

Niagara Falls New York

September 23–28, 2012



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Strategies for Reimagining the Former Rainbow Centre Mall
and Downtown Niagara Falls

September 23–28, 2012

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and
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About the Urban Land Institute

THE MISSION OF THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI is committed to

- Bringing together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs;
- Fostering collaboration within and beyond ULI's membership through mentoring, dialogue, and problem solving;
- Exploring issues of urbanization, conservation, regeneration, land use, capital formation, and sustainable development;
- Advancing land use policies and design practices that respect the uniqueness of both built and natural environments;
- Sharing knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, and electronic media; and
- Sustaining a diverse global network of local practice and advisory efforts that address current and future challenges.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has nearly 30,000 members worldwide, representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines. ULI relies heavily on the experience of its members. It is through member involvement and information resources that ULI has been able to set standards of excellence in development practice. The Institute has long been recognized as one of the world's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

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1025 Thomas Jefferson Street, NW
Suite 500 West
Washington, DC 20007-5201

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About ULI Advisory Services

THE GOAL OF ULI'S Advisory Services Program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 400 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfield redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's Advisory Services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda for a five-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing day composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; a day of hour-long interviews of typically 50 to 75 key community representatives; and two days of formulating recommendations. Long nights of discussion precede the panel's conclusions. On the final day on site, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. A written report is prepared and published.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, participants in ULI's five-day panel assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues

and to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academics, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this Advisory Services panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

ULI Program Staff

Gayle Berens
Senior Vice President, Education and Advisory Group

Thomas W. Eitler
Vice President, Advisory Services

Annie Finkenbinder Best
Director, Education and Advisory Group

Caroline Dietrich
Panel Associate, Education and Advisory Group

Gwen McCall
Senior Administrative Manager, Education and Advisory Group

James A. Mulligan
Managing Editor

Laura Glassman, Publications Professionals LLC
Manuscript Editor

Betsy VanBuskirk
Creative Director

Deanna Pineda, Muse Advertising Design
Layout Artist

Craig Chapman
Senior Director, Publishing Operations

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Finally and most important, the panel acknowledges the members of the Niagara Falls community—residents, employees, business people, agency representatives, and neighborhood leaders alike—who participated in the panel interview sessions. Representing a diverse and informed public, through their passion and understanding these stakeholders provided valuable information and perspectives, greatly aiding the panel in its analysis.

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ULI Panel and Project Staff

Panel Chair

Glenda Hood
President
Hood Partners LLC
Orlando, Florida

Panel Members

Nancy Cappola
Vice President, Business Development
North Star Advisors
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Bill Clarke
Planning Consultant
Ross, California

David Hancock
Principal
CBT Architects/Childs Bertman Tseckares Inc.
Boston, Massachusetts

Charles Johnson
President
C.H. Johnson Consulting Inc.
Chicago, Illinois

John Orfield
Principal
BOKA Powell
Dallas, Texas

Monte Ritchey
President
The Conformity Corporation
Charlotte, North Carolina

Kathleen Rose
President
Rose & Associates Southeast Inc.
Davidson, North Carolina

ULI Project Staff

Thomas W. Eitler
Vice President
Advisory Services

Caroline Dietrich
Logistics Manager

Student Intern

Julia Triman
University of Virginia
School of Architecture

Foreword: The Panel's Assignment

NIAGARA FALLS, NEW YORK, is a city of 50,000 people located on the Niagara River at the United States/Canada border. The city is world famous for its proximity to Niagara Falls. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was a center for both tourism, because of the falls, and manufacturing, with its readily available electric power. As distinguished from the city of Niagara Falls, Ontario (population 82,000), Niagara Falls, New York, has been losing population since the mid-1950s as industry and corporate headquarters have abandoned the city. The Rainbow Bridge, a steel-arch bridge across the Niagara River, is an international border crossing connecting the United States with Canada. Built in 1941, its terminus on the U.S. side discharges approximately 130,000 vehicles a month into the downtown area.

In the late 1960s, the city embarked upon an urban renewal initiative that demolished vast swaths of the city's downtown urban fabric. Although the Niagara region and the Niagara Falls State Park continue to attract visitors, downtown Niagara Falls has struggled with the effects of urban renewal. Some of the efforts to revitalize downtown included the following:

- The Wintergarden, a former public arboretum designed by Cesar Pelli, was built in 1977 on top of the public right-of-way of Falls Street. After years of maintenance issues, reuse, and low visitation, it was sold by the city to private interests in 2004 for an unsuccessful commercial use, and later acquired and demolished in a 2009 effort to restore Falls Street (now called Old Falls Street).
- The Niagara Falls Convention and Civic Center was a 113,000-square-foot venue developed by the state of New York primarily for large meetings and entertainment or sporting events, with a capacity of 10,000 people. As



a result of a compact between the state and the Seneca Nation of Indians, the center was turned over to the Seneca Nation and redeveloped as the Seneca Niagara Casino in 2002. Located on the east side of downtown, the casino now occupies 147,000 square feet with a new 604-room, 26-story hotel developed and operated by the Nation.

Regional map.

- In 2004, the state developed the new Conference and Events Center Niagara Falls on Old Falls Street. This multipurpose facility consists of 116,000 square feet of event, ballroom, and professional conference space.



An aerial view of Niagara Falls looking east.

Rainbow Centre Mall

Built as part of public/private partnership (i.e., a 75-year leasehold) between the city and the Cordish Company of Baltimore, Maryland, the Rainbow Centre Mall, an approximately 287,000-square-foot indoor shopping mall, was developed in 1982 as a component of a city-owned parking structure. The mall operated as a retail location until 2000, when the loss of its anchor retailers prompted the Cordish Company to close most of the mall. In 2010, the Cordish Company donated its development rights in the building to the Niagara County Community College Foundation to allow the southern portion of the mall space, roughly 87,000 square feet, to be repurposed by the college as the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute. The Culinary Institute includes food service and instructional facilities to accommodate up to 1,000 students (its inaugural class consists of 350 students). Other uses include a small



Two views of the former Rainbow Centre Mall. The southern portion of the structure has been renovated to accommodate the 87,000-square-foot Niagara Falls Culinary Institute.

business development center (with a test kitchen and sales area for local food products); a “community kitchen” (for local and tourist-oriented day classes); and a series of street-level retail uses, such as a bakery, a deli, a sit-down restaurant, and a college-format Barnes & Noble bookstore.

USA Niagara Development Corporation

In January 2001, the state of New York established the USA Niagara Development Corporation (USAN), a subsidiary of the state’s economic development agency (Empire State Development), which focuses specifically on facilitating redevelopment in downtown Niagara Falls, New York. With its intimate partnership with the city of Niagara Falls, USAN has been the driving force behind revitalization of downtown Niagara Falls as a tourism center, including the construction the new Conference and Events Center, the reestablishment of Old Falls Street, and the redevelopment of the Rainbow Centre Mall.

As part of the multiagency agreement for the funding and development of the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute, USAN has been tasked as the sole marketer and solicitor for new uses in the balance of the former mall not occupied by the institute. As an initial step toward this effort, USAN, funded in part with grants from National Grid Corporation and the ULI Foundation, engaged ULI to undertake an Advisory Services panel to examine new uses in the balance of the former mall.



The Panel's Assignment

Since the completion of the Culinary Institute, roughly 200,000 square feet in the former mall remains as raw space, fully cleared of its former interior finishes with all environmental issues remediated or abated. USAN asked this Advisory Services panel to consider a series of questions to determine appropriate uses for the remainder of the former Rainbow Centre Mall. Questions to be addressed by the panel included the following:

- What is an appropriate mix of particular uses and square footages in the space?
- Could other possible redevelopment scenarios for the space be economically successful, including pure adaptive use, partial demolition of certain building elements, or additional new development?
- How can the reuse of the space best complement its closest neighbor—the Culinary Institute—and other adjoining downtown uses?
- What would be the most successful uses of upper-floor space in the former mall?
- Would other uses fit into the unique context of the project site near the recreational opportunities of Niagara Falls and the Niagara Gorge?
- Given the monolithic nature of the structure, what would be the best design techniques to reduce the perceived scale of the building to better fit into the pedestrian-oriented setting that is being promoted through various infrastructure projects downtown?
- What would be the best design techniques for “turning the building inside-out”? This particularly is an issue where interior floor grades do not match adjoining sidewalks.
- How can a new design best deal with the issues of loading, utility services, and storage?
- What can be done to incorporate sustainable design practices into redevelopment of the former mall space, and are options available for any emerging energy applications?
- Is the issuance of a developer request for proposals (RFP) an appropriate and viable approach to advancing the redevelopment of the property? What is the profile of a development entity that can deliver the desired results? What would be the best legal structure for the city to allow long-term use of the remaining space (e.g., sale, long-term lease, or other)? What role, if any, should the city of Niagara Falls, USAN, or other public sector entities play in redevelopment of the remaining former mall space?
- Is seeking a single redeveloper or staging a phased approach to reuse of the property more appropriate?



*The Urban Land Institute
Advisory Services panel.*

Summary of Recommendations

The panel focused on several physical, institutional, and organization improvements that can help USAN and the city move forward with a redevelopment strategy for the Rainbow Centre Mall. These recommendations include the following:

- Redeveloping and retenanting the mall, using one or a combination of three design scenarios outlined in this report;
- Understanding and matching the current market potential and psychographic profile of the Niagara Falls area (including Canada) for the repurposed space;
- Initiating redevelopment and retenanting for key locations around the mall site on Old Falls Street;
- Improving coordination among state and local agencies;

- Undertaking short-term actions, such as improved facades, better wayfinding, recladding of the parking ramp, enforcement of signage controls, and establishment of an ambassador program; and
- Implementing a request for qualifications (RFQ) process.

The remainder of this report elaborates on these recommendations.

Initial Observations and the Market

THE ULI PANEL WAS INVITED to provide a summary market analysis and economic, design, development, and implementation strategies for the former Rainbow Centre Mall in Niagara Falls, New York (Subject Property). Its purpose is to assist in scoping the development program to achieve the overall mission of the project sponsors to “revitalize downtown Niagara Falls as a sustainable, globally recognized place to visit, as well as a place in which to live and work.” Niagara Falls, its downtown, and the former Rainbow Centre Mall have been well studied. Rather than retread the same ground, the panel reviewed and used a number of well-qualified studies from respected professionals as the jumping-off point for its analysis and recommendations with respect to the redevelopment of the former mall. The following documents were included in this review:

- Economic and Market Assessment, Niagara Falls, New York, June 15, 2011, by HVS Consulting;
- The Economic Impact of Tourism in New York, 2011, by Tourism Economics;
- Downtown Niagara Falls Strategic Action Agenda, March 2011, by USA Niagara Development Corporation and Empire State Development;
- Niagara Falls, New York, 2011 Visitors Report, June 2012, by Longwoods International;
- Buffalo-Niagara Shopping Research, 2011, by Longwoods International; and
- Comprehensive Plan for the City of Niagara Falls, USA, August 2004.

Subject Property and Context

During the Industrial Revolution, the power of the Niagara River created the city of Niagara Falls, which continues to exist because of its attraction as a natural wonder of North America. The city’s survival depends on those who are entrusted with its care. Historically, the community has viewed its residents and visitors (and the areas they frequent) as distinctly separate. The sustainability of Niagara Falls requires the integration of people; the environment in which they live, work, and recreate; and the economy to ensure reliable prosperity.

The former Rainbow Centre Mall is located in downtown Niagara Falls, in Niagara County, in the Western New York region. The Buffalo–Niagara Falls metropolitan statistical area (MSA) includes Niagara and Erie counties. The purpose of this effort is to understand the dynamics of the local economy and its context as a globally recognized icon to frame a sustainable plan that will contribute to the overall community it serves.

Key Themes

The outcome of the panel’s review and analysis provides the following key themes for the Subject Property, which recognize and support the region’s assets:

- Downtown Niagara Falls and the new Culinary Institute will serve as a centerpiece of social, academic, and tourism activity in the community. The institute will draw students, faculty, and citizens to its campus from Niagara and Erie counties and visitors from around the world. Niagara Falls is a key asset as a natural wonder of North America, bringing roughly 8 million visitors to the area as the largest natural attraction in the United States. Surrounded by a ribbon of parks and trails, in-

cluding Niagara Falls State Park, the oldest state park in the nation, the waterfront is a key focus of ecotourism.

- The area surrounding Niagara Falls is rich in agricultural assets, including a number of farms and grape vineyards producing regionally popular wines, as well as cherries, peaches, and other stone fruits. The farm-to-table movement in the region has sprouted a number of microbusinesses related to food, preservation, and presentation, thus providing small business and employment opportunities in “agri-tourism.”
- The Niagara River area was the hub of commerce and shipping during the 18th century. This provides much of Niagara’s industrial history, which was fueled by river-generated power. Neighboring villages of Lewiston and Youngstown had a bloody history when the first shots of the War of 1812 were fired across the border. Old Fort Niagara provides an educational history of battles, industry, migration, and folklore unique to America. This heritage includes its place in history as a last stop on the Underground Railroad for many escaped slaves journeying to freedom, as soon to be memorialized at the Underground Railroad Interpretive Center near the former crossing over the Niagara River where many of these movements to Canada took place. This educational and historical component is the backdrop for a rich heritage tourism theme.

Together, these thematic areas provide opportunities for education, inspiration, job opportunities, and most important, expanded tourism and community wealth in rebuilding a sustainable economy in the Niagara Falls region.

Market Reality

The panel began with a look at the current reality—that is, the economic, demographic, and social elements that make up the community and the study area. The panel used a combination of methodologies in developing the findings and recommendations of this report. The analysis and forecasting of market data, which includes demographic and population estimates together with economic and employment estimates, is both art and science. All

market research analysis begins with U.S. and Canadian Census Bureau data, which have limitations as to both accuracy and timeliness. Nonetheless, the data provide a benchmark as much for a retrospective look as a prospective one. Three factors must be considered when looking exclusively at market data: the role of economic drivers that are a departure from past trends; growth or contractions from primary centers into outlying areas, and vice versa; and constraints caused by availability of land physically and legally suited for development. When the combined market of both Buffalo–Niagara Falls and Toronto is considered, its population is the largest concentration of people after New York City and Los Angeles. Although the following data focus on the United States, the panel recognizes that Canada includes a substantial component of the market and trade area.

Demographic Analysis

The basic element of any market-driven plan considers the demographic makeup of the community, past trends, and future potential. The panel reviewed the data from a macro to a micro perspective to summarize the place of Niagara Falls in the larger economy. The state of New York is made up of ten labor market regions, 14 MSAs, and 62 counties. The Rainbow Centre Mall is located in the Western New York Region, Buffalo-Niagara MSA, and Niagara County. The data in this analysis include 2010 U.S. census data or 2010 Environmental Systems Research Institute Inc. (Esri) estimates, which use national census data with local updates, New York state data, and other regional and local resources. Data are also compiled from other federal and binational sources.

Population

U.S. census figures estimate the U.S. population grew 9.7 percent overall from 2000 to the most recent census in 2010. Niagara County lost 1.5 percent of its population, bringing it to 216,469, which is close to the same level seen during the 1950s. More dramatically, the city of Niagara Falls lost 9.7 percent of its population, shrinking to 50,193, which is similar to its population level last seen in 1920—thus losing more than nine decades of growth.

Age Distribution

In 2000, the U.S. median age was 35.3 years, increasing to 36.7 by 2010. By contrast, in 2010 the median age in New York state was 35.9 years; in the city of Niagara Falls, 39.8; and in the downtown district, 41.3 years, suggesting a population that is both shrinking and aging in place. The distribution in all age categories is fairly diverse: the largest percentage of population in the 45–54 year range is in downtown Niagara (17.7 percent) and that in the 0–15 year range is in the city of Niagara Falls (18.0 percent). Most notable is the shrinkage of the group 25–34 years of age, showing a decline in generation Y (also known as “millennials”) within the community. This decrease is notable with regard to the gen-Y student population attending college and finding job opportunities in the community, because these factors affect housing.

Household Income

The median household income of Niagara Falls residents is \$31,452, significantly lower than the state of New York median of \$55,603. The disparities in income distribution become evident when comparing income levels. The largest percentage in the city of Niagara Falls is the \$50,000–74,900 range (16.80 percent), followed by \$15,000–24,999 (16.58 percent). Additionally, 17.60 percent of households have incomes below the poverty level. Within the downtown district, one-third of households live below the poverty level, with the largest percentage of population (24.68 percent) in the \$15,000–24,999 range, according to the census.

Educational Attainment

The working population 25 years of age and older by educational attainment provides insight into the skills of the local labor force. According to the 2010 census data, 13 percent of the city's population and 15 percent of the downtown population hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Education and intellectual capital is important not only in attracting companies to the region but also for employment and entrepreneurship. Nationally a great deal of discussion centers on the “creative class” and the economic effects of business and activity, regardless of educational attainment (e.g., Steve Jobs and Bill Gates). The discussion suggests

a strong relationship between cultural and lifestyle amenities often associated with place making and business and entrepreneurial activities that directly affect the economy. This debate often takes center stage in areas where an imbalance exists among quality of life, occupational skills, and employment opportunities. Niagara Falls should support policies and actions that improve these quality-of-life and employment opportunities.

Economic Analysis

Economic base analysis is used to understand what drives a regional or local economy and determines real estate demand. The underlying theme suggests that jobs drive demand for real estate: in other words, for every job that is created, a multiplier effect increases overall employment, thus increasing both population and income within an area benefiting from such job growth. The corresponding growth (or decline) in jobs, population, and income corresponds to demand for various commercial and residential uses of real estate. There are two types of jobs: those which export their goods and services outside the community (basic employment), and those which service the local community (service or nonbasic employment). Therefore, attracting companies with basic jobs to locate in the area is the goal of most economic development officials. These companies both occupy office and industrial space and are the catalysts for subsequent growth in housing and retail. Other factors such as education, income, and tourism influence workforce development, housing, and consumer expenditures.

Employment

According to data obtained from the New York State Department of Labor, the Buffalo-Niagara region ranked eighth in New York state in unemployment, at 8.8 percent for August 2012.

Private sector employment in the Buffalo-Niagara region showed a net employment growth of 200 jobs over the 12 months ending in August 2012. The sectors with the most gains include educational and health services and manufacturing, whereas the biggest losers included professional

Job Growth by Employment Sector, Buffalo-Niagara Region, August 2012

Increase or decrease in number of jobs	Employment sector
2,800	Educational and health services
1,300	Manufacturing
1,000	Natural resources, mining, and construction
400	Information
200	Other services
-3,200	Professional and business services
-1,200	Leisure and hospitality
-900	Financial
-200	Trade, transportation, and utilities

Sources: New York Department of Labor; Rose and Associates.

and business services, and leisure and hospitality (see figure above).

Economic Base

Successful economic development strategies result in job growth. Job growth creates demand for specific land use needs. These land uses are subject to business recruitment efforts and product availability attracting investment to the region. The sectors with the largest percentage of employment in the county include the following North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) categories: 722 Food services and drinking places (9.97 percent), 622 Hospitals (5.45 percent), and 623 Nursing and residential care facilities (5.36 percent).

The region's employment location quotient, or percentage of U.S. employment ratios that exceed base industry standards, identifies which sectors contribute the greatest local job and economic growth. Those with quotients greater than 1.00 demonstrate ratios higher than U.S. averages and thus contribute to the local economic base. The most significant contributors to the local economy, in other words, the economic drivers in Niagara County, are shown in the following figure.

Significant Contributors to the Local Economy, Niagara County, 2011 Annual Average

Location quotient	Industry sector (NAICS category)
9.80	487 Scenic and sightseeing transportation
5.49	562 Waste management and remediation
4.35	485 Transit and ground transportation
3.97	327 Nonmetallic mineral product manufacturing
3.17	325 Chemical manufacturing
2.40	332 Fabricated metal product manufacturing
2.06	448 Clothing and clothing accessories stores
2.01	336 Transportation equipment manufacturing

Sources: New York Department of Labor; Rose and Associates.

These categories clearly demonstrate the importance of tourism-related industries and the continued role of industry and manufacturing in the region. The strength of the fashion outlet mall is also evident. This information provides confirmation of areas that serve as the foundation of the economy and marketplace.

Quality of Life, Place, and Community

Similar to *quality of life*, *place making* is a subjective term associated with creating a sense of place commonly found in downtowns, villages, arts districts, resort areas, and other places where people gather to socialize or to honor a historical event, time, or place. Although definitions and terms may vary, most have similar elements that are critical to success or memorable stature. More often than not, these places are associated with things to buy and things to do, such as shops, restaurants, and other entertainment venues. Physical and structural changes to the landscape through public improvements can be successful only with private investment to create a place that matches consumer spending, behavior, and lifestyle patterns. In Niagara Falls, these areas are scattered in a variety of centers and locations that are not physically connected. Many of these areas lack a sense of place and therefore must also be the focus of this project.

Central Place Theory

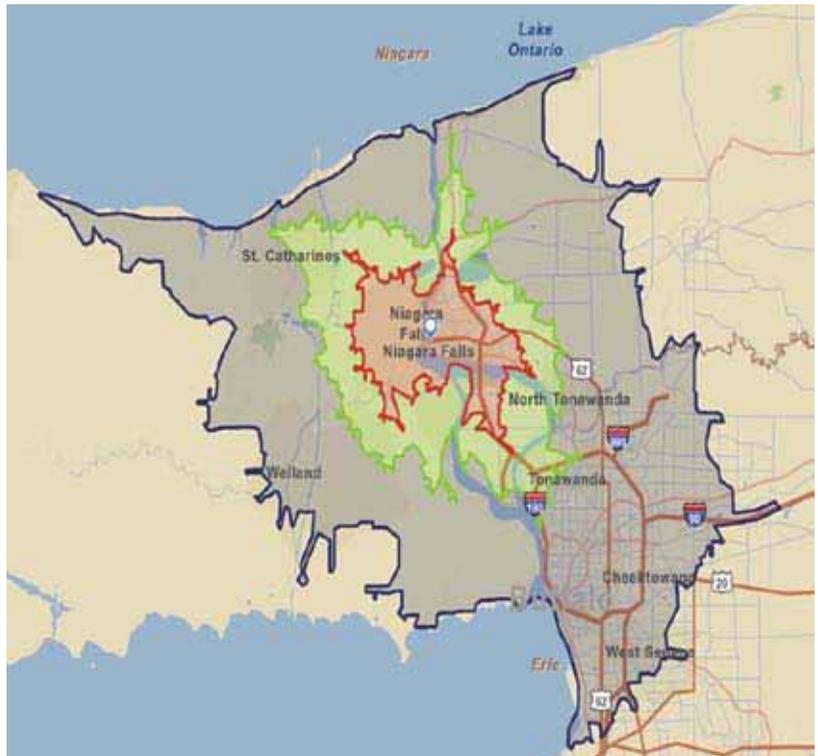
Central place theory (CPT) is used to evaluate commercial feasibility and trade areas. The underlying theme of CPT is that the location decisions of retail and business establishments are driven by rent-maximizing forces. That is, providers of goods and services will locate where they believe they can maximize profits. CPT suggests that certain locations are more desirable than others, primarily because of the location of existing businesses or drivers that are already attracting customers. Thus “central places” with varying degrees of magnitude attract such customers. The fundamental theme of CPT is that commercial or retail locations are spatially interdependent, implying that growth is not random, but ordered and rational. Downtown Niagara Falls can be that central place for the community.

Civic and Public Infrastructure

The city’s infrastructure and assets include roads, streetscapes, government offices, public parks, and recreation facilities. Together they form the civic nucleus, connecting the community socially to create a quality of life that must become an integral part of Niagara Falls. This integration requires leadership that is both bold and innovative in finding ways to create a vibrant central business district that will anchor downtown’s sense of place.

Identifying Trade Areas

Trade areas identify the market potential for goods and services within a specific physical area. They assist in determining threshold demographics such as population, consumer dollars, workers, education, and other factors required to support various uses. Primary and secondary trade areas are identified because companies seeking to locate here will draw from the region for employees and consumer dollars. A trade area for data collection is primarily defined as a prescribed distance radius around a specific intersection or location. The secondary method, becoming more common with urbanization and growing traffic volumes, is the drive-time analysis. Consumers may choose locations based upon destination in time versus miles, depending on time of day and traffic status. Commuting patterns determine the ability of a company



The primary trade areas for Niagara Falls include portions of Ontario, Canada, and the northern edge of Buffalo, New York.

to attract employees. Convenience-oriented goods and services contemplate those goods and services that are local and convenient for those living or working in the immediate area, such as within one to five miles or three to five minutes. Destination-oriented goods and services contemplate a trade area that provides employment opportunities and goods and services on a more regional level. This would include goods and services such as specialty retail, entertainment and recreation venues, and employment centers. These services would attract those within the local area as well as those from outside the area, with distances in excess of five to seven miles or drive times in excess of ten minutes.

For the purposes of this study, the 310 Rainbow Boulevard address was used, including ten-, 15-, and 30-minute drive times to define the primary trade areas. When considering effect on central places, these trade areas assist to identify the dynamics of consumer behavior and expenditure trends to determine potential for retail, housing, entertainment, and other uses.

Targeting the Consumer: Tapestry Lifestyle Characteristics

Determining the depth of the market based on household growth projections is limiting; therefore, geodemographic segmentation, or lifestyle clustering, helps us understand

that demographic variables exist not only region to region but also by neighborhoods and in subcommunities within each neighborhood. Esri Tapestry Segmentation™ classifies U.S. residential neighborhoods into 65 unique market segments based on socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. The illustrative labels for each segment allow users to quickly correlate locations with common lifestyle descriptions. Tapestry Segmentation is linked to Esri's powerful family of GIS software such as ArcGIS and ArcView. This type of modeling is based on the premise that people tend to gravitate toward communities or neighborhoods of relative homogeneity. Factors that go into clustering include age, income, education, ethnicity, occupation, housing type, and family status. Tapestry Segmentation identifies those households with a preference for living in either rural or suburban areas versus urban neighborhoods. Each has different buying characteristics and consumer behavior that create demand for housing choices, as well as shopping, recreation, and entertainment preferences. However, this information should not be used in a vacuum, because retail, housing, and recreation demand include other factors, such as community culture, real estate and land use offerings, local assets, and existing supply.

Of 65 total potential segments, the top three segments in the trade areas provide some insight into the local consumer market. Canadian geodemographic components are not included in this tapestry analysis but have some similar qualities with a much younger, cosmopolitan population, as the one near Toronto. This becomes a factor in dealing with cross-border business development and consumer targeting.

Rustbelt Retirees

These households are mainly married couples with no children or singles who live alone. Although many are still working, labor force participation is below average, and many receive social security benefits. Most live in single-family homes and are not inclined to move. They are proud of their homes and gardens and participate in community activities and clubs. Leisure activities include bingo, gambling, crossword puzzles, and golf.

Rustbelt Traditions

Most of these households have employed residents in the service, manufacturing, and retail trade industries. They own and live in modest single-family homes and are a mix of married-couple families, single-parent families, and singles who live alone. They use coupons, shop at large discount stores, and work on home improvement projects. Favorite leisure activities include hunting, bowling, fishing, and attending auto races, music shows, and ice hockey games.

Cozy and Comfortable

These residents are settled, married, and still working. Many couples are still living in the single-family homes in which they raised their children. Home improvement projects are important, including painting and lawn care. They play softball and golf, attend ice hockey games, watch films, and gamble at casinos. Television is significant, and many households have four or more sets.

The preceding Esri psychographic profile shows the Niagara Falls trade area to be a community that is older, less mobile, and with lower incomes. The panel's observations and recommendations in the remainder of this report take cognizance of these profiles and attempt to tailor potential redevelopment opportunities and new uses to appropriately meet these market segments.

Review of the 2011 Niagara Falls Visitors Report completed by Longwoods Travel USA suggests that both daytime and overnight visitors regard dining, entertainment, and cultural uses high on their preferred list of activities and experiences. Such uses include museums, theater, fine dining, and bar or nightclub experiences. Activities of special interest that ranked high include historic places, cultural activities and attractions, and exceptional culinary experiences. These characteristics for visitors are somewhat divergent from the characteristics of residents as outlined in the Tapestry Segmentation.

Retail and Entertainment Dynamics

The demand dynamics for retail differ from office and industrial uses, because demand comes not only from job growth but also from population growth, visitation, and disposable income. Within each trade area, as earlier defined, a number of components determine which retail operators might find adequate demand for their goods and services, or retail sales potential. The demographic benchmarks include population and households, but most important is disposable income to spend on those goods and services. Consumer expenditures outline the average dollars spent in any given category for those items on an annual basis within a trade area. The drive-time areas are used to assess both demand and supply factors to determine gaps in the market for the major industry group segments. The retail gap is defined by the actual dollar expenditures within each category for a given trade area. This is based upon national and regional data, including sales tax, to define the supply. Negative values (surplus) suggest oversupply or a market where customers are drawn in from outside the area, whereas positive values (leakage) indicate areas where customers are shopping elsewhere, thus an opportunity for retail sales within a given trade area for a particular category. The retail marketplace forecast for the trade areas defined suggests that downtown Niagara has a significant retail gap (leakage) in four primary areas:

- Furniture and home furnishing stores;
- Sporting goods, hobby, book, and music stores;
- Specialty foods in market and restaurant formats; and
- Drinking places.

In addition to the Tapestry Lifestyle and Retail MarketPlace Forecast data obtained from Esri, the panel reviewed data regarding recreation expenditure, as well as sports and leisure market potential. Within the trade areas defined, the predominant activities identified include the following:

- Bowling;
- Fishing (freshwater);

- Walking for exercise;
- Weightlifting and attending exercise classes;
- Going to the movies;
- Attending a music performance;
- Going to a bar or nightclub;
- Reading or purchasing a book; and
- Purchasing a children's toy or game.

The current economic cycle has resulted in the retail industry exercising caution as it focuses on profitability over new store openings and expansion. Many international, national, and regional chains and franchises are retooling their store prototypes by reducing square footage and integrating Internet marketing into their brick-and-mortar operations. Although the Subject Property can support retail uses in a small number of categories, it is limited not only by population and income, but also by physical constraints, costs, and competition from neighboring shopping venues. The key to successful retail includes identifying the best locations, clustering for synergy, having a competitive environment (e.g., signage, access, and parking), having sales potential (threshold population), and enjoying a dynamic employment base (e.g., casino, hospital, and the like) to drive additional consumer traffic. As with many markets, Niagara Falls cannot solely depend upon the local population for the success of downtown retail. However, it is in the enviable position of attracting millions of visitors each year to its doorstep. By car, by bus, or on foot—the key to success for the redevelopment of the former Rainbow Centre Mall includes attracting these visitors from the city's parks and gateways to its retail location.

The HVS study concluded that 200,000 square feet of retail uses could be supported in the downtown, inclusive of food and beverage establishments. The panel concurs with this assumption and further suggests that this demand be used in more than one location.

Subject Site

The former mall site should provide the anchors driving customer traffic to the mall location as well as the streetfront venues along Rainbow Boulevard and Old Falls Street. The Subject Property could provide anchors to meet retail gap and customer demand in the areas of specialty foods and drinking places.

Adjacent Sites

Based upon the potential for redevelopment opportunities consistent with both the visitor and resident market potential noted previously, an estimated 66,000 square feet of small-space retail is potentially available along Old Falls Street from the park entrance of the casino and along Rainbow Boulevard to meet the retail gap and customer demand in the following areas: furniture and home furnishings, sporting goods, hobby, book, and music stores.

Tourism and Hospitality

The study by Tourism Economics (2011) suggests that tourism in Greater Niagara is a \$2.1 billion industry supporting approximately 46,000 jobs. This includes 6.2 million person-trips, of which 54 percent are day trips and 46 percent are overnight trips. The HVS study concludes that a gap exists in the hospitality market for upgrading and expanding hotel offerings in downtown Niagara Falls, including upgrading from economy to more luxury brands as well as extending visitor stays and room nights. The panel believes the subject site can accommodate hospitality uses; however, hotel projects such as the proposed restoration of the Hotel Niagara and new development on the vacant site at 310 Rainbow Boulevard, as well as others by experienced hotel operators, will ultimately satisfy this demand.

Therefore, the focus for the Subject Property will be to provide opportunities for things to do as well as things to buy for its visitors. The first goal of the plan should be increasing the capture of the percentage of visitors and revenue that come to the edge of the downtown. The first step includes enticing them to venture into the downtown from the gateways and parking areas that are located at

the edge of downtown. This is best done by wayfinding signage and a pleasant streetscape that invites visitors to make the trip, by car or on foot, along Rainbow Boulevard and Old Falls Street toward the mall site. The retail and entertainment components recommended for the first floor of the mall will provide both shopping and entertainment options.

Educational and Cultural Uses

The panel recommends uses for the second floor of the mall that include the potential expansion of educational space for the Culinary Institute as well as opportunities for additional educational and cultural programming that will engage the local market. Additionally, exercise, spa, and health and wellness venues will engage not only local residents and daytime workers or students but also visitors. Surrounding hotels can provide passes for their visitors to enjoy the second-floor exercise, spa, yoga, and other facilities: they may attend cooking classes, yoga classes, or other health and wellness activities.

Housing Potential

A key ingredient to the success of any downtown revitalization plan is the addition of people living in good quality housing. It provides additional retail customer traffic, life, and activity after dark and on weekends and adds energy to the street. The housing stock, housing policy, and future housing opportunities are important factors to be considered in any locale's economic development strategy. Surveys and more anecdotal data suggest that most residents believe that quality of life and neighborhoods are the most important descriptors of the community and that an important part of quality of life is housing stock. Niagara Falls is largely dominated by neighborhoods consisting of single-family homes. Much of the existing housing product surrounding the downtown is in disrepair or has become functionally obsolete. Opportunities exist for the rehabilitation of historic housing, provided that incentives for such restoration are made available. The city has provided incentives for recent college graduates to live in a target area north of Niagara Street, including the Third Street

Business District, areas along Main Street, and the Park Place Historic District (all just north of the former mall), which would populate and energize this neighborhood and provide support for the emerging retail that is occurring along this corridor.

The plans and studies reviewed by the panel indicate that the marketplace is already responding to the demand for alternative housing product. The Giacomo Hotel and Residences, a boutique property created through the 2009 restoration of the United Office Building, includes 24 apartments that enjoy full occupancy and strong rental rates. This success suggests that additional housing—apartments, townhomes, and condominiums—within and immediately adjoining downtown is a viable option. Other planned projects including housing are part of the 310 Rainbow Boulevard project as well as the revitalization of the Buffalo Avenue Heritage District for more traditional housing stock.

Recommended Programmatic Uses

Having reviewed reports, collected data, taken tours, and conducted interviews, the panel offers a mix of programmatic uses. To serve visitors, students, residents, and workers—and honor the key themes—the first-floor program is recommended to include retail, entertainment, and cultural uses. These uses include specialty foods, complementing the agricultural uses and the Culinary Institute; sports and recreation, specifically bowling; and entertainment and leisure, such as movies, restaurants, wine bars, and micro-breweries, complementing the

culinary arts. Offerings that share the history and attractions important to the Niagara experience would also be appropriate. The second floor of the mall should consider educational and cultural uses for potential future expansion of the Culinary Institute and the addition of other educational and cultural organizations. In addition, to support the notion of nutritional health, wellness and health services could include spa services, yoga and exercise facilities, and other concepts that would provide expanded tourism visits, student learning opportunities, and resident options for well-being. These are described in further detail in the following development, design, and implementation sections.

Development Recommendations

THE FORMER RAINBOW CENTRE MALL, unlike many greyfield malls encountered throughout the United States, lends itself neatly to a wide array of programming and uses as recommended throughout this report by the panel. Although the building is fairly forgiving and flexible, its ultimate developer must not lose sight of the key principles that drive the world's outstanding urban environments. Niagara Falls is already on the world stage thanks to its natural beauty and assets. Its urban environment should be world class as well. This is both the promise and the challenge the city faces. The panel recommends that a basic premise for the redevelopment of the mall focus on a public place that is attractive to both visitors and residents alike.

Urban environments are rarely perfect. The best ones, however, are always engaging. Many great cities enjoy the good fortune of having been developed before the advent of either the car or modern financing methods. The lack of cars meant that cities and their buildings responded more to the human being than the machines that carry them. Goods and services of untold variety had to be available on foot or by horse-drawn carriage. Old-world financing methodologies generally meant that incremental development, resulting in a more finely grained world, was the norm rather than the exception. People of all types, visitors and residents, young and old, poor and rich were much more likely to interact with one another as a byproduct of how their built environments were arranged.

Most typically, urban planners will point to the post-World War II development patterns as key contributors to urban blight and decay. Within the urban context itself, the use of "urban renewal" policies (i.e., large-scale clearance of physically blighted properties and reassembly for new development) often created more harm in what was left than the "blighted" property represented in the first place. In some ways Niagara Falls has suffered as an urban environment in ways that are in fact prevalent in many

major cities (scars from urban renewal activities), and in other ways it is dealing with matters that are entirely unique to it, such as an industrial history with some twists and turns, the advent of certain transportation decisions, and displaced decision making and public finance models.



A view of Falls Street from the 1940s shows the urban fabric of two- and three-story commercial buildings that was lost as part of the urban renewal programs of the 1960s and 1970s.

These things must be overcome to capture more people, visitors and residents alike, to downtown Niagara Falls and energize that environment. No amount of buildings or streets or trees will ever activate a city or space on their own. They must engage the human condition.

How do you begin the process of converting the city's millions of annual "visitors" to the falls to a growing number of overnight "tourists" downtown? How can the city of Niagara Falls ensure that its buildings, its urban fabric, engage people and pull them back again and again?

The following principles should, in a general sense, guide the redevelopment of the former Rainbow Centre Mall. It has the potential to be and should be the bellwether in Niagara Falls. Its location, scale, ownership structure, and recent adjacent successes clearly point to the notion that the former mall is the city's opportunity to complete its ideal demonstration project. It should be the project against which others are measured in terms of commit-

ment to the public interest, creative thinking, and design excellence, as well as execution discipline.

Because the process is so visible, because of the excitement around the adjacent Culinary Institute, and because the city has turned the corner toward renewed optimism, the success of redefining the former mall will be the measure going forward, for better or worse. Every precaution should be taken to ensure a positive outcome, because positive or not, how the Subject Property advances will be a benchmark.



Rainbow Boulevard immediately west of the mall includes vacant parcels and underdeveloped properties, some of which are undergoing redevelopment.

The redevelopment of the former mall should be engaging as a building and as a place. Its uses should serve to inform the energy of downtown Niagara Falls not only as a highly charged and successful tourist destination for its visitors, but also as one that attracts year-round residents of the city as an entertainment district.

Building

Today, the long dimension of the subject building creates a “superblock”—an urban renewal technique that joined two or more city blocks and multiple properties through street abandonment and consolidation to create a single large development site—adjacent to Rainbow Boulevard and First Street. Generally, a city succeeds when it engages its visitors not just once, but over and over again when they are walking in an urban environment. The world’s

great environments pull you along for hours as you turn the next corner, are drawn to the next shop, or come upon yet another great view, “terminal vista,” street condition, or piece of architecture. You can easily get lost wandering about aimlessly but blissfully. These environments are layered, textured, and often unpredictable in the positive sense. In its design suggestions, the panel offers a variety of scenarios, but common among them are best practice ideas such as the following:

- The fracturing of the superblock;
- The creation of human-scale buildings that feel manageable on foot as part of a city that is well thought out and engaging when used by its visitors and residents; and
- The easing of street-side building faces so that the building does not feel (from a visual perspective) as if it is weighing upon the pedestrian.

Not surprisingly, the panel recommends formatting newly realized spaces in ways so that visitors feel comfortable interacting with them.



The existing facade of the mall on First Street exhibits all the characteristics of a superblock. This typology tends to deaden interest, reduce the human scale, and discourage exploration by visitors.

The panel has suggested a variety of methods that conspire to soften the remaining elements where they directly interface with the public realm, such as the following examples:

- Building a loggia (building facade open to the air on one side, supported by columns or pierced openings in the wall) along First Street as a possible solution for today's grade separation and pulling back the building where it meets the First Street sidewalk;
- Using varied materials and articulated building faces whose differing planes eliminate the monotony presented today along three of four building faces; and
- Creating a complete porosity or open area along significant lengths of public sidewalk, which would have the effect of eliminating the street wall altogether.

Natural light should be introduced to a greater percentage of both the site and the building. The solutions presented should suggest improvements that reduce the percentage of floor space that lacks natural light.

Smaller floor plates, appropriately sized to the market opportunity, must be part of the solution, turning outward wherever possible and presenting themselves in ways that are indicative of today's best practices in urban planning.

As much parking as possible should be preserved, but not at the expense of improving the balance of the building.

Today the building features a unique atrium element, and the plans reflect efforts to take advantage of it.

Place

Creating a thriving public place should be an overall goal of the development program. However the building and the place are treated physically, careful consideration should be given to a number of matters, such as the following, to ensure the ultimate success of the vision for the Subject Property.



One Niagara, located on the west side of Rainbow Boulevard, dominates the initial impression of Niagara Falls as one enters from Canada.

A new street extension or pedestrian way element should be programmed with public furniture and be representative of best practice throughout the country and the world.

Public plazas (or public "living rooms") should be considered as informal gathering spaces and relaxation spaces for residents and visitors alike.

View corridors should be improved, and where terminal vistas are introduced, they should either be actively redeveloped with uses or otherwise articulated architecturally to establish scale in the broader urban context.

The parking and related access should be easy to locate, well signed, and well maintained. These parking spaces should not be mixed with signage related to offerings elsewhere in the Subject Property. On the one hand, visitors may park at this deck and head elsewhere, using it strictly as a public parking facility. On the other hand, visitors parked elsewhere may end up in the Subject Property as they walk about, and what they find in the form of retail offerings and the like should not be confused or muddled by references to parking that happens to be adjacent. The Subject Property uses and the parking above should be viewed as entirely separate except that vertical movement within the deck (elevator) should deliver visitors who do happen to park on site directly into the Subject Property's offerings, ideally depositing them into an open-air environment central to the new land plan.

Urban design guidelines, such as those already promulgated by USAN and the city, should be applied (at a minimum) for this project and possibly broadened to address the specific features of this particular site. Conditions to an RFP document would be an appropriate place to pursue such an objective.

Wayfinding, streetscape, and sidewalk communication should be planned and managed aggressively. Careful consideration should be given to the city's existing ordinances on business signage. Great care should be taken to enliven the street with signage, active doorways, and other street-level engagement—but never at the expense of a reasonable cohesiveness throughout.

The second level should engage the sidewalk as well. Considered for the second level are a variety of uses, possibly aligned with educational and cultural opportunities. Some service retail potential may issue from these arrangements. Second-level retail of any type can be tricky. Every effort needs to be made during the design phases to ensure that this reality is respected and dealt with. Any upper-level tenant spaces must be designed in ways that engage the street. This level needs to draw patrons up. Active, visible, and well-lit events need to occur regularly on the second floor. As an example, one 30- by 60-foot parking bay could be presented to street-level residents and visitors as an elevated 1,800-square-foot porch or terrace. Programming ideas for this element include

- An outdoor kitchen that is part of the Culinary Institute space;
- An outpost for a first-floor market envisioned as a possible use; and/or
- A workout space for an outdoor Zumba class or other personal training, yoga, or tai chi classes should a related health care or gym use emerge there.

Tenant Targets: Concept Overview

The panel recommends that the Subject Property have two categories of uses. The upper level should expand the

educational success seen with the Culinary Institute and offer spaces that support this notion. The lower level should be reprogrammed as entertainment and cultural retail. To make the building more aesthetically pleasing, plazas, lobbies, and a central cut-through should be used to enhance both levels. After the building is reconfigured, each floor will have just over 74,000 square feet of space. From a functionality standpoint, the panel recommends that the first floor serve as retail while the second floor expands educational uses in the downtown area. The market indicates and the panel recommends the following space program.

Rainbow Centre Mall Space Use Program

Floor	Use	Square footage
First floor (retail/entertainment/ culture)	Fresh food market/showcase	42,000
	Small format bowling alley and restaurant	20,000
	Draft house theater (four screens)	12,500
	Subtotal	74,500
Second floor (educational/health)	Educational, expansion	20,000
	Educational, new*; office; and/or institutional	34,000
	Exercise/fitness	12,000
	Spa/yoga	8,500
	Subtotal	74,500
Total		149,000

* No competing culinary or hospitality schools.

The retail aspect of the project is the most complex and has to be very carefully executed. The panel has concluded that 200,000 square feet of retail space can be supported now in the downtown market, based on the extensive prior research that has been performed as well as the panel's independent confirmation. About 66,000 square feet of retail is currently considering entering or could enter the market in several proposed developments.

If these 66,000 square feet do advance, a remaining 134,000-square-foot potential exists to be served. How should the remaining retail opportunity be addressed? The panel's recommendation is that the lower floor of the Rainbow Centre Mall be converted to retail, or 74,500 square feet. The remaining demand potential (200,000 square feet, less the pipeline, less space provided by the mall) is 59,500 square feet (see table).

Overall Retail Strategy Summary for the District

	Square footage
Current market gap (HVS Economic and Market Assessment)	200,000
Less supply of potential retail, convertible, and rumored pipeline	-66,000
Remaining potential	134,000
Amount recommended for Rainbow Centre Mall after reconfiguration	74,500
Remaining potential for other areas surrounding Subject Property, especially after conversion	59,500

The panel's criteria for recommended uses relate to multi-seasonality, resident and visitor attractors, and matching size to market potential. The panel's recommendations are described in the following subsections.

Farmers, Artisan Foods, Organic Marketplace

This use is consistent with the Culinary Institute and the Niagara region's (including Canada's) food and beverage cluster. If done well, this use can be a high-volume visitor activity, a draw for the regional resident base, and a place where shoppers can actually buy bulk food products that serves as an alternative market for the local resident population. A space of 42,000 square feet is targeted. This is large enough to provide a fully functioning market with space for temporary demonstration spaces as well.

The venue would offer a mix of regionally prepared products (canned, bottled, bulk, and jarred), wines and beers, fresh foodstuffs, flowers, and on-property consumables, with seating at vendor areas, plazas, and common areas.

The panel sees an opportunity to complement the Culinary Institute's incubator program by attracting regional entrepreneurs as tenants in the space. A program for parking discounts and "buy local" should be developed for local residents.

Entertainment Retail

This destination requires activities in which visitors can participate while they are in the market. Visitors stay for only a short time, and those who stay overnight have little to do. Furthermore, entertainment for local residents is very limited in the downtown area. What types of entertainment retail fit the market demographics and can entertain families in the evening when they stay overnight in the few hotels that exist in the market? The panel's criteria were to provide retail offerings that could be supported by residents and visitors alike and have a role during multiple seasons.

The uses that fit these criteria best are as follows:

- A small-format bowling lounge concept occupying 20,000 square feet of space: this product would offer four to six lanes, plus a themed restaurant and bar area with 150 to 200 seats, a family entertainment center or arcade, and two party rooms. It meets the local market interests, is fun for families, and is multiseasonal.
- A four-screen draft house and movie theater, offering both stadium seating and a food service area. This theater can have two markets, daytime/late afternoon and evening. During the day, content about the region regarding geology, nature, industrialization, and heritage can be shown. Screenings of these films as part of a visit would enrich the knowledge of the market. In the afternoon and evening, the theater could be a first- and second-run venue targeted to the visitor and local markets alike. One theater could be fitted as a broadcast theater and stage for productions and broadcasts from the region. The venue could also be used for storytelling, folk events, and film festivals.

Educational and Cultural Uses

The Culinary Institute has created excitement in the community. It is exactly the quality and type of use that fits the panel's vision for the upper level of the space. Expansion space for existing tenants and attracting a second school are recommended: 54,000 square feet of space is available for expanded and additional educational uses.

A possible school category could be film and communications. Niagara Falls offers excellent settings for film shoots as does the city of Buffalo and the surrounding region in both the United States and Canada. Both Toronto and New York are major media centers, and Niagara Falls is close to each.

Another category is an arts program, which could benefit from the varied urban and natural settings in the region. Furthermore, the U.S., Canadian, and Native American cultures intersect at this spot, making for interesting and distinctive arts and cultural opportunities.

Health and Fitness

An 8,500-square-foot spa, health, and wellness element, with classroom space, could be considered. It could serve as a training lab for students for spa services, massage, and spa management and could be open to the public as well. A fitness center and yoga studio of 12,000 square feet should be included, open to students, area hotel guests, and residents.

Residential

The uses envisioned in this development scheme for the former mall would help advance nearby residential development. Several reasonable categories of rental residential demand exist, notably student and workforce housing. The city should make it a policy that pocket residential projects be considered with every project developed, be it retail, hotel, or mixed use.

Planning and Design

THE PANEL INVESTIGATED the building's fabric and surroundings and suggests certain considerations with regard to redevelopment. These suggestions flow from a realization that the former Rainbow Centre Mall building is, in a sense, a metaphor for downtown Niagara Falls—a big project intended to solve big problems that, with time and upon reflection, has been seen to be a poor solution. The temptation is often to start with another big intervention to solve the new perceived big problem. Nonetheless, and this is the conundrum, the building represents significant urban investment and, the panel believes, still retains residual value for development. The district, through strategic interventions such as development of the Conference Center, removal of the Wintergarden and restoration of Old Falls Street, and redevelopment of the United Office Building into the Giacomo Hotel and Residences is improving and incrementally building on its residual value. The panel's quest has been to find the keys that will unlock residual value of the former mall building through strategic intervention. In the ongoing relationship of the building as a major component of the downtown district, unlocking value in the building and creating a great urban place will add one more success to downtown's revitalization.

What follows is a general description of the building fabric, a review of redevelopment strategies, and three options the panel investigated for physical redevelopment of the building.

General Description of Building

The building is approximately 620 feet by 291 feet in plan. It has two high-bay levels (ground level: 17 feet floor to floor; second level: 20 feet floor to floor) and three parking levels (third, fourth, and roof decks, which are nominally 10 feet 8 inches floor to floor). The third level and roof level appear to have waterproof membranes protected by

a four- to six-inch-thick concrete wearing surface. The sloped ramps have polyurethane waterproof topping. Building facades consist of precast concrete spandrel panels at the garage and glass and metal curtain wall at the high-bay spaces. The structure appears to be in generally good condition. The first, second, and third floors at the southern end of the building have been recently converted for use as a teaching facility by the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute. The remaining areas of the high-bay space have been stripped of all infrastructure, partitions, and finishes and have been remediated of all hazardous and flammable materials. This vacant, stripped area is approximately 100,000 square feet per floor and extends from the Culinary Institute property line (i.e., at a fire-rated demising wall) at the south to the garage ramps at the north and from exterior wall to exterior wall on east and west. The panel understands that \$9 million has been invested in interior demolition, asbestos abatement, and structural rehabilitation of the building to stabilize its value and create the opportunity for future development.

Organization of the High-Bay Space

The building was originally used as a two-level shopping mall organized around an atrium and light well that passes through the parking levels to a fully glazed skylight at the roof parking level. The glazed skylight structure had suffered severe deterioration and was replaced as part of the \$9 million rehabilitation of the ramp with a metal standing-seam roof with skylight cut-outs. The light well is partially used by the Culinary Institute and partially available to the vacant space. Peripheral egress stairways go from the garage levels to grade, a bank of four elevators near the northwest corner serves all parking levels, and a new elevator at the southeast corner provides easy access to the Conference Center, Old Falls Street, and other uses south of the structure. The Culinary Institute has an operating fire



sprinkler system; the garage and vacant space are served by dry standpipe systems. The garage has a full operative lighting system; the vacant space has only temporary lighting. No heating, ventilation, or air-conditioning systems are present in the garage or vacant space.

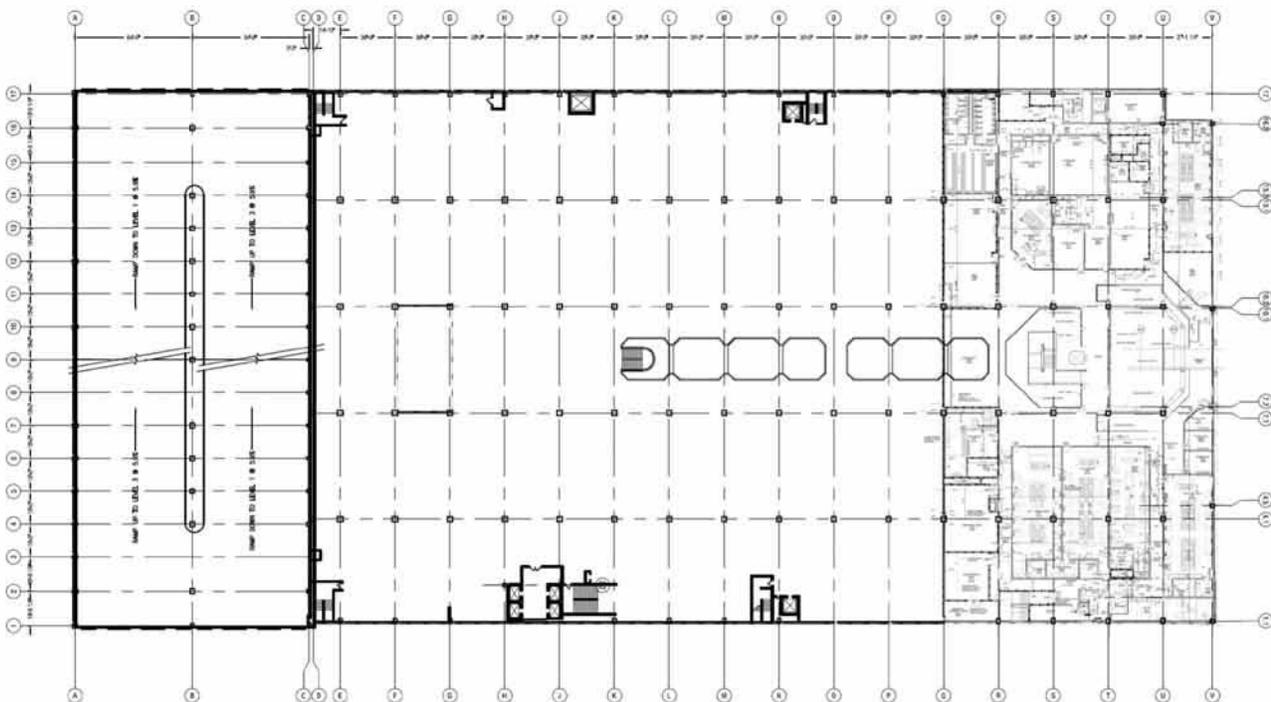
Building Construction

The entire building structure consists of precast concrete columns, beams, and prestressed double-T and quad-T floor panels. It is organized with two long-span ramped bays providing vertical access for cars at the north end and nominally flat decks (actually sloped about 0.5 percent for drainage) stretching for the full block length. Ramp bays are nominally 18 by 64 feet, consisting of 18-foot-long double-T floor panels supported by 64-foot-long precast girders bearing on column haunches. The three parking levels served by these ramps consist of five bays of double-T decks spanning 30 feet to girders 58 feet long

supported directly on column haunches. The two-high bay floors (ground and second) have the same structure as the parking decks, although the second floor is constructed without slopes. The ground floor is assumed to be slab on grade. Driving clearance is generally six feet nine inches to seven feet below girders, and ceiling height under the precast deck panels is generally nine feet or more. The first-floor clearance under the beams would be about 14 feet and under the precast deck approximately 16 feet. Second-floor clearances would be about 17 feet under the girders and 18 feet six inches under the deck. Because the girders run east to west through the building, the floors consist of high clear bays 30 feet wide between girder lines; there are no spandrel beams, meaning that full glass facades are possible for the any spaces on the east and west facades.

The interior of the Rainbow Centre Mall. The entire structure consists of precast concrete columns, beams, and prestressed double-T and quad-T floor panels. This type of construction can be disassembled by component, thus allowing a great deal of flexibility in redevelopment options.

The floor plan of the mall depicts the general arrangement of the Culinary Institute, the remaining high-bay space, and the parking ramp.



Existing Grade Differences

The sidewalks and streets surrounding the site slope down from northeast to southwest approximately six feet. As constructed, the entire ground floor of the high-bay space was at a single elevation, more or less level with the sidewalk at Rainbow Boulevard and Old Falls Street. This meant that the floor slab is generally three to five feet lower than the First Street sidewalk. The existing internal ramps and stairs down from the loading dock and egress doors along First Street are artifacts of this grade difference. The level floor was an important consideration for an inward-facing retail mall, but to create retail that connects to the street, new floors may need to be constructed above the existing slab to meet the outside grade. Because the second floor is level, raising the ground floor lowers the ceiling height above the raised floor.

One alternative to preserve ceiling height for the greater part of a large retail user is to create a welcoming entrance experience at the sidewalk level, with internal steps and ramp or wheelchair lift down to the existing slab level. Another would be to create an arcade under the building by setting the exterior wall at grade back a certain distance from and at a lower level than the walk. This would allow some or all of the grade difference to be accomplished outside the retail area. These and other approaches should be explored in detail as the retail development is designed. Yet a third alternative is demonstrated by the Barnes & Noble bookstore: where the difference is a few feet, the retail windows can simply have a taller sill. The panel believes that many potential solutions are available for the grade difference and that it should not be viewed as an impediment to development.

Arrangement of Parking

The ramped bays are clear span with perpendicular parking on either side, providing a light and airy feeling. The ramps are accessed at grade through card-reader gates providing entrance and egress parking control at Rainbow Boulevard and First Street for self-park operation. These ramps create a double helix of ramps running east and west such that every level of the garage has two entrance/up ramps and two exit/down ramps. Additional “speed-ramping” at grade

is arranged so that vehicles may exit to either street. The parking levels are arranged as five one-way lanes running north–south with angled parking on both sides, such that a search logical pattern may be followed, and a logical path to the nearest exit ramp is always clear. The garage capacity is approximately 1,600 cars.

Critique of the Former Shopping Mall

The former shopping mall was logically developed in the tradition of its time. It had an entry from the former Wintergarden to a sunlit atrium food court, with an anchor tenant at the far end served directly by elevators from the parking above and in-line stores down both sides of the central atrium. All store service access was at the periphery of the site along Rainbow Boulevard and First Street. The mall was apparently successful until competition from suburban shopping opportunities, depopulation of the city of Niagara Falls, and development of easy transport to other shopping centers forced its closure. The inward-facing retail contributed nothing to surrounding streets, and the building facades were generally opaque and unlit. The long facades with service entries only, lacking overlooking windows, earned an undeserved reputation as unsafe places to be. Even if safe, they were not hospitable to pedestrians.

The intent of this redevelopment is to return retail presence to First Street and Rainbow Boulevard, to create a viable and vibrant locally sourced and unique retail experience in the vacant space. This would extend the friendly and inviting environment created by the Culinary Institute ground-level restaurant and retail uses down the two cross streets. In addition, it is hoped also to re-create a smaller scale for the building and perhaps reestablish the finer-grained, pedestrian-oriented street pattern of an older city.

On the basis of this critique and intent, the panel suggests five principles to guide the design and redevelopment of the building:

1. *Breaking down the monolith*: This process has already begun with the development of the Culinary Institute. Its new facade is remarkably different from the old building, bringing a finer-grained, more pedestrian-oriented scale to the building. Continued development should break up

the long facades on Rainbow Boulevard and First Street with indentations, cutaways, and projections. At the urban scale, consideration should be given to creating a cross-block connector midway between Old Falls Street and Niagara Street to enhance east–west pedestrian circulation.

2. *Warming and welcoming:* The concrete and dated curtain wall facades are not inviting. New materials should be in warmer colors, inviting textures of natural stone, and generally more animated. Creation of facades that are highly visible from Old Falls Street will be important: this implies creating bays and indentations to provide facade surfaces perpendicular to the street and using projecting “blade” signage that can be read from Old Falls Street.
3. *Embracing the street:* Provide a multitude of activities and entrances on Rainbow Boulevard and First Street to connect the retail development to the sidewalk. Provide brightly lit windows to showcase the interior of the stores to greet and entice the passerby.
4. *Opening the facades:* The second story should be seen as another opportunity to showcase the interior of the building and mark the uses and activities within. To the greatest extent possible and in contrast to the monolithic inwardly oriented mall, the entire facade should have windows, giving the building a human scale and indicating openness. Again, the Culinary Institute design has done this along Old Falls Street.
5. *Making a place and finding the way to it:* Create an identifiable public place, and give it meaning through activities, promotion, naming, and other branding activities; provide maps and signage and subliminal cuing that help visitors find their way to and from the place; create a sense of anticipation, then deliver the goods with an exciting new locally developed and themed retail environment.

Proposals Studied for Redevelopment of the Vacant High-Bay Space

Three general concepts for the redevelopment the space have been developed for discussion purposes. These include

1. Simply turning the retail space outward by establishing a service corridor down the center served from remote loading docks adjacent to the ramp structure;
2. Extending Mayor Michael O’Laughlin Drive eastward as a public way between Rainbow Boulevard and First Street by taking out the first two levels 60 feet wide and cutting back the parking levels to allow daylight and air; and
3. Creating plaza space at Mayor O’Laughlin Drive and Rainbow Boulevard and at First Street opposite the street, leading west from the Sheraton entrance, which would be linked by a two-story open pedestrian way at grade.

Option 1: Least Structural Intervention

The first option requires the least structural intervention and is the most straightforward reaction to the available space. It simply creates service access within the available high-bay space, concentrating truck docks to space immediately adjacent to the garage ramps. This would allow stores to face the streets and to be serviced from inside the mall. The second floor would follow a similar pattern with service elevators up from the docks providing access to a corridor running down the center of the space. This diagram implies a retailing plan of several smaller merchants, all facing either Rainbow Boulevard or First Street. Some of these retailers (restaurants, perhaps) may use two floors (as perhaps a lounge café or “grab-and-go” prepared foods on the ground floor with table service and private dining on the second). The second floor might also be used for destination entertainment or education uses with a marquee entrance at grade and dedicated vertical circulation up.



Option 1: Least Structural Intervention—This option retains the exterior of the building and creates service access within the available high-bay space, concentrating truck docks in space immediately adjacent to the garage ramps. It would allow stores to face the streets and to be serviced from inside the mall. The second floor would follow a similar pattern, with service elevators up from the docks providing access to a corridor running down the center of the space.

In general, the only structural changes associated with this option would be facade work and floor penetrations associated with tenant work. Exit stairs and passenger elevators from the parking decks would remain where they currently exist. Public elevators would deliver visitors from the garage to either First Street at Old Falls Street (the new elevator) or Rainbow Boulevard using the existing elevator core. No loss of parking capacity would occur.

Option 2: Extend Mayor Michael O’Laughlin Drive

The second option is to extend Mayor Michael O’Laughlin Drive eastward through the lower two levels of the building to meet First Street. To make this a pleasant public street and to break down the apparent scale of the building, the panel also proposes cutting away part of the parking deck above to allow more daylight and air circulation to the new street. This bold proposal implies a retailing plan that allows a connection to additional compatible retail in the part of the block adjacent to it and a separate retail grouping on the north side of the new street. This proposal more than doubles the length of street frontage, provides four new corners, and creates an identifiable place.

Option 2: Extend Mayor Michael O’Laughlin Drive—This bold proposal extends Mayor Michael O’Laughlin Drive eastward through the lower two levels of the building to meet First Street. To make this a pleasant public street and to break down the apparent scale of the building, the panel also proposes cutting away part of the parking deck above to allow more daylight and air circulation to the new street. This proposal more than doubles the length of street frontage, provides four new corners, and creates an identifiable place.

To create a true street, the panel proposes significant structural intervention. First, to create a column-free street section 60 feet wide with 25 to 30 feet clear height requires the removal of two 30-foot structural bays of the second floor from Rainbow Boulevard to First Street. The next move would be the removal of three levels of parking deck from each of three areas about 60 feet square. With the second floor and parking decks removed, the next

intervention is to remove the columns from the center of the street alignment and transfer the remaining reduced parking deck load to the side columns at the underside of the third floor to create the clear street. Finally, with structure removed and resupported, remove the ground-floor slab in the area of the street and build a sloped street with curbs and sidewalk extending Mayor O’Laughlin Drive and connecting Rainbow Boulevard up a very slight slope to First Street. The intent would be for this street to appear like any other street in the district although it would have some parking garage elements bridging it at high level. This would be a simple reestablishment of the street fabric of the district to provide retail blocks of a size consistent with adjoining blocks and a seamless pedestrian experience.

Because the existing garage is formed of precast discrete elements rather than monolithic cast-in-place concrete or composite concrete-and-steel construction means that these interventions are more in the nature of “taking apart” and removing than they are in the nature of “demolition” and the dust and noise that process implies. The removal of parking deck would take about 200 spaces away from the garage capacity. This type of work has been done to other garages in other cities and is achievable.

Option 3: Courtyard Plazas and Pedestrian Linkage—the Panel’s Preferred Option

The third option, recommended by the panel, is to recognize not only Mayor O’Laughlin Drive on the west but also the remnant street on the east between the Falls Street Station building and the city-owned parking lot on the east





across First Street. When the parking lot is redeveloped, a natural pedestrian route will parallel Old Falls Street all the way from the Seneca Office Building to the state park entrance. To facilitate this movement, this option proposes to cut the building away at the perimeter to create two new outdoor plazas: one across First Street from the existing street adjacent to the parking lot, and the other across Rainbow Boulevard from Mayor O’Laughlin Drive. These would be connected through the building by a two-story-high pedestrian arcade.

This proposal has the retailing advantages of the second option studied but adds usable outdoor space, creates more corner stores, requires less extensive structural intervention, and creates a special and identifiable place in the city. To enhance this place, the panel suggests serious study of abandoning the existing parking elevator core on Rainbow Boulevard and the construction of a new core at the center of the garage connecting to the pedestrian way and in conjunction with this a new penetration through the garage decks to bring daylight down to street level. This light well would be the ideal place to put glass elevator cabs because they would form a visual link between parking and the pedestrian way and the plazas at the two streets.

The structural interventions are minor relative to the second option, consisting of the removal of the first bay at the perimeter, work that can be done entirely from the street. Because the passage under will be for pedestrians, removing a line of columns and resupporting the structure above is not necessary. About the same number of parking spaces (200) will be lost with this option as would be lost under option 2.

Alternative Additive Development Applicable to All Three Options

Finally, the panel investigated changing the use of the perimeter parking bays to residential or hotel development.

It is possible but complicated by three constraints: access to the apartments or hotel would require an additional vertical core; the garage decks are designed for a lower load capacity than is required by living space; and the size of development seems limited in comparison to the construction required.

However, because the building is said to rest on shallow footings on bedrock, and because it is believed the columns may have extra capacity for vertical support, the panel suggests investigation of adding additional programming in new structures above the garage. This would require new structure, spanning column to column above the existing roof deck. One suggestion might be a three-level hotel above the ramped area with a new core at the corner of Rainbow Boulevard and Niagara Street. This could take advantage of the leasable space at ground level beneath the ramps. An exterior elevator core would be an architectural feature visible along Niagara Street, marking the entrance to the Falls District.

Environmental Sustainability

The panel encourages USAN, as exclusive marketer of the building, to require the highest practical levels of sustainable building using the U.S. Green Building Council LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating system. The bones of efficient and compact development are already in place because the building is in a highly walkable district served by public transit and most parking is in structure.

Energy efficiency can be enhanced through the use of LED fixtures throughout. Consideration should also be given to installing solar panels on the broad roof. These would not only produce electricity for use in the project, but also would shade cars from the summer sun and protect them from snow in the winter.

Even though a vast abundance of water is only a few hundred yards away, water efficiency is a primary consideration. The panel suggests investigation of harvesting

Option 3: Courtyard Plazas and Pedestrian Linkage—This option cuts the building away at the perimeter to create two new outdoor plazas: one across First Street from the existing street adjacent to the parking lot, and the other across Rainbow Boulevard from Mayor O’Laughlin Drive. These would be connected through the building by a two-story-high pedestrian arcade. This proposal has the retailing advantages of the second option studied but adds usable outdoor space, creates more corner stores, requires less extensive structural intervention, and creates a special and identifiable place in the city.



Four illustrative views of option 3, which focuses on the creation of usable and attractive open space that provides an outward presentation of the mall's new uses, a welcoming attraction to vehicular visitors, and plaza space that is an identifiable destination for students and residents.

rainwater from the roof to use in irrigating planting in the plazas and along Old Falls Street, to provide for natural percolation and not to add loads to the city's combined sewer system, as is the case for bioretention features incorporated in the Old Falls Street design.

Sustainable living is a theme that is also supported by the celebration and retailing of locally produced foods and crafts and by the redevelopment of an existing building rather than its demolition with replacement with new construction. The theme can be extended through visitor education programs.

Beyond the Walls of the Building

Beyond the immediate building, the revitalized Rainbow Centre Mall sits within the wider context of what the City of Niagara Falls Comprehensive Plan describes as the "Falls Precinct" (more generally referred to as "downtown Niagara Falls"). This is generally the area east of the casino including the interface with Niagara Falls State Park. To further many of the goals described in the comprehensive plan, redevelopment of the Rainbow Centre Mall should contribute to the revitalization of this broader area.

Provision of Resident-Serving Uses

Services are needed to meet the needs of residents on or near Old Falls Street, in the Rainbow Boulevard and Buffalo Avenue neighborhood, and to the north along Main Street. The Jefferson Apartments, the Buffalo Avenue condominiums, and the Giacomo Hotel are the core of an emerging downtown residential district south of Old Falls Street. In addition, 310 Rainbow Street is to provide hotel units and 24 units of new housing right on Old Falls Street. The proposal to redevelop the Hotel Niagara will provide additional visitor accommodations within this area. The present and anticipated residents of these neighborhoods need typical residential support services, such as food and personal services and recreational opportunities. Development within the revitalized Rainbow Centre Mall should fulfill some of this need. If provided, these uses will serve visitors as well as local residents.

Drawing Visitors Downtown

Renovation of the Rainbow Centre Mall should contribute to the process of drawing visitors into downtown Niagara Falls. This will introduce them to more of what the city has to offer and contribute to the revitalization of the downtown.

The First Right Turn in the United States

As discussed, downtown Niagara Falls has two important visitor contact points. The first is at the visitor center at the roundabout on Buffalo Avenue at First Street. The second is the corner with the City Parking Ramp (i.e., which is incorporated into the Rainbow Centre structure) at the intersection of Niagara Street and Rainbow Boulevard. For the visitor coming from Canada, this is the first right turn in the United States.

The panel recommends reconsideration of the use in the leased commercial space at the Niagara Street and Rainbow Boulevard corner. This location should contain a use that introduces and directs the arriving visitor not only to the falls but also to the wide range of regional attractions.



The first right turn as visitors enter the United States from the Rainbow Bridge. This first-impression view of the United States should be improved.



The panel is not recommending here the minimization of the present visitor center at the Buffalo Avenue and First Street roundabout. That visitor center is very important for those arriving from the west. This suggestion is to encourage USAN to recognize that a significant opportunity exists to intercept the Canadian visitor at Niagara and First streets.

If current lease conditions prove too difficult to overcome, USAN should consider painting and signage improvements here to help direct the visitor to opportunities in the redeveloped Rainbow Centre Mall and elsewhere downtown. (See the larger discussion of signage and wayfinding below.)

Niagara Falls State Park

Niagara Falls receives roughly 8 million visitors a year. At present most of these visitors enter Niagara Falls State Park from the parking lot at Prospect Street and Niagara Street. The number of visitors entering or leaving the state park at Old Falls Street is relatively minor, perhaps because bus traffic and parking are oriented away from this intersection.

The panel notes the efforts being made to reintegrate some of the state park's natural attributes back into the city. Said another way, initiatives such as reconfiguration of sections of the Robert Moses Parkway will open both views and access to the state park. The town/park connections will be much more immediate.

To help energize the Old Falls Street connection to the state park, the entry at the foot of the street must be convenient and direct. Currently this connection is less than convenient. Although a ceremonial overlook exists at the foot of the Old Falls Street axis, wayfinding within the park from there to the visitor center or the falls overlook is unclear.

The panel understands that state park officials are about to make improvements around the visitor center that may ameliorate this lack of clarity and the access situation. The city and USAN should work with state park officials to design access that strengthens the connection to the foot

of Old Falls Street. At the same time, signage and wayfinding materials could be created that would take into account the opportunities for making connections between the state park and the city. Certainly the resource at Niagara Falls is an internationally significant site. The panel would support the concept of continuing this discussion and ultimately adding the state park to the National Park System.

Signage, Wayfinding, and Street Furnishings

As a near-term action item, the panel recommends improvements to signage and wayfinding systems. The opening of the Culinary Institute brings a new educational, retail, and visitor attraction to downtown Niagara Falls. The restaurant, bakery, and bookstore will be of interest to residents and visitors alike. At present very little helps the Niagara Falls visitor learn of this or other destinations on Old Falls Street. The renovation of the former Rainbow Centre Mall will bring a further need for directional information both for orientation and as a service to new retail uses.

The panel is aware that the city and USAN have planned and designed a comprehensive wayfinding system and that some initial phases of this system have been implemented in the downtown area, pending final approval of the system by federal and state transportation officials. The panel recommends advancing the final steps necessary to gain approval of the larger system throughout downtown. For example, in some key locations well-designed, larger signs (as is planned in the full system) could better direct visitors. Other locations where this would be most effective are near the state park entrances and at the Buffalo Avenue/First Street roundabout and at the Niagara Street/First Street corner of the revitalized former mall.

Development of such a wayfinding system should be done considering its use in reinforcing the city-falls interface. As is anticipated by USAN and the city in the larger system, coordination with state park officials to adopt a similar set of standards to direct visitors from park to town and town to park would be desirable.

Another recommended near-term action will be to ensure that street furnishings along Old Falls Street convey a



An illustration of Mayor O’Laughlin Drive improvements leading up to the revitalized Rainbow Centre Mall.

consistent, high-quality image. The street furnishings installed as a part of the Old Falls Street revitalization do a wonderful job in this regard. Unfortunately, this effort is undercut in some locations by the city’s long-term contract with a private purveyor that permits plastic, advertising-covered benches and large plastic trash cans at all city bus stops. These essentially nonconforming materials should be removed and replaced with materials matching the Old Falls Street standards.

Mayor O’Laughlin Drive Urban Design

The southeast corner of the parking lot for the state park is near the Hard Rock Café on Prospect Street at the foot of Mayor O’Laughlin Drive. The facade improvements on the former Rainbow Centre Mall at the east end of Mayor O’Laughlin Drive need to establish a dramatic terminus to this street that encourages visitors to seek services at the redeveloped building and beyond to the Culinary Institute. Streetscape improvements should be undertaken in association with construction of the 310 Rainbow building to clean up and strengthen the Mayor O’Laughlin Drive frontage between the park and the revitalized former mall.

attract those visiting the falls and to orient them toward the Culinary Institute and the rest of Old Falls Street.

The panel recommends that an evaluation of individual sites be conducted that includes remediation, rehabilitation, and if necessary an acquisition strategy so that these properties comply with the new image of downtown Niagara Falls. Actions to be taken include the following:

- Enforcing adopted city and USAN urban design standards;
- Establishing new city regulations and beginning immediate enforcement of signage guidelines;
- Implementing a “clean and safe” program (for which USAN has undertaken initial analysis and stakeholder efforts);
- Advancing measures for accelerated participation in the city’s and USAN’s facade improvement program; and
- Retaining a tenant recruiter and site manager who actively seeks appropriate tenants for underoccupied space.

Strategies for Surrounding Parcels

Successful revitalization efforts are often accompanied by a “trigger event.” In the case of Niagara Falls, the opening of the Culinary Institute can be seen as one of those events. The panel feels that working off the momentum of this trigger event is important; it should be used as a launching point for reinvention of the retail surrounding the mall site. The panel recommends that a focused effort be made to regenerate and retenant some key locations along Old Falls Street. This street has a big opportunity to



A view of Lower Falls Street looking toward Canada. This area has excellent urban design and streetscape improvements and should serve as a model for other improvements along Rainbow Boulevard, First Street, and other roads that feed into the downtown.

The ultimate goal is to have a thriving and active downtown catering to both visitors and residents with uses that complement the reimagined former mall site. The planned 100,000-square-foot, seven-story building at 310 Rainbow is designed as a mixed-use development with a variety of retail, residential, and a hotel uses that are geared toward the visitor experience. The retail frontage on Old Falls Street should complement the hotel's ground-floor activities on Rainbow Boulevard. The panel recommends that in the final design the hotel lobby, bar, and food services be oriented onto Rainbow to enliven the street facing the Rainbow Mall. The remaining four sites mentioned below should be the focus of an intense redevelopment and retenanting initiative.

Falls Street Station

The panel was told that the curtain wall of the 10,000-square-foot Falls Street Station, which is a vestige of the Wintergarden/Conference Center link, is to be removed in the near future. This will open up the existing Falls Station frontage for retail development.

Conference Center Old Falls Street Frontage

This frontage could be remodeled to accommodate a variety of potential retail uses in the available 8,000 square feet of space fronting on Old Falls Street, particularly restaurants and cafés that could enliven the street.

Comfort Inn Building

This 20,000-square-foot retail building attached to the hotel is currently mostly empty. Spaces in the building that front on Old Falls Street would be appropriate for restaurants. The panel believes that because of its size, location, and architecture, this building could be renovated relatively easily. In the near term, appropriate facade improvements and the installation of outdoor café space would help complement the extraordinary existing streetscape. In the long term this site could accommodate a variety of mixed-use development.

The Wax Museum

This low-rise building containing 20,000 square feet of space should be redeveloped as Old Falls Street emerges as a vibrant destination. It is most likely a five- to ten-year development opportunity.

Implementation

THE PANEL HAS SUGGESTED a development program to transform the former Rainbow Centre Mall into a valuable and strategic property. This program delineates the physical uses, urban design, and programmatic components that will make the plan successful. The successful implementation of this plan will require creative development skills on the part of a development entity and support from the highest levels of government, the business community, academia, and city residents.

In Niagara Falls, public sector entities have a large role in coordinating and guiding the physical and programmatic redevelopment of the Subject Property. Their leadership is central to identifying qualified, diverse, and high-quality developers and users for successful redevelopment.

The public sector can be a most effective partner to its stakeholders and the Niagara Falls community by fostering partnerships, mediating disagreements, building strategic collaborations, and providing access to patient capital and development incentives. Key strategies should include the building of collaborative partnerships and relationships with important external stakeholders. These entities include developing public/private partnerships and cross-border business relationships and engaging with community development corporations and other nonprofit organizations, elected officials, real estate professionals, developers, and lenders. Designing strategies to integrate the internal city staff and resources with the external players and resources is also important and should be promoted at all levels of the public sector. These strategies should include programs and policies that address the transitions between the stages of vacant property revitalization from stabilization to rehabilitation and prevention.

As redevelopment continues within the Niagara Falls community, the public sector is positioned to assemble, prepare, and convey sites for major mixed-use developments

and to provide a portfolio of programs that include project financing for redevelopment, business location, relocation and expansion, housing construction and rehabilitation, and home purchases and improvements.

The public sector can facilitate the transfer of vacant properties, work closely with community organizations to remove blight, and enforce codes to prevent future blight and disinvestment by absent or unresponsive landowners. The public sector can assist developers in working with internal city departments providing access to multidisciplinary teams in economic development, planning, housing, legal, engineering, and law enforcement. It can direct staff to coordinate activities and services to expedite development time frames.

As the panel concludes its study and presents its recommendations, the Niagara Falls community may wish to reflect on its history and the past practices that have been impediments to its economic growth, a vibrant downtown, and thriving residential neighborhoods. Strategies that promote good governance; cooperative relationships between local, county, and state governments; enforcement of zoning ordinances and master planned development; and fair and streamlined approval processes contribute to good development that attracts high-quality developers, new businesses, and an active lending community. Real estate development is fraught with numerous risks to the developer. Developers seek to minimize their exposure to risk. Communities suffer economically from the stigma of corruption, governmental infighting, lack of land use enforcement, and government's failure to effectively address the root causes of blight. High-quality developers and lenders do not invest in these types of communities. The panel is suggesting the following short-term wins to invigorate the community.

Implementation Steps

Continuation of public engagement by the city, USAN, and stakeholders is essential to the success of downtown. Although the heavy lifting is done with respect to physically establishing the institute, a program of events and advertising should be considered. In that regard, the trigger event of the Culinary Institute is also an appropriate time to consider the establishment of a downtown ambassador program. Ambassadors work as “concierges” for downtown, ready to offer event information, downtown maps and directions, restaurant and shopping suggestions, and a friendly smile. Ambassadors can be either part time or volunteer; many examples and analogs of successful programs exist from around the country.

In addition, to energize change in the short term, the panel suggests adoption of strict code enforcement and zero tolerance for any property owners, and especially absent or disinvested landholders who do not maintain their properties. Their actions compromise the surrounding properties, thereby diminishing the desirability of neighborhoods and districts and leading to a cycle of blight and community safety issues.

The panel also recommends implementation of an operator or development RFQ or RFP model as a best practice for all development or redevelopment initiated by the public sector at the former Rainbow Centre Mall and in future public sector–led redevelopment.

The panel recommends that a two-step process be used (first an RFQ to identify the best development team or teams to then respond to a formal RFP) instead of a one-step process (RFP only) because the former will allow the exclusive marketer of the property, USAN, to enter into negotiations with a development entity that can be designated as the deal maker to bring about redevelopment. The deal maker or master developer acts as the steward’s agent to carry out the regeneration of the property. The deal maker can conduct the project due diligence. As part of the startup costs, USAN may wish to cover the expenses of the master developer through this phase, while

the master developer retains the flexibility of structuring its own land deal in accordance with the goals of the plan.

An RFP is useful in providing multiple solutions or even similar solutions with different implementation strategies. A successful RFP provides thoughtful and clear direction and in return it requires the responder to consider all aspects of the proposal and articulate them.

The panel recommends establishing an operator or development RFQ and RFP process in the redevelopment of the subject property. An effectively executed RFQ or RFP process would allow the sponsor to comprehensively articulate a unified vision and scope of work for specific development requests and would be useful in improving transparency. In turn, an effective RFQ or RFP process has the potential to attract high-quality developers and contribute to successful redevelopment.

Building Renovation Strategies

Under either alternative, the panel recommends that USAN have preliminary architectural plans prepared for the shell renovation of the Rainbow Centre Mall. This design work should address the details involved in removing sections of the building, design the new building facade treatment, and set design standards for materials and possibly signage.

The panel recommends USAN use the preliminary architectural package described previously as part of an RFP. The request would be structured such that the successful developer would work with USAN to refine the preliminary design materials to suit a proposed finishing and leasing package. The successful bidder would then complete the construction documents and proceed with the construction and leasing activities. With USAN first setting the general architectural standards, followed by the opportunity for a successful bidder to work with USAN in finalizing the design, the process should offer the most flexibility in delivering a well-designed, lease-ready building to the marketplace.

The panel has recommended a variety of market-driven concepts for each floor. To execute high-quality, market-driven projects, the panel recommends a phased approach to development with management of the process by the public sector steward.

Conclusion

THE PANEL BELIEVES THAT THE CITY of Niagara Falls and USAN have made tremendous strides in addressing the challenges facing downtown. The caustic urban renewal initiatives of the 1960s and 1970s are beginning to be reversed. The construction of the Conference Center Niagara Falls, the streetscape program along Old Falls Street, and the recent opening of the Culinary Institute—for both its injection of students to the downtown scene and its street-level retail uses—point to a renaissance for downtown.

One of the three redevelopment options for the former mall outlined in this report, coupled with an intense redevelopment and retenanting program for selected buildings along Old Falls Street, will provide a destination for Niagara Falls residents and the millions of visitors who come to the city each year. Improved coordination among state and local agencies, especially as it relates to the state park, will help the entire downtown organize to provide an improved visitor experience and help boost overnight stays. Some

short-term action, such as improved facades, realizing better wayfinding, recladding the parking ramp, establishment and enforcement of signage controls, and establishment of an ambassador program, will help catalyze the momentum created by the Culinary Institute. Even small initiatives such as announcing a new strategy for the mall or replacing the existing banner program along Old Falls Street will help. Finally, from a process perspective, the table must be set to allow the inexorable market forces to thrive in concert with the regulations that the city has established.

For the municipality, the City of Niagara Falls Comprehensive Plan has identified seven big moves to reach its strategic goals. The panel recommends adding three more big moves: (8) Reimagine Former Rainbow Centre Mall Site; (9) Reestablish Old Falls Street Retail; and (10) Rethink and Fix the Process. Niagara Falls is poised to enter the next step in its civic evolution. The panel hopes that in some small way the suggestions and recommendations outlined in this report will help.



About the Panel

Glenda Hood

*Panel Chair
Orlando, Florida*

Hood was elected three-term mayor of Orlando from 1992 to 2003 and then served as Florida secretary of state from 2003 to 2005. Before being elected Orlando's first woman mayor, she served as a City Council member for three terms from 1982 to 1992. She also owned her own public relations business.

Known as a hands-on leader and ardent advocate of growth management strategies and smart growth principles, Hood worked to ensure that Orlando's neighborhoods were safe and livable for all residents and visitors, steered the resurgence of downtown, and encouraged the growth of businesses that contributed to the overall strength of Orlando's local economy. Under her leadership, the city's geographic area grew by 50 percent; older and historic in-town neighborhoods were revitalized; compatible new land use infill was constructed; the city's largest parks initiative built new parks and refurbished existing ones; unprecedented partnerships in education were established; regional transportation alternatives were championed; Orlando became positioned as a high-tech center and competitive international market; and the arts were elevated to a civic priority and economic driver.

Hood spearheaded the reuse plan for the Orlando Naval Training Center, the most ambitious economic development project in the city's history, which has been recognized across the country as one of the best examples of reuse of former government properties and a model for incorporating all elements of smart growth.

As Florida's secretary of state, she was responsible for administrative services, corporations, cultural affairs,

elections, historical resources, and library and information services. She was coauthor of the state's economic development plan and generated the statewide cultural affairs plan.

Hood has served as president of the National League of Cities and Florida League of Cities and as chair of the Florida Chamber of Commerce. She is a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration; an active participant with the Urban Land Institute's Advisory Services panels and an advisory board member of ULI's Rose Center for Public Leadership and longstanding board member and past board chair of Partners for Livable Communities. She currently serves on the corporate boards of SantaFe HealthCare, Baskerville-Donovan Inc., and Urban Trust Bank as well as Florida's Blood Centers and Florida's Gubernatorial Fellows Program.

She received her degree in Spanish literature from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, after studying in both Spain and Costa Rica; completed the Executive Program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government; and was selected to attend the Mayor's Urban Design Institute at the University of Virginia.

Nancy Cappola

Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Cappola is currently a vice president, business development, with North Star Advisors, a private equity firm in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and a consultant with the Metis Group of Washington, D.C., for real estate advisory projects. Her career has been shaped by scientific study in the life sciences, over 20 years in real estate and banking, and for the past seven years in economic development in southeast Michigan with regional government and a university-led business incubator.

Prior to joining North Star and Metis in 2011, Cappola was the chief development officer and director of international soft landings for Wayne State University Research and Technology Park (TechTown), a university-based business incubator. As director of international soft landings, Cappola developed the “soft landings” concept for TechTown, a business initiative to provide key collaborative partnerships and immediate market access to inbound later-stage and mature foreign inbound technology companies. In the first year of the program, she attracted business, government, and academics from 22 countries and 89 companies. She targeted foreign direct investment from the life sciences and energy sectors of Canada, Israel, Mexico, European Union countries, and Asia. Cappola was part of an advisory team representing the Michigan life sciences sector at major university and medical centers in Israel. She has worked closely with representatives of the Polish government on developing initiatives to bring technology companies to the United States. During her tenure at TechTown, she raised over \$10 million in capital through relationship-based funding and tactical grant writing.

Earlier, as a deputy director of business development for Wayne County, Michigan, Department of Economic Development, Cappola managed the county's New Markets Tax Credit program, securing \$50 million in tax credits. She managed all of the compliance, project structuring, and project closing operations of this federal program.

Cappola worked in banking at BNY Mellon, Citizens Financial Inc., and Laureate Capital in Pittsburgh, closing over \$300 million in commercial real estate financings with banks, life insurance companies, the commercial mortgage-backed securities market, and a union pension fund.

She is a real estate broker in New York state and an executive board member of CityConnectDetroit.

Bill Clarke

Ross, California

Clarke is licensed as both a civil engineer and a landscape architect and has over 30 years' experience in planning, design, and construction projects. He currently consults to developers and other planning and design firms and public agencies on issues ranging from new community plans to site planning and engineering.

For over 20 years, Clarke was with two of the largest landscape architecture firms in the country. As a principal at the SWA Group in Sausalito, California, he worked on projects including the Weyerhaeuser Corporate campus outside Tacoma, Washington; the engineering planning for the Woodbridge new community in Irvine, California; and ARAMCO compounds in Saudi Arabia. As a principal at EDAW Inc., Clarke led a team that won a design competition for a government complex in Doha, Qatar; prepared two specific plans for more than 6,000 homes and 800 square feet of office industrial land in Tracy, California; and prepared construction documents for Washington Harbour in Washington, D.C.

In recent years, Clarke's work has centered on the planning and implementation of a variety of projects. Among these has been an 11,000-acre residential development near Livermore, California; an 800-acre commercial and industrial plan in Tracy, California; and a 300-acre business park in Livermore, California. He was also part of a team preparing a resource management plan for the country of Palau. Currently, he is working on the implementation of a town center for the new community of Mountain House, California.

David Hancock

Boston, Massachusetts

Hancock is a principal with CBT Architects with 40 years of experience in urban design and the design and management of building projects of almost all types, including civic, multifamily residential, hotel, institutional, private development, corporate real estate, and transportation.

He represented NAIOP on the Commonwealth's Green Building Roundtable, was a member of Mayor Menino's Boston Green Building Task Force, and regularly serves on advisory committees for local government on such issues as smart growth, sustainable design, and historic preservation. He is regularly invited to speak at national conferences on urban design issues. Hancock is a member of the American Institute of Architects and has been a member of the Urban Land Institute for 16 years. He has served on one previous Advisory Services panel in Germantown, Maryland.

Hancock holds an undergraduate degree from McGill University and a graduate degree from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

Charles Johnson IV

Chicago, Illinois

President and CEO of the International Society of Hospitality Consultants, Johnson is a nationally recognized consultant with over 30 years of experience in convention, sports, hospitality, and general real estate consulting. Prior to forming Johnson Consulting, he worked for the Chicago-based real estate development firm Stein and Company, which was design/build for the expansion at McCormick Place in Chicago.

Before that, Johnson was national director of KPMG Peat Marwick's Convention, Sports, and Leisure Consulting practice. He served as program manager for the Puerto Rico Convention Center District project in San Juan, Puerto Rico, for four years, and successfully guided that project from an idea to a highly regarded 110-acre urban redevelopment project. He has worked on numerous projects in western New York, including the expansion analysis of the Buffalo Convention Center.

Johnson has worked on more than 600 public assembly and urban development consulting assignments in the United States and abroad. He is a member of ULI and he has served on two Advisory Services panels.

John Orfield

Dallas, Texas

A graduate of Columbia University with a master of science in architecture and building design, Orfield is both product and proponent of the collaborative style that is exemplified in BOKA Powell. Influenced professionally by both his theatrical mother and engineering father, Orfield enjoys exploring the kinship between architecture, film, and dance, art forms he sees as related in their portrayal of human experience moving through time and space. He has sought out collaborative environments or created them on the spot in design firms and universities from New York to Indianapolis to Mexico City.

Orfield considers every project a partnership, not only between the architect and the client, but also with the site itself. He sees this contextual approach as one reason why BOKA Powell has no recognizable "style"—only spaces that benefit their surroundings as the result of a very intentional design process. He, his photographer wife, and their children recharge batteries on trips to the most exotic destination available at the moment.

Monte Ritchey

Charlotte, North Carolina

Ritchey is president of the Conformity Corporation, a Charlotte, North Carolina-based full-service real estate company specializing in mixed-use and historic preservation projects. Affiliated companies are ACCESS Property Management and Accord Construction. The work of the Conformity Corporation focuses on an appreciation for the human condition—how we experience the world. Conformity seeks to be a demonstrator of best practices and, where necessary, to break through "known models" to discover new solutions, all while insuring feasibility. Acknowledging the pure sense of place and context that historic structures can provide to a venture, the Conformity Corporation routinely looks for opportunities to combine preservation with new infill. Ritchey is expert in the area of tax-advantaged rehabilitation, having completed more than

half a dozen certified projects, most recently the Rutzler, the largest of the remaining multifamily structures in Charlotte's Elizabeth neighborhood, a National Register District.

In 2009, Conformity Corporation, in partnership with Lowe's Companies Inc., completed Southborough, which includes Lowe's Home Centers' flagship store and cleverly integrated retail, office, and housing uses in Charlotte's SouthEnd, a transit-oriented business improvement district. Southborough is a ULI Featured Case Study. Other recent infill projects include the Williamson, SteelHaus, and Elizabeth Village, predominantly residential projects with supporting retail and office components. Conformity's work enjoys a continuing stream of top honors and awards from professional organizations, including the American Institute of Architects, the American Society of Landscape Architects, the Counselors of Real Estate, and Preservation North Carolina. Conformity's work has been the subject of numerous white papers and has been used in the classroom at both the Harvard Graduate School of Design and the MIT Department of Urban Studies.

Ritchey is a member of the Urban Land Institute, the International Council of Shopping Centers, and Preservation North Carolina and is past president of the board of International House, where today he is leading International House and six other nonprofits in tenancing a surplus Charlotte-Mecklenburg school to create the Midwood International and Cultural Center, a 42,000-square-foot hub of like-minded nonprofits. He is president of the Elizabeth Community Association and serves on several citizen advisory committees for the city of Charlotte. Ritchey also volunteers with the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's School of Architecture, working with students studying architecture and urban planning.

Kathleen Rose

Davidson, North Carolina

President of Rose & Associates Southeast Inc., Rose combined decades of experience as a development expert and real estate analyst to build a unique consulting practice that assists public and private sector clients in the analysis

and positioning of communities and projects for social and economic sustainability. The firm's work integrates market reality, land use, and economic dynamics in assisting to create comprehensive plans to strategically and holistically guide land use and economic development decisions.

Rose has managed the analysis, planning, development, and marketing of retail, industrial, hotel, office, and mixed-use projects throughout the eastern United States. She holds the Certified Commercial Investment Member (CCIM) designation of the Commercial Investment Real Estate Institute of the National Association of Realtors, an elite corps of professionals recognized for their expertise in all disciplines of commercial-investment real estate. She received her CCIM designation in 1989 and went on to serve on the institute's faculty and as chair on a number of national executive committees. She is past president of the Connecticut CCIM chapter and a retired member of the North Carolina CCIM chapter board of directors. She has also been honored with the designation of Counselor of Real Estate (CRE) of the National Association of Realtors. The CRE credential is awarded only to those individuals who are invited by their peers as established consultants into the membership of the Counselors of Real Estate.

Rose has served on Advisory Services panels for the Urban Land Institute, including the Daniel Rose Center for Public Policy, and is a member of the International Economic Development Council, International City/Council Management Association, and the Charlotte and Lake Norman Chambers of Commerce. She is past president of the East Granby Chamber of Commerce. Rose has written articles for a number of industry trade publications, such as *Shopping Center Business*, covering topics including retail, development, urban planning, economic development, and related subjects. She has served as a general certified commercial appraiser in the state of Connecticut and is currently licensed as real estate broker in both North Carolina and Connecticut.

To provide living models and case studies for the firm's work, Rose is also managing partner of Urban Organic I LLC, a property company that developed South Main

Square in downtown Davidson, North Carolina, a mixed-use revitalization project that was the catalyst for forming the arts district in the South Main Street corridor. Rose's most recent endeavor is the creation of PiES—the Project for Innovation, Energy and Sustainability—a green industries incubator to serve as a public/private partnership model for community entrepreneurial development. PiES was nominated in 2011 for the Sustainability Award in two categories by the *Charlotte Business Journal*.

Her work in real estate and community and economic development has resulted in Rose being recognized by *Business Today* as a top businesswoman in the Lake Norman region in 2010 and by the *Charlotte Business Journal* as among the top 25 businesswomen in 2011.

