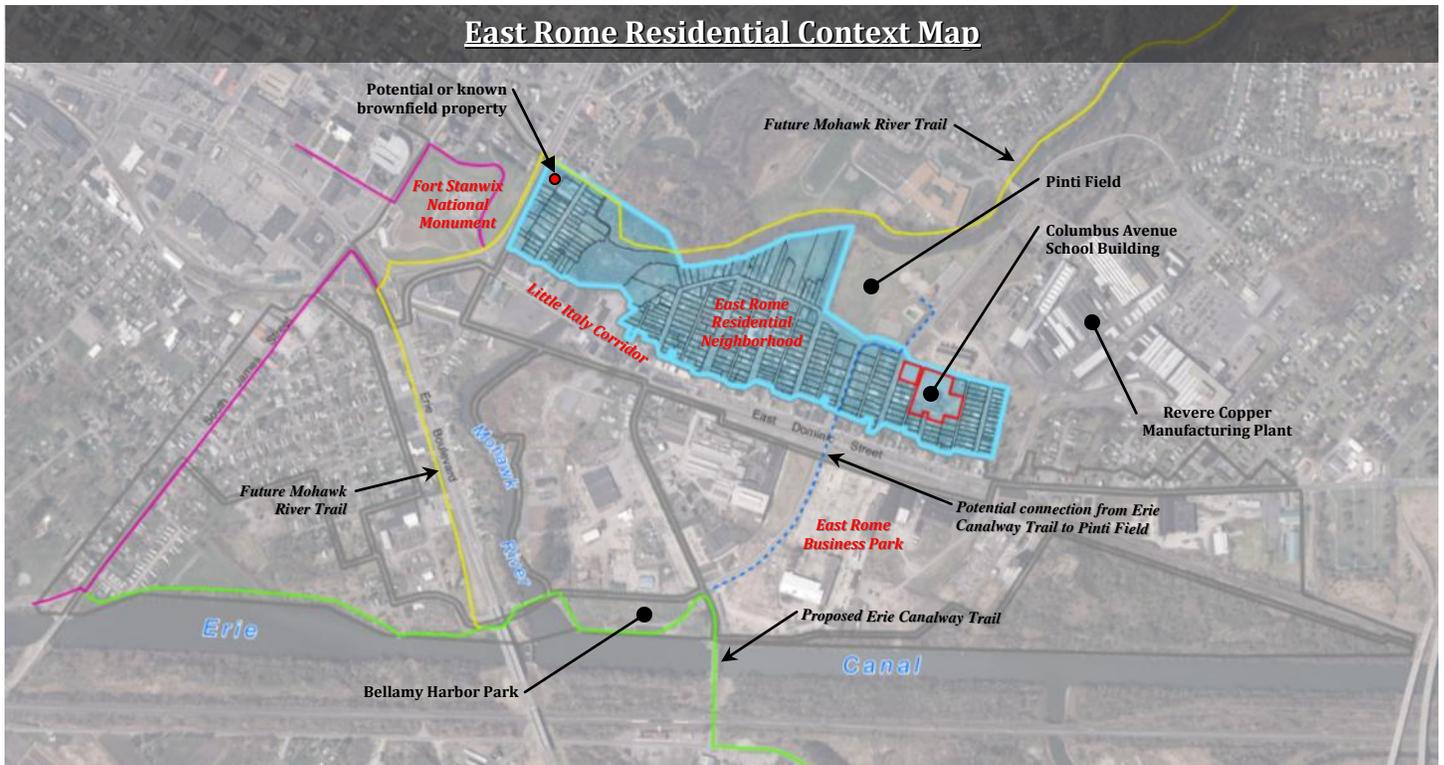




EAST ROME RESIDENTIAL

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



a snapshot

51.7 acres

- 59% residential
- 28% vacant land
- 10% commercial

305 parcels

- 205 residential
- 12 parcels owned by City

1 brownfield

- 78 vacant properties

1 Strategic Site

- former school building

2,500 feet

- of Mohawk River frontage

“Rooted in culture...”

The East Rome Residential neighborhood is defined by its diversity. For more than a century, successive generations of families have lived as part of Rome’s Little Italy. While the neighborhood retains a solid working-class character, a lack of continued investment over recent years has resulted in some poorly maintained and abandoned properties. The vacant Columbus Avenue School remains a reminder of the vibrant past of this residential enclave.

The location of the neighborhood continues to be one of its greatest assets which can be capitalized upon, with close proximity to East Dominick Street, the Mohawk River waterfront, downtown, and the Employment District.

IMAGINE...

the East Rome residential neighborhood as one of the City's most desirable neighborhoods to live and raise a family thanks to its convenient proximity to jobs in the Employment District, culture and amenities in Little Italy, and easy access to amenities along the waterfront and in downtown.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Live.

- Develop incentive programs for the rehabilitation of renter- and owner-occupied housing.
- Identify opportunities to follow the revitalization model created by the Canal Village project.
- Investigate the potential to redevelop the former Columbus Avenue school for senior housing or other compatible uses.
- Continue to provide affordable single- and two-family residential opportunities.

Work.

- Foster safe and continuous pedestrian connections into the adjacent Employment District, East Dominick corridor, and downtown.

Play.

- Identify vacant and underutilized lands to create a small pocket park within the neighborhood.
- Provide a clearly defined path for the Mohawk River Trail and provide connections from within the neighborhood.



CASE STUDY: SENIOR HOUSING- BALTIMORE, MD

Howard Park Elementary School was built in 1907, and was abandoned by the Baltimore City School District in the 1970s as neighborhood populations declined. The school sat vacant, attracting criminal elements and activities. A private development company proposed an affordable housing development for senior citizens. The plan integrated the rehabilitation of the historic neighborhood icon with a newly constructed state-of-the-art addition. The project promotes the community's strong desire for inter-generational activity. With housing options available in the neighborhood, seniors are inclined to move out of homes for which they can no longer care, thereby creating housing opportunities in the neighborhood for the next generation of work-force families. The plan seamlessly integrates the original historic structure with a 77,000 square foot, three-story building that includes a multi-purpose community room, an exercise room, laundry facilities, computer room, and supportive services offices.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Land Use

The East Rome Residential subarea consists of 305 parcels covering 51.7 acres, currently categorized as residential, vacant land, commercial, and recreation and entertainment, and community services.

- **Residential land use** is predominant, covering 59 percent of the land area.
- **Vacant land uses** comprise 78 parcels on 14.7 acres, with vacant lots present on all streets but 4th Street.
- There are 18 **commercial properties** on over 5 acres. Half (9) of these parcels are apartment properties.
- The remainder of the properties within the subarea are categorized as **recreation and entertainment and community services**, with 4 properties on just over 1 acre.

See Appendix C for additional information on land use within the East Rome subarea.

Ownership

Of the 305 parcels within the East Rome Residential Subarea, only 12 are publicly controlled, seven of which are currently vacant.

- Ninety-six percent of the parcels within the subarea are privately owned, making large-scale redevelopment unlikely.
- The former Columbus Avenue school and the adjacent parking lot are privately owned and represent the greatest opportunity for a larger redevelopment project.
- Publicly owned vacant parcels should be considered for community gardens, neighborhood parks, or infill development.

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

Zoning

There are four zoning districts within the East Rome Residential Subarea –Mixed Commercial/Residential (C-2), Preservation Zone (P-Z), Small Lot Single-Family Residential (R-2), and Residential/Professional (R-P). The Mixed Commercial/Residential (C-2) district is primarily located along the southern boundary of this subarea in areas adjacent to East Dominick Street, as well as within the western portion of the subarea between River Street and Black River Boulevard. The Small Lot Single-Family Residential (R-2) district is the largest district in this subarea and is located east of the Mohawk River covering 33.1 acres.

See Appendix C for detailed zoning information.

Parks & Open Space

There are no dedicated park facilities within the East Rome Residential Subarea. However, the City's Pinti 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 6th Street via a sidewalk.

A City-owned vacant property along the Mohawk River is currently unimproved, and preserves the vegetated character that defines the Mohawk River corridor throughout the BOA. This parcel should continue to remain undeveloped and in a natural state, with limited enhancements that will provide for pedestrian access to the waterfront.



Pinti Field is within walking distance to most of the East Rome subarea.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Transportation

The East Rome Residential Subarea is well connected to the surrounding roadway network, including the east-west corridor of East Dominick Street and the north-south corridors of 6th Street and Black River Boulevard. The Centro Bus Line has numerous stops along East Dominick Street and 5th Street, providing good accessibility to the transit network.

The proposed Mohawk River Trail will have a terminus at Pinti Field just north of the subarea along 6th Street. The trail will travel along 5th Street and provide access south to Bellamy Harbor Park and the Erie Canal along Harbor Way. A second portion of the proposed trail will follow the Mohawk River from Bellamy Harbor Park north into the East Rome Residential Subarea on the west side of the river, ultimately connecting trail users to Delta Lake State Park and Griffiss Business and Technology Park (see page 97 for map). These trail connections provide subarea residents with access to multiple destination points for recreation and represent a significant open space asset for the neighborhood.



A view of 2nd Street looking north.

Natural Resources

The Mohawk River is the greatest and most widely recognized natural resource within the subarea. The river provides a great diversity of habitat along its shoreline, and the largely vegetated banks provide a natural, peaceful escape from the built environment.

The City-owned parcel at the terminus of Brook Street is a forested upland portion of a larger wetland complex that extends from East Dominick Street north to Bloomfield Street. The significant stands of trees make this a highly valuable habitat and natural resource that also provides flood protection and mitigation for properties along River Street and Floyd Avenue. Public access and development of this parcel should be limited, yet the City should investigate the provision of a modest trail or boardwalk to enhance public enjoyment.

Beyond the Mohawk River, there are no significant natural resources that would impact the redevelopment and revitalization of the East Rome Residential Subarea.

Infrastructure

The East Rome Residential subarea has adequate water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer, and telecommunications infrastructure in place. The subarea lacks significant opportunities for extensive new development, and it is anticipated that existing infrastructure capacities will support the continued revitalization of the neighborhood without the need for investment in additional infrastructure.



The Mohawk River as it flows south through the East Rome Residential subarea.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Historic Sites

While the subarea is adjacent to the Fort Stanwix National Monument along Black River Boulevard, there are no known sites of historical importance within the East Rome Residential subarea.

Brownfield, Vacant, & Underutilized Sites

Only one site within the East Rome Residential Subarea has been identified as having the potential for environmental issues. The City of Rome Central Fire Station is located along Black River Boulevard, and historically contained underground storage tanks. The potential for these structures to leak and fail makes this site a possible brownfield. Additionally, there were two documented occurrences of tank test failures at this site that resulted in a spill incident report being filed with the NYS DEC. This property is active and under public control as a fire station. There are no plans for a change of use on this site in the foreseeable future.

154-160 Black River Blvd - 242.059-1-9

Two UST failures resulting in spills.

Of the 78 vacant properties located within the subarea, 73 are classified as residential based on assessment information. The most significant underutilized site is the vacant former school building on Columbus Avenue.

See Appendices C and F for additional information on potential brownfields in the BOA study area.

Key Buildings

The Columbus Avenue school building is a large brick structure, predominantly two stories, with a large three story gymnasium at the rear of the property. This building is privately owned, and most recently served as the temporary headquarters for the Rome Police Department while their new facility was under construction.

The condition of this building for redevelopment is unknown. A building condition assessment should be completed to determine adaptive reuse feasibility.



The site of the former Columbus Elementary School.



The former Columbus Elementary School as seen from the air, looking north.

STRATEGIC SITES

SITE ER-1: COLUMBUS AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Strategic Site ER-1 is an abandoned former school building in the heart of the East Rome Residential subarea. The structure is tucked away at the northern terminus of Columbus Avenue, a short street with a handful of residential properties. Strategic Site 1 includes a second parcel under the same private ownership, forming a large parking area along Mohawk and 6th Streets behind the school building. While the property is accessible from Columbus, Mohawk and Frank Streets, the best access can be attained from 6th Street.

The existing building has an approximately 28,000 gross square feet of class room and administrative space on two stories, along with an approximate 9,500 square foot gymnasium. The main property consists of 2.41 acres, with the adjacent parcel bringing the total potential redevelopment area to 2.84 acres.

The structural and environmental conditions of the property are unknown, and a formal investigation into the reuse potential of the building, including potential asbestos abatement, should precede any detailed redevelopment scenarios that retain the existing structure.

Strategic Site ER-1 offers the largest contiguous developable parcel within the subarea. There are numerous options available for the use of these properties. One alternative is to rehabilitate and reuse portions or all of the existing structure. A creative approach will be required to reuse the building in its current form. The classroom layout



SITE LOCATION MAP

may present opportunities for reuse as office and meeting space for local not-for-profit corporations. The potential reuse as senior housing should also be considered, although the need for elevators may increase development costs. If the reuse of the City Yard facility for a recreation center does not take place, the gymnasium facility presents a potential secondary opportunity to provide an indoor recreational facility.

An alternative option includes the clearing of the site to prepare for redevelopment. Opportunities for redevelopment include senior or transitional housing and market-rate housing such as townhomes and single-family residences.



This image is taken from the rear of the property looking towards the parking area. An adjacent warehouse can be seen on the north side of Mohawk Street.

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengths

- Adjacency to East Dominick commercial corridor offers easy access to goods, services, and cultural destinations.
- Relatively intact housing stock which can be enhanced through maintenance and upgrades.
- Opportunities for infill development of residential housing stock similar to Canal Village.
- Vacant public parcels provide opportunity for creation of neighborhood parks and community gardens.
- Connection to Pinti Field offers direct access to recreational amenities.
- Potential for strong connection to future Mohawk River Trail, which will provide linkages to destinations throughout City.
- Mohawk River frontage can be capitalized on as an asset for investment on waterfront properties.
- Redevelopment of former school can act as a catalyst for adjacent investment and function as a neighborhood anchor.

Challenges

- Conversion of homes to multi-family residential units has reduced number of owner-occupied units which has impacted property maintenance and overall feeling of sense of community.
- Adjacent industrial development on northeast corner is not compatible with residences and should be screened and mitigated to ensure neighborhood is not negatively impacted.
- Confusing one-way street pattern complicates access and hinders neighborhood connectivity across 5th Street.

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

- Leverage the redevelopment efforts associated with the Neighborhood Stabilization Program.
- Promote a diversity of housing types that provide options for different income levels and age groups.
- Promote, encourage, and assist with the development of the Mohawk River multi-use trail linkage to Bellamy Harbor Park, Delta Lake State Park, and Griffiss Business and Technology park.
- Develop a neighborhood pocket park and/or community open space to enhance neighborhood amenities and stimulate local pride.
- Encourage owner-occupancy to increase the long-term vested interest residents have in neighborhood revitalization and make this a desirable area for nearby workers.

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Future Land Use

The East Rome Residential subarea should retain its existing residential character with land uses limited to residential, community service, parks and open space. Single and two-family homes are desirable, including owner occupancy of multi-family dwellings. Opportunities for townhouse-style development should be explored to diversify the housing supply. Residential development which supports seniors and empty-nesters is also possible within the former school building on Columbus Avenue, as well as the large multi-unit property on 3rd Street.

Community service uses that complement residential neighborhoods, such as religious institutions, community centers, parks, and neighborhood gardens are also appropriate. The City should seek to identify key groupings of vacant or abandoned parcels to supply one or two small recreational areas within the neighborhood. Although Pinti Field is directly adjacent to the subarea, this park functions to serve a more City-wide population, and may be too far away to fully service the day-to-day recreational needs of East Rome residents.

The use of one or two vacant properties for community gardens would further enhance the quality of life for area residents. The frequent attention required by community gardens would bring more people outside, improving neighborhood vitality and likely safety. Local children can benefit through close work and mentoring with neighborhood garden caretakers, often senior, building intergenerational relationships, developing life skills, and improving the sense of community.

Regulatory Updates

The intent of this subarea is to retain the single-family and two-family residences and neighborhood character while also supporting uses that improve quality of life in the neighborhood, such as parks, public open space, and community services. The most appropriate zoning designation for this subarea east of the Mohawk River is Small Lot Single-Family Residential (R-2), which allows for single-family residential uses and duplexes. West of the Mohawk River the character of the subarea is slightly more commercial and would be most appropriately zoned as Mixed Commercial / Residential (C-2).

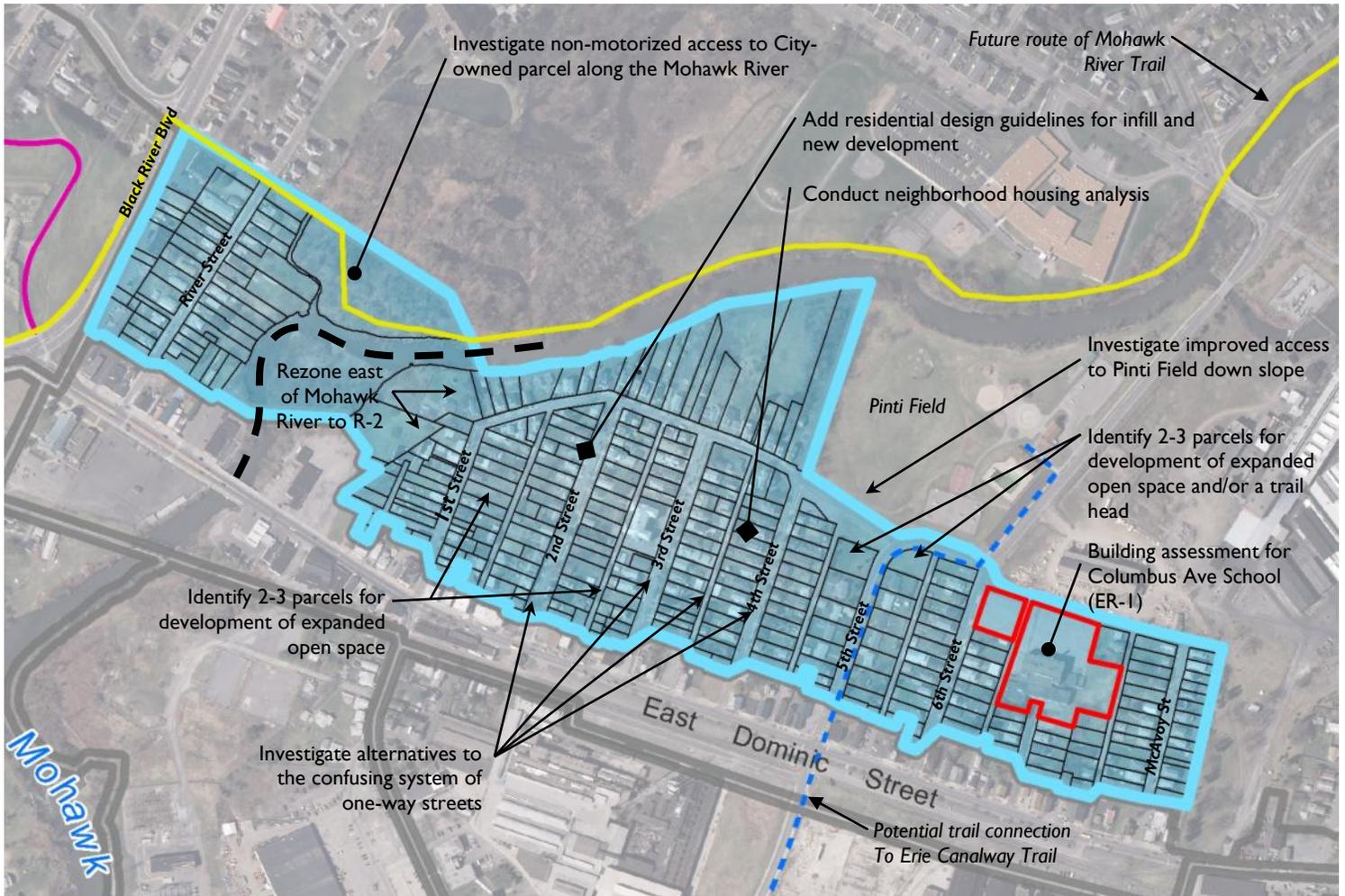
The redevelopment of the former Columbus Avenue School into senior housing would require a change of permitted uses within the R-2 district or the creation of a Planned Development-Residential district (PD-R). Prior to revising permitted uses within the R-2 district, the City should carefully evaluate potential impacts upon other neighborhoods within R-2. The approval of any Planned Development districts within the East Rome Residential subarea should be mindful of buffering, setbacks, and screening requirements to protect the quality of life and privacy of adjacent residents, while providing an opportunity to expand investment opportunities within the neighborhood.

Zoning modifications would require minor adjustments to the City's zoning map with no significant changes needed to actual zoning district language.

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

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

East Rome Residential Concept Map



Columbus Avenue School Redevelopment (ER-1)



A potential redevelopment scenario for the Columbus Avenue School includes the construction of several multi-story townhouse structures to provide increased density to the neighborhood. The sketch at left, from the viewpoint at the intersection of 6th and Mohawk Streets looking southeast, depicts several new buildings on currently vacant land. In this scenario, the school is rehabilitated and converted into residential units. The potential exists for this development to function as a single entity as part of a homeowners association, with residents having access to a gymnasium and other services within the rehabilitated school building.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Land Use & Zoning Recommendations

1. Rezone all of Subarea west of Mohawk River to C-2.
2. Expand existing residential design guidelines to include an architectural pattern book for new residential development.

Capital Project Recommendations

1. Identify 2-3 parcels for the development of expanded open space to improve neighborhood quality of life and recreational opportunities.
2. Investigate the provision of a non-motorized access trail into the City-owned parcel at the end of Brook Street along the Mohawk River and a small picnic area or other limited improvements.
3. Improve pedestrian connectivity to Pinti Field down the slope along Mohawk Street.

Recommended Non-Capital Actions

1. Develop an incentive program to facilitate the rehabilitation of renter- and owner-occupied housing.
2. Investigate alternatives to the existing one-way traffic patterns to improve circulation and accessibility for neighborhood residents.
3. Perform a building assessment and adaptive reuse feasibility study for the conversion of the former Columbus Avenue School and grounds into senior housing or other appropriate uses. This study should also include anticipated costs for remediation, rehabilitation and demolition, as needed.
4. Investigate the ability of the reuse and reprogramming of the gymnasium at the former Columbus Avenue School to be utilized for City recreational programming.
5. Conduct a neighborhood housing analysis to understand the supply and demand for housing across a broad range of users and types, including single family, renter, senior citizen, apartments, townhomes, etc. This study should include an analysis of the marketplace for housing in the neighborhood.

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