

10.3.6 Managing Other Aesthetics

The East Side has a rich history that is reflected in a variety of land uses and in the attitudes and sense of community expressed by the residents. This history provides a base upon which to build with arts and strategic land use decisions and management.

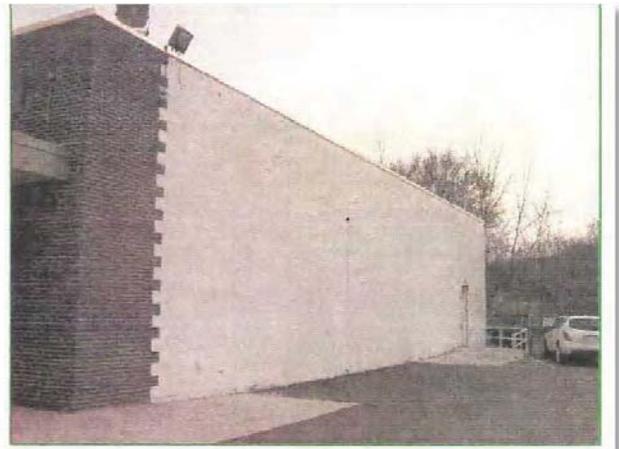
Local Artists

As much as possible, the city should work with local artists to increase the aesthetic appeal of the area. Artists could be hired to create sculptures that would be placed along the corridor. Artists might also help to design and/or enliven bus stops, waste receptacles, fences, gateways, bike racks and murals, among other things. *Local* is a key word in this recommendation. Hiring local artists and artisans not only helps to boost the local economy but also strengthens community bonds, encourages community pride, and creates a sense of uniqueness for the area.

Murals

Murals should be created where appropriate. There are many blank walls along the Robinson St. corridor, such as the eastern side of the Lourdes Primary Care facility (Figure 10.14), the Western facing wall of the Irish Pub and the Eastern facing wall of the local branch of the American Legion. These spaces offer an opportunity to reflect what is special about the East Side, thereby enhancing the sense of community and sense of place.

Figure 10.14 Blank Wall on Lourdes Primary Care Facility

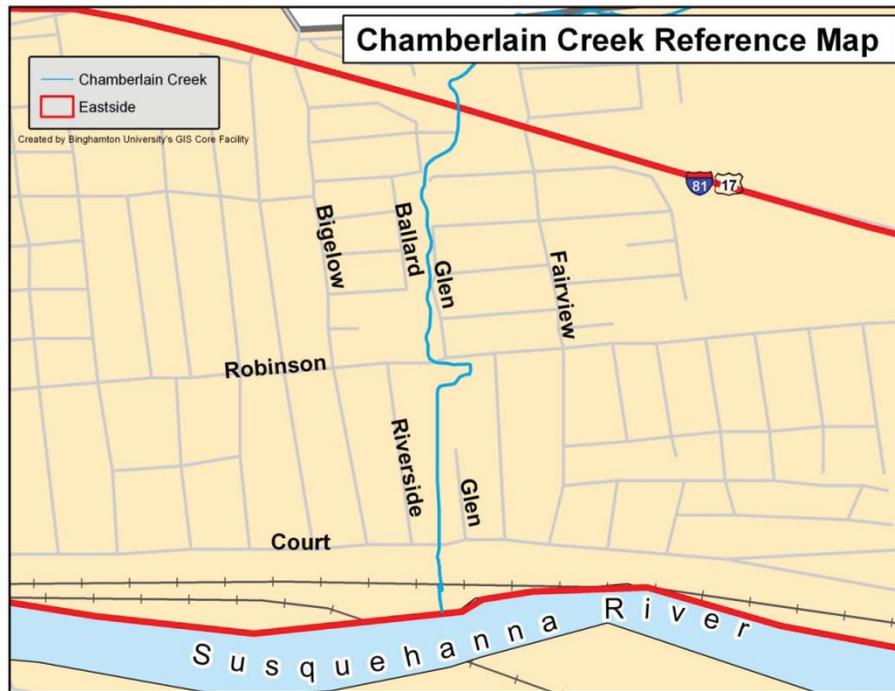


10.3.7 Green Space

Urban Parks

At this time, public park facilities along the corridor are lacking, so opportunities for enhancing what exists or for creating additional park space need to take high priority. There are several ways to bring this about. Fairview Park should be renovated and updated. There is the potential to create a walking trail along the creek that is bordered by Glen Avenue and Calvin Coolidge Elementary (Figure 10.15). This space would provide excellent recreational opportunities for residents as well as learning opportunities for school children. Similarly it would encourage foot traffic in the residential neighborhood of Robinson Street and could potentially have health benefits for residents.

Figure 10.15 Potential Walking Trail



The Information Center recommended earlier could provide green spaces in the empty lot on the Eastern side of the American Legion. Currently, the lot is empty, unpaved and large enough to accommodate moderately sized public functions and gatherings. This would require significant landscaping

efforts as well as the planting of several trees along its periphery and interior. Such a project would provide additional outdoor public space, facilitate movement to the area, and provide a place for public gatherings to occur. A sketch of this lot as it might look as a park is included in the collection of sketches provided.

10.3.8 Physical Structures

While the Robinson Street corridor is not an area rich in historic architectural features, there is one building, the Cameo Theater, which should be revived. Unfortunately the Cameo Theater is in a state of disrepair. Much effort should be spent in reviving this community treasure which could clearly become a center of community spirit. Preservation and renovation is much preferred to demolishing the theater. Other existing historic structures should be identified and prioritized for maintenance and repair where needed.

Building Enhancements

There are numerous ways in which enhancements can be made to existing buildings that will improve the aesthetics of the corridor and, at the same time, encourage more customer traffic for businesses. Some of these will require an investment on the part of the store owners; perhaps an incentive program can be developed by the City.

Enlarging the windows along the corridor will function to bring the street and building interiors closer together. They also serve to accentuate the small businesses that are intermittently scattered along the corridor. When shopping destinations are not clustered, it is important to find other ways of bringing them into the public eye. Large store front windows should be installed and existing windows should be expanded depending on their prior size. In addition, newly installed windows and replacement windows should all be double pane insulated and should be very securely mounted to ensure minimal heat transfer to the outdoors.

Exteriors of buildings should strive for unity but not replication. Colors of exteriors should correlate with the surrounding landscape. For instance, by relating the prevailing colors to the sky, sea, land. In the case of Robinson Street, muted earth tones should be favored. Earth tones create a serene sense of place. Bright and extreme colors should be avoided.

For any renovation or new buildings, exteriors should be made of natural materials such as wood, brick, stone or stucco as opposed to vinyl or aluminum. Recycled materials or those made with partially recycled content should also be favored. Decorative bricks, cobbles, brackets, arches, etc. should be used to accentuate the buildings' placement in the streetscape. Preserving and enhancing buildings exteriors will help to showcase the historic qualities of the area.

Signage

Signs should relate the significance of a place to passersby. They too should try to reflect the prevailing colors of the area. Signs should not be flashy and gaudy rather, they should be limited in proportion to the size of the building. Officials should consider limiting sign size to 15 percent of the building front. Billboards should be permanently removed and disallowed anywhere along the corridor.

10.3.9 Examples of Changes to Existing Buildings in the Corridor

Sketch 1: Subway

The sketch in Figure 10.16 illustrates several improvements to the retail strip in the photo. Perhaps difficult to discern from the rendered image, a large photovoltaic panel has been placed on the roof of the two-story building on the left. Large south-facing windows have been installed to make use of passive solar rays as well as to make the strip a more inviting and friendly place. The large windows serve a second purpose and are also intended to reduce the divide between the interior of the building and the exterior streetscape. A series of small lamps, presumably solar powered or using compact fluorescent bulbs, accentuate the first story of the far left building both aesthetically and functionally. Several street lamps, also solar powered, are found along the sidewalk near the strip. A public bench, a bike rack, a waste receptacle and several raised planting beds adorn the exterior of the building. By making these public facilities available and aesthetically pleasing, they are more attractive to customers. Raised cross walks are also utilized to encourage slower driving which in turn encourages more pedestrian use of the sidewalks in front of the strip. The vacant building between the Subway and the two-story building has been refinished in the hopes that a small business or restaurant will soon occupy the space.

Figure 10.16 Existing Conditions and Conceptual Drawing for Robinson Street Retail



Sketch 2: Bus Shelter

This sketch is intended to draw attention to the lack of bus shelters along the Robinson Street corridor between Broad Avenue and Fairview Avenue (Figure 10.17). Currently only uncovered bus stops are available to the public. This lack of covered, comfortable bus shelters reduces city transit ridership and contributes to the “car culture” phenomenon. The sketch proposes a fairly simple shelter made from metal, Plexiglas and stone. A stone wall wraps around the back of the shelter and forms a bench on its interior as well as two raised planting beds on either side. The preexisting garden located to the left of the proposed shelter has been enlarged and the fence behind it has been removed in favor of a low stone wall. Trees have been planted near the shelter to provide aesthetic relief and shade in the summer. A lamp post has been erected very close to the shelter to provide a sense of security to late night bus users as well as to provide light to pedestrians.

Figure 10.17 Existing Conditions and Conceptual Drawing of Bus Shelter Location



Sketch 3: American Legion Park

The location of the photo upon which this sketch is based is along Robinson Street, directly to the west of the American Legion (Figure 10.18). The lot located here is empty and unpaved and would be relatively easy to transform into a functional and natural public gathering space. A small gazebo has been sited in the center of this proposed park. A winding walkway leads up to the structure and is surrounded on both sides by well kept flower beds. Herb and vegetable gardens are also possible uses of this space. Solar powered street lamps light the sidewalk in front of the park as well as the area along the walkway, thus ensuring pedestrian safety and promoting a sense of street level stillness in the evening. This space is intended to be a natural refuge from the encroaching urban setting. Hedges, flowers and trees are planted on all sides of the park except the front. This decision stems from the desire to screen out the cityscape

surrounding the park from the sides and back, but to simultaneously encourage pedestrians and motorists to observe and easily make use of the park by leaving its street facing front void of trees. This will also provide a sense of safety since the interior of the park will be visible from the street and those passing by. The eastern wall of the legion has been repainted and decorative bricks have been integrated into the corners of the structure. Readers should note that the westernmost section of sketch 2 (Figure 10.20) can be seen on the far left side of this sketch.

Figure 10.18 Existing Conditions and Conceptual Drawing for Pocket Park



Sketch 4: Calvin Coolidge Elementary School

The Calvin Coolidge Elementary School is not technically within the focus area; however, improvements here could serve as a nice gateway for the Cameo Theater district. Though the school is not directly visible in this sketch, the presence of children and waiting parents can be felt as features in the sketch are designed to accommodate these groups. The sidewalk area has been greatly expanded and where there once were temporary parking spots, there are now flower beds, green grass and public seating facilities. The high wire mesh fence has been removed and replaced with a low stone wall and stone benches (Figure 10.19). With more space between the road and the sidewalk, the need for a fence is diminished. A boundary still exists between the school grounds and the road, but in a much more aesthetically and intrinsically pleasing form. Local slate or other local stone has been used in the construction of this feature. The stone bench also caters to the needs of children waiting for their parents to pick them up, providing them with a well shaded, natural and healthy setting to do so. A raised speed bump has been strategically placed at the sidewalk intersection to slow outgoing traffic and to increase pedestrian safety. Lights have also been installed on the tops of stone gateway features at the two front entrances to the school. Trees have been planted all along the corridor in front of the school to improve the look of the area as well as to provide pedestrians some relief from the unpredictable Binghamton sun.

Figure 10.19 Existing Conditions and Conceptual Drawing for Streetscape near Calvin Coolidge Elementary School



Sketch 5: Cameo Theater

At present, the Cameo Theater is unutilized and in disrepair. This sketch proposes several changes to the building façade as well as to the surrounding area (Figure 10.20). The building has been repainted white in order to emphasize the presence of newly installed decorative red brick patterning along the windows and edges of the theater’s front. The original “Cameo” sign has been left intact to instill a sense of historical importance to the place as well as to maintain its fundamental character. The physical structure has been largely left alone but for a few changes. Awnings adorn the front and sides of the building both for aesthetic purposes as well as functional purposes; visitors to the theater should be assured of some shelter from the elements. Windows have been installed all along the second floor of the building as well as on the western edge of the building, a space that could feasibly serve as a ticket booth in the future or simply as a place at which interchanges between people on the interior and people on the exterior of the building may occur. Two trimmed trees frame the entrance and more raised beds of trees could be planted in front of the building. The installation of additional lighting in the front is also an option but seems unnecessary if the theater opens and begins operating on a regular basis. Perhaps least apparent from the sketch is the purpose of the trees and plants on the roof. The sketch proposes to install a living roof on top

of the building to enhance its aesthetic appeal and to serve as a city wide trial of the compatibility of this particular green technology on old, energy inefficient buildings.

Figure 10.20 Existing Condition and Conceptual Drawing of Cameo Theater

