

City of Geneva Policies on Lakefront and Downtown Development



Prepared for:

City of Geneva Department of Planning & Economic Development
and the Quality Communities Planning Committee

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City of Geneva

Policies on Lakefront and Downtown Development

Final Adopted Report February 2009

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Introduction

There is a natural draw and desire to be close to water. Throughout our history, humankind has settled near waterbodies for protection, food, potable water, industrial processes and recreation. During our country's industrialization, as waterfronts were focused on their value for the production and transportation of goods, society turned its back to the water's edge. This may seem like poor policy and behavior today in an age where waterfront access is considered a given right to all citizens. However, historically the majority of waterfronts in urban areas were not places you would want to spend leisure time. It would have been the equivalent of going for a walk or having lunch in a modern day industrial park. As a result, many cities looked at their waterfronts as low value real estate and often worked to separate them from the rest of the community with physical barriers. Currently, this trend is changing as our economy and society shifts from industrialization to innovation.

The City of Geneva is not unique in its goal to reconnect its downtown and waterfront, to define a future for the lakefront and promote a new image for the community. Over the past 40 years, waterfront revitalization efforts have transformed the image of communities across New York State and the United States. Reclaiming waterfronts for recreation, economic development, the restoration of linkages with downtowns and neighborhoods, and changing the perception of residents are all consistent themes in the truly successful communities.

Policy Development Process

This document summarizes a broad community consensus on the future direction of Geneva's downtown and lakefront that was formed through an extensive public participation process. The results of this process included a vision for the future and a cohesive set of policy recommendations that will guide future development within the lakefront and downtown areas.

The project's public participation process was comprehensive and extensive, ranging from informational meetings and vision-building workshops to area-specific focus groups over 14 months. The common thread tying the public involvement process together was the formation of a Steering Committee composed of residents, business owners, organizational leaders and City staff.

Vision, Policies, Objectives and Action Items

This policy document provides a framework that describes the broad vision of the community and the necessary steps to ensure action and responsible expenditures by the City. The development of effective policies to guide community investment and decision making in Geneva's lakefront and downtown areas over the next decade requires a multi-level approach. Policy components must work together in a logical way, while reinforcing the community's vision, to provide a viable and long-lasting document that is representative of a consensus driven decision making process. As a result, this document represents the playbook or manuscript from which the City's future direction, actions and development decisions will be made regarding the downtown and lakefront.

The *Policies on Lakefront and Downtown Development Plan* has four key elements, which are described below.

Vision Statement

- A general statement about the desired future condition or state of the community; it is the end toward which all actions are aimed.

Policy Statement

- Policies are narrower in scope and target a specific area or topic; imagine what the community should include.

Objective

- A statement of measurable activity to be accomplished in pursuit of the policy which is reasonably attainable. Consider broad actions or aspirations, such as increase, develop, or preserve.

Action Item

- A specific proposal to do something that relates directly to accomplishing an objective, which usually takes the form of a plan, activity, project or program.

Vision Statement

The City of Geneva is an attractive and vibrant business and residential community with safe and easy access to the natural beauty and open public spaces throughout the City's lakefront and downtown. Geneva's lakefront and downtown will be seamlessly linked via physical and visual connections, providing an integrated destination community for recreation, tourism, cultural attractions, and small-city living at an appropriate scale and character, to create a high quality of life for residents and visitors. The City's lakefront and its accompanying activities will serve as a catalyst for urban revitalization, attracting visitors from the region and funneling them into Geneva's downtown core. The resulting relationship between the lakefront and downtown will make the City of Geneva a destination community within the Finger Lakes region for living, shopping, recreation and investment.

Beyond identifying the overall vision for the City of Geneva's lakefront and downtown, this document outlines policies, objectives, and action items for four specific areas of concern:

- Downtown Revitalization;
- Downtown and Lakefront Connectivity;
- Waterfront Programming; and
- Recreation and Open Space.

The policy areas, objectives and action items can be reviewed for consistency against the vision and policy statements, providing a methodology for checks and balances on policy elements and their implementation.

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Policy Area 1: Downtown Revitalization

Policy Statement

It is the policy of Geneva to support the continued transformation of the core business district into a vibrant and sustainable economic center for the City. The City shall coordinate with the Business Improvement District, merchants, cultural resources and residents to ensure services are efficiently provided. The City will also strive to ensure regulations support the desired image of the downtown core, promoting an attractive place to live and own a business as well as a destination for visitors. Future efforts to become the recognized gateway for Finger Lakes Region will focus on Geneva as a destination for overnight visits, a regional tourism transit hub and attractive multi-stop shopping opportunities in a walkable and safe downtown core. This effort will begin with defining Geneva's downtown as the first stop for regional tourism as well as a destination for cultural events.

Objectives

- A. Improve coordination between the City, Geneva Business Improvement District, Geneva Chamber of Commerce and other public/private business organizations for economic development activities, patrolling, and general maintenance and beautification efforts.
- B. Enhance the local and regional identity and perception of downtown Geneva.
- C. Continue to improve the physical appearance and defining image of downtown.
- D. Boost foot traffic downtown throughout the daytime and evening hours.
- E. Capitalize on Geneva's location within the Finger Lakes Region.

Action Items

A Improve coordination between the City, Geneva Business Improvement District, Geneva Chamber of Commerce and other public/private business organizations for economic development activities, patrolling, and general maintenance and beautification efforts.

1. Coordinate the marketing of available property within downtown.
2. Jointly explore the feasibility, programming, and location of an Ecological Interpretive Center on or near the lakefront.
3. Create a Downtown Coordinator as part of a Local Development Corporation to improve the business environment downtown.

B Enhance the identity and perception of downtown Geneva.

1. Actively promote Geneva through use of local/regional media outlets to improve its image and perception to residents and the broader region.
2. Complete a Wayfinding and Gateway Design Study to denote the arrival in downtown and improve signage, landscaping and visual appeal.
3. Improve visibility of local police with an assigned Beat Cop on foot, bicycle or horse.

C Continue to improve the physical appearance and defining image of downtown.

1. Require high quality landscape architecture and urban design principles on public and private projects
2. Continue facade enhancements for both front and rear facing properties.
3. Coordinate litter pick-up and other detailing such as the washing of windows and maintenance of street furniture.
4. Complete a Downtown Geneva Microplaza Feasibility Study to provide places and spaces for people to sit and congregate downtown.

D Boost foot traffic downtown throughout the daytime and evening hours.

1. Modify the existing City of Geneva Housing Code to permit the utilization and renovation of upper story areas for residential uses.
2. Update the City's current zoning ordinance to reflect the desired character and built form of development downtown.
3. Promote high quality market rate housing and residential options downtown and in adjacent neighborhoods.
4. Develop regularly scheduled walks and tours of downtown to promote awareness of opportunities.
5. Continue the programming of coordinated year-round cultural events and activities taking place throughout daytime hours.
6. Enhance the downtown Farmers' Market to provide more permanent space to be utilized for events, sales and festivals of all types.
7. Pursue efforts to improve upper floor access to downtown buildings, including elevators.

E Capitalize on Geneva's location within the Finger Lakes Region.

1. Focus on tourism related activities that retain visitors downtown.
2. Promote things to do/see during outings to Geneva for pass-through, afternoon, evening and weekend visits.
3. Improve coordination of events and activities that link downtown with the lakefront.
4. Conduct an Inter-Modal Transportation Feasibility Analysis (UPMTP) to study the potential for a multi-modal rail/bus station along Lake Street.

	0-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	On-Going	Date Completed
A	X				
B	X	X			
C	X				
D	X				
E	X				



Allow for a vibrant mix of uses downtown.



Enhance sense of place in core downtown.



Celebrate cultural resources.



Retain 19th century historic architecture.

Policy Area 2: Downtown & Lakefront Connectivity

Policy Statement

It is the City of Geneva's policy to promote the visual and physical connection of the downtown business core with the City's vast frontage along Seneca Lake. Gateway features at Castle Street, Lake Street, and Elizabeth Blackwell Street shall enhance visual connections between Geneva's lakefront and downtown while providing a physical link within the landscape for motorists and pedestrians. Physical connections shall also include the continuation of the built form across Routes 5 & 20 at appropriate locations that integrate connection points and gateway elements, further strengthening the overall fabric of pedestrian and motorist mobility within the downtown and lakefront vicinity. Any development activity in this area will be reviewed for its economic contributions to downtown and the general Geneva market, be subject to rigorous architectural standards designed to complement the existing downtown stock, provide for unique uses that complement, rather than compete with downtown businesses, protect the sensitive ecological conditions along the lakefront, and maintain or enhance access to the water. Through coordinated efforts with key partners and agencies, the City shall strive to provide safe, effective and accessible connections between the lakefront and the adjacent downtown core for pedestrians and motorists. The City shall also work to enhance connectivity to the lakefront for neighborhoods where Routes 5 & 20 limits access.

Objectives

- A. Reduce the impacts of Routes 5/20.
- B. Visually connect the downtown and lakefront areas.
- C. Physically connect the downtown and lakefront areas.



Maintain views between downtown and lake.



Improve views from waterfront to downtown.



Solidify Castle Street connection w/ culture & public art.



Improve visibility of pedestrian accommodations at crossings.

Action Items	0-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	On-Going	Date Completed
<p>A Reduce the impacts of Routes 5/20</p> <p>Partner with NYSDOT and Genesee Transportation Council to investigate the reduction of speeds and roadway width of Routes 5/20 within the study area. Including application for inclusion within the Unified Planning Work Program and Transportation Improvements Program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce visual friction and density, such as development, landscaping or other elements at key locations to calm traffic and provide beautification to the corridor. 2. Investigate traffic control measures at the Elizabeth Blackwell intersection. 3. Improve the pedestrian environment at intersections by enhancing visibility of the crosswalk and minimizing crossing distances. 	X	X			
<p>B Visually connect the lakefront with downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop gateway features at Castle Street, Lake Street and Elizabeth Blackwell Street to visually define a linkage across Routes 5/20. 2. Develop coordinated streetscape enhancements that provide a continuous path between downtown and the lakefront. 3. Maintain and preserve view corridors between the lakefront and downtown from key locations, such as but not limited to Castle Street, Lake Street, Franklin Street and Bicentennial Park. 4. Enhance the visual character of rear facing structures along Routes 5/20 to promote the continuity of urban form and character towards the lakefront. 	X	X		X	
<p>C Physically connect the lakefront with downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pursue only those development opportunities along East Castle Street that conform to the standards laid out in the attached RFP guidelines. 2. Investigate the feasibility of a pedestrian bridge to connect the Middle Street area with the lakefront. 3. Complete a Design Study for the Castle Street Commons public open space at the extension of Castle Street. 4. Investigate the feasibility for transportation alternatives such as a tram or shuttle to utilize the pedestrian tunnel connecting the lakefront with downtown. 	X		X		

Policy Area 3: Waterfront Programming

Policy Statement

It is the City of Geneva's policy to improve the Seneca Lake waterfront for water-dependent and water-enhanced uses. The needs of the community shall be met through a coordinated space programming effort to provide a backdrop for year-round activities along the lakefront, while also providing improved pedestrian connectivity along the length of the lakefront's myriad spaces and activities. Coordinated and enhanced marketing and promotional campaigns shall be developed to boost the utilization and brand identity of Geneva's waterfront, making it a destination for residents and visitors within the Finger Lake Region.

Objectives

- A. Improve the utilization of the Seneca Lake waterfront for water-dependent and water-enhanced uses.
- B. Enhance pedestrian connectivity to and along the lakefront's many spaces.
- C. Make Geneva's waterfront a destination within the Finger Lakes Region.
- D. Provide capital improvements that enhance the user experience and viability of the lakefront.

Action Items

	0-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	On-Going	Data Completed
A Improve the utilization of the Seneca Lake waterfront for water-dependent and water-enhanced uses.					
1. Develop a space programming and infrastructure plan for the festival and event spaces.		X			
2. Provide family-friendly opportunities for the enjoyment of the lakefront by residents and visitors through the development of picnic and activity spaces that provide shelter, amenity and bathroom facilities.	X				
3. Improve the public's awareness of available water-dependent and water-enhanced opportunities through signage, marketing and promotional materials.	X				
4. Improve public access and viewing locations along the lakefront and Seneca Lake through the development of user-friendly series of seating, gathering and observation areas.		X			
5. Create a Lakefront Coordinator position that is charged with programming events and activities along the waterfront year-round with the Chamber of Commerce.		X			
B Enhance connectivity to and along the lakefront's many spaces.					
1. Develop a way finding system of pathways, including a Seneca Lake Promenade, that links the lakefronts many spaces while providing a connection point to the Cultural Walk leading from downtown.	X				
2. Develop strong and direct pedestrian linkages between waterside access points and landside destinations such as park facilities and downtown.	X			X	
3. Investigate the enhanced utilization of the tunnel underneath Routes 5/20 for pedestrian and motorized vehicle use.					
C Make Geneva's waterfront a destination within the Finger Lakes Region.					
1. Continue to develop a strong brand identity focusing on Geneva's Lakefront as a destination within the Finger Lakes.				X	
2. Concentrate efforts on providing services, amenities and packaged-experiences not found elsewhere in the Finger Lakes Region.				X	
3. Develop an iconic element or focal point, such as a sculpture, fountain or structure, that attracts people for the experience of viewing it.		X			
4. Create a taskforce on the programmatic elements and best location of a Visitor's Center and/or Interpretive Center that will draw visitors into Geneva and provide information to enhance their experience while in the area.	X				
D Provide capital improvements that enhance the user experience and viability of the lakefront.					
1. Conduct a market study for the development of a public, non-commercial marina (no fuel, repair or storage).	X	X			
2. Investigate the feasible development of an Event Center on the lakefront located adjacent to lodging for utilization by public and private groups.		X			
3. Investigate the feasible development of iconic fountains within Seneca Lake as a destination element along the lakefront.		X			
4. Complete a Waterfront Improvements Study to investigate the feasible development (engineering) of shoreline infrastructure such as a pedestrian pier, fishing pier, public marina, shoreline stabilization, swimming beach and boat launch.	X				



Policy Area 4: Recreation & Open Space

Policy Statement

It is the City of Geneva's policy to create a cohesive system of recreation and public open spaces that improve the comfort, convenience and experience of residents and visitors within the downtown and lakefront areas. The development of this green infrastructure system shall be founded on the recognition that parks, open spaces and recreational opportunities play a valuable role in a community's overall quality of life. Geneva's green infrastructure system shall be enhanced to create inviting spaces for people to enjoy the natural and built environment through passive and active means. The City shall strive to improve residents' pride of ownership in their lakefront and downtown's open spaces by creating a unique sense of place and community, and offering a variety of activities and options for residents and visitors. Recreation and event infrastructure shall be developed such that it provides maximum flexibility for multiple uses as well as minimal impacts to the physical environment, while limiting required operations and maintenance resources.

Objectives

- A. Improve the comfort, convenience and experience of the downtown and lakefront areas.
- B. Create a system of public and recreational spaces that improves the quality of life for residents and visitors.
- C. Encourage year-round activity and utilization of Geneva's public and recreational spaces.



Enhance public travel ways to be ADA compliant.



Reduce redundancy of trail infrastructure.



Restore the Willows area in the North End.

Action Items	0-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	On-Going	Date Completed
<p>A Improve the comfort, convenience and experience of the downtown and lakefront areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide family-friendly spaces for people to sit, eat a meal, picnic, observe and otherwise passively enjoy the lakefront and downtown. 2. Develop a North End Park Master Plan that will program the open spaces for large, small, passive and active uses. 3. Create a unique sense of place through the enhanced use of vegetation, landforms, sculpture and structures that makes the lakefront an inviting place to visit. 4. Develop a visual draw or iconic landscape that provides an experience unique to Geneva. 	X	X		X	
<p>B Create a system of public and recreational spaces that improves the quality of life for residents and visitors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigate the development of small pocket parks and/or plazas within the downtown core to improve variety and options for residents, employees and visitors. 2. Develop a recreational 'green loop' that connects lakefront and downtown public spaces via new and existing paths, sidewalks and trails. 3. Improve and enhance the variety of active recreational options available at the lakefront. 4. Encourage the utilization of public art throughout the public and recreational space system. 5. Sponsor design competitions, on a national scale, to bring significant public art pieces to focal points within the downtown and along the lakefront. 	X	X		X	
<p>C Encourage year-round activity and utilization of Geneva's public and recreational spaces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to encourage and promote Geneva's lakefront as a venue for events and activities through the development of permanent (fixed) and temporary (movable) infrastructure and amenities. 2. Consider the development of four-season structures that would permit the enjoyment of the lakefront during the winter months. 		X			X