

WATERFRONT GREENSPACE

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

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September 27, 2012



a snapshot

45.7 acres
- 100% land area vacant

2 parcels
- 22.9 acre average
- 24 acres within Investment Zone

2 brownfields
- 1 privately owned
- 1 property owned by NYS Canal Corp

2 Strategic Sites
- Canal Corp Lands
- Former AAS utilized lands

1 mile of waterfront

“Green and open....”

Nestled along the Erie Canal, the Waterfront Greenspace area includes more than a mile of canal frontage and is one of the few remaining undeveloped areas within the downtown.

The area retains significant value in an undeveloped state, with opportunities for recreational programming, environmental education, or alternative energy demonstration sites. With its direct proximity to the Employment District and nearby residential and commercial centers, its an asset that the City can still further explore. This area is also a suitable location for water access and the continuation of the Canalway Trail.

IMAGINE...

the Waterfront Greenspace as a unique location in the downtown that provides a natural setting for passive recreation, environmental education, and opportunities for sustainable and renewable energy technologies to benefit the adjacent Employment District.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Live.

- Work with NYS Canal Corporation to construct trail along length of Erie Canal, connecting surrounding waterfront residential neighborhoods and activity centers.
- Promote an enhanced quality of life for residents through the preservation of greenspace.

Work.

- Provide alternative transportation to and from home and work, including trail access and bike paths.
- Seek partnerships with area institutions and companies to develop renewable energy projects.

Play.

- Provide opportunities for recreation and enjoyment of the canal from nearby employment and commercial centers.
- Provide enhanced public access to the canal via the overlooks, fishing areas, boat launches or a boardwalk.

CASE STUDY: BIOMASS from WILLOW

Short Rotation Woody Crops (SRWC) are being developed as a sustainable source of biomass for the production of bioenergy, biofuels and bioproducts. SRWC, such as shrub willow, are fast-growing hardwood species with the ability to regrow after each harvest. SRWC have been studied for more than then 20 years at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF). The shrub willow cropping system involves establishing willow on marginal soils and growing it with low labor, machinery, fertilizer, or herbicide input relative to traditional agricultural crops. After establishment, the willow is cutback and harvested during the dormant season every 3- 4 years, and produces a new crop for at least seven harvest cycles. As interest in woody biomass grows, there has been the need to increase outreach and education for numerous stakeholders, including: landowners, farmers, small businesses and biopower and biofuels companies. The development a SRWC demonstration installation to continue education and outreach efforts should be investigated to promote Rome as a City on the cutting edge of sustainability and renewable energy practices.



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Land Use

The Waterfront Greenspace subarea consists of two parcels covering 45.7 acres currently categorized as **vacant** land.

- Northern parcel is adjacent to the rail line and covers 24 acres consisting largely of wooded land and scattered clearings.
- Southern parcel consists of 21.7 acres of wooded land and steep slopes along the Erie Canal, with a total frontage of 5,300 feet within the subarea.

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

Ownership

Property ownership has a significant impact on the ability to redevelop land. Privately owned land will require coordination with existing and future property owners and/or acquisition by the City in order to achieve the desired objectives.

- NYS Canal Corporation owns a contiguous strip of waterfront land within the subarea that extends approximately 5,300 feet from Mill Street to the Route 49 overpass.
- The larger parcel to the north is privately owned vacant land.

See Appendix C for detailed ownership information.

Infrastructure

While the subarea does not contain internal utility infrastructure, stub connections provide service along Railroad Street for both water and sanitary sewer. Due to this subarea's proposed use as greenspace, upgrades to off-site infrastructure are not anticipated to meet the limited demands of associated recreational uses.

Zoning

Modifications to existing zoning may be required as part of implementation efforts. There are two zoning districts represented in this subarea: Light-Industrial (E-3), and Preservation Zone (P-Z). The Industrial zoning classification retains this area for future development, though current market forces do not support greenfield development in this location over the redevelopment of previously disturbed sites elsewhere within the BOA.

See Appendix C for detailed zoning information.

Parks & Open Space

The entire subarea consists of vacant open space with the potential for the incorporation of recreational and open space opportunities and amenities. The park and recreational opportunities are further expanded by this subarea's access to and significant frontage along the Erie Canal.

Additionally, the Canal Corporation parcel provides water access to adjacent properties in the East Rome Business Park, and the proposed Erie Canalway Trail will provide a direct linkage with Bellamy Harbor Park and adjacent areas.

Natural Resources

The Erie Canal and large amounts of vacant open space are the most significant natural resources within the subarea. The canal corridor provides a great diversity of habitat along its shoreline, and the heavily vegetated banks provide a natural, peaceful escape from the surrounding built environment. The significant stands of trees and understory growth along the Canal and internal to the subarea provides a strong sense of enclosure, but also limit viewsheds and physical access. Due to the steep slopes along the Canal, none of the subarea is located within the 100-year floodplain. As a result of its vacant status, a lack of mapped wetlands, and an elevated position above the canal, this subarea does not contain any significant obstacles to development.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Transportation

The Waterfront Greenspace subarea offers significant and desirable alternatives to vehicular travel. Vehicular access is provided via Railroad Street which connects to East Dominick Street. The northern parcel also benefits from frontage along approximately 2,700 feet of Class 1 rail operated by the Mohawk, Adirondack & Northern Railroad, which ultimately connects to the CSX Transportation, Inc. Chicago Line.

An extension of the NYS Erie Canalway Trail is proposed from Erie Canal Village to Bellamy Harbor Park and points east along the canal. Via a connection to Bellamy Harbor Park, subarea users can also access the proposed Mohawk River Trail that will provide a connection north from Bellamy Harbor Park to Delta Lake State Park through downtown and Griffiss Business and Technology Park (see Subarea Context Map).

Rome is well-positioned to take advantage of the full commercial and recreational travel potential offered by the Erie Canal. While the Canal is widely used throughout New York State, it has not reached its full potential in Rome. The Waterfront Greenspace subarea is a potential destination along the canal for recreational activity for local residents and workers, as well as tourists and canal users.



View from underneath the Mill Street Bridge towards the Waterfront Greenspace subarea.

Historic Sites

Other than the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, there are no sites on the State or National Registers of Historic Places in the Waterfront Greenspace subarea. The publicly-owned lands along the canal corridor offer the potential for the development of interpretive and educational elements that coincide with the historic status of the canal, its development, and the City of Rome.

Brownfield, Vacant, & Underutilized Sites

Within the Waterfront Greenspace subarea there are two potential brownfield sites, one of which is publicly owned and adjacent to the Erie Canal.

- NYS Canal Corporation owns a contiguous strip of land that extends from Mill Street to the Route 49 overpass along the entire length of the canal. Potential chemical impacts on the land have been identified on directly adjacent lands, and aerial photography depicts the potential for contamination based upon areas of disturbance. Future redevelopment is targeted for recreation, trails and waterfront access; these uses should not be impacted by its potential brownfield status.
- A second parcel is privately owned and aerial photography also indicates the potential for contamination based upon areas of disturbance.

See Appendices C and F for additional information on brownfield sites.

Key Buildings

There are no significant buildings within the Waterfront Greenspace subarea. Currently, the only structure is a small pump-house along the Erie Canal that was part of the former Rod Mill industrial operations on lands within the Employment District.

STRATEGIC SITES

SITE WG-1: VACANT PARCEL

Strategic Site WG-1 is vacant, yet based upon a review of site disturbances and aerial photography there is the potential for limited contamination. However, it is not anticipated that environmental issues will create significant obstacles in the utilization of this property for recreational or educational purposes. Its vacant status, size (24 acres), and proximity to the Erie Canal and adjacent recreational amenities provide opportunities for a large-scale greenspace and recreational destination for use by residents and visitors.

The property also holds the opportunity to become a demonstration and interpretive site for the alternative energy industry. Currently, the State University at New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry and other institutions have been undertaking research into the utilization of willow and other short rotation woody crops as a sustainable source of biomass for the production of biofuels, bioenergy, and bioproducts. The marginal soils on Strategic Site 1 make this a viable alternative. The concept for this property could include demonstration plantings, interpretive stations, and potentially small-scaled versions of the energy production technology to educate the public and promote Rome as a community at the forefront of sustainable, green technologies.

The location of a demonstration site adjacent to the Employment District may also have unique advantages in the production and use of bioproducts derived from the biomass generated within the Waterfront Greenspace subarea.

The use and development of this property should not preclude the potential for future expansion of the Employment District upon full build-out.



SITE LOCATION MAP



The utilization of the large vacant parcel for alternative energy production can leverage its proximity to the Employment District (ED) as a potential demand for energy products. The large parcel can also be converted to a higher-value industrial use upon the full build-out of the ED, making alternative energy use a good interim land use strategy.

STRATEGIC SITES

SITE WG-2: CANAL CORPORATION LANDS



SITE LOCATION MAP

The 21.7 acre strip of land along the Erie Canal offers a significant opportunity to provide public access to the canal and recreational amenities for area residents and canal users. This section of the Erie Canal, which is owned and maintained by the Canal Corporation, offers drastically different vegetation, landform, and views of the canal corridor than other segments within the BOA. The width of the property varies from approximately 75 feet to 210 feet.

The width of the Canal Corp lands provide the opportunity for a broad multi-use trail and amenity areas such as picnic pads, shelters, and other infrastructure including viewing platforms and a public boat launch along the canal. The boat launch is proposed at the far western end of the parcel, and is part of proposed redevelopment opportunities on the Rod Mill property (Strategic Site E-1) within the Employment District Subarea.



The City should investigate the potential for a commercial port facility along the canal to service the Employment District, as well as continue to promote the construction of the Canalway Trail through this property.

Recreational amenities in this location should not be designed to compete with Bellamy Harbor Park, yet should complement the offerings in a more rugged, natural setting. By contrasting the amenities provided between Bellamy Harbor Park and this property, area residents, workers and canal users will be afforded a complete range of recreation opportunities within close proximity, and will take full advantage of the Erie Canal as a primary resource within the community.

This stretch of canal frontage also offers the potential for a small commercial port facility from which materials and products could be off-loaded from barges for utilization by businesses within the Employment District.



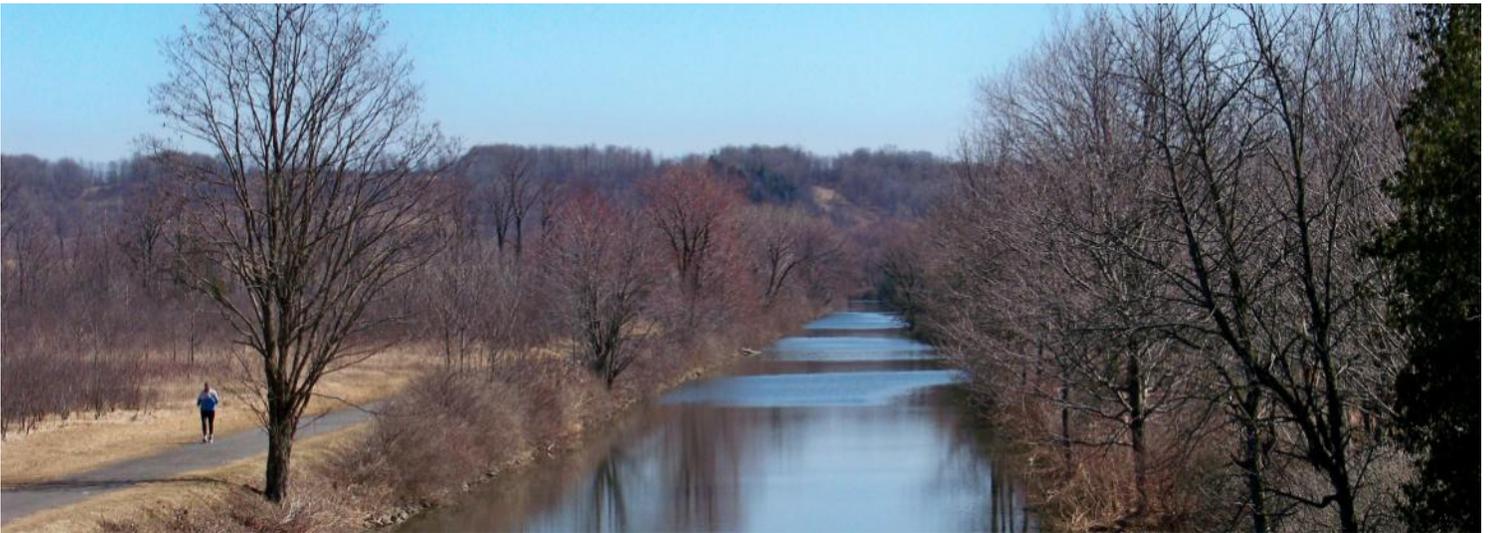
ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengths

- Adjacency to the Erie Canal affords opportunities to capitalize on waterfront access.
- Opportunity to connect with proposed Canalway Trail and Bellamy Harbor Park.
- Clean slate for preservation or development will allow City to consider the highest and best use for future of site.
- Opportunities for renewable energy production within close proximity to industrial end-users.

Challenges

- Private ownership of land may impact redevelopment potential and vision of the City for the site.
- Unknown levels of environmental contamination.



A typical view of the Erie Canal in the fall.

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

- Promote, encourage, and assist the development of multi-use trail linkages with points east and west to improve connectivity.
- Consider recreational, educational, and interpretive programming on site to enhance as a natural resource and asset for the community.
- Investigate the development of interpretive and educational investments that focus on alternative energy and sustainable woody biomass production to establish the City of Rome as a model “Green Community”.
- Complete a Phase 2 Site Assessment to determine the level of contamination on site, if any, and a plan for remediation.

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Future Land Use

The Waterfront Greenspace subarea should incorporate a range of recreational and educational land uses that embrace sustainability and capitalize on its prime waterfront location. Recommended land uses include:

- water-dependent uses, such as boat docks and fishing and viewing platforms on west side;
- water-enhanced uses such as picnic areas, park shelters, and multi-use trails;
- commercial dock, port or terminal facilities to enhance the viability of the Employment District;
- educational offerings such as habitat and sustainability interpretive stations; and
- alternative energy, technology, science and horticultural demonstration installations.

The City will need to balance the need for any future industrial expansion and the unique recreational and educational opportunities this land provides as they move forward with the implementation of land use recommendations .



Regulatory Updates

The Waterfront Greenspace subarea currently includes two zoning districts which allow for varying degrees of recreational, commercial, and light industrial land uses. The City intends to promote the utilization of this area for open space and alternative energy purposes, along with limited commercial uses (e.g. port facility). Upon complete build-out of the Employment District, industrial uses may be allowed in portions of the subarea in the future. Current zoning would permit the development of this subarea as currently envisioned, and should be retained to promote continued flexibility in the use of this area.

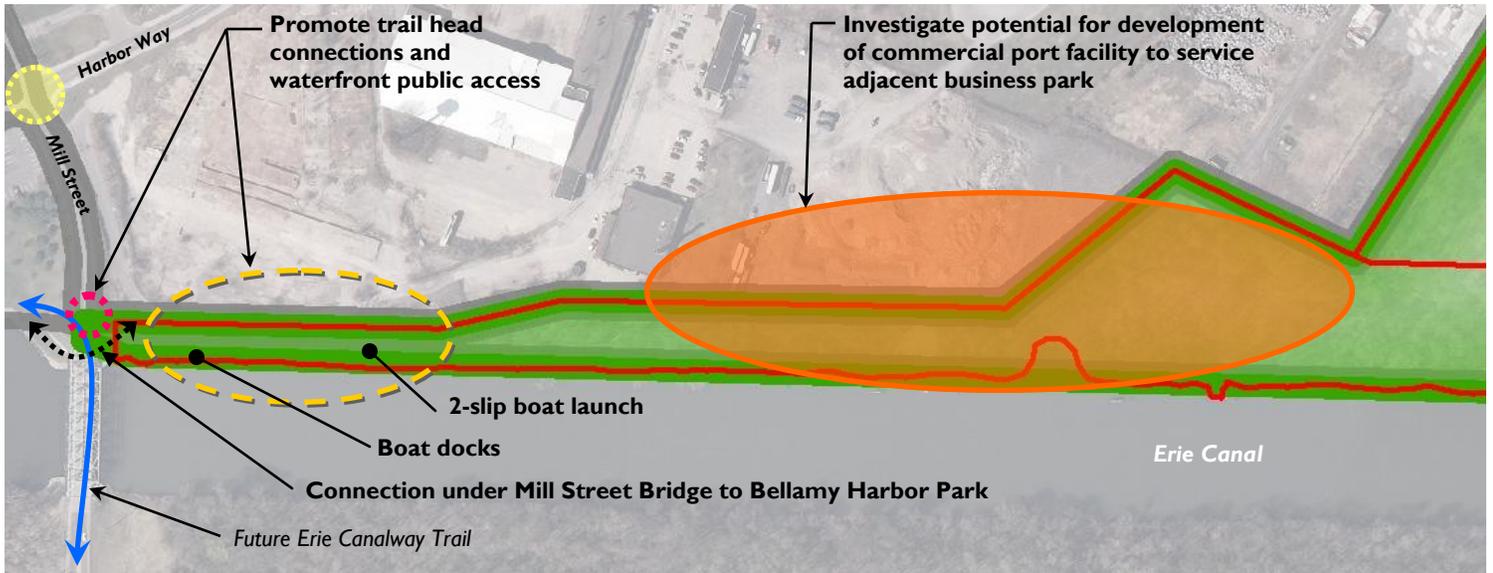


These two images depict typical canal and natural area trails that provide enhanced connectivity and recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors.

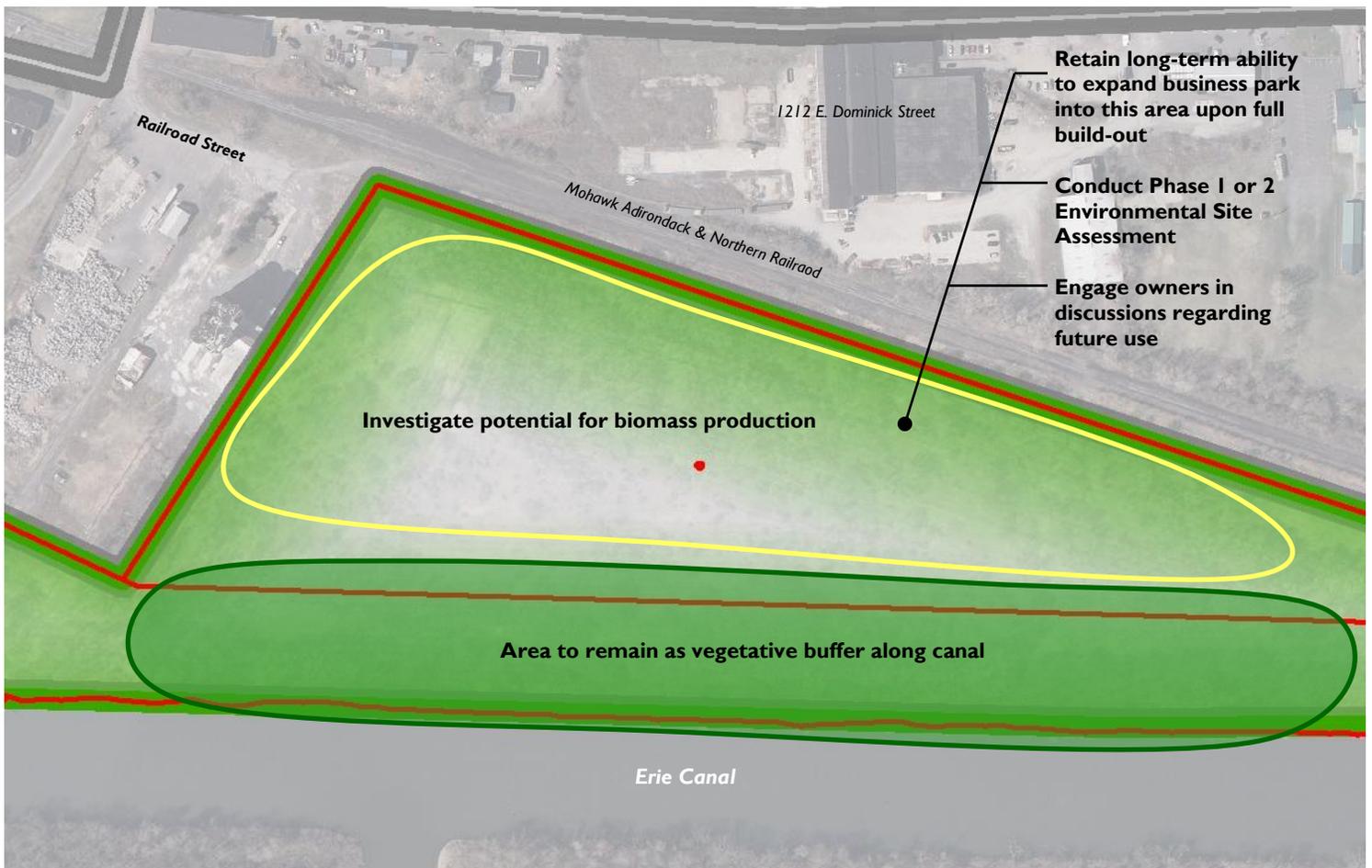
See the Summary Analysis, Findings and Recommendations Section for more information on recommendations.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Waterfront Greenspace Concept Map - West



Waterfront Greenspace Concept Map - East



IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Land Use & Zoning Recommendations

1. Promote the active use of lands for passive recreation, environmental education and interpretation, and/or alternative energy development, to include the growth, production, harvesting and processing of crops or forest products.
2. Retain long-term ability to expand industrial capacity upon full build out of Employment District.

Capital Project Recommendations

1. Coordinate the construction of the Canalway Trail with the NYS Canal Corporation and ensure connectivity into the Waterfront Greenspace subarea as appropriate.

Recommended Non-Capital Actions

1. Conduct a feasibility study for the development of commercial port facilities along the canal to supply products and materials to industry within the Employment District.
2. Conduct a detailed inventory and analysis of the biomass production capabilities present within the subarea, including the potential need and feasibility for bioremediation to address any contamination that may be on site.
3. Coordinate a partnership with regional institutions or private companies to investigate the feasible utilization of the area for sustainable energy demonstration or pilot programs, including the growth, harvesting and utilization of short rotation woody crops such as willow.
4. Conduct Phase I and or Phase II site assessments on each of the properties to confirm or eliminate possible environmental contamination.
5. Engage existing private property owner in discussion about future development plans for the site.

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

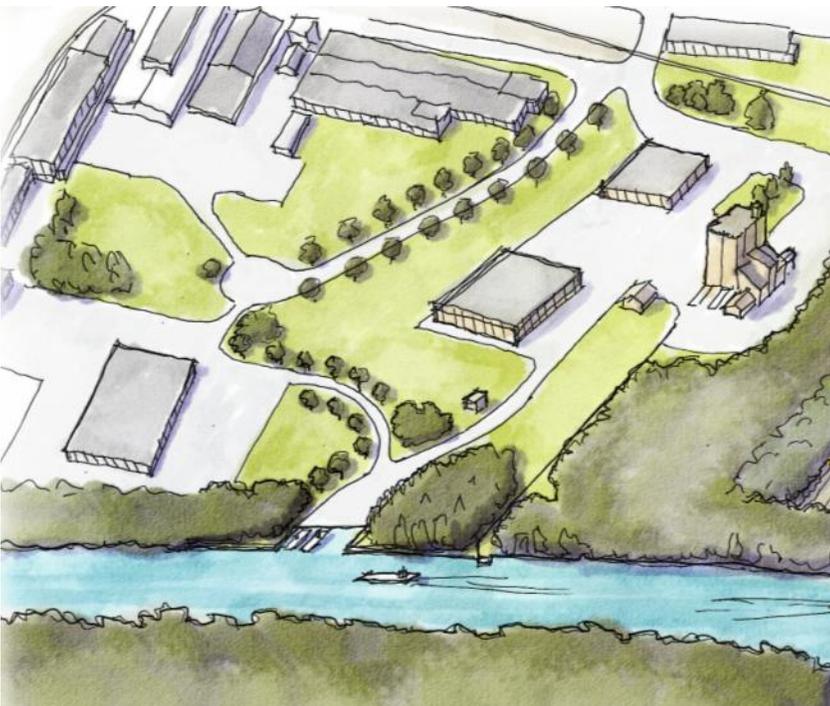
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Vacant Parcel (Strategic Site WG-1)



The growth and harvesting of biomass for energy production is a high quality interim use for this currently underutilized area. The annual potential energy contained in 20 acres of managed biomass would be enough to power the average 32,000 square foot warehouse for one year. Thus, the 25-acre plot of land within the subarea could realistically support or offset the energy needs of buildings within the adjacent Employment District. The successful use of these marginal lands could demonstrate the potential of biomass production, and serve as a model for additional biomass plantings within the City.

Canal Corporation Lands (Strategic Site WG-2)



The subarea's narrow stretch of Canal Corporation property has limited usefulness for the purposes of traditional economic development. However, the construction of a commercial port facility on a portion of these lands would provide low-cost, bulk-goods/resource shipping access via barges for businesses in the Employment District. The development of this port facility would make Rome a strategically important inland site for industrial development offering high quality access to truck, rail, and barge shipping in central New York. A commercial port facility along the canal would provide businesses the ability to transport bulky and heavy goods from the East Coast and Upper Great Lakes into the City for processing, with finished good traveling quickly to major Northeast markets via rail and truck. The added flexibility and cost-savings of barge shipping may be exceptionally useful for Rome's current copper industries.