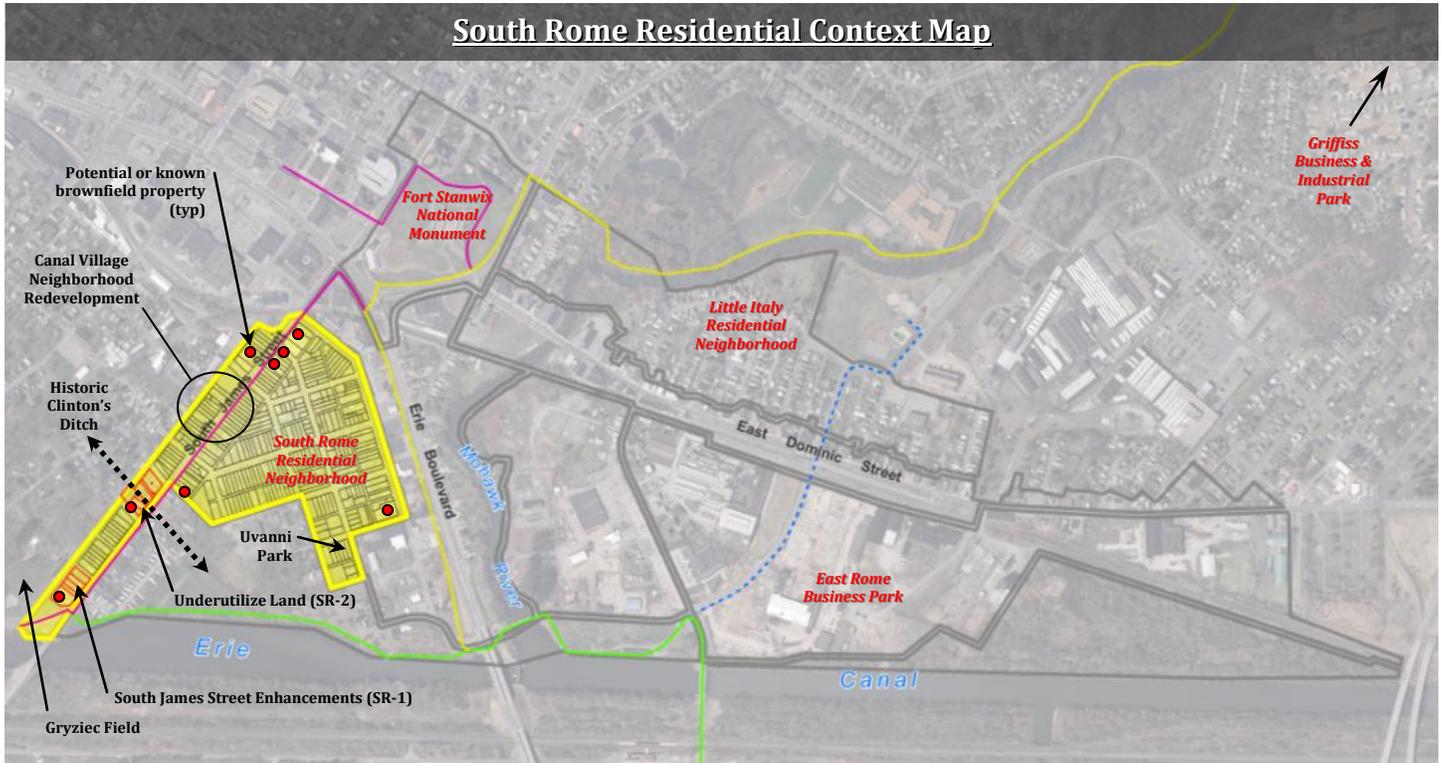




SOUTH ROME RESIDENTIAL

From Brown to Green:
A Revitalization Strategy for the Downtown Rome BOA
City of Rome, New York
New York State Department of State
Brownfield Opportunity Areas Program

South Rome Residential Context Map



a snapshot

35.9 acres

- 60% residential
- 29% vacant land
- 9% commercial

306 parcels

- 186 residential
- 92 vacant
- 14 parcels owned by City

8 potential brownfields

2 Strategic Sites

- South James Street
- Underutilized Land

33 New Housing Units

- Canal Village

“Evolution of a neighborhood...”

The scale of the South Rome Residential neighborhood is inherently walkable - residents can easily walk to employment, shopping and recreation destinations. Its “Mom-and-Pops” character and scale reflect the small town appeal of the neighborhood.

The South James Street corridor has gradually evolved from owner-occupied factory worker housing to a mix of rental and owner housing and mixed use buildings. The new \$8 million Housing Visions Canal Village project has infused new life onto the corridor, with 33 new rental units and a public community center. The City seeks to replicate this effort to further support and enhance the local population.

The neighborhood’s modest housing - most over 100 years old - provides opportunities for targeted neighborhood revitalization programs aimed at first-time home buyers.

IMAGINE...

South Rome Residential as a close-knit residential neighborhood offering diverse housing options in close proximity to neighborhood-scale establishments providing goods, services and open space.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Live.

- Recruit developers and partners to continue the investment in developing affordable housing along the South James Street corridor.
- Identify potential historic neighborhood districts in an effort to leverage the City's history in neighborhood revitalization.
- Continue to enforce property maintenance codes, while enhancing education and awareness on their importance to the vitality of the community.

Work.

- Improve connections from the neighborhood core to Waterfront Village and the Employment District via walking trails along the canal.
- Attract small business development through incentives such as property tax rebates .
- Implement the recommendations in the Urban Design Plan to enhance the commercial portions of the South James Street Main Street corridor.

Play.

- Promote the development of mixed use buildings and public spaces along South James Street through incentive zoning.
- Improve sidewalk connections to Uvanni Park and playground.
- Enhance the street presence and access to Gryzniec Field Park.
- Construct linkages from South James Street to the proposed Erie Canalway Trail.

CASE STUDY: CANAL VILLAGE – ROME, NY

The 400 block of South James Street had recently suffered from increased instances of crime that further exacerbated blight and disinvestment within the neighborhood. Numerous vacant lots and abandoned or derelict structures line the streets, disrupting the urban form, decreasing property values and impacting on the residents' quality of life. In response, Housing Visions Consulting, Inc has constructed 33 units of affordable housing on South James Street between Henry and North Streets. The development demolished four derelict buildings, rehabilitated three buildings, and built eight new structures. An on-site management office with tenant community space and laundry facilities has been included in the revitalization scenario, which now provides quality housing choices for larger families, veterans, and individuals with mobility and vision impairments. The units are owned and managed by Housing Visions Consultants, and are a great example of successful urban-infill that addresses the needs of the community.



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Land Use

The South Rome Residential subarea consists of 306 parcels covering 35.9 acres. While residential parcels are the predominant land use classification, this subarea also comprises a large number of vacant properties. Residential infill development, similar to the on-going Canal Village project, will take advantage of the availability of vacant land and reestablishing historic levels of housing density.

- **Residential** (59%) land use is predominant, with 186 parcels. Single-family homes account for 53 percent of all residential land uses.
- **Vacant** (29%) land uses comprise 92 parcels on 10.5 acres
- There are 23 **commercial** properties on over 3 acres (9%), yet only one is classified as an apartment property.

See Appendices C and E for detailed land use tables and maps.

Ownership

Only 14 parcels (5%) within the subarea are publicly controlled, all of which are owned by the City of Rome.

- City ownership will allow infill development on individual sites to be effective.
- There is an increasing neighborhood problem with absentee landlords and the general maintenance of private property. Of the 306 parcels within the subarea, 170 (56%) have a primary owner address in a zip code other than 13440.
- High levels of renter-occupied residences and property owners who live outside the City will continue to be an important issue in neighborhood revitalization and property maintenance discussions.

See Appendices C and E for detailed ownership information and maps.

Zoning

Two zoning districts encompass portions of the South Rome Residential subarea – Mixed Commercial/Residential (C-2) and Small Lot Single-Family Residential (R-2). These zoning districts do not present any significant impediments to revitalization within the Subarea, though may require modifications to implement the future vision for the Subarea and the South James Street corridor.

See Appendices C and E for detailed zoning information and existing zoning map.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Parks & Open Space

Uvanni Park is the only dedicated park facility within the South Rome Residential Subarea. Uvanni Park provides a small open area, seating and playground equipment at the corner of Lynch and Lawrence Streets. Community planning standards suggest one acre of parkland for every 1,000 residents. While the actual population of the neighborhood is unknown, there is a lack of small recreation spaces within the core neighborhood.

However, the City's Gryzic Field is directly adjacent to the neighborhood, providing open play areas, ball diamonds, hard courts, a pool, and playground equipment. These facilities are accessible from South James Street via Gryzic Avenue, via West Street and also from Muck Road along the Erie Canal. The City is embarking on a major initiative to reinvest in Gryzic Field, and intends to improve the park's connectivity and visibility from South James Street through access and gateway enhancements.

Transportation

The South Rome Residential Subarea is adequately connected to the surrounding roadway networks. Typical to neighborhoods in Rome, numerous streets function as rear access alleys for adjacent residences. As a result, the perceived roadway network is dense, and provides multiple pathways to meander across the neighborhood. However, a notable level of isolation and discontinuity exists in portions of the neighborhood south of Depeyster Street. The numerous east-west streets in these southern areas lack direct connectivity with Erie Boulevard or South James Street. Future opportunities for connections through the Waterfront Village Subarea and enhanced connectivity between Canal Street and Erie Boulevard should be investigated.

The Centro Bus Line has numerous stops along South James Street, yet none along Eire Boulevard or internal to the subarea. However, nearly all properties are within 1/4 mile of a transit stop,



Uvanni Park and future amenities should be made accessible via continuous sidewalk networks, providing a safe and easy-to-navigate path for children and families

providing good accessibility to the transit network. Sidewalks are found throughout the South Rome Residential subarea, providing connectivity along most roadways. The roads functioning as rear access alleys (Cooke Ave, Avenue A, Avenue B, Day Ave) offer the opportunity for pedestrian and bicyclist connections. There are numerous gaps within the sidewalk network, either at individual properties or along portions of side streets. At a minimum, the City should seek to provide a continuous and uninterrupted sidewalk along a single side of most streets. Lawrence and Depeyster Streets should be targeted as primary pedestrian thoroughfares with sidewalks on both sides, if possible.

Natural Resources

There are no substantial natural resources present within the subarea, with remaining open spaces comprised of abandoned or vacant lots.

Infrastructure

The subarea has a full complement of water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer, and telecommunications infrastructure in place. This infrastructure was installed to match the build out capacity of the neighborhood. While there are

EXISTING CONDITIONS

numerous opportunities for infill development it is not anticipated that existing infrastructure capacities would need to be upgraded to support the continued revitalization of the neighborhood.

Historic Sites

The former first generation Erie Canal prism cut across South James Street between West Wright Street and West South Street. The historic waterway continues south towards the current day Erie Canal along a strip of City-owned land. This area has significant potential for interpretive elements; the crossing of the former canal on South James Street should be recognized and celebrated as a major component of Rome's history.

According to assessment data, there are 74 residential structures that were constructed prior to 1900, with the oldest structures dating to the 1830s. While none of these structures are on the state and national historic registers, they remain a significant part of the neighborhood's historic fabric, and should be considered an important asset during revitalization.

For instance, Depeyster Street between Avenue A and Louisa Street contains 17 structures that pre-date 1900. The City should investigate the significance of these structures as they relate to the City's vernacular architectural style, and consider this a potential focal point for revitalization, preservation and rehabilitation efforts.

Brownfield, Vacant, & Underutilized Sites

There are ten sites within the South Rome Residential Subarea that can be considered to have the potential for environmental issues. These sites are largely confined to the commercial portion of South James Street at the northern and southern extremes of the corridor. They represent former gas stations, active restaurants, and active commercial properties. Concerns on these properties relate to the current/historic use of bulk storage tanks for fuel or waste oil, and does not indicate the presence of any wrong-doing, contamination, or imminent danger to the public.

Nor do these sites currently represent significant obstacles to redevelopment. These ten sites are:

229 South James Street - 242.065-2-13

Parking lot. Contains 1 inactive UST.

301 South James Street - 242.065-2-15

Currently an active restaurant. Two USTs removed.

307 South James Street - 242.065-2-18

Parking lot. Former gasoline/service station.

309 South James Street - 242.065-2-19

Parking lot. Former gasoline/service station.

310-314 South James Street - 242.065-2-7

Currently a lumber yard. Two USTs removed.

612 South James Street - 242.073-1-6

Vacant lot. Former gasoline/service station. Five USTs removed.

736 South James Street - 242.018-1-43

Active commercial property. Four USTs removed. Contaminated soil removed.

738 South James Street - 242.018-1-44

Active commercial property. Four USTs removed. Contaminated soil removed.

103 East Wright Street - 242.073-2-2

Active commercial property. Four USTs removed. Contaminated soil removed.

416 Canal Street - 242.074-1-25

Active commercial property. Four USTs removed. Contaminated soil removed.

See Appendices C, E and F for brownfield maps and data.

Key Buildings

No buildings have been identified as catalysts for redevelopment within the South Rome Residential subarea. There are several small underutilized or vacant commercial structures scattered along the South James Street corridor, along with numerous vacant residential structures. As the subarea currently lacks a focal point or prominent landmark structure, future revitalization scenarios should strive to create a clear identity and center of activity within the neighborhood.

STRATEGIC SITES

SITE SR-1: GRYZIEC FIELD and SOUTH JAMES STREET ENHANCEMENTS

Strategic Site SR-1 includes properties along the west side of South James Street from Gryziec Avenue to Muck Road. These parcels have rear access to Gryziec Field, a recreational center the City is seeking to improve. The five parcels that make up Strategic Site SR-1 total one acre and are a mix of residential and commercial uses. This includes a property identified as a potential brownfield located at the gateway entrance to the BOA adjacent to the Erie Canal.

All five parcels are privately controlled by four separate owners, requiring close coordination between the property owner and City to facilitate redevelopment/rehabilitation projects. As part of the City’s intent to revitalize Gryziec Field, a more prominent gateway and entry experience is envisioned along South James Street and Gryziec Avenue. The project’s location at a major BOA Gateway also supports investments in the aesthetics, appearance and function of these properties to showcase the broader revitalization efforts taking place within the City.

The City should consider the development of a new entrance to Gryziec Field from South James Street or Muck Road. Gryziec Avenue could then become closed to through traffic with portions made into a pedestrian/bicycle-only entry that is improved with a strong delineation between the public right-of-way and adjacent private property. This access corridor could potentially include landscaping, decorative fencing and a dedicated sidewalk for pedestrians.

Streetscape improvements along South James Street should follow the general recommendations made in the Urban Design Plan, focusing on providing additional street trees and tree lawns. Upon development of the Erie Canalway Trail, a linkage to the sidewalk system along South James Street and into Gryziec Field should be developed to promote utilization of and access to this community recreational resource.



SITE LOCATION MAP



As depicted in this aerial, Gryziec Avenue is a narrow and difficult to find access point to Gryziec Field. Options include the development of an alternate entry from South James Street or Muck Road.



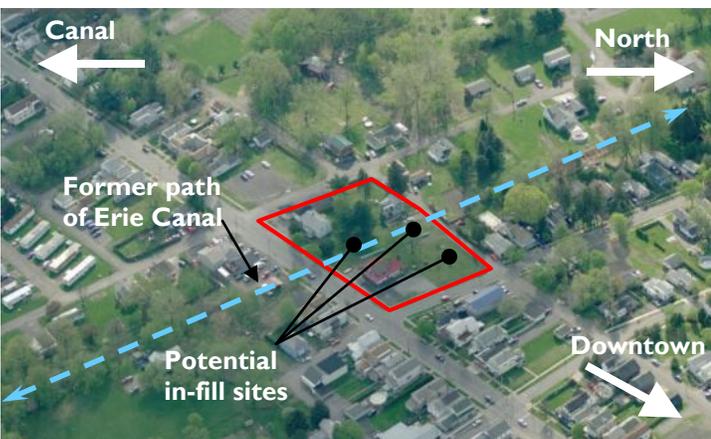
Existing street presence of Gryziec Field along South James Street is virtually non-existent and unwelcoming for visitors.

STRATEGIC SITES

SITE SR-2: UNDERUTILIZED LAND



SITE LOCATION MAP



The 600 block of South James Street is a short stretch between Wright Street and South Street, with just over 300 feet of road frontage and over a half acre of developable land.



A large parking lot dominates the corner of South James and Wright Streets.

Strategic Site SR-2 includes eight properties along the west side of South James Street from Wright Street to South Street. These parcels have rear access to West Street, and one is the former path of the original Erie Canal and is owned by the City. The 1.2 acres that make up Strategic Site SR-2 are a mix of residential and commercial uses, yet only 4 structures are located on these parcels. The lack of development diminishes the urban character found throughout the corridor. This stretch of South James Street would benefit greatly from investments in energy efficiency and façade improvements, as well as targeted infill or redevelopment. A project similar to the Canal Village investments made to the north along South James Street should be investigated for feasibility to continue the momentum generated by that residential project.

If infill development is not considered feasible, the City should focus efforts on improving the streetscape appearance of these properties consistent with the Urban Design Plan and the City’s Main Streets Design Guidelines. Streetscape improvements should include a well defined tree lawn between on-street parking areas and the sidewalk, complete with street trees and shrubbery.

Additionally, the City should either seek to divest the former canal parcel between adjacent land owners, or improve the boundary definition between the public and private parcels. Although the City should continue focusing major investment efforts on nearby Gryziec Field, this parcel would benefit from simple green space improvements, including a few additional shade trees, to provide a place for open play or rest and relaxation mid-block along South James Street. If the City is to retain ownership as open space, a sign should be placed at the street line to inform the neighborhood that this is public land open for public use.

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengths

- Established residential core can be strengthened through revitalization and infill programs.
- Existing housing stock can provide an affordable alternative for housing rehabilitation projects.
- South James Street corridor provides local, neighborhood based commercial options.
- Numerous opportunities for infill development on private and publicly owned sites.
- Proximity to Erie Canal provides opportunities to capitalize on linkages and public space improvements.
- Vacant land on north end of South James Street is opportunity for targeted reinvestment.

Challenges

- Large number of multi-family residential units reflects low owner-occupancy rates.
- Lower owner occupancy rates have direct impact on property maintenance and values.
- Low owner occupancy indicates residents are less vested in the neighborhood.
- High levels of vacant structures in the neighborhood are centers for criminal activity.
- Industrial business located in southeast corner of subarea creates noise and detracts from the overall character of the residential neighborhood and Uvanni Park.
- In long-term development scenario, transition from working class neighborhood to high-end development on waterfront.

Key Objectives *(see Implementation Strategy section for additional information)*

- Leverage the efforts associated with the Canal Village housing development by focusing future neighborhood investments in adjacent properties to further strengthen the critical mass of renewal along South James Street.
- Implement the Urban Design Plan which identifies a streetscape enhancement strategy for South James Street that focuses on maintaining the pedestrian-friendly character and buffering public spaces from adjacent parking areas and driveway entrances.
- Enhance existing intersections to improve connectivity and circulation. Treatments may include traffic calming measures and pedestrian oriented improvements, such as colored asphalt.
- Develop residential design standards that are considerate of existing scale and character of the residential neighborhood. Build on vernacular style developed as part of Canal Village.
- Improve sidewalk conditions to address trip hazards and deteriorating conditions.
- Focus residential rehabilitation projects and infill development on the 500 and 600 blocks of South James Street to complete street revitalization from Canal Village south to Gryziec Field.

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Future Land Use

The South Rome Residential subarea should continue as a mixed use residential neighborhood that provides a variety of housing types and a strong neighborhood-scale commercial corridor. South James Street should remain a mixed use corridor that provides higher density residential units and limited-scale commercial/retail establishments to service the adjacent neighborhoods. The core residential neighborhood should remain mixed residential, yet should strive to increase levels of ownership and owner-occupancy via infill projects, housing rehabilitation programs, and ownership incentive programs as detailed in Actions 2.2 and 2.3 in the Comprehensive Plan.

The core residential area lacks adequate park facilities, and future land use strategies should identify appropriate locations for additional recreational space to meet Goals 1, 2 and 4 of the Comprehensive Plan relating to vibrant neighborhoods and high quality recreational opportunities. The industrial areas on the southeast corner should be buffered from adjacent residential uses with open space, vegetation, and other screening techniques.

Recommended land uses for infill and redevelopment projects include:

- market-rate single family residences;
- affordable single-family residences;
- townhomes and multi-family buildings;
- mixed use commercial and convenience retail; and
- parks and open space.

See the Summary Analysis, Findings and Recommendations Section for more information on recommendations.

Regulatory Updates

The South Rome Residential subarea currently includes two zoning districts (Mixed Commercial/Residential [C-2] and Small Lot Single-Family Residential [R-2]) which allow for varying degrees of residential and commercial land uses. While current regulations permit a mix of land uses, the code lacks design guidelines or standards for development. The City should continue to implement appropriate development typologies for the South James Street corridor as outlined in the Urban Design Plan and the core residential neighborhood as outlined in the Downtown Residential Design Guidelines. This will prevent future development from eroding the identity of the neighborhood.

The City should strive to incorporate sustainable construction strategies through the provision of guidelines for environmentally responsible and sustainable development. Historically, the South Rome Residential neighborhood has suffered from significant levels of code violations by absentee property owners. Strategies should be created that mitigate repeat offenders through enhanced education, training, and enforcement activities through the Code Enforcement Office.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

South Rome Residential Concept Map



IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Land Use & Zoning Recommendations

1. Develop design guidelines and an architectural pattern book for residential development based upon the historic vernacular architecture found throughout the neighborhood. The recently constructed housing visions project provides appropriate examples for new development.

Capital Project Recommendations

1. Improve sidewalk connectivity within the core of the neighborhood by filling gaps, seeking to create contiguous runs of sidewalk on at least one side of the street.
2. Enhance connectivity and access to Uvanni Park by completing sidewalk segments within the neighborhood.
3. Coordinate the development of a trail head and connectivity with the future Erie Canalway Trail and Gryziec Field, Lawrence Street, Canal Street and East North Street.
4. Improve visual and physical connectivity between South James Street and Gryziec Field, and investigate an enhanced access point from Muck Road.
5. Continue to implement the recommendations made within the Urban Design Plan as redevelopment continues along South James Street.
6. Utilizing minimal public funds, convert the former Erie Canal corridor parcel in the 600 block of South James Street to a public greenspace, with an open lawn area, shade trees, bench seating and interpretive signage describing the historic use of the land.

Recommended Non-Capital Actions

1. Complete an inventory and analysis of existing housing to identify the quality and quantity of the existing supply of owner-occupied and renter-occupied housing. The study should also identify opportunities for rehabilitation, new construction, land assembly, and demolition.
2. Work with housing developers to complete large-scale redevelopment and rehabilitation initiatives that build on the success of Canal Village. Continue targeted housing enhancements within the 500, 600, and 700 blocks of South James Street, including rehabilitation, infill development and selective demolition.
3. Work with neighborhood representatives to develop grassroots initiatives targeting neighborhood and property maintenance, including the creation of local tool libraries and the hosting of “how to” clinics.
4. Complete the redesign of the entry to Gryziec Field as a prominent gateway into downtown Rome along South James Street.
5. As part of a city-wide wayfinding strategy, enhance the gateway entrance at the canal bridge into Rome along South James Street, and consider extending gateway improvements from the railroad overpass south of the canal north to Muck Road.

See the Summary Analysis, Findings and Recommendations Section for more information on implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Gryziec Field Enhancements (SR-1)



The redevelopment of the South James Street frontage at Gryziec Field will improve the visibility and functionality of this important neighborhood recreational resource. This project would also highlight a significant downtown Rome gateway as motorists cross the Erie Canal and travel north into the core of the City. Improvements should include new sidewalks, decorative fencing, landscaping, lighting and street trees to enhance the definition of the park and its identity as a major entry feature to the South Rome Residential Subarea.

Underutilized Land (SR-2)



The continued revitalization of South James Street should include additional revitalization projects along targeted portions of the corridor. By concentrating investment efforts, a critical mass could begin to form at key locations within the neighborhood, leading to spin-off development and investment activity at the periphery. Vacant lots can become useful as locations for infill development, pocket parks or greenspaces, and modest off-street parking areas. The above lot was originally part of the original Clinton's Ditch, and could be improved with heritage and interpretive components along with minor improvements for seating and landscaping.