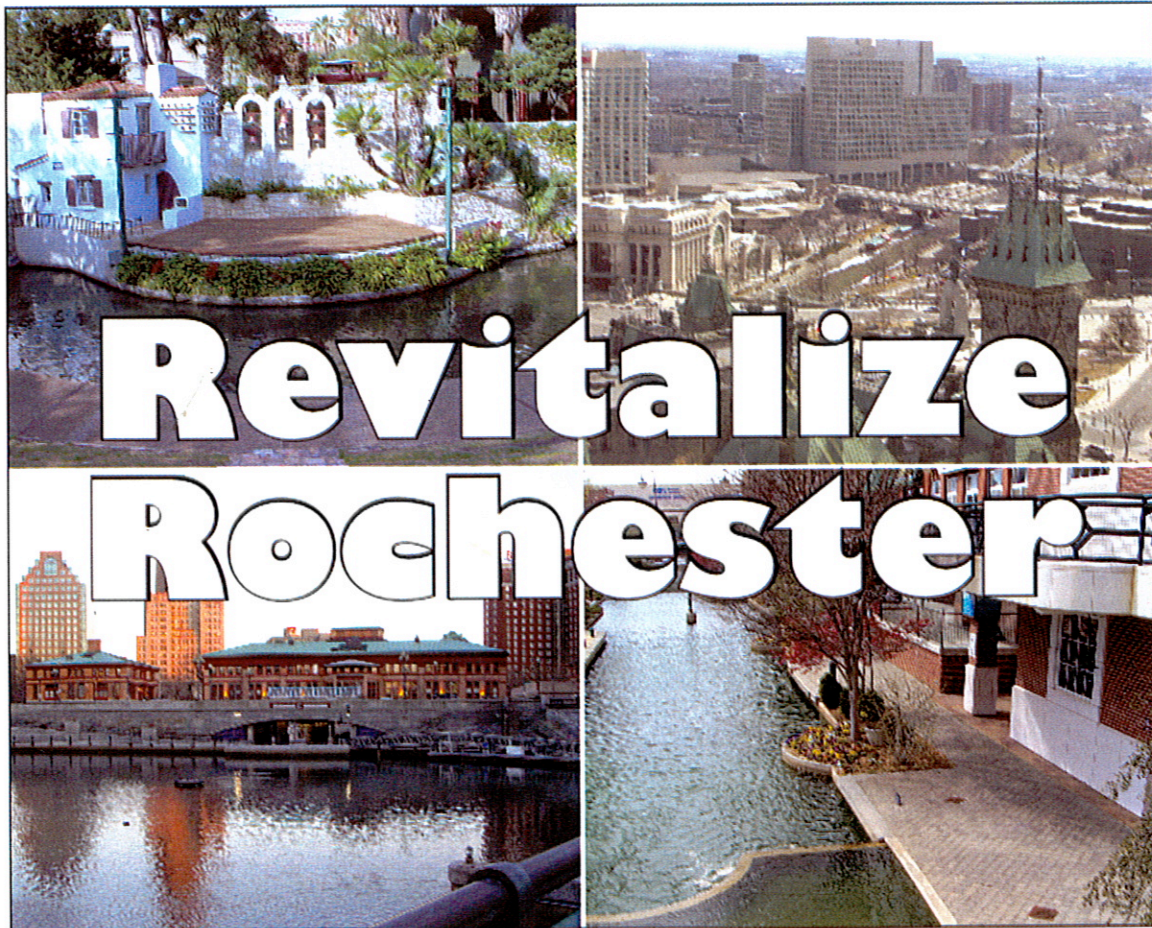


# **A Revitalization Report**

**Written for the Grasso-Zimmer Plan**

**Rochester, NY**



# **Revitalize Rochester**

**Created by the Genesee Community Charter School**

**Sixth Grade Class**

**June 2006**



## Acknowledgements

The **Genesee Community Charter School** would like to thank the following people for their time and continuous efforts in supporting us throughout this project.



### San Antonio, Texas

**Ms. Ann McGlone**, City Historian; **Mr. Cris Young**, Assistant to the City Manager, Office of Economic Development; **Frank Faulkner Jr.**, Texana Department Director, Central Library; **Ms. Mari Aguirre**, Assistant to the Mayor, Mayor's Office; **Mr. Ben Brewer**, **Ms. Stephanie Krueger**, **Mr. Bernie Cantuse**, and **Mr. Bill Clave**, Downtown Alliance; **Ms. Marcel Johnson**, Vice President of Area

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Finally, the sixth grade class would like to thank **Dr. Wing**, **Mrs. O'Malley**, **Mrs. Daniels**, **Miss Stoll**, **Ms. Ericson**, **Mr. Kruse**, **Mr. Hack**, and **Mr. Grasso** for all of their time and efforts in developing the presentation and report.

# Dedication

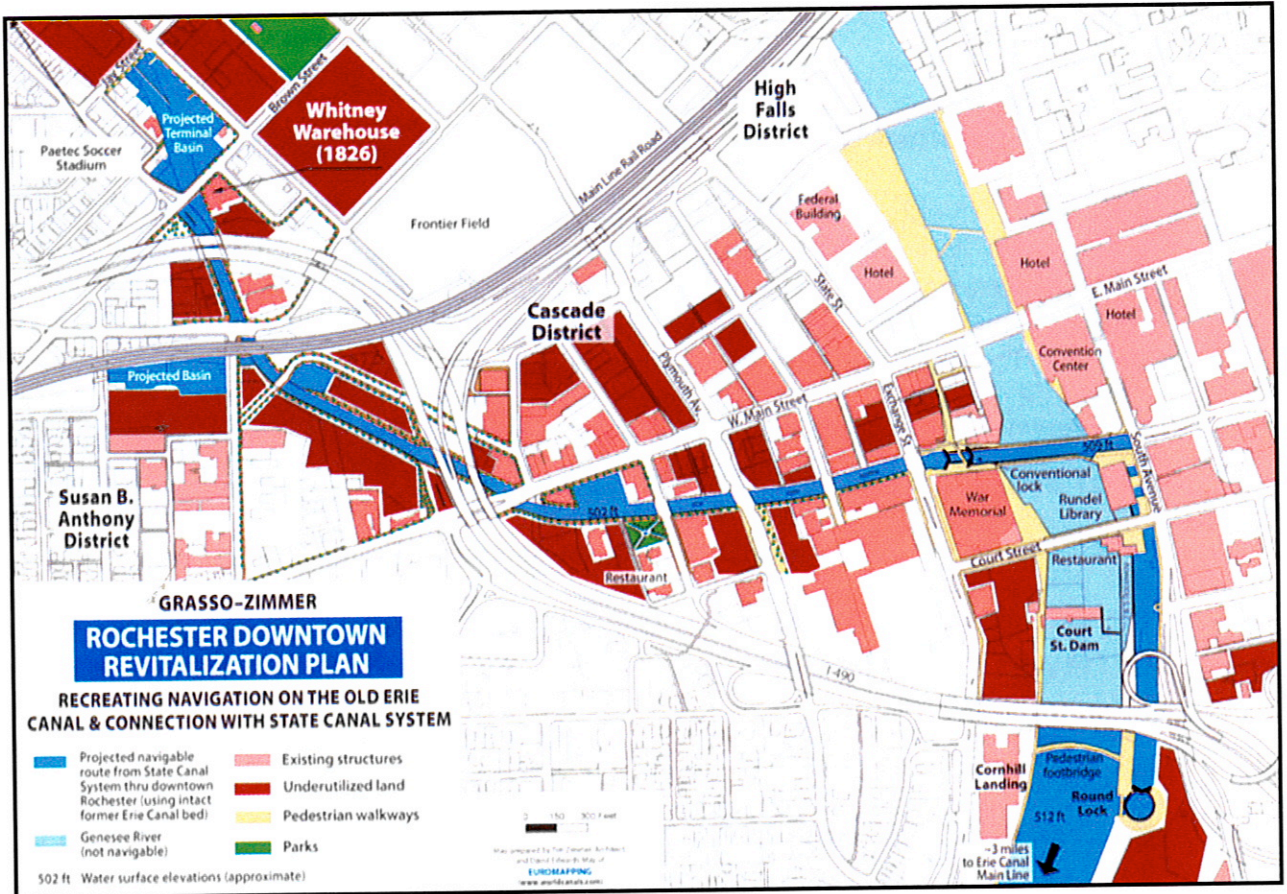
**This report is dedicated to Mr. Tom Grasso  
for introducing us to this project and giving us the  
opportunity to have such a big part in our community.**

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## The Grasso-Zimmer Plan



The Grasso-Zimmer plan is a proposal to re-water part of the old Erie Canal bed, which is currently covered by Broad Street. The re-watered canal would stretch from the Rundel Library and South Avenue, west to Brown Street. The proposal includes a round lock across from Corn Hill Landing and a terminal basin at the corner of Broad Street and Brown Street. The canal would include a water taxi service to ferry visitors and residents, ice skating in the winter, dining establishments, shopping and lodging all along the waterway. It could be used to kayak, bike and for other recreational activities. The canal has the potential to completely revitalize the downtown area's economy.



We want that to be true now, and for generations to come. We've grown up here and we want our children and grandchildren to be proud to call Rochester "home." But for us to see Rochester as a thriving community, we have to resolve some problems. Rochester's economy is declining. There has been urban flight and Rochester is losing its younger citizens. Crime continues to be a problem in this city. Major employers are downsizing and the unemployment rate continues to concern our families. Rochester needs revitalization! We need more jobs and a reason for businesses and people to come to the downtown area. We need a reason to stay!

Rochester's renewal has begun. Paetec Park just opened drawing thousands downtown. Renaissance Square is on its way. Plans to refurbish Manhattan Square Park are in process. The Chase Tower modernization, The Strong Museum expansion, Frontier Field, The Convention Center, and festivals are all strong examples of Rochester's commitment to boost the economy. We just need a ribbon to tie it all together.

Rochester has another problem. The tunnel under Broad Street was the old Erie Canal and then a subway tunnel. Now it is vacant. The tunnel is dirty, structurally unsafe, filled with graffiti, and is the perfect place for crime.

We have two problems that may be addressed with one solution. We have learned that throughout the world, people have a natural affinity



to water. We acknowledge that water is abundant in Rochester. But we do not have access to a navigable waterway downtown that invites people to dine, relax, shop, exercise, and gather together at the water's edge. We could increase tourism and resurrect and preserve Rochester's rich history at the same time with The Grasso – Zimmer Plan. It is one potential solution worth considering.

We know there are always obstacles. Where will the money come from? How will we deal with traffic issues? If we build it, will they come? Our purpose for writing this report is to inform you about other cities that have attempted something similar and have succeeded.

We've spent the year researching the impact of waterways in communities. We traveled to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Providence, Rhode Island; Ottawa, Canada; and San Antonio, Texas because they all have waterways that have made a big difference in their economies. In these cities, we conducted original research by talking to city officials, tourists, residents, business owners, planners, and architects. Now we will share how the stories of these cities' waterways will inspire Rochester's future.



# San Antonio, Texas



## Now and Then

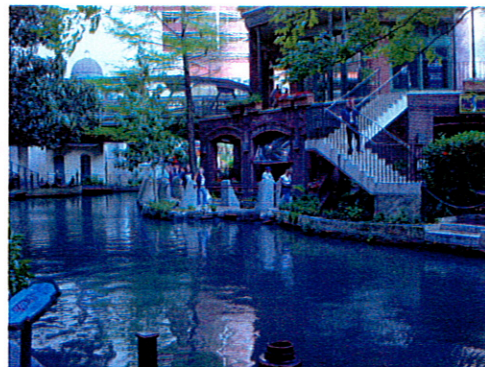
Julia Hermanson

Our group traveled to Texas to study how the River Walk affects the economy of San Antonio. In the 1920's the area of the River Walk was simply a

trickle of water. San Antonio was built around this oasis. Though only a small stream, it caused serious flooding issues and the city considered filling it in. The ladies of the San Antonio Conservation Society opposed the idea and convinced city officials to turn the stream into a park. The River Walk was born. Today it is a thriving community with business growth increasing annually, and the River Walk infuses San Antonio with millions of tourist dollars.



Early 1920's



Today



The River Walk was not always this successful. Before 1968, citizens did not realize the historical significance and economic potential of the waterway. Today the River Walk is an economic powerhouse that attracts over 20 million tourists per year. Similar to San Antonio, Rochester has its own forgotten treasure. Buried in downtown Rochester lies the original Erie Canal bed. Rochester's Erie Canal could have the same economic impact on our city as the River Walk had on San Antonio.

## **Building and Planning**

Emma Marshall

As you read this report, water flows along the River Walk in downtown San Antonio. Thousands of tourists and residents are enjoying the area. In fact, there are more tourists than residents. The River Walk is one of the top tourist attractions in Texas.

"As you walk along the River Walk your relationship with the river



changes," stated City Historian Anne McGlone. The designers took the time to create everything to the finest of detail. By doing that, the area drew more tourists to the water's edge. You can discover unexpected designs around every turn. For instance,

around a bend, underneath a bridge, was this lovely fountain. What could have been an unattractive drainage pipe of run-off water was turned into an extraordinary fountain.

The San Antonio River was simply a stream of water flowing down the middle of San Antonio. Planners took good advantage of the area's appealing Mexican history; it is clear everywhere you look. It will be a worthwhile challenge for planners to expand on our city's monumental history. They should also study ways to use Rochester's four seasons to an advantage.

Planning is the key to any successful development project - especially one like the redevelopment of the Erie Canal in downtown Rochester. We should look to the extensive planning done in San Antonio to learn how an accessible downtown waterfront can promote business and rejuvenate a community.



## **Government and Financing**

Corey Gauthier-Tyger

The government in San Antonio supports the River Walk in several ways. We met with City Council members who explained that

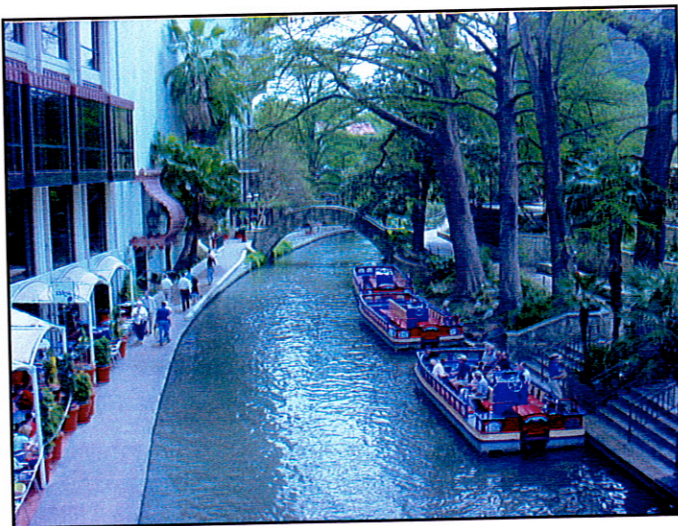
to help business owners be more successful the city has set many regulations for buildings on the River Walk. One example is that business owners need a permit for everything they do, including landscaping. They also have to use natural materials when building and there are regulations about where shadows are cast. Another way the city supports the River Walk is by the Rio 3 River Improvement program. Business owners



volunteered to be taxed extra money and in return the city maintains the area around those businesses.

City Council members also explained that the money used to build the River Walk were provided by federal, public, and a lot of private funding. Today taxes, tourists, city district funds, contractors, and the city fund maintenance costs. There are many people working around the city sweeping, removing graffiti, and weeding to maintain the beauty of San Antonio. Along with maintenance, there are ambassadors who are there in case people have questions. The ambassadors' presence on the River Walk also helps prevent crime in the area.

Funding for events along the River Walk comes from many sources, such as private sponsors, local taxes, and city funds. One million dollars of tax money is set aside for security. Sidewalk revitalization projects along the River Walk cost approximately one million dollars. However, the hospitality industry in San Antonio is an industry that generates over seven billion dollars per year and much of this money goes back into local coffers.



## **Why the Waterway?**

Whitney White

Tourism is the key to success especially on a waterway. Money coming in from tourism has created a positive economic change in San Antonio. About twenty

million visitors come to San Antonio each year. Twenty percent of the people that visit come for business and eighty percent come for vacation and recreation.

The Annual Fiesta, one of the many festivals held on the River Walk, brings in over 16 million dollars each year. Some of the recreational choices on the River Walk are biking, roller-blading, and walking. Different events that bring in a lot of money are the Annual Fiesta and different conventions. Therefore, the city of San Antonio not only benefited economically, but also by making their citizens smile after seeing the success of the River Walk.

## **Community Engagement and Advice**

Ryan O'Malley

In a lush city of green, community engagement and public support were both valued parts in the making of the River Walk. Ben Brewer of San Antonio's Downtown Alliance stated, "Sell your idea by targeting major cities for advertisement." This draws tourists. In Rochester, not only do we need to attract tourism but also we need remember the local residents who will use the waterway. If there are a variety of activities for people of all ages, then residents will be drawn downtown. Imagine local water parades viewed by the people of Rochester, "Mules on Parade" or festivals along the canal that build local pride in our community. Even ice skating along the canal as was popular in the 1800's.





If all goes well, Rochester will once again be a thriving community. Look at how developed San Antonio is, all thanks to the citizens that took the chance and did what they thought was best for their city. Rochester's rich historic past is filled with many pieces that could be highlighted throughout downtown because of the Grasso – Zimmer Plan. We have potential; we just have to identify what makes us unique and bring that out in any future project.

## Ottawa, Canada



### Now and Then

Kennethea Wislon

My group traveled to the beautiful French-styled city of Ottawa to witness for our own eyes Ottawa's very own canal. It has the same climate as Rochester and it

is known for its historic preservation. The War of 1812 was the reason for digging the Rideau Canal. When it was completed the canal's main purpose was so the Canadian military could transport materials to the soldiers fighting in the war. Overall, the Rideau Canal is made up of different man-made and natural water systems that are equivalent to 126 miles stretching from Ottawa to Kingston, Ontario.



Currently the Rideau Canal is a National Historic Site of Canada and will soon be a World Heritage Site because the canal still uses the special features that are original to the design. However, the Rideau Canal

doesn't serve the same purpose as it did in the 1800's, it is now used for recreation such as boat trips through its 24 locks and skating in winter. Ottawa is also known for *Winterlude*, one of the most popular winter festivals in North America today!



## Building and Planning

Jamie Dean

The City of Ottawa had an idea to use the Rideau Canal as a winter festival site. A festival in the winter would generate tourism during a non-tourist season, thus boosting the economy. The festival was started in 1979 and was dubbed *Winterlude*. This festival takes place on a five-mile long skateway, which is equal to 200 Olympic-sized rinks! To this day, it still holds a World record for the longest outdoor skateway. In addition to ice-skating, the *Winterlude* festival includes a triathlon, hockey day, ice cafés, ice sculptures, and the all-famous fried dough Beaver Tails.





The festival runs for three weekends in February and brings 1.5 million visitors per year to Ottawa. The festival generates approximately 85 million dollars for the local economy and the city makes 500 thousand dollars in profit through skate rentals and

fees paid by retail booth owners. Rochester could also create a winter festival around the proposed re-watering of the old Erie Canal bed.

## Government and Financing

Ben Herring

Parks Canada, a federal organization, owns the Rideau Canal. This is different than canals in the United States, because American canals are owned by state or local governments. Since the Rideau Canal extends from Ottawa to Kingston, the profit that the government makes goes not only to Ottawa but also to the Rideau Canal's surrounding villages. According to a report completed in 1998, Parks Canada spends



approximately seven million dollars a year on maintaining the Rideau Canal. Parks Canada made over 16 million dollars that year. That money comes from festivals, fees, tourists, and other businesses surrounding the

canal. If city officials decide to go ahead with the Grasso – Zimmer Plan, Rochester could probably make profits similar to those of Parks Canada. Rochester has many companies, as well as philanthropists, that already support festivals such as the Arctic Swim and the Lilac Festival.

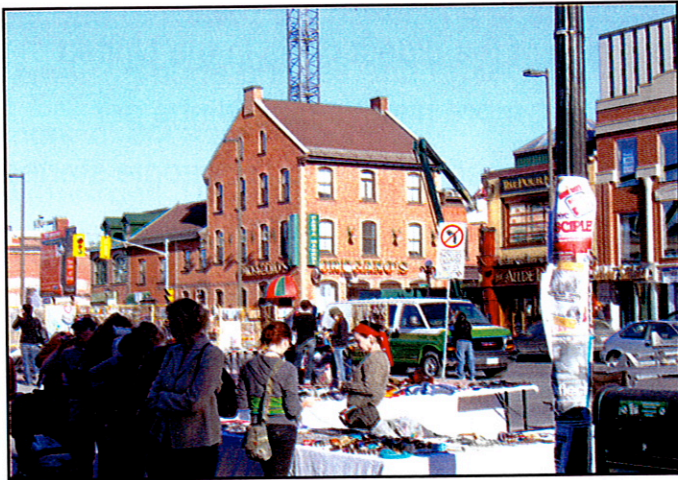
## Why the Waterway?

Cheyenne Schultz

The Rideau Canal has many uses such as skating, biking, boating, running, and walking. There are businesses along the canal as well.

Aside from the *Winterlude*, about one million land-based visitors come to see the Rideau Canal per year. They spend over seven million dollars annually. There are also approximately 18,000 boaters that travel on the waterway per year. They spend on average 913 dollars per visit!

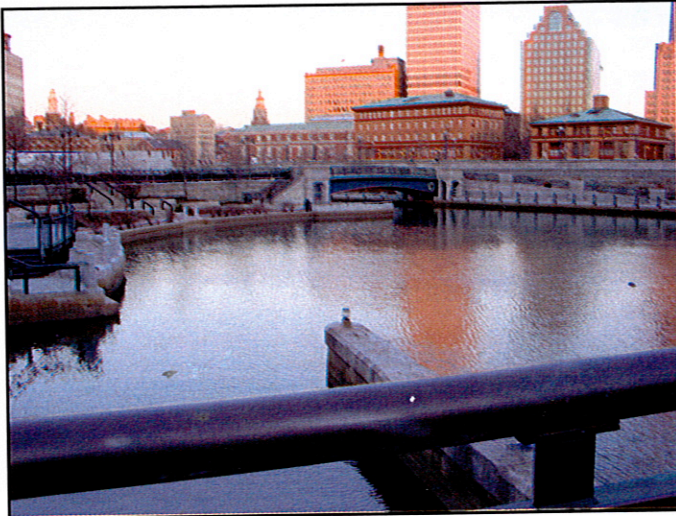
Ottawa has a lot of tourists because of various museums, restaurants, shopping, recreation, and festivals all near the waterway. All



of these things make tourism successful for the Rideau Canal. Rochester has a similar climate to Ottawa. If the re-watering takes place, we might be able to have some of the same activities and events.



# Providence, Rhode Island



## Now and Then

Eden Yayehyirad

Our group traveled to Providence, Rhode Island to study how the waterfront revitalization impacted the economy of downtown. One of the results of the

revitalization was the creation of Waterplace Park, a man-made basin in the Woonasquatucket River that flows through the center of town.

Waterplace Park was built in 1994, and in eight short years has turned around the spirit of the city. We wanted to study Providence because of the similarity in its climate to Rochester, and the fact that the populations of both cities have many college and university students.

Providence, Rhode Island is one of the oldest cities in the United States. It has stunning architecture and more historical buildings per square foot than any other US city. However, in the 1930's, people started to flee downtown. Providence was like a ghost town. It had abandoned railroads, empty parking lots and environmentally unsafe rivers. Three projects tremendously improved the quality of downtown while preserving its unique history. One of the projects is Waterplace Park. Creating Waterplace Park involved moving two rivers and changing their confluence. This opened up a vast park area and created a waterfront that is important to the economy of downtown Providence. Waterplace Park is the gem of downtown. It caused commercial and residential construction and has put the economy of Providence back on track.

Providence is a city extremely proud of its past. Historical markers highlighting the city's past can be seen on almost every corner. Rochester could also share the wealth of its history. Restoring the old Erie Canal bed could stimulate the economy and preserve history in a creative way.



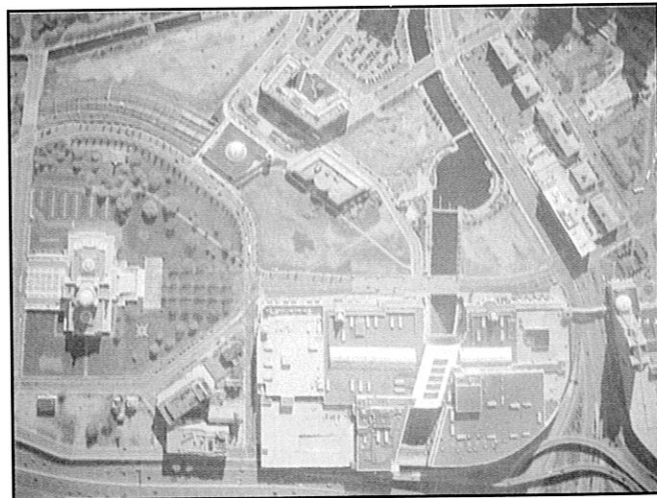
## Building and Planning

Brennan Reaves

People joked that the city of Providence was home to the world's largest bridge. The rivers that flowed through downtown were blocked by bridges and

parking lots. Three major projects brought positive change to the area.

The first project moved the railroad that cut downtown in two. The second re-routed the rivers and changing their confluence. It involved removing huge bridges and replacing them with smaller ones that allowed more direct access to the waterfront. The third project moved the major highway and made room for parks and gathering places. The downtown area is now more open, and the river is accessible from many points. These areas are now used for





concerts and festivals, and showcase public art. The project architects made great use of public space by incorporating seating areas along the waterfront with historical landmarks.

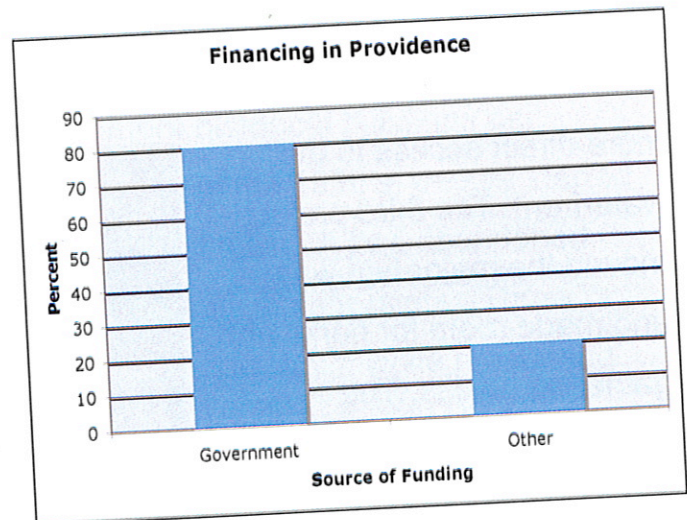
This project is similar to Rochester's Grasso – Zimmer Plan because we'd be removing Broad Street. This would provide a place for boats to travel downtown and a space for businesses to be restored.

## Government and Financing

Zachary Kruse

The completion of the Capital Center and Water Place Park projects required a lot of creative financing. The federal government paid eighty percent of the cost. The Federal Rail and Federal Transport System funded one hundred ten million dollars, the state contributed 20 million dollars and the City of Providence paid the remaining 11 million dollars.

This graph shows the relationship between the sources that were used to fund revitalization projects in Providence.



Because of the abundance of historical buildings downtown, Providence was able to receive a Historic Tax Credit. This means the state pays thirty percent and the federal government pays twenty percent of the money required to repair old historical buildings. Overall, Providence is economically thriving.

By ensuring that Rochester's old canal bed is on the Historic Registry, we can get government funding.



## Why the Waterway?

Mark Torres

Waterfire is a community-bonding event in Providence, Rhode Island. This event is a series of small bonfires right on the water. They are lit from

dusk until midnight, and run along both the Woonasquatucket and Moshassuck, the two rivers that flow through downtown Providence. While the fires burn visitors enjoy music and various acts such as dancing, Capoeira, and gymnastic performances. Volunteers silently moving along the water in boats, feeding the bonfires, and gondola rides are available to the public. This event runs from spring to fall, and in 2004 brought over 1.1 million people to Providence. It has also transformed Providence into a summer destination vacation place. People no longer leave the city for the shore, but stay to enjoy the many cultural attractions of the city.

Providence is still in the process of growing. Many job opportunities have developed. The re-routed Woonasquatucket River now flows under the mall.





Just the mall itself has created three thousand permanent jobs. Other businesses have created approximately one thousand jobs. Providence is well on its way economically and is going to keep expanding.

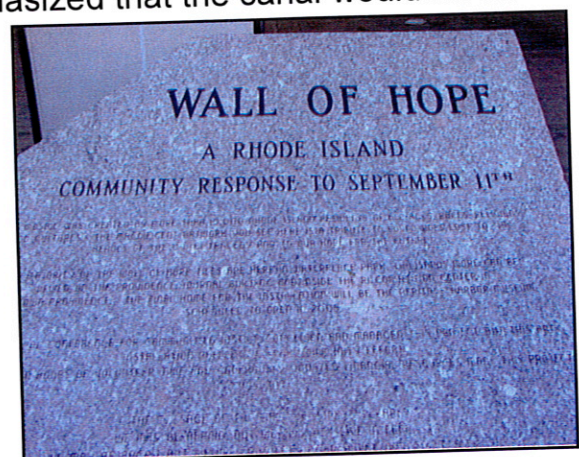
An idea for Rochester similar to Waterfire might be titled Icefire. Icefire would consist of several ice sculptures, which represent the glaciers, as Rochester was once covered by a huge piece of ice. The sculptures could be illuminated by neon lights. Their melting would represent Rochester as a warm sea.

## Community Engagement and Advice

Addie Ainsworth

In Providence, Rhode Island we met with city officials, city planners, architects and engineers. They all said to think ahead and try to avoid obstacles that may affect the idea of re-watering the canal. Another important thing to remember is you need to look back to move forward. You need to learn from the mistakes you made before so you can correct them the next time.

Another suggestion Providence city officials gave us is to ask for input from citizens because they will be most affected by the re-watering of the canal. Providence officials emphasized that the canal would be an attraction, which would create hundreds of new jobs and make a stronger, healthier, community. It worked in Providence and it could work here.



# Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



## Now and Then

Maggie Easton

When we stepped off the plane in Oklahoma, a red carpet rolled out before us, and we soon saw that Oklahoma City is an extremely welcoming place. The citizens of Oklahoma City are very proud of what

they have accomplished in the past decade. This city provided an exemplar for us of how a community can be recreated with a downtown waterway.



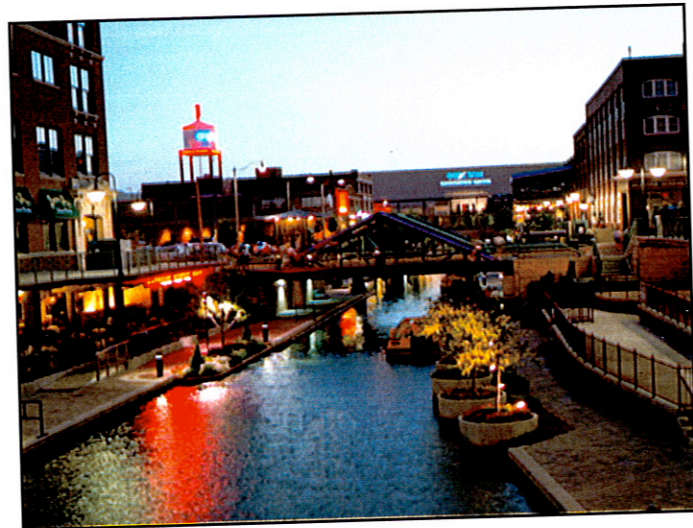
The dry, dusty, barren state of Oklahoma does not seem the place to have a clean canal surrounded by lush, green foliage, such as the Bricktown Canal. It exists for purely recreational purposes, such as dining, strolling and shopping. Like

Rochester, Oklahoma City has a lot of rich history and you can see the history everywhere you look represented with murals, mosaics and huge bronze statues honoring the 1889 Land Rush. Oklahoma City was a



boomtown in the 1800's just like Rochester, but in the early 1990's Oklahoma City was in a slump. It was 1993 and they just lost United Airlines which was looking for a city for its new headquarters but United Airlines could not see their employees living in tired, boring, old Oklahoma City.

Mayor Ron Norwick had a plan that a canal and other projects could be the push to turn downtown Oklahoma City into a thriving tourist destination. In 1999 the Bricktown Canal opened. It has been a very successful venture for

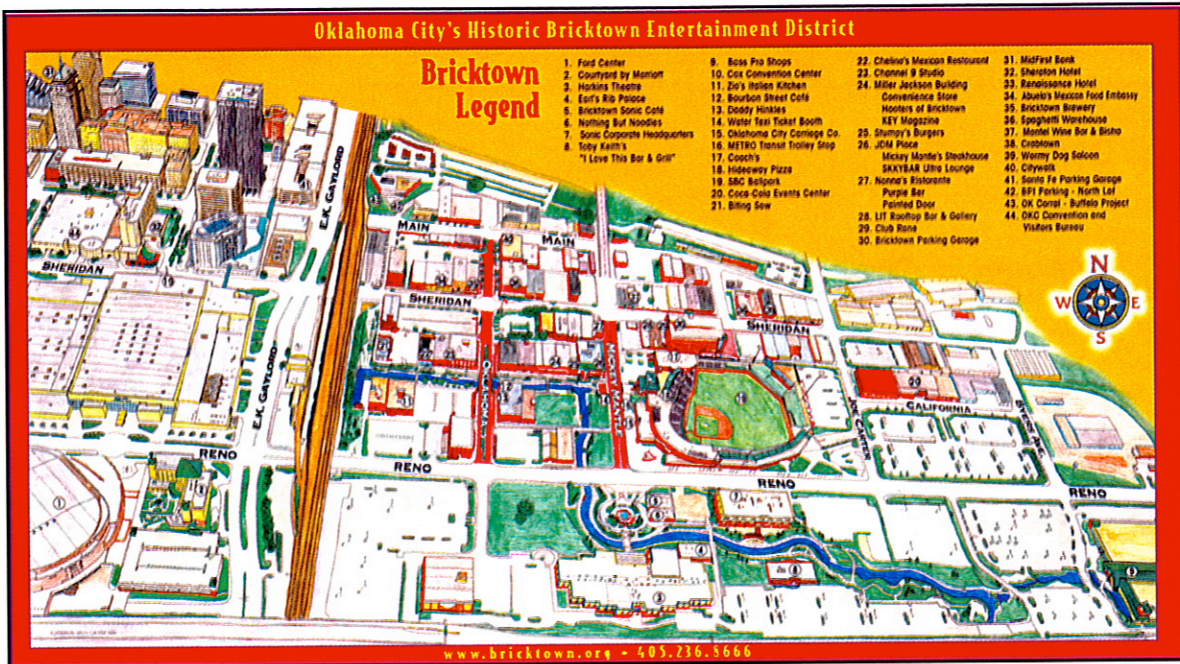


Oklahoma City. Property values have increased 235 percent since the canal started in the Bricktown area. Restaurants, retail shops and huge anchor business are everywhere. Most people moving to downtown Oklahoma City are single people, young couples or empty nesters, and they all benefit from the canal.

## **Building and Planning**

Bolan Marshall – Hallmark

The Bricktown neighborhood was not always the way it is today. It had several different stages that it progressed through on its way to becoming the thriving area it is now. At first, after it was settled in 1889, it became a railroad transportation hub. Through the years, it experienced development and decline and unrest between different cultures. In 1999, it moved into its present stage: a revitalized, highly attractive neighborhood.



This map of downtown shows the Bricktown Canal as the central feature of the Bricktown area.

The Canal is approximately four feet deep, twenty feet wide, and one mile long. There was never any waterway in that area before. The city dug out a street called California Avenue to create a canal. The canal now sits about one story below the location of the original street.



The canal stretches from the Convention Center at one end to the banks of the Oklahoma River, which lies just beyond the wall in this picture. Plans include constructing a mini-harbor to create access between the Oklahoma River and the canal, so that like in Rochester, the waterways will be connected.



## Government and Financing

Eric Quitter

Oklahoma City needed to find a way to attract both businesses and the general public. The plan to do this is titled MAPS, or Metropolitan Area Projects. MAPS' mission was to revitalize the downtown area with nine major projects, including the Bricktown Ballpark, downtown library, Performing Arts Center, and Convention Center, all of which Rochester already has. One of these projects, with a 23 million dollar price tag, was the Bricktown Canal. Oklahoma City funded the canal and all other MAPS projects with a temporary extra penny sales tax for six years, with the approval of the residents of Oklahoma City. Each project was paid in full before construction started. This ensured that there would be no debt service for the citizens. After the amount of money that would be needed for all nine projects was raised, the extra tax was removed.

Oklahoma City also received federal transportation funding because the water taxi service is used to get people around the downtown area. Oklahoma City's MAPS revitalization has spurred over 2 billion dollars in private investment in the area. In the Bricktown neighborhood, property values have gone up 235 percent.



## Why the Waterway?

Emma Doeblin

In Oklahoma City, the canal is an important part in a network of attractions throughout the metropolitan area. The Bricktown Canal hosts a multitude of events including taxi tours, baseball games, and other recreational activities. Of the thirty people responding to our survey, most use the canal for dining and exercise. Other uses are recreation, site seeing, business, and shopping. There are also seasonal events such as a Christmas parade and different rowing competitions.

Community members are actively involved in the many events centered along the canal. One example is the SBC Bricktown Ballpark in the picture below. It draws in millions of dollars and millions of people a year. Tourism is a large part of the canals job and it is so effective, that it draws in people from all over the world.



After the canal's opening, jobs greatly increased within the area. Large anchor businesses such as Bass Pro Shops drew in newer, smaller businesses, increasing jobs and population. Because of the canal and other MAPS

projects, population has increased one percent yearly in the city.

The Bricktown Canal has greatly improved the downtown area of Oklahoma City, and will for years to come.



## **Community Engagement and Advice**

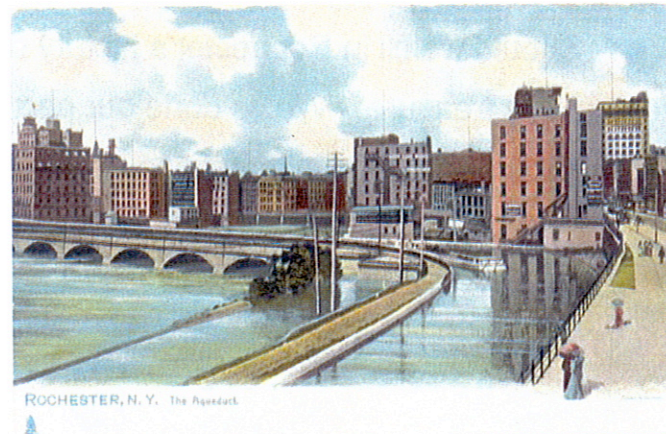
Khari Johnson

“Dream no small dreams” was a monumental gem of advice given to us by Pat Downs. In Oklahoma City, the people and their leaders dreamt big, and had great success. They gave us advice as to how we could have the same results.

They said that we should have a well-rounded proposal with something in it that appeals to everyone. They suggested that we have multiple sources of funding, both private and government. They also suggested that we state and plan all activities ahead of time and be public with all decisions. If the people are united with the same understanding and cause, they will work with you. They advised us to be on time and on budget to build trust and support for projects to come. They told us that history promotes tourism, and a healthy pride for the city. If this advice is taken to heart, and the project approved, our community and our government will act, dream, plan, and believe together.

As we end our report, we realize that this is only the beginning of new ideas. The key points we addressed are important to the development of Rochester. We are the next generation of the city and we want to stay here.

Rochester was once a boomtown with a thriving canal and later a running subway. Now the tunnel is deserted and the canal path, a street. This abandoned tunnel has become a dangerous, unprotected



rpc0409a.jpg Rochester Public Library Local History Division

place. Something needs to be done. The Grasso-Zimmer Plan could possibly create a better tomorrow for this forgotten piece of the past.

Each of the four cities we visited provided excellent examples of what Rochester could become. These cities also made helpful suggestions to overcome our own obstacles. For instance, we may be able to use Oklahoma City's temporary penny sales tax increase, or Providence's Historic Tax Credit and transportation funding. We could also use suggestions from San Antonio's Ambassadors Program to help reduce crime. Like Ottawa, we could make the most of our winter weather. We learned from all four cities that revitalization of their waterways sparked economic growth, brought people together, and created pride in the community.

Now is the time for the people of Rochester to take action. We urge city officials to research the proposal in more depth and conduct a feasibility study. More businesses should consider locating downtown. Private investors should acknowledge how the waterway will open economic doors. The media needs to spread the word about this dynamic



proposal. The community should join together, establish priorities for their city, and speak out. We pass the torch to next year's sixth grade class to continue our research on the revitalization of the Erie Canal in Downtown Rochester.

Should we fill in Rochester's history or preserve and profit from yesterday's treasure? We've done our part to show you what Rochester might become. Join us in imagining a new Rochester.





M 188  
Revitalize Rochester- report  
R. Berger Archive  
Genesee CCS



**Genesee Community Charter School**  
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