African American
HISTORICAL CORRIDOR
A STUDY ON HISTORICAL ELEMENTS, EXISTING CONDITIONS & CONCEPTUAL DESIGN THROUGH THE LENS OF ECONOMIC & NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

A LANDMARK SOCIETY OF WESTERN NEW YORK PROJECT

DEVELOPED IN CONJUNCTION WITH CLARK PATTERTON LEE
“HISTORY IS A CLOCK THAT PEOPLE USE TO TELL THEIR TIME OF DAY. IT IS A COMPASS THEY USE TO FIND THEMSELVES ON THE MAP OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY. IT TELLS THEM WHERE THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY ARE.

- John Henrik Clarke
noted author of African American literature
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Through the process of community meetings, listening sessions and committee groups, The Landmark Society of Western New York has identified four areas deemed appropriate for the study. These areas are Joseph Avenue, Clarissa Street in the Corn Hill Neighborhood, the PLEX Neighborhood and Caledonia-Mumford. Two additional areas focus on either current or former homes identified as being historically significant. The Hamm House at 301 Adams Street and the Douglass/Sprague House at 271 Hamilton Street are the residences chosen. The following report focuses on both historical analysis as well as current site conditions. A conceptual recommendation for each location has been developed to promote the history of African Americans in Rochester. Additionally, neighborhood and economic redevelopment were key factors in the outcomes.
Historic Clarissa Street
Corn Hill Neighborhood
Clarissa Street (High Street, Caledonia Street):

Clarissa Street lies to the western edge of the well-established Corn Hill Neighborhood in downtown Rochester, New York. Originally known as the Third Ward, Corn Hill is the city’s oldest established neighborhood. Once known as the ‘Ruffled Shirt District’ or the ‘Silk Stocking District’ some of Rochester’s first and wealthiest settlers established homes in the area. Characterized by its hill shaped landscape; desired for its sanitary abilities (downhill drainage). The area in the early 1800’s was a mix of mansions and smaller homes. The smaller homes were occupied by the workers of the wealthy, positioned strategically amongst the mansions of their employers. Since transportation was still much of a luxury in an early developing city, the workers needed to live close to those in which they served. Its proximity to the downtown area, allowed for easy access to other amenities afforded to a developing city.

Since many of the workers for the areas affluent families were African American (many Irish as well), the Third Ward area was a logical area for them to settle in. Additionally, banks would not sell to African Americans elsewhere in the City, thus ‘driving’ them to the area. They initially settled on the edge of the Third Ward on what was then called High Street (ca. 1839). The location of High (Clarissa) Street to downtown allowed for Rochester’s’ early African Americans to find jobs in downtown restaurants, hotels, banks, etc.

High Street had become an established settlement for the areas African American community, naturally offering services and amenities for the population along this street. The cities first African American Church (African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church) served as a religious institution but also as a haven for and key stop for runaway slaves along the Underground Railroad. Frederick Douglass moved to Rochester and published his famed ‘The North Star’ paper in the basement of the Church at its original location on Favor Street (North of Troupe Street-currently 549 Clarissa Street).

As the city’s population began to grow, so did the African American population. Thanks to Douglass and the abolition of slavery, the population of African Americans extended now beyond the Third Ward. A movement of African Americans from the South leading up to and following WWI, doubled their population, coincidentally creating a bit of a housing crisis. World War 1 created many jobs and opportunities for the black population. By the mid 1920’s Clarissa Street alone had 15 black owned businesses and cities black population ballooned to 3,000. By the 1940’s there was 25 black owned businesses.

Around the 1950’s Clarissa Street had established itself as the major cultural and entertainment center for African Americans in Rochester. The street was characterized by its proliferation of popular Jazz Clubs including the former Pythodd Club, Dan’s Tavern and the Elks Lodge #91. The clubs were known for entertaining both blacks and whites and featured some of the biggest acts in Jazz at the time. Many black jazz musicians traveling to Rochester would make the Pythodd Club a must stop, regardless of their booking arrangement elsewhere in the City. Clarissa Street served as the only area for a hotel for many of the black musicians not allowed to stay in other city hotels at the time. The street thus became known as Rochester’s Broadway and is well remembered for its energetic vibe and atmosphere.

Clarissa Street has unfortunately succumbed to the Urban Renewal movement of the early 1970’S which demolished many and most of the former black owned businesses and structures. Any existing remnants of the streets historical past remain only in name and memory.
The analysis of Clarissa Street proved difficult. The street maintains little to no resemblance of its former self as a commercial, cultural and entertainment center. The street is largely residential with little defining characteristics.

For all its history, the street offers nothing to pronounce its former glory. A major component of the former street must have been its defined street edge. Lined with businesses, shops and nightclubs, the street (as research has suggested) was a bustling area. Noted not only for being a street of ‘firsts’ for the black community it was also a noted jazz hub. The vibrancy and energy with which it once exuded is nearly impossible to capture again.

It is these characteristics which made the street. Unfortunately it is without a major building intervention and economic interest that it will ever revive itself as it once was. The street, which sits in the already well-established Corn Hill neighborhood falls victim to the areas overall historic character. Since the street has been largely demolished, that character is even more difficult to see. The area reads more suburban than urban, more ‘new’ than historic. It’s difficult to suggest that this street can become the center for African American culture and activity as it once did. We can, however, bring to light and life the importance of this street for our ENTIRE city’s history.

To properly honor the history for the black community in this area as well as try to recapture its vibrancy, we feel the most fitting solution is to memorialize. The focus, now, literally becomes the street. Since we cannot rebuild completely or even repair, we need to focus on what is still left: the street. The street becomes the memorial. The street becomes the memory.

We will highlight the street with a vibrancy of murals, paintings, crosswalks and markings. We will memorialize locations by creating street lined markers, which both call out history but attempt to define the street edge once more. We will also attempt to recreate the path the original street followed by making visual markers showing its previous location. The intervention will focus the eye downwards; towards the street, rather than up at a nonexistent memory. The memory will now be the experienced directly with the street itself. Our installations will attempt to highlight a time and place but also conjure the experience. The experience of music, community and people still alive with the street itself. We hope that by memorializing the street we will inject a somber and reflective spirit. We want a pedestrian, driver or neighbor to stumble upon the street and be forced to stop. We also hope to inject color and vibrancy, currently lacking, but referencing what once was. The built environment of Clarissa Street may be gone, but its spirit and essence will remain on the street....

The African American Landmark Corridor Project presents: Clarissa Street...memorialized.
Clarissa Streets northern section offers 3 primary intersections. These areas currently lack any major presence in terms of announcing themselves as important intersections.
Clarissa Streets building density was largely removed during the 1960’s during Urban Renewal. The current Street is far less dense than the rest of the Corn Hill neighborhood.

The northern part of the street maintains some of its former commercial past, with a few buildings having appropriate street frontage and density.

New building development to the South of the Street is largely 'suburban' in its character. There are several large parking lot areas as well as larger swaths of green space. These areas offer potential space for streetscaping intervention and memorial dedication.
process
The choice of a larger, narrow paver gives the appearance of a wood floor. The design intention to create a wood floor comes from desire to provide the appearance of a stage floor. The stage floor is in reference to Clarissa Streets past as a major jazz area in the city. By using these ‘wood’ pavers we are able to conjure up the vision of its former past. The pavers also provide a more modern look. Using the patterning to our advantage, we can create the look of floor boards missing—alluding to the fact that the jazz clubs have been removed.
Painted crosswalks provide a strong visual element as well as adding vibrancy to the street. The crosswalks define street intersections and call out the importance of pedestrian traffic. Themed paintings of the crosswalk help to unify the street and give prominence certain streets.
Adams & Clarissa
intersection_exisiting

Adams & Clarissa
intersection_proposed

ZONE A - INTERMEDIATE INTERSECTION
Adams & Clarissa
intersection-existing

Adams & Clarissa
intersection-proposed

ZONE A-INTERMEDIATE INTERSECTION
Waverly & Clarissa
intersection_exiting

Waverly & Clarissa
intersection_proposed

ZONE A-INTERMEDIATE INTERSECTION
Memorial elements not only call out specific people and events but they help to create a destination point for people to visit and interact with. Simple naming elements or more powerful examples can help to evoke feelings and memories of things or people no longer in existence. Memorial elements go beyond traditional historical markers. The use of memorial elements help to create a sense of place & importance.
The intent with the memorialization of the Pythodd club is to create a new public park that attempts to recapture the mood and ambiance of the famed club. The park acts as a ‘ruin’, almost as if the building had never been demolished but slowly decayed, allowing nature to take over. Tables and chairs remain in the space and have historical facts, images, etc. etched in them. The offer seating but also an interactive element highlighting important historical figures or events.

The ‘wooden’ floor appears to be withered away and new plantings sprout up in the voids. In some areas linear lights fill in where the floor has gone away. These lights contain quotes, names or even images that become another element of the memorial.

The linear pole lights with memorial banners define the original buildings footprint and appear to be old remaining columns. The varying heights and light create a sense of new life springing up from the ruins. They also provide a strong visual to make the visitor feel they are in an endless space.
memorial

Clarissa Street was once a more prominent street that defined the Third Ward area of the City (Corn Hill). Ford Street has now taken over the major outside ring of the neighborhood and even the bridge which bears its name (formerly Clarissa Street Bridge—now Ford Street). Creating a park that ‘recreates’ the streets former path will visually reconnect the street as it once was. Situated next to the AME Zion Churches current location provides an ideal location for this memorial park. A ‘living timeline’ of events will make the area more interactive and powerful. Street trees and lighting will simulate the street edge and feeling.
clarissa street extension
historical street memorial park
PLEX Neighborhood: a Historical Riverfront Community

The analysis of the PLEX neighborhood is one that involves two distinct histories and geographies. One history speaks to the Genesee River and the other of Plymouth Avenue.

The region is rich with history since the area developed early along the Genesee as a major stopping point of transportation along the river, with Brooks Landing as a major hub of loading and off-loading. Native Americans were the first inhabitants of the region with settlements along the Rivers embankments.

Located in an area of the river that at one time was unnavigable, the region evolved to include a canal (Genesee Valley Canal till 1878) and a then a railroad. For a short period of time the area was home to a Civil War Training Camp.

We see PLEX as a blending of Rivers Edge and City Fabric. Connecting the two fields with an identity that speaks to both histories. We want to give PLEX a rebranding in terms of color and material cohesiveness. The materials will evoke the sprint of the waterfront while alluding to the significant historical makeup of the area. Clearly defining an ‘entrance’ and ‘exit’ for the neighborhood will help to mark place. The use of the A.A.L.C logo will provide a cohesive visual to that of Clarissa Street, as well as our intervention on Joseph Avenue.

Re-Connecting to Nature

The geographic location of the PLEX neighborhood within the Rochester city limits affords the community with many unique amenities and natural resources such as the Genesee River and Riverwalk Trail, a large tract of historically significant openspace along the banks of the Genesee River which had formerly been occupied as a Civil War encampment, as well as the historically significant Vacuum Oil site.

Establishing and developing linkages to these resources should be a primary focus of the neighborhood rebranding effort. Drawing focus to the historically significant sites as well as promoting the connections and access to the neighborhood’s large tracts of open space and river access through the development of unique directional and way-finding signage, pavement markings, streetscaping elements and landscape plantings should be considered.
Many tactics can create a feeling of cohesiveness and branding for neighborhoods. In order to establish a strong brand, one needs to identify the elements that make up that brand.

Activating the street for vehicular and pedestrian traffic is of upmost importance in establishing a neighborhood. A common theme for the area should be developed through the use of a strong visually defined logo, materials and signage. Adding usable features (benches, trash cans, planters, etc) will activate the street-essentially decorating it.

Basic amenities for the neighborhood are great ways to develop the branding. Benches, signage, trash cans, etc. all contribute to a well thought out identity. Encouraging residents and owners to adopt the overall brand will be a simple and easy way for furthering this process. Plantings that respond to the neighborhoods color scheme allow residents and business owners to take part in the redevelopment process. Historical markers and directional signage with the branding elements offer feelings of safety and destination points for those visiting.

Vacant lots can also offer areas of quick and immediate intervention. Developing community gardens or pop up seasonal markets turn unused land into programmatic usable space. Activating vacant lots can turn undesirable real estate into areas of opportunity. Providing park areas for sitting or gathering will contribute to the areas overall sense of welcoming and community. While these areas may not be permanent they become proactive areas for future development.

We envision the PLEX neighborhood taking advantage of their historical past as a transportation/industrial hub as well as their current riverfront natural features. Developing their brand as one that’s part industrial part natural will give the area a new identity. Using natural materials with modern design will create an identity for the neighborhood as one that’s part commercial part nature.
Significant Vacant Lots/Areas for Intervention (i.e. pocket parks, community gardens, etc.)

Intersections to receive PLEX Amenities (i.e. benches, trash cans, signage, etc.)

Areas where historically significant signage will be placed, highlighting African American history, businesses and other PLEX specific history.

Directional Signage with Branding to link Plymouth Ave with Riverwalk. Signage will attempt to provide strong visual down Plymouth while directing/indicating the River front amenities.

Vacuum Oil Brownfield Opportunity Area

Riverwalk Trail

University of Rochester Student Housing
The PLEX Neighborhood has an identity crisis. The neighborhood does not formally announce itself in terms of its ‘boundaries’. A tactic of creating a visual (and actual) gateway marking entrance will help to establish the neighborhood as an area. The gateway elements also provide the first opportunity to introduce the branding elements (materials, logo, colors, etc.).

Strategically chosen away from the Ford Street roundabout to more formally and officially announce Plymouth Ave as the major arterial street. Located near Carlson Commons will serve as a major area for the neighborhood. The open green space at the corner of Plymouth and Bartlett (behind Carlson Commons) can be turned into a neighborhood park, garden or other landscaped feature.

The configuration of this major intersection provides an ideal opportunity for the southern gateway. Locating this Gateway up the street from the UofR housing is strategically done. The formal arrangement of the streets convergence along with the most defined street edge along Plymouth make this intersection a wonderful area to more formally 'announce' the PLEX Neighborhood.
Upon entering the PLEX neighborhood and passing through the Gateways, the next area for intervention is the secondary intersections. These areas are essential for continuing the streetscaping elements, providing essential neighborhood amenities and directing people to specific areas in the neighborhood. Signage indicating Riverfront access will begin to reconnect Plymouth Avenue to the River.

**1. Plymouth & Violetta**

This intersection terminates at Plymouth Ave and the MLK Plaza. Streetscaping (trees) and proper signage will aid in reviving this commercial plaza. Violetta street leads directly down to the Riverwalk, making it an ideal location for directional signage. A vacant lot across from MLK Plaza provides opportunity for a seasonal public market, highlighting the food and goods offered in the plaza.

**2. Plymouth & Flint**

Flint Street acts as the major corridor to connect Plymouth Ave. with the Riverway Trail and the other initiatives surrounding the Vacuum Oil Site. Major directional signage to lead visitors and residents to the River will be of chief importance. Future interventions of Flint Street (PLEX branded signage and streetscaping) will tie in the Vacuum Oil Complex as well as the River. Important African American history occurred on Flint Street and will be highlighted at the intersection.

**3. Plymouth & Magnolia**

Although not directly connected to the Riverway Trail, Magnolia Street offers as much possibility for branding and signage as the other two intersections. Defining the corners through signage elements, specified amenities as well as painted crosswalks will help to bring cohesiveness to the overall appearance of the neighborhood.
gateway

Gateway elements physically and visually identify an area. They provide an opportunity for branding and set the tone for a first impression. Gateways offer a grand welcoming to visitors and residents.
plex gateway entrance

plymouth ave & bartlett street
PLEX Commons-Southern Gateway

To help further reinforce the southern gateway of the study area, the development of a public plaza space should be considered. The five street convergence that composes this intersection affords a prime opportunity for the development of a public plaza as a vacant lot currently occupies the prominent corner lot of Plymouth Ave. and Cottage St. Developing this lot into a vibrant plaza space through the use and repetition of unique site amenities, signage and plantings will help to articulate the neighborhood boundary as well as announce your arrival as you enter from the south.
plex historical signage & amenity elements

Millard E. Latimer & Son Funeral Directors, Inc. & various locations throughout PLEX
Plymouth & Magnolia
intersection_existing

Plymouth & Magnolia
intersection_proposed
PLEX Community Garden

Community gardens can successfully engage and unite community members of a neighborhood by generating a sense of ownership and pride among participating residents. Urban agriculture has the additional benefits of providing local produce, encourage outdoor activity and engagement with nature while reconnecting residents with their food through hands-on interactions. Vacant or derelict parcels adjacent to multiple residential properties and or business should be considered for the development of community garden space as the adjacent residences / business will provide a level of security while also making it conveniently accessible to the community members. A community garden located at the vacant corner lot of Plymouth Ave. and Violetta St. would place a community garden adjacent to residential properties and across the street from the existing Martin Luther King plaza while prominently displaying a source of pride and community activism along the neighborhoods primary corridor, further reinforcing the ‘natural’ amenities unique to the PLEX neighborhood.
Historic

Joseph Avenue Neighborhood

Clark Patterson Lee
Design Professionals

African American
Historical Corridor

Landmark Society
of Western New York
Joseph Avenues history as it relates to the African American community is a relatively recent one. Although infamously remembered for the 1964 race riots in Rochester, the area is now a hot bed of activity. Spear headed by the Joseph Avenue Business Association, there are many exciting initiatives ongoing in the area.

A beautifully documented vision plan developed by the Community Design Center of Rochester (formerly RRCDC) outlines a clear and bright future for the area. Given the history and on-going work in the area it is our recommendation to work within this current vision plan.

We feel creating a pocket park at the major intersection of Avenue D and Joseph Avenue would be the most sensitive and logical choice. The park would be dedicated to celebrating the well known and not so well know history of the African American community in Rochester. Specific consideration to the area’s history would be a major focus. Providing a community gathering area that celebrates the past will help to define the corner of this intersection.
HISTORIC
Caledonia-Mumford
THE BIG SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Caledonia Mumford has a rich and unique history in relation to the region’s African American History.

The region became a home to many freed slaves following the Civil War when labor was needed in the Caledonia farms due to the significant losses of men from the area. An unique partnership developed between Caledonia farmer and a freed slave from Culpepper, Virginia. This connection, made during the War, saw 24 families migrate from Culpepper to Caledonia following the Civil War. An estimated 17 are believed to still reside in the quaint village outside of Rochester, New York.

This special history was documented in great length and detail by local Caledonia historian Jean Guthrie and several other at The Big Springs Historical Society. The research on the lineage of these 24 families is well documented however very poorly displayed. A recent visit to the museum to see this exhibit revealed a terribly inadequate display for such great work of local history.

Our recommendation is to create a permanent display of this work with equal care and beauty as the research done. The Big Springs Historical Society is an impressive museum with extensive amount of artifacts and displays. This history needs to be prominently displayed in a permanent location within the community treasure.
Facade Program

· PLEX NEIGHBORHOOD ·
facade remediation program for PLEX Neighborhood

The process of identifying the key areas to focus the study were carefully considered and determined. All the areas targeted offer wonderful opportunities to highlight their unique African American History as well as provide for economic development. One area in particular seemed to be the most appropriate for an overall intervention of bricks and mortar development, branding and history. This area is the PLEX (Plymouth-Exchange) Neighborhood.

We’ve chosen PLEX for initial bricks and mortar intervention for several reasons. The Landmark Society has key partners in the area including the PLEX Neighborhood Association and the City of Rochester, that want this type of work to be done. The geographic make up of PLEX is a well definded and manageable area for impactful change. The PLEX neighborhood has recieved some momentum recently in terms of economic and neighborhood development. Their location on the River offers prime trail and nature walking ammneties. There are current plans for improving the trailway as well as installing a playground area. The proximity to the University of Rochester has allowed PLEX residents and UofR students to become closer neighbors. Two pedestrian bridges link the areas and the university has expanded their student housing options into the neighborhood. We feel that the work being done by UofR in the area would compliment the work we are proposing for PLEX.

The PLEX neighborhood offers the most 'commerical' type buildings and properties than the other areas surveyed. The areas residents and business owners are eager to improve upon their neighborhood. The Ghandi Institute, among others, have established themselves as an invaluable assets to the community. They are offering educational programs for residents and students.

Establishing a facade rehabilitation program would be a very simple and visual expression of improvement and development. This type of bricks and mortar investment cleans up the look of both the buildings and the neighborhood. We feel this type of work would help to spur the other initiatives we’ve proposed. We’ve targeted around 10 commerical buildings that would be eligible for this type of program. We envision the facade program as a two-fold program. On one hand, certain buidlings facades would only need to be repaired and 'cleaned' up. Repairing fascia/cornices, addressing brick condition and re-painting would be elements of this type of remediation. Other buildings would be repaired in order to bring back a more historically appropriate and proper commerical aesthetic. Repairing and improving storefronts, exterior lighting and proper signage would all be addressed.
The buildings shown on these two pages are the roughly 10 buildings we think are ideal candidates for the proposed facade rehabilitation program. These mostly commercial properties compliment the other work/initiatives proposed in the report. Repairing and improving the look of these buildings would be the initial work done in the neighborhood. Signage, branding and other elements would be complimentary.
Rough Facade Rehabilitation Cost:

- Selective Demolition: $5,208.00
- Aluminum Entrances/Storefront 40%: $27,760.00
- Aluminum Windows: $11,880.00
- Brick Facade & backup wall: N/A
- Brick Restoration: $102,240.00
- Painting & Finishes: $8,908.00

TOTAL: $155,996.00*

1013 Plymouth Ave S

Rough Facade Rehabilitation Cost:

- Selective Demolition: $9,072.00
- Aluminum Entrances/Storefront 70%: $84,640.00
- Aluminum Windows (2nd Floor): $11,160.00
- Brick Facade & backup wall: $13,968.00
- Brick Restoration: $22,500.00
- Painting & Finishes: $16,250.00

TOTAL: $157,592.00*

1155 Plymouth Ave S

Rough Facade Rehabilitation Cost:

- Selective Demolition: $22,140.00
- Aluminum Entrances/Storefront: $126,720.00
- Aluminum Windows: N/A
- Brick Facade & backup wall: $85,536.00
- Brick Restoration: N/A
- Painting and Finishes: $20,196.00

TOTAL: $254,592.00*

761-793 Plymouth Ave S, MLK Plaza
Facade Program Overview

**Commercial Buildings-Estimage Breakdown**

- Selective Demolition: assumes $6 per sf
- Aluminum Entrances and Storefront: assumes $80 per sf
- Aluminum Windows (2nd floors): assumes $60 per sf
- Brick Facade and Backup Wall (includes mtl. stud, insulation and drywall): assumes $36 per sf
- Brick Restoration (Repoint & Repair): assumes $45 per sf
- Painting and Finishes (Exterior Paint & General Flooring): assumes $8.50 per sf

*Price estimate does not include Electrical/Mechanical work and Design fees. Contingency (10% typical) is also not included.

**Price considers prevailing wage rates**

**Residential Buildings: Estimate range per house $10,000-$15,000** (varying square footages & conditions)

Facade Program to target the (10) Commercial Buildings First Floor retail improvements
(Entrances & Storefront, Brick Restoration, Brick Facades (new), Painting & Finishes).

Estimated $50,000 per structure (average cost depending on level of work).