



HOUGHTON CONSERVATION AREA COMMUNITY VISIONING WORKSHOP



January 24, 2023
6:00 PM - 7:30 PM
Machnica Center
1799 Clinton St., Buffalo

On Tuesday, January 25, 2023, Buffalo Niagara River Land Trust (BNRLT) and consultant Joy Kuebler Landscape Architect (JKLA) held a Visioning Workshop with over 30 community members in attendance at the Machnica Center, about 0.3 miles north of the Houghton Conservation Area. The 25-acre open space comprised of woods and fields along the Buffalo River was recently acquired by BNRLT through a conservation easement to be protected from development in perpetuity. The BNRLT and JKLA have invited the community to help plan future access and recreation opportunities through a series of 4 community events, with this being the first one. The purpose of the Visioning Workshop was to give community members an opportunity to share their ideas and come to a consensus around a mission and vision that will help guide the planning process. Through a series of hands-on activities, attendees expressed their hopes and inspiration for the values, activities, and elements that they would like to see in the Conservation Area. Council Member Bryan Bollman attended the workshop and discussed the importance of this park to the neighborhood, urging participants to help make it amazing. More information about BNRLT's work, conservation easements, and what is and is not allowed on conserved land can be found at bnrlandtrust.org

Roles and Contributions Activity

Participants were asked to leave their seats and go to a table at the front of the room, where they could choose one card from many on the table that reflected what they see as their role and contribution to this project. On each card was an image that was meant to nudge the brain and prompt a response. Once a card was chosen, participants



discussed it with the people around them before sharing with the group. Through this activity, everyone in the room met and listened to one another and began to understand a little bit about each person's connection to the Conservation Area. Each response to the question, what do you see as your role and contribution, is paraphrased in the table below.

Name	Role and Contribution
JJ	The image of a little girl – I see the child as myself, the next generation, enjoying myself in the park
Margaret	Dandelion – I picture myself as the wind blowing on the dandelion, creating change
Chris	Black sand – Concerned about contamination from the foundry, we want to conserve nature and we don't want children playing in contaminated land
Mike	Most of the land is covered in ugly vegetation and few types of trees, like cottonwood. We need more variety of trees and walking paths
Chris	Concerned with protecting wildlife – deer, birds, turkey
Derek	Image of someone playing basketball – new business owner in Kaisertown, wants to support the project
Nadine	Image of horses running – thinking of the deer, something to keep them contained and protected
Sharon	Image of birds - conserving nature, protecting wildlife
Meg	Image of bicycle – patrolling, supporting and keeping the land the way it's supposed to be

Dylan	He and his wife are very optimistic about seeing change
Arthur	Image of confused cat – didn't expect what is happening here, it is different than other meetings he's been to
Donna	Image of a brick wall –lived in the neighborhood her whole life and has seen many projects with great ideas and optimism, and then they hit the brick wall – money, politics. My contribution is to see that broken down, be the project's champion



What is Holding Us Back?

The next question, like the first, asked participants to choose a card and reflect on what they see as challenges to the progress of this project. Some common obstacles include negativity in the community, development, long-term maintenance, invasive species, motorized vehicles, contamination and garbage. Responses to the question, what is holding us back, are recorded in the table below.

Name	What is Holding Us Back?
Stef	Image of donkeys (like deer)– I've lived here my whole life, and dirt bikes and ATVs have contributed to issues. There used to be little paths, I'd like to see that come back
Nadine	Image of child crying – I grew up and lived here my whole life, there's so much negativity, that's why I came, I want something positive to happen in my lifetime
Brian	Image of dandelion – a perpetual long-term obstacle to address invasives and manage species that are more desirable
Robyn	An obstacle is people not being open-minded
Arthur	Image of brick wall – it's all on lockdown and we don't have access to open it up
Phil	Image of a forest fire – the site has seen an environmental toxic legacy, that might be a barrier
Kevin	Image of a bulldozer – this is what I don't want to see. I want to lock down the area to not be developed. There are all kinds of uses and people, I don't want that to go away

Mike	Image of building falling down – So many projects took beautiful areas and made them a mess. They need to be finished and maintained – ongoing stewardship
Quinn	There are concerns about toxicity on the land, but there were no failures, the land should not be contaminated
Meghan	Every day there are new people dumping garbage. It doesn't feel safe.
Mike	When working for the City, I saw people didn't take care of what we have. It is great and we want to keep it that way



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What Could be Possible?

Next, participants were asked to think about what they would like to see in the future, or what could be possible? Participants imagined an area that is kept clean and monitored; with simple trails, and native birds, butterflies and insects; with space for spiritual connection and connections with nature, and feeling free and happy here. Again, each participant chose a card to prompt their responses, which are recorded in the table below.

Name	What Could be Possible?
Ollie	Image of people praying – people can go to the park and pray together, find a spiritual connection or connection to nature
Margaret	Image of arrows – it's important to have a simple but beautiful connection
Dylan	An area that is cleaned and patrolled often
Meghan	Image of trash – a clean area where you can walk and get lost in nature
Chris	Image with lens into a landscape – I spent a lot of time as a kid in Houghton Park. When I returned it wasn't the same. Like Boston Park, it could have walkways made of wood, boxes for feeding birds, multiuse, and areas to pray. All ages, ethnicities and religions will gravitate there
Dawn	Wildflowers, birds, an awesome nature feeling, feel free and happy
Arthur	Image of an empty well – let's fill it up with good things, everything that we need
Jason	Growing up here the neighborhood had dance centers, community center, and thriving businesses. This project could be the spark for development in the whole neighborhood and attract people to move here
Stef	So many people are invested and care about this area. School kids could do their community service here and be stewards
Chris	Council Member Bollman and M&T and others in the community are helping with cleanups, there are lots of volunteers



Cover Story Game

The Cover Story Game asks participants to imagine that in 15 years, the transformation in Houghton Conservation Area is so great that Time Magazine is going to put Houghton on its cover. Who is using the space, and what activities are they doing? The participants divided themselves into 7 groups, with 4-5 people in each group. Groups were asked to choose the headlines, sidebars, quotes and photos that they would use to highlight the success of the area and to answer the question, what becomes of this space in the future because of our efforts today? The results and some images from this activity are shown below, followed by a recap of the group's closing discussion about common themes that they heard during this activity and throughout the workshop.

GROUP 1

Title: *Hidden Gem of Community Remains Secret*

Big Headlines:

- Ecological Restoration
- Local Community Space
- Hidden Gem
- Sanctuary without Parking!

Sidebar: Leave No Trace

GROUP 2

Cover Image: Friendly deer walking on path

Other Images: Trees, kayak launch

Big Headlines: *Kaisertown Conservation Area Open to All*



GROUP 3

Title: *Kaisertown Nature Preserve Park*

Cover Image: Before and after pictures

Other Images: Deer, fish

Big Headlines:

- Walking Trails
- Wildlife Preservation
- Fishing
- Kayak Access
- Snowshoeing and X-Country Skiing

Sidebar:

- Community Engagement
- Educational (Field Trips)
- Bicycle Trail

Quote: "Build it and they will come"

GROUP 4

Cover Image: Picture from railroad bridge facing east, showing river with eagle in tree and waterfowl on river

Other Images: Trees, birds, deer, ducks, flowers, butterflies

Big Headlines:

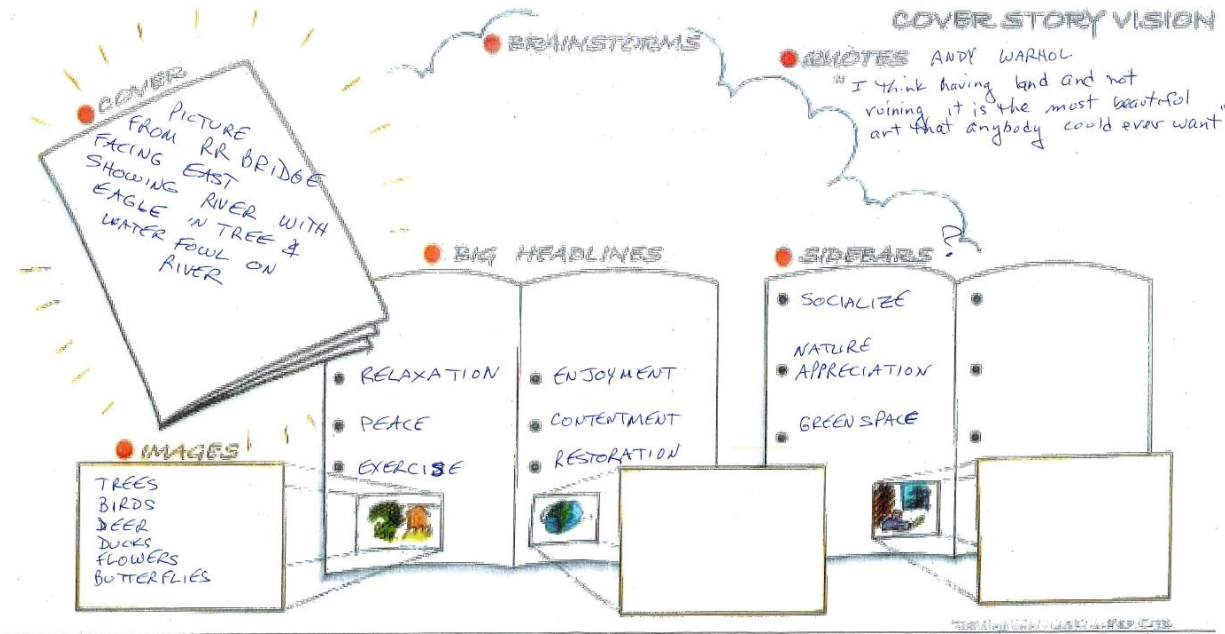
- Relaxation
- Peace
- Exercise
- Enjoyment
- Contentment
- Restoration

Sidebar:

- Socialize
- Nature Appreciation
- Greenspace

Quote: "I think having land and not ruining it is the most beautiful art that anybody could ever want" – Andy Warhol





GROUP 5

Cover Image: Tree and dirt bikes sign

Other Images: bike, tree, people

Big Headlines:

- Oldest Trees in Town
- Invasive Plants Gone
- Dirt Bikes
- 300-year Old Tree
- No Trash

Sidebars:

- Community Comes Together
- Safe Place For All

Quote: "Conservation park is huge" –Donald Trump

GROUP 6

Big Headline: *How a Park Saved a Neighborhood*

Sidebars:

- A Pathway to the Lake
- Awareness
- Investment
- Bring Back a Sense of Community
- History

GROUP 7

Title: *People Must Have a Voice*

Big Headline: *Unifies the Community*

Sidebar: Charging Stations for Electric Vehicles

Brainstorms:

- Exercise workout stations
- Music & festivals
- Kayak launches
- Yoga and meditation areas
- Opportunities for children/adults with disabilities like autism and blindness
- Restrooms

Common Themes and Group Alignments

In the final minutes of the workshop, participants discussed the common themes that they heard emerge throughout the activities. These themes will help the group determine their mission and vision for the Houghton Conservation Area to guide planning throughout the remaining events and into the future. Common themes included:

- ❖ Neighborhood unity
- ❖ Awareness and education
- ❖ Trail and recreation opportunities
- ❖ Access to the water
- ❖ Wildlife and native plant preservation
- ❖ Nature appreciation across generations
- ❖ Clean, monitored and maintained
- ❖ Safe for everyone
- ❖ A spiritual connection and connection to nature
- ❖ A “spark” for neighborhood development

The next event will be a walking tour on site at the Houghton Conservation Area on February 4. Participants were given a map of the Conservation Area and given the chance to share their preferred route. The community is invited to meet at the Machnica Center at 10:00 AM for a kickoff activity, and will proceed to the Span Street Parking Lot at 10:30 AM to begin the tour. The tour will include a walking SWOT analysis to identify the area’s greatest strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.