

***Sheridan Drive Commercial Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA)
Pre-nomination Document***

I. Description of Project and Boundary

A. Community Overview and Description

The Sheridan Drive Commercial Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) is located in western portion of the Town of Amherst, Erie County, New York. The Town of Amherst, as the Town's Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan notes, is "a premier residential community and activity/employment center in Western New York," with significant concentrations of new residential, commercial and retail development. In contrast to the rest of the Town, the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area Brownfield Opportunity Area has experienced relatively high rates of vacancy, a lack of investment and a general need of revitalization.

The Town of Amherst is the second largest municipality in the Buffalo-Niagara Falls, NY Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Its population in 2000 was 116,510 persons, second only to the City of Buffalo, with 292,648 persons. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, the Town of Amherst was one of the strongest growing Towns in the region, and it remains one of the few municipalities in the region that has not been losing population. One of the major generators of growth in the Town has been the Amherst Campus of the State University of New York at Buffalo. The Amherst campus was constructed in the 1970's, and has seen continued expansion since that time. The campus has spurred development in housing, office, light industrial and retail uses in the area surrounding the campus, located less than two miles north of the project area. Regional transportation access to the Town of Amherst is excellent, with Interstate I-90 (the Thruway); I-290 and I-990, and convenient access to the Buffalo Niagara International Airport just over the municipal border to the south in Cheektowaga.

Map 1 depicts the Community Context, showing where Amherst is situated within the Buffalo-Niagara region. Map 2 shows the Study Area Context, illustrating where the proposed Sheridan Commercial Area is within the Town of Amherst.

The area directly north of the study area is recognized as one of the principal retail centers in Western New York, with a large concentration of stores and restaurants anchored by the Boulevard Mall and the Consumer Square Plaza. The area south of the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA is the Eggertsville neighborhood. The Eggertsville area is diverse, with a variety of housing types and several small neighborhood business centers. The area includes both neighborhoods of high-quality single-family homes and the Town's two subsidized apartment complexes, as well as a variety of housing types in between. As one of the older sections of the Town, the population density of the Eggertsville area is significantly higher than other areas of the Town.

The socio-economic character of the Eggertsville area is also more diverse than other areas of the Town, with a greater mix of income levels, ethnicity and race. The area has been

designated by the Town as a Focus Area, which means that the Town has targeted the Eggertsville and the adjacent Snyder communities as areas that merit special attention. The proximity of these neighborhoods to the City of Buffalo, changing demographics, the relatively higher proportion of low-income residents in these areas and the age of the built environment (both buildings and infrastructure) all point to a need for revitalization in the Town's designated Focus Areas.

The Town's goal for the Eggertsville area, as stated in the Town's Comprehensive Plan, is to build upon its distinct character and social diversity. Planning efforts for Eggertsville have focused on retaining the community-scale commercial and mixed-use development patterns while encouraging compatible new infill development.

The western boundary of the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA is Niagara Falls Boulevard, which is also the western boundary of the Town. Niagara Falls Boulevard (State Route 62) is a major highway that acts as a natural barrier between the project area and areas to the west. The neighborhoods of the Town of Tonawanda west of the study area consist primarily of traditional suburban neighborhoods, with a mix of residences and small scale commercial uses. The area to the east of the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA is characterized by fairly dense residential neighborhoods, with a mix of retail and commercial development along the major transportation routes, such as Sheridan Drive, Millersport Highway and Main Street.

Although population trends in the Town of Amherst are relatively stable, the southwest portion of Amherst, in the vicinity of the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA, has experienced difficulties with loss of population, aging population and lower income levels. Eggertsville is not an incorporated municipality, and the Census does not track data for the Eggertsville neighborhood. The boundaries of census tracts in the Town do not correspond to what is commonly considered the Eggertsville community. However, some statistical information on trends is available from the Eggertsville Action Plan, prepared for the Town of Amherst in 2000¹. According to data in that report, Eggertsville was losing population faster than the Town as a whole, with a projected decline of 3.8% between 2000 and 2005. In comparison, the Town was estimated to have remained essentially unchanged over the same time frame, increasing by 456 persons to an estimated total of 116,966 in 2005 (+0.2% increase). According to the Eggertsville Action Plan, Eggertsville's median household income in 1999 was \$49,222, or about 11% lower than town-wide income levels (\$55,247).

The Eggertsville Action Plan focuses on market-related issues, and does not contain a full demographic profile. In order to develop a general demographic profile of the area surrounding the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA, the three Census tracts surrounding the BOA were used as an approximation of the study area. These boundaries are significantly larger than the BOA boundary, and do not correspond exactly to the definition of Eggertsville that was used in

¹ Source for data in Eggertsville from the *Eggertsville Action Plan*: CACI, Inc. and Economics Research Associates, 2000.

the Eggertsville Action Plan, but they provide a basis for a general comparison of the area to the Town and the region.

Population, 2000			
	BOA Vicinity*	Town of Amherst	Erie County
Total Population	12,168	116,510	950,265
Households	5,868	45,076	380,873

* Census Tracts 92, 93.01 and 93.01
Source: *U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000*

Demographics, 2000			
	BOA Vicinity*	Town of Amherst	Erie County
Race: White	81%	89%	82%
Race: Black	9%	4%	13%
Race: Other	10%	7%	5%
Median Household Income	NA	\$55,427	\$38,567
Per Capita Income	\$20,070 (est)	\$27,647	\$20,357
Percent below poverty line	13%	6%	12%
Housing Vacancy	4.5%	3.5%	8.4%

* Census Tracts 92, 93.01 and 93.01
Source: *U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000*

These demographic statistics indicate that the area surrounding the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA is characterized by potential indicators of stress. The Eggertsville population is more diverse, both in terms of income and race. Per capita income is significantly lower than the town-wide figure and comparable to County-wide figures, which include areas with concentrations of poverty, such as the Cities of Buffalo and Lackawanna. The percentage of persons falling below the poverty line is more than twice the rate for the Town and slightly higher than that of the County. Housing vacancy exceeds town-wide figures. These figures justify the Town’s designation of Eggertsville as a Focus Area, to ensure that it remains a vital community.

As shown in Map 2, there are a number of community features in the area surrounding the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA. The State University of New York at Buffalo has two campuses. The South, or Buffalo Campus, is located less than two miles south of the site. The North, or Amherst Campus, is approximately two miles northeast of the site. As noted above, the area directly north of the project area is one of the strongest retailing centers in Western New York, anchored by the Boulevard Mall approximately one mile due north of the site. University Plaza is located in the southwest corner of Amherst approximately a mile south of the site. University Plaza, one of the first retailing centers in Western New York, has recently received significant investment and renovation. Another community center in the Town of Amherst is the Village of Williamsville, located approximately 5 miles southeast of the project area. The Village of Williamsville, one of the earliest settlements in Western New York, is home to Amherst Town Hall. The other significant governmental center in Amherst is located

in the Audubon community just north of University at Buffalo's North campus. The Audubon Center houses the Town Court, the Police Station, the main Town library and the Town Senior Center.

The area has relatively good access. Interstate I-290 traverses the Town of Amherst, with exits at either end of the general project area, on Millersport Highway to the east and Niagara Falls Boulevard to the north. Sheridan Drive (US Route 324) is a major east-west route for the region and Niagara Falls Boulevard (US Route 62) is a major north-south route. The Buffalo-Niagara International Airport is approximately 6 miles southeast of the site.

Land use trends in the Town of Amherst represent a range of patterns. The earliest settlement in the Town of Amherst, and one of the earliest settlements in Erie County, was the Village of Williamsville, which was settled in 1805. Williamsville remains a cultural, historic, business and civic hub for the Town. Route 5, or Main Street, was a major route across New York State, linking Buffalo to points east, and small settlements grew up along its length during the 1800's, including the hamlet of Eggertsville at the Eggert Road intersection and the hamlet of Snyder at the Harlem Road intersection. Major population growth in southwest Amherst was spurred by the development of the streetcar line along Main Street. The Eggertsville, Snyder and Williamsville areas boomed in the early 20th century with development patterns typical of a 'street-car' suburb, with relatively dense residential growth, intermixed with small commercial centers at regular intervals along the street-car route. As automobiles replaced street-cars as the preferred transportation, development spread from the Main Street spine both north and south, filling in the neighborhoods with residential housing. Northtown Plaza, one of the central parcels in the proposed Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA, was developed in the post-war era of suburbanization as a retail center in support of this growing area of the Town of Amherst. One of the early suburban shopping plazas, Northtown Plaza is no longer configured to meet current retail market demands.

B. Project Overview and Description

The impetus for the Sheridan Drive Commercial BOA was the relatively large amount of underutilized lands in an area of town where significant retail activity was occurring. In initial research, it became apparent that the presence of brownfields may be a factor.

An area-wide Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) was performed for the entire Sheridan Drive Commercial BOA to identify potential Recognized Environmental Conditions (RECs) that could hinder or discourage redevelopment of properties within the BOA. The Phase I ESA provides descriptions of the physical environmental setting of the BOA (soil type, topography, hydrology and hydrogeology) as well as historical and current site uses relative to potential environmental contamination. As part of the Phase I ESA process, multiple environmental data bases were reviewed and summarized. In addition, historic aerial photos, topographic maps, and Sanborn fire insurance maps were evaluated. Site reconnaissance and interviews were also performed.

No evidence of former or current manufacturing based industrial land uses were found within the study area. However, records indicate that several of the properties within the BOA contained petroleum contaminated soil that was removed but in some cases only partially removed. Also, many of the site properties were (with some still) used for purposes that could have resulted in environmental contamination. These uses include gas stations, dry cleaners, and auto service facilities. As part of a due diligence process, sampling of environmental media prior to redevelopment of these Properties-of-Interest would be recommended. Sampling could include subsurface soil, groundwater and in some cases, soil vapor and indoor air. Figure A-3 in Appendix A and Table C-1 in Appendix C of the Phase I ESA report provide the locations and summary details of the identified Properties-of-Interest.

C. Community Vision and Goals and Objectives

The Town of Amherst has been actively involved in planning for the southwestern portion of the Town. Extensive public outreach was conducted as part of the Town's Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan, which includes the southwest section of the Town as a focus area. The Town also specifically studied the Eggertsville area, which includes the area identified as the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA, as part of the Eggertsville Action Plan. Finally, public outreach was conducted as part of this planning study, to help clarify and articulate the community's vision and specific goals for this area. Public meetings, an informal written survey, a project website and a steering committee helped inform visioning for the area.

There is consensus that the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area is an important community retail location that would benefit from revitalization efforts. The most commonly cited issue with the area was a need for improved aesthetics. The appearance of the area was seen as a negative factor that impedes potential redevelopment efforts. There was also concern about the significant vacancies throughout the area. Given the amount of new retail space located north of the project area, there was concern as to whether there was sufficient market demand for the area to remain focused on largely on retail uses. There was support for diversifying the area with residential and office uses in addition to retail.

The Sheridan Drive Commercial Area is a transitional area between the regional retail center of the Boulevard Mall to the north and the more mixed-use character (residential, small scale retail and office uses) of the Eggertsville neighborhood to the south. The Sheridan Drive Commercial Area's traditional role as a regional retail center has been supplanted by newer commercial areas which are better configured to meet modern market demands. There was general agreement that a new vision for the future is needed for the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area. The preferred future for the area, based on community and stakeholder input, is to redevelop the area as a mixed-use center that includes a blend of retail, commercial and residential properties. Properties on the north side of Sheridan Drive, which are closer to the regional retail concentration, would remain predominately retail, while areas south of Sheridan would see more integration of more office, service and residential uses with retail development.

In terms of design standards, the large expanses of parking should be broken up with landscaping and walkways to make them more attractive, more sustainable and more pedestrian-friendly. There is strong support for increased aesthetic standards for the area, including improved facades, better architectural design and for site landscaping. There is also strong support for more streetscape amenities, such as benches, pavers, crosswalks and pedestrian features. The area south of Sheridan, where feasible, should consider re-establishment of former rights of way to break the area up into smaller blocks more consistent with the residential neighborhoods south of the project area.

Based on public input and the results of planning research, the following vision statement has been developed for the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA:

Vision Statement:

The Sheridan Drive Commercial Area is a vital mixed-use center, seamlessly integrating retail and office uses into the adjacent residential neighborhoods. Storefronts and the lands surrounding the businesses are attractive and well-maintained. Walking between destinations within the BOA is a pleasant experience, with shaded walkways and attractive landscaping.

Goals

Goals for the area are in support of revitalization and improved aesthetics:

- Increase occupancy rates of existing retail development
- Improve aesthetics of the area with landscaping, streetscaping and façade improvements
- Soften the appearances of large parking lots through landscaping and, where feasible, small-scale infill development
- Make the area more pedestrian-friendly with crosswalks, clear pedestrian pathways through larger sites, and amenities such as benches
- Support business development with targeting of available incentive programs
- Redevelop the area with a greater mix of uses to include residential and offices within traditionally retail properties, where feasible
- Support a more traditional ‘neighborhood’ style of design, particularly south of Sheridan Drive, to help integrate large parcels with adjoining neighborhoods.

D. Brownfield Opportunity Area Boundary Description and Justification

The boundary for the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA is shown in Map 3: BOA Boundary. The western boundary of the BOA is the western boundary of the Town of Amherst, which follows the centerline of Niagara Falls Boulevard. The easternmost boundary follows the centerline of Sweet Home Road. The northern boundary encompasses commercial properties fronting on Sheridan Drive and adjacent commercial uses. The southern boundary encompasses all properties fronting Eggert Road between Niagara Falls Boulevard and Bailey Avenue, and commercial properties along Bailey Avenue and Sheridan Drive east of Bailey. Described more succinctly, the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA boundaries incorporate all commercial properties fronting either side of Sheridan Drive and Eggert Road from the Town of Amherst western boundary to the Sweet Home Road/Sheridan Drive intersection. This is commonly referred to as the Northtown Plaza area of the Town of Amherst.

Initial concepts for the boundary used Eggert Road as the southern boundary, which simplified the conceptual description of the boundaries. However, in response to public and property owner input, it was agreed that it was important that the Eggert Road corridor present a cohesive, unified image on both sides of the street. As a result, the boundary was expanded to include the properties fronting the south side of Eggert Road. Given street patterns and land uses, using the property lines of parcels fronting Eggert Road was the most logical delineation for the southern boundary, once the decision was made to include both sides of Eggert Road.

Although difficult to summarize verbally, the boundary represents a compact, cohesive area when mapped, and forms an obvious core area that corresponds to residents' concepts of what the Sheridan Drive/ Northtown area is. The intent in delineating the boundary for the BOA was to concentrate efforts on the commercial areas in the vicinity. The residential neighborhoods surrounding the BOA are stable, well-kept neighborhoods that are not in need of public support to remain vital. In contrast, much of the commercial property has a more mixed character, with vacant and underutilized properties interspersed among healthier retailing centers. The consensus opinion from both community residents and commercial property owners was to avoid including residential neighborhoods in drawing the BOA boundaries. This consensus is reinforced by the fact that the properties most affected by past uses and potential brownfield issues are the commercial lands within the boundary. The properties within the designated Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA represent under-performing properties adjacent to some of the most dynamic retail properties in the Town of Amherst. Given the sharp contrast between the Sheridan Drive corridor and these nearby commercial areas, it was deemed important to concentrate the potential resources of the BOA program on commercial properties in the area.

E. Community Participation

Public participation for the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA occurred throughout the study process. Input was solicited from a range of interests including public officials, affected property owners and business owners, community organizations and groups and the general public, and through a variety of avenues.

Advisory Committee

AIDA, as project sponsor, established an advisory committee that met to oversee the development of this plan. This committee met several times throughout the process to provide input and advice on planning efforts. Representation of the advisory committee was designed to represent a variety of viewpoints and interests. Membership included:

- Gary Black – Town of Amherst Deputy Planning Director
- Tom Ketchum, Town of Amherst Building Commissioner
- Dave Mingoia, Amherst IDA
- Paul Quebral, resident
- Dirk Rabenold, Sweet Home Central School District
- Robert Schell, resident
- Aaron Stanley, Eggertsville Community Organization (ECO)
- Ken Swanekamp, Erie County Department of Environment and Planning
- Richard Wedekindt, Eggertsville Community Organization (ECO)

Public Meetings

There were two public meetings held on the Pre-Nomination Study. The first public meeting was used to introduce the study and its purpose, present information on existing conditions and development activity in the area, and gather input from the public regarding issues and concerns. We also solicited information from the public on a preliminary vision for the area and received feedback on the proposed boundaries for the BOA. The meeting was structured to obtain reactions to potential alternative types of development and land uses throughout the area. A second public meeting was held at the conclusion of the project to present preliminary conclusions of the Pre-Nomination Study and to obtain additional public input and feedback on the direction of the study, including confirmation of the proposed boundaries and refinement of the vision.

Questionnaire

A short questionnaire was developed to solicit specific reactions to preferred vision and goals for the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA. This questionnaire was distributed at the first public meeting and was also posted to the Amherst Industrial Development Agency (AIDA) website.

Stakeholder Meetings

Stakeholder outreach occurred on two levels. Specific stakeholders and community organizations associated with the BOA were invited to participate in the general public outreach meetings that were held during the planning process. The stakeholder groups that were invited to participate in this process included:

- NYS Department of Transportation
- Town of Amherst
- Town of Tonawanda
- State University of New York at Buffalo (UB)
- Amherst Industrial Development Agency
- Amherst Chamber of Commerce
- Eggertsville Community Organization
- Hartford Estates Homeowners Association
- Property Owners

In addition, specific outreach was made to key property owners to ensure their awareness of the planning efforts for the area. A meeting with property owners was held on March 20, 2008. All major property owners within the Study area boundary were sent an invitation to the meeting. There was significant interest in the BOA program, and comments were generally positive regarding AIDA's efforts to revitalize the area. Owners who attended indicated an interest in upgrading their properties, with some already in the process of making some improvements. There was general support for increased mixing of uses, and it was noted that the area could do more to capitalize on its proximity to SUNY at Buffalo, particularly with SUNY's plans to expand the University. Concerns were raised about underutilized properties with capital investment needs, which were seen as a detriment to surrounding properties. One participant also noted concerns with Town's design guidelines and development review procedures.

Website

Information regarding the Sheridan Drive Amherst BOA was posted on the Amherst Industrial Development Agency website at www.amherstida.com and was updated throughout the process. Use of the website provided an alternative means of obtaining information about the project and feedback from the public. The website was used to inform the public about public meetings and to provide a summary of current status throughout the project. The powerpoint presentation used in the first public meeting was posted to the website and citizens were able to e-mail comments or concerns via the website.

Media Outreach

The local press was used to disseminate information about the project and encourage public participation. AIDA has an excellent relationship with the Amherst Bee, which ran notices about scheduled meetings and an article about the project. The Eggertsville Community Organization (ECO) newsletter was also used to provide the public with information about meetings and the status of the project.

Partners

The Amherst Industrial Development Agency (AIDA) has taken the lead in this project, working closely with the Town of Amherst. The Eggertsville Community Organization (ECO) is also actively involved. ECO members were represented on the steering committee and the organization was an important means of disseminating information about the study to the wider community.

II. Preliminary Analysis of the Brownfield Opportunity Area

A. Existing Land Uses and Zoning

The Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA is located in the southwestern portion of the Town of Amherst, in an area that has traditionally been a retail center for the community. The total Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA is approximately 150 acres in size. The dominant land uses throughout the BOA are shopping centers and retail stores, intermixed with offices. There are several large shopping plazas in the BOA. The largest is Northtown Plaza, located between Sheridan Drive and Eggert Road near the western edge of the BOA. Northtown, one of the older traditional shopping plazas in the Buffalo MSA, serves as the commercial anchor for the area. The traditional anchor building for the plaza, the former Bon Ton department store, is currently vacant. The remainder of the plaza is configured as a traditional strip mall, with a single row of storefronts facing a large field of parking. The rear portion of Northtown Plaza (off Bailey Avenue) is known as Century Plaza. This portion of the plaza has gradually been converting from retail to office use. The side of the plaza that faces Eggert Road has a few storefronts, but is mainly the backside of businesses that face the parking on the Sheridan side of the property. Other larger shopping plazas include the TJ Maxx Plaza on the north side of Sheridan Drive east of the intersection of Niagara Falls Boulevard and the Sheridan Centre Plaza at Sheridan Drive and Sweet Home Road, which is also known as Crawford Furniture Plaza. Both of these plazas have significant amounts of vacant or underutilized storefronts. There are several smaller shopping plazas within the BOA, including Piccadilly Square at Sheridan Drive and Bailey Avenue, and Royalite Plaza at Sheridan Drive and Sweet Home Road. These smaller plazas also contain a number of vacant storefronts. The former Sheridan Hills Plaza on the north side of Sheridan Drive east of Bailey Avenue is currently vacant, but it is in the process of being redeveloped as the proposed site of a new Wal-Mart super store.

Land Use

The character of Sheridan Drive is dominated by these plazas. Newer development along Sheridan Drive tends to be moderately sized, single-tenant stand-alone retail outlets, such as Consumer Beverages, USA Baby and Valu Home Centers. There are also several banks and office buildings located along Sheridan Drive, concentrated near the center of the BOA at Alberta Drive. Most of the developments include large parking lots with minimal landscaping.

The character of Eggert Road differs from that of Sheridan Drive. The south side of Eggert Road is characterized by a variety of small retail stores, offices and small mixed use commercial buildings (retail/office). The eastern and western edges of the north side of Eggert Road exhibits a similar mix of commercial properties. While there are still vacancies, vacancy issues appear less prominent along Eggert Road, and there are some new developments, including a newly constructed Dunkin' Donuts near the intersection with Niagara Falls Boulevard. These areas appear to be somewhat better integrated into the adjoining neighborhoods, and many of the businesses, particularly along the southern side of the street, are small, locally-oriented shops and services. The central portion of the north side of Eggert Road is dominated by the Northtown plaza site. Although there are a few small stores that

front on the Eggert side of the plaza, the primary visual impression on the north side of Eggert Road is of large areas of parking.

Bailey Avenue is characterized by a mix of uses, including retail, office and some small warehouse and distribution facilities. The businesses fronting Niagara Falls Boulevard within the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA include restaurants, automotive uses, and a few older, small mixed-use commercial buildings (office/retail). There are several restaurants scattered throughout the BOA. There are no public lands or dedicated parklands within the boundaries of the BOA, although Eggertsville Community Park is just northeast of the area. There is one small open space just outside the BOA where a small tributary of Ellicott Creek runs from the northeast corner of the project area northward. The creek is culverted under and south of the BOA. This creek corridor is publicly owned and maintained as flood control lands. There are no institutional uses within the designated boundary of the BOA, although there are several institutional uses located just outside the designated boundary. These uses include a senior living facility, a firehouse, a temple and two churches.

The area surrounding the designated BOA consists primarily of a mix of residential uses. To the south and southeast, the residential neighborhoods are mostly single-family homes. To the north, the housing stock is very mixed, with apartments, single-family homes and condominium developments all represented. Niagara Falls Boulevard, as a major, high-traffic roadway, is a significant barrier between the BOA and areas to the west, but uses west of the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA are a similar mix of retail along Sheridan Drive surrounded by residential uses.

There are no public parks, recreational facilities, schools, or libraries located within the BOA or in the adjacent neighborhoods. The nearest parks are Garnet Park and Dellwood Park, both east of the BOA near the intersection of Sheridan Drive and Millersport Highway, and Curtis Park located in the Town of Tonawanda. The nearest recreation center and school is Saint Leo the Great, north of the BOA on Sweet Home Road just south of Maple Road. The BOA is entirely within the Sweet Home Central School District.

The transportation network within the Sheridan Drive Commercial BOA is dedicated largely to an auto orientated network. There are two principal arterials that provide access to the BOA. Sheridan Drive (NYS Route 324) is a major east-west corridor that bisects the BOA. Sheridan Drive is a 6-lane divided road, with left turning lanes at major intersections. In total, Sheridan Drive contains four signalized intersections within the BOA, at Niagara Falls Boulevard, Alberta Drive/Norhtown Plaza, Bailey Avenue, and Sweet Home Road. An average of 31,400 vehicles travel this corridor each day. Niagara Falls Boulevard (U.S. Route 62, north of Sheridan Drive) is a major north-south corridor that acts as the border between the Town of Amherst and the Town of Tonawanda and is also the western extent of the BOA. Niagara Falls Boulevard consists of a 5-lane section with a continuous center turn lane south of Sheridan Drive, and a 6-lane median divided section north of Sheridan Drive. This corridor handles 34,400 vehicles per day.

Bailey Avenue acts as a north-south minor arterial that carries 11,500 vehicles per day. Within the BOA, it is primarily a 4 or 5-lane road with turn lanes at Sheridan Drive. South of Sheridan Drive, Bailey Avenue is U.S. Route 62. Eggert Road is another minor arterial that bisects the BOA at an angle and intersects both Sheridan Drive and Niagara Falls Boulevard, providing the southern border of the BOA. Eggert Road is primarily a 4-lane section with limited turning lanes that handles 9,900 vehicles per day. Several other minor corridors exist throughout the BOA. Sweet Home Road is a north-south road that acts as the eastern boundary of the BOA. Alberta Drive is a 4-lane road that provides access between Sheridan Drive and the Boulevard Mall to the north.

The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) operates three Metro bus routes in the BOA, Route 34, 34M, and 5D. These bus routes primarily operate on Sheridan Drive and Niagara Falls Boulevard. There are areas with sidewalks along many roadways, but there are many gaps in where sidewalks are located. There are also many areas where the sidewalks are not wide enough or are located too close to the roadway. This tends to discourage pedestrian activity, as pedestrians may feel unsafe.

Map 4: Existing Land Use depicts land uses with the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA. The distribution of land uses within the BOA is as follows:

	Acres	Percent
Residential	1.69	1.1%
Retail/ Commercial	3.95	2.6%
Office	13.65	9.1%
Vacant	100.98	67.3%
Streets/ Rights-of-Way	29.82	19.9%
Total	150.09	100.0%

Zoning

The majority of the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA is zoned General Business (GB) District. Under the Town of Amherst Zoning Code, the General Business District allows a variety commercial and civic uses. The purpose of the GB district is to provide “commercial nodes and mixed use activity centers” for a community-wide market. It is intended for larger and more intensive commercial activity than would be seen at a neighborhood business district. Although there a few existing residential uses falling within this zoning category, new residential is only allowed as an upper-story dwelling unit. Allowed uses include public and civic uses, such as day care centers or ambulance service; and a range of commercial uses, including retail, restaurant, banking, automotive sales, printing, offices and motels. The zoning does not permit industrial and open space uses are also prohibited.

The parcel that comprises Northtown Plaza is zoned Shopping Center (SC) District. This district is intended to provide regional shopping centers within the Town. These shopping centers are envisioned as planned, consolidated plazas that provide a full range of goods and services, drawing from a regional market area. The parcel must be at least 5 acres in size;

access, parking, stacking and loading areas are shared. Although the intent is to provide for commercial uses, residential uses are allowed as part of an integrated business unit, either as an attached or an upper-story dwelling unit. No industrial uses and no open space uses are permitted.

There are three areas zoned Motor Service (MS) District within the BOA: two on Niagara Falls Boulevard and one on Sheridan Drive. All three properties are actively in automotive use. The MS district is intended to provide areas for transportation-oriented commercial uses. Permitted uses include car washes, passenger terminals, restaurants, service stations, tire/ battery/ accessory stores, vehicle sales, rental leasing and related repair, as well as some public uses, such as ambulance service or minor utilities. No industrial and no open space uses are allowed.

Two areas on either side of Alberta Drive are zoned Office Building (OB) district. The OB district is intended to be exclusively devoted to offices. Permitted commercial uses include banks, contracting or construction services, offices or training schools. Certain public and civic uses, such as day-care centers are also allowed. No industrial and no open space uses are permitted. As in the case of GB, residential is allowed as an upper-story dwelling unit, but not as a primary use.

There are no other zoning districts within the BOA. The area surrounding the BOA is primarily zoned for various residential districts, with areas of Community Facilities where there are churches, fire halls or similar community uses. Map 5 depicts zoning for the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA and the surrounding areas.

There are no other local, county, state or federal designations (historic districts, empire zones, etc.) that fall within the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA boundaries.

B. Brownfield Sites and Underutilized Sites

Environmental Issues

A detailed description of brownfield sites within the project area is included in the Phase I Environmental Site Assessment completed for the project area. This report is included as an appendix to this Pre-nomination document. Based on the research in the Phase I Site Assessment, 27 addresses within the project area have appeared in one or more governmental database sources as having actual or suspected environmental problems. None of the sites are associated with typical heavy industrial uses; contamination sources were generally associated with petroleum contamination or spills on former gasoline stations or auto-repair shops. There were also a number of listings pertaining to dry cleaning facilities.

The databases in which one or more properties within the BOA were listed include the following:

Source	No. of Sites Reported
Resource Conservation and Recovery Act Small Quantity Generator (RCRA SQG) Database of sites that generate, transport, store, treat and/or dispose of hazardous waste in quantities between 10kg and 1,000kg per month	8
Facility Index System/ Facility Registry System (FINDS) Additional source of information on sites in RCRA database	8
Leaking Storage Tanks Incidents Reports (LTANKS) Inventory of incidents of leaking storage tanks	8
Underground Storage Tank (UST) Database Listing of all underground storage tanks	7
Above Ground Storage Tanks (AST) Database Listing of all Above Ground Storage Tanks	3
Chemical Bulk Storage (CBS) facilities Database of facilities that store regulated hazardous substances in large ASTs (185 gallons or more) or any USTs	1
New York Manifests Database Database of facilities that transport hazardous waste	7
Spills Database Database of spills occurring since April 1, 1986	14
Dry Cleaners Database Listing of all registered dry cleaning facilities	3

Historic databases for LTANKS, USTs, ASTs and Spills were also investigated. In each case, any listings in the historic database were also included in the current database.

Results of the database review are summarized in the table below:

Summary of Database Review

Name(s)	Address	Database(s)
Northtown One Hour Cleaners, Inc.	3077 Sheridan Drive Eggertsville, NY	RCRA-SQG, FINDS, NY Manifest, Dry Cleaners
Northtown Inc. Northtown Plaza	3097 Sheridan Drive Amherst, NY	RCRA-SQG, FINDS, UST, NY Manifest
Former Gas Station	3140 Sheridan Drive Amherst, NY	SPILLS
Former Gas Station	3154 Sheridan Drive Amherst, NY	SPILLS, HIST SPILLS
Chevron USA/Public Storage	3171 Sheridan Drive Amherst, NY	LTANKS, HIST LTANKS,
Northtown Autoworld	3185 Sheridan Drive Amherst, NY	LTANKS, HIST LTANKS, UST
Precision Tune	3220-3221 Sheridan Drive Amherst, NY	SPILLS, HIST SPILLS
Tom's Family Restaurant Precision Tune	3221 Sheridan Drive Amherst, NY	LTNAKS, HIST LTANKS, SPILLS, HIST SPILLS
Eckerd Store	3249-3265 Sheridan Drive Amherst, NY	SPILLS, HIST SPILLS
Hills Department Store	3270 Sheridan Drive Amherst, NY	SPILLS, HIST SPILLS
Cole Muffler, Inc.	3280 Sheridan Drive Amherst, NY	AST
Dry Clean USA	3310 Sheridan Drive Amherst, NY	RCRA-SQG, FINDS, NY Manifest, Dry Cleaners
Reid Petroleum Corp- Quick Stop Kwik Stop Quick Check Foods Motorist at Citgo Smith's Dairy NYS DOT Project/Reid	1924 Eggert Road Amherst, NY	RCRA-SQG, FINDS, LTANKS, HIST LTANKS, UST, HSIT UST, NY Manifest, SPILLS, HIST SPILLS
Kristen Uniform and Linen	2010 Eggert Road	LTANKS HIST, LTANKS, UST, SPILLS, HIST SPILLS
Courtesy Cleaners:	2044 Eggert Road	RCRA-SQG, FINDS, NY Manifest
Northtown Plaza Car Wash	2125 Eggert Road	UST, HSIT UST
Marty's Autopro Center	2131 Eggert Road	RCRA-SQG, FINDS, NY Manifest
National Fuel Gas Excavation	Eggert Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard	SPILLS, HIST SPILLS
National Fuel Gas Excavation	Eggert Road and Carmen Road	SPILLS
Boulevard U-Haul Center NYS DOT Project/U-Haul	925 Niagara Falls Boulevard	UST, HSIT UST SPILLS
Bridgestone Firestone	995 Niagara Falls Boulevard	RCRA-SQG, FINDS,

Name(s)	Address	Database(s)
NYS DOT Project/FIRESTONE		LTANKS, HIST LTANKS, AST, HIST AST, NY Manifest, SPILLS, HIST SPILLS, HIST SPILLS
Pep Boys	1025 Niagara Falls Boulevard	RCRA-SQG, FINDS, AST, HIST AST, SPILLS, HIST SPILLS, CBS
1 st Amherst Development Corp	Alberta Drive and Sheridan Drive	UST
NYS DOT Project/Norhttown	4544 Bailey Ave	SPILLS, HIST SPILLS
Springbook Golf Shop	4555 North Bailey Ave	SPILLS, HIST SPILLS
Drums at Cobti's	Bailey Ave and Eggert Road	SPILLS, HIST SPILLS
NYS DOT Project/AMH Health	Bailey Ave and Eggert Road	HIST LTANKS

It should be noted that any of the sites identified and cleaned up by the NYS Department of Transportation were associated with road construction. In these cases, the extent of their clean up was limited to contaminated soils within the right-of-way. In some cases, the contamination extended onto adjacent properties outside the road limits, and may not have been completely remediated.

The environmental investigation also examined historic aerial photographs, topographic maps, Sanborn fire insurance maps, and historic City directories to identify any sites that may have contained uses that may have potential environmental issues. Results showed properties that include a former paint company, several automotive uses, a former nursery shelter and a plastic laminating shop. The results of the environmental investigation are depicted on Map 6, Underutilized Sites Location Map.

Underutilized Sites

In addition to sites with known or suspected brownfield issues, there are several prominent sites within the BOA project area characterized by high rates of vacancy, a lack of capital investment or other indicators of underutilization. In one case, the site is owned by an out-of-town owner and operates on a land-lease situation that discourages any investment by the tenants. At least one additional tenant in that plaza is scheduled to relocate to a new facility currently under development north of the project area at the Consumer Square plaza.

C. Land Ownership

There are no publicly owned parcels within the defined project area for the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA. With the exception of publicly-owned rights of way, all parcels are in private ownership, including all lands that are potential brownfields. The only lands that are publicly owned are committed to roadways and rights-of-way. The majority of streets in the area are local. Sheridan Drive, Bailey Avenue and Niagara Falls Boulevard are State routes. Eggert Road is under the jurisdiction of Erie County. All other roadways within the project area are Town roads. Approximately 20% of the land area within the 150 acre project area is committed to roads and rights-of-way. In addition, a significant amount of the property within the boundary is dedicated to parking lots and internal circulation on private property.

Because all lands are in private ownership, no Land Ownership Patterns map is provided.

D. Natural Resources

The BOA is fully developed. It is characterized by large shopping plazas and parking areas, which in conjunction with the roads in the area, leaves very little impervious area or green space. There is an intermittent stream that runs from the Sheridan Hills Plaza, northeast towards Bizer Creek, which empties into Ellicott Creek. This creek is culverted under the project area and to the south. There is a small area of undeveloped lands adjacent to the creek, representing approximately 2 acres of land. This undeveloped area is split between two privately-owned parcels within the project area. Northeast of the project area, the creek is publicly owned and maintained for flood control purposes.

The BOA has no topographic constraints and consists of soils identified as Urban Land, Urban Land- Schoharie Complex, Urban Land- Odessa Complex, and Odessa Silt Loam. Along the intermittent stream, Schoharie Silt Loam and Lakemont Silt Loam soils are present. The southeast portion of the study area contains some Canadice Silt Loam soils. There are no floodplains or wetlands within the BOA.

Groundwater is not used for water supply within the project area. The majority of the BOA is serviced by Amherst Sewer District No. 1. Businesses along Niagara Falls Boulevard north of Sheridan Drive, the Sheridan Hills Plaza, and a portion of the Sheridan Centre Plaza are serviced by the Amherst Sewer District No. 16. All stormwater from the parcels located in the BOA drains into the public stormwater sewer system that the Town of Amherst maintains. Storm Sewer District No. 4 services the entire BOA. Public water is available throughout the BOA and is managed by the Erie County Water Authority.

III. Summary of Preliminary Analysis and Recommendations

The research conducted through the Pre-Nomination study suggests a number of areas that merit further investigation. The Sheridan Drive Commercial Area is characterized by relatively high vacancy rates in near proximity to one of the region's major shopping areas (Boulevard Mall/ Consumer Square). Several of the properties seem underutilized and suffer from a lack of investment. Initial investigations have identified a number of properties where former uses or other evidence suggest there may be brownfield concerns. Some questions have been raised about the feasibility and market support for additional retail, and community input has shown strong support for redevelopment options that are more creative. Based on this research, it is recommended that this effort move to a Nomination Study, where more focused attention can be brought on some of these issues.

Concepts that appear worth pursuing include investigating the feasibility of a more mixed-use approach, particularly south of Sheridan Drive. There is sentiment that redevelopment schemes for the Sheridan Drive BOA should look at ways to revitalize what has become a somewhat "shop-worn" shopping district. There needs to be improved aesthetics for the area, including better streetscaping and higher standards for public spaces, as well as stronger architectural standards and higher quality design for private investment. Ideally, there is a need for more greenspace landscaping, particularly within parking lots, although current regulations make this effort problematic.

There is an immediate need to look at the zoning for the area. Input from property representatives suggests that there are a number of concerns about zoning in the area that tend to depress investment and rebuilding. For example, under the current parking requirements, Northtown Plaza does not have enough parking spaces. These requirements would preclude additional landscaping within the parking lots and prevent any infill opportunities. At the same time, public input has suggested the community feels there is excessive parking in the plaza, and the large expanses of pavement detract from the area. Casual observation confirms that the plaza has more parking than is needed. Other concerns about zoning include confusion over development procedures, and questions about allowed uses and other regulatory issues. The Town has recently revised zoning regulations and there is a need for better information about how the changes affect property owners within the BOA. Since the Town's zoning revisions were based on a town-wide basis, it is also important to look closely at the impact on redevelopment area specifically, to determine if further revisions are needed to fully support redevelopment efforts.

Another problem identified is ownership structures. One of the properties with the highest degree of vacancy is owned under a land-lease structure that discourages investment. Out of town ownership, sometimes by trusts who are not actively involved in property management complicates this issue. There are also a number of sites where further investigation into potential environmental contamination is warranted.

The Sheridan Drive Commercial Area falls within one of the Town of Amherst's "enhancement zones," and it is eligible for additional support from the Town's IDA. It may be helpful to

conduct a survey of business owners. This survey could measure their awareness of available incentives, as well as obtain information about what additional incentive programs, training or other business support may be helpful. Additional support is needed in order to help defray the added costs of re-development, compared to building on ‘greenfields.’

There is also a sense that some of the properties could benefit from site plan improvements. For example, circulation between plazas can be difficult due to the configuration of site infrastructure (curb cuts, internal circulation). Better traffic flow and access controls could help improve access to and between sites.

Given the strong growth of Consumer Square, there is concern about market issues. Some of the vacancies within the BOA are due to tenants relocating to nearby properties in newer space. It is recommended that a careful look at market niches be conducted to determine which types of uses have the strongest potential within the BOA.

Based on the results of the Pre-Nomination study, we have developed an initial list of recommendations regarding areas for further study in a Nomination Study for the Sheridan Drive Commercial Area BOA. Recommended steps fall into themes of functional, business development, environmental, design and regulatory issues, and are summarized as follows:

- Town of Amherst Zoning-
 - Visualization Study to assess potential development options under current zoning
 - Zoning Revisions to address problems with new code
 - Parking regulations: assess appropriateness of requirements and consider options
- Town of Amherst Development Procedures:
 - Study of processes and procedures and where these can be improved/ streamlined
- Streetscape/ Pedestrian Facilities- design concepts for improving aesthetics and walkability of BOA area (e.g. benches, crosswalks, trees)
- Circulation Study- ways to improve vehicular and pedestrian access, particularly between adjacent parcels/ plazas
- Market Analysis- assess appropriate mix of uses (residential, retail, office, other); identify target markets/ market niches
- Small Business Support- assess need for support programs to encourage business development, determine what incentives are needed.
- Business Needs Assessment- assess business plans/ needs. Where expansions may be contemplated; type of space needed to accommodate planned expansions.

- Design issues: Streetscape improvements
- Schematic design for redevelopment options
- Brownfields investigation/ Feasibility Studies for targeted brownfield sites