

BUFFALO NIAGARA MEDICAL CAMPUS NEIGHBORHOOD WORKSHOP SUMMARY

February 2002

BNMC Neighborhood Workshop held,
Langston Hughes Institute
December 20, 2001

INTRODUCTION

On December 20, 2001, about 40 citizens and stakeholders convened at the Langston Hughes Institute to share their ideas about how to shape the future development of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC). All of the participants expressed a strong desire to better integrate the campus with its adjacent communities. Questions and comments from the participants are documented here and will contribute to outlining an agenda for the BNMC master plan.

WELCOME

Tom Beecher, Chairman of the BNMC, welcomed all of the participants to the workshop. He opened the evening by outlining the goals and mission of the BNMC, and he underscored that BNMC is entirely committed to a collaborative planning approach. Without close and continuous involvement by its member institutions, local officials, and neighbors, Beecher said, the BNMC cannot become the world-class medical institution that it aspires to be.

There is potential for great synergy encompassing the medical campus and its surrounding communities. That is, the whole – BNMC plus its adjoining neighborhoods – has the potential to be much greater than the sum of its individual parts. If people keep this potential in mind and work together, Beecher said, the quality of life in neighboring communities and within the medical campus can increase in concert.

Tom then introduced David Gamble from Chan Krieger Associates, an architecture and urban design firm located in Cambridge, MA. Chan Krieger has been contracted to initiate a scoping study for a master plan for the BNMC.

Without close and continuous involvement by its member institutions, local officials, and neighbors, the BNMC could not become the World-Class Medical Institution that it aspires to be.

The scoping study is not *the plan* for the campus, Gamble said. Rather, it is the plan for *the master plan*, which can only be completed after a full citizen participation process, including all of the stakeholders and residents of the adjoining neighborhoods, has occurred. This workshop, he explained, was just the first step in that process.

SCOPING STUDY PRESENTATION

In a 20-minute visual presentation, Gamble led the participants through a description of the current physical, economic, and social conditions in the medical campus and along its edges on Michigan, Main, North, and Goodell Streets. Properly identifying positive and negative aspects, assets and obstacles, is an essential step in designing and developing a more successful campus in the future, Gamble said.

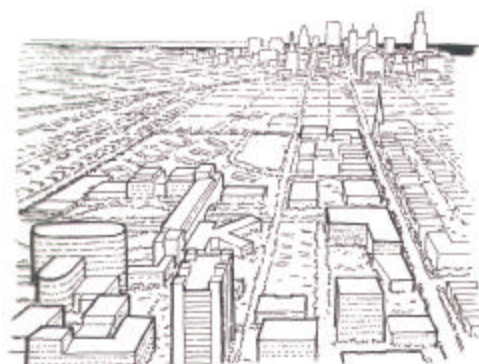


Fig. 1: Aerial sketch of the BNMC and Downtown Buffalo

Neighborhood Workshop Summary

The loosely defined campus boundaries encompass 72 acres. Based on an initial analysis, Gamble said, this is more than enough to accommodate the current needs and future plans of the five medical and research institutions involved. However, the range of possibilities for how to design and organize the campus for such an expansion is vast.

The design of the campus, Gamble said, needs to address a wide array of issues and incorporate key concepts, including access, transportation, “critical mass”, definition of place, and connections to adjacent spaces. Future links between the campus and its adjacent neighborhoods and the city at large also need to be considered.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Robert Shibley, director of the Urban Design Project at the University at Buffalo, moderated a lively question and comment session about the scoping study and the work ahead. Some of the issues and topics discussed were:

1. Placemaking and Development Options

Numerous studies, including the 2001 Regional Urban Design Assistance Team (RUDAT) report, have identified downtown Buffalo as somewhere that should be a great place to live, as well as to work and play. In the past several decades, however, housing availability has shifted to the urban fringe and suburban communities. Still, the potential for housing options in neighborhoods like the Fruitbelt, Allentown, and the Theatre District are encouraging because of their proximity to places of work and entertainment. In addition, employees of member medical and research institutions may find housing options in nearby neighborhoods practical because of the proximity to their place of work.

The planning activities of the BNMC should focus on development at the fringes of the campus (its Main Street and Michigan Avenue edges) in order to increase physical and social linkages to the Fruitbelt and Allentown communities. Streets and rights-of-way often act as physical thresholds between communities. Such thresholds can facilitate integration between neighborhoods or impose separation between them.

2.

BNMC Member Institutions:

Buffalo Medical Group Foundation (BMG)

Hauptman-Woodward Medical Research Institute

Kaleida Health

Roswell Park Cancer Institute

University at Buffalo

Main Street and Michigan Ave. were identified as the two major edges of the medical campus. Main Street, on the western edge of the campus, was described as allowing little integration between Allentown and the BNMC, due in part to the speed of traffic on Main Street. Likewise, Michigan Avenue, on the eastern edge of the campus, acts increasingly as a boundary or barrier between the BNMC and the Fruitbelt neighborhood. This is particularly so as more families depart from the street and leave behind empty houses and vacant lots. Identifying options for improving the connections between these neighborhoods and the BNMC should be a crucial element in the forthcoming planning and design activities.

The appropriate physical massing of buildings in relation to outdoor public spaces contributes greatly to the process of placemaking. In its current configuration, buildings seem disorganized in relation to one another, which creates a feeling of unwelcome, distance, and isolation. Buildings on the campus not only feel estranged from each other, but also from the fabric of neighboring communities. The master plan for the campus will focus on urban design criteria for the massing of current and new structures to address these problems.

Improved parking options were also identified as vital to accommodating expected growth in employment in all elements of the BNMC. Residents of the adjoining neighborhoods are concerned that BNMC employees will resort to parking on nearby residential streets more and more as the campus grows.

Neighborhood Workshop Summary

If we do not address future parking needs properly these concerns will surely be borne out. Employees already find it necessary to park in abandoned lots along Michigan Avenue and in the Fruitbelt neighborhood. The BNMC needs to create an orderly plan for structured parking on the medical campus to prevent parking overflows into the Fruitbelt and Allentown communities.

2. Implementation & the Comprehensive Plan

The public generally gives little credence to grandiose plans, especially when they lack support from City government. In the case of the medical campus master plan, some participants expressed concern over the ability of the BNMC to influence changes in the adjacent neighborhoods without strong support from City officials.

While residents from neighboring communities were encouraged by the approach outlined by the BNMC, some were nonetheless skeptical of the prospects of success for the campus master plan without strong and direct connections to the City's Comprehensive Plan. Chuck Thomas of the Office of Strategic Planning said it would be his agency's responsibility to integrate the recommendations of the BNMC master plan with the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Thomas emphasized that ensuring broad and ongoing involvement by diverse members of all of Buffalo's communities is also a responsibility of the Office of Strategic Planning as it proceeds with creation of the City's new Comprehensive Plan. In that regard, the intention of BNMC to take a thoroughly collaborative approach to medical campus planning is fully in line with City policy. But the BNMC will still rely on OSP to connect its plan with the greater plan for Buffalo.

Both Allentown and Fruitbelt residents identified the need to increase the East - West arterial connections between the neighborhoods and the medical campus.

It was also suggested that prior to the planning and design activities, the BNMC should conduct a population and demographic study of its employees and possibly of the adjacent neighborhoods. Workshop participants, BNMC representatives, and City of Buffalo officials all endorsed such a methodology.

3. Commitment to Excellence

The workshop and the work-to-date that it showcased was indicative of the commitment by the BNMC to excellence in master planning for its emerging campus. The ultimate success of the effort, however, will demand a similar commitment by the City of Buffalo – the administration, members of the Common Council, and participants in Good Neighbors Planning Alliance. Without an across-the-board commitment to excellence, enthusiasm and support for the plan may diminish over time.

Development organized around:

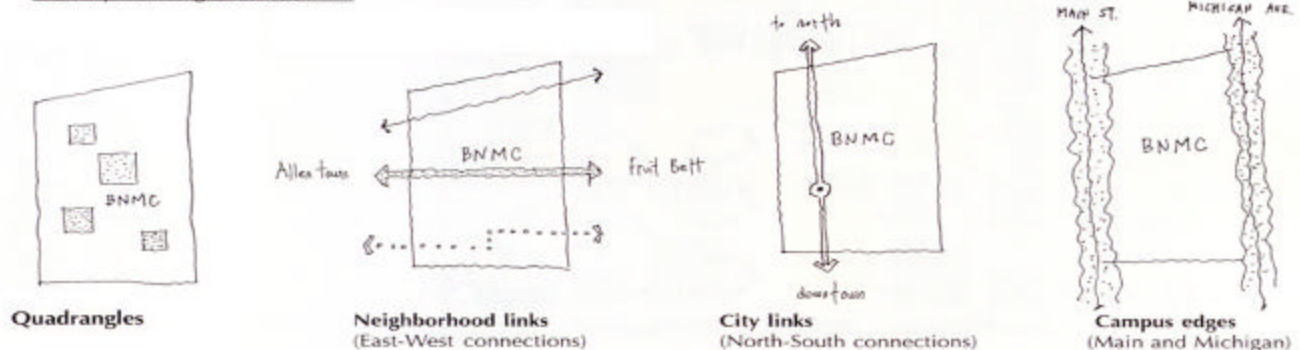


Fig. 2: Scoping Study Development Schemes, Chan Krieger & Associates

Neighborhood Workshop Summary

From the neighborhood perspective, the rationale is strong for providing community services on a shared or cooperative basis across the campus and both adjacent neighborhoods – if the BNMC recognizes that need. If that is the case, provision of such services should be planned and not be left to chance. Instead, it was suggested that a committee be organized to develop, implement, and oversee such shared services.

Neighbors also insisted that the BNMC show its commitment to a systematic review of community suggestions and complaints according to a clear schedule and protocol. In that regard, public and community review coordination for the scoping study is currently scheduled to continue through February, 2002. The final master plan is due in May 2002.

4. Opportunity for Minorities

Neighborhood residents applauded the BNMC for its hope that development of the medical campus will contribute to improved quality of life in the Fruitbelt community and other neighboring areas.

But concerns were expressed, as well. As one Fruitbelt resident pointed out, the scoping study focused on the need to offer more opportunities for the majority of neighborhood residents who are African American. However, it did not appear that the opportunities being created by work on the master plan itself included minority involvement. While the organizations involved in the scoping study and master plan could affirm current minority involvement, they all agreed that they could and should do better.

5. Security

Reducing crime and increasing the sense of security for residents and workers alike must be a priority issue for both the BNMC and the City of Buffalo. A city street or the boundary of a campus or a neighborhood provide no barrier to crime. That means the BNMC and the surrounding communities must work together to achieve a safe and secure environment in and around the area. Likewise, if people do not feel safer, any efforts to connect the campus with adjoining neighborhoods will likely not succeed.

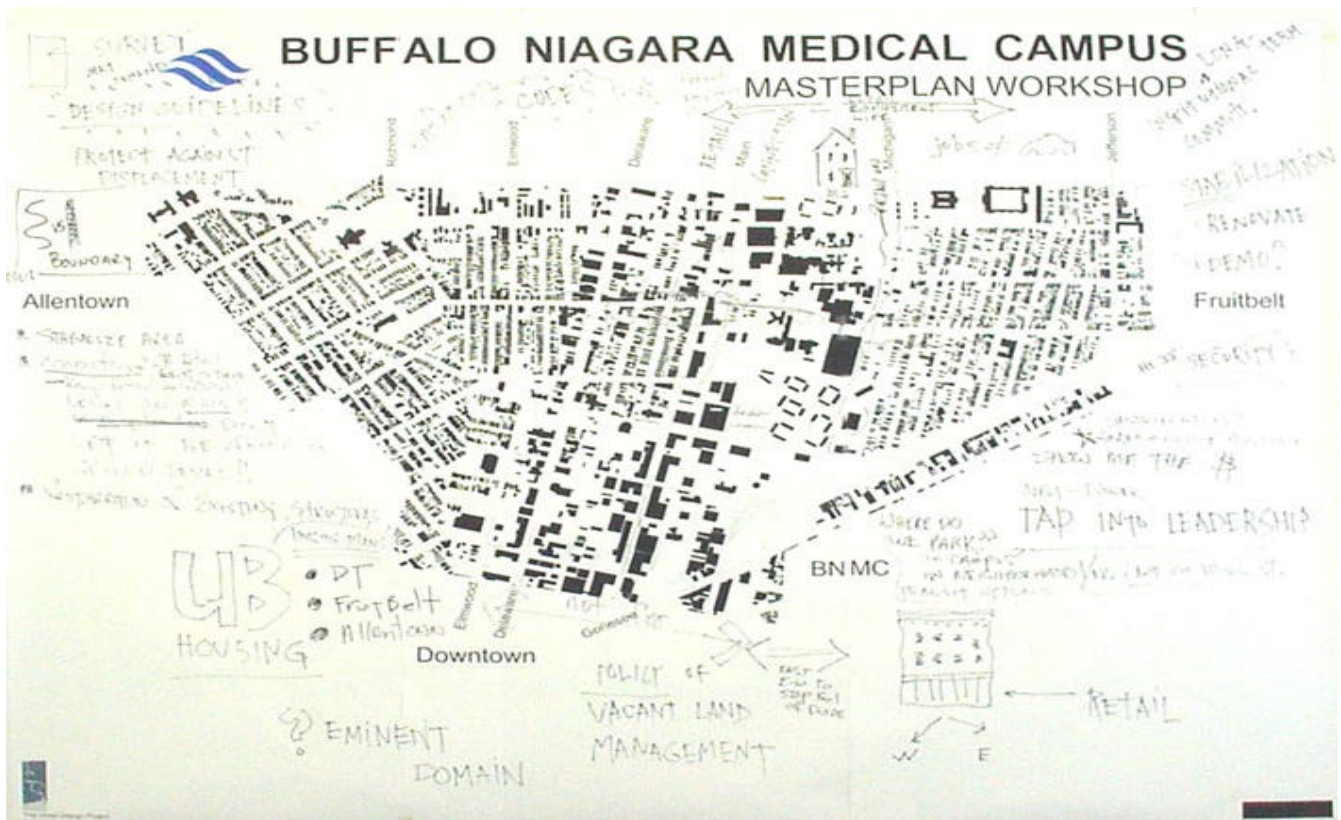


Fig. 3: Interactive Poster of BNMC, Fruitbelt, Allentown, & Downtown Building Footprints used at Neighborhood Workshop

Neighborhood Workshop Summary

GOALS FOR THE BNMC NEIGHBORHOODS

Those involved in planning for the BNMC understand that the success of the effort depends on placing value on the goals and aspirations of neighboring communities. The workshop included an interactive exercise to elicit comments about those community goals and aspirations. A large poster – six feet by eight feet – was used to show the building footprints of the BNMC, the Fruitbelt, Allentown, and Downtown (specifically the Theatre District). The discussion that ensued identified these goals:

The reduction of crime and an increased sense of security need to be priority issues for the BNMC and the City of Buffalo alike.

A Soft Boundary:

The campus should have a “soft boundary.” That means the connections across Main Street on the west and Michigan Avenue on the east need to be improved. Both Allentown and Fruitbelt neighbors identified the need to make east-west arterial connections from neighborhood to campus to neighborhood. Currently, many streets form a “T” intersection at Main Street and do not cross into the adjacent district.

One opportunity for bridging the gaps between neighborhood and campus may be to promote retail development along the streets that border the BNMC. New retail development there would serve both residents and campus employees, providing a human connection between the two, and improving the pedestrian scale environment at the same time. Providing incentives for such development can help meet the placemaking goals of both neighborhood and medical campus and promote local small business growth simultaneously.

Housing Strategies:

Absentee landlords and the flight of homeowners from the city has led to the dilapidation of many homes within Buffalo’s inner city neighborhoods, including the Fruitbelt neighborhood and Allentown. Restoration of existing homes instead of demolition and urban renewal strategies were seen as important goals.

Residents of surrounding neighborhoods suggested the possibility that the University at Buffalo might refocus its housing strategy on the periphery of the BNMC, for example providing housing for its medical students who intern on the medical campus.

Increased Security:

While individual block clubs and planning community organizations have identified security as a priority goal, the BNMC should also identify security as a measure of success. A cohesive and collaborative strategy on security should be part of the plan.

Parking and Transportation Options:

The BNMC and each adjoining neighborhood need to work together to outline a planning approach to deal with parking and transportation options. It was noted that while much of the discussion so far has dealt with automobile parking options, the NFTA Metro Rail line and bus routes should also be a part of the discussion.

Environmental and Spatial Cohesiveness:

Workshop participants said the City of Buffalo needs to assess the specific conditions of vacant land in each community and create a detailed city-wide policy on vacant land management.

They also recognized the need to adjust building codes and adopt design guidelines for the unique neighborhoods and business strips. Such design criteria can unify streetscapes and public spaces. However, the participants acknowledged that without the enforcement of such guidelines and codes, developers and builders would fail to abide by them.

Neighborhood Workshop Summary

Guard Against Gentrification:

Gentrification must be prevented in the area surrounding the medical campus. As property values increase, lower income residents may be forced out of their homes by rising rents or taxes. The City and the BNMC must provide opportunities for residents to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods while preventing displacement. An important part of such a strategy must be providing new opportunities for jobs for which they are qualified. Meanwhile, a stock of quality affordable housing must be maintained, Fruitbelt and Allentown residents agreed.



Fig. 4: Aerial view of the BNMC and surrounding neighborhoods

Need for Committed City Leaders:

In addition to proactive community leaders, City officials and decision-makers must be committed to implementing plans that the community believes are appropriate for their neighborhoods. The City's Office of Strategic Planning and the Good Neighbors Planning Alliance will need to lead the process of translating goals into realities.

Neighborhood Workshop Summary

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Ms. Mino Amini, Center for Urban Studies, University at Buffalo
Mr. Schuyler Banks, Fruitbelt Resident
Ms. Barr, Fruitbelt Task Force
Mr. Jonathan Barr, Fruitbelt Task Force
Mr. Charles Battle
Ms. Peggy Beardsley, Buffalo Place, Inc.
Mr. Thomas Beecher, Chair, BNMC Board of Directors
Ms. Pearl Bobo, Langston Hughes Board Member
Ms. Diane Brown, Langston Hughes Institute
Mr. Robert Docherty, Ross – Wilson & Assoc.
Mr. Matthew Enstice, BNMC Associate Director
Mr. David Gamble, Chan Kreiger & Assoc.
Mr. Aigiel Godie
Mr. William Harmon, Allentown Association
Ms. Dorothy Hill, Langston Hughes Institute
Ms. Gwen Howard, Foit Albert Assoc.
Mr. George Ivancic
Ms. Elizabeth Licata, Allentown Association / North Pearl Block Club
Ms. Bonnie K. Lockwood, City of Buffalo
Ms. Joanne Loughry, Buffalo Place Inc.
Mr. Steven Maglotte, Senator Byron Brown's Office
Mr. Craig Marlatt, Ross – Wilson & Assoc.
Mr. Mark V. Mistretta, Wendel Duchscherer
Mr. Hayward Powell, Fruitbelt Service Center
Mr. Rasheen Powell, City of Buffalo
Mrs. Gertrude Ross, Fruitbelt Task Force
Dr. Horace Rosteing, Ross – Wilson & Assoc.
Mr. Michael Schmand, Buffalo Place Inc.
Ms. Amy Schmit, BNMC Program Manager
Mr. Robert Shibley, Director, Urban Design Project, University at Buffalo
Mr. W. Morgan Smith, Buffalo Place Inc. / Allentown Association
Dr. Henry Louis Taylor, University at Buffalo
Mr. Chuck Thomas, City of Buffalo
Ms. Florence Thompson, Langston Hughes Board
Mr. David Vitrano, North Pearl Block Club / Allentown Business Association
Ms. Phyliss Vitrano, North Pearl Block Club / Allentown Business Association
Mr. Steven Watchorn, Urban Design Project, University at Buffalo
Mr. Jonathan White, Allentown Association
Mr. Michael A. Williams, President (N.A.C.) Community Action Organization
Ms. Joyce Wilson, Fruitbelt Resident

Next Neighborhood Meeting Scheduled
March 19, 2002
Langston Hughes Institute
25 High Street
4:00 pm



Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus

Clinical, Research, and Academic Excellence
Scoping Study Workshop News

Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus

901 Washington Street

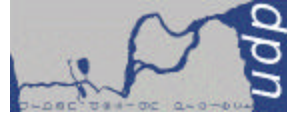
Buffalo, New York 14203

(716) 843-7423

(716) 843-7410 (fax)

<http://www.bnmc.org>

U.S. Postage



Urban Design Project

3435 Main Street

Buffalo, New York 14214

(716) 829-3483 Ext. 218

(716) 829-3256 (fax)

<http://urbandesignproject.org>



University at Buffalo
The State University of New York

CHAN KRIEGER & ASSOCIATES

Architecture
Urban Design