

# Right-Sizing Cities

Presentation to the conference on

**Strengthening Neighborhoods in  
Weak Market Cities**

Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis  
St. Louis, Missouri  
September 24, 2008

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University at Buffalo Regional Institute



# Outline

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The Paradox

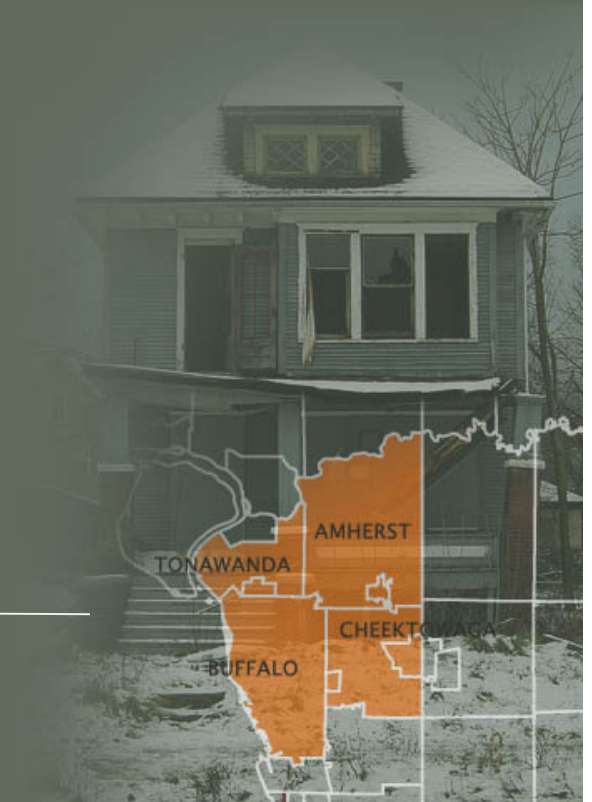
The Condition

The Options

The Action

The Opportunity

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# The Paradox

Small is Beautiful  
**But Bigger**  
**is Better...**



# The Paradox

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“Accept that we are a  
smaller city.”

-- *Youngstown 2010 Vision*

versus

“If you say ‘downsize,’  
politically you’re  
dead.”

-- *A Detroit observer*



# The Condition

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Budget

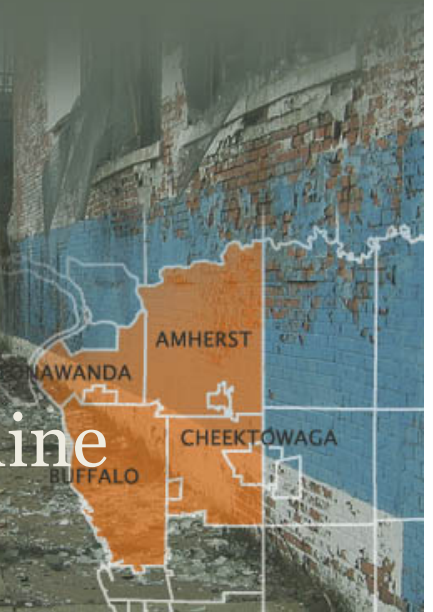


# The Condition

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## Why the Mismatch?

- Economic transformation
- Exodus of industry and jobs
- Population aging
- Obsolescent infrastructure
- Fiscal stress; decline of public services
- Downward spiral of disinvestment & decline



# The Condition

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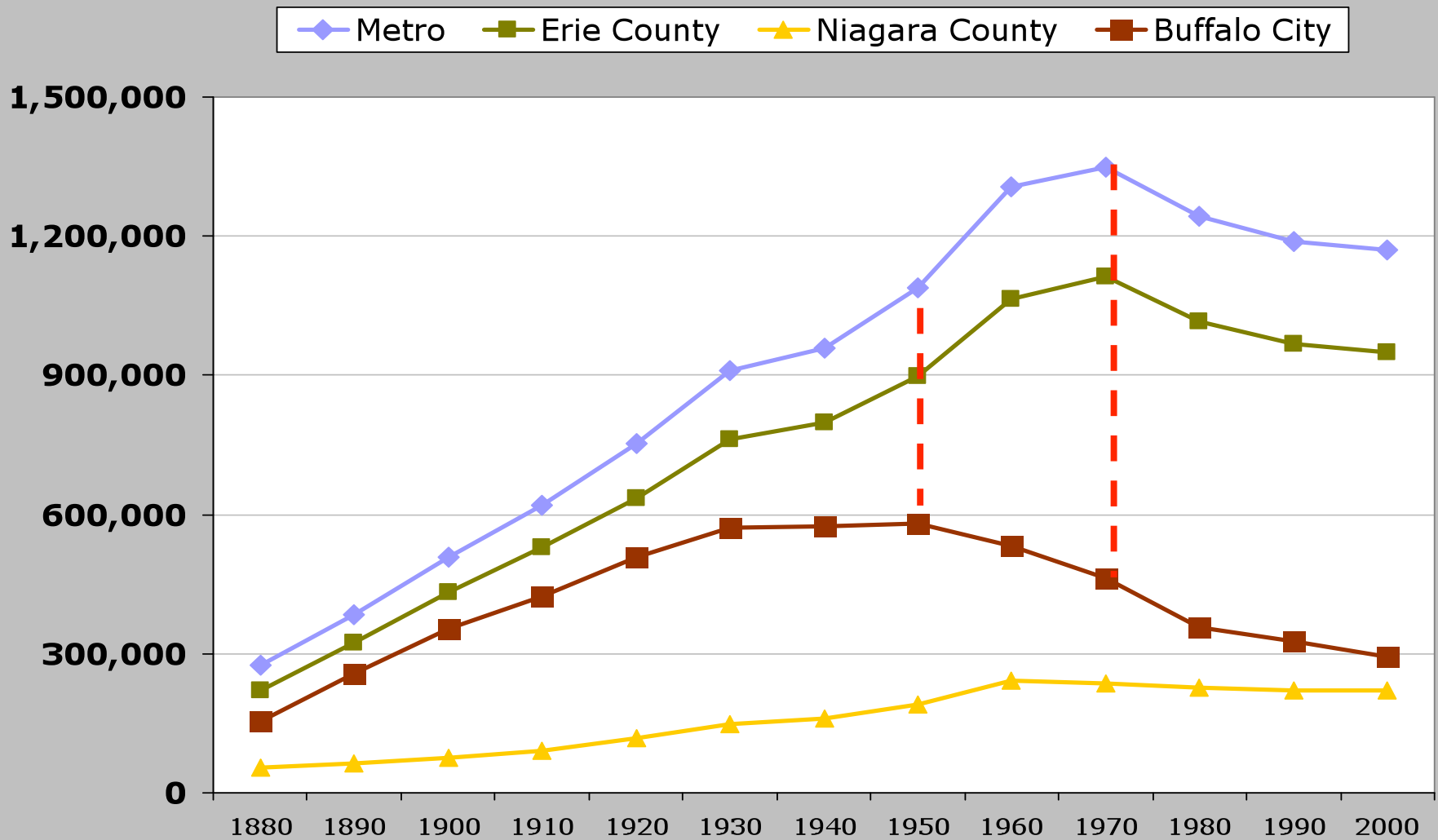
## Residue of Mismatch

- Declining property values
- Abandonment and vacancy
- Housing and commercial surplus
- Infrastructure inefficiencies
- Crime, arson, squatters
- Civic disengagement
- Negative perceptions and image
- Stigmatization & demoralization



# The Condition

## Anatomy of Population Change, Buffalo Metro, 1880-2000





# The Condition

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## Magnitude of mismatch

- as of 2006: 33,000 vacant housing units and lots, 4,000 other vacant structures in Buffalo
- 13% of all addresses are 'undeliverable' (2008 HUD USPS)
- increasing inner-ring suburban problems
- 500 vacant properties in Cheektowaga
- Empty storefronts in Amherst
- Tonawanda losing population at rate faster than Buffalo



# The Condition

## Vacant Homes Abundant in Buffalo

Even though the city demolishes hundreds of abandoned buildings each year, Buffalo continues to have among the largest percentage of chronically vacant housing units in the nation.

### Cities with the most vacant units per 100 people

St. Louis	3.7
Buffalo	3.4
Baltimore	3.2
Gary, Ind.	2.5
Philadelphia	2.5
Pittsburgh	2.4
New Orleans	2.2
Dayton, Ohio	2.0
Savannah, Ga.	1.8
Kansas City, Kan.	1.8

\*Does not include short-term or seasonal housing

Sources: Federal Reserve Bank of New York;

### Vacant structures demolished in Buffalo

800



onawanda  
(City)

New York Times

Clarence



Hamburg

Orchard Park

# The Options

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- a. Ignore It.
- b. Accommodate It.
- c. Combat It.
- d. Embrace It.





# The Options

## *1. Ignore it: Let the Market Work*



## *2. Accommodate it: Treat the Symptoms*

- **Anti-flipping efforts**
- **Demolitions**
- **Brownfield redevelopment**
- **Land banks**
- **Building moratoria**



# The Options

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## 3. *Combat it: Exploit new opportunities*

- **Re-greening**
- **Gardening collectives**
- **Tax abatements**
- **Deregulation – e.g., mixed use zoning**
- **Code enforcement**



## 4. *Embrace it: revitalization without growth; right-sizing*

- **Strategic planning**
- **Targeted investment; triage**
- **Relocations**
- **Decommissioned infrastructure**
- **Planned abandonment**

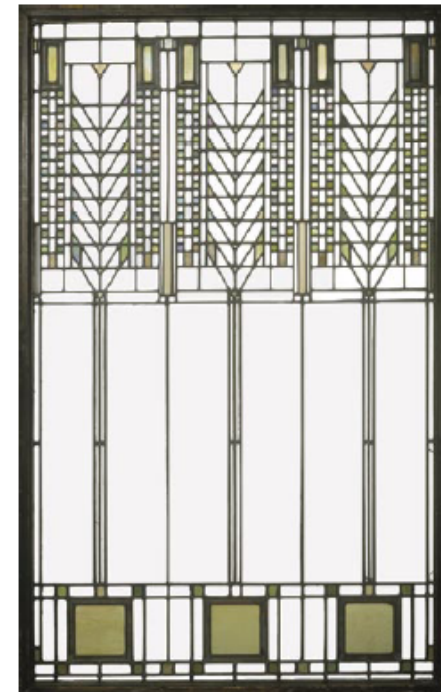


# The Action

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## Key Strategies

- Make Buffalo a “living laboratory” for vacant properties efforts
- Build property information system
- Develop comprehensive code enforcement policies/processes
- Redevelop brownfields and greyfields
- Right-size and reinvest, creating green infrastructure



## **BLUEPRINT BUFFALO**

**ACTION PLAN**

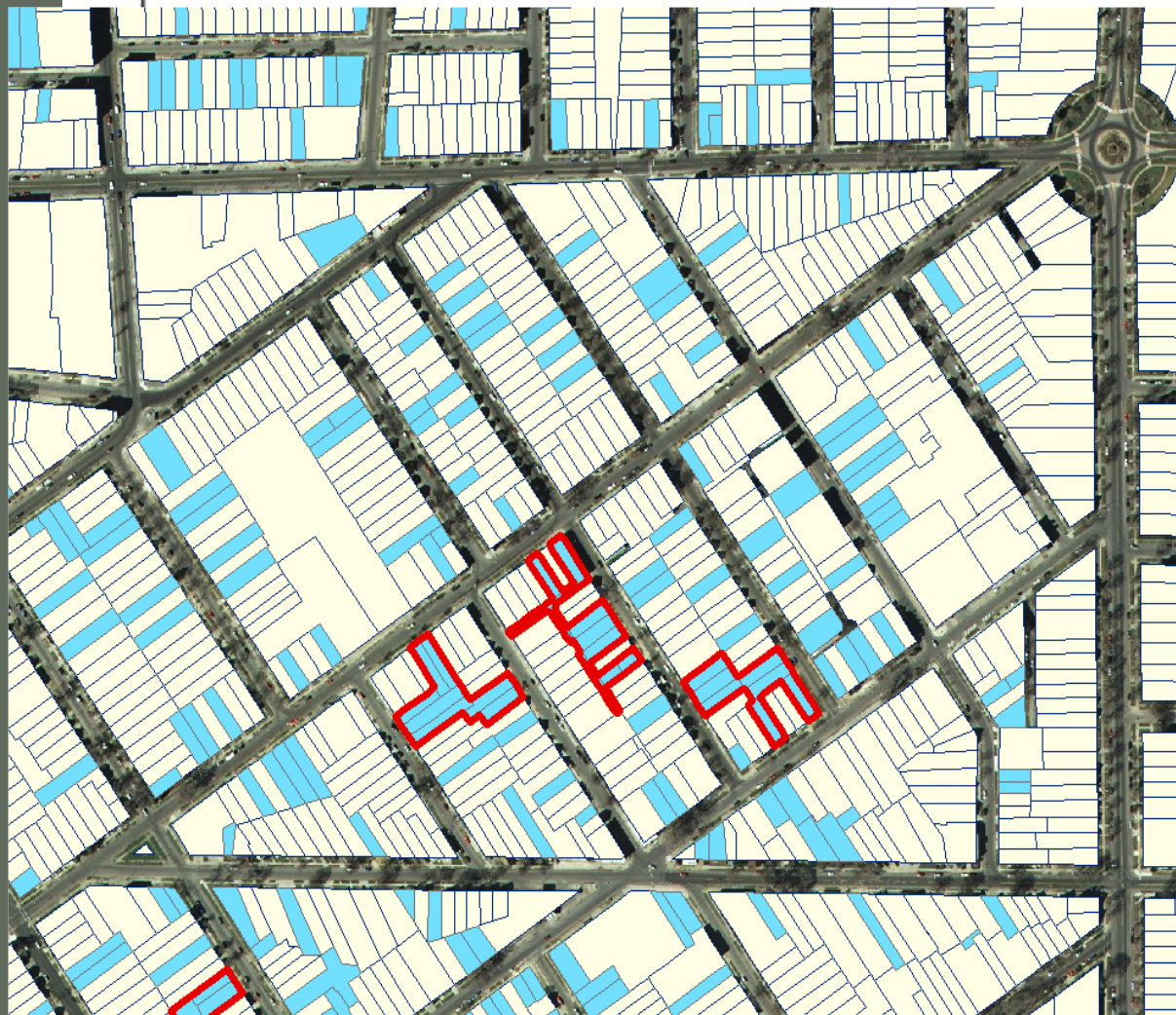
REGIONAL STRATEGIES AND LOCAL TOOLS FOR RECLAIMING  
VACANT PROPERTIES IN THE CITY AND SUBURBS OF BUFFALO



# The Action

Buffalo Neighborhood Property Conditions Survey Form (Draft 2008 04 22)

Part A



Contiguous  
vacant lots and  
home forming  
areas of at least  
1/2 acre

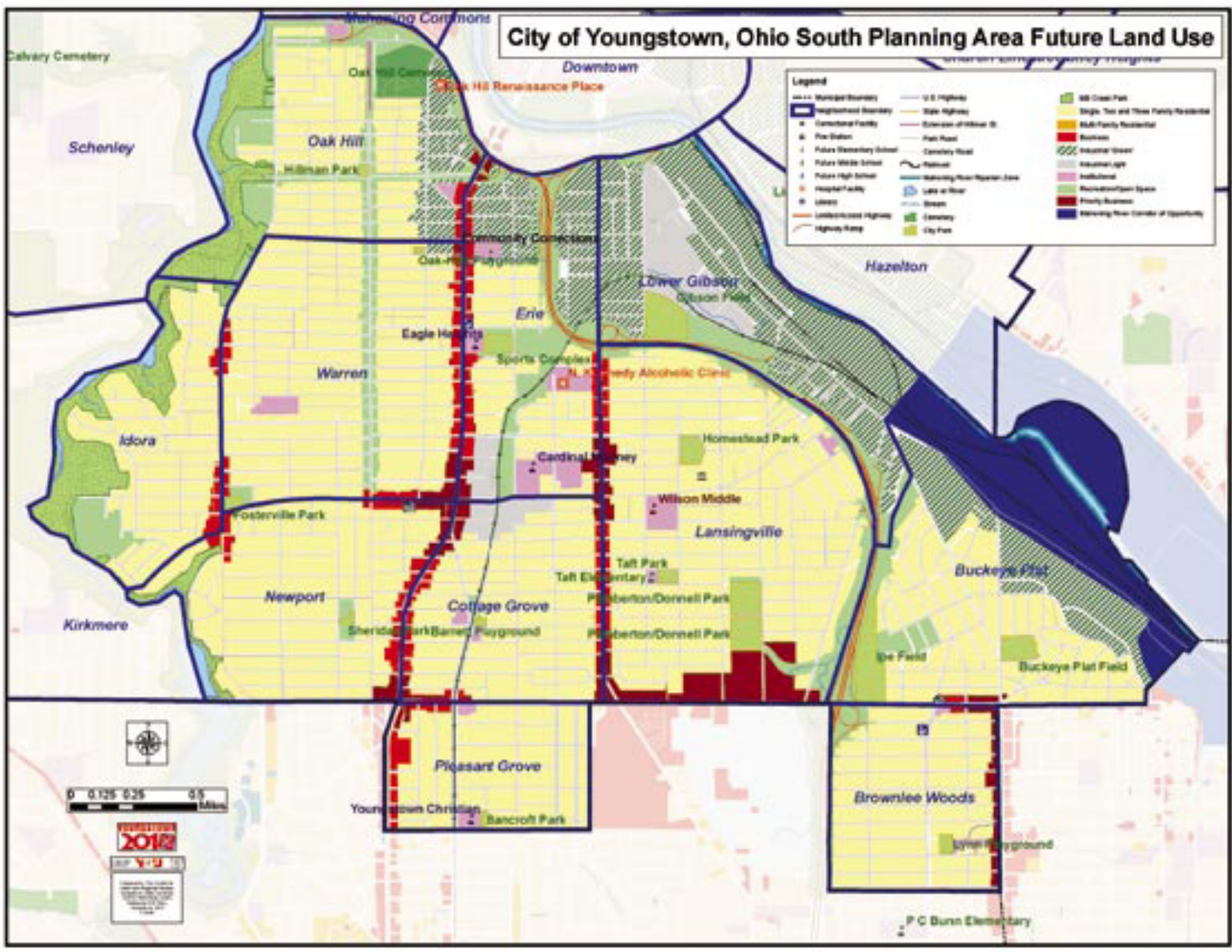
- |    |                        |
|----|------------------------|
| A  | Significant Structure  |
| B  | Contributing Structure |
| C  | Non-Contributing       |
| D  | New Build              |
| 1  |                        |
| 2  |                        |
| 3  |                        |
| 4  |                        |
| 5+ |                        |

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| A | Excellent Condition  |
| B | Good Condition       |
| C | Fair Condition       |
| D | Poor Condition       |
| E | Severely Dilapidated |

Part B

Housing Components	Excellent Condition	Good Condition	Fair Condition	Poor Condition	Severely Dilapidated	N/A

# City of Youngstown, Ohio South Planning Area Future Land Use





# The Opportunity

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## Seven to consider

- Community introspection
- Community development
- New (unexpected) partners
- Environmental, recreational & financial gains
- Increased capacity and confidence
- Changed perceptions & reputation
- Civic leadership



# The Opportunity: Paradox Lost

NEW YORK

Where the Urban Dream Life Is  
Going Cheap  
What could possibly make  
someone want to leave New York  
and move to Buffalo?  
By [Adam Sternbergh](#)  
Published Aug 24, 2008



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