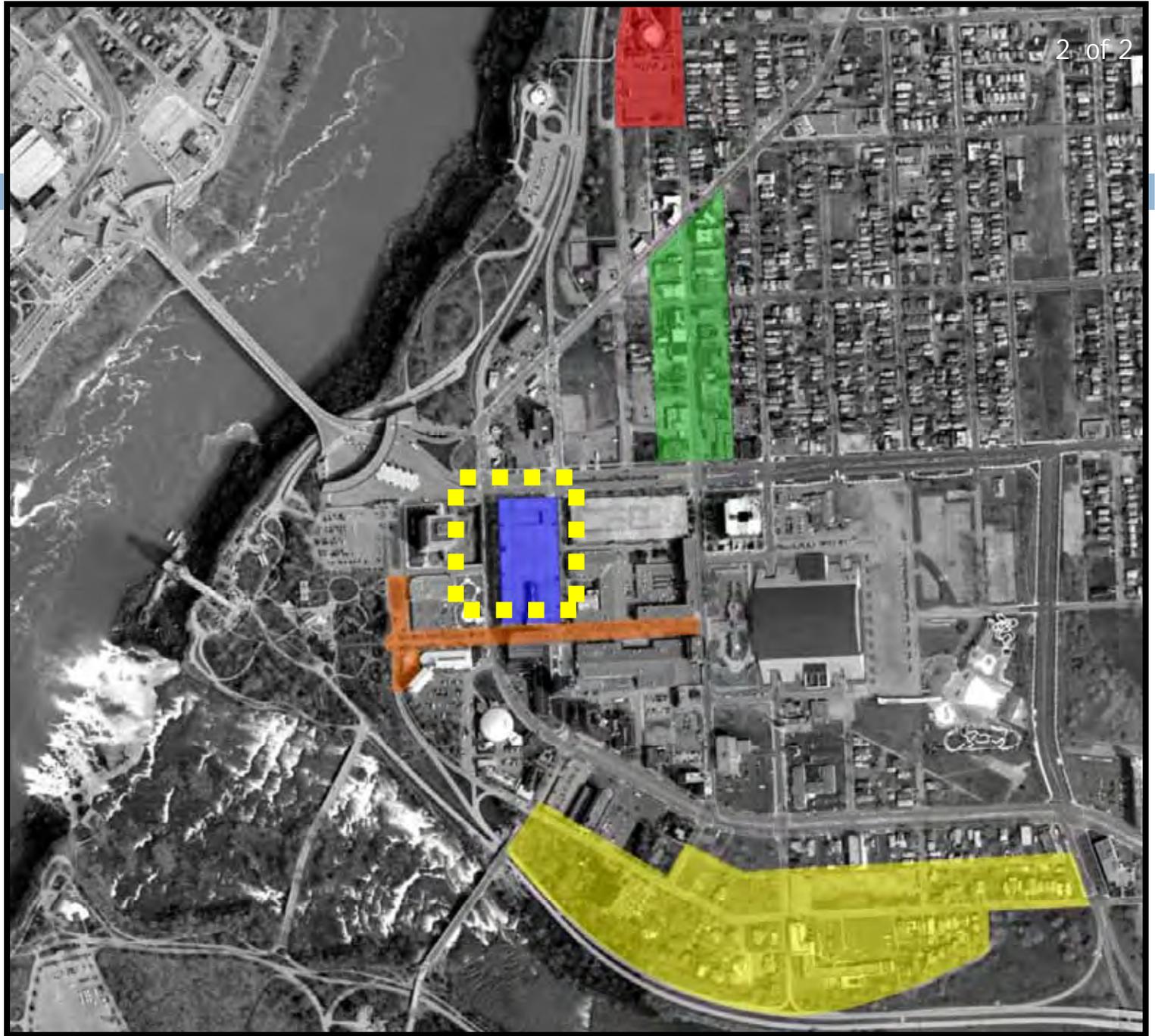


# Rainbow Centre Parking Ramp

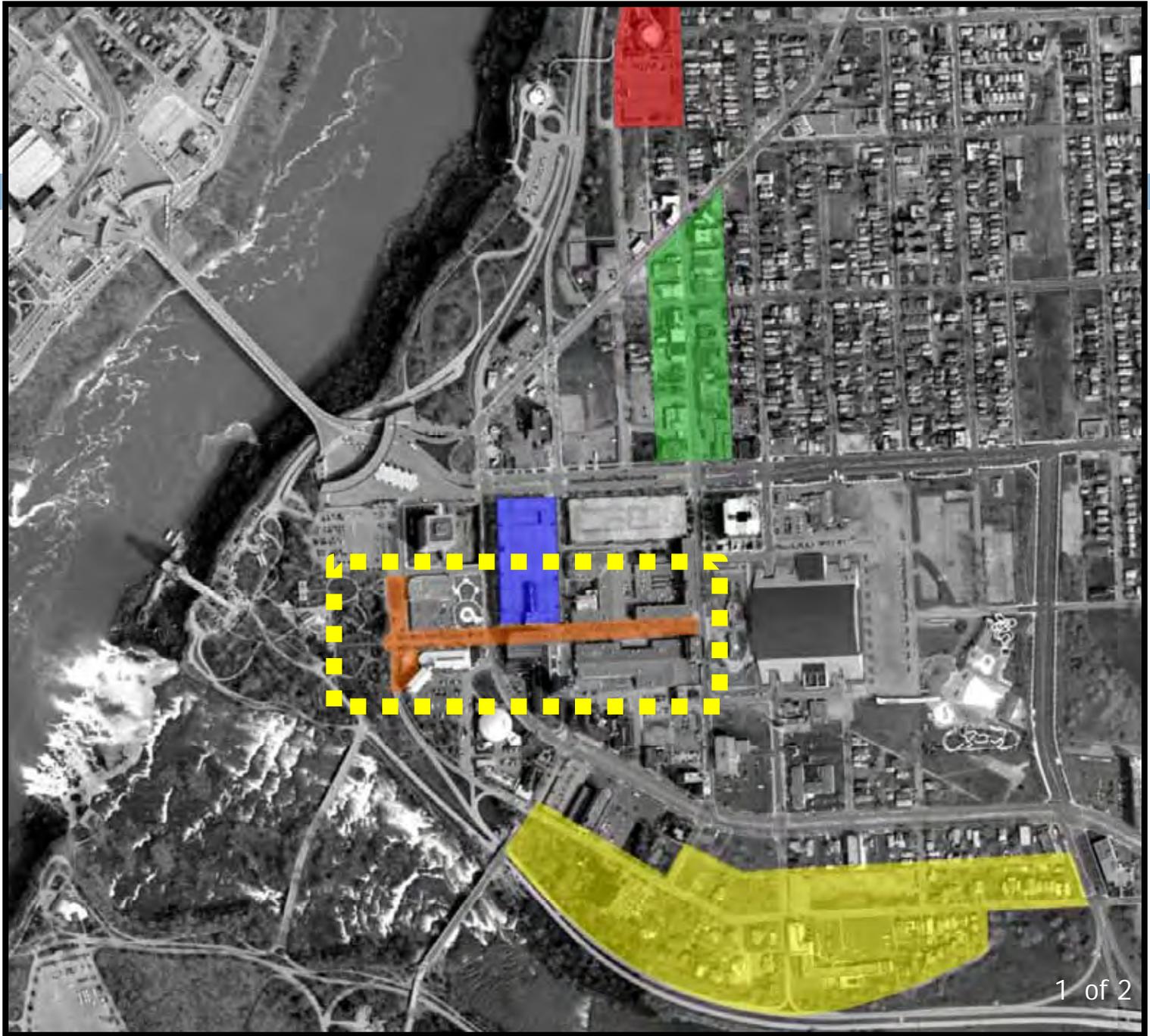




# Rainbow Centre Parking Ramp



Old Falls  
Street  
&  
State  
Park  
Entrance



# Old Falls Street / State Park Entrance



# Old Falls Street / State Park Entrance



# Old Falls Street / State Park Entrance



Old Falls Street / State Park Entrance



## Old Falls Street / State Park Entrance



## Old Falls Street / State Park Entrance



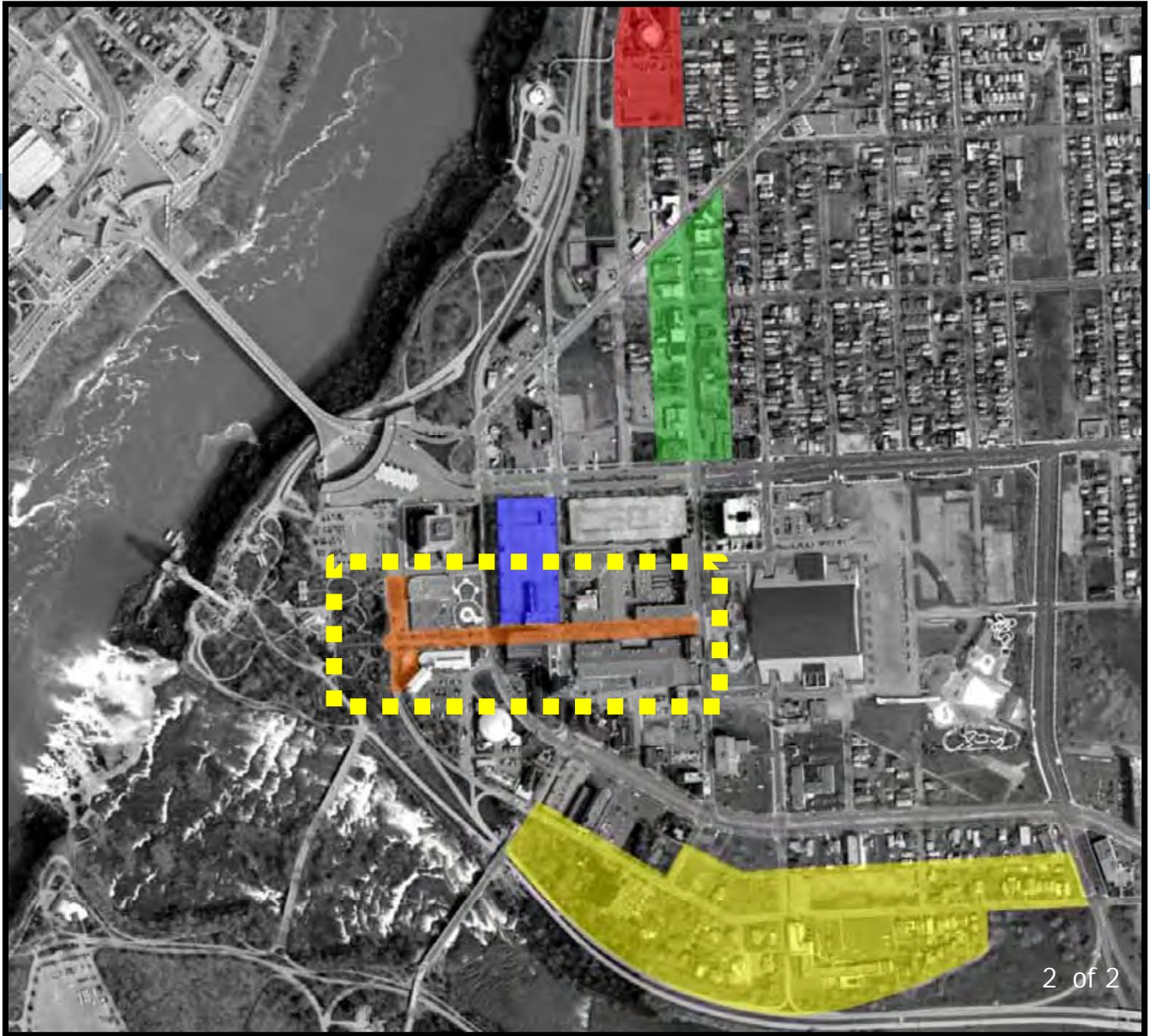
Old Falls Street / State Park Entrance



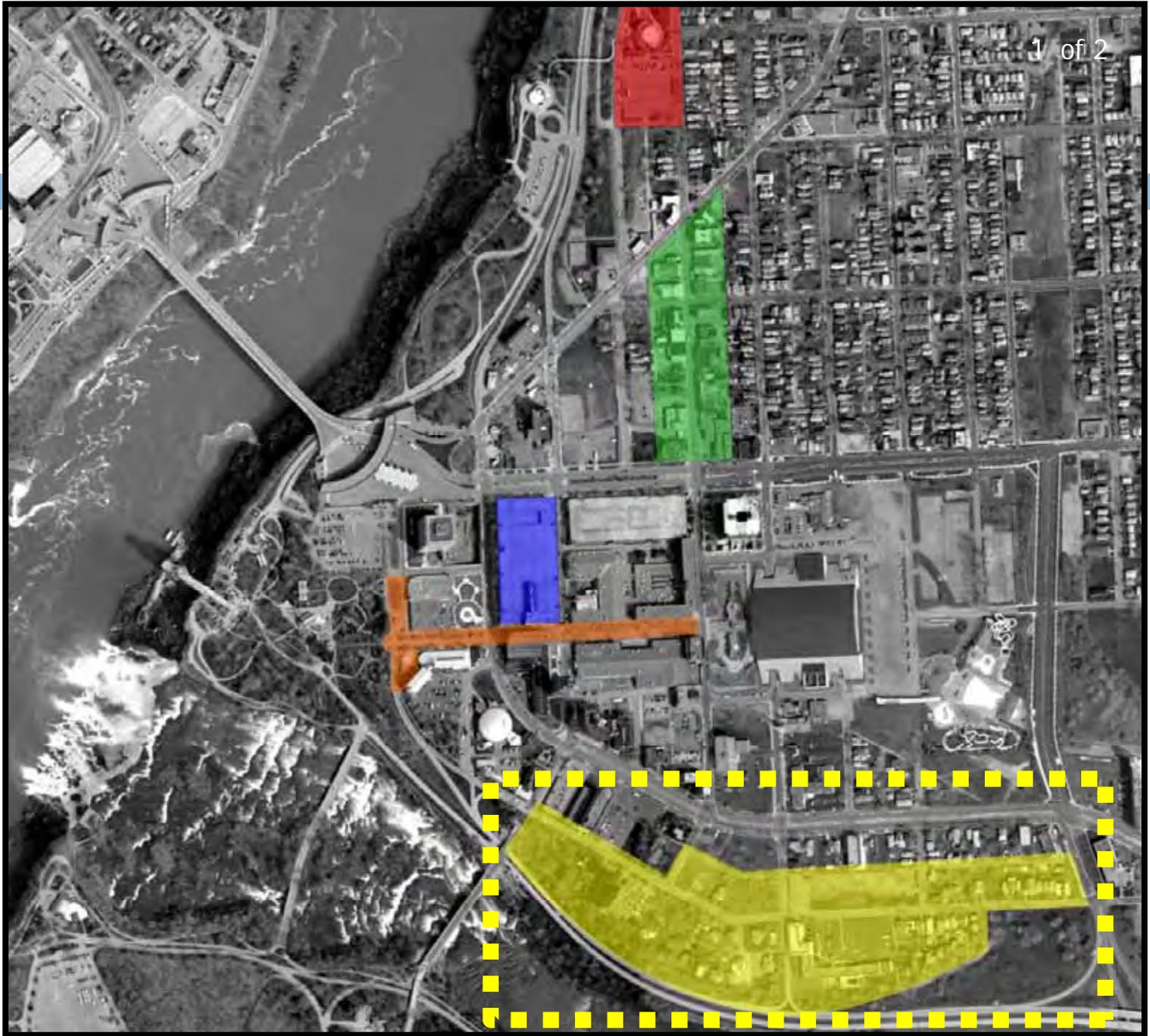
Old Falls Street / State Park Entrance



Old Falls  
Street  
&  
State  
Park  
Entrance



Buffalo  
Avenue  
Heritage  
District



# Buffalo Avenue Heritage District



## Buffalo Avenue Heritage District



## Buffalo Avenue Heritage District



## Buffalo Avenue Heritage District



# Buffalo Avenue Heritage District



## Buffalo Avenue Heritage District



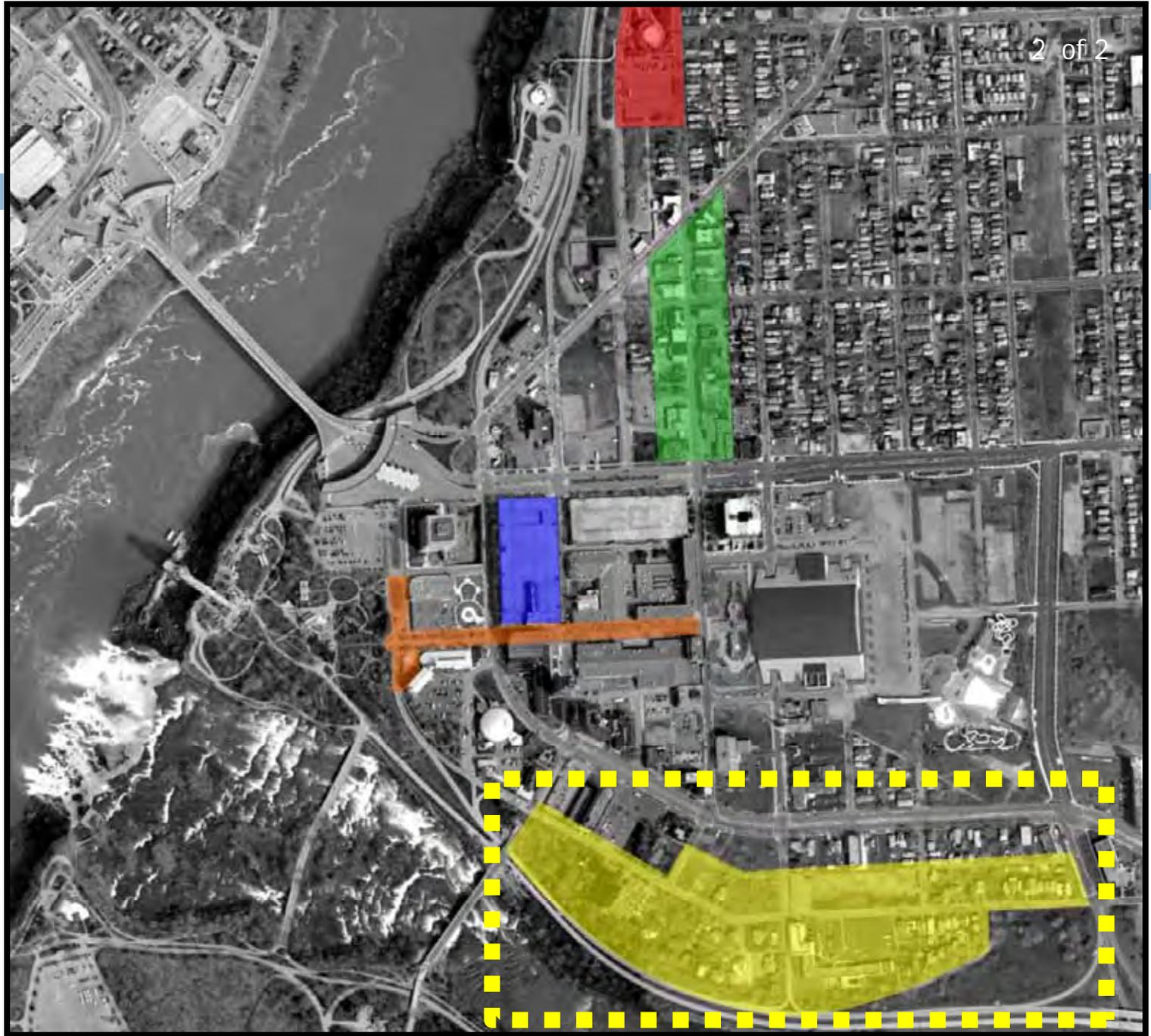
## Buffalo Avenue Heritage District

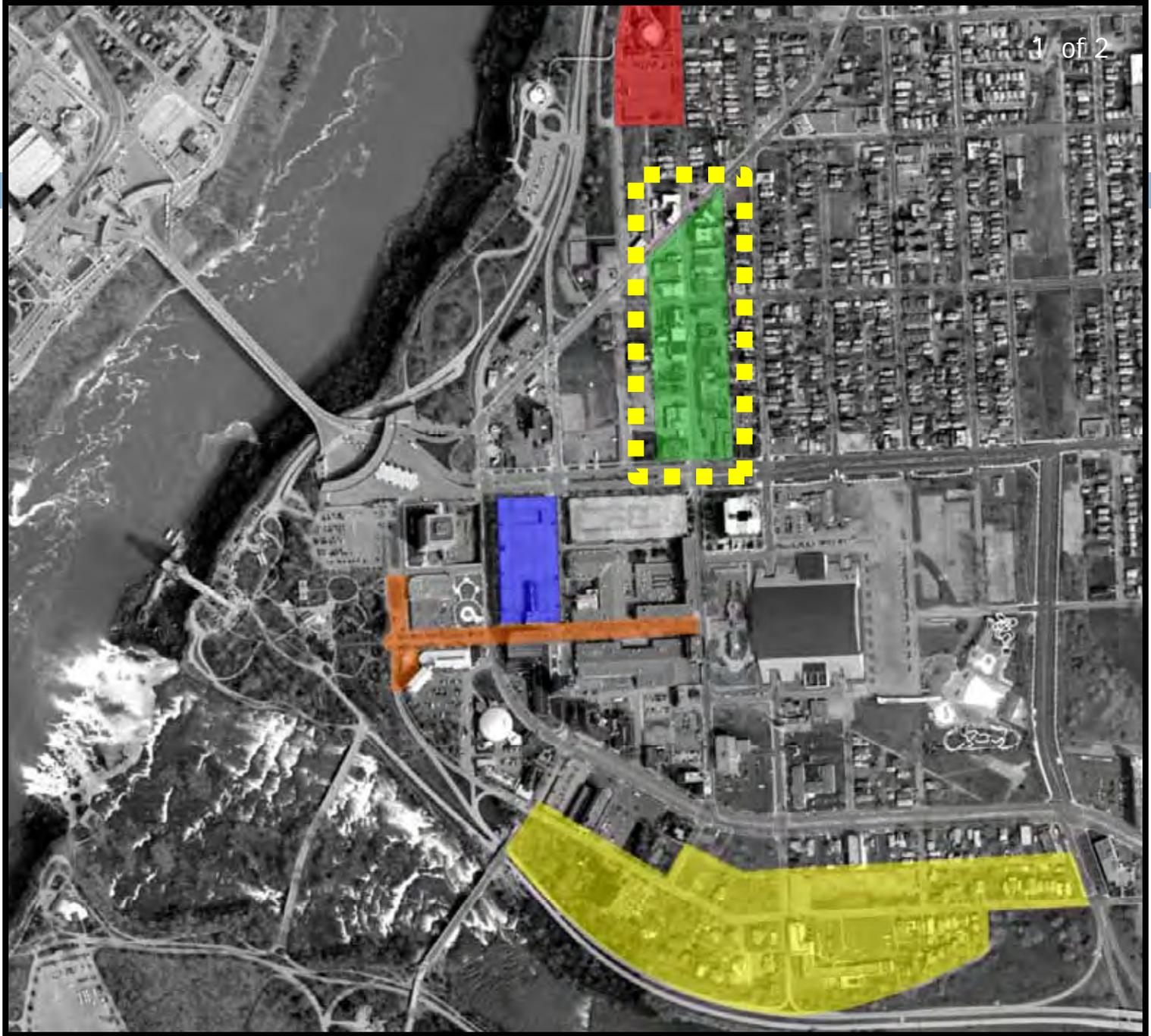


## Buffalo Avenue Heritage District



Buffalo  
Avenue  
Heritage  
District





# Third Street

# Third Street Entertainment District



## Third Street Entertainment District



## Third Street Entertainment District



## Third Street Entertainment District



# Third Street Entertainment District



## Third Street Entertainment District

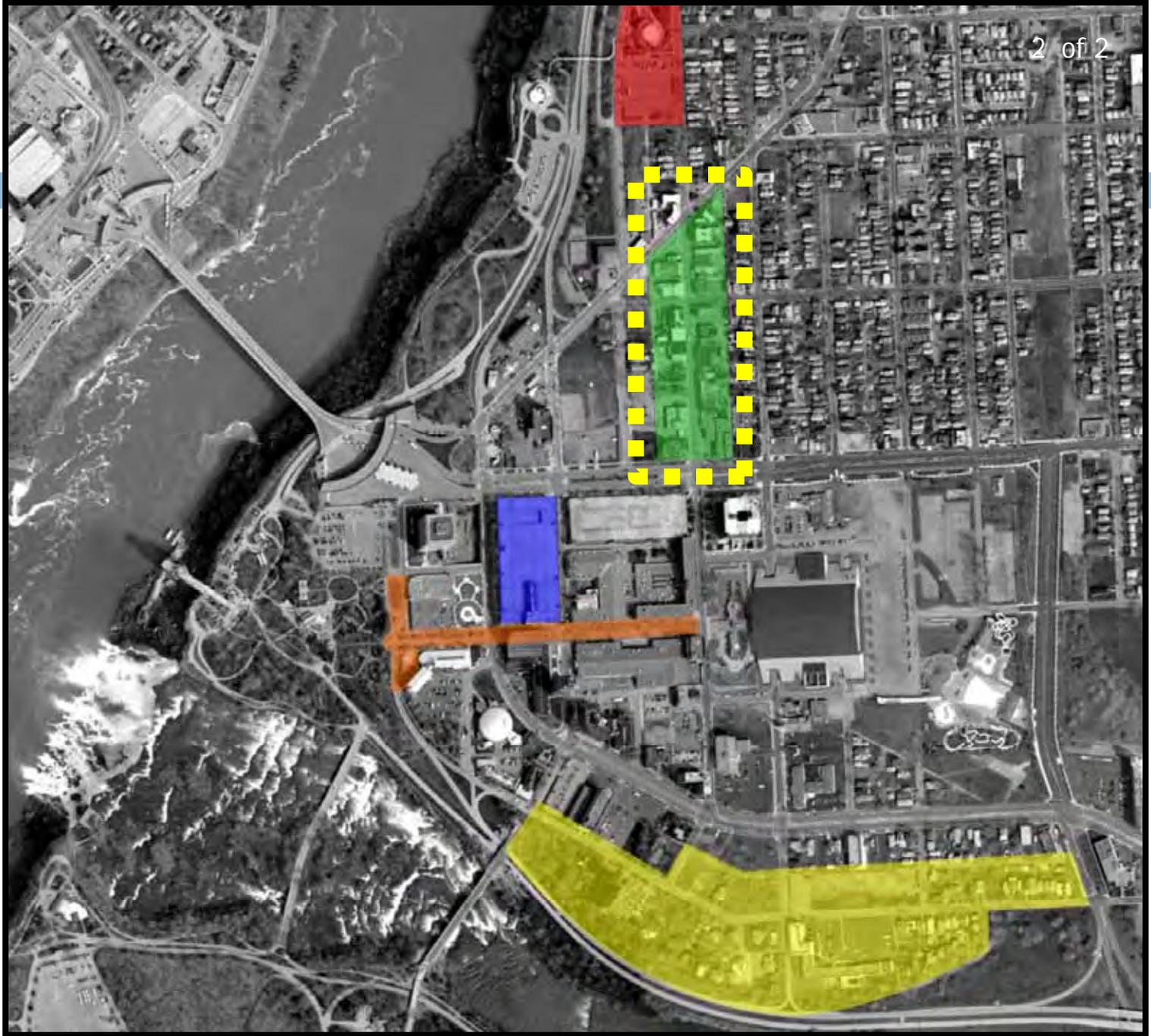


## Third Street Entertainment District



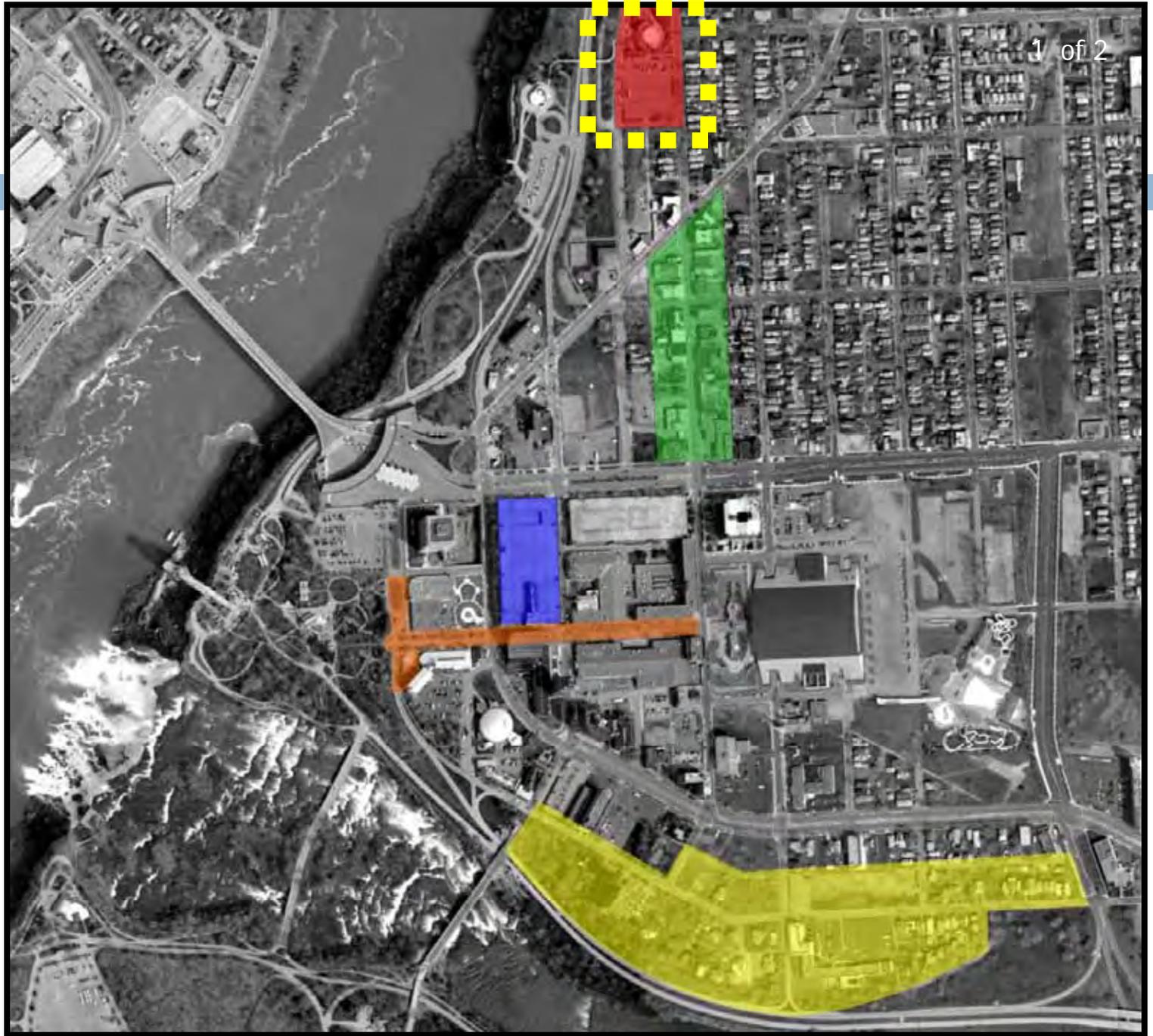
## Third Street Entertainment District





# Third Street

Aquarium  
of  
Niagara



# Aquarium of Niagara



# Aquarium of Niagara



# Aquarium of Niagara



# Aquarium of Niagara



# Aquarium of Niagara

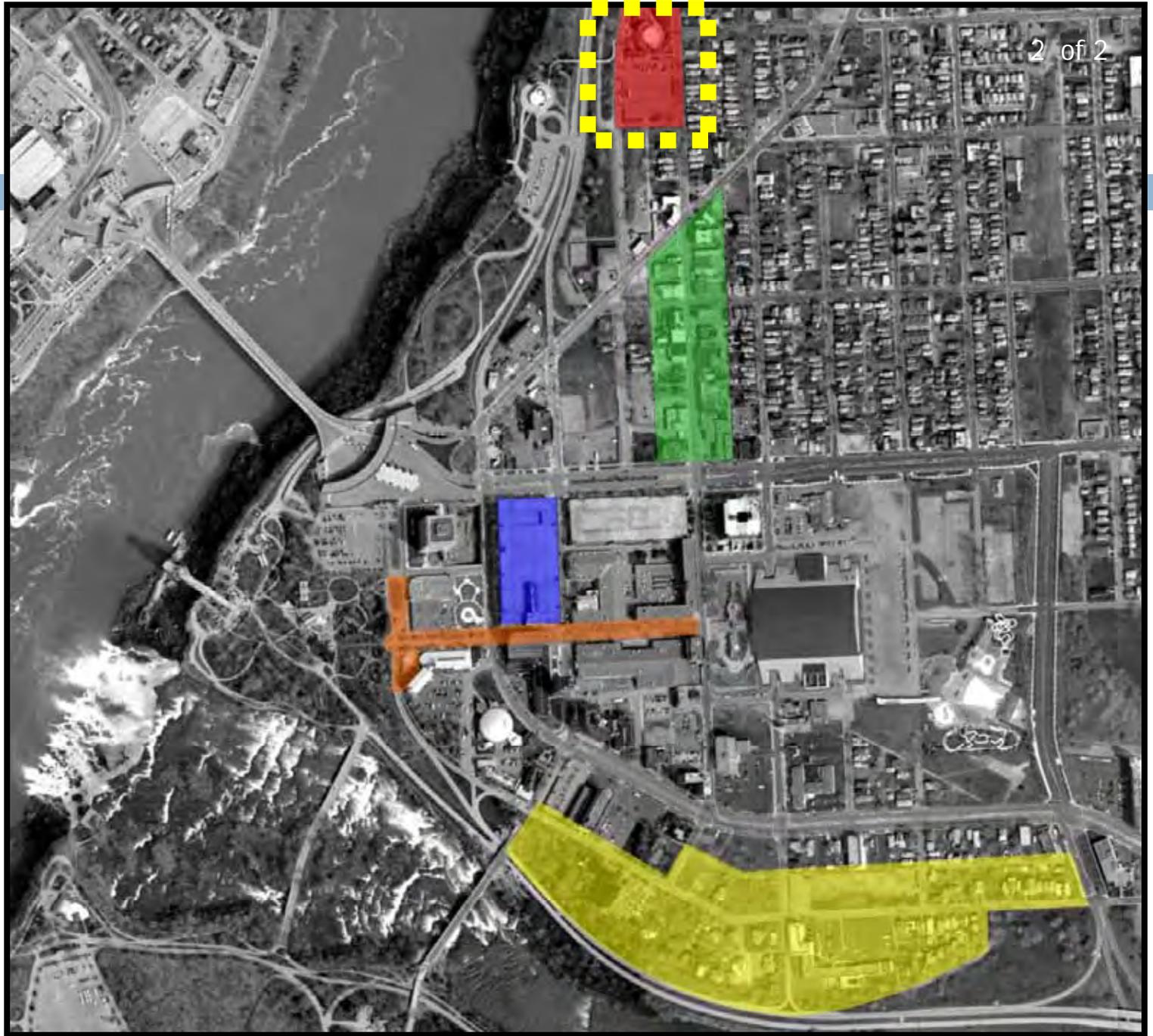


# Aquarium of Niagara





Aquarium  
of  
Niagara



# Other Areas



- Please use this opportunity to tell us about other places IN DOWNTOWN that concern you or that you feel are particularly safe

# Thank you!



- We appreciate your time and help with this project
- If you have more information or know someone who might want to participate in the safety audit please contact:

Holly Ortman

USA Niagara Development Corp.

716-284-2556

[hortman@empire.state.ny.us](mailto:hortman@empire.state.ny.us)

## Conclusions

### Further Work

This effort includes the type of work that is never truly finished. *Safe & Clean Niagara* is a picture of the safety issues in the study area at this point in time. Many things affect the rate of crime and feelings of safety in a place, but any of the incremental action items listed in the recommendations section would begin to improve conditions.

Now that this benchmark has been created, it would be beneficial to revisit this topic in the future. There are several ways this could be approached, some more intensive than others.

- Annual reassessment of recommendations, looking at what has been accomplished and what might need additional attention.
- Review the entire document in about three years and re-run the police data, looking at data from 2011, 2012, and 2013. New recommendations could be created at that point.
- A full-scale re-evaluation study could be performed in the future, including focus groups, street level assessments, and police data, using the format that was laid out in *Safe & Clean Niagara*. This new study could be compared to this 2011 study to determine changes and better guide next steps for safety.
- Other groups could be brought into a future study, expanding the footprint of the study area, including State Parks, the Seneca Niagara Casino, taxi drivers, students at the Niagara County Community College Culinary Institute and Homeland Security. Social media, newspaper ads and other forms of outreach could also be used to drive more participants to take part in future studies.
- The Niagara Tourism & Convention Corporation could be further involved in future studies by using their Meridian System to survey visitors to the area to get outside perspectives and impressions on safety issues in the tourist district of Niagara Falls. It would be recommended to do this survey over the course of a whole year in order to see the varying perceptions during different seasons.
- The Niagara Falls Police Department could facilitate an online survey on the perception of safety of Niagara Falls, perhaps with a section focusing specifically on the tourist district. This survey would include the perspective of local employees and residents, and it would also be recommended to conduct this survey year round.

- This study could also be used as a guide for other areas of Niagara Falls and other cities looking for ideas on how to develop a model to analyze the perception of safety.

Changes in the tourist district including development, infrastructure, new buildings, and new businesses will likely change the landscape of the study area and the reality and perception of safety. Specifically, within the next two years the City Parking Ramp will change because of the rehabilitation of the ramp and the development of the Culinary Institute. This is a change that can be foreseen and there are likely to be many others that may justify a reassessment of positive and negative safety elements.

## Next Steps

The recommendations made as a result of the *Safe & Clean Niagara* study will require the active involvement of many private, public and government municipalities throughout the study area. Many of the responsibilities associated with implementing these recommendations will fall on the following stakeholders:

- Private owners have a responsibility to practice the regular upkeep and maintenance of their properties.
- The City of Niagara Falls should task its departments with appropriate items including code enforcement, routine maintenance, and economic development.
- The Downtown Niagara Falls Business Association can be a unified voice for tourist district concerns and a liaison between tourist district businesses and appropriate departments at the City of Niagara Falls.
- Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation could include safety information for all visitors coming to the area. Additionally, the NTCC building might be a good location for an exterior emergency phone for times when the facility is closed. NTCC could also partner with the City to coordinate tourism information that is posted in the City Parking Ramp and ensure that the information is timely and attractive.
- Niagara County Community College should make a concerted effort to bring students, faculty and activity out onto Old Falls Street to make the environment on the street feel more vibrant.
- The Aquarium of Niagara, as the only privately-owned area examined in *Safe & Clean Niagara* has unique responsibilities to maintain their facility for the comfort and safety of their patrons. In addition they should examine the possibility of installing security cameras around the facility, paying particular attention to the parking lot, as that has been the location of numerous car break-ins.
- Old Falls Street and the Conference Center Niagara Falls should continue to have open communication with law enforcement, especially about events that may not have to be addressed by the special events task force. NFPD should be informed of any event that may draw a large group of people to any area of the City so they can adequately prepare for any issues.

- The Downtown Niagara Falls Business Association, in coordination with the City of Niagara Falls and USAN, could determine the feasibility for an Americorps-style “Feet on the Street” ranger or ambassador program in the tourist district. If it is a feasible model, funding should be secured and the program should be implemented.

# Safe & Clean Niagara



A safety audit for the Niagara Falls, New York tourist district.  
Revised January 2012

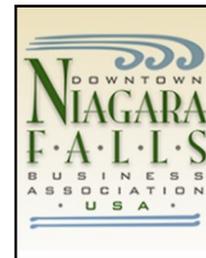


USA Niagara Development Corporation

## **Acknowledgements**

USA Niagara Development Corporation would like to express its sincere thanks to all the focus group participants and local residents, businesses and individuals who volunteered their time to assist with the *Safe & Clean Niagara* study. Without them, *Safe & Clean Niagara* would not have been possible.

Special thanks to the City of Niagara Falls, Mayor Paul Dyster, City Administrator Donna D. Owens and the city department heads, as well as the Niagara Falls Police Department especially Captain John DeMarco, Detective Lieutenant Kelly Rizzo, Detective Karl Brusino, and Amanda Retzlaff. USA Niagara would also like to thank the Downtown Niagara Falls Business Association for sponsoring the *Safe & Clean Niagara* study and Dr. Samina Raja of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at SUNY Buffalo for her assistance during the planning stages of this study.



## Executive Summary

USA Niagara Development Corporation, in collaboration with the City of Niagara Falls, have created *Safe & Clean Niagara*, a safety audit intended to ascertain the perception and reality of safety in the tourist district of Niagara Falls, New York. For the purpose of this exercise, the concept of safety that was being examined was defined as a feeling of personal security. The goal of this exercise was to understand whether people feel safe moving throughout the tourist district and what factors affect that feeling of security. In addition to examining the tourist district as a whole, *Safe & Clean Niagara* also looked at five different “areas of concentration” within the study area. These are areas that were not selected because of particular safety issues, but rather because of the opportunity to facilitate revitalization efforts in these areas. The areas of concentration were: City Parking Ramp, Old Falls Street & the State Park Entrance; Buffalo Avenue Heritage District; Third Street Business District; and the Aquarium of Niagara.

In addition to understanding the safety issues in the study area, *Safe & Clean Niagara* also strives to develop a series of implementable action items that can be actively pursued by both public sector and private sector entities. By working together to implement these action items, both the perception and reality of safety in the tourist area of Niagara Falls, New York can be improved, to the benefit of residents, tourists, businesses and the City itself.

Three instruments were used in the course of this study to understand the issues of safety in the study area.

- Focus groups of 7-12 participants, comprised of downtown employees, residents, and others interested in safety issues in Niagara Falls;
- Crime data and interviews with the Niagara Falls Police Department (NFPD); and
- Street level assessments conducted by the study team to understand the physical attributes of the study area that may lead to a feeling of security or insecurity.

The focus groups were intended to provide information on the perceptions of safety in the study area. Participants were led through a slide presentation while filling out a lengthy survey form. In addition, they were given the opportunity to discuss their opinions and debate the safety issues as a group. The NFPD data provided a quantitative picture of the reality of safety in the study area, while the street level assessment provided an on-the-ground assessment of the conditions of the study area.

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More than 70 participants took part in the focus group sessions. Overall, participants perceived the study area to be relatively safe, although there were specific concerns about the seasonality (the winter, non-tourist months being the biggest issue) and time of day (more concern at night and in the dark). For the most part, the concerns centered on a lack of people being in the area.

Of the five areas of concentration, the two that were the biggest concern for participants in the focus groups were the Third Street Business District and City Parking Ramp. City crime data backed up the perceptions on Third Street, although most of the crime in that area was related to rowdiness around drinking establishments. The City Parking Ramp, on the other hand, had very low crime rates, but participants' perceptions of the structure were very negative. The low crime rates may be a result of how underutilized the space is and how few people and cars there are in the Ramp.

Buffalo Avenue Heritage District received mixed responses, but negative perceptions, for the most part, came from participants who were unfamiliar with the area or did not see a reason for tourists to visit the area. The responses became more based on Buffalo Avenue as a tourism draw than on the safety of the area. Most of the safety-related concerns in the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District concerned insufficient lighting and poor maintenance of privately owned structures and public infrastructure.

Finally, the Aquarium of Niagara and Old Falls Street and the State Park Entrance received the most positive response from participants. As Old Falls Street was recently reconstructed and is well maintained, it is not surprising that this area elicited positive feelings from respondents. The Aquarium showed a slightly more mixed response, but mostly when considering the area after dark. In other words, most people thought that the area was safe during the Aquarium's operating hours. The Aquarium area was found to be fairly well-maintained, but could use some improvements in infrastructure to improve feelings of safety, including lighting and parking lot improvements. The NFPD data revealed that there are quite a few issues with larceny (car break-ins) in the area of the Aquarium, which could be addressed with a camera surveillance system or parking lot attendant.

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While there are certainly issues of safety and crime in downtown Niagara Falls, the reality of safety in Niagara Falls as born out of actual crime statistics is not nearly as grim a picture as that conveyed by many focus group participants. *Safe & Clean Niagara* includes a lengthy list of recommendations to address the issues of safety, maintenance, cleanliness, and perception of the study area as a whole and the areas of concentration. These are important steps to take and many can be implemented in the near-term to great benefit. However, it cannot be denied that Niagara Falls is suffering from a bad reputation of being an unsafe place and only through time, education and good experiences in Niagara Falls will that reputation begin to be combated.

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## Findings and Analysis

This section organizes the findings of *Safe & Clean Niagara* into three sections:

- Findings for the entire study area based on focus groups;
- Findings for the entire study area based on NFPD data; and
- Findings for individual areas of concentration.

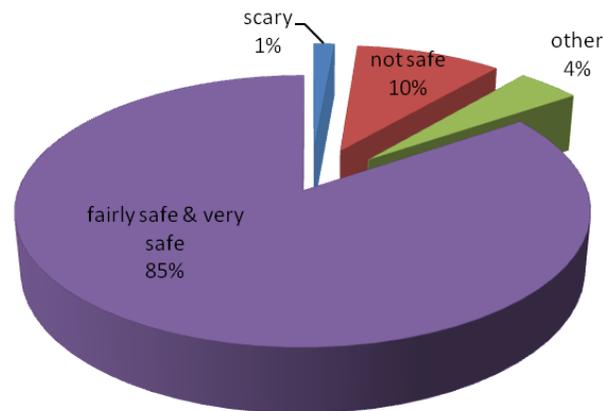
### Findings for entire study area based on focus groups

The focus groups began with an exercise that asked participants to consider the Niagara Falls tourist district as a whole (see Figure 2). Participants in focus group sessions were either individuals who live or work within the tourist district or people who were very familiar with and interested in

the area. The majority of participants, some 85% believed the tourist district area to be fairly safe or very safe. However, the first question posed by participants in almost every focus group session was something along the lines of, “this survey seems too general, how do I rank the overall safety when I think it is different during day and night?” or “how can I rank the overall safety when my perception changes depending on different factors?” Focus group leaders encouraged participants to answer the qualitative questions with additional explanations as necessary. The survey was a written survey that would be analyzed by the focus group leaders so participants were free to write on the lines provided as well as in the margins and on the back of each page.

While the answers to Exercise 1: Question 1 were overwhelmingly positive, responses to later questions illustrate how time of day, location, presence of other visitors and law enforcement were great factors determining perceptions of safety.

### Exercise 1: Question 1: How would you generally rate the safety of downtown?



**FIGURE 2:** This graph shows the overall perception focus group participants had of the tourist district of Niagara Falls, NY. Participants were asked to rank the tourist district on a scale of 1 to 4: 1 = scary, 2 = not safe, 3 = fairly safe, and 4 = very safe.

One participant explained, “Depending on the season, my perceptions vary; during summer there are more people and I feel more comfortable, during winter/fall, less people, less comfortable being alone,” another stated, “the less litter, the safer I feel; north side of casino not safe and east,” and another said, “little uneasy, depends on time of day and would not walk around at night, night just okay.” Familiarity with the tourist district was also attributed to participants feeling more comfortable moving around the tourist district. One participant who ranked the tourist district as very secure stated, “Not only do I always make myself aware of my surroundings in any environment but after graduating from college I rented an apartment above a local business on 3rd Street and lived there for 2 years. I also made sure I was not putting myself in any situations where I could be harmed.” Another participant stated “I grew up and live in Niagara Falls; I’m very aware of my surroundings here and feel fairly safe,” and another who ranked this study area fairly safe stated, “when visiting the tourist district and being aware of the surroundings I feel safe. It can be scary to some but for me I am careful where ever I am.”

Some of the questions in Exercise 1 were excluded from this analysis because the responses were redundant. The answers to question 3b (Explain on average how safe you feel when you visit the tourist district), question 6b (Would you recommend friends/family/acquaintances visit the tourist district? Why or why not?) and question 9 (Do you feel comfortable walking around the tourist district of Niagara Falls alone?) were very similar, referenced one another or were repetitive. And, of the participants who answered questions 10 and 11 on what items they carry or do not carry with them while traveling in the tourist district, almost everyone wrote they always have their cell phone and they do not carry large amounts of cash.

While a strong majority of participants believed the tourist district to generally be safe, the specific reluctance some participants had in stating the tourist district is very safe became further evident in Exercise Two in descriptions of each area of concentration.

### **Findings for the entire study area based on NFPD data**

The Niagara Falls Police Department supplied *Safe & Clean Niagara* with statistical data from 2008, 2009, and 2010. While the next section of this document will examine the areas of concentration that the study focused on, this section will look at the study area as a whole. This will include all the areas of concentration as well as the other areas within the study boundary (see Figure 1 on page 3).

On average, the top crimes between 2008 and 2010 in the study area are:

1. Larceny (on average 125 per year)
2. Criminal mischief (61 on average per year)
3. Disorderly conduct (43 on average per year)
4. Narcotics (25 on average per year)
5. Assault (18 on average per year)

Seasonality of crime was evident in tourist district crime between 2008-2010. The months with the highest crime are also the months that usually have the greatest number of tourists and visitors in Niagara Falls. On average over the three years, the months lowest in crime were December (19 crimes on average over 3 years), February (21 crimes on average over 3 years) and November and January (with 24 crimes on average over 3 years), which are also the slowest tourism months and the time of year with the least number of people moving throughout the study area. The months highest in crime were July (39 crimes on average over 3 years), August (37 crimes on average over 3 years) and May (36 crimes on average over 3 years).

In discussions with USAN, the NFPD stated that the tourist district of Niagara Falls and the 5 areas of concentration experience relatively low levels of crime. However, safety can also be especially important when it comes to economic development initiatives, private investment, and the perceptions of the people using this space, so any amount of crime is worthy of attention. The NFPD remains actively involved in the tourist district because the area is a major tourism destination. Tourists and locals feel more at ease with a visible police presence. Tourists may be more likely to venture outside of the State Park into the city with police visible

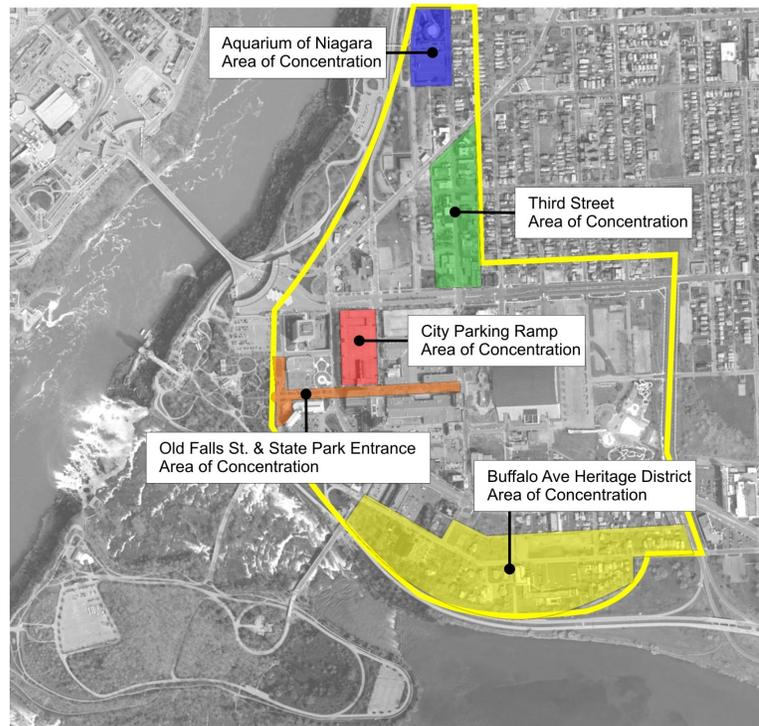


on foot, bike and in police vehicles. A police presence makes the study area feel more like a local community rather than a tourism destination and their presence may further enhance the perception of safety.

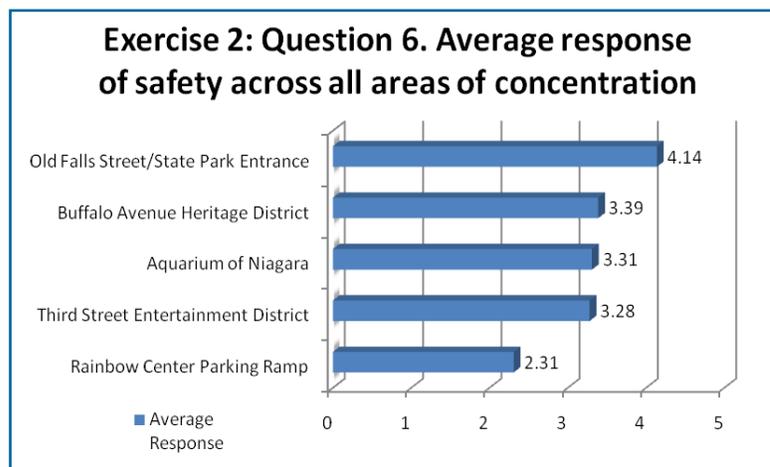
Conversations with police officers revealed that much of the petty crime in the tourist district of Niagara Falls is not dependent on time of day or season as much as it is dependent on which petty criminals are incarcerated at any given time. For instance, when certain criminals are released, officers anticipate that they will see an increase in larceny (car break-ins).

### All findings for individual areas of concentration

The second exercise of the *Safe & Clean Niagara* safety audit provided more detailed information on the five areas of concentration that participants were asked to consider. These areas were chosen because they were areas that the study’s leaders felt were important in terms of facilitating economic development efforts, not because they were believed to be necessarily safe or unsafe places. The five areas were: City Parking Ramp; Old Falls Street & the State Park Entrance; Buffalo Avenue Heritage District; Third Street Business District; and the Aquarium of Niagara (see Figure 3). Of the specific areas of concentration studied, participants in *Safe & Clean Niagara* focus groups believed Old Falls Street & the State Park Entrance to be the safest area studied, giving the area an average score of 4.14 out of 5 (1- dangerous, 2-unsafe, 3-fairly safe, 4- safe, 5- secure) and believed the City Parking Ramp to be the least safe area with the average score of 2.31 (see Figure 4).



**FIGURE 3:** The map above shows the location of each area of concentration. The yellow line shows the boundaries of the entire study area.



**FIGURE 4:** Focus Group Survey participant’s average response of safety of each of the five *Safe & Clean Niagara* areas of concentration: 1-Dangerous, 2-Unsafe, 3-Fairly Safe, 4-Safe & 5-Secure

### City Parking Ramp (Former Rainbow Centre Mall Parking Ramp)

#### Focus Group Sessions:

Many participants voiced strong feelings about safety in the Ramp during focus group sessions despite the fact that they had not been in the Ramp for many years. This is an area that has a strong legacy of being unsafe with very little observed crime. The biggest challenge here may simply be overcoming perception. This area had by far the most negative reviews of any area studied. The Ramp was perceived by 61% of participants to be either “dangerous (1)” or “unsafe (2)”. No respondents thought that the Ramp was “secure (5)”. Among the top reasons cited for ranking the Ramp’s safety as an issue were lighting, lack of people present, lack of security and cleanliness/maintenance issues. Several participants were very vocal in their concern about a body that had been discovered in the Ramp many years ago. A few participants pointed out that if the Ramp felt more like the Seneca Niagara Casino parking ramp they would feel more comfortable because participants reported that the casino ramp has visible security, is better maintained and has stronger lighting (see Figures 5 & 6).

Focus group participants stated, “It is just a dark scary place, there is never anyone

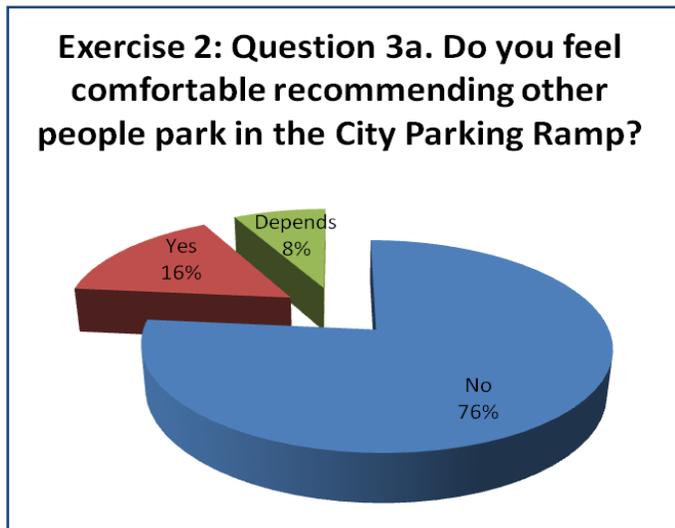


FIGURE 5: This graph shows the percentage of participants who were comfortable recommending others to use the City Park Ramp.



FIGURE 6: Participants were asked think about how they enter and exit the City Parking Ramp, and how they move around both the interior and the exterior of the facility. The facility perimeter on Rainbow Blvd, Niagara Street and First Street was studied. The face of the parking ramp on Old Falls Street is studied in the Old Falls Street area of concentration section.

working there it seems,” “unsafe, however I haven't been in the Ramp for years; it smelled and was dark and dreary,” “ugly, dirty, large waste of space, creepy when inside, stairwells are dirty, do not trust elevators, top floor has a rust color fence makes it look more scary,” “its unsightly, places for bad people to hang out, smells” and “not a great impression to give clients or tourists! It’s a scary location. It’s not welcoming. I don't feel my car or myself would be safe there” (see Images 5, 6 & 7).

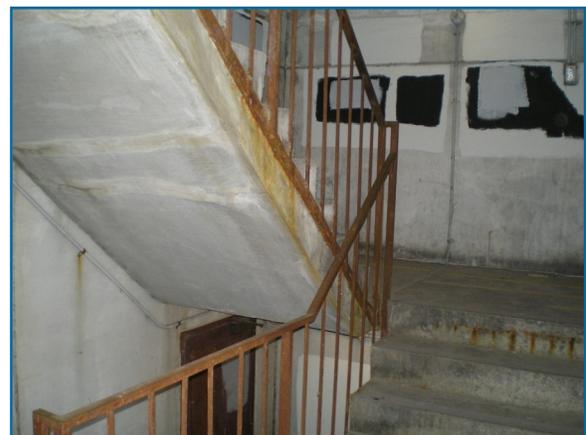
**Street Level Assessment:**

An assessment of the Ramp was conducted during the day by foot in the interior of the ramp and during the evening by car circling the exterior (see APPENDICES D & E). The Ramp was highly underutilized during the time of our audit around 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 10, 2011 as only one car was parked within the enclosure (not including the Parks & Recreation, Department of Homeland Security and NFPD cars).

There was adequate lighting within the Ramp during the day and evening but inadequate lighting on the exterior of the building and sidewalk perimeter after dark. A visitor may feel safe inside but may have an unsecure feeling exiting into the City. While the main floors appeared desolate, the stairwells were dreary and appeared uncared for because of the patches of darker paint, rust stains on the concrete, and limited lighting.



**IMAGE 5:** City Parking Ramp on the corner of Old Falls Street & 1st Street. This parking facility served the former Rainbow Center Mall.



**IMAGE 6:** Above is a picture of a stairwell within the City Parking Ramp. The lighting is inadequate and the space is dirty and dreary.



**IMAGE 7:** The signage within the parking ramp needs to be updated. For example, signage still directs users to the Rainbow Center Mall which has been closed for years.

The assessment revealed that the signage is inadequate as it is difficult to find entrances and exits and there is no signage directing users to emergency assistance. There was an assumption both in focus group sessions and during the street-level assessments that many of the signage, maintenance and limited use challenges will improve once the Ramp is remodeled under the direction of the City of Niagara Falls and when the Niagara Community College Culinary Institute, Barnes & Noble and the Small Business Administration become tenants starting as early as fall 2012 (see Appendix E for additional questions used in the street level assessment of the City Parking Ramp).

***Police Data:***

Police data show that there is relatively low criminal activity reported in and around the Ramp. It was suggested by the officers that the reason for the lack of criminal activity may have to do with how few people are using the Ramp at this point. Officers implied there is little opportunity for larceny (an issue in other parking facilities in the downtown area) when there are very few cars using the facility (see APPENDIX C to view NFPD crime data).

This was one area where time of day and season did not seem to have a particular impact on levels of crime. It is more likely that an increase in crime coincided with certain petty criminals being out of prison or jail.

The bulk of the criminal activity in the ramp was larceny (2 cases in 2008, 11 cases in 2009 and 4 cases in 2010) and criminal mischief, graffiti and other nuisance crimes, (2 cases in 2008, 14 cases in 2009, and 5 cases in 2010). There were three other isolated incidents of other crimes during the three year period examined in this study (harassment in 2008, stolen vehicle in 2009, and narcotics in 2010).

## Old Falls Street & Niagara Falls State Park Entrance

### **Focus Group Sessions:**

Old Falls Street & the State Park Entrance was the area of concentration with which participants felt the most comfortable. In terms of safety, 100% of participants indicated that they would feel comfortable recommending that other people visit this area. The two factors that were of some concern to participants were the differences in the area between the summer tourist season and the off-season, and the lack of people on the street (often linked to the seasonality issue). Participants stated that they felt safer in the peak tourist season and when there were more people on the street. While the street is well-maintained and feels safe, the lack of people around during the non-tourist season and during the night when there are not events caused some concern, and some participants noted safety is dependent on time of day. Focus group participants stated, “I would send people down any time of day between 7am and 12 midnight during any season,” “I’m not sure I would recommend state park entrance after dark if walking,” and “it feels empty during the off season which makes it feel more unsafe.” There is a perception that this area would be safer if there were more operating businesses along the street. This would also address some of the lighting issues by the shop window lights illuminating the street edges. (See Figure 7 for a map of this area of concentration.)

### **Street Level Assessment:**

The assessment of Old Falls Street & the State Park Entrance during the evening revealed the overall impression of the space to seem fairly safe. The area was clean and appeared to be well maintained (see Image 8 to the right & Image 9 on page 18).



**FIGURE 7:** This area of concentration is on Prospect St between Comfort Inn The Pointe and the Hard Rock Café, and on Old Falls Street from the State Park Entrance to the Seneca Niagara Casino Complex.



**IMAGE 8:** Above is an aerial view of the West Mall area of Old Falls Street which leads to a historic 1885 entrance of the Niagara Falls State Park.

The only maintenance issues to document were a couple of lights out near the State Park entrance. While the lighting was generally good, more exterior lighting would be encouraged by the Hard Rock Café alcoves and on the Quality Inn and future Culinary Institute facades. There are virtually no places for potential perpetrators to hide as the facades of the buildings are mostly flush and line the majority of the street and there appear to be very few alcoves. The wayfinding system present helps to guide visitors and those unfamiliar with the area throughout the tourist district (see Image 10)(see Appendix D to view the street level assessment questionnaire).



**IMAGE 9:** Above shows the East Mall portion of Old Falls Street, which leads towards the Seneca Niagara Casino Complex.

**Police Data:**

On average, top crimes in the Old Falls Street & State Park Entrance area between 2008 and 2010 were larceny (on average 6 cases per year), disorderly conduct and criminal mischief (on average 3 crimes per year each). In addition, there were a few one-time occurrences, including harassment and a stolen vehicle in 2008, narcotics in 2009, and robbery in 2010. The bulk of the crimes in this area are concentrated around the Hard Rock Café and the Conference Center Niagara Falls, likely a result of the amount of activity occurring in those locations and the congregation of large numbers of people (see APPENDIX C to view NFPD crime data).

There does seem to be a seasonal link to the crime occurring in this area of concentration, again because the summer months are the time when there are large numbers of people using the two largest facilities and attending events in the area (Conference Center Niagara Falls and the Hard Rock Café). There does not seem to be a linkage between the time of day and occurrence of crime.



**IMAGE 10:** This information station is part of the wayfinding system located on Old Falls Street. It helps to guide visitors around downtown Niagara Falls, NY.

### Buffalo Avenue Heritage District Focus Group Sessions:

Many participants were not as familiar with this area as the other areas of concentration in the study. During the focus group session it was apparent that many participants did not recommend other people visit the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District because of a lack of activities to draw tourists, not because of safety concerns (see Figure 8 for a map of this area of concentration). This concern was not adequately expressed in the Exercise 2: Question 3a responses. Had participants answered this question only in terms of safety the results would likely have shown fewer “no’s” (see Figure 9). This is evident by safety audit respondents who answered no to exercise 2 question 3a stating, I would “not (visit) after dark” because there is “not much police presence and not a lot of activity,” “there is nothing there to do” as it is mostly a “businesses and residential” area, “I don't think I would recommend it because it’s not like it’s a tourist attraction. It’s a residential area, nothing to see for tourists,” and “I feel fine recommending this area but there is no reason to send people there.”

There were four factors featured prominently in the safety of Buffalo Avenue, each having

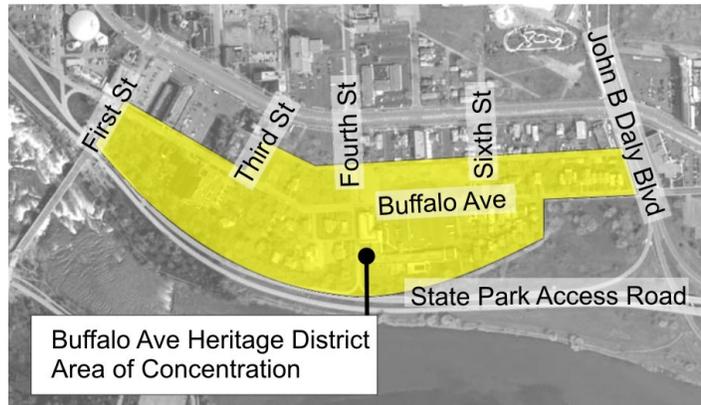


FIGURE 8: Buffalo Avenue Heritage District participants were asked to analyze the residential areas along Buffalo Avenue extending between John B. Daly Blvd and First Street.

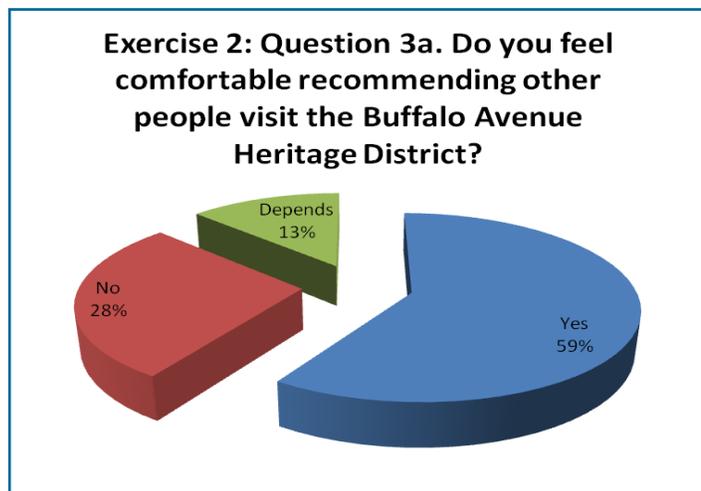


FIGURE 9: Above shows how comfortable survey participants were at recommending others visit the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District. Of those who did not recommend the area, many did so because they were unfamiliar with the space, not because of safety concerns.

more than 30% of respondents mention that factor in their surveys. They were time of day (37%), lighting (36%), maintenance and cleanliness (32%) and season (31%). Lighting and time of day are likely correlated. Participants wrote they were very “hesitant to recommend” others visit the area due to “poor lighting,” as the area is “very dark and uninviting” and people “have fallen on the sidewalks at night because of lack of lighting.” Participants stated there seem to be, “many unkempt properties and empty lots that aren't maintained,” and that the area has “bad roads” and “run down homes.”

One issue raised about the seasonality of Buffalo Avenue was the inaccessibility of the sidewalks as a result of snow. In this district, there is no snow storage area between the street and the sidewalk, so snow plows clearing the street generally push the snow onto the sidewalks, blocking access (see Image 11). Very few of the property owners fully clear the sidewalks after the plows go by. While these are the issues participants believed to link season with maintenance, there are other cleanliness and maintenance issues that are present year-round, including the condition of housing, lawn maintenance, garbage in the alleys and other issues. Due to these factors survey participants stated the area is perceived as “dirty,” “dark,” and “not a walkable area unless it is daylight and summer.” Additionally, seasonality had to do with the number of people in the district; there tend to be more people present on the street during the summer tourist season, a factor that made participants feel more comfortable.

### ***Street Level Assessment:***

The street level assessment of Buffalo Avenue revealed the overall first impression to be unsafe because the area is extremely dark. The area is almost completely unlit in the evenings on the blocks between 4th and 6th Streets as the hotel spanning this general area (the only structure on the street in this block) is presently not in use and the street lights in that stretch are absent, burned out, or inadequate to light the space (see Image 12 on page 21). There is also an inadequate amount of vehicular and pedestrian wayfinding signage in this district.



**IMAGE 11:** This winter image shows how the sidewalks along Buffalo Avenue get covered with snow each time snow plows go by. The sidewalks close proximity to the road makes it challenging for residents to keep their sidewalks clear of snow.

A survey participant commented, “As a tourist (I would feel) kind of lost here.” The rhythm and layout of the neighborhood is very positive in that it helps to maintain sightlines. Some of the homes in this corridor are well kept while others seem neglected. The large vacant lots lead to a feeling of insecurity. The alleys are very poorly lighted and not well maintained (see Appendix D to view the street level assessment questionnaire).



**IMAGE 12:** Above is an image of the blocks between 4th Street and 6th Street. Since the closing of the Fallside Hotel & Conference Center in this block this area has been incredibly dark in the evenings due to inadequate lighting.

***Police Data:***

2008 to 2010 NFPD data show similar trends to the other areas of concentration studied. The majority of the crime is larceny (12 cases on average per year) and criminal mischief (4 cases on average per year). There are several instances of other crimes in the district spread over the three year period: assault (2 instances, one in 2009 and one in 2010), disorderly conduct (one case in 2008), harassment (3 instances, one in 2009 and two in 2010), robbery (one case in 2008) and stolen vehicle (4 instances, one in 2008, two in 2009, one in 2010) (see APPENDIX C to view NFPD crime data).

Much of the crime in this area was concentrated around the several large hotels and inns located in the district. Of the years studied (2008-2010), the only year that there was a significant spike in crime during the high summer tourist season was 2009, but there was no overall seasonal or hourly trend year to year.

### Third Street Business District

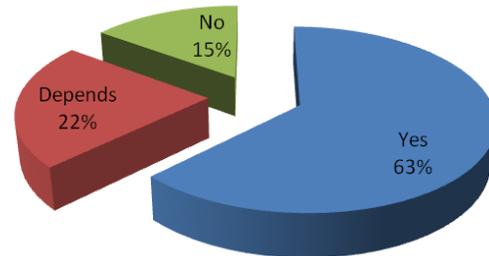
#### Focus Group Sessions:

Although the majority of focus group participants would feel comfortable recommending that other people visit the Third Street Business District, there were still quite a few who either would not recommend it or would hesitate to recommend it (see Figure 10 for a map of this area of concentration). Responses in the focus groups led to four major factors that affect their feeling of safety in that district: season (37%), time of day (37%), people (33%), and law enforcement (22%) (see Figure 11). From responses and discussions in the focus groups, there seemed to be two different safety issues on the street. One was a feeling of remoteness on the street when there were no other people around. This seemed to be linked to the off-season winter months. The second issue was a feeling of insecurity in the evenings and late at night when the bars on the street attract visitors, some of whom are intoxicated and rowdy. Participants were unlikely to visit this area “late on Friday or Saturday nights” and they perceived the area to be “unsafe at night around bars.” One survey participant stated of the Third Street Business District, “I recommend walking during the day and driving after dark.” It was this issue that was most frequently linked to a desire for more law enforcement presence, with participants saying, “At night and on weekends more police presence is needed.”



**FIGURE 10:** Participants were asked to think about how they enter establishments on Third Street between Niagara and Main Streets, keeping in mind that some businesses have rear entrances, and to think about the alleyways parallel to Third Street.

#### Exercise 2: Question 3a. Do you feel comfortable recommending other people visit the Third Street Entertainment District?



**FIGURE 11:** The majority of focus group participants recommend others visit the Third Street Business District. Those who were skeptical or did not recommend others visit were mainly concerned with evening activities in this area of concentration.

***Street Level Assessment:***

The overall impression of this area in the street level assessment was fairly safe at night with adequate lighting, maintenance, cleanliness and signage. Additional lighting is recommended in the municipal lot at 446-448 Third Street. Many property owners whose businesses have exterior lighting did not have that lighting turned on at the time when the assessment was conducted in the late evening. That additional light would help provide pedestrian-level lighting that would make the area feel more secure. The sidewalks are wide making for a very pedestrian friendly street (see Image 13). The alleyways behind Third Street present the greatest challenges for their need of additional lighting, cleaning of brush areas and overall maintenance (see Appendix D to view the street level assessment questionnaire).



**IMAGE 13:** This image shows how the wide sidewalks, benches and trees along Third Street make the street very pedestrian friendly.

***Police Data:***

Many concerns about bar activity in the area can be validated by the NFPD data, showing that, by far, the greatest volume of calls to the NFPD from within the study area came from the Third Street Business District. The crimes in this area were mostly attributed to the rowdy crowds that may be present late in the evenings and on weekends and this is the only area of concentration examined by *Safe & Clean Niagara* that showed a strong time of day trend. On average, 73% of the crimes in this area occurred between 11pm and 6am. There is no overall seasonal trend to the crime in this area, possibly reflecting the fact that the clientele is mostly local and not dependent in the increase in tourist population during the summer months.

Overall, there has been a significant decrease in crime in the Third Street Business District over the three years examined in this study (95 crimes in 2008, 59 crimes in 2009, and 39 crimes in 2010). Criminal mischief defies this trend, which is consistent with the significant amount of criminal mischief seen in the rest of the study area. Additionally, disorderly conduct peaked in 2009 and fell significantly in 2010, likely the result of the closing of Club New York, one of the rowdier bars on the street (16 cases in 2008, 18 cases in 2009 and 5 cases in 2010). Assault showed a similar trend (9 cases in 2008, 8 cases in 2009, and one case in 2010).

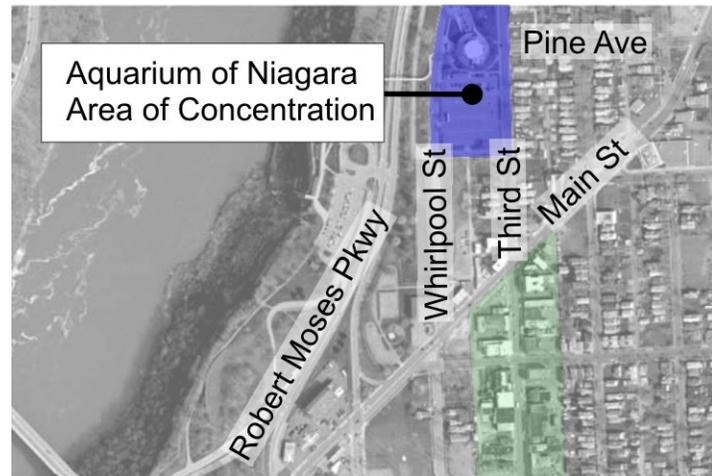
The crimes that remain the most significant issue in this area are criminal mischief (8 cases in 2010), disorderly conduct (5 cases in 2010) and indecent exposure (9 cases in 2010). As there are a number of late-night drinking establishments in this area, it can be anticipated that these issues will remain and will need to be carefully monitored by police and other security. Additionally, there were still instances of open containers, assault and other crimes that can be attributed to alcohol consumption (see APPENDIX C to view NFPD crime data).

### Aquarium of Niagara Focus Group Sessions:

The Aquarium of Niagara was an area of the City that focus group respondents felt was largely quite safe (see Figure 12 for a map of this area of concentration). There were no respondents who felt that the area was “dangerous” and no respondents indicated that they would feel uncomfortable recommending that people visit the Aquarium, although there was a good percentage (32%) whose recommendation would depend on some factors (see Figure 13). There were six major factors that impacted this decision: season, time of day, location, lighting, people, and the houses across the street.

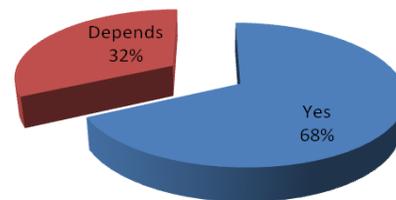
Season and time of day are factors that have been present in most of the areas considered in this study. The factors for this district are the same. Late nights feel less safe, particularly because the facility is closed at night.

Participants noted, “The landscaping, (pedestrian) bridge and area is nice looking but I wouldn't feel safe walking there at night” and that they would visit, “during open hours” if they “locked belongings up” in their car and would not recommend “walking around the grounds after dark.” The next highest factor was location. This has to do with the isolation of this facility. The Aquarium is separated from the other tourist amenities in the area (the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center and the State Park) by the Robert Moses Parkway and is only connected by an unlighted pedestrian bridge. The facility itself is also located at the edge of a very large parking lot with setback from the street and a large landscaped area to the north. This physical location leads people to feel somewhat isolated and removed and therefore feel unsafe.



**FIGURE 12:** This area of concentration includes the area looking out from the Aquarium entrance on Whirlpool St. It includes the Aquarium parking lot, the homes across the street on Third St, and the pedestrian bridge leading to the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center.

#### Exercise 2: Question 3a. Do you feel comfortable recommending other people visit the Aquarium of Niagara?



**FIGURE 13:** The figure above shows the percentage of participants who felt comfortable recommending others visit the Aquarium. The main reasons for respondents stating “depends” were due to concerns when visiting after dark.

Survey takers commented the area feels, “isolated,” and is “not pedestrian friendly” as it is “not easily accessible unless driving.”

Lighting was another factor raised in the focus groups. There are vehicular scale lights lining Third Street that illuminate the parking lot fairly well, but there is some improvement that could be made in terms of supplying light for pedestrians and making sure that all areas around the facility are adequately lighted. Participants recommended to add “more lighting at night” as “more lighting may help to deter unwelcome guests” (see Image 14). The

facility is across the street from apartments and housing units on Third Street that appear to be poorly maintained. Eighteen percent of respondents stated the homes across the street were a safety issue. Aquarium of Niagara staff also commented on the homes making guests feel insecure. Survey participants commented that the “run down” “homes across the street are a problem” in terms of safety and that they are “eye sores.” Staff also commented how the employee entrance is particularly dark and could be a potential entrapment site due to all of the obstructions that block one’s view from that doorway. Participants recommend increasing the presence of law enforcement around the aquarium stating, “post an officer on foot” or in a “patrol car around the property.”

### ***Street Level Assessment:***

The evening audit of the Aquarium of Niagara showed the area to be fairly safe. The building lighting would be adequate if all lights were operational. Perimeter lighting of the parking lot is good, although for such a large expanse of parking the middle of the lot would feel dark and isolated if there were many cars present at night. There seemed to be good visibility ahead in the parking lot, but it is not easy to spot what is happening beyond the perimeter of the facility because of the space lying within a large green landscape with limited lighting. The bushes are kept low and not too dense which makes for positive sightlines. The area is kept clean and there is no graffiti or litter around. The new signage is very attractive however the first impression of signage is that it is present but in some cases not large enough or not



**IMAGE 14:** This is an image of the Aquarium of Niagara Parking lot. As you can see there are no lights within the center of the parking lot, only around the perimeter.

coordinated. The closing time of the facility is also not clearly designated on signage on the exterior of the building. The audit supported the focus group participants' feelings of isolation in that the facility is literally cut off from other destinations in the area including the Third Street Business District and the attractions within the Niagara Falls State Park. The slope of the natural landscape leads to the dead-end of the highway and the gorge beyond (see Appendix D to view the street level assessment questionnaire).

***Police Data:***

Crime statistical data showed that the majority of crimes around the Aquarium of Niagara focused on property and not bodily harm. There were many instances of unattended items visible in unlocked and locked vehicles leading to larceny (car break-ins). The top reported crimes in this area were larceny (8 cases in 2008, 7 cases in 2009, and 10 cases in 2010) and criminal mischief (5 cases in 2008, 7 cases in 2009, and 7 cases in 2010). This is troubling because both of the top crimes in this area are actually increasing over the three year period. Time of year does not seem to have a bearing on number of crimes. Additionally, most crimes are not happening in the area of the Aquarium during the night (11pm to 6am), which makes sense because the facility is closed and there are generally no cars or other property in the area.

The police pointed out that there are no cameras pointing into the parking lot at the Aquarium. There is only one camera on the premises, which is pointing to the outdoor sea lion enclosure. Police recommended installing an additional camera to monitor the parking lot (see APPENDIX C to view NFPD crime data).