

The American Institute of Architects:  
**SDAT Program**

**Syracuse**

prepared by:  
AIA Center for Communities by Design



## **SDAT purpose:**

To serve as a catalyst, convener, and source of information that helps AIA members work with citizens and other stakeholders to envision and create more livable, healthy, safe, and sustainable communities.



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## **SDAT principals:**

Multi-Disciplinary Experts

Objective Outsiders

Community Participation



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**process:**

community engagement: **review:** assessment:  
**recommendation:** prioritization: **development:**  
implementation



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# **Syracuse SDAT National Team:**

**Chris Giattina- Team Leader**

**Ken Bowers- Economic Development**

**Deana Swetlik- Environment and Urban Form**

**Anindita Mitra- Sustainability**



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# Local Steering Committee and Team:

Fernando Ortiz  
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Robert Haley  
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Kristin Kowalski  
Mark Lichtenstein  
Rachel May  
Karen Kitney  
Jim Terrinoni  
Paul Mercurio  
Andrew Maxwell



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**sustainability:**

what is it?



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**photovoltaic cell**





**green houses**





**green roofs**



**wind farms**

**sustainability:**

is this an adequate definition?



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The Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy is an indigenous people noted for working together; for using, respecting, and caring for the land centered in this Syracuse area.



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Their traditional wisdom advised the Iroquois to “make their decisions for the seventh generation”.

(core ideology is about sustainability)



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**is sustainability still relevant:**

economically?

social equity?

environmentally?



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# onondaga lake:

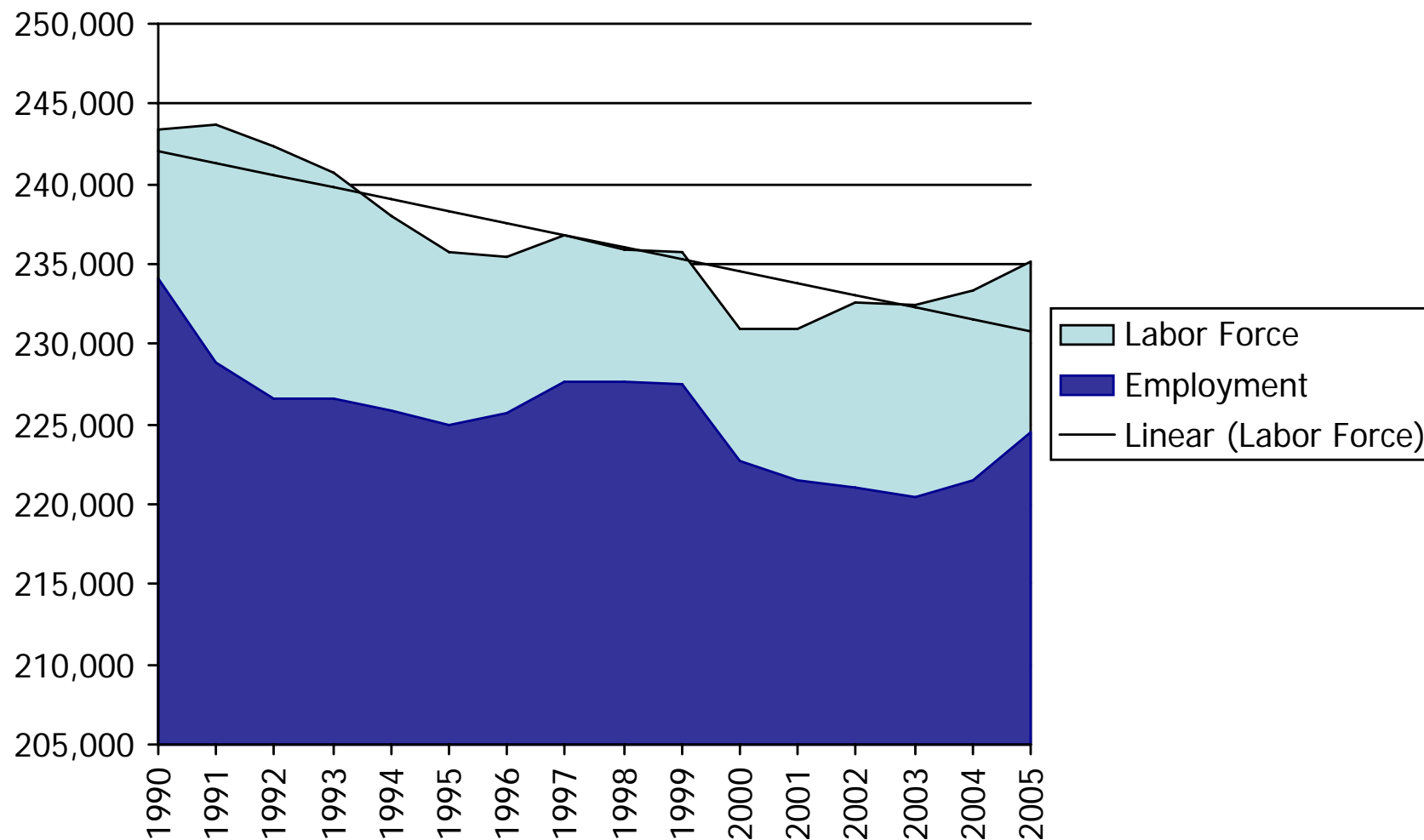
“is one of the most polluted lakes in the U.S.”

(from industrial waste, storm run-off and sewage)

source: onondaga lake partnership

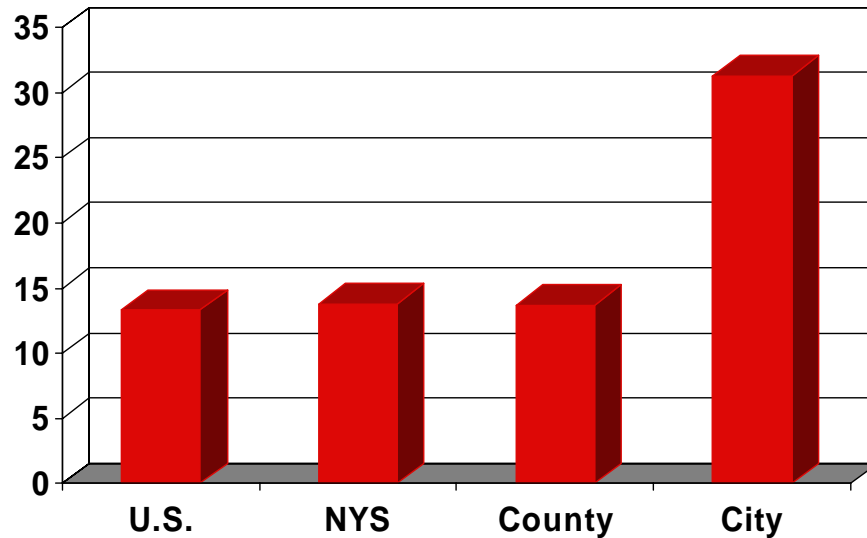


**environmental**

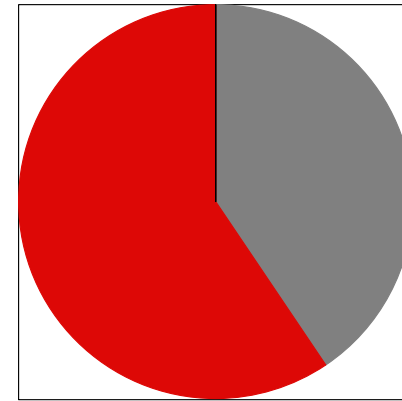


**shrinking labor force**

2005 Poverty Rates



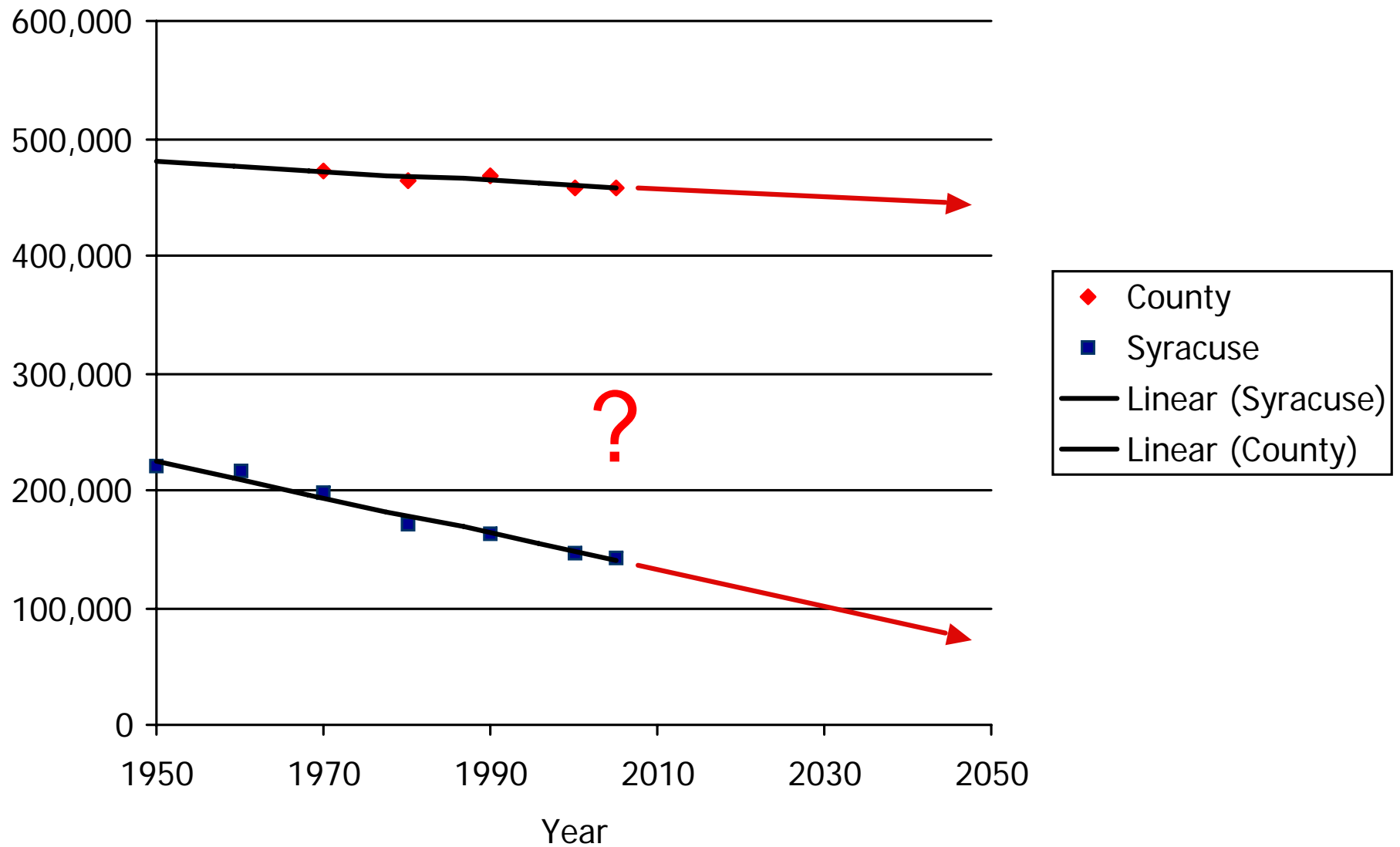
Percent of County's Poor Residents who Live in Syracuse



- Syracuse school system graduates 65 percent of its students
- 85 percent of Syracuse graduates came from poverty



**social equity**



**population decline**

## **attention:**

you are not on a sustainable path. You have not made sustainable decisions consistently, and you are not positioned to take advantage of opportunities when they arrive.



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**there is no easy solution:**

you spent the last 100 years getting here,  
you will not emerge from the problem in a  
year. However, if you don't start now, you  
will never get there.



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**interestingly, you are well  
positioned to get together:**

but not if you don't change your actions.  
You must stop being busy and be effective  
instead.



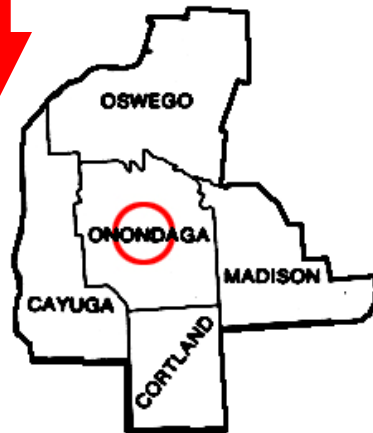
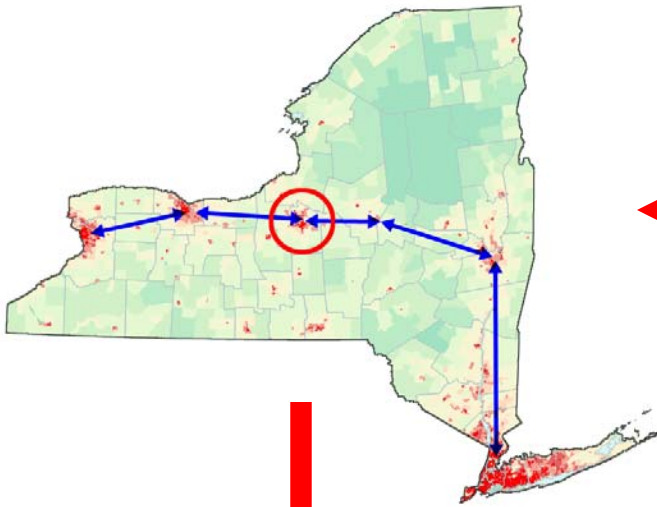
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## **problem statement:**

How do you make Syracuse sustainable:  
economically  
environmentally  
and with social equity



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**Syracuse in context**







# **strengths of region and county:**

- natural beauty
- location
- wealth
- transportation
- diversified economy
- cost of living



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## **strengths of the city:**

- natural beauty
- strong urban form
- great meds and eds
- historical building stock
- infra-structure capacity
- neighborhood character



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## **weaknesses of region and county:**

- governmental structure
- negative perception internally
- declining population
- stagnant economic growth

## **weaknesses of the county:**

- governmental structure
- negative perception of city
- sprawl without growth
- declining population
- stagnant economic growth
- aging infra-structure

## **weaknesses of the city:**

- governmental structure
- fiscal imbalance
- poverty/racism/social equity
- declining population/tax base/growth
- education
- aging infra-structure

**assessment and opportunities:**



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# economic assessment:

## In the region:

- Diversified economy
- Less impacted by recession/expansion
- Large R&D presence in CNY: higher ed, health care
- Non-growth market: population, jobs, labor force
- Unfavorable structural factors: NYS taxes, utilities
- Weak market metro: specialized business services lacking



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# economic assessment:

## In Syracuse:

- Loss of 8,000 households since 1970
- Widespread property abandonment in nearly every neighborhood
- Excess supply + stagnant demand = depressed real estate values
- Construction/rehab/development costs can outweigh achievable economic return
- Higher site costs: assembly, remediation



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## **regional governance:**

- City, county, and 34 towns & villages + home rule
- 24 school districts
- Many more special purpose taxing districts
- Land use policy wielded at local level
- Infrastructure (roads, water, sewer) controlled by County & MPO

## **municipal governance:**

- Planning function split between County (land use & zoning) and Community Development (redevelopment)
- No site plan standards or review
- Antiquated zoning
- Weak policy framework for planning & economic development

## **economic opportunities:**

- Focus on city core
- Policy framework for public/private partnerships
- Regional job creation strategy
- Neighborhood wealth creation



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# focus on city core:

County => City => Neighborhoods => Core



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## downtown opportunities:

- Repairing the fabric
- Activating historic buildings
- Comprehensive **access** strategy: parking & transit
- Niche markets
- Mixed use to combine market segments
- Connective Corridor

## **policy framework for public/ private partnerships:**

- Current economics make public subsidies a fact of life in Syracuse
- History of large expenditures and low returns (Empire Zones)
- Perceptions of unfairness, favoritism, back room dealings



# is subsidy a sustainable policy?

- Most frequent subsidy vehicle is local property taxes
- Failure to improve tax base begets continued need for subsidy
- Marketplace is uncertain: City may subsidize failure as well as success

# **“public investment for public goals to create public benefits”**

- Coordinate County & City
- Achieve consensus on goals
- Frame the debate
- Depoliticize the process
- Define expectations
- Promote lasting value



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# draft goals for project evaluation

- Direct & indirect economic impacts
  - Jobs/\$\$
- Targeted area revitalization
  - Downtown, neighborhoods, Lakefront, University Hill
- Relationship to adopted plans
- Image/competitive position
- Sustainable communities



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## **regional job creation**

- As a non-growth market in New York State, Greater Syracuse is at a competitive disadvantage for major corporate relocation decisions
- The region is potentially well positioned to incubate and grow both startup and established businesses



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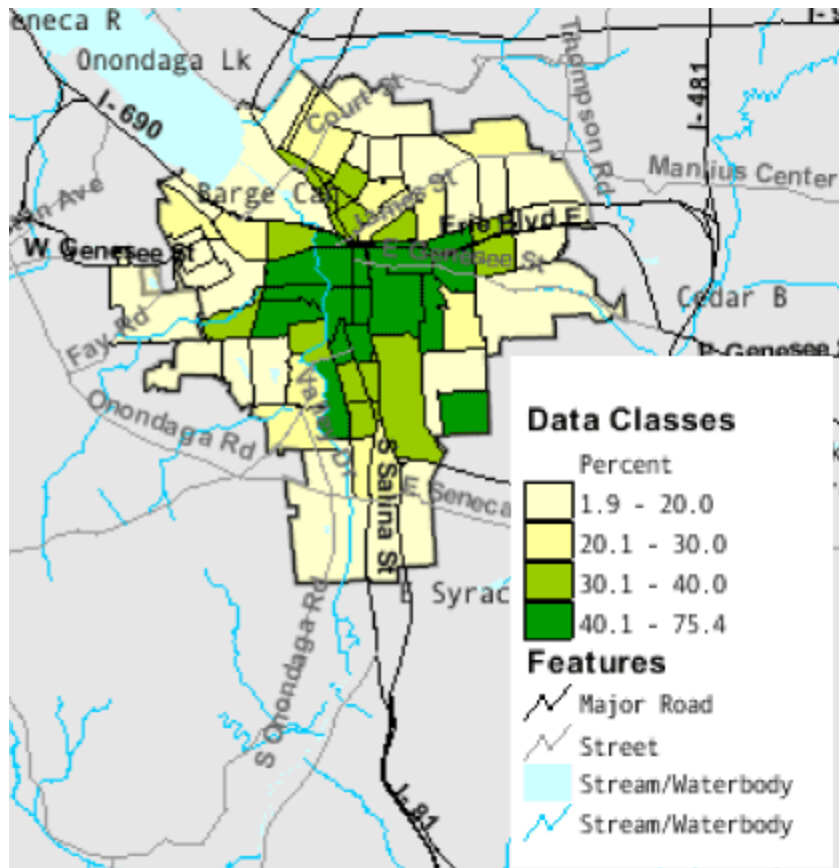
## **growth opportunities**

- \$1 - 2 Billion in R&D flows into CNY each year
- Growing niche in renewal energy
- Partnerships with Higher Ed for Technology Transfer
- Center for Excellence points the way
- Key challenge is attracting business talent in finance & marketing
- Regional effort: City, County, Chamber, MDA



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# concentrated poverty



- 21 percent of Syracuse's census tracts are "extreme poverty" tracts (> 40% poverty rate)
- 20 percent of the City's population lives in these tracts

# wealth creation: neighborhoods

- Begins with the schools
- Entrepreneurial/ financial/ lifelong education
- Recognizing and exploiting opportunities:
  - Historic rehabilitation==>building trades
  - Underserved markets==>neighborhood business
- Recirculate dollars within the community
- Whitman School provides immediate opportunity



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# **environmental overview:**

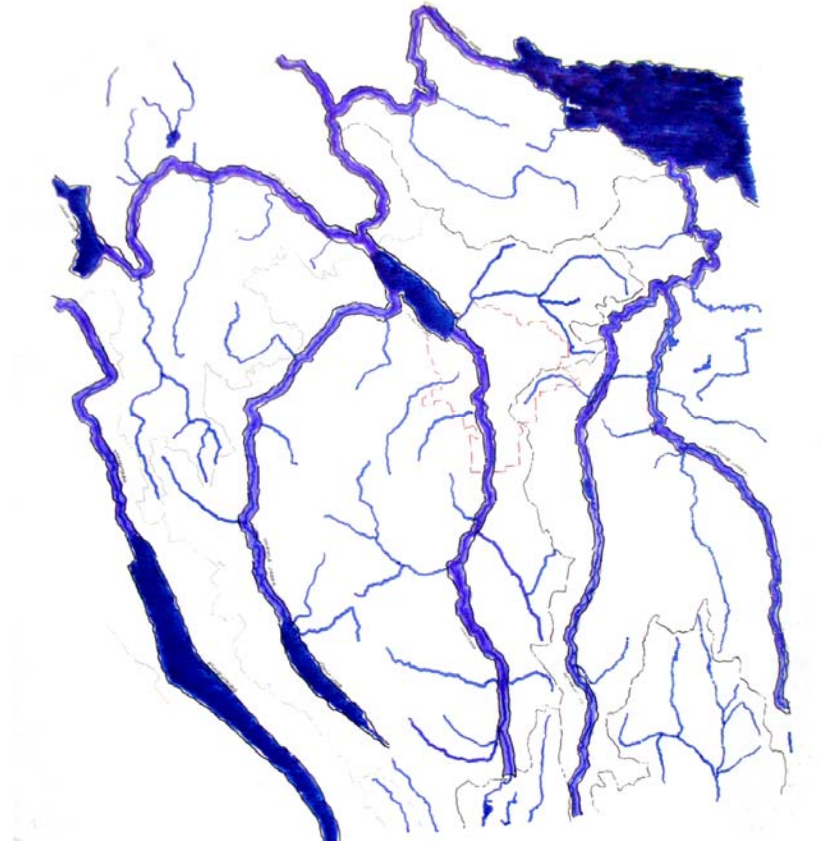
Hills . Water . Air . Food . Energy . Waste . Learning



# One ecosystem: *many components*

## Waterways and Watersheds

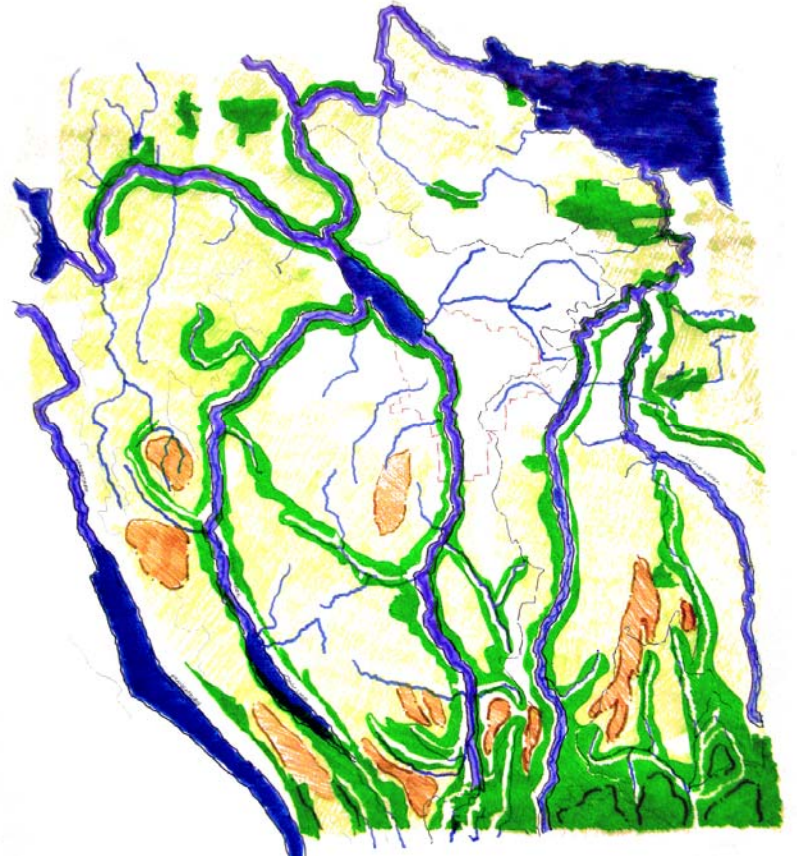
- Lake Ontario Plains
- Drumlin Fields
- Northern uplands of the Appalachian Plateau
- Part of the “finger lakes” waterway system
- 8 River Basins and Watersheds
- Onandoga River Valley and wetlands
- Filters, Habitat, Stormwater Catchment,



# One ecosystem: *many components*

## Hills and Forests

- Transition from 1850'+ to 500'
- Regional Forests to a Delta
- Forests to Riparian Corridors
- CO2 Banks, Biofilters, Habitat
- Agriculture and Animal Husbandry
- Great Vistas, Recreational Opportunities, Psychological Recharge



# One ecosystem: *many components*

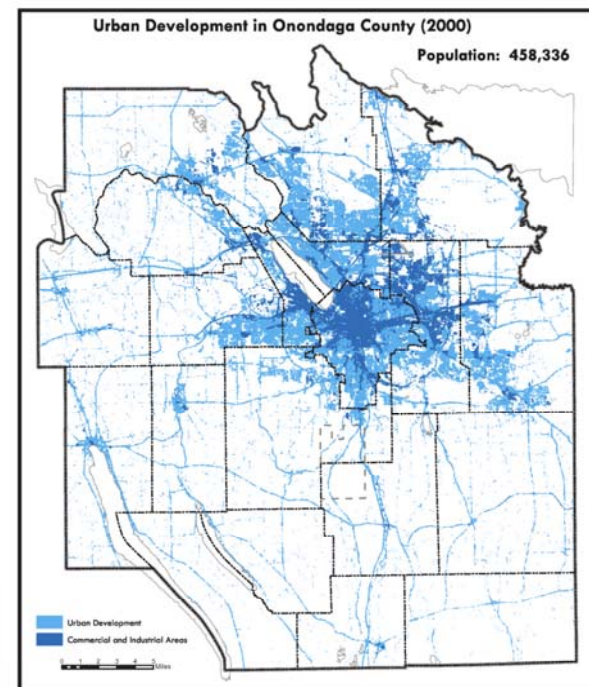
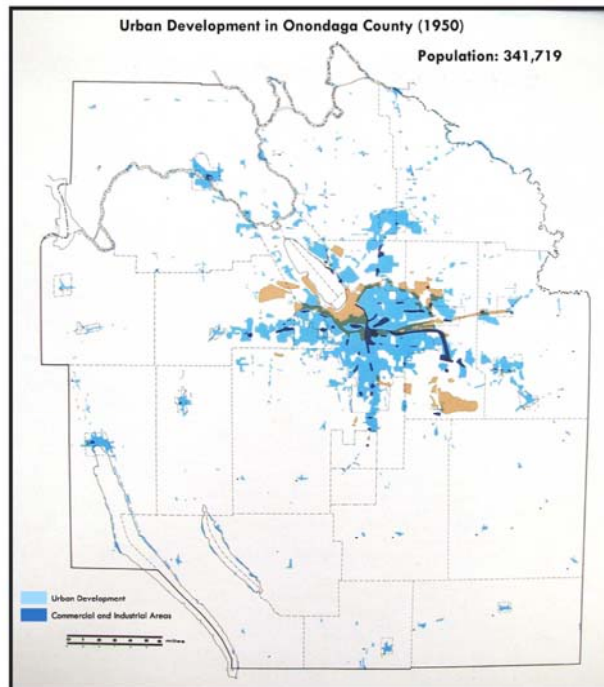
## Places and Passages

- Urbanized Core
- Erie Canal
- Network of Railroads
- Crossroads of Regional and National Highways
- Network of County and Local Roads
- National Airport
- Well-connected, efficient, diverse





# Paving of the Ecological Infrastructure

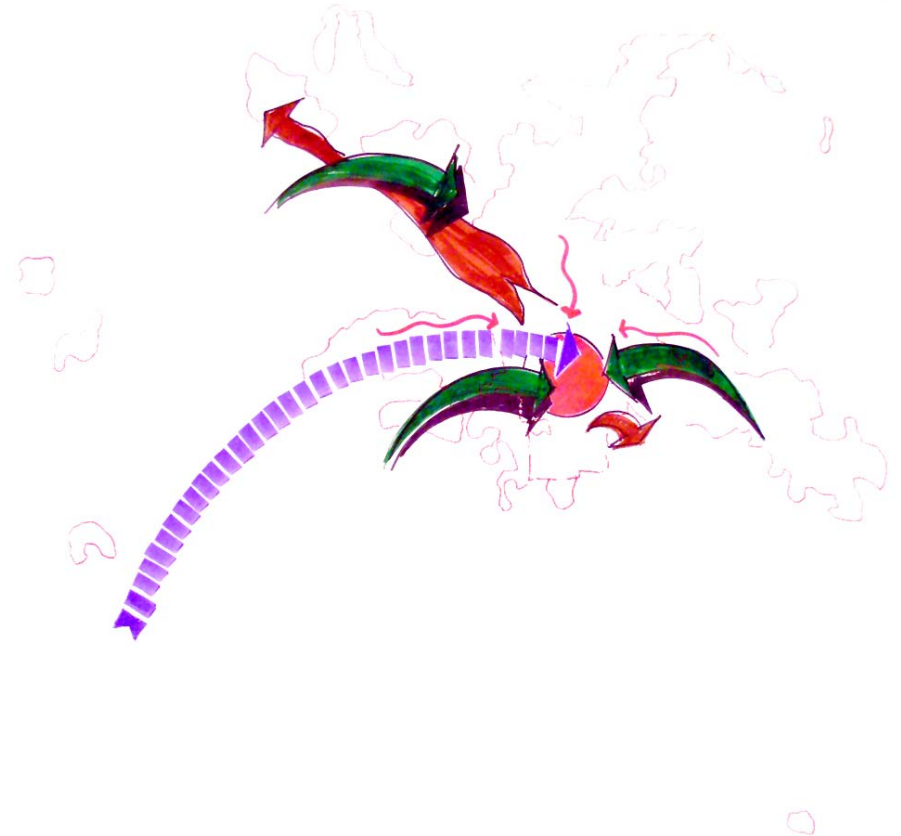


# Past Paradigm: *Control and Conquer*

## Resource to Waste

- Skaneateles Water to households
- Farms to Landfill (Seneca)
- Urban run-off and sewage to Onandoga River to Onandoga Lake to Lake Ontario
- Urban Waste to Onandoga County Resource Recovery Agency Waste to Energy Plan

## Cultural and Job Center

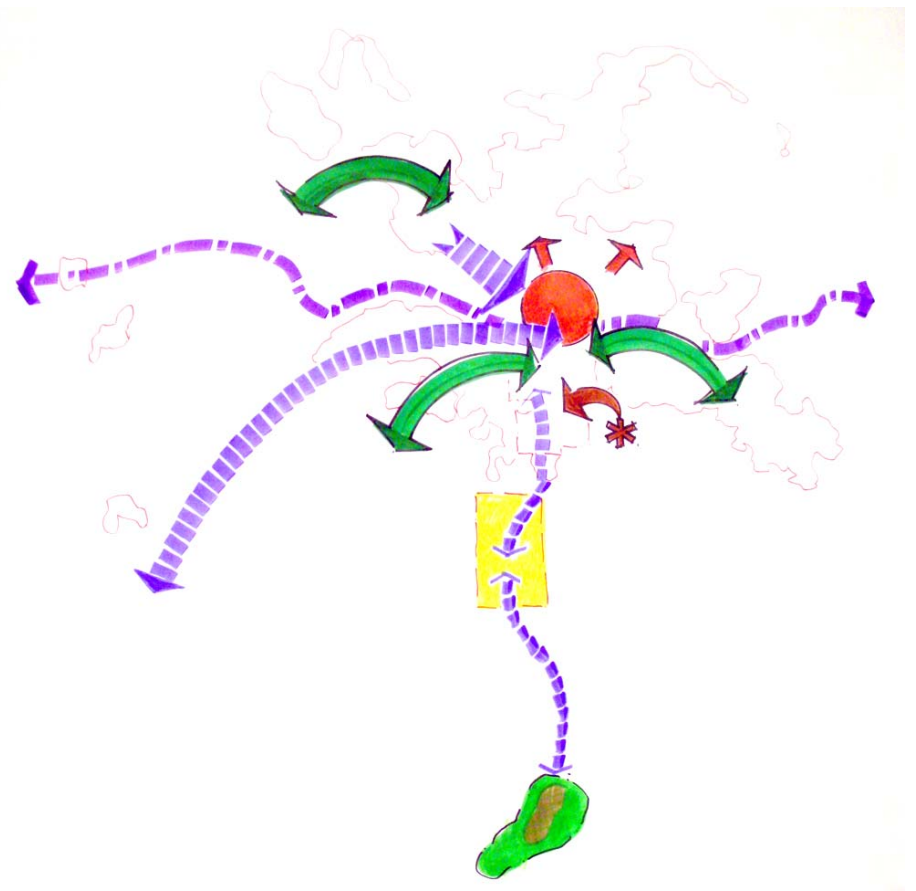


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# New Paradigm: *Connections and Conservation*

## Natural-Cultural Linkages

- Unite Regional Lakes
- Mountains to Lakes Trails
- Cultural Core Outreach



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# New Paradigm: *Connections and Conservation*

## Erie Canal Interpretive Trail

- Re-create historic trail through modern interpretations
- Connect Rural, Suburban and Downtown Core
- Link to key target development areas (Center For Excellence, Intermodal etc.)
- Create gateways, events



# New Paradigm: *Connections and Conservation*

## Onondaga Lake Recreational and Rehabilitation Master Plan

- Build upon current clean-up
- Connect to State Fair Grounds
- Link to existing trails
- Plan for passive and active recreation





# New Paradigm: *Connections and Conservation*

## Onandoga River Basin Cultural Master Plan

- Consolidate vacant property
- Link to institutions
- Link to available funding
- Build upon destinations
- Strategically rehabilitate creek's edge to natural state
- Reconnect the Iraquois nation to Onandoga Lake
- Make this an opportunity for learning



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# New Paradigm: *Connections and Conservation*

## Energy Re-Sourcing

- Farms to City to Farms Initiatives
- Waste to Energy (Urban and Rural)
- Water Conservation and Health
- Energy Efficiency



**recommendations:**



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***partnerships and policies***



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# ***partnerships and policies***

## **Partnerships / Governance**

- Establish Implementation Task Force
- The City and the County must work hand in glove to align priorities / mandates
  - Regular partnership meetings with Mayor / Planning Director and County Executive / County Planner
  - Inspirational and success story speakers: Leaders of other communities
- Re-establish clear Planning and Zoning functions within Community Development Department
- Create formal site plan review / approval process within the City
- Create “One-Stop Shop” for permitting, information, available parcels for redevelopment, incentives/subsidy information – Hire expeditor



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# ***partnerships and policies***

## **Partnerships**

- Marketing and Branding – local, regional and institutional – stop feeling sorry about yourselves and start selling yourselves !
- USE your Public Access Channel
  - Housing Assistance Program
  - Public Meetings
  - Council Meetings / Planning Commission / County Commissioner
  - Bus System / Special shuttles, etc.
  - Communicate the agencies and plans that are underway and have been done



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# ***partnerships and policies***

## **Policies**

- The Zoning Code must be simple and easy – should be the rule not the exception – less overlay zones and variances
- Create consolidated City / County GIS System and regional system all needs to work together – get it organized and coordinated
- More police presence
- Develop and adopt appropriate area plans e.g. the University Hills Plan currently underway



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# ***policies and partnerships***

## **Policies**

- Create Policy on Abandoned Land
  - Complete Inventory of the properties that are:
    - Tax delinquent
    - Abandoned
    - Deteriorated - Safety threat
  - Identify parcels / clusters for reinvestment
  - Establish criteria for transfer / disposal – long term benefit, not short term \$
  - Led by Community Development or URA
- Create Design Guidelines / Design Review Mechanism (longer term)





# ***the connective tissue***



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# ***connective tissue***

## **Transport Systems**

**...now is the time...**

- Roadways:
  - Be a leader in major investments to come in the interstate system
  - Preserve regional connectivity while balancing local access:  
I-81 as grand boulevard



# ***connective tissue***

## **Transport Systems**

**...now is the time...**

- Transit:
  - Begin work on a national, super-regional, and local commuter rail system – regional multi-modal station in Downtown/University Hills Districts
  - Begin work on long range plan for CENTRO – land use / transport connections
  - Consider smaller buses – more frequent headways
  - Create new transit maps – assure easy use and availability on internet and in buses, libraries
  - Consider smart car/zip car possibilities
  - ECO Pass: transit passes for employees, lower cost to employee



# ***connective tissue***

## **Transport Systems**

**...now is the time...**

- **Bikeways/Trails/Recreation:**
  - Continue implementing the local trails and bikeways plans
  - Continue regional coordination
- **Pedestrian Environment:**
  - Everyone is a pedestrian at some point in any journey
  - Make the pedestrian environment a priority

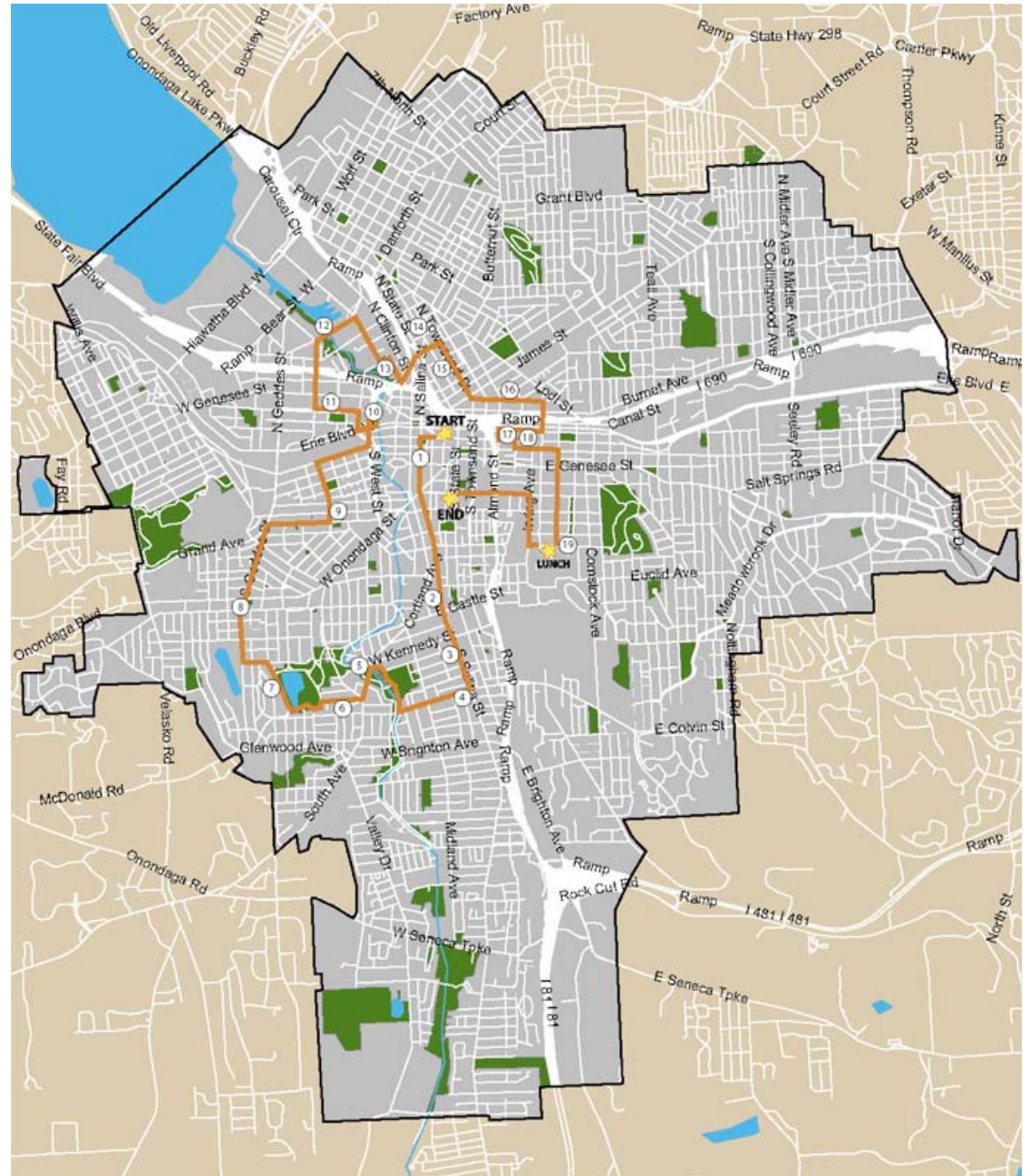


*the physical setting*

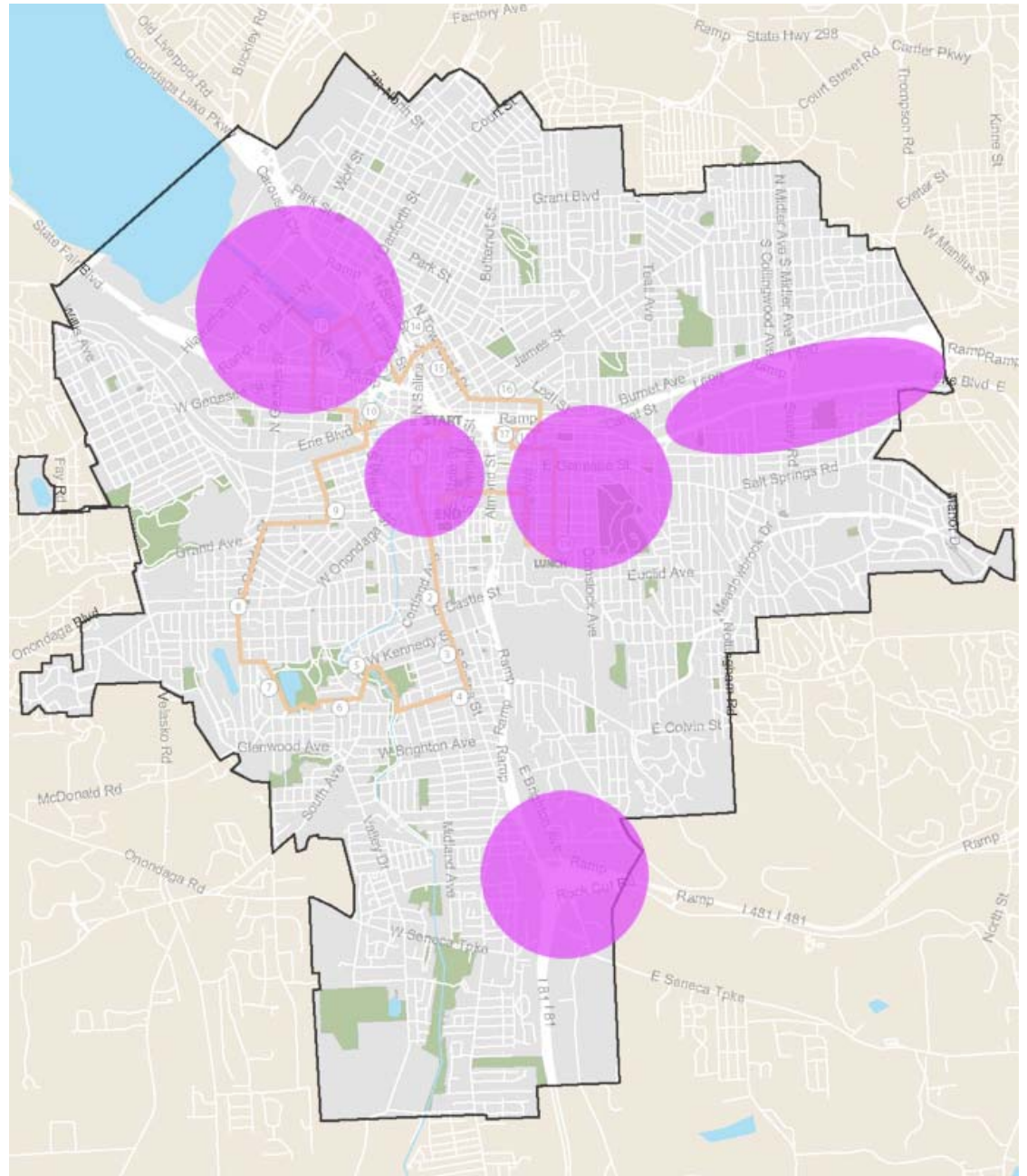


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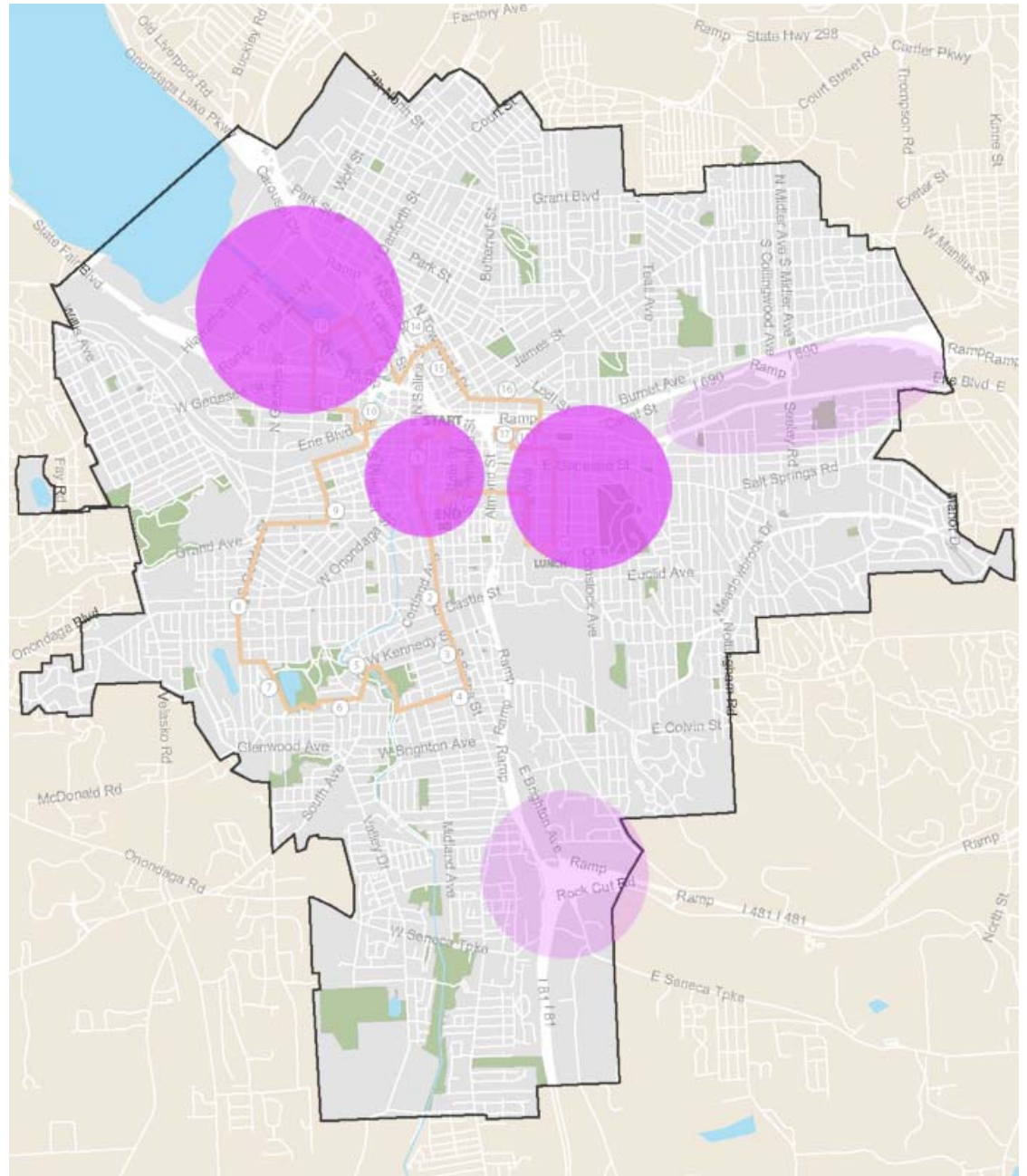


**city of syracuse**



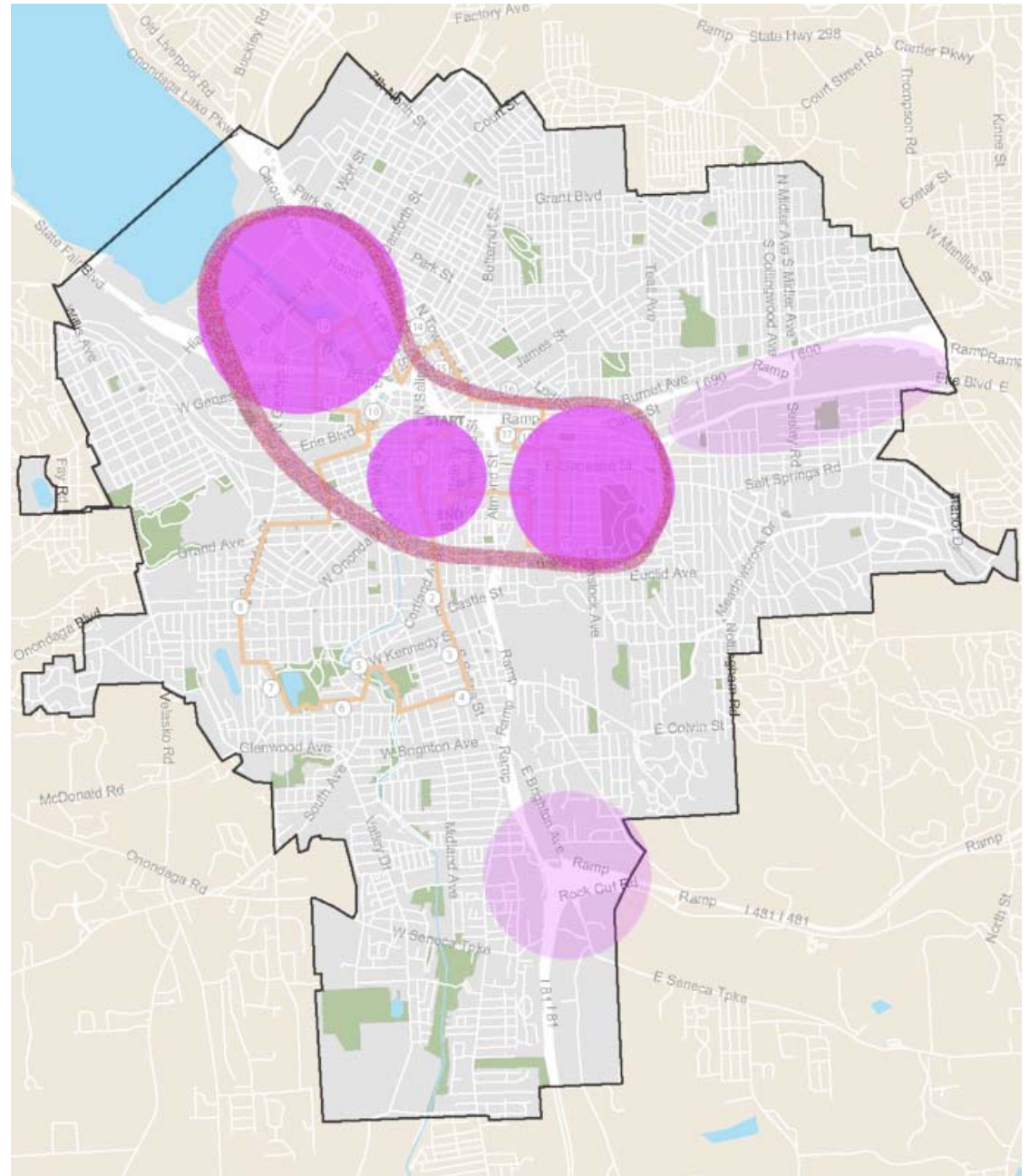
**2005 comprehensive plan**

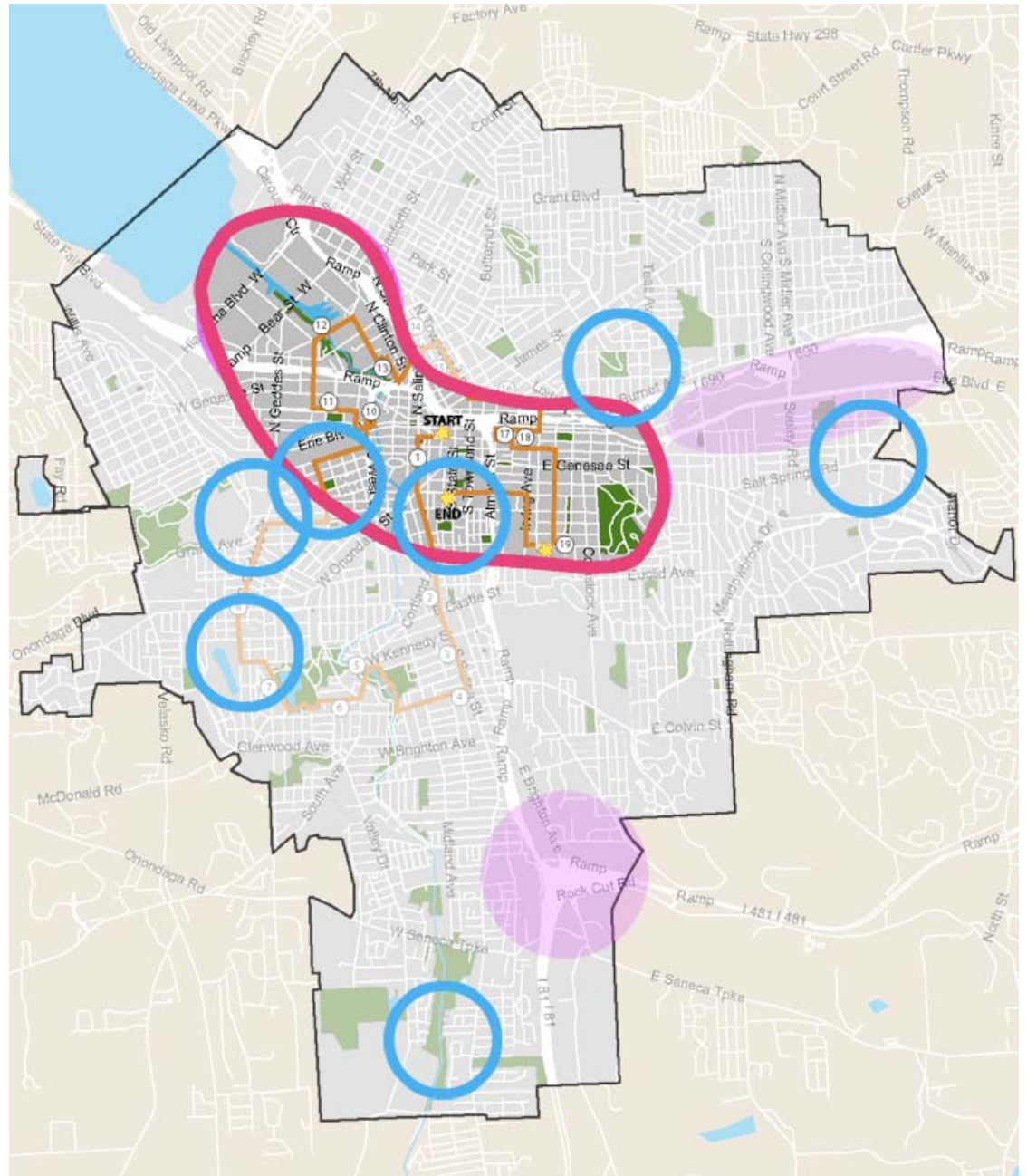




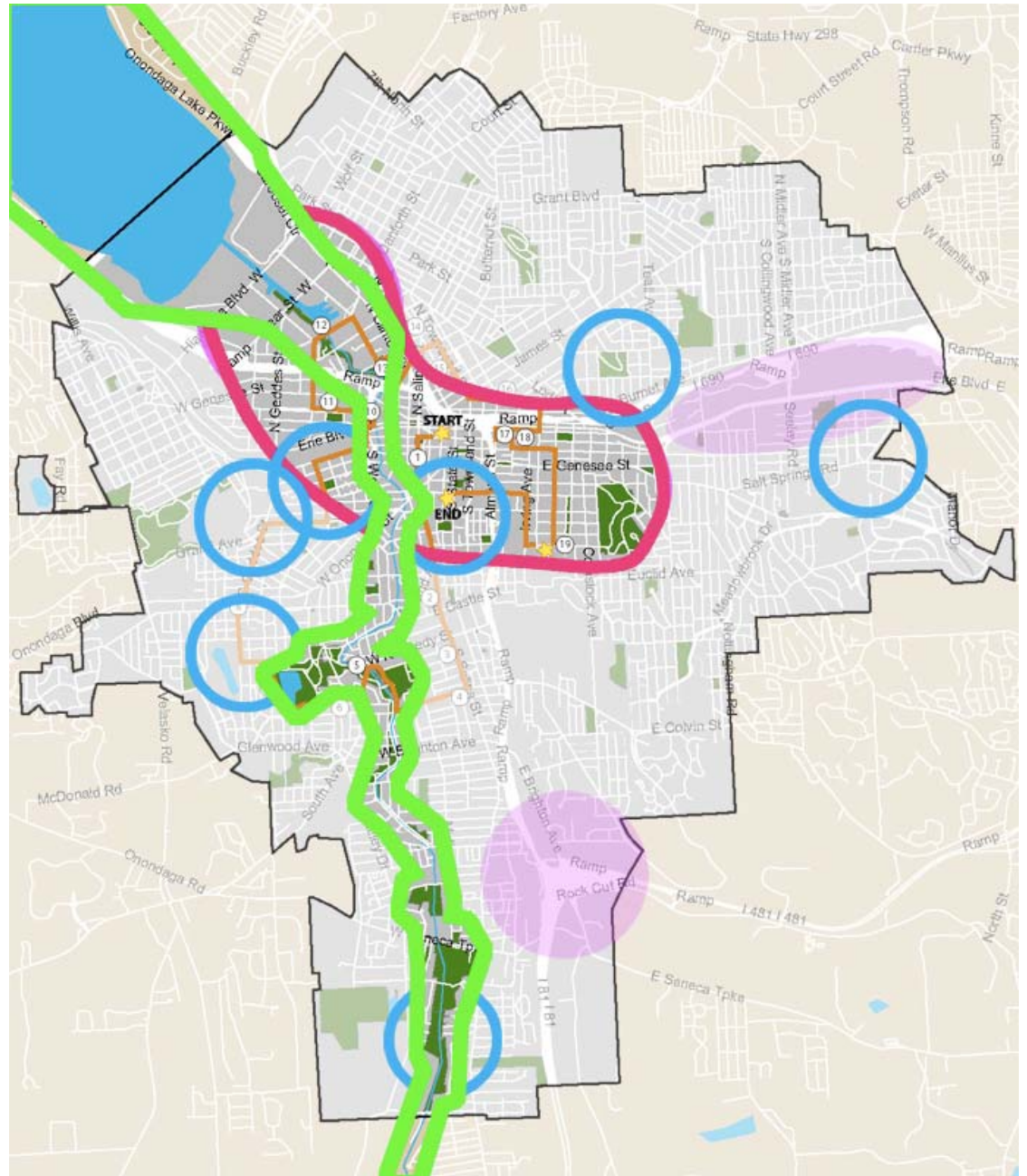
**2005 comp plan: adjusted**











# ***the physical setting***

## **Local Planning**

- Complete a Lake Onondaga Land Use Plan
- Complete an Onondaga Creek Land Use Plan



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# *the physical setting*

## **Focused Investment Zones (FIZ)**

- **Downtown Core**
- **University District**
- **Lakefront**
- **Neighborhood Investment Zones**



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# ***the physical setting***

## **Focused Investment Zones (FIZ)**

### ***Downtown Core***

- **Build Upon the Strengths:**
  - Heart of the Region
  - Historic Districts
  - History
  - Cultural Center
  - Convention Center
  - Infrastructure



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# *the physical setting*

## Focused Investment Zones (FIZ)

### *Downtown Core*

- **Invest in Your Future:**
  - Nodes and Corridors: Areas around 2 Historic Districts, Salina Corridor
  - Downtown living: Artists, DINKS, empty nesters, students
  - Convert one way streets to two way



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# *the physical setting*

## **Focused Investment Zones (FIZ)**

### ***Downtown Core***

- **Invest in Your Future:**
  - Gateways: Adams, Genesee, others
  - Boulevards at the edges – I-81, Adams, West Street Arterial,
  - Parking Management Strategy
  - Transit passes for employers, parking cash-outs (Program)



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# *the physical setting*

## **Focused Investment Zones (FIZ)**

### *University Hill*

- **Build Upon the Strengths:**
  - Higher Education: SU, SUNYC, Upstate Medical University
  - Hospital District: Crouse, University, VA, Children's Hospital,
  - Center of Excellence
  - Genesee – The Connective Corridor



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# ***the physical setting***

## **Focused Investment Zones (FIZ)**

### ***University Hill***

- **Invest in Your Future:**

- Nodes and Corridors: Genesee Connective Corridor, Center for Excellence
- Regional Multi-Modal Center
- Mixed Use Infill: Kennedy Square Site
- Living: Artists, DINKS, Empty nesters, students, researchers
- Employment: Mixed use infill along the Connective Corridor – Medical office Buildings, support research to the University



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# ***the physical setting***

## **Focused Investment Zones (FIZ)**

### ***Lakefront***

- **Build Upon the Strengths:**
  - Lake Onondaga
  - Marina
  - Regional waterway access
  - Regional transport access
  - P&C Stadium
  - Vacant land



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# *the physical setting*



## **Focused Investment Zones (FIZ)**

### *Lakefront*

- **Invest in Your Future:**
  - Nodes and Corridors: Onondaga Creek Portal, land around the marina
  - Complete Area Plan
  - Partner with State to find developer for marina area
  - Mandate significant public access to lakefront
  - Maintain / improve transit/trail access
  - Work w/ surrounding jurisdictions for holistic access plan



# ***the physical setting***

## **Focused Investment Zones (FIZ)**

### ***Neighborhood Investment Zones***

- **Build Upon the Strengths:**
  - Bond initiative: District-wide Reconstruction Project
  - Great Bones:
    - Building stock
    - Existing infrastructure
    - Lot, block, topography



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# ***the physical setting***

## **Focused Investment Zones (FIZ)**

### ***Neighborhood Investment Zones***

- **Invest in Your Future:**

- Nodes and Corridors: Schools as community centers, Onondaga Creek Corridor
- Citizen and civic leader partnership in regeneration of the neighborhoods: TNT or Neighborhood Organizations
- Schools:
  - lifelong learning: home buying, finance, technical training – partnerships with employers and institutions
  - before and after school programs
  - consolidation of pre-K
  - community gathering places



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# *the physical setting*

## **Focused Investment Zones (FIZ)**

### *Neighborhood Investment Zones*

- Invest in Your Future, can't
  - Homes:
    - Rehabilitation of Homes around the schools
    - ¼ mile radius, perhaps start with Phase I schools



# *the physical setting*

## **Focused Investment Zones (FIZ)**

### ***Neighborhood Investment Zones***

- **Invest in Your Future, con't**
  1. City take control of homes through: acquisition, tax foreclosure, condemnation
  2. City or other agency (eg non-profit developer) intermediary 'flipper' to oversee rehabilitation
  3. Skilled contractors work with unskilled / unemployed persons: on-site, gains skills to be utilized long term
  4. Potential buyers – sweat equity into rehab, sense of investment



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# *the physical setting*

## **Focused Investment Zones (FIZ)**

### ***Neighborhood Investment Zones***

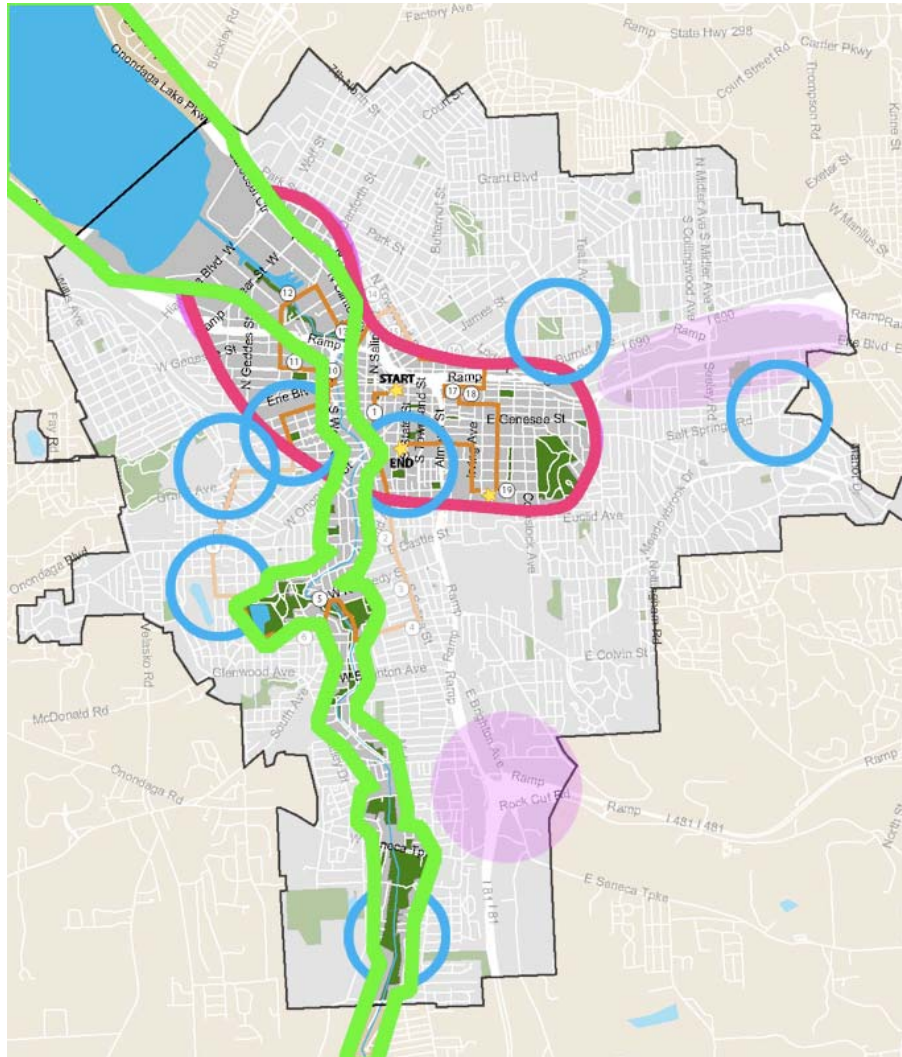
- Invest in Your Future, con't

*= Rehabilitated neighborhoods at key locations -  
catalytic public / private partnership success stories  
that initiate future investment*



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# *the physical setting*



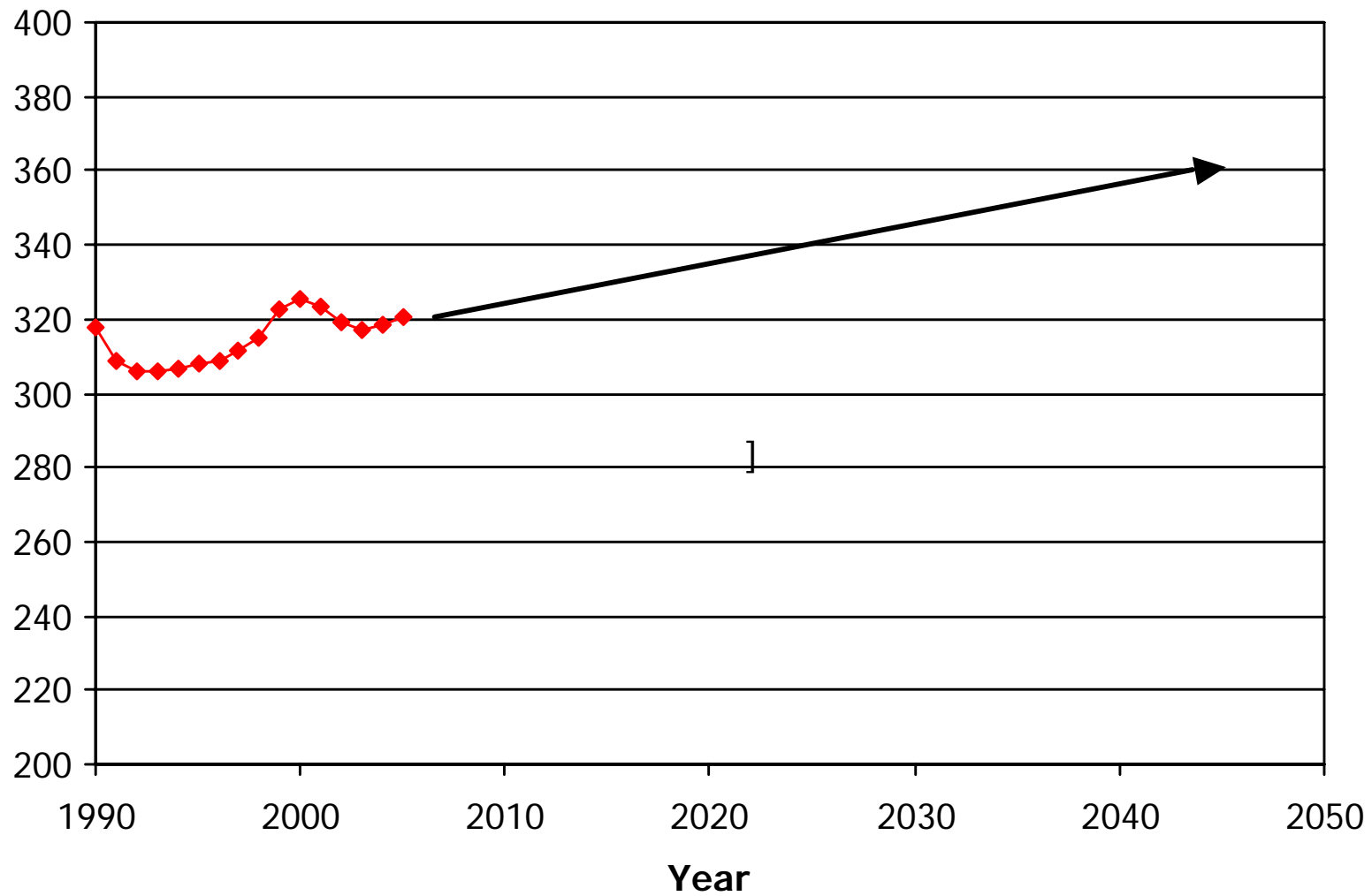
**wrap up**



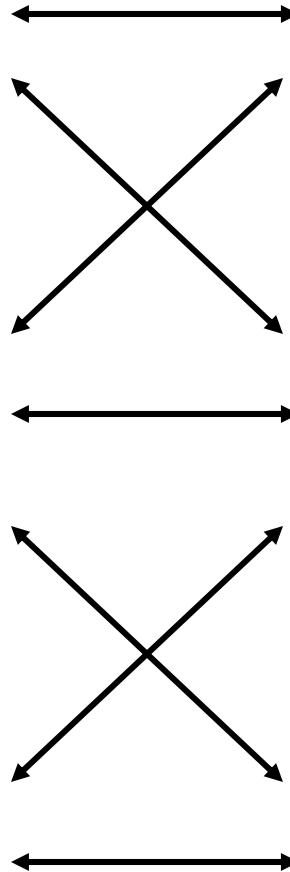
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**sustainable environment**



**growing economy**



**partnerships**





**education**



**social equity**





**strong community**

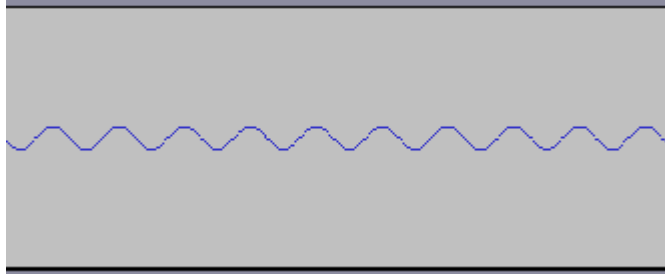
**sustainable system**



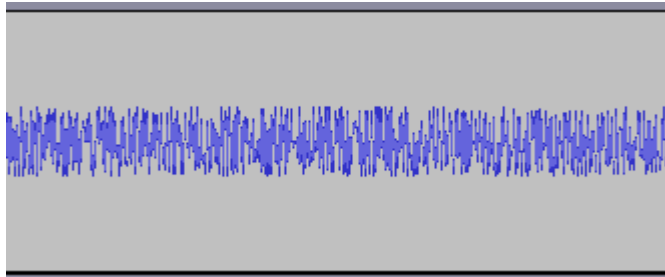




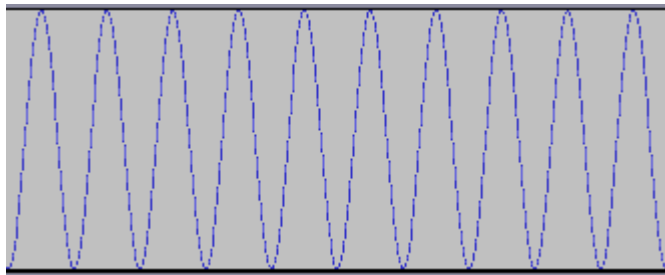
**implementation**



Community energy



Destructive energy creates white noise



Coordinated energy creates ***resonance***



**strategic, disciplined, consistent,  
cogent voice**

**create a task force now:**

city/county/citizen/design/media



**build clocks**



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# AIA Center for Communities by Design: Contact Information

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