



Pardi Partnership Architects

July 28, 2017

**Little Italy Historic District
Lyell Avenue Corridor / Rochester, New York**

Project No. 20617

Submitted to:

**Silvano D. Orsi
President / Chairman
Little Italy Neighborhood Association**





Pardi Partnership Architects

July 27, 2017

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Little Italy Neighborhood Association
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Chairman Orsi:

I am pleased to submit this summary of research for the proposed Lyell Avenue Corridor “Little Italy” Historic District project. The conditions and criteria for this project are many. We have focused on analyzing the basic factors that have shaped and defined the Lyell Ave area in the past, what it’s condition is at present, and what we believe could be its future using the strong Italian heritage of the area as the basis for the creation of a “Little Italy” historic district to provide a focus for revitalization and economic growth in a portion of Rochester that has not yet been part of the strong urban renaissance now happening in other parts of the City.

Overview

The study is organized as follows:

- Executive Summary
- Concept creation for the Little Italy district mechanism
 - History of Italian immigration to Rochester
- Physical Complexion of the proposed district
 - Architectural Styles
 - Public Realm
- Municipal Controls
 - Zoning
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 - Public Benefit Corporation
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 - Sustainability
- Building Blocks of the District
 - Visitors Center
 - Public spaces
- Public Input
 - Steering Committee
 - Community presentations

Executive Summary

(Taken from the City of Rochester 2016 DRI application)

“The revitalization of downtown Rochester must engage and retain young adults as residents who want to live and work in cities. A recent Urban Land Institute and National League of Cities study of downtown Rochester, NY identified an immediate need to re-activate the Genesee Riverfront and Main Street by targeting diverse young adults and bringing vibrancy to the fronts of downtown buildings.”

While these areas of the City described above are the highlights of the current economic resurgence in Rochester, there are other areas just as worthy of improvement, chief among them being the Lyell Avenue corridor, herein identified as Lyell Avenue from State Street to Dewey Avenue. This area is considered the most vital west side “gateway” to the City. It is an area of both commercial and residential uses; there are industrial structures, small to medium commercial structures, multi-family buildings and single family residences within the area under consideration. The corridor suffers from a lack of modern transportation (roadway) infrastructure improvements, right sizing of surface parking, traffic calming elements, as well as a lack of unified public realm elements – engaging storefronts, ample sidewalks for outside activities, clear wayfinding and safe lighting.

This area of the city has a rich, strong and lengthy ethnic history as one of its main underpinnings. It had not only been the nexus of Italian immigration in the Rochester area – the first Italian immigrant came to this area in the late 1860’s - but other ethnic groups as well as they 1st made their way to establish themselves in this region. To this day it is a mix of many cultures: Italian / Hispanic / Middle Eastern / African American are amongst the many living here now. Based on the extensive history of 1st Italian migration, then other ethnic groups, the concept for the creation of a “Little Italy Historic District” was born to bring focus to and to form a framework for rebuilding, rebranding and a rebirth of this long neglected part of Rochester which is ripe for intelligent and creative development. The Little Italy Neighborhood Association is partnering with the Landmark Society of Western NY in the creation of the historic district that will utilize the experience of the past to inform and create a better future for the Lyell Avenue Gateway community.

(Again, from the City of Rochester 2016 DRI application)

“The process of re-activating downtown will create jobs, and it is imperative that we give these jobs to the people who need the work the most.” (Underline ours)

While Rochester’s downtown Center City District (CCD) is experiencing dramatic Live / Work / Play growth, by contrast, the Lyell Avenue corridor has languished for years. Laying just outside and to the west of the CCD, it has been a repository of chronic crime; from petty theft to robbery, assault and prostitution, even with various City efforts to install satellite police stations and direct access City offices within the neighborhood. Other factors that negatively affect this area are a significant percentage of absentee landlord rental properties and dilapidated vacant and/or abandoned commercial structures. Local residents struggle with fractured family structures, some with only one parent as head of household, and multi-generational raising of children due to absent parents. Young citizens who do grow up here find little to retain them after completing local education and find themselves wanting / needing to leave their community for better futures elsewhere. One of the most basic tenants in the creation of this district is the retention of its residents; creating a renewal of pride - a sense of place - and an ongoing personal investment in their community.

Although developers are partnering with government to create new living spaces within iconic buildings in the adjacent CCD and, despite the 1.7 million people visiting that district annually with record investments in downtown growing high tech firms, the minimal amount of current retail and dearth of walkable amenities do not support 18 hours of activity, especially in this part of the City.

If the goal is, as the 2016 application identified “ . . . *Increased foot traffic by young adults who would encourage downtown living and working can only happen when walkable and bike-able streets will connect the transportation needs of young adults who are drawn to an iconic city. This will create the demand for first floor retail that will give jobs and stabilize neighborhoods.*”, then creating a focused / branded / easily identifiable cultural historic district as backdrop for a strong, inclusive local community identity makes sense. This concept, based in a community wide vision for sensitive development is in opposition to the more traditional method of providing funds to select private entities who benefit personally from development efforts

Although the images portrayed here appear to represent a very distressed future, there is a core of longtime residents who want something better for their neighborhood. They are from many backgrounds: Business owners, long-time residents, first time tenant occupants, in-home businesses as well as developers who already see the possibilities for this area. Drawing from the history of those first Italian immigrants as well as other later ethnic groups who passed through this area, these descendants are now expressing their desire for a better vision for their community. They clearly understand the importance of a community based vision for their neighborhood based on local history and future opportunity. Using the rich available historic data on Italian culture of this area coupled with wanting to provide development incentives for property owners through private / public investments, public infrastructure improvements and historic tax credit possibilities has led to the idea of creating a designated historic district as a vehicle for community based improvement.

It is for this reason that the Little Italy Historic District on Lyell Avenue was envisioned.

Little Italy Concept Creation

There has been a strong Italian presence in Rochester for over 150 years, beginning with the 1st Italian immigrant to Rochester in 1860. (See historic narrative at end of study) As this ethnic population grew, it migrated to and settled in the neighborhood along the streets of what is now known as Lyell Ave.

This area of Rochester has a much neglected past. It has chronic serious crime issues (a murder just this last week), prostitution and ever present drug dealing. Property values are lower than other locations in the community and it has one of the higher levels of per capita poverty in the City. Blanketing all of these issues is the lack of any group or organization to be able to gain traction with municipal officials in the same way as other part of the city have been able to do.

While other parts of the City have been the focus of major economic efforts in years past, the Lyell Ave corridor has not shared in those efforts. Significant work was done to the business corridor of Main Street in the late 1980's – early 1990's, major economic zones have come and gone for projects such as the never realized Renaissance Center Cultural and Performing Arts center & Rochester's short lived Fast Ferry project. (That project at least did bring major improvements to the State Street and Lake Avenue as well as a resurgence in interest in the Charlotte neighborhood.) Even the recent Focused Investment Strategy (FIS) program over-looked this area of the City, instead focusing on the Marketview Heights / Dewey Driving Park / Beechwood and Jefferson Avenue neighborhoods.

There have several efforts in the past to address certain critical security issues on Lyell Ave. A NET office (Neighborhood Empowerment Team) was created on Lyell as a liaison for City Hall and Police working with the neighborhood, and a HUD sponsored commercial facade improvement program was offered in the 1990's but that program had little or no impact to the community. Even the construction of two sports stadium venues – Frontier Field baseball and Capelli soccer - in nearby locations have failed to bring any impetus to improving this area.

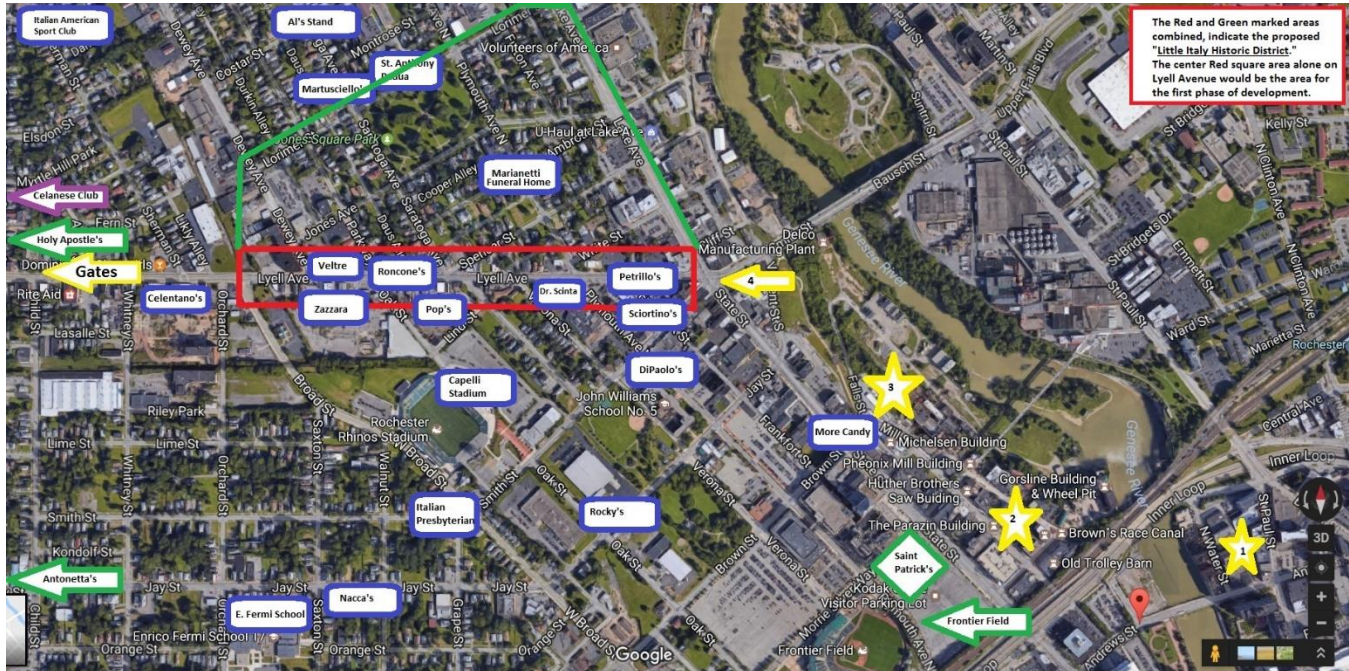
This is not meant to paint the Lyell Ave. area as one of lost hope. On the contrary, there are many in this area who are committed to their business and homes that want to benefit from what they see going on in other parts of their community. It is for these people that the Little Italy Historic District was envisioned

So – what to do? How does this worthy and historic area of the city improve its place in the community? We believe that the missing piece in being able to move the Lyell Avenue future forward is the creation of an identity that the surrounding businesses, citizens, landlords and tenants can rally around. One that draws on the historic ethnic strength of the area, its position as the primary western gateway to the City, and it's close proximity to the present resurgence of interest in urban live / work / play areas now undergoing transformations in the High Falls and City Center areas.

We are proposing a "Little Italy" historic district be created for the Lyell Avenue corridor & Jones Square Park neighborhoods. This historic designation would provide a "framework" for the immediate businesses, commercial and residential communities to use to build a sense of identity that is here-to-fore lacking for Lyell Ave. It would be heralded by the present Little Italy Neighborhood Association which already has a significant interest in Italian culture through its many connections to the Rochester community such as the sponsor of the yearly "Italianfest".

An historic designation provides many benefits: 1st - It elevates the impression of the area by connoting a recognized connection of importance to the areas past. 2nd – it provides a means to coordinate and organize a higher standard of outward appearance for the structures that create and define the public realm. 3rd – It provides the possibility of tax credits that can be applied to renovations of qualified buildings to help offset those costs while creating a more unified appearance for the streetscapes.

The proposed district is shown in the following map. A larger scale version of this graphic is included at the end of this document



Physical Complexion / Public Realm

The current Lyell Ave corridor is the major western arterial road for Rochester. It is both a significant connector from downtown to a host of industrial / commercial and retail enterprises that followed westward expansion of the city in the 20th century. It starts at State Street, just somewhat north of the original 4 corners of Rochester and runs west all the way to Spencerport as both a 2 lane and then 4 lane non-divided commercial highway.

It is just as significantly the primary gateway roadway artery into Rochester. Approaching from the west is like going back in time; the closer to the city one gets the older the mix of bldg. types / styles uses / sizes. Within the area under consideration, it is a mix of early to late 1900's buildings. The ages and architectural styles covers over 100 years of building. The predominant scale of the streetscape is one and two story, interspersed with an occasional 3 story or larger commercial structure, school or factory building.

Most buildings are right at street edge. In most cases, only a broad sidewalk of 15' to 20' separates them from the street. Within this zone lie whatever street amenities that exist. For the most part they

are essential infrastructure – traffic lights / street lights / fire hydrants / concrete sidewalks. Occasionally a bench or tree pit is found, but there has not been any recent concerted effort to utilize this very important aspect of the public realm to enhance this part of the city.

Architectural types vary as well. Some of the more dominate ones being:

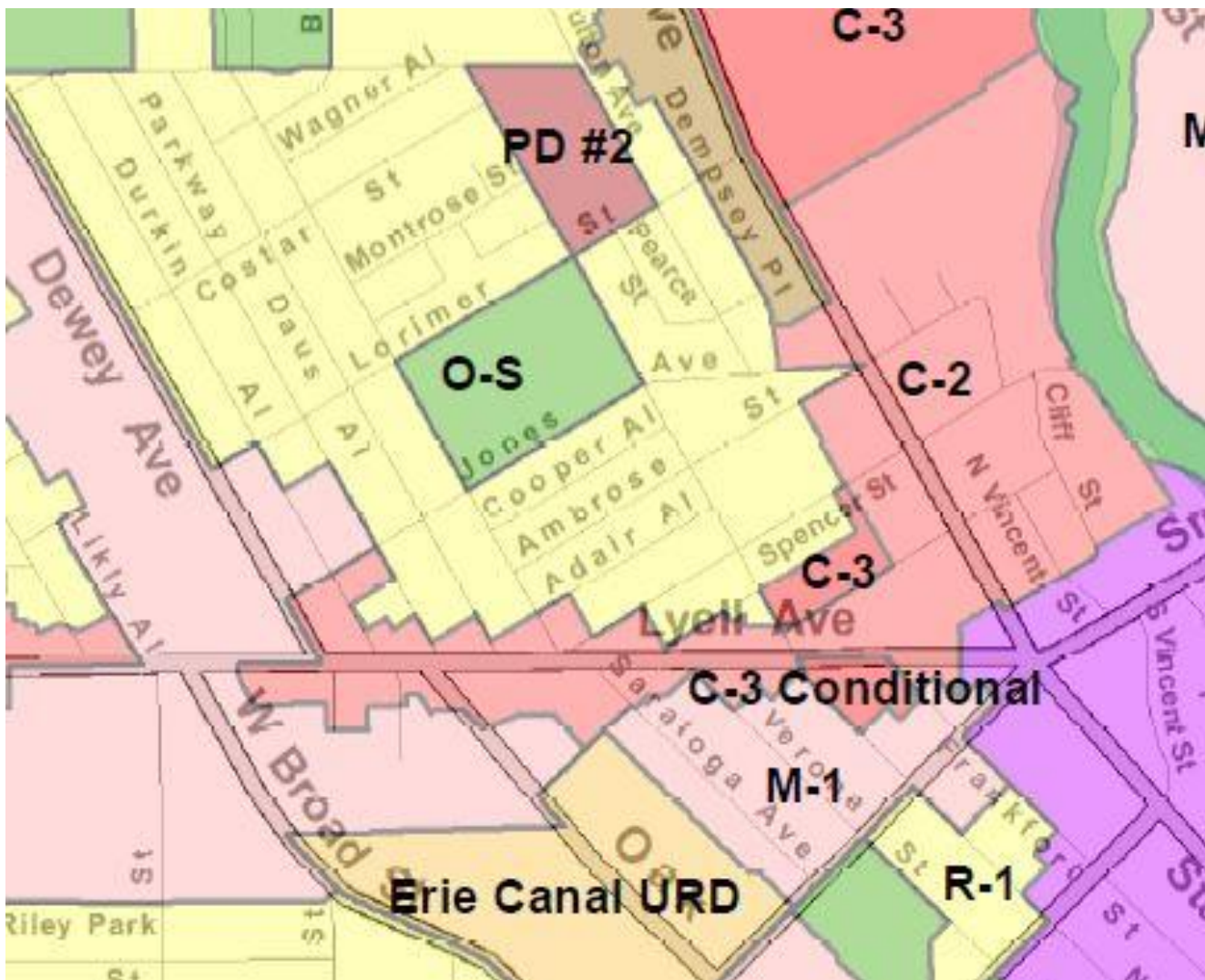
- **Greek Revival** – this bldg. type was the default favorite for upstate NY in its earliest days. The style persists to this day. It is characterized by 1-1/2 to 2 story size / medium slope gable roofed and heavily decorated eaves and soffits. As its name implies, decorative motifs and proportions of the style were taken from copying Greek temples. Many of the structures are of wood, yet brick was also a material of choice for these structures, especially for close-in fire resistant construction in denser urban areas.
- **Gothic Revival** – Steeply pitched roofs, board and batten type siding, arched windows dictate this architectural style. A few are in the area of study, but in the minority of styles present.
- **Italianate** – These are mostly 2 story structures, either of wood or masonry, with large broad low slope roofs and eaves decorated with large brackets. Many roofs are hipped with a central cupola structure capping the center. Proportions tend to be vertical at doors and windows.
- **Victorian** – these structures date from the end of the 1800's into the early 1900's. Highly decorated many wood framed with extensive porches
- **20th Century** – many of the industrial structures / churches / schools along Lyell Ave. are a mix of styles as the century progressed.
- **Present Day** – The results of over 100 years of uninformed planning is an amalgam of disconnected styles / appearances that read as a jumble of shapes and forms without any real continuity. This is a typical example of 20th century unplanned development without a community wide basis of thought given to it. In most cases a lower rather than higher common denominator ruled when it came to appearances here. This is what this study strives to address.



Municipal Controls

Zoning – zoning here is generally appropriate for the current uses. It is residential / single family and multi-family, commercial and a small percentage of Industrial. (See map; following page) The biggest challenge is parking. In other parts of the city, specifically the Center City District (CCD) there are no parking requirements. The city provides a broad brush for determining how best to make parking work for each property. Here the zoning does dictate specific requirement for numbers of spaces required based on use and size. Creative solutions will be required between municipal authorities and property owners to gain control of parking so it can be an asset to the public realm not a deterrent.

Guidelines for parking should be an integral part of the historic district designation. Parking in the rear of properties as a concept for enhancing a streetscape has been successfully used in other parts of the city – it should be considered here. Creation of community benefit parking lots is another way for a group of businesses to share in parking that can be created in a visually pleasing and easy accessible way. Costs are shared amongst those property owners who get access to the lot through a fee charged by the City for maintenance and security.



Proposed Lyell Ave Historic District existing base zoning map

Review Process

Similar to preservation district reviews. Criteria would be established akin to any other historic district that have been specifically designed to accent the goals of presenting a level of appearance based on a "Little Italy" model. This does NOT mean all structures would have to be Italian in character or appearance. What it would mean is property owners will be held to a standard that they have collectively agreed to and codified into a series of regulations that represent the idea of a welcoming, inclusive, community based concept idealized by the term "Little Italy".

Historic Overlay Benefit

A historic district designation would allow the city to begin to better shape the appearance of this corridor using proven planning and legislative techniques for improving the overall appearance of the area over time by bringing a level of consistency to the public realm that does not now exist here. Property owners would be required to submit their concepts for any / all changes to the exterior of a property for review by a designated municipal board to evaluate them based on the Little Italy concept for public realm components: bldg. facades, open space & parks, infrastructure, public lighting and streetscape components. The long term goal is to create a more unified visual experience for the public such as the example of what is already being done in the Neighborhood of the Arts district, Riverside and Charlotte districts.

Public Benefit Corporation

A logical expansion of the historic district mechanism utilizing the Little Italy concept would be a Public Benefit Corporation. (PBC) There are many successful examples of PBC's across the country, one of the most successful being the Little Italy CBD in San Diego, CA. (<http://www.littleitalysd.com>) This outtake is from their website:

The Little Italy Association of San Diego

The Little Italy Association of San Diego is a 501(c)(3) public benefit corporation that was established in 1996 to oversee and expedite the revitalization and beautification of the Little Italy neighborhood in Downtown San Diego. The Association represents the property owners, residents, and businesses of Little Italy.

The Association is the only Little Italy district management corporation of its kind in any neighborhood in the United States. The Association pledges to advocate on behalf of its members' best interests in the areas of public safety, beautification, promotion, and economic development while preserving the unique cultural resources that exist in our neighborhood.

The Association currently has 29 Board Members that are comprised of property owners, residents, business owners and community-at-large representatives. The Board of Directors meets on the first Tuesday of every month at Our Lady of the Rosary Church Hall; unless otherwise posted. For more detailed information on dates and location, visit the [Events Calendar](#) page and if you would like to be added to the Reminder eBlast, please email Chris Gomez at chris@littleitalysd.com. As a reminder, all Board and Committee meetings are open to the general public.

Public Realm Infrastructure

Presently, there is no real rhyme or reason to the appearance of the Lyell Ave corridor infrastructure. It has developed in an unstudied and inconsistent way typical of much public improvements of the last half of the 20th century. However, a movement has been underway in Rochester for some time now to improve the public realm in various neighborhoods through a public design process involving community stakeholders within each area under study.



One of the more successful examples of this kind of community partnership has been the Neighborhood of the Arts district in the University / Goodman area of Rochester. Here, multiple public charrettes workshops were held to gain public input on what the public realm could become. This was then interpreted by the City and taken to conclusion through streetscape modifications that have transformed this area



The difference could not be greater!

The quality of the public space is critical to providing a backdrop for a successful Little Italy district. Design devices employed can and should be:

- Conceptualization and implementation of an overall design theme with specific criteria to be met in all design instances relative to the public realm within the district
- Reassignment of traffic lanes widths to slow traffic yet create safe left turning with 3 lanes
- on-street parking with turn-outs at intersections
- Careful selection of street lights for visual appearance consistent with the district theme while providing adequate illumination for a safe environment / not “over lighting” - but following dark sky criteria

Sustainability

There are many ways sustainable practices can be employed in the public realm. Chief among them is storm water management. Urban landscaping consisting of trees / rain gardens / linear storm water gardens that provide a sustainable solution to storm water runoff can be employed in the public rights of way of Lyell Ave to “bring some green” to an otherwise dense built environment. Management / maintenance of these features could be provided by the Little Italy Public Benefit District as part of their duties in private management of the area.



Efficient LED street lighting and oversight of building lighting to maintain quality lighting of the public realm utilizing “dark sky” principals is another useful way to provide sustainability in the public interest.

Building Blocks of the Little Italy Historic District

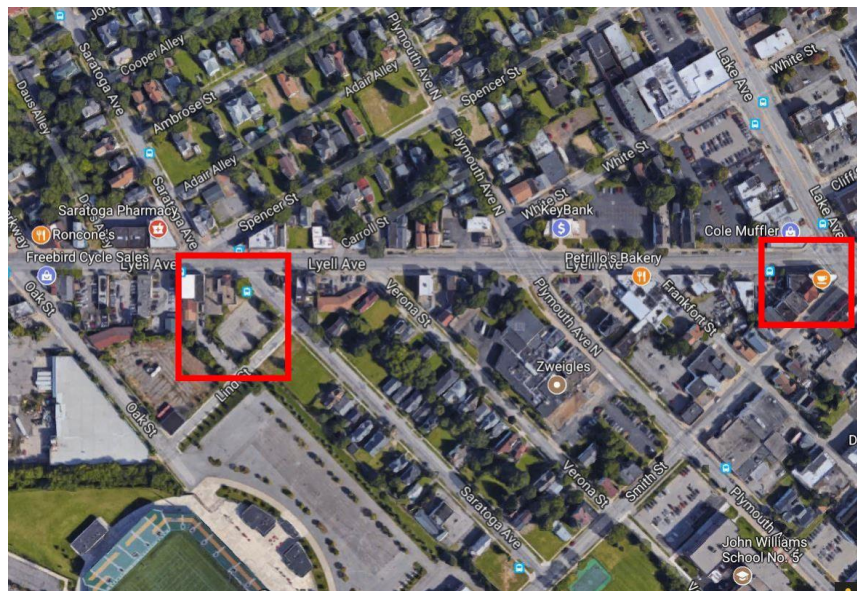
What makes a great urban experience? Sometimes, as in the San Diego Little Italy district, it is the southern California sunshine that provides the backdrop for great outdoor spaces that can be

frequented nearly all year round for dining, shopping and entertainment. Sometimes, as in the Seattle WA Public Market, it is a strong tradition of place and connection to the geography that provides the underpinning of that great public space. Rochester's Public Market is now undergoing such a transformation providing multiple opportunities for people to interact on a variety of levels.

Fundamental to any successful neighborhood is skillful organization of public spaces integrated within the streetscapes that provide relief from blocks of buildings that provide opportunities for people to interact for business and social reasons. Principal structures that provide essential services to local citizens within the community is one such device. It is for this reason that a Little Italy Visitors Center is envisioned as part of this historic district. The center would be the "1st stop" for anyone with an interest in belonging to the Little Italy community. It is conceived as both a physical presence for the Little Italy management organization and as a community clearing house for information on the following:

- Center for education on the historic character of the Little Italy neighborhood, its Italian beginnings and its development into a multi ethnic community for business and urban living
- Essential social services for 1st time immigrants entering the area wishing to live here
- Liaison for city government for addressing district oversight of community affairs / police relations / zoning compliance / property maintenance / building signage
- Educational services for individual betterment for employment
- Possible day care center
- Blood drive center

There are 2 sites that have been identified that could well serve this purpose. They are the Flat Iron building, located at the entrance to the district at 561 State Street - the corner of Lyell and State Streets - and 125 Lyell Ave, the former Brown Square Medical Center and originally a local community bank. Consideration for both are illustrated on the following pages:





Potential Site for a new
Little Italy Historic District
Visitor's Center:

The Flat Iron Building

561 State Street @
Corner of State Street
and Lyell Ave

2,000 SF of space
of this building at the
eastern gateway to the
Little Italy Historic District



This structure, built in 1834, has the potential to provide space for a Visitor's Center for the historic district. It is located on the west side of the apex of State St., Smith Street and Lyell Avenue at the eastern gateway to the district. The center would be located on the 2nd floor of the building. An entrance on Lyell Avenue would lead up a unique staircase, giving the visitor an immediate sense of what immigrants would have felt going to their walk up living quarters in the early days of Rochester's ethnic history.

The center would provide space for Little Italy staff and volunteers to present narratives of the history of multi-ethnic migrations to the City, starting with the Italians in the mid 1800's, that came to and through the district. Multi-media materials would also provide graphics as a selected way to present the history of the district. A system for researching family's by name could also be part of the center.

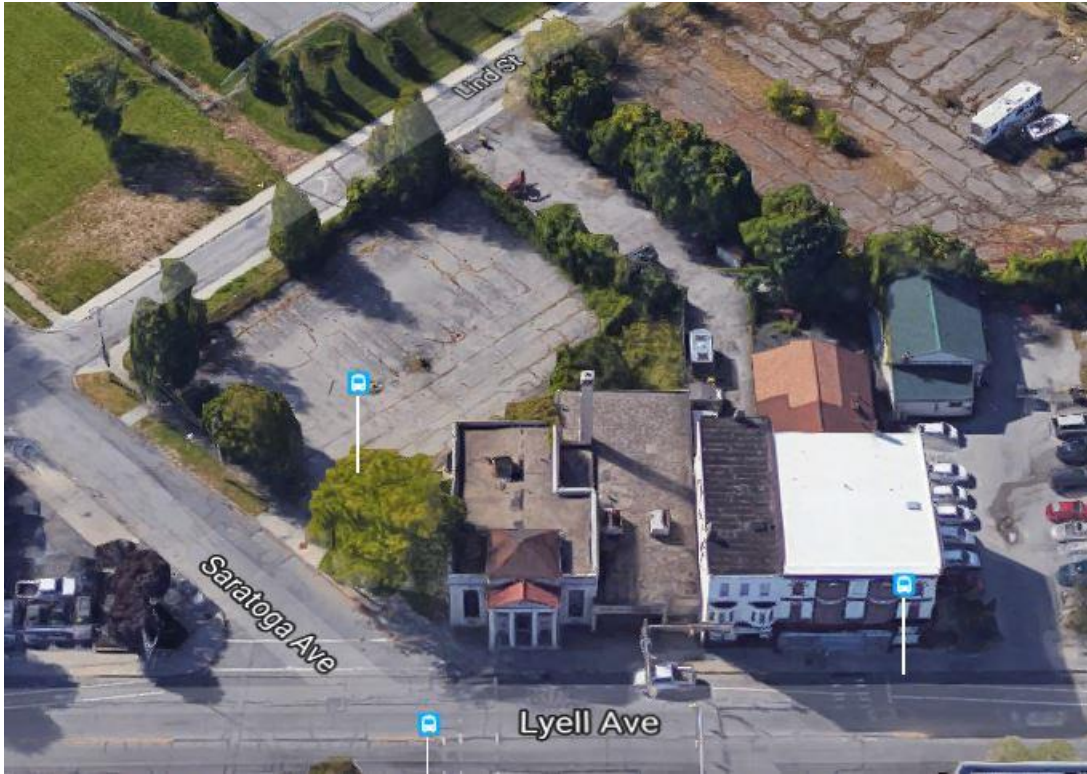
Connections to local businesses would be highlighted, that provide links to neighborhood specialties and services to promote the local community to the public at large.

Renovations Required:

- Demolition and structural repairs to existing wood framed floor systems
- Refurbishment of existing windows and doors
- New entrance sequence
- Interior walls / floors / ceilings and finishes
- New utilities: New HVAC system / Electrical service, power and lighting / Plumbing for toilet rooms and misc. sinks

Budget Estimate for renovations: 2,000 SF x \$140 / SF

\$280,000



125 Lyell Avenue Location / Looking South



Lyell Avenue Elevation

This structure, originally built as a community bank, was last used as a community health center. Due to its previous use, it has the potential to function as the envisioned community / visitor's center with little in the way of modifications. It has an excellent location / location adjacent to a bus stop / On-site parking / approx. 3,668 SF of space that can be dedicated to the community needs outlined above. New mechanical systems are envisioned, as well as some space reconfiguration to create the needs of a true visitor's and community center for Little Italy

Expected renovation costs @ \$140 / SF would be \$513,520

Public Spaces – gathering areas

A significant part of a great urban lifestyle are places for the public to gather. One such kind of space is a public fountain / piazza or outdoor public plaza. Properly located at a significant intersection or near a major community service such as a grocery store, it can provide multiple opportunities for relaxation / entertainment and act as a public forum for discussions and presentations to the local citizenry.



Another mode of public space is a piazza or open public plaza. These spaces, when fringed with small retail and commercial enterprises, or Live / Work / Play spaces create a vibrancy to a neighborhood and help cement its identity in urban place making. Public plazas have a long history in urban areas, but not so in Rochester. Designing such space that responds to the changes in season to offer year round opportunities for its use are essential to the successful use of this public space. An example is shown below that combines fringe retail, fountain and piazza all in one combined design.



Jones Park is another component of this overall historic district. It is a premier public space, designed by Fredrick Law Olmsted in the early 20th century as part of a series of parks for Rochester including Genesee Valley Park, Highland Park – including the Children’s Pavilion, the Seneca Park Zoo and the Olmstead Lodge. This park alone deserves recognition for its historic value to the City of Rochester.

Public Input / Summary

A project of this magnitude needs organization to be efficient and to move its agenda forward in a logical and intelligent way. To this end, the Little Italy Historic District Steering Committee was formed to advance the ideas presented here. Members are from all walks of Rochester’s community:

- City of Rochester City Council level government
- Neighborhood representation from municipal agencies
- Little Italy Neighborhood Association
- Landmark Society of Western NY - Historic Preservation experts
- The Community Design Center / Rochester – Urban Planning and Public Realm Charrettes
- Pardi Partnership Architects - Architectural consults
- Lyell Avenue Business Association business leaders
- Local businesses and residents

Goals for the district were formulated by the steering committee to advance the idea of the historic district. Paramount to any determination of how the process should take place was the clear goal that public input would be fundamental to the establishment of any kind of district for this. To that end, two community meetings were held to review the concepts envisioned by the steering committee. The documented results indicated a nearly 100% positive support for the creation of the district as a way to advance their community.

The ultimate goal for this process is to hold a public charrette – a day long community event monitored by the CDC and volunteer architects / planners / urban design professionals in a public forum to allow the community to provide as much input as possible as to what they would like to see happen to their community going forward. This data becomes the true direction for any further advancement of the district.

Information from the charrette is taken by the CDC, distilled down into a document of goals / design concepts / methods of implementation to be used going forward with the creation of community involved spaces, in this case, of the historic district. There is significant cost to this study, typically \$35,000 to \$50,000. There are also associated costs for establishing the actual historic district, completing the architectural planning studies needed to finalize the district and establish a Community Benefit District. Overall costs for these processes could be \$87,000 - \$110,000.

The Lyell Avenue corridor has too long been in the shadow of other more prosperous parts of the City of Rochester for many years. Utilizing the history of first the Italian and then the many other ethnic immigrations that passed through this area on their way to better lives elsewhere is a way to honor their past while providing for a more secured future for the present residents of this worthwhile part of the greater Rochester community.

Respectfully Submitted,

Scott L. Fiske, R.A.; AIA

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE
ITALIAN SETTLEMENT AND MIGRATION
CITY OF ROCHESTER, NY – LYELL AVENUE CORRIDOR

The purpose of this paper is to present evidence to be used by the Landmark Society of Western New York and the Little Italy Neighborhood Association, Inc., of Rochester, NY, in their collaborative effort to seek and obtain “Little Italy Historic District” designation for a specific area located along the Lyell Avenue corridor in the City of Rochester, N.Y. More specifically, the area located on the west-side of the city, which saw the bulk of Italian migration and settlement over the past 150 years. The initial boundaries for the proposed Little Italy Historic District would be from the corner of Lake Avenue and Lyell Avenue (to the East) to near the corner of Broad Street, Dewey Avenue and Lyell Ave (to the West), and primarily one building or property deep, to the North and South of that area. *(Please see the district map below.)*

One of the principal causes of Italian immigration to the United States was the “Risorgimento” (Unification of Italy), during the period of 1860 to 1870, and the subsequent World Wars. The unification (and wars) caused many economic difficulties for the people of Italy, especially in Southern Italy.

The first Italian immigrant arrived to Rochester, NY, in 1860, but his name was not known or recorded. Many Italian immigrants came to Rochester and the Upstate NY area initially for very short periods, during the mid-1800’s, to work on the railroads, or to help dig the enlargement of the Erie Canal (the Barge Canal), and they lived and worked under extremely harsh conditions, often times discriminated against and treated poorly, as simple uneducated “Day-laborers” *(a term for the Italians who didn’t understand English and who came as simple workers to earn a meager daily wage, and which later morphed into the ugly racial slur, “Daygo” still used in poor taste, even to this day).*

The first Italian actually listed in the City of Rochester’s records and directories of the late 1860’s was Domenico Sturla (1868), an organ grinder, who resided in a house on Carthage Alley, in an area known as “Sleepy Hollow”, located north of Andrews Street and between St Paul Street and the Genesee River, now known as “Old Rochesterville”.

In 1868, two other Italians, Isaac and John Verspelle, also resided just north of the train tracks near what is now the Inner Loop area, and near the area of Front and Mill Street, at the mouth of the Lyell Avenue corridor. In 1878, a settlement existed in an area on North Street and St Paul St., called “Poison Row”. Eventually that settlement was demolished and its residents moved to another crowded

tenement on North Water Street, Platt Street and near State Street, again near the mouth of the Lyell Avenue corridor, where in 1889, an “Italian Mission” was set up by several prominent matrons, near the area of Lake Avenue and State Street, headed by C.R. Cutler and her associates.

The Italian Mission served to educate Italian immigrants who were turned away from night school, due to their inability to understand English at that time. In 1898, the Italians confirmed the initial organization of their “colony” on the Lyell Avenue corridor (*as it was referred to by City of Rochester Historian Blake McKelvey in his historical recount of 1960, listed below in the bibliography*), by establishing their first Italian-built Catholic Church in the City of Rochester, known as St. Anthony of Padua Church, which was originally located close to Lyell Avenue, on the corner of Jay Street, State Street and Lake Avenue, near the famous DiPaolo Bakery, which still operates at that same location to this day.

Later, St. Anthony’s was moved north along the Lyell Avenue corridor, a few blocks away, to the area now known as Jones Square Park, near Lorimer Street. In the late 1880’s, as the number of Italian families and newcomers in Rochester overflowed the original tenements located in the St. Paul and North Street area (*known as “Poison Row”, as mentioned above, which was demolished in 1887 by Board of Health order for its squalor*), the Italian colony began its more dense migration to the area near the mouth of the Lyell Avenue corridor, (*near Front and Mill Streets, as depicted by the yellow stars in the map below*), and eventually moved into the Lyell Avenue and Jay Street area, headed West towards Broad Street and Sherman Street.

In 1901, the Baden Street Settlement was started, first to help Jewish immigrants and later, Italian immigrants. The first “Italian Democratic Club” was established in the 5th ward, near the Jewish community, and near what is now the Town of Brighton, and it was led by Michael Cariola. In 1896, the Italian colony’s first non-political men’s club was formed, called “La Societa Italiano”, made up of primarily west-siders from Front St., Mill St, Lyell Avenue and the Jay Street area neighborhoods. In 1896, the “West End Italian Political Club” was also formed by west-side homeowners, who hailed primarily from the Jay Street and the Lyell Avenue corridor area.

In 1906, there was a location actually referred to as “**Little Italy**”, (*as mentioned by City of Rochester Historian Blake McKelvey in his historical recount of 1960, listed below in the bibliography*), indicating that the Italian colony had better-organized itself at that time, and that it extended from the mouth of the Lyell corridor, near Front Street and Mill Street, into the area of Lake Avenue, Lyell Avenue, Lorimer Street and Jay Street, where the Italians had primarily settled and built their church, and where they set up many shops, businesses, saloons, bakeries and other commercial activities. (*See map below.*)

In 1929, the “Congrega dei Santi Martiri di Celano” (a Catholic Women’s Society formed by Italian immigrants from the City of Celano, L’Aquila, in the Abruzzi region of Italy) formed at Saint Anthony of Padua Church, where the Congrega Society regularly held its meetings, and where those passionate ladies and their organization planned annual dinners and exciting cultural festivities, celebrating St. Anthony and the three Martyred Saints of Celano (*S.S. Santi Martiri di Celano*), also holding lavish Grand Processions around the area of Jones Square Park, Lyell Avenue, Lorimer Street and the surrounding neighborhoods.

At approximately the same time (1920’s), Italian immigrants of primarily Neapolitan (Pignataro) and Sicilian origins, held their annual celebration of St. Giorgio (St. George), in the area of Smith Street and Lyell Avenue, utilizing the old St. Patrick’s Church and later St. Patrick’s Cathedral.

(St. Patrick's was Rochester's first Catholic Church, founded more than a decade before the City of Rochester was established in 1817. St. Patrick's was also the area's first Cathedral, and it served that role for decades before Eastman Kodak Co. bought it and then demolished the property in 1937, to expand its growing industrial empire. As the center of what later became the Catholic Diocese of Rochester, four bishops were consecrated at St. Patrick's Cathedral, highlighting the strong faith and presence of Italian and Irish immigrants in that west-side area of the city, and near the Lyell corridor, more specifically, near Platt St., North Plymouth Avenue, Jay and Brown Streets. The original St. Patrick's Church was built at the northeast corner of North Plymouth Avenue and Platt Street, and as the number of immigrants and local Catholics increased to the area, it soon became evident that a larger church would be needed. The original church was demolished, and a second St. Patrick's Church was constructed, but that too was deemed too small, and so the cornerstone of a third and much larger St. Patrick's Church was laid, at the same location, in 1864, around the time that the first Italian immigrants arrived to Rochester. The new church, not yet completed, was opened for use in 1869 and dedicated as a cathedral in 1870. Most Italians who found their home on the west-side at that time, and near the Lyell Avenue corridor, at first did not see the need to develop their own church, and frequented St. Patrick's Cathedral, becoming part of that Parish.)

When the Bausch Street Bridge was built in 1931, it facilitated easier access to the “Little Italy” that had formed on the west-side, along the Lyell Avenue and Jay Street corridor, and many east-side Italian residents moved across the river to the more bustling Lyell Ave, Jay Street and Smith Street areas.

Bishop B.P. McQuaid, who believed in integrating the Italians into the Rochester Catholic Church, assigned Father J. Emil Geffel to organize the first Italian Parish. He purchased, through Walter Duffy, a parcel of land between Lyell Avenue, Plymouth Avenue and White Street, from the City of Rochester, in

the late 1880's – early 1900's. Bishop McQuaid transferred ownership of the land to the future parish of “St Anthony of Padua”. Originally the church was a school located on the corner of State and North Plymouth. St. Anthony's was later moved to Lorimer Street, as mentioned above, but soon the flourishing Italian community out-grew the parish, which numbered around 14,000 people. Bishop McQuaid again entrusted Father Gefell to organize and build “Our Lady of Mount Carmel”, which opened in 1909, located at 53 Ontario Street, *(near the areas of Central Park, North Street, Scio Street, Avenue D and the famed North Clinton Avenue area [which was known as a primarily Italian neighborhood called “Mount Allegro”, described in Jerre Mangione's famous book entitled “Mount Allegro”], and near the Public Market area, East of the Genesee River and High Falls, where many Italians had also settled in the early 1900's, since many Italians immigrated to Rochester as tailors, and wanted to be closer to Rochester's budding clothing industry factories where they were employed, such as Hickey Freeman, Bonds and Timely Clothes).*

Between 1890 and 1920, the population of Italian immigrants increased twenty-fold in Rochester, primarily on the west-side's Lyell Avenue area, however, where skilled laborers were employed as masons, carpenters and in other trades, or as assembly workers in the area's many factories. While most Italian immigrants and their families were Catholic's, a few were Protestants, *(actually known as Waldensians at the time)*, and they came from a congregation founded in the Middle Ages in Europe. These immigrants settled in the Jay Street and Smith Street area, and their church was built at 766 Broad Street, off of Lyell Avenue, and it opened in 1915. It was called the “Italian Presbyterian Church” and its parishioners were often pelted with stones by those who opposed the Italians and/or protestant faiths.

In 1910, the “DiPaolo Baking Co.”, originally located on Ontario St., was established. In 1920, they purchased an old church at 598 N. Plymouth Ave, (previously called Frank St., near Lyell Ave), to expand operations. At that time, there were 10 Italian bakeries in that neighborhood alone. Another bakery, “Petrillo's Bakery”, was established in 1920, and it still operates at its original location on Lyell Avenue.

The “More Candy Company” was started in 1916 by a father and son, David and Ray Cassaretti, at 31 Mill Street, at the mouth of the Lyell corridor, where it had its home for over 50 years. In 1966, it moved to 54 Brown Street, and in 1970, Douglas Lee Rook Sr. bought the company. In 1983, the land and building were sold back to Eastman Kodak. In 1993, the company dissolved. In 1932, John Veltre opened the “Veltre's Bakery” on Parkway Street, just off of Lyell Avenue *(right next door to Roncone's Restaurant, the Rochester area's current oldest Italian restaurant, established in 1937)*, and John Veltre

also bought the “Zazzara Bakery”, which was on the opposite corner from Roncone’s present location on Lyell Avenue.

Workers at the “Bond Bakery”, which was part of “General Baking Co.”, actually helped found “Petrillo’s Bakery”, which still operates today on Lyell Ave near State St. It is important to note here that during the period of the 1920’s to the 1940’s, Italian immigrants were banned by the United States as enemy aliens, during World War II. Yet during that time, the Italians that had made it to Rochester were very resourceful, and began to form many businesses. Bars and restaurants along the Lyell and Jay corridor area, such as Shortino’s, Antonetta’s and Shorty’s, the Cordial and Celentano’s market, among others.

In 1949, the Mastrella family opened the famous “Rocky’s Restaurant” on Jay Street. In 1966, Nacca’s Bakery was established at its current location on Jay Street. From the 1960’s onward, the Italian’s “Little Italy” on the Lyell and Jay corridor strengthened in numbers, and in commercial activity as well, eventually expanding westward down Lyell Avenue in the late 1970’s and 1980’s into the Town of Gates, which to this day, still features a prosperous Italian culture and presence, with Italian many businesses such as bakeries, restaurants, dentists, insurance and travel agencies, and other commercial activities.

In the year 2016, the Little Italy Neighborhood Association, Inc., (“LINA”) formed in Rochester, NY, as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation and public charity, seeking the formal commemoration of the over 150 year history of the Italian culture’s settlement and migration along the famous Lyell Avenue corridor, with the hope of attaining “Historic District” status for an initial small and well-defined area on Lyell Avenue, where “Little Italy” primarily began to form, develop and expand in its historic heyday.

LINA’s mission is to commemorate that splendid 150 year history, and utilize the historic district designation in an effort to revitalize the area; attract retail, housing and business investment; and help turn the area around into a safe, prosperous and vibrant “destination place”, and new economic driver for Rochester and the Upstate NY region – creating not only a historic district and exciting meeting place, but also an inclusive “Cultural Welcome Center” and “Community Benefit District” that the entire community could celebrate and enjoy together, as a resource and true historical **treasure** of our city.

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PROPOSED "LITTLE ITALY HISTORIC DISTRICT" MAP



The red outlined area is the proposed Little Italy Historic District area along the Lyell Avenue corridor, (including the recently Italian-named Capelli Stadium and surrounding businesses and residential areas). The yellow stars indicate the areas where the first few Italian families settled in the late 1860's, later migrating towards the mouth of the Lyell corridor, and then to the Lyell Avenue and Jay Street area, which later formed, developed and prospered as Rochester, New York's original "Little Italy" neighborhood.

