

# ERIE



**downtown master plan**





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Prepared by:

*Kise Straw & Kolodner*

Architects Planners Historians Archaeologists

**Urban Partners**



It's a familiar scenario in many "rust-belt" cities: in the last half-century, downtown Erie has seen its role as the regional business district stagnate, its appeal as a shopping destination diminish, and its residential attraction to anyone other than fixed-income renters decimated. Early attempts to stop or slow these trends focused on competing with the nearby suburbs and often harmed the downtown despite the good intentions behind them. The dense historic fabric has been eaten away by surface parking lots, streets that once thrived with activity have been remade into virtual expressways, while the major business thoroughfare, State Street, underwent mall-like cosmetic makeovers, removing its vehicular traffic and convenience for the few remaining shoppers.

However, times have changed and the past few decades have seen many once-dead cities come back to life by focusing on being a great urban place instead of competing with suburban locales. And to its credit, Erie retains a significant amount of the infrastructure necessary for downtown regeneration - attractive historic buildings, a significant employment base, a growing University, a successful ballpark and hockey arena, attractive museums, performing arts venues, an active nightlife scene, and a new waterfront Convention Center. Recent developments like the Starbucks at 5th and State are proving the downtown's basic viability.

**Our formula :**

**Market Potential**  
+  
**Physical Opportunities**  
+  
**Transport Needs**  
=  
**PLAN**

Erie's Downtown Improvement District, as part of its strategy to provide special services for downtown Erie, joined with the Erie Redevelopment Authority and the City of Erie to create a master plan for the downtown. Using the help of a professional planning and economic development consultant team, stakeholder and community input, as well as an in-depth review of current market conditions, this plan provides a framework for rebuilding the downtown into an active residential and commercial center, while enhancing its role as the region's premier office district. The plan identifies the best opportunities for redevelopment and recommends a series of public and private investments that will improve the aesthetics and usefulness of downtown's public spaces, create retail districts that respond to specific market niches, and reuse historic buildings to attract new downtown residents.

It should be noted that this plan is informed by several recent plans and studies. These include the update to the municipal zoning map and codes, the Civic Center Complex Master Plan, the ongoing Erie Art Museum Expansion Plan, an On-Street Parking Inventory, and a Traffic Study concerning the capacity of the Bayfront Connector, 12th Street, and other cross-town streets.

The 60 blocks within Erie's Downtown Improvement District formed the Master Plan study area.

*The 60 blocks within Erie's Downtown Improvement District formed the Master Plan study area.*



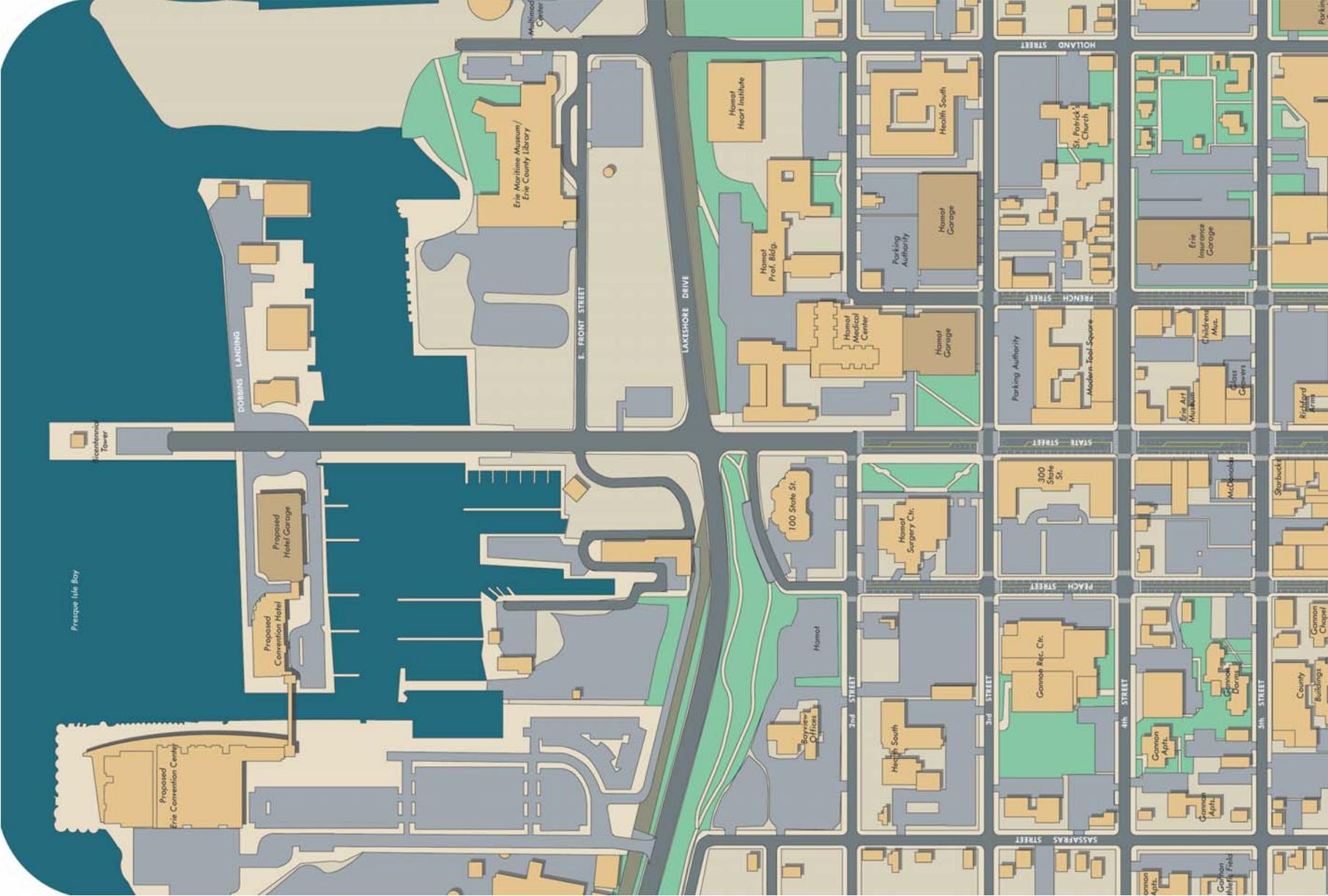
## Market Conditions

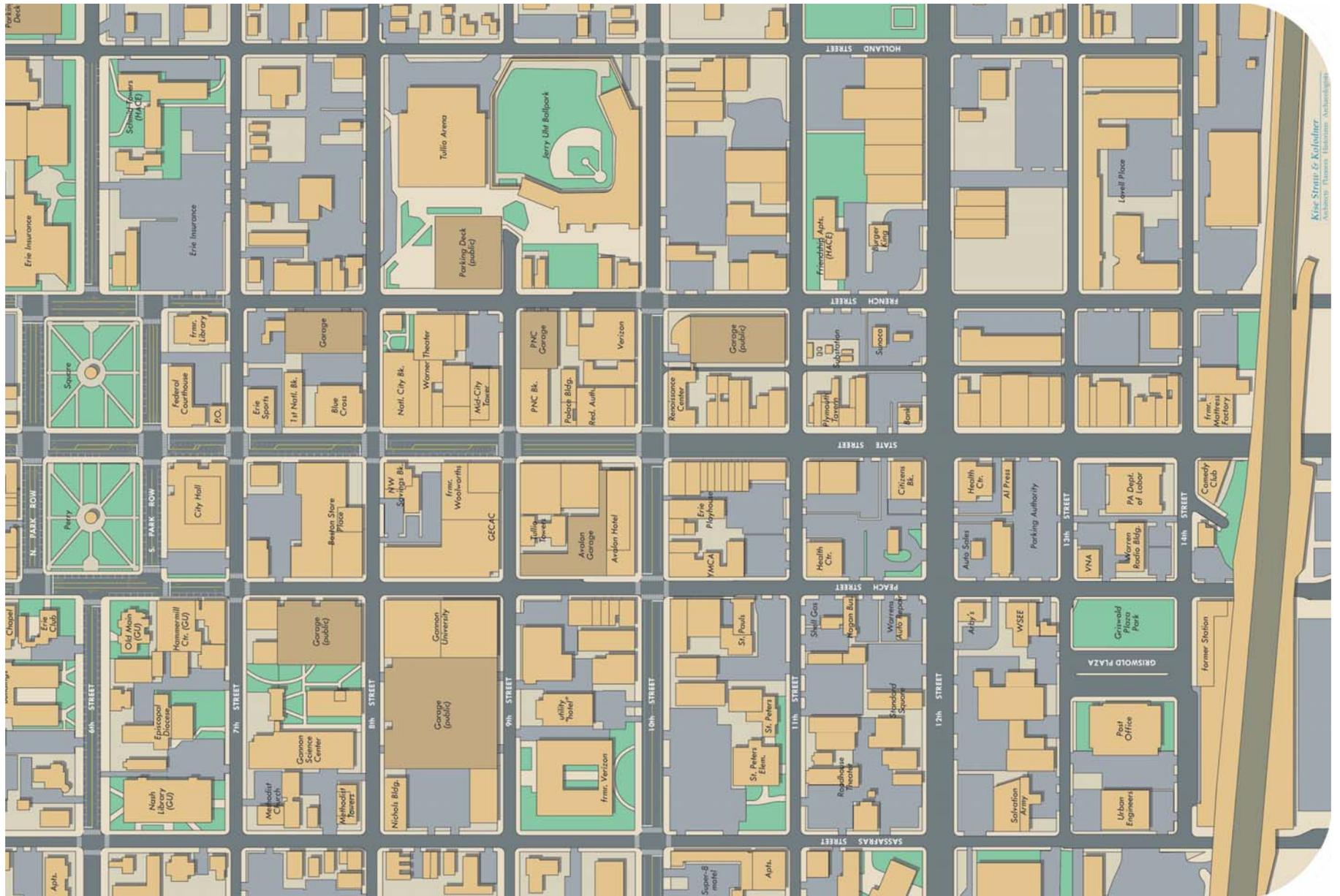
In an effort to tie any recommended planning actions to the realities of the various markets in operation in downtown Erie, the planning team conducted a market conditions assessment. The assessment looked at the trends in office, retail, residential, hotel, markets in and near downtown, as well as the greater Erie area for comparison. It also included a survey of downtown employees to determine potential demand for downtown housing.

The market assessment found that the downtown has several strengths, including a large employment base created from stable employers like Erie Insurance, Hamot Medical Center, Gannon University, government offices, and professional service providers, as well as a dense concentration of entertainment and cultural facilities. These assets have allowed the downtown to become a major center for eating, drinking, and other nightlife activities in northwest Pennsylvania. However, to successfully revitalize itself, downtown Erie must capture new market opportunities. The largest opportunities - sales housing and retail development - can be key contribu-

tors, but each must target specific markets with distinctive products. The market assessment identified this development potential. To be successful, new housing development must provide products that set downtown apart as a unique and positive living environment that offers a competitive alternative to that offered in the suburbs. Pricing of new sales housing depends on location and housing type - luxury housing with lakefront views targeted to "empty nesters" can be priced significantly higher than housing targeted to first-time homebuyers. Retail strategies should focus on significantly increasing the capture of sales from the 39,400 of Erie residents who live within a mile of downtown, while also establishing a high-quality retail cluster targeted to the regional market. These larger strategies can be supplemented with smaller, carefully crafted activities aimed at the growing the available "luxury" student rental housing, preserving and expanding corporate and professional office presence, and participating in an expanding hotel market.

| MARKET OPPORTUNITY   | QUANTITY                             | PRICE   | LOCATION  |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Residential (Sales)</b><br>New luxury waterfront condominiums<br>Historic loft conversion condominiums<br>New construction townhomes  | 50 units<br>60 units<br>90 units     | \$125,000 - \$175,000<br>\$75,000 - \$135,000<br>\$105,000 - \$135,000 initially,<br>then \$145,000 - \$175,000 | Waterfront<br>12th Street - 14th Street<br>Various infill sites |
| <b>Residential (Rental)</b><br>Luxury student housing (2-4 bedrooms)   |                                      | \$400 - \$425 / month per student   | Avalon Hotel or YMCA conversion?                                |
| <b>Retail</b><br>Community-serving retail hub anchored by supermarket and drug store<br>Compact cluster of regionally-oriented specialty retailers<br>New full-service restaurants | 128,000 SF<br>30,000 SF<br>21,000 SF |   | 12th Street corridor<br>5th & State Street area<br>Various      |
| <b>Office</b><br>Expansion opportunities for existing employers<br>Site for new Class A office building  | Various                              |   | Near existing employers<br>Near existing Class A space          |
| <b>Hotel</b><br>Expanding, modernizing downtown hotels   | Possibly 80-100 new rooms            |   | Near convention center. Avalon Hotel may need reinvestment      |





Kise-Strain & Kolodier  
Architects Planners Historians Architects

## Physical Conditions

Though Erie has experienced many large-scale changes in the last 50 years or so, its downtown is still a pleasantly compact and walkable urban place, with a unique location overlooking Presque Isle Bay. The following analysis outlines some of the major issues and opportunities that inform the downtown master plan.

### *Urban Fabric*

Erie's history as an important port, center of manufacturing, and center of commerce has left its downtown with a fine collection of older buildings, though many are now in disrepair and various states of vacancy. As the city grew, it moved away from the bay and left different character zones behind - the area near 5th and State Streets has many smaller-scale mid-19th Century commercial buildings, while large 20th Century office towers cluster between 7th and 11th Streets. Beyond 11th, industrial and warehouse buildings dominate, with the railroad viaduct at 14th Street walling off the downtown area. The downtown is linearly aligned, with residential neighborhoods beginning within two blocks east and west of State Street.



Bayfront



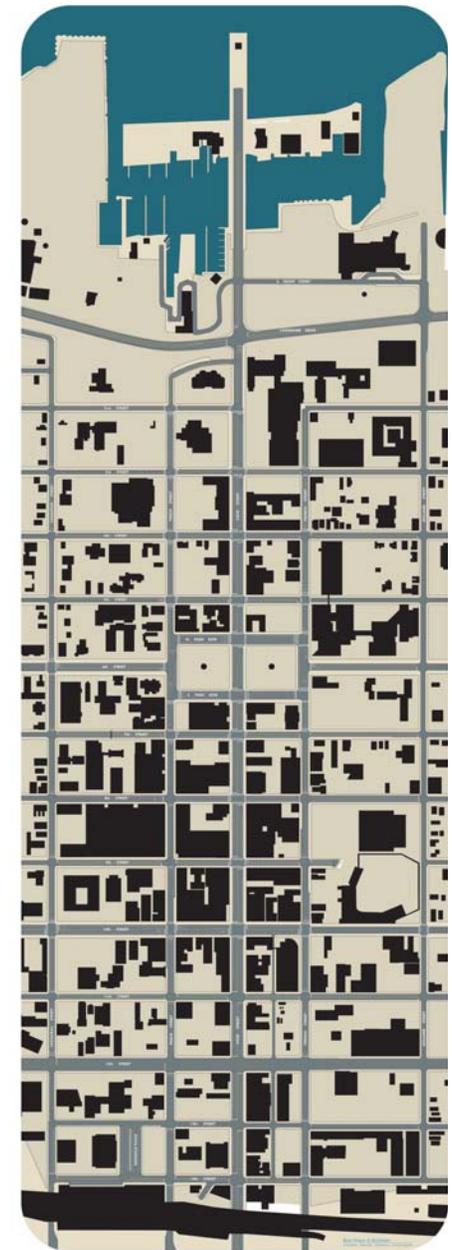
5th & State



7th & State



13th & State



Building density



Surface parking lots

Though Erie retains a relatively dense urban center, much of the fabric has been eaten away by extensive mid-century urban renewal projects, redevelopment of whole blocks for large building projects, and demolition of buildings for parking lots. The result is that only a handful of blocks, mainly along State Street, have complete "street walls" where occupied, non-garage buildings line both sides of the street. Surface lots cluster along Peach and French Streets, especially below 11th Street, either to support State Street commercial properties, or as part of newer, automobile-centric commercial development. There are also several large parcels of vacant land, along the waterfront and on 12th Street between French and Holland.



Auto-oriented site designs are being allowed into the pedestrian core.



Some commercial uses are not appropriate within downtown.



Large portions of the downtown are taken up by surface lots, including this underused public lot at French and 11th Streets.

## existing conditions

Downtown Erie also has several sizable public spaces, including Perry Square at the heart of the original town plan, Griswold Plaza near the industrial loft buildings below 12th Street, the bluffs overlooking the Bayfront, and several smaller open spaces associated with Gannon University or downtown commercial buildings. Though their condition varies, these green spaces already attract a variety of users and can serve as anchors to new development or redevelopment.

The building facades that form the public face of Downtown Erie are a mixed lot. While some facades are attractively maintained and add a warm ambiance to the streets, others are coldly impersonal and poorly maintained. Ground floor vacancy may be a partial explanation, but all facades in a commercial district should seek to address the street in an inviting manner.



Erie's best public spaces are surrounded by attractive buildings: Perry Square.



Repelling facade



Inviting facade



Poorly maintained facade



Restored facades



Dull window display



Creative display despite vacancy

### *Transportation and Movement*

How visitors, workers, and shoppers arrive in a downtown and move about once there will greatly influence the perception of a positive experience. Ideally, a downtown should be readily accessible via automobile and transit, supply inexpensive parking, and provide a pleasant walking environment. These needs can conflict, and Downtown Erie over-emphasizes the need to move autos in and out of downtown by sacrificing additional on-street parking or a pleasant walking environment.

Though good transit connections to downtown Erie exist and are well-used, most people arrive in a private automobile via the Bayfront Parkway, 12th Street, Peach Street, or State Street. Unfortunately, parts of these roads are physically overbuilt for automobiles - large turning radiuses, extremely wide travel lanes, excess travel lanes, no on-street parking, and one-way directions all encourage cars to move along much faster than the posted speed limit. These conditions make for an unsafe and unpleasant pedestrian experience and encourage property owners to accommodate fast traffic with curb cuts, drive-thrus, and private surface lots. Also, as a recent PENNDOT study found, the amount of traffic that actually enters or travels through downtown is not enough to justify the large capacity of the built road system, particularly on 12th Street.

■ One-way streets

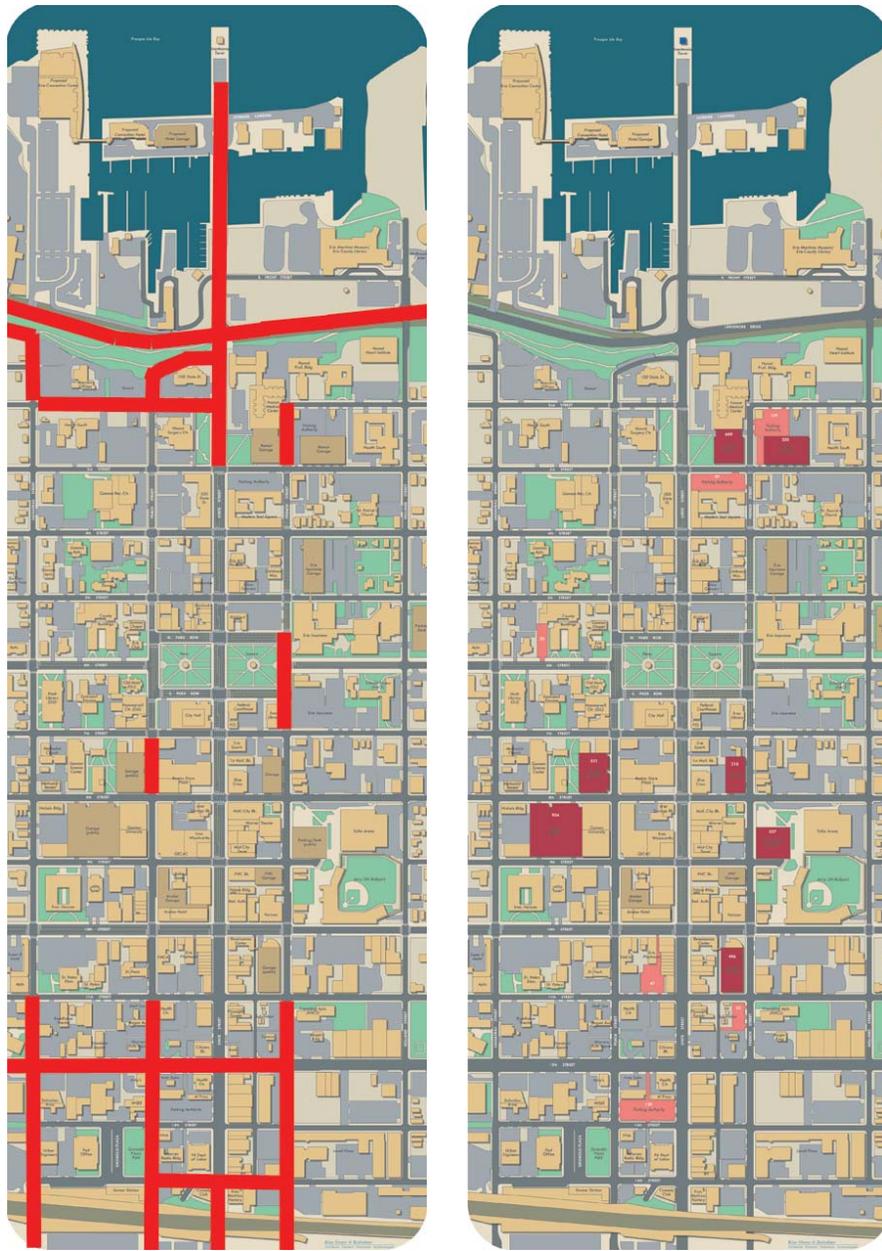
■ Two-way streets

*Thickness represents relative road size/capacity*

In addition, the auto-centric nature of the uses along parts of these corridors, the tall interior-lit signage, and the lack of amenities like trees or attractive lights leave a negative impression on visitors entering the downtown. Downtown is a special place, yet no memorable signage or attractive landscaping exists to announce it, and no directional signage points towards downtown destinations or public parking. These may seem like trivial matters, but first impressions last - especially for a city looking to increase its tourism and convention visitation.



*Many visitors' first impression of downtown Erie.*



■ No on-street parking     
 ■ Public Garage     
 ■ Public Lot

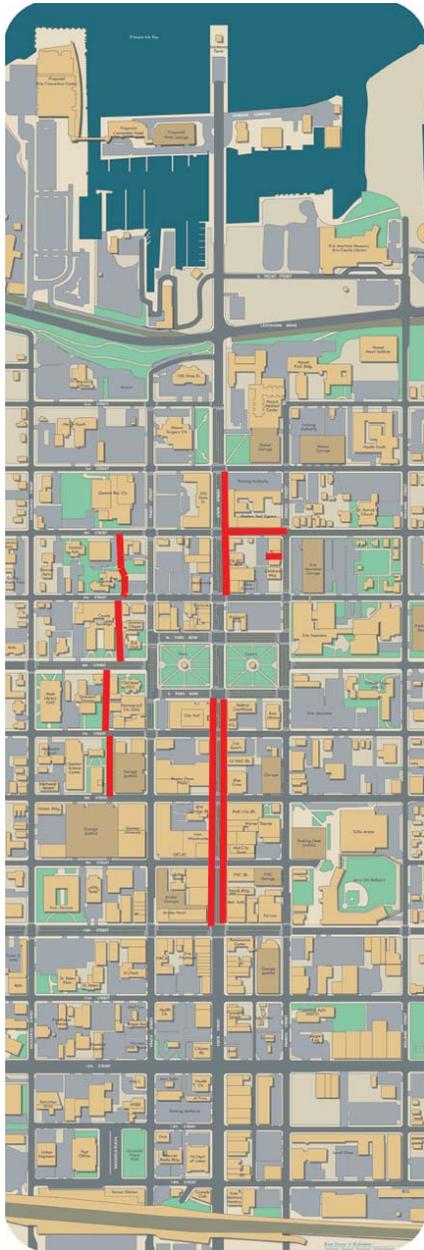
Once in downtown, visitors need to find convenient parking. Downtown Erie has plenty of surface parking lots and parking ramps, but many of these are reserved for the exclusive use of one building or employer. There is adequate public parking but often not near the desired destinations - the off-street parking nearest to Perry Square, an emerging retail area, is almost exclusively the domain of Erie Insurance and other employers. On-street parking does exist, but not on every street and the parking enforcement officers have a reputation for their zealously. Overbuilt roads around Perry Square and below 11th Street offer opportunities to increase convenient parking in these areas while calming speeding traffic.



*Lack of on-street parking on Peach Street encourages drivers to speed, while forcing businesses to build their own private lots.*



*Much of the off-street parking in the emerging Perry Square retail area is reserved exclusively for nearby employers.*



Existing pedestrian lighting

The pedestrian experience varies widely across downtown. State Street, with its wide sidewalks, trees, and low pedestrian lights, provides a positive and attractive environment; but only between South Park Row and 10th Street. There are patches of pedestrian lighting and landscaping on other blocks, but these are often provided by individual landowners and do not coordinate with each other.



Several styles of pedestrian lights exist downtown.

On the other end of the spectrum is the terribly unpleasant and unsafe experience along 12th Street, Peach, and French Streets. Having been given over to the automobile, these streets have narrow sidewalks placed alongside speeding roadways, unpleasant building facades, and many surface lots with no edge treatments. This is particularly dangerous along State Street at 12th, where nighttime bar patrons are found crossing seven speeding lanes of traffic. With the new Convention Center and continued development of the waterfront area, the intersection of State and Bayfront Parkway will also need attention.



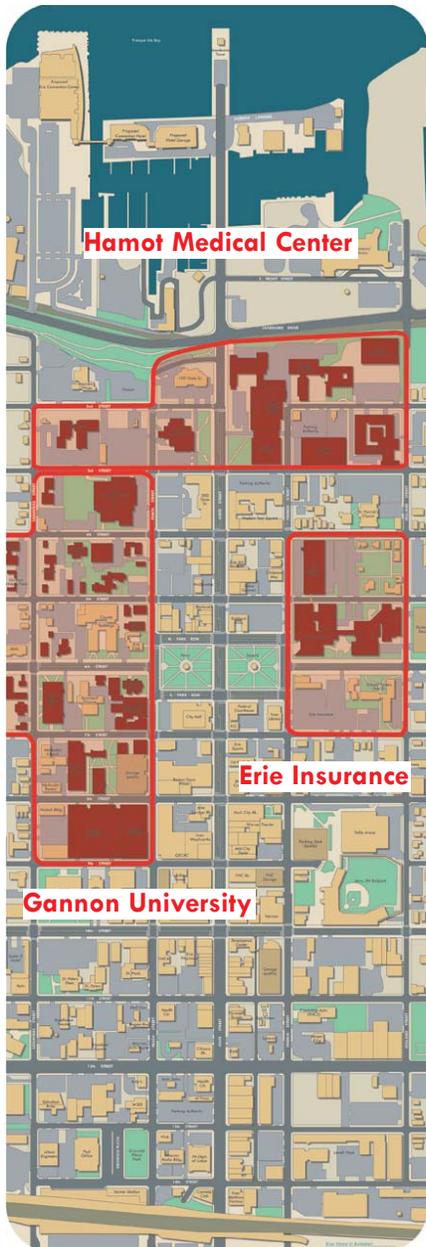
Intimidating: unwelcoming facades, no buffer from traffic



Uncomfortable: parking lots without edge treatments



Dangerous: crossing extra-wide 12th Street



Downtown's economic engines

Several overall strategies inform the downtown master plan:

1) *Maintain downtown's economic engines.* Erie's downtown is fortunate to have several large employers, creating a strong economic base that supports many other businesses. Gannon University, Hamot Medical Center, Erie Insurance, regional banks, and government entities should be encouraged to maintain and expand their presence downtown.

2) *Grow arts and entertainment.* Many of the region's arts and culture venues are located downtown. Renovation and expansion of those facilities, and addition of new venues will reinforce downtown Erie as a unique place to live, work, and play.

3) *Target urban market niches.* Downtown Erie is an urban place. To compete successfully, planned investments should target proven urban market niches, such as creating a retail district for "anti-mall" shoppers, homes for younger "pre-family" downtown workers and older "empty nesters", and office locations for "creative class" businesses.

4) *Use public-private partnerships.* In some ways, downtown Erie is an unproven area for developers and investors. For example, almost no market-rate sales housing exists in downtown. To establish a market base and prove that downtown can be a successful place for investment, some initial projects may require public investment leveraging private dollars.

5) *Build on existing strengths.* Downtown Erie has several strengths that place it ahead of other similarly-sized cities in downtown regeneration. The master plan seeks to maximize the advantage these strengths give downtown Erie:

- The strong collection of family-centered cultural and entertainment venues in the core of downtown can be used to generate additional restaurant activity nearby. The recent updates to Jerry Uht Park and the Warner Theater should be followed by needed updates to Tullio Arena.
- The nightlife on State Street now attracts many people in their 20's and 30's who might be interested in renting or buying a residence nearby.
- Attractive specialty outfits like Glass Growers, Starbucks, Pufferbelly, and the Erie Art Museum concentrate around the attractive 400-500 blocks of State Street in the midst of a large white collar, hospital, and university employment base. This area could be encouraged to grow into a regional shopping destination.
- The view of Presque Isle Bay from the 2nd Street bluffs and the convenience of downtown living is a unique combination that could attract empty-nesters and others who seek a "luxury" residential location.
- The 39,400 people living within a mile of 12th and State Streets now have to travel far away for convenience goods like groceries, medicine and auto parts. The underutilized parcels along the highly-accessible 12th Street corridor could be a more central location for these stores.

6) *Improve the public environment.* As downtown is the most accessible and civic-oriented part of the region, its streets, parks, and public spaces should reflect the spirit of the community. To attract shoppers and businesses, commercial streets should feel welcoming and safe to pedestrians, have publicly accessible parking available nearby, and not be given over wholly to moving large amounts of traffic. Park spaces, attractions in their own right, should be made uniquely attractive and safe for a diversity of uses and users. Building facades should be visually interesting and where possible show off the historic faces that define Erie's unique past.

7) *Connect the destinations.* Focusing efforts in several zones of strength will create reinvestment nodes that will spread in time, but these nodes need to be connected by attractive pedestrian infrastructure, transit, directional signage, and sensitive infill and redevelopment. Tying the various parts of downtown together will help direct reinvestment, and encourage users of the downtown to park once and easily move between areas.

*The Plan*

The Master Plan focuses efforts to four "Opportunity Zones" where early actions can leverage the largest returns, create connections between healthy areas, and reinforce the downtown core. The following sections of the master plan focus on specific plans for these zones.

**OPPORTUNITY ZONES**

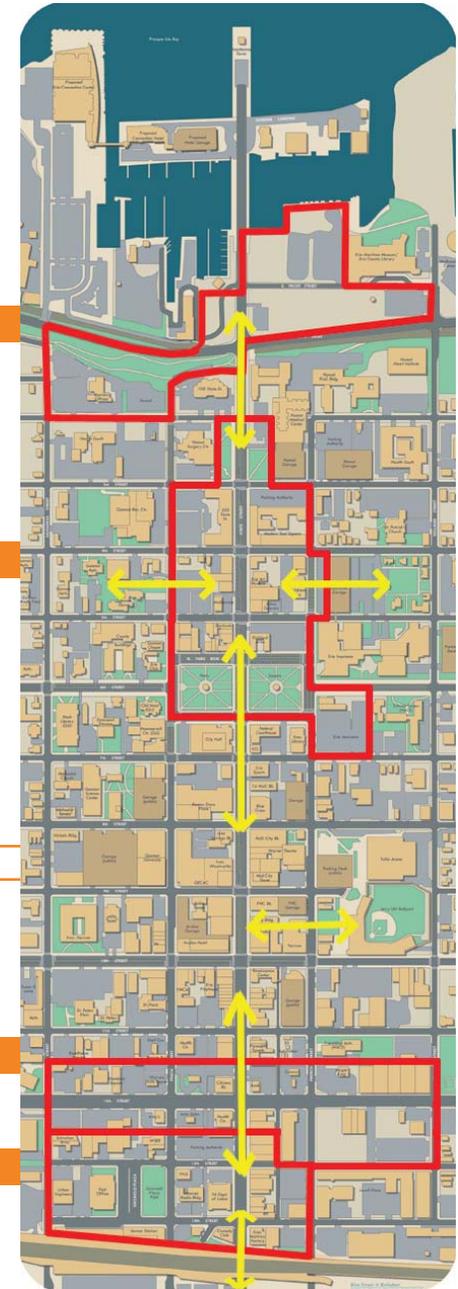
**BAYFRONT ZONE**

**PERRY SQUARE ZONE**

**DOWNTOWN CORE**

**12th STREET ZONE**

**INDUSTRIAL CHIC ZONE**



## Bayfront Opportunity Zone

The Bayfront Zone is centered on the bluffs, between the Presque Isle Bay and 2nd Street. Its strengths include the proximity and views of the bay, the open space and trail along the bluff edges, and the nearby economic engine of Hamot Medical Center. Several large parcels in this area present opportunities for infill development based on these strengths. Several actions constitute the plan for this zone:

### Priority projects:

*Encourage luxury residential development.* The magnificent views atop the bluffs along 2nd Street west of Peach are currently enjoyed only by large

surface parking lots and a vacant single-story office building. These views and the proximity of downtown and waterfront amenities are perfect for attracting high-end luxury residential development, marketed to "empty-nesters" who are looking to downsize their homes. The market assessment suggests a demand for a 50-unit building, but demand will likely increase once an initial project is built. The plan proposes 150 units in three towers, each within the height limits established by the zoning code. The typical unit would be 1000-1500 square feet, selling for \$125,000 - \$175,000. Development on this site could easily incorporate underground parking placed into the hillside, and should be designed to allow movement and views through the site to the bluff edges.



*Create a strong connection to the waterfront.* Visitors to the Convention Center and other waterfront attractions should be encouraged to visit other parts of downtown in order to maximize their economic benefit to the city. Streetscape improvements, with wide sidewalks, street trees, and pedestrian lighting along State Street between 2nd Street and Dobbins Landing, will help foster a pedestrian-friendly environment. Additionally, the intersection of Bayfront Parkway and State Street should be made easier to cross with highly visible crosswalks, elimination of slip lanes, sidewalk extensions, tighter turn radii, and pedestrian crossing signals. Gateway signage should be placed nearby to welcome drivers into the downtown and alert them to the presence of pedestrians. Additionally, new trolleys are running regularly from the Bayfront through downtown along State Street. Obvious trolley signage and information should be placed at all trolley stops.

#### **Other Actions:**

*Preserve sites for institutional expansion.* Sites should be kept available for Hamot Medical Center to grow and expand its facilities. Likely locations for growth include the grass lots along either side of State Street in front of existing Hamot buildings - these sites would help define a more urban streetwall along State Street. Ground floor retail and large entrances should be encouraged to add activity to this otherwise quiet stretch.

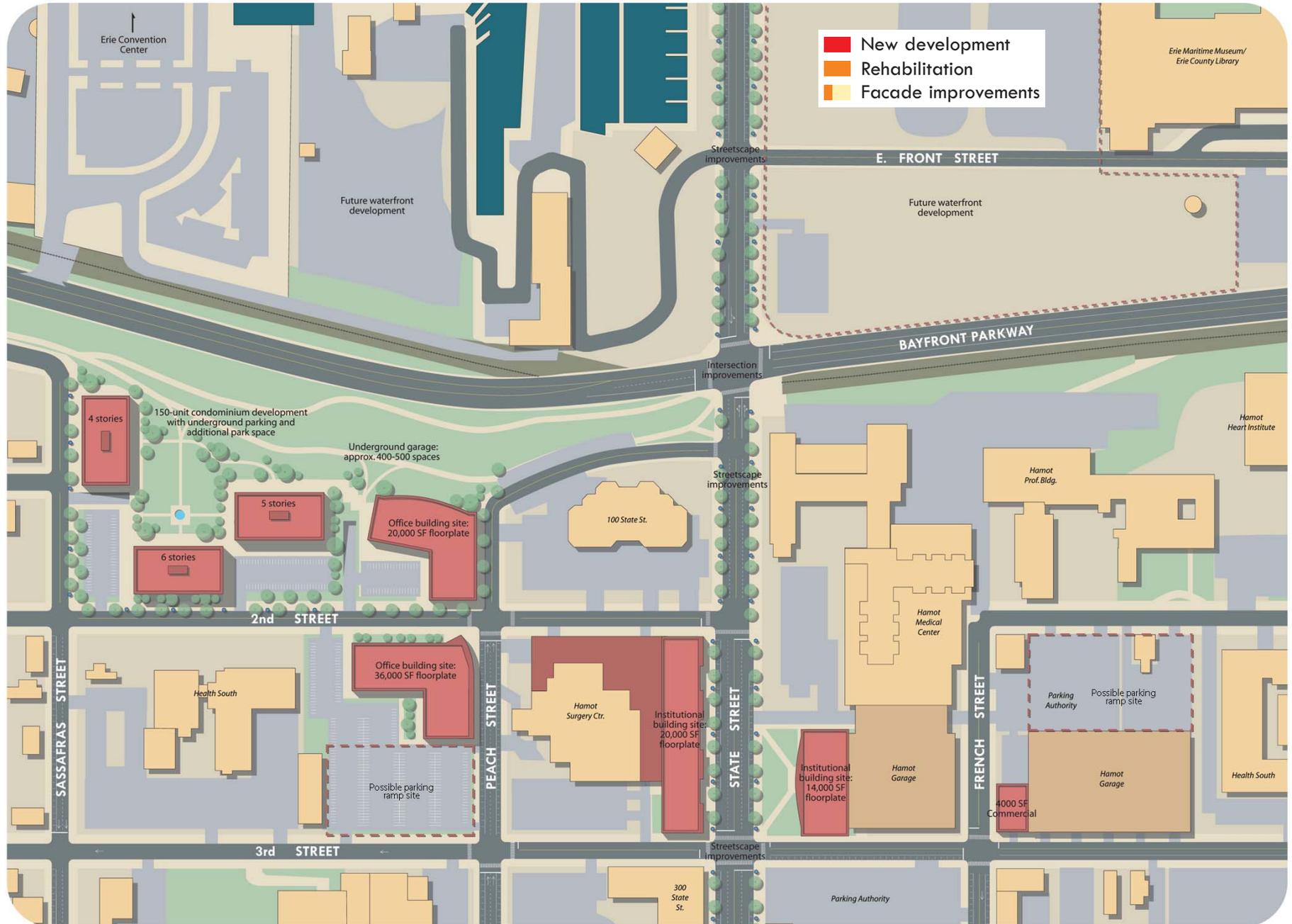
*Preserve sites for new Class A office buildings.* The Bayfront zone is already home to most of downtown's Class A office stock, which is well-occupied but aging and facing competition from locations outside downtown. In order to attract future Class A office growth, specific sites for future office buildings should be identified and marketed by the region's business attraction organizations. Prominent sites include the parking lots on both sides of 2nd Street west of Peach Street.

*Improve conditions along the bluff trails.* The existing multi-use trail along the bluffs is attractively landscaped, but will be improved with pedestrian-scale lighting, benches, and other amenities.

*Plan for future waterfront development.* Large sites exist on the bay side of Bayfront Parkway, and given their proximity to the bay, the Hamot Medical Center, and the new Erie Convention Center, development is likely to occur here soon. The City, DID, and Redevelopment Authority should work with developers to ensure quality of design and construction. Sound urban design principles should be upheld, including mixing uses within buildings, having buildings close to and facing streets, placing parking lots to the rear of buildings, and preserving waterside walkways and open spaces. In the near-term, parking could be built to support Hamot's growth and replace parking lost to development along the bluff tops.

*Future view: luxury residences overlooking Presque Isle Bay*





State & Bayfront intersection improvements:  
reduce curb radii, crosswalks, pedestrian signals

New Class-A office or  
institutional expansion site

Parking garage buried  
into hillside

New residential development with public plaza  
and connections to waterfront trail system



Trail improvements: interpretive signage,  
benches, trash cans, additional lighting

Future view: bayfront bluffs



## Perry Square Opportunity Zone

The Perry Square Zone is the area north of Perry Square between 4th Street and 6th Street. The square itself, the attractive historic buildings, and existing anchors such as the Erie Art Museum, Discovery Square, Glass Growers, Pufferbelly, and other entities already make this area a destination. The zone's location is another strength, between the four major employers in downtown - Gannon University to the west, Hamot to the north, Erie Insurance to the east, and government to the south. The following actions are recommended:

### Priority Actions:

*Improve the Square and surrounding parking.* Perry Square is the civic heart of Erie and its design should reflect its significance. Currently, the park functions as passive open space - trees and grass with a few random picnic tables, dozens of memorials, and a minimally-maintained feel. Instead, the square should be closer to a formal garden - a textured and urbane refuge with a variety of "outdoor rooms" that present a mélange of pleasing sights, smells and sounds that draw people there to visit, stroll, sit, play chess, sunbathe, or enjoy the fountain. A new plan for the square should improve the landscaping and park amenities with attractive



new paving, flowerbeds and shrubbery, low-rise iron fencing and entrance pillars, interpretive signage, benches, pedestrian lighting, larger and more attractive bus shelters, and an improved fountain. The plan should also address the placement of an increasing number of memorials and monuments. A transformed square will serve as the anchor for a transformed shopping district to the north.

The overly-wide streets surrounding the square present an opportunity to calm the speeding traffic in this pedestrian district while providing public parking needed for shopping convenience. Removing a lane will allow space to create slanted back-in parking spaces, increasing the on-street parking supply by several dozen spaces.

*Market the area as a regional specialty retailing destination.* There are a few specialty retailers already in downtown who successfully capture sales from the regional market. However, because of their scattered locations, virtually no store-to-store reinforcement occurs, and potential sales and customers are lost. With its nearby daytime employee and new convention customer base, existing restaurants, stores and attractions, and its collections of attractive buildings, the Perry Square zone is the most effective location for creating a compact cluster of specialty retail stores that target a regional "anti-mall" market. Existing specialty retailers should be encouraged to relocate, and new retailers should be recruited to locate in the Perry Square zone. The market assessment suggests 24,000 square feet of new commercial uses could be supported, including a high-end cosmetics store, a jeweler, additional gift shops, one or two women's apparel stores, one or two high-quality shoe stores, a home furnishings store, a luggage store, and a specialty toy/hobbies store.

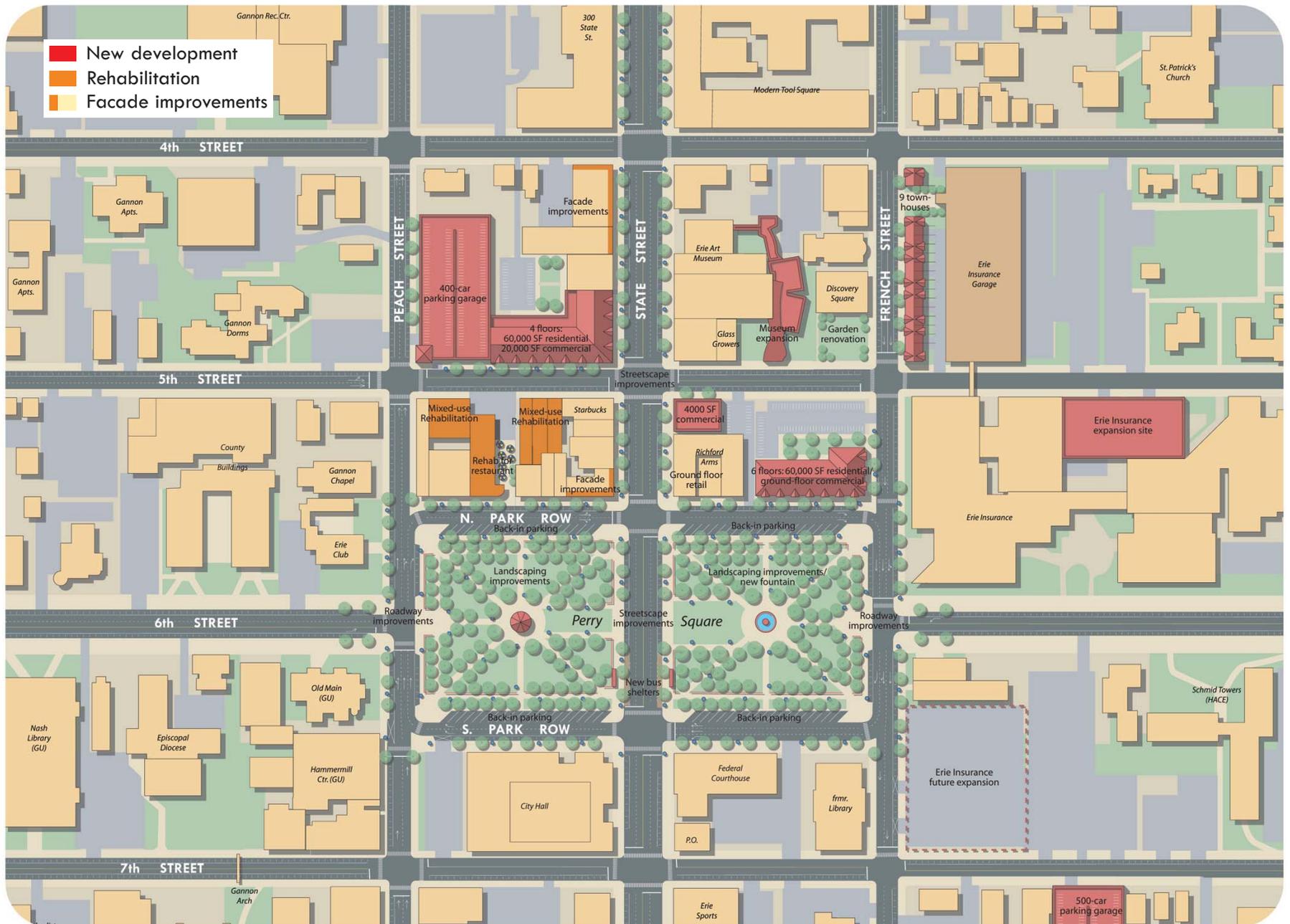
*Upgrade facades and encourage rehabilitation of vacant buildings.* Many of the attractive older buildings in this zone suffer from façade treatments that do not show off the building's architectural qualities or create a welcoming commercial face. Owners should be encouraged to clean and

improve their buildings' public faces as this will help market the area to retailers, shoppers, and residents. Improvements might include restoration work, interesting paint schemes, awnings, architectural lighting, improved signage, and window box planters.

Additionally, many buildings have vacant upper floors or are wholly vacant. The City, DID, and Redevelopment Authority should look into creating programs to help renovate these buildings for new commercial and residential uses. Possible programs include façade renovation grants and loans, tax incentives for building rehabilitations, and marketing efforts to link potential occupants with buildings.



Clockwise from top right: Perry Square's former fountain; outdoor "room" in Rittenhouse Sq, Philadelphia; landscaping in Rittenhouse Sq, Philadelphia; bus shelter in Rodney Sq, Wilmington, Delaware.



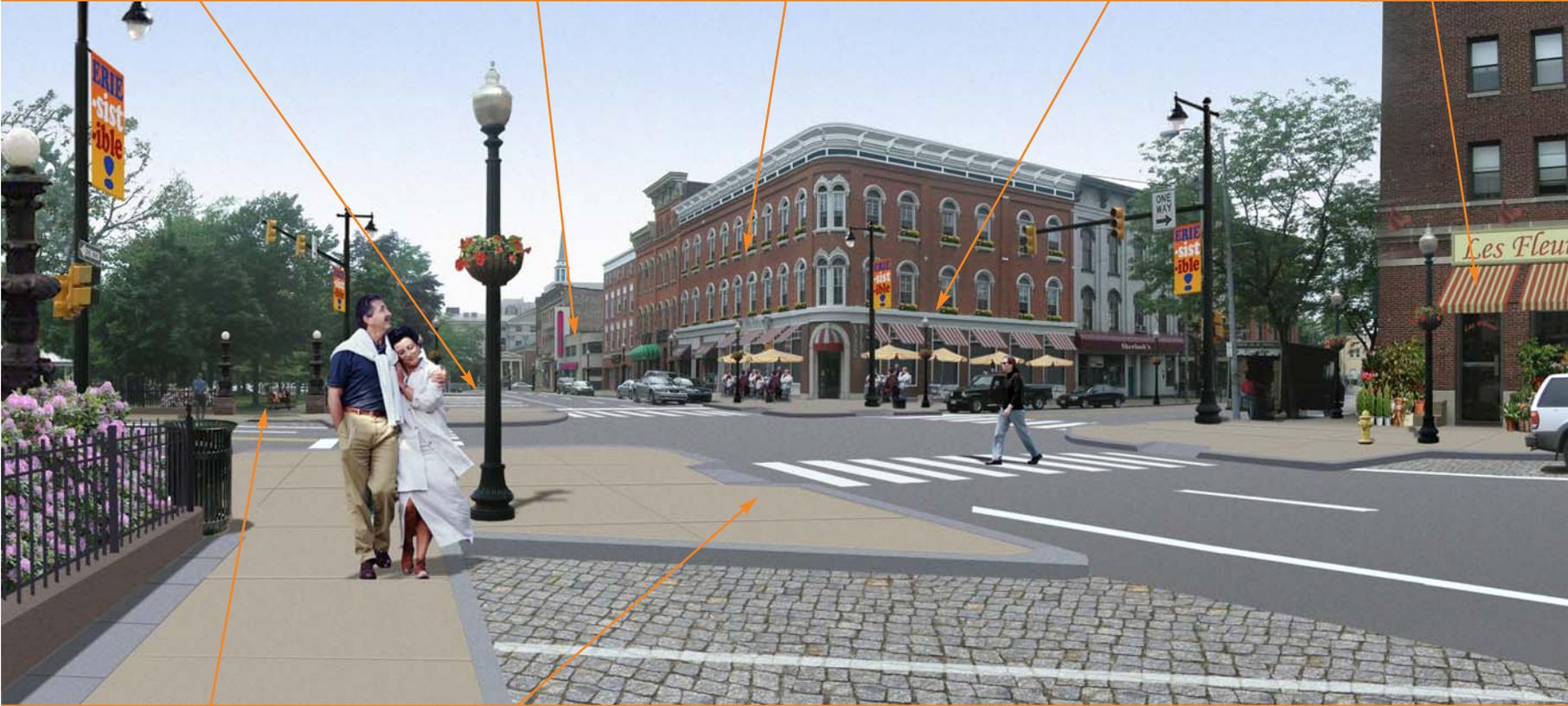
Remove lane and narrow roadway to provide back-in parking

Re-use of vacant buildings

Facade improvements and restorations

Pedestrian-scale lamps, attractive streetlights with banners

New commercial use and facade



Park improvements: fences, formal entrances, benches, landscaping

Curb extensions and crosswalk striping

Future view: North Park Row and State Street



**Other Actions:**

*Preserve sites for institutional expansion.* Sites should be kept available for Erie Insurance and the Erie Art Museum to grow and expand their facilities. Likely locations for Erie Insurance's growth include the sites near their campus along 5th Street and at the corner of French and 7th Streets. The Art Museum's planned expansion will occur behind their buildings and open a new entrance along 5th Street.

*Investigate the need and design of a parking structure.* Convenient public parking will be necessary to support the growth of this zone as a retail district. Changes to the parking configuration around Perry Square will help, but a long-term solution might include a new parking ramp, particularly as the Art Museum finishes its planned expansion. The large lot on the northeast corner of Peach and 5th Streets is ideally situated for this use. Any future parking structures should also help increase the amount of retail space in this zone by incorporating leasable ground-floor commercial space in its design.

*Make sites available for infill development.* Several parcels in this zone are currently under-used or have an auto-centric design not appropriate for a dense pedestrian district, and should be considered for infill and redevelopment. The surface lot in front of Erie Insurance's parking ramp along the 400 block of French is ideal for townhouse infill development. This will add residences in the neighborhood and "finish" an otherwise attractive block. The large surface lot along North Park Row is the only undeveloped parcel facing Perry Square and could easily support a larger mixed-use development with ground floor retail and several floors of residences or offices. A commercial use could also occupy the smaller parking lot at the southeast corner of 5th and State Streets, behind the Richford Arms. Finally, the drive-thru McDonald's at 5th and State is not ideally designed for a pedestrian shopping district and should be encouraged to redevelop into a 3-4 story mixed-use development.



## 12th Street Corridor Opportunity Zone

The 12th Street Corridor is the area along both sides of 12th Street, between Sassafras and Holland Streets. Its main strength lies in its relatively central location within the city, ease of access, and its use as a major cross-town traffic route. There are a few large vacant parcels in this corridor and several under-utilized commercial lots that might find better uses. The following actions are recommended:

### Priority Actions:

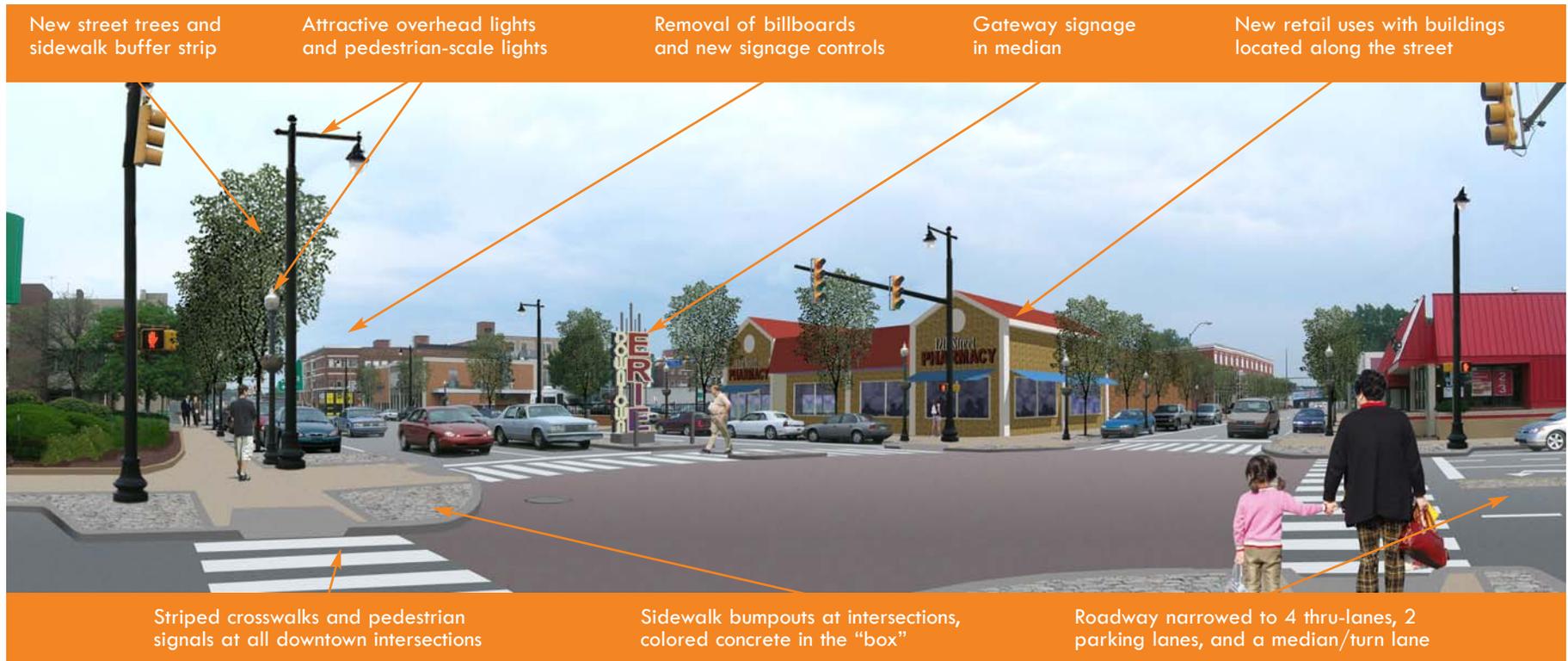
*Re-stripe 12th Street, Peach Street, and French Street.* Many drivers complain about the ability to move quickly along the 12th Street corridor, but studies have shown this has more to do with the number, timing, and coordination of stoplights than the design of the street itself. Currently, 12th Street, and Peach and French Streets (below 10th Street) have much

more traffic capacity than necessary, and their ultra-wide lanes and lack of on-street parking encourage drivers to go much faster than posted speed limits. This situation is extremely dangerous to pedestrians, especially given the active nightlife district along State Street. 12th Street should be re-striped to convert one lane in each direction into on-street parking lanes, and Peach and French Streets should be converted to two thru-lanes and one or two parking lanes - as they currently are above 10th Street. Not only will this action calm traffic, but it will add numerous convenient public parking spaces within this zone.

*Improve the public streetscape along 12th Street and State Street south of 10th Street.* The 12th Street corridor is a major entrance route into Downtown Erie and its appearance should be attractive and memorable. Likewise, the attractive streetscape of State Street above 10th Street should be extended south to the railroad viaduct to establish a strong pedestrian-friendly connection between downtown districts. Improvements should







Future view: 12th Street at Peach Street

address pedestrian needs as well as driving customers. Buildings should be located close to the street, with the major entrance facing the street, and many windows along the public face. Parking lots should be placed on the side or in the rear and should have edge landscaping or low-rise fencing when along streets. There should be height and size limits for signage, allowing only external illumination. Existing businesses should be encouraged to improve their facades and signage.



## Industrial “Chic” Opportunity Zone

The Industrial "Chic" zone, or “Midtown” area, constitutes the area between 12th Street and the railroad viaduct. It contains many interesting loft buildings, active and growing nightlife uses, and unique elements like Griswold Plaza, Union Station, and the main Post Office. Several large historic warehouses are under-utilized or vacant and present clear opportunities for redevelopment, while other vacant lots offer sites for infill development. The plan recommends the following actions:

### Priority Actions:

*Improve Griswold Plaza.* Griswold Plaza could serve as an anchor for new residential development, but it should be improved before being considered a premier urban open space. New paving, new pedestrian lighting, attractive landscaping, benches, low-rise edge fencing, and a playground will create a sense of safety and enliven the space. Semi-permanent shelters for the periodic farmers’ market could be built along the western side where plentiful parking exists.



*Re-stripe area streets to delineate on-street parking.* Many of the streets in this area currently have no parking lanes (Peach, French, Sassafras) or unclear areas where legal on-street parking exists. Parking lanes should be created wherever possible, especially along Peach and French Streets where overly-wide streets and three travel lanes encourage commuting traffic to speed unnecessarily. Additional parking will also support area retail and nightlife uses.

*Rehabilitate and reuse the Mercantile Building and 1329 State Street.* These publicly-controlled buildings present early opportunities to start the regeneration of other nearby vacant buildings and upper floors. Active uses should be found for the ground floors, with residences or offices above.

### Other Actions:

*Encourage rehabilitation of vacant buildings and vacant upper floors.* Many of the attractive buildings along State Street are at least partially vacant. These upper floors could be transformed easily into chic loft condominiums, apartments, or office space that is marketed to the 20-something and 30-something singles and younger couples that form the clientele of the nearby nightlife uses. Residential units should be high-ceiling lofts ranging from 800-1800 square feet, priced between \$75 and \$95 per square foot.

In the meantime, owners should be encouraged to clean and beautify their buildings' facades with window replacements, awnings, interesting paint schemes, architectural lighting, flower boxes, and unique signage. Temporary art exhibits could be created by area artists for vacant window space.

*Encourage infill development.* The several large and under-used parcels surrounding Griswold Plaza could be combined easily to create an opportunity for infill residential development. Based on the market assessment,

the plan recommends a series of townhouses be built surrounding the plaza, marketed to first-time homebuyers. Units would be 1300-1900 square feet, priced at \$70-\$80 per square foot, or \$105,000 to \$135,000. Development should be phased and prices systematically raised through build-out, so final units are closer to the Erie County market prices of \$90-\$115 per square foot, or \$145,000 - \$170,000. The design of the houses should be of an urbane style, with 3-4 stories, short setbacks, and parking in shared lots or pads in the rear.

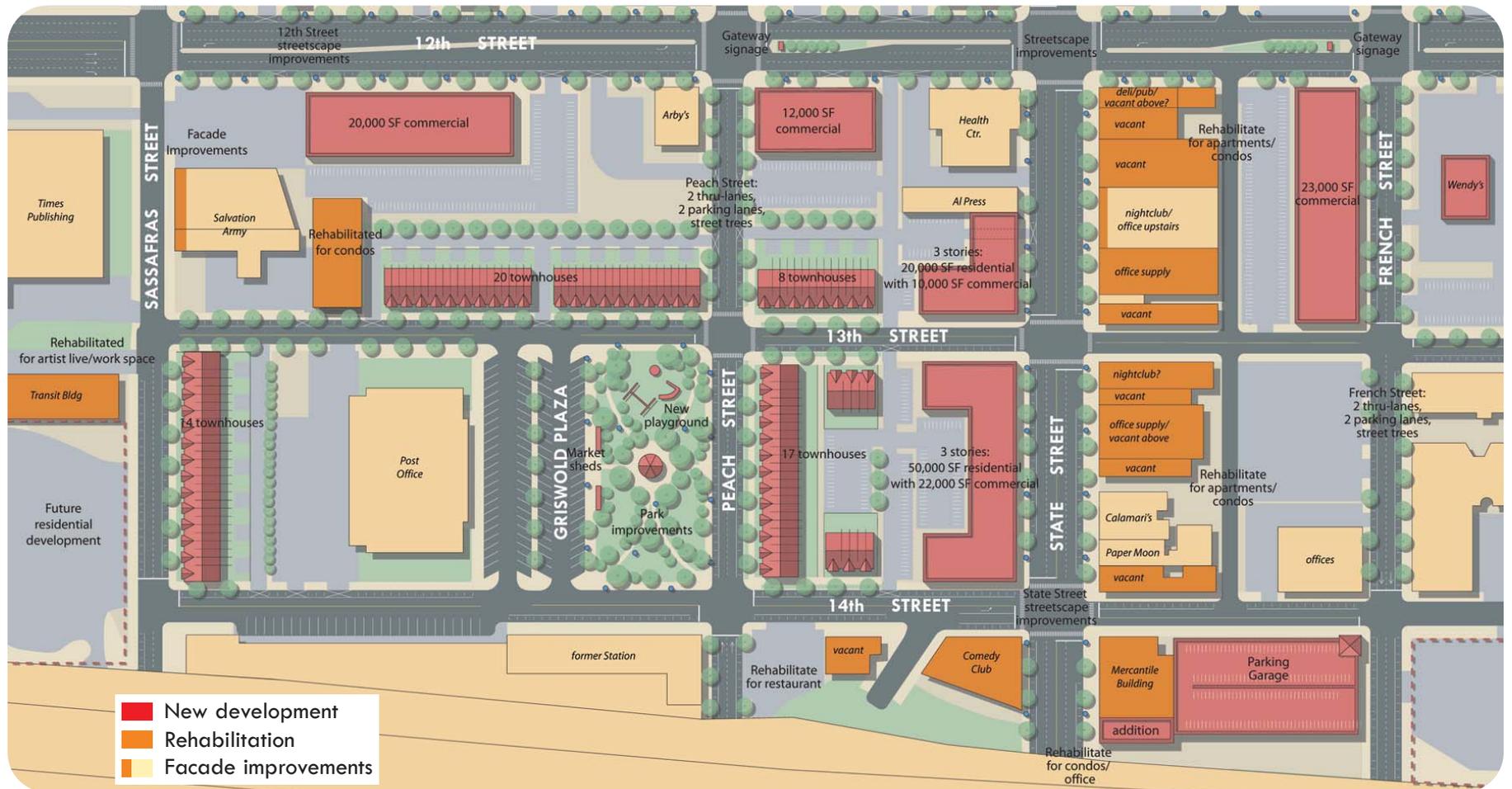


Future view: artist's rendering of Mercantile Building (courtesy WMF)

plan - industrial district zone

Redevelopment parcels along State Street, including the Parking Authority lot at 13th and State, and the aging Department of Labor building ought to yield denser development to match the historic loft buildings on the east side of the street. Three- to five-story buildings are appropriate, with ground-floor retail and upper-story residences or office space. Parking should be located in the rear, using the existing alley for access.

*Artist live-work space.* One of the keys to enlivening Downtown Erie will involve attracting the "creative class" to live and work downtown. The largely-vacant Transit Building, with its historic industrial charm and regular bays along the side would make a perfect building for artist live/work studio space. The vacant lot south of the building could also support infill townhouse development. Other buildings throughout the district also show potential as artist live-work spaces. This development would build on the existing studio and gallery spaces at 1505 State Street.





Future view: Peach Street, looking south from 13th Street



## Implementation Plan

Implementation of the plan will involve many public and private organizations and a variety of funding sources. Moreover, it will take time. The following steps outline the most feasible and efficient order of implementation actions:

### FIRST ACTIONS 2006/2007 Private Development Actions

- *Forge public-private partnerships*

The City of Erie, and the Redevelopment Authority will work with private development entities to establish ongoing public-private partnerships that will play a key role in implementing specific development projects that are consistent with the plan and will need both private and public funding sources.

- *Initiate new downtown business attraction program*

In the fall of 2006, based on the recommendations included in the market study element of the Downtown Erie Plan, the Erie Downtown Improvement District will begin an aggressive targeted business marketing and solicitation program to attract branches of successful existing businesses in the Erie region to downtown Erie, as well as community serving retail on the 12th Street corridor. The City, DID, and the Gannon Small Business Development Center will implement a program to support small retailers in downtown Erie.

- *Organize developers' round table*

The City and Redevelopment Authority will organize a developers' forum to provide the opportunity for developers to share information and concerns, and focus on specific public sector support and actions that can jumpstart private developer action on specific downtown plan development projects.

- *Establish upper floor residential financing program*

The Redevelopment Authority, working with local banks and potential grant funding sources, will work to establish a financing program that will encourage property owners to rehabilitate upper floors of buildings, particularly along State Street. The City's new Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area (NRSA) plan and new flexibility in using CDBG funding will be a cornerstone in this effort.

- *Mercantile Building design and financing*

The market study identified a market for historic warehouse loft condominiums targeted to younger singles and 2-person households. A private/public partnership has been formed for the rehabilitation of the Mercantile Building at 1401 State Street for first mixed retail, commercial and residential condominiums. The project will be a key element of the "Industrial Chic" redevelopment zone. The City and Redevelopment Authority will work to secure appropriate publicly assisted financing to make the project feasible. The final architectural drawings will be prepared anticipating construction in 2007.

- *1329 State Street design and financing*

A developer has proposed the rehabilitation of 1329 State Street for commercial and residential use. This project will also be a key element of the "Industrial Chic" redevelopment zone and an opportunity to begin an artist live-work initiative. The Redevelopment Authority will seek a private developer to lead this project. The developer will work toward drawings for construction in 2007.

- *Create mezzanine financing tools*

The City and Redevelopment Authority will work to create sources of financing for projects difficult to finance through traditional means. This effort will include creative partnerships between investors, financial institutions, foundations, and public entities.

## FIRST ACTIONS 2006/2007 Public / Infrastructure Actions

Early actions will focus on low cost, easily implementable projects that will have immediate visible benefits, and applications for funding and initial design phase of major public improvements, that will support early-phase private development.

- *Restripe streets for additional on-street parking*

Traffic studies have shown that several Erie streets have excess capacity, and the number of travel lanes can be reduced, without creating congestion. Eliminating a travel lane provides the opportunity to create an additional parking lane. In addition, traffic lane widths are often excessive and can be reduced. The number of travel lanes on Peach Street and French Street from 10th Street to 14th Street will be reduced from 3 to 2, and parking lanes provided on both sides of the street to provide additional on-street parking lanes. Work will be completed by the City of Erie. Funding for traffic signal improvements will be sought through PennDOT and the Metropolitan Planning Organization.

- *8th Street 2-way operation*

8th Street between Holland and Peach Streets currently operates one-way eastbound, but is a 2-way street outside of downtown. Since 8th Street does not form part of a one-way pair it can be converted back to 2-way operation, to improve traffic circulation. 8th Street between Holland and Peach Street will be converted to 2-way operations, and on-street parking lanes provided on both sides of the street. Work will be completed by the City of Erie in 2007.

- *Develop concept plans and public funding for Griswold Plaza improvements*

Improvements to Griswold Plaza will support private development in the "Industrial Chic" zone. The plaza as a focal point of new development, with an expanded farmers market and playground. The city will contract

with a landscape design consultant to develop concept plans and a cost estimate for redesign that will be submitted with a grant application for funding construction of the improvements.

Potential grant sources for the public Griswold Plaza improvements include DCNR's Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, Community Conservation Partnership Program Grants. DCNR grants require a 50/50 match, and are submitted during the fall of each year. A grant application will be submitted in the fall of 2006.

- *Develop preliminary design and pursue funding for 12th Street streetscape improvements*

Conceptual designs have been prepared for redesign of 12th Street as a landscaped boulevard, and attractive gateway to Erie from the west. 12th Street has excess capacity, and the street will be reconfigured to provide 2-way lanes in each direction, with parking both sides of the street, and widened sidewalks. Landscaped medians will be constructed where there are no turn lanes. PennDOT has expressed interest in improvements of this state highway, and in 2007, the city will contract with an engineering firm to prepare surveys and preliminary designs for the 12th Street improvements. Detail designs will be developed in consultation with corridor stakeholders, and preliminary design and cost estimates will be completed in fall 2007.

- *Main Street Program*

The DID will seek approval as a State "Main Street" Program, supplementing its program and organizational structure to maximize benefit to downtown businesses and leverage their DID investment.

- *Small business assistance*

The DID and City will seek to partner with Gannon's SBDC to provide assistance to small businesses looking to locate and grow in the downtown area. Loans and technical support have been identified as needs.

INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS 2007/2008

Private Development Actions

- *Construction of Mercantile Building Improvements*

It is anticipated that after financing is secured and designs complete, construction of the Mercantile Building development will begin in the summer of 2007 and extend through 2008.

- *Construction of 1329 State Street*

Construction start on the 1329 State Street development is targeted for fall 2007, and will extend through 2008.

- *Establish Downtown Erie Reinvestment Fund*

The Redevelopment Authority and City will work with local banks to establish a Downtown Erie Reinvestment Fund, a low-cost source of financing to assist downtown redevelopment projects identified in the plan. The fund will focus on (1) Mezzanine financing and (2) Real estate acquisition and assembly.

- *Support continued development of Griswold Plaza/Union Station Square area*

The Redevelopment Authority will continue to work with private developers to complete the proposed residential and commercial developments surrounding a revitalized Griswold Plaza through 2007 and beyond. Redevelopment of parking lots along 13th Street between State and Peach Streets present an early opportunity.

- *Identify the first phase of townhouse and other mixed-use development at Griswold Plaza*

The market study identified a market for new construction for sale townhouses targeted to first time homebuyers. Through continued discussions with developers, the Redevelopment Authority will identify development partner for a proposed first phase 90-unit townhouse development abutting Griswold Plaza. The Redevelopment Authority will assist

in site assembly, and financial packaging as required. Sites for other mixed use developments will be identified and assembled.

- *Recruit specialty retailers to Perry Square*

The market study indicated that downtown could more effectively capture the regional specialty retail market by creating a cluster in the Perry Square area, adjacent to the museum hub and within walking distance of major employers. Stores would include high-end cosmetics, jewelers, women's clothing, home furnishings, etc. Based on the market study findings and recommendations, Erie Downtown Improvement District will continue the marketing campaign begun in 2006 and actively recruit new retailers to energize this specialty retail area..

- *Identify potential developers for bluff condominiums*

The Redevelopment Authority will work to identify condominium developers with the experience and interest in developing the first phase of the mid-rise condominium development on the bluffs, overlooking the lake. The public entities will assist in negotiating with Hamot in assembling the sites.

- *Identify potential developers for 12th Street Retail Corridor*

The market analysis showed potential for community-serving retail along 12th Street. Sites must be identified, acquired, and assembled. The City and Redevelopment Authority will seek private development partners and anchor tenants for 12th Street redevelopment.

- *Commercial Grants Program*

The City of Erie will prioritize commercial façade, sidewalk, and commercial rehabilitation grants in further CDBG budgets to ensure continued assistance to small and relocating businesses as part of downtown's revitalization.

## INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS 2007/2008

### Public / Infrastructure Actions

- *Construct Griswold Plaza improvements*

Once funding has been secured in spring 2007, the City will contract with a design consultant for completion of construction documents and bidding for the Griswold Plaza improvements. A fall 2007 construction start is anticipated.

- *Design of 12th Street streetscape improvements*

A design contract with a highway engineering firm will be awarded for final design and completion of construction documents for the 12th Street corridor improvements. Final design will extend through 2008, with completion of construction documents and approvals by spring 2009.

- *Develop concept plan and pursue funding for Perry Square improvements*

An improved Perry Square will be the focal point of the Perry Square development area. The project will include reconfiguration of curb lines, to reduce the width of the surrounding streets, provision of on-street back-in angle parking, and enhancement of the square's landscaping and amenities.

The City will contract with a landscape architect/engineering team to develop a concept plan for the improvements and costs, to provide a basis for a grant application to DCNR in the fall of 2007, for a Community Conservation Partnership Program grant.

- *Pursue Seaway Trail funds for State and Bayfront Parkway intersection improvements*

The intersection of State Street and Bayfront Parkway will be reconfigured with tighter curb radii, and attractive crosswalk treatments, to enhance the pedestrian linkages between downtown and the waterfront

along State Street. The bluff trail/bike path will also be improved, with landscaping and other amenities.

The Bayfront Parking is part of the Great Lakes Seaway Trail, a 518-mile scenic byway route that parallels Lake Erie and Lake Ontario in Pennsylvania and New York. The City or Redevelopment Authority will seek federal Scenic Byway funds for the intersection and trail improvements. An application for funding will be submitted in 2007.



**FURTHER ACTIONS - 2008 AND BEYOND**

**Private Development Actions**

- *Construct first phase bluff condominiums*

It is anticipated that financing will be in place for the first bluff condominium building in early 2008, construction documents will be completed in 2008, and construction started in the fall of 2008. Occupancy is anticipated for the end of 2009.

- *Continue townhouse development*

The Redevelopment Authority will continue to aggressively work with developers for subsequent phases of the townhouse developments around Griswold Plaza. The Authority will assist in land assembly, approvals, and financing.

- *Continue residential loft development*

The Redevelopment Authority will continue to partner with development interests for rehabilitation of the State Street loft buildings for residential condominium development, in the 13th and State vicinity.

- *Continue recruiting specialty retailers to Perry Square*

The Downtown Erie Improvement District will continue to aggressively solicit high-quality destination retailers for commercial frontages on Perry Square and State Street vicinity, near the Erie Art Museum.

- *Continue investment in Downtown Culture/Entertainment Venues.*

Erie will need to continue investment in downtown culture and entertainment venues, with a focus on modernizing aging facilities. Recent and ongoing efforts to modernize the baseball stadium and the historic Warner theatre should continue with expansion of the Playhouse, modernization of the Tullio Arena, and improvements to smaller venues in and around the downtown.

**FURTHER ACTIONS - 2008 AND BEYOND**

**Public / Infrastructure Actions**

- *Construct 12th Street streetscape improvements*

Construction documents for 12th Street will be completed in the spring of 2008, with bidding the summer of 2008, and start of construction in the fall of 2008. Construction will be completed in late 2009.

- *Construct Perry Square improvements*

After receipt of the grant award in spring 2008, the Redevelopment Authority will oversee the completion of the construction documents, for bidding in fall 2008. Construction will be completed by summer 2009.

- *Construct State and Bayfront Parking improvements*

After receipt of grant awards, the Redevelopment Authority will authorize completion of construction documents for the intersection and trail improvements. Construction documents will be completed in summer 2008, for bidding in the fall of 2008, with start of construction by the end of the year.





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ERA Board Members:

Gerry Urbaniak, Chair

Joe Koehle

Bob Banks

Dinah Durr

Steve Flamio

John Elliott, Executive Director



*Kise Straw & Kolodner Inc.*

123 South Broad Street • Suite 1270 • Philadelphia, PA 19109-1029 • 215.790.1050 • 215.790.0215 fax • [www.ksk1.com](http://www.ksk1.com)