

U.B. School of Architecture and Planning Center for Urban  
Studies

# Report on the Brownfield Opportunity Area Mini- Course

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## Goals

The goals of the Brownfield Mini-Course were to create a common knowledge base and language on brownfield development between neighborhood residents and stakeholders and City Officials and the project consultant team and to provide residents with deeper insight into brownfield development so that might participate at a higher level in community visioning and planning sessions. Brownfield redevelopment is a technical area, and without knowledge base to inform them, residents and stakeholders will be limited in their ability to participate in forging strategies to both redevelop the brownfields and to link their regeneration to the community development process.

## The Program

The mini-course was an introductory course on brownfields that ran from May 6 through June 10, 2008. All sessions were held in the Attain Computer Laboratory at the Doris Jones Resource Center in the Highland community. The sessions ran from 6:00 to 8:00 on Tuesday evenings. The program was coordinated by Mary Fisher of Environmental Education Associates.

### *The Target Population*

Unlike many brownfield educational programs, the mini-course was targeted for residents, stakeholders, and community leaders. We anticipated that there might be different levels of knowledge about brownfield development among the attendees, but decided not to make any special efforts to compensate for these differentials. However, Professor Taylor and Pitts routinely asked the presenters questions designed to clarify and/or provide examples of issues that some attendees might have difficulty reaching.

In determining the target population, our primary consideration was for a small group to attend regularly the mini-course, but one that was representative of the various residential clusters in the neighborhood. The Highland community consists of three main residential clusters (Figure One). The conditions in each of the main clusters differ. Therefore, having

representatives from each cluster would help ensure that most sections of the community were represented.

### ***The Mini-course***

#### **Week One: Introduction to Brownfields**

This opening session focused on three topics. The first was to define brownfields, and the second focused on the brownfield problem in the Highland community. The third topic discussed planning and visioning for brownfield reuse within a neighborhood revitalization strategy. The session centered on a lecture and PowerPoint presentation on Brownfields.

#### **Presenters**

Mary Fisher, Environmental Educational Associates

Greg Sutton, NYSDEC

#### **Handouts**

EPA Fact Sheet, “What is a Brownfield”  
EPA Fact Sheet, “About Brownfield’s”  
EPA Fact Sheet, “Brownfield’s Definitions”  
Glossary of Brownfield Terms  
BOA Mini Course Overview  
BOA Color Site Map of Highland Area

#### **Week Two: Step One and Step Two Nomination Studies**

This session provided a discussion of both Step One and Step Two Nomination Studies, with the great emphasis placed on the purpose and activities involved in a Step Two Nomination Study. The discussion focused on Step Two studies in general and then closely examines the study that will take place in the Highland community. The session examined the interpretation of reports, ways of assessing potential areas of concerns, what to look for in Step Two reports, and the types of questions to ask of technical consultants.

#### **Presenters**

Ross Burnett and Shonda Wang, Urban Strategies, Inc.

### **Handouts**

BOA Project Team and Tasks Overview  
NYSDEC 8650 “BOA Program Fact Sheet”  
NYSDEC 39179 “BOA frequently Asked Questions”  
Resume/Bio for Shonda Wang/Ross Burnett

### **Week Three: Employment Opportunities and Brownfield Reclamation**

This session will explore two interrelated themes. The opening session examined the technical aspects of brownfield remediation and discussed the role of the federal and state governments in brownfield reclamation. This discussion also included issues such as land acquisition and the various levels contamination. The second session discussed the different types of employment opportunities that can occur at various phases of a reclamation project and discuss the role of Step Two studies in anticipating employment opportunities.

### **Presenters**

William Bradberry, City Administrator  
Mark Baetzhold, Department of Environmental Conservation  
John Glavin and Andrew McLellan

### **Handouts**

APHA “Should Housing Be Built on Former Brownfield Sites”  
Tonawanda new Article “Brownfield’s Possibilities”  
USEPA Brownfield’s Job Training & Development demonstration Pilot

### **Week Four: Redevelopment Options**

This assistance will provide detailed information about brownfields reuse options that are outside the traditional economic uses that have dominated early brownfields redevelopment. It intended to help the CBO to “think outside the box” at uses that benefit the community and explore funding, assistance and partnership options that can help to facilitate these reuse options. Coalition-building was discussed within the local political context. The goal was for the residents with a wide range of the kind of options that exist in brownfield redevelopment and then to discuss various options that might be beneficial to the Highland community. The session

also examined the different programs and funding streams available for brownfield redevelopment.

### **Presenters**

Professor Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.  
James Pitts  
Alan Nusbaum

### **Handouts**

City of Niagara Falls Strategic Master Plan  
COB Brownfield's Demonstration Pilot  
Funding Sources for Brownfield's Redevelopment  
Urban Habitat Green Collar Jobs  
Urban Habitat Green Collar Jobs Cleaning Brownfields  
EEA Training Course Catalogue  
500 New Green Jobs List

### **Week Five: Provide Feed-back at Public Open Houses**

This session examined the types of reporting that occurs at the various public open houses and helps participants think through ways to critic reports, reflect on projects goals and objects, and how to provide useful feedback. The duties and responsibilities of the steering committee was also be discussed.

### **Presenters**

Phil Haberstro, Executive Director of the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo & Western NY  
Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.

### **Handouts**

“Forming a Steering Committee, What Makes a Good Group?”  
“Forming the Steering Committee”

### **Week Six: Bus Tour of Brownfield on the Niagara Frontier**

The bus tour focused on two different brownfield sites. The first visit discussed the development of the BlueCross/Blue Shield-Health Now building in Buffalo. The presentation was made by Dennis Gorski, VP of Policy and Representation. Gorski discussed the evolution of the project and the extent of environmental clean-up, which preceded construction of the Health Now

building. He said the process of site identification, clean-up and construction of the facility took place within a five year timeline. Following the formal presentation, the group was given a tour of the facility. The Health Now tour gave participants an opportunity to view a completed brownfield redevelopment process.

The second visit was to the Remington-Rand site in North Tonawanda. The presentation was made by Chuck Bell, a planner in the Town of Tonawanda Community Development Department. Unlike the BlueCross/Blue Shield project, this initiative was in its formative stage of development. A developer had been identified who planned to turn the site into a restaurant and loft apartments. The redevelopment was part of a broader strategy of regenerating the downtown and riverfront portions of the Town. The return trip to Niagara Falls featured a drive by the Love Canal site.

## **Residents Comments**

The primary goal of the mini-course was to provide residents and stakeholders with the knowledge and insights required to participate more effectively in the Step-Two Nomination Study process. Therefore, we made no effort to systematically engage them in discussions about the character of the Highland community and their ideas about redevelopment. Nonetheless, discussions, both inside and outside of the classroom setting, did take place. The following is a general summary of the ideas that did emerge from these discussions.

- **Character of the Neighborhood**

1. The participants described Highland as a quiet community that was dispersed over a large area, which made it difficult to develop a sense of neighborliness and cohesiveness.
2. The internal divisions in the neighborhood often caused the community to squander opportunities for improvement.
3. Although many efforts at development have existed, the voice of the residents still seems muted, and their suggestions were not implemented. The development of Center Court, with its perceived loss of green space, was given as an example of this type of development.
4. There is a rural, small town feel to the community. Some participants thought this was both a good and bad thing. On the positive side, they the green space and

vegetation, if properly landscaped could make the community beautiful. On the other hand, the presence of coyotes, uncertainty about the toxicity of the land, and the community's overall unkempt look had a demoralizing effect.

5. The community lacks a center or hub around which the locale is organized. Once that hub was Highland Avenue. Its descent into disrepair, participants believed, left the community without that critical central core.
6. While residents like and are very proud of their community, the participants believe that its shabby and rundown look gives it a bad reputation, as well as neglected appearance.
7. The cohort of homeowners is very important. Many of these people have made sacrifices to live in the community and are very proud of their homes.

- **Redevelopment Ideas**

1. The greatest concern centers on jobs. However, the participants were adamant that the key to creating sustainable jobs was the development of neighborhood job training centers that would prepare residents, especially young people, to take the jobs that developed in the Highland community. They believed that the key to community development was the creation of an economic opportunity structure that would keep residents, especially the young, in the neighborhood.
2. There is a need to develop a permanent, neighborhood based institution, that would oversee economic and community development activities and provide Highland with an interactive link with the City. Deep concern existed over the emergence of development strategies over which the community had no control. They wanted a transparent process in which they were afforded authentic opportunities for participation. This, they felt, was the only way to maximize the possibility of creating sustainable development that benefitted the community.
3. Maximize green space and place it in a highly landscaped environment that *connects* and *stitches* the community together. Within this context, the participants envisioned a revitalized Highland Avenue that would again serve as the community's center.
4. Develop the community in a historic fashion that recreates the past, with the same types of facilities that made Highland an enjoyable community – places of entertainment, music, and gathering that are generators of pleasant memories.
5. Recreational space for the children and youth. Although there are two community centers and a swimming pool, the participants appear to be talking about *outdoor* recreational spaces, such as basketball courts, playgrounds, roller rinks, and walking

and jogging paths. The presents of vacant land does not negate the sense that outdoor recreational space is still a premium.

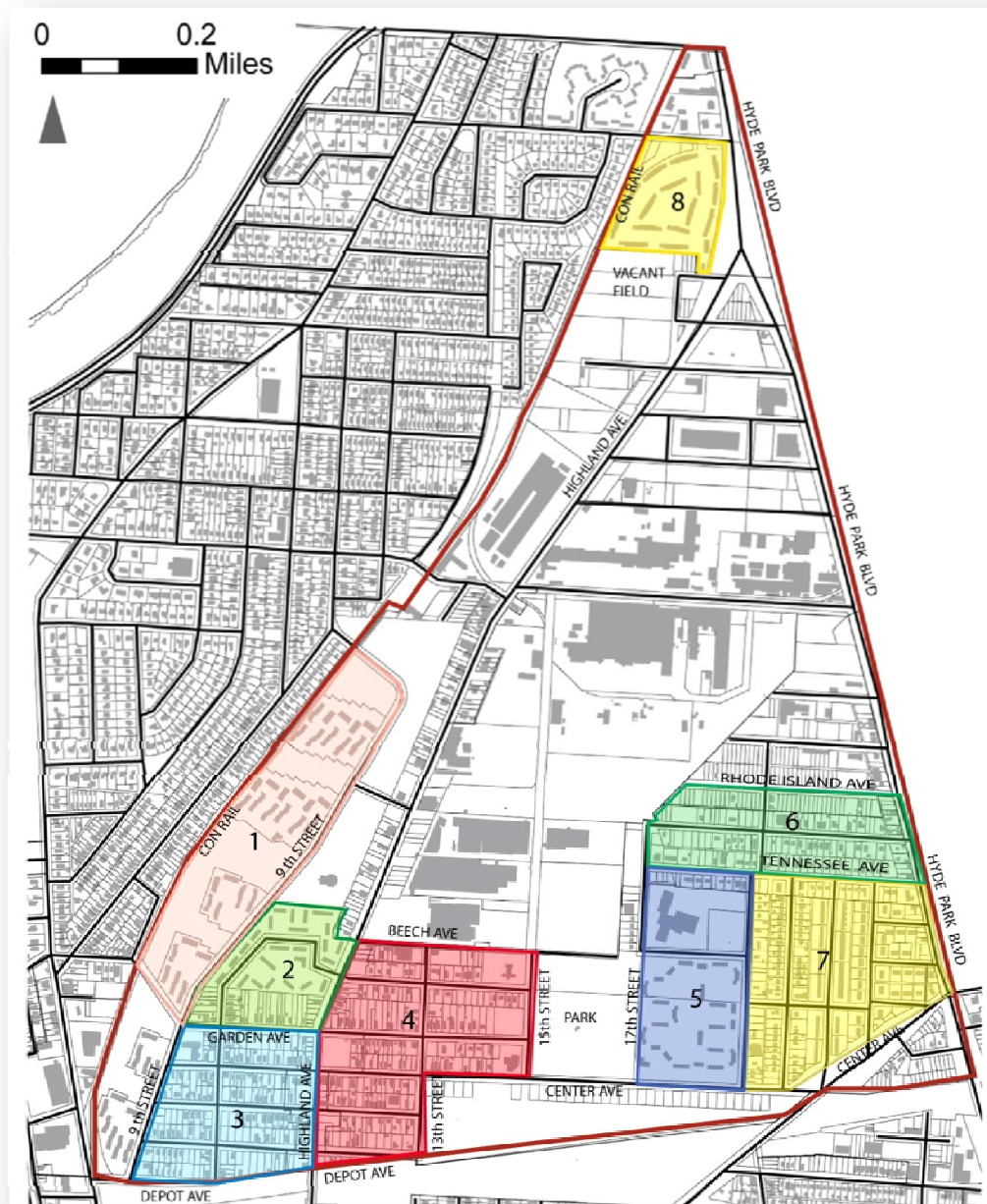
6. Programs should be developed that provide school aged children with education experiences dealing with the natural environment and career opportunities in green industries.
7. The regeneration of Highland should be viewed as a way to construct a community retail service center that is supportive of the businesses developing in the community. The participants were also very agreeable to the concept of a *Northend development strategy* that made Highland Avenue a regional commercial retail center.
8. Highland Avenue should also have diners, Christian book stores, places for young people, and retail service centers, such as gasoline stations, grocery stores and pharmacies.
9. The New York Power Authority should be integrated into the brownfield redevelopment process. As a partner, they have the resource based to help with implementation of economic and neighborhood projects.
10. There should be a threefold strategy for the redevelopment of the community. First, the emphasis should be placed on attracting green industries to the neighborhood. Second focus should be connecting Highland's development to the Niagara Falls and regional tourist industry, especially cultural tourism. The third focus should be linking redevelopment in the Main Street area to redevelopment in Highland. Within this framework, the participants believed that creating greater interactivity between the community and Niagara University was very important.

## **Attendance**

A threefold strategy was used to advertise the mini-course. First, we distributed flyers in each of the major residential clusters in the neighborhood and the neighborhood ministers were asked to make announcements in their churches prior to each seminar (Map One). Second, we made telephone calls to all individuals with numbers listed on the contact list. Lastly, after the seminar started, we made telephone calls to each attendee to remind them of the upcoming meeting.



Map One: Residential Areas in the Highland Community



The strategy for reaching out to residents was very successful. Over the six week period, 38 different people attended the sessions. On average, approximately 18 people attended each session. Significantly, the male participants in the mini-course outnumbered the women. This is unusual. Normally, in inner city communities it is extremely difficult to get male participation. An average of 12 men attended each session, compared to an average of six women (Table One).

Over the six week period, a total of 26 males and 12 females attended the course. Sixteen of the participants attended at least three of the six sessions, which made them eligible for having attended and successfully completed the “Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Mini-Course.

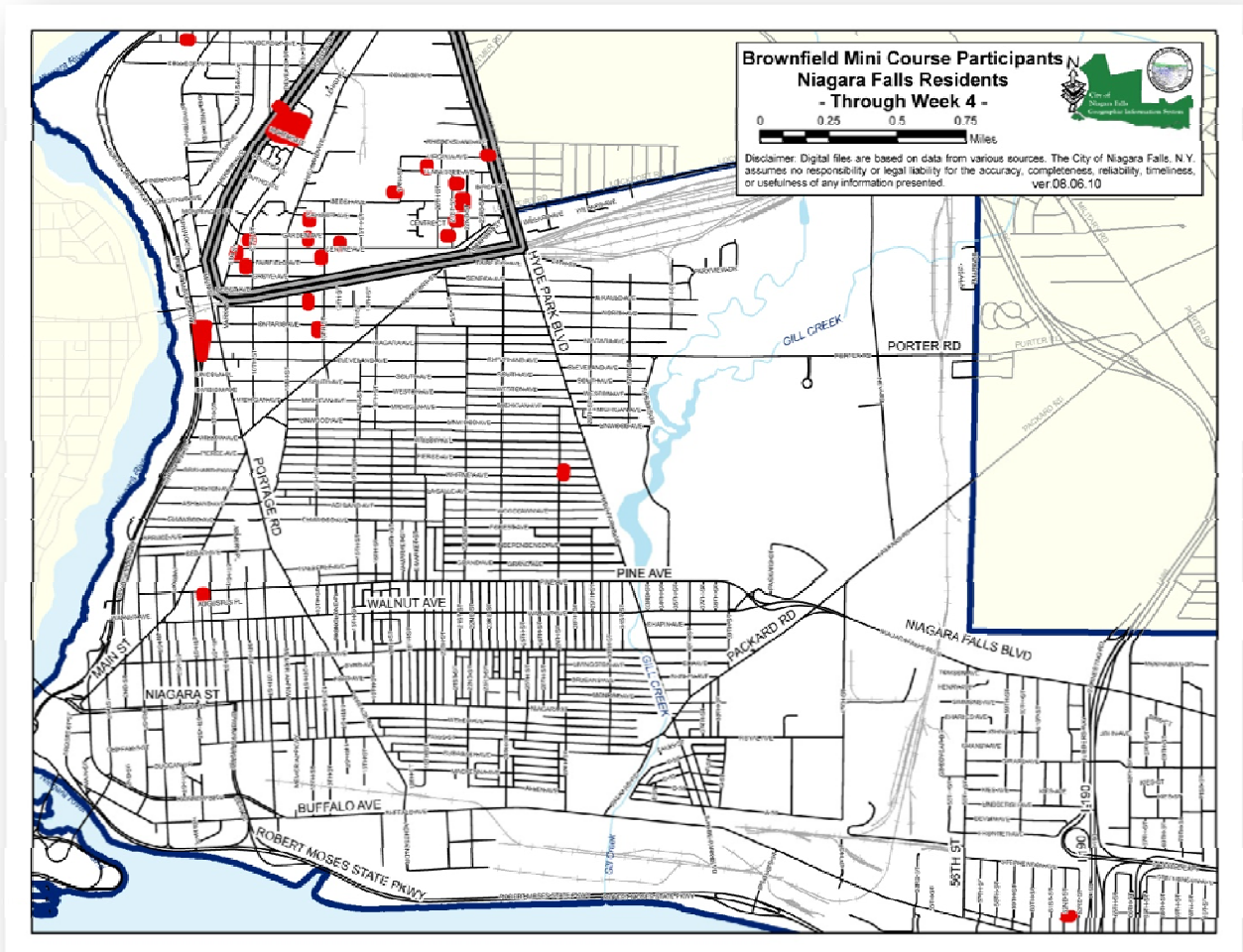
We did not obtain information on the age or organizational affiliation of the participants. However, observations suggest that most participants were middle-aged, with youth and elders underrepresented.

**Table One: Participants in the Mini-Course**

	Wk 1	Wk 2	Wk 3	Wk 4	Wk 5	Wk 6
<b>Total Number of Attendees</b>	18	22	19	17	15	16
<b>Male</b>	11	13	13	12	10	10
<b>Female</b>	7	9	6	5	5	6

The weekly attendance was about what we expected and conformed to our goal of generating a critical mass of residents to serve as representative for their neighborhoods. Thus, the *residential distribution* was more important than the number of weekly participants. To

determine if those attending the weekly sessions were representative of the various residential clusters, the City of Niagara Falls geocoded and mapped the residential location of participants on a weekly basis (Map Two).



An examination of the map shows that the participants mirrored the various residential clusters, which indicated an excellent correlation between mini-course attendees and location of the three major residential clusters (Map One).

## **Appendix: List of Participants Receiving the BOA Certificate**

1. Lena Thomas
2. Reverend Joseph Jones
3. Bob Belton
4. Noreen O'Connell
5. Annie Porter
6. William Carter
7. Bishop/Reverend Samuel Porter
8. David Taylor
9. Betty Rivers
10. Willie Dunn
11. Jill Shuey
12. Lerone Abrams
13. Jennifer Phelps
14. Ricky Daniels
15. Frida Ferrer
16. Bob Harper