

COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT VISION

FORMER BEECH-NUT FACILITY, VILLAGE OF CANAJOHARIE, NY

MARCH 2018



INTRODUCTION

The former Beech-Nut facility sits in the heart of the Village of Canajoharie, a quaint town on the Mohawk River in New York. Imperial Packing Company started operations on the site in 1891. Imperial grew the business selling vacuum-packed hams using the adjacent Erie Canal, and the founders invested in the Village as the industry grew. The facilities expanded rapidly when Beech-Nut began producing a growing number of food products including chewing gum, coffee, baby food and more. For decades, Beech-Nut's thriving operations provided jobs, community support, significant tax revenue and a sense of identity for the Village.

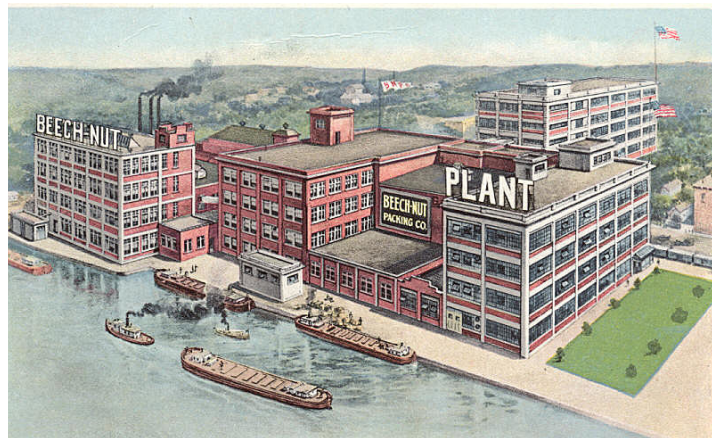
Since the former Beech-Nut facility closed in 2010, the property has remained inactive and many of the 35 vacant buildings have fallen into disrepair. The Village and Montgomery County foreclosed on the property in 2017, creating the opportunity to begin visioning and planning for redevelopment of the iconic site encompassing 27 acres.

During 2017, the EPA Superfund Redevelopment Initiative (SRI) provided reuse planning assistance to engage the community in developing a redevelopment vision for the site. The SRI team has worked with Montgomery County and the Village of Canajoharie to facilitate reuse discussions with local stakeholders including the Village of Canajoharie administrators, the Exit 29 Task Force, the Montgomery County Executive office, and local business owners. In addition, the SRI Team facilitated a series of public meetings to gather input from over 150 community members.

This report summarizes the community's redevelopment vision and goals for the site and incorporates future use ideas into a flexible concept plan to guide ongoing cleanup and redevelopment discussions. The report concludes with an action plan that aligns next steps, planned initiatives and potential resources to support implementation.

Site facts

- 27 acres, 35 structures
- Downtown Canajoharie, NY
- Access to I-90 Thruway, Route 10 and Route 5
- Former food production facility
- Located adjacent to the Mohawk River



Erie Canal and Beech-Nut factory ca. early 1900's.



Beech-Nut, ca. 1920s following canal closure.

REUSE CONSIDERATIONS

The former Beech-Nut facility, strategically located in proximity to key transportation routes and assets in the Mohawk Valley region, is positioned for a range of reuse opportunities. Factors to consider during reuse planning include:

LOCATION

- The site, located in the heart of downtown, comprises one-third of the Village.
- Over 23,000 vehicles pass daily on NY Interstate Thruway I-90, which offers full visibility of the site.
- The site is the gateway into Canajoharie from the NY State Thruway I-90, Route 5 and Route 10.
- Canajoharie Creek bisects the site, feeding into the Mohawk River.

STRUCTURES

More than 35 connecting structures, varying in age, character and condition, stand on the site.

- Buildings west of Canajoharie Creek housed food production and administration. A structural evaluation is needed to determine the feasibility of reusing select buildings. Several structures facing Church Street are considered historic, and are favored for potential reuse.
- The warehouse buildings east of the creek pose safety risks based on site studies. The County has identified the structures that present the most imminent risk, and those have been prioritized for demolition.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- High volume water infrastructure was developed to support former operations and has been maintained for potential new industrial users.
- Stakeholders anticipate investments in technology infrastructure and Internet access at the local level are needed to support redevelopment.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL FEATURES

- A public waterfront park and marina accommodates boaters during the spring/summer season where Canajoharie Creek meets the Mohawk River downstream from the site.
- The Erie Canal Bikeway, a 500+ mile bike path that connects across the Mohawk River Valley, runs adjacent to the property.
- Wintergreen Park showcases a natural water feature, the Boiling Pot, and a gorge within one mile south of the site.
- Several growing tourist destinations, including Sharon Spring and Cooperstown, are within 30 miles.

HISTORY

- The area bears significance in Mohawk Native American history.
- The historic Erie Canal, for which a bicentennial celebration is being planned for 2018, once crossed the site and provided access to the town and the facility.



Left: Local transportation and recreational features. Below: Map illustrating Canajoharie's proximity to regional destinations. Bottom left: Erie Canal marker; center: historic ironwork entry to facility; right: facility's Church Street facade.



SITE SUITABILITY

Few constraints exist for redevelopment of the former Beech-Nut facility.

STRUCTURES

Demolition is planned for the warehouse structures east of Canajoharie Creek. The County has identified and prioritized the structures that present the most imminent risk for demolition. The structures west of Canajoharie, where food production took place, vary in age, size and height, and have not been maintained since the operations terminated in 2010. A building conditions assessment is needed for these structures to determine the feasibility of adaptive reuse.

ENVIRONMENT

Phase I and Phase II environmental assessments facilitated by EPA did not raise significant flags or restrictions regarding contamination that would limit redevelopment. Asbestos rubble piles present the only known contaminants that contain risk based on testing. Montgomery County removed the debris in early 2018.

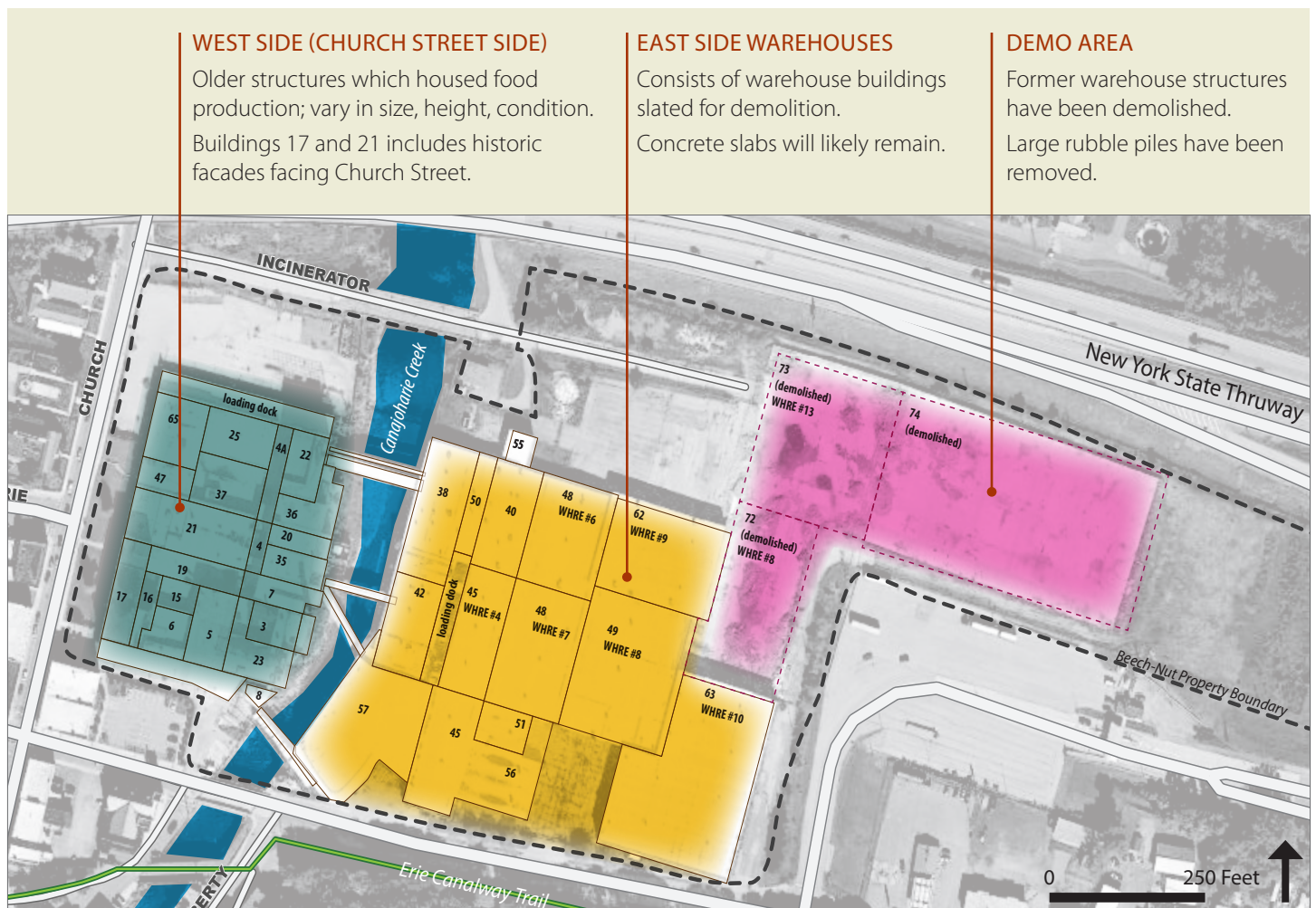
Several structures presented barriers for complete testing and will require additional assessment for redevelopment. Based on industrial use and information gathered to date, studies indicate a low probability that significant contamination exists in those areas on site.

FLOODPLAIN

The site has been prone to major flooding, such as the flood in 2006 that caused significant damage to the facility and downtown Canajoharie. The entire site is located in the 100-year floodplain, and new construction requires elevating the site prior to new construction to meet updated floodplain regulations.



Aerial view of former Beech-Nut facility. Source: Tolga Morawski.



COMMUNITY GOALS AND PRIORITIES

The reuse planning team gathered input from the community during stakeholder meetings, a public open house and high school visioning workshops, as well as through a survey and written submissions. The community shared a range of perspectives on whether to demolish or try to reuse the existing structures on site. The majority of community members propose adaptive reuse of the administrative Church Street building if feasible and demolishing other structures.

Next steps in reuse planning for the site include a building condition assessment and a market study. These evaluations will provide valuable information to determine the feasibility of partial reuse and help the community refine near-term priorities and decisions contingent upon structural condition.

NEAR TERM PRIORITIES (ONE TO TWO YEARS)

Based on available information, community members voiced the following near-term priorities.

- *Maintain interim condition of site.* Plant and maintain ground cover, such as lawn or meadow plantings, on cleared areas of site to beautify the Village and provide recreational open space.
- *Demolish the east side structures and beautify the gateway entry corridor.* Improving the beauty and way-finding experience for vehicles entering the Village from the Thruway along Main Street to the downtown district is a high priority. Removal of the warehouse structures that face the thruway entry and those along the edge of Main Street will provide space for plantings along the entry corridor and open views toward the creek and river.
- *Create a master plan for Church Street site (property west of Canajoharie Creek).* Community members would like to complete a master plan that improves downtown and waterfront connections and generates new development to improve tax revenues and spur job creation. The plan could potentially include adaptive reuse of Church Street buildings.
- *Clear the site.* Many community members support full demolition of all Beech-Nut structures and remedial action as needed to position the site for future development. These residents and business owners agree that the property in its current condition is likely to distract potential buyers and sellers from the positive qualities of the site. Additionally, many feel that the dilapidated structures negatively affect the appeal of the surrounding commercial and residential areas.
- *Create an adaptive reuse plan.* High school students who participated in visioning workshops proposed innovative ideas for reuse of the different types of industrial structures that spanned the fields of manufacturing, recreation, services and more. The students propose assessing the feasibility of adaptive reuse over the next two years.

LONG TERM VISION

The former Beech-Nut site will be transformed into productive, vibrant, walkable development that integrates with the existing fabric of the Village and enhances quality of life.

Stakeholders and community members envision a mix of development that provides jobs, increases the tax base, and provides recreational and social benefits for Village residents.



Village of Canajoharie Mayor Francis Avery kicks off the community meeting and workshop in November 2017.

LONG TERM PRIORITIES (TEN YEARS)

- *Livable, walkable downtown*
- *Complete redevelopment of the vacant site*
- *Thriving Village economy*
- *Improved opportunities, services, connectivity and other assets that attract visitors and increase residential population*

FUTURE USE INPUT

Community members provided input on types of future uses that could support community needs. They also shared ideas about pedestrian, bike, vehicular, and waterway connections, environmental functions, and cultural features to incorporate in future use design.

SUGGESTED FUTURE USES

- **Commercial.** Small- to medium-scale office space; retail and services that meet needs of visitors (tourists, boaters, cyclists); local and regional retail storefronts. Market-style infrastructure is proposed for temporary or seasonal use.
- **Industrial.** Light industrial with minimal truck traffic, preferably in a sector that appeals to younger populations and includes workforce diversity (a range of educational, socio-economic and skill levels) such as technology manufacturing or a distillery.
- **Agricultural/production/renewable energy.** Hydroponics, solar farm, medical marijuana growing facility.
- **Educational.** Workforce training, satellite community or regional college campus, agricultural research, technology research center, trade and artisan workshop space.
- **Recreational.** Flexible open space for outdoor recreation and parks; new trail connections to the waterfront, Erie Canalway and natural gorge upstream. Additional features suggested include dog park, creek access, marina services, and a waterway to provide entry by boat to downtown. Ideas for structural recreational uses include indoor/outdoor all-season athletic facility and facilities for recreational entertainment such as paint ball, drone racing and laser tag.
- **Residential.** Medium density, low maintenance, high quality housing to meet needs of seniors and young adults.
- **Hospitality.** Mid-level hotel for tourists, business travelers along Route 10, Route 5 and Thruway corridor.
- **Entertainment.** Indoor water park, performance venue.
- **Institutional.** Indoor and outdoor space for a history museum and expansion of the Arkell Museum collection. Montgomery County has suggested consolidating county and municipal offices on the site.
- **Services.** Rehabilitation, day care, elder care.

CONNECTIONS

- **Vehicular.** New routes for industrial traffic around the downtown area. The high level of trucks moving through narrow downtown streets presents significant safety, noise and convenience issues
- **Pedestrian.** Pedestrian connections between downtown, Canajoharie Creek, Riverfront Park and along the creek to the Gorge, as well as an accessible and relatively flat pedestrian loop.
- **Bicycle.** Connect new pedestrian and bike paths on site with the Erie Canalway; features and services for regional bicyclists riding through the Village.

- **Waterway.** Bring boats closer to the downtown area by dredging the entry to Canajoharie Creek; construct a canal along the location of the original Erie Canal to allow boats to travel directly to Church Street.

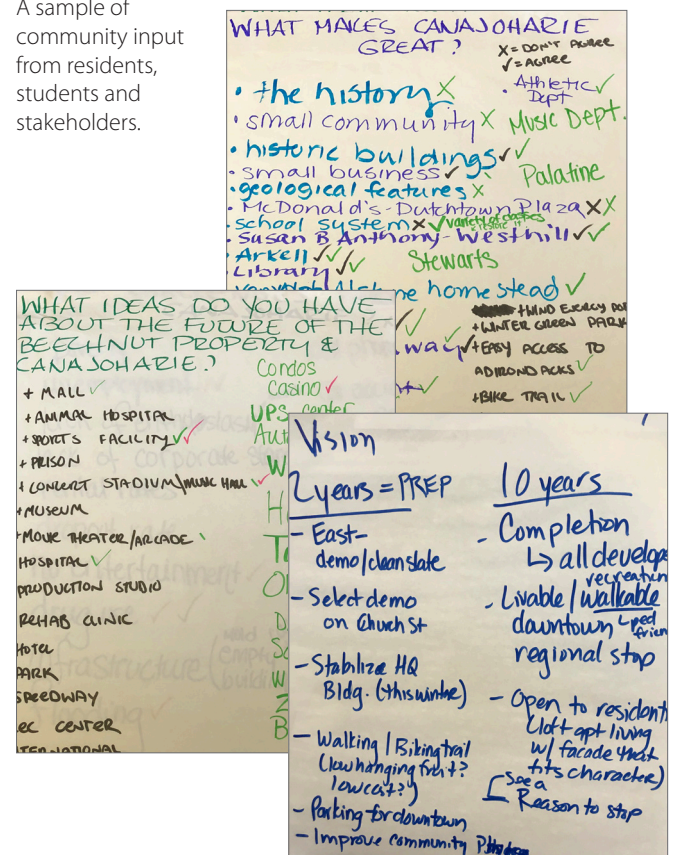
ENVIRONMENT

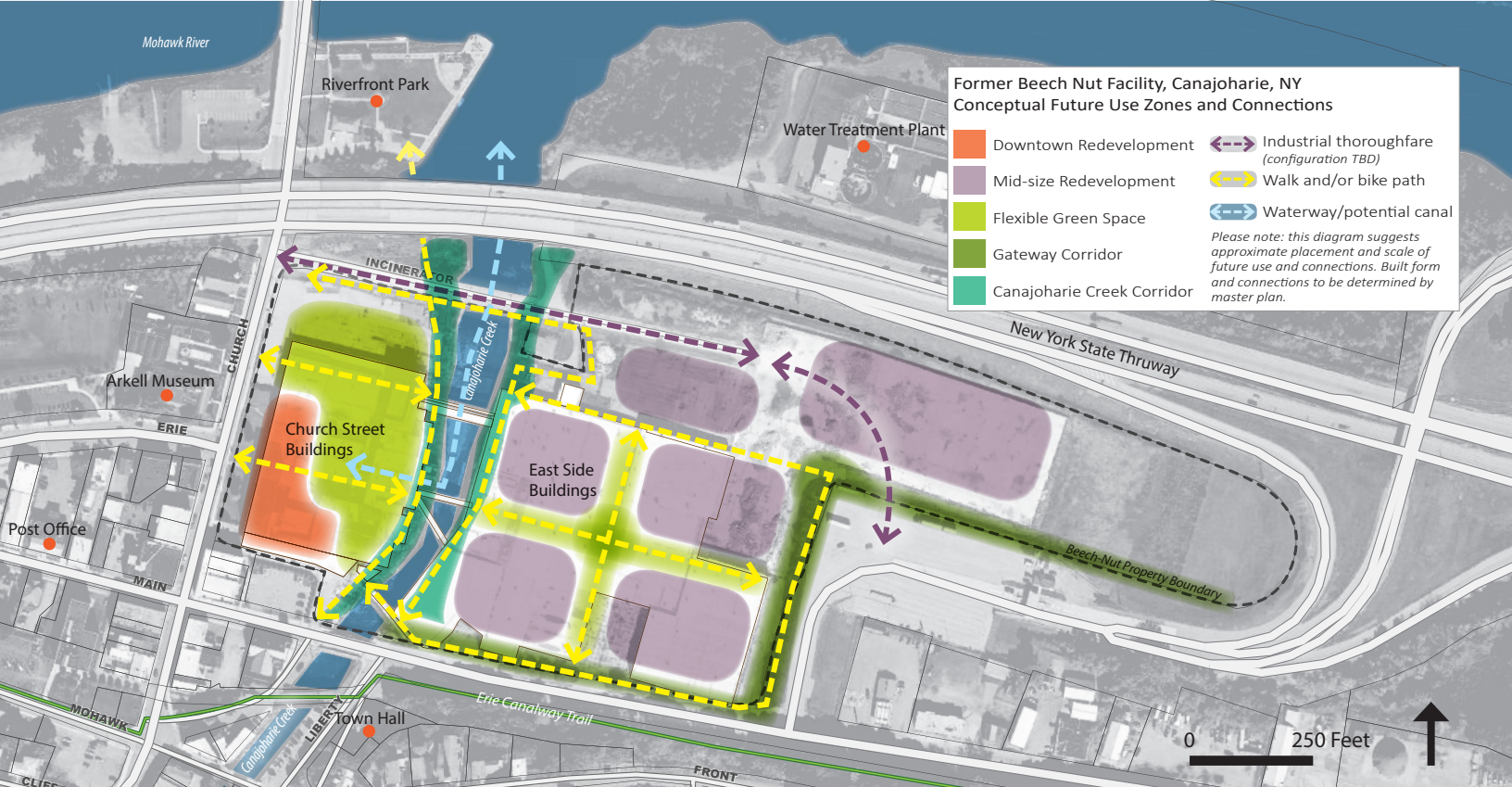
- **Riparian edge.** Natural and engineered features, such as creek restoration and wetland plantings, to help mitigate flood effects on the site and restore ecological functions along the waterfront.
- **Materials recycling.** Recycling and reuse of building materials from demolition to increase elevation and meet updated floodplain requirements for new development.

CULTURAL HISTORY

- **Erie Canal.** Recognition of Erie Canal's former location on site; leveraging regional Erie Canal recreational programming and publicity (i.e. events, signs, maps).
- **Mohawk history.** Features and programming that raise awareness of the area's significance in Mohawk heritage.
- **Industrial history.** Potential inclusion of historic features such as the smokestack, Church Street facade, Church Street "green" (the maintained open space facing Church Street), ironwork entries and the Beech-Nut sign (currently in storage); a small museum to archive artifacts from the Beech-Nut factory and former production companies that operated on the site.

A sample of community input from residents, students and stakeholders.





The figure above illustrates a site concept plan that integrates a mix of uses and multi-modal connections reflecting community goals and the surrounding land use context. These future use zones described in more detail below can help guide redevelopment planning, phasing and implementation.

FUTURE USE ZONES

■ DOWNTOWN REDEVELOPMENT

Pursue adaptive reuse or new construction to complement the downtown historic district.

- Support a mix of commercial uses and community-oriented facilities for education and innovation.
- Provide accessible buildings storefronts and sidewalks similar to size and style of downtown.
- Provide parking on street or behind buildings to supplement existing downtown parking.
- Consider retaining or incorporating the historic “green” along Church Street as an active open space for the Village.

■ MID-SIZE REDEVELOPMENT

Accommodate larger buildings in a campus-like setting.

- Support a mix of uses that need larger structures, such as indoor recreation, light industry and urban agriculture.
- Provide public access to key features, such as the creek, open spaces and views from Main Street gateway.
- Consider parking areas in rear of buildings to integrate new development with look and feel of downtown.

■ FLEXIBLE GREEN SPACE

Provide a variety of high quality, connected public spaces and pedestrian-friendly development.

- Create public spaces such as informal green areas, small playgrounds, formal squares, market pavilion or recreational fields for people to gather, interact, and play.
- Connect to Mohawk River Riverfront Park and Erie Canalway Trail
- Evaluate potential for boat access, docking and marina facilities close to downtown; consider boating access alternatives along lower Canajoharie Creek and options aligned with the former Erie Canal channel.





Example of campus-like redevelopment with public green space.

A revitalization strategy for downtown Lockport, NY called for the city to capitalize on its unique Erie Canal heritage by expanding canal-related attractions, enhancing the mix of goods and services offered, developing underutilized land parcels, and improving the downtown landscape to accommodate visitors and shoppers. Photo: 31st Annual Lockport Outdoor Arts & Craft Festival by Bigbadbflo/CC BY-SA 3.0

FUTURE USE ZONES

GATEWAY CORRIDOR

Provide a welcoming Main Street entry corridor from the Thruway to the Village downtown area.

- Develop corridor design guidelines for signage, street trees and sidewalks along Main Street; consider architectural considerations for street-facing buildings that complement downtown and adjacent buildings and features.

CANAJOHARIE CREEK CORRIDOR

Restore creek corridor to increase safe access and flood resilience.

- Provide safe access and views to Canajoharie Creek.
- Consider opportunities to integrate plantings and trees along streambank to improve water quality and reduce flooding.

CONNECTIONS

INDUSTRIAL THOROUGHFARE

Redirect truck and freight traffic away from downtown.

- Explore an alternate truck route through the north portion of the site.

PEDESTRIAN AND BIKE PATHS

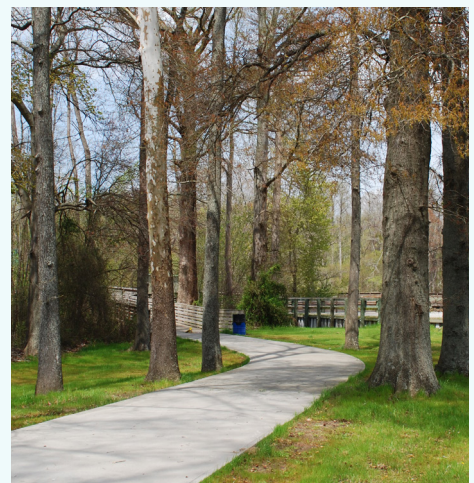
Link open spaces and buildings to ensure the site is pedestrian-oriented and accessible to and from the Village.

- Connect public spaces and key features with sidewalks and paved paths. Consider paths at different widths to accommodate pedestrians and/or bicyclists.
- Connect on-site paths with the Erie Canalway and existing downtown.

WATERWAY

Provide boating access to the site and downtown from the Mohawk River.

- Evaluate potential for boat access, docking and marina facilities close to downtown.
- Consider boating access alternatives along lower Canajoharie Creek and options aligned with the former Erie Canal channel.



Examples of waterway and recreational trail connections.

ACTION PLAN

The *Community Redevelopment Vision* presents the community's vision for integrating the former Beech-Nut site back into the fabric and life of the Village of Canajoharie to enhance economic, social, recreational and environmental qualities.

NEXT STEP: FEASIBILITY AND MASTER PLANNING

The vision provides a framework for a building condition assessment and market analysis, two funded studies which will help determine the feasibility of ideas generated to date. The market analysis will likely evaluate market sector demand, consider the community vision and determine the highest and best uses of the property. A building condition assessment will focus on the Church Street structures to help determine feasibility for adaptive reuse of the existing buildings.

Beyond the market and structural feasibility analysis phase, a critical next step for revitalizing the area is the development of a master plan. A master plan is a typical step in the redevelopment process for larger sites that proposes the type of development and phasing consistent with a vision, site suitability and economic drivers. Master plans typically detail specific uses, building sizes, densities and amenities, and also address New York State's required environmental impact review.

A master plan could be developed to advance revitalization in a few different ways. Several options are described below.

- Owner and/or local government could propose a master plan for redevelopment, initiate marketing and oversee redevelopment efforts; or
- Owner and/or local government could solicit proposals from a third-party or private sector master developer who would propose a master plan, secure necessary development approvals and oversee redevelopment efforts.

Regardless of the approach taken, the community vision outlined in this document provides a reference and clear documentation of community members goals and priorities that can inform future discussions and redevelopment process steps.

FORMER BEECH-NUT SITE REVITALIZATION PROCESS

CLEAN UP	REUSE PLANNING	FEASIBILITY	IMPLEMENTATION
Resolve ownership. Complete environmental site assessment. Remove asbestos-contaminated debris. Demolish East Side warehouse structures.	Conduct community outreach. Gather community and stakeholder goals and vision. Develop reuse concepts and reuse planning summary.	Conduct targeted market analysis. Perform structural assessment of Church Street buildings. Refine reuse concepts. Share with redevelopment experts for input. Develop master plan.	Build awareness of site plan and opportunities. Adopt policies and codes compatible with master plan. Secure funding. Market property for redevelopment. Solicit developer proposals.

RESOURCES

The County continues to track grant opportunities to support redevelopment of the site. The initial grants received have resulted in recent activity, such as selective demolition and removal of rubble and debris, which are making a visible difference on site and building momentum around the project. Additional grant determinations, expected by mid-2018, will augment the findings from the studies with information about potential funding that may inform master planning.

Additional funding opportunities for revitalization planning at the former Beech-Nut site:

- USE PA Brownfields Area Wide Planning grants: <https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/types-brownfields-grant-funding#tab-5>
- Strategic Planning and Feasibility Studies (NYS Empire State Development): <https://esd.ny.gov/strategic-planning-and-feasibility-studies-program>
- Brownfield Opportunity Area Program (NYS Department of State): <https://www.dos.ny.gov/opd/programs/brownFieldOpp/index.html>
- New York Consolidated Funding Application – Mohawk Valley Regional Economic Development Council (multiple state programs): [https://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/cfa/projects?region\[Mohawk%20Valley\]=Mohawk%20Valley](https://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/cfa/projects?region[Mohawk%20Valley]=Mohawk%20Valley)

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