

FRUIT BELT STRATEGIC PLAN

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Acknowledgements

City of Buffalo

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Ellicott District

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Fruit Belt Neighborhood

Fruit Belt Advisory Coalition

Fruit Belt Coalition

Fruit Belt United

Fruit Belt Homeowner and Tenant Council, Inc.

Mulberry Street and Friends Block Club

Orchard Community Initiative

Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers

First Community Alliance

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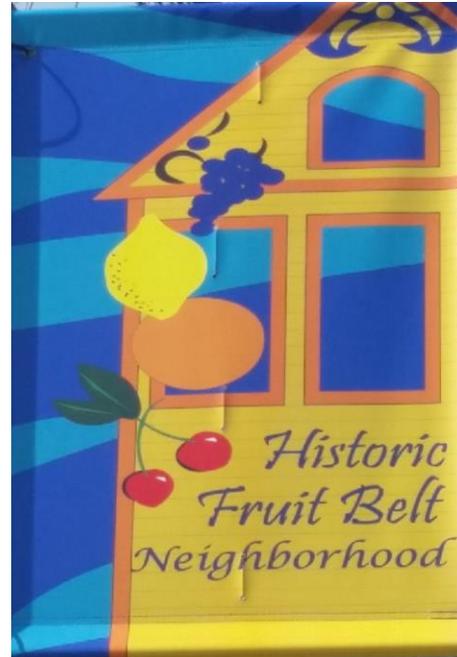
Introduction

The Fruit Belt Strategic Plan has been created in response to a resolution adopted by Common Council on November 3, 2014 led by Councilman Darius Pridgen. The resolution places a moratorium on the sale of city-owned properties in the Fruit Belt (defined as Best Street to the north, Cherry Street to the south, Jefferson Avenue to the east, and Main Street to the west), until the Office of Strategic Planning is able to work with residents, businesses, organizations and other stakeholders to create a strategic plan for the neighborhood.

The Strategic Plan is designed to build on the city's Green Code to help guide and support redevelopment of the Fruit Belt neighborhood.

It represents a collaborative effort of the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency, residents, local partners, community organizations, faith-based groups and other stakeholders who are committed to preserving and growing a healthy neighborhood.

The Strategic Plan seeks to build upon, rather than replicate, recent planning efforts in the Fruit Belt. The document consists of a brief neighborhood profile, an outline of the community engagement process, a review of the guiding principles developed by the community, and a summary of the goals and policies designed to drive neighborhood redevelopment.



Neighborhood Profile

The Fruit Belt was originally developed by German settlers in the 1850s, with the residential streets named for various trees that were planted. The neighborhood has undergone many changes since its inception, and now faces potential development pressure spilling over from the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus immediately to its west.

The current demographics of the Fruit Belt differ in many ways from the City of Buffalo and Erie County (all figures are from the 2013 five-year American Community Survey). The neighborhood is largely African American, compared to a more even breakdown within the city as a whole, and a mostly white population found in the suburbs.

Racial and Ethnic Origin

	<i>Fruit Belt</i>		<i>City of Buffalo</i>		<i>Erie County</i>	
All persons	2,670		260,568		919,230	
African American	2,225	83%	97,939	38%	121,112	13%
White	224	9%	130,756	50%	731,926	80%
Other race	221	8%	31,873	12%	66,192	7%
Hispanic / Latino	135	5%	25,302	10%	43,061	5%

Residents are more likely to have not graduated from high school, and less likely to have obtained a college degree, than their counterparts in the city and county. These lower educational levels are reflected in higher unemployment and poverty rates, and lower median household incomes.

Educational Attainment

	<i>Fruit Belt</i>		<i>City of Buffalo</i>		<i>Erie County</i>	
Persons 25 years +	1,890		165,675		627,301	
Less than high school	540	29%	29,321	18%	64,108	10%
High school	1,007	53%	95,957	58%	369,317	59%
Bachelors or more	343	18%	40,397	24%	193,876	31%

Economic Characteristics

	<i>Fruit Belt</i>		<i>City of Buffalo</i>		<i>Erie County</i>	
Unemployment rate		24.4%		13.8%		8.6%
Poverty rate		44.9%		30.7%		14.6%
Median household income	\$20,047		\$30,942		\$50,653	

A larger share of the housing stock in the Fruit Belt is vacant, and much of it is not being offered for sale or rent. These units, whether in abandoned structures or ones that the owners simply don't want to rent out, signal a weak market. Homeownership and median values lag behind both the city and county, with the median housing value just two-thirds of the citywide figure, and just over one-third of the countywide number.

Housing Characteristics

	<i>Fruit Belt</i>		<i>City of Buffalo</i>		<i>Erie County</i>	
All housing units	1,598		134,839		419,815	
Occupied	1,232	77%	112,037	83%	380,152	91%
Vacant	366	23%	22,802	17%	39,663	9%
Renter-occupied	825	67%	64,783	58%	131,773	35%
Owner-occupied	407	33%	47,254	42%	248,379	65%
Med value (owner-occupied)	\$45,775		\$66,600		\$124,300	

Community Engagement

Stakeholders Focus Group

An initial focus group was held with Fruit Belt stakeholders to generate awareness of the Strategic Plan, request their assistance, and help formulate and develop this process with the community. The stakeholders represented various groups, including the Fruit Belt Advisory Council, Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers, Fruit Belt Coalition, Fruit Belt United, Homeowner and Tenant Council, Mulberry Street and Friends Block Club, and the Orchard Community Initiative.

In the stakeholders meeting we reviewed previous plans that had been prepared, and evaluated each of the plans and the key themes. These plans included:

- Fruit Belt Redevelopment Plan, Preliminary Study; UB Center for Urban Studies; 2002
- Masten District Plan; Good Neighbors Planning Alliance; 2004
- Fruit Belt Neighborhood Strategy; Sasaki Associates (BNMC); 2009
- Better Buffalo Fund Neighborhood Assessment; City of Buffalo; 2013

Those key themes were then compared to the needs, issues and concerns of the present time to see if there was consistency. We concluded that the issues of neighborhood character, housing, vacant lots, and parking were the key areas of concern.

We examined these areas in more detail through a survey (see Appendix A), in which each leader was asked to rank the importance of these issues. The objective was to triage the issues and give priority to what they felt needed to be addressed the most. This does not take away from the importance of other issues, but it does allow stakeholders to begin thinking collaboratively about developing their community in phases, based on a consensus of the most important issues.

Another phase of the focus group was to develop a collaborative initiative to focus on “One Thing” to create safe, healthy and prosperous partnerships. What came out of this discussion was guiding principles for the community groups to abide by for the activity that occurs within the neighborhood.

Facilitation Meetings

Several facilitation meetings were held with the public to discuss these key issues within a strategic format. The facilitation meetings were held at the Gethsemane Baptist Church on Grape Street and the Moot Center on High Street. There were two meetings held at the Gethsemane Baptist Church with Fruit Belt residents. The first meeting was held on October 15, 2015, to identify and discuss key issues that impacted the community. The next meeting was held on January 11, 2016, where staff from both the city and BURA presented the final version of key issues and recommendations for addressing those issues. The key issues that the Fruit Belt residents identified were: Neighborhood Character, Housing, Vacant Lots, and Parking.

A series of facilitation meetings were planned to begin the process of developing the Strategic Plan. A focus group meeting with Fruit Belt leadership was held on March 3, 2016 to discuss the previous plans, scope, timeline and core values of the Strategic plan. The first meeting was held on March 24, 2016, to discuss focus group findings, and key issues in detail. Residents were then divided into groups to discuss these issues and develop goals and action steps for each. A questionnaire was used

to facilitate the discussion. The responses to the questions provided a starting point for developing goals and policies.

The second facilitation meeting was held on April 21, 2016, and gave residents an opportunity to review the draft goals and policies in more detail. Recommendations were provided for both the Fruit Belt Strategic Plan as well as the city's Green Code.

The third facilitation meeting was held on May 16, 2016, and allowed participants to review the final draft and to make some additional comments to the formulation of the planning alliance and other recommended policies.

Our fourth facilitation meeting was held on June 20, 2016. The residents made some final recommendations and final updates to the Strategic Plan. Staff from Office of Strategic Planning and BURA used this feedback to adjust the final document that was presented to the Mayor and Councilmember Pridgen for review.

Guiding Principles

The Strategic Plan contains goals and policies to guide redevelopment and activities within the Fruit Belt neighborhood. These are driven by a series of principles that the community would like to see implemented.

1. The Fruit Belt relies on the concept of community development to guide our policies.

The community is committed to meeting existing needs without compromising future generations. Long-term impacts of policy development will be consistent to ensure the neighborhood's social, cultural and environmental systems are well-integrated.

2. The Fruit Belt values equity.

The community will actively work to eliminate barriers to collaboration and participation in community development. Residents will ensure that their resources and opportunities are fairly distributed and that every person has the capacity and a fair say in their community's progress.

3. The Fruit Belt is committed to investments that support long-term sustainability.

Residents will ensure that strategic investments maximizing long-term returns are supported. The community recognizes that investments in infrastructure, public facilities, housing and the use of green space and green development will maximize property values, strengthen blocks, and foster a strong business corridor to make the Fruit Belt a great place to live, work and play.

4. Partnerships are essential.

Because the community is a series of interconnected systems that function together, partnerships among businesses, professionals, organizations, residents, the city, and all community stakeholders are necessary to achieve community development.

Goals and Policies

The goals and policies for the Strategic Plan were developed through a series of facilitated meetings with Fruit Belt residents. The goals reflect the recommendations of residents, while the policies are designed to fit within existing frameworks to allow those goals to be met.

Goal #1 - Community Participation

Establish a Fruit Belt Planning Alliance in collaboration with residents, stakeholders, City of Buffalo, BURA, Community Organizations and institutions to work together to address development, planning, Green Code regulations and service delivery within the Fruit Belt Neighborhood.

The Fruit Belt Planning Alliance (FBPA) is a neighborhood-based planning initiative and a part of the Fruit Belt's ongoing comprehensive planning efforts that seeks to involve citizens in the creation of Community Based Action Plans. The Fruit Belt Planning Alliance is also a community building process whereby community residents have a voice in determining the future direction of their neighborhood.

CP 1.1: Fruit Belt residents will collaborate with the Ellicott District Councilmember and the Mayor's office to establish a Fruit Belt Planning Alliance (FBPA, or similar entity) to further involve residents in the creation of community-based action plans, and give a voice in determining the future of the Fruit Belt neighborhood.

CP 1.2: The FBPA will hold community meetings at the preliminary stage of new proposals to inform residents and ensure public awareness and input.

CP 1.3: The District Council Office will provide the FBPA and residents with adequate and timely notification of public hearings to facilitate participation in Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Preservation Board, and Common Council hearings regarding the Fruit Belt neighborhood.

CP 1.4: The FBPA, in partnership with the local business community and stakeholders, will consider establishing a business association to help retain, reinvest and attract new businesses to the local market.

CP 1.5: Residents and Stakeholders who are active participants and members of the FBPA will have an opportunity to proactively guide how public resources are invested in the Fruit Belt neighborhood and what the Fruit Belt neighborhood will look like in the future. These resources and improvements include:

- a. Public Safety
- b. Infrastructure
- c. Recreational Opportunities
- d. Sustainable Economic Growth
- e. Cultural Riches
- f. And A Diverse Participatory Governmental Process

CP 1.6: The Fruit Belt Planning Alliance will be led by a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will function as the governing body to work with the neighborhood residents to formulate, adopt and execute the action(s) for the neighborhood.

- a. The FBPA will be responsible for reviewing and making recommendations and suggestions to proposed projects within the Fruit Belt to the developer and the council district representative.
- b. All members of the Fruit Belt Planning Alliance (FBPA) MUST be residents who live within the boundaries Fruit Belt Neighborhood.

Goal #2 - Neighborhood Character

To support policies in the Green Code that help create an environment that is characterized by vibrant, safe and sustainable features and encourages walkability, social interaction and partnership opportunities within the Fruit Belt Neighborhood.

NC 2.1: Proposed developments within the Fruit Belt must be consistent with all Green Code requirements regarding both allowable uses and design.

NC 2.2: To the greatest extent possible, a property should be maintained in its historic purpose, or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site.

NC 2.3: The FBPA will be encouraged to meet with private sector builders and development agencies prior to the planning for future improvements, development, or redevelopment of housing and provide recommendations to the Common Council to either adopt, or deny proposed project.

NC 2.4: New proposed large scale development should be reviewed under Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) guidelines. CPTED is a multi-disciplinary approach to deterring criminal behavior, and includes natural surveillance, natural access control, territorial reinforcement, lighting, and signage.

It is recommended to designate the Fruit Belt Neighborhood as a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) District. CPTED is defined as a multi-disciplinary approach to deterring criminal behavior through environmental design. Any new, or proposed development should include (CPTED) design standards and concepts to ensure the development is compatible and safe for pedestrians. CPTED Standards include:

- **CPTED 2.4.1: Natural Surveillance:** Natural surveillance of a concealed or isolated route should be encouraged. A stair or a ramp may be located such that it has external glazed/ open areas and has a view from the surrounding properties.
- **CPTED 2.4.2: Natural Access Control:** If a concealed or isolated route is enclosed and prone to crime e.g. passageway or stairwell, there should be a surveillance through security hardware should be considered and these hardware should be properly monitored
- **CPTED 2.4.3: Territorial Reinforcement:** The properties that are normally not protected and that can easily be intruded should be defined by the presence of design features and maintenance. For example, poorly defined front and rear yards could be defined by a small fence or by regular maintenance of the surrounding landscape.
- **CPTED 2.4.4: Lighting:** Concealed or isolated routes should be adequately and uniformly lit. Lighting should be vandal proof and properly located. Light colored walls and ceiling

materials help to reflect light and can enhance the brightness of an area. Natural lighting is preferred and should be encouraged.

NC 2.5: Any new business or institution being proposed must include a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategy to maximize the utilization of transportation alternatives to the extent practical, consistency with the Green Code and taking into account the opportunities and constraints of the site and the nature of the development.

NC 2.6: All open spaces and community gardens must comply with the Green Code, including lot dimensions, coverage and building setbacks.

NC 2.7: Any proposed paths must provide convenient routes to abutting streets and take advantage of topographical or landscape features.

NC 2.8: If additional signage is proposed within the neighborhood it should complement the character of the Historic Fruit Belt neighborhood.

NC 2.9: It is recommended for the Fruit Belt neighborhood groups to consider collaborating with the local Buffalo Public Schools as a community facility use, and to continue to progressively work toward developing a future plan for a neighborhood community center.

Goal #3 - Land Sales

To ensure that the sale of city-owned vacant land has specific requirements and is prepared in a manner that protects the integrity and continuity of the neighborhood.

LS 3.1: All sales of city-owned land will be carried out under the guidelines of the city's Real Estate Disposition Policy. This policy will be administered by the Real Estate Division of the Office of Strategic Planning (a copy of the draft is attached for reference). The Real Estate Division will review and evaluate all direct sale offers to purchase or lease city property based on the information provided in a purchaser's application and offer to purchase. Final approval for proposed sales must be provided by District Council Representative who solicits recommendations from the FBPA.

LS 3.2: The Fruit Belt Strategic Plan does not give the right, authority or designation to any one particular developer to have exclusive rights to be the sole developer within the neighborhood. ALL developers, projects, community organizations and plans must go through the City's Office of Strategic Planning land disposition process for review.

LS 3.3: Any plan or recommendation for the reuse of vacant lots must incorporate a use that is consistent with the Green Code and contributes to the overall character of the neighborhood.

LS 3.4: The Fruit Belt residents and neighborhood groups are discussing the creation of a Fruit Belt land trust. A Fruit Belt land trust will be subject to the same Real Estate Disposition Policy and Green Code guidelines as any other developer and/or entity for purchasing and developing City-owned vacant lots. A Fruit Belt land trust must also possess the capacity, resources, finances, personnel and plans for acquiring and developing vacant land to be consistent and compatible with the adjacent and surrounding uses.

LS 3.5: City-owned properties that are within designated areas are eligible for homesteading, as long as the property is not needed for a public purpose and no qualified buyer is attempting to purchase it at market value. Applicants can acquire property in these areas for below market value plus required closing costs.

LS 3.6: Homesteading can apply to renovating abandoned structures, building new housing on vacant lots, or adding a side yard for a current homeowner. All homestead sales will be guided by the policies of the city's Homestead Urban Renewal Plan.

LS 3.7: Residents who OWN AND OCCUPY the residential structure adjoining the city-owned vacant lot will have the first opportunity to homestead that vacant lot. The resident must be in compliance with the following: Be current on all city and county property taxes, water, sewer and user fee charges; have no other liens owed to the City of Buffalo; or property code violations on any properties owned. The applicant will be required to clean and improve the vacant parcel and maintain the property for a period of thirty-six (36) months.

LS 3.8: If a proposal is submitted for new home construction on an acquired city-owned vacant lot the applicant must:

- a. Provide sketch with dimensions, detailed cost estimates and financial plans sufficient to erect and maintain a residence.
- b. Obtain all required permits and approvals from the purchaser.
- c. The structure must be erected on the premises within twelve (12) months and must be occupied by the homesteader for a minimum of thirty-six (36) months.
- d. The housing structure erected shall be comply with the housing policy section 1.0 of the Fruit Belt Strategic Plan document and ALL Green Code designations and ordinances.

Goal #4 - Parking

The Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus parking study encourages a range of parking options to ensure that on-street parking in the Fruit Belt is optimized to improve the access, mobility and quality of life for the Fruit Belt Residents.

P 4.1: The New York State Legislature recently approved a residential parking permit system for an area within the Fruit Belt bounded by East North Street, Michigan Avenue, Rose Street and BFNC Drive. Under the proposed system, one-half of each street will be designated for resident-only parking and the remaining half designated for the public. The city will be responsible for implementation of this system.

P 4.2: The incorporation of a Parking Benefits District (PBD), which requires state legislative approval, will be considered as a long term strategy to ensure adequate oversight, regulation, maintenance, enforcement and fee acquisition within the neighborhood. It should also be used to continue to ensure equitable parking options and implementation strategies for future growth and development within the Fruit Belt.

P 4.3: Consistent with legislation, commercial spaces would be metered within the commercial-zoned areas with funds providing revenues for the PBD.

P 4.4: Newly developed businesses need to provide a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategy as required by the City of Buffalo Green Code. When offsite parking is being provided, it must be located within a short walking distance of the facility to ensure pedestrian safety and mobility.

- ✓ TDM must identify the anticipated travel demand for the development by mode.
- ✓ Identify how the anticipated travel demand for the project will be met on-site or off site, including:
 - Number of on-street vehicle parking spaces, off-street vehicle parking space, or shared vehicle parking arrangements.
 - Number of short-term and long-term bicycle parking spaces.
 - Accommodations for pedestrians, cyclists, motorists, transit riders and mobility impaired.
- ✓ Any request in addition to the Green Code TDM should consult the City of Buffalo Green Code Section 8.4 Transportation Demand Management.

P 4.5: Adequate parking for new businesses must be to the rear or side of the facility, except when deemed necessary due to residential constraints.