



LITTLE ITALY MAIN STREET COMMERCIAL

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



a snapshot

31.6 acres

- 34% commercial land use
- 17% vacant
- 10% residential

115 parcels

- 48 commercial
- 97 parcels in Excelsior Investment Zone
- 15 publicly-owned parcels

15 potential brownfields

- 3 publicly-owned

2 Strategic Sites

- Grand Hotel
- Nolan Machinery

“The cultural heart of Rome”

The East Dominick Main Streets Corridor, proposed as Rome’s Little Italy District, offers a variety of alternatives for food, drink and services for surrounding residences and workers. The corridor takes pride in its strong local heritage and the roots of past generations that settled in Rome from Italy, Poland, and Ireland.

The Little Italy Main Street corridor is flanked by a residential neighborhood and the City’s East Rome Business Park, providing demand for goods and services. St. John’s Church and the Mohawk River provide cultural and natural resources to complement the corridor’s mixed use character. There are numerous opportunities for rehabilitation and redevelopment that bolster the corridor’s Italian-American heritage theme and the numerous established eateries and businesses currently along East Dominick Street.

IMAGINE...

the Little Italy Main Street Commercial subarea is a multicultural mixed use corridor that displays a full complement of retail, commercial, office and residential uses. The subarea is physically linked to the Employment District and Recreation Corridor, while functioning as East Rome's cultural and economic center.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Live.

- Promote the use of upper stories for apartments and live-work units.
- Identify infill development opportunities for multi-use buildings.
- Encourage the inclusion of owner-occupied housing into infill and redevelopment projects.
- Continue to promote and brand this corridor as a complete neighborhood with a variety of commercial and residential options.

Work.

- Encourage the development of upper story residential for live-work space.
- Encourage the formation of a business improvement district or merchants association to improve corridor advertising and promotions.
- Encourage businesses to offer outdoor seating to add vibrancy to the street.
- Post a developer-RFP for the redevelopment of the Grand Hotel with RESTORE NY funding.
- Continue to implement the City's Façade Improvement Program along East Dominick Street.

Play.

- Develop a formalized cultural walk to promote the neighborhood's cultural heritage.
- Create strong linkages with the proposed Mohawk River Trail that will cross the corridor at the river and at 5th Street.
- Improve pedestrian connections between the corridor, the Employment District and the Recreation Corridor.

CASE STUDY: ARTWalk - ROCHESTER, NY

The City of Rochester's Neighborhood of the Arts (NOTA) is the center of the local arts and cultural community. The Memorial Art Gallery and the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film spawned a synergistic cluster for the arts in a small neighborhood only fifteen blocks long and just three blocks wide.

Functioning as a permanent urban art trail dubbed the ARTWalk, this 'arts and culture' promenade links the Memorial Art Gallery, the George Eastman House, and large 'public performance' spaces at the center of the project.

The City of Rome can actively transform the concept of an urban art trail into an urban cultural trail by incorporating heritage, history, and culture into the physical forms along the corridor. This will help transform the identity of East Dominick Street from a primary



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Land Use

Redevelopment in this subarea will likely build on the successes associated with Rome's Main Streets Program, including a focus on "Little Italy" promotions, and serving the needs of the anticipated growing workforce within the Employment District.

- **Commercial** (34%) land use is predominant, covering 10.8 acres.
- **Vacant** (17%) land uses comprise 34 parcels on just 5.5 acres
- **Residential** (10%) land uses account for 26 parcels on 3.3 acres.

See Appendix C for additional land use information.

Ownership

Fifteen parcels within the subarea are publicly controlled, 12 of which are owned by the City of Rome.

- Largest publicly-controlled parcel is a non-developable six-acre portion of the railroad right-of-way under the control of the Oneida County IDA.
- The City of Rome owns several critical properties within the corridor, including: the former Grand Hotel; the former Nolan Corporation property; and a linear strip of parking along the southside of East Dominick Street. Each of these properties possesses the potential for redevelopment.

See Appendix C for detailed ownership information.

Zoning

Four zoning districts encompass the Little Italy Main Street Commercial subarea – Mixed Commercial/Residential (C-2), Business and Industrial Park (E-1), Light Industrial (E-3), and Small Lot Single-Family Residential (R-2). The majority of this subarea is zoned under the Mixed Commercial/Residential (C-2) district, which allows for a combination of land uses that are consistent with the BOA's overarching vision.

See Appendix C for detailed zoning information.

Excelsior Investment Zone

Approximately 84 percent of the parcels in the subarea are located within the Rome New York Investment Zone. The revitalization of this subarea could be furthered by marketing and advertising the potential tax incentives associated with locating a business in an Investment Zone.

See Appendix C for additional information.

Parks & Open Space

There are no public or private parks or open spaces within the subarea. However, the corridor is nearly equi-distant between Bellamy Harbor Park/Erie Canal to the south and Pinti Field to the north. A new, on-road multiuse trail is proposed to travel through the subarea that would connect these two recreational destinations.



View south from East Dominick Street bridge over the Mohawk River.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Transportation

The Little Italy Main Street subarea is a transportation dominated mixed use commercial corridor. East Dominick Street is the primary artery serving East Rome, connecting downtown with points east including Utica and the State Route 365 and 12 corridors. On-street parking is prevalent throughout the East Dominick Street corridor, which provides a buffer to sidewalk areas while servicing area businesses.

The Mill Street intersection is very busy, providing access south to Martin Street on the south side of the Erie Canal. This intersection also offers the most dense development pattern in the corridor, with on-street parking consistently utilized for area businesses. The development of a strong gateway presence to the Erie Canal at the Mill Street intersection will need to take this location's existing activity into account during project development.

The Centro Bus Line has numerous stops along East Dominick Street, providing good accessibility to the transit network.

Sidewalks are found the entire length of the corridor on the north side of the street. The south side of East Dominick has sidewalks from Black River Boulevard to Mill Street, yet they come to an abrupt stop mid-block after Mill Street. The City should investigate further connections of the sidewalk system to the parking areas along East Dominick to enhance safe and effective connectivity along the corridor.

Natural Resources

Although the Mohawk River crosses underneath East Dominick Street on its journey southward to the Erie Canal, the urban-commercial corridor lacks substantial natural resources.



The width of East Dominick Street on the west end of the corridor allow for 2 lanes of traffic and a central median with on-street parking.



The definition between parking areas, the road, and sidewalks is indistinguishable at many curb cuts, and should be addressed as an issue of real and perceived safety.



On the south side of East Dominick Street, the sidewalks end mid-block, creating a confusing prospect for pedestrians.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Infrastructure

The subarea's numerous opportunities for infill development are not anticipated to exceed existing infrastructure capacities. Upgrades to in-place water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer, and telecommunications infrastructure should not be needed to support the continued revitalization of the neighborhood.

Historic Sites

There are no listed sites on the State and Federal Historic Registers within the Little Italy Main Street Commercial subarea. However, history and culture remain a significant part of the neighborhood's fabric and identity, and should be considered an important asset during revitalization. For instance, the Grand Hotel at the corner of First and East Dominick Streets is an historic former hotel that has been redeveloped with upper-story residential units and first floor retail space. This property was awarded funding in the City's recent RESTORE NY rehabilitation application, and is currently under rehabilitation and redevelopment. Similar opportunities to reuse and rehabilitate landmark or critical structures should be investigated throughout the corridor.

Brownfield, Vacant, & Underutilized Sites

There are 15 sites within the Little Italy Main Street Commercial subarea that have been identified as potential brownfields. These sites are scattered throughout the corridor, and primarily are the result of commercial activities such as gas stations. The corridor's largest industrial brownfield is the former Nolan Corporation building on Nock Street. This property is currently undergoing remediation through the DEC Environmental Restoration Program for spills and leads associated with above and below ground storage tanks. The Nolan property was also included within the City's 2009 RESTORE project to assist in deconstruction and rehabilitation activities to create unique and flexible commercial space.

The following is a listing of potential brownfields within the subarea:

Nolan Building - 243.070-1-25

Former industrial use, documented spills and subsurface contamination; ERP site under remediation

200 East Dominick Street - 242.059-1-77

Historic metal working site

255-257 East Dominick Street - 242.059-1-66

Former gas/service station

267-261 East Dominick Street - 242.059-1-65

Historic metal working site

268-276 East Dominick Street - 242.067-1-1

Former gas/service station

273-277 East Dominick Street - 242.067-1-22

Former gas/service station

280-286 East Dominick Street - 242.067-1-3

Former gas/service station

612 East Dominick Street - 242.020-1-24.2

Former gas/service station

1001 East Dominick Street - 243.069-1-16

Former gas/service station

1009-1011 East Dominick Street - 243.069-1-17

Former gas/service station

1201-1207 East Dominick Street - 243.070-1-5

Former gas/service station, documented spills and subsurface contamination; ERP site under remediation

1025 East Dominick Street - 243.013-1-1.3

Failed UST, Spill No. 9407227

1027-1029 East Dominick Street - 243.069-1-18

Former gas/service station

1313 East Dominick Street - 243.070-1-24

Former gas/service station

1401-1405 East Dominick Street - 243.070-1-30

Historic USTs, major petroleum storage facility

See Appendix C for additional information on brownfields and Appendix F for detail property profile sheets.

STRATEGIC SITES

SITE LI-1: GRAND HOTEL

Strategic Site LI-1 is a former hotel on the northeast corner of East Dominick and First Streets, and sits at a major internal gateway within the BOA. Currently under renovation, the 3-story structure sits on 0.3 acres of land and includes 11,700 square feet of future retail, commercial, and residential space. In 2009, the property was awarded \$400,000 in the third round of RESTORE NY funding for rehabilitation and design work. After award of the RESTORE grant, the City distributed a developer-RFP at the end of 2009.

The reuse of this property includes 4,600 square feet of first floor retail/commercial space, and over 7,000 square feet of high quality housing units (6 total) on the second and third floors.

The rehabilitation and reuse of this structure will be a catalyst for the redevelopment of the East Dominick Street corridor. Investment in this building will also begin to promote the adjacent intersection as a primary gateway to the Erie Canal and a central node of activity within the corridor. The former Grand Hotel sits prominently at the intersection, and offers views from the upper stories down Mill Street towards the Erie Canal.

The project will remove the blighting influence of this massive once-abandoned brick structure, and will promote foot traffic on the street, the use of upper stories, and will activate the building facades to bring life back to this historic neighborhood node. The redevelopment of the former hotel will also remove this property from City-ownership and place it back on the tax rolls to provide additional revenue to City coffers.

Future redevelopment activities surrounding this structure should also strive to bring above market-rate rental units to the corridor to supply the variety and tenant mix needed to support a vibrant mixed use neighborhood.



SITE LOCATION MAP



The former Grand Hotel is the anchor building for the intersection, and one of the largest buildings on the East Dominick Street corridor.



A view of the Grand Hotel during renovation into ground floor retail space and upper story residential units.

STRATEGIC SITES

SITE LI-2: NOLAN CORPORATION BUILDING



SITE LOCATION MAP



The former Nolan Building occupies a prominent location at the corner of East Dominick Street and Gansevoort Avenue.



Portions of the City-owned structure, such as the brick columns surrounding the front of the building, are in need of significant repair.

Strategic Site LI-2 includes four City-owned properties totaling 2.33 acres at the eastern end of the East Dominick Street corridor. The primary property is two acres and includes former operations of the Nolan Corporation which manufactured machine parts and equipment for the printing industry. The adjacent three parcels are small properties surrounding the primary lot that provide buffering to the site's main structure.

While most of the buildings sit at the rear of the property, the main structure retains good frontage and visibility from East Dominick Street, with a large front staircase that leads from the column adorned front entry to the sidewalk. Existing mature trees and a wrought iron fence with stone columns line the property boundary along Gansevoort Avenue and East Dominick Street, giving this building a strong positive presence in the neighborhood.

The site is currently undergoing remediation activities for contamination resulting from the failure of underground and aboveground storage tanks and asbestos abatement. At the completion of remedial activities the site is anticipated to provide 37,000 square feet of office and commercial space. The original building that fronts on East Dominick Street dates back to 1902 and offers unique spaces with tall ceilings and large windows. The rehabilitation of this building's façade consistent with the City's Main Streets Design Guidelines will make this property an anchor of the corridor's east end.

In 2009, the City successfully obtained funding under the RESTORE NY program to rehabilitate and selectively demolish portions of the property. The City is awaiting the completion of remedial activities, and has prepared a developer-RFP to facilitate the return of this site to the City's tax rolls and use as an active business.

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengths

- Strong local identity around history and culture provides a solid foundation for continued investment.
- Viable business clusters cater to residents and local employees and promote a strong sense of place.
- Numerous infill sites provide opportunities for new business development.
- Accessibility to Employment District and Recreation Corridor.
- Visible signs of renewal and reinvestment throughout the corridor promote a stable economic environment.

Key Objectives

(see Implementation Strategy section for additional information)

- Continue to promote the East Dominick Street corridor as a small-scale, neighborhood commercial use district to support adjacent residences and centers of employment.
- Ensure that regulations permit the development of health and medical services to support a well-balanced commercial corridor.
- New development should strive to be mixed use with multi-family housing on upper levels to add vibrancy and foot traffic for corridor businesses.
- Implement streetscape enhancements as stated in the Urban Design Plan, including a prominent pedestrian connection to Fort Stanwix.
- Develop a formalized branding campaign to support the identity of the corridor as the cultural heart of the City.
- Provide cultural and historic interpretation opportunities, to include a formalized cultural walk and more passive opportunities to learn about the history of the corridor and City.

Challenges

- Corridor lacks consistency in scale and land use pattern, diminishing the urban form.
- Lack of sidewalks on majority of south side of street, a lack of adequate pedestrian safety measures (crosswalks, ramps, ped signals) diminishes accessibility and character.
- Roadway feels and functions more like an arterial and less like a neighborhood street, leading to higher traffic speeds.
- High levels of vacant land and gaps in the urban street frontage hamper the ability to visually and physically connect the corridor together.



A newly rehabilitated business on East Dominick Street. The property is consistent with the City's Main Streets Design Guidelines, and should become a model for future property owners seeking to reinvest.

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Future Land Use

The Little Italy Main Street Commercial area should be promoted as a mixed use district with commercial and office uses occupying the street level and residential and office uses utilizing upper-story spaces. The existing character and cultural flavor of the East Dominick Street corridor should be preserved through the implementation of the City's Main Streets Design Guidelines for new development and redevelopment projects. There are significant opportunities for infill development along the corridor. The City should continue to promote the redevelopment of vacant and underutilized parcels to service adjacent population and employment centers.

The largest land use opportunity present in the corridor is a vacant strip of land along the south side of East Dominick Street. With a depth of approximately 45 feet, the land between the existing railroad line and East Dominick is currently utilized for public parking, yet is not deep enough to support traditional development of buildings. The proximity of the limited-use rail line also limits development potential. The City should consider the feasibility of townhouse style residential units in this area to provide a greater variety of residential options. Changes to the cross-section of East Dominick Street should also be investigated to facilitate the redevelopment and enhancement of this important street edge within the Little Italy Main Street corridor.

Recommended land uses include:

- mixed use commercial with upper story residential;
- Restaurants and bars;
- professional services, including medical, financial and real estate; and
- townhomes and multi-family buildings.

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

Regulatory Updates

The Little Italy Main Street Commercial corridor is currently comprised of four zoning districts including Mixed Commercial / Residential (C-2), Small Lot Single-Family Residential (R-2), Business and Industrial Park (E-1), and General Industrial (E-3).

The C-2 zoning designation is appropriate to achieve the desired mix of uses within this corridor. The City's Main Streets Design Guidelines should be implemented for the subarea to ensure that new development and redevelopment is consistent with the desired character and reflects the cultural and aesthetic authenticity of East Dominick Street.

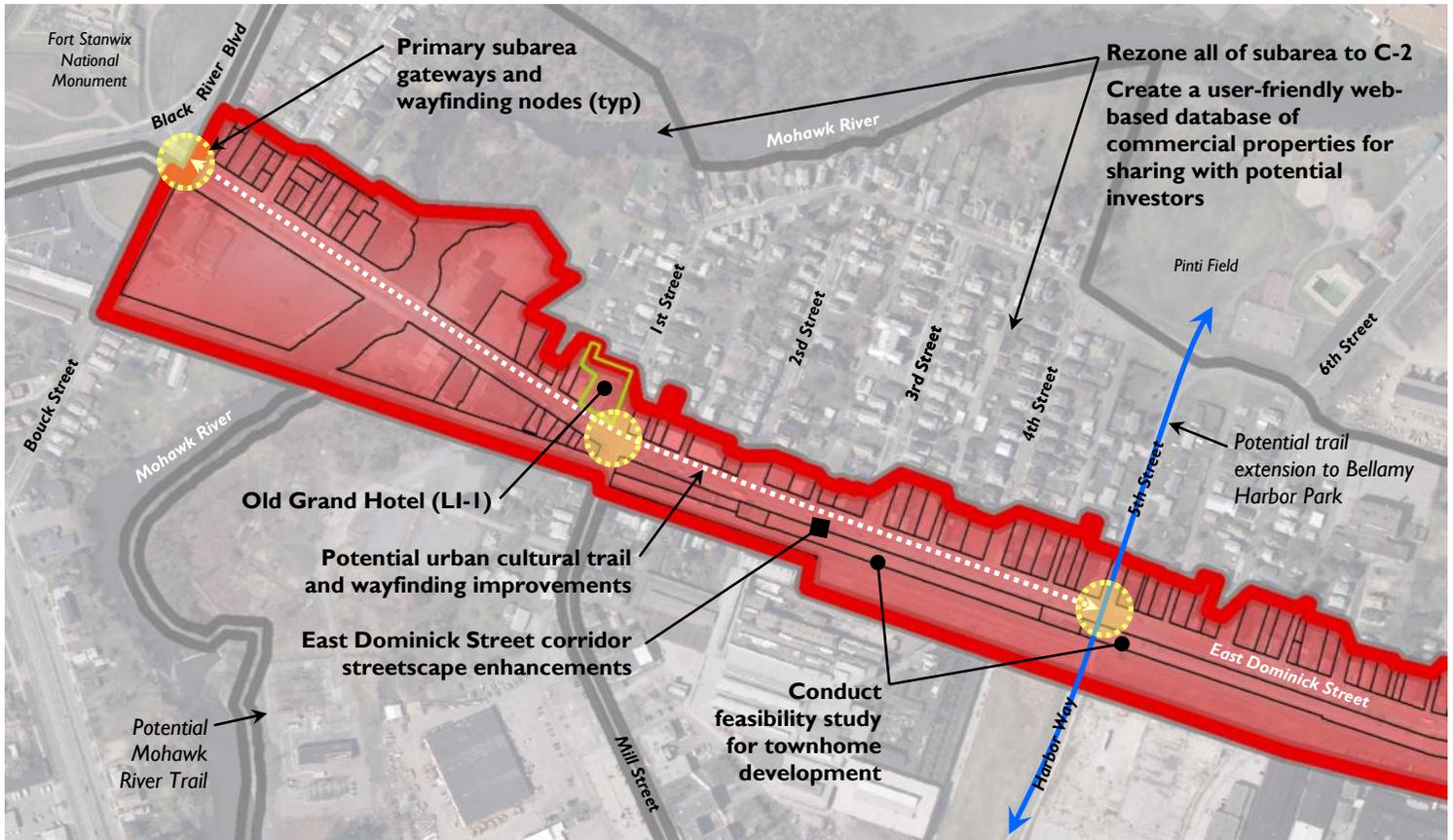
The City should require sustainable construction strategies through the provision of guidelines for environmentally responsible development practices. Similar to the South Rome Residential subarea along South James Street, portions of the corridor have suffered from code violations by absentee property owners. Strategies should be created that mitigate repeat offenders through enhanced programs offering education and training for property owners through the Code Enforcement Office.



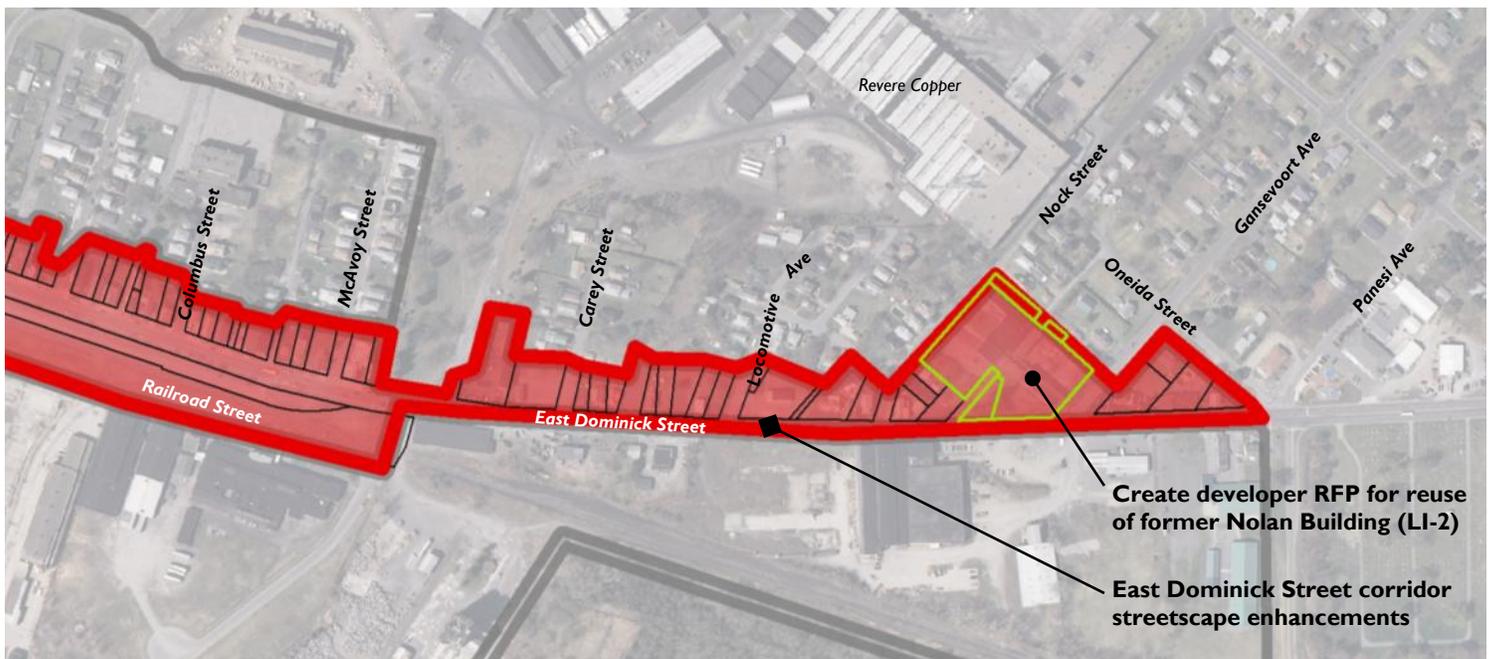
Stairs and lighting in the process of installation to connect the parking lot on the south side of East Dominick with businesses across the street.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Little Italy Main Street Commercial Concept Map - West



Little Italy Main Street Commercial Concept Map - East



IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Land Use & Zoning Recommendations

1. Rezone all of subarea to C-2 to achieve the desired mix of uses within the corridor.
2. The City should develop guidelines that promote environmentally responsible construction practices.
3. Continue to implement the Main Streets Design Guidelines.

Capital Project Recommendations

1. Design and construct a corridor streetscape enhancement project which will narrow the cross section of East Dominick Street and improve aesthetics, landscaping, and lighting.
2. Enhance pedestrian safety at corridor crossings at intersections and from parking areas.
3. Design and construct a formalized cultural trail along the north side of East Dominick Street, with the first phase beginning at Black River Boulevard and Fort Stanwix and ending at 1st Street to begin the branding process for the corridor.
4. As part of the cultural trail and a larger downtown-wide wayfinding strategy, design and install directional, informational and interpretive signage at key intersections along the corridor to improve the movement of pedestrians and motorists throughout the subarea.
5. As part of the cultural trail and wayfinding improvements, install gateway features at the 1st Street intersection to highlight this prominent location in the corridor.

Recommended Non-Capital Actions

1. Prepare a developer request-for-proposal to redevelop the former Nolan Building at 1333 East Dominick Street (LI-2) as flexible, energy-efficient commercial space.
2. Create a user-friendly, web-based database of commercial buildings and properties within the East Dominick Street corridor that can interface with the City's GIS system and share building information with the public and potential investors.
3. Gauge interest and assist in the formation of an East Dominick Street business improvement district.
4. Identify and implement a unique marketing campaign specific to the East Dominick Street corridor, complete with a new logo and slogan, to attract visitors and new investors to the corridor.
5. In consultation with property owners, conduct a market and design feasibility study for the development of townhomes on the narrow parcel of land (242.068-1-77) adjacent to East Dominick Street, including the City-owned parcel (242.020-1-24.1).

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

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Redevelopment of former Grand Hotel (Strategic Site LI-1)



The former Grand Hotel occupies a prominent location by anchoring the middle of the Little Italy Main Street corridor and functioning as a primary gateway entrance to the Recreation Corridor subarea. This building has recently undergone rehabilitation into four upper-story residential units and two ground-floor commercial spaces. The return of this long vacant building to an active, mixed-use structure will add 24-hour vibrancy and activity to the East Dominick Street corridor, while also providing area businesses with potential new customers for food, entertainment and services. The rehabilitation of this structure is a model for revitalization activities elsewhere along the corridor, including the several multi-story structures located opposite 1st Street at the same intersection.

Redevelopment of former Nolan Building (Strategic Site LI-2)



The former Nolan Corporation building is currently vacant and undergoing remediation for limited environmental contamination which took place over the course of its 100 year history. The structure has great potential for flexible commercial and office uses, and ample space for parking to the rear of the property. The exterior rehabilitation of this structure should include façade cleaning, the replacement of windows and doors, and the rehabilitation of the decorative iron fencing and columns along the street line. The removal of overgrown vegetation along the foundation will highlight this structure as an important gateway feature within the East Dominick Street corridor. At full capacity, the 37,000 square feet of space available at the Nolan Building could equate to over 300 employees desiring services in the corridor.