

CITY OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
Environmental Assessment for the Conversion of a Portion of Genesee Valley
Park under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act as a Result of the
Brooks Landing Revitalization Project

5.0 MITIGATION

In the course of the Environmental Assessment review process with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP), a number of potential impacts were identified for the preferred alternative, Alternative 2 – Brooks Landing Revitalization Project. Where this is the case, mitigation strategies were developed to reduce the potential impact anticipated to acceptable levels. These mitigation strategies have been incorporated into the project (Alternative 2). The City of Rochester is committed to the mitigation strategies identified and entered into an agreement to that effect. A Memorandum of Agreement (refer to Appendix N) has been signed by the appropriate consulting parties to complete the Section 106 process in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act. Specific items have been discussed with NYSOPRHP and the City of Rochester has committed to the following stipulations:

A. To Mitigate Impacts to Open/Greenspace:

1. Provide additional vegetation (landscaping) for the proposed parking lots in Sub-Area I.
2. Provide additional vegetation (landscaping) to the proposed public waterfront promenade to make it more “park-like.”
3. Reconfigure the parking layout in the southern portion of Sub-Area I to maximize the buffer/greenspace between the proposed development and the park and provide additional landscape buffer plantings.
4. Incorporate wayfinding signage leading the public to the Genesee Riverway Trail and to the Greenway Trail south of the project site. Provide interpretive information on both the Riverway and Greenway Trails. Include historic information within the interpretive kiosk to be installed in the public gathering area of the promenade (see below).

B. To Mitigate Impacts to Historical Resources:

1. Incorporate an historic/interpretive kiosk that highlights the park’s origin and design by Olmsted in the public gathering area of the proposed public waterfront promenade.

2. Modify the remaining South Plymouth Avenue south of the project site to Elmwood Avenue to create a true park road. This modification will include narrowing the road and providing parallel parking spaces intermittently along the road.
3. Provide a commitment to never alienate/convert the remaining portion of Genesee Valley Park West between the project and Elmwood Avenue.

Mitigation has been proposed in Chapter 4 for potential impacts under the various impact topics. This section summarizes potential impacts of concern and the proposed mitigation for those impacts. In the course of doing this, the above items of concern are addressed.

5.1 Mitigation for Impacts on Plants and Animals

In Section 4.4.2, it is documented that a total of approximately 62 mature trees will be removed from the 1.38-acre conversion parcel and the adjacent 1.39 acre City-owned vacant open space parcel in addition to understory and shrub areas for the project. Immediately to the west of the project area, a vegetated slope will also be cleared by re-grading activities and the installation of a retaining wall for parking areas. Some riverbank vegetation (approximately 225 linear feet) that has grown at the base of the river wall at the land/water interface will be removed for the construction of the waterfront area. Sidewalks and curb lawn areas will be removed during the construction phase on the site and on the associated street improvements.

As mitigation for the removal of the vegetation, the landscaping plan for the project was revised to include additional plantings of trees and shrubs around the proposed parking areas as well as in islands to be constructed within the parking areas (Figure 49). Additional plantings are also proposed around the public waterfront promenade. This additional vegetation will provide biomass and habitat for small birds and mammals. Permanent riverbank vegetation removal will be limited to only the area receiving shoreline improvements for the new landing. Temporary vegetation disturbance/removal may be required for construction and river dredging access. After construction, those areas will be allowed to re-vegetate and re-establish naturally. All sidewalks and strip plantings that are removed during the construction phase on the site and on the associated street improvements will be replaced. This mitigation will address concerns A.1 and A.2, above.

5.2 Mitigation for Impacts on Aesthetic Resources

In Section 4.5.2, it is documented that 1.38 acres of 6(f) parkland (conversion parcel) and 1.39 acres of adjacent City-owned open space, a portion of the naturalized vegetated shoreline, and mature hardwoods will be removed and replaced with one and four-story structures and 225 linear feet of hardscape river edge for the boat dock/berthing structure. The proposed hotel will be visible to varying degrees from the rear yards of approximately 10 adjacent residences on the west that front Genesee Street. The greatest potential visibility of the hotel would be from the east, within the Genesee River or from the east bank, south of the pedestrian bridge (Figures 42 and 43).

The proposed hotel and restaurant siting, however, take advantage of the existing topography and are located near the low end of the site, minimizing the perceived height of the 4-story hotel. The vegetation to be planted (as depicted on the landscaping plan and as described in Section 5.1) will help to screen the project from the east, south and from the adjacent residences. Proposed landscaping between the Riverway Trail and the hotel will, as it matures, continue to increase the screening of the buildings and mitigate their visual impact on the river corridor and from the University of Rochester river campus.

Views of the project site from the south within Genesee Valley Park West are expected to be screened by the mature existing vegetation to remain, additional landscaping installed to screen the parking, and by the curved alignment of the existing park access road. The proposed parking layout along the southern portion of the site has been reconfigured to provide a landscape buffer which would be planted with a combination of hardwood (deciduous) trees and dense understory vegetation to screen views from the adjacent park (Figure 49). The plant material species within this landscape buffer would be selected to match the type found throughout the surrounding area and designed to reflect the natural context and character of the park.

The design details for the hotel's riverside façade and roof as described in Section 4.5.2 is anticipated to minimize the visual effect of the hotel by blending the architectural style, finish and color with those of the adjacent structures along Genesee Street and across the river at the University of Rochester campus.

5.3 Mitigation for Impacts on Historic and Archaeological Resources

Potential impacts to cultural resources from the April 2003 Cultural Resources Report (Appendix H) are summarized in Section 4.6.2.

With regard to compliance with Section 106 regulations, the project has the potential to affect four resources eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. These include 1.) the University of Rochester campus on the east side of the Genesee River opposite the project site; 2.) the Genesee Valley Park West, the northern tip of which is within the project area; 3.) the Genesee Valley Canal which formerly ran through the project area; and 4.) the Erie Canal which is adjacent to the site (this section of the Genesee River is also part of the Erie Canal system).

The proposed entrance and parking lot will be built upon the footprint of the Genesee Valley Canal/Railroad. Discussions with the SHPO have concluded, however, that adverse effects are not anticipated for the Genesee Valley Canal provided that excavation does not extend beyond an area of existing fill over this resource. This resource, nevertheless, will be recognized in the final design by pavement treatment changes to increase the awareness of this historic route in this area. For the Erie Canal, the location of the new marginal wharf system was determined based on the depth of the existing river wall and the river channel bottom. The design of the proposed bulkhead consists of a pile-support marginal wharf system. This is essentially a concrete slab extending 16 feet from the riverbank and supported by posts or piles located within the river. This system eliminates the need for fill into the river, minimizes the amount of disturbance to the existing river wall since it spans over it, and minimizes the amount of dredging required to accommodate vessels. Therefore, the proposed wharf design and location

significantly reduces the amount of dredging required for the design vessels (see Figures 10 and 11), which decreases the intensity of potential impacts to the Erie Canal/Genesee River and its riverbank. Impacts to the University of Rochester are limited to visual impacts from the east bank of the river and proposed mitigation is discussed in Section 5.2 above. Proposed mitigation for impacts to the Genesee Valley Park West is summarized in Section 5.4. These include concerns B.1, B.2 and B.3, above.

In accordance with the regulations under Section 106, a Draft Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) has been prepared which lists several stipulations designed to minimize and mitigate impacts on historic, cultural, natural, and recreational resources. The final MOA has been signed by the appropriate consulting parties to complete the Section 106 process in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (Appendix N).

5.4 Mitigation for Impacts on Open Space and Recreation

Impacts from the project to open space and recreation are documented in Section 4.7.2. Adverse impacts include the conversion of 1.38 acres of dedicated 6(f) parkland as well as 1.39 acres of adjacent city-owned vacant open space. This is a total loss of 2.77 acres of passive open space. Adverse impacts to vegetation are summarized in Sections 4.4.2 and 5.1.

To mitigate the loss of parkland adjacent to the river in this area, it is critical to maintain views to provide visual access. The view looking east down Brooks Avenue towards the river has been identified as an important neighborhood feature and has been maintained in the proposed development plans.

It should be noted that the project would also cause beneficial impacts to open space and recreation, such as reducing the volume of traffic going through the park, enhancing the access and use of the park facilities and Genesee Riverway Trail, and providing new access to recreational experiences in and on the Genesee River. This would be enhanced further through the establishment of “way-finding” signage leading the public to the Genesee Riverway Trail and the Greenway Trail to the south.

Potential future impacts that could result from the City’s loss of control of the open space would be minimized through City zoning and the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process. Potential pedestrian/vehicle conflicts would be minimized with clearly delineated sidewalk on and adjacent to the hotel site. A cul-de-sac would be constructed to terminate South Plymouth Avenue and would minimize those who would “cut through” the hotel parking lot. Parking would be configured in the southern portion of Sub-Area I to maximize the buffer/greenspace between the proposed development and the park.

The mitigation measures have been made part of the project, including the dedication of the substitution parcel as parkland.

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5.5 Mitigation for Impacts on Transportation

Section 4.8.2 documents potential impacts on transportation from the project. A traffic analysis was summarized that models and predicts that the severing of South Plymouth Avenue has the potential to produce a major localized impact.

The summary of the analysis went on to model and analyze the effect of the implementation of several proposed intersection improvements in the local area. The proposed intersection improvements, or mitigation measures, would include:

1. An exclusive northbound right turn lane on Genesee Street at Brooks Avenue.
2. A median on the South Plymouth Avenue extension to Brooks Avenue to allow for only right turns in and out of the access drives in that area.
3. Lane reconfiguration at the affected intersections to alter the allowed turning movements to move traffic through the intersections more quickly and efficiently.
4. New signalization at the intersections of Scottsville Road/Elmwood Avenue/Genesee Street; Genesee Park Blvd/Genesee Street and Brooks Avenue/Genesee Street. This will move traffic more efficiently through those intersections.
5. Striping of the intersections and specialized signaling to safely and efficiently allow pedestrians to move through the intersections.

The analysis concluded that with these mitigation measures, the street system surrounding the project area will be enhanced and improve the traffic flow from its current condition. These improvements will be constructed prior to the severing of South Plymouth Avenue.