

Tonawanda Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) Public Workshop Summary – Thursday, May 16, 2024

I. Meeting Overview

On Thursday, May 16, 2024, three workshops were held for the Tonawanda Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI), including one public workshop and two targeted workshops:

1. Workshop with senior citizens and residents of the Tonawanda Towers affordable housing complex from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM at the Tonawanda Senior Citizens Center at 35 Main Street, Tonawanda, NY 14150. There were eight participants.
2. Workshop with middle school and high school students from 1:00 PM to 2:30 PM at the Tonawanda Middle/High School located at 600 Fletcher Street, Tonawanda, NY 14150. There were 15 participants.
3. Public workshop from 5:30 PM to 7:00 PM at the Tonawanda Middle/High School located at 600 Fletcher Street, Tonawanda, NY 14150. There were 23 participants.

These meetings were promoted through a variety of channels, including press releases, flyers posted around the community, targeted outreach to residents of Tonawanda Towers and patrons of the Senior Citizens Center, Local Planning Committee (LPC) member networks, and the Tonawanda DRI Facebook page and community Facebook groups. Middle and high school student participants were recruited by the Tonawanda Middle/High School principal. A total of 37 residents and stakeholders participated across the three workshops.

These workshops consisted of a short presentation explaining the DRI planning process followed by an individual vision and goals exercise and a group mapping exercise to identify issues and opportunities within the DRI area. Throughout the workshops, DRI project team members were present to assist and guide participants, answering questions related to the DRI process and encouraging participants to provide their input both on the maps and the vision and goals worksheet. At the public workshop, representatives from New York State and the Local Planning Committee were also present.

Paper copies of the Tonawanda DRI public survey as well as handouts with the Quick Response (QR) code to the online version of the public survey were distributed to participants to complete and share with those who could not attend the workshops. Following the workshops, online versions of the vision and goals exercise and mapping exercise were made available on the Tonawanda DRI website.

The themes from each workshop are summarized below.

II. Senior Citizen/Tonawanda Towers Workshop

At this workshop targeted to patrons of the Senior Citizens Center and residents of Tonawanda Towers, transportation safety was a major concern. Inaccessibility and a lack of safety on Main Street between Fletcher Street and Niagara Street was top of mind for these residents, as they walk along this street daily to run errands, shop, and attend appointments. Access ramps compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), sidewalks, and crosswalks are either in disrepair or missing. Residents also suggested improving the lighting and adding decorations and landscaping to make the streetscape more appealing. Another area of concern was the intersection of Delaware Street and Broad Street. Residents suggested that this intersection might be a candidate for a traffic circle.

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Participants also discussed the potential reuse of the vacant Rite Aid and McDonald's properties. Residents stressed that more businesses are needed to add tax revenue. One resident suggested having an Aldi's at the location of the vacant Rite Aid, as Tops is the only other grocery store within walking distance and they prefer Aldi's products. Other residents said that more restaurants are needed, especially those that serve breakfast. However, residents did not want these properties to be converted into high-rise buildings.

Participants suggested a number of parks improvements. At Niawanda Park, they wanted to see lighting along the trail, more fishing access (and potentially a breakwater to fish from), and a kayak launch. They also wanted better access to the trail from Niagara Shore Drive. They suggested enlarging the gazebo at Clinton Park, better landscaping along the south side of Ellicott Creek, and enclosing the Tonawanda Pavilion, which is not protected from the elements. They also suggested that the food truck area needs activation year-round and not just in the summer.

III. Tonawanda Middle/High School Workshop

The students found one of the strengths of the DRI area to be the small businesses along Main Street. They would like to see more small businesses and mixed-use buildings along Main Street, especially businesses such as cafes that would provide a space for teenagers to meet and socialize safely, and more restaurants instead of bars. In general, more family-friendly activities are needed. They did express concern about drug activity, especially near Tonawanda Towers. They also expressed a need for a community center for youth/teens as well as an indoor sports/recreation center and skate park. In addition, they recommended improving the landscaping and signage on Main Street.

Another strength of the area that the students identified was the location near the water. They suggested several improvements to activate the waterfront even more, including more events, such as music festivals and plays at the amphitheater in Niawanda Park, as well as a kayak launch. They also suggested planting trees along the trail to provide shade during hot summer days as well as lighting, trash cans, and more benches. In addition, they recommended fixing the seating area on the eastern end of the trail near East Niagara Street.

Students expressed concern about the general walkability and bikeability of the area. Students mentioned that the Delaware Street bridge in particular was not safe to cross. They also suggested installing bike lanes on Main Street. Several students said they would prefer to not have hotels or apartments added to the DRI area.

IV. Public Workshop

In the public workshop, participants overwhelmingly wanted to move institutional uses away from the waterfront and convert these areas to public uses. For example, participants suggested moving the Department of Public Works (DPW) facility and transforming the east side of Ellicott Creek into a "Riverwalk-like" development with a walking trail and mixed-use buildings. It was also suggested that the City Hall/Police building be moved.

Participants also wanted vacant and underutilized buildings to be reused, such as the vacant McDonald's and Rite Aid properties, vacant Armory building, American Legion building, and the upper floors of buildings on Main Street. They wanted to see infill development across the DRI area and less parking overall. Some participants wanted more downtown housing, while others wanted to see more businesses, restaurants, event spaces, and hotels.

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Additionally, participants wanted improvements to beautify the downtown area, more landscaping, and distinct downtown signage throughout the DRI area, as well as traffic safety improvements. Main Street in particular was identified as needing more landscaping, better sidewalks, and façade improvements. Niagara Street was also identified as a focus area. Several groups identified the intersection of Delaware Street and Broad Street as needing a roundabout, as well as the intersection of Fletcher Street and Seymour Street. Participants also wanted more “complete streets” and bike lanes on neighborhood streets (outside of the DRI area).

Participants wanted amenities providing better waterfront access. Specific suggestions included ADA-accessible docking on the south side of the Erie Canal, similar to the North Tonawanda side; a fishing pier on the south side of Ellicott Creek between the pedestrian bridge and the Delaware Street bridge; transient docking in Niawanda Park (west of the DRI area) or a jetty; and waterfront access near East Niagara Street. Participants also noted erosion near the mouth of Tonawanda Creek and a failing seawall near Erie Canal Plaza. Other suggested park improvements included fixing the pavilion at Erie Canal Plaza, a nature-based playground in the green triangle between Tonawanda Creek and Ellicott Creek, and bocce courts, food trucks, and concerts at Clinton Park.



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Appendix A: Feedback on Draft Tonawanda DRI Vision and Goals

Draft Vision: *Downtown Tonawanda will become a commercial and cultural hub at the confluence of the Erie Canal and Niagara River, offering a distinct blend of historical charm and modern vitality for residents, workers, and visitors of all ages. By capitalizing on its natural and built assets as a historically rich waterfront community, downtown Tonawanda will be sustainable; a vibrant place to live, work, and gather; and a unique destination to connect with history and nature.*

Draft Goals:

1. Attract new shops, restaurants, and other businesses to make downtown Tonawanda a year-round destination.
2. Embrace Tonawanda’s waterfront as a key asset that will bustle with activity for tourists and residents alike.
3. Improve walkability throughout downtown to encourage visitors to explore Main Street and Tonawanda’s trails.
4. Refresh streetscapes to make downtown Tonawanda look and feel livelier and more attractive to businesses.
5. Upgrade downtown Tonawanda’s housing stock with a diverse mix of options for all residents.
6. Celebrate Tonawanda’s rich industrial heritage through the preservation of historic buildings and cultural sites.
7. Highlight the small-town, historic feel of the city through enhancements to public spaces and amenities.

What Participants Like About the Vision:

- I think that we should definitely tie into our history because it's a fun one.
- I enjoyed that they take non-profits and other non-DRI into consideration so that they can be sure that it will be an attraction. I also liked that they take input from students and people of the community rather than building things and places that may not boom. I like that they intend on keeping our land historical.
- Connecting with our history and local (although small) ecosystems. There is so much interesting history around here that nobody knows about. I also like the fact that we should make Tonawanda more vibrant and have more areas for gathering and working.
- I like that it's going to be for all ages and a blend of modern and historical charm
- The capitalizing on its natural and built assets, and the historically rich waterfront
- I like the last sentence.
- Maintaining and showing off the historical importance of Tonawanda. Using the waterfront to get engagement.
- All of it

What Participants Felt was Missing from the Vision:

- Small-town feel, community, family, playful
- Covers everything
- It needs to make reference to recreation. Replace gather with play or recreate. Also needs a focus on community and connection. Add "recreate" to "live, work, and gather", and add "and each other" to the end of the vision statement
- Shopping district, tourism destination
- Draw for families to both visit and want to move into the area
- Missing Ellicott Creek in "the confluence of", doesn't mention waterfront access (maybe boating), should include a reference to recreation and trails, might use the word "gateway" (as in gateway harbor, gateway

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to the Erie Canal), need to redevelop suburban-style lots to be less empty and more dense, need to redevelop underutilized buildings. History/historically has three mentions?

- Clean up and revitalize Main Street and the surrounding area to give residents and others reasons to stay downtown.
- A focus on being a regional hub for events. Perhaps building infrastructure for music events and festivals could be beneficial.
- I'm envisioning a boardwalk oriented experience leading to the intermodal hub. That would involve all business' currently situated on the east side of Main Street.
- I feel we should get a facility for anyone to practice sports or just train it can have weights to get stronger.
- We could do a building for all individuals sports not just one sport like a sport training center. Kinda like a practice for people to practice their sports. But only age from like 13+
- We could improve the amount of vacant businesses and parking lots. We could use a good skatepark.
- I think we could put a skate park because the one we have is small, we could build small community gardens around the trail.
- Maybe we could add a sports training center for all sports.
- We could do a gym that has a bunch of sports in it.
- Some of the things that could be better is to make certain areas here and there stand out instead of just building on top of what is already there, re-vamping it and making it more visually appealing.
- We need to focus on what's already here like abandoned buildings and untapped resources
- I feel like it could be a little more detailed
- Not much
- I think it needs to be more of a place with activities. Some spots for kids to hang out, playgrounds, basketball courts, and somewhere to live. It's a beautiful city with lots of potential.
- I would like a place to have community and hang out without having to pay. Please more public spaces.
- An Alide's
- Safety for seniors, access to parking lot, transportation for seniors, homelessness is an issue.

What Participants Liked About the Goals

- Attendee liked goal numbers 1, 2, 3, and 7
- Covers all goals
- Walkability, embracing waterfront
- Attracting businesses is key, walkability, refresh streetscapes
- Almost everything!
- Attendee liked goal numbers 1, 2, 3
- Walkability and streetscapes
- All of them
- Refreshing the streetscapes
- Attendee liked goal numbers 6 and 7
- I like how they are going to try and make it a year-round destination for tourists.
- Attendee liked goal numbers 3, 4, and 6
- Making walkability throughout downtown
- I like that they want to make it feel more lively and bring more options for the residents

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- Embracing waterfront, attracting businesses
- I like a majority of it.
- I like all of it! We need to attract more people to our city.
- Attendee liked goal number 1 - there needs to be more things to do
- Refresh streetscapes, history, growing a Tonawanda pride
- All of them
- Attendee liked goal numbers 3 and 4

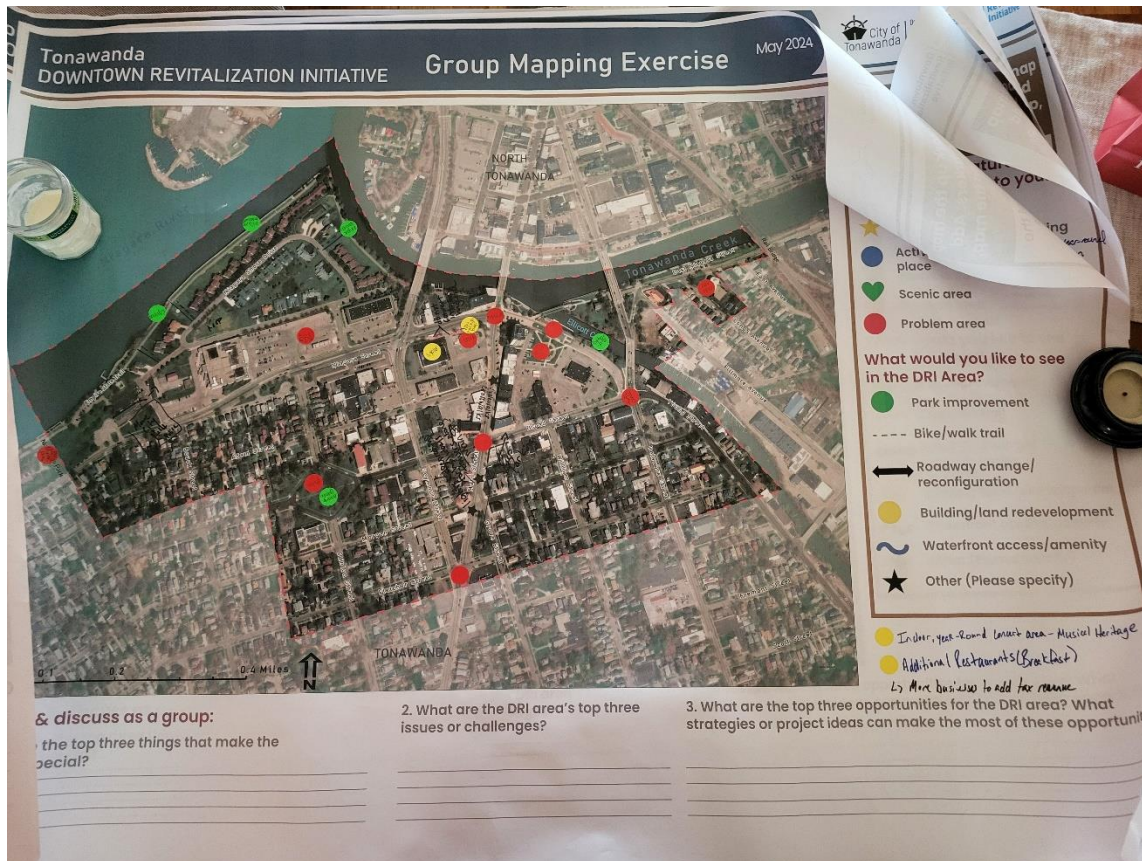
What Participants Felt was Missing from the Goals:

- Nature exposure
- Harbor accessibility
- Add enhancements to include spaces that are conducive to community programming. Need to include bikeability and safe ways to get to shoreline trail.
- Places for visitors to stay
- #4 - increasing green space around these businesses. #5 - needs to include housing for family growth not only 1 or 2 BR dwellings which do not foster growth, #7 - include some form of historical information to relate to the buildings
- Don't understand the connection / reference to industrial heritage, but heritage is important. Don't understand the connection between small-town, historic feel and public spaces.
- Converting or eliminating parking which is not only a drain on taxpayers, restrictive to business growth, and not the future!
- Better traffic flow
- I don't think anything is missing from all these goals.
- For the first one instead of bringing well known stores, bring more local things. Another thing is more places for teens to go and hang out especially during summer.
- I think they need to consider bringing colors and attractions that teenagers can engage, study, and hang out in
- Possibly adding more native plants and species to the area
- Things more geared toward teenagers, places where you can study and hang out with friends / things that aren't too expensive for teens and young adults to do.
- Fix some sidewalks, no hotels
- No hotels, please
- Please no hotels or apartments
- A place for teens to congregate
- Attract coffee shop. Bus stop improvements

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Appendix B: Group Mapping Exercise Results

Senior Citizens/Tonawanda Towers:



Tonawanda DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE Group Mapping Exercise May 2024

What would you like to see in the DRI Area?


- Active place
- Scenic area
- Problem area
- Park improvement
- Bike/walk trail
- ↔ Roadway change/reconfiguration
- Building/land redevelopment
- ~ Waterfront access/amenity
- ★ Other (Please specify)

Inherit, year-round market area - Musical Heritage
Additional Restaurants (Great Place)
↳ More businesses to add for revenue

& discuss as a group:
 1. What are the top three things that make the area special?
 2. What are the DRI area's top three issues or challenges?
 3. What are the top three opportunities for the DRI area? What strategies or project ideas can make the most of these opportunities?

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Group Mapping Exercise May 2024



Instructions: Mark the map with stickers & make notes on post-its, on the map, or in the margins.

What existing features of the DRI Area stand out to you?

- ★ Point of interest
- Activity center or gathering place
- ♥ Scenic area
- Problem area

What would you like to see in the DRI Area?

- Park improvement
- Bike/walk trail
- ↔ Roadway change/reconfiguration
- Building/land redevelopment
- ~ Waterfront access/amenity
- ★ Other (Please specify)

Consider & discuss as a group:

1. What are the top three things that make the DRI area special?

The waterfront - being right by the river
Main Street - small business scene *aside from the village drugs*

2. What are the DRI area's top three issues or challenges?

DRUGS
LACK of green space

3. What are the top three opportunities for the DRI area? What strategies or project ideas can make the most of these opportunities?

vacant areas ready to be developed
lot of visitors - events

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tonawanda DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE Group Mapping Exercise May 2024

What exists in the DRI Area stand out?

- ★ Point of interest
- Activity center or gathering place (Handwritten: Find truck area, needs something, @ Senior Center transportation, safe)
- ♥ Scenic area
- Problem area (Handwritten: 1. unsafe, need a road ramp, 2. Crosswalk w/...)

What would you like to see in the DRI Area?

- Park improvement
- Bike/walk trail
- ↔ Roadway change/reconfiguration (Handwritten: 1. widening, 2. bike trail)
- Building/land redevelopment
- ~ Waterfront access/development
- ★ Other (Please specify)

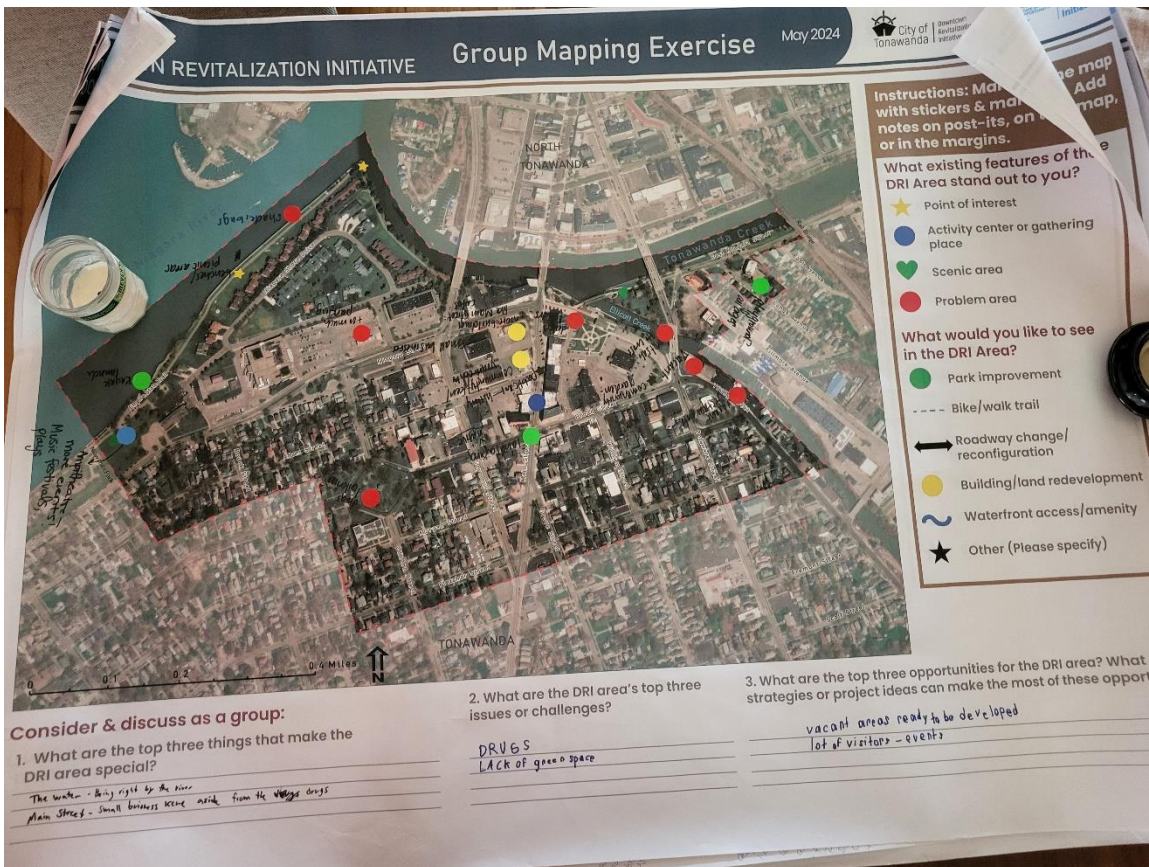
Discuss as a group:

2. What are the DRI area's top three issues or challenges?

3. What are the top three opportunities for the DRI area? What strategies or project ideas can make the most of these opportunities?

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Tonawanda Middle/High School:



Group Mapping Exercise May 2024

Instructions: Mark the map with stickers & make notes on post-its, on or in the margins.

What existing features of the DRI Area stand out to you?

- ★ Point of interest
- Activity center or gathering place
- ♥ Scenic area
- Problem area

What would you like to see in the DRI Area?

- Park improvement
- Bike/walk trail
- ← Roadway change/reconfiguration
- Building/land redevelopment
- ~ Waterfront access/amenity
- ★ Other (Please specify)

Consider & discuss as a group:

1. What are the top three things that make the DRI area special?

*The water - being right by the river
Main Street - small business scene - avoid from the village across*

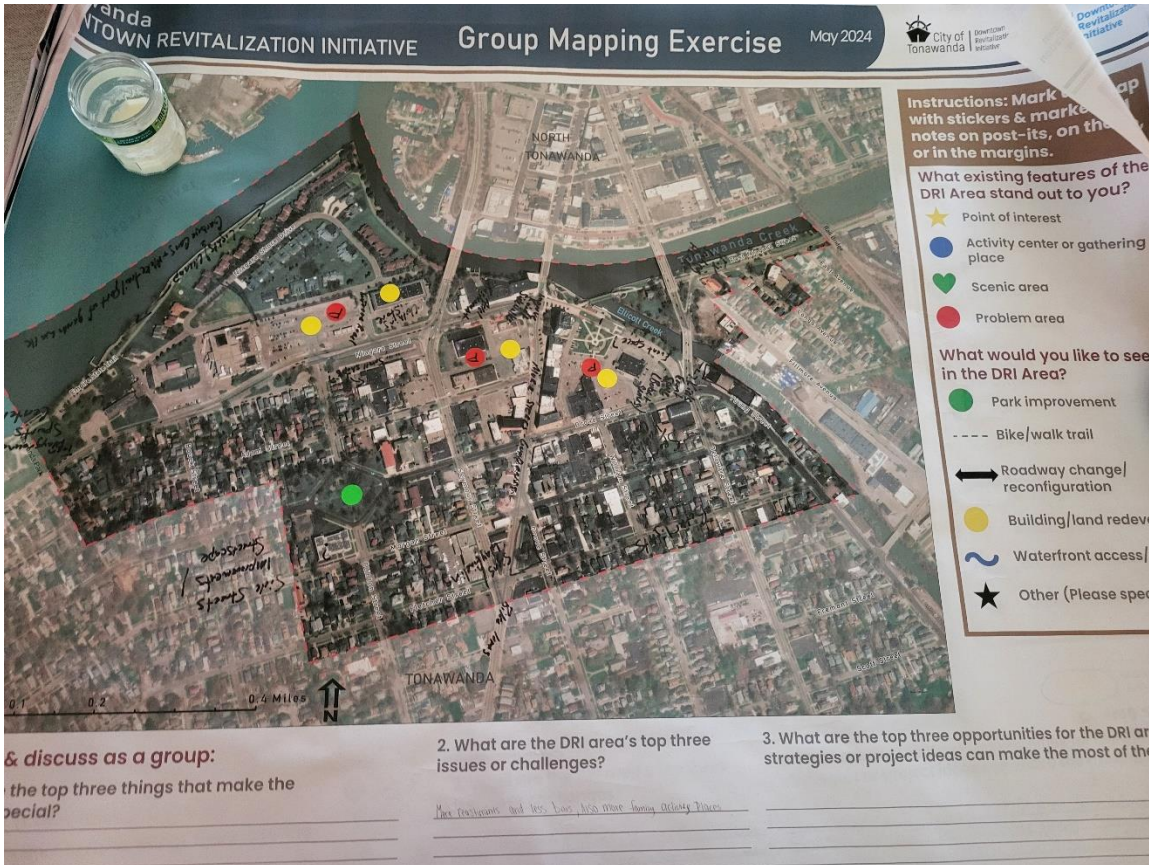
2. What are the DRI area's top three issues or challenges?

*DRUGS
LACK of green space*

3. What are the top three opportunities for the DRI area? What strategies or project ideas can make the most of these opportunities?

*vacant areas ready to be developed
lot of visitors - events*

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Group Mapping Exercise May 2024

Instructions: Mark with stickers & make notes on post-its, on the map or in the margins.

What existing features of the DRI Area stand out to you?

- ★ Point of Interest
- Activity center or gathering place
- ♥ Scenic area
- Problem area

What would you like to see in the DRI Area?

- Park improvement
- Bike/walk trail
- ↔ Roadway change/reconfiguration
- Building/land redevelopment
- ~ Waterfront access/corridor
- ★ Other (Please specify)

& discuss as a group:

1. What are the top three things that make the area special?

2. What are the DRI area's top three issues or challenges?

3. What are the top three opportunities for the DRI area? What strategies or project ideas can make the most of these opportunities?

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Public Workshop:

Tonawanda DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE
Group Mapping Exercise
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Instructions: Mark up the map with stickers & markers. Add notes on post-its, on the map, or in the margins.

What existing features of the DRI Area stand out to you?

- ★ Point of interest
- Activity center or gathering place
- ♥ Scenic area
- Problem area

What would you like to see in the DRI Area?

- Park improvement
- Bike route
- ← Road reconstruction
- Building/land redevelopment
- ~ Waterfront access/amenity
- ★ Other (Please specify)

Handwritten notes on map:
 - Tonawanda Creek into a beautiful lake structure (downstream)
 - FOOD TRUCK PARK
 - CAT RID ON PINE KINGS
 - MORE DRI LOCATIONS

Consider & discuss as a group:

1. What are the top three things that make the DRI area special?
Handwritten notes: Defeat and proximity to many resources to bring people into the area.

2. What are the DRI area's top three issues or challenges?
Handwritten notes: water table & it causes drainage to be a problem, not successful on the neighborhood surrounding, & keep your families, & risks health situation in sidewalk.

3. What are the top three opportunities for the DRI area? What strategies or project ideas can make the most of these opportunities?
Handwritten notes: Brown being former including what to avoid their history in the area, Encouraged for CAT Downtown area signage, wayfinding, community, many footprints for green space.

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DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE Group Mapping Exercise May 2024

Instructions: Mark up the map with stickers & markers. Add notes on post-its, on the map, or in the margins.

What existing features of the DRI Area stand out to you?

- ★ Point of interest
- Activity center or gathering place
- ♥ Scenic area
- Problem area

What would you like to see in the DRI Area?

- Park improvement
- Bike/walk trail
- ↔ Roadway change/reconfiguration
- Building/land redevelopment
- ~ Waterfront access/amenity
- ★ Other (Please specify)

Consider & discuss as a group:

1. What are the top three things that make the DRI area special?

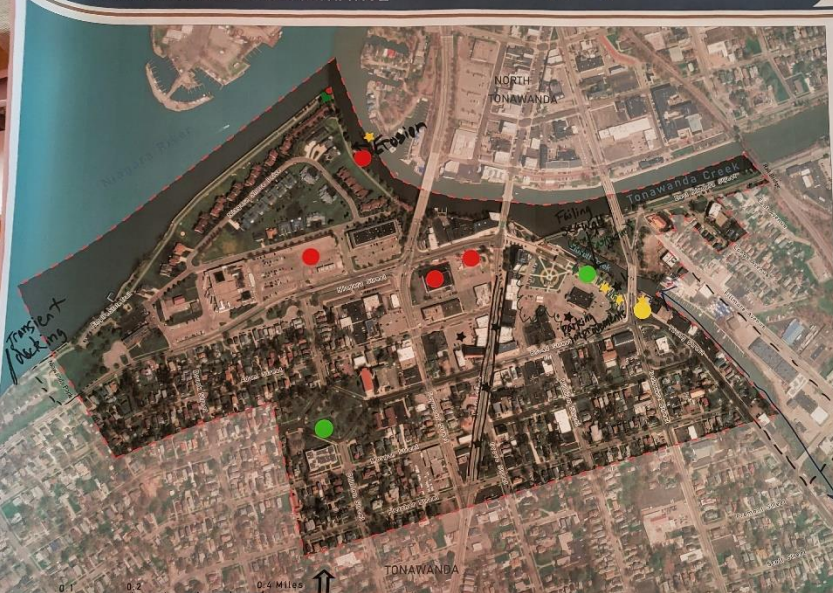
2. What are the DRI area's top three issues or challenges?

3. What are the top three opportunities for the DRI area? What strategies or project ideas can make the most of these opportunities?

Force clubcourts at Clinton Park — food trucks + concerts
Businesses like restaurants, not housing

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Group Mapping Exercise May 2024



Instructions: Mark up the map with stickers & markers. Add notes on post-its, on the map, or in the margins.

What existing features of the DRI Area stand out to you?

- ★ Point of interest
- Activity center or gathering place
- ♥ Scenic area
- Problem area

What would you like to see in the DRI Area?

- Park improvement
- - - Bike/walk trail
- ↔ Roadway change/reconfiguration
- Building/land redevelopment
- ~ Waterfront access/amenity
- ★ Other (Please specify)

Consider & discuss as a group:

What are the top three things that make the DRI area special?

Waterfront

2. What are the DRI area's top three issues or challenges?


1. ★ Possible gathering spot
Fishing pier between pedestrian bridge and Delaware
Vacant buildings + excess parking

3. What are the top three opportunities for the DRI area? What strategies or project ideas can make the most of these opportunities?

2. Complete streets/bike lanes in neighborhoods (connections to trails)
3. Sidewalks, Landscaping, building improvements (facade) on Main St
4. More downtown housing
5. Expand Erie Canal Plaza (park)

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Group Mapping Exercise May 2024



Instructions: Mark up the map with stickers & markers. Add notes on post-its, on the map, or in the margins.

What existing features of the DRI Area stand out to you?

- ★ Point of interest
- Activity center or gathering place
- ♥ Scenic area
- Problem area

What would you like to see in the DRI Area?

- Park improvement
- Bike/walk trail
- ← Roadway change/reconfiguration
- Building/land redevelopment
- ~ Waterfront access/amenity
- ★ Other (Please specify)

Consider & discuss as a group:

1. What are the top three things that make the DRI area special?


2. What are the DRI area's top three issues or challenges?

3. What are the top three opportunities for the DRI area? What strategies or project ideas can make the most of these opportunities?

Handwritten notes under question 3:
 Redeveloping McDonalds, Rite Aid
 increased parking + rooftop bar
 Fix city pavilion

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Tonawanda DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE
Group Mapping Exercise
May 2024



Instructions: Mark up the map with stickers & markers. Add notes on post-its, on the map, or in the margins.

What existing features of the DRI Area stand out to you?

- ★ Point of interest
- Activity center or gathering place
- ♥ Scenic area
- Problem area

What would you like to see in the DRI Area?

- Park improvement
- Bike/walk trail
- ↔ Roadway change/reconfiguration
- Building/land redevelopment
- ~ Waterfront access/amenity
- ★ Other (Please specify)

1. Share & discuss as a group:

What are the top three things that make the area special?

2. What are the DRI area's top three issues or challenges?

3. What are the top three opportunities for the DRI area? What strategies or project ideas can make the most of these opportunities?
