Coping with a Turbulent Age: Drilling down into the focus areas for regional sustainability

Today’s session focuses on key focus areas for creating and maintaining a more sustainable region. Land use and development, transportation, food systems, housing and community development and community organizing are interrelated and critical components for creating a more resilient community.

Land use planning dictates what goes where (development) and the limitations of what happens in that space (land use regulations, zoning and ordinances). In some cases, land use planning also determines what form development can take (form-based code, design guidelines). At times, land use patterns can have secondary effects that impact other systems. In our region, the dominant land use pattern is commonly referred to as “sprawl.” In 1992, we had 5,301 square feet of developed land per person, but in 2011, there were 6,880 square feet of developed land for each Buffalo Niagara resident, a 30% increase over a 20 year span. [1] Much of this land was critical environmental infrastructure such as farmland, floodplains, forests and wetlands.

While sprawl allows for single-use development of land, single-family homes on large lots, big box retail, and abundant surface parking, it also consumes vast amounts of arable land, demands expensive transportation (roads, highways, public transportation, etc.) and infrastructure (sewer, water, utilities, internet, etc.), uses a lot of water (potable, irrigation, waste), and increases the demand for energy. Because these systems cross municipal and legal boundaries, taking a more regional approach to land use planning helps us minimize the negative impacts of development on how we grow our food, how we get around and where we live. We can grow smarter locally, if we think regionally.

Transportation systems are heavily impacted by land use patterns. Less compact development means we drive longer and further to get to work, home and play. Since 1970, we drive twice as much [1], creating a greater demand for costly infrastructure while increasing fossil fuel pollution. The cost of driving is also heavily borne by car owners who spend approximately $8,000 per year to own and operate a car. [1] As a result of sprawling development, our public transportation system is equally sprawling, and for those who can not afford to drive, it is also inconvenient and time consuming. [1] Reducing sprawl and moving towards a more compact region can help to make public transportation more efficient, while reducing the time, distance and cost for people who drive. Compact development also creates the...
opportunity for alternative transportation modes like walking or biking to play a larger role in day-to-day commuting.

Regional land use patterns and transportation systems also affect food access. While agriculture is an important part of our regional economy, very little of the food we eat comes from Western New York. With increasing instances of severe weather and drought, paired with increasing energy costs, we can also expect an increase in the cost of food even as it becomes less available. As a region, we need to produce more food locally to cope with future volatility in the food system. [1, 2] However, in order for this to be accomplished we need to preserve farmland from residential development, support farm economies, promote sustainable agricultural practices, improve “field to fork” connections, promote urban agriculture, farmer’s markets and improve food storage. In addition, we need to make food more accessible in underserved urban neighborhoods and rural areas. Healthy food can be difficult to access due to its cost and location. For those who have tight budgets and limited access to transportation to reach food retail destinations with a selection of quality foods it can be hard to maintain a consistent healthy diet. Poor access to healthy foods has big implications for our public health system as a contributor to health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and malnutrition. [2]

How we live impacts the region. Our homes use energy, water and materials. Our neighborhoods - where they are and how they are connected - demand energy for transportation and land for its development. At the same time, our neighborhoods can be catalytic places which significantly impact the lives and outcomes of those living within them. So, the challenge before us is how to create sustainable places that also preserve and maintain the structure of our neighborhoods, while simultaneously attempting to meet the housing needs and preferences of a changing population and demographic. Not only do we need to make homes more energy efficient, and neighborhoods more compact or better connected, but we also need to ensure that communities have good housing and are universally accessible for all including diverse populations such as children, elderly, disabled, and immigrant communities. Bolstering the connections between neighborhoods and places of employment to improve access and desirability can help to bring back some of our struggling communities. Creating and maintaining quality housing and great neighborhoods are central to making Buffalo Niagara better for everyone. [3]

Today’s learning session will feature four brief presentations that discuss these critical topics and then open up the conversation during the Q & A for an opportunity to discuss how we can move the region forward through a coordinated, yet community-tailored approach to sustainable planning and implementation. After we’ve started the conversation as a group, please take the lunch period to get to know one another and continue the conversation before heading to your workshop. Today’s workshops offer concrete tools for moving the region forward. We are thrilled to have Open Buffalo here to present a workshop on community organizing and using public narratives to motivate action. If you aren’t ready to organize your community or start your own project, UB Regional Institute will be teaching you how to use free, accessible, online mapping tools to better understand critical planning issues in the region. We hope you enjoy today’s learning session and we look forward to seeing you at the Idea Summit on May 2nd!

Find data on local demographics, transportation, land use, economic activity, food systems, and more that can help uncover what the data says about your community.

Learn about your local community using the powerful, user-friendly ArcGIS Online interface. Explore maps to get to know the region, create your own map and share it over the web, or use the data to advocate for change in your neighborhood.

http://www.oneregionforward.org/data-tools/mappingmetrics/

For Enhanced Tools:

Before you begin, you’ll need to create a free, personal account for ArcGIS Online. Just go to the link below, click “Sign-up for a free account”, then on the next page click “Create a Public Account”:

www.esri.com/software/arcgis/arcgisonline/features/free-personal-account

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Planning in Our Region

One Region Forward is not the beginning of planning in the Buffalo-Niagara region. It is an extension of a broad and growing body of work by local and regional governments, community-based organizations, businesses, and citizens. The regional plan for sustainable development will build on that work and align its policies and program of action on existing regional plans that are currently in place for economic development, land use, transportation, energy, environment, and more.

One Region Forward Plan Library

Keywords: Planning, Zoning

Comprehensive plans are formal planning documents that address a wide range of planning issues and are reflective of the community’s goals and objectives in regard to planning issues. Comprehensive plans are the guiding documents for the development of zoning, ordinances, land use decisions and community development. One Region Forward has worked with communities across Erie and Niagara counties to create a plan library where you can review plans from all across the bi-country region.

Why you should check it out...

NYS zoning stipulates that comprehensive plans should guide local zoning law. Comprehensive plans also guide land use and development in a community. It is important to know what has been determined to be a priority in order to leverage planning processes.

Link: http://www.oneregionforward.org/data-tools/plan-library/

Buffalo Green Code

Keywords: Planning, Zoning, Smart Growth

The Buffalo Green Code is a historic update of Buffalo’s development framework that will target investments, facilitate job creation, restore the environment, and improve quality of life for residents. The Buffalo Green Code has been successful in terms of extensive public engagement, with more than 4,000 residents and stakeholders have already participating in this initiative.

Why you should check it out...

This plan covers a wide variety of topics that would be of interest to those working on economic development, environmental, and community development issues. The effort acts as a model for effective and widespread community engagement.

Link: http://www.buffalogreencode.com/

City of Buffalo Comprehensive Planning Effort

Keywords: Planning, Community, Land Use

The City of Buffalo Comprehensive Planning Effort resulted in a suite of plans. The main guiding document is the Comprehensive Plan (2006). The overall goal of the plan is to guide Buffalo in building a city that is a prosperous, green regional center providing livable communities for all its citizens. It also provides a framework for all other planning initiatives at a variety of districts throughout the city.

Why you should check it out...

Buffalo’s Comprehensive Plan guides all development in the City of Buffalo, and offers information about the general vision that the City of Buffalo seeks to achieve, along with strategies that will guide development toward this vision.

Links:

The Buffalo Comprehensive Plan: https://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/files/1_2_1/mayor/cob_comprehensive_plan/chapter_90.html


The Local Waterfront Revitalization Program: http://www.oneregionforward.org/plan/queen-city-waterfront/

Additional Buffalo Planning Document Links:


Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus Master Plan: http://www.oneregionforward.org/plan/buffalo-niagara-medical-campus-master-plan-update/

Good Neighbors Planning Alliance Neighborhood Plans: http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/City_Departments/Office_of_Strategic_Planning/Divisions/Planning/Good_Neighbors_Planning_Alliance
GrowWNY Urban Regeneration Group

**Keywords:** Vacancy, Community, Environment

The purpose of this group, which is part of the larger environmental umbrella group of GrowWNY, is to obtain and improve vacant property through advocating for new public policies, and building and zoning codes to make reclamation easier for residents. Check out its reading materials, attend a meeting, sign up for the listserv or read the minutes of previous meetings on the group’s site.

**Why you should check it out...**
This group is working to empower citizens to reclaim the abandoned properties that are causing further disinvestment in our neighborhoods, and use them for creative, productive purposes. The group also has access to a wide range of other groups and resources that are members of GrowWNY, which fosters collaborative, effective action.

**Link:** [http://www.growwny.org/urban-regeneration/](http://www.growwny.org/urban-regeneration/)

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WNY Land Conservancy

**Keywords:** Land Use, Environment, Planning

The WNY Land Conservancy is a regional, non-profit land trust that works with landowners, municipalities, and other organizations to conserve their natural spaces and works with farms throughout Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, and Wyoming Counties. Its primary tool for protecting land are conservation easements, property acquisitions, and transaction assistance. Read up about their current projects, recent successes, events and volunteer opportunities.

**Why you should check it out...**
This site features a comprehensive list of related land trust organizations. It also features detailed information about current and past projects. This site is a good resource for those interested in land preservation within Buffalo Niagara and WNY in general.

**Link:** [http://wnylc.org/](http://wnylc.org/)

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NFTA Transit Options in the Metro Amherst-Buffalo Corridor

**Keywords:** Transportation, Planning, Community

The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority and its partners have embarked on a study of public transportation options for the corridor connecting Buffalo and Amherst. This could include an extension of the Metro Rail and/or improvements to the current bus service. The study is an important step in expanding public transit in the region.

**Why you should check it out:**
Transit influences the way we live and should be a priority in the region. Getting involved and keeping track of this study could empower you to become part of the regional transit planning process.

**Link:** [http://toamherst.nfta.com/](http://toamherst.nfta.com/)

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Ready To Grow – WNY Food Hub

**Keywords:** Food Systems, Community, Planning

Field & Fork Network is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the local food system in Western New York. It has recently completed a feasibility study for a WNY food hub, in which growers across a 12 county region were surveyed to analyze whether there is sufficient growth and supply capacity to meet the increasing demand for locally grown foods. The study results support a development of a produce aggregation facility that would serve small and mid-size farmer, who would not have the capacity to directly sell to a wholesaler on their own.

**Why you should check it out...**
Of the 7,500 farms that exist in Western New York, more than 88% of those are considered small farms. Many of these produce exceptional agricultural goods. However, market constraints have left farmers out of the wholesale market. This project will address and eventually mitigate those barriers for both farmers and institutional buyers who want to produce and consume local products.

Creating Healthy Places to Live, Work and Play

Keywords: Health, Food Systems, Community

Creating Healthy Places to Live, Work and Play, is a Cornell University Cooperative Extension project to provide high quality research-based information to county residents in order to prevent obesity and Type II diabetes. This cooperative extension implements initiatives such as Healthy Kids, Healthy New York, community gardens, corner stores, Plentiful Partnership of Niagara, joint use agreements, walking trails, and streetscaping improvements.

Why you should check it out...
It is an excellent program for people to be more physically active and eat healthier food choices. It also promotes community gardens and encourages people to grow their own produce. Furthermore, this initiative works on publicizing recreational spaces in order to increase physical activity options for residents.

Link: [http://cceniagaracounty.org/program-areas/creating-healthy-places-to-live-work-and-play/](http://cceniagaracounty.org/program-areas/creating-healthy-places-to-live-work-and-play/)

Buffalo Erie-Niagara Land Improvement Corp

Keywords: Vacancy, Community, Land Use

Description:
This organization is aimed towards alleviating issues found in distressed neighborhoods through revitalization efforts and strategically acquiring, improving, assembling, and selling distressed, vacant, abandoned, and/or tax-delinquent properties. In other words, the organization serves as our region’s “Land Bank.”

Why you should check it out:
Vacancy has become a major issue in our region. The Erie County Department of Real Property Tax Services has stated that there is an excess of 73,360 tax liens within Erie County worth more than $53,529,325 in taxes owed to Erie County. This corporation is working on addressing this issue.

Link: [http://www.benlic.org/](http://www.benlic.org/)

Growing Together: Ensuring Healthy Food, Viable Farms, and a Prosperous Buffalo Niagara

Keywords: Food Systems, Community, Planning

A key component of One Region Forward’s planning initiative, Growing Together is a sustainable food access and food justice report for Erie and Niagara Counties. It was created by a team from the University at Buffalo, School of Architecture and Planning’s Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab, led by Dr. Samina Raja. The report echoes community concerns over weaknesses in the region’s food system and seeks to make fresh food more equitably accessible, ensure that sustainable food production remains a viable career, and strengthen the connections between the region’s food producers and residents.

Why you should check it out...
This report is a helpful resource for understanding how the food system operates in the Erie-Niagara region. It thoroughly assesses the current challenges faced by communities and also identifies strategies and actors to improve this region’s food access and food justice.


Blueprint Buffalo

Keywords: Vacancy, Housing, Community

Blueprint Buffalo is a policy brief and action plan that recognizes the barriers that vacant and blighted properties impose on redevelopment efforts, as well as the opportunities they present to the traditional communities they are located in. The plan presents four actions that public, private, and nonprofit leaders can pursue to address these challenges and take advantage of opportunities. It also describes four key strategies for achieving these goals, that can be tailored to the needs of each community and neighborhood within Buffalo. Blueprint Buffalo also gives the larger Erie County a policy framework in which to tackle the issue of vacancy at a regional scale.

Why you should check it out:
Blueprint Buffalo outlines necessary and practical steps in addressing vacancy issues. Blueprint Buffalo presents vacancy as a product of other connected and systematic issues that should be addressed.

Link: [http://www.oneregionforward.org/plan/blueprint-buffalo](http://www.oneregionforward.org/plan/blueprint-buffalo)
Room at the Table: Food System Assessment of Erie County

**Keywords:** Food Systems, Planning, Health

This 2011 plan outlines strategies for strengthening Erie County’s food system. Specifically, the plan aims to ensure economically viable and sustainable agriculture, promote access to local food, ensure lasting food security, promote residents’ overall health and wellness, and educate the general public about the food system in Erie County.

**Why you should check it out...**

Assesses the current conditions of the county’s entire food system, describes public policies related to food, and analyzes local growing capacity and the economic viability of agriculture in Erie County. It also discusses the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of our food system, lessons learned from other communities, and recommendations for enhancing our food system.


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2014-2018 GBNRTC Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

**Keywords:** Transportation, Economy, Planning

The GBNRTC is responsible for the maintenance of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). It is a five year financial program describing the schedule of federal funding for approved transportation projects in the Buffalo-Niagara region. The current TIP contains funding information for the period from Federal Fiscal Year 2014 to 2018 and includes approved highway, transit, bicycle, pedestrian, and air quality projects, as well as studies and programs in the region.

**Why you should check it out...**

The TIP is the primary way federal funding is allocated for transportation infrastructure improvements in localities across Erie and Niagara Counties. With limited and dwindling Federal dollars, only projects of highest priority based on need, local desires, and long-range plan conformity are likely to be funded. Learning about this can help you advocate for needed projects in your community as well as tracking the progress of existing projects.

**Link:** [http://www.gbnrtc.org/projects/transportation-improvement-program/](http://www.gbnrtc.org/projects/transportation-improvement-program/)

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Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan 2030

**Keywords:** Planning, Community, Public Policy

The first plan that proposes a collaborative, multi-municipality approach to planning and development in Niagara County over the next 20 years. The plan identifies challenges, as well as assets and opportunities, in five key areas: land use, economic development, service delivery, capital improvements, and quality of life. In addition, the plan offers several actions for improving these sectors and ways to obtain financing for these projects.

**Why you should check it out:**

This plan offers a countywide perspective that is often lacking in other planning initiatives focused on more specific areas or projects. It also consolidates countywide planning efforts into one plan, while acknowledging the good work that has been occurring under smaller government and community-based organizations.


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Building the Blue Economy

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Water, Economic Development

A report from PUSH Buffalo and The Partnership for the Public Good that discusses stormwater management opportunities for community-based organizations. Discusses how non-profit groups, policy makers, and funders can address the environmental and public health issue of combined sewer overflows through green infrastructure or blue economy approaches in addition to traditional gray infrastructure techniques. The report also explains how these methods can achieve the “triple bottom line”: environmental protection, job creation, and neighborhood redevelopment. Various public, private, nonprofit, academic institutions, and residents contributed to the creation of this report.

**Why you should check it out...**

This report outlines practical strategies for how neighborhood organizations can take advantage of stormwater management opportunities through advocating for green infrastructure and creating local social enterprises. It also provides several helpful case studies and recommendations for receiving funding.

Researching the Issue:
Management guru William Deming said, “If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.” Planning efforts that do not specify goals and obtain data to determine if the goals have been met lack credibility and effectiveness. The data tools below are helpful for transforming raw data into understandable and useful formats.
Access tools online at http://www.oneregionforward.org/data-tools/

Growing Food Connections
Keywords: Food Systems, Public Policy, Community
The broad goal of this partnership is to increase community food security while guaranteeing sustainable and economically viable agriculture and food production. This involves removing public policy barriers and deploying innovative public policy tools by building the capacity of local government. The Growing Food Connections Team includes investigators, National Advisory Committee Members, food system experts, planning professionals, representatives of Communities of Innovation, and representatives from Communities of Opportunity.
Why you should check it out...
Growing Food Connections will coordinate and integrate research, education, planning and policy activities to build a stronger community food system from the ground up. It will use research to assess how local governments are using policy and planning tools to foster connections between family farmers and underserved community residents.
Link: http://growingfoodconnections.org/

HUD Data Sets
Keywords: Housing, Data, Public Policy
HUD Data Sets provide raw data and research from various housing organizations from around the country associated with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. A variety of information, including rental estimates, geospatial data, and housing affordability data is provided through this website.
Why you should check it out:
Housing is a transdisciplinary topic, affecting a variety of subjects and stakeholders. This website pulls together a wide range of research and data from a variety of sources that collectively describe a national perspective on housing.
Link: http://www.huduser.org/portal/pdrrdatas_landing.html

Land Conservation Tools
Land conservation tools can serve a variety of functions, including the preservation of open space, protection of farmland, redevelopment of central business districts, limitation of urban sprawl, and improvement of water and air quality, to name a few. The tools listed below are commonly used in land conservation:
Link: http://www.oneregionforward.org/data-tools/

Conservation Easements: Conservation easements, also referred to as conservation restrictions, are the most widely used tool for protecting private land. They are legal arrangements between landowners and land trusts or government agencies that permanently limit uses on the property in order to preserve their conservation worth. They do enable owners to continue to own and use their land, and sell or pass it down to heirs.
Link: http://www.landtrustalliance.org/conservation/landowners/conservation-easements

Transfer of Development Rights: Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs work off the assumption that property owners have a “bundle of rights” associated with their land. For example, a land owner might have the right to subdivide and develop his or her property. TDR programs allow landowners to sell their unused rights to developers, for them to use in an area where greater growth is desired.
Link: http://www.farmlandinfo.org/sites/default/files/TDR_04-2008_1.pdf

Downzoning: Downzoning, which is generally a voluntary program, is a practice through which one or a group of landowners chose to have a property’s zoning revised so that it allows for lower density. For instance, a property owner could downzone her property from one unit per 10 acres to one unit per 40 acres, and thereby preserve open space and the character of a rural area.
Link: http://www.realtor.org/field-guides/field-guide-to-downzoning
**New York Department of State**  
*Keywords: Public Policy, Education, Planning*

The New York State Department of State has provided a summary of how local laws are adopted for private citizens who are interested in improving local government. This document provides an overview of legislative powers in New York State, the Home Rule Policy, and the processes of developing, drafting, filing, and adopting a local law.

**Why you should check it out...**
This document is a good technical resource for understanding how policies and plans become enforceable laws in New York State, and the general legal context of planning in our state. For additional information about local governance in New York State, check out the Department of State’s Division of Local Government Services website at http://www.dos.ny.gov/lg/publications.html


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**HUD’s Sustainable Housing and Communities Page**  
*Keywords: Sustainability, Community, Planning*

This is the web page of HUD’s Sustainable Housing and Communities Program, which administers the grant that supports One Region Forward. Here are just a few of the things that you can do on this website: apply for a grant, sign up for the program’s mailing list, check out the HUD Sustainable Communities Resource Center, and learn about the program’s Housing and Transportation Affordability Initiative. Check out the page to see what other knowledge and resources it has to offer.

**Why you should check it out...**
Offers information on the program that makes One Region Forward possible, case studies of other regional sustainability efforts, and tools to implement sustainability in your community.


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**Food Availability Data System**  
*Keywords: Food Systems, Data, Health*

The USDA’s Food Availability (Per Capita) Data System (FADS) includes three different but connected data sets on food availability, loss-adjusted food availability, and nutrient availability data. All serve as common proxies for actual consumption behaviors at the national level. Food availability and loss-adjusted food availability data are updated through 2012, while the nutrient availability data is updated through 2006. Documentation is available for each of the three data series.

**Why you should check it out...**
The 2012 data include estimates for over 200 commodities. Users also have access to summaries of findings, a glossary of terms, and additional readings. In general, this data set is useful for those interested in food access and nutrition in their communities.


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**Food Systems Bibliography**  
*Keywords: Food Systems, Education*

A listing of key classic food systems planning readings, journal articles and reports.

**Why you should check it out...**
If you are looking to expand your knowledge base of food systems and food system planning these resources are the place to start. The items in this bibliography will give you the best foundation to understanding the issues at hand and actions that can be taken on whole new level.

**Link:** [http://growingfoodconnections.org/tools-resources/food-systems-bibliography/](http://growingfoodconnections.org/tools-resources/food-systems-bibliography/)

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**One Region Foward Regional Strategy Documents**  

Resources and planning documents include technical reports on food systems planning, climate change action, and a planning resource for coordinating housing investments across the region.
Organizations for Action:

There are many local and national organizations who have opportunities for you to engage with issues related to sustainability. Many of these organizations are also a wealth of information and are great resources for Citizen Planners. Here are a few featured organizations to get you started...

Open Buffalo

**Keywords:** Community, Advocacy

Open Buffalo is a civic initiative to make major, long-term improvements in justice and equity; it is an unprecedented collaboration among a diverse group of partners; and it is one of three projects in the nation chosen for the Open Places Initiative of the Open Society Foundations.

**Why you should check it out...**

Open Buffalo is a new initiative in the area and looks to make Buffalo a more open and just city. Their website contains a number of events, news and resources for those that want to get involved in their cause.

**Link:** [http://www.openbuffalo.org/about/open-buffalo/](http://www.openbuffalo.org/about/open-buffalo/)

GO Bike Buffalo

**Keywords:** Health, Transportation, Sustainability

Green Options Bike Buffalo works to create healthy, environmentally sustainable, community-friendly transportation options in the City of Buffalo. It serves this mission through its Safe Routes to School, Play Streets, Complete Streets, Bicycle Benefits, and Recycle-A-Bicycle programs. GO Bike Buffalo also provides information about bicycle parking locations and a bike to work survival guide, among other resources.

**Why you should check it out...**

GO Bike Buffalo is leading the way towards a more bike and environmentally friendly Buffalo. Get involved by attending one of their community workshops, signing up their newsletter and text updates, participating in their PhotoVoice program, or volunteering at The GObike Shop or one of their Bike Month Events.

**Link:** [http://gobikebuffalo.org/](http://gobikebuffalo.org/)

Citizens for Regional Transit

**Keywords:** Transportation, Advocacy, Community

Citizens for Regional Transit (also known as the Citizens’ Regional Transit Corporation) is committed to creating a broad base of support for the improvement and expansion of bus and rail transit for all citizens of the Niagara Frontier. The purpose of the organization is to build an understanding of the benefits of transit through outreach events, information sharing and other public participation activities.

**Why you should check it out...**

This grassroots organization is committed to increasing transit access for all. The group is volunteer-based, so you can join, attend one of their quarterly meetings, or participate in one of their engagement events.

**Link:** [http://www.citizenstransit.org/](http://www.citizenstransit.org/)

Buffalo CarShare

**Keywords:** Transportation, Community, Sustainability

A community-driven organization that advances affordable and environmentally friendly transportation by offering a car share service. Members reserve vehicles that are located throughout Buffalo by the hour or day for a reasonable price.

**Why you should check it out...**

Buffalo CarShare is making traveling by car an option for those who would normally not be able to afford this, while preserving the environment. You can get involved in Buffalo CarShare by becoming a member or partnering with them to have their services expanded to your community.

**Link:** [http://www.buffalocarshare.org/](http://www.buffalocarshare.org/)
**Food Policy Council of Buffalo and Erie County**

**Keywords:** Food Systems, Public Policy, Advocacy

This is a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation supported partnership to help create a healthy food system and built environment in the region. In order to improve the local food system, the Food Policy Council was created as an advisory body to provide expert information on policies regarding food systems. This initiative focuses on increasing the number of farmers markets in Erie County and increasing the overall number of jobs in the local food system.

**Why you should check it out...**

This initiative offers volunteer positions for farmers, processors, retailers, and others interested in food issues. The Food Policy Council of Buffalo and Erie County use the latest research and methods to address public health concerns for marginalized groups.


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**Massachusetts Avenue Project**

**Keywords:** Food Systems, Community, Education

The mission of the Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP) is to nurture the growth of a diverse and equitable local food system and promote local economic opportunities, access to affordable, nutritious food, and social change education. MAP runs the Growing Green Program and its urban farm.

**Why you should check it out...**

The youth enrolled in the Growing Green Program improve healthy food access in their communities while learning marketable skills. Also, the urban farm is impressive, consisting of 13 lots that cover over an acre of reclaimed vacant lots in Buffalo’s West Side. Get involved by donating, interning, working there as a youth, or volunteering.

**Link:** [http://mass-ave.org/](http://mass-ave.org/)

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**Grassroots Gardens of Buffalo**

**Keywords:** Community, Food Systems, Land Use

and improve quality of life by developing and maintaining community gardens. These efforts help to beautify blocks, produce healthy food, and strengthen neighborhood pride. Grassroots Gardens projects include the Buffalo Food Project, Buffalo Sprouts School Gardens, and the Community Garden Stabilization Initiative. These programs aim to bring food to neighborhood youth and low-income residents, create gardens at every school, and secure the future of community gardens through long term land tenure options in Buffalo, respectively.

**Why you should check it out...**

Grassroots Gardens has helped establish close to 70 community gardens throughout the City of Buffalo on over 100 vacant lots that have revitalized and provided healthy food to numerous neighborhoods. Get involved by becoming a community gardener, volunteering, attending one of their events, or donating.

**Link:** [http://www.grassrootsgardens.org/](http://www.grassrootsgardens.org/)

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**Greenworks Buffalo Niagara**

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Environment, Economy

Greenworks Buffalo Niagara is a community organization committed to encouraging the growth and development of local green businesses and green business practices, through fostering connections between environmentally-minded companies and individuals, and providing them with necessary resources. It is a volunteer-based organization that coordinates networking events, workshops, and forums for environmentally conscious Western New York residents.

**Why you should check it out...**

Greenworks Buffalo Niagara is brought to you by the same group of people that organized the successful Buffalo Niagara Green Expo. Network with other environmental professionals and activists at one of their Green Drinks events, stay up-to-date on events in the local green business community through attending a Business Gets Green presentation, or join one of their local green business tours.

**Link:** [https://www.facebook.com/pages/Greenworks-Buffalo-Niagara/418537631544691](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Greenworks-Buffalo-Niagara/418537631544691)
Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy

Keywords: Land Use, Environment, Community Development

Maintains, preserves, and restores Buffalo’s Olmsted Park System. In addition, it has created the Olmsted Naturally Committee, which is composed of various Olmsted employees who are working to make the Olmsted Parks the greenest parks system in the nation through sustainable practices and projects. Examples of their projects include composting, native plantings, and pesticides and fertilizer alternatives.

Why you should check it out...

This organization is responsible for maintaining and enhancing one of Buffalo’s most treasured historical assets, made by the father of landscape architecture, Frederick Law Olmsted. Anyone who is interested in public parks and greenspace could learn from this organization. Volunteer as a board member, college intern, representative of a partner community organization, Eagle Scout, or youth group leader, among other volunteer positions.

Link: http://www.bfloparks.org/

ReNU Niagara

Keywords: Education, Community Development, Advocacy

ReNU Niagara engages, empowers and educates a diverse community of stakeholders to mobilize their collective capacity and resources to improve Niagara Falls and the surrounding areas based on a collaborative vision consistent with the mission and core values of Niagara University. It has several initiatives, including the GreenRoots Leadership Development Program, Highland Community Greening, Vacant Lot Initiative, and Niagara University Campus Garden

Why you should check it out...

ReNU Niagara has completed projects that have contributed to the resurgence of Niagara Falls. For example, it has created two community vegetable gardens, provided tax preparation assistance, and offered resident and organizational training for residents. This is appealing to those who want to work with an organization with a successful track record.

Link: http://www.niagara.edu/renu

Featured Online Resources:

There are many excellent resources on sustainable development online. Below are a few resources that discuss the general concept of sustainable development.

Erie County Parcel Viewer

Keywords: Mapping, Data, Community Development

The Erie County Government Office of Geographic Information Services provides an interactive and free tool that is highly accessible. The website provides up-to-date property information, tools for spatial mapping to create various mapping scenarios related to one’s area of interest. The latest update offers Pictometry online extension that provides high resolution satellite and aerial images of the entire Erie County up to the neighborhood level.

Why you should check it out...

This is an excellent tool to obtain property information especially for researching on current status of vacant parcels. It is also a good preliminary tool for gaining an understanding of current property situation at a neighborhood level.

Link: http://gis2.erie.gov/GC/ErieCountyNY/

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) - Bicycle and Pedestrian Program

Keywords: Transportation, Public Policy, Planning

The Bicycle & Pedestrian Program of the FHWA promotes bicycle and pedestrian transportation use, safety, and accessibility. This site provides guidance to how states can fulfill bicycle and pedestrian related legislation, as well as outlining funding mechanisms, planning requirements, and policy tools necessary to create more walkable and bicycle-friendly communities.

Why you should check it out...

This site features information about the amount of federal dollars dedicated to state pedestrian and bicycle initiatives, potential federal funding opportunities, legislation, and recommendations on how to create accessible bicycle and pedestrian designs. The site also hosts the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center which offers data on a broad range of topics related to bicycle and pedestrian engineering, promotion, awareness, and compliance.

Link: http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/
Environmental Protection Agency Climate and Transportation

Keywords: Climate Change, Transportation, Advocacy

This page features basic information on the relationship between transportation and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, what actions you can take to reduce your personal emissions, regulations and standards related to transportation emissions, methods for measuring GHGs, and recommendations for decreasing transportation emissions.

Why you should check it out...
The revitalization of brownfields can also improve the neighborhoods that surround them. Thus, these projects are of interest to individuals that want to make a far-reaching impact. There are also several BOAs in Erie and Niagara counties, thus change agents can choose to support or propose rehabilitation plans for a project in an area that is of particular interest to them.


ReImagining Cleveland - Vacant Land Re-use Pattern

Book Description

Keywords: Vacancy, Community Development, Sustainability

This pattern book was adopted by the Cleveland City Planning Commission and provides design recommendations and management strategies for adaptive re-use of vacant properties. It also outlines preliminary cost estimates for each design strategy.

Why you should check it out...
Vacancy in neighborhoods can be an eyesore and negatively affects social and economic activity in a community. This handbook outlines strategies and designs that tackle vacancy through creating attractive places and stimulating public interaction. It also features practical financial calculations for redevelopment strategies.

Link: http://www.cudc.kent.edu/projects_research/research/reimagining_cleveland.html

Food Environment Atlas

Keywords: Food Systems, Data, Mapping

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food Environment Atlas consolidates statistics on food environment indicators in order to encourage research on the determinants of food choices and diet quality. In addition, it offers a spatial representation of a community’s ability and success in accessing healthy food. The Atlas gathers statistics related to the following three food environment factors: food choices, health and well-being, and community characteristics. The Atlas features more than 200 food environment indicators at the county, state, and regional level.

Why you should check it out...
Users can generate maps displaying the variation in a single indicator across the country or view all of the county-level indicators for a specific county. Website visitors can also zoom into particular areas, export or print maps, and download full datasets in the Microsoft Excel format.


American Planning Association - Food Systems

Keywords: Planning, Food Systems, Health

The APA’s Food System initiative promotes healthy, sustainable communities with sustainable food systems. It emphasizes the planner’s role in the development of healthy, sustainable, local and regional food systems to support and enhance the overall public, social, ecological, and economic health of communities. The APA’s Food System project focuses on collaborative planning processes that develop local and regional land use decisions, along with economic development decisions, that encompass public health and the environment.

Why you should check it out...
The APA’s Food System Planning Interest Group (FIG) is a coalition of planners and allied professionals, who have come together to advance food systems planning. FIG currently includes more than 490 members — from local government staff and consultants, to professors and students and the general public— interested in food system topics at the intersection of planning.

Link: https://www.planning.org/resources/ontheradar/food/
American Community Gardening Association

**Keywords:** Advocacy, Community Development, Food Systems

This site features resources on community garden management, conservation, green infrastructure, food gardens, urban farms, culture, wellness, social justice and advocacy, urban issues, and educational involvement with the youth. It hosts how-to guides, sample evaluation tools and forms, land use agreements, contracts, research, funding opportunities, and much more.

**Why you should check it out...**

This is a one-stop-shop for anyone interested in starting their own community garden. It includes several sample materials that people can simply tweak according to their neighborhood’s needs. In addition, it has materials on a broad range of topics, including tips for gardening with seniors, rooftop gardening resources, and information on open land preservation.

**Link:** [https://communitygarden.org/resources/category/conservation-and-green-infrastructure/](https://communitygarden.org/resources/category/conservation-and-green-infrastructure/)

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The Partnership for the Public Good’s Citizen Toolkit

**Keywords:** Advocacy, Public Policy, Education

This free online toolkit created by the Partnership for the Public Good features resources on how to get involved in advocacy, influence policy, obtain data, work with government officials, contact the media, and write press releases, among others. The information is geared towards change agents in Buffalo.

**Why you should check it out...**

This easy-to-use toolkit is a one-stop-shop for citizen activists.


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MapBox

**Keywords:** Mapping, Data

MapBox is an open and crowdsourced build-it-yourself mapping service. It provides street, terrain, and satellite maps that are easily customizable. You can change the style of maps, upload data layers, and mark points, lines, and polygons on maps. The maps can then be saved and used in various platforms, including mobile and web applications.

**Why you should check it out:**

The maps are easy to make and can be highly tailored to your specific needs. Also, data displayed visually on a map is in general more compelling than data presented through text or other means.

**Link:** [https://www.mapbox.com/editor/#welcome](https://www.mapbox.com/editor/#welcome)

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Developing a Comprehensive Plan

**Keywords:** Education, Planning, Public Policy

The New York State Department of State has created a general presentation that broadly describes what a comprehensive plan is, how it can incorporate smart growth concepts, reasons for creating it, the public’s role in forming these plans, and steps for completing such plans.

**Why you should check it out:**

This presentation provides a general but useful overview of the opportunities and challenges of comprehensive plans, as well as how to make one.

**Link:** [http://www.co.oswego.ny.us/planning/comp%20plan%2012-03-08.pdf](http://www.co.oswego.ny.us/planning/comp%20plan%2012-03-08.pdf)
Shareabouts

**Keywords:** Mapping, Data, Planning

Shareabouts is a customizable tool for collecting citizen feedback. You can gather information on various topics, collect information about participants, create categories for submissions, and ask different types of questions. Furthermore, the results of these surveys can be displayed on a highly customizable map.

**Why you should check it out:**

Shareabouts allows for the collection of public input from diverse participants at the neighborhood or state scales. It can also be used in collecting feedback in several municipalities, for topics such as transportation planning, participatory budgeting, and resiliency mapping, among many others.

**Link:** [http://openplans.org/shareabouts/](http://openplans.org/shareabouts/)

Organizer’s Toolbox

**Keywords:** Education, Planning, Advocacy

The New Organizing Institute’s Organizer’s Toolbox is created for organizers by organizers. The toolkit contains downloadable videos, slideshows, templates, and resources for organizing, campaigning and training other organizers. These resources offer essential tools that are needed to build momentum for your cause and accomplish meaningful results. There are ten Resource Centers to draw from: Organizing and Leadership, Campaign Management, For Trainers, Online Organizing, Voter Registration, Organizing Your Career, Data Management, Voter Contact, Election Administration, VAN and GOTV. Thus, there is inevitably something for any organizer in this toolkit.

**Why you should check it out:**

It contains several lessons on various essential topics, such as “Tactics & Timing”, “Building Relationships”, and how to use the Microsoft Excel and Access programs. Also, the fact that it was actually created by organizers means that the information and recommendations are credible.

**Link:** [http://neworganizing.com/organizerstoolbox/](http://neworganizing.com/organizerstoolbox/)

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**Words and Concepts:**

**Brownfield**

This refers to a parcel of land unsuitable for development or reuse due to being contaminated by hazardous materials from industrial use or from proximity to toxic materials. Contamination can cause health problems, as well as possess a legal liability. Cleaning of a Brownfields site is normally very costly and disincentivises further use of that property. Some sites have been cleaned up through the Superfund government program.

**Community Development Block Grant**

This is a program that uses federal dollars allocated by local and state governments to provide adequate resources and services to vulnerable communities seeking decent affordable housing, jobs through the expansion and retention of businesses, and general neighborhood improvements.

**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)**

Refers to a partnership between an individual or group and a local farm/farmer. Members pre-pay for a “share” of produce, dairy, or protein from the farming season or may even participate in the farming.

**Green Economy**

Describes an economy that strives to improve human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks. Growth is accomplished through investing in low carbon and resource efficient employment opportunities.

**Complete Streets**

Multi-modal street design approach that focuses not only on the physical attributes of a street but on the community implications of road construction. This concept promotes access for all users, such as pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit users, and private vehicle drivers.

**Euclidean Zoning Codes**

A method of urban planning where land is classified according to the land use. Euclidean zones are single-use and often grouped according to similar land use types such as business, commercial and single family houses.
**Farm Bill**
A comprehensive food and agriculture policy tool for the Federal Government. A controversial bill which affects elements of food and nutrition programs, rural development, commodity programs, farm credit, agricultural research, conservation, and trade, some elements of which were introduced for assistance during the depression.


**Food Security**
Refers to one’s ability to obtain enough food to lead an active, healthy life, that is, to be “food secure”. Food should be nutritional, culturally appropriate, and affordable and the food source within proximity of the residence.


**Form-Based Zoning Codes**
A method of urban planning which regulates development to achieve a specific urban form and is often used to promote public access through the relationship of the surrounding public streets, buildings and other spaces. Mixed land-uses are often associated with Form-Based Zoning Codes.


**Infill Development**
An urban design strategy involving building on vacant areas in city centers and urban settings. Infill development promotes condensed neighborhood living.


**Long Range Transportation Plan**
A 15 to 20 year forecast plan that identifies a broad range of social, environmental, energy and economic factors that affect transportation. This plan discusses the role of transportation in meeting regional goals and priorities in a practical and cost-effective way.


**Metropolitan Planning Organization**
A federally funded transportation planning organization. Located in most urbanized areas in the United States, MPOs serve as a resource for federal aid and funding for urban transportation.


**New Urbanism**
A place-based strategy that incorporates interrelated patterns of land use, transportation, and urban form to create communities that nurture more desirable characteristics of human habitation: neighborliness, environmental sustainability, economic efficiency and prosperity, historic preservation, participation in civic processes, and human health.


**Placemaking**
A transformative practice that reimagines public spaces as the heart of every community which is meant to inspire people to create and improve public spaces. This strategy strengthens the connection between people and the places they share.


**Public Housing**
Rental housing funded by the federal government and administered by local housing agencies for eligible low income residents, the elderly, and people living with various disabilities. Rent is determined based on an individual's income status.


**Rural-Urban Transect**
A method of categorizing and organizing all elements of the urban environment on a scale from rural to urban. Transect zoning associates land use with the appropriate category of rural to urban.


**Smart Growth**
A placed-based design approach for communities which encourages mixed use of land, transportation and housing, compact development, and strengthening existing qualities of communities.


**Triple Bottom Line**
A business model which aims towards three different motivations of public interest, capital profit and planetary environmental impact. Commonly referred as the three P’s (Public, Profit, and Planet). Companies and organizations which acknowledge the triple bottom line consider the cost and impact of operations on a large scale.


**Unified Development Ordinance**
Planning approach which responds and implements the community’s vision and input through workshops and public forums. Buffalo Green Code uses a UDO approach in drafting their new land use and design plan for the City of Buffalo.


**Urban Renewal**
Redevelopment aimed towards eradicating blight and urban deterioration due to vacancy or abandonment although it was applied to existing inuse properties in the past. Demolition and lack of community involvement are common criticisms, especially regarding actions in the 1950s and 1970s. There have been many successes and failures of urban renewal, either causing the revitalization of a neighborhood or community wide displacement and loss of local businesses.

Acronyms

AOC: Area of Concern
APA: American Planning Association
BENLIC: Buffalo Erie Niagara Land Improvement Corporation
BMHA: Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority
BOA: Brownfield Opportunity Area
BURA: Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency
BNR: Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper
BYP: Buffalo’s Young Preservationists
CAFO: Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations
CCE: Comprehensive Code Enforcement
CDBG: Community Development Block Grant
CNU: Congress of New Urbanism
CSA: Community Supported Agriculture
EDC: Economic Development Administration
FADS: Food Availability Data Systems
FIG: Food Systems Planning Interest Group
GNPA: Good Neighbor Planning Alliance
HOME: Housing Opportunities Made Equal
HUD: Housing and Urban Development
MAP: Massachusetts Avenue Project
MPO: Metropolitan Planning Organization
MSA: Metropolitan Statistical Area
NACTO: National Association of City Transportation Officials
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
PPS: Project for Public Spaces
REDC: Regional Economic Development Council
UDO: Unified Development Ordinance
ULI: Urban Land Institute
URA: Urban Renewal Area
WNYEA: Western New York Environmental Alliance